

Cowper's Return Home: Remembering and Working-Through in *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture*

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The concept of home was much on Cowper's mind throughout his career. Most conspicuous, perhaps, are the sections of *The Task* (1785) that mark him as the celebrant of domestic life, its pleasures and its virtues:

Domestic happiness, thou only bliss
Of Paradise that has survived the fall!
Though few now taste thee unimpair'd and pure,
Or tasting, long enjoy thee, too unfirm
Or too incautious to preserve thy sweets
Unmixt with drops of bitter ...

(III. 41-6)¹

Oh friendly to the best pursuits of man,
Friendly to thought, to virtue, and to peace,
Domestic life in rural leisure pass'd!
Few know thy value, and few taste thy sweets,
Though many boast thy favours ...

(III. 290-04)

Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud-hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups,
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in.
Not such his evening, who with shining face
Sweats in the crowded theatre ...

(IV. 36-43)

These passages, the last of which goes on to describe with some affectionate humour a range of indoor activities from reading newspapers to sewing by 'the fair', give formal expression to a theme that is recurrent also in Cowper's private correspondence. There, for example, he reports

in October 1766 to his cousin, Mrs Cowper, from the household of the Reverend Morley Unwin in which he had taken lodgings as a guest after leaving Dr Cotton's Collegium Insanorum at St Albans:

As to Amusements, I mean what the World calls such, we have none: the Place indeed swarms with them, and Cards and Dancing are the professed Business of almost all the *Gentle* Inhabitants of Huntingdon. ... Having told you how we *do not* spend our time, I will next say how we *do*. We Breakfast commonly between 8 and 9, 'till 11, we read ... at 11 we attend divine Service ... and from 12 to 3 we separate and amuse ourselves as we please. During that Interval I either Read in my own Apartment, or Walk or Ride, or work in the Garden. ... After Tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. ... At Night we read and Converse as before.²

It is hardly surprising that Cowper should find this regime congenial while convalescing from a bout of suicidal monomania. The letter makes clear, however, how instinctively his response to domesticity can blend personal psychology with not only moral but socio-political conviction, the latter being forcibly present in the aggressive sarcasm of '*Gentle* Inhabitants'. He looks back to the 'happy man' ('*felix qui*') of classical tradition, the Horatian ethos of civilized retreat, and forward to the Victorian middle-class creed of home, family, and religion as the cornerstones of social well-being. In the *National Review* of July 1855 Walter Bagehot characterizes Cowper as the poet of what 'the English people really prefer'.³ There is more to this status than (as the aloof Bagehot plainly suggests) the popularity of fireside gatherings or drinking tea and Cowper's skill in portraying such pursuits. Cowper spoke for and served to advance an ideology whose later influence can be seen in works as diverse as Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and Samuel Smiles's bestselling treatise on *Self-help* (1850).

It is worth noting that, as I have shown elsewhere, the same ideology surfaces in the open letter Cowper published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for June 1784 about his experience of keeping the three pet hares, Puss, Tiney, and Bess, which he had rescued from a neglectful owner.⁴ His rich account of accommodating, caring for, observing, and training his charges delineates a whole system of improving and regulating lives, individual and collective, that can apply as well to people as to animals. In this narrative, the hares are very much part of his family, in some

ways his ‘children’. Orchard Side is their home, but it also shades into other institutions of a mature society, the refuge, the school, the clinic, the laboratory. Though reflecting a mind-set rather than from deliberate policy, the work proffers and thus disseminates the liberal-humanist dispensation of modern times with its ideas of freedom within bounds and welfare under rules.

Thoughts of home, however, were not without anxiety for Cowper. ‘We are never more in danger than when we think ourselves most secure.’⁵ Thus he draws the moral of an incident he describes in a letter to William Unwin in 1782 and afterwards in the mock-heroic ‘Colubriad’, where he is suddenly confronted by a viper in the garden of Orchard Side. He puts the invader to flight with a flourish of the hoe. There is no such positive outcome to the comparable drama of ‘On the Death of Mrs. Throckmorton’s Bullfinch’ (1788). Here the assumption of safety proves an illusion on two fronts: the Throckmortons’ well-appointed house (‘Night veil’d the pole. All seem’d secure ... ’ [31]) presents no barrier to the incursion of a foraging rat, while, with sad but pointed irony, Maria’s choice of a wooden rather than metal cage as kinder to feathers (‘for Bully’s plumage sake’ [27]) only facilitates the monster’s ravenous attack. Cowper’s evident fascination with Bully’s demise reflects that deep-seated conviction of being himself singled out for destruction that had surfaced with particular intensity in the lines beginning ‘Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion’ (1774?) or in his dream (told to John Newton in a letter on spiritual matters) of a figure pronouncing the sentence ‘Actum est de te, periisti’ (‘It is all over with thee, thou hast perished’).⁶

This darker current of Cowper’s inner life and writings culminates in ‘The Cast-away’ (1799). The mariner canted overboard, in whose fate he contemplates his own, is introduced as one who ‘Of friends, of hope, of all bereft, / His floating home for ever left’ (5-6). The phrase ‘floating’ home’ is no mere poeticism (technically ‘periphrasis’ or circumlocution) for ‘ship’. The couplet suggests that ‘home’ is a shifting site, not so much a place of settlement as the condition of being settled, which is to say inwardly resilient, supported by others, and capable of moving forward. Home is what keeps us metaphorically afloat and above water, as Cowper had found in a series of different locations, as a child at Great

Berkhamstead rectory, as a voluntary patient at Dr Cotton's asylum (the enlightened regimen of which may well have influenced his treatment of his adopted hares), with the Unwins at Huntingdon, in Olney with Mrs Unwin at Orchard Side (with John Newton nearby) and then at neighbouring Weston Underwood, and finally in Norfolk under the care of his kinsman John Johnson. (His time at the house of Mrs Disney the oculist, Westminster School, and the Inns of Court served of course more practical purposes, though during this period as an aspiring lawyer he did seek out the semblance of a home by regular visits to his uncle Ashley's in Southampton Row.) Yet like a ship at sea, or Bully's cage in Maria Throckmorton's drawing-room, home is at the same time constantly at risk, open to being suddenly lost and 'forever left'.

* * * *

All these perspectives on 'home' are somewhere present in *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture Out of Norfolk*, except the socio-political dimension. Composed in 1790 but not published until 1798, this poem belongs pre-eminently to the seam of self-contemplation in Cowper's writings.⁷ In the 'Winter Evening' segment of *The Task* he talks of how through 'the loop-holes of retreat' he reflects upon 'the globe and its concerns', comparing himself to a sailor atop the mast whose vision 'runs the great circuit, and is still at home' (IV. 88, 99, 119). This evokes Cowper's extensive, informed, and urgently partisan interest in world affairs and the condition of England, not least the Seven Years War and the conflict with the American Colonies, the Revolution in France, the Anti-slavery Movement (of which he was of course, with John Newton, a leading proponent), and the consequences of imperial expansion in trade.⁸ In *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture* he remains the mental traveller still but journeys into his own past, present, and future.

Near the beginning he recalls a time when the props were snatched from under him, in so far as they consisted in maternal tenderness:

My Mother! when I learn'd that thou wast dead
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
Wretch even then, Life's journey just begun? ...

I heard the bell toll'd on thy burial day,
 I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away,
 And, turning from my nurs'ry window, drew
 A long long sigh, and wept a last adieu! ...
 Thy maidens grieved themselves at my concern,
 Oft gave me promise of thy quick return:
 What ardently I wish'd I long believed,
 And, disappointed still, was still deceived,
 By expectation ev'ry day beguiled,
 Dupe of to-morrow even from a child.
 Thus many a sad to-morrow came and went,
 Till all my stock of infant sorrow spent
 I learn'd at last submission to my lot,
 But though I less deplored thee, ne'er forgot.
 (21-4, 28-31, 36-45)

Reading this, we may wonder if Cowper's experience of his mother's death during his sixth year set up the mechanism for both his later serial dependence on caring women (Mrs Unwin, Lady Austen, Lady Hesketh) and his implacable expectation of repeated blows and ultimately damnation.⁹ Whatever the answer, the event must have been a traumatic one. For his part, the adult Cowper does recapture the child's bewilderment and futile longing in the stark, dream-like images of the funeral day and slow-moving see-saw rhythms of its aftermath of 'sad to-morrow[s]' and sees this drama as the first passage in a history of adversity. The continuity implied in 'Wretch even then, Life's journey just begun' is underscored by 'Dupe of to-morrow even from a child', itself the perfect example of Cowper's powers of compressed formulation. It is important to emphasize, however, that in the moment of the poem's composition, at the start of his last decade, Cowper is not troubled or unsettled by viewing the dark side of his existence. On the contrary, no longer vulnerable to being either 'still deceived' or in a posture of 'submission', he embraces his lot with wide-awake equanimity.

On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture is, as we shall understand more fully in due course, a poem very much about mental strength and stability. All memory is in some measure re-creation, and all re-creation involves to some extent invention and interpretation. In this poem Cowper writes a script of and for his life and in so doing brings it

psychologically under control. 'Script' seems a good word, for the lines quoted above can read like opening scenes or flashbacks in a film. While Ann Bodham's surprise gift prompted in her cousin a process of private remembrance and contemplation that brought decided therapeutic gains, the text which enacts that process makes Cowper's life and mind eminently consumable by others. The fact would not have been lost on the relatives and friends (kinsman 'Johnny of Norfolk', say, or William Hayley) who no doubt encouraged publication of the poem (in pamphlet form) eight years after it was written, when, as the end approached, they were beginning to take steps to ensure future interest in Cowper's singular biography as well as enhance his standing as a poet.

What is happening in *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture*, then, is not simply remembering but *working-through*. The term is Sigmund Freud's, first used in his short article of 1914 on developments in psychoanalysis entitled in the English translation 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through'. Here Freud opens by looking back to his and his associate Josef Breuer's simple faith in 'abreaction', the cathartic method where repressed memories are brought to the surface in the patient so as to be beneficially discharged 'along the path of conscious activity'. This approach, he goes on to explain, has been superseded in mature practice by a commitment to putting the recovered materials under extended scrutiny so that they may be appraised and redispensed in an engagement with oneself 'on solid ground out of which things of value ... for future life have to be derived'.¹⁰ If Freud's formulations help us to characterize the habit of mind on show in *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture*, however, the poem also connects directly in this aspect with a genre of which Cowper had himself been an exponent. *Adelphi* (written 1766), his account of his early life, suicidal breakdown at the Inner Temple in 1663, and subsequent recovery and conversion to Evangelicalism at Dr Cotton's asylum, is a late example of Puritan spiritual autobiography, of which the primary motivation had always been the search for stability through self-knowledge and the discovery of patterns in the history of one's inner life. 'Call forth thy own recorded experience', Richard Baxter advises the wavering convert in *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650): 'Remember what *discoveries* of thy *state* thou hast made formerly in the walks of *self-examination*.'¹¹

The spiritual autobiographers, of which the most distinguished is John Bunyan in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), sought to trace in their lives the presence of God, the admonishments for sin, promises of salvation, evidences of election. There is of course nothing of this in *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture*. On the contrary, the poem projects an inversion of the usual pattern. It is true that early on Cowper does raise the possibility of meeting his mother in heaven – ‘May I but meet thee on that peaceful shore / The parting word shall pass my lips no more’ (35). This, however, is a gesture of wishful thinking. The prevailing impression is of one patiently resigned to living outside the bounds of grace. The significant continuity in Cowper’s existence is of unaccountable affliction. ‘Wretch even then, Life’s journey just begun.’ The word ‘wretch’ is a common term of self-reference in Protestant salvationist discourse, as famously at the beginning of John Newton’s hymn, ‘Amazing grace! how sweet the sound! / That saved a wretch like me.’ Whether or not Cowper intends to evoke the religious idiom and situation is impossible to say. Probably not. For certain, the pointedly human wretchedness he describes is not the state of unregenerate sinfulness specified in Newton’s representative act of devotion. Nonetheless, Cowper’s line situates him as a ‘wretch’ who is not ‘saved’ but predestined to adversity.

This is very much the picture he draws as the poem nears its conclusion. While his mother has safely reached her haven of repose, he flounders continually in a sea of troubles and hostile force with scant hope of a happy outcome:

Thou, as a gallant bark from Albion’s coast
 (The storms all weather’d and the Ocean cross’d)
 Shoots into port at some well-haven’d isle
 Where spices breathe and brighter seasons smile,
 There sits quiescent on the floods that show
 Her beauteous form reflected clear below,
 While airs, impregnated with incense, play
 Around her, fanning light her streamers gay—
 So Thou, with sails how swift! hast reach’d the shore
 ‘Where tempests never beat nor billows roar,’ ...
 But me, scarce hoping to attain that rest,
 Always from port withheld, always distress’d,

Me howling winds drive devious, tempest-toss'd,
Sails ript, seams opening wide, and compass lost,
And day by say some current's thwarting force
Sets me more distant from a prosp'rous course ...
(88-97, 100-05)

The contrast between blessed peace and relentless turbulence is obvious. There is, however, also a telling and barely perceptible formal difference between Cowper's representation of his mother and of himself. She is given an extended simile that conjures a compelling strange and stately beauty but remains separate from her person. He, on the other hand, dissolves into the image of a tempest-tossed, directionless, and ill-fated vessel. In so doing, as when more familiarly he identifies with 'the stricken deer' ('I was a stricken deer, that left the herd' [*Task*, III. 108]) and 'the castaway', he lays claim to a mythopoeic status and a place in the hearts and minds of future readers. (How much, we might ask, does the title of Lord David Cecil's well-known and much-reprinted biography of 1929 – *The Stricken Deer* of course – account for its advance as a best-seller and how much, in turn, has the book helped to sustain Cowper's popular standing?) There is at the core of *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture* a contradiction between subject-matter, which is Cowper's helplessness and distress, and the confidence and equanimity with which it is expressed. Negation and affirmation are intertwined. The above-quoted passage ends with Cowper's declaration of pride in his parents' attainment of the rewards of the Kingdom of Heaven whatever his own fate ('arrive what may to me'), itself a strong-minded gesture in its outgoing spirit: 'My boast is not that I deduce my birth / From loins enthroned and Rulers of the earth, / But higher far my proud pretensions rise, / The son of parents pass'd into the skies' (108-11). All the same, he does bid for and accomplish lasting earthly success in the noble order of poets – while also in these particular lines certainly reminding us of and perhaps taking a subterranean pleasure in the fact that he did descend from 'Rulers of the earth', his mother having traced her lineage back to Henry III (as well as the poet Donne) and his father's family being part of the Whig Establishment in which his uncle, Ashley Cowper, had latterly served as Lord Chancellor of England. 'Blest be the Art that can immortalize, / The Art that baffled

Time's tyrannic claim / To quench it' (7-10), says Cowper in salutation of the painter's skill that keeps alive his mother's image and influence. His art in poetry does the same for his own as well as hers. He is in this anything but 'Dupe of to-morrow'.

The negative content of Cowper's vision of his life, then, is made affirmative from within by the quality of its expression. Just as importantly, it is also balanced from without by acts of positive recollection, the use of memory as a means of grace. At one stage, in yet another instance of the strong-mindedness that emerges as the poem progresses, Cowper refuses the temptation to wish the happy years of his infancy back again since that would be harsh repayment for his mother's love: 'I should ill requite thee to constrain / Thy unbound spirit into bonds again' (86-7). Yet self-abnegation does not preclude but exists alongside the pursuit of self-interest in the poem. The portrait has immediately prompted in Cowper the dual purpose of paying belated tribute to a parent and seeking solace for himself:

Faithful Remembrancer . . .
Who bidst me honour, with an artless song
Affectionate, a Mother lost so long,
I will obey ...
And while that face renews my filial grief
Fancy shall weave a charm for my relief,
Shall steep me in Elysian reverie,
A momentary dream that Thou art She.
(11, 13-15, 17-20)

As we shall find and as Cowper subsequently suggests, 'solace' and 'relief' are hardly sufficient to describe the harvest he reaps from the recovery of scenes from the period before his mother's death. We shall get closer if we borrow lines from a poet whom (in other respects) he influenced: 'There are in our existence spots of time, / Which with distinct pre-eminence retain / A vivifying virtue ... / A virtue by which pleasure is enhanced / ... and [which] lifts us up when fallen.'¹² Cowper discovers in early childhood a fund of uplifting moments and in himself the ability to access them through imagination. In a stanzaic missive of 1780, 'To Mr. Newton on His Return from Ramsgate', which employs

the parallel between tempestuous voyage and soul-trouble, he contrasts his own baleful prospects with his friend's propitious course:

Your Sea of Troubles you have pass'd,
And found the peacefull Shore;
I Tempest-toss'd and wreck'd at last,
Come Home to Port no more.
(9-12)

In *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture* Cowper comes home. He locates there, though not an answer, certainly a palliative riposte to his darker convictions.

'Where once we dwelt, our name is heard no more; / Children, not thine, have trod my nurs'ry floor' (46-7). The recollections are framed by a distant and poignant elegiac perspective that throws into relief the immediacy with which they are seen and felt. They are extraordinarily vivid. Their factual detail has proved invaluable to biographers of Cowper's childhood, but, like all memories in some degree, they inevitably bear the impress of the adult mind through which they are mediated, its leanings and preoccupations. They speak of the psychology of the present as well as the events and settings of the past. The first of them sets a tone:

And where the gard'ner Robin day by day
Drew me to school along the public way
Delighted with my bawble coach, and wrapt
In scarlet mantle warm and velvet-capt ...
(48-51)

Quaintness and visual clarity are important features of delineation, but most striking here is Cowper's interiority to sensations of simple delight, warmth and softness (in the texture of 'scarlet' and 'velvet' no less than more obvious references), and protective enclosure (the toy coach in which he was pulled along, the cloak, the cap). The poet perceives and re-experiences a world of unthinking security and unselfconscious pleasure. Then added to these, as the focus narrows, are intimacy and dependency:

Thy nightly visits to my chamber made
That thou might'st know me safe and warmly lay'd,

Thy morning bounties e'er I left my home
The biscuit or confectionary plum,
The fragrant waters on my cheeks bestow'd
By thy own hand, 'till fresh they shone and glow'd ...
(58-63)

The trace of the erotic within these episodes then grows even more pronounced in the final one, where the sense of touch comes to the fore:

the hours
When playing with thy vesture's tissued flow'rs
The violet, the pink and jessamin,
I prick'd them into paper with a pin,
(And thou wast happier than myself, the while,
Would'st softly speak, and stroak my head and smile) ...
(74-9)

This is the only one of the vignettes in which the infant Cowper does not play an entirely passive role. His act of copying the flower patterns into paper suggests the first stirrings of the poet in him. The attending mother then becomes his Muse.

We may again speculate that in his later relationships with women Cowper compulsively sought to repeat the one that he had, or instinctively thought he had, experienced with his mother and had been lost to him prematurely. Engagements to his cousin Theadora and Mary Unwin, one in youth and the other in middle age, were both somewhat mysteriously broken off. Lady Hesketh, Lady Austen, and Mary herself were each for a substantial period his carer, while even Theadora, several decades after their separation, helped him with money. All this, however, is a side issue. In *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture*, the early years are for Cowper a rich landscape of Innocence, a Paradise he can for a space re-inhabit. Not only that. He talks of the evidences of his mother's kindness and love as something to be read from within himself: 'the record fair / That Mem'ry keeps' (54-5), 'All this, still legible in mem'ry's page' (70). This is more than a convenient metaphor. As he writes the poem, Cowper creates out of the past a text that operates and is also interpreted as part of the process of 'working-through' the story of his life and present situation. It is a text, moreover, whose benefits and

benign influence will stretch into the future; that is, which not only ‘still outlives many a storm that has effaced / A thousand other themes’ but is ‘still to be so to my latest age’ (56, 71). There is, to put it differently, a cluster of continuums woven into the tapestry of the poem. Set over against those of a conviction and an imagery of lifelong adversity is that constituted by the arc of Cowper’s mnemonic redemption of his infant past. This arc mirrors in its virtual continuities, spatial and temporal, the ‘constant flow of love’ (65) that memory ascribes to his mother and is at last made potential beyond the present.

The future is a salient element in Cowper’s summary overview of what the poem has accomplished, which is itself an abstract ‘working-through’ of the preceding substantive one. After the recollections of infancy, he had returned to the theme of obligation and elegiac tribute, for the thought of his mother’s ‘constant flow of love’, adding ‘joy to duty’, makes him ‘glad to pay / Such honour to thee as my numbers may’ (65, 70-1). This, however, is not where he places the emphasis in the concluding lines:

And now farewell—Time, unrevoked, has run
His wonted course, and what I wish’d is done,
By Contemplation’s help not sought in vain
I seem t’ have lived my childhood o’er again,
To have renew’d the joys that once were mine
Without the sin of violating thine;
And while the wings of Fancy still are free,
And I can view this mimic show of thee,
Time has but half succeeded in his theft,
Thyself removed, thy pow’r to sooth me left.

(112-21)

‘Lived’ and ‘renew’d’ are strong words exactly true to the nature of the passages of retrospection, while ‘sooth’ catches precisely the reflective calm that presides in this closing paragraph. Psychologically understood, the ending shows a perfect balance of the mind. Cowper accepts that time cannot in reality be revoked and Paradise truly regained. It can, however, be accessed on ‘the wings of Fancy’. Though the ‘pow’r’ of Cowper’s mother and the ‘mimic show’ is brought finally to the centre, the poem bears witness above all to the recuperative agency of memory,

imagination, and reasoning. As the final couplets imply, moreover, this force, albeit vulnerable itself to the vagaries and passing of time ('while the wings of Fancy still are free'), can be repeatedly summoned and applied in the service of the well-being of the self.

I once offered a detailed analysis of *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture* as a transitional poem adopting the conventions of eighteenth-century elegy but presenting overall a new genre:¹³

a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling, which remains closely intervolved with the outer scene. In the course of the meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem rounds upon itself to end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation.¹⁴

This is M.H. Abrams's classic definition of what he terms 'the greater Romantic lyric', taking in poems like Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' and 'Dejection', Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', or Shelley's 'Stanzas written in Dejection'. Substitute 'picture' for 'outer scene' and we have a good description of Cowper's poem. Suffice it to say on this occasion that the picture, with which he stays 'closely intervolved', is both inspiration and anchor of a meditation that, through a series of twists and turns, views back and forth, reflections and weighings-up, achieves not just one but all of the things Abrams states may be achieved, facing up to tragic loss (the death of a mother, the death of innocence, the prospective loss of Heaven), reaching a moral decision (subordinating his wishes to the claims of filial duty), resolving an emotional problem (learning to cope with his inheritance of affliction), deepened understanding (not least of the power and the limits of 'Fancy'). To set *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture* alongside 'the greater Romantic lyric' illuminates the nature of its originality and place in literary history. If we see it as a model performance in the psychodrama – the 'working-through' – that Freud taught us to recognize as a crucial resource in the battle for self-knowledge and stable selfhood, we understand with new insight its modernity and universal relevance.

Notes

- ¹ All references to Cowper's poetry are from *The Poems of William Cowper*, ed. John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-95).
- ² To Mrs Cowper, 20 October 1766: *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, ed. James King and Charles Ryskamp, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979-86), I, 152-53.
- ³ Reprinted in *Cowper: Poetry and Prose, With Essays by Hazlitt and Bagehot*, ed. Humphrey S. Milford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), pp. 17-55 (p. 38).
- ⁴ *Letters and Prose*, ed. King and Ryskamp, V, 40-4. For a detailed discussion of this important essay, see my 'Cowper Prospects', in Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler (eds), *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 48-51 especially and 'The Loop-holes of Retreat: Exploring Cowper's Letters', *Cowper and Newton Journal*, 1 (2011), 37-9.
- ⁵ To William Unwin, 30 March 1782: *Letters and Prose*, IV, 68.
- ⁶ To John Newton, 21 August 1781: *Letters and Prose*, I, 510.
- ⁷ For my early discussion of this important poem, covering all aspects including its eighteenth-century contexts, see *Cowper's Poetry: A Critical Study and Reassessment* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), pp. 245-70. The present article is a reappraisal of the core themes of memory and the search for stability.
- ⁸ See my 'William Cowper and the Condition of England', in Vincent Newey and Ann Thompson (eds), *Literature and Nationalism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), pp. 120-39.
- ⁹ Compare 'When I have thought myself falling into the abyss I have been caught up again; when I have thought myself on the threshold of a happy eternity, I have been thrust down to hell. ... I have no expectation but of sad vicissitude, and ever believe that the last shock of all will be fatal' (letter to John Newton, 2 September 1788, *Letters and Prose*, III, 209).
- ¹⁰ 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), XII, 145-56 (pp. 147, 152).
- ¹¹ Richard Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, 4th edn (London, 1653), Part 4, p. 187.
- ¹² William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), XI. 258-60, 266, 268.
- ¹³ See Newey, *Cowper's Poetry*, pp. 266-70.
- ¹⁴ M.H. Abrams, 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric', in Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (eds), *From Sensibility to Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 527-28.