The Wrest Circle:

Literary Coteries and their Influence on Landscape Design, 1740-1760

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THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the Wrest Circle to understand the connection between literary coteries and garden design in the mid-eighteenth century. The Wrest circle, named after Wrest Park in Bedfordshire, centred on Philip Yorke, later 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, and his wife, Jemima Marchioness Grey. Although many members of the Wrest circle held prominent public positions and engaged with the commercial literary world, significantly, they chose to keep their literary compositions within the remit of this inner circle. The coterie also had a significant role in the garden design at Wrest Park, creating the Mithraic Glade that referenced its private literary compositions. While visitors did come to see the gardens at Wrest, nobody beyond the inner circle could understand the full significance of the enigmatic altar and root-house. Critical attention has tended to focus on coteries as part of the public sphere, yet the Wrest circle problematises this understanding, not least since the coterie went to great lengths to make its literary works – and private references in the gardens at Wrest Park – inaccessible to outsiders. Thus, the question underpinning this thesis is how far, and in what ways, could an elite coterie retain exclusivity against a backdrop in which country houses – and coterie compositions themselves – were increasingly subsumed into the public sphere through domestic tourism and the print trade?

Key to understanding the inner circle is the correspondence between members. Not only do the letters allow some insight into the social dynamics between members and the personal references that appear in their literary compositions, but letters also provide a virtual space for intellectual engagement and discussion. This is particularly important in the instance of the female members of the coterie, who were careful not to advertise their literary or intellectual pursuits beyond their immediate close network of friends. While studies of women's sociability and intellectual engagement in the eighteenth-century has tended to

focus on ‘public’ intellectuals such as the Bluestocking circle, this thesis will demonstrate the way in which some elite women operated in an exclusive literary circle. Thus, this thesis also seeks to demonstrate that the women of the Wrest circle offer a particularly interesting example of women’s agency and participation in a country house coterie.

Chapter 1 introduces the members of the Wrest circle through their unpublished manuscript, *Wrestiana*, using the compositions to explore their academic interests, as well as understand the tensions within the group. Chapter 2 explores the academic and political context for the *Athenian Letters*, one of the coterie’s key texts that several members composed while they were at the University of Cambridge in the early 1740s. Chapter 3 examines the literary allusions in the gardens at Wrest Park in order to understand the different layers of interpretation that were available to visitors, depending on their proximity to the inner members of the circle and their compositions. Chapter 4 examines the coterie’s travel accounts to understand the way in which, through their exclusive scribal network, members engaged in social readings of the gardens that they visited. Ultimately, this thesis argues that understanding the connection between coterie compositions and garden design in the context of the country house offers the potential to reframe our understanding of the distinction between public and private.

Contents

Thesis Abstract ii

Contents iv

List of Figures vi

Acknowledgements viii

Abbreviations xi

A Note on Texts, Dates, and References xii

Introduction: The Wrest Circle 1

- Research Resources 6
- The Lucas Papers 9
- The *Wrestiana* Manuscript (1742-c.1783) 10
- The Gardens at Wrest 13
- Literary Coteries and Manuscript Culture 18
- Eighteenth-Century Social Culture and Authorship Practices 22
- Defining the Public Sphere 24
- Polite Tourism and the Public Sphere 29
- New Perspectives in Garden and Country House History 33
- Why Examine the Wrest Coterie? 40
- Structure of the Thesis 42

Chapter 1: The Establishment of the Wrest Coterie 46

- Unexpected Beginnings: Jemima Grey, Marriage, and the Inheritance of Wrest Park 46
- The Wrest Coterie and *Wrestiana* 55
- 'Oft Our Best Muse, She Verse Inspires': Grey's Significance in the Wrest Coterie 61
- Sociable Verses and Serious Pursuits 65
- 'Take Care Mr Warburton Does Not Hook You into the Next Edition of the Dunciad': Literary Infamy and the *Canons of Criticism* 69
- The Mid-Century Spenserian Revival 74
- Political Poetry and the Public Sphere 81

Chapter 2: 'It Kept up a Correspondence Between Friends': The *Athenian Letters* and the Yorkes' Cambridge Circle (1738-42) 88

- Introduction 88
- The Cambridge Network 89
- The *Athenian Letters* as a Coterie Composition 92
- Tension between Public and Private: The Printing of the 99

Athenian Letters
The *Athenian Letters,* Oriental Fiction, and Political Satire 109
The *Athenian Letters* and Patriot Politics 114
Afterlife and Publication History of the *Athenian Letters* 119

Chapter 3: Literary Allusions in the Gardens at Wrest Park 124

Introduction 124
Spirituality, the Natural World, and the *Athenian Letters* 126
The Influence of William Stukeley 131
The Influence of Thomas Wright 134
Visualising the *Athenian Letters* at Wrest and Wimpole 136
George Lyttelton and Planning the Mithraic Glade 138
The Construction of the Mithraic Altar 141
'It Baffles all Arrogant Pretences to Learning': The Indecipherability of the Inscriptions 146
Thomas Edwards and the Construction of the Root-house 150
'An Image of Wildness & Barbarity': Primitivism and the Root-house at Wrest 155
Thomas Edwards's Sonnets for the Root-house 159
The Later Monument Inscriptions 163
The Gothic Tower at Wimpole 165
The Cold Bath at Wrest 172

Chapter 4: The Wrest Coterie and Garden Visiting 177

Introduction 177
Developing a Critical Eye through Domestic Tourism 180
An Eye for Improvement 185
Theatricality, Sociability, and Playfulness in Gardens 189
Private Satire and the Politics of Taste 191
Female Viewers and the Language of Aesthetics 198
Ruins, Antiquarianism, and the Picturesque 205
Written Travel Accounts and the Problem of Representation 216

Conclusion 225

Public or Private? 225
Social Authorship and the Garden at Wrest 227
Social Interpretations of Gardens 229
'Vacuna's Children Fall'n so Low': Mock Seriousness and the Wrest Circle 232
Private Space for Intellectual Exchange 235
Final Thoughts 237

Appendix: Context of the Thesis and the Archival Materials 239

Bibliography 248

List of Figures

Figure 1. *Wrestiana*. Photograph by the author, 2021. Private collection. 11

Figure 2. John Roque, 'A Plan & View of the Buildings & Garden at Rest', 1737. 17
Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

Figure 3. Peter Tillemans, View of the South Gardens including the Archer Pavilion 18
and Cain Hill from the South East, c. late 1720s. BLARS, L33/129.

Figure 4. Charles Phillips, 'Conversation Piece at Wrest Park', c. 1735. 50
Private collection.

Figure 5. Allan Ramsay, 'Lady Jemima Campbell, Marchioness Grey' 1741. 51
Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire. © National Trust Images / Roy Fox.

Figure 6. Allan Ramsay, 'The Hon Philip Yorke, Later 2nd Earl of Hardwicke', 1741. 52
Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire. © National Trust Images / John Hammond.

Figure 7. The Mithraic Altar at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire. Photograph by 141
the author, 2021.

Figure 8. Greek Inscription on the Mithraic Altar at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire. 142
Photograph by the author, 2021.

Figure 9. Cuneiform Inscription on the Mithraic Altar at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire. 143
Photograph by the author, 2021.

Figure 10. Cornelis de Bruijn, *Travels into Muscovy, Persia, and Part of the* 143
East Indies (1737), II.

Figure 11. Earl de Grey, Watercolour of the root-house at Wrest, 1830s. 152
© English Heritage.

Figure 12. Henry Reginald Yorke, 'The Antique Persian Altar in the Gardens at Wrest', 152
print by W. F. Wells, c. 1820, in BLARS, L33/44.

Figure 13. The Bath House at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire. Photograph by the author, 2019. 164

Figure 14. Anonymous artist, ‘View of the Gothic Tower at Wimple after completion’, Engraving, 1777. © National Trust / Norman Anderson. 165

Figure 15. The Mosaic Floor of the Bath House at Wrest Park. Photograph by the author, 2021. 174

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Abbreviations

Add. MS	Additional Manuscript
BL	British Library
BLARS	Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service
LP	Lucas Papers
ODNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography,* online ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004—), < https://www.oxforddnb.com/>
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary,* online ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000—), <https://www.oed.com>

A Note on Texts, Dates, and References

I have preserved the original spellings and shorthand when quoting from contemporary sources, although I have not preserved the long 's'. For clarity on the shorthand words, I have added the full word in square brackets.

All references to the *Athenian Letters* refer to the first edition printed by James Bettenham (1741-3), except where otherwise explicitly stated. I have chosen to italicise *Wrestiana* for clarity to differentiate the individual compositions within the work from the manuscript as a whole. When referencing the individual compositions in *Wrestiana*, the *Athenian Letters*, or *The Philosopher,* I have included in square brackets the coded initials of the authors provided in the original texts, followed by my own 'translation' of the authors' full names.

I have listed dates as they were recorded at the time of writing.

Introduction

The Wrest Circle

On 8th June 1741, Philip Yorke wrote a sonnet to his brother Charles urging him to abandon his studies at Cambridge and visit him at his wife's estate, Wrest Park in Bedfordshire.

O Charles! Replete with learning's various store;
Howe'er attentive to th' historic page,
The poet's lay, or philosophic lore,
Thy thoughts from these high studies disengage.
Let Horace rest and Locke, and quick repair
To Wrest, that ancient honourable seat!
In its wide garden breathe a purer air,
And pass the fleeting hours in converse sweet.
From this short respite shall thy mind renew
(Whose spirit by the midnight lamp decays)
Her native strength, its labours to pursue,
And in thy bloom of age outstrip the praise.
Each studious vigil thou shalt pleas'd review,
When honors crown thy well-spent early days.[1]

For Philip, the garden at Wrest has an integral function; its 'native strength' has restorative powers for the 'spirit [that] by the midnight lamp decays.' In addition, the reference to 'converse sweet' almost certainly alludes to conversation with other members of the Wrest literary coterie, a heterosocial group of politicians, poets, and wits who would congregate at Wrest Park each summer at the invitation of Philip Yorke and his wife, Jemima Marchioness Grey. At Wrest Park, the gardens and the library were at the heart of the coterie's socialisation, intellectual exchange, and literary composition, so it should be no surprise that they should become so central to the identity of the eponymously named Wrest circle. This quotation demonstrates that gardens could be significant as social spaces, even though the social aspect of gardens has been frequently omitted from both garden histories and histories

[1] Philip Yorke, 'Sonnet. To Mr. Charles Yorke (His Brother)', *A Catalogue of the Royal and Noble Authors of England,* ed. by Horace Walpole, 4 vols (England: J. Scott, 1806), IV, p. 339.

of literary coteries.[2] This thesis will focus on the significance of the gardens to the Wrest circle, which would both inspire the coterie's compositions and reflect the same ideas and imaginary world evoked in its literary works.

Although the marriage between Philip Yorke (1720-1790), later the 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, and Jemima Marchioness Grey (1722-1797) had been arranged as an alliance between two powerful and wealthy Whig families, it was also a union of minds that brought together two bookish individuals who had fostered close intellectual friendships in their adolescence. Quite unconventionally, owing to the open-mindedness and mutual academic interests that characterised their marriage, Yorke and Grey brought together these like-minded friends and formed their own scholarly network.[3] On Grey's side, this consisted of her young aunt, Mary Gregory (née Grey) (1719-1761), and the later bluestocking, Catherine Talbot (1721-1770). Yorke's connections would make up the lion's share of the group. The Yorkes were an academic family, and Philip's brother, Charles (1722-1770), and sisters, Elizabeth (later Lady Anson) (1725-1760) and Margaret (later Heathcote) (1733-1769), would become immersed in the intellectual life at Wrest. Even before this time, while Philip and Charles were students at Cambridge in the late 1730s, they had also been at the centre of their own literary circle that consisted of their friends and tutors. From this group, only the Yorkes' cousin, John Lawry (1714-1777),[4] the antiquarian, Daniel Wray (1701-1783), and the historian, Thomas Birch (1705-1766) would become inner members of the Wrest coterie. However, the Cambridge circle's key collaborative work, the *Athenian Letters* (1741-3), a series of mock-historical letters set during the Peloponnesian wars, would continue to have

[2] But see Kate Felus, *The Secret Life of the Georgian Garden* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016) and John Dixon Hunt, *The Afterlife of Gardens* (London: Reaktion, 2004).

[3] As the Wrest coterie is, in many respects, a family network, it is inevitable that many members share the same surnames. While I have tried to refer to coterie members predominantly by their full names or surnames, there are several instances where this would lead to lack of clarity, and I have had to resort to first names.

[4] John Lawry's mother, Elizabeth (née Yorke), sister of Simon Yorke of Erddig in Wales, was first cousin of the first Earl of Hardwicke. It is likely that this family connection secured Lawry the position of rector at Wimpole from 1742 to 1745 as he embarked on his clerical career.

significance for the Wrest coterie.[5] This is particularly resonant in the way in which the *Athenian Letters* would be referenced at Wrest Park itself in the enigmatic Mithraic Altar, situated in the secluded glade that would become known as the Mithraic Glade.

The Wrest circle soon became a coveted circle that other poets, politicians, and garden designers aspired to join. After 1745, Daniel Wray introduced Thomas Edwards (1699-1757) and Richard Owen Cambridge (1717-1802) to the Yorkes, and the two poets seem to have been in friendly competition with one another to gain acceptance into the group. Edwards was more involved in the late 1740s and early 1750s owing to his publication of the *Canons of Criticism* and his construction of the root-house at Wrest, which would become part of the Mithraic Glade. On the other hand, Richard Owen Cambridge, a poet who had attracted some fame as an imitator of Spenser, seems to have taken longer to become established in the coterie. His ambition to get his work into the coterie's private manuscript, *Wrestiana* (1742 – c.1783), was noted by Edwards, who would write to Wray that he did not doubt 'Cambridge's ambition to get into the Wrestiana […] all that I quarrel is that like other ambitious folks he neglects those of his friends that are not able to assist in his pursuits.'[6] Cambridge's poems do not appear in *Wrestiana* until 1758, although Edwards noted as early as 1746 that he had read three of Cambridge's 'numerous compositions at Wrest,' suggesting that Cambridge had been vying for recognition for some time.[7] This certainly demonstrates how membership of the circle and inclusion in the coterie's private manuscript was aspirational and afforded cultural capital only to the initiated few.

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[5] One might consider the years 1740-1743 as a transitional period from the Cambridge to the Wrest circle, especially since Catherine Talbot would also become involved in writing some of the later *Athenian Letters*.
[6] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl 1010, fol. 196 [TE to DW, March 14th 1745]; Cambridge's social climbing appears to have been a running joke in the coterie, for Daniel Wray would similarly write to Philip Yorke that 'nor need I much regret Dick Cambridge's neglect of me […] he contents himself with his late acquaintance, the Duchess and the Pr [Prince]; and aims at nothing higher till the K. [King] returns', in London, British Library, Add. MS 35401, fol. 133v [DW to PY, 1st September 1750].
[7] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1010, fol. 231 [TE to ROC, 15th December 1746].

The exclusivity of the circle invites an examination of the way in which the coterie's literary works and the garden design problematise the boundary between public and private. Significant critical attention has been paid to the way in which public architectural displays reflected the intellectual culture of urban salons,[8] yet the connection between gardens and country house coteries remains to be satisfactorily explored.[9] Such an examination has the potential to reshape our thinking about eighteenth-century sociability, for while literary salons offered a more public arena for intellectual activity, the country house coterie is far more exclusive by nature. The Wrest coterie certainly capitalised on the privacy and retirement of Wrest Park: not only was the garden imbued with personal significance as the coterie projected its imaginary world onto the garden design, but the coterie's frequent pun on the homonyms Wrest/rest shows that the country house offered a fantasy of retirement from busy city life. Yet, while it might be tempting to consider Wrest Park as a private retreat from the public world, country houses were never entirely private spaces, and nor was the coterie ever truly separate from the broader political, literary, or social spheres of London. In addition, as roads improved and travel became easier as the eighteenth century progressed, polite tourism became an increasingly popular pastime.[10] Far from constituting a private space, Wrest Park was a space in which comparative strangers could – and did – intrude to examine the gardens for themselves.

Against this backdrop, one might ask how far the Wrest circle really was accessible to outsiders. This is significant, not least since many members of the coterie also engaged in

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[8] See Kerry Bristol, 'The painted rooms of "Athenian" Stuart', *The Georgian Group Journal,* 10 (2000), 164-174; Rosemary Baird, '"The Queen of the Bluestockings": Mrs Montagu's house at 23 Hill Street rediscovered', *Apollo* (2003), 43-49; Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason from Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), pp. 62-9.

[9] But see Tim Richardson, *The Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Landscape Garden* (London: Bantam Press, 2011).

[10] See Adrian Tinniswood, *The Polite Tourist: Four Centuries of Country House Visiting* (London: National Trust, 1998), and Jocelyn Anderson, *Touring and Publicizing England's Country Houses in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

'public' lives and were self-conscious of their visibility in high society, the political sphere, or in more public-facing societies, such as the Royal Society or the Society of Antiquaries. In addition, members were closely connected to the commercial literary sphere: they were avid consumers of the literary print trade, and their literary compositions were often in dialogue with, or sometimes in imitation of published works. As a private, aristocratic coterie, the Wrest circle was undeniably exclusive, yet members were also well connected to other famous literary, political, and culturally significant circles of the day. Thus, it is no surprise that both the coterie's manuscripts and the garden design at Wrest reflected the circle's private interests as well as broader cultural trends, but it does mean that it places the garden design in an ambiguous terrain that is neither public nor private. A country house garden might be physically accessible, but whether it was intellectually accessible is another matter entirely. While gardens were often designed to offer public 'readings' that might be easily identified by a well-read visitor, they could also embody exclusivity when a select group encodes its own private jokes or literary compositions into the garden design. In both the Wrest coterie's compositions and garden design, the boundaries between public/private, or accessible/exclusive are sometimes porous, depending on the visitor's personal relationship with the owners or proximity to the coterie's private compositions.

Recent literary scholarship has highlighted the social networks behind authorship and readership in the eighteenth century, but I propose drawing a further parallel between social networks and gardens to examine the relationship between literary coteries and garden design. After all, gardens, like literary texts, required a discerning critical eye to interpret them, could be read or mis-read, provoke debate and discussion, and visitors could either follow the intended narrative or take their own path.[11] In addition, garden design was not

[11] The notion of 'reading' or 'interpreting' a garden is a common concept in garden history, especially in examinations of 'iconographical' early-eighteenth century gardens, although this is not to say that all visitors sought intellectual meaning in gardens or that there was only a singular interpretation available. See Stephen

always the product of an individual genius, but rather a result of discussions with friends who might add their own contributions. Ultimately, this thesis examines the Wrest circle to argue that gardens are at the heart of coterie sociability, and as such, have the potential to challenge current critical thinking around coteries and their relationship to the public sphere.

RESEARCH RESOURCES

The extensive archival material that has survived from the Wrest circle provides a wealth of information for understanding the coterie's social activities, composition processes, discussions of the books that they read or gardens that they visited, and even private references such as coterie nicknames or jokes. Importantly, the surviving letters also allow us to recover the intellectual lives of the women of the Wrest circle. As Leonie Hannan has recently argued in *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England* (2016), private letters can reveal 'hidden networks of creative exchange', since most women 'engaged with a life of the mind through reading and writing letters.'[12] By understanding women's private letters as a form of literature, we can expand the canon of early modern female writers and explore the intellectual social networks that they maintained. This is particularly significant for this thesis, since the letters between Jemima Grey, Elizabeth Anson, Mary Gregory, and Catherine Talbot are particularly rich and reveal much about their intellectual engagement. There is, indeed, growing critical interest in Jemima Grey as a letter writer, and her letters are currently being compiled for an edited scholarly edition.[13] Grey's literary engagement has been observed by Leonie Hannan, and while this is

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Bending, 'Re-reading the eighteenth-century English landscape garden', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly,* 55.3 (1992), 379-399; John Dixon Hunt, 'Emblem and Expression in the Eighteenth-Century Landscape Garden', *Eighteenth Century Studies,* 3 (1971), 294-317.

[12] Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2016), this is also explored in James Daybell, *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

[13] Natasha Simonova's forthcoming book on the epistolary lives of Jemima Grey and her daughter, Amabel Yorke, is due to be published in 2022.

an important aspect of Grey's correspondence, there remains a great deal we might draw from her letters. In this thesis, using the letters between Grey, Anson, Gregory, and Talbot, I will delve into women's engagement with garden design through their private domestic travel accounts and writing about their own gardens. In so doing, I will challenge the notion that women were limited to engaging with the landscape as 'second-class or passive consumers.'[14] While scholarship on women as travel writers has mainly focused on published travel journals or on fictional representations of women in novels or satire, I would argue that returning to women's letters and drawing on unexplored material allows us to develop a greater understanding of their engagement. The same problem applies to the way in which some literary scholars have depicted women as passive readers of literature,[15] even though work by Leonie Hannan, Jacqueline Pearson and James Raven has questioned this assumption.[16] I would like to re-assess the notion of women as 'passive' readers of the landscape, using the material in their letters to showcase the way in which they were educated and informed viewers who engaged with garden design in a meaningful and intellectual way. Jemima Grey, Mary Gregory, and Catherine Talbot had been taught by the polymath and garden designer, Thomas Wright, earlier in the 1730s, and so were unusually educated in critical thinking about garden design. Once Grey inherited Wrest Park, she would play a significant role in the garden design there.[17] Similarly, her sister-in-law, Elizabeth Yorke, upon her marriage to Admiral Anson in 1748, took great interest in the gardens at

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[14] Elizabeth Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 2.
[15] Heidi Brayman Hackel, '"Boasting of Silence": Women Readers in a Patriarchal State', *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England,* ed. by Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 101-121.
[16] Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters,* pp. 8-9; Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 16-17*;* James Raven, 'New Reading Histories, Print Culture, and the Identification of Change: The case of eighteenth-century England', *Social History,* 23.3 (1998), 268-87 (p. 270).
[17] Andrew Hann, 'A Tale of Two Advisors: Jemima, Marchioness Grey and the Improvement of the Gardens at Wrest Park in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *Women's History: The Journal of the Women's History Network,* 2.13 (2019), 5-14.

Shugborough and Moor Park. Thus, examining the letters in this intellectual female network affords considerable opportunity to trace the way in which the women of the Wrest coterie were significant participants in the group's activities and discussions.

However, letters are also complex artefacts and can sometimes present problems. As scholars have noted of literary salons, the key social activity, conversation, quickly evaporates and leaves only fragmentary relics behind in the form of letters, diary entries, and manuscript drafts.[18] While the surviving material relating to the Wrest circle is undoubtedly rich, there do remain some gaps where conversations, activities, or events happened in person and were not recorded, or where records have been lost.[19] A key problem emerges from the very fact that while the eighteenth-century letter was supposed to be unaffected and 'resemble the conversation between friends',[20] as Gary Schneider observes, letters cannot replicate conversation in person.[21] Furthermore, letters can be limited in providing information. Letter-writers do not always write in ideal conditions, and interruptions or time constraints can distract the focus of the letter or even force the writer to end the letter completely. While letters might hint at conversations, gossip, or hearsay, the modern researcher is both historically and socially distanced and thus cannot hope to recover this information. Nor are letters always legible, not only because of poor handwriting, but stained or damaged pages can mean that small snippets of information are simply lost. Nevertheless, while these factors must be taken into consideration when examining the letters, they remain

[18] Susanne Schmid, *British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth Century and Early Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), p. 2.
[19] One such example is the garden designer Thomas Wright. While he was Jemima Grey's tutor in the 1730s and makes record of having sent letters to the family, the letters themselves have not survived. Thus, it is almost impossible to gauge how far he had an ongoing relationship with the coterie or whether he had any continued involvement at Wrest Park itself.
[20] Rebecca Earle, 'Introduction: Letters, Writers and the Historian', *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945*, ed. by Rebecca Earle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 1-14 (p. 5).
[21] Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolary: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), p. 16.

a valuable resource for understanding the social network and intellectual lives of the Wrest coterie.

THE LUCAS PAPERS

The letters between Jemima Grey, Mary Gregory, and Catherine Talbot, which will be referenced extensively in this thesis, are in fact transcriptions, rather than the original letters. In her will, Jemima Grey had declared that 'if any letters or papers are found in my hand writing which haven't been returned to me from friends corresponded with and not burnt (which it is my intention to do) I desire my executor will burn them.'[22] The original letters appear to have been burned as per the request, but happily for researchers today, the letters were transcribed by Yorke and Grey's eldest daughter, Amabel Hume-Campbell (née Yorke), presumably since she saw considerable value in them.[23] Thus, Grey's correspondence in the archives, is, to some extent, an edited edition. Hume-Campbell sometimes provides explanatory notes: defining words that were unique to the coterie, correcting instances where Grey had misremembered literary works, or adding small biographical details between letters. It is unclear whether Hume-Campbell ever intended to publish her mother's letters or whether she hoped simply to keep them for future family generations. Indeed, she seems to have curated her parents' papers, for one of the compositions in *Wrestiana,* 'A Mock-Heroic Historical Romance,' is written in her hand. In the title, she has added 'Written about 1743 but omitted in the Copies of the *Wrestiana*',[24] and she has inserted the composition at the end of the book, thereby further attempting to preserve materials that she thought might have value. While Hume-Campbell's efforts have undoubtedly furnished modern researchers with a wealth of materials that would otherwise have been lost to the flames, we are nonetheless

[22] Kew, The National Archives, PROB 11/1284/194.
[23] It is unclear when exactly Hume-Campbell transcribed her mother's letters, but it was likely after Grey's death in 1797.
[24] Private collection, 'A Mock-Heroic Historical Romance', *Wrestiana,* fol. 187.

removed from these original materials as they were written – indeed, it is entirely possible that words, sentences, or even sections might have been inadvertently or even deliberately omitted.[25] One might also consider that in deciphering and decoding letters that the original writer intended to be destroyed, does this bring about an ethical consideration?[26]

THE *WRESTIANA* MANUSCRIPT (1742- c.1783)

This thesis draws from the *Wrestiana* manuscript (Figure 1), which has been in family possession since it was compiled in the late eighteenth century.[27] The manuscript is bound in a green hardback cover, which is likely how it earned the nickname 'The Green Book' by inner members of the Wrest circle, and it certainly matches the description in 'Ragguagli Di Parnasso, Or, Advertisement from Parnassus' in *Wrestiana,* when there is a reference to a 'large green book entitled the W—t—a [Wrestiana]'.[28] *Wrestiana* is arguably the most representative literary work of the Wrest coterie, consisting predominantly of sociable verses in which members frequently depict one another as characters. In this respect, the manuscript reflects the personal relationships as well as the private scholarly interests within the group. *Wrestiana* is a largely unexplored resource, and while it is given brief attention in Betty

[25] Thus, despite the critical turn that considers the materiality of the letter to determine more about the letter sender, this is lost in the instance of Grey's letters, see Ruth Larsen, 'An Archaeology of Letter Writing: The Correspondence of Aristocratic Women in Late Eighteenth – and Early Nineteenth Century England', *Pen, Print and Communication in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. by Caroline Archer-Parré and Malcolm Dick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), pp. 75-88 (p. 86).

[26] A question recently raised by Karen Harvey as part of the University of Birmingham's *Social Bodies in British Letters, 1680-1820* project (2021-2025), 'What are the ethics of writing about letters that were initially meant to be kept private? Should we feel guilt as researchers for going against the wishes of the letter-writer?' [Twitter Post] (@SocialBodiesUoB, 16 April 2021).

[27] I am grateful to Lord Lucas, who allowed me to photograph the original manuscript; a photocopy was made in 1974 by Joyce Godber for the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service (BLARS), and while the photocopy provides a close representation of the original, some pages are blurred, and others are missing entirely.

[28] Private collection, 'Ragguagli Di Parnasso, Or, Advertisement from Parnassus', *Wrestiana,* fol. 96 [c. 1745, signed 'E', Elizabeth Anson].

Schellenberg's *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture* (2016), it is not analysed or examined in any real depth.[29]

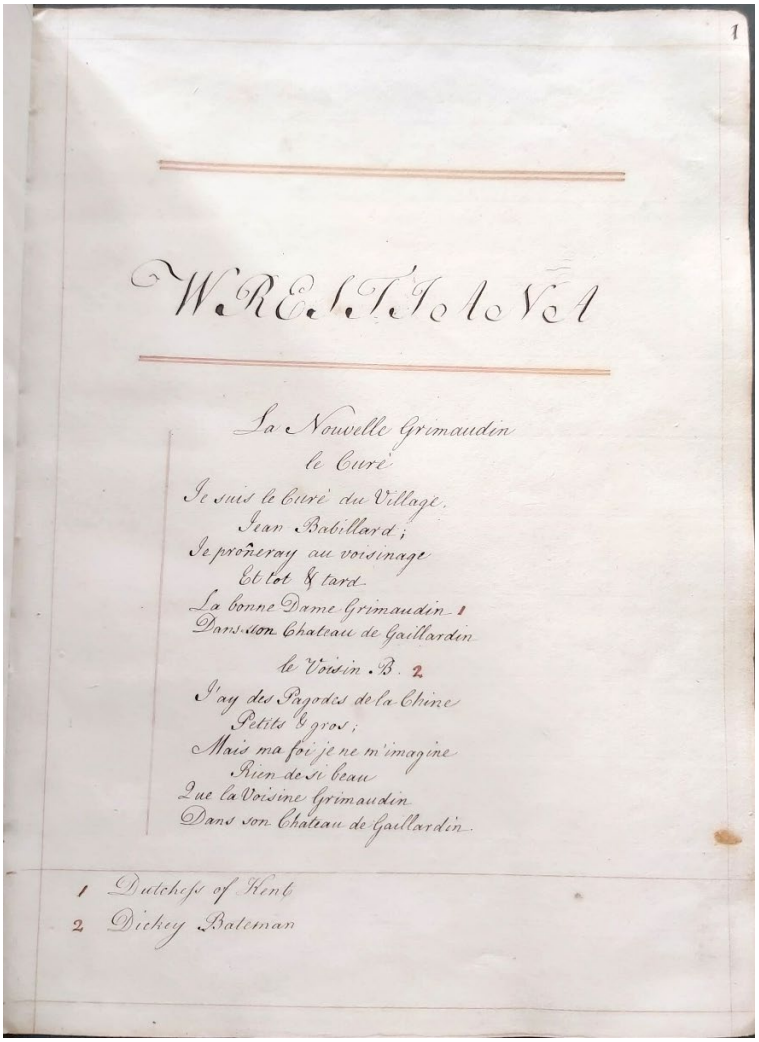


Figure 1. *Wrestiana*. Photograph by the author, 2021. Private collection.

[29] Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 30-33; Schellenberg also discussed the depiction of Catherine Talbot as 'Sappho' in the *Wrestiana* manuscript in 'Afterword: Researching, Writing, and Teaching Women's Tributes to Women', *The Circuit of Apollo: Eighteenth-Century Women's Tributes to Women,* ed. by Laura L. Runge and Jessica Cook (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2019), pp. 194-204 (p. 196); Markman Ellis also briefly references *Wrestiana*, but without any analysis or description of the content, in '*The English Mercurie* Hoax and the Early History of the Newspaper', *Book History,* 22 (2019), 100-132.

It is in fact quite a complex artifact, not least as it appears that this surviving manuscript is in fact a later copy. This manuscript appears to have been transcribed in 1783, since the first eighty-five compositions that appear up to this date are written in the same hand. Only 'A Mock-Heroic Historical Romance', written in Amabel Hume-Campbell's hand, appears in the remaining blank pages at the back after the last 1783 composition. However, the earlier letters and compositions hint that there was another *Wrestiana* manuscript from the earlier years that was a continual work in progress. On 11th October 1747, Thomas Edwards wrote to Philip Yorke that 'Mr Wray gave me some little account of the Bam-manufacture[30] and has raised in me great expectations from the Green book, which he tells me has received several considerable additions.'[31] However, whoever compiled *Wrestiana* (likely Philip Yorke) was selective in what was included. As evidenced in the earlier quotation, both Thomas Edwards and Richard Owen Cambridge composed many verses that were not included in the *Wrestiana* manuscript. In addition, the fact that rough drafts survive as 'literary fragments' or are written up and attached to personal letters, would suggest that only final drafts were written up into *Wrestiana*.[32] It is possible that Philip Yorke, wanting to add some of his later compositions (this time under 'H' for 'Hardwicke', rather than 'P' that he had used for his earlier works, for 'Philip'), compiled another *Wrestiana* to account for the later works too, and in procuring another green book, tried to make this copy closely resemble the first.[33]

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[30] The *OED* defines a Bam as 'a story intended to impose upon the credulous; a hoax or imposition' (n.1), but the coterie appears to use the term in the sense of a witty or mock-serious verse. This is particularly suggested in Grey's use of the term in a letter to Catherine Talbot, June 1746 in which she writes 'I am much edified with the regard & approbation you express for a Bam! That inexhaustible Fund of Ingenious Conceits. I thought you had been its declared & mortal Foe, & would rather have defied & slain it in single Combat, (like the Acrostick's Fate in the Reign of False Wit) than ever have been in League of amity' in BLARS, L30/9a/4, fol. 128.

[31] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1011, fol. 11 [TE to PY, 11th October 1747].

[32] For examples of such rough drafts, see Bedford, Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service (BLARS), L31/340, fol. 12 ['Daniell Wray Esquire'], L31/459, fol. 220 ['Oh, welcome Coach! Oh, vile Town, farewell!'], and L30/21/3, fol. 11 ['That Bedfordshire is the County of Wits'].

[33] This may also account for some of the discrepancies. For example, while Daniel Wray enclosed 'Carolus Fastidious', 'Lady Mary en voyage', and 'Lady Grey' in a letter to Philip Yorke as 'the produce of this evenings Lucubration' in 1749, the bouts-rimez are dated in *Wrestiana* around 1744. See BL, Add. MS 35401, fols 104^{v} -

A key is provided in *Wrestiana* to explain the coded references that would otherwise be indecipherable for anybody not involved in that intimate social circle. It is possible that, like the *Athenian Letters,* this was to give the impression of a scholarly work complete with footnotes; as the thesis will explore, mock-seriousness is a key characteristic of both the coterie's literary works and the garden architecture at Wrest Park. Furthermore, if *Wrestiana* was compiled around 1783, this would coincide with Yorke's decision to re-print a hundred copies of the *Athenian Letters* in 1781, implying that Yorke, perhaps nostalgically looking back on his earlier literary pursuits with friends, wanted to revive those memories in a scholarly edition of *Wrestiana*. However, this does complicate our understanding of the manuscript's intended audience. On the one hand, even if Philip Yorke only added the key as a scholarly joke, it has been indispensable for understanding the private references within the coterie. Yet it also seems incongruous for such an exclusive and personal work to offer so much information up to a stranger. In fact, one imagines that the original coterie members, always so careful about the circulation of their literary compositions, would be horrified at the prospect of a stranger leafing through their manuscript almost three centuries later. It is unlikely that *Wrestiana* was ever intended for an audience beyond the immediate circle, and the fact that the original manuscript remains in private possession indicates that it was always intended to remain so.

THE GARDENS AT WREST

One might also consider the garden, like *Wrestiana* or Grey's letters, as a type of palimpsest that has been curated by subsequent generations. In the case of the garden, however, the changes are far more extensive and reflect the many generations at Wrest both before and

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106^{v} [DW to PY, c. 1749] and private collection, 'Bout Rimez', *Wrestiana,* fols 46-8 [signed 'W', Daniel Wray].

after the coterie in the mid-eighteenth century. This is emphasised in the presentation of the gardens today, and English Heritage advertises the gardens as 'one of the few places […] where visitors can see the evolution of landscape gardening over the last 300 years.'[34] Certainly, unlike the original house, which was demolished by Thomas, Earl de Grey between 1834 and 1838 and rebuilt in the French chateau style that is visible today, any changes to the gardens were more sympathetic, reflecting the way in which different generations of owners felt a strong personal connection to the gardens and so enhanced rather than transformed them.[35] Retaining the 'mystery of the gardens' appears to have been a longstanding motif, for even when Lancelot "Capability" Brown was employed to undertake work at Wrest in the late 1750s, his changes were limited to softening the canals that surround the garden on three sides. It was at Wimpole, which Philip Yorke would inherit from his father, where Brown was given the freedom to make far more extensive changes, perhaps since there was not such a long family history attached to Wimpole (the 1st Earl of Hardwicke having bought the property in 1739).[36] Although Horace Walpole, writing in 1771, remarked that he considered the gardens at Wrest 'fine & very ugly in the old fashioned manner with high hedges & canals,'[37] given that he made the remark the same year that his essay 'On Modern Gardening' was published, it is likely that he was biased towards his own narrative and his view should not be taken to represent what other visitors necessarily thought of the gardens. Certainly, when George Lyttleton visited Wrest in 1747, it was not the formal layout of the gardens that he objected to, rather the heaviness of Archer's

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[34] *English Heritage,* <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/wrest-park/things-to-do/> [accessed 3 May 2021]. Since English Heritage took over Wrest in 2006, it has aimed to showcase different periods of garden history by returning different areas of the garden to different periods when they were altered.
[35] Andrew Hann, 'A Tale of Two Advisors: Jemima, Marchioness Grey and the Improvement of the Gardens at Wrest Park in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *Women's History: The Journal of the Women's History Network,* 2.13 (2019), 5-14; Mark Laird, 'Lancelot Brown and the Pleasure Grounds at Luton Hoo and Wrest Park', *Garden History,* 44.1 (2016), 39-15 (p. 46).
[36] David Adshead, *Wimpole: Architectural Drawings and Topographical Views* (London: National Trust, 2007), pp. 57-60.
[37] Paget Toynbee, 'Horace Walpole's journals of visits to country seats' *Walpole Society,* 16 (1927-8), 9-80 (p. 71).

baroque pavilion at the end of the Long Water.[38] Considering that Batty Langley had been employed to undertake extensive work at Wrest between 1735-7,[39] by the time Jemima Grey inherited the gardens in 1740, there is no reason to believe that they were unfashionable. [40] Thus, the garden at Wrest, rather than slotting in neatly with Walpole's (infamous) narrative of garden history, tells its own story about the evolution of garden design in the eighteenth century.

However, a further problem for the modern researcher is that gardens, left to their own devices, continue to grow, eventually losing the design that had once been intended for them. Although visiting the gardens today allows us to view surviving garden buildings and follies,[41] the natural environment is not as it would have appeared between 1740 and 1760. But how much of the experience is lost when visiting today, especially as there are so many elements we can never recapture? Grey's letters range from describing the perfumes of the garden to recounting her futile attempts to keep roving peacocks within the bounds of the gardens. We might attempt to piece together a picture from combining letters and images, but it should be noted that there are no images surviving of the gardens at Wrest in the period from 1740 to 1760 – although we know that Grey and her friends did sometimes draw in the gardens. In fact, Philip Yorke had asked Thomas Gainsborough to paint a scene at Wrest*,* but the artist refused on the grounds that he did not think 'real Views from Nature' a subject 'equal to the poorest imitations of Gaspard [Poussin] or Claude [Lorrain]', and alas, there is

[38] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fols 142-3 [JG to MG, 11th June 1747].
[39] Christine McAleavy, 'Batty Langley at Wrest Park', (unpublished paper, 2016); See also, Roderick Floud, *An Economic History of the English Garden* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), p. 54; Linda Cabe Halpern, 'The Duke of Kent's Garden at Wrest Park,' *Journal of Garden History*, 15 (1995), 149-178.
[40] Grey's grandfather, the Duke of Kent, had made constant improvements to the gardens at Wrest, bringing back ideas from his Grand Tour in the Netherlands and using political iconography in the gardens to celebrate William III, see Linda Cabe Halpern, 'Wrest Park 1686-1730s: Exploring the Dutch Influence', *Garden History,* 30.2 (2002), 131-152.
[41] However, even these have not survived in their original state; notably, the root house which formed part of the Mithraic Glade has long disappeared, although recent excavations by English Heritage have confirmed the location.

no painting.[42] While John Dixon Hunt reminds us that even visual representations are limited in conveying accurate depictions of gardens,[43] even so, the key visual resources that remain are both before and after the period that concerns this thesis. Before 1740, a plan of Wrest features in Kip and Knyff's *Britannia Illustrata* (1707), Peter Angelis and Peter Tillemans drew watercolours of the gardens at Wrest in the 1720s,[44] and John Rocque produced two maps of Wrest in 1735 and 1737.[45] These depictions from the early eighteenth century (figures 2 and 3) give us some idea of how the gardens might have looked when Jemima Grey inherited them in 1740, but we must rely on Grey's letters for descriptions of the changes she and her husband made to the garden, such as the new walks added in 1744 and the improvements made to The Serpentine in 1748.[46] Amabel Hume-Campbell, a talented amateur artist, produced drawings of Wrest in the 1760s, some of which would be reproduced on Josiah Wedgewood's Green Frog Dinner service for Catherine the Great, although the original drawings are now lost.[47] From a garden history perspective, Hume-Campbell's drawings importantly show how the gardens appeared following Capability Brown's changes to the gardens in the late 1750s. Then, after 1797 (the year in which Jemima Grey died), J.P. Neale depicted Wrest in his *Views of Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen* (1823) and Thomas Earl de Grey painted his own watercolours sometime in the early 1830s, showing the layout

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[42] *The Letters of Thomas Gainsborough,* ed. by John Hayes (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 30.
[43] John Dixon Hunt challenges the assumption that paintings 'must describe actual layouts' in *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), p. 143.
[44] The English Heritage research report suggests that Angelis's drawings date from the early 1720s and Tillemans' drawings from the late 1720s, see Magnus Alexander, Andrew Hann, Fiona Small and Paddy O'Hara, *Wrest Park, Silsoe, Bedfordshire: Landscape Investigations* (Portsmouth: English Heritage, 2013).
[45] Johannes Kip and Leonard Knyff, *Britannia Illustrata or Views of Several of the Royal Palaces as Also of the Principal Seats of the Nobility and Gentry of Great Britain* (London: David Mortier, 1707); it is uncertain when exactly Tillemans painted Wrest, but it has been suggested between 1717-1728 in Robert Raines, 'Peter Tillemans, Life and Work, With a List of Representative Paintings', *The Volume of the Walpole Society, 1978-1980,* 47 (1978-1980), 21-59 (p. 40); BLARS, L33/127-138, 'Views of Wrest Park etc by Peter Tillemans (1684-1734); John Rocque and T. Badeslade, *Vitruvius Britannicus, Volume the Fourth* (London: John Wilcox, 1739), plates 30-33.
[46] Magnus Alexander, et al., *Wrest Park,* p. 73.
[47] David Adshead, 'Wedgwood, Wimpole and Wrest: the Landscape Drawings of Lady Amabel Polwarth', *Apollo: The International Magazine of Arts*, 410 (1996), 31-6; Peter Hayden, 'British Seats on Imperial Russian Tables', *Garden History,* 13.1 (1985), 17-32 (p. 21).

of the gardens before he inherited them in 1834.[48] While these resources can give rough ideas of how the gardens may have appeared in the mid-eighteenth century, this thesis is largely reliant on letters to understand how the gardens at Wrest were experienced by members of the coterie, as well as how the garden design corresponded with the coterie's literary and antiquarian interests.

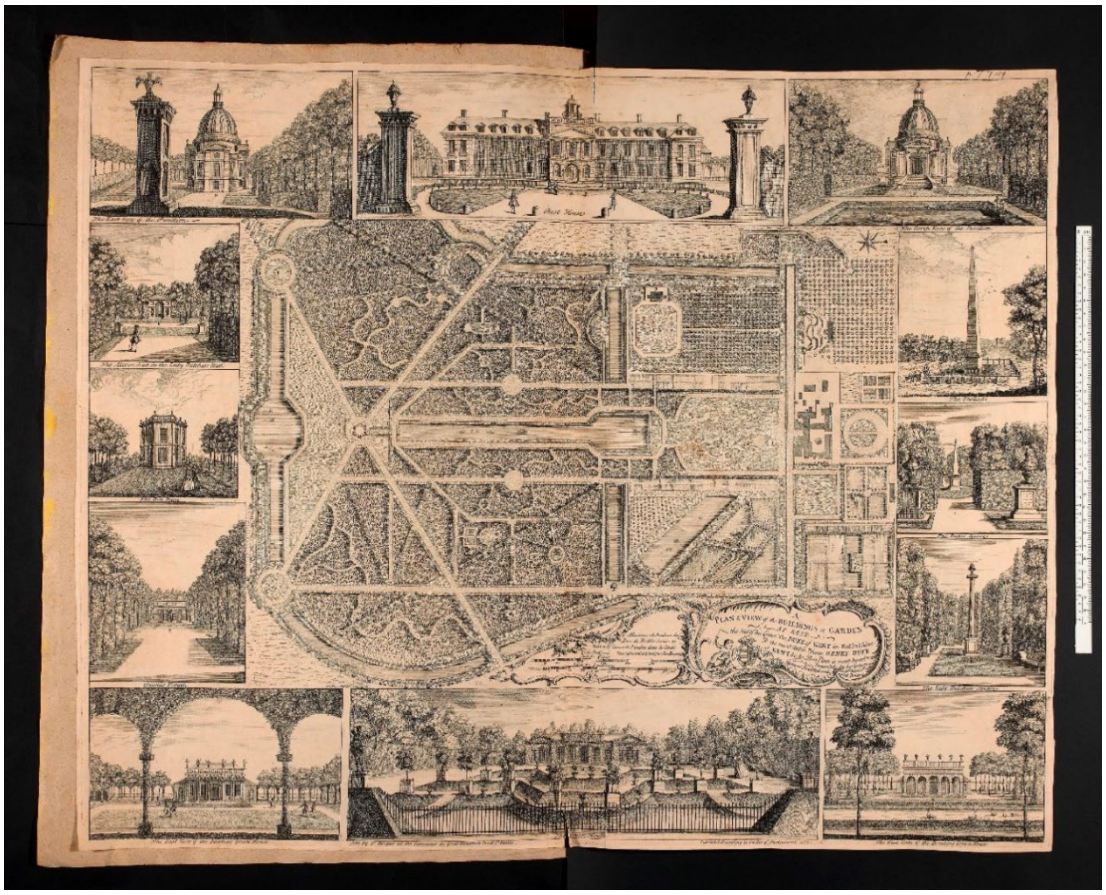


Figure 2. John Roque, 'A Plan & View of the Buildings & Garden at Rest', 1737. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

[48] J. P. Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen, in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland* (England: Sherwood, Neeley, and Jones, 1823).



Figure 3. Peter Tillemans, View of the South Gardens including the Archer Pavilion and Cain Hill from the South East, c. late 1720s. BLARS, L33/129. Further use without permission not permitted.

LITERARY COTERIES AND MANUSCRIPT CULTURE

Traditionally, early scholarship considered literary coteries as synonymous with aristocratic, courtly culture, usually in direct contrast to the seemingly more egalitarian culture of the print trade. Thus, writing in 1951, J.W. Saunders posited that aristocratic circles in the sixteenth century did not deign to write for the press, arguing the 'stigma of print' prompted most courtier poets to avoid publication.[49] This perception led to the general perception that the coterie poet was amateurish, aristocratic, and arrogant, especially in contrast to the burgeoning print trade that was seen to characterise a more democratic value system. Emerging scholarship on the technological revolution of the printing press cemented the perception that scribal culture gradually gave way to print. Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) suggested that the advent of the printed book fundamentally changed western consciousness,[50] while Elizabeth Eisenstein's pioneering *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979) argued for the historical importance of the Western European innovation of printing, the ripples of which can still be

[49] J.W. Saunders, 'The Stigma of Print: A Note on the Social Bases of Tudor Poetry', *Essays in Criticism* 1.2 (1951), 139-164 (p. 150).
[50] Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

felt in scholarship.[51] Although Eisenstein acknowledged that some writers still employed manuscript as a medium, her argument that there was a 'shift' from script to print assumed that after the arrival of print, the golden era of manuscript was over.[52] It was generally accepted that by the eighteenth century, 'an older system of polite or courtly letters – primarily oral, aristocratic, amateur, authoritarian, court-centred – was swept away' since the emergence of print 'forced the writer […] to redefine themselves.'[53] Throughout the 1980s, early modern scholarship examining the 'revolution' of the print trade continued to cast literary coteries and manuscript culture as relics of a by-gone era, even suggesting that they were inimical to the egalitarian innovations of print.[54] Margaret Ezell summarized the way in which scholars cast manuscript culture in 'the role of villain – the elitist, snobby aristocrat' in contrast to the 'heroic, democratizing impact of print technology.'[55] It is in this sense that Helen Gardner remarked disdainfully that some of the metaphysical poets have the 'smell of a coterie, the writer performing with a self-conscious eye on his clever readers.'[56] Even though there was some challenge to the 'stigma of print,' as Stephen W. May tried to rescue the image of aristocratic writers by arguing for the 'ever-widening scope of aristocratic works issuing from the press,'[57] the assumption remained that scribal, coterie culture was growing increasingly obsolete in comparison to the print trade.

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[51] Testified by studies such as *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein,* ed. by Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).
[52] Elizabeth Eisenstein, 'Preface', *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. xi.
[53] Alvin Kernan, *Samuel Johnson & the Impact of Print* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 4.
[54] Epitomised in studies such Christopher Small, *The Printed Word: An Instrument of Popularity* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1982).
[55] Margaret Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (London and Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 11.
[56] Helen Gardner, 'Introduction', *The Metaphysical Poets,* 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. xxi.
[57] Stephen W. May, 'Tudor Aristocrats and the Mythical "Stigma of Print"', *Renaissance Papers* (1980), 11-18.

The assumption that manuscript was in decline was gradually challenged as scholars identified the persistence of manuscript culture throughout the early modern period. This persistence had already been suggested by scholars examining literary coteries, such as Arthur F. Marotti, who, in *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (1986), examined the 'coterie social transactions' whereby Donne carefully circulated his manuscripts and adjusted his rhetoric for 'specific audiences, occasions, and milieus.'[58] Significantly, Peter Beal and Jeremy Griffith's *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700* (1989) highlighted the way in which manuscripts continued to be produced and circulated beyond the medieval period. Beal's *Index of English Literary Manuscripts 1450-1700* (1980-1993) further made a vast number of manuscripts widely available to researchers.[59] In addition, Harold Love's *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (1993) demonstrated the ways in which scribal publication was particularly employed by oppositional groups who wished to avoid the censorship and control that was part of the print publication process.[60] In addition, acknowledging the persistence of manuscript culture also allowed feminist critics such as Germaine Greer and Margaret Ezell to recover the scribal works of female authors.[61] Yet it was Ezell's *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (1999) that was particularly ground-breaking for the way

[58] Arthur Marotti, *John Donne Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), pp. 19; 20. Following on from Marotti, Ted-Larry Pebworth also explores the significance of Donne as a coterie poet, noting that it was his friends who helped to preserve and even print his poetry, in 'John Donne, Coterie Poetry, and the Text as Performance', *Studies in English Literature,* 29.1 (1989), 61-75 (p. 68). Writing in 1996, H. R. Woudhuysen also demonstrated the connection between manuscript circulation and sociability in *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

[59] Peter Beal, *Index of English Literary Manuscripts,* 4 vols. (London: Mansell, 1980-1993); the impact of Beal's work has been further augmented by the *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts (CELM),* which adapted the *Index* to an online edition and added further manuscript materials, *CELM* < https://celm-ms.org.uk> [accessed 16th April 2021]

[60] Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 185-191.

[61] Germaine Greer, *Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women's Verse* (London: Virago, 1988); Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 65-6. In addition, the online publication of *Perdita Manuscripts: Women Writers, 1500-1700*, made a wide range of early modern women's writing available to scholars.

in which it urged scholars to further consider literary life in the provinces and the way in which the anticipated audience influenced the author's choice of publication practices.[62]

Thus, in addition to demonstrating the persistence of manuscript culture in the early modern period, scholars began to question the rigid dichotomy of print and manuscript, which has proved particularly fruitful when examining women's literary production. In the 'Introduction' to *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England 1550-1800* (2002), George Justice and Nathan Tinker argued for the co-existence of print and scribal culture, noting that manuscript was not merely a 'safe choice' for women to avoid the 'stigma of print.'[63] David McKitterick also argued against this division, noting that the 'boundary between manuscript and print is as untidy chronologically as it is commercially, materially, or socially.'[64] Joseph A. Dane even went as far as to argue that the culture of print existed only in the realm of scholarship.[65] However, most scholars acknowledge that despite the eventual prevalence of print culture, manuscript culture continued to co-exist alongside print and that the two mediums were even complementary. Studies by H. R. Woudhuysen, Arthur Marotti, Michael D. Bristol, Kathryn R. King, Melanie Bigold and Betty Schellenberg demonstrated the way in which coteries used manuscript and print tactically, thus problematising the traditional values associated with scribal and print culture.[66] Furthermore, as Susan Whyman argued in *The Pen and the People* (2009), the

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[62] Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 2-3.
[63] G.L. Justice and N. Tinker, eds, 'Introduction', *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England 1550-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 11.
[64] David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 12.
[65] Joseph A. Dane, *The Myth of Print Culture: Essays on Evidence, Textuality, and Bibliographic Method* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2003).
[66] H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol, eds, *Print, Manuscript and Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000); Kathryn R. King, 'Elizabeth Singer Rowe's tactical use of print and manuscript', in *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England 1550-1800,* ed. by G.L. Justice and N. Tinker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 158-181; Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Catharine Cockburn and*

connection between scribal culture and print is demonstrated in the close connection between letter-writing and the rise of epistolary fiction, since 'eighteenth-century readers imitated epistolary models that they found in printed literature.'[67] More recently, Rachael Scarborough King has argued in *Writing to the World* (2018) that letters formed a 'bridge' genre that connected manuscript and print in the eighteenth century.[68] Acknowledgement of the connection between print and scribal culture led Paula McDowell to argue in 'Media and Mediation' (2017) that print is not synonymous with publication nor manuscript with the 'private space.'[69] More recently, *Pen, Print and Communication* (2020), edited by Caroline Archer Parré and Malcolm Dick, noted the 'complementarity of handwriting and typography, the interconnections between writing and printing, and the social and cultural impact of the pen and the press.'[70] It is now widely accepted in scholarship that print and scribal culture existed side by side in the eighteenth century, and offered opportunities for social groups to engage in different ways with literary culture.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOCIAL CULTURE AND AUTHORSHIP PRACTICES

While manuscript studies have uncovered the richness and variety of eighteenth-century literary culture, social historians' focus on clubs and societies in the eighteenth century has since allowed literary historians to examine the way in which social culture informed authorship practices. As Zeynep Tenger and Paul Trolander observe, a shift was needed from

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Elizabeth Carter (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012); Betty A Schellenberg, 'Coterie Fame, Media Choice and the Writing Lives of Hester Mulso Chapone and Catherine Talbot', *Women's Writing: the Elizabethan to Victorian Period,* 21.3 (2014), 316-336.

[67] Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 5.

[68] Rachael Scarborough King, *Writing to the World: Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018), p. 2.

[69] Paula McDowell, 'Media and Mediation in the Eighteenth Century', *Oxford Handbooks Online* <oxfordhandbooks.com> [accessed 26 August 2021].

[70] Caroline Archer-Parré and Malcolm Dick, eds, 'Introduction', *Pen, Print and Communication in the Eighteenth Century* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2020), pp. 1-10 (p. 6).

'media per se to the social conditions of authorship and reading.'[71] While literary scholars had previously located sociability in the context of manuscript culture or literary coteries, the work of social historians was helping to shed light on the networked world of Georgian Britain. Of particular influence was Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (originally published in German in 1962, and translated into English in 1989), in which he advocated the model of a democratic eighteenth-century literary culture epitomised by coffee-houses, lending libraries, and reading societies, whose social activities were sustained by the press.[72] Habermas defined this 'public sphere' as a 'forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion.'[73] Throughout the 1990s, historians examined the ways in which sociability in the eighteenth century was shaped by new rules around polite conversation and civility. Anna Bryson's influential *From Courtesy to Civility* (1998) argued that as aristocratic 'modes of lordship' gave way to 'modes of urbanity', polite discourse 'became a central social ritual.'[74] Susan Whyman's examination of the Verney family in *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England* (2002) shows the shift in social practices from the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century, from country house entertainments to urban modes of socialisation epitomised in coffee-houses and pleasure grounds.[75] This shift towards urban, commercial sociability in the eighteenth century is also charted in Peter Clark's *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800* (2000) and Jon Stobart, Andrew Hann and Victoria Morgan's *Spaces of*

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[71] Zeynep Tenger and Paul Trolander, 'From Print versus Manuscript to Sociable Authorship and Mixed Media: A Review of Trends in the Scholarship of Early Modern Publication', *Literature Compass,* 7.11 (2010), 1035-1048 (p. 1040).
[72] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 59.
[73] Ibid., pp. 25-6.
[74] Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[75] Susan E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys 1660-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 9.

Consumption: Leisure and Shopping in the English Town, c. 1680-1830 (2007).[76] Yet if some scholars chose to focus on the cultural shift from court culture to civility, others, such as Brian Cowan in *The Social Life of Coffee* (2005) maintained that it was more of a two-way process, for 'just as coffee-drinking was transformed […] from a relatively restricted circle of gentlemanly elites […] so were the social lives of the virtuosi and the city dwellers who drank coffee and frequented coffee houses.'[77] In other words, people both shaped, and were shaped by, coffee house culture.

DEFINING THE PUBLIC SPHERE

While the democratization of the public sphere offered new avenues of research into early modern sociability, feminists and historians focusing on class relations began to note that Habermas's model of a bourgeois public sphere was problematic. Although Habermas did not explicitly align private and public with gender, feminist scholars have particularly noted that only propertied men could properly participate in the bourgeois public sphere as described by Habermas's model.[78] In recent years, gender historians have drawn attention to the inadequacy of a separate sphere model in which gender is defined in terms of 'public' and 'private', and in her influential essay, Amanda Vickery described the public/private dichotomy as an 'artificial and unwieldy conceptual vocabulary,' calling for new categories and concepts to be generated to map the breadth and boundaries of female experience.[79] Countering the masculinist assumptions in Habermas's work, Paula McDowell argued in *The*

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[76] Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3; Jon Stobart, Andrew Hann, and Victoria Morgan, *Spaces of Consumption: Leisure and Shopping in the English Town, c. 1680-1830* (London: Routledge, 2007).
[77] Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 3.
[78] Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 7; for a full literature review of Habermas's theory, see Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 1-4.
[79] Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal,* 36.2 (1993), 383-414 (p. 413).

Women of Grub-Street (1998) that women's activity as writers, printers and publishers allowed them to play a key part in the transmission and circulation of ideas, and thus the public sphere was not always masculine or bourgeois.[80] In a similar vein, Betty Schellenberg made the case that networks of female authorship could exist within the public and professional sphere,[81] and feminist historians have shed light on women's involvement in the commercial urban public sphere.[82]

It was not only on grounds of gender that scholars took issue. While Habermas identified the eighteenth century as a starting point for the politicization of the public sphere, some critics had taken Habermas's model to suggest that the public sphere offered a space in which 'men are judged by the degree of their information and the quality of their ideas, not by rank, office, or wealth.'[83] Countering the ideal of the public sphere as a liberal utopia, J. A. Downie argued that 'those who were in positions of authority and influence were […] reluctant to surrender their privileges to the great unwashed: instead of enthusiastically embracing an intellectual egalitarianism based on the appeal to reason, the nobility and gentry sought to perpetuate their hold on power.'[84] For this reason, notions of politeness could also be exclusionary.[85] As Nancy Fraser has argued, Habermas's model fails to account for 'a plurality of competing publics', so that far from constituting a utopian ideal of democratic

[80] Paula McDowell, *The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678-1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 6-9.
[81] Betty Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[82] Rosemary Sweet and Penelope Lane, eds, *Women and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Hannah Barker, *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[83] John Bender, 'Introduction', *Tom Jones* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. xxi.
[84] J. A. Downie, 'Public and Private: The Myth of the Bourgeois Public Sphere', *A Concise Companion to the Restoration and Eighteenth Century,* ed. by Cynthia Wall (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 58-79 (p. 64).
[85] See Helen Berry for an exploration of the way in which the experience of polite shopping in eighteenth century England still operated in terms of 'unwritten […] rules about who could enter these eighteenth-century theatres of consumption', in 'Shopping in Eighteenth-Century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), 375-395 (p. 384).

space, the public sphere was defined through conflict.[86] It is with this understanding that Jon Mee's *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community* (2011) argues that despite the common desire for civic improvement through polite sociability, the republic of letters is one of 'collision, misunderstanding, resistance, and silence.'[87] Similarly, Hannah Greig has argued that the public pleasure gardens of Vauxhall and Ranelagh, far from constituting spaces of openness and social mixing, were places where social hierarchies were carefully maintained and policed.[88] Evidence suggested that the public sphere was, in fact, far more nuanced and contentious than had previously been acknowledged.

Although Habermas's model has been deconstructed and re-assessed in scholarship, there remains a critical focus on redefining the public sphere in eighteenth-century Britain. Further problematizing the public/private dichotomy, John Brewer suggests that the boundary between public and private was porous, since the public sphere as defined by Habermas 'provided the grounds […] by which [the private] could be colonized and invaded.'[89] In addition, Lawrence E. Klein's influential essay, 'Gender and the Public/Private Distinction' (1995), observed that in the eighteenth century, this distinction 'did not correspond to home and not-home'.[90] Thus for Klein, 'people at home, both men and women, were not necessarily in private.'[91] This argument challenged the views previously posited by architectural historians, who suggested that the designs of elite houses from the seventeenth

[86] Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text* (1990), 56-80 (p. 61).
[87] Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 281.
[88] Hannah Greig, '"All Together and All Distinct": Public Sociability and Social Exclusivity in London's Pleasure Gardens, ca. 1740-1800', *Journal of British Studies,* 51.1 (2012), 50-75 (p. 53).
[89]John Brewer, 'This, that and the other: Public, Social and Private in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Shifting the Boundaries: Transformation of the Languages of Public and Private in the Eighteenth Century,* ed. by Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1995), pp. 1-21 (p. 18).
[90] Lawrence E. Klein, 'Gender and the Public/Private distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *Eighteenth Century Studies,* 29.1 (1995), 97-109 (p. 105).
[91] Ibid.

century onwards increasingly reflected owners' desire for privacy in the home.[92] Yet as scholars, including Vickery, have more recently argued, houses could represent a subdivided interior of multiple households in which the boundaries between public and private often shifted.[93] Similarly, scholarship on the history of social readership has also observed the way in which the home confounds the distinction between public and private, serving as a space for leisure and hospitality.[94] Benjamin Heller has even suggested moving away from the terms 'public' or 'private' and instead referring to leisure activities within the home as 'domestic'.[95] While it is helpful to move away from a rigid dichotomy of public/private, as this thesis will argue, the term 'domestic' alone does not perhaps allow for the necessary distinction between exclusivity and accessibility in the country house setting.

The implications of Klein's argument have had considerable impact in scholarship, not least since opening the definition of 'public' to include any sociable activity has meant that there is increasing focus on the way in which clubs, salons, societies, and coteries, were in some way or another, engaging with the 'public sphere.' The University of York's recent project, *Networks of Improvement: Literary Clubs and Societies, c. 1760 – c. 1840* (2011-2015), examined the way in which clubs and societies constituted a public discourse that was at the heart of the ideal for civil improvement.[96] Similarly, Moyra Haslett argued in *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (2003) that the popularity of literary

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[92] Mark Girouard notes that the arrival of backstairs 'revolutionized' the country house and 'tidied away' the servants, affording greater privacy to owners, in *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 138.
[93] Amanda Vickery, 'An Englishman's Home is His Castle? Thresholds, Boundaries and Privacies in the Eighteenth-Century London House', *Past and Present,* 199 (2008), 147-173 (p. 172); idem, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 33-48; Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 18; John Brewer, 'This, that and the other: Public, Social and Private in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', p. 16.
[94] Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 9.
[95] Benjamin Heller, 'Leisure and the Use of Domestic Space in Georgian London', *The Historical Journal,* 53.3 (2010), 623-645 (p. 625).
[96] *Networks of Improvement,* <https://www.york.ac.uk/eighteenth-century-studies/research/networksofimprovement> [accessed 15th April 2021]

coteries embodies the public or conversational aspect of Habermas's model of public sociability.[97] Importantly, Haslett made the case for women's intellectual involvement in creating the public sphere; an important development when scholarship had previously judged the Bluestockings' activities or influence to be limited by their relegation to the private sphere. In the last decade, there has been a surge in scholarship on salon culture and female *salonnières*, examining both the way in which architectural spaces and display were a crucial part of salon entertainment,[98] as well as the way in which salons, on the cusp between public and private, played a significant role in shaping public discourse.[99] As Nichole Pohl and Betty Schellenberg note in their introduction to *Reconsidering the Bluestockings* (2002), 'literary salons may have been located in the intimate domestic sphere, the salon […] but were nothing less than an expansion of the authentic public sphere into institutions of "intellectual sociability."'[100] If women were excluded from the masculinist public sphere of coffee-houses and clubs, then it was through the literary salon that they participated in this associational mode of sociability and progressed ideals of civic virtue.[101] The recovery of female sociability has prompted a lot of critical interest in the Bluestocking salons, with prominent studies by Nicole Pohl, Betty Schellenberg, Elizabeth Eger, and Emma Major, among others, demonstrating the cultural significance of the Bluestockings, and the way in

[97] Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney*, pp. 5-6.
[98] Elizabeth Eger, for instance, considers that Elizabeth Montagu's choice of Chinoiserie for her salons marks 'a form of resistance to the predominantly masculine sociability associated with classical taste', in *Bluestockings: Women of Reason*, p. 69; see also Will Bowers, who argues for significance of different domestic spaces for different social activities, in 'The Many Rooms of Holland House', *Re-evaluating the Literary Coterie, 1530-1830,* ed. by Will Bowers and Hannah Leah Crummé (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 159-180.
[99] Deborah Heller argues for women's 'intellectual, cultural, and…public agency' through the Bluestocking salons, in 'Bluestocking Salons and the Public Sphere', *Eighteenth Century Life,* 22.2 (1998), 59-82, p. 60
[100] Nichole Pohl and Betty Schellenberg, 'Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography', *Reconsidering the Bluestockings,* ed. by Nichole Pohl and Betty Schellenberg (= *Huntingdon Library Quarterly,* 65.1-2 (2002)), 1-19 (p. 12). See also, Nicole Pohl, '"Perfect Reciprocity": Salon Culture and Epistolary Conversations,' *Women's Writing,* 13.1 (2006), 139-159, (p. 14).
[101] Susanne Schmid's *British Literary Salons of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century* argues that British Salon culture existed alongside other public modes of sociability (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), p. 2.

which they sought to fashion themselves 'as moral and social models for the nation' – even if this public visibility also prompted cultural insecurities.[102]

POLITE TOURISM AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

If the literary salon, coffee-houses, clubs, assemblies, and taverns formed part of the bourgeois, urban public sphere, it might appear strange to talk of the country house as similarly part of this culture.[103] Although it might be tempting to view country seats as places of private retirements for the elite, scholarship has revealed the extent to which country houses were very much part of the public sphere through the rise of domestic tourism. As Jocelyn Anderson has recently argued in *Touring and Publicizing England's Country Houses* (2018), 'when country houses are viewed solely as spaces of elite retreat […] there is no apparent reason as to why they would be relevant to the nation at all. For a country house to achieve significant fame, it had to be known beyond elite circles and local communities.'[104] Scholars generally identify a significant demographic shift in tourism practices throughout the eighteenth century, from the elite connoisseur at the turn of the century, to a 'new breed' of polite tourist who visited for their own self-improvement.[105] While in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the tradition of country house hospitality was an elite practice for those who could afford to travel, by the end of the eighteenth century, it had become a popular pastime for the gentry and aspiring middle-classes.[106] In addition, while early country house guidebooks were prohibitively expensive, by

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[102] Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, 'Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography', *Library Quarterly* 65.172 (2002), 1-19 (p. 12); Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason*, p. 29; Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation 1712-1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 5; Susanne Schmid, *British Literary Salons,* p. 2.

[103] Even though, as Susan Whyman demonstrated in her study of the Verney family, aristocrats embraced this mode of modern sociability, in *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[104] Jocelyn Anderson, *Touring and Publicizing England's Country Houses,* p. 8.

[105] Adrian Tinniswood, *The Polite Tourist: A History of Country House Visiting* (London: The National Trust, 1998), p. 99; John Stobart, ed, *Travel and the British Country House: Cultures, Critiques and Consumption in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 3.

[106] Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths, *Consumption and Gender in the Early Seventeenth-Century Household: The World of Alice Le Strange* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 191-7.

the mid-eighteenth century, enterprising booksellers were beginning to provide more affordable guides for the polite visitor. Thus, the print trade had a significant role both in marketing the country house and in providing accessible readings for this new breed of polite tourist.[107] Garden treatises too placed new garden designs into the public sphere, as designers sought to show off prominent gardens that they had worked on and use them to attract potential clients.[108] However, our understanding of tourism and the print trade has been further complicated by literary scholars examining mixed-media practices. In *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture* (2016) Betty Schellenberg argued that the domestic travel narrative was developed through a complex interplay between commercial print and manuscript accounts, as editors capitalised on the cachet of the educated gentleman to market exclusive coterie accounts. Thus, exclusive travel accounts, which had initially only been circulated between select friends, soon became subsumed into the commercial print trade and could be read by wider audiences. Famously, this applied to writers like William Gilpin, who had initially circulated manuscript accounts of his tours to friends, before they were distributed more widely and eventually published, making his aesthetics accessible to any reader who could afford a copy.[109] While Schellenberg acknowledges the extent to which gentlemen like George Lyttelton offered a 'discourse of proprietary domestic tourism' that countered Gilpin's democratising aesthetics, she nevertheless maintains that the print trade ultimately undermined the cultural supremacy of the property owner by marketing and exploiting his elite associations.[110] Yet, while Schellenberg focuses on the way in which coteries publicised their works through engaging with the print trade, this thesis instead scrutinises the boundary

[107] Dana Arnold, 'Country House Visiting and Its Publics', in *The Georgian Country House: Architecture, Landscape and Society,* ed. by Dana Arnold (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp. 20-42; Tim Clayton, 'Publishing Houses: Prints of Country Seats', *The Georgian Country House,* pp. 43-60.
[108] See Elena Butoescu, 'Eighteenth-Century Garden Manuals: Old Practice, New Professions', *Romanian Journal of English Studies,* 13.1 (2016), 69-78 (p. 70).
[109] Zoe Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2016), p. 57.
[110] Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture,* pp. 193; 203.

between accessibility and exclusivity, examining the Wrest circle's attempts to retain exclusivity in an era in which country house gardens, and elite accounts of visiting them, were increasingly subsumed into the public sphere.

It is perhaps easy to overstate the democratisation of aesthetics, especially when, as Stephen Bending has argued, gardens 'offered a shared arena for discussion' and thus remained a 'contested social and aesthetic space.'[111] Certainly, there were many interpretive discourses available to tourists. John Dixon Hunt regarded Gilpin's *A Dialogue upon the Gardens […] at Stow* (1748) as an example of the wide-ranging reading practices in the mid-eighteenth century, noting the way in which Gilpin's characters 'attend to both the emblematic and expressive gardens.'[112] Elsewhere in 'Emblem and Expression in the Eighteenth-Century Landscape Garden' (1971), Hunt brought attention to the terms 'emblematic' and 'expressive' from Thomas Whately's *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770),[113] in which Whately had defined an 'emblematic' garden as one that contained 'ingenious contrivances' that 'must be examined, compared, perhaps explained, before the whole design of them is well understood.'[114] Thus, for about twenty years, scholars generally accepted that there was a shift from 'emblematic' gardens that relied on the visitor's knowledge to make the intellectual leaps, to 'expressive' gardens that prompted an emotive response from the viewer and anticipated the later picturesque way of seeing.[115] In other words, a shift from a public, stable interpretation, to an interpretation that relied on the private responses of the individual. This apparent shift

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[111] Stephen Bending 'One Among the Many: Popular Aesthetics, Polite Culture and the Country House Landscape', *The Georgian Country House*, pp. 61-78; in addition, the picturesque way of seeing did have to be learned, see Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Beth Mary Tegan, 'Training the Picturesque Eye: The Point of Views in Jane Austen's Persuasion', *The Eighteenth Century,* 58.1 (2017): 39-59.
[112] John Dixon Hunt, 'Introduction', *A Dialogue upon the Gardens of the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham at Stow in Buckinghamshire* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1976), p. ii.
[113] John Dixon Hunt, 'Emblem and Expression in the Eighteenth-Century Landscape Garden', *Eighteenth Century Studies,* 3 (1971), 294-317.
[114] Thomas Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening* (London: T. Payne, 1770), p. 120.
[115] Ronald Paulson, *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975).

was an attempt to account for the difference between the early eighteenth-century gardens of Alexander Pope and William Kent that favoured inscriptions, temples, or statues, and the later landscape gardens of Capability Brown that did not offer the visitor the same architectural signifiers that might be read and interpreted.[116] Yet while the iconographical model might apply to Augustan gardens such as Stowe, Rousham, or Stourhead, it remained ambiguous what the viewer might take from the 'expressive' garden. As a corrective to this model, Stephen Bending suggested that the earlier 'emblematic' garden was not replaced, rather, viewers were able to draw from a range of publicly available discourses, whether literary, political, or artistic, in order to extrapolate meaning.[117] More recently, rather than focusing on garden design as intended by owners and designers, garden historians have begun to examine the reception history to explore the different ways that visitors engaged with gardens. John Dixon Hunt's *The Afterlife of Gardens* (2004) was the first to suggest changing the critical focus from stories of origin to the longer story of how gardens are experienced over time.[118] This is proving a fruitful avenue of research, as Hunt has shown in his own *Site, Sight, Insight* (2013), which demonstrates the way in which eighteenth-century tourists not only 'mis-read' the famously iconographical gardens at Stourhead, but sometimes even deviated and took their own paths.[119]

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[116] This is not to say that buildings ceased to feature in the garden; grottos, root-houses or gothic ruins remained popular, but they were now employed more sparingly, see Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 79. While Brown's architectural drawings and designs are usually understated, he nonetheless did also have a reputation as an architect in his own time. See Sarah Rutherford, Ceryl Evans and Steffie Shields, *Capability Brown's Drawings: A Reference Catalogue of Drawings by Brown or his Office (c. 1740s-83)* (Swindon: Historic England, 2019), p. 6.

[117] Stephen Bending, 'Re-reading the English Landscape Garden', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 55.3 (1992): 379-399. In addition, one might consider that the 'picturesque' way of seeing became so commonplace that it has been charged by critics as becoming a 'tyrannical' way of seeing, see Ian Thompson, 'The Picturesque as Pejorative', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 26.3 (2006): 237-248 (pp. 239-240). The picturesque aside, the landscape garden as a political allegory for liberty was well established by Horace Walpole and later writers, and recent scholarship has identified that political gardening was revived by the Rockingham Whigs after 1760 to denote liberty and virtue, see Patrick Eyres, 'Introduction', *Rockingham Whig Landscapes: Political Discourse Embedded in the Landscape of the Country Estate in the Various Forms of Agriculture, Garden Buildings, Monuments, and Structure,* ed. by Patrick Eyres (= *New Arcadian Journal,* 71/72 (2013)), pp. 9-13.

[118] John Dixon Hunt, *The Afterlife of Gardens* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004).

[119] John Dixon Hunt, 'Stourhead Revisited and the Pursuit of Meaning in Gardens', *Site, Sight, Insight: Essays on Landscape Architecture* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 32-31. See also Oliver

More recently, Zoe Kinsley's *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812* (2016) and Jon Stobart's study of Lady Sophia Newdigate's travel journal reassess the significance of women's accounts and their engagement with landscape aesthetics in eighteenth century.[120] It is against this critical backdrop that this thesis will situate the Wrest coterie's readings of gardens and landscapes.

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN GARDEN AND COUNTRY HOUSE HISTORY

In recent years, garden historians have also challenged the focus on the English landscape garden in the eighteenth century. Traditionally, garden historians took their leads from Horace Walpole's *Essay on Modern Gardening* (1771) when discussing shifts in garden design in the eighteenth-century. Walpole constructed a Whiggish narrative of liberty and progress when discussing the emergence of the English landscape garden, aligning the 'natural' landscape style with English values of liberty, particularly in contrast to French formal gardens and what Walpole perceived to be its despotic constitution. Uvedale Price and George Mason, writing twenty years after Walpole, helped to cement this perspective, for despite harbouring some disagreements with his *Essay on Modern Gardening*,[121] they nonetheless emphasised the originality and superiority of the English taste in gardening.[122] Although, as Stephen Bending has observed, such a narrative should be considered as 'a form of cultural self-representation […] to represent political claims as natural causes,'[123]

Cox, 'A Mistaken Iconography? Eighteenth Century Visitor Accounts of Stourhead,' *Garden History,* 40.1 (2012), 98-116.

[120] Jon Stobart, 'From Magnificent Houses to Disagreeable Country: Lady Sophia Newdigate's Tour of Southern England and Derbyshire, 1748', *Women and the Land 1500-1900,* ed. by Amanda L. Capern, Briony McDonagh, and Jennifer Aston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 127-148; Zoe Kinsley, *Women Writing the Home Tour, 1682-1812* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2016).

[121] Uvedale Price argued that Brown's designs were artificial and uniform, *An Essay on the Picturesque* (London: J. Robson, 1796), pp. 370-1; George Mason in his revised essay in 1795 (27 years after his first edition) argued that Brown had little influence on the English landscape revolution, *An Essay on Design in Gardening* (London: C. Roworth for Benjamin and John White, 1795), p. 131.

[122] George Mason, *An Essay on Design in Gardening*, p. 133.

[123] Stephen Bending, 'Horace Walpole and Eighteenth-Century Garden History', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutions,* 57 (1994), 209-226 (p. 226).

Walpole's reductionist Whig narrative is exactly what appealed to twentieth-century historians such as Niklolaus Pevsner and Frank Clarke, who attempted to draw parallels between Whiggery in the eighteenth century and Modernism.[124] Thus, for several decades, this perspective went unchallenged.[125] The traditional narrative of the 'English landscape garden' would start with Joseph Addison and Alexander Pope in their rejection of geometrical designs, parterres, and clipped topiary that characterised the French and Dutch styles and had been popular in the reigns of Charles II and William III respectively. Then, a new era is ushered in with William Kent, who 'leaped the fence and saw that all nature was a garden,' and continued by Capability Brown, Kent's 'very able' successor.[126] Each of these designers is viewed for their teleological value, the work of one designer simply laying the ground for the next. While this might appear a compelling narrative – indeed, its persuasiveness is still difficult to shake off today – it should be noted that the proponents of this narrative were selective in their use of primary material. This story of the English landscape garden was one in which great designers and 'great men' took the centre stage, obscuring the roles of lesser-known gardeners, women, and the natural world itself.[127]

Since the 1980s, scholarship has begun to draw attention to the inadequacy, even the 'seductive' rhetoric of Horace Walpole's narrative of garden history and the artificial

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[124] H. F. Clarke, *The English Landscape Garden* (London: Pleiades Books, 1948); Nikolaus Pevsner, 'Picturesque England', *The Englishness of English Art* (London: The Architectural Press, 1955), pp. 169-80. For a discussion on the parallels between Pevsner's *Englishness of English Art* and Modernism, see William Whyte, 'The Englishness of English Architecture: Modernism and the Making of a National International Style, 1927-1957', *Journal of British Studies,* 48.2 (2009), 441-465.

[125] Christopher Hussey agreed with Pevsner, noting that the principles Pevsner had identified in art were also applicable to Georgian garden design, although his examples demonstrate his awareness of the persistence of formal gardens in the first half of the century, in *English Gardens and Landscapes: 1700-1750* (London: Country Life, 1967), p. 13. For examples of texts accepting Walpole's narrative, see Edward Hyams *Capability Brown & Humphrey Repton* (London: J. M. Dent, 1971), pp. 3-10; Miles Hadfield *The English Landscape Garden* (London: Shire, 1977); David Jarret, *The English Landscape Garden* (New York: Rizzoli, 1978).

[126] Horace Walpole, *Essay on Modern Gardening* (Canton: Kirgate Press, 1904), pp. 55; 129; for summaries of this argument, see Stephen Bending, *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 9; and David Jacques, *Gardens of Court and Country: English Design 1630-1730* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 4-15.

[127] Further epitomized in studies such as James Lees-Milne's *Earls of Creation: Five Great Patrons of Eighteenth-Century Art* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962).

divisions between natural/formal and English/French.[128] Social historians were quick to observe that Walpole's definition of liberty referred exclusively to the power and liberty of the landowning classes. In *Landscape and Ideology* (1986), Anne Bermingham argued that the concept of the English landscape garden was essentially an ideal fostered by the ruling classes.[129] In addition, Tom Williamson's landmark *Polite Landscapes* (1995) particularly noted the way in which the emergence of the landscape park in the decades after 1760 provided 'a socially unifying style of landscape design, one which both local gentry and great landowners alike could share', but one that excluded the lower social orders.[130] Williamson's study was particularly influential, however, for demonstrating the way in which there was no single-minded transition from formal to informal, and that the concept of 'nature' shifted considerably as the eighteenth-century developed. Noting the way in which narratives of garden history tended to focus on the 'great estates' that were the first to embrace innovations in garden design, Williamson argued that, in practice, geometric and naturalised gardens existed alongside one another until the late 1750s. Indeed, as Mark Laird has shown, from a horticultural perspective, garden design was not a one-directional march towards the English landscape revolution in which formal gardens were swept away, since baroque planting styles lasted into the final decades of the eighteenth century.[131] In addition, Roderick Floud and David Jacques have similarly observed that the vast costs involved in modifying gardens meant that owners did not rush to have their gardens redesigned at the first glimpse of a new fashion.[132] Furthermore, studies have begun to reassess the significance and persistence of the

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[128] John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections*, p. 209.
[129] Anne Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986).
[130] Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 110; Girouard similarly notes in *Life in the English Country House* that in the country house, there was a 'growing gap between the polite world of the gentry and the impolite world of servants, farmers and smallholders', p. 184.
[131] Mark Laird, *The Flowering of the Landscape Garden: English Pleasure Grounds 1720-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 6.
[132] Roderick Floud, *An Economic History of the English Garden* (London: Penguin, 2019); David Jacques, *Gardens of Court and Country* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017).

formal garden in the eighteenth century, starting with Mark Laird's *The Formal Garden* (1992), which argued that the relationship between formal gardens and the landscape garden has frequently been misjudged.[133] More recently, David Jacques in *Gardens of Court and Country* (2017) has sought to demonstrate that the period between Addison and Kent, far from being an awkward period in the evolution of the English landscape garden, was in fact 'one of the most glorious episodes in English garden history.'[134]

One of the most disruptive texts to directly challenge Walpole and propose a new model for understanding garden history in the eighteenth century is John Dixon Hunt's *Greater Perfections* (2000). While Stephen Switzer was traditionally heralded as one of the first gardeners to embrace the English landscape garden in his notion of 'rural and extensive gardening,'[135] Hunt argues that Switzer in fact carried forward seventeenth-century gardenists' ideas, in particular those of John Evelyn in *Elysium Britannicum.*[136] Thus, for Hunt, the early eighteenth-century garden is an extension of ideas that were espoused by earlier writers, rather than the beginning of a new era of 'natural' gardening. In fact, disrupting the traditional historical narrative even further, Hunt suggests that until the arrival of Capability Brown, gardens of the early-eighteenth century shared with earlier gardens the understanding that a garden was necessarily an artificial representation of the natural world that would create a perfected nature. Only with the arrival of Brown does Hunt note a 'watershed' when the notion that a gardener should produce perfected nature 'wholly slipped from sight,' and 'a new insistence upon and taste for naturalness […] collapsed the distance between medium and message.'[137] Ironically, despite the fact that Brown knowingly

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[133] Mark Laird, *The Formal Garden: Traditions of Art and Nature* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).
[134] David Jacques, *Gardens of Court and Country: English Design 1630-1730,* p. 6.
[135] Stephen Switzer, *Ichonographia Rustica; or, The Nobleman, Gentleman, and Gardener's Recreation* (London: D. Browne, 1718), p. 395.
[136] John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections*, p. 201.
[137] Ibid., p. 81.

cultivated the landscape to represent a perfected ideal of nature, the fact that later picturesque writers such as Uvedale Price would criticise his gardens for *not* resembling 'nature' reveals how far by the late eighteenth century, there was an expectation that gardens should represent unmediated nature, rather than a perfected ideal. Hunt's text is particularly useful for establishing a framework of understanding that does not rely so much on binary oppositions or teleological narratives, rather suggesting that gardens are a 'complex and central human activity' and reveal 'how men and women represent themselves and their place in the world.'[138]

Thus, scholarship on gardens is moving away from the perspective of select designers and 'great men', allowing historians to uncover far richer histories of garden design in this period. As Mark Laid observes in *A Natural History of English Gardening* (2015), 'what Walpole […] excluded – including life forms that inhabit a garden, or women who spent more time than men in the garden, pursuing horticulture and natural history through the garden – have never received the attention they deserve.'[139] From a gender perspective, the work of historians such as Twigs Way and Catherine Horwood has uncovered the way in which women were involved as gardeners,[140] while Stephen Bending's *Green Retreats* (2013) and Kate Felus's *Secret Life of the Georgian Garden* (2016) have explored the ways in which elite women often worked with designers to create their own gardens.[141] Laird's own *Natural History,* by focusing on the natural world itself, highlights female

[138] Ibid., p. 216.
[139] Mark Laird, *A Natural History of English Gardening* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 4.
[140] Twigs Way, *Virgins Weeders and Queens: A History of Women in the Garden* (London: The History Press, 2006); Catherine Horwood, *Gardening Women: Their Stories from 1600 to the Present* (London: Virago Press, 2010).
[141] Stephen Bending, *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Kate Felus, *The Secret Life of the Georgian Garden* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016).

accomplishments such as Mary Delaney's botanical collages and the Duchess of Portland's shell studies.[142]

As well as dismantling the Walpolean narrative of garden history in the eighteenth century, new research highlights the impact and legacies of empire and colonialism in the western garden. Despite the frequent claims made of an *English* landscape garden, scholars note the ways in which the originality lay in the acts of translating foreign styles for an English landscape, rather than in the novelty itself.[143] Studies in the history of botany have also traced the way in which plants were acquired and collected from across the globe,[144] and *The Botany of Empire in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2016) explores the complex relationship between natural history and empire.[145] Building on previous work on slavery and colonialism,[146] there is also increased focus on the economic and cultural links between country houses and the empire, emphasising the transnational influences behind the design of buildings, gardens, and parklands, as well as the plants and material objects that inhabited them. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the global histories of the properties that will be examined, the notion of 'Otherness' and exoticism will recur throughout the thesis, especially in discussions of the *Athenian Letters* and the Mithraic Altar

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[142] Mark Laird, *A Natural History of English Gardening.*
[143] Rafaella Fabiana Giannetto, '"Greens after the Italian Way": The landscape of the Venetian mainland through the lens of the Grand Tour', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes,* 36.3 (2016): 143-155, p. 151. David Jacques similarly challenges the notion of labelling styles by nationality, noting that 'there are always difficulties in pinpointing the characteristics that especially denote national styles, but even if some are identified, they rarely transfer it in an unambiguous fashion… when foreign gardeners were important to England their designs tended to be adapted to suit the owners' preferences and the local conditions,' in *Gardens of Court and Country*, p. 22.
[144] David Miller and Peter Reill, *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Londa Scheibinger and Claudia Swan, *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Daniela Bleichmar, *Visible Empire: Botanical Expeditions and Visual Culture in the Hispanic Enlightenment* (London and Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012).
[145] Yota Batsaki, Sarah Burke Cahalan, and Anatole Tchikine, eds, *The Botany of Empire in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2016).
[146] Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2002) (first published 1978); Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London and New York: Verso, 1988).

in Chapters 2 and 3. It is also worth noting that while the issues of slavery and colonialism are not addressed in this thesis, some of the people with whom this research is concerned did, in their public capacities, have roles in facilitating such practices.[147] Thus, while this thesis is concerned with the country house as a site of exclusivity for the Wrest literary coterie, it is also important to remember that the country house, far from being divorced from broader eighteenth-century society, is also at the heart of a complex global history. Influential studies include Stephanie Barczewski's *Country Houses and the British Empire, 1700-1930* (2014), English Heritage's *Slavery and the British Country House* (2013), edited by Madge Dresser and Andrew Hann, and *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857* (2018), edited by Margot Finn and Kate Smith.[148] In addition, UCL's *Legacies of British Slave*-ownership (2009-2012) explored the physical legacies of slavery, particularly the way in which slave-owners became significant collectors or used wealth to construct country houses, while the East *India Company at Home, 1757-1857* (2011-2014), run by the University of Warwick and UCL, carried out research into colonial material cultures. Thus, there is now a concerted effort to move away from what Mark Rothery and Jon Stobart term a '*Country Life* view of the house' – that is to say, a view that regards the county house unproblematically as a symbol of power, wealth, and taste.[149] Instead, a reorientation is required to register the country house as a 'site of consumption set within local, national, and global systems of

[147] Lord Chancellor Hardwicke unofficially supported the proslavery doctrine through the *Yorke-Talbot* opinion in 1729 and *Pearne v Lisle* (1749), and when Charles Yorke served as legal counsel for the East India Company in the 1750s, he was responsible for the *Pratt-Yorke* opinion in 1750, which upheld the East India Company's rights to ownership of land it acquired in India. These links are highlighted in the National Trust's report, Sally-Anne Huxtable, Corinne Fowler, Christo Keflas, and Emma Slocombe, *Interim Report on the Connections between Colonialism and Properties now in the Care of the National Trust, Including Links with Historic Slavery* (Heelis: National Trust, 2020), p. 67.

[148] Stephanie Barczewski, *Country Houses and the British Empire, 1700-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); *Slavery and the British Country House,* ed. by Madge Dresser and Andrew Hann (Swindon: English Heritage, 2013); *The East India Company at Home, 1757-1857,* ed. by Margot Finn and Kate Smith (London: University College London Press, 2018).

[149] Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, 'Introduction', *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 7.

supply.'[150] This is echoed in Tim Parker and Lynne Rickabaugh's foreword to *The Country House: Past, Present, Future* (2018), in which they note that the country house belongs to a 'rich and complex story' that needs to be placed in its wider cultural and social context.[151] Thus, despite the traditional reliance on telling the stories of country houses and their gardens through great designers and owners, scholarship is unearthing a rich array of voices and complex histories, as well as working towards inclusive histories for visitors to sites today.[152]

WHY EXAMINE THE WREST COTERIE?

Against this backdrop, examining the social authorship and readership practices within the Wrest coterie allows greater insight into the way that members created their own exclusive meanings that were only accessible to the initiated few, whether in their literary manuscripts and travel accounts or in their designs for the garden at Wrest Park. While literary scholarship has focused on the "clubbable" characteristic of coteries to argue for their significance in the public sphere,[153] little attention has been paid to the exclusivity of the country house coterie. The Wrest circle has much to offer in this regard, although up to now, historians have tended to focus on members' more public roles or involvement in public-facing societies. Indeed, Philip and Charles Yorke's political careers have been well charted,[154] as has Catherine Talbot's involvement in Samuel Richardson's coterie and the Bluestocking Circle.[155]

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[150] Jon Stobart and Mark Rothery, 'Introduction', *Consumption and the Country House,* p. 7.
[151] Tim Parker and Lynne Rickabaugh, 'Foreword', *The Country House: Past, Present, Future,* ed. by Jeremy Musson (New York: Rizzoli, 2018), p. 7.
[152] Exemplified in The Garden Trust's recent lecture series, *Other Voices in Garden History,* which ran from 12 April to 14 June 2021.
[153] Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney,* p. 7.
[154] Christopher Reid, 'Reporting by Letter: The 2nd Earl of Hardwicke and his Parliamentary Correspondents', *Parliamentary History,* 39.2 (2020), 239-254; David Philip Miller, 'The "Hardwicke Circle": The Whig Supremacy and Its Demise in the 18th-Century Royal Society', *Notes and Record of the Royal Society of London,* 52.1 (1998), 73-91; Markman Ellis, 'The English Mercurie Hoax and the Early History of the Newspaper', *Book History,* 22 (2019), 100-132; idem, 'Thomas Birch's "Weekly Letter" (1741-66): Correspondence and History in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Royal Society', *Notes and Records,* 68.3 (2014), 261-278.
[155] The 'Introduction' of *Bluestocking Feminism* details Talbot's involvement with Samuel Richardson's coterie and the Bluestockings, but only cursory attention is given to her friendship with Jemima Grey and association with 'young Cambridge men' in the *Athenian Letters*, see *Bluestocking Feminism,* ed. by Gary Kelly et al.

However, focusing on members' public roles overlooks the way in which the Wrest circle, as an exclusive country house coterie, also negotiates the boundary between public and private. There has been almost no examination of the Wrest circle as a literary group, barring Betty Schellenberg's *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture* (2016), which sheds valuable light on the cultural significance of the group, especially when it had been critically overlooked for so many years.[156] However, while Schellenberg – rightly – argues that the Wrest circle engaged in mixed media practices, demonstrating that clearly, the coterie did not fear what J.W. Sanders termed the 'stigma of print,' she ultimately focuses on the 'fame and influence' that the coterie's *Athenian Letters* would achieve.[157] This might apply to its circulation much later in the eighteenth century, but does not fully account for the coterie's strong resistance to sharing its works in the mid-eighteenth century when it was at the height of its literary activity. The coterie does playfully engage with the public literary and political world, but entirely on its own terms, and in fact, much of the humour in the *Athenian Letters*, *Wrestiana* and the garden design at Wrest Park relies on the ignorance of outsiders who might take the coterie's works at face value and not detect the teasing satire underneath.

As Susanne Schmid has argued in her study of literary salons, rather than thinking in terms of a simple public/private binary, it is more helpful to consider the way in which 'sociable activities create their own spaces while they last.'[158] Thus, the question

(London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), pp. 1-18; Emma Major discusses Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Montagu as examples of female piety who contributed to the 'Publick Good,' in 'Performing Madam Britannia and the Blessing of Example', *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation 1712-1812* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 70-96 (p. 71); Soile Ylivuori examines Talbot's letters to Jemima Grey to showcase her engagement with ideals of women's politeness, but there is no attention given to her friendship with Grey or sociable authorship as part of the coterie, in *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 2019); Sylvia Harcstark Myers does explore Talbot's contribution to the *Athenian Letters* as 'Sappho', but this is not considered in relation to the Wrest coterie, in *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); only Leonie Hannan's *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing, and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018) gives detailed insight into the early intellectual friendship between Catherine Talbot, Mary Gregory, and Jemima Grey.

[156] Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture.*

[157] Ibid., p. 34.

[158] Susanne Schmid, *British Literary Salons,* p. 14.

underpinning this thesis is how far, and in what ways, could elite coteries retain exclusivity against a backdrop in which private spaces – and coterie compositions themselves – were increasingly subsumed into the public sphere through tourism and the print trade? Despite the critical acceptance of Klein's definitions of private and public to denote whether a person is solitary or in company, this does little to explain the way in which the Wrest coterie clearly set boundaries in terms of who had access to its manuscripts or was privy to its private jokes, and who was excluded. Even the gardens at Wrest, while they were technically publicly accessible spaces, they were still imbued with meaning only comprehensible to inner members of the coterie. In discussions of the gardens that members of the coterie visited, their interpretations were clearly only intended to remain within their exclusive scribal network and demonstrate their personal engagements with garden design. Somewhere between public and private, a conceptual redefinition is required to account for the way in which coteries carved out exclusive interpretations for a select audience of chosen individuals.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In order to understand the relationship between literature, gardens, and coterie sociability, this thesis delves into the rich correspondence between coterie members to understand the complex social, literary, and intellectual networks in which the coterie is embedded. The first half of the thesis thus introduces the Wrest literary circle through its key literary compositions, and the second half explores the connection between social authorship/ readership and garden design, both in the design of the Mithraic Glade at Wrest, and the way in which members of the coterie 'read' and debated the other gardens that they visited.

The first chapter, 'The Establishment of the Wrest Coterie', will make a fuller introduction to the Wrest circle through the *Wrestiana* manuscript, using the compositions to

explore the academic interests, social circles, and dynamics within the group. Since the manuscript appears to have circulated no further than close associates of the coterie, it thus provides a privileged insight into this inner circle of friends. Although members of the coterie themselves joke that the manuscript is of little literary merit due to the abundance of private jokes and sociable verses, this chapter explores the way in which the comedy and playfulness in *Wrestiana* in fact allows the authors to consolidate their serious scholarly pursuits with sociable entertainment. It will argue that this academic playfulness allows the coterie to couch its literary and political ambitions within a safe, 'non-serious' context.

The second chapter, '"It Kept up a Correspondence between Friends": the *Athenian Letters* and the Yorkes' Cambridge Circle (1738-42)', explores the intellectual circle that Philip and Charles Yorke fostered while they were undergraduates at the University of Cambridge. This chapter teases out the early influences on the Yorkes' education, the academic community that they forged, and the way in which this intense intellectual network brought about the *Athenian Letters* and *The Philosopher.* The main thrust of this chapter is to argue for the sophistication of the *Athenian Letters,* both the way in which it corresponded with, and departed from, George Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian in England* (1735). Understanding the political undertones in the work further helps to explain the Yorke brothers' own political sympathies, especially against the context of the fall of Robert Walpole in 1742.

The third chapter, 'The Literary Allusions at Wrest Park', explores the connection between the coterie's literary compositions and the garden design at Wrest. On one level, the garden monuments at Wrest can be contextualised within broader trends in mid-century garden design. However, there is another level of interpretation that is only accessible to those in the inner circle of the coterie. In an era in which gardens were increasingly visited

and open to public decipherment, the Mithraic Altar frequently baffled visitors and resisted interpretation. This was not only to make a joke out of the antiquarian culture of decipherment; the Mithraic Altar, by making private reference to the group's early scholarly interests and composition, further reaffirmed the exclusivity of the circle and served as a consolidation of their friendship. While Thomas Edwards's root-house is part of the Mithraic Glade and alludes to the world of the *Athenian Letters,* he brings his own unique style that merges classical architecture with native primitivism. Further, the literary inscriptions he provides for the root-house serve to consolidate his own involvement with the Wrest circle. In contrast, by the early 1770s, when the Bath House was constructed at Wrest and the Gothic Tower at Wimpole, the original coterie had considerably fragmented as many of its members had passed away. Yet, the fact that the inscriptions for these garden buildings were included in *Wrestiana* suggests a nostalgic desire to place the inscriptions in dialogue with the original coterie and its earlier compositions. In addition, the fact that the authors of the inscriptions are only revealed in *Wrestiana* suggests how far surviving members of the Wrest circle wished to keep the authorship between friends. Ultimately, the chapter explores how, in an era when gardens were increasingly visited by the public, the coterie retains exclusivity since the garden design at Wrest Park is in dialogue with its private literary compositions.

The final chapter, 'The Wrest Coterie and Garden Visiting' will explore the coterie's observations of the gardens that they visited, both to contextualise the gardens at Wrest within the wider culture of garden design in the mid-eighteenth century and to explore the discussions and debates about garden design within the circle. Although accounts written by members of the Wrest circle were sometimes in imitation of published travel guides, travel observations in the correspondence between members also offered opportunities for private jokes and criticisms. While opinions could be shared, equally, the tensions that arose from these discussions also highlight the way in which members of the coterie could read and

experience gardens in different ways. In matters of garden design especially, there could be disagreement over the ways in which gardens should be 'read,' and whether the owner's taste matched those of the viewer. It is in this latter point that the letters between Jemima Grey, Catherine Talbot, and Elizabeth Anson particularly exhibit both their knowledge of garden design and the way in which they situate themselves within these larger debates.

Ultimately, this thesis will argue that reconsidering the exclusivity of the literary coterie offers the potential to reframe our understanding not only of the distinction between public and private, but also the tension between accessibility and exclusivity in garden design in the mid-eighteenth century.

1

The Establishment of the Wrest Coterie

UNEXPECTED BEGINNINGS: JEMIMA GREY, MARRIAGE AND THE INHERITANCE OF WREST PARK

When Jemima Grey (née Campbell) was born on 20th October 1722, it seemed highly unlikely that she would one day become the heiress of Wrest Park. She not only had an elder brother, Henry, but also her uncle, Anthony Grey, Earl of Harold, was in line to inherit the estate of her grandfather, Henry Grey, the 1st Duke of Kent. Anthony Grey was clearly involved in the plans to remodel and improve Wrest, taking some of the designs his father had commissioned from Giacomo Leoni to Italy on the Grand Tour to solicit critical comments from 'the best Architects and Judges [he] shall meet with.'[1] However, none of these plans were ever executed. Within the space of a few years, a series of family tragedies would place Grey in line to inherit her grandfather's estate.

The Earl of Harold died unexpectedly in 1723 after choking on an ear of barley, and only a few years later in 1727, Grey lost both her mother and brother. Due to her father's diplomatic career in Copenhagen, she stayed at Wrest Park with her maternal grandparents and was raised alongside her aunt, Mary Grey, who was only three years her senior. Upon the death of Grey's grandmother in the summer of 1728, the Duke of Kent quickly remarried, anxious to secure a male heir.[2] It is at this point that Grey and her aunt were sent to live in

[1] See Terry Friedman, 'Lord Harrold in Italy 1715-16: Four Frustrated Commissions to Leoni, Juvarra, Chiari and Soldani', *The Burlington Magazine,* 130. 1028 (1988), 836-845 (p. 837); Thomas Parne's *A Sermon on the Death of the Rt hon Anthony Earl of Harold* suggests that Harrold had also been inspired by his travels and 'Had He lived to execute these [plans], our Country had seen something second to the Buildings as well as the Gardens of *Italy.*' (Cambridge: James Knapton, 1724), p. 10.
[2] Robin Eagles, '221 Grey, Henry, duke of Kent' (unpublished manuscript, History of Parliament) p. 10; Joyce Godber, *Marchioness Grey of Wrest Park* (Bedford: Bedfordshire Historical Society, 1968), pp. 11-2.

Chelsea under the watchful eye of the Reverend Thomas Secker. There, Secker introduced them to another intellectual companion, the child prodigy, Catherine Talbot.[3] Secker was effectively Talbot's guardian; her father had died before she was born, and so her mother had merged households with a friend, Catherine Benson, who later became Secker's wife. Talbot and Secker seem to have had a complex relationship: although he was fatherly towards her and encouraged her learning, he also dampened her creativity and she felt obliged to serve him as his secretary, not gaining her own independence until after his death in 1768.[4]

The three girls received an extensive education in London, and their intellectual abilities were certainly encouraged in a way that was still unusual for the time. Women's education was increasingly considered a characteristic of polite sociability and marker of distinction,[5] but there appears to have been some tension in how far women should be allowed to become intellectuals in case they should threaten the 'natural' order.[6] This tension comes across in Secker's treatment of the young women. For all that he appears to have encouraged the girls' academic pursuits, even encouraging Jemima Grey to learn Latin;[7] he also felt the need to remind them that they should demonstrate 'due submission to the superior sex.'[8] Despite Secker's cautions, this did not discourage the girls in their academic pursuits, and in fact, their mutual love of books and learning would foster happy childhood memories and lifelong friendships with one another. Years later, Grey would write fondly to

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[3] Talbot herself resented the 'Fame' she had acquired for her youthful verses, see Sylvia Harcstark Myers, '"A Buried Talent": The Writings of Catherine Talbot,' *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, p. 213.
[4] Sylvia Harcstark Meyers, *The Bluestocking Circle,* pp. 62-5; 228.
[5] Leonie Hannan, *Women, Letters, and Life of the Mind*, p. 41; Kate Glover in particular draws attention to how some families lavished great expenses on their daughters' education, with many sending them to London for a premium education as a marker of their polite status, in *Elite Women and Polite Society in Eighteenth-Century Society* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), pp. 39-41.
[6] Felicity Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (John Hopkins University Press, 1995); Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England 1660 – 1850* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 83.
[7] In this letter, Jemima describes how Secker left her a copy of Horace in Latin for her to read, but unfortunately as she was entertaining 'Fine Gem'men' over breakfast when she was presented with the copy, she was embarrassed at being thought a 'Femme Scavante'. BLARS, L30/9/4, fols 30-2 [JG to CT, 18th January 1744/5].
[8] BLARS, L30/9/84, fol. 2 [TS to JG, before 1737].

Talbot after re-reading *Celia,* remarking that she had 'cried as heartily over it again, as we Three & the Kittens did in your Dining-room.'[9] Similarly, upon watching *Henry V* again, she would recollect 'the Remembrance of our reading it with much Pleasure at Wrest the third or second Time you were there (ay! In our Old Friend 39 I believe!).'[10] The earlier letters between the three women are infused with their playful humour and intellectual curiosity; in 1738, Grey would comment to Talbot that, 'We shall be such meer Book-Worms that t'will be impossible to travel even from hence to London without contriving to get some Shelves put up in the Coach, & so turn it into a Library.'[11] Literary discussions would form a significant part of their lifelong correspondence, and it is with Catherine Talbot in particular that Jemima Grey engages in critical literary debates, from Samuel Johnson's *The Rambler* to Samuel Richardson's newly-published *Clarissa.*[12]

Meanwhile, the line of succession at Wrest Park was undergoing changes once again. The Duke of Kent's infant son by his second marriage had died in 1733, and Henry Grey was forced once again to consider who he might choose to inherit in the absence of a male heir. Jemima Grey, as the only surviving child of his eldest daughter, was the next in line, and the Duke of Kent formalised this in his will in 1736.[13] Yet his choice is clearly signalled the year before, for the *Conversation Piece at Wrest Park* (Figure 4), painted by Charles Phillips in 1735, places Jemima Grey on the right-hand side of her grandfather.[14] It is at this point in the late 1730s that Jemima and Mary returned to live at Wrest Park. From around 1736 until the early 1740s, Thomas Wright was employed to teach the ladies of Wrest, and his subjects

[9] BLARS, L30/ 9a/5, fols 42-3 [JG to CT, 28th November 1747].
[10] BLARS, L30/9a/4, fol. 57 [JG to CT, 26th December 1747].
[11] BLARS, L30/9a/3, fol. 61 [JG to CT, 1737/8].
[12] For Jemima Grey's thoughts on *Clarissa,* see BLARS, L30/9/5, fols 108-9 [JG to CT, 15th September 1748]; for a discussion on Grey's and Talbot's debate about *The Rambler* (1750), see Jack Orchard, 'Dr Johnson on Trial: Catherine Talbot and Jemima Grey Responding to Samuel Johnson's *The Rambler*', *Women's Writing,* 23.2 (2016), 193-210.
[13] Joyce Godber, *Marchioness Grey,* p. 15.
[14] BLARS, Z49/302.

included an ambitious combination of geometry, astronomy and surveying.[15] Despite the Duke of Kent's increasingly poor health, he continued to make improvements to the gardens at Wrest; employing Batty Langley between 1735 and 1737 to make further extensive changes.[16] But Henry Grey's most important task was to ensure the continuation of the family name and bloodline. In his final years, he not only ensured that his granddaughter could inherit the title Marchioness Grey in her own right, but he also arranged her marriage to Philip Yorke, the eldest son of the Lord Chancellor.[17] As the Duke of Kent's health rapidly began to decline early in 1740, the marriage arrangements were hastened; Philip Yorke was summoned from Cambridge and the marriage articles were executed on 19th May 1740. On 22nd May 1740, Yorke wrote to his new bride, declaring that she had 'contributed in the nearest & most essential manner to the happiness of my Life as an Alliance with so noble a Family will be the higher honour to it.'[18]

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[15] Edward Hughes's 'The Early Journal of Thomas Wright of Durham' shows that Wright stayed at Wrest for two months to 'teach ye Young Ladies Geometry etc', and in the summer of 1739 he stayed at Wrest three months to 'Teach the Ladies to Survey', in *Annals of Science* 7.1 (1951): 1-24 (pp. 12; 14); Christa Jungnickel and Russell McCormmach discuss the scientific lectures at Wrest in the late 1730s in *Cavendish: The Experimental Life* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999), p. 23. Eileen Harris also mentions Wright's involvement at Wrest in 'A biographical sketch', *Arbours & Grottos: A Facsimile of the Two Parts of Universal Architecture (1755 and 1758), with a Catalogue of Wright's Works in Architecture and Garden Design, by Eileen Harris* (London: Scolar Press, 1979).

[16] Christine McAleavy has demonstrated the extent of Langley's work at Wrest between 1735 to 1737, which included adding his trademark serpentine walks, creating plain grass parterres, reshaping the Amphitheatre, as well as constructing the orangery and greenhouse, in 'Batty Langley at Wrest Park', (unpublished paper, 2016); See also, Roderick Floud, *An Economic History of the English Garden* (London: Allen Lane, 2019), p. 54; Linda Cabe Halpern, 'The Duke of Kent's Garden at Wrest Park,' *Journal of Garden History, 15* (1995): 149-178.

[17] Both father and son were named Philip, but for clarity this thesis will use 'Philip Yorke' to denote the son (1720-1790); Philip Yorke senior will be referred to as the 1st Earl of Hardwicke or Lord Chancellor Hardwicke.

[18] London, British Library, Add. MS 35605, fol. 43 [PY to JG, 22nd May 1740]; Joyce Godber suggests that the 1st Earl of Hardwicke had supervised the draft, in *Marchioness Grey,* p. 17.



Figure 4. Charles Phillips, ‘Conversation Piece at Wrest Park’, c. 1735. Private collection.



Figure 5. Allan Ramsay, ‘Lady Jemima Campbell, Marchioness Grey’, 1741. Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire. © National Trust Images / Roy Fox.



Figure 6. Allan Ramsay, 'The Hon Philip Yorke, Later 2nd Earl of Hardwicke', 1741. Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire. © National Trust Images / John Hammond.

Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, the son of a Dover attorney, had both the talent and ambition to rise through the ranks in his political career; he was knighted in 1720 and became the 1st Earl of Hardwicke in 1754.[19] Establishing his family in the upper echelons of society was a key concern and he gave particular thought to his children's marriages, especially keen that his eldest son should marry an heiress from 'so noble a Family.'[20] Horace Walpole was particularly put out at the Hardwicke family's rise to power and alliance with 'one of the first families of Britain,' remarking rather acidly, 'what luck the Chancellor has! […] People talk of Fortune's wheel, that is always rolling: troth, my Lord Hardwicke has overtaken her wheel and rolled away with it.'[21] No matter the financial or political advantages of the union, the older generation also had good reason to believe that the young couple was compatible on a personal level too. Philip Yorke possessed a reserved, scholarly disposition, and had also fostered a close circle of intellectuals in his youth. He and his brother Charles had attended Dr Newcome's school in Hackney and then been privately tutored by Dr Samuel Salter, before going onto Benet College (now Corpus Christi), Cambridge, where Salter was a fellow.[22] Even as children, Philip and Charles started a journal, *The Triumvirate,* based on Joseph Addison's *Spectator*, in which they would write philosophical essays on history, literature, and morality. Their father perused and criticised their essays, even contributing a few pieces himself under the name 'Paterculus'.[23] This would anticipate some of the works that the two brothers would write at Cambridge, both *The Philosopher, or Essays on Various Subjects Begun at Cambridge* (1738-1741) and the *Athenian Letters* (1739-1743). These

[19] Peter D.G. Thomas, 'Yorke, Philip, first earl of Hardwicke', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) < https://www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 31 August 2021].
[20] Philip Chesney Yorke, *The Life and Correspondence of Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain* (New York: Octagon Books, 1977)
[21] Horace Walpole, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence,* ed. by W. S. Lewis, 42 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), XXXVII, p. 71 [Horace Walpole to Harry Conway, 5th July 1740].
[22] Dr Newcome's school had a reputation for teaching Whig political principles and was attracted many prominent Whig families, see Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754-1790* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1985), p. 110.
[23] Philip Chesney Yorke, *Life and Correspondence*, pp. 102 - 103.

works will be considered in greater depth in Chapter 2, although Corpus Christi College deserves some brief mention here for its role in fostering this group of writers and intellectuals. These early compositions showcase the Yorke brothers' literary aptitude, but perhaps more significantly, the collaborative aspect of their literary projects would establish a network of editors, antiquaries, historians, and academics. Some in particular would be influential friendships: Thomas Birch (1705-1766) was Philip Yorke's key literary contact in London, and he even facilitated the anonymous publication of an essay that Yorke had written for *The Philosopher,* 'On the Acta Diurna of the Old Romans' which was published in the tenth volume of Edward Cave's *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1740 and described as an 'Ingenious Dissertation.'[24] Yorke also established an inseparable friendship with Daniel Wray (1701-1783), for despite the almost twenty-year age difference between the two men, they shared a fascination for curious books and manuscripts. Wray would later receive Yorke's patronage, becoming his Deputy Teller of the Exchequer in 1745. Wray is an influential figure in the coterie too, as his friendship with Philip Yorke allowed him to offer introductions for aspiring poets seeking patronage, notably Thomas Edwards, Richard Owen Cambridge, and, to some extent, Isaac Hawkins Brown.

Philip Yorke had a minor political career that he carried out with diligence, largely to satisfy his father's ambitions, but he was naturally disinclined to lead a public life. He was elected to the House of Commons for Reigate, Surrey in 1741, and in 1747 he was chosen by the general meeting of the county to stand for Cambridgeshire – costing his father £2000 to ensure his election, which Hardwicke considered a 'monstrous sum […] for an election

[24] 'On the Acta Diurna of the Old Romans', *The Gentleman's Magazine* (London: Edward Cave, 1740), 10, p. iii; Markman Ellis examines this essay and Philip Yorke's other early compositions in '*The English Mercurie Hoax* and the Early History of the Newspaper'. For the correspondence between Yorke and Birch, see Markman Ellis, 'Thomas Birch's "Weekly Letter" (1741-66): Correspondence and History in the Mid-Eighteeth-Century Royal Society', p. 266.

without any opposition.'[25] But Yorke's interests truly lay in scholarship and collecting historical documents. In 1741 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society and in 1744, fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. The shared interest in antiquarianism was a core characteristic of the Wrest circle, and several members were elected members of the Society of Antiquaries: Thomas Birch was elected in 1735, Daniel Wray in 1741, Thomas Edwards in 1745, and John Lawry in 1746. This antiquarian interest will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 in relation to the *Athenian Letters* and the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park. Philip Yorke, possessing a keen interest in collections, would also go on to become one of the founders of the British Museum in 1754.[26]

THE WREST COTERIE AND *WRESTIANA*

The Duke of Kent died only a fortnight after his granddaughter's marriage, leaving her with the title Marchioness Grey and the estate of Wrest Park. In August 1740, Grey seems to have been keen to show her childhood home to her new husband, pleased that 'what he has seen of the garden he admires mightily,' and adding with playful disapproval that 'he has been stealing a walk […] whilst I was dressing, which I did not at all allow of, for I had wanted to be with him every Time he was to see anything in the garden.'[27] This remark gives an early insight into Grey's custodianship of Wrest; clearly, while she was keen to share her family home with her husband (and later her friends), her choice of the verb 'to steal' suggests how far she considered Wrest to be her property, and not that of her husband. It also suggests how far she wished to control the way he interpreted the gardens and share his responses. It has been suggested that she and Yorke would not officially reside at Wrest until 1743 owing to

[25] Stephanie L. Barczewski, 'Yorke, Philip, second earl of Hardwicke', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) < https://www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 31 August 2021].
[26] Anne Goldcar, 'The British Museum and the Virtual Representation of Culture in the Eighteenth Century', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies,* 32.2 (2000): 195-231 (p. 223); A.E. Gunther, 'The Royal Society and the Foundation of the British Museum, 1753-1781', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London,* 33.2 (1979), 207-216 (pp. 213-5).
[27] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fols 1-2 [JG to MG, August 18th 1740].

the debts left behind by the Duke of Kent,[28] but even before this date, Yorke and Grey's friends had begun to collaborate on literary works, and the letters suggest that the newly-wed couple had already invited their friends to Wrest in the summers of 1741 and 1742. In fact, the years from 1740 to 1743 could be seen to denote a transition period as the Cambridge circle merges with the Wrest circle: Yorke would continue to correspond with the Cambridge collaborators on the *Athenian Letters* until 1743, bringing in Catherine Talbot to write the letters of 'Sappho'; while the first compositions in *Wrestiana* are dated 1742. By 1743, Wrest Park has truly become the home of the Wrest coterie. Catherine Talbot's diary from 14th September 1751 provides an insight into how members of the coterie spent their time at Wrest:

> Our days past pretty uniformly in a delightful Place, the Weather was vastly fine, & I lived in a state of studious idleness quite new to me, for I had no earthly thing to do. For a morning & night [I read a] Book I had taken out of their Library Dr Scotts *Christian Life*, which I own I like enormously. […] Our Breakfast Chatty & Cheerful. From 11 to 3 I was generally with my dear Ang [Angelina; Talbot's nickname for Grey]: Walking in those Fine Gardens whch [which] were in high beauty & resting between whiles. Post days with Letters from our best Friends made an agreeable break in our Walks. We read together the Essay on Man at 3 ½ we dined, & Conversed till 5 ½. Then an hour Musick […] then to Tea in the Library, where we sat over our Several Books till supper was brought in at Ten, & Cheerful Char [Charles Yorke] kept us till 11 ½. We laughed over the Follies of Courts many Centuries since buried, or debated the Politics of a hundred years ago. Sometimes on matters of Literature, the Style or Merit of Authors.[29]

Talbot's account suggests how far stays at Wrest afforded both culture and sociability that was not afforded elsewhere in her daily life. It is likely that Jemima Grey herself as the hostess was not always in such a state of 'studious idleness,' but she certainly provided an environment for her friends to indulge in such a state.

Unlike other heterosocial coteries that could be charged with sexual politics,[30] the Wrest coterie – perhaps, in this particular aspect, more akin to literary salons – operated in

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[28] Joyce Godber, *Marchioness Grey,* p. 23.
[29] BL, Add. MS 46690, fols 28^{v}-29^{r}.
[30] See Christine Gerrard, 'The Hillarian Circle: Scorpions, Sexual Politics and Heterosocial Coteries' in *Re-evaluating the Literary Coterie, 1580 – 1830*, pp. 93-109; Stephen Bending examines the tension between

terms of polite sociability, in which the different sexes were seen to complement one another and improve the level of conversation.[31] This is detectable in *Wrestiana*, for in the 'Epistle from Wrest to the ingenious Philemon', there are distinctions between the ladies' and the gentlemen's responses; while the ladies are praised for being more 'poetically inventive', the gentlemen contribute their knowledge of Greek.[32] Similarly, in a letter to Philip Yorke, John Lawry remarked with amusement: 'that the Ladies of Rest were distinguished in an uncommon degree for all excellent accomplishments that ever adorn'd their Sex and quality […] I never was so happy to know 'till your last Letter, where you bid me adieu because it was impossible to attend to the Ladies Conversation and Wrayes [sic] sprightly sallies, and write to me at the same time.'[33] While the letter is evidently playful – a characteristic to which this chapter will return – there is undoubtedly respect for the women's intellect, even if it is deemed comical that their conversation should be intellectually demanding enough to require Yorke's full concentration and prevent him from writing at the same time.

It is also likely that the group was inspired by an earlier coterie at Wrest in the mid-seventeenth century that centred on the heiress of Wrest, Elizabeth Grey (née Talbot). Members of this coterie included the poets Thomas Carew and Samuel Butler, [34] the antiquary John Selden, the scholar Robert Cotton, and the miniaturist Samuel Cooper.[35] In

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intellect and sexuality in the correspondence between Elizabeth Montagu and George Lyttelton in *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens and Eighteenth-Century Culture,* pp. 156-7; Tim Richardson also notes in the Tory coterie around Henrietta Howard at Marble Hill that some members were vying for her affections while others hoped that, as the mistress of Prince George, she would exert political influence, in *Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Landscape Garden*, pp. 247-252.

[31] Amy Prendergast, *Literary Salons across Britain and Ireland in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015); Gary Kelly also observes that 'bluestocking feminism' similarly operated through 'progressive aristocratic' ideals of egalitarian sociability in contrast to traditional cultures of court libertinism, in 'General Introduction: Bluestocking Feminism and Writing in Context', *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), p. xxii.

[32] Private collection, 'Epistle from Wrest to the Ingenious Philemon', *Wrestiana*, fols 20-21 [c. 1744, signed 'P.W.L.' Philip Yorke, Daniel Wray, John Lawry].

[33] BL, Add. MSS 35605, fol. 144^{r} [JL to PY, 21st June 1743].

[34] In 1639 Carew wrote a poem, 'To my Friend G.N. from Wrest', *Poems, with a Maske by Thomas Carew* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1651), p. 116.

[35] Sam Kinchin-Smith, 'The Countess of Kent and a Cookbook', *English Heritage,* <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/wrest-park/history/countess-of-kent> [accessed 29th August 2020].

Wrestiana, John Lawry envisages a scene where the two coteries, past and present, merge in the meeting of Daniel Wray and John Selden. Selden remarks that 'where I was most at ease I was devoted to the severer Muses, and many a Learned Treatise renewed its first Conception in those happy hours which I spent at Wrest,' and the two characters continue to discuss their mutual antiquarian interests.[36] Grey would also read Carew's poem about Wrest, amused at the archaic depictions of 'the hospitable life of the Lord or Lady there, the ample Board spread in the great Hall groaning with the weight of Sirloins, &c, the double Moat round the House & much more.' While Grey considered the poetry itself to be 'bad Verses', she nevertheless took some joy from encountering 'a Description of this Place,'[37] and members of the coterie evidently saw themselves in relation to their predecessors at Wrest. In this respect, the Wrest coterie could be seen to parallel more closely aristocratic country house coteries from the previous century, such as the more well-known Sidney-Herbert circle at Penshurst and Wilton.[38] Indeed, the aristocratic connection to Wrest Park was particularly attractive to aspirational members of the group for the cultural capital that it afforded them, but as this thesis will explore, this also accounts at least in part for the coterie's reluctance to publish its works.[39]

Wrestiana is an important resource, not only for revealing the coterie's interests and the dynamics between members, but also because it indicates when the coterie was at its most

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[36] Private collection, 'Nouveaux Dialogues des Morts & des Vivans', *Wrestiana*, fol. 85 [signed 'L', John Lawry].
[37] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 5 [JG to CT, June 1747].
[38] M.E. Lamb, 'Literary Coteries of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke and William Herbert, Third Earl of Pembroke', *Re-evaluating the Literary Coterie, 1580-1830,* pp. 15-34; H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). For the intellectual significance of the country house in early modern culture, see *The Intellectual Culture of the English Country House, 1500-1700,* ed. by Matthew Dimmock, Andrew Hadfield and Margaret Healy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).
[39] 'Cultural Capital' is a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu to refer to the connection between cultural acquisition and social prestige, and the way in individuals adopt similar behaviours or tastes to the cultural/social elite in order to gain admittance, see *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2010). For an exploration of the way in which aristocratic writers sought to reconcile 'aristocratic manners' and 'commercial print publication', see Markman Ellis, '"An Author in Form": Women Writers, Print Publication, and Elizabeth Montagu's *Dialogues of the Dead*', *ELH,* 79.2 (2012), 417-445 (p. 418).

active. Most of the compositions in *Wrestiana* are dated in the 1740s; there are fifty-eight compositions in this period, compared to a mere six compositions in the 1750s. There is a complete hiatus throughout the 1760s, before eighteen more poems are added in the 1770s. This is not altogether surprising; members' lives were not static, and while most of them were in their twenties in the 1740s; through the 1750s, many of the members had undergone significant life changes that limited the time they could dedicate to writing verses. By 1760, they were approaching middle age and had other life responsibilities. While Yorke and Grey had been childless in the first decade of their marriage, likely affording them the time to pour their energies into entertaining friends and writing on top of their public lives, the births of their daughters in 1751 and 1757 respectively meant that Grey's focus in particular was increasingly turned to child-rearing – a common hindrance to women's intellectual participation.[40] She certainly maintains her intellectual interests, and her letters describing her domestic tours of the country continue to be a valuable resource, but there is a marked shift as her letters focus predominantly on family life. This shift can be detected in the garden design as well; whereas the Mithraic Glade, created between 1747-1751, made literary associations with the coterie's *Athenian Letters*, by the time Capability Brown was introduced to Wrest in the late 1750s, Yorke and Grey were thinking about how to alter the garden so that it might lend itself to family activities such as boating.[41]

It was not only Philip Yorke and Jemima Grey's lives that had changed significantly during this time. Charles Yorke also became increasingly diverted away from the coterie: he

[40] Leonie Hannan discusses how far women's roles as mothers often interrupted their intellectual engagements, in *Women of Letters*, p. 81. It might seem unusual that the couple only had two children, and even then, after over a decade of marriage, but there do not appear to be any records of any other children or miscarriages, unlike Mary Gregory, whose miscarriages and child deaths are discussed in correspondence. See, for example, BL, MS 35360, fol. 127^{v} [CY to PY, 29th May 1744], in which Charles Yorke writes to Philip Yorke that 'I am told L. M. Gregory has had the misfortune to miscarry twice, certainly once; and she is at present not well.' The death of Mary Gregory's infant son in January 1746 is also discussed in BLARS, L30/9a/4, fol. 125 [JG to CT, 4th January 1746] and L30/9a/1, fols 82-3 [JG to MG, 9th January 1746].
[41] Kate Felus, *The Secret Life of the Georgian Garden*, p. 69.

was ambitious to advance his political career and appeared to be quickly rising to prominence, becoming solicitor-general to the Prince of Wales in 1754, and solicitor-general in 1756.[42] Not only did the demands of his career limit the time he could devote to sociable writing with friends, but, as this chapter will explore, it is also likely that the *Canons of Criticism* battle between his friend, William Warburton, and his brother's friend, Thomas Edwards, caused some tension within the group. Edwards himself, along with Catherine Talbot, began to gravitate towards Samuel Richardson's writing circle; perhaps wanting to continue their literary projects while their friends in the Wrest coterie were increasingly preoccupied with politics and raising families.[43]

There is a miscellaneous collection of the verses from the late 1750s in the 'Commonplace Book', written by Charles Yorke, but it is likely that these were never intended for *Wrestiana*.[44] The later compositions that appear in *Wrestiana* from the 1770s consist of sociable verses, inscriptions for the Gothic Tower at Wimpole and the Bath House at Wrest, and political satire, predominantly written by Philip Yorke, Daniel Wray and Richard Owen Cambridge, but does also include the notable name of the poet laureate, William Whitehead.[45] While *Wrestiana* is undoubtedly an important document for understanding the coterie, a separate study would be required to examine the manuscript in full, and it is beyond the remit of this thesis to undertake such a task here. As this study is

[42] John Canon, 'Yorke, Charles', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) < https://www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 31 August 2021].
[43] Edwards's increasingly frequent correspondence with Samuel Richardson can be seen in his letters, from 25th January 1748, in MS Bodl 1011, fol. 103; Betty Schellenberg discusses the connection between the Wrest circle and Richardson's coterie in *Literary Coteries,* pp. 44 – 59.
[44] Unlike the sociable, mock-serious compositions in *Wrestiana,* some of the poems in the 'Commonplace Book' are particularly private in nature. For example, 'Sonnet' is an elegy for a deceased child, in New Haven, Beinecke Library, Osborn c. 135 fol. 27; it was likely for Charles Yorke's first-born daughter who died unexpectedly in September 1756; he reflects on his grief in a letter to William Warburton, BL Add. MS 35404, fol. 119 [CY to WW, 20th September 1756].
[45] Whitehead is mentioned in the earlier compositions, largely as a successful poet who inspires the young Charles Yorke, but he does compose 'Inscription for the Cold Bath at Wrest', in private collection, *Wrestiana*, fol. 162.

particularly concerned with the coterie in the years 1740 to 1760, I will only consider the earlier compositions up to 1760, although Chapter 3 will touch on the garden inscriptions that feature in the manuscript in the 1770s and how this links to the surviving members and their later lives. By comparing the sociable verses in *Wrestiana* with the correspondence between members, this chapter will uncover the compositional conditions and literary culture of the Wrest coterie at the height of its activity.

'OFT, OUR BEST MUSE, SHE VERSE INSPIRES': GREY'S SIGNIFICANCE IN THE WREST COTERIE

Grey herself did not contribute to *Wrestiana*, which may seem curious given the enthusiastic involvement of her female peers, and she would surely have had the opportunity if she had so wished. Grey was evidently well-read herself, often reading books at the same time as her friends so that they could exchange ideas about the texts in their letters. Certainly, recent criticism has shed light on Grey's role as a literary critic, and as Chapter 4 will demonstrate, Grey possessed a keen critical eye when she visited other country house gardens. Yet, this is not to say that she was redundant in the coterie. Far from it, she was an integral figure within it as hostess, muse, and sometimes even interlocutor.[46] As Catherine Talbot's earlier description of Wrest suggests, Grey ensured that her guests could enjoy a state of 'studious idleness.' Her nickname, 'Graia', is both a pun on her surname, Grey, but also links her to the goddess of mother earth itself, further cementing her connection to both the gardens and the grounds of Wrest. It is also significant that Wrest was Grey's family inheritance (Yorke

[46] In this respect, Grey's role is more akin to *salonnières* in the French literary salon, rather than the Bluestocking model in which the hostess was often a literary critic and writer herself, see Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, eds, 'Introduction: A Bluestocking Historiography', *Library Quarterly,* 65.172 (2002), 1-9 (p. 4); Elizabeth Eger, *Bluestockings: Women of Reason*, p. 60; Nicole Pohl, '"Perfect Reciprocity": Salon Culture and Epistolary Conversations', p. 145.

would not inherit Wimpole until his father's death in 1764), and her personal attachment to Wrest is evident when she writes to her aunt in 1743, declaring that:

> My Attachment is by no means lessen'd by above Three Years Absence […] But it is now again my home. It is not only returning to the Country & a Country Life (which I love everywhere) but in the only Place I am fond enough of to make those Words peculiarly charming, to the only Place that can heighten my Enjoyment of my Friends.[47]

Grey's natural inclination to bring friends together at her family home must have had a considerable part to play in nurturing the coterie. In another letter, she envisages a scheme of inviting her friends to paint the gardens 'in Vacuna's Shades' and assemble 'all the Beaux-Esprits of my Acquaintance to make Verses upon you in the Employment.'[48] Her role as hostess and muse is suggested in the coterie's composition 'Horace Book II, Ode XVI' in *Wrestiana*:

> Meanwhile thy Bards Vacuna's Fame
> Embosoms in the fragrant shade
> Our balmy sleep, our flowing strain,
> Nor restless hopes nor fears invade:
>
> Oft Graia Snowy Curd supplies,
> Oft, our best Muse, she Verse inspires:
> These Joys our lot, and to despise,
> The W— [Wrestian] Wits and B— [Bedford] Squires.[49]

As these two stanzas suggest, Wrest Park provided a private retreat for the coterie to meet, its 'fragrant shade' offering an escape from the 'restless hopes' and 'fears', while Jemima Grey herself was considered its Muse. This is not to overlook the extent to which country house gardens could occupy an ambiguous space between public and private,[50] and as Chapter 3 will explore, the private significance of the Mithraic Glade to the coterie was some attempt to keep the coded allusions in the garden private from the wider world of antiquaries and

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[47] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fol. 4 [JG to MG, May 8th 1743].
[48] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 69 [JG to CT, June 2nd 1748].
[49] Private collection, 'Horace Book II. Ode XVI', *Wrestiana,* fol. 57 ['P. C. W.' Philip Yorke, Charles Yorke, Daniel Wray].
[50] This ambiguity is explored in Tom Williamson's *Polite Landscapes,* pp. 110-111; and Jocelyn Anderson, *Touring and Publicizing England's Country Houses*, p. 8.

intellectuals. Nevertheless, the fact that the coterie is embosomed 'in the fragrant shade' of 'Vacuna' indicates how far the coterie depicted Wrest as a place of private retreat, even though in reality, the house and gardens were accessible to polite members of the public.

In fact, the coterie seems to have been particularly charmed by the depiction of aristocratic country house culture in James Thomson's *The Castle of Indolence* (1748), which members discussed at length in their letters. *The Castle of Indolence* was based on the literary circle around George Lord Lyttelton at Hagley, and although the poem was started in 1733-4 as a private literary joke that teased the poet's friends for their idle country house lifestyle, Thomson made later additions in the 1740s so that it became a Spenserian allegory conveying his political opposition to Walpole.[51] Interestingly, when Grey discusses the poem in her letters to Mary Gregory and Catherine Talbot, she does not make any reference to the political allusions. As Chapter 4 will explore, it is likely that the oppositional politics that had been so prevalent in the 1730s and early 1740s were no longer as pertinent by the late 1740s. The aspect of the poem that Grey particularly focuses on is the depiction of a country house retreat. She notes that 'I think the Author loves it so much himself he has play'd Booty in his Descriptions of it, which are quite enchanting […] I fear I should have borne no good will to the busy meddling Knight that had disenchanted me.'[52] Her observation reveals much about her attitude towards the country house lifestyle and the companionship there; suggesting how far she viewed country life as an escape from the outside world. She adds, 'I really think it is dangerous to read in the country where your inclinations are so tranquilised & so averse to Business & interruptions.'[53] Yet Grey also appears to have had a personal connection to the Hagley coterie through George Lyttelton, who had visited the previous summer to advise on

[51] Christine Gerrard, 'The Castle of Indolence and the Opposition to Walpole, *The Review of English Studies,* 41.161 (1990), 45-64.
[52] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fol. 162 [JG to MG, June 1748].
[53] Ibid.

the placement of the altar and root-house. [54] She certainly detects some of the private allusions in the poem, remarking that 'The Character of Thomson himself was wrote by Mr. Lyttelton. I don't know how any of the others or how Quin's [the actor, James Quin] came in,' indicating that Lyttelton himself might have given her some hints about the poem. At the point when Jemima Grey is writing to Mary Gregory, the *Castle of Indolence* had just been published as a large, expensive edition, and it is likely that is the copy she refers to here, but it is possible that she had seen the poem in manuscript through George Lyttelton, or at least known of it before it was published. [55] In any case, *The Castle of Indolence* appears to have inspired a recurring motif of idle country retreat in the coterie's depictions of Wrest, for Catherine Talbot writing to Elizabeth Carter in 1751 would declare that 'I am here in an enchanted Castle, with no one earthly thing to do, no one interruption of business, real or pretended […] the most delightful groves to wander in all day, and a library that will carry one as far as ever one chuses [chooses] to travel in an evening.'[56] In all these depictions, Wrest is both a geographical and cerebral escape from the demands of public life.

Jemima Grey also had a significant role as interlocutor, facilitating the exchange of compositions even when her friends were at a distance from Wrest. She particularly kept Catherine Talbot and Mary Gregory abreast of the latest compositions produced by her guests in the library at Wrest and encouraged them to send their own compositions in return. For example, on 20th August 1747, Grey wrote to Catherine Talbot, jokingly despairing of the bad taste evidenced in their friends' latest craze for bams,[57] acrostics and anagrams:

> the truth is they [the poems] are so degenerate as to be almost lost to Shame. You can't imagine what a strange way we live in, the poor Old House is haunted with Ghosts in the

[54] Grey recalls Lyttelton's visit in BLARS, L30/9a/1, fols 142-3 [JG to MG, June 11th 1747].
[55] William Shenstone wrote to Lady Luxborough on 25th September 1748, saying he had received a copy of *The Castle of Indolence* after saying he had waited 'three months, to buy it in a smaller edition', in *The Letters of William Shenstone*, ed. by Duncan Mallam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1939), p. 126.
[56] *A Series of Letters between Mrs Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot,* ed. by Montagu Pennington (London: F.C. and J Rivington, 1800), p. 51 [CT to EC, 24th October 1751].
[57] See Introduction, footnote 27 for a definition of 'Bam'.

> Shape of Bams, it is quite a magic circle. People are conjur'd hither from all Parts of the Globe, & nobody is sure what Compositions Writings or Drawings they may have set their hands to. Even in the Garden you Stumble over Card Letters as you walk, nay! I begin to fear our very Soil is so corrupted it will bear nothing for the future but an Any-Gram or a Cross Stick […] They indeed flourish, & were you more indulgent to them, I could have sent you as Choisi & pretty a Nosegay as ever you saw.[58]

It is perhaps also telling that Grey envisions the soil of Wrest itself literally flourishing from the library's labours to provide a 'nosegay' of poems. Although this is a common literary trope, there is an inextricable connection between the literature and the gardens that the ground itself should become imbued with literary associations. Yet Grey's correspondence also provides some insight into the compositional process itself. Writing to Mary Gregory, Grey observes:

> As to the kind of ingenuity in Fashion I can't say much in its Honour, & you will think us much sunk from the Days of the Borlaciad when I tell you Anagrams & Acrostics have been (in their first State of Card-Letters) the great Employment of the Ladies after Dinner & such Idle Times, & putting them into Verse of the Gem'men. Several Names have been very luckily hit off; one upon Miss Talbot has produced some very excellent Verses in Return.[59]

Evidently, while Grey herself appears not to have put her name to any of the compositions, she had an integral role in sustaining the literary collaborations by acting as the interlocutor between her house guests and friends who were at a distance. The 'Ladies' in this quotation likely refer to Grey's sisters'-in-law; in Talbot's final retort, she refers to 'Peggy' [Margaret Yorke, later Heathcote] and 'Eliza' [Elizabeth Anson].[60]

SOCIABLE VERSES AND SERIOUS PURSUITS

Some words must be said on the role of playfulness in the coterie's verses, and the way this is sometimes at divergence with members' serious academic interests. The conceit of 'false-wit' appears to have caused some amusement in the coterie, especially after the mock-heroic 'The

[58] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fols 13-14. [JG to CT, August 20th 1747].
[59] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fol. 144 [JG to CT, August 30th 1747].
[60] Private collection, 'Stanzas in answer to all the preceding False-Wit', *Wrestiana,* fol. 113 [signed 'T', Catherine Talbot].

Borlaciad' that satirised the 'High-Borlace' Club in Oxford,[61] or even the *Athenian Letters*, conceived at Cambridge as a scholarly pursuit. In 'Stanzas in answer to all the preceding False-Wit', Talbot despairs of the 'Acrostick, Anagram, Rondeau. – / Vacuna's Children fall'n so Low!' dramatically picturing:

> The Leaden Wings Lo Dullness spreads
> O'er fair Vacuna's Lawrell'd shades,
> Whose Echo's now no more
> With Greek Sonorous, All repeat
> Quibbles with Iteration sweet,
> And Laughters empty roar.[62]

Recent work has been done to argue for the literary merit of these kinds of sociable verses. Significantly, Kathleen Keown's doctoral thesis, 'Sociable Productions: Women's Poetry 1730-60', has reassessed the significance of sociable verse, arguing that this, as a socially accepted pastime for women, provided aspirational individuals the means to obtain cultural capital by reading or writing it.[63] Keown argues that while this verse form was denigrated in the eighteenth-century, the fact that it was printed suggests that it did appeal to some eighteenth-century readers and could bring literary or professional advantage to women who chose to publish.[64] In the case of the Wrest circle, its disinclination to print suggests that this verse form was perhaps employed for the cultural capital and 'aura' of aristocratic connections rather than for any professional purposes.[65] Yet there is clearly a tension between

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[61] The 'High Borlace' was a Tory and Jacobite Club in Oxford, a jovial and social club that met frequently at the King's Head; it was patronised by the county families and also elected a Lady Patroness, see A. Hamilton Gibbs, *Rowlandson's Oxford* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1911), pp. 74; 81; Eleanor Chance, Christina Colvin, et. al., 'Social and Cultural Activities' in *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 4, the City of Oxford* (London: Victoria County History, 1979), pp. 425-441. In the 'Borlaciad', the coterie tries to nominate Catherine Talbot, 'Sappho' as the patroness to oppose the 'dullness and Toryism' of the society. Private collection, 'The Borlaciad', *Wrestiana*, fol. 22 [c. 1744, signed 'G. P. W.', likely Mary Gregory, Philip Yorke, Daniel Wray].

[62] Private collection, 'Stanzas in answer to all the preceding False-Wit', *Wrestiana,* fol. 115 [signed 'T', Catherine Talbot].

[63] Kathleen Keown, 'Sociable Productions: Women's Poetry 1730-1760', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2018).

[64] Ibid., p. 8.

[65] Betty Schellenberg discusses the 'aura' of aristocratic coteries in 'Coterie Culture, the Print Trade, and the Emergence of the Lake Tour', pp. 210; 214.

the group's pursuit of scholarship and the conviviality of sociable writing. Talbot's allusion to the goddess 'Dulness' from Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* suggests that the coterie, as in Pope's poem, are on the cusp of slipping into stupidity and poor writing. It is possible that Talbot's allusion to the *Dunciad* also carries connotations of Scriblerian scepticism towards pedantic learning, given the way in which the coterie itself frequently parodies the pursuit of scholarship. As Chapter 3 will explore, this is made manifest particularly in the Mithraic Altar, the false antiquity that would be erected in the gardens at Wrest the following year, which was particularly intended to mock visitors with pretences to learning. Yet Talbot's poem particularly suggests the difficulty that members of the coterie sometimes faced, whether they took themselves seriously as writers and scholars, or whether they satirised their academic and literary pursuits in the form of intellectual jokes. The Yorke brothers in particular seem to have struggled to reconcile their own private literary ambitions with the family expectation that they should pursue political careers. In the 'Stanzas to […] false wit,' Talbot even suggests that Philip Yorke's public, political concerns were inimical to true literary wit and genius, teasing that 'Philips Brow/ With Publick Cares is wrinkled Now: / Ingenius [sic] Mirth forgot.'[66]

One might argue that the mock-seriousness in the coterie's compositions attempts to reconcile members' literary aspirations with the constraints attached to their class and political positions. There is a clear tension when some members flirt with the possibility of publication and even position themselves as the successors of key literary figures, while also setting themselves apart from the tastes of the commercial print trade. While at Cambridge, John Lawry wrote to Philip Yorke about printing *The Philosopher* – a manuscript containing a series of *Spectator*-style essays that the Yorke brothers, Lawry himself, and another of their

[66] Private collection, 'Stanzas in answer to all the preceding False-Wit', *Wrestiana*, fol. 112 [signed 'T', Catherine Talbot].

tutors, Henry Heaton, wrote in the late 1730s and early 1740s. Speculating that his cousin had quarrelled with his printer, Lawry asked whether Yorke would grant a patent to 'print the Philosophers only' in the same way that 'Addison & Steele encourag'd Tonson and Pope was in some measure the making of Bernard Lintot.'[67] While *The Philosopher* would remain in manuscript form, this comment nonetheless suggests how far the authors wrote it with famous publications and literary figures in mind. Furthermore, the coterie clearly had enough knowledge of the commercial print trade to satirise it in its private compositions. In 'Fragment of Le Libraire a la Mode' in *Wrestiana*, there is an imagined dialogue between Robert Dodsley, who was a popular printer at the time, and Charles Yorke, as they discuss publishing the *Athenian Letters*. Significantly, Dodsley was never the printer of the *Athenian Letters*; it was in fact James Bettenham who was entrusted with printing the mere twelve copies for private circulation. However, imagining Dodsley as the printer allows the coterie to situate itself and its compositions in relation to the commercial literary trade. The 'Fragment' even imagines that Dodsley compares the coterie to famed literary circles and writers:

> D. [Dodsley]
>
> Ay Sir such a set of Authors as these set up your Jonsons and your Buckleys, you really put me in mind of the Spectators Club, and to say a bold Word, but let it go no further, I question whether Pope, Warburton, and Allen, could surpass you.
>
> C.Y. [Charles Yorke]
>
> I hope it will prove a Good Job for you Mr Dodsley […] If you send it immediately to the Press, We may have it for our Country amusement against the long Vacation.

While the coterie, on the one hand, is compared to well-known literary clubs, the fact that Charles Yorke insists that the manuscript should be printed for 'our Country amusement against the long Vacation' suggests how far the coterie's outputs were intended to be enjoyed

[67] The matter is not brought up again and *The Philosopher* remains in manuscript form; BL, Add MS 35605, fol. 40^{v} [3rd March 1740, JL to PY].

privately, both at a geographical distance from the urban sociability of London but also at a cerebral distance from their political public lives. In fact, in the 'Fragment', Dodsley highlights his concern the *Athenian Letters* is not suited to public tastes:

> The Town indeed has had enough of Egypt, in our two late Folios, but Sir I doubt the Letters about Painting, Statuary Delphi, and Divination will do little better […] I wish Sir there had been a few more Love Letters, Those from a Nun to a Cavalier sell rarely.[68]

This extract shows the authors' acute awareness that their project would not be a commercial success. However, there is a sense of pride that their private, elite tastes depart from the popular, sensationalist and print-orientated tastes of the public. Thus, despite the coterie's awareness of, and engagement with public print culture, it is significant that its compositions remained firmly as 'country amusements' to be enjoyed at Wrest.

'TAKE CARE MR WARBURTON DOES NOT HOOK YOU INTO THE NEXT EDITION OF THE DUNCIAD': LITERARY INFAMY AND THE *CANONS OF CRITICISM*

While the Yorke brothers had reservations about appearing in print themselves, there were sometimes tensions when other members of the coterie sought their own literary reputations. This reached a culminating point when Thomas Edwards launched a scathing attack on William Warburton's editorial practices in *A Supplement to Mr. Warburton's Edition of Shakespear* (1748), which was republished as the *Canons of Criticism* in 1750 and thereafter went through several editions. Warburton was the infamous editor of William Shakespeare's works and Alexander Pope's *Dunciad,* whose verbosity had rendered him the subject of some satire in the literary world as 'a dealer in many words.'[69] Edwards seems to have been encouraged by Philip Yorke, for he borrowed Yorke's copy so that 'I might insert into the

[68] Private collection, 'Fragment of Le Libraire a la Mode', *Wrestiana*, fol. 18 [c. 1744, signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].
[69] Zachary Grey, *A Word or Two of Advice to William Warburton: A Dealer in Many Words* (London: J.L., 1746).

blank leaves of mine such amendments as I should like' and expressed doubts that he feared himself 'unequal to the task you require of me.'[70] Edwards was certainly cautious in attacking 'the great Judge of Shakespear,' aware that it could not only affect his friendship with Charles Yorke on account of the latter's friendship with Warburton, but also invite a target on his own back, adding that: 'I find it dangerous to touch him [Warburton] with a careless or presumptuous hand, and who ever dare either way profane him, do it at their very great peril.'[71] Edwards had cause to be concerned. As Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger argue, due to the way in which critical practices were shaped by polite conversation and conduct, it was seen as openly hostile to an author to publish criticism of their work beyond private coterie circles.[72] Such public criticism had to be justified, either on the grounds that the author of the text in question had not adhered to the criticisms of friends before publishing their work, that the critical response to a text was shared by a group of authoritative readers, or that the author of the criticism was writing in their own defence.[73] In this respect, one might assume Edwards only took the risk of publishing his attack on Warburton in the knowledge that he had the support of Philip Yorke and other members within the Wrest coterie.

The general opinion of Warburton is rather poor in *Wrestiana* – while acknowledging his literary significance, the authors seemed to have disliked Warburton's 'usual air of Superiority'.[74] In 'Confessions du Chevalier de Conte Morale', Charles Yorke's friendships with numerous 'Bel-esprits' from the literary world are compared to dalliances with

[70]Bodleian, Bodl 1011, fol. 23 [TE to PY, 27th November 1747].
[71] Ibid., fols. 24-5 [TE to PY, 27th November 1747].
[72] Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), p. 20.
[73] Ibid., pp. 86-8.
[74] Private collection, 'Supplement to the General Dictionary', *Wrestiana,* fol. 9 [c. 1743, signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].

mistresses that draw him away from his wife, the law.[75] The most prominent of these is 'the shining figure the Baronne du Grandir', William Warburton, who is depicted as Charles's most ardent mistress.[76] Despite the deliberate comedy in depicting the formidable critic as a paramour, this perhaps provides some insight into the coterie's view of Warburton:

> Her Gallantrys were not numerous, but from the Warmth of her temper they were never long a Secret in the Beaumonde: and from the same turn the lest Coolness or even Equivocal behaviour in her Lovers threw her into Public Expressions of Dislike and Aversion which being in livened with a good deal of Satyrical Wit, not only brought upon her the Resentment of the Injured, but of many Indifferent people; whom she met in Visits; She was even feared by several, who had never spoke to her in their lives.[77]

While Charles Yorke's friendship with Warburton was close, it is perhaps an overstatement to suggest that Edwards' attacks 'strained' his relationship with Charles Yorke,[78] when Charles Yorke himself was cautious about the mercurial temper of 'Reverend Furioso.'[79] On a separate occasion, while he was still an undergraduate at Cambridge, Charles Yorke had privately agreed with a pamphlet criticising Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses* (1738), but feared making his opinion known, acutely aware that Warburton would be 'offended at any conduct in me, that looked like giving countenance to a thing published agst [against] him, which is likely to bear so much credit, and make so much Noise.'[80] While Charles Yorke – perhaps deliberately – appears to have refrained from making any comment on Edwards' *Canons of Criticism* in his letters to Warburton, this earlier comment implies that he trod the ground quite carefully around the fearsome critic. Furthermore, Charles must have

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[75] Private collection, 'Confessions du Chevalier de x__ Conte Morale', *Wrestiana*, fol. 38 [c. 1744, signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].
[76] Ibid., fol. 37.
[77] Ibid.
[78] David E. Shuttelton and John A. Dussinger, 'General Introduction', *Correspondence with George Cheyne and Thomas Edwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. lxi.
[79] BL, MS 35360, fol. 44^{v} [CY to PY, 2nd June 1741]; the occasion of this remark was when Warburton entered a dispute with Henry Coventry, a friend of the Yorke brothers, over whether Coventry had plagiarised the material Warburton was going to publish in *Divine Legation* for his own *Philemon to Hydaspes* (London: 1736-44), see Adam Jacob Levin, 'Coventry, Henry', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <https://www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 31 August 2021].
[80] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 58^{r} [CY to PY, c. 1740].

gathered from *Wrestiana* that Warburton was unpopular among his friends, and possibly deliberately remained at a distance to prevent any further disagreement. In fact, it seems that the Yorke brothers, between them, were able to diplomatically handle the contending wits. Daniel Wray would write to congratulate Philip Yorke that: 'Edwards indulges on venison at Wrest while Warburton is entertained with Whitings at Lincoln's Inn; whichever side prevails, your family is secure; Nor is the difference of the fare not attended to, just in proportion to the respective merits of the Canons and the Dunciad Notes.'[81]

Despite receiving Philip Yorke's support, Edwards did not manage to escape Warburton's vengeful pen, finding himself written into the notes of Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* that his adversary was in the process of editing. In these notes, Warburton questioned Edwards' status as a gentleman and described him as a 'Grub-Street Critic run to Seed.'[82] Yet Edwards was clearly not alone in his criticism of Warburton, and Catherine Talbot seems to have shared his opinion. In a letter to Talbot, Grey teases her for rising 'higher & presum[ing] to attack Mr. Pope & Mr Warburton,' adding that 'whatever Impunity your first attempt might be attended, I will not insure you when you venture upon the second. Take Care Mr Warburton does not hook you into the next Edition of the Dunciad.'[83] In fact, as well as Catherine Talbot, Edwards seems to have also gained the support of Jemima Grey and Elizabeth Anson in this matter, for in the 1753 edition of the *Canons of Criticism*, he opens with *Sonnets to Three Ladies Sent with the Book.* While their names are censored, there is evidence that these poems were composed at Wrest, and likely refer to the ladies of the Wrest coterie. Indeed, in the first sonnet addressed to Jemima Grey, Edwards writes:

> While I with Hasard of my own good name
> Like *Calidore* pursue the Blatant Beast
> In dear defense of Ladies' honest fame,

[81] BL, Add. MS 35401, fols 140^{r}-140^{v} [DW to PY, 18th November 1750].
[82] William Warburton, ed, *The Dunciad: Complete in Four Books,* 4 vols (London: J. and P Knapton, 1749), IV, pp. 256-7.
[83] BLARS, L30/9a/6, fols 64-5 [JG to CT, 1st August 1751].

Which his foul mouth profanely taints with blame,

Jemima Grey must have read this sonnet when Edwards was staying at Wrest in the summer of 1751, for when she suggested to Catherine Talbot that Edwards should attempt to write a vindication of the ladies as represented in Pope's work, she added that 'he has already professed himself you know in Sonnet armed like Sir Calidore in pursuit of the Blatant Beast "to vindicate dear Ladies injur'd Fame," & I think it is a part of his Province.'[84] It turns out that that summer Edwards was 'perusing Mr Birch's new Edition of Spenser' at Wrest Park, and so, as this chapter will later uncover, the allusions to the *Faerie Queene* were particularly apt.[85] Therefore, while members of the coterie did not strictly put their names publicly to the *Canons of Criticism*, the fact that the ladies of Wrest were addressed in the opening of it would indicate that Edwards was not alone in this venture. Indeed, the sonnets addressed to the ladies of Wrest could be seen to subtly advertise his membership of an exclusive and select coterie, which thus added authority to his criticism of Warburton.

While Edwards evidently had reservations about publicly criticising Warburton, one might argue that it was a strategic attack. The fact that the *Canons of Criticism* went through six editions by the time of Edwards's death in 1758 testifies to its popularity, and future editions gave Edwards further opportunities to publish his sonnets, and in effect launch his literary career. By the summer of 1748, only months after the first edition was published, Edwards was overwhelmed by letters from booksellers, and wrote to Wray, 'the Guardian of my literary fame', to enquire whether he, Cambridge, Hawkins Browne, and George Lyttelton could review which of his poems 'are worth publishing.'[86] Clearly, Edwards's connections through the Wrest coterie were invaluable for his literary career. Other literary

[84] BLARS, L30/9a/6, fol. 67 [JG to CT, 1st August 1751].
[85] Ibid.
[86] Bodleian, Bodl 1011, fol. 37 [TE to DW, July 25th 1748].

figures also wrote in Edwards's defence: Mark Akenside's *Ode VII. To Thomas Edwards, Esq. On the late Edition of Mr. Pope's Works* (1751) urged Edwards to ignore the 'fierce envy and calumnious hate' and take up 'SPENSER's lyre again […] and let thy pious strain/ For POPE's dishonour'd shade complain.'[87] In fact, Edwards's name was placed so frequently alongside Warburton's, that Samuel Johnson felt the need to defend the latter, stating that:

> he [Edwards] has given him [Warburton] some smart hits to be sure; but there is no proportion between the two men; they must not be named together. A fly, Sir, may sting a stately horse and make him wince; but one is but an insect, and the other is a horse still.[88]

THE MID-CENTURY SPENSERIAN REVIVAL

This chapter has already traced some of the Spenserian allusions within the Wrest circle: the coterie's interest in Thomson's *Castle of Indolence,* Thomas Edwards's references to Sir Calidore from *The Faerie Queene*, and Thomas Birch's edition of *The Faerie Queene* in 1751. Richard Owen Cambridge, albeit more of a peripheral member of the coterie at this point, had also attracted some fame as an imitator of Spenser in his *Archimage* (1748). It would be remiss not to discuss these works in relation to the mid-century Spenserian revival, and therefore some brief overview of Spenser in the first half of the eighteenth-century is necessary here.

Edmund Spenser's work had begun to fall out of fashion by the last decade of the seventeenth century, and by the turn of the century, eighteenth-century readers tended to prefer the works of John Milton or William Shakespeare. While *The Faerie Queene* was considered one of the classics, Spenser's antiquated style divided opinions and made him

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[87] Mark Akenside, *An Ode to the Late Thomas Edwards, Esq; Written in the Year M.DCC.LI* (London: J. Dodsley, 1766).
[88] James Boswell, *The life of Dr. Samuel Johnson*, ed. by F. Thomas (London: printed for the editor, 1792), p. 306; Vedder Gilbert, 'The Altercations of Thomas Edwards with Samuel Johnson', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 51.3 (1952), 326–335 (p. 326).

appear inaccessible. The shift in how Spenser was regarded can be seen most clearly in the criticism of Joseph Addison, who famously disparaged Spenser in 1694 as 'warm'd with Poetick Rage,/ In Antick Tales amus'd a Barb'rous Age.'[89] Addison would later change his opinion of Spenser, for after reading *The Faerie Queene* while on the Grand Tour in Rome in 1710, he was charmed with what he perceived to be the Gothic or 'Fairy Way of Writing'.[90] The Reverend Henry Felton, writing in 1709, regarded Spenser as 'antiqued too,' but he believed there was charm in his 'antique verse.' [91] Regarded as an example of the Gothic, English poetic style, Spenser was soon appropriated by different political factions to represent their understanding of English values. As Christine Gerrard has shown, Spenser's 'double-sided political profile' as both Elizabeth I's royal panegyrist and a critic of court corruption meant that he was 'malleable to political manipulation.'[92] Matthew Prior, one of the first eighteenth-century imitators of Spenser, used the monarchist associations of Spenser to curry favour with Queen Anne in *An ode, humbly inscrib'd to the Queen* (1706), which paralleled the Duke of Marlborough's victory at Ramillies with the military glory of the Elizabethan golden age. However, after Queen Anne's death, the poet Samuel Croxhall subverted Prior's poem in *An Ode Humbly Inscribed to the King* (1714), in which he reappropriated Spenser to represent his Whig ideology of a peaceful, refined Britain; the focus on the native, pastoral aspects of Spenser's poetry soon came to be aligned with Whig values and ideology.[93]

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[89] Joseph Addison, 'An Account of the Greatest English Poets,' ed. by John Dryden in *The Annual Miscellany for the Year 1694* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1694), pp. 317-27.
[90] Joseph Addison, 'The Fairy Way of Writing', The Spectator (1 July 1712), 419.
[91] Henry Felton, *A Dissertation on Reading the Classics, and Forming a Just Style. Written in the year 1709.* (London: J. Bowyer, 1730), p. 226.
[92] Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole.* See also Hazel Wilkinson's *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book*, which highlights the way different volumes of Spenser were appropriated to reflect different ideologies, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
[93] David Hill Radcliffe remarks that writers who highlighted Spenser's native primitivism tended to be Whig supporters, in *Spenser, a Reception History* (London: Camden House, 1996), p. 37.

Yet by the 1730s, Spenser had been appropriated once again by the Patriot opposition that frequently met at Lord Cobham's Stowe. William Kent, then the head gardener at Stowe, was inspired by Spenser's picturesque descriptions for his designs in order to draw out the Gothic allusions.[94] In a similar vein, James Thomson's *The Castle of Indolence* borrowed the allegories from *The Faerie Queene* to satirise Walpole's government, and Gilbert West depicted the increasingly unpopular Robert Walpole as the enchanter Archimago, who 'rule[s] with hidden Influence the Land.' [95] It is possible that Richard Owen Cambridge composed his *Archimage* to make similar political allusions. Nevertheless, when Cambridge's poem was published in 1748, it appears not to have had the same traction as earlier imitations of Spenser and perhaps any political allusion was no longer pertinent. Indeed, if there were clear political associations with Spenser in the 1730s, by the 1750s, I would argue the political associations had begun to fade. While Spenser's poetry continued to represent a native English past that was pertinent to the imaginative visions associated with the picturesque, this was a shifting concept. For instance, George Lyttelton's neighbour at Hagley, William Shenstone, who famously imitated Spenser in *The School Mistress* (1737), seems to have preferred Spenser for the simple imaginative and pastoral value,[96] marking sections in his copy of *The Faerie Queene* of landscapes and gardens that he thought were especially 'Picturesque.'[97] One might argue that Spenser was increasingly associated with the aesthetic and picturesque, rather than the political.

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[94] Hazel Wilkinson, *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book,* pp. 108 – 110.
[95] Gilbert West, *A Canto of the Fairy Queen* (London: G. Hawkins, 1739); David Fairer, '*The Faerie Queene* and Eighteenth-century Spenserianism', in *A Companion to Romance from Classical to Contemporary,* ed. by Corinne Saunders (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 197-215 (p. 202).
[96] Stephen Bending suggests that Shenstone's garden at the Leasowes had difficulty in justifying itself as a country retirement on the grounds that Shenstone himself had scarcely ventured into politics, in 'Uneasy Sensations: Shenstone, Retirement and Fame', in *Arcadian Greens Rural: The Leasowes, Hagley, Enville Little Sparta*, ed. by Patrick Eyres (= *New Arcadian Journal,* 53/54 (2002)), 20-40 (p. 32); Hazel Wilkinson states that Shenstone had 'mined' Spenser for its picturesque descriptions, but failed to follow the plot, in *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book*, p. 83.
[97] Shenstone's copy of Hughes's 1715 edition is in New Haven, Beinecke Library, Osborn PC 234.

At the point when Thomas Birch was editing the *Faerie Queene* in 1751 and Thomas Edwards was seeking to revive Spenser himself, both figures were caught between competing ideologies about what Spenser should represent. This was not helped by the fact that Birch's copy was to be illustrated with William Kent's drawings, and this was problematic for a number of reasons. Not only did the focus on Kent's illustrations rather eclipse Birch's original contributions to scholarship as the editor, but it also added a layer of outdated political inferences that jarred against the purpose of this edition, which was to present a full-length copy of Spenser in contrast to the miscellanies of Spenser that had prevailed in the first half of the century.[98] When Horace Walpole purchased a copy of the 1751 edition, he made no reference to Birch, rather remarking his disappointment that the illustrations constituted the 'most execrable performance you ever beheld.' [99] In fact, Walpole is more concerned about Kent's rendering of the landscape than Spenser himself, remarking his distaste for the 'awkward knights, scrambling Unas, hills tumbling down themselves, no variety of prospect, and three or four perpetual spruce firs.'[100] Given how far Kent's name had become inextricably linked to oppositional politics, his illustrations were loaded with political associations.[101] It is possible that Horace Walpole (son of Robert Walpole, the 'Archimage') deliberately focuses on critiquing the landscape as offering 'no variety of prospect' in order to suggest that Kent's garden designs were obsolete and unfashionable. By extension, his comment further implies that the politics associated with Kent are also outdated and irrelevant, even ridiculous.

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[98] As Hazel Wilkinson has shown, this edition demonstrated a move away from the modernised, miscellaneous versions of *The Faerie Queene* that had been popular in the first half of the century by presenting a full-length edition that emphasised the difficulty of the antiquated spelling, in *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book,* pp. 123-4.
[99] *Horace Walpole's Correspondence,* IX, p. 116 [Horace Walpole to George Montagu, 13th June 1751].
[100] Ibid.
[101] Hazel Wilkinson, 'Spenser Illustrated: Antiquaries and Illustrations: Thomas Birch's 1751 Edition', in *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book*, pp. 107; 121.

The fact that Kent's illustrations gained more fame than Birch's editorship of Spenser particularly vexed Thomas Edwards. Edwards, sharing an antiquarian and historical interest with Philip Yorke and Thomas Birch, undoubtedly felt that the pictures detracted attention from Birch's original contributions to scholarship.[102] He wrote vehemently to Yorke on this point, exclaiming:

> A – [pox] on their pictures! I had almost said. I desire that you would bring in a bill against them, and since pictures are the books of the unlearned, let none but such who will own themselves blockheads be allowed to subscribe to or buy them, except as waste paper at second hand.[103]

He expressed a similar view to Samuel Richardson on 30th March 1751, complaining that:

> What can be done in this picture-loving age, when, if a bookseller can but get a few paltry cuts to raise the price of a book, people will come-in in shoals to subscribe, be the editor's work ever so carelessly or ignorantly executed? [104]

Edwards's objection to 'the picture-loving age' is largely on elitist scholarly grounds. He was certainly a firm proponent of the English classics, and considered 'Shakespear, Spenser and Milton' as 'the three great ornaments of our Nation and Language.'[105] It is not incidental that he had been planning to edit Spenser himself, but eventually felt that time and resources were not working in his favour.[106] It appears that Philip Yorke was keen for Edwards to edit Spenser, but it seems that the task was deferred to other people. Edwards finally responded in June 1751, making it clear that he was no longer interested in editing Spenser:

> I think in this affair of Spenser we seem to be playing at "The Parson has lost his Fuddling cap."[107] The Speaker [Arthur Onslow] and you Sir would charge me with it; I would throw it off up on Mr West as the fittest Man I know, and Mr West, as it should seem, upon Mr Upton;

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[102] Ibid., p. 129.
[103] BL, Add. MS 35606, fol. 20r [TE to PY, May 7th 1751].
[104] *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson … Selected from the original Manuscripts*, ed. by Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), III, pp. 13-14 [30th March 1751].
[105] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1011, fol. 252 [TE to PY, 5th April 1751].
[106] On 19th June 1751, Edwards wrote to Richardson to express how 'there are infinite discouragements in my way,' and that without patronage, his pride prevented him from 'begging subscriptions' or 'hir[ing] myself out as a hackney writer', in *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson*, III, pp. 24-6.
[107] A game that was popular during the interregnum, in which one player would play as the king to give orders, and the other players would respond with burlesque answers, discussed in James-Orchard Halliwell, *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales* (London: John Russell Smith, 1849), p. 19. In this context Edwards seems to be referring to the game as a deliberate deferral of a command.

> and I do not know why this should not do; if the former will oversee the work and correct the impetuosity of the latter.[108]

While reluctant to take on the editorship of Spenser himself, Edwards instead composed a private sonnet to Yorke in which he envisages himself as Sir Calidore, rescuing the classics from incompetent editors, who he characterises in the figure of 'the Blatant Beast':

> O for that courteous Knight, Sir Calidore,
> Who with relentless rigor never ceast
> Through Fairy land to chase the Blatant Beast,
> Till him in caitive bands he bound of yore!
>
> He now again broke loose doth rage and rore,
> Nor who 'mongst Men is virtuousest and best;
> Nor fairest Lady spareth in the least
> But doth them both with felon tooth engore;
>
> Nor thee, O Glory of our British Isle,
> Divinest Milton! Can the grave defend,
> Though long since hersed in its peaceful shade;
> But, mask'd in Lauder's shape, with slanders vile
> He thy fair honors would in pieces rend
> And blast the laurels on thy sacred head.[109]

This depiction parallels with the sonnets he would eventually publish in *The Canons of Criticism* that were designed to 'rescue dear ladies' injur'd fame'. Yet it also demonstrates Edwards' own original appropriation of the Spenserian allegory to denote his own attack against bad scholarship. In this sonnet, it is not only the editorship of Spenser that Edwards lambasts an attack against, but also William Lauder, who in the previous year had accused Milton of plagiarizing his poetry.[110]

It is not only in his poetry, but also in his own garden architecture, that we can see Edwards construct his own Spenserian allusions that further departed ideologically from

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[108] BL, Add. MS 35606, fol. 23[r] [TE to PY, 8th June 1751].
[109] Ibid., fol. 21[r].
[110] William Lauder, *Milton's Use and Imitation of the Moderns* (London: J. Payne and J. Bouquet, 1750), suggested that Milton had raised 'so beautiful a structure, even supposing all the materials were borrowed,' p. 2. Jemima Grey also had opinions on Lauder's scholarship, writing to Mary Gregory that she wished there was a 'Poetical Pillory for this Wretch to Stand in, or rather a Real One […] erected over against the Spot where our Poets House stood'. BLARS, L30/9a/1, fol. 58 [JG to MG, November 1750].

William Kent. This is evident in one of his garden buildings at Pitshanger, that was inspired by Inigo Jones's Tuscan-style church at Covent Garden. In this temple, Edwards informs a friend, he had placed 'a large head of Mr Prior' in the 'middle of the pediment.'[111] It is revealing that Edwards should deliberately hark back to earlier imitations of Spenser in the figure of Matthew Prior, rather than the well-known imitators such as James Thomson or Gilbert West in the 1730s. More than this, it is striking that Edwards does not try to replicate Italianate classicism and Palladianism as innovated by Burlington and Kent in gardens such as Stowe or Chiswick, but instead, returns to an earlier form of classical architecture in emulating the designs of Inigo Jones. Edwards notes that Jones himself had copied his design from a temple of Mars, which would certainly be fitting for the bust of Prior, given Prior's emphasis in his Spenserian imitation on the heroic military valour of the Elizabethan age. Unfortunately, Edwards speaks little more on this architectural construction, but what this certainly suggests is the degree to which Edwards, both aesthetically and ideologically, attempts to create his own classical associations with Spenser that remarkably seem to ignore the Spenserian allusions and revivals of the 1730s.

It is more difficult to detect what the other members of the coterie thought about Spenser, and even harder to suggest that members had a unified perspective. Birch evidently had scholarly interest in *The Faerie Queene* and his 'The Life of Mr. Edmund Spenser' provided new historical insights into *The Faerie Queene* and Spenser's posthumous critical reception.[112] It is likely that Philip Yorke took an interest in Birch's edition and encouraged Edwards out of a similar scholarly antiquarian and historical interest. The fact that Jemima Grey refers to the *Castle of Indolence* in terms of its depiction of country life, rather than the satire that Thomson later imbued into the poem, further implies that perhaps, as with

[111] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1007, fols 192-5 [Thomas Edwards to John Forster, 26th October 1741].
[112] Thomas Birch, ed., 'The Life of Mr. Edmund Spenser', in *The Faerie Queene, With a Life of the Author* (London: J. Brindley, 1751), pp. i-xxxvii.

Shenstone, she saw the value of Spenser primarily in the imaginative descriptions that lent themselves to a pastoral ideal. She had certainly read some of Spenser's work with Elizabeth Yorke (later Anson) at Wrest in the summer of 1745, but, unusually for her letters, she does not express any opinions on it.[113] By 1751, when the coterie is discussing *The Faerie Queene*, members seem to have a scholarly and antiquarian interest in Spenser, rather than endorsing any political ideologies associated with his work.

POLITICAL POETRY AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

While the coterie is predominantly characterised by its historical and antiquarian interests, this is not to say that its members simply did not engage with the political worlds in which they were also involved. In fact, the political satire in *Wrestiana* allows the coterie to bridge otherwise culturally opposed positions between the private retirement of Wrest Park and their public lives in politics. This is particularly evident in the poetry of Soame Jenyns and Isaac Hawkins Browne, both peripheral associates of the coterie who were also involved in politics. However, unlike the Yorke brothers and Wray, they did not have the same reservations about publishing their poems.

Soame Jenyns (1704-87), the poet and politician, appears to have contributed a handful of sociable verses to *Wrestiana* in the late 1740s. Unlike other members of the Wrest circle, he seems to have had little objection to publication, and around this time was establishing a reputation for himself as a wit and satirist after his poems were included in Dodsley's *Collection of Poems. By Several Hands* (1748). Yet, in contrast, his contributions to *Wrestiana* are more personal, consisting of Horatian odes written in dialogue with Philip Yorke, possibly written around 1747 when both were elected MPs for Cambridgeshire.[114]

[113] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 54 [JG to CT, August 1745].
[114] He was also the preferred candidate of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, who had paid for half his electoral costs in 1747.

Jenyns's ode to Philip Yorke jokes that neither of them is particularly suited to elections or political life, declaring that 'the Candidate for Quiet prays,/ Sick of the Bumpers, and Huzzas's/ Of blest Electioneering' and adds, 'Why sho'd We then to London run,/ And quit our chearfull Country Sun/ For Bus'ness, Dirt and Smoak?'[115] In return, Philip responds to his 'Worthy Brother Knight':

> These be their Joys: – Be mine O Friend.
> A Life tho gay, not loose, to spend:
> Old Books, Old Friends my constant Fare,
> And yet for new some room to Spare.
> Amidst Wrest Groves to moralise,
> And in the Senate Vote supplies.[116]

These verses not only consolidate their friendship, but further depict Wrest as an idyll of retreat and retirement away from their public duties in London. What seems curious, however, is that Jenyns publishes his ode in 1747,[117] while Yorke's remains in manuscript form in *Wrestiana.* One might ask why Jenyns should publicize his friendship with Philip Yorke, especially given the latter's inclination to keep his literary pursuits private, or at least anonymous. For Jenyns, who was patronised by Lord Chancellor Hardwicke anyway, advertising his association with the Wrest coterie through this form of sociable verse afforded a degree of cultural capital. It is also possible that Yorke himself did not mind publicly being known as a cultural patron and public political figure, while his own compositions remained in limited circulation in manuscript form.

Similarly, Isaac Hawkins Browne seems to have bridged a similar gap between the private and public realms: both associating with an exclusive, aristocratic coterie and writing for the public print trade. Although Hawkins Browne does not contribute to *Wrestiana,* he is

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[115] Private collection, *Wrestiana,* fols 117-8 [signed 'S.J', Soame Jenyns].
[116] Ibid., fols 120-1 [signed 'P', Philip Yorke].
[117] Soame Jenyns, *An Ode to the Hon Philip Y—ke Esq. Imitated from Horace, Lib. II. Ode XVI* (London: A. Moore, 1747).

given honourable mentions in the manuscript and seems to have visited Wrest Park several times, probably through his friendships with Daniel Wray and Charles Yorke.[118] The coterie seems to have held Hawkins Browne in high regard as a literary figure. In *Wrestiana*, not only is he at one point paralleled with Alexander Pope,[119] but in 'Supplement to the Causidicade' (1744) he is considered a shining wit.[120] In the 'Supplement', Hardwicke lectures Charles to abandon his literary ambitions if he wants to become Solicitor-General, instructing him to leave 'Your W__n [Warburton] […] to his Shakespear and Moses,/ Nor Tinker the Verses which Whitehead composes. […] Burn the lace off your Wastecoats, likewise your Romances,/ And before these dull fellows I warrant your chance is.'[121] However, it is the entrance of Hawkins Browne at the end of the poem that signals a volta as Hardwicke shifts from political proselytizing to admiration for the literary wit:

> With countenance Sheepish and hands dangling down
> In the midst of the bustle in limp'd H___ B___ [Hawkins Browne]
> My Lord star'd on his face, and cry'd out, I submit
> Whether business will suit with so shining a wit;[122]

It is unclear how serious this is: the bathetic juxtaposition of Browne as a 'shining wit' who 'limped' in with a 'countenance Sheepish' seems typical for the coterie's mock-serious depictions of both the political and literary worlds that its members inhabit.

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[118] As early as 1743, Daniel Wray wrote to Philip Yorke that 'H. Brown was here yesterday; he […] proposed a question about the propriety of asking for Charles when he visits your Gardens.' In Add. MS 35401, fol. 22v [DW to PY, 16th August 1743]. Hawkins Browne visited again in 1744, which Wray records when he writes to Yorke that 'I dined lately with Browne & his Wife: they talk of the Day spent at Wrest, as it deserves,' in MS 35401, fol. 41v [DW to PY, 11th November 1744].

[119] Private collection, 'Fragments of the Vision', *Wrestiana*, fol. 34 describes how 'a New Pope/ Another Hawkins shou'd arise in thee [Charles Yorke]', [c. 1744, signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].

[120] This composition was in itself a parodic supplement to the anonymously published *The Causidicade* (1743), a satire on the legal profession upon the resignation of Lord John Strange as Solicitor General, which had required prominent members of the bar to put themselves forward for the position. Martin C Battestin, ed. *The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding: The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon, Shamela, and Occasional Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008), p. 345; Frederick Lawrence, *The Life of Henry Fielding: With Notices of His Writings, and his Contemporaries* (London: A. Hall, Virtue & co., 1855), p. 198; H. Pagliaro, *Henry Fielding: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 38.

[121] Private collection, 'Supplement to the Causidicade', *Wrestiana,* fol. 49 [signed 'P.W.', Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].

[122] Ibid., fol. 50.

While Soame Jenyns was keen to showcase his political patronage from the Yorke family, it seems the coterie also, privately, took delight in noting personal connections to published poets. In the case of Hawkins Browne, Jemima Grey is particularly pleased to note the personal connection with him when his satirical poem, *The Fire Side: A Pastoral Soliloquy on the E—of G—taking the S—ls* [John Carteret, Earl of Granville] is published in 1746. While the coterie prides itself on its privacy and exclusivity, Jemima Grey's letters demonstrate that there was also prestige for the inner circle in associating with published poets and satirists. *The Fire Side* is a satire on John Carteret's hankering for rural retirement and reluctance to take the seals when the ministry had resigned and left the country without leadership.[123] Amid the need to 'Haste, and save sinking *Britain,*' in the poem, Carteret resignedly obeys and remarks 'Ah O! witness ye Powers, that *Ambition* and *Pride*/ Have no Share in this Change – *for I love my Fire Side*'.[124] As soon as the poem was published, Grey recommended his 'best grave Satire' to Mary Gregory, highlighting the personal connection when Hawkins Browne had stayed at Wrest the previous summer.[125] Grey noted that it was 'taken from My Lord G:s great & heroick Way of Talking at the Time of all the Changes in the Winter, & when he was forced to resign his false Hopes' and 'return to his Fireside.'[126] Grey had, of course, been following the 'Confusion and Madness' that winter,[127] and she likely had intelligence through her husband and brother-in-law. On the 18th February 1746, Charles had written to Philip with his account of the debacle, noting that on being presented with the seals,

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[123] In February 1746, the ministry resigned over disputes with the King at a point when the Jacobites had not yet been suppressed at Culloden. Carteret was forced to take the seals and attempt to form a ministry with Lord Bath, but when this failed, he resigned after less than forty-eight hours, eager to return home again. This is described in detail in Basil Williams, *Carteret and Newcastle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 173, and John Cannon, 'Carteret, John, second Earl Granville', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) < https://www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 31 August 2021].
[124] Isaac Hawkins Browne, *The Fire Side: A Pastoral Soliloquy* (London: G. Hawkins, 1746), pp. 7-8.
[125] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fol. 104 [JG to MG, 10th June 1746].
[126] Ibid.
[127] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fol. 86 [JG to MG, 11th February 1746].

> Ld [Lord] G says, "upon my soul I knew nothing of it. I was sitting quietly by my Fireside in my study (some say Demosthenes,) The King sends to me to take the seals. I saw it would not do, & was amazed at it. But like a Dutiful subject of the Crown I obeyed. I waited on the King & took the Seals, went directly to my office, wrote a few letters of form and signed a pass. That's all the business I have done. […] Family circumstances, which have lately detained me at home, shall now engross me. I will go home; into the Country; to my books, to my Fireside. I love my fireside." So the thing is carried off with an air of Burlesque magnificence.[128]

Curiously, Hawkins Browne's poem resonates strongly with this account, not only the bathetic refrain 'I love my *Fire Side*', but also the description of Carteret 'reclining at Ease turn *Demosthenes* o'er'.[129] It is possible that Hawkins Browne used Charles Yorke's farcical account as inspiration for the poem, given his connection to the group; although given he was an MP himself the story might have spread organically within political circles. However, it appears that even when Hawkins Browne was staying at Wrest the previous summer, he was brooding over lines for a poem. Grey proudly notes that '"I have said it at Home, I have said it Abroad," is exactly the Expression he was pleased to make use of at Wrest last year, followed by 'They were the finest Gardens in the World.'[130] The fact that Grey is keen to demonstrate the personal connection with Hawkins Browne and his poem, as well as his approval of her estate, suggests the extent to which the group enjoyed having exclusive connections to public literary figures, even though they preferred to operate within a more private sphere themselves.

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In conclusion, this chapter has shown that although the Wrest coterie had reservations about publishing its compositions, it was nevertheless an influential and coveted circle. Its extensive network demonstrates how far the group was on the periphery of influential literary

[128] BL, Add. MS, 35360, fols 153^{v}-154^{r} [CY to PY, 18th February 1746].
[129] Isaac Hawkins Browne, *The Fire Side: A Pastoral Soliloquy,* p. 6.
[130] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fols 104-5 [JG to MG, 10th June 1746].

circles, such as those around George Lyttelton and Samuel Richardson, as well as political satirists such as Hawkins Browne or Soame Jenyns. It is particularly significant that Lyttelton's circle should carry so much literary influence, especially when, as this thesis will explore, Lyttelton's earlier *Letters from a Persian in England* would be a key influence on the Cambridge Circle's *Athenian Letters*, and Yorke and Grey would also seek his advice for the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park. The prestige of the coterie also explains why Thomas Edwards and Soame Jenyns would wish to publicise their connection with the Wrest circle, since the cultural capital strengthened their critical and literary authority. It also appears that Yorke and Grey were proud of their own contacts in the commercial literary world, even though they did not want their own works to appear in print.

Wrestiana showcases the breadth of the group's interests, as well as the mock-serious tone that would infuse most of their works. Paradoxically, while the coterie does not always take *Wrestiana* seriously (as its sociable verses attest), it nevertheless represented something of an achievement for aspiring poets to have their compositions featured. Despite the vast number of poems that both Edwards and Owen Cambridge would write at Wrest, only a scant number feature in *Wrestiana,* especially in comparison to the sociable verses written by Philip and Charles Yorke, Daniel Wray, John Lawry, and Catherine Talbot. This reveals a hierarchy between the members, since Philip Yorke and Jemima Grey's oldest friends feature the most prominently, while the later members of the group seem to feature more as a token of their association with the group.

The playfulness in *Wrestiana* is also more complex than it might first appear. While it is obviously a source of comedy and entertainment between friends, it does not always sit easily in relation to the circle's academic interests or literary ambitions. One might consider that the manuscript itself provided an exclusive space for the coterie to write about subjects that they could not have dared put to print, which is evident in the political satire. By

couching more serious literary and political ambitions into comical writing and sociable verses, the coterie is perhaps able to defuse some of the tension between members' public lives and private interests. As this thesis will continue to explore, playfulness in the coterie's work should not be taken at a superficial level, in fact offering a disguise for their serious literary, historical, and political interests. For the friends themselves, these private jokes also consolidate their friendships and provide private meanings only accessible to members of the inner circle.

2

‘It Kept up a Correspondence Between Friends’: The *Athenian Letters* and the Yorkes’ Cambridge Circle (1738-42)

Well the great Atossa, fam’d
First Epistolograph, may boast the palm
T’invent, but must from all her Glory Shrink
When Cleander rears his beamy head
Refulgent o’er the Letter-writing Tribe.

— Charles Yorke and Daniel Wray, ‘Charles Yorke on the occasion of the *Athenian Letters*’. [1]

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter will explore the literary and intellectual circle that centred on Philip and Charles Yorke at Cambridge in the late 1730s. This precocious circle, composed of the Yorke brothers, their friends, and tutors at the university, produced two literary projects: the *Athenian Letters* (1738-1743) and *The Philosopher* (1738-42). This chapter will primarily focus on the *Athenian Letters* since this work would be referenced frequently by the Wrest coterie in *Wrestiana* and in the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park. However, as this chapter will reveal, considering the *Athenian Letters* in relation to the political context of the late 1730s and early 1740s reveals that the work was also a thinly veiled political satire of the Patriot opposition. The political implications are important, and suggest that, like *Wrestiana*, the *Athenian Letters* bridged the Yorke brothers’ private academic interest and their public political careers. In fact, the political satire would come to present difficulties for the Yorke

[1] Private collection, ‘Charles Yorke on the occasion of the *Athenian Letters’*, Wrestiana, fol. 52 [‘C. W’, Charles Yorke and Daniel Wray].

brothers, especially as their decision to privately print twelve copies of the *Athenian Letters* inadvertently risked its exposure in the public sphere. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to afford more than a cursory examination of *The Philosopher*, a manuscript containing a series of thirty-six *Spectator*-style essays primarily written by Philip and Charles Yorke under the initials 'P' and 'C' respectively, but also including other compositions under the initials 'H' (Heaton), 'L', (Lawry) and 'Q' (unidentified).[2] However, I will make references to some of the compositions in *The Philosopher* to understand the simultaneously playful and intensely intellectual spirit that infused the Cambridge Circle, or the 'Philosopher's Club' as Philip Yorke would term the group.[3]

THE CAMBRIDGE NETWORK

As undergraduates at Cambridge, Philip and Charles Yorke both possessed scholarly dispositions and seem to have especially sought the intellectual companionship of their tutors. A family friend of the Yorkes, the lawyer Thomas Clarke, wrote to Philip Yorke to express his concern that 'you do not receive prejudice from too intense an application to Study; Pray consider that very few people are blest with the Constitution of my Lord Chancellor.'[4] Apparently, Lord Chancellor Hardwicke had set a formidable example that his sons felt under considerable pressure to follow.[5] Moreover, the Lord Chancellor's political position must

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[2] The introduction alludes to characters in the *Spectator*, noting that 'I am sensible it might conduce to the success of my Paper, if I proved myself a lineal Descendent from Isaac Bickerstaff, or asserted roundly that I had drunk a Bottle with Sr Roger de Coverly, & that Mr Ironside left me his Desk for my Lucubrations, but I cannot think a good cause wants Falsities to support it.' In 'No. 1. The Character & Design of the Author', in *The Philosopher*. New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Osborn c. 368, fol. 2 [signed 'P', Philip Yorke].

[3] Yorke appears to have described a 'Club' of fictional philosophers based on his Cambridge friends in 'No. 36. Characters of the Philosophers Club' in *The Philosopher, Or, Essays on Various Subjects Begun at Cambridge*, Osborn c. 368, fol. 282 [signed 'P', Philip Yorke]. Upon reading this essay, Wray would write to Philip Yorke that 'The Pictures of your Philosophers Club I have been admitted to a sight of […] if I am Mr Freeman […] I should endeavour to Come up to your Idea, & Model myself after my Picture.' In BL Add. MS 35401, fol. 1^{r} [DW to PY, 29th March 1740]

[4] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 14^{v} [TC to PY, 5th June 1739]

[5] George Henry Rooke would also view Philip and Charles as following in their father's footsteps, remarking that 'to transmit the same Parts and the same happy Genius to a first, and a second son […] was never attempted by any one but My Ld Ch—r [Chancellor].' BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 35^{v}.

have also had considerable weight in enforcing his sons' diligent behaviour at university, considering that his political ally, the Duke of Newcastle, was High Steward of the university at this time.[6] Nevertheless, the Cambridge circle appears to have felt some contempt towards undergraduates who were not so studiously inclined. In 'No 12. Letters from two Fellow Commoners' in *The Philosopher,* written by Philip Yorke and Henry Heaton, they satirise the lifestyles of typical undergraduate students in the figures of the dull and aptly-named 'William Easy' and the frivolous 'Jack Smart'.[7] William Easy struggles to pass the time, finally resolving to 'take a turn about my Room, hum a Tune, consult Bailey for […] a word I Heard in Conversation, Stir up my Fire, take Snuff, Look in the Glass, perhaps read a Stanza of Horace.'[8] In comparison, the 'gay & Polite' Jack Smart passes the time lounging in his room in a fit of despair when his 'verses to Celia' are not published, 'yawn[ing] terribly' when conversing with the fellows, or otherwise frolicking with his friends Bob Airy and Lord Sparkish. Continuing in this vein of satirical wit, Yorke describes his own friends as 'the Philosophic Tribe' who are 'Stupid & queer with Cicero,'[9] acknowledging that their thirst for knowledge was unusual compared to their peers and likely derided by the fashionable sets. Despite the self-depreciation, there is an element of pride in their serious intellectual endeavours which provide more substance than the superficial lives of their fellow students.

It might seem unusual that Philip and Charles Yorke should have sought out the company of their tutors and other older academics,[10] but there were mutual benefits to these

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[6] Denys Arthur Winstanley, 'The University and Politicians', in *The History of Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 37.
[7] The letter of William Easy is written by 'H', most likely Henry Heaton whose signature on the *Athenian Letters w*as 'H'.
[8] Beinecke Library, Osborn c368, 'No. 12. Letters from two Fellow Commoners, giving an account how they spend their Time at the University', *The Philosopher,* fols 76-85 [signed 'P', Philip Yorke, and 'H', possibly Henry Heaton].
[9] Ibid., fol. 85.
[10] Denys Arthur Winstanley's history of the University of Cambridge suggests that a typical academic was 'servile towards his superiors and overbearing towards those he considered beneath him, he was he was frequently gross and boorish with his friends and equals.' 'Introduction' in *The History of Cambridge,* p. 3.

relationships. The Yorke brothers seem to have been in awe of the literary and intellectual connections that Cambridge afforded them. It was through the university, for instance, that Charles Yorke first became acquainted with William Warburton. Impressed at Warburton's friendship with Alexander Pope, a fact that Warburton did not neglect to mention ('He speaks of him in strains of Rapturous commendation'), Charles Yorke felt compelled to 'share as much in his [Warburton's] company as I could.'[11] Yet the brothers also had much to offer themselves, both intellectually and socially. They were often asked to comment on their friends' manuscripts prior to publication, and while, on an intellectual level, manuscript exchange enabled academic discussion, on a more practical level, the Yorke brothers could use their connections to exert some influence and help attract subscribers for the works. When Conyers Middleton gave Philip Yorke a manuscript copy of his *Life of Cicero*, Yorke responded with an extensive analysis that praised 'how much sagacity you have searched into every thing that relates to the constitution, Politics, & manners of the Romans […] we […] are not so much Readers as Spectators of the Events wch [which] you describe.'[12] Yet he was also keen to convey his praise of Middleton's manuscript to influential friends so that they might support the publication of the work. For example, Thomas Clarke would write that 'I was extremely entertain'd with the promising account you give me of Tully's life […] If the Dr continues his Resolution of Printing It by Subscription I shall very Gladly contribute the Little assistance I can Exert among my Friends towards Encreasing [sic] the number of His subscribers.' [13] Charles Yorke too was presented with a 'Brouillon' from the fifth volume of

[11] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 1r [CY to PY, June 1st 1740]; Charles admits his surprise that Warburton should have taken any interest in him on account of the gulf in age and experience between them, remarking to Warburton that 'I looked upon it as a singular Instance of your condescension, to admit one so young and unexperienced into any Share of your regard.' BL, Add. MS 35404, fols 1-2 [CY to WW, 10th July 1740].
[12] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 33r [PY to CM, 1739]. It is possible that Middleton's imaginative recreation of ancient Rome and Cicero's involvement in political intrigues provided some inspiration for the re-imagining of ancient Athens and the political intrigues during the Peloponnesian wars in the *Athenian Letters.*
[13]BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 8v [TC to PY, 17th February 1738]. Later Jemima Grey would also subscribe, although Charles Yorke appears to have managed this from Cambridge, writing to Philip that 'I have subscribed to Dr Middleton for Lady Grey, and will put the Receit [sic] into her hands, when I shall be in Town.' BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 35r [CY to PY, 1741].

Henry Coventry's *Philemon to Hydaspes* (1736-44) to review. In his account of reviewing the work, Charles Yorke reveals his awareness of the sensitivities around publication. He suggested that Coventry should make amendments to his composition, remarking that 'he [Coventry] alluded so strongly to […] modern Times […] that if he prints it in the form where in I saw it, it will give singular offense.'[14] These examples demonstrate the intense intellectual, but also reciprocal, nature of the relationships Philip and Charles fostered at Cambridge. In this regard, it is likely that this reciprocity also underpinned their literary projects: collaborating with the Yorke brothers afforded cultural or social capital for the Cambridge academics, while the Yorke brothers themselves benefited from belonging to an academic community that gave them a taste for the literary world and the opportunity to write.

THE *ATHENIAN LETTERS* AS A COTERIE COMPOSITION

The *Athenian Letters,* begun at Cambridge in 1738, was a series of fictional letters set during the Peloponnesian Wars, composed by the Yorke brothers and their tutors. [15] Similarly to *Wrestiana*, discussed in Chapter 1, the *Athenian Letters* represents both the authors' scholarly interests and an elaborate intellectual joke between friends. The preface to the *Athenian Letters,* written by Charles Yorke, concocts an elaborate tale about the provenance of the correspondence, claiming that the letters were genuine artefacts discovered in 1688 and finally 'translated' into English.[16] In reality, the Cambridge authors drew on ancient Greek authors to narrate their own exposition of the Peloponnesian Wars through the letters of

[14] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 9^{r} [CY to PY, 6th July 1740].
[15] This consisted of Samuel Salter (1713-1778), Henry Heaton (d. 1777), George Henry Rooke (1702-1754), Henry Coventry (1710-1752), John Green (1706-1779), and William Heberden (1710-1801), as well as family and friends of the Yorkes, John Lawry (1714 – 1773), Daniel Wray (1702-1783), Thomas Birch (1705-1766), and later, Catherine Talbot (1721-1770), who would write letters for the third and fourth volumes.
[16] Philip Yorke, et al., 'Preface', *Athenian Letters: or, the Epistolary Correspondence of an Agent of the King of Persia, Residing at Athens During the Peloponnesian War,* 4 vols (London: J. Bettenham, 1741-3), I, pp. iii-x [signed 'C', Charles Yorke].

Cleander, an agent of the King of Persia, and his friends and ministers in the Persian Court. The letters cover a range of subjects, including ancient religious practises, the customs and politics of the Greeks and Persians, and descriptions of historical people and events. Curiously, perhaps to further give the illusion of authenticity, the authors decided to have the *Athenian Letters* printed privately by James Bettenham, who was restricted to producing a mere twelve copies, one for each of the contributors. By the time the work was completed in 1743, it ran to four quarto volumes. However, as this chapter will explore in the next section, the decision to print the *Athenian Letters* would cause the Yorke brothers considerable difficulties and cause a tension with other members of the Cambridge circle.

Philip and Charles Yorke were largely responsible for the work; between them, they wrote the bulk of the correspondence, 118 of the 179 letters. They maintained control over the composition process too, from approving the letters that their friends were planning to chasing the unpunctual authors to pay their 'Epistolary debts,'[17] and keeping the book that contained the final compilation of letters that would go to print.[18] Philip Yorke's tutor, Samuel Salter, was certainly happy for him and his brother to steer the venture, stating in a letter that 'I have often declar'd that I thought yr Brother & you had a clear right to, & ought to enjoy the Monopoly of this Persian Manufacture.'[19] Charles Yorke also had a prominent role as interlocutor in Philip's absence, passing on 'Cambridge intelligence' to his brother and sending updates on the authors' progress with the *Athenian Letters.*

Initially, the *Athenian Letters* was a Cambridge-centric production, but once Philip Yorke left Cambridge in May 1740 to marry Jemima Grey, most of the remaining *Athenian*

[17] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 75^{r} [JL to PY, 27th November 1740]
[18] John Lawry suggests that Philip Yorke was the keeper of this book, when he invites his cousin to visit 'with a very keen appetite for the Feast of Persian Letters […] and I hope the Book wherein I shall be ready to transcribe it will not be left behind.' BL, Add. MS 25605, fol. 68^{r} [JL to PY, 4th October 1740].
[19] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 73^{r} [SS to PY, 26th November 1740].

Letters were written at a distance. By the time the final volume of the *Athenian Letters* was written in 1743, the authors also included Catherine Talbot. For Philip Yorke in particular, the years 1740 to 1743 constituted a transition period from his undergraduate life at Cambridge to married life with Jemima Grey and the start of his political career. Thus, continuing to manage the *Athenian Letters* at a distance provided a means of maintaining the intellectual network and interests he had enjoyed at Cambridge, particularly at a time when he was 'hurried into the Eyes of the public from the Studies of Retirement.'[20] Certainly, upon leaving Cambridge, Philip must have expressed his apprehension to his brother about leaving this intellectual network behind, for Charles would respond: 'I join with you in the Anxiety which you express on parting from Cambridge: But if you regret the loss of Academical Acquaintance, what a sufferer am I in the absence of you.'[21] Philip seems to have privately felt that leaving Cambridge was premature and his elevation through marriage undeserved, remarking privately to Conyers Middleton that 'The Great Fortunes wch [which] so suddenly & so early have brought me into the Scene of public life, before I had time even to take a view of it […] claim all the Duty & Gratitude I can shew to those who have advanced me far beyond my expectations as well as merits.'[22] In the same letter, he also looks back fondly on the friendships that crowned his university experience, noting that 'I […] look upon yr [your] Friendship as one of the most valuable Acquisitions I made at Cambridge.'[23] While continuing the *Athenian Letters* at a distance allowed members of the Cambridge circle to maintain their literary venture, it was equally important to maintain the friendships forged at Cambridge. As John Lawry stated upon the completion of the *Athenian Letters*, 'it rendered

[20] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 5^{v} [CY to PY, 27th May 1740].
[21] Ibid., fol. 3^{r} [CY to PY, 1st June 1740].
[22] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 54^{v} [PY to CM, May 1740].
[23] Ibid., fol. 54^{v} [PY to CM, May 1740].

Men ingenious who had it in them to be so, and […] kept up a Correspondence between Friends.'[24]

The act of writing and sending fictional letters alongside their own letters to one another meant that the composition process acquired a meta-epistolary dynamic. This would sometimes provide the opportunity for private jokes as the authors deliberately elided the fictional world of the letters with their real lives; something that will be addressed again in Chapter 3 in the discussion of the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park. In this regard, the ability to reference the private imaginary world of the *Athenian Letters* allows the authors to draw attention to their own membership as insiders of this privileged literary circle. For instance, Samuel Salter playfully suggests to Philip Yorke that he would not visit him for dinner 'without bringing my Persian along with me, whom you have so often & so kindly invited to your House: & yet […] I cou'd scarcely prevail upon Him to venture himself in so large a Company of Worthies, though his own Countrymen, as you […] entertain constantly at your table.'[25] Not only is the letter itself playfully personified so that it becomes his character, but the other authors are elided to become the character's Persian 'Countrymen'. It also alludes to the hierarchy of characters and authors; Salter claims that both his contribution to the *Athenian Letters*, and his character, are inferior in the 'Company of Worthies.'[26] In any case, the very act of alluding to the *Athenian Letters* in private correspondence affirms Salter's membership in this exclusive literary circle. John Lawry would similarly compare the real and fictional world in his observation to Philip Yorke that 'the relish you shew for your country residences and the regret you express at the thought of leaving it are extremely in the

[24] Ibid., fol. 142[r] [JL to PY, 10th June 1743].
[25] Ibid., fol. 71[r] [SS to PY, 12th November 1740].
[26] Disappointingly, it is difficult to identify Salter's letters as none of the 179 letters are marked with his code letter "S"; Bettenham appears to have accidentally omitted several initials, including Catherine Talbot's "T' in the letters from Sappho to Cleander, 'Letter CLCCVI. Sappho to Cleander' and 'Letter CLXXVII. Sappho to Cleander', *Athenian Letters*, IV, pp. 207- 210. Nevertheless, Salter's minimal input is corroborated by the apology he later expresses for his 'backwardness in contributing to the Athenian Letters' in BL Add. MS 35605, fol. 152r [SS to PY, 30th July 1743].

manner of Orsames.'[27] Orsames was Lawry's character in the *Athenian Letters*, and so Lawry's comparison between his cousin and his own imaginary character is a particularly personal reference.

Belonging to this private imaginary world was an important distinction both of friendship and exclusivity. It appears that Catherine Talbot and Jemima Grey were also given nicknames and characters that would mark their belonging to the world of the *Athenian Letters.* It is more obvious in the case of Catherine Talbot, who contributed two letters as Cleander and Smerdis, and she also wrote the two letters by Sappho in the final volume of the *Athenian Letters*. It is not incidental that her coterie nickname within the Wrest circle remained Sappho, evidenced in the *Wrestiana* manuscript. Talbot's involvement as a 'learned [woman] among […] young Cambridge men' has been documented by scholars examining the Bluestocking circle, [28] but for the purposes of this thesis, we might consider that her involvement in the *Athenian Letters* marks not just her privileged admission as a woman writer into a circle of university men, but admission into an exclusive imaginative coterie world. There are parallels between Sappho and Talbot herself in the *Athenian Letters*, which is drawn out further in *Wrestiana.* In 'Letter CLXXVI, Sappho to Cleander' in the *Athenian Letters*, Sappho claims that she would rather 'be adorned […] with these modest, soft, and female graces, which dwell retired among the domestic virtues, than with those light external charms, which have more lustre in poetry.'[29] This modesty is also apparent in 'Advertisement from Parnassus' in *Wrestiana*, although in a twist, it is Sappho who recommends Catherine Talbot to Apollo, noting that 'a young Lady who had already been called a Tenth Muse […] only I must say, that I fear I offend her cautious love of retirement in procuring to her here a confirmation of that

[27] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 163^{r} [JL to PY, 6th October 1743].
[28] Rhoda Zuk, ed., *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785: Catherine Talbot and Hester Chapone* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), III, p. 12.
[29] Philip Yorke, et al., 'Letter CLCCVI. Sappho to Cleander', *Athenian Letters,* IV, p. 208.

fame.'[30] In the 'Advertisement', Sappho goes on to recommend that Talbot 'shall hereafter be called by my Name And may her happiness in Life be as great as she deserves.'[31] Significantly, the 'Advertisement' was written by Elizabeth Anson (née Yorke), who perhaps deliberately counters Talbot's own modesty by having Sappho praise her literary talents. Although Sylvia Harcstark Myers argues that the *Athenian Letters* highlights the 'need for improvements in the condition of women', one might also observe that it is through the private world of the coterie's compositions that the female authors are afforded respect for their intellect and the opportunity to write themselves.[32] In this regard, one might draw further parallels between the ideals of polite sociability and complementarity that would define the Wrest circle and the depictions of heterosocial activity in the *Athenian Letters*. This is emphasised in the translator's note to Sappho's letters in the *Athenian Letters*, which explicitly states that there was 'nothing dishonourable' in Sappho's relationship with Cleander, for 'Our Ephesian understood how to converse with the ladies for political purposes, without proceeding to gallantries.'[33]

While Jemima Grey does not contribute directly to the *Athenian Letters*, she does receive an honorary mention through the figure of Aspasia. Featuring in the third volume of the *Athenian Letters*, Aspasia is described as a woman who:

> Abounds in so many elegant turns of wit, and in such a variety of good knowledge and good sense, that no one here is either equal or superior to her […] As soon as the performers on the lute and harp were retired, with most of the persons who were invited, we drew together into a circle, and Aspasia led the conversation.[34]

While the earlier descriptions of the historical figure Aspasia were written by Dr John Green, the above quotation was written by Charles Yorke. This is significant, for in a letter to Philip,

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[30] Private collection, 'Ragguagli. D. Parnasso, Or, Advertisement from Parnassus', *Wrestiana,* fol. 94 [signed 'E', Elizabeth Anson].
[31] Ibid.*,* fol. 95.
[32] Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England,* p. 213.
[33] Philip Yorke, et al., 'Letter CLCCVI. Sappho to Cleander', *Athenian Letters,* IV, p. 207.
[34] Philip Yorke, et al., 'Letter CXXXVI. Cleander to Hippias', *Athenian Letters,* III, p. 202 [signed 'C', Charles Yorke].

Charles sends his compliments to 'Ly [Lady] grey, i.e. Aspasia.'[35] The fact Charles Yorke deliberately parallels his sister-in-law with Aspasia is both a private and affectionate gesture that effectively draws Grey into their fictional world. The description of Aspasia also resonates with later descriptions of Grey as the hostess at Wrest, 'so superior not only to her own sex but to most of ours'.[36] It is no surprise the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park was erected in homage to the friendships forged and maintained during the process of writing the *Athenian Letters,* or that Grey herself would later read the *Athenian Letters* in the Glade to remember those friendships.

However, the planning and composition process could also bring about tensions within the literary circle and even drive a wedge between friendships. Despite the Yorke brothers' otherwise close relationship, there was also a degree of sibling rivalry between them, which came to a head when there was a dispute over who was to write – and who first conceived – 'Letter CXLVI', in which Cleander describes how he has bribed Cleon in order to prolong the Peloponnesian War.[37] Charles insisted that 'you know as well as I do that the thought of employing Cleander to put a bribe into the hands of Cleon (tho' not a very extraordinary one) was my own, and as such I had a right to make use of it.'[38] Despite his lengthy protest, he concludes 'I wish I had never writ these silly Letters rather than we shd [should] dispute about them.'[39] John Lawry also involved himself in the dispute, writing to Philip that he hoped Charles would 'withdraw his <u>needless</u> however ingenious […] Letter and

[35] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 77[r] [CY to PY, March 1741/2].
[36] Thomas Edwards, Bodl. 1010, fol. 224 [TE to DW, 22nd November 1746]; see also letter from Daniel Wray to Philip Yorke, in which he reports how, in Philip's absence, Grey 'took upon her the Office of our Entertainer' and 'entered Freely into the Conversation,' even regretting that 'she will not oftener exert her Good sense & excellent Taste, instead of patiently attending to our Prattle!', in BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 116[r] [DW to PY, 19th Aug 1749].
[37] Philip Yorke, et al., 'Letter CXLVI. Cleander to Gobryas', *Athenian Letters*, IV, pp. 12 – 19 [signed 'C', Charles Yorke]. This letter was particularly original as it departed from historians' narratives and took its cue from a comedy by Aristophanes, which, according to the author's note, 'in all probability alludes to some such story [of bribery],' p. 17.
[38] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 51[r] [CY to PY, 13th November 1741].
[39] Ibid., fol. 52[r].

be convinced you are in the right as soon as He shall see the plan which I am confident was originally yours, finished as you intend it.'[40] The dispute continued between the two brothers for almost a fortnight, apparently bringing up a deeper strain in their relationship. Charles would write to his brother 'as to the plan and yielding it to you in every exercise […] I have long learned to sit down not only contented but happy in the consideration; – pleased with each circumstance that contributes to raise your character, while I only follow at a distance.'[41] Evidently, he felt some resentment at his older brother's authority. The dispute eventually seems to have been settled, and since the printed volume features Charles's letters, it seems that Philip eventually retracted his objections to them.

TENSION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE: THE PRINTING OF THE *ATHENIAN LETTERS*

The printing of the *Athenian Letters* brought about a further tension within the Cambridge circle. Although the *Athenian Letters* was effectively a vanity publication and Bettenham was limited to printing a mere twelve copies, the anxieties that arose from printing the compositions reveal the fine line between print and publication. It might be easy to conflate printing and publication, but as recent studies have shown, print was certainly not necessarily synonymous with publication, [42] and in the case of the *Athenian Letters,* the authors clearly expected their work to remain private even once it had been printed. After all, there are numerous other examples of small, private print runs during this time.[43]

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[40] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 120^{r} [JL to PY, 18th November 1741].
[41] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 57^{v} [CY to PY, 26th November 1741].
[42] Paula McDowell, 'Media and Meditation in the Eighteenth Century', *Oxford Handbooks Online,* 2017; Caroline Archer Parré and Malcolm Dick, 'Introduction' in *Pen, Print and Communication in the Eighteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), p. 3; James Raven, *Publishing Business in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), p. 258.
[43] Lord Henry Bolingbroke, for instance, initially privately printed the *Idea of a Patriot King,* see Giles Barber, 'Bolingbroke, Pope, and the *Patriot King', The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society,* 5.1 (1964), 67-89 (p. 69).

One reason that the *Athenian Letters* was printed at all was to present the work as a quasi-serious historical study; heightening the irony that this was in fact a fabrication and an exclusive endeavour between friends. Certainly, it would have saved significant printing costs if the letters had stayed in manuscript form, as both *The Philosopher* and *Wrestiana* would remain. The introduction to the *Athenian Letters* playfully frames the work as a serious contribution to scholarship for the benefit of the general public. The 'Translator,' Charles Yorke, concludes the introduction with a request to:

> congratulate the literary world on the discovery of this hidden treasure of antiquity […] and to congratulate himself on his own being the unworthy instrument, after an interval of so many ages, of presenting these inestimable relics to the public.[44]

This is clearly a private joke between the authors given that they had no intention of making the work available to the public. It is a joke that is continued in 'Supplement to the General Dictionary' in *Wrestiana*, in which Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray imagine themselves to be future historians commenting on the life of John Lawry.[45] In this piece, they pretend that the *Athenian Letters* had genuinely been taken for a piece of antiquity, noting that 'This work which after much dispute among the Learned is at last agreed to be a forgery [...] composed by a Society of Literati in the 18th Century.'[46] This will have much in common with the fabricated ruin in the Mithraic Glade that will be considered in Chapter 3, but what is particularly revealing in this quotation is that the group consider themselves a 'Society of Literati', defined by their elite learning and literary pursuits.[47] In addition, by focusing on the *Athenian Letters* as a historical artefact, Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray place it alongside the original classical sources that inspired the *Athenian Letters* in the first place, self-consciously

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[44] Philip Yorke, et al., 'The Preface', *Athenian Letters*, I, pp. ix-x [signed 'C', Charles Yorke].
[45] Private collection, 'Supplement to the General Dictionary' in *Wrestiana*, fol. 10 [c. 1743, signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].
[46] Ibid.
[47] The *OED* defines 'literati' as 'men or women of letters; the learned class as a whole; people interested in literature, or engaged in literary pursuits.' *OED, <www.oed.com>* [accessed 30th October 2020]

blurring the boundary between historical fact and fiction. As Philip Yorke expressed in *The Philosopher*, 'few Histories have passed for authentic […] I have often wished that antiquity amongst its other invaluable Legacies, had handed down to us a larger collection of such precious remains, by whose assistance we might detect Innumerable Errors in their Historians.'[48] The fact that the *Athenian Letters* has supposedly passed for authentic in the 'Supplement' and baffled the minds of the 'Learned' is a self-conscious reference to the exclusivity of the work and the fact that few people were supposed to understand this scholarly joke.

Despite the playfulness of the *Athenian Letters* and the fact it was a private literary endeavour between friends, Charles Yorke still had high expectations that the work should closely resemble a scholarly publication. He was particularly perturbed that higher editorial standards had not been adhered to, remarking to his brother that 'I read it with less Entertainment while I think the impression might have been better conducted.'[49] His chief criticism was that Philip had not been strict enough in keeping John Lawry's letters free from 'that ridiculous profusion of flowers which he […] scatter[s] over [his letters] with a wasteful hand.' Charles complains that these were not 'weeded out of his first compositions.'[50] Perhaps not detecting the irony, Charles continues the horticultural metaphor, comparing the editing of the letters to cultivating a garden, reminding his brother that 'I wd [would] say it is not to be raised in a hot-bed: The blossoms are fading: the fruit never ripens kindly with such cultivation.'[51] Despite Charles's serious insistence on editing the letters, he appears to have made a rod for his own back, as he would later remark to Philip that 'Wraye tells me, that my Errata have been prodigiously ridiculed & set at naught, for that many of them are

[48] Beinecke, Osborn c. 368, fol. 119.
[49] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 28^{v} [CY to PY, 1741].
[50] Ibid., fol. 29^{r} [CY to PY, 1741].
[51] Ibid., fol. 29^{v} [CY to PY, 1741].

Emendations.'[52] Evidently, while Charles Yorke treated the *Athenian Letters* as a serious scholarly publication with his 'Errata', the other authors found this a source of comedy when the work was never intended for publication.

In addition, the authors seem to have assumed that as a coterie composition, the *Athenian Letters* was at a divergence from the tastes of the commercial literary market. As Chapter 1 examined in the example of 'Le Libraire a la Mode' in *Wrestiana*, written by Daniel Wray and Philip Yorke, the disparity between the coterie's esoteric interests and the taste of the public creates comic opportunities. In 'Le Libraire a la Mode', Dodsley throws down the manuscript of the *Athenian Letters* in frustration at its '4 Volumes about Hormuz and Ahriman, Fire, and the Devil Knows what', before he negotiates with Charles Yorke about the length:

> D. Nothing now goes down but a single vol. and that must not be above an 8vo [octavo] […] Would it be impossible (in a low voice) to draw the work within a more moderate compass? […]
>
> C.Y. […] For my part, I thought the volumes rather thin, and was preparing some further Additions to my Vision: however we must take your Judgement in these Matters, half a dozen Letters in a vol. may be spared, and indeed, –
>
> D. interrupting
>
> Oh Dear Sir, We must not talk of retrenching by Letters, but by volumes[53]

Here, comedy is created out of the contrast between Dodsley's attuned business mindset, and Charles's 'Vision', which is completely out of touch with commercial tastes. The imagining of Dodsley in this scene, rather than Bettenham, further heightens the contrast between the Cambridge circle and the fashionable literary world that Dodsley represents. Bettenham, by contrast, seems to have established a reputation for printing religious, classical, travel and

[52] Ibid., fol. 47[r] [CY to PY, July 1741].
[53] Private collection, 'Le Libraire a la Mode' in *Wrestiana*, fol. 17 [c. 1744, signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].

antiquarian works; the *Athenian Letters* does not appear out of place compared to these other texts that were published.[54] Indeed, he had already published Henry Coventry's *Philemon to Hydaspes* in 1737 and Conyers Middleton's *Life of Cicero* in 1741, and so it is likely his existing relationship with two members of the Cambridge circle had some influence in the decision to employ Bettenham. However, if in 'Le Libraire a la Mode', Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray imagined that Dodsley's concern would be the undue length of the *Athenian Letters*, Bettenham's concern seemed to be quite contrary. Somewhat cynically, Philip Yorke thought that Bettenham preferred the longer volumes in order to maximise his profit, noting to Thomas Birch that 'I put money into Charles's hands to pay Bettenham, who, I dare say, is sorry that Cleander's Correspondence is not as bulky as some others.'[55] There is some class interplay in this too: the suggestion that Bettenham stood to make a profit from such an unfashionable vanity publication further separates the *Athenian Letters* from the public print trade that depended on subscriptions and generating profit through sales.

Despite framing the *Athenian Letters* as a private work that indulged the esoteric tastes of a few intellectual elites, the Yorke brothers' fear that the work might be widely distributed implies that exclusive coterie productions were desirable for the very fact that they were supposed to be limited to a select few. Upon receiving the first printed volume of the *Athenian* Letters in 1741, Charles Yorke was particularly keen to stress his reservations about the possibility of inadvertent publication, arguing that 'I can foresee that let it be dispersed into e'er so few hands, It will be much shewn about, and being communicated every where as a secret, will become a Notoriety.'[56] It is telling that the fear is not of fame or publicity per se, but 'Notoriety'; motivated by the fear that the work would reflect badly on

[54] Such works include Inigo Jones's *The Most Noble Antiquity of Great Britain* (1725), Andrew Ramsay's *The Travels of Cyrus* (1730), and George Ogle's *Antiquities Explained* (1737).
[55] BL, Add. MS 35396, fol. 109^{r} [PY to TB, 19th June 1743].
[56] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 28^{r} [CY to PY, April 1741].

the authors. In addition, Charles's fear that it will 'be much shewn about' conveys his concern that once the *Athenian Letters* was printed, the authors no longer had absolute control over the work or its readership. Charles emphasises the privacy and sociable motivations of the composition, stating that 'the whole was Begun & carried on merely for our own Improvement & our own Entertainment, witht [without] any Intention of aiming at Reputation from it, I would not have any appearance methinks of the thing's being laid much weight upon by ourselves.'[57] Charles's letter reveals his heightened awareness of their perception in the outside world, not wanting to be seen as taking the work seriously. Far from willing the *Athenian Letters* to attract fame and influence, Charles was adamant that they should be printed under the 'Strongest Restrictions.'[58] Apparently concerned that his brother was not as alarmed about the circulation of the letters as he was, Charles added:

> it is right to confine the communication of the Books as much as ever, and lay those to whom you have given it under the strongest Restrictions. It is incredible how soon a matter of this kind is reported abroad, how desirous the generality are to be entrusted with a secret, – how foolish it wd [would] be to have the thing blown upon, the performance sought after, and various opinions entertained of it. [59]

The fact that the 'generality' should so wish to be 'entrusted with a secret' hints at the way in which it is not the subject matter that attracts the curiosity of readers, but the exclusivity. Despite the confidence in the 'Le Libraire a la Mode' that the *Athenian Letters* was highly out of touch with commercial tastes, the letters between the Yorke brothers reveal their awareness that the *Athenian Letters* harboured the potential to reach a wider audience due to its exclusivity, as well as their own deeper insecurities about their perception in the public sphere.

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[57] Ibid., fol. 29^{v} [CY to PY, April 1741].
[58] Ibid., fol. 29^{r} [CY to PY, April 1741].
[59] Ibid.

There is also almost certainly a class dynamic which prevented the Yorke brothers from establishing a literary reputation for themselves and writing for public recognition. Although some aristocratic writers did publish, notably Anthony Ashley Cooper, 1st Earl of Shaftesbury, Shaftesbury nonetheless had reservations about writing for commercial gain. In *Advice to an Author* (1710), he argued that the noble writer writes for 'self entertainment', whereas to 'adjust […] for the market' and write 'what the public likes' would 'prostitute his art'.[60] We can gain further insight into the Yorke brothers' personal reservations about publication through their correspondence with published scholars and academics within the Cambridge circle. In particular, the respected scholar and author, Conyers Middleton, wrote to Philip Yorke to request that he might dedicate the final volume of his *Life of Cicero* (1742) to him.[61] For Middleton, Philip Yorke's patronage was a means of 'signifying […] the honor that is derived to me by possessing a share of your friendship.'[62] Yorke declined this request, 'refusing to receive it [the *Life of Cicero*] under any other character, than that of a candid reader.'[63] Betty Schellenberg observes from Philip Yorke's later letters that he would regret declining Middleton's offer and had been under considerable pressure from his father to refuse.[64] However, Middleton's argument to persuade Yorke otherwise reveals much about the reasons Yorke himself had given for not engaging more publicly in the literary world. While Yorke had privately praised the *Life of Cicero* to influential friends and even written an essay in praise of that 'eminent author['s] […] fine way of writing' in 'No. 17. Essay on

[60] Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Advice to an Author* (London: John Morphew, 1710), pp. 20-1. p. 20; Markman Ellis suggests that his ideology in the early eighteenth century provided an example for later aristocratic writers to reconcile their literary pursuits to commercial print publication, in '"An Author in Form": Women Writers, Print Publication, and Elizabeth Montagu's *Dialogues of the Dead*'.
[61] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 128r [CM to PY, 25th October 1742].
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., fol. 130v [CM to PY, 14th November 1742].
[64] Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture,* p. 43.

Epistolary Compositions' in *The Philosopher,*[65] he would go no further in public. Middleton wrote to Yorke that:

> you declare yourself afraid of these Dedications, they are apt to place men's characters in too glorious a light, make their part in life the more difficult, by raising an expectation of them in the world by exposing them to public envy. But these, Sir, are apprehensions, as flowing from a sort of modesty, wch [which] how laudable soever in others, would be thought even blameable in you. For the splendor [sic] of your fortunes have already done that for you; have already exposed you to envy, & placed you in too advanced a post, to think of any retreat, or of concealing yourself from the public view; it is your business to reflect on that character wch [which] the condition of your birth has imposed upon you.[66]

Middleton's attempt to dissuade Yorke from this 'modesty' emphasises that his social position already denies him privacy and exposes him to scrutiny in the public eye. It further suggests that Yorke was distinctly uncomfortable that his advantageous marriage and social position had subjected him to public envy. In addition, Middleton urged Yorke 'not to suffer the charms of a studious & indolent life, how much soever they may flatter your inclination, to check the nobler ambition of dedicating your abilities to the service of your country.'[67] For Yorke, there is evidently a further tension between the possibility of literary fame and his natural inclination for private retirement. The fact that Yorke does not lend his name to the dedication would suggest that despite Middleton's protests, the 'charms of a studious & indolent life' would outweigh any personal literary ambitions. It is no surprise that Philip Yorke should have found an outlet for his literary ambitions in the retirement of Wrest Park where he and his wife could form their own exclusive literary circle.

The issue of printing the *Athenian Letters* came to a head when, on the 2nd September 1742, Thomas Birch admitted that 'Mr Warburton […] had heard of the *Athenian Letters*' and further desired 'leave to present him with a copy of them, under the usual Restrictions.'[68]

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[65] Beinecke, Osborn c. 368, fol. 121.
[66] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 130^{v} [CM to PY, 14th November 1742].
[67] Ibid.
[68] BL, Add. MS 35396, fol. 52^{v} [TB to PY, 2nd September 1742].

Birch added, 'you must own him formidable enough to make it prudent to oblige him in such cases.'[69] This was not well received, and Birch had clearly underestimated the Yorkes' desire for absolute privacy. The threat of Warburton's formidableness did not seem to perturb the brothers either, for Charles Yorke further added in a postscript that 'Warburton is on no acct to be intrusted with a printed Copy […] I could give you a thousand reasons agst [against] showing him the whole performance in print, arising from our own situation & circumstances in general, and from the friendly impetuosity of the man in particular.'[70] What seems quite extraordinary, however, is Charles Yorke's adamance, given that Warburton was a close friend of his. In fact, at one point, Charles Yorke seems to have seriously considered showing Warburton the *Athenian Letters*, and perhaps even suggesting he contribute to them, for in the summer of 1740 he would write to Philip:

> Tho' I saw much of Warburton while he was in Town, yet I thought it wd [would] hardly be proper upon so short & early an acquaintance to shew him the Persian Letters. Besides he is at present so employ'd […] and hath so alter'd his Views, & new modell'd his company & his friends by having been introduced to all Mr Pope's intimates, that I imagine He can have no time left to engage in a Scheme of this sort.[71]

Charles Yorke seems to have harboured some concern about Warburton's inconsistency, apparently 'new modell'd' as a result of his friendship with the eminent Alexander Pope.[72] Yet Warburton appears to have been keen to attract the patronage of both brothers, also leaving Philip Yorke a copy of his second volume of the *Divine Legation of Moses* in May 1741.[73] There is little discussion of the *Divine Legation* in the correspondence between the

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., fol. 55^{v} [PY and CY to TB, 5th September 1742].
[71] BL, MS 35360, fol. 7^{v} [CY to PY, June 1740].
[72] Warburton's friendship with Pope was itself something of a volte face, as he had previously written to Matthew Concanen that 'Dryden borrowed for want of leisure, and Pope for want of genius', John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century*, 8 vols (London: John Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1817-58), II, p. 195.
[73] Charles Yorke writes to Philip that 'I dare say you have by this time received a present from Mr Warburton of his 2d Volume – He writ to me a little while ago in which he told me he intended one for you.' In BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 40^{r} [CY to PY, May 1741].

brothers,[74] although they must have seen some historical value in the work for the *Athenian Letters*, for Charles Yorke would insist that 'John Lawry [should] look into it before he shuts the Scene of Aegypt [sic];– perhaps he may find something of use to him in […] his Enquiries into their learning and Hieroglyphics.'[75] Lawry did apparently take up the advice for his letters describing Orsames's travels to Egypt, noting that he had 'read over some part of Warburton, and entirely agree with him in his notion of the Hierogylphic &c.'[76] However, the *Divine Legation of Moses* was a controversial work, and tension arose when several members of the Cambridge circle became engaged in disputes with Warburton over it in 1741. As Chapter 1 explored in the *Canons of Criticism* debate between William Warburton and Thomas Edwards, Warburton had an unfortunate tendency to publicly discredit other scholars. Charles Yorke was certainly aware of this, for he would write to his brother that 'Abbe Heaton is writing on the Persian Education [for the *Athenian Letters*] […] He proposes to […] add one antient Authority in support of Dr Prideaux, before Mr Warburton has destroyed it, beyond all hopes of Recovery.'[77] Charles Yorke seems to have remained on good terms with Warburton,[78] but by the end of 1741, Charles would write to Philip in despair that 'all our friends almost are breaking with Warburton.'[79] By the time the final volume of the *Athenian Letters* was printed in 1743, Warburton had been embroiled in bitter disputes with at least two of the other contributors.[80] It was perhaps due to Warburton's

[74] The brothers apparently discussed it with one another, but it was a topic they likely reserved for private conversation. In May 1741, Charles would remark to Philip that 'His [Warburton's] Book is indeed a very extraordinary performance. – I have no time to say any thing of it in this letter.' BL, Add MS 35360, fol. 40^{r} [CY to PY, May 1741].
[75] Ibid., fol. 43^{r} [CY to PY, 2nd June 1741].
[76] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 94^{v} [JL to PY, 25th June 1741].
[77] Ibid.
[78] Charles would maintain an extensive correspondence with Warburton, see. BL Add. MS. 35604; John Lawry was less impressed with the friendship, remarking to Philip Yorke that 'Your Brother hath been very much engaged of late with his Friend Mr W—n. He puffs him more than ever… much in the same way that Pope did his St John. Nor can he bear to be with any person who does not speak of him in an exalted stile…' in Add MS 35605, fol. 44^{v} [JL to PY, 21st June 1743].
[79] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 59^{r} [CY to PY, 1741]
[80] Webster's pamphlet set in motion further debates between William Warburton and Conyers Middleton, Henry Coventry, and Thomas Birch.

arguments with other writers, as well as the influence of his 'new modell'd' friends, that the Yorke brothers ultimately refused to share the *Athenian Letters* with him.

THE *ATHENIAN LETTERS,* ORIENTAL FICTION, AND POLITICAL SATIRE

As well as fearing the way in which the printing of the *Athenian Letters* harboured the potential to attract public interest, the Yorke brothers were also aware that the politically sensitive views covertly expressed in the letters made publication dangerous for their burgeoning political and legal careers. This section will explore the intellectual content of the *Athenian Letters* and explore the broader context for the way in which oriental fiction was also employed as a vehicle for political satire.

The concept of the *Athenian Letters* was not entirely original; oriental tales were becoming increasingly popular since Giovanni Paolo Marana's *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy* was published in 1684, Montesquieu's *Lettres Persannes* in 1721 and George Lyttleton's *Letters from a Persian in England to his friend at Ispahan* in 1735.[81] The oriental tale certainly captured the imaginations of eighteenth-century authors and readers, and indeed, as Chapter 3 will explore, travel books such as Cornelis de Bruijn's *Travels in Muscovy, Persia and Part of the East-Indies* (1737) brought ancient antiquities from distant parts of the world into the libraries of eighteenth-century readers in Britain.[82] However, it is not always clear whether writers adhered to the binary frameworks of occident and orient as posited by Edward Said in *Orientalism*.[83] Certainly, Montesquieu's *Lettres Persannes* reifies the binary opposition between East and West, drawing attention to the exotic nature of the Persian

[81] Philip Yorke appears not to have read *Letters Writ By a Turkish Spy* until after the *Athenian Letters* was written, for a friend would send him a copy in 1742 after having 'the honor of mentioning [it] to you'. BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 136 [Peter Isaac Cornabé to Philip Yorke, 31st January 1742/3].
[82] Cornelis de Bruijn's *Travels into Muscovy, Persia, and Part of the East-Indies* was first published in Amsterdam in 1711, but was first translated into English in 1737.
[83] Edward Said defines 'Orientalism' as 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,' in *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 3.

characters by referring to them as 'a set of Characters never before represented in *Europe.*'[84] Equally, the Persian stereotype in the eighteenth-century continued to depict the 'East' as the barbarous, exoticized, immoral other; a foil against which Protestant, British values might appear all the more virtuous.[85] But we should be careful about making assumptions about the power dynamics in texts and the role that oriental fiction played in this period. Not only have historians problematised the insistence of the west claiming interpretive authority over the east in the eighteenth century,[86] but as Srinivas Aravamudan has argued, 'a transcultural, cosmopolitan, and Enlightenment-inflected Orientalism existed.'[87] In addition, as Ros Ballaster has shown, the rise of the oriental novel in the eighteenth century demonstrated the adaptability of an emergent 'British' identity that could 'speak from and of the place of the "other"'.[88] Importantly, the framework of the oriental tale, by inviting comparisons between different cultures, allows for interrogation of the culture of the 'self' as much as the 'other,' and it is for this reason that it could equally be employed as a vehicle for political commentary and satire on Britain.[89]

This is particularly obvious in George Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian in England,* which was essentially a manifesto for liberty and a caution against the 'tyranny' of Robert Walpole. As discussed in Chapter 1, George Lyttelton was a key member of the Patriot

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[84] Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, *The Persian Letters*, trans. by Mr Ozell (London: J. Tonson, 1721), p. A2
[85] See, for instance, Roger Acherley's *The Britannic Constitution*, which depicts Persia as a nation centred 'in the Absolute and Arbitrary Will and Pleasure of those Eastern Monarchs', in Roger Acherley, *The Britannic Constitution, or, The Fundamental Form of Government in Britain* (London A. Bettesworth, 1727), p. 12.
[86] Anne Laura Stoler and Kate Teltscher have argued that colonial agendas are not self-evident, and Orientalism does not allow for the possibility that there could be the 'emergence of a much less stable sense of European self' in 'Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule', *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 31.1 (1989), 134-161 (p. 136) and Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed – European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 7.
[87] Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 3.
[88] Ros Ballaster, 'Narrative Transmigrations: The Oriental Tale and the Novel in Eighteenth Century Britain', *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture,* ed. by Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 75-96 (pp. 76-7).
[89] James Watt, 'The Origin and Development of the Oriental Tale', p. 54; Gregory Weight, *Oriental Correspondences: Eighteenth-Century Epistolary Fiction and Imperial Culture* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Delaware, 2001).

opposition, one of 'Cobham's Cubs' who met at Stowe in the 1730s.[90] His *Letters from a Persian in England* uses the Persian narrator, Selim, as a vehicle to compare the tyrannical monarchical government of his native country with that of Britain. By the end of *Letters from a Persian in England*, Selim remarks that England is a 'very *Powerful*, and Happy Nation: but how long they shall *continue so* depends entirely on the *Preservation of their Liberty*.'[91] For Lyttelton, the threat to that preservation of liberty was Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister. Despite being framed as an oriental tale, Lyttelton's satire was hardly subtle, and the ministerial retort in *The Persian Strip'd of his Disguise* (1735) was quick to label the work as an outright '*Libel* on the present *Government.*'[92] The title of this response indicates that the oriental theme was little more than a disingenuous costume that only had to be 'strip'd' to reveal the true nature of the work.

This is certainly in contrast to the carefully researched *Athenian Letters*, in which the authors had been at great pains to recreate an authentic sense of Ancient Athens and Persia. Against other oriental tales, the agenda of the *Athenian Letters* is more neutral in its outlook. Not only do the authors envision Cleander as a 'philosopher & thinking man' rather than drawing on contemporary Persian stereotypes,[93] but in common with Addison's 'Vision of Mirzah' in the *Spectator*, they are more concerned with the human condition itself that is shared across cultures.[94] This philosophical perspective is shared in 'No. 17. Essay on

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[90] For further reading on the political allusions in the landscape at Stowe, see Christine Gerrard, 'Patriot Gothic' in *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, National Myth, 1725-1742* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 109-149; Francesca Orestano, 'Bust Story: Pope at Stowe, or the Politics and Myths of Landscape Gardening', *Studies in the Literary Imagination,* 38.1 (2005): 39-60 (p. 52).
[91] George Lyttelton, *Letters from a Persian in England to his Friend at Ispahan* (London: J. Millan, 1735), pp. 207; 208.
[92] *The Persian Strip'd of his Disguise: Or, Remarks on a Late Libel, Intitled, Letters from a Persian in England to his Friend at Ispahan* (London T. Cooper, 1735), p. 2.
[93] BL Add. MS 35360, fol. 57^{v} [CY to PY, 26th November 1740].
[94] Joseph Addison's 'The Vision of Mirzah' is ostensibly a translation from one of 'Several Oriental Manuscripts', Mirzah climbs the hills of Baghdad and, inspired by the genius, contemplates the human experience, in *The Spectator* (1 September 1711), 159.

Epistolary Compositions' in *The Philosopher* (itself modelled on the *Spectator*), in which Philip Yorke suggests that through reading historical letters, the reader becomes:

> their [the characters'] intimate confidants, partaking in all their anxieties, & distresses, & sharing in their triumphs & prosperity; one while accompanying them in the hurry, & splendor [sic] of their public employments, & then retiring into their private Apartments […] Such a shifting scene & the train of reflections that occur from the view put me in mind of Fontenelle's wish, to stand suspended in the air, and see the Globe turn round under him.[95]

The image of the globe also conveys the power of fiction to transport the reader over the world, to places that go beyond their own experience. Yorke goes on to argue that reading the letters of 'the greatest Men in all Arts & Sciences' carries a didactic purpose to improve and broaden the mind.[96] While the essay was in direct reference to Conyers Middleton's *Life of Cicero*, given that the composition of the *Athenian Letters* was also underway at this time, Yorke must have also had in mind their own epistolary compositions. Like the *Life of Cicero*, the *Athenian Letters* was inspired by classical sources and intended to evoke as vivid an account of the Peloponnesian wars as the authors were able to create. This philosophical, transcultural outlook particularly sets the *Athenian Letters* apart from earlier oriental tales; while the customs of Persia certainly contrast with those of Athens, this prompts Cleander to interrogate the values of both.

Curiously, the title of the work itself also blurs the characters' cultural identities, as the authors interchangeably refer to both the 'Athenian Letters' and the 'Persian Letters' in their correspondence. This may hint that either George Lyttleton's *Letters from a Persian in England* or Montesquieu's *Lettres Persannes* served as the original inspiration, but the slippage also suggests that the exchange of letters between Athens and Persepolis blurs the boundaries between the two cultures. The *Athenian Letters* essentially undergoes what Srinivas

[95] Beinecke, Osborn c. 368, 'No. 17. Essay on Epistolary Compositions, with a Character of Tully's Letters', *The Philosopher*, fol. 117 [signed 'P', Philip Yorke].
[96] Ibid.

Aravamudan has identified in the Oriental tale as 'a fluid circulation of endocultural and exocultural processes';[97] Cleander's correspondence allows a fluid exchange between the foreign and the domestic, in which Cleander both looks inward at the values of his 'native' Persia and outward at the values of Athens. Thus, Cleander's peripatetic existence between Athens and Persia creates a paradoxical process of estrangement and assimilation, as his identity becomes a hybrid of both Persian and Athenian values. The slippage in Cleander's identity was picked up by Thomas Clarke, who, upon perusing some of the early letters in 1739, remarked that 'the Free Spirit of Greece & the Enchanting Notions of Liberty have already quite corrupted the Persian Vessel […] Little Good is therefore to be Expected by Persia from such an agent who is Evidently Athenian in His Heart; & has so far forgot his native Country that even his Style is truly Attic.'[98] While Clarke suggests that Cleander is in danger of losing his native identity, he perhaps does not fully grasp the extent to which the blurring of Cleander's identity allows him to interrogate the values of both nations. Soon after his exposure to the Athenian way of life, Cleander seeks to 'discover the excellencies of each [government] […] and to determine whether a constitution, blended of both [Persian and Athenian principles], might not compose the most perfect form that human invention can ever expect to attain.'[99] Presented as philosopher, Cleander's outlook is inspired by his open-minded intellectual curiosity, and arguably represents the way of thinking that the writers themselves explored in *The Philosopher*. In the introduction to *The Philosopher,* Philip Yorke states that the essays are written in the character 'of a Person wholly disengaged from the little Prejudices, narrow views, & mean Passions wch [which] infest the generality of men, & disturb the Peace of Society – as one who has spent the greatest part of his Life in the Steady Pursuit of Truth,

[97] Srinivas Aravamudan, "The Wake of the Novel: The Oriental Tale as a National Allegory," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction,* 1.33 (1999), 5-31 (p. 10); 'Exoculture' can be defined as the 'culture of the Other' while 'endoculture' can be defined as 'the culture of the Self, one's own culture'.
[98] BL Add. MS 35605, fol. 20 [TC to PY, 31st August 1739].
[99] Philip Yorke, et al., 'Letter XIII. Cleander to Gobryas, chief scribe to ARTAXERXES king of Persia', *The Athenian Letters*, I, p. 45 [signed 'P', Philip Yorke].

Knowledge, & Virtue.'[100] This outlook of intellectual curiosity informs the process of researching and writing the *Athenian Letters*, and likely infuses the authors' depictions of Athens and Persia.

THE *ATHENIAN LETTERS* AND PATRIOT POLITICS

Though the *Athenian Letters* is, in many respects, a scholarly and historical exercise and thus does not obviously situate itself in modern society, there are subtle parallels with the political landscape in the late 1730s and early 1740s in the later years of Robert Walpole's ministry before his fall in 1742. During this time, Lord Chancellor Hardwicke was a member of Walpole's Cabinet, but his relationship with the Prime Minister was becoming increasingly taut.[101] The Yorke brothers followed the political developments closely, and once Philip Yorke was elected the MP for Reigate in 1741 he would regularly pass on reports from the House of Commons to his brother.[102] The letters between Philip and Charles Yorke do not explicitly reveal their thoughts of Walpole himself, but they were certainly suspicious of the promises of freedom put forward by the Patriots in opposition to Walpole and his ministry. A key concern that occupies the letters between the Yorke brothers and their friends during this time is the way in which the ideology of the Patriot opposition had been popularised through the press. As Robert Harris argues in *A Patriot Press*, by the late 1730s and early 1740s, the 'press battle for popular support had been comprehensively won by the opposition,' which ignited fears about how pandering to popular opinions of the 'mob' could undermine the

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[100] Osborn c. 368, 'No. 1. The Character & Design of the Author', *The Philosopher*, fol. 4 [signed 'P', Philip Yorke].

[101] Not only had they disagreed over foreign policy, but there is also some disagreement in how far Hardwicke and Newcastle were behind the fall of Walpole. Robert Walpole (and his son, Horace) seemed to believe that Hardwicke had betrayed Walpole 'to save himself', but this has been disputed by historians. See Romney R. Sedgwick, ed, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1715-1754* (London: History of Parliament Trust, 1970), I, p. 50; Clyve Jones, 'The Duke of Newcastle's Letters on the Fall of Walpole in 1742', *The Electronic British Library Journal* (2013): 1-13.

[102] In July 1741, Charles would write to Philip to 'thank you for your Political News. I find we coincide much in our sentiments on the state of affairs.' In BL Add. MS 35360, fol. 47^{v}.

social hierarchy.[103] Charles Yorke's disdain for the opposition and the power of the press is evident in a letter to his brother, in which he criticises the loaded rhetoric of the opposition in his concern for the 'popular inflammatory powers [of the opposition] […] more consistent with the flashiness and want of argument in ye Craftsmen.'[104] Similarly, Thomas Clarke would write to Philip Yorke about his concern that 'our Modern Patriots think that the perfection of a Free Government consists in doing what each Individual thinks fit […] Such notions as that necessarily prove fatal to Liberty, & have generally, been a Prelude to the loss of it.'[105] It is not insignificant that this particular letter also describes Lord Chancellor Hardwicke's debate in the House of Lords, in which, according to Clarke, he 'convinc'd every body […] that Liberty, tho' it be uppermost in the thought & Conversation of all of us, is, nevertheless, a Subject that is very seldom rightly understood by any.'[106] There is a clear concern that liberty is a slippery term not properly understood by the people, yet a notion that nonetheless possesses dangerous potential to destabilise the balance of the constitution. This fear was shared by other contemporary observers. Samuel Johnson, in his later account of James Thomson in *Lives of the Poets* (1781) would regard the period as one in which 'a long course of opposition to Sir Robert Walpole had filled the nation with clamours for liberty, of which no man felt the want, and with care for liberty, which was not in danger.'[107]

Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that the *Athenian Letters* should have become infused with coded political allusions and touches on topical debates about freedom, power, and ideal governance. In fact, the authors even seem to have regarded the composition of the *Athenian Letters* as training for their future political careers. Once Philip Yorke had departed

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[103] Robert Harris, *A Patriot Press: National Politics and the London Press in the 1740s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 19.
[104] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 17^{r} [CY to PY, 7th December 1740].
[105] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 8^{v} [TC to PY, 17th February 1738]
[106] Ibid.
[107] Samuel Johnson, 'James Thomson', *The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland; and a Criticism of their Works,* 8 vols (Dublin: J. Moore, 1793-1802), VIII, p. 592.

from Cambridge in 1740, Daniel Wray would advise him to apply the lessons of the *Athenian Letters* to his political career:

> After so long an intimacy with Consuls & Archons, you must now be introduced to Parliament-men & Privy-counsellors; Whether you will find many Pericleses & Ciceros among them, my little acquaintance in the Great-world does not enable me to say; But the Lessons of Politics & Eloquence, which we have drawn from the divine records of Greece & Rome, become mere idle Speculations unless we apply them to the Business at the Cockpit & the Debates at Westminster.[108]

But the *Athenian Letters* was more than a rehearsal for the world of politics; it also contained its own political satire on the Patriot opposition. In July 1741, shortly after the general election in which Walpole's ministerial majority was diminished, Charles Yorke writes an Athenian letter in which the discussions in the Athens assembly are paralleled with real contemporary parliamentary debates. In this respect, he elides the fictional, classical world of the *Athenian Letters* and the real, modern world of eighteenth-century politics.[109] Charles explains the political allegories to his brother in a letter:

> the first of these [Athenian letters] is to Hydaspes taking notice of Sandwich's speech on the motion to know who advised the King's answer to Ld Chesterfield's Address, Ld Halifax's speech on the motion concerning the Queen of Hungary […] the speech of the same Noble Ld on the speech addressed to the Commons, and setting forth likewise Mr Lyttelton under Philostratus, and Ld Talbot under the character of Dithyrambus.[110]

The letter in the *Athenian Letters* in which this scene takes place makes no overt reference to the particulars of these debates, merely referring to it as 'some debate in the assembly, which it seems had been carried on with a peculiar vehemence',[111] but Charles still covertly expresses his disapproval of the Patriot opposition through Philemon's observations.

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[108] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 6^{v} [DW to PY, 2nd September 1740].
[109] For a detailed analysis of the politics in this period, see Robert Harris, *A Patriot Press: National Politics and the London Press in the 1740s*, pp. 97-121, and Philip Chesney Yorke, 'Chapter X Lord Chancellor The Walpole Ministry, 1737-1742', *The Life and Correspondence of Philip Yorke, Earl of Hardwicke,* pp. 203-4; Basil Williams, *The Whig Supremacy: 1714-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 210.
[110] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 46^{v} [CY to PY, July 1741]
[111] Philip Yorke, et al., 'Letter LXXXIX. Cleander to Hydaspes. From Athens', *Athenian Letters,* II, p. 194. [signed 'C', Charles Yorke].

Philemon observes that 'young men, instead of informing themselves in the merits of the question […] suffer themselves to be led by the force of invectives, rather than the weight of argument,'[112] while the older men are:

> foolish enough to encourage them in this fatal way of thinking; are artful enough to persuade them, that they embrace patriotism in adhering to a faction; are mean enough to flatter these boys of premature judgments and no experience; and are wicked enough to spoil the whole rising generation, for the sake of those sordid views which interest a part only of the present.[113]

In the *Athenian Letters*, Charles Yorke is particularly critical of George Lyttelton for his role in these debates, represented in the figure of 'Philostratus, the nephew of the trierarch [Lord Cobham].' In the *Athenian Letters,* Philemon describes Philostratus as having:

> parts and learning; but by taking a wrong turn in the management of popular business, as yet has never made a considerable figure. He chuses the warm and declamatory, not the cool and rational way of speaking; and professes to enter into no subject, as he expresses it, except when he is raised by it, or, as a plain man would say, in a downright passion.[114]

The suggestion that Lyttelton had taken a 'wrong turn' and 'never yet made a considerable figure' is almost certainly pointing to his association with the Patriot opposition. Yet the dismissal of Lyttelton as having not reached his potential is perhaps undeservedly disparaging, given that he had served as Prince Frederick's personal secretary since 1737. In fact, Prince Frederick had significant leverage, and Chancellor Hardwicke had considered the Prince's move into opposition a threat to the ministry. He observed that it 'will make a coalition between the Whigs desperate & impossible. Before this, the Whigs in opposition wanted a head […] & had no prospect of ever coming into any share of power […] They will now find a head in the Prince.'[115] In light of this, the suggestion that Lyttelton has 'never

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[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., p. 196.
[115] George Harris, *Life of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke,* 3 vols (London: E. Moxon, 1847), I, pp. 377-8; Recent studies have also shown that the prince's rival court at Leicester House had some role in helping to remove

made a significant figure' is possibly an attempt to downplay the real threat that he and his politics represented to the ministry. The depiction is also incongruent with the authority that Philip and Charles Yorke would later attach to Lyttelton's opinion; as this thesis will explore in Chapter 3, Lyttelton would later advise on the garden design at Wrest, suggesting that they nonetheless respected him as a man of taste and learning.[116] Yet when the Yorke brothers were composing the *Athenian Letters*, they had not yet met Lyttleton in person. Rose Mary Davis suggests it was not until 1745 that Charles Yorke would be introduced to George Lyttelton through William Warburton, and he would visit Lyttelton at his estate at Hagley in 1746.[117] It is possible, therefore, that in 1741, when Charles Yorke was writing this letter, Lyttleton merely represented the antithesis of his own political views, not yet realising that they would later form a sincere and meaningful friendship.

The political differences between Lyttelton and the Yorke brothers make an interesting contrast when one compares the *Athenian Letters* with Lyttelton's *Letters from a Persian in England.* As discussed in the previous section, while Lyttelton uses his oriental narrator Selim as a foil so that he might praise British liberties in contrast to the despotic monarchy of Persia, in the *Athenian Letters,* the philosophical Cleander is able to question the values of both his native country and that of Athens. No matter how 'enchanted' Cleander might be with Athenian liberty, the correspondence in the *Athenian Letters* is careful to offer a balanced perspective that also demonstrates the dangers of such liberty. In Charles Yorke's letter from Hippias to Cleander, he offers a counter argument, reminding Cleander that 'How little then ought we to admire those [democratic] governments, where the spirit of *faction* is

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Walpole from power, see Robin Eagles, 'Frederick, Prince of Wales, the 'Court' of Leicester House and the 'Patriot' Opposition to Walpole, c. 1733-1742', *The Court Historian* 21.2 (2016): 140-156, p. 156.

[116] Charles Yorke was certainly on friendly terms with Lyttelton as early as 1746, for upon visiting Hagley that August, he would remark how he was 'entertained in the kindest Manner,' and was impressed at the 'Genius' of the gardens, believing Lyttelton had 'drawn out the natural Beauties of it to View with great taste.' BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 158v [CY to PY, 26th August 1746]

[117] Rose Mary Davis, *The Good Lord Lyttleton: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Culture* (Pennsylvania: Times, 1939), p. 275.

mistaken for the spirit of *freedom*; and that, which constitutes the real happiness and grandeur of a nation, is surrendered, not for the sake of liberty, but licentiousness […]?'[118] This particularly resonates with Clarke and Hardwicke's criticism of 'modern patriots' and is relevant to the debates about patriotism and liberty in the early 1740s. Yet, in setting Cleander's correspondence during the Peloponnesian wars, the authors of the *Athenian Letters* avoid making direct or potentially controversial political parallels to Britain – as Lyttelton did with his *Letters from a Persian in England*. Not forgetting, of course, that Charles Yorke's chief criticism of Coventry's *Philemon to Hydaspes* was that it made too strong an allusion to 'Modern Times' and would thus cause 'singular offence'. If the authors were to engage in politically sensitive issues, they would have to do so in a careful and subtle manner. We might consider, therefore, that the decision to parallel contemporary political debates with the real history of the Peloponnesian wars was an attempt to provide a disguise that would not be 'strip'd' as easily as Lyttleton's *Letters from a Persian in England*. Clearly, the authors were not going to take any chances in making the *Athenian Letters* publicly accessible and thereby laying it open to criticism. While Philip and Charles Yorke might not have agreed with the Patriot opposition and went as far as drawing parallels in the *Athenian Letters*, they nevertheless thought it prudent to keep the work strictly within the remit of their immediate circle.

AFTERLIFE AND PUBLICATION HISTORY OF THE *ATHENIAN LETTERS*

The exclusivity and political sensitivity of the *Athenian Letters* meant that it was kept under close guard and did not receive any critical recognition until it was reprinted a generation later in 1781, when Philip Yorke, now at the age of 61, allowed 100 copies to be circulated to a wider audience. In the preface that he wrote for the 1781 edition, he emphasises the

[118] Philip Yorke, et al., 'Letter XCII. Hippias to Cleander', *Athenian* Letters, II, p. 222 [signed 'C', Charles Yorke].

Athenian Letters as a work authored by a 'Society of Friends,'[119] and nostalgically mourns the loss of several of the original contributors, suggesting that reprinting the work might 'cultivate the remembrance of their former friendly connection'.[120] The *Gentleman's Magazine* published the first review of the letters in 1784, finally exposing the writers' names and the title of the work, although as the work had been merely reprinted as opposed to published, the periodical was obliged to 'deny ourselves and our readers the pleasure of making extracts.'[121] Certainly, during the time at which Philip and Charles Yorke were at their most socially and politically active in the mid-eighteenth century, they and the other authors were careful to curate their public images. When Robert Masters published his *History of the College of Corpus Christi* in 1755, while the Yorke brothers are afforded considerable attention, there is only a vague reference to some 'ingenious epistles' that were composed. It is likely that Birch, to whom Masters was 'indebted for some useful Communications,' deliberately withheld details and even the title of the *Athenian Letters*.[122] By 1781, while most of the original contributors had died, the fact that Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray, both key contributors, were still living perhaps explains why the *Athenian Letters* did not fully enter the public sphere. It was only in 1798 that the *Athenian Letters* was published, by which time, none of the original authors was still living. The work was thus framed in nostalgic homage to the previous generation. The preface to the 1798 edition was written by Charles Yorke's eldest son, Philip Yorke (by then, the 3rd Earl of Hardwicke since his uncle's death in 1790), who explained the suppression of the work as:

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[119] Philip Yorke, 'Preface to the Edition of 1781', in Philip Yorke et al., *Athenian Letters* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1798), p. xv.
[120] Ibid.
[121] *The Gentleman's Magazine* 54.1 (1784), p. 276.
[122] The *History of the College of Corpus Christi* does mention Philip Yorke as a 'Lover and Encourager of Literature', and Charles Yorke's publication, *Some Considerations on the Law of Forfeiture for High Treason* (1744) is listed. It appears that Philip and Charles's profiles were carefully curated; while their political roles are advertised, their literary capacity only goes as far as their patronage rather than their own compositions. In Robert Masters, *History of the College of Corpus Christi* (Cambridge: J. Bentham), pp. 424-5.

> ingenuous diffidence, which forbad the Suggesters of it, at that time extremely young, to obtrude on the notice of the World, what they had considered merely as a preparatory trial of their strength, and as the best method of imprinting on their own minds some of the immediate subjects of their academical studies.[123]

The youthfulness of the authors was also emphasised by early reviewers, a feature that would certainly apply to the Yorke brothers themselves.[124] This is further emphasised in the 1798 edition, as the frontispieces of both volumes feature portraits of Philip and Charles depicted later in life at the height of their social, cultural, and political power, further framing the *Athenian Letters* as a youthful pursuit in comparison.[125] However, the twelve authors varied greatly in age and experience, so the 'youthfulness' should not be taken entirely at face value. Some of the authors were established academics and theologians who had already published similar works, such as Henry Coventry, whose *Philemon to Hydaspes* (1736) was almost certainly an inspiration.[126] However, an aspect that the 3rd Earl of Hardwicke and the early reviewers do not address – possibly because almost six decades had passed between composition and publication – is the political sensitivity of the work. Earlier in the 1740s, Thomas Birch had considered it 'prodigious Self Denial' that Philip and Charles Yorke should have chosen sensitive political subjects that obliged them to 'supress their performances' and deny themselves the literary 'Reputation' they were capable of acquiring.[127] Nevertheless, the tendency to frame the *Athenian Letters* as a youthful

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[123] Philip Yorke, 3rd Earl of Hardwicke, 'Preface' to *Athenian Letters*, ed. by Thomas Birch, 2 vols (London: T Cadell and W. Davies, 1798), II.
[124] For instance, in Philip Yorke's entry in *The British Cabinet*; *containing portraits of illustrious personages,* John Adolphus described the work as one of 'considerable merit; particularly when it recollected, that the persons […] were at that this time extremely young men.' 2 vols (London: T. Bensley, for E. Harding, 1799), II, p. 68; the *Mercure de France* considered the authors 'jeunes gens estimables destinés par leur naissance aux plus hauts emplois de la société' ['eminent young men destined from birth to enter the highest professions in society'], 6 vols (London: W. and C. Salisbury, 1800), I, p. 25.
[125] The frontispiece of Philip Yorke in volume 1 is after the George Romney portrait of 1779; the frontispiece of Charles Yorke in volume 2 is after a wax model by Gossell in 1760.
[126] The characters Philemon and Hydaspes also feature in the *Athenian Letters*. Philip Yorke, Wray and Lawry also praise the work for 'its 'dryness of ancient Learning happily relieved with that easy elegance proper to Dialogue', in 'Epistle from Wrest to the Ingenious Philemon', *Wrestiana*, fol. 20 [c. 1744, signed 'P. W. L.', Philip Yorke, Daniel Wray, John Lawry].
[127] BL, Add. MS 35369, fol. 213 [TB to PY, 30th June 1744].

endeavour, may, in part, have been an attempt to divert attention away from the political undertones of the work, although these may have also been lost over time.

Despite the flurry of interest in the *Athenian Letters* in the late-eighteenth century,[128] during the nineteenth century, the work slipped once again into obscurity. By the early twentieth century, the *Athenian Letters* was dismissed as little more than a 'youthful imitation' of Montesquieu and has received little critical acknowledgement since, despite the growing academic interest in the genre of eighteenth-century oriental fiction.[129] The early suppression of the work undoubtedly had some role in limiting its public visibility, especially when compared to more famous oriental epistolary novels. Only recently have a couple of scholars brought the *Athenian Letters* back into critical discussion.[130] Betty Schellenberg has given the work the most critical attention, particularly examining its afterlife in the late eighteenth-century to argue for the 'fame and influence' that could be achieved by a coterie publication. While Philip and Charles Yorke certainly toyed with the idea of printing and playfully situated themselves in relation to the public print trade, focusing too much on the afterlife of the work undermines the great lengths to which the authors went in order to keep the work secret. In fact, as the following chapter will explore, it was the very secrecy of the work that allowed them to later create their own private coded meanings in the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park. In many respects, the later publication and afterlife of the *Athenian*

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[128] The *Athenian Letters* went through two more print runs in 1801 and 1810.
[129] FTH Fletcher, 'English Imitators of Montesquieu', *Revue de Literature Comparée* (1933), 460-505. Recent works examining the vogue for oriental fiction in the eighteenth century include: James Watt, 'The Origin and Development of the Oriental Tale', *Orientalism and Literature*, ed. by Geoffrey Nash (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 50-65 and 'Arabian Nights and Oriental Spies' in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: Volume I: Prose Fiction in English from the Origins of Print to 1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 472-485; Srinivas Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Ros Ballaster, 'Narrative Transmigrations: The Oriental Tale and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *A Companion to the Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture,* ed. by Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 75-96.
[130] Sylvia Harcstark Myers, 'A Buried Talent': The Writings of Catherine Talbot', p. 212; Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture,* p. 18.

Letters broke with the original spirit and motivation that brought about its composition in the early 1740s.

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In conclusion, this chapter has sought to demonstrate that the *Athenian Letters* was both a serious academic endeavour as well as a consolidation of the friendships that Philip and Charles Yorke forged during their undergraduate years. It is in these early Cambridge years that the Yorke brothers appear on the periphery of the commercial literary market and engage with it on their own terms; but their efforts to limit the circulation of their works and curate the way in which they appeared to the outside world reveals their reticence to fully immerse themselves in the public sphere of the commercial print trade. Philip and Charles Yorke evidently harboured deeper reservations about allowing the *Athenian Letters* to become more widely circulated, likely due to the political sensitivity and personal significance of the work. While the Cambridge circle initially facilitated the brothers' academic pursuits, a clear tension emerges between those who were willing to publicise their compositions and those who preferred to keep them a private endeavour. It is likely that Warburton's interest in the work revealed to the Yorke brothers how close their work was to being made more public, and it also put them in an uncomfortable position when the other contributors had been embroiled in their own disputes with Warburton. By the summer of 1742, Philip and Charles Yorke would begin to write their own compositions for *Wrestiana*, and some of their close friends from the Cambridge circle began to pass their summers at Wrest Park. However, the *Athenian Letters* was hardly relegated to the past. The fact that it became its own legacy in *Wrestiana* and would inspire the creation of the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park suggests that it would continue to serve as a reminder of the intense academic friendships that were forged in the Cambridge years.

3

Literary Allusions in the Gardens at Wrest Park

INTRODUCTION

In the 1740s and 1750s, the coterie's summer visits to Wrest Park were crowned not only by lively literary compositions in *Wrestiana,* but also by experiences of the gardens. The correspondence between members certainly demonstrates how far the gardens at Wrest provided space for socialisation, intellectual exchange, and congenial inspiration for their compositions. John Lawry would write to Philip Yorke that he hoped 'Sieur Charles has given many an extempore Oration upon the Beauties of the place. For oft I wean must you with the Ladies have sat attentive to his Lore in that fine Alcove by the Water at the lower end of the Gardens.'[1] The experience of the gardens too, provided a country retreat away from the buzz of London. Daniel Wray would despair that upon returning to London, 'I am fallen into a situation so intensely different, kennels for canals, Dusty East-Winds instead of Honeysuckles, Rawthmells for the Hill-house, and Birch alone to supply the place of all the Borlacian Poets & Charles the Critic.'[2] Wray's play on 'kennels' and 'canals' emphasises the contrast between the dirt and waste in the city and the simple beauties of the country. Similarly, Philip's sister, Elizabeth Anson, would remark upon leaving Wrest that 'My Hearing grieves that […] the Music of the Birds, or Lady Grey's Harpsichord' should be disturbed by 'the unintelligible cries of London' and that her sense of smell 'suffers extremely by the loss of the Perfumes of Hay & Honeysuckles.'[3] The sensory observations highlight how far the garden at Wrest was not merely decorative, but above all, intended to be

[1] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 92^{v} [JL to PY, 20th June 1741].
[2] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 22^{v} [DW to PY, 16th August 1743].
[3] BLARS, L30/9/3/2, fol. 157 [EA to JG, July 1748].

experienced, sensed and enjoyed.[4] The garden was not only a place in which visitors enjoyed walks around the grounds; it was also a space that inspired compositions and in turn, the garden itself contained intellectual and literary references to those compositions.

This chapter will examine the literary allusions in the landscape at Wrest Park, primarily focusing on the connection between the *Athenian Letters* and the Mithraic Glade that was created between 1747 and 1751. On one level, the garden monuments at Wrest can be contextualised within the broader trends in mid-century garden design, and indeed, the Mithraic Glade is indebted in some way to the ideas espoused by influential figures such as Alexander Pope, William Stukeley, Thomas Wright, and George Lyttelton. However, there is another level of interpretation that was only accessible to those in the inner circle of the coterie. In an era in which gardens were increasingly visited and open to public decipherment, the Mithraic Altar frequently baffled visitors and resisted interpretation. This was not only to make a joke out of the antiquarian culture of decipherment; the Mithraic Altar, by making private reference to the members' early scholarly interests and composition, further reaffirmed the exclusivity of their circle and served to consolidate their friendship. While Thomas Edwards's root-house is part of the Mithraic Glade and alludes to the world of the *Athenian Letters,* he brings his own unique style that merges classical architecture with native primitivism. Further, the literary inscriptions he provides for the root-house rather consolidate his own involvement with the Wrest circle. By the early 1770s, when the Bath House was constructed at Wrest and the Gothic Tower at Wimpole, these later garden buildings have some links to the original coterie, not least as the inscriptions for both the Bath House and the Gothic Tower appear among the later compositions in *Wrestiana.* However, by this point, few members of the original Wrest circle were still living, and these

[4] This is a point highlighted in Kate Felus's *Secret Life of the Georgian Garden,* that reminds us 'how important use and enjoyment of their gardens was to the Georgians', p. 3.

later garden buildings reflect a later phase in Yorke and Grey's lives. In many respects, that the inscriptions for the Bath House and Gothic Tower appear in *Wrestiana* perhaps reflects a nostalgic desire to revive the circle's literary manuscript and, like the earlier compositions, retain a degree of exclusivity.

SPIRITUALITY, THE NATURAL WORLD, AND THE *ATHENIAN LETTERS*

As Chapter 2 demonstrated, the *Athenian Letters* was both an imaginative retelling of classical history, and a veiled political satire. However, the work also engages with spirituality and the natural world through the characters Cleander, Smerdis, and Orsames in the letters written by John Lawry and Henry Heaton. Heaton was Lawry's tutor at Cambridge, and they appear to have composed some of their *Athenian Letters* together.[5] In many respects, this interest fed into Christian Europe's long-standing fascination with oriental languages and religious practices, especially those that linked to the early biblical scriptures, such as Hebrew, Arabic, or Persian.[6] In the early eighteenth century, the ideas of writers such as William Stukeley helped to cement the notion that Christianity was the ultimate goal of all religions, and, as this chapter will explore, different religious practices are merged in the concept of primitivism, which might be defined as an idealisation of ruggedness associated with the natural world, removed from civilised, modern society.[7] This cultural fascination is exemplified in Alexander Pope's *The Temple of Fame,* in which a ritual takes place in the 'Eastern' front of a temple decorated in '*Barbarick* Gold', where 'in long Robes the Royal Magi stand' and 'Grave *Zoroaster* waves the circling Wand'.[8] Feeding into

[5] Lawry would write to Philip to inform him that 'Mr Heaton & myself have been employed in writing you a joint Epistle ever since the time of his arrival which was Monday last.' BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 124^{r} [JL to PY, 13th June 1742].
[6] Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Philadelphia and Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. xii.
[7] Maximilian E. Novak, 'Primitivism', *Themes and Movements,* ed. by H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 456-469 (p. 456); Lois Whitney, *Primitivism and the Idea of Progress: In English Popular Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), p. xi.
[8] Alexander Pope, *The Temple of Fame* (London: Bernard Lintot, 1715), p. 14.

this cultural vogue, the authors of the *Athenian Letters* demonstrate a curiosity for ancient religious practices and attempt to reconcile these different spiritual beliefs. Cleander is an adherent of Zoroastrianism, and yet, in the same way that his political views become infused with Athenian influence, so too do his religious beliefs. A footnote in the *Athenian Letters* explains this tension:

> The letters of moral and religious speculation in Cleander's correspondence may be divided, like the Dialogues of PLATO, and the philosophic pieces of other great men of antiquity, into the esoteric and exoteric. Those, which contain his inward doctrine, are addressed to ORSAMES; but those of the opposite turn to Smerdis. […] This can be reconciled on no other supposition, than that he had adopted the double doctrine of his favourites, the Greek philosophers.[9]

Thus, while Cleander outwardly worships Mithras and adheres to Zoroastrianism, secretly, 'his sentiments of all the known modes of popular worship are unsettled' as a result of his conversations with Socrates. This suggests even further Cleander's cultural hybridity.

Orsames, in a similar vein to Cleander, is also curious about other religious practices, and Lawry has his character observe the religious practices in ancient Egypt during his stay at Thebes. In a philosophical manner akin to that of Cleander, Orsames draws parallels between ancient Egyptian practices and those of Persia, noting that the caves remind him of 'those caverns of the Magi, under the mountains of my native Persia.'[10] In addition, Orsames observes how the 'primaeval mysteries of the AEgptian learning […] said to have been placed here by Hermes Trismegistus, a sage as highly reverenced amongst the AEgyptians, as Zoroaster is with us.'[11] Finally, Orsames witnesses 'a great sacrifice and lustration to the mysterious Hermes, or Mercury, [which] was to be solemnized within the bowels of this

[9] Philip Yorke, et al., 'Letter CXXVIII. Cleander to Hippias', *The Athenian Letters,* III, pp. 163-4 [signed 'H', Henry Heaton].
[10] Philip Yorke, et al. 'Letter XXV. Orsames to Cleander. From Thebes in Aegypt', *Athenian Letters,* I, p. 98 [signed 'L', John Lawry].
[11] Ibid.

stupendous cave.'[12] The visceral metaphor 'bowels' clearly evokes the sanguine nature of the sacrifice; evoking a sense of 'religious horror'. One might further draw parallels between this visceral description and Pope's descriptions of druidic ritual in the *Temple of Fame,* which feature 'rude Iron Columns smear'd with Blood.'[13] The amalgamation of different religious practices is striking. In 'Supplement to the General Dictionary' in *Wrestiana*, a mock-biographical entry on the life of John Lawry, he is noted for 'his Attachment to Magianism and his regard to the exploded Superstitions of Egypt' in his Orsamian letters.[14] Furthermore, he is noted for residing in 'a place called the Hermitage', which is described as having 'greatly puzzled the Antiquarians' and where 'here probably he had his Antrum Mithraicum [Mithraic Cave].'[15] The 'Supplement' ends with a fictional epitaph to Lawry:

> Retired from Rawthmells[16] & from Meyers here lies
> Lawry the Good, the orthodox, the wise;
> His fiery Soul burn thro' the moral crust
> Doubtfull, if gone to Bull or to Zerdusht.[17]

'Zerdusht' refers to the Iranian prophet who founded Zoroastrianism; the epitaph playfully suggests that Lawry may be torn from his Christian calling and join the same faith in Mithras as his character. In the same way that Cleander and Orsames are not quite able to reconcile their belief in Mithras with their curiosity towards other religions, so too is Lawry depicted as divided between Mithraicism and Christianity. This no doubt also caused some amusement

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[12] Ibid., p. 99.
[13] Alexander Pope, *The Temple of Fame,* p. 16.
[14] Private collection, 'Supplement to the General Dictionary', *Wrestiana*, fol. 10 [c. 1743, signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].
[15] Ibid., fol. 8. The 'Supplement' pretends that Lawry was killed in 1744 as a result of weighty tomes falling on his head; fortunately for Lawry, he would outlive this prediction by almost thirty years.
[16] A London coffee-house that members of the coterie often frequented, see Bryant Lillywhite, *London Coffee Houses: A Reference Book of Coffee Houses of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1963), pp. 477-8.
[17] A 'Guebre' is another term to describe adherents to Zoroastrianism, 'Guebre', *OED* [online] < https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/82226> [accessed 6 August 2021]; private collection, 'Supplement to the General Dictionary', *Wrestiana*, fol. 10 [c. 1743, signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].

within the Wrest circle, given that Lawry held the office of Prebendary of Rochester and was destined for a clerical career.

Heaton too is closely paralleled with his character Smerdis, described in the 'Supplement' as 'a Mage residing in that college.'[18] Like Lawry, Heaton is teased for being more faithful to Zoroaster than to his Christian calling. The 'Supplement' notes that it 'may seem strange to find a Doctor of the Guebres in that Christian University: but it is certain from many of his Letters that he was deeply tinctur'd with that superstition.'[19] While Heaton did not become a member of the Wrest coterie in the same way that Lawry would, his letters nevertheless seem to have been among the most significant.[20] Thomas Clarke, upon perusing the *Athenian Letters* in 1739 would remark that 'Cleander, Gobryas & Smerdis gave me the greatest Entertainment imaginable & have so far excited my curiosity as to make me very desirous of Engaging in one of their Conversations & Acquaintance.'[21] The figure of Smerdis must have also had some further influence in the imaginations of the authors too, since the Mithraic Glade itself would be created in homage to the Magian priest.

Heaton's descriptions of Smerdis's Bactrian retreat in the *Athenian Letters*, while unlikely to have been written with Wrest Park in mind, may well have informed the coterie's later experiences of the Mithraic Glade:

> We inhabit those groves, which have been the mansions of the wise and virtuous, by the appointment of Zoroaster, who blessed them with this abode; and whose memory still warms our breasts with a noble enthusiasm. We point out in our pleased imagination the paths he trod, and the places he took the most delight in: here, say we, within the spacious arch of this cave he penn'd his divine precepts; on the slope of yonder hill or under the shade of that ancient cedar, he reposed himself […] The air of this country is perfumed and of a purer draught; the sky more serene and of a brighter azure; the prospects beautiful and various, since nature is not only favourable to us, but has received all the improvement she was

[18] Ibid., fol. 7. This appears to have been a nickname; in a letter to Philip Yorke, Lawry would note that he found the 'Mage Heaton' with 'his Table cover'd with Folios of Physick' in BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 65 [JL to PY, 20th July 1740].
[19] Ibid.
[20] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 150 [HH to PY, 30th June 1743].
[21] Ibid., fol. 20 [TC to PY, 31st August 1739].

> capable of, without being disguised by art. Immense wealth has been bestowed on her cultivation, yet the richness of her dress seems to arise from the genius of the place.[22]

This description of the groves is infused with spiritual and literary significance; the authors effectively draw parallels between the landscape and its ability to inspire the composition of 'divine precepts'. Yet, this description of the groves also feeds into contemporary ideas about garden design. The descriptions of 'prospects beautiful and various', cultivated for improvement while maintaining the 'genius of the place' adheres to key ideas espoused in the early to mid-eighteenth century. Famously, Alexander Pope in his *Epistle to Burlington* (1731) would declare that 'let *Nature* never be forgot./ Consult the *Genius* of the *Place* in all.'[23] But this notion also was also popularised by contemporary garden designers. Batty Langley, for instance, would insist that 'the Pleasure of a Garden depends on the variety of its parts' and bemoan the modern tendency to over-cultivate a garden, arguing that 'Those great *Beauties of Nature* [...] were levelled at great expense, to the total ruin of the Gardens.'[24] Thomas Wright would similarly insist that 'those places are most perfect that are most natural […] hence artificial hills [must be] made to appear as the work of nature.'[25] Of course, both 'art' and 'nature' are slippery terms in the eighteenth century, and the ideal for the 'natural' was an ever-changing concept that shifted with successive generations.[26] Yet, there is an anachronistic tension in having Smerdis adhere to modern aesthetic values in the *Athenian Letters,* which was supposed to be a fabricated history set during the Peloponnesian Wars. One way to account for this anachronistic paradox would be to look at the gardens of the ancients as a source of inspiration in early to mid-eighteenth-century garden design; John Dixon Hunt, for instance, argues that 'Palladian' gardens, including the aesthetic for groves,

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[22] Philip Yorke, et al., 'Letter XVII. Smerdis to Cleander', *Athenian Letters*, I, pp. 58-9 [signed 'H', Henry Heaton].
[23] Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Burlington* (London: L. Gilliver, 1731), p. 7.
[24] Batty Langley, *New Principles of Gardening* (London: A. Bettesworth and J. Batley, 1728), p. iii-iv.; not incidentally, Langley had been employed by Henry Grey to construct the greenhouse at Wrest between 1735-7, see Roderick Floud, *An Economic History of the English Garden* (London: Penguin, 2019), p. 54.
[25] Newcastle Central Library, MSS of Thomas Wright, vol. 8, p. 54.
[26] Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes,* p. 3.

owed much to the classical gardens of Italy, as well as the Italian Renaissance.[27] This is particularly evident in gardens such as Chiswick or Marble Hill.[28] Yet this passage in the *Athenian Letters* deliberately tries to distance the reader from Italy and familiar sites of the Grand Tour by situating the scene in Bactria and having the characters worship Zoroaster. In fact, I would even argue this distancing from classical Rome provides the authors a blank canvas upon which to paint their own imagined ideas in the *Athenian Letters*. Thus, in this passage, Heaton essentially merges ancient Mithraic practices with the contemporary taste for garden design, creating an imagined spiritual world that could easily be transposed onto contemporary gardens. However, the depictions of druids and native primitivism in the *Athenian Letters* also owed a lot to the ideas of the antiquary and 'father of archaeology', William Stukeley.

THE INFLUENCE OF WILLIAM STUKELEY

While William Stukeley was not a member of the Wrest circle, he was certainly acquainted with some of its members, and he even seems to have visited Wrest Park himself.[29] It is thus entirely possible that the coterie was in some way influenced by his ideas that conflated mysticism and the natural world. Stukeley was an alumnus of Benet College, and the college in the early eighteenth century was commonly known as the home of the 'Benedictine antiquaries' for its role in encouraging the study of archaeology and antiquarianism.[30] That it should have been the place that fostered an environment in which the Yorke brothers and

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[27] For instance, in *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination, 1600-1750*, John Dixon Hunt argues that the development of the English landscape garden was indebted to the classical influence of Italy. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p.186.

[28] *The Palladian Revival: Lord Burlington, his Villa and Garden at Chiswick* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Emily Parker, '"The Taste of the Ancients": The Garden at Marble Hill', *Garden History,* 46.2 (2018).

[29] *The Correspondence of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society, 1710-1761,* ed. Diana Honeybone and Michael Honeybone, suggests that Stukeley had visited Wrest Park and passed his sketch of the altar on to Dr Cornewall Tathwell, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), p. 198.

[30] Other antiquaries included Richard Gough, William Cole, and Michael Tyson, see Rosemary Sweet, 'Antiquaries and Antiquities', *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 34.2 (2002), 181-206 (pp. 184-5).

their tutors could write the *Athenian Letters* should not be surprising. Yet it was not only the college itself that provided the link to Stukeley; he was also known to several of Philip Yorke's friends and family. Daniel Wray was acquainted with Stukeley through his involvement in the Royal Society,[31] and Yorke's tutor, Samuel Salter, was a Lincolnshire neighbour of Stukeley's, and they seem to have met on several occasions.[32] The most prominent link, however, is with Lord Chancellor Hardwicke. Stukeley produced sketches of Wimpole in October 1747, and even dedicated his first volume of *Palaeographia Britannia or Discourses on Antiquities in Britain* (1743-52) to him.[33] From these connections at least, one might assume that the coterie knew enough of Stukeley to have been well acquainted with his work. Thomas Edwards, author of the *Canons of Criticism* and architect of the hermitage at Wrest, had certainly read his works at length.[34]

Stukeley has been heralded as the "father of archaeology" for his extensive excavations at Stonehenge and Avebury, which he later published as *Stonehenge: A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids* (1740) and *Abury, A Temple to the British Druids* (1743). Stukeley attributed these sites to the druids, Iron-Age Celtic priests. Although archaeologists have since proven that these monuments were erected over 2,000 years before the druids in the Neolithic era, Stukeley's ideas nevertheless had significant traction in the eighteenth century. Ronald Hutton argues that druids would have still 'become much more prominent in British culture […] even had Stukeley never been born' as a result of the wider cultural

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[31] Wray would note that in his absence at the Mitre, the tavern in Fleet-Street where the Royal Society dined, 'I doubt not but Stukeley [makes] a decent representative of us' and 'has seized the occasion.' BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 92^{r} [DW to PY, 8th October 1748].

[32] After Philip Yorke's marriage to Jemima Grey in 1740, Salter moved to Burton in Lincolnshire; Salter relates to Yorke that he heard some political intelligence 'thro' the unerring, antiquarian channel of W. Stukeley M. D.' in BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 110^{r} [SS to PY, 26th September 1741], and he reports having met 'Dr Stukeley' in Stamford on 30th July 1743. Ibid., fol. 153^{v} [SS to PY, 30th July 1743].

[33] For more on Stukeley's relationship with Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, see David Adshead, *Wimpole: Architectural Drawings and Topographical Views*, p. 51.

[34] Edwards discusses how 'Dr Stukeley […] has taken Stonehenge from the Romans and given it to the Druids, that, he says, being a simple circle is an emblem of the Supreme God', in MS Bodl. 1010, fol. 25 [TE to John Clerke, 8th March 1742/3].

conflation of primitivism and patriotism in the mid-eighteenth century,[35] and yet Stukeley's significance in this period cannot be ignored. It is beyond the scope of this study to trace Stukeley's ideas in full,[36] but for the purposes of this chapter, the parallels between Stukeley's later work and Heaton's description of the sacred groves in the *Athenian Letters* are striking. Stukeley's *Stonehenge* attempts to reconcile native primitivism with Christianity, believing the druids' 'ancient heathen customs' were the remnants of the 'first and patriarchal religion.'[37] Moreover, he believed that the British druids were descended from a Phoenician colony, who themselves 'brought along with them the patriarchal religion, which was so extremely like Christianity.'[38] Perhaps most significantly, Stukeley argued against Inigo Jones's hypothesis that Stonehenge was a Roman creation, instead arguing that the monument predated the Romans.[39] In addition, he emphasises the 'sacred groves' for which 'we know our *Druids* were famous'.[40] Groves have also been attributed to the Italian Renaissance garden, yet Stukeley distances from this tradition by instead suggesting that groves were part of Britain's native past and sacred to the Druids. Stukeley's history of the druids offered an interpretation of the landscape that distanced it from classical Italian gardens and provided a narrative that encapsulated primitivism and Christianity. This not only parallels Heaton's description of the groves in the *Athenian Letters*, but as this chapter will explore, the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park.

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[35] Ronald Hutton, *Blood & Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 111.
[36] For more studies on Stukeley and his shifting ideas as a result of his ordination, see Stuart Piggott, 'Stukeley, Avebury and the Druids', *Antiquity,* 9.33 (1935), 22-32; David Haycock, '"A small journey into the county": William Stukeley and the formal landscapes of Stonehenge and Avebury', *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice 1700 – 1850,* ed. by Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 67-82; Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, pp. 86-102.
[37] William Stukeley, *Stonehenge: A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids* (London: W. Innys and R. Manby, 1740), p. a.
[38] Ibid., p. 2.
[39] Ibid., p. 5.
[40] Ibid., p. 58.

THE INFLUENCE OF THOMAS WRIGHT

Another key influence on the Wrest circle is Thomas Wright, who had tutored Mary Gregory and Jemima Grey, along with the Duchess of Kent, at Wrest in the 1730s. He had also taught Catherine Talbot, and it was in fact through Wright that she met and became lifelong friends with Elizabeth Carter. Wright was well acquainted with the gardens at Wrest, and for a long time, garden historians attributed many of the structures at Wrest, including the Mithraic Glade, to him.[41] It is difficult to gauge Wright's continued association with Wrest or the coterie throughout the 1740s, although he appears in an early composition of *Wrestiana* as 'le Professeur', or 'Mr Wright the Astronomer,'[42] and Jemima Grey seems to have been aware that he was travelling in Ireland in the late 1740s. [43] There must have been some ongoing connection with Wright, for in 1748, Philip Yorke would present Wright's sketches of Ireland for his upcoming *Louthiana: Or, An Introduction to the Antiquities of Ireland* (1748) to the Society of Antiquaries,[44] suggesting that, at the very least, he and Grey continued to follow Wright's work and ideas. It is also possible that they continued to consult Wright on proposed improvements at Wrest Park, in the same way that Sophia, Dowager Duchess of Kent, had consulted Wright on the remodelling of Beaumont Lodge in 1743.[45] It is uncertain whether Irish antiquities or *Louthiana* offered inspiration for the Mithraic Glade, but it is possible that this work influenced Thomas Birch, a key member (and, from 1752, the secretary) of the Society of Antiquaries and a regular correspondent of Philip Yorke. In Birch's edition of

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[41] Eileen Harris, 'Introduction', *Arbour & Grottos. A Facsimile of the Two Parts of Universal Architecture, 1755 and 1758* (London: Scolar Press, 1979), n.pag; *Historic England* < https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1158808> [accessed 10th August 2021]

[42] Private Collection, 'La Nouvelle Grimaudin le Cure', *Wrestiana*, fol. 2 [signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].

[43] Confirmed in the letters between Catherine Talbot and Jemima Grey, in which Talbot asks Grey 'pray what is Mr Wright gone into Ireland for?' BLARS, Lucas Papers (LP), I, p. 113 [modern transcript; CT to JG, 24th June 1746].

[44] The minute book reads that Mr Yorke 'shew'd several very pretty drawings done by Mr Wright of Places in Ireland, which is to attend a Book he gave the proposals of' in London, Society of Antiquaries, *Minute Book Vol. V: From 23 March 1745 to 23 Sep 1749,* fols. 155-6.

[45] Morris R. Brownell, 'William Gilpin's "Unfinished Business": The "Thames Tour", *The Volume of the Walpole Society,* 57 (1993/4), 52-87 (p. 73).

Spenser's *The Faerie Queene,* he would argue that it was the 'pleasant and romantic Situation' of Ireland that influenced Spenser's imagination.[46] Wright himself highlighted this literary connection in *Louthiana* by including an extract from Spenser's *Ruins of Time* on the frontispiece.[47] In addition, Thomas Wright had drawn a map of Wrest that members of the coterie knew about. On 10th August 1745, Thomas Edwards wrote to Philip Yorke to thank him for his stay at Wrest, adding that 'I make you many mental visits […] for I have the plan of Wrest (Rocque's I mean, not that after Mr Wright) hanging by my bedside.'[48]

Wright was also an admirer of William Stukeley. He even wrote a poem on Stukeley's interpretation of Stonehenge, in which he referenced 'Sagacious Stukeley, who can see thro' Stones,/And judge Men and Women by their bones,/ Whose fertile brain's of so refin'd a fluid,/ Can prove where all is dust, and dust a Druid.'[49] Wright himself had an interest in the connection between ancient religious rituals and the landscape, and elsewhere in an unpublished draft for 'Observations upon Building and Planting', he explained that 'the Druids who first understood the powers [of] optics could in a visionary manner, bring down the sun & moon into their sacred groves.'[50] He further draws out the mystic element in his suggestion that 'the druids […] could draw the sun and moon from heaven' and rise 'artificial storms, and [imitate] thunder.'[51] While the exact date of this unpublished manuscript is unknown, it is almost certain that he had passed on these ideas to his former students. In fact, his ideas about druids having the ability to change the weather must have been passed on to both Grey and Talbot. When, in the early spring of 1747, Talbot noted the sudden foul

[46] Thomas Birch, ed., 'The Life of Mr Edmund Spenser', in Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (London: J. Brindley & S. Wright, 1751), p. xviii.
[47] Thomas Wright, *Louthiana: Or, An Introduction to the Antiquities of Ireland* (London: W. Faden, 1748), p. title page.
[48] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1009, fol. 153 [TE to PY, 10th August 1745].
[49] Newcastle, Newcastle Central Library, Thomas Wright MSS 8, p. 134 [Thomas Wright, 'An Epistle to Stonehenge, the most notable antiquity of England'].
[50] Ibid., p. 91.
[51] Ibid., pp. 151-2.

weather that prevented her journey to Wrest, she would playfully write to Grey that 'What a Conjurer have you been with (Mr Wright you say is in Ireland) to raise all these storms and prevent our Journey, for I remember now you had no mind we should come yet?'[52] It is telling that even before the creation of the Mithraic Glade, Talbot should associate Wright with mysticism in the gardens at Wrest Park, and that through him or another 'conjurer', Grey herself might have been involved in some form of ritual to change the weather.

VISUALISING THE *ATHENIAN LETTERS* AT WREST AND WIMPOLE

The Mithraic Glade was not created until five years after the final volume of the *Athenian Letters* was printed in 1743. Even before the work's completion, however, the gardens at Wrest seem to have inspired some of the letters. John Lawry would write to Philip Yorke that he was 'glad to hear of the Letters […] indited in the Groves at Rest,'[53] clearly suggesting that the writers must have at least sought inspiration from the groves at Wrest and conflated the imaginary world of the *Athenian Letters* with the physical space of Wrest Park. Yet it is unclear when exactly the plan for the Mithraic Glade was first made, and in fact, it seems there was some preliminary discussion of even constructing a Mithraic Temple in the gardens at Wimpole.

It is plausible that Wimpole might have also been considered as a possible location for the Mithraic Glade; not least since Philip and Charles Yorke wrote and discussed some of their *Athenian Letters* there as well.[54] Philip Yorke would not inherit Wimpole until his father's death in 1763, but the family would regularly congregate there every autumn, and

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[52] BLARS, LP, I, p. 122a [modern transcript; CT to JG, 18th February 1747].
[53] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 94v [JL to PY, 25th June 1741].
[54] In July 1741, Charles wrote to Philip that he would 'do service to that book [the volume of the *Athenian Letters*] as soon as I can lay hold of it at Wimple, when I have the pleasure of seeing you there.' BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 47r.

Philip was certainly interested in his father's improvements on the estate.[55] Daniel Wray was even involved with the construction of the church at Wimpole, contributing his 'little stock of Hebrew to the perfection of Wimple church, which the united powers of My Lord [Lord Chancellor Hardwicke], & Mr Flitcroft, & Mr Plumptre have made so decent a place of worship.'[56] Between 1740 and 1743, John Lawry also served as the rector of Wimpole. Therefore, in the early 1740s, Wimpole had enough close familial connections to offer another site upon which to visualise the imagined world of the *Athenian Letters.* In fact, Wray and Lawry seem to have been the first to discuss the *Athenian Letters* in relation to the gardens at Wimpole, and these early musings provide some insight into the inspiration for the Mithraic Glade at Wrest. Lawry relates how he and Wray:

> were sitting […] upon Lady Oxford's Bench, & enjoying the freshness of those shades where the Sons of Apollo who is Mithras have often waited on their Patron God. I happened to observe to our Friend that a rustic Temple, or some other such structure would have a very good effect in that wooded corner of the Park, when turning about & casting his eye […] behind the seat, he asked whether that might not be entrance to the hidden recesses of some Mithraic Cave.[57]

The conflation between the imaginary world of the *Athenian Letters* and the landscape itself is clear in these speculations about 'Mithras' and the 'Mithraic Cave.' Lawry continues to relate his debate with Wray about Mithraic practices:

> Pray said I can you give a guess whereabouts might be the dimensions of their altars? Or whether they were something like the high altar of the Jews with Steps for the Priest to go up to them and whether they were ever erected in their Paradises and Gardens of pleasure? No said He in the first place they were only hearths for the sacred Fire to burn upon. The Victim was to be slain not burned […] and upon the green turf as to Paradises and Gardens of

[55] Philip's own contributions to the landscape at Wimpole are discussed at length by Kasie Alt in 'Fictions and Fabrications: The Gothic Folly at Wimpole, Cambridgeshire', *Garden History,* 44.1 (2016), 74-89.
[56] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 136^{r} [DW to PY, 25th September 1750]. It was also under Lord Chancellor Hardwicke's recommendation that Henry Flitcroft undertook work at Wrest Park, indicated in Charles Yorke's letter to Philip: 'As to the operator for your Room at Wrest […] he [Lord Chancellor Hardwicke] thought it better to employ Flitcroft, as a great deal of money had been laid out under his direction at Wimple, to advantage, and as Flitcroft was much obliged to my Lord, for procuring him the Surveyor's place at St Paul by recommending him to the Bp of Bristol […] he would be the more likely to act fairly & figure himself to be more diligent & observant in what you expressed from him.' In BL, Add MS. 35360, fols 190^{v}-191^{r} [CY to PY, 29th October 1748].
[57] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 154^{r} [JL to PY, 24th August 1743].

> pleasure, unless those places used to be upon the summits of high hills, they were not proper places for their sacrifices to be performed in. You may think perhaps an high Altar erected in some corner of this wood might be a pretty embellishment to the place; But I would undertake to proof it if I were at leisure.[58]

It is perhaps no surprise that Lawry should have discussed this with Wray, especially after his interest in ancient sacrifices in the *Athenian Letters.* Yet Wray's dismissal of constructing an altar for the sake of adding a 'pretty embellishment' suggests an antiquarian interest in understanding the ancient Magian practises and ensuring historical veracity, rather than simply constructing a mere decorative feature.

In any case, although this discussion reveals Wray and Lawry's preliminary thoughts about constructing a real altar in a garden, it was largely hypothetical. Within two months of Lawry and Wray's musings at Wimpole, Wray appears to have discussed with Philip Yorke the possibility of constructing a Mithraic Altar at Wrest Park, for Lawry would eagerly write to Philip to confirm whether 'Wray's Plan about erecting a Mithraic Altar in yr [your] Gardens at Wrest, was suspected to be coined there for the sake of absent Friends.'[59] That the altar should be erected for 'the sake of absent friends' highlights how far the Mithraic Glade was created in homage to the writers of the *Athenian Letters* and in particular, those writers who would later become members of the Wrest circle. Even though Wimpole might have inspired some of these preliminary ideas, it was far more appropriate that Wrest, the intellectual home of the coterie, should ultimately be the location of the Mithraic Glade.

GEORGE LYTTELTON AND PLANNING THE MITHRAIC GLADE

It is unclear why it should have taken several years for the idea of an altar to become a reality, but by the summer of 1747, plans were being made for the Mithraic Altar at Wrest Park. George Lyttelton was invited to stay at Wrest in June, where he had some role in

[58] Ibid., fol. 154^{v} [JL to PY, 24th August 1743].
[59] BL, Add. MS 35605, fol. 163 [JL to PY, 6th October 1743].

helping to identify a location for the Mithraic Glade. Jemima Grey wrote to Mary Gregory that Lyttelton intended to prolong his stay in order to 'point out new Openings in the Park, & […] to talk over Rustick Altars and Roothouses.'[60] Evidently, by this point, they already had in mind the juxtaposition of the altar and the root-house, although the root-house was not built until after the altar. It might seem curious that Lyttelton was brought into this project, not least since the glade itself alluded to the *Athenian Letters,* in which, as Chapter 2 demonstrated, there is a veiled political satire regarding Lyttelton's involvement in the Patriot opposition. Yet it is unlikely that Lyttelton knew of the *Athenian Letters* or even of the satire when he visited Wrest. It is possible that if he had informed Jemima Grey about his own hand in writing a verse of *The Castle of Indolence* before 1748, that they might have discussed some of their coterie compositions without providing full insights into the works. Grey, for instance, was not informed about all the satirical references in the *Castle of Indolence,* and so it is possible that Lyttelton had knowledge of the *Athenian Letters* but not necessarily the political satire within it.[61] In any case, by the time that Lyttelton visited Wrest in 1747, Yorke and Grey genuinely sought out his opinions, especially since his own gardens at Hagley were renowned for their taste and beauty and also contained a grotto, root-house and hermitage. Yorke and Grey would not visit Hagley until 1763, but they at least knew of it second hand, since Charles Yorke had visited in the previous summer of 1746, and wrote detailed descriptions to his brother:

> Mr Lyttelton shews the place with a most enthusiastic fondness for it, and has drawn out the natural Beauties of it to View with great taste; No more art or expence has been employed than was just sufficient for that purpose. It has something of the Genius of Mr Aislabie's Ground [Studley Royal, North Yorkshire]; great Variety of Hill & Dale; […] Rills murmuring thro' the Groves; & as they join together, forming a large water, which falls in several cascades, at different levels, down the side of a cliff into the bottom. The highest spot in the Ground (wch [which] in many parts commands the most extensive views) is designed for a Gothic Tower, in the manner of that we saw at Stowe with so much pleasure. Another spot

[60] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fols 142-3 [JG to MG, 11th June 1747].
[61] While Lyttelton's *Persian Letters* was deliberately satirical, the *Athenian Letters* was far more careful in its depiction of politics, so the political parallels are not so easily identifiable.

> has an Hermitage, & the whole scene leading to it and about it prepares you for that solitary cell.[62]

This description matches that of Smerdis's Bactrian retreat that possesses a 'richness of […] dress' arising 'from the genius of the place.' It is possible that Charles's description of Hagley resonated with the *Athenian Letters*, and so based on this, Philip and Jemima decided that Lyttelton would be an ideal person to advise on the garden design. The Yorke family certainly held Lyttelton in high regard for his taste, and in fact, Lord Chancellor Hardwicke was so taken with Lyttelton's design for the Gothic Tower at Hagley that around 1749, he tried to have an exact replica built at Wimpole. Lyttelton insisted that Sanderson Miller, the architect, should come up with another design for Hardwicke, noting that 'I found it would be better for him not to copy mine, but have one upon something the like idea.'[63] Hardwicke appears to have abandoned the project in 1750, and, as the final section of this chapter will explore, Philip Yorke would eventually have it constructed once he inherited Wimpole.[64] From the discussions of the Gothic Tower alone, it is evident that the Yorke family held Lyttelton's opinions on gardens in high regard. Grey too regarded Lyttelton as a 'Friendly Critic' when she showed him around the gardens, and she was particularly keen that 'this Place should appear in its best Looks,' remarking that 'his [Lyttelton's] Judgement has great Weight with me, as One not only used to Stow & a more charming Place (I believe) of his own, but whose Taste is very elegant.'[65] Despite Lyttelton's early involvement in discussing the location of the Mithraic Glade, he does not appear to have had any role in the actual construction, or to have even visited Wrest Park again to see the final result.

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[62] BL, Add. MS 35360, fols 148^{v} – 149^{r} [CY to PY, 26th August 1746].
[63] L. Dickins and M. Stanton, eds, *An Eighteenth Century Correspondence* (London: John Murray, 1910), pp. 271-72.
[64] Kasie Alt argues that Philip Yorke was not merely continuing the work of his father, however, and that the Gothic Tower corresponds with the culture of historical fabrications that infused both Philip's literary work and the garden design at Wrest Park, see 'Fictions and Fabrications: The Gothic Folly at Wimpole, Cambridgeshire', *The Gardens Trust,* 44.1 (2016), 74-89.
[65] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fol. 142 [JG to MG, 11th June 1747].

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MITHRAIC ALTAR



Figure 7. Mithraic Altar at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire. Photograph by the author, 2021.

The Mithraic Glade is located in a secluded woodland clearing at the south-west corner of the Great Garden at Wrest, at a distance from the main house, which gives the glade an element of mystery. The altar (Figure 7) has a coarsely treated, rustic Ketton stone base that sits on a substantial block formed from uncut pieces of flint, beneath which lies a stone foundation. Above the base, the die is constructed from knapped flint with a beige, pebble-encrusted frieze. At the base of each corner of the die are carved lions' paws that project out to the corners of the rustic base, and from which large, upturned volutes, carved as acanthus leaves, rise to the top of the die. The inscriptions, Ancient Greek on one side (Figure 8), and

cuneiform on the other (Figure 9), are cut into Ketton stone slabs in the form of classical tablets and are set into the upper part of the die on the west and east elevations.[66] The design itself seems entirely original, quite distinct from the Celtic altars depicted in Stukeley's works. In the same way that Cleander envisages a 'constitution, blended of both [Persian and Athenian] principles' in the *Athenian Letters*, so too does the altar represent the two ancient languages blended to become a part of the same structure. In terms of Cleander's religious affiliation, it is significant that even the monument of his Zoroastrian worship should betray his sympathies for Athens.

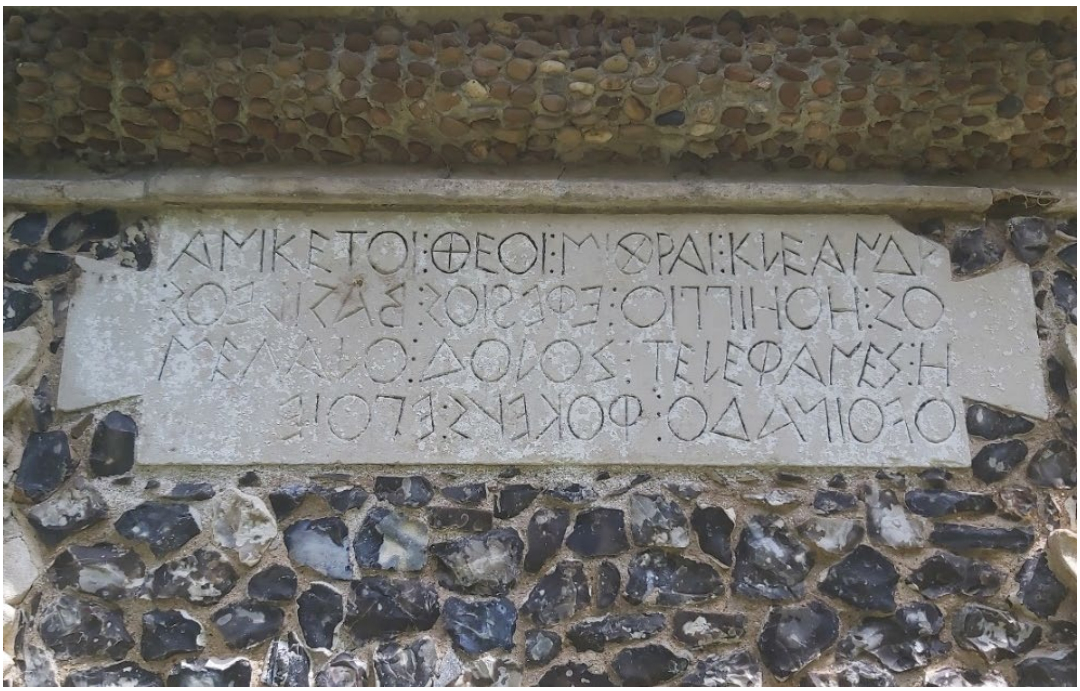


Figure 8. Greek Inscription on the Mithraic Altar at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire. Photograph by the author, 2021.

[66] Full description can be read in the *Historic England* listing, although the design of the altar is misattributed to Thomas Wright, < https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1158808> [accessed 20th July 2021].

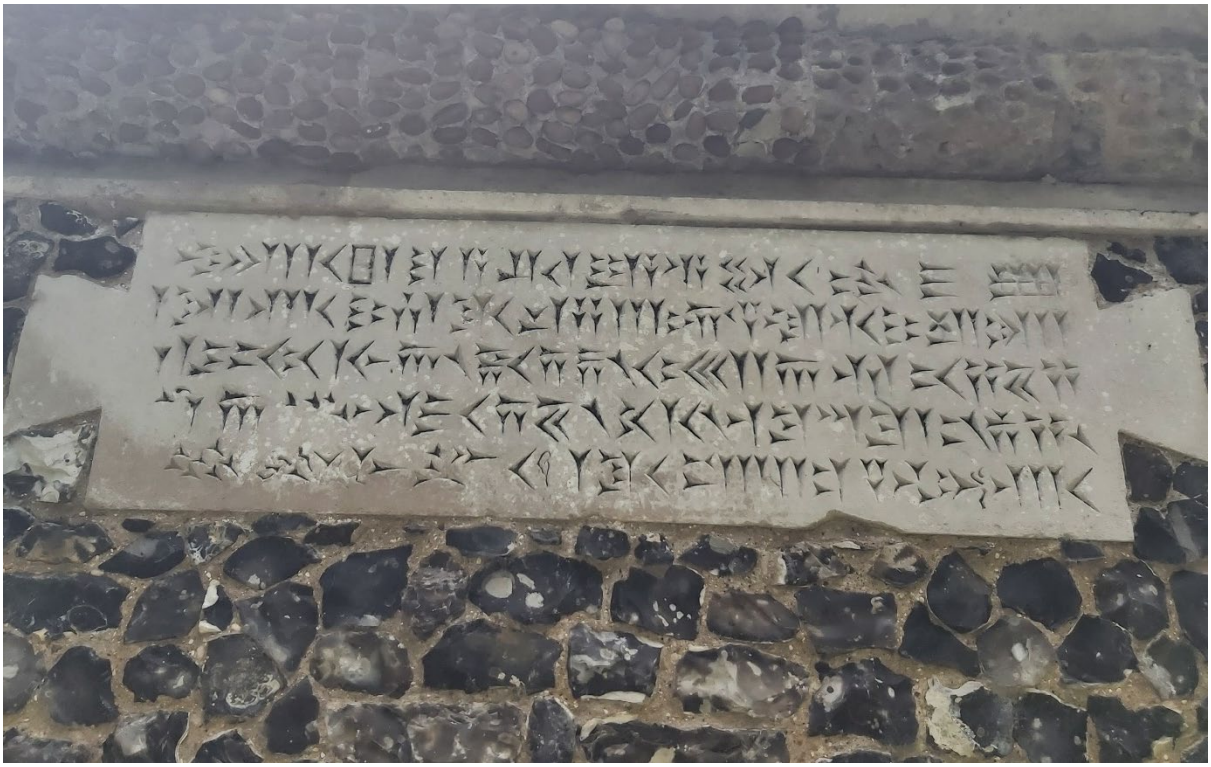


Figure 9. Cuneiform Inscription on the Mithraic Altar at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire. Photograph by the author, 2021.

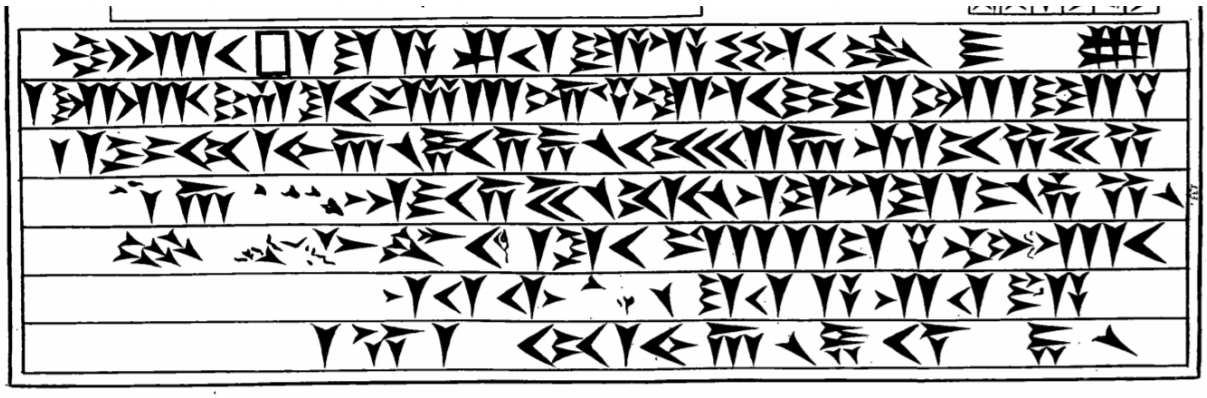


Figure 10. Cornelis de Bruijn, *Travels into Muscovy, Persia, and Part of the East Indies* (1737), II.

Despite historians' early suppositions that Wright was responsible for the altar, the evidence in the letters between Daniel Wray and Thomas Edwards indicate that Wray, Edwards, and the sculptor, Robert Adye, were the ones involved in the altar's creation.[67] Wray managed the altar's creation, bringing in Adye for the construction itself and Edwards for assistance with the inscriptions. On 25th June 1748, Wray wrote to Philip Yorke to inform him of the altar's progress:

> I will not pretend to defend Adey to praise myself. But many are the conferences we have had; Edwards assisting concerning Greek & Persic: this very day is Adey gone to pick up Pebbles for the Fire at Highgate; and proposes to wait on the Magian Inscription to Wrest by the end of the week. If the Greek is not thought to be granted for Eternity, it may be strengthened at anytime.[68]

Despite the musings at Wimpole about how altars were used, the fact that Adye was charged with collecting pebbles for the fire suggests that the coterie seems to have settled on the altar's use as a hearth for the eternal fire to Mithras. The 'Greek & Persic' inscriptions on the altar have received some scholarly attention for their idiosyncrasies. The classicist Lindsay Allen has examined the ancient languages in the context of eighteenth-century antiquarian culture, highlighting that the cuneiform would not be understood for another hundred years, and so the altar would 'enunciate its own lost language.'[69] While the Greek inscription was legible, it was an archaic variant that was not accessible even for visitors with an understanding of Ancient Greek.[70] Interestingly, even members of the coterie themselves

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[67] The letters between Edwards and Wray add further evidence that the Mithraic Glade was constructed by Wray, Edwards, and Adye; Edwards would ask whether the pebbles he has sourced for the hermitage 'may serve for other uses, and may save the wearing out of Ady's boots if the Freize of the Altar should want repair?' in Bodleian, Bodley 1011, fol. 181 [TE to DW, 4th October 1750]; Wray was further responsible for bringing in Adye on the project, not only does Edwards thank Wray 'for your soliciting Adye', in Bodleian, Bodley 1011, fol. 66 [TE to DW, 16th January 1749] but Adye was a London sculptor who had also worked for members of the fashionable Dilettanti Society, and it is possible that Wray was introduced to him through his friend George Knapton, the portrait artist of the same society, who had accompanied Wray on the Grand Tour. See C. Watkins and Ben Cowell, *Uvedale Price (1747-1829): Decoding the Picturesque* (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), p. 12.

[68] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 76^{v} [DW to PY, 25th June 1748].

[69] Lindsay Allen, 'The 'three-dimensional fiction': a cuneiform inscription of 1748 C.E. and the culture of decipherment' (unpublished paper, 2014).

[70] Kasie Elaine Alt offers a translation for the Greek Inscription as follows, 'Invincible Gods, Kleandros, the Son of Hippias, from Ephersos, the Slave of the Great King, [dedicated] to Mithras. Telephanes from Phokaia, the Son of Oinades, Made [the monument].' Alt particularly notes the archaizing aspect of the idiosyncratic

knew that the cuneiform was inaccessible, not least because it was sourced from a drawing in Cornelis De Bruijn's *Travels into Muscovy, Persia, and Part of the East Indies* (Figure 10). Even if a visitor identified the source of the inscription, they would be frustrated. De Bruijn informs the reader that some of the characters of this inscription were 'broken off in part', so he 'replaced them in the best manner I was able.'[71] It was perhaps an over-confident decision to replace the fragments himself, given that he did not understand the cuneiform and would later admit that he had 'made several ineffectual attempts to obtain a discovery of their meaning, without being able to find a single person, who could decipher a single letter.'[72] He admits that he had hoped to encounter 'some priest among the *Guebres*, who could afford me some light with relation to them', but his attempt was apparently in vain. Therefore, Wray clearly chose an inscription that would at worst, frustrate viewers, and at best, lead them down a dead end. In fact, when comparing De Bruijn's inscription with that on the Mithraic Altar (figures 10 and 9, respectively), it is possible to see inconsistencies: both the bottom two lines and the final three characters of the second line have been omitted. These deliberate omissions suggest how far Adye, Wray, and Edwards assumed that nobody would be able to read the inscription, and that the aim was to have the appearance of cuneiform, rather than to convey any actual meaning. Jemima Grey herself joked to Catherine Talbot that 'Persic is the Character I will learn! The whole of it is Triangular, & they are dispos'd upon each other's heads in the prettiest manner you can imagine.'[73] For an educated woman like Grey to have drawn attention to the decorative significance further indicates that the inscription itself was more symbolic, and not intended to have any literal meaning.

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punctuation in this quotation. See 'Culture of Illusion: Landscape Gardens, Fabricated Ruins, and the Diorama, c. 1750 – 1850' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Texas, 2014), p. 44.

[71] Cornelis De Bruijn, *Travels into Muscovy, Persia, and part of the East Indies,* 2 vols (London: A Bettesworth, C. Hitch, S. Birt, C. Davis, J. Clarke, S. Harding, D. Browne, A. Millar, J. Shuckburgh, and T. Osborne, 1737), II, p. 23.

[72] Ibid.

[73] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 87 [JG to CT, 21st July 1748].

'IT BAFFLES ALL ARROGANT PRETENCES TO LEARNING': THE INDECIPHERABILITY OF THE INSCRIPTIONS

The fact that the cuneiform could not be understood meant that its meaning could be conveniently appropriated to allude to the *Athenian Letters.* In describing the 'Fame & Praise' of the altar to her aunt, Grey noted that the altar contains:

> two Inscriptions one of which (as somebody told Mr. Yorke) Few People can read, the Other, nobody can: – One in Old Greek, the Other in strange Persick Characters taken out of a Book of travels, for you know it is an Altar raised by Cleander to Mithras.[74]

In this instance, the 'strange Persick Characters' become an unstable signifier, not having any fixed meaning other than that which the coterie members themselves wished to attribute, that is, the world of Cleander and the spiritual associations of Zoroastrianism. This exclusive reference to the *Athenian Letters* provided endless entertainment for members of the inner circle, who would watch as outsiders attempted to make sense of the inscriptions. Grey adds that:

> It has given us some Diversion from the different Effects it has had upon Strangers: the Generality stare & don't understand it, but some Few of greater Penetration have gone away highly edified with it as a Piece of valuable Learned Antiquity.[75]

This account gives some indication of the number of visitors who tried to make sense of the altar. It might seem paradoxical, that the garden at Wrest was intended to be a private retreat for the family and close friends away from London, and yet should also be populated with 'strangers'. Jocelyn Anderson has explored this paradox between public and private in the country house setting, arguing that most country house owners encouraged tourism so that their art collections, architecture, and gardens could become known beyond elite circles and

[74] BLARS, L30/9a/2, fol. 11 [JG to MG, 14th September 1748].
[75] BLARS, L30/9a/2, fol. 12 [JG to MG, 14th September 1748].

gain national significance.[76] In the context of the Mithraic Glade, however, there is a further tension. While Grey is certainly delighted at the 'Fame' the Mithraic Glade has attracted over the summer, the fact that the altar itself resists decipherment also shows how far it is not intended to be publicly accessible. The butt of the joke rests on visitors' *mis*interpretation of the altar. In fact, it was common for tourists to take the altar as a 'Piece of Learned Antiquity'. Daniel Wray noted that even the 'most judicious in the neighbourhood' supposed that the Altar 'is a present of mine, a curiosity found in my Travels.'[77] Here, Wray is playing on the practices of the 'virtuosi,' exemplified in societies such as the Society of Dilettanti, who would collect antiquities from Italy and bring them back to their estates.[78] Thus, it is entirely possible to understand how visitors might have mistaken the altar at Wrest for a genuine artifact. Similarly, Elizabeth Anson recalled how the Duchess of Bedford, with a party, 'walked over the Garden by Moon-shine; however they saw enough to excite their Curiosity extremely as to the Altar, & taking it for an Antiquity, at least in its Shape & Design they went home & turned over Montfaucon & Kennet, but without success.'[79]

The indecipherability of the inscriptions was particularly intended to frustrate those with pretensions to learning. Edwards, who had assisted Wray with the inscriptions, would observe that 'a Gentleman who came to see the Gardens a little while ago told the Gardener that he could read both the inscriptions which as one of them can be read by no man living gives a great round of suspicion that he could read neither.'[80] In fact, it seemed a particular snub at fellow antiquaries; Edwards would joke that 'I think there is a great chance that some Antiquarian or other will copy it, and we shall have it printed in some collection: If our

[76] Jocelyn Anderson, *Touring and Publicizing England's Country Houses*, p. 8.
[77] BL, Add. MS. 35401, fol. 116^{v} [DW to PY, 18th August 1749].
[78] See Susan Stewart, *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. 203; Illaria Bignamini and Clare Hornsby, *Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).
[79] BLARS, L30/9/3/7, fol. 162 [EA to JG, 13th August 1748].
[80] Bodleian, Bodley MS 1011 fol. 66 [TE to John Clerke, 22nd November 1748].

Secretary [Joseph] Ames should travel that way, he would certainly trace it off, because he does not understand it.'[81] Similarly, Wray would observe to Philip Yorke that a mutual friend had returned to the 'sacred Grove' in order to 'correct his Reading of the Inscription.'[82] Grey too delighted in witnessing 'how it greatly baffles all arrogant Pretences to Learning.'[83] In a letter to Talbot, she describes how one visitor could not 'suppose the Characters upon a Stone to Lie',[84] and her letter creates comic anticipation as she observes how the inscription baffles him:

> Why! What was the Matter! He could not read it, he must take another Glass to help his Sight better: & at last cried out with great Transport, 'Oh! Is it Boustrophedon! (Is that good English Greek?)[85]

Grey's use of parenthesis undercuts the gentleman's attempt at decipherment; despite his attempt to identify the inscription and showcase his learning, he only reveals his own ignorance. Grey adds how 'he so little suspected a Bam […] one might easily have persuaded him from the uncommon height of this altar of the larger Race of Men in that age of the world, at least of the Priests who were to sacrifice upon It.'[86] This is not only drawing attention to the visitor's gullibility to believe that a 'larger Race of Men' might have existed, but the reference to the 'sacrifice' deliberately plays into the coterie's joking speculations about how altars were used. As the discussion between Lawry and Wray at Wimpole suggested, high altars were never used for sacrifices, but rather 'they were only hearths for the sacred Fire to burn upon'. It is for this reason that Wray would later refer to the Mithraic Altar as 'our Monument to the Sacred Fire.'[87] Yet, typically for the coterie, these joking

[81] Ibid., fol. 42 [TE to PY, 13th August 1748].
[82] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 116v [DW to PY, 19th August 1749].
[83] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 86 [JG to CT, 21st July 1748].
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] BL, Add. MS. 35401, fol. 90r [DW to PY, 22nd September 1748].

speculations were married to a serious academic interest. Around the time of the altar's completion, Philip Yorke would ask Thomas Birch for 'an abstract of Sykes's Book upon Sacrifices, wch [which] you say gave Mr Coventrye so much satisfaction.'[88] One of the reasons the joke of the altar was highly successful was that it fed into genuine historical and antiquarian scholarship.

However, one should be careful not to assume that there was a single, 'correct' narrative for the altar. The coterie also deliberately misinterpreted the altar or added their own private allusions to the Mithraic Glade. Elizabeth Anson, for instance, playfully suggested that an offering ought to be made to Neptune on the altar before their friends' next voyage.[89] Here, Anson chooses to misinterpret the Mithraic Glade and refer to classical Roman religion in making an offering to Neptune. Similarly, following Talbot's suggestion, Grey declares she 'must get an Eolus's Harp to hang up among the Trees', even noting her literary debt to 'Thompson's [sic] Verses, which I fancy made you too think of getting one.'[90] Far from referring solely to their own coterie compositions in the Mithraic Glade, Grey and Talbot's reference to James Thomson's *An Ode on Aeolus's Harp* (1748) refers to broader literary culture. It is not incidental that Thomson's poem merges the ancient Greek god, 'Aeolus' with Christianity, referring to the music from the harp as 'the song which Zion's children sung.'[91] In these merged spiritual references, the sacred idea becomes what Michael Charlesworth terms a 'floating signifier' in which individuals could attribute the signified of their choice.[92] This certainly appears to be the case in the Mithraic Glade, in which a range of

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[88] BL, Add. MS. 35397, fol. 119^{v} [PY to TB, 21st June 1748]; this refers to Arthur Ashley Sykes's *An Essay on the Nature, Design, and Origin of Sacrifices* (London: P. and J. Knapton, 1748).
[89] Elizabeth Anson writes 'As to the Altar, if your Scheme about it were already executed, I would beg your Ladyship to make an offering upon it for me, to induce Neptune to prosper the voyage and return some friends of ours who will very soon be trusted to his care.' In BLARS, L30/9/2, fol. 150 [EA to JG, 12th May 1748].
[90] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 133 [JG to CT, 3rd August 1749].
[91] James Thomson, 'An Ode on Aeolus's Harp', *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes. By Several Hands,* 6 vols (London: J. Hughs for R. and J. Dodsley, 1763), pp. 4-5.
[92] Michael Charlesworth, 'Sacred Landscape: Signs of Religion in the Eighteenth-Century Garden', *Journal of Garden History,* 13.1-2 (1993), 56-68 (p. 59).

literary and spiritual associations are imbued into the same place. However, this is not necessarily a contradiction, and it seems that the coterie did not seek to attribute a fixed meaning to the place. Even in Grey's discussion of the altar with Catherine Talbot, there is slippage as she refers to the altar as both a 'Persic' and a 'British' work.[93] In fact, they appear to have had a loose notion of spirituality in the groves at Wrest; in August 1749, Daniel Wray informed Jemima Grey that when 'he had paid his Devotions at the Temple of Vacuna he never saw the Rites of the Goddess so completely & solemnly performed as during the last Festival […] they had given him most sublime Pleasure.'[94] While the inner members of the circle knew that the altar was originally intended to serve as a hearth for the sacred fire to Mithras to burn upon, it also provided opportunities for imaginative reinterpretation or at least, deliberate playful misinterpretation.

THOMAS EDWARDS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ROOT-HOUSE

The Mithraic Glade was not only to be furnished with the altar, but also a root-house intended as a 'proper Spot for a Habitation of the Priest of Mithras.'[95] A root-house is an ornamental building made principally of tree roots, and it was a popular feature in eighteenth-century gardens, typically used like a summer house today. It seems that Yorke and Grey had already planned for a root-house when they showed Lyttelton the gardens in 1747, but on the 1st November 1748, Grey was again 'consulting over Root-houses' in the glade, eventually finding a 'retir'd pretty quiet place' for it.[96] Unfortunately, the root-house no longer survives today and there are no surviving drawings from the mid-eighteenth century to reveal what it might have looked like when it was first built. Yorke and Grey's grandson, Thomas Earl de Grey, would paint watercolours of Wrest in the 1830s including one of the root-house (Figure

[93] BLARS, L30, 9a/5, fol. 133 [JG to CT, 3rd August 1749].
[94] BL, Add MS 35376, fol. 14v [JG to PY, 1749].
[95] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 119 [JG to CT, 1st November 1748].
[96] Ibid.

11), but by then, the building had undergone several restorations. Charles Yorke's grandson, Henry Reginald Yorke, also drew the Mithraic Altar around this time (Figure 12), but the root-house is not included in the view. It is no surprise that so little remains of the original root-house. Root-houses typically did not last since they were made from ephemeral materials, and as Thomas Edwards remarked to Richard Owen Cambridge, 'Billets and moss are my materials and what serves me for a summer house one year warms my hearth a winter or two after.'[97] It is also for this reason that Elizabeth Anson would wish that 'the Root Hermitage will be more durable than that at Lord Westmorland's, wch [which] is fallen down & is to be repaired, many of the Roots being rotted.'[98] John Fane, 7th Earl of Westmorland had a root house in his fashionable gardens at Mereworth Castle.[99] In fact, one of the only surviving root-houses from the mid-eighteenth century is that built by Thomas Wright at Badminton, which gives some idea of the rustic style. English Heritage carried out excavations in the Mithraic Glade in 2019 to examine the foundations, and while there is very little remaining of the original root-house, the archaeological evidence does demonstrate that the brick-rubble foundations echo the instructions for the root-house that Edwards gave in his letters. Indeed, the detail of Edwards's letters alone provide a clear picture of the construction process and the end result.

[97] Bodleian, MS Bodl. 1010, fol. 160 [TE to ROC, 19th August 1745].
[98] BLARS, L30/9/3/11, fol. 180 [EA to JG, 9th August 1749].
[99] Horace Walpole describes the garden in a letter to Richard Bentley, in *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, XXXV, pp. 143-4 [5th August 1752]; the house and gardens are described in Christopher Hussey, *English Country Houses: Early Georgian, 1715-1760* (London: Country Life, 1965), pp. 58-65.



Figure 11. Earl de Grey, Watercolour of the Root-House at Wrest, 1830s. © English Heritage.



Figure 12. Henry Reginald Yorke, 'The Antique Persian Altar in the Gardens at Wrest', print by W. F. Wells, c. 1820. BLARS, L33/44. Further use without permission not permitted.

Although Edwards was a relative latecomer to the coterie, not actually visiting Wrest until August 1744,[100] there are several reasons why he should have been chosen as the architect of the root-house. Not only had he already assisted Wray with the inscriptions for the Mithraic Altar, but in the 1730s, he had already established a reputation as a rustic architect well-known for his classically inspired rustic buildings.[101] In describing the plan for the root hermitage to Talbot, Grey refers to Edwards as having 'great fame in the world as a Wooden Inigo',[102] referring to the architect Inigo Jones. He was first inspired by his visit to see the tessellated Roman pavement at Stonesfield near Blenheim Park, which had been unearthed in 1713. Over the next few years, he recreated rustic patterns that imitated the Roman design, first at his family home in Pitshanger, Middlesex, then at his new residence at Terrick House, Buckinghamshire (although referred to as 'Turrick' by Edwards). In fact, he was soon called upon by friends and neighbours to supervise the building of temples, hermitages, and root-houses paved with mosaic floors on their estates. Even before his acquaintance with the Yorkes, he had carried out work for notable figures, including John Wilkes, John Hampden, John Revett, and Richard Owen Cambridge.[103] His efforts so impressed Thomas Birch that he was elected to the Society of Antiquaries in 1745.[104] On his previous work alone, it is fitting that Edwards should have been chosen to design Cleander's root-house at Wrest Park.

Edwards's root-house at Wrest seems to have taken at least three years from the planning in 1748 to the final completion in 1751, although assembling the materials for the

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[100] Edwards was invited to Wrest in the summer of 1743, but regretfully declined since 'the rains had […] spoiled the roads between us' in Bodleian, MS Bodl. 1009, fols 52-4. Wray appears to have smoothed the matter over on his behalf, writing to Philip Yorke that Edwards 'makes you his best compliments for your obliging Invitation, & is out of patience at several accidents which prevented his obeying it; but he resolves to make himself amends some other time,' in BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 22^{v} [DW to PY, 16th August 1743].
[101] Vedder Gilbert, 'Thomas Edwards as the Wooden Inigo', *Notes and Queries,* 200.12 (1955), 532-535 (p. 532).
[102] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 133 [JG to CT, 3rd August 1749].
[103] Vedder Gilbert, 'Thomas Edwards as the Wooden Inigo', p. 534.
[104] Ibid.

root-house and mosaic floor seems to have taken most of the time, rather than the construction itself. While Edwards was working on his own mosaic pavement at Terrick in the August of 1748, Wray came to visit him and they discussed a plan for the hermitage at Wrest.[105] The following week, Wray reported to Philip Yorke that 'last week I spent with Edwards; he was busy upon a Mosaic Pavement of Horse-teeth; Bones Flints & Pebbles; nor has he neglected the consideration of your hermitage.'[106] The roots were assembled in the summer of 1749; on 19th June, Edwards ordered for the roots 'to be drawn into the grove and placed as near as possible to the place where the building is to be', and by the 25th July, Edwards informed Wray that he and Lady Grey had taken tea in the newly constructed root-house to celebrate its completion.[107] It was sourcing the pebbles for the mosaic pavement that was to prove the most troublesome for Edwards; the following summer he would report his vain attempt at 'pebble negotiations,' noting that 'to collect such a number of a proper size for our Mosaic, and such different colors as will give it any beauty is a work of some time as well as judgement.'[108] By 5th October, Edwards had resorted to 'collecting Pebbles from all quarters', and wrote apologetically to Philip Yorke that 'Had I the summer before me, I would have provided for you as elegantly as I did for myself […] but it is now too late for encampments.'[109] By the late summer of 1751, Grey would report to Mary Gregory that 'Mr Edwards has not quite finished his Pavement to the Root-house, but it is upon the conclusion, & he has adorned the House still more by writing a pretty sonnet for it.'[110]

[105] On 15th August 1748, Edwards asks Wray to help him 'not only look out for roots, but also men who can pile them […] However, when you are here we will consider that.' In Bodleian, Bodl. MS. 1010, fol. 47 [TE to DW, 15th August 1748].
[106] BL, Add. MS. 35401, fol. 89v [DW to PY, 30th September 1748].
[107] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1011, fol. 143 [TE to DW, 25th August 1749].
[108] Ibid., fol. 187 [TE to DW, 4th October 1750].
[109] Ibid., fol. 192 [TE to PY, 6th October 1750].
[110] BLARS, L30/9a/2, fol. 68 [JG to MG, 1751].

'AN IMAGE OF WILDNESS & BARBARITY': PRIMITIVISM AND THE ROOT-HOUSE AT WREST

Not everybody was pleased with Edwards's design for the root-house. The final result seems to have startled Catherine Talbot, at least, who would pronounce the root-house a 'Tartar's Den'.[111] Her criticism may, in part, have been in Edwards's choice of materials. Certainly, the teeth, bones fragments, and skulls that Edwards used for his mosaic pavements likely served as a *memento mori,* and fittingly echo the coterie's interest in sacrifices and the visceral descriptions of them in the *Athenian Letters*. Yet the rustic, even barbarous elements of the design is something that the architects of the root-house were keen to enhance. Wray, assisting Edwards with the root-house in August 1749, would describe him as 'Rough-Hewn Vitruvius.'[112] In fact, Wray even draws a comic contrast between Edwards's swift work in the glade and Henry Flitcroft's tardy work in the house, writing to Philip Yorke that Edwards 'shames all your cunning workmen with their Chissels and Planes, and his awfull Temple is roofed & finished before the Stone-Bow window raises breast high.'[113] It is not only the speed of construction that Wray contrasts here, but the refined work done by Flitcroft's workmen with their 'Chissels' further juxtaposes with Edwards' 'awfull Temple.'

In response to Talbot's criticism of the root-house as a 'Tartar's Den', Grey playfully admonishes her for passing 'so harsh a sentence', asking 'was ever a rural Hermitage so traduced? The most Soothing Contemplative tranquillizing Scene turned into an Image of Wildness & Barbarity.'[114] In fact, Grey suggests a different interpretation of the root-house, and rather than insisting on a binary opposition between tranquil scenes and wild barbarity,

[111] BLARS, L30/9a/6, fol. 62 [JG to CT, 25th July 1751].
[112] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 116v [DW to PY, 19th August 1749].
[113] Ibid.
[114] BLARS, L30/9a/6, fols 61-2 [JG to CT, 25th July 1751].

she suggests that beauty should be seen even in rough forms and that cultivation can create something beautiful out of even the crude elements of nature:

> Would not any Candid Person have rather admir'd the ingenious penetrating Eye that could discover Beauties in every Common Object, the seeming refuse of Nature, & place them together into agreable Forms as exactly as Art could have formed them.[115]

This agrees with Edwards's own instructions for how the materials should be treated: there is a contrast between the violent 'grinding' of the teeth and the careful management of the process, as Edwards tries to ensure that the 'person who grinds them should take care to hold the jaw uneven that they may be ground flat, and not one side higher than another.'[116] Edwards's insistence that the teeth should be 'smooth and shew their colours' also reveals his attention to the aesthetic details.[117] In fact, even when Edwards describes the necessary ingredients for the cement, 'One part of Terras two of Stone Lime and one sixth of Brickdust with a serum of blood,'[118] he is quick to give the recipe literary and cultural merit by adding that the 'Cement I use […] I had from Mr Pope.'[119] Edwards was distantly acquainted with Alexander Pope, having tried, but not altogether succeeded, to procure stones for his grotto in 1741.[120] In any case, the conscious and unsubtle reference to Pope demonstrates Edwards's attempt to showcase his own influential network. Far from being the architect of a Tartar's Den, Edwards tries to position himself alongside great literary gardeners such as Alexander Pope.

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[115] Ibid.
[116] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1011, fol. 192 [TE to PY, 6th October 1750].
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] In fact, the favour seems to have been undertaken by his friend, Charles Bathurst, and the delay in having the stones delivered to Pope caused Edwards much anguish, fearing that 'I should be thought slack in my zeal for Mr Pope's service, or slight and impertinent in undertaking what I am not able to perform, as well as because it has robbed me of another handsome opportunity of waiting upon him, which perhaps I may never have again.' In Bodleian, MS Bodl 1009, fol. 163 [TE to CB, 1st June 1741].

Grey too sees the merit of imbuing the root-house with literary associations. While she shares Talbot's anxieties about 'breaking the Bones & drawing the Teeth of the poor animals' as well as sourcing the blood for the cement serum from the Bricklayer's horse, whose illness she suspects 'was so luckily timed I could not think it suspicious', she nevertheless defends the cultivation in the supposed barbarity:[121]

> But yet we can't allow ourselves to be ranked with Cannibals & Tartars, & the inclosed Paper is to shew you that the Han of the Tartars can do something more than Bleed his Horse, & Boneify his Tent. He can adorn my Root-house with something more valuable than these materials, & if he does not obey you in Paving a Sonnet, can at least Write one.[122]

Grey's justification further shows how far Edwards's inscription for the root-house was intended to imbue the root-house with further literary, as well as artistic merit, and thereby elevated the root-house from being a rude construction. Elizabeth Anson appears to have had similar thoughts to Catherine Talbot, remarking that she was 'a little shocked to find the habitation of the Sober Hermit turned, in appearance, into the Den of a Savage Ogre, (a metamorphosis I should never have expected to have been brought about by the courteous Sir Calidore).'[123] There is clearly a playful contrast in Anson's statement between Edwards's gallantry in confronting Warburton (one might recall from Chapter 1 that in attacking Warburton in the *Canons* debate, Edwards compared himself to Sir Calidore in pursuit of the Blatant Beast from the *Faerie Queene*), and the apparent crudeness of his root-house design. Yet Anson would also add that 'the Sight of the variegated Pavement has made me admire the Genius that could turn such disagreeable objects into one pleasing one.' [124] Far from being a 'Tartar's Den' or the 'Den of a Savage Ogre', the primitivism – even the barbarity – of the root-house is elevated through literature and art.

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[121] BLARS, L30/9a/6, fol. 63 [JG to CT, 25th July 1751].
[122] Ibid.
[123] BLARS, L30/9/3/26, fol. 240 [EA to JG, 7th August 1751].
[124] Ibid.

In fact, while Edwards was constructing the root-house, Grey seems to have been charmed by the 'picturesque scene', describing it thus to her husband:

> Mr Edwards was seated under an old Oak, with a Table before him covered with Plans & compasses, a Book in his hand, […] a Basket hanging upon a bough by him, & a whistle. The use of this last ornament he pretended was to call the swans to be fed. But altogether he had greatly the appearance of a Magician, casting figures & attended by his familiar Spirits who were raising this rude uncouth Pile at his Command. The Whistle too the Ensign of Power was fortunately drop'd into the canal or carried off by a Swan as soon as the House was finished, so that the Charm cannot now be broken & the Building we suppose may stand for ever.[125]

The connection between antiquarianism and the picturesque will be covered in greater detail in the following chapter, but for the purposes of this discussion it is worth highlighting the connection that Grey makes between 'picturesque' and enchantment. One on level, the trope of enchantment in gardens is a common one in this period, drawing attention to the imagination's ability to transform the natural into the supernatural. [126] For the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park, it is particularly fitting that the groves would acquire their own mysticism in Grey's imagination – one might recollect Talbot's remark about Grey working with a 'conjurer' in the gardens. Yet landscape painting can also inform the mind's impression of what it sees to go beyond the physical reality, and even, as John Dixon Hunt argues, lend itself to bringing out the 'magical, preternatural, even sacred meaning' of gardens.[127] In describing Edwards as a 'Magician' and describing his power to convert the 'rude uncouth Pile' of raw materials in this 'picturesque' scene, Grey draws attention to the transcendent power of the artistic imagination to transform the barbaric into something beautiful. Grey herself would also later describe Capability Brown in similar terms, when in 1767, he worked

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[125] BL, Add MS 35376, fol. 13 [JG to PY, 15th August 1749].
[126] Max F. Schulz suggests the trope for the picturesque rural experience as 'enchanted' and 'magical' refer to Arcadian enchantment, in 'The Circuit Walk of the Eighteenth-Century Landscape Garden and the Pilgrim's Circuitous Progress', *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 15.1 (1981), 1-25 (p. 17); for an analysis of enchantment in the early eighteenth-century landscape, see David Lambert, 'William Shenstone and the Fairy Landscape', *The Georgian Group Report & Journal* (1986), 67-73 (p. 71).
[127] John Dixon Hunt, *Greater* Perfections, p. 167.

on the landscape at Wimpole. After 'having hobbled over rough Ground', Grey declares that Brown has been 'leading me such a Fairy Circle & his Magic Wand has raised such landscapes to the Eye […] his Touch has brought them out with the same Effect as a Painter's Pencil upon Canvass.'[128]

THOMAS EDWARDS'S SONNETS FOR THE ROOT-HOUSE

Stylistically, the rustic primitive design of the root-house has much in common with the altar; in planning the Mithraic Glade, Grey noted that the root-house 'will look very rustic, & suitably to the ancient Persic Simplicity [of the altar].'[129] What is striking about Edwards's inscription for the root-house, however, is how far he departs from the mystical world of the *Athenian Letters* that is so clearly evoked in the Mithraic Altar. Of course, to the inner members of the Wrest circle, the literary connection to the *Athenian Letters* was still obvious since the root-house was, after all, intended to be the habitation of the Magian Priest. Indeed, the connection between the root-house and the *Athenian Letters* must have been evident enough for John Lawry to visit Edwards at Terrick so that he might pass on to him that he had 'paid his respects to Cleander's Altar and Hermitage.'[130] Grey herself also used the Mithraic Glade in order to escape to the imaginary world created by her husband and their friends. On 11th August 1750, finding herself alone at Wrest, Grey wrote to Catherine Talbot that 'Mr Y: is gone to Cambridge […] & has left me to inhabit the Root-Hermitage & recommend myself to the protection of Mithras (you must know I have been deeply engaged in the Athenian Letters of late).'[131] Evidently, there was still a strong connection between the *Athenian Letters* and the Mithraic Glade itself. It might therefore seem strange that Edwards does not draw from the *Athenian Letters* in his inscription. Even Elizabeth Anson, who had

[128] BLARS, L30/9a/9, fols 125-6 [JG to CT, 19th September 1769].
[129] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 133 [JG to CT, 3rd August 1749].
[130] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1011, fol. 147 [TE to DW, 9th September 1749].
[131] BLARS, L30/9a/9, fol. 21 [JG to CT, 11th August 1750].

almost certainly read her brothers' contributions to the *Athenian Letters,* alluded to the work when she recommended a galley for boating at Wrest, suggesting that if Grey tired of writing from the root-house or her closet, she might 'now and then date, from on board the Minerva Quinquireme, in the Harbour of Naupactus.'[132] In contrast, Edwards does not attempt any reference to the *Athenian Letters*, likely since he himself was not a contributor.[133] While the Mithraic Altar resists the interpretation of strangers, 'For a Root-House at Wrest' makes itself accessible to 'Stranger or guest':

> Stranger or guest, whome'er this hallowed grove
> Shall chance receive, where sweet contentment dwells,
> Bring here no heart, that with ambition swells,
> With avarice pines, or burns with lawless love.
>
> Vice-tainted Souls will all in vain remove
> To sylvan Shades, and hermits peacefull cells,
> In vain will seek retirement's lenient spells,
> Or hope that bliss, which only good men prove.
>
> If heaven-born truth, and sacred virtue's lore.
> Which chear, adorn, and dignify the mind,
> Are constant inmates of thy honest breast,
> If, unrepining at thy neighbor's store,
> Thou count'st as thine the good of all mankind,
> Then welcome share the friendly groves of Wrest.[134]

The didactic message for viewers to bring 'no heart that with ambition swells' may well resonate with the altar, whose inscriptions baffled all 'arrogant pretences to learning.' In the same way that the iambic metre is interrupted with the trochee 'Vice,' so too would such a soul disrupt the harmony of the glade. The moralising tone may also elevate the root-house from representing an uncultivated 'Tartar's den.' However, the root-house is by no means dislocated from the coterie's literary compositions. While the sonnet makes no reference to

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[132] The 'Minerva Quinquireme' references one of Philip Yorke's letters in the *Athenian Letters,* in which Phormio informs the Athenian people of the naval victory against the Corinthians, in Philip Yorke, et al., 'Letter XLV. Cleander to Gobryas, Chief Scribe, &c.', *The Athenian Letters,* I, p. 186 [signed 'P', Philip Yorke].
[133] This is the reason suggested by Lindsay Allen in 'The "three-dimensional fiction': a cuneiform inscription of 1748 C.E. and the culture of decipherment', p. 14.
[134] Private collection, 'For a Root-house at Wrest', *Wrestiana*, fol. 151.

the *Athenian Letters* or even to Cleander, for whom the root-house was intended, it does feature in *Wrestiana*. This is, in fact, Edwards's only contribution to the manuscript, despite having written poems to other members of the coterie in the *Canons of Criticism.* It is thus significant that this sonnet privately consolidates his membership of the coterie.

Edwards wrote another private sonnet for the root-house that was addressed to Grey herself. This sonnet makes private references that would only have been known to Edwards and Grey, which is pertinent given that it was Grey who oversaw Edwards' work in 1749. Indeed, Philip Yorke was abroad in Holland and France from July 1749 until the autumn, leaving Grey to manage the improvements and host their friends at Wrest. Daniel Wray was certainly impressed at Grey's management, writing to Philip Yorke that 'in your absence her Ladyships become Directress of the Works Flitcroft with his Masons & Bricklayers […] and the Buckinghamshire Architect [Edwards] was in the midst of his Roots & his Billets from morning to night.'[135] After Edwards finished the root-house at Wrest, Grey thanked him by leaving 'half a Buck of Ailsburg for Mr Edwards with the Compliments of the Root-house.'[136] In his response to Grey, Edwards continues to play on the personification of the Root-house by enclosing a sonnet in which 'the Beech roots send their compliments to their Elmen brethren.'[137]

> The Beechen Roots of wood-clad *Buckingham*
> To *Bedford* Elms, their courteous breth'ren, send
> Health and kind greeting, as from friend to friend,
> And gladly join to celebrate their fame;
> Beyond all roots above ground we proclame
> You happiest, destin'd all your days to spend
> In *Wrests* fair groves, and *Graia* to defend
> From *Eurus'* blasts, and *Phoebus* sultry flame;
> High Privilege to you, though dead, accorded,
> Which every living tree with envy views!
> We envy not, but pray for your stability;
> Proud, that ourselves by *Graia* are regarded,

[135] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 116[r] [DW to PY, 19th August 1749].
[136] BL, Add. MS 35376, fol. 22 [JG to PY, 3rd September 1749].
[137] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1011, fol. 148 [TE to JG, September 1749].

> At her command we not the fire refuse,
> But chearful [sic] blaze and burn with *Affability**
>
> * A cant word used by Builders of the Root-house

This sonnet is much more personal than the inscription for the root-house. Edwards's reference to Grey's coterie nickname, 'Graia,' clearly signals his involvement with the inner members of the Wrest circle. More than this, he ventriloquises his own friendship with Grey through the personified roots, who send 'health and kind greeting, as from friend to friend.' However, Edwards also makes his own private reference to '*Affability*'. While the asterisk explains that this is a 'cant word used by Builders of the Root-house', it does not draw out the full significance of the joke. Grey explains the significance in a letter to her husband, noting that the chief architect under Edwards, who 'liked to distinguish himself from the rest by hard words,' declared that the roots at Wrest were not 'as affable as their Beech roots at home.'[138] The builder's mis-use of the word 'affable' seems to have caused particular amusement, for Grey would continue that 'it [the root-house] is so great an edifice we were forced to get four or five loads more of these un-affable Logs to compleat it.'[139] Therefore, the reference to the roots burning with 'Affability' alludes to their shared joke at the architect's expense. In the note enclosed with the sonnet, Edwards jokes that if the poem 'should prove wooden, your L[Ladyship] is so candid as to consider that beech roots are much more affable for building of roothouses, or fires, than of Verse.'[140] The zeugma in this line parallels Edwards's craft as both a garden architect and a poet, while the pun on 'wooden' is a playful use of language as he continues to parody the word 'affable.' In contrast to the inscription for the root-house, this sonnet is a private consolidation of Edwards's friendship with Jemima Grey.[141]

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[138] BL, Add MS 35376, fol. 13 [JG to PY, 15th August 1749].
[139] Ibid.
[140] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1011, fol. 148 [TE to JG, September 1749].
[141] It was certainly private during Edwards's lifetime; it would not be published until a year after Edwards's death in the 6th edition of the *Canons of Criticism* (London: C. Bathurst, 1758), p. 305.

THE LATER MONUMENT INSCRIPTIONS

Edwards's inscription for the root-house at Wrest is not the only garden inscription to feature in the *Wrestiana* manuscript. Interestingly, two other inscriptions appear in the early 1770s, over twenty years after Edwards composed the inscription for the root-house. These are not exactly coterie inscriptions – after all, by the early 1770s, many of the early coterie members had died,[142] but the surviving members, Philip Yorke, Jemima Grey, Daniel Wray, and Richard Owen Cambridge seem to have revived *Wrestiana* in this later period. This revival coincided with some of the later garden developments: Edward Stephens's construction of the Bath House at Wrest (Figure 13) in 1769-70, and James Essex's construction of the Gothic Folly at Wimpole (Figure 14) – which Philip Yorke had now inherited, along with his father's title. In some respects, the later garden buildings, like the later inscriptions, feed into broader cultural trends and do not have the same private significance of the earlier works. In this, we might detect a transition in the life stages of key members: while the changes to the garden in the 1740s reflect their youthful playfulness and enthusiasm, by the 1770s, as Yorke and Grey are now in their fifties, the later improvements reflect their later lives. For instance, the desire to keep up with the latest fashions may account for the decision to bring in Capability Brown at Wrest in the late 1750s and at Wimpole in the late 1760s.[143] However, this does not fully account for the decision to place the inscriptions for the later garden buildings in *Wrestiana,* nor why the authorship of the inscriptions and the connection to the place should only be revealed in the manuscript. Evidently, there was still some desire to keep the authorship between friends. In fact, in the case of the inscription for the Gothic Tower at Wimpole, it is

[142] By 1771, this included Thomas Edwards, Elizabeth Anson, Mary Gregory, Catherine Talbot, and Charles Yorke.

[143] Brown's intervention at Wrest was minimal as Grey wished to retain the formal integrity of her grandfather's gardens; Brown agreed, stating that to do more would 'unravel the mystery of the garden,' qtd in Andrew Hann and Shelley Garland, *English Heritage Wrest Park.* Guidebook. (London: English Heritage, 2014), p. 15; Brown joined the canals 'so that the whole […] will appear one Stream running-in where the Brook now comes into the Garden, & winding on till it is lost among Bushes &c, beyond the furthest Bank of what is now the Mill-pond.' In BLARS, L30/9a/3, fol. 20 [JG to MG, 3rd Oct 1758].

possible that the political connotations of the work meant that it was prudent to keep the authorship at least partially hidden. This final section will focus on these later inscriptions, arguing that situating them within the context of *Wrestiana* can provide closer insights into the way in which the remaining members of the coterie continue to negotiate the boundary between public and private.



Figure 13. The Bath House at Wrest Park, Bedfordshire. Photograph by the author, 2019.



Figure 14. Anonymous artist, 'View of the Gothic Tower at Wimple after completion', Engraving, 1777. © National Trust / Norman Anderson.

THE GOTHIC TOWER AT WIMPOLE

Although Lord Chancellor Hardwicke had initially considered creating a Gothic Tower at Wimpole after George Lyttelton's at Hagley, he quickly dropped the idea, stating that 'as the building of this Castle requires no great haste, I think there will be no great harm if it remains in the air a few months longer.'[144] It seems to have remained in the air a good deal longer than a few months, and it was not until 1768 that Philip Yorke resurrected the idea, bringing in James Essex to construct a sham folly as an eyecatcher on Johnson's Hill based on Sanderson Miller's earlier design. Scholars have largely assumed that Yorke was merely continuing his father's work.[145] David Stewart, for instance, reads the Gothic Tower at

[144] *An Eighteenth Century Correspondence*, eds, Lilian Dickins and Mary Stanton, p. 262.
[145] This assumption is made by David. R. Coffin in *The English Garden: Meditation and Memorial,* pp. 42-3, and David Adshead, 'Wimpole: Architectural Drawings and Topographical Views', p. 47; David Stewart

Wimpole as a 'sign of Whig power' in reference to the aftermath of the 1745 rebellion, in which Lord Chancellor Hardwicke severely punished the Jacobites.[146] Yet one might question how far Lord Chancellor Hardwicke really wanted to make these associations in the landscape; after all, if he had cared enough about making such a clear political point, why allow the idea for the Gothic Tower to 'remain in the air' for so long? Furthermore, why should Yorke revive ideas that harked back to his father's policies two decades earlier? Only Kasie Alt has attributed the folly to the 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, arguing that the fabricated character of the Gothic Tower has much in common with the Mithraic Altar at Wrest and Philip Yorke's own early *jeu d'esprit* writings.[147] However, little critical attention has been paid to the inscription itself, which has been attributed to Daniel Wray, based on an anonymous engraving (Figure 14) and the publication of the verse in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1779.[148] Significantly, the poem, though undated, features in *Wrestiana* alongside other compositions from the early 1770s, and is signed 'W.P.', suggesting that Philip Yorke also had a hand in the composition. This is not surprising; as many of the compositions in *Wrestiana* can testify, Yorke and Wray habitually joint-authored verses, but Yorke was particularly reticent about publishing his works. Yorke's joint authorship of the inscription further supports the argument that he was bringing his own ideas to the Gothic Tower, and not simply continuing the work of his father.

Unlike any of the primitive or classically inspired inscriptions at Wrest, the 'Ruin at Wimple' draws instead on medieval history, far more appropriate for the Gothic:

> When Henry stemm'd Jernes stormy flood
> And bowd to Britains yoke her savage brood;
> When, by true courage and false zele impell'd,
> Richard encamp'd on Salems palmy field;

assumes the Gothic Folly is part of the 1st Earl of Hardwicke's anti-Jacobite sentiment, in 'Gothic Sham Ruins and the '45', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians,* 55.4 (1996), 400-411 (p. 403).
[146] David Stewart, 'Gothic Sham Ruins and the "45"', pp. 403-404.
[147] Kasie Alt, 'The Gothic Folly at Wimpole, Cambridgeshire', *Garden History* 44.1 (2016), 74-89 (p. 87).
[148] Daniel Wray, 'Inscription in a Tower at Wimpole', *The Gentleman's Magazine* 49 (March 1779), p. 150.

> From Tow'rs like these Earl, Baron, Vavasor,
> Hung high their banners floating in the air;
> Free, hardy, proud, they brav'd their Feudal Lord
> And try'd their rights by Ordeal of the Sword;
> Now the full board with Christmas plenty crown'd
> Now ravag'd and oppress'd the country round.
> Yet Freedom's Cause once rais'd the Civil Broil,
> And Magna Charta clos'd the glorious Toil.
>
> Spruce modern Villas diff'rent scenes afford:
> The patriot Baronet: the courtier Lord.
> Gently amus'd, now waste the summers day
> In Book-room, Print-room or in Ferme ornee,
> While Wit, Champagne, and Pines and Poetry
> Virtu and Ice the genial feast supply,
> But hence the Poor are cherish'd, Artists fed
> And Vanity relieves in Bounty's stead.
>
> Oh might our Age in happy concert join
> The manly Virtues of the Norman line
> With the true Science and just Taste, which raise
> High in each useful Art these Modern Days![149]

On one level, the choice of Gothic reflects Yorke and Wray's historical interests, and the Gothic Tower could be read in relation to the antiquarian nostalgia that was a prominent feature of Sanderson Miller's Gothic designs.[150] For instance, Lyttelton's ruined castle at Hagley, which originally inspired the design of the Gothic Tower at Wimpole, was clearly read in relation to Britain's medieval past. When Horace Walpole visited Hagley in 1753, he described it as having 'the true rust of the Barons' Wars.'[151] Similarly, the inscription for the Gothic Tower draws on a history that idealises the barons' revolt against feudal oppression as 'Free, hardy, proud, they brav'd their Feudal Lord.' There are further thematic parallels between the two Gothic follies. Like the folly at Wimpole, the inscription for Lyttelton's ruined castle also evokes an idealised past before drawing attention to the vanity of earthly possessions. In Joseph Heeley's *A Description of Hagley, Envil and the Leasowes* (1775), he

[149] Private collection, 'The Ruin at Wimple', *Wrestiana*, fol. 161 [signed 'W.P.' Daniel Wray and Philip Yorke].
[150] Jennifer Meir, 'Sanderson Miller and the Landscaping of Wroxton Abbey, Farnborough Hall and Honington Hall', *Garden History,* 25.1, 81-106 (p. 82).
[151] *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence,* XXXV, p. 148 [Horace Walpole to Richard Bentley, September 1753].

offers a translation for the Latin inscription in the ruined castle at Hagley ('Sedes Contemplationis. Omnia Vanitas') as 'The Seat of Contemplation. All is Vanity.'[152] It is possible this inspired Yorke and Wray's satire on 'spruce modern villas' and their owners who 'waste the summers day/ In Book-room, Print room, or in ferme ornee.' Although reference to the 'patriot Baronet' could be a slight poke at Lyttelton himself, owing to his earlier prominence as a member of the Patriot opposition, this does also seem strange given that members of the Wrest circle were rather partial to the 'book room' themselves, and as Chapter 1 demonstrated, the Wrest coterie had much in common with Lyttelton's literary circle at Hagley. Jemima Grey even identified with the idle, country house lifestyle depicted in James Thomson's *Castle of Indolence,* though it was originally a teasing reference to Lyttelton. Oddly, then, the reference to 'spruce modern villas' is as damning to themselves as landowners of taste.

In fact, there is a striking irony, that if Yorke and Wray envisage making art 'useful' in their final stanza of the inscription, Lyttelton's castle, despite the ruinous appearance, did have a practical purpose. This is a point that Joseph Heeley picked up on in his guide to Hagley, observing that despite 'lamenting the mouldering power of time' on the approach to the dilapidated castle, he soon realised that it was 'a useful modern structure, built for a keeper's lodge.'[153] In this regard, Lyttelton's folly parallels more closely with the practical Gothic-style farm buildings on the Duke of Beaufort's estate at Badminton, designed by Thomas Wright in the 1750s. In contrast, the Gothic Tower at Wimpole offers no such practical purpose, serving as an optical illusion that further highlights the way in which 'Vanity relieves in Bounty's stead.' This is a point further drawn out in the inscription, for Yorke and Wray deliberately invoke Pope's 'Yet hence the *Poor* are cloth'd, the *Hungry* fed'

[152] Joseph Heeley, *A Description of Hagley, Envil and the Leasowes* (Birmingham: M. Swinney, 1775), p. 99.
[153] Ibid., p. 96.

from his *Epistle to Burlington* in the line 'But hence the Poor are cherish'd, Artists fed'.[154] In so doing, they draw attention to the importance of combining art and utility. Yet, one wonders whether the folly at Wimpole, by not having any such practical purpose, ironically highlights its own vanity and artifice as a structure. In this respect, the Wimpole folly breaks from the antiquarian medievalism of the mid-century Gothic revival under Miller (as the original design had perhaps intended) and this later inscription could even be read in dialogue with the later political revival of the Gothic as a critical discourse to articulate concern about state of politics and the nation.

The 'Gothic' was a nebulous concept in the eighteenth century, but it offered writers and designers an idealised medieval past that represented Britain's quest for liberty and patriotic strength. This ideology famously underpinned Cobham's highly Gothic ironstone Temple to Liberty at Stowe, which, in reference to politics in the 1730s and 40s, stood as a reminder of the values of Britain's medieval past in contrast to the perceived corruption of modern times under Walpole.[155] While, as the final chapter will argue, the gardens of Stowe do not appear to be as politically charged in the 1740s as they had been in the previous decade, by the 1760s, political gardening was revived once more by the Rockingham Whigs.[156] Having enjoyed a monopoly of power under George II, the Whig Ascendency began to lose its political stability when George III ascended the throne in 1760. In response, Charles Watson-Wentworth, the 2nd Marquis of Rockingham, became the champion of an opposition group, fearing that George III planned to restore an absolute monarchy that had characterised Stuart Tyranny. [157] Attention has been paid to the way in which this is clearly

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[154] Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Burlington*, p. 9.
[155] Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1726-1742* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 128.
[156] Patrick Eyres, 'Introduction', *Rockingham Whig Landscapes: Political Discourse Embedded in the Landscape of the Country Estate in the Various Forms of Agriculture, Garden Buildings, Monuments, and Structure,* ed. by Patrick Eyres (= *New Arcadian Journal,* 71/72 (2013)), pp. 9-13 (pp. 9-10); Oliver Cox, 'King Alfred's Castle: Or, How to Memorialise the Yorkshire Petition of 1769'. Ibid., pp. 33-53.
[157] Patrick Eyres, 'Introduction', *Rockingham Whig Landscapes,* p. 9.

articulated in the gardens of other Rockingham Whigs,[158] but I would argue that the Gothic Folly at Wimpole could also be situated within this later political context, not least since Philip and Charles Yorke had been closely allied with Watson-Wentworth. This political context offers another way into understanding the first stanza of Yorke and Wray's inscription, which clearly idealises and celebrates the civil liberties enshrined in the 'Magna Charta' and idealises baronial powers who would oppose the 'Feudal Lord.' Given his role in opposition by the early 1770s, it seems fitting that Philip Yorke should be concerned that once again, the country should once more be 'ravag'd' and 'oppress'd.'

Yet how might we read the irony that the inscription for the Gothic Tower at Wimpole insists on 'useful Art' when the folly itself is an optical illusion? One might read this, as Kasie Alt does, as another example of the playfulness exhibited in the Mithraic Altar at Wrest Park.[159] Yet, a lot had changed in the two decades between the construction of the Mithraic Altar and the Wimpole folly. Philip Yorke himself was no longer a precocious young man creating intellectual jokes for a close group of friends, and by late 1760s, he and his brother's once bright political careers were waning considerably as the 'Hardwicke Circle' had lost much of its earlier influence. [160] Particularly devastating to Philip was the untimely death of Charles in 1770, which had come about through a serious political disagreement between them. On 12th January 1770, Charles had been offered the seals – a prize he had yearned for his whole career – but acceptance meant breaking with his brother and the other Rockingham Whigs.[161] He had, after much deliberation, reluctantly accepted,

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[158] *Rockingham Whig Landscapes: Political Discourse Embedded in the Landscape of the Country Estate in the Various Forms of Agriculture, Garden Buildings, Monuments, and Structures,* ed. by Patrick Eyres (= *New Arcadian Journal,* 71/72 (2013)).
[159] Kasie Alt, 'Fictions and Fabrications: The Gothic Folly at Wimpole, Cambridgeshire', *Garden History,* 44.1 (2016), 74-89.
[160] See also David Philip Miller, 'The "Hardwicke Circle": The Whig Supremacy and Its Demise in the 18th-Century Royal Society', p. 79.
[161] John Cannon, 'Yorke, Charles', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) < https://www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 31 August 2021].

but the gravity of the decision and the arguments that ensued sent him to an early grave.[162] In light of this political context, the Gothic Tower is more satirical than the earlier garden buildings at Wrest. If the inscription for the Gothic Tower values 'useful Art', the optical illusion of the architecture itself undercuts these values by highlighting its own inefficacy. Thus, rather than epitomising useful strength, as Lyttelton's ruined castle would do, the Gothic Tower at Wimpole rather highlights the decaying strength of the nation and its landowners. One might even read the satire on landowners of taste who 'waste the summers day' as a comment on Yorke's own diminishing political influence as he spends his days 'gently amus'd' in the library and further embellishing the landscape.

Thus, although the Gothic Tower could be read in relation to the Mithraic Altar, it is more likely to reflect this later point in Philip Yorke's career. One might even argue that, more like the political satire in the *Athenian Letters*, the Gothic Ruin is carefully disguised through a historical narrative. After all, it would be easy to merely view the optical illusion as another joke on the viewer that fools them into thinking the folly is a genuine medieval structure before they realise it is a modern fabrication. However, this does not fully account for the discrepancy between the architectural design and the literary inscription. After all, a viewer would not need the inscription to discover the fabricated nature of the folly. When read in relation to other Rockingham Whig landscapes, the inscription is more politically charged, drawing on the same concern for civil liberties, and could even touch on Yorke's personal disillusionment as a result of his declining political power. However, as we have seen in both the *Athenian Letters* and *Wrestiana*, Yorke was careful about making overt political statements, possibly another reason he did not attribute his name to the inscription

[162] This is described in Amabel Hume Campbell's diary, who, aged 18, observed her uncle's downfall. She reflects whether there was 'ever a more striking instance, of the Vanity of all human pursuits', and believes that Mr. Yorke was hurried 'from Friends & Life, by setting his Heart too strongly on things on the Earth.' Leeds, West Yorkshire Archive Service, WYL 150/7/6, fols 62-7; 88.

when it was published. It is possible that, in making some allusions to Lyttelton's Gothic ruin, Yorke allows the reader to take the history in the inscription at face-value and regard it as another recreation of Britain's medieval past. Furthermore, the picturesque-style engraving in 1777 could be seen to provide a further disguise for the political inferences by distracting the reader with an easily identifiable historical and artistic context. The picturesque aesthetic would have also been reinforced with Capability Brown's landscaping of the gardens at Wimpole. Thus, like the *Athenian Letters,* any political satire in the Gothic Tower is carefully hidden, cloaked in the authors' genuine historical and antiquarian interest.

THE COLD BATH AT WREST

At Wrest, the 'Inscription for a Cold Bath at Wrest' is not written by any of the original coterie members, but by the then poet laureate, William Whitehead. Whitehead was not entirely unconnected to the coterie, and in fact, seems to have been at least an acquaintance of Charles Yorke from their Cambridge days.[163] There is also a poem dedicated to Whitehead in *Wrestiana* on the occasion of his being elected poet laureate.[164] Yet, in seeking a verse from a well-known poet outside the coterie, this departs from private verses such as Edwards's inscription for the root-house in 1749. While the earlier inscriptions in the Mithraic Glade played literary games with visitors, Whitehead's inscription refers in practical terms to the medicinal use of the Bath House:

> Inscription for a Cold Bath at Wrest
> By Mr W. Whitehead
>
> Whoe'er thou art, approach. – Has med'cine fail'd?
> Have balms, and herbs essay'd their powers in vain?
> Nor the free air, nor festring sun prevail'd

[163] When dining with Lord Ashburnham at Clare College in 1741, Charles Yorke was asked to recommend a private tutor from the same college, and so 'recommended Whitehead to him, with whom I am well acquainted.' BL Add. MS 35360, fol. 39^{r} [CY to PY, May 1741].
[164] Private collection, 'To Mr Whitehead on his being made Poet Laureat', *Wrestiana,* fol. 179 [signed 'R.O.C.', Richard Owen Cambridge].

To raise they drooping strength, or sooth thy pain?

Yet enter here. Nor doubt to trust thy frame
To the cold bosom of this lucid lake
Here health may greet thee and lifes languid flame,
Ev'n from its icy grasp new vigour take.

What soft Ausonia's genial shores deny
May Zembla give. Then boldly trust the wave:
So shall thy gratefull tablet hang on high.
And frequent votaries bless this healing cave.[165]

It is unclear whether the Bath House was, in practice, used for medicinal purposes. While Philip Yorke was increasingly afflicted with gout in his later years and might have benefited from such treatment, bath houses were also fashionable garden ornaments.[166] The inscription was likely hung above the door to the Bath House, since it invites the visitor to 'enter here' and suggests that the 'gratefull tablet hang[s] on high.' While Edwards's inscription provided a moralising tone, only inviting the humble into the glade, Whitehead's poem is far more welcoming, allowing 'whoe'er thou art' to approach.' In some respects, Whitehead's inscription departs significantly from that of Thomas Edwards.

Nevertheless, there are literary and architectural parallels between Edwards's root-house and the later Bath House. Both inscriptions are in the vocative case and address the viewer directly, compared to the 'Inscription for the Ruin at Wimple' which instead tells the viewer a historical narrative. Architecturally too, there are similarities. While no images remain of Edwards's mosaic pavement and there was little remaining evidence when English Heritage excavated the ground in 2019, the descriptions in the coterie's letters reveal that Edwards characteristically used pebbles, bones and teeth in his design. Similarly, the floor for the Bath House (Figure 15) contains a mosaic of pebbles and deer-bones, possibly in

[165] Private collection, 'Inscription for the Cold Bath at Wrest', *Wrestiana*, fol. 142 [William Whitehead].
[166] For the historical use of bath houses, see Kate Felus, *Secret Life of the Georgian Garden,* pp. 73-81.

reference to Edwards's mosaic pavement for the root-house. In fact, the resemblance must have been noticeable to visitors, as Horace Walpole, when he visited in June 1771, mistakenly attributed both the hermitage and the Bath House to Capability Brown.[167] Clearly, efforts were made for the Bath House to appear in harmony with the root-house. Furthermore, Whitehead's inscription was not exactly publicised. Although Whitehead did publish the inscription in *Plays and Poems* in 1774, significantly, the title is generalised to become 'Inscription for a Cold Bath'. By omitting 'At Wrest', the private significance of the place is lost in the published format. While visitors may have been able to make the connection after seeing Whitehead's inscription on the Bath House at Wrest, it was certainly not advertised in the publication. In this respect, by keeping the significance of the place in the *Wrestiana* manuscript alone, an element of exclusivity is maintained.



Figure 15. The mosaic floor of the Bath House at Wrest Park. Photograph by the author, 2021.

[167] Walpole wrote that 'Mr Brown has much corrected this garden, & built a hermitage & cold bath in bold good taste', in Paget Toynbee, 'Horace Walpole's Journals of Visits to Country Seats', *The Volume of the Walpole Society,* 16 (1927-1928), 9-80 (p. 71).

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In summary, this chapter has sought to demonstrate the way in which the Wrest coterie retained private meanings in the garden, while also adhering to broader cultural, aesthetic, and intellectual trends. The Mithraic Glade, in many respects, could be understood within broader cultural trends, such as the vogue for primitivism after William Stukeley, or antiquarian culture that many expected from the Grand Tour. However, the fact that the Glade was inspired by the privately circulated *Athenian Letters* allowed the coterie to retain its own private meanings within the garden. This is not to say that there was only one 'correct' reading, as the Mithraic Altar could also be an unstable signifier. While it was clearly constructed in homage to the *Athenian Letters,* it also allowed coterie members to playfully explore other interpretations and create their own private jokes, as well as provide superficial meanings for visitors who were not privy to the mysteries of the coterie's private works. In this respect, the Mithraic Altar was primarily a consolidation of friendship; both a reminder of the early literary collaboration at Cambridge and a private intellectual joke that reinforced the exclusivity of the Wrest circle.

Edwards plays on the joke of the inscriptions for the Mithraic Altar, since his sonnet for the root-house warns visitors to leave their pride before entering the Glade; a fitting message for those who would seek to understand the indecipherable inscription. However, Edwards also brings his own ideas and associations to the creation. The fact that his design was also inspired by the classical architecture of Inigo Jones infuses the Glade with Roman influence, even though the Mithraic altar itself eschews such a connection by representing Persepolis and Athens. It is significant that Edwards's inscription for the root-house was his only sonnet to feature in *Wrestiana,* demonstrating that it was his work on the root-house that effectively brought him into the coterie. Although his sonnet to Grey did not feature in *Wrestiana*, by making references to their shared joke in this sonnet, Edwards was able to

capitalise on his role as the architect of the root-house to consolidate his personal friendship with Jemima Grey.

Although the later 1770s inscriptions largely reflect later points in Yorke and Grey's lives, there are echoes of the earlier coterie works. Since both the inscriptions – and the truth of the authorship – are only identifiable from the *Wrestiana* manuscript, this clearly points to the fact that some attempt was made to withhold the full significance. While the inscription for the Gothic Tower at Wimpole was written by Yorke and Wray and could be read in dialogue with the playfulness of the Mithraic Altar, it is also important to consider the later political context. The contrast between the need for 'useful Art' in the inscription and the optical illusion of the architectural design draws attention to the artifice of the structure and ironically conveys Yorke's own political decline. Perhaps, more like the *Athenian Letters*, it carefully makes use of history to make more pertinent political points. In contrast, the 'Inscription for the Cold Bath at Wrest', written by William Whitehead, is not so obviously a coterie work. While the Mithraic Glade was a consolidation of friendship, the Bath House does not carry such associations, even if there are stylistic parallels with the root-house. However, it is entirely possible that by featuring both inscriptions in *Wrestiana,* that Yorke was nostalgically harking back to the golden era of the Wrest circle.

4

The Wrest Coterie and Garden Visiting

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 focused on the connection between social authorship and garden design, and this final chapter will now turn to the way in which visiting gardens and discussing them with friends constitutes a social reading of gardens. Garden visiting was often a sociable activity to be enjoyed with friends in person, but even when friends were absent, descriptions in letters constitute both a literary act and the desire to share the experience of visiting from afar. It might be tempting to assume that as an elite literary group, the Wrest coterie shared similar views or motives in visiting other gardens. Indeed, the desire for a singular, overarching narrative to understand gardens is an approach that garden historians have traditionally favoured.[1] Yet it is also important to recognise the differences in visitors' outlooks when they discuss the gardens that they visited. Despite the similarity of their educational backgrounds, not all members of the coterie possessed the ability and freedom to develop a critical eye through travel. Yorke and Grey, for instance, could afford to be leisured tourists and travel fairly spontaneously; on their Staffordshire tour in 1748, Grey wrote to Mary Gregory that 'the Spirit of Travelling & Curiosity had seized us so much we were dispos'd to extend our Journey […] to any Place that would afford us new Sights.'[2] But this level of freedom was not a possibility for all members, and arguably, not all members engaged to the same degree. While some members kept travel diaries specifically for the purpose of recording the places they visited, others simply recorded passing observations in letters and some seldom travelled

[1] For disruptions of this approach, see, John Dixon Hunt, 'Stourhead revisited & the pursuit of meaning in gardens' and Oliver Cox, 'A Mistaken Iconography? Eighteenth-century visitor accounts of Stourhead'.
[2] BLARS, L30/9a/2, fol. 4 [JG to MG, 4th September 1748].

at all. For instance, Thomas Edwards, frequently in ill health, was rarely fit enough to travel, and he often remarked to friends that he lived as a 'Buckinghamshire Bumpkin' in his 'Hermitage'.[3] But the Wrest coterie's travel accounts demonstrate the rich assortment of observations and insights within the members' scribal network.

Scholars have predominantly examined published guides and accounts for their role in advertising and publicizing the country house and effectively subsuming it into the public sphere.[4] Yet work remains to be done on coterie accounts and where they sit in relation to public or private. This is not always a simple distinction; while it might be tempting to place the coterie's travel accounts within the private sphere, as Betty Schellenberg argued in *Literary Coteries* (2016), the line between private and public accounts could become blurred as the exclusivity associated with coterie accounts became marketable through the cachet of the gentleman tourist.[5] However, not all travel accounts were written for a public audience, and in fact, unpublished accounts were likely only to circulate among select friends. This is certainly the case with the Wrest circle. Rather than viewing these accounts as 'private', it might be more fitting to understand them as personal accounts intended for circulation within an exclusive scribal network. This chapter will explore how far the accounts written by members of the Wrest circle were often shaped through a range of both public and personal discourses. While public guidebooks could, and did, inform an understanding and interpretation of gardens, the sociability of garden visiting should not be underestimated. Even if members of the circle did not visit a garden together, the fact that they often

[3] Bodleian Library, MS Bodl 1009, fol. 177 [TE to PY, 29th November 1745]; MS Bodl 1011, fol. 165 [TE to John Clerke, 27th January 1749/50]; Ibid, fol. 39 [TE to PY, 13th August 1748].
[4] Dana Arnold, 'The Country House and its Publics', *The Georgian Country House: Architecture, Landscape and Society* (Stroud: The History Press, 2013), pp. 20-43 (p. 33); Jocelyn Anderson, *Touring and Publicizing England's Country Houses*.
[5] Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture,* pp. 182-3. Schellenberg mentions Yorke and Grey's domestic travel in this chapter, but only in terms of the exclusivity of their travelling habits, so far there has been no scholarly attempt to close read their accounts in relation to debates in garden design and the visitor experience.

communicated their observations through letters suggests the desire to share their personal impressions in some form with friends.

Of course, travel accounts written for friends can sometimes prove frustrating since they are not written with a critical public audience in mind. The author is not always at complete leisure when relating accounts through letters, and as a result some descriptions are interrupted or ended prematurely – such as when Grey abruptly ends a description of Lord North's gardens at Wroxton Abbey as she realises 'I am in such haste to be dress'd for Company, that I scarcely know what I have wrote.'[6] While this sort of comment would never feature in a published travel guide, for a letter writer communicating to a friend, it offers interest and immediacy. Indeed, these personal accounts afford us an insight into the sociability underpinning coterie travel accounts. While published guides were often patriotic or didactic in their aim to furnish readers with local knowledge or promote domestic tourism,[7] personal accounts often reveal both the private sociable motivations for writing and the writer's desire to demonstrate their taste or intellect. In a letter to Mary Gregory on 5th July 1748, Jemima Grey revealed that the intention behind writing her accounts of Stowe, Easton and Althorp 'was to amuse you' and stemmed from 'the Habit of relating to you my Opinion on anything I see.'[8] In addition, as this chapter will explore, the exclusivity of the coterie's scribal network afforded members the freedom to discuss gardens in a personal or candid manner: they feel at liberty to note disapproval of an owner's taste or judgement, share their own unique interpretations of the gardens that they visited, or draw private comparisons with their own gardens. In this respect, discussions of the gardens through personal letters essentially constitute their own virtual, exclusive spaces of interpretation,

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[6] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fol. 108 [JG to MG, 1st September 1748].
[7] John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 499; Benjamin Colbert, 'Introduction: Home Tourism', *Travel Writing and Tourism in Britain and Ireland,* ed. by Benjamin Colbert (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1-12 (p. 5).
[8] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fol. 183 [JG to MG, 5th July 1748].

providing a very specific hermeneutic space. Moreover, as John Dixon Hunt has noted, written accounts tend to recall the visit – its meanings, resonances, connections, in retrospect.[9] Thus, written travel accounts constitute an imaginary revisitation, a point that is emphasised when Grey ends her account of Stowe by exclaiming that 'here I have tired myself & my pen with Stowe as I did my Legs with Walking Over it.'[10] In this example, the zeugma parallels the acts of writing and walking, the paper and the landscape. Although the coterie's travel accounts primarily demonstrate the writers' personal tastes, significantly for this thesis, these travel letters also reveal much about the social motivations for sharing the experience of garden visiting. Furthermore, they also highlight the way in which some interpretations, especially those that are political or satirical in nature, would only be communicated in confidence to friends. Thus, personal travel accounts can helpfully frame our understanding of the connection between coterie sociability and garden design, as gardens themselves, like literary texts, become the shared subject of discussion, critique, and interpretation.

DEVELOPING A CRITICAL EYE THROUGH DOMESTIC TOURISM

Philip Yorke and Jemima Grey would develop a knowledgeable and critical eye in matters of garden design and country house architecture, but this was a skill that they honed and improved through extensive domestic tourism. Tracing the observations in their private travel journals and letters throughout the 1740s and 1750s reveals the development of their taste during this time. While Philip and his brother Charles were undoubtedly encouraged in their classical and literary studies, it is difficult to gauge the extent of Philip's education in garden design prior to his marriage. Whereas other young men in this period might have been

[9] John Dixon Hunt, 'Time of Walking', *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes,* 36.4 (2016), 297-304 (p. 301).
[10] BLARS, L30 9a/1, fol. 175 [JG to MG, 5th July 1748].

inspired by the landscapes and architecture of Italy on a Grand Tour – Daniel Wray, for instance, had embarked on a prolonged visit to Italy between 1722 and 1728 along with the artist Arthur Pond and the poet John Dyer – surprisingly, given their classical and antiquarian interests, the Yorke brothers never partook in this cultural rite of passage.[11] The reason for this is unclear, although it has been suggested that Lord Chancellor Hardwicke did not see the need for his sons to embark on a Grand Tour when he had not done one himself.[12] More probably, the War of Austrian Succession (1740 to 1748) created hostilities across Europe, and while this did not end British tourism, few travellers dared to take the risk.[13] Philip Yorke himself would later encourage his nephew to travel to Italy in the 1770s and urged him to report back on his travels.[14] Even so, in the early 1740s, it seems that Yorke could scarcely be persuaded to travel beyond his own library. Writing in September 1741, Daniel Wray would tease him that his devotion to study had come at the expense of taking the time to appreciate the natural world:

> What care you for the craggy Tors & the rapid streams of the Peak or the more civilised prospects of the rich meadows & shaggy Cliffs of this country? […] These are entertainments for a man […] who is satisfied with sunshine & air & exercise; and does not think a morning thrown away where it is spent amongst pictoresque views. All this, I know you will treat with indifference, perhaps with contempt: yet […] I should be glad to persuade you to loiter on horseback now & then to taste the pleasure of looking about you.[15]

Apparently, Wray had made a similar comment to Charles Yorke, for he would add 'My advice has had some effect upon Mr Charles; you see how much better he looks for it; and I

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[11] E. I. Carlyle and J. A. Marchand, 'Wray, Daniel', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) (Online edition; accessed 17th May 2021); Richard Wilson, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House, 1660-1880* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000), p. 88; Ben Cowell and C. Watkins, *Uvedale Price 1747-1829: Decoding the Picturesque,* p. 12; for the influence of the Grand Tour on garden design in the early eighteenth century, see John Harris, *The Palladian Revival: Lord Burlington, his Villa and Garden at Chiswick* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Rafaella Fabiana Giannetto,'"Greens after the Italian Way": the landscape of the Venetian mainland through the lens of the Grand Tour'.
[12] Joyce Godber, *Marchioness Grey*, p. 47.
[13] Jeremy Black, *The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud: The History Press, 1992), p. 7.
[14] Sarah Goldsmith, *Masculinity and Danger on the Eighteenth-Century Grand Tour* (London: University of London Press, 2020), p. 21.
[15] BL, Add. MS. 35401, fol. 9r [DW to PY, 30th September 1741].

defy you to say he talks or writes none but the worse.'[16] Wray's advice certainly does seem to have had a considerable role in encouraging both brothers to develop a critical appreciation of the landscape. By 1746, Charles Yorke revealed himself an eloquent travel writer when he undertook a tour of Wales. Upon receiving Charles's accounts of his travels, Philip would write to Thomas Birch that his brother 'seems like a young Traveller, much struck with the Novelty & Variety of what he has seen & is very eloquent & particular in his descriptions.'[17] This comment also suggests that sharing descriptions of gardens and landscapes was an important means of demonstrating taste and judgement, even if only to close friends and family.

Grey, by contrast, had almost certainly been given a more extensive education in garden design. During her adolescent years at Wrest, she had been taught surveying, as well as the theories and ideas of garden design, by Thomas Wright, and she was also an admirer of Batty Langley, who had been employed at Wrest in the late 1730s.[18] Yet in her early accounts, written in her late teens and early twenties, Grey was not always confident in her ability to provide descriptions. When she attempted to describe Burghley House to Mary Gregory in 1743, she feared that 'my Description which is always bad will fail intirely [sic] in giving you any idea of it.'[19] She added that she wished she had her aunt's company, noting 'I should really have seen better with the help of your Eyes, & with your assistance should have remembered what I saw better than I do now, & been more certain what was worth it.'[20] For Grey, the act of viewing and judging value was preferably a sociable activity, not least because she lacked the confidence to know 'what was worth' recording on her own.

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[16] Ibid., fol. 9^{v} [DW to PY, 30th September 1741].
[17] BL, MS 35397, fol. 20 [PY to TB, 24th May 1746].
[18] Christine McAleavy, 'Batty Langley, Robert Morris and the writing of *Ancient Masonry*', *The Georgian Group Journal,* 25 (2017), 95-112 (p. 108).
[19] BLARS L30/9a/1, fol. 8 [JG to MG, 17th August 1743].
[20] Ibid., fol. 12 [JG to MG, 17th August 1743].

Despite her early reservations about writing descriptions, Grey's frequent tours of the country soon made her an informed and skilled observer. This would cause a slight tension in her friendship with Catherine Talbot, as Talbot – not having the same opportunities to travel as her childhood friend – reflected on the need to acquire experience in order to develop a critical eye, despairing that:

> how shall one determine to omit any part where all is pleasing? To You this is easy; because you have been to so many fine places all together that you can easily omit what is Common to all & distinguish only what is peculiar in Every one, but for me I am a meer *paysanne*[21] & think every one I see the finest in the world.[22]

Though Talbot's description of herself as a 'paysanne' is likely playful, there are also serious undertones highlighting the social differences between herself and Grey. As scholars have noted of the friendship between the two women, despite Talbot's high social position and connections, the material differences between them would sometimes cause unease in their relationship.[23] This discrepancy manifests again in their discussions of country house visiting, which was still, in the mid-century, largely an elite activity.[24] However, Talbot had, like Grey, been educated by Thomas Wright, and her accounts of the garden at Cuddesdon reveal her keen interest in gardens, so her insecurity cannot stem from a lack of education or practical knowledge of gardening.[25] Rather, her feelings of inadequacy as a travel

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[21] "paysanne, n", 'a countrywoman; a peasant woman', in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), <oed.com/view/Entry/139201> [accessed 24th May 2021].
[22] BLARS, LP, I, p. 165a [CT to JG, 16th September 1748; modern transcript].
[23] Betty Schellenberg notes a 'growing psychological and social gulf separating [Talbot] from the fashionable lives of Grey and the others of the Yorke circle', in 'Coterie Fame, Media Choice and the Writing Lives of Hester Mulso Chapone and Catherine Talbot', p. 327.
[24]While there are increasing numbers of country house tourists, the fact that Yorke and Grey were the class of tourist who could expect to be shown around by the owners themselves bespeaks their elevated social status, see Jon Stobart, 'Introduction', *Travel and the Country House,* ed. by Jon Stobart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 1-18 (p. 4).
[25] For instance, when Talbot writes that 'Ah Sweet Cuddesden! Was I sighing not a week ago, must I leave ye fresh Springing Greens, ye opening Blossoms, ye Gay Blue Sunny Skies, ye Soft Vernal Gales […] we were reckoning yesterday sixteen different sorts of Flowers in Bloom, besides some JonQuills [sic] just opening & some Lilies of the Valley ready to blow,' in BLARS, LP, vol. 1, p. 113b [CT to JG, 1747; modern transcript].

correspondent are due her limited experiences. When describing the gardens at Rousham to Grey, Talbot writes:

> I am sure you would have been extremely pleased with them, & yet you would not have been so much struck with them as I was, because you have wandered this year thro' so vast a variety of beautiful Scenes. I do not suppose they are at all equal to Wroxton, nor is there anything Romantick or Magnificent as at Warwick. The Gardens are small, & the buildings few, but then every thing with very few expectations is pleasant Elegant & in fine taste.[26]

Here, Talbot reveals that, more than possessing knowledge of garden design, it is the ability to make adroit comparisons that makes a worthy travel correspondent. Even within *Wrestiana,* Talbot's life at Cuddesdon is associated with the pastoral rather than the grander gardens of elite society. In 'Fragments of the Poem' from 'The Borlaciad', the garden at Cuddesdon is contrasted with Wrest and Stowe, as 'neither Stowe/ With all its Works to wonder at, by Kent […] nor the Groves of Wrest/ its winding Streams, its odor breathing Shrubs/ Can vie with Cuddesden', in which 'Flocks and Herds/ Enliven the Landscapes.'[27] While the mock-heroic genre would suggest this is a comic comparison, the rural simplicity at Cuddesdon provides a moral contrast with the embellishments and 'wonder' of Stowe.[28] Yet Talbot herself, characterised as 'Emilia' the heroine – exists within the realm of pastoral retirement, and her garden at Cuddesdon is associated not with her own gardening labours, but with the pastoral and agricultural.[29]

Unlike Talbot, Grey did possess the privilege and opportunities to develop a keen critical eye through tours of the country, reflected in the increasing confidence with which she expresses her opinions in her letters to friends. In fact, by the late 1740, her observations

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[26] Ibid., p. 164a [CT to JG, 8th September 1748; modern transcript].
[27] Private collection, 'Fragments of the Poem', *Wrestiana,* fol. 30 [c.1744, signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].
[28] Ibid.
[29] One might compare this pastoral depiction of Talbot with Grey's depictions of herself as having 'a very fine Shepherdess air' when she adopts a fawn at Wrest in 1744; however, there is a clear difference in agency and property in these depictions. BLARS, L30/9a/1, fol. 34 [JG to MG, c. 1744].

certainly seem to have impressed Daniel Wray, who suggested to Yorke that he should heed his wife's observations on their tour of Staffordshire in 1748, noting that 'Lady Greys picturesque Eye will discover many particulars worthy of your Travelling Pocket-book.'[30] This 'pocket-book' is almost certainly the journal that Yorke kept between 1744 and 1763, in which he recorded the nine tours he took of the country. Grey, when she accompanied her husband, seemingly made her own additions in the journal too. On their return from Staffordshire, Wray would express his wish 'to refresh my memory [of Staffordshire] out of your Green Book illustrated by Lady Greys notes.'[31] It is also likely that Yorke and Grey collectively developed taste and understanding of garden design through their discussions with one another. After all, they seem to have made joint decisions about the improvements at Wrest. This was evidently Daniel Wray's impression of the couple, for he would write to Yorke that the beauties of Staffordshire 'must have given you & Lady Grey many new ideas; all to be employed in heightening the beauty of that spot to me for a thousand reasons [is] the most charming in the world.'[32] That Yorke and Grey should have sought inspiration for their own improvements at Wrest hints at the influence of other country house gardens and the role of domestic tourism in developing a critical eye.

AN EYE FOR IMPROVEMENT

As the decades progressed through the mid-eighteenth century, there is increased emphasis on bringing out the 'natural' beauties in a garden, although this, of course, is an unstable and subjective concept. The search for 'nature' was a motif throughout the eighteenth century, although what 'natural' should look like changed considerably.[33] However, the shifting

[30] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 87^{v} [DW to PY, 5th August 1748].
[31] Ibid., fol. 90^{r} [DW to PY, 22nd September 1748].
[32] Ibid., fol. 88^{r} [DW to PY, 30th August 1748].
[33] Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes*; David Jacques, *Georgian Gardens: The Reign of Nature* (London: Batsford, 1983).

definition of 'natural' might particularly explain why Yorke should change some of his views upon visiting a garden a second time a few years later. When he first visited Studley Royal in North Yorkshire in 1744, he would remark that 'the natural Beauties of this Place are superior to any thing of the Kind I ever saw, & improved with great Taste both by the late & present Owner.'[34] Yet when he visited eleven years later with Grey in 1755, he remarked in his travel journal that 'Upon this 2d View of the Place, the water in the gardens appeared to me ill disposed […] the reservoir, wch [which] is enclosed with the wood, is the more beautiful, because art has had the least to do with it.'[35] In fact, his critical eye has developed to a point where he is able to make his own suggestions for improvement, observing that 'The high hedges and terrace walks obscure the beauties of the steep banks, covered with fine hanging wood and thrown by nature into more pleasing declivities than art can possess.'[36] As well as engaging with emerging ideas of what constituted 'natural' – likely anticipating the style represented in the gardens of Capability Brown – it is also possible that Yorke's taste was shifting as he acquired greater knowledge and experience himself. The first time Yorke viewed the gardens, aged 24, he was still in the process of learning how to critically evaluate a garden. By the time he visited again, aged 35, he had likely developed a keener critical judgment.

Yorke's changed opinion may have also been shaped through his conversations with Grey. The fact that Grey makes similar observations in the travel journal she wrote for Catherine Talbot would imply that she and her husband had discussed the gardens as they walked around together. Grey similarly notes that:

> Art has done its utmost Efforts to spite, nay, destroy Nature. Few Places if any have more natural Beauties than this Disposition of Ground, fine wooded Hills & winding Valleys betwixt them. One of these valleys with the two Slopes of a very steep Hill on Each side,

[34] Private collection, *Philip Yorke Travel Journal,* fol. 34 [1st September 1744].
[35] Ibid., fols 109-110 [11th July 1755].
[36] Ibid., fol. 110 [11th July 1755].

> cover'd with Wood from Top to Bottom is what makes the Garden: but the sides of the Hills being cut into a number of Walks upon different Levels of Terrasses, & these divided from each Other by clipt [sic] Hedges, intirely [sic] destroy the natural slope of the Hill & conceal the Trees that cover it.[37]

While both Yorke and Grey note that the hedges in the valley spoil the prospects, Grey's account further emphasises the detrimental impact of man-made artifice as she contrasts the 'cut' and the 'clipt' hedges with the 'natural' slope of the hill. The personification of Art further emphasises its role as the antagonist as it tries to 'spite' or even 'destroy' Nature. While Yorke notes that the canals at Studley Royal are 'very awkward shapes',[38] Grey goes even further by stating that the stream 'has been […] tortured into those numberless Canals, formed into Circles, half circles, parts of Circles, strait Lines, & all that such a sort of Fancy could invent.'[39] Her personification of the natural world and concern that it has been 'tortured' also conveys her sympathy for the gardens, which contrasts with the 'Fancy' of the owner, John Aislabie, which has been forced onto nature. In this respect, the idea is similar to Alexander Pope's concern in *Epistle to Burlington* that 'the suff'ring Eye inverted Nature sees.'[40] Closer to home, Grey's thinking may have been further influenced by her former tutor, Thomas Wright. In Wright's 'Observations upon Building and Planting', he instructs that 'all the great advantages nature has given the situation must be […] attended to and considered', and only where 'they are most wanted they must be made ornamental.'[41]

Elizabeth Anson had also developed a keen eye for improvement in gardens by this time. Upon her marriage to Lord Admiral George Anson in 1748, she became the mistress of her own estates at Carshalton, Shugborough, and later Moor Park, which gave her the opportunity to work with garden designers and carry out improvements to the grounds. Her

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[37] BLARS, L309a/7, fols 16-17 [JG to CT, *Journal of a Northern Tour,* c. July 1755].
[38] Private collection, *Philip Yorke Travel Journal,* fol. 109 [11th July 1755].
[39] L30/9a/7, fol. 17 [JG to CT, c. July 1755].
[40] Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Burlington,* p. 10.
[41] Newcastle Central Library, Thomas Wright MSS 8, p. 50; while there is no clear date on Wright's manuscript, it is likely that he was writing down thoughts he had previously passed on to his former students.

travel accounts similarly demonstrate that she was a knowledgeable tourist with an eye for improvement. When Anson was staying near Southampton, she wrote to Grey to describe the gardens at Bevis Mount, which she visited frequently owing to her acquaintance with Lady Peterborough, who had 'very obligingly lent us keys of her Garden to walk here at any time.'[42] Of the gardens, Anson noted that it 'is laid out in the same kind of Taste as ours at Carshalton, with tall Hedges, & artificial Slopes, by wch [which] means several natural beauties are lost, particularly what would make a most delightful rising Terras with a beautiful Prospect, improving every step.'[43] It is not necessarily the style that Anson objects to, given that it is in the 'same taste' as her own garden, but she notices that the style does not work so well on this different terrain. Evidently, Anson also possessed knowledge of how to make best use of the natural terrain. In fact, even if only intended jokingly, she proposes to Grey that she – along with her 'Fellow-Labourer', her brother-in-law, Thomas Anson – will write 'a Treatise concerning the Genius of Places', which she suggests dividing into the following sections:

> one Head will be Prospects, subdivided into the Bold & Great, & the Mild & Amiable; of such as are Pictures, & of what are only Scenes; Objects will furnish out a long Chapter, divided into those of the greater kind, properly so called, […] & those of a lesser sort more familiarly called Furniture; Slopes also are a various Subject – as of the Convex Slope – of the Concave, of the Undulating &c; Many & many more are there, such as Scenery, Light & Shade, Swelling Hills, - Beautiful Bosoms, Nightingale Peeps, Universal Configurations of Trees, &c, &c, &c – but these must suffice as a Sample.[44]

Regardless of whether she really intended to write her own treatise, this 'sample' evidences her grasp of the language of taste and practical understanding of different terrains. Yet she also clearly makes artistic, theatrical, and literary allusions; her account is as much a poetic and artistic configuration of the landscape as it is a practical one.

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[42] BLARS, L30 9/3/27, fol. 240 [EA to JG, 7th August 1751].
[43] Ibid.
[44] BLARS, L30/9/3/33, fol. 249 [EA to JG, 19th May 1752].

THEATRICALITY, SOCIABILITY, AND PLAYFULNESS IN GARDENS

Gardens, especially public gardens, have long been considered theatrical spaces, since garden design imitated the theatre and gardens were even used as performance spaces. In the summer of 1744, Grey describes how she, along with Wray and her husband, watched Ben Jonson's *Alchemist* at Woburn Abbey – one assumes it was set in the gardens, since Grey writes 'you can't imagine what a fine Moonlight & how pretty it was last Night.'[45] As well as providing the literal stage for theatrical drama, gardens could also provide a space in which visitors themselves populated the garden like actors on a stage.[46] As John Dixon Hunt notes, gardens could provide sites of role playing, social dramas, and theatrical opportunities in the visiting experience itself.[47] This is certainly the case in public pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall, in which people saw themselves both as spectators and actors as they visited to attend performances but also engaged in social rituals of visiting in the knowledge that they would be seen by others.[48] In contrast, when Jemima Grey visits Stowe for the first time in 1748, she objects to the publicity of the gardens and the way this impinges on the viewing experience. In comparison to the comparative privacy of her own estate at Wrest Park, Grey remarks that Stowe:

> is only fit for a Public [garden], there is scarcely any Shade or Retirement to be found in it: you are seen from one end of it to the Other, & there is always Company of various sorts to see you.[49]

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[45] L30/9a/1, fol. 28 [JG to MG, 1744]; the performance also features in *Wrestiana,* describing 'Woburns Carnival' in which 'Johnsons learned Sock at Night/ The Noble Troop how Graceful! Wears', in private collection, 'Horace Book II. Ode III ad Dellium', *Wrestiana*, fols 53-54 [c. 1744, [signed 'P.W' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].

[46] For scholarship on gardens as theatres, see John Dixon Hunt, 'Theatres, Gardens, and Garden Theaters', *Gardens and the Picturesque* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 49-74; David Marshall, 'The Problem of the Picturesque', *Eighteenth Century Studies,* 35.3 (2002), 413-437.

[47] John Dixon Hunt, *Greater* Perfections, p. 163.

[48] John Dixon Hunt, 'Theaters of Hospitality: The Forms and Uses of Private Landscapes and Public Gardens', *The Pleasure Garden, from Vauxhall to Coney Island,* ed. by Jonathan Conlin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 29-48 (p. 30); Hannah Greig, '"All Together and All Distinct": Public Sociability and Social Exclusivity in London's Pleasure Gardens', p. 51.

[49] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 75 [JG to CT, 30th June 1748].

The publicness thus affects her ability to 'perform' the role of spectator within the gardens – or at least shows her to be an unwilling actor in such a performance. Unlike her own gardens that she would enjoy with close friends or family, Grey's remark on the 'company of various sorts' perhaps also implies that some of her criticism is levelled at the type of visitor with whom she is obliged to share the gardens.

In contrast, accounts of gardens owned by members of the coterie parallel more closely to private theatricals and playful role-play opportunities between friends. This is certainly the case when Elizabeth Anson shows Capability Brown the gardens at her newly purchased home at Moor Park with her husband and a few friends. Her letter to Jemima Grey shows the playfulness of role play as they transform the act of viewing and planning improvements to a type of theatrical performance with expectations attached to each role that they perform:

> My Lord [Anson] acted the Part of Owner – Mr. Anson of a good Cousin (according to [Richard Owen] Cambridge's Idea, & an excellent one he was,) to shew & puff – [William] Pitt of an Enthusiastic Admirer, & Brown of an Artist who scorned to find difficulties in executing any great or beautiful Idea & made nothing of raising or levelling any spot to the height desired. – This is a short Sketch of what entertained Cambridge & me for above four hours.[50]

In Anson's description, the act of viewing and improving is ritualised and even becomes a performance in which Anson and her friends adopt stereotypical roles of garden visitors and connoisseurs (and privately satirise them in the process). Yet the garden is not only a theatre that foregrounds this role playing as each person 'acted the Part'. In fact, the theatrical playfulness of the role play can even be paralleled onto the landscape itself as Brown suggests improvements that would transform the scene into whatever the owners' imaginations saw fit to create. For Anson, this scene represents a private theatrical event that

[50] BLARS, L30/9/3/33, fol. 249 [EA to JG, 19th May 1752].

she directs herself, with the help of Richard Owen Cambridge. The fact that it provided entertainment for them both 'for above four hours' suggests that this role play is essentially a private joke between the friends, not one that could be understood by anybody outside the 'cast'. In this respect, one might draw a parallel with the way in which the Wrest coterie effectively set the scene in the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park for a private comedy of errors, in which they could spectate the visitors' performance of (mis)interpreting the altar. It may also account for Grey's discomfort at Stowe, since her awareness of 'being seen' in a public garden makes her aware of her role as an actor, rather than as a private spectator or even as a director in her own garden.

PRIVATE SATIRE AND THE POLITICS OF TASTE

If garden visiting could make tourists aware of their public roles as actors, then it is in letters where we can see private engagement and analysis of the gardens. This is significant, as it demonstrates how far the exclusivity of the letter itself also allowed authors the freedom to convey unfavourable or even satirical interpretations to close friends. Given the fame that Stowe received in its own time as a tourist attraction, it seems striking that the coterie's critical discussions of the gardens should depart so greatly from the interpretations offered by contemporary guidebooks or even Lord Cobham's famous political narrative. In this section, I will explore the way in which the coterie's readings of Stowe were shaped not only by guidebooks or other publicly available discourses, but also by their friends' opinions and accounts. This is important, as it allows some insight into the way in which visitors could challenge the owner's intended narrative of the gardens, either by subverting the political connotations directly, or, rather more subtly, by undermining the narrative by questioning the owner's taste.

Stowe is one of the most celebrated examples of the eighteenth-century garden, exemplifying the works of iconic garden designers from Charles Bridgeman and William Kent to Capability Brown. Stowe enjoyed significant fame in its own time and was one of the first estates to produce guidebooks, beginning with Benton Seeley's *A description of the gardens […] at Stow* in 1744.[51] The dominant interpretation of Lord Cobham's famous gardens at Stowe is based on the iconographical allusions to Cobham's oppositional Whig politics.[52] It would be difficult to argue that this political ideology was not significant, but by the mid to late 1740s, it seems remarkable how few visitors comment on Cobham's politics.[53] An argument could be made that by this time, the original political messages had become obsolete. Yet, the criticism of Stowe in accounts written by members of the Wrest circle suggests that visitors did challenge Cobham's intended political narrative. In fact, through interrogating the taste and displays of grandeur at Stowe, these accounts indirectly challenge and undermine the merits of Cobham's political ideology.

In an influential chapter, John Barrell argued that for elite landowning men, the display of correct taste in landscape was used as a means of legitimating their political authority within the discourse of civic humanism.[54] Barrell argued that the 'panoramic prospect' – characterised by the landscapes in the second half of the century which did not offer the same architectural signifiers that had characterised earlier gardens – was only

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[51] Published tours featuring country houses, such as Daniel Defoe's *Tours* were popular at the turn of the century, but modern guidebooks as we might recognize them today emerged with Benton Seeley's guides in 1744, which subsequently went through several editions. See Jocelyn Anderson, *Touring and Publicizing England's Country Houses*.

[52] See Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes,* p. 63; Patrick Eyres, 'The Iconography of the Medallions of Concord and Victory', *The Political Temples of Stowe,* ed. by Patrick Eyres (= *New Arcadian Journal* 43/44 (1997)), pp. 79-107; John Martin Robinson, *Temples of Delight: Stowe Landscape Gardens* (London: National Trust), p. 12; Sir Roy Strong, *The Artist and the Garden* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 219; 223; James Noggle, *The Temporality of Taste in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 78; Edward Hyams, *Capability Brown & Humphrey Repton* (London: J. M. Dent, 1971), p. 9.

[53] See Stephen Bending, 'Re-reading the English Landscape Garden' for an exploration of other publicly available discourses that visitors employed, in *Huntingdon Library Quarterly,* 55.3 (1992), 379-399 (p. 387).

[54] John Barrell, 'The public prospect and the private view: the politics of taste in eighteenth-century Britain', *Reading Landscape: Country, City, Capital,* ed. by Simon Pugh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 19-40.

accessible to the man of 'liberal mind' due to his ability to 'abstract the general from the particular.'[55] There are issues with Barrell's argument, not least since his exclusion of both women and non-propertied men does also overlook the way in which aesthetics became increasingly accessible to polite women and the middling-classes in the second half of the century, and the vaguer and broader language of the picturesque even came to challenge the taste of the elite.[56] Moreover, elite women were not necessarily marginalised from developing taste in landscape aesthetics earlier in the eighteenth century, and nor were they barred from political life.[57] Yet the notion of civic humanism might usefully be applied to illuminate the connection between taste and political authority,[58] which is detectable in public guidebooks of Stowe. In the third edition of Benton Seeley's guide of Stowe, Cobham is praised for acting in the public interest, planning his gardens 'for the Ornament of your Country, the Delight and Pleasure of all Spectators, who are bless'd with a Taste to relish the Beauties of your Designs', and the guide adds that these endeavours 'will always […] be directed to the public Good.'[59] In William Gilpin's *A Dialogue upon the Gardens at Stowe* (1748), an essay he wrote while still a student, one of his gentleman tourists, Callophilus, suggests that 'I would have our Country Squires flock hither two or three times in a Year, by way of Improvement, and after they have looked about them a little, return Home with new

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[55] John Barrell, 'The Public Prospect and the Private View', p. 29. This is not to say that buildings ceased to feature in the garden; grottos, root-houses or gothic ruins remained popular, but they were now employed more sparingly, see Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes,* p. 79; Capability Brown's architectural drawings and designs are usually understated, but he nonetheless did also have a reputation as an architect in his own time. See Sarah Rutherford, Ceryl Evans and Steffie Shields, *Capability Brown's Drawings: A Reference Catalogue of Drawings by Brown or his Office* (Swindon: Historic England, 2019), p. 6.

[56] Stephen Bending, 'The Country House Landscape', *The Georgian Country House: Architecture, Landscape and Society,* ed. by Dana Arnold (Stroud: The History Press, 2013), pp. 61-78 (p. 63); Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 119.

[57] Jon Stobart, 'From Magnificent Houses to Disagreeable Country: Lady Sophia Newdigate's Tour of Southern England and Derbyshire, 1748', pp. 127-148; Elaine Chalus, *English Political Life, c. 1754-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 12.

[58] Steven Hyde demonstrates how civic humanism applies in earlier Augustan gardens in the early eighteenth century, in 'The historical roots of "aesthetics" in landscape architecture: an introduction,' *Studies in the history of gardens & designed landscapes,* 34.2 (2014), 123-145 (p. 126).

[59] Benton Seeley, *A Description of the Gardens of Lord Viscount Cobham at Stow in Buckinghamshire* (Northampton: W. Dicey, 1746), p. vii.

notions.'[60] *A Dialogue* should be treated carefully in relation to Gilpin's later writings,[61] however, there is no mistaking the way in which taste and virtue are closely aligned in these mid-century publications of Stowe. There is no overt mention of Cobham's oppositional politics in these guides, though it is implied that his taste in garden design is, in some way, a public service that adds authority to his position as a landowner. After all, as scholars have demonstrated, polite classes of tourists regarded country house visiting as an important activity for developing their own taste.[62]

When Philip Yorke first visited Stowe with his brother Charles and Daniel Wray in 1744, the development of taste may well have been his primary motivation for visiting. He recorded his observations of the famous gardens in both his travel journal and in his letters to his wife, who had remained at Wrest on this occasion. Yorke's journal offers a more practical description of Stowe, mainly concerned with the garden dimensions and the logistics of maintenance, rather than taste or aesthetics. This might demonstrate a personal interest or desire to compare the dimensions with other gardens. Yet it is in his letter to Grey that Yorke provides a greater insight into his personal interpretation of Stowe, suggesting that sharing critical assessments was a sociable exercise that he often engaged in with Grey. Yorke seems to have purchased Seeley's first-edition guide when he visited in 1744, for he would write to Grey that 'the Inscriptions, &c are inserted in a short printed Acct of the gardens wch [which] I will bring home with me.'[63] In following the guide and paying attention to the inscriptions,

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[60] William Gilpin, *A Dialogue Upon the Gardens at Stowe,* ed. by John Dixon Hunt (Los Angeles: University of California, 1976), p. 48.
[61] Despite the apparent contradictions in Gilpin's ideas, recent scholarship has argued that his writing needs to be read carefully in relation to his moral beliefs, see Robert Mayhew, 'William Gilpin and the Latitudinarian Picturesque', *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 33.3 (2000), 349-366, and Stephen Bending, 'Vile Things: William Gilpin and the Properties of the Picturesque', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 80.4 (2017), 585-607 (pp. 587-8).
[62] Jon Stobart, 'Introduction', *Travel and the Country House: Cultures, Critiques and Consumption in the Long Eighteenth Century,* p. 3; Adrian Tinniswood, *The Polite Tourist,* p. 74.
[63] BLARS, L30/9/113, fol. 8 [PY to JG, 8th August 1744]; the first edition of the guide was printed in 1744, *A Description of the Gardens of Lord Viscount Cobham, at Stow in Buckinghamshire* (Northampton: W. Dicey, 1744).

Yorke likely experienced the garden as it was intended to be seen and read. Yet, if the possession of a guidebook is supposed, in John Dixon Hunt's terms, to ritualise movement by establishing a pattern or performance of visitation,[64] it cannot prescribe the whole experience. Yorke's use of the first-person plural gives the impression that his criticism of the garden came about through conversations with his brother and Wray, as he notes that 'We were pleased with some of the Buildings but they are expensive ones, viz. the Temples of Venus, Friendship, & Ancient Virtue, the Gothic Church, the Grotto above all, & the Palladian Bridge. It wd [would] certainly be an Improvement to remove a few of the smaller structures.'[65] The fact that Yorke refers to the Gothic Temple of Liberty as the Gothic 'Church', perhaps deliberately, removes it from its political context. Yorke's suggestion of improvement certainly demonstrates that he is not merely a passive observer, by now developing his own notion of taste and improvement in garden design. This was likely at least partly informed by an appreciation for Wrest Park, since Philip Yorke remarks with some satisfaction to Grey that 'the wood walks [at Stowe] are not so shady & well kept as ours.'[66] This comparison is both an indicator of landowning status as well as a personal reference to their own superior management of Wrest.

It might seem curious that Yorke makes no reference to the political symbolism within the gardens at Stowe, which one might expect. As Chapter 2 argued, the Yorke brothers used the *Athenian Letters* as a vehicle through which they could criticise the ideology of the Patriot opposition, and they were certainly aware of the faction around Viscount Cobham, or 'the trierarch' as he is referred to in the *Athenian Letters*.[67] Furthermore, as Chapter 3 argued, the political connotations in Yorke and Wray's inscription

[64] John Dixon Hunt, 'Lordship of the Feet', p. 197.
[65] BLARS, L30/9/113, fol. 8 [PY to JG, 8th August 1744].
[66] Ibid.
[67] Philip Yorke, et al, 'Letter LXXXIX. Cleander to Hydaspes. From Athens.', *Athenian Letters,* II, p. 196 [signed 'C', Charles Yorke].

for the Gothic Tower at Wimpole demonstrates how far Yorke engaged in political gardening himself. Thus, given both Philip and Charles Yorke's close following of politics, their lack of comment on the political iconography at Stowe seems nothing short of extraordinary. Either they were not aware of the political allusions at Stowe – which seems highly unlikely – or, rather more plausibly, it was no longer the dominant narrative by the 1740s. David Jacques suggests that for the younger generation visiting Stowe in the mid-century, there was greater inclination to notice the pictorial charms of the countryside, rather than the symbolic allusions that had been so central for the previous generation.[68] After the fall of Walpole in 1742, one might question whether the allusions to patriotism and virtue were appropriate, especially once several of Cobham's 'Cubs' joined the 'broad-bottom' administration.[69] It is on this point that Wray would write to Philip Yorke four years later on 25th June 1748, reporting his discussion of the gardens at Stowe with 'the upright Cadwallader's Correspondent.'[70] According to Wray, their mutual friend 'bewails the Degeneracy of the greater part of the Heroes and advises the removing the Pr [Prince] & two or three more & supplying their places out of the Coalition changing the Title of the building from Friendship into Prostitution.'[71] Evidently, while political allegories could still be 'read' in the garden, the original meanings intended by its owner had become stale. As Wray's comment suggests, the political allusions were open to re-interpretation and even satire. Furthermore, it is likely that this sort of inflammatory comment would only surface in letters between friends – suggesting that satirical criticisms would be kept private. Thus, by the 1740s, one might argue that

[68] David Jacques, *Georgian Gardens: The Reign of Nature,* p. 61.
[69] Matthew Kilburn, 'Broad-bottom ministry', *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) < https://www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 31 August 2021].
[70] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 76r [DW to PY, 25th June 1748]; it is uncertain who 'Cadwallader's correspondent' is, but the scathing nature of the comment is likely the reason the name should have been carefully coded in a letter.
[71] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 76v [DW to PY, 25th June 1748].

visitors held significant power to forge their own interpretations of the gardens and subvert the original political messages.

Yorke visited Stowe again in 1748, this time with Grey, although remarkably, he makes no record of this second visit in his travel journal. It is only in a letter to Thomas Birch that he records his visit, observing that 'Lord Cobham is making vast additions to his gardens; & while He lives a curious Traveller should visit the Place once in 2 years at least.'[72] In contrast to Yorke's faint praise, Grey had plenty to say about the gardens at Stowe, evidenced in the letters she wrote to Catherine Talbot and Mary Gregory. It is likely that she already knew of the gardens through Seeley's 1744 guide that her husband promised to bring back with him. Yet, if the 1744 guide claimed that 'the Gardens of the Lord Cobham at Stow […] are esteemed, by Persons of most exact Taste, to be the finest in this Kingdom,' it is revealing that the accounts she writes to Catherine Talbot and Mary Gregory should depart so greatly from this guided interpretation.[73] If the gardens at Stowe were supposed to symbolise the merits of Cobham's opposition ideology or even of the man himself in opening his fine gardens to the public, Grey's account challenges this by arguing the extent to which the gardens are rather a reflection of Lord Cobham's poor taste and personal vanity. Indeed, she inflicts the worst possible insult that one might attempt on an elite country house owner, declaring that:

> the Owner [Lord Cobham] I am convinced has neither much Taste or Genius in the forming his Works, or any Notion of Enjoyment from them afterwards. The Vanity of making what shall be seen & talked of by Strangers carries him on to new Enlargements & Buildings from year to year, while those that are Done are neglected, & just affords some Hours of a Sunday being a long idle Day to go round his Garden.[74]

[72] BL, Add. MS 35397, fol. 116^{v} [PY to TB, 21st June 1748].
[73] Benton Seeley, *A Description of the Gardens of Lord Viscount Cobham, at Stow* (Northampton: W. Dicey, 1744), p. i.
[74] BLARS, 9a/1, fols 171-2 [JG to MG, 5th July 1748].

The implications of Grey's claim go further than simply disagreeing with his taste. If the demonstration of taste was supposed to exemplify a righteous character that made one deserving of political power, then, by extension, criticising the poor taste and vices of the owner questions whether he should carry political influence. In their ability to question taste and apply their own judgement, elite women are not, as Barrell claimed, 'almost entirely out of the question',[75] for as Grey's account suggests, correspondence could provide a private, virtual space for dissent. By demonstrating her taste and understanding of garden design, I would argue that Grey's critical account claims aesthetic and moral authority.

FEMALE VIEWERS AND THE LANGUAGE OF AESTHETICS

The question of whether, and how far, women engage with landscape aesthetics is a complex one. In many ways, the cultural construction of the viewing subject as male means that women, by default, are marginalised from the language of aesthetics. After all, as Joseph Addison famously remarked in the *Spectator,* it is the man of polite imagination who is 'let into a great many pleasures, that the vulgar are not capable of receiving', and is given 'a kind of Property in every thing he sees, and makes the most rude, uncultivated parts of nature administer to his pleasures.'[76] From Addison's statement, it is clear that viewing authority is afforded to polite men, but not to women or even non-polite men. Yet for women, there is a further complication as the landscape is feminised and exists for the 'pleasures' of the male eye. As scholars have shown, Nature, 'like a woman […] was expected to be sensuous and pleasing, but only within the bounds defined by her male owner.'[77] Aesthetic beauty was

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[75] John Barrell, 'The Public Prospect and the Private View', p. 19.
[76] Joseph Addison, *Spectator* No. 411, [21st June 1712].
[77] Carole Fabricant, 'Binding and Dressing Nature's Loose Tresses: The Ideology of Augustan Landscape Design', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture,* 8 (1979), 109-135 (p. 111); see also, Anne Bermingham, 'The Picturesque and ready-to-wear femininity', *The Politics of the Picturesque,* ed. by Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 81-119 (p. 89); Ian Thompson, 'The Picturesque as Pejorative', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes,* 26.3 (2006), 237-248 (p. 241); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (London: Wildwood House, 1980).

defined in terms of curves and serpentine lines; William Hogarth's *The Analysis of Beauty* (1752) identified the serpentine line, commonly found in the human form, to represent 'superior beauty to all others.'[78] It is not incidental that the principles of gardening around this time had also shifted from straight lines to serpentine ones, or that Hogarth's theory would influence the designs of Capability Brown.[79] Edmund Burke, in his *Enquiry* (1756), would ultimately disagree with Hogarth that his line of beauty is the *most* pleasing, since Burke sees beauty in the 'change of surface,' which he sees most clearly in the female body. He observes 'that part of a beautiful woman, where she is, perhaps, the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts: the smoothness, the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of surface […] the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily.'[80] It is remarkable how closely this description parallels with those of the landscape, similarly subject to the male gaze. William Shenstone would recall a conversation with William Lyttelton and James Thomson at the Leasowes, in which Thomson allegedly compared 'Clent and Waw-ton Hill' to 'the two bubbies of Nature,' which seemed to amuse the gentlemen, as the 'double entendre was work'd up to a point, and produced a laugh.' [81] In this example, Nature is both fetishized and sexualised. This is not to say that all male commentators necessarily objectified Nature; William Whitehead, for instance, subverts the tradition in 'On the Late Improvements at Nuneham' by depicting Nature as a 'Modern Fine Lady' who triumphs over Capability Brown in her statement that 'The world's little malice will balk his

[78] William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty: Written with a View of Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas of Taste* (London: J Reeves, 1753), p. 57.
[79] Dorothy Stroud, *Capability Brown* (London: Country Life, 1950), p. 15; Kristen Podolak and G. Mathias Kondolf, 'The Line of Beauty in River Designs: Hogarth's Aesthetic Theory on Capability Brown's Eighteenth-Century River Design and Twentieth Century River Restoration Design', *Landscape Research,* 41.1 (2016), 149-167.
[80] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757), p. 100.
[81] William Shenstone, 'Account of an Interview between Shenstone and Thomson (1746)', in *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620-1820,* ed. by John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988), p. 244.

design:/ Each fault they'll call his, and each excellence mine.'[82] Equally, women themselves could adopt a form of male gaze. One might recall Elizabeth Anson's feminization of Nature in her allusion to 'Beautiful Bosoms' – which does call to question how she situates herself within the gendered language of aesthetics. It is possible that she is parodying the poetic feminisation of Nature, but it is equally possible that she is deliberately masquerading as the male subject – something she would do in a public political capacity.[83]

Thus, for a woman to engage as a viewing subject she must inevitably negotiate the gendered language of aesthetics. Even in describing a landscape, women must employ ekphrasis – a verbal representation of the visual, an act that is, according to James Heffernan, 'powerfully gendered […] the voice of male speech striving to control a female image that is both alluring and threatening.'[84] In many respects, this could also apply to descriptions of the landscape. As the examples of Burke and Thomson reveal, these descriptions draw attention to the control of the male gaze. Yet, it is not quite satisfactory to agree with Elizabeth Bohls that women only engaged marginally with landscape aesthetics due to their social, political, and cultural exclusion, rendering them 'second-class practitioners or passive consumers'.[85] While adopting the male gaze and feminizing the landscape places women into a contradictory position, one might also argue that the male gaze is not the only discourse available to them. At this point, I would like to suggest that the female gaze – an eye that seeks to empathise rather than objectify – comes into play here. The term was coined by film

[82] William Whitehead, 'On the Late Improvements at Nuneham, the Seat of the Earl of Harcourt', *Poems by William Whitehead, Esq, Late Poet Laureat* (York: A. Ward, 1788), p. 79.
[83] For example, when the Admiralty was under attack after the invasion of Minorca in 1756, she wrote a defence that was published under a Roman male pseudonym in the *Public Advertiser.* See Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c. 1754-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 65.
[84] James Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 1.
[85] Elizabeth Bohls, *Women Travel Writers,* p. 2. Similarly, Ann Bermingham focuses on satire of the Picturesque to argue that women 'appear to be either incapable of understanding it or are blinded by it to "reality"', in 'The Picturesque and ready-to-wear Femininity', p. 92.

critics in response to Laura Mulvey's identification of the 'male gaze',[86] and while it might seem anachronistic to apply this to eighteenth-century accounts of the landscape, I would argue that it usefully highlights the power dynamics of viewing. This is not to make an essentialist argument that the female gaze is unique to women, or the male gaze to men: male viewers and poets could also find an alternate discourse that did not seek to control and objectify Nature.[87] But, if the prevailing discourse of taste gives the man of polite imagination 'a sense of ownership in everything that he sees', then women necessarily have to find a way to negotiate the culturally constructed gender dynamics associated with the viewing experience. For the purposes of this section, I will focus on the way in which the women in the Wrest circle negotiate the language of aesthetics and how this influences their readings of the gardens that they visit.

In many respects, Stowe was a garden predominantly designed to be 'read' and enjoyed by classically educated male tourists. The famous political iconography aside, features such as the Temple of Venus, depicting lascivious scenes from Spenser's *Faerie Queene,* clearly presents women as sexualised objects and invites the male gaze.[88] Grey does not discuss the Temple of Venus when she visits in 1748, but as we have seen from her earlier comments, she hardly thought Cobham the paradigm of virtue. Not incidentally, when Elizabeth Montagu visited Stowe the year before Grey in 1747, she observed the way in which the gardens are both objectified and designed for male enjoyment. She compares Stowe to a 'court beauty […] richly adorned, and set off with great cost and contrivance;

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[86] The 'male gaze' that Mulvey identifies is evident in the examples quoted above of viewers whose satisfaction comes 'from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other', in Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen,* 16.3 (1975), 6-18 (p. 9); for a definition of the 'female gaze', see Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday, 'female gaze', *A Dictionary of Media and Communication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) <www.oxfordreference.com> [accessed 30th July 2021].

[87] See for instance, Joseph Warton's *The Enthusiast: or, the Lover of Nature,* in which the poet asks Nature to 'Lead me from Gardens deckt with Art's vain Pomps' and looks back to 'the Bards of old/ Fair Nature's Friends' as an example of poets in harmony with Nature. Joseph Warton, *The Enthusiast: or, The Lover of Nature* (London: R. Dodsley, 1744), pp. 5-6.

[88] Hazel Wilkinson, *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book,* p. 109.

nature is at all the expense for his [Cobham's] Amoret, and [he] has lavished on her charms that art can poorly imitate.'[89] In Montagu's allegory, Cobham is construed as a doting but tasteless suitor, adorning his 'Amoret' at the expense of her natural beauty. Montagu's personification further allows her to convey a degree of sympathy for Nature, although, like a 'court beauty', her personified Nature exists to be admired for her beauty and little else.

This is akin to Grey's account of Studley Royal, in which her personification of Nature allowed her to demonstrate greater sympathy for the natural world and criticize the way in which it had been 'tortured' to fulfil the owner's fancy. In Grey's observation of Stowe, she again shows sympathy for the natural world, but this time she makes the gendered dynamic more explicit in her personification and feminisation of Nature. In her observations of the fields on the hill by the entrance at Stowe, she notes that:

> I suppose the Roughness & Unevenness is design'd to Contrast to the great Regularity & Ornament of the Objects that surround them. But it is hard upon poor Nature & playing Booty with her to take her Defects & not her beauties; and that the only thing remaining in the State she left it should be a bare rough Hill, when a little Help (& not Disguise) might have smooth'd it into a level green Lawn with a few Clumps or single Trees scattered over it, & made it by far the most beautiful object there. What a strange Want of Judgement does it seem not to have hit upon this! But my Lord is too great a Friend to Art to trust Nature in her best Dress, knowing how much the first would lose in the comparison & her simple Beauties get the better of all his Vain Pomp.[90]

In this, Grey articulates her criticism of the elite (male) connoisseur who would leave Nature in an unimproved state to contrast with the 'Regularity & Ornament' in the rest of the grounds. Significantly, her sympathetic portrayal of 'Poor Nature' who ought to be 'trusted' in her 'best Dress' even affords Nature a degree of agency. The fact that Grey underlines the possessive pronouns deliberately emphasises the gender dynamic in which she sees femininized Nature victorious over Cobham's 'Vain Pomp.' By highlighting her own

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[89] *The Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu: With Some of the Letters of Her Correspondents,* ed. by Matthew Montagu, 4 vols (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809-1813), II, pp. 141-2.
[90] BLARS, 9a/1, fol. 172 [JG to MG, 5th July 1748].

sympathetic relationship with the natural world, Grey carefully re-negotiates the relationship between the female viewer and the feminised landscape. In fact, employing her own knowledge of garden design affords her a critical authority over the type of male owner who would torture nature to fulfil his own fantasies and ambitions.

Yet it should not be forgotten that Grey, as a landowner herself, had the means and authority to develop an eye for improvements. As we have seen between her and Catherine Talbot, this is a difference that Catherine Talbot certainly felt very keenly. While Talbot too seems to have been critical of gardens that reflected the vanity of the owners, she nonetheless emphasises her own invisible presence as a viewer. When wishing that she and Grey could have visited Blenheim Palace together, she writes that 'I wish You & I could have gone invisibly along […] & spent that whole day in prolling about that vast house, & meditating on the Vanity of Humane Grandeur.'[91] Furthermore, the social role of gardens was clearly an important one for Talbot, and her letters sometimes create private imagined garden spaces with friends. In imagining Grey's normal evening routine at Wrest of walking by the terrace by moonlight, Talbot writes that 'I should wish myself with you. You and & go thro' the whole Gardens by ourselves, our Conversation broken by long pauses of silence, our meditations heighten'd by a Thousand Solemn Objects, & nothing to interrupt them but now & then a solitary Owl.'[92] Talbot's literary imagining of the gardens at Wrest predominantly serves a social purpose, as her letter creates an intimate imagined space that she shares with Grey. Yet it is notable that for Talbot, she is a silent observer or a companion, and while she might draw on literary references to gardens, she does not employ the language of improvement to engage in garden design.

[91] BLARS, LP, vol. 1, p. 93a [CT to JG, 1744; modern transcript].
[92] Ibid., fol. 132a [CT to JG, July 4th 1747; modern transcript].

It is perhaps no surprise that when Catherine Talbot visited Stowe herself in the September of 1748, she seems to have taken Grey's account as 'the Companion of our Journey.' [93] The personification of Grey's letter further highlights the personal and social associations of a friend's travel account, and even suggests that visitors could be informed and guided by personal accounts within their exclusive scribal networks, not only the narratives offered by guidebooks. Yet, if Grey's account cleverly subverts the gendered language of aesthetics to claim interpretive authority, Talbot challenges this by complaining that 'I could scarce help wishing you had rather imitated the Style of Dr Pooles Travels than of Mr Addisons, for we found ourselves very much at a loss about Roads & Inns.'[94] In referring to Addison's *Spectator,* Talbot is possibly referring to his 'Man of Polite Imagination', or it might be a broader reference to the authoritative critical language that Addison frequently employed in the *Spectator* to discuss garden design. In any case, Talbot teases Grey for claiming this critical voice at the expense of practicalities about travel. More than this, in drawing a parallel between 'the Style of Dr Pooles Travels' and 'Mr Addisons', she also highlights the differences between herself and Grey as visitors. While Grey, like Addison, engages critically with garden design, Talbot herself, more concerned with roads and inns, places herself among the polite class of visitors who would rely on this sort of practical knowledge.

Despite agreeing with Grey that 'what you say […] is to be sure upon the whole very just', Talbot had a very different impression of the gardens. Grey had complained to Talbot that 'for an Inhabitant [at Stowe], there is scarcely any Part for Comfort & Privacy.'[95] Grey does not explicitly align privacy with feminised space, but she certainly sets up a binary opposition between Cobham's ambition for public fame and her own preference for spaces of

[93] Ibid., p. 164a [CT to JG, 8th September 1748; modern transcript].
[94] Ibid.
[95] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 75 [JG to CT, 30th June 1748].

retreat.[96] The contrast was likely heightened by Grey's partiality for her own gardens at Wrest; in her letter to Gregory, she remarked that Stowe is 'what I would least chuse to live at of any I ever saw,' adding that 'at our Return Wrest even to my Eyes look'd as a Model only, a Garden in Miniature: – but on the Other hand One that I would not change not even for a Week upon any Condition.'[97] Yet when Talbot visited Stowe, 'the accident of meeting [Lady Cobham] in the pleasantest part of the Evening strolled out all alone with a book in her hand,'[98] seems to have persuaded her to regard Stowe as a private, feminized space for contemplative retreat, rather than a reflection of Lord Cobham's vain aspiration for public recognition. Talbot would write to Grey that far from thinking the gardens 'so uninhabitable as you seem to do', Talbot remarks that 'my good Lady [Cobham] enjoys them extremely.'[99] In fact, Talbot reckons that there are 'three or four spots where one might spend as many solitary days very agreeably.'[100] Although Talbot disagrees with Grey on the extent to which Stowe reflects Cobham's personal vanity, both accounts display a preference for gardens as spaces for feminine retreat. Furthermore, that Talbot's impression is informed by Grey's account, rather than a guidebook, and demonstrates that women did not simply passively absorb the public language of guidebooks, but that they could form their own impressions and debate as active readers of the landscape.

RUINS, ANTIQUARIANISM, AND THE PICTURESQUE

Given the Wrest coterie's interest in antiquities, it is no surprise that observations about ruins and artefacts should form the basis of their discussions of the gardens and landscapes that they encountered. As Susan Stewart notes in *The Ruins Lesson,* as 'we respond to ruins, we

[96] For the way in which women had to negotiate the problematic language of retirement in the eighteenth century, see Stephen Bending, *Green Retreats: Women, Gardens, and Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[97] BLARS, L30/9a/1, fols 164; 168 [JG to MG, 5th July 1748].
[98] BLARS, LP, vol. 1. p. 164a [CT to JG, 8th September 1748; modern transcript]
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

transform materiality into ideas, learning something about the value of human making and the place of our made world within the natural world.'[101] The cultural fascination with ruins owed much to the classical ruins of Rome that elite tourists encountered on the Grand Tour.[102] It was in Rome that John Dyer, who had travelled there with Daniel Wray in the early 1720s, was inspired to write 'The Ruins of Rome' and 'Grongar Hill' (1740), offering a nostalgic and melancholic depiction of these ruins as relics of fallen civilisations. The ruins of Italy might have started the interest, but in the 1740s, the British antiquaries William Stukeley and Richard Gough had key roles in encouraging tourists to take an interest in ruins in Britain as an alternative to the Grand Tour – perhaps capitalising on travellers' reluctance to risk travelling to the continent during this time. In *Stonehenge* (1740), Stukeley suggested that there was more to be learned from the ancient stones left by the Druids than the antiquities in Europe, noting that 'a noble spirit as produced these works [Stonehenge and Avebury], still visible with us, which for grandeur, simplicity and antiquity, exceed any of the European wonders.'[103] Similarly, as Chapter 3 explored, Thomas Edwards' rustic designs were inspired by his excursion to the Roman Mosaics at Stonesfield. On 24th September 1742, Edwards wrote to Wray of his visits to see other mosaic pavements and his growing interest in domestic antiquities, adding that while he 'had very little opportunities of knowing anything of the antiquities of our Island,' he would be glad 'if when we meet in Town, you would point me out some books, which may give me a little insight into this matter.'[104] Similarly for Philip Yorke and Jemima Grey, their antiquarian interest in historical objects is one of the key motivations for their visits and is often the focus of their travel accounts. Yorke and Grey's accounts also reveal how far ruins triggered the literary and picturesque

[101] Susan Stewart, *The Ruins Lesson: Meaning and Material in Western Culture,* p. 2.
[102] Ibid., p. 17; 204-5.
[103] William Stukeley, *Stonehenge: A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids*, p. x; see also Rosemary Sweet, 'Gothic antiquarianism in the eighteenth century', *The Gothic World,* ed. by Glennis Byron and Dale Townshend (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 15-26 (p. 20).
[104] Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 1009, fols 254-5 [TE to DW, 24th September 1742].

imagination and provide some insight into their gradual development of a picturesque aesthetic.

The early entries in Philip Yorke's travel journal highlight the histories of the places that he visits, revealing his antiquarian interest in the past. This is to be expected, given his election to the Society of Antiquaries in 1744.[105] In his observations of York in 1744, he particularly notes the 'antiquities wch [which] I observed':

> 1. The inner Arch of Mickelgate, undoubtedly a Roman Work; 2. 3 Tumuli called Severn Hills wch [which] it is supposed were thrown up in honor of the Emp. Severus who died at York, by the Soldiers. […] 3. The remains of St Marys abbey, standing on a rising Ground gently declining to the Ouse: the vestiges of the choir, side isles & abbots Lodgings may still be traced out. 4. The manor House where the Lords Presidents of the North kept their court, is partly in ruins […] 5. Clifford's tower, which was one of the principal pieces of the old fortifications, but now only the shell is standing […] The old walls are kept in good repair and, as they surround the best part of the city, afford a convenient walk.[106]

Yorke had purchased a copy of (the antiquarian) Francis Drake's *Eboracum: Or, The History and Antiquities of the City of York* (1736) as a guide,[107] for he would also note his disappointment that at Cawood castle, 'an inscription in the old Gothic letter […] none of our company could make out, nor is it explained in Drake.'[108] One does wonder whether this inability to understand a historical inscription provided some inspiration for the indecipherable cuneiform on the Mithraic Altar at Wrest Park. Yet, the fact that Yorke was guided by an antiquarian guide further indicates his serious interest and desire to understand relics of the past.

However, the coterie's travel accounts also reveal a tension between members' pursuit of serious historical study and self-mockery of themselves as antiquaries – a tension that is

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[105] The Society of Antiquaries' minute books records that Yorke, 'a Gentleman of great skill in Polite Learning and Antiquity', was proposed and elected on 19th January 1744. London, Society of Antiquaries, *Minute Books vol IV,* fol. 186.
[106] Private collection*, Philip Yorke's Travel Journal*, fols 25-7.
[107] Francis Drake, *Eboracum: Or, the History and Antiquities of the City of York From its Original to the Present Times* (London: W. Bowyer, 1736).
[108] *Philip Yorke's Travel Journal,* fol. 27 [20th August 1744].

also prevalent in *Wrestiana* and the Mithraic Glade at Wrest Park. But in this instance, the self-mockery also fed into broader cultural depictions of the antiquary. Satire depicted the antiquary as a figure whose credulous enthusiasm led him 'to be duped by every forgery and to be transfixed by even the most banal and bathetic remains of the past'.[109] This latter impression was sealed by literary wits in the eighteenth century, such as Horace Walpole, who, despite his own interest in historical artefacts, would declare of antiquaries that 'it is impossible to infuse taste into them, [and] they will be as dry and dull as their predecessors.'[110] When Yorke and Grey visit Kenilworth Castle in 1748, Grey's account paradoxically highlights both their serious scholarly interest while also making a comedy of this pursuit as she notes that 'The first thing that attracted us in that Road, a few Miles before we got to Warwick, was the Ruins of Kenelworth [sic] Castle, which as Antiquarians & Philosophers we could not but give up some time to examine minutely into its venerable Rubbish & moralize over its Remains.'[111] The oxymoronic 'venerable rubbish' humorously conveys an almost bathetic reverence for the remnants of history.

The tension between serious academic interest in the past and veneration for meaningless historical objects is also evident in Charles Yorke's travel accounts when he toured Wales in 1746. In his visit to the Cathedral at Worcester, he notes to his brother that he 'read two Epitaphs (don't laugh) of Ld Somersis [sic] writing, & worshipped the old Lores and Penates with a very serious devotion.' Lord Somers was the Yorkes' great uncle, whose

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[109] Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth Century Britain* (London: Hambledon, 2004), p. xiii.
[110] *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, II, p. 116 [Horace Walpole to William Cole, 1st September 1778]. Walpole was particularly bitter about the Society of Antiquaries after his resignation in 1772, and in the same letter to William Cole, Walpole waspishly insinuates that Philip Yorke was 'the mover of the cabal in the Antiquarian Society against me'. Walpole's comments – while influential in later interpretations of eighteenth-century antiquarianism, should be taken with a grain of salt. See Rosemary Sweet, 'Antiquaries and Antiquities', *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 34.2 (2001), 181-206 (p. 193); Maria Grazia Lolla, 'Ceci n'est pas un monument: Vetusta Monumenta and antiquarian aesthetics', *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice, 1700-1850,* ed. by Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-34 (p. 1).
[111] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 99 [JG to CT, 1st September 1748].

papers Charles was in the process of researching – his quest to read the epitaphs was likely fuelled by enthusiasm for the protagonist of his research.[112] The parenthesis shows his awareness that his pilgrimage to find objects related to Lord Somers might not be shared by his brother and opened himself up to mockery. However, Charles was not as much of an antiquary as his older brother or other members of the Wrest circle and does not always share the same enthusiasm.[113] When Charles set out on his travels in 1746, the antiquary Charles Lyttelton (a friend of Daniel Wray and younger brother of George Lyttelton) encouraged him to visit Basin's Abbey. This proved a disappointing experience, for after rising early and walking several miles to find the ruins, Charles found that:

> it appeared to me so poor a thing of the kind that I determined never to take in an Abbey again in my way anywhere upon an Antiquary's word. Their Veneration for the Ruins of religious Houses leads 'em to admire, what, if standing, would have been thought not to have the least degree of elegance or curiosity.[114]

Apparently, Charles Yorke was not the only one to be underwhelmed by Charles Lyttelton's veneration for historical rubble. In Horace Walpole's infamous letter to William Cole, he recalled how 'Bishop Lyttelton used to torment me with barrows and Roman camps […] I have no curiosity to know how awkward and clumsy men have been in the dawn of arts or in their decay.'[115]

If their veneration for historical rubble could render antiquaries into figures of mockery, the vogue for 'fake' ruins in gardens could appear convoluted or even ridiculous. Owners could not always rely on visitors making the associational leaps or even being

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[112] The papers were lost when Charles Yorke's chambers in Lincoln's Inn caught fire in 1752; Yorke's interest is also charted in 'Nouveaux Dialogues des Morts' in *Wrestiana,* in which Charles Yorke is depicted as meeting Lord Somers in Elysium, fols 58-63 [signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].
[113] This is supported by the fact that while several members of the Wrest circle and Cambridge circle were elected as members of the Society of Antiquaries, Charles Yorke is one of the few who is not elected.
[114] BL, Add. MS 35360, fol. 163^{r} [CY to PY, 6th September 1746].
[115] *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, II, p. 116 [Horace Walpole to William Cole, 1st September 1778].

convinced by the imitation.[116] When Catherine Talbot visits Stowe, while perhaps not as critical as Grey, she is nonetheless critical of what she regards as the 'knicknackatory & Concettose'.[117] For Talbot, it is not the use of ornament in the gardens that she criticises, but rather the use of forgeries. At Rousham, Talbot delighted that 'the few busto's & bas reliefs that adorn the Buildings are all Real Antiques', amazed 'to find a Pyramid tho' of very modern structure, Yet, Graced with a Marble that really & truly was once belonging to a Pyramid in Egypt.'[118] She goes on to explain the importance of having genuine artefacts in a garden as opposed to copies:

> As long as there was but an inch of anything two thousand years old I can revere the place with a good conscience; but to have all those ideas, that belong only to Venerable Antiquity, raised by a knick-knack of the day, is such a Mockery to ones sublime imaginations that (except in the Altar at Wrest) I cannot pardon it.[119]

It is interesting that Talbot should explicitly make an exception for the Mithraic Altar, implying that even though, as Chapter 3 argued, it was a false antiquity and an intellectual joke within the coterie, it still carried serious connotations and had more significance than other 'knick-knacks' that imitated antiquity. But it was not always affordable or practical for owners to transport genuine pieces of antiquity for their gardens. Thus William Shenstone argued in 'Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening' (1764) that:

> a ruin […] may be neither new to us, nor majestick, nor beautiful, yet afford that pleasing melancholy which proceeds from a reflexion on decayed magnificence. For this reason an able gardiner should avail himself of objects, perhaps not very striking; if they serve to connect ideas, that convey reflexions of the pleasing kind.[120]

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[116] John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections,* pp. 100-101.
[117] BLARS, LP, vol. 1, p. 164b [CT to JG, 8th September 1748; modern transcript].
[118] Ibid., p. 164a [CT to JG, 8th September 1748; modern transcript].
[119] Ibid., p. 164b [CT to JG, 8th September 1748; modern transcript].
[120] William Shenstone, 'Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening', *The Works in Verse and Prose of William Shenstone*, 2 vols (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1764), II, pp. 125-147 (p. 126).

Thus, for Shenstone – and Thomas Whately after him[121] – the primary value in a ruin was in its ability to prompt ideas and emotions, rather than in its physical appearance or authenticity. This said, physical appearance was still important. Elizabeth Anson's brother-in-law, Thomas Anson, was so concerned about the aesthetic value of the modern ruins at Shugborough, that he took a chisel to it himself 'to demolish as much […] as taste and judgement claimed.'[122] In this respect, the deliberate introduction of roughness and ruination that would become a key element of the later picturesque aesthetic.

At this point, some words should be said on the 'picturesque'. The term 'picturesque' was primarily an artistic term, and in fact, William Gilpin first defined 'picturesque' as denoting 'a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture' in *An Essay Upon Prints* in 1768.[123] Although Gilpin would become a populariser of the picturesque,[124] the term had been in use from the early eighteenth century to denote a subject suitable for painting.[125] It was in this respect that Jemima Grey used the term in 1748 when she wrote to Catherine Talbot about her plan to invite their friends to Wrest in order to draw the gardens:

> They [the gardens] are in some Places really so picturesque, we want some of you Painter's to come & draw them: only I doubt whether all your Art could do them Justice, but it might be a good Pretence to get a few of our Friends to us by proposing this Trial of their Skill […] you might each chuse your Station […] in what part of the Garden suited most your taste.[126]

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[121] In *Observations on Modern Gardening,* Whately would write that, design aside, 'the idea [of a ruin] is besides interesting in itself', p. 134.
[122] This was observed by the Reverend Syneyd Davies when he visited Shugborough in 1750, in John Nichols, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century,* 8 vols (London: John Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1817-58), I, pp. 638-41.
[123] William Gilpin, An *Essay on Prints; Containing Remarks upon the Principles of Picturesque Beauty* (London: G. Scott, 1768), p. 2.
[124] See Mary Beth Tegan, 'Training the Picturesque Eye: The Point of Views in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*', *The Eighteenth Century* 58.1 (2017): 39-59, p. 47, Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 117, and Kim Ian Michasiw, 'Nine Revisionist Theses on the Picturesque', *Representations* 38 (1992), 76-100 (p. 92).
[125] John Dixon Hunt observes that when Alexander Pope used the term 'picturesque' it was in reference to a painting, not to a garden, see 'Ut Pictura Poesis, Ut Pictura Hortus, and the Picturesque', *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992).
[126] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 69 [JG to CT, March 1748].

It was not until 1782 that Gilpin published his *Observations on the River Wye* in which he proposed to 'examin[e] the face of a country *by rules of picturesque beauty*'.[127] The 'picturesque' would become an increasingly problematic term as later theorists advocated altering landscapes to resemble paintings;[128] but in the mid-century, the term begins to move from meaning 'suitable for painting' to becoming an aesthetic category. Gilpin's 'Essay on Picturesque Beauty' attempted to explain that roughness should be introduced for an object to be truly 'picturesque'. Using the example of Palladian architecture, he stated that:

> Should we wish to give it picturesque beauty, we must use the mallet, instead of the chissel: we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps. In short, from a *smooth* building we must turn it into a *rough* ruin. No painter, who had the choice of the two objects, would hesitate a moment.[129]

This description curiously resonates with Anson's deliberate defacing of the ruin at Shugborough in 1750. In many respects, however, this quotation is close to misrepresenting Gilpin's view of the picturesque and should be treated with caution; unlike later theorists, who would use the picturesque as a means of controlling and shaping landscapes, Gilpin is aware of the limitations of human agency. As Kim Ian Michasiw notes, Gilpin's picturesque was intended for 'transient presences in the landscape, whose separation from any agency in it is apparent.'[130] However, the above quotation does illuminate the way in which ruins very clearly inform the picturesque aesthetic.

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[127] William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye* (London: R. Blamire, 1782), p. 1.
[128] David Marshall, 'The Problem of the Picturesque', *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 35.4 (2002), 413-437.
[129] William Gilpin, 'Essay I. On Picturesque Beauty', *Three Essays, On Picturesque Beauty, On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape* (London: R. Blamire, 1792), pp. 7-8.
[130] Kim Ian Michasiw, 'Nine Revisionist Theses on the Picturesque', *Representations* 38.1 (1992): 76-100 (p. 82). This may seem paradoxical, but as Robert Mayhew and Stephen Bending have recognised, Gilpin's writing on the picturesque is both consistent with his religious and moral beliefs, see Robert Mayhew, 'William Gilpin and the Latitudinarian Picturesque', *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 33.3 (2000), 349-366 (p. 359); Stephen Bending, 'Vile Things: William Gilpin and the Properties of the Picturesque', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 80.4 (2017), 585-607.

It is not only the aesthetic value that visitors took from ruins. For the Wrest circle in particular, ruins also had historical significance. While Philip Yorke's early travel accounts suggest a purely antiquarian interest in the past, as the eighteenth century progresses, it is possible to see the blending of antiquarianism with picturesque aesthetics. Certainly by 1776, when Philip and Jemima visit Stonehenge with their eldest daughter Amabel, Amabel's diary points to the dual antiquarian and aesthetic interest in the site, as she writes that they:

> drove through a very wild desert Country to Stonehenge, which is certainly a very curious Object, & in some Views picturesque. Sr Stukeley's Description, is like, though extravagantly wrote up. We agree in Notion of its being druidical.[131]

As well as embracing the roughness of the 'wild', Amabel's description also registers Stukeley's druidical ideas and the historical significance of the remains themselves. Similarly, if Stukeley's descriptions were intended to serve as an interpretive guide, by this point, Amabel agrees with the history but adds her own thoughts on the picturesque aesthetics of the place.[132] Arguably, by the 1770s, although Gilpin was yet to publish his *Observations,* the 'picturesque' way of seeing was becoming increasingly prevalent.[133] However, in the coterie's travel accounts from two decades before, one might note that as well as demonstrating an antiquarian interest in the past, some members are beginning to develop a taste and aesthetic for the picturesque similar to that later articulated by William Gilpin.

In her remarks on Kenilworth, although Grey makes fun of herself and her husband as 'Philosophers & Antiquaries', her comment is not merely in jest. She also has a clear aesthetic and historical appreciation for ruins, and to her, they are also meaningful objects

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[131] West Yorkshire Archive Service, WYL150/61979/5, *Diary of Lady Amabel Yorke*, p. 10 [Saturday 24th August 1776].
[132] It should be added that Amabel Yorke was a talented amateur artist, and her surviving drawings in the British Museum testify to her interest in landscape art.
[133] See, for point of comparison, Caroline Lybbe Powys, *Passages from the diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys of Hardwick house, Oxon, A.D. 1756-1808,* ed. by Emily J. Climeson (England: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899).

that prompt the picturesque imagination. Grey situates the ruins at Kenilworth within a simultaneously romantic and historical context as she writes to Talbot that 'It is a very fine Ruin that still gives a good Idea of the magnificence of the Place, & is itself an Object for a Painter to be in rapture with.'[134] While we might expect the word 'picturesque' in this context, Grey does make the artistic connection, and in her account of Kenilworth to Gregory she does actually use the word 'picturesque' as she describes:

> there are several parts of Walls, Arches of different sorts, Bow-windows, &c, some open to the day, others half-clos'd with Ivy that flourishes very finely amongst the Ruins, & helps to make it the most Picturesque Object I ever saw.[135]

The fact that Grey does not always use the word 'picturesque' suggests that it has not become a throwaway word of taste,[136] and Grey clearly values the artistic associations of the term. That Grey notes the scene's suitability for painting denotes the way in which ruins could prompt both an artistic and emotive response, anticipating the later picturesque aesthetic. In fact, one might argue that literature also helped to inform an imaginative and emotive response. On the cascades at Rousham, Catherine Talbot remarked that the water

> springs from some Old Ruined Arches overgrown very naturally with Ivy, & dashes down upon the Pebbles with a sound that put me in mind of all I have ever read of refreshing Water Falls heard by Thirsty Knights or Damsels lost in a Forrest & guided only by their Ear.[137]

Pastoral romance aside, the historical value of ruins also had the power to prompt the imagination. In fact, when Grey visits Holdenby House, she writes to Mary Gregory that it was the place 'where King Charles was confin'd' and notes 'this Ruin would sooner carry you a Pilgrimage […] than another Piece of Antiquity much more beautiful.'[138] In this

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[134] BLARS, L30/9a/6, fol. 99 [JG to CT, 1st September 1748].
[135] BLARS, L30/9a/2, fol. 5 [JG to MG, 4th September 1748].
[136] This is a common criticism of the 'picturesque', that it should become a term so overused that it loses its value in the currency of taste, see Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, 'Introduction', *The Politics of the Picturesque,* ed. by Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1-12 (p. 1).
[137] BLARS, LP, vol. 1. p. 164b [CT to JG, 8th September 1748; modern transcript].
[138] BLARS, L30/9a/2, fol. 182 [JG to MG, 5th July 1748].

quotation, she even suggests that the history itself had the ability to prompt the imagination more than the aesthetic value alone.

At Studley Royal, while Yorke and Grey were critical of the apparent artifice in the gardens, they nonetheless praised the aesthetic of the park and the ruins of Fountain's Abbey. While their observations are almost identical,[139] Grey's account is more descriptive and embellished with examples. This may be due to Yorke having already seen the ruins in 1744, but he does note that the ruins 'pleased me as well upon a second view as they did at the first.'[140] Significantly, Yorke does not use the word 'picturesque' to describe the ruins at Fountains, although both times he describes the ruins as 'Romantic', thereby registering an emotive response to the landscape.[141] Grey's account goes further in evoking the later Gilpinian notion of picturesque beauty that would encompass both the wild and the beautiful in her observations that:

> The park is left in its wild natural State encompassed with the finest thickest woods of large-grown Trees, excepting where the bare brown Rock in some places juts out between their roots; is indeed highly beautiful. [The Ruin] is placed in the same wild Hilly romantic Country that forms Studley Park, & its Remains are so perfect that they are themselves a very beautiful Object.[142]

She goes on to describe it as a 'charming picturesque scene' – thus, employing both an artistic eye and taste in appreciating the scene as an object to be painted, as well as registering an emotive response.[143] Yet Grey's account is not limited to aesthetic observations, and it is also filled with nostalgia as viewing the ruins prompts her reflection on fallen history and present decay. She notes that one of the towers 'seems to have been richly adorned with

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[139] The phrases used in both accounts echo one another: such as the ruins at Fountains 'deserv[ing] all that can be said of them' and the joke about the ground being indebted to the 'taste of a heretic'. For Yorke, see Private collection, *Philip Yorke Travel Journal,* fol. 111; for Grey, see BLARS, L30/9a/7, fols 18-20.
[140] *Philip Yorke Travel Journal,* fol. 111 [11th July 1755].
[141] *Philip Yorke Travel Journal*, fols 36; 111 [1st September 1744; 11th July 1755].
[142] BLARS, L30/9a/7, fols 12-18 [JG to CT, c. July 1755].
[143] Ibid., fol. 19.

Figures &c, &c, now lost', that the arches 'are Gothic, & appear to great advantage by the Shrubs & Trees that are now grown up amongst them', and that the cloister 'is quite entire & over that the walls that are supposed to have contain'd the Monks Cells.'[144] Thus, the ruins at Fountains Abbey particularly invited a picturesque sensibility and antiquarian interest in the past.

WRITTEN TRAVEL ACCOUNTS AND THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION

As this chapter has so far demonstrated, travel accounts in letters serve a key social function in attempting to share an experience with a friend. But they also have a literary function as they attempt to translate the visual experience of a garden into a verbal form and are thus ekphrasis. The act of translating a picture into a written description is itself a challenge, but there is a further issue in describing a garden. Unlike a painting, a garden – and the experience of viewing it – is not static. This inevitably presents difficulties; as John Dixon Hunt notes, many aspects of visiting a garden do not readily translate into verbal or visual form.[145] Thus, Thomas Whately in 1770 insisted on the limitations of artistic representation, arguing that 'even when painting exactly imitates the appearances of nature, it is often weak in conveying the *ideas* which they excite, and on which much of their effect sometimes depends.'[146] Yet, this raised a particular problem as the vogue for the picturesque gained traction in the polite imagination. As artistic principles increasingly informed the viewing experience, the boundary between the object and its representation began to collapse, and it was not always clear whether it was the landscape itself being described, or its artistic representation as a painting.[147] Yet, while David Marshall's study of eighteenth-century

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[144] Ibid., fols 18-19.
[145] John Dixon Hunt, 'Ekphrasis: Déjà Vu All Over Again', *Site, sight, insight: essays on landscape architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 114-123 (p. 116).
[146] Thomas Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening,* p. 148.
[147] See David Marshall, *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, 1750-1815* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 9; and 'The Problem of the Picturesque', *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* 35.3 (2002), 413-437. This view is countered by Ian Thompson, who argues that while the picturesque might offer

aesthetics identifies this particular problem of blurring the boundary between 'the real and the imaginary, between art and real life', his study predominantly focuses on fictional accounts.[148] His approach usefully highlights 'what was at stake in fantasies of aesthetic experience',[149] but I am more interested in what this meant for 'real' observers. As Jas Elsner notes in his work on ekphrasis in art history, the act of translating the sensory and visual into the verbal for the purposes of an argument is by nature 'tendentious', and thus 'the enormity of the descriptive act cannot be exaggerated or overstated,' constituting a 'betrayal' of the object being described.[150] This may well apply to the practice of describing gardens, and in imposing an artistic or literary interpretation onto the landscape, the writer is aware that *something* is lost and they cannot convey the full experience. For the final part of this chapter, I will explore the way in which the picturesque way of seeing further problematises this issue and draws attention to the way in which travel accounts fail to truly represent the scene.

One might argue that letter-writers, self-conscious of their craft, quickly realise the limitations of verbal representation and the weight of ensuring that their experience might be shared and understood by a friend. Thus, Catherine Talbot writes to Grey that:

> I think of all sorts of Writing the Descriptive is most Difficult to succeed in; one should have a true Genius for Painting to Groupe the Objects properly to throw large Masses of Light & Shade; for to be too minute only distracts the Imagination & gives an Air of Littleness on the Whole.[151]

It is interesting that in discussing the issues of verbal representation, Talbot should refer to artistic representation and the need to possess a 'Genius for Painting', and her account shows

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organizing principles, 'it can be countered that there were instinctive as well as aesthetic responses to landscape before Claude Lorrain ever picked up a brush', in 'The Picturesque as Pejorative', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes,* 26.3 (2006), 237-248 (p. 245).

[148] David Marshall, *The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, 1750-1815* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 14.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Jas Elsner, 'Art History as Ekphrasis', *Art History,* 33.1 (2010), 10-27 (p. 12).

[151] BLARS, LP*,* vol. 1, p. 165a [CT to JG, 16th September 1748; modern transcript].

an artistic knowledge of framing a scene. The notion of the 'sister arts' of literature, art, and gardening, was well established in the eighteenth-century. Horace Walpole famously referred to these elements as the 'three sisters […] who dress and adorn nature'.[152] Yet, the ability of art to represent nature is an issue which writers and garden theorists frequently grapple with.

At this point, we might turn to the ideas of Thomas Wright, since he likely had significant influence on the thinking of the women of the Wrest circle. While Elizabeth Anson was not taught by him, she certainly knew of him through Jemima Grey and he may have been commissioned to undertake work at Shugborough.[153] In Thomas Wright's manuscript, 'Observations upon Building and Planting', he frequently borrows artistic language to explain his principles of gardening, noting that in the 'blending and mixing of plants […] great care should be taken to […] sort them to their tints or colours which will have an effect equal to light and shade […] and make a living picture.'[154] Yet Wright was also sceptical about using art as a controlling principle to design nature, arguing that 'Pictoresk as the painters call it, is a term of art, opposed to the perfection of nature, and the reason painters are so fond of it is, they are well aware they can paint a stronger likeness of the imperfection of nature, than of her excellences or perfections.'[155] This might appear paradoxical, but attention should be drawn to his term 'a living picture' in his description of planting, which, while borrowing terms of art as a means of explication, also acknowledges the organic elements of nature. Thus, while writers might borrow terms of art in referring to the picturesque, this does not mean that they overlook the actual experience of nature itself. It is also in this respect that Elizabeth Anson writes about seeing Stoke Park for the first time in

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[152] Horace Walpole, *Satirical poems published anonymously by William Mason: with Notes by Horace Walpole, now first printed from his manuscript,* ed. by Paget Toynbee (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 43.
[153] In a letter to Grey, Anson notes that on her visit to Stoke Park, she had dined 'in an Octagon Room with 4 windows (built by <u>your</u> Mr Wright)', in BLARS, L30/9/3, fol. 54 [EA to JH, 25th November 1755]; Michael Cousins explores the Thomas Wright attribution at Shugborough in 'Shugborough: A Perfect Paradise', *Garden History,* 43.1 (2015), 33-73 (pp. 45-80).
[154] Newcastle Central Library, Wright MSS 6, p. 51.
[155] Ibid., p. 54.

1755 (a place in which, coincidentally, Wright had some involvement),[156] in which she recalls:

> The Picturesque Beauty of the spot immediately under the Eye, & the immense Command one has of Hill & Vale, cultivated Fields, & beautiful Meadows, Woods & wild Glens, that one looks down into […] make it one of the richest as well as greatest views I ever saw […] I need not add that the paths about the Ground, & the variety of foreground the Trees give to different parts of the Landscape, as one changes ones situation in walking about, must be delightful, when the weather will permit one to enjoy them.[157]

Anson's attention to the foreground suggests an artistic eye in appreciating the scene, but the fact that she also notes how the different parts change in 'walking about' also conveys her acknowledgement that the act of viewing a landscape, unlike viewing a painting, is not merely static. In this respect, she enjoys the scene as – to use Wright's terms – a 'living picture' in which one walks within and interacts with the landscape.

Like Talbot, Grey often draws attention to her own role as a writer and the difficulties of description. This is particularly revealing in her visit to Hagley Park in 1763. On one level, her understanding of art and literature informs much of her experience, as she describes Hagley as 'Poetry & Painting,' noting Lyttelton's 'Poetick & Enthusiastic Love of Nature.'[158] This is to be expected, since the inscriptions within the gardens at Hagley invite the viewer to make poetic associations. Grey remarks that:

> the Seats are often distinguished by Lines from Milton & Other Poets, (too many in Latin which is not so considerate for the Ladies) applicable to the Scenes before them, & One Building sacred to the memory of Pope & another to Thompson [sic].[159]

Her use of parenthesis mimetically marginalises herself as a viewer and provides a separate space to convey her sense of exclusion. However, given Talbot and Grey's mutual admiration

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[156] David Lambert and Stewart Harding, 'Thomas Wright at Stoke Park', *Garden History,* 17.1 (1989), 68-82.
[157] BLARS, L30/9/3, fol. 54 [EA to JG, 25th November 1755].
[158] BLARS, L30/9a/8, fol. 117 [JG to CT, 17th August 1763].
[159] Ibid., fol. 118 [JG to CT, 17th August 1763].

for Thomson's verses, as well as her own knowledge of the Lyttelton/Thomson connection in the 'Castle of Indolence', Grey could equally have used this knowledge in her interpretation of the gardens. In fact, in Philip Yorke's travel journal, he seems to have been content to see Hagley through the designers who had worked on the gardens, describing it as 'a most delightful place […] decorated with buildings or seats in the most favourite spots; a seat designed by Pope, a Doric temple by Stewart [James "Athenian" Stuart]; a Palladian bridge by Mr. Thomas Pitt etc.'[160] It is thus striking that instead of dwelling on the inscriptions and garden architecture and reading the gardens as they were supposed to be read in terms of owners and designers,[161] Grey instead chooses to engage with the language of the picturesque. She notes that 'even the Lights through Trees […] seem almost copied from the Landscapes of Poussin & Rubens.'[162] Yet Grey is careful not to collapse the distinction between object and its representation by her use of the limiting modifier *almost.* In this regard, like her tutor Thomas Wright, Grey is not fully able to reconcile the experience itself with verbal or visual representation, not least because she implies that the scene almost transcends the human experience or comprehension.

Grey's self-conscious use of ekphrasis helps to convey her ambivalence about the relationship between the sister arts, as well as that between the observer and the landscape:

> But when you ask me for a Description of the Place itself I must stop short for it is beyond me. I believe that Words may describe & even convey a tolerable Idea of the finest Works of Art, but they cannot raise ideas equal to the most beautiful and varied works of Nature.[163]

Paradoxically, in paralleling works of art with works of nature, Grey draws attention to the landscape as an art form, as a representation in itself, whilst emphatically stating that nature

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[160] *Philip Yorke Travel Journal,* fols. 171-2 [15th-20th August 1763].
[161] One might further argue that by the 1760s, the vogue for inscriptions was beginning to fade anyway, see Robert Williams, 'The Leasowes, Hagley, and Rural Inscriptions', *The Leasowes, Hagley, Enville Little Sparta,* ed. by Patrick Eyres (= *New Arcadian Journal* 53/54 (2002)), p. 50.
[162] BLARS, L30/9a/8, fol. 119 [JG to CT, 17th August 1763].
[163] Ibid., fol. 116 [JG to CT, 17th August 1763].

cannot be represented. This could be a hint of the grandeur of the sublime, but it also anticipates the very problem of representation that later picturesque theorists would grapple with. For Grey, her reservations about her ability to represent the scene calls into question her own role as an observer and the inadequacy of verbal descriptions:

> All these are Words, but by no means a Description of the Place; the peculiar beauty of which is that it cannot be described […] Could I stay here long enough to read over all our Poets, I might from them collect Descriptions in Verse that would bear a nearer Resemblance to It; or had I a Pencil at my Command, I might send you a View of some of the scenes (& yet no Painter can equal the Lights & Shades of Nature) But without One or Other of these Helps, you must be content to know very little more of Hagley from my being in It.[164]

The self-consciousness with her role as both observer and letter-writer is perhaps to be expected. While this could, in some respects, be due to a fear of 'betraying' the object being described, her account deliberately limits her own role as the observer in order to heighten the significance of the natural world. Yet, if we recall the gendered nature of ekphrasis, in which male discourse seeks to control the feminised subject, then Grey's refusal to allow her words to 'control' the landscape also affords greater sympathy for Nature. By minimising her own presence within the gardens, Grey's own position as a viewer is complicated as she simultaneously evokes the language of taste and resists imposing an interpretation.

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In conclusion, this chapter has shown that personal travel accounts written for friends demonstrate both the sociability of travel correspondence as well as the ways in which different members of the coterie engaged with garden design. This is not to argue that this form of engagement was divorced from public discourse or the language of guidebooks; the fact that Philip Yorke seems to have invested in guidebooks in his early visits to York and Stowe gardens suggests he saw value in buying printed material, even though, as his travel

[164] BLARS, L30/9a/8, fols 17-18 [JG to CT, 17th August 1763].

accounts attest, his impressions were often further shaped through discussions with friends or with Grey. In addition, personal travel accounts evidently did carry value, not only as a means of demonstrating the writer's taste and judgement, but also in providing an interpretation that could offer an alternative discourse to public guidebooks. This is particularly evident when Catherine Talbot adopts Grey's account of Stowe to inform her own visit a few weeks later. While she does not necessarily agree with Grey, it is significant that she does base her analysis on Grey's account. In this respect, personal travel accounts did provide an exclusive space in which members could discuss and compare gardens with one another.

One might further remark on the parallels between the coterie's travel accounts and themes identified in its literary compositions and the garden design at Wrest Park. For instance, the mock-seriousness towards antiquaries in both Charles Yorke and Jemima Grey's accounts highlight the tension between serious historical interest and a more bathetic depiction of themselves as scholars, which is palpable in *Wrestiana*. Yet more than this, while Catherine Talbot excludes the Mithraic Altar from her dismissal of other false antiquities, her comment reveals the anxiety around what false antiquities should signify. Whereas she, and other members of the coterie understood the full reference to the Mithraic Altar at Wrest, without the same signifiers at Stowe, the garden represented to Talbot rather the 'knicknackatory & Concettose'. As I argued in Chapter 3, the Mithraic Glade at Wrest was effectively a floating signifier in which members of the coterie could attribute their own meanings. This is also the case in the gardens that they visit; while Catherine Talbot apparently does follow a prescribed route at Rousham, her focus is less on the fact that it is a garden designed by William Kent, rather the way in which the ruined cascades prompt her literary imagination and transport to her to the world of a pastoral romance with 'Knights' and 'Damsels'.

It is significant that the women within the Wrest circle provide some of the most substantial accounts on travel and garden design – particularly in the case of Jemima Grey, who, unlike other women within the coterie, did not directly contribute to the coterie's key literary compositions. It is in her personal travel accounts written for friends that, in many respects, we see her flourish as a writer and critic. In tracing the different ways in which the women within the Wrest circle did engage with the gendered language of aesthetics, the accounts of Elizabeth Anson, Catherine Talbot, and Jemima Grey reveal how far they each negotiate their own relationships with nature as observers. For Grey and Anson, their status as landowning women does allow them to engage with the language of improvement, no doubt since experience of redesigning their own gardens had given them an aptitude for this way of seeing. However, it is not as straightforward as simply adopting the male gaze and using this language to control and restrict nature: while Anson's position in this regard is more ambiguous (perhaps reflecting her own position within the masculine political spheres in which she was situated), Grey subverts this language to convey her own sympathetic relationship with Nature. For Catherine Talbot, despite her education and ability to comment on gardens, the fact that she is not a landowner herself places her in a more ambiguous domain: it is possibly for this reason that she is associated more with the pastoral in *Wrestiana* and describes herself as a 'meer paysanne'. It would require a much broader study to examine whether this speaks for the way in which elite women more generally engaged with garden design in the mid-eighteenth century, but for the purposes of this thesis, the examples of the women in the Wrest circle suggest how far their letters provided an exclusive interpretive space in which they could actively participate in garden theory.

It would be a mistake to claim that by looking at personal accounts, we are recovering insights or interpretations of gardens that have never been recorded before, although there is, of course, some scope for writers to show originality. Rather, through examining personal

travel accounts, we can see how far impressions were shared and shaped within social networks. Although public discourses such as guidebooks, garden treatises, and poetry did play a significant role in forming visitors' interpretations, so too did the personal accounts of friends. In the instance of the Wrest coterie, the group's epistolary travel accounts demonstrate that exchanging thoughts on gardens was an important aspect of members' correspondence. While these travel accounts reveal much about the letter writer's understanding of garden design and engagement with aesthetics, they also convey the desire to share those experiences within an exclusive scribal network.

Conclusion

PUBLIC OR PRIVATE?

'*Has not one often in ones enterprising younger days wished that a set of ones own friends would set to writing Spectators & admit one of the Party? But then fear of trouble, fear of being Famous & of wanting perseverance, were insurmountable Obstacles. The Authors of the Triumvirate & of the Philosopher might now benefit the Publick by their Lucubrations*.'

— Catherine Talbot to Jemima Grey, 28th June 1750[1]

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As the above quotation suggests, the Wrest circle self-consciously positioned itself on the periphery of the literary public sphere. Catherine Talbot's wish that members would 'admit one of the Party' even conveys a desire for the group to join with other significant literary figures of the day. Yet, no matter the 'Publick' benefit of sharing their literary compositions, Talbot's letter makes it all too clear that self-censorship, the 'fear of trouble' and the 'fear of being Famous' kept these works within the more intimate circulation of the Wrest circle. This is a recurring theme throughout this thesis, revealing that the boundary between public and private was a fine one. Despite some members' reticence to publish, they were avid consumers of the print trade themselves and often positioned their compositions in dialogue with popular literary works. Indeed, it would have been hard for them to resist the influence of the print trade; as recent studies by Betty Schellenberg and Jocelyn Anderson have shown, both the country house and coterie compositions became increasingly subsumed into the public sphere through the proliferation of the print trade and the rise of polite tourism.[2] However, while scholarship has focused on the way in which coteries sought literary fame or engaged in the public sphere, as Talbot's above quotation suggests, members of the Wrest

[1] BLARS, LP, vol. 1. p. 201d [CT to JG, 28th June 1750; modern transcript].
[2] Jocelyn Anderson, *Touring and Publicizing England's Country Houses*; Betty Schellenberg, *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture.*

coterie clearly did not view themselves as 'one of the Party'. In fact, as this thesis has shown, the coterie went to great lengths to preserve its exclusivity, carefully coding meanings in both its literary works and in the garden design at Wrest Park.

This is not to argue that the Wrest coterie somehow operated within its own private microcosm at Wrest Park and was divorced from the public sphere. In fact, the only reason that the coterie's intellectual jokes offered entertainment, whether in the *Athenian Letters, Wrestiana,* or the Mithraic Glade, was because there *was* indeed a public who could not understand the true meaning or private significance behind the creations. After all, both the *Athenian Letters* and *Wrestiana* imitate scholarly editions that could have been purchased at a bookseller's – 'Le Libraire a la Mode' in *Wrestiana* even capitalises on this by comically suggesting that the *Athenian Letters* might be available at Robert Dodsley's shop. It is the coterie's knowledge that this was exactly the sort of book that would *not* sell that allows the group to create comedy out of the situation when Dodsley throws the book down in frustration at the verbose prose of the *Athenian Letters*. Further comedy is created as Dodsley, deferential to the class difference, pretends to Charles Yorke that there was some entertainment in the esoteric tastes of an elite coterie. Evidently, members of the coterie had enough knowledge of the print trade to publish their works had they so wished – it is, after all, for this reason that Thomas Edwards would write to Daniel Wray to be the 'Guardian of my Literary Fame' upon receiving a letter from Dodsley about publishing his sonnets.[3] But the coterie seems to have deliberately created an aura of elite exclusivity around its compositions, and there is even a sense of pride that its compositions – like the Mithraic Glade – would not be understood by the public. As a result, the coterie's compositions and garden design must be read in relation to broader cultural and literary trends. Without knowledge of the print trade or of influential literary works that members of the coterie

[3] Bodleian, MS Bodl 1011, fol. 37 [TE to DW, 25th July 1748].

themselves read, it would be impossible to gauge how far the coterie subverts literary or academic trends to create its own jokes. Equally, without the vogue for travel books, antiquarian guides, and the fashion for bringing back antiquities from abroad, the Mithraic Altar could not have been mistaken for a genuine piece of antiquity or fooled visitors into deciphering the inscriptions.

So, this thesis has not been about reinforcing the dichotomy between public and private as much as it has been to problematise the boundary. In fact, since most of the private references in this thesis are drawn from the letters between coterie members, we might consider the role of correspondence in providing a separate space for discussion, literary exchange, and interpretation. Certainly, letters provide a window into the personal references and jokes that would only have been known within the inner circle. As the first and second chapters demonstrated, the exchange of compositions through letters often gave members opportunities to merge their fictional and real worlds, and references to these shared fictional worlds could even be used as a marker of belonging to that exclusive literary circle. This applies to the earlier composition process of the *Athenian Letters* when Salter refers to bringing his 'Persian' with him to dinner, as well as in the later compositions for *Wrestiana*, such as when Daniel Wray writes to Philip Yorke to express his sadness at having lost the company of the 'Borlacian Poets and Charles the Critic' upon leaving Wrest.[4] Possessing knowledge of the Wrest circle's literary compositions thus carried significant weight, marking one's belonging to a socially and politically elite group.

SOCIAL AUTHORSHIP AND THE GARDEN AT WREST

However, the coterie's compositions were not limited to the *Athenian Letters* or *Wrestiana.* One might even consider the Mithraic Glade as another of the coterie's key compositions, not

[4] BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 22^{r} [DW to PY, 16th August 1743].

least since the garden, like the library, was an equally important space for the coterie's social and literary activities. Furthermore, like the *Athenian Letters,* the creation of the Mithraic Glade was a collaborative venture that depended on the input of several coterie members. In the same way that members might refer to literary compositions as a marker of belonging to the inner circle, private references to the garden design could serve a similar function. After his involvement helping Wray with the inscriptions for the Mithraic Altar, Thomas Edwards was able to joke to Philip Yorke that 'I think there is a great chance that some Antiquarian or other will copy it, and we shall have it printed in some collection: If our Secretary [Joseph] Ames should travel that way, he would certainly trace it off, because he does not understand it.'[5] In making fun of their mutual acquaintances in the Society of Antiquaries for *not* understanding the inscriptions, Edwards positions himself as an insider who is privy to the real meaning of the altar. For Edwards, as a latecomer who had no part in the *Athenian Letters* and only had one sonnet featured in *Wrestiana,* it was the opportunity to work on the root-house in the Mithraic Glade that allowed him to create his own literary compositions for the building and consolidate his membership within the inner circle. In this respect, the Mithraic Glade particularly demonstrates that garden design, like a literary composition, could be created through social authorship. It is for this reason that participating in the creation of the Mithraic Glade was important for aspirational members to consolidate their membership within the inner circle.

Equally, it would be wrong to give the impression that there was only one interpretation of the altar available, especially as the coterie did playfully come up with its own suggestions. Although the altar was intended to be in dialogue with the *Athenian Letters*, the illegibility of the altar provided other members of the coterie playful opportunities for deliberate reinterpretation or even misinterpretation. Both Elizabeth Anson and Catherine

[5] Bodleian, MS Bodley 1011, fol. 42 [TE to PY, 13th August 1748].

Talbot were closely involved with the *Athenian Letters,* Talbot as a contributor and Anson had evidently read her brothers' compositions, but they both also create their own interpretations of the Mithraic Glade. Anson's joking reference to making a sacrifice to Neptune departs from Mithraicism, while Talbot's suggestion of having an Aeolus's harp in the glade draws on both Greek religion and Christianity, and is also a more publicly available literary reference. By drawing on their own references, Talbot and Anson's letters to Grey create their own personal interpretations. This would suggest that interpretation of the gardens was not so much about having a 'correct' meaning (although of course, comedy is created out of the outsider's inability to decipher the altar), but rather that one's ability to create meaning depended on one's proximity to the inner circle.

SOCIAL INTERPRETATIONS OF GARDENS

Wrest Park and its gardens had especial importance as the intellectual home of the coterie. It is no surprise that the other gardens that members visited would not have the same personal or intellectual significance. While the coterie could effectively set up a comedy of errors in the Mithraic Glade – and Anson too could direct a kind of role play when showing Capability Brown the gardens at Moor Park, members' authority as tourists in public gardens is compromised. This is particularly evident in Grey's account of Stowe in her observation that it 'is only fit for a Public [garden], there is scarcely any Shade or Retirement to be found in it: you are seen from one end of it to the Other, & there is always Company of various sorts to see you.'[6] This thesis has resisted suggesting that there was a homogenous 'coterie reading' of gardens. Rather, my interest lies in the role of the coterie's scribal network in providing a virtual space in which members could share their personal interpretations of gardens, drawing

[6] BLARS, L30/9a/5, fol. 75 [JG to CT, 30th June 1748].

on their own experiences as well as their wider reading of literature and understanding of garden design.

The coterie's accounts are complicated when one considers the intersection between gender, class, and landownership that further influences the viewing experience. However, in comparing the accounts of the women in the Wrest circle, I have not tried to make any essentialist claim that their accounts differ *because* they are women. Rather, female writers are obliged to negotiate the cultural and literary construction of nature as female, and so gender becomes yet another factor – like class or education, that affects how a viewer might engage with the natural world. In many respects, Philip Yorke and Jemima Grey's travel accounts are remarkably similar. The parallels in their readings of the gardens they visit together suggest that they often discussed gardens and came to similar conclusions. As landowners, they could often draw comparisons with their own gardens at Wrest, and, as their accounts of Studley Royal suggest, they were aware of contemporary debates around garden design and possessed a critical eye for improvements. However, there are also differences between their accounts. Even though Yorke would often take his lead from his wife's 'picturesque eye', his own observations are more likely to be practical and highlight a garden narrative of the owner's intention and the key designers who were employed. Grey, by contrast, is far more aware of the cultural gendering of the landscape and her own position as a female viewer. Evidently, a garden like Stowe was designed to appeal to elite, educated, male landowners, even though its many visitors (both male and female) brought with them a range of outlooks on garden design. While Grey does adhere to cultural tropes in feminising nature, she nevertheless does so in a way that affords greater agency and sympathy to the natural world. Thus, in Grey's accounts, employing her own knowledge of garden design allows her to claim a critical authority of the gardens that she visits while also applying a distinctly female perspective.

However, a gulf emerges between landowners and non-landowners in how far they can engage in issues of improvement in garden design. Although Catherine Talbot believed that Grey was too critical of Stowe, her teasing suggestion that Grey's account was too much in the Addisonian style rather than that of Dr Poole clearly implies that she considered Grey to be a different type of visitor to herself. While Grey, in possessing a critical understanding of garden design, was able to use that in order to criticise Lord Cobham and Stowe, Talbot positions herself as more of a transient presence. Obviously, Talbot's own experience of Stowe was conditioned by the accident of meeting Lady Cobham in the gardens, and the differences in their opinions also down to chance. Had Grey also encountered Lady Cobham, she might not have despaired so greatly at the lack of shade and retirement. Yet for Talbot, she privileges the value of gardens to prompt the literary imagination and contemplation, or provide a space to enjoy the companionship of a friend. In her letters to Grey, it is notable that she creates a private imagined space in which they could 'go thro' the whole Gardens by our Selves'.[7] Despite her clear knowledge of gardens, she does not attempt – as Grey and Anson would do – to engage in critical discourses around garden design. Evidently, she considered her own social position and few opportunities to travel a hindrance to her ability to comment on the other gardens that she visited.

The coterie accounts do not differ greatly from what other contemporary writers were observing, and indeed, it would be hard to state their cultural significance outside the coterie. My interest is not in the influence of the accounts *per se*, but rather the way in which the exclusive scribal network provided a space in which coterie members could actively engage in debates about garden design with one another. For all Grey's criticism of Stowe, it is significant that she should only express this to Mary Gregory and Catherine Talbot. Furthermore, although Catherine Talbot would form her own view of Stowe, it is significant

[7] BLARS, LP, vol. 1, p. 132a [CT to JG, 4th July 1747; modern transcript].

that she should have brought Grey's account with her as a sort of guidebook. Friends' accounts could thus provide a valuable resource that could influence one's own readings of a garden. Similarly, Daniel Wray's rather damning suggestion that the Temple of Friendship at Stowe should be renamed the Temple of Prostitution is something he likely only communicated to Philip Yorke, and he certainly would not have shared this remark with the women in the coterie. Despite the critical focus on how far the gardens at Stowe represent Lord Cobham's patriot politics, Wray's comment in fact challenges this as the sole dominant narrative of the gardens. Although visitors were still able to 'read' the intended political connotations, apparently, they could privately subvert it and update their own interpretations to reflect current politics. This thesis makes no attempt to claim that the coterie's accounts carried authority beyond their immediate circle, however, these accounts demonstrate how far people were informed and influenced by their own social circles, as well as the more publicly available language of guidebooks. Letters thus provide a virtual exclusive space for the coterie to exchange manuscripts and ideas and are the key to understanding the personal significance of the literary compositions, the garden design at Wrest, and the gardens that they visited.

'VACUNA'S CHILDREN FALL'N SO LOW': MOCK-SERIOUSNESS AND THE WREST CIRCLE

A common theme that has recurred throughout this thesis is the way in which the coterie employs private jokes and mock-seriousness to consolidate friendships among the inner members of the Wrest circle, while also withholding private meanings from wider audiences. Although entertainment must have been a key motivation – perhaps even providing a release from the demands of their public lives – there is a risk that in regarding the coterie's compositions and garden designs merely as a joke, we overlook the seriousness of the circle's intellectual pursuits and the pointed political satire in some of its works. After all, if the

Athenian Letters was merely intended to be a work of historical fiction set during the Peloponnesian Wars, then why should Philip and Charles Yorke make their own satirical allusions to contemporary politics and subtly criticise the Patriot opposition? Given the way in which George's Lyttelton's satirical *Letters from a Persian in England* was mercilessly 'stripped' of its oriental disguise, it is understandable that the authors of the *Athenian Letters* should have been much more careful. While the Yorke brothers' reticence about publishing the work was partly down to modesty and not wishing to advertise their private literary ambitions, they must have also been aware that the coded political inferences in the *Athenian Letters* would have made it dangerous to circulate, given their own hopeful political careers at this point.

The tension between the pursuit of serious scholarship and playfulness also comes across in *Wrestiana* and the Mithraic Glade. In many respects, the private jokes *were* a source of comic entertainment. But does this diminish the literary value of the works? The coterie certainly seemed to fear that this was the case, demonstrated in Catherine Talbot's 'Stanzas in answer to all the preceding False-Wit', in which she dramatically pictures 'Vacuna's Children fall'n so Low' as a result of their endless 'Bams' or private jokes.[8] One does wonder whether, behind this veneer of comedy, there is a more serious concern that their compositions do not allow the authors to fulfil their full literary potential. After all, the circle was well-connected to the literary world, and as Chapter 2 demonstrated, there were high expectations within the Cambridge circle that the Yorke brothers should lead successful literary careers. However, both Philip and Charles Yorke had been under considerable pressure from their father to pursue politics, and it was with some difficulty that they suppressed their literary ambitions. This tension is palpable in the 'Confessions du Chevalier

[8] Private collection, 'Stanzas in answer to all the preceding False-Wit', *Wrestiana,* fol. 115 [signed 'T', Catherine Talbot].

de Conte Morale' in *Wrestiana*, in which Charles Yorke's friendships in the literary world are compared to dalliances with mistresses that draw him away from his wife, the law.[9] While this is ostensibly a playful coterie composition, comparing Charles's legal career to an arranged marriage alludes to the very real weight of family obligation and expectation. This tension recurs again in 'Supplement to the Causidicade', in which Lord Chancellor Hardwicke lectures Charles to abandon his literary ambitions if he wants to become Solicitor-General, instructing him to 'Burn the lace off your Wastecoats, likewise your Romances,/ And before these dull fellows I warrant your chance is.' Although this is a teasing reference to the frivolities associated with the literary world, it again comes with the implication of personal sacrifice. Thus, we should be careful of dismissing the mock-seriousness in the coterie's compositions since they touch on a rather more serious tension in the Yorke brothers' lives. We might even consider that the mock-seriousness in the compositions enable the Yorke brothers to bridge otherwise culturally contradictory positions, effectively tempering their private literary interests with the expectation of their political careers.

Like the *Athenian Letters*, the 1770s inscription for the Gothic Tower at Wimpole uses history and antiquarianism as a disguise for the underlying political satire. In fact, the political messages could easily be overlooked and read in relation to Yorke and Wray's historical and antiquarian interests. Nevertheless, unlike the Mithraic Altar, the Gothic Folly is not simply trying to dupe viewers into believing that it is a genuine piece of antiquity (although it could be read in such a way). By this point in the 1770s, when Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray wrote the inscription for the Gothic Tower, they were disillusioned with the state of politics, especially after Charles Yorke's premature death. Nor were they alone; their political allies among the Rockingham Whigs also created coded political inferences in their

[9] Private collection, 'Confessions du Chevalier de x__ Conte Morale', *Wrestiana*, fol. 38 [c. 1744, signed 'P.W.' Philip Yorke and Daniel Wray].

gardens to highlight concern about the state of the nation and threat to civil liberties, which is clearly evoked in the Wimpole inscription in the reference to the 'Magna Charta'. However, it is also deeply ironic that the final message of the inscription urges a reconciliation of aestheticism and utility when the Gothic Tower itself is an optical illusion. While other Gothic buildings could serve practical functions, such as George Lyttelton's Gothic Ruin at Hagley, the Wimpole folly draws attention to the vanity of its own appearance, rather epitomising the way in which 'Vanity relieves in Bounty's stead.' Given the way in which Yorke had largely lost his political influence by this point, the satire in the inscription has deeper personal associations, perhaps even implying that such an empty display of taste rather epitomizes his own loss of political strength. While the Gothic Tower could be considered another mock-serious creation, in contrast to the coterie's earlier works, the implications are rather more satirical and betray a sense of disillusionment with the state of politics.

PRIVATE SPACE FOR INTELLECTUAL EXCHANGE

Most members of the Wrest circle had their own reasons for not advertising their literary compositions, intellectual engagement, or political opinions. Evidently, for the Yorke brothers, belonging to the coterie provided a space in which they could pursue their literary interests when they could not do so more publicly. Equally, for the ladies of the Wrest circle, this provided them with a private space for intellectual activity. Grey, ever cautious of the damning judgements of high society, was horrified of being thought a 'Femme Scavante' when she was entertaining 'fine' gentlemen over breakfast one day, even though within the Wrest circle, her husband and his friends not only permitted her intellectual engagement, but even wished that she would 'not oftener exert her Good sense & excellent Taste, instead of

patiently attending to our Prattle!'.[10] But how might we gauge their literary contributions, and is there scope to add their names to the literary canon of female writers? Of course, Catherine Talbot has already received much critical attention for her involvement in the Bluestocking circle, and she was evidently a key contributor in most of the coterie's compositions. Elizabeth Anson too, was a key contributor within the coterie and even used her own compositions in *Wrestiana* to counter Talbot's modesty and praise her friend's literary skills, even if she feared she might 'offend her cautious love of retirement in procuring to her here a confirmation of that fame.'[11] It is more difficult to place Grey alongside a canon of female writers, when, despite her flair with a pen, she does not contribute to the coterie's compositions. However, as Melanie Bigold and Leonie Hannan have argued, letters in themselves deserve attention as a primary medium for intellectual and literary exchange.[12] After all, it is looking at the letters between Grey, Anson, Talbot, and Gregory, that allows us to see that even within the Wrest circle, these women have their own virtual network for intellectual exchange. In fact, through this scribal network, this thesis has demonstrated not only the way in which the women were active readers of the texts they read, but the way in which they were active readers of the gardens that they visited. It is hoped that, given the increasing scholarly interest in Jemima Grey as a letter writer, this thesis adds further insight into Grey's intellectual engagement with garden design.

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[10] BLARS, L30/9/4, fols 30-2 [JG to CT, 18th January 1744/5]; BL, Add. MS 35401, fol. 116r [DW to PY, 19th Aug 1749].
[11] Private collection, 'Ragguagli. D. Parnasso, Or, Advertisement from Parnassus', *Wrestiana,* fol. 94 [signed 'E', Elizabeth Anson].
[12] Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2016); Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn, and Elizabeth Carter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

FINAL THOUGHTS

In examining the Wrest circle, it has been my intention to challenge critical thinking around coterie sociability and problematise the notion that coteries were necessarily drawn into the public sphere through the proliferation of the print trade. While Philip Yorke does seem to have been more amenable to circulating the *Athenian Letters* in the early 1780s, it is nonetheless at a point when most of the original coterie members had deceased, and it is possible that he did not suspect readers would be able to trace the political connotations relating to an earlier generation. However, the example of the Wrest circle clearly demonstrates the way in which coteries could, very deliberately, situate their compositions and intellectual activities somewhere between public and private. Whereas the urban culture of the literary salon engages with the public sphere, the country house and its gardens are more ambiguous, allowing for coded meanings that were not always accessible to outsiders. Although much of the garden design at Wrest draws on broader cultural trends in garden design, offering an accessible interpretation for visitors, the fact that many of the garden buildings are in dialogue with the coterie's private manuscripts also means that only inner members of the circle could infer the full significance. Thus, while on one level, the gardens of Wrest Park offered physical and cerebral escape from members' otherwise public lives and responsibilities, the gardens also, like their manuscripts, became pages on which they could inscribe private meanings. In fact, it is the very textuality of the garden that lends itself well to both a social authorship and readership of garden design.

Of course, the conclusions from this thesis relate very specifically to the Wrest circle. In many respects, the wealth of surviving archival materials has allowed me to demonstrate the uniqueness of the way in which the Wrest circle deliberately drew private parallels between the garden design and its literary compositions. However, more research would be required to understand whether and how far other country house coteries also made

connections between their manuscripts and garden design. This thesis has touched on parallels with George Lyttelton's literary circle at Hagley Hall, as well as the way in which Bluestocking writers also engaged with garden design. This has offered some insights into the way in which coteries intersected with one another in this period, but it also begs some tantalising questions. For instance, was George Lyttelton – who had, after all, advised on the placement of the altar and root-house at Wrest Park – ever aware of the *Athenian Letters,* in which he himself was satirised? There are also larger questions to be asked. How exactly might the Wrest coterie's observations of gardens differ from those of other coteries, or even from those not in a literary coterie? How do other coteries fit in relation to the public or private spheres? This thesis does not pretend to offer any answers here. Rather, having taken the reader around the gardens at Wrest, I now merely point out further avenues for research. Ultimately, I hope that through examining the relationship between coterie compositions, sociability, and garden design in the instance of the Wrest Circle, this offers a new way of thinking about the country house coterie and its rather more complex relationship to the public sphere.

Appendix

CONTEXT OF THE THESIS

This thesis, 'The Wrest Circle: Literary Coteries and their Influence on Landscape Design, 1740-1760', came about through an AHRC-funded collaborative doctoral award co-supervised by Professor Christine Gerrard from the University of Oxford and Dr Andrew Hann from English Heritage. The research built on existing research carried out by Professor Gerrard on eighteenth-century literary coteries and research carried out by Dr Hann and English Heritage on the garden history of Wrest Park. The aim of the thesis was to explore the intersection between country house literary culture and garden design in the mid-eighteenth century, with a particular focus on Wrest Park. It was hoped that this research would help to inform English Heritage's reinterpretation of the gardens at Wrest Park in 2021-2022.

The time frame of the project was set out by Professor Gerrard and Dr Hann to cover the period from 1740 to 1760. This might seem a narrow scope, but the reasons for keeping the research within this twenty-year period were twofold. First, the Wrest Circle was at its most active in the mid-eighteenth century, so it seemed logical to focus on the materials created during that time. In addition, due to the wealth of archival materials identified in the preliminary research, broadening the scope any further would have made it impractical to finish within three years. As I conducted the research, I realised that I would need to go slightly beyond 1760, given Philip Yorke's revival of *Wrestiana* in the 1770s. However, these later compositions do not fully reflect the original spirit of the group, so I chose to keep the focus predominantly on the Wrest circle at the height of its literary and social activity in the 1740s and 1750s.

As the title suggested, at the outset, there was scope to explore other literary coteries and the way in which different literary groups influenced and engaged with garden design in the mid-eighteenth century. However, upon embarking on the doctoral research, it became clearer that there was a wealth of unexplored archival material relating to Wrest Park and the Yorke-Grey social circle in the mid-eighteenth century. Thus, I decided to make the most of this rich material by focusing predominantly on the Wrest circle and exploring the intricate connections between the coterie's literary compositions and the gardens at Wrest Park. I hoped that a detailed analysis of one coterie would lay the groundwork for similar studies of other coteries in the future.

THE ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

Thus, while the scope of the project was set within a mere twenty-year period, the wealth of archival materials made this an immense project requiring substantial original research. The preliminary research, conducted by Dr Hann and Professor Gerrard, had identified some of the key archival resources. The letters between Jemima Grey, Catherine Talbot, and Mary Gregory were identified in the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service (BLARS), and the letters between Philip Yorke and his Cambridge friends were identified in the British Library. Dr Hann had also explored the letters of Thomas Edwards in the Bodleian Library, and the manuscripts of Thomas Wright in the Newcastle Central Library. These early research leads were enormously helpful, but they only revealed a part of the Wrest circle. I thus endeavoured to delve deeper into different archives to gain a range of perspectives from different members of the coterie and explore their other literary works.

The research was slightly impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak, which forced the closure of all archives in the UK for a substantial period of this research, from March 2020 until April 2021. Although I had managed to photograph most of the materials I needed in my

first year, it was difficult to follow up on further research leads or re-photograph any materials.

BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

LUCAS PAPERS

The Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service is a significant archive containing most of the materials relating to Wrest Park and the Lucas family. In the early stages of my research, I was fortunate that Natasha Simonova, who is working on a scholarly edition of Grey's letters, was kind enough to share her archive photographs from BLARS with me. This consisted of nine volumes of Grey's letters to Catherine Talbot and Mary Gregory that Amabel Yorke transcribed (BLARS L30/9a/1-9), as well as the letters that Catherine Talbot wrote to Jemima Grey. In the case of Talbot's letters, typed transcriptions of her letters are available to read in the archives, although her original letters have been misplaced.

In BLARS, I also examined the letters that Elizabeth Anson wrote to Jemima Grey (L30/9/1-3), which have been transcribed by BLARS. Since I consulted the volumes of these typed transcriptions, I was not able to examine the original letters.

WRESTIANA, OR, 'THE GREEN BOOK'

There is also a microfilm copy of *Wrestiana* in BLARS, which was identified by Betty Schellenberg and given a brief discussion in *Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture* (2016). It was only upon examining this myself that I realised what a substantial manuscript it was, containing 212 pages of sociable verses, literary games, Horatian odes, extracts from longer poems and short play scripts. In some respects, *Wrestiana* is more representative than the *Athenian Letters* as a collaborative coterie manuscript, since many of the compositions have been joint-authored and signed with different initials ('P' for Philip Yorke, 'C' for Charles Yorke, 'W' for Daniel Wray, 'L' for John Lawry, 'T' for

Catherine Talbot, 'R.O.C.' for Richard Owen Cambridge, 'J' for Soame Jenyns, and 'G' for Mary Gregory), although not all the compositions have been signed or dated.

It was necessary to both transcribe and decipher the whole manuscript before I was able to analyse it in any real depth and understand what the compositions could reveal about the social dynamics and academic interests within the Wrest circle. Upon close reading the manuscript, I identified a reference that revealed *Wrestiana* was also known collectively within the coterie as 'The Green Book', which helped to explain some of the references to the 'Green Book' in the correspondence between members.[13]

While I was able to access the microfilm copy in the archives, it remained unknown where the location of the original manuscript actually was. It was only in the summer of 2021 that this mystery was finally answered, when English Heritage was given a list from Lord Lucas that described the items still in family possession, which included 'The Green Book'. Having identified that the 'Green Book' was another name for *Wrestiana,* I was hopeful that the original manuscript was still in family possession. I was fortunate to be given permission to examine this 'Green Book' and determine whether it was, indeed, *Wrestiana.* My hopes were not disappointed, and upon examining the original *Wrestiana,* it also became clear how a copy had ended up in the archives. Enclosed within the pages of the manuscript was a note written by Joyce Godber in 1974, a former archivist at BLARS and author of *Marchioness Grey of Wrest Park* (1968), stating that she had made the copy in the archive and had attempted to decipher it, before returning it to the family again. Shortly after this visit, *Wrestiana* was donated to English Heritage and is now kept in storage at Wrest Park, where it

[13] While *Wrestiana* is commonly referred to as 'The Green Book', it appears the coterie did have other 'green books' for rough notes. For instance, Daniel Wray refers to Philip's travel diaries as his 'Green Book', Add MS 35401, fol. 90^{r} [22nd September 1748], idem, fol. 116^{v} [19th August 1749]. Catherine Talbot seems to have had her own 'green book', which she references in her letters to Elizabeth Carter, see, for instance, *A Series of Letters Between Mrs Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot,* ed. by Montagu Pennington, 4 vols (London: F.C and J. Rivington, 1809), II, p. 141 [Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot, 21st September 1753].

is hoped the manuscript may be used for public engagement purposes to showcase the coterie's literary activities.

MISCELLANEOUS LITERARY PAPERS

These miscellaneous literary papers (L31/340) are extensive, totalling 136 items that span almost 200 years, featuring compositions both before and after the Yorke-Grey coterie in the mid-eighteenth century. At the time of conducting this research, it was only possible to view four items at a time in the archive, and I focused on examining the rough drafts of poems that were later included in *Wrestiana.*[14] Since the restrictions on visiting archives were eased on 20th July 2021, I was able to return to the archive, by which point the rules had been relaxed so I was able to review the whole box of literary papers. While I could only draw from a small selection of this material in my research, these materials would certainly deserve further examination, especially as these papers reveal the way in which Wrest Park has been the home of different generations of literary coteries.

BRITISH LIBRARY

HARDWICKE PAPERS

The Hardwicke Papers are extensive; there are twenty volumes of Philip Yorke's general correspondence alone, dating from 1739 to 1790.[15] To keep the scope manageable, I focused on the volumes from the mid-eighteenth century that were addressed to other members of the Cambridge circle and the Wrest circle (Add. MS 35605-6). I also examined a volume of Daniel Wray's correspondence to Philip Yorke from 1740 to 1767 (Add. MS 35401), a volume of Charles Yorke's letters to Philip from 1740 to 1760 (Add. MS 35360), and two volumes of the letters between Philip Yorke and Thomas Birch from 1740 to 1750 (Add. MS

[14] BLARS L31/340, fol. 12 ['Daniell Wray Esquire'], L31/459, fol. 220 ['Oh, welcome Coach! Oh, vile Town, farewell!'], and L30/21/3, fol. 11 ['That Bedfordshire is the County of Wits…'].
[15] The British Library produced an index of all the Hardwicke papers, which lists 1000 items.

35396-7). In order to gain a better understanding of Charles Yorke's friendship with William Warburton, I also examined the volume of letters that Yorke wrote to Warburton between 1740 and 1769 (Add. MS 35404). It was necessary to produce my own transcripts of these letters.

BODLEIAN LIBRARY

THOMAS EDWARDS'S LETTER BOOKS

The Bodleian Library has letter books of Thomas Edwards's correspondence from 1720 to 1756. These letters are copies that Edwards made himself, with some corrections and omissions. I consulted all the volumes (MS. Bodl. 1007-1012), although I only transcribed the volumes from the years he was associated with the Wrest coterie, from 1742 until 1756 (MS. Bodl. 1010-1012). His original letters are also available to view in the Hardwicke papers in the British Library (Add MS 35605), where it is possible to compare the copies and the originals.

STAFFORDSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

RECORDS OF THE ANSON FAMILY OF SHUGBOROUGH

I consulted and transcribed the letters that Elizabeth Anson wrote to her husband, Admiral George Anson (D615/P (S)1/1/1-63), and to her brother-in-law, Thomas Anson (D615/P(S)1/2/1-50), from 1749 to 1758. These contain evidence of her own literary exchanges, as well as her involvement in the garden design and improvements at Moor Park. While these letters were not referenced extensively in the thesis, they were important for gaining a deeper understanding of Elizabeth Anson's correspondence network, her country house visits, and her other intellectual pursuits outside of the Wrest circle.

NEWCASTLE CENTRAL LIBRARY

THOMAS WRIGHT MANUSCRIPTS

There are eight volumes of Wright's manuscripts in the Newcastle Central Library, which I consulted for the thesis. These manuscripts are undated, although some of the references suggest Wright compiled these notebooks from the 1730s until the end of his life. The notebooks range in content, including poetry, geometry, drawings, a treatise on gardening, and historical timelines.

THE LIBRARY, SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES

MINUTE BOOKS

I consulted three volumes of the Society of Antiquaries' minute books, which covered the minutes for all the society's meetings throughout the 1740s (volumes III-VI). This allowed me to gauge not only which members and associates of the Wrest circle were involved in the Society of Antiquaries, but also their level of engagement. Importantly, volume V provided evidence that Philip Yorke had some connection with Thomas Wright through their mutual antiquarian interests, since Yorke showed Wright's drawings for *Louthiana* (1748) to the society on the 26th November 1747.

BEINECKE LIBRARY

THE PHILOSOPHER

The Philosopher, Or, Essays on various Subjects begun at Cambridge June 11th 1738 is currently at the Beinecke Library in New Haven (Osborn c368). The manuscript consists of 36 essays, amounting to 297 pages in total. There is a digitised copy of the contents pages on the Yale Library website, listing the titles of the essays and the initials of the authors. Due to travel restrictions during the pandemic, I was unable to consult the original manuscript in its entirety, however, the Beinecke Library generously digitised a few selected essays and sent them over to me so I was able to make use of them in the thesis. I transcribed 'No. 1. The

Character & Design of the Author' (pp. 1-5), 'No. 4. An essay on the variety necessary for a paper of this kind. Letter with a Translation of two Odes of Anacreon' (pp. 20-25), 'No. 6. An essay shewing the tendency of pastoral poetry to inspire philosophy. Part of the 1st Idyllium of Theocritus translated' (pp. 35-41), 'No. 8. Mr Selden vindicated from some severe aspersions of Dr Drake, in a Letter to the Philosopher' (pp. 49-55), 'No. 12. Letters from two Fellow Commoners, giving an account how They spend their Time at the University' (pp. 76-84), and 'No. 17. Essay on Epistolary Compositions, with a Character of Tully's Letters' (pp. 115-122). This is a rich resource that would certainly merit further investigation, especially given the insights it reveals about the Yorke brothers and their social circle at Cambridge.

THE COMMONPLACE BOOK

This is a common-place book, composed around 1756, which consists of eleven poems written by Charles Yorke. The book is short, only totalling 24 pages. The Yale Library digitised the manuscript and sent it to me, and the manuscript is also now available to view in the digital collections. While these poems give further insight into Charles Yorke's personal compositions, since they were not linked to the coterie or to the gardens at Wrest, I chose not to examine them in depth in this thesis.

ONLINE MATERIALS

THE *ATHENIAN LETTERS*

The *Athenian Letters* is one of the coterie's better known literary outputs owing to the print revival in 1781 and eventual publication in 1798. Although the letters between members of the Cambridge circle indicate that drafts of these compositions were circulated alongside their own personal letters, the manuscript drafts of the *Athenian Letters* do not appear to have survived. This thesis has drawn from a rare first edition volume that has been digitized and is available

to read on *Eighteenth Century Collections Online.* It is unknown whether any other copies from the first edition of the *Athenian Letters* survive.

The four volumes of the *Athenian Letters* form an extensive piece of work, consisting of 179 letters that amount to 1061 pages in total. The letters range considerably in terms of content, but as the focus of this thesis was on the social network at Cambridge and the way in which the *Athenian Letters* reflected the Yorke brothers' early literary pursuits, political views, and academic social network, I chose to only discuss the letters that offered insights into these areas.

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Lucas Papers, vol. 1 (modern transcript): Letters from Catherine Talbot to Jemima Marchioness Grey

Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, New Haven

Osborn c. 135, The Commonplace Book

Osborn c. 368, The Philosopher

Bodleian Library, Oxford

MS. Bodl. 1007-1012: Letters from Thomas Edwards to Richard Owen Cambridge, John Clerke, Lewis Crusius, John Forster, Peter Harvy, John Lawry, Arthur Onslow, Nathanael Paice, Joseph Paice, Alexander Pope, Samuel Richardson, John Saville, John Wilkes, Daniel Wray, and Philip Yorke (2nd Earl of Hardwicke)

British Library, London

Add. MS 35376: Hardwicke Papers, vol. XXVIII. Miscellaneous family correspondence of Philip Yorke, 2nd Earl of Hardwicke

Add. MS 35396-7: Hardwicke Papers, vols. XLIII-LII. Correspondence of Philip Yorke, 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, with Rev. Thomas Birch

Add. MS 35401: Hardwicke Papers, vols. LIII-LIV. Letters to Philip Yorke, 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, from Daniel Wray

Add. MS 35404: Hardwicke Papers, vol. LVI. Letters of the Hon. Charles Yorke to William Warburton

Add. MS 35360: Hardwicke Papers, vols. XII-XIV. Correspondence of Philip Yorke, 2nd Earl of Hardwicke, with his brother, the Hon. Charles Yorke

Add. MS 35605-6: Hardwicke Papers, vols. CCLVII-CCLXXVII. General correspondence of Philip Yorke, Viscount Royston

Add. MS 46690: Berkeley Papers series II vol. III. Journals of Catherine Talbot

The National Archives, Kew

PROB 11/1284/194: Will of The Right Honorable Jemima Marchioness Grey, Widow, 20th January 1797

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Society of Antiquaries, London

Minute Book Vol. V: From 23 March 1745 to 23 Sep 1749

Staffordshire Record Office, Stafford

D615/P(S)/1/1/11: Lady Elizabeth Anson to Admiral George Anson and Thomas Anson

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Philip Yorke's Travel Journals

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