THE FATE OF AN “AMBITIOUS SCHOOL-MARM”

Amy Cruse and the History of Reading

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As the author of a series of four large “reader-centered” volumes of English literary history, published 1928–1938, and extending from the Anglo-Saxons to the Edwardians, Amy Cruse (1870–1952) was undoubtedly a pioneer historian of reading. Yet she is seldom mentioned by later reading historians, and when she is it is often with a certain ambivalence. Richard Altick, while never giving her entrée to his main text, credited her in a footnote with “a good description of the place of religious literature in Victorian middle-class life” and adopted her figures for Mudie’s book purchases in the 1850s.¹ By 1980, however, his caution had grown to the point of footnoting an uncorroborated statement about the magazine publication of *Nicholas Nickleby* with the comment, “So, at least, says Amy Cruse in *The Victorians and their Books* (London, 1935)” —declining even to provide a page reference.² Kate Flint, in *The Woman Reader 1837–1914*, makes explicit the basis for Altick’s caution—and probably for the wide berth other scholars seem to have given Cruse’s work—when she calls *The Victorians and their Books* “one of the earliest examples of research into nineteenth-century women readers, . . . wide-ranging but infuriatingly unreferenced.”³

And there, probably, we have it. Her books are not entirely without scholarly apparatus: they all have indexes. But of the hundreds of interesting, useful, sometimes quite *recherché* examples of individual and collective reading-responses and observations about books that are reported or quoted throughout the four volumes, none is conventionally referenced, and only a very few are casually and incompletely identified in the main text. It is indeed an infuriating state of affairs, even though, as I shall try to show, the books are interesting and satisfying in their own right, and deserve to be better known.

But the question of why Cruse made the seemingly perverse decision not to reference her work properly in the first place is itself of some interest.

What could she have been thinking? An answer to that question may help us to understand and appreciate her achievement better, and at the same time open a window on a somewhat neglected aspect of the institutional provenance of modern reading historiography.

If, as Leah Price has suggested, “no academic discipline can really be said to have arrived until it receives the final mark of legitimacy: a Routledge Reader,”⁴ then the history of reading, like book history, has indeed arrived—if not as a discipline, then certainly as a “defined field of study.” For the editors of the recent Routledge Reader, the new field has emerged “from the context of the history of the book, economic and social history, and literary criticism and theory”⁵—an impeccably scholarly genealogy. But Cruse’s adoption of what the Routledge editors would call a “micro-analytical approach” to the history of reading, namely the study of individual readers’ recorded interactions with specific books,⁶ predates the work of scholars such as Jauss, Tompkins, and Ginzburg by several decades,⁷ and later, more wide-ranging microanalytical studies and projects by three-quarters of a century.⁸ What is different about Cruse’s work is that it emerges out of a context not of academic scholarship, where full and accurate referencing has been *de rigueur* for 150 years or more, but mainly of applied curriculum development and practical pedagogics in teacher education, where referencing has been much less consistently practiced.⁹

The different institutional contexts and discursive conventions are a necessary but not, I think, sufficient determinant of Cruse’s decision. Another possible factor would of course be pressure from her publisher, whom one might suspect of trying to economize by refusing to pay for more “extras” than a general index; but this is made less likely by the fact that the four books were published by two different publishers. George G. Harrap published *The Shaping of English Literature* (1927) and *The Englishman and his Books in the Early Nineteenth Century* (1930), and George Allen & Unwin *The Victorians and their Books* (1935) and *After the Victorians* (1938); and both of these firms produced academic books with at least some referencing. It would seem, therefore, that there was no fixed policy against scholarly referencing with either house, and there is no correspondence in either publisher’s archive indicating any discussions of this issue with the author.¹⁰ It may well be, especially in the case of the two Harrap books, both of which were quite generously illustrated, that there was a trade-off between illustrations and references. (Some earlier Harrap books with footnotes are indeed unillustrated.)

Institutional referencing conventions and publishing constraints, then, may have had a quite limited influence on the decisions (whoever made

them) to omit referencing in all four books. But there may also have been another, more positive reason for doing so—misguided as we might now judge it to be.

A Life in Letters

Amy Cruse was born Amy Annie Barter to a middle-class Church of England family in Islington in 1870. She attended local schools, trained as a teacher at the Islington Day Training College, and spent some years in the classroom before moving into teacher education. In 1902 she is identified on the title page of her first published book, a Schools Edition of Thackeray's *History of Henry Esmond*, as Assistant Mistress at the Mile End Pupil Teachers' School in London's East End. By 1904, when her schools edition of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* appeared, she was a lecturer at that same institution, but by 1908 she is given on the title page of a coauthored monograph on English teaching as "Late Head-Mistress of the Braintree Pupil-Teacher School" in Essex.¹¹ The "late" indicates that, like most women teachers at the time, she resigned immediately after her marriage in 1907 to Charles Cruse, a mathematics teacher, with whom she had two daughters. For the rest of her life she worked at home in Winchmore Hill, North London, and at the British Museum, as an independent researcher, refreshed by annual holidays with her family on the Isle of Wight (Figures 1–2).¹²

In her twenties Amy Barter studied English literature and history, either by correspondence or external evening classes in London, through the University of St. Andrews, which offered the only arts degree available to women in the United Kingdom at that time, the quaintly named Lady Literate in Arts (LLA), which she seems to have acquired shortly after 1900.¹³ The potential handicap of a background in schoolteaching rather than traditional university study is thrown into sharp relief by a private exchange in 1912 between R. W. Chapman of the Clarendon Press and Sir Walter Raleigh regarding Cruse's proposed writing primer, *English Composition*. Both agree on a description of its author as "an ambitious school-marm." Raleigh allows that the book is "decent of its kind," though "its kind is bad," and observes that "people like this s-marm (they are very numerous, and get good degrees) are rapidly making ditch water of English literature."¹⁴ The book was nonetheless published by the Clarendon Press the following year, and a supplementary volume was published under the Humphrey Milford

Figure 1 Amy Cruse, studio portrait, 1925.

Figure 2 Charles and Amy Cruse, Ventnor, Isle of Wight, 1933.

imprint twelve years later. But Cruse's relationship with Oxford University Press seems never to have been a comfortable one, as indicated by the acerbic tone of some of their later correspondence.¹⁵

If she could be assertive in protecting her interests with publishers, she was otherwise the most self-effacing of authorial properties. Neither dust jackets nor publishers' puffs provide any personal information about her beyond the bare facts of her current job or the titles of previous books. In the Harrap context, especially, this was a little unusual, as Harrap liked to personalize its British authors in the 1920s and 1930s with biographical articles and photographs; but promotional pieces for the Cruse books deal only with the books themselves.¹⁶ We are, however, granted a rare retrospective glimpse of her life as a young woman with an enthusiasm for literature in the last of her reading-histories, *After the Victorians* (1938), which covers the years 1887 to 1914 and in which, for the first and only time, her own reading experience became a historically relevant part of her narrative.¹⁷ Here she is evoking the popular reception of George Meredith's novels in the 1890s:

Earnest young men and women belonging to Literary Societies wrote papers full of psychology and sociology, ethics and dialectics on the works of Meredith but usually failed to convince the unregenerate majority among their fellow members. The present writer remembers one such society, which contained a single Meredith enthusiast who, after persevering efforts, managed to get *Sandra Belloni* set down for reading and discussion. Unfortunately the effect on her fellow members was not what she had hoped for. They met in ribald mood declaring that the only part of the book they had been able to understand and appreciate was the scene in which the father of the heroine threw nine large potatoes at his daughter's lover when he came upon the two taking an unauthorized walk together, and her attempts to enlighten them only produced further irreverences. The Meredithians were perhaps not altogether disappointed when their proselytizing efforts failed. They could always attribute it to the inferior capacity of those outside their charmed circle.¹⁸

After more than a thousand pages, the unexpected appearance of "the present writer" is quite a special moment! The note of humorous, gentle irony, however, is a constant through all four volumes, and it has had its admirers. As late as 1966 the reviewer of a book on the evolution of American secondary school textbooks contrasts its pedestrian style ruefully with "the

graceful writing, the kindly humor, and the rare talent for showing intrinsic quaintness to advantage found in such volumes as those by Amy Cruse, author of *The Victorians and their Books*.”¹⁹ Another, much earlier review (1931) of Cruse’s *The Englishman and his Books in the Early Nineteenth Century* pronounces it “decidedly successful”:

[Cruse] . . . appreciates what is fine in the writing of the time, tempering her appreciation with sly and discerning thrusts at much that was pietistic, pretentious, and prudish. Very skilfully, the writers and book lovers, even the remote mysterious poets and critics as well as the more obscure readers, are brought to life again. Withal Mrs. Cruse’s style is so bright and vivid that her pages can be read with keen interest and no great tax on the attention.²⁰

The reviewer, a senior American historian, Arthur Lyon Cross, warns that “the scholar must not expect a work of formal criticism, fortified by a formidable array of references,” though he applauds the breadth, diligence, and accuracy of Cruse’s scholarship. And he notes that “her idea is rather a novel one . . . —to indicate, so far as possible, what folk from all classes of society were reading and how they responded to what they read.” He acknowledges (as many have in recent years) the real difficulty of finding empirical evidence of reading responses, people being “more inclined to talk about books than record their impressions in writing.” It is in that context that he mentions, with cautious approval, a particular feature of Cruse’s method that—as much as her lack of referencing—probably damaged her later reputation for serious scholarship. This is her practice of inventing imaginary “scenes of reading.”²¹

Inventing the Evidence?

Describing this dubious-sounding technique in the preface to the first of her four volumes, Cruse says simply that “incidents have been adapted and fictitious characters, scenes and incidents introduced for purposes of illustration.”²² The *Sunday Times* reviewer of the volume approved: “Employing a method as novel as it is ingenious, . . . Mrs Cruse . . . makes us free of the company which listened to the Saxon gleeman, applauded the Miracle plays, harkened to Latimer’s preaching at Paul’s Cross, or crowded into the pit at the Globe for the first performance of *Julius Caesar*.” She has “ransacked all available sources for requisite incidents . . . ; others, out of the breadth and variety of her reading, she has felicitously coined.”²³

The felicitous coining can be quite varied, especially in the first volume, *The Shaping of English Literature*, where there are ten instances in thirty-two chapters. In some, an “ideal-typical” figure is introduced and named: a bright and ambitious carpenter’s son from the Midlands, ca. 1250, on the road to a rumored new place of books and learning in the town of Oxford;²⁴ a law student in St. Paul’s churchyard in the early 1590s, agonizing over whether to spend his allowance on a quarto of *The Old Wives’ Tale* and a good dinner, or *The Faerie Queene* and leftovers;²⁵ a London silversmith in the 1740s whose wife and daughter are red-eyed with weeping at the trials of Pamela Andrews.²⁶ In others a modern spectator is privileged to watch a moral interlude being performed by strolling players in Sir Thomas More’s garden at Chelsea;²⁷ an Elizabethan Shakespeare fan, a draper, is allowed to reappear seventy years on, to be shocked and scandalized by a performance of George Etherege’s *She Would if She Could*;²⁸ John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys enjoy a bookish conversation in Eastcheap shortly after the Great Fire;²⁹ and Evelina’s fictional correspondence with the Reverend Mr. Villars is augmented to include detailed accounts of the plays she has attended in London (about which Fanny Burney’s novel is in fact silent).³⁰

In her second volume, *The Englishman and his Books*, the strategy of “whole-cloth” invention is limited to one chapter, a lively account of a family’s evening at the theater to see a performance of Thomas Holcroft’s *The Road to Ruin* at Covent Garden in October 1802.

Here are Mr and Mrs Jones, come from their flourishing haberdasher’s shop in Holborn, with Mrs Jones’s sister, Miss Julia Dawkins, and her mother’s lodger, Miss Laura Montreville. Julia is short, round, rosy, and sentimental; Miss Laura is tall and surpassingly lovely.

“Fancy!” says good-natured Mr Jones, “here’s Miss never seed a play in her life. Howsoever, she’ll see a good one tonight, an’ it’ll be something she can talk of when she gets back to Scotland.”

“I wish it was a tragedy,” sighs Miss Julia, in a deep, low voice. Last week she borrowed from the circulating library *The Hut and the Castle*, and she is at present imagining herself the heroine, “the pensive Alethea.”

Miss Laura is interested and amused by the lively scene, though the loud voices frighten her a little, and she refuses to press in among the throng, even at the risk of having to put up with a seat at the back when she gets inside the theatre.

“We must have some oranges,” says kindly little Mr Jones, intent on making his theatre party a success; and he beckons one of

the ragged, clamorous girls who are shrilling out “Chase an orange, chase a nonpareil” and buys a generous supply. “Buy a bill of the play,” resounds on the other side, and his hand goes into his pocket once more, and the flimsy playbills are passed round. The girl makes a coarse, good-natured jest on his luck in having so many ladies under his charge, and beaming Mr Jones is ready with his reply. Miss Julia titters, then, remembering “the pensive Alethea,” frames her rosy mouth to what she hopes is “a wan smile.”³¹

Julia’s romantic self-fashioning is surely a nice touch. The scene continues to develop for another ten pages, featuring varied, often robust interactions with an expanding array of representative social types, in tandem with a running description of the performance of the play and the audience’s rowdy responses to it.

Presumably the relative abundance of suitable historical material—diaries, letters, and essays—made such invention seem less necessary for the later volumes, but the general tone of those books also suggests that Cruse may have been aiming at more mature and informed readers than in the first volume, readers for whom invented scenes, however scrupulously “authentic,” were likely to be greeted with raised eyebrows. Accordingly, her evocations of specific reading formations, occasions, and milieus—the Clapham Sect, the schoolroom, the public lecture hall, dinner at Holland House, a supper at Charles Lamb’s—though richly and freely imagined, are firmly grounded on specific historical accounts. The occasion last mentioned, for example, features a vigorous four-way conversation conjured out of bits and pieces from essays by Lamb, Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt, and Crabb Robinson’s *Reminiscences*.³²

The Englishman and his Books begins with a ten-page introductory chapter in which Cruse speaks eloquently about the value and importance of historical reading research in general, and in particular makes a strong case for using *existing* fictional accounts of reading—scenes of reading in novels and plays—as evidence. “When fact fails us we can turn to fiction,” she declares. Novels, she argues (quoting several examples), are especially useful for tracing the reading lives of ordinary people:

Biographies and autobiographies are for the most part concerned with extraordinary persons. Only occasionally does a quite undistinguished man—or woman—leave us the details of his—or her—reading. . . . When Bulwer Lytton says of Lord Erpingham, in *Godolphin*, “He was generally considered a sensible man. He had read Blackstone, Montesquieu, Cowper’s Poems, and the *Rambler*, and

was always heard with great attention in the House of Lords,” it is reasonable to suppose that such a course of reading was in those days considered a normal and adequate literary equipment for a second-rate politician.³³

Cruse’s third and fourth volumes, published by Allen & Unwin, also each include just one extended imaginary scenario. *The Victorians and their Books* begins with a family—“We will imagine a household of the upper middle class, the class which at that period was quickly rising into special prominence”—and then methodically invests its members with a spectrum of reading tastes, interests, and habits: literary, religious, scientific; reading silently or aloud, singly or in company.³⁴ *After the Victorians* features a full chapter toward the end in which “a middle-aged, book-loving City gentleman whom we will call Mr Smith” is first surprised and then interested and perturbed by the rise of the “New Journalism” in the 1880s. Because it imagines, in some depth and detail, the mental process by which an ordinary man of the Victorian middle class could gradually “come to terms” with the sudden storm of new ephemeral publications—*Tit-Bits*, *Answers*, *Forget-Me-Not*, the *Daily Mail*, and much else—that broke upon the reading public at this time, Cruse’s method provides a more shareable and dynamic understanding of responses to sudden cultural change than the mere quoting of a range of fixed attitudes to the phenomenon.³⁵

The reason for Cruse’s change of publishers is something of a puzzle, which Harrap’s lack of a correspondence archive or sales figures for the prewar period makes difficult to solve. *The Shaping of English Literature* was simultaneously published in the United States by Thomas Y. Crowell, Harrap’s most frequent American collaborator, but was not widely reviewed and was never reprinted in either country, despite vigorous pre- and post-publication promotion in Britain.³⁶ This suggests that the book probably fell between the educational market and the cultivated general readership, pleased neither, and sold poorly.³⁷ Structurally and stylistically, *The Englishman and his Books* was aimed more squarely at that cultivated general readership, and it garnered some full and favorable reviews from this quarter.³⁸ As a consequence, it seems to have sold better, since it was reprinted just two months after it was first published in August 1930. The American edition was reprinted again three years later. In short, it would seem that Cruse’s market prospects may actually have been improving rather than declining at the time of the transfer. If Harrap instigated the move notwithstanding, it may be that since the author herself was now in her sixties, the publisher doubted—wrongly, as it turned out—that she would finish what was always

conceived as a four-volume project.³⁹ It is also possible that for whatever reason Cruse believed that Allen & Unwin offered her project a more congenial home than Harrap, and instigated the move herself. Speculation on what that reason might have been is probably idle, but it is not inconceivable that Harrap was making unwelcome demands for fuller referencing or fewer “scenarios.”

One fortunate aspect of the move to Allen & Unwin, from a researcher’s point of view, is the availability of a correspondence archive, which contains readers’ reports on *After the Victorians*.⁴⁰ An early report reveals that the original typescript contained two imaginary occasions of reading that were cut from the published version: one was a meeting of a literary society at which the merits of Meredith and Hardy were discussed by all the celebrities of the day; and the other was a book fair at which the great attractions were the celebrity novelists Hall Caine and Marie Corelli. The reviewer, Bernard Miall, a regular Macmillan reader, noted that “the material is interesting, but Mrs Cruse, if I may say so, frisks rather heavily,” and he recommended that the chapter they appeared in be rewritten on more conventional lines. She complied.⁴¹

Pace the *Sunday Times* reviewer quoted earlier, Amy Cruse was by no means the first to use imaginary scenarios to dramatize cultural themes and issues. The extended conversations that were (in both senses) *composed* by her in the first two books of the series (and originally in three, perhaps all four of them) bear some resemblance to the quasi-Socratic “dialogues” that were popular with several late Victorian writers as a form of intellectual discourse. The best-known examples, Oscar Wilde’s “Decay of Lying” and “The Critic as Artist,” were certainly familiar to her.⁴² And the one remaining imaginary scenario in *After the Victorians*, in which “Mr. Smith” embarks on a lengthy surveillance of the so-called New Journalism, is more Wells than Wilde:

The weeks and the months went on and Mr Smith grew accustomed to the green eruption [the green-covered *Tit-Bits*] though he did not lose his interest in it. Then one June evening, more than three years after that interest had been first aroused, he was greeted as he came into the house by his son. “I say, Dad, you can’t guess this one. Mother couldn’t. What eminent person is called by his friends Tum-tum, and why?” Mr Smith, as usual, gave it up. “You got that out of *Tit-Bits*, I suppose,” he said. “Wrong,” said the boy, “it came from *Answers*, a new paper out this week. Lots of the fellows at school have got it, and the answer to the one I asked you

is the Prince of Wales, because he's so jolly fat," and he exploded with laughter. "Extremely vulgar," he said, "this new paper must be worse than *Tit-Bits*." "It was not put quite like that," explained his son; "it says 'because of the graceful rotundity of his person.' And it's rather a jolly paper."⁴³

Nor was Amy Cruse the first to "enliven" the study of traditional literary history with such devices, though she did it rather better than some. Edith L. Elias, a children's poet and an occasional collaborator with Cruse in an earlier Harrap series, introduces the "great names in English literature" by means of a dream vision, in which the Dreamer gazes in awe as the great authors pass silently before him. Suddenly a "mighty man" appears.

"Oh, I know you!" cried the Dreamer. You are the greatest of our early English poets. Hail, author of *Beowulf*!"

(Here follows half a page of rhapsodizing about the poem; and then . . .):

He looked again at the stranger passing before him. "When did you live, I wonder?" he whispered. "Was it as far back as the sixth century, as some of our critics say, or was it the eighth century that you gladdened with your genius?" By this time the poet had already gone . . .⁴⁴

(And who could wonder?)

J. F. Herbart and the New Movement in English

Apart from casting Cruse's efforts into a somewhat better light, what the Elias passage exemplifies is the specifically *educational* application of the dramatic scenario. Making the study of literature, especially past literature, *interesting* and *pleasurable* was an explicit pedagogical project in schools in the early decades of the twentieth century throughout the English-speaking world. In Britain, this project was part of the broader movement in favor of secular moral education that flourished in these years under the leadership of Frederick James Gould, Stanton Coit, and the Moral Instruction League (later the Moral Education League).⁴⁵ For these reformers, the study of the humanities, preeminently history and literature, was important above all as a means of sensitizing children to the positive values of civilized life, to an

admiration for virtue, reverence for nobility, and an appreciation of beauty. But for these character-forming and civilizing effects to be achieved, the subjects had to be taught differently, with less dogma, less grammar, a more affective engagement with the students' life experiences, and greater stimulus to their imaginations.

The new ways of teaching literature that were needed in order to realize its morally elevating functions were described and demonstrated in fine detail by educationists such as Thomas Rooper⁴⁶ and Frank Hayward.⁴⁷ Their common theoretical and methodological framework was Herbartian (or Neo-Herbartian); that is, they and others associated their work explicitly with the late nineteenth–early twentieth-century international revival of the educational doctrines of the German philosopher and psychologist Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841). The “secret of Herbart,” as Frank Hayward, one of his chief British apologists, put it in a popular 1904 book of that name, was the concept of “many-sided Interest,” used in an almost technical sense to signify the student’s positive disposition to learning. This blend of curiosity, partial familiarity, and desire was held to be the indispensable foundation of effective learning, produced by and through “Apperception,” the mental process by which new ideas and impressions were “welcomed” into the mind of the student by their many points of contact with groups of ideas (or as Herbart called them, “thought-masses”) that were already there, as the result of personal experience and prior instruction.⁴⁸

Herbart’s most persistent legacy to teaching practice at the coalface was undoubtedly the famous “Five Formal Steps” in the structure of the lesson, an arrangement designed to promote Apperception, elicit interest, and begin the gradual process of character-formation. (The steps are Preparation, Presentation, Association, Generalization, and Application.) The five-step series, which continued to crop up as a recommended pedagogical method in Britain, North America, and Australasia well into the interwar period,⁴⁹ was thoroughly familiar to Amy Cruse as a young teacher-educator in London in the early 1900s. At this time, under her maiden name of Barter, she wrote several articles in educational journals and also coauthored a book, *The Teaching of English* (1908), in which she explicitly acknowledged her Herbartian affiliations and placed them at the core of her conception of effective English teaching. In explaining her method of organizing a lesson on Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, for example, she noted that “the purpose of the introduction should be to awaken interest. . . . Unfamiliar ideas, so far as they stand in the way of a proper appreciation of the general drift

of the play being studied, should be cleared away. This method is sound psychologically, and represents the *Preparation* and the *Association* of the Herbartian method.”⁵⁰

The following excerpt from the opening chapter of the book conveys a broader sense of the principles of what she and her coauthor, Albert Roberts, called the “New Movement in English”:

The purpose of literary education is not merely to create an elevated taste. Literature is to be used as a great dynamic and socializing force, an ever-potent means of developing the character of the individual. It should afford him pleasure and interest in life, be a valuable aid to a successful and noble career, and “console, inspire and sustain” him in illness and old age. It should be indirectly one of the greatest moral factors in the ethical training of the child. . . . Yet the ethical content in each work of art is to be kept in subordination to the aesthetic element.⁵¹

The last sentence marks their concurrence with Hayward’s more robust formulation: “To distinguish between the creation of elevated Interests and the formation of character is foolish and disastrous.”⁵²

Roberts and Barter go on to describe and exemplify a range of teaching strategies designed to realize these aims. They include an emphasis on storytelling at all levels, a generically graduated choice of books and extracts (moving from myths, legends, and fairy tales in the lower forms, to prose and poetry in the upper forms),⁵³ the use of pictures and illustrations in the classroom, reading aloud by the teacher, humor, a sympathetic attitude to the stories or poems being read, student recitations and dramatic performance, original composition in prose and verse, provision of a dedicated “English room” and a good reference library, and formation of literary, dramatic, and debating clubs.⁵⁴

Another suggestion of particular relevance for textbook writers was to foreground the “personalities” of the writers by presenting selected biographical information to enhance the more advanced students’ sense of a personal connection with the mind of the writer, and thereby heighten their appreciation of the work. This was the intention behind some of Amy Cruse’s earlier publications, her individual biographies of R. L. Stevenson, Sir Walter Scott, and two more that were planned but probably unwritten, of Chaucer and Charlotte Bronte, in Harrap’s “Heroes of All Time” series.⁵⁵ The idea clearly appealed to Harrap, who also constructed a long-running series on poetry around it, the “Poetry and Life” books, edited by W. H. Hudson.⁵⁶

Literary Histories and Reading Histories

Cruse, then, devoted the middle part of her career to producing literary biographies, literary histories, and edited anthologies, in which the lives of authors were indeed a major focus; these were no doubt intended to appeal to indifferent or incurious students by making the experience of studying past literature resemble, at least in some respects, the experience of “getting to know” a series of interesting and unusual individuals.⁵⁷ But this was only part of the intended appeal. In fact, her longer literary histories (both about 600 pages)—*English Literature through the Ages* (1914) and *The Golden Road in English Literature* (1931)—though garnished with biographical anecdotes and copiously illustrated with authorial images, are not just strings of potted biographies. Like her reading-histories, they have a strong narrative drive, enriched by generous infusions of social, intellectual, and political history. Here the enduring influence of the “New Movement in English” is evident: presenting knowledge in “storytelling” form wherever possible, and “feeding apperception” by showing connections with other fields of knowledge.

What the literary histories also contain, however—and this makes them a little different from the general run of literary histories in the early twentieth century—is a recurrent focus on the book itself as a salient actor, on a par with the author, in both literary and social history. The title of the condensed version of the earlier book, *Famous English Books and their Stories* (1926), combines both themes, and indeed each of its twenty-five chapters deals with a single famous book, ranging from *Beowulf* to *The Idylls of the King*—others are Wyclif’s Bible, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and the *Essays of Elia*—not an altogether predictable canon, but an interesting one. In the preface to the larger volume (first published in 1914, and reprinted four times up to 1928), the rationale is elaborated:

This book aims at telling the story of English literature through the stories of individual books. . . . Of these books the author has told the story in considerable detail, aiming at making each appear to her readers as a living reality, not merely a constituent part of a great whole known as English literature. She has hoped by so doing to set up a series of bright lights, which, although they do not mark every winding and every change of level, yet do show the main features and general outline of the road, and do reveal it as a fair and pleasant path along which those who have once travelled will be willing to return again and again, exploring by-paths and finding new beauties.⁵⁸

The illustrations (sixty-five black-and-white plates and a color frontispiece) reflect her book-centered narrative: while the majority of them are standard author portraits, about a third are images pertaining to the books themselves. The existence of the book as both palpable object and powerful force is clearly a dimension of the story Cruse wants to tell in this particular literary history, and since printed books—and for that matter illuminated manuscripts—are on the whole readable rather than writable entities, their prominence cannot help but refract some light from authors to readers.

In the Preface to her much later literary history, *The Golden Road in English Literature: From Beowulf to Bernard Shaw*, first published in 1931 and reprinted in 1949, we find a noticeable shift of perspective. Instead of continuing the focus on books, she seems almost to disavow it:

In this book I have tried to tell you something about the way in which we English people have made for ourselves the wonderful possession that we call our literature. I have tried to show this literature to you, not (as we are sometimes tempted to think of it) as a collection of marvelous and beautiful things, each one brought into being by some particular man or woman, worked at and finished with loving care, and then placed reverently in a great storehouse for the use and joy of future generations, but rather as a living thing, the product of the nation's growth, in which the humblest of our forefathers, working with the greatest, has had his small unnoticed part.⁵⁹

It is a small step from this conception of the national literature as a communal and ongoing social creation to a conviction that the history of its readers is almost as important as the history of its writers. And of course it was a step that Cruse had already taken four years earlier, in *The Shaping of English Literature*, the first of her reading histories, in which the vaguely defined “humblest of our forefathers” had been explicitly identified as the mainly anonymous readers whose demands and responses enabled writers to do what they did.

In the making of a country's literature two classes of people are concerned—the writers and the readers, or hearers; and though the writers must of necessity take the more important part, the readers are not without influence. What they ask for the writers take care to supply. . . . Poets have made songs, divines have preached sermons, travellers have painted pictures of far-off lands, controversialists have argued and disputed, all with regard to the

needs and tastes of a crowd of undistinguished people whose names are not recorded in any history of literature.

We can all be readers, though few of us can be great writers; and, therefore, when we have paid our homage to the great figures throned high above us we shall surely have some interest to spare for the lowlier company which is made up of our comrades and our equals.⁶⁰

Cruse's histories of reading, while representing a shift from her earlier focus on writers and books, is the logical concomitant of a movement in her thinking toward what might be called a more democratic, even socialist conception of literary history. Words like "classes" and "comrades" could hardly have been used without some sense of their political baggage, and it would not be surprising if the already liberal cast of mind evident in *The Teaching of English* had moved somewhat farther left in the aftermath of the war and the General Strike, perhaps to the point of feeling that readers as a class had received a raw deal from the author-dominated academic establishment.⁶¹ But the reading-histories remain, I think, less a political project than an educational one, directed—perhaps somewhat uncertainly at times—at a wider audience than the school (at the "cultivated general reader," in fact) but educative, even pedagogical, in their purpose nonetheless. The key to it is the passage that follows immediately the one just quoted:

We look at the readers of past ages, and see ourselves as we should have been if we had lived in their day. If we had wanted our stories, our poems, our pleasant jests, and our words of inspiration, we should have had to seek them where our ancestors sought them. We should have hailed with joy the gay company of minstrels approaching our village. We should have stood for long hours in the street or the market-place while the pageants of the miracle play passed before us. . . . We should have paid our subscription to the circulating library with the feeling that we were doing something very new and adventurous. We should have hung about bookstalls, and made with care our small selection of high-priced books.⁶²

Bringing past readers to life on the page was fundamentally a strategy for enabling her own readers to identify with, and share, the fresh experience of reading an old book, or seeing an old play, as if it were brand new, and it offered them a series of imaginative positions from which to do so. In other words, the history of reading contained in Cruse's four volumes—richly detailed and psychologically perceptive as much of it is—was not principally

designed to add to the sum of human knowledge about past reading; it was designed to motivate and enable people (students and others) to read or re-read the English literature of the past with enjoyment and profit, by evoking the pleasure and interest that other, very different readers had found in it.

This is as much as to say that her driving impulse was phenomenological rather than historiographic,⁶³ and that her methods of presentation were largely governed by a desire to preserve and heighten the many moments of imaginary identification between the readers *of* her books and the readers *in* her books. One thing she certainly did not need if the reading experience was to function as she intended it to—and this brings us back finally to the “referencing problem” with which we began—was the estranging, distancing, delaying effects of superscript numbers and visible footnotes. One of the few places in which Barter and Roberts rise to indignation is in their surprisingly long critique of annotated editions. The following is a brief excerpt, minus prolonged discussions of individual examples of notes said to be “absolutely useless”:

The only principle that can be safely insisted upon is that no annotation at all is certainly better than over-annotation. . . . Over-annotated editions are always dangerous, even when, as is often the case, the notes they contain are scholarly, interesting, and well expressed. They distract the attention from the real subject at hand, and transform the study of literature into the mere acquirement of a very scrappy kind of general information. The only justification for a note is that it gives real help towards the full appreciation of the passage to which it refers, and even then the question remains as to whether it would not be better for the pupil to gain the required information by his own exertions.⁶⁴

Annotations, we should acknowledge, do not have quite the same purpose as footnotes, but they may well have a similar effect on the experienced reading process.⁶⁵ This consideration might possibly have weighed heavily enough with Amy Cruse to persuade her not to use them in her first two volumes, and perhaps even to change her publisher in order to continue to exclude them from the third and fourth volumes. Whether the principle (if principle it was) was worth maintaining even at the time is doubtful, and the historical consequences of the decision have been unfortunate, not only in terms of her own reputation but also in terms of the likely loss to the discipline of much of the material she collected. Yet for all that, she would probably have been happy enough with the final verdict that Bernard Miall, the reader for George Allen & Unwin, delivered on the fourth volume, *After the Victorians*:

Not an exciting book, but one of some real historical and psychological value, and quite a good bed- and/or fireside book; one that many older readers would read with appreciation and entertainment, and some younger ones, perhaps, with wonder and amusement.⁶⁶

While applauding Miall's perceptiveness in identifying the dual readership Cruse was aiming to engage, we might want to make a stronger claim than this for the permanent value and interest of her whole four-volume work. The burden of this article has been that she planned, researched, and wrote a major work of historical synthesis almost as a by-product of what certainly began—and in certain respects always remained—an essentially pedagogical project in literary appreciation. And in a traditional undergraduate English literature program today I suspect it might still be found that some of her livelier chapters hold up surprisingly well as supplementary “enrichment” material for studying older literature with pleasure and understanding.

But the value of her work for the history of reading goes well beyond that. First, irrespective of her main reason for doing so, she assembled quite a large body of historical evidences of reading in England from the eleventh to the early twentieth century and made it permanently available (if not easily verifiable) to the scholarly community. Second, she anticipated certain specific themes and directions in much later reading historiography: a growing interest in fictional representations of readers and what these can tell us about historical patterns of reading behavior;⁶⁷ and the conviction, recently rearticulated by Martyn Lyons, that readers are underrecognized contributors to the historical creation of literate cultures.⁶⁸ It might even be argued that her most original strategy, the invention of imaginary “reading scenarios”—on the face of it a scholarly dead end—anticipated (without directly influencing) the “ideal-typical” constructions of the reader used by European and American reader-response theorists in the 1970s and 1980s.

Amy Cruse's strongest claim to recognition as a significant pioneer of the modern subdiscipline of reading history, however, is straightforward and largely incontestable: that she produced a substantial work of genuine scholarship that, whatever its disciplinary aims and auspices, and for that matter whatever its exclusions and naïvetés, was—as she herself rightly believed—the first published attempt at a complete history of the English reader.

Notes

1. Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900*, 2nd ed. (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1998), 108, 296.
2. Richard D. Altick, "Varieties of Readers' Response: The Case of *Dombey and Son*," *Yearbook of English Studies* 10 (1980): 73n.3. The page reference for Cruse is 155.
3. Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 32.
4. Leah Price, "The Tangible Page," *London Review of Books* 24 (October 31, 2002): 36–39.
5. Shafquat Towheed, Rosalind Crone, and Katie Halsey, eds., *The History of Reading: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2011), 5.
6. *Ibid.*, 2.
7. Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Jane P. Tompkins, "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response," in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 201–232; Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).
8. For example, Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001); "The Reading Experience Database, 1450–1945," <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/>.
9. Anthony Grafton finds the origins of systematic modern referencing in the work of individual seventeenth-century scholars, in particular Pierre Bayle, but dates its institutional beginnings as the norm for scholarly publication to von Humboldt's new research university in Berlin in the first half of the nineteenth century. See Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 34, 190–222. For examples of unreferenced monographs in applied educational studies, see Blackie's Library of Pedagogics, ca. 1907–1919, in which one of Cruse's earliest books was published (1908). The two dozen or so volumes in this series are all unreferenced, though a few contain some short explanatory footnotes.
10. The absence of documentary evidence does not, of course, prove that no such discussions took place. The correspondence archive for Harrap was lost when the Harrap building at 182 High Holborn was gutted in a firebombing raid in 1941, though there is a small archive of old authors' contracts, some with correspondence attached, housed in the offices of Chambers-Harrap in Edinburgh.
11. William Makepeace Thackeray, *The History of Henry Esmond*, with introduction and notes by A. A. Barter (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1902); Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, with introduction, notes, and appendixes by A. Barter, 3rd ed. (London: Normal Correspondence College Press, 1904); A. E. Roberts and A. Barter, *The Teaching of English* (Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1908).
12. Most of the biographical facts and impressions mentioned in this paragraph were provided by Amy Cruse's granddaughter, Penelope Gaine, for whose assistance I am very grateful. She has fond memories of her grandmother as a quietly spoken and dignified old lady, who died when Penelope was ten.
13. This three- or four-year diploma was established at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland some ten years before women were first granted admission to the university, in 1892. It proved so popular with women all over the United Kingdom that it lasted into the 1930s. <http://specialcollections.st-and.ac.uk/faq.htm> (accessed December 21, 2011). The letters appear after her name on a title page in 1904, but not in 1902.

14. Chapman to Raleigh, August 30, 1912; Raleigh to Chapman, August 31, 1912, OUP Archive, ref. #1449.

15. Amy Cruse, *English Composition Based on the Study of Literary Models* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913); Amy Cruse, *A New Course of Composition, Based on the Study of English Masters of Style* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1925). For signs of strain in the relationship, see a testy exchange in 1914 regarding nonpayment of an agreed fee for correction of proofs of *English Composition*. Cruse to OUP, October 1, 1914, and internal office memos following, OUP Archive, ref. #LB3256.

16. Numerous "human interest" articles on current Harrap novelists, poets, anthologists, and historians appeared in the *Harrap Mercury* and its successor, *Harrap Book News*, through the 1920s and 1930s.

17. The oddity of the title, given that the book deals with the last decade and a half of Victoria's reign as well as the "longer" Edwardian age, was queried by one of the publisher's readers. Report by B[ernard] M[iall], AUC 50/23, RUI MS 3282/AURR 6/1/33, September 17, 1937, George Allen & Unwin Archive, University of Reading. Cruse's reasoning, as given in the first chapter, "After Victorianism," is that there was a decisive shift of "mentality" in the 1890s, when the values and assumptions of "Victorianism" were comprehensively rejected. Amy Cruse, *After the Victorians* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938), 11–19.

18. Cruse, *After the Victorians*, 175.

19. John Manning, "High School Textbooks Open Window to Past," rev. of John A. Nietz, *The Evolution of American Secondary School Textbooks* (Rutland, Vt.: Charles Tuttle, 1966); *Phi Delta Kappan* 48 (December 1966): 176.

20. Arthur Lyon Cross, rev. of Amy Cruse, *The Englishman and his Books in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1930); *Journal of Modern History* 3 (June 1931): 310.

21. *Journal of Modern History* 3 (June 1931): 311.

22. Amy Cruse, *The Shaping of English Literature and the Readers' Share in the Development of its Forms* (London: George G. Harrap, 1927), 4.

23. Quoted in "The Reader's Share," *Harrap Mercury* (Autumn 1927): 28.

24. Cruse, *Shaping*, 78–84.

25. *Ibid.*, 127–131.

26. *Ibid.*, 246–256.

27. *Ibid.*, 100–104.

28. *Ibid.*, 202–206.

29. *Ibid.*, 208–212.

30. *Ibid.*, 241–245.

31. Amy Cruse, *The Englishman and his Books* (London: George G. Harrap, 1930), 167–177.

32. *Ibid.*, 240–248.

33. *Ibid.*, 14.

34. Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and their Books* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), 16–20.

35. Cruse, *After the Victorians*, 91–104.

36. Substantial paragraphs appeared in two successive issues of the *Harrap Mercury*, the company's sales catalog-cum-journal, for Spring 1927 (10) and Autumn 1927 (28).

37. I have used the precise but unwieldy term "cultivated general readership" because of a certain reluctance to use the currently much-used "middlebrow." This latter term, as developed and deployed by Joan Rubin in *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), would probably encompass the fairly distinct fraction of the reading public I have in mind—well-educated and well-read, with an interest in literary history and culture above and beyond the reading of recent and contemporary fiction, but with no

professional or scholarly involvement in the study of literature. Other, mainly British uses of the term that associate “middlebrow” with certain kinds of writing, and indeed certain writers (usually novelists), are less helpful for this inquiry. See, for example, Rosa Maria Bracco, *Betwixt and Between: Middlebrow Fiction and English Society in the Twenties and Thirties* (Parkville, Vic.: University of Melbourne History Department, 1990). I have sought to escape the ambiguity by avoiding the term.

38. For example, “Our Great-Grandfathers’ Reading,” *West Australian* (September 6, 1930): 4. The London-based reviewer “Astolpho” is enthusiastic about the project as a whole, and especially interested by the fresh information on the circulation of religious and political reading matter.

39. The firm was not blessed at this time with an especially acute nose for future success, as witness its decision, after publishing Patrick White’s first novel *Happy Valley* in 1938, to allow its option on his second novel to lapse. Internal memo from Joseph Gaute, July 25, 1940, Author files (uncataloged), Chambers-Harrap office, Edinburgh.

40. The George Allen & Unwin archive is held in the Archive of British Publishing and Printing at the University of Reading, United Kingdom. Unfortunately, while it contains readers’ reports on *After the Victorians* and on an unpublished historical novel, “Portrait of a Stuart Lady,” based on the Verney Letters, there are no reports in the archive on Cruse’s most popular and respected book, *The Victorians and their Books*.

41. Report by B[ernard] M[iall], AUC 50/23, RUI MS 3282/AURR 6/1/33, August 12, 1937.

42. Cruse devotes a chapter in *After the Victorians* to “The Decadents of the Nineties” (44–55), in which Wilde figures prominently. I am indebted to Shafquat Towheed for pointing out this connection.

43. Cruse, *After the Victorians*, 194–195.

44. Edith L. Elias, *Great Names in English Literature* (London: Harrap, 1913), 1:12.

45. David Nash, “Beyond the Bible,” *History Today* 49 (January 1999): 26–27.

46. T. G. Rooper, “Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra: A Literary Object-Study,” in *Selected Writings of Thomas Godolphin Rooper* (London: Blackie & Sons, 1897), 273–287.

47. Frank H. Hayward, *The Lesson in Appreciation: An Essay on the Pedagogics of Beauty* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 1–99.

48. Frank H. Hayward, *The Secret of Herbart: An Essay on Education and a Reply to Professor James of Harvard* (London: Swan & Sonnenschein, 1904), 43ff. Earlier commentators on Herbart’s concept of Apperception included Rooper (1891) and Karl Lange (1894).

49. See, for example, Alan Barcan, *A History of Australian Education* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980), 223ff.

50. Roberts and Barter, *Teaching of English*, 80.

51. *Ibid.*, 7.

52. Hayward, *Secret of Herbart*, 75.

53. This reflects the so-called Recapitulation Theory of reading, whereby children’s natural reading abilities and preferences were thought to “recapitulate” those of the human race. This theory also originated with Herbart, but see David Shayer, *The Teaching of English in Schools 1900–1970* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 42–43, for a brief account of its currency in Britain that fails to mention its Herbartian origin.

54. Roberts and Barter, *Teaching of English*, 46–50.

55. Amy Cruse, *Sir Walter Scott* (London: Harrap, 1915); Amy Cruse, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Harrap, 1915). The volumes on Chaucer and Charlotte Brontë are listed among her previous publications on the title pages of the two existing volumes. *Chaucer* is also in the series list on the flyleaves, and *Charlotte Brontë* is listed as “in preparation.” As I can find no other evidence of their existence, I conclude they were probably never published.

56. Patrick Buckridge, "Personality, Appreciation and Literary Education: Harrap's Poetry and Life Series, 1911-1930," in *The Culture of the Publisher's Series*, Vol. 1, *Authors, Publishers and the Shaping of Taste*, ed. John Spiers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 125-140.

57. This personalizing rationale for biographically based literary study is common before the First World War. See, for example, W. H. Hudson, *An Introduction to the Study of Literature* (London: George G. Harrap, 1910), 22-25.

58. Amy Cruse, *English Literature through the Ages* (London: Harrap, 1914), 5.

59. Amy Cruse, *The Golden Road in English Literature: From Beowulf to Bernard Shaw* (London: Harrap, 1931), 5.

60. Cruse, *Shaping of English Literature*, 3.

61. While I have no independent information on Cruse's political sympathies or leanings, a generally leftward shift in liberal thinking in Britain between the wars, especially in the education sector, is well documented. See Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).

62. Cruse, *Shaping of English Literature*, 3.

63. I use the term "phenomenological" here in the sense in which it has been applied to work on the experience of reading by reader-response theorists such as Roman Ingarden, Wolfgang Iser, and Stanley Fish. See Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1984), 23-29, 89-92.

64. Cruse, *Teaching of English*, 56-57. This critique of (excessive) annotation echoes an earlier attack by John Churton Collins on the philological clutter of the Clarendon Press editions of English literary classics. See John Churton Collins, *The Study of English Literature: A Plea for its Recognition and Organization at the Universities* (London: Macmillan, 1891), 57-60.

65. See, for example, Kevin Jackson, *Invisible Forms: A Guide to Literary Curiosities* (London: Picador, 1999), 137.

66. Report by B[ernard] M[iall], September 17, 1937.

67. See, for example, several of the essays in James Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor, eds., *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

68. Martyn Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1-11.