

DIRECTIONS TO THE JURY IN THE CASE OF *R. vs. LAMERTON*

Gentlemen: We have summoned you from your graves and Gardens of Repose – at no small expense to the Borough of Lambeth – to pass judgement in this most painful and disturbing of cases. The defendant, Mr Lamerton, stands accused on fifty-nine counts of cowardice, defamation, indecent exposure, and regicide. By his own admission he has – freely, repeatedly, with malice aforethought, and *in oil paint* – depicted his own county as possessing a horrible, an intensely horrible face *of crumpled linen*.

Mr Lamerton is a man of Kent with no previous convictions and, you may think, no convictions at all. But that is entirely a matter for you. Spectres though you may be, you are all solid – if insubstantial, damp and somewhat ashy – citizens, who returned to your native soil with your pockets unpicked and your psyches unpoked, thank you very much. By contrast, you all know the defendant's sort: they infest derelict schools and tower blocks in the outer postcodes, wear their trouser cuffs several inches too short, roast their own coffee beans, and in short do everything they can to make you feel unwelcome in your local Wetherspoons. I speak here without malice; I merely state facts.

Like every voyeur Mr Lamerton has looked far too hard at his subject. (Harder, indeed, than you may care to look at his paintings, but that, again, is entirely a matter for you.) Consider – if you can bear it – his murky palette, his erythematous textures, his off-centre compositions, the counterpoint of light and dark. Look at the sodium-light migraines and the ley-line road signs, the séances in kitchens, the sitting rooms that overlook brownfield sites and bypasses. Take him at his word and you find yourself pushed into a sentient and vengeful terminal moraine, a bleak, visionary topography of presence-in-absence. The contemplation of this repulsive spectacle, this libel against the Garden of England herself, recalls the worst excesses of – oh, I don't know, Samuel Palmer or Tristram Hillier.

What might be said in defence of this miserable creature? Mr Lamerton is, I suppose, a man who does honour to the seriousness of haunting. No, I don't believe in ghosts. (Even you, gentlemen; you are – and I say this in a spirit of comradeship – legal fictions, every one of you.) But if they and you were real, this is how the world must appear to them. Of his choice of medium I shall say nothing, except that I seem to hear the distant sound of Constable turning in his grave. (Not you, Constable Evans.)

As to what homosocial hooligan longings, what incomplete agricultural traumas, what gusts of necrophiliac desire lie behind these works – well, we may only speculate, and we may at least be grateful that the defendant has remained silent on the matter. But where will it end? Shall we allow this neurasthenic Chartist layabout to rewrite every word of the fiction we know as England? You call this pastoral, Mr Lamerton? You stand condemned by each stroke of your own filthy brush.

Putting all thoughts of prejudice or petty grievance from your minds – and setting aside any personal disgust, however natural, at the depravity of the defendant's conduct – you are now to retire, carefully to consider your verdict of 'Guilty'.

Richard Barnett