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Afterword: Writing Coteries, Reading Coteries

Reading the essays in this collection is like joining a lively conversation. Members of different scholarly communities with different specialisms – perhaps we could call them coteries? – have gathered here to evaluate the productiveness of the term ‘coterie’ in their particular areas of expertise. Their findings suggest that it may be applied to widely various settings and groupings: family networks; or clusters of writers around a patron or mentor-figure; sets of friends; members of a particular college or legal inn; customers of a particular tavern or coffee-house; or participants in a fashionable salon. Some contributors are suspicious of the word. Mary Ellen Lamb, for instance, finds that although Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke and her son William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke, are often seen as the centres of coteries, the term may obscure the precise dynamics of their interactions with other writers: the tensions in the Countess’s patronage relationships; the extensiveness of the literary intimacies of her son. For Felicity James, on the other hand, importing the word ‘coterie’ to criticism of Romantic literature is a useful way of disrupting conventional models of solitary authorship and foregrounding instead the sociable writing practices of a figure such as Charles Lamb. Christine Gerrard reminds us that no two coteries are the same, and each one has its own particular dynamic; it seems also to be the case that critical usages of the term ‘coterie’ can differ widely. What conclusions can we draw from placing different coteries and different approaches to coteries side by side?

My own interest in coteries mainly arises from the literary activities of two particular seventeenth-century women. Lady Mary Wroth flaunted her family connections on the title page of her published prose romance, the *Urania* of 1621: ‘Written by the right honourable the Lady Mary Wroath. Daughter to the right Noble Robert Earle of Leicester. And Neece to the ever famous, and renowned S<sup>r</sup> Phillips Sidney knight. And to the most exelent Lady Mary

Countesse of Pembroke late deceased'.<sup>1</sup> The full title of the work, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, also announces various kinds of familial coterie credentials: emulation of *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (authored by Wroth's uncle Sir Philip Sidney, dedicated to and published by her aunt, Mary Sidney Herbert); composition in a sociable context; and dedication to a close relation and friend, Susan Vere Herbert, Countess of Montgomery, Wroth's sister-in-law. Either Wroth or her printer or both clearly believed that announcing her affiliation to a group famous for producing and situating their works within an intimate family circle, and thereby making a paradoxically public declaration of the supposedly private nature of her writing, would be a selling point. The reader is invited to gain a glimpse of, and even an imaginary entrée into, the world of the aristocratic and literary Sidney-Herbert family.

As we venture beyond the title page of the *Urania*, this effect is intensified by multiple fictional allusions to events in Wroth's own life and the lives of others known to her. Hints and clues intimate that her fictional characters might be versions of herself and her friends and relations, building on her uncle Philip's insertion into his works of his fictionalised personae Astrophil and Philisides. Stories imbued with implications that those in the know will find hidden depths, veiled allusions to real people and events; and also that these knowing readers will keep their knowledge to themselves, silently recognising encoded truths but not exposing them. Pamphilia, the central heroine, seems to be a fictional persona for Wroth, and in a characteristic layering of narratives she relates the story of Lindamira (Lady Mary?), which in some details resembles the known facts of Wroth's life. Her companion Dorolina judges it 'some thing more exactly related than a fixion', but her 'discretion taught her to be no Inquisitor', modelling Wroth's ideal reader: one who is co-operative and sympathetic reader, and who will participate in the fiction that this fiction is

merely fiction, consenting to Wroth's use of it as a safe space where troubling or controversial real-life events can be addressed.<sup>2</sup>

Thus both the packaging and the content of the *Urania* create what we might call a 'coterie effect', publicly announcing it as a text with levels of private address to *cognoscenti*. However its reception went wrong: Edward, Lord Denny read the work unco-operatively and unsympathetically and objected to Wroth's recognisable fictionalisation of a recent scandal in his family by attacking her in vitriolic letters and verses.<sup>3</sup> It may be that the *Urania* was originally written, like Wroth's uncle Philip's works, for manuscript circulation among family and friends, and that Wroth naively misjudged the response when this relatively private work was released in the more public arena of print. The apparently coterie nature of the *Arcadia* and *Astrophil and Stella*, published safely after their author's death, had been an attraction to readers of the posthumous print editions; but Wroth's deployment of coterie codes was deemed more dangerous not only because she touched on more scandalous matters, but also because her gender made any act of authorship controversial (Denny exhorted her to 'Work oth[er] Workes leave idle bookes alone / For wise and worthy women have writte none').<sup>4</sup> The episode suggests that a coterie may be both a context for textual production and itself a textual construct; that this construction of coterie writing as containing private, secret knowledge may be strategically deployed; and that coterie conventions may be stretched beyond their capacity, or displaced into a hostile setting, and so break down.

The second seventeenth-century woman who has led me to think about the concept of the coterie is Constance Aston Fowler. While still in her mid teens but recently married, this daughter of a Catholic family in Staffordshire compiled a manuscript verse miscellany.<sup>5</sup> It combined work by poets who were miscellany staples in the period, such as Ben Jonson and Henry King, with verses by Constance's family and friends, including her father Walter, Lord

Aston; her brother Herbert, who also supplied her with poems enclosed in letters; and her friend Katherine Thimelby, who became Herbert's wife. Other Astons married other Thimelbys, forming a network of exchange of poems and letters represented not only in Constance's miscellany but also in another compiled by Herbert,<sup>6</sup> and in two print anthologies of their manuscript writings published by a nineteenth-century descendant, Arthur Clifford, and titled by him *Tixall Poetry* and *Tixall Letters* (Tixall was the Aston seat in Staffordshire).<sup>7</sup> They wrote because of their relationships and about their relationships: for instance, Constance copies into her miscellany a poem by Herbert about their sister Gertrude and an exchange of friendship poems between Katherine Thimelby and Lady Dorothy Shirley.<sup>8</sup> Their writings both reflect social bonds and work actively to construct and fashion those bonds.<sup>9</sup>

This group seems in many ways like an archetypal coterie. They participate in typical forms of coterie writing (manuscript circulation, miscellany compilation), coterie conventions (the use of poetic pseudonyms such as Celestina, Castara, and Seraphina), and coterie genres (occasional poems and answer poems, discussed further below). But as I have argued elsewhere, the term 'coterie' can be unhelpful when applied to this group, obscuring important features of their literary activities.<sup>10</sup> For one thing, it can imply isolation and introversion. These have often been assumed to be characteristics of the Aston-Thimelby circle because of their Catholicism and their provincial base at Tixall; yet in fact the Astons were actively connected to court culture, and as Catholics they were part of an established Catholic gentry community in Staffordshire and a network of Catholic families across England (including the Thimelbys, ninety miles away in Lincolnshire). Moreover their faith connected them to international Catholic networks – various Astons and Thimelbys joined the English convents in exile in the Low Countries, or trained overseas as Jesuits – and Lord Aston's two extended periods as an ambassador in Madrid engaged them with Hispanic

culture. Crucially, assumptions that the Astons' interests were inward-looking and mainly domestic led to misidentification of the second scribe of Constance's verse miscellany as her sister Gertrude.<sup>11</sup> As Cedric C. Brown and I have shown, this scribe, who contributed assertively Catholic verses to the miscellany, was in fact Father William Smith (*vere* Southerne), a Jesuit missionary trained at St Omer and Valladolid, an identification which corroborates the Astons' connections to far-reaching Catholic networks.<sup>12</sup> As we understand more about their outward-looking and cosmopolitan affiliations the term 'coterie' comes to seem less appropriate to the Aston-Thimelby circle. And yet it also continues to have some purchase in that much of their writing is conditioned by, and participates in, personal intimacies and shared insider knowledge. Increasingly it seems that the term 'coterie' itself requires re-examination and rethinking, just as the present volume sets out to do.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscript studies form a field where some of the most active and productive use of the term 'coterie' has taken place, and where this term is now coming to be vigorously investigated and even challenged. Jerome De Groot, writing in 2008 about a seventeenth-century manuscript commonplace book owned by Lucy Hutchinson (née Apsley),<sup>13</sup> asserts that it was 'the result of coterie compilation' but quickly acknowledges that this could mean various: 'it is unclear whether the text in the commonplace book is a product of manuscript publication, coterie interaction, or patronage system'. Thinking about the manuscript as a coterie production 'is intriguing for what it can tell us about the various poetic and intellectual nexus points that Hutchinson was connected to at various key stages in her life' but at the same time it demonstrates that 'we still have little understanding of how or, more importantly, why coterie manuscripts were compiled and used'.<sup>14</sup> Over the course of the article De Groot uses the term 'coterie' frequently and somewhat uncritically: the manuscript may situate Hutchinson within a 'domestic coterie', and/or 'Catholic and courtly coteries', and/or an 'educated' coterie 'interested in translation';

there is some overlap with ‘the coterie Great Tew manuscript’; there may be links to a ‘poetic coterie’ around James Shirley and the ‘legal coterie publisher’ William Cooke.<sup>15</sup> There are also possible links to various ‘circles’, both literary and political, but De Groot does not clarify how these may or may not resemble ‘coteries’.<sup>16</sup> He concludes that the manuscript under investigation can be read as evidence of ‘various models of reading and coterie compilation’ and that this uncertainty is salutary because it ‘demonstrates that we need to investigate further the cultural and social relationships suggested by coterie manuscripts in order to appreciate the subtleties of loyalty, self-presentation, and interpersonal relationships during the seventeenth century’.<sup>17</sup>

Elizabeth Clarke, in a fascinating conference paper of 2011 responding to De Groot’s article, thought further about the difficulty of establishing the relationship between a manuscript and a coterie. The contents of a manuscript may lead us to project and even fantasise a particular coterie context; while in the reverse direction, a lack of certainty about the social conditions of production of a manuscript may impede interpretation of its contents.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile Steven W. May and Heather Wolfe have argued that scholars of early modern manuscripts have been unduly attached to the concept of coterie circulation, and that many manuscripts ‘saw such widespread dispersal as to belie any relegation of their texts to coteries’.<sup>19</sup> Developing this theme, Arthur F. Marotti, in a 2014 article on Caroline manuscript verse miscellanies, concludes that ‘It is tempting to say that, in the literate classes of early modern England, everyone knew everyone else’. He quickly adds that ‘this was obviously not the case’,<sup>20</sup> but he is one among many scholars finding it useful to question and disrupt the concept of coterie activity as the primary model for manuscript composition and circulation. Some prefer terms such as ‘circle’ or ‘network’, both of which Mary Ellen Lamb in her essay in the present volume understands as looser and more open than a coterie. Some, drawing on Harold Love’s pioneering work, find it useful to think about scribal or textual

communities. In this essay I will sometimes use the more neutral terms ‘circle’ and ‘textual community’ in order to stand back from the term ‘coterie’ as I seek to re-evaluate it in the light of chapters presented in the volume.

Resistance to the term ‘coterie’ may naturally arise from its sometimes pejorative use, with connotations of elitism, preciosity, introversion, and parochialism. However it can be reclaimed as a more positive term if we think in terms of a group which is select, fashionable, and leading-edge; and in term of a safe space for informality, relaxation, freedom of expression, and literary experiment. Even then, a coterie’s supposed exclusivity and enclosure are almost always found to be less than absolute, and often more notional than real. As shown by many of the examples discussed in the present volume, the theoretical boundary by which a coterie defines itself is frequently transgressed. Members come and go, or communicate with outsiders; texts escape or are released. Literary compositions may originate in a relatively private setting, but then manuscripts can pass from hand to hand, and perhaps also into print, progressively passing further away from their original circumstances and from authorial or coterie control. Coterie writings can therefore be appropriated and manipulated in ways quite different from their intended purposes; and in any case those intentions may be inaccessible to us, or accessible only as back-formations which we construct speculatively from the textual evidence. Yet even if the boundaries of the coterie are almost always permeable and somewhat imaginary, this need not make them irrelevant or insignificant, as long as there is a shared understanding that a group exists on terms that divide insiders from outsiders. Indeed coteries may be defined not only from within, by their own members, but also from outside, by those who react to the perceived existence of a coterie, perhaps by commenting anxiously upon it.

How, then, are coteries typically defined? One key criterion is class. An aura of exclusivity may be based on aristocratic status, as with the Sidney-Herbert circle. It is notable

that their contemporary Shakespeare is never referred to as a coterie author, even though he often wrote in collaboration or competition with fellow playwrights, and even though Francis Meres in 1598 described his ‘sugared sonnets’, not yet in print, as circulating only ‘among his private friends’.<sup>21</sup> There tremendous cultural investment in Shakespeare as a writer for everyone, across classes and across periods; and his writing was for commercial purposes, which are often (but not always) regarded as opposite to coterie writing. However, the class definition of a coterie is not necessarily aristocratic: Marotti observes of seventeenth-century university-based miscellany verse that ‘Professional academics and their students positioned themselves socially – above the class of “town” figures and a servant class, on the one hand, and below powerful aristocrats, government officials, and royalty’.<sup>22</sup> The class identity of a coterie was usually precise and self-conscious, and involved elevation above someone, but not necessarily everyone.

Self-conscious superiority might also take the form of intellectual elitism. When Spenser asserted his affiliation with Sidney’s ‘Areopagus’ (as described by Mary Ellen Lamb in the present volume) this served not only to associate himself with an aristocratic family and to court the patronage of Sidney’s sister, but also to claim membership of an intellectually advanced and innovative group. In their chapters above, Peter Huhne and Abigail Williams (writing on the idealisation of the Scriblerians by the Bloomsbury Group), Hazel Wilkinson (writing on eighteenth-century efforts to confine access to Spenser’s works to a cultural elite), and William Bowers (describing how Holland House attracted not just a particular social set, but also writers eager to use the well stocked library) all discuss coteries defined by intellectual aspiration and exclusivity as well as various forms of class privilege.

A coterie might also be defined by political allegiance, particularly oppositional politics which set the group apart from the establishment or the mainstream. However this could vary widely from conservative to radical, depending on context. Marotti finds that



seventeenth-century verse miscellanies produced in the universities and the Inns of Court were frequently arenas for political critique, while Wilkinson shows how the elite readership of Spenser's works in the eighteenth century was associated with the Whig cause. Bowers finds that the Holland House set of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries promoted liberal reform, but Robert Morrison characterises *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, launched in 1817 and in many ways a coterie-style publication, as 'bellicose High Tory'. Religion could also be a defining cause and source of identity. For the Sidney-Herbert circle, their 'forward' Protestantism was both a religious and a political stance; while the Aston-Thimelby circle were bound together by their Catholicism.

A coterie might also centre on a particular individual, for instance via patronage. Mary Ellen Lamb illuminates the complex mix of mutual dependence and conflicting objectives involved in the network of patron-client relationships around Mary Sidney Herbert: the Countess employed writers to advance her personal literary and cultural interests, they took opportunities to advance their own careers. Samuel Daniel's neo-Senecan tragedy *Cleopatra*, commissioned as a sequel to the Countess's own *Antonius*, offers a striking example of how the interests and wishes of a patron could have a direct effect on the kind of work produced by a client-author. Beyond aristocratic patronage, there were also other ways in which a focal figure could give identity to a coterie and shape its writings. Christopher Burlinson finds that in the universities aspiring young authors clustered around particular tutors and mentors such as Richard Corbett, conventionally addressed as 'Maecenas' figures, who instigated particular kinds of literary exercises and competitions. Later, the 'Hillary' circle discussed by Gerrard orbited around Aaron Hill; while Morrison finds not only William Blackwood himself but also John Wilson to have been catalytic figures in the creation and development of *Blackwood's Magazine*.

Coteries have also frequently been identified by association with a particular place. The Sidney-Herbert circle had centres of activity at Penshurst and Wilton, representing aristocratic, country-house literary production. This developed a tradition established by Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* where the court of Urbino is depicted as an idealised Renaissance cultural community, a place of elegant wit, *sprezzatura*, and civilised philosophising. Behind this again stands Plato's *Symposium*, an originary myth of an informal and urbane social gathering as a fertile site of storytelling, debate, and intellectual innovation. The identification of the Astons with their seat at Tixall also owes something to this after-dinner, country-house model of cultural activity, but was somewhat exaggerated retrospectively by their nineteenth-century descendant and editor Arthur Clifford. When he titled his editions of his ancestors' manuscript writings *Tixall Poetry* and *Tixall Letters* he was partly motivated by his own investment in asserting family roots and property and in capitalising on Romantic fascination with the picturesque ruins of Tixall Old Hall. However many of the Astons were not at Tixall while engaging in their literary exchanges: they either lived at other family houses in the area (Constance lived at Colton while compiling her miscellany), or were abroad (Lord Aston and Herbert in Spain, various Aston and Thimelby women at the English convent in Louvain) – hence the need to send each other letters and poems. Identification of the Astons as 'of Tixall' is to some extent Clifford's later invention, and hence I prefer to refer to them as the Aston-Thimelby circle.

Other coteries were related to other kinds of location: educational establishments, including schools, university colleges, and the Inns of Court; or more open, fluid metropolitan social spaces such as taverns and coffee-houses. Marotti finds correlation between membership of a particular Inn, attendance at a particular tavern, and inclusion in a certain manuscript miscellany; it seems that a miscellany can act as a fossil record of a sociable grouping in a particular location. The writing team for *Blackwood's Magazine* met at

Ambrose's tavern, and mythologised their conversations there in their *Noctes Ambrosianae* (Morrison). Meanwhile Lamb, Coleridge and Hunt moved from early friendships and collaborations at their school, Christ's Hospital, to sociable forms of literary production based at the Salutation and Cat tavern, then at the Feathers (James).

The Holland House salon as described by Bowers is particularly fascinating as a space intermediate between the pastoral separatism of the country house and the metropolitanism of other coterie locations: neither in the City, nor in Westminster, nor in the country, but potentially drawing in guests from all these locations. There are other ways in which Holland House was spatially and topographically complex: looking outwards, its denizens had various international, cosmopolitan connections; looking inwards, different rooms (the dining room, the library) had specific functions in its operation as a social nexus, as Bowers demonstrates. The partitioning of these spaces was not merely physical, but was loaded with symbolic meaning. There could also be tension between desire for access to the physical space and cultural assets of a coterie, and reluctance to be associated with the focal personages of the coterie: Bowers discusses how Leigh Hunt and Jeremy Bentham sought access to the intellectual resources of Holland House, but resisted affiliation to the Hollands.

Not only were the physical locations of coteries freighted with symbolism; often a coterie was an idea as much as a real community in a real place. Despite the importance of place to some coteries, membership might not necessarily depend on physical proximity, but could involve the textual construction of a virtual community. A coterie could be a rhetorical gesture as much as, or perhaps even more than, a social reality; a 'coterie effect' created in writing. An early example of this was Erasmus's circle of humanist scholars: Lisa Jardine has shown how the carefully manipulated publication of their letters and other textual exchanges created a kind of virtual university in print.<sup>23</sup> A century later, miscellanies in both manuscript and print as studied by Marotti constructed textual communities of authors who had not

necessarily met. But even if a group of writers were in close social contact with each other, their intimacy could itself be reinforced and refashioned in writing. The Aston-Thimelby circle not only wrote from and about their social bond, but also strengthened and shaped those bonds by exchanging and preserving each other's writings.<sup>24</sup> In a later period, the medium of the periodical allowed the contributors to *Blackwood's Magazine* to fictionalise and celebrate their own intimacy and conviviality in its pages, and invited readers to imagine themselves members of their virtual club.

Across periods a coterie effect has frequently relied on an essential paradox: the public performance of privacy. Again this textual strategy can be traced back as far as Plato's *Symposium*, where the opening narrative frame offers an account of a private gathering that has been passed from teller to teller, and hence constructs the ensuing text as a precious commodity.<sup>25</sup> Much later, in the age of print, publishers might similarly exaggerate the exclusivity of their materials to suggest that they were releasing into the public domain something previously unavailable. In the Elizabethan period, George Gascoigne's fictional narrative *The Adventures of Master F. J.* (1573) was presented as purloined from manuscripts exchanged between friends, and as exposing scandalous events at a real-life house party. The assertion that this print text originated in the more intimate world of manuscript culture was inherent to its appeal to the purchaser. Soon afterwards, when Mary Sidney Herbert oversaw the posthumous editing and print publication of her brother Philip's manuscript works, her status as a member of his family coterie both bestowed authority on the texts and offered the frisson of access to an elite private space. I mentioned earlier that much of the critical thinking about coteries has taken place in the field of manuscript studies, but numerous examples such as these illustrate that a coterie effect was frequently created in print works which could claim or suggest manuscript origins. Should we consider the Aston-Thimelby circle to be a 'true' coterie because they wrote only in manuscript and only for each other? Or

is the *Urania* in fact a more characteristically coterie text because it involved the public display of supposedly private writing? A coterie effect was often created precisely at the point where a supposed boundary was transgressed, where the previously concealed was made partly visible, and this often occurred at the point where a manuscript work passed into print. Coterie writing typically presented itself as secluded from and elevated above commercial concerns, but paradoxically deployed this anti-commercialism as a marketable feature.

Catharine Gray, in an article on the seventeenth-century poet Katherine Philips, offers a useful phrase for these kind of public performances of textual privacy: she notes that Humphrey Moseley, publisher of a volume to which Philips contributed, presented it in a preface as addressed to ‘an elitist circle of the knowing few – or knowing many’.<sup>26</sup> In the same century, the miscellany verses discussed by Marotti often crossed over into print anthologies which flaunted and simulated their manuscript origins. Over time, other means of creating a coterie effect in print developed: in the eighteenth century, subscription publication positioned texts within a coterie of declared supporters and readers, as examined by Wilkinson; then periodical publication emerged as a means of simulating a sociable insider culture in print, and made this feeling of select membership commercially available to a paradoxically wide readership, as shown by Morrison.

Membership of a coterie could involve various kinds of role-play, including, often, the use of pseudonyms. The Aston-Thimelby circle adopted the names Celestina, Castara, and Seraphina in their poems; Katherine Philips and her friends used the names Orinda, Rosania, Lucasia, and so on; and the Hillarian circle discussed above by Gerrard also used pseudonyms. Such adopted names were means of textualising identities and relationships, and confirmed the insider status of readers who knew and understood who was who. In cases where coterie writings passed into wider manuscript circulation, and even more so in those

cases where they passed into print, this insider knowledge became a desirable feature of the text, an enticing code to be cracked. Wroth's *Urania* is a potent example. Most scholars agree that the hero and heroine, Pamphilia and Amphilanthus, are versions of Wroth herself and her cousin-lover, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke; these characters' family trees within the romance can also be mapped onto the real-life Sidney and Herbert dynasties.<sup>27</sup> Wroth disclaimed any reference to real people as 'strang[e] constructions which are made of my booke contrary to my imagination',<sup>28</sup> but this looks like a defensive gesture after she discovered that print was not as safe a medium for fictionalising real controversies and scandals as she had expected. Her contemporaries evidently enjoyed trying to decipher her code: in 1640 George Manners, seventh Earl of Rutland, sent Wroth a partial key to her characters asking her to confirm and complete it.<sup>29</sup> The *roman à clef* has a natural relationship with coterie writing, and this continued across the centuries, as for example in Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* as discussed by Bowers.

Various other genres are strongly associated with coterie writing. Dedicatory poems and other paratexts often served to construct a virtual community, as in the example of Erasmus's circle as mentioned above, and as in the paratexts of *The Faerie Queene*, where the 'Letter to Raleigh' and the commendatory verses by 'W. R.' (Raleigh again) and 'Hobynoll' (Gabriel Harvey, already known by this pseudonym from *The Shepheardes Calender*) affirm Spenser's key friendships and situate his poem within a sociable intellectual context.<sup>30</sup> Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611) is bookended by a prefatory sequence of poems addressed to eminent ladies, and a closing poem, 'The Description of Cooke-ham', which nostalgically recalls time spent idyllically in pastoral study with two of the prefatory dedicatees, Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland and her daughter Anne, Countess of Dorset.<sup>31</sup> In combination, these paratexts locate Lanyer's long central poem within an idealised female reading community.

Occasional verse, especially memorial elegies, also served to record and/or produce a textual community. In volumes like *Astrophel* and *Lycidas* a cluster of writers gathered to mourn for a particular individual either known to them, or representative of ideals to which they wished to be affiliated. Marotti in his chapter above lists further verse genres frequently found in seventeenth-century miscellanies: ‘the epigram, the love lyric, the love elegy, the verse letter, formal verse satire, the essay, the paradox, and the character’. Several of these are obviously sociable genres; others, such as the love lyric and satire, could be provocative, and so were fostered by the relative freedom of coterie writing. For such genres the relatively restricted circulation of manuscripts was an advantage over print, and enabled risk-taking. For the same reason manuscripts circulated among co-religionists were an important place for the composition and preservation of Catholic devotional verses.

Answer-poems are among the sociable genres which feature often in coterie writing. There are examples not only in the male-authored, homosocial, university-based and metropolitan miscellany verses discussed by Marotti, but also in the mixed-gender circles of the Aston-Thimelbys and of Katherine Philips. Aston-Thimelby examples include exchanges between Katherine Thimelby and her friend Lady Dorothy Shirley (‘upon the L[ady] D[orothy] saying K[atherine] T[himelby] could be sad in her company’, ‘The L[ady] D[orothy’s] ansure’),<sup>32</sup> and between Edward Thimelby and his sister-in-law Gertrude Aston Thimelby (‘Self-love mentayned, to the faire self-denyer, my sister, Th[imelby]’; ‘To Mr E[dward] T[himelby], who holds selfe-love in all our actions’).<sup>33</sup> The poetic dialogues of the Philips circle prompt from Gray an evocative description of ‘the antiphonal nature of coterie poetry, the call and response’ which applies equally well to other groups.<sup>34</sup> Dialogic composition occurs in later periods too: in James’s example of Charles Lamb’s reworking of Coleridge’s ‘Monody on Chatterton’ as ‘To Sara and Her Samuel’, adaptation of a single

poem forms an answering voice from an interlocutor, and also produces a poem which is in itself a celebration of friendship as a source of inspiration.

Call and response could also take the form of friendly or not so friendly competition. The pastoral narratives of Philip Sidney and Mary Wroth included eclogues, verse competitions between shepherds and shepherdesses which played with different personae and voices in their coteries. William Herbert's competitive exchanges with poets including Benjamin Rudyerd and George Herbert are discussed above by Mary Ellen Lamb, while Burlinson and Marotti show how at university formal competitions and less formal rivalries were contexts for poetic composition. Continuing into later centuries, Gerrard demonstrates that rivalry – social and sexual as well as literary – between Martha Fowke Sansom and Eliza Haywood was an important dynamic in the Hillarian circle, while Morrison charts both the internal competitiveness between *Blackwood's* contributors and their rivalry with other groups, with Blackwood denigrating Hunt's circle as 'that vile Cockney coterie'. Coterie writing could involve not only contexts of friendship and community, but also various forms of tension and aggression both within the group and looking outwards.

As suggested by some of these intra- and inter-coterie tensions, gender was often a factor in the self-definition and operation of a coterie, but functioned in a range of ways in different cases. The college and Inns of Court coteries studied by Marotti and Burlinson were decidedly male, a culture of aspiring young men and their older mentors, but other coteries fostered participation in cultural production by women. Among the Aston-Thimelbys poems and letters circulated only in manuscript, creating a safe, decorous space in which women's writing was accepted. However women were also active in other coteries which played on the borderline between the relative privacy of manuscript circulation and the publicity of print. For women of the Sidney-Herbert circle and for Katherine Philips' Society of Friendship the fiction of a private, manuscript-based coterie, even when presented in print, created a space



where women's writing was legitimised. Later in the Hillarian circle women were at least as active and prominent as men, creating what Gerrard calls 'heterosociality'. Gerrard offers a fascinating analysis of the sexual tensions and rivalries in the Hillarian group, and to some extent these were prefigured among the Sidney-Herberts, the Aston-Thimelbys, and the Philips circle, each of which also contained and was shaped by complex and distinctive dynamics of friendship, desire, and rivalry, both hetero- and homo-. The precise co-ordinates are particular to each case, but it seems that coterie writing often involves various forms of emotional intensity.

Mary Sidney Herbert had an important role as a patron as well as an author. In the eighteenth century the Bluestocking circle was a striking example of a coterie that was predominantly female, and here too the cultural participation of leading figures such as Elizabeth Montagu took the form of patronage as much as authorship. Later again, Lady Holland role primarily a patron, not an author herself. As I have argued elsewhere, coterie culture can help us to think beyond individual authorship to consider other forms of cultural participation and literary production, especially by women. These might include acting as the inspiration, subject-matter, and addressee of texts, and can include further activities too. I have been particularly interested in Constance Aston Fowler, who may not have written any poems herself, but had a pivotal role as a kind of literary agent, collecting, exchanging, and recording the poems of others.<sup>35</sup> Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger have described her as a 'voucher', someone who by receiving, evaluating, and transmitting poems acted as an arbiter of taste and literary value in her circle.<sup>36</sup> Thinking about coterie culture can help us to appreciate the extent of cultural participation by women, which might include reading, critiquing, collecting, selecting, transcribing, editing, juxtaposing, endorsing, and exchanging texts. Some other recent work on early modern women's cultural participation might be particularly relevant to coterie contexts: this includes Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson's

coinage of the term ‘deviser’ for the creative role of women such as Lady Elizabeth Russell and Lady Anne Clifford in commissioning and designing artistic works executed by the hands of others;<sup>37</sup> and Julie Crawford’s use of the term ‘mediatrix’ for the integral roles of four aristocratic women – Mary Sidney Herbert; Lady Margaret Hoby; Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford; and Lady Mary Wroth – in the literary production and political activism of their particular but overlapping circles. Borrowing the term from a reference by John Donne to Lucy Harington Russell, Crawford defines a mediatrix as ‘politically and culturally powerful, but with an edge of oppositionism; at once a patron to be honoured and a force to be reckoned with; a maker of texts and a maker of careers’. She notes that her work builds on ‘work on coterie and communal manuscript literary production’ which ‘has revealed the startling range of women’s literary practices’.<sup>38</sup>

How useful or meaningful is it to compare the coterie activities of sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century women with those of, say, Lady Holland in the nineteenth? This question is of course implicit in the range and structure of the present volume. Thinking beyond gender to coterie in general, how far can we trace continuities and similarities across periods? Several of the contributors to the present volume insist on the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of each particular coterie, and there might appear to be quite a gulf between aristocratic country house culture of the sixteenth century and metropolitan periodical cultures of the early nineteenth century. Even so, as some of the connections that I have traced above have suggested, it might be possible to chart an evolutionary sequence from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scribal and print communities, via taverns, coffee-houses, and salons, to various forms of textual community and sociable authorship in the Romantic period. Such thinking across periods is encouraged by the retrospective gestures made by various coterie discussed here to their predecessors. Gerrard quotes Benjamin Victor on the Hillarian gatherings: ‘How like those scenes we read in our youthful days in Sir Philip

Sidney's pastoral romance!<sup>39</sup> Gerrard points out that this is a nostalgic idealisation not just of the turbulent social relationships depicted in Sidney's *Arcadia*, but also of the Hillarian circle itself, but this is part of the point: coteries are frequently self-mythologising, and such self-mythologisation frequently involves identification with an earlier coterie idealistically recalled. Similarly for the Bloomsbury Group, as discussed by Huhne and Williams, revisiting the Scriblerians was a means of constructing themselves as a circle similarly defined by what they understood to be 'shared interests and tastes, exclusivity and friendship'. It was also a means of distinguishing themselves from the previous generation, who dismissed the eighteenth century as arid and dull; and of seeking to preserve exclusivity in reaction to fears about mass access to literature. Yet all of this, as Huhne and Williams demonstrate, depended upon fantasising a stronger unity and identity for the Scriblerians than actually existed, and ironically overlooked the extent to which the Scriblerians felt themselves to be living in an age of the commercialisation and vulgarisation of literature. In further examples, James finds that Charles Lamb looked back to the culture of seventeenth-century Christ Church as it was perceived from his own Romantic perspective; while according to Bowers not only did Lady Holland see herself as reviving the social set of Addison, a former resident of Holland House, but also the Holland House set itself went on to be mythologised by its twentieth-century descendants.

In conclusion, some general observations can be made about literary coteries over the period 1580-1830 and their cultural role. Coteries, as understood by the contributors to this volume, were groups who defined themselves or were defined by others as in some way different or distinctive, and for whom that sense of difference and of a collective identity was productive of literary activity. Such definition of a collective identity involved a notional boundary between insiders and outsiders, though this was often more performative or conceptual than real. Coteries were often both fertile sites of literary production, and

influential sites of literary and cultural criticism and taste-formation. In self-consciously setting themselves apart from the cultural mainstream, they were often *avant garde*, consciously striving to innovate and to define a separatist identity. This could sometimes include, paradoxically, connections to cosmopolitan and even international networks (as for the Aston-Thimelby circle and the Holland House set). *Coterie* culture involved complex relations between exclusion and exclusivity, and frequently involved converting supposed isolation, protection, and privacy into the allure of privilege, *cachet*, and secret knowledge to be deciphered.

Overall, the essays gathered here amply demonstrate that the term ‘*coterie*’, while it undoubtedly incurs potential hazards, is not ready to be discarded. It is precisely because the concept of the *coterie* is currently undergoing vigorous testing and investigation that it continues to be productive, and can help us to think more deeply about a number of issues concerning the social contexts and processes of literary production. As long as we continue to deploy the term ‘*coterie*’ critically, precisely, and with rigorous self-consciousness, it will continue to help move forward our understanding of communal forms of literary production and cultural participation from the Elizabethan to the Romantic period, and perhaps also beyond.

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<sup>1</sup> Lady Mary Wroth, *The Countesse of Mountgomerie's Urania* (London, 1621), title page.

<sup>2</sup> Wroth, *Urania*, 429/3H2r; and see Helen Hackett, 'Lady Mary Sidney Wroth: *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Sidneys, 1500-1700, vol. 2: Literature*, ed. Margaret P. Hannay, Mary Ellen Lamb, and Michael G. Brennan (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 135-7.

<sup>3</sup> Lady Mary Wroth, *Poems*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 32-3, 238-9; and see Margaret P. Hannay, *Mary Sidney, Lady Wroth* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 234-42.

<sup>4</sup> Wroth, *Poems*, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Constance Aston Fowler (compiler), verse miscellany, Huntington Library Manuscript HM 904 (c. 1635-40); and see Deborah Aldrich-Watson, ed., *The Verse Miscellany of Constance Aston Fowler: A Diplomatic Edition* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies/Renaissance English Text Society, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Aston (compiler), verse miscellany, Beinecke Library, Yale University, Osborn MS B4 (c. 1634-50).

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Clifford, ed., *Tixall Poetry* (Edinburgh, 1813); *Tixall Letters: Or, the Correspondence of the Aston Family, and Their Friends, During the Seventeenth Century*, 2 vols (London, 1815).

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<sup>8</sup> Fowler, HM 904, 155r-159r; Aldrich-Watson, *Verse Miscellany*, 128-34.

<sup>9</sup> See Helen Hackett, 'Sisterhood and Female Friendship in Constance Aston Fowler's Verse Miscellany', in *Early Modern Women and the Poem*, ed. Susan Wiseman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 131-46.

<sup>10</sup> Helen Hackett, 'Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks in Seventeenth-Century England: New Research on Constance Aston Fowler's Miscellany of Sacred and Secular Verse', *Renaissance Quarterly* 65.4 (2012): 1094-1124; 'The Aston-Thimelby Circle at Home and Abroad: Localism, National Identity, and Internationalism in the English Catholic Community', in *Region, Religion and English Renaissance Literature*, ed. David Coleman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 123-38.

<sup>11</sup> Aldrich-Watson, *Verse Miscellany*, xxxii-xxxiv, lxi-lxii.

<sup>12</sup> Helen Hackett, 'Unlocking the Mysteries of Constance Aston Fowler's Verse Miscellany (Huntington Library MS HM 904): The Hand B Scribe Identified', in *Manuscript Miscellanies in Early Modern England*, ed. Joshua Eckhardt and Daniel Starza Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 91-112; Cedric C. Brown, 'William Smith, Vere Southerne, Jesuit Missioner, and Three Linked Manuscript Miscellanies', in *Manuscript Miscellanies*, ed. Eckhardt and Starza Smith, 113-32.

<sup>13</sup> Lucy Hutchinson (née Apsley) (compiler), commonplace book, Hutchinson MSS DD/HU, 1, Nottinghamshire Record Office.

<sup>14</sup> Jerome De Groot, 'John Denham and Lucy Hutchinson's Commonplace Book', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 48.1 (Winter 2008), 148.

<sup>15</sup> De Groot, 'John Denham', 150, 151, 152, 153, 160.

<sup>16</sup> De Groot, 'John Denham', 152, 153, 154, 155.

<sup>17</sup> De Groot, 'John Denham', 160.

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- <sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Clarke, 'What's in a Name? Lucy Hutchinson's Religious and Non-religious Commonplace-books' (paper presented at *Early Modern Female Miscellanies and Commonplace Books* symposium, University of Warwick, July 22, 2011).
- <sup>19</sup> Steven W. May and Heather Wolfe, 'Manuscripts in Tudor England', in *A Companion To Tudor Literature*, ed. Kent Cartwright (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 132.
- <sup>20</sup> Arthur F. Marotti, "'Rolling Archetypes": Christ Church, Oxford Poetry Collections, and the Proliferation of Manuscript Verse Anthologies in Caroline England', *English Literary Renaissance* 44.3 (Autumn 2014): 509.
- <sup>21</sup> Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia. Wits Treasury* (1598), quoted in William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016), A22.
- <sup>22</sup> Marotti, 'Rolling Archetypes', 506-07.
- <sup>23</sup> Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- <sup>24</sup> Hackett, 'Sisterhood and Female Friendship'.
- <sup>25</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, *Internet Classics Archive*, accessed December 31, 2015, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/symposium.html>.
- <sup>26</sup> Catharine Gray, 'Katherine Philips and the Post-Courtly Coterie', *English Literary Renaissance* 32.3, *Renaissance Poetics* (Autumn 2002): 432.
- <sup>27</sup> Lady Mary Wroth, *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), lxxi–xcviii.
- <sup>28</sup> Wroth, *Poems*, 236.
- <sup>29</sup> Wroth, *Poems*, 29, 244–5.

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- <sup>30</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 714-25.
- <sup>31</sup> Aemilia Lanyer, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, ed. Susanne Woods (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-47.
- <sup>32</sup> Fowler, verse miscellany, 158r-9r; Aldrich-Watson, *Verse Miscellany*, 132-4.
- <sup>33</sup> Clifford, *Tixall Poetry*, 45-51, 90-2.
- <sup>34</sup> Gray, 'Katherine Philips', 442.
- <sup>35</sup> Hackett, 'Women and Catholic Manuscript Networks'; 'Sisterhood and Female Friendship'.
- <sup>36</sup> Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger, *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625-1725* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 33-4.
- <sup>37</sup> Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson, 'Elizabeth I's Reception at Bisham (1592): Elite Women as Writers and Devisers', in *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (Oxford, 2007), 207-26.
- <sup>38</sup> Julie Crawford, *Mediatrice: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-3.
- <sup>39</sup> Benjamin Victor, *Original Letters, Dramatic Pieces, and Poems*, 3 vols (London, 1776), I:68.