

Companionable Forms:

**Writers, Readers, Sociability, and the Circulation of Literature in
Manuscript and Print in the Romantic Period**

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Companionable forms: writers, readers, sociability, and the circulation of literature in manuscript and print in the Romantic period

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Abstract

Following recent critical work on writers' representations of sociability in Romantic literature, this thesis examines in detail the textual strategies (such as allusion, acts of address, and the use of 'coterie' symbols or references) which writers used to seek to establish a friendly or sympathetic relationship with a particular reader or readers, or to create and define a sense of community identity between readers.

The thesis focuses on specific relationships between pairs and groups of writers (who form one another's first readers), and examines 'sociable' genres like letters, manuscript albums, occasional poetry, and periodical essays in a diverse series of author case-studies (Anna Barbauld, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb, John Keats and Leigh Hunt). Such genres, the thesis argues, show how manuscript and print culture could frequently overlap and intersect, meaning that writers confronted the demands of two co-existing audiences—one private and familiar, the other public and unknown—in the same work.

Rather than arguing that writers used manuscript culture practices and produced 'coterie' works purely to avoid confronting their anxieties about publishing in the commercial sphere of print culture, the thesis suggests that in producing such 'coterie' works writers engaged with and reflected contemporary philosophical and political concerns about the relationship between the individual and wider communities. In these works, writers engaged with the legacy of eighteenth-century philosophical ideas about the role (and limitations) of the sympathetic imagination in maintaining social communities, and with interpretative theories about the best kind of reader.

Furthermore, the thesis argues that reading literary texts in the specific, material context in which they are 'published' to particular readers, either in print, manuscript, or letters, is vital to understanding writer/reader relationships in the Romantic period. This approach reveals how within each publication space, individual texts could be placed (either by their writers, by editors, or by other readers) in meaningful relationships with other texts, absorbing or appropriating them into new interpretative contexts.

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Introduction

If the majority of my readers had but the same personal knowledge of me as you have, I should sit down to the work with good cheer. But this is out of the question. Let me, however, suppose you for the moment, as an *average* reader—address you as such, and attribute to you feelings and language in character.—¹

The relationship of Romantic-era writers to the reading public has, in much recent literary criticism, been depicted as a relationship marred by the writers' anxieties over whether their readers would have the taste and understanding to be competent interpreters, or whether their reviewers would respond with hostility. Rather than address how writers related to the abstract idea of the 'reading public' as a whole, this thesis instead turns its attention to writers' engagements with actual known readers or specific audiences associated with particular publications.

Following recent critical work which has highlighted the importance of sociability in Romantic literary culture, the thesis examines how Romantic writers engaged not simply in the textual representation of their social circles, but how they sought to construct, perform, and create sociable relationships and community identity through manuscript and print media. Influenced in part by the growing field of book history, this thesis examines literary texts as material, contextually-situated objects of exchange and/or mediums of address. It argues that coterie-oriented practices of manuscript circulation maintained a persisting importance in the literary culture of the era, and overlapped and intersected with the realm of print.

This thesis argues that 'social' genres of writing which bore a closer link to the more intimate, domestic practises of manuscript culture—such as letters, occasional poetry, albums, and even periodical essays which represented a club or coterie ethos (and often drew on real social circles)—provided a format in which writers could imagine a sympathetic reading. In such genres, writers could seek to engage with, represent, or indeed create, friendly networks, or wider shared-interest groups, through acts of address or allusion, or through 'coterie'

¹ S. T. Coleridge, 'Selection from Mr. Coleridge's Literary Correspondence with Friends, and Men of Letters', *BM*, (Oct. 1821), 243-262, 244.

references available only for knowing readers. I have focused with particular interest on literary works in which writers address or imagine different, yet co-existing reading audiences: immediate, personally-known readers; the wider contemporary public; and the unknowable reader of posterity. The presence of these multiple potential audiences leads these works to embody certain socio-historical tensions and issues of literary interpretation. Firstly, acts of writer-reader address in the literary work can be viewed in the historical, cultural, and intellectual context of the Romantic era, in which ideas about sociability and friendship, sympathy and sentiment, became loaded with particular social, political, and religious significance and connotations. Secondly, Romantic writers' negotiations with the idea of audience suggest fundamental hermeneutic issues concerning the literary work's multiple potential lives: firstly within its social, temporal context; and later, as a text free to be reworked and re-appropriated to accrue new meanings and interpretations.

Print culture anxieties: the Romantic-era reading audience

Economic histories of the book market have depicted the Romantic period as characterised by a rapid expansion of print culture.² Increasing literacy, the growing presence of circulating libraries, and the appearance of smaller, cheaper printed books and pamphlets in addition to expensive folios meant that books could become available to larger and more diverse audiences. The era also saw an increasing proliferation and diversity of print newspapers, periodicals and magazines. Many leading commentators have argued that this expanding commercial market for books had a negative impact on how Romantic writers perceived their potential readers. Lucy Newlyn has suggested that the combination of an emerging mass-reading audience and the rise of professional criticism, led writers to become increasingly

² Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800-1850*, (Baltimore, MD; London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996); William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004).

anxious about their reception, fearing, on the one hand, that few among the mass public would understand them, and on the other, that the professional critics and reviewers would be hostile to their work.³ In an increasingly commercialised literary marketplace, the mass public, writers feared, were neither discerning in their tastes, nor thoughtful or reflective in their reading. As a result, writers developed particular strategies—both social and textual—to attempt to ameliorate these anxieties. Newlyn has suggested that reading aloud—as a social practice and a symbolic figure—acquired a new meaningfulness as a way of returning the sense of intimacy between writer and reader that was threatened by the commoditisation of literature (19-22, *passim*). For certain writers, in particular the Lake School, the coterie reading and circulation of a work, by ‘delaying and pre-empting its public reception’ could offer a reassuring alternative to the perceived threat of a widening print-readership. Not only that, but coterie practices had a social function, which ‘helped [writers] to establish common aims, intentions, and prejudices; a shared and inevitably exclusive language; and strongly cohesive loyalties’ (24). Such ideas about the important social function of literary works in the Romantic age have been particularly influential in forming this thesis.

Other commentators on Romanticism have suggested that writers formulated certain textual strategies to overcome their anxiety about facing an anonymous mass public as well as an increasing number of critical reviewers. Andrew Bennett has suggested that in response to the commercialised literary market, ‘poets begin to figure reception in terms of an ideal audience—masculine, generalised, and anonymous—deferred to an unspecified future.’⁴ For poets, the work of art becomes idealised as ‘an expression of self uncontaminated by market forces, undiluted by appeals to corrupt prejudices and desires of (bourgeois, contaminating, fallible, feminine, temporal, mortal) readers’ (3). As a result, Bennett argues that Romantic writers come to conceive of the poet-genius as a figure inevitably neglected by their contemporaries, only to be redeemed by posterity. Taking a contrary track, Andrew Franta

³ Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: the Anxiety of Reception*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 4.

⁴ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 3.

has suggested that, as evidenced by the prominence of review culture, and changes in libel laws, the Romantic period was characterised by ‘a shift from defining the text as the expression of its author’s views to understanding the text in terms of its effects on its readers’.⁵ As a result, the poem can be imagined to have a ‘textual self-sufficiency’ which enables it ‘to lie in wait for until the proper audience comes along’ (7). Most recently, Tim Fulford has suggested that the commercial pressures of the literary market and the threat of hostile reception led writers to band together, invoking poetical allies past and present through an intimate language of allusion, borrowing, and echo that constituted a ‘dialect’.⁶

Rather than seeking to divert the perceived threat of the mass public through social or textual strategies, some writers could, on the contrary, fully embrace the task of, as Wordsworth put it, creating the taste by which they were to be enjoyed. Jon Klancher, in his influential study of early nineteenth-century periodicals, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, has suggested that periodical writers in the Romantic period sought, through the textual medium of the magazine, to give readers a conscious sense of belonging to a particular community of readers—and this development of self-conscious audiences, Klancher argues, was intrinsically linked to the formation of class and cultural identity.⁷ Klancher argues that by shaping their readers’ ideological awareness and training their ability to interpret signs, ‘[w]riters shaped audiences who developed awareness of social class as they acquired self-consciousness as readers’ (4). Klancher’s primary concern is with four particular ‘publics’ which he defines as the self-conscious middle-class, nascent mass audience, polemical radical readership, and the institutional audience which Coleridge would term the ‘clerisy’ (5). The cultural politics of the period, Klancher argues, ‘obliged writers not only to distinguish among conflicting audiences, but to do so by elaborating new relations *between* the individual reader and the collective audience’ thereby giving readers a sense of themselves as belonging to one

⁵ Andrew Franta, *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 9.

⁶ Tim Fulford, *Romantic Poetry and Literary Coteries: The Dialect of the Tribe*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 6-7.

⁷ Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, (Madison; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

particular community, united by its reading habits, as distinguished from another (11). Using the example of plebeian radical texts, Klancher suggests that they were ‘not meant to form a singular bond between reader and writer, but to bind one reader to another *as* audience’ (100).

Following Newlyn and Klancher, I have sought in this thesis to examine how writers situate themselves and their readers in relationships of community, united by textual exchange. In the face of a changing cultural landscape which saw the emerging dominance of the mass print audience, Klancher implies that to imagine writer-reader relationships in terms of personal friendships and social circles, as some writers did, was an act of nostalgia in the face of inevitable change, suggesting that ‘What made it a particularly poignant moment of cultural transformation was that, perhaps for the last time, it was still possible to conceive the writer’s relation to an audience in terms of a personal compact’ (14). However, I think these moments at which writers imagine a ‘personal compact’ are important precisely as a site of tension in which writers try and negotiate their relationship to both individual readers and the wider reading public. By examining the literary texts as material, embedded, contextualised objects (letters, manuscript poetry books, periodical essays) which perform the work of addressing, exchanging, and configuring social relationships and community identities, this thesis explores how writers in the Romantic period attempted to walk the borderline between potential readerships (private/public, known/unknown) which were not necessarily conflicting but rather intersecting. Lines of connection could ripple outwards in circles of ever-increasing size: writers could make use of a private frame of reference or language of allusion shared with an intimate group of known readers; while, often simultaneously, looking outwards in hope of forming a wider community united by shared interests or ideals, be they cultural, religious or political. What underlies this textual creation and depiction of reading communities is the important role which real-life social circles had in the literary culture of the Romantic age.

Sociability and Romanticism

Over the past few decades, Romantic scholarship, following the wake of the notable works by Jerome McGann and Jack Stillinger, has debunked the myth of the solitary Romantic genius.⁸ Much work has been done to elucidate the importance of group sociability, writers' creative relationships with one another, and collaborative methods of authorship in Romantic period literature. The conventional groupings of Romantic writers—the 'Lake school', the 'Cockney school', Byron and the Shelleys—have formed the focus of many leading critics' work in bringing the richly-woven allusive and collaborative relationships of these writing groups to light.⁹ This group-centred vision of Romanticism has informed recent biographies such as John Worthen's *The Gang*, or Daisy Hay's *Young Romantics* which have preferred to depict the poets' lives collectively rather than individually, as well as biographies which have focused on important family and friendly relationships, such as Lucy Newlyn's *William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, Adam Sisman's *The Friendship*, and William St Clair's *The Godwins and the Shelleys*.¹⁰ As well as focusing on collaborative relationships, recent criticism has explored how writers represented and replicated their social circles in print. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite have sought to push ideas about sociability in the Romantic era even further, suggesting that it can

⁸ Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

⁹ On the Lake School: Lucy Newlyn, *Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Language of Allusion* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986; 2001); Paul Magnuson, *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988); Gene W. Ruoff, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: the making of the major lyrics, 1802-4* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1989); Richard E. Matlak, *The Poetry of Relationship: the Wordsworths and Coleridge, 1797-1800* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1997); Nicola Healey, *Dorothy Wordsworth and Hartley Coleridge: the poetics of relationship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). On the younger Romantics: Charles E. Robinson, *Shelley and Byron: the snake and eagle wreathed in fight*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976); William D. Brewer, *The Shelley-Byron Conversation* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1994); Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt, and the Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998); Sharon Lynne Joffe, *The Kinship Coterie and the Literary Endeavors of the Women in the Shelley Circle*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). Essay collections on the topic of collaborations and sociability: Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson (eds.), *Literary Couplings: Writing Couples, Collaborators, and the Construction of Authorship* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (eds.), *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

¹⁰ John Worthen, *The Gang: Coleridge, the Hutchinsons and Wordsworths in 1802*, (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2001); Daisy Hay, *Young Romantics: The Shelleys, Byron, and other Tangled Lives*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2010); Lucy Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth: All in Each Other* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013); Adam Sisman, *The Friendship: Wordsworth and Coleridge* (London: HarperPress, 2006); William St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: the biography of a family* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989).

function ‘as a kind of text in its own right, a form of cultural work [...] which was a fundamental part of the self-definition of Romantic writers and artists’.¹¹

Other studies in the field of cultural history have outlined how important the places and institutions of social life—the coffee house, the theatre, the lecture hall, the exhibition, the salon, the club, the tavern, the library, or book shop—were in the intellectual culture of the long eighteenth-century as a whole. Peter Clark has described how urban sociability was transformed in the latter part of the eighteenth century as, in addition to the male-dominated sociability of the coffee-house and tavern, a new ‘fashionable sociability,’ in which women took greater part, arose in the public spaces of parks, theatres, and galleries.¹² Gillian Russell has described how these social spaces led to the increased presence and participation of women in public, cultural life in the later part of the eighteenth century, and Susanne Schmid has argued for the continued importance of literary salons, like those hosted by Lady Holland and the Countess of Blessington, in the cultural life of the Romantic period.¹³ Jon Mee has discussed the importance of conversational circles, book clubs, and debating societies in the social and literary culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁴ He has described how the idea of conversation functioned as a literary paradigm; how contemporaries viewed the role of conversation in public life; and how various writers and sociable communities, such as Elizabeth Montagu’s ‘Bluestocking’ circle, or London’s radical intelligentsia in the 1790s, drew upon and developed different models what conversation should be—either polite and harmonious, or contentious and disputative. Herein lies the importance of sociability in thinking about the literary culture of the Romantic period. In addition to being the means by which literary communities were formed and associated, for Romantic writers, thinking about

¹¹ ‘Introducing Romantic Sociability,’ in Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (eds.), *Romantic Sociability*, 4.

¹² Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: the Origins of an Associational World*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000).

¹³ Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability and the Theatre in Georgian London*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007); Susanne Schmid, *British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹⁴ Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, & Community 1762 to 1830*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011).

sociability and community networks provided a way of conceptualising and figuring the transmission of ideas and emotions, be that through talking, reading, listening or spectating. As I shall explain in greater detail later in this introduction, one important aspect of recent critical work on sociability and Romanticism has been to situate writers' attitudes to the literary representation of social life, friendship and sympathy within the wider cultural, historical, and intellectual currents of the age. The Romantic era saw a great deal of (intensely politicised) debate over the role of social feelings in civic life—in particular, questions about how sympathy is created, how emotions are transmitted, how community feeling is formed, and about the educative (or potentially disruptive) impact of reading. Romantic-era literature which enacts and represents the social life of its writers and readers therefore situates itself within a cultural landscape in which the idea of sociability had acquired competing, ambiguous connotations and politicised associations. A great deal of recent criticism has sought to elucidate what sociability and friendship represent for Romantic writers. For example, Felicity James and Gurion Taussig have explored the political resonances of the idea of friendship in the Coleridge circle in the 1790s, and Nicholas Roe has argued that Leigh Hunt's representation of suburban 'sociality' in print was 'a lyrical expression of the *Examiner's* oppositional politics'.¹⁵ For Romantic writers, the concerns of private life could not be separated from the wider public concerns of the nation.

Such a reading of the Romantic era draws out the complexities implicit in the historian Jürgen Habermas's distinction of the various 'spheres' of human activity. Habermas theorised that the eighteenth century saw the formation of the 'public sphere,' an open arena (such as the coffee-house) in which ideas could be freely exchanged and discussed. He suggests, however, that the rise in domestic kinds of sociability (such as salons), meant that the borderlines of the public and private spheres ran right through the eighteenth-century

¹⁵ Felicity James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth: Reading Friendship in the 1790s*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Gurion Taussig, *Coleridge and the Idea of Friendship, 1789-1804*, (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2002); Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 122.

bourgeois family home.¹⁶ Furthermore, through networks of letter-writing, diaries, and the epistolary novel which arose in, as well as depicted, the intimate space of the family, this ‘audience-oriented privacy’ with its theatrically-staged intimacy became increasingly represented in the public sphere (51). What is most significant for the purposes of this thesis is the idea that the boundaries of ‘public’ and ‘private’ sphere retained an essential fluidity. Such an overlap between private and public can be clearly seen in the permeable boundary between print culture in the Romantic age, and an alternative literary culture of manuscript circulation which co-existed, and frequently interacted, with print.

Manuscript culture

Recent studies in book history have suggested that the kind of manuscript practices which are commonly associated with sixteenth and seventeenth-century literature persisted, in one form or another, into the early nineteenth century. Margaret Ezell has argued that during the eighteenth century, ‘script was still a competitive, if not dominant, mode of transmitting and reading what we term ‘literary’ and ‘academic’ materials’.¹⁷ Both George Justice and Betty Schellenberg have shown coterie manuscript circulation to have been a persisting (and problematic) sphere for Frances Burney in the 1770s.¹⁸ Justice suggests that ‘it is necessary to look at manuscript culture as a persisting set of procedures with its own history and customs as well as balancing manuscript and print as unfinished, in-process cultures with strong cross-fertilization’.¹⁹

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, transl. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989; 1991), 45.

¹⁷ Margaret M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1999), 12.

¹⁸ George L. Justice, ‘Suppression and censorship in late manuscript culture: Frances Burney’s unperformed *The Wiltings*’, in George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker (eds.), *Women’s Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: manuscript publication in England, 1550-1800*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 201-222; Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005).

¹⁹ George L. Justice, ‘Introduction’ in Justice and Tinker, *Women’s Writing*, 8.

Recent scholarship has argued for the persisting importance of manuscript-based literary culture in the Romantic period. Jeffery Cox has suggested that close-knit networks of manuscript circulation were important within the ‘Cockney’ circle because of the writers’ feelings of distance and alienation from the reading public as a whole: ‘faced with an increased sense of the author’s isolation in relation to a distant public of purchasers, [the Hunt circle] sought to forge a collective literary practice and to communicate that communal sensibility through even their printed works’.²⁰ Cox writes that coterie practices ‘need to be seen not as a sign of poetic weakness but as an attempt to create an alternative cultural practice, as a means to acquire a new cultural power’ (62). By representing their friendship ties in print, they sought ‘to infuse the sometimes alienating medium of print with the communal values of coterie production’ (64). Cox argues that the ‘Cockney School’ were a self-consciously defined group, which used coterie practices—letters, dedications, the circulation of poems—to reinforce their feelings of being united as a political and social ‘counterculture’; a reading which, however, plays down some of the tensions within the circle (5-12, *passim*).

Such coterie-oriented manuscript circulation of texts was not, as Cox implies, a practice idiosyncratic to the Keats-Hunt circle; but rather a popular pastime well into the nineteenth century, and one frequent in many writers’ circles. Michelle Levy has described how the collaborative practises of family authorship were enabled and sustained by the use of manuscript forms, and furthermore how ‘in many works of family authorship [...] features characteristic of manuscript writing were deliberately revived, or “remediated,” for use in print’.²¹ Furthermore, Levy suggests that, ‘sociability itself became an important marketing device—a feature emphasized, perhaps in part, because it tended to mask the underlying commercial nature of the book’ (4). What is notable in particular about these practices of collaborative, domestic, family authorship, Levy notes, is that many of the works produced in these conditions, ‘represent the family as utterly inseparable from the political sphere, and

²⁰ Cox, *Poetry and Politics*, 62.

²¹ Michelle Levy, *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6.

private individuals as inevitably enmeshed in political and religious controversies' (14). Cox and Levy both argue, with reference to different circles of writers, that the small communities forged and represented through manuscript culture could represent or challenge, on a small scale, the wider public political life of the nation.

What is also important about this persisting, social, manuscript-based literary culture is that networks of response could be established between writers and readers. Romantic-era readers should not be seen simply as consumers of increasingly multitudinous print-matter, but also as creators of and responders to a sociable, communicative literature which was home-made in manuscript, and which co-existed alongside the commercial literary market. Furthermore, manuscript works could circulate far beyond the domestic or social circles of the authors, and were sometimes pirated into print from distant copies. Printed texts could also be reclaimed into manuscript culture through handwritten annotations and alterations. William St. Clair has described how transcribing verse into commonplace books and albums, either copied from magazines, books borrowed from a circulating library, or friends' manuscript albums, enabled 'diffuse and expensive' works by modern authors to reach a wider range of readers than those who could afford to purchase poetry books.²² Poems and extracts from periodicals could be cut out and pasted into albums and scrapbooks. St. Clair describes one reader's memories of his childhood home in the 1820s, where magazine poems were 'not read and cast aside, but re-read, conversed upon, and kept as household treasures'.²³ Manuscript was the only way for a large class of readers to own and re-read contemporary poetry. Stephen Colclough has outlined how this manuscript-based access to texts would have shaped readers' knowledge and appreciation of certain authors—for example, most contemporary readers would have been familiar with Byron's shorter, more easily-copied

²² St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 224.

²³ Benjamin Gregory, *Autobiographical Recollections* (1903), quoted in St. Clair, *Reading Nation*, 225.

lyrics, while only selected highlights of his longer epics could be transcribed.²⁴ Creating an album involved the reader remaking the copied texts by selecting certain passages over others, and placing them in a new contextual relationship to other material.²⁵

The forms and features of manuscript culture interacted with and permeated the medium of print. St Clair has described how the increasingly popular printed ‘keepsakes’ of the 1820s were based on the form of handwritten albums. The earliest ‘keepsakes’ were mainly blank but contained advice on how to make selections, or were printed with blank pages interspersed for the owner to handwrite poems of their choice into the volume; later versions left only a blank space for the owner’s (or the giver’s) name.²⁶ Andrew Piper has suggested that what he terms the ‘intermediality’ of the ‘keepsakes’ or ‘gift books’—the overlapping interaction of print and handwriting within the same book—was a way of turning the printed book into a communal, shareable space, as well as humanizing and personalizing a mass-produced technology.²⁷ Samantha Matthews has described how Victorian readers in the mid nineteenth century continued to customise and personalise printed, commercially-produced albums.²⁸ In effect, the printed keepsakes act to perpetuate the sociable aspects of manuscript culture—sharing and circulating one’s books—and encouraging the reader to inscribe or mark the text to memorialise the participants or occasion of gift-giving.

The lines between the commercial, distanced sphere of print, and the intimate sphere of manuscript culture should not therefore be seen as strictly drawn during the Romantic age. In a very material way, print books as well as manuscripts continued to have a place within the social life of groups through annotation and gift exchange—one thinks, for example, of Keats’s sonnet inscribed into Charles Cowden Clarke’s copy of Chaucer; or Coleridge’s

²⁴ Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 124.

²⁵ See Stephen Colclough, ‘Recovering the Reader: Commonplace Books and Diaries as Sources of Reading Experience’, *Publishing History*, 44 (1998), 5-37, 19.

²⁶ St Clair, *Reading Nation*, 229.

²⁷ Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age*, (University of Chicago Press, 2009), 128.

²⁸ Samantha Matthews, ‘Album’, *Victorian Review*, 34:1 (Spring 2008), 13-17.

profuse marginalia, sometimes addressed to particular readers, like his letter and annotations in a copy of Thomas Browne's works for Sara Hutchinson. Such activities challenge the idea of the printed book as a static, finished (and necessarily commercialised) object, instead suggesting the ways in which it can be reabsorbed into the creative life of the group. The idea that the personalised, handwritten text functions as a way of neutralising the commercialised nature of the commoditised book hints at the way in which manuscript culture practices of textual exchange function in ways more akin to a gift economy. Indeed, Lucy Newlyn has suggested the gift economy as a theoretical model in which to interpret the writing practices of the Wordsworth family.²⁹

Examining these interactions between manuscript and print culture therefore gives an increasingly complex picture of writer-reader relationships in the Romantic period. In addition, as many recent critics, including Cox, Levy and Roe (as discussed above) have suggested, manuscript-oriented communities created a space in which writers and readers could express social, political, and religious affiliations and allegiances with one another in addition to negotiating more literary concerns about their relationship to the reading public as a whole. One common thread which has emerged in recent criticism of Romanticism is the implication that practices of manuscript circulation persisted as an expression of the cultural importance, and, furthermore, the contemporary ideological resonance (political and/or religious) attached to ideas about friendship, sociability and sympathy. These cultural values, which I will describe in more detail in the next section, led manuscript practices, and their tropes and modes of representing friendship and social circles, to permeate into and interact with print culture. Not only that, but the popularity of the literature of sensibility (bearing, of course, its own ideological connotations) with its emphasis on the representation of subjective interiority, and its characteristic forms of the letter and the sonnet, entwined with and influenced manuscript-culture practices just as it did the print market.

²⁹ Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 6-8.

Contesting sociability, contesting sympathies

Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite have described sociability and sensibility as ‘heavily contested terms and practices critically implicated in the cultural politics of the 1790s, with often highly unstable meanings’.³⁰ To look at how and why these ideas (and the literary genres and forms which articulated and represented them) had acquired such controversial and often deeply politicised cultural connotations by the Romantic period, it is necessary to give a little background narrative of developments in moral philosophy, social psychology, and literary taste which had arisen over the course of the eighteenth century.

Over the past few decades several influential critical studies in the fields of literary criticism and history have described the profound impact of eighteenth-century philosophy on the intellectual culture of the Romantic age; in particular, philosophers’ interest in the role which human emotions—in particular, sympathy—played in forming and maintaining the relationships which underpinned the harmonious functioning of civil society, family life, and the ‘public sphere’. As John Mullan, and James Engell, among others, have described, numerous philosophers became interested in how emotions were transmitted from person to person, and the implications of this for social relations.³¹ Much of the debate centred on whether human nature was essentially self-interested or altruistic. One fundamental question arose, which recurred time and again in the writing of philosophers and moralists, and became increasingly charged in the 1790s: were the close bonds of family affection and the ties of friendship incompatible with an individual maintaining a universal benevolence towards the whole of humanity? Chris Jones has outlined the two fundamental strands of eighteenth-century thinking on the subject: on the one hand, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had both, in their various ways, suggested that each individual possessed a natural ‘moral sense’ that

³⁰ Russell and Tuite, *Romantic Sociability*, 9.

³¹ John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: the Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981).

regulated the social feelings.³² As a result of this ‘moral sense’, the limitations of partiality could be overcome and balanced out by universal benevolence. On the other hand, both Hume and Smith, while arguing for the immense importance of sympathy in endowing human nature with a sense of morality, had implied that the sympathetic imagination had its limitations, since individuals were likely to have more sympathy for those who resembled themselves.

The Earl of Shaftesbury, in his *Characteristics* (1711), propounded the importance of the social principle in human nature and public life. He wrote that, ‘A public spirit can only come from a social feeling or sense of partnership with humankind’ and that the feeling of obligation ‘to act sociably and honestly’ is a natural impulse which precedes the establishment of systems of civil government.³³ Humankind has a natural ‘herding’ instinct, which can sometimes be harmful if taken to extreme: Shaftesbury suggests that ‘the very spirit of faction, for the greatest part, seems to be no other than the abuse or irregularity of that social love and common affection which is natural to mankind’ (93). He criticises as unnatural, dissociable and destructive ‘that partial affection, or social love in part’ which does not expand outwards to include society as a whole, nor take into account the good of the public (205). It was up to the individual’s reason to keep such immoderate attachments checked, and to weigh emotions in the moral balance, since: ‘Who can depend on such a friendship as is founded on no moral rule but fantastically assigned to some single person or small part of mankind, exclusive of society and the whole?’ (206). When judging whether a particular action tends towards the public good or selfish good, Shaftesbury writes, motive is everything: ‘Let him, in any particular, act ever so well, if at the bottom it be that selfish affection alone which moves him, he is in himself still vicious’ (171).

³² Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s*, (London: Routledge, 1993).

³³ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2000; 2004), 89; 91.

Like Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson posited that humankind's naturally social feelings under-pinned the formation of public spiritedness. The natural impulse to sympathy was the source of disinterested compassion for others: 'this Sympathy with others is the Effect of the Constitution of our Nature, and not brought upon our selves by any Choice, with view to any selfish Advantage, they must own: whatever Advantage there may be in Sympathy with the Fortunate, none can be all edged in Sympathy with the Distressed'.³⁴ Hutcheson saw the perfection of human virtue in a kind of disinterested benevolence which looks towards the good of the general community. It was by means of this 'calm universal benevolence' that a restraint or limitation could be kept on 'the particular Affections or Passions of Love, Congratulation, Compassion, natural Affection' (33). The true moral sense, Hutcheson argued, demanded that private affections and public affections must be kept in balance.

While philosophers such as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson had taken a view of human nature in which the moral sense could regulate the influence of the passions, prejudices, and antipathies, other eighteenth century thinkers represented human nature as subject to the influence of a sympathetic capacity which was far more instinctive. David Hume theorized that, due to the essential similarity between individuals, each a mere bundle of impressions and sensations, emotion was transferred by a seemingly mechanical instinct, working without volition:

As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget the corresponding movements in every human creature. When I see the *effects* of passion in the voice and gesture of any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself. In like manner, when I perceive the causes of any emotion, my mind is conveyed to the effects, and is actuated with like emotion.³⁵

However, despite working by this 'natural' mechanism, the extent of sympathy, in Hume's opinion, is variable depending on the partial affections and habitual close associations

³⁴ Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. Aaron Garrett, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 23.

³⁵ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), I. 368.

between individuals. We are far more likely, Hume writes, to sympathise more strongly with people ‘proportion’d to the connexion’ which we share with them: so the ties of blood are strongest, but the similar ties are extended to countrymen, neighbours, those of the same trade, etc. (228) The creation of sympathy is therefore influenced by existing social ties, and in addition, can seem to uphold existing social structures: Hume suggests we are far more likely to sympathise with the rich, who surround themselves with fine, pleasurable things ‘such as houses, gardens, equipages; which, being agreeable in themselves, necessarily produce a sentiment of pleasure in everyone, that either considers or surveys them’, than with the misery of the poor (231).

One of the most influential treatises to discuss sympathy, Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, asserted its importance as ‘the basis of all moral thought and action’.³⁶ Furthermore, he asserted the fundamental importance of the imagination in enabling sympathy to exist. When viewing another person’s distress, Smith describes how:

[the senses] never did and never can carry us beyond our own persons, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. [...] By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted them and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels. (2-3)

However, this imaginative change of situation can only be momentary. The human propensity to sympathise has its limitations. Furthermore, Smith suggests that in social relations an individual need be perpetually conscious of how much (or how little) others are disposed to sympathise with them: the sufferer must check and compose their emotions in order to conform them to the degree that an observer might be expected to sympathise with. (26-9, *passim*) We are inclined, Smith argues, to judge how appropriate someone else’s emotions are to the situation by the degree to which their ideas and feeling concord with our

³⁶ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, (London: A. Millar, A. Kincaid and J. Bell, 1759), 150.

own. Furthermore, like Hume, Smith suggests that sympathy is dependent upon close association and partiality, so that ‘the misery of one, who is merely their fellow-creature’ rather than linked to them by any ‘particular connection’ is of little importance (86).

Representations of and thinking about the role of the emotions in social life, especially sympathy and sensibility, became increasingly and anxiously politicized in the wake of the French Revolution. Conservative and liberal/radical thinkers fought to define the increasingly contested, ambiguous and murky terminology at the centre of the debate, particularly the question of whether or not partial affections and local attachments were incompatible with universal benevolence. The language of sympathy and community could be variously used to the advantage of all sides in the political debate.

Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, famously asserted that the cold reason which he accused the French Revolutionaries of possessing could never replace the ties of habitual affection:

No man ever was attached by a sense of pride, partiality, or real affection, to a description of square measurement. He never will glory in belonging to the Chequer No. 71, or to any other badge-ticket. We begin our public affections in our families. No cold relation is a zealous citizen. We pass on to our neighbourhoods, and our habitual provincial connexions. These are inns and resting-places. Such divisions of our country as have been formed by habit, and not by a sudden jerk of authority, were so many little images of the great country in which the heart found something which it could fill. The love to the whole is not extinguished by this subordinate partiality.³⁷

Burke emphasised that personalised affinities and localised connections were the source of a wider sense of belonging, arguing that:

To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind. (40)

Burke sees the ‘little platoon’, the small domestic unit, held together by habitual affections, as the heart of national stability, forming the nucleus from which all public affections move outwards. Burke parallels the natural influence of the parent over the child to the influence

³⁷ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Frank M. Turner et al., (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 2003), 167.

which the inherited conventions of the state should wield on the present nation, so that metaphorically ‘we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars’ (29-30). Burke thus portrays the traditional hierarchical structures of family and state as a natural order, the continuance of which is upheld by customs and the habitual loyalties of the populace towards the existing state of things.

Burke prized instinctive sensibilities over rational questioning; the ties of blood irrespective of a rational appreciation of moral virtue. To counter this, the radical philosopher William Godwin adapted ideas about universal benevolence inherited from the Shaftesburian/Hutchesonian line of moral philosophy and took them to a greater extreme, as both Chris Jones and Evan Radcliffe have argued.³⁸ In *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, Godwin argued that the ties of kinship and affection inhibited individuals from choosing the rational path of benevolent action that ensured the good of the wider public. In his most notorious analogy, Godwin argues that acting according to pure justice (that is, acting in a way most conducive to the general good) would mean that one should save the life of the archbishop Fénelon from a fire rather than the archbishop’s chambermaid, even if that chambermaid were one’s wife or mother.³⁹ Such reasoning led Godwin to be associated with a kind of cold, calculating rationality from which many of his contemporaries were eager to distance themselves. More recent critics, such as Chris Jones, have defended him as being forced into a position of extremity to counteract the ideas about partial affections which conservative reactionaries had ‘exaggerated into unthinking principles of action’: ‘In his attack

³⁸ Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, 89-96, passim; Evan Radcliffe, ‘Arguing Benevolence: Wordsworth, Godwin, and the 1790s,’ in Lisa P. Crafon (ed.), *The French Revolution Debate in English Literature and Culture*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 59-81, 68.

³⁹ William Godwin, *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, 2 vols. (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1793), I. 83.

on family affections [Godwin] is attacking the exclusivity and self-aggrandizement of the great aristocratic families who monopolized the wealth and power of Britain'.⁴⁰

One contrary tactic in response to Burkean conservatism was to reclaim the language of family and localised affection and use it to argue the case for radical and democratic philosophies of civil society. Mary Wollstonecraft saw family relations as the key to allowing a reformation of the state. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, she argued that domestic affections in early life were essential for exercising the sympathies of children and thereby educating them to wider social feelings for humankind:

if you wish to make good citizens, you must first exercise the affections of a son and a brother, This is the only way to expand the heart; for public affections, as well as public virtues, must ever grow out of the private character, or they are merely meteors that shoot athwart a dark sky, and disappear as they are gazed at and admired. Few, I believe, have had much affection for mankind, who did not first love their parents, their brothers, sisters, and even the domestic brutes, whom they first played with.⁴¹

However, as Mary Fairclough has recently argued, for Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Burke, sympathy could have an ambiguous, if not dangerous potential, especially with regard to the emotions of crowds. While Burke had infamously complained in his *Reflections* of the 'swinish multitude' of the common populace that threaten to trample learning into the dust, Fairclough describes how Wollstonecraft and Godwin repeatedly characterised sympathetic communication in pathological terms, tending 'to characterise the actions of collectives as prompted by a pernicious, unthinking contagion of influence'.⁴² Sympathy, as the means by which an instinctive transference of emotion occurred, could have disruptive potential. Shaftesbury, as John Mullan notes, had drawn a class distinction between the sentiments shared by small, polite social groups, and the unconstrained passions of the crowd or mob: 'One may with good reason call every passion 'panic' which is raised in a multitude and

⁴⁰ Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, 91.

⁴¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Men; A Vindication of the Rights of Woman; An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution*, ed. Janet M. Todd, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 246.

⁴² Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), 83.

conveyed by aspect or, as it were, by contact or sympathy' (10).⁴³ The threat of 'contagious' emotion acquired more dangerous implications in the 1790s when ideas about the sympathetic transmission of emotion became entwined with popular politics. Where the implications of sympathetic transmission become most interesting, is, as Fairclough suggests, when the transmission of emotions becomes symbolic of the textual transmission of ideas: sympathy 'becomes a model for the diffusion of information through the press'.⁴⁴ In parallel to physical public meetings, the press could create 'virtual collectives', and the cohesive force of sympathy could be used to create bonds of solidarity on a national level, similar to Klancher's ideas about the formation of reading audiences (10).

In reaction to the Terror in France, Coleridge was scathing about those 'Friends of Liberty' who followed their sympathies without any adherence to moral principle, arguing that intensity of feeling could be a dangerous thing: 'The ardour of undisciplined benevolence seduces us into malignity: and whenever our hearts are warm, and our objects great and excellent, intolerance is the sin that does most easily beset us'.⁴⁵ However, in fundamental disagreement with the cold claims of Godwinian reason, Coleridge, in language akin to Burke and Wollstonecraft, argued for the importance of domestic ties in his 1795 pamphlet, *Conciones ad Populum*. Drawing on David Hartley's theory of associationism, he claimed that, 'We love an object if, as often as we see or recollect it, an agreeable sensation arises in our minds' (45). Domestic attachments, formed by frequent and habitual associations, therefore formed the basis of all wider attachments. In contrast to Godwin, Coleridge argued that:

The searcher after Truth must love and be beloved; for general Benevolence is a necessary motive to constancy of pursuit; and this general Benevolence is begotten and rendered permanent by social and domestic affections. Let us beware that proud Philosophy, which affects to inculcate Philanthropy while it denounces every home-born feeling, by which it is produced and nurtured. The paternal and filial duties discipline the Heart and prepare it for the love of all Mankind. The intensity of private attachments encourages, not prevents, universal Benevolence. (46)

⁴³ Mullan, 26.

⁴⁴ Fairclough, 6.

⁴⁵ 'Conciones ad Populum', *Lectures 1795*, 35.

Coleridge's thoughts echo those of Joseph Priestley, whose work had a significant impact on both Coleridge and Lamb during their youthful Unitarian days in the 1790s. Many decades earlier, Priestley had suggested that, 'when once a man's affections have been transferred from himself to others, even his wife and children, they are more easily extended to other persons, still more remote from him, and that, by this means, he is in the way of acquiring a principle of general benevolence, patriotism, and public spirit'.⁴⁶

The attitude of Coleridge and his friends towards sociability, their ideas about the importance of family and friendly connections, and their textual representations of their own social circles, were rooted in the 1790s debate about the role of domestic attachments and friendship in civil society, as several critics have explored in great detail over the past few decades, among them Nigel Leask, Kelvin Everest, Nicholas Roe, Nicola Trott, and more recently Felicity James, and Gurion Taussig.⁴⁷ Recent scholarship on Romantic-era writers has done much to elucidate how they inherited from eighteenth-century moral philosophy a long history of ideas about sympathy, sociability and friendship, which in turn influenced how they conceptualised their friendships and social relationships—an influence which persisted into second-generation Romanticism, as both Porscha Fermanis and Nicholas Roe have discussed in the case of Keats and Hunt.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Joseph Priestley, *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*, 2 vols. (Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason, 2nd ed. 1782), I. 86-7.

⁴⁷ Kelvin Everest, *Coleridge's Secret Ministry: the Context of the Conversation Poems, 1795-1798*, (Brighton: Harvester; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979); Nigel Leask, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988); Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988; 1990); Nicola Trott, 'The Coleridge Circle and the 'Answer to Godwin'', in Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure (eds.), *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland*, (Tirril, UK: Humanities-Ebooks, 2007), 43-61; James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth*; Taussig.

⁴⁸ Porscha Fermanis, *John Keats and the Ideas of the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009); Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*.

Friendship, sentiment and society

The literary representation of friendship took on an important political charge in the 1790s, as James and Taussig have discussed in much detail. Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* had contested that 'man, were he not corrupted by governments, is naturally the friend of man'.⁴⁹ The adoption of the language of friendship by politically radical writers, as well as by radical associations like the 'Society of the Friends of the People', meant that sociable practices and acts of association, as well as the representation of friendship and friendly communities in literature, could become charged with latent political meaning.

In the repressive climate of revolutionary anxiety, sociability could be a political act: anyone discussing politics in a tavern, for example, was at risk of being overheard by government spies, on the alert for 'seditious' activities. The social spaces of the public sphere—debating clubs, public meetings, chapels—became sites of surveillance. As a result, Russell and Tuite have argued, private sociability became increasingly important as a way of preserving free debate and intellectual liberty, citing as evidence the importance which Godwin places on conversation in *Political Justice* as a means of 'constructing a space that might be more secure from the attentions of government but which would also serve to monitor the dangers of conviviality's "loose talk"'.⁵⁰ Writing could perform the work of creating virtual networks that could, on the one hand, bring physical associations or meetings into being, and on the other, function as their substitute in the face of government surveillance and legal restrictions. Mary Favret has argued that in the 1790s the 'friendly letter' became a symbol of collective political activity as well as a political weapon.⁵¹ Societies such as the London Revolution Society, the Society for Constitutional Information, the London Society of the Friends of the People, and the London Corresponding Society, were established

⁴⁹ Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man: Part the Second*, (London: H. D. Symonds, 1792), 44-5.

⁵⁰ Russell and Tuite, *Romantic Sociability*, 17.

⁵¹ Mary Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 27.

in a large part through correspondence networks, and used them to spread ideas of parliamentary and political reform. The ‘friendly letter’, deploying the epistolary rhetoric of friendship and sentiment, could encourage a sense of unified community between radicals and reform societies distributed across the country, creating a network of those whom Richard Price called, the ‘friends of freedom, and writers in its defence’.⁵²

Just as Favret outlines the importance of letter-writing in creating networks of political radicals, Susan Whyman’s social history of letter-writing, *The Pen and the People*, uses unpublished collections of family letters to show how letter-writing functioned to establish the writer’s identity and place in a community. Whyman argues that correspondence networks were especially important to Dissenting communities who sought solidarity in their religious affiliations.⁵³ The marginalised position of Dissenters, unable to fully belong the establishment, and at risk of persecution, especially during the turbulent decade of the 1790s, meant that, as Daniel White and Felicity James have observed, networks of Dissenting sociability, established through worship, education, and family connections, took on particular significance.⁵⁴ Dissenting culture, education, and social networks had a significant impact on many writers in the Romantic period, and it is no accident that all of the authors in this study have links to Dissent in one way or another. This is most evident in Anna Barbauld’s close ties to Warrington Academy and her friendship with prominent Non-conformists such as Joseph Priestley. Daniel White has suggested that the collaborative literary practices of Barbauld and her brother John Aikin emerged as an attempt to forge a particular ‘Dissenting public sphere’ which emphasised the link between the domestic domain of the family and the wider civil life of the nation (67). White furthermore emphasises that the impact of Dissenting sociability persists beyond strictly religious circles, arguing that it ‘needs to be

⁵² Richard Price, *A discourse on the love of our country, delivered on Nov. 4, 1789*, (London: T. Cadell, 1789), 50.

⁵³ Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 154-5.

⁵⁴ Daniel White, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006); Felicity James ‘Introduction’, in Felicity James and Ian Inkster (eds.) *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle, 1740-1860*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2012).

understood in terms of the rhetorical or stylistic legacies of religious communities which continued to inform social manners and values for groups of Dissenters who may no longer have been united by denomination or creed' (98).

These 'rhetorical legacies' of the language and values of friendship, community, and domesticity had a wide-ranging and persisting impact on Romanticism. Felicity James has shown how, in response to Burke's and Godwin's conflicting theories of the role of partial affections, Coleridge and Lamb, influenced by the ideas about the importance of social worship which they had encountered at Essex Street Chapel, 'turned to the language of family and affection in Unitarianism' to express their friendship.⁵⁵ While Coleridge would abandon his early Unitarian inclinations in later life, Charles Lamb continued to identify himself as a 'One-Goddite' for the rest of his life.⁵⁶

Through educational institutions, Dissenting culture spread far and wide. Nicholas Roe has described in great detail how John Keats's Dissenting education at Enfield School, which placed him in direct continuity with a long line of English radicalism and republicanism, shaped the poet's thinking.⁵⁷ Roe has also shown how Leigh Hunt's fondness for domestic sociability was influenced by the Universalist doctrine of inclusiveness, absorbed from his parents, which 'gave spiritual sanction for extending 'friendship' and 'unity' to the whole world under a republican, millenarian banner'.⁵⁸

The language and values of sociability, friendship, and domesticity which played such an important part in Dissenting culture entwined with the popularity of the rhetoric of intimacy and affection drawn from the culture of sensibility. Mary Waters has argued that Dissenters had 'a privileged relationship to the culture of sensibility' since '[b]oth their religious thinking and their social practice emphasized values that have been identified as the

⁵⁵ James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth*, 32.

⁵⁶ Lucas, III. 325.

⁵⁷ Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Roe, *Fiery Heart: The First Life of Leigh Hunt*, (London: Pimlico, 2005), 29.

core of eighteenth-century sentimental culture'.⁵⁹ The idea of a 'Dissenting public sphere,' existing at the intersection of domestic and civil life, reflects simply one aspect of a wider concern with the connection between private manners and public life which formed a core concern within the literature of sentiment and sensibility.

Literary critics and cultural historians have linked the development of sentimental fiction and the literature of sensibility to the eighteenth century theories of sympathy and moral philosophy which I have described in the previous section. John Mullan has outlined the similarities between moral philosophy and narrative fiction in the eighteenth century, as both 'engage in the description of forms of society,' adding that 'neither type of text simply reflects social conditions or relations: both *produce* society; both seek to make society on the page'.⁶⁰ As the characteristic sentimental genre, the epistolary novel, had used the rhetoric of 'audience-oriented privacy' to emphasise the intrinsic link between private manners and virtues and the conduct of public life, so the literature of sensibility became implicitly linked to ideas about the formation of civil society. On a more material level, social historians Paul Langford and George Barker-Benfield have linked the development of the 'culture of sensibility' to an emergent middle-class identity that desired an alternative code of manners that 'challenged aristocratic ideals and fashions'.⁶¹ Langford has furthermore suggested that sensibility was important in galvanizing the emergent voice of public opinion (485).

The implications of this link between sensibility and society became increasingly charged in the 1790s. Markman Ellis has suggested that by using the metaphor of sensibility 'which provided an understanding of the organisation and integration of the body,' writers

⁵⁹ Mary A. Waters, *British Women Writers and the Profession of Literary Criticism 1789-1832*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 12.

⁶⁰ Mullan, 25.

⁶¹ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989; 1998), 461; G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex & Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

‘could also model the organisation of the body politic’.⁶² Harriet Guest has described how the language of sensibility in the 1790s provided a way for women, in particular, to imagine and express their position in relation to the wider community of the nation.⁶³ The medium of the epistolary novel became the format in which writers of all politics expressed and examined the crisis of the 1790s, as Thomas O’Beebee notes in regard to Revolutionary France.⁶⁴ Mark Phillips notes the popularity of the letter, with its affective possibilities, in historical writing of the period, describing how Helen Maria Williams chose the epistolary format for her letters from Revolutionary France, since she felt that the ‘deepest meaning of the Revolution would be felt in private life’.⁶⁵ In Britain, the epistolary genre became charged with radical connotations: as Mary Favret asserts, ‘the sentimental fiction of letters disguises [...] a revolutionary politics’ (10).

The power and potency of the literature of sensibility lay in its ability to represent and transmit emotions through engaging the reader’s sympathies. Ellis suggests that reading sentimental novels, ‘was to be an improving experience, refining the manners by exercising the ability to feel for others’ (17). While in theory, sentimental fiction was to teach the practice of sympathy, much anxiety existed as to whether this truly proved effective. Barker-Benfield has described how, while sentimental fiction promoted ‘simplicity’ of dress and manner, and ‘the renunciation of material ‘luxury’, in favour of the ‘luxury’ of grief and other forms of morally superior feelings’, there was no guarantee that the adoption of such outward signs of sensibility reflected inner character (268). The idea that sensibility could be false, and assumed merely for the sake of fashion, was as Barker-Benfield suggests, an ongoing concern (268). Phillips describes how the opponents of sensibility feared that rather than

⁶² Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 20.

⁶³ Harriet Guest, *Unbounded Attachment: Sentiment and Politics in the Age of the French Revolution*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 4.

⁶⁴ Thomas O’Beebee, *Epistolary Fiction in Europe 1500-1850*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 140.

⁶⁵ Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain 1740-1820*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000), 95.

strengthening the moral faculties, ‘would only induce a state of excited passivity that had no outlet in effective action’ (127). Barbauld, Wollstonecraft and Coleridge all wrote of their suspicions that a misplaced sensibility could be a sign of sheer self-indulgence. Wollstonecraft criticised particular displays of feminine sensibility, suggesting that the same lady that ‘sheds tears for the bird starved in a snare’ might keep her coachman and horses waiting for hours in the rain and frost, and likewise, ‘she who takes her dogs to bed, and nurses them with a parade of sensibility, when sick, will suffer her babes to grow up crooked in a nursery’ (259-60). Coleridge likewise stressed that ‘Sensibility is not Benevolence’.⁶⁶ The vicarious exercise of sympathy in the realm of fiction did not, therefore, in the eyes of many Romantic writers, necessarily lead to feelings of wider benevolence in the realm of actual life.

Despite ambiguities over the true social function of sentimental fiction, Romantic writers nevertheless exploited the affective potential of the language of sensibility. In discussing the early works of Coleridge, James and Taussig both argue that politically-inflected language of friendship used by the circle arises from the culture of sensibility: James writes how the political stance of Coleridge’s early sonnets ‘was inextricably linked to the rhythms and constructions of the literature of sensibility’ and how, for his circle, it was ‘their shared reading of authors such as Bowles and Mackenzie, who helped to form the language of their friendship’.⁶⁷ It was precisely because the culture of sensibility foregrounded the importance of an intuitive, instinctive responsiveness that it seemed suitable to express idea of the innate naturalness of family and friendly sympathies and connections. Even as late as the second decade of the nineteenth century, Leigh Hunt could still adopt elements of the language of sensibility, laden with its political connotations, as the language of social conscience.

The genres commonly associated with the literature of sensibility (letters, sonnets to friends) were those which existed on the borderline between print and manuscript culture.

⁶⁶ *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 2, ed. Lewis Patton, *The Watchman*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton UP: 1970), 139.

⁶⁷ James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth*, 24.

The political connotations of sensibility raise the question whether some contemporary critics reacted negatively to the use of sociable, ‘manuscript’ forms because of the association of this kind of writing with ‘dangerous’ emotions and radical politics. In the interaction of manuscript and print culture, therefore, we find a borderline at which are being demonstrated tensions and ambiguities about the interaction of public and private life, and between public and private allegiances.

Coteries, communities, and reading

In this brief outline of the intellectual and literary culture of the Romantic era, I have examined eighteenth-century theories of sympathy alongside the question of whether private attachments could coexist with universal benevolence, as well as how these ideas found expression in the literature of sensibility, to show how such ideas, and the language in which they were framed, were heavily contested and laden with ambiguity. As a result, when writers try to adopt particular interpretations about what sympathy, friendship, and community attachments mean to them, no matter what the political inclinations or affiliations of the individual writer or circle, there is always the implicit potential that the same words, images, and arguments can be interpreted through a contrary lens, and deployed to fundamentally different ideological ends. Romantic sociability and its representations are therefore characterised by the need for constant acts of self-definition and situation; the role of social communities in civil life is not clear cut but contested. What I want to stress as an important aspect of this thesis is that ideas and concerns about the role, function and transmission of the literary work in the community mirror ideas about the formation and action of social ties in the communities in which the texts move. The relationship of the writer and potential reader(s) are imagined and represented in terms which parallel the relationship of the individual and the community or wider society. Just as eighteenth-century

philosophy had debated the issue of whether sharing bonds of affection with certain individuals inhibited a wider universal sympathy with humankind, so a parallel question implicitly arises in the circulation of the literary text. When poetry is written for coterie audiences or to create shared interest groups, is it invariably limited in usefulness or meaningfulness to ‘outsiders’, and is its transmission to a wider audience necessarily impaired? The fundamental question which arises (and which is invariably inflected with the contemporary politics of the era) is whether by using ‘sociable’ kinds of writing, writers are in effect writing mainly for the ‘little platoon’ of their own friends. While writers of radical or liberal politics might imagine that by using the rhetoric of sociability they can look to vicariously include a wider universal brotherhood in their circle, the mechanism by which this might be transmitted seems invariably problematical. The question then, implicit but not always openly addressed by Romantic writers and their (contemporary and present day) critics, is does this sociable ‘coterie’ kind of writing look inwards, or reach outwards? Is it inclusive or exclusive? I think examining this specific tension provides a way, not just of examining the implications of Romantic writers’ own representations of sociability, but of elucidating and explaining the often hostile responses of their contemporary critics to works which openly represented social circles in print, an idea which I will return to in more detail in chapters discussing Barbauld and Hunt.

Furthermore, when writers attempt to form the identities of their reading audiences, as Jon Klancher has suggested, the making of one class or cultural group occurs as an act of differentiation from another; what unites one group, distances another. The awareness of being a reader or member of one audience is relational—it is an identity which is shared with some readers but not with others.⁶⁸ It is this implication that the literary work can define the limitations of its own transmission, including or excluding some individuals from the act of reading, which makes reading a charged activity.

⁶⁸ Klancher, 11-12.

The idea that the reading audience, and interpretative access to the text, can be limited points to more fundamental hermeneutic issues. Romantic-era theories of how reading transmitted feelings or ideas were grounded in the concept of sympathetic imagination. Throughout the eighteenth century, numerous writers suggested that, in the most immersive kind of reading, the reader relinquished their own identity under the direction of the writer. Kames wrote that, ‘The reader’s passions are never sensibly moved, till he be thrown into a kind of reverie; in which state, losing the consciousness of self, and of reading, his present occupation, he conceives every incident as passing in his presence, precisely as if he were an eye-witness.’⁶⁹ Later authors concurred with this sentiment. William Godwin described how, ‘When I read Thomson, I become Thomson; when I read Milton, I become Milton. I find myself a sort of intellectual chameleon, assuming the colour of the substances on which I rest.’⁷⁰ However, Godwin claims that such responsiveness was the result of a trained sensibility acquired from extensive reading in early life. He suggests that, in contrast,

The late reader makes a superficial acquaintance with his author, but is never admitted into the familiarity of a friend. Stiffness and formality are always visible between them. He does not become the creature of his author; neither bends with all his caprices, nor sympathises with all his sensations (34).

Becoming the most responsive kind of reader, therefore, seems dependent on early training, and a willing sympathy and receptiveness that resembled the kind of goodwill established between friends. In this ‘chameleon’ model of reading, whereby the pliable reader relinquishes self-hood to the writer’s direction, the reader also, implicitly, relinquishes up the power interpret the text in their own way.

In contrast, elsewhere in *The Enquirer*, Godwin suggests that more resistant, independent forms of reading are possible, and indeed, likely. Godwin makes a distinction between two aspects of the work, the ‘moral’ and the ‘tendency’:

⁶⁹ Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: A. Millar; London: A. Kincaid & J. Bell, 1762), I, 112.

⁷⁰ William Godwin, *The Enquirer*, (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1797), 33.

The moral of any work may be defined to be, that ethical sentence to the illustration of which the work may most aptly be applied. The tendency is the actual effect it is calculated to produce upon the reader, and cannot be completely ascertained but by the experiment. The selection of the one, and the character of the other, will in a great degree depend upon the previous state of mind of the reader. (136)

Different readers, depending on their 'temper of mind and preparation' may derive different impressions from the same book. Likewise, the moral which an author assigns to their own work may be radically different from that which the reader takes from it. Godwin suggests that authors frequently 'show themselves superlatively ignorant of the tendency of their own writings,' suggesting that, for example, 'Nothing is more futile, than the formal and regular moral frequently annexed to Esop's fables of animals. Examine the fable impartially, and you will find that the lesson set down at foot of it, is one of the last inferences that would have occurred to you' (132-3). The author's intention, Godwin suggests, is of little consequence. Furthermore, Godwin's measure of authorial merit places all questions of moral or tendency below the author's ability to create works which are 'fraught with irresistible enchantment', authors who 'pour their whole souls into mine, and raise me as it were to the seventh heaven' (139-40). The sympathetic, emotional appeal of the work therefore trumps all other considerations.

In Godwin's formulation of the mismatch between writerly intention and readerly interpretation we find the core of modern hermeneutics. One particular idea to emerge in Romantic hermeneutic theory was that the friend, with more extensive personal knowledge of the author and therefore a greater propensity to sympathise, was the best interpreter of the work. Recent work by Tilottama Rajan, Lucy Newlyn, and Elinor Shaffer has established the importance of the idea of the reading friend in the German lectures of Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose work (while not widely known in Britain in the Romantic period) had many parallels with Coleridge's theories of reader-response.⁷¹ Schleiermacher emphasised the

⁷¹ Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990); Newlyn, *Reading, Writing and Romanticism*; Elinor Shaffer, 'The Hermeneutic Community: Coleridge and Schleiermacher,' in Grivil and Lefebure (eds.), *The Coleridge Connection*, 186-211.

important role that sympathy plays in understanding: 'In interpretation it is essential that one be able to step out of one's own frame of mind into that of the author'.⁷² The friend is therefore the best kind of reader and interpreter of the text, since they are closest to knowing the writer's mind. They are therefore capable of what Schleiermacher called the 'divinatory' method of reading, 'in which one, so to speak, transforms oneself into the other person and tries to understand the individual element directly'.⁷³ This method of reading, inevitably, becomes more problematic with the passage of space and time, as author and reader are at further distance from one another. Schleiermacher's model of understanding, involving an imaginative act of transforming oneself into the other person, shares certain attributes with Adam Smith's depiction of the imagination's role in facilitating sympathy between one person and another.

Coleridge independently developed a similar theory of reading to Schleiermacher. Rajan has suggested the Coleridge saw himself as the best reader of Wordsworth's poetry, claiming to understand Wordsworth better than the poet understood himself.⁷⁴ Rajan argues that the two parts of *Biographia Literaria* form 'a theory and an enactment of reading' so that the first part 'sketches the author's need for a prophetic reader' while the second 'introduces precisely that reader and raises the question of whether the 'author' is not a construction of the reader' (109). Shaffer has argued that Coleridge took a similar approach when looking to his own readers, citing as evidence not just Coleridge's periodical *The Friend*, but the epigraph to *Biographia Literaria* which addresses the work, not to a social class or group, but rather to the friends he hoped to be 'of like mind' with himself.⁷⁵ For both Coleridge and Schleiermacher,

⁷² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle, trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman, (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), 30.

⁷³ The alternative method is the 'comparative,' which 'first of all posits the person to be understood as something universal and then finds the individual aspect by comparison with other things included in the same universal.' Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, ed. and transl. Andrew Bowie, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 92-93.

⁷⁴ Rajan, 106.

⁷⁵ Shaffer, 197.

it was specifically spoken conversation with a close companion, in particular, that permitted the 'divinatory' method of understanding.

What privileging friendly reading above all other kinds implies, however, is a view that human sympathies are invariably limited and incomplete. It suggests, as Smith and Hume had suggested, that sympathy is based on resemblance, on shared experiences and outlooks. The ties of friendship, closeness and instinctive affinity appear to override the sort of rational, reasoning interpretation which any reader could bring to bear upon the text. In the contrast between this friendly, instinctive method of reading, and the alternative, more independent—if not resistant—model of reading theorised by Godwin, in which the reader freely applies their own moral to the work, or sees in it a tendency that the author could not, appears to be mirrored the kind of tensions between particularity and universality, the exclusive and the inclusive, the small group and the wider network of humanity, which also characterised the social and political concerns of the age. What is notable, as Godwin's essay implies, is that the former, instinctive, friendly, and self-relinquishing kind of reading seems to be the most emotionally satisfying. I will explore in more detail later on how other kinds of reading also seem to emerge at particular moments in Romantic-era literature. However, for the time being, I suggest that the problem which arises for Romantic writers from the tension between writing for a small group of known readers, and for a wider unknown public, is a problem which can be framed in two ways—either in historically-specific ideological terms, or as a universal, atemporal problem which is inherent as a condition of literature.

The twentieth-century philosopher Paul Ricoeur expressed the dynamics of hermeneutics in terms of distanciation (the semantic autonomy of the text which creates the distance necessary to allow it bear meaning apart from the intentions of the author) versus appropriation (the interpretative act of the reader which allows them to make what was foreign familiar and their own). Ricoeur writes how, for anti-historicist critics,

a text is not primarily a message addressed to a specific range of readers and, in that sense, not a segment in a historical chain; inasmuch as it is a text, it is a kind of atemporal object, which has, so to speak, cut its ties from all historical development. The access to writing implies this overcoming of the historical process, the transfer of discourse to a sphere of ideality that allows an indefinite widening of the sphere of communication.⁷⁶

In writing this thesis, I have focused with particular interest on moments in which writers appear to be facing this particular hermeneutic problem, either as an atemporal, essentially literary problem, as here or, alternatively, as a problem historically and politically contextualised by the intellectual and culture climate of the Romantic era. While they can, ostensibly, have an idea of a specific, known reader, whom they are addressing, they are simultaneously aware that the text is ultimately out of their control and can be remade by other readers (their contemporaries, and readers far into the future) whom they do not know. Moments when two coexisting audiences are evidently present (for example, when a writer addresses a specific individual in medium of the public press) seem particularly to bring this tension to the fore. Language, like any social phenomenon, as Ricoeur rightly states, is subject to rules of admission and exclusion (31). As a result, writers' practices of using allusion, in-jokes, and covert references for 'knowing' readers have the effect of complicating, perhaps even policing, the boundaries of interpretation that are open for the distanced, 'unknowing' reader. By using these covert references and allusions, writers can privilege the known, friendly reader over the stranger reader, and maintain the idea that the reading friend is the ideal reader. Such intimate languages have a protective function, whereby the stranger reader is excluded, and, often, knows that they are placed outside of the knowing circle. Yet, since literary value depends on the work's ability to transcend time, space, and its initial sphere of reference, writers must nevertheless look beyond the friendly coterie to the larger unknown audience, contemporaneous and future. This essential tension between the two coexisting, if not competing, kinds of readers by whom a writer's work can be read lies at the heart of the

⁷⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian UP, 1976), 91

case studies examined in this thesis. It is precisely the way that admission and exclusion in language appears to mirror wider social phenomena that makes these issues so charged in the Romantic period.

Material texts and contexts

In order to trace the interaction of writers and their readers in a tangible rather than an abstract or theoretical sense, I have sought to read literary works as social acts, positioning them in their individual, localized, and material contexts of publication and reception, either in manuscript or print. By reading texts in this materially-located context—in a letter to a friend, in a manuscript book, within the pages of a particular newspaper—allusions, influences and reciprocal relationships can be revealed that are otherwise obscured. I have examined with particular interest moments when writers appear to evoke or imagine multiple, co-existing audiences: a specific, known reader or group of readers; historically-specific networks of readers, linked by friendships or by political or religious allegiances; a more amorphous, unknown ‘general reader’; or an imagined community of readers associated with a particular publication. Likewise, I have examined moments at which a poem or prose work exists within a localized or personalized context, connected to an immediate reader or a temporal or material context, and yet is, simultaneously, more widely available to be detached, reworked, and re-appropriated.

Gerard Genette’s *Paratexts* argued that the material that frames a text—the title, preface, dedication, footnotes, etc., and, in addition, other things like writers’ interviews—has an important impact upon the text’s reception. The fringes of the text are, Genette argues, used to control how it is received:

this fringe, always the conveyer of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and

achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies).⁷⁷

Such textual fringes are, therefore, important sites in which interpretative access can be opened up or shut down. Where I have differed from Genette is in taking into account ways that the text can be framed by other texts which are beyond the author's control—for example, in the space of a newspaper or magazine where the articles surrounding it are placed either by accident or by the editor's decision; or, in the space of a manuscript album copied by a reader. Such moments, when texts undergo appropriation, repositioning, recontextualising or remaking are important evidence of the work's availability to the meanings of other readers beyond the 'first audience', and evidence of its continued life outside the coterie.

In taking this approach to Romantic texts, I have been influenced by earlier critics who have sought to read the process of the 'socialization' of literature, and argued that publication context has an impact on the meaning and interpretation of a literary work. Jerome McGann has argued that, the 'initial moment of publication constitutes the first explicit appearance of the poem's meaning (a meaning that arises in the communication-event involving the author's expression and the reader's response)'.⁷⁸ McGann mainly focuses on the author's own intentions regarding their work, describing how, 'those intentions are codified in the author's choice of time, place, and form of publication—or none of the above, by which I mean his decision *not* to publish at all, or to circulate in manuscript, or to print privately' (23-4). Paul Magnuson has argued that it is important to read 'the material specificity of [a work's] utterance' to show how it forges connections to other works, and takes its place in a public discourse: 'Beginning with the specificity of a poem's location, one can trace within the public discourse a network of echoes, allusions, repetitions, innuendoes, signatures, and apostrophes that mediate the work's public significance'.⁷⁹ By means of these

⁷⁷ Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 2.

⁷⁸ Jerome McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 50.

⁷⁹ Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 4; 23.

textual indicators, the works ‘speak through their paratexts to other individual speakers, classes or readers, or other works’ (35). It is precisely this act of address and the presence of this paratext, Magnuson argues, that turns literature into a public genre, suggesting that, ‘when subjective Romantic lyrics are addressed as letters, they become public documents’ (38). Placing a similar importance on an individual work’s context, other critics of Romanticism, such as David Fairer and Neil Fraistat, have read individual poems in the light of the place they take within a larger volume of poetry.⁸⁰

Given the persisting importance of manuscript circulation in the social, literary culture of the Romantic period, I have chosen to expand the idea of reading texts in their context beyond the confines of print publication to include letters and manuscript poetry. I have emphasised reading letters *as letters*—taking into account their place in a dialogue with a known recipient, as well as their generic position relative to a literary tradition of letter-writing that crossed fictional works and biography, filling writers with a peculiar consciousness of literary precedent, and the prospect of writing for posterity. As I shall describe in greater detail later on in this thesis, letters had the potential for permanence, and could be preserved for future re-reading or, indeed, publication.

Recent critical attempts to categorise manuscripts seem somewhat inadequate to describe the dynamic and complex role which manuscript circulation could play in the literary circles of the Romantic era. Donald Reiman has attempted to classify modern manuscripts into three categories, ‘*public, confidential (or corporate), or private (or personal)*’: the first kind addressed to a widespread, unspecified and personally unknown audience; the second addressed to a specific group of individuals or group sharing communal values with the author; the final kind addressed to specific persons.⁸¹ Reiman’s attempt to categorise

⁸⁰ David Fairer, *Organizing Poetry: the Coleridge Circle, 1790-98*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009); Neil Fraistat, *The Poem and the Book: Interpreting Collections of Romantic Poetry*, (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

⁸¹ Donald Reiman, *The Study of Modern Manuscripts: Public, Confidential, and Private*, (Baltimore, MD; London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), 38.

manuscripts brings to the fore the issue of readerly interpretation as texts move in different circles of transmission. Whereas personal and confidential manuscripts have a basis of '*preestablished communality*' between writer and intended reader(s), public documents require a writer to work harder to attempt to ensure successful interpretative transmission. Public documents, Reiman suggests, demonstrate a 'self-conscious effort to define and distinguish the 'self' or 'us' from 'the other' or 'them' and to reach across that gap', and asserts this as the reason why public documents 'depend so heavily on formal conventions, such as genre, prosody, and intertextual allusions: they represent attempts to establish a common ground between writer and a diverse group of potential readers' (68). As I have already discussed, this question—what kind of reader was best able to interpret the writer's text?—was central to the theories of hermeneutic interpretation posited by Schleiermacher and Coleridge, both of whom suggested that the reading friend, with a shared communality of experience, could provide the best interpreter. One source of interest for this thesis is the way that shared allusions, that draw on the common cultural landscape of a social group—favourite texts, themes, or genres—can also work on a 'corporate' level within smaller groups to include (and by extension exclude) particular readers.

Certain caveats about the approach I have taken in this thesis must follow. One of the central and important omissions from this thesis is that I have not addressed how real 'general public' readers actually did respond to the texts studied here, only how the writers imagined, or attempted to project a reader or readers. This omission is linked to one of the fundamental problems with trying to examine how readers read: the need to find evidence of readers' responses, or to access both parts of a two-way exchange between writer and reader. Recent critics have tried to find means of overcoming this empirical problem: H. J. Jackson has looked at the evidence offered by readers' marginalia; William St. Clair has gathered concrete data about the sales and circulation figures of Romantic works, and collected evidence from

numerous manuscript albums.⁸² I have focused my attention on writers and their social circles of (often literary) friends: such a canonical approach may lead to conclusions which are perhaps misrepresentative of the wider literary culture of the time. I have frequently focused on the kind of genres and forms, such as letters and occasional poems, which are inherently socially-oriented, coterie forms; were I to examine in detail other genres—novels, plays, pamphlets—the portrait of writer/reader relations would perhaps prove to be vastly different. Examining non-literary or more ‘popular’ writing, or the work of writers who sought a very different demographic of readers—the writers of penny pamphlets for example—could likewise reveal fundamental differences in the kind of attitudes which writers took towards their perceived reading audience. Given the fact that many Romantic writers (Coleridge, Hazlitt, Lamb, etc.) theorized about drama, and the reactions of a play’s audience or a play’s reader, it could be fruitful to expand the concerns of this thesis into a study of dramatic texts of the period.

An Overview

Each chapter takes a single author as a case-study. Through a diverse selection of authors I aim to show how textual sociability is represented and enacted in various distinct communities of writers and readers, and in different discursive occasions throughout the Romantic period—in magazines and newspapers, in letters, and in manuscript and printed collections of poetry.

Beginning with a study of Anna Barbauld’s poetry the thesis shows manuscript culture practices intersected with print publication. The chapter shows how Barbauld—whose early *Poems* (1773) arose from, and replicated in print, the community built around Warrington Academy—used the form of the personal poem to enclose wider political, social and moral

⁸² H. J. Jackson, *Romantic Readers: the Evidence of Marginalia*, (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2005); St Clair, *Reading Nation*.

themes and reach out to a wider Dissenting community. It shows how the representation of personal allegiances took on greater political force in John Aikin's *Poems* (1791) and how Barbauld's herself addressed issues of social sympathies and community allegiances in the 1790s. Examining first Barbauld's poems in the *Morning Chronicle*, and later a manuscript album from a Dissenting family in Norwich, the chapter shows how poems could be adopted by readers as expressions of their own opinions or allegiances. The chapter argues that the circulation of poetry, in manuscript and in print, played a role in creating and reinforcing networks of readers, united by political and religious affiliations.

The second chapter shows how Coleridge in 1802 struggled to negotiate ideas about sympathy, community and the linguistic transmission of ideas by repeatedly reworking the same themes, language and imagery in a series of texts directed at different readers ('A Letter to [Sara Hutchinson]', 'Dejection', 'Soliloquy of the Full Moon', 'To Matilda Betham', and letters to William Sotheby). In addition, the chapter examines Coleridge's poetry as it appears in two radically different contexts—Sara Hutchinson's manuscript poetry book, and the *Morning Post*—to show how Coleridge's poems negotiate the potential presence of two readerships: the intimate Grasmere circle, and the unknown public reader of the newspaper. The chapter argues that the disjunction between these two publication spaces is symbolic of Coleridge's fractured relationship to his own former ideas of the social, political, and spiritual importance of domestic attachments and communities, which provoked, on the one hand, a turning inwards, seeking to represent in a textual form through private symbolic language his own relationship to the intimate, domestic circle at Grasmere, and on the other hand, a turning outwards as the public journalist 'ESTHĒE', opening up these same poems to the *Morning Post* readership, stripped of their personal connections, and re-appropriated and re-contextualised by Stuart's editorial decisions.

The third chapter shows how the *London Magazine's* place at the heart of a real-life social community forms a vital context for Charles Lamb's 'Elia' essays. Not only do the

essays play with a web of allusions and in-jokes for a 'knowing' readership, but the network of private friendships, such as between Lamb and Hazlitt, allowed the magazine's writers to carry on a 'conversation' or 'dialogue' with one another within its pages through allusions and meaningful juxtapositions. In addition, the chapter argues that Lamb's habit of drawing on ideas developed in letters in his essays locates his published work within a 'coterie' intellectual context. In certain essays which evolved from letters to Coleridge, Lamb continued an ongoing discussion about sympathy and community first begun in their youth in the 1790s. Furthermore, the importance of shared reading within their friendship leads both Coleridge and Lamb—in letters, essays, and marginalia—to reflect on the important moral, sympathetic, educative, and political role of reading in the individual's relationship to wider communities.

The fourth chapter examines how Keats, in the apparently confidential space of his letters, nevertheless displays an acute literary self-consciousness brought about by writing in a genre that comes weighted with literary precedents, and which, for nineteenth-century writers, increasingly had the potential for posthumous publication. In addition to being a medium in which Keats negotiates the relationship of writer and reader on a personal and (obliquely) public level, in his letters, Keats attributes a great importance to the sympathetic imagination in the action of reading and interpreting, depicting the reading friend, whose identity can sympathetically merge with the writers, as best endowed with the ability to make an imaginative interpretive leap. Taking up this idea, the chapter pays particular attention to Keats's epistolary and poetical relationship with John Hamilton Reynolds, arguing that the two poets make use of a dense web of mutual allusions, and draw on a shared knowledge of poetry and philosophy, in order to construct a fraternal poetical pairing which unites them as one another's best interpreters, and which seeks to position their evolving creative identities relative to the previous generation of poets.

The final chapter examines how Leigh Hunt sought to construct, firstly, a unified public image of his coterie of 'brother-reformers' in his volume of poetry, *Foliage* (1818), and

secondly, to construct and shape a community of readers for his newspaper, the *Examiner*. The chapter argues that in the *Examiner* Hunt used his personal, subjective, conversational style of writing (as well as, at times, the language of sensibility) to present his newspaper as the voice of honesty. Furthermore, Hunt as editor exploited the possibilities of the newspaper form in creating meaningful juxtapositions and relationship between its contents. The chapter suggests that some of the negative criticism which Hunt's work received can be interpreted as resistance to way that Hunt sought to define the character and limits of his audience. In his openly coterie-oriented poetry, and his attempt to depict his journalism in the *Examiner's* as a 'conversation' with a reader in a domestic setting, who implicitly shares the same suburban lifestyle, the same intellectual interests, aesthetic tastes, and the same political leanings, Hunt placed himself in danger of limiting his readership, and defined his community in ways which his detractors could portray as marginal, ineffectual, or elitist.

In choosing which writers to include in this study, I have been drawn to instances where the writer's work experienced a kind of 'publication' in manuscript, if only to a small, select group of readers, or even just a particular individual; at the same time I have also sought instances where there appears to have been a cross-over between sociable communities of friends created through letters or manuscript circulation, and the wider audience of print. Naturally, there are some notable omissions: Wordsworth's 'Poem to Coleridge,' for one. It is of course notable that one of the central works of the Romantic canon is addressed, notionally, to only one friendly reader. To have covered Wordsworth's complex relationship to issues of print and manuscript publication would probably have required a whole single-author thesis; but it is hoped that by examining this representative range of authors, covering a chronological period of nearly fifty years, a fuller picture of the literary culture of the Romantic era can be given.

Anna Letitia Barbauld

Recent criticism on the work of Anna Barbauld and her brother John Aikin has stressed the importance of sociability, collaboration and community to the family's writing practices and ideological outlook. A particular focus for many recent studies has been Barbauld's and Aikin's status as members of the Dissenting community—a group prohibited by the Corporation and Test Acts from properly belonging to the establishment, and increasingly associated with political radicalism and republicanism during the turbulent years of the 1790s. This chapter shows how Barbauld's early poetry uses 'sociable' forms addressed to particular friends as a medium in which to address wider ideas of community, and how such acts of address take on greater charge in Barbauld's and Aikin's verse in the 1790s. It also shows how poetry could be taken up by readers as a sign of community affiliation or political allegiance. The circulation of poetry in print and manuscript could lead individual poems to become imbued with additional significance through context and juxtaposition, as happened with some of Barbauld's poems in the pages of the *Morning Chronicle*. Finally, the chapter will examine a manuscript album, made in the 1810-20s by a Dissenting family in Norwich with connections to Barbauld, to show how homemade collections of poetry could function as expressions of community ties and allegiances.

Sociability and manuscript culture

Many of Barbauld's early and unpublished poems clearly show the place of poetry in creating and reinforcing, as well as representing, friendship and community. This could be on a textual level through acts of address, and on a material level as gifts sent to friends. Barbauld's *Poems* (1773) appears as a public, printed manifestation of this manuscript-based literary culture.

The exchange of manuscript poems and other homemade gifts such as pictures or needlework provided mementos of female friendships. George Kendrick, in his memoir of his mother Elizabeth Belsham Kenrick (Barbauld's oldest friend), described how 'several of Mrs. Barbauld's most admired poems [...] were first written in the course of their correspondence, many of them never published are now in the possession of our family'.⁸³ Separated by distance, as 'Betsy' Belsham lived in Bedford during the time Barbauld was at Warrington, the two friends used poetry as well as letters to bridge the gap, creating a poetic dialogue: for example, in response to her eclogue celebrating Betsy 'the joy of the plain,' Betsy composed her own pastoral verses in which a sensible Nancy shoos away the 'foolish Swains' that cover her with praises.⁸⁴ Such acts of poetical gift-giving also characterised Barbauld's friendship with the Priestleys. Mary Priestley compiled a poetry book filled with Barbauld's unpublished verses, which she had enclosed with letters to the Priestleys after their move to Leeds in 1767. Years later in 1797, after Mary's death and his own emigration to America, Joseph Priestley wrote to Barbauld asking for copies of the poems, since the poem-book had burned along with the Priestley's house during the Church and King riots in 1791. As well as providing access to 'pleasing impressions of so early a date', the poems become increasingly valuable as physical mementos with the passage of time:

If my diaries had not been destroyed in the riots, I should have been able to retrace some of them better than I can do now. She [i.e. Mary] often lamented the loss of a folio book, into which she had copied all your unpublished poems, and other small pieces, especially the first poem we ever saw of yours, on taking leave of her when we left Warrington, and of this I think I heard you say you had no copy. The perusal of it would give me more pleasure now than it did at the first. The short and very just

⁸³ Quoted in *PALB*, 204.

⁸⁴ '[Eclogue on Elizabeth Belsham]', *PALB*, 15-16; William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment*, (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), 79-80.

character which you drew of her I have, and value much. We regretted also the loss of the little poem you wrote on the birth of Joseph.⁸⁵

The exchange of letters or ‘occasional’ verse in manuscript becomes a tactile, permanent record of fleeting moments, and records the landmarks of domestic life—moving home, the birth of a child. Deirdre Coleman has described how Priestley’s letter creates a ‘phantasmatic relationship [...] between letters and bodies – letters and poems standing in for bodies’.⁸⁶ The ‘character’ of Mary Priestley—now lost—was most likely a silhouette with accompanying verses, one of many such ‘characters’ which Barbauld made for her friends and acquaintances (a few of which she published in *Poems*). The artefact becomes a posthumous relict of Mary, just like a lock of hair. Compiled over time, collections of poetry and correspondence grow into a biographical narrative of intertwined lives, with the diaries and letters making up for the failures of memory.

Ironically, while Priestley himself had no copy of Barbauld’s poem on the birth of his son, the poem seems to have had found its way through wide circles of manuscript transmission. It was printed as ‘On the Birth of an Infant,’ without being attributed to Barbauld, in *Miscellanies, Moral and Instructive* (1793), a volume compiled by a Quaker woman in Philadelphia, Milcah Martha Moore.⁸⁷ The text has several significant variants from that printed in the posthumous collection of Barbauld’s work, *A Legacy for Young Ladies* (1826), suggesting that it came either from an earlier version of the poem that circulated in manuscript, or from a version that had been mistranscribed or altered.⁸⁸ Poignantly, given

⁸⁵ Joseph Priestley (letter dated 1797), quoted in A. L. Le Breton, *Memoir of Mrs. Barbauld*, (London: George Bell & sons, 1874), 78-9.

⁸⁶ Deirdre Coleman, ‘Firebrands, letters and flowers: Mrs Barbauld and the Priestleys,’ in Russell and Tuite, *Romantic Sociability*, 82-103, 98.

⁸⁷ *Miscellanies, moral and instructive, in prose and verse, collected from various authors, for the use of schools, and improvement of young persons of both sexes*, 2 vols. (London: J. Phillips, 1793), II. 68. In addition to editing her printed miscellanies, Moore also collected poetry (mainly written by her female acquaintances) in an extensive manuscript commonplace-book which she shared in Quaker circles. Her book has been published, and offers an insight into the practice of manuscript circulation in late eighteenth century America: *Milcah Martha Moore’s Book: A Commonplace Book for Revolutionary America*, ed. C. LaCourreya Blecki and K. A. Wulf, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997).

⁸⁸ The same text then appeared in the *Weekly Entertainer and West of England Miscellany*, (21 Jan. 1811), 59-60, and in *The Rural Visitor*, [Burlington, N. J.] (11 Feb. 1811), 152, signed ‘A’.

Priestley's regret for the loss of what was to him a very personal poem, the poem established its own independent life through manuscript and print circulation, stripped of any link to a particular family.

Poems which Barbauld shared in manuscript with her family and friends could often circle through ever-widening readerships, from Warrington Academy to a larger network of Dissenting families, and through literary society in general. Poems could be copied into manuscript books and shared with other readers, or even, as we have seen, be pirated into print, sometimes crossing the Atlantic via manuscript copies. Her 'Character of Joseph Priestley' somehow made it into print in the *Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*. The newspaper published the 'hitherto unpublished' poem 'from the pen of Mrs. Barbauld' two months after Priestley's death in 1804, reflecting that the poem would be 'at this time peculiarly acceptable to our readers'.⁸⁹ One of her poems, 'A Thought on Death', was printed in a Boston magazine, the *Christian Disciple*, before being reprinted from there in the British magazine, the *Monthly Repository*.⁹⁰ Barbauld was surprised, and sent a note to the *Monthly Repository* with her own version of the poem to replace the 'very inaccurately given' American version which had jumbled the order of the stanzas.⁹¹ Likewise, Barbauld's poem 'To Miss Kinder, on Receiving a Note dated (by mistake) February 30th 1817', was printed in the *Liverpool Mercury*, with a note indicating that the verses had 'been privately circulated in manuscript'.⁹² The existence of multiple manuscript copies has ensured the survival of poems that would otherwise have been lost to modern scholarship: Barbauld's contemporary editor William McCarthy notes that, today, 'copies more or less remote from Barbauld supply the only texts we have of several of her most interesting poems'.⁹³

⁸⁹ *Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, (9 April 1804), [p. 4; unnumbered]. The text has a few variant readings from the text (taken from an autograph MS) in *PALB*.

⁹⁰ *The Christian Disciple and Theological Review*, [Boston, MA] (Nov.-Dec. 1821), 440; *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature*, (Oct. 1822), 636.

⁹¹ *Monthly Repository*, (Nov. 1822), 679.

⁹² *Liverpool Mercury*, (27 Nov. 1814), [unnumbered].

⁹³ McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld*, 105.

With these examples in mind, it seems clear that networks of readers were widely sharing and copying poetry, either in letters or in their own homemade manuscript books, creating an alternative literary culture which co-existed independently of print publications and yet also frequently intersected with them. Poems which started life in the intimate, gift-exchange circle of a particular family or friendship group could filter outwards through wider networks. In this way, the fate of Barbauld's own poetry, transmitted freely in manuscript through networks of readers, mirrors the model of publication depicted in print in *Evenings at Home*, where a domestic, familial composition is offered to the wider reading public. Furthermore, the flow of manuscript circulation, blurring the demarcation between family, network, and public, mirrors—as I shall discuss later—Barbauld's own model of the state in *Civic Sermons to the People* (1792) as a widening network of thousands of families and neighbourhoods.

From domestic sphere to public sphere

Recent work by Daniel White, Michelle Levy, and Scott Krawczyk has shown how important family composition and collaboration were for Anna Barbauld and her brother John Aikin.⁹⁴ One of the earliest surviving letters written by Barbauld to her brother accompanies a story she had begun composing for the eldest Aikin child. She entreats him that, 'When you have brought the shepherd Hidallan a sheet further in his adventures, send him back to me, and I will take up the pen: it will be a very sociable way of writing, and I doubt not but it will produce something new and clever'.⁹⁵ Such collaborative writing practices lay behind much of the siblings' published work. As well as their two joint publications, *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* (1773) and *Evenings at Home* (1792-6), their collaboration can be seen in the songs which

⁹⁴ White; Levy; Scott Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families*, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁹⁵ Barbauld (letter dated 9 Sept. 1775), *The Works of Anna Latitia Barbauld, with a Memoir*, ed. Lucy Aikin, 2 vols. (London: Longman [& co.], 1825), II. 5.

Barbauld provided for Aikin's *Essays on Song-Writing*, her contributions to the *Monthly Magazine* (which John edited), and as Krawczyk has shown, their linked pamphlets published in the 1790s.⁹⁶

White and Levy have both emphasised how *Evenings at Home* fictionally represents in print a model of the kind of domestic, manuscript production which Barbauld and Aikin had employed in its creation.⁹⁷ The book's preface gives an account of the fictional Fairborne family's home amusements, in which the children 'rummage the Budget' (a collection of written pieces) to pick out a new story to read aloud. The positive responses of local families that have shared in these entertainments are the purported reason for the book's publication. As well as mirroring the circumstances of its own production, the book's preface implies that such home-made entertainments could also be made by the readers themselves. Barbauld's *Lessons for Children* (1778-9) likewise had home-made, family origins: it was made to teach little Charles Rochement to learn to read, but then published, as she wrote in her preface, with the desire of being *useful* to the public.⁹⁸

This intersection of domestic literary culture with print publication is something which both White and Levy have seen as symbolic of Barbauld's and Aikin's belief that the private life of the family is intrinsically connected to and engaged with the wider public life of the nation. Levy writes that, 'For Barbauld and Aikin, the home is part of the public sphere, and the family itself is the institution most capable of effecting profound national change' (21). In *Evenings at Home* the home provides a sphere in which children can be taught to think critically about issues in the wider world.

The idea of family and state as part of a continuum is one that Barbauld herself expresses in her *Civic Sermons to the People* (1792). She uses the example of the child's growing awareness of being part of larger and larger communities: in early life, its community

⁹⁶ Krawczyk, 2; 22.

⁹⁷ White, 71; Levy, 24.

⁹⁸ Barbauld, 'Advertisement', *Lessons for Children, from two to three years old*, (London: J. Johnson, 1787), 3.

comprises close family members: ‘This first society is called a Family. It is the root of every other society. It is the beginning of order, and kind affections, and mutual helpfulness and provident regulations’.⁹⁹ As the child becomes older it becomes aware of belonging to a town or village, surrounded by neighbours. Finally, it becomes aware of its town as one among a large network of other places, ‘and all these together make up that large society called a *State*; so large is it, that you must stretch your imagination to conceive properly of its extent; it contains thousands and thousands of families whom you never have seen, nor probably ever will see; yet of all this you are a part, and joined to it in a most intimate and binding connection, like a limb to the body, or a single shoot to a large tree’ (7). Such an organic metaphor of belongingness blurs the boundaries of where one ‘family’ begins and ends. Unlike Burke’s families, characterised by bloodlines of inheritance, handed down historically through the generations, the thousands of families comprising Barbauld’s state-society are interlinked into one large contemporaneous network. In Barbauld’s vision there appears to be no tension between the ‘little platoon’ or small group and the wider community—instead, small groups merely conglomerate to form communities of ever-increasing size.

The Warrington community

One small community particularly associated with Barbauld’s *Poems* was that of Warrington Academy, where her father taught from 1758 onwards, and in the society of which Barbauld moved until her marriage in 1774.

Anne Janowitz and Jon Mee have described how Barbauld was influenced by Warrington Academy’s ethos of amiable sociability, which drew on Hutchesonian principles

⁹⁹ Barbauld, *Civic Sermons to the People: Part 2*, (London: J. Johnson, 1792), 6.

and also on Shaftesbury's idea of polite and harmonious conversation.¹⁰⁰ Shaftesbury had stressed how free and familiar conversation was important in refining civil manners and the intellect:

All politeness is owing to liberty. We polish one another and rub off our corners and rough sides by a sort of amicable collision. To restrain this is inevitably to bring a rust upon men's understandings.¹⁰¹

Politeness, in this context, acts as a guarantor of free discussion and intellectual liberty: 'A freedom of raillery, a liberty in decent language to question everything, and an allowance of unravelling or refuting any argument without offence to the arguer, are the only terms which can render such speculative conversations any way agreeable' (33). Conversation functions as a method of debate and a tool for instruction.¹⁰² Through the informing influence of moral philosophy, therefore, sociability in the Warrington Academy community—charged with the task of forming young men for civil life—seems to have been implicitly conceived of in ways that linked their small institution to wider national public concerns. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Barbauld's poetry written while closely involved with this community should show a similar tendency.

In his recent biography of Barbauld, William McCarthy has described how Barbauld was greatly influenced by Hutchesonian ideas of benevolence, learned firstly from her father, as well as from the Warringtonian ethos.¹⁰³ Hutcheson had suggested that human beings possessed a 'moral sense' given to them by God, which guided and, if necessary, restrained the passions and affections, permitting the development of the 'universal calm benevolence' that was Hutcheson's ideal of virtue. Hutcheson had an essentially positive view of human

¹⁰⁰ Anne Janowitz, 'Amiable and Radical Sociability: Anna Barbauld's "Free Familiar Conversation"', in Russell and Tuite, *Romantic Sociability*, 62-81, 67; Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 183.

¹⁰¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 31.

¹⁰² Levy has noted the importance of 'instructive conversation' in Barbauld and Aikin's childrens' books (*Family Authorship*, 33, 37).

¹⁰³ Her father had learned Hutchesonian ideas from Philip Doddridge, his tutor at Kibworth; John Seddon who founded Warrington Academy tried to run it on Hutchesonian principles (McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld*, 15-16; McCarthy, 'How Dissent made Anna Letitia Barbauld, and what she made of Dissent,' in James and Inkster (eds.), *Religious Dissent*, 52-69; 64-5).

nature—in his view, ‘Every Passion or Affection in its moderate Degree is innocent, many are directly amiable, and morally good: we have Senses and Affections leading us to publick Good, as well as to Private; to Virtue, as well as to external Pleasure.’¹⁰⁴ Barbauld, much like Hutcheson, takes a positive view of the action of sympathy: she argued that ‘they who would thus reduce the sympathetic emotions of pity to a system of refined selfishness, have but ill attended to the genuine feelings of humanity’.¹⁰⁵ Her open representation and celebration of sociableness in *Poems*, displays a Hutchesonian-style faith that there is an innate, natural human impulse towards social affections.

In *Poems*, Barbauld’s poetry openly acknowledges its roots in a sociable, manuscript-oriented literary culture. Several of the poems are composed to named individuals, and indicate that they have first been circulated in a manuscript format, in letters or as gifts: Dr. Priestley is openly addressed by ‘The Mouse’s Petition,’ and other female friends are addressed although their names are disguised. As McCarthy and Newlyn have variously described, the intimate mode of address of Barbauld’s poems seems to place her readers in the position of being ‘overhearers of private musings’.¹⁰⁶

Lucy Aikin would assert many years later that the circulation of poetry played an important role in the social life of Warrington Academy:

Both ‘bouts rimés,’ and ‘vers de société’ were in fashion in the set. Once it was their custom to slip anonymous pieces into Mrs. Priestley’s work-bag. One ‘copy of verses,’ a very eloquent one, puzzled all guessers a long time; at length it was traced to Dr. Priestley’s self.¹⁰⁷

Barbauld’s sociable verse in *Poems* can thus appear as a public display of the domestic practices of a particular community, which, despite being centred on an institution, is given a domestic, homely character by having at its heart Mrs. Priestley’s needlework bag. Barbauld’s epigraph

¹⁰⁴ Hutcheson, *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections*, 65.

¹⁰⁵ ‘On Romances: an Imitation,’ *Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose*, (London: J. Johnson, 1773), 45.

¹⁰⁶ McCarthy, “‘We hoped the *Woman* was going to appear’”: Repression, Desire, and Gender in Anna Letitia Barbauld’s Early Poems’, in Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (eds.), *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, (Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1995), 113-137, 117; Newlyn, *Reading, Writing and Romanticism*, 139.

¹⁰⁷ Lucy Aikin, quoted in Henry A. Bright, *A Historical Sketch of Warrington Academy* (Liverpool: T. Brakell, 1859), 14.

to *Poems* (1773) from Virgil's *Eclogues*, as Felicity James has noted, seems to be an in-joke on these poetical practices—'your poet, goddesses, has sung enough, while he sat and wove a basket of light rushes'—however, at the same time, as James shows, through this epigraph Barbauld positions herself within a wider intellectual tradition by using the classical trope of poet as weaver.¹⁰⁸ Such touches appear characteristic of the way in which Barbauld's poetry looks outwards towards a wider community and intellectual culture as well as inwards to her own close coterie of friends. In her earliest volume of poetry, which roots itself very distinctly within a small, personalised group of early readers, we see ideas forming about the role of literary exchange in the social life of the community (smaller or larger) that would become more overtly displayed in her later works of the 1790s.

Sociable poetry can be performative as well as representative. Communal participation in verse-making, like the coterie practices Lucy Aikin describes, is a way of forging community. Anne Janowitz has described how Warrington Academy, in reality, was far from being the harmonious place depicted by Aikin, or described in Barbauld's poem 'The Invitation'. Janowitz argues that Barbauld's depiction of the social life of Warrington attempts to create and reinforce a community identity rather than simply represent one, suggesting that 'the boundaries of amiable sociability upon which Warrington was built needed to stabilize itself, had to be rhetorically made firm'.¹⁰⁹

While it is not openly named in *Poems*, Barbauld's connection to Warrington Academy seems to have been common knowledge. William Woodfall, the first reviewer of *Poems*, describes how the circulation of manuscripts privately amongst Warringtonians formed the basis of Barbauld's literary reputation, both on a local and a wider scale, and encouraged her into print: 'The pupils of that very useful seminary,' he wrote, 'have, with a genuine and unanimous enthusiasm, celebrated her genius, and diffused her praises far and wide [...] Hence the most pleasing impatience was every where expressed, when the public was assured that

¹⁰⁸ James, 'Introduction' in James and Inkster (eds.), *Religious Dissent*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Janowitz, 69.

Miss Aikin had, at length, been prevailed on to assert her claim to literary fame'.¹¹⁰ Despite having no known connection to Warrington Academy, Woodfall records having seen in manuscript several of Barbauld's poems which were not included in the printed volume.¹¹¹ Woodfall signals Barbauld's Dissenting background as daughter of a Presbyterian clergyman, yet reassures the reader that her 'address to *Wisdom* is not composed [...] on puritanic principles, but on the most rational and liberal philosophy'.¹¹² Here we see a hint that Dissenting connections bring with them ambiguous connotations for the more general reader. Barbauld nevertheless is open about her link to Dissent: signing the dedication to her poems from Warrington, Daniel Watkins argues, was a sign that 'from the very beginning, at least implicitly, Barbauld [...] situated *Poems* as a political document'.¹¹³

Barbauld's most openly 'Warringtonian' poem, 'The Invitation,' would be reprinted in extract by her friend William Enfield in his anthology, *The Speaker* (1774), with the title 'Warrington Academy'.¹¹⁴ 'The Invitation' clearly shows Barbauld's characteristic blurring of demarcation between private/public, feminine/masculine, provincial/global spheres: within an ostensibly 'occasional' poem of female friendship is enclosed a depiction of masculine education, reverberating with themes of national importance.

Placed second in *Poems*, 'The Invitation,' addresses 'Miss B—,' (Elizabeth Belsham Kenrick, Barbauld's second cousin and dearest friend) and encourages her to leave the city behind and join the writer in a pastoral retreat. From a description of an abstract rural landscape inhabited by the goddesses Pleasure and Flora, Barbauld's poem moves on to particular, localized scenes, describing the sight of the Duke of Bridgewater's canal. Barbauld's rural landscape proves to be not really one of pastoral ease, but rather a modern landscape under the process of change, altered by the hard work of navvies who 'with many a

¹¹⁰ 'Poems, by Miss Aikin', *Monthly Review*, (Jan. 1773), 54-9; 54.

¹¹¹ 'Poems, by Miss Aikin, concluded', *Monthly Review*, (Feb. 1773), 133-7; 135.

¹¹² *Monthly Review*, (Jan. 1773), 58.

¹¹³ Daniel Watkins, *Anna Letitia Barbauld and Eighteenth-Century Visionary Poetics*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2012), 41.

¹¹⁴ *The Speaker*, (London: J. Johnson, 1774), 248-251.

wearied stroke' and with a 'steady patience' have dug the canals and created a man-made landscape (ll. 59-62).¹¹⁵ The canal represents the outcome of human industriousness which has tamed the waters with a 'guiding hand', and the coming of the canals seems to Barbauld to have allowed the flow of 'social plenty' to the region, which now 'circles round the land'—although the poem only hints at the real reason for the canal's construction, in mentioning the 'sulphurous mines' which the streams visit on their way (ll. 76-8).

Barbauld's poem then zooms in on the real focus of its visit, directing her reader's attention to the unpretentious, 'simple front' of the building which houses Warrington Academy (l. 82). Barbauld's poem offers up a sense of regional pride: the Mersey may have been 'neglected' by fame, but Warrington Academy helps put it on the map, reflecting the building 'with conscious pride,' and, in daring 'to emulate a classic tide,' implies that the academy represents an Enlightenment return to classical civilization (ll. 86-90).

The poem is a eulogy to the academy, presenting it as a model community: a place where the riches of knowledge are unlocked to the young students, and they are inspired to worthwhile greatness and ardent friendships; a place where 'gentlest arts and purest manners reign' (l. 110). It is a place where, under the influence of teachers like Priestley, and untrammelled by the 'bigot rage' that controlled the universities, the study of 'heav'n-born science' is able to achieve its full, exciting potential (ll. 98-100). In her idealistic portrayal, Barbauld represents the skills taught at the academy as vital to forming young people who can contribute to wider human progress: here, she writes, 'virtue blossoms for a better age' (l. 114). In these sentiments, which also lie behind her later books for children, the right kind of education is seen as key to the wider progress of human society.

In Barbauld's portrait, Warrington Academy is a place in which everyone can fulfil their individual and useful role in life, creating harmony through differences that allow the members of the community to complement one another:

¹¹⁵ 'The Invitation', *PALB*, 9-15. All future references are to this text.

Their various tastes in different arts display'd,
 Like temper'd harmony of light and shade,
 With friendly union in one mass shall blend (ll. 139-141)

Barbauld's role is that of poet, and circulating the poem among her Warrington readership seems intended to strengthen their sense of belonging to the community that is built on shared values, and to foster a sense of communal pride. In *Poems*, the poem functions as an invitation to a nationwide readership, introducing them to poems centred on a particular location and community, and inviting them to imaginatively join with the friendly community and its ideals. Barbauld's poem reaches out from the small community of Warrington, inviting the reader to join a paper community of like-minded individuals: 'This little group their country calls,' she writes, to make reforming changes to the nation—to 'fix her laws,' and, implicitly, to bring a religious spirit to it which will 'light up glory' (ll. 135-138). Barbauld's portrait of Warrington Academy, encouraging her readers to join empathetically with its ideals of liberty, knowledge, friendship in Warrington, is therefore a way of encouraging the spread of these Dissenting ideals further afield into wider public life. Jon Mee argues that the poem is 'explicit about the role of enthusiasm in drawing the individual out of the private into the public sphere through the power of sympathetic identification'.¹¹⁶ Just as Warrington's students, by their 'fond enthusiastic thought' and 'quick affections' are inspired with virtuous ideals, so may the general reader, Barbauld's poem seems to hope, catch such emotions.

The multiple, co-existing audiences which are implicitly addressed in the poem—firstly, Elizabeth Belsham, and the audience of like-minded readers at the Academy, and later the wider audience of the published poem—make the poem resonate with layers of meaning. Inside a supposedly 'private' poem to a friend lies a much more socially-engaged poem, which looks outwards from Warrington Academy to the place which its students, and the ideals

¹¹⁶ Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 196.

behind its curriculum, play in the wider life of the nation and—wider still—the world of trade and empire.

‘The Invitation’ continues on a calmer, more domestic scale the ideals of national liberty which Barbauld zealously expounded in the opening poem in *Poems*, ‘Corsica,’ which praises the Corsicans who fought (albeit unsuccessfully) for their liberty in the face of French attempts to invade their island in 1768-9. The isle of Corsica functions as an oblique parallel for Britain, with Barbauld suggesting that Britons should be stirred by the Corsicans example:

should they not catch
The warm contagion of heroic ardour,
And kindle at a fire so like their own? (ll. 15-17)

The events in Corsica provide an example of the ‘tales of vast heroic deeds’ (l. 122) which Barbauld had depicted as influential in stirring the Warringtonians to action through ‘contagious’ emotions. In reflecting on the failure of the Corsican uprising, Barbauld draws comfort from the persisting potential for the kind of internal, intellectual freedom which Warrington Academy’s educational outlook sought to protect:

There yet remains a freedom, nobler far
Than kings or senates can destroy or give;
Beyond of the proud oppressor’s cruel grasp
Seated secure; uninjur’d; undestroy’d;
Worthy of Gods: The freedom of the mind.¹¹⁷ (ll. 197-201)

Barbauld’s Miltonic echo in the final line suggests an ideological outlook that resonates not just between the poems in the volume, but looks backwards to a legacy of English Non-conformist writing about liberty. Barbauld’s friends had urged in 1769 that ‘Corsica’ be published to benefit the Corsican campaign, and Joseph Priestley offered to ‘introduce’ the poem (like a guest) to Mr. Boswell’s notice, ‘by means of Mr. Vaughan or Mrs. Macaulay, or some other friends of liberty and Corsica in London’.¹¹⁸ The poem thereby has the potential to take up a social life of its own, articulating a group cause, and through its circulation within the ‘friends of Corsica’ has the potential to create a shared-interest group by emphasising the

¹¹⁷ *PALB*, 21-6.

¹¹⁸ Priestley (letter dated 13 June 1769), quoted in Le Breton, 36.

sympathies shared by its members with one another as well as with the Corsicans. Furthermore, poetry could be an active political force in a material way, funding the campaign through sales.

Just as ‘The Invitation’ had explored wider themes within a poem addressed to a personal friend, so too does Barbauld’s poem, ‘To Mrs. P—,’ (Mrs. Priestley).¹¹⁹ The poem, which indicates its status as sociable verse accompanying some drawings of birds and insects, claims to be a creative act motivated purely by friendship, and with the sole purpose of providing Mary with a homely pastime ‘to cheat the lonely hour’, so that Mary’s praise, rather than literary fame, is reward enough (l. 121).

In the poem, the birds which Barbauld has sketched—those ‘various nations’ of the ‘feather’d tribe’—are personified with human symbolism, and the poem is imbued with Dissenting values and ethics (ll. 20-1). Just as the previous poem in the volume, ‘The Mouse’s Petition,’ addressed to Dr. Priestley, had outlined the responsibility which humankind owes to the smaller creatures to show them hospitality, benevolence and compassion, her verses ‘To Mrs. P—’, outline a similar responsibility to protect the weak or threatened. Some of the birds,

fly to man, his household gods implore,
And gather round his hospitable door;
Wait the known call, and find protection there
From all the lesser tyrants of the air. (ll. 27-30)

The poem thus echoes the imagery and themes of ‘The Mouse’s Petition,’—which pleads with Priestley not to act like a tyrant and oppress ‘A free-born mouse’ by keeping him in captivity—in calling for the Priestley home to be a place of hospitality and freedom (ll. 11-12).¹²⁰ Just as internal liberty can be found in the ‘freedom of the mind’, so the domestic space is one where ideals of intellectual and religious freedom can be protected.

¹¹⁹ ‘To Mrs. P[riestley], with some Drawings of Birds and Insects’, *PALB*, 6-9.

¹²⁰ ‘The Mouse’s Petition’, *PALB*, 36-7.

Continuing her anthropomorphic images of the birds, Barbauld depicts the flocks of migrating birds as ‘a firm united band,’ as if they were marshalled like an army, but more importantly the birds’ migration takes place as ‘congregated nations,’ with the smaller flocks combining together like a chapel congregation, and finding strength despite the severity of winter through unity—an image which seems to be resonant with the idea that Dissenters themselves can find consolation through community (‘To Mrs. P—’, ll. 63-5). Barbauld’s poem is, therefore, a kind of parable hidden in a seemingly straightforward ‘occasional’ poem to a friend. As Coleridge would later demonstrate in his poetry of the 1790s, the form of a personal poem addressed to a friend proves eminently suitable for addressing the connection between private, domestic life, and the concerns of the nation. The kind of home life which is represented in the poetry mirrors on a small scale ideas about how wider society should look.

While Barbauld’s personal, sociable verse could be resonant with wider themes, for a later generation of readers the way in which *Poems* appeared to be so entwined with a particular community could have less positive implications for the poetry. In his obituary for Barbauld, written in 1825, William Turner (himself an old Warringtonian who had published articles on the history of the Academy) presented her *Poems* as an expression of the particular society of Warrington, remarking that: ‘Perhaps, however, both these pieces [‘Groans of the Tankard’ and ‘To Miss Rigby’], as well as some others in the volume, may require an actual acquaintance with persons and scenes, which none but a Warringtonian can possess, to enter into all their beauties’.¹²¹ The ‘general reader’ needs to know about the Presbyterian family tankard filled with water, or the reputation of the Rigby sisters as handsome, flirtatious girls fond of practical jokes, in order to appreciate the poems. Poetry which indicated its place within the manuscript culture of a particular community therefore had limitations when presented to a print public (or at least, seemed limited in this way by 1825, even if it had not

¹²¹ ‘Mrs. Barbauld’, *Newcastle Magazine*, (May 1825), 229-32; 230.

in 1773). Presenting Barbauld's poetry as work which appeals to the special knowledge of the Warringtonian reader privileges the students and associates of Warrington as the 'knowing' readers, and makes Barbauld's work representative of a particular, Dissenting community. By 1825, however, Warrington Academy had dissolved, and the former Warringtonians like Turner were now elderly: the sphere of Barbauld's poems, therefore, is located in the past, and their beauties—for Turner at least—spring in part from nostalgia for a lost community and its ideals.

Barbauld in the 1790s

In a 1790 sonnet to his sister, John Aikin called on Barbauld to 'seize the lyre!' and encouraged her to resume writing, inspired by the 'jocund notes of Liberty' heard throughout the nations.¹²² Aikin implicitly seeks to direct her towards politically-engaged poetry, reminding her that 'thy own CORSICA has burst her chain!' and contrasting this with Britain's condition, 'Where Freedom's once-lov'd voice is heard, alas! in vain.' Barbauld, who by this point was living at Stoke Newington, and part of the circle of Dissenting and radical writers who met frequently at the publisher Joseph Johnson's house, seems to have responded with fervour to this encouragement to take up the pen. Anne Janowitz has suggested that, in contrast to the 'informal, familiar and amiable' sociability which had characterised Warrington, the radical publisher Joseph Johnson's circle had 'a more urban and militant notion of sociability linked to political activism'.¹²³ It is this more radically-engaged period of sociability in Barbauld's life to which I now turn.

It is revealing to compare the sociable mode of Barbauld's *Poems* (reissued in 1792 with a few additions, including her 'Epistle to Wilberforce') with her brother John Aikin's

¹²² John Aikin, *Poems*, (London: J. Johnson, 1791), 75.

¹²³ Janowitz, 62.

Poems (1791). This latter volume shows how displays of friendship and allegiance had become far more politically charged than they were in the earlier decade. With poems and sonnets addressed not only to Barbauld, but to George Washington, Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, and William Enfield, Aikin firmly locates his allegiances with a Dissenting community of reformists and republicans. In a verse-epistle to his son Arthur, ‘Student in New College, Hackney’, Aikin offers a far more stridently ideological poem as a parallel to Barbauld’s ‘The Invitation’. Hackney offers Warringtonian ideals with renewed vigour and force. The ethos of the college founded ‘by the liberal friends of human kind’ (l. 24) is to raise free-thinking youth, who have not been simply ‘School’d in the discipline of *blind assent*’ (l. 28).¹²⁴ In the Hackney curriculum there is no place for existing repressive religious and political ideologies:

No mystic creeds chalk out their narrow lines,
Nor human systems claim a right divine (ll. 29-30)

The school aims, like Warrington before it, to inspire its young people with an ardency that they can carry forth into civil life, aiming among other things to, ‘To bid the bosom glow with social fires’ (l. 44). Barbauld’s earlier poem had sketched the potential destinies of its pupils, as scientists, travellers, doctors, patriots, and preachers. Aikin, even more so than Barbauld, emphasises how the Hackney education gives its pupils the potential to be active forces for the wider good. He describes their future characters—the ‘Moral Teacher’, the ‘Assertor of the freeborn Mind’, the ‘Patriot’, the ‘Friend of Man’—in ways that mirror the tutors they studied under, such as Price, to whom Aikin elsewhere gives the epithet, ‘Friend of all human kind!’.¹²⁵ Through the relationship of the brother-and-sister poems, therefore, we see how the power of the small educational community is imagined to take on even greater force and urgency in the 1790s. Through the vehicle of a familiar epistle to Arthur that seeks to inspire him with the idea of being a member of such a community, Aikin, like Barbauld before him,

¹²⁴ ‘An Epistle to Mr. Aikin, Student in New College, Hackney’, *Poems*, (1791), 69-74.

¹²⁵ ‘Sonnet to Richard Price’, *Poems*, (1791), 78.

also looks beyond that one individual addressee, seeking to emotionally involve a wider readership in the college's Dissenting ideals.

Such a parallel between the two poems suggests that the siblings consciously and unconsciously paralleled one another's writing. Thematic echoes appear, for example, between Aikin's 'Epistle to the Rev. W. Enfield' and Barbauld's unpublished 'Character' of him, with both poems emphasising Enfield's gentle, friendly, educative influence. Stronger linguistic echoes occur between Aikin's sonnet to Priestley and Barbauld's poems addressed to Priestley. Aikin's sonnet begins:

Priestley! whose ardent ever-active soul
Thro' earth and heav'n has held unwearied flight,
And dipp'd her pinions in the fount of light,
Unaw'd by fear, and spurning vain control:
Truth's dauntless champion!¹²⁶

(ll. 1-5)

The poem echoes not just Barbauld's 'Character' of Priestley, where he is 'Champion of Truth', but also her depiction of Science in 'The Invitation'. In that poem, Science, figured as a female eagle, had fought off the 'bigot rage' which had sought 'to check her ardent progress'—in the intellectual climate of Warrington, Science had been able to take full flight, and thus 'On sounding pinions yet aloft shall soar, / And thro' the azure deep untravel'd paths explore' (ll. 107-8). Warrington's science-teacher's soul, therefore, takes on the eagle-like aspects of Science itself. Lines of influence run back and forth between the siblings, creating a coterie circle of language. Aikin's sonnet is a poem of public encouragement to Priestley, advising him to look ahead to the prospect of a better future time in the face of struggle:

Go on triumphant! View with noble scorn
The bigot's rage, the pedant's bloated pride;
Secure, with Truth and Freedom at thy side,
To win thy stedfast way. O soon be born
That day whose beams no falsehood shall abide,
Bright *Reason's day!*—I hail th' approaching morn!

(ll. 9-14)

¹²⁶ 'Sonnet to the Rev. Joseph Priestley', *Poems*, (1791) 77.

Aikin's *Poems* was published sometime before the beginning of June 1791, just over a month before the Birmingham riots.¹²⁷ Barbauld would echo such sentiments with greater poignancy at the end of 1792, when events had made it increasingly dangerous to express public support for the controversial Priestley. As a result, unlike Aikin's open expression of support, Barbauld's 'To Dr. Priestley' was not initially intended for the eyes of the general public.

In July 1791, an angry mob of supporters of 'Church and King' set fire to Priestley's Birmingham house, and in the following months he was attacked for his politics and religious beliefs. In September 1792, Priestley was offered a place in the newly-formed French National Convention, which he politely declined, but such associations, nevertheless, increasingly made Priestley a target for caricature and hatred—one cartoon by Isaac Cruikshank shows Priestley and Paine apparently conspiring for a revolution, armed with weapons and gunpowder.¹²⁸ In 1794, Priestley emigrated to America with his family, just weeks before many other prominent 'radicals' were arrested. The same 'loyal associators' who made life difficult for Priestley also attacked other dissenters such as Barbauld's husband, Rochemont: one of Barbauld's letters records how they have been 'persecuted with anonymous letters' for refusing to join in the address of loyalty demanded by the supporters of Church and King.¹²⁹

Barbauld's poem 'To Dr. Priestley,' was written in December 1792 when Priestley was being vehemently persecuted—earlier in the same month he and Thomas Paine had been burned in effigy in Colchester. She did not intend her poem for publication but, as she wrote to Charles Aikin when she sent him one of the privately printed copies, 'the lines to Dr Priestley, some of the ministers who did not join in the address [of loyalty] got hold of & wd

¹²⁷ It was advertised as 'just published' in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, (9 June 1791) [p. 1; unnumbered]. However, I suspect that *Poems* was probably published by 19 April (the date of Richard Price's death) since Aikin's sonnet to Price addresses him as if he were very much still alive.

¹²⁸ A print entitled, 'Sedition, Levelling, and Plundering; or, The Pretended Friends of the People in Council' (published 15 Nov. 1792).

¹²⁹ Letter (dated 4 Jan. 1793) quoted in Betsy Aikin-Sneath, *Georgian Chronicle: Mrs. Barbauld and her Family*, (London: Methuen, 1958), 211.

print them'.¹³⁰ Barbauld, who was nervous about potentially hostile responses to her work during the period of trouble, had asked Charles in the same letter not to give out copies of her manuscripts:

of the *Dialogue & Fragment* do not give any copies & do not read & show the Historical Fragment, except to our particular friends, & return it me when you have an opportunity because some things in it would appear too free if read to any but friends.¹³¹

Barbauld's concerns on this occasion imply that, in normal circumstances, she sent her poems to Charles with the tacit consent that he could freely share them with other readers. Charles, at this time in early 1793, was living in Norwich, so Barbauld's concerns carry the assumption that a poem read and shown about to a circle of people in Norfolk could easily travel back to Stoke Newington, where the Barbaulds were living, in manuscript copies.

The rhetorical devices which begin Barbauld's poem reveal her anger (as well as that which she assumes Priestley must feel): the poem criticises the 'servile' people who willingly and obsequiously allow themselves to be ruled by the powerful; it criticises the 'hooting crowds' that have attacked Priestley, and the reverend brothers who have shown no fraternal loyalty and have abandoned him now that he is under attack (ll. 2-7).¹³² Despite these causes for anger, Barbauld's poem encourages Priestley to adopt a stoical, Christ-like, resignation in the face of public scorn, and advises him to look beyond these present trials to a future time of progress. Like her brother's sonnet, in which Priestley, 'Freedom's steadfast friend', had been encouraged to look towards the approaching 'Bright Reason's day', Barbauld's poem offers the hope of future recognition to offset the 'slander of a passing age' (l. 13):

Well can'st thou afford
To give large *credit* for the debt of fame
Thy country owes thee. Calm thou can'st consign it
To the slow payment of that distant day,
If distant, when thy name, to freedom's join'd,
Shall meet the thanks of a regenerate land. (ll. 16-21)

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid. The dialogue is 'Madam Cosmogonia', published 3 years later.

¹³² 'To Dr. Priestley', *PALB*, 125.

Like Aikin, Barbauld stresses confidence in the progress of history—such changes ‘Shall’ come to pass. Priestley’s name had been frequently joined with the name of ‘Liberty’ (with pejorative connotations linking him to the French Revolution) in caricatures of the time. In suggesting that the future will come to see the value of Priestley’s name, Barbauld’s poem implies a hope that the future that will also come to value the name of freedom properly.

Once again, addressing a poem to a known friend becomes an act of taking a stance in a public field of contention. The process of the poem’s circulation shows how publication method can have an impact on the meaning attached to a poem. Keeping the poem in manuscript, as Barbauld intended, appears, in one way, to fit the mode of circulation to the poem’s theme: it is a poem which offers private consolation to Priestley, and others who were persecuted for sharing his political opinions; it does not seek the notice of a wider reading public that might show disapproval or hostility. However, once the poem was privately printed and circulated by dissenting ministers, the poem gains added force as a subversive political statement in support of Priestley, and a public critique of those who ‘lay their necks beneath the foot of power’ (l. 4). The poem was published, without an attribution to Barbauld, in the Whig *Morning Chronicle* (8 January 1793) where it appears as a signal of the newspaper’s own sympathy for Priestley. The *Morning Chronicle*’s editor, James Perry, had long been a supporter of Fox’s party. In summer 1791 he went to France to report on the events of the Revolution; returning home a year later, his articles maintained a radical tone. In 1793, Perry was prosecuted for seditious libel for printing an advertisement for a meeting of the Society for Constitutional Information in Derby in July 1792. To publish or be published in the *Morning Chronicle*, therefore, meant to be associated with radical Whig opinion and Revolutionary sympathies.

In the pages of the *Morning Chronicle*, Barbauld’s poem is printed next to an article defending Perry’s long-time associate, the Whig leader Charles Fox (see Fig. 1). The juxtaposition of the poem and article side by side suggests the similar positions of Fox and

Priestley—a parallel which is emphasised by similarities in the themes and language of the two pieces. The article describes how Fox has been libelled and ‘calumniated by his time-serving friends’, who were looking only to advance their own careers. However, the *Morning Chronicle* holds similar hopes for the future as Barbauld’s poem, suggesting that: ‘it is the fate of Mr. Fox, as he extends his views beyond the reach of common vision, to have his propositions first misunderstood, then slandered, and finally adopted’.¹³³ The article and the poem endow both subjects with a capaciousness of mind: Priestley’s intellectual vision has a touch of sublimity, as Barbauld writes,

Scenes like these hold little space
In his large mind, whose ample stretch of thought
Grasps future periods. (ll. 14-16)

In placing Priestley and Fox side by side, much as they were in countless contemporary cartoons, the *Morning Chronicle* uses Barbauld’s poem as a statement of its own allegiances. Immediately above the poem is an article mentioning an anecdote about the Bishops Latimer and Ridley being burnt as heretics—one is said to have remarked: ‘our persecutors will be disappointed: for *our sufferings will lead men to enquire into that for which we suffered*: and this fire will light such a candle in England, as I trust, by God’s grace, will never be extinguished’.¹³⁴ This juxtaposition—Priestley, after all, had been in burned in effigy, and his house burnt to the ground by a rioting mob—creates a parallel with Barbauld’s poem and its theme of religious persecution and martyrdom, which will be put right by the progress of the future. Priestley appears as one in a long line of Protestant martyrs—a link which Barbauld herself had implied in her earlier, unpublished satire, ‘An Apology of the Bishops’.

What Barbauld’s poem shows, therefore, is on the one hand, a poetical dialogue between herself and her brother, centring on poems to public personalities who were also personal friends; on the other hand, it shows such a poem of private allegiance can be

¹³³ *Morning Chronicle* (8 Jan. 1793), [p. 3; unnumbered]

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

adopted and appropriated by other readers—members of the dissenting community, Perry of the *Morning Chronicle*—as a public political statement of alliance.

Fig. 1: *Morning Chronicle*, (8 Jan. 1793), [p. 3] (section)

KERSAINT'S REPORT.

We are sorry that we cannot, from its length and its columns, give a literal translation of the Report made by KERSAINT. It is the most extravagant philippic, not merely on the conduct of England, but on the first characters of this kingdom, and seems evidently to spring from a similar source as all the philippic against France and Frenchmen, that have recently disgraced England—that is, from the implacable malice of certain English emigrants, who misrepresent their country, that they may aggravate the fever that now rages in the Convention.

It is curious to see how the first and most distinguished statesman of the present age is libelled in this lofty *diatribe*: Mr. Fox, who is at this moment calumniated by his *time-serving* friends in England, because he would not submit to a compromise that would have procured them the emoluments of office, by a sacrifice of the true interests of his country, is accused in France of having no other view “than that of rising on the ruins of his rival, and of revenging himself at once for all his Parliamentary defeats, not less fatal to his personal interests than to his glory.” Thus in both countries is this illustrious man, whose whole life has been a series of personal sacrifices, calumniated.—If the sweets of office had been the objects of his heart, he would not now be deserted by a set of men, who found, in the steadiness of his principles, their only barrier to the highest situations; and, if the ruin of his rival had been his prevailing passion, he would not have exerted his great powers to prevent him from plunging into a war that must have terminated with infamy his career.

But it is the fate of Mr. Fox, as he extends his views beyond the reach of common vision, to have his propositions first misunderstood, then slandered, and finally adopted: and thus it will fare with his reasonable plan for averting from his country at this moment a war of pride and passion; as soon as our intemperance has been chastised by rebellion or by disaster, men will wonder how we could have been so warped by self-conceit, or so deluded by confidence, as to refuse even to enquire into the grounds of our rupture.

KERSAINT'S plan of a general war is as ridiculous as it is possible even for confirmed insanity to project. First, he says, they must fall upon the trade of England and Holland, and call into their service, as privateers, the adventurers of all maritime Europe, to whom the myriads of rich English cargoes will offer a grand booty. The opulent possessions of Spain, Portugal, England, and Holland, are next to be attacked. They must attack Lisbon; and their fleet, after having made contributions in the Tagus, must take the Brazils. They must send an auxiliary army to Tipoo Sultan, seize the Cape of Good Hope, capture Ceylon, and demolish both the Church and the British

... of a new and very dangerous club is acknowledged.

A never-failing Receipt for giving a Book an extensive circulation, proved by an example.

If any Government with that any book should be read by all degrees of people, let them prosecute the author, and prohibit all men from reading his writings. The leading offences of Ridley and Latimer were, distributing English Bibles; and when for this *heretical offence* these two great men were burnt at Oxford, one of them said to the other,—“Brother, be of good comfort; our persecutors will be disappointed; for our sufferings will lead all men to enquire into that for which we suffered; and this fire will light such a candle in England, as I trust, by God's grace, will never be extinguished.”

Nothing can be a stronger proof of the deplorable ignorance of the Ministerial writers with respect to what really passes in France, than that in all their railings and revilings, they join the names of BRISSOT, ROBESPIERRE, and MARAT, as of the same party. If they did know any thing of the affairs of France, they could not miss knowing that BRISSOT is the daily subject of invective by the ROBESPIERRES and the MARATS, and that the party of the latter is as much in opposition to that to which BRISSOT belongs, as the speculations and assertions of our Ministerial writers are to reason and truth.

TO DR. PRIESTLEY.

Steer not thy spirit, PRIESTLEY, as the train
With low obsequance, and with servile phrase,
File behind the advance, with supple knee,
And lay thee necks beneath the foot of power:
Burns not thy cheek indignant, when thy name,
On which delighted science lov'd to dwell,
Becomes the bundled theme of hoarding crowds;
With timid caution, or with cool reserve,
When e'en each reverend brother keeps aloof,
Eyes the struck deer, and leaves thy naked side
A mark for power to shoot at! Let it be.
“On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,”
To thee, the slander of a passing age
Imparts not. Scenes like these hold little space
In his large mind, whose ample stretch of thought
Grasps future periods.—Well canst thou afford
To give large credit for that debt of fame
Thy country owes thee. Calm thou canst consign it
To the slow payment of that distant day,
If distant, when thy name, to freedom join'd,
Shall meet the thanks of a regenerate land.

DUBLIN,

JANUARY 1.

The accounts from the county of Louth, with respect to the proceedings of a banditti, calling themselves Defenders, grow daily more alarming; near forty houses have been attacked belonging to Protestants, for the purpose of plundering them of their arms, and most of the attacks have been suc-

On other occasions, Barbauld would take the circulation of her poetry into her own hands. Adopting a more active voice in public debate, in November 1794, she sent her poem, ‘To the Poor,’ to the *Morning Chronicle* along with a letter, signed ‘X. Y.’. Existing critical editions of Barbauld’s poetry have noticed neither the publication of this poem in her lifetime, nor the existence of the letter. Writing to the *Morning Chronicle*, Barbauld expressed angry sentiments:

There is no point in which people of property are at present more universally agreed, than in the doctrine of the necessary subordination of ranks; that is to say, that those who happen to be uppermost, should be all the means in their power depress and keep under those below them. As this is extremely natural, and would probably be the system pursued by the other class upon a change of situation, I have nothing to observe concerning it so long as it is pursued by those methods which seem appropriated to the carrying on of worldly contests; but when I see *Religion* made an engine of Government, when I see it imposed as a yoke on the poor man, for the mere purpose of breaking his spirit into a more complete and absolute submission, and that by men who themselves would be ashamed even to be thought by their own companions to receive the tenets and to respect the sanctions they press upon others.—When too, I see *preachers* co-operate in this system, and endeavouring by *their* dominion over the minds, to strengthen the dominion of others over the bodies and estates of men—I own I cannot repress my indignant feelings.¹³⁵

The letter is a frame which appears, at first glance, to make the sentiments look less volatile—the objection is, apparently, to the use of religion ‘as an engine of Government’, not to ‘the necessary subordination of ranks’. However, on closer inspection, a satirical voice is at play: the first sentiments are attributed to ‘people of property’ not the writer; it is ‘extremely natural’ that these people (who simply ‘happen’ to be uppermost) should wish that this were the case. Providing her poem with a framing letter is an attempt to ensure none of her readers miss the point: the letter expresses an ardent indignation to balance the consolatory message of the poem.

The poem is similar in its sentiments to the poem to Priestley, offering the consolation of future heavenly reward to the poor to compensate for their earthly sufferings. Similar phrases are used in both poems, which creates a parallel between the situations of the two poems’ addressees. Barbauld’s poor feel indignation at their situation with the same kind of

¹³⁵ *Morning Chronicle*, (7 November 1794), [page 3, unnumbered]. The poem text here is taken from the *Morning Chronicle*. It is nearly the same as that in Lucy Aikin’s posthumous collection of her aunt’s work, *A Legacy for Young Ladies*, (London: Longman & co., 1826) albeit with a few variants in spelling and punctuation.

physical sensibility—a ‘bursting heart’—that she had imagined Priestley to feel. Barbauld’s phrasing contains a tension: it is not clear how close the passions of the poor child, ‘Whose bursting heart disdains unjust controll, / Who feel’st oppression’s iron in thy soul’ (ll. 7-8) are to being unleashed. While ‘oppression’s iron’ may have conditioned them to subjection much like Blake’s ‘mind-forg’d manacles’, the bursting heart threatens to break through external ‘unjust’ restrictions and the individual’s powers of self-control.

While Barbauld’s poem to Priestley had criticised those who voluntarily ‘lay their necks beneath the foot of power,’ the poor—who have less of a choice in the matter—are exhorted to undertake the same submission with a sense of patient martyrdom, just as Priestley bore his wrongs in the earlier poem: ‘Bear bear thy wrong,—fulfil thy destined hour; / Bend thy meek neck beneath the foot of power’ (ll. 11-12). Barbauld’s tone treads the line between satire, and also a genuine feeling that a pacifist response (rather than the threat of any violent revolution) is the best.

Barbauld’s poem returns to ideas which she had expressed several years earlier in a pamphlet on ‘social’ or public worship. One of the most important aspects of public worship, Barbauld argues, is that the congregation provides a sphere of social equality which cannot be found elsewhere: ‘Public Worship is a *civic* meeting’, she argues, ‘This is the only place, to enter which nothing more is necessary than to be of the same species;—the only place where a man meets man not only as an equal but a brother; and where, by contemplating his duties, he may become sensible of his rights’.¹³⁶ The teachings of the church have a revolutionary potential—here the poor man, despite his disadvantage in material wealth and rank, learns that ‘in the large inheritance to come, his expectations are no less ample’ than the rich. As a result,

He rises from his knees, and feels himself a man. He learns philosophy without pride, and a spirit of liberty without its turbulence. Every time Social Worship is celebrated, it includes a virtual declaration of the rights of man. (46)

¹³⁶ Barbauld, *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship*, (London: J. Johnson, 1792), 43.

Barbauld's anger in 'To the Poor' stems from the fact the church which should be a sphere of spiritual liberty and equality (and by extension, a means of transmitting ideas about earthly equality) has become a means of 'dominion' over the minds and bodies of the poor.

Barbauld's Hutchesonian belief in a benevolent, fatherly God, rather than a harsh disciplinarian, leads her to criticize those who seek to represent God in authoritarian terms as a means of exerting social control. In her pamphlet on social worship she acknowledged that since the striking feature of the deity is power, it could 'naturally be likened to an absolute monarch' (68). However, she argues, this is simply a reflection of human corruption, so that 'features of human depravity have been most faithfully transferred to the Supreme Being; and men have imaged to themselves how a Nero or a Domitian would have acted' (69). In her poem, 'To the Poor', she stresses how, in the hour of death, each 'freed spirit' (freed from the mortal body and from earthly restrictions) can approach their God without fear. The poor should not 'deem the Lord above, like Lords below' (l. 18) and should neither fear the stern, monarchical God 'whom priests and kings have made' (l. 22). The 'threats' and 'whispered terrors' of preachers, Barbauld argues, have sought to create an inward oppression that reinforces outward, political oppression (ll. 16-17).

The publication of Barbauld's poem 'To the Poor' in the *Morning Chronicle* is framed by other recurrent concerns in the newspaper at that time. Reports of the trial of Thomas Hardy for treason had dominated the *Morning Chronicle* in the previous few weeks. Among the evidence cited in the trial, as reported in the *Chronicle* on 3 November, four days before Barbauld's poem appeared, were some verses on liberty by James Thomson, which had been prefixed to the Address of the London Corresponding Society—one of the 'seditious' pamphlets that had led to Hardy's arrest. Thomas Erskine, speaking in Hardy's defence, had told the court:

Let them [i.e. the Jury] read the lines prefixed to the Address of the Corresponding Society, and see if they could find any thing in their subsequent proceedings to match them.

Unblest by virtue, government a league
 Becomes, a circling Junto of the Great,
 To rob by Law; Religion mild, a yoke
 To tame the stooping Soul, a trick of State
 To mask their Rapine, and to share the Prey.
 What are without it Senates, but a Face
 Of Consultation deep and Reason free,
 While the determin'd Voice and Heart are sold?
 What boasted Freedom but a sounding Name?
 And what Election but a Market vile;
 Of Slaves self-bartered?

Yet these verses were written by Thomson, under the roof of Lord Littleton, under the protection of the Prince of Wales, who perhaps thought that the Rights of the People were the surest guarantee of his own Rights.—By a man who had studied and understood the British Constitution, who venerated liberty but loved order—by a man whose works had been the delight of a nation, and to whose memory a monument was now erecting.¹³⁷

Erskine's defence implies that the interpretation of poetry as 'radical' or 'seditious' arises from the perspective of the reader looking to categorise works as such. The language of Thomson's poem, appropriated to a new context in the London Corresponding Society's pamphlet, appears imbued with additional 'radical' connotations beyond the poet's original intention. What is noticeable is how Thomson's portrayal of religion being misused as a 'trick of State,' and turned into 'a yoke / To tame the stooping Soul' resonates with the sentiments expressed in Barbauld's poem. She had used an epigraph from Thomson's *The Seasons* for her early patriotic poem, 'Corsica', that celebrated the Corsican struggle for liberty. Thomson's poem stresses the hypocrisy arising if systems of government and religion do not have virtue at their core. Barbauld's poem and her letter to the editor echo this sentiment: religion, she writes, is exploited as a tool of governance, 'by men who themselves would be ashamed even to be thought by their own companions to receive the tenets and to respect the sanctions they press upon others'.¹³⁸ The mere fact of being printed in the same newspaper only a few days later, makes the language of Barbauld's 'To the Poor' seem imbued with the contested language of the Treason Trials, whether she intended it to echo Thomson or not. Here, as

¹³⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, (3 Nov. 1794), [page 4, unnumbered].

¹³⁸ *Morning Chronicle*, (7 November 1794), [page 3, unnumbered].

with her poem to Priestley, the publication context of the newspaper lends added force to the poem by echoes and juxtapositions.

Examining Barbauld's poems published in the *Morning Chronicle* shows how the poems accrue meanings from their place of publication and the articles that are printed around them, becoming part of the themes which recur through the paper over a particular period of time. The newspaper is a textual version of a kind of public space, jumbling together articles, poems, adverts, reports, and letters. However, it is also a public forum which unites together various voices who speak from a shared political standpoint, harmonised by Perry's editorial influence.

Social worship, social feeling

Barbauld's 'To the Poor' is evidently a rhetorical apostrophe directed to the readers of the *Morning Chronicle* and not to the poor themselves. On other occasions, as in her *Civic Sermons to the People*, she would address this public directly in simple language accessible to readers of all abilities. Addressing her newspaper readership, Barbauld's poem 'To the Poor' depicts the poor in a dignified way, showing them, like Priestley, suffering a kind of martyrdom. What she had learnt by the 1790s, as expressed in her 'Epistle to Wilberforce', was that the language of sensibility and vivid depictions of distresses could be ineffective at raising compassionate sympathies. In her early poem, 'To Mrs P—', Barbauld had depicted poetry as having an immediate, sympathetic function that can physiologically stir up the sensibilities of the reader: it, 'Can pierce the close recesses of the heart; / By well set syllables, and potent sound, / Can rouse, can chill the breast, can sooth, can wound (ll. 12-14). However, by the 1790s, the affective potential of literature no longer seems certain. Sensibility appears ineffective as a tool for social protest: thus, Barbauld's 'Epistle to William Wilberforce' complains that,

Thy Country knows the sin, and stands the shame!
The Preacher, Poet, Senator in vain

Has rattled in her sight the Negro's chain;
 With his deep groans assail'd her startled ear,
 And rent the veil that hid his constant tear¹³⁹ (ll. 2-6)

In 'To the Poor', therefore, Barbauld represents the sufferings of the poor in abstract terms—'Whose bread is anguish and whose water tears'—and represents them as possessing a kind of nobleness in extremity. Barbauld seeks to inspire pity rather than a more painful kind of sympathy. In a much earlier essay in *Miscellaneous Pieces*, she had made a distinction between sympathy and pity, each manifested through different bodily symptoms:

We have, indeed, a strong sympathy with all kinds of misery; but it is a feeling of pure unmixed pain, similar in kind, though not equal in degree to what we feel for ourselves on the like occasions; and never produces that melting sorrow, that thrill of tenderness, to which we give the name of pity. They are two distinct sensations, marked by very different external expression. One causes the nerves to tingle, the flesh to shudder, and the whole countenance to be thrown into strong contractions; the other relaxes the frame, opens the features, and produces tears.¹⁴⁰

Underlying Barbauld's physiological depiction of sympathetic transmission is a history of eighteenth-century debate over exactly how sympathy functioned: alongside the emotional or imaginative models of sympathy described by Hume and Smith, other accounts of sympathy by Robert Whytt and John Hunter had depicted it as a material, physiological mechanism by which emotion was transferred from one body to another.¹⁴¹ The distinction which Barbauld makes between sympathy and pity suggests that we are inspired to benevolent actions towards people or situations which excite one but not the other, so that if poverty is to stir compassion, 'the rags and dirt, the squalid appearance and mean employments incident to that state must be kept out of sight' (203). Sympathy is not a reliable way of stirring benevolence, since people simply recoil from distressing sights. The kind of physiological transmission of sympathy which Barbauld describes appears to mechanically render painful emotions in the observer. Much as Hutcheson suggested, the emotions alone are not a reliable guide towards

¹³⁹ 'Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade', *PALB*, 114-8.

¹⁴⁰ 'An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which excite agreeable Sensations; with a Tale', *Miscellaneous Pieces*, (1773), 193.

¹⁴¹ Fairclough, 39.

benevolence. Passion may incite a person to benevolent actions, but this needs to be reinforced and strengthened by the moral sense.

Like many of her contemporaries, Barbauld condemned the repeated and disproportionate depictions of tragedy in sentimental novels, arguing that these inured their readers to the sight of more commonplace misfortunes in real life. She writes that, though the novels exercise sensibility, ‘sensibility does not increase with exercise’ (211). On the contrary, ‘By the constitution of our frame our habits increase, our emotions decrease, by repeated acts; and thus a wise provision is made, that as our compassion grows weaker, its place should be supplied by habitual benevolence’ (211). When sympathy is evoked with no outlet for benevolent action, it merely dulls the moral feelings, which ‘grow less and less vivid every time they recur, till at length the mind grows absolutely callous’ (211). The affective potential of the literary text must strike a delicate balance between evoking finer feelings and avoiding destructive excess. Such ideas about the constructive and destructive potential of sympathetic transmission lie behind Barbauld’s belief in the importance of public worship.

Unlike the isolated sphere of novel-reading, social worship provides a meeting place in which social sympathies can have an active effect on the formation of a community. The rich can be encouraged to aid the poor in their own congregation, simply because the familiarity of their persons is more likely to engage ‘the enquiring eye of benevolence’.¹⁴²

Like Hutcheson, Barbauld represents social feelings and sympathy as inherently natural: men are prone in every circumstance ‘to associate together, and communicate the electric fire of correspondent feelings’ (7). As a result, she takes issue with Gilbert Wakefield’s idea that worship should be a solitary activity; instead, for Barbauld, a vital part of religious experience involves the desire to know that those feelings are shared with others:

The devout heart, [...] bursts into loud and vocal expressions of praise and adoration; and, from a full and overflowing sensibility, seeks to expand itself to the utmost limits of creation. The mind is forcibly carried out of itself, and, embracing the whole circle

¹⁴² Barbauld, *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's Enquiry*, 38-9.

of animated existence, calls on all above, around, below, to help bear the burden of its gratitude. (18-19)

In an expansive movement which mirrors Barbauld's early poem, 'A Summer Evening's Meditation', such uniting sensibilities seem to threaten a limitless transference of emotion. However, Barbauld, as Jon Mee has discussed in much detail, could at other time express concern about such emotional contagion, and criticised excessive, unregulated, religious enthusiasm.¹⁴³ Social worship refines the relationship of individual and community, stirring social sympathies yet also regulating them. By refining the manners and sensibilities of the congregation, and stirring sympathetic ties through association, social worship provides self-regulation to a community—an entirely different matter from the fear-inducing worship that functions as a tool of political repression. Just as elsewhere Barbauld posits a model of society that expands through family to neighbourhood to nation, so in her views on social worship, the congregation seems to form a parallel intermediary network through which individuals and families are linked to wider religious or national affiliations.

A Norwich Dissenting Family Album and Barbauld's poetry

As a coda to this chapter, I want to look briefly at a manuscript album from the 1810s-20s, in which some of Barbauld's poems appear, to show how, just as the *Morning Chronicle* could adopt 'To Dr. Priestley' into its radical agenda, so within the space of a family manuscript book, poetry could be assembled as an expression of family ties and allegiances.

The album, part of the large archive of papers from Dissenting families kept at Harris Manchester College, Oxford, has been attributed to a member of Pendlebury Houghton's family. It contains twelve of Barbauld's poems from various sources, as well as copies of two of her short prose pieces.¹⁴⁴ Possibly Houghton's only daughter Mary Pendlebury Houghton,

¹⁴³ Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 175-201, passim.

¹⁴⁴ Oxford, Harris Manchester College, MS Misc. Notebooks 1.

whose initials 'M. P. H.' occur as the addressee of some of the verses, could have been the copyist, since the early poems in the book are written in what seems to be a young person's handwriting. McCarthy and Kraft suggest that the poems were transcribed into the book after 1811 (the date of 'On the King's Illness,' one of the first poems in the book), and furthermore suggest that most of the entries date from between 1818-1826, but with the last entry of the book dated 1872.¹⁴⁵

The Houghton family had connections to Barbauld herself, as well as many other prominent Dissenting families around Norwich. Pendlebury Houghton was a Warrington graduate who had served as a tutor there from 1778-9. He was minister to the Octagon Chapel in Norwich from 1787-1808, and then again 1811-12.¹⁴⁶ Charles Aikin mentioned Houghton in his letters to Barbauld from Norwich (where Charles was living with the Martineaus) as being a friend whom he admired for his Republican principles.¹⁴⁷ The manuscript album at Harris Manchester contains a miscellaneous collection of poems written by family and friends on special occasion—valentines; birthday poems; memorial poems; and verses sent with gifts of albums, paint-boxes, and other trinkets. But there are also poems on public events, such as 'On the failure of the Roman Catholic Bill in the Spring of 1825,' with all of the political significance which that event would have had for Dissenters in their own battle for religious toleration. Alongside these are transcribed poems by Burns, Byron, Moore, Scott, Southey, Hemans, Helen Maria Williams, Horace Twiss, and a few 'Ossian' poems; as well as poems by Non-Conformists such as Amelia Opie, Philip Doddridge, the Taylor family of Norwich, William Roscoe, and the Quaker poet Bernard Barton. A glance at the contents page made for the book indicates its owner's links to the Norwich society of the Martineaus, and to Barbauld herself as a number of her poems are written in the opening

¹⁴⁵ *PALB*, 353-4. Mary's maturing handwriting could explain what McCarthy and Kraft have described as two different hands. Mary was born around 1800; she married in 1823, and died in 1877, as recorded by notices in the *Liverpool Mercury*, (11 July 1823), 15, and *Ipswich Journal*, (3 Nov 1877), 6.

¹⁴⁶ George Eyre Evans, *Record of the Provincial Assembly of Lancashire and Cheshire*, (Manchester: H. Rawson & co., 1896), 55.

¹⁴⁷ *PALB*, 304.

pages of the book (see Fig. 2). In the space of the Houghton album, Barbauld's poetry is positioned within a social sphere, as part of a larger community of Dissenting families, both known to them and unknown. The poetry which the Houghton family chose to collect reflects and represents their sense of belonging to this community, and reveals their own connection to Barbauld: one short piece called 'Mrs. Barbauld in reply to Mr. Houghton, Impromptu' signals its place as a piece of occasional, sociable verse that was never intended for a print readership.¹⁴⁸

The Houghton album proves important for the survival of two of Barbauld's poems, 'Song for the London Volunteers' and 'Sorrow and Consolations', which are the only copies of these poems in existence: the poems were never printed, and no autograph or other manuscript exists for either of them. Another three of the poems in the notebook were never printed by Barbauld herself, and only appeared in print posthumously, although other manuscript copies of them exist. One of these poems, 'Verses written on the Leaves of an Ivory Pocket-book', appears in the Houghton notebook with a different and shorter text than both the printed versions of the text. The poem was first printed—from his own manuscript copy—by William Turner in his obituary for Barbauld written in 1825.¹⁴⁹ Turner, whose father had been acquainted with Dr. Priestley, had, when a young boy, been given the pocket-book (with the verses inscribed in it) by Barbauld when she came to Leeds to visit the Priestleys.¹⁵⁰ Turner, who possessed many manuscript copies of Barbauld's poems through his family connections, suggests it would be improper of him to bring these works into print, with the exception of the one poem—the 'Lines in an Ivory Pocket-book', which was given to him personally as a gift:

¹⁴⁸ This poem, unprinted until McCarthy and Kraft's edition, is called there, 'On being asked if One was a Number'.

¹⁴⁹ 'Mrs. Barbauld,' *Newcastle Magazine*, (Apr. 1825) 183-6; (May 1825) 229-32.

¹⁵⁰ *PALB* dates the entry in the Houghton notebook for the 'Lines in an Ivory Pocket-book', to sometime after 27 December 1822 (236). The other printed version was in Lucy Aikin's collection of her aunt's work, *A Legacy for Young Ladies*, (London: Longman & co., 1826).

Although he does not think that he has any right to bring before the world any of the other productions of her pen during this most interesting and fruitful visit, and hardly knows whether he is justified in giving the titles of some of those he possesses, and concerning which her immediate friends have the sole authority to determine whether they shall see the light, yet he conceives himself under no such restrictions with regard to the following lines.¹⁵¹

Nevertheless, the poem must have circulated in various manuscript versions, since the copy in the Houghton album is markedly different from Turner's text. Turner's concern, in 1825, about the social propriety of printing the poems, appears in stark contrast to those ministers who brought Barbauld's potentially far more controversial Priestley poem into print in 1792.

The poem which opens the Houghton notebook, 'On the death of Mrs. Martineau,' is, McCarthy suggests, copied from one of the 'few copies [...] to be printed for the family', which were published with a dedication to the families of Martineau and Taylor by 'their affectionate A. L. Barbauld'.¹⁵² The Houghtons were clearly acquainted with the Martineaus, since the third poem in the notebook is Pendlebury Houghton's poem, 'On visiting Mr. Martineau's grounds at Bracondale, during his absence'. Notably, the Houghton album also contains a privately-printed copy of Barbauld's poem 'To Dr. Priestley' pasted into its pages. McCarthy and Kraft speculate that this is the very same copy sent by Barbauld to Charles Aikin, and passed on by him to the Houghton family.

Privately printed texts appear to have inhabited an intermediate space—produced for specific, limited audiences—for personal friends in the case of the poem on Mrs Martineau; of political sympathisers in the case of Barbauld's poem 'To Dr. Priestley'—and yet the medium could lead these poems to travel widely: the poem on Mrs Martineau made its way into the 1820 American edition of *Poems*, although it was not widely printed in Britain until the posthumous edition of Barbauld's *Works* (1825) produced by her niece Lucy Aikin.

¹⁵¹ 'Mrs Barbauld', (April 1825), 185. Turner lists the poem on losing at chess, the inventory of Priestley's study, the poem on the birth of the Priestleys' son, the verses on Priestley's arms, and has lost a copy of a poem called 'Invocation to the Muse, for help to describe the various romantic scenes to which she had been taken while in Yorkshire, in a letter to Mrs. P[riestley]'—a poem which is now completely lost. .

¹⁵² Lucy Aikin, letter to J. Roscoe (1 Aug. 1801) quoted in *PALB*, 300.

Fig. 2: Oxford, Harris Manchester College, MS Misc. Notebooks 1, f. 1.

<i>Index to the contents.</i>	
<i>On the death of Mrs Martineau</i> _____	<i>Mrs Barbauld</i>
<i>To Nature on earth</i> _____	<i>Grigg</i>
<i>On visiting Mr. Martineau's grounds at Bracondale, during his absence</i> _____	<i>P. Houghton</i>
<i>Mrs Siddons's address on quitting the stage</i> _____	<i>H. Swift</i>
<i>The Washing day</i> _____	<i>Mrs Barbauld</i>
<i>Volgyor</i> _____	<i>Thomson</i>
<i>On the King's illness</i> _____	<i>Mrs Barbauld</i>
<i>Song for the London Volunteers</i> _____	<i>ibid</i>
<i>Fashion - (a vision)</i> _____	<i>ibid</i>
<i>Description of the effects of opium</i> _____	<i>translation from Homer</i>
<i>Lines with an umbrella</i> _____	<i>P. Houghton</i>
<i>Lines impromptu to P. Houghton</i> _____	<i>Mrs Barbauld</i>
<i>To M. P. H. on her birthday</i> _____	<i>P. Houghton</i>
<i>The Butterfly's Funeral</i> _____	_____
<i>On a lady's mending his stocking</i> _____	<i>Doddridge</i>
<i>Lines written in a drawing book</i> _____	_____
<i>The Stranger</i> _____	_____
<i>On a bird which took refuge on a vessel crossing the Atlantic</i> _____	<i>Rev. d. Harris</i>
<i>To P. H. on reading his Sermon on the renewal of virtuous Friendships hereafter</i> _____	<i>ibid.</i>
<i>Extempore on a watch</i> _____	<i>Mrs. Opie.</i>
	<i>Dr. Myron.</i>

Other poems by Barbauld in the Houghton notebook appear to have been copied from printed texts which appeared in the *Monthly Magazine*, *Monthly Repository*, and *Annual Register*. As well as reflecting their ongoing sibling collaboration, contributing pieces to John Aikin's *Monthly Magazine* placed Barbauld among the network of Non-conformist writers who were published in its pages. The young Mary Houghton copied Barbauld's, 'Fashion: a vision', into her album from the *Monthly Magazine*—returning into manuscript a prose piece which claimed to have been originally written as a letter to a young lady.¹⁵³ The kind of permeation between print and manuscript, domestic and public spheres, which Barbauld and Aikin had depicted in *Evenings at Home* can thus be seen to be perpetuated in the space of the Houghton album.

What the Houghton notebook shows is a family using poetry to express their ties to a network of friends and a wider Dissenting community. Collecting together poetry in an album was a way of tangibly expressing the sociable impulses which Barbauld's poems expressed internally through acts of address, and on a material level as gifts sent to friends. Poetry thereby could actively create social ties, as well as represent or depict friendship and community.

Conclusion

Barbauld's work shows how manuscript culture practices intersected with print in many ways. Firstly, through textual features of her poetry that indicated its roots in a sociable community through acts of address to particular friends, or in her collaboration with her brother John Aikin and the allusions and echoes running between their works. Furthermore, through the networks of readers through which her poems circulated in manuscript and were sometimes pirated into print

¹⁵³ Printed anonymously in the *Monthly Magazine*, (Apr., 1797), 254-6.

Drawing on Shaftesburyan/Hutchesonian ideas of amiable sociability, as well as ideas about the nature of sympathy and the transmission of emotion, Barbauld's work explores the links between individual, family, community and nation. In her *Poems*, Barbauld's intimate, sociable poetry arising from the particular community of Warrington had frequently functioned as a means to position herself relative to a wider community of Dissenters, and to articulate issues of wider national relevance. Her work expresses the important role of literary texts and their circulation in creating communities of friends and readers, informed by the cultural values of Dissent. Later, her 1790s poems like 'To the Poor' reached out from the Dissenting community to wider radical networks through the Whig *Morning Chronicle*. The circulation of poetry, in manuscript and in print, played a role in establishing, extending and solidifying networks of readers, united by political and religious affiliations. Additionally, poems could be taken up by other readers, as we have seen in the case of 'To Dr. Priestley', and accrue additional force and meaning through their circulation or re-appropriation into new contexts.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

In his youthful, radical days during the turbulent decade of the 1790s, Coleridge's poetry, in particular his 'conversation' poems, had expressed a fervent belief that friendship, sociability, domestic attachments played an important role in civil society. Furthermore, as various critics have suggested over the past few decades, Coleridge's early conversation poems functioned as a rhetorical strategy through which the poet could attempt to create a reading community, or attempt to shape a responsive reading audience for his work.

Some decades ago, Kelvin Everest firmly linked Coleridge's problem of audience to his idea that social values such as benevolence arose from and were sustained by the private, domestic attachments of family and friendship. Everest argued that 'Coleridge's efforts to realise his social ideals were quite at one with his efforts to establish a sympathetic audience, and the rhetoric of the conversation poems is [...] precisely an effort to create relationship, a sense of connectedness, between particular men and women (and, especially important for Coleridge, between adults and children), and between man and his particular world'.¹⁵⁴ In the intimate rhetoric of the conversation poems, Everest argues that Coleridge sought to establish the language of an 'elect', a small group of intellectuals and dedicated reformers which, though initially limited in scope, hold 'within their circle of affection and influence the potential of a new world' (87). Tim Fulford has interpreted the conversation poems in a similar fashion, arguing that Coleridge aimed to recreate for a print readership the kind of intimate, spiritual community which he had experienced in direct conversation with a responsive audience of listeners. In the use of colloquial speech and the language of family affection, Fulford suggests that, 'the content and the style of Coleridge's radical language aim to reproduce this spiritual community on a public scale'.¹⁵⁵ Coleridge therefore looks outwards from the small group, hoping to find a language that can create the basis of wider social and spiritual unity.

¹⁵⁴ Everest, 10.

¹⁵⁵ Tim Fulford, *Coleridge's Figurative Language*, (London: Macmillan, 1991), 3.

As has been frequently noted, such an outwards movement of shared sympathy has its roots in Coleridge's reading of David Hartley (and of Hartley's expositor, Joseph Priestley) who had suggested a model by which human sympathies spread outwards, uniting individuals together in a kind of spiritual communion. Hartley describes the process, suggesting that if person A feels 'unbounded Happiness, on Supposition that he considered every man as his friend, his son, his neighbour, his second self, and loved him as himself' and if his neighbour felt the same, then, 'A, B, C, D, &c. would all become, as it were, new Sets of Senses, and perceptive Powers, to each other, so as to increase each other's Happiness without Limits; they would all become Members of the mystical Body of Christ [...] Happiness would circulate through this mystical Body without End'.¹⁵⁶ These social sympathies lead onwards to love of the divine and back again: 'we are led by the Love of good Men to that of God, and back again by the Love of God to that of all his Creatures in and through him' (ii. 283) so that we should cultivate 'universal, unlimited Benevolence' (ii. 283).

However, despite the influence of such an optimistic view of human sympathies, Coleridge encountered problems during the 1790s, firstly, in establishing such communal sympathies within his friendship groups, and secondly, on a textual level, in forging a sympathetic relationship with his readers. Numerous critics have suggested that Coleridge's depictions of friendship, community and collaboration are shot through with tension. Gurion Taussig has discussed how Coleridge imbued his personal friendships with ideological dimensions, coloured by radical politics and Unitarian idealism, which led these individual friendships to be put under (sometimes intolerable) pressure.¹⁵⁷ David Fairer posits an essential ambiguity in Coleridge's attitude to friendship and collaboration, suggesting that Coleridge is perpetually 'challenging those bonds of sympathy and shared endeavour that he

¹⁵⁶ David Hartley, *Observations on Man: His Frame, His Duty and His Expectations*, (London: S. Richardson, 1749) II. 286-7.

¹⁵⁷ Taussig, 151; 214-5.

also values, and at moments reaching out to an idealist, seraphic plane'.¹⁵⁸ In recent criticism, Jon Mee has suggested that, despite Coleridge's conception of 'the literary as sociable discourse', his 1790s poems, 'register a strong pressure towards converting conversation into monologue'.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Fulford has suggested that allusive collaboration between Coleridge and Southey was 'both an intimate exchange and a mutual differentiation', as their attempts to collaborate in 1799-1800 resulted in both poets seeking to define themselves against one another.¹⁶⁰

In the conversation poems, Coleridge's representations of the relationship of speaker and listener, writer and reader, suggest his anxiety that a sympathetic response cannot be guaranteed. Furthermore, the existence of an uncontrollable reader, potentially unsympathetic, potentially inclined to 'misinterpret' Coleridge's poem, could lead him to coercive textual strategies. In her work on Coleridge and hermeneutics, Tilottama Rajan has suggested that 'to insure our cooperation, the romantic text often makes the appropriate reader a part of its rhetoric' in order to offset the impact of actual, disobedient readers who do not necessarily follow the roles prescribed for them in the text.¹⁶¹ So, she suggests, the conversation poem 'protects itself against questioning by making its readers part of an intimate circle' (113). Lucy Newlyn sees a similar interpretative anxiety behind Coleridge's textual strategies: 'in the use of framing-devices (prefaces, footnotes, marginal comments) around his poems, as well as in the inclusion of model readers within them, he elaborately foregrounds the reader's role in constructing meaning. Yet at the same time, he attempts to place constraints on the reader's activity, so as to preserve his own authority as poet'.¹⁶² By addressing his conversation poems to members of a coterie audience, these imagined readers can 'fend off his anxieties with respect to the public reception of his poetry' (73). However,

¹⁵⁸ Fairer, 5.

¹⁵⁹ Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, 190.

¹⁶⁰ Fulford, *Romantic Poetry and Literary Coterie*, 78.

¹⁶¹ Rajan, 2.

¹⁶² Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism*, 59.

these model readers ‘seldom move beyond the performance of a surrogate role in relation to the poet’s own desires, or a reconciling role in relation to his inner conflicts’ (73).

To examine how Coleridge’s use of address and his representation of audience in his poetry expressed and addressed his ideas, hopes, and fears about friendship, sympathy, and community, this chapter looks at a slightly later point in his career: the year 1802—a crisis point at which Coleridge no longer saw private, domestic sympathies, as he once had, in the terms of political idealism. With the failure of Coleridge’s 1790s ideals of pantisocratic fraternity, and his veer towards the more conservative politics expressed in his articles for the *Morning Post*, Coleridge’s poetry from this later period no longer envisioned or represented community in the language of his former ideology.

Coleridge’s 1790s poetry had openly represented friendship as an expression of his belief in the social, political, and spiritual significance of domestic community. For example, in the second edition of his *Poems on Various Subjects* (1797) Coleridge had reprinted his poems alongside poetry by Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd. It was a volume which publicly and openly celebrated their friendships, including among its contents various poems addressed by one friend to another, as well as poems by each of the contributors on similar topics and themes which emphasised their shared politics and religious beliefs.

However, by 1802, a growing sense of personal crisis (marital breakdown, unrequited love, fears of being excluded from the changing Wordsworth household) meant that Coleridge wrote with a more intense need to find sympathy and understanding within this ‘coterie’ reading community. Establishing an intensely private language of allusion and symbolism became a way for Coleridge to attempt to inscribe himself into the closeness of the Grasmere circle. Any personal references or allusions which occur in his publicly-printed poetry of 1802 are opaque and hidden to the eyes of the public reader.

Coleridge’s former ideals about the domestic community as source and starting point of wider sympathies became tainted with anxiety. As I shall examine in more detail,

Coleridge's 1802 poetry questions whether sympathy could prove to be an unreliable mechanism for the transmission of emotion and understanding. This has an impact firstly on an aesthetic level—leading to a failure to establish writer/reader relationships through sympathy—and secondly on a social/political level—sympathy may not, as Hartley had suggested, form a reliable basis for unifying individuals into his ideal, spiritual community.

'O Wordsworth!'

Literary criticism has been fascinated by the creative relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge for over a century. Too much has been written to summarise fully here, but the poets' creative relationship has been read, from one point of view, as friendly and collaborative, played out through echoes and allusions and a shared private language; from the other side, critics have argued that this relationship was full of latent tension, rivalry and resentment, and that the poems stage an argument in which the poets answer and critique one another's work and ideas.

Much critical work has focused on tracing the strands of influence and allusion between Coleridge's and Wordsworth's longer poems of 1802, and what this reveals about the poets' relationship. Much attention has focused on the relationship between Coleridge's multiple versions of his 'Letter to — [Sara Hutchinson]'/ 'Dejection', each addressed to a different recipient ('Sara', 'Wordsworth', 'Edmund', 'Lady'), and the beginning of Wordsworth's 'Intimations' Ode and the 'Leech-Gatherer'. The timeline of the Coleridge's composition and revisions, and the reasons for his repeated changes of addressee have provoked much scrutiny.

While most critics have assumed the later poem, 'Dejection,' is a revision and refinement of the original verse-letter, George Dekker has argued that 'the essential components of *Dejection: an Ode* existed as actual stanzas of poetry *before* the verse letter to Sara

Hutchinson was drafted', and has drawn parallels between the poem and views which Coleridge expressed in his correspondence with Godwin, Poole and Davy during the years 1800-1.¹⁶³ John Worthen likewise suggests that both Wordsworth's 'Ode' and Coleridge's 'Letter' were probably composed over a considerable period of time, and furthermore suggests an alternative chronology, raising the possibility that 'the 1804 *Ode* looks more like a response to the *Letter* and *Dejection* than the other way round' (153), and that Coleridge's poem could, potentially, be a response to the 'Leech Gatherer' (154).

David Erdman suggests that in writing the verse-letter, Coleridge 'at first had not been certain to whom he might send it. Perhaps he had had in mind a round robin'.¹⁶⁴ Stephen Parrish suggests that the addressees were easily interchangeable, since the poem was always more about Coleridge than Sara.¹⁶⁵ Others have argued that the poem was always intrinsically about Coleridge's relationship with Wordsworth. Paul Magnuson, in framing the 'Letter' as a response to Wordsworth's *Intimations Ode* speculates as to whether 'if Sara Hutchinson received the letter, she would have understood the allusions to stanzas [of the *Ode*] that she might not have seen until much later. Wordsworth is Coleridge's intended reader as much as she is'.¹⁶⁶

Various critics have positioned Coleridge's poem as part of an ongoing poetical and intellectual debate with Wordsworth, and as a token of professional and personal anxiety.¹⁶⁷ Paul Fry argues for a contested relationship between the poets, suggesting that Coleridge's verse-letter 'is deliberately in conflict with some of Wordsworth's most cherished ideas of the relationship between the human mind and nature. [...] Coleridge's verse letter is not simply a response to the four opening stanzas of the "ode". In effect, Coleridge's letter addresses

¹⁶³ George Dekker, *Coleridge and the Literature of Sensibility*, (London: Vision Press, 1978), 33-42; 47.

¹⁶⁴ David V. Erdman, 'The Otway Connection,' in Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn, and Nicholas Roe (eds.), *Coleridge's Imagination: essays in memory of Pete Laver*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 143-160, 149.

¹⁶⁵ Stephen Parrish, *Coleridge's Dejection: the earliest manuscripts and the earliest printings*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), 17-18.

¹⁶⁶ Magnuson, *Coleridge and Wordsworth*, 273-317; 291.

¹⁶⁷ See also Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: the Borders of Vision*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 149-173; Ruoff, 75-103.

Wordsworth's entire cannon'.¹⁶⁸ Likewise, Bruce Lawder suggests that 'Dejection' and 'Tintern Abbey' can be read as 'moments of an agonizing struggle between two male rivals'.¹⁶⁹ He argues that 'Dejection' expresses 'Coleridge's opposition to Wordsworth's 'impressionistic' code of perception' (70) and furthermore that, 'What began as a difference in concepts of perception [...] can be read as a disguised and deadly quarrel'. (73)

Lucy Newlyn has discussed how Coleridge's verse-letter not only revisits and reworks images from his own earlier poetry ('Effusion XXXV', 'France: an Ode', 'The Nightingale', 'Frost at Midnight') 'following patterns of private and literary association' but also makes use of deeply-woven allusions to Wordsworth's poetry so that the language, 'reveals a deep sense of Wordsworth's poetic presence'.¹⁷⁰ Coleridge's use of echoes and allusions to Wordsworth's poetry, she argues, are not just 'a token of exchange' but speak also of his anxiety and increasing awareness of a discrepancy or divergence between them (69). William Ulmer takes a more harmonious view, arguing that rather than being 'an intertextual power struggle' (193), the poets' work expresses not a dichotomy of ideas but rather a more collaborative and sympathetic relationship, in which the 'language of the poetry was quickly appropriated as a familiar, consolidating element of the group idiom' (207) and which fostered a non-proprietary circulation of texts.¹⁷¹ In trying to suppress the more private aspects of the poem when he revised the verse-letter into 'Dejection', and turning Wordsworth into an abstracted rather than intimately-known figure, David Pirie argues that Coleridge's verses 'lost much of their power and most of their subtlety'.¹⁷²

Though I will return to the 'Letter'/'Dejection' later, my focus in this chapter is not to address the ins and outs of the complex Wordsworth-Coleridge relationship, nor the

¹⁶⁸ Paul H. Fry, *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980), 305-6.

¹⁶⁹ Bruce Lawder, 'Secret(ing) Conversations: Coleridge and Wordsworth', *New Literary History*, 32:1 (Winter 2001), 67-89; 68.

¹⁷⁰ Newlyn, *Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Language of Allusion*, 64; 74.

¹⁷¹ William Ulmer, 'Radical Similarity: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Dejection Dialogue', *ELH*, 76:1 (2009), 189-213.

¹⁷² David Pirie, 'A Letter to [Asra]', in Jonathan Wordsworth (ed.), *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1970), 294-339; 294.

intertextual relationship of influence and allusion between the grand ‘Odes’ written by the poets at this time, but rather to examine how the idea of belonging (and the fear of not belonging) to the sympathetic community of Grasmere friends (William, Dorothy, and the Hutchinson sisters) is expressed in Coleridge’s poetry of the period, and furthermore, how some of Coleridge’s smaller poems of the year 1802 provide a space to retrace the implications and issues of the ‘Letter’ and ‘Dejection’ for the eyes of various readers.

Rather than reading Coleridge’s poems of 1802 as part of a grand masculine battle with Wordsworth, or reading it—as much criticism of Coleridge’s 1790s poetry has done—in terms of male friendship and ideas of brotherhood, I instead want to address how Coleridge’s poetry engages with the idea of belonging to the small extended-family community that encompasses William, Dorothy, Mary and Sara Hutchinson: the group which John Worthen (following Coleridge himself) terms ‘the Gang’. John Beer suggested long ago that Coleridge unsuccessfully sought ‘to make the Wordsworth household as a whole a substitute for his lost community by the Susquehannah’.¹⁷³ In the Coleridge’s anxious, longing, representation of this community we can see a shift from Coleridge’s 1790s attitudes: personal troubles shake his faith—not in the value of domestic attachments—but in the ability to realise and sustain these sympathetic communities of friends (and readers) both textually and in real-life.

During the year 1802, Coleridge created a whole constellation of poems which reworked the same material (themes, ideas, images, language, motifs) for different readers. There has been much critical speculation over the exact relationship between Coleridge’s ‘Letter’ (unpublished in his lifetime) and his ‘Dejection: an Ode’ (first published in the *Morning Post* on 4 October 1802), and about the processes of revision, alteration, and censorship through which the manuscript verse-letter became the publicly-printed ode.¹⁷⁴ In addition to various fragments quoted in letters to William Sotheby and Robert Southey in the summer of

¹⁷³ John Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1959), 286.

¹⁷⁴ Detailed accounts of the various versions of the poem have been given in Parrish, *Coleridge’s Dejection*, and Jack Stillinger, *Coleridge and Textual Instability: the multiple versions of the major poems*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1994).

1802, further works from the same period—not only ‘The Day Dream’, but also the ‘Soliloquy of the Full Moon’ and ‘To Matilda Betham’—show Coleridge in a constant process of revisiting, remaking and reworking the same poetical elements for different readers and different modes of ‘publication’, either in manuscript or in print. The first part of this chapter explores Coleridge’s negotiation of audience as he reworks his poem in ‘publications’ of various sorts; the final part of this chapter follows the stories of Coleridge’s poems when they are contextualised within larger ‘publications’ made by other readers (by Sara Hutchinson in her manuscript poetry book, by the *Morning Post*’s editor Daniel Stuart in his newspaper).

Landscapes of sentiment

Coleridge’s verse-letter, as George Dekker suggested many years ago, owes much to the eighteenth-century literature of sensibility.¹⁷⁵ The poem is a dramatic representation of what Samuel Richardson calls ‘writing to the moment’.¹⁷⁶ It tracks the passing of both time-in-the-mind and time-in-the-world (by tracking the course of the evening and the rising and ceasing of the storm), while describing a diffuse mental reverie in which stanzas are linked apparently through Coleridge’s own acts of mental association—ideas are presented apparently in the process of being formed, describing an emotional journey taking place. Through this self-consciously literary mode of writing, as well as allusions to his own poetry and Wordsworth’s, Coleridge poem is tinged with a performative self-awareness despite appearing to describe his uncensored woes. Indeed, Dekker has suggested that *Dejection* is ‘at once an epitome and profound criticism of the literature of Sensibility’ (8) and argues furthermore that the poem is ‘perhaps the most distinguished English contribution to Werthiana’ (95).

Unsurprisingly, in its epistolary form, it is a poem deeply concerned with figuring the relationship of writer and addressee—not only the direct addressee-object figured in the text

¹⁷⁵ Dekker, 9.

¹⁷⁶ Samuel Richardson, *The History of Charles Grandison*, 7 vols. (London: 1754), I. p. vi.

(Sara) but those other readers or ‘overhearers’ of the poem that formed its first readership within the Grasmere circle of friends. As I have outlined above, much critical attention has been paid to the idea that it is Wordsworth—first as reader, and later as addressee of the poem—to whom Coleridge addresses himself with most intensity. In this chapter I suggest that, in addition, Coleridge makes a wider engagement with ideas of community, sympathy and belonging. In his verse-letter, Coleridge uses images with personal meanings, symbolism, and associations shared by the whole Grasmere circle. However, since these images simultaneously draw on sentimental conventions, they can appear as simple evocations of sentiment to a wider public readership. Furthermore, in the verse-epistle, Coleridge—as in his earlier conversation poems—examines the limitations of sympathetic imagination.

In the first few stanzas of his verse-letter, Coleridge imagines Sara as a distant, independent and simultaneous observer of the evening sky, out in a landscape of well-known features which have a marked significance for himself and friends:

O Sara! in the weather-fended Wood,
 Thy lov'd haunt! where the Stock-doves coo at Noon,
 I guess, that thou hast stood
 And watch'd yon Crescent, & it's ghost-like Moon.
 And yet, far rather in my present Mood
 I would, that thou'dst been sitting all this while
 Upon the sod-built Seat of Camomile—
 And tho' thy Robin may have ceas'd to sing,
 Yet needs for *my* sake must thou love to hear
 The Bee-hive murmuring near,
 That ever-busy & most quiet Thing
 Which I have heard at Midnight murmuring.¹⁷⁷ (ll. 80-91)

These details—‘seats’ of moss, birdsong, and ‘murmuring’ bees—recur repeatedly in his poetry of the period. Sara is pictured at her brother’s home at Gallow Hill, with its prominent dovecote, rather than being, as Coleridge would prefer, on the ‘sod-built Seat of Camomile’ nearer to Grasmere. Sara had laid the first stone of what the gang called ‘Sara’s seat’ on 26 March 1801. Coleridge recorded how he, William, and Dorothy had finished building the seat

¹⁷⁷ ‘A Letter to —’, *PWC*, I: 2, 677-691.. All references are to this text.

together on 10 October 1801, ‘we being all there in hope and prayer, that Mary with Tom Hutchinson had then already set off, and were setting off, from Gallow Hill—on their road to Grasmere’.¹⁷⁸ Recording in detail the time, place, and people, Coleridge’s note shows the seat as a monument symbolic of the shared experiences and collaborative creative endeavours (in both seat-building and writing) of the group. The creation of such landscape-markers which have a meaning and significance unknown to outsiders works to reinforce their sense of belonging to their own little community. The gang had made the Lakeland landscape familiar and domesticated by giving names to particular places that created personal associations, (‘Sara’s rock’, ‘John’s Grove’), building seats, and carving rocks.

The symbolism which these ‘seats’ have for Coleridge has long been recognised: a great many years ago Charles Bouslog linked the recurring image of the mossy ‘seat of camomile’ to Coleridge’s feelings for Sara Hutchinson.¹⁷⁹ Though the significance of that *particular* seat can only be fully appreciated by the Grasmere gang, when such ‘mossy seats’ appear in Coleridge’s poems published in the *Morning Post*, like ‘Tranquillity: an Ode’ or ‘Inscription for a Jutting Stone’, the image of a rustic seat evokes in a far more superficial way the long-established popular fashions for primitive, rustic simplicity in garden design. Eighteenth-century garden design manuals such as William Wrighte’s *Grotesque Architecture, or Rural Amusement* (1767) had advertised plans ‘for huts, retreats, summer and winter hermitages, terminaries, Chinese, Gothic, and Natural Grottos, Cascades, Baths, Mosques, Moresque Pavillions, Grotesque and Rustic Seats, Green Houses, &c. Many of which may be executed With Flints, Irregular Stones, Rude Branches, and Roots of Trees’.¹⁸⁰ The various ‘seats’ and ‘inscriptions’ for places composed by the Grasmere circle could be placed within a longer tradition of picturesque landscaping. There is a sentimental inheritance informing the gang’s use of such landscape features as mementos of their unity (and writing poems about

¹⁷⁸ CN, I. 1242, 21.255n. Dorothy also records the occasion (GJ, 35).

¹⁷⁹ Charles S. Bouslog, ‘The Symbol of the Sod-Seat in Coleridge’, *PMLA*, 60:3 (Sept. 1945), 802-10.

¹⁸⁰ William Wrighte, *Grotesque Architecture, or Rural Amusement*, (London: Henry Webley, 1767).

these places) which becomes more evident when the poems are published to a public readership for whom the personal associations appear merely generic. As Heidi Thomson suggests, in the context of the *Morning Post*, sandwiched between miscellaneous articles, letters, adverts for books, medicines, carpets and carriages, music and dancing lessons, plays and the circus (including ‘the Popular Pantomime of The ENCHANTED HARP’), and beside a description of the latest Paris fashions, Coleridge’s ‘Dejection’, with its wailing Aeolian harp, ‘reads far less like the heartfelt cry of a lonely Romantic poet and far more as a traditional poem of sensibility on a fashionable subject, the expression of melancholy.’¹⁸¹ Therefore, while the string of poems which Coleridge published in the *Morning Post* in the autumn of 1802 under the signature ‘ESTHÆE’ speak a language of personal reference, drawing on images and associations available only to the Grasmere coterie, at the same time this landscape symbolism continues a sentimental tradition. Appearing in the space of the newspaper, such personal symbols can simply appear as conventional tropes to the public reader.

Landscapes of sympathy

Coleridge’s portrait of Sara as a fellow observer of the evening sky suggests the hope that such simultaneous perception of natural phenomena can close up the physical and emotional distance between poet and addressee. He hopes he and Sara can be drawn into shared sympathy viewing the moon in the same way that he had imagined Charles Lamb sharing in the sight of the homecoming rook flying across the setting sun in the earlier poem ‘This Lime Tree Bower my Prison’.¹⁸² Coleridge’s verse-letter revisits similar phrasing to ‘This Lime Tree

¹⁸¹ Heidi Thomson, ‘The Publication of Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode” in the *Morning Post*’, *Script & Print: Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia & New Zealand*, 29 (2005), 298-310, 306.

¹⁸² Christopher Miller has noted the long lyric tradition of evening poetry, and how the use of the shared perception of the evening sky—as an objective marker of the passage of time-in-the-world not just time-in-the-mind—and of the sun and moon, as natural phenomena which have a definite existence outside of the individual’s own perceptions, functions to position the lyric reverie (often an genre characterised by atemporality)

Bower’, imagining Sara taking a particular stance within the landscape: ‘I guess, that thou has stood / And watch’d yon Crescent, & it’s ghost-like Moon’ (ll. 80-83).

Dorothy records seeing a similar moon on 8 March: ‘like a gold ring snapped in two & shaven off at the Ends it was so narrow. Within this Ring lay the Circle of the Round moon, as *distinctly* seen as ever the enlightened moon is—William had observed the same appearance at Keswick perhaps at the very same moment hanging over the Newlands fells’.¹⁸³ Coleridge was at Gallow Hill in March, so quite possibly saw the same new moon with Sara Hutchinson. Dorothy suggests that William, at a distance from her, may have watching the moon at the same moment as herself—just as Coleridge imagines Sara to do in the poem. The whole gang are, therefore, tied together by sharing the same perception at a distance from one another, and Dorothy and William are implicitly present as other phantom-observers alongside Sara. Using this detail in the verse-letter—a observation shared by and belonging to whole group—Coleridge attempts to bond himself more tightly to this little community.

While he draws on a personal, intimate knowledge of Sara’s habits (‘the weather-fended Wood, / Thy lov’d haunt!’ ll. 80-1) and tries to show through this imaginative portrait of her movements a willingness to imaginatively enter into her experience, the poem cannot escape the implication that this imaginatively-constructed figure has been ‘stood’ there by Coleridge to console his own desires. Coleridge imagines Sara’s responses, hoping for her sympathy by positing that,

Yet needs for *my* sake must thou love to hear
The Bee-hive murmuring near,
[...]
Which I have heard at Midnight murmuring. (ll. 88-9, 91)

In hoping that she will love the sounds out of sympathy with him, Coleridge again replays the situation of ‘This Lime-Tree Bower’ when he had imagined his friend’s pleasure in the sight of the rook. As I shall outline in more detail in the next chapter, several critics have argued that

in a distinctly temporal frame. (*The Invention of Evening: perception and time in Romantic poetry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 48-9).

¹⁸³ *GJ*, 76.

Coleridge's poem in fact represents a failure of the poet's sympathetic capacity.¹⁸⁴ Rather than entering into Lamb's perceptions, Coleridge simply—as William Ulmer and Felicity James have suggested—projects himself onto the figure of Lamb.¹⁸⁵ In 'This Lime Tree Bower', Coleridge had blessed the rook,

deeming its black wing,
[...]
Had cross'd the mighty orb's dilated glory
While thou stood'st gazing; or when all was still
Flew *creeking* o'er thy head, and had a charm
For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles!¹⁸⁶

(ll. 71; 73-6)

In the 'Letter', imagining that Sara shares with him a simultaneous perception of the heavens leads Coleridge to another act of blessing:

I feel my spirit moved—
And wheresoe'er thou be,
O Sister! O Beloved!
Those dear mild Eyes, that see
Even now the Heaven, I see—
There is a Prayer in them! It is for *me*—
And I, dear Sara—I am blessing *thee!*

(ll. 92-98)

The repeated rhymes 'Eyes'/'I', 'see'/'see'/'me'/'thee' seem to reflect the blessing back and forth, in an attempt to linguistically meld the two identities into one. However, Coleridge's profusion of pronouns suggest the more troubling potential that the 'thee' in the poem is merely a reflection or echo of 'me', and the expression of her 'eyes' are simply the product of the creating 'I' of the poem.

When Coleridge reworks the poem, firstly, in his July letter to William Sotheby, and later in 'Dejection: an Ode', he no longer dramatically figures his addressee (first 'Wordsworth', then 'Edmund', then the unnamed 'Lady') as a concrete subject positioned in a landscape, who is imagined to share in the same, simultaneous perception as himself. The

¹⁸⁴ See pp. 160-1.

¹⁸⁵ William Ulmer, 'The Rhetorical Occasion of "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison"', *Romanticism*, 13:1 (April 2007), 15-27; 22-24, passim; James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth*, 109.

¹⁸⁶ 'This Lime Tree Bower my Prison', *The Annual Anthology*, (Bristol: Biggs & co., 1800), II. 140-4. All references are to this 1800 text. (*PWC*, II.: 1, 480-87).

sense of the poem as a dramatic encounter (albeit an imagined, illusory one) with a potential, other, perceiving consciousness has been lost from the poem. If we consider the verse-letter as the dramatisation of a mental narrative of self-realisation, then the act of imagining an ‘other’ consciousness who perceives the same natural scenes with a different emotional response appears to be what leads Coleridge to the idea that all perceptions are subjectively coloured by the individual’s own emotions: as he concludes famously in aphoristic form, ‘we receive but what we give, /And in *our* Life alone does Nature live’ (ll. 296-7). The poem dramatises the fault-lines of subjectivity and the limitations of sympathy. There remains a fundamental doubtfulness about whether Coleridge is able to inhabit imaginatively the perceptions of his subject-addressees. In response to this sense of doubt, Coleridge’s poem aims to elicit—perhaps even coerce—sympathy from the reader/addressee. As if he were a character in a sentimental novel, Coleridge, by portraying his own subjective experience, hopes to give the others access to it and allow them to see as he sees, to stand as he has stood. Only by this means can he hope to receive the sympathy which he desires.

Landscape, vision, and revision

Coleridge’s first, revised, ‘publication’ of the verse-letter is in a letter to William Sotheby written on 19 July 1802. Sotheby was a recent acquaintance, with whom Coleridge began corresponding in the summer of 1802, while William and Dorothy were away on their journey to Calais to see Annette Vallon and Wordsworth’s daughter Caroline—a journey which would culminate on their return with William’s marriage to Mary Hutchinson on 4 October. Coleridge had shared his verse-letter with William and Dorothy on 21st April, but the letter to Sotheby marks the moment when the poem is first shared beyond a confidential (indeed almost familial) audience, with a reader with whom Coleridge assumes a semi-public kind of persona: writing to Sotheby, Coleridge assumes the confident tone of writing as ‘poet and

man-of letters'.¹⁸⁷ He remakes and refashions fragments of his verse-letter, mediating the poem for a new reader outside of the intimate circle of friends.

Coleridge's most significant revision of the verse-letter is to make Wordsworth the addressee. Writing to Sotheby, Coleridge breaks down the 'Letter' into a series of fragments: the first section, edited from stanzas 15 and 16 of the 'Letter,' describes the negative impact which Coleridge's philosophical speculations have had on his 'shaping spirit' of imagination. In the second portion of the poem, Coleridge puts together edited versions of the first three stanzas and the last three stanzas of the 'Letter'. In this fragment, Coleridge describes his dejected mood and his inability to find joy in nature's sights. He expresses the idea that joy comes from within to colour our perceptions, and implies that because Wordsworth has joy, things in nature live to him. The third 'fragment' (explicitly introduced as such) describes the screams of the 'Eolian Lute,' with a few changes from the 'Letter' version.

In most cases, Coleridge simply made a direct substitution of 'Wordsworth' or 'Poet' instead of 'Sara'. In the final stanza of the second fragment, however, Coleridge replaced the potent image of Sara as 'mother Dove' with a substitute line hailing Wordsworth as 'Great Son of Genius! Full of Light & Love!' which seems a mere empty invocation in comparison.¹⁸⁸ Coleridge also refined his modal verbs: Sara's responses are discussed in terms of future potentiality—she 'should'st rejoice'¹⁸⁹ and to her 'would all Things live from Pole to pole' (l. 334-5). However, Coleridge describes Wordsworth's reactions in more definite terms: 'thus [~~may'st~~] dost thou rejoice. / To thee *do* all things live from pole to pole' (my italics).¹⁹⁰ Coleridge has removed from the text the words that express the chance that his friend will not react as predicted (unlike Lamb who 'may stand' in 'This Lime Tree Bower'), and also located Wordsworth's responses as temporally already present and definite, rather than potential (as in Sara's case).

¹⁸⁷ *GJ*, 89; Griggs, II. 813-9.

¹⁸⁸ 'A Letter to —', l. 328; Griggs, II. 817.

¹⁸⁹ Mary Hutchinson's transcript of the poem (Dove Cottage MS G1 15 1) has 'would'st' (*PWC*, II.: 2, 874).

¹⁹⁰ Griggs, II. 817-8.

While in the revised version of the poem, Coleridge omits those sections of the poem which, as I have described above, suggest that shared perceptions can be a means of establishing sympathy between two subjects, or between writer and addressee, he nevertheless attempts to use exactly this technique in the letter text itself. Coleridge immediately follows his transcription of extracts from the poem with a painterly description of the scene ‘now before the window’ to Sotheby. Such landscape-paintings-with-words are a common feature of Coleridge’s notebooks, letters, and poems—Josie Dixon makes the comparison between passages in the notebooks and ‘Constable’s equally obsessive cloud studies, dashed off at speed to catch a passing light effect’.¹⁹¹ Dixon argues that such notebook descriptions show Coleridge increasingly self-consciously exploring philosophically-freighted ideas about perception, symbolism, vision and experience (44-5): despite his expressed desire for a symbolical language, Dixon suggests that the notebooks also reveal a sense of loss at ‘the passage of direct experience in the immediate moment [...] into the recorded, constructed image, mediated by language into something which renders it, finally second-hand’ (51). Likewise, Ramonda Modiano, writing on Coleridge’s relationship to theories of the picturesque, has suggested that he ‘did not merely look for paintings in the midst of nature he literally tried to create paintings in the domain of language’.¹⁹² By this means he ‘attempts to close the gap between the moment of perception and its subsequent translation into a verbal sign’ (15). Modiano suggests that for Coleridge the picturesque represented and encouraged ‘an active exchange between the mind and natural objects’ (23) and was related to his desire for unity in multiteity—for Coleridge, she suggests, the picturesque, ‘refers essentially to the manner in which a perceiver apprehends the relationship of parts to the whole’ (23). Coleridge’s repeated attempts to ‘translate’ a visual scene he is perceiving into language are

¹⁹¹ Josie Dixon, ‘The Mind’s Eye: Vision and Experience in Coleridge’s Notebooks’, *The Coleridge Bulletin*, NS 31 (Summer 2008), 42-54, 48.

¹⁹² Raimonda Modiano, *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature*, (London: Macmillan, 1985), 15.

therefore expressive of his anxieties about the relationship between language and reality, and about how thoughts, feelings, and perceptions can be mediated and transmitted to others.

In this context, it is notable that Coleridge frequently uses landscape descriptions in his letters to allow his reader to share imaginatively and vicariously in his perceptions. Sharing observations with another appears at first glance to offer a way of forging sympathy—allowing each to stand as the other has stood—however, as in the verse-letter and ‘This Lime Tree Bower’, such hopes seem to deliberately ignore the many potential pitfalls and problems.

During his walking tour in August, Coleridge’s descriptive letters to Sara followed this method of (sentiment-influenced) ‘writing to the moment’—from the top of Sca Fell he describes how, ‘on a nice Stone Table am I now at this moment writing to you—between 2 and 3 o’Clock as I guess / surely the first Letter ever written from the Top of Sca’ Fell! But O! what a look down just under my Feet! The frightfullest Cove that might ever be seen / huge perpendicular Precipices, and one Sheep upon it’s only Ledge, that surely must be crag!’¹⁹³

In his July letter to Sotheby, Coleridge’s landscape descriptions take on particular significance as displacements of the verse-letter’s concerns about the perception and representation of the external world into the prose letter. Coleridge sends Sotheby an extract from the beginning of the poem—his experience of blankly gazing on the sunset scene which proves illustrative of his state of dejection:

in this heartless Mood
 All this long Eve so balmy & serene
 Have I been gazing on the western Sky
 And it’s peculiar Tint of yellow-green —
 And still I gaze — & with how blank an eye!
 And those thin Clouds above, in flakes & Bars,
 That give away their Motion to the Stars;
 Those Stars, that glide behind them or between,
 Now sparkling, now bedimm’d, but always seen;
 Yon Crescent Moon, as fix’d as if it grew
 In it’s own cloudless starless Lake of Blue —
 A Boat becalm’d! thy own sweet Sky-Canoe!
 I see them all, so excellently fair!

¹⁹³ Griggs, II. 840.

I *see*, not *feel*, how beautiful they are!¹⁹⁴

This fragment of poetry describing how he gazes on the evening scene is framed by a parallel sunset scene which closes the letter and acts as a temporal frame which shows that, as in the poem, the act of writing is something that is happening in time:¹⁹⁵

My dear Sir! ought I to make an apology for troubling you with such a long verse-cramm'd Letter?— O that instead of it I could but send to you the Image now before my eyes—Over Bassenthwaite the Sun is setting, in a glorious rich *brassy* Light—on the top of Skiddaw, & one third adown it, is a huge enormous Mountain of Cloud, with the outlines of a mountain——this is of a starchy Grey—but floating fast along it, & upon it, are various Patches of sack-like Clouds, bags & woolsacks, of a shade lighter than the brassy Light of the clouds that hide the setting Sun—a fine yellow-red somewhat more than sandy Light—and these the highest on this mountain-shaped cloud, & these the farthest from the Sun, are suffused with the darkness of a stormy Color.—Marvellous creatures! how they pass along!——¹⁹⁶

Coleridge's creates a prose painting of these formations of luminous cloud, pinning down distinctions in colour, light, and shape. By showing that he can find aesthetic pleasure in the landscape, Coleridge's description appears to show that he has recovered from his dejection: he claims, in prose that parallels the final line of the poem, that 'I shall go on rejoicing'.¹⁹⁷

Coleridge had last written to Sotheby on 13 July, six days before the letter containing the edited version of the verse-letter and the day after William and Dorothy had left on their journey to Yorkshire (and then on to London and Calais). This earlier letter is even more strongly imbued with the images of the verse-letter than that of 19 July. In explaining to Sotheby that he has been feeling dejected, Coleridge inadvertently gives something of a prose version of the poem. Coleridge, apologising for his loquaciousness when he had last met the Sothebys, writes that,

I had but just recovered from a state of extreme dejection brought on in part by Ill-health, partly by other circumstances / and Solitude and solitary Musings do of themselves impregnate our Thoughts perhaps with more Life & Sensation, than will leave the Balance quite even.—But you, my dear Sir! looked [at a] Brother Poet with a Brother's Eyes—O that you were now in my study, & saw what is now before the

¹⁹⁴ Griggs, II. 816.

¹⁹⁵ Ending the letter with a sunset scene also draws on the poetic tradition, stretching back to Virgil's *Eclogues* through Milton's 'Lycidas,' of closing a poem at sunset (Miller, 16-17).

¹⁹⁶ Griggs, II. 819.

¹⁹⁷ Griggs, II. 816; 815.

window, at which I am writing, that rich mulberry-purple which a floating Cloud has thrown on the Lake—& that quiet Boat making it's way thro' it to the Shore!—We have had little else but Rain & squally weather since you left us, till within the last three Days—but showery weather is no evil to us—& even that most oppressive of all weathers, hot small *Drixxle*, exhibits the Mountains the best of any. It produced such new combinations of Ridges in the Lodore & Borrodale Mountains, on Saturday morning, that, I declare, had I been blindfolded & so brought to the Prospect, I should scarcely have known them again. It was a Dream, such as Lovers have—a wild & transfiguring, yet enchantingly lovely, Dream of an Object lying by the side of the Sleeper. Wordsworth, who has walked thro' Switzerland, declared that he never saw any thing superior—perhaps nothing equal—in the Alps.¹⁹⁸

The scene shares many details with the poem: the rain and 'squally' weather, the unusual colours and formations created by the clouds, and the boat (a real one this time, sailing through the reflected colours of a cloud) that mirrors the 'Sky canoe' moon in its 'Lake of Blue'.

The most bizarre, and yet telling image, however, is the comparison Coleridge draws with a lover's dream: a perception which recalls the tantalizing vision of a woman by his side from 'The Day Dream'.¹⁹⁹ In viewing the familiar mountains, rendered unfamiliar by new colours and cloud shapes, Coleridge is reminded of the imaginative potentiality of this dream-state in which the mind is able to project what it wishes to see in the indeterminate sensations it experiences while half-asleep: it is enabled to 'half-create' (to use Wordsworth's phrase from 'Tintern Abbey') what it perceives.

The letter therefore returns to those concerns expressed in the verse-letter of what the relationship is between the perceiver and the object perceived, and the troublesome attempt to render perceptions into language. Modiano has argued that Coleridge became a serious student of the picturesque, consciously engaging with contemporary theories about picturesque aesthetics and perception.²⁰⁰ On the one hand, Uvedale Price held that objects had a picturesque beauty in themselves; on the other hand, William Gilpin suggested that the

¹⁹⁸ Griggs, II. 809.

¹⁹⁹ Mary Hutchinson's transcript (Dove Cottage MS G1 15 1) contains both the 'Letter' and 'The Day Dream'. A date for the MS has been conjectured of July-August 1802. (*PWC*, II: 2, 862-4; 897).

²⁰⁰ Modiano, *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature*, 8-27, *passim*.

perception of picturesque beauty resided in the subjective vision of the observer.²⁰¹ Thus, people have the ability to take visual pleasure in the sight of rough, ugly, or mean things: Gilpin defines ‘picturesque grace’ as ‘an agreeable form given, in a picture, to a clownish figure’ (3).

Coleridge’s letter plays with these ideas. He appreciates the ‘oppressive’ drizzle, despite its negative emotional effects, for the new appearance it gives to the mountains. The natural phenomena are endowed with their own transforming agency: the drizzly weather ‘exhibits the Mountains the best of any’, and the rain ‘produced such new combinations of Ridges’ that Coleridge’s perceptions were confused. Material changes in nature obscure the view, making the familiar scene unfamiliar, and stir Coleridge’s mind anew. His engagement with a picturesque kind of vision in his letters suggests that his ability to respond with engagement and creativity to his perceptions has not been lost: rather visual sights (and the attempt to render them in language) can be transforming, stimulating, and creatively fruitful.

Writing to Sotheby on 10 September 1802, there are clues that Coleridge appears to be in the process of revising the verse-letter to create ‘Dejection’ for the *Morning Post*. In this letter Coleridge makes a distinction between the Greek poets, for whom, ‘All natural Objects were *dead*—mere hollow Statues—but there was a Godkin or Goddessling *included* in each,’ and the Hebrew poets, in whose poetry, ‘each Thing has a Life of it’s own, & yet they are all one Life. In God they move & live, & *have* their Being—not *had*, as the cold System of Newtonian Theology represents but *have*’.²⁰² Dekker suggests this allusion to Acts 17:28 as the source of the lines Coleridge added to the end of the first stanza, which suggest that the storm sounds, ‘Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!’²⁰³ The same allusion, curiously, appears in the first of Coleridge’s essays in the *Morning Post* comparing present day France with Rome under the Caesars (21 September 1802), where it is used to describe, ‘that

²⁰¹ William Gilpin, *An Essay upon Prints; containing remarks upon the principles of picturesque beauty*, (London: J. Robson, 1768).

²⁰² Griggs, II. 865-6.

²⁰³ Dekker, 95. ‘Dejection: An Ode’, *PWC*, II.: 2, 884-897, l. 20.

liberty, in which alone the Genius of our Isle lives, and moves, and has his being’—the animating spirit being the ‘spirit of English freedom’.²⁰⁴

In the same letter to Sotheby, Coleridge quotes a passage from his poem ‘To Matilda Betham, from a Stranger’, written the previous day. This passage once more revisits the image of the wind as a metaphor for poetic inspiration:

Poetic Feelings, like the flexuous Boughs
Of mighty Oaks, yield homage to the Gale,
Toss in the strong winds, drive before the Gust,
Themselves one giddy storm of fluttering Leaves;
Yet all the while, self-limited, remain
Equally near the fix’d and parent Trunk
Of Truth & Nature, in the howling Blast
As in the Calm that stills the Aspen Grove.²⁰⁵ (ll. 34-41)

Poetic feelings may be animated by this wind, but are centred and anchored by the poet’s self. No longer is poetry an act of ventriloquism, with the poet played on like an Eolian harp; instead poetic feelings are balanced and shaped by the poet’s distinct, unchanged, identity. Coleridge’s poem ‘To Matilda Betham’, shows him returning to one of the central images of the verse-letter once again in a slightly different form, trying to refine the significance of storm and wind in the poem.

Other images from the verse-letter recur in ‘To Matilda Betham’. Coleridge, having been shown Betham’s poetry by a mutual friend, writes encouragingly to her that the poems,

Have found a little home within *my* heart,
And brought me, as the quit-rent of their lodging
Rose-buds, and Fruit-blossoms, and pretty Weeds,
And timorous Laurel Leaflets half-disclos’d,
Engarlanded with gadding woodbine Tendrils!
A coronal, which with undoubting Hand,
I twine around the Brows of patriot HOPE! (ll. 13-17)

The poem’s emphasis on Hope, Morton Paley has argued, is a specific allusion to Betham’s ‘Rhapsody’, a poem which Coleridge praised; he offers her a coronal as a public

²⁰⁴ *EOT*, I. 320.

²⁰⁵ ‘To Matilda Betham, from a Stranger’, *PWC*, I.: 2, 726-8.

encouragement.²⁰⁶ However, the coronal and the laurel leaflets also recall elements of the verse-letter. Where they had in that poem been details with an intensely personal resonance (the leaflets he recorded in his notebook seeing at Gallow Hill; the coronal an allusion to Wordsworth's 'Intimations' Ode), here they are units of poetry that can be taken apart and reassembled for a new, stranger-reader. Betham's poems do not bring *him* laurel leaflets and a coronal, but rather these are tokens from his own poetical store that he can give to *her*. It seems that Coleridge sees the verse-letter's language and imagery as available to be taken apart and remade in new poems for different readers outside the Grasmere circle.

'ΕΣΤΗΣΕ' in the *Morning Post*

When the verse-letter, substantially altered and reworked into 'Dejection: an Ode', appeared in the *Morning Post* in Autumn 1802 it was publicly re-contextualised into a relationship with the other articles in the newspaper, and to the other work signed by 'ΕΣΤΗΣΕ'.

Much has been written on the significance of Coleridge's punning signature. Writing on the earlier poems which Coleridge signed 'Esteesi' in the *Annual Anthology* (1800) Paul Magnuson suggests that this signature links 'This Lime Tree Bower' with the more openly political poems sharing the same signature, among them the anti-war poems 'A Christmas Carol' and 'Ode to Georgiana', and suggests furthermore that in publicly addressing 'Charles Lamb' in that poem, Coleridge 'addresses the figure associated with the Godwinians, the pantisocrats, and the West Country radicals'.²⁰⁷ Lamb objected strongly to Coleridge's public 'lugging in' of his name (as well as being addressed as '*gentle hearted*')—Coleridge's own name, of course, being obscured.²⁰⁸ Perhaps it was Lamb's reaction which made Coleridge reluctant to openly identify Wordsworth in October 1802, disguising him instead as 'Edmund', with

²⁰⁶ Morton D. Paley, 'Coleridge's "To Matilda Betham, from a Stranger",' *The Wordsworth Circle*, 27 (Summer 1996), 169-72.

²⁰⁷ Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism*, 58.

²⁰⁸ Marrs, I. 224.

only an allusion to the ‘lonesome wild’ of Wordsworth’s poem ‘Lucy Gray’ identifying him to a select group of readers. ‘ΕΣΤΗΣΕ’s friends, of course, could interpret the code: Lamb knew exactly who ‘a certain Edmund’ was.²⁰⁹

Despite Coleridge’s claim in a letter to Sotheby in September 1802 that ΕΣΤΗΣΕ signified ‘*He hath stood*’—which in these times of apostasy from the principles of Freedom, or of Religion in this country, & from both by the same persons in France, is no unmeaning Signature’, it has been frequently pointed out how Coleridge’s politics were consistent mainly in their inconsistency.²¹⁰ Tim Fulford describes how Coleridge’s signature on his two letters to Fox (in the *Morning Post*, 4 and 9 November 1802) covertly claimed ‘a spiritual consistency of position and authorial identity even as his article attacked his former positions’ and calls it ‘a hopeless gesture towards the self-deception that indeed he had always *stood* for his new views and always written thus as a author’.²¹¹ Likewise, Fulford suggests, the same signature on ‘Dejection’ offered a tribute to Wordsworth ‘endorsed by a private allusion to Coleridge’s sincerity and consistency’ (78). Despite revealing the discrepancy between his past and present politics, what the signature does do in the *Morning Post* is link together a series of otherwise miscellaneous poems with the two public letters to Fox. In contrast, the reprint of ‘France: an Ode’ and an extract from ‘Fears in Solitude’ are by ‘S. T. Coleridge’, and other articles written by Coleridge for the paper during that autumn are unsigned. ‘ΕΣΤΗΣΕ’ is therefore a code for the initiated reader within the knowing circle of Coleridge’s acquaintances.

Heidi Thomson has interpreted in a very pointed way the implications of this coded reference for certain readers. She argues that Coleridge’s *Morning Post* publications: ‘could be said to address a double audience: the ordinary newspaper reader, and the Wordsworth circle

²⁰⁹ He wrote, in Latin, to Coleridge: ‘Istas Wordsworthianas nuptias (vel potius cujusdam *Edmundi* tui) te retulisse mirificum gaudeo’ / ‘Your Wordsworth nuptials (or rather the nuptials of a certain *Edmund* of yours) fill me with joy in your report’ (Marrs, II. 73; 75).

²¹⁰ Griggs, II. 866; see Jerome Christiansen, ‘Once an apostate always an apostate,’ *Studies in Romanticism*, 21 (1982), 461-4; Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1989), 423.

²¹¹ Fulford, *Coleridge’s Figurative Language*, 32.

who would have understood the references to their own situation'.²¹² Thomson suggests that Coleridge's publications in the newspaper during the autumn—his epigraph 'Spots in the Sun' which alludes to Annette the 'lovely courtesan'; his article on the seduction and betrayal of the 'Maid of Buttermere' by a bigamist; his public letters to Fox in November criticising him for fraternizing with the French (who are characterised by 'domestic depravity' and 'truly frightful licentiousness in private life')—are sly digs at Wordsworth's past relationship with his French lover Annette Vallon, motivated by an 'uncontrollable jealous urge to hurt Wordsworth and his family' (89). Coleridge's depictions of domestic disruption can, however, be seen in a much more personal light: firstly, as a dark spectre of the immoral road-not-taken in his personal life, seen in the tale of the Irish swindler Hadfield ('Captain Hope') who had made a 'romantic marriage' with the well-known Lakeland beauty, Mary Robinson, only to run off, leaving poor Mary to discover that her new husband was already married. Secondly, Coleridge's portraits of domestic trouble show an uneasy negotiation with his prior emphasis (in his younger, radical years) on the importance of domestic, local, familial attachments in stirring 'universal Benevolence'. In 1795 he had argued that, 'The paternal and filial duties discipline the Heart and prepare it for the love of all Mankind'.²¹³ Such reflections must now have acquired a bitter taste in his current situation: he complained in a letter to Southey in December 1801, 'What is Life, gangrened, as it is with me, in it's very vitals—domestic Tranquillity?'²¹⁴ Displacing depictions of impure domestic morals and marital disruption onto French public leaders such as Citizen Talleyrand, or the Irish Hadfield, proves a handy way of ignoring any implications closer to home.

The publication of Wordsworth's sonnet 'I griev'd for Buonaparte' in the *Morning Post* (16 September) is also significant. In this sonnet—the only one of Wordsworth's political sonnets to be copied into Sara's book—Wordsworth seems to have essentially adopted

²¹² Heidi Thomson, "Merely the Emptying out of my Desk": Coleridge about Wordsworth in the *Morning Post* of 1802,' *The Coleridge Bulletin*, NS 31 (Summer 2008), 73-89; 76.

²¹³ *Lectures 1795*, 46.

²¹⁴ Griggs, I. 158.

Coleridge's earlier ideas about the politics of domesticity. Wordsworth's sonnet, composed 21 May 1802, laments Bonaparte's early mis-education that has shaped him to be what he is: while it is necessary to 'temper with the sternness of the brain / Thoughts motherly, and meek as womanhood' (ll. 7-8), this moral training of sensibility does not best occur 'in battles' (l. 5). Rather, Wordsworth suggests:

Wisdom doth live with children round her knees:
Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk
Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk
Of the mind's business²¹⁵ (ll. 9-12)

In suggesting that the domestic sphere forms the training ground for public life, Wordsworth echoes Coleridge's early sentiments. Coleridge in turn echoed Wordsworth's ideas about Napoleon's upbringing in his unsigned article 'Affairs of France' (5 October), claiming to have previously at the commencement of the Consulate, 'expressly warned our readers not to anticipate any system favourable to rational liberty from a young man, who had formed his habits, feelings, and political creed, at the head of an army, and amid the career of dazzling victories'.²¹⁶ It could be possible to read Wordsworth's sonnet as a reminder (or even a rebuke) to Coleridge—confronting him with his own principles at a time when Coleridge's domestic life was in a sad state (in May 1802, he and his wife had discussed separation).

Much of Coleridge's poetry written in 1802, as I shall discuss in the remainder of this chapter, revolves around the idea of the domestic circle in Grasmere. While Wordsworth's poetry frequently looked back to his early family life shared with Dorothy, and forward to the inclusion of Mary, Coleridge sought to inscribe his own presence into this little community. One object embodying and representing in a material, textual way the life of this domestic circle is the little book known as *Sara Hutchinson's Poets*.

²¹⁵ 'I griev'd for Buonaparte', *P2V*, 157-8.

²¹⁶ *EOT*, I. 341.

Sara's Poets

In the spring of 1802, Sara Hutchinson—Dorothy's childhood friend, Wordsworth's soon-to-be sister-in-law, and the object of Coleridge's affections since the autumn of 1799—began to compile a notebook filled with poetry.²¹⁷ One end of the book she filled with Coleridge's poems; the other end (flipped the other way up) with Wordsworth's poetry. John Worthen remarks that her book was 'a rather expensive notebook, designed to be kept and valued'.²¹⁸ He suggests it was most likely a 'public' record, open to circulation, since she chose not to include more personal poems like Coleridge's 'Letter' or 'The Day Dream' (43-4). George Whalley, in contrast, reads the book as Sara's 'personal record of Coleridge', but stresses that it is 'no confessional' on her part.²¹⁹ Rather, he suggests that Sara's book possesses 'a compact and intricate coherence which arises not from the way the selection was made but from the informing impulse of the poems themselves'—that impulse being Coleridge's love for 'Asra' (97). However, I think the book has rather more to say about Coleridge's (and Sara's) relationship to the Grasmere group as a whole.

Sara titled her book 'Sarah Hutchinson's Poets'—an allusion, Worthen suggests, to the popular contemporary anthology, 'Anderson's Poets'.²²⁰ Robert Anderson's multi-volume *Works of the British Poets* (published between 1795 and 1807) had been a grand act of national canon formation. Sara made her own canon from the poets of her acquaintance. The possessive title—they are her poets—defined her place and role in within the group as a reader and transcriber of poetry. She is at once an appreciative reader, yet also one who could answer back with criticism. Sara's complaint that Wordsworth's 'The Leech-gatherer' was dull provoked William and Dorothy to write a pair of rather scolding letters in June 1802.

²¹⁷ Grasmere, Wordsworth Library at the Jerwood Centre, Dove Cottage MS 41.

²¹⁸ Worthen, 42.

²¹⁹ George Whalley, *Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson and the Asra Poems*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), 2; 97.

²²⁰ Worthen, 43.

Wordsworth criticised her for not appreciating his authorial intentions in making the old man's speech appropriate to his nature:

You speak of his speech as tedious: everything is tedious when one does not read with the feelings of the Author—'*The Thorn*' is tedious to hundreds; and so is the *Idiot Boy* to hundreds. It is in the character of the old man to tell his story in a manner which an *impatient* reader must necessarily feel as tedious.²²¹

Dorothy seconded her brother's criticism, and in a rather defensive tone advised Sara that she should she should think more carefully about whether she was reading in the correct way (i.e. according to what William intended) before venturing criticism:

When you happen to be displeased with what you suppose to be the tendency or moral of any poem which William writes, ask yourself whether you have hit upon the real tendency and true moral, and above all never think that he writes for no reason but merely because a thing happened—and when you feel any poem of his to be tedious, ask yourself in what spirit it was written—whether merely to tell the tale and be through with it, or to illustrate a particular character or truth etc etc. (367)

The Wordsworths adopted a protective attitude to the work, attempting to privilege William's intended moral above anything else the reader might devise, and stressing the importance of attempting to read with the 'feelings of the author'. However, Wordsworth's letter does, obliquely, seem to acknowledge that the reader's positive response is necessary in order for the poem's moral purpose to be achieved. He writes that, 'it is of the utmost importance that you should have had pleasure from contemplating the fortitude, independence, persevering spirit, and the general moral dignity of this old man's character' (367). Sara, after all, had been deeply responsive to other poems: 'Your feelings upon the Mother, and the Boys with the Butterfly, were not indifferent: it was an affair of whole continents of moral sympathy' (367). With Sara (as one of 'The Leech-gatherer's first readers) proving resistant to its moral teachings, Wordsworth did take her criticism on board, altering a substantial part of the poem (a fact acknowledged by a page torn out of Sara's book on which the objectionably tedious stanzas had once been).

²²¹ *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd ed. 1967-1993), I. 367.

George Whalley estimates that the majority of the Wordsworth poems in Sara's notebook were entered during the spring and summer of 1802.²²² The first Coleridge poem in the book, 'A Soliloquy of the Full Moon,' seems to have been composed in April 1802; the second poem, 'The Language of Birds' in May.²²³ Of the Wordsworth poems in the book, all of them except the political sonnet 'I griev'd for Buonaparte' (published anonymously in the *Morning Post* on 16 September 1802), remained unpublished until *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807). A few of the Coleridge poems had already been published: 'Ode after Bathing' and 'Tranquillity' had been printed in the *Morning Post* in autumn 1801. 'The Picture', 'The Keepsake', 'Inscription for a Jutting Stone', and 'The Language of Birds', appeared in the same paper in September-October 1802. All of these poems were published under the signature 'ΕΣΤΗΣΕ', alongside (during Autumn 1802) 'Dejection', 'The Day Dream', 'Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouny', 'Ode to the Rain' and various epigrams.

Even though copies of the *Morning Post* were sent to Sara, she did not transcribe the poems from it; instead the poems seem to have been copied from manuscript drafts.²²⁴ The act of copying and collecting the poems weaves the bond of friendship and soon-to-be family connections. However, the book appears to be functioning in slightly different ways for the two poets' work—acting as a family or group record for the Wordsworth poems that still remained in manuscript; while, in the case of the Coleridge poems that were already published, rescuing them from the transient space of the newspaper.

Transcribing poetry was an important activity within the Wordsworth circle: Dorothy's journal records how often she was engaged in making copies of William's verses. In March 1802, for example, she records writing out 'The Pedlar' and stitching it up into a

²²² Whalley, 23-9, passim.

²²³ R. S. Woof, 'A Coleridge-Wordsworth Manuscript and "Sarah Hutchinson's Poets"', *Studies in Bibliography*, 19 (1966), 226-231.

²²⁴ In a letter to Stuart (19 Sept. 1801) Coleridge asks him to send the *Morning Post* to Sara Hutchinson for the next quarter (Griggs, II. 760).

booklet.²²⁵ The manuscript copies, either in notebooks or in booklets sewn together from sheets of paper, appear to have been not just useful documents in the process of poetic revision, but also important acts of preservation, turning the poems from transmutable, changeable, losable fragments into something more permanent.

1802 was a year of change for the group: Wordsworth and Mary Hutchinson were to marry in October; Dorothy was anxious and nostalgic contemplating the coming alteration to the sibling household; Coleridge was feeling exceptionally glum—his marriage had become increasingly unhappy, his health was poor, his opium-dependency growing, and he was full of illicit (and most likely unrequited) feelings for Sara. There is virtually no surviving evidence of what Sara thought of all this: the only material token remaining is her book—within its space she collected the poets together and in doing so created an object to express the group and her place in it. It was an expression of the same kind of communal, manuscript-based literary culture enjoyed by Anna Barbauld at Warrington Academy, or the Houghton family whose album I described in the previous chapter.

'The moon in a mad passion'

Probably the earliest poem to have been copied into Sara's book is Coleridge's 'A Soliloquy of the Full Moon'—a poem written roughly contemporaneously with the verse-letter and never published, though Coleridge sent a manuscript copy to the Wordsworths.²²⁶ The 'Soliloquy', which Seamus Perry terms the 'sprightly partner-piece' of 'Dejection', comically reworks some of the verse-letter's themes and images.²²⁷ The poem is an in-joke for the 'Gang'—one in which Coleridge makes light of his own poetical predicament—and yet simultaneously addresses deeper issues at work.

²²⁵ *GJ*, 75

²²⁶ Robert Woof dates the poem to April 1802 at the earliest: see Woof, 226-231. Dorothy later used the same sheet of paper to copy out 'The Tinker' and 'Foresight', and Wordsworth used it to draft stanza 7 of 'A Farewell' (Worthen, 34-5).

²²⁷ Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 145.

In this poem apparently intended only for the eyes of a familiar audience, Coleridge experiments with a dramatic voice and a wildly irregular verse form. The personified ‘New moon’ with ‘the Old Moon in her Lap’ that opens the verse-letter is here endowed with her own speaking voice, and offers her own alternative perspective on the activities of the poets who come and gaze at her:

With fun, jeering
 Conjuring.
 Sky-staring,
 Loungering
 And still to the tune of Transmogrification—
 Those muttering
 Spluttering
 Ventriloquogusty
 Poets
 With no Hats
 Or Hats that are rusty.²²⁸ (ll. 5-15)

In the verse-letter, Coleridge had described himself as a school-boy ‘sky-gazing in “ecstatic fit”’ (l. 62). The Miltonic allusion (to Ezekiel’s vision of the chariot of God in Milton’s *The Passion*) leads the poem to a sense of bathos: Coleridge’s school-boy ‘gazing’ is not a religious mediation but is instead prompted by his adolescent ‘secret Yearnings’ (l. 61) for female company which, as in the verse-letter, lead him to imagine ‘a Maiden quiet Eyes’ (l. 69) watching the sky just as he does. Coleridge’s representation of his dreamy school-boy gazing has a latent, self-aware, comedy; the ‘Soliloquy’ likewise explores the comedic potential of poets’ self-indulgent fantasies.

The feisty moon of the ‘Soliloquy’ strongly objects to the poets’ attempts to translate their perceptions of her into increasingly ridiculous metaphorical images. Wordsworth, ‘head of the Gang’ (l. 27) begins the moon’s series of transformations by describing her as a ‘little Canoe’ (l. 32). The canoe (which also appears in the verse-letter) alludes to Wordsworth’s ‘Peter Bell’,—in this poem the moon had been the vehicle for Wordsworth’s imaginative flight into the heavens and had then rebuked him for being a faint-hearted poet, a ‘heartless

²²⁸ ‘A Soliloquy of the Full Moon, she being in a mad passion’, *PWC*, I.: 2, 691-694. All references are to this text.

loon', when he wanted to go home.²²⁹ In the 'Soliloquy', Wordsworth's 'witch-rhymes' perform a 'strange Enchantment' on her, transforming her sense of her own identity (l. 33). Within the poem, the poet's imaginative transformations of his perceptions into language are portrayed as having a concrete impact on the external world.

Coleridge, 'a Raff of the self-same Banditti' (l. 35), not to be outdone by Wordsworth, invents a series of metaphors which track the waxing of the moon over time—from half a Cheshire cheese, she becomes a barley-mow, and an ostrich's egg. Unlike Wordsworth's 'witch-rhymes' (l. 30), Coleridge produces only 'pitiful Prose' (l. 39). The moon steadily resists the silly attempts of such a 'Loon' to transform her (l. 51)—the poetical figurations seek to appropriate her identity, and project onto her alternative, inaccurate and (in many cases) demeaning identities. Ultimately it is 'more than his might' for Coleridge to turn the moon into a bowl, and she rests secure in her own identity, 'in contempt of the Loon / I am I myself I, the jolly full Moon' (ll. 64-6).

Through the light-hearted form of the moon's soliloquy, Coleridge expresses two fundamental creative issues which also underlie the verse-letter. Firstly, the mediation of experience which results from the subjectivity of the mind's perceptions, and which imaginatively colours and gives significance to external things. Secondly, the issue of how to 'translate' observations or experiences into language, and the potential for poetic language to fail to make satisfactory symbols or images. The poem reveals Coleridge's self-deprecating awareness and implicit anxiety over imaginative failure, excess or delusion.

The poem opening 'Sarah Hutchinson's Poets' is therefore one which covertly speaks to the tension (from Coleridge's point of view at least) in the pairing of the two poets. Coleridge's comic and dramatic (self)-representation of himself and Wordsworth implies an anxiety over poetical creation and a latent rivalry between the two of them. Despite being brought together in the space of Sara's book, their poems are not directly juxtaposed or

²²⁹ *Peter Bell*, ed. John E. Jordan, (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1985), 50 (MSS 2 and 3, l. 67).

intermingled side-by-side; rather each poet is given their own end of the book—upturned, inverted, moving from opposite sides—keeping their creative identities separate.

‘Ventriloquogusty’ poets

George Whalley suggests that the Coleridgean portmanteau-word in the ‘Soliloquy’—‘ventriloquogusty’—indicates that the poets are imagined to be like the Eolian harp, a vehicle for gusts of inspiration which come like the wind (ultimately from a divine source, like the ‘organic Harps diversely fram’d’ (l. 37) of ‘Effusion XXXV’).²³⁰ The figure of ventriloquism can, on the contrary, imply that the poet is an active rather than passive agent, whose identity imaginatively colours their material and whose ego can be projected outwards onto things and characters external to themselves. In both the verse-letter and the ‘Soliloquy’ the identities of wind and poet are blended: in the verse-letter the wind is creative agent—a ‘Mad Lutanist,’ a dramatic ‘Actor’ and ‘mighty Poet’ (l. 194; ll. 198-200)—and in the ‘Soliloquy’ the identities of the wind and Wordsworth are ambiguously blended: either could be speaking with ‘the voice of a Wizzard!’ (l. 28).²³¹

For Coleridge, however, the ventriloquist-poet has negative connotations: he would much later apply the term ‘ventriloquism’ to the work of lesser poets and dramatists who, in his opinion, write verse in which the poetic diction does not suit the characters: instead the characters give the impression of simply being mouthpieces for the poet. Thus of one particular scene in Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus, His Fall* (1603), Coleridge writes: ‘in no genuine part of Shakespear is to be found such an absurd rant & *ventriloquism* [...] Ventriloquism, because

²³⁰ Whalley, 5. ‘Effusion XXXV,’ *Poems on Various Subjects* (London: C. G. and J. Robinsons; Bristol: J. Cottle 1796), 96-100). (*PWC*, II: 1, 316-28).

²³¹ Dekker has suggested the symbolist function of the wind in the verse-letter: poetic utterance is symbolised at first by the wailing of the Eolian lute, passively played on by the wind, and later by the wind as an active creative force (113).

Sejanus is a puppet, out of which the poet makes his own voice appear to come'.²³² Writing to Sotheby on 13 July 1802, Coleridge describes how great poets like Shakespeare are capable of thinking themselves into a totally different character; lesser poets simply clothe a character with their own feelings.²³³ Coleridge would later make a similar criticism of Wordsworth's poetry in *Biographia Literaria* (1817). In Coleridge's opinion, Wordsworth has an 'undue predilection for the *dramatic* form in certain poems' which leads his poetry into one of two faults:

Either the thoughts and diction are different from that of the poet, and then there arises an incongruity of style; or they are the same and indistinguishable, and then it presents a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking, while in truth one man only speaks.²³⁴

In Coleridge's eyes, the characters in Wordsworth's poetry can appear to be simply the poet himself speaking in the unconvincing guise of various characters. In mocking the 'ventriloquogusty' poets, the moon's soliloquy—Coleridge's comic attempt to throw his own voice into another character—speaks of a host of anxieties that preoccupied Coleridge at this time: questions about whether the poet is active or passive, and whether the mind perceives or creates the external world. It also speaks surreptitiously of Coleridge's increasing feeling that his own poetical voice and Wordsworth's may be diverging from one another.

'Do you ask what the birds say?'

It has frequently been remarked upon how Coleridge's verse-letter echoes his poem, 'The Nightingale: a conversational poem', written four years earlier, printed in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and addressed to friends who, though unnamed, are clearly William and Dorothy Wordsworth. In a night-time walk with these friends, Coleridge remarks on the 'merry

²³² *CM*, III. 179. On Beaumont and Fletcher, Coleridge wrote: 'the scenes are mock dialogues, in which the Poet *Solo* plays the ventriloquist, but cannot suppress his own way of expressing himself' (*CM*, I. 402). These comments both come from books which Coleridge annotated with the date 29 March 1815.

²³³ Griggs, II. 810.

²³⁴ *BL*, II. 135.

Nightingale', who sings a 'love-chant', refusing to see it as the melancholy bird of poetical association (l. 43; 48).²³⁵ In this earlier poem Coleridge had claimed that, 'In nature there is nothing melancholy' (l. 15). The poetical convention exists only because:

some night-wandering Man, whose heart was pierc'd
 With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,
 Or slow distemper or neglected love,
 (And so, poor Wretch! fill'd all things with himself
 And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
 Of his own sorrows) (ll. 16-21)

In writing the verse-letter, Coleridge is only too aware that he himself has become this very figure, whose own sadness colours his perceptions of the external world. His encounter with the thrush in the verse-letter provides a parallel to his earlier moonlit walk with the nightingales (seen among the spring foliage 'On moonlight bushes / Whose dewy leafits are but half disclos'd', ll. 64-5), but the thrush attempts in vain to 'woo' him to happier thoughts:²³⁶

In this heartless Mood,
 To other thoughts by yonder Throstle woo'd,
 That pipes within the Larch tree, not unseen,
 (The Larch, which pushes out in tassels green
 It's bundled Leafits) woo'd to mild Delights
 By all the tender Sounds & gentle Sights
 Of this sweet Primrose-month—*& vainly* woo'd
 O dearest Sara! (ll. 23-30)

In his 1802 poem, Coleridge has himself become the melancholic poet's nightingale, singing 'with my breast against a thorn' (l. 285). In the 'Letter', Coleridge reads stories into the wind's wailing that reflect his own dejected emotions: the wind's sounds suggest images which represent his own feelings of exclusion and isolation—wounded soldiers left out to die after a battle, or a gloomy adaptation of Wordsworth's 'Lucy Gray' in which the lonely little girl in the wild screams for her mother.

²³⁵ 'The Nightingale', *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1802*, ed. Fiona Stafford, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 29-31. All references are to this text. (*PWC*, II.: 1, 679-84).

²³⁶ One songbird could be easily mistaken for another by certain listeners: John Clare described to Taylor and Hessey how he had witnessed two poetically-inclined young Londoners 'lavishing praises on the beautiful song of the nightingale which happend to be a thrush'. (John Clare, *Major Works*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994; 2008), 457).

Such natural sounds—the wind, birdsong, the harp, murmuring bees, or even the noise of a spring—seem for Coleridge to be pregnant with the phantom potential for language. As natural ‘voices’ seeming to hover on the periphery of being interpretable, they are ripe for the input of the mind’s own interpretative, creative activity.

The second Coleridge poem in Sara’s book (later printed in the *Morning Post* as ‘The Language of Birds’, and titled in another manuscript copy sent to the Beaumonts in 1803 ‘Extempore to a Child of six years old’) returns to these ideas from a far more positive viewpoint. Hartley Coleridge, who in ‘The Nightingale’ as a mere baby, ‘capable of no articulate sound’ (l. 92), had bid his father listen to the bird-song, and had been consoled in his tears by the sight of the moon, has now grown up enough to wonder what the birds’ song means. In this delightful little poem, Coleridge interprets the bird-song in ways which recall the cheerful love-chant of the earlier nightingale, and is content not to question the meaning of the wind-song that elsewhere had been full of troubling tales and implications:

Do you ask what the Birds say? The Chaffinch, the Dove,
The Blackbird the Thrush say ‘I love & I love!’
In the Winter they’re silent—the Wind is so strong—
What it says, I don’t know; but it sings a loud song.
But green Leaves & Blossoms & sunny warm Weather,
And Singing & Loving all comes back together.
‘I love & I love’ almost all the Birds say
From Sun-rise to Star-rise, so gladsome are they!
But the lark is so brimful of gladness & Love,
The green Earth below him, the Blue Sky above,
That he sings & he sings, & for ever sings he
I love my Love & my Love loves me!
No wonder that He’s full of Joy to the brim,
When He loves his Love, & his Love loves Him!²³⁷

In his simple, joyful poem, Coleridge adopts a language of one-syllable words and repetitions, a childlike language appropriate for a poem to a child, and yet not dissimilar in this style to some of Wordsworth’s poetry from Spring 1802. Birds are a recurring theme in the group’s writing of the time: Lucy Newlyn has suggested how the sparrow’s nest in Wordsworth’s

²³⁷ Whalley, 7-8. (‘Answer to a Child’s Question’, *PWC*, II.: 2, 880-2).

poem resonates as a symbol for the Wordsworth family—five little eggs for the four brothers and one sister.²³⁸

I started seeming to espy
The home and little bed,
The Sparrow's dwelling, which, hard by,
My Father's House, in wet or dry,
My sister Dorothy and I
Together visited.²³⁹ (ll. 5-10)

Likewise, for Dorothy in the summer of 1802, the nest which the swallows build beneath her window (which then falls down) becomes imbued with meaning as a symbol of her domestic life with William, soon to be forever changed by the arrival of Mary.²⁴⁰ For Dorothy and for Coleridge, maternal images of birds and nests speak of the desire for enclosure within the secure confines of the group. Dorothy writes of her swallows that, 'Every now & then there was a feeling motion in their wings a sort of tremulousness & they sang a low song to one another'.²⁴¹ The intimate closeness of birds, trembling wings, and warmth resonates within the images of Sara and Mary Hutchinson in Coleridge's poems. Sara (who appears in the 'Letter' to be associated with the stock-doves at her brothers' farm at Gallow Hill) is transformed at the end of the verse-letter into a maternal (as well as spiritual) dove-figure:

Thou being innocent & full of love,
And nested with the Darlings of thy Love,
And feeling in thy Soul, Heart, Lips, & Arms
Even what the conjugal & mother Dove
That borrows genial Warmth from those, she warms,
Feels in her thrill'd wings, blessedly outspread— (ll. 325-30)

In the verse-letter Coleridge fondly recalled memories of being cosseted and caressed like a child by Mary and Sara; in a similar scene on a fireside couch in 'The Day Dream', Coleridge (in an odd reversal of maternal imagery) feels a 'subtile Feeling' (l. 11) on his lips leading him to imagine himself into a mother's role, 'softly stooping down to Kiss / Her Babe' (ll. 15-

²³⁸ Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 169.

²³⁹ 'The Sparrow's Nest', *P2V*, 212-3 (DC MS 41 text). Coleridge had, incidentally, copied out 'The Sparrow's Nest' and another Wordsworth poem recalling his childhood with Dorothy, 'To a Butterfly' ('Stay near me') in a letter to Tom Poole on 16 April. (Griggs, II. 800-1).

²⁴⁰ Newlyn, *William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 174-5.

²⁴¹ *GJ*, 115.

16).²⁴² Coleridge has simultaneously become mother-figure, child-figure and nest-mate, feeling a sensation that, ‘Across my chest there liv’d a weight so warm / As if some bird had taken shelter there’ (ll. 19-20). These recurrent images of intimate enclosure speak of the desire to belong to the close domestic household to be formed by the Wordsworth-Hutchinson marriage, to which Sara will also belong: ‘When thou, & with thee those, whom thou lov’st best, / Shall dwell together in one happy Home’ (ll. 133-4). Coleridge’s prayer of blessing for Sara—‘Cover her, gentle Sleep! with wings of Healing’ (l. 219)—repeats the image of the family dwelling as a protected nest. In the later ‘Dejection’ versions of the poem Coleridge replaced ‘cover’ with ‘visit’, weakening the image of maternal protection. Behind Coleridge’s cheerful poem about bird-song for Hartley, therefore, lies a heartfelt desire for the comfortable assurance of family and conjugal companionship which Coleridge reads into the birds’ songs.

Reading across ‘Sara’s Poets’ and the *Morning Post*

The third Coleridge poem in Sara’s book, ‘Tranquillity: an Ode’—the first part transcribed by Sara, the final ten lines by Coleridge himself—had appeared with a nearly-identical text in the *Morning Post* on 4 December 1801.²⁴³ ‘Tranquillity’ is a rather awkward poem, with the first two stanzas directed to the concerns of contemporary politics, and the rest of the poem offering a timeless meditation. Such a construction suggests that the first two stanzas were added to turn the poem into ‘something *of* the day & *for* the day’ to suit the *Morning Post*.²⁴⁴ These stanzas directly link the poem to the political context of the newspaper, and this link is emphasised by the paratext established for the poem when Daniel Stuart, the *Post*’s editor, positions it in the paper. The poem appears opposite an article reporting rumours that

²⁴² ‘The Day Dream’, *PWC*, I.: 2, 703-4.

²⁴³ Whalley, 8-9.

²⁴⁴ Griggs, II. 759.

Napoleon planned to appoint his brother Lucien as Chief Consul of the Cisalpine Republic—the French-controlled state in northern Italy (on this topic the *Morning Post* remarks that ‘if Bonaparte’s system be not that of Liberty, it is at least one of *Fraternity*’); the same article also reports that the French government is considering whether to make peace treaties with America and Naples.²⁴⁵ These early stanzas imply that political ‘tranquillity’ in Europe has been achieved uneasily and with certain costs: Peace is merely one part of ‘the Consul’s game’, France is self-enslaved, and ‘crude’ treaties are characterised by ‘heap’d-up terms, which Fear compels’ and which hold in them the seeds of future conflict (l. 5; ll. 12-13).²⁴⁶

Within this politicized, contemporaneous framework, the rest of the poem is concerned with a search for personal tranquillity, centring on the image of a ‘mossy seat’ (l. 36), the personal significance of which I have discussed earlier. The frame imposed by the first two stanzas positions this desire for tranquillity as a retreat from the depressing state of European politics; the act of retirement appears to be a political one, made from a desire for purity from ‘low intrigue and factious rage,’ and to be ‘Aloof’ from present corruption (l. 20; l. 45).

Apart from the copy in Sara’s book, all of the later manuscript or print versions of ‘Tranquillity’ omit the first two stanzas. This revision is made fairly quickly, with Coleridge omitting the stanzas in a manuscript transcript which he made for Sir George and Lady Beaumont (22 September 1803).²⁴⁷ However the final few lines of the poem, criticising the ‘present works of present man—/ A wild and dream-like trade of blood and guile’ (ll. 46-7) seem curiously without reference once the first two stanzas have been lost.

The next poem in Sara’s book, untitled there, but elsewhere called ‘Ode to Bathing’, was written by Coleridge after swimming in the sea at Scarborough during a fortnight’s trip to Gallow Hill in August 1801 spent in the company of the Hutchinson siblings, Thomas, Mary,

²⁴⁵ *Morning Post* (4 Dec. 1801), [p. 2; unnumbered].

²⁴⁶ *Morning Post* (4 Dec. 1801), [p. 3; unnumbered]. All quotations are from this text. (‘Ode to Tranquillity’, *PWC*, II.: 2, 854-7).

²⁴⁷ Griggs. II. 993-8.

Joanna, and of course, Sara.²⁴⁸ Though the poem's title in later manuscripts describes bathing 'with T. Hutchinson', Anya Taylor suggests that what the poem omits is that 'swimming along with her brother Thomas Hutchinson, and Coleridge, her admirer, was Sara Hutchinson herself', and suggests furthermore that Coleridge's joyful rapture arises not from mere boyish frolics in the waves, but rather 'the passions are those of a grown man experiencing love more deeply than ever before'.²⁴⁹ Within Sara's notebook, the poem acts to commemorate the occasion of Coleridge's happy visit to the Hutchinsons.

Fig. 3: *Morning Post*, (15 Sept. 1801), [p. 2] (section)

<p style="text-align: center;">WEYMOUTH, SEPT. 13.</p> <p>This morning His Majesty bathed. The Royal Family attended Divine Service at Weymouth Church, where they heard a sermon, preached by the Reverend the Lord Bishop of Salisbury, from the First Book of Corinthians, chap. xiii. verse 13.</p> <p>"And now abide Faith, Hope, Charity, these three; but the greatest of these is Charity."</p> <p>After Church, the King, Prince Adolphus, Sir H. Neale, Captain Grey, and Colonels Fitzroy and Cartwright, walked on the Esplanade.</p> <p>The Princesses in their sociables, accompanied by their sister, Princess Amelia, took an excursion on the Sands.</p> <p>The Earl and Countess of Westmoreland left Weymouth yesterday.</p> <p>Lieutenant Colonel Slade, of the First Regiment of Dragoons, one of His Majesty's Equerries in waiting, arrived here yesterday morning.</p> <p><u>Lady CHARLOTTE STEWART, who was on Saturday married to Sir EDWARD CROFTON, is fifth daughter of the Earl of GALLOWAY. Her four elder sisters are married to the Marquis of BLANDFORD, Lord SPENCER CHICHESTER, Sir JAMES GRAHAM, and Mr. REED. Two younger sisters remain unmarried. Lady and Sir EDWARD CROFTON are gone to pass the <i>honeymoon</i> in Berkshire.</u></p> <p>HARRY SIDMONS, the son of Mrs. SIDMONS, is said to be engaged at Covent Garden Theatre.</p> <p>Mrs. JORDAN certainly performs for a few nights at Brighton: Her exhibition</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ORIGINAL POETRY.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ODE,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AFTER BATHING IN THE SEA, CONTRARY TO MEDICAL ADVICE.</p> <p>GOD be with thee, gladsome Ocean! How gladly greet I thee once more! Ships, and waves, and endless motion, And life rejoicing on thy shore!</p> <p>Mildly said the mild Physician, To bathe me on thy shores were death; But my soul fulfill'd her mission, And lo! I breathe untroubled breath!</p> <p>Fashion's pining sons and daughters, That love the City's gilded sty, Trembling they approach thy waters, And what cares Nature if they die?</p> <p>Me a thousand loves and pleasures, A thousand recollections bland, Thoughts sublime, and stately measures, Revisit on thy sounding strand.</p> <p>Dreams (the soul herself forsaking) Grief like transports, boyish mirth, Silent abstractions, making A blessed shadow of this earth!</p> <p>O ye hopes, that stir within me, Health comes with you from above! God is with me, God is in me, I cannot die if life be love.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ESTABL.</p>
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²⁴⁸ 'After Bathing in the Sea at Scarborough in Company with T. Hutchinson, August 1801', *PWC*, II.: 2, 841-4. Whalley, 10.

²⁴⁹ Anya Taylor, *Erotic Coleridge: Women, Love, and the Law Against Divorce*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 85-6.

When the poem is published in the *Morning Post* however, Stuart positions the poem to create a wry joke (see. Fig. 3). It appears next to article on the King bathing at Weymouth, and directly above a letter to the editor describing a pamphlet written by a gentleman at Ramsgate complaining about the ‘gross violations of decorum’ which have resulted from machine-bathing.²⁵⁰ The pamphlet’s writer recommends that gentlemen should purchase ‘oil-skin pantaloons’ to wear while bathing, and that ladies walking at the seafront should be fitted with blinkers to avoid them catching sight of anything unmentionable. Sara’s transcription of the poem into her book therefore rescues it from the impact of Stuart’s editorial decisions, and repositions it once more within the personal, familial context of the manuscript book—and in doing so suppresses any inkling that sea-bathing could have risqué connotations.

The next poem in Sara’s book, ‘Inscription for a Jutting stone, over a Spring’ again makes recourse to images with personal associations for Coleridge.²⁵¹ Kathleen Coburn interprets the image of the spring in a particular entry in Coleridge’s notebooks, in which the initials WW MH DW SH accompany a description of a placid spring near Greta Hall, as emblematic of the Wordsworth household. Coburn suggests that Coleridge ‘is not part of the spring, the cone of sand, and the unruffled surface; that is the Dove Cottage circle. He, alas, lives in the angry, spasmodic, painful companionship of Greta Hall’.²⁵² Anthony Harding likewise suggests that the ‘quiet productivity’ characteristic of the Dove Cottage household led Coleridge to associate it with the spring.²⁵³ The ‘Inscription’ makes recourse to elements which recur in the verse-letter—the murmuring bees, which also appear at the end of ‘A Day Dream’, and the familiar mossy seat (and the image of the ‘living fount’ (l. 6) that appears in the ‘Sonnet to Asra’)²⁵⁴:

This Sycamore, oft musical with Bees,

²⁵⁰ *Morning Post*, (15 Sept. 1801), [p. 2; unnumbered].

²⁵¹ Whalley, 11.

²⁵² *CN*, I. 980n.

²⁵³ Anthony John Harding, *Coleridge and the Idea of Love: Aspects of Relationship in Coleridge's Thought and Writing*, (London: Cambridge UP, 1974), 9.

²⁵⁴ ‘Sonnet to Asra’, *PWC*, I.; 2, 704-5.

(Such Tents the Patriarchs lov'd!) O long unharm'd
 May all its darksome Boughs o'er canopy
 The small round Bason which this jutting stone
 Keeps pure from falling Leaves! Long may this spring
 Quietly as a sleeping Infant's Breath
 Send up cold Water for the Traveller
 With soft ~~green~~ [[& even]] Pulse! Nor ever cease
 Yon tiny cone of Sand it's soundless Dance,
 That at the Bottom, like a Fairy's Page,
 As merry, and no taller, dances still,
 Nor wrinkles the smooth Surface of the Fount.
 Here Coolness dwell and Twilight!
 Here is Moss, A soft Seat, & a deep & ample Shade
 Thou may'st toil far and find no <other> Tree!
 Here, Trav'ler, drink! here rest! and if thy Heart
 Be innocent, here too ~~thou~~ may'st thou refresh
 Thy Spirits, list'ning to these gentle Sounds,
 The passing Gale, or ever murmuring Bees!²⁵⁵

However, to a reader of the *Morning Post* unfamiliar with this intensely personalised symbolism, the poem appears a conventional sort of verse, of the kind of inscription-writing which, Mays notes, both Coleridge and Wordsworth were interested at the time.²⁵⁶ Indeed, the poem's imagery appears not dissimilar to the 'Inscription for a Bower, Written at the Request of a Friend near Belfast' by 'Hafiz' which appeared in the *Morning Post* only a few weeks later:

Thou, whom the sacred love of sweet repose
 From the vexatious cares of busy life
 Hath won—with confidence approach this bow'r
 Abstracted from the follies, guilt, and woes,
 That haunt, too oft, the crowded scene of strife,
 Here may'st thou pass the calm, the blameless hour
 While dripping rocks their limpid stores distil,
 And with a gentle, soul-composing sound,
 Into the vale descends the murm'ring rill,
 And birds their blended song pour thro' the shades around.²⁵⁷

Coleridge therefore adapts relatively commonplace imagery to function as his own specific, personal symbolism. Within the 'Inscription' resonate the same images of domestic enclosure which reverberate through the verse-letter: the enclosed space of the 'tent' created by the

²⁵⁵ Whalley, 11 (Brackets indicate: [[STC's hand]]; <written between the lines>). All quotations are from this text. (*PWC*, II.: 2, 845-7).

²⁵⁶ *PWC*, I: 2, 662.

²⁵⁷ *Morning Post*, (8 October 1802), [p. 2; unnumbered].

sycamore, whose ‘darksome boughs o’ercanopy / The small round basin, which this jutting stone / Keeps pure from falling leaves!’ (ll. 3-5), and the prayer-like blessing invoked on this space. Like the verse-letter, furthermore, the poem suggests that an individual’s own nature affects whether they are able to receive consolation from natural sounds: the spring’s healing effects are expressed in conditional terms: ‘*if* [my italics] thy heart / Be innocent, here too may’st thou renew / Thy spirits’ (ll. 16-18).

Following the ‘Inscription’, the next poem in Sara’s book, ‘The Picture’, shows Coleridge returning to the kind of dramatic descriptive-narrative of a journey through a landscape that he had used in earlier poems, ‘Reflections’, ‘Fears in Solitude’, and ‘This Lime Tree Bower’.²⁵⁸ This time Coleridge draws on a German poem by Gessner for inspiration, although Frederick Burwick notes that the work is ‘a translation that ceased to be a translation, and became very much Coleridge’s own poem’.²⁵⁹ Familiar scenes and sounds occur once again—the bees, and the brook, that ‘murmurs with a dead yet bell-like sound’ (l. 35).²⁶⁰ Coleridge’s portrait of the lover seeking (without success) to escape thoughts of love, who interprets the natural scenery in the context of his own desires—‘These are no groves / For Love to dwell in’ (ll. 17-18)—evokes an obscure echo of the ‘night-wandering man’ suffering from ‘neglected love’ (l. 18) in ‘The Nightingale’, as well as—with a wry sense of self-parody—his own lamentations in the verse-letter.²⁶¹ The revisions which Coleridge made to the poem much later in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) strengthen this parallel. Among other changes, Coleridge adds the following passage:

Here Wisdom might resort, and here Remorse;
Here too the love-lorn Man who, sick in soul,
And of this busy human heart weary,
Worships the spirit of unconscious life
In tree or wild-flower.—Gentle Lunatic!
If so he might not wholly cease to be,

²⁵⁸ Whalley, 12-16.

²⁵⁹ Frederick Burwick, ‘Coleridge as Translator’, in Frederick Burwick (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 412- 432, 423.

²⁶⁰ ‘The Picture, or Lovers Resolution’, Whalley, 12-13.

²⁶¹ Whalley, 12-16; Stafford, 29-31.

He would far rather not be that, he is;
 But would be something, that he knows not of,
 In winds or waters, or among the rocks!²⁶² (ll. 17-25)

These lines were written by at least 1814, when Coleridge quoted them (with ‘~~heart-sick~~ woe-worn’ for ‘love-sick’) in a miserable, self-loathing letter to Joseph Cottle, in which he details his struggles with sinfulness and a crisis of faith, and describes how ‘in my early manhood in lines, descriptive of a ~~moody~~ gloomy solitude, I disguised my own sensations in the following words’.²⁶³ The echoes of Hamlet, and the context of these lines within the dark 1814 letter, make the lines seem to sit uneasily in the light-hearted (if not rather comic) dramatic love-tale of ‘The Picture’. The poem, like the ‘Soliloquy of the Full Moon’ seems to be a reworking, with a self-conscious sense of humour, of some of Coleridge’s most serious and deeply-felt problems. The poems in Sara’s book present the lighter side of Coleridge in 1802, and express his darker emotions and troubles only obliquely or comically. Either through Coleridge’s self-censorship, or Sara’s act of censorship in her choice of poetry, her book is a semi-public or confidential document, suitable to be shown to other readers in manuscript.

The remaining poems in Sara’s book, Whalley has suggested, were entered over the course of many years. Among these poems is ‘The Keepsake’ (published in the *Morning Post* 17 September 1802), a poem which describes a kind of gift-exchange in which the creative endeavours of auburn-haired ‘Emmeline’ (a name which Wordsworth often used for Dorothy in poetry), sewing flowers and her name into an embroidery to make a ‘keepsake’, mirror the poet’s act of representing the flowers and memorialising Emmeline’s name in language in a poetical ‘Keepsake’.²⁶⁴ This poem has most often been read as a commentary on Coleridge’s love for auburn-haired Sara, achieving within the poem-space what was impossible in real life: the promise of their future marriage, and that ‘when Spring return’d, / She ~~neer~~ would resign one Half of that dear Name, / And own henceforth no other Name but mine!’ (ll. 38-40) (a

²⁶² ‘The Picture, or, The Lover’s Resolution’, *PWC*, II.: 2, 909-22.

²⁶³ Griggs, III. 499.

²⁶⁴ Whalley, 18-19.

wish that does look rather odd when printed above the pseudonym ‘ΕΣΤΗΣΕ’ in the *Morning Post*).²⁶⁵ However, it also offers a rare portrait of the female creativity that formed a sustaining part of the household at Grasmere—one thinks of Dorothy sewing, mending stockings, making Derwent’s frocks: ‘William worked at the Cuckow poem. I sewed beside him’, she wrote in March 1802.²⁶⁶ Anne Wallace has argued that such statements by Dorothy assert the equal value of this domestic work with authorship, while Nicola Healey suggests in contrast that Dorothy’s descriptions of her tiring domestic labour reveal her ‘repressed frustration’ that these chores impede her own creative impulses.²⁶⁷ ‘The Keepsake’ offers a more positive view of sewing as an aesthetically-valued activity, on a par with poetry: Emmeline’s embroidered flowers and name sewn with her own hair are equal in value to the poetic keepsake she is given in return—embroidery and poetry are depicted to bind poet and recipient together, sewn and linked with threads and words. Sara metaphorically ‘sews’ Coleridge’s poems together, along with Wordsworth’s, within the space of her book, creating a material memento of the creative life of the Grasmere circle.

Conclusion

Coleridge’s poetry of 1802 shows a repeated concern with ideas about how sympathy and community can be forged and, equally, the limitations which may be encountered when trying to transmit perceptions, thoughts and feelings into language to be read and experienced by another. As a way of attempting to negotiate this fundamental difficulty, his poetry and letters of the period show him continually reworking the same themes, language and imagery in different forms (the verse-letter and ‘Dejection’, the light-hearted ‘Soliloquy’, ‘To Matilda Betham’, and the letters to Sotheby) to different readers.

²⁶⁵ Whalley, 18-19. (‘The Keepsake’, *PWC*, II.: 2, 906-8).

²⁶⁶ *GJ*, 82.

²⁶⁷ Anne D. Wallace, ‘Home at Grasmere Again: Revising the Family at Dove Cottage’, in Stone and Thompson, *Literary Couplings*, 100-23; 109; Healey, 177.

Coleridge's writing of the period attempts to inscribe his place into the sympathetic, domestic community at Grasmere, through a language and landscape of personal symbolism which is nevertheless resonant with the literary and generic inheritance of sentimental conventions. Coleridge's representation of domestic community is complicated, furthermore, by the legacy of his 1790s ideals about social, political, and spiritual significance of domestic attachments which by 1802 were uncomfortably juxtaposed with the more personal failures and disillusionments of his own situation.

Examining Coleridge's poetry in the two radically-different contexts of Sara Hutchinson's manuscript poetry book, and the *Morning Post*, throws into sharp relief the way that Coleridge's poems negotiate the co-existing presence of two potential readerships—the intimate Grasmere circle, and the unknown public reader of the newspaper. Poems which appear intimately connected to and representative of the life of the group when appearing in the space of Sara's book, can nevertheless be depersonalised as generic, conventional newspaper poetry, or even re-appropriated by the *Morning Post's* editor into contexts which bring new meanings and implications to bear on the poems.

Charles Lamb

Much recent critical work on Romantic period literary magazines has highlighted how magazine writers adopted a familiar, personal, conversational style of writing and sought to represent sociability in print. Leigh Hunt's publications, as I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, were characterised by what Gregory Dart calls Hunt's 'aesthetics of familiarity', often representing the periodical as a 'conversation' with the reader.²⁶⁸ Similarly, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine's* ongoing 'Noctes Ambrosianae' series depicted a purported conversation between the magazine's writers in Ambrose's Tavern. Both Richard Cronin and David Stewart have suggested that the conversational style adopted by the magazines was a way of disguising their commercial nature as a consumable product—Cronin suggests that the magazines' friendly manner 'worked to transform the anonymous consumer of the magazine into a valued member of an exclusive, brilliant, and sparkingly entertaining social circle'.²⁶⁹

Lamb's essays written under the pseudonym 'Elia', like those of several of his contemporaries, gesture beyond the periodical to an extra-textual community which is partially revealed and partially obscured, partially fictionalised and partially real. In this chapter I suggest that, in addition to taking part in this playful 'performance' of sociability within the pages of the *London Magazine*, Lamb's essays engage in a real ongoing 'conversation' with his literary friends, in particular Hazlitt and Coleridge. His essays draw on ideas and images developed in letters to his friends, and emerge from a private intellectual context of conversation and the domestic sphere of manuscript exchange. Lamb's letters and essays reveal how he continues to explore ideas of reading, sympathy, community, and the legacy of eighteenth-century philosophy—all of which had been important topics of discussion for members of his friendship group since the 1790s.

²⁶⁸ Gregory Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-40: Cockney Adventures*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 10.

²⁶⁹ Richard Cronin, *Paper Pellets: British Literary Culture after Waterloo*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 87; David Stewart, *Romantic Magazines and Metropolitan Literary Culture*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 38.

Alongside this confidential frame of reference, Lamb's essays are also part of a network of relationships established between articles in the public, printed site of the magazine. Examining Hazlitt's brief editorship of the *London Magazine*, this chapter shows how its writers make use of the possibilities of the printed space by creating meaningful juxtapositions between essays and poems placed near one another.

Through covert gestures and allusions towards a private community of readers in print, Lamb's essays evoke the presence of several overlapping and co-existing audiences: firstly, the small community of the *London Magazine's* writers; secondly, the knowing readers among Lamb's acquaintances who could understand and enjoy the essays' open secrets and allusions; and thirdly, the audience of strangers that composed the general readership of the magazine. The presence of these multiple potential audiences makes the essays a natural vehicle for Lamb to reflect on the social function of reading and the sympathetic imagination.

The 'little band of Scribblers' of the *London Magazine*

The writers of the *London Magazine*, like many of their contemporaries, colluded together to represent the magazine at the heart of a sociable network of individuals. T. G. Wainwright's 'Janus Weathercock' described the inhabitants of the 'Contributor's Club-room' when he wrote his elegy for the (allegedly) deceased 'Elia' in January 1823: 'Little didst thou [i.e. John Clare] think that evening would be the last, when thou and I and two or three more, Messer Brunetto, Dugdale Redivodus, T— that anthery Cicero, parted with the humanity-loving Elia beneath the chaste beams of the watery moon'.²⁷⁰ Janus portrays the magazine as the product of a gathering of 'wits' (as Clare called them, according to Lamb), using the *London's* purported position at the heart of a real-life social network to attempt to create a unified identity behind

²⁷⁰ 'Janus Weatherbound; or, the Weathercock steadfast for lack of oil', *LM*, (Jan. 1823), 45-52; 48.

the magazine's disparate articles.²⁷¹ This social circle was by no means fictional: when Taylor and Hessey bought the *London*, B. W. Procter recalled, they gave a dinner once a month for their contributors to consult and talk on literary matters together.²⁷²

For Lamb, writing for the *London Magazine* was enjoyable precisely because it was intertwined with membership of this small, friendly circle of fellow-contributors: he wrote in July 1821 that 'The *Lond. Mag.* is chiefly pleasant to me, because some of my friends write in it', and as his friends one by one stopped writing for the magazine, Lamb's own enthusiasm for it waned. At the beginning of 1825, he lamented: 'Why did poor Scott die! There was comfort in writing with such associates as were his little band of Scribblers, some gone away, some affronted away, and I am left as the solitary widow looking for water cresses.'²⁷³ Without the community of Scott's 'little band', the *London* is left like Goldsmith's deserted village, or a ruined building where only Lamb lingers 'among its creaking rafters, like the last rat'.²⁷⁴

For Lamb and his fellow *London Magazine* writers, depicting a community of distinct writerly personalities appears to be a vital part of forging a strong identity for the magazine within a crowded marketplace of periodicals. David Stewart has described how *Blackwood Magazine's* used the fictional editorial personality, 'Christopher North' to provide the magazine with a 'sense of continuity amid a succession of competing personal voices'.²⁷⁵ In Lamb's opinion, the *London* needed to be structured around these kinds of distinct personae—like Janus, who 'talkd about it & about it'—to give the magazine a positive identity and coherency from issue to issue.²⁷⁶ Lamb remarked to one of the new editors of the magazine, James Hessey, that, 'The *Lond. Mag.* wants a personal character of its own too much. Blackw^d owes

²⁷¹ 'The *Wits* (as Clare calls us) assemble at my Cell [...] this evening [...] Cold meat at 9. Puns at—a little after' (Lucas, II. 297).

²⁷² P. P. Howe, *The Life of William Hazlitt*, (London: Penguin, 1922; 1949), 329.

²⁷³ Lucas, II. 460.

²⁷⁴ Lucas, II. 395.

²⁷⁵ Stewart, 29.

²⁷⁶ George L. Barnett, 'Corrections in the Text of Lamb's Letters', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 18:2 (Feb. 1955), 147-158; 155.

all to that'.²⁷⁷ Lamb complained to Hesse that the *London Magazine* had declined with the loss of DeQuincey the opium eater, 'Barry Cornwall', and T. G. Wainwright's many personae including 'Janus Weathercock'. James Treadwell has argued that it is Lamb's 'Elia' which 'stands for the institutional coherence of the *London*'—the brief essays 'requiring no connection between one and the next other than the same signature and some uniformity of tone'.²⁷⁸ Authorial personality becomes an important structuring feature of the magazine's identity. Lamb's 'Elia' proved a distinctive enough figure to draw forth poetical tributes: sonnets by John Clare (August 1822) and Bernard Barton (February 1823), and a verse epistle from 'Olen' (Charles Elton) in August 1821.

As Cronin suggests, these personalities were established by creating a distinct writing style, so that each authorial pseudonym 'identifies a mode of writing rather than an individual'.²⁷⁹ As a result, 'Christopher North' was 'a pseudonym that in the early years of the magazine might be assumed by any *Blackwood's* writer' (208). Authorial pseudonyms existed as a token sort of guessing game with the reader: Josephine Bauer has described how the identities of Scott's band of authors were hidden only under very thin disguises.²⁸⁰ The *London Magazine's* first editor, John Scott, remarked in a review of poems by 'Barry Cornwall' that,

These are the days of authors in masquerade, and as we do not pretend to be able to say, in every instance, *je vous connais, beau masque*. *Mystification* is now added to the other allurements of popular writers; as a trick of trade it is at least innocent, and we believe it has been found pretty effectual.²⁸¹

Scott's review acknowledges how the performance of an authorial persona was a sort of game used in order to draw the reader into a sense of collusion with the writer. The playful mystification of the *London's* writers, Scott asserted, was in complete contrast to the malignant

²⁷⁷ George L. Barnett, 'Corrections in the Text of Lamb's Letters', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 18:2 (Feb. 1955), 147-158; 155.

²⁷⁸ James Treadwell, *Autobiographical Writing and British Literature, 1783-1834*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 216.

²⁷⁹ Richard Cronin, 'John Wilson and Regency Authorship', in Robert Morrison and Daniel S. Roberts (eds.), *Romanticism and Blackwood's Magazine: 'An Unprecedented Phenomenon'*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 203-214; 208

²⁸⁰ Josephine Bauer, *The London Magazine 1820-29*, (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1953), 68.

²⁸¹ [Review of] 'A Sicilian Story, with Diego de Montila, and other poems', *LM*, (Jan. 1820), 84-6, 85.

anonymity of writer such as 'Z' at *Blackwood's*, kept up 'for dishonest purposes, and under cowardly motives.'²⁸²

As one of the 'authors in masquerade,' Lamb gestures towards his real identity through a series of allusions open to 'knowing' readers: for example, by describing himself as a schoolboy at Christ's Hospital, through the eyes of his purported contemporary Elia. The antics of a certain 'L.' are sometimes appended to the essays, for example in a footnote (claiming itself '*not by Elia*') complaining of 'that silly joke of L----,' who fooled G. D. by telling him that Lord Castlereagh was the author of the Scotch novels; or Elia's anecdote about his 'friend L—' entertaining a beggar-woman with a pun, which leads him to remark that 'L. has a way of viewing things in a rather paradoxical light on some occasions'.²⁸³

Lamb plays with the conventions of authorial pseudonyms in magazines in a teasing note about Leigh Hunt, who had publicly identified Lamb as the author of the *Elia* essays:²⁸⁴

A writer, whose real name, it seems, is Boldero, but who has been entertaining the town for the past twelve months, with some very pleasant lucubrations, under the assumed signature of *Leigh Hunt* [...] has thought fit to insinuate that I *Elia* do not write the little sketches which bear my signature, in this Magazine; but that the true author of them is a Mr. L—b. Observe the critical period at which he has chosen to impute the calumny!—on the very eve of the publication of our last number—affording no scope for explanation for a full month—during which time, I must needs lie writhing and tossing, under the cruel imputation of non-entity.²⁸⁵

Elia makes a comical claim for his existence by asserting his physical anguish of 'writhing and tossing' under the 'assassin' Hunt's imputations. Hunt's accusations place Elia in a state of limbo, unable to express himself between one number of the magazine and the next—just as 'Elia' must indeed wait to be called forth into existence again each month by Mr. Lamb. While Hunt in fact never signed his name in the *Indicator* (and only very rarely in the *Examiner*), Elia's accusation that 'Leigh Hunt' is merely an assumed signature is perceptive of the way that the authorial personality of the *Indicator* is as much a textual construction as Elia

²⁸² 'Blackwood's Magazine,' *LM* (Nov. 1820), 509-521, 513.

²⁸³ 'Oxford in the Vacation,' *LM*, (Oct. 1820), 365-9, 367; 'A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis,' *LM*, (June 1822), 532-6, 536.

²⁸⁴ 'The Works of Charles Lamb,' *Indicator*, (31 Jan. 1821), II. 129-136, 129.

²⁸⁵ 'A Chapter on Ears,' *LM*, (Mar. 1821), 263-266; 266.

himself: so much so that *Blackwood's* writers are able to write their own 'Hunt' in several stylistic parodies.²⁸⁶ Elia claims (with a nod to Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*) that, "They call this an age of personality"—but the instability of his own persona is an in-joke between himself and his literary acquaintances.²⁸⁷ Hunt's response to Elia's note is to make up his own version of Elia's identity, claiming that,

Elia is not an anagram, as some have thought it, but the Judaico-Christian name of the writer before us, whose surname, we find, is not Lamb, but Lomb; Elia Lomb! What a name! He told a friend of ours so in company, and would have palmed himself upon him for a Scotchman, but that his countenance betrayed him.²⁸⁸

Hunt's note—which as well as accusing 'Lomb' of trying to pass himself off as a Scotchman, also links him to a family of the name of Elia who were Genoese Jews—raises the question of whether he had seen Lamb's essay 'Imperfect Sympathies' and was therefore indulging in a private joke.²⁸⁹

Lamb playfully resists attempts (apparently) made by some readers to find out the true identity behind the phantom figure.²⁹⁰ One correspondent (who may well, one suspects, be fictional) had admonished Elia on the discrepancy between his claim to have been born in the Temple (in the 'Old Benchers') and his conflicting claim to have been born in Cavendish Square (in 'A Chapter on Ears'); another, 'a Wiltshire man,' claimed Elia for a countryman on the basis that he had claimed to be from Calne in his 'Recollections of Christ's Hospital'.²⁹¹ Elia's response is to ask for a 'latitude of interpretation' to be applied to his claims; the reader should suppose 'an allegorical or tropical sense' is intended: 'So by the word 'native,' I may be

²⁸⁶ "Two Papers: a Theatrical Critique, and an Essay (being No. 999 of the Pretender) on Sonnet-writing, and Sonnet-writers in general, including a Sonnet on Myself; attributed to the Editor of the Ex-m-n-r. Preceded by Proofs of their Authenticity, founded upon the Authority of internal Evidence", *BM*, (Mar. 1819), 325-330. And also, a later mockery of Hunt and Hazlitt, 'Cockney contributions for the first of April', *BM*, (July 1824), 67-73.

²⁸⁷ *LM*, (Mar. 1821), 266.

²⁸⁸ 'Elia versus Indicator', *Indicator*, (7 Mar. 1821), 175-6, 175.

²⁸⁹ Duncan Wu has suggested that this essay was written in early 1821 and its printing postponed in the light of Scott's fatal duel. ('John Scott's death and Lamb's "Imperfect Sympathies"', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, NS 114 (Apr. 2001), 38-50, 47).

²⁹⁰ An interesting example of this search for Elia's identity is given in Lamb's letters to and from John Bates Dibden. Dibden came to the East India House regularly to do business, and realised that Lamb ("the little clever man") was the author of the essays: he sent him a poem, 'I've found thee out Elia,' and the two then became friends (Lucas, II. 384).

²⁹¹ 'Elia to his correspondents', *LM*, (Nov. 1821), 465-466; 465.

supposed to mean a town where I might have been born; or where it might be desirable that I should have been born, as being situate in wholesome air, upon a dry chalky soil, in which I delight' (466). To his inquisitive correspondents who 'are so importunate about the true localities of his birth—as if, forsooth, Elia were presently about to be passed to his parish,' Lamb claims the right to reinvent Elia however he chooses: 'he hath not so fixed his nativity (like a rusty vane) to one dull spot, but that, if he seeth occasion, or the argument shall demand it, he will be born again, in future papers, in whatever place, and at whatever period, shall seem good unto him' (466). The too-curious seekers after Elia's birthplace show traces of the Caledonian intellect criticised in the essay, 'Imperfect sympathies,'—the kind of mind that cannot be satisfied 'with fragments and scattered pieces of Truth,' nor with 'Surmises, guesses, misgivings, half-intuitions, semi-consciousnesses, partial illuminations, dim instincts, embryo conceptions'.²⁹² Elia's essays demand the reader's receptive and imaginative acceptance of whatever tales he should choose to spin—a poetic faith in Elia's 'fantastic shapes': 'Be satisfied', he advises them in the first essay on the South-Sea House, 'that something answering to them has had a being'.²⁹³ Drafting out a preface for the collected volume of the 'Elia' essays, Lamb prescribes the kind of reading he wants from his readers, asking for a 'friendly and judicious reader' who will read:

not understanding every thing perversely in the absolute and literal sense, but giving fair construction as to an after-dinner conversation; allowing for the rashness and necessary incompleteness of first thoughts; and not remembering, for the purpose of an after taunt, words spoken peradventure after the fourth glass. The Author wishes [...] a candid interpretation to his most hasty words and actions.²⁹⁴

Lamb, however, decides against directly dictating to his readers how he wants to be read, concluding that 'The Essays want no Preface: they are *all Preface*. A Preface is nothing but a talk with the reader; and they do nothing else' (350). In his draft preface, the trope of the

²⁹² 'Jews, Quakes, Scotchmen, and other Imperfect Sympathies', *LM*, (Aug. 1821), 152-6; 153.

²⁹³ 'Recollections of the South Sea House', *LM*, (Aug. 1820), 142-146; 146.

²⁹⁴ *Lucas II*, 350.

essay-as-conversation, so common in early nineteenth century magazine writing, represents not just familiarity but the ephemeral, open-ended, inexactness of the spoken word.

The idea of identity-as-masquerade takes on a much deeper and more symbolic resonance, however, within the essays. For example, John Tipp, one of the clerks of the South Sea House fills his leisure hours with concerts and music, yet becomes ‘quite another sort of creature’ at his desk, filling the role of accountant with an absolute sense of duty—‘He is the true actor’, Elia remarks, ‘who, whether his part be a prince or a peasant, must act it with like intensity’.²⁹⁵ Elia, in compensation for his lack of university education, imagines himself a scholar in ‘Oxford in the Vacation’, or imagines himself a father in ‘Dream Children’, exploring the emotional and consolatory value of these kind of imaginary games, in the willing suspension of disbelief. The essays ask not just that the reader indulge Elia’s moments where ‘the mind knowingly passes a fiction upon herself’, but asks them to participate in the game.²⁹⁶

As well as playing with his own identity, Lamb’s essays repeatedly and tantalisingly gesture towards a network of real friends and acquaintances whose identities are only lightly veiled by initials or false names, such as George Dyer in ‘Oxford in the Vacation’, and Coleridge’s pseudonym ‘Comberbatch’ in ‘The Two Races of Men’. The ‘South Sea House’ includes a footnote which mentions one of its present employees, a ‘Mr Lamb’ who ‘is happy in possession of some choice pictures, and among them a rare portrait of Milton, which I mean to do myself the pleasure of going to see’—Charles’s brother John.²⁹⁷ Lamb’s footnotes and allusions offer the public reader the sense of overhearing references that would be understood by a knowing readership. Richard Cronin and David Stewart have noted similar techniques in use in *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Cronin suggests that in ‘Noctes Ambrosianae’, ‘[r]eaders are at once invited to join an intimate, convivial social group and apprised that they

²⁹⁵ *LM*, (Aug. 1820), 145.

²⁹⁶ Marris, I. 365.

²⁹⁷ *LM*, (Aug. 1820), 144.

are excluded from it' since they do not possess particular knowledge.²⁹⁸ Stewart suggests that *Blackwood's* satires, like the notorious 'Chaldee Manuscript', would be completely incomprehensible to those outside the small circle of writers, however 'it was precisely this 'tantalising' quality, as the *Blackwood's* writers recognized, that made their writing appeal to an audience that was not confined to a small circle in Edinburgh'.²⁹⁹ Stewart describes how *Blackwood's* makes use of false leads and dead ends, creating in-jokes that lead nowhere, so that '[n]ot being in on the joke is precisely the point of the joke: nobody is' (139). Lucas notes that Lamb drew up a 'Key' to explain certain initials and blanks in the essays for R. B. Pitman, a fellow clerk at the East India House. While a large portion of the initials indicate various acquaintances or real-life individuals, a few of the references like 'B., Rector of —' Lamb notes, have 'no meaning'.³⁰⁰ The essays hover between tangible references and textual phantasms, weaving both together.

While Lamb's playful use of such 'coterie' allusions are a frequent trope of magazine writing, in this chapter I argue that, rather than simply adopting 'sociability' as the commonplace stylistic mode of magazine writing, Lamb's essays arise from a more deep-rooted sociable feeling. Lamb's essays were frequently composed and developed as a result of correspondence and conversations, and can form part of a series of ongoing, responsive exchanges between Lamb and a private circle of known readers. Lamb's long friendships with other writers, in particular Coleridge and Hazlitt, shaped his essays for the *London Magazine*: the essays draw on shared reading, conversations, and a shared interest in philosophical debates about topics such as sympathy, benevolence, and community going back to the 1790s.

²⁹⁸ Cronin, *Paper Pellets*, 80.

²⁹⁹ Stewart, 135.

³⁰⁰ *Elia and the Last Essays of Elia*, ed. E. V. Lucas, (London: Methuen, 1912), 339-40.

Lamb and Hazlitt in conversation

Hazlitt's essays for the *London*, like Lamb's, gesture towards a real-life community of acquaintances. A month after 'Elia' first appeared in the magazine, Hazlitt's essay 'On the Conversation of Authors', offered a nostalgic depiction of the 'lively skirmishes' he had formerly enjoyed at 'L—'s' Thursday evening parties.³⁰¹ Guests who could be easily identified by the general reader, like 'C— [...] riding the high German horse', are described alongside others like 'Ned P.—' and 'M. B.' who only those in Lamb's circle could identify (258). After eulogizing 'L— himself, the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men' (257), Hazlitt refers to his visit to Oxford, and how he 'walked gowned' among its quadrangles—an allusion to Lamb's sonnet written (at Cambridge), 'I was not trained in academic bowers' (261). The following month, the second Elia essay, 'Oxford in the Vacation,' appeared, subtly hinting at the connection of 'L—' and 'Elia'.³⁰²

The existence of this real-life, friendly, conversational circle seems to have allowed a densely-woven allusive relationship to be established between the two essayists' work at particular moments. Essay topics sometimes seem to have derived from conversations, resulting in some striking similarities such as between Lamb's 'New Year's Eve,' and Hazlitt's 'On the Past and Future'.³⁰³ The relationship between Lamb's and Hazlitt's essays is particularly strong and striking in the few months following the sudden death in a duel of the *London Magazine's* first editor, John Scott, in January 1821. Scott had left February's number of the magazine largely complete, but Hazlitt took over the editorship of the magazine for the next two months, March and April.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ 'Table Talk, No. III: On the Conversation of Authors', *LM*, (Sept. 1820), 250-62, 257.

³⁰² Mark Schoenfield has explored the relationship between Lamb's 'Oxford in the Vacation' and 'The Old and New Schoolmaster,' and Hazlitt's essay, 'On Antiquity' in 'Voices Together: Lamb, Hazlitt, and the "London"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 29:2 (1990), 257-72.

³⁰³ Both essays were written about the same time: see *The Letters of William Hazlitt*, ed. H. M. Sikes et al., (New York, NY: New York UP, 1978), 203.

³⁰⁴ Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 295.

Mark Parker has argued that as editor, John Scott had sought subtly to shape the magazine to his own Burkean-Coleridgean political outlook ‘by either pairing articles or by weaving a kind of running commentary into articles throughout an entire number’.³⁰⁵ Parker suggests that Scott sought to emphasise the nostalgic, domestic, escapist aspects of the Elia essays: in response to the ‘intolerable political present’, Scott uses the essays as ‘soothing displacements’ (42). Parker furthermore suggests that Scott encouraged a kind of conversation between Hazlitt’s essays for the *London* and his own editorials (65). Even after Scott’s death, Parker suggests that Hazlitt’s contributions ‘carry on the conversation begun in the previous year’ and that Hazlitt’s ‘allegiance to Burke’s style, especially within the skeptical, experience-rich genre of the familiar essay, almost inevitably leads him to arguments that could be effortlessly absorbed by Scott’s institutional frame—even by Scott’s conservative politics’ (79).

I want to build on this interpretation of the *London*’s articles, by examining the ‘conversation’ established between Hazlitt’s and Lamb’s essays in the few months following Scott’s death. Following Scott’s example, Hazlitt tried to give the magazine a sense of coherent organization. Two years later, Hazlitt would complain how the magazine had declined in quality when it was no longer directed by a strong editorial influence:

it wants a sufficient unity of direction and purpose. There is no particular bias or governing principle,—which neutralizes the interest. The articles seem thrown into the letter box and to come up like blanks or prizes in a lottery—all is in a confused, unconnected state, like the materials of a rich plum-pudding before it has been well boiled.³⁰⁶

Hazlitt as editor positioned the magazine’s articles and poetry in ways that emphasised the thematic links between them. However, while the essays by Hazlitt and Lamb in this period do show a deep engagement with Burkean ideas, they cannot quite be ‘effortlessly absorbed’, as Parker suggests, into the conservative framework of the magazine established by Scott. Rather, Hazlitt and Lamb together subject Burkean ideas to interrogation—suggesting the

³⁰⁵ Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 37.

³⁰⁶ ‘The Periodical Press’, *The Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal*, (May 1823), 349-378; 370-1.

value of instinctive, irrational sympathies as a resistance to cold utilitarianism, yet also subtly puncturing and satirising the politics of instinctive prejudice.

In ‘On the Conversation of Authors’, Hazlitt had commented that ‘there is no use in talking to people of sense, who know all that you can tell them, nor to fools, who will not be instructed’.³⁰⁷ A juxtaposition of ‘fools’ and ‘people of sense’ opens the April 1821 issue of the *London Magazine*, where Hazlitt’s essay ‘On People of Sense’ appears alongside an essay by Lamb which celebrates the kind-hearted virtues of fools (see Fig. 4).

‘Elia’ invites ‘Mr. Hazlitt’ to his April Fools’ banquet, but rebukes him: ‘I cannot indulge you in your definition. I must fine you a bumper, or a paradox. We will have nothing said or done syllogistically this day’.³⁰⁸ Hazlitt’s essay criticises the folly of dogmatic thinkers, complaining that ‘the greatest absurdities’ are often maintained by people ‘who give themselves out as wiser than everybody else’.³⁰⁹ Hazlitt criticises people who possess what he describes as a mechanical and abstract kind of understanding: his prime target is Jeremy Bentham, but he criticises Shelley too, as someone who is guided by his own speculative notions, rather than by experience. Hazlitt had considered publishing his ‘philippic against Bentham’ earlier in the year, but had substituted ‘On Reading Old Books’ in the February number, possibly at Scott’s wish.³¹⁰

In the essay, Hazlitt suggests two opposing views of human nature—one Benthamite, one Burkean—which he would later develop further in his essay on Bentham in *The Spirit of the Age*.³¹¹ Hazlitt writes that,

The modern Panoptic and Chrestomathic School of reformers and reconstructors of society propose to do it upon entirely mechanical and scientific principles. Nothing short of that will satisfy their scrupulous pretensions to wisdom and gravity. They

³⁰⁷ *LM*, (Sept. 1820), 250-62, 256.

³⁰⁸ ‘All Fools’ Day,’ *LM*, (Apr. 1821), 361-3, 362.

³⁰⁹ ‘Table Talk, No. IX: On People of Sense,’ *LM*, (Apr. 1821) 368-74, 368.

³¹⁰ Sikes, 203.

³¹¹ Hazlitt’s criticisms of Bentham’s Utilitarianism have been discussed in great detail by Roy Park, *Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 43-76; Uttara Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense: Criticism, Morals and the Metaphysics of Power*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 74; and Tim Milnes, “Darkening Knowledge”: Hazlitt and Bentham on the limits of empiricism’, in Uttara Natarajan, Tom Paulin, and Duncan Wu (eds.), *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 125-136.

proceed by the rule and compass, by logical diagrams, and with none but demonstrable conclusions, and leave all the taste, fancy, and sentiment of the thing to the admirers of Mr. Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*. That work is to them a very flimsy and superficial performance, because it is rhetorical and figurative, and they judge of solidity by barrenness, of depth by dryness.³¹²

The Benthamite, mechanical kind of understanding that bases its judgments on calculation is contrasted with the value which Edmund Burke ascribes to the emotive power of art, imagery, and pageantry, which appeal to instinctive human emotions. In Hazlitt's opinion, the Benthamites and dogmatic thinkers deny a vital aspect of human nature in their attempt to make a rational and scientific reform of society.³¹³

Hazlitt's essay criticises the crushing effect of rigid dogmatism on natural affections, using an anecdote about the mothers of Kidderminster, who were crushed into resignation when they tried to argue with the minister who told them that their unbaptised infants were burning in Hell. In Hazlitt's opinion the interpretation of Scripture had provided one of the most fertile sources of fanaticism. Lamb's 'All Fools' Day' essay adds another layer to Hazlitt's argument. Lamb's essay ends with a description of the response which he had as a child on reading Bible stories, when he had felt an instinctive sympathy and 'yearnings' towards the foolish characters in the Parables.

When a child, with child-like apprehensions, that dived not below the surface of the matter, I read those Parables—not guessing at their involved wisdom—I had more yearnings towards that simple architect, that built his house upon the sand, than I entertained for his more cautious neighbour; I grudged at the hard censure pronounced upon the quiet soul that kept his talent; and—prizing their simplicity beyond the more provident, and, to my apprehension, somewhat unfeminine wariness of their competitors—I felt a kindliness, that almost amounted to a tendre, for those five thoughtless virgins.³¹⁴

The child Lamb's instinctive and sympathetic affections lead him to interpret the parables in a way that contradicted the accepted or authorised meaning of the passages. Lamb suggests

³¹² *LM*, (Apr. 1821), 371.

³¹³ Duncan Wu has shed an interesting light on Hazlitt's quarrel with Bentham. From 1813 to 1819 Hazlitt was Bentham's tenant at 19 York Street (Milton's former home, and the place where *Paradise Lost* was composed). The plan to establish a Chrestomathic School at Bentham's house round the corner (which would have involved demolishing 19 York Street) was one which, Wu notes, loomed over the Hazlitt's time in the house and was one of many politically-motivated reasons which led Bentham to evict Hazlitt. ('Hazlitt, Francis Place, and the Bentham Circle: New Findings', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, 132 (Oct. 2005), 95-103; 97, 102).

³¹⁴ *LM*, (Apr. 1821), 362.

that this response was due to the limitation of his ‘child-like apprehensions’ which could not comprehend the ‘involved wisdom’ of those passages; however, the child’s simple act of questioning the justice of the biblical narrative—for example, his compassionate resistance to the ‘hard censure’—works to disrupt the authority of previous scriptural interpretations. Lamb’s essay functions as a playful counterpoint to Hazlitt’s, suggesting the value of instinctive, sympathetic responses.

Lamb’s and Hazlitt’s essays in the April and May issues of the *London Magazine* repeatedly explore the contrast between instinctive responses, and dogmatic or ‘mechanical’ understanding. Hazlitt in ‘On People of Sense’ argues that poetry and the arts have an important ability to transmit meaning to the reader or viewer through sensory, sympathetic, and intuitive appreciation. In Hazlitt’s opinion, the evocative power of the ‘dim, religious light’ of the windows, the solemn music, and statues of Westminster Abbey are more effective at teaching people a moral sense than religious doctrine.³¹⁵

Lamb’s essay on Quaker meetings in the April issue also follows this theme. To Elia, the value of the meetings lies in the comfort to be drawn from being part of a group of people united in silent companionable solitude. He can therefore appreciate the meetings without concerning himself with the question of whether the Quakers’ beliefs have validity. So he is content to give a certain Quaker (who stands up to confess to having been a wit in his youth) the benefit of the doubt about his spiritual experience: ‘I saw him shake all over with the spirit—I dare not say, of delusion—the strivings of the outer man were unutterable’.³¹⁶ Like Keats’s state of ‘negative capability,’ Lamb’s Elia is content to appreciate the mystery without demanding an objective or provable truth. Lamb, as I have mentioned earlier, asks the reader to adopt this mind-set in the preface which he drafts for the collected edition of the Elia essays. Likewise, his essay ‘All Fools’ Day’ cautions the reader to approach the essay with

³¹⁵ *LM*, (Apr. 1821), 372-3.

³¹⁶ ‘A Quaker’s Meeting,’ *LM*, (Apr. 1821), 384-7, 386.

a playful, indulgent, knowing laxity, not a strict regard for truthfulness, warning that 'if you wrest my words beyond their fair construction, it is you, and not I, that are the *April Fool*.'³¹⁷

Fig. 4: *London Magazine*, (Apr. 1821), p. 357

THE	
LONDON MAGAZINE.	
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LONDON:	
BALDWIN, CRADOCK, AND JOY.	
[Entered at Stationers' Hall.]	

³¹⁷ LM, (Apr. 1821), 363.

Hazlitt as editor juxtaposes certain articles in the magazine to highlight the thematic connections between them: for example, he places Lamb's sonnet, 'They talk of time, and of time's galling yoke', immediately before 'On People of Sense'. Lamb's sonnet defends 'divine Leisure' from the criticism of utilitarian-minded people who suggest that one's time should be filled with work.³¹⁸ Lamb desires to spend time in spiritually-fulfilling 'silent meditation' (like that found in Quaker meetings) rather than laborious 'Occupation'. Bentham's philosophy had proposed to increase the sum total of human happiness, but in Hazlitt's opinion the utilitarians,

leave hardly any one source from which the smallest ray of satisfaction can be derived. [...] Show one of these men of narrow comprehension a beautiful prospect, and he wonders you can take delight in what is of no use [...] Point to Hogarth, and they do confess there is something in his prints, that, by contrast, throws a pleasing light on their Utopian schemes³¹⁹

Hazlitt objects to the utilitarian urge to find a useful purpose or moral in all things. This objection is mirrored in the ending of B. W. Procter's essay 'A May Dream' that opens the May issue of the *London Magazine*. The author, in response to an imagined question from the reader as to the dream's meaning, asserts that it is intended purely to please, and 'hath no hidden purpose' or moral—'there is no concealed drug in the sugar which we proffer to thee'.³²⁰

Procter's playful 'May Dream', a text of sheer literary enjoyment, is immediately followed by Hazlitt's essay on Crabbe, a poet of completely contrasting characteristics. In Hazlitt's opinion, Crabbe is a utilitarian kind of poet, who examines and records the world in a matter-of-fact way, and does not enhance his experiences by looking beyond them for spiritual or imaginative insight. Crabbe, according to Hazlitt, copies the 'petty details' of nature so unforgivingly that he 'is for the most part a poet, only because he writes in lines of

³¹⁸ *LM*, (Apr. 1821), 367.

³¹⁹ *LM*, (Apr. 1821), 372.

³²⁰ 'A May Dream,' (*LM*, (May 1821), 477-483, 483.

ten syllables. All the rest might be found in a newspaper, an old magazine, or a county-register'.³²¹

In 'On People of Sense' Hazlitt objects to the educational program projected by Bentham's 'Chrestomathic school', which planned to replace the study of classics and poetry with the more useful sciences, so that, in Hazlitt's opinion, the children 'are to be taught to do every thing, and to see and feel nothing'.³²² In Lamb's essay 'The Old and the New Schoolmaster', from the May issue, modern teaching expectations have placed the schoolmaster in a situation where,

He must seize every occasion—the season of the year—the time of the day—a passing cloud—a rainbow—a waggon of hay—a regiment of soldiers going by—to inculcate something useful. He can receive no pleasure from a casual glimpse of Nature, but must catch at it as an object of instruction. He must interpret beauty into the picturesque. He cannot relish a beggar-man, or a gipsy, for thinking of the suitable improvement. Nothing comes to him, not spoiled by the sophisticating medium of moral uses. The Universe—that Great Book, as it has been called—is to him indeed, to all intents and purposes, a book, out of which he is doomed to read tedious homilies to distasting schoolboys.³²³

The modern schoolmaster is forced into a straightforward, moralistic way of interpreting the world, rather than allowing himself to imaginatively engage with it. The world has become for him a book that can be easily read and comprehended, rather than a place of wonder that pushes the limit of human understanding. The schoolmaster is not able to simply enjoy his experiences—instead each sight or sound must be categorised into a scientific scheme, or exploited as the medium for a moral, instructive lesson.

Lamb's 'Great Book' of the Universe is an image drawn from Unitarian tradition—it recalls Anna Barbauld's 'mystic characters [...] Wrought in each flower, inscribed in every tree', (ll. 59-60) or Coleridge's 'mighty alphabet / For infant minds' (ll. 19-20).³²⁴ Lamb objects to the way that the utilitarian kind of school-teaching encourages a 'translation' of the

³²¹ 'Living Authors, No. V: Crabbe,' *LM*, (May 1821), 484-490, 485.

³²² *LM*, (Apr. 1821), 372.

³²³ 'The Old and the New Schoolmaster,' *LM*, (May 1821), 492-7, 495.

³²⁴ Barbauld, 'An Address to the Deity,' *PALB*, 5; Coleridge, 'The Destiny of Nations: a Vision,' *PWC*, II: 1, 381-408.

‘Great Book’ of the world that focuses on scientific experimentation and social problems, rather than looking for spiritual sustenance. The modern schoolboy is taught through ‘tedious homilies’ rather than, like the young Hartley Coleridge in ‘Frost at Midnight,’ learning instinctively by interacting with the natural world, seeing and hearing in his surroundings the ‘lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language’ of the divine (ll. 64-5).³²⁵

In ‘The Old and New Schoolmaster,’ Elia presents himself as the antithesis of the ‘people of sense’ in Hazlitt’s essay: he lacks knowledge of the sciences, geography, and history, but he does know about literature and the old stories of myth. His mind is ‘dimly impressed’ with ‘glimmering notions from old poetic associations’ rather than able to form any ‘speculations reducible to calculation’.³²⁶ Lamb therefore playfully presents Elia as a Burkean rather than a Benthamite kind of thinker.

Elia gives a similar self-portrait in ‘Imperfect Sympathies’—an essay which Duncan Wu has suggested was written in the spring of 1821, although it was not published until August.³²⁷ Elia’s criticism of the Caledonian intellect is similar to Hazlitt’s critique of the ‘people of sense’. Elia claims that Caledonians (apparently following in the tradition of Scottish Empiricism, which founded its philosophical basis on the evidence of the senses) never have any doubts or hesitancy about the validity of their ideas, and ‘no falterings of self-suspicion’.³²⁸ However, after criticising the Scots’ inability to accept compromises or complexities, Elia demonstrates exactly the same prejudices in his attitude to the mixing of Christians and Jews, claiming not to understand the ‘half-convertites’ and proclaiming, ‘I like fish or flesh’.³²⁹ Elia’s portrait of the Quakers, describing their caution with words, their self-watchfulness, and inability to accept the lesser, laxer form of truth which binds ‘the common affirmations of the shop or market-place’, stands as a contrast to his own claim not to be able

³²⁵ ‘Frost at Midnight,’ *Fears in Solitude, written in 1798, during the alarm of an invasion*, (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 19-23. (*PWC*, II.: 1, 569-73).

³²⁶ *LM*, (May 1821), 494.

³²⁷ Wu, ‘John Scott’s death and Lamb’s “Imperfect Sympathies”’, 47.

³²⁸ *LM*, (Aug. 1821), 153.

³²⁹ *LM*, (Aug. 1821), 154.

speak always as if he were upon oath.³³⁰ Yet, in the anecdote that closes the essay, Elia finds himself drawn into moral equivocation by copying the example of his companions, the ‘grave and warrantable’ Quakers, who leave without paying their bill at a tavern.³³¹ Influenced by the mild, quiet and grave demeanour of the Quakers, Elia allows his own moral sense of what is just to the tavern lady to be lulled asleep. In his essay, Lamb subtly demonstrates how Elia comes to embody exactly the faults he criticises in others.

Both Lamb and Hazlitt have a complex, conflicted attitude to Burkean ideas. Hazlitt’s desire that the pomp and prejudice inherited from past ages should be overturned is a direct argument against Burke’s *Reflections*; yet, conversely, Hazlitt agrees with Burke about the importance of the instinctive, irrational ties that influence human nature. A footnote to ‘Imperfect Sympathies’ reveals it as—on one level—Lamb’s joke on Burke’s notion that people have an instinctive wisdom comprised of prejudices that favour custom and tradition. Elia notes that he believes that some people are ‘born and constellated so opposite to another individual nature’ that they cannot help fighting upon first meeting, and quotes some lines from Heywood’s *Hierarchie of Angels*, to which Heywood had added a tale ‘of a Spaniard who attempted to assassinate a King Ferdinand of Spain, and being put to the rack could give no other reason for the deed but an inveterate antipathy which he had taken to the first sight of the King’.³³² Burke’s argument that people inherit an instinctive attachment to the idea of monarchy is comically countered by Lamb when he uses the idea of instinctive prejudice to justify regicide.

Lamb’s letter, ‘The Confessions of R. F. V. H. Delamore, Esq.’, in the April issue also makes a comical argument with Burke’s ideas. ‘Delamore’ asks whether the nobility of his family has been ‘extinguished forever’ by his brief spell in the pillory. He writes in language

³³⁰ *LM*, (Aug. 1821), 155.

³³¹ *LM*, (Aug. 1821), 156.

³³² *LM*, (Aug. 1821), 152.

similar to Burke about how the blood of his ancestors bears a chivalric inheritance to him, and asks,

Can a family be tainted backwards?—can posterity purchase disgrace for their progenitors? [...] Can a reputation, gained by hard watchings on the cold ground, in a suit of mail, be impeached by hard watchings on the cold ground in other circumstances – was the endurance equal?³³³

Delamore's bizarre idea that his actions could stain his lineage retroactively calls into question the whole notion that nobility can pass through inheritance either backwards or forwards in time. Lamb uses the masque of 'Delamore' in the same way that he uses the flexible character of 'Elia,' making the characters embody particular viewpoints which Lamb seeks to tease apart.

As editor of the *London Magazine* for this brief period, Hazlitt deliberately exploited the juxtapositions created by the magazine format in order to establish a thematic unity across the contents: he seems to ask the reader to make comparisons and cross-references between articles. Hazlitt used his own essay, 'On People of Sense,' to establish the central themes under discussion in the April and May issues of the *London Magazine*: the flaws of utilitarianism, and the influence of Burke. Lamb's essays expand upon Hazlitt's argument, but also expose the complexities of the issues under discussion. Hazlitt and Lamb establish a relationship which is in turns collaborative and disputative: the essays elaborate upon a central theme, yet also subject the same ideas to an ongoing interrogation.

Open letters

Lamb's public conversation with Hazlitt continued, in one way or another. Elia's 'Letter to Robert Southey'—drastically different in style to the other 'Elia' essays—is an interesting example of Lamb signalling his allegiance to a particular community of writers, and participating in a particularly public argument with Southey. William Ruddick has described

³³³ 'The Confessions of R. F. V. H. Delamore, Esq.', *LM*, (Apr. 1821), 383-4, 383.

how Lamb takes on an argumentative style closer to Hazlitt's, without Elia's characteristically archaic diction and whimsical outlook, in order to signal his allegiance to Hazlitt and Hunt in the face of Southey's criticism.³³⁴ Elia's open letter signals publically Lamb's friendships with named individuals like Coleridge, and those like 'W—th', and 'the authors of Rimini and of the Table Talk', who could be easily identified. However, Lamb simultaneously alludes to a private circle who would be identifiable to Southey, perhaps, but not a more general reader: people like 'N., mine and my father's friend', or 'W.A.', one of the 'little knot of whist-players'—allusions which give the effect that a private as well as a public quarrel is being overheard.³³⁵ Lamb's allusions to 'those old evenings, when we used to sit and speculate (do you remember them, Sir?) at our old Salutation tavern, upon Pantisocracy and golden days to come on earth', remind Southey of his past Pantisocratic fervour and his turncoat politics.³³⁶ But there is also another reader being invited to 'overhear' Elia's letter: Hazlitt himself, to whom Lamb offers the hand of friendship after a misunderstanding on Hazlitt's part had driven him from his old friends, aiming to reassure Hazlitt by telling Southey that, 'I never in thought swerved from him [i.e. Hazlitt], I never betrayed him, I never slackened in my admiration of him, I was the same to him (neither better nor worse) though he could not see it, as in the days when he thought fit to trust me'.³³⁷

By using the *London Magazine* to address one particular friend in this way, Lamb adopts a Hazlittian method of dealing with his friends. For Hazlitt, there seems to have been no boundary between public and private spheres of discourse. During a quarrel over Hazlitt's criticism of Shelley in the *London Magazine*, Hunt accused Hazlitt of possessing 'a misconception of anything private'.³³⁸ Hazlitt replied by inviting Hunt to play out their argument in the field of periodical journalism: 'I [...] wish you would write a character of me

³³⁴ William Ruddick, 'Coleridge against Romantic Autobiography: Charles Lamb's 'Letter of Elia to Robert Southey'', *Prose Studies*, 13:3 (December 1990), 115-28, 122.

³³⁵ 'Letter of Elia to Robert Southey, Esquire', *LM*, (Oct. 1823), 400-7, 402.

³³⁶ *LM*, (Oct. 1823), 402.

³³⁷ *LM*, (Oct. 1823), 405.

³³⁸ Quoted in Howe, 319.

for the next number [of the *Examiner*]. I want to know why every body has such a dislike to me'.³³⁹ Hazlitt had a strange and harsh method of dealing with his friends in public, yet expected his friends to take a similar tactic. Lamb's letter to Southey acknowledges the unpredictable attitudes that Hazlitt took to his friends in print: 'At this instant, he may be preparing for me some compliment, [...] or [...] he may be about to read a lecture on my weaknesses'.³⁴⁰

True to form, Hazlitt made his reply to Lamb in the essay 'On the Pleasure of Hating', written in November-December 1823, but not published until the *Plain Speaker* (1826). Like Elia, Hazlitt reminisces about their old circle of friends (depicted in 'On the Conversation of Authors'):

I have quarrelled with almost all of my old friends, (they might say this is owing to my bad temper, but, they have also quarrelled with one another. What is become of 'that set of whist-players,' celebrated by ELIA in his notable *Epistle to Robert Southey, Esq.* (and now I think of it—that I myself have celebrated in this very volume) 'that for so many years called Admiral Burney friend?' They are scattered, like last year's snow.³⁴¹

Hazlitt uses the public vehicle of his essay to obliquely address Lamb, commenting that, 'I think I must be friends with Lamb again, since he has written that magnanimous Letter to Southey, and told him a piece of his mind!' (122). Hazlitt also makes more subtle friendly gestures: the sight of a spider 'crawling along the matted floor of the room where I sit' brings to mind 'the admirable *Lines to a Spider*' written by Leigh Hunt, with whom Hazlitt had also bickered over the years (118). In public addresses such as these, which offer up the friendships and antipathies, the quarrels and reunions of a friendly circle to the general readership, Hazlitt pushes the confessional rhetoric of intimacy to his own brusque and uncompromising extreme.

³³⁹ Sikes, 206.

³⁴⁰ *LM*, (Oct. 1823), 405.

³⁴¹ 'On the Pleasure of Hating', *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, vol. 8, ed. Duncan Wu, *The Plain Speaker*, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), 118-126, 121.

Lamb's letters and the essays of 'Elia'

It has long been recognized, ever since George Barnett writing half a century ago, that Lamb's essays frequently draw on ideas and images which he had been developing, repeating, and sharpening in letters to his friends and in conversation over many years.³⁴² Felicity James has shown how Lamb's earliest essay, 'The Londoner' (published in the *Morning Post*, February 1802) incorporates material from letters to Wordsworth and Robert Lloyd.³⁴³ Lamb's letters to his friends functioned as an exploratory literary space for him to play with ideas and style.

Lamb's compositional method shows how supposedly 'confidential' manuscript modes of writing like letters intersected with the 'public' realm of print. Furthermore, as I have suggested earlier in this chapter, the essays gesture towards this 'confidential', coterie reading audience within the public magazine. Addressing these multiple, coexisting audiences, Lamb's essays are drawn to explore ideas about reading, sympathy, and the transmission of emotions.

The letter as a generic form, as I will explore in more detail in the next chapter, could make writers particularly self-conscious about the act of writing, evoking concerns not just about fitting the subject and style to the recipient and seeking to ensure the reader's sympathy or comprehension, but also about the effect of temporality. This issue forms the basis of Lamb's essay, 'Distant Correspondents,' which arises from the background of Lamb's long correspondence with Barron Field in New South Wales, and Thomas Manning in China. The *London Magazine* prints Lamb's essay, subtitled 'in a letter to B. F. Esq., Sydney, New South Wales,' in the same issue as the 'Narrative of a Voyage to New South Wales' by 'B. F.', thereby highlighting the connection between the two writers and demonstrating to its readers that Elia's epistolary essay has a root in a genuine correspondence.³⁴⁴ Elia complains that,

³⁴² George Barnett, *Charles Lamb: the Evolution of Elia*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1964), 66-103.

³⁴³ James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth*, 201.

³⁴⁴ 'Distant Correspondents', *LM*, (March 1822), 282-5.

The weary world of waters between us oppresses the imagination. It is difficult to conceive how a scrawl of mine should ever stretch across it. It is a sort of presumption to expect that one's thoughts should live so far. It is like writing for posterity; and reminds me of one of Mrs. Rowe's superscriptions, 'Alcander to Strephon, in the shades.'³⁴⁵

A letter sent overseas has a vulnerable status, as Lamb remarks to Thomas Manning in China: 'it is such a forlorn hope to send a scrap of paper straggling over wide oceans'.³⁴⁶ The practical difficulty of sending letters overseas is demonstrated by the fact that, on Christmas Day and Boxing Day 1815, Lamb wrote Manning two different letters—one addressed to Canton, the other to St. Helena—because he could not predict where Manning would be in six months' time. Lamb's letters to Field and Manning frequently comment upon the problems which arise from the time delay between him writing the letters and his recipients reading them. Back in 1807, Manning wrote to Lamb expressing concerns which prefigure the essay:

How strange & unsocial it seems to be at such a distance. I can't ask whether Mary has received her letter. I sent it last spring! I am sure it is not arrived yet, but it ought to be long before this reaches England; & it would be two years before I could get an answer to the question!! Shall I condole poor Holcroft? No! rather let me hope that his sorrow was forgotten in some new success before I even heard of it.³⁴⁷

A letter to Barron Field describes how the discrepancy between 'my *Now*' and 'your *Now*' undermines the writer's veracity: after jokingly mixing in some invented stories when recounting news about their mutual friends, Lamb reflects that, 'half the truths I have sent you in this letter will become lies before they reach you, and some of the lies (which I have mixed for variety's sake, and to exercise your judgment in the finding of them out) may be turned into sad realities before you shall be called upon to detect them'.³⁴⁸ Lamb teases Manning, who had been absent from England for over ten years, with an exaggerated description of the changes that have occurred since his departure:

³⁴⁵ *LM*, (March 1822), 282.

³⁴⁶ Marris, III. 208.

³⁴⁷ *The Letters of Thomas Manning to Charles Lamb*, ed. G. A. Anderson, (London: Martin Secker, 1925), 100-1.

³⁴⁸ Marris, III. 252.

Empires have been overturned, crowns trodden into dust, the face of the western world quite changed; your friends have all got old—[...] St. Paul's Church is a heap of ruins; the Monument isn't half so high as you knew it, divers parts being successively taken down which the ravages of time had rendered dangerous—[...] Scarce here and there one will be able to make out your face; all your opinions will be out of date, your jokes obsolete, your puns rejected with fastidiousness as wit of the last age. Your way of mathematics has already given way to a new method³⁴⁹

In this passage, Lamb builds, develops, and exaggerates his images in a similar style to his essays: the letter, like the essay, is an exploratory space—a free form that can be used to represent a mental reverie, or the movement of the mind through various subjects. The distorted chronology is illustrated with images of ruin—the ageing and deaths of friends, the crumbling of buildings and civilizations. Christopher Nield has suggested that such images of ruin speak of an increasingly strained correspondence between Manning and Lamb caused by the demands of distance.³⁵⁰ However, the letter-writer's worries about obsolescence—of opinions, jokes, or even 'the phrases of our English letters'—also hold true of the essay-writer who knows his work may not remain fresh for the tastes of posterity.³⁵¹

Even though the magazine will be read by a contemporaneous audience, Lamb's 'Distant Correspondents' suggests the writer's unease at his reception: one cannot tell if the jokes will carry, or anticipate the tastes of the public readership. While Lamb deploys the epistolary feint of 'insensibly chatting' with his correspondent, the pose of inclusive familiarity is obliquely directed at the reader of the *London Magazine*, who is asked to imaginatively inhabit the 'you' being addressed (284). As David Stewart has suggested, however, while magazine writing can pose as conversation, the distance between writer and reader is unbridgeable: instead, Lamb's essay 'elegizes the distance between them'.³⁵²

Lamb's 'Distant Correspondents' suggests that the temporal and physical distance between writer and reader makes it more difficult for sympathetic feeling to be transmitted

³⁴⁹ Marris, III. 204-5.

³⁵⁰ Christopher S. Nield, 'Distant Correspondents: Charles Lamb, Exploration and the Writing of Letters', *Romanticism*, 10:1 (April 2004), 79-94; 90-92.

³⁵¹ *LM*, (March 1822), 284.

³⁵² Stewart, 158.

between them. Eighteenth-century philosophy had frequently emphasised that it was the impact of sensory impressions or the visual sight of another's emotions that led one individual to sympathise with another. Hume had theorised that when one individual observes another's behaviour, they form an idea of the other's emotional state. The sympathetic imagination then converts the idea into a sense impression, and so the individual comes to feel the same emotion as the other with whom they are sympathising. For Adam Smith, sympathy also involved a spectatorial element, so that, 'Grief and joy, for example, strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any one, at once affect the spectator with some degree of a like painful or agreeable emotion'.³⁵³ However, for Lamb, as for Hazlitt, sympathy is created primarily through the imagination, rather than by such mechanical means contingent on physical presence. Problems ensue nevertheless: in Hazlitt's philosophy, it is just as difficult to project our sympathies forwards in time to encompass our future selves as it is to project our sympathies into the experience of another person. Temporal distance creates a difficulty for the sympathetic imagination.

In Lamb's essay, the temporal distance between the moments of writing and reading inhibits the reader's ability and motivation to enter into the writer's emotions. So, for example, while 'F.' might envy Elia his theatre trip, for the 'relish left on my mental palate', were it merely a few days ago; reading the letter 'ten months hence, your envy or your sympathy would be as useless as a passion spent upon the dead'.³⁵⁴ The fact that the time difference between writer and reader negates the 'hateful emotion' of envy is not necessarily a positive thing; rather, 'F.'s envy is a token of the fact that he can enter into Elia's relish of the theatre—it is a marker of their shared tastes.

Lamb repeatedly uses images of tasting and relishing foods to express sympathetic identification between writer and reader. In contrast to the letter which has gone stale on its journey to foreign lands, 'in twenty-four hours a friend in Cumberland gets it as fresh as if it

³⁵³ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 5.

³⁵⁴ *LM*, (March 1822), 282.

came in ice' (282). Sentiment, Lamb writes, is the kind of dish which 'requires to be served up hot; or sent off in water-plates, that your friend may have it almost as warm as yourself. If it have time to cool, it is the most tasteless of all cold meats' (283). A pun, likewise, 'hath a hearty kind of present ear-kissing smack with it; you can no more transmit it in its pristine flavour, than you can send a kiss' (284). In typically Elian fashion, the ability to share in a taste, relish or flavour is the starting point of an amicable relationship. For Hazlitt, likewise, taste (in the sensory as well as aesthetic sense) provides a starting point from which to understand another's experience. In 'On the Conversation of Authors', Hazlitt described how all manner of individuals were welcomed to Lamb's parties: 'If a person liked any thing, if he took snuff heartily, it was sufficient. He would understand, by analogy, the pungency of other things, besides Irish blackguard, or Scotch rappee'.³⁵⁵ Both Hazlitt and Lamb suggest that, in addition to the powers of the sympathetic imagination, there is a tactile, physical, sensory element to understanding another's experience (and imaginatively replicating it in oneself).

The physical presence of a speaker and listeners can however enable certain kinds of sympathetic exchange unavailable in writing. The ability to make a pun, in particular, seems dependent on the answering presence of a listener. Such jests, Lamb writes, are so time-sensitive that they 'will scarce endure to be transported by hand from this room to the next'.³⁵⁶ A pun can have only a 'brief existence,' like lightning, and thrives on instant acknowledgement, so that 'A pun is reflected from a friend's face as from a mirror,' an image which suggests that the hearty recognition of a shared pun creates a sympathetic merging of identities between punster and audience (284). Lamb's review of Field's *First Fruits of Australian Poetry* (1819) in the *Examiner* had told the story of 'a merry Captain' (James Burney), who,

prides himself on having planted the first pun in Otaheite. It was in their own language, and the islanders first looked at him, then stared at one another, and all

³⁵⁵ *LM*, (Sept. 1820), 257.

³⁵⁶ *LM*, (March 1822), 283-4.

at once burst out in a genial laugh. It was a stranger, and as a stranger they gave it welcome.³⁵⁷

The pun and its answering laughter, reflected between the faces of punster and audience, permits a sympathetic bond to be formed between strangers. The speaker's physical presence adds something which is irreplaceable in the exchange of writing and reading. This sense lies behind Lamb's depiction of Coleridge as a compelling orator, who repeats 'Kubla Khan', 'so enchantingly that it irradiates & brings heaven & Elysian bowers into my parlour while he sings or says it'.³⁵⁸ Without the enchanting presence of Coleridge himself, however, Lamb worries that the poem, when exposed to the 'the lantern of typography' may be 'an owl that wont bear day light'.³⁵⁹ In the same letter as he makes these observations, Lamb reflects on the effect of the physical presence of the two Lake poets, with their superior genius, on himself and Mary. Lamb's letter complains of his own inferiority and weak sense of selfhood, unable to withstand the influence of Coleridge, who is depicted as a kind of demoniac possessor, like Geraldine in 'Christabel':

'Tis enough to be within the whiff & wind of **his** genius, for us not to possess our souls in quiet. **If** I lived with him or the *Author of the Excursion*, I should in a very little time lose my own identity, & be dragged along in the current of other peoples thoughts, hampered in a net. [...] I hold the personal presence of the two mentioned potent spirits at a rate as high as any, but I pay dearer, what amuses others **robs me of my self**, my mind is positively discharged into their greater currents, but flows with a welling violence.³⁶⁰

The metaphor of the river-current initially suggests Lamb is swept away from himself (down Alph the sacred river, presumably) and confined, yet the 'current' image recurs with a rather more powerful implication. Lamb's mind, 'positively discharged,' implies a lightning bolt or electrical charge, released with violent energy; the language implies that the process *fuses* him to the creative energy of the poets, rather than merely obliterating him. Lamb's letter therefore quietly asserts his own poetic responsiveness and sensibility: to borrow Keats's

³⁵⁷ *E.*, (16 Jan. 1820), 39.

³⁵⁸ Marris, III. 215.

³⁵⁹ Marris, III. 215.

³⁶⁰ Marris, III. 215-6.

phrase, Lamb seems to possess a kind of ‘negative capability’, able to be drawn forth into other selves. Despite being marked by tension as Charles and Mary seek to resist being drawn into Coleridge’s encompassing ego, Lamb’s response nevertheless shows the strength of his sympathetic imagination.

Sympathy and benevolence

Lamb returned to the topic of sympathy later in 1822 in a letter to Coleridge which formed the basis of the essay ‘A Dissertation on Roast Pig’. Lamb’s essay on roast pig, like ‘Distant Correspondents’, addresses the question of whether the capacity of the sympathetic imagination is limited. As in ‘Distant correspondents,’ the imagery of tasting and relishing food is used to evoke sympathetic identification. Lamb attempts to involve himself in his friends’ identities by imagining their relish of gustatory pleasures and vicariously participating in it. Elia claims that ‘I take as great an interest in my friend’s pleasures, his relishes, and proper satisfactions, as in mine own,’ so that in sending his friends presents of game, ‘I love to taste them, as it were, upon the tongue of my friend.’³⁶¹ However, ‘Elia’ suggests that he should by rights keep roast pigs for his own consumption rather than giving them away to his friends, since a pig is ‘a blessing, so particularly adapted, predestined, I may say, to my individual palate,’ that it would be an affront to God or Nature to send them away, ‘under pretext of friendship, or I know not what’ (247). Lamb’s particularly refined taste for pork, he claims, gives him rights of ownership.

Arising as it does in a letter to Coleridge, Lamb’s essay seems to draw on a legacy of shared exchanges. Lamb’s attempt to sympathetically imagine his friend’s relish for roast pigs provides a comical counterpoint to Coleridge’s ‘This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison.’ In that early poem, Coleridge had described himself imaginatively participating in Lamb’s experience

³⁶¹ ‘A Dissertation on Roast Pig’, *LM*, (Sept. 1822), 245-248; 247.

of a familiar walk through the Somerset landscape. The poem, it has been noted, is a more optimistic response to Wordsworth's 'Lines left upon a Seat'—a poem which depicts a solitary misanthrope trapped within the limits of his own experience.³⁶² In contrast, Coleridge is made vicariously happy imagining how Lamb will take pleasure in the various sights: 'A delight / Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad / As I myself were there' (ll. 45-7).³⁶³ Coleridge's sympathetic imaginative participation in Lamb's experience appears, at first sight, to bridge the two friends' individual subjective perceptions. However, as many critics have noted, the poem relies on a series of ambiguous modal verbs: possibly indicative, possibly imperative.³⁶⁴

While Coleridge can speculate that,

So my Friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
Silent with swimming sense

(ll. 37-9)

there is an implicit possibility that, while Lamb *may* stand there and have the same experience, equally, he might not. William Ulmer suggests that Coleridge's poem responds to the religious attitudes Lamb had expressed in his 1796 letters: by placing Lamb in the company of the Wordsworths, and 'collapsing Lamb's viewpoint into his own by crediting Lamb with responses similar to his, Coleridge offers his friend an escape from the spiritual isolation lamented in his "Religion is not a solitary thing" letter'; nevertheless, as Lamb himself recognised, the poem 'merely showed [Coleridge's] willingness to use Lamb as prop for an exercise in complacent self-projection'.³⁶⁵ As Felicity James notes, Lamb is 'defined mainly in relation to the poet himself' and therefore 'may simply be another, ventriloquist self'.³⁶⁶ Gurion Taussig suggests furthermore that there is an aggressive element to the spiritual power that Coleridge gains in the poem, arguing that 'Coleridge's sympathy rests upon a rhetorical

³⁶² James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth*, 103-6.

³⁶³ 'This Lime Tree Bower my Prison,' *The Annual Anthology*, (Bristol: Biggs & co., 1800), II. 140-4 (*PWC*, II.: 1, 480-7).

³⁶⁴ Michael Simpson 'Coleridge's Swinging Moods and the Revision of "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison"', *Style* 33:1 (1999) 21-42; 27. See also Everest on the 'confusion of grammar' in the poem (254).

³⁶⁵ Ulmer, 'The Rhetorical Occasion of "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison"', 22; 23.

³⁶⁶ James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth*, 109.

impoverishment of his friend's spirit'.³⁶⁷ James argues that by the mid-1790s, Coleridge, Lamb, and Wordsworth were all engaged in a struggle to negotiate the relationship between self and community, and that Lamb in particular, had a 'growing awareness of the problems and limitations of sympathetic identification and response, and the difficulties and responsibilities of claiming sympathy with others' (85). Lamb's concerns about the possibilities and limitations of sympathy do not appear to have abated with the passing of years; rather, it seems that writing to his old friend leads Lamb to revisit the preoccupations which had shaped the early years of their friendship.

In his essay on roast pig Lamb uses the example of culinary pleasures to examine the question of the limits of sympathetic identification. Like Coleridge, Lamb's ability to imagine his friends' tastes can only be achieved by projecting his own pleasures and antipathies onto another, in an attempt to guess at their potential response. Both Coleridge's poem and Lamb's essay implicitly suggest that sympathetically identifying with another person can, in fact, involve subsuming the independent identity of another person into one's own ego and constructing them simply as a mirror for one's own ideas and emotions. What appears to be 'sympathy' can in fact be construed as selfishness.

In addition to exploring the problems of sympathy, the essay also explores the moral complexities underlying Elia's motives for benevolent actions to his friends or acts of charity. In his letter to Coleridge, Lamb remarks that he will give away the tasty delights of his table only in cases 'where the fine feeling of benevolence giveth a higher smack than the sensual rarity'.³⁶⁸ The moral quality of benevolence is described in unexpectedly gustatory terms—in Lamb's view it can give the benefactor a kind of earthly, self-satisfying relish. Lamb slips into the kind of archaic language ('giveth') in his letter which is central to Elia's stylistic identity, showing how his letter and essay-writing appear to be stylistically intertwined. Lamb's essay explores how the act of giving has a relish that arises partly from the pride of self-

³⁶⁷ Taussig, 236.

³⁶⁸ Lucas II. 317.

congratulation; a reflection that leads Lamb to associate his thoughts on pig with the anecdote of himself as a child giving away a plum-cake (which his aunt had given to him) to a beggar. With a dark humour, the piglet for roasting is described as the true example of selfless benevolence, who ‘helpeth, as far as his little means extend, all around’.³⁶⁹

Lamb’s story about the plum-cake, included in both the letter to Coleridge and the essay, subtly engages with the legacy of eighteenth century moral philosophy, which had shown a recurrent interest in the idea of benevolence and self-interest. Shaftesbury had asserted that even benevolent actions needed to be motivated by the ‘natural affections’ rather than ‘self-good’ in order to be truly virtuous: ‘Let him, in any particular, act ever so well, if at the bottom it be that selfish affection alone which moves him, he is in himself still vicious’.³⁷⁰ Similarly, under Hutcheson’s moral system, as Adam Smith described, ‘virtue must consist in pure and disinterested benevolence alone’ since ‘the mixture of any selfish motive, like that of a baser alloy, diminished or took away altogether the merit which would otherwise have belong to any action’.³⁷¹ More recently, Hazlitt had been preoccupied with examining similar questions: his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* had argued that it was through the same means—the sympathetic imagination—that human beings were capable of self-interest in their own future selves and disinterested benevolence towards others.³⁷² Lamb’s tale draws on a Shaftesburyan/Hutchesonian moral system: little Lamb practices ‘the coxcombry of taught charity’ when, in an act of benevolence to a stranger, he gives away the cake; his act is not a disinterested one, however, because he takes pride in what he calls in the essay his ‘vanity of self-denial’.³⁷³

³⁶⁹ *LM*, (Sept. 1822), 247.

³⁷⁰ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 171.

³⁷¹ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 362-3.

³⁷² William Hazlitt, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, (London: J. Johnson, 1805), 3. Hazlitt repeats his argument in his later essays on ‘Self-Love and Benevolence’ (published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1828) which are depicted (as the initials on Hazlitt’s manuscript make clear) as a conversation between himself, Lamb, and their circle of acquaintances.

³⁷³ Lucas, II. 318; *LM*, (Sept. 1822), 248.

The essay also subtly addresses the issue of whether general benevolence is in conflict with particular attachments. As I have outlined in the introduction, this was an issue much contested during the 1790s: in response to Burke's emphasis on the importance of the ties of blood, Godwin argued that such localised affections inhibited that spread of general benevolence. As numerous critics have noted, Coleridge had argued against Godwin's philosophy, insisting that the ties of close affection facilitated and strengthened wider sociable feelings: 'General Benevolence is begotten and rendered permanent by social and domestic affections [...] The intensity of private attachments encourages, not prevents, universal Benevolence'.³⁷⁴

Lamb's essay delves into the implications of these theories. The child feels a moral qualm only when he realises the ingratitude which he has shown to his aunt by frustrating her attempt to bestow an act of kindness on him—the child Lamb had shown an 'unfeeling' lack of regard for the kindly ties of domestic affections in an act of affected and hypocritical selflessness. Familial feeling seems to conflict with the child's act of charity. With Lamb's subtle humour, however, the child's feelings of regret are also stirred, in part, but the memory of how tasty the cake smelled. Reading the 'Dissertation' in the light of its genesis in a letter to Coleridge illuminates Lamb's subject matter, showing how he makes a light-hearted yet complex engagement with Coleridge's ideas from the 1790s. It seems that, even into the 1820s, writing to Coleridge persistently stirs Lamb to a playful engagement with ideas which had been common topics of debate in their youthful days spent at the Salutation-and-Cat tavern. The philosophical context of Lamb's essays resonates on a private, 'coterie' level as well as a public one, reminding Coleridge—who could perhaps be termed the 'ideal' reader of the essay—of their shared past.

³⁷⁴ *Lectures 1795*, 46.

Lamb and Coleridge: books and reading

Shared reading and discussions about books played a significant part in the long literary friendship between Lamb and Coleridge. Sending a parcel of books to Coleridge in November 1802, Lamb advises him that:

If you find the Miltons in certain parts dirtied and soiled with a crumb of right Gloucester blacked in the candle, (my usual supper,) or peradventure a stray ash of tobacco wafted into the crevices, look to that passage more especially: depend upon it, it contains good matter.³⁷⁵

The marks of Lamb's reading act as a way of sharing his mind and taste (both literary and gustatory) with his friend. H. J. Jackson has noted numerous examples of eighteenth and nineteenth century readers annotating books to be shared with their friends.³⁷⁶ Shared reading provides a mutual basis (of shared knowledge, and shared taste) for friendship, and the pencil traces of another's responses in the seemingly confidential space of the margins of books offer the spectre of companionship.

In recent years, Coleridge's extensive marginalia have become the subject of critical study. However, he gained a reputation as an annotator of books during his own lifetime. In Lamb's December 1820 essay, 'The Two Races of Men', which centres on the topic of borrowing and lending, Lamb advises his reader that should they lend their books,

let it be to such a one as S. T. C.—he will return them (generally anticipating the time appointed) with usury: enriched with annotations, tripling their value. I have had experience. Many are these precious MSS. of his—(in *matter* oftentimes, and almost in *quantity* not unfrequently, vying with the originals)—in no very clerkly hand—legible in my Daniel: in old Burton; in Sir Thomas Browne; and those abstruser cogitations of the Greville, now, alas! wandering in Pagan lands.—I counsel thee, shut not thy heart, nor thy library, against S. T. C.³⁷⁷

Lamb's essay, in addition to alluding to a long friendship established through shared reading and marginalia, echoes a letter Lamb wrote to Coleridge, rebuking him for plundering his

³⁷⁵ Marris, II. 84-5.

³⁷⁶ Jackson, 171.

³⁷⁷ 'The Two Races of Men,' *LM*, (Dec. 1820), 623-5, 625.

bookshelves.³⁷⁸ Coleridge's repeated borrowing of Lamb's books had been the cause of a long-running and semi-serious quarrel between them. Several of Lamb's books annotated by Coleridge survive. In a few of them, Coleridge makes annotations directly addressed to Lamb, or makes the kind of punning jests likely to appeal to Lamb's sense of humour. In Lamb's copy of Jeremy Taylor's *Polemicall Discourses*, Coleridge alludes to their youthful shared experiences: 'O noctes Atticæ at the Cat and Salutation, Blood Alley, Newgate Market, when Butchers grasped their Steel, and listened to ~~my~~ our knock-down Arguments'.³⁷⁹ In Lamb's copy of Samuel Johnson's *Works*, Coleridge rebukes him for his Unitarianism (though, of course, recognising that he had once shared it). Commenting on a passage describing the Emperor Constantius' death-bed regrets at innovating in matters of faith, Coleridge comments:

Charles! Dearest Charles! let it not have been ~~uttered~~ recorded in vain! [...] persons, who have never been to Newgate, may have been in Essex Street Chapel, not far distant—Alas! I am assured of this by my own experience—³⁸⁰

As well as being a space to share thoughts, quibbles, and jests with a friend, Coleridge's annotations are relics of him, as well as memorials of friendship. The handwritten notes, Lamb's essay implies, endow the books with sentimental value, as well as the intellectual worth of S. T. C.'s thoughts. Coleridge often wrote rather morbid little notes in his friends' books complaining that he was near death, giving the date, and marking his own presence with a kind of 'Coleridge was here'. Lamb teased him about these in a letter (signed 'Elia') written a few months after 'The Two Races of Men', sending Coleridge a postscript with an, 'Extract from a MS. Note of S.T.C. in my Beaumont and Fletcher, dated April 17th 1807.

³⁷⁸ Lucas, II. 284-6. E. V. Lucas speculates that this letter dates to Autumn 1820, although it may perhaps have an earlier date since it describes Coleridge taking away Lamb's copy of Luther's *Table Talk*, and one of Coleridge's marginal notes in that book is dated 25 September 1819 (*CM*, III. 753).

³⁷⁹ *CM*, V. 531.

³⁸⁰ *CM*, III. 146.

“*Midnight*. God bless you, dear Charles Lamb, I am dying; I feel I have not many weeks left”³⁸¹.

Lamb’s ‘Two Races of Men’ develops images first expressed in his letter to Coleridge. In his letter, Lamb portrays his own welfare and identity as intertwined with his books, complaining to Coleridge that, ‘You never come but you take away some folio that is part of my existence’; and that ‘a huge fissure [in his bookshelves] suddenly disclosed to me the true nature of the damage I had sustained’.³⁸² In his ‘Elia’ essay, Lamb expands upon his idea that books and identities are intertwined, personifying his collection as a number of acquaintances with their own appropriate characteristics: ‘Here stood the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, in sober state. There loitered the *Complete Angler*; quiet as in life, by some stream side’.³⁸³

In both the letter and essay Lamb uses the image of the books as abandoned children: the ‘orphans’ that he welcomes into his home, treating both natives and strangers just the same. Yet Lamb also presents the books as commodities stored in his warehouse on behalf of his friends. The contrasting representations of the books—sometimes as friends, sometimes as merchandise—expresses the dual role of essayist himself in the literary marketplace, who offers himself as the reader’s companion, and yet is in fact aiming to have his work bought and consumed by the reading market.

As well as using similar images to his letter, Lamb’s essay continues to pursue the same ideas and themes. Lamb’s letter to Coleridge had highlighted how scales of value depend on the individual’s viewpoint. While complaining about his friends borrowing his books, Lamb confesses to his own moral failing in keeping hold of a book that does not belong to him by a sort of wilful inaction: a book which,

is the property of a friend, who does not know its value, not indeed have I been very sedulous in explaining to him the estimate of it; but was rather contented in giving a

³⁸¹ Lucas, II. 295.

³⁸² Lucas, II. 284.

³⁸³ *LM*, (Dec. 1820), 623-5, 625.

sort of corroboration to a hint that he let fall, as to its suspected to be not genuine, so that in all probability it would have fallen to me as a deodand.³⁸⁴

The letter poses a mismatch between the book's monetary value, which rests on it being 'genuine,' and Lamb's appreciation of its literary value, which leads him to want to keep it regardless. Likewise, the essay, 'The Two Races of Men,' hinges on the idea that value is subjective: Bigod, the essay's archetypal borrower, accords no value to money at all.

Lamb's guilty confession in the letter has a parallel in the essay, where he hints that he has subtly manipulated the rights of ownership. Elia presents himself as acting charitably by taking in the 'orphan' books, and charging 'no warehouse-room' for their storage; on the other hand, however, he makes no effort to find out 'their true lineage' and restore them to their rightful owners.³⁸⁵ Elia's attitude to the books makes him similar to the good-natured borrowers of money who confound distinctions of ownership:

What a liberal confounding of those pedantic distinctions of *meum* and *tuum*! or rather, what a noble simplification of language (beyond Tooke), resolving these supposed opposites into one clear, intelligible pronoun adjective!³⁸⁶

Lamb ironically presents these borrowers of money as establishing a radical notion of shared property—a touch which, considering the essay's genesis in the letter to Coleridge, suggests that Lamb is gently teasing his friend for retaining a Pantisocratic attitude towards Lamb's books, even if he has otherwise abandoned his old principles. This kind of gentle jibing seems much in keeping with the kind of notes—like the reference to attending Essex Street Chapel—that Coleridge wrote in Lamb's books.

'S. T. C.' and the public

In turning his letter into an essay, Lamb fictionalizes Coleridge into two contrasting characters—'Comberbatch' and 'S. T. C.'—one of whom, of course, would be far more

³⁸⁴ Lucas, II. 284-5.

³⁸⁵ *LM*, (Dec. 1820), 625.

³⁸⁶ *LM*, (Dec. 1820), 623.

recognisable to the general reader. ‘Comberbatch’ (an in-joke for those friends who would recognise the false name that Coleridge took when he enlisted in the Dragoons) plunders Elia’s shelves and is ‘matchless in his depredations’—he is a ‘mutilator of collections’, and consumes the books with a kind of gluttony: ‘he will make one hearty meal on your viands, if he can give no account of the platter after it’ (623). Like an unstoppable force (and not unlike the irrepressible borrowers of Elia’s money), Comberbatch makes his absent-minded substitutions of books: ‘if he sometimes, like the sea, sweeps away a treasure, at another time, sea-like, he throws up as rich an equivalent to match it’ (623). ‘S. T. C.’, in contrast, returns the books ‘with usury; enriched with annotations tripling their value’, with ‘precious MSS.’ of copious annotations (623).

Comberbatch’s gustatory relish for books, which leads him to devour Elia’s collection as a ‘hearty meal’, is, however, a sign that their tastes are in sympathy with one another. Lamb attributes to ‘Comberbatch’ the theory that ‘the title to property in a book [...] is in exact ratio to the claimant’s powers of understanding and appreciating the same’ (624). ‘Comberbatch’, appropriating Lamb’s books, appears to think that he is their best interpreter. However, S. T. Coleridge seems to be positioned as the best interpreter or reader of the essay, able to bring to it his contextual knowledge of their ongoing conversation in letters and marginalia.

Lamb’s final plea to his magazine readers, ‘I counsel thee, shut not thy heart, nor thy library, against S. T. C.,’ creates a fictional bridge of intimacy between his two coexisting readerships, by supposing, for a moment at least, that they could interact (625). The joke, of course, being that the reader can indeed have the well-known man-of-letters ‘S. T. C.’ in their own library in the form of Coleridge’s own books.

Lamb’s playful assignment of two different identities to Coleridge echoes not just his own dual identity as Lamb and Elia, but also the manifold representations of ‘S. T. C.’ in the periodical press. In the same issue of the *London Magazine* (December 1820) as Lamb’s ‘Two Races of Men’, an article by John Scott placed the public personality of Coleridge at the heart

of a quarrel with John Lockhart of *Blackwood's Magazine*. Chief among Scott's many criticisms was that the magazine had treacherously published a supposedly private letter sent by Coleridge. Scott's article portrays Coleridge as a somewhat naïve and 'over-confiding writer', who had thought that 'Peter Morris', the pseudonymous author of an article in his praise, was to be trusted.³⁸⁷ Scott writes that,

Mr. Coleridge has been since *boaxed* into believing the author of the above well-inclined towards him! Under the influence of this idea, with all the simplicity of a metaphysical philosopher, he lately addressed a private letter to the present Editor of Blackwood's Magazine, which private letter was no sooner received, *than it was sent off the Blackwood's printing office*; and in No. 42, there, sure enough it appears, with the signature of S. T. Coleridge (not Samuel Taylor in full) and an accompanying note from *Dr. Morris*, calling attention to it as, "a very *characteristic* letter of one, whom," says the Doctor, "I well know that *you*," Christopher North—alias Doctor Morris himself, "agree with *me* in honouring in the highest!" (675)

For Scott, the use of pseudonyms by the editor of *Blackwood's*, writing under the two names (or 'noms de guerre') of Morris and North, is symbolic of the magazine's duplicitousness, in praising Coleridge after having previously abused him. Earlier *Blackwood's* articles, Scott notes, had alluded to Coleridge deserting his wife and children, and had depicted 'S. T. C.' 'lying dead drunk in the house of a Brummagem patriot' (675).

Scott argues that, 'If there is one point of honour more settled and recognized than another in society, it is the sanctity of a private letter' (676). In publishing a private letter, *Blackwood's* have taken 'an unwarrantable liberty with private respectability' (676). However, it is interesting to note that Coleridge's own version of the incident is completely different—he claimed to have been aware all along of Morris's identity, and denied that the letter was intended to be strictly private. Scott's angry reflections on the 'sanctity of a private letter' form an interesting comparison with the way that Lamb draws on ideas rehearsed in his own correspondence when writing his essays for magazine readers. For Coleridge and Lamb, manuscript genres like letters and marginalia which might seem by nature 'confidential' can still have the potential to reach a public, print readership.

³⁸⁷ 'The Mohock Magazine', *LM*, (Dec. 1820), 666-685; 676.

Indeed, Coleridge had published his own marginalia a year before Lamb's essay. In November 1819, Coleridge published an edited extract of a letter and marginalia originally written in a copy of Thomas Brown's *Works* intended for Sarah Hutchinson. The framing letter to the editor (probably written by Coleridge himself) argued for the importance of marginalia within the corpus of his work, and offered it as a specimen of his conversation:

It is well known to those who are in the habit of intercourse with Mr. Coleridge, that not the smallest, and, in the opinion of many, not the least valuable part of his manuscripts exists in the blank leaves and margins of books; whether his own, or those of friends, or even in those that have come in his way casually, seems to have been a matter altogether indifferent. The following is transcribed from the blank leaf of a copy of Sir T. Brown's *Works* in folio, and is a fair specimen of these *Marginalia*; and much more nearly than any of his printed works, gives the style of Coleridge's conversation.³⁸⁸

Coleridge thus sought to use his marginalia to further his public reputation as talker, thinker, and lecturer. The marginalia that are, supposedly, the closest the magazine reader could get to Coleridge's conversation pretend to offer the reading public access to the personality and presence of the well-known man-of-letters.

Furthermore, in the 'private' letter that he had sent to 'Peter Morris' of *Blackwood's* (the publication of which John Scott had so objected to), Coleridge had written how, in gratitude for Morris's praise, he was sending copies of his works, covered with marginal comments, which Coleridge appears to consider part of the gift, writing that, 'I flatter myself their value will not be diminished by their having been corrected, and, I hope, sometimes amended, by myself'.³⁸⁹ In representing Coleridge as a copious annotator in 'The Two Races of Men', Lamb, in addition to making a private allusion to a friendship sustained by a history of shared reading, also draws upon a public image which Coleridge had already been establishing for himself in the periodical press.

Through the publication of supposedly 'private' or 'confidential' writing like letters and marginalia, the magazines and their writers (sometimes playfully, sometimes maliciously)

³⁸⁸ 'Character of Sir Thomas Brown as a Writer', *BM*, (Nov. 1819), 197-198; 197.

³⁸⁹ 'Letter to Peter Morris, M. D.', *BM*, (Sept. 1820), 629-631; 631.

openly undermined the idea that private and public audiences could be completely distinguished from one another. Lamb's essays self-consciously invoke and play with the idea of these multiple, coexisting and overlapping audiences, through the use of coterie references available to particular readers, and his free reworking of his own letters for a public audience.

Ways of reading

As I have briefly outlined in the introduction, Coleridge theorised that the best kind of reader was one able to achieve a sympathetic identification with the author. In this kind of reading (as Coleridge wrote in his copy of Archbishop Leighton's work) through the words of 'a powerful and perspicuous Author [...] I identify myself with the excellent Writer and his thoughts become my thoughts'.³⁹⁰ Lamb likewise felt this act of sympathetic identification to be one of the joys of reading, through which, 'I love to lose myself in other men's minds'.³⁹¹ Jackson suggests that Coleridge's cardinal rule was 'genial' reading: which means 'exercising historical imagination: suspending contemporary prejudices to the best of one's ability and making an effort to judge a work in relation to others of its own time'.³⁹² Particularly interesting then, are Coleridge's two letters written in the front of Lamb's copy of Samuel Daniel's *Works* in February 1808, in which Coleridge depicts a rather different method of reading.

Lamb, at that time, was preparing for publication his *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, who lived about the time of Shakespeare* (which would appear on 27 August). Coleridge's letters respond to a conversation the two seem to have had, in which Lamb had said that he did not relish Daniel's *Civil Wars* (a poem about the 'Wars of the Roses', originally published in

³⁹⁰ *CM*, VI, 305.

³⁹¹ 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading', *LM* (July 1822), 33-36; 33.

³⁹² Jackson, 269.

multiple volumes between 1595 and 1609). Coleridge responds with the following letter advising him to read while imaginatively inhabiting the character of a particular reader:

all the while I am reading it, I cannot but fancy a plain England-loving English Country Gentleman with only some dozen Books in his whole Library, and at a time when a 'Mercury' or 'Intelligencer' was seen by him once in a month or two, making this his Newspaper & political Bible at the same time/ & reading it so often as to store his Memory with its aphorisms. Conceive a good man of that kind, diffident and passive, yet *rather* inclined to Jacobitism; seeing the reasons of the Revolutionary Party, yet by disposition and old principles leaning, in quiet nods and signs at his own parlour fire, to the hereditary Right—(and of these characters there must have been many)—& then read this poem assuming in your heart his Character—conceive how grave he would look, and what pleasure <there would be, what > unconscious, harmless, humble self-conceit, self-compliment in his gravity; how *wise* he would feel in himself—& yet after all, how forbearing, how much calmed by that most calming reflection (when it is really the mind's own reflection)—aye! it was just so in Henry the 6th's Time/ always the same Passions at work—&c—. Have I injured thy Book—? or wilt thou 'like it the better *therefore*?' But I have done as I would gladly be done by— thee, at least.³⁹³

Rather than suggesting that Lamb try to read in sympathy with the mind of the Elizabethan author Samuel Daniel, or indeed, that he read as himself in 1808, Coleridge instead fabricates a specific alternative reader for Lamb to imaginatively occupy: a gentleman living in the late 17th century, and restricted in his outlook to a particular, conservative, limited world-view, and imbued with the politics of the day. Coleridge encourages Lamb to value Daniel by imagining how another reader in a different time and place could find in Daniel's work an application for their own time by seeing a parallel between the Wars of Roses and the events following the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

Coleridge portrays a reader whose reasoned judgment (in favour of the Revolutionary party) is overcome by inertia and attachment to custom and history, so that, in a portrait of comfortable Burkean conservatism, he leans 'in quiet nods and signs at his own parlour fire, to the hereditary Right'. This reader, lacking much information or exchange with wider society, reads the book according to his world-view, and so finds in it things which confirm his own existing prejudices and answer to his emotional and political needs—the 'calming reflection' stirred by the book is 'really the mind's own reflection'. Coleridge's letter suggests

³⁹³ *CM*, II. 118.

an alternative model of reading in which the reader appropriates, even ‘misreads’, a book according to their wishes.

In his second letter, written ‘5 hours after the first’, Coleridge returns to a more familiar assessment of the process of reading, suggesting that a book’s reception depends on how, when, and where it is read: a ‘genial mood’, he promises Lamb, will come for reading ‘sober-minded’ Daniel (119). However, Daniel ‘must not be read piecemeal’—the separate stanzas are dependent on their relation to one another, and their place in the narrative, for much of their effect, so that, ‘[e]ven by leaving off, & looking at a Stanza by itself, I find the loss’ (120).

Coleridge’s imaginary seventeenth-century reader is placed in an enclosed, domestic, fireside scene—a space familiar from Coleridge’s earlier poetry. This scene is mirrored when Coleridge imagines reading in the company of Charles and Mary, his interjections creating a sense of excited, conversational immediacy:

Do read over—but some evening when ~~we are~~ I am quite comfortable, at your fire-side—and O! where shall I ever be, if I am not so there—that is the last Altar, on the horns of which my old Feelings hang, but alas! listen & tremble/—Nonsense!—well! I will read it to you & Mary—the 205, 206 and 207th page (above all, that 93rd* Stanza)³⁹⁴

This domestic fireside space, represented in the supposedly ‘private’ site of the margin of a book, is nevertheless under the oblique influence of politics, and the act of private reading and discussion looks outwards to engage with a wider public discourse. Reading Daniel (with his patriotic fervour for ‘English valour’) can, Coleridge suggests, continue to have an educating influence: ‘Thousands even of educated men would become more sensible, fitter to be members of Parliament, or Ministers, by reading Daniel—and even those few, who *quoad intellectum* only gain refreshment of notions already their own, must become better Englishmen’.³⁹⁵ In the confidential space of his marginal letter, Coleridge seems to be rehearsing ideas that could form the basis of a printed essay.

³⁹⁴ *CM*, II, 119.

³⁹⁵ *CM*, II, 120.

Despite his supposed preference for ‘genial’ or sympathetic reading, Coleridge still felt free to appropriate and remake what he read. He would appropriate Daniel in *The Courier* the following year (December 1809), slightly altering certain stanzas from the *Civil Wars* to make them appropriate to contemporary events, changing ‘Scottish-border broils’ to ‘Irish discontents’.³⁹⁶

However, the ability to appropriate the work in this way depends on qualities inherent in the text itself. Years later in *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge drew a comparison between Daniel and Wordsworth, suggesting that Wordsworth’s ‘strikingly resembles’ Daniel in the way that he seeks to use language ‘intelligible to all readers of average understanding’.³⁹⁷ Notably, Wordsworth on occasion also alluded to and quoted Daniel in his poetry. Coleridge describes Daniel as a writer,

whose diction bears no mark of time, no distinction of age, which has been, and, as long as our language shall last, will be, so far the language of to-day and for ever, as that it is more intelligible to us than the transitory fashions of our own particular age. A similar praise is due to his sentiments. No frequency of perusal can deprive them of their freshness. (146)

Elsewhere in Lamb’s copy, Coleridge notes that Daniels’ method of versification, ‘represents a grave easy man talking seriously to his friends’.³⁹⁸ Daniel’s plain and comprehensible language, Coleridge suggests, allows the *Civil Wars* to have a continued relevance for readers throughout all ages.

It is interesting to compare Coleridge’s approach to the earlier poet with Lamb’s treatment of his extracts from Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights in the *Specimens*. Lamb plays fast and loose editorially—omitting certain lines, passages and characters if they would require having to give too much explanatory detail—and notes that, ‘I have expunged without ceremony all that which the writers had better never have written, that forms the objection so

³⁹⁶ [Adaptation of Lines from Daniel’s *Civil Wars*], *PWC*, I.: 2, 866-7

³⁹⁷ *BL*, II. 146 ; 147.

³⁹⁸ *CM*, II. 123.

often repeated to the promiscuous reading of Fletcher, Massinger, and some others'.³⁹⁹ Lamb openly presents his book as formed and shaped by his own whims, choosing and adapting the extracts to fit into 'the brief scope of my plan' (441). Lamb works with a specific agenda in mind, describing in the preface that,

My leading design has been, to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors. To shew in what manner they felt, when they placed themselves by the power of imagination in trying situations, in the conflicts of duty and passion, or in the strife of contending duties; what sort of loves and enmities theirs were; how their griefs were tempered, and their full-swoln joys abated: how much of Shakspeare shines in the great men his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind. (p. vi)

The notes attached to the extracts from the plays address these two topics: firstly, a comparison of Shakespeare's imagination with his contemporaries, and secondly, the representation of morality and the spectrum of human emotions. Coleridge's letters in Lamb's copy of Daniel's *Civil Wars* seem to respond to these aims, comparing Daniel's verse with Shakespeare's, and making a claim for the educational impact of reading the *Civil Wars*.

As a comparison to Lamb's *Specimens*, the notes given in Dodsley's *Old Plays*—the major eighteenth-century collection of early drama—were confined to biographical or historical details, explanatory or glossarial notes, or made comparisons between plays.⁴⁰⁰ Lamb's critical notes, though by no means numerous, can often be strikingly personal, emotional or idiosyncratic, sometimes launching off somewhat tangentially from the play to which they refer. His response to a scene in the *Revenger's Tragedy*, where a son rebukes his mother's immorality, describes an intensely personalised responsiveness:

The reality and life of this Dialogue passes any scenical illusion I ever felt. I never read it but my ears tingle, and I feel a hot blush spread my cheeks, as if I were presently about to 'proclaim' some such 'malefactions' of myself, as the Brothers here rebuke in their unnatural parent; in words more keen and daggerly-like than those which Hamlet speaks to his mother. Such power has the passion of shame truly

³⁹⁹ *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets, who lived about the time of Shakespeare*, (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1808), p. vi.

⁴⁰⁰ *A Select Collection of Old Plays*, 12 vols. (London: R. Dodsley, 1744).

personated, not only to ‘strike guilty creatures unto the soul’ but to ‘appall’ even those that are ‘free’.⁴⁰¹

Even while working the extracts from the plays into the framework of his own specific agenda, Lamb still emphasises his own emotional, sensory, sympathetic responsiveness to reading. Lamb’s *Specimens* is preoccupied with the question of how drama can provide a form of moral training by evoking such emotive responses and sympathetic identification. The act of private reading can therefore be loaded with implications for the individual’s relationship to wider society, and—as Coleridge’s notes in Lamb’s *Daniel* had also suggested—can resonate with public, political issues.

What is also important to note, however, is that Lamb’s *Specimens* negotiates the margins of private and public in its textual form. In some ways the *Specimens* can seem like a print version of a commonplace book, in which Lamb presents us with his favourite passages, and gives us notes to his responses that seem somewhat like marginalia, although always shaped with an eye to its audience.

For Lamb as well as Coleridge, reading is an activity which implicitly bridges the spheres of private and public life. The margins of a book could function as a confidential and companionable space to ‘share’ reading with friends; however, actions of reading, annotating, and interpreting, also lead these two writers to engage with wider concerns about sympathy, morality, politics, and national community.

Conclusion

While engaging fully in the playful conventions of magazine writing of the period—the use of pseudonymous characters, covert allusions, and representations of a sociable community—Lamb’s essays show how important the real-life ‘coterie’ network was in sustaining the

⁴⁰¹ Lamb, *Specimens*, 193-4.

creative life of the *London Magazine*, enabling its writers to carry on a ‘conversation’ or ‘dialogue’ with one another within its pages. This chapter has shown how Lamb and Hazlitt established just this kind of ‘conversation’—through allusions and through meaningful juxtapositions—within the pages of the *London Magazine*.

Lamb’s habit of using his letters as a space for literary experimentation and basing essays on ideas rehearsed over many years in private correspondence means that his work blurs the boundaries between print and manuscript culture, and between public and private audiences. Drawing on his correspondence with Coleridge in certain essays, Lamb carries on a private debate in the public periodical, continuing a discussion about sympathy and community first begun in their youth in the 1790s. Furthermore, Lamb’s ‘Two Races of Men’ simultaneously evokes the private relationship of shared reading, and engages with printed representations of Coleridge as a public figure.

The importance of shared reading within their friendship leads both Coleridge and Lamb to reflect on the importance of reading in a wider sense: Coleridge’s marginalia reflects on how reading leads the individual to connect and position themselves relative to a wider national, political and historical community, while Lamb’s *Specimens* suggests the moral, educative, sympathetic power of reading.

John Keats

John Keats's thoughtful, playful, and well-crafted letters have received a great deal of critical attention. Within the epistolary medium Keats wrote with literary self-consciousness: Christopher Ricks has examined how the letters gave free play to Keats's linguistic creativity with puns and portmanteaux words, and 'are full of conscious effects of which Lewis Carroll or James Joyce would have been proud'.⁴⁰² Others have read Keats's letters as an autobiographical narrative in which the poet constructs an authorial identity. John Barnard has described Keats's letters as 'a prose analogue to Wordsworth's *Prelude*', describing the growth of a poet's mind to the minute rather than retrospectively, and suggests that the letters offered Keats a safe creative space in which he was sure of his audience's support and free from the anxieties induced by the idea of the reading public at large.⁴⁰³ In addition, Andrew Bennett has examined Keats's letters as a medium in which the poet negotiated ideas of audience, reading, and reception. Bennett has argued that Keats could attempt to construct and influence his readers in the letters, by 'both meeting the projected responses of his readers and attempting to determine those responses'.⁴⁰⁴ Due to the impossibility of knowing the reader's humour, Bennett argues, 'one must figure the reader, construct a role for audience' (38).

⁴⁰² Christopher Ricks, *Keats and Embarrassment*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 69.

⁴⁰³ John Barnard, 'Keats's Letters', in Susan J. Wolfson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 120-134; 121-2.

⁴⁰⁴ Andrew Bennett, *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 36.

Letter-writing certainly stirs in Keats a particular consciousness of audience. The key to being a good letter-writer and a good *friend* to the recipient is to suit the tone and content of the letter to their tastes. Keats writes to Reynolds that, ‘I wish I knew always the humour my friends would be in at opening a letter of mine, to suit it to them nearly as possible,’ and later writes to George and Georgiana Keats that, ‘I wish I knew what humours you were in that I might accommodate myself to any one of your Amiabilities—Shall it be a Sonnet or a Pun or an Acrostic, a Riddle or a Ballad’.⁴⁰⁵ The time difference between the moment of writing and the moment of reading can create the kind of problems which Charles Lamb described in ‘Distant Correspondents’. The temporal distance has the effect of emphasising the fact that sympathy between writer and reader is easily fractured: after sending a presumably angry and heated letter to Benjamin Bailey in a moment of vexation, Keats laments that, ‘in that temper if I write to any friend I have so little selfpossession that I give him matter for grieving at the very time perhaps when I am laughing at a Pun’.⁴⁰⁶

It is the contention of this chapter that the medium of the letter evokes a peculiar self-consciousness in the writer: while addressed at first hand to a limited audience of known readers, it is nevertheless a form freighted with a generic and literary history, and a document with the potential for preservation and future circulation or publication. The focus of this chapter is twofold: the first part shows how Keats’s letters display a literary self-consciousness of audience, and show him fashioning a poetic identity that looks beyond the confidential space of the letter to an engagement with the reading public and posterity. The second part of this chapter shows how Keats shapes an epistolary relationship with John Hamilton Reynolds as brother-poet, finding in Reynolds an ideal reader, with whom he is able to draw on a shared language of allusion and shared poetical and intellectual interests.

⁴⁰⁵ LJK, I. 324; 303.

⁴⁰⁶ LJK, I. 340.

Letter-writing and literature in the Romantic period

In the previous chapter, I described how Charles Lamb's letters provided a medium for him to develop ideas and stylistic features which he later made use of in his published essays. Furthermore, I have described how Coleridge's letters to Sotheby show him engaging with the issues and images of his verse-epistle to Sara while also providing a space for him to revise and edit the poem. In examining how letters can be used as a literary test-space, it is important to recognise that many aspects of early nineteenth-century cultural practices of letter-writing give the personal letter a status akin to literature or narrative. Letters were often saved and safely stored, giving them the semi-permanence of a kind of manuscript 'publication': they were texts to be returned to and re-read. Letters could circulate poetry in manuscript: copied and recopied into letters by readers, poems could travel great distances, sometimes—as in the case of Barbauld's poetry—without the poet's knowledge.

When Keats gave advice on letter-writing to his fourteen-year-old sister Fanny his comments stressed the emotive function of letters as sentimental relics. He instructed her,

Now Fanny you must write soon—and write all you think about, never mind what—only let me have a good deal of your writing—You need not do it all at once—be two or three or four day about it, and let it be a diary of your little life. You will preserve all my Letters and I will secure yours—and thus in the course of time we shall each of us have a good Bundle—which, hereafter, when things may have strangely altered and god knows what happened, we may read over together and look with pleasure on times past—that now are to come⁴⁰⁷

Letters transmit not just their news and content, but also the writer's good intention or feeling that motivates the act of writing. By communicating the 'diary' of events and trivialities, the letter enacts the far more important task of creating and maintaining social ties: it is therefore 'a necessity,' writes Keats, 'for we ought to become intimately acquainted, in order that I may not only, as you grow up love your (*sic*) as my only Sister, but confide in you as my dearest friend'.⁴⁰⁸ Letters are keepsakes, to be preserved and secured as an access to memories,

⁴⁰⁷ *LJK*, I. 155-6.

⁴⁰⁸ *LJK*, I. 153.

providing security in the consoling size and solidity of the ‘good Bundle’ that will be accumulated over time. Implicitly, the act of writing in the present moment calls to mind not simply the point at which the letter will be first read by its recipient, but also projects the mind forward in time to consider moments of re-reading which will occur in an as-yet-unimaginable future. The letters, *as objects* passed back and forth between two writers and amassed in number over time, are not only a record of an entwined history: the material presence of the documents will have a lasting relevance, an atemporal quality as evidence for lived lives, which will persist even when the contents of them are old news. The letters will acquire this secondary layer of meaning only *when* ‘things have strangely altered’—by change, separation, or death which endow the correspondence with meaning by having survived for posterity and by having survived the writer. Like a poem, a letter is written into an unspecified future in which it has the potential to be read in contexts beyond the writer’s control by readers unknown to them.

Letters could often circulate through groups of readers and acquaintances. In September 1819, Keats sends ‘a brace of letters’—one to Woodhouse and one to Reynolds, both of whom are visiting Bath and staying in the same house—that are designed to be read in tandem with one another.⁴⁰⁹ Addressing Woodhouse, Keats jokes that, ‘If you see what I have said to Reynolds before you come to your own dose you will put it between the bars unread’, and later adds that, ‘as I know you will interread one another—I am still writing to Reynolds as well as yourself.’⁴¹⁰ Keats intends for ‘three or four pairs of eyes whose owners I am rather partial to’ to have access to his letters written to his brother Tom from Scotland, and later re-used these letters himself by re-sending them in a bundle of letters to George and Georgiana Keats in America.⁴¹¹ The letters were bundled up in a fat packet co-ordinated

⁴⁰⁹ *LJK*, II. 166.

⁴¹⁰ *LJK*, II. 169; 173.

⁴¹¹ *LJK*, I. 301. Tom Keats, letter to John Taylor, 30 June 1818: ‘I had a Letter this morning from Kendal—my Brother is delighted with what he has hitherto seen— I have sent it to John Reynolds—if you are desirous you

between Keats and his family's acquaintances so that all of their letters could be sent together to George and Georgiana. Keats jokes as he relays the gossip from their social circle that, 'Now I am coming the Richardson,' and the inclusion of letters by multiple recipients turns the packet into a kind of epistolary novel.⁴¹² The analogy between letters and epistolary fiction, Timothy Webb has suggested, gave Keats an acute 'epistolary self-consciousness' which 'alerted him to the possibility that he might construct his style and the persona of his correspondence according to a fictional model'.⁴¹³ Webb notes how the letters 'allow Keats to assume a variety of literary styles and voices, including those of Sterne, Swift, Smollett, Radcliffe, the picturesque and the legal petition' (154).

Keats at times openly negotiates the relationship between his letters and the literary conventions of letter-writing. In letters written to his fiancée Fanny Brawne Keats appears particularly conscious of the literary conventions and precedents of love-letters. He repeatedly satirises the sentimental language of lovers, popularised by Rousseau's novels, and is sensitive to his own potential to exploit the same rhetoric:

I am glad I had not the opportunity of sending off a Letter which I wrote for you on Tuesday night – 'twas too much like one out of Ro[u]sseau's Heloise. I am more reasonable this morning. The morning is the only proper time for me to write to a beautiful Girl whom I love so much: for at night, when the lonely day has closed, and the lonely, silent, unmusical Chamber is waiting to receive me as into a Sepulchre, then believe me my passion gets entirely the sway, then I would not have you see those Rapsodies [*sic*] which I once thought it impossible I should ever give way to, and which I have often laughed at in another, for fear you should [think me] either too unhappy or perhaps a little mad.⁴¹⁴

Keats emphasises that he has had to make some stylistic choices in writing. This letter is a second attempt—behind it is conjured the phantom of a prior letter, a rejected alternative full of embarrassing 'rapsodies' in the manner of Rousseau's sentimental novel. On one level, the letter shows Keats as a young man self-conscious about how to write a love-letter without

can see it there, as also the subsequent account I may receive' (*The Keats Circle: Letters and Papers 1816-1878*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1948), I. 31).

⁴¹² *LJK*, I. 394.

⁴¹³ Timothy Webb, "'Cutting Figures": Rhetorical Strategies in Keats's *Letters*,' in Michael O'Neill (ed.), *Keats: Bicentenary Readings*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997), 144-169, 145.

⁴¹⁴ *LJK*, II. 122.

sounding silly. However, as a writer, he is also questioning what it means to write in the genre of the ‘love-letter’. He writes with a playful literary awareness that there are certain literary precedents that influence the act of writing a love-letter, by having established what kind of language is expected. While he claims to reject this literary love-language, Keats’s letter is imbued with a literary consciousness: his image of himself alone in his ‘lonely, silent, unmusical Chamber’-come-sepulchre evokes the tragic loves of Romeo and Juliet, Werther’s passion to the point of madness, and a hint of the Gothic.

With this weight of prior literary influence, Keats’s letter implicitly poses the question of how to write authentically in one’s own language. In later letters to Fancy he continues to address the issue of the linguistic choices which a letter-writer must make, and drily assesses his own style in the light of these generic expectations:

This Page as my eye skims over it I see is excessively unloverlike and ungallant—I cannot help it—I am no officer in yawning quarters; no Parson-romeo [...] ask yourself whether ‘t is not better to explain my feelings to you, than write artificial Passion—⁴¹⁵

Keats complains of the inauthenticity of an excessive love-rhetoric and is suspicious of its potential to be used to emotionally manipulate the reader, and to play upon the desires of silly young women who ‘would like to be married to a Poem and to be given away by a Novel.’⁴¹⁶ He writes in a later letter to Fanny, “Thank god that you are fair and can love me without being Letter-written and sentimentaliz’d into it’.⁴¹⁷

To offer some perspective on Keats’s scathing opinions on the sentimental language of epistolary fiction, Susan Whyman’s recent study of archives of letters surviving from ordinary families, *The Pen and the People*, has outlined several case-studies of ordinary late-eighteenth-century letter-writers whose correspondence shows the influence of the language of sentimentality, absorbed from the epistolary novels of the late eighteenth century.⁴¹⁸ This

⁴¹⁵ *LJK*, II. 141.

⁴¹⁶ *LJK*, II. 127.

⁴¹⁷ *LJK*, II. 267.

⁴¹⁸ Whyman, 214.

sentimental discourse, as I have outlined in the introduction, became increasingly problematical in the 1790s, due to its association on one hand with the excesses of Revolutionary politics, and on the other with the affected and much-satirised poetry of the Della Cruscian fashion. By the time Keats is writing, Richardson and Rousseau appear to be part of a silly former fashion, which he mocks and satirises much as Austen does in her novels. Richardson, in Keats's opinion, is noted for his 'self-satisfaction' and his 'power of making mountains out of molehills'.⁴¹⁹

Equally important, however, is the fact that Rousseau and Richardson were notable examples of eighteenth-century writers who created public personalities through correspondence with readers that sent them fan mail.

Samuel Richardson preserved all the letters that he received, and set his daughters to take copies of all the letters he sent. Anna Barbauld's preface to her 1804 edition of Richardson's correspondence portrayed him as a writer who perceived his own letters as ripe for publication, just like the epistolary novels which fuelled his literary fame:

It was the favourite employment of his declining years to select and arrange them, and he always looked forward to their publication at some distant period, when the lapse of time should have precluded the necessity of observing that delicacy which living characters have always a claim to. Indeed, he was not without thoughts of publishing them in his life time, in which case he would have subjected them to such restrictions as his correspondents thought proper to impose.⁴²⁰

In *selecting* and *arranging* his letters, Richardson approached his correspondence with the editorial, creative eye of a novelist. The published letters were directed to posterity, to a temporally distant reader who can have the same intimacy with the unsuppressed writings of the correspondents that the readers of epistolary fiction enjoyed. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Coleridge attempted to create the same kind of intimacy with his readers by publishing extracts from his own marginalia—the notes written in the confidential space of

⁴¹⁹ LJK, II, 83, 196.

⁴²⁰ 'Preface,' *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, ed. A. L. Barbauld, 6 vols. (London, 1804), I, pp. iii-iv.

the marginal of books, Coleridge suggested, were the closest the public could get to listening to his private conversation.

As Barbauld's preface makes clear, the publication of writers' letters stemmed from a growing culture of celebrity. The homely language of her preface implied that **readers** desired the same kind of comfortable intimacy with public figures which they may have felt with the characters of novels: the publication of letters stemmed from, 'the curiosity of the public, which has always shewn an eagerness, more natural perhaps than strictly justifiable, to penetrate into the domestic retirements, and to be introduced to the companionable hours of eminent characters'.⁴²¹ Like Richardson, Rousseau received many enthusiastic letters from the readers of his novels, cementing his status as 'celebrity' writer, and demonstrating how successful he had been at influencing the kind of sympathetic reading that his novels received.⁴²² One young woman, Mme. Latour de Franqueville, and her female friend, wrote to Rousseau addressing him as St Preux, after the young lover in *La Nouvelle Heloise*, and called themselves Julie and Clara after the two heroines from his book. This correspondence was published in 1803, and Keats, on reading a copy, took a rather scathing view, as he wrote to Fanny in late February 1820:

I have been turning over two volumes of Letters written between Ro[u]sseau and two Ladies in the perplexed strain of mingled finesse and sentiment in which the Ladies and gentlemen of those days were so clever, and which is still prevalent among the Ladies of this Country who live in a state of reasoning romance. The Likeness however only extends to the mannerism not to the dexterity. What would Rousseau have said at seeing our little correspondence! [...] I don't care much—I would sooner have Shakespeare's opinion about the matter. The common gossiping of washerwomen must be less disgusting than the continual and eternal fence and attack of Rousseau and these sublime Petticoats. One calls herself Clara and her friend Julia two of Ro[u]sseau's Heroines—they all the same time christen poor Jean Jaques St Preux [...] Thank God I am born in England with our own great Men before my Eyes⁴²³

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, I. p. v.

⁴²² See Robert Darnton, 'Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity', *The Great Cat Massacre and other Episodes in French Cultural History*, (New York: Basic Books, 1984; rev. ed. 2009), 215-256.

⁴²³ LJK, II. 266-7. The volumes are the *Correspondance originale et inédite de J. J. Rousseau avec Mme. Latour de Franqueville et M. du Peyrou*, 2 vols. (Paris: 1803).

Keats contrasts effeminate French sentiment with the writing of great Englishmen such as Shakespeare. In an undated letter, which Rollins tentatively dates March 1820, Keats jokes with Fanny that he proposes in future to offer their correspondence to the publisher John Murray—a joke which seems to follow from this discussion of how Rousseau’s flirtatious correspondence had been posthumously offered up for public consumption.⁴²⁴

For Keats, or any writer in his time, the chance of success and fame as a poet brought with it the likelihood of his letters being publicly printed after his death. Mark Phillips has described how, in the latter part of the eighteenth-century, biographies and histories were increasingly told through the evidence of letters, with William Mason’s *Life of Gray* setting ‘a new pattern for biography by creating the poet’s life as far as possible through letters and journals’.⁴²⁵ Mason noted that through this method, ‘Mr. Gray will become his own biographer’.⁴²⁶ Further biographies of poets followed this trend: Chatterton’s letters were published with G. Gregory’s *The Life of Thomas Chatterton* (1789) and Burns’ letters were included in James Currie’s *The Life of Robert Burns, with his general correspondence* (1800). Sterne, Johnson, and Cowper, to name a few, were all the subjects of ‘Life, Works and Letters’-style volumes printed in the final few decades of the eighteenth-century and the first few years of the nineteenth.⁴²⁷ This tendency towards viewing a writer’s letters as part of their oeuvre, as well as material relics of celebrity, could be a source of anxiety and discomfort for certain writers. For example, Thomas Moore recorded a conversation with Wordsworth in 1837, in which ‘Wordsworth said that for his own part, such was his horror of having his letters

⁴²⁴ LJK, II, 282.

⁴²⁵ Phillips, 136.

⁴²⁶ *The Poems of Mr Gray, to which are prefixed Memoirs of his Life and Writings by W. Mason*, (York: A. Ward, 1775), 5.

⁴²⁷ Samantha Matthews has written extensively on the popularity of ‘poetical remains’ (containing letters, poetic fragments and biography) in the nineteenth century, in which the poet’s posthumous corpus and corpse are linked in a disconcerting imaginative association. See *Poetical Remains: Poets’ Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 4; 7.

preserved, that, in order to guard against it he always took pains to make them as bad & dull as possible'.⁴²⁸

Keats jokingly toys with the possibility of posthumous publication in a letter to his brother and sister-in-law:

We will before many Years are over have written many folio volumes which as a Matter of self-defence to one whom you understand intends to be immortal in the best points and let all his Sins and peccadillos die away—I mean to say that the Book-sellers with [*for will*] rather decline printing ten folio volumes of Correspondence printed as close as the Apostles creed in a Watch paper—⁴²⁹

Keats's wry comment to George and Georgiana Keats, like his joke with Fanny that he will offer their correspondence to Murray, shows he at least considers the possibility that his letters could be printed.⁴³⁰ The image of the printed correspondence 'printed as close as the Apostles creed in a Watch paper' creates a visual parallel with the cluttered, closely-written script of a crossed letter. In the above quotation, the large number of letters which he imagines they will amass between them, like the 'great Bundle' of letters to Fanny Keats, is a source of security and 'self-defence': the quantity of handwritten 'folio volumes' of letters will, by the sheer volume of correspondence, be impenetrable to outsiders and unmarketable, taking away the risk that it will be turned into the printed folio volumes. Keats returns to the same pun in a later letter, writing to George and Georgiana that, 'I intend to write you such Volumes that it will be impossible for me to keep any order or method in what I write'.⁴³¹

Keats's desire for self-defence and self-editing—'to be immortal in the best points'—and cover up the 'Sins' (which is a term he uses at one point to describe the poems he has written which he does not think are very good), leads him to preface certain poems, like the acrostic to his sister-in-law, with the remark that he would not send the verses were they to be

⁴²⁸ *The Journal of Thomas Moore*, ed. Wilfred S. Dowden, 6 vols. (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated UP, 1983-1991), V. 1908.

⁴²⁹ *LJK*, I. 305.

⁴³⁰ *LJK*, II. 282.

⁴³¹ *LJK*, I. 392.

seen by anyone else.⁴³² But Keats's phrasing hides an inner tension. He is aware that were he to become an 'immortal' poet, this would bring with it the likelihood that everything he has written could become someone else's commodity, assessed by the book-sellers on the basis of its profitability. His defiance of this public invasiveness is tempered by the sardonic tone that shows he thinks this poetic fame unlikely: were the book-sellers to print a ten volume edition of his letters, it would be a grand material proof of him having gained public recognition. The thought of a ten volume edition of his correspondence is both a source of terror and a source of literary pride. Keats's idea that letter-writing and public printing are not entirely distinct from one another shows in the parallels drawn between the two forms: Keats's assertion that 'we will have written many folio volumes' suggests that letter-writing customs—copying, collecting, and storing letters in books and boxes—have an affinity with print culture, and that the Keatses between them are creating a kind of multi-volume epistolary novel.

Portraiture

Certain properties of the letter intrinsically evoke a sense of the writer's posterity. Firstly, it remains a material memento of the writer which can outlast their physical self. Secondly, it gives them a duplicate, textual self, as Keats writes: 'our friends say I have altered completely—am not the same person—perhaps in this letter I am for in a letter one takes up one's existence from the time we last met'.⁴³³ In a letter, the writer becomes like a character in a book, having a textual existence which is defined by the 'narrative' of the letters, operating on a different scale from real time.

Keats's much-quoted description of himself in the act of writing to his brother and sister-in-law seems, in its visual, corporeal qualities—like his poem "This living hand now

⁴³² *LJK*, II. 195.

⁴³³ *LJK*, II. 208.

warm and capable’—to encapsulate a moment that will have its fullest resonance when the hand that wrote the words is no more:

there is another extract or two—one especially which I will copy tomorrow—for the candles are burnt down and I am using the wax taper—which has a long snuff on it—the fire is at its last click—I am sitting with my back to it with one foot rather askew on the rug and the other with the heel a little elevated from the carpet—I am writing this on the Maid’s tragedy which I have read since tea with Great pleasure—Besides this little volume of Beaumont & Fletcher—there are on the tabl[e] two volumes of chaucer and a new work of Tom Moores call’d ‘Tom Cribb’s memorial to Congress—nothing in it—These are trifles—but I require nothing so much of you as that you will give me a like description of yourselves, however it may be when you are writing to me—Could I see the same thing done of any great Man long since dead it would be a great delight: as to know what position Shakespeare sat when he began ‘To be or not to be’—such thing[s] become interesting from distance of time or place⁴³⁴

Timothy Webb has suggested that this representation is ‘carefully constructed’ and Keats is ‘posing for his picture’.⁴³⁵ Keats’s pictorial depiction of himself however seems to gesture beyond his first readers George and Georgiana Keats to the future reader of posterity. Keats writes surrounded by books, alone before the fire late at night. Though the moment will be long passed by the time the letter is read, the present tense freezes him in that one instant in time, and will eternally recreate him with each rereading. He represents himself as a reader of old authors—Beaumont and Fletcher, and Chaucer—the taste for whose works he shares with other members of the literary community of which he is part, including Hunt, Hazlitt and Lamb. Keats’s desire to see a portrait of ‘great men long since dead’ hints that he is providing a description of himself as if he were, in the future, to be one of them. It is as if the poet imagines himself—sitting in his solitude—as he would look to an observer: an observer who is the imagined, future reader.

In portraying himself in a fireside reverie, Keats takes up a literary trope from Cowper’s *The Task*, and Coleridge’s ‘Frost at Midnight’—reworking the form of the ‘conversation poem’ which is laden with the poet’s desire for a friendly auditor, to the conversational tone of the letter in which Keats imagines his distant companions George and

⁴³⁴ LJK, II. 73.

⁴³⁵ Webb, 149.

Georgiana. In addition, the link between the poet's self-portraiture and the watching eye of posterity is amplified by the parallel between Keats's depiction of himself at the fireside and Leigh Hunt's essay 'A Day by the Fire' (first published in the *Reflector* in 1811, and then republished in the *Round Table* in 1817).⁴³⁶ Hunt's essay takes the reader through 'a day's enjoyments by the fireside'—enjoyments that encompass solitary, creative meditation and 'fireside festivity' with company.⁴³⁷ By maintaining a unity of place, time and action, Hunt's essay traces the journey of the mind through a series of prose-poetical reveries. As such it has much in common with Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight,' and Cowper's *The Task*. Hunt shows domestic life as a source of imaginative inspiration, and outlines a long literary tradition of homely poetry by quoting copiously from writers of classical antiquity, from Spenser, Milton, Chaucer, and others. Hunt's essay recounts his desire to be able to visualise the similar domestic habits of past writers:

In like manner, we are anxious to discover how these great men and poets appeared in common, what habits they loved, in what way they talked and meditated, nay, in what postures they delighted to sit, and whether they indulged in the same tricks and little comforts that we do. [...] Thus we have Horace talking of his blazing hearth and snug accommodations like the jolliest of our acquaintances; and thus we may safely imagine that Milton was in some such attitude as I have described, when he sketched that enchanting little picture which beats all the other cabinet portraits that have been produced.⁴³⁸

Hunt's essay, to which I will return in more detail in a later chapter, aims to forge a sense of companionable intimacy with his public readership by portraying himself at his fireside. In the space of the periodical as well as in Keats's letter, the visual depiction of the enclosed, intimate, domestic space which writer and reader seem to share imaginatively aims to create and reinforce a companionable feeling between them. However, the letter also poignantly looks back to one of Keats's earliest sonnets, 'To my Brothers', which opens with a similar fireside portrait (with Coleridgean echoes):

Small, busy flames play through the fresh laid coals,

⁴³⁶ *Reflector*, (Mar.-Dec. 1811), II. 400-419; 'A Day by the Fire', *RT*, II. 122-162.

⁴³⁷ *RT*, II. 125; 139.

⁴³⁸ *RT*, II. 144.

And their faint cracklings o'er our silence creep
 Like whispers of the household gods that keep
 A gentle empire o'er fraternal souls.⁴³⁹ (ll. 1-4)

The sonnet, written for Tom Keats's birthday in 1816, depicts the brothers together in a moment of silent household companionship. Keats depicts himself writing presumably this very sonnet, struggling to find a rhyme for 'coals' and 'souls' ('for rhymes, I search around the poles'); while he does this, Tom is otherwise occupied, his eyes 'fix'd, as in poetic sleep' (l. 6) nevertheless mirroring Keats's poetical occupation. Keats's wish in the sonnet that, 'Many such eves of gently whisp'ring noise / May we together pass' (ll. 11-12) has gained a retrospective poignancy by March 1819 when he writes his fireside portrait in the letter to George (incidentally two weeks after George's birthday). In this letter Keats attempts a virtual, textual recreation of the kind of domestic fraternal togetherness that has been forever lost with Tom's death in 1818, and George's emigration to America. The letter's portrait therefore hovers between a personal frame of reference—the early sonnet—and the images of domesticity which resonated within the published work of Keats's contemporaries.

Reading, friendship, and sympathy

Past scholars have suggested that the act of letter-writing leads Keats to address the interpretative relationship between writer and reader. David Luke has argued that Keats celebrates the aesthetic potential of fragments, suggesting that Keats's letters 'ultimately explore the 'rough edges' between writer and reader'.⁴⁴⁰ Susan Wolfson has argued that the open-endedness of letter-writing, reliant upon reception for its meaning, offers up 'creative outlines for the imagination of the reader', and encouraging a 'creative cooperation' between writer and reader; for Keats, Wolfson argues, 'epistolary composition [...] is an expansive

⁴³⁹ 'To My Brothers', *JKCP*, 35.

⁴⁴⁰ David Luke, 'Keats's Letters: Fragments of an Aesthetic of Fragments', *Genre*, 11:2 (Summer 1978), 209-226; 216-7.

action rather than a closed artifact'.⁴⁴¹ In the remainder of this chapter I will focus on the poetical and epistolary relationship between Keats and John Hamilton Reynolds, arguing that Keats seeks in Reynolds an ideal friendly reader, whose interpretative ability is shaped by sympathetic imagination and a shared background of knowledge.

For Keats, friendship is created and sustained through a kind of sympathetic merging of identity. Writing to Benjamin Bailey in January 1818 he advises:

The sure way Bailey, is first to know a Man's faults, and then be passive, if after that he insensibly draws you towards him then you have no Power to break the link. Before I felt interested in either Reynolds or Haydon—I was well read in their faults yet knowing them I have been cementing gradually with both—⁴⁴²

A year later in a letter to George and Georgiana, Keats writes that, 'Men who live together have a silent <p> moulding and influencing power over each other—'They interassimilate'.⁴⁴³ This unconscious process of 'cementing' and 'interassimulating' suggests that the boundaries of the individual self are permeable, and continuing familiarity can lead identities to merge or blend together. Sympathetic identification appears intrinsically entwined with a kind of egolessness. This view of human nature reveals Hazlitt's deep influence on the poet—an influence which David Bromwich has outlined in great detail.⁴⁴⁴ Both Bromwich and Robert Gittings have described how Keats was influenced by Hazlitt's *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805) which argued that the imagination—the means by which sympathy is created—is fundamentally disinterested.⁴⁴⁵ We can imaginatively identify with our future selves to no greater or less extent than we can imaginatively identify with another person:

The imagination, by means of which alone I can anticipate future objects, or be interested in them, must carry me out of myself into the feelings of others by one and the same process by which I am thrown forward as it were into my future being, and am interested in it. I could not love myself, if I were not capable of loving others.

⁴⁴¹ Susan J. Wolfson, 'Keats the Letter-writer: Epistolary Poetics,' *Romanticism Past and Present*, 6:2 (Boston: Northeastern University, 1982), 43-61, 58-59.

⁴⁴² *LJK*, I. 209.

⁴⁴³ *LJK*, II. 208-9.

⁴⁴⁴ David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: Mind of a Critic*, (Yale: Yale UP, 1999), 362-401.

⁴⁴⁵ Bromwich, 374; Robert Gittings, *John Keats*, (London: Heinemann, 1968), 153.

Self-love, used in this sense, is in it's [*sic*] fundamental principle the same with disinterested benevolence.⁴⁴⁶

In his *Essay* Hazlitt responded to a long history of eighteenth-century moral philosophy which had been concerned with the relationship between sympathy and benevolence (which I have briefly outlined in the introduction). Certain critical studies of Keats have sought to emphasise that the poet intellectually engaged with this same philosophical inheritance in his work. Porscha Fermanis has suggested that Keats's *Endymion* and 'The Fall of Hyperion' reveal how the poet's thought was influenced by Scottish Enlightenment philosophy. Fermanis notes that Keats was aware of the works of Adam Smith and Francis Hutcheson, even if only indirectly through reading Benjamin Bailey's 'An Essay on the Moral Principle' and Hazlitt's *Essay*; she argues that Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* forms the intellectual background to Keats's 'growing awareness of the importance of a sympathetic identification with human suffering for personal, cultural and historical progress'.⁴⁴⁷ Furthermore, Robert Ryan has argued that Hutcheson's 'moral sense' philosophy underlies Bailey's ideas on the nature of conscience, and Keats's argument for 'a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts'.⁴⁴⁸

Various eighteenth-century thinkers had linked the sympathetic imagination not only to the functioning of the moral sense but also the creative abilities of the poet. James Engell has shown how, from the late seventeenth century onwards, Shakespeare's masterful creativity had been linked to the strength of his sympathetic imagination that allowed him to transform himself into his characters.⁴⁴⁹ Engell has shown how Hazlitt's and Keats's ideas about sympathy, creativity, and poetical identity had their roots in a much longer tradition of philosophy and literary criticism. Where such ideas gather added resonance for this chapter is that Keats's idea of the sympathetic imagination also appears to shape how he depicts the act

⁴⁴⁶ Hazlitt, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Fermanis, 50; 54.

⁴⁴⁸ Robert Ryan, *Keats: The Religious Sense*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976), 125–38, *passim*.

⁴⁴⁹ Engell, 154-5.

of reading. The imaginative ‘willful and dramatic exercise of our Minds towards each other’ must accompany reading, in order to overcome the separation of time and distance.⁴⁵⁰

Keats’s idea of friendship as a sympathetic merging of identity leads him to suggest to Reynolds that he might fill out the following letter with his own creative, imaginative input:

I wish I had a little innocent bit of Metaphysic in my head, to criss-cross this letter: but you know a favourite tune is hardest to be remembered when one wants it most and you, I know, have long ere this taken it for granted that I never have any speculations without assoc[i]ating you in them, where they are of a pleasant nature and you know enough to [*for* of] me to tell the places where I haunt most, so that if you think for five minutes after you have read this you will find it a long letter and see written in the Air above you,
Your most affectionate friend
John Keats⁴⁵¹

Reynolds’s knowledge of the characteristic imaginative haunts of Keats’s mind allows him to function, for Keats, as the kind of ideal friendly reader about whom both Schleiermacher and Coleridge had theorized. Keats’s letter asks that Reynolds sympathetically imagine himself into Keats’s mind: it seeks to build a connection between writer and reader, not simply through a conversational dialogue, or through building a shared language of allusion, but through the reader actively and imaginatively engaging with the writer’s identity. Keats continually reminds Reynolds of their shared knowledge of certain matters—remarking that ‘you know what I think’ about particular subjects, and ‘with respect to the affections and Poetry you must know by a sympathy my thoughts that way; and I dare say these few lines will be but a ratification’.⁴⁵² In this way, he posits Reynolds as a privileged and ideal reader, able to make the best sense of Keats’s letter using the knowledge he has gained from their friendship. In a similar way, Keats’s ‘Mansion of many apartments’ letter (3 May 1818) asks Reynolds to read with an active, imaginative input:

So you see how I have run away from Wordsworth, and Milton; and shall run away from what was in my head, to observe, that some kinds of letters are good squares others handsome ovals, and others some orbicular, other spheroid—and why should there not be another species with two rough edges like a Rat-trap? I hope you will find

⁴⁵⁰ *LJK*, II. 209.

⁴⁵¹ *LJK*, I. 246.

⁴⁵² *LJK*, I. 278.

all my long letters of that species, and all will be well; for by merely touching the spring delicately and ethereally, the rough edges will fly immediately into a proper compactness, and thus you may make a good wholesome loaf, with your own leaven in it, of my fragments—⁴⁵³

In asking Reynolds to apply his own ‘leaven’ to the letter, Keats echoes a metaphor which he had used in the earlier letter to Bailey in which he had written of ‘cementing gradually’ with Reynolds and Haydon (despite his friends’ quarrels with one another). In that letter Keats wrote that, ‘The best of Men have but a portion of good in them—a kind of spiritual yeast in their frames which creates the ferment of existence—by which a Man is propell’d to act and strive and buffet with Circumstance’.⁴⁵⁴ David Bromwich links this metaphor to Keats’s later depiction of Hazlitt’s gusto: discussing the ‘Letter to William Gifford’ Keats praises Hazlitt’s writing for ‘the force and innate power with which it yeasts and works up itself’.⁴⁵⁵ The ‘leaven’ is identified with the active, forceful, creative portion of human nature: thus, Keats asks for the input of Reynolds’s imaginative energies, and for a reader who will take an active part in the friendly combat of epistolary debate and gamesmanship in which, Keats writes, ‘I must play my draughts as I please, and for my advantage and your erudition, crown a white with a black, or a black with a white’.⁴⁵⁶

In this particular letter, unpolished and undrafted, Keats emphasises the spontaneous leaps taken by his mental associations, prompted by the material form of the crossed letter: ‘This crossing a letter is not without its association—for chequer work leads us naturally to a Milkmaid, a Milkmaid to Hogarth Hogarth to Shakespeare Shakespear to Hazlitt—Hazlitt to Shakespeare and thus by merely pulling an apron string we set a pretty peal of Chimes at work’.⁴⁵⁷ In his string of associations which lead to Hazlitt, Keats follows Hazlitt’s associationist model of the imagination. Uttara Natarajan has described how, in contrast to the mechanistic, habitual, Hartleian model of association (in which the mind’s associative

⁴⁵³ *LJK*, I. 279.

⁴⁵⁴ *LJK*, I. 210.

⁴⁵⁵ *LJK*, II. 76. Bromwich, 365.

⁴⁵⁶ *LJK*, I. 279.

⁴⁵⁷ *LJK*, I. 280.

processes are dependent upon the sense impressions that impinge on it), Hazlitt argued that the creative imagination actively constructed an associated chain of images.⁴⁵⁸ To follow the workings of Keats's imagination in making these associative leaps, Reynolds must draw on their shared framework of cultural knowledge—Milton's poetry, Hazlitt's essays, etc. Furthermore, in drawing on Hazlitt's theory Keats alludes to the philosophical interests which he shared with Reynolds. This shared cultural background—the same poetry, mutual interests and taste, perhaps their recent topics of conversation—provides an interpretative background for the friendly reader to start from.

Keats and Reynolds: young poets in conversation

Reynolds is the recipient of some of Keats's most thoughtful and well-planned letters. The two poets first met at Leigh Hunt's house, sometime in October 1816, and in December 1816 Hunt's article, 'Young Poets,' in *The Examiner* had praised Keats and Reynolds (and Shelley too) as the up-and-coming young writers of the age: young poets who could build on the 'new school' begun by Wordsworth and Coleridge that aspired after 'real nature and original fancy'.⁴⁵⁹ It is possible that Hunt's article (one of the earliest mentions of Keats in the press) helped to give the two poets some sense of having a linked public professional identity. Early in their acquaintance Keats and Reynolds established a responsive and allusive poetic dialogue with one another. In response to Keats's sonnet, 'Great Spirits,' which he had been shown by the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon, Reynolds composed his own, and sent it to Haydon with instructions that a copy should be sent on to Keats. Keats had described Haydon as one 'whose steadfastness would never take / A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering', and instructs the nations to listen in silence to the 'hum / Of mighty workings' (ll. 7-8; ll. 12-3).⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁸ Natarajan, *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense*, 52-55, passim.

⁴⁵⁹ Nicholas Roe, *John Keats*, (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2012; 2013), 107. *E*, (1 Dec. 1816), 761-2.

⁴⁶⁰ 'Addressed to the Same' [i.e. Haydon], *JKCP*, 36.

Reynolds's poem picks up this image of rapt attention: 'I watch whole Nations o'er thy works sublime / Bending; —And breathing,—while their spirits glow', and likewise makes a link to Raphael, imagining that 'The wings of Raphael's spirit play about thee' (ll. 5-6; l. 14).⁴⁶¹ Reynolds's use of this shared language implies that he asks the poem be sent to Keats as a gesture which demonstrates his feelings of affinity, and offers the open hand of friendship, rather than as an act of competition with Keats. This poetical responsiveness to one another's work continued with Reynolds's sonnet (written 27 February 1817) to Keats on reading his sonnet, 'This pleasant tale', written in Charles Cowden Clarke's copy of Chaucer.⁴⁶² Reynolds could sometimes be a test-audience for Keats, who wrote in November 1817 asking for Reynolds's to 'give your vote, pro or con' on a stanza from *Endymion*.⁴⁶³

In the early months of 1818, the two poets continued their exchange of poetry. Keats's sonnet 'Blue!' (written on 8 February 1818) was a direct response to Reynolds's 'Sweet poets of the gentle antique line'. Reynolds's sonnet, complaining that the older poets only praised golden hair and blue eyes, argues instead that, 'dark eyes are dearer far / Than orbs that mock the hyacinthine-bell' (ll. 13-14).⁴⁶⁴ Keats in response argues the reverse—that the colour blue, colour of the sky, the waters, and the flowers, possesses powers, 'how great, / When in an eye thou art, alive with fate!' (ll. 13-14).⁴⁶⁵ In this sonnet-argument contesting a point of female beauty, Keats and Reynolds appear to be reviving the friendly rivalry characteristic of early modern sonneteers: Wendy Wall has described how the exchange of manuscript poetry, especially sonnet sequences, 'created a network of homosocial rivalry' between Renaissance-era poets.⁴⁶⁶ Such sonnet exchanges were, of course, more widely characteristic of the circle around Hunt, whose sonnet-writing competitions seem to have

⁴⁶¹ LJK, I. 120.

⁴⁶² Quoted in Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*, 138; Roe takes the text from Richard Woodhouse's commonplace books in Harvard Keats collection.

⁴⁶³ LJK, I. 188.

⁴⁶⁴ 'Sonnet', *GF*, 128-9.

⁴⁶⁵ 'Blue!—'Tis the life of heaven—the domain', *JKCP*, 173.

⁴⁶⁶ Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship & Publication in the English Renaissance*, (Cornell University Press, 1993), 38.

been a conscious attempt to return to Shakespearean-era practices. Reynolds's three sonnets on Robin Hood draw a direct response from Keats. The opening, 'No! those days are gone away', of Keats's poem is his answer to the questions which form the octet of one of Reynolds's sonnets (l. 1).⁴⁶⁷ Reynolds had made the fanciful suggestion that it might be possible to visit the forest, ('Go there, with Summer, and with evening') in order to catch a sight of the archer men and Robin and Marian (l. 9).⁴⁶⁸ Keats replies that it would be no good: even 'at the fairest time in June', 'with sun or moon', still 'you never may behold' them, for they and their way of life are gone (ll. 19-24). To add to this poetical conversation, Keats and Reynolds also planned to collaborate on a joint volume of poems based on tales from Boccaccio: Keats began his *Isabella* in February and completed it by April.⁴⁶⁹ Reynolds later wrote two Boccaccio tales, *The Garden of Florence* and *The Ladye of Provence*, although the planned collaborative volume was never compiled.

In the early months of 1818, the two poets seem to have been particularly close. Their correspondence was dominated by poetry and the discussion of poetry. They sent poems back and forth between themselves, each poem seeking a friendly, engaged response from the recipient. Two topics dominate the conversation of the two 'coscribblers' in the early months of 1818. Firstly, the problem of how to negotiate the influence of older poets—in particular Wordsworth; secondly, their shared sense of a kind of existential angst—a fear that, as Reynolds apparently put it, 'there is little chance of any thing else in this life'.⁴⁷⁰ These concerns underlie Reynolds's poem 'Devon' (written in 1817) and are also at the heart of Keats's verse-epistle to Reynolds (25 March 1818) and his later letter of 3 May 1818, in which Keats famously compares human life to a 'Mansion of Many Apartments'.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁷ 'Robin Hood', *JKCP*, 169-170.

⁴⁶⁸ 'Sonnet to —', *GF*, 124-5.

⁴⁶⁹ *LJK*, I. 274.

⁴⁷⁰ *LJK*, I. 278.

⁴⁷¹ *LJK*, I. 280.

West Country connections

While Keats's allusions to Wordsworth have often been noted by critics, less attention has been paid to the way in which his verse-epistle to Reynolds responds to Reynolds' poem 'Devon', which is, in itself, a response to the 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey'. Reynolds's poem was first published in *The Champion* (27 July 1817) and later revised and reprinted in *The Garden of Florence* (1821). Reynolds also included the poem in his (now lost) manuscript volume of poetry by himself, Keats and Hunt: as well as 'Devon', this volume included (as far as we know) a few of Reynolds's sonnets (such as 'To a Lady'), Keats's sonnet, 'On the Sea,' his sonnets on the Elgin Marbles, and his 'Ode to Apollo'.⁴⁷² Keats's sustained discussion of the problems of poetic influence in his letters to Reynolds in early 1818 seems to have arisen because he knew that Reynolds, in 'Devon', had been engaged in his own negotiation with the influence of Wordsworth.

Devon—the place—was also a pertinent topic. During March and April 1818, Keats was staying at Teignmouth with his sickly brother Tom.⁴⁷³ Reynolds was also very ill, and confined at home in London. In his verse-epistle, Keats alludes to the language, imagery, and ideas of Reynolds's poem, creating a shared language which conveys his empathy with Reynolds's experiences.

On his journey to and from Teignmouth and London, Keats passed through Honiton, close to Coleridge's birthplace of Ottery St Mary. Coleridge is the other, perhaps less openly acknowledged, influence on the two young poets in this period. Jack Stillinger has argued for Coleridge's extensive influence on Keats's work, arguing that 'in their formal features, Keats's odes are much more clearly descendants of the Conversation poems than they are of *Tintern*

⁴⁷² *KC*, I, 63-5.

⁴⁷³ Keats left London on 4 March 1818, and left Teignmouth to return to London on 4 May. (Roe, *John Keats*, 219; 229).

Abbey and the Intimations ode'.⁴⁷⁴ Coleridge's early poetry had been steeped in the West Country locality. His early sonnet, 'To the River Otter', like 'Tintern Abbey', had dwelt on the emotive power of a remembered place to offer some relief from cares, and the Otter, of course, was only a few miles distant from the 'wandering Sid' (l. 99), described in Reynolds's 'Devon'.⁴⁷⁵

Throughout 1814-16, Sidmouth had been the base of a young poetical circle comprising Reynolds, Bailey, Rice, the three Leigh sisters—Thomasine, Mary and Sarah—their cousin Maria Pearse, and Eliza Powell Drewe.⁴⁷⁶ Reynolds became engaged to Eliza, and Keats wrote to him in July 1818 how, 'one of the first pleasures I look to is your happy Marriage'.⁴⁷⁷ The Leigh sisters' fifteen lengthy manuscript commonplace-books, filled with poetry, drawings, and locks of hair, are preserved in the Leigh Browne collection at Keats House in Hampstead. Among them is 'Poems by Two Friends', a manuscript book containing thirty-two poems by Bailey and twenty-five by Reynolds, which Bailey flirtatiously dedicated to 'Thomazin Leigh' in December 1816.⁴⁷⁸ The sisters' manuscript books record how poetry helped create the communal life of the group: a series of poems, 'Inscriptions for the Rocks', takes inspiration from Wordsworth's 'Poems on the Naming of Places' in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, and names each rock at Dunscombe cliffs for a member of the group, ending with a poem celebrating the 'Union Rock' that unites them in friendship.⁴⁷⁹ The books are a record of communal poetical activities—one poem bears the inscription, 'Written Saturday night (all sitting round the table) by one of our dear brothers "a happy family was this" March 18 1815'.⁴⁸⁰ The Leigh sisters copied their friends' poetry into their books alongside verse selected from printed authors, including Wordsworth, Byron, Moore,

⁴⁷⁴ Jack Stillinger, *Romantic Complexity: Keats, Coleridge, and Wordsworth*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 53.

⁴⁷⁵ *The Champion*, (27 July 1817), 238. All references are to this text.

⁴⁷⁶ Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1963), 199; 278.

⁴⁷⁷ *LJK*, I. 325.

⁴⁷⁸ Paul Kaufman, 'The Leigh Browne collection at the Keats Museum', *Library*, (Sept. 1962), 246-250, 247-8.

⁴⁷⁹ Kaufman, 248.

⁴⁸⁰ Quoted in Kaufman, 248.

Burns and Henry Kirke White; and one commonplace book belonging to Thomasine Leigh (dated New Year's Day 1817) has three Keats poems, 'Haydon, forgive me', 'On seeing the Elgin Marbles', and the 'Epistle to Charles Cowden Clarke', copied from print.⁴⁸¹ Like the Houghton family album discussed in the first chapter, the Leigh sisters' manuscript books show how homemade poetry albums could be a space in which their compilers forged a sense of belonging to a particular community.

Although this poetical circle predates Keats's acquaintance with Reynolds, Rice and Bailey, the way in which its members emphasised the link between poetry and friendship (in a similar way to Coleridge, Lamb and Lloyd's *Poems on Various Subjects* (1797)), and had followed the Wordsworth circle's habit of naming places in the landscape for their friends, hint that these influences underlie the friendly, mutually-allusive relationship which Keats and Reynolds built up in the poems and letters which they sent to one another during 1817-18.⁴⁸²

Friendly allusions: young poets and the older generation

Reynolds's poem 'Devon,' describes a reverie in which the poet imaginatively revisits and journeys through his favourite Devonshire landscape. In common with Coleridge's meditative 'conversation' poetry from the 1790s, and Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', Reynolds takes up the popular eighteenth-century genre of the prospect poem. Marjorie Levinson has described how an early poem from Keats's *Poems* (1817), 'I stood tip toe', shows the influence of two traditions of prospect poetry. On one hand, the topographical poetry of Gray and Thomson in which the poet's 'lofty remove' from what he describes, his 'encompassing [...] disinterested gaze, is also the condition of the poet's moral, spiritual, and

⁴⁸¹ Kaufman, 247; Clayton E. Hudnall, 'John Hamilton Reynolds, Benjamin Bailey, and James Rice in the Leigh Browne Lockyer collection', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 19 (1970), 11-39, 11.

⁴⁸² Coleridge, Lamb and Lloyd's *Poems on Various Subjects* (1797) was among Keats's books at his death. (Rollins, *The Keats Circle*, I. 256).

political authority'.⁴⁸³ On the other hand, the poetry of 'mental topography' exemplified by John Dyer's 'Grongar Hill'. Levinson argues that adopting this genre amounts to an act of self-assertion—due to his class background, 'for Keats to attempt either of the easy topographical gazes is to claim a social prerogative that is not his by rights' (240). Reynolds's mental topography, I suggest, makes a far more direct engagement with his immediate poetical predecessors, Wordsworth and Coleridge, echoing their language and adopting their ideas about how memories of place have the power to emotionally sustain the poet.

For Reynolds the river Sid takes the place of Wordsworth's river Wye. The 'sweet inland murmur' of Wordsworth's Wye, and his recollections of once having bounded 'like a roe' over the hills on a former visit seem to be recalled in Reynolds's poem (l. 4; ll. 68-9).⁴⁸⁴ Reynolds hears the sound of a streamlet and recalls how 'Once adown the brambles wild I broke / To trace this silly murmurer' (ll. 72-3).⁴⁸⁵

In mentally revisiting the landscape, Reynolds is reminded of those female companions that accompanied him on his last visit (among them, presumably, Eliza Drewe). These female presences do not, however, take on the same importance as Dorothy in 'Tintern Abbey,' who functions as a mirror that reminds Wordsworth of his own past self. Nevertheless, Reynolds's sudden interjection— 'Hark!—Hear ye not!' (l. 69)—provides something of a shock to the reader, like the moment in 'Tintern Abbey' when Dorothy's presence is revealed. It is unclear to whom this sudden question is being addressed: is it addressed to the memory of his female companions, or to the reader? Reynolds's momentary evocation of the potential, yet unconfirmed, presence of an auditor places the reader in a position of unease, much like the revelation at the end of 'Tintern Abbey' that another auditor has been present the whole time.

⁴⁸³ Marjorie Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 238.

⁴⁸⁴ 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey,' *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992), 1798 text, 116-120. All references are to this text.

⁴⁸⁵ Reynolds revised 'Devon' for *The Garden of Florence* (1821), 95-103. *GF* reads 'the hidden' for 'this silly'.

Reynolds, while at present, ‘caged in cities’, and ‘lonely in the populous city’, (l. 21; l. 151)—complaints which echo Coleridge’s feelings of being ‘pent’ in the great city—seeks the kind of ‘tranquil restoration’ from his memories of the landscape which Wordsworth derived from his Wye memories while, ‘in lonely rooms, and mid the din / Of towns and cities’ (l. 31; ll. 26-7). In taking Wordsworth as his template for a meditative, contemplative kind of poetry, Reynolds nevertheless remakes this poetic mode in his own language. Even though he makes use of Wordsworth’s poetical motif of revisiting a place, Reynolds does not follow Wordsworth’s ideas on poetic language: like Keats, Reynolds uses classical references to Proserpina, Europa, etc., of a kind which Wordsworth would never use.

In the 1817 publication of the poem in *The Champion*, Reynolds adds an epigraph from Wordsworth’s *The Excursion* (1814): ‘Devon’s leafy shores’. This small quotation, from book three of the poem, comes from a passage in which the solitary describes the cottage to which he moved with his young bride in the happy early days of their marriage:

a low Cottage in a sunny Bay,
Where the salt sea innocuously breaks
And the sea breeze as innocently breathes,
On Devon’s leafy shores.⁴⁸⁶ (III. ll. 523-6)

The solitary describes the pleasant walks which he shared with his new wife through the heights and combs of Devon’s landscape; but his tale is told from the point of retrospect—he is now widowed and the couple’s children died in infancy. As a result, Reynolds’s choice of this particular epitaph for a poem which records his walks through Devon with his female companions gives the poem a darker tone: what if these walks, held in the memory, should likewise be necessary to sustain the poet in sad future times?⁴⁸⁷

In mentally revisiting the Devon landscape, Reynolds recalls the sight of a cottage, ‘Where, in a dreaming mood, I once had wished / To have dwelt for life’ (ll. 88-9). In an earlier article published in the *Champion*, Reynolds presents from his common-place book

⁴⁸⁶ *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell et al., (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2007).

⁴⁸⁷ Reynolds’s first sweetheart, whom Eliza Drewe also knew well (and resembled), had died in 1813 (Leonidas Jones, *The Life of John Hamilton Reynolds*, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1984), 30-1).

prose sketches which apparently show the basis for the scenes in ‘Devon’: a ‘sea of foliage’ seen from a height, the sound of ‘a stealing rill’, and a deserted cottage with a garden straggled with flowers and weeds.⁴⁸⁸ The sketches arise in response to the influence of Wordsworth, whom Reynolds praises in the article for his ‘illustrations of nature’, in which he ‘brings before our eyes the daisy as clearly as if we met it at our feet, during a ramble on a summer evening’ (373). For Reynolds, it seems that the Devon scenery and the deserted cottage are imbued with the weight of Wordsworthian influences.

However, Reynolds’s ‘fanciful desires’ for cottage life appear to be also, in part, drawn from the idealised and ideologically-inflected depiction of cottage life in Coleridge’s early poetry; like Coleridge in his ‘Reflections on leaving a Place of Retirement’, the desire for seclusion is replaced by the demands of ‘solid purpose’, and the rural landscape is retained solely in the memory for emotional sustenance (l. 90-93). To console Reynolds for the lost sight of the cottage where in his ‘dreaming mood’ he wished to have dwelt, Keats, in his verse-epistle, fabricates a castle to show to his friend ‘in fair dreaming wise’ (l. 31).⁴⁸⁹

Reynolds’s poem is the product of Coleridgean as well as Wordsworthian influences. His ascent of the hillside to the view of a prospect follows in Coleridgean footsteps:

Now upward winding,
I rise above the trees, and look upon
A Sea of wood,—and on its billowing leaves
Rolling in solid sunshine (ll. 76-9)

With a sudden interjection, Reynolds is interrupted and startled by the ‘sudden gush of song’ of a ‘madcap bird’ (l. 81). Continuing this dramatically-rendered narrative, Reynolds’s imagined prospect of the landscape is described with a sense of immediacy and distinct topography: ‘Here, on a hill, I stretch / My form along in boyish happiness’, ‘Here is the style on which with Friends I sat’, ‘there the wandering Sid’, and ‘lo! Beneath me lies / The huge, majestic Sea’ (ll. 96-101). In its dramatic narration, as well as its depiction of a vista seen from

⁴⁸⁸ ‘The Reader, No. XVI’, *The Champion*, (24 Nov. 1816), 373-4.

⁴⁸⁹ ‘Dear Reynolds, as last night I lay in bed’, *JKCP*, 179-182. All quotations are from this text.

a height, the poem recalls several of Coleridge's poems, among them, 'This Lime Tree Bower my Prison,' 'Reflections on leaving a Place of Retirement', and the prospect depicted at the end of 'Fears in Solitude,' with the sea glittering like diamonds.

In addition to these influences from the previous generation of poets, Reynolds's 'Devon' also alludes to Keats's poetry—and Keats returned the gesture in his verse-epistle to Reynolds. In its description of the emotive power of the ever-changing sea sounds, Reynolds's poem, as Nicholas Roe has noted, echoes images from Keats's sonnet 'On the Sea'.⁴⁹⁰ The sea in Reynolds's 'Devon' 'talks for ever to the quiet sands', (l. 25) and is heard 'in some dreary cavern, muttering / A solitary story of old days', (ll. 13-45) echoing the 'eternal whisperings' of the sea in Keats's poem (l. 1).⁴⁹¹ Keats, in the letter (17-18 April 1817) which he had sent to Reynolds containing this sonnet, had linked it to some misremembered lines in *King Lear*, 'Do you not hear the Sea?'⁴⁹² Reynolds's poem implicitly makes this same Shakespearean link, describing how the sea, 'like mad age, / Tosses its white hair wildly to and fro' (ll. 127-8). Reynolds's later revisions to the poem intensify these images of madness, describing how the sea, 'Tosses its hoar-hair on the raving wind' (*GF*, l. 129). Reynolds seems to firmly link Keats's sonnet to his own Devon memories: he misquoted it in a letter to Mary Leigh written just ten days after Keats had sent him the poem—it is unclear whether the recipient herself would have known the source of the allusion. Recalling a past visit to Sidmouth, he wrote how, 'There was that delightful walk on the mellow Autumn evening, under the young trees, to the cliff!—There was the Sea "whispering eternally on desolate shores"!'⁴⁹³

The link between the two poems continued when Keats's sonnet appeared in the *Champion* three weeks after 'Devon,' in response to a correspondent who claimed to admire the poems by 'J. H. R.' that had been published in the paper more than the poetry of Keats.

⁴⁹⁰ Roe, *John Keats*, 175.

⁴⁹¹ 'On the Sea', *JKCP*, 59-60.

⁴⁹² *LJK*, I. 132.

⁴⁹³ *The Letters of John Hamilton Reynolds*, ed. Leonidas Jones, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 9.

Leonidas Jones suggests that it was Reynolds himself who was responsible for printing the sonnet in order ‘to prove to our correspondent Pierre, [Keats’s] superiority over any other poetical writer in the *Champion*’.⁴⁹⁴ Jones also notes that Reynolds’s theatrical review for that week had quoted ‘shadows of sweet sounds’ from Keats’s unpublished poem, ‘Unfelt, Unheard, Unseen’—thereby giving a covert sign of his appreciation for Keats’s poetry for the small coterie readership that would be able to know the source of the quotation.

For both Keats and Reynolds the sight and contemplation of the sea had provoked a kind of existential angst. Reynolds writes how, as a result of watching the sunlight upon the sea,

All my Being seems,
To swell with o’erwrought feelings,—And to shake
With thronging thoughts,—And to be well nigh sick
With vain surmises, and deep yearnings that
I might associate with the Enormous Sun,
Or be a stern companion to the Sea. (ll. 106-11)

Despite these wishes, Reynolds is unable to be drawn into the same kind of sense of pantheistic unity which Wordsworth had experienced viewing the landscape above Tintern Abbey. In further lines, which describe an experience very similar to that which Keats describes in his verse-epistle, Reynolds writes how,

Tremendous Thoughts come o’er us, when we gaze
With all the mind weighing upon the eyes,
At the grand Sun and Sea. A wearing pain
Clings drearily to the heart. A consciousness
Of mortal poverty.—Of heavy helplessness,—
Haunts all the aching soul. (ll. 112-7)

In one of many revisions to this passage for *The Garden of Florence*, Reynolds changes ‘aching’ to ‘waking’. This alteration, which emphasises the contrast between the troubles of the ‘waking soul’ and the ‘romantic dream’ that offers relief, intensifies the thematic links between Reynolds’s poem and Keats’s verse-epistle, which had offered Reynolds’s a dream-vision as relief from worldly cares.

⁴⁹⁴ Jones, *Life of John Hamilton Reynolds*, 122.

In his verse-letter, Keats revisits some of the language of ‘Devon’. Reynolds writes how, though the sea remains unheard, ‘I can see it curling to the Shore, / And whitening on the yellow beach’ (ll. 102-3). Keats echoes these images, colours, and sibilant sounds in his description of how, ‘the wide sea did weave / An untumultuous fringe of silver foam / Along the flat brown sand’ (ll. 90-2). Like Reynolds, the sight of the quiet sea brings thoughts of mortality to Keats’s mind, which trouble what should be a peaceful scene:

—‘Twas a quiet eve;
 The rocks were silent—the wide sea did weave
 An untumultuous fringe of silver foam
 Along the flat brown sand. I was at home,
 And should have been most happy—but I saw
 Too far into the sea; where every maw
 The greater on the less feeds evermore:—
 But I saw too distinct into the core
 Of an eternal fierce destruction,
 And so from happiness I far was gone. (ll. 89-98)

Keats sees ‘too far’ for comfort, finding in the natural scene a tale of inescapable conflict and death. Wordsworth in ‘Tintern Abbey’ had been able to see ‘into the life of things’ with a ‘quiet eye’ and to find a spiritual sense of unity, in which he felt the presence of, ‘A motion and a spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things’ (l. 50; ll. 101-3). Neither Keats nor Reynolds seems able to find such a sense of consolation from meditating upon the landscape. However, ‘Devon’ ends on a more positive note than Keats’s verse-epistle. As his Devon vision fades, Reynolds reflects on the parallels between the flux of the mind’s emotions and the seascape:

The Mind hath, like the Sea, its swells and sinkings,
 Its turbulence,—its tremblings,—and its sleep,—
 Swayed by the very temper of the Elements. (ll. 152-4)

The mental resonances which are left in Reynolds’s memory—the sounds of birds, waves, bees, the brook—fall silent or dampened in his mind: ‘All these are quiet now,—or only heard / Like mellow’d murmurings of the distant Sea’ (ll. 162-3). These distant, persistent murmurings which—the concluding line of the poem suggests—have the potential to linger

always as a comforting presence in Reynolds's mind, seem to echo the consolatory image of the 'immortal sea' which Wordsworth described in his 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality':

Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.⁴⁹⁵ (ll. 165-70)

While it lacks the spiritual dimension of Wordsworth's poem, Reynolds in a smaller scope, suggests that the lingering, remembered sea-sounds can offer some emotional comfort.

Keats appeared to respond intensely to the sentiments which Reynolds had expressed in 'Devon,' seeing in the poem a parallel to his own experiences. In a letter he wrote to Reynolds just over a month later (3 May) Keats dwells on those concerns which he knows that they share. In response to a letter from Reynolds which is now lost, Keats writes that, 'You seem [...] to have been going through with a more painful and acute zest the same labyrinth that I have'.⁴⁹⁶ Keats's verse-epistle had already hinted towards Wordsworthian allusions in its imagery of mystery and mistiness: 'I have a mysterious tale / And cannot speak it', Keats writes (ll. 86-7). In his letter of 3 May, Keats writes, with Wordsworthian allusion, 'We are in a Mist—*We* are now in that state—We feel the "burden of the Mystery"'.⁴⁹⁷

Keats speculates, as Reynolds's poem and his own verse-letter implicitly had, that Wordsworth's poetry had a key role to play in bringing them both to a sense of their own confusion and helping them to work it out. Keats posits his 'surmises' (echoing Reynolds's 'vain surmises'), about the question of whether Milton had the ability of 'seeing further or no' than Wordsworth.⁴⁹⁸ In echoing the language and sentiments of Reynolds's poem when he writes to him, Keats reinforces a sense of his empathy with Reynolds's feelings. Their web of

⁴⁹⁵ 'Ode,' *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1983), 271-6.

⁴⁹⁶ LJK, I. 278.

⁴⁹⁷ LJK, I. 281.

⁴⁹⁸ LJK, I. 278.

shared allusions, to one another, to Wordsworth and to Coleridge, provides a way of creating a language of friendship.

This echoing, allusive language seems to have been a feature of Keats's friendly letters in the early months of 1818. His famous image (in a letter to Reynolds on 19 February) of the passively receptive flower, whose leaves 'blush deeper' in a feminine manner when visited by the bees, and the parallel which Keats draws to human life—'and who shall say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted?'—recalls the flirtatiously gendered floral image in 'Devon': 'the light flowers / Were nodding here and there at the fickle bees, / That left them heedlessly' (ll. 16-18).⁴⁹⁹

Keats, in referring to the 'labyrinth' of speculation, uses an image which Reynolds also uses in his poem, 'The Romance of Youth'. Reynolds's biographer Leonidas Jones suggests, on the basis of the poem's preface, that Reynolds's 'Romance' was probably written by January 1817.⁵⁰⁰ However, in a letter (written 3 May 1818) Keats remarks, 'I see no reason, because I have been away this last month, why I should not have a peep at your Spenserian', which seems to indicate that Reynolds was still writing 'The Romance of Youth' at that point.⁵⁰¹

Reynolds's Spenserian-style poem describes a solitary, imaginative young man, who lingers in the forest, filled with innocent fairy reveries, until he becomes aware of the sorrows of the world. The poem's preface proclaims that it shows how 'the world of the imagination is darkened by the shadow of the world of reality'.⁵⁰² The young protagonist of the poem (perhaps based on Reynolds himself, although Hunt believed the character was based on Keats) becomes increasingly unhappy through the impact of 'books of quaint research' which 'brought their bewildering / Over the youngster's mind' (ll. 821-2). The protagonist comes

⁴⁹⁹ LJK, I. 232.

⁵⁰⁰ Jones, *Life of John Hamilton Reynolds*, 103.

⁵⁰¹ LJK, I. 276.

⁵⁰² 'The Romance of Youth', *GF*, 29-92; 32.

under the intellectual influence of an older friend (probably based on Hazlitt) who introduces him to philosophical speculations and,

set the young thoughts straying wide,
Through metaphysic labyrinths, — which none
Have ever yet explored. (ll. 864-6)

These ‘metaphysic labyrinths’ seem, like the imagery in Keats’s verse-epistle and his letters from 1818, to derive from a Wordsworthian influence. It has long been recognised how the ‘chambers’, ‘labyrinth’, and ‘dark passages’ of Keats’s 3 May letter echo the architectural imagery of Wordsworth’s preface to *The Excursion*. Likewise, Keats adapts Wordsworth’s metaphor from ‘Tintern Abbey,’ ‘thy mind / Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms’ (l. 140-1) into his own more troubling and ambiguous analogy, comparing human life, ‘to a large Mansion of Many Apartments’.⁵⁰³ Keats suggests that he and Reynolds have traced the same intellectual path as Wordsworth himself had by 1798 when he wrote ‘Tintern Abbey’, ‘The verse-epistle to Reynolds prefigures the imagery of the letter, with Keats’s image of the imagination ‘still confined,— / Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind’ (ll. 79-80) suggestive of the labyrinthine ‘dark passages’.⁵⁰⁴ Reynolds and Keats seem to deploy these potent images with the knowledge that both will understand the allusion, with the labyrinthine imagery functioning as a kind of shorthand for Wordsworthian philosophical concerns.

As well as being acutely aware that he shared his disquieting philosophical concerns with Reynolds, Keats in his verse-letter appears to respond directly to Reynolds’s claim in ‘Devon’ that the only relief from these haunting feelings comes from,

some romantic Dream which hides the Earth,
Some momentary and most strange possession
Of an ideal vastness,—or the voice
Of that intense, sure Hope, which ne’er betrays. (ll. 118-121)

Reynolds posits that a momentary feeling of spiritual unity of the kind available to Wordsworth and Coleridge (but not it seems to himself or Keats) would offer some relief.

⁵⁰³ *LJK*, I. 280.

⁵⁰⁴ *LJK*, I. 281.

His momentary possession of ‘an ideal vastness’ suggests that experiencing the imaginative sublime could afford a revivifying power to the spirits. Keats, in addition, desires dreams made from ‘something of material sublime’ as the means of escaping from the ‘shadow’ of daytime concerns that falls upon the sleeping subconscious (ll. 69-70).

Since moments of sublime transcendence seem out of reach, Keats playfully takes another track: in his verse-letter, he fabricates a ‘romantic dream’ for Reynolds to offer him some direct relief from the oppression of sickness and mental anguish.

Keats’s ‘romantic dream’ has darker, Coleridgean echoes of both ‘Kubla Khan’ and ‘The Pains of Sleep’. Coleridge’s preface to ‘Kubla Khan’ in his 1816 publication had described the now well-known story of how he came to write the poem: after being taken ill at a lonely farmhouse near Porlock, Coleridge had taken opium for his indisposition, and, after falling asleep while reading an account in Samuel Purchas’s *Pilgrimes* of Kubla Khan’s palace and stately garden, composed a long poem in his dream, which he attempted to write down as soon as he awoke. Coleridge pairs the poem with ‘The Pains of Sleep’, a contrasting vision ‘describing with equal fidelity the dream of pain and disease’.⁵⁰⁵ For Keats, in Teignmouth with his tuberculosis-ridden brother Tom, writing to the sick Reynolds confined in London, Coleridge’s two poems of ‘psychological curiosity’ that explored the manifold impact of bodily disease, medication, mental anguish, and dream-states, would have seemed of particular interest (51).

In contrast to Coleridge, whose reading of Purchas’s *Pilgrimes* led him to dream an exotic architectural vision of Kubla Khan’s pleasure dome, Keats describes his own last night’s dream as a jumbled juxtaposition of historical and contemporary people and objects, which are comical in their incongruity. His waking thoughts are reformed by his dreaming imagination into ‘Things all disjointed’ (l. 5). There are darker hints underlying Keats’s comical bathos, however, and the ‘shapes, and shadows, and remembrances’ which come to

⁵⁰⁵ S. T. Coleridge, *Christabel; Kubla Khan, a vision; The Pains of Sleep*, (London: John Murray, 1816), 54. All following references are to this text.

‘vex and please’ him in the form of witch eyes and hellish noses (ll. 3-4). These images seem to echo the ‘fiendish crowd / Of shapes and thoughts’, which tormented Coleridge’s sleeping mind in ‘The Pains of Sleep’, and his experience of having ‘Desire with loathing strangely mixed / On wild and hateful objects fixed’ (ll. 16-17; ll. 23-4).⁵⁰⁶ Coleridge’s pair of poems explore the ambiguous potential of dreaming: the paradisiacal landscape of ‘Kubla Khan’ is tinged with dark hints of violence, and ‘The Pains of Sleep’ describes painful psychological disorientations. Keats’s verse-epistle echoes the concerns of Coleridge’s poems: first he claims that his ‘real’ dreams are full of disorienting confusion; then, in response to the failure of this ‘psychological’ dream matter, he fabricates an alternative, artificial waking dream-vision for Reynolds, building on his memory of Claude’s painting—a vision which is interrupted by dark thoughts of elemental violence.

The structure of Keats’s verse-epistle parallels that of Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan,’ where the first part describes the vision of the pleasure dome, before the second part reveals the poet’s limited ability to recall his dream, and therefore his inability to act as either a seer or shaman, or as the creator who ‘would build that dome in air’ if he could (l. 46).⁵⁰⁷ Keats’s depiction of the Enchanted Castle is followed by a parallel failure at maintaining this creative act of castle-building: he breaks off, to complain of the problems of dreaming, before re-starting his poem, stating ‘Dear Reynolds, I have a mysterious tale / but cannot speak it’ (ll. 86-7). Both Keats and Coleridge appear to have a parallel in the figure of the herdsman who sees the enchanted place and then ‘tells of the sweet music and the spot / To all his friends, and they believe him not’ (ll. 65-6).

Many of the details of Keats’s enchanted landscape recall Coleridge’s depiction of Kubla Khan’s palace: the landscape is ‘a mossy place’ rather than a savage one, with cold ‘rills’ (ll. 34-6). Elements of the landscape—the lake, isles, mountains, rills—appear to be endowed with and animated by humanoid emotions:

⁵⁰⁶ ‘The Pains of Sleep’, *Christabel*, 61-4 (PWC, I.: 2, 753-5).

⁵⁰⁷ ‘Kubla Khan’, *Christabel*, 55-8. (PWC, I.: 1, 509-14).

Here do they look alive to love and hate,
 To smiles and frowns; they seem a lifted mound
 Above some giant, pulsing underground. (ll. 38-40)

This peculiar and threatening animation recalls the landscape of ‘Kubla Khan’, in which the ‘ceaseless turmoil’ of the chasm, and the momentary creation of the fountain, arise, ‘As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing’ (l. 18).

Keats’s collection of disparate orientalisms—the ‘santon of Chaldee,’ the Kamschatkan church bell, etc—are reminiscent of Coleridge’s random juxtaposition of Mongolian warlord and Abyssinian dulcimer-player. In the ‘banish’d santon of Chaldee’ perhaps lies an allusion to *Blackwood’s Magazine’s* controversial satire, the spoof ‘Translation from an Ancient Chaldee Manuscript’, which had appeared in the same number as ‘Z’s first ‘Cockney School’ article.⁵⁰⁸ In the same issue, *Blackwood’s* review of *Biographia Literaria* had brutally critiqued Coleridge as a man who ‘presumptuously came forward to officiate as High-Priest at mysteries beyond his ken—and who carried himself as if he had been familiarly admitted into the Penetralia of Nature, when in truth he kept perpetually stumbling at the very threshold’—a quotation which John Beer identifies as the source of Keats’s image of Coleridge as someone who ‘would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining Content with half knowledge’.⁵⁰⁹ Despite this well-known criticism of Coleridge, Keats nevertheless appears to respond deeply to the influence of Coleridgean dream-poetry and romance; Keats does not criticise Coleridge’s mystical tendencies but rather his inability to follow through his intuitive half-seeing to its fullest effect.

The female figure whose image haunts Coleridge’s poem, imagined ‘wailing for her demon lover’ (l. 16), seems to lie behind Keats’s description of the ‘beauteous woman’s large blue eyes / Gone mad through olden songs and poesies’ (ll. 53-4). It also perhaps lies behind

⁵⁰⁸ A satire on the Edinburgh Whigs, the ‘Chaldee Manuscript’ was later suppressed. *BM*, (Oct. 1817), 89-96.

⁵⁰⁹ ‘Some Observations on the “Biographia Literaria” of S. T. Coleridge, Esq.’, *BM*, (Oct. 1817), 3- 18; 6; Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary*, 305-6; *LJK*, I. 193-4.

his choice of painting. Claude's painting was originally entitled, 'Landscape with Psyche outside the Palace of Amor'. It illustrates the story of Psyche, a mortal woman with whom Cupid fell in love. He swept her away to an enchanted land, and the painting appears to show Psyche at the moment before she sees her would-be lover's unearthly palace for the first time; or, alternatively, after she has been abandoned by Cupid for lighting a lamp to catch sight of the godly lover who visited her only by night.

The woman's 'blue eyes' are a detail which recalls the large blue eyes of Coleridge's 'Christabel', and the contrastingly disconcerting eyes of Geraldine, which reveal her demonical character by shrinking up to a 'serpent's eye', and at other times present an ambiguous disguise, for example in the way that she 'rolled her large bright eyes divine / Wildly on Sir Leoline' (l. 574; ll. 584-5).⁵¹⁰ The blue eyes also recall Keats's sonnet-based debate with Reynolds in February over whether blue eyes or dark eyes in a woman are more powerful: Keats had argued for the power of blue eyes in his sonnet, 'Blue!'

In using these Coleridgean allusions, Keats seems to be making the case in favour of the mysterious, mystical aspect of Coleridge's poetry which Reynolds had frequently criticised in *The Champion* over the past few years. In his essay, 'The Pilgrimage of the Living Poets to the Stream of Castaly', Reynolds pictures Coleridge muddying the waters of the stream, an action symbolic of how he has 'confused himself with the abstruseness of his own observations'.⁵¹¹ In a comic dialogue in which he imagines how Boswell, Johnson, and their circle would discuss the modern poets, Reynolds depicts Samuel Johnson giving a very matter-of-fact disparagement of 'Kubla Khan':

Sir Joshua—'I think his description of the shadow of pleasure's dome floating midway on the waves of a river, gives you a grand idea of the size of the structure. It seems to me very picturesque.'

Johnson—'But, Sir, I can make nothing of the dream. Any man may say an occasional good thing, but it will not embalm his eternal follies. He talks of a *sunny*

⁵¹⁰ 'Christabel', *Christabel*, 1-48 (PWC, II.: 1, 606-662).

⁵¹¹ *The Champion*, (7 Apr. 1816) in *SPR*, 49.

dome, with caves of *ice*;—Sir, such a building could not exist. Fancy turns away with disgust from such an absurdity.⁵¹²

In his review of *Zapholya*, Reynolds remarks of Coleridge that he has set himself beyond the bounds of comprehension, so that, ‘where he ought to be admired there are few to wonder at, and fewer to feel with him [...] We meet with but one here and there who is able to enter fully into his fantastic thought region; or be intense over his phantom-illustrations’.⁵¹³ In contrast, Reynolds’s review of Keats’s *Poems* (1817) had praised him for avoiding this particular vice:

though Mr. Keats’s poetry is remarkably abstracted, it is never out of reach of the mind; there are one or two established writers of this day who think that mystery is the soul of poetry—that artlessness is a vice—and that nothing can be graceful that is not metaphysical;—and even young writers have sunk into this error, and endeavoured to puzzle the world with a confused sensibility.⁵¹⁴

Given that Keats must have been well aware of Reynolds’s views on Coleridge, the choice of such a reference point when composing his dreams seems to arise from a desire to demonstrate the interest and value of Coleridge’s dream-poetry. Therefore, while Keats’s verse-epistle on one hand aims, through allusion and imagery, to show the values and experiences which he shares with Reynolds—their mutual appreciation of Wordsworth, and their similar experiences of existential angst contemplating the sea—on the other hand, the verse-epistle also shows where the two poets differ, as Keats’s echoes of Coleridge’s dream-vision shows his own appreciation of the works which Reynolds does not share. Keats appears, perhaps, to be the ‘one here and there’ mentioned in Reynolds’s review, who can enter into the fantastic regions of Coleridge’s thought.

Keats’s verse-epistle nevertheless seems to have had a lasting impact in Reynolds’s memory. Keats’s depiction of the Enchanted Castle is echoed in the opening stanza of Reynolds’s *Ladye of Provence*, one of two poems by Reynolds based on tales from Boccaccio, which were originally planned to accompany Keats’ *Isabella*. The magic casements of Keats’s

⁵¹² *The Champion*, (15 Dec. 1816) in *SPR*, 93.

⁵¹³ *The Champion*, (16 Nov. 1817) in *SPR*, 121.

⁵¹⁴ *The Champion* (9 Mar. 1817) in *SPR*, 100.

Castle, ‘as if latch’d by fays and elves’, of course prefigure those in the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ (l. 50). From the windows of Keats’s Castle,

comes a silver flash of light
As from the westward on a summer’s night;
Or like a beauteous woman’s large blue eyes
Gone mad through olden songs and poesies. (ll. 51-4)

Reynolds’s two castle in Provence stand ‘facing the setting sun, whose rays they cast / Back on the evening from the sheening ivy / And gorgeous window pane’ (ll. 3-5).⁵¹⁵ Through this same ‘great gazing window’, later in the poem, the tragic Indreana, after finding out that she has just eaten the cooked heart of her murdered lover, throws herself to her death: her eyes ‘Flash’d an unnatural light’, in the moments before she rushes to the window (l. 272; l. 269). By deploying these echoes of Keats’s verse-letter in his poem, Reynolds memorializes their never-completed project of co-writing a volume of tales from Boccaccio. Since the verse-letter was not published until 1848, Reynolds’s allusions would be inaccessible to anyone outside of Keats’s close circle of friends; they speak a private language directed at Keats alone.⁵¹⁶ The echoes of Keats’s imagery keep the poet alive in Reynolds’s work, and seem to be part of Reynolds’s way of memorializing his dead friend—his preface to his volume of poems, *The Garden of Florence*, published in 1821, after Keats’s death, speaks warmly and sadly of Keats, even though he is not openly named.

Tracing the echoes and allusions between Keats’s and Reynolds’s work, as I have done here, reveals how the poets forged a close friendship in the early months of 1818 which was created and sustained through poetry. The two poets drew on their shared cultural framework to maintain a kind of poetical ‘conversation’ between their work, and implicitly experimented with creating a fraternal kind of poetical pairing that echoed the early days of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

⁵¹⁵ ‘The Ladye of Provence’, *GF*, 157-175.

⁵¹⁶ It was first published in the *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats*, ed. Richard Monckton Milnes, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1848).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Keats's letters display his self-consciousness about writing in a genre that comes weighted with literary precedents, and which, for nineteenth-century writers, increasingly had the potential for posthumous publication. Keats's letters therefore hover between a personal and public frame of reference, at moments looking forwards with a haunted sense of posterity. Nevertheless, the literary works which Keats shares through letters have an intrinsically sociable function, reinforcing family ties or a sense of literary comradeship. As the example of the Leigh sisters' poetry albums shows, the manuscript circulation of poetry in the early nineteenth century could be used by its creators to forge a friendship group or a sense of community.

In addition, the letters reveal how, for Keats, the sympathetic imagination was not just the means of sustaining friendship and the enabling force behind poetic creativity, but also played an important role in the act of reading and interpreting. Keats figures friendship and reading in images of a sympathetic merging of identity, depicting friends like Reynolds as endowed with the ability to make an imaginative interpretive leap by reason of their intimate knowledge of the writer.

The framework of knowledge which Keats shares with Reynolds—a grounding of poetical allusions and philosophical concerns—allows the two poets to establish a kind of 'conversation' and debate through echoes and allusion to one another's poetry, both published and unpublished. Through these intimate, coterie references the young poets seek to establish a brotherly pairing which positions their own creative identities relative to the previous generation of poets.

Leigh Hunt

Much recent scholarship on Leigh Hunt's life and work has emphasised his position at the centre of a circle or coterie of writers, poets, artists, and musicians, dubbed the 'Cockney School' by its critics at *Blackwood's Magazine*. Jeffery Cox, in particular, has argued that this group 'conceived of itself as a coherent circle', united in a collective project of forging a social, aesthetic, and political 'counterculture'.⁵¹⁷ This chapter, however, argues that the impression of a 'coherent circle' is to a large extent the product of Leigh Hunt's attempt to construct a public image of group unity in his publications, such as *Foliage* (1818) and the *Examiner*. Undoubtedly, the various members of Hunt's wide social circle had a significant and substantial aesthetic and intellectual impact on one another's work through discussion, literary influence and exchange of ideas—as indeed I have shown in the previous chapter's examination of the poetical relationship between Keats and Reynolds. However, it is important to recognise that literary works by Hunt and friends are not simply textual *representations* of the circle, but rather these texts *construct* and *perform* the creation of a community identity in ways similar to Barbauld writing about Warrington Academy, Coleridge writing in relation to the Dove Cottage group, Lamb and Hazlitt writing within the *London Magazine*, or Keats and Reynolds forging a fraternal poetical pairing.

In his print publications, Hunt presents the general public reader with an idealised view of his various acquaintances as constituting a unified community sharing social, aesthetic

⁵¹⁷ Cox, *Poetry and Politics*, 20; 67.

and political values. This textual strategy papers over differences in opinion, and the sometimes fractious relationships between various members of the circle. Furthermore, Hunt attempts to create a wider public community of *Examiner* readers through similarly coercive textual means, constructing a depiction of the ideal *Examiner* reader who shares in the group's domestic leisure, aesthetic tastes, and political ideology. Just as Anna Barbauld had shaped her poetry for a particular community at Warrington Academy and a wider community of Dissenters, so Hunt in the *Examiner* and its associated publications such as the *Reflector*, the *Indicator*, the *Round Table*, *Foliage*, and the *Literary Pocket-Book* expressed the political and cultural ideals which he saw (rightly or wrongly) as uniting his particular community of acquaintances, and tried to promote the ideals of this community to his wider readership. This chapter examines first *Foliage* (1818), then Hunt's weekly newspaper, the *Examiner*, to explore how Hunt textually fashions a community, and seeks to define the character and limits of his readership.

Coterie connections

Hunt's *Foliage* (published 19 March 1818) is full of poetical addresses: through a series of verse-epistles and sonnets dedicated to various friends and acquaintances, *Foliage*'s table of contents announces the people to whom Hunt wishes to be publicly linked.⁵¹⁸

The verse-epistles had first been printed two years earlier in the *Examiner* in summer 1816. The first was an open declaration of support for Lord Byron as he headed abroad in exile. The rest formed a series called 'Harry Brown's letters to his friends', in which Hunt, under this pseudonym, addressed firstly 'Thomas Brown' (the pseudonym under which Thomas Moore had published his *Intercepted Letters; or the Twopenny Post-Bag*, a series of spoof

⁵¹⁸ Leigh Hunt, *Foliage; or Poems Original and Translated*, (London: C. and J. Oliver, 1818).

letters in verse, purporting to have been written by public figures such as the Prince Regent, and Princess Charlotte), and then ‘W. H.’ (Hazlitt), ‘C. L.’ (Lamb), and ‘B. F.’ (Barron Field).

Moore’s *Intercepted Letters* (1813) had (as I shall examine in more detail later) included a veiled declaration of support and consolation to the Hunts after their imprisonment for libel in 1813.⁵¹⁹ Hunt’s choice of pseudonym for his epistles, ‘Harry Brown’, the supposed cousin of ‘Tom Brown’, is a gesture which acknowledges his gratitude for Moore’s friendly words. Moore’s verse had sought to offer the Hunts’ recompense for being confined without sight of natural scenery, and Hunt’s first letter as ‘Harry Brown’ seems to answer this concern—now free from confinement he can lie at ease on the grass, and feel ‘a cheek-smoothing air’ on his face, surrounded by ‘fern and wild flowers’ (ll. 36-7).⁵²⁰ When viewed as an answer to Moore’s text, Hunt’s descriptions of joyfully sauntering about the lanes of Hampstead and celebrating the simple sights of fields, gardens, and streets, appear not mere self-indulgence but rather a celebration of freedom, with an appreciation born from having been denied such small pleasures for two years. Hunt’s verse-epistles—sometimes publicly, sometimes confidentially—thank those friends who stood by him and visited him in jail: so, for example, Hunt records Charles and Mary Lamb’s ‘visiting feats’ through terrible weather, ‘When I wanted it most’ (ll. 8-10).⁵²¹

In their first incarnation in the *Examiner*, Hunt’s verse-epistles have a somewhat different character to the pieces later published in *Foliage*. The epistles addressed to Moore are predominantly a vehicle for political satire, mocking various contemporary statesmen for, among other things, their dull oratory and their insubstantial politics. The stylistic features of the epistles echo Moore’s own satirical letters in their racing metre and daring (some would say appalling) rhymes. When he revises the epistles to Moore for *Foliage*, Hunt omits these

⁵¹⁹ Thomas Moore, *Intercepted Letters; or, the Twopenny Post-Bag*, (London: J. Carr, 1813), 107-8.

⁵²⁰ *E.*, (30 June 1816), 409-10.

⁵²¹ *E.* (25 Aug. 1816), 536.

references to contemporary politics; the emphasis of the verse-epistles shifts to focus on depictions of Hunt's lifestyle of suburban wandering and companionable domestic sociability.

As if to emphasise the entwining of poetry and politics, reading the verse-epistles in situ in the *Examiner* also reveals Hunt's repeated onslaught on the Tory poet laureate Robert Southey. As well as comparing him to Bob Acres in 'The Rivals' (in a passage deleted from what later becomes the second epistle to Moore in *Foliage*), Hunt's criticism of him 'changing his whim' in the epistle to Barron Field appears in the *Examiner* next to the first instalment of his 'Acanthologia: Specimens of Early Jacobin Poetry' which serves up choice selections of Southey's early verse to reveal his turncoat politics.

Importantly, the verse-epistles as they appear in the *Examiner* cannot really be described as 'coterie' poetry—though the identities of the addressees may be obscured, understanding the epistles nevertheless does not particularly require any knowledge that would not be available to a constant reader of the *Examiner*. Hunt had referred to his time in prison so often that the average *Examiner* reader would be in on Hunt's joke to Moore that he looks 'so slender and pale, / You'd swear me a rhymester just come out of jail' (ll. 23-4).⁵²² Various sonnets on Hampstead had appeared in the *Examiner* over the past few years, so Hunt's descriptions of his suburban wanderings in the verse-epistles to Moore and Hazlitt would not have revealed much unfamiliar information to the general reader.⁵²³ In fact Hunt goes to great lengths to make sure that the general reader can follow his allusions, adding footnotes to explain classical or literary references.

When he republishes the verse-epistles in *Foliage*, Hunt openly reveals the names of his addressees. Likewise Hunt's sonnets are addressed to named friends: as well as 'Mrs L. H.' and his sister-in-law 'Miss K.', sonnets are dedicated to Percy Shelley, Hunt's musical friends Henry Robertson, John Gattie and Vincent Novello, John Keats, Horatio Smith, Benjamin

⁵²² *E.*, (21 July 1816), 456; see also *E.*, (7 July 1816), 424.

⁵²³ *E.*, (29 Aug. 1813), 556; *E.*, (7 Aug. 1814), 503; *E.*, (18 Dec. 1814), 806; *E.*, (7 May 1815), 300; *E.*, (14 May 1815), 316.

Robert Haydon, John Hamilton Reynolds, and Thomas Stothard. The poems offer the public a portrait of Hunt's relationships with his social circle: the poems record social occasions, or give a friendly response to other poems or gifts. His sonnet to Keats responds to the Keats's dedicatory sonnet to Hunt in *Poems* (1817), and two more sonnets record their exchange of crowns of ivy and laurel; Keats had also written (though not published) sonnets on the occasion. Hunt's sonnet, 'To the Grasshopper and the Cricket,' arose from a sonnet-writing contest with Keats, and Hunt had printed their two poems on the topic next to one another in the *Examiner* (21 September 1817). 'On the Nile' was also the product of a sonnet contest, though it is unclear whether this would have been obvious to anyone outside the circle—possibly some readers would have seen echoes of Shelley's and Smith's two 'Ozymandias' poems published in the *Examiner* in January and February 1818. Hunt's sonnet to Reynolds responds to 'his lines upon the Story of Rimini' published in the *Champion* (8 December 1816), 'Ye who do love to hear of mossy places'. Three sonnets to the (unnamed) Robert Batty, M.D. respond to his gift to Hunt of a lock of Milton's hair. Hunt's musical social life is implied in the sonnet to Robertson, Gattie, and Novello 'on not keeping their appointed hour', and he displays his interest in the fine arts through sonnets to the painters Benjamin Robert Haydon and Thomas Stothard.

Fig. 5: *Foliage; or Poems Original and Translated*, (1818), p. 4 (section).

SONNETS.—On Hampstead	- - - -	cxv
To Mrs. L. H.	- - - -	cxvii
To Kosciusko	- - - -	cxviii
To the Grasshopper and the Cricket	- - - -	cxix
Under a Portrait of Rafael	- - - -	cxx
To Miss K.	- - - -	cxxi
To Percy Shelley	- - - -	cxxii
To the same	- - - -	cxxiii
To Henry Robertson, John Gattie, and V. Novello	- - - -	cxxiv
To John Keats	- - - -	cxxv
On receiving a Crown of Ivy	- - - -	cxxvi
On the same	- - - -	cxxvii
To Horatio Smith	- - - -	cxxviii
To Benjamin Robert Haydon	- - - -	cxxix
To John Hamilton Reynolds	- - - -	cxxx
On receiving a Lock of Milton's Hair	- - - -	cxxxi
On the same	- - - -	cxxxii
On the same occasion	- - - -	cxxxiii
On the Nile	- - - -	cxxxiv
To Thomas Stothard, R. A.	- - - -	cxxv

Through poems dedicated to his various acquaintances, Hunt depicted himself at the centre of a harmonious network of friends. Jeffery Cox argues that such a grouping together of named associates was an act of defiance in the wake of the attacks launched by *Blackwood's Magazine* on the 'Cockney School' in October 1817: the volume 'proudly defines a roster of the Hunt circle. It recreates the living group textually'.⁵²⁴ The epistles, Cox argues, are not just tokens of friendship but 'statements of artistic and ideological solidarity' (66). However, Hunt's register of names can give a misleading impression: while the contents page of *Foliage* defines the people with whom Hunt wants to be publicly linked, it by no means reveals a harmonious friendship network or coherent coterie: some of those mentioned had never met one another, others were but coolly acquainted, while a few downright hated one another.

A rather different picture of the 'Cockney' coterie is given in the letters and diaries of the group in this period. Keats, writing to his friend Benjamin Bailey (on 8 October 1817),

⁵²⁴ Jeffery Cox, 'Leigh Hunt's *Foliage*: a Cockney manifesto', in Nicholas Roe (ed.), *Leigh Hunt: Life, Poetics, Politics*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 58-77; 60.

describes a rather quarrelsome group of acquaintances, whose discordant relationships are punctured by backbiting:

From No 19 [Reynolds's house] I went to Hunt's and Haydon's who live now neighbours. Shelley was there—I know nothing about any thing in this part of the world—every Body seems at Loggerheads. There's Hunt infatuated—theres Haydon's Picture in statu quo. There's Hunt walks up and down his painting room criticising every head most unmercifully—There's Horace Smith tired of Hunt. The web of our Life is of mingled Yarn. [...] I am quite disgusted with literary Men and will never know another except Wordsworth—no not even Byron—Here is an instance of friendship as such—Haydon and Hunt have known each other many years—now they live pour ainsi dire jealous Neighbours. Haydon says to me Keats dont show your Lines to Hunt on any account or he will have done half for you—so it appears Hunt wishes it to be thought.⁵²⁵

It would be tempting to assign Keats's irritation at this group of bickering literary men to the impact of *Blackwood's* 'Cockney School' critique, only he does not seem to have been aware of it or read it until the end of the month—he first mentions the article in a letter to Bailey dated 3 November, and not any of his letters to Bailey written in October. In letters to his brothers and to Bailey from January 1818, Keats records two serious quarrels: one between Haydon and Reynolds, who began 'retorting and recriminating' when Reynolds did not reply to one of Haydon's social invitations; another between Hunt and Haydon, which arose when Mrs Hunt borrowed Haydon's silverware and did not return it at the appointed time. Both pairs of friends, Keats reports, have now 'parted for ever'.⁵²⁶ Haydon's diary reveals that resentment had been brewing on his part for a year, since a dinner party in January 1817 at Horace Smith's house, at which Shelley had called Christianity 'detestable'—he, Hunt, and Haydon had then argued like 'fiends'. Haydon wrote how, dining at Horace Smith's on 20 January 1817 with Hunt, Shelley, and Keats, he,

became excessively irritable at Hunt's unfeeling, heartless, and brutal ridicule of Christ and his divine doctrine. I have known Hunt now *10 years*, during which we have scarcely ever met without a contest about Christianity [...] After such perpetual contests without effect on either side, during the latter of which we have become rather warmer, one would think he as well as myself must see the uselessness of tormenting each other on a subject in which we cannot from the constitution of our Minds ever come to a similar conclusion. [...] of late my resolution to put in

⁵²⁵ LJK, I. 168-9.

⁵²⁶ LJK, I. 205, 210.

Voltaire's head into my Picture seems to have brought up all Hunt's bile & morbidity, boiling with froth into his acrid & gloomy imagination [...] My only refuge now is in personal insult, and that I will make a point of inflicting whenever I meet him.⁵²⁷

Such clashes reveal the substantial differences in opinion within the 'coterie', though this particular quarrel was forgiven by March 1817.⁵²⁸ Hunt's sonnet to Shelley in *Foliage* 'on the degrading notions of deity' can only have provoked Haydon further.

The sonnet to Haydon which Hunt published in *Foliage* had been written in 1816. The sonnet praised Haydon as one whom 'the conquered toil confesses / Painter indeed, gifted, laborious true', and numbered him with Michael and Raphael as one of the greats. At that time, Hunt had implicitly linked the development of their two careers, writing that 'he who with thee grew, / The bard and friend, congratulates and blesses'. By the time this poem appears publicly in *Foliage*, its declaration of friendship and artistic appreciation is no longer representative of the private situation of trivial quarrelling and backstabbing, religious differences, and Hunt's criticism of Haydon's 'Christ's Entry into Jerusalem'. Furthermore, the sonnet to Haydon is unhappily placed right next to Hunt's sonnet to Reynolds—a textual juxtaposition of names which betrays no inkling of the fact that Reynolds had only recently sent Haydon what Keats describes as 'one of the most cutting letters I ever read'.⁵²⁹

Despite Hunt's best efforts to gather about him a group of individuals united in their artistic, intellectual, and political interests and beliefs, the group appears to have been sustained far more harmoniously in the textual sphere of publications such as Keats's *Poems* (1817), Hunt's *Foliage* (1818), and the *Examiner* than it was in real-life exchanges.

For Hunt, presenting a public face of unity between the members of his social circle seems tied to his political agenda. A few years later, when Hazlitt publicly criticised Shelley in his essay 'On Paradox and Common-place' in *Table Talk* (1821), and (covertly) criticised Hunt in 'On People with one Idea', Hunt responded angrily that, 'the sight of acquaintances and

⁵²⁷ *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. Williard Bissell Pope, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960), II, 80-2.

⁵²⁸ *Diary of B. R. Haydon*, II, 101.

⁵²⁹ *LJK*, I, 205.

brother-reformers cutting and carbonadoing one another in public is, I conceive, no advancement to the cause of Liberal opinion'.⁵³⁰ Hunt accused Hazlitt of possessing 'a misconception of anything private' in making such deeply personal criticisms of his friends' characters in public, and furthermore suggested that Hazlitt was trying to distance himself from his acquaintances in response to the influence of 'a few paltry fellows in Murray's or Blackwood's interest' (319). The way that Hunt publicly represents his social circle of 'brother-reformers' seems to be something of a propaganda mission, seeking to advance 'the cause of Liberal opinion' by linking it to a tangible community of poets, artists, and intellectuals harmoniously united in the cause of reform.

What Hunt depicts in *Foliage*, therefore, is an idealised sociability. In this way it does indeed function as what Cox describes as 'a Cockney manifesto'.⁵³¹ Hunt seeks to define his community by their aesthetic tastes and companionable, domestic sociability: their shared love for books, and for 'busts and flowers, / And pictured bowers, / And the sight of fields' (ll. 3-5).⁵³² The volume reveals not just his fondness for Hampstead's fields and gardens, and his artistic tastes, but his atheism, his political inclinations in 'To Kosciusko' (if those were not already clear from the *Examiner*), and furthermore his classical education in the series of translations which comprise half the volume. The verse-epistles offer portraits of friendly companionship: Hunt pictures himself chatting with Hazlitt—reading over books together, listening to Mozart or Venetian ballads, taking a stroll down a leafy Hampstead valley—or reminiscing over the times the Lambs visited him in prison, and they would sit sipping tea and discussing writers like Chapman, Marvell, and Spenser. The verse-epistles place leisure and artistic pursuits above commerce: Hunt imagines shop owners criticising Hazlitt and himself

⁵³⁰ Letter (dated 20 April 1821) quoted in Howe, 318.

⁵³¹ Cox, 'Leigh Hunt's *Foliage*', 58–77.

⁵³² 'Fancy's Party: a Fragment,' *Foliage*, (1818), p. xxxix-xliii.

for indolence—‘How idle! [...] really a sin!’ (ll. 58-61)—although in reality, of course, both were hard-working journalists.⁵³³

As Cox and Nicholas Roe have argued, Hunt’s representation of group ‘sociality’ was an expression of political liberalism and ideals of creating a new kind of society on amiable, aesthetic, and democratic principles. Roe describes how Hunt’s preface to *Foliage* celebrates qualities such as cheerfulness, beauty, nature, health and sociality, which are opposed to the vicious effects of the ‘partial systems’ of the exclusive political establishment.⁵³⁴ Through these poetical depictions of his own lifestyle, Hunt aims ‘to cultivate a love of nature out of doors, and of sociality within’ among his readers.⁵³⁵

Portfolio poetry

The writing practices of Hunt and his friends—composing occasional verse and linked poems, sonnet competitions, dedicating poems to one another, and inscribing books—are, as Jeffery Cox has noted, reminiscent of the manuscript culture practices of earlier centuries.⁵³⁶

As I have shown in earlier chapters, such practices were by no means unique to the ‘Cockney’ circle: such domestic, coterie literary production was also characteristic of the work of Barbauld and Aikin, and of the Dove Cottage gang. The creation of manuscript albums like the one belonging to the Houghton family (described in chapter two) or the Leigh sisters (in chapter four) could be a popular pastime.

As well as forging the group’s community identity, Cox suggests that when replicated in printed works by members of the group, ‘these coterie practices sought to recreate on the page for the reader the generosity, the camaraderie, the collective inquiry, the communal celebration of life that the group offered as the ground for a new society’ (81). Coterie poetry

⁵³³ *E.*, (14 July 1816), 440.

⁵³⁴ Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*, 118.

⁵³⁵ Hunt, *Foliage*, 8.

⁵³⁶ Cox, *Poetry and Politics*, 63.

can, however, become problematical when it reaches a wider readership. Discussing Keats's *Poems* (1817), which contained verse-epistles to George Felton Mathew, Charles Cowden Clarke, and George Keats, as well as various occasional verses written in response to gifts (of shells, verses, roses etc), Cox argues that the reader needs 'insider' knowledge to fully understand and appreciate poems such as Keats's verse-epistle to Mathew, and 'its meaning is restricted to those who are privy to the secrets of the group' (95). Nevertheless, Cox suggests that sharing an overtly coterie poem with a wider network of public readers invites them 'to join the group in reading the poem'; the poem is an 'imagined social space' open to the public reader (96). Cox suggests that by openly representing the life of the coterie, the writers of the Hunt circle aim to attract or convert readers to the values and tastes of their social group. Yet, significantly, Cox argues, 'it includes only those who want to be included, those who in this case share the values of the poem' (97).

I will return to the problems with coterie writing later in this chapter with reference to Hunt's *Examiner*. What is clear is that the coterie poem (or indeed any 'coterie' kind of writing) is a site of tension—a literary form that clearly (in its allusions and references to insider knowledge and particular values and tastes) demarcates between potentially coexisting if not conflicting groups of readers. The general public of readers may be resistant to being coerced into the coterie; they may feel shut out by in-jokes or allusions that depend on insider knowledge; or they may simply be bored at 'overhearing' poems with a limited frame of reference.

By naming his acquaintances openly, Hunt gives *Foliage* an intimate feel, as if he has opened up his private manuscript album to the public. The hostile reaction of various critics can be explained not just as a resistance to Hunt's liberal politics, or class distaste at his supposed middle-class vulgarity, but also a resistance to reading such unashamedly 'coterie' poetry.

Certain critics thought that, by printing poems more suitable for a private audience than a public one, Hunt had committed a transgressive act in publishing *Foliage*. The *Monthly Magazine* commented that ‘we cannot avoid wishing, for his own fame, that Mr. Leigh Hunt had reserved the principle part of this volume as *memoranda* for his port-folio, their appropriate place’.⁵³⁷ For these critics, the occasional verse in *Foliage* appears unprofessional and self-indulgent for publicising the minutiae of Hunt’s life in poetry, not to mention vulgar for its extensive name-dropping. The *Literary Gazette* comments that ‘though they may be tolerable enough to his private circle’, Hunt’s songs and sonnets about Hampstead, his children, etc., must be ‘very unentertaining and tiresome’ to outsiders.⁵³⁸ As I have described in chapter one, William Turner’s obituary for Anna Letitia Barbauld perceived her verse as limited by the fact that only a reader familiar with the context of Warrington Academy could derive the most pleasure from it.⁵³⁹ Hunt’s occasional verses appear to suffer from a similar limitation in the eyes of his critics. Furthermore, in publishing verse on such private, domestic matters, Hunt’s poetry seems to blur the boundaries between ‘amateurish’ writing and professional authorship which, as Michelle Levy has described, became increasingly policed by critics during the Romantic period, resulting in hostile criticism of books such as Lamb’s *Album Verses* (1830).⁵⁴⁰

However, other reviewers admit that there might be something intriguing about poetry which displays so much of the author’s ‘personality’ to the reader: the *Eclectic Review*, in an otherwise negative critique, admits to a certain gossipy interest: ‘The Epistles to dear Byron, dear Tom Moore, dear Hazlitt, and others, were worth printing, just to let people see who were the poet’s correspondents’.⁵⁴¹ For the *New Monthly Magazine*, however, Hunt’s poetical dedications to his friends amount to vulgar name-dropping, and the magazine is full

⁵³⁷ ‘New Publications in April’, *Monthly Magazine*, (May 1818), 342-9, 346.

⁵³⁸ [Review of] ‘*Foliage*’, *Literary Gazette*, (Apr. 1818), 210-2, 210.

⁵³⁹ ‘Mrs Barbauld’, *Newcastle Magazine*, (May 1825), 229-32, 230.

⁵⁴⁰ Levy, 135.

⁵⁴¹ ‘Art. X. *Foliage*’, *Eclectic Review*, (Nov. 1818), 484-93, 492.

of ‘utter disgust and loathing at the “hail-fellow-well-met” style in which Mr. Hunt addresses these gentlemen, viz. “My dear Byron,” and “My dear Tom”’.⁵⁴² For the *New Monthly Magazine*, Hunt’s over-familiar style breaks class boundaries. For the *Literary Gazette*, Hunt’s poem book prompts a reflection on what *Blackwood’s* would later describe as the ‘*metromanie*’ of the lower classes, with the *Gazette* drawing an implicit parallel between Hunt and ‘the rhyming cobbler of Gosport’.⁵⁴³ The implicit criticism behind these reviews is that the portfolio-book-made-public style of *Foliage* is yet another manifestation of Hunt’s socially aspirational vulgarity; in a similar vein, a reviewer of Charles Lamb’s *Album Verses* claims that they could only be of interest to ‘amatory footmen and romantic housemaids’.⁵⁴⁴

However, *Foliage* also taps into the kind of manuscript books that many of his readers—like the Houghton family (whose homemade album contained a number of Barbauld’s poems), or the Leigh sisters of Teignmouth—might have made for themselves at home. These books were, in themselves, sites of domestic sociability, and ‘among the little practices by which friendships are cemented or perpetuated’.⁵⁴⁵ In a later essay for *The Keepsake for 1828*, Hunt reflects on how even printed books, inscribed and personalised by handwritten notes, could acquire sentimental value as material objects commemorating a friendship: ‘one precious name, or little inscription at the beginning of the volume, where the hand that wrote it is known to be generous in its wishes, if not in its means, is worth all the binding in St. James’s’.⁵⁴⁶ Writing in a book and then giving it as a gift leads the book itself to become like a friend since, ‘it can talk with and entertain us’; therefore Hunt suggests that ‘the said giver should mark his or her favourite passages throughout (as delicately as need be), and so present, as it were, the author’s and the giver’s mind at once’, making the book a site of interaction between writer and reader (16). Manuscript culture practices of textual exchange

⁵⁴² [Review of] ‘*Foliage*’, *New Monthly Magazine*, (Sept. 1818), 162-5, 164.

⁵⁴³ *Literary Gazette*, (Apr. 1818), 210.

⁵⁴⁴ ‘Monthly View of New Publications’, *Belle Assemblée*, (Sept. 1830), 125-9, 127.

⁵⁴⁵ ‘S.’, ‘On Albums’, *Literary Chronicle & Weekly Review*, 152 (13 Apr. 1822), 234.

⁵⁴⁶ Leigh Hunt, ‘Pocket-Books and Keepsakes’, *The Keepsake*, (London, 1828), 1-18, 17.

could reinforce friendships and community links. Homemade poetry books could also represent an aspiration to taste, and a participation in cultural life: they could be a means for the creators to define a cultural identity for themselves, and (like the Houghton family's manuscript book) represent their political or religious affiliations as well as their membership of personal social groups.

The *Examiner*: forming a virtual coterie

In the pages of his weekly newspaper the *Examiner*, Hunt devises various stylistic and rhetorical strategies to construct a distinct relationship between himself and his readership. In particular, Hunt forged a familiar, conversational style of writing. Richard Cronin and David Stewart have linked the development of this familiar magazine style to the demands of producing a mass-market periodical for a large reading audience 'with which he could not assume, but needed to construct, an intimacy'.⁵⁴⁷

One of Hunt's most self-conscious attempts representing a sociable, 'conversational' style of journalism in the *Examiner* was the collection of essays under the title of the 'Round Table'. The series was launched as the Hunt brothers prepared for their release from prison in February 1815. In a new prospectus, published in December 1814, Hunt indicated his intention to shift the *Examiner* in a more literary direction, with an increasing number of essays on literary and philosophical topics. In the first 'Round Table' essay, Hunt emphasised that the essays would be the project of a group: Thomas Barnes and Charles Lamb were originally intended to be additional contributors, but in fact most of the essays were written by Hazlitt, with a few contributions from Hunt. Hazlitt, however, wrote under various sets of initials, thereby creating the illusion that multiple writers were contributing to the series.

⁵⁴⁷ Stewart, 38. See also Cronin, 86.

In the first few essays, Hunt seeks to create a sense of intimacy with his readers by presenting them as included in the sociable life of a domestic environment, and his intimate, confiding tone stands as an assurance of his honesty: the *Examiner* is to be ‘a Journal carrying out into the public the voices of honest men by their fire-sides,’ and the writers of the essays are ‘literally speaking’ Hunt’s small party of friends (a play on the sense that they are his real friends, and yet also ‘of letters’) ‘who meet once a week at a Round Table to discuss the merits of a leg of mutton, and of the subjects of which we are to write’.⁵⁴⁸ The essay’s subjects will, Hunt claims, arise from the party’s real topics of conversation, thereby—supposedly—opening up the private conversation of the group to the involvement of the public reader. Implicitly the diners are united by certain tastes in art and literature and shared political leanings, and their free and pleasant domestic discussion is presented as an ideal of sociability. The company at the dining table are the centre of a network which, Hunt hopes, can extend outwards to the *Examiner*’s readership through imaginative participation or through correspondence with the writers.

Hunt’s images of the diners at the ‘Round Table’ blur the distinction between writing and speech to create a dramatic figuration of familiarity: the conversation of the ‘Round Table’, he writes, will be ‘as casual and unrestrained as it usually is among social parties’, and ‘the stream of conversation’ will be allowed to ‘wander through any ground it pleases’. Furthermore, the participants will ‘all speak, as becomes our social familiarity, in the first person’.⁵⁴⁹ Unlike the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, or indeed the playful use of pseudonyms later employed by the writers of *Blackwood’s* or the *London Magazine*, the participants in the ‘Round Table’ will not, Hunt writes, assume fictitious characters: rather, for the sake of greater honesty, the writers, ‘wishing to be regarded as [the reader’s] companions [...] shall talk, just

⁵⁴⁸ ‘New Prospectus of the Examiner’, *E.*, (25 Dec. 1814), 819-20, 819; ‘The Round Table, No. 1’, *E.*, (1 Jan. 1815), 11-13, 12.

⁵⁴⁹ *E.*, (1 Jan. 1815), 12

as we think, walk, and take dinner, in our proper persons'.⁵⁵⁰ Hunt's use of the plural 'we' acts inclusively, not just to present himself as writing representatively for a group, but also allowing the reader to identify themselves as part of this plural identity.

Hunt's 'conversational' style of writing bore the weight of a longer intellectual and cultural inheritance, however, as Jon Mee has discussed. Hunt positions himself in the tradition of eighteenth-century essay writing, practised by Addison and Steele in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, which had framed the magazine as a coffee-house discussion. Furthermore, Hunt's intimacy with his readers, Mee suggests, represents 'a continuation of a peculiarly English civic ideal'.⁵⁵¹ Like Addison and Steele before him, Hunt believed that the role of the periodical was to educate its readership in 'Manners, Morals and Taste'—the triad of themes which Hunt places at the heart of the 'Round Table'. In Hunt's opinion, therefore, the language of the periodical had to aim at literariness to improve the taste, manners, and sensibilities of its readership. Promoting his first issue of the *Examiner*, Hunt criticised other newspapers in which, 'You are invited to a literary conversation, and you find nothing but scandal and common-place'.⁵⁵² Hunt saw the great achievement of the *Spectator* to be its positive influence on social life, suggesting that 'there is not a domestic party now-a-days, in high life or in middle, but in it's [*sic*] freedom from grossness and it's [*sic*] tincture of literature, is indebted to Steele and his associates'.⁵⁵³

Hunt's belief in the improving influence of conversation and polite sociability bears the influence of Shaftesburyan liberalism. Lawrence Klein has described how, for Whigs like Shaftesbury, 'Ideal conversation was a moral framework for public interchange, since its conventions embodied the norms of freedom, equality, activity and pleasure'.⁵⁵⁴ The politeness of the conversationalists allowed ideas to be freely debated without causing offence:

⁵⁵⁰ *E.*, (1 Jan. 1815), 12.

⁵⁵¹ Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, 247.

⁵⁵² 'Prospectus', *E.*, (3 Jan. 1808), 6-8, 6-7.

⁵⁵³ 'The Round Table, No. 2', *E.*, (8 Jan. 1815), 26-8, 27.

⁵⁵⁴ Lawrence E. Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 98-99.

for Shaftesbury, ‘A freedom of raillery, a liberty in decent language to question everything, and an allowance of unravelling or refuting any argument without offence to the arguer, are the only terms which can render such speculative conversations any way agreeable’.⁵⁵⁵ In an early *Reflector* essay, ‘A Day by the Fire’ (reprinted in the collected volume of *Round Table* essays in 1817), Hunt depicts conversation in a musical metaphor as the root of social harmony:

nothing is like discourse, freely uttering the fancy as it comes, and varied, perhaps, with a little music, or with the perusal of some favourite passages, which excite the comments of the circle. It is then, if tastes happen to be accordant, and the social voice is frank as well as refined, that the “sweet music of speech” is heard in its best harmony, differing only for apter sweetness, and mingling but for happier participation, while the mutual sense smilingly bends in with every rising measure, “And female stop smoothes the charm o’er all”⁵⁵⁶

Hunt’s use of assonance and alliteration in the passage mimics the harmonious mingling of voices—harmonious due to their shared tastes and ‘mutual sense’, as well as by the participation of all parties; Hunt’s image presents a unified group in which each participant is part of the orchestration.⁵⁵⁷

For Hunt, the press could take on the role of educating a public that did not have access to a university education; the *Examiner* acts as a textual form of the kind of ‘literary and philosophical’ clubs that assisted and encourage the self-education of the rising middle classes.⁵⁵⁸ Indeed, the forerunner of the ‘Round Table’ was a series of essays called the ‘Literary and Philosophical Examiner’. Hunt’s preface, which asserts ‘a humble attempt [...] to revive [...] philosophy’ in the *Examiner* shows his direct inheritance from Addison, who in an early edition of the *Spectator* outlined his intention to widen the audience of philosophy:

I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables, and in Coffee-Houses.

I would therefore in a very particular Manner recommend these my Speculations to all well regulated Families, that set apart an Hour in every Morning for

⁵⁵⁵ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 33.

⁵⁵⁶ *RT*, II, 155.

⁵⁵⁷ Musical evenings, incidentally, formed a regular entertainment for Hunt and his friends. Hunt composed songs (such as the ones in *Foliage*) which his friend, the musician Vincent Novello, set to music.

⁵⁵⁸ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850*, (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 420; 442.

Tea and Bread and Butter; and would earnestly advise them for their Good to order this Paper to be punctually served up, and to be looked upon as a Part of the Tea Equipage.⁵⁵⁹

In his effort to democratise philosophy (as well as literature and politics) Hunt takes on Addison's vision of the domestic scene at the tea-table (rather than the coffee-house) and makes it one of the recurring images of the *Examiner*. Addison's statement carries two implications: firstly, that the medium of periodicals can have a positive educational impact by opening up knowledge and culture to a new readership; secondly, that this aspiration after culture characterises, and produces, 'well-regulated families'—as symbolised by Addison's imagined readers consuming the periodical at a genteel tea table. Like Addison, Hunt associated his paper with a domestic circle, and the ritual of tea-drinking—tea being itself a symbol of the trickling-down of prosperity that took place over the course of the eighteenth-century, as it slowly became a universal beverage rather than the preserve of the wealthy.

However, Hunt's conversational ideal of domestic politeness, as Mee has pointed out, draws on a very different tradition from the conversational mode employed by his fellow *Round Table* author, William Hazlitt. Hazlitt believed good conversation should be combative and pugnacious. Hazlitt derived this idea of conversation, Mee argues, from his Dissenting education: he followed works such as Isaac Watts's *The Improvement of the Mind* and William Godwin's *Political Justice* in seeing the collision of mind with mind as the means to strike out new truths.⁵⁶⁰ The differing models of conversation followed by Hunt and Hazlitt implicitly undermine something of the supposed unity of the *Round Table* writers.

Style and subjectivity

⁵⁵⁹ *The Spectator*, (No. 10; 12 Mar. 1711), ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965; 1987), I, 44-45.

⁵⁶⁰ Mee, *Conversable Worlds*, 262-7, passim.

As well as attempting to evoke a written ‘conversation’ with his reader, Hunt’s colloquial, first-person style of address also emphasises the presence of a subjective author compiling and presenting the weekly news. Hunt’s continual foregrounding of his own identity, is not, as his critics deemed it, an act of as pure egotism, but rather reflects Hunt’s concern with transparency. Hunt criticises other newspapers for reflecting the political opinions of their patrons disguised as the neutral reporting of events. He represents his own magazine, which in self-conscious moments foregrounds the decisions an editor must make over content and style, as a more honest approach to periodical journalism:

We only wish that other Editors would be so candid; and then—how the town would be enlightened! and what an alteration in the grave faces of thousands that wait impatiently for the coming in of their newspapers, half careless of their tea, or well imagine, while they are holding the steaming oracle to the fire, that they are going to be made acquainted with all sorts of intelligent opinions and pure matters of fact.⁵⁶¹

This image of the readers of other newspapers, passively and mindlessly consuming the opinions set before them, implicitly flatters the *Examiner* reader by suggesting that they, in contrast, take a more enlightened approach to reading by choosing a newspaper whose editor (purportedly) seeks a ‘conversation’ with them. Hunt’s ‘hail-fellow-well-met’ style asserts not only that this relaxed colloquialism is suitable for newspaper journalism, but that it is representative of greater clarity and honesty.

Hunt, like editors of the plebeian radical press, sought to place the language and rhetoric of the establishment newspapers under scrutiny. Most notoriously, he did this with the *Morning Post*’s panegyric to the Prince Regent, in the piece that landed himself and John Hunt in prison for libel. Henry Brougham’s case in the Hunts’ defence was that the piece was a commentary on the *Morning Post* rather than a criticism of the Regent.⁵⁶² Hunt deploys comic and dramatic writing to expose the puffery and panegyric of the establishment newspapers, for example in his parody, ‘A week’s speculation, in humble imitation of the style

⁵⁶¹ ‘The Political Examiner, No. 428’, *E.*, (26 May 1816), 321-2, 321.

⁵⁶² Roe, *Fierce Heart*, 177.

and sentiments of the *Morning Post*.⁵⁶³ In a critique of the *Courier* and its praise of the Tory MP and Master of the Mint, Mr. Wellesley Pole (apparently, it would seem, a notoriously dry and uninspiring speaker) in the House of Commons, Hunt breaks up his transcription of the *Courier's* report of the debate with comic interjections in order to break apart the *Courier's* rhetoric:

“Mr. Brougham,” he [i.e. the *Courier* journalist] continues, “tried a short but faint rally, and was closely and vigorously followed up by”—whom! Whom does the reader think? If he loves a surprise, here is one for him with a vengeance—“by”—really we hardly know how to write it—the recollection of Mrs. Jordan’s giggles comes upon us, and splits the thing into laughter—but come—we positively will put on a grave face and a steady hand—by—Reader, don’t take that mouthful, or it will be the death of you—by Mr. Wellesley Pole!⁵⁶⁴

Here, the conspiratorial tone of Hunt with his reader, and his use of a comic suspense, builds the transcription of the *Courier* into a joke with a delayed punch-line. In this case, the familiar and intimate style which characterises Hunt’s editorial columns in the *Examiner* presents his paper as the one that speaks honestly to the reader and is on the side of the reader’s interest. In Hunt’s portrayal, contemporary newspapers appear not as mediums of fact, but as several competing voices all capable of talking back at one another.

For Hunt, the newspaper or periodical is a potentially disruptive space in which one text can be questioned, undermined, or informed by other texts around it. Indeed, Hunt drew his readers’ attention to the fact that interesting, ironic or comical juxtapositions could often be unintentionally created in the crammed pages of many newspapers: he describes, ‘those amusing coincidences, [...] which will present us, at one time, with a Ministerial panegyric at the back of a long list of bankrupts, and at another, a Brighton one backed by a quack advert’.⁵⁶⁵ Playing with the potential of the newspaper space was a tactic also pursued by radical pamphlets: Gilmartin has described how T. J. Wooler’s *Black Dwarf* contrived its own

⁵⁶³ *E.*, (3 Sept. 1809), 561-4.

⁵⁶⁴ ‘The Political Examiner, No. 415’, *E.*, (25 Feb. 1816), 113-5, 115.

⁵⁶⁵ ‘The Political Examiner, No. 413’, *E.*, (11 Feb. 1816), 81-3, 81.

‘Cross Readings in a Newspaper’ (supposedly by reading across rather than down columns of print) as a way of expressing a series of satirical and potentially seditious ‘misreadings’.⁵⁶⁶

The newspaper was the natural medium in which meaningful, rather than accidental, juxtapositions could be created by cunning editorial decisions about placement. Hunt, like James Perry of the *Morning Chronicle* in the 1790s, and Hazlitt during his editorship of the *London Magazine*, was well aware of how individual items could be illuminated by being placed in the context of the surrounding material of the newspaper. Hunt’s editorial practices, as Nicholas Roe has noted, typically involved juxtaposing news articles and/or poetry, usually with the intent of revealing discrepancies or biases in his news sources, or to throw his own commentary in the ‘Political Examiner’ into sharp relief.⁵⁶⁷ In doing so, he aims to encourage an alert and sceptical kind of reading amongst his readers. For example, Hunt juxtaposes articles on the death of Princess Charlotte with reports of ‘lamentable punishments at Derby’ (the execution of the leaders of the Pentrich rising), and criticises the ‘Ministerial Papers’ for filling their columns with grieving sentiment for the Princess Charlotte but ignoring ‘the lives and deaths of much humbler persons’.⁵⁶⁸

Hunt arranged the contents of the *Examiner* to open up ‘conversations’ between the articles on the pages, or to follow through a particular theme from issue to issue. For example, Hunt printed Charles Lamb’s sonnet ‘Who first invented work,’ at a time when the newspaper had been following the plight of the ‘the poor industrious wretches at Carlisle’ for a number of weeks. The Carlisle weavers had recently petitioned Parliament to be expatriated to the colonies: the bottom had fallen out of the cotton market, and wages were so poor as to reduce the workers to destitution; this, combined with rising bread prices, meant they were starving. Lamb’s sonnet laments the condition of those bound to ‘plough, loom, anvil, spade,’

⁵⁶⁶ Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: the Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 95.

⁵⁶⁷ Roe, *Fiery Heart*, 307.

⁵⁶⁸ ‘The Political Examiner, No. 501’, *E.*, (16 Nov. 1817), 721-3, 721.

and most of all, the drudgery of the desk. However, the creator of work, Satan, is himself envisioned as bound in endless toil:

Sabbathless Satan! He who his unglad
Task ever plies in rotatory burnings,
That round and round incalculably reel—
For wrath divine hath made him like a wheel—
In that red realm from whence are no returnings⁵⁶⁹ (ll. 8-12)

Lamb's imagery of Satan as wheel-like, caught up in a seemingly mechanised 'rotatory' burnings, evokes an image not unlike that of Blake's satanic mills. The satanic kind of labour is one that seems automated, mechanical, endlessly returning and revolving. The imagery in fact makes very little sense, unless it is taken as evoking a vision of Satan as a kind of rotative steam-engine-powered wheel. When he reprints the sonnet in his later essay, 'The Superannuated Man,' Lamb's prose makes a similar allusive link, asking 'Will no kindly earthquake come and swallow up those accused cotton mills?'⁵⁷⁰

Lamb's lament for lost holidays, and his complaint at how 'the unremitting importunity / Of business' has taken over in the 'green fields' (ll. 3-4), echoes Hunt's thoughts in his 'Calendar of Nature' for June 1819. Hunt writes that, while 'something like a holiday' is still made of the sheep-shearing, nowadays,

the holiday is but a gleam of the same merry period in the cheap and rural time of our ancestors. Poverty, discontent, and the progress of a gloomy fanaticism, and a mechanical and mercenary spirit that cannot see beyond what is falsely called matter-of-fact, (for things, with respect to our perceptions, are just as little or as much as we can make them) have rendered many people unable to get pleasure, others too sullen for it, others too superstitious, and others ridiculously ashamed of setting about what is graceful and happy!⁵⁷¹

The rural landscape can no longer be imagined as the haunt of pastoral escapism, but rather Hunt's georgic describes how tensions are growing, and how rural labour (despite Hunt's best attempts to encourage a return to joyful rural traditions) can no longer be viewed as peaceful or contented. This same instalment of the 'Calendar of Nature' (along with the 'Calendar' for

⁵⁶⁹ *E.*, (20 June 1819), 396.

⁵⁷⁰ 'The Superannuated Man,' *LM*, (May 1825), 67-73, 73.

⁵⁷¹ 'Calendar of Nature,' *E.*, (6 June 1819), 363-4, 364.

September) has been cited as an influence on Keats's 'To Autumn'.⁵⁷² William Keach has argued that Hunt's September 'Calendar', quoting verse by Spenser and Shelley, had emphasised not just the month's literary significance but also expressed a covert politics associated with images of natural bounty and rural labour.⁵⁷³ In complaining of the 'mechanical and mercenary' spirit in the July 'Calendar', Hunt bemoans the advance of the same kind of utilitarian thinking which Lamb and Hazlitt complained about in the *London Magazine* (as I have described in an earlier chapter). Reading Lamb's sonnet in its publication context in the *Examiner*, therefore, reveals how its imagery and themes are linked to recurring contemporary concerns in the newspaper. Hunt—in contrast to other authors in this study whose work could often move into print contexts without their knowledge, or without their full control—is enabled by his editorial position to create and shape the contexts in which poems and articles appear, and thereby set up meaningful juxtapositions.

Hunt's language of sensibility

In February 1813, the Hunt brothers were each given a two year prison sentence for libelling the Prince Regent. The brothers were sent to separate prisons: Leigh Hunt to Surrey Gaol on Horsemonger Lane in Southwark, John Hunt to Cold Bath Fields Prison in Clerkenwell. In reporting his own trial in the *Examiner*, Hunt drew repeated contrasts between his unhappy personal situation, torn apart from his close family ties because of his imprisonment, and the Prince Regent's wilful neglect of his own family. The Prince had separated from his wife soon after their marriage, and furthermore, restricted her contact with their daughter Princess

⁵⁷² Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Richard Marggraf Turley, and Howard Thomas, *Food and the Literary Imagination*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 132-133; William Keach, 'Cockney Couplets: Keats and the Politics of Style', *Studies in Romanticism*, 25:2 (Summer 1986), 182-196; 194.

⁵⁷³ Keach, 194-6, *passim*.

Charlotte. Nikki Hessel and Greg Kucich have both argued that, during the period of his imprisonment, which coincided with this crisis in the Royal marriage, Hunt established a particular politics of domesticity.⁵⁷⁴ By integrating the private and public, the family and the state, Kucich argues that Hunt established, ‘one of Romanticism’s strongest working models for the kind of family politic Mary Wollstonecraft had envisioned back in the early 1790s’ (250). Hunt’s continued emphasis on the link between domestic life and the wider public life of the nation in his writing displays the influence of his Dissenting upbringing, as Nicholas Roe has detailed, by parents who had abandoned the established church to become Unitarians and Universalists in the 1790s.⁵⁷⁵

Hunt’s openly personal and familiar style of journalism becomes a means for him to emphasise the contrast between his own sensibilities and the Regent’s vices. Hunt describes beginning the first editorial article he wrote after his sentencing ‘after having just read an account of the brilliant court day on Thursday’ and contrasts his own family attachments with the Prince Regent’s shambolic marriage:

one man looks happy, provided he can avoid his wife, while another is fallen, both in countenance and heart, because his wife is not with him.—But my hand grows unsteady at this levity, and reminds me that my smiling is gone.⁵⁷⁶

Hunt uses the language of sentiment—the hand unsteady with emotion—to express his virtuous attachment to his family. In doing so, he readdresses Edmund Burke’s conservative criticism of the sentimental genre. Burke, writing in the 1790s, had blamed the sentimental novelist Rousseau and the ‘false sympathies’ of his *La Nouvelle Heloise* for the fervour of the French revolutionaries; for undermining relationships of trust in the home and encouraging children and servants to disobey, so that ‘By these principles, every considerable father of a family loses the sanctuary of his home [...] they destroy all the tranquillity and security of

⁵⁷⁴ Nikki Hessel, ‘Jailhouse Journalism: Leigh Hunt and the *Examiner*, 1813-1815’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 54 (2005), 79-92, 81; Greg Kucich, ‘“The wit in the dungeon”: Leigh Hunt and the insolent politics of cockney coteries’, *European Romantic Review*, 10:1-4 (1999), 242-253.

⁵⁷⁵ Roe, *Fierce Heart*, 28.

⁵⁷⁶ ‘The Political Examiner, No. 258’, *E.*, (7 Feb. 1813), 81-3, 81.

domestic life; turning the asylum of the house into a gloomy prison, where the father of the family must drag out a miserable existence'.⁵⁷⁷ Burke had represented one of the worst effects of the French Revolution as being the breaking down of the security of domestic order and family ties, but Hunt turns this blame back on the sentencing court at his libel trial, charging the court with the same inhumane disrespect for the natural and virtuous family affections in separating the two brothers, and in separating a father from his family:

why separate two brothers? Why separate two persons who are brothers still more by affection than by blood! [...] the law must make an example of us: —be it so, but let the example be according to the nature of the 'offence.' What feelings of brotherhood have we violated? What domestic ties have we torn asunder? What contempt exhibited for virtuous attachment and the charities of relationship?⁵⁷⁸

Hunt uses the emotive language of sensibility in describing this fraternal attachment and 'letting the daily and silent panegyric of my heart burst out towards' his brother in the article.⁵⁷⁹ Behind the image of literal fraternity lies, in addition, the resonance of the more encompassing idea of wider human fraternity so potent in the period.

Thomas Moore's *Intercepted Letters* (1813), which provided his own comment on the Hunt brothers' trial, sympathetically echoes the language that Hunt used in the *Examiner*. Moore's work included a satirical spoof manuscript of a play, 'The Book,' about the Regent's troubled domestic relationship with his wife. The sub-plot of this drama, Moore writes, is 'the Trial and Imprisonment of two Brothers,' undoubtedly based on the Hunts. The play juxtaposes the situation of the separated Royal women with the separated brothers: in Moore's drama the Lord Chancellor has a portentous vision of a 'Princely Dame' (Caroline) with the Princess Charlotte,

a young maiden, clinging to her side,
As if she feared some tyrant would divide
The hearts that nature and affection tied!⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁷ Edmund Burke, *A Letter from Mr. Burke, to a Member of the National Assembly*, (London: J. Dodsley, 1791), 43.

⁵⁷⁸ *E.*, (7 Feb. 1813), 82-3.

⁵⁷⁹ *E.*, (7 Feb. 1813), 83.

⁵⁸⁰ Moore, *Intercepted Letters*, 105.

In presenting the Regent as a destroyer of the natural and virtuous bonds of family affection, Moore picks up Hunt's imagery and language from the *Examiner*.

In a speech addressed to the brothers as they 'exeunt severally' to prison, Moore attempts to offer consolation. Though as prisoners, the brothers will be deprived of the joys of nature—'the air of Spring / No mountain coolness to your cheeks shall bring' and 'summer flowers shall pass unseen away'—they will, Moore asserts, find a spiritual sustenance instead from 'thoughts, as blessed as the air / Of Spring or summer flowers':

Thoughts, such as He, who feasts his courtly crew
 In rich conservatories, *never* knew!
 Pure self-esteem—the smiles that light within—
 The Zeal, whose circling charities begin
 With the few lov'd-ones Heaven has plac'd it near,
 Nor cease, till all Mankind are in its sphere!—
 The Pride, that suffers without vaunt or plea,
 And the fresh Spirit, that can warble free,
 Through prison-bars, its hymn to Liberty!⁵⁸¹

Moore's image of the zeal that spreads its 'circling charities' outwards from a handful of loved ones to encompass the whole of mankind echoes the kind of language which, as I have described in the introduction, was used by both conservative and radical writers—Burke, Coleridge, Barbauld, Wollstonecraft—during the 1790s to describe how small communities formed the nucleus from which to imagine a connection to a wider nationhood, or from which benevolent feelings could spread outwards to include a universal human fraternity. In linking the Hunt brothers to this image, Moore is picking up on the intellectual inheritance of the 1790s which Hunt himself is drawing upon in his representations of community in the *Examiner*, and furthermore implicitly recognising the 1790s rhetoric of sensibility with which Hunt depicts his personal suffering in his articles on his trial and imprisonment.

In the aftermath of his conviction, Hunt adopts a particularly personal, confessional mode of writing that continues his concern with honesty and transparency—he aims, he says, to give the reader 'as clear a view of the Examiner's feeling under a melancholy prospect, as

⁵⁸¹ Moore, *Intercepted Letters*, 107-8.

ever he was accustomed to have under a gay one'.⁵⁸² With himself now the subject of his narrative, Hunt foregrounds his own subjective experiences. Hunt, in the first two articles following his imprisonment, uses the claims of personality—his refined sensibility, delicate health, and family affections—to emphasise the injustice of the court's sentence: the purported libeller is indiscriminately incarcerated alongside 'burners of houses' and 'inciters to robbery and murder'.⁵⁸³ Hunt portrays a kind of feeling masculinity ('I must feel like a brother, a father, and a husband, but I can still act like a man') which resides in the proper and virtuous attachment to domestic ties—again, creating the implicit comparison between himself and the Regent: 'as a palace itself would be a prison to me where my family are not, so the worst of prisons, where I was, would be a palace to them'.⁵⁸⁴ Hunt borrows the novelistic and epistolary trope of portraying himself in the act of writing to create a sense of physical presence and immediacy: 'I am now writing', he writes once his family have been allowed to visit, 'in their presence, and my bare walls and grated windows seem to have borrowed a look of home'.⁵⁸⁵ During his imprisonment, representations of domestic life quite literally come to represent liberty of thought and expression, as opposed to the state of the incarcerated libeller, and, furthermore, as Hessel suggests, the *Examiner* itself becomes the means for Hunt 'to escape prison metaphorically'.⁵⁸⁶

The language of sensibility also offers a voice for Hunt's social indignation, be it at military punishments, or starving sailors, or the state of the manufacturing towns, 'which look more like the petrified cities in romance' because their inhabitants—among them 'honest men, who weep bitter tears, some from want of work, and some for too much'—must work from morning to night.⁵⁸⁷ Hunt reclaims the language of sentiment, after its contested, dubious status in the 1790s, as the language of social conscience and empathy. For Hunt it

⁵⁸² *E.*, (7 Feb. 1813), 81.

⁵⁸³ 'The Political Examiner, No. 259', *E.*, (14 Feb. 1813), 97-9, 97.

⁵⁸⁴ *E.*, (7 Feb. 1813), 83.

⁵⁸⁵ *E.*, (14 Feb. 1813), 97.

⁵⁸⁶ Hessel, 86.

⁵⁸⁷ 'The Political Examiner, No. 487', *E.*, (10 Aug. 1817), 497-8, 497.

becomes the language of protest, much as it had been for Barbauld or Coleridge writing in earlier decades.

Hunt uses his sentimental rhetoric to once more question the language of other newspapers: in response to the *Courier's* cool report that 'only fifty' people are incarcerated as a result of the suspension of Habeus Corpus, Hunt emotes, 'ONLY *fifty!* Only fifty human beings immured in living tombs, to say nothing of the violence done to the Constitution! Only fifty human beings suffering the all-but-madness of solitary confinement, some of them perhaps on the verge of it in consequence; and how many *afflicted relatives* to mourn for them!'⁵⁸⁸ Hunt's personal, subjective style of writing, tinged with sensibility, aims to present the *Examiner* as heartfelt and honest journalism.

Figuring the reader

In the *Examiner*, Hunt frequently creates brief portraits of his ideal imagined readership in the text, often picturing them caught in the act of reading. Often, the reader appears to be a reflection of Hunt himself, and living a similar lifestyle—the essays are aimed at 'luxurious persons fond of reading at breakfast', and a reader who can be left to 'his own cogitations, when he has done with his paper, and goes out to take his morning walk'.⁵⁸⁹

At other times, however, Hunt's portraits of his readers imply that the *Examiner* itself has the function of creating a bridge between members of a wide-ranging audience. At the beginning of Hunt's 'Four letters to the constant reader of the *Examiner*, on extending to the poorer part of their countrymen the blessings of education', he reflects on the difficulty of finding an appropriate style to address his readership:

the body we address is of too miscellaneous a description to allow for one appellation [...] We shall therefore take our old liberty of fancying ourselves at the reader's elbow

⁵⁸⁸ 'The Political Examiner, No. 502', *E.*, (23 Nov. 1817), 737-8, 737.

⁵⁸⁹ *E.*, (1 Jan. 1815), 12.; 'The Examiner', *E.*, (24 Sept. 1815), 615-6, 615.

in propria persona, [...] If the reader is then a man of quality, he will then be good enough to fancy a sufficient number of Lords and Lordships scattered at due intervals, according to his taste; if a gentleman of the middle class, we have the honour of conceiving a glass of wine with him; if a tradesman, we are drinking tea in his back parlour; if a farmer, a draught of his butter-milk; if a labourer, a glass of pump-water; if none of these, we are in any the most comfortable situation with them their sociality can devise,—over a fire, on a sofa, on horseback (we cannot well be more accommodating, for prisoners),—lastly, if a lady, we are her very humble servants, and plainly inform her, that we reckon upon her good wishes before we begin⁵⁹⁰

Hunt's pictorial descriptions, placing himself in different scenarios with different readers, portray a society that is vividly hierarchical, as manifested in the kinds of beverages the readers can afford; yet the forms of sociability—the ritual of conversing over a shared beverage—have an overarching similarity. Hunt's essay therefore enacts through its image of conversation the kind of social inclusiveness that he hopes will be created by offering education to the poor: education is the means by which they can become involved in the nationwide 'conversation' of public life. The contrast between these imagined scenarios and Hunt's real position, during the years 1813 to 1815, as a prisoner, though expressed with a light-hearted turn, reminds the reader that the imagined, textual community of the *Examiner* exists in opposition to constricting factors in real life.

Hunt's domesticity and the politics of place

One of the foremost characteristics of Hunt's *Examiner* is his repeated references to a domestic setting: writer and reader are imagined to interact with one another at the breakfast-table, over tea, or seated in an armchair by the fireside. Much has been written on the political nature of Hunt's domestic ideology. As it had been for Barbauld, Coleridge, Burke, and Wollstonecraft in earlier decades, the language and imagery of domesticity was open to appropriation by writers of all political leanings. Davidoff and Hall's study of middle-class life in the period 1780-1830, finds domestic values to be the core of an emerging class identity:

⁵⁹⁰ 'The Political Examiner, No. 317', *E.*, (27 Mar. 1814), 193-5, 193.

the voice of domesticity ‘was the voice of the middle class uniting Anglican and Dissenting audiences. Uniting, furthermore, Radicals, Liberals and Tories from all strata of the occupational spectrum’.⁵⁹¹

Critical opinion has been somewhat divided over the implications of Hunt’s politicised domesticity. On the one hand, Hunt imagines the home as a space offering freedom of intellectual inquiry into political, artistic, as well as religious matters. The value of ‘the manliness and independence of English private life’ arises from the fact that it can facilitate free discussion: for Hunt there is an indissoluble link between ‘our blazing fire and our freedom of speech’.⁵⁹² Nicholas Roe has suggested that Hunt’s critics recognised the radical implications of his poetics of domesticity and familiarity. Roe draws a parallel between the reception of Coleridge early poetry by Tory readers of the 1790s, who saw Coleridge’s ‘discourse of compassion, benevolence, fraternity, and philanthropy’ as ‘Jacobin’, and the response of Hunt’s critics to the latent radical ideologies in his work, who saw ‘seemingly innocuous categories such as cheerfulness, sociality, the greenwood, pastoral bowers, suburban life, and even tea-drinking’ as ‘suspect tokens of a resurgent radical community’.⁵⁹³

On the other hand, other critics have viewed Hunt’s domestic ideology in more ambiguous terms, suggesting that Hunt’s domestic spaces evoke an insular escapism, and function as a means to separate and distinguish himself and his readers from the more volatile aspects of popular radicalism. In the period after Waterloo, a shifting political landscape meant that the heart of active radicalism was with Leigh’s namesake Henry Hunt, addressing the massed crowds in Bristol and London with a loaf of bread on a pole. Richard Cronin sees the period 1815-1819 as the point in history at which politics became expressed in terms of class antagonism, and at which a political language was created ‘that construed political difference as the expression of class enmity. The politics that Hunt, recognized, the battle

⁵⁹¹ Davidoff and Hall, 179.

⁵⁹² ‘The Political Examiner, No. 327’, *E.*, (5 June 1814), 353-5, 355; *RT*, II. 136.

⁵⁹³ Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*, 116.

between ideas, was being replaced by a different politics which hinged on the relationship between classes'.⁵⁹⁴ Kathleen Chittick likewise draws a distinction between the 'celebrity Whiggism' of the *Examiner* and the new language of radical reformism.⁵⁹⁵ In the context of this changing political scene, Kevin Gilmartin has suggested that the 'imagined domestic space' established in Hunt's periodical writing—at tea-tables, over breakfast, by the fireside—figured 'as a collective space free of threatening political engagements'; while Gregory Dart has argued that Hunt's championing of suburban life was intended, 'was not to shoo Cockneys away from politics per se, but rather to encourage them to privatize it, to start behaving, in other words, like armchair *Examiner* readers, and not like the rowdy audiences of "Orator" Hunt'.⁵⁹⁶

Perhaps unsurprisingly, contemporary perceptions of Leigh Hunt's 'radicalism' also vary wildly. Southey, perhaps as payback for the accusations which Hunt threw at the newly-created laureate for being a turncoat in his politics, portrays Hunt as a dangerous radical. Southey sought to link Leigh Hunt's journalism firmly to the progress of the popular radical movement, suggesting that just as 'Marat and Hebert followed in the train of Voltaire and Rousseau' so 'Mr. Examiner Hunt does but blow the trumpet to usher in Mr. Orator Hunt in his tandem, with the tri-colour flag before him and his servant in livery behind'.⁵⁹⁷ In Southey's opinion, Leigh Hunt's moderate, intellectualized politics is seen as the conduit to the spread of the more active politics of Henry Hunt. Southey furthermore seeks to overturn Leigh Hunt's portrait of his domesticized readership, depicting him instead as a 'thoroughpaced revolutionist' who is particularly dangerous due to the doctrines

⁵⁹⁴ Richard Cronin, *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: in Search of the Pure Commonwealth*, (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 2000), 188.

⁵⁹⁵ Kathryn Chittick, *The Language of Whiggism: Liberty and Patriotism, 1802-1830*, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 90.

⁵⁹⁶ Gilmartin, 210; Dart, 40.

⁵⁹⁷ 'Art. XI., [Parliamentary Reform], *Quarterly Review*, (Oct. 1816), 225-278, 248.

and language 'which this convicted libeller sends into the pothouses of manufacturing towns and of the remotest villages!'⁵⁹⁸

Kevin Gilmartin has argued that Southey's critique reveals a particular concern about the 'collective reception' associated with tavern reading.⁵⁹⁹ Southey's 1812 essay, 'On the State of the Poor, the Principle of Mr. Malthus's Essay on Population, and the Manufacturing System,' argued that the circumstances in which radical papers were read was just as important as their content with regard to the influence that they had on their readership. Southey writes that,

He who finds a factious newspaper upon his breakfast table, and, casting his eye over its columns while he sips his coffee, smiles at its blunders, or at most vents a malediction [...] has but a faint conception of its effects upon the great body of its readers.⁶⁰⁰

Tied into this representation of the relaxed and reasonable reaction of the domestic reader, reading in calm isolation at the breakfast table, is the implication that the 'respectable' classes of readers can be exposed to radical prose without being led astray. In contrast, the response of a lower-class tavern audience listening to radical periodicals read aloud is expressed in grotesque terms:

The weekly epistles of the apostles of sedition are read aloud in tap-rooms and pothouses to believing auditors, listening greedily when they are told that their rulers fatten upon the gains extracted from their blood and sinews; that they are cheated, oppressed, and plundered. [...] If madder be administered to a pig only for a few days, his bones are reddened with the dye; and can we believe that the bloody colouring of such 'pig's meat,' as this will not find its way into the system of those who take it for their daily food? (342)

Southey's Burkean image of a swinish audience who greedily, unreasonably and unthinkingly devour whatever periodicals are read to them, evokes the perceived threat posed by lower-class tavern readerships. An anonymous tract from 1824 comes to a similar conclusion: that the tradesman class of readers should read at home, where they can maintain a rational and

⁵⁹⁸ 'Art. X. [Rise and Progress of Popular Disaffection],' *Quarterly Review*, (Jan. 1817), 511-552, 545.

⁵⁹⁹ Gilmartin, 102.

⁶⁰⁰ [Review of] 'Propositions for ameliorating the Condition of the Poor [...] by P. Colquhoun,' *Quarterly Review*, (Dec. 1812), 319-356, 342.

reasonable perspective; tavern reading—or rather listening—where the reader is one among a mass audience, brings the danger of a crowd mentality:

A tradesman, with any moderate share of discernment, is always able to estimate the utility of a public measure better in his own parlour than any where else. There he is safe from the influence and the stormy dogmatism of the tavern demagogue. There he can think for himself and judge for himself. [...] While such a man gathered the occurrences of the day by the light of his own candle, he might at the same time be useful to his family⁶⁰¹

Gilmartin argues that these radical patterns of collective reading challenge the idea of newspaper-reading as a private, middle-class habit, suggesting instead, ‘an alternative phenomenology of the newspaper, one that is more active, communal, and synthetic’, and noting furthermore that ‘the personal tone and vernacular rhythms of a radical prose style can be seen as an effort to narrow the gap between the printed word and its popular reception’.⁶⁰² When considered in this particular cultural context, Hunt’s effort to situate his reader in domestic surroundings seems an attempt to portray his readership as respectable, and to disassociate himself, his publication, and the cause of reform, from the plebeian radical politics of the taverns. Despite attempting to forge a ‘conversational’ style, unlike Cobbett, Hunt’s prose never raises the potential presence of multiple ‘hearers’ as well as readers.⁶⁰³ When Hunt does identify the *Examiner* with tavern culture, it is as a surrogate imaginative space that takes the place of the physical one. His first article for the newly-launched *Indicator* in 1819 attempts to give his two publications distinct identities:

The Examiner is his tavern-room for politics, for political pleasantries, for criticism upon the theatres and living writers. The Indicator is his private room, his study, his retreat from public care and criticism, with the reader who chooses to accompany him.⁶⁰⁴

Hunt’s depiction of these two periodicals as being two different rooms—the more literary *Indicator* as the private space; the more political *Examiner* as a public space—imply that the evocation of a space asks for a particular kind of readership: implicitly, it would seem, with the

⁶⁰¹ *The Periodical Press of Great Britain and Ireland: or an Inquiry into the State of the Public Journals, chiefly as regards their moral and political influence*, (London: Hurst, Robinson & co., 1824), 53-4.

⁶⁰² Gilmartin, 104.

⁶⁰³ *Cobbett’s Political Register*, (16 Nov. 1816), 611.

⁶⁰⁴ ‘The Indicator and Examiner’, *The Indicator*, (20 Oct. 1819), 9-11, 9.

Examiner as a site of critical discussion, and the *Indicator* as a place for a more relaxed and agreeable tone. The *Examiner* is a virtual society, an imagined, textual community which replaces the public sociability of the tavern or the coffee-house, bringing the forum for public debate into the calm, intimate (and feminized) sphere of the home. However, it is significant to note that Hunt's textual tactics seemingly had little impact on who read the *Examiner* and where. A Home Office report from 1817 of a typical meeting of a Spencean 'free and easy' society, held by radical groups in London taverns, lists the *Examiner* as one of those weekly publications commonly read aloud: 'The meetings [...] Generally Commence ab^t 8 o'clock – Sunday is the General evening for reading Cobbett – frequently after which the Examiner & Independent Whig are read & other Political tracts Calculated xxx the heart and inflame the understanding'.⁶⁰⁵ It is peculiar indeed to think of the conversational 'voice' Hunt uses in the 'Political Examiner' essays—with his frequent textual flourishes addressing the reader as a tea-guest in his imagined home-space—emerging from the mouth of a Spencean society member reading aloud in a tavern.

Taste

In attempting to define the readership of the *Examiner*, Hunt's writing therefore not only attempts to create, define and connect together particular community, but also to establish its limits. Hunt wished to establish for the *Examiner* the public reputation of a paper produced by, and written for, an artistic, educated, liberal intelligentsia. Hunt therefore engages with the era's increasing politicization of the idea of 'taste'.

Nicholas Roe has suggested that Hunt sought to remake and democratize ideas of 'taste', liberating the values of 'real art and nature' from the influence of the artificial French

⁶⁰⁵ Report dated 4 Feb. 1817, quoted in David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790-1820*, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 95.

school associated with an age of oppression and tyranny.⁶⁰⁶ In foregrounding the arts in the *Examiner*, Hunt asserts that, by possession of his natural good taste, he is empowered to critique politics or art, and no longer obliged to follow the aesthetic opinions of the *beau-monde*. His *Examiner* is a periodical for a new age in which ‘notions about poetry can no longer be controuled, like the fashions, by a coterie of town gentlemen’.⁶⁰⁷ It amounts to an assertion of what Bourdieu would call Hunt’s ‘cultural capital’.⁶⁰⁸

Hunt’s critics at *Blackwood’s Magazine* attempt to undermine his cultural authority by questioning precisely Hunt’s assertion of his own good taste. Instead, its ‘Cockney School’ articles portray Hunt’s pretensions to taste as a vulgar and effeminate appropriation of the trappings of gentility. Gregory Dart has described in great detail how *Blackwood’s* critique drew on the newly-evolved figure of the Cockney. Once exclusively connected with the City, the early nineteenth century Cockney was, Dart has shown, a far more amphibious figure that was ‘fast becoming a symbol for all that was wrong with modern life, not least in his promiscuous straddling of city and suburb, old and new, vulgar and genteel’.⁶⁰⁹ This new Cockney was increasingly a suburban figure inhabiting a specific social class comprised of shop-keepers, clerks, school-mistresses, etc: a class, Dart notes, ‘roughly commensurate with that broad band of people swelling the ranks of the new reading public: working people but not labourers, aspirant but not affluent, imperfectly educated but hungry for culture’ (15). *Blackwood’s* critique aims to place Hunt firmly within this caricature of a particular social type.

Blackwood’s describes reading Hunt’s *The Story of Rimini* (1816) as being like entering ‘the gilded drawing-room of a little mincing boarding-school mistress who would fain have an *At Home* in her house’.⁶¹⁰ At this party the beaux are in fashionable gentleman’s attire, carrying ‘chapeau bras’ and wearing ‘Limerick gloves’, and the company is entertained by a

⁶⁰⁶ Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*, 119.

⁶⁰⁷ Hunt, *Foliage*, 12.

⁶⁰⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, transl. Richard Nice, (London: Routledge, 2010), passim.

⁶⁰⁹ Dart, 9.

⁶¹⁰ ‘On the Cockney School of Poetry, No. I.’, *BM*, (Oct. 1817), 38-41, 39.

‘paltry’ version of that aspirational purchase, the piano forte, and served with ‘lukewarm negus’ (39). While this company can purchase the dress, furnishings and entertainments of gentility, *Blackwood’s* implies, the effect is of superficial social aspiration rather than substance.

What the writers of *Blackwood’s* astutely recognised, was that the concretely material aspects of Hunt’s writing—his constant references to places and things—were a means for him to locate himself socially and politically. Hunt’s descriptions of his home, his poetical coterie, his tea-taking, his harmonious dinners with friends, his musical evenings, his leisurely breakfasts, his statues and pictures and wallpaper and flower-vases and gardens are all designed to show him as a tasteful consumer of books and art and social pleasures. Hunt’s writing established a language of cultural symbolism, in which the books he reads, the music he plays, the pictures on his walls, the sociable practices he describes—suburban rambles, fireside chats, sonnet contests, etc.—all carry associations which mark and define his identity (and by extension, aim to define the identity of his readers). *Blackwood’s Magazine’s* parodies sought to override the meanings which Hunt had assigned to these things, and give them negative connotations instead.

However, Hunt’s earlier essay ‘A Day by the Fire’ shows that he is well aware of the ambiguity of his assertion of suburban tastes. In the essay, Hunt confesses that he has replaced his tea-kettle, an object ‘so warm-hearted and unassuming’ with a ‘bronze-coloured and graceful urn’. The tea-urn has been described as ‘an icon of the eighteenth century’.⁶¹¹ Hunt’s bronze version of the silver-plated urns which were the height of novelty and fashion in the 1770s is an example of style over substance: whereas Cowper’s tea-urn in *The Task* is the focal point of domestic harmony, and provides solace and escape from society’s ills with its ‘cups that cheer,’ Hunt’s urn is dysfunctional:

I sometimes feel as if I had sent of a good, plain, faithful old friend, who had but one wish to serve me, for a superficial, smooth-faced upstart of a fellow, who, after a little promising and vapping, grows cold and contemptuous and thinks himself bound to

⁶¹¹ Maxine Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 164.

do nothing but stand on the rug and have his person admired by the circle. To this admiration, in fact, I have been obliged to resort, in order to make myself think well of my bargain, if possible; and accordingly, I say to myself every now and then during the tea,—‘A pretty look with it—that urn;’ or ‘It’s wonderful what a taste the Greeks had;’ or ‘The eye might have a great many enjoyments, if people would but look after forms and shapes.’ In the meanwhile, the urn leaves off its ‘bubbling and hissing,’—but then there is such an air with it! My tea is made of cold water—but then the Greeks were such a nation!⁶¹²

The urn is personified as a ‘Cockney’ type of character, ‘a superficial smooth-faced upstart of a fellow’. The urn acts as a symbol and focus of anxiety, and Hunt’s ambiguous relationship with it expresses his unease that he may be simply an aspirational consumer with pretensions of refined taste: rather than evoking the classical grace of the Greeks, his new urn may instead show that he has bought into a consumer aesthetic by making a status purchase. Hunt’s comically anxiety-tinged representation of his comfortably-furnished domicile is, in some ways, a pre-emptive answer to potential critics who might condemn him for weakness and effeminacy in writing about his aesthetic taste and his home life.

Hunt managed to deploy the motif of tea-drinking, with which *Blackwood’s* criticism had so thoroughly connected him, to political effect in the summer of 1819. New taxes were introduced that summer on basic commodities like tea, coffee, tobacco, spirits, pepper and malt, placing pressure on poor families, even though the government papers claimed that these were luxury items which the poor did not consume. Hunt used the criticisms which *Blackwood’s Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review* had thrown at him for dwelling on such topics and turned them to his advantage. Hunt aimed to disprove the *Courier’s* claims that the poor do not consume such items:

According to the *Courier* [...] Our friends the washerwomen (with whom Mr. Giffard was so afraid of being supposed to have any acquaintance) no longer take their favourite beverage on tubs turned upside down.⁶¹³

Here, Hunt takes up and owns the accusations of vulgarity that have been used against him: his essay describing washing-day in the Hunt household, ‘On Washerwomen’, published in

⁶¹² RT, II. 123.

⁶¹³ ‘The Political Examiner, No. 584’, *E.*, (20 June 1819), 385.

the *Round Table* (1817) had been the subject of critical condemnation. In protest at the tax on tobacco, Hunt invites the *Courier's* journalist to take the kind of suburban stroll with which Hunt fills his own time:

Let him take a *vulgar* walk into the suburbs one of these delightful evenings, and on the benches outside of every alehouse he will see dozens of carters, waggoners, bricklayers, and carpenters, soothing the toils of the day by inhaling this pleasant herb.⁶¹⁴

In describing how he and his friends take simple pleasure in consuming such everyday commodities, Hunt implicitly allies his own concerns and interests with those of the working classes. In another poem written under the pseudonym 'Harry Brown', Hunt hymns the praises of a Covent Garden tobacco shop run by a beautiful woman to which 'all ages and all ranks' come as patrons. To this shop Hunt and his friends come, embodying the spirits of previous generations of writers who called there in the past:

There's Prior come in shape of Moore;
Arbuthnot, Lamb, in thine;
And Swift in Hazlitt's too, they say;
And Garth, dear rogue! in mine.⁶¹⁵ (ll. 77-80)

Even in such a simple, light-hearted verse, Hunt portrays himself and his friends as the inheritors of the urban literary culture of the eighteenth century while, simultaneously, linking their simple lifestyle pleasures and consumer consumption to the tastes of the wider population. In Hunt's poem, he and his friends are set apart by their literary preoccupations, and yet at the same time at one with the people.

The Sonneteer and the Pheasant-shooter

In his delicate negotiations with the potential 'vulgarity' of writing about subjects like tea-drinking, suburban wandering, and musical parties, Hunt shows a distinct consciousness of the fact that his preoccupation with taste could be interpreted in political and class-conscious

⁶¹⁴ 'The Political Examiner, No. 583', *E.*, (13 June 1819), 369-71, 371.

⁶¹⁵ 'La Bella Tabbaconista', *E.*, (18 July 1819), 459-60.

ways by his critics. Hunt's attempt to define his own coterie and the *Examiner's* reading community in terms of taste and aesthetic pursuits brings with it other political implications. Kevin Gilmartin suggests that Hunt's investment in taste constitutes, 'a means of redeeming radical protest from its own increasingly vulgar constituency'.⁶¹⁶ Denise Gigante has noted how in Burke's infamous image of the 'swinish multitude', the common populace is characterised by its brute and 'cannibal appetites'—the national community is presented as under threat from the uncontrollable and indiscriminate consumption performed by a multitude of individuals who lack taste and aesthetic judgment. Burke's swinish multitude, Gigante argues, does not enable 'the sublimation necessary to convert appetite into taste, or the human animal—grumbling for food, printed matter, and the growing supply of consumable goods—into a tasteful individual'.⁶¹⁷ In emphasising his own taste, Hunt implicitly sets himself apart from the Burkean multitude. By establishing the *Examiner* as a vehicle for a tasteful, liberal brand of politics, Hunt aims to connect the cause of Reform with an educated, tasteful middle-class rather than working-class community.

Leigh Hunt's reaction to the figure of Henry Hunt—'Orator' or 'Bristol' Hunt—exposes the complex and contradictory nature of his own politics. Orator Hunt represents the 'vulgar' voice of Reform—vulgar in terms of the language Henry Hunt used to address the working classes in public meetings; and in the street-based politics that carried the Burkean threat of the power of the multitude, loosed from reason by the tumultuous emotions of the crowd. Hunt's ambiguity towards crowd politics had been apparent from the first issue of the *Examiner*, where he had situated himself as a bystander and observer of the crowd:

The *Examiner* has escaped from the throng and bustle, but he will seat himself by the way-side and contemplate the moving multitude as they wrangle and wrestle along. [...] the more rational part of the multitude will be obliged to him, when he warns them of an approaching shower, or invites them to sit down with him and rest themselves, or advises them to take care of their pockets.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁶ Gilmartin, 219.

⁶¹⁷ Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History*, (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2005), 63.

⁶¹⁸ *E.*, (3 Jan. 1808), 7.

Hunt's portrayal of the crowd, the tumultuous shape of the 'moving multitude,' seething with energies, is Burkean. Hunt distances his intended audience from the impassioned and irrational crowds of this wrangling throng, instead portraying his readership as located among the 'more rational part of the multitude,' guided by reason, rather than driven by emotion. One of Hunt's earliest wishes was to have 'the Paper considered as the representative of that good part of Reformists, which, while it is earnest and independent as any other, is somewhat anxious to be considered decent in conduct and unequivocal in principle'.⁶¹⁹

Leigh Hunt depicts Henry Hunt and other radicals in terms similar to those used by conservative, anti-Jacobin publications in order to create an opposition between his moderate politics, and the public speeches of Henry Hunt, 'a nonsensical spouter at dinners, imitating the revolutionary language of a French mob,' prone to 'feasting at taverns, and talking ferocious nonsense about lamp-posts' (732). Henry Hunt's actions mean that 'the common and obscure name of Hunt may be found wandering away in a different path, that has been trodden and kneaded in blood by the wretched herd of political fanatics' (732). Thus, in powerful and Burkean terms, Leigh Hunt denigrates the Orator, who 'is doing every thing to injure the cause of Reform by his vulgar and turbulent proceedings'.⁶²⁰ Even after Peterloo, when Hunt becomes more sympathetic to the Orator because of his 'bold and intelligent manner,' he still wishes 'that without lowering a jot of his tone of contempt for the usurpers of the constitution, he could be a little less coarse'.⁶²¹

After *Blackwood's* 'Cockney School' attacks, however, Leigh Hunt's feelings towards the Orator show some signs of altering: he defends Henry Hunt and Cobbett against charges of vulgarity in order to defend himself and his friends at the same time from the Cockney accusations—Keats might have been an apothecary, but Gifford of the *Quarterly*, he points

⁶¹⁹ 'The Political Examiner, No. 198', *E.*, (17 Nov. 1811), 731-2, 732.

⁶²⁰ 'The Political Examiner, No. 232', *E.*, (19 July 1812), 449-50, 449.

⁶²¹ 'The Political Examiner, No. 595', *E.*, (5 Sept. 1819), 561-2, 561.

out, began as a shoemaker's apprentice.⁶²² In response to their critics, Hunt claims that 'there is no surer mark of vulgar ignorance than to be perpetually bringing accusations of it.'⁶²³

Significantly, Leigh Hunt's critics used the comparison between the two Hunts (and their respective audiences) against him. The robust, rural landowner Henry Hunt, *Blackwood's* writes, addresses an audience that 'has to do with the bony and sinewy constituents of the street mob, and he attacks them with the bluster and swagger of a ring-fighter'. In contrast, Leigh Hunt's readership appears more passive and circumscribed: he is writing for 'a generation afflicted with headaches, tea-drinking, and all the nosologia of the nerves' therefore he is 'always writing about headaches, bile, tea, and suppers of boiled eggs and lettuces, and so persuading his male subscribers, that he is "one of us"'.⁶²⁴ In contrast with the bluff yet manly bearing of Henry Hunt, 'sentimental' Leigh Hunt—'He of the rose and the violet', 'the lank and sallow hypochondriack' of Hampstead—is a 'drivelling garetteer'.⁶²⁵ The *Scourge* portrays him as something of a dandy, 'in his fashionable jacket',—a man who shakes with nerves 'like a jelly in a bag' at being confused with his namesake.⁶²⁶ Cobbett had made a similar juxtaposition between Leigh and Henry Hunt—one 'the author of the ever-lasting sonnets [...] the paid-for-paragraph monger'; the other a man of action, and country sports, 'the politician, and fox-hunter and pheasant-shooter'.⁶²⁷ Cobbett jeered that 'my friend Mr. [Henry] Hunt produced more *political* EFFECT at the last Westminster Meeting than Mr. Leigh Hunt will have produced at the end of his life' (273).

Blackwood's uses the comparison of the two Hunts to suggest Leigh Hunt's hypocrisy in attempting to divide his artistic and intellectual elite from the 'tasteless' multitude, while at

⁶²² *E.*, (5 Sept. 1819), 561.

⁶²³ 'The Political Examiner, No. 590', *E.*, (1 Aug. 1819), 481-2, 482.

⁶²⁴ 'The Tent', *BM*, (Sept. 1819), 628-42, 641.

⁶²⁵ *BM*, (Sept. 1819), 640-1.

⁶²⁶ 'Henry Hunt, Esq., Candidate for Bristol, versus Henry Leigh Hunt, Esq.,' *The Scourge; or Monthly Expositor of Imposture and Folly*, (1 Sept. 1812), 246-50, 246.

⁶²⁷ *Cobbett's Political Register*, (2 Mar. 1816), 273.

the same time imagining himself to possess the kind of political influence that, in reality, Henry Hunt has a far greater claim to:

Bristol Hunt utterly despises ‘Foliage’, ‘Rimini,’ and ‘the Feast of the Poets;’ and cannot imagine how ‘annual parliaments and universal suffrage’ (the great objects, as he says, of all his own exertions) are to be brought about by a set of whiffing creatures, that fall into ecstasies at the chime of a musical snuff-box, and speak of a print of Mr Landseers with as much rapture as they should of the Magna Charta. Hampstead Hunt, on the other hand, fears, that if the House of Commons were remodelled after the designs of the Bristol artist, things would be arranged in such a way, that neither he, nor any of the delicate chirping members of the Round Table Club, could have any chance for seats; or that, at the best, were they so lucky as to be returned by the new-made burghs of Hampstead, Camberwell, Wapping, Pimlico, &c. they would be very little listened to by the tasteless, unmusical, and unpoetical majority of the regenerated assembly.⁶²⁸

As *Blackwood's* scathingly recognizes, the aesthetic preoccupations of the *Examiner* are a means by which Hunt and his associates in the cause of Reform can represent themselves as lifted—by their taste—above the plebeian radical multitude. *Blackwood's* accuses ‘Hampstead Hunt’ of a vulgar kind of pretentiousness when—out of jealousy of Bristol Hunt’s influence, the magazine claims—Leigh Hunt ‘insinuates, in so many words, that the Bristol orator is a rude vulgar dog, who could never be permitted for a moment to shew his nose in those elegant and intellectual coteries, where ‘crowns of ivy’ and locks of ‘glorious hair’ are presented to the bard of Rimini’ (641).

For all their undoubted exaggeration, *Blackwood's* criticisms do expose some element of truth: by painting such a specific portrait of his coterie community and the kind of readership which he hopes to create for the *Examiner*—intellectual, artistic, tasteful—Hunt has in fact created a reading community which appears limited by its over-definition. Defining his reading community in terms tied so closely to an aesthetic, domestic sphere, and to a particular coterie of acquaintances, meant that his particular sphere of politics could appear limited and marginal. While Hunt may intend his small group of ‘brother-reformers’ to be free-thinking counterculture group, the vanguard of a new future kind of society, to whose social, artistic and political ideals he hopes to convert a wider readership, it is equally

⁶²⁸ *BM*, (Sept. 1819), 641-2.

possible that such a small and well-defined group could appear elitist, inwards-looking, self-satisfied, and marginal to the concerns of the wider public. Rather than reaching out to a wider community, the coterie can suggest exclusivity and selectiveness. Furthermore, Hunt's attempt to construct an audience for the *Examiner* depends on the reader's compliance in fitting themselves into the imaginative role in which Hunt has placed them.

Some of Hazlitt's criticisms of Hunt feel particularly pertinent in this case. In his essay 'On the Conversation of Authors' in the *London Magazine*, Hazlitt draws a parallel between Hunt's private conversation and his publications. In private conversation, Hazlitt suggests that Hunt is happiest chatting with a reliable, sympathetic (or sycophantic) audience: he 'requires not to be appreciated, but to have a select circle of admirers and devotees, to feel himself quite at home'.⁶²⁹ When Hunt writes publicly using the same manner and style as his private conversation, Hazlitt suggests that the effect is unsatisfactory for the wider reading public:

The same things that tell, perhaps, best, to a private circle round the fireside, are not always intelligible to the public, nor does he take pains to make them so. He is too confident and secure of his audience. That which may be entertaining enough with the assistance of a certain liveliness of manner, may read very flat on paper, because it is abstracted from all the circumstances that had set it off to advantage. (259)

Hunt's companionable style and coterie references, Hazlitt suggests, can make his writing seem limited. In attempting to create and shape a reading community for the *Examiner*, Hunt has become 'too confident and secure of his audience'. Reading cannot, like talking, rely on the author's voice, manner, and companionable presence to engage the reader, however much Hunt might seek to replicate conversation on the page. The relationship between Hunt's 'private circle round the fireside' and the wider reading public is one that is more ambiguous—its boundaries perhaps more difficult to cross, the interests of the two audiences perhaps more divergent—than Hunt's textual strategies of audience-making would seem to admit.

⁶²⁹ *LM*, (Sept. 1820), 250-262; 258.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued, firstly, that Hunt sought to textually construct a unified public image of his coterie of ‘brother-reformers’ through poetical addresses to his friends in *Foliage* and the *Examiner*. Some of the negative criticism which Hunt’s poetry received, I suggest, can be interpreted as resistance to this coterie-oriented style of writing which, by specifically defining the community to which it is addressed, can appear cut off from a wider readership.

Additionally, I argue that, in his weekly newspaper the *Examiner*, Hunt sought to use his personal, subjective, conversational style of writing (as well as, at times, the language of sensibility) to present his newspaper as the voice of honesty. In his use of sentimental language and domestic imagery, Hunt implicitly drew on the legacy of 1790s debates over the relationship of private and public life, and the relationship between individual sympathies and wider communities. Furthermore, Hunt used his editorial powers to exploit the possibilities of the newspaper form and create meaningful juxtapositions and relationships between articles.

However, (as examining contemporary criticism of Hunt reveals) the textual strategies which Hunt used to attempt to shape the *Examiner*’s audience placed him in danger of limiting his reading circle. By attempting to depict a portrait of the ideal *Examiner* reader—one sharing the suburban lifestyle, and the intellectual, aesthetic, and political interests of Hunt himself—and attempting to shape his newspapers reception by portraying it as a ‘conversation’ occurring in a domestic setting, Hunt defined his reading community in ways which his detractors could portray as marginal, ineffectual, or elitist.

Conclusion

This thesis has used a series of case studies to explore the relationships between Romantic-era writers and their readers (in particular, specific known readers or defined audiences) in various print and manuscript mediums. I have shown, firstly, how the writers in this study sought to establish a friendly or sympathetic relationship with a particular reader or readers, or to create and shape a reading community. I have shown how Barbauld in her *Poems* sought not just to unite the Warrington Academy community but to reach out to a wider community of dissenting readers with shared religious and political affiliations; how Coleridge sought to

write himself into the intimate, familial community at Dove Cottage; how Lamb and Hazlitt represented the sociable community surrounding the *London Magazine* in print; how Keats and Reynolds forged a friendship through poetical allusions and epistolary exchanges; and how Hunt sought to represent himself as part of a unified ‘coterie’ of friends in *Foliage*, and to create a larger, imagined community of *Examiner* readers.

The thesis has examined in great detail the textual strategies which writers used to try and forge these community relationships, focusing in particular on the allusive relationships which writers established between one another’s work. I have shed new light on the sibling language of allusion which echoes between Barbauld’s and Aikin’s poetry, in particular their poetical representations of their mutual friend Joseph Priestley in print; I have paid great attention to the allusive relationship (previously little studied) between the poetical works of John Keats and John Hamilton Reynolds; shown how Lamb and Hazlitt established a string of thematic echoes between their writing for the *London Magazine*, and examined the links between Hunt and Thomas Moore. Further work remains to be done to give a fuller picture of these densely-woven allusive relationships which such pairs of writers established between one another’s work.

The thesis has also shown how the act of addressing a particular, often named, reader in a public medium could, in certain cases, become charged with an added political resonance. So for example, Barbauld could use her occasional poems addressed to friends as vehicles for ideological messages, or even, addressing friends like Priestley, use poetry to take a public political stance. Hunt named a roster of his acquaintances in *Foliage* as an attempt to create a public impression of a unified community of ‘brother-reformers’. However, more covert acts of address could be used as ‘secret’ code for knowing readers—so Coleridge addresses ‘Edmund’, or Lamb and Hazlitt play with a series of initials or pseudonyms when representing their friends (and one another) in print.

One of the aims of this thesis has been to question and discover just how coterie-oriented these sorts of literary works are, what sort of knowledge is needed to interpret them, and how open their frame of reference is to the general reading public. Often the answer seems hazy. While Barbauld and Aikin, in certain poems, openly signified their sociable connections to friends who were public figures (and by extension, their willingness to be aligned with these friends in political and/or religious matters), their mutual echoes of the language and imagery of one another's poetry seems to form a more private, sibling frame of reference. Coleridge's poetry which appeared in the *Morning Post* in 1802 frequently used images which were in effect secret symbols with a private meaning only the Grasmere gang could interpret. Despite arising from this deeply personal domestic context, however, such symbols (often very similar to the commonplaces of sentimental or picturesque poetry) can appear as simply conventional and generic literary tropes when read in the context of the newspaper. When Reynolds echoed the language of Keats's verse-epistle in his poems in the *Garden of Florence* he used private allusions to an unpublished poem that few (if any) other readers could understand. In the sphere of periodical writing, Hunt's verse-epistles openly indicated their 'coterie' nature, as did several essays by Lamb and Hazlitt. Even though Hunt, Lamb, and Hazlitt made a notional attempt to hide the identities of their friends and acquaintances in print (some figures would have been easily identifiable to a general reader, although others would not have been) it is not clear that the general reader would necessarily *need* to have known the identities in order to understand the general topics of the poetry and essays. The regular reader of the *Examiner* or the *London Magazine* would, presumably, be rewarded by learning in a piecemeal fashion enough about the identities of the writers and their circles to be able to understand the more 'coterie' references. However, in addition to this playful use of pseudonyms and allusions for those in the know, there is a hidden framework of background knowledge, inaccessible to the general reading public, which Lamb's essays in particular draw upon—the legacy of discussions and conversations which he

had been having with Coleridge and Hazlitt, in print and in person, for many years. This private intellectual background, based on shared reading and a shared cultural framework, comes to light only when—as I have done in this thesis—Lamb’s essays are read in the context of their development, over many years, in his correspondence with particular friends.

Lamb’s essays are directed, at least in part, to a particular reader (or readers) sharing in a certain ‘coterie’ background knowledge or frame of reference. This ‘coterie’ frame of reference also underlies the relationship between the poetry of Barbauld and Aikin, the poetry of Keats and Reynolds, and the poems Coleridge wrote around 1802, full of allusions for the Grasmere gang. For the writers I have studied here, the reading friend frequently seems to be the ‘ideal’ reader, able to interpret the literary work in the light of this shared knowledge. Sometimes the writers openly and actively sought to construct their readers in this role—so, for example, Keats directed Reynolds that he must bring his own knowledge of the tendencies of Keats’s thought to bear on the letters; and (in a more public medium) Hunt depicted his projected *Examiner* reader as a mirror of himself, sharing the same lifestyle, politics, tastes and interests. Coleridge likewise (as I have noted earlier) theorised that the sympathetic friend made an ideal reader. However, this way of thinking about reading and interpreting ‘coterie’ literature implicitly brings with it certain problems.

In this thesis I have sought to show not just how writers seek to forge community relationships with their readers through various textual strategies like allusion and address, but also what effects these textual strategies have on reading the texts (and, in addition, on reading the texts in different contexts of publication). I have argued that negative critical reactions to openly ‘coterie’ poetry, like William Turner’s criticisms of Barbauld’s *Poems* and the many hostile reviews of Hunt’s *Foliage*, can be explained, at least in part, by the reviewers feeling that such poetry is of limited value due to its inaccessible frame of reference. Poetry which located itself within a defined community by using allusions that ‘outsiders’ could not necessarily understand, could appear to reviewers to be limited in scope, self-indulgent or elitist. In using

literary works to create and shape a community identity, writers could also (deliberately or inadvertently) place interpretative boundaries on that community, limiting readers' access to the text.

The problems with establishing a community of readers (through allusive language, shared intellectual or cultural backgrounds, or sympathetic friendship) reflect in microcosm contemporary Romantic-era concerns and theories about the formation of community feeling on a wider social, national, and political level. A recurring question in this thesis has been how the writers in this study engaged with contemporary theories about the role of sympathy in social communities (and in reading), and how in their work they sought to examine the potentials and the limitations of the sympathetic imagination. Barbauld, writing in the 1790s, made a distinction between pity and a more distressing kind of sympathy, and sought to create the former not the later in her poem 'To the Poor'. Attempting to stir a reader's sympathy in literary works, Barbauld recognised, could be problematical. Furthermore, she stressed the importance of social worship in stirring social sympathies and community feeling. Coleridge's early 1790s poetry had been deeply engaged with ideas about sympathy and society. His poetry of 1802, as I have discussed, expressed his growing sense of the problems and limitations of sympathy, as he sought to create a sympathetic identification between himself and his addressees through sharing visual perceptions—firstly with 'Sara' in the verse-letter, and later in his painterly landscape descriptions in his letters to William Sotheby. Lamb's letters and essays addressed the problems experienced by writer and reader when attempting to overcome time, distance, and difference in tastes, via the sympathetic imagination. Lamb's work from the 1820s continued to engage in an ongoing debate about sympathy and community begun in his youthful days with Coleridge at the Salutation and Cat tavern. Likewise, Lamb's and Hazlitt's articles for the *London Magazine* continued to engage with the legacy of the politics of the 1790s, and questioned the Burkean idea that partiality and prejudice are the natural, instinctive tendencies of human nature.

In marginalia and letters, Coleridge and Lamb explored various models of reading. As well as a 'genial' model of reading, in which the reader sympathetically identifies with the author, Coleridge suggested other models of reading in which the reader 'misreads', remakes, or appropriates the text according to their own desires. For Keats, the sympathetic imagination was a vital component of friendship, allowing friends to 'interassimilate' with one another's identities. In addition, Keats sought to reinforce his friendship with Reynolds by suggesting that their shared knowledge and friendly sympathies made Reynolds the best reader and interpreter of Keats's letters. Hunt, like Lamb and Hazlitt, revisited some of the concerns of the 1790s in the *Examiner*. In addition to presenting himself as the voice of subjective, confessional honesty, he used the language of sensibility in an attempt to stir the reader's sympathies over social injustices, as well as the injustice of his own imprisonment. The writers in this study show differing degrees of confidence in the potential of the sympathetic imagination to maintain individual and community relationships, and to sustain the relationship of writer and reader. Overall, I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis that the problems which writers experienced and negotiated in attempting to forge a relationship with a reading audience were not just the product of anxieties about the commercial nature of a burgeoning print culture. Rather, in shaping a relationship with their readers, writers engaged with the legacy of eighteenth-century philosophical ideas about how sympathy is created and how emotions are transferred; with contemporary political debates about the individual's relationship to the wider community; and with interpretative theories about the reading process.

However, I do not mean to negate the importance of the material conditions of literary culture. Rather, one of the major assertions of this thesis is that the boundaries of print and manuscript culture in the Romantic period, and their respective audiences, cannot in many cases be strictly drawn. The works of the writers studied here are characterised by repeated intersections and crossovers between manuscript and print, and between public,

confidential and private audiences. Barbauld's poems, for example, found their first audience in the social circle surrounding Warrington Academy before their print publication. Her work also circulated widely in manuscript, and poems were sometimes pirated into print. To this day, new instances of Barbauld's poems being printed without her knowledge can be found, as I have shown in the cases of her poem on the birth of the Priestleys' first child, and her 'Character' of Joseph Priestley. Writers could also bring their own seemingly 'confidential' works, rooted in manuscript culture, into print. Coleridge, for example, published his own marginalia as a specimen of his conversation. Much as Richardson in earlier decades had selected and arranged his own letters with the thought of their future publication, so Coleridge saw his own 'private' marginalia as part of his literary oeuvre, and their publication as a way of shaping his public image as an author. As I have noted in an earlier chapter, the popularity of printed collections of writers' letters in the period, alongside the influence of epistolary fiction, and the importance of the 'public letter' in newspapers and political tracts, meant that for writers like Keats, the act of writing a letter evoked a particular literary self-consciousness. For Lamb, letters acted as a space for literary experimentation and a medium for developing ideas, images and themes which formed the basis for later essays. For Coleridge, his letters to Sotheby provided a space to begin revising his 'Letter to Sara Hutchinson' into a form suitable for a public audience. In addition, the letters show him revisiting (and perhaps subconsciously displacing) some of the verse-letters themes and concerns into his prose letter. Keats, in his verse-epistle to Reynolds, drew on the background of their private epistolary exchange, and on the poetry they had shared with one another in manuscript. However, the poem also offered Keats's private response to some of the opinions which Reynolds had expressed in essays and reviews in the *Champion* (particularly his negative views of Coleridge). The allusive relationship between the two poets crossed between published poems, like Reynolds's 'Devon' and Keats's 'On the Sea' (printed in the *Champion*), and unpublished pieces—as mentioned above, few could have heard Reynolds's

private echoes of Keats's work in his *Garden of Florence* poems. As I have already noted, in cases where writers openly acknowledged the overlap of print and manuscript cultures, reviewers could be hostile: Hunt was criticised for bringing what seemed like 'portfolio' album verse into print in *Foliage*.

Since, at least in the case of the writers studied in this thesis, the boundaries between print and manuscript culture cannot be strictly drawn, it seems inappropriate in these cases to represent the persisting importance of manuscript culture in the Romantic period purely as a rejection of print culture, or to suggest that the main reason that writers made use of coterie-oriented works, arising from the domestic sphere of familial composition and manuscript circulation, was to avoid the commercial, alienating sphere of print culture and its associated anxieties of reception. Rather, for at least a few of the writers in this study such as Barbauld and Hunt, the reading and circulation of literary texts appears to offer the potential to create a continuous community between writer, individual readers, and wider reading communities.

Recent critics of Barbauld's and Aikin's work have emphasised how the writers' compositional practices, crossing over between manuscript and print culture, reflected their belief that the private, domestic life of each household was intrinsically connected to their place within wider communities of society and state. As I have outlined in the introduction, much has been written on the important ideological and political significance of domestic, familial imagery in the literature of the period. For other writers in this study too, private reading had an important role to play in national life: Coleridge's marginalia and Lamb's *Specimens* reflected upon how reading and discussion at home could have a moral, educational, and political influence. Hunt aimed for his newspaper the *Examiner*, consumed by the domestic fireside, to have a positive, educational influence on the politics and aesthetic tastes of the reading public.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that homemade manuscript albums could be used by their compilers, not just as expressions of family and friendly ties, but also as expressions of

allegiance to a wider community, united by religious or political affiliations. In their album (which I described in the first chapter) the Houghton family, by choosing to include verse written by a large number of Dissenting poets, some of whom were family friends, positioned themselves as members of the Dissenting community. Other books, like the Leigh sisters' albums, formed a space to record (and forge) friendships, through poetical dedications based on literary models. Leigh Hunt attempted to represent a united coterie of friends through occasional and dedicatory sonnets in his printed 'portfolio' book, *Foliage*. In her poetry book, Sara Hutchinson collected together Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry. Her book did not simply provide a safe space to preserve poems awaiting publication, or rescue poems that had appeared in newspapers from their ephemeral context, but also asserted her own place within that particular community as one of the first readers of the poems—a reader whose critical voice could be heeded, as it eventually was in the case of Wordsworth's dull first draft of 'The Leechgatherer'. Even printed books, with the addition of marginalia and annotations like Coleridge's, could provide a manuscript space within their pages where friendships could be created and enacted, and where critical debates could take place (between reader and writer, or between different readers).

This thesis has shown that reading literary texts as documents in a very material sense, in the contexts—both in manuscript and print—in which they reach their readers, is a vital aspect of elucidating and understanding writer/reader relationships in the Romantic period. I have therefore read individual letter-texts with reference to their place within an ongoing conversation with a particular reader (as in the case of Keats's letters to Reynolds), and also read poems like Coleridge's revisions to the 'Letter to Sara' in the context of the letter containing it. I have also sought to read manuscript books as documents with a certain integrity and coherence created by the principle of selection that has taken place, such as in the case of the Houghton album, and 'Sara's Poets'. More work remains to be done in examining these books in greater detail, and I am only too aware that the latter book, in

particular, demands a fuller consideration (especially of the Wordsworth poetry that it contains) than I have been able to give here.

As a further aspect of reading the material contexts of literary texts, I have revealed new evidence of the juxtapositions which could be created by writers and editors between poems and articles in magazines and newspapers. I have shown how James Perry as editor of the *Morning Chronicle* placed Barbauld's poetry in meaningful juxtaposition with surrounding articles, creating linguistic echoes between the various contents of the newspaper page. Perry took up Barbauld's poem 'To Dr Priestley' as an assertion of his own political feelings, allowing the poem to speak for him. However, I have also shown how poems could take on additional resonances (perhaps unintended) through such juxtapositions, such as when Barbauld's echoes of Thomson in 'To the Poor' came to resonate with the contested language of the Treason Trials. In a similar vein, I have shown how Daniel Stuart sometimes placed Coleridge's poems to deliberate effect in the *Morning Post*, creating echoes between 'Tranquillity' and the surrounding newspaper articles, and on a more comical note, making a sly joke with the 'Ode to Bathing'. I have shown in great detail how Hazlitt used his brief editorship of the *London Magazine* to work poems and articles into a meaningful relationship with one another. Through careful placement of items which followed through a theme, Hazlitt used the magazine's contents to criticise, question and debate the conflict between the philosophies of Burke and Bentham. Leigh Hunt followed similar principles in his editorship, highlighting the relationship of poems like Lamb's sonnet 'Who first created work' to ongoing issues and concerns in the *Examiner's* articles.

Examples such as these show how editors, in their position as one of the first readers of a poem or article, could frame it with their own interpretation when presenting it for a wider reading public. Through clever positioning, they could choose to emphasise certain aspects of the work for their own ends, and thereby adapt or appropriate the work to fit it within the wider scheme of the publication. Examining writer/reader relations therefore

needs to take into account the way in which the literary text (particularly in print, but even in manuscript albums) comes to the ‘general’ reader mediated through the actions of other, prior readers. In the case of some of the writers studied here, such as Lamb, Hazlitt, and Hunt, the writers and editors were closely acquainted with one another—the editorial reader is a reading friend, yet one who reads with an appropriative, or sometimes combative, rather than sympathetic eye.

These same issues of reading, adaptation and appropriation can, of course, be examined more widely. I have shown how Coleridge suggests ways in which readers might interpret Daniel’s *Civil Wars* through the lens of their own politics, and I have noted how he himself adapts Daniel’s poetry for his own times. Charles Lamb’s *Specimens* likewise presents the reader with extracts from Elizabethan dramatic poetry framed by his own aesthetic interests and moral concerns. There is undoubtedly more work to be done on examining the ways that Romantic-era writers and editors self-consciously engage in acts of readerly reinterpretation and appropriation. In this way it seems that we have returned to Godwin’s two contrasting ways of reading which I described in the introduction: on the one hand, sympathetically losing oneself in the author’s mind; on the other hand, finding in the work a tendency the writer did not necessarily indeed. Even by using ‘coterie’ features (such as allusion, address, or secret symbolism) in a literary work, in order to create and define a certain community of ‘knowing’, friendly readers who are its best interpreters, each writer is still only able to define one way in which the work can be understood.

The major outcomes of this thesis have been to provide a new context for thinking about the creation and representation of literary coteries, reading communities, and sociability in Romantic literature, by showing how these ‘coterie’ works often suggest a continuum between manuscript and print culture, and between private and public readerships. Furthermore, I have shown how Romantic representations of these writer/reader relationships draw on a wider contemporary philosophical (and also political) background of

thinking about community, sympathy, and reading. In addition, I have argued for the importance of a new method of reading these textual relationships which takes into account the material context that frames them.

One important factor to have emerged in the course of this study is the way in which an individual reader's encounter with the text can be framed or mediated. In some cases, this can be done by the author themselves—perhaps they can frame a poem within the space of a letter, or select certain poems to be printed together as a series. Yet readers can also intervene with their own interpretative frames, for example by choosing to copy a poem into the space of a particular manuscript book, or making the editorial decision to place it next to a specific newspaper article. The printed book can be adapted with annotations by prior readers who, as I have shown in the case of Coleridge's letter in Lamb's copy of Daniel's *Civil Wars*, can give advice to those who follow on *how* the book should best be read. It seems difficult, and perhaps a distortion, to isolate individual writer/reader relationships in a vacuum; rather readers can and do read *with* or *through* the influence of other readers.

On a more specific level, I have illuminated new aspects of the allusive textual relationships between writers such as Barbauld and Aikin, Coleridge and Lamb and Hazlitt, Keats and Reynolds, and Hunt and friends. Further work remains to be done to explore more fully the relationships of allusion and intertextual 'conversation' between these pairs and groups of writers, and to reveal the shared intellectual and cultural background that informed and shaped these relationships. In addition, great potential remains to pursue these coterie relationships further by examining how the writers' work appears together in particular sites of publication. In particular, more work remains to be done to illuminate the relationships between groups of authors writing in the *London Magazine* and the *Examiner* (and furthermore, to examine intertextual and allusive relationships between these two publications), as well as to examine more extensively the editorial practices at play in the *Morning Post* and *Morning Chronicle*. Recent criticism, including work by Samantha Matthews on album verses and by

Ruth Abbot on Wordsworth's notebooks and his compositional practices, has begun to shed more light on Romantic period manuscript culture and sought new methodologies of reading manuscript books as literary documents.⁶³⁰ Undoubtedly, the potential remains for further study of this manuscript material: not just, for example, reading the Grasmere circle manuscript books as coherent 'publications' of a sort in themselves, but also examining archival material by readers such as the Houghton family and the Leigh sisters as documents which establish coherent, allusive, thematic relationships within their contents. What I hope to have done in this thesis, at least, is to suggest that these domestic, coterie, manuscript publications need not be read in isolation from, or in conflict with, wider issues of writer/reader relationships manifested and expressed in print culture.

Abbreviations

- BL *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 7, ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, *Biographia Literaria*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983).
- BM *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood).
- CM *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 12, ed. George Whalley and H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia*, 6 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980-2001).
- CN *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 5 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957-2002).
- E *The Examiner*, (London: John Hunt).
- EOT *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 3, ed. David V. Erdman, *Essays on his Times in the Morning Post and The Courier*, 3 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978).

⁶³⁰ Samantha Matthews, 'From Autograph to Print: Charles Lamb's *Album Verses, with a Few Others* (1830)', *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, NS 154 (Oct. 2011), 143-154; 'Importunate Applications and Old Affections: Robert Southey's *Album Verses*', *Romanticism*, 17:1 (Apr. 2011) 77-93; "'O all pervading album!": locality and mobility in late-Romantic albums', in Christoph Bode and Jacqueline Labbe (eds.) *Romantic Localities: Europe Writes Place*, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 99-116; Ruth Abbott, 'Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the "strain of words / That shall be life" in Dove Cottage Manuscript 28', *Textual Practice*, 28:5 (2014), 901-928.

- GF John Hamilton Reynolds, *The Garden of Florence; and other poems*, (London: John Warren, 1821).
- GJ Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere Journals, including the Alfoxden Journal*, ed. Pamela Woof, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991; 2002).
- Griggs *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71; reprinted Oxford UP, 2000).
- JKCP *John Keats: Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger, (Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1978; 2003).
- Lectures 1795 *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 1, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Man, *Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton UP: 1971).
- LJK *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1958).
- LM *The London Magazine*, (London: Baldwin, Craddock & Joy, 1820-1; Taylor & Hessey, 1821-5).
- Lucas *The Letters of Charles Lamb: to which are added those of his sister, Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas, 3 vols. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Methuen & Co., 1935).
- Marrs *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marrs, 3 vols. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1975).
- P2V William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis, (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell UP, 1983).
- PALB *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Craft, (Athens, GA; London: University of Georgia Press, 1994).
- PWC *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 16, ed. J. C. C. Mays, *Poetical Works*, 3 parts; 6 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001).
- RT William Hazlitt and J. H. L. Hunt, *The Round Table*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: A. Constable; London: Longman [etc.], 1817).
- SPR *Selected Prose of John Hamilton Reynolds*, ed. Leonidas M. Jones, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1966).

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