Routledge New Textual Studies in Literature

RICHARD POLWHELE AND ROMANTIC CULTURE

THE POLITICS OF REACTION AND THE POETICS OF PLACE

Dafydd Moore

Richard Polwhele and Romantic Culture

Richard Polwhele was a writer of rare energies. Today known only for *The Unsex'd Females* and its attack on radical women writers, Polwhele was a historian, translator, memoirist, and poet. As an indigent Cornish gentleman clergyman and JP, his extensive written output encompassed sermons, open letters, and even headstone verse. This book recovers the lost Polwhele, locating him within an archipelagic understanding of the vitality and complexity inherent in the loyalist tradition with British Romantic culture via a range of previously unexamined texts and manuscript sources.

Torn between a desire for sociability and an appetite (and capacity) for a good argument, Polwhele's outspoken contributions across a range of disciplines testify to the variety and dynamism of what has previously been considered provincial and reactionary. This book locates Polwhele's work within key preoccupations of the age: the social, economic, and political valences of literary sociability in the age of print; the meaning of loyalism in an age of revolution; the meaning of place and belonging; enthusiasm, religious or otherwise; and the self-fashioning of the provincial man of letters. In doing so it argues for a broader definition of Romanticism than the one that has typed Polwhele as an unpalatable embarrassment and the anachronistic voice of provincial High Tory reaction.

This volume will be of interest to those working in the field of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British Literature, with a particular focus on politics and on the nature of literary production and identity across the non-metropolitan areas of the British Isles.

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The Collaborative Literary Relationship of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley
Anna Mercer

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Acknowledgements

Close acquaintance with Richard Polwhele, a man who weaponised name-dropping to an extent that was startling by the standards of even his age, does sensitise one to the temptations of self-indulgence in the acknowledgement of others. However, this book is the product of quite a few years of reading, thinking, and writing about Polwhele, and has collected quite a number and variety of debts in the process.

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The last time that I wrote such a reckoning of accounts, I had a long list of libraries and archives to acknowledge (and a longer list of friends and relatives of whose hospitality I had availed myself to match). As this series acknowledges, research into the corners of eighteenth-century letters inhabited by the likes of Polwhele has been revolutionised by the advent of digital resources. However, such ready access only throws more emphasis and importance on the insights to be gained from undigitised MS collections, or specific copies of

specific books. Reading Polwhele's marginal comments on his own work was a particular highlight of a visit to the National Art Library, for example. I'd specifically like to acknowledge the assistance of colleagues at the Cornwall Records Office, Devon Records Office, National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the West Country Studies Library of Exeter Library, the Devon and Exeter Institution, the Wellcome Institute, the Bodleian Library, and the university libraries of Plymouth and Exeter.

It is fair to say that this book has rarely commanded my undivided attention, and a number of colleagues beyond the confines of the project have helped me make the time I hope it deserved. Over the years many colleagues at different times – but especially David Coslett, Steve Butts, Rachel Goodsell, Lisa Petford, Cheryl Hurrell, Susan Matheron, Adrian Dawson, and Rupert Lorraine – have done more than they know to keep the show on the road.

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Abbreviations

BSC	*Biographical Sketches in Cornwall*, 3 vols (Truro: W. Polybank, 1831)
EMPC	*The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Considered by Bishop Lavington; with Notes, Introduction and Appendix by R. Polwhele* (London: A.J. Vaply, 1820)
ESGE	*Essays by a Society of Gentlemen at Exeter* (Exeter: R. Trewman, 1795)
GM	*The Gentleman's Magazine*
ILA	*The Influence of Local Attachment with Respect to Home, a Poem in Seven Books: A New Edition with Odes and with Other Poems*, 2 vols (London: Johnson, Dilly, Cadell and Davies, 1798)
PCG	*Poems, Chiefly by Gentlemen of Devonshire and Cornwall*, 2 vols (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1792)
RP&V	*Reminiscences in Prose and Verse,* 3 vols (London: J.B. Nichols, 1836)
T&R	*Traditions and Recollections: Clerical, Literary and Domestic*, 2 vols (London: J.B. Nichols, 1826)

Introduction
Locating Richard Polwhele

> POLWHELE! whose genius, in the colours clear
> Of lyric grace and philosophic art,
> Traces the sweetest feelings of the heart,
> Scorn for thy Muse the envy-sharpen'd spear,
> In darkness thrown, when, shielded by desert
> She seeks the immortal fane. To virtue dear
> Thy verse esteeming, feeling minds impart
> Their vital smile — their consecrating tear.
> Fancy and judgment view with gracious eyes
> Its kindred tints, that paint the silent power
> Of local objects, deeds of high emprise
> To prompt; while their delightful spells restore
> The precious vanish'd days of former joys,
> By Love or glory wreath'd with many a flower.[1]

In this poem Anna Seward contemplates two versions of Richard Polwhele. One is able to 'paint the silent power | Of local objects' and 'restore | The precious vanish'd days of former joys'; the other is intent on wielding 'the envy-sharpen'd spear, | In darkness thrown'. Posterity is familiar with the latter Richard Polwhele, while the former has disappeared from view. This book re-establishes both aspects of Polwhele as subjects for critical enquiry and in doing so traces a lost narrative of British Romanticism. This narrative has unexpected resonances, affinities and turns, and casts important light on the ideological contours of the period. Adequately tracing it also offers an illuminating challenge to the discourse of literary revisionism.

Seward may have had in mind the specific poem responsible for the idea of Polwhele handed down by posterity, *The Unsex'd Females*.[2] A 206-line satire on the kinds of women writers and female preoccupations that offered, as Polwhele saw it, a threat to the fabric of British society, it has become an axiomatic point of reference for scholars interested in radical women, radical science, indeed even radical dress sense.[3] It is an irony that Polwhele's name is today almost exclusively associated with writers, and in particular Mary Wollstonecraft, whose views he despised. This book does not seek any straightforward rehabilitation of Polwhele. The deplorably misogynistic

views he expressed in *The Unsex'd Females* on the subject of female education, writing, and role in society are but one element of a lifelong campaign to assail any groups and individuals whom Polwhele perceived as undermining the prevailing cultural, religious, and political establishment. He believed that this Establishment, whatever its flaws, represented an optimum – and divinely appointed – way of disposing human affairs, and he defended it in the bluntest and most combative terms possible. Amongst his opponents Polwhele at various times counted Methodists, Evangelical Anglicans (including Hannah More, who exemplifies female literary propriety in *The Unsex'd Females*), and proponents of universal education of any stripe. Yet it also included representatives of those sections of society he would otherwise seek to defend: an enervated gentry, preferment-seeking or otherwise negligent Anglican clergy, and anyone else Polwhele identified as endangering the British constitutional and religious settlement through the abdication of their responsibilities. He was also peculiarly adept at falling out with friends and collaborators. Indeed, despite his significant activities and in some cases significant successes as a poet, historian, and translator, nothing topped Polwhele's ability to cause and take offence. In other words, while there *is* more to Polwhele than the anti-Jacobin misogynist of popular repute, he was an anti-Jacobin misogynist, and quite a lot of that 'more' is equally unpalatable.

Staring this in the face and coming to terms with Polwhele without explaining it away or otherwise acting as an apologist involves recognising the moral assumptions frequent within acts of scholarly recuperation. What do we do with the fact that, as Judith Pascoe has observed, the misogynist Polwhele produced poems that offered 'veiled critiques of masculine power structures'?[4] Pascoe's response, hinted at by that 'veiled', is to not quite believe the evidence of her own eyes. The opposite response, to emphasise the unsuspectedly progressive nature of Polwhele's thinking, to see him as proof that a right-thinking liberal lurks within even the most Right-leaning of writers if only we look hard enough, would be disingenuous. This book argues that, by resisting the temptation to over-estimate or over-generalise such moments, we reveal a more contingent and multi-faceted literary Loyalism than that assumed in literary accounts of a period still predominantly constructed through the consideration of more familiar and radical characters.

In accounting for the entirety of Polwhele's long career, this book sits at the confluence of two critical positions: first, the consideration of range and complexity of loyalist literary activity and culture – its characteristic preoccupations and methods – as exemplified by Polwhele. It contemplates some abiding assumptions of Romantic-era literary studies from a different angle, indeed from the point of view of a historical cul-de-sac, given the predominant interest in more radical or at least progressive perspectives. Second, it contributes to the ongoing effort to establish a genuinely archipelagic approach to the literary culture of the period, here by insisting on the specificity of Polwhele's experience as defined by a life and career based in West Cornwall. Both critical perspectives share a suspicion of overly whiggish interpretations of history, whether the post hoc rationalisation in question be the inevitability of the

Anglo-British State or secular liberalism. The spirit and motive with which the historical contingency and therefore fragility of what previously seemed permanent and inevitable is revealed differs in each case. Those advocating the dismantling of Anglo-British hegemony do not tend to look to the end of secular liberalism with a similar enthusiasm; while those questioning assumptions within the unruffled narrative of secular Modernity tend to do so more as part of the exercising of a richer historical imagination than out of hostility to the world as it came to pass. Nevertheless, both are interested in understanding the traces of alternative narratives within histories that have been retrospectively simplified. The salutary act of historical imagination that allows us to meet Polwhele on something like his own terms without either demonising or apologising for him serves as a necessary reminder of the vulnerability of values he would not recognise but which most modern readers hold dear. This introduction expands on these two critical agenda, suggesting the ways in which a full reckoning with Polwhele contributes to a more complete understanding not only of the political cultures of literary Romanticism but also of the revisionist dynamics we are accustomed to deploy to further that understanding. But before that, a brief consideration of Polwhele's life and career can serve to demonstrate the value of reading Polwhele in the overlap between the loyalist and the archipelagic because it draws attention to the fate of the minor gentry in late eighteenth-century Cornwall and the cultural and social attitudes such a fate might foster.[5]

Polwhele was born on 6 January 1760 at Truro into a secure and locally significant landed family. They claimed their descent from one Drogo de Polwhele, Chamberlain to Queen Matilda, who had acquired land in Cornwall in 1140. Whether or not that was true, the family was well established at its seat at Polwhele, just northeast of Truro, and had been 'prominent and active in county affairs' on a continuous basis from the fifteenth century onwards.[6] The family provided a number of Members of Parliament and Lord Lieutenants of the County and was related (albeit often distantly) to some of the more important eighteenth-century Cornish families. During the English Revolution the Polwheles had been prominent Royalists and had forfeited significant property for their pains. Their profile was such that Parliamentarian troops had destroyed the family monument in the Parish Church of St Clement.

Polwhele's father Thomas had been deputy-lieutenant of the County, and in the 1830s the family still merited mention in Burke's *Landed Gentry*. But the Polwheles had endured a difficult century. Richard's friend John Nichols sums up the change across two generations neatly in his pen portrait of Richard's great-uncle, the Rev Edward Collins. With reference to Collins' 1723 publication of *Two Assize Sermons to Richard Polwhele Esq, High Sheriff of Cornwall*, Nichols observes:

> In 1801 the Rev Richard Polwhele published an Assize Sermon, dedicated to Edward Collins Esq. High Sheriff. Thus Richard Polwhele was in 1723 Sheriff, and Edward Collins his Chaplain; but in 1801 Edward Collins was Sheriff, and Richard Polwhele his Chaplain.[7]

Polwhele was educated at Truro Grammar School where he was taught by the family friend John Wolcot. Wolcot and Polwhele remained friends even though the former would later find fame, notoriety, and fortune as the anti-ministerial satirist Peter Pindar (that their friendship should survive Peter Pindar's anti-government satire but flounder in the face of Pindar's attack on the Church of England is significant). Polwhele's father died in 1777, an event that had a lasting effect on Richard emotionally and practically. In his will Thomas left not only significant bequests to the Collins family but also the majority of the remaining estate (including Polwhele itself) to his wife Mary, without condition or covenant, for the duration of her life. Richard had to make do with a small annuity and the unspecified residue of the estate in the meantime. We do not know what led to this unusual state of affairs but it meant that Richard was, for most of his life, short of disposable income (a situation that continued even after his mother's death in 1803).[8]

He went up to Christ Church Oxford in 1778, leaving on a financially related technicality without taking a degree and was ordained in 1782. From that time on, he combined his literary activities with scraping a living from a series of small curacies and benefices, initially in the Exeter area and then, from 1794, in West Cornwall, where he also served as a Magistrate for 30 years and, according to Burke, acted as Deputy Warden of the Stannaries.[9] Despite assiduous networking and vociferous Church and King politics, Polwhele found clerical preferment unforthcoming. This seems partly because on more than one occasion taking an interest in Polwhele's advancement narrowly proceeded the untimely demise of members of the Deanery of the Diocese of Exeter before they could exercise their patronage; and partly because assumptions made about his background and family meant that he was overlooked for more lucrative benefices (or at least that is what he records being told). His clerical career is a salutary lesson in the importance of being the right person in front of the right person at the right time in the eighteenth century.[10] His impecuniousness was not helped by what he and his acquaintances frequently had cause to refer to as his ever-increasing family: he had 15 children, 3 with his first wife Loveday, who died in 1793, and 12 with his second, Mary.[11] In 1821 he retired to Polwhele, one of eight estates still within the family's possession in 1828 (he also retained the benefice of Newlyn East until his death).[12] He died, aged 78, at Truro in March 1838.

If the material circumstances of Polwhele's life provide an insight into the vagaries of Ecclesiastical patronage in the period, they also testify to the fortunes of agrarian Cornwall in the late eighteenth century and the precariousness of the provincial gentry. Polwhele land apparently lacked the mineral deposits that made some of his peers rich, and Richard lacked either the ability or the inclination to invest in the mining ventures of others.[13] His Estates seem to have provided little by way of income, and he was dependent on his clerical living, and on what he could make from writing. One of his surviving memorandum books testifies to the coexistence of these two worlds. It combines the estates-related concerns of a member of the landed gentry with the preoccupations of one who writes for money: tree-planting schemes sit

next to details of print runs, subscription prices and records of reviews out to, and payments received from, the London periodicals.[14] Polwhele's family circumstances illuminate his fierce Church and King politics in not altogether straightforward ways. On the one hand, a longstanding family tradition of Royalism instantiates his own vehement Loyalism (not for nothing does he print letters received by the family from Charles II at the start of *Traditions and Recollections*). On the other hand, those same circumstances offer a way of understanding his frequently ambivalent attitude towards the class of which he would have felt himself a part by pedigree and history. If Polwhele sometimes gives the impression of being on the outside looking in, with his nose pressed up against the door of the eighteenth-century Establishment, it was a door that had only recently shut in his face.

To turn to the first of this book's central themes – the necessity of coming to terms with the range and flexibility of an ultra-loyalism that defies conventional categorisation – the apparently straightforward *Unsex'd Females* is a worthwhile place to start. Appraising the critical heritage of the poem, and identifying some of its assumptions and elisions, provides an occasion to isolate further the challenges as well as the opportunities for our understanding of the literary culture of the period arising from a more complete reckoning with Polwhele.

The poem takes its title from fellow anti-Jacobin Thomas Mathias's *The Pursuits of Literature* (though it is also inspired, if that is quite the right word, by William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'*. It articulates in condensed form many of the central tenets of reactionary conservatism's view of the threat posed to Britain by French revolutionary ideas, or 'Gallic freaks'. In the words of one of its more predictably enthusiastic reviewers, it is 'at once, politically useful and poetically beautiful', offering at a moment of 'awful crisis of church and state' a 'vindication of all that is dear to us as Britons and as Christians'.[15] Its particular concern is with the impact of revolutionary ideas on female behaviour, education (particularly concerning Botany) and fashion, and the threat that this more assertive model of female behaviour poses to patriarchal British society. It identifies nine women as 'unsex'd': Mary Wollstonecraft (an account of whose writings and personal life take up much of the poem), Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, Charlotte Smith, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Robinson, Emma Crewe, Angelica Kauffman, and Ann Yearsley. Nine are offered as a counter image to represent an ideal of female intellectual endeavour and artistry: Hannah More, Elizabeth Montagu, Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Diana Beauclerk, Anna Seward, Elizabeth Carter, and the Hesters Chapone and Piozzi.

The line-up of the first list has been the subject of some critical discussion, since not all of those included are a ready fit for a category defined by Wollstonecraft or Hays. Ultimately even though the overall tone of the poem is, in Gina Luria Walker's phrase, 'deliciously vindictive', Polwhele's purpose seems as much a warning to those displaying tendencies he finds troublesome

as it is immediate condemnation.[16] Such warnings are often combined with interpersonal score settling. Polwhele's footnote makes clear that it is Yearsley's 'ingratitude' to her patron (and old acquaintance of Polwhele's) Hannah More that has attracted his attention; as more than one critic has pointed out, Yearsley's politics were entirely suited to Polwhele. The same may be true of Smith, who by this time had broken from her and Polwhele's mutual friend William Hayley. Polwhele's note is effusive about her poetry and even novels, admitting that he has 'observed only a few slight symptoms' of 'the Gallic mania' in Smith.[17]

There has also been consideration given to the definition of 'unsex'd' with which Polwhele was working as a way of unlocking the poem.[18] Most agree that Matthias/Polwhele meant something different (indeed opposite) to Lady Macbeth, whose use of the word is the likely original source of the phrase. The rather scandalous details of Wollstonecraft's personal life (to the likes of Polwhele at least), or the sexualised nature of Linnaean botany (to the details of which *The Unsex'd Females* pays almost pornographic attention), suggest inappropriate *over*sexualisation.[19] Instead, Polwhele emphasises a chaste, 'modest', and passive female sexuality as the essence of femininity and labels the disruptive sexuality of these women as monstrous and without a gender.[20] Polwhele's most notorious claim makes this point, and characteristically, it comes not in the poem itself but one of its accompanying notes. He announces that Wollstonecraft's death post-partum represents the reassertion by the Almighty of divinely sanctioned gender roles, and the reinforcement of a binary biological distinction that Wollstonecraftean feminism would otherwise seek to deny but cannot ultimately evade. As Polwhele puts it, 'she died a death that strongly marked the distinction of the sexes, by pointing out the destiny of woman and the diseases to which they are liable'.

A snappy, rhetorically flexible title, and a high hit rate in terms of reactionary *bête noirs*, has led to the poem entering literary general knowledge and anthologies of the period as 'a misogynist classic'.[21] The poem frequently functions as a literal (as here) or figurative footnote, a point of reference for more detailed enquiries in relation to figures he identifies as 'unsex'd', or the cultural dynamics for which the poem can stand metonymically.[22] This means that he pops up in some unlikely places: Terry F. Robinson's account of 'the pairing of voguish attire with Jacobinical politics'; or Sarah Burdett's analysis of changing theatrical representations of Margaret of Anjou; or even Margaret Morlier's discussion of Elizabeth Barrett's literary engagement with George Sand.[23] Polwhele's characteristic sentiments have made him a bogeyman for the kinds of efforts to broaden the canon of Romanticism from which he might otherwise have benefited. It also means that he is often woven into readings of Romanticism with little consideration of what a fuller or more nuanced representation of Polwhele might reveal.

Approximation is the common fate of literary and cultural bellwethers. In fact Polwhele and *The Unsex'd Females* fare better than many, while the contradictions between – and misassumptions within – critical characterisations

of Polwhele usefully help to identify the difficulty in locating figures such as Polwhele within default ways of thinking about the period. On the one hand, he is assumed to have been a Grub Street hack seeking to make a name for himself, a 'London curate', a 'quarrelsome curate with literary aspirations'.[24] This is occasionally accompanied by the assumption, or at least clear implication, that Polwhele is an isolated outsider desperate to break in: 'it appears that Polwhele was considered a marginal writer both by those who shared his values and those who did not. In an era of circles, Polwhele appears to have been somewhat out of the loop'.[25] However, he is also depicted as a foremost instrument of anti-Jacobin Church and King hegemony, an authoritative voice of a repressive cultural establishment, albeit one feeling itself under siege.[26] *The Unsex'd Females* was hugely popular or largely ignored, depending on who you read, and, perhaps, the larger point to be made. Polwhele represents a fault line in scholarly understandings of the literature of Reaction, which cannot quite make up its mind whether to condemn it for being mindlessly fashionable or irrelevantly marginal.

In reality, Polwhele seems to have been all these things. He was no Grub Street hack, but the scion of a Cornish family of quality who eventually retired to the family estate. He enjoyed a wide circle of literary acquaintance and was consistently published by a range of firms in Bath, London, and Edinburgh. Indeed, if anything, getting into print was a little too easy for him.[27] *The Influence of Local Attachment* garnered him a widespread reputation; his translation of Theocritus was standard well into the nineteenth century; and his topographical histories of Devon and Cornwall were widely respected. His longstanding admirer and correspondent Walter Scott attempted to engage him to produce something similar for Scotland.[28] Looked at in one light, his career is a testament to the possibilities of provincial engagement with a national literary culture. Yet he remains in the final analysis (including his own), a nearly man who from his time at Oxford was never quite able to break confidently into that national culture. On the rare occasion he managed to scrape the cultural capital together to gain purchase on the world of letters, it seems he was let down by a lack of financial capital. He could not accept Scott's potentially transformative offer because he could not afford the time away from his duties and family in Cornwall. If, as we shall see, Polwhele was more a real-life Tristram Shandy than J. Alfred Prufrock (and more vicious than either), he remained, nevertheless – in important ways – on the outside looking in.

Thus the critical response to *The Unsex'd Females* identifies a tension within Polwhele's status that we will see repeatedly in this book and which makes him difficult to accommodate within some of the normative categories for writers in the period. Coming to terms with the totality of Polwhele involves acknowledging an occluded dimension to literary scholarship's understanding of the period. Traditional Romantic studies took the radical energies of its main players as axiomatic (or their apostasy as problematic). Similarly, the commitment to a radical, progressive Romanticism has been a key part of both the historical turn with Romantic studies and the recovery of the lost voices of the Romantic period. In the close-on 40 years since Marilyn Butler drew

attention to the fact that the nation that gave rise to 'English' Romanticism was also 'most deeply and lengthily committed to the conservative crusade', field-defining work has, generally speaking, continued to take as its subject the radical response to Revolution and remains, on the whole, more interested in exploring, nuancing, and expanding this progressive, liberal Romanticism, than in grappling – and understanding the interconnections – with its Conservative alter-ego.[29] The situation is rather different in Historical studies, where 'the ideological ambiguities of loyalism' and the 'highly problematic nature of the relationship between the government and the many but varied effusions of loyalism throughout the 1790s' have long been a topic of debate.[30] It is some time since Kevin Gilmartin noted that, while historians and political theorists 'have undertaken a substantial critical reassessment of conservatism in the period, their work has yet to be felt in the political framework of Romantic studies', which too often remains wedded to a distortingly simple opposition between Burkean reaction and Paine-ite radicalism.[31] Or, as Matthew Grenby has observed, when scholarship has attempted to 'revise the notion of a heavily polarised debate' by questioning the 'oppositional relationship between conservative and radical' it has tended to do so in order to expand the category of the radical and distract from the fact that 'loyalty, patriotism and even quite specifically targeted anti-Jacobinism, were much more significant elements in British society – affecting more people more deeply – than any radical impulse had ever managed to become'.[32] In Grenby's analysis, literary history has failed quite to grasp that 'much of the evidence pointing to a continued revolutionary underground enduring until the re-emergence of a confident and vocal radicalism after about 1807 derives from the reaction to that perceived threat by the establishment rather than from the threat itself', a reaction that 'in retrospect, seems totally out of proportion to the level of danger'.[33] Grenby's attempt to establish the anti-Jacobin novel as 'perhaps the most historically meaningful literary response to the French Revolution and its aftermath' and Gilmartin's efforts to consider the 'range and complexity of counter revolutionary expression' to grapple with the 'constitutive tensions' within a discourse torn between revision and tradition, between an 'unyielding confidence in the viability of the old regime, and a realisation that new social forces and cultural forms must be enlisted in its defence' remain amongst a small minority of works devoted to the subject.[34] As a measure of the centre of gravity in the field, Gilmartin's is the only work devoted to loyalism cited amongst the 15 suggestions of further reading in Jon Mee's chapter of the *Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism* dedicated to 'the Revolutionary Decade'.[35] This book suggests a slightly different focus, one that pinpoints a neglected dimension to the literature of the period and the literary historiography that has overlooked it.

Something similar can be observed in the treatment of the other bastion of loyalist thought during the period, the Anglican Church. Historians of Religion are nowadays reluctant to read the eighteenth-century Anglican Establishment through the interpretative framework of its nineteenth-century detractors.[36] They are much more likely to consider phenomena such as

the Methodist or practical Evangelical movement as evidence of 'complex debates within seventeenth and eighteenth-century Anglican circles' and in turn to understand such debates as part of a longstanding theological discourse grounded within the intimate relationship between 'political theory and political theology' that was relevant well into the nineteenth century.[37] Similarly, attention has turned to the fact, for example, that during the eighteenth century eight pages of sermon material was printed for every one page of fiction, and there is greater awareness that the 'centrality of religion to the nation's political, cultural and social life fits uneasily into the prevailing grand narratives of the period'.[38] Misty Anderson has argued that the assumption of 'progressive secularism as the narrative of modernity' has led to an interpretative bias within literary studies that 'makes expressions of religious belief as such into a misrecognition of other social and material impulses, which are the real historical content to be explored in literary reading and writing'.[39] A similar point has been made by Philip Connell, who notes that, given its Arnoldian founding myth, it is hardly surprising if literary criticism has been slow to acknowledge its own birth within an 'Anglican Enlightenment' that was as much about 'Protestant apologetic' as it was 'incipient secularism'.[40] When literary scholars have engaged with the depth of work in this field, Romantic scholarship's predominant interest in non- or anti-Establishment figures has tended to assert itself. Laura Davies and Emma Salgård Cunha's volume devoted to highlighting the importance of religious experience and its complexity in the period, and the literariness of religious genres, is made up of ten articles almost exclusively devoted to Dissenting or otherwise alternative or marginalised religious experience.[41] Jon Mee's interest in the potential of a fuller awareness of theological discourse for the 'revivification of the critical purchase of the term enthusiasm [to] help us understand nuances in […] writing that has become dead to us' operates in similarly non-conformist and radical circles.[42] The current study attempts to use such acute insights in relation to a figure from what literary studies tends to consider in unproblematical terms as a coherent Anglican Establishment.

In parallel, this book argues that understanding Polwhele in relation to the variety, flexibility, and vitality of LOYALIST thought is also an archipelagic gesture, since it insists on the significance of locations and experiences previously ignored by more totalising narratives of the period. Again, though, Polwhele makes for an uncomfortable revisionist travelling companion. As such, placing Polwhele within an archipelagic understanding of the period highlights and offers a qualifying perspective on some of the central tenets of archipelagic studies.

The archipelagic approach attends to the experience of those from the nations and regions of the 'United Kingdom' that were previously elided within the Anglo-British and metropolitan history of English Literature. It seeks to recover the 'discarded dialogues' of previous literary cultures and, by 'strip[ping] away modern Anglo-Centric and Victorian imperial paradigms to recover the long, braided histories played out across the British-Irish archipelago', reformulate

both our sense of what counts and our scholarly priorities.[43] It takes as axiomatic 'the intrinsic merits of places far from the centres of political, social and cultural power' in part through a process of '*recentralizing*, since the writer who depicts a small familiar society as if it were the whole world is challenging conventional ideas about the centre of power by placing London, Edinburgh, or Paris in the margins'.[44] This shifts attention away from an (English) centre-(Celtic) periphery model towards the dynamic interactions and differences between nations and regions, working to 'disrupt', in Kathleen Wilson's elegant formulation, 'the presumed equivalences between "metropolitan" and "national" politics so aggressively asserted by eighteenth-century Londoners and rather uncritically adopted by their historians'.[45] Such attention to a less generalised, more sharply delineated experience pays different dividends in different fields. For Wilson it is the insight that different 'institutional and extra institutional practise forged alternative definitions of political community and citizenship', while for literary studies it affords the opportunity for 'a salutary defamiliarisation of some of the fundamental categories that structure literary history'.[46] Attention to the different and specific cultural and institutional contexts for literary production away from the metropolitan centre turns what might otherwise seem recherché or anachronistic into evidence of distinct and different cultural moments and milieu.

Late eighteenth-century Devon and Cornwall were certainly distinctive amongst the regions of the wider British state. Forming a remote peninsula they nevertheless, in an era dominated by war and the threat of invasion, held a strategic importance that belied their distance from the centre of power. And this was not limited to obvious military assets such as the naval yard at Plymouth Dock. Polwhele spent most of the 1790s looking after small, poor parishes tucked away in a corner of the Lizard peninsula. Yet the headlands of those parishes command the shipping lanes into the crucial western Channel port of Falmouth, and their secluded coves and beaches were a potential front line against French invasion and an actual front line in the efforts of the authorities to combat smuggling. The social, political, and religious infrastructure of Cornwall was unique, at least to England, and as late as the eighteenth century the county existed in a state of 'feudal anarchy' in which clergymen and magistrates such as Polwhele represented the precarious authority of the State.[47] Conversely, eighteenth-century Devon and, in particular, Cornwall count amongst the first significantly industrialised landscapes and economies within Britain and Ireland. Yet even that was in some measure unique since Cornwall had an ambiguous relationship with the instruments of capitalist modernity. The technical innovations associated with Cornish mining were not accompanied by similar innovations in corporate and financial governance, a failing that would in the end prove costly.[48] Indeed the region also experienced some of the nation's earliest post-industrial economies. Polwhele's time in Exeter coincided with the city's transition from an industrial to a service economy; the period when, in a less kind assessment, what had been at the start of the century the fifth largest city in the Kingdom began 'slipping back into the embrace of rural England'.[49] Over the course of a 60-year career Polwhele

responds and testifies to the particularity of his far West Country locations, but he does so as an engagement in broader debates and controversies of the day. From a succession of run-down rectories in South West Cornwall he wrote on religion, education, and reform; produced histories, biographies, and autobiographies; and in his poetry was recurrently and intensely interested in questions of place and of the past, in loyalty and belonging, what he in his most famous poem referred to as the influence of local attachment. Recovering the vitality and complexity of writings simultaneously informed by local pressures and the national scene reveals the contingent nature of what are often still generalised as 'romantic' categories of attitudes, beliefs, and politics. Polwhele is far from unique or uniquely important in this regard.[50] However, by establishing Polwhele as a subject of critical enquiry in these terms this book does more than fill a gap, it reveals, and to some extent re-orientates, the centre of gravity in the archipelagic perspective.

Archipelagic criticism is rooted in the assertion and valuing of specific and previously overlooked identities in the face of an ignorant, neglectful, and at times downright biased mainstream status quo. This can be a fraught activity. In 2001 Murray Pittock identified the vicious circle whereby 'the self-congratulation of elements in a local elite are identified as provincial braggadocio by the metropolitan eye, which as a result sees no reason to alter its own perspectives' leading to 'the prevalence of caricature born either of an exaggerated sense of self-worth or an ignorant desire to dismiss'.[51] Almost more damaging are what he later termed 'facile gestures towards inclusion'.[52] Furthermore, archipelagic approaches share with many revisionist endeavours an understandable tendency to position themselves as a deficit model. It seems at times as if commentators are competing with each other to establish, as the key principle of scholarly interest and method for achieving critical purchase, just how marginalised from the 'Eng Lit' mainstream their field of enquiry has been. Welsh critics identify a disproportionate interest in Irish and Scottish literature at the expense of an interest in the Welsh experience, while Alan Kent notes the exclusion of Cornishness from the alternative canon of Celticism established by Irish, Scottish, and, of course, Welsh criticism.[53] This 'onedownmanship' is not just a feature amongst the Celtic nations. Nicholas Roe welcomes the 'sharper awareness of the decentred energies of Romantic culture' and argues that 'regionalism […] is a key critical dynamic of Romantic studies now', while also implying an overemphasis on the Celtic nations when he suggests that 'canonical marginality and regional cultures are in fact most urgently in need of reassessment within England'.[54] It would be easy to begin a study of Polwhele in similar terms. The West Country as defined by Roe's collection does not stray significantly West of the Tamar. Polwhele does not merit a single mention in Kent's otherwise comprehensive account of the literature of Cornwall, with the result that Humphrey Davy is probably the Cornish poet of the era best known to modern scholarship. However, drawing attention to Polwhele's exclusion from this attempt to create a Cornish tradition is for this book about more than just setting the record straight. Rather it provides a commentary on, and corrective to, aspects of the archipelagic method.