

## 'Leaving the Herd': How Queer Was Cowper?

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It is the paradoxical intention of this paper to grapple firmly and yet obliquely with the issue of William Cowper's sexuality, searching not for an identity but rather for endless possibilities of identity. By refusing to settle for the notion that Cowper was either 'straight' or 'conventionally' queer/gay/molly/sodomitical, a far more radical challenge to heteronormativity presents itself when considering the life and legacy of this extraordinary and perplexing writer.

Discussion of Cowper's sexuality has been limited and fragmentary to date, largely due to an ill-founded rumour of hermaphroditism, dating back to his early biographer Robert Southey.<sup>1</sup> The most recent full-length study of Cowper (2004) is unable, disappointingly, to accommodate more than a few hints on the topic.<sup>2</sup> Although David Perkins has an intriguing essay on Cowper's animal poems that hints at a troubled sexual identity (while reinforcing certain rather stale assumptions regarding his 'femininity'),<sup>3</sup> critics on the whole appear content to regard Cowper as asexual, almost ethereal in his rejection of bodily pleasure and sexual adventure. An honourable exception to the general trend is provided by Andrew Elfenbein who devotes an important chapter of his book *Romantic Genius* (1999) to a valuable discussion of how Cowper's refusal of a heterosexual role cast a long shadow throughout the ensuing century.<sup>4</sup>

This writer agrees with Elfenbein that Cowper is an author charged with radical anti-heteronormative potential and, as far as the main interest of Elfenbein's chapter ('The Domestication of Genius: Cowper and the Rise of the Suburban Man') is concerned, has absolutely no quarrel with his theoretical line of inquiry. Elfenbein's main project is, however, not Cowper but Cowper's afterlife and his place within a suburban culture of homosocial yet homophobic bachelordom. In short, Elfenbein sees how a nineteenth-century cult of Cowper helps make Eve Sedgwick's<sup>5</sup> work on nineteenth-century homosocial bachelordom even more interesting.

Unfortunately, as part of his efforts to demonstrate this line of influence, Elfenbein edits out many of the more contradictory and confusing aspects of Cowper's own life and relationships. Readers of Elfenbein who have no other knowledge of Cowper are left with a Cowper who never married and who felt different from other people, and are left to fill in the blanks for themselves. This would be reasonable practice were it not for the fact Elfenbein suggests blank areas in Cowper's life and work that are *not* in fact blank, areas that can and should be written about.

None of this essay affects theories derived from recognitions and appropriations of Cowper in the nineteenth century. But even if one's major interest is in the cultural effects of misreadings and distortions, it is useful to know the extent and the nature of such distortions, since the very effort and techniques of misreading have their own political importance. By reminding ourselves of what the evidence of Cowper's life and work actually suggests, it becomes possible to measure the 'stretch' involved in desperate appropriation and then assess the omissions and confusions in respect of the Cowper later generations most wanted and most feared. Given Cowper's status as the most consistently popular poet writing in English for more than half a century, and given a culture of homosocial paranoia of a kind that Elfenbein and Sedgwick describe so creatively, a gay Cowper has been alternately and simultaneously feared and devoutly wished for. These hopes and fears do not lose their force or their meaning if it turns out that, after all, gay Cowper is not at home.

In claiming that one cannot assume a gay identity for Cowper I would not for a minute wish to suggest that he was 'straight'. Everybody working beneath the capacious umbrella of 'queer studies' is presumably motivated by a desire to abolish 'straightness' as the default setting of anybody's sexuality. I would like to argue that Cowper was in fact queerer than Elfenbein might suggest, not simply in terms of his posthumous impact, but in terms of choices he himself made. Not only did Cowper refuse a traditional heterosexual role, he also refused many of the attributes attached to those who were supposed to have refused such a role. His anti-heteronormativity also undercuts stereotypical assumptions about those who are assumed to live anti-heteronormative lives, making him anti-heteronormative and anti-homonormative at one and the same time.

William Cowper loved women. He was incapable of living without women and all of the closest relationships of his life were with women. As one of his most important biographers, Charles Ryskamp, notes: 'For most of his life William associated with women every day – there were always one or more women hovering in the background, or sitting beside him in the parlours at Olney or Weston. His friendships were carefully non-sexual.'<sup>6</sup> (This author would prefer to declare that such friendships were carefully anti-heteronormative.) Elfenbein casually claims that women are not important presences in *The Task* (which is not true) and then discusses *The Task* as though it were the only important thing Cowper ever wrote, ignoring the many poems addressed to women or which are about important women in his life. (In Elfenbein's elegant conclusion he refers to 'Cowper's poem' in a way that suggests that Cowper only ever wrote one.) In other words, all but one of Cowper's poems, and much of that one, are obliterated from Elfenbein's analysis in order to streamline a very interesting theoretical argument. This paper will argue that, in contrast, the reality of Cowper's queerness is that it is based not on the absence of women in his biography but on the fact that

Obviously the fact that Cowper was much closer to women than to men does not make him straight, and it does not preclude his being gay, but his essential queerness becomes far more interesting if the evidence of his close female 'friendships' is included rather than smothered. Cowper as a young man (1750s) was passionately drawn to his cousin Theodora Cowper, and some of the best heterosexual love poetry of the 1750s is written in her honour. (The dearth of memorable heterosexual poetry of the mid-eighteenth century is a useful topic of related concern.) The relationship between the cousins was never consummated and the marriage never took place, apparently because Theodora's father (William's Uncle Ashley) was worried about insanity in the family compounded by consanguinity. (In light of Cowper's later life, it is hard to protest that such fears were unfounded.) The prolonged engagement and the self-indulgent quality that informed the grief occasioned by their enforced separation indicate that Ashley Cowper's reservations may well have been a convenient explicit confirmation of Cowper's own.

Cowper himself went down hill rapidly following these events. A perpetual law student, by his early thirties the Cowper family began to doubt his ability to do or be anything decisive or remunerative. In 1763, following the pressure of an impending job interview, a sequence of amusingly inept suicide attempts lead to his confinement in a private asylum and subsequent conversion to evangelical Calvinism, a conversion which would, ten years later, be complicated by his becoming the only Calvinist in history ever to be saved and then arbitrarily damned (according to his own complicated testimony). Around this time, shortly after his release date, he developed a close relationship with the Unwin family in Huntingdon. When the Unwin paterfamilias died, Cowper moved in with the widow and stayed with her for the next thirty years. Understandably, the fact that this self-professed evangelical was, in essence, 'shacked up' with a woman who was neither his wife nor any blood relative caused some alarm at first in the town of Olney in Buckinghamshire. Intriguingly, the wagging tongues were very short lived, and virtually everyone who actually visited them was placated by what they saw and moved to declare that there were no untoward circumstances in their co-habitation. It is interesting to speculate that some subconscious recognition that Mr Cowper was 'queer' actually enabled their relationship to 'pass'. When Cowper announced that there was nothing improper going on between him and Mrs Unwin, visitors tended to believe him. This leads us to the most interesting paradox of Cowperian queerness, an uncanny 'respectability' that is the key to his scandal. If unmarried heterosexual couples cannot co-habit without scandal, and if everyone agrees that Cowper is respectable, then it seems logical that he could not have been a heterosexual. Living with a woman (rather than as a Sedgewickian 'bachelor') is what makes him queer.

Cowper's relationship with Mary Unwin (the longest and most important relationship of his life) was, like Milton's religion, more easily described in terms of what it was not. They were not brother and sister, they were not husband and wife, they were not live-in lovers, and they were not mother and

son. Cowper seems to have wanted to refuse any definition for his relationship with Mary. One of his great late poems, 'My Mary', describes his sense of horrible identification with her ageing and illness, a complicity with her suffering that verges on the sado-masochistic.

Thy spirits have a fainter flow,  
I see thee daily weaker grow –  
'Twas my distress that brought thee low  
My Mary!<sup>7</sup>

The poem is about intensity of identification, about a degree of total sensibility that threatens to overwhelm both parties. (Interestingly, Byron, who disliked Cowper's poetry and personality, parodied this poem by addressing his publisher in love-lorn homoerotic terms: 'My Murray'.) Cowper's sense of self required the idea, if not the realisation of relationship, literally and metaphorically sustained by 'correspondence'.

Cowper's mature and sustained writing career did not take off until 1780 when Cowper was told that his cousin Martin Madan had published a lengthy, two-volume work of scholarship advocating the decriminalisation of polygamy, entitled *Thelyphthora*. He picked up his pen and started writing a satirical refutation of his cousin's horrible heterodoxy, entitled (awkwardly and unoriginally) *Antithelyphthora*. His arguments spilled over into a series of moral satires on intellectual hubris, and, in a real sense, he did not put his pen down again for fifteen years. Yet, while horrified by legalised polygamy, Cowper's own life would be dominated by the problems attendant on his psychological need to live with more than one woman. Lady Anna Austen, who inspired the writing of *The Task*, was invited in effect to join Mrs Unwin along with other close female friendships within what might be called a very strange evangelical harem and ultimately recoiled from the prospect. The women in Cowper's life had good reason to feel frustrated with his inability to decide and commit, though not all of them did so. Theodora Cowper, Mary Unwin, Anna Austen and Harriet Hesketh all at various times enjoyed very close friendships with the poet that were not permitted to take on any known forms of legal permanence.

The formlessness of Cowperian intimacy, in fact, in correspondence (and in poetry which is correspondence) clearly made him feel special. Cowper felt different from other people, sometimes aggressively and hyperbolically so. While Ellenbein steers his readers to a recognition of what 'feeling different' probably meant, Cowper's own declaration of difference suggests something far more radical still: Cowper felt different, not just to the heterosexual mainstream, but from every other human being who had ever lived. He was 'Damn'd below Judas' in his own pleasant phrase,<sup>8</sup> a declaration that cannot simply be made to mean a recognition of same-sex orientation, although of course it does not preclude it. Cowper was well aware that there were and always have been people who are attracted to members of their own sex rather than to the opposite sex but there is no point in his writings where he suggests

any sense of affinity or recognition with any body or category of people either gay or straight. In the course of his 1782 moral satire 'Expostulation', Cowper denounces sodomy with all the force of Old Testament righteousness (lines 414-17):

Hast thou within the sing that in old time  
Brought fire from heav'n, the sex-abusing crime  
Whose horrid perpetration stamps disgrace  
Baboons are free from, upon human race?

Such homophobic rant need not of course be regarded as secure heterosexual assertion and can plausibly be interpreted as its opposite, either as hysteric self-justification or even (knowing what we know of Cowper's strange self-loathing) as self-denunciation. It is possible that Cowper was an early example of a later trajectory of homophobia traced by Sedgwick: 'This slow, distinctive two-stage progression from schoolboy desire to adult homophobia seems to take its structure from the distinctive anxieties that came with being educated for the relatively new class of middle-class gentleman.'<sup>9</sup> Anxiety and gentility are two important tropes in Cowper's self-fashioning. However, as far as the prehistory of homosexual roles is concerned, William Cowper was not Thomas Gray and Cowper's refusal of a heterosexual role is not accompanied by any strong attachment to anyone of his own sex. It is not possible, therefore, to confidently assert that had Cowper been born in another age, in another culture, he would have known who he was and been happy. Cowper resolutely refused such contexts and definitions and is, I would argue, worth cherishing on those terms.

His own development of digressive blank verse is part of a wider commitment to non-predictive sexuality, rejecting the closures of the couplet and of marriage within the same life movement. His queer sexuality found formal relief and expression in enjambement. The heteronormative convention that yokes two people together in a familiar pattern is subverted by a Miltonic rejection of the tyranny of rhyme. Cowper's sense of the nobility of blank verse echoes the sentiments of Edward Young (1759): 'what we mean by blank verse, is verse unfallen, uncurs'd, verse reclaim'd, reenthron'd in the true language of the Gods, who never thunder'd, nor suffer'd their Homer to thunder in Rhime'.<sup>10</sup> Cowper's blank-verse translation of Homer (1791) would answer Young's distaste for Pope's couplet version. For both Young and Cowper, couplet poetry is experienced as a kind of Mosaic law, unworthy of truly liberated spirits. It is tempting, therefore, to read Cowper's technical commitment to blank verse as a rejection of heteronormative marriage, the yoking of partnered lines together in a predictable arrangement. As his blank-verse epic *The Task* unfolds, the narrator starts to fulfil a lifelong tendency towards digression (Book I, 109-15):

For I have loved the rural walk through lanes  
Of grassy swarth, close cropp'd by nibbling sheep.

And skirted thick with intertexture firm  
 Of thorny boughs; have loved the rural walk  
 O'er hills, through valleys, and by rivers' brink,  
 E'er since a truant boy I pass'd my bounds  
 To enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames;

The refusal to 'settle down' demonstrated in rambling blank verse has a sexual as well as a technical quality. Anti-heteronormative Cowper plainly was, his entire life (even prior to his eccentric personal theology) represented a refusal of the heterosexual role. Cowper, therefore, frequently plays with the idea of his own difference, notably in this famous passage from Book III of *The Task* (108-23):

I was a stricken deer, that left the herd  
 Long since; with many an arrow deep infixt  
 My panting side was charged when I withdrew  
 To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.  
 There was I found by one who had himself  
 Been hurt by th'archers. In his side he bore,  
 And in his hands and feet the cruel scars.  
 With gentle force soliciting the darts  
 He drew them forth, and heal'd and bade me live.  
 Since then, with few associates, in remote  
 And silent woods I wander, far from those  
 My former partners of the peopled scene,  
 With few associates, and not wishing more,  
 Here I may ruminate, as much I may,  
 With other views of men and manners now  
 Than once, and others of a life to come.

The stricken deer passage performs many things. It is a reworking of a passage from Prior's great poem *Alma* (1718), a poem famous and popular throughout the eighteenth century, which describes how intelligence has an irretrievable biological and social context. Prior's idea of the self is nomadic, floating up the body to illustrate various life stages. Cowper's reworking of Prior provides a statement of theological estrangement and re-integration and it is an assertion of radical difference. The word 'herd' suggests dull conformity rather than happy community. No-one in the eighteenth century read Milton more avidly than Cowper, and Milton uses the word 'herd' frequently and always with extreme distaste. For example, Milton's Christ describes most people as a 'herd confused' (*Paradise Regained*, III, 49).<sup>11</sup> From the point of view of queer readings, it is tempting to ask whether Cowper regarded heteronormatives as a herd.

Milton's archangelic ambassador remarks that angels can assume any sex they wish and describes angelic copulation in the most polymorphic terms imaginable (*Paradise Lost*, VIII, 622-29):<sup>12</sup>

Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy'st  
 (And pure thou wert created) we enjoy  
 In eminence, and obstacle find none  
 Of membrane, joint, or limb exclusive barrs  
 Easier then Air with Air, if Spirits embrace,  
 Total they mix, Union of Pure with Pure  
 Desiring, nor restrained Conveyance need  
 As Flesh to mix with Flesh, or Soul with Soul.

The sex-lives of angels offer anti-heteronormative expectations that defy not only the canon laws of marriage but also the laws of physics and biology. Raphael has difficulties explaining such *ars erotica* within a steady iambic and clearly would find it utterly impossible within couplets. As a passionate Miltonist who had written on marriage and polygamy, these ideal sexual possibilities would have greatly intrigued William Cowper. In a famous letter he remarked: 'I am of a very singular temper, and quite unlike all the men that I have ever conversed with... In short, if I was as fit for the next world, as I am unfit for this, and God forbid I should speak it in vanity, I would not change conditions with any Saint in Christendom.'<sup>13</sup> This strange declaration may have a literary source that provides another unusual point of identification, with Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, who was defined by her friend Anne Howe in the following terms: 'I am fitter for this world than you, you for the next than me.'<sup>14</sup> *Clarissa*'s destruction has a tragic inevitability about it, considering the wicked state of the world as we know it. Unfortunately, on the whole, Cowper felt himself to be unfit for this world and the next.

This 'unfitness' is not, however, to be construed as unsociability. Elfenbein overestimates Cowper's isolation throughout his chapter and at one point attempts to prove that Cowper's 'few associates' implicitly means 'no associates'. He also refers to Olney as a village, whereas Cowper's house in that town (well preserved as a museum) actually opens out onto the main market square. Samuel Johnson had a more secluded dwelling in Bolt Court in central London than Cowper enjoyed in Olney. Yet again, the extent to which Cowper was not really a loner in fact only strengthens the crafted narrative of his loneliness. A reading of Cowper's earlier poem 'Retirement', which anticipates many of the themes of *The Task*, helps illuminate Cowper's need for both singularity and sociability. In this important work, Cowper satirises those who think solitary rural retreat can provide a formula for happiness (lines 739-40):

For Solitude, however some may rave,  
 Seeming a sanctuary, proves a grave,  
 A sepulcher in which the living lie,  
 Where all good qualities grow sick and die.  
 I praise the Frenchman, his remark was shrew'd –  
 How, sweet, how passing sweet is solitude!  
 But grant me still a friend in my retreat,  
 Whom I may whisper, solitude is sweet

Again, the reader is left with the idea of someone who enjoyed the idea of solitude rather than solitude as an enforced condition. (Samuel Johnson undoubtedly spent far more of his life alone than Cowper did.) Cowper spent very few waking hours alone, because ever since his breakdown of 1763 it was considered unsafe to leave him on his own. Yet solitude remained a pose, a useful strategy, and an idea that needed the presence of at least one other person to sustain and affirm. For Cowper, retirement into private life was a public work, a *task*, and his poems and letters are sustained and sustain him within a spirit of social and sociable utility. In *The Task* itself, Cowper shows an ironic and realistic awareness that solitude is a trope and a pose rather than a real life choice when he considers the possibility of leaving the bustle of Olney for the life of a real recluse in the so-called 'Peasant's Nest' (l. 247-51):

So farewell envy of the peasant's nest!  
If solitude make scant the means of life,  
Society for me! – thou seeming sweet,  
Be still a pleasing object in my view;  
My visit still, but never my abode.

Along with the sociability that he always equated with health and sanity, Cowper enjoyed celebrity. In an age in which anonymous publication was common for men as well as for women, Cowper proudly placed his own name and address ('Of the Inner Temple') on the title pages of his major works. (This address was badly out of date admittedly, asserting a metropolitan and professional identity he had abandoned decades earlier, an identity in any case refuted by many autobiographical verses.) There is plenty of evidence, therefore, to suggest that despite Elfenbein's assertions that he refused to consider himself as a genius, Cowper enjoyed being identified as a poet, a celebrity, and as an inspired talent. Yet Elfenbein's Cowper is an available Cowper nonetheless, and the reading of Cowper as a domesticated loner, timid, self effacing and 'effeminate', is neither a true reading of Cowper nor a misreading, but rather just one of Cowper's many roles.

This role-playing both invites and rejects readerly identification. William Hazlitt famously sneered at Cowper, declaring: 'there is an effeminacy about him that repels hearty sympathy'.<sup>15</sup> It is true that no-one has actually called Cowper 'hearty', although sympathy is what he has always been afforded. Yet the association between Cowper and ideas of frailty, delicacy and effeminacy, although prevalent, is paradoxical in light of the fact that Cowper was probably fitter and stronger than most men of his age and class in the 1780s and certainly fitter than Hazlitt would have been at the same age. It is an instructive 'exercise' to visit the neighborhood of Olney and Weston and undertake the same walks as the supposedly sickly and timid poet. A combination of varied, moderate diet and regular exercise made Cowper one of the healthier poets of the eighteenth century. Hazlitt of course reproduces a homophobic discourse that associates those who refuse heterosexual choices with physical weakness. The fact that Cowper's physical weakness is disproved



not merely by close biographical research but by the internal evidence of his most famous works, merely shows the illogical force of homophobic rhetoric.

As a way of countering the entire grammar of such rhetoric, it is, therefore, worth observing that Cowper was a healthy, physically strong individual, very sociable in his own strange way, and highly attractive to women. His campness is, I believe, a matter of deliberate poise, and the merest tweaking of his own persona might produce someone comparatively macho. Cowper himself claims in *The Task* to 'Frown at effeminate' (II, 223). Like most moralists of the mid-eighteenth century (including Jean-Jacques Rousseau), Cowper denounced effeminacy as an urban vice, praising rural retirement as the recuperation of masculinity (I, 103-106):

Oh may I live exempted (while I live  
Guiltless of pamper'd appetite obscene)  
From cramps arthritic that infest the toe  
Of libertine excess.

With very little help from Cowper himself, biographers and literary historians might today be casually referring to a muscular ladykiller, witty, highly appreciative of the attentions of the opposite sex, but unable to commit to any one woman, a very different figure to the stereotype Elfenbein reports. Yet this Cowper is both imaginable and unimaginable, since the refusal of heteronormativity and the heterosexual role is a key part of Cowper's subtle and pervasive literary identity. Neither an accident nor a biological condition, it is for Cowper a choice and a performance.

Asexual he was not. His poem 'An Epistle to Lady Austen' provides a rare moment of eroticism, eroticism associated with his own, only half-ironic claim of genius (lines 9-14):

But when a Poet takes the pen,  
Far more alive than other men,  
He feels a gentle tingling come  
Down to his finger and his thumb,  
Derived from nature's noblest part,  
The centre of a glowing heart!

These verses provide at last that very rare thing, erotic suggestion. The exquisite hesitation after 'part' provides a sexy comma from sexy Cowper. The noblest part of Cowper is hinted at and then refuted (or at least redirected). Cowper emerges not as a sexless author but rather as one whose sexuality is strangely controlled, inhibited and sublimated, chiefly to serve his pen. It was the métier of poet and author that helped Cowper cohere and stabilise as any kind of personality in the 1780s. The tingling Cowper experiences when he takes his pen is powerful but does not lead where the reader automatically imagines, suggesting a sexuality that is other than merely genital. Lady Austen certainly felt misdirected and confused by Cowper's behaviour. The attentions she had received from Cowper had led her to expect

a formal declaration of some kind. Instead she was offered a part in a strange, flirtatious, unconsummated *ménage à trois* and she fled the scene in a state of some embarrassment.

Cowper was sexually inhibited certainly, but he knew that these very inhibitions had creative implications. As Foucault famously suggested, 'Pleasure, sexuality and power do not cancel or turn back against each other, they seek out, overlap, and reinforce one another.'<sup>16</sup> The traditional theological approach to Cowper's sexual inhibitions would emphasise the fact that he felt himself damned for all eternity. As God's special, unique little victim, he could never allow himself to become 'one flesh' with anyone else or allow his own tragic destiny to drag anyone else down. A different kind of psycho-biographical approach would look more closely at poems like these, and would examine the fear of, and obsession with, 'piercing' throughout the stricken deer passage, and conclude that Cowper was afraid of his own sexuality. While this paper does not dispute the interest of such speculations, I should like, finally, to suggest that this inhibition can be interpreted in creatively queer terms. Cowper's repression consists not so much of the marshalling and formalising of discourses of power but rather of a redistribution of power and sex for the purpose of literary originality and the proliferation of discourse.

From a more literary perspective, the key influence on Cowper's strange sexuality was, I would argue, none other than Laurence Sterne. Writing in 1766 (at the most earnest and humourlessly evangelical point of his life), Cowper described Sterne as 'a great Master of the Pathetic' and regarded Yorick's sermons as masterpieces of secular moral rhetoric.<sup>17</sup> Cowper's youthful literary circle, the Churchill and Lloyd circle, were all strongly influenced by Sterne, regarding him as the true heir of the great Matthew Prior, and Cowper's own life and literary career is dominated by certain Sternean tropes of indecision, vacillation and oscillation. In sexual and/or literary terms, Sterne makes a virtue of 'not going through with it'. Sterne is perhaps the only writer in history to make impotence sexy, and the most erotic moments in *Tristram Shandy* concern a character who may well be sexually incapacitated. The incompleteness of sex in Sterne has something sublime about it at its subtlest and most memorable, authentically sublime in a truly Longinian sense. Sternean and Cowperian sexuality recalls Longinus in its incompleteness, its fragmentary frustration, and in its demand that the reader extrapolate the whole from the part. Jonathan Lamb, in the course of a chapter on the 'Shandean Sublime' captures the importance of things not said: 'Tristram's privative sublime, which makes no concessions to the unitary qualities of any thing or person, abounds with figures upon figures of incompleteness.'<sup>18</sup>

Studying Cowper's sex life is an experience akin to reading a chapter from Sterne, offering a rambling, slightly rude joke with no punchline. Above all, a sexualised reading of Cowper's life and work provides a refusal of the basic expectations of heteronormative narrative. With the help of Cowper, Sterne

and, I believe, Andrew Elfenbein at his most astute and imaginative, it should be possible to postulate an anti-heteronormative sublime, a sublime that is based on a wholesale refusal of the predictive unidirectional grammar of sexual exchange.

## NOTES

1. This rumour has been deconstructed and dismissed by Andrew Elfenbein in the chapter essay cited below.
2. Conrad Brunstrom, *William Cowper: Religion, Satire, Society* (Cranbury, NJ 2004).
3. David Perkins, 'Cowper's Hares', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 20.2 (1996), p.57-96.
4. Andrew Elfenbein, *Romantic Genius: The Prehistory of a Homosexual Role* (New York 1999).
5. Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York 1985).
6. Charles Ryskamp, *William Cowper of the Inner Temple Esq.* (Cambridge 1959), p.138-39.
7. *The Poems of William Cowper*, ed. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, 3 vols (Oxford 1995), iii.206. All further references to Cowper's poetry are from this edition.
8. *The Poems of William Cowper*, i.209.
9. Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p.177.
10. Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition; In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (London, A. Millar and R. & J. Dodsley, 1759), p.60.
11. *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, ed. Helen Derbyshire, 2 vols (Oxford 1952-1955), ii.30.
12. *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, i.180-81.
13. *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, ed. James King and Charles Ryskamp, 5 vols (Oxford 1979-1986), i.93.
14. Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth 1985), p.69.
15. *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, 12 vols (London 1902), v.91-92.
16. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth 1978), p.48.
17. Cowper, *Letters*, ii.4.
18. Jonathan Lamb, *Sterne's Fiction and the Double Principle* (Cambridge 1989), p.137.