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DOMESTICATING ANTIQUARIANISM AND DEVELOPING AN ENGLISH NATIONAL TALE

The Early Historical Romances of Anna Eliza Bray

Diane Duffy



ANNA ELIZA BRAY was born in 1790 in Newington, Surrey, and began her writing career in 1820 with the publication of a French travelogue.¹ However, I argue in this article that it was not until she remarried and moved to a vicarage on the margins of English society, in Tavistock, Devon, that she could actively pursue her interests as an historian and antiquarian. In addition, I explore how Devon provided Bray with a secure space from which to write, and contend that her regional romances, begun in 1828, provided her with a genre and subject matter through which she could produce a far more politically engaged work: an English national tale. For reasons of space, in this article I focus mainly on the first of Bray's local romances which was published before the end of 1830.

Bray was a prolific writer, publishing two travelogues, a memoir of her first husband, fourteen historical romances and a topographical study of western Dartmoor compiled from her letters to Robert Southey. Many of her volumes ran to two or more editions, and all of this within a period of thirty years. Yet despite her attempts to maintain a literary legacy (she left five hundred pounds in her will to cover the publication of her autobiography and the republication of her collected tales and romances), she is chiefly remembered today for her study of Dartmoor and her novel *The Protestant* (1828)—the former because of its connection with Southey, the latter because of critical responses to the novel that denounced her 'cruel and unfeminine disposition, labouring to incite the Protestants to persecute, and if possible to burn the Roman Catholics'.² Such responses highlight the problems Bray encountered as a woman writer when trying to find a space from which to compose a form of political history that included antiquarian studies and topography, all male-dominated disciplines in this period. This emphasis on unfeminine behaviour caused Bray much anxiety as she too explicitly connected political engagement with masculinity: 'I never liked what is called a *political lady*; and never, I trust, deserve a character so masculine or out of place'.³

For a woman who wished to stress her compliance with accepted conventions of female behaviour, her venture into these masculine preserves may seem odd particularly because, as Mary Poovey has noted, there are tensions between the self-effacement of a 'Proper Lady', an image which Bray courted publicly, and the self-advertisement of a published woman writer, particularly one who chose to enter the fields of antiquarianism and professional history.⁴ As Rosemary Sweet

shows, antiquarian research was traditionally a male discipline because the Society of Antiquaries required records to be academic in their presentation, supported by 'evidential proof. Proper referencing and citation of authorities was crucial'.⁵ Bray was acutely aware of that dichotomy, even though an epistemological shift towards the recording of social as well as military and political history had given women, including Bray, an opportunity to write in those male-dominated genres. However, although an opportunity to gain access to this traditionally male preserve had opened up, Bray still needed to find a secure space from which to write her histories; a space from within which she could, as Poovey argues, create 'an expressive self within the behavioural confines of the self-effacing Proper Lady'.⁶ That space was initially her own family, as the domestic sphere was traditionally a place from which and about which a woman could write without fear of transgression.

Bray was lucky as all her immediate family had a keen interest in antiquarianism: her brother, Alfred Kempe, was an antiquarian and wrote for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, her first husband was an architectural artist and a member of the Royal Society of Antiquaries, and her second husband was also an amateur antiquarian. Thus, Bray was both educated and encouraged in the subject of antiquarianism from within the domestic space, and therefore could use her family as a final defence against any charge of transgressive behaviour: she could have argued that she was merely drawing on their knowledge rather than flaunting her own. In a letter dated 14 August 1814, written while on a visit with her mother to Arundel and Bignor, Bray describes to her father (who remained at home) the different architectural styles she recognises, even adding personal comments on the success of their execution: 'The habitable part is *modern Gothic*, [...] but the imitations of Norman Gothic arches and ornaments in the courtyard, are well executed'.⁷ Moreover she is extremely critical of the information available to visitors: 'A woman, who performed the office of guide, could not answer a single question [...] and on asking for Mr. Stothard's painted window, we were shown a frightful one by Hamilton—the former they had never heard of, the guide said' (*Memoirs*, 137–38). Considering the nature and depth of Bray's knowledge, it is fair to assume that her questions would be searching and technical. But it is towards the end of this letter that her role as a practising antiquarian is manifested. She describes her attempts to gain access to the Roman pavement at Bignor. The portrayal is typical of Bray's letter writing, displaying a sense of the comic while simultaneously revealing a desire to be taken seriously. She explains that the guide:

stuck as close to me as if she suspected I could carry off a pavement in my pocket: but she need not have feared; for although I did not scruple to purloin a broken fragment of pottery, I have too deep a veneration for these magnificent and ancient remains, to steal the smallest piece of tesara that helps to compose them. She would not let me walk upon any of the pavements for the purpose of examination, although, to awe her severity, I thundered in her ears the name of Mr. Lysons, who is dame Tupper's Bignor king. The name had some effect; and she suffered me to crawl upon hands and knees under

the railing on to the pavement. In this way I made my remarks; and crawling off again, deeply engaged in my subject. (*Memoirs*, 146–47)

Here Bray is displaying an authoritative discourse and knowledge more usually apparent in men.

At the time of writing these were private letters confined to the domestic sphere with, at that point, no expectation of their appearance in the public domain. It is interesting, however, that Bray selected these letters to be included within the memoirs of her late husband, Charles Stothard, published in 1823—the year following his death, her marriage to Edward Bray and her move from London to Devon. Away from the political centre and in the security of a second marriage, Bray clearly felt able to reveal her credentials as an authoritative antiquarian, particularly as the text was presented through the framework of family letters.

Perhaps the most convincing evidence in support of the argument that Bray needed a more remote and secluded space from which to write than London, may be seen in her inability to settle to any form of extended composition during the period of her marriage to Stothard. In 1819, a year after her first marriage, she attempted a novel set at the court of Gaston de Foix, which would reflect the customs and traditions of the chivalric age. Bray includes in the *Memoirs* a number of letters showing the extent of Stothard's help with matters concerning the styles and dress codes of the period: 'The wives and daughters of knights, not possessing property to the value of two hundred marks a-year, were restricted from using linings of *ermine*, or *letice esclaires*, or any kinds of precious stones, unless it be on their heads.' (*Memoirs*, 332) Yet despite his input, encouragement and advice, Bray did not finish the novel until December 1825, over three years after Stothard's death, and only after her move to the vicarage in Tavistock. John Kempe, Bray's great nephew, literary executor and the editor of her *Autobiography*, creates the impression that life at the vicarage was quiet and calm, a retreat from the world and an ideal geographical space because of its seclusion: 'what a picture of tranquil life in that snug parsonage is conjured up' (*Autobiography*, 27). And yet that seclusion could, as Kempe seems to suggest, also mean isolation from the realities of life. However, this atmosphere of easy domesticity suited Bray, for she held a position of social respectability as the wife of an Anglican clergyman, and therefore must have been even more acutely aware of how such a role forced her to maintain a public image commensurate with Mary Poovey's 'proper lady'.⁸ If the first way in which Bray managed to avoid transgressing the boundaries of acceptable feminine behaviour was by presenting her learning within a domestic framework, then the second was by buying into emerging antiquarian interest in social and cultural rather than political history—and by political history, I mean state politics.

State politics, commerce and military exploits all comprised a male version of national history with which women who wished to be considered culturally conventional, such as Bray, could not allow themselves to be associated. However, the turn of the nineteenth century witnessed what Greg Kucich calls a shift in the 'basic epistemological structures of history', privileging 'the new history of social

and affective life'.⁹ Different reasons have been suggested for this shift. Kucich contends that it resulted from the growth of commerce, while Deirdre Lynch attributes it to the French Revolution, which caused relations between the public and private spheres to be 'reconsidered and sometimes renegotiated'.¹⁰ Whatever the reason, or reasons, for this change, the fact remained that by writing within the framework of domestic experience, women could become not just readers of history, but writers, while remaining within the boundaries of acceptable gender codes. Ina Ferris explains how antiquarians often documented a very different kind of historical record, including 'unofficial historical memory [...] song, legend, joke, family tradition [...] letter, tracts, pamphlets and private memoirs'.¹¹ Such material allowed for the construction of alternative histories; and it was the private face of public history that interested Bray. This interest is reflected in the subtitle of her first historical romance, *De Foix or, Sketches of the Manners and Customs of the Fourteenth Century*, published by Longman in 1826.

Thus, Bray had found a temporal space from which to write: a period in her own lifetime when historical writing was moving towards a union of state and domestic politics. However, the early nineteenth century saw further developments in the field of historical writing, in the form of historical fiction.¹² In his introduction to *Queenhoo-Hall* (1808), Joseph Strutt explains the potential for blending history with fiction, emphasising that such a mixture provides much useful instruction, imperceptibly, to the minds of such readers as are disgusted at the dryness usually concomitant with the labours of the antiquary, and present to them a lively and pleasing representation of the manners and amusements of our forefathers.¹³

Walter Scott completed this text after Strutt's death and, recognising the advantages of presenting history through the medium of fiction, set about writing *Waverley* (1814).

By 1824, then, when she began her first historical romance, Bray had acquired geographical, temporal and generic spaces in which to write. Moreover, the publication of Scott's novels had, as Gary Kelly notes, raised the status of romance to make it 'worthy to enter the emergent institution of "national literature"'.¹⁴ Particularly after the Union with Ireland Act of 1800, there was a rise in the publication of so-called national literature. Maria Edgeworth published *Castle Rackrent* (1800) to coincide with the Act of Union, as she wished to create a record of Irish national character before Ireland, like Scotland, became united with Great Britain. As Edgeworth notes, in this changing modern world, '[n]ations as well as individuals, gradually lose attachment to their identity and the present generation is amused, rather than offended, by the ridicule that is thrown upon its ancestors'.¹⁵ Michael Gamer argues that Scott had a similar agenda when publishing *The Border Ballads* (1802) which, he asserts, were 'antiquarian attempts to reconstruct a local history of the Scottish Border', a way of memorialising a region's history before it became submersed in a larger, all-encompassing identity: Great Britain.¹⁶ Progress, modernisation and change, are cultural conditions which both Edgeworth and Scott

viewed as inevitable, although the desire to preserve a nation's identity suggests regret at the losses union would ultimately mean.

While much has been written about the Irish and Scottish national tale, little mention has been made of a corresponding English national tale, mainly because of England's position as the dominant nation and the centre of government for the newly created United Kingdom. Nevertheless, such a position generally meant that England became synonymous with Britain, a position which is often still apparent today. By 1826, Bray was acutely aware of the potential loss or attenuation of English identity, perhaps more so because of her brother's close connections with the *Gentleman's Magazine*, a publication which Michael Gamer notes highlighted connections between antiquarian traditions and national identity, convincing 'readers that their own local ruins, traditions, and records could validate, revise, or disprove received notions of Britain's origins and identity'.¹⁷

In her first regional romance, *Fitz of Fitz-ford* (1830), she echoes Edgeworth on the nature of modernisation, but unlike Edgeworth she does not see England's progress into the modern world as either positive or desirable:

Change seems to be the order of everything in this world. And, in spite of all the boasted refinements and improvements of the present age, it is much to be questioned if [...] we have not considerably degenerated from our ancestors. (*Autobiography*, 207)

Thus, Bray embarked on a documentation of English customs and traditions which, she notes, began to decline 'within the walls and about the precincts of the great metropolis' as early as the reign of Elizabeth I, before sweeping 'through all the counties of England'.¹⁸ Katie Trumpener has argued that the 'lasting sense of historical rupture caused by the political and religious developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' prompted antiquarians to begin documenting aspects of English customs, material culture and landscape.¹⁹ Similarly Bray saw the birth of a new Britain as the potential end of 'Old England', 'the England of Elizabeth', as Krishan Kumar describes it, which for Bray appears to epitomise everything English. It is, therefore, not surprising that the first of her novels to document the customs and traditions of Old England should be set in the reign of Elizabeth I.²⁰

Situating Bray's work within the framework of national politics and national literature, however, places her in a position at odds with her desire to be viewed as a modest woman, a 'proper lady'. We can see from her work that she found ways of re-inscribing her work within a feminine and domestic framework. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Edmund Burke had unequivocally presented state politics in familial terms:

we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections, keeping inseparable, and cherishing with warmth [...] our state, our hearths, our sepulchres and our altars.²¹

When Bray began *Fitz-ford* in 1826 she was eager to stress the domestic nature of her work. In her *Autobiography*, she states how her first local romance comprised

‘real family history which, having already been made the theme of tradition, might be employed without impropriety as the foundation of a tale’ (p. 207). Bray’s use of the word ‘impropriety’ indicates that she believed local traditions and family history to be acceptable subject matter for a woman writer.

Moreover, the setting for these romances was her own area, the south west of England, at some distance from traditional centres of power. Home is a particularly important and conflicted concept here, linking location or place with domestic space: home can also denote homeland. Ina Ferris notes how nineteenth-century English reviewers associated the Irish writers Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) and Charles Maturin ‘with foreign rather than domestic genres’.²² Thus the dual signification of the term ‘home’ as both a national and domestic space makes it easier to discuss national politics through a medium that appears to be dissociated from the public sphere.²³ Likewise, as the new nation is Britain, not England, Bray’s decision to confine herself to a representative region of England, as well as to the Tudor past, would twice remove her work from obvious associations with contemporary national politics, for, as Raphael Samuel observes, England is less political a term than Britain:

England [...] conjured up images of rusticity, chronicles of ancient sunlight. ‘English’ is smaller and gentler than ‘British’, and it has the charm for the historian of the antiquated and the out of date. British was an altogether more uncomfortable term. [...] Its associations are diplomatic and military rather than literary, imperial rather than—or as well as—domestic.²⁴

In this context, the term domestic therefore becomes increasingly significant, for, as Trumpener argues, ‘[f]rom *Waverley* onwards, the historical novel describes how war divides loyalties and rends domestic harmony’, a sentiment echoed by Bray in *Courtenay of Walreddon* (1842), and one which she often uses to justify her involvement with state politics and antiquarianism: ‘The great occurrences of the civil wars have become subjects for history, for history I leave them [...] It is a domestic tale that I propose to write’, and in these romances domestic once more takes on a very personal significance.²⁵ To inscribe her work more securely into the private rather than public sphere Bray sought to blend ‘description[s] of local beauty [with] interesting objects from my own personal knowledge and investigation’.²⁶ Not only did she obtain information in the form of oral history from her mother-in-law who knew all the local families, their history and legends, and from her husband’s own antiquarian research in the locality, she also visited all the sites described in her romances. In her introduction to *Warleigh* (1834), Bray describes her stay with William Radcliffe and his wife, whose estate the Brays visited during the summer of 1830, and where she was able to make detailed observations on the house and grounds. At Warleigh House, she gained access to private documents kept by William Radcliffe’s uncle, who was ‘somewhat of an antiquary [...] a careful preserver of all the old family deeds, leases, letters, records, etc.’²⁷ These documents constitute the public face of history, but Bray blends them with alternative histories, personal stories pieced together from family letters,

journals and 'traditional lore' (*Warleigh*, 7). Similar records were made available to her by Lady Trelawny at Trelawne House in Cornwall, where she stayed with her husband in November 1833 while researching *Trelawny of Trelawne* (1837).

The landscape of Devon and Cornwall is rich in history and tradition, as its position on the geographical margins of Great Britain meant that modernisation came late, and that it was therefore was one of the last regions to lose its traditions and customs, thereby providing Bray with a wealth of material for her stories. In her introduction to *Warleigh* she explains:

There is no county, perhaps, in England that abounds more in the traditions of old times and families than that of Devon. These, however, are fast falling into oblivion. The rising generation, who, commonly speaking, are eager to follow in the march of intellect, smile at the legends of their grandmothers; and the elders themselves, who are mostly the living depositories of this kind of lore, gradually sink into their graves; and, with them, too often dies a fund of information which has no written record [...] (pp. 1–2)

Here, Bray is explicitly revealing her conservative, and conservational, agenda, but the written records that she preserves are largely feminised ones: letters and diaries which reveal 'the most hidden feelings, the most secret thoughts and actions of the writers [...] never intended for any other purpose than the silent contemplation of their own minds', personal chronicles of an English way of life and national character (p. 3). Although, as Gerald Newman notes, national character was a 'manufactured national ideal', countless attempts have been made to define it.²⁸ Newman believes that English national character comprises five specific qualities: innocence, honesty, originality, frankness, and moral self-reliance, Claudia Johnson, however, sees it exemplified by Jane Austen's George Knightley. Johnson maintains that the name 'Knightley' serves as a symbol of England's king, its patron saint and the chivalric ideals of courtly behaviour espoused by Edmund Burke, whose philosophy influenced Bray's writings.²⁹ Thus, Bray's romances contain a moral element which links them to earlier didactic fiction popularised by women writers.³⁰

Although Bray was a great admirer of Scott, and it is possible to note many similarities in the two writers' approaches to historical fiction, there are also significant differences. The first edition of Scott's *Guy Mannering* (1815) was written without any introductory notes; a preface was added later in 1829, probably in answer to his readers' constant speculation concerning the geographical locations and characters in the novel. In this 'Additional Note', with its capitalised subheading 'GALWEGIAN LOCALITIES AND PERSONAGES WHICH HAVE BEEN SUPPOSED TO BE ALLUDED TO IN THE NOVEL', Scott adds impact to the word 'supposed' and stresses the irony of his later comments: 'He must, however, regard it as a great compliment that, in detailing incidents purely imaginary, he has been fortunate in approximating reality as to remind his readers of actual occurrences.'³¹ As a male author writing history, Scott had less need to assert his credentials as either an historian or an antiquarian. Bray is much more committed to historical accuracy

than Scott, for as a woman writer she felt the need to establish an authoritative persona through which to narrate her history. She achieves this by adding prefaces, footnotes and endnotes to her work. In the footnotes, she meticulously references all her sources, usually from male-authored histories, while her endnotes explain where, in the pursuit of her romance narrative, she has made alterations to the source material, or how local traditions digress from documented history. Thus, Bray's romance narrative is framed by the voice of an antiquarian/historian that brings an authoritative weight to her writing.

The material for *Fitz-ford* was taken from the Revd John Prince's *Worthies of Devon* (first published 1810). Here, Prince documents the story of Sir John Fitz, an astrologer who discovers that his son's birth is about to take place under inauspicious signs. Unable to delay the birth 'he declared that the child would come to an unhappy end, and undo his family. And it fell out accordingly'. The son, also named John Fitz, first slew 'Sir Nicholas Slanning, of this county, knight, and after that one or two more, he fell upon his own sword and destroyed himself' (*FF*, 412). This story is interwoven with the fate of another local worthy, Judge Glanville who, according to Prince, sentenced his own daughter to death for the murder of her husband and Lady Howard:

famed in her life-time for some great offence, was now nightly doomed to a fearful penance, to follow her hound that was compelled to run from Fitz-ford to Oakhampton Park, between midnight and cock-crowing, and to return with a single blade of grass in its mouth.
(p. 6)

In her endnotes to *Fitz-ford*, Bray is quick to dissociate herself from aspects of tradition that she views as fanciful, stating that 'all I knew of her was, that she bore the reputation of being hard hearted in her lifetime', and offering some explanation as to how the legend of the hound might be founded on fact. She tells how the Duke of Bedford's hounds were housed in what remained of the Fitz-ford estate: it is, therefore, nothing improbable, that one of them might have slipped the kennel, and ran out as the church clock struck twelve, and so personated, in the eyes of imagination, the terrific spectre of the old tale. (p. 410)

These tales, however, provide a sound basis from which to weave a story of jealousy, love, revenge and religious tension during the reign of Elizabeth I.

While these legends are interesting in themselves, it is Bray's long-running attempt to preserve the records, customs, landscape and material culture of Devon that I wish to discuss in more detail here. Both Scott's *Guy Mannering* and Bray's *Fitz-ford* begin with a traveller who is able to observe and comment with a stranger's eye on the landscape and customs of the region he is visiting. In both cases the travellers are male. Ina Ferris notes that writers adopt this technique in the Irish national tale to create a sense of estrangement, a way of writing against Irish Tour narratives in which the traveller moved abroad and reported his observations in the dominant discourse, thus 'securing the journey by a reassuringly English enunciation'. In the Irish national tale the traveller is an English aristocrat, a supe-

rior observer, but one who finds the dominant discourse without terms to explain Ireland, thus dislocating and destabilising the traveller, and likewise the reader.³² Horatio M——, in Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) describes himself as a 'tasteful spectator', but finds Ireland disconcerting after being 'dropt by the stage at the foot of a mountain [...] fearing that I had lost my way'.³³ Although the traveller in *Guy Mannering* is an Englishman, a member of the ruling elite, his role is not to destabilise the reader's preconceptions of Scotland. Neither is Bray's traveller, also an outsider—because Jewish in this case—intended to destabilise the reader's preconceptions of the English countryside; his role, she states, is instead to challenge preconceived notions of Jewishness, to 'sketch him [...] as a very different sort of character to that we generally expect to find in a Jew' (*FF*, 411). Moreover Bray models her Jewish traveller, Levi, on a family acquaintance, a German Jew who taught Edward Bray Hebrew, thereby linking the character with her own domestic circumstances.

Bray's style of presentation also diverges from Scott's because of its similarity to a travel guide. She provides accurate geographical descriptions of the region, its landmarks and major towns, which were facilitated by her insistence on visiting each location with her husband. *Fitz-ford* begins by supplying the reader with the exact geographical position of Tavistock, 'towards the western limits of the county of Devon', followed by a brief history and geological description of the area:

If he turns his eye inland, it ranges from height to height, from tor to tor, in unbroken succession [...] If he looks towards the west, the conical eminence of Brent Tor, with its little church perched on the very summit, is seen rising above an extensive plain of high land, and forms a striking feature in the landscape. If he turns his eye towards the coast, far below his lofty stand appears a country, fertile, cultivated, and varied by hills, woods rivers and hamlets that extend as far as the town of Plymouth. (pp. 9–10)

Exact locational deixis is used to place the reader alongside the traveller, thus creating closeness, rather than estrangement between narrator, traveller, and reader—a style Bray adopts in her early travel writing when she takes her mother on a tour of Rouen.³⁴ This style is very different from Scott's, whose narrator dispassionately records his observations rather than sharing the experience of his travels. In *Guy Mannering*, the Scottish landscape that Mannering encounters on his journey to Kippletringan is also described in detail, but its bleakness and isolation is here used for the more political purpose of showing readers the advantages of a more advanced English society:

a wild tract of black moss, extended for miles on each side and before him. Little eminences arose like islands on its surface, bearing here and there patches of corn, which even at this season was green, and sometimes a hut or a farm-house [...] These insulated dwellings communicated with each other by winding passages through the moss [...] The public road, however, was tolerably well made and safe.³⁵

While Bray is equally precise with her description of Tavistock, located 'about three miles from Dartmoor', her additional notes on local beauty spots and places of historical significance in the area read more like a tourist guide (*FF*, 33). By 1823, when Bray arrived in Tavistock, all that was left of the medieval manor of Fitz-ford was a gatehouse which is now, as it was in Bray's day, a landmark of some interest to visitors. The gatehouse with its high frontage and sloping side walls was restored as a square castellated structure in 1871, but the need for restoration clearly illustrates Bray's belief that a record of these historic monuments should be made for posterity. In her romance, Bray provides a clear and detailed description of the house itself, giving the precise orientation of the mansion's aspect: the front faced south and on the eastern side there was a chapel, and its exact distance from the river: 'two hundred yards from [...] [Fitz-ford] house flowed the river Tavy [...] a bridge, still remaining, of three beautifully turned arches [...] crossed the river in that part called Fitz-ford' (pp. 40–41).³⁶ It is the consistent inclusion of this type of locational deixis that makes Bray's work very different from Scott's, or from contemporary women writers who make a feature of location, such as Ann Radcliffe or Annabella Plumptre.

Bray also assiduously records the physical changes to the landscape wrought by modernisation, changes which she charts by juxtaposing descriptions of the past with the present; a technique that she also adopts in her travel writing.³⁷ She relates how nothing now remains of the Fitz-ford estate:

but the ivy-grown gateway; nor is it the building alone that has experienced those changes so common to the revolutions of time. Of the noble park that once surrounded the house not a vestige exists; and the gentle eminence on which [Fitz-ford house] stood [...] is now divided by hedge-rows into a monotonous scene of meadow-lands, resembling even in its utmost diversity no other than the variations of a chess-board. (p. 39)³⁸

For Bray, the destruction of Fitz-ford house signals the loss of something deeply, historically English, a point supported by her use of the adjectives 'noble' and 'gentle' to describe (aspects of) England's feudal past. Local customs and traditions comprise another element of the 'Old England' that Bray considers in this and other works, but where some of these customs are specific to certain localities, others are national customs that Bray considered to be an integral part of national identity.

Many English customs had been abolished during the Interregnum and it is therefore no surprise that Bray's first novel was set prior to this period. Bray feared that the traditions and legends of England would disappear through neglect, in the wake of empiricism, though the West Country was still, in Bray's view, rich in these dying traditions because of its distance from the metropolis. In her descriptions of Fitz-ford house, with its avenue of stately oaks and elms housing colonies of rooks, she unites landscape with local tradition by explaining how these birds were culled in early spring to 'supply the tables of the great hall with a rarity of Devon, a rook pie, sauced with the rich scald cream of the county' (p. 40). The

demolition of Fitz-ford house and its estate meant that these colonies of rooks no longer had a habitat, and thus the tradition of making rook pie 'to supply the tables of the great hall' declined. However, Bray represents other traditions, such as the May procession, as national rather than local or regional and thus claims a wider political resonance for them. The procession is described through the voice of an antiquarian commentator who disrupts the main narrative with historical details. Readers are informed that the procession, even during Elizabeth's reign, had become extinct in its original form except in Devon, thus presenting Bray's home county as the last bastion of Englishness.

The narrator explains in particular the religious significance of the ceremony, which combines paganism, Christianity, and folklore, the latter being represented by the national folk hero Robin Hood and his band, who follow the May queen and her female attendants. These major figures are in turn followed by the fool, the dragon, and the hobby horse. Later church choristers, known as 'the Latin boys', are singing 'an old English chorus' telling of pagan rituals: 'childhood plucks the yellow broom, | Weaves the wreath, sings with glee | We have brought the summer home', and thus provide a visual representation of the amalgamation of Christianity and paganism (p. 84).

Although Bray explains that such festivals were enjoyed by everyone, therefore creating a degree of social levelling, her focus here is on the 'peasantry', who only feature because of their integral role in keeping customs and superstitions alive. She proceeds to catalogue the May Day traditions, which range from hanging ashen boughs over the doors of dairies to ensure a plentiful milk production, to scrambling for wedding rings in a milk pail (a local variation on catching a bride's bouquet). In addition, by slipping from past to present she is able to chart the changes which have taken place from the festivals of Elizabethan England to their early nineteenth-century counterparts—and her disapproval of these changes is suggested through her Blakean descriptions of them. The folk heroes Robin Hood and Marion have been replaced by milkmaids and chimney sweeps: 'black votaries of foul chimneys [...] triumph[ing] in faded flowers and paper crowns' (p. 32). But Bray is not, like Blake, angry at human exploitation; she is instead mourning the loss of a sentimentalised rural idyll. Her work echoes Rousseau in its romanticised image of rural simplicity and urban corruption, a picture of England which, Jeremy Burchardt argues, was popularised particularly by Wordsworth and only existed in literature.³⁹ Yet, for Bray, these traditions were at the very heart of English culture and heritage, and her descriptions of their erosion or transformation are deeply elegiac.

Trumpener has attributed this nostalgic longing for a lost age to 'the literature of nationalism'.⁴⁰ There is much evidence in support of an idea of Bray's work as national tale: an attempt to define England and Englishness against the new British nation state. Bray believed that English traditions dating from the Middle Ages were passing away, and with them 'the good taste and wisdom of those ages, which in the present day we are too fond of ranking under the clause of general barbarianism' (*FF*, 33). Sweet has argued, however, that during the eighteenth

century idealised views of the past stemming from fears of ‘innovation’ were in tension with Enlightenment perceptions of the past as a ‘period of backward belief and religious oppression’.⁴¹ How far, then, can we view Bray as having a nationalist agenda? Carlton J. H. Hayes points out that nationalism can be defined as

a fusion of patriotism with a consciousness of nationality [...] [which means] a group of people who speak either the same language or closely related dialects, who cherish common historical tradition, and who constitute or think they constitute a distinct cultural society.⁴²


In her autobiographical manuscript, Bray defines herself as an Anglican patriot: ‘I am, I hope, a sincerely loyal subject, and clearly love my country and the state under which I live, and the church into which I have been received as a member’.⁴³

By inscribing her politics within a framework of virtue and patriotism, Bray is exploiting a feminine discourse exploited by both conservative and radical women writers. In *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), Hannah More prevails on women to ‘exert themselves with a patriotism firm and feminine’.⁴⁴

For More there is a clear divide between patriotism, which is acceptable for women, and politics, which is not.⁴⁵ Moreover, by defining nationalism not as a political movement but as a sense of shared cultural identity, we can consider Bray’s novels as national tales without necessarily viewing her as a radical or transgressive writer.

Her conservatism would also reflect Hans Kohn’s belief that the Romantics

established a distinction between state and nation; they regarded the state as a mechanical and juridical construction, the artificial produce of historical accidents, while they believed the nation to be the work of nature, and therefore something sacred, eternal, organic, carrying a deeper justification than the works of men.⁴⁶

It is in this way that Bray was able to write a national tale without seeming to break the boundaries of Anglican loyalism. Bray’s writing suggests that she would have liked the present to return to the past; certainly, in terms of manners, customs, and social hierarchies, although she also clearly realised that change was inevitable. Her version of the national tale thus preserves for posterity a sense of what she believed it was to be English. 

NOTES

1. Anna Eliza Bray, *Letters Written during a Tour through Normandy, Brittany and Other Parts of France in 1818: Including Local and Historical Descriptions: With Remarks on the Character and Manners of the People* (London: Longman, 1820).
2. Anna Eliza Bray, *Autobiography of Anna Eliza Bray*, ed. by John A. Kempe (London: Chapman & Hall, 1884), p. 204. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.
3. Anna Eliza Bray, Autobiographical Manuscript, WSRO, accession 12182, E. M. Kempe papers, boxes 1–4, II, 106.
4. Devoney Looser, *British Women Writers and the Gendering of History, 1670–1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. 8–9. Here, Looser discusses how ‘historical scientificity [...] limited how far audiences were prepared to see women’s historical writings as authoritative or successful’ (p. 9). See also Fiona

- Price, "A Great Deal of History": Romantic Women Writers and Historical Fiction', *Women's Writing*, 19.3 (2012), 261.
5. Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hambledon, 2004), p. 13.
 6. Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), p. xi.
 7. Mrs Charles Stothard [Anna Eliza Bray], *Memoirs including Original Journals, Letters, Papers, and Antiquarian Tracts, of the Late Charles Alfred Stothard, F.S.A. with Connective Notices of his Life, and Some Account of a Journey in the Netherlands* (London: Longman, 1820), p. 137. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the body of the text.
 8. Poovey, *Proper Lady*, p. xi.
 9. Greg Kucich, 'Biographer', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther Schor (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 230.
 10. Deirdre Lynch, 'Historical Novelist', in *Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, p. 137.
 11. Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 217.
 12. See Price, 'Romantic Women Writers', pp. 260–61.
 13. Joseph Strutt, *Queenhoo-Hall, a Romance: And Ancient Times, a Drama, in Four Volumes* (London: John Murray; and Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1808), p. 2.
 14. Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790–1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 177.
 15. Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent and Ennui*, ed. by Marilyn Butler (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 63.
 16. Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 180.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
 18. Anna Eliza Bray, *Fitz of Fitz-ford: A Legend of Devon* (1830), vol. 4 of *The Novels and Romances of Anna Eliza Bray*, rev. edn, 10 vols (London: Longman, 1845–46), p. 32. Further references will appear parenthetically in the text with the abbreviation *FF* where necessary.
 19. Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 149; Sweet, *Antiquaries*, p. 335. Antiquarian studies of English regions include John Aubrey, *Wiltshire the Topographical Collections of John Aubrey [...] Corrected and Enlarged by John Edward Jackson* (Devizes and London: Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, 1862); William Henry Bourne, *Antiquitates Vulgares; or, the Antiquities of the Common People* (Newcastle: For the Author, 1725); Francis Grose, *The Antiquities of England and Wales*, 2nd edn, 8 vols (London: Hooper, 1773); Joseph Hunter, *Hallamshire. The History and Topography of the Parish of Sheffield in the County of York* (London: Lackington, 1819); and John Hodgson, *A History of Northumberland in Three Parts* (London and Newcastle: Nichols, 1820–35).
 20. Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. 178, 19.
 21. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Dodsley, 1790), p. 34.

22. Ina Ferris, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p. 15.
23. Miranda Burgess, *British Fiction and the Production of Social Order 1740–1830* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 153; and Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 191–203. Johnson argues that Austen's *Emma* was directed from the private sphere of the family to the national public sphere by its redefinition of masculinity and femininity.
24. Raphael Samuel (ed.), *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, 3 vols (London: Routledge, 1989), I, xii.
25. Trumppener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 218; Anna Eliza Bray, *Courtenay of Walreddon. A Romance of the West*, vol. 10 of *Novels and Romances*. Further references will appear parenthetically in the text with the abbreviation *CW* where necessary.
26. Bray, *Autobiography*, p. 207.
27. Bray, *Warleigh; or, the Fatal Oak. A Legend of Devon*, vol. 6 of *Novels and Romances*, p. 6. Further references will appear parenthetically in the text.
28. See Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740–1830* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), pp. 129–31.
29. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, p. 201.
30. Lisa Woods, *Modes of Discipline: Women, Conservatism, and the Novel after the French Revolution* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2003) argues that didactic fiction had declined in popularity after 1815, and that Bray, like Scott, adapted her fiction to reflect this change in the consumer market.
31. Sir Walter Scott, *Guy Mannering*, vol. 2 of *The Waverley Novels*, Centenary Edition, 25 vols (Edinburgh: Black, 1886), p. xix.
32. Ferris, *Romantic National Tale*, pp. 19, 51.
33. Sydney Owenson [Lady Morgan], *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale*, ed. by Kathryn Kirkpatrick (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 19.
34. In her *Letters from Normandy*, Bray's mother seems ever present as a companion whom she addresses directly: 'turn with me towards Mount St. Catharine, and there look around you' (p. 33).
35. Scott, *Guy Mannering*, p. 1.
36. Bray would have been privy to accurate descriptions of the place as her father-in-law used to kennel his dogs there.
37. See Bray's recreation of the siege of Hennebon in *Letters from Normandy*, p. 231.
38. Here, Bray is referring to enclosures; see John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Hammersmith: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 626.
39. Jeremy Burchardt, *Paradise Lost: Rural Idyll and Social Change Since 1800* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), pp. 28–29.
40. Trumppener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p. 13.
41. Sweet, *Antiquaries*, p. 338; Burgess, *British Fiction*, p. 159.
42. Carlton H. Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 2.
43. Bray, Autobiographical Manuscript, II, 106.
44. Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), 3rd edn, 2 vols (London: Cadell & Davies, 1799), I, 6.
45. For a discussion of the connections between religion and national identity, see Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church and Nation 1712–1812* (Oxford:

OUP, 2012). Major emphasises in particular the 'sheer extent and range of modes of belonging offered by ideas of protestant nationhood' (p. 8).

46. Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (1944; New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2008), p. xxviii.

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