

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

# **Attitudes to Love and Marriage in Poetry by Women of the Romantic Period**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in English

at Massey University

**Rachel Anne Jones**

**1994**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Women and Romanticism	7
Chapter Two: "Women's Poetry" of the Romantic Period	26
Chapter Three: Strategies of Subversion in Love Poetry by Women of the Romantic Period	48
Chapter Four: Courtship and Marriage Poetry by Women of the Romantic Period	69
Chapter Five: Felicia Hemans	93
Chapter Six: Letitia Landon	112
Conclusion	134
Works Consulted	138

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the little-known poetry of the women poets writing during the Romantic Period in Britain. In particular, it focuses on attitudes to love and marriage expressed in their poetry, with a view to showing how women poets were confined by their society's ideology and how this affected the content of their poetry. The thesis focuses on poems that deviate from the ideologically "appropriate" representations of love and marriage and attempts to identify the strategies by which the women managed to express conventionally unacceptable thoughts. Particular attention is paid to the work of the two leading women poets of the period, Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Massey University for its financial assistance in awarding me a Massey University Masterate Scholarship in 1993. Thanks are also due to the Manawatu Branch of the New Zealand Federation of University Women for their financial assistance and support through a 1993 Branch Scholarship.

Grateful thanks go to my supervisor Dr Greg Crossan for his constant encouragement and interest in my work. His unfailing support, approachability, and sound advice have been invaluable.

Thanks must also go to my family for their personal and financial support, and to my friends, who have always listened and shown an interest in this thesis. A special thanks to Myreille Pawliez for her practical advice, and to Julie Mulcahy for taking time out of her busy schedule to proofread.

Finally, I am indebted to Craig Woods for his practical input, cheerful patience, and wholehearted support which enabled me to complete this thesis. Many thanks.

## INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of British Romanticism the poets that typically come to mind are the "big six": William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats. Pressed to name any women Romantics, one might suggest Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, Ann Radcliffe, Dorothy Wordsworth, and, perhaps, Jane Austen, before exhausting one's repertoire. In fact, there were many more women than men writing, and being published, during what we have come to know as the Romantic Period (Curran, 186). A good number of these women were poets (J. R. de J. Jackson's forthcoming bibliography lists 1403 volumes by about 900 women poets<sup>1</sup>), who, until recently, had been consigned to oblivion by literary history.

This thesis developed out of an awareness of an absence of female authors, particularly poets, in the academic texts considered representative of the Romantic Period.<sup>2</sup> Not believing that women simply stopped writing after the Augustan Period and remained mute until Victoria took the throne, I searched for evidence of Romantic women poets - and found plenty. Other scholars have also noticed that this period of women's literary history has been neglected and several anthologies of, or including, women's poetry have been published in the last few years.<sup>3</sup> Now that the poetry is slowly becoming more available criticism should soon follow, and build on the pioneering work of Marlon B. Ross and Anne K. Mellor who have both invited a reconsideration of Romanticism in the light of women's writing of the period.

As I read as much of the work of the women poets as

was available, it became clear that, while they shared many of the concerns of the male Romantics (such as a desire for social change, a love of nature, and a nostalgia for the past), there were also areas where female experience directly informed theme and subject. Of primary importance to the women poets was the experience of romantic love as a prelude to marriage, with virtually all of them writing on the subject of love and/or marriage.

On first reading these outpourings on relationships between the sexes one is struck with an overriding sense of the sentimental, with teary-eyed melancholy and noble female suffering being the prevailing ethic. Reading and re-reading the texts, however, reveals an intimation that beneath the surface emotionalism there lies a deeper, perhaps more politically concerned, attitude to love and marriage than is initially suggested.

Given that marriage was virtually compulsory for the late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century woman, exactly what attitudes these women had to this institution became a source of interest. I decided to examine poems on love and marriage hand-in-hand, as for the women of the period the expectation was that these two states would exist together. To achieve my goal of reading the Romantic women poets' works to discover their attitude to love and marriage, I felt that a socio-historical heuristic was most appropriate. As Angela Leighton has expressed in her Introduction to Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart, the socio-historical approach, while not fashionable, has particular merit when applied to women's writing (4-5). For Leighton, and other feminist critics, it is important to recover the lost history of women's writing, and that includes

biographical and social details as well as the texts themselves.

Reading the poetry produced by women during the Romantic Period I became aware of a huge shift in ideas and their expression (concerning love and marriage) that occurred between 1780 and 1837 (approximately). I felt that to achieve insight into their work I needed to explore the culture they were writing in. The pressures on the woman writer had to be examined and acknowledged as forces that shaped the text, as did her society's attitudes towards and expectations of marriage. I have chosen to focus in this thesis on the tension I perceive between poet, poem, and society as evidenced in the texts.

While applying a socio-historical approach to the texts I have also incorporated elements of feminist criticism. I have deliberately chosen to follow what has come to be termed "Anglo-American feminist criticism", as opposed to "French feminist theory" (Mellor, Romanticism and Feminism 3). Both strains are equally important to literary criticism and feminism, but I felt that the Anglo-American methodology lent itself better to a study that takes into account the social and historical aspects of a text.

Mellor explains the reason for this:

Feminist critics working in this Anglo-American tradition have developed a method that Elaine Showalter has christened "gynocriticism," a working hypothesis that women both write and read differently from men. The role of the critic is to define these differences, locating them both in the particular biographical experiences of the writers and readers and in the more general cultural ideology that conditions both the behaviour patterns and the modes of discourse available to men and women. (Romanticism and



Feminism 4)

In the case of the poetry of the Romantic women a political rather than a philosophical approach seemed important, as ideology appeared to play such a dominant role in their lives and texts. In using some of the major texts of Anglo-American feminist criticism I have attempted to apply to the Romantic women poets what in many cases are theories that focus on women novelists or prose writers.<sup>4</sup>

The application of feminist theory to the texts of the women who wrote during the Romantic Period is a huge task waiting to be effected. In fact, there is an enormous amount of work to be carried out in every area of Romantic women's writing, as critics and leading Romanticists Anne Mellor and Marlon Ross have suggested in their recent works.<sup>5</sup> This thesis aims to serve as an introduction to the writing of these women and hopefully will inspire others to further investigate the re-awakened voices of the female authors of the Romantic Period.

## ENDNOTES

1. J. R. de J. Jackson, Romantic Poetry by Women: A Bibliography, 1770-1835 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

2. Examples of anthologies of Romantic literature that contain little or no writing by women of the period (particularly poetry) include:

Albert Reed, ed., The Romantic Period (New York: Scribner's, 1929).

Ernest Bernbaum, ed., Anthology of Romanticism (New York: Ronald Press, 1948).

G. B. Woods, ed., English Poetry and Prose of the Romantic Movement (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1950).

Russell Noyes, ed., English Romantic Poetry and Prose (New York: Oxford, 1956).

David Perkins, ed., English Romantic Writers (New York: Harcourt, 1967).

John Mahoney, ed., The English Romantics (Lexington: Heath, 1978).

B. Martin, ed., The Nineteenth-Century: 1798-1900 Macmillan Anthologies of English Literature, Vol. 4 of 5 Vols. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

3. Examples of recent anthologies containing poetry by women authors of the Romantic period include:

Jennifer Breen, ed., Women Romantic Poets 1785-1832: An Anthology (London: Everyman's Library, 1992).

Roger Lonsdale, ed., Eighteenth-Century Women Poets

(Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990).

Jerome J. McGann, ed., The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993).

Forthcoming is Andrew Ashfield, ed., Women Romantic Poets, 1770-1838: An Anthology (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994).

4. Texts such as:

Sandra M. Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).

Margaret Homans, Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, and Emily Dickinson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980).

Mary Poovey, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984).

5. Mellor's Romanticism and Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988) and Romanticism and Gender (New York: Routledge, 1993), and Ross's The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry (New York: Oxford UP, 1989).

## CHAPTER ONE

### WOMEN AND ROMANTICISM

Unbeknown to many students and scholars of English literature, there were about nine hundred women writing poetry during what we have come to know as the Romantic Period. Unbeknown because, despite their immense popularity and prolific output, these women have all but vanished from literary history. In contemplating why the women poets of the Romantic Period have been written out of the literary canon until recently, we need to examine our whole concept of literary judgement, literary history and ideology.

The Romantic Period, as Marlon Ross has pointed out, is not simply an historical age but also represents a set of values and beliefs, structural, thematic and generic tendencies, and a zeitgeist with its own aims and assumptions; in other words, an ideology (3). It is not, however, an ideology we can examine objectively from historical hindsight, because it is a system we ourselves have inherited. Therefore when we approach the writings of women who worked alongside and interactively with Romanticism, we find that because they were not entirely incorporated within and did not wholly subscribe to that ideology, in some respects we are approaching an alien tradition.

A number of critics, including Marlon Ross and Anne Mellor, have recently illustrated that English Romanticism has a gender, and therefore it becomes historically impossible for women to have written from within this belief system. For us to read the women poets with a sense of historical perspective we need to be able to identify and distance ourselves from

Romantic ideology. (In The Romantic Ideology Jerome McGann argues that this is also important for reading the male poets.) We need to be able to place the women historically and ideologically, remembering that ideology is never fixed and that ideologies co-exist and rival one another for control. Literary movements can only define themselves in relation to other literary movements, deciding what they are not as much as what they are, so it is important to examine the poetry in its cultural context. Ideally, we should not judge women's poetry solely by Romantic ideological values, but consider it in its own right. We need to examine how the alternative perspectives shaped one another and how and why Romanticism became dominant - a dominance clearly illustrated by the fact that we have no term for the rise of women's poetry in this historical period.

Cultural outlook becomes ideology when it furthers the interest of the dominant sector in society, supporting patterns of social power and existing as a majority belief. Culture is a site of conflict between lived experience and ideology, where ideology seeks to tame experience and experience looks to go beyond ideology. Ideology attempts to incorporate, diffuse or contain any oppositional ideas and make its own values seem natural, objective and ahistorical. Hegemony is the internalized weapon of ideology, the means by which the dominant group succeeds in getting the oppressed to endorse their oppression. Dominant ideological groups tend not only to dominate mental production (of ideas, beliefs, and values), but also material production, and therefore any products of a culture bear the stamp of ideology. Romanticism was in many respects in opposition to the new ideology of capitalism which was becoming dominant. However, as the political influence of a literary elite waned and

literature began to cater for the masses, Romanticism provided a useful safety valve catering for those who were resistant to change. Initially badly reviewed, poets like Wordsworth and Keats became supported as it was realised that the poets offered values alternative to the materialism and industrialism of society. To the newly prevailing capitalists the poets were essentially harmless, even useful in that their focus on the importance of the individual supported bourgeois values.

Applying this information to the literary canon we can begin to see that this is not simply an aesthetically pleasing but otherwise arbitrary compilation of authors and works. Rather, those works which become part of the canon do so because they meet ideological criteria in such diversities as genre, style and content, the criteria being that they endorse the way the dominant group perceives the world, expose the folly of alternative beliefs, show the present as a natural extension of the past and do not threaten the power structure of the culture. Romanticism performed the function of acting as a kind of release from the capitalist values of everyday life. Within Romanticism, however, separate strains of thought also emerged allowing for the absorption of dissenting voices like Blake's. Incorporating unorthodox views was again part of the work of ideology as including oppositional ideas under the dominant ideological umbrella diffuses their potential threat. This controlled form of acceptance was the exact response meted out to the women poets.

Close examination of literary texts will yield the workings of ideology and hegemony as internalised by authors. For instance, it is not hard to find examples of women writers depicting women in roles

imposed by the patriarchy that oppresses them. We can see ideology incorporating oppositional ideas on its own terms when we examine how women poets were accepted provided they adhered to the male, ideological definition of the "feminine poetess". We can see how the Romantic doctrine of the strong poet developed out of a fear of feminization of the poetic vocation, resulting in the repression of the feminine which then works subversively below the surface of the ideology. We can see Romantic ideology as attempting to control changes like the rise of women poets and the influence of market forces by asserting doctrines establishing the masculinity of the poet and literary greatness as independent of sales.

It is necessary to have some understanding of Romanticism in its emergence to see its influence on the work of the women writing during the period. Romanticism stressed the fundamental significance of the individual, the relationship between subject and object as inspired by Kant, the creative powers of the mind, and the value of passionate feeling (Mellor, "Why Women Didn't Like Romanticism" 275-76). The poet as a figure above or outside society was an idea fostered by the small group of male poets we now identify as the Romantics. They refused to see poetry as purely ornamental and felt that as poets they had a social responsibility and their works a social purpose. For them marketing and mass readership deprived poetry of its intrinsic merit and usefulness to society. They believed and eventually managed to convince the literary Establishment that the greatness of the poet had no relation to sales, that the poet influenced history and politics more than the utilitarian, and that great poetry could only be written by men of vision. For the Romantic poet the quest for self-creation and self-comprehension in

poetry was perceived to have universal consequences. Through self-possession they claimed mastery over the world and the establishment of a reader's market threatened the grandeur of their self-construction.

The Romantic poet also sought to incorporate any aspect of the feminine he desired to possess while at the same time fearing emasculation. It is well documented that the male Romantics felt threatened by the rigid gender definitions that their society imposed on people and so attempted to redefine masculinity. It is also well documented that the male poets' attempts at describing androgyny result in supremacy of the masculine over the feminine. The male poets also endorsed a concept of the self that gave significance to and gained control over nature, and then troped that nature as female, thus legitimising their repression of women and the importance of the individual (man) in the world (Mellor, Romanticism and Feminism 6-8). As Marlon Ross says, by resorting to "the myth of the masculine poet's unrivalled power over culture, the Romantic plants the seeds for his own self-canonization, for his victory over popular women poets" (12).

In many ways the women poets struggled with similar conflicts as their male counterparts (such as their relationship to nature and the effects of the French Revolution), but gender creates its own experience, particularly under the dominance of patriarchy. As Marlon Ross succinctly puts it: "Even as women poets begin publicly to record their own experience for the first time in history, they do so under the shadow of masculine ideology" (12). The women poets undoubtedly were affected by their speaking in an alien, because it was a masculine, literary tradition. The woman poet was forced to live out an ideological paradox: in



writing poetry she was "masculine" but to succeed as a poet she had to be the ultra-feminine, delicate, suffering poetess.

Why did the woman writer accept the imposition of the role of the poetess? Because ideology and hegemony are a powerful internalised team. These women had to survive in their society, and external social pressures and the forces of internalised ideology working together meant revolution could only come in small steps. For a woman to write poetry was itself a revolutionary concept, and was perceived as enough of a privilege, by the women themselves, to make challenging the prescribed boundaries of their work and taking the risk of losing the right to write unattractive. Yet the tensions and discrepancies between ideology and the lived experience of being female are evident in their work and it is this that I wish to examine closely.

According to Stuart Curran, traditional chronologies of English poetry show that after 1764 there was something of an historical trough in male-produced poetry (excepting Cowper) until 1798 (187). During these "lean years", however, a first generation of Romantic women poets came to maturity. Anna Barbauld, Hannah More, Anna Seward, Charlotte Smith, Helen Maria Williams and Mary Robinson all benefited from the Bluestocking circle that provided them with both economic and intellectual support. These women dominated the publishing scene and had a powerful and pervasive influence on their male contemporaries, ably chronicled by Marlon Ross in The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry. Their absence from the established literary canon, particularly when they were so popular with the reading public, arguably shows a fear of their

presence. During the decades that followed, 1790-1830, poets, critics, and readers put more energy and time into defining the make up and status of the poet than ever before - a desperate attempt to retract lost ideological ground, particularly in relation to the position of women which was to become even more strictly ideologically defined in the Victorian era.

In the hierarchy of the period the powerful male poet headed the natural order, followed by the feminized male poet, then the feminine poetess, and lastly the Bluestocking poet (Ross 189). The Bluestockings were seen as particularly repugnant and unnatural women in terms of ideological outlook because they sought to inhabit a male tradition, compete with men on their own ground, and influence culture and society like their male counterparts. To allow, even encourage, the development of a feminine tradition was to defeat the Blues' purpose of establishing intellectual equality between the sexes, because the feminine was seen as inherently non-literary and sub-intellectual. Byron wrote a satire on the Blues, The Blues: A Literary Eclogue, in 1821, some decades after their peak of influence, showing the profound effect they had on intellectual society.

Mary Poovey has outlined three main factors that combined to open up the literary field for women. Firstly, the demise of patronage, a casualty of the social and political upheaval of the closing decades of the eighteenth century, did away with the need for a (usually male and aristocratic) patron. This meant that women's works could be published anonymously, and male friends or family members could be used to negotiate with the publishers. Ironically, the collapse of patronage meant that women were expected to preserve the paternalism of the old social order,

done away with in the revolutionary decades, in the home. They were meant to separate themselves from the commercial competition pervading the rest of society and maintain the home as a haven from capitalist bourgeois ideology. Secondly, the influence of the Bluestockings showed that a woman could publish poetry and yet maintain an unblemished reputation, as they elevated what had previously been genteel amateurism into an acceptable professional career. Finally, the eighteenth-century embrace of philosophical empiricism produced a corresponding interest in, and emphasis on, individual experience, and led to women being able to exploit in their writings the realm of feeling that they were so often told was inherent in them. This final factor, the phenomenon commonly referred to as the rise of sensibility, had far-reaching effects on the work of the women poets. Women may have been excluded from learned argument and denied access to education, but as expression of feeling became a measure of quality of poetry, women felt able to write (Poovey 36-38).

The replacement of the exclusive system of patronage with the development of the literary marketplace was one of the most significant changes of the Romantic Period. Patronage had provided a degree of psychological as well as financial security, for the male poet in particular, as he was able to feel that his writing was already validated by the ruling class, his views authorized. Despite the advantages of a literary market, such as "more creative freedom, opportunity, fame and financial reward" than under the patronage system (Gaul 13), the male poets were full of complaints. The increasing emphasis on publishing and its common reader market meant the poet had to stoop to compete with anyone who chose to write, and had to prove himself on his own merits to a fickle,

and not necessarily discerning, audience. That the majority of the new mass audience were female did nothing to ease the male poets' transition into market forces. Byron criticized poetry written for the female audience as he felt it feminized the poetic process, and saw the popularization of poetry as the sinking of the craft. Meanwhile, women took seriously their allocated role of maternal nurturer and exploited it by using it to justify their writing.

The second wave of women writers were more visible and financially successful than their predecessors. Included in this group were Joanna Baillie, Matilda Betham, Mary Tighe, Amelia Opie, Charlotte Dacre and the later poets Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon. Not only did women constitute the majority of readers in the early nineteenth century, they also wrote and reviewed poetry and edited annuals. As a collective group they became very influential, a change in the status of the women writer that intimidated the male poets. Women were threatening to break free from their allotted sphere of activity, and the male literati collectively, if not deliberately, worked to redefine acceptable roles for women authors.

The attempt to incorporate women into the ideology by allowing them to write as the feminine poetess, which had been the reaction to the first wave of women poets of the Bluestocking generation, didn't quite succeed. Patriarchal questioning of the femininity of the Blues resulted in a narrowly delineated sphere in which the woman was able to write poetry without overt attack on her sexuality. While many women elected to write in this sphere of overt femininity as the only option available to them, there is an undeniably strained element to their work, sometimes covertly subversive and at infrequent moments overtly disruptive. In what

in present times may be termed a "backlash", various publications (such as Blackwood's) established and sustained Romantic ideology, supporting the myth of poetry writing as a powerful, masculine vocation. Because it shows the working of ideology in containing women's efforts to find a poetic voice, it becomes important to remember that the term "Romantic" was applied to the male poets in hindsight; it was not a concept they applied to themselves collectively. Romantic ideology, as Ross notes, came to dominate the literary Establishment before the Romantic canon was selected - indeed the canon was selected to consolidate and authorise the ideology (54).

Even though the feminine poetess was ideologically defined to keep the woman author under control, some women were able to move beyond their internalization of this role and use it to express their own agenda. Unlike the Bluestockings, they saw themselves as part of a new feminine tradition rather than a female continuation of the male tradition. Male writers and reviewers unwittingly but effectively authorized women to write poetry when they emphasized it as the realm of feeling and private experience. "Feminine Romanticism" existed in dialogue with or opposition to masculine Romanticism, posing an alternative political, aesthetic and moral literary culture. There was a strong system of support between the women poets and there does not seem to have been the anxiety of influence and concern with individual poetic growth so conspicuous in the male Romantics.

To speak about the women poets of this period as Romantics is obviously problematic when we have ascertained that Romanticism is a male ideological system. We should not define women by the literary history of men when important differences of education

and experience make the trajectory of women's literature different (Hickock 6). For example, the learning of Latin was a kind of male puberty rite which meant that the main body of learning, in both content and technique, was not available to women (Tayler and Luria 100-01). This was particularly debilitating for the aspiring woman poet who had the weight of a masculine classical tradition to contend with in the high genre of poetry. The educated woman was an unusual phenomenon, and she tended to come from an unusual background such as belonging to a Dissenting family, or having a particularly liberal father. The majority of women's learning came from their readings in English, and those who wrote poetry did so with similar disadvantages to self-educated men, often with the effect that their work relied on the conventional posturing of classical tradition. Women were paradoxically deprived of learning then despised for their ignorance, but even if they acquired an education this was then ridiculed as unfeminine. No-one was more aware of this situation than the women themselves, as evidenced by educated women such as Anna Barbauld and Hannah More discouraging female education, and Fanny Burney turning down Latin lessons from Dr Johnson because she knew to have such learning would be a waste as she would have to feign ignorance to be socially acceptable (Tayler and Luria 102).

Anything but a superficial education for the young girl was seen as a hindrance to marriage: her first priority was to catch a man and to be educated was a well-known deterrent. Women were to be learned enough to be an agreeable companion to their husband and to be able to educate their children in their early years, and that was all. Girls were educated in their own home, usually by their mother. Some were lucky

enough to share their brothers' tutor or use their father's library. Only the very upper classes, or those of radical background, occasionally received a solid education. The medium between a frivolous education for women and a thoroughgoing Bluestocking one that was found towards the end of the eighteenth century was, however, an improvement on previous decades. Importantly, such an education, and the increase in the leisure time of the upper-middle-class woman, provided a ready market for literature. The increased sales as a result of these factors, and cheaper paper production, brought down the costs of publishing and increased the number of circulating libraries in Britain (Stone 156).

The women poets' response to their lack of a classical education varied. Some women, such as Charlotte Dacre, wrote deliberately non-imitative work free from any classical allusion. Such works appealed to the new female readership and indicate that the barriers between popular and learned culture were shifting, Dacre's work in particular influencing Shelley and Byron as they aimed at the new mass audience (Reiman, Introduction to Dacre xii). The women writers were aware of the shortcomings of their education and rather than attempt to mimic their forefathers in style, knowing they lacked the necessary knowledge they often exploited their lack of education for their own ends. By acknowledging their lack of skill in the technical aspects of poetry they allowed for experimentation and innovation. They also used their ignorance to justify non-conventional subjects as they deliberately and provokingly lowered the muse to the level of gossip. Less talented and challenging writers floundered as they attempted to mimic the classical traditions that preceded them, though some, like Mary Tighe, managed to find their own voice while

using conventional form.

For the woman author the interaction between literature and culture is very complex, as Kathleen Hickock has discussed in her study of how women portray women in Victorian poetry (8-9). Expression of uniquely female experience is frequently muted by the dominance of patriarchy. The woman poet's representations of society often differ from her consciousness of lived experience; she supports the patriarchal order by portraying women in the distorted way used by males even while she is aware of the falseness of the image. Literary and social conventions provide a framework that inhibits content so that elements of protest are almost unconsciously incorporated in a sort of code. To express their experiences, women poets had to simultaneously conform to and subvert the patriarchal literary and cultural standards (Gilbert and Gubar 73). This two-faced balancing act is evident in their work as the tension between conventional ideas about women and the women poets' reactions to them. They had a solidarity in a kind of unstated conspiracy to appear to conform to social expectation while subverting it. Even the least talented and most conventional women poets show flashes of resentment or discontent about women's lot.

The Romantic tradition makes it difficult for any writer to separate their sexual identity from their writing because of its identification of the poet as masculine. Women poets were judged as women first and as poets second. Women had to turn the restrictions on them to their advantage, and exploit rather than do battle with them, in order to survive. As Margaret Homans has explained, masculine Romantic poetry minimizes its connections with practical experience in its desire for transcendence of time, place, and,



ideally, gender. Neither the women poets nor the men achieve such transcendence as their work bears the traces of their social experience of gender. Poetry as a tradition had been entirely masculine: Wordsworth may have been burdened by the greatness of Milton but women were burdened by the masculinity of both. Literary tradition not only offered women distorted stereotypes of themselves but also a masculine bias in the structures of thought and language, and the expectations of diction, form and subject, which made it difficult for a woman to view herself as poet (Women Writers and Poetic Identity 8-9).

Publishers and editors were predominantly male during the Romantic Period and this meant that women, as well as suffering psychologically from their desire to enter the masculine domain of writing poetry, also had to deal with the external pressures of a male-dominated industry. Poovey ably outlines how writing for publication catapulted women into the public arena, where commercial competition openly reigned, and the effects this had on the female poets (35-36). To have their works published seemed an act of calling attention to women as subject rather than object and jeopardised modesty, that cornerstone of femininity. To combat these social prejudices women used a variety of strategies. Often they encouraged the notion that they published reluctantly, only at the behest of friends or family, and apologetic introductions accompanied their editions, reassuring readers that they only wrote for personal pleasure or as a hobby. Alternatively women stressed their need for financial assistance and shared the sorrows of their lives to prove the honesty of their claims. The female poet was split between the feminine and the masculine, the private and the public, as she competed in the market for readers but at the same time rejected the

entrepreneurial values associated with it as a masculine domain.

Women poets were certainly published but this was often due to market forces rather than any significant respect for women as authors. There was still prejudice against learned women: manuscripts were often altered by publishers or booksellers, who, as men, saw their judgement to be superior to that of the author. This in fact was a big problem for the women as they almost always had to submit their work to male judgement, even if to that of friends or family members, before it was published. Once their work was published it was an open target for the eye of male critics. Even if their criticism was not openly hostile it was insidious in its indulgence of the woman poet. Women were kept firmly in their place by not being critically appraised on the same level as men. A whole vocabulary developed associated with the criticism of women's poetry: they were praised for "quickness of apprehension", for "delicate taste", and for not presuming to "strong judgement" (Poovey 39). There was a tendency to focus on the technical aspects of their verse with something akin to wonderment when spelling, rhyme and diction were "correct".

Nevertheless, women published volumes of their own poetry, contributed to periodicals and miscellanies, and were anthologised. Annuals also provided a lucrative market for the female poet as by the 1830's over two hundred were being published and women had entered the market as editors and critics as well as authors. Writing for the annuals may have been financially secure but often led to the familiar criticisms of "gaudy and inane phraseology" associated with women's poetry as opposed to the masculine style of the true poet: Wordsworth's "a man speaking to men"

(Williamson 284). The annuals focused on the picturesque and the styles were predominantly the narrative and the descriptive. The financial requirements of a woman like Letitia Landon meant she was forced to write poems for pictures given to her by the annuals' editors, and she herself noted that what made a pretty picture often did not lend itself to a poem (Adburgham 245). They were, however, largely free from the politics that dominated the main serials and journals.

Critics and commentators rewarded "feminine" qualities of sentimentality, domesticity, delicacy, and moralism in poetry by women but themselves preferred the type of poetry they saw as impossible and inappropriate for the female, that is, the poetry that embodied the masculine values of intellectuality, strength and ethical concern (Hickock 11). There were no rewards for women who sought to be innovative or challenge the social order. They were confined to feminine subjects, themes, and attitudes and had to please in order to be published and to be read. The mission of the female poet to guide and morally uplift society meant their poetry often represented ideals of womanhood rather than exploring social realities (Hickock 13).

As Fergus and Thaddeus note in their thorough study, writing offered decent wages and did not necessarily affect gentility. The number of women published increased by fifty percent per decade in the second half of the eighteenth century (Fergus and Thaddeus 191). There were four main methods of publication. The first was the subscription method which tended to be demeaning for women as it involved actively soliciting payment. The second involved a fee for limited copyright which was prestigious, if not always lucrative, as success depended on the publisher being

able to predict the market. Profit sharing was a third alternative whereby the publisher assumed responsibility for production and the profits were shared equally. The fourth method was that of commission, whereby the author paid for the cost of production and the publisher charged commission on the profits. Choice of publisher was an important financial and career decision as writers depended on a reading public that remained largely fixed in size. That most of the publishers were male seems to have counted both for and against the woman author. Certainly archival records show many women dealt directly, firmly and successfully with their publishers, but there was still social resistance to the idea of women making money and some felt it necessary to provide a male front or publish anonymously. The same indulgence of women's writing that the critics meted out was found in publishing. Fergus and Thaddeus have documented Mary Robinson and Amelia Opie as running up enormous debts with their publisher, debts that would not have been indulged for a male author (201).

The closing decades of the eighteenth century with their revolutionary ideals about human rights and personal dignity, amongst other things, touched off a reactionary explosion of conservatism. Mary Wollstonecraft's ideals came under particular fire and numerous publications refuted her claims for women's equality, contributing to the formulation of the cult of "true" womanhood. Two ideological doctrines supported the conservatives: the idea of male superiority as natural and the idea of the sexes being complementary in their differences. Literature after the 1790's reinforced women's submission through novels, periodicals, sermons, and conduct books, all of which supported male authority and female

subjection as the natural order of things. Ambition in women was a major usurpation of this natural order and for the woman writer involved three main sins: the neglect of the domestic, aspiration to influence society, and the competition with the male in the market place which may lead to economic independence (Clarke 21). The only way to reach the public with reputation intact was by being published because of financial necessity, parental admiration or the moral desire to effect good.

The woman poet had to be tearful and/or provoke tears in order not to offend, thus showing that her poetry was the overflow of feminine sensibility, and that she was not really a poet but an angel of the hearth. Such sentimentalism had the uncanny effect of misting over the critic's eye, all the more insidious because the male reviewer seemed to be unable to see any incongruity between the text and the woman author (Leighton 28-29). It was not until late in the Romantic era that women, like Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon, emerged as self-professing poets rather than dabblers in scribbling. As the early literary market expanded, publishers marketed the mystique of the woman writer, which provided an incentive for the later authors but also helped shape the myth of what it meant to be a woman poet.

"Self-expression" assumes autonomy and the power to participate in the culture as a subject, so how did women who were defined as objects and in relation to men manage to write? Certainly not without struggle and psychological hardship, as they fought against not only the visible ideological influence, like male literary portrayal of women, but also the ideology as they had internalized it. Social experience is informed at every level by ideology, and all

literature participates in the representation and evolution of ideology. Literature itself is ideology (and its corresponding tensions) internalized, articulated and circulated by the individual author. Contradictions in texts reproduce the discrepancies between lived experience and ideology, showing the author, consciously or unconsciously, attempting to resolve them imaginatively (Poovey, Preface x-xv). As lived experience is delimited by ideology, so too is artistic creation. As Curran says, the "achievement of these women poets was to create literature from perspectives necessarily limited by the hegemony of male values" and to have these perspectives participate in the mainstream of culture in their time (205).

## CHAPTER TWO

### "WOMEN'S POETRY" OF THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

Having examined the various ideological elements that influenced and constrained the women poets writing during the Romantic Period, we now turn to an exploration of the characteristic genres and themes that emerged in their poetry. The female poet's career depended on a combination of the support of the reading public and the discretion of fathers, brothers and male publishers. This "politics of taste", as Marlon Ross calls it, determined what kind of poetry women could write and publish (232). Given that women's role was to nurture the soul (sentiment and affection) and not the mind (intellect and reason), and given that the soul is nobler than the mind, it was inferred that women lowered themselves if they wrote like men. This seemingly logical deduction contributed to the delineation of a separate sphere of influence for the woman writer, as compared to her male counterpart, and is an obvious precursor to the Victorian myth of the "angel in the house".

Because women were exploiting the role of female nurturer that had been allocated to them, in order to justify their writing at all, many of the concerns present in their work are related to this role. Women poets had to contend with set ideas of women's "sphere" and duties, which tended to confine them to ideologically-defined "appropriate" subjects, themes and attitudes (Hickock 13). They could write on the same things as men but not in the same way - their approach, attitude, expression, method, manner and

style should distinguish them from the male poets (Ross 239). Women had to disclaim desire for equality and proclaim satisfaction with their prescribed role, partly because of the backlash against the learned verse of the Bluestockings and the corresponding growth in praise for ultra-feminine and sentimental writing. The female poets' desire to nurture culture, however, competed with the male poets' desire to father culture. The negative reaction against this overlap of roles from the critics and male poets (alarmed at the feminisation, and therefore lowering, of the genre) led to the stressing of the male and female poetic spheres as separate and different. The women poets largely accepted this division because it at least sanctioned their writing of poetry; their acceptance is clearly evidenced by the difference in themes of the bulk of female-authored poetry as compared to male.

Publishing and market forces also influenced women's poetry, as can be seen in the moralising works of Hannah More and Anna Barbauld, two women who helped bridge the ideological gap between the Bluestockings and the feminine poetesses, and between Augustan social satire and Victorian concerns with social and self-improvement. More and Barbauld filled a market niche in their authoring of conservative guidelines for moral living, and their timidity in educational and political claims for women offset the more radical writing of women like Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria Williams. The Bluestocking writers, and to some extent their protégées, had tackled male authors on their own ground, and the backlash against them resulted in the development of a new feminine tradition rather than a female continuation of the male poetic tradition. The critics moved from belittling the efforts of the Blues to respecting the



feminine, which is a shift from ridiculing an ideological threat to attempting to diffuse and contain it. The new respect for the feminine involved critics disguising sociomoral values as literary criteria and praising the women poets for such things as piety, delicacy, simplicity, and modesty (Ross 254).

By the late eighteenth century "women's poetry" had come to consist of a typical mixture of pastorals, sonnets, occasional poems, gothic tales, and melancholy, introspective verses like those of Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson and Helen Maria Williams. Common forms were odes, sonnets, elegies, ballads, hymns, and metrical tales. The most fashionable genres of poetry were eastern pastorals, medieval legends, imitations of Ossian, laments for dead birds and small animals, quatrains on flowers, tales of the New World, and odes to Fancy, Sensibility and other personifications (Lonsdale xxxvi; Todd, Dictionary 14). (Such poems are often omitted from modern anthologies in deference to current taste and literary judgement, despite their contribution to literary history.) Much of women's poetry was for children, and included poems that carried allegorical meaning (such as Mary Howitt's "The Spider and the Fly") presumably intended for the adults (usually women) who read to the young. The women poets preceded Wordsworth's "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads in their use of ordinary language and everyday subjects, and they were largely responsible for the revival of the literary ballad and sonnet. They wrote in naturalistic mode about domestic matters and satirised assumptions about the nature of poets and poetry. They tended not to write semi-autobiographical poems or attempt classical myths, Mary Tighe's Psyche being a notable exception.

The self-conscious search for poetic identity is one of Romanticism's definitive characteristics, yet the majority of the women poets do not raise the issue of poetic development. Neither is the teleological ideal of growth of the self, exemplified most markedly by The Prelude, a preoccupation of women's poetry of the period. In contrast to the visionary universals issuing from the pens of the male poets, the women concentrated on the details of everyday life. Their emphasis was on the particular, the quotidian, the minutiae of life. They defiantly expressed the emotional response of the individual to the specific (something they shared with the also marginalised male lower-class poets), and made no claims to be speaking for humankind.

Because the dominant ideology worked against learned women and allocated to the female the realm of feeling, women poets cultivated and celebrated sensibility (in direct contrast to most women novelists of the time who followed Mary Wollstonecraft's lead and argued for female rationality). Their apparently constant celebration of hearth and home, God and country, rings painfully in the ears of the modern, secular and post-colonial, reader. There were, however, frequent darker elements in women's poetry: strains of exile, failure, frustrated female genius, alienation and death (Curran 189). Poetry of feeling enabled women to encode their dissatisfaction with the female condition and the number of poems addressing displaced female consciousness, e.g. fallen, mad, exiled and aged women, shows how frequently the previously silenced woman was given a voice or at least spoken of. (Charlotte Dacre's volume Hours of Solitude alone includes poems titled "The Exile", "Love and Madness", "The Musing Maniac", "Ruin'd Innocence", and "The

Maniac".) Such sympathy for distress and victimization was an extension of the nurturing role of women and an ideological marker for what modern critics have come to call the "ethic of care", supported by women in opposition to the developing male preoccupation with the individual ego. In encouraging a sense of community the women poets showed a concern with the effects of single instances on the reader and tended to eschew conventional plot for incidentality, in order to emphasise and share the emotion involved (Ross 291). Women's poetry gave women's experience a forum in which women could share their values and concerns about society and the nature of human relations.

The potential and actual negative effects that writing and publishing poetry had on women's domestic happiness was a crucial influence on women's poetry. Writing itself was frequently portrayed as a transgression, often by means of ironic self-depreciation or the assumed voice of an imaginary detractor (Williamson 280-81). Women poets subverted the notion of the female muse by using her to explore women's experience from women's perspective. They mocked masculine convention, satirizing the idea that poetry must be elevated in language and theme (Breen xvi). Their awareness of the masculinity of the domain of poetry also increased the importance of female solidarity. Female friendship was an important recurring theme in women's poetry. Adults spent more time with members of the same sex than those of the opposite sex, and the years of sexual maturity that preceded marriage encouraged passionate friendships, particularly between women (exemplified by the sonnets of Anna Seward about her friendship with Honora Sneyd). The frequent use of the verse epistle form by women poets also points to the importance of recording

women's experience for female friends.

Nature, as with the male Romantics, played a prominent role in the poetry of women, but the same communing with nature that left the male poets emotionally uplifted often produced states of feeling characterised by emptiness and loss for the female poet (Kaplan 86). Charlotte Smith's melancholy sonnets provide numerous examples of introspective contemplation of nature leading to feelings of isolation and self-pity. For Felicia Hemans, only nature as it relates to humanity, rather than its intrinsic beauty or sublimity, is significant. People can trek into the wilderness but they cannot leave their humanity behind and therefore are always tied to the domestic affections - something Hemans sees as a blessing (Ross 307-08).

As Roger Lonsdale has noted, women poets, like the lower-class males, were often intimidated by or indifferent to loftier poetic genres and worked less self-conscious and more sociable forms, such as the verse epistle (xliv-xlv). Some provincial writers had never encountered the requirements of polite taste, and/or did not write for publication, so authors like Susanna Blamire show an earthy vigour of expression. The most successful forms for the women poets were those where generic expectations were minimal and polished diction was unnecessary. The resulting unaffected conversational ease produces some of the best work from the women, such as Blamire and Joanna Baillie's "humorous and graphic descriptions of humble rural life" (Lonsdale xlv).

Women certainly drew on the growing concern for individual experience, but focused on the experiences of shared daily life, not transcendental universals.

One of the major themes of women's poetry was, not surprisingly, the domestic. Unlike the male Romantic's vision of the domestic, particularly Wordsworth's, the female ideal was shared equal affection rather than a microcosmic monarchy dominated by the male sovereign (Ross 310). Domestic poetry by its very nature was personal, specific, and part of female experience. Subjects ranged from "Washing-Day" to "A Mother to her Waking Infant" to "Lines, Written on Seeing my Husband's Picture" (Anna Barbauld, Joanna Baillie, and Anna Sawyer respectively). No facet of the domestic escaped the women poets' description, from laborious drudgery to the pleasures of home life. They showed a deliberate disregard for the hierarchies of language, genre and subject, often invoking the muse as gossip as in Barbauld's "Washing-Day". Domestic verse appealed to these poets' largely female audience, as it spoke of their experiences as women; moreover, as already noted, because the critics rewarded the "feminine" qualities of sentimentality, domesticity, delicacy and moralism, these are the qualities women cultivated in order to be published and popular.

The cult of sensibility of the late eighteenth century enabled women to express female consciousness within certain boundaries: they could express a restricted desire. By the 1790's sensibility had provoked negative reaction and women's poetry became concerned with the moral aspects of political issues like revolution, slavery and the poor. The feminist movement of the 1790's attacked sensibility in favour of rationality, but Mary Wollstonecraft, the leading articulator of these ideas, was vilified because of ill timing. A brief period of liberality, when even the sexual "eccentricities" of women like Helen Maria Williams and Wollstonecraft were tolerated, came to an

abrupt end because of events in France, and conservatism and moralism reigned supreme into the nineteenth century (Todd, Dictionary 8). Sensibility was revived again with the careers of Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans during the 1820's. Unfortunately, while it was both profitable and fashionable, it also accrued strongly prescriptive gender-specific values like sincerity and purity (Leighton 3). In disallowing any traces of sexuality, economics, politics or power, sensibility proved one of the women poets' most disabling inheritances. Because it dissociated them from the affairs of the world, it helped create the distinctive spheres of the masculine and feminine poets.

The Romantic women poets were writing before the onslaught of religious doubt that characterises Victorian literature, and religion is an important touchstone for them. They often used direct speech to God as a means of expressing what would otherwise be unacceptably addressed to a male authority figure. Personal and artistic inhibitions that were in conflict in the patriarchal world were resolved in communion with God, for example in Hemans' poem "The Grave of a Poetess". Poetry could be viewed as a religious offering, where the poet answered only to God, not his representative on earth - man. Women's writing was sanctioned if she could show it was done out of duty and service to God, and as an extension of the domestic duties of the home. Religion was a powerful medium, used to transmit messages of self-sacrifice and self-denial to women (the Bible providing the model of woman as helpmate that marriage was founded on), but religion could also be used by women to legitimate desires, like writing, that were self-fulfilling rather than self-denying (Clarke 45-46).

Love, and in particular the love between husband and wife, was a constant theme of women's poetry. Women's relations with men were part of the material reality of their lives, interrelated with the household, children, money and health, and all influenced the woman poet's work (Clarke 14). The majority of the poems produced on this topic abound in repetitions of undying love and the combination of sweetness and tears. The woman is depicted as the grateful recipient of the male hero's affection although such love may result in anguish and sorrow. As authorities on the heart and creatures of innate feeling, women writers were expected to focus on love, but only "proper" love that had nothing to do with sexual desire. Before we look for evidence of this and examine the other characteristic features of poetry dealing with love and, in particular, marriage, we need to examine marriage itself as an institution during the Romantic Period.

It is certainly not surprising that the romance theme was so frequent in women's poetry when we consider that every young woman was groomed and raised in the expectation of marriage. Marriage was much more than a contract between individuals: family, economics, land, and issues of class were all involved in this social institution. Marriage was a very rigidly defined custom, acceptable only within certain boundaries, as demonstrated by the disapproval incurred by Hester Thrale, Fanny Burney and Catherine McCauley when they made "inappropriate" second marriages for no other reason than love (Rogers 13-14). Marriage and a literary career did not make agreeable companions. The most prolific years for the women poets (and novelists) who did marry were pre-marriage or post-separation from a husband. Many of the successful women poets never married, such as Anna

Seward, Joanna Baillie, Hannah More and Matilda Betham, while the careers of some came to a halt upon marriage (Letitia Landon's and Maria Jane Jewsbury's). Anna Barbauld was reproached because her early poems dealt with the imagination and knowledge and because she used "masculine" blank verse; she took the criticism to heart and played the subordinate role in a bad marriage, contenting herself by writing for children (Lonsdale xxxiii-iv).

Historian Lawrence Stone has traced the changes in the British family through several centuries and notes that at the end of the eighteenth century several factors influenced marital decisions. There was a definite trend towards bachelorism in the owners of country estates and younger sons, and a corresponding rise in the number of women who reached fifty without ever having been married (to 25% at the end of the eighteenth century). The average age for marriage for women was 22-23 years while for male heirs it was 27-29 years and partners for all strata of society were drawn from a limited social and geographical range (Stone 40). The trend to greater freedom for children, more equal partnership between spouses, and more affection between all members of the nuclear family, was accompanied by the nuclear family's increasing withdrawal from networks of kin and community (Stone 149). As Western culture moved its focus from gratification in the next world to the seeking of pleasure in this lifetime, greater freedom for the individual in choice of spouse arose. The fashionability of sensibility meant it became acceptable to express abhorrence of cruelty and this initiated moves for the implementation of legal protection, for children and women in particular. The influence of the Romantic Movement encouraged a more openly emotional involvement in family relations,



which improved the treatment of both wives and children and was spread successfully through evangelicalism and the newly emerging mass communications (Stone 163-64).

The new ideal of an affection-based marriage that emerged from these social changes Stone refers to as the "companionate marriage" (217). It grew in popularity from the realisation that affection did not necessarily develop naturally after marriage, yet, as life expectancy increased, along with leisure time that forced couples to spend more time together, a desire for companionship between spouses arose. An indicator of the changed nature of marriage was the use of first names between spouses, rather than honorific titles, that occurred at the end of the eighteenth century (Stone 220). Similarly, an increase in the number of separations that took place by the late eighteenth century shows increasing emotional expectations of marriage. As Stone says, "In periods where expectations are low, frustrations will also be low" (223).

While the companionate marriage seems to us a vast improvement on the parentally arranged, loveless unions that preceded it in history, it was not without its drawbacks. The move to an affectional marriage was more beneficial to men than to women. The male could wait later for marriage in order to be financially secure and still be assured of a selection of women, and if the marriage didn't succeed he was free to follow interests outside the home or file for divorce. Women could still not really choose their spouse as it was socially unacceptable for them to initiate courtship; they could only accept or refuse a suitor. Parental influence was still strong in practice, as were financial considerations. The

successful companionate marriage depended to a large extent on the docility and adaptability of women (Stone 249). They were not permitted to be active or passionate in their love and on marrying were absorbed into the life and status of the husband.

A negative aspect of the companionate marriage must have been the ideals and expectations it raised in the minds of young women. Trained only to catch husbands in the marriage market, they were ill-equipped to deal with the spinsterhood that ever-increasing numbers of them would face. They also had idealistic expectations of a romantic, mutual love and respect that would endure beyond courtship (partly fuelled by the romantic novels of the period whose central theme was "the struggle of love and personal autonomy against family interest and parental control" (Stone 156)). The actualities were often harsh, particularly the reality of their legal situation which provided a stark contrast to the ideals of the companionate marriage. Upon marriage the woman was legally incorporated and consolidated into the existence of her husband (where it had previously been that of her father). As Ray Strachey put it (rephrasing Sir William Blackstone), "My wife and I are one and I am he" (qtd. in Tayler and Luria 98). She could not sue, or be sued; all money she earned belonged to her husband; any children belonged to their father; and she could divorce only by obtaining an Act of Parliament and proving cruelty (until the law change of 1857). In effect married women were civilly dead, with no direct legal, economic or political power in society and similarly no legal, economic or political responsibility (Hickock 18). Given these circumstances it seems pertinent to ask what the attraction of marriage was for women.

Like religion, marriage offered women a secure position in the scheme of things. It allowed them daily happiness and self-fulfilment through self-sacrifices that would ultimately be rewarded in heaven. Norma Clarke suggests that a woman's husband became the masculine part of her self, the part that was respectable socially and through which she could pursue her social identity and economic position, things not available to the single woman. Marriage offered a female heroism in the form of heroic self-sacrifice, as woman must always devote herself while man must always disappoint (Clarke 79-80).

Ideal versions of womanhood were a popular part of social discourse, delineating the aspirations of women, but there were no corresponding sets of ideals for men (Clarke 98). The wife's identity was bound with her husband's but not the reverse. The approved public tone for speaking about one's husband was the hushed respectful tone that was used to speak of one's father, aligning the status of wife and child (Clarke 100). Women were meant to be silent about their marriages: criticizing the husband made the wife an unwomanly shrew. This had major implications for the woman author who was both compelled to explore experience for truth and, as a good wife, suppress much of what was significant (Clarke 131). Looking at the biographies of the women poets, and novelists, of the period we see a remarkable number of unsuccessful marriages and large numbers of unmarried women, yet paradoxically the poets in particular seem to support and encourage the idea of love and wifely submissiveness.

Marriage was seen as the only respectable occupation for women, learning and writing representing threats to domestic duty. Affection-based marriages may have

become the norm at the end of the eighteenth century but informal safeguards continued to enforce economic considerations, for example the conduct books which told girls to obey their parents in the critical decisions of their lives (Poovey 13-14). Marriage still often operated as a business arrangement with affection second to commercial gain. Chastity was perhaps the single most important virtue for a woman (Rogers 9). The concept of strict settlement ("...a legal provision...to ensure that the family estate would descend intact to the eldest son of each generation" (Poovey 12)) meant that women could threaten male security and property through one act of infidelity, and therefore virtuous women suppressed all sexual feeling, fixing innocent affections where "Duty" required. Chastity denoted a woman's value, was narrowly defined, and once lost was assumed irrecoverable, so women were constantly preoccupied with maintaining its appearance (Rogers 9). Women also represented an economic threat to their husbands, as consumers not contributors in the household, so just as sexual desire was deferred in the virtuous woman so too was material gratification. The entanglement of love with property and the repression of sexual desire played important roles in the concept of marriage for the female.

Friendship and affection were the basis for a successful companionate marriage, not passionate love. There was a clear distinction made between love founded on knowledge and judgement, and love of a sexual nature. Marriage was the single most important choice of a woman's lifetime: her entire future happiness depended upon it and there was no escape should she make the wrong decision. The new freedom from absolute parental authority in the matter led to internalised guilt and self-reproach for a misguided

choice (Figes 6). Separation discredited the woman regardless of circumstances and divorce with the right to remarry was effectively only given to husbands with adulterous wives. All acceptable patterns of female life involved preparation for, or fulfilment of, the "natural" roles of wife and mother (Hickock 4). Women who failed to fulfil this vocation were seen as inadequate, sad, lonely and deviant, as well as economic burdens.

Once married, the woman was obliged to make the marriage successful, through whatever degree of sweetness, compliance and self-sacrifice was necessary to keep her husband happy and the marital home harmonious. The Church preached that a woman should show obedience to her husband in all except anything unlawful, and not only that, but she was obliged to obey cheerfully. A woman was not permitted to show anger and could only attempt to influence her husband through cajolery or tears. Since he was legally entitled to restrict her activities, friendships, spending and access to her children, "it was in her interest to prevent him from wanting to wield his power" (Rogers 10).

Modesty restricted a woman's freedom, forcing her into a passive role in courtship where sexual attraction was to be denied at all costs, and birth, wealth, and affection were to be the controlling elements of a decision to marry. Women who married without parental approval were liable to find themselves without inheritance, and with a damaged reputation as they clearly displayed "uncontrolled passion and wilfulness" (Rogers 11). The wife's main role was to please her husband and develop the home as a refuge from the world, and this was to be achieved by contributing to his material wealth via her dowry,

submitting to his will, gratifying his sexual desires and deferring to his intellect. In return for her contribution the wife could expect to be loved, honoured and protected (Hickock 51). The emphasis of conduct books was on wifely submissiveness, the cultivation of beauty and domestic harmony. Despite the wife's duty to her husband including sexual obligation, she was expected to be ladylike, dispassionate and unprovocative, with no sexual desires of her own; in other words virtually sexless. Until 1884 women could be imprisoned for denying conjugal rights and divorce was virtually impossible for women until 1857 (Hickock 52). Those who remained unmarried or those who were left by their husbands were denied their share of inheritances. Women were prevented from supporting themselves by a lack of access to professional training and by the social stigma attached to earning money. A surprising number of professions were considered indelicate, including artist and actress, and one of the few respectable professions that developed was writing, despite its earlier links with unchastity (the scandals associated with Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood etc.) (Rogers 21).

Women were defined as relative, to men and sexuality - "A Daughter, a Sister, a Wife and a Mother" as Richard Steele put it (qtd. in Rogers 7) - which offered them no substantive role outside of the home. Women were trained to seek love but had to be chaste before marriage and monogamous after. As Mary Wollstonecraft had pointed out, the way in which most middle class women were educated prepared them only "to excite love...[and] they cannot live without love" (qtd. in Breen xv). The young English girl was the subject of much sentimental verse, mostly with an emphasis on maidenhood as a time of preparation for marriage and motherhood. Girls were trained to fulfil

the character expectations of society; if they didn't fit the stereotype they were encouraged to fake it (e.g. by acting delicate even if perfectly healthy)(Hickock 33). Social expectations were redefined during the early nineteenth century insofar as the wife went from being supposed to be idle and admired in the Regency Period to, additionally, being sheltered and protected in the Victorian Period (Hickock 34).

Various themes and forms of verse emerged directly from women's experience as daughters, wives and mothers, socially ignored with no legal or economic status. Class was entangled with gender and created a variety of responses and distinctive voices. Jennifer Breen in her anthology of Romantic women poets distinguishes between women of letters who wrote for fulfilment in their chosen vocation, and working women who were "discovered" by patrons and wrote for money (xi). The distinction at least attempts to differentiate the effects of social status but its usefulness is questionable when the concept of "women of letters" includes such contrasts as Charlotte Smith, who wrote from necessity, and Dorothy Wordsworth, who wrote for pleasure.

Numerous feminist critics, such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, have shown that women poets had difficulties in creating a uniquely female point of view because of social and psychological inhibitions. This is particularly evident in love poetry where the expectation would be that women would take a quite different perspective from that of their male counterparts. Despite the assumption that every woman would "fall in love", remain chaste until marriage, then monogamous, and also take the dominant role in preserving married love, "women poets of all classes

often adopted masculine conventions, including a male persona, to write love poetry" (Breen xix). Part of the reason for this perhaps lies in the fact that women were not allowed to express desire, and therefore had no vocabulary, or form, or social permission to do so, except by male tradition. Such an approach to love poetry indicates a split between what was acceptable and women's real experience of love. The women tended to make women objects rather than speaking subjects in their poetry, and endowed them with the same characteristic virtues that the male poets ascribed to the ideal woman. They portrayed women as desirable, decorative, highly feeling objects, and there is a notable absence of sharp comments or the frustration one would expect to arise from unequal sexual status. The love poetry of the women portrays a world of ideals that is curious when the lived experience of the writers themselves belies the rosy picture they paint of romantic love.

It is interesting that despite the common protestations about woman's lot in terms of education, writing and general social status, the success of romantic love in marriage appears to remain an untarnished ideal in the bulk of women's poetry. For example, Felicia Hemans wrote of men as heroes while vaguely referring to women's suffering in marriage (in "Madeline" it is woman's destiny "to suffer and be still, / And with submissive love count the flowers..."), and it was only in the last years of her life that she became outspoken in her disillusionment. Letitia Landon in her Preface to "The Venetian Bracelet" identified love as her "source of song" and spoke of her province as a woman as being to "paint [love] self-denying, devoted and making an almost religion of its truth" - taken to its extreme in her poem "Immolation of a Hindoo Widow" (qtd. in Cooper 8-



9).

Sexuality, or physicality in any form, rarely appears in the poetry: love is portrayed as of the heart, not the body. The direct expression of sexuality or any particularly physical female experience was forbidden in deference to public morality, although internalized self-censorship would not have allowed many women to contemplate expression of it (Hickock 12). This censorship was extremely oppressive as virtually all experience that was uniquely feminine was unspeakable, let alone unprintable. Sentimentalism caused the polarization of love, allocating the spiritual and domestic aspects to women, the intellectual and passionate (sexual) aspects to men. Female sexual desire was virtually silenced, passion and physicality being only hinted at in physiological details like the fluttering heart, quickening breath, and flushed cheek (Todd, Dictionary 23). Similarly, issues of family, social status, money and land in relation to love rarely feature, despite their enormous influence in actual marriages.

The common characteristics of women's poetry on love and marriage include the construction of the male as a conquering hero. He may leave his woman sorrowful but he has to pursue his own ambition for self-fulfilment, and fight for his country or discover new lands. There is no reproach in the woman's voice as she documents her own sorrow in being left by her lover, but rather a general acceptance of the ways of the world. Numerous poems illustrate this paradigm, including Helen Maria Williams' "A Song", Amelia Opie's "Song; I'm wearing away like the snow in the sun" and many poems by Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon.

The virtues established as belonging to the woman in love include constancy, truth, fidelity, chastity and self-sacrifice. There is an awareness that love causes pain but it is a pain to be revelled in, a pain that is part of woman's lot and that will be rewarded in the next life. The social construction of the feminine is supported, whereby the woman is shown to be of high feeling and sensibility. A desire to be at one with the lover is often expressed, the woman being satisfied to be made whole by her husband and incorporated into his being. Consequently, on the death of the husband or lover, the woman too must die as she has lost part of her self. Even absence of the beloved that is not death often produces a death-like existence or actual death for the woman left at home. Examples of these two routine occurrences are Hannah Cowley's "An Elegiac Ballad" and Anne Hunter's "A Pastoral Song" respectively. It was also commonly depicted that a woman can only love once in her lifetime: once her heart is given it can never be retrieved to be reattached elsewhere, as in Landon's poem "The Secret Discovered". The women poets who can be so clear-sighted on such issues as slavery and the poor tend to see love through rose-coloured glasses. Women's love is typically associated with death and suffering but there is a lack of protest at the situation and no blame is allocated to the man.

It is this kind of unquestioning acceptance of inequality and unhappiness in relationships that makes the modern reader uncomfortable, and perhaps goes towards explaining the neglect of these poets. Where love or marriage is unsuccessful the women accept responsibility, chastising and reproaching themselves. Why the bulk of women's poetry remained so conservative in its representations of love and marriage during the period is complex, as Kathleen

Hickock has noted (11-12). Many women certainly accepted the validity if not the attainability of contemporary ideals. Many women probably believed in the fairytale picture of wedded bliss and romantic love that was presented to them in girlhood, and, when the ideal was tarnished by experience, they perhaps felt the failure to be their own so maintained the myth in their poetry. As Lynne Agress has suggested, the women writers were perhaps victims of their own naivety: having grown up in a sexist society and knowing nothing different, they accepted and perpetuated their position.

The role of wife was a powerful identity model that provided both security and status, giving a sense of achievement, satisfaction and solidarity with other women (Hickock 11). It is ironic that women of potential poetic genius often thought of themselves as failures as women and consequently worked hard to present their writings as an extension of their domestic role. Repetition of conventional female roles in social discourses (including women's poetry) contributed to the construction of the "feminine poetess", the poet who is woman first and poet second. Some women were possibly not wholly committed to the ideals exemplified in their poetry but were nudged into conservatism by the requirement of the market. The middle classes wanted comforting conventions about women reinforced, not challenged; they wanted to be entertained, not criticised (Hickock 12).

There is no doubt that part of the reason for their conventionality is social conditioning, as the women who became poets would have been raised with an ideal notion of romantic love and the companionate marriage like any other female of the period. Also contributing to their portrayal of love and marriage

would have been the definition of the feminine poetess which required women to be deeply feeling and completely satisfied with home, hearth and husband. Marriage being the prime goal of a woman's life, it was unthinkable that a woman with a husband could be unhappy (Clarke 131).

Virginia Woolf thought the profusion of women's poetry of the early nineteenth century facile, sentimental, conservative and trite (Hickock 220-21). However, despite an overall tendency to "safe" poetry of that description, when the women write of love and marriage there are moments of rebellion, variation, and lively risk. It is these moments that I wish to document, focusing on discontentment with marriage and sexual love. I intend to show that close readings of numerous poems apparently supportive of the patriarchal ideology actually reveal strong anti-marriage sentiment on the part of the Romantic women poets. The surprisingly large number of covert expressions of dissatisfaction with marriage are reinforced by the less frequent, but extremely interesting, overt statements on the same theme.

# CHAPTER THREE

## STRATEGIES OF SUBVERSION

### IN LOVE POETRY BY WOMEN OF THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

The ideological struggle that was occurring in society, in the matter of defining woman, the feminine and the realm of the female poet, was also an internalised struggle within the woman writer. Given that their own lives were so often at odds with the standard, accepted patterns of behaviour, it is not surprising that tension is evident in their work - tension between ideology and lived experience. As Mary Poovey has pointed out, the legacy of the period is a range of literary strategies that allow the woman writer to express subversive ideals, often in a poem that can be read as ostensibly supportive of the status quo. Poovey sees these strategies working collectively as a code, capable of being read as acceptance of, or departure from, the norm. These encoded protests are not necessarily the conscious thoughts of the woman writer: they may be the result of subconscious and repressed dissatisfaction with her society. The very act of writing for a woman of the Romantic Period, in its necessitating self-expression rather than self-denial, can be interpreted as a form of ideological resistance (Poovey 41).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar closely examine the writing of the better-known women authors of the nineteenth century in their groundbreaking feminist study The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination. They argue that because the woman artist is both

figuratively and literally confined, by patriarchal literature and patriarchal society, she suffers from an "anxiety of authorship", rather than the Bloomian model of "anxiety of influence". (For a woman author to achieve literary self-definition she had to transcend male versions of femaleness (Gilbert and Gubar 17).) Gilbert and Gubar refer to eighteenth- and nineteenth- century women writers as "struggling in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, [and] obscurity that felt like paralysis" (51). They propose that feelings of self-doubt, inadequacy, and inferiority plagued the early women writers, as they confronted patriarchal society's definition of the feminine, and that these feelings were manifested in their writing.

However, Anne Mellor in her Introduction to Romanticism and Gender questions the validity of applying this theory of anxiety of authorship to the women of the Romantic Period. For Mellor, the sheer volume of female-authored work and the large numbers of women writing (J. R. de J. Jackson's forthcoming work identifies 900 women poets publishing during the period), indicates that "they did not succumb to the debilitating 'anxiety of authorship' assigned to them by Mary Poovey, Margaret Homans, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar" (8). Having read much of the Romantic women poets' work I would be inclined to suggest a middle ground between the confidence that Mellor perceives and the self-doubt evident to the other critics she names. It seems to me that Marlon Ross's model of "anxiety of perception" is a more useful one. Ross proposes his feminine converse to "anxiety of influence" with particular regard to the work of Felicia Hemans, but I think it can be applied to the majority of the women poets of the period. He sees the important question as not "Shall I write?" but

"How will I be viewed?" The worry for the woman poet is how men will view her, her work, and how men (or patriarchal ideology) will determine how she views herself (Ross 248).

No matter which, if any, model of anxiety is preferred, the strategies that Gilbert and Gubar have analysed as the means by which women poets and novelists escape patriarchal definitions of the feminine are still relevant. They see a distinctively female literary tradition that uses "images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles function as asocial surrogates for docile selves, metaphors of physical discomfort manifested in frozen landscapes and fiery interiors" (Preface xi). Gilbert and Gubar see the common motifs of women's writing, because they are associated with key themes of female lives, as being sewing, snow, blood and enclosure - representing the woman author's attempts to escape patriarchal definitions of herself (37). Gilbert and Gubar also refer to the woman writer's "schizophrenia of authorship" whereby she cannot avoid duplicity in her work. Working within traditional genres and telling stories about male heroes and submissive, docile heroines the woman author participates in perpetuating the mythic, patriarchally-constructed version of femininity. Such self-denial in the form of masking or duplicity potentially leads to self-destruction, as the compromise and hypocrisy involved inevitably take their toll on the author (Gilbert and Gubar 69-70).

The strategies women developed for escaping or subverting the patriarchal ideology were varied. Some accepted their very act of writing as enough of a challenge to the patriarchy and consequently confined their works to "lesser" genres (letters, diaries,

children's books, travel writing) and thereby limited their readership to women (Gilbert and Gubar 72). Often, however, the women "revised male genres, using them to record their own dreams and their own stories in disguise" (Gilbert and Gubar 73). For Gilbert and Gubar, the fact that women's literature sometimes doesn't easily fit into the male frameworks of Romantic, Victorian, etc. can perhaps be attributed to the female experience that is part of the submerged meaning of a text, below the public face of a work (72). As the woman author attempts to conform to and yet, either consciously or subconsciously, subvert patriarchal literary standards she creates texts with underlying tensions. The women authors worked at presenting publicly acceptable facades, as women have traditionally feigned acquiescence in order to gain some kind of freedom, even if only of thought. Such masks, however, only serve to obscure, and not obliterate, their most subversive impulses (Gilbert and Gubar 73-74).

Gilbert and Gubar suggest that the women writers "did not so much rebel against the prevailing aesthetic as feel guilty about their inability to conform to it" because female experience is necessarily different from male (75). They see images of evasion and concealment in women's work as representing a hidden quest for self-definition as a woman. Such self-definition first required the shattering of the patriarchal definitions of femininity, meaning the woman author had to assault, revise, deconstruct and reconstruct male images of women in literature (Gilbert and Gubar 75-77). The independent, angry, and often mad woman in literature by women is seen as the double of the author (female schizophrenia of authorship). She is the manifestation of a sense of fragmentation and discrepancy between what the woman



writer is and what she is supposed to be (lived experience versus ideology). Parody is another means the woman writer used to express duplicity, whereby in using and misusing male traditions and genres, she undercuts and ridicules the reader's expectations (Gilbert and Gubar 78-80). The spatial images of enclosure and escape are important in women's texts as they reflect the writer's own discomfort with the prescribed "woman's place", her literal confinement in the patriarchal household and figurative confinement in society (Gilbert and Gubar 83-84). The desire to escape is often enacted through the violence of the double in the text. Either unconsciously or consciously, "Women authors...reflect the literal reality of their own confinement in the constraints they depict....Recording their own distinctively female experience, they are secretly working through and within the conventions of literary texts to define their own lives" (Gilbert and Gubar 87).

The Madwoman in the Attic looks closely at women authors of the mid-to-late nineteenth century and leans towards focusing on women novelists. Mary Poovey's study The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen focuses on Romantic women prose writers, but many of her ideas can be applied to the women poets. Poovey extends Gilbert and Gubar's repertoire of strategies used by women writers by including indirection, obliqueness and accommodation as the means of expressing the duplicitous nature of their everyday lives (42). Intellectual indirection, that is the lack of a single-minded pursuit of a teleological goal, was perceived to be a "natural" feminine trait. In literature, particularly novels, this was often expressed in the form of eternally frustrated plots,

deferring the predictable and inevitable ending, and of circuitous asides (Poovey 43). Poovey sees accommodation as including role-playing, in which the author expresses her own repressed desires through the actions in her texts, and also the use of the gothic genre, to speak about experiences unspeakable in the real world. Obliqueness she sees as being evident when women are spoken of by the writer's "directing attention to people or objects around them" (Poovey 45).

Using Gilbert and Gubar's and Poovey's findings as a starting point, I wish to examine Romantic women's poetry looking for strategies of subversion with particular reference to love and marriage. To do this I will analyse poems which deviate from the "normal" representation of women, love, and marriage as established in Chapter Two. Social expectations had established romantic love as a precursor to marriage, and the construction of the feminine ideal involved women loving only once in their lifetime. Therefore, when women wrote of love it was often closely associated with the expectation of marriage. In this chapter I will concentrate on poems that are to do with love and/or sexual relationships before marriage.

It is difficult for a modern reader to accept that the normal representation of romantic love continually associated women, love, and death, and that this was an accepted part of a society's ideology. This remarkably common association should perhaps be examined as a strategy in its own right, as surely the death that failed romantic love brings to the female is a way of removing herself from the society that considers a woman without a man incomplete. Even while the majority of the poems accept this chain of events as inevitable, their incessant depiction of

death as the only possible outcome of failed romance points to a dissatisfaction with definitions of womanhood. For Helen Cooper, in her examination of the works of Felicia Hemans, the frequent deaths of women in women's poetry are a strategy meant to exalt the suffering woman "while desiring to kill her off as an image of womanhood" (20). The association of death and love reaches its peak with the ultra-feminine poets Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans (examined in Chapters Five and Six).

One form of variation from the norms of women's poetry was the inclusion of references to sexuality within a text. The expression of sexual desire and discussion of the physical aspects of love were forbidden territory for the Romantic women poets. Nevertheless, in their encoded protests about various features of love they found means of speaking the unspeakable. A common strategy was to use analogy and the favourite of these appears to have been the likening of women to flowers. The blooming of the flower was often compared to the female reaching sexual maturity, and the picking of the bloom referred to the male having sex with the naive young woman, or the "deflowering" of the virgin. The "fallen woman" was also a frequent subject for discussion by analogy, as the subject was deemed unsuitable for women to deal with directly.

"Youth Unsuspicious of Evil" is a Matilda Betham poem that uses analogy between woman and flower to gently warn of the unhappiness that accompanies sexual maturity. She warns the flower not to look up so "fresh and bright" and grieves to see it "so unconscious" of its lot:

For gloom and tempests wait thy day,  
And thou, unhappy, fear'st it not!

Betham speaks of the plant ripening into lovely beauty and further grieves for the "showers" that await it. The poem reads as the voice of experience lamenting the ignorance of the eager innocent yearning for maturity. The sexual connotations are clear, as is the feeling of melancholy that accompanies the poem, and the title itself points to the use of analogy.

Charlotte Dacre's poem "The Mountain Violet" makes similar comments to "Youth Unsuspicious of Evil" but more directly. Again the flower is sweet and fragile, blooming unselfconsciously, and exposed to the harsh elements. The analogy with sexual maturity is also present - the flower's "rich perfume / Impregnates round the unhallow'd air." Dacre herself draws attention to the relationship between the flower and person, as she refers to the violet as "sweet emblem of the soul-fraught mind" and continues the simile for several stanzas. A sense of foreboding is developed as images of storm and evening chill are repeated. In the penultimate stanza we learn why, as Dacre conjures up an image of violence with the lines:

Yet if perchance, in evil hour  
Some lawless hand invade thy shrine,  
Or nightly blast, with ruthless pow'r  
Sap the short life which might be thine...

The words "invade" and "blast" leave no doubt that Dacre is describing rape.

Anne Hunter's poem "A Simile" also uses analogy with a flower to describe rape. The "wild rose" has scarcely "spread to meet the orb of day" when it is savaged by "ruffian blasts" which tear the flower from its parent bush. The concluding stanza shows the effect that the rape has on the so-called "fallen woman":

So, torn, by wild and lawless passion's force,  
 From every social tie, thy lot must be;  
 At best oblivion shades thy future course,  
 And still the hapless flow'r resembles thee!

"Ruin'd Innocence" is another Dacre poem that uses analogy with a flower to make direct social comment on the nature of sexual relationships. On this occasion the lily is the favourite of both the gardener and vale, envied by the other flowers as it blooms into sexual maturity. Unfortunately its beauty results in attracting the interest of the "pirate hand" who wants possession: he

Prefers thou should'st be his, and shortly dead,  
 Than gaily bloom amid thy spotless band.

The next stanza equates the loss of virginity, which has been "purloined", with death, as the male pleases himself in a moment and then casts the despoiled flower aside. Suddenly the flower is despised by all, crushed and disfigured, and Dacre lays the blame squarely with the male, repeating throughout the vocabulary of ownership:

Then by the fell destroyer, man, desir'd,  
 Obtain'd - and then - unpitied cast away.

Dacre then depicts the fall into prostitution as the "flower" listens to the "next seducer's tale." She also accumulates images of duplicity as mirth becomes affected, laughter false, and smiles are feigned to hide melancholy, as the "victim to the crimes of man confest" is driven through degradation to the tomb.

Lady Caroline Lamb's poem "Amidst the Flowers Rich and Gay" varies slightly from the other poems discussed in that it uses a male persona. Nevertheless, the same imagery is used as the selected flower is "seiz'd" and becomes a "treasure", words with connotations of

violence and possession. Again, too, there is abandonment, and not for the first time, as the speaker says of his "violet":

Alas! I left it like the rest,  
And left it when it lov'd me best.

But the male's regret lies not in the damage he has done by breaking his vows "so fondly plighted", but rather in the fact that he has lost the thing that loved him the most.

In all of these poems the common images are of the innocence of the young, newly sexually-mature female, the sexual violence of the male, the triumph of ownership, and the male's lack of remorse. The flower represents the status of the virgin - to be "picked" or "deflowered" is to be destroyed. The use of the flower as a symbol for the woman allows the forbidden and distasteful aspects of sexual relationships, and the position of women in them, to be explored, in however thinly veiled a manner.

It has been well documented that the women novelists of the Romantic Period supported rational love in preference to passion and sensibility. This was in part a reaction to the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility and the remnants of the belief that all women were inherently sexual beings, but in some ways this new emphasis on women as rational in love contributed to the desexualization of women that culminated in the "angel in the house" of the Victorian Period. The majority of women's poetry of the Romantic years, however, indicates that the women poets were swept away by the idealised romance of fluttering hearts and conquering heroes. Some who produced sentimental verse that envisaged the ideal companionate marriage, however, also had moments of

practicality in which they advocated that rationality should temper passion. They do not, however, ever seem to totally deny the importance of physical attraction and passion between lovers.

Charlotte Dacre is a good representative of this phenomenon. In "Passion Uninspired by Sentiment" she recounts the effects of passion, "the wild throbbing heart" and "half pleasure, half pain!", with delight, but her closing statement indicates that these moments of "tender excess" are degrading to love if not accompanied by intellectual affection. Similarly, in "The Kiss" Dacre acknowledges the pleasure of physical contact (itself rare in women's poetry) but desires that the physical feeling be accompanied by feeling of the mind and soul:

...For if desire  
Alone inspire  
The kiss not me can charm.

In her much longer poem "The Triumph of Pleasure" Dacre attempts to dramatise the pitfalls of passionate love for women, using the personifications of Love, Beauty and Pleasure. It is interesting to note that Cupid (male) triumphs only by deception over Beauty (female). "The Vanity of Hope" also expresses the deceptive nature of love for women. The speaker is a woman coming to terms with the fact that ideal love is unobtainable. She perceives that "woman's the plaything of the man" and laments the male ability to dissociate affection and passion. The speaker prefers to "languish" in solitude rather than to vainly hope for true love; that is, the man who loves the "sensitive mind."

Mary Tighe is another poet who wrote advocating affection over passion, an example being her poem "A

Faithful Friend is the Medicine of Life". Tighe refers to sexual love as "passion's foul tide" and expresses a preference for friendship which she envisages as an "unpolluted" stream. She goes on to describe her idea of a true companion, rejecting affectation and flattery in favour of a friend who is steadfast through sorrow and pleasure, and who acts as a mirror to the soul. The social construction of love, and all its rituals and affectations, is distasteful to the speaker.

Gilbert, Gubar, and Poovey all note parody as a strategy by which women writers generally appear to conform to literary conventions while, in effect, subverting them. The women poets of the Romantic Age also used parody, most often when discussing women writing poetry (e.g. the muse as gossip), but also in poems dealing with love and marriage. Amelia Opie employs role-reversal as a means of parody in her poem "Remembrance" where a male is rejected in love and subsequently pines to death. Rather than the usual portrayal of female suffering, here we have a poem in which it is the rejected male who loses the colour in his cheeks and whose lips become pallid, as he takes on the self-sacrificing role normally allocated to the woman:

Deep in my heart the load of grief,  
Concealed from every glance, shall lie;  
Till sorrow proves its own relief,  
And I shall suffer, smile, and die.

It is interesting to note that Opie also shows the male having to resort to duplicity and concealment as he hides his sorrow and forces an appearance of happiness. Opie seems to mock the fact that these consequences of love are typically depicted as "natural" to women by associating them with a male.



Elizabeth Hands' poem "The Favourite Swain" uses parody and role-reversal to subvert expectations. Rather than the traditional male-authored poem listing the attributes of the ideal woman, here we have a female persona being allowed to construct her ideal man. Cleverly using the language and imagery typically associated with descriptions of the female, the woman speaks of "his eyes like dew-drops", "his breath as sweet as western breeze", and "his countenance cheering as the dawn." The poem's speaker is adamant in her preference for rational love over passionate attachment and stresses the necessity of reason, honour, virtue and friendship in their relationship. Hands also defies convention in "Perplexity: A Poem" where she subverts the belief that women are able to love only once a lifetime by having the narrator love two men simultaneously.

"Allen Brooke of Windermere" is a poem by Amelia Opie that depicts the strength of parental influence, but in a manner that verges on parody in its role-reversal. The woman speaks of a young man of "pallid cheek, / Which secret sorrow seems to speak", a sorrow that prevails over his youthful health, in an inversion of the usual scenario where the woman pines for the absent male to the detriment of her health. In the final stanza we learn that the Jessy who speaks of Allen

Is still with answering cares opprest;  
But know, a father's stern command  
Withholds from him my willing hand.

The final two lines of the poem express the intensity of filial duty/love and its dominance over sexual love:

All but a father's frown I'd bear  
For Allen Brooke of Windermere.

Another Opie poem expresses concern at the effect of parental disapproval on the young woman in love. "The Virgin's First Love" contains stanzas that clearly resent the need for deception and concealment that parents' "relentless" disapproval necessitates. Opie speaks of "sighs [that] when half heaved [must] be with terror suppress"; the choice of the word "terror" raises interesting questions about the nature of the parent-child relationship, which seems to be threatened by blossoming sexual love.

Despite an overall tendency to poems of self-reproach, self-blame, or deferred satisfaction (via reward in heaven) when love fails, there are some women's poems in which the responsibility for failed love is squarely laid either with the male or with the social construction of "love". Dacre's "The Unfaithful Lover" rails bitterly against masculine infidelity. It is an interesting poem because the female speaker is consciously constructing a mask for herself. In the third stanza she tries to convince herself of her indifference to the offending male:

Cold, cold I feel to all your sighs,  
Cold, cold to all your tears,  
Indiff'rence arms my alter'd eyes,  
And apathy my ears.

But the opening line of the fourth stanza just verifies this as a masquerade: "Hard as the flinty rock I seem" (emphasis mine). Again, in the sixth stanza, there is a clear statement that the lover's influence is being consciously resisted; that is, the speaker is constructing a front for her real feelings ("Seduction from those eyes no more / My conscious nerves will feel"). There is also reference to the female association of the affections and the physical aspects of love as she says "I think the senses cannot stray / Indiff'rent and alone." For the woman

physical infidelity and emotional infidelity are equally abhorrent. While the woman's hurt is transparent, her attempts to deny any remaining feeling for the unfaithful lover are less than convincing. Similar feelings are expressed in Dacre's succinct quatrain "Simile" which views love and courtship somewhat cynically:

The little Moth round candle turning,  
Stops not till its wings are burning:  
So woman, dazzled by man's wooing,  
Rushes to her own undoing.

Also bitter and direct about the negative aspects of love for women is Amelia Opie's poem "The Virgin's First Love". We have already seen how parental disapproval forces concealment in this poem, but the poem also examines the effect of male infidelity and inconstancy on the young woman in love. Opie draws a distinct correlation between mental stress and physical health, following the conventional association of blighted love and the female wasting away to the point of death. What is interesting in particular about this poem are the recurring images of repression. The young virgin never speaks; she listens to the male's vows, "the tale of his treachery she hears", her eye "beams with disdain" and "glistens with tears", her sighs are "half heaved", and, in her distress, "her eye boasts a lustre no language can speak." The young woman is full of repressed and suppressed feeling and her inability to use language (because of the social restrictions on her as a woman) is eventually manifested by the body in the form of "disease" - a word Gilbert and Gubar see as a recurring metaphor for female dis-ease (71).

A slightly less forceful approach is taken by Helen Leigh in her poem "The Natural Child". Leigh unites

issues of class (in implying that the father is upper-class whereas the mother is certainly a peasant), with male sexual transgressions. Focusing on the child and its likely fate, Leigh paints a grim picture of the consequences of being born to an unmarried mother, whether they be a life of poverty and shame or early death by infanticide. The prevailing feeling is one of bitterness towards men and Leigh refers to the illicit sexual activity as "his crime." This is a fairly novel approach to the notion of the fallen woman as she was typically seen as being the party in the wrong, this perhaps being why Leigh focuses on the plight of the child rather than that of the mother. The final two lines plainly state Leigh's feeling that the responsibility lies with the male:

But ah! what punishments await the men,  
Who, in such depths of misery, plunge the fair?

Anna Dodsworth's "To Matthew Dodsworth, Esq., On a Noble Captain Declaring that His Finger Was Broken by a Gate" is a humorous piece relating an amusing incident between family members. It also, however, raises issues of class and gender as it narrates the tale of how a drunken Captain sexually assaulted a kitchen maid. In her attempt to escape her attacker the maid broke his finger, establishing the severity of her reluctance and his persistence. The Captain, on seeking assistance for his injury, pretends he broke it on a gate so as to be sympathetically attended to by "the ladies." It is disturbing that when these ladies discover the truth, the issue for them is not the assault on the servant but the fact that they were deprived of the opportunity of teasing the Captain. The final word of advice is for him to use bribes in future. The poem shows a clear double sexual standard, not only in the unspoken approval of

the Captain's antics but in the treatment of the incident as a source of amusement because the victim was "only" a servant woman.

In a more serious vein, Mary Lamb's poem "Helen" is a sophisticated psychological analysis of love as a social construction. Using a male persona, Lamb outlines the role of a lover as the male speaker perceives it, which is "to glory in his pain." For the male it has been the thrill of the chase, the desiring of the unobtainable object, the ideal not the real that has maintained his "love". In an honest, if unpleasant, summation of his feelings, the male who has finally been accepted by Helen (whom he has pursued for twenty years), realises he doesn't love her:

...On sighs I've fed, your scorn my bread;  
I perish now you kind are grown.

Can I, who loved my beloved  
But for the scorn 'was in her eye',  
Can I be moved for my beloved,  
When she 'returns me sigh for sigh'?

The more unsavoury aspects of marital and sexual relationships were occasionally tackled by the women poets. Charlotte Dacre was one poet who wrote about the normally suppressed issues of relationships. Dacre's poems "The Exile" and "The Lass of Fair Wone" both examine the plight of the fallen woman. "The Exile" is a dramatic monologue that unconventionally gives the fallen woman a voice. A despairing young woman wanders the sea-shore speaking aloud as she courts death. Frustrated with humanity she disdains to sink beneath the scorn "of narrow minds" and refuses to name her transgressor, preferring to carry her secrets to the grave. While not naming an individual, she does not hesitate to allocate blame:

Farewell, oh, man! destroyer of my fame!  
 Forgot for ever be my injur'd name!  
 'Tis your unkindness digs my early grave,  
 Prone to destroy, with every power to save.

The woman then directs her speech to the man who is responsible for her situation, clearly indicating that it is not the first time he has transgressed. Time progresses and as winter begins the woman is left with the options of starvation or suicide - "Famine must waste, or suicide bid me bleed." Her final speech, before, we assume, she uses "the fatal steel", is again directed at her once-lover:

Oh! thou, devoid of honour! but for thee,  
 I still would breathe the life of nature, free-  
 Still tranquil, for still pure,....  
 So the young rose...  
                                     ...not long its term  
 Of splendour, hasten'd by the cank'ring worm.  
 Like me it falls, ere half its little day,  
 And leaves at large the ravager to prey.

The woman's anger and resentment at her treatment by both her lover and society is unequivocally stated in "The Exile". The image of the rose being destroyed by the worm is an important one. As we have already seen women are often symbolised by flowers and the worm metaphor has a clear phallic associations. It is an image that recurs frequently in women's poetry of the period.

"The Lass of Fair Wone" is a poem Dacre translated from German, with the addition of several stanzas, relating the somewhat gothic story of a woman's fall from "unstain'd" maiden to murderer. The poem is very direct in its approach, and it may be that the fact it is a translation allowed Dacre to eschew the use of analogy in that it effectively removed from her the responsibility of authorship. In "The Lass of Fair Wone" a young woman is "robb'd" of her chastity by a "Bacchanalian" lord when she succumbs to his flattery,

written on the back of a picture he sends her. Interestingly, although Dacre describes their sexual encounter as rape:

Then beat her heart - and heav'd her breast -  
And pleaded ev'ry sense;  
Remorseless the seducer prest,  
To blast her innocence...

she first shows the maiden as experiencing desire:

Lock'd in his arms, she scarcely strove,  
Seduc'd by young desire,  
The glowing twin brother of Love,  
Possess'd with wilder fire...

and later talks of her "tears repentant" and "the fault of yielding love", which both suggest a degree of consent or, at least, the presence of sexual desire in the woman.

As time passes it is evident that the woman is pregnant, and when it can no longer be concealed, she approaches her father with her story. In a rather disturbing portrayal of patriarchal violence the irate parent "smote her snowy breast" and "the patient blood that gush'd so clear, / Its purity confess'd." The injured woman then goes to her lover's home with the cry:

'A mother hast thou made of me,  
Before thou mad'st a bride...'

only to find he is more concerned with issues of money and class. In another unsettling aspect of the poem, he offers to let her marry his huntsman as a facade to hide their relationship:

'While still our loves, voluptuous free,  
No shackles shall confine.'

Not surprisingly, the woman is offended by this and curses her lover before running directionless in

"frenzied woe", ironically to the bower where she was first "undone." There she gives birth to and then kills her child before turning the knife upon herself. Dacre unstintingly, if somewhat melodramatically, depicts the dangers of sexual love and also indicates the potentially duplicitous nature of marriage and sexual relations.

The bulk of women's love poetry of the period idealises love but the poets in this chapter have introduced some of the everyday realities of relationships to their texts. In some respects the poems are traditional in that they assume love should lead to marriage, that it should last forever and that sexual relations outside marriage only bring despair. However, in this collection of poems which show some deviation from the usual representations of love, one notices the recurrence of several key issues that clearly concerned the woman poet. Issues like parental influence, rational love, and an acknowledgement of sexual desire make notable appearances. A number of the poems discussed express a desire for rational love over passionate attachment, a parallel with the women novelists of the period. There is a discernible desire to express an active sexuality, to acknowledge the physical effects of love and the potential dangers that physical attraction can hold. A large number of poems are concerned with male infidelity or the incapability of males to offer a satisfying relationship. In a similar vein, several poems express unrestrained bitterness towards men and the position, i.e. the vulnerability, of women in situations of a romantic/sexual nature.

There is little doubt that the women poets we have looked at here are less than content with their culture's formulation of love, and, in particular,



women's role and treatment. Several of the strategies that Gilbert, Gubar, and Poovey have outlined, such as parody, duplicity, accommodation and concealment, are evident in the poetry. In the next chapter we go on to explore poems that directly relate to courtship and marriage to see if the women poets are dissatisfied with these social rituals and what strategies they use to express their feelings.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE POETRY

### BY WOMEN OF THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

When writing poems dealing with the social intricacies of courtship and marriage, rather than the idealistic construction of love, the Romantic women poets brought several key issues to the fore. There are, in fact, not as many poems directly dealing with courtship and marriage as one might expect from these poets who located themselves firmly in the domestic, and who focused on women's experience. The realities of courtship and marriage, in such areas as financial considerations and parental influence, perhaps dampened the women poets' enthusiasm for these topics, and meant a preference developed for writing about the headier realm of love. The passive role prescribed to women in courtship, and the discretion and decorum expected of a wife, probably also worked to prevent women discussing these aspects of female experience. Nevertheless, the early Romantic women poets, in particular, do occasionally venture to speak out on courtship and marriage, questioning both social rituals as they do so.

A recurring theme in poems that deviate from the traditional portrayal of love and marriage is women's rejection of courtship. Some poems commend rejection in the form of advice to women, such as Mary Howitt's "The Spider and the Fly", a poem ostensibly written for children but with a clear comment on courtship as the female fly is lured to her "death" in the male spider's lair by succumbing to his words of flattery. Others explicitly reject the male's attempt to woo the

woman to marriage and mock the man as they do so. "The Laird O' Cockpen" by Lady Caroline Nairne is a good example of this kind of poem. The "laird" coldly decides he wants a wife to keep his house and, being rich and important ("His mind is ta'en up wi' things o' the State"), he sees no need for a prolonged courtship and dispenses with convention. He demands to speak to Mistress Jean, proposes, and is subsequently amazed "when the lady [says] 'Na.'" His only thought as he rides away, having been blatantly rejected, is that it is her loss. There is definite satisfaction for the reader when the pompous laird is spurned and his reaction provides a nice touch of irony. Because of this it is particularly interesting to note that "Miss Ferrier" (the prominent Scottish author) added two further stanzas to the poem (Miles 26):

And now that the laird his exit had made,  
Mistress Jean she reflected on what she had said;  
'Oh, for ane I'll get better, its waur I'll get  
ten,  
I was daft to refuse the Laird o' Cockpen.'

Next time that the laird and the lady were seen,  
They were gaun arm-in-arm to the kirk on the  
green;  
Now she sits in the ha' like a weel-tappit hen,  
But as yet there's nae chickens appear'd at  
Cockpen.

These stanzas have the effect of making the poem far more traditional, negating the outright rejection expressed by the woman in the original poem, and presenting marriage as the preferred state.

"Lob's Courtship" by Elizabeth Hands is another rejection of the male wooer. Again the male makes a decision to marry and selects his preferred bride, this time sending a rather crude letter declaring his love. He notes in his letter that he is surprised that she hasn't wed, suggesting that she has a history

of deterring suitors. He sends apples as a gift accompanying the letter to Nell, and Hands amusingly describes her reactions:

Then he in haste this letter sent,  
Also two apples did present,  
Which Nell received, and read the letter  
(But she liked the apples better);  
When read, she into the fire threw it,  
And never sent an answer to it.

Lob, however, is not deterred by the lack of response and goes to visit "his lass" only to meet with abrupt rejection as she shuts the door in his face when he asks her out.

Hands wrote another, similar poem entitled "The Widower's Courtship" where Roger, "a doleful widower" of eighteen weeks, makes an approach to milkmaid Nell, an approach which Hands interestingly describes with the phrase "He thus accosted Nell" (emphasis mine). Nell proves herself independent, declaring:

...indeed my milking pail  
You shall not touch, I vow;  
I've carried it myself before,  
And I can carry it now.

When Roger declares his intentions Nell responds by saying: "A sweetheart I don't want...I / Am not the lass for you", and he is left to go his way home.

Ann Yearsley's poem "The Indifferent Shepherdess to Colin" is another example of spurned courtship and open rejection of marriage. The female speaker addresses the lovesick Colin without sparing his feelings:

Colin, why this mistake?  
Why plead thy foolish love?  
My heart shall sooner break  
Than I a minion prove...

and the recurring motif of the poem is one of liberty. Each stanza finishes with a line expressing love of liberty and the desire to keep it, and it is clearly stated that it is men who deny women their freedom:

For my eternal plan  
Is to be calm and free.  
Estranged from tyrant man  
I'll keep my liberty.

The hapless Colin bears the brunt of this sentiment as the shepherdess makes her feelings on love indisputably clear:

Slave to commanding eyes!  
Those eyes thou wouldst commend  
My judgement must despise -  
My pity is thy friend:  
If eyes alone can move  
A swain so dull as thee,  
They mean but to reprove  
Thy loss of liberty.

Susanna Blamire's "O Jenny Dear, The Word is Gane" depicts a woman, Jenny, with a choice of swains, none of whom she is attracted to. Jenny's rejection of the men available to her (from reasons as various as Sandy being too gruff, Colin too unintelligent, and Jocky too much of a playboy) results in her being seen as "unco saucy" and conceited, but to her it is preferable to be an old maid than to marry any of the options available.

What these poems all have in common is that the right for women to be independent in making marital decisions is asserted. Given that the social reality meant women were unable to initiate courtship and that for practical reasons, to all intents and purposes, they were ill-advised to reject more than one offer of marriage, these women are being uncharacteristically assertive for the period. "The Indifferent

"Shepherdess to Colin" is particularly radical in that it does not just reject an individual suitor but clearly rejects marriage and sexual love entirely. All the authors also take obvious delight in making the men in these poems look incredibly foolish: they are all laughed at, whereas the women are to be admired. This absence of a male hero, and indeed the introduction of the male as a comic figure, certainly goes against the conventional representation of men in Romantic women's poetry.

The influence of money on the expected harmony of marriage is an issue one would expect to be prominent in women's poetry, as during the Romantic Period marital values were changing at an accelerated pace. As has already been discussed, the companionate marriage was the socially expected norm by the end of the eighteenth century, and arranged marriages were by then viewed with aversion. However, financial considerations and issues of class were by no means taken lightly in the selection of a spouse. The issue of money is closely related to parental influence, particularly the paternal (patriarchal) authority of the father. Poems that focus on these concerns deviate from the majority of women's poetry of the period in that they locate love within the social fabric. The "normal" idealised poetry paints love as being beyond social control, in an almost divine realm - certainly love is portrayed as enduring beyond the grave - and nothing is seen to come between the couple romantically involved.

Poems that show monetary and parental issues affecting marriage include works by Susanna Blamire, Joanna Baillie, Caroline Nairne, Charlotte Smith and Amelia Opie. Blamire's "The Siller Croun" is the lament of a woman forced against her will to marry a suitor

because his wealth would allow her to marry in a silk gown and "siller hae to spare." More important to the woman than the money the unnamed suitor has to offer, however, is "the mind wha's every wish is pure" and the "virtues rare" of the man, Donald, that she has chosen and has pledged herself to. The closing lines of the poem depict the traditional expectation of the woman desiring death on being separated from her lover:

And ere I'm forc'd to break my troth  
I'll lay me down an' dee.

The word "forc'd" indicates the influence of parental control. It is notable that the speaker has outlined a love that follows the ideal expectations of a companionate marriage, but that that ideal has been deconstructed by the influence of money on the woman's parents.

Another poem by Blamire, "I've Gotten a Rock, I've Gotten a Reel", tackles the same issue. It is a cynical poem detailing how the wheel of fortune, with a play on the word "fortune", often dictates issues of love and marriage. A girl's new-found wealth suddenly attracts suitors who previously were not interested:

There's Jock, when the bit lass was poor,  
Ne'er trudg'd o'er the lang mossy moor,  
Though now to the knees he wades, I trow,  
Through winter's weet an' winter's snow.

The final stanza relates the speaker's conclusion about such behaviour and is implicitly critical and bitter, particularly in the final suggestion that a change in fortune would result in infidelity:

Now, lassies, I have found it out,  
What men make a' this phrase about;  
For when they praise your blinking ee,  
'Tis certain that your gowd they see:  
An' when they talk o' roses bland,

They think o' the roses o' your land;  
 But should dame Fortune turn her wheel,  
 They'd aff in a dance of a threesome reel.

Joanna Baillie's "Woo'd and Married and A'" approaches the same topic from a different angle: in her poem it is the would-be bride who worries about a lack of money. The parents' role in this case is to talk their daughter into marriage. The mother notes that her own marriage took place without any money in her pocket, and she then makes the interesting observation that her daughter is lucky to be being married at all when her "havins and tocher" (holdings and dowry) are "sae sma'!" The father then contributes to persuading his daughter by pointing out she is more like a child than a bride and has to learn sense and discretion. He encourages her partner to be half-husband and half-daddy, to be patient and steady, and comments that he is unsure whether to laugh or cry at the thought of his daughter as a married woman. It is the well-weighted flattery of her fiancé, however, that wins the bride over, replacing her tears with coquettish behaviour and gratitude at being "woo'd and married at a'!"

While capable of being read as admonishing the young girl and generally supporting custom, this poem seems to be parodic in nature, mocking the shallow aspects of the marriage arrangement. The bride is certainly portrayed as immature and her concerns over money are trivialised by the focus on ornament and clothing rather than real issues of poverty. Baillie seems to be covertly laughing at the ridiculousness of marriage, particularly of young people, and depicts the bride as being controlled by those around her rather than making an independent decision. Her concern over money is perhaps a genuine one, but it is over-ridden by her parents and husband-to-be who



obviously feel that to be married is the most important thing. Despite immaturity and poverty, singleness is not an option. In a second poem, simply entitled "Song", Baillie depicts money worries from the perspective of the male as the poem's narrator "dares not tell" Nan he loves her because he fears rejection as he is competing with richer swains:

But how will Nan prefer my boon,  
In tatter'd hose and clouted shoon!

The influence of money also appears in "Lay Bye Yer Bawbee" by Lady Carolina Nairne, a poem that advises a young woman to save a dowry. Jenny is told to follow in her mother's footsteps and prepare well for marriage. In a more generally directed stanza the speaker advises all lads and lasses not to start courting until

...ye hae gather'd the siller,  
An' the weel plenish'd kist it is fu'.

A poor couple, Archie and Peggy, are then cited as an example of the effect of no dowry, with Peggy "beggin' and greetin'" and Archie "listed awa'."

Charlotte Smith's "Elegy" combines the issues of wealth, class, and parental control, telling the story of a pair of lovers separated by the father of the male. It is a gothic poem that, conventionally, culminates with the death of the woman in a kind of suicide. She is extremely bitter against her lover's, now dead, father, stigmatised as "ruthless Avarice", who, Smith explains in the notes to "Elegy", was a wealthy yeoman who resented his son's love for an indigent young woman and drove his son from home, forcing him into the dangerous occupation of pilot that caused his death. The woman resents the father's noble tomb when his son has no grave but the stormy

sea, and she courts the same death in the gathering tempest. Eventually she is overcome by the elements, and it is fitting that the waters also "tear from its base the proud aggressor's tomb." Smith demonstrates the woman's anger and frustration at the authority of the father, and the influence that wealth and class have on him.

Amelia Opie's poem "Julia, or the Convent of St. Claire" is a gothic tale of ghosts, love, and suicide, that raises many questions about the nature of love and marriage, and uses a number of subversive strategies (despite the traditional ending of the woman choosing death over separation from her lover). The convent is clearly a symbol of enclosure, and Julia's suicide equally clearly a symbol of escape. Her suicide is an attempt to avoid the confinement forced on her by her father, who is the representative of the patriarchy. In the second stanza, Opie refers to "many a noble virgin" as the "victim of parental pride", explicitly declaring her stance on patriarchal control of a woman's emotional life. The individual story of Julia represents the story of all the noble virgins, "noble" in terms of class, as it is to avoid dowry-paying that these women are married to Christ by their fathers. Julia's father sends her to St. Claire's and his naive daughter goes without reluctance, as in a typically female self-sacrificing role she says:

'Yes...be a nun's vocation mine,  
So I my brother's bliss improve;  
His be their wealth,' sweet Julia cried,  
'So I may boast my parent's love!'

This is a figurative self-sacrifice later to become literal and it is interesting that it is only her father's love she seeks.

At her brother's wedding (ironically), Julia, however, discovers romantic love and becomes reluctant to her "warm heart in cloisters hide." Her father's answer to Julia's suitor is a clear statement of patriarchy:

'Think not my son his rights shall yield,  
To swell my pining daughter's dower.'

When Montrose, Julia's love, offers to accept her without a dowry, money issues give way to pride and her father replies:

'And darest thou think that Clermont's child  
Shall e'er pronounce the nuptial vow  
Unless,' he said, 'I could a dower  
Equal to Clermont's rank bestow!'

Julia's own impassioned plea to her parent, coupled with her mother's prophetic warning of impending death, fails to move her father. Images of decay follow, with love being described as a worm feeding "on her beauty's opening bloom" (an image that we have already seen recurring in women's poems on love). A mockery of a wedding to a heavenly spouse is about to occur when Montrose bursts in to claim his bride. It is not a change of heart that has motivated Julia's father to allow the marriage, however; rather the death of her brother means Julia has succeeded to Clermont's wealth. Because money and pride still ruled the decision, it is perhaps fitting that Julia dies by her own hand, her bridal gear bathed in blood. It is only in the final stanzas that Opie retracts her sometimes both cutting and direct approach, and she has Julia berate herself for a lack of patience and, more insidiously, pardon and bless her father for his acceptance of her suitor with her dying breath.

"Julia, or the Convent of St. Claire", then, is a good example of tension between repressed feeling and social expectations; there is a definite subtext



In the effort to be a good wife she conceals her lyre, and therefore her own true nature, until old age, when domestic responsibility has lessened. Despite obviously missing her poetic outlet and being less than fond of her domestic duties, as implied in her descriptions of them, Grant prefers her life to those of the famous women poets. In what appear to be allusions to Anna Seward and Anne Hunter, Grant observes:

The Muse's fair daughters triumphant were borne  
Till the public applause was converted to scorn.

She also notes that their desire for fame resulted in the sacrificing of their private lives:

The duties and joys of the mother and wife,  
The nameless soft comforts of calm private life,  
Fell victims together at Vanity's shrine,  
For who could endure to exist and not shine!

She goes on to discuss Helen Maria Williams' chequered career, closing with the statement:

Why regret, when celebrity proves such a curse,  
The cares of the mother and toils of the  
nurse?...

and for her own part her overall conclusion seems to be satisfaction with the path she has chosen. It is interesting to hear first-hand, that is from a woman poet, the effect of marriage on one's poetry and the preference for private, domestic success, even if it involves some degree of sacrifice, rather than public success and private sacrifice.

A somewhat melancholy view of marriage is to be found in Anne Hunter's poem "To My Daughter On Being Separated from Her on Her Marriage". It is worth noting that Hunter refers to the impending marriage as "the waking dream", implying that her daughter's

expectations will not be met. As a mother she is experiencing pain rather than the happiness one would expect over her daughter's nuptials, and the overall feeling is one of sorrow, not optimism. She sees the mother-daughter relationship as necessarily altering on the daughter's marriage and hopes that the husband is worthy of her daughter's love - which seems unusual in that one would expect her to know her daughter's lover reasonably well.

Several poems were written by the women poets that ignore sentimentalism in favour of directly depicting some of the harsher realities of marriage. Lady Nairne's "Cauld Kail in Aberdeen" is such a ballad. Will manages to "get" as his wife Mary, "the flower o' a' Stra'bogie", but on marriage forsakes her in favour of the "tipplin' trade" with "boozin' Rob and Harry." The next stanza presents the reader with a sobering image of married life for Mary:

Sair Mary wrought, sair Mary grat,  
 She scarce could lift the ladle,  
 Wi' pithless feet, 'tween ilka greet,  
 She'd rock the borrow'd cradle.  
 Her weddin' plenishin' was gane,  
 She never thought to borrow;  
 Her bonnie face was waxin' wan,  
 And Will wrought a' the sorrow.

Despite the blame for the dismal marriage being laid squarely with Will and grounded in the realities of domestic life, it is only a near brush with death that frightens Will into better behaviour and improves Mary's life.

The influence of the father on a child's marital happiness that we have seen in "Julia, or the Convent of St. Claire" is also evident in Betham's "The Daughter". "The Daughter" is a married woman's monologue about the sway of her father over her, a

sway that extends beyond the grave. The daughter defied her father to marry her lover, seeing their love as more important than a dowry, and confident that her father would forgive and pardon her "when our happiness is told." She was wrong. While he did not curse his child he refused to see her, even on his deathbed, and his parting cruel comment

...I leave her all my store;  
 She wrung my doating heart with deep despair,  
 And even now perhaps desires no more...

affects his daughter by destroying her peace, and sapping her strength. The daughter then lives a life of duplicity, telling her husband her father had relented. This attempt to hide the truth, coupled with her father's disapproval, affects her health so she feels she "must shortly die." Betham offers a glimmer of hope to the reader, however, as we learn in the final stanza that her husband has overheard her lament and it will no longer be necessary for her to live a lie. Evasion and concealment as strategies for living are typically manifested by the body in the form of ill-health, a kind of subconscious means of releasing suppressed emotion, and the image of the "dis-eased" woman is frequent in poems about love and marriage.

A common strategy, noted by Gilbert, Gubar, and Poovey, for discussing the less than idealistic marriage was to employ parody. Joanna Baillie's "Hooly and Fairly" has a husband complaining about his marriage to a domineering and tyrannical wife. The wife is described as drunk, greedy, extravagant, violent, lazy and loud - attributes perhaps generally more readily associated with a male. The husband tells the reader:

I wish I were single, I wish I were freed;

I wish I were doited, I wish I were dead,  
Or she in the moul's, to dement me nae mair, lay!

Rather than generating sympathy for the oppressed and embarrassed husband his peevish remarks serve to make a mockery of him. Baillie creates a picture of a bad marriage, parodying the complaining husband, but with a serious undertone that reminds us that it is usually the woman in marriage who is in the position of being tyrannised and powerless; the poem's humour is derived from the role-reversal.

Amelia Opie parodies conventional poetry in her poem "Ballad, Founded on Fact" where she describes an almost farcical marriage. The husband-to-be lies on his sick-bed and, realising death is imminent, determines to marry his beloved. His main motivation for doing so seems to arise from a desire to possess his lover, as his lament is:

'And must I, must I, then,' he said,  
'Ere thou art mine, my Lucy, die!'

and he foresees it almost being a joy to resign his life if he can but call her "wife" and claim her as his. In an extremely unidealistic portrayal of a wedding, the couple hasten to the church and are married. The woman is not the traditional happy bride, but is pale and cold with the fear of impending death, and Henry, rather macabrely, begins to glow with triumph:

The nuptial knot was scarcely tied,  
When Henry's eye strange lustre fired,  
'She's mine! she's mine!' he faltering cried,  
And in that throb of joy expired.

This final stanza leaves the reader feeling uncomfortable as it offers an unpleasant image of the male's triumph, and Henry's preoccupation with ownership is clearly stressed. Though it could be



read as a traditional sentimental romance, I think Opie is highlighting, in an only marginally encoded manner, the possessive nature of love, and perhaps she is also pointing out that marriage as an institution is a manifestation of the masculine desire to possess the feminine.

Upper-class marriages do not escape the sharp eye and pen of the Romantic women poets. "The Tête à Tête, Or Fashionable Pair. An Eclogue" is a poem by Ann Murry, written in the form of a dialogue between husband and wife, dramatising an upper-class marriage relationship. It begins with the couple gossiping about high society over their breakfast but soon digresses into discussion about themselves. Money is the first issue to be raised, the husband using his business affairs to justify a trip to town and the woman replying:

How cruel is my fate! How great the fall!  
So large my fortune, yet my jointure small.

Her husband's response is to criticise his wife, then her sex in general, emphasising women's role as consumers:

Women of highest rank so thoughtless live,  
They naught but sorrow and vexation give;  
In dissipated scenes they spend their time,  
Infants in sense, thought oft in years past  
prime.

They continue their petty bickering over their children and politics until finally Lady M. accuses:

Alas! you hate the matrimonial life,  
Domestic joys, and e'en your faithful wife.

The result is her husband's final statement:

I never will forgo the joys of life  
To please the haughty or capricious wife...

And for the present will retire to France;  
 The remedy you'll gain in legal course:  
 A separate stipend, or a kind divorce.

Thus Murry manages to convey the disintegration of a marriage in approximately two hundred lines.

Matilda Betham gives unhappy marriage rather an unusual twist in her poem simply entitled "Fragment". Narrated in the first person the poem describes a traveller (the narrator) in a country "strange and rude." He encounters a man who is described as haughty and malevolent, and then progresses to the man's "secluded" mansion where he sees through an open window a "fair dame" nursing her child, to whom she begins to sing. The first part of the poem is interesting in that it provides a narratorial framework for the second, less pleasant, section where the woman reveals the suffering she experiences in her marriage. The stress on the physical confinement of the woman is also a point worth noting in the light of Gilbert and Gubar's strategies. The mansion is described as secluded, "a fortress of determin'd strength", and the woman is seen through the frame of a window, with her hair "confin'd" in the "large snowy folds" of her gown.

The woman's speech also emphasises her confinement, literally within the walls of her home and figuratively by the patriarchal rule of her husband. Addressing her child, she remembers what her life was like before its birth:

I bore with anger and disdain,  
 I had no power to break my chain,  
 No one to whom I dar'd complain.

And when some bird has caught my eye,  
 Or distant sail been flitting by,  
 I wish'd I could as freely fly...

and sadly recounts the little comfort she now has:

And when thy father frowns severe,  
Although my spirit faints with fear,  
I feel I have a comfort near.

And when he harshly speaks to me  
If thou art smiling on my knee,  
He softens as he looks on thee.

To soothe him in an evil hour  
The bud has balm, oh! may the flower  
Possess the same prevailing power!

We then learn she was forced into the marriage and that she seeks to mend her broken heart through her child. She sorrowfully contemplates her child someday causing her pain, and then reflects that she would not blame it and would still love it because she would know "from whence unkindness came!" The woman then hears the approaching footsteps of the pilgrim and, probably in anticipation of it being her husband, flees. This is a potentially controversial poem in its description of emotional abuse in a marriage, and one is left with the suspicion that there is also physical abuse. Betham's framing of the story with a male narrator and setting of it in an exotic location enable her to discuss an essentially taboo subject.

Betham was not the only woman poet to delve into the unsavoury aspects of the marital relationship. Mary Robinson also tackled normally suppressed issues, depicting the potentially violent and often manipulative elements of marriage. Her poems "Deborah's Parrot, a Village Tale", "The Confessor, a Sanctified Tale", and "The Fortune-Teller, a Gypsy Tale", do so with a black humour that only slightly distracts from the fact that these poems are all scathing renditions of love and marriage.

"The Fortune-Teller, a Gypsy Tale" tells the story of

Lubin ("the silly, simple, doting Lad") and Kate (who "...ever roving / Was never fix'd, though always loving!"), breaking with conventional representation by having Lubin the constant lover and Kate "giv'n to range." And range she does, pursuing the village swain Stephen because, says Robinson,

...women pant for Sov'reign sway.  
And he, who has been known to ruin,  
Is always sought, and always wooing.

Stephen is described as a trader in deception, the bane of maids and swains alike, with women his "trophies"; Kate becomes one of these as she "who had been pleas'd to rule" is "rul'd." Meanwhile, Lubin is concerned because he has given Kate ten pounds to buy her wedding gear, and he becomes even more concerned when, the day before their wedding, a gypsy tells him:

That he a maid inconstant loves,  
Who, to another slyly roves...  
...'home his bride would bring  
A little, alien, prattling thing.'

Lubin is not, however, the innocent victim of the deceptive Kate and Stephen. For one thing, he looks at the gypsy fortune-teller and thinks her far lovelier than Kate and wishes she were his mate, with Robinson warning that "...PASSIONS, when they learn to stray / Will seldom keep the beaten way." Secondly, he also shows a talent for deception as he encourages Kate to have her fortune told, disguises himself as the fortune-teller, and forces her to pay ten pounds in order to keep silent on her affair with Stephen. The return of his money miraculously cures Lubin of his "jealous pain." Clearly Robinson is depicting the rather sordid nature of "love" and marriage arrangements. There is no love in this poem, just lust, deceit, pride and money. There is no victim, no villain and no hero (all are equally duplicitous), and

there is no conventional happy ending.

"Deborah's Parrot, a Village Tale" is equally cynical in its portrayal of sexual relationships. Deborah is an old woman "doom'd a Spinster pure to be", "her quiet destiny / Never to be molested", who beneath a demure exterior is a seething mass of passion and resentment at her spinster state. (Robinson describes her appearance as belying her true nature, as being her mask.) Deborah owns a parrot that she has taught to repeat gossip and scandal but the end result is that she is shunned by her fellow villagers. They despise her, attributing her malicious behaviour to the jealousy of one whom nobody wanted to marry, her gold not being enough to counter her nature. Deborah leaves her village and with her gold "an husband bought", a husband like herself in person and age. Deborah's early scandal-mongering days return to haunt her, however, as her now neglected parrot repeats one of his lines in front of her new and jealous husband. Her reaction to the parrot's cry is a trembling blush, because the malicious activities of her past are not known by her husband, a blush he interprets as indicative of guilt:

'And with your gold, a pretty joke,  
You thought to buy a pleasant cloak;  
A screen to hide your shame.'

Thinking he has been used as front for adultery he then gets violent with Deborah - "...many a drubbing DEBBY bought / For mischief, she her PARROT taught!" Again there is no idealism in love, no heroes or victims - just duplicity, malice and violence.

These same ingredients appear in "The Confessor, a Sanctified Tale" where a young farmer's wife is having an affair, along with numerous others, with the local priest, under the guise of going to confession. (The

implication is that he will keep secret the various infidelities of the wives if they are also unfaithful with him.) Farmer Twyford is unsuspecting of his wife's infidelity, which also includes an affair with a neighbour that is conducted in front of her child. In a comic episode the neighbour is found under the bed by Farmer Twyford, but it is black humour as the cuckolded farmer turns to violence and "fiercely" beats his wife's lover. Again, Robinson depicts marriage as a farce and shows violence and infidelity as the norm, even in the context of religion, and again everyone is a participant in the nastiness.

Rebekah Carmichael's poem "A Young Lass's Soliloquy" deals with a number of issues pertaining to love and marriage. The young woman speaks to quell rumours that she has "ne'er been woo'd nor courted." She refutes this by saying that the lads flocked around her but she was "cald as winter snaw" and goes on to explain that only one managed

To melt this icy breast o' mine,  
To take my heart without design,  
An' keep it ever.

The poem's tone is one of spite and bitterness and this is confirmed by the final stanza:

O vow but he was proud an' saucy,  
An' better loo'd anither lassy,  
Wha had some siller;  
But I hae five an' five good nails,  
An', ere my strength or courage fails,  
I'll wi' them till her.

There is a pervading feeling of repressed sexuality in the poem, the young woman stressing her coldness while passions are obviously seething below her icy exterior, although threatening to spill over in the form of violence. Again, too, we see the issue of money playing an important role in courtship.

Two poems that are brutally honest in their assessment of marriage are "O Jenny Dear" by Susanna Blamire and Mary Alcock's "Modern Manners". Blamire's poem involves a dialogue between an unnamed male and Jenny. He is admonishing her, encouraging her to lay her pride aside and marry, warning her she will become an old, unattractive spinster. Jenny's reply is to say:

'Ye fill our hearts sae fu' o' care,  
We wish them ours again.  
To witch our faith, ye tell a tale,  
O' love that ne'er will end;  
Nae hinnyed words wi' me prevail,  
For men will never mend.'

The male's response is to remind her of her maiden aunt, as an example of what her life will be like, but Jenny says she would prefer to be a spinster than married, when marriage means men change from wooing to insulting and the wife becomes a drudge and is never in the right. She offers him examples of her own, naming two wives who wooed their husbands with beauty:

'But now they watch their lordies' frowns,  
Their sauls they daurna own;  
'Tis tyranny that wedlock crowns,  
And woman's joys are flown.'

This is an unusually direct negation of marriage and a rare positive portrayal of spinsterhood.

Alcock's "Modern Manners" involves a conversation between a young woman and her grandmother, with the young Flirtilla celebrating the relaxing of old customs. Pleasure is the main motivation, and freedom from domestic care the best aspect of "these enlightened days." Says Flirtilla:

'Oft have I heard them jeer and joke  
At wedlock's galling chain;  
Then cry, "Thank Heaven, 'tis now no yoke;  
We wed to part again".

'In former times, indeed, 'twas said  
That hearts were joined above,  
That women to their husbands paid  
Obedience, truth and love.

'But title, pin-money and dower  
Now join our hands for life;  
No other ties than these have power  
To couple man and wife.

'To these alone my thoughts aspire,  
On these I fix my heart;  
A wealthy husband I require -  
I care not when we part.'

Again this is an unusually blatant statement from a woman against the sacred institution of marriage. It is cynical and completely at odds with the idea of the companionate marriage. It also points towards the secularisation of society and, in particular, marriage, in its acknowledgement of divorce and its comment that it was in "former times" that couples were "joined above."

All these poems show that the Romantic women poets did employ strategies of subversion in their poetry. Of the motifs that Gilbert and Gubar identify there are repeated examples of two especially, namely enclosure and blood, and these seem to represent respectively the confining nature of patriarchy and the devastating effect this confinement has on women. The strategies of evasion, concealment, parody, obliqueness (e.g. the use of analogy) and accommodation (e.g. the use of the gothic genre) are clearly in evidence in many of the poems. Likewise, poems such as "Julia, or the Convent of St. Claire" show evidence of schizophrenia of authorship in that they both attack and support the ideology of the period. There does not, however, appear to be much in the way of self-doubt, inadequacy or inferiority felt by these women writers. The more confident and outspoken of them are often the rural or Scottish women, and those who did not write for



publication, such as Susanna Blamire. Their refreshingly practical and down-to-earth approach to marriage is perhaps evidence that the women outside of "society" did not feel the effects of ideology (i.e. they did not suffer so greatly from anxiety of perception) to the same extent as the middle-to-upper class English women poets.

There is a definite sense that the bulk of women's poetry that dealt with the idealistic aspects of love and marriage was the result of their catering to the market place, as well as the limitations dictated by society on what women could write about. The majority of the women wrote at least one poem expressing dissatisfaction with the social system of marriage, so it seems that, despite their frequent demonstrations of idealism and happiness with women's role in love and marriage, they were well aware of the realities of women's situation in the marriage market. These astute women who knew, and were able to write, what was necessary in order to be published in a male-dominated marketplace, were also capable of venting their discontentment with the systems they pandered to. However, their often overt attacks on the patriarchy did not go unnoticed and resulted in the definition of the female poet as the "feminine poetess" - the effects of which we shall look at in the next two chapters.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FELICIA HEMANS

Once it became evident that women poets were an established part of the literary market, and that there could be no return to an exclusively masculine literary scene, ideology worked to diffuse and contain the impact of the women poets rather than ridiculing them. It did this by defining what was acceptable for a female poet, and so, in a continued backlash against the intellectuality of the Bluestockings who had tried to compete on the same level as men, the construction of the "feminine poetess" prevailed.

The realm of the feminine poetess was deliberately defined as separate from the realm of the male poet. If women were going to write poetry, and be published, they had to do so in a way which did not compete with or threaten male dominance of the literary scene. The male poets were struggling to maintain an important place in society as utilitarianism became the dominant ethic, and the last thing they wanted was competition from within their field as well as without. Women's writing was therefore managed and accommodated by the predominantly male publishers and reviewers, who helped dictate the popular taste, in a manner that they were comfortable with. The reviewers tended to discuss how a woman could be a poetess, i.e. to define her sphere, before discussing her works, thus dividing poetry into separate spheres of influence for the sexes. Feminine poetry became an extension of the woman's role as domestic caretaker and moral guardian. While she could write about the same themes as her male counterparts, it was assumed she would do so with an inherently different approach and in a different

way - "different" being feminine (Ross 237-39). The female poets had to assure everyone that they were content with their sphere, that they were unambitious, and had no desire for equality of the sexes (and therefore were not a threat to the male poets), but their overwhelming commercial success introduced the paradox of supposed self-effacement finding expression in increasingly self-confident verse.

Felicia Browne Hemans was considered one of the greatest poets of her day, Byron her only contemporary rival in terms of popularity. Her works went through countless editions and reprints from 1808 to the end of the nineteenth century, and her success spanned Britain and America. She was the epitome of the ultra-feminine poetess, held up as a paragon of virtue and used as a stick with which to beat other female poets who were resisting their allocated sphere of the feminine poetess (just as Hannah More's writings had been used to counteract Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas) (Clarke 33). Hemans was cherished by reviewers and readers alike because her poetry did not seem to disturb the notion of separate spheres for men and women, and several poems indeed wholeheartedly endorse it. Along with Letitia Landon, Hemans was one of the first women to be a self-professed poet, claiming poetry writing as her vocation. Earlier women poets like Smith, Robinson and Taylor had been self-supporting in that they wrote for financial reward but they do not seem to have regarded poetry as a "calling" as Hemans and Landon did.

Hemans both fulfilled and contributed to defining a literary niche, the niche of the feminine poetess, that may partially explain her later neglect (Curran 189). In catering to a very specific market, the mass bourgeois, female readership of the uncontroversial

annuals and pocketbooks, her writing was limited to a particular type. There was a renewed focus on sensibility which was both popular and profitable but, as we have already noted, "acquired prescriptive, gender specific values of sincerity and purity" that excluded the realities of sexuality, money and power from poetic representation of women (Leighton 3). Consequently, her poetry was very located in its historical period and, as Ross suggests, perhaps lacks universality in that it is not transhistorical (254). Nevertheless, Hemans chose to inhabit her society's construction of the feminine poetess and made the realm of the domestic her own. She consciously developed and projected the myth of the "holy, sweet, Mrs Hemans" which was both an invention for an age unsettled by new industrial and capitalist values, and a means of protecting herself (Leighton 8).

Women's poetry was meant to be unstudied, spontaneous effusions, not laborious work, according to the myth of the feminine poetess: a woman didn't create poetry, she was poetry. Hemans perpetuated this myth and produced what was required of the feminine poetess: works of sweetness, holiness and propriety (Leighton 41). Hemans' poetry was stressed as being innately female - "It was agreed that Mrs Hemans' poems 'could not have been written by a man'" (Clarke 33)- and she deliberately invited this perception of her work. She articulated in both her writing and speech the ideal, domestic, passive female, emphasising childlike qualities, helplessness, and the virtues of piety, submission, purity and domesticity (Clarke 36). Her poetry of hearth and home, God and country, was sentimental and melancholy but comforting to a readership undergoing social upheaval. The domestic ties were stressed as gifts to be cherished and domestic happiness portrayed as being far more

rewarding than the public accolades of fame for women (see "Woman and Fame"). Hemans' poetry was about women and for women and was written to be heard rather than overheard, in contrast to the solitary musings of the male Romantic (Leighton 13). She gave women's experience a central place in poetry and a public platform, but it was a woman's experience delineated by ideology and therefore void of the practical realities of a woman's life.

Hemans' poetry represents the ideal domesticity where the home is a refuge for the male, purified by the devoted female, and is a sanctuary of security, stability and love. Examples of poems that emphasise this idealism are "The Graves of a Household" and "The Homes of England". Several of her poems show women purifying and sustaining the private refuge of the home while the men seek glory through conquest in the public world (see "The Troubadour and Richard Coeur de Lion", "The Death of Conradin" and "Songs of the Cid"), endorsing the doctrine of separate spheres for the sexes (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 135). The reality of domesticity, the depiction of the drudgery of everyday labour, does not feature in the work of the feminine poetess as it had done in the poems of the earlier women poets (e.g. Barbauld's "Washing Day"). The atmosphere of Hemans' work is very much woman-to-woman; there is a notable lack of her male contemporaries' use of the autobiographical "I". Rather than focusing on herself (a transgression for the feminine poetess), she speaks of the general human condition, and in particular the female condition (Leighton 17-18).

However, the image of the feminine poetess that Hemans adopted, developed and consciously projected, did not accord with the facts of her own life. Two major

considerations prevented her from being the ideal woman according to the terms of her contemporary ideology. First there was her success as a poet and the accompanying public glare and fame, which contradicted the myth of the ideal woman whose realm was the domestic. Secondly, and probably more importantly, was the failure of her marriage, which was virtually scandalous in a woman supposed to be the icon of feminine domesticity. The paradoxical nature of her situation had a profound effect on both her works and her conception of her public image.

The eighteen-year-old Felicia Browne married Captain Hemans in 1812, and bore him five sons in six years, while continuing to produce volumes of poetry. They separated in 1818, her husband going to Italy, Felicia and her sons remaining with her mother's household. The separation was kept very quiet and was not public knowledge until after her death when it became subject to rumour and hypotheses. There are no historically verified, detailed records concerning reasons for the separation but it seems to be the general consensus amongst scholars and those that knew her that the couple were of incompatible temperaments (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 133-34). Given that Felicia could support her family through her poetry, when Captain Hemans decided to go to Italy, ostensibly for reasons of health, there was no need to accompany him and it seems to have been preferable for everybody concerned that she did not. In effect, Felicia Hemans chose her career over her marriage - a decision that caused her much personal anguish and affected her poetry.

There is, however, considerable evidence that marriage and a literary career were incompatible for women of the Romantic Period. As has been previously

mentioned, the majority of successful authors were either unmarried (Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More, Anna Seward), separated (Felicia Hemans, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith), or middle-aged brides (Letitia Landon, Caroline Bowles Southey). Promising literary careers were often terminated upon marriage, such as those of Maria Jane Jewsbury and Anne Grant. It seems that the professional pursuit of a poetic career threatened the chance of a happy married life for women (Hickock 72, 121). The women poets return continuously to the theme of conflict between the private or domestic and the world of public fame, no doubt because it was so palpable in their own lives.

Hemans clung tenaciously to respectability, embracing the ideal of the feminine poetess because she was so aware of the elements jeopardising her poetic success. As Angela Leighton has pointed out, besides her potentially scandalous marital situation, her provinciality (she came from Liverpool) and self-education also threatened her reputation (9). Marlon Ross relates his proposed "anxiety of perception" particularly to Hemans. He feels her work is influenced by her worries over how she will be perceived and judged, first as woman, then as poet (Ross 248-49). Her poetic success and the failure of her marriage opened up the very real possibility of her being ridiculed or ostracised. Because of this her work attempts to avoid controversial issues such as gender equality, and certain characteristics emerge in her poems on romantic love. Her poetic endorsement of the primacy and endurance of love between a woman and her mate stands in stark contrast to the reality of her own life (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 134).

Many of Hemans' poems take hearth and home as their theme, and it is characteristically women who are

present and men who are absent. This enacts the double abandonment that Hemans experienced in her own life - that of both her father and husband leaving their marital home. However, the absence of men in her poems takes place with much romantic drama, pain and suffering on the part of all concerned. These abandonments are very different from the absence of men in her life which was certainly beneficial, if not downright convenient (Leighton 10). Her husband's absence allowed her career to flourish as she was no longer responsible for the household or for his happiness, nor was the family increasing on an annual basis. The female-headed household of which she was a loved and cherished member was crucial to Hemans, both in terms of her wellbeing and her poetical capacity. She had a particularly strong relationship with her mother, who was solely responsible for her thorough education. Her family's support saved her from being a woman poet alone and unprotected in the glare of fame, a state to be avoided if the experiences of Landon and, to some extent, Hemans in her last years, are anything to go by .

The absence of her husband naturally had drawbacks, both in practical terms and in the traumatic effect it must have had on her emotionally, particularly considering the conflict between the ideology she had internalised and espoused through her poetry, and her personal experiences. Financially it meant that she was under pressure to support herself and her sons (writing epitaphs proved a profitable sideline), and despite projecting an image of helplessness she must have been a tough, talented, market-oriented writer as she was literally writing for her life. One can only wonder at what her poetry would have been like had she been free to write what she chose rather than what the public demanded. The public register of melancholy so



closely associated with Hemans does not appear to have been her natural mode. Her earlier works and essays show a sense of humour and she seems to have modified her tone in response to public demand for sentimentality and melancholy (Leighton 11).

The conflict between the domestic sphere and the world of fame was very important to all the successful women writers, but particularly to the feminine poetesses Landon and Hemans. Fame threatened privacy and because of her marital situation privacy was paramount to Hemans. Women were supposedly tainted by fame and publicity as it removed them from the feminine world of the domestic into the masculine, public world. Consequently the more famous she became (she was so well-known and well-loved that people would hover outside her home hoping to catch a glimpse of her) the harder she had to work at retaining an image of purity (Clarke 75). Being famous opposed the ideals of her poetry and her increasing success as a poet only highlighted her perceived failure as a woman. Marriage was supposed to afford a woman protection, the husband acting as a screen between herself and the world. As her fame increased in the 1820's Hemans keenly felt the lack of a husband. Her sense of isolation was compounded by the death of her mother, a blow from which she never recovered, and the departure of her brother and marriage of her sister (Clarke 47-49). In a letter Hemans wrote of her sister's impending marriage:

I am to lose this, my only sister...She is about to change her name and home and remove very far from me. O how many deaths there are in the world for the affections! (Clarke 49)

As Hemans began to feel more conspicuous and vulnerable she attempted to reconstruct the feminine space around her through developing friendships with

other female writers, including Maria Jewsbury, Mary Mitford and Joanna Baillie. The networking of women writers enabled them to support one another and prevented any one being singled out for rough treatment by "Fame" (Ross 297-98).

In writing of hearth and home Hemans focuses on the faithfulness of women rather than the importance of men, who are, as we have already noted, more often absent than present in the domestic scene (Leighton 14). The ties of love are very central to Hemans' poetry, particularly love between mother and child and woman and her mate. Woman's love is depicted as innate, virtuous, and constant but is consistently associated with abandonment and sadness. The misery of lovers parted by death, distance or other circumstances beyond their control is a recurring theme, with the burden of self-sacrifice the woman's (Hickock 20-21). There are no bad marriages where the "badness" is the fault of either party but there are frequent displays of abandonment of wives by husbands, whether through infidelity, travel or death. Hemans turns loneliness and dissatisfaction for women into self-rewarding virtues, comforting her female readers, who were, of course, themselves confined to their homes and marriages.

The conventional association of romantic love, woman and death reaches its peak with Hemans and Landon. Kathleen Hickock in her book Representations of Women: Nineteenth-Century British Women's Poetry sees these deaths as indicative of the status of the widow and wife in society (71). On marriage the woman's identity was legally incorporated into that of her husband, financially, socially and emotionally. Consequently, on his death she too was figuratively dead in that she was left with no status or identity,

and if no one came to her aid she would die physically as well. In Hemans' poetry it is often the mother, or another member of the immediate family, who saves the young widow from the grave. This is evident in "Madeline" where a mother's love keeps her child alive, in contrast to "The Lady of Provence" where, on winning her dead husband fame for his deeds, the wife too dies. Hemans' closing line - "She hath lived - she hath loved - her task is done" - sums up women's existence in "The Lady of Provence".

Most of Hemans' poetry attests that women's reward for suffering on earth will be found in heaven: it is typical to find women depicted as martyrs. "The Effigies" is a good example of this where the speaker contemplates the material, earthly gains the male warrior has achieved and compares them to the wife's lot on earth:

Thine was the void, the gloom,  
The straining eye that followed far  
His fast-receding plume.

The woman's consolation for her unrecognised "still sad life" and her "deep, quiet love, submissive tears" is that she will be

Oh! happy, happier than thy lord,  
In that lone path to heaven!

Hemans was writing before the onslaught of religious doubt of the later nineteenth century and faith is a strong component of her verse. Poems like "The English Martyrs" and "The Image in the Heart" attest to the endurance of romantic or marital love beyond the grave, although the latter poem also leaves the reader with the feeling that Hemans herself has known no such enduring love. However, there are several poems which seem to doubt the durability of romantic

love, such as "Parting Words" and "A Thought of the Future". "Parting Words" is a dying woman's address to her lover: his love comes between her "heart and heaven" and death is seen as something that will rive their souls apart. The overriding feeling is that the woman's death will be the death of their love. In "A Thought of the Future" the speaker directly contemplates whether love travels beyond the grave, but sees it as being a burden in the otherwise blissful afterlife. The final stanza illustrates the scepticism of the speaker:

Let me, then - let me dream  
That love goes with us to the shore unknown;  
So o'er its burning tears a heavenly gleam  
In mercy shall be thrown!

In her final years Hemans' faith was particularly strong, something that Norma Clarke sees as indicating that dependency on God was safer in Hemans' eyes than dependency on man (107).

The Mrs Hemans dealt with by critics was judged to have succeeded as woman and poet but this "Mrs Hemans" was a deliberately and carefully constructed identity. In reality, Hemans' life was a warning to ambitious young women writers (Clarke 37). Having so thoroughly bought into the myth of the feminine poetess, Hemans found she could then not give full expression to the tensions and experiences of her life. There was always to be internalised conflict between the sweet, holy myth of the woman poet she had helped develop and her personal experience, realised as a strain of scepticism that ruffles her public voice (particularly in her later poems). It is clear that Hemans was aware of the precariousness of her position, her "schizophrenia of authorship", from such poems as "The Grave of a Poetess". In this poem she envisages herself visiting the grave of Mary Tighe, where she

regrets the passing of her sister-poet until the final stanzas when she realises that in death there is a comfort not to be found in life for the woman poet:

Thou hast left sorrow in thy song,  
A voice not loud but deep  
The glorious bowers of earth among,  
How often didst thou weep?

Where couldst thou fix on mortal ground  
Thy tender thoughts and high? -  
Now peace the woman's heart hath found,  
And joy the poet's eye.

It is only in death that the conflicting roles of woman and poet can be reconciled.

On close examination of her works it becomes evident that Hemans was both aware of and dissatisfied with the conflict between her role as a woman and a poet. There is also a clear disillusionment with romantic love and the nature of marriage. Stuart Curran in his article "Romantic Poetry: The 'I' Altered" notes that the darker strains of exile, failure and frustrated female genius, as well as the omnipresence of death, point to the subversion of the role the feminine poetess filled (189). He cites the commonness of the theme of displacement and the regular perishing of heroines, even in the sentimental and pious verse, as further evidence of subversion. Helen Cooper in her book Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Woman and Artist speaks of Hemans as expressing "a rage" against the conditions (for women) she attempts to support, a rage "rumbling under the sentimental, domestic surface [of her work]" (Cooper 19). No modern critics read Hemans' work as supportive of the ideology that she tries to uphold, nor do they read her as being satisfied with the position of women in society, particularly in their relationships with men.

It is true that none of Hemans' poems are as openly

and forthrightly critical of the position of women in marriage as those of the earlier Romantic women poets we have examined, but numerous works contain images or lines that sit uneasily for the reader. For instance, in "Madeline" the ideological position is that it is woman's destiny to "suffer and be still" in the face of the sorrow that romantic love brings, in this case in the form of abandonment through death. Yet, as Madeline leaves her mother's home to become a bride, the thing that triggers her tears is the song of her "caged bird" - perhaps an image of what life is to become as well as a reminder of what she leaves. In "Madeline" it is mother-love that is all-powerful, calling the young widow back from the grave, as in Hemans' life it was Mrs Browne's love that prevailed over Captain Hemans'. The strength of a mother's love is constantly celebrated in Hemans' poetry, as critics have noted, but it is often celebrated at the expense of romantic or marital love. "The Memorial Pillar" is a poem about the spot where mother and daughter parted when the daughter was to be married. The love of a mother for her child is described as "The one love changing not" (Hemans' emphasis) and the poem focuses on what the child loses upon marriage, which separates her from her mother.

It is not only the love of the mother that overrides the marital relationship: other family members provide protection from the perils of romantic love. In "Sister! Since I Met Thee Last" a woman greets her sister, noting the changes that love has wrought in her:

...In the softness of thine eyes,  
 Deep and still, a shadow lies;  
 From thy voice there thrills a tone  
 Never to thy childhood known;  
 Through thy soul a storm hath moved,  
 -Gentle sister! thou hast loved!

Realising that her sister's love has been in vain, she asks for no explanations but offers her her breast for comfort, noting that "home alone can give thee rest."

Hemans' female characters combine "resilience and weariness, heroism and victimisation, importance and helplessness" and are strongly influenced by both the Corrine and Sappho myths which represent female self-denial in that they are lovelorn and suicidal, but also female glorification in that they are self-expressive and triumphal (Leighton 12-13). The ideal domestic woman was an identity model that provided both security and status for women, offering them a sense of importance, satisfaction and solidarity. Hemans' middle-class audience wanted conventional womanhood reinforced, not challenged, and wanted to be inspired, instructed and amused by poetry, preferably in sentimental or entertaining form (Hickock 12). Yet there is also an underlying ambivalence towards the lot of women and several of her poems give expression to this. One of her more famous poems is "Evening Prayer at a Girl's School", superficially a sentimental poem about young English virgins. However, their happy innocence is contrasted with the mingled joy and woe that awaits them in maturity:

Her lot is on you - silent tears to weep,  
And patient smiles to wear through suffering's  
hour...  
And to make idols, and to find them clay,  
And to bewail that worship. Therefore pray!

The only resource offered to the girls is prayer, with the hope of reward in heaven, which if one traces an element of scepticism in Hemans' faith could be read as irony.

Hemans' poems "The Broken Chain" and "The Freed Bird" can both be read as little allegories of marriage and





No more!

Similarly in two of the last poems she wrote before her death, "A Thought of the Sea" and "The River Clwyd in North Wales", she expresses her dissatisfaction with her life. "A Thought of the Sea" notes her lack of a "bower of steadfast bliss / A home" (Hemans' emphasis) and speaks of a "chastened hope" that now turns from worldly satisfaction to hope in the next world. In "The River Clwyd in North Wales" she refers to herself as having passed "through rocks and storms" and again she seeks consolation in the world to come.

The volume of verse generally considered representative of Hemans' dilemma in terms of her role as the feminine poetess and her own life experiences as a woman is Records of Woman (1828). In Records of Woman women are the central figures of all the poems, which include dramatic monologues (although without the customary irony) and third-person narratives. Superficially the poems are concerned with nostalgia and heroism but they also give expression to women's experience of being let down by men. The poems illustrate various kinds and degrees of suffering that women experience, particularly in the domestic affections, and invariably it is romantic love or familial love that is the cause of their anguish. As Angela Leighton has noted, for a poet supposed to epitomise the conservative values of the marital home there is obvious conflict in that the women she writes of are exiled, abandoned, regretful, restless or dying (26).

Men are conspicuous by their absence, and it is only when they are alone that the heroism of women surfaces. Without men around women take centre stage and, even if their act is one of death, Hemans gives them a public platform from which to first tell their

story (see "Properzia Rossi", "Edith, A Tale of the Woods" and "Indian Woman's Death-Song" as examples). There are no satisfactory husbands in Records of Woman: the protection supposedly accorded to women on marriage is as absent as the men themselves, and the women express, or the poems indicate, varying degrees of resentment and/or resignation to the associated suffering (Clarke 80). Woman is depicted as relative to man, her suffering contingent on male rejection, betrayal or loss - a suffering ceasing only with death.

As with the earlier Romantic women poets Hemans expresses her dissatisfaction through various forms or strategies. In Records of Woman the vivid images that feature frequently are those of blood, violence and physical pain (see "The Indian City", "Imelda", "The Bride of the Greek Isle", "The Wife of Asdrubel" and "The Suliote Mother"). Helen Cooper sees these recurrent images as the result of Hemans' rage against the prevailing ideology. A woman could not turn her anger on men so it is displaced and instead results in the destruction of the woman. This is also the figurative killing off of the idea of womanhood that the suffering woman represents in the ideology, so Hemans both exalts and destroys her in a way that indicates the paradoxical nature of her situation (Cooper 19-20). Both mothers and lovers are covered in blood, the leaving of one's mother being a form of death for Hemans.

Even though in Records of Woman love is associated with suffering, it is also idealised in that devotion to one's loved ones is shown as more valuable than fame or achievement (e.g. "Joan of Arc in Rheims") (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 131). While celebrating the strength of woman's love Hemans

simultaneously acknowledges the futility of such commitment as it is always met with separation or rejection. Mellor feels that Hemans exhausts and collapses the domestic ideology she espouses. She accepts the hegemonic inscription of women within the domestic sphere but then can only show it as bringing suffering to both men and women (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 142). For example her poem "Troubadour Song" illustrates fatal domesticity, where the warrior returns from the battlefield to find "there was death within the smiling home" and the woman has perished in his absence. Physical death seems to be necessary to terminate the spiritual torment that man's inadequacy induces in women.

When the surface of sentimentalism is penetrated the undercurrent of strain and resistance in Hemans' poetry becomes self-evident to the modern reader. Ideological pressures meant that self-censorship prevented Hemans being specific about her own life in her poetry, and her experience is therefore evidenced in an oblique and fragmentary manner (Clarke 101). Her rage at her abandonment was muted in the cause of self-protection, for, as Norma Clarke notes, to lose a husband was to lose respectability (131). As a disaffected wife Hemans could not speak out and tell the truth about marital unhappiness, but she could not help but express some of her dissatisfaction in her voluminous works. Elizabeth Barrett Browning said that the flaw of Hemans' work was that "she was bound fast in satin riband", that is she was too concerned with moral delicacy and metrical correctness to accurately record women's experiences (Leighton 42). Yet, despite her limitations, which were really the unavoidable accompaniments to the role of the feminine poetess, Hemans wrote for and about women and made a professional success of doing so. She had the ability

to fuse her poetry with the desired image of the poet (Clarke 88). Together with Letitia Landon, Hemans helped pave the way for the women poets who were to follow in raising the profile of women in poetry and women as poets.

## CHAPTER SIX

### LETITIA LANDON

Letitia Landon's poetical career in many ways paralleled that of Mrs Hemans. There were, however, important differences between their two situations and their personalities that were crucial to differentiating their poetry. Superficially the poetry of these two virtual contemporaries looks interchangeable: tales of women suffering in love, set in exotic locations. Even the titles of the poems are practically identical in some instances: for example, "The Troubadour and Richard Coeur de Lion" and The Troubadour, "Moorish Bridal Song" and "Moorish Maiden's Tale", "The Chamois Hunter's Love" and "Song of the Hunter's Bride" (Hemans and Landon respectively). It is interesting to closely examine and compare the works of these two women poets to see the different effects that the same ideological pressures had on two individuals, both so prominent in their atypical roles.

Like Hemans, Landon had been a precocious and gifted child, encouraged in her vociferous reading and poetic composing. Also like Hemans, she met with success at an early age - Landon was only sixteen when she was first published. They both viewed their poetry as a calling, a vocation, not something that they did as an amusement or diversion. Landon, too, became a professional success, able to live off her earnings, pay for the education of her brother, and support her mother. Both women had an eye for the market and were able to produce what the new mass readership wanted to read. This perhaps accounts for much of the similarity between their works as they were both

writing for the same audience. Thus Landon's predominant register, like Hemans', was the pangs of sensibility and melancholy.

Both women adopted the role of the feminine poetess. The ideology that this role imposed is evident in their work, Landon like Hemans emphasising the separate spheres of man and woman. Landon, too, was careful to assure her readers that she was not attempting to compete with males on their level. She referred to her power as "but a woman's power" (in The Golden Violet 238), ranking her poetry as being of inferior merit to male poetry but having its own feminine purpose, tone and audience (Renalds 43-44). As with Hemans, Landon was forced into financially supporting her family. Landon's father had died in 1825, one year after the phenomenally successful The Improvisatrice had been published. (The Improvisatrice went through six editions in its first year and established Landon's poetic reputation.) His death compounded the family's financial difficulties. Hemans and Landon were professional women, forced to carve out careers for money, and both lacked the almost mandatory support and protection of a male.

The point where the paths of Hemans and Landon diverge most noticeably is in their social status. Landon was a single woman without the protection afforded by a father figure, a single woman in the glare of the public eye. She embraced the public stage whereas Hemans secluded herself in the private and domestic. Apparently Landon's relationship with her mother was not entirely amicable and soon after her father's death she left home to board with her grandmother. This arrangement did not prove entirely satisfactory, her grandmother not understanding the poet's need for uninterrupted, quiet seclusion in order to work, and

it lasted only two years. Landon then took up a private boarding situation, at last achieving the writer's desire for a "room of one's own" (Leighton 48).

While this living situation was ideal for her work it was not so beneficial to her reputation. Landon was immensely popular, one of the quirkiest testaments to her renown being the explorer Sir James Ross's naming an Arctic lake after her (Renalds 31), but her fame had a different effect on her from that which such recognition had had on Felicia Hemans. Landon lived amongst the social whirl of London and became one of the first in what is now a long line of media-created "stars" (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 121). Her early works show evidence of an innocent egocentricity, understandable when from a young age she had been fed on praise. She became a conspicuous figure in London literary circles and presented herself as sociable and fun-loving. Her social persona contrasted strongly, however, with the realities of her life as a writer. She often worked into the small hours of the morning writing poetry, editing annuals and, later, working on her novels in a drudgery motivated by financial need. In private Landon suffered from anxiety and nervous attacks, perhaps partially caused by the double life she led.

As with all women authors of the period, her success depended to a large extent on the men involved in the publishing industry. Fortunately for Landon her family lived close to William Jerdan, editor of the Literary Gazette, and he became her mentor, responsible for publishing her early poems and volumes and for giving her financial advice. A later influence and literary aid to Landon was the Irishman Dr Maginn. Unfortunately for Landon her vulnerable

social position and others' envy of her success resulted in her name being scandalously associated with these two men. There was no word at this time to describe a collegial relationship between men and women, particularly between single women and married men, and consequently their relationship was assumed to have sexual overtones (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 121).

The effect of such scandal on Landon was devastating. Landon suffered from what Marlon Ross has termed "anxiety of perception", and to be perceived as a "fallen woman" totally destroyed her constructed image of the feminine poetess. As Anne Mellor notes, Landon as public property was part of the social discourse, and once rewritten as a fallen woman she lost her social position and marketability (Romanticism and Gender 121-22). The rumours surrounding her first began in the twenties but were revived in their most serious form in 1834. The long-term results were the ending of her engagement to (Dickens' biographer) John Forster and the instigation of her disastrous marriage to George Maclean, the latter at least partially in order to escape the gossiping of London society (Leighton 55). The role of the feminine poetess and the harsh realities of the society she lived in collided in Landon's life. She became personally disillusioned with the position of women, and in particular their experiences in love, through the conflict between her assumed role, actuality, and public perception. Her awareness of this gap between ideology and lived experience is traceable in her poetry.

There is no doubt that initially Letitia Landon subscribed wholly to the construction of the feminine poetess. Her assumption of the role was virtually



entirely conscious ("virtually" because obviously internalised ideology also contributed) and there is evidence that this was an astute marketing strategy on Landon's part. Anne Mellor makes an interesting and valuable distinction between Felicia Hemans' adoption of the ideology of the feminine poetess and Landon's. Whereas Hemans constructed herself as the icon of female domesticity, Landon constructed herself as the embodiment of "the beautiful" (Romanticism and Gender 110). Mellor sees Landon as influenced by the philosopher Edmund Burke and his construction of the ideal woman as "the beautiful", that is, characterised by the "soft" virtues of tenderness, affection, submission, compassion and kindness. Burke's influence had many middle- and upper-class women aspiring to be languorous, melting beauties possessed of attributes defined in opposition to the higher qualities of the mind associated with the masculine sublime (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 108).

If Letitia Landon "constructed both her life and her poetry as an embodiment of Burke's female beauty" (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 110), she was also influenced by Rousseau, who had defined the role of the ideal woman as being pleasing to men, and Byron, who stressed love as woman's whole existence. She supported the construction of herself as a commodity, "an acquirable artifact of beauty", from her early titillation of readers by her use of the modestly discreet initials "L.E.L." to the portraits that depicted her as the icon of demure female beauty (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 110-11). Her writings subscribed to Burke's definition of woman in that she presented female subjectivity as defined by love, fidelity, sensitivity and melancholy. In effect she rewrote her own life to fit this model, encouraging her poems to be read as semi-autobiographical, despite

the fact that they were derived from medieval lyrics and Greek influence and were a far cry from her personal experience (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 112).

As Mellor notes, Landon successfully gauged the taste of her time, accepted the hegemonic definition of woman as "one who loves", and then obsessively detailed every possible aspect of female love, always concluding by recognising its futility. The recognition that female love as defined by society could never bring happiness shows that even though Landon accepted her culture's construction of her gender as correct (there are numerous references in her work to woman's love as the one "truth"), she illustrated its emptiness (Mellor, Romanticism and Gender 114). Among the numerous conventional poems that do support the prevailing ideology, as with Hemans', there are scattered lines that do not accord with the ideology of the feminine poetess. In her later poems, particularly the shorter "fragments", Landon clearly matures and strains of bitterness, scepticism and, in some cases, open hostility, are clear, no doubt the influence of her personal experience of male/female relations.

As with Hemans and the earlier women Romantic poets, Landon's conventional poetry stresses woman's constancy in love, man's betrayal, and the consequent suffering that women endure. Predictably, death is preferable to life without love and is a frequent outcome for her various heroines. Two images repeatedly recur in Landon's conventional poetry. She often refers to love as the "summer hour", stressing it as a brief period of illusion of happiness followed by pain and "autumn decay." The second recurrent image is that of the male as an idol, a falsely

worshipped God. "The Warning" incorporates both these motifs, as the narrator warns another woman of the perishability of love:

...Thou art in the summer hour  
Of first passion's early power:  
I am in the autumn day  
Of its darkness, and decay.  
- Seems thine idol now to thee  
Even as a divinity?...  
[I] Own my idol gilded clay.

Landon differs significantly from Hemans, however, in her lack of religious piety. Hemans ended most of her poems with a moral and displayed a deep faith that, although this world brought women suffering, there was at least a better world to come. Landon had no such faith and her scepticism is evident in her poems. Her works do not offer the comfort of "Therefore pray!" but rather, as in "A Girl at her Devotions", illustrate prayer to be superficial, unable to soothe "earth's ills" or penetrate "silent, secret, unrequited love" (Leighton 69).

Anne Mellor lists the subjects of Landon's poetry as "Sorrow, Beauty, Love, Death" (Romanticism and Gender 113), but one would have to add that these are explored specifically in relation to women, and add another topic - poetry itself, or, more accurately, the poet. Much of Landon's verse is concerned with the poet (male and female) and how the poet differs from ordinary mortals. In particular, Landon is preoccupied with the stress and strain that fame brings the woman poet. Poems like "The History of the Lyre", "Felicia Hemans", "The Summer Evening's Tale" and "Erinna" show how the female poet, having crossed the boundary between the private and public spheres, pays the price in suffering in both of these aspects of her life (Ross 299). Critics have noted the

egocentricity of her early work in particular, and she certainly viewed herself confidently as being among those of genius. In The Improvisatrice she describes the woman poet's love as having two aspects:

I loved him as young Genius loves...  
I loved him, too, as woman loves.

The ability to poeticise and love were often linked in her work such as in "Sappho's Song" from The Improvisatrice where without love there can be no poetry. There is a kind of irony in such assertions as Landon herself knew love only at a late age, long after writing The Improvisatrice, something she admitted in her later poetry.

For Landon, as stipulated by the ideological definition of the feminine poetess, woman's love was by its very nature different from men's. A stanza from The Troubadour illustrates this:

There is a feeling in the heart  
Of woman which can have no part  
In man; a self devotedness,  
As victims round their idols press,  
And ask nothing, but to show  
How far their zeal and faith can go.

Many of her poems contemplate its various aspects including The Troubadour and "The Broken Spell". Also in The Troubadour the young Eva has

...to learn  
How often woman's heart must turn  
To feed upon its own excess  
Of deep yet passionate tenderness!  
How much of grief the heart must prove  
That yields a sanctuary to love!

These sentiments are reiterated constantly throughout her works, as, for example, in "The Broken Spell" where Landon stresses woman's "lone and long

constancy" and her "creed of suffering".

Notably absent from Landon's work are poems dealing directly with marriage. Very few touch on the subject and those that do are unusually bitter. It does not seem credible to assume that because Landon had not experienced marriage she chose not to write on it, when the bulk of her work is on topics of which she had little or no experience, as she herself admitted. Rather, it seems feasible to suppose that two opposing "taboos" prevented her from fully exploring this topic area which, after all, was still the socially expected goal for a woman.

The first taboo is the happy marriage. As Mellor has noted, Landon's poetry shows an inability of the poet to speak of happiness in love - when love succeeds the lyre is silent (Romanticism and Gender 115). Two poems that illustrate this point are "The Child of the Sea" from The Golden Violet and "Roland's Tower". In "The Child of the Sea" love triumphs with the death of the rival, but the teller of the tale concludes by saying:

My tale is told. May minstrel words express  
The light at noon, or young love's happiness?  
Enow, I trow, of that sweet dream can tell  
Without my aiding. Gentles fare ye well.

Similarly, these lines from "Roland's Tower":

They loved; - they were beloved. Oh, happiness!  
I have said all that can be said of bliss,  
In saying that they loved...

are indicative of an inability to speak of successful romance. For Mellor this phenomenon is the result of Landon's subscription to Burke's concept of the beautiful (Romanticism and Gender 115). Having accepted the social doctrine of the beautiful, Landon

can only describe woman's love as the ideology defines woman's love -i.e. in terms of constancy, fidelity, sorrow and suffering. It then becomes ideologically impossible for her to speak of woman's love as anything else, such as successful, rewarding, fulfilling and joyful. Landon's wholehearted acceptance of the definition of the feminine poetess limited her poetic subject matter.

The ideology of the feminine poetess also worked to prevent Landon from discussing the second and opposite taboo, the bad marriage. Love was supposed to bring a noble and uplifting suffering to women and it was this that most of the poetry focused on. However, the romantic drama of love in real life concluded with marriage. Marriage was still the idealised goal for women and for someone who was such a strong influence on the female public to portray marriage as anything but desirable amounted to heresy. The ideological paradox that prevented the woman poet discussing either the happy or the unhappy marriage, without jeopardising her career and reputation, seems to me the reason why the subject was virtually avoided altogether.

Landon in her later years, however, managed to publish a poem that does portray an unhappy marriage in "She Sat Alone Beside Her Hearth". This poem tells the tale of an American Indian woman married to a white man. Having been saved by her from death at the hand of her people

...He lingered at her side;  
And many a native song yet tells  
Of that pale stranger's bride.

Two years later and the bride has lost her smile and her eyes their light as

...With what a fond and earnest faith  
To desperate hope she clung!

His eyes grew cold - his voice grew strange -  
They only grew more dear.  
She served him meekly, anxiously,  
With love - half faith - half fear...

...With nothing to recall  
But bitter taunts, and careless words  
And looks more cold than all.

The narrator comments:

Alas! for love, that sits at home,  
Forsaken and yet fond;  
The grief that sits beside the hearth -  
Life has no grief beyond.

Following her husband when he deserts her in a vain effort to make him love her, she is met with rebuff, told she is too dark to be his bride. Her recourse is that of the Indian woman in Hemans' "Indian Woman's Death Song" as she takes a canoe over a waterfall to meet her death. This differs from the conventional suicide as the result of unrequited love in that the couple are actually married, which is a significant development - although by using an exotic setting she distances this union from the marriages of England.

A poem within a poem, "The Ring" from The Golden Violet, also describes a less-than-happy marriage. The bride is portrayed as an independent woman:

...And the maiden, hers is no smile to brook  
In meekness the storm of an angry look;  
For her forehead is proud, and her eyes' deep  
blue  
Hath at times a spirit flashing through,  
That speaks of feelings too fierce to dwell  
In, woman, thy heart's sweet citadel...

and the marriage begins with a bad omen as the wedding ring cuts her and "blood drip[s] red on the altar stone." Agatha, the bride, is soon neglected by her







Unlike other heroines this woman does not quietly die of unrequited love but willingly commits a crime in her desire for revenge. Even though she does die at the end of the poem it is a death caused by remorse for her sin, not a death caused from being rejected by a male. These differences from the normal representations of betrayed love are significant as they show Landon deviating from the ideology that dominates the conventional poems.

Similarly in "A Supper of Madame de Brinvilliers" a woman takes an active rather than passive role in the relationship between the sexes. Here the typical roles of woman and lover (as portrayed in Landon's poetry where the male is commonly referred to as the idol) are reversed, as the male "knelt to gaze on her - / He the latest worshipper", and she the idol. Landon paints a sensuous and languorous scene in which the woman is in the position of power and the man the victim. His love is described in terms typically associated with woman's love while she is described with words like "fiercely", "unquiet", and "passion." Her love for the youth at her feet is dead and she already thinks of another: not only does she not love, she actively hates and cold-heartedly poisons him.

Evasion and concealment as strategies for subverting the ideology, or as means of encoding protests about the nature of woman's position in society, seem to be Landon's speciality. The two most common motifs Landon uses are those of the mask and the secret. The role of evasion and concealment through these two motifs is closely associated with doubling and schizophrenia of authorship. That is, it depicts woman as living a surface existence that differs from and/or conflicts with their internal experience. The titles of some of her poems highlight Landon's



forbidden knowledge (Leighton 69-70). The fragment "Secrets" seems to support this theory. In this poem Landon refers to the universality of "sorrow silent, gloomy and unknown" that feeds on the bearer. The secret

...works incessantly, and fears  
The time to come; for time is terrible,  
Avenging, and betraying.

Landon clearly does not see the secret as a positive thing; rather it is described as insidious and malicious.

The image of the mask has much the same function as that of the secret and the two are invariably linked. The mask is the conscious facade that the woman uses to hide the fact that she is concealing a secret; it is consciously duplicitous. For Landon the mask seems to be a necessary part of a woman's existence and it is constantly referred to, particularly in relation to love. The most common association of the mask, women, and love, is when love has failed and the woman must conceal the depth of her sorrow and present a happy face to the public. It is an image that precipitates melancholy and despair in Landon, but which later women poets come to celebrate, as the discrepancy between what may and may not be seen becomes the conventional condition of the creative woman (Leighton 72).

The fifth of Landon's "Poetical Portraits" provides a good example of the complexities at work in this image. The speaker describes a woman with the conventions that indicate beauty but then comments that her "brow is but the sculptor's mould", and that it is "less fair than cold." The reason for her inanimation is given as the loss of love, upon which

the heart must "either break or freeze", hers doing the latter. The woman's exterior hardness has allowed her to

...[move] amid the heartless throng  
 With school'd and alter'd brow:  
 Thy face has worn its mask so long,  
 It is its likeness now.

For the speaker the "pictured show" that betrays "not the slightest trace / Of what may work below" means the woman has alienated herself from love forever. Yet, reading the poem, one is left with sympathy and admiration for the woman, who at least chose not to pine away with a broken heart and has pride enough to continue to function. It would seem plausible to suggest that while the speaker admonishes the woman for using such a strategy, Landon's frequent reference to it shows she sees it as necessary, if undesirable, for women.

Perhaps the best poems to examine so as to gain a clear picture of Landon's feelings on love are those that are almost certainly autobiographical and those where her own narratorial voice comes through. "Lines of Life" is a poem that can be read as autobiographical and speaks forthrightly to the images of the mask and the secret. Landon illustrates how the mask becomes so frequent that it almost becomes the self:

Well, read my cheek, and watch my eye, -  
 Too strictly school'd are they,  
 One secret of my soul to show,  
 One hidden thought betray.

I never knew the time my heart  
 Look'd freely from my brow;  
 It once was check'd by timidity,  
 'Tis taught by caution now.

I live among the cold, the false,  
 And I must seem like them;

And such I am, for I am false  
As those I must condemn.

I teach my lip its sweetest smile,  
My tongue its softest tone;  
I borrow others' likeness, till  
Almost I lose my own.

She goes on to catalogue the falsities that she must perform in order to survive in the social scene; the fear that compels her to act in a manner she obviously deplores is named as "withering ridicule." Clearly, this is a description of how anxiety of perception affects Landon. Her fear is also to do with her poeticising, not with love, as she worries that her capitulation to flattery and social niceties will result in the loss of her "hallow'd words" and she yearns for longevity through her poetry.

Several of Landon's poems make passing bitter comments to do with masks. In "Life's Mask" we hear:

Methinks that life is what the actor is -  
Outside there is the quaint and gibing mask;  
Beneath, the pale and careworn countenance.

Similarly in "The Mask of Gaiety" Landon refers to the "mask and mantle" and "cloak" that act as "bars" and "curtains" to real feelings. "Roland's Tower" contains a more direct reference to love and the use of a facade:

...I did love once -  
Loved as youth - woman - genius loves; though now  
My heart is chill'd and sear'd, and taught to  
wear  
That falsest of false things - a mask of smiles.

Besides doubling, evasion and concealment Landon also prominently features revenge in her poems. We have already met with actively vengeful women in "The

Venetian Bracelet" and "The Ring" and there are others who choose a similar path. The poem simply titled "Revenge" shows a woman scorned in love who, while not actually actively avenging herself, takes a bitter delight in her lover's pain when he is scorned by the woman he left her for:

'Tis well: I am revenged at last; -  
 Mark you that scornful cheek, -  
 The eye averted as you pass'd,  
 Spoke more than words could speak.

Ay, now by all the bitter tears  
 That I have shed for thee, -  
 The racking doubts, the burning fears, -  
 Avenged they well may be -

By the nights pass'd in sleepless care,  
 The days of endless woe;  
 All that you taught my heart to bear,  
 All that yourself will know

...this is fit punishment,  
 To live and love in vain, -  
 O my wrung heart, be thou content,  
 And feed upon his pain.

"Love's Last Lesson" brings together many of the strategies discussed. It begins with a woman berating her lover who has told her to forget him, she referring to him as her "god on earth." She rejects his call to forget, saying that it may be possible for "light summer love. / It [is] not thus with mine." Her love was a deep passionate love, her "heart's deep secret", and her only expectation of respite is the grave. Then the speaker suddenly changes, becoming a third person, and we learn that the woman had been writing to her lover but flung her scroll aside as "her woman's pride forbade / To let him look upon her heart." The narrator describes the loss of love bitterly, stressing it as a "common tale / Of woman's wretchedness." The male's rejection of the woman for worldly ambition is balanced with her pain in the





Imagination yields, - fruits which unfit  
The palate for the more substantial food  
Of our own land - reality.'

These lines clearly show Landon's awareness of the falsity or the artificial construction of her persona of the feminine poetess.

The much later poem "Stanzas" seems to speak of her reasons for marriage, her desperate clutching for love:

...Aye, let me worship, ere I know  
The falsehood of my creed.

The time may come - they say it must -  
When thou, my idol now,  
Like all we treasure and we trust,  
Will mock the votive vow.

And when the temple's on the ground -  
The altar overthrown -  
Too late the bitter moral's found, -  
The folly was our own.

Like the section from "A History of the Lyre" this poem emphasises Landon's personal disillusionment with love and awareness of the duplicity of her role as the feminine poetess. In her later years, Landon was self-critical and very conscious of not having maximised her poetic potential. Her improvisatory technique incurred criticism of deficient technical skill, repetitive and monotonous subjects and themes, and a lack of thought-provoking material (Renalds 64). She was also criticised for her focus on passionate love and provoked such strong reaction as the supposedly gentle Charles Lamb's comment: "If she belonged to me, I would lock her up and feed her on bread and water till she left off the writing of poetry" (Renalds 204).

Landon had fulfilled but exhausted the definition of

the feminine poetess (something she herself was aware of as she moved towards novel writing in the thirties - novels that were far more overtly critical of love and marriage than her poems had been). Had Letitia Landon lived longer she may have shaken the role altogether and used her gift for greater things. But what Landon, and Hemans, did do was open the way for the women poets that followed. By exhausting the ideology of the feminine poetess, simultaneously supporting and questioning its authenticity, particularly in relation to love between the sexes, they enabled writers like Barrett Browning and Rossetti to depict women's feeling and experiences more accurately.

## CONCLUSION

My close examination of the Romantic women poets' works on marriage and love has attempted to demonstrate that their output was crucially limited by the effects of the dominant ideology of the period. My aim has been to show that a tension between ideology and lived experience is identifiable in their poetry. Locating the women poets in history (Chapter One) and identifying their expectations and normal representations of marriage and love (Chapter Two), has allowed their poetry to be read within a context. The surface banality and sentimentality of much of the women Romantics' poetry gives way to reveal discontentment when it is considered in the context of the women poets' lives and culture.

Chapters Three and Four have encompassed a wide range of women poets from the early Romantic Period, their poetry providing us with much insight into the workings of ideology. We can see the writers who needed to make money (e.g. Charlotte Smith) being less outspoken than their counterparts who did not necessarily write for publication (e.g. Susanna Blamire). It has also become clear that many of the strategies that feminist critics have identified as being used by women novelists and Victorian women poets to covertly protest against the patriarchal construction of culture were employed by the Romantic women poets.

The concern, scepticism, and even lively disrespect that these women showed towards love and marriage, and their impact on the literary market, had a backlash effect. In the final two chapters, which have concentrated on the works and lives of the two most

famous women poets of the period, the power of ideology has loomed large. Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon assumed the mantle of the feminine poetess with all its trappings of sentimentality, suffering, and melancholy. The lives of both these poets conflicted with the role for women they so determinedly and repeatedly advocated. It is in the poetry of these two women that the discrepancies between ideology and lived experience are most evident, and the strategies of subversion most encoded. Stuart Curran sees the writings of Hemans and Landon as representing what to some extent is lacking in masculine Romanticism, a transition into the characteristic expectations of Victorian verse (188). The women poets' stressing of quotidian values and their moralising verse points to Victorian concern with social and personal improvement.

In speaking of covert protest against the prevailing conditions and expectations of love and marriage and women's role within these, it has not been my intention to suggest that such expression of dissatisfaction as we have encountered was always conscious on the part of the author. Rather, I think many of the strategies used, particularly in the cases of Hemans and Landon, were the unconscious result of repression of women's desire and experiences. Love and marriage have been the focus of this thesis but I think that when women covertly challenge the patriarchal conception of these institutions they are implicitly challenging other aspects of the culture and other aspects of women's role in society.

Marlon Ross suggests that the accommodation of women's poetry by the literary Establishment was indicative of the growing marginalisation of poetry within an increasingly industrialised, production-oriented

culture. However, the literary Establishment chose to elevate and pass on the traditional standards of taste (as enunciated by the likes of Hazlitt), thus consigning women to the realm of popular culture (255). Because the women poets were engaged in ideological contestation, as Anne Mellor puts it, their choice of subject and form rejected traditional aspects of the genre, which male poets were using to justify the egotistical sublime, in favour of simple forms that created and sustained community. The Romantic women poets need to be read in a way that acknowledges their cultural power, and in particular, their impact on popular culture (Romanticism and Gender 10). By locating the texts in their historical context I hope to have highlighted the struggle between and within poet, poem and culture.

The impact of all the Romantic women poets was far-reaching. Not only did they influence their contemporaries (Ross illustrates Mary Tighe's influence on Keats and Curran shows Charlotte Smith's impact on Wordsworth, for example) but they influenced generations that followed. Hemans and Landon, despite their sentimentality and other limitations, put women and female experience at centre stage in their poetry. Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti were both influenced by these two "poetesses". Barrett Browning bemoaned a lack of poetic grandmothers and conceived of herself as a poet in the masculine tradition of literary greatness, but she was indebted to Hemans and Landon for showing that it was possible for a woman to devote herself to poetry and to write about women (Cooper 4; 20).

I am confident that I have shown that not only do the women poets covertly and overtly attack their culture's definition of women's role in love and

marriage as well as the institutions themselves, but that the women poets writing during the Romantic Period deserve our critical attention. These poets and their poetry have been unfairly dismissed from literary history. Several factors contributed to their rejection, including the elevation of masculine Romantic ideology with its "high" genres and "traditional" standards of taste over the women poets' appeal to popular culture. Also important was the advent of modernist criticism with its privileging of poetic complexity, irony and ambiguity over the simplicity of form and subject that the female poets preferred. In conclusion I would like to stress the point that one of the leading pioneers in this area, Anne Mellor, makes in the introduction to her book Romanticism and Gender:

It will require decades of research and hundreds of books before we fully grasp the complex intellectual and formal configurations of this terra incognita. (2)

## WORKS CONSULTED

- Adburgham, Alison. Women in Print: Writing Women and Women's Magazines from the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria. London: Allen, 1972.
- Agress, Lynne. The Feminine Irony: Women on Women in Early-Nineteenth-Century English Literature. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1978.
- Barlough, J. Ernest, ed. Minor British Poetry, 1680-1800: An Anthology. Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1973.
- Bernikow, Louise, ed. The World Split Open: Four Centuries of Women Poets in England and America 1552-1950. London: The Women's Press, 1979.
- Betham, Matilda. The Lay of Marie / Vignettes in Verse. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- . Poems / Elegies. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- Breen, Jennifer, ed. Women Romantic Poets: 1785-1832 An Anthology. London: Everyman's Library, 1992.
- Clarke, Norma. Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love - The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans, and Jane Welsh Carlyle. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Cooper, Helen. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Woman and

- Artist. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988.
- Curran, Stuart. "The I Altered." Romanticism and Feminism. Ed. Anne K. Mellor. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988. 185-207.
- Dabundo, Laura, ed. Encyclopedia of Romanticism: Culture in Britain: 1780's-1830's. New York: Garland, 1992.
- Dacre, Charlotte. Hours of Solitude. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- Fergus, Jan, and Janice Farrar Thaddeus. "Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820." Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture 17 (1988): 191-207.
- Ferguson, Moira. "Resistance and Power in the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley." The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation 27 (1986): 247-268.
- Figes, Eva. Sex and Subterfuge: Women Writers to 1850. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Fullard, J., ed. British Women Poets 1660-1800: An Anthology. New York: Whitston, 1990.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.
- , eds. The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English. New York:



- Norton, 1985.
- Hemans, Felicia. The Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans.  
Edinburgh: Nimmo, Hay and Mitchell, n.d.
- Hemans, Felicia. Songs of the Affections. Romantic  
Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-  
1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- Hervey, T. K., ed. The English Helicon: A Selection  
of Modern Poetry. London: Bailey, n.d.
- Hickock, Kathleen. Representations of Women:  
Nineteenth-Century British Women's Poetry.  
London: Greenwood, 1984.
- Homans, Margaret. Bearing the Word: Language and  
Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's  
Writing. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986.
- . Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy  
Wordsworth, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily  
Dickinson. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980.
- Kaplan, Cora. Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and  
Feminism. London: Verso, 1986.
- Kuttrieh, Marcia Geib. "Popular British Romantic Women  
Poets." Diss. Bowling Green State University,  
1974.
- Landon, Letitia Elizabeth. The Poetical Works of  
Letitia Elizabeth Landon (L. E. L.). Excelsior.  
London: Routledge, n.d.
- Landry, Donna. The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-  
Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796.  
Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.

- Leighton, Angela. Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.
- Lonsdale, Roger, ed. Eighteenth-Century Women Poets. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.
- McGann, Jerome J., ed. The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.
- Mellor, Anne. K. Rev. of The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry, by Marlon Ross. Studies in Romanticism Spring (1992): 103-105.
- , ed. Romanticism and Feminism. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988.
- . Romanticism and Gender. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- . "Why Women Didn't Like Romanticism: The Views of Jane Austen and Mary Shelley." The Romantics and Us: Essays on Literature and Culture. Ed. Gene W. Ruoff. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1990. 274-287.
- Milford, H. S., ed. The Oxford Book of English Verse of the Romantic Period. Oxford: Clarendon, 1928.
- Miles, Alfred H., ed. Joanna Baillie to Jean Ingelow. Vol. 8 of The Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century. 1905-1907. New York: AMS, 1967. 12 vols.
- Moers, Ellen. Literary Women. London: W. H. Allen, 1977.

- Montefiore, Jan. Feminism and Poetry: Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing. London: Pandora, 1987.
- Myers, Sylvia Harcstark. The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England. Oxford: Clarendon, 1990.
- Opie, Amelia. Poems. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- . The Warrior's Return / The Black Man's Lament. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- Opie, Amelia, and Mary Tighe. Elegy to the Memory of the Late Duke of Bedford / Psyche with other Poems. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- Poovey, Mary. The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen. Women in Culture and Society. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984.
- Reiman, Donald H. Introduction. Elegy to the Memory of the Late Duke of Bedford / Psyche with other Poems. By Amelia Opie and Mary Tighe. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- . Introduction. Hours of Solitude. By Charlotte

- Dacre. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- . Introduction. Poems / Elegies. By Matilda Betham. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- . Introduction. Songs of the Affections. By Felicia Hemans. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- Renalds, Brenda Hart. "Letitia Elizabeth Landon: A Literary Life." Diss. University of South Carolina, 1985.
- Robinson, Mary. Lyrical Tales 1800. Oxford: Woodstock, 1989.
- Rogers, Katharine M. Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England. Sussex: Harvester, 1982.
- Ross, Marlon B. The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.
- Seward, Anna. Original Sonnets on Various Subjects and Odes Paraphrased from Horace. London, 1799.
- Sherry, Ruth. Studying Women's Writing: An Introduction. London: Arnold, 1988.
- Shevelov, Kathryn. Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Smith, Charlotte. Elegiac Sonnets 1789. Oxford: Woodstock, 1992.

- Spender, Dale, and Janet Todd, eds. Anthology of British Women Writers. London: Pandora, 1989.
- Springer, Marlene, ed. What Manner of Women: Essays on English and American Life and Literature. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.
- Stevenson, Lionel. "Miss Landon, 'The Milk-and-Watery Moon of Our Darkness,' 1824-30." Modern Language Quarterly 8 (1947): 355-363.
- Stone, Lawrence. The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800. Abridged ed. Peregrine. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.
- Taylor, Irene, and Gina Luria. "Gender and Genre: Women in British Romantic Literature." What Manner of Women: Essays on English and American Life and Literature. Ed. Marlene Springer. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978. 98-123.
- Tighe, Mary - see Opie, Amelia above.
- Todd, Janet, ed. A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660-1800. New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985.
- . Sensibility: An Introduction. London: Methuen, 1986.
- Trinder, Peter W. Mrs Hemans. Writers of Wales. N.p.: U of Wales P, 1984.
- Uphaus, Robert W., and Gretchen M. Foster, eds. The "Other" Eighteenth Century: English Women of Letters 1660-1800. East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1991.

Williamson, Karina. "The Eighteenth Century and the  
Sister Choir." Essays in Criticism 40 (1990):  
271-286.