

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.

'All that fame hath cost . . .':

The Response to Fame of British Women Poets  
from 1770 to 1835.

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in English  
at Massey University

Rachel Anne Jones

1996

## ABSTRACT

The years 1770 to 1835 produced a considerable number of famous women poets. They were famous at a time when there was a conflict between the ideology of the feminine and the implications of being a published woman poet. Looking in particular at the most successful female poets of the period, I trace the various ways in which they perceived and dealt with that conflict in their lives and their poetry. I argue that the women poets of the period were a diverse group and cannot be regarded as homogeneous, and as such they responded to fame differently. They did, however, share some of the same ideological pressures, and I contend that they all found fame more or less burdensome.

In my first chapter I establish the socio-historical conditions in which the women poets were working, with particular reference to the position of poetry during the period. In my second chapter I examine the women poets (More, Barbauld, Seward, and Williams) who were directly influenced by the Bluestocking group, looking at their experience of fame and how fame is treated in their poetry. My third chapter focuses on the most successful women poets of the 1790s -- Smith, Yearsley, and Robinson. In my fourth chapter I look at the effect that the instability of the 1790s had on the later women poets. I also investigate how fame appears in the works

of some of the lesser-known, and some of the more conservative, women poets, as well as considering the important figure of Joanna Baillie.

My final two chapters concentrate on the two most famous women poets of the period, Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon respectively. I examine the impact of their phenomenal fame on their lives and trace their poetry's concern with the effects of fame on a woman.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks must undoubtedly go to my supervisor, Dr Greg Crossan. He has always been extremely generous with his time and steady in his encouragement. His thorough reading of my work in progress has been invaluable, and I know I am a better writer for my years under his careful eye. Thank you Greg for your support.

I am also grateful to my second supervisor, Dr John Muirhead, who took time out of his busy schedule to read my draft and provide helpful comments, and to Robert Petre, Rare Book Curator at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington.

I would like to thank Massey University for awarding me a Doctoral Scholarship, without which this thesis would have been an impossible dream. Thanks must also go to the three departments which have helped me financially by providing me with employment: the English Language Centre, the Department of Linguistics and Second Language Teaching, and the Department of English. Thanks, too, to the staff in those departments who took an interest in my work.

My final debt of gratitude goes to Craig Woods for always being there when I needed him. Thanks for everything.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Women and Poetry, 1770 to 1835	10
Chapter Two: The Early Decades	71
Chapter Three: The Revolutionary Years	122
Chapter Four: The New Century	190
Chapter Five: Felicia Hemans	245
Chapter Six: Letitia Landon	288
Conclusion	335
Works Consulted	349

## INTRODUCTION

Pressed to name any women poets of the Romantic Period, one might come up with Dorothy Wordsworth, Mary Shelley, and, perhaps, Anne Radcliffe, before exhausting one's repertoire, though none of these women were famous primarily as poets. Yet J. R. de J. Jackson's bibliography lists 1403 volumes, by about 900 women poets, published during what we have commonly termed "the Romantic Period."<sup>1</sup> Some of these women poets experienced unprecedented contemporary fame, featuring in newspapers, cartoons, portraits, periodicals, and pamphlets, often on both sides of the Atlantic. It was an age of increasing literacy, increasing population, and increasing publication. It was during this period that writers first concerned themselves with the idea of a mass audience. It was also during this period that women first entered the literary market in large numbers, both as consumers and as producers. Furthermore, it was in this period that people could achieve fame in their lifetime in the way that we conceive of fame now: Anne

---

<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this study I have decided to use the dates 1770 to 1835 inclusive, in order to encompass Anna Barbauld's first volume and the last major poetical publications of Letitia Landon, although realising that this constructs an artificial boundary in the history of women's writing. (Landon died in 1838 but her major poetical works were published before 1835.) These are also the dates that Jackson settles for in his bibliography Romantic Poetry by Women: A Bibliography, 1770-1835 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

Mellor refers to Letitia Landon, poetess of the 1820s, as one of the first media-created "stars" (Mellor, Romanticism 121). But what did stardom, "fame," mean to a woman poet?

It is interesting that references to fame commonly express it metaphorically as a rise to some great peak. This choice of metaphor suggests that fame is a desirable attainment, a positive achievement. There are connotations, too, in the idea of the climb, of hard work and determination to achieve fame, and of rising in isolation above the masses. Also implicit in the metaphor is the eventual descent from the peak, or the fall into oblivion. In fact, the metaphor seems to embody certain Romantic values, that is, the elevation and the importance of the individual and "an ongoing, enthusiastic engagement with the creative energy of both nature and the human mind, an engagement that acknowledges human limitations . . . but nonetheless continues in a dialectical, perhaps ever-to-be-frustrated, yearning for transcendence and enduring meaning" (Mellor, "Why" 277). If the metaphor is one we have inherited from the tenets of Romanticism then it is also a masculine metaphor. Numerous critics have demonstrated that Romanticism has a gender and that many of the literary practices we adhere to today are founded

on Romantic concepts.<sup>2</sup> It seems pertinent, then, to ask what experience of fame the woman poet of the Romantic Period had. Did she rise to a great height, elevated above the common person by her own industry? Or was fame for the woman poet in fact more of a descent, a fall from her proper role as a woman?

Women poets of the Romantic Period became public figures in a different manner to their male peers. Their persons and personalities loomed larger than their written texts -- something they constantly battled against, or else tried to accommodate, reconcile with, or exploit (Pascoe, Staging 237). Many women poets were a part of the public discourse of their time, a time that prescribed for women a domestic, private role. During the Romantic Period, women writers in general struggled against the social and psychological force of the idea of proper or innate femininity to create their own professional identity (Poovey x). Poovey names the "Proper Lady" (as constructed in the period's conduct books, periodicals, diaries, novels etc.) as representing the culture's definition of femininity, and therefore the figure that women of the period aspired to (xi). She embodied propriety, virtue, modesty, and other "natural" feminine qualities. The publishing woman placed herself

---

<sup>2</sup>See Marlon Ross's The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry (New York: Oxford UP, 1989), and Anne K. Mellor's Romanticism and Gender (New York: Routledge, 1993), for example.

at odds with this definition of her femininity because deliberately writing for publication jeopardised her modesty, calling attention to woman as subject (Poovey 36). The conflict between the ideology of the feminine and the "masculine" nature of publication informs the women poets' experience of fame.

Because the period was a time of social change, the experiences of the women poets vary over the years in question. The issues this thesis hopes to elucidate, focusing on those poets who were well known, are the implications of fame for the lives of the women poets, the construction of fame in their poetry (particularly poems that focus on the woman as artist), and the changes that occur in their responses to and experiences of fame during a sixty-five-year period. My first chapter provides an outline of the social and literary climate that the women poets of the period were working in. The subsequent three chapters look at clusters of famous women poets, the women being grouped together loosely on the basis of chronology and ideological outlook. Hannah More, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Anna Seward, and Helen Maria Williams are discussed in my second chapter; Charlotte Smith, Ann Yearsley, and Mary Robinson feature in my third chapter; and the fourth chapter looks at a number of women poets, including Jane West, Anne Grant, Isabella Lickbarrow, and Joanna Baillie. The final two chapters discuss the "feminine poetesses" Felicia Hemans and

Letitia Landon respectively.

In examining the Romantic women poets' works with regard to the significance of fame in their lives and their poetry, I have chosen a socio-historical heuristic as the most appropriate. As well as examining the appearance of fame in her poetry, for each poet I shall look at the biographical details that shed light on her experience of fame. It seems to me methodologically acceptable to discuss women's biographies along with their texts, particularly when looking at the subject of fame, as their lives are so integral to their writings, and, in their own time, were as much a text before the public as their poetry. The approach I have adopted is also informed by a feminist analysis, specifically Anglo-American feminism, and here I have been especially influenced by Anne Mellor's assessment of this methodology:

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. ("On Romanticism" 4)

As Angela Leighton has argued in her Introduction to Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart, this historical-biographical approach, while not very

fashionable, has particular merit when applied to women's writing because "to ignore the authorial name, and all the historical and biographical information that goes with it, would be to lose, not only an already lost history of women's writing, but also the rationale for writing about women poets at all" (4).

Numerous feminist critics have endorsed this approach to women's writing. Mary Poovey argues for the validity of biographical material because feminist criticism implicitly argues for an expansion of interpretive perspectives. A primary assumption of feminism is that a woman's gender materially affects her economic, political, cultural, psychological, and imaginative position within society, so feminism recognises the connections among all spheres of an individual's life (Poovey xviii). Donna Landry also favours the use of biographical information and other relevant details in the analysis of women's writing: "the material condition of a text's production, including . . . 'biographical knowledge' and knowledge of relations of patronage, subscription, publication, and reception are part of the text as such and not 'contextual,' that is, supplementary or secondary" (Landry, Muses 252).

As indicated above, Leighton similarly feels 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. For her, "to offer biographical information is not therefore to subscribe to some form of authorial intentionalism" (Leighton 4). As far as she is concerned, woman and poet, life and works, one aspect of the author's psyche and another, are not necessarily causally related but neither are they unrelated. "The self who lives is not the same self who writes, but that is not to say that the first is simply irrelevant and 'dead'" (Leighton 4-5). Cheryl Turner also advocates an interdisciplinary approach between history, literary criticism and feminism, seeing such an approach as being important for examining the social forces on writers (2). As Turner notes, social, cultural and economic forces were different for women writers as compared to men, and these factors differentiate their writing from men's writing (3).

It is only in the last decade or so that the women poets of the Romantic Period have become accessible to the reading public again. The Garland facsimile reprints in the 1970s were one of the first efforts to make their poetry available. The more recent Woodstock series "Revolution and Romanticism" includes a number of women writers, and Routledge has recently published a twelve-volume collection entitled The Romantics: Women Poets 1770-1830 (1995). Several anthologies have been published recently that either focus exclusively on women poets or begin to include them alongside their male

contemporaries: those edited by Lonsdale, Breen, McGann, and Ashfield are conspicuous among these.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, more and more works of single authors are being re-edited or reprinted: McCarthy's edition of Barbauld and Curran's edition of Smith, for example. These volumes have all been useful in supplementing my primary source for women's poetry of the period, the Chadwyck-Healey English Poetry Full-Text Database. The Eighteenth Century database on microfilm has also been a rich source of women's poetry before 1800. I have also been fortunate to have had access to some early editions of the women poets' works. Because of the various media of my textual sources, I have chosen, when quoting any poem in the body of my thesis, to supply only its author and title. Readers wishing to consult the poems at length can refer to my list of Works Consulted, where all individual authors cited have (often multiple) source references.

I hope that this thesis, as well as examining the issues I have identified, will serve to raise awareness of not only the sheer volume of women publishing, but also the extent of their fame. The women poets I focus on were well respected and extremely popular in their own

---

<sup>3</sup>Roger Lonsdale, ed., Eighteenth-Century Women Poets (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990); Jennifer Breen, ed., Women Romantic Poets 1785-1832: An Anthology (London: Everyman's Library, 1992); Jerome J. McGann, ed., The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993); Andrew Ashfield, ed., Women Romantic Poets, 1770-1838: An Anthology (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995).

time, and deserve to be rescued from oblivion by a more comprehensive literary history than that which has prevailed until now. They came from a variety of backgrounds and led lives that were in many respects very different from one another, but they did share two important aspects of experience, namely their gender and their fame. Did being a woman affect a poet's response to fame, or did being famous affect a poet's perception of herself as a woman? And, did the common experience of gender and fame unify the women poets and elicit similar poetic expressions of that experience, or were there significant differences between their responses? These are the questions I hope to answer.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WOMEN AND POETRY, 1770 TO 1835

#### i Women Readers

The traditional demarcation of the British Romantic Period, roughly bounded by the publication of the Songs of Innocence (1789) at one end and the death of Coleridge (1834) at the other, identifies the importance of (male) poetry to Romantic ideology. Yet the role of women in the field of literature, including poetry, during the years 1770 to 1835 was an ever-increasing one, both as producers and consumers. Women participated in print culture as writers, patrons, and readers.

Their role as readers was nurtured by the growth of the periodical press, circulating libraries, and female literacy. Due to changes in education, mostly agitated for by Dissenting groups, more women became literate during these years than ever before. Coupled with an increase in leisure time, thanks to forces such as increased wealth and redefinition of a woman's role in the home, this literacy contributed to an increased market for literature (Turner 15). To some extent the female audience undermined the traditional market for poetry because, although women were literate, they were

not necessarily classically educated. This meant that the traditional market that catered to the (largely male) aristocracy and gentry was expanded to include genres that required little or no classical education, such as the novel.

Most male authors of the period had something derogatory to say about the mass audience in general. Keats and Wordsworth both vowed to write for posterity, and in 1829 Charles Lamb declared: "Damn the age! I will write for antiquity" (qtd. in Gaull 13). The advent of large numbers of women readers was one aspect of mass readership the male poets found particularly burdensome. A friend of Keats' reported that he did "not want ladies to read his poetry: he writes for men" (qtd. in Lonsdale xli). Keats also went so far as to claim he would rather avoid publishing altogether, simultaneously expressing distaste for the mass audience and female readers by preferring the singular to the plural and excluding woman altogether: ". . . I would like to compose things honourable to Man -- but not fingerable over by Men" (qtd. in Gaull 15).

Literature, and in particular, poetry, had always been constructed as masculine, and the poets were used to providing works for a well-educated and discriminating audience. The changes in the marketplace meant their work had not only to compete with the writing of women

and lower-class men but also was available to a mass, and not necessarily discerning, audience -- although Lee Erickson points out that in 1810, when England's population was 11 million, a book in great demand sold only 10-20 thousand copies, and even though the circulating libraries brought books to the middle classes, these comprised only another ten percent of the population (Erickson 896). The male poets feared that an audience that consisted largely of women would lower the standard of literature, as it had to appeal to the lowest common denominator in terms of intellectual ability. However, despite the contemporary preoccupation with the number of women readers, women never actually numerically dominated audiences (Turner 136).<sup>4</sup> The fuss over the concept of a female audience can be interpreted as a reaction against change in both female behaviour and the literary marketplace. The hostile and critical response to entities such as the circulating libraries shows a social unease about the changing role of women as well as concern about the commercialisation of literature (Turner 137).

Women readers could gain access to literature in a variety of ways, including subscribing to volumes and/or periodicals or exchanging copies between friends, but

---

<sup>4</sup>For example, Jan Fergus traces the growth of periodical readership by women and, despite showing large increases over four decades, the proportion of women subscribing to magazines by 1780 was still only 16.7% (Fergus 53).

undoubtedly one of the most influential and controversial methods of disseminating literature to women was via the circulating libraries. The circulating libraries brought books to those in the middle classes who could not afford to buy them, and extended access to literature of all genres. Such libraries often included women's writing from both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and they provided excellent distribution centres for literature, especially women's novels (Turner 135-36).

It was on account of these novels, such as those published by the Minerva Press, that the circulating libraries attracted criticism.<sup>5</sup> It was felt, or feared, that giving women easy access to the type of literature the libraries held would fill the weak female mind with romantic delusions that would render young women in particular unfit for marriage. More insidiously, there was the worry that there would be no censorship of women's reading and thus areas of knowledge that women had previously been excluded from would be revealed to them. In other words, the patriarchal control over what women read was threatened, meaning the new habit of female reading had the potential to subvert the status quo of a male-dominated literary scene, and, more importantly, a male-dominated society (Turner 137).

---

<sup>5</sup>The Minerva Press was an entrepreneurial venture of the successful publisher William Lane, and was famous for its low-brow novels of passion and romance aimed at women readers.

## ii Women Writers

The number of women writers, however, was perhaps more feared by the male poets than the number of women readers. Women poets were regarded with particular trepidation because poetry had traditionally been sealed off as a male, upper-class realm, requiring both birth and breeding as well as a classical education and exclusive standards of shared taste (Curran, "Women" 182). The proliferation of women poets, amongst other factors, threatened to disrupt this old order. To assess the impact of women poets on the literary scene between 1770 and 1835 it is important to examine some relevant historical background: first, their precursors; secondly, their literary marketplace; and thirdly, their social circumstances.

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries poetry was well established in the repertoire of literary women (Turner 121), as is shown by even a cursory glance at Janet Todd's Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660-1800. Writing poetry, however, was far more common for women of (and prior to) the early eighteenth century, than publishing poetry. Some women wrote poetry professionally, such as Aphra Behn, but the majority of women poets wrote without contemplating publication. Publication was usually the result of fame already achieved through poems circulating

in manuscript among the author's class (Greer et al. 6). For example, Katherine Philips was a celebrated woman poet who circulated her poetry privately in manuscript before publishing. In contrast, Aphra Behn preferred publication because as a professional writer she had everything to gain and nothing to lose by taking public credit for her own work (J. Stevenson 44).

Writing for publication subjected the women poets to the mercy of the booksellers and the public:

Their self-esteem was called vanity and their courage impertinence, while their desire to communicate was interpreted as exhibitionism. The booksellers pushed them into a notoriety that ruined their lives, and then dumped them. (Greer et al. 20)

The professional women poets characteristically had morally suspect private lives, according to contemporary values, and because of this publishing was considered morally dubious for women. Writing for money also had connotations of manual labour which upper-class women wanted to avoid. Consequently, much of women's early poetry remained in manuscript form, and consequently, much of it has been lost. By 1680, however, several collections of poems by women had appeared and after 1700 the number increased dramatically -- partly due to increased literacy, the establishment of newspapers, and the expansion of the publishing industry (Fullard 1). The occasional, sometimes posthumous, publications of women socially more respectable than the professional

writers (such as Elizabeth Rowe and Lady Winchilsea), gradually served to make publication more acceptable for women, albeit under certain conditions.

From the 1730s onwards it became increasingly normal for women to write poetry for publication. They published their own volumes, contributed to periodicals and miscellanies, and were often anthologised. A two-volume collection of Poems by Eminent Ladies in 1755 contained works by 18 poets, while the second edition in 1780 had 33 contributors. John Duncombe published The Femiuiad; or, Female Genius, A Poem in 1754, which was often reprinted and served as a rollcall of women notable for wit and learning since the Restoration. Praise for women writers was, however, not unconditional. Duncombe censured licentious writing of the type associated with Behn, Delariviere Manley, Eliza Haywood, and Susanna Centlivre, and he also warned women about becoming conceited and allowing their learning to interfere with their domestic duties (K. Williamson 274-75).

One of the most influential groups of women writers, including poets, was the network which originated in the middle of the eighteenth century and became known as "the Bluestockings." These highly respectable, and generally upper-class, intellectual women led impeccable personal lives and elevated publishing for women, showing that women could publish and yet retain an unblemished

reputation. The early generation of "Blues" was at its peak from about 1760 to 1780. Their wealth and connections allowed them to foster a large audience, make money and support other women. They included male luminaries in their circle, such as Samuel Johnson, and were famous for their virtue as much as for their literary achievements (Curran, "Women" 180). They believed in the intellectual equality of men and women and sought to compete with men on their own ground, but without altering the social hierarchy in any way. As intellectual women they sought to rise above the frivolity and lewdness traditionally associated with the woman writer and to raise the status of their sex in general (Todd, Sign 134). That is, they visualised themselves as part of an ongoing literary tradition rather than a particularly "female" literary lineage. In poetry, and other literary genres, they followed classical models. They also worked together to nurture other women's writing and poeticising by acting as patrons and facilitating publication. Their influence on literary culture was important and far-reaching.

As well as an awareness of their female precursors, an understanding of women's experience of the literary marketplace is important to the study of women poets of the Romantic Period. The position of women's poetry in that marketplace was affected by the changing standing of poetry in general. Considerable time and energy was put

into defining the nature, status, and role of the poet during the Romantic Period. Several interacting cultural and social factors contributed to this. One of these was the move to a literary marketplace driven by commercial forces. Previously, poets had been part of the elite of society, generally well-positioned socially and therefore well-educated. Their views had been endorsed by the upper classes through the system of patronage and they were secure in their high social status. A literary market based on competition and money posed a huge threat to the security of the poet.

As well as a general shift to more capitalist values in society, the advances that occurred in printing technology contributed to the precariousness of the poet's position after about 1820. Lee Erickson's study of the impact of technological changes in printing argues that changes in reading behaviour (such as the eventual marginalisation of poetry in favour of the novel), both reflect and anticipate change in the conditions of literary production (Erickson 907-08). Erickson claims that the popularity of poetry in the first two decades of the nineteenth century was in part attributable to the rise in paper costs after the French Revolution (previously paper had been made from rags imported from France). Publishers favoured the cheaper printing of volumes of poetry over diffuse prose, and this, along with the fad for verse as a drawing-room accomplishment,

encouraged readers, who could afford fewer books, to purchase poetry (Erickson 894-95). Advances in papermaking and typesetting, however, made printing cheaper and the publishers began to favour periodicals and newspapers for their appeal to a large audience (Erickson 907). These forms lent themselves to the serialisation of fiction and to short stories, and these became popular with the reading public. They also encouraged contributions of poetry by amateurs that both undermined the earnings of the professional poets and lowered the standards of poetry, so high-level poetry writing became increasingly marginalised (Erickson 899-900).

The status of the poet during the Romantic Period was also affected by various other factors. There was a gradual move from the highly stratified social system of the eighteenth century, where position was largely determined by birth, to a social structure that more readily allowed social mobility. There was a growing emphasis on the primacy of the "truth" of science over the "truth" to be found in literature, an emphasis consistent with the rise of utilitarianism, which challenged the practical value of the arts in general. And there was the ever-increasing literacy of the population, the demand of that population for reading matter, the broadening and diversification of the middle classes, the ability of the public to pay for books, the

spread of circulating libraries, advances in printing technology, and the expansion of the periodical press, all of which meant that poets, including women, could reach a large market without the need for old-style patronage (Berliner 44).

The move from an elitist perception of poetry writing to a literary marketplace necessarily involved a change in the social circumstances of poets. For women, the notion of a poem as a marketable commodity changed female poetry from aristocratic scribbling to bourgeois publishing, where the writer had a sociomoral obligation to the state to civilise society (Ross 192). The Bluestockings as a group provided a kind of intermediate stage for this change. They bridged the gap between aristocracy and bourgeoisie in that they were upper-class women, but they also participated in the marketplace. The generation of women poets that followed them, a few of whom were their protégées, represented a change in the type of woman typically publishing poetry. Marlon Ross identifies the move from the early Bluestocking poets to the next wave of women poets as a move from the upper to the middle class, from leisured thinkers to active doers, from women who served as distant patrons to women immersed in the political and social life of the middle and lower classes, and from the rich to the poor (192). These are, of course, generalisations, but they hold true for many of the women poets from 1770 to 1835.

The shift in class of the women poets who came after the Bluestockings was influenced by several factors. As Gary Kelly emphasises, this historical period was one of cultural revolution where power was shifting from the aristocracy to the middle classes. (Kathryn Shevelov rightly reminds us that references to the "middle class" should refer to an ideology in the process of formation rather than an established social group at this point (9-10).) Kelly argues that "woman" was constructed "to represent a professional middle-class discourse of subjectivity as opposed to communal or court sociability, 'nature' rather than decadent 'civilisation', domesticity as opposed to the public and political spheres, and the 'national' culture, identity, and destiny rather than local, temporary, narrow interests of rank or region" (Women 4). Hence, the high public profile or fame of the moralising and refining middle-class woman poet was an important part of the cultural revolution.

The increasing literacy and education of middle-class women were also important in urging them into print. Access to education was an important issue for women, and many women writers were associated with the clergy. The daughters or wives of the clergy had the practical advantage of access to books unavailable to other women. Some women were fortunate enough to have liberal parents who provided them with a good education -- Anna Seward for example -- while others were

autodidacts, such as Matilda Betham, who educated herself from her father's library. The Anglican Church did not stress women's education but both the Quakers and the Methodists did, even encouraging the publication of spiritual works. Dissenters encouraged education in letters beyond religious materials -- benefiting such women as Anna Barbauld, Helen Maria Williams, Amelia Opie, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Mary Hays. The Dissenters also seemed to be more involved in politics, constantly pushing for reform (Todd, Dictionary 4-5).

Apart from a movement in class, Ross also notes the shift from women poets who were leisured thinkers to those who were active doers, and from those who provided distant support for the less fortunate to those who actively involved themselves in social service. Much of women's philanthropy in the eighteenth century was directed at other women, and literature became an effective tool for such efforts. As women were authorised to write poetry to morally uplift and to civilise society, they became more involved in social issues. Many women wrote on social and political issues under the guise of moral guidance: for example, Helen Maria Williams, Ann Yearsley, and Hannah More all wrote poems against the slave trade. More is the literary woman who best represents the phenomenon of change from theorist to participant: she was involved in philanthropy and evangelism throughout her long writing career.

The move from upper to middle class also often represented a move from the wealthy to the relatively poor, and the economic pressure to publish increased. The need for money was often a motivation for publication of poetry, with many of the professional women poets being forced into publication through a combination of financial and family circumstances. The opportunity for social mobility also encouraged publication, particularly in the nineteenth century among the middle classes. It was important for the lower-class women poets too, however, allowing Ann Yearsley, for example, to progress from milkwoman to librarian.

Age seems not to have been a significant factor in choosing to publish. Child prodigies published their verse as young as 14 (Smith) and 15 (Hemans), whereas Anne Grant did not publish until she was 53. In contrast, marital status does seem to have been significant: there were not many women who managed to combine a successful marriage with a poetic career. The majority of publishing women poets appear to have been single, separated, or widowed. Amelia Opie is a notable exception to this rule, her husband encouraging her to turn her hobby of writing into a profession, apparently to keep her away from the social whirl of London society that she was so fond of (Reiman, Introduction to Elegy vi).

## iii Publishing Poetry

During the Romantic Period the numbers of women publishing poetry increased steadily. Jackson shows that in total 2584 editions of women's poetry were published between 1770 and 1835, 1402 of these being first editions of works by some 900 women (xxii; 392-94). Clearly women had experienced financial pressure before 1770 and undoubtedly there had always been women with literary ambition, so why did so many women begin to publish poetry in this period? Apart from the influence of the Bluestockings and the changes in printing technology, Mary Poovey identifies two other factors that opened the field of publishing to women in particular: the rise of sensibility and the decline of patronage (Poovey 36-38).

Sensibility as a phenomenon legitimised women's writing as the spontaneous expression of feeling: "an innate sensitiveness or susceptibility revealing itself in a variety of spontaneous activities" (Todd, Sensibility 7). (The value placed on spontaneity also authorised and made fashionable the work of working-class or "primitive" poets.) Sensibility privileged the subjective over the social self, as did Romanticism, supposedly privileging the domestic affections and therefore the feminine sphere (Kelly, "Revolutionary" 112-13). Women poets could express themselves in its conventional diction and exalt their own sensibility

without having their propriety questioned (Todd, Sensibility 60). They could place women's experience, particularly the physical manifestations of acute sensitivity (trembling, fainting, tears etc.), at the centre of their poetry. Many women were ambivalent, however, if not hostile, to the tropes of sensibility with its implications for the nature of the feminine. Those who reacted against it included women as diverse in outlook as Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft (Kelly, "Revolutionary" 113).

The second factor that Poovey identifies as facilitating women's entry into the literary market is the decline of patronage, part of the commercialisation of literature in general. Historically, patronage tended to be a patriarchal and aristocratic system. The relationship between poet and patron was one of self-interest, with the poet receiving financial support and a degree of respectability, and the patron social éclat, flattery and amusement (Turner 103). Traditional patronage waned during the eighteenth century, but there were still some private patrons during the period, and politics (the poet laureateship) provided the most visible and controversial patronage (Gaul 13). There was also patronage in the forms of the dedication and the subscription list sponsors. One area where patronage in the traditional sense remained strong throughout the century, however, was in the relationship between

"natural," working-class poets and their patrons.

Both male and female working-class poets were patronised and there were several female poets from the lower classes who managed to be published during the eighteenth century. These include Elizabeth Hands, Mary Collier, Mary Leapor, and, most famous of all, Ann Yearsley, whom I shall look at in some depth later. Similarly, both males and females were able to act as patrons: high-placed women such as royalty, nobility, and the Bluestockings patronised women poets. Poetry was generally the favoured genre because of the social prestige it carried. Betty Rizzo's detailed study of the relationship between working-class poets and their patrons in the eighteenth century shows that the reputation or social position of the patron had a direct effect on the fame of the patronised poet (citing several examples, pages 242-43). The higher the position of the patron, the more likely the success of the poet (Rizzo 242).

The decline of the traditional system of patronage was beneficial to those outside influential circles, particularly women, but because it was difficult to break into an increasingly competitive market and establish a reputation, many women poets still made use of a well-placed mentor (Turner 102-03). Charlotte Smith was assisted by the Earl of Egremont; both she and Mary

Robinson were supported by the Duchess of Devonshire; and William Jerdan acted as a mentor to the young Letitia Landon, to name but a few literary relationships.

The patronage system was replaced by the literary marketplace, one of the most important institutions to develop in the Romantic Age. It offered more creative freedom, opportunity, fame and financial reward to poets than the patronage system (Gauhl 13). One effect of increasingly market-driven literary production was to bring women poets into more frequent contact with the booktrade, some more successfully than others. They had to develop the ability to negotiate for publication and payment, and had to attune themselves to the market. The number of women poets whose careers spanned years and even decades shows that it was possible to be successful (Turner 83). The booksellers were the new and powerful patrons who purchased, printed, and sold manuscripts, and often owned the periodicals that reviewed them (Gauhl 14). In the new order, publishers had a crucial influence over the literary and financial success of an author as they were in a position to judge demand, to nurture an author, and to choose whether to promote or suppress works (Turner 86). Public awareness of women poets was heightened by the booksellers who by the late eighteenth century included biographical information about women poets in their miscellanies as a marketing strategy. This was undoubtedly a contributing factor to

the eventual construction of women poets and their texts as congruent, where women's poetry was assumed to be the outpouring of the experiences of the poet.

Subscription was one means of publishing work and a popular one for women poets. The publishers Robinson and Wallis record half of their list of women's works published by subscription as being poetry (Turner 112). It was not without its disadvantages, however, as, although it did not require the absolute favour that patronage did, it was still based on a system of preferment. Those with well-placed friends were better off when it came to publishing by subscription, as success was more likely with a socially acceptable intermediary to drum up support for a publication. Alternatively authors had to pay an agent, advertise, or rely on their friends and immediate circle of acquaintances (Turner 110). The development of the provincial booktrade meant smaller subscriptions could mainly be local, which was beneficial to women outside London like Isabella Lickbarrow. Subscribers could be drawn from a wider geographical base if a poet had distinguished supporters, or solicited in newspapers and periodicals in advance, as Ann Yearsley did (Lonsdale xxvii).

Subscription was potentially profitable but its heavy dependence on personal contacts and the favour of

individuals was felt by some to be demeaning. Some poets thought subscription involved an undignified touting of one's reputation or work, particularly upper-class women: Charlotte Smith hated the subscription method of publication because money was slow in coming in and it made her "a kind of literary beggar" (qtd. in Stanton 388). For the working-class women poets, however, subscription was often vital for publication. By the century's end, according to Lonsdale, the largest subscriptions were for poor but morally "deserving" women like Jane Cave Winscom, Elizabeth Bentley and Frances Greensted (xxvii). Women's role as readers was important because through their subscriptions they emerged as a significant source of funding for women poets (Turner 112).

There were other methods of publication available to women poets who did not favour subscription. Some authors managed to finance their own publications: for example, Charlotte Smith paid for the first edition of her sonnets (Turner 92). Direct sale of copyright was another publishing option, and often the quickest means of making a profit, depending on the reputation of the author. Most authors, such as Mary Robinson, expected to make their living by selling a lot cheaply, and fame did not always equate with long-term financial success. Some of the more famous and "successful" women poets like Smith, Robinson, Hemans, and Landon were never wealthy

despite their enormous reputations. In some cases this was due to the patriarchal structuring of society that dictated that a married woman's earnings belonged to her husband. It is clear from her letters that Charlotte Smith had to surrender her earnings to her profligate husband when he demanded them, even though they were separated (McKillop 239). For others, it was because their income was supporting numerous children or other relatives.

Poetry could be lucrative but this required a combination of luck, talent and opportunity. Some writers entered the market as poets but turned to novels as a more reliable source of income. Novels tended to be more lucrative than poems and were often paid out on according to quantity: hence many women, particularly those dependent on their earnings, ventured across several genres. However, poetry carried greater prestige than the novel and some women were very definite that they were poets before they were novelists, such as Seward, Smith, Yearsley, and Landon. They perhaps consciously or unconsciously subscribed to the male literary hierarchy which placed poetry as a genre above the novel.

Publishing a complete volume of one's poetry was not the only publication option available. One of the factors facilitating women's entry into the literary

market was the increase in the number of periodicals and newspapers, and both these media provided outlets for women poets. Women contributed to periodicals intended for men as well as those aimed specifically at a female audience. While poems appearing in the popular press more often than not carried little literary weight, they are important for a variety of reasons. For example, they illustrate the ease with which women poets could be published and they show that large numbers of women sought publication. Often they became a stepping stone to a successful career, as the fourteen-year-old Charlotte Smith's contributions to the Lady's Magazine illustrate. Alternatively, the periodicals and newspapers provided the bread-and-butter income for a writer, as was the case with Mary Robinson who had a long and profitable association with the Morning Post.

Apart from being a source of income, writing for the periodicals and annuals was a way for women to attract attention and be noticed by "society": that is, it was a means to become socially mobile. Professional poets had to compete with amateurs for space, and the activities of some publishers undermined the standing of the genre and the earning power of the professionals, as they actively solicited contributions from amateurs because they did not have to pay for them. Magazines that printed readers' works, such as the Lady's Magazine, were often very successful and they both exploited and flattered

readers. Decorum was the main criterion for publication, and most verses were submitted under assumed names. Such magazines flattered readers into thinking they could write and encouraged them to see themselves as part of a writing and reading community. The ability of a magazine to enact a direct dialogue with its readership attracted and maintained an audience (Fergus 50-51). Towards the end of the period the height of ambition for middle-class female literary climbers was to be included among the Regency Bluestockings (different from the eighteenth-century Blues in that they were more fashion-conscious and money-motivated, and less educated) (Adburgham 252).

Newspaper publication shared many characteristics of publishing in the periodicals and annuals but also differed in some ways. The perishability of newspapers provided a psychological stumbling block for some poets (see Isabella Lickbarrow's poem "The Fate of Newspapers"), as did their mass audience and tight deadlines (Pascoe, Staging 154). Like periodicals, newspapers were inextricably bound up with the political and social movements of their era, and political affiliation could be determined by what paper a person took. In this way they paradoxically sought to define and solidify a particular type of audience while also needing to appeal to a large mass readership. Literary columns in the newspapers were frequently used to foster the idea that readers were part of a select coterie as

opposed to being merely faceless members of a mass audience (Pascoe, Staging 148-52).

In order to develop this sense of elitism some editors aligned themselves with a particular poet or poets, and accorded them a kind of stardom, constructing the poet into what we might now refer to as a "celebrity." This type of arrangement did not appeal to all poets as it highlighted the commodity status of the poem. It also made the poet a commodity and closed the gap between author and audience, which made a poet like Wordsworth, who saw his vocation as elevated and even priestly, feel uncomfortable (Pascoe, Staging 156; 163). One poetic and publishing arrangement that benefited from this sort of relationship, however, was that between Mary Robinson and Daniel Stuart of the Morning Post, which I shall discuss in a later chapter.

#### iv Ideology

It was not only the practical aspects involved in publication, such as the commercial marketplace and relationships with publishers, that affected the success or otherwise of women's poetry. The ideology that defined female and male roles, the feminine and the masculine, changed during the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth. Changes in society's perception of

gender roles in general affected the literary world in particular because of the visibility of authors and their function of representing society in their literature. At the same time as women were becoming visible as readers and writers, the literary representation of women was producing an increasingly narrow model of femininity (Shevelov 1).

Access to mechanisms of print both enfranchised and contained women. Print played a key role in this simultaneous inclusion and restriction of women because, while making claims for women's capabilities and social importance, the dominant ideology constructed woman as "other" than man; that is, biologically and socially different from man (Shevelov 1-2).<sup>6</sup> This interpretation of masculine and feminine, that viewed male and female as different but complementary, had far-reaching effects in all areas of society, including literature. In a sense it authorised women to write as it delineated an essentially feminine space, but it also clearly defined the limits of femininity, ensuring that women could only write within confined boundaries if they were to be acceptable. The idea of separate spheres also had a profound effect on critical assessments and audience expectations: women poets tended to be treated as part of a class before they were thought of as individuals (M.

---

<sup>6</sup>The complementary but divergent characteristics of the sexes were first made part of public discourse by Rousseau (M. Williamson, Introduction xx).

Williamson, Introduction xxi).

One of the major consequences of the belief in the complementary state of the sexes was the division of society into binary oppositions. The "interrelated categories of masculine and feminine, public and private, home and 'world,'" were constructed as mutually exclusive, the meaning of each being determined by its opposite (Shevelov 10). The ideology of a separate masculine public sphere and feminine domestic sphere relegated women to a passive domestic role, and correspondingly alienated them from an active public one. Not surprisingly, this had a huge impact upon women poets who as women participated in one sphere but as published poets transgressed the boundary of the other. Narrowly defining the subjects and themes appropriate to "woman," and also dictating a poet's style,<sup>7</sup> this doctrine also meant that women's poetry had to be constructed as an extension of their domestic duties. Kathryn Shevelov has identified the paradox inherent in these binary oppositions: women had to participate in the public (as readers, objects and subjects) to have the ideology of the private enforced (15).

The effects of the hegemonic workings of ideology on

---

<sup>7</sup>See Mary Poovey, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

the woman poet were various. Gary Kelly has identified the public sphere as a space defined by the court and by patronage, a space divided by class, culture, race, age and gender. Woman was allocated the domestic sphere but only if she was excluded from the public, and women who transgressed the boundaries were thought to have denatured themselves, simultaneously disrupting the private and tainting the public spheres (Kelly, "Revolutionary" 110). In choosing to publish, the woman poet was inviting questioning of her femininity, unless she wrote in a manner that supported the dominant ideology. Hence many of the successful women did not make any claims to rights for their sex, and often discouraged other women from following their paths (for example, the well-educated More and Barbauld did not advocate an extensive education for women, seeing themselves as exceptions rather than models). One way for women to keep their femininity was to join in the chorus against female writers. Lynne Agress has identified this phenomenon as "feminine irony" and she documents many cases of women writing to support the ideology that subjugated them in the early nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Clarke argues that bemoaning the life of a female writer was almost a ritual, a way of disclaiming authority at the very moment of claiming it through publication, a way of appearing weak at the point

---

<sup>8</sup>See Lynne Agress, The Feminine Irony: Women on Women in Early-Nineteenth-Century English Literature (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1978).

of strength (29).

Of course, ideology is not fixed and the definitions of male and female roles, and masculine and feminine writing, were hotly contested during the years from 1770 to 1835. Marlon Ross has outlined how the women poets' gender was such a crucial factor in their social and literary experiences that we should regard them as a distinct class with its own ideological patterning, rather than a sub-species of the "Romantic Poets" (6). But the "ideological patterning" of the woman poets was by no means uniform over the sixty-five-year period. It seems important, then, when looking closely at the works of any one poet, to be aware of the ideological field that she (or he) was operating in. Ann Yearsley and Felicia Hemans cannot be read as poets of the same period because the definitions of the feminine and the female writer that were current for each of them were startlingly different. Nor can Mary Robinson and Hannah More be read as ideologically the same merely because they published together chronologically. They wrote and published in a period of social turmoil, where many beliefs competed for control. Elements of the cultural conditions they worked under were the same, but they subscribed to different viewpoints as individuals.

From 1770 to 1835 there were a number of significant changes in dominant ideology. Initially there was a

fairly liberal period, when many ideologies were competing for dominance and women could publish poetry in a variety of styles, on a variety of subjects, and be met with a variety of reactions. Changes in the literary market, such as the rise of sensibility, the popularity of the novel, the easier access to print, the phenomena of mass audiences and powerful commercially-driven booksellers, and the consequent large numbers of publishing women, were new to society and there were no precedents as to how to react to them. At the end of the eighteenth century the famous literary woman was a relatively new phenomenon, and reactions to her were mixed. A conglomeration of competing beliefs about women and women's writing jostled for dominance, and if a woman poet was criticised in one quarter she would just as likely be praised elsewhere. Hence in 1798, Richard Griffiths, when reviewing a volume of verse by Elizabeth Moody, could celebrate "the Age of ingenious and learned Ladies" and the intellectual equality of the sexes, while Richard Polwhele could launch a poetic attack on the private and political lives of some of the leading women poets (Lonsdale xxi; xxxviii-xxxix).

A number of major strains of thought did emerge from the competing beliefs. The emphasis on women's sensibility was one of these (although it was later undermined), encouraged by a proliferation of novels centring on extreme female emotions and by poetic

movements like Della Cruscanism.<sup>9</sup> Counteracting this was a movement that emphasised women's capacity for rationality, supported by writers as politically diverse as Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More (Kelly, "Revolutionary" 113). There were also opposing movements for women's education, Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays pushing for equal education for the sexes, More and Barbauld preferring to educate young girls on how to be good wives and mothers. Contrary styles emerged in fiction, with the gothic genre co-existing with novels of moral didacticism and with the emotional excesses of the novels of sensibility. In poetry, the introspective and melancholy sonnets of Charlotte Smith co-existed with the classically styled productions of Anna Seward. Eventually, it was politics that resulted in a dominant ethic emerging and narrowly defining the woman poet and her role.

The last decade of the eighteenth century was expectant with the promise of change, and many writers linked the issues of gender with those of politics. As Gary Kelly points out, in the early 1790s, many writers, especially Dissenters, brought "feminine" issues (such as social sympathy and humanitarianism) into the revolutionary debate, including Barbauld, Wollstonecraft, and Williams (Women 22). Revolutionary feminism claimed

---

<sup>9</sup>The Della Cruscan school of poetry was introduced to England from Italy by Robert Merry and emphasised the emotions in an ornate poetical style.

equal participation for women in the moral and intellectual culture of the professional class, blurring the lines between public and private (Kelly, "Revolutionary" 110). Because the demarcation of the two spheres was not clear, women could participate in the public sphere via publication without unduly threatening their femininity. The aftermath of the French Revolution sent shock waves through Britain, however, and led to an ideological redefinition of class and gender roles that resulted in a backlash against feminism.

As part of the backlash, women writing in the vein of sensibility were mocked, yet also blamed for contributing to revolutionary sympathy in Britain (Kelly, "Revolutionary" 126). Sensibility was used to stress that females had weak minds and were easily swayed to revolutionary thoughts because of their overactive imaginations and extreme passions. The irregular personal lives of Williams, Robinson, Hays and Wollstonecraft, and their liberal views, linked feminism, radicalism, and immorality in the public mind (Todd, Dictionary 5). The exclusion of women from the public sphere was more vigorously stressed than ever before, which had the effect of discouraging women poets from publication and made them "even more reluctant to assume a professional public identity" (Kelly, Women 174). After the crisis of the 1790s, women largely abandoned overtly political writing but a conflict between form and

official ideology became evident; that is, women could still subvert their allocated sphere while seemingly working within it (Kelly, "Revolutionary" 122).

The ideological shift impelled by the Revolution had a huge impact on the women poets of the time, and of the future. Even though in the 1770s and 1780s women moved closer to the forefront of the publishing world, it was not until the 1790s that men seemed threatened by their visibility, and reacted accordingly (Curran, "Women" 184). William Gifford indicated the emerging opinion when he published his Baviad (1791) and Maeviad (1794), attacking the pre-revolutionary feminisation of culture in general, and the Della Cruscan poets in particular, especially the women. Richard Polwhele's 1798 poem The Unsex'd Females targeted women writers even more specifically, particularly Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft for their irregular personal lives and revolutionary ideals, but also Anna Barbauld, Mary Robinson, Ann Yearsley, and Charlotte Smith for their liberal sympathies. He held up Hannah More, Anna Seward, Ann Radcliffe and the Bluestockings as women writers who were ideologically sound in their piety and political outlook (Lonsdale xxxix). Two years later Wordsworth published the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, further undercutting women's role as poets by stressing that a poet was "a man speaking to men." Consequently, the poetry that women published after the Revolution was less

diverse in ideological outlook than it had been leading up to the end of the century.

Once women had entered the literary market and proved a popular success, lost ideological ground could not be entirely reclaimed and women could not be eliminated from the public sphere altogether, but the definitions under which they participated in literary culture were far more strictly defined. As Marilyn Williamson has noted, the nineteenth century was the first age to clearly define in structured terms the role and subjects of the woman poet. Up to this time a woman writer could largely invent herself, albeit by overcoming various obstacles; she had far more freedom to define her voice, her subjects, and her audience (M. Williamson, Introduction xvii).

The new conservative wave of ideology took a firm hold after 1800. The term "Bluestocking," once well respected, became pejorative, and the Bluestockings themselves were largely disparaged and ridiculed as unfeminine. The call for female education from liberals like Wollstonecraft and Hays had led to a fear of the "over-educated" woman, and a woman who showed her "blue stockings" was one who transgressed the boundaries of the separate spheres. Women who conformed to the dominant ideology of the feminine suffered less than women who were controversial. After 1800 women poets like Amelia

Opie, Matilda Betham, Mary Mitford, Mary Tighe, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Landon dealt primarily in the subjective and the domestic (Kelly, "Revolutionary" 126). Women poets who rejected the negative connotations of the Blues and constructed themselves as feminine did so at a literary price, however, as they pandered to the ideological prejudice, not so much against women themselves, as against certain perceptions of women (Clarke 89-90).

Reviewers were an effective means of keeping the newly defined structures in place. The critical rewards for innovation in women's writing were virtually non-existent, hence the monotony of subject, theme, and form of large quantities of women's poetry in the early 1800s (Hickock 13). There was a broad cultural uncertainty about the place of the woman poet and many reviewers discussed this problem before assessing the poetry. The women poets' virtues and failings as women were weighed before their virtues and failings as writers (Clarke 81). Biographical bias was a characteristic of nineteenth-century criticism of writing by women (M. Williamson, Introduction xxiii). Knowing how they would be reviewed must certainly have contributed to poets' decisions on whether to publish and what to write.

As the nineteenth century progressed, women poets had an increasingly narrowly-defined role available to

them. Women were admitted into literature in the 1820s but in a subordinate and secondary role, being denied the power accorded to men's writing (Kelly, "Revolutionary" 128). The term "poetess" was in common usage by the 1820s, and shows that although women poets were an acknowledged part of the literary scene they were distinguished by a linguistic diminutive from their male counterparts (Curran, "Women" 182). The textual voices used by Wollstonecraft and More in the 1790s were no longer available by the 1830s, so when Maria Jane Jewsbury compared the writing of her predecessors at the end of the last century with that of her contemporaries, she saw a loss of nerve, vigour, authority and intellect to accomplishment, grace, sentiment and the feminine (Clarke 90). Ultimately, the women poets at the end of the period found themselves living a contradiction. According to the ideology of the feminine they belonged to the domestic sphere alone, yet their role as poets in an age of ever-increasing publicity saw them in a very visible role in the public sphere.

#### v Female Fame

What did it mean for a woman poet to become famous? Essentially it meant that she became part of the public discourse, her work and her self commodities open for exchange and discussion in the market. The literature of

sensibility, which to some extent merged private history and public representation for women, proved ultimately damaging as it fuelled the notion that woman and text were congruent. Woman and text were equated because a woman's writing was supposedly a spontaneous effusion, a natural overflowing of a full heart. This idea became a major belief of the eighteenth century and is clearly evidenced by the many reviews and articles that discuss woman and her work as one and the same. Biographical details, character judgements, and literary criticism go hand in hand. As Ross has pointed out, many reviews of women's poetry judge the work by sociomoral criteria (piety, delicacy, femininity) rather than literary values (254). Consequently, when a woman chose to publish poetry (or any genre) and enter the public discourse, with the ensuing possibility of becoming famous, she knew she was subjecting her life to scrutiny. As one (anonymous) commentator, in Public Characters of 1800-1, put it:

The penalties and discouragements attending the profession of an author fall upon women with a double weight. . . arraigned, not merely as writers, but as women, their characters, their conduct, even their personal endowments become the subjects of severe inquisition; from the common allowances claimed by the species, literary women appear alone to be exempted . . . (qtd. in Adburgham 178)

Considering the public scrutiny that publication subjected the woman poet to, it is surprising that women published at all. Yet, as has already been established,

publish they did, and in ever-increasing numbers. Even as it restricted the kind of writing a woman could acceptably produce, the newly dominant ideology clearly marked a feminine space. By stressing the difference in kind between men and women it authorised women to write within the confines of the feminine. It is important, however, to differentiate between women writing poetry and women publishing poetry. Writing itself does not dictate the sacrifice of privacy, but by publishing a woman chooses to enter the public arena and the commercial field of literature.

In the <sup>late</sup> early 1970s, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar reconstructed Harold Bloom's masculine "anxiety of influence" model into a feminine "anxiety of authorship," in their groundbreaking study The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. Anne Mellor has refuted this model by citing the large numbers of women writing during the Romantic Period and the large volume of work they produced. She has also noted the number of salons and literary circles for women, and the growth in the numbers of women critics and readers, as attesting to women's self-confidence (Romanticism 8). Marlon Ross offers the alternative model of an "anxiety of perception," where the question is not "Shall I write?" but "How shall I be viewed?" The woman poet's worry was how society would view her and her work, and how this would determine how

she viewed herself (Ross 248). Ross's model seems to me an accurate analysis of the pressures on women poets. It is not until a woman's poetry is published that society is able to view her, so this model makes the important distinction between writing and publishing that writing. The theory of an anxiety of perception epitomises the conflict this thesis investigates, between the expected role of a woman and the public nature of publication. For the women poets who became particularly conspicuous through their writing, fame intensified the pressure of the conflict. The more famous they became the further removed they were from the role of the ideal woman.

One of the women poets' main improprieties in publishing was the transgression of the boundary of the public sphere, resulting in their potential construction as masculine. This transgression was twofold. First, poetry itself had always been constructed as masculine, so in choosing this genre women were invading a male realm. Secondly, in choosing to publish women were deliberately entering the masculine public sphere. The internalisation of the ideology, however, meant that most women poets accepted the definition of their role and maintained their "proper place." They focused on the domestic and quotidian in their poems and spoke of social issues only in relation to their moral concerns, hoping that writing within the feminine topic areas would protect them from accusations of masculinity (Kelly,

"Revolutionary" 114). Femininity in women's writing was strongly emphasised in the ideology of the early nineteenth century.

Even before the ideology of the poetess was established from around 1800, the ambitious woman poet still risked public scrutiny, scandal and abuse (for example, Mary Robinson was the subject of sexually explicit cartoons). The boundaries of acceptability for women writing poetry prior to the nineteenth century were not so rigidly defined as they would be later, yet the publishing woman poet still had to fulfil certain conditions to be acceptable. Denial of literary ambition was one of these conditions, and many women who published went to great lengths to disavow any aspiration to greatness. Jane and Ann Taylor both clearly disclaimed any desire for gain and admiration and ambition, stressing that they wrote poetry for amusement and still attended to their domestic duties. Ann said of Jane that she was "free . . . from that ambition which often accompanies intellectual superiority; . . . to the character of a literary lady, she had, in fact, a decided dislike" (qtd. in Agress 54). Ann Radcliffe evidently did not wish to be considered an author and she did not involve herself in society. When a report of her death (from madness) circulated (a poem "Ode to Terror" was even written to commemorate the event), Radcliffe, who

lived another 13 years, did not bother to deny it (Agress 161).

Prefaces to volumes of poetry were often used to deny any ambition, to justify the poet's audacity in publishing, and to link a woman's writing to her domestic image. Mary Darwall's "Advertisement" to her Poems (1794) reads:

The following pages were the effusions of a mind generally occupied in the domestic duties. When written, they were only the amusements of leisure, and were not intended to be obtruded on the public. (qtd. in Gibson 82)

Gibson points out, however, that the prefaces of the post-1760 women poets did acknowledge their poetry was a result of labour and effort and tended to apologise for their lack of education rather than their gender, a tendency which shows more confidence than their predecessors (82-83). By the 1790s the women poets were increasingly confident in presenting their work to the public: both Smith (1777) and Seward (1799) used prefaces to their volumes of sonnets to discuss the suitability of the form to English. Despite such literary assurance, women authors were confined by the ideology of the feminine. Smith's concluding remarks to the Preface of the sixth edition of her Elegiac Sonnets illustrate this:

Notwithstanding I am thus frequently appearing as an Authoress, and have derived from thence many of the greatest advantages of my life, . . . I am well aware that for a woman -- 'The Post of Honour is a Private Station.' (qtd. in Gibson 84)

Modesty was a key element of much of women's publication, even if it was pretended. Aristocratic women poets were often "reluctantly" pressed into publication by their friends or family, who thought the world would benefit from their works. According to the dominant concept of woman throughout the period, femaleness and literary ambition were mutually exclusive. To be ambitious was to be unfeminine and to court the sin of pride. Throughout the period, women's poetry was acceptable when it was modest and pious, given to the world only at the cajoling of friends and family. As writing was prescribed to be an extension of a woman's domestic duties it was unacceptable for her to see it as a career. To actively seek fame and fortune for their own sakes was to transgress the boundary of the private domestic world into the public masculine world, so women were by and large careful to either deny any desire for fame or avoid the topic of fame altogether (in order not to draw attention to the conflict between their roles as women and their participation in the public sphere).

The pressure on women to be unambitious and modest in their literary pursuits intensified after the anti-feminist backlash. Ambitious women who succeeded in worldly terms could at any moment fail in womanly terms -- the internal and external pressure on "unnatural" woman was such that mental and physical collapse was a propensity of many women writers in the nineteenth

century (Clarke 51). Clarke cites as an example Maria Jane Jewsbury's failure of health when her anonymously published and phenomenally successful first book had its authorship revealed (51). Letitia Landon also suffered from nervous complaints, the result of a highly public life plagued by scandal and under constant financial pressure. Praise for literary women was often meted out according to their notable lack of desire for fame.

William Howitt described Joanna Baillie as

the woman whose masculine muse every great poet has for nearly half a century delighted to honour[; she] wrote because she could not help pouring out the fulness of her heart and mind, and the natural consequence was fame; otherwise whoever sees that quiet, amiable, and unassuming lady . . . sees that, though not scorning the fair reputation of well exercised intellect, she is at home in the bosom of home, and lets no restless desire for mere fame disturb the pure happiness of a serene life . . .  
(2: 248)

Similarly, Hannah Cowley, poet, playwright, and critic, earned praise from a male contemporary for her ability to maintain an untarnished reputation despite her association with the stage:

In the different characters of daughter, wife, and mother, the conduct of our fair author has been most exemplary. There is nothing about her that indicates the writer . . . the very circumstance of want of incident is the highest praise; for to be public as a GENIUS, and private as a WOMAN, is to wear laurels gracefully veiled. (qtd. in Adburgham 174)

Despite the pressure on women to maintain the front that their poetry writing was nothing more than a hobby

of their leisure hours or an extension of their domestic duty, perhaps a vital necessity to keep their families alive, some women poets were covertly ambitious. Their aspirations are predominantly revealed in their private correspondence. For example, Felicia Hemans expressed in a letter to her friend Mrs. Lawrence her wish "to concentrate all [her] mental energy in the production of some more noble and complete work, something of pure and holy excellence which might permanently take its place as the work of a British poetess" (qtd. in W. Howitt 2: 120). Similarly, Mary Russell Mitford's private desire was to be the "supreme English woman poet" (Kutrie 265), although she is also recorded as saying: "I would rather scrub floors [than write novels] if I could get as much [money] by the healthier, more respectful and more feminine employment" (qtd. in Agress 118). Maria Jane Jewsbury was also ambitious and eager for fame, saying:

The passion for literary distinction consumed me from nine years old . . . The ambition of writing a book, being praised publicly, and associating with authors, seized me as a vague longing. (qtd. in Clarke 51)

Not all the woman poets of the period aimed at fame, however, or even publication. The Scottish women poets in particular appear to have avoided recognition for their work. Susanna Blamire appears in most modern anthologies of Romantic women's poetry and the complete

edition of her works has recently been republished.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in her lifetime Blamire did not publish but merely circulated her manuscripts amongst her neighbours, seemingly unplagued by financial need or desire for fame. (Roger Lonsdale comments that her lack of interest in publication makes her poetry less concerned with convention and taste than it might have been otherwise (xxxvi).) Lady Anne Barnard also showed no interest in public recognition: she did not divulge her authorship of "Auld Robin Gray" for fifty years (Bell 22). Lady Carolina Nairne was stimulated to write in the 1790s primarily by Robert Burns, sharing his patriotic desire to give "life to the national airs and folk songs of the people" (Kutrieh 169). Her brother sang one of her songs at a dinner where it met with favour; copies were made and the song circulated. Nairne took on the pseudonym "Mrs Bogan of Bogan" in 1821 (going so far as to dress up as a "middle-class country gentlewoman of advanced years" (Bell 21)) to help Robert Purdie, a music publisher of Edinburgh, in his resolve to form a collection of the national airs suitable for refined company (Kutrieh 165). Even her husband knew nothing about her literary works. She was very virtuous and religious, and did not seek popularity. Before she died she consented to have her poems published anonymously, but in fact they were published with her name.

---

<sup>10</sup>Susanna Blamire, The Poetical Works 1842 (Oxford: Woodstock, 1994).

For many women poets the decision to publish was at least partly motivated by financial necessity. The woman poet did not necessarily have the luxury to agonise over the morality of publication. As Janet Todd has noted, writing for publication was one of the few growth industries for women when traditional areas such as midwifery and millinery were being appropriated by men (Dictionary 1). Similarly, Cheryl Turner identifies the relatively low entry costs of authorship, as compared to other occupations like mantua making and dressmaking, as motivating women to seek publication (79). Of the professions open to women, acting was the most lucrative but was also flamboyant and self-promoting therefore morally suspect (Fergus and Thaddeus 191). Such social restrictions on acceptable occupations and a lack of financial stability were two conditions that led women to turn to literature for money. Writing offered the possibility of a decent income without necessarily requiring a long apprenticeship or huge talent. As a commercial business, writing gained propriety slowly for women, but it was eventually possible to be a writer and still a "lady." By the end of the eighteenth century authorship was respectable if combined with delicacy of tone and irreproachableness of life (Todd, Dictionary 2).

The financial distresses of women cut across all classes of society. Many upper- and middle-class women poets experienced marital difficulties that resulted in

their being required to earn their living, frequently supporting large broods of children and occasionally husbands, lovers, mothers, and other family members. Mary Robinson supported both her daughter and mother after originally publishing her poetry to raise money to pay off her husband's debts. Similarly, Charlotte Smith financed the publication of her Elegiac Sonnets to buy her husband out of debtors' prison and later supported nine children and herself from her earnings. Felicia Hemans raised a family of five on her wages, and Letitia Landon supported herself, her mother, and brother from her poetry. Because of these large drains on their incomes, these women poets, though best-selling authors, never achieved anything more than a comfortable lifestyle, and some could not even maintain that.

Urgent production schedules and deadlines often pressured poets and writing generally had to be juggled with the responsibilities of home. Conflict between domestic duties and literary ambition was an issue for women poets throughout the period, and had been an issue earlier in the century too. It loomed particularly large for the working-class women who were employed in other trades (such as washerwoman, milkwoman, servant), had to raise and support families, had less leisure time than their middle- and upper-class counterparts, and consequently, often felt guilty for spending time on literary pursuits. This conflict is aptly illustrated by

Mary Leapor's "An Epistle to Artemisia On Fame" of 1751, where a speaker remonstrates with the author about her poeticising:

'You thoughtless baggage, when d'ye mind your work?  
Still o'er a table lends your bending neck:  
Your head will grow preposterous, like a peck.  
Go, ply your needle: you might earn your bread:  
Or who must feed you when your father's dead?'

Publishing poetry was not a guaranteed means of income, however, as market preferences were hard to pick and publishers had a large pool of authors to choose from. Most women poets had another source of income, often another profession such as teaching or acting. As previously mentioned, most were also flexible between genres. A few women writers achieved comfortable financial status and national standing from their writing, such as Ann Radcliffe, Fanny Burney and Hannah More (who died leaving a fortune of thirty thousand pounds), and by the end of the period Hemans and Landon could achieve these rewards solely from poetry. Despite the success stories, there were naturally many more women who failed to achieve financial success or national reputation (Turner 79; 115).

Financial reward was not always seen by society at large as an acceptable motivation for a woman to publish. The growth of the booktrade and the increasing commercialism of literary production affected the social,

cultural and economic status of the author and was not to everyone's liking. A hostile reaction developed towards those writing blatantly for money, a hostility springing from the notion that such a mercenary motive demeans the status of the poet; this is a notion that Romantic ideology has continued to foster. A number of women authors were "dependent professionals," and the female contribution to the lowering of the writer's social standing is something that Turner rightly identifies as part of the reason for adverse reaction to women's writing (101). The common feeling of the time appears to have been that only those women who published to support others, particularly parents and children, and denied the desire for fame and fortune for themselves, were untainted: poets like Charlotte Smith, Charlotte Richardson, Helen Leigh, and Anne Grant.

One of the indices of fame must be the demand for a poet's work and the women poets of the period were certainly in demand. Anna Barbauld had five editions of her poems published between 1773 and 1777, Hannah More produced six volumes between 1773 and 1786, Anna Seward published successive editions of her Monody on Major Andre, and Charlotte Smith published ten expanding editions of her sonnets over fifteen years. Mary Robinson's first novel sold out on the day of publication and her Poems (1791) was a prepublication success with more than 600 subscribers (Pascoe, "Spectacular" 166).

Susanna Harrison's Songs in the Night went through sixteen editions between 1780 and 1823, and several of Anne Hunter's songs were set to music by Joseph Haydn (Fullard 10).

#### vi Literary Liaisons

Another index of fame has always been the extent of contact with the already famous (Clarke 61). The women poets of the period rarely wrote in social isolation and they tended to mix with other well-known figures, both male and female. They also tended to be aware of the works of other women writers. Lynne Agress claims that "women writers, especially the more successful ones, perhaps because the profession carried little prestige and because they were so often criticized, were, with few exceptions, mutually supportive" (120). Yet Norma Clarke asserts that the broad cultural uncertainty about the place of the woman poet and the subsequent precariousness of the validity of their writing made it hard for women to support one another (81). Both these statements seem legitimate as, although the norm seems to have been mutual support, there were also factors that made it hard for the woman writer to provide that support.

One of these factors was the tendency of reviewers to construct the women poets into a masculine hierarchy,

based on competition. Hence, in the early nineteenth century, Mary Tighe was hailed as the reigning Irish poetess, Joanna Baillie as the poetic queen of Scotland, and Felicia Hemans as the premier poetess of England. This artificially imposed a limit on the number of "great" poetesses in any one generation and forced the women poets into a competitive and hierarchically measured structure (Ross 302). That is not to say that the women poets did not ever conceive of themselves as rivals and that they were not ambitious, but the construction allowed only one woman per country to succeed, at the expense of her peers.

It is commonly assumed that the relationship between male and female poets of the period was one of scorn and hostility, whereby the male poet resented and feared the female poet as an intruder or attempted to regard her as insignificant. Marlon Ross has ably analysed the male poets' reactions to the women poets entering the marketplace in the initial chapters of The Contours of Masculine Desire, so it is unnecessary to go into detail here. It is important, however, to emphasise two aspects of the relationship between the poets of both sexes that seem to be frequently overlooked. First, the sometimes supportive and mutually admiring nature of the relationship between male and female poets seems to get lost in the rush to emphasise male hostility towards the women. Secondly, the relationship changed over time, as

did the ideological field in which these relationships were constructed. So, the grounds on which the poetesses of the nineteenth century interacted with their contemporary male poets differ vastly from those on which the women poets of the 1790s interacted with their male contemporaries. The earlier poets tended to view each other as competitors in the same field whereas the later poets were keenly aware they operated in different spheres.

As Janet Todd has noted, many women poets and novelists were linked through major male writers. For example, Samuel Johnson knew the Duchess of Devonshire, Fanny Burney, Hannah More and Helen Maria Williams, while William Godwin knew Mary Wollstonecraft, Amelia Opie, and Mary Robinson amongst others (Todd, Dictionary 10). Relationships between male and female literary figures were diverse and numerous. Mary Robinson was too notorious to enter the best homes but she attracted the elite, like Godwin, Edmund Burke, Joshua Reynolds, and other writers and artists, to her own (Pascoe, Staging 120). Shelley was an early admirer of the young Felicia Hemans' work, going so far as to write to her in an effort to establish a relationship (wisely disallowed by Hemans' mother). Coleridge exchanged poetry and compliments with Mary Robinson, and wrote an admiring poem to Matilda Betham in response to her work. Wordsworth had Maria Jane Jewsbury and Felicia Hemans to

stay at his cottage (separately), praised Hemans (in his "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg"), and admired Smith and Williams. Keats esteemed the poetry of Mary Tighe; William Hayley encouraged Charlotte Smith; Scott was an avid admirer of Joanna Baillie and a friend of Anna Seward; Robert Burns corresponded with Williams. This merely touches on an intricate network of literary relationships between the sexes, relationships that deserve more detailed study.

Groups of writers, artists and intellectuals tended to form around important authors, publishers and members of the social elite. Men and women had their own as well as mixed networks of support. The support that such networks provided could be as tangible as financial assistance or as ephemeral as stimulating exchanges (Turner 106). The Bluestocking coterie provided both intellectual encouragement and an economic base for women poets, developing an initial framework for intellectual relationships between writing women. The early upper-class Blues were responsible for the patronage and/or encouragement of Hannah More, Helen Maria Williams, and Anna Barbauld; More herself went on to patronise Ann Yearsley. Oddly enough, Barbauld later in her career denied there was any "bond of union among literary women" (qtd. in Lonsdale 300).

There is plenty of evidence that confirms that the

women poets were well aware of each other. The extensive cross-referencing in prefaces, novels, poems, and actual lives of the women writers points to the inspiration they offered one another (Turner 129). Obviously, the different agendas and backgrounds of the women poets meant they did not necessarily endorse one another on the basis of their sex. Some were highly critical of others; some conceived of themselves as rivals; others tried to distance themselves from the ever-increasing numbers of women writers; but the general relationship between the women poets seems to have been one of professional friendship if not intimate companionship. Marlon Ross sees the early-nineteenth-century poetesses as being more than correspondents in their relationships but less than rivals. He claims that Hemans thrived on the affection of her literary network and that the network enabled shared fame and shared failure, protecting her from both (Ross 301-02).

London was the centre of the literary world but literary groups were also developed in the provinces. Most groups had a strong and charismatic leader to whom others gravitated, such as Elizabeth Montagu, Anna Seward, and (in Paris) Helen Maria Williams (Todd, Dictionary 10). Strong personalities, however, occasionally led to literary clashes. Anna Seward was renowned for her lofty perception of her poetic vocation and she took great pride in being an astute critic of

both men and women. She was notoriously critical of Charlotte Smith's sonnets, an attitude which could have perhaps contained an element of professional rivalry. Janet Todd also cites jealous eruptions between Seward and Clara Reeve, between Hannah Cowley and Hannah More (a notorious and surprisingly public exchange that took place in print and concerned accusations of plagiarism), and between More and Ann Yearsley (Dictionary 11).

Intertextual references as a means of indicating awareness of and support for another female poet's work were a common device. Many of the large number of women's verse epistles "were addressed to other female poets, patrons, subscribers or well wishers" (K. Williamson 283). Charlotte Smith included her friend Henrietta O'Neill's poem "Ode to a Poppy" in her novel Desmond; Hannah Cowley's The Scottish Village does honour to Barbauld, Burney and Seward; Felicia Hemans dedicated Records of Woman to Joanna Baillie and often used epigraphs from women to introduce her poems. Mary Blackett's poems were included in the Falconar sisters' Preface; Baillie wrote about her ancestor Lady Griseld Baillie; and Anne Bannerman dedicated a poem to Joanna Baillie. Towards the end of the period, elegies on prominent women poets also became common and included Hemans on Mary Tighe, Elizabeth Barrett Browning on Hemans and Letitia Landon, Landon on Hemans, and Christina Rossetti on Landon.

Assistance was on occasion more practical. Agress records that when Mary Russell Mitford's father died, other literary women, including Baillie, Opie, Maria Edgeworth, and Frances Trollope, raised money to help her. According to Agress, "these women -- all of whom were of the upper middle class -- formed an informal group and believed themselves to be somewhat above other middle- and lower-middle-class women writers . . ."

(120). Subscription to women's poetic volumes was another means of support, particularly vital for working-class women. Todd states that working-class women rarely saw themselves as a group and that their networking with other women was a means of survival that involved interaction with the middle classes in the form of patronage (Dictionary 12). There is some evidence to suggest, however, that the lower-class women poets also felt a sense of community -- for example, Janet Little's exchanging poetry with her fellow "rustic" poet Jean Murray (Bold 29). Karina Williamson summarises their mutual support: "Women poets could feel that they belonged both to a living network of women writers and readers, and to a succession of poets reaching back into the seventeenth century" (283).

## vii Public Personae

Public interest in women's poetry, as already mentioned, extended to public interest in women poets. As well as being freely discussed in publications of the day, some of the women poets were so famous as to become public curiosities. Howitt's Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets was first published in 1847, twelve years after Hemans' death, but he comments that her house of birth "is still pointed out to strangers" (2: 105). In her lifetime Hemans was subject to the stares and approaches of her admiring public, and many of her letters, which will be discussed in a later chapter, illustrate the discomfort she felt at being so famous. Mary Robinson seems to have encouraged her high profile but she too expressed some discomfort with the scrutiny of the public: "Whenever I appeared in public, I was overwhelmed by the gazing of the multitude" (qtd. in Pascoe, Staging 118).

Some of the women poets were famous before they ventured into print, such as Robinson through her acting and her liaisons with prominent men, and Caroline Lamb through her affair with Byron. Most, however, could credit their fame to their literary pursuits and take pride in their efforts. Charlotte Smith never forgot that she was the daughter of a gentleman, and although she constantly bemoaned the necessity of writing she was

very proud of her literary career. As well as taking satisfaction from the income she earned she was gratified at the opportunities that her fame and reputation opened for her children (Stanton 393).

The public scrutiny that fame brought was often not desirable for the woman poet. Anonymous publication was one means by which women poets could avoid publicity, and it served a variety of other purposes for the women poets. Many of the well-born authors felt that authorship was not ladylike. Whether it was a lingering stigma from Restoration times or the new taint of commercialism that led them to believe writing was not appropriate to their gender, we can only surmise. Of course, social position was also important, and publishing poetry could be seen as a kind of manual labour not suitable for a "lady." Nairne considered it "a disgrace for a woman 'to have ink on her thumb'" and Ann Radcliffe was ashamed of being thought an authoress as her "chief ambition . . . [was] to be thought a lady" (qtd. in Agress 119). Anonymity also protected a woman from the glare of publicity should her work succeed, or from the public humiliation potentially involved in an unsuccessful production. It allowed a woman's publishing aspirations to be kept private, even from family. It also meant that a work could be judged on its own merit rather than harshly attacked because it came from a female pen, or, perhaps, worse, condescended to on

account of the sex of its author. Similarly, women poets had to consider that when they published under their own names they could be attacked for being unfeminine, or their poetry dismissed as frivolous (Fullard 4).

Kutrieh's anthology of popular British women poets of the Romantic Period identifies a number of women who kept their identities secret. Catherine Maria Fanshawe usually published anonymously (her "Riddle on the Letter H" was attributed to Byron). Fanshawe was part of a small coterie, and her poems often circulated in manuscript for unknown periods before publication. She moved in famous circles but was not herself well known and only became noticed after her death (Kutrieh 76). Amelia Opie initially published an anonymous novel that attracted no attention but in 1802 she published a volume of poems that went through six editions by 1811 (Kutrieh 112). Mary Blachford Tighe wrote Psyche in 1795 and circulated it amongst her friends. It was privately reissued in 1805 and was so successful that she was able to use the proceeds to build a ward for an orphan asylum. Tighe died in 1810, and in 1811 Psyche was first offered to the public, becoming exceedingly popular and highly praised (Kutrieh 137-38). Caroline Bowles was orphaned at 20 and with poverty imminent decided to write for money. She sent a manuscript of a poem to Southey (her future husband) and this was published anonymously in 1820. According to Miles, her disfigurement by smallpox

was part of the reason she desired retirement and seclusion (40).

Publishing anonymously meant the author ran the risk of having her work attributed to someone else. When the first series of Joanna Baillie's Plays on the Passions appeared anonymously in 1798 it was reviewed as "undoubtedly the work of a man" and for a time was ascribed to Walter Scott (Whyte 1). One way to avoid this yet to retain anonymity was to publish under a pseudonym. Many of the women poets used pseudonyms, and used them for a variety of purposes. As mentioned above, Carolina Nairne used a false name to protect her identity because she did not wish to be known as an author. Despite the celebrity of her works she chose never to reveal her authorship of such popular ballads as "The Land o' the Leal."

Other women poets had different agendas in their use of pseudonyms. As has already been discussed, a woman and her text were assumed to be inseparable during the period. This assumption had the effect of confining a woman to only one textual voice, a single and stable identity. Yet, clearly, women as much as men were able to construct a poetic persona (or personae). Mary Robinson is one woman poet who exploited the use of personae. She had a difficult task in building a respectable literary reputation because in the public

discourse she was already a fallen woman (Pascoe, Staging 20). Pascoe's study of Mary Robinson argues that for Robinson the use of pseudonyms (and she used at least ten) was a chance to develop different poetic voices (Staging 160).<sup>11</sup>

As well as allowing women greater creative freedom, the use of pseudonyms distanced the poet from the speaking voice and allowed women to enjoy literary success while still shielded from direct public attention (Pascoe, Staging 56). In an era of increasing public scrutiny of famous authors it was useful for women to be able to construct a public version of themselves which they marketed as part of the poetic package. Letitia Landon was extremely successful at this. She published her poetry under the half-pseudonym "L.E.L." to titillate her readers and arouse curiosity about herself, and continued this marketing ploy and literary strategy even when her name had been revealed. She also encouraged her work to be read as autobiographical, seemingly subscribing to the dominant belief of woman and text as one. Yet, historical information clearly shows her own life was far from the life she constructed for herself in her poetry.

The development of a poetic persona for public

---

<sup>11</sup>Pascoe lists only the eight Robinson used in the Morning Post.

consumption is an interesting aspect of the development of women's poetry from 1770 to 1835. Changes in ideological beliefs and the social circumstances of the poets resulted in various types of personae being constructed. The more famous the poet, the more interesting the use of a public mask or persona becomes. In the early part of the period the famous women poets present selected details, an edited version, of their own lives to the public in their poetry. By the 1820s the famous women poets are rewriting their lives to fit their public image.

Common to the sixty-five years under study, despite the differing cultural beliefs about women and women poets, is the fact that increasing numbers of women poets achieved success, popularity, and fame. In spite of a number of pressures, both internal and external, that made it difficult for women to publish poetry, large numbers did so and were indisputably popular. The famous women poets' attempts to publicly balance the demands of society with their own internal expectations (regarding the idea of woman and the idea of a poet) makes fascinating study. In the next chapter I shall look at the Bluestockings' influence on the first group of women poets who published in the 1770s and 1780s, and these poets' experience of fame.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EARLY DECADES

#### i The Bluestockings

The Bluestocking network provided both an important model and a point of departure for the women poets who eventually emerged from under its influence (Myers 11). The women who were known as Bluestockings were upper-class, intellectually inclined, and exceptionally well educated for their time. Their friendships spanned many decades and were nurtured largely through correspondence in the early years, before they established themselves in the social scene of London. In many ways the second generation of women poets who participated in the Bluestocking circle, like Hannah More, Anna Barbauld, Anna Seward, and Helen Maria Williams, went beyond the precedents set by the women of the earlier generation. Yet, in other ways, this second generation of publishing women were more conservative than their predecessors.

Sylvia Harcstark Myers, in her thorough and very readable study The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England, provides a well-documented account of the formation and continuation of the network of women

who began the Bluestocking circle. According to Myers, for the original Blues (Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, Catherine Talbot etc.) being a Bluestocking meant being an impeccable member of an intellectual community of men and women, a community in which learning, virtue and friendship were linked (Myers 11). Prominent intellectual men like Dr Johnson, Lord Lyttelton, David Garrick, and Horace Walpole, among others, respected and admired the women who dominated the coterie. Male mentors often provided support for the women, who were aware of their lack of systematic and classical education (Myers 155). The Bluestocking goal was for women to be accepted as having a right to literature, "literature" in its widest sense (letters, learning, books), perhaps better understood now as "education" (Myers 127). They sought acknowledgement of female intellectual capacity.

It is noteworthy that the Bluestockings did not aspire to develop a "feminine" literary tradition but to participate in their culture's established (masculine) literary tradition. (The notion of female and male writing being inherently different had yet to come to prominence.) The Bluestockings did not want to be professional authors. They had an ambivalent attitude towards writing for a living, preferring not to regard their work as having been done for money, as women who relied on profit from their work were seen as needy and dependent. They wanted to feel that they published

because their intellectual interests gave them pleasure and self-respect, and influenced others for good (Myers 155). They were predominantly women from the upper middle classes, eminently respectable and financially secure. Publishing was still tainted with an air of unrespectability and female authorship had not totally shaken off the disreputable image it had gained during the Restoration. Carter and Montagu published reluctantly, at the behest of others, anxious about their reputations, and not entirely confident of their abilities (Myers 243).<sup>12</sup> Myers notes that the Bluestockings' actual published output was very small, and that their intellectual work was characterised by diffidence and uncertainty (156).

Though not aspiring to fully developed literary careers themselves, the Bluestockings often acted as patrons or advocates of other women's writing, their wealth and connections placing them in a unique position (for females) that allowed them to do so (Curran, "Women" 180-81). Of course, the women they fostered were required to meet their standards of morality and respectability, the virtuous and financially needy being favoured as protégées. Elizabeth Carter, for instance, was concerned for Charlotte Smith's success and Elizabeth

---

<sup>12</sup>Carter's early career with the Gentleman's Magazine had been encouraged by her father and a number of influential literary mentors; it ended in 1739 for a variety of reasons (see Myers 58-60) and she did not publish again until 1758, except for two periodical poems in 1750 and 1751.

Montagu patronised many writers, including Sarah Fielding and Ann Yearsley (Myers 149). The favoured genre for Bluestocking patronage was undoubtedly poetry. Stuart Curran has noted that the Bluestockings stressed the primacy of classical learning (advocating women's access to it) and forged a common cause with men in refining culture. The Bluestockings honoured the traditional terms of poetry as an upper-class realm that required a classical education and exclusive standards of shared taste, while women who had neither the means nor education to devote themselves to high culture turned to the novel (Curran, "Women" 182).

The Bluestockings are often discussed in relation to feminism, and their contribution to the advancement of women is frequently debated. Some modern scholars nominate the Bluestockings as early feminists because of their prominent role in changing contemporary perceptions of women (for example, Lawrence Stone in Chapter Eight of The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800).

Myers, however, argues, and I think rightly so, that the Bluestockings did not see themselves as part of a feminist tradition (121). There is no evidence from any of their surviving letters that they read any of their female precursors who are now regarded as feminist, with the exception of Katherine Philips whose work Carter had some copies of. (The literary female who provided a role model for Talbot and Carter was the religious poet

Elizabeth Singer Rowe.) It is impossible to know whether they were aware of and/or influenced by the writings of Margaret Cavendish, Bathsua Makin, Sarah Fyge Egerton, or Mary Astell, whom modern scholars have declared the first literary feminists. The fame of these early women writers tended to dissipate quickly after their death, much as was to be the case for the women writers of the Romantic Period (Myers 121-22).

Other scholars agree with Myers, regarding the Bluestockings as ultra-conservative and perhaps even more of a hindrance than a help to the growth of feminism. The Bluestockings can be seen as achieving women who refused to acknowledge the claims of feminism. In other words, because they managed to succeed under contemporary conditions they preferred not to jeopardise that success by attempting to increase the status of women in general, or perhaps even saw no need to change contemporary social conditions. Marilyn Williamson, in her article "Who's Afraid of Mrs Barbauld? The Blue Stockings and Feminism," argues that the Bluestockings did not seek to change male-female relationships, but to improve education for women so they could better fulfil the conventional role (95). While the Bluestockings' comments on women's education support this interpretation of their goals, it is also possible that they presented a conservative facade to disguise their more liberal intentions, as

early eighteenth-century proponents of women's education had.

One of the problems that modern critics face in assessing how feminist the Bluestockings were is their emphasis on virtue and other "feminine" qualities. To dissociate themselves from licentious publishing women like Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood and Delariviere Manley, other female writers were forced to emphasise their own virtue. It was not only women who propelled this movement. Men who believed in women's intellectual and literary capacity also fostered the connection between virtue and respectability and publishing for women. The minor poet Thomas Seward, father of Anna, stressed the importance of combining learning with virtue and the domestic skills in his poem "The Female Right to Literature, in a Letter to a Young Lady, from Florence" (1748). In the poem he encourages the young woman in her studies but stresses the importance of combining her learning with virtue and domestic skills (Myers 126). This combination of attributes gradually became the key to women being accepted, reputations intact, as worthy of publication. John Duncombe's rollcall of women poets, The Femiinad; or, Female Genius, A Poem (1754), as already noted, distinguished between virtuous and non-virtuous female writers, praising the modest and moral like Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Elizabeth Carter, Katherine Philips, and Anne Finch (Myers 127-29).

Ultimately, it is necessary to assess the influence of the Bluestockings in the light of the ideology of their own period, rather than to apply recent feminist theory and ask them to measure up in terms of what we now assess as "feminist." The Bluestockings were very much the product of their own time, and issues of gender were then unavoidably complicated by issues of class, politics, and religion. The exceptional intellectual capacities of the early generation of Bluestockings were at odds with their society's expectations of their gender. Their primary concern was to allow women access to intellectual activity and education, but they did not advocate such privileges for all women: emancipatory and democratic impulses did not necessarily go hand in hand. In many respects the Bluestockings were very timid in their claims for women. They nevertheless established women's right to intellectual and literary activity, thereby paving the way for the women poets who were to follow them.

Around 1775, the term "bluestocking" widened to focus on learned ladies and female writers in general, thereby including women who were not strictly members of the Bluestocking circle. The broadened use of the term was the result of intense interest by participants and observers (newspapers, periodicals) in the new phenomenon of "women writing, publishing, and taking a public role in the life of the mind" (Myers 244). Journalists and

satirists focused on them, as did portrait artists and caricaturists, so that the public at large was very aware of their existence. Between 1773 and 1800 there were a large number of media references to the Bluestockings which kept them prominent and made them a matter for public discussion. By the 1770s the women were being observed by poets, journalists, and painters with varying attitudes. Some thought that they were the touchstone of learning and virtue, showing education for women was beneficial, while others were angry they had crossed into a masculine sphere and satirised them (Myers 270-71).

Contrary to earlier in the century when learned and publishing women tended to be isolated figures, the Bluestockings were perceived by society at large as a group and, though the numbers and names varied, the tendency was for attention to focus on them collectively, not as individuals (Myers 273). Because of their fame, they were able to extend their influence beyond their own coteries. The publicity surrounding them came because their social lives had become public, and meant that the figure of the Bluestocking did not die with the demise of the group but remained influential and well known into the nineteenth century (Myers 288).

Placing themselves in the public eye through their writing, the Bluestockings knew that they invited scrutiny of their lives. Johnson's Dictionary (1786)

defines "fame" as, first, celebrity or renown, and secondly as report or rumour.<sup>13</sup> The emphasis on a publishing woman's morality and virtue meant that for the Bluestocking women the two meanings of "fame" were inextricably linked. Fame in terms of celebrity increasingly conflicted with the prevailing ideology of gender that placed women in the private, domestic sphere. The Bluestockings' learning and fame were potential threats to their femininity so they worked hard to maintain impeccable morals and virtuous reputations. Fame was thus ambiguous: it was something to be cultivated in terms of reputation but something to be modestly deflected in terms of celebrity. This conflict, and the paradoxical fact that the publishing woman was necessarily in the public eye while gender ideology was increasingly dictating separate spheres of activity for men and women, manifested itself in poetry by women in these first decades, and, indeed, throughout the period.

In firmly associating the writing woman with virtue, the Bluestockings simultaneously opened the field of literature and publication for women and defined the limits of that participation in terms of acceptability and respectability. They did not try to make their own lives models for others -- far from it -- but by their very example they raised the tone of English thought with

---

<sup>13</sup>Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language (London: Harrison, 1786).

regard to the value of their sex (M. Williamson, "Who's Afraid?" 98). Among the women poets influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Bluestockings were four of the most famous literary names of the late eighteenth century: Hannah More, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Anna Seward, and Helen Maria Williams.

## ii Hannah More

The shift from the original Bluestockings to the next generation, as already indicated, involved a shift from the upper classes to the middle classes, from women who talked about the need for education to women who actually set up schools, and from thinkers to doers (Ross 192). Hannah More epitomises this movement. Although a generation younger than the original Bluestockings and a provincial schoolteacher, she became part of their circle and went on to become one of the most influential and famous writers of her day. Albeit best remembered for her prose works, More achieved fame initially via drama and poetry.

More was the fourth of five daughters of a schoolmaster who provided her with an early education in Latin, Italian, Spanish and mathematics (although he grew alarmed at her mathematical ability so discontinued this subject). With her sisters, More ran a school in

Bristol, and her role as schoolteacher prompted her literary inclinations. Her work The Search After Happiness was circulated as a school text many years before it was published in 1773 (Todd, British 483). A broken engagement resulted in a compensatory annuity that allowed More to live comfortably and independently, never marrying (Lonsdale 323).

More first visited London in the winter of 1774-75, quickly making prominent friends such as the theatrical Garricks (Myers 260). Her social ease and wit ensured her popularity with such luminaries as Johnson and Montagu, and London visits became an annual event (Todd, British 482). She experienced rapid social and literary success as a poet, essayist, and dramatist, quickly becoming a prominent figure in the literary scene through her combination of sentiment and moral rhetoric (Lonsdale xxxiv). Her output was prolific, with the majority of her poetry appearing in the years from 1776 to 1788. Lonsdale sees More as being at the height of her celebrity in London in 1777 when she published her Essays on Various Subjects, Principally Designed for Young Girls (xxxv), though her most influential period was undoubtedly 1790 to 1810 during publication of The Cheap Repository Tracts.

More's early poetry tended toward fairly light narrative verse in the sentimental vein (though she was

later to denigrate the fashionable cult of sensibility's artificial ecstasies over the "sacred rapture" of pain felt by the truly sensitive (Todd, British 483)). Titles like Sir Eldred of the Bower, and The Bleeding Rock: Two Legendary Tales (1776), and "Ode to Dragon, Mr Garrick's House-dog, at Hampton" (1777) indicate her early interests. The death of her mentor Garrick saw the end of More's theatrical career (she later regretted her affiliation with the stage), and was an intense personal loss that perhaps initiated her move to a preoccupation with morality, social concerns, and eventually Evangelism. Her later poetry illustrates a shift towards such issues, in poems like "Sensibility: A Poetical Epistle to the Honourable Mrs Boscawen" (1785) and Slavery, A Poem (1788).

Considering More's renown and respectability, it is perhaps surprising that references to fame are absent from any of her poems. Even her poem on the Bluestockings, "The Bas Bleu, or, Conversation," circulated in manuscript before being published in 1786, does not address the issue of women and fame.<sup>14</sup> In the poem More made prominent the view of the Bluestockings as conversationalists, but in the process somewhat trivialised the older women's motives by attributing their fondness for conversation to their opposition to

---

<sup>14</sup>More claimed in the advertisement for the poem that she only published it to prevent copied manuscripts with errors in them from circulating (Florio 66).

card games. The circle arose more out of a desire to promote women's intellectual capacities and rational conversation abilities than merely to replace whist (Myers 262).

A likely reason for More's lack of writing on fame is its relevance to her own life. Given her prolific output (Jackson's bibliography contains 33 entries for More, most of which appear in multiple editions, and this tally excludes the collections that More's work appeared in), and her financial success, it seems reasonable to assume that Hannah More had literary ambitions. The natural consequence of her success was fame. However, More's own life was at odds with her teachings and her conservative opinions on the role of women. I suggest that More was astutely aware of this contradiction and had no desire to draw attention to it by writing about fame or ambition.

Hannah More was probably the most regressive of the Bluestockings and their protégées in terms of her attitude towards "the advancement of women" (Myers 260). In her Essays of 1777 she shifted the grounds on which the early Bluestockings sought to participate in literature by advocating the notion of separate spheres for male and female writers. More refers to the public sphere as the "proper element" for men, not women, and says that the female mind is capable of "lively

imagination" and "exquisite perception" but not a masculine "strength of intellect." Women's poetry is to be characterised by "the beautiful, the soft, the delicate," while "the steep of Parnassus" are to be reserved for the "bold adventurers of the other sex" (qtd. in Lonsdale xxxiv-xxxv). These prescriptions for women's writing gained currency as the century drew to a close.

More's earliest publication, The Search After Happiness, encouraged the notion of separate spheres for men and women in all areas, not just literature. When one of the female characters expresses a desire for fame she is reprimanded, and reminded of the need for humility: "A meteor, not a star you would appear, / For woman shines but in her proper sphere." More was adamant that woman's role should be a domestic one, and if she did take a literary role then it should be for the moral betterment of society: ". . . a woman's talents are only a means to a still higher attainment . . . ; merely to exercise them as instruments for the acquisition of fame and the promoting of pleasure, is subversive to her delicacy as a woman" (qtd. in Poovey 35). Though More promoted the ultimately damaging notion of separate spheres of literary activity for men and women, she also delineated a clear space for, and therefore authorised, women's writing.

As was the case with the original Bluestockings, but to a greater extent, More's life and her teachings, her actions and her words, were contradictory. Marlon Ross notes how More continued to depict herself as a provincial schoolmarm despite her enormous fame and influence in political and educational spheres (204). (How successful she was in promoting this conception of herself is shown in comments like Thomas De Quincey's, assessing that "she was modest, feminine, and, by nature, retiring; . . . it was only by a most unnatural and transient effort that she ever attempted to shine" (Moulton v: 191).) She had to balance her own phenomenal fame and extensive publication with her continual writing against female ambition and female participation in the public sphere. She had to be publicly influential without being a public spectacle (Ross 206). In order to defend the femininity of her own fame she stressed her propriety. Like the Bluestockings before her, but more systematically, she combined female genius with female virtue and domestic ability:

The truth is, women who are so puffed up with the conceit of talents as to neglect the plain duties of life, will not frequently be found to be women of the best abilities. And here may the author be allowed the gratification of observing, that those women of real genius and extensive knowledge . . . have been, in general, eminent for economy and the practice of domestic virtues . . . (qtd. in Ross 208)

By differentiating between genuine feminine genius and pretension to genius More could declare literary pursuits

proper for women while denying ambition and masculinity (Ross 208). This also allowed her to praise the works of the Bluestocking circle. To the third edition of The Search After Happiness More added an epilogue which also differentiated kinds of writing women. One character says:

'How well so'er these learned ladies write,  
They seldom act the virtues they recite;  
No useful qualities adorn their lives,  
They make sad mothers, and still sadder wives.'

The reply of the second speaker qualifies these assertions:

'I grant this satire just in former days,  
When Sapphos and Corinnas tuned their lays,  
But in our chaster times 'tis no offence,  
When female virtue joins with female sense . . .'

Several of the Bluestockings, including Aikin (later Barbauld), Carter and Montagu, are singled out for praise, though the character hastens to add:

'She bids me add -- though Learning's cause I plead,  
One virtuous sentiment, one generous deed,  
Affords more genuine transport to the heart  
Than genius, wit, or science can impart . . .'

Feminist in the modern sense she was not, but More was aware of the precarious social position of the educated, publishing woman like herself:

But there is one human consideration which would perhaps more effectually tend to dampen in an aspiring woman the ardours of literary vanity . . . than any which she will derive from motives of

humility, propriety, or religion; which is, that in the judgement passed on her performances, she will have to encounter the mortifying circumstance of having her sex always taken into account, and her highest exertions will probably be received with the qualified approbation, that is really extraordinary for a woman. (qtd. in Poovey 39)

This is an interesting quotation as More does acknowledge that women can entertain the idea of "aspiring" to "literary vanity," and, despite her own assertion that women and men should operate in separate spheres, she sounds genuinely annoyed by the qualified praise meted out to women writers. More's response to the threat of this kind of treatment was to publish all but her last four works anonymously, although they were instantly recognisable to readers (Poovey 39).

Yet, though she allowed the possibility of literary ambition in women in general, More denied any such ambition on her part. Predominantly in the prefaces to her poems, More attempted to appear self-effacing and unambitious, though her protestations sound clumsily overstated to the modern reader. She went to great lengths to represent her work as insignificant and herself as having no esteem for her productions. Rebecca Gould Gibson notes that post-1760 women poets start to refer to their works as "endeavours" and "labours," a change from the earlier focus on women's poetry as "trifles" and "diversions" (82). Not More, however. In her dedication to David Garrick prefacing Sir Eldred of the Bower, and, The Bleeding Rock: Two Legendary Tales

(1776) she refers to her volume as a "little production" and "a trifle" (241-42). Similarly in her dedication to Horace Walpole that precedes "Florio: A Tale, for Fine Gentlemen and Fine Ladies" (1786) she speaks of her "little tale" and "light verses," and the advertisement accompanying "The Bas Bleu" calls her poem a "trifle" and a "slight performance" (Florio iii-iv; 66). In all these cases More also expresses her reluctance to publish.

Hannah More wrote and published throughout the period 1770 to 1835, but she focused on didactic prose from the 1790s. Although stressing women's role as domestic and subservient to men, More gave women a means of participating in national identity by giving them a sense of moral responsibility (Todd, British 485). She is interesting as an example of a woman achieving literary fame while denying all aspiration to such fame and never mentioning in her poetry the conflict between being female and being famous. I shall return to discussion of More and her attitude to the woman poet and fame later, in relation to her patronage of a fellow woman poet, Ann Yearsley.

### iii Anna Letitia Barbauld

Similar in many respects to More was her contemporary Anna Letitia Barbauld. (The major

difference between the two was religion, More being a staunch Anglican and Barbauld a Dissenter.) Barbauld (née Aikin) was the daughter of a Dissenting minister who ran a school for boys, and her father and brother were responsible for her unusually thorough education. Her brother John Aikin was also responsible for encouraging her to publish her poetry in a volume, entitled simply Poems (1773).<sup>15</sup> Barbauld's biographer, Betsy Rodgers, tells us that the "book had an immediate and astonishing success, passing through four editions in twelve months, and from [then] on she was considered a famous author" (57). Barbauld's classical education was evident in her poetry but she was never obscure and her language was simple and direct (Rodgers 61). An enthusiastic review from the Monthly Review showed Barbauld was already known as a poet -- "Before these elegant poems appeared in print, we were not wholly unacquainted with this Lady's extraordinary merit, & fine talents" -- indicating that her poems had circulated amongst family friends prior to publication (Rodgers 58).

Although the Monthly Review spoke favourably of the volume, the reviewer did have reservations about

---

<sup>15</sup>Lucy Aikin's biography of Barbauld, her aunt, says ". . . her Poems were selected, revised, and arranged for publication: and when all these preparations were completed, finding that she still hesitated and lingered . . . he procured the paper, and set the press to work on his own authority" (qtd. in McCarthy and Kraft xxx). Whether this was the truth or Aikin's desire to present Barbauld as suitably modest for an 1820s audience we can only guess.

Barbauld's absence of feminine concerns:

We hoped the Woman was going to appear; & that while we admired the genius & learning of her graver compositions, we should be affected by the sensibility & passion of the softer pieces. Miss Aikin, like most female writers, has, in some measure, disappointed us on the subject of Love. (qtd. in Rodgers 59)

He goes on to discuss the inappropriateness of women quitting their station and province to write about "masculine topics." According to the reviewer, she and other female writers, in "pursuing the road to fame," trod too much in the footsteps of men, through no fault of their own, but because of a lack of feminine companionship and because they had been educated by men (qtd. in Rodgers 59-60). These comments show the emerging emphasis on separate literary spheres for men and women, and indicate the failure of the Bluestocking ideal of women participating in the masculine literary tradition.

Miss Aikin became Mrs Barbauld in 1774 and the focus of her life became the boys' school that she and her husband ran. Her writing was influenced by this occupation and she achieved further fame as a writer of children's literature. Many commentators, including Samuel Johnson, regarded her marriage to Rochemont Barbauld as stifling her literary potential (McCarthy and Kraft xxii). The marriage was not without its problems. The threat of hereditary insanity hung over her husband's

family, a threat that was eventually realised and resulted in enforced separation from his wife (he was violent towards her, trying to kill her on several occasions) and later, suicide. In many ways Rochemont Barbauld lived in the shadow of his famous and well-respected wife, something she seems to have been conscious of and tried to avoid drawing attention to as she subordinated her own interests to her husband's (Rodgers 62).

As well as being an accomplished poet, Barbauld wrote successfully in prose (although never writing a novel), and she was particularly impassioned about social and Dissenting causes. She supported the abolition movement and American independence, and was a sympathiser with the French Revolution in its early stages. She published several political tracts (anonymously) on these issues (Curran, "Women" 188). Despite her far-reaching social sympathies Barbauld has been judged very conservative in her attitudes towards women's education. Like More, she considered her own situation as a well-educated and successfully publishing woman as an exception, and not a model for others to follow, and allocated men and women separate spheres: men were to participate in "various departments in active life" while women participated in the domestic sphere only, as "a wife, a mother, a mistress of a family." She quashed Elizabeth Montagu's suggestion in 1774 that she head an

academy for women, not seeing how rigorous education would help women to be "good wives or agreeable companions." Defending her own role as author, Barbauld said "my situation has been peculiar, and I would offer no rule for others" (qtd. in M. Williamson, "Who's Afraid?" 91).

The assessment of Barbauld as unfeminist has been challenged recently by William McCarthy. Reading her in the light of her contemporary conditions, McCarthy sees Barbauld as indicating her resentment of woman's restricted lot in her poems, which represented both her imaginative resistance to that lot, and her efforts to conceive a more satisfying idea of her gender. In publishing her self-constructions she performed the political act of inviting others to emulate and observe. He sees women readers' responses to Poems as confirming her writing as liberating rather than constraining in its depiction of womanhood (McCarthy 116).<sup>16</sup> McCarthy also notes that Barbauld's complaints against "her culture's oppressive construction of 'woman'" are necessarily encoded because the poems "circulated in the very milieu of which they complain" (125).

---

<sup>16</sup>Poems was welcomed by Mary Scott, for example, in The Female Advocate, and Hannah Cowley in The Scottish Village. A young Mary Robinson was also impressed by the volume (McCarthy and Kraft xxxii). She "read them with rapture; [and] thought them the most beautiful Poems [she] had ever seen, and considered the woman who could invent such poetry, as the most to be envied of human creatures" (Robinson, Memoirs 55).

From her childhood Barbauld had been acquainted with leading intellectual figures of the day, particularly Dissenters like Joseph Priestley. Her success with Poems opened doors to the literary circles of London. Rodgers notes that the letters and memoirs of the time show literary society to be small and intimate, with chief writers knowing each other well and keeping in constant contact. Those who lived in the country like More and Barbauld made regular trips to London (Rodgers 80). Her female literary acquaintances included Elizabeth Montagu, Hester Chapone, Joanna Baillie, and Hannah More.

More and Barbauld developed a warm friendship despite their widely differing religious and political beliefs. According to More they felt "no envy or malice towards each other" (Rodgers 81). Barbauld wrote much religious verse, suggesting that faith empowered her not with the moral responsibility of More's idea of the separate spheres, but "with purpose, vigour, courage, and activity that is not gendered" (McCarthy and Kraft xxv-xxvi). But both religion and politics were powerful forces in the late eighteenth century, and not everyone was prepared to disregard Barbauld's convictions. Horace Walpole, a close friend of More's, wrote to her of Barbauld: "I have neither read her verses, nor will. As I have not your aspen conscience, I cannot forgive the heart of a woman that is party per pale blood and tenderness, that curses our clergy and feels for negroes"

(qtd. in Rodgers 112). Wordsworth, too, had his vision clouded by these issues, saying Barbauld "was spoiled as a poetess by being a dissenter, and connected with a dissenting academy," but he still felt her to be the first among literary women (qtd. in Rodgers 149).

Barbauld herself was very conscious of the potentially divisive force of religion and politics. When Maria Edgeworth wrote of her father's idea for a magazine written solely by women, Barbauld responded that she thought it a bad idea as she felt political, religious, and moral differences would prevent many women wanting to appear in print alongside one another. Barbauld said that realistically there is "no bond of union among literary women, any more than among literary men," and she even mentioned Hannah More by name as probably not wanting to publish with her, as much as they would both be reluctant to publish alongside Mary Hays or Mary Wollstonecraft (Rodgers 133). Yet More and Barbauld were united by their unusual public position, their moral beliefs, and their conservative outlook on the education and position of women in society; both profited from their writing but, to protect their sense of decorum, refused to see themselves as working in a vocation (Ross 229).

The poetic silence that resulted from Anna Letitia Barbauld's marriage was broken in 1791, again at her

brother's encouragement, with her publication of Epistle to William Wilberforce, her poem in support of Wilberforce's rejected anti-slavery bill. From 1796 Barbauld contributed to the Monthly Magazine which John Aikin was editing (Lonsdale 300), and she also worked as an editor and reviewer. During the period of her husband's sickness and the grief experienced after his death, Barbauld did not write much. She eventually returned to poetry with Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, A Poem, in which she predicted the eventual decay of Europe, expecting literature and philosophy to live on only in the New World. Written during a period of long war and impoverishment, it was very unpopular.<sup>17</sup>

Barbauld was harshly criticised, even by her friends, for attempting satire and meddling in politics, and was attacked mercilessly in the Quarterly:

Our old acquaintance Mrs Barbauld turned satirist!  
The last thing we should have expected, and, now  
that we have seen her satire, the last thing we  
could have desired . . . . But she must excuse us if  
we think she has wandered from the course in which  
she was respectable and useful, and miserably  
mistaken both her powers and her duty . . . (qtd.  
in Rodgers 140-41)

Barbauld was so mortified by the hostile reaction that she published no more poetry in her lifetime. In fact, in the 52 years of her life that followed the publication of Poems (containing 33 poems), Barbauld published only

---

<sup>17</sup>See William Keach's article "A Regency Prophecy and the End of Anna Barbauld's Career" (Studies in Romanticism 33 (1994) 569-77) for more detail on the poem and the critical reaction to it.

22 more poems herself (some seven or eight were published without her permission). In old age she sometimes spoke of collecting all her poems, published and unpublished, to be printed. But it was not until after her death that her niece, Lucy Aikin, edited and published her works, presenting 52 new poems to the public, though rejecting some pieces (McCarthy and Kraft xxi). The new poems included simple and direct lines on her experience of bereavement, pain, resignation, and contentment, including "some of her best poems," suggesting that her private poetic voice differed markedly from her public persona (Rodgers 143).<sup>18</sup>

Like More's, Barbauld's public persona is conspicuous in its modesty, though this is expressed in her poetry rather than in prefaces and dedications. Though they invite a biographical reading because they abound with the autobiographical "I," her poems also slightly repel such a reading by obscuring titles, people and places. The effect of half-disclosure is to make them seem as though they were not meant for the public eye -- they are more like overheard private musings. Privacy was the realm of woman so this strategy helps Barbauld to emphasise her femininity, indicating both that she is writing of private themes and that she is

---

<sup>18</sup>McCarthy also notes that her published and unpublished poems are different, observing that in the published poems the personal is encoded in displaced forms (120).

reluctant to present the details of her life to the world (McCarthy 117).

Barbauld also frequently refers to the feebleness of her muse in an effort to establish her modesty. In one of her earliest poems, "Corsica, Written in the Year 1769," Barbauld refers to her muse as "A British Muse . . . weak and powerless" as she launches into a lengthy poem on the Corsican fight for independence. In the same poem, as she contemplates the fame to be bestowed upon Paoli, the leader of the fight, she says that his name is one that

. . . some Muse,  
More worthy of the theme, shall consecrate  
To after-ages, and applauding worlds  
Shall bless the godlike man who saved his country.

Barbauld frequently employs this method in her poetry to emphasise her expected modesty and lack of ambition. Similarly, in "The Invitation: To Miss B-----" Barbauld closes the poem thus:

Here cease my song. Such arduous themes require  
A master's pencil, and a poet's fire:  
Unequal far such bright designs to paint,  
Too weak her colours, and her lines too faint,  
My drooping Muse folds up her fluttering wing,  
And hides her head in the green lap of spring.

Yet these lines come after a long poem that has touched on numerous "arduous themes." In "To Mrs P-----, with some Drawings of Birds and Insects" Barbauld also stresses her poetic limitations:



Nor that commanding glance strike through the heart,  
 When meaner beauties shall have leave to shine,  
 And crowds divide the homage lately thine,  
 Not with the transient praise those charms can boast  
 Shall thy fair fame and gentle deeds be lost:  
 Some pious hand shall thy weak limbs sustain,  
 And pay thee back these generous cares again;  
 Thy name shall flourish, by the good approved,  
 Thy memory honoured, and thy dust beloved.

An apparent role model for Barbauld was the early-eighteenth-century poet, Elizabeth Rowe. In "Verses on Mrs Rowe" Barbauld praises the religious poet for her combination of "Christian meekness" and "poet's fire," for her love of her work but shunning of praise, which allowed her to be "with love, with health, with fame, and friendship blest." Barbauld calls on Rowe thus:

Bright pattern of thy sex, be thou my Muse;  
 Thy gentle sweetness through my soul diffuse:  
 Let me thy palm, though not thy laurel share,  
 And copy thee in charity and prayer: --  
 Though for the bard my lines are far too faint,  
 Yet in my life let me transcribe the saint.

Again, Barbauld denigrates her own poetic ability but there is a sense of longing in the poem, a longing that she too may balance the requirements of femininity with literary success.

The problem with fame was that it was a mixed blessing. If the woman poet could maintain an unimpeachable reputation by conforming to the critics' perceptions of what a woman should be, do, and say, then fame could be acceptable. Barbauld's "masculine"

tendencies in her poetry, however, meant that fame brought criticism in a period when the inclination was increasingly toward developing a feminine literary sphere. She showed a range of poetical subjects and styles, and could not be easily categorised as having either a masculine or feminine sensibility (McCarthy and Kraft xxiii). Barbauld's reaction to her fame was to modestly deflect her celebrity and quietly yearn for the ability to balance the conflicting aspects of the woman poet's lot.

#### iv Anna Seward

A poet with far more overt confidence in her abilities than Barbauld, and less deference in her demeanour than More, was Anna Seward. According to Lonsdale, "she projected herself for many years as perhaps the most prominent and formidable woman writer of the later century" (313). Like both More and Barbauld, Seward was provincially based. Unlike the other women, she seems not to have made regular trips to London (perhaps because of her commitment to looking after her senile parent), instead fostering a literary circle around herself (Lonsdale 312). Although Seward was not directly involved in the literary circles of London, she did have an extensive literary correspondence, including Helen Maria Williams and Hester Thrale Piozzi, and she

was friends with William Hayley and Sir Walter Scott. Her father, a poet and a supporter of women's access to literature, was the Canon of Lichfield Cathedral, and Seward lived in Lichfield all her life.

Lichfield had no shortage of intellectual and literary figures: its two most famous sons were Samuel Johnson and Erasmus Darwin, Darwin acting as Seward's mentor. Her literary ambitions developed in her mid-thirties, seemingly indulged as a result of the termination of various attachments to young men out of obedience to her father (Scott x).<sup>19</sup> She was surrounded by a circle of admirers whom she flattered and who flattered her, although, according to one commentator, she did not really have the knack for making friends (Moulton iv: 541). She became a regular contributor to the Gentleman's Magazine.

She quickly established her literary reputation with the publication of her Elegy on Captain Cook (1780) and her Monody on Major Andre (1781), which went through successive editions until 1821. These poems were followed by numerous other volumes that were popular, all going through several editions, if not necessarily

---

<sup>19</sup>Seward had written poetry from a young age but "literature was deemed an undesirable pursuit for . . . the heiress of an independent fortune . . . destined to occupy a considerable rank in society." Her mother discouraged her versifying and her father also withdrew his support, apparently worried that his daughter would turn into "that dreaded phenomenon, a learned lady" (Scott vii).

critical successes. During the 1780s and early 1790s there was such a large number of reviews and counter reviews, poems to and by Seward, that Lonsdale refers to them as being so pervasive as to defy brief summary (312). In 1789 Seward listed seven distinguished contemporary women poets in the Gentleman's Magazine -- Barbauld, More, Helen Maria Williams, Hester Piozzi, Elizabeth Carter, Hannah Cowley, and Charlotte Smith -- discreetly leaving it to the editor to add herself (Lonsdale xxxv). Her admirers called her the Swan of Lichfield, a title she seems to have regarded as not unmerited (Moulton iv: 542). To many, Anna Seward was the epitome of the gushing, provincial, sentimental Bluestocking, but to others hers was a model of a literary woman's life (Todd, British 601).

Seward had very definite ideas on poetry and was not afraid to voice them. Unlike More and Barbauld she saw poetry as her vocation, not in a financial sense but more in terms of a moral obligation (Lonsdale xxxvii). Seward was not afraid to venture into the realm of criticism and is notorious for her dislike of Johnson's character and for her hostility towards the adulation he received upon his death (something she addresses in her poetry).<sup>20</sup> Her

---

<sup>20</sup>Sonnet lxviii. "On the Posthumous Fame of Doctor Johnson"

Well it becomes thee, Britain, to avow  
 Johnson's high claims! -- [y]et boasting that his fires  
 Were of unclouded lustre, Truth retires  
 Blushing, and Justice knits her solemn brow;  
 The eyes of Gratitude withdraw the glow

lofty perception of poetry also meant that she was often a rigorous critic of her fellow female poets. Seward quarrelled in print with Clara Reeve and was critical of More, Smith, and Piozzi's verse (Lonsdale 313). Her dislike of the sonnets of Charlotte Smith -- she called them "a perpetual dun on pity" -- Curran attributes to professional jealousy (Introduction xxv), but Seward, as well as bemoaning Smith's persistently melancholy tone, based her criticism on Smith's non-Petrarchan form.

Seward published her own volume of sonnets in 1799, towards the end of her career, and the publication illustrates her confidence in her ability. The Preface to the volume is a didactic treatise on the suitability of the sonnet to the English language (Smith had also discussed this in her 1797 volume, but more briefly) and makes no apologies, nor offers any excuses, for her poeticising (Gibson 84). Seward also prefaces her own sonnets with two poems penned by men in her praise, hardly a modest act for a woman poet. In introducing the second part of her volume, her paraphrases from Horace, she says that she submitted her work to two male friends

---

His moral strain inspired. -- Their zeal requires  
 That thou should'st better guard the sacred lyres,  
 Sources of thy bright fame, than to bestow  
 Perfection's wreath on him, whose ruthless hand,  
 Goaded by jealous rage, the laurels tore,  
 That Justice, Truth, and Gratitude demand  
 Should deck those lyres till time shall be no more.  
 A radiant course did Johnson's glory run,  
 But large the spots that darken'd on its sun.

for revision and correction and they praised them, hence she is "indifferent to the expected cavils of illiberal criticism."

However, the pen of the critics appears to have been somewhat of a preoccupation with Seward. Walter Scott felt that she was jealous of critical authority when exercised over her own or her friends' work (Scott xxiv). Numerous poems remonstrate with the critics in general and Johnson in particular. One example is her "Epistle to Nathaniel Lister, Esq. of Lichfield, on Having Read his Verses in Manuscript, Written December 1786":

And mark the scribbling Serpent's station,  
 Artificer of defamation!  
 Who, sore beneath the general sense  
 Of his vain Muse's impotence,  
 Turns public Critic, to supply  
 His spleen, and gaunt necessity;  
 Breathes purchas'd praise, in servile tone,  
 On lays as meagre as his own,  
 And with rapacious spite abuses  
 Each happier votary of the muses.  
 Behold, from day-light cautious screen'd,  
 His kennel-dirt, with labour glean'd,  
 This self-elected censor fling,  
 This dull, insidious, nameless thing . . .

O, wise art thou those paths to shun,  
 Where much is lost, and little won . . .

The popularity of Seward's poetry was shortlived. She was strongly influenced by the cult of sensibility and her poems were largely sentimental and effusive. Although she was immensely popular during the 1780s, as sensibility lost favour so too did the reputation of her

works. Seward's work was criticised as ornamental and affected, and her elaborate and obscure style dated quickly (Wordsworth, Introduction to Seward).

Ironically, given her own criticism of the Della Cruscan poet Robert Merry ("All his poems that I have seen are a heap of fustian vulgarity, and nonsense . . ." (qtd. in Hargreaves-Mawdsley 216)), Seward's poetry was seen by some as imitating the Della Cruscan school of obscurity and tinsel, Llangollen Vale in particular (Wordsworth, Introduction to Seward).

Despite her fading popularity Seward had one eye on posterity and as her health failed she began to prepare her works and correspondence for posthumous publication, which she asked Walter Scott to edit. Scott reluctantly accepted the task of presenting her works to the public, mindful that taste had changed, but declined to publish her letters, which she left with an Edinburgh bookseller anyway (Moulton iv: 543). When they were published, all six volumes, they attracted much criticism. Mary Russell Mitford said, in 1811, that Seward's letters were "affected, sentimental, and lackadaisical to the highest degree; and her taste is even worse than her execution" (qtd. in Moulton iv: 543).

Despite Seward's public profile and literary confidence, she did not concern herself with the issue of fame in her poetry. Or rather, she did not give any

indication that she perceived a conflict between her role as a woman and her literary career, for fame in connection with others appears frequently in Seward's copious output. Generally fame is mentioned in terms of military glory, as in her Elegy On Captain Cook and her Monody on Major Andre. Seward also repeatedly refers to literary fame but generally in association with male figures such as Johnson, Garrick, and William Hayley. For example, her poem "Monody on the Death of David Garrick, Esq." asks the muses to give him their "loudest fame," engraving on their shrines Garrick's "unrivall'd name." Similarly, in "Epistle to Mr Romney, Being Presented by him with a Picture of William Hayley, Esq.," one of her many poems concerned with Hayley, she writes:

Though ne'er beheld the actual form he wears,  
My spirit thus thy Hayley's fame reveres;  
Marks his dear Muse her charming strains extend,  
And boasts the privilege to call him Friend.

Despite frequently wishing fame upon her literary friends, Seward is careful not to prize fame for herself. Other gifts are considered to be more desirable than celebrity:

An honest heart is all to me,  
Nor soil, nor time, makes that look old;  
And dearer shall the jewel be  
Than youth, or beauty, fame, or gold.  
(from "Hast Thou Escaped the Cannon's Ire?")

"To Charles Simpson . . ." makes a similar comment:

O! while this great essay of learned art  
 Meets thy clear judgment, charms thy liberal heart,  
 Still may the donor thy kind friendship claim,  
 Than gold more welcome, and more wish'd than fame!

Literary modesty does not seem to have come naturally to the confident Seward, but like More and Barbauld she too could denigrate her own poetic ability:

Ingenious Romney, in thy liberal heart  
 We feel thy virtues rivals of thy art;  
 Indulgent wilt thou then accept my lay,  
 Though faintly gilded by poetic ray,  
 When it would tell how much to thee I owe,  
 That on these walls thy Hayley's features glow?  
 (from "Epistle to Mr Romney . . .")

Yet Seward also occasionally allowed herself to admit the attractions of fame:

Ah! why have I indulged my dazzled sight  
 With scenes in Hope's delusive mirror shewn?  
 Scenes, that too seldom human life hath known  
 In more than vision rise; -- but O! how bright  
 The Mind's soft sorceress pour'd her rosy light  
 On every promis'd good; -- oft on the boon  
 Which might at Fame's resounding shrine be won,  
 Then lanc'd its beams where all the Loves invite!  
 (Sonnet xvii)

The one poem that dwells on female literary fame is Poem to the Memory of Lady Millar. Lady Millar had encouraged numerous poets with her poetry sessions at Bath-Easton, Seward among them. The poem begins by asserting that to be celebrated in poetry is not the sole prerogative of those who achieve military glory, but is equally merited by deserving females:

Not to your shades alone, ye martial Dead,  
 The scatter'd flow'rs of plaintive rhyme belong,  
 Tho' Valour, marching round your grave, may shed  
 The richest seeds of elegiac song;  
 Tho' Fame's proud chissel o'er your trophied tomb  
 Hangs the bright falchion high, and bends the  
 warrior-plume.

When Death with silent footstep prints the plain,  
 And spreads o'er female worth his sable pall,  
 Shall Poesy renounce the mournful train,  
 Shall her melodious tears refuse to fall,  
 Where Friendship's sighs, where Love's deep groans  
 invite,  
 And Virtue calls aloud to aid the solemn rite?

Seward links virtue and ambition in Millar, two aspects  
 rarely regarded as compatible for a woman, and credits  
 Millar with inducing her to publish:

Benignant Laura! to the Muses dear,  
 Thy virtuous mind with bright ambition glow'd,  
 To tune the lyre, the votive shrine to rear,  
 By Science hallow'd in their fair abode;  
 From sterling wit to clear each base alloy,  
 And fill with purest fires the crystal lamp of joy.

With high-soul'd pleasure, and ingenuous truth,  
 'Twas thine to nurse the hopes of young Renown;  
 'Twas thine to elevate the views of youth;  
 To look, with calm disdain, superior down  
 On Pride's cold frown, and Fashion's pointed leer;  
 On Envy's serpent lie, and Folly's apish sneer . . .

Tho' all unknown to Fame its artless reed,  
 My trembling hand, at thy kind bidding, tried  
 To crop the blossoms of th' uncultur'd mead,  
 The primrose pale, the briar's blushing pride,  
 And on thy vase with true devotion laid  
 The tributary flow'rs---too soon, alas! to fade.

Safe thro' thy gentle ordeal's lambent flame  
 My Muse, aspiring dar'd the fiercer blaze,  
 Which Judgement lights before the hill of Fame,  
 With calm determin'd hand and searching gaze;  
 But for thy lib'ral praise, with awful dread,  
 Far from those burning bars my trembling feet had  
 fled.

Despite dwelling on Millar's contribution to fostering poetic fame, Seward is careful to emphasise Millar's moral goodness as much as her literary efforts, praising her for her shunning of the "public view." Says Seward:

Thus while with fervent zeal the auspicious Nine  
 O'er Laura's form the classic cestus threw,  
 Hung all their golden harps within her shrine,  
 And ting'd her wreaths with undecaying hue,  
 Yet, Charity, thy soft seraphic flame  
 A purer glory shed around her spotless name . . .

Nor yet that worth, which shunn'd the public view,  
 Wilt thou, O mournful muse! refuse to sing;  
 Each virtue rather to its shade pursue,  
 And stoop from shining heights thy trembling wing;  
 Teach the soft sex whence genuine transport flows,  
 Tell them, domestic joy the fullest bliss bestows.

This beauteous lesson may they wisely read  
 In the white page of Laura's vital state;  
 And emulate each great, each gentle deed,  
 That crown'd her fame, or that disarm'd her fate;  
 For sky-rob'd Innocence can smiling brave  
 The dart of instant death, and triumph o'er the  
 grave.

Once again, female fame is only acceptable in combination with virtue and domesticity. And lest her audience think her too confident in her own poeticising, Seward closes by saying:

Yet must this verse thy kind indulgence crave,  
 Thou, who wilt most perceive its failing art;  
 Who view'st, slow wand'ring round thy Laura's grave,  
 Her juster image in thy widow'd heart;  
 For the fond wish to bid her merits live,  
 Forgive the fainter tints, the erring line forgive!

Seward regards her own fame, with a rare display of humour, in "To Ch. Clarke, Esq. on his Request to Obtain the Author's Signature Written with her Own Hand"

(Impromptu). These seem to be some of the least contrived lines on fame that we have from a woman poet of this period:

Our self-inscrib'd name, as the scroll were a  
treasure,  
 When strangers request, in their fanciful pleasure,  
 It flatters the hope that our bark may be scudding  
 From this corporal climate of beef and of pudding,  
 To the high shrine of Fame, where posterity know  
men,  
 And we deem such request a right prosperous omen.  
 But gales inauspicious oft blow from that region,  
 And for one who attains it they blow back a legion;  
 Then in spite of Clark's wish, and his brother's  
kind record,<sup>21</sup>  
 Whose rays from that shrine my pale streamers have  
checker'd,  
 Its winds will too probably soon blow from leeward,  
 And sink in oblivion's cold waves Anna Seward.

Seward's comments are perceptive. She acknowledges that it is men who are known by posterity, and also directly states that femininity and fame are not necessarily perceived as appropriate companions: when domestic women aspire to fame "inauspicious" gales blow back. She also acknowledges that for every woman who achieves success, there are many who fail. The poet would have been depressed by, but perhaps not surprised at, the eventual fulfilment of the prophecy of her closing line.

A Victorian anthologist of English poetesses in 1883, Eric Robertson, felt that the esteem Seward earned

---

<sup>21</sup>The accompanying note to the poem, by Seward, tells the reader that the brother of the gentleman addressed had published a volume in 1793 which included descriptions of Lichfield "and very flattering mention . . . of the Author of this Miscellany."

was because she was "a much more perfect mistress of her conduct than she was of the poet's pen" (qtd. in Moulton iv: 542), and certainly her virtue was never in doubt. Her education was not as thorough as that of the original Bluestockings as she had not been taught the classical languages, but she was still a learned woman for the time. Her sense of poetry as a vocation distinguishes her from More, Barbauld and their predecessors but she was still conservative in her approach to the position of women in society. As with the Bluestockings, More, and Barbauld, Seward's acceptability as a publishing woman came largely from her impeccable reputation; the two senses of fame were again inseparable.

#### v Helen Maria Williams

A literary friend and correspondent of Seward's was Helen Maria Williams. Williams was a generation younger than More, Barbauld, and Seward but in her initial period of poetic fame she moved in the same circles. Born in Wales to a Dissenting family, Williams wrote poetry at an early age and was only 20 when she went to London armed with Edwin and Eltruda: A Legendary Tale, which she published in 1782. It was well received and a wide literary acquaintance followed, including Fanny Burney, William Hayley, Robert Burns, Dr Johnson, Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Montagu, and Seward (Todd, British 720).

Williams published An Ode on the Peace in 1783, and Peru in 1784 (dedicated to Montagu). Poems (1786) was successfully published by subscription, dedicated to the Queen. The subscription list included such names as Mrs More, Mrs Carter, Miss J. Baillie, and Miss Seward. It was followed in 1788 by the publication of a poem against the slave trade.

Williams' association with the conservative figures of the literary circles of London did not endure. By the 1790s she was moving in more radical circles as a sympathiser with the French Revolution. Unlike Barbauld and Seward, Williams did not lose her enthusiasm for the cause: in 1791 she left Britain for France and changed from sentimental poet to prose chronicler of history. Her extreme views, and later her irregular personal life (she lived with a divorced man), served to separate her from the early generation of women poets, and align her politically with radical writers like Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays (Todd, British 721). Many of her friends were deeply offended at what they perceived as her moral lapse, Seward publicly denouncing Williams' continuing enthusiasm for the French Revolution in 1793 (Lonsdale 312). Nevertheless, her initial period of fame came from her fashionable verse of the 1780s.

Williams' poetry, like Seward's, was in the sentimental vein. Her poetry attempted themes that were

political and public but in an acceptably feminine manner. That is, as Kelly explains, she wrote as a woman of feeling, and employed many topics and devices of the literature of Sensibility ("Revolutionary" 119). Like More and Barbauld she wrote sentimentally against the slave trade, and her long poem Peru had a political subtext against colonisation. In the March 1787 issue of the European Magazine a sonnet appeared, entitled "On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress," under the pseudonym of "Axiologus." Williams' sensibility had impressed sixteen-year-old William Wordsworth, leading to the publication of his first poem (Wordsworth, Introduction to Williams).

Again, despite popularity and frequent publications Williams cultivated the image of a modest, sensitive woman reluctant to publish. Williams' 1786 volume Poems marked the height of her fame as a poet (Wordsworth, Introduction to Williams). The Preface to Poems talks about her apprehension in "submitting these Poems to the judgement of the Public," excusing them as "written under the disadvantages of a confined education." Williams says she was persuaded to publish Edwin and Eltruda by Dr Kippis, though it had been composed "to amuse some solitary hours and without any view to publication." The "favourable reception" the "little poem" met with encouraged her "still farther to meet the public eye." She asserts that she has revised those poems in the

volume which have been published previously to "render them somewhat more worthy of perusal," and that the other poems are "offered with a degree of humility." Her affinity with sensibility is clearly evident, as she claims that a tear fills her eye in thanks for the friendships which enabled her to publish Poems by subscription (Williams A3-A5). The advertisement that precedes Peru in the volume explains why the poem is not a full historical narration of the fall of the Peruvian Empire by denigrating her poetic ability: she is "conscious of her utter inability to execute such a design" (Williams D3-D4).

Williams has no poem that directly concerns itself with female literary fame. It is really only in her verse dedication to Mrs Montagu, in the revised version of Peru, that the subject of fame arises at all and then, as with the other poets, Williams is eager to deny her own poetic ability:

O might a transient spark of genius fire  
 The fond effusions of her fearful youth;  
 Then should thy virtues live upon her lyre,  
 And give to harmony the charm of truth.

Vain wish! they ask not the imperfect lay,  
 The weak applause her trembling accents breathe;  
 With whose pure radiance glory bends her ray,  
 Whom fame has circled with her fairest wreath.

Williams also does this in her "Epistle to Dr Moore" where she pleads "Oh for a muse less weak of wing" to do justice to her subject.

As with the other poems that touch on female literary fame, in the dedication to Montagu the two meanings of fame are virtually synonymous:

For this, while fame thro' each successive age  
On her exulting lip thy name shall breathe;  
While woman, pointing to thy finish'd page,  
Claims from imperious man the critic wreath;

Truth on her spotless record shall enroll  
Each moral beauty to her spirit dear;  
Paint in bright characters each grace of soul --  
While admiration pours a gen'rous tear.

Williams thus unites Montagu's literary achievements (as Shakespearean critic) with her impeccable moral reputation, though ambiguously praising her for setting the precedent of claiming the role of critic from "imperious man." Nevertheless, it is Montagu's ability to combine literary recognition and virtuous reputation that ensures her lasting fame.

#### vi Sharing Fame

Despite Barbauld's assertion that there was no bond of union among literary women, the poets often cross-referenced each other in their poetry and were frequently literary correspondents, if not close friends. As Williams' poem on Montagu and Barbauld's address to Mrs Rowe both illustrate, the poetic cross-referencing often provided an opportunity to overtly praise another woman writer. Although, because of the bounds of modesty, they

were unable to glory in their own fame and success, they could direct their pride in female literary success towards other worthy women writers. This phenomenon occurs repeatedly in this generation of women poets but also continues throughout the period. Marlon Ross discusses the notion of shared fame in relation to the later poet Felicia Hemans but his ideas apply equally well to these women publishing earlier in the period. He argues that for women poets the only acceptable fame was reflected or shared fame and that the women were conscious of the reputation of one affecting the reputation of their sex in general (Ross 300-01). Addressing one another in poetry becomes a means by which they publicly encourage one another's endeavours and share the potential burden of fame.

In 1774 Mary Scott wrote The Female Advocate to extend Duncombe's original rollcall of worthy female writers, and included Elizabeth Montagu and other first-generation Bluestockings, along with Anna Barbauld (Myers 273-74). Amongst the poetic tributes within this first wave of publishing women poets, More made a flattering reference to Barbauld in her poem "Sensibility," while modestly disparaging her own ability:

Nor, Barbauld, shall my glowing heart refuse  
 Its tribute to thy virtues or thy Muse;  
 This humble merit shall at least be mine,  
 The Poet's chaplet for thy brow to twine;  
 My verse thy talents to the world shall teach,  
 And praise the genius it despairs to reach . . .

to which Barbauld responded with praise for More's "Sacred Dramas" in a letter to her (Rodgers 81-82).

Seward wrote a flattering poem on More, "Written After Having Visited Miss More, and her Sisters at Cowslip Green, Near Bristol, in August 1791." She praises the city of

. . . Bristol; that hears her More's distinguish'd  
name
 Wafted, by echoes, round the shrine of Fame.  
 On whose mild brow she sees bright laurels twine,  
 Cull'd from their choicest bowers by all the nine,  
 Enwreath'd with charity's assuasive balm,  
 And faith, and virtue's never-dying palm.

And ye, sweet satellites, that gently bear  
 Your lesser radiance round this beamy star,  
 Aiding her pious efforts to impart  
 Religion's lustre to the youthful heart,  
 That else in lightless ignorance must stray,  
 Where guilt's fell snares the indigent betray,  
 Ye fair examples of an heedless age,  
 Ye glowing votaries of the sacred page,  
 O! may your virtues wake the just desire,  
 "To live like you, and be what we admire!"

Seward addressed a sonnet to her "Poetic sister" Williams (Lonsdale 413), and Williams praised Seward's verse in her "Ode to the Peace." Seward also dedicated a poem to the great actress, Mrs Siddons, as did Williams, writing:

Yet the heart says, respect a rival claim,  
 A claim that rises in unvanquish'd strife;  
 Behold, dividing still the palm of Fame,  
 Her radiant Science, and her spotless Life!

As always, literary or public success and virtue are inextricably interwoven.

The women not only wrote of each other but were also addressed by male poets. As well as being poetically addressed by the young William Wordsworth, Williams also had a poem written to her by the Della Cruscan poet Edward Jerningham (Kelly, Women 40). Seward was addressed by many poets, and was flattered and regarded as a patron by H.F.Cary, Thomas Lister, Thomas Park, and William Newton (Lonsdale 312).

Of course, not all references to these famous women were flattering and those who were against the education of women, or an individual's political or religious views, for example, often made them the victims of satire. More was satirised by John Wolcot, as a plagiarist amongst other things, and by Charles Pigott as a self-serving conservative (Myers 286-87). Barbauld was treated with hostility by both Coleridge and Charles Lamb over petty matters (see Rodgers 147-49). Gossip was also a risk that famous women exposed themselves to, and while the woman poets I have discussed largely had unquestionable reputations, Williams certainly suffered from gossip when she became known as a radical.

Although Hannah More, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Anna Seward, and Helen Maria Williams were very different individuals they did have some things in common. They were all publishing women poets in the 1770s and 1780s, they were all famous, and they all moved in literary

circles. Of their fame there can be no doubt. Most conspicuously, the numerous editions of their works attest to their popularity. Barbauld had five editions of her Poems published between 1773 and 1777; More six volumes of poetry between 1773 and 1786; Seward multiple editions of her monody on Major Andre, elegy on Cook, and poetical novel Louisa; and Williams had seven poetical volumes published between 1782 and 1791 (Curran, "Romantic Poetry: The I" 187).

Other indices of fame also testify to their renown. More and Barbauld were both included in Richard Samuel's painting of "The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain" along with first-generation Bluestockings and prominent learned women (Myers 276). Seward's prominence enabled her to act as a patron to aspiring young male poets, including William Newton the uneducated Derbyshire Minstrel. More, of course, patronised Ann Yearsley; Williams became a leading figure in salon circles; and Barbauld took an interest in young poets (addressing Coleridge in a poem, for example).

More, Barbauld, Seward, and Williams all continued to write into the nineteenth century, but tended to focus on genres other than poetry. Their influence on women's poetry, however, was far-reaching. They made poetry seem more accessible to the middle classes, as none of these successful women had as good an education as the original

Bluestockings. They also made publishing poetry a viable occupation for women, showing that it was possible to combine a large literary output and a virtuous reputation. They did not fully maintain the goal of the Bluestockings to participate in the male literary tradition, instead tending to encourage separate spheres for male and female writers, while not necessarily subscribing to those spheres themselves. Nor did they continue the Bluestocking aim of reforming education for women, or at least not in the manner advocated by the early network: by and large, More, Barbauld, Seward, and Williams publicly advocated keeping women in their conventional role, a role they themselves strained against. They were liberal with regard to some social issues, such as slavery, but they were more conservative than the Bluestockings on the "woman question," Wollstonecraft famously attacking Barbauld on this issue.

During the 1790s Britain experienced a period of social and political upheaval. As Marlon Ross observes, the fact that the second generation of women were more timid in their feminism than their Bluestocking predecessors allowed them to "make headway as famous authors in an age of reactionary retreat" (216-17). However, a new group of women poets gained prominence from the 1780s into the 1790s, and these contrasted with More, Barbauld, and Seward in their political views, their financial circumstances, and their public images.

The most famous of the publishing women poets in this unsettled period were Charlotte Smith, Ann Yearsley, and Mary Robinson, whom I shall look at in detail next.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE REVOLUTIONARY YEARS

#### i The Second Wave

The late 1780s and early 1790s saw a change in the Bluestocking lifestyle, as women of the early generation of Blues died or retired from social life. The women poets whom they had inspired, Barbauld, Seward, Williams, and More, continued to write, but the idea of a shared network of social and literary activity for women became increasingly unviable. The social instability associated with political events in England and France, the evangelical revival, and the increasing commercialisation of literature overrode any unifying influence that gender might exert. Differences in beliefs, differences in reasons for publishing, and differences in class all hindered the maintenance of women poets as a distinct social group.

This chapter looks in detail at the relationship between fame and three women poets: Charlotte Smith, Ann Yearsley, and Mary Robinson. Essentially, these women were contemporaries of Barbauld, Smith, Williams and More: all of them published during the 1790s. However, their motivation for publication, and their approach to

fame and the career of a poet, were vastly different from those discussed earlier. Smith, Yearsley, and Robinson all published out of a need for financial gain; all lacked the benefits of a nurturing circle of literary peers; and all were disadvantaged by inadequate spouses. In effect, they had less status and respectability than the women poets who were nurtured by the Bluestockings (although, as already indicated, Williams' situation changed with her move to prose writing in the 1790s).

For this new generation of publishing women poets, because they relied on the income they could generate from their writing, fame was a measure of success and vital to their livelihood. Yet all three faced similar ideological pressures concerning modesty and femininity to those faced by the earlier poets. So, how did they balance the desire for financial success and its accompanying fame with the requirements of femininity?

## ii Charlotte Smith

Charlotte Turner Smith earned her fame first as a poet, then as a novelist. She was born into a good family and lived in a world "of genteel elegance," spending her early years at Bignor Park in Sussex (Curran, Introduction xix). Her mother died when she was young, and for a time she was raised by an aunt who saw

that she was taught skills appropriate to finding a husband rather than given a "bluestocking" education. Her father, however, encouraged her early poetry writing and she published some verse in the Lady's Magazine in the early 1760s (Todd, British 623). Her comfortable lifestyle came to an end when her father remarried, as he decided his nuptials were an opportune time to arrange a match for his daughter. Consequently, in 1765, at the age of fifteen, Charlotte married twenty-one-year-old Benjamin Smith (Ehrenpreis viii).

The marriage was not a success. Benjamin was financially incompetent, and Charlotte's letters indicate he was both unfaithful and physically abusive (see McKillop 238-39). Nevertheless, the union produced twelve children, nine of whom survived infancy. Ten years into the marriage, her father-in-law died, leaving a complicated will which resulted in protracted litigation for three decades, and Smith worked tirelessly to try and secure her children's inheritance for them. In 1783 the family's financial woes reached the stage where Benjamin was imprisoned for debt. Charlotte accompanied him to prison and from there arranged publication of her Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Essays, which appeared shortly before he was released in May 1784. She had to finance publication herself, though she was aided by her former neighbour, the poet William Hayley, whom she approached for help after she had been

refused by several publishers (Todd, British 624). Following Benjamin's release from prison, the family moved to France to escape from his creditors, and there Smith took on translation work.

In 1787 Charlotte Smith separated from her husband. He fled to Scotland to live but still made financial claims upon her, as he was entitled to do as her husband (Lonsdale 366). Smith's recourse was her writing. Poetry not being lucrative enough to support her large family, she turned to prose and produced almost a novel a year for a decade, from 1788 to 1799 (Curran, Introduction xxiii). Yet, to Smith, her novels were merely a means of subsistence and not a source of literary pride: "I am writing (pour vivre) another Novel which I hope the last" (qtd. in McKillop 245). The distinction between poetry and prose was important to Smith: "I love novels 'no more than a Grocer does figs'" (qtd. in Ehrenpreis ix-x). Smith never forgot where she came from, or what her children were entitled to, and her sense of "her genteel heritage and her claims to artistry" meant she was always more committed to her poetry than her prose (Curran, Introduction xxiii). Although her novels far surpassed her poetry in terms of profitability,

she valued poetry more for her reputation, and it was important for her own estimation of her worth as a writer. Since she felt that she was forced to

'live only to write and write only to live'. . .  
poetry made her other work more respectable.  
(Stanton 392-93)

Smith's valuing of her poetry over her novels also shows that she, like many of the women poets, had internalised the masculine literary hierarchy of genre.

Besides her numerous sonnets Smith published two long narrative poems expressing her views on events in France, namely The Emigrants (1793), and Beachy Head (1807). Smith was a sympathiser with the Revolution until, like many others, she reluctantly changed her views around 1793. The Emigrants, according to Curran, is the finest blank verse between The Task (1785) and The Prelude (1799) and a "missing link" in its interweaving of private and public, political and personal, its meditative absorption of the poet's surroundings, and its sense of universal existential crisis (Introduction xxiv). "It belongs not to a feeble and feminine hand to draw the bow of Ulysses," Smith wrote when dedicating The Emigrants to William Cowper. Her assumed modesty does not disguise the fact that she does exactly that: that is, draw the bow (Anderson 1). Matthew Bray interprets Beachy Head as Smith's most subversive work in its violation of the implicit code of patriotic discourse for the era, as she focuses on the Normans' civilising influence rather than on celebrating Anglo-Saxonism (157). Late in her career Smith also wrote poems for children, but her use of the sonnet form and her blend of

intense melancholy and vivid natural description became her trademark (Lonsdale 365).

According to Ralston, the sonnet appealed to women writers for several reasons. First, traditional topics of the sonnet were central to female experience: friendship, moral reflection, scenic description, and romantic love. Secondly, the sonnet was regarded as poetry of the private rather than the public sphere. It was also a form that emphasised the individual self, which, according to Ralston, appealed to the women poets and their strong personalities (125). Along with Seward, Williams, and Mary Robinson, Smith was one of the most popular sonnet writers at the close of the eighteenth century (Ralston 125). When the Elegiac Sonnets were published they proudly bore the name of the author, "Charlotte Smith, of Bignor Park in Sussex," who never hid behind the cloak of anonymity (Curran, Introduction xxii), and gave no clue as to the motivation for publication. They were a huge, immediate, and lasting success, eventually going through eleven editions (by 1851) and being translated into several languages (Wordsworth, Introduction to Smith). It was the fifth edition, published in 1789, that undeniably indicated Smith's arrival as a respected poet. Published by subscription, it listed over 700 <sup>subscribers</sup> ~~contributors~~, among them notables of society, literature, and politics. By 1800 her sonnets were housed in two volumes and adorned with

the engravings of the major illustrator Thomas Stothard (Curran, Introduction xxiii).

When the Elegiac Sonnets were first published, the reviewers, though impressed by the poetry, expressed some concern as to the author's melancholy (Lonsdale 365). The melancholy was no doubt a genuine response to the legal, financial, and emotional troubles that loomed over life, yet it was also part of a poetic persona that Smith shaped for public consumption. Judith Pascoe identifies Smith's carefully constructed persona as "the sorrowful Charlotte" (Staging 2).<sup>22</sup> The introspection of the poems invited the reader to associate the poetic persona with the poet, and Smith encouraged that perception in her prefaces by relating accounts of her own sorrows. Including her name and origins with her poems also helped construct her persona, because her readers could see her as an impoverished gentlewoman, worthy of public notice. Having gained the public's respect and sympathy with her poetry she could then turn to other works for profit (Labbe 68). She justified her literary career both to herself and to the public by focusing on herself as a maternal figure battling injustice on behalf of her children. In emphasising this aspect of her life, and

---

<sup>22</sup>Smith's sister indicated that the melancholy poetic persona was not Smith's natural nature, describing her as playful, witty and cheerful, particularly in her youth (Curran, Introduction xxvii). This aspect of Smith's personality is evident only in a small number of her poems, the best example of which is the gently amusing "Thirty-eight."

thereby creating a persona for public consumption, she was able to maintain respectability while simultaneously seeking financial success. She turned chivalry into a marketing tool, promoting her poetry as written by a woman in need, avoiding the charge of prostitution by references to her children and her social position (Labbe 68). Her growing awareness of the usefulness of her public persona, and her construction of it, can be traced in the prefaces to each edition of the Elegiac Sonnets (Pascoe, Staging 9-10).

In her later prefaces Smith emphasises that she had turned to literature in order to support her family, and that the sorrows she bears as a mother are numerous and painful. However, the Preface to the first and second editions of the Elegiac Sonnets does not directly refer to her dire financial situation but rather says she was moved to publish because her friends had multiplied copies of her sonnets, which had found their way into print in a "mutilated state" (similar to More's reasons for publishing The Bas Bleu). This implies a pride in her craft: she cares about the fate of her poems (Gavin 125). It is also, however, a familiar stratagem of the eighteenth century: "mutilated" work often provided an excuse to publish an authorised edition. Smith also says that "some very melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations these moments brought." This suggests that her original motivation for

writing was private, rather than public, gratification (Gavin 124). She refers to her sonnets as "little Poems" and is modest about her use of the sonnet form (Smith, Poems 3), showing the proper humility expected of a woman writer.

The Preface that accompanies the third and fourth editions still stresses her modesty, as she explains that she has added a few more sonnets "recovered from [her] acquaintance, to whom [she] had given them without thinking well enough of them at the time to preserve any copies [herself]" (Smith, Poems 3). This remark again indicates that originally Smith was not writing for publication, but also shows a changing attitude to her work. The public reception of her work gave these poems some value, and public opinion has more weight than her own estimation or that of her friends (Gavin 126). Smith has come to view her work differently since it has appeared in print. What was once personal has become disposable property. That Smith is now thinking about her poetic craft, not just "beguiling time," is shown by her discussion of how she is attempting the Italian model. The fact that she is now writing for an audience is also shown by the provision of notes for sources. This is also indicative of a desire not to be accused of plagiarism -- another sign of her growing sense of professionalism (Gavin 126). Smith is careful to retain the appropriate appearance of modesty, however, as her

attempts at the Italian sonnet come "with what success I know not" (Smith, Poems 4).

By the sixth edition (1792), Smith is far more assured and secure in her popularity, and devotes a large portion of the long Preface to defending herself against criticism of her monotonous tone. She provides an explanation for the melancholy tone of the poems, referring to her legal battles, thus making public her private troubles. Smith both plays for the reader's sympathy for her situation and defends her position as a publishing woman (Smith, Poems 4-6). Her defence of her melancholy tone gives credibility to the idea that she writes personally and honestly: that is, it gives credibility to her persona and encourages the reader to identify the persona with the poet (Gavin 128). In keeping with the requirements of the ideology of the feminine, at least superficially, she carefully notes for her readers that she is "well aware that for a woman -- 'The Post of Honour is a Private Station'" and that she prefers it to literary fame (Smith, Poems 6).

Smith closes the Preface with a veiled threat to detail more of the law case in the future, presumably to embarrass the participants into action, while claiming that her frequent appearances as an authoress stem directly from the actions of "those gentlemen" who delay the settlement. The Preface to the second volume of

poems (1797) makes good this threat as Smith delivers an angry and defensive diatribe against the ills that have befallen her and bewails her helplessness in the face of the protracted legal process. This preface was suppressed when the second edition was printed in 1800 (Smith, Poems 6).

The last poem of the first volume of the Elegiac Sonnets (the ever-expanding editions led to the sonnets being housed in two volumes) also points to the public image she wanted to establish for herself. "Verses Intended to Have Been Prefixed to the Novel of Emmeline, but then Suppressed" was originally entitled "To My Children" and summarises Smith's tribulations. Smith writes:

O'erwhelm'd with sorrow, and sustaining long  
 "The proud man's contumely, th'oppressor's wrong,"  
 Languid despondency, and vain regret,  
 Must my exhausted spirit struggle yet?  
 Yes! -- Robb'd myself of all that fortune gave,  
 Even of all hope -- but shelter in the grave,  
 Still shall the plaintive lyre essay its powers  
 To dress the cave of Care with Fancy's flowers,  
 Maternal Love the fiend Despair withstand,  
 Still animate the heart and guide the hand.  
 -- May you, dear objects of my anxious care,  
 Escape the evils I was born to bear!

By constructing herself as the wronged domestic woman she legitimised her writing, and was able to touch on themes that were deemed by the age as unsuitable for the female pen, such as politics and the legal system (Ehrenpreis x). By appealing to the effects of politics and other elements of the public sphere on the family and domestic

sphere she was operating within the feminine ideology and was able to criticise the public sphere. The success of her strategy is shown by a comment from Southey, who praised her because

[b]y having a large family, she is more humanised, more akin to common feelings, than most literary women. Though she has done more and better than other women writers, it has not been her whole employment -- she is not looking out for admiration and talking to show off. (qtd. in McKillop 252)

Not everyone, however, was impressed by the "sorrowful Charlotte" persona, and some criticised her public parading of personal woes (Ehrenpreis ix). Ralston suggests that Seward, for one, was harshly critical of Smith's "dun on pity," because Smith was incapable of finding consolation through nature or religion at the end of her melancholy poems (128). Smith certainly maintains a fairly consistently sorrowful voice in her poetry, particularly the sonnets; she projects a self of extreme sensitivity to suffering (Ralston 129). Her troubles are rarely referred to specifically; in fact, very few direct references are made to any aspect of her life, but her misfortunes pervade in terms of general tone (in her novels she was far less reticent, providing thinly disguised characterisations of her husband and others).

Smith was definitely aware of the persona that she was constructing. This is clearly illustrated by the

concern she expressed in a letter to her publisher Cadell in March 1794, in which she was "considering, with some mortification, a request by Sewell to publish her [Smith's] memoirs in the European Magazine, a tribute to her popularity and reputation in the early 1790s" (R. Taylor, "Evils" 313). She felt that her history of "sufferings & sorrows" made the prospect of her being "drawn & memoir'd" painful and potentially embarrassing. She feared that public disclosure of her husband's finances and her own tribulations would harm her literary career and affect her children adversely. Yet, as Taylor says,

[t]he image of the author as impoverished, self-sacrificing mother, conveyed autobiographically in her letters and prefaces and fictively in characters such as Mrs. Stafford in Emmeline, is one of the most pervasive and distinctive features of her work. (R. Taylor, "Evils" 313)

Smith asked Cadell to liaise with Sewell for her, to enable her to "escape being exhibited in a Magazine (for which I own I have no taste)" (qtd. in R. Taylor, "Evils" 317). Her reticence about being memoir'd shows that she by no means sanctioned carte blanche revelation of the details of her life. This would seem to indicate that Smith was consciously and carefully constructing a "self" for the public: the prospect of having her self written by someone else was highly unappealing. Also contributing to the idea that Smith carefully monitored material that was made available to the public, is her sister's information that she "left no posthumous works

whatever. The sweepings of her closet were, without exception, committed to the flames" (qtd. in Curran, Introduction xxvii).

Part of the reason Smith was so careful about how she was portrayed to the public was her absolute need for financial success. Although she spoke of her literary career with pride towards the end of her life, her first thought was necessarily money (Stanton 375). She hated the subscription method of publication because money was slow in coming in and it left her "a kind of literary beggar" (qtd. in Stanton 388). Unfortunately her legal problems meant she saw "no other prospect than being the slave of the Booksellers as long as my health or fancy hold out" (qtd. in McKillop 239). Some scholars suggest that Smith's sense of her own gentility meant that she lived beyond her means, as she attempted to keep her children in the style to which she had been accustomed, believing her writing to be a stop-gap measure only until the inheritance was settled. In a letter to her publisher Cadell she mentions that Bell, another publisher, treated her as

a miserable [Author] under the necessity of writing so many sheets a Day. This is but too true, but I have not yet learned to endure contempt that I very naturally wish to return, where I have always received the treatment of a Gentlewoman. (qtd. in R. Taylor, "Charlotte" 151-52)

Stanton's article "Charlotte Smith's 'Literary Business': Income, Patronage, and Indigence" provides much

interesting detail regarding Smith's finances. There is no doubt that her family suffered a series of tragedies, including injury and illness, that exacerbated her need for money. So how did Charlotte Smith, with her genteel heritage but desperate financial situation, deal with the conflict between the modesty required of her as a woman and the fame conferred on her as a financially successful author?

Essentially she constructed herself a public persona that legitimised her publishing her work. In this way she was able to retain her femininity and also speak out on controversial issues, traditionally assigned to the public sphere, because of her role as a mother battling injustice on behalf of her children. In choosing to stress her maternal, sorrowful image, however, Smith was not free to comment on poetic ambition and the desire for fame as a reward for her craft. The only success she can legitimately aspire to is financial success, because of her focus on her maternal duties. Not surprisingly, therefore, there are few direct references to fame, in particular female literary fame, in her poetry.

The comments that Smith does make concerning poetical aspirations are generally in regard to patronage. In Sonnet 19, "To Mr Hayley, on receiving some elegant lines from him," Smith describes her muse as inspired by sorrow to form an "artless" song. She

expresses her gratitude to Hayley, who from his place "high in Fame's bright fane" helped her poetry last longer than mere "transient hours." In Sonnet 34 she addresses a friend, probably Hayley, describing her delight in his praise:

But when thy envied sanction crowns my lays,  
A ray of pleasure lights my languid mind,  
For well I know the value of thy praise;  
And to how few, the flattering meed confin'd,  
That thou, -- their highly favour'd brows to bind,  
Wilt weave green myrtle and unfading bays!

"To Dependence," Sonnet 57, seems to refer both to a poet's struggle with patronage and the struggle of a woman in a man's world (Smith, Poems 51). Evidently Smith found it hard to balance patronage and poetic freedom. "Dependence! heavy, heavy are thy chains," begins Smith, who sees labourers who work for a pittance as happier and

More noble than the sycophant, whose art  
Must heap with taudry flowers thy hated shrine;  
I envy not the meed thou canst impart  
To crown HIS service -- while, tho' Pride combine  
With Fraud to crush me -- my unfetter'd heart  
Still to the Mountain Nymph<sup>23</sup> may offer mine.

A similar sentiment is expressed in Sonnet 82, "To the shade of Burns," where Smith rails against the indignities of subscription both in her poem and in the accompanying footnote.

---

<sup>23</sup>The footnote to the poem indicates that the Mountain Nymph is the mountain goddess, Liberty, from Milton's L'Allegro (Smith, Poems 51).

The most direct reference that Smith makes to fame comes in the last poem of her last, posthumous, volume, Beachy Head, Fables and Other Poems (1807). "To My Lyre" explains Smith's relationship with her poetry throughout her life, the symbol of the lyre perhaps meant to indicate that her verse was the personal and private realm of lyrical poetry. She describes her early life:

Far from my native fields removed,  
From all I valued, all I loved;  
By early sorrows soon beset,  
Annoy'd and wearied past endurance,  
With drawbacks, bottomry, insurance,  
With samples drawn, and tare and tret . . .

In a tone almost lighthearted compared to that of her sonnets, she notes that she felt out of place in the city: "For I was of a different species." Valuing her lyre as her faithful companion through her troubled life, Smith closes with the following stanza:

And as the time ere long must come  
When I lie silent in the tomb,  
Thou wilt preserve these mournful pages;  
For gentle minds will love my verse,  
And Pity shall my strains rehearse,  
And tell my name to distant ages.

This prediction of the longevity of her fame rests on future readers identifying with her poetic persona: "sorrowful Charlotte." Smith, far more clearly than More, Williams, Barbauld, and Seward, developed a persona distinctly for the reading public; she was able to control the construction of her self that entered the marketplace. She chose to stress the feminine, maternal

aspect of her life, actively seeking financial success in the name of her children.

Despite her general poetic silence on the subject of fame, there is little doubt that Smith enjoyed aspects of her success. Her fame was a consequence of that success, and while she could not overtly enjoy its benefits, Smith certainly acknowledged privately her pleasure in it. She possibly could have been a greater influence on the literary scene had she not been forced to write to survive (she had to sell her works before they were completed to whomever would buy them because she was so desperate for money (Stanton 386)). In February 1802, after completing her most profitable works, she wrote to her publishers: "I am never so well pleased as when I have a good deal of work to do, & my greatest vexation is that the affairs of my family require so much of my attention that I cannot work at my literary business & at that only" (qtd. in Stanton 375). Her family affairs were thus both the legitimising reason for her writing and a distraction from it.

Smith certainly took as much pride in her literary fame as in her income. She was most gratified that her reputation won benefits for her children, bringing about the promotion of one of her sons in the civil service (Todd, British 624). In a letter of 1790, Smith assures Cadell she is not writing for another publisher, having

decided that a little temporary advantage would not outweigh the long-term effects which she thought might "injure my fame" (qtd. in R. Taylor, "Evils" 313). Smith was very aware that her popularity was essential to sustain her income. She successfully managed to maintain her respectability, while expressing controversial views on controversial issues (not an easy task for a separated, working woman in the late eighteenth century).

Smith's literary success, her fame, came in the face of every possible obstacle (Stanton 396). Unlike her contemporaries (More, Barbauld, etc.), Smith worked in virtual literary isolation. Constant financial pressure and ill-health kept her from maintaining an expensive London lifestyle and travelling regularly. She did not develop the large literary correspondence usual for successful writers of the day, and demands on her time meant that her reading was also limited. According to McKillop, Smith had only casual and intermittent contact with the literary scene and her letters indicate her reading was dictated by personal interest: she read those whom she knew personally, like Hayley and the Lee sisters (252-53).

As a consequence Smith's literary network was restricted. She was initially patronised by William Hayley, but the two fell out. Through him she met Romney, who sketched her, and Cowper, to whom she

dedicated The Emigrants. She knew Helen Maria Williams, whose politics she shared, and provided the young Wordsworth, distantly related to Smith by marriage, with an introduction to Williams when he visited her (Wordsworth, Introduction to Smith). She also entertained Coleridge in 1800 (Ehrenpreis x). Among the women of her period, Smith is known to have raised the ire of Anna Seward, praised Joanna Baillie, and been a close friend of Henrietta O'Neill. In a time when the literary circle was small and close, Smith indeed had limited literary contacts.

Despite her relative isolation from the literary scene, Smith's poetry had a wide and important impact on numerous literary figures. Her sonnets attracted the attention of Wordsworth, Coleridge, William Lisle Bowles, Burns, Cowper, and Hayley. Wordsworth included a quotation from Smith's "To the South Downs" in his "An Evening Walk" (Kelley 220) and on Christmas Eve 1802 he read aloud sonnets by himself, Milton and Charlotte Smith (Tayler and Luria 105). Curran goes so far as to describe Smith as the first poet in England who can be called "Romantic." He claims that through her popularity of 25 years she established "enduring patterns of thought and conventions of style that became norms for the period" (Curran, Introduction xix). When she died in 1806, she was widely lamented by other women poets: "They testified at once to her personal struggle for

independence in the midst of misfortune and to the public position she so long sustained as a beacon to writers who emulated her popularity" (Curran, Introduction xxviii). An aging Wordsworth reflected that she was a poet "to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered" (Curran, Introduction xix).

### iii Ann Yearsley

Ann Cromartie Yearsley was a working-class woman who delivered milk for a living. Her mother, also a milkwoman, encouraged her to read and her brother taught her to write (Tompkins 60-61). Born in 1752, Ann was only 18 when she married John Yearsley, whose income of six pounds a year was thought too advantageous to refuse, and the couple produced six children (Lonsdale 392). The milkwoman led a conventional labouring woman's life -- with the exception of her poetry writing. She was nearly thirty years old when she came to public attention as a poet.

In the winter of 1783-84, the Yearsley family were virtually destitute, and were only just rescued from starvation, in time for all but Ann's mother to survive, by a kindly man who happened to look into the stable where the family were sheltering (Tompkins 63). Some

months after this low ebb, Hannah More discovered Yearsley's writing through her cook, from whom Yearsley bought household scraps (Tompkins 65). More was impressed by Yearsley's poetry and moved by the difficulty of her situation, so much so that she undertook patronage of her. Before arranging for the publication of her poetry via subscription, however, she assessed Yearsley's suitability in moral terms. In a letter to Elizabeth Montagu, More is at pains to point out that Yearsley's poetry is secondary to her domestic duties: "tho' she never allowed herself to look into a book till her work was done and her children asleep, yet in those moments she found that reading and writing cou'd allay hunger and subdue calamity" (qtd. in Lonsdale 392). At the time that they met Yearsley was not only financially desperate but also mentally depressed by the death of her mother (Tompkins 64). Her emotional lethargy in the face of this loss perhaps served to give More the wrong impression of her personality.

More worked hard on behalf of Yearsley, enlisting the help of Montagu, with whom she often corresponded about her protégée. More was adamant that she was attempting only to provide Yearsley with financial gain: ". . . I am utterly against taking her out of her station. Stephen [Duck] was an excellent Bard as a Thrasher, but as the Court Poet, and rival of Pope, detestable" (qtd. in Wordsworth, Introduction to

Yearsley). On another occasion she said:

It is not intended to place her in such a state of independence as might seduce her to devote her time to the idleness of Poetry . . . as a wife and mother, she has duties to fill, the smallest of which is of more value than the finest verses she can write. (qtd. in Shiach 56)

More was careful to delineate the appropriate sphere of activity for Yearsley, dictated by both her class and her gender.

An unsigned account of Yearsley appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine in December 1784, and in January 1785 she was hailed as a "literary phenomenon" in the London Chronicle. Some of her poems were also published in periodicals (Lonsdale 393). By June 1785, when Poems on Several Occasions was published, there were over 1000 subscribers, including many nobility. The majority of the subscribers were women, More having utilised the Bluestocking network well (Shiach 56). The volume was prefaced by a letter from More to Montagu giving a detailed account of Yearsley's background, reading, and character (Lonsdale 393). Poems met with instant acclaim. Yearsley set before the public the results of an intensively creative decade or more of autobiographical poetry. The public responded enthusiastically, and three editions were published (by Cadell) before she and More parted company (Ferguson, "Resistance" 250-51). According to Tompkins, the interest came not from her poetry but the figure of

Yearsley the poet struggling to surmount the barriers of which she was painfully aware (69).

Ann Yearsley differs significantly from the famous women poets discussed previously because she was working-class. Many scholars, including Donna Landry, Moira Ferguson, and Morag Shiach, have looked at Yearsley's work in relation to the peasant poet tradition.<sup>24</sup> Yearsley's class is important when considering how she reacted to and felt about her fame because for Yearsley fame did not just bring money or literary friends, but also the opportunity for social mobility.

Peasant poetry enjoyed an upsurge in popularity in the eighteenth century, as society increasingly valued "natural" genius in the hope that those uncultivated by learning could recover the "natural fire" of Homer. Peasant poets were also popular because of the increasing sentimentality towards the simple and primitive, and, though potentially revolutionary in showing natural genius as superior to art, they were also comforting to the Establishment because they were not actually artistically superior to the educated poets (Rizzo 241-42). Yearsley was welcomed as an example of the

---

<sup>24</sup>See Landry's The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796 (Cambridge UP, 1990); Ferguson's "Resistance and Power in the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley" (The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation 27 (1986) 247-68) and "The Unpublished Poems of Ann Yearsley" (Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 12:1 (1993) 13-29); and Shiach's Discourse on Popular Culture (Polity Press, 1989), 35-70.

primitive force of genius by a reading public who feared that genuine poetic fire was elusive in their age. She was living proof, as More said, "that genius is antecedent to rules and independent [of] criticism" (qtd. in Tompkins 58). Simplicity of expression and honesty of emotion were valued in peasant poets. More said of Yearsley: "she seems to possess the general principles of sound taste and just thinking [;] . . . you will seldom find in her those inexplicable poetic sins, the false thought, the puerile conceit, the distorted image" (qtd. in Shiach 45).

More's patronage of Yearsley led to their now infamous quarrel, Yearsley taking exception to More's no doubt well-meaning but condescending attitude to her. More had refused to let her protégée consider the life of an author, and aimed only to alleviate the family's financial worries while Yearsley continued in her primary duties as mother, wife, and milkwoman. She dreaded that publication might unsettle Yearsley's sobriety and "by exciting her vanity, indispose her for the laborious employment of her humble condition" (qtd. in Tompkins 65). More arranged that she and Montagu would have control of Yearsley's income via a trust so as to save the funds for her children, after having relieved their immediate wants. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Yearsley resented the lack of control over her own earnings and More's attitude in general. Yearsley sought upward

mobility and resented More's controlling her life, especially as More herself had achieved such mobility through her own writing.

According to Yearsley's testimonies and poems, More desired, on the one hand, the fame attached to patronising an uneducated poet and the praise accorded to such cultural philanthropy, and on the other she wanted Yearsley to do as she was told. Yearsley was a cultural find but had to be controlled and therefore was not supposed to gain financial, thence social, independence (Ferguson, "Unpublished" 16). The ideological conflict between More and Yearsley centred on More's desire to elevate the standing of "Lactilla" (Yearsley's poetic persona) while keeping Yearsley the milkwoman in her place (Landry, Muses 130). More denied that she felt any pride in the act of being a discoverer:

For my own part, I do not feel myself actuated by the idle vanity of a discoverer; for I confess, that the ambition of bringing to light a genius buried in obscurity, operates much less powerfully on my mind, than the wish to rescue a meritorious woman from misery, for it is not fame, but bread, which I am anxious to secure her. (qtd. in Rizzo 259)

Ironically, Yearsley was publicly praised (in the Monthly Review's review of her Poems On Several Occasions) for trying to imaginatively emancipate herself from her disadvantages at the very time when she was being denied practical upward mobility in that her right to her money was hotly contested (Landry, Muses 151-52).

Yearsley was also annoyed by More's prefacing her volume with the details of her life and by her "correction" of her poems, and she was mortified that More had allowed the publishers to burn her manuscripts. Yearsley wrote to More:

You helped place me in the public eye; my success you think beyond my abilities, and purely arising . . . from your protection. You have led me to sign a settlement that defrauds me of my right . . . and let me ask you, Miss More, what security have you ever given my children whereby they may prove their claim? (qtd. in Wordsworth, Introduction to Yearsley)

The dispute that developed caused More to withdraw all support from Yearsley. Tompkins refers to the furore caused by the protégée turning on her patron as "a nine day wonder in London," but notes that for both Yearsley and More the effects of the split were far-reaching (73).

Within a few weeks of the publication of Poems on Several Occasions it was known in literary circles that Yearsley was not "turning out well": she was quarrelsome; prosperity had made her arrogant; she was malicious; and she spread slander about More (Tompkins 59). This construction of Yearsley stemmed directly from her position as a labouring-class woman obliged to a patron. The large and respectable body of subscribers were disappointed and cynical. Horace Walpole had assumed that when she received her money she would "hum no more ditties," and he sympathised with More (Lonsdale 393). He told More that he was "sick of mendicant poetesses"

and was astonished by Yearsley's "superlative" ingratitude to her patron, who had "washed and combed her trumpery verses" (qtd. in Lonsdale 393). Anna Seward was a little more perceptive: she recognised the pride behind Yearsley's anger and "ingratitude." Seward wrote to the Rev. T.S. Whalley in February 1786:

The milk-woman's celebrity must have reached you across the seas. She is said to have behaved most ungratefully to her humane and energetic patroness, Miss H. More . . . . Her writings breathe a gloomy and jealous dignity of spirit. Great delicacy was required in the manner of conferring obligation on a mind so tempered. Miss More's letter to Mrs Montagu, prefixed to Lactilla's first publication, struck me with an air of superciliousness towards the being she patronized; and the pride of genius in adversity revolted. (qtd. in Wordsworth, Introduction to Yearsley)

Yearsley's moment of fame had turned into a prolonged period of infamy.

This was not the sort of celebrity that Yearsley desired, as although it might still lead to financial success, it forced on her a public image of herself that she was not comfortable with and threatened her personal reputation as a woman. In an attempt to counteract the construction of herself as an ungrateful troublemaker, Yearsley appealed to the public by providing them with the details of her dispute with More. She prefaced the fourth edition of Poems on Several Occasions with a ten-page narrative that defended her against charges of ingratitude. But such a public airing of private troubles was not always acceptable even for upper-class

women (criticism of Smith's publicising her woes illustrates this), and it was considered embarrassing from a female member of the working class whose foe was of superior status. Her public denigration of popular, virtuous and respectable More lost Yearsley many admirers, although it gained her support from those who did not like More.

For More, the quarrel was a relatively short-term embarrassment, an "odious tale" that was a means of spiritual growth. Her reputation survived intact, although the incident evidently changed her attitudes later when, in her evangelical role, she decided not to encourage the working class to write (Tompkins 76). For Yearsley, however, the impact was deeper. She was bitter and angry, and her pride and her consciousness of class difference led her to become very personal in her insulting of More, stooping even to comment on her broken engagement. Her Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade (1788) was no doubt intentionally published to compete with More's poem on the same subject. Yearsley salved her hurt pride with arrogant defiance (Tompkins 77).

Yearsley's literary career was not unscathed by her falling out with More. Cadell, More's publisher, refused to have anything more to do with Yearsley and she had to find another publisher in the Robinsons (Tompkins 80).

By 1786 she had also found a new patron in the wealthy, if somewhat disreputable, Frederick Augustus Hervey, Bishop of Derry and Earl of Bristol (Lonsdale 393). Yearsley continued to publish, encouraged by favourable critical comment. She published a second volume of poetry, Poems on Various Subjects, in 1787. Aesthetically freed by the distant patronage offered by Hervey, Yearsley's work became increasingly radical, socially critical, and politicised (Landry, Muses 122). She supported the French Revolution and railed against social injustice, though never officially aligning herself with any particular group (Landry, Muses 124). During the 1790s she published poems on Marie Antoinette, the death of Louis XVI, and an historical play on Earl Goodwin. In Stanzas of Woe (1790), Yearsley publicly condemned the former mayor of Bristol, Levi Eames, for his authorising of the whipping of her children for playing on his property, and later for his indirect causing of her miscarriage (Yearsley saw two boys running from a man and the fear that her children would be whipped again induced labour) (Tompkins 82-83). Her poetic attack was followed by a prose pamphlet The Dispute: Letter to the Public from the Milkwoman (Lonsdale 394).

It is Yearsley's last volume of poetry, The Rural Lyre (1796), that many critics consider to be her best because of its wide scope and consistent style. In The

Rural Lyre Yearsley's public space changes: her issues become more global, and her private life less a matter for public record (Ferguson, "Unpublished" 25). During the 1790s she sat somewhere between being a civic poet for Bristol and a social dissident (Landry, Muses 122). Her later publications were reviewed respectfully by the Monthly and Critical Review (Tompkins 82). However, due to her class she was not taken seriously as a political thinker, but rather relegated to the position of a curiosity (Ferguson, "Resistance" 266).

Yearsley's desire for social mobility was realised in 1793 when she opened a circulating library in Bristol, financially helped by Ralph Griffiths, Thomas Beddoes, and Joseph Cottle. Her fame also secured apprenticeships for two of her sons. Yearsley's health deteriorated in the late 1790s, and two sons died, followed by her husband in 1803. These domestic troubles may have prevented further work after The Rural Lyre, but she had also identified herself with liberal sentiments in a time of growing conservatism. Literary criticism was tainted with political prejudice and the liberal reviewers were forced to step warily (Tompkins 98).

Though Yearsley was probably more concerned about her own class struggle and financial gain than she was about whether she was conforming to the ideology of the feminine, she still experienced the anxiety of perception

that came at the moment of publication for the woman poet. Yearsley's pride and motivation ensured that she attempted to control how she was perceived by the world, and consequently ensured a high public profile. Yearsley hoped to gain social mobility from her poetry, whereas the famous women poets previously discussed already moved in elite social circles, so she had to have a public image that allowed for class movement. The modesty expressed by other women poets, in an effort to retain the characteristics of femininity even as they participated in a masculine activity, is present in Yearsley's work for a different reason. The modesty she voices regarding her poetic ability is more an acknowledgement of her lack of education than an effort to be demure and feminine.

This modesty can be seen in Yearsley's argument to her poem "Brutus: A Fragment":

The Author offers this humble specimen as a spark, from whence she wishes a body of fire may arise in the imagination of some more able Poet. The Aeneid is not so eventful, nor so interesting, but that an Epic Poem from the History of England might vie with it. If the Author may presume to offer an opinion, her opinion will be, that some of the greatest geniuses of this island neglect the choice of subjects best suited to their learning and their natural powers.

Her own poetry is portrayed as "humble," and it is those with both "learning" and "natural powers" who would be better suited to the grand theme.

Yearsley continually struggled to rewrite the public's impression of her after her quarrel with More, to turn her infamy into fame. To pacify the conflict between her celebrity (her infamy) and reputation (her honour) it is clear that Yearsley worked at the construction of a poetic persona that was acceptable to the reading public. Moira Ferguson's article "The Unpublished Poems of Ann Yearsley" discusses how, when she died in 1806, Yearsley left behind a large quantity of unpublished poems. Ferguson shows that a number of the poems that Yearsley kept from publication would have contributed to the view of her as a radical, angry and troublesome author. She surmises that Yearsley consciously constructed a poetic identity and protected her public image. Donna Landry also identifies a clearly constructed persona in Yearsley's writing. She shows how class identification is complex and contradictory for Yearsley because her writing differentiated her from other working-class women in that she was capable of public self-representation through writing (Landry, Muses 125). But in her writing she clearly inscribes herself as a poetical milkwoman, "Lactilla," who possesses "a stubborn and a savage will." Lactilla is proud, bold, sometimes comical, but never cringing. Yearsley was aware of her audience's expectations and packaged herself accordingly, showing herself to be a shrewd professional (Landry, Muses 128-29).

In her first volume of poetry Yearsley constructed herself as More desired her to be. She expressed the gratitude appropriate to "Stella," her patron. Once in exile from More she could develop her own poetic identity. Ferguson identifies a poem, "To Stella," written in the heat of Yearsley's quarrel with More, that Yearsley toned down and turned into the more general "To Those Who Accuse the Author of Ingratitude" for publication in Poems on Various Subjects. The poem "To Stella" would have titillated the reading public, but would also have contributed negatively to Yearsley's reputation, so she refrained from publishing it. In the last stanza of the original poem she denounces More's claim to fame, her motivation, and her Christian principles, denunciations that would have shocked the reading public whom More was popular with (Ferguson, "Unpublished" 15-16). "To Those Who Accuse the Author of Ingratitude" is still an angry response to the after-effects of her quarrel with More. Yearsley questions the motives of those who "thro' optics dim, so falsely view" the world:

A wish to share the false, tho' public din,  
 In which the popular, not virtuous, live;  
 A fear of being singular, which claims  
 A fortitude of mind you ne'er could boast;  
 A love of base detraction, when the charm  
 Sits on a flowing tongue, and willing moves  
 Upon its darling topic. These are yours.

Yearsley implies that it is only through her fortitude of

mind that she can cope with the fear associated with being different, with being famous.

Yearsley obviously learnt discretion as she became more experienced in the ways of the literary world. She almost certainly left some of her most controversial poems unpublished in the desire not to foster her notoriety as a troublemaker, and to negate the image of her as an angry, vulnerable working-class subject. Yearsley shows her sense of discrimination and self-discipline in holding these poems back from the public. She preferred a less volatile and more uncontroversial public persona, although she did operate out of a sense of social justice and therefore touched on potentially radical topics. According to Ferguson, the poems withheld from publication show Yearsley was uncomfortable with her public representation, and illustrate a political and personal cultural struggle that sheds new light on Yearsley's beliefs in relation to her notorious public profile in the years 1786-89 ("Unpublished" 25-26).

Yearsley also attempted to redress the negative image of herself in her poetry. "Revenge" appeared in Poems on Various Subjects, written in response to the events of her patronage. In the poem Yearsley struggles with her conscience regarding her reaction to More's injustices. She expresses regret that she allowed

Revenge to motivate her to "hang up human frailty to the view, / Of a poor pitiless World":

I loathe thy curst acquaintance: urg'd by thee,  
The wounded Victim plucks the arrow forth,  
Writhing with anguish strikes the guilty Foe,  
Then groans in horrid sympathy.

Yearsley acknowledges "the wounds I feel, / In base Revenge, shall never find their cure." She asks Revenge to "spare the slave of Fame."

In the poems that were made available to the public, Yearsley only fitfully addresses the issue of fame. Like the other women poets, she is aware of the correlation of the two meanings of "fame," as she cynically illustrates in "Lucy, A Tale." When the married Lucy develops a platonic friendship with a male neighbour her reputation is at stake:

Hark, Lucy! Censure lifts her tongue;  
On its fell point thy name is hung.  
Now striding o'er the villa's [sic] near,  
Nor thee, nor Lelius, will she spare;  
But breathing strong the venom'd blast,  
Fame's brighter trophies down are cast.

With Lucy the victim of village scandal, the male friend considers rising in her defence:

Conscious of injur'd Fame, he tries  
His rectitude of soul, but flies  
The task -- for public Fame he knew,  
To secret Virtue ne'er was true.

Similarly, in "Brutus: A Fragment" fame is mentioned in terms of reputation:

Zaunus came next, of swarthy Lara born,  
 Lara the maiden's and the matron's scorn;  
 She young neglected virtue: deaf to fame,  
 Zaunus existed as the heir of shame . . .

There are no poems that deal with a woman's literary fame, although she often reflects on her own poeticising. For example, in "Clifton Hill," she recalls her early fascination with words, remembering how, when she and her mother visited the local cemetery, epitaphs on the graves attracted her, while her mother was fascinated by the sculptures. In "Addressed To Ignorance, Occasioned by a Gentleman's desiring the Author never to Assume a Knowledge of the Ancients" Yearsley plays on assumptions of class in relation to her poeticising.

Yearsley implicitly links the two senses of "fame" together on one occasion. In "To William Cromartie Yearsley. On his Becoming a Pupil to Mr. ---." she writes:

Where Virtue is not, Fame her wreath denies . . .

intimating that a good reputation is critical to poetic success. This clearly reflects her own experience of fame, and succinctly encapsulates the beliefs of the famous women poets already mentioned.

Yearsley is painfully aware that fame is not an easy burden to bear. In "To Mr V----" she states:

Corrosive, curst Avarice, still preys on the heart;  
Ambition high stretches the mind;  
Loud Fame may awhile her false transport impart,  
Yet all leave their torment behind.

Well into her career and freed from the yoke of More's patronage, however, Yearsley refused society's prescription of humility and eschewal of fame. In the Preface to her 1795 novel The Royal Captives she boldly asserts:

. . . I love Fame, though I have only heard her whispers; am sensible she incites towards the wonderful, the great and good; and that Authors, who affect to despise her, are cowards, insincere, and guilty of profanation; yet there is a vast difference in being her lover and her slave. For me, I confess myself not deaf to, nor independent of the voice of the world, except in those enraptured moments when bewitching Fancy renders me insensible to the real dependencies of life. In poesy, I am her slave; in prose I wish her to be mine . . . . Nature herself drew delusion in the desert where I was beloved by Fancy, before I was alive to Fame, and tasted more delight than I have found since in the midst of proud society, where favour falls heavily on the heart from the hand of arrogance . . . . One of my motives for publishing the work unfinished, is, that the world may speak of me as I am, whilst I have power to hear. The clouds that hang over my fortunes intervene between me and the Public. I incessantly struggle to dissipate them, feel those struggles in vain, and shall drop in the effort . . . (i-iii)

Her attack on those who affect to despise fame is undoubtedly directed at More, who had, of course, made many comments denying her desire for fame. Yearsley's open claim for the right to enjoy her fame and her repudiation of arrogant patronage show a refreshingly honest and forthright attitude for a woman poet of the period.

Yearsley required fame to bring financial success and also class mobility, but the fame she achieved was nearer to infamy and threatened her reputation as a virtuous woman. To succeed in her ambitions, Yearsley needed to "sustain patronage and public interest, [but] in the long run class and reputation told against her" (Ferguson, "Resistance" 253). Yearsley was always tainted by social stigma; praise was qualified with contemplation of her vocation (Ferguson, "Resistance" 247). When she died in 1806 she had fallen into relative obscurity, not having published since 1796. Her death produced an unkind epitaph --

Ann Yearsley tasted the Castilian stream  
 And skimmed its surface as she skimmed her cream;  
 But struck at last by fate's unerring blow  
 All that remains of Ann is -- "Milk Below."

-- which was at least proof that she had not been entirely forgotten (qtd. in Tompkins 101). There was a brief revival of interest in Yearsley in the early nineteenth century, prompted by the re-engraving of a portrait of her (one of two done) and its publication in the Ladies' Monthly Museum in 1814, and in 1831 Southey treated her respectfully in his Lives and Works of the Uneducated Poets (Tompkins 101).

## iv Mary Robinson

Mary Robinson differs from all the women poets discussed previously because she was already famous when she began to earn a reputation as a poet. Her life is an extraordinary chronicle of a woman in the public eye in the late eighteenth century. Her prominence as socialite, actress, fashion trendsetter, royal mistress, as well as author, kept her constantly under public scrutiny, as revealed by innumerable newspaper mentions of her, cartoons, paintings, and other textual references.

Mary Darby Robinson's childhood began with every indulgence but her father shattered that existence when he went to make his fortune in America, leaving his family but taking his mistress. Says Robinson in her autobiography: "My father's impracticable scheme had impoverished his fortune, and deprived his children of that influence which, in their infancy, they had been taught to hope for" (Robinson, Memoirs 21). Yet Robinson remembered her father fondly, and felt he was "the victim of an unfortunate attachment" (Robinson, Memoirs 17). Mr Darby's desertion resulted in fluctuating fortunes for the family. Eventually, Mrs Darby was approached about considering a stage career for her beautiful and physically mature daughter. According to Robinson, her mother was persuaded to allow it by the examples of

females who, "even in that perilous and arduous situation, preserved an unspotted fame" (Memoirs 25).

Robinson's stage career was postponed for some years, however, by her marriage to Thomas Robinson when she was fifteen. According to her memoirs, she was enticed into the marriage from her sickbed by Thomas, who misrepresented his circumstances to both mother and daughter. The couple mingled in high society, living well beyond their means. Thomas was lured into gambling and womanising, while Mary Robinson thrived on the attention her beauty and dress sense obtained her. Although at first "not accustomed to the gaze of impertinent high breeding," she dressed in such a way that couldn't help but "attract attention at places of public entertainment" (Robinson, Memoirs 51-52). The young wife soon found herself the object of upper-class male lechery but in her memoirs denies any infidelity on her part.

Thomas Robinson's neglect led her to turn to poetry: "I dedicated all my leisure hours to poetry: I wrote verses of all sorts . . ." (Robinson, Memoirs 57). Spending her time in such a manner proved useful in 1775 when she accompanied her husband to prison for debt. From there she arranged publication of her poems, sending a copy to the Duchess of Devonshire. The Duchess, whom Robinson was later to rival as England's fashion queen,

was moved to help the imprisoned young wife and mother. The volume, Poems, was largely ignored critically and although it was followed by another publication, Captivity. A Poem; and Celadon and Lydia. A Tale (1777), this was something of a false start to Robinson's literary career. What these early publications show is that though Robinson wrote poetry from a young age her primary motivation for publication was financial.

Her husband's philandering and gambling and her own extravagant living led to Robinson reviving her interest in a stage career. Supported by David Garrick and Richard Sheridan, Robinson debuted in 1776, and "looked forward with delight both to celebrity and fortune" (Robinson, Memoirs 107). Her success was immediate and she quickly became the major drawcard of Drury Lane. Robinson relished the limelight, as her "prospects, both of fame and affluence, began to brighten" (Robinson, Memoirs 119). Robinson's memoirs detail the extent of her renown, as much for her beauty as her talent, and illustrate just how public a figure she was: "I was consulted as the very oracle of fashions; I was gazed at and examined with the most inquisitive curiosity" (113).

The public scrutiny Robinson was under was to intensify. Her acting, though resulting in sexual offers, did not unduly tarnish her reputation:

It was at this period that the most alluring temptations were held out to alienate me from the paths of domestic quiet . . . But I had still the consolation of an unsullied name. I had the highest of female patronage, a circle of the most respectable and partial friends. (Robinson, Memoirs 111)

What did sully her name, and also brought her acting career to an end, was her affair with the young Prince of Wales. Even before the affair officially began the newspapers were running stories on the royal flirtation. Once the liaison, which lasted about a year, was cemented the couple publicly flaunted their relationship. From her memoirs it is clear that Robinson saw her life as being under constant public surveillance ("I was now known by name, at every public place in and near the metropolis" (69)); her memoirs are a record of increasing public exposure (Pascoe, "Spectacular" 166).

Whenever I appeared in public, I was overwhelmed by the gazing of the multitude. I was frequently obliged to quit Ranelagh, owing to the crowd which staring curiosity had assembled round my box; and, even in the streets of the metropolis, I scarcely ventured to enter a shop without experiencing the greatest inconvenience. Many hours have I waited till the crowd dispersed, which surrounded my carriage, in expectation of my quitting the shop. (Robinson, Memoirs 139-40)

Robinson seems to have been both vexed and bemused by the attention given to her, though it had some compensations. Some of the publicity was far from kind, but she was living the high life in royal favour so was not unduly concerned by the malice of her enemies. The Prince had

sworn his undying love to the beautiful "Perdita" (the character Robinson had been playing when he first noticed her), and had also promised to support her financially, pledging a 20,000 pound bond when he came of age.

Unfortunately for Robinson the Prince was as wayward with his affections as her husband. When she was unceremoniously rejected by her royal consort, her "fame" quickly turned to infamy. She was immediately a fallen woman, fallen from favour and sexually fallen, in the eyes of the public. Her fallen reputation and her popularity and renown (her fame in both senses), meant she became fair game for gossiping society and the press:

Every engine of female malice was set in motion to destroy my repose, and every petty calumny was repeated with tenfold embellishments. Tales of the most infamous and glaring falsehood were invented, and I was again assailed by pamphlets, by paragraphs, and caricatures, and all the artillery of slander . . . (Robinson, Memoirs 145)

For Robinson, who had enjoyed all the trappings of fame when the attention was positive, the public scandal was unbearable. The affair inspired a flow of titillating literary commentary. The fictional portrayals of her life were virtually soft pornography, and she fled to Paris to escape from the scandals of the newspapers (Pascoe, Staging 95).

Robinson did not leave the limelight, however. She moved in high circles in France, where she met Marie

Antoinette (about whom she was later to write a poem), and when she returned to England impressed herself once more on the fashion scene. She was also rumoured to have had several prominent men (Lord Meldon and Charles Fox among them) as her lovers (Fox securing for her a 500 pound annuity from the Prince of Wales in lieu of the bond). Her movements, dress, carriages, partners, and health were always recorded in the newspapers. By the mid-1780s, primarily through her association with famous men, she was a stock figure in print illustrations of London crowd scenes (Pascoe, "Spectacular" 166). Her portrayal in the press ranged from idolatrous to vicious, perhaps the worst example being Gillray's cartoon "The Thunderer" (1782), in which a barebreasted Robinson is sexually impaled upon a whirligig (the army's treatment for prostitutes), while two men (the Prince and another lover, Colonel Tarleton) compete for her affections (Bass 201). Another example of the kind of attack Robinson suffered is the 1784 anonymous pamphlet The Memoirs of Perdita; interspersed with Anecdotes of the Hon. Charles F-x; Lord M---; Col. T---; P-E of W-s; COL St. L---R; Mr. S---N, and many other well known characters (Pascoe, Staging 95).

In 1782 Robinson began an eighteen-year affair with Banastre Tarleton, himself a famous military and social figure. Early in their relationship Robinson suffered a fever, speculated to be the result of a miscarriage, that

resulted in the paralysis of her lower limbs. The couple began to travel the continent in search of a cure, Robinson now spending more time on her writing. The papers observed her absence: "Of Mrs Robinson, once so famed, the world hears nothing" (qtd. in Bass 252). On July 14, 1786, the Morning Post published an inaccurate obituary of Robinson, calling her illegitimate and focusing on her amours. She responded from Germany, correcting the incorrect information and defending her honour (Bass 253-54). While on the continent she published some poetry in France and worked on translations. She returned to England in 1788, and began her literary career in earnest.

Robinson's second entry into the literary world was an anonymous one. Soon after her return to London she met the poet Robert Merry and began a poetical correspondence with him (Bass 300). Merry had begun to introduce England to a poetic style that he had picked up in Italy. The school of poets who wrote in this florid manner, exuding sensibility and abounding in personification, were known as the "Della Cruscans." They used poetry to carry on public conversations and flirtations, all using pseudonyms (Gavin 144). "Laura" (Robinson) became the darling of "Della Crusca" (Merry) when "Matilda" (Hannah Cowley) fell from grace, and they poetically adored each other in the pages of the World (Pascoe 35). In some senses the poems were very

personal, but they were always seen as a performance of their craft despite their protestations of sincerity (Gavin 144). For a time, the style was very popular and many memorised and recited them (Bass 300).

According to Pascoe, the Della Cruscan construction of the poet as a highly sensitive figure propelled by emotional intensity was useful for women to mask their artistic and commercial ambitions. Robinson in her "Ode to Della Crusca" represented the poem as an uncontrollable outpouring of feelings in response to those of the male poet (Pascoe, Staging 45-46). In a letter of 1794, Robinson said that pleasure was her prime motivation to write ("I am never happy but when I am tagging rhymes, and never pleased with them when they are finished" (qtd. in Pascoe, Staging 50)), though the persona she adopted in her public role was that of the sensitive poet forced into verse by the strength of her feelings. Della Cruscanism ushered women into print because it did not require special training and allowed a pose of supplication to a revered master that hid their own ambition (Pascoe, Staging 50). Though the Della Cruscans claimed disinterest in fame and fortune, it is highly likely that Robinson was motivated by both (Pascoe, Staging 36). She also needed to rewrite her infamy into a respectable reputation.

The public was initially impressed by Della Cruscanism but the critical tide turned quickly against the movement. Robinson received more favourable reviews than Merry; out of chivalry, the reviewers portrayed her as an innocent trapped in the web of Della Cruscanism:

True taste turns with disdain and disgust from all meretricious ornaments. We think Mrs. Robinson is sometimes in danger of being misled by the glare of what some may think splendour. (qtd. in Pascoe, Staging 41)

Robinson, in her memoirs, encouraged this view of herself being temporarily misled, a view sometimes convenient to other women writers who used the movement as a medium for their own poetic desires (Pascoe, Staging 41). 1791 saw the Della Cruscans receive their first serious public criticism (in the Monthly Review). They were attacked for writing bad poetry but were really literary scapegoats in a political witch hunt: they were too radical at a time of revolution (Hargreaves-Mawdsley 243). William Gifford wrote The Baviad ostensibly to ridicule the Della Cruscan poetic style, but there were many far worse poets he could have attacked. Gifford's real motivation was his hostility to their liberal sympathies and, according to Pascoe, to the feminisation of poetry. Gifford was scathing and personal in his attack on Robinson, and was equally rude in his sequel poem, The Maeviad, in which he openly attacked Robinson's Jacobin sympathies (Pascoe, Staging 58-62).

Having established her poetical abilities Robinson capitalised on her new career, using at least ten pseudonyms. Her use of pseudonyms meant she was able to have her poetry read and judged without her public image interfering. The decision was effective, as is delightedly recounted in her memoirs:

. . . several ladies of the Bluestocking club, while Mrs Robinson remained unknown, even ventured to admire, nay more, to recite her productions in their learned and critical coterie. (Robinson, Memoirs 170)

Though she claimed her use of pseudonyms was to ensure an honest response from her readers, this does not explain the proliferation of names (Pascoe, Staging 166). Also, the pseudonyms were not necessarily always an attempt to obscure her tarnished reputation because she invariably identified herself, sometimes almost immediately after publication (Pascoe, Staging 164-65). Her deliberate creation of multiple selves can be read as an attempt to keep the private, stable self from the public eye and commodity status (Pascoe, Staging 163). Alternatively, the pseudonyms can be seen as allowing her to construct a variety of roles or personae in her poetry, a parallel with her theatrical career. Unlike Smith and other women poets, Robinson did not confine herself to a single public stance in her poetry. She was able to be fluid in her presentation of herself to the public.

One example of the fluidity allowed by the construction of various personae is the poem Modern Manners, published under the male pseudonym "Horace Juvenal." The 1793 poem is a satire on the place of the critics and the excesses of fashion. The male pseudonym, combining two famous satirical styles, allows Robinson to be more critical than would be expected from a feminine pen:

. . . Ye solemn potentates! whose secret trade  
 Befits the sullen solitude of shade!  
 Ye self-nam'd monarchs of the laurel'd crown,  
 Props of the press, and tutors of the town!

. . . Who spare nor age or sex, nor friend or foe,  
 But deal on all alike, the recreant blow.  
 Who batten on the pasture you abuse,  
 And while ye slander, pilfer from the Muse.  
 Think not, because each meek and timid wight  
 Shrinks from your touch, and dwindles in your sight,  
 That Men of Genius dread your feeble sway, --  
 The Lion trembles not when Asses bray!

The Bluestockings, who were a particular bane of the morally suspect Robinson's life, also came under attack in the poem:

. . . There in blue stocking dignity divine,  
 The blooming daughters of the virgin Nine!  
 Not like the wither'd witches in Macbeth,  
 Who fill the murd'rous cauldron "pale as death;"  
 But with enchanting smiles, and harmless glee,  
 Dissect the laurel wreath, and sip their tea;  
 Who compliment in prose, and court in rhymes,  
 The purest censors of the purest times!  
 The fair distributors of taste and fame,  
 Who kindly flatter, -- where they dare not blame!

Despite her use of pseudonyms her poems were largely autobiographical, many obviously addressed to Tarleton.

Though constructing herself a new, literary, identity she assured herself of financial success by titillating her readers with references to her past and her present sexual liaisons. Robinson's poetry was read by reviewers and the public alike with her personal history in mind (Pascoe, Staging 57). Trading on her image as a fallen woman to make her poetry more compelling, she simultaneously appealed to the reader's chivalry and piqued that reader's prurient attention, in a far more sexualised way than Smith (Labbe 70-71).

In 1791 Robinson published Poems by subscription (different in content from the 1775 volume of the same name). Among the six hundred subscribers were the titled (including the Prince of Wales), and prominent military and social figures. Notably absent were those female figures normally supportive of women's writing, that is, the Mores, Carters and Montagus. The volume was well reviewed. Many of the poems were autobiographical in nature, and her "novelty of expression, in unusual figure and striking metaphor," abounding in "vivid exertions of genius, pathos, and sentiment," saw the Critical Review link Robinson with the emergence of Romanticism (qtd. in Bass 307-08).

The aspects of her life that Robinson referred to publicly in her poetry were those aspects that the public already knew of. Other details of her life she kept

private. Because she already had a kind of public voice as a theatrical and "royal" celebrity, Robinson had no need to release further information regarding her life. She suffered ill health throughout her career yet seldom complained directly of it in her poems (unlike Smith and her legal problems) (Gavin 150). She seems to have had less personal connection with her poetry than the women poets who were her contemporaries (Gavin 158). Both Smith and Robinson led lives of hardship but Robinson was able to apply her poetic gift to a wider range of circumstances and events than Smith was able to. She used her poetry as a vehicle for commenting on politics, social observation, story-telling, and mood description (Gavin 159).

Robinson's various poetic publications record her shifting style. She was a prolific writer in a variety of forms, capable of assuming different roles for different effects (Gavin 140). She moved from the "false metaphors and rhapsodical extravagance" (Robinson, Memoirs 170) of her Della Cruscan phase to the simplicity and directness to be found in volumes like Lyrical Tales (1800). Her verse shows a humanitarian sensibility towards the poor, the mentally ill and other marginal figures, and against racism, slavery, and so on. Many of her love poems were set to music (Todd, British 576). The theatre was a big influence on her work, with many of her poems emphasising orality and performance (Gavin 141-

42). Verse was not lucrative enough, however, to support Robinson's still flamboyant lifestyle, and Tarleton's gambling. She turned to novel writing and met with instant success: her first novel Vancenza sold out on the day of publication. Numerous others followed. Her books became famous, and were translated into several languages. By the late 1790s, her popularity had reached such heights that publishers were competing for her work (Todd, British 576).

Robinson's health deteriorated during the 1790s and her affair with Tarleton came to an abrupt end, both of which made her life more difficult. In 1798 she became poetry editor of the Morning Post, and also contributed a multitude of poems (using pseudonyms) to its pages as she tried to sustain herself financially. Writing for the Post meant she was able to take an active role in the type of celebrity coverage she got. Editor Daniel Stuart and Robinson worked together in developing her as a "personality." Stuart made good use of her notoriety and special place in the public interest. By dripfeeding his readers with information about Robinson, titbits about her health, dress, and lovers, he maintained her position as fashionable, thereby creating a demand for her work and biographical detail about her (Pascoe, Staging 156-58). The paper frequently contained newsbriefs and flattering remarks about Robinson. She, in turn, contributed a large number of works to the paper and

actively participated in constructing the personality that Stuart wanted.<sup>25</sup>

In many ways Robinson was more overtly commercial in her writing than either Smith or Yearsley, and certainly more so than More, Barbauld, Seward and Williams. Her flexibility in style and voice increased her marketability. She also shrewdly published and republished her poems, in order to make as much money out of them as possible. For example, she would publish them under pseudonyms in various newspapers and then, later, collect them for a volume (Pascoe, Staging 172). According to Fergus and Thaddeus, Robinson attempted to control her own career and made many publishing decisions herself but was not particularly successful (196). She blamed some of her failure on swindling publishers, but Fergus and Thaddeus suggest Robinson herself misjudged the market and tended to print too many copies of her works; in 1797 she changed publishing companies but still struggled to live off her profits (196-97).

Mary Robinson was too notorious to move freely in the homes of respectable London, but she was crucial to the social fabric and many of London's elite visited her

---

<sup>25</sup>Robinson's venue of publication may have contributed to her later decline in reputation, as she embraced the market which most Romantics stigmatised as to be avoided. The denigration of popular appeal, as compared to the elitism of high literature, is part of the Romantic ideology still commonly embraced today (Pascoe, Staging 173-74).

(Pascoe, "Spectacular" 167). Her revolutionary sympathies led to friendship with Godwin and Wollstonecraft, some of her prose work, such as Thoughts on the Condition of Women, and on the Injustice of Mental Subordination, showing that influence. Through her work for the Morning Post she became acquainted with Coleridge, who showed much respect for her. They addressed each other poetically, Robinson writing a poem to celebrate the birth of another Coleridge son, and another poem that shows Coleridge had sent her an early copy of "Kubla Khan" (Wordsworth, Introduction to Lyrical Tales).<sup>26</sup>

Robinson died on December 26, 1800, aged forty and penniless. Virtually her whole life had been spent in the public eye. She left behind her incomplete autobiography, which was finished by her daughter and published in 1801 (Lonsdale 470). There were many tributes to Perdita, including numerous poems from the pens of male poets. Her fame was in many respects sexually based, and she did not receive support from literary women; her memoirs frequently note that "female malice" was her major foe. Like Yearsley, Robinson fell prey to infamy and had to rewrite her self in order to regain public favour (though she was socially in a far better position to do so than Yearsley). Ironically, she

---

<sup>26</sup>Susan Luther discusses their relationship in her article "A Stranger Minstrel: Coleridge's Mrs. Robinson" (Studies in Romanticism 33:3 (1994): 391-409).

had to use that infamy and her fallen reputation to gain respectability.

Perhaps because of the prolonged and varied nature of her celebrity, Robinson makes many more direct references to fame than her contemporary women poets, but in ways often ambiguous and contradictory. Robinson's early foray into the literary market, as mentioned previously, came as a result of her husband's imprisonment for debt. In these first poems, Robinson displays or affects the modesty which has been established as typical of the woman poet. She denies all ambition for fame and insists that she publishes only out of desperate financial need. She also repeatedly denigrates her own poetic ability.

These strategies to establish her fulfilment of the role of the ideal woman, despite her entry into the masculine sphere via publication, can be seen in her poem "Captivity." Robinson writes:

While bright-ey'd Science crowns this favor'd Isle,  
 And Wisdom o'er the nation deigns to smile,  
 While genuine Knowledge fills each ample page,  
 And many a Bard adorns this happy age:  
 Say, shall a Female's soaring breast aspire,  
 To boast what Genius only can acquire?  
 The partial Friend's applause she may obtain,  
 But if she hopes for more, -- she hopes in  
 vain . . .

. . . The Captive's woe inspires the bold essay;  
 Ye Nine, assist the weak untutor'd lay:  
 An humble vot'ry at your shrine confess'd,  
 Pours forth the dictates of an artless breast . . .

. . . Frown not on me, the lowliest in your train,  
 No proud applause my artless tale can gain:  
 At Pity's shrine my humble vows I pay,  
 And soft Humanity inspires the lay:  
 For thee alone, I court the pensive Muse,  
 For thee, Captivity's the theme I chuse;  
 For thee alone, I soar on Fancy's wing,  
 Alone from thee, my young ideas spring;  
 No other views my slender efforts claim,  
 Untaught by Wisdom, and unknown to Fame;  
 I heed not what the giddy throng may say,  
 If Heaven-born Charity approves the lay . . .

The keynotes here are her lack of ambition, her lack of esteem for her own talents, and the financial motivation behind publication. The same emphasis on lack of ambition appears in "Elegiac Verses":

Be such the sanction of an humble Bard,  
 Untaught the depths of Science to explore;  
 Whose numbers, while they flow from pure regard,  
 Seek not on Fame's expanded wings to soar.

She expresses similar sentiments in "Celadon and Lydia: A Tale," the companion piece to "Captivity." The heroine, Lydia, is described thus:

One peaceful tenor of serene repose  
 Her bosom own'd, from pain and trouble free,  
 She never sought Ambition's gilded woes,  
 Content to follow Nature's soft decree.

The relationship between the lovers also stresses a lack of ambition:

Each shar'd the grief or joy the other prov'd,  
 Their hearts were one, their wishes were the same,  
 In calm serenity they meekly mov'd,  
 Nor barter'd sweet Content for glitt'ring Fame.

Similarly to her contemporaries, Robinson emphasises virtue as much as renown:

Thro' the wide country largely spread her fame,  
 Her virtues echo'd thro' the distant land,  
 And every voice proclaim'd Celinda's name.

Robinson's later poems, written after her high public profile was established, reflect her experiences of fame. Fame in Robinson's poetry is never treated consistently: at times it is portrayed as a negative burden, at times as an exciting phenomenon. The positive views of fame are often connected with famous male figures, Robinson being no doubt aware that femininity and fame are less sure companions than masculinity and public recognition. In "Elegy to the Memory of David Garrick Esq.," Robinson refers to "the bright harvest of luxuriant Fame." And in her elegy on Chatterton she laments the young poet's loss of personal fame (his name hidden by "OBLIVION'S wing") but is reassured that his verse will "in dazzling lustre live." Similarly, in "A Monody to the Memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds," Robinson says:

. . . Brightly it shines where thy pure ashes sleep;  
 And while pale melancholy hides to weep,  
 Fame, with glittering wing, shall fan the fire,  
 To shed new lustre on the Muse's lyre!

. . . And though thy voice no more can charm the  
breast,  
 Though thy pure spirit mingles with the blest,  
 Thy sainted ashes shall e'en death defy;  
 For fame, which virtue gives -- shall never die.

It is interesting that Robinson unites fame and virtue even for a male. It is certainly something that she repeatedly does when she writes about women and fame. For example, in her poem "Elegy on the Death of Lady Middleton," who "by peerless VIRTUES claim'd the fairest fame," Robinson invites a comparison as she sets up Middleton's life in contrast to her own:

Nor did those Virtues flaunt their innate rays,  
To court applause, or charm the vulgar throng,  
No ostentatious glare illum'd her days,  
No idle boast escap'd her tuneful tongue.

When FAME, ambitious to record her praise,  
On glitt'ring pinions spread her name afar,  
Her gentle nature shunn'd the dazzling blaze,  
Mild as the lustre of the morning star!

Robinson seems almost ashamed of her own lust for fame and recognition. Other poems testify even more explicitly to the burden of fame for a woman, if one interprets the speaker as Robinson herself.

"Reflections," for instance, makes this cynical comment on the matter:

We pant for glitt'ring Fame,  
And when pale Envy blots the page  
That might have charm'd a future age,  
We find 'tis but a name.

Robinson specifically discusses the poet's response to fame in "The Adieu to Fancy," emphasising the pains rather than the pleasures that fame brings:

'Tis Fancy wings the Poet's thought,  
With classic Taste sublimely fraught;

And bids the fount of Reason flow,  
With smooth delight, or ruffled woe.

Full oft the gentle Sylph I've seen,  
With soothing smile and sportive mien,  
When, wand'ring to her fairy bow'rs,  
She bound my grateful breast with flow'rs.

And oft with flatt'ring Hope she came  
To twine a wreath of promis'd Fame;  
Yet 'midst the laurel'd gift I found  
Full many a thorn my breast to wound.

"Stanzas" repeats the sentiment, also in relation to the poet:

For what are the pleasures the world can bestow --  
The gay mirthful scene, or the banquet profuse?  
What the laurel of Fame, or the song of the Muse,  
When the heart bleeds in silence, the victim of woe?

Many of Robinson's poems are apparently autobiographical, and would therefore seem to express her own feelings about her fame. "Ode to Beauty" draws on Robinson's experiences of being early in the public eye. First linking beauty to ill-nature, jealousy and slander, she then addresses a beautiful young maid:

Lur'd by the babbling tongue of FAME,  
Too soon, insidious FLATT'RY came;  
Flush'd VANITY her footsteps led,  
To charm thee from thy blest repose,  
While Fashion twin'd about thy head  
A wreath of wounding woes . . .  
While Envy's meagre tribe assail  
Thy gentle form, and spotless mind.

For Robinson, fame as celebrity, in this poem, contributes to the downfall of the beautiful woman, which in turn leads to an attack on her fame as reputation.

(This is an uncannily accurate description of Letitia Landon's experience of fame in the nineteenth century.) In "An Ode to Vanity" Robinson bemoans the influence of vanity on people from all walks of life, from the warrior whom "mad ambition warms" to the Indian who "paints his tawny face" out of vanity. Robinson includes herself in those under vanity's sway, surprisingly not in relation to her beauty, but in relation to her literary aspiration:

TRIUMPHANT, DEATHLESS VANITY!  
 E'en now, I feel thy vivid sparks infuse  
 A warmth that guides my hand, and bids me court  
the MUSE.

Thus Robinson admits a desire for recognition and praise; though fame has been the cause of much grief, she is still attracted to it.

Robinson's life in the public eye was obviously draining at times. In "Stanzas to a Friend" she indicates her disillusionment:

Tir'd of the world, my weary mind recoils  
 From splendid scenes, and transitory joys;  
 From fell Ambition's false and fruitless toils,  
 From hope that flatters, and from bliss that cloy.

However, in "The Reply to Time" Robinson shows that while fame is not always desirable, oblivion is not an attractive alternative:

The loftiest fabric rear'd to fame;  
 The sculptur'd BUST, the POET'S name . . .  
 The flame that warms th'empassion'd heart;

All that fine feeling can impart;  
 The wonders of exterior grace;  
 The spells that bind the fairest face;  
 Fade in oblivion's torpid hour  
 The victims of the TYRANT Pow'r!

In "Stanzas to a Friend, Who Desired to Have my Portrait"  
 we find Robinson openly admitting her love of fame:

I'm odd, eccentric, fond of ease,  
 Impatient, difficult to please;  
 Ambition fires my breast!  
 Yet not for wealth, or titles vain --  
 Let the Laurel deck my strain,  
 And, Dulness, take the rest!

Together with Yearsley's Preface to The Royal Captives,  
 this is one of the most direct, if whimsical,  
 declarations of aspiration to fame from the pen of a  
 woman poet in the Romantic Period.

One measure of the change in Robinson's attitude  
 towards her poetry, and also of the change in the times  
 in terms of the growing assertiveness of the publishing  
 woman in the tumultuous 1790s, is Robinson's use of the  
 pen name "Sappho." According to Pascoe, Robinson's  
 public image was as "the English Sappho," equivalent to  
 Smith's "sorrowful Charlotte" (Pascoe, Staging 2).  
 Robinson's persona, unlike Smith's, was more sexualised  
 than maternal. In the public eye she was a fallen woman,  
 and the title of Sappho was double-edged -- both erotic  
 and poetic. Pascoe and Adburgham both quote from reviews  
 to show that the title was accorded to her by the critics  
 (Adburgham 176; Pascoe, Staging 157).

It was an association Robinson encouraged with her 1796 volume Sappho and Phaon, as she rewrote and transformed the details of her own life through the literary persona of Sappho (Ralston 140). "The story of the LESBIAN MUSE . . . [is an] example of the human mind, enlightened by the most exquisite talents, yet yielding to the destructive controul of ungovernable passions" wrote Robinson (Sappho 3). Her "Account of Sappho" preceding the sonnets stresses Sappho's fame as a natural consequence of her talents: "[her] fame beamed around her with the superior effulgence which her works had created . . ." (Robinson, Sappho 5). The classical persona of Sappho gave her confidence to assert herself as an independent, talented and sensual woman, but protected her from being personally accused of masculinity, egotism or libertinism (Ralston 141). Robinson also wrote a history of the sonnet in association with Sappho and Phaon, so while playing to the reading public's knowledge of her past she also claimed literary respectability (Pascoe, Staging 17-18).

In the sonnets themselves, fame recurs again and again. The first sonnet allows the poet's aspiration to fame:

Well may the mind, with tuneful numbers grac'd,  
 To Fame's immortal attributes aspire,  
 Above the treach'rous spells of low desire,  
 That wound the sense, by vulgar joys debas'd.

Sonnet v refers to "That fame, ill-fated Sappho lov'd so

well," as being unable to replace love; it is this sentiment that is echoed throughout the sequence, for example in sonnets viii, xi, and xxi.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from the sonnet sequence of Sappho and Phaon, Robinson encouraged her association with Sappho in other poems, including "To a False Friend. In Imitation of Sappho":

False Lover! no, upon the tow'ring steep,  
Where Fame her temple rears, defying Time,  
Sappho shall mark unaw'd the bounding deep,  
And meet her fate with fortitude sublime!  
And while thy name to blank Oblivion fades,  
Sappho shall smiling seek th' Elysian shades.

Both the assertion of lasting fame for the woman poet and the author's literary confidence in assuming the name "Sappho" point to how much Robinson's attitude and the times had changed since her first publications. Also showing Robinson's end-of-career confidence are a series of pseudonymous works in which she responded to criticism of women's public role, and her "city" poems which bring women into the public realm and domestic detail into the street, confusing and disrupting two supposedly separate spheres (Pascoe, "Spectacular" 170).

As with Smith and Yearsley's, Robinson's public literary role emerged from financial necessity. To be

---

<sup>27</sup>Jerome McGann explores Robinson's feelings regarding Sappho and the position of women in literature in depth in his article "Mary Robinson and the Myth of Sappho" (Modern Language Quarterly 56:1 (1995) 55-76).

successful in the marketplace Robinson had to develop a marketing strategy: her use of pseudonyms, her autobiographical details, and her newspaper "personality" all contributed to her success. Despite the commercial motivation behind the publication of her poetry, Robinson does seem to have wished finally to be remembered by posterity as "the MUSE, and not the WOMAN" (Robinson, Sappho 5). Robinson's literary career was at its peak in the 1790s, a time of social upheaval in Britain. The tolerance of that decade was not to last. The end of the century saw a change in the climate -- Robinson's memoirs were meant to justify her actions, reclaim propriety, and stress the maternal, as I shall discuss in the next chapter.

#### v Changing Times

Charlotte Smith, Ann Yearsley, and Mary Robinson were all poets of renown at the close of the eighteenth century. Because of their lack of connection and overt need to write for money, these women who were not part of the Bluestockings raised issues that the Blues had managed to avoid (Gavin 18). Their lack of financial security was important because the need to write for money directly challenged the domestic ideology that relegated women to the home. All three needed fame for the financial success it brought with it, but struggled

to find ways of juggling fame's implications in terms of femininity and respectability. The emphatic tone in which these poets often insisted they were fulfilling their obligations as mothers by writing, served to highlight the flaws of domesticity, and therefore of the ideology of the feminine (Gavin 19). By publishing poetry women made their economic plight and the masculine failure that caused it public. Smith and Robinson in particular exploited the idea that women needed men's protection for survival, constructing personae that meant that readers saw not just the poems but the poets, not just authors but women in distress (Labbe 68). They also threatened the myth of poetry as a priestly vocation, or alternatively as a dilettantish hobby, by making it seem like a job or career (Gavin 20).

Yearsley, Smith, and Robinson were public figures in a different way to More, Seward, Barbauld and Williams. They were much more conscious of, and to some extent controlled, what details of their lives went public. They all became sensible of the need to develop a poetic persona for the marketplace, unlike their more conservative contemporaries, so as to distance their private selves from their public reputations. They did, however, exploit the details of their lives that encouraged financial success, selling their sorrows to

sell their poetry (Labbe 71).<sup>28</sup> Their poetry is in some ways less personal than the previous generation's because the women were now much more aware of the public and public perception. To be successful in the marketplace, they had in part to appease those who feared the growing power of the commercial woman writer. Accordingly the poets had to express the expected protestations of modesty and reluctance to publish. However, their literary success brought confidence in their abilities, as shown by the changing prefaces and admissions of desire for and enjoyment of fame.

Together with Seward, Barbauld, More, and Williams, Smith, Yearsley, and Robinson represent the elite of women poets from 1770 to 1800. Although these women were the most famous and successful, they were by no means the only women publishing poetry during these years. Jackson's bibliography of Romantic women poets provides a multitude of names of women who published volumes of poetry. Many published only one edition of one volume; others managed two volumes, or perhaps a number of editions. From 1770 to 1799, which provides a convenient if somewhat arbitrary cut-off date for distinguishing two periods of ideology, 335 first editions of poetry were published by women poets. In all, 431 editions of

---

<sup>28</sup>Labbe refers only to Smith and Robinson in her article, but I think Yearsley also sold her sorrows to sell her poetry, if in a somewhat different and less sophisticated manner than the other two women. For example, she complained of her treatment by More and her children's misfortunes in her poems.

women's poetry appeared (Jackson 393). In the next chapter I shall look at the poetry of some other women who aspired to a literary reputation but met with limited success. I shall also look at the changes in gender ideology (that factors like the French Revolution and the commercialisation of literature helped to produce), and the effect they had on the women poets' relationship with fame into the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE NEW CENTURY

#### i Fleeting Fame

Not all women publishing poetry before the turn of the century achieved the recognition that Smith and Robinson, in particular, did. Other women had more fleeting entries into the public sphere. Among them were a number of working-class women (Yearsley was not the only labouring woman to venture into print), who met with limited success. The period's taste for the concept of natural genius assisted these women's access to print, but didn't necessarily ensure everlasting fame. The working-class women poets were often quite cynical about their reception into the literary world and the likelihood of literary success, and were not above venting that cynicism in their poetry. Perhaps the roughness of their education, coupled with their marginalised position in life, meant they were not quite as reticent or as decorous as their upper-class colleagues in dealing with possible public reaction.

One such "peasant poet" was Janet Little, a Scottish dairy maid. She was in service with Robert Burns' patron Mrs Dunlop, a position that facilitated the publication

of The Poetical Works of Janet Little, the Scotch Milkmaid in 1792. The annexing of her occupation to the title of her publication indicates Little may have deliberately assumed the role of peasant poet, with all the advantages and disadvantages this entailed. Presenting herself as a self-taught writer would have helped secure patronage, but custom dictated that patronage should be uncritically and humbly appreciated. Appeasing a patron and maintaining artistic integrity were two aims not always compatible (Bold 23).

Little dedicated her volume "To the Right Honourable Flora, Countess of Loudon," saying that the "following poems are with Permission, Humbly Inscribed, by Your Ladyship's Ever Grateful, and Obedient, Humble Servant, Janet Little" (qtd. in Ferguson, "Janet" 205). Her dedication shows her to be suitably self-effacing about her own social position and sufficiently flattering of her patron's. Various poems, including "To a Lady Who Sent the Author Some Paper with a Reading of Sillar's Poems," "On Seeing Mr. -----Baking Cakes," and "To My Aunty," also allude to herself and her poetic ability in an appropriately humble manner. In "To the Public" the thrice-marginalised (female, Scots, and peasant) poet asks for indulgence, in the third person, of her background:

"Vain are her hopes," the snarling critic cries;  
 "Rude and imperfect is her rural song."

But she on public candour firm relies,  
And humbly begs they'll pardon what is wrong.

Yet it is clear from her poetry that Little would have loved to have been as successful as her countryman Burns, whom she addresses in several poems, including the respectful "Epistle to Mr Robert Burns" (Bold 23).<sup>29</sup> She seems to have been somewhat vexed by the lack of response from Burns to her attempts to contact him, and resentful in general of the double standards she faced as a female peasant poet (Bold 25). Her poem "Given to a Lady Who Asked me to Write a Poem" shows some bitterness about reactions to her attempt at literary success:

"Yet Burns, I'm tauld, can write wi' ease,  
An' a' denominations please;  
Can wi' uncommon glee impart  
A usefu' lesson to the heart;  
Can ilka latent thought expose,  
An' Nature trace whare'er she goes:  
Of politics can talk wi' skill,  
Nor dare the critics blame his quill.

"But then a rustic country quean  
To write -- was e'er the like o't seen?  
A milkmaid poem books to print:  
Mair fit she wad her dairy tent;  
Or labour at her spinning-wheel,  
An' do her wark baith swift an' weel.  
Frae that she may some profit share,  
But winna frae her rhyming ware.  
Does she, poor silly thing, pretend  
The manners of our age to mend?  
Mad as we are, we're wise enough  
Still to despise sic paultry stuff.

---

<sup>29</sup>Moira Ferguson has analysed Little's relationship with Burns and her treatment of it in her poetry. See "Janet Little and Robert Burns: The Politics of the Heart" in Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices, eds. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (Hanover UP of New England, 1995), 207-219.

"May she wha writes, of wit get mair,  
An' a' that read an ample share  
Of candour every fault to screen,  
That in her doggerel scrawls are seen."

All this and more, a critic said;  
I heard and slunk behind the shade:  
So much I dread their cruel spite,  
My hand still trembles when I write.

It is notable that the "cruel spite" of the critics causes her only to hide from public view (and therefore, presumably, publication), and not to cease writing altogether. The distinction between writing and publishing, as previously noted, is an important one, as it is not until the moment of publication that the woman enters the public sphere. Janet Little published only the one volume in her lifetime, though some religious poems were published after her death (Lonsdale 453).

Elizabeth Hands was another working-class poet who produced only one volume: The Death of Amnon. A Poem. With an Appendix; Containing Pastorals, and Other Poetical Pieces appeared in 1789. Her main poem, "The Death of Amnon," was about incestuous rape, and there was apparently some concern over its possible reception, even though the subject was biblical. The reviewers, however, did not mention the controversial topic. One reviewer did comment that though he did not feel the volume would rescue her from oblivion, he hoped that the subscription money would allow Hands and her family to lead a comfortable life (Lonsdale 422).

In her volume, *Hands* included two interesting poems that anticipate people's reaction to a poetical servant. "A Poem, On the Supposition of an Advertisement appearing in a Morning Paper, of the Publication of a Volume of Poems, by a Servant-Maid" mimics the tea-time conversation of a group of ladies discussing the advertisement:

"I suppose you all saw in the paper this morning  
A volume of Poems advertised -- 'tis said  
They're produced by the pen of a poor servant-maid."  
"A servant write verses!" says Madam Du Bloom:  
"Pray what is the subject -- a Mop, or a Broom?"

The women go on to discuss appropriate behaviour for servants:

". . . If servants can tell  
How to write to their mothers, to say they are well,  
And read of a Sunday The Duty of Man,  
Which is more I believe than one half of them can;  
I think 'tis much properer they should rest there,  
Than be reaching at things so much out of their  
sphere."

*Hands'* companion piece, "A Poem, On the Supposition of the Book having been Published and Read," parodies the same ladies reacting to her work. *Hands* sneers at their values, imagining them reacting to her topic of rape ("'A Rape! . . . A delicate theme for a female I swear'"), and mocks the ignorance of her socially superior audience:

". . . Amnon, Miss Rhymer, who's he?  
His name," says Miss Gaiety, "'s quite new to  
me". . .  
Says Sir Timothy Turtle, "My daughters never look  
In anything else but a cookery-book:  
The properest study for women designed."

Having been told the poem is based on a Scripture tale, Miss Gaiety declares if she thought she could find it she'd borrow her housekeeper's Bible, Hands scorning the dubious Christianity of her social betters who have to borrow the Bible from their servants. The ladies are more concerned with Hands' occupation and family than the products of her pen, dismissing her poetry thus:

"Some pieces, I think, that are pretty correct:  
 A style elevated you cannot expect;  
 To some of her equals they may be a treasure,  
 And country lasses may read 'em with pleasure."

The working-class women poets were always aware that they were stepping out of not only their expected gender role, but also their social sphere. They dealt confidently with the potentially negative reaction of their audience, often in a satirical style. However, such confidence perhaps belies a genuine anxiety of perception that these women felt, for though assured enough to write about the potential criticism that they faced, they were undoubtedly harmed by such criticism: the nature of their social position meant that they were reliant on their publications being profitable. I would suggest that the very fact that they anticipated negative reactions to their verse is indicative of an underlying concern about their reception.

## ii The Backlash

The 1790s were years of political and social turmoil, when many different strands of ideology and belief competed for dominance in an increasingly unstable environment. The French Revolution was a dramatic symbol of the social and economic change that threatened England. It challenged traditional English society and its ideology, as competition and confrontation replaced the paternalistic notions of responsibilities and dependences (Poovey xv). Literature did not escape the turbulence, and "when the hopes for a republican France began to fail, the general literary climate turned against or attempted to moderate the feminine sensibility that had formerly dominated the scene" (Ralston 153). The 1790s had seen a huge increase in women's writing in all genres and the first concerted representation of feminist thought (Curran, "Women" 185). As a consequence, revolutionary sympathy, liberalism, and feminism all became linked in the public's mind, so that the political backlash against Jacobinism entailed a simultaneous movement against feminist thought.

The association of these values is conveniently and neatly illustrated by Richard Polwhele's now frequently cited poem The Unsex'd Females. In the poem, Polwhele deplores the influence of Mary Wollstonecraft (whose vilification typified the conservative resurgence),

linking her feminist sympathies with subversive "revolutionary politics and anti-Christian values" (Byrnes). Polwhele labels several other women as her followers and similarly berates them. Amongst these women are the poets Anna Barbauld, Charlotte Smith, Helen Maria Williams, Ann Yearsley and Mary Robinson. Only Williams of this list can justly be termed a follower of Wollstonecraft (she steadfastly supported the French Revolution). The others all had brief flirtations with revolutionary ideals but this, along with their public presence as writers, was their only substantial link with Wollstonecraft.

The real reason these women were classed as "unsex'd" was not so much what they did as what they didn't do. Unlike the catalogue of literary women whom Polwhele holds up as exemplary (including poets Hannah More and Anna Seward, and the prominent Bluestockings), these women did not provide positive role models of chaste, sentimental, subordinate femininity. It is More that Polwhele extols as the most saintly example, because she was vehemently opposed to Wollstonecraftian feminism and believed in the natural intellectual and psychological differences between the sexes. Maintaining gender role distinction is Polwhele's not-so-hidden agenda in an ostensibly political poem (Byrnes).

Public ponderings on what might happen to England if women abandoned their femininity and domestic obligations, as alleged in The Unsex'd Females, generated fear that contributed to a backlash against certain kinds of female writing and certain kinds of females. Other contributing factors were the reaction against sensibility (what Gary Kelly terms the "remasculinisation" of literature), the increasing moral conservatism of English society, and the growing emphasis on the "natural" differences of kind between the sexes. Consequently, the ideology of the feminine was re-emphasised for the new century. The terms under which women could participate in the public sphere were redefined. Women were not to be eradicated from the public sphere altogether: publishing material by women that supported and enforced the gender ideology was a useful means of entrenching ideas. Domesticity, morality, and delicacy were stressed as essential to the femininity of the publishing woman. Literature had to reflect and authorise the newly delineated role of the domestic woman.

Nancy Armstrong credits the increase in domestic writing from the eighteenth century on as reflecting a shift from a class-based culture to a culture based primarily on gender norms (Armstrong 11; 65-66). Domesticity was characterised by the division of spheres of influence, with political concerns being assigned to

the masculine arena and all functions related to the management of the home being assigned to the feminine. Women ran the household but were also labelled the instinctive or natural experts of emotional and moral relations (Gavin 20). New conservative conduct books came out in force at the end of the 1790s, and Hannah More and Elizabeth Hamilton's efforts helped redefine the domestic woman as custodian of the nation's morals (Kelly, Women 21). The irony was that women in fact had to participate in the public sphere (as readers, writing subjects, and written-about objects) for the feminine ideology of the domestic to be enforced (Shevelov 15).

Marlon Ross identifies a hierarchy of four "categories" of poet in the years 1790 to 1820: the powerful male poet, the feminised male poet, the feminine female poet, and the abnormal Bluestocking woman poet (189-90). This hierarchy illustrates the dramatic fall in status of the intellectual woman writer and the corresponding rise in status of the overtly feminine woman poet. The term "Bluestocking," once bringing to mind shining examples of female virtue and learning, came to be pejorative, as fear developed that "overeducating" women would leave them unfit for their sphere (M. Williamson, Introduction xv). The hierarchy also provided women poets with a space of their own from within which they could be approved as writers: "the feminine poetess [could] position herself and delineate

her own normality" against the abnormality of the Bluestocking poet (Ross 190). The image of literary femininity that was deemed acceptable was difficult for women to challenge because it was so embedded in the dominant culture (Poovey 4). By the end of the eighteenth century "female" and "feminine" were thought by almost all to be synonymous (Poovey 6), so to not be feminine in writing threatened the poet's female identity as a whole.

Not surprisingly, the impact of this ideology on women poets was enormous. By publishing poetry they transgressed the boundaries of the public sphere and risked being labelled unfeminine, and as a result women writers grew more reluctant to be seen as professional writers or attempt the traditionally masculine genres and discourses (Kelly, Women 174). From the turn of the century, the woman poet had to work within the confines of the socially acceptable definition of "femininity" or fail to succeed as an author. For poetry, this meant avoiding overtly political subjects, or indeed any topic related to the public sphere -- unless it was in some way connected to the upholding of moral values. Sentimental feeling and the soft affections were emphasised in contrast to the reason and excessive passions that had supposedly led Wollstonecraft astray (Curran, "Women" 190). It also meant the women poets had to emphasise

that their writing was only a hobby of their leisure hours and not an occupation.

As a consequence of the visibility of either their success or failure, women worked hard at presenting themselves as paragons of domestic virtue, trying to establish their authorship as an extension of their domesticity rather than an alternative role (Hickock 11-12). Often the women poets constructed their readership as a circle of family or friends to be entertained, "thus avoiding charges of masculine ambition" while reassuring readers of activity proper to their sex (MacDonald Shaw 96). For example, Mary Tighe's Psyche was printed privately and distributed to her friends. Her poems were "not published until after her death but it is clear they were intended for publication all along" (Ross 159).

Modesty was essential for the woman poet, and there is a marked return to the gestures of reluctance to publish in prefaces after 1800, gestures that had disappeared from poets like Smith and Robinson. Prefaces were used by the women poets after 1800 to deny their literary ambition (a strategy similar to that of the first group of women poets discussed) and to emphasise their femininity. Publishing at the behest of friends or to relieve financial burdens were again frequent pretexts. For example, Anna Adcock's 1808 volume Cottage Poems contains an address "To the Public" which

apologises for her temerity in publishing the poems. She assures her readers that the book is "exclusively for the benefit of [her] Creditors" (qtd. in MacDonald Shaw 92).

Women were also eager to signal that they held their poetic efforts in little regard and that they were certainly not attempting to compete with the male poets. Often this was done by stressing their own ignorance. To use Adcock again as an example, the same address points out her lack of education and her knowledge that her poems are "neither elegant nor correct." She emphasises that they were written from the heart, a heart that she tells the reader is honest (MacDonald Shaw 92).

In many respects these methods are similar to those used by Barbauld, More, Seward and Williams, as they attempted to appear demure and feminine even as they published poetry. However, the events of the 1790s influenced the new generation of women poets. The first group had all been advantaged by social position and a good education. The new poets did not necessarily have either benefit. The modesty of the earlier poets often appears assumed: in the light of their often complex and intellectual works their demureness comes across as an expected component of publication rather than a sincere expression of feeling. After the 1790s there is a sense of genuine concern on the part of the woman poet that she will be perceived by her audience as ambitious and

unfeminine because she publishes. Whereas the earlier generation sought to reassure their audience that they were feminine, the later women poets often seek as much to reassure themselves as their audience. They have absorbed the beliefs of the ideology of the feminine.

This new ideology was monitored in part by the critics. The approach could be fairly subtle: rather than admonishing those who strayed from the prescribed values, they praised those who adhered to them. Reward rather than punishment enticed women to conform. Those poets who concentrated on themes of love, and other aspects of the domestic sphere, had their works gushed over by chivalrous male reviewers. The more conservative the viewpoint of the woman poet the more she was praised -- for example, Jane West and Ann Bannerman (Curran, "Women" 189-90). In 1799, The British Critic praised West for her ability to "communicate instruction to the young," and, in 1800, Ann Bannerman's volume Poems was praised by the same journal because "it offers itself to the world in a plain, simple, and modest garb, without any promise of title-page, or vain parade of preface; and is merely addressed to a friend in . . . chaste and beautiful lines" (Rev. of West 279; Rev. of Bannerman 139).

Critical indulgence of women poets kept them in their place more effectively than hostile criticism,

flattering women into complaisance while frustrating the efforts of the more discerning (Poovey 39). Their contributions to society were rewarded by both male approval and a sense of self-worth, so women had an investment in naturalising the feminine ideal (Poovey 15). Punishment for straying from the established path was meted out, however, when it was thought warranted. One of the most startling examples of this is the previously mentioned hostile reception to the poem 1811, by the otherwise respected and much-loved Anna Barbauld. Another who fell victim to changing definitions of morality and femininity was Mary Robinson. Both the content and the reception of Robinson's Memoirs point to changes in the dominant ideology.

In her autobiography, Robinson works hard at constructing herself foremost as a wife and mother. Her writing is portrayed as both an extension of her domestic duty and secondary to it ("I divided my time betwixt reading, writing, and making a little wardrobe for my expected darling. I little regretted the busy scenes of life; I sighed not for public attention" (Memoirs 71)). She asserts that her falling into disrepute is the result of her husband's failings and not her own: ". . . my CREATOR can bear witness that had I been blessed with that fidelity and affection which I deserved, my heart was disposed to the observance of every duty, every claim

which would have embellished domestic propriety" (Memoirs 73).

Robinson tried to re-write her life in accordance with the prevailing ideology of the new century. She tried to present herself as a domestic woman forced into the public arena, but, as Peterson notes, there is always a sense of her appreciating the financial calamity that allowed her to venture into print, and she also clearly delighted in the public speech and self-presentation that acting allowed (Peterson 170). Robinson claims she turned to poetry, then acting, to support herself and her daughter -- that is, from a desire to fulfil her domestic function -- but this is hardly the truth of the matter (Peterson 170). Her failure to convince her audience of her disregard for fame can be seen in the response to the publication of her memoirs.

Robinson had generally been fairly well treated by literary critics, particularly after she moved away from Della Cruscanism. The 1792 edition of her poems had been reviewed as "the elegant effusions of a mind which seems to feel too much for its own peace" (qtd. in Todd, Dictionary 272). In December 1796 The British Critic declared: "We have frequently had occasion to commend the taste and talents of this fair writer . . ." Of the publication they were reviewing, Sappho and Phaon, the review pronounced: "We think this before us the most

polished production of her pen" (Rev. of Sappho 627).

Five years later, however, in August of 1801, The British Critic said of her memoirs:

We treated the performances of this well-known female, when alive, with a certain complacency inspired by her misfortunes, and justified by the degree of talents she possessed. These Memoirs have nothing to do with the one, and exhibit no proof of the other. (Rev. of Memoirs 217-18)

Also in 1801, a disgruntled reader said: "we surely want not public panegyrics upon characters which have been lost to decency and shame" (qtd. in Todd, Dictionary 271).

According to MacDonald Shaw, memoirs like Robinson's (and William Godwin's biography of Wollstonecraft) were seen to be socially and morally subversive, detailing as they did alternative lifestyles to the patriarchal family (109). In 1806, Arthur Aikin, nephew of Anna Barbauld, cautioned in a review of Robinson's Poetical Works:

Before a tender-hearted young lady has committed to memory the invocation to "Apathy," or learned to recite with tragic emphasis the "Ode to Ingratitude," let her at least be aware from what reflections the author wished to take shelter in insensibility, and for what favours her lovers had proved ungrateful. (qtd. in Lonsdale 470)

This quotation shows the increasing emphasis on interpreting and judging a woman's poetry in the light of biographical detail. Ironically, this approach, which was to have enormous repercussions for the women poets of the nineteenth century, had been encouraged by Robinson

and Smith in their use of their own lives as a basis for their public personae and their poetical themes.

Not everyone agreed with the literary Establishment's reassessment of women's poetry, however. Some women poets managed to show dissent. For example, Charlotte Dacre, whose poetical publications met with limited success, wrote in support of Robinson in 1805. "To the Shade of Mary Robinson" was written after Robinson's death and is effusive in its praise of the poet. Dacre refers to Robinson as an angel several times, and rather melodramatically and somewhat unbelievably comments on her "high virtues, angelic, yet glorious." She also mentions in veiled terms the troubles of Robinson's life, characterising them as being caused by "base upstarts." Dacre sees Robinson's fame as a victory: "Still, still in the grave dost thou triumph victorious, / Thy fame sounding loud in thine enemies' ears!" Dacre asks that the spirit of the "lovely Mary" smile on her and be her companion for the rest of her life. Dacre clearly defies the critics' efforts to consign Mary Robinson to oblivion.

### iii The Conservatives

Surprisingly, considering the social circumstances, more women published first editions of poetry after 1800

than before. From 1800 to 1829, 851 first editions were published and 1454 editions of women's poetry in all (Jackson 393-94). Even a cursory glance at Jackson's bibliography, however, shows that a large number of these publications were devotional poems and poetry for children -- two genres that fitted perfectly with woman's newly demarcated role as moral guardian. A large number were also women who made brief forays into publishing poetry, only to return to obscurity. No woman poet was to achieve the same prominence as any of the poets before the close of the century, until Felicia Hemans emerged as a leading poetic figure after 1815. Joanna Baillie was probably the most respected and famous female literary figure between 1800 and 1815, but her renown rested predominantly on her dramas. The first decade of the new century saw the death of some of the more prominent women poets: Robinson (1800), Smith (1806), Yearsley (1806), and Seward (1809). Several other poets, mostly conservative, outlived their more famous counterparts and managed to weather successfully the changes that occurred in the literary and social environment as the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth.

Jane West was one such poet: she was conservative, adaptable, and her publications spanned the two centuries. West is perhaps better remembered as a novelist, but she published seven volumes of poetry from 1786 to 1810. She subscribed to the conservative

ideology espoused by the likes of More, her 1806 conduct manual Letters to a Young Lady advocating women be educated in order to fit them for the task of morally uplifting society (Todd, British 707). She was the wife of a farmer but details of her financial position are unclear now and were presented to the public somewhat confusingly in her own time (Lonsdale 379; Todd, British 706).

West's conservatism developed with the changing social climate, perhaps indicating her ability to astutely judge the requirements of the changing marketplace rather than her moral growth. Her initial publications are certainly not as "correct" in outlook as her later efforts. The advertisement to West's volume of 1786, Miscellaneous Poetry, presents West as a domestic woman before a literary one but interestingly closes on the admission that she seeks "Literary Fame." Nevertheless, she is careful not to claim literature as a career:

. . . the Writer is so fully engrossed by the essential duties of domestic life, as not to be able to consider Poetry in any other light, than as an agreeable relaxation.

The author's apparent modesty is somewhat undercut, however, by the closing passage:

Should the present undertaking meet with a favorable reception, she may, perhaps, have the courage to publish a larger work; but whatever may be the event, she will have the consolation to reflect,

that the cause of Religion and Morality will receive no injury by her attempt to acquire Literary Fame.

Lonsdale describes her as always self-deprecating but persistent (379), in that she always expressed modesty but certainly worked hard at her literary endeavours. Such a description suggests that West was aware that modesty helped ensure the acceptability of fame for the publishing woman.

The first poem in Miscellaneous Poetry has West addressing a friend who had advised her to correct and publish her poems. "Elegy to a Friend" expresses West's trepidation as she exposes her verses to public view, but it also clearly states her motivation:

With such a bosom inmate shall I dare,  
The unknown paths of public fame to try;  
At fashion's high tribunal urge my prayer,  
And on the sentence of caprice rely?

Still as of old, fame's golden fruit to guard,  
An ever wakeful dragon couchant lies;  
Around lies scatter'd many a murder'd bard,  
Who erst adventur'd to obtain the prize.

Say, should thy timid friend the fight demand,  
Fir'd by the prospect of the rich reward,  
Will generous candour and the tuneful band,  
Who know to gain success, her doom award?

It is surely no coincidence that such an open acknowledgement of fame as a motivation comes only in the first volume of West's career. As well as making this acknowledgement, the lines also voice West's expected, and partially feigned, anxiety of perception. How will the dragon respond to her works? Will she too become a

"murder'd bard?" Does she dare risk offering her work to a fickle public? These protestations of fear of public scrutiny are reminiscent of the largely pretended modesty of poets like More and Barbauld.

Together these stanzas and the advertisement illustrate nicely the two contradictory positions of the woman poet. On the one hand is the emphasis on domesticity, reluctant publication, and morality; on the other hand there is the increasing viability of literary fame and success for women poets. West capitalises on both of these positions by expressing reluctance and concern over publishing while, in the process, calling attention to her hopes for her poems. She later established herself firmly in the conservative camp ideologically, but was still a prolific and popular writer, so in fact, like More, she balanced both sides of the equation.

West presented her modesty and domesticity more convincingly in a later poem, "To the Hon. Mrs. C[ockayn]e" (1791), but her desire for fame is still evident. In this poem she describes herself in the third person as a woman "Self-taught, and married to a farmer; / Who wrote all kinds of verse with ease, / Made pies and puddings, frocks and cheese." But the self-effacing pose is undercut somewhat at the end of the poem where she laments the hostile treatment poetry is subject to from

critics. At first West modestly says: "Oh! that the great ones would confine / Such treatment to such verse as mine, / Adapted but to entertain / A partial friend or simple swain." But what follows suggests she would prefer less hostile treatment:

Yet, with a votary's ardent zeal,  
The sorrows of the Muse I feel.  
While Painting for her sons can claim  
At once emolument and fame;  
While Music, when she strikes the chord,  
Confers distinction and reward;  
Contemptuous scorn, or cold regard,  
Awaits the heaven-illuminated Bard.

West is always careful to separate herself from the ranks of the "heaven-illuminated," but, in doing so, spends such a lot of time dwelling on the treatment meted out to poets that one cannot help but think it of personal concern. However, West maintained that for women literature was "an ornament, or an amusement, not a duty or profession[;] . . . when it is pursued with such avidity as to withdraw us from the especial purposes of our creation, it becomes a crime" (qtd. in Poovey 40). She thus subscribed to the newly dominant ideology, while exploiting it for her own ends: she preached a conservative message while establishing for herself a literary career.

In contrast to West, the poet Anne Grant adamantly rejected fame as a motive for writing poetry in her work. Grant versified throughout her life, but only published two volumes of poetry, in 1808 and 1814, when her husband





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

Yet the reader is always aware of the paradox inherent in the poem: while she celebrates her choice of domesticity over the fame that accompanies entry into the public sphere, and laments the loss of purity, the public scorn, and the vanity that accompany woman's literary fame, the reader is always conscious that she is expressing these sentiments in a published poem. Publishing in 1808, Grant was perhaps aware that valorising domesticity provided a legitimate means for a woman's entering the public sphere. She thus includes this early poem in her volume to appeal to the more conservative literary marketplace.

Ironically, Grant ended up becoming a famous literary figure herself: ". . . to the last her literary celebrity made her an object of curiosity and attraction to strangers from all parts of the world" (qtd. in Moulton v: 329). After a series of domestic misfortunes, friends rallied to see if Grant could receive a pension for her services to literature and Grant vigorously took up her own case, much to the chagrin of Sir Walter Scott who had been involved in the initial petition. Scott's assessment of the elderly Grant was that she was "proud as a Highland-woman, vain as a poetess, and absurd as a bluestocking" (qtd. in Moulton v: 329).

Mary Tighe was another woman poet who warned of the perils of public life. This Irish poet, as already mentioned, achieved posthumous fame when her work was published by her husband. Apparently, Tighe liked to shine in society and had enjoyed the success of her poems that were circulated in manuscript a little too much (Clarke 50-51). In the poem "The Vartree" Tighe reproves herself, telling herself that she belongs in the natural shade of the vartree not in the artificial glare of public view:

Here, Mary, rest! the dangerous path forsake  
Where folly lures thee, and where vice ensnares,  
Thine innocence and peace no longer stake,  
Nor barter solid good for brilliant cares.

. . . Hast thou not trod each vain and giddy maze,  
By Flattery led o'er Pleasure's gayest field?  
Basked in the sunshine of her brightest blaze,  
And proved whate'er she can her votaries yield?

. . . Hast thou not tried the vanities of life,  
And all the poor, mean joys of Fashion known?  
Blush then to hold with Wisdom longer strife,  
Submit at length a better guide to own.

Here woo the Muses in the scenes they love;  
Let Science near thee take her patient stand:  
Each weak regret for gayer hours reprove,  
And yield thy soul to Reason's calm command.

Poetry itself is not the problem, since she still allows herself to woo the muse; it is the consequences of the attention that comes from presenting her work to the world that are to be avoided.

Tighe's preface to her most famous poem, Psyche, confirms her anxiety of publication. She writes of how

publishing poets must steel themselves to possible criticism:

The author, who dismisses to the public the darling of his solitary cares, must be prepared to consider, with some degree of indifference, the various reception it may then meet. (Tighe, Psyche i)

Her next sentence claims that preparing herself for criticism is even more difficult when her audience consists of friends. It is harder to steel her heart against those opinions she values: "But from those, who write only for the more interested eye of friendship, no such indifference can be expected" (Tighe, Psyche i). She follows these remarks with the usual modest comments about her lack of ability, her "deficiency of genius," then interestingly asserts that she has not "been able to resist the seductions of the mysterious fair" (Tighe, Psyche iv-v). As Anderson notes, writing an epic (a masculine genre) like Psyche opened Tighe to accusations of ambition (85). By describing her muse as a seductress she attempts to make the muse the active agent and herself, the poet, a passive recipient, thus absolving her of charges of masculine ambition (Anderson 87).

Another conservative approach to female fame can be found in a poem by Ann Taylor. Together with her sister Jane, Taylor wrote and published poetry for children. The sisters published 19 volumes of verses and hymns for "infant minds," many going through multiple editions. Ann Taylor's poem "The Discontented Violet" makes a clear

analogy with women seeking fame, and provides a decidedly conservative viewpoint:

A violet who blossomed gay  
 Beneath a hedge of prickly may,  
 Condemn'd upon her stalk to linger,  
 No taller than one's little finger;  
 With nothing but her gentle smell,  
 Her place of residence to tell;  
 But young in days, in wisdom younger,  
 For public fame began to hunger.

Sings the violet:

"Green Earth, or whosoe'er you be,  
 "Who had the care of forming me,  
 "What fame or glory could you get  
 "By making me a violet?  
 "No traveller plucks me for his own,  
 "My very being is unknown;  
 "And all the sweetness I possess,  
 "Is wasted on the wilderness!  
 "O! hear my humble prayer," she cried,  
 "And make me any thing beside."

The earth hears the violet's lamentations and moves her to a more visible flower bed, where she awaits the dawn:

At length the shadows broke apace,  
 And daylight stared her in the face:  
 Full fronting to the southern sky  
 She was a sunflower, two yards high!  
 And not a neighbour, great or small,  
 Grew nearer than the garden wall.  
 The sun, who did not recollect her,  
 Look'd rudely at her to detect her,  
 And overcome with shame and dread,  
 She blush'd, but could not hang her head:  
 Alas! no friendly bush was nigh,  
 To screen her from his cruel eye . . .

The little flower quickly regrets her foray into the public glare and yearns to return to the protective shade of her former role:

"O! pitying mother Earth," she cried,  
 "Forgive a silly creature's pride!  
 "Again my pretty bank permit  
 "To shield thy foolish violet,  
 "And on thy bosom evermore,  
 "My freshest fragrancy shall pour."

. . . Kind Earth the better wish obey'd,  
 And dropp'd her in her native shade.

As with Grant, there is a certain irony in the publishing woman poet advocating women be content with the private, domestic sphere. All the poets who adopted a conservative approach to women's role in their poetry demonstrate the paradox of the ideology of the feminine that Shevelov identifies: women have to participate in the public sphere in order to convey the ideological message that they belong in the domestic realm (15). But they also show that by conveying the ideology of the feminine in their poetry they are able to find an acceptable place in the public sphere. In this way -- that is, in manipulating the literary market for their own ends -- the ideologically conservative women poets after 1800 in fact adopt the methods of the more radical poets of the 1790s whom they were defining themselves against.

#### iv Mixed feelings

Not all the women poets who published after 1800 expressed such certainty of the folly of seeking public recognition for their poetry. Yet nor were they sure



as a gift from God that should be utilised for moral benefit (MacDonald Shaw 94). Thus Adcock represents publication, and the possible accompanying recognition, as legitimate for a woman.

Financial worries were also often used to justify a woman's venturing into print. Mary Bryan published Sonnets and Metrical Tales in 1815 with the help of a patron, who, from the information in her Dedication, appears to have been her doctor (Wordsworth, Introduction to Bryan). The preface to the volume tells the reader that she is a widow with six children, and that though her husband forbade her to write poetry she has turned to it now to keep the family from poverty (Bryan xiii).

Modesty accompanies financial calamity. Both Bryan's Preface and Dedication establish the modest regard she has for her poetry. In the Dedication she informs the reader: "I neither expect nor wish for this volume more than a local circulation . . ." (Bryan iii). She has apparently chosen her patron because he "cannot mistake the motive" for her venturing to publish, and she will "not be suspected of motives [she] disdain[s], or, perhaps, justly incur the charge of presumption, in making an offering of undecided worth, that cannot be important, and may be deemed altogether insignificant" (Bryan iv). In the Preface she asks that those who feel her poems are "puerile and worthless" favour silence over

criticism in order to "consign the present effort to the oblivion it must deserve, and prevent future attempts," as she feels she is "ill calculated to support" a critical attack (Bryan xii). Yet a note later in the text says that "[t]he annexed Pieces were intended for a separate publication" (an idea discarded when she thought that those who appeared in her poetry might object), showing that she had at least considered "future attempts" (Bryan 99).

Most of Bryan's poems are to do with the people and the events of her life; there is virtually no reference to fame in her poetry and no contemplation of her own chances of success. Her most interesting poem, in terms of this study, is "Lines, On Reading in Miss Seward's Letters, Vol. VI. p.43, 'I have called Mrs Smith's Sonnets Everlasting Duns on Pity.'" Bryan refutes Seward's criticism, praising Smith's poems and telling of the comfort she found in them. She closes the poem thus:

Now years have roll'd away and brought thee rest  
 And pour'd on that devoted one, ills keen as thine!  
 More helpless, far, to ward their coming fate,  
 Trembling, she views her little thoughtless group  
 And suffers every pain she wept as thine.

It is not only in this poem that Bryan likens herself to Charlotte Smith. In her Preface she also exalts Smith's genius and her ability to rise above her misfortunes and, though acknowledging her genius inferior to Smith's ("More helpless"), she still draws a parallel between the

two with her exclamation "Admired Woman! blessed Mother! under all thy cares, blessed in that independence which thy talents secured to thy children!" (Bryan x). She goes on to say:

After this, it might appear highly presumptuous to mention the influence of accidental similarity of circumstances towards the present production -- yet has it contributed its effect; not, however, inducing the vain hope of obtaining her success or fame. The writer respects genius too much to wish that meed which ought to be its sole and sacred reward. (Bryan x-xi)

Bryan thus uses her predecessor's respectable image to justify her own publication. Worried about how the public will react to her work, she establishes herself in parallel with a successful woman poet who had been accepted as a publishing woman on the basis of her maternal persona.

Another poet, Sydney Owenson, was aware that her poetry writing both affected how people perceived her and was at odds with her role as a woman. Her poem "To My Muse, On Making a Vain Effort to Write on a Given Subject" humorously records her frustration both at her muse and at others' response to her poeticising. Addressing her muse, she says:

. . . Nay, by thy ingrate self I swear;  
Ne'er from this moment to implore  
Thy aid or inspiration more;  
Nor sacrifice my youth's short day,  
In begging a poetic lay;  
Or wit to scribble song or sonnet,  
When I should trim a cap or bonnet:  
Entreat a spark of attic fire,

To animate my languid lyre,  
 When I, as in my sex befitting,  
 Should take my work or mind my knitting!  
 For thee what have I not endur'd,  
 To scoffs, and taunts, and sneers inur'd;  
 By misses for thy favours maul'd,  
 By masters "learned lady" call'd!

She berates her muse for striking her with inspiration at awkward moments, causing her female companions to fret over her:

In whispers they converse and shew it,  
 The poor thing's mad, or worse, turn'd poet;  
 Then vow they'd pardon any crime,  
 In their own girls but love of rhyme,  
 Which should it epidemic prove,  
 Might well affect all those they love;  
 And spreading quick the cautioning rumour,  
 To exile from their presence doom her!

Though the poem may be lighthearted, Owenson seemingly amused at the impression she makes and even her muse's fickleness, being known as a poet clearly affected people's response to her. The types of reactions she describes may have been amusing at one level, but, at another, Owenson must have been frustrated with the response she engendered. A later poem, "Fragment xviii: Home," makes a more conventional comment on her poetic fame when she says:

For tho' the world's fleet joys awhile deceive me,  
 Though dazzled by my more than meed of fame,  
 Should thy dear threshold, Home, again receive me,  
 Thou'lt find my warm, my untouch'd heart the same.

Here she stresses that fame does not alter her and emphasises the genuine affections of the private sphere over the dubious attractions of the public sphere.

Few women poets openly claimed desire for fame but, nevertheless, the attractions of fame are acknowledged in some works. Isabella Lickbarrow was a poet who mentioned fame often, but in varying contexts. Lickbarrow was described in the preface to her second work, Lament for Princess Charlotte, as "a young Female in humble life, a native of Kendal . . . an orphan, unlettered, and of exemplary character" (qtd. in Wordsworth, Introduction to Lickbarrow). Her exact occupation is a mystery but the Introduction to her Poetical Effusions (1814) tells us that she published "to assist the humble labours of herself and her orphan sisters . . . and better their condition in life." The introduction also tells us that "the benevolence of kind friends suggested the present publication to the Authoress, who after the domestic employments of the day, had secretly indulged herself in 'wooing the Muse' at intervals stolen from repose." There are no signs of poetic ambition here, just acceptable modest requests for indulgence of her "intrusion upon the public" (Lickbarrow iii).

Lickbarrow was certainly capable of adhering to acceptable views on female poetic ambition. "Thoughts on Friendship" offers a conventional and expected view of fame from a woman poet. Fame, honour, wealth, and friendship are all compared; not surprisingly, friendship ends up being the most highly valued. The faults

Lickbarrow finds with fame are its brevity and insubstantiality:

Fame is but a tell-tale echo,  
Which the passing sounds repeats,  
Loudly praising each new object,  
Till the next its flatt'ry greets; --

'T is a momentary bubble,  
Buoy'd up by th' unstable air;  
Let censure's busy finger touch it,  
And 't will instant disappear.

"Occasioned by Reading T. Wilkinson's Elegy on Life" is also a conventional expression of poetic ambition, or lack of it, by a woman poet. Lickbarrow disparagingly refers to herself as young and inexperienced, unknown to the world, and a nameless rhymer, and wonders how the revered male poet will regard her uncouth lines, artless strains, and presumptuous pen in addressing him. Lickbarrow denies her own poetic ability and ambition in deference to her perceived superior.

Yet some of Lickbarrow's poetry unmistakably attests to both a desire for accolade and a fear of negative reception. The first poem of the volume, "Introductory Address: To the Muse," shows Lickbarrow's fear of public rejection. Addressing her muse she says: ". . . together we must try / The favour of the world, or bear its frowns. / How dear is to the anxious parent's heart / The reputation of a darling child!" She elaborates further:



to her own mortality. Considering her own death, she says:

What muse will then in strains of sorrow,  
 Pour the simple dirge for me?  
 What kindred mind inspir'd by pity  
 Frame one plaintive elegy?

I, like the wild flowers of the mountains,  
 That unknown, unheeded die,  
 Like them shall leave a name unhonour'd,  
 And like them forgotten lie.

"The Mountain Flower" develops a similar analogy, and recalls Taylor's discontented violet. Lickbarrow describes a "simple" flower, faced with ungenial skies and infertile soil, that, though it cannot compete with its more luxurious counterparts of a tended garden, may "please some humbler eyes." The comparison with her own situation as a poet is obvious from the beginning, but Lickbarrow states it anyway:

. . . oft I've stay'd my eager haste,

To view the flower so unassuming,  
 So simple, yet so spotless fair,  
 Which on no higher rank presuming,  
 Blossoms and dies in secret there;

And thought perhaps my artless ditties,  
 Had better like their sister been,  
 Still all unknown in towns and cities,  
 And had bloom'd and died unseen.

A more sophisticated poem concerned with the brevity of fame is "On the Fate of Newspapers." Lickbarrow satirically considers the short-lived popularity of the newspaper ("What once was valu'd, highly priz'd, / Is in

a few short hours despis'd"), noting that only hours after its purchase it has been reduced to wrapping the handle of the kettle and being used to light the candles. The fate of poetry is singled out for a special mention:

It surely would, beyond a joke,  
The patience of a saint provoke,  
To think that after all their pains,  
The rhymes which rack'd the poet's brains . . .  
Should come to this disgraceful end.

Addressing the unappreciated poets, she offers them small consolation by saying that their lines may be used to light a pipe, and then

They'll, with tobacco fumes, infuse  
The inspiration of the muse,  
And furnish many an empty brain --  
If so, we'll write and sing again.

The last line -- "If so, we'll write and sing again" -- is somewhat problematic. Hitherto, Lickbarrow has excluded herself from the poets she addresses (referring to them as "good sirs" and their poems as "your productions"), but this last line seems to include herself in their number. Therefore, she is perhaps satirically dealing with her own discomfort at the treatment of her poetry. At the same time, she could be referring to herself as one of the "empty brains" waiting to be filled with inspiration provided by the burning of already published poetry, in which case she is satirising her own poeticising. Either interpretation suggests a degree of discomfort with the treatment of poetry and its brevity.

Lickbarrow's concern about publication resulting in only a brief moment of public favour proved well founded. Her subscription list to Poetical Effusions reads like a "roll-call of Lake District worthies," including Thomas De Quincey, Robert Southey, and Wordsworth (Wordsworth, Introduction to Lickbarrow). But, as Jonathan Wordsworth notes and Jackson's bibliography confirms, no second edition was called for. Lickbarrow's second publication in 1818 met with no more success.

Unlike Lickbarrow, Amelia Opie was one of the more successful female poets of the nineteenth century. During the 1790s Opie moved in radical circles, befriending William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. Later she distanced herself from radicalism, keeping her respectability, but still expressed an interest in humanitarian concerns. She published a novel anonymously in 1790 but didn't begin her literary career in earnest until after her marriage in 1798 to the divorced painter John Opie, at his encouragement. Most of her poetical volumes were published in the early 1800s as in her later life Opie became a Quaker, meaning she was not supposed to write for amusement. She was popular and well known for her high spirits, and observers noted that even her Quakerism did not always prevent her from maintaining an air of fashionability (Moulton v: 741-42). Her novels, also written before her conversion, always had an obvious moral and were written to appeal to the sentiments.

Francis Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review commented on Mrs Opie's Simple Tales:

. . . she is too pathetic to be read with much advantage to practical morality. Her writings, however, are very amiable and very beautiful, and exhibit virtuous emotions under a very graceful aspect. They would do very well to form a woman that a gentleman should fall in love with, but can be of no great use in training ordinary mortals to ordinary duties. (qtd. in Moulton v: 743)

Opie's poems indicate the movement towards the phenomenon that has come to be known as the "feminine poetess." She writes mainly about female concerns, the pains and joys of romantic love being a dominant theme in her work. Humanitarian concerns also pervade her poems: there are several addressed to the marginal in society, for example "To a Maniac" and "The Orphan Boy's Tale." The poems are generally songs and ballads with simple subjects and simple construction. One humanitarian poem that also mentions fame is "Lines Respectfully Inscribed to the Society for the Relief of Persons Imprisoned for Small Debts." Opie asks "What are the deeds that fill the historic page, / And most the plaudits of the world engage? / What actions most attract the eyes of Fame . . . ?" and answers:

The conqueror's deeds, . . . the awful works of  
death[;]  
 For them the trophied bust, the flatterer's breath.  
 He, he alone a nation's praise enjoys,  
 Whose noble daring dazzles, but destroys;  
 While the blest deeds performed by Pity's hand  
 Nor praise nor notice from the world command . . .

Opie decides to give credit where it is due:

But though I Valour's offspring love to praise,  
To Pity's humbler sons shall flow my lays.

To me the warrior's brightest wreath appears  
Steeped in the orphan's, parent's, widow's,  
tears . . .

and dedicates her poem to the charity workers.

The typical association of fame and military glory is reiterated in "To Henry" where Opie depicts public fame and domestic love as competing for a man's heart:

How I hail this morn's appearing!  
It will thee, my love, restore:  
Safety danger past endearing,  
Sure we meet to part no more!

Fame is thine, lo! crowds aver it,  
And her smile is dear to thee;  
But I charge thee, don't prefer it  
E'er again to home and me.

Thou, thy country's call obeying,  
Hast her battles nobly fought;  
And, thy ready zeal repaying,  
See, she gives the laurels sought.

But have I no claims, my rover?  
Claims as fondly dear to thee?  
Yes, O yes! and, wandering over,  
Thou wilt rest with love and me.

In this case, the love of the woman draws the man from the public sphere into the domestic. Such happy endings are not always arrived at, as Opie's "Secret Love" indicates. In this poem the woman loses her lover to the pull of glory in the public sphere:

But he forgets that I am near . . . .  
Fame, future fame, in thought he seeks:

To him ambition's paths appear,  
And bright the sun of science breaks.

His heart with ardent hope is filled;  
His prospects full of beauty bloom:  
But, oh! my heart despair has chilled,  
My only prospect is . . . the tomb!

One only boon from Heaven I claim,  
And may it grant the fond desire!  
That I may live to hear his fame,  
And in that throb of joy expire.

Opie was not prone to self-reflection in her poetry: unlike the poems of the earlier women poets, none of Opie's stands out as obviously autobiographical. MacDonald Shaw offers an explanation. She speaks of Opie's having "absorbed the concept of propriety which limited the achievement of women poets, persona and self being dangerously identified in verse, threatening the ideal of modesty . . ." (MacDonald Shaw 102). If one compares the number of clearly autobiographically-based poems produced by the likes of Barbauld, Smith, Yearsley, and Robinson to the limited number in the output of Opie and those who were to follow her, this explanation seems valid. Woman and text were identified as one throughout the period but the stricter confines of acceptable morality after 1800 meant that many of the women poets were reluctant to use their own lives as a basis for their poetry. Instead they carefully constructed a persona fit for public consumption and wrote more verse in which the speaker was meant to be differentiated from the author.

Because of this shift away from offering the self to the public, Opie does not overtly discuss her own experience of fame in her poetry. She does, however, have one very interesting poem concerning fame and the woman artist in "The Maid of Corinth to her Lover." In this tale the maid, about to be separated from her lover, traces the outline of his face while he is sleeping, from which her father fashions a pottery likeness. Her talent at drawing leads to her becoming famous, after her lover has left for war, and in the poem she writes to him of her experiences.

In the opening stanzas of the poem the maid, Eudora, tells her lover Philemon of her fame but says it means nothing to her in his absence: "I hate e'en glory, if unshared by thee." Further into the poem Eudora apprises him of the extent of her fame, telling him how the people of Corinth assure her her fame will live on after her death: "'Know, future ages shall Eudora bless, / And hail the art that sprang from chaste desire.'" Eudora, however, is quick to point out that she prefers love to fame:

But well thou know'st I shun, not covet fame;  
From the fond breast that genuine passion sways  
For ever distant be Ambition's flame!

The only two comforts she takes from her renown are that it pleases her father and that it makes her more worthy of her lover. Later in the poem she also mentions that

fame has brought her and her father wealth.

Eudora also expresses a desire for Philemon to choose love over fame by not dying a hero for Greece but returning to her instead. She tells him that fame comes at a cost:

. . . For, oh! when Fame my humble roof drew nigh,  
Friendship I saw by slow degrees depart.

The fair companions of my lowly youth  
With coldness praise me, or with malice blame,  
And on my heart impress this mournful truth,  
"They forfeit friendship, who are dear to fame."

Love is the maid of Corinth's eternal comfort, and in the poem she tells of a dream in which she was visited by the God of Love, who promised her that Philemon would return safely to her. Significantly (because the woman artist never actually has both her lover and fame simultaneously), this reunion does not take place in the poem. In the last stanza Eudora declares that she is always in a state of "distress" except when she presses the drawing of her lover to her "throbbing heart."

Fame is presented in "The Maid of Corinth" as secondary to romantic love. It is a mixed blessing with both negative and positive aspects but is never an adequate replacement for the love of a man. Although Eudora is never berated for her fame, which is carefully depicted as arising out of her love, she never achieves the happiness of having love and fame together in the

poem. It is up to the reader to infer whether her lover will return or not, and whether it is possible for a woman artist to have both domestic and public success. This poem is extremely interesting because it compares remarkably to a Felicia Hemans poem published 20 years later, "Properzia Rossi" (which I shall discuss in the next chapter).

Some women poets were quite outspoken and unconventional when they mentioned fame in their poetry. Caroline Bowles' "What if the tale was true, as some believe" atypically bemoans woman's limited access to fame. The sonnet contemplates how a woman may only achieve fame through the reflected glory of a man:

What if the tale was true, as some believe,  
That Tasso's love to Leonora gave?  
Oh! happy Leonora, to receive  
Such fame-conferring vows from such a slave!  
Darling of many hearts! Of short-lived fame  
The favoured minion! born in courts to shine!  
Yet but for him, for his illustrious name,  
What deathless annals had recorded thine?

The lines seem critical of woman's devalued position in society and the sentiment is again similar to that of a later poem by Hemans, "The Effigies," which contemplates the tomb of a husband and wife; the husband had earthly fame but Hemans finds comfort in the thought that the woman will be rewarded in heaven.

On the other hand, of some kinds of fame one could get too much. Lady Caroline Lamb's poem A New Canto,

1819, in the style of Byron's Don Juan, laments the lot of the infamous woman poet:

I'm sick of fame -- I'm gorged with it -- so full  
 I almost could regret the happier hour  
 When northern oracles proclaimed me dull,  
 Grieving my Lord should so mistake his power --  
 E'en they, who now my consequence would lull,  
 And vaunt they hail'd and nurs'd the opening flower.  
 Vile cheats! He knew not, impudent Reviewer,  
 Clear spring of Helicon from common sewer.

. . . Mad world! for fame we rant, call names, and  
fight --  
 I scorn it heartily, yet love to dazzle it,  
 Dark intellects by day, as shops by night,  
 All with a bright, new, speculative gas lit,  
 Wars the blue vapour with the oil-fed light,  
 Hot sputter Blackwood, Jeffrey, Giffard [sic],  
Hazlitt --  
 The Muse runs madder, and, as mine may tell,  
 Like a loose comet, mingles Heaven and Hell.

You shall have more of her another time,  
 Since gulled you will be with our flights poetic,  
 Our eight, and ten, and twenty feet sublime,  
 Our maudlin, hey-down-derrified pathetic:  
 For my part, though I'm doom'd to write in rhyme,  
 To read it would be worse than an emetic --  
 But something must be done to cure the spleen,  
 And keep my name in capitals, like Kean.

The woman poet often had a love-hate relationship with fame, but it was a relationship that was rarely expressed in such an overtly and spiritedly autobiographical poem.

#### v Joanna Baillie

A discussion of the women poets of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries would be incomplete without mention of Joanna Baillie.

Principally a dramatist, Baillie was a prominent literary

figure from around 1800 through until the 1820s. Her first publication was an anonymous offering of poems in 1790, a volume that she later remembered as having received only one review. But it was her publication in 1798, also anonymous, of the first of her plays that began her career in earnest. Baillie successfully acquired literary fame yet suffered no threat to her femininity in a period when this was no easy task.

Her Plays on the Passions <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ preceded by an "Introductory Discourse" which was a modest but intelligent and critical theoretical introduction to her dramatical ambition. It was immediately assumed to have been written by a man and was in fact attributed to Sir Walter Scott for some time (Whyte 1). (This "Discourse," incidentally, provides the use of ordinary language in poetry with a spirited defence that predates Wordsworth's famous "Preface" by two years.) Though her life exemplified feminine virtue, it was the masculinity of her work that was often praised: "Of all English women-poets, she speaks in accents least easily distinguishable from a man's" (Whyte 4). The frequent references to Baillie's "masculine muse" partially explain her success in balancing her femininity with her fame. Baillie did not write in the manner prescribed for the feminine poetess: she wrote in a more intellectual, "masculine" way. Though encouraging women to write in a feminine way, the critics actually preferred and elevated

masculine writing. By referring to her muse as masculine, male critics did not have to relinquish the idea of good literature being a male preserve. They therefore constructed Baillie as a kind of androgyne in their own minds, though publicly praising her femininity. This is exemplified by Byron's reaction to Baillie's dramas:

When Voltaire was asked why no woman has ever written even a tolerable tragedy? "Ah (said the Patriarch) the composition of a tragedy requires testicles." -- If this be true, Lord knows what Joanna Baillie does -- I suppose she borrows them. (qtd. in Mellor, "Joanna" 559)

Though she clearly transgressed the boundaries of the masculine sphere by writing in a masculine style, her exemplary private life, her modest attitude, and her literary skill allowed her transgression to be accommodated by male and female readers alike. Baillie never married, the title "Mrs" being a mark of respect for her age, so she could not be accused of neglecting her domestic duty (her husband's and children's needs) when she wrote. Initially she published anonymously, so she could not be accused of seeking fame. She lived a quiet life with her sister away from the social whirl of London, so she could not be tarnished by scandal. William Howitt wrote of the still-living Baillie in 1847:

The powerful dramatic writer, the graceful and witty lyricist, and the sweet and gentle woman, who has for so many years, in her quiet retreat at Hampstead, let the world flow past her as if she had nothing to

do with it, nor cared to be mentioned by it . . . Joanna Baillie, a name never pronounced . . . but with the veneration due to the truest genius, and the affection which is the birthright of the truest specimens of womanhood . . . [She is] the woman whose masculine muse every great poet has for nearly half a century delighted to honour[; she] wrote because she could not help pouring out the fulness of her heart and mind, and the natural consequence was fame; otherwise, whoever sees that quiet, amiable, and unassuming lady . . . sees that, though not scorning the fair reputation of well exercised intellect, she is at home in the bosom of home, and lets no restless desire for mere fame disturb the pure happiness of a serene life . . ." (2: 248)

Baillie's modesty in life extended to her poetry. She seems not to have articulated any conflict she may have felt between her role as a famous literary figure and her role as a woman. In this respect she seems to be an exception among most of the female poets writing after 1800. Nowhere in the huge corpus that makes up her volume The Dramatical and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie (1851) does she express a desire for fame. She does acknowledge her poeticising, but always in an appropriately modest and gently self-mocking way. In "Address to the Muses" she gently berates the muses for their lack of influence on her "rugged" verses:

O lovely Sisters! well it shows  
 How wide and far your bounty flows.  
 Then why from me withhold your beams?  
 Unvisited of vision'd dreams,  
 Whene'er I aim at heights sublime,  
 Still downward am I call'd to seek some stubborn  
 rhyme.

No hasty lightning breaks my gloom,  
 Nor flashing thoughts unsought for come,  
 Nor fancies wake in time of need:  
 I labour much with little speed,

And when my studied task is done,  
Too well, alas! I mark it for my own.

Despite their lack of influence on her work, Baillie praises the sisters:

Yet should you never smile on me,  
And rugged still my verses be,  
Unpleasing to the tuneful train,  
Who only prize a flowing strain,  
And still the learned scorn my lays,  
I'll lift my heart to you and sing your praise.

Baillie closes the poem by saying the wild heights of the muses are too great for her but ". . . still contented will I be, / Though greater inspirations never fall to me." She thus is suitably modest about her poeticising, though, in fact, her verses have won her fame. This modesty extends to her other poems. For example, in "The Legend of Lady Griseld Baillie" she refers to her skills as "feeble."

Though never directly addressing fame in her poetry Baillie mentions literary fame in her "Lines on the Death of Sir Walter Scott." The poem emphasises Scott's moral goodness as much as his literary ability, thereby establishing his candidacy for fame:

For who shall virtuous sympathies resign,  
Or feed foul fancies from a page of thine?  
No, none! thy writings as thy life are pure,  
And their fair fame and influence will endure.

When those, who now thy recent death deplore,  
Lie in the dust, thought of and known no more,  
As poet and romancer, thy great name  
Will brightly shine with undiminish'd fame;

And future sons of fancy fondly strive  
To their compatriots works like thine to give.

Baillie also addressed a poem to a famous woman contemporary. "To Mrs Siddons" pays tribute to the retired actress, acknowledging the justness of her renown but also emphasising her moral goodness, echoing earlier poems (by Williams and Seward) addressed to Siddons:

And now in crowded room or rich saloon,  
Thy stately presence recognised, how soon  
On thee the glance of many an eye is cast,  
In grateful memory of pleasures past!  
Pleased to behold thee, with becoming grace,  
Take, as befits thee well, an honour'd place  
(Where blest by many a heart, long mayst thou  
stand!)  
Among the virtuous matrons of our land.

Similarly in another poem, "The Legend of Lady Griseld Baillie," Baillie emphasises her version of the ideal woman. She is to be brave, modest, wise, tender, generous, and cheerful (fame is incidental). At the close of the poem Baillie holds up Lady Griseld in contrast to the women of her own day, making particular reference to feminist beliefs. She firstly berates the fashion-conscious, and then those with literary ambition who consider themselves too good for the domestic sphere, asking:

[Will] she, whose cultured, high-strain'd talents  
soar  
Through all th' ambitious range of letter'd lore  
With soul enthusiastic, fondly smitten  
With all that e'er in classic page was written,  
And whilst her wit in critic task engages,  
The echoed praise of all praised things outrages;  
Whose finger, white and small, with ink-stain tipt,  
Still scorns with vulgar thimble to be clipt;

Who doth with proud pretence her claims advance  
 To philosophic, honour'd ignorance  
 Of all, that, in divided occupation,  
 Gives the base stamp of female degradation;  
 . . . No whit behind the very costliest fair  
 That woos with daily pains the public stare;  
 Who seems almost ashamed to be a woman,  
 And yet the palm of parts will yield to no man,  
 But holds on battle-ground eternal wrangling,  
 The plainest case in mazy words entangling:--  
 Will she, I trow, or any kirtled sage,  
 Admire the subject of my artless page?

Again we can see a woman in the public eye, herself famous, enforcing the ideology of the feminine and the notion of separate spheres in her poetry (though simultaneously undermining these concepts by publishing her works and achieving fame). Baillie successfully used the domestic ideology to legitimise her own writing. She was certainly not without literary ambition, but it seems that her ambition was private rather than public, and acceptable because of her literary skill, virtuous private life, and moral intentions. Ironically, her modest approach to her literary career contributed to women's aspiration to fame because she was an ideal feminine model for novice women poets.

Baillie was certainly admired by many other women aspirants to literary fame. Anne Grant and Anne Bannerman are just two of the women poets who praised her poetically. Grant incorporated a tribute to her fellow Scot in her lengthy poem "Eighteen Hundred and Thirteen":

Bring freshest bays, and cull the greenest bough,  
 To twine around Joanna's modest brow;  
 The cypress, too, shall mingle in the wreath,

The mournful tree, that silent speaks of death.  
 Amidst that wreath one only flower appears,  
 A lonely purple flower begirt with spears:  
 While with pure hands she decks the tragic shrine,

Exulting Caledonia sees her shine,  
 And cries, "the Maid inspired, and armed flower, are  
 mine!"

Anne Bannerman, also a Scottish poet, published two volumes of very conventional and conservative poetry (1800 and 1802). She wrote "To Miss Baillie On the Publication of Her First Volume of Plays on the Passions." The poem begins by demonstrating Bannerman's reading of the works and praising Baillie's literary talents. The last four lines, however, point to the purpose of Bannerman's praise:

Then may these accents for their country claim  
 The pride, the honour, of thy native name;  
 And with the voice of Fame delighted join  
 To hail the triumph of the sex -- in thine.

Though she herself was never to achieve lasting fame, she delighted in the success of a fellow woman and a fellow Scot.

Another woman poet who was influenced by Baillie was Felicia Hemans. The two ended up becoming correspondents, and Hemans dedicated her best-known volume, Records of Woman, to Baillie. It is the hugely successful, and unquestionably feminine, poetess Hemans, and her contemporary Letitia Landon, whom I shall discuss next, as I look at how those who wholly subscribed to the construction of the "feminine poetess" dealt with fame.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FELICIA HEMANS

#### i Sweet Success

Felicia Dorothea Browne Hemans was commercially the most successful English-language poet of the nineteenth century; indeed, she is commercially the most successful woman poet ever (Cochran). When she died in 1835, at the age of 41, she had brought out 25 major publications and collections and contributed to numerous annuals and periodicals (Wordsworth, Introduction to Hemans). The author of a prefatory memoir for an edition of her works wrote: "Her songs were set to music, and sung in every home, and her volumes of poems were eagerly bought as they were issued from the press" (Prefatory xvi). Such phenomenal success for a woman poet, however, did not come without a price. Felicia Hemans demonstrated "the potentially devastating effects of the cultural construction of ideal femininity on a woman artist" (Clarke 32).

Hemans first came to the attention of the public as Felicia Browne in 1808, when she published a quarto volume of her juvenile verse at the age of fourteen. There were 978 subscribers to the volume, which the

Advertisement acknowledged as owing its publication to "the regard and partialities of friendship, and to the hope that the poems may in some degree be rendered subservient to the earnest wish of the young authoress for intellectual improvement" (qtd. in Trinder 6). The critical response to this work was far from kind (the Monthly Review commented that the verses contained "some erroneous and some pitiable lines" (qtd. in Hemans, Poems 3)), causing Miss Browne to be taken ill for several days: "the young poetess was thus early initiated into the pains and perils attendant upon the career of an author . . ." (Hemans, Poems 3).

Though the harsh criticism meted out to her first publication was never to be repeated, Hemans certainly went on to feel the "pains and perils" of authorship. The consequence of her commercial success was a fame and renown far surpassing that of any woman poet who had preceded her. While this fame brought her some rewards -- money and contacts within the literary scene, for example -- it also thrust her into the public eye. Hemans subscribed wholeheartedly to the role of the feminine poetess but found that fame and femininity were at variance. Her life and works fascinatingly testify to the conflict between the public and private spheres that emerged for a successful woman poet at the end of the Romantic Period.

According to contemporary notions, Hemans was the ideal middle-class young lady (Trinder 10). Except for Latin lessons which she received from the local clergyman, Hemans was educated by her mother. She was competent at French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, music and drawing. She read Shakespeare at the age of six, was renowned for her ability to memorise, and composed poems from an early age (Prefatory xix). Unusually for a well-known author, she led a sheltered existence, living in the literary isolation of rural Wales for most of her life (she visited London only once, as a child, but did not enjoy "its crowds and gaiety" (Chorley 12)). Her lifestyle led Hemans' contemporary poetess Letitia Landon to comment:

. . . Mrs Hemans was spared some of the keenest mortifications of a literary career. She knew nothing of it as a profession which has to make its way through poverty, neglect, and obstacles: she lived apart in a small, affectionate circle of friends. (qtd. in Hemans, Poems 632)

These circumstances nurtured her talents, and she was a prolific poet, publishing regularly from 1812 to 1834.

Hemans' prolificness meant that she covered a variety of themes, settings, and subjects. A large proportion of her poetry revolves around the domestic affections, concerned with not only the love between woman and her mate, but the maternal bonds between mother and child. Most of her poems endorse the doctrine of separate spheres, showing women as purifying and

sustaining the domestic realm while men seek glory and noble conquest in the public, for example "The Troubadour and Richard Coeur de Lion," "The Death of Conradin," Songs of the Cid and The Vespers of Palermo (Mellor, Romanticism 135). The poems often, however, show the fragility of the domestic sphere, women's private worlds being destroyed by the public ambitions of men. Many of her women characters die in their pursuit of domestic happiness, often as a consequence of men going in pursuit of ambition, military glory, and financial power (Mellor, Romanticism 124).

Another prominent feature of Hemans' poetry is her focus on imperialism and military glory. Politics was not an acceptable subject for a woman poet but Hemans managed to work and rework political themes by linking them to the domestic affections. Throughout her career she wrote political poems behind the veil of domesticity, focusing on the trials of feminine affections (Ross 285). Even as a young girl she was aware of her transgression into an inappropriate sphere, but sought to justify herself. She wrote to an aunt in 1808: "[M]y whole heart and soul are interested for the gallant patriots [of the Peninsular War], and though females are forbidden to interfere in politics, yet as I have a dear, dear brother . . . on the scene of action, I may be allowed to feel some ardour" (qtd. in Chorley 13). As Gary Kelly succinctly summarises, Hemans led the way for women to

move from themes of subjectivity and domesticity to the public and political by showing women to be the repository of national culture, but outside the public sphere ("Revolutionary" 126).

In her poetry, Hemans explored the cosmopolitan milieu (ironically from the isolated sanctuary of Wales). She was a "modern" woman and citizen of an imperial age, in which the traditionally lesser European languages were more useful than the classics (Curran, "Women" 190-91). Many of her poems are set in a variety of exotic locations,<sup>30</sup> but the affections and emotions of the individuals are always recognisable as a shared humanity. Her themes are the excitement of distant lands and customs, challenges that test the human spirit, the moral nature of man and woman put to trial, and the values of heroism and compassion inspired by religious assurance (Trinder 21). Hemans always found comfort and strength in the promise of the afterlife, and so too did her characters. The overriding tone of her poetry was that of a weary melancholy with things earthly, but hope for better things in the next world. "Evening Prayer at a Girls' School," "The Graves of Martyrs," and "To My Own Portrait" all display her faith in the afterlife.

---

<sup>30</sup>Hemans' Mediterranean themes and settings are examined in impressive detail in Nanora Sweet's dissertation The Bowl of Liberty: Felicia Hemans and the Romantic Mediterranean (University of Michigan, 1993).

Her settings, themes, and tone were extremely popular with the reading public, and her poetic skills were admired by the critics. In 1819 Hemans won a national competition with her poem Wallace's Invocation to Bruce, defeating such notable competitors as James Hogg. (Hogg was gracious in defeat, admitting her poem was "greatly superior both in elegance of thought and composition. Had I been constituted the judge myself, I would have given hers the preference by many degrees" (qtd. in Trinder 19).) By 1820, the year after the failure of her marriage, Hemans was judged to have "arrived" on the literary scene (Trinder 26). She was both a popular and critical success, and during the 1820s her reputation continued to grow, peaking in 1828 with the publication of Records of Woman.

The critics loved Hemans, and her career benefited from the support she had from the male Establishment in Reginald Heber, Henry Milman, and William Gifford, all Tory paternalists of the Quarterly Review (Cochran). The reviewers were effusive in their praise. The Edinburgh Monthly Review gave this glowing account on publication of The Sceptic in 1820:

The verses of Mrs Hemans appear the spontaneous offspring of intense and noble feeling, governed by a clear understanding, and fashioned into elegance by an exquisite delicacy and precision of taste. With more than the forces of many of her masculine competitors, she never ceases to be strictly feminine in the whole current of her thought and feeling, nor approaches by any chance the verge of that free and intrepid course of speculation, of

which the boldness is more conspicuous than the wisdom, but into which some of the most remarkable among the female literati of our times have freely and fearlessly plunged. She has . . . made a choice of a subject of which it would have been very difficult to have reconciled the treatment, in the hands of some female authors, to the delicacy which belongs to the sex, and the tenderness and enthusiasm which form its finest characteristics. (qtd. in Hemans, Poems 114)

Blackwood's Magazine in December 1826 said of Hemans:

Of all the female poets of the day, Mrs Hemans is, in the best sense of the word, the most truly feminine -- no false glitter about her -- no ostentatious display -- no gaudy and jingling ornaments -- but, as an English matron ought to be, simple, sedate, cheerful, elegant, and religious. (qtd. in Hemans, Poems 372)

Similarly, Lord Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review wrote in 1829 of The Forest Sanctuary:

If taste and elegance be titles to enduring fame, we might venture securely to promise that rich boon to the author before us, who adds to those great merits a tenderness and loftiness of feeling, and an ethereal purity of sentiment, which could only emanate from the soul of a woman. (qtd. in Hemans, Poems 337)

Hemans' success spanned both sides of the Atlantic; indeed, many of her most ardent admirers were American. The American literary luminary, and Hemans' American editor, Andrews Norton wrote of her poems: "[I]n what part of the United States are they not known? So general has been the attention to those of her pieces adapted to the purposes of a newspaper, we hardly fear to assert, that throughout a great part of this country there is not

a family of the middling class, in which some of them have not been read" (qtd. in Cochran). As Blackwood's Magazine noted after her death in 1835, her "pre-eminence has been acknowledged, not only in her own land, but wherever the English tongue is spoken . . ." (qtd. in Hemans, Poems 630).

## ii Public versus Private

What was the key to Hemans' popularity with reader and critic alike? Marlon Ross suggests that Hemans' success rested with her ability "to write poetry without disturbing the harmony between the sexes" (240). Anne Mellor follows the same line of thought, explaining that Hemans constructed herself as "the icon of female domesticity, the embodiment of the 'cult of true womanhood'" (Romanticism 123). Norma Clarke sees Hemans' ability "to fuse her poetry with the images of the poet that [the public] desired" as being the source of her popularity (88). By being undeniably, unquestionably feminine in her very public, and therefore potentially unfeminine (masculine), role as a publishing poet, she could be perceived as successful as both woman and poet.

Certainly, as can be seen from the excerpts above, the reviewers constantly emphasised Hemans' unfailing femininity. The practical hardship involved in writing

poems was ignored; part of the womanliness of her poetry was the effortless and invisibility of writing (Leighton 28-29). Clarke explains that because this was a time when poetry was going through a period of uncertainty, discussion of the nature of the poet often preceded any review of an actual work (81). Ross examines this phenomenon, looking at several reviews of Hemans' work (233-43). As a poetess Hemans was taken seriously and highly ranked by reviewers, but differently than a poet would have been. The character of the poetess is conflated with the worth of the poetry, and she is judged on the basis of her womanly virtues (Ross 236). The critics never found her femininity wanting.

The success of her literary career was not, however, paralleled by success in her private life. In 1812 Felicia had married Captain Hemans, an army officer some years her senior. Seven years, five children, and six major poetic publications later, Captain Hemans left Britain for Italy, ostensibly for reasons of health; he never saw his wife again.

The reasons why Hemans' marriage disintegrated have never been clearly established. It was a topic that was largely avoided by Hemans herself, and her protective friends. Various scholars point to various reasons, including incompatibility of age and temperament (Trinder 14), Captain Hemans' ego's being affronted by his wife's

earning power (Cochran), and Hemans' preferring to follow her poetic career than accompany him to Italy (Clarke 45; Leighton 19). Whatever the reasons (most probably a combination of those above), the breakdown of her marriage had a lasting effect on the poet, both practically and emotionally.

Practically, the Captain's desertion of his wife and family resulted in her becoming the sole means of income for herself and their five sons. However, it also meant continued security of residence in the maternal fold, as she and her boys lived with her much-beloved mother in Wales. (Her father had also deserted the domestic domain, leaving Britain for Canada when Hemans was a child.) The marriage collapse disadvantaged Hemans in that it put pressure on her to earn from her poetry, but it was advantageous in that it relieved her from the burden of the everyday drudgery of running a household, allowing her to focus on her poetic career.

Hemans never publicly complained of her husband, and even to her dearest friends rarely spoke of the failure of her marriage (Hall 364), but it is known that she considered the separation a tragedy. Hemans was aware that her continual poetic endorsement of a woman's primary love for and devotion to her mate stood in stark contrast to her own life (Mellor, Romanticism 134). She agonised over this unresolvable contradiction. Mellor

states: "In public, Hemans reconciled the tension between her poetic commitment to the domestic realm and her failed marriage by adopting the congenial position of the patiently suffering, neglected wife" (Romanticism 134). People refrained from discussing Hemans' private life, even after her death, but this merely inscribed her further into the role of the feminine poetess; her "delicate circumstances" meant part of her was always to remain unspoken (Mellor, Romanticism 135). "She, who could from her popularity and fame as a writer have won the sympathy of all of England for her wrongs, was silent . . ." wrote one memoirist (Prefatory xxi). Hemans' silence was consistent with her acceptance of the role of the feminine poetess.

### iii "Mrs Hemans"

Hemans, and Letitia Landon after her, chose to inhabit the hegemonic construction of the ideal woman (Mellor, Romanticism 107). Hemans adopted, developed, and consciously projected a persona fit for public consumption, that of the feminine poetess. The reality of her own life was clearly unsuitable for an icon of female domesticity. Who would accept a separated woman, unburdened by domestic chores, writing full-time for money, as a paragon of femininity? Instead of the actual details of Felicia Hemans' life, the myth of the holy and

sweet "Mrs Hemans" was fostered (Leighton 8). The constructed image was of a melancholy, delicately suffering, neglected authoress, devoted to hearth and home. (The potentially damaging counter-image of the ambitious author who sacrificed her marriage for her career was never allowed to develop.) "Mrs Hemans" was both a deliberate self-projection on Hemans' part and an invention of an age that needed it (Leighton 8).

Hemans' persona differed from the personae that Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson had used during the 1790s. Whereas Smith and Robinson had selected certain appropriate details of their life to be revealed to the public as a kind of marketing ploy, "Mrs Hemans" was almost as much a fantasy of the poetess as a facade. Hemans was a product of her age: at one level she wanted to be the image that she constructed for the public. Judging from her comments in prose and poetry, she ideally would have liked to have been able to combine her poetic career with her marriage, and have the best of both the public and private worlds. However, because of the failure of her marriage and the extent of her fame, she worried about how others would perceive her, particularly if they knew the truth about her domestic circumstances. She wanted to be perceived as a holy and sweet model of domestic propriety but was acutely aware that her own life was at odds with this image. Smith and Robinson were largely in control of the images that they

projected; Hemans seems as much controlled by the dominant ideology as controlling of it. The tensions that result from her struggle with the conflict between ideology and lived experience are evident in her poetry, particularly the poems that deal with fame and the woman artist.

Nevertheless, the construction of the persona of Mrs Hemans was extremely effective at one level: the critics and her readers were entirely convinced that she had managed to combine the roles of feminine woman and poetess. Although weary melancholy was the style responsible for her large following, particularly among women readers, Hemans' earlier poems show a wit and humour that suggest that the mournful tone of her public register (made fashionable by the annuals) was not necessarily her natural one, but rather part of her image (Leighton 11).<sup>31</sup> In her early volume The Domestic Affections and Other Poems (1812), several playful, humorous poems feature ("Epitaph on Mr W--, A Celebrated Mineralogist" and "Epitaph on the Hammer of the Aforesaid Mineralogist"). Chorley comments that Hemans' forays into humorous verse were often destroyed after composition and that they were certainly not intended for publication (20). The editor of her Poems also remarks,

---

<sup>31</sup>This is very similar to Charlotte Smith's adoption of a melancholy voice in her sonnets, while her sister asserted that she was naturally vivacious. Indeed there are many parallels between Smith and Hemans in terms of their public images, as there are between Mary Robinson and Letitia Landon.

of another light poem, "The Fever Dream," that her livelier effusions "she never wrote with any other view than the momentary amusement of her own immediate circle" (139). Humour and liveliness were not desirable attributes for a sweet and holy domestic woman poet.

As I have discussed in earlier chapters, the woman author and her text were often seen as congruent during the period. Poetry in particular was seen as the spontaneous effusion of a woman's emotions. Careful thought and hard work were not considered components of women's poetry; rather, poetry was considered a flow of feminine instinct onto the page, the natural extension of equally effortless duty in the home (Leighton 29). The concept of the poetess was imbued with Rousseau-like qualities, her compositions supposedly unaffected by premeditation (Berliner 70). The woman poet had to maintain this illusion in order not to offend, reassuring all that she was not a poet but a contented angel of the hearth. Hemans was hugely successful at this and her emphasised saintliness of character became a literary value for all women (Leighton 27).

Because of this supposed congruency between text and author, the woman poet was often identified with the speakers of her poems. Whereas the earlier poets like Smith and Robinson had exploited this by using the details of their own lives to foster their causes and

attract readers, the feminine poetesses distanced their lives from their writing, aware of the disjunction between fantasy and reality. The autobiographical "I" is generally absent from the works of Felicia Hemans. The "I" that does feature in her poetry is the "I" of the mythical Mrs Hemans. There are no poems in the first person on how she feels about her poeticising, her husband's desertion, her abandonment by her father, or her fame. There are, however, poems on her mother, her attachment to her home in Wales, and specific occasions in her life (such as moving house): it is only those aspects of her life that accord with the image of the feminine poetess that appear in her poetry. Hemans characteristically disguises the more personal autobiographical aspects of her poems by ending them with public advice. She continued the tradition that began with More and Barbauld in which the woman poet is seen as the "conscience of culture" (Leighton 27). Behind Hemans' sentimentalism is an ethical and religious purpose; like Baillie she believed that her writing should have a moral function (Berliner 31).

Hemans' literary success suggests that she was astute at catering to the tastes of the market, winning over male and female readers alike. Financial necessity seems to have been responsible for her prolificness but there is little doubt that Hemans considered poetry to be her vocation. Yet, as for all the woman poets, there was

some trepidation for her in presenting her work to the public. Not surprisingly, considering the discrepancy between her own life and the persona of the feminine poetess, Hemans was deeply concerned with how the public would perceive her. She knew that in submitting her work for publication she was offering herself for public scrutiny. To some extent Hemans was protected by her geographical isolation and the feminine space she had ensconced herself in. Her mother and sister were her audience and fame was acceptable as long as it was shared and reflected, bringing pleasure to her family. Unreflected fame was improper and destructive (Ross 297). "The pleasure of fame to woman must ever be reflected, such at least is my feeling of it," wrote Hemans to Mary Howitt (qtd. in Chorley 99). In a letter to Mary Russell Mitford she reiterated that sentiment: "I am sure that you will agree with me, that fame can only afford reflected delight to a woman" (qtd. in Chorley 65).

Sharing her fame was a way of deflecting the public glare from herself.<sup>32</sup> For Hemans the close family that surrounded her eased the burden of her fame. Like the homes of her poems, her own home had been affected by male participation in the public sphere. Her father's

---

<sup>32</sup>This seems to parallel the early generation of women poets (More, Barbauld, etc.), who had modestly deflected their celebrity in their prefaces and poems. The major difference, I think, is that while the early poets did so mostly because it was expected of them (they were not necessarily sincere), Hemans did so because it was necessary to protect her own self-image.

financial failures had caused her family to move from Liverpool to Wales when she was only six, and he had later left the family to go to Quebec (Leighton 9). Hemans seems to have coped with desertion by the men in her life by forming strong bonds with the rest of her family, her mother in particular. Many critics highlight the importance of Hemans' mother to her poetry and to her life, including Mellor, Trinder, Leighton and Ross. All commentators on Hemans note that her mother's death in 1827 was a turning point in her life and career, a blow from which she never fully recovered. After Mrs Browne's death, Hemans (then 34) said: "How hollow sounds the voice of fame to an orphan!" (qtd. in Chorley 96). Her sister's marriage soon followed, causing Hemans to comment: "O how many deaths there are in the world for the affections!" (qtd. in Chorley 61). Hemans tried to replace the closeness of her family with female friends; from 1827 she corresponded with Joanna Baillie, Anne Grant, Mary Mitford, Caroline Bowles, Mary Howitt, and Maria Jane Jewsbury (Hemans, Poems xi).

The disintegration of Hemans' domestic circle meant that her fame became more and more of a burden for her. The private letters published after her death attest to the negative aspects of her fame: ". . . I feel so alone, so unprotected; and this weary celebrity makes such things, I believe, press the more bitterly" (qtd. in Chorley 131). The loss of Hemans' feminine space through

her mother's death and sister's marriage threatened her health and her poetic capacity as her poetry was an extension of that space (Ross 297). Hemans repeatedly said she was only able to bear fame because of the protection her family offered. She did not want her poeticising to threaten her status as a feminine woman ("People really do take me for a sort of literary ogress . . ." (qtd. in Chorley 107)), and she shrank from public attention. Her family had been a means of confirming her as an ordinary, feminine woman. In the eyes of the public, however, she was not ordinary, and was revered and sometimes even feared. "I appear to be regarded as rather a 'curious thing' . . . I should be strongly tempted to do something very strange amongst them, in order to fulfil the ideas I imagine they entertain of that altogether foreign monster, a Poetess . . ." (qtd. in Chorley 241-42).

This is not to suggest that Hemans found all aspects of her fame burdensome: she certainly seems to have enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of the prestigious literary friends she won, and to have valued the financial success that accompanied her celebrity. It was the interest of "the public" and the scrutiny of her private life that Hemans found difficult to cope with, because they might have led to her persona being exposed as a fictional construction, and they also intensified her perception of herself as aberrant.

## iv Feminine Fame

The feminine poetess was required to abjure ambition; fame from her poetry was supposed to be the natural consequence of her spontaneous effusions of womanliness. (The paradox that the author had to make the decision to publish, and therefore send her most private feminine feelings into the public sphere, seems to have been ignored by her contemporaries as long as she was perceived as subscribing wholly to the ideology of the feminine.) Hemans and her admirers were keen to establish that she was not an ambitious writer. In his biography, Chorley asserts that Hemans' poems were "unsullied by any base alloy of ambition" (56). He idealises Hemans as "seeking rather sympathy than praise" (Chorley 57). As an ideal woman she could not, of course, demonstrate any desire for fame. Hemans was always anxious about how she would be perceived, and worked hard at convincing herself and her audience that she was a true "feminine poetess."

One anecdote which suggests how sensitive Hemans was to public perception of her is her decision regarding the dedication of the poem The Sceptic. Her friend and literary advisor Reginald Heber had suggested that she dedicate the poem to William Gifford, the editor of the Quarterly Review. Hemans did not take his advice, however, as according to Chorley she "was afterwards

deterred from putting it into execution, by a fear that it might be construed into a manoeuvre to propitiate the good graces of the Quarterly Review; and from the slightest approach to any such mode of propitiation, her sensitive nature recoiled with almost fastidious delicacy" (qtd. in Trinder 27). Hemans' construction of herself as unambitious was so successful that even 150 years after her death, Trinder felt able to write: "She was a facile writer of verse rather than an ambitious poet" (50).

Hemans' fear about how others would perceive her was certainly not groundless. In 1830, she visited the Wordsworth household. She was at the height of her career, used to being the centre of attention, and apparently talked much during her stay. Wordsworth himself was impressed by her intellect, according to Chorley's memoirs. The two poets both disagreed with Moore's assessment in his biography of Byron that genius was unfit for domestic happiness (Chorley 175); Wordsworth's circumstances supported their theory but Hemans' hardly did. It is worth noting, however, that he was shocked at her lack of knowledge of things domestic (Clarke 65). He had expected the poet to be the domestic Mrs Hemans of her poetry, illustrating how successful the construction of her public persona was. When she died, Wordsworth wrote of her passing, without having to name her:

Mourn rather for that holy spirit,  
 Sweet as the spring, as ocean deep,  
 For her who, ere her summer faded,  
 Has sunk into a breathless sleep.  
 (from "Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James  
 Hogg")

The women of the Wordsworth household, however, were not so enamoured of Hemans. Sara Hutchinson said she was "spoilt by the adulation of 'the world'" and found her "affectation . . . perfectly unendurable" (qtd. in Clarke 64). Hutchinson also made a disdainful comment regarding Hemans' fame, saying that a Miss Hamilton wrote "ten times better poetry than Mrs Hemans but would be shocked if she thought the world should ever know she had written a line" (qtd. in Clarke 74). Such a comment illustrates that it is not writing that threatens a woman's femininity, but the worldly success that comes from publishing.

While Hemans may have unconsciously conveyed her worldly success at times, she also worked at presenting herself as unambitious of fame. As noted earlier, Clarke persuasively argues that bemoaning the life of a female writer was almost a ritual: it was a way of disclaiming authority at the very moment of claiming it through publication, a way of being weak at the point of strength (29). Hemans constantly complained of the rewards of her authorship: "I wish I could give you the least idea of what kindness is to me -- how much more, how far dearer than fame" (qtd. in Chorley 87). Complaining about fame

assured her friends, her public, and herself that she was a true feminine poetess, not an ambitious author revelling in her success. Clarke also suggests that the networks of female writers may have ironically endorsed women into the role of feminine poetess. Many women writers suffered some degree of uncertainty about their own femininity in the face of public success, and wrote to one another for assurance that they were indeed feminine (Clarke 81). The letters of Hemans' that Chorley prints seem to support both these arguments. Hemans used her writing both to sustain the image she had constructed and to reassure herself that she was indeed close to that image.

Fear not any danger for me in the adulation which surrounds me . . . . Of all things, never may I become that despicable thing, a woman living upon admiration! The village matron, tidying up for her husband and children at evening, is far, far more enviable and respectable . . . .

wrote Hemans in a letter to fellow author Mary Russell Mitford (qtd. in Clarke 50). Hemans emphasised that she drew emotional satisfaction from her domestic setting and felt better "formed for [the family's] quiet happiness, than for the weary part of femme célèbre which I am now enacting" (qtd. in Clarke 47). Again to Mary Russell Mitford, Hemans wrote: "there is no enjoyment to compare with the happiness of gladdening hearth and home for others -- it is woman's own true sphere" (qtd. in Mellor, Romanticism 123). For Hemans to have enjoyed the rewards

of her fame might have suggested that she had deliberately set out to achieve it, contradicting her image and the message of her poetry (Clarke 50).

Fame had its advantages, but there were aspects of renown that were undesirable, namely those that highlighted the contradictory nature of Hemans' public image and her private life. She was sought out as a tourist attraction: people travelled across the Atlantic to meet her. Chorley records how "[s]ome came merely to stare at the strange poetess; others to pay proper neighborly morning calls, and discuss household matters. Great was their surprise at finding that she was not ready with an answer on these important topics" (88). That people expected their beloved poetess to be able to give household advice shows how convincing her image as the icon of domesticity was (Ross 253). Their surprise at her lack of knowledge must have only served to remind Hemans of the disjunction between her image and herself.

In the later years of her career, Hemans resented the increasingly frequent invasions of her privacy by her devoted fans. Hemans' letters speak of the interruptions of tourists seeking her out, "the Albumean persecution," and a storm of mail (Chorley 89). The inundation was overwhelming. Such a multitude of visitors illustrates the contradictory nature of a society that believed fame and publicity were bad for women but still sought and

invaded the privacy of the woman writer (Ross 252-53). Ross notes that though at times Hemans expressed fear that she was perceived as a monster (see quotation from Hemans above), on other occasions she felt it was the public who were monstrous and who threatened her femininity: "That monster known by the name of the People is tormenting me . . ." (qtd. in Ross 253; Chorley 204).

William Howitt tells how Hemans attempted to escape to the Lake District for peace and quiet, but

it was a great mistake to suppose that a woman of any reputation could escape the inroads of the Tourist Vandals so near Ambleside, and Lowood. If anyone wants to set up for a lion or lioness, let him or her go and take a cottage in the Lake country . . . a literary creature is a fascinating monster . . . If I heard of a literary person settling at the Lakes, I should at once say, that person is anxious to be lionized. But this was not the case with Mrs Hemans. To avoid all notoriety, she never, after her reputation was spread, would visit London; she sought for peace . . . (2: 116)<sup>33</sup>

Even as late as 1847, Howitt wrote that Hemans' house of birth in Liverpool was "still pointed out to strangers" (2: 105).

Despite her distaste for coming face to face with her public, Hemans still wanted to be a successful poet. Though the feminine poetess was not supposed to be

---

<sup>33</sup>Though sceptics could argue that she deliberately set herself up for "a lioness," she left Liverpool to avoid the city and its hordes of admirers, and chose the Lake District because of her health, the rural setting, and the benefit to her sons (W. Howitt 2: 115-17). Proximity to her favourite poet, Wordsworth, may also have influenced her decision.



The fragility of Hemans' persona was further emphasised after her death. Her friend Henry Fothergill Chorley quickly put together his Memorials, containing large portions of Hemans' (edited) correspondence, even though, on her deathbed, Hemans had asked that her letters not be published (Berliner 134). Chorley focused on Hemans' poeticising, saying that "the woman and the poetess were in her too inseparably united to admit of their being considered apart from each other" (272). Chorley presented Mrs Hemans as a dedicated and feeling poetess but Hemans' sister, Harriet Owen, felt his depiction of her threatened the poet's femininity. For example, from the letters that Chorley prints it is clear that Hemans did not appreciate the attention of her fans. She comments often quite sarcastically on their visits, ridiculing them for their expectations of a female poet (Ross 252). These letters undermine her fragile position as a feminine poetess, displaying as they do the unsuitable characteristics of wit and ingratitude. Chorley tried to offset these anecdotes with others that rendered his subject suitable for the title of feminine poetess. For example, he relates how she tore out pages from books that offended her delicacy, and never read the life of Byron because she was so shocked by the excerpts that appeared in the periodicals (Chorley 135).

Owen modified Chorley's depiction of Hemans with her own memoir. She wrote: "Perhaps there never was an

individual who would have shrunk more sensitively from the idea of being made the subject of a biographical memoir, than she [of] whom, by a strange fatality, so many imperfect notices have been given to the world" (qtd. in Ross 251). Ross demonstrates that Owen tried to restore the image of Hemans as a mother devoted to her children and her God. She tried to stress Hemans' femininity over her career as a poetess, suppressing the details that show Hemans' wit and her distaste for her household duties. One key point that Owen rewrote concerned Hemans' marriage failure. Chorley had said: "Mrs Hemans, whose literary pursuits rendered it advisable for her not to leave England, remained with her family" (18). The comment threatens Hemans' persona as it indicates she put her public role before her private role. Owen, in contrast, emphasised that the education of her children and her devotion to her mother, as well as her poetical career, led to her staying in England, thus stressing Hemans' maternal and filial duties (Ross 252). Paradoxically, to do this Owen had to reveal more about her sister, printing more of her letters and bringing more attention to her private life. This only emphasised her famousness and therefore her abnormality (Ross 251). In death, even more than in life, Hemans became part of the public discourse.

## iv Hemans' Poetry

Though Hemans appeared to balance her role as a woman and her role as a poetess publicly, by professing her abhorrence of fame and endorsing the domestic duties of women, privately she knew that she was far from the ideal woman she promoted in her poetry. Her fear was that others would discover her charade. With the conflict between her public image and private life being a source of anxiety for Hemans, it is perhaps surprising that fame, a subject that jeopardised a woman's femininity, features so frequently in her work. One would have expected Hemans to avoid dealing with a topic that threatened the constructed image of herself (much as More and Barbauld had done earlier in the period).

In the early part of her career, particularly before her mother's death, the subject of fame appeared again and again in her poetry, but it was predominantly associated with men and military glory. Warrior after warrior, soldier after soldier, earned himself the right to glory and praise. This is particularly the case in the early volumes of Hemans' career such as Tales and Historic Scenes, Songs of the Cid, and Greek Songs. Again, this calls to mind the 1770s and 1780s. The earlier women poets, such as Seward, had also mentioned fame primarily in relation to men. Hemans was perhaps reviving a technique that allowed a woman to write of a

subject thought inappropriate for her gender, a technique that was also a means for vicariously expressing a woman's own desire for fame. In Hemans' early writing, fame and female were rarely linked. Occasionally in her juvenile verses, such as "To My Mother," she would briefly touch on the subject in an uncharacteristically personal way:

And oh! if e'er I sigh'd to claim  
 The palm, the living palm of fame,  
 The glowing wreath of praise;  
 If e'er I wish'd the glittering stores  
 That Fortune on her favourite pours;  
 'Twas but that wealth and fame, if mine,  
 Round thee with streaming rays might shine,  
 And gild thy sun-bright days!

Yet not that splendour, pomp, and power  
 Might then irradiate every hour;  
 For these, my mother! well I know,  
 On thee no raptures could bestow; --  
 But could thy bounty, warm and kind,  
 Be, like thy wishes, unconfined,  
 And fall as manna from the skies,  
 And bid a train of blessings rise,  
 Diffusing joy and peace . . .

This is an example of the acceptable kind of fame that Ross discusses: reflected and shared fame. The conditional "if" keeps her desire for fame hypothetical and, if she did yearn for fame, it would only be to bring joy to her mother. Even in her youth, Hemans had absorbed the requirements of the feminine poetess.

But it is not until the 1828 volume Records of Woman, published after the death of her mother and the same year as the marriage of her sister, that Hemans delves into the relationship between fame and the woman

artist in any detail. This was the time in her life when she was most vulnerable to the pressures of fame, her protective feminine space, which had previously sheltered her from these pressures, being no longer inviolable. Hemans said there was "more of herself to be found" in Records of Woman than her other works (qtd. in Chorley 52). Again and again in this volume art is shown to be disruptive. The gift of song and the gift of fame undercut the emotional life on which the woman writer's happiness is based (Wordsworth, Introduction to Hemans). "Joan of Arc in Rheims," "Properzia Rossi," and "The Grave of a Poetess" are three poems from Records that focus on the tribulations of famous women.

"Joan of Arc in Rheims" does not deal particularly with the woman artist, but it still deals with a woman who has transgressed into the public, masculine sphere; in this case, the military rather than the literary world has been entered. The victorious Joan of Arc stands beside the altar while the king is being crowned:

Never before, and never since that hour,  
 Hath woman, mantled with victorious power,  
 Stood forth as thou beside the shrine didst stand,  
 Holy amidst the knighthood of the land,  
 And, beautiful with joy and with renown,  
 Lift thy white banner o'er the golden crown,  
 Ransom'd for France by thee!

After the coronation, the cheering crowd greet Joan:

. . . Then rose a nation's sound:  
 Oh! what a power to bid the quick heart bound,

The wind bears onward with the stormy cheer  
 Man gives to glory on her high career!

The exhilaration of her reception is made to seem insignificant, however, when out of the throng comes the lone voice of her father and she catches sight of him and her brothers. Her thoughts immediately turn to her childhood, and she sees "the pomp no more." The strength of the domestic affections outweighs the attraction of fame. Hemans closes the poem with a melancholy stanza that warns that, for woman, the price of fame is high:

Oh! never did thine eye  
 Through the green thoughts of happy infancy  
 Wander again Joanne! Too much of fame  
 Had shed its radiance on thy peasant name;  
 And bought alone by gifts beyond all price --  
 The trusting heart's repose, the paradise  
 Of home, with all its love -- doth fate allow  
 The crown of glory unto woman's brow.

Fame also costs Properzia Rossi, a "celebrated female sculptor of Bologna" who is also talented poetically and musically. Addressing her beloved, Adriane, who does not return her affections, Properzia Rossi sculpts his face in her last piece of work before she dies of unrequited love. Her artistic power is seen as the cause of her failure in love:

It comes! the power  
 Within me born flows back -- my fruitless dower  
 That could not win me love.

Despite its failure to win her love, she greets her power

with pride and enjoys her ability to fashion the features of her beloved.

In something of a vicious circle, the lack of love and companionship caused by her artistic gifts is blamed for stifling her talents:

. . . Oh! I might have given  
Birth to creations of far nobler thought;  
I might have kindled, with the fire of heaven,  
Things not of such as die! But I have been  
Too much alone! . . .

Properzia Rossi goes on to deride the "worthless fame" that has not brought her love, while admitting that her "heart, / In its own fairy world of song and art / Once beat for praise." Her love, given to Adriane, has been "unvalued wealth." Happiness and fame are shown to be incompatible for a woman:

. . . If I could weep  
Once, only once, beloved one! on thy breast,  
Pouring my heart forth ere I sink to rest!  
But that were happiness! -- and unto me  
Earth's gift is Fame . . .

In her imagination, her ideal was that her fame was a glory for her lover's brow. Ironically, in the end, her fame, her "name . . . awhile to live," is what she dedicates to her love, hoping he will remember her in death. The content of this poem parallels that of Amelia Opie's "Maid of Corinth" discussed in my previous chapter. Opie's woman artist's love was requited but her lover was not present while she found fame and the couple

were not reunited in the poem. Whereas Opie suggested that fame and love may have been compatible, but did not show the two together, Hemans is clear that the two are incompatible, perhaps indicating the ideological shift that had occurred in a twenty-year period.

It is extremely tempting to relate the sentiments expressed in "Properzia Rossi" to Hemans' life. Towards the end of her life, as we have seen, Hemans expressed some regret as to the mediocre quality of her works. Some critics considered her genius undeveloped. No doubt the pressures of providing an income and the lack of a supportive partner affected her poetic output, but the reader cannot afford to forget that Hemans constructs the details of her life for her public according to the image of the feminine poetess. Casting herself as the victim of unrequited love is not necessarily an accurate assessment of her marriage break-up, as evidence suggests she chose her career over her husband. Attributing a lack of any "great" work to the lack of a marriage partner may just be an excuse, and suggesting that fame and happiness are incompatible does not tally with the seemingly happy years between her husband's leaving and her mother's dying. Records of Woman, as Anderson points out, tends to be read as though the poems, because they are about women and because Hemans herself felt they reflected her life, are part of Hemans' own experience and observation (197). But the poems are just as much a

product of her reading experience and imagination as her poems on Greece, Italy, and Spain (Anderson 198). The reader must always be wary of seeking complete congruency between the poems' speakers and the poet. She always had her public image to consider as she wrote the details of her life into her poetry.

One poem that is always read as voicing Hemans' own thoughts is "The Grave of a Poetess," the final poem in Records of Woman. It is written in the first person and based on an occurrence in Hemans' life, hence the autobiographical interpretation. The speaker of the poem visits the grave of the poetess Mary Tighe and mournfully expresses sympathy for her. The speaker's sadness at the poetess's fate is soon comforted, however, when contemplating the better life in heaven that Tighe must have found, a life where the roles of poet and woman can be reconciled:

Now peace the woman's heart hath found,  
And joy the poet's eye.

Interestingly, this is not the only poem Hemans wrote about Tighe. "Written After Visiting a Tomb" is a later poem on the same subject, and the accompanying footnote in Poems informs the reader that the earlier "Grave of a Poetess" was actually "written several years previously to visiting the scene" (519). The speaker of "Written After Visiting a Tomb" addresses a butterfly that has distracted her from the gloominess of the tomb. The

careless joy of the butterfly contrasts with the complications of the speaker's life:

Thou art not lonely, though born to roam,  
Thou hast no longings that pine for home;  
Thou seek'st not the haunts of the bee and bird,  
To fly from the sickness of hope deferr'd:

In thy brief being no strife of mind,  
No boundless passion, is deeply shrined . . .

It is only in the ninth stanza (of twelve) that the speaker turns her thoughts to Tighe:

And she, that voiceless below me slept,  
Flow'd not her song from a heart that wept?  
-- O Love and Song! though of heaven your powers,  
Dark is your fate in this world of ours.

This later poem more explicitly states what was merely hinted at in "The Grave of a Poetess": the life of a woman poet is incompatible with happiness in love. Hemans also wrote "Records of Immature Genius" on Tighe, a poem which Chorley says could just as easily have applied to Hemans herself in its comments on poetic maturity being thwarted. Perhaps Hemans felt that both she and Tighe had been held back from their true potential as poets: Tighe by death, herself by personal circumstances.

In all three poems, Hemans clearly sympathises with Tighe, aware of the complexities of being a woman and being a poet. Tighe's family did not approve of her poeticising (W. Howitt writes that they were probably ashamed "that any of their name should have degraded

herself by writing poetry" (1: 419)). Despite their disapproval, Tighe privately circulated her poems among her friends. According to Chorley, Hemans said: "I think I shall feel much interest in visiting 'the grave of a poetess' . . . her poetry has always touched me greatly, from a similarity which I imagine I discover between her destiny and my own" (214). It was apparently her early death that attracted Hemans; recalling standing by Tighe's grave, she commented: ". . . though surrounded by attention . . . my heart was envying the repose of her who slept there" (qtd. in Chorley 213).

To a friend, however, Hemans implied more complex reasons for her fascination with her fellow poetess. She said of Tighe in a letter in 1831:

I heard much of her unhappiness was caused by her own excessive love of admiration and desire to shine in society, which quite withdrew her from Hearth and Home and all their holy enjoyments, and that her mother, standing by her deathbed passionately exclaimed -- "My Mary, my Mary, the pride of literature has destroyed you." (qtd. in Clarke 50-51)

Though Hemans does not explicitly state it, there is an underlying suggestion that these are faults that she worries that she shares with Tighe, the comment recalling her own failed marriage.

Following Records of Woman, the subject of fame in

relation to women appears frequently in various lyrics.<sup>34</sup> The final message is always the same: the ideologically sound conclusion that fame and womanhood are incompatible is always reached. Yet close readings of these lyrics show that Hemans seems to have mixed feelings about fame. On the one hand, the gratification of being the centre of attention is exciting and rewarding, but on the other, fame always costs the woman her domestic happiness and therefore threatens her femininity. The details of her own life must surely have influenced Hemans' depiction of woman's relationship with fame in her poetry.

"Woman and Fame" is the only poem by Hemans that contains the word "fame" in its title. The poem decries fame for a woman but also expresses some of the attractions of renown. In the opening stanza, Hemans says fame "seems to lift this earthly frame / Above mortality," but she bids it "away," preferring instead the "Sweet waters from affection's spring." The "proud wreath" and the "thrilling tone" of fame are rejected in favour of "words of home-born love." Fame is rejected because

A hollow sound is in thy song,  
A mockery in thine eye,  
To the sick heart that doth but long  
For aid, for sympathy --

---

<sup>34</sup>Occasionally Hemans examines fame in relation to the male artist or poet. Three of her poems concern Tasso, while others deal with Körner, a dying improvisatore, and the death song of a dying poet.

For kindly looks to cheer it on,  
For tender accents that are gone.

In the final stanza, Hemans declares:

Fame! Fame! thou canst not be the stay  
Unto the drooping reed . . .

This seems to be the voice of Mrs Hemans, the suffering delicate woman, "the drooping reed," who celebrates domestic ties and recoils from publicity. While Felicia Hemans may have felt that fame had cost her her domestic affections and was in some ways a curse, she in many ways chose fame and relied on it for her income and lifestyle. The practical, financial benefits of fame do not feature in this, or any other, poem. Fame is always depicted as the thing that costs woman her romantic relationships but the woman -- poet or otherwise -- is always shown as the passive recipient of fame. Fame is not depicted as a great height that has been reached via toil and effort. Never is the woman shown to have made a decision, for example to publish, that could be construed as her having sought or chosen fame. This contrasts with the earlier poets who were always aware that their decision to publish opened them to the charge of courting fame, and who consequently denied ambition in either their prefaces or poems. Hemans, avoiding the autobiographical "I," is careful to depict fame as almost an inevitable outcome of talent, uncontrolled by its

recipient, much as a woman's poetry is a spontaneous, uncontrolled overflowing of her soul.

Another poem that links fame and the woman artist is "Corinne at the Capitol," based on an extremely influential novel of the early nineteenth century. Written by Madame de Staël, Corinne, or Italy was immensely popular from its publication in 1807. Corinne's story is one of an independent, family-less, free-spirited heroine, a poet and improviser, beautiful and powerful and possessing a very public fame. Even though this fame brings her loneliness, desertion and death, it is shown to be something she deeply desires. Corinne depicts poetry as a calling for women, rather than as a means of moralising; the heroine is proud to be performing on a public platform (Leighton 30-31). This is one of very few poems of this period to embrace the woman artist in the spirit of Corinne, even if she was represented as tragic and pining for domesticity (Leighton 31).

The first five stanzas of "Corinne at the Capitol" focus on the glory and beauty of Italy and Corinne's improvisatory powers, in lush and sensuous tones:

. . . And thy lyre's deep silvery string,  
Touch'd as by a breeze's wing,  
Murmurs tremblingly at first,  
Ere the tide of rapture burst . . .

. . . And the burning words of song  
From thy lip flow fast and strong,

With a rushing stream's delight  
In the freedom of its might.

The final stanza abruptly changes the tone of the poem, from wonderment at the nature of Corinne's calling to a moral suited to the pen of an ideologically sound feminine poetess:

. . . Crown'd of Rome! -- oh art thou not  
Happy in that glorious lot? --  
Happier, happier far than thou,  
With the laurel on thy brow,  
She that makes the humblest hearth  
Lovely but to one on earth!

The rewards of fame and attention in the public realm are thus belittled in the face of a woman's lack of domestic devotion to a mate. This is an example of what Leighton refers to as the "public advice" at the end of Hemans' poems (18), but it is not enough to counteract the positive images of a famous woman poet that have preceded it. As Leighton astutely observes, "Corinne at the Capitol" allowed Hemans to enact the feeling of public glory before condemning it (33).

Another influence on Hemans' poetry was the Greek poet Sappho. Sappho's story was a mixture of sexual passion and love, but also of self-expression that placed women at centre stage. Hemans' "Last Song of Sappho" began a tradition of last songs for the famed Greek poetess (Leighton 36). In the poem, Sappho gives one last poetic performance before plunging herself into the sea. Her cry is that she is "Alone, alone!" -- once

again fame has not brought the female artist happiness.

. . . Was it for this the death-wind fell  
On my rich lyre, and quench'd its living strings?

Let them lie silent at my feet!  
Since, broken even as they,  
The heart whose music made them sweet  
Hath pour'd on desert sands its wealth away.

Yet glory's light hath touch'd my name,  
The laurel-wreath is mine --  
With a lone heart, a weary frame --  
O restless deep! I come to make them thine!

Give to that crown, that burning crown,  
Place in thy darkest hold!  
Bury my anguish, my renown,  
With hidden wrecks, lost gems, and wasted gold.

Sappho is the ultimate symbol of conflict between domestic happiness and worldly fame for Hemans (Ross 298). She said of the statue of Sappho that inspired her poem: ". . . it seems to speak piercingly and sorrowfully of the nothingness of fame, at least to a woman" (qtd. in Chorley 198). Yet, ironically, Sappho's suicide, though ending the earthly pains caused by the conflict between art and love, results in not only another poem but also everlasting fame. The ultimate solution to the conflicts between love and art, home and fame, is to die, but in death, art and fame prevail.

The negative effect of fame on women's domestic happiness is a crucial theme in Hemans' poetry (Ross 297-98). According to Ross, Hemans was not concerned with fame's uncertainty and ephemerality but with the barriers that it placed between the woman artist and humankind

(299). Success in the public sphere is often contrasted with failure in the private sphere for the famous woman artist in Hemans' poems. Her statement is that woman cannot live on fame (Berliner 32). But Hemans' relationship with fame in her own life was ambivalent. It brought her money, esteem, and success, but it also highlighted the discrepancy between herself as woman poet and her poetic persona.

"In the pursuit of literary renown she never forgets what is due to feminine reserve," wrote George Bancroft in 1827, showing that Hemans was able to balance fame and femininity in her public role. Despite this success, she privately suffered from anxiety of perception because of the conflict between her prescribed role as a woman and her actual role as a public poet. Hemans convinced her audience she was able to be both feminine and famous, mainly through her poetic message about the incompatibility of fame and womanhood, but privately she knew that she fell well short of the ideal that she promoted and represented.

In many ways, Hemans was sheltered from the full glare of publicity by her geographical isolation and the protective circle of family and friends around her. When her close friend and fellow published writer Maria Jane Jewsbury died in India, where she had followed her husband, Hemans said:

Yet I would rather, a thousand times, that she should have perished thus, in the path of her chosen duties, than have seen her become the merely brilliant creature of London literary life, living upon those poor succes de societe [sic], which I think utterly ruinous to all that is lofty, and holy, and delicate in the nature of a highly-endowed woman. (qtd. in Chorley 255)

This sounds like a thinly-veiled reference to her contemporary Letitia Landon, who was not so fortunate as Hemans in her personal situation. Whereas she successfully managed to convince the public she was "Mrs Hemans," Letitia Landon let the facade of her public persona slip. In my final chapter I shall examine the conflict between feminine ideology and the fame of the woman poet that occurred in Landon's life and works.

## CHAPTER SIX

### LETITIA LANDON

#### i Fame and Finances

Letitia Elizabeth Landon, although not as commercially successful as Mrs Hemans, was also a hugely popular poet during the 1820s and 1830s. Many aspects of Hemans' and Landon's careers are similar: they both wrote for the financial support of their families; they both were child prodigies; they both were professional poets with a sense of vocation; and they both felt the pressures of fame. In other ways, however, the two poets could not have been more different: while Hemans lived in literary isolation, Landon joined the social scene of London; while Hemans was surrounded by a protective family, Landon was a woman alone; and while Hemans developed her poetic persona as the icon of domesticity, matronly and respectable, Landon subscribed to the ideology of the Beautiful<sup>35</sup> and developed a persona that emphasised the sensual, romantic aspects of femininity.

---

<sup>35</sup>Edmund Burke "consistently identified the qualities of the beautiful with the feminine" in his Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful (1757). He constructed the image of the ideal woman with emphasis on her appearance and her "softer virtues" (Mellor, Romanticism 107-09).

Like Hemans, Landon began poeticising at a young age. As a child she showed an early talent for memorising and improvisation. Her juvenile poems were brought to the attention of her literary neighbour, magazine editor William Jerdan. Jerdan at first thought that the poems were the work of Landon's mother, but when convinced they were by Letitia he accepted her work for publication, printing her first poem in the Literary Gazette in March, 1818, under the initial "L" (Renalds 20). Another poem followed in the next issue, and soon Landon's poetry was appearing frequently in Jerdan's "influential and fame-dispensing publication" (Renalds 20-21). Her success was immediate.

The praise she received fed Landon's hopes that her writing could be commercially successful (Renalds 21). The Landon family struggled financially, and Landon's biographer Brenda Hart Renalds suggests that even from her teens her motivation for publishing was financial (15). Letters between Jerdan and Landon's mother imply monetary need, Mrs Landon hinting at her daughter's motivation for publishing: "Need I say how very anxious she is for your opinion? I trust you will not think her arrogant, as I believe you are aware of her reasons for wishing to publish" (qtd. in Renalds 24).<sup>36</sup> After her

---

<sup>36</sup>Jerdan quoted these letters in his autobiography to show those unacquainted with the publishing world "some of the tribulations which young aspirants to literary fame must undergo" (qtd. in Renalds 25).

success in the Literary Gazette, Landon favoured attempting a book because it would be more profitable, and so began work on a long poem with a view to having it published as a book, Jerdan providing advice and criticism (Renalds 21).

The Fate of Adelaide was duly published in 1821, dedicated to Mrs Siddons, the famous actress who happened to be a friend of Landon's grandmother (Renalds 25). The volume sold well, and Jerdan commissioned Landon to do a series of poetical sketches for the Gazette, sketches that she signed "L.E.L.". Her poems appeared from 1821 to 1824, and the interest of the reading public rose to a high pitch within a few months, her initials becoming virtually a name (Renalds 28). The success and reputation that her poetical sketches brought gave Landon the confidence to publish a second volume of her verses in the more lucrative book form, introduced by the title poem, "The Improvisatrice" (Renalds 32).

The Improvisatrice (1824) was a spectacular publishing success, going through six editions in its first year. Within a month of publication it had caused such a sensation that a discussion of it featured in the influential "Noctes Ambrosianae" of Blackwood's Magazine (Renalds 36). Landon's next volume, The Troubadour, appeared in 1825. In 1826 The Golden Violet was published, followed by The Venetian Bracelet, The Lost

Pleiad, The History of the Lyre, and Other Poems in 1829.

Besides producing these large volumes Landon published prolifically in the periodicals and annuals of the day. She contributed poems, reviews, and prose work. Within a few years she became one of the most sought-after names in the annuals, not only as a poet but also as an editor (Leighton 46). In the 1830s she also published several novels and a tragedy.

Despite her popularity and prolificness, the financial burden on Landon was great. Her father died when she was only 22, leaving her the sole support of her family. After his death she left home, as she apparently had a strained relationship with her mother. She briefly took up residence with her well-meaning but disruptive grandmother before moving into a boarding house and achieving "a room of her own." Though her independence was beneficial to her composition, it added to her financial worries -- she supported her mother, grandmother and herself, and paid for her brother's education (Leighton 48). Landon herself said: ". . . from the time I was fifteen, my life has been one continual struggle in some shape or another against absolute poverty" (qtd. in Leighton 48).

Money was considered an unsavoury topic in conjunction with the feminine poetess, whose sphere was love and domestic bliss. There was an incongruity

between the glamorous "natural" effusions of a gifted poet and the unnatural circumstances of a wage-earning daughter (Leighton 47). The economic situation of the "maleless" woman poet was ignored, reviewers forgetting that L.E.L. depended on the financial benefits of the popular press for her very survival. Landon's critics felt that she belittled her talent by stooping to write for all manner of publications in copious quantities. William Thackeray was one who accused Landon of degrading her genius by writing for the periodicals (Leighton 49). Landon herself was clear on the subject of her earning capacity, the arrival of two cheques eliciting the comment: "[W]hat lover's name will ever make my breast beat as does that of Messrs. Longman?" (qtd. in Pascoe, Staging 237). She wrote what the market required, and in quantity, at least in part because she needed the money.

The absolute need for money and the daily grind required to churn out poem after poem were aspects of Landon's life that she kept from her reading public. Like Hemans, Landon avoided mentioning these areas of her life in her poetry because they did not accord with the public's picture of a female poet, in particular the picture she cultivated of herself as an effortlessly improvising genius. However, the reality of the situation was that she spent much of her time hunched over her writing desk into the small hours of the morning in order to meet some deadline or other. Landon herself

bemoaned the effort needed to sustain her fame and lifestyle. "My whole life has been one of constant labour. My contributions to various periodicals -- whether tales, poetry, or criticism -- amount to far more than my published volumes," she wrote to memoirist S.C. Hall when asked to provide an outline of her career (qtd. in Hall 269). "What is my life? One day of drudgery after another; difficulties incurred for others which have ever pressed upon me beyond health, which every year, by one severe illness after another, is taxed beyond its strength . . ." she complained (qtd. in Hall 266). Her complaints distinguish her from the silently suffering Mrs Hemans, and show the disjunction between her image as a feminine poetess and the reality of her life.

It was her work for the annuals that was particularly stressful for Landon. The annuals had deadlines she had to meet, even when she was ill, and often required her to compose poems to pictures, pictures that were tediously similar (Renalds 160). Renalds estimates that, beginning in 1824, she contributed "approximately 150 works of poetry and prose" to some 14 annuals, writing three (annuals) in entirety in the 1830s (149). The drawcard of the annuals was their profitability. They could afford to pay their authors high fees and the initials "L.E.L." were a strong selling

point when she was at the height of her career (Leighton 49).

## ii Fame and Femininity

Money was not the only reason that Landon entered into the public arena, however. "The desire of publication is inseparable from composition . . . ," Landon wrote to Hall (qtd. in Hall 269). If recognition was what Landon sought she certainly achieved it in her lifetime. She eagerly embraced the fame that she won by publishing her poetry. In the naivety of her youth Landon seems not to have suffered any anxiety of perception. She does not appear to have anticipated the conflict that would arise between her participation in the public sphere as a feminine poetess and her status and expected role as a woman. The reality of the situation was to hit her with full force later in her career.

The initials "L.E.L." signed to the poems in the Literary Gazette proved to be a marketing dream. They aroused the curiosity of the periodical's readers, and when Jerdan let it slip that they belonged to a young girl "still in her teens," the mysterious author was even more tantalising to the public (Greer 292). (Interestingly, at the time Jerdan imparted this

information about his prodigy, Landon was in fact 22 (Pascoe, Staging 232), which suggests that this was part of an astute marketing ploy.) Young men were particularly interested in the poetess and nearly all Landon's biographers quote the anecdote of the Cambridge undergraduates rushing for the Literary Gazette, admiring the verse of L.E.L. and wondering if she was young, pretty and rich (L. Stevenson 356; Mellor, Romanticism 110; Renalds 28-29; Leighton 46-47; Greer 267; Stephenson 2).

It was not only smitten young men and the middle-class readers of the periodicals and annuals she contributed to who fêted Landon, however. She was also embraced by literary society, despite the, often glaring, imperfections of her work. The professional critics and serious periodicals hailed her as a poetical genius (Renalds 68). In 1824, Thomas Lovell Beddoes discussed the possibility of Landon's being a poetical replacement for the recently deceased Shelley, Byron and Keats (L. Stevenson 355). A critical work of 1841 said of Landon: "In the high places of intellect, indeed, her name is dear as a household word, and the radiance of fame encircles her brow" (qtd. in Renalds 70).

Apart from the admiration of her readers, the extent of her fame is attested to by several other facts. Her volumes sold well; she was highly paid; and she received

numerous poetic tributes, including verses from Winthrop Mackworth Praed, Bernard Barton, and Francis Mahoney (L. Stevenson 356-57). There was even an Arctic lake named after her by a British explorer (Renalds 31). A major part of Landon's attraction was her status as an attractive, young, single woman. Reviewers constantly commented on her material status (Pascoe, Staging 235), for example, her age, her looks, and her romances, as they had done with Mary Robinson 35 years earlier. A reviewer of The Improvisatrice spent a third of the review giving instructions on how to get to her house (Pascoe, Staging 232). Often, tribute poems were inspired by her portraits rather than her verse, especially the attractive portrait by Daniel Maclise (alias Alfred Croquis). A contributor to Fraser's Magazine in 1833 wrote:

[S]he is a very nice, unbluestockingish, well-dressed, and trim-looking young lady, fond of sitting pretty much as Croquis . . . has depicted her, in neat and carefully-arrayed costume, at her table. (qtd. in Pascoe, Staging 235)

She and her writing were both turned into purchasable icons of female beauty (Mellor, Romanticism 120), a consequence of her fame and ideological position.

Living in London, Landon was drawn into the whirl of society, attending many literary parties and receiving callers. She gained a reputation as a social being and as her fame grew she became a sought-after attraction at

literary events. Anne Mellor refers to Landon as the first in a long line of media-created stars (Romanticism 121)<sup>37</sup>; she certainly captured the public's imagination more than any of her contemporaries. William Howitt said of Landon: ". . . she had been for the greater part of her life the cherished and caressed favourite of the most intelligent society of London . . ." (2: 140). He also refers to her as the "idolized object" of the social circles of the metropolis (W. Howitt 2: 141). According to S.C. Hall, "[s]he became a 'lion,' courted and flattered, and fêted" by society, but she never believed popularity was happiness "or lip service the true homage of the heart" (267).

The themes of Landon's poetry initially fuelled her success and popularity, although they were later to prove a bane. Her poems focused on romantic love and were invariably melancholy in tone. If Hemans had been relentless in her depiction of the domestic woman, Landon was positively monotonous in her portrayal of romantic love. Woman was formed, according to the ideology of the feminine, for the private sphere and the essence of woman was love, therefore what else could a feminine poetess write about? Yet some criticised Landon for her choice of subject. In 1825 The Westminster Review wrote:

---

<sup>37</sup>I would argue, however, that Mary Robinson equally merits this title.

. . . our serious and well-meant advice to L.E.L. is, to free herself as much as possible from her poetical vocabulary, to nurse her poetical thoughts, to avoid the subject of love, a topic so barren of thought, and, above all, not to be elated by the praise, or guided by the "poetical taste and critical judgement" of the Literary Gazette, if she wish that her reputation as a poet should rest on a solid and permanent foundation. (qtd. in Abbey 155)

Landon responded in her Preface to The Venetian Bracelet:

I allude to the blame and eulogy which have been equally bestowed on my frequent choice of love as my source of song. I can only say, that for a woman whose influence and whose sphere must be in the affections, what subject can be more fitting than one which it is her peculiar province to refine, spiritualise and exalt? (qtd. in Greer 370)

At least one reviewer agreed with her, Francis Mahoney of Fraser's Magazine writing, as late as 1833:

How . . . can there be too much of love in a young lady's writings? . . . Is she to write of politics, or political economy, or pugilism, or punch? Certainly not. We feel a decided dislike of women who venture into these unfeminine paths . . . she does right in thinking that Sappho knew what she was about when she chose the tender passion as the theme for woman. (qtd. in Abbey 158)

Love and poetry were indissolubly linked themes for Landon and she repeatedly wrote about the nature of poetry and of the poet (Mellor, Romanticism 114). As with much of Hemans' work, the settings were often exotic and the endings were often tragic. She derived her plots from medieval courtly love lyrics and Greek poetry, rather than from personal experience (Mellor, Romanticism 113), a practice which also resulted in criticism and

which she later regretted (as I shall discuss later with reference to her poetry).

### iii Public Persona

Considering Landon's experiences as a woman poet, it should not be surprising that the topics of love and poetry recur in her work. First, she, in an initially uncritical manner, embraced the idea of the feminine poetess, which largely defined her own image and dictated the content of her poetry. Secondly, she was a young and inexperienced woman when she found herself in the limelight of the literary scene. The way she entered the public sphere was to influence how she would construct herself and her poetry, and how she would be perceived by her audience, throughout her career.

Anne Mellor identifies Landon as constructing herself within the Burkean concept of the "Beautiful," so that her subjectivity was defined by love, fidelity, sensitivity, and melancholy (Mellor, Romanticism 112). By using those mysterious initials "L.E.L." she promoted herself as a commodity able to be possessed, by young men in particular (Romanticism 110-11). Landon supported the construction of her image as a desirable, feminine woman, in contrast to Hemans' domestic persona. Hemans, however, was a married woman with a skeleton to hide --

she was painfully aware of the discrepancy between her public image and her private life in terms of the role of the feminine poetess. Landon was far more naive with regard to the intensity of social pressure and ideology. Whereas Hemans had always been wary of wholeheartedly entering the details of her life into the public discourse, Landon seems to have leapt in with both feet, perhaps believing she could control the perception of her poetic persona and separate it from her self. She tried to live the Corinne myth (the life of de Staël's fictional improvisatrice who had successfully married femininity and poetic fame), but found fact more sordid than fiction (Leighton 45-46).

In her major poetry Landon's persona was quite static: she always reinforced the conventional female poetic voice. Pascoe argues that the women poets of the 1790s could fashion various personae for various types of writing and publications, but that Landon's poems represent a change from the fluid self of the 1790s to a static gesture of a self trapped in one persona (Pascoe, Staging 24; 217). Countering this claim, Stephenson shows, by examining Landon's prose work in contrast to her poetry, that, in fact, she had other voices available to her. In an anonymous critical essay on poetry Landon followed a "masculine" style that was grammatically correct, unlike much of her poetry, and used the typically masculine pronoun "we." In contrast, in an

essay on Hemans, which Stephenson argues she was using to develop her public identity, Landon wrote far more effusively, in a personal style with grammatical errors (Stephenson 10-11). Contrasting the styles of writing that Landon could master illustrates the deliberateness of her construction of her poetic persona.

To be a literary success she needed an audience; to win an audience, she needed critical approval. So Landon wrote what her audience required. She wrote according to a definite ideology and filled a definite literary niche. Jane Williams suggested in 1861 that Landon "composed poetry in accordance with her own idea of a poetess" (qtd. in Stephenson 2). But Stephenson argues that Landon's poetic persona was to a great extent an imposed image and was therefore limiting rather than liberating (1). The idea of the poetess was not really her own, more a product of her society's wants, so Landon was fulfilling what she perceived the requirements of a poetess to be. Berliner sees this as confirmed by Landon's ability to lay out the requirements of the feminine poetess in the epilogue to The Golden Violet (to be discussed later) (80).

She and Jerdan so successfully constructed her poetic identity, assumed to be reflective of the personality of the author, that it became of more interest than her work or her "real" self (Stephenson

14). The public was obsessed by the phenomenon of an attractive young woman pouring out her soul in melodious verse full of rich imagery. Her treatment of the passions and her own unconventional lifestyle titillated her readers (Renalds 67). Since all her narrative poems dealt with passionate love affairs and betrayals, the central figures often being artists, and since the woman poet and her text were conflated, it was assumed that the fictions of her poetry were the story of the actual career of the poetess (L. Stevenson 359). In 1829, objecting to the public interpreting her poems as confessions of her sins, Landon addressed the issue of congruency between poem and poet in her Preface to The Venetian Bracelet:

With regard to the frequent application of my works to myself, considering that I sometimes portrayed love unrequited, then betrayed, and again destroyed by death -- may I hint the conclusions are not quite logically drawn, as assuredly the same mind cannot have suffered such varied modes of misery (qtd. in Greer 307).

But even though she insisted that her poetry was not related to her own experience, she did bring her own voice and experience into her poems with autobiographical digressions. Her attempts to distance herself from her works were thwarted by her technique, and one wonders at the sincerity of the effort. Ironically, "The Venetian Bracelet" itself begins by discussing her own lack of acquaintance with Italy (Greer 307-09). In writing herself into the poem, she reminded her readers of the

author behind the text, almost encouraging them to associate her poetic persona with her self. Perhaps Letitia Landon, though aware that the feminine poetess should not revel in her fame, chose this as an indirect means of drawing attention to herself as author.

#### iv Dangerous Gossip

Landon's success was to backfire on her. She was an easy target for the press because of the nature of the image that she constructed and that was constructed for her. As well as embracing the image of the poetess as obsessed by romantic love, Landon plunged herself wholeheartedly into the social aspects of the literary scene. Not surprisingly, she relished the attention she was given and enjoyed the social life her poetic success made available to her. Unfortunately, the eagerness with which she embraced an active social life and the flattery she enjoyed served only to increase the burden of fame for Landon. She became trapped in the social discourse of her day, her life a source of public scrutiny and gossip because of her fame (Mellor, Romanticism 120).

Although as a famous, single, pretty, and unprotected young woman she had been an object of scrutiny from the earliest days of her career, in 1826 harmless rumours escalated into a scandalous and

envenomed attack on her character and reputation (Renalds 93). Her dress, apparently careless and somewhat flamboyant, and her work (for its "immoral" monotonous romantic themes) were criticised, and, worse, Landon was rumoured to have committed indiscretions with the much older Jerdan and much-married William Maginn (Renalds 94-98). Being a practical person, she had realised the best way to make a living in her profession was to profit by the assistance of the editors (L. Stevenson 359). Her business friendships with the powerful editors Maginn and Jerdan gave rise to gossip in part because there was no word to describe a purely collegial relationship (Mellor, Romanticism 122). Having men visit her alone in her rooms particularly damned Landon in the eyes of some.

Landon was quick to see that it was her precarious social position that left her vulnerable to attack: "It is only because I am poor, unprotected, and dependent on popularity, that I am a mark for all the gratuitous insolence and malice of idleness and ill-nature" (qtd. in Renalds 99-100). She was not so quick, however, to realise her own behaviour fuelled the gossip. Rather than curb the aspects of her lifestyle that were inviting criticism, Landon stubbornly refused to change her behaviour, believing that to do so would suggest guilt; she feigned indifference to the public and resolved to "wear no false manner" to appease vicious tongues (qtd. in Renalds 101). Fortunately her influential friends,

such as the Halls, rallied round in support of her, refuting the gossip.

That was not the last of the innuendo, however: the same kind of insinuations emerged several years later and this time the effects were more devastating, resulting in the termination of Landon's engagement to John Forster (later himself famous as Dickens' biographer). Although some sources suggest Landon and Forster were not suited (Hall 266; Renalds 209-12), the broken engagement was devastating for Landon's public image: it opened her to more slander as it was impossible to explain her motives to the public, who assumed a degree of guilt (Renalds 213). Physical repercussions went hand-in-hand with emotional consequences, Landon suffering ill health and depression as she became the object of intense public scrutiny and speculation. The fragment "Gossiping" provides an insight into Landon's feelings about the slanderers:

These are the spiders of society;  
They weave their petty webs of lies and sneers,  
And lie themselves in ambush for the spoil.  
The web seems fair, and glitters in the sun,  
And the poor victim winds him in the toil  
Before he dreams of anger, or of death.  
Alas, the misery that such inflict!  
A word, a look, have power to wring the heart,  
And leave it struggling hopeless in the net  
Spread by the false and the cruel, who delight  
In the ingenious torment they contrive.

On November 20, 1835, the actor William Charles Macready recorded in his diary: "I felt quite concerned that a woman of such splendid genius and such agreeable manners should be so depraved in taste and so lost to a sense of what was due to her high reputation. She is fallen!" (qtd. in Mellor, Romanticism 122). For Landon to be written into the public discourse as a fallen woman was disastrous. Whether the accusations were true or not was immaterial: public perception was everything. Landon began to talk about leaving England and before long rushed into a hasty marriage with a diplomat named George Maclean, moving to Africa with him. Her intense reaction to the malicious gossip showed just how important public opinion was to her, despite her previous attempts at expressing indifference (Renalds 215). Four months after her marriage, in 1838, she died from an overdose of prussic acid in unclear circumstances.

Landon did not find peace even in death. Her fame meant she was considered public property and the manner of her death, surrounded by suspicion and incompetence, meant she was the subject of intense speculation. Several rumours circulated, including the accusations that she had been murdered by Maclean's native mistress and that she had committed suicide. She became like the characters of her own poems, tragically dying without fulfilment in love or career. Many poetic tributes followed her death, including poems by Landor and Barrett

Browning (Renalds 263). Soon after her death, her publishers issued a collection of her poetry and printed a memoir by her friend Laman Blanchard. The memoir was hastily put together and was written to vindicate Landon, clearing her name of scandal and accusations of suicide (Renalds 265). Other biographies followed, often focusing on the less savoury details of her life (in contrast to Hemans' biographers who avoided those kinds of details), and assuming "L.E.L." and Letitia Landon to be one and the same. All show how a famous woman submits herself to the public discourse: Landon tried to write her self, but ended up being written and rewritten.

#### v Conflicting Roles

Landon's life as a famous woman poet was a life epitomised by conflict. There was conflict between her role as a poet and her role as a woman, her public persona and her private self, and her desire for and her experience of fame. Ashfield argues that during the 1820s and 1830s there was an anxiety concerning the status of the poetess, the cost of imaginative activity, and the conflict between woman's heart and the claims of art. He argues that the women poetesses had to censor their creative urges because they were worried that the exposure of their hearts' desires would "endanger the cherished virtues of domesticity." For the later poets

like Hemans and Landon, woman's heart was hidden behind a persona, and poetic creation was limited by this: the woman poetess could only publish in the voice of her persona (Ashfield xv).

In developing a persona, designed for the marketplace and meant to ensure financial success, Landon unwittingly, naively, wrote herself into a corner. The tender-young-melancholy persona of her poetry, eternally suffering the pangs of love, was not necessarily the personality of the poet. In public she was warm, outgoing and friendly, often childishly high-spirited. The disjunction between her public personality and her poetry gave rise to much speculation: which was feigned and which was real (Mellor, Romanticism 121)? This was a natural reaction from a society that considered a woman's writing as the extension of her "true" self.

Numerous sources recount anecdotes that illustrate both the apparent disjunction in her personality and the concern that such a disjunction engendered. William Howitt said of Landon: "There was a frankness and a generosity about her that won extremely upon you. On the other hand, in mixed companies, witty and conversant as she was, you had a feeling that she was playing an assumed part" (2: 132). Howitt also mentions her encounter with a Quaker at a party where Landon asserted that her writing of love was "all professional." The

Quaker responded by saying: "Why, dost thou make a difference between what is professional and what is real? Dost thou write one thing and think another? Does that not look very much like hypocrisy?" (W. Howitt 2: 133). Landon was apparently amazed at this perception of her behaviour, but, again, such a perception seems a natural reaction from a society that considered a woman's writing and her self congruent.

Many who knew her agreed that Landon was often guilty of saying things for effect, excusing herself by arguing that she was merely putting her poetry into practice (Hall 266). Mrs Hall, Landon's close friend, recorded how "[w]ords and thoughts . . . she flung hither and thither, without design or intent beyond the amusement of the moment . . ." (qtd. in Hall 271). Her exuberance, carelessness of the rules of conduct, and pleasure in making people stare more, made her an object of suspicion and aversion to some detractors (Renalds 93). According to Mellor, people interpreted the discrepancy between her personality and her poetry in various ways, some arguing that her public mirth was an attempt to hide a secret sorrow, others that her poetry was merely a conscious fiction (Romanticism 121).

There were, however, elements of both explanations in Landon's behaviour. She acted a part both in public and in her poetry. In public, she behaved gregariously,

presenting herself as an outgoing, fun-loving person. Laman Blanchard, a close friend, in his effort to rescue Landon's name after her death from speculation of suicide, emphasised her personality as being far removed from her poetic persona:

There was not the remotest connection or affinity, nor indeed a colour of resemblance between her every-day life or habitual feelings, and the shapes they were made to assume in her poetry. No two persons could be less like each other in all that related to the contemplation of the actual world, than L.E.L. and Laetitia-Elizabeth Landon . . . (qtd. in Stephenson 2).

Numerous anecdotes from various biographers recall her playfulness on social occasions.

Recollections from other friends, however, such as the Halls, contradict this interpretation. To them her private personality tended to be melancholy. They felt that she assumed a role in public, displaying a vivacious character foreign to her private personality and expressing sentiments and opinions that belied her true intelligence (Renalds 91-92). "Like all the earnest workers I have known intimately, she had a double existence -- an inner and an outer life . . . the melancholy was real, the mirth assumed," judged Mrs Hall (qtd. in Hall 272). Her husband tells of Landon's gaiety in society but he too stresses her melancholy side as more genuine (Hall 275). Landon always spoke of herself as a shy person, insisting that her gregariousness in public was the result of nervousness (Renalds 90). In

the same essay on Hemans mentioned above, she wrote about the disparity between a woman poet's writing and conversation: "The one is often sad and thoughtful, while the other is lively and careless. The fact is, that the real character is shown in the first instance, and the assumed in the second" (qtd. in Pascoe, Staging 231).

Yet if, as Stephenson argues (and Pascoe also proposes (Staging 231)), that essay on Hemans was written in support of her public image as a feminine poetess, Landon had reason to insist that her liveliness was assumed; frivolity was not, after all, the expected demeanour of the woman poet. The Halls' comments, too, then, can be read as attempting to counteract the negative image of Landon as a frivolous socialite. Just as Blanchard had stressed her outgoing happy nature to rescue her from speculation of suicide, perhaps the Halls stressed her melancholy side to rescue her from accusations of insincerity.

We will never know for sure what the "real" Letitia Landon was like, but we can make an educated guess. In the early years of her career Landon probably tended to be the happy young woman Blanchard would have us believe she was. Basking in her new-found fame, the accompanying praise and social opportunities, Landon developed a poetic persona that was just that, a persona. However, as the critical tide turned against her, as she became a

victim of gossip and ever-pressing financial need, and as she matured, she undoubtedly became more reflective and subdued in her private life. Leighton describes her as "a sad figure" out of her class, away from her family, and hiding behind a "posturing and flirtatious facade" (53), and this probably neatly summarises Landon's position after her fame first became burdensome.

Interestingly, the idea of a facade, or a mask, is one that recurs repeatedly in Landon's poetry. Often the mask hides a secret, and often the secret is unspoken love or loss of love (see "Life's Mask," "Secrets," "The Mask of Gaiety," "False Appearances"). Sometimes, however, the masks in Landon's poetry are worn for show in public, to protect the private self, symbols of the disjunction between the two spheres of the feminine poetess. The recurring motif of masks in her poetry hints at a growing anxiety of perception. Landon seemed to become more and more conscious throughout her career of how others perceived her, how she presented herself to others, and how they presented themselves to her. The image of a mask appears in "A History of the Lyre":

I speak of my own feelings, -- I can judge  
 Of others but by outward show, and that  
 Is falser than the actor's studied part.  
 We dress our words and looks in borrow'd robes:  
 The mind is as the face, -- for who goes forth  
 In public walks without a veil at least?  
 'Tis this constraint makes half life's misery.

Landon uses her own mask, her poetic persona, to comment on the deceptive nature of people's public behaviour.

"Lines of Life" provides another example of a public facade, the speaker cataloguing the discrepancies between her real feelings and those she expresses in public:

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 timidness,  
 '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 most condemn.

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

Importantly, the distinction between the two selves (private and public) of the speaker becomes blurred, so that she seems not to be sure of her "real" identity. If we read the speaker as being Landon there are potentially three selves masked in the poem: the poetic persona, the public social self, and the private self of the author. The reader is left to surmise which self is speaking.

It is not only the writer who wears a mask, however. Often the public present a false image to the poet. In "Stanzas to the Author of 'Mont Blanc,' 'Ada' etc."

Landon warns Shelley of the pains of poetry:

'Tis well for thee thou are not made  
 Struggle like this to share;  
 Ill might the gentle, loving heart  
 The world's cold conflict bear;  
 Where selfish interest, falsehood, strife,  
 Strain through their gladiatorial life;  
 Save that the false ones wear  
 Seeming and softness and a smile,  
 As if guilt were effaced by guile.

S.C. Hall felt that it was not in Landon's nature to open her true heart to anyone, and that her secretiveness was her bane. He thought that her desire for privacy was the "origin of that misconception that embittered her whole life" (that is, the gossip relating to her relationship with various men) and made "Fame a mockery" (Hall 265). The multiplicity of her public faces, though partially developed in response to the dictates of society, contributed to her downfall.

Comments Landon made late in her career show how she became bitterly aware of the double-edge of fame. In an 1836 letter to Mrs Hall, Landon wrote:

I have long since discovered that I must be prepared for enmity I have never provoked, and unkindness I have little deserved. God knows that if, when I do go into society, I meet with more homage and attention than most, it is dearly bought. (qtd. in Hall 266)

In a letter to Hall himself she said: "Mine has been a successful career . . . [b]ut my life has convinced me that a public career must be a painful one to a woman. The envy and the notoriety carry with them a bitterness

which predominates over the praise" (qtd. in Hall 269-70). Having succumbed to the flattery and praise heaped upon her in her youth, Landon later realised the cost of her success and naivety. Writing to Mrs Hall, she said: ". . . envy, malice, and all uncharitableness, -- these are the fruits of a successful literary career for a woman" (qtd. in Hall 278). These private comments verify some of her later, more public renunciations of fame. Her essay on Mrs Hemans' poetry concluded with the comment: "Ah! Fame to a woman is indeed but a royal mourning in purple for happiness" (qtd. in Pascoe, Staging 231). This was no doubt intended to further the public image of her as a feminine poetess, but the feelings expressed in her personal correspondence suggest that her distaste for certain aspects of fame had become genuine. Her maturing from girlish innocence and youthful confidence to a hard-bitten, cynical and somewhat self-pitying view of fame can be traced in her poetry.

#### vi Landon's Poetry

In contrast to all the women poets who had published before her, Landon is almost obsessive in her constant portrayal of the lot of the poet, and particularly the famous woman poet. In her early verse, Landon focuses on the woman poet's painful experiences of romantic love.

In most of these poems it is the characters' gender that determines their suffering in love; their fame is not blamed for their unhappy fates. Indeed, fame is portrayed as an attractive reward for artistic creation. Many of the heroines of her poetry are modelled on Mme de Staël's *Corinne*, the Italian improvisatrice, who combined both femininity and fame. The most obvious example of this is the poem "The Improvisatrice" where the central figure is an Italian poetess. As well as cashing in on the popularity of de Staël's novel, Landon was working at constructing her public persona. She was already known for her improvisatory ability when this poem, in the volume of the same name, was published, and so encouraged readers to identify her with her young, gifted, passionate heroine (Renalds 35-36).

The plot of "The Improvisatrice" follows that of de Staël's novel, the poetess's beloved being betrothed to another from childhood. When she dies at the end of the poem, unable to halt the fading of her body despite her love now being requited, she finds some small comfort in knowing her lover will always remember her:

It is deep happiness to die,  
 Yet live in Love's dear memory.  
 Thou wilt remember me -- my name  
 Is linked with beauty and with fame.

Fame is not responsible for her failed romance (as it would be in Hemans); rather it is her comfort in death. In "Sappho's Song," incorporated within "The

Improvisatrice," Landon does not moralise the link between fame and faithlessness. Her Sappho would have been the same wretch whether she played her lute or not. The poison lies in being female, not a poet (Leighton 60):

Farewell, my lute! -- and would that I  
Had never waked thy burning chords!  
Poison has been upon thy sigh,  
And fever has breathed in thy words.

Yet wherefore, wherefore should I blame  
Thy power, thy spell, my gentlest lute?  
I should have been the wretch I am,  
Had every chord of thine been mute.

The youthful Landon did not embrace the notion of the feminine poetess in its entirety: female fame is not regarded with alarm and abhorrence in her early poems.

The Improvisatrice was followed by The Troubador, a long poem with a poet as the main character. The autobiographical digression that closes the poem shows Landon as innocently egocentric and grateful to the critics (Renalds 39-40):

And I was happy; hope and fame  
Together on my visions came, . . .  
My brow burnt with its early wreath,  
My soul had drank its first sweet breath  
Of praise . . .  
'Tis vain, and yet my heart would say  
Somewhat to those who made my way  
A path of light, with power to kill,  
To check, to crush, but not the will.  
Thanks for the gentleness that lent  
My young lute such encouragement.

Landon's next major poem was The Golden Violet, a lengthy effort that consisted of a number of tales told by various poets in an effort to win a prize. In the two years between the publication of The Improvisatrice and The Golden Violet, 1824 and 1826 respectively, Landon's attitude to fame became more demure. The epilogue is the most interesting part of the later poem. Just as Clemenza is about to bestow the golden violet on the victor, Landon herself enters the poem in an apparent modest refusal to select a winner from her own poems:

Let each one at their pleasure set  
 The prize, the Golden Violet.  
 Could I choose where it might belong,  
 Mid phantoms but of mine own song?

This is another example of the technique described earlier: Landon draws attention to herself as author under the guise of modesty. She follows this by telling her readers that the poet is at the mercy of the critics and that fame is an uncertain path. Landon also responds to criticism of her own subject matter by outlining the requirements of the feminine poetess:

[The poet] must read in other eyes,  
 Or if his spirit's sacrifice  
 Shall brighten, touch'd with heaven's own fire,  
 Or in its ashes dark expire.  
 Then even worse, -- what art thou, fame?  
 A various and doubtful claim  
 One grants and one denies; what none  
 Can wholly quite agree upon.  
 A dubious and uncertain path  
 At least the modern minstrel hath;  
 How may he tell, where none agree,  
 What may fame's actual passport be? . . .

One saith that tale of battle brand  
 Is all too rude for my weak hand;  
 Another, too much sorrow flings  
 Its pining cadence o'er my strings.  
 So much to win, so much to lose,  
 No marvel if I fear to choose.  
 How can I tell of battle-field,  
 I never listed brand to wield;  
 Or dark ambition's pathway try,  
 In truth I never look'd so high;  
 Or stern revenge, or hatred fell,  
 Of what I know not, can I tell?  
 I soar not on such lofty wings,  
 My lute has not so many strings;  
 Its dower is but a humble dower,  
 And I who call upon its aid,  
 My power is but a woman's power,  
 Of softness and of sadness made.

Yet, as Stephenson points out, this merely reminds the reader that all the poems within The Golden Violet, with their range of topics, are from the pen of one woman (9). It is as though Landon is playing games with the literary Establishment, simultaneously subscribing to and undermining the ideology of the feminine poetess, just as literary society created then criticised that ideology.

In The Golden Violet fame promises much more dubious rewards compared to the author's earlier, rather overt, delight in her success. By 1826, Landon possibly had become more aware of the modesty required from a feminine poetess. Before falling victim to slander, Landon enjoyed her step into the public world, the self-display she was allowed, and the adulation of the reading public:

I would give all the reputation I have gained, or am ever likely to gain, by writing books, for one great triumph on the stage. The praise of critics or friends may be more or less sincere; but the spontaneous thunder of applause of a mixed multitude

of utter strangers, uninfluenced by any feelings but those excited at the moment, is an acknowledgement of gratification surpassing, in my opinion, any other description of approbation. (qtd. in Stephenson 7)

This is not a "proper" confession for a feminine poetess but does confirm that Landon was initially attracted by fame.

Landon's attitude towards and portrayal of fame certainly shift in her later efforts. The poems begin to address fame far more directly, and become quite specific as to the pitfalls of success. "Erinna" and "A History of the Lyre" are two poems that are generally read as semi-autobiographical, and both focus on the experience of fame. While working on "Erinna" Landon had written:

Other poets have painted a very sufficient quantity of poetical miseries; but my aim is not to draw neglected genius, or 'mourn a laurel planted on the tomb' -- but to trace the progress of a mind highly-gifted, well-rewarded, but finding the fame it won a sting and a sorrow, and finally sinking beneath the shadows of success. (Landon, Poetical 214)

Landon's later poetesses always end with the ideologically appropriate recognition of the hollowness of fame, but their initial intoxication and delight over their success do linger for the reader (Stephenson 8), much as they do in similar poems by Hemans. When her heroines move from the private sphere into the public, they are tainted by ambition and vanity, are then unable to return to the private sphere, and so must die, even

though they remain faithful in love. In this way, Landon undermines the very construction of femininity that her poetry is grounded on (Mellor, Romanticism 120).

Landon's heroines desire fame but find it ultimately disappointing, as fame and domestic happiness prove incompatible.

Erinna, like the improvisatrice, is modelled on de Staël's Corinne, combining both intellect and extreme sensitivity of feeling (the masculine and the feminine), as symbolised by her body: "The mouth and brow are contrasts . . . / The one spoke genius, in its high revealing; / The other smiled a woman's gentle feeling." In "Erinna" Landon begins to recount some of the conflicts that fame and femininity combined bring, and to portray the cost of that conflict for a woman. As Mellor asks (Romanticism 118), "If for Landon the essence of woman is love, a love that can exist only in the private sphere . . . what happens in Landon's poetry when a woman moves into the public sphere?" Erinna herself at first naively sees public recognition as bonding her with the community:

The lute, which hitherto in Delphian shades  
Had been my twilight's solitary joy,  
Would henceforth be a sweet and breathing bond  
Between me and my kind. Orphan unloved,  
I had been lonely from my childhood's hour,  
Childhood whose very happiness is love:  
But that was over now; my lyre would be  
My own heart's true interpreter, and those  
To whom my song was dear, would they not bless  
The hand that waken'd it? I should be loved

For the so gentle sake of those soft chords  
Which mingled others' feelings with mine own.

Initially, Erinna's youthful solitary outpourings bring her happiness, but she becomes seduced by the praise and fame she earns: "And I -- I felt immortal, for my brain / Was drunk and mad with its first draught of fame." Erinna's experience of fame affects her life and her work, focusing her on the reaction of others:

This time of dreaming happiness pass'd by,  
Another spirit was within my heart;  
I drank the maddening cup of praise, which grew  
Henceforth the fountain of my life; I lived  
Only in others' breath; a word, a look,  
Were of all influence on my destiny:  
If praise they spoke, 'twas sunlight to my soul;  
Or censure, it was like the scorpion's sting.

She recognises the hollowness of praise and flattery but the realisation comes too late: her gifts are already prostituted (Renalds 48).

And a yet darker lesson was to learn  
The hollowness of each: that praise, which is  
But base exchange of flattery; that blame,  
Given by cautious coldness, which still deems  
'Tis safest to depress; that mockery,  
Flinging shafts but to show its own keen aim;  
That carelessness, whose very censure's chance;  
And, worst of all, the earthly judgment pass'd  
By minds whose native clay is unredeem'd  
By aught of heaven . . .  
O dream of fame, what hast thou been to me  
But the destroyer of life's calm content!  
. . . To what use have I turn'd  
The golden gifts in which I pride myself?  
They are profaned; with their pure ore I made  
A temple resting only on the breath  
Of heedless worshippers. Alas! that ever  
Praise should have been what it has been to me,  
The opiate of my heart.

She scorns herself for bowing to praise but knows there will always be conflict for all poets between egocentric introspection and communion with others, echoing Landon's own comment (in the letter to Hall quoted earlier) that the desire for publication is inseparable from composition:

. . . it is in vain  
 For the full heart to press back every throb  
 Wholly upon itself. Ay, fair as are  
 The visions of a poet's solitude,  
 There must be something more for happiness;  
 They seek communion. It had seem'd to me  
 A miser's selfishness, had I not sought  
 To share with others those impassion'd thoughts,  
 Like light, or hope, or love, in their effects.

Erinna's final hope is that future judgement will be kind to her poetry, so despite censuring herself for succumbing to flattery she still desires fame:

And yet I would resign the praise that now  
 Makes my cheek crimson, and my pulses beat,  
 Could I but deem that when my hand is cold,  
 And my lip passionless, my songs would be  
 Number'd 'mid the young poet's first delights;  
 Read by the dark-eyed maiden in an hour  
 Of moonlight, till her cheek shone with its tears;  
 And murmur'd by the lover when his suit  
 Calls upon poetry to breathe of love.  
 I do not hope a sunshine burst of fame,  
 My lyre asks but a wreath of fragile flowers.

What Erinna finishes the poem hoping for is "immortality." Landon in this poem shows an awareness of the distinction between immediate popularity and the experience of lasting fame, the reward of true worth. It



Who seeks support and shelter from man's heart,  
 And pays it with affection quiet, deep, --  
 And in his sickness -- sorrow -- with an aid  
 He did not deem in aught so fragile dwelt.  
 Alas! this has not been my destiny.

When Eulalia attempts to return to the private sphere she cannot find the perfect love she idealistically constructed in her verse. Deprived of both love and ambition, she dies (Mellor, Romanticism 120). She describes herself as a withering, wasted bloom that "has dwelt too much in the open day." Fame in the poem costs the woman genius her happiness:

I paid my price for this, 'twas happiness.  
 My wings have melted in their eager flight . . .

Again we can see Landon more carefully adhering to the persona of the feminine poetess than she did in her earlier poetry. The poem "Love's Last Lesson" also stresses the separate spheres of man and woman. In the last stanza of the poem the woman's unrequited love is explained:

. . . his spirit wholly turn'd  
 To stern ambition's dream, to that fierce strife  
 Which leads to life's high places, and reck'd not  
 What lovely flowers might perish in his path.

And here at length is somewhat of revenge:  
 For man's most golden dreams of pride and power  
 Are vain as any woman-dreams of love;  
 Both end in weary brow and wither'd heart,  
 And the grave closes over those whose hopes  
 Have lain there long before.

Neither sphere, in short, brings happiness.

Apart from dwelling on the hollowness of fame to the woman poet, Landon turns away from the association of art and love, recognising artistic failure as coming from within (Leighton 65). Eulalia admits artistic vanity and confronts the source of her poetic failure (that is, that she courted and was satisfied with easy popularity rather than nurturing her gifts) (Leighton 66). She also comments on her choice of topic, something that critics were attacking Landon for, admitting she might have been better to draw on experience (unlike in The Golden Violet where, as noted above, she defended her choice of topic). But she acknowledged too that the imagination is beyond control:

I have sung passionate songs of beating hearts;  
 Perhaps it had been better they had drawn  
 Their inspiration from an inward source.  
 Had I known even an unhappy love,  
 It would have flung an interest round life  
 Mine never knew. This is an empty wish;  
 Our feelings are not fires to light at will  
 Our nature's fine and subtle mysteries;  
 We may control them, but may not create,  
 And Love less than its fellows. I have fed  
 Perhaps too much upon the lotos fruits  
 Imagination yields, -- fruits which unfit  
 The palate for the more substantial food  
 Of our own land -- reality.

Leighton claims that the searching honesty of this poem suggests Landon was starting to take criticism rather than praise to heart (66-67), a claim that is supported by her more conservative approach to fame. The poem's mature dealing with large poetical issues facing the successful woman poet is further emphasised by the omission of one of Landon's recurring motifs: love is

absent rather than unrequited in "The History of the Lyre" (Leighton 68).

The sentiments that Landon expressed in her major, and most often analysed, poems are also to be found in her less well-known lyrics. One recurring theme is the fate of young poets succumbing to flattery and in some measure debasing their gifts. "The Poet's First Essay" speaks of the poet coming forth from "sweet solitude" to "ask the iron verdict of the world." According to the poem,

. . . the strong need of praise impels him forth;  
 For never was there poet but he craved  
 The golden sunshine of secure renown.  
 That sympathy which is the life of fame,  
 It is full dearly bought: henceforth he lives  
 Feverish and anxious, in an unkind world,  
 That only gives the laurel to the grave.

"The Young Poet's Fate" expresses similar sentiments, but also makes the telling comment that with so much flattery filling his ear, "What marvel if he somewhat overrate / His talents and his state!" Landon's depiction of fame, then, is informed not only by the requirements of the feminine poetess (adhered to more strictly in her later works to prevent criticism), but also by her own experience of it. She acknowledges that fame is the goal of the poet, but also acknowledges that it comes at a price, and she begins to distinguish between types of fame.

This notion of personal experience colouring Landon's poetic persona is supported by the lyrics written in the first person, such as "Gifts Misused":

Oh, what a waste of feeling and of thought  
 Have been the imprints on my roll of life!  
 What worthless hours! to what use have I turned  
 The golden gifts which are my hope and pride!  
 My power of song, unto how base a use  
 Has it been put! with its pure ore I made  
 An idol, living only on the breath  
 Of idol worshippers. Alas! that ever  
 Praise should have been what praise has been  
 to me --  
 The opiate of the mind!

"Stanzas on the New Year" also laments the influence of flattery on her genius:

Oh Vanity! alas, my heart!  
 How widely thou hast stray'd  
 And misused every golden gift  
 For better purpose made!

In "A Summer Evening's Tale" Landon discusses the purpose of poetry: ". . . to purify, refine, exalt, subdue, / . . . Making imagination serve as guide / To all of heaven that yet remains on earth." The speaker admits to her lover: ". . . I know my weakness, and I know / How far I fall short of the glorious goal / I purpose to myself . . ."

Two poems Landon wrote about Mrs Hemans provide further insight into Landon's feelings about fame and the woman poet. The two poets were near contemporaries but never met, Leighton suggesting that perhaps Hemans deliberately avoided acquaintance with the not entirely

respectable young woman from London (45). Nevertheless, Landon obviously felt a sense of affinity with her fellow famous woman poet. Both poems were written after Hemans' death and focus on the cost of poetic fame to a woman. "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs Hemans" comments on the disparity between the public's perception of the poetess and her actual state:

Ah! dearly purchased is the gift,  
 The gift of song like thine;  
 A fated doom is her's who stands  
 The priestess of the shrine.  
 The crowd -- they only see the crown,  
 They only hear the hymn; --  
 They mark not that the cheek is pale,  
 And that the eye is dim.

Landon explains that the extreme sensitivity that is needed to be a poet results in constant anguish for the woman. She also says that fame brings loneliness and despair to the woman poet:

The meteor-wreath the poet wears  
 Must make a lonely lot;  
 It dazzles, only to divide  
 From those who wear it not.

Didst thou not tremble at thy fame,  
 And loathe its bitter prize,  
 While what to others triumph seemed,  
 To thee was sacrifice?

Following these lines, Landon becomes sentimentally effusive over Hemans' poetry, suggesting that she was not fully appreciated -- "And yet I feel as thou hadst been / Not half enough beloved" -- and finishing the poem with a final misting over of the eye at the thought of Hemans in



hour," though the details of the poem are more reflective of Landon's own life than Hemans'. Because the autobiographical poem was not suitable for the feminine poetess, Landon uses Hemans to voice her own experience of fame, a similar tactic to that of the earlier women poets who praised each other, though when living.

Certainly, there was a marked change in Landon's portrayal of fame throughout her career. The early attraction to fame found in poems like "The Improvisatrice" is largely replaced by bitterness at the cost of fame to a woman and the effects of easily won success on the poet's gifts. "New Year's Eve" contemplates the change of year in a melancholy tone, indicating Landon's change in attitude towards fame and her poetry:

Oh, for mine early confidence,  
Which like that graceful tree  
Bent cordial, as if each approach  
Could but in kindness be!

Then was the time the fairy Hope  
My future fortune told,  
Or Youth, the alchemist, that turn'd  
Whate'er he touch'd to gold.

But Hope's sweet words can never be  
What they have been of yore:  
I am grown wiser, and believe  
In fairy tales no more . . .

Yet Landon never totally relinquishes her desire for fame. The later poems of her career show that she has realised that fame comes at a price, but she still yearns for longevity for her poetry. In "Lines of Life," though

chiding herself for succumbing to the social pressures of fame, she nevertheless concludes the poem with a wish for immortality through her poetry:

But song has touch'd my lips with fire,  
And made my heart a shrine;  
For what, although alloy'd, debased,  
Is in itself divine.

I am myself but a vile link  
Amid life's weary chain;  
But I have spoken hallow'd words,  
Oh do not say in vain!

My first, my last, my only wish,  
Say will my charmed chords  
Wake to the morning light of fame,  
And breathe again my words?

Will the young maiden, when her tears  
Alone in moonlight shine --  
Tears for the absent and the loved --  
Murmur some song of mine?

Will the pale youth by his dim lamp,  
Himself a dying flame,  
From many an antique scroll beside,  
Choose that which bears my name?

Let music make less terrible  
The silence of the dead;  
I care not, so my spirit last  
Long after life has fled.

But the plain fact is that the loss of reputation that Landon has suffered since the pinnacle of her fame has been phenomenal. Her contemporaries referred to the "magical letters of L.E.L." but later critics used Landon as a measure of the bad taste of their predecessors. Sypher neatly summarises the reasons for the brevity of her fame as being the dilution of the quality of her writing by its prolificness, the constraints of

contemporary culture upon her poetic horizons, the fact that she wrote at a time of brilliance in poetry, and the dating of her "annual style" poems (3-4). Most commentators agree, however, that Landon did have a talent and that her poetry was improving as she matured (" . . . she was improving in taste and execution, and would probably have gained a far higher reputation had she lived a few years more," wrote one critic in 1844 (qtd. in Moulton v: 327)).

What critics of Landon tend to forget is that she was quite literally writing for her life (Leighton 51). She did not have the luxury of time and fortune to spend painstaking hours cultivating her genius. From the first moments of her career she was under pressure to perform financially. Together with Hemans, Landon was one of the first women poets to earn a sizeable income from her poetry and to be publicly recognised as a professional writer (Curran, "Romantic Poetry: Why" 188). Both produced what the public wanted from them and their ability to cater to popular taste is probably partially responsible for their later neglect (Curran, "Romantic Poetry: The I" 189).

Late in her career, however, Landon did recognise the void at the centre of sensibility and the limits of the ideology of the feminine poetess (Leighton 64). Her poetry was refreshingly free of the conventional pieties

that always dominated Hemans ("Stanzas on the New Year" being a rare exception to this).<sup>38</sup> Her poetry gradually achieved realism and distrust, though her realisation of the nature of her career was always tinged with melancholy and self-pity (Leighton 68). Landon lived the Sappho/Corinne myth and it cost her dearly. Her rejection of the superficial fame, with all its consequences, that she had initially embraced came too late to bring her happiness. Her changing attitude to fame in her poetry is both part of an assumed role (that is, the feminine poetess), and a sincere expression informed by her own experience of fame. By the end of the Romantic Period she realised that it was not possible, in the patriarchal society she lived in, to happily combine being female and being famous. Though she could produce the poetry and the persona that were expected of her as a feminine poetess, she could not keep her private self separate from her public image. Landon's life story and her poetry show all too clearly the price of fame for a woman poet of the Romantic Period.

---

<sup>38</sup>Amelia Opie commented to Mary Russell Mitford that Landon "had strong feelings, not under the only safe control -- that of religious principle" (qtd. in Leighton 69).

## CONCLUSION

### i Fame and the Women Poets

Was not this purchased all too dearly? -- never  
Can fame atone for all that fame hath cost . . .

wrote Letitia Landon at the end of the Romantic Period, as she contemplated the life of her fellow poet Felicia Hemans. For the feminine poetesses of the 1820s this was a valid sentiment. For them, fame came at an expensive price; in Landon's words, it was ". . . the destroyer of life's calm content!" Being a famous woman poet during the Romantic Period, as we have seen, resulted in a conflict between woman's domestic role and the public role of a poet -- a conflict that was increasingly emphasised over the sixty-five years in question.

The early group of women poets did not wish to draw attention to the potential conflict between the two spheres that they operated in, hence the shortage of comment on female fame in their poems. They worked hard at appearing modest in the face of their success and were careful to balance domestic duties with literary ventures. Their overt virtue and femininity made their celebrity acceptable. They worked at maintaining fame in the sense of virtuous reputation but deflecting fame in

the sense of public celebrity. For the early generation it was possible to be famous and to be feminine at the same time. The later women poets found it increasingly difficult to juggle these two aspects of their lives, as the definitions of femininity became increasingly narrow.

The second group of women poets, who came to the fore in the 1790s, were more diverse socially than More, Barbauld, Seward and Williams, alongside whom they published. Lower- and middle-class women entered the market in increasing numbers from the 1790s, more financially needy than the early generation. They lacked the educational and class advantages of the initial group of women poets, but they were more confident about their participation in the marketplace. Robinson, Yearsley, and Smith all learned to manipulate the literary marketplace. They found that marketing their poetry also meant marketing themselves and they constructed for themselves an image that would facilitate their success. The women poets of the 1790s still affected modesty, but were much more confident in their public roles than either their predecessors or their successors.

The anti-feminist backlash that followed the failed efforts of the French Revolution saw the notion of separate spheres for the genders more firmly established than ever before. This led to an internalised conflict within the woman poet, as publishing meant that she

crossed the boundary of her appropriate sphere. The critics became less receptive to certain kinds of women poets, and suitable topics for women became narrowly defined. The demarcation between the feminine poetess and the "bluestocking" poet emerged: women poets began to define themselves against the stigmatised radicals and Blues. They worked hard at presenting themselves as modest and feminine, employing a variety of strategies to do so. Critics praised the ultra-feminine women poets but actually preferred the vigorous "masculine" work of poets like Joanna Baillie. By the end of the period, Hemans and Landon were all too aware of the conflict between their roles as feminine icons and their lives as public figures.

This conflict was particularly palpable at the point of publication, when a woman's poetry entered the masculine public sphere. It often manifested itself as an "anxiety of perception" that can be found expressed in the poetry. Publishing women became anxious about how they would be perceived by the public and their families, and were also increasingly concerned with their own self-perception. This anxiety, like the conflict it stemmed from, intensified during the Romantic Period. It also became more intense the more famous a woman poet became.

The dominant ideological beliefs about the nature and role of woman that emerged during the period, not

only affected <sup>not only</sup> the lives of the famous poets but also the content of their poetry. Because fame was part of the lived experience of the well-known women poets, and the act of publishing implies a desire for public recognition, one would expect it to be a prominent theme of their poetry. But the disjunction between the prescribed role of women and the reality of the famous women poets' lives complicated the treatment of fame in their poetry.

The early generation, publishing from the 1770s, largely avoided mentioning literary fame in their poetry, particularly their own. The two definitions of fame, particularly for the early women poets, were very closely linked: that is, fame as celebrity, renown, and fame as report, rumour. When they used the word in their poetry, they generally associated it with military glory (men), or reputation (women). One way that they did broach the subject of female celebrity in their poetry was to direct praise towards another successful female public figure.

The theme of fame, in terms of female celebrity, appeared more frequently in the works of the second group of women, but was still often linked to reputation. Only Robinson really mentioned her own experience of fame in her poetry. After 1800, the suitability of female fame became such an issue that it was frequently addressed by the women poets in their poetry and their prefaces,

mostly in the form of denial of the attractions of fame. For the two most successful women poets of the period, fame had a huge impact on both their lives and their poetry. Both subscribing to the ideology of the feminine poetess, Hemans and Landon wrote in support of separate spheres for men and women while their own lives contradicted their message, a contradiction they were acutely aware of. They wrote numerous poems discussing fame and the woman poet, denying the possibility of being feminine and being famous at the same time and ruing the cost of fame to a woman. Although this was certainly a strategy for appealing to the market, I suggest that Hemans' and Landon's experience of fame led to these sentiments also being an expression of the ideological conflict between being a woman and being a poet at the close of the Romantic Period.

What motivated a woman poet to publish depended largely on her personal circumstances, but was also affected by issues of femininity. The first group of publishing poets did not see poetry as a career. They were well positioned in terms of class, education, and money, and were politically and socially aware. They used their poetry to further the humanitarian causes important to them. Fame seems to have been acceptable if it was not actively sought -- that is, if they were personally virtuous, modest, and feminine, and it was a natural consequence of their talent. Appreciation of

this talent in their intimate circles was appropriate. Publication was acceptable if motivated by the "correct" reasons, such as to convey a moral, to celebrate the worthy deeds of others, or at the behest of friends and family.

In contrast, the majority of women poets who followed them were motivated to publish by financial necessity, and therefore fame became an essential component of their success. For Smith, literary fame meant she could sustain her family; for Yearsley, fame brought social mobility as well as money; and for Robinson, income and respectability were the rewards of literary fame. Many of those who published after 1800 also did so predominantly out of financial need, but they tended to refer to themselves as domestic women who only dabbled in poetry. Hemans and Landon were the first true professional women poets, in that they were motivated not only by money but also by a sense of poetic vocation.

The increasing commercialisation of literature and their need for money meant that women poets operated to satisfy the market. Meeting the requirements of the market often involved the woman poet's developing a persona. The early women poets often presented their own opinions and anecdotes from their lives in their poetry; they were very aware of the necessity of a virtuous reputation but they did not establish a poetic persona as

such. Smith, Yearsley, and Robinson seem to have begun exploring the idea of constructing a version of their lives for their poetry, because they, more than the others, needed success in the marketplace. Robinson and Yearsley both felt the impact of infamy but worked to represent themselves to the public in acceptable terms. They disclosed selected biographical details to the public, and worked in a variety of textual voices.

After 1800, women were reluctant to use autobiographical detail as a basis for their poetry. The emphasis on separate spheres for the sexes, the redefinition of "feminine," the conflation of woman and her text, and the new conservatism in general meant they were nervous about putting themselves before the public -- a manifestation of their anxiety of perception. They did, however, continue to use the marketing strategies that their predecessors had developed. They too cultivated personae, but personae for the newly-conservative literary marketplace that stressed modesty, demureness, reluctance to publish, and abhorrence of fame. The feminine poetesses who emerged in the nineteenth century had more of a static voice, due to the supposed congruency between woman and text. They operated within the strictly defined parameters of the feminine poetess, which was both the reason for their success and a limiting factor artistically. They tended to suppress poems that deviated from their public voice.

They also moved towards developing an almost fictional persona, but one that was read by the public as biographical. As Leighton says, "at the end of the period [the poetess] is aware that being a poet is not simply a profession but an idea to be invented and lived out" (4). But subsuming themselves to their personae bred an anxiety of perception, the poetesses always being afraid that the public would see through their facade.

Modesty and meekness, essential qualities of the lady, were transferred to the poetess (Berliner 61). Women poets throughout the period denigrated their poetic ability in an effort to appear appropriately humble. Before the turn of the century, they worked at presenting an acceptably modest estimation of their literary ability in public but they were not shy of reaping and using the rewards of their fame for their own purposes. By the third wave of women poets, modesty had become increasingly essential for success, and any confidence in their talent was not directly expressed in public. Whereas the earlier generation had sought to reassure their audience with their expressions of modesty that they were not unfeminine, the later women poets (Hemans and Landon) sought as much to reassure themselves as their audience.

## ii Fleeting Fame

One thing that all the famous women poets of the Romantic Period had in common was the fleeting nature of their fame. Poetry is the genre that has been most exclusively written along a masculine gender line, historians distorting the lineage by their exclusion of women (Curran, "Romantic Poetry: The I" 187). Between 1789 and 1824 some 5000 books of original verse were published, but the Romantic canon was based on about 25 of these, written by men (Curran, "Romantic Poetry: Why" 216). Women's poetry is notable for its absence from the received canon.

The reason for the disappearance of eighteenth-century women's verse appears to be directly linked to the policies of two apparently all-inclusive editors: Robert Anderson in his Works of the British Poets (13 vols, 1772-5) and Alexander Chalmers in his Works of the English Poets (21 vols, 1810). These two editors both decided to exclude women's poetry (possibly because many of the women poets were still living), anonymous poetry, and poetry not already in collected editions. These anthologies were hugely influential in the establishment of a canon (J. Stevenson 84-85). The Poets of Great Britain (109 vols., 1776-82) by John Bell and The Works of the English Poets (68 vols., 1779-81) by multiple booksellers also contributed to the establishment of a

female-exclusive canon (Bonnell 53). Bell claimed to have included "all the British Poets from the time of Chaucer to Churchill," while the other booksellers focused on "all the English Poets of reputation, from Chaucer to the present time" (Bonnell 58). Bell included 50 poets, the others 52; 42 were common to both collections, as was the fact that they included no women at all (Bonnell 59).

As well as the impact of these canon-setting collections, Lonsdale cites Wordsworth's Preface to the Lyrical Ballads as re-establishing poetry for men, attacking "gaudy and inane phraseology" in the manner of similar criticism of women's verse in the 1780s and 1790s by reviewers (x1). The exclusion of women from the poetic canon continued into the nineteenth century. Dale Spender has said that "males have determined the criteria of what constitutes good writing, . . . they have then also controlled the means of making decisions about what good writing gets published and what does not, and . . . they have also had the power to rank published writing, making or breaking the reputation of women writers," and this has certainly affected the development of a canon (200).

Despite exclusion from the received canon, a female canon of sorts did emerge in the eighteenth century. George Ballard's Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great

Britain who have been Celebrated for their Writings (1752), John Duncombe's list in The Femiuiad (1754), and George Colman and Bonnell Thornton's Poems by Eminent Ladies (1755) helped establish a kind of canon of female writers (Lonsdale xxix). Mary Scott's The Female Advocate (1774) added to the rapidly changing canon of women's poetry (Lonsdale xxxiv). Anthologies of women's poetry continued into the nineteenth century. Williamson comments on how women tended to be treated as part of a class (female) before they were thought of as individuals, hence men and women tended to be anthologised separately (M. Williamson, Introduction xxi). Women poets were always women before they were poets. Not only that, but since Romantic times there has been a history of women poets being anthologised by male editors (Anderson 10).

In 1990, Karina Williamson saw the "mass extinction" of women's verse as having continued into the twentieth century, with only a few women making it into anthologies (284-85). Even in the twentieth-century recovery of women's literature, a gender of their own has tended to eclipse a genre of their own (Leighton 1). Williamson felt that it was necessary to bring these women out of the shadows, so as to reappraise the values of the dominant culture, a culture whose poetry has fostered the values of supposedly universal timeless truths (K. Williamson 285). Fortunately all is not lost for the

women poets of the Romantic Period. After two hundred years of neglect their work is at last being made available to the reading public again. Apart from the texts now in print, and used in this study, there are many forthcoming works, both primary and secondary: Paula R. Feldman's British Romantic Poetry by Women: 1770-1840 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP); William McCarthy's biography of Barbauld; Judith Pascoe's edition of the collected poems of Robinson; and Jonathan Wordsworth's The Bright Work Grows: Women Writers of the Romantic Age (Oxford: Woodstock, 1997).

Having a female-authored canon running alongside the traditional male canon, however, is problematic for some modern critics. Donna Landry is worried about whether developing a female or feminist counter-canon is desirable for feminist criticism (Muses 58-59; Anderson 10). Nancy Armstrong argues that separation of studies along gender lines makes subordination inevitable (Armstrong 41; Anderson 11). Joel Haefner has contemplated how the woman writers of the Romantic Period can be incorporated into mainstream teaching.<sup>39</sup> The debate is an ongoing one, but here discussion of the canon highlights how completely the famous women poets I have looked at were written out of literary history.

---

<sup>39</sup>"(De)forming the Romantic Canon: The Case of Women Writers," College Literature 20.2 (1993): 44-57.

Marilyn Williamson suggests that the biographical bias, the considering of life and text together, that was a characteristic of nineteenth-century criticism of writing by women perhaps accounts for their obscurity in death -- their life and their art were one text that terminated with their death (Introduction xxiii).<sup>40</sup> In this study I have tried to resuscitate both the lives and the works of the famous women poets of the Romantic Period. It is an area that needs ongoing work. There is room for further research in the area of the relationships between the poets of the day (both male and female), and I would like to investigate further the fascinating parallels that have emerged between Smith and Hemans, and between Robinson and Landon.<sup>41</sup> I also think it is important that scholars take into account the changing ideological conditions when they study the women poets of the period. We should be wary of confining the women poets to fixed, arbitrary categories constructed in hindsight. Scholars need to remember that the careers of a good number of the women poets lasted many years and they therefore wrote under significantly different socio-historical conditions.

---

<sup>40</sup>This seems a plausible argument for many of the women poets but is not a completely satisfying reason. For example, it does not take into account the fact that Joanna Baillie's fame faded before her death.

<sup>41</sup>As well as specific similarities between these poets there are more general parallels between the 1790s and the 1820s as far as women's poetry is concerned. For example, the construction of poetic personae, the public interest in the famous poets, and the demand for women's poetry.

To return to the questions that I set out to answer at the beginning of this thesis, I think I have established that being a woman affected both a poet's response to her fame and her perception of herself as a woman, but how and how far it did so varied considerably during the period. I have also established that while gender and the experience of fame did unify the women poets' response to fame to some extent, there were also significant differences in that response depending on the individual circumstances of the poet and the social conditions under which she was publishing.

## WORKS CONSULTED

- Abbey, Cherie D. and Janet Mullane, eds.  
Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism. Vol. 15.  
 Michigan: Gale, 1987.
- Adburgham, Alison. Women in Print: Writing Women and  
 Women's Magazines from the Restoration to the  
 Accession of Victoria. London: Allen, 1972.
- Adcock, Anna. See MacDonald Shaw, Clare.
- Agress, Lynne. The Feminine Irony: Women on Women in  
 Early-Nineteenth-Century English Literature.  
 Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1978.
- Anderson, John Matthew. Beyond Calliope: Epics by Women  
 Poets of the Romantic Period. Diss. Michigan:  
 Boston College, 1993. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1994.  
 9402785.
- Armstrong, Nancy. Desire and Domestic Fiction: A  
 Political History of the Novel. New York: Oxford  
 UP, 1987.
- Ashfield, Andrew, ed. Romantic Women Poets 1770-1838: An  
 Anthology. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995.
- Baillie, Joanna. The Dramatical and Poetical Works of  
 Joanna Baillie. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and  
 Longmans, 1851.
- . See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.

- . The Family Legend and Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- . Poems 1790. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1994.
- Bannerman, Anne. See The Eighteenth Century.
- Barbauld [Aikin], Anna Laetitia. Poems. London: Joseph Johnson, 1773.
- Barbauld, Anna Letitia. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- . The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld. Eds. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1994.
- Bass, Robert D. The Green Dragoon: The Lives of Banastre Tarleton and Mary Robinson. London: Alvin Redman, 1957.
- Bell, Mackenzie. "Carolina, Lady Nairne 1766-1845." Joanna Baillie to Jean Ingelow. Ed. Alfred H. Miles. The Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century 8. 1905. New York: AMS, 1967. 17-22.
- . "Felicia Dorothea Hemans 1793-1835." Joanna Baillie to Jean Ingelow. Ed. Alfred H. Miles. The Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century 8. 1905. New York: AMS, 1967. 53-58.
- . "Laetitia Elizabeth Maclean (L.E.L.) 1802-1838." Joanna Baillie to Jean Ingelow. Ed. Alfred H. Miles. The Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century 8. 1905. New York: AMS, 1967. 103-08.

- Berliner, Donna Gaye. The Female Romantic Imagination.  
Diss. The University of Texas at Dallas, 1994. Ann  
Arbor: UMI, 1995. 9503972.
- Betham, Matilda. Poems / Elegies. Romantic Context:  
Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New  
York: Garland, 1978.
- Blakey, Dorothy. The Minerva Press: 1790-1820. London:  
Oxford UP, 1939.
- Blamire, Susanna. See The English Poetry Full-Text  
Database.
- . The Poetical Works 1842. Revolution and  
Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1994.
- Bold, Valentina. "Janet Little 'The Scotch Milkmaid' and  
'Peasant Poetry.'" Scottish Literary Journal 20.2  
(1993): 21-30.
- Bonnell, Thomas F. "Bookselling and Canon-Making: The  
Trade Rivalry over the English Poets, 1776-1783."  
Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 19 (1989):  
53-69.
- Bowles, Caroline. See The English Poetry Full-Text  
Database.
- Brand, Barbarina. See The English Poetry Full-Text  
Database.
- Bray, Matthew. "Removing the Anglo-Saxon Yoke: The  
Francocentric Vision of Charlotte Smith's Later  
Works." Wordsworth Circle 24.3 (1993): 155-58.
- Breen, Jennifer, ed. Women Romantic Poets 1785-1832: An  
Anthology. London: Everyman's Library, 1992.

- Bryan, Mary. Sonnets and Metrical Tales 1815.  
 Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford:  
 Woodstock, 1996.
- Butler, Marilyn. "Culture's Medium: The Role of the  
 Review." The Cambridge Companion to British  
 Romanticism. Ed. Stuart Curran. Cambridge: Cambridge  
 UP, 1993. 120-47.
- Byrnes, Peter, ed. The Unsex'd Females. By Richard  
 Polwhele. London: Cadell and Davis, 1798. Online.  
 British Poetry 1780-1910: A Hypertext Archive of  
 Scholarly Editions. Alderman Library: U of Virginia,  
 1991. Internet.  
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/britpo.html>
- Chorley, Henry F. Memorials of Mrs Hemans with  
 Illustrations of her Literary Character from her  
 Private Correspondence. Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and  
 Blanchard, 1836.
- Clarke, Norma. Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship,  
 Love - The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans, and  
 Jane Welsh Carlyle. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Cochran, Peter. "Fatal Fluency, Fruitless Dower." The  
 Times Literary Supplement 21 July 1995: 13.
- Curran, Stuart. Introduction. The Poems of Charlotte  
 Smith. By Charlotte Smith. Women Writers in English  
 1350-1850. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. xix-xxix.
- . "Isabella Lickbarrow and Mary Bryan: Wordsworthian  
 Poets." The Wordsworth Circle 27.2 (1996): 113-18.

- . "Romantic Poetry: The I Altered." Romanticism and Feminism. Ed. Anne K. Mellor. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988. 185-207.
- . "Romantic Poetry: Why and Wherefore?" The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism. Ed. Curran. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. 216-35.
- . "Women Readers, Women Writers." The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism. Ed. Curran. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. 177-95.
- Dacre, Charlotte. Hours of Solitude. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- DiMauro, Laurie, ed. Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism. Vol. 29. Michigan: Gale, 1991.
- Duncombe, John. The Femi<sup>1754</sup>niad: A Poem.<sup>^</sup> Los Angeles: Clark Memorial Library, UCLA; 1981.
- Ehrenpreis, Anne Henry. Introduction. The Old Manor House. By Charlotte Smith. London: Oxford UP, 1969. i-xix.
- The Eighteenth Century. <4830> reels. Microfilm. Woodbridge, CT: Research Publications, 1982-<1991>.
- The English Poetry Full-Text Database. CD-ROM. Cambridge, Eng.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1994.
- Erickson, Lee. "The Poets' Corner: The Impact of Technological Changes in Printing on English Poetry, 1800-1850." Journal of English Literary History 52.4 (1985): 893-911.

- Feldman, Paula R. and Theresa M. Kelley, eds. Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices. Hanover: UP of New England, 1995.
- Fergus, Jan. "Women, Class, and the Growth of Magazine Readership in the Provinces, 1746-1780." Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 16 (1987): 41-56.
- Fergus, Jan and Janice Farrar Thaddeus. "Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820." Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 17 (1988): 191-207.
- Ferguson, Moira. Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class, and Gender. Albany: State U of New York P, 1995.
- . "Janet Little and Robert Burns: The Politics of the Heart." Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices. Eds. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley. Hanover: UP of New England, 1995. 207-19.
- . "Resistance and Power in the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley." The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation 27 (1986): 247-68.
- . "The Unpublished Poems of Ann Yearsley." Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 12.1 (1993): 13-29.
- Fullard, Joyce, ed. British Women Poets 1660-1800: An Anthology. New York: Whitston, 1990.
- Gaull, Marilyn. English Romanticism: The Human Context. New York: Norton, 1988.
- Gavin, Mary Anne. Gender and Poetic Identity in the Age of Revolution and Reaction. Diss. Brown University, 1994. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1995. 9433361.

- Gibson, Rebecca Gould. "'My Want of Skill': Apologias of British Women Poets, 1660-1800." Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts. Eds. Frederick M. Keener and Susan E. Lorsch. New York: Greenwood, 1988. 79-86.
- 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.
- Grant, Ann. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- Greer, Germaine et al., eds. Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women's Verse. London: Virago, 1988.
- Greer, Germaine. Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet. London: Viking, 1995.
- Haefner, Joel. "(De)forming the Romantic Canon: The Case of Women Writers." College Literature 20.2 (1993): 44-57.
- Hall, S. C. A Book of Memories of Great Men and Women of the Age, from Personal Acquaintance. London: Virtue, 1877.
- Hands, Elizabeth. See Lonsdale, Roger, ed.
- Hargreaves-Mawdsley, W. N. The English Della Cruscan and Their Time, 1783-1828. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967.
- Harris, Jocelyn. "Sappho, Souls, and the Salic Law of Wit." Anticipations of the Enlightenment in England, France, and Germany. Eds. Alan Charles Kors and Paul J. Korshin. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1987. 232-258.

- Heiland, Donna. "Swan Songs: The Correspondence of Anna Seward and James Boswell." Modern Philology 90 (1993): 381-91.
- Hemans, Felicia. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- . Poems of Felicia Hemans. London: Nimmo, 1878.
- . The Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans. Edinburgh: Nimmo, Hay and Mitchell, n.d.
- . The Poetical Works of Mrs Hemans. London: Frederick Warne, n.d.
- . Records of Woman 1828. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1991.
- . Songs of the Affections. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- Hickock, Kathleen. Representations of Women: Nineteenth-Century British Women's Poetry. London: Greenwood, 1984.
- Hole, Robert, ed. Selected Writings of Hannah More. London: William Pickering, 1996.
- Homans, Margaret. Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, and Emily Dickinson. New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1980.
- Home, Anne. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- ← Howitt, Mary. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.

- Howitt, William. Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets. 1847. 2 vols. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1968.
- Jackson, J. R. de J. Romantic Poetry by Women: A Bibliography, 1770-1835. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.
- Johnson, Samuel. A Dictionary of the English Language. London: Harrison, 1786.
- Keach, William. "A Regency Prophecy and the End of Anna Barbauld's Career." Studies in Romanticism 33 (1994): 569-77.
- Kelley, Paul. "Charlotte Smith and 'An Evening Walk.'" Notes and Queries 29 (1982): 220.
- Kelly, Gary. "Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism: Women, Writing, and the Cultural Revolution." Revolution and English Romanticism: Politics and Rhetoric. Eds. Keith Hanley and Raman Selden. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990. 107-30.
- . Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.
- Kutrieh, Marcia Geib. Popular British Romantic Women Poets. Diss. Bowling Green State University, 1974. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1992. 74-23,336.
- Labbe, Jacqueline M. "Selling One's Sorrows: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, and the Marketing of Poetry." The Wordsworth Circle 25.2 (1994): 68-71.
- Lamb, Lady Caroline. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- Lamb, Mary. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.

- Landon, Letitia Elizabeth. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- . 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.
- . "The Traffic in Women Poets." The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation 32 (1991): 180-92.
- Leighton, Angela. Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.
- Lickbarrow, Isabella. Poetical Effusions, 1814. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1994.
- . See Wu, Duncan.
- Lipking, Lawrence. "Sappho Descending: Eighteenth-Century Styles in Abandoned Women." Eighteenth Century Life 12.2 (1988): 40-57.
- Little, Janet. See Bold, Valentina.
- . See Ferguson, Moira. "Janet Little and Robert Burns: The Politics of the Heart."
- . See Lonsdale, Roger, ed.
- Lonsdale, Roger, ed. Eighteenth Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.
- Lootens, Tricia. "Hemans and Home: Victorianism, Feminine 'Internal Enemies,' and the Domestication of National Identity." PMLA 109 (1994): 238-53.

- Luther, Susan. "A Stranger Minstrel: Coleridge's Mrs. Robinson." Studies in Romanticism 33 (1994): 391-409.
- MacDonald Shaw, Clare. "Some Contemporary Women Poets in Clare's Library." The Independent Spirit: John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition. Ed. John Goodridge. Helpston: The John Clare Society and the Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust, 1994. 87-122.
- Mack, Anne, J. J. Rome, and Georg Mannejc. "Literary History, Romanticism, and Felicia Hemans." Modern Language Quarterly 54 (1993): 215-35.
- McCarthy, William and Elizabeth Kraft. Introduction. The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld. By Anna Letitia Barbauld. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1994.
- McCarthy, William. "'We Hoped the Woman was Going to Appear': Repression, Desire and Gender in Anna Letitia Barbauld's Early Poems." Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices. Eds. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley. Hanover: UP of New England, 1995. 113-37.
- McGann, Jerome. "Mary Robinson and the Myth of Sappho." Modern Language Quarterly 56 (1995): 55-76.
- McKillop, Alan Dugald. "Charlotte Smith's Letters." Huntington Library Quarterly 15 (1951): 237-55.
- Mellor, Anne K. "A Criticism of Their Own: Romantic Women Literary Critics." Questioning Romanticism. Ed. John Beer. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 29-48.

- . "Joanna Baillie and the Counter-Public Sphere." Studies in Romanticism 33 (1994): 559-67.
- . "On Romanticism and Feminism." Romanticism and Feminism. Ed. Mellor. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988. 3-9.
- . Rev. of The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry, by Marlon Ross. Studies in Romanticism 31 (1992): 103-05.
- . 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. 274-87.
- Messer-Davidow, Ellen. "'For Softness She': Gender Ideology and Aesthetics in Eighteenth-Century England." Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts. Eds. Frederick M. Keener and Susan E. Lorsch. New York: Greenwood, 1988. 45-56.
- Miles, Alfred H. "Carolina (Bowles) Southey 1787-1854." Joanna Baillie to Jean Ingelow. Ed. Miles. The Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century 8. 1905. New York: AMS, 1967. 39-42.
- More, Hannah. Florio: A Tale, for Fine Gentlemen and Fine Ladies: and, The Bas Bleu; or, Conversation: Two Poems. London: Cadell, 1786.
- . See Lonsdale, Roger, ed.

- . "Sir Eldred of the Bower, and The Bleeding Rock:  
Two Legendary Tales." A Collection of Poems.  
London: Dodsley, 1779.
- Moulton, Charles Wells, ed. The Library of Literary  
Criticism of English and American Authors. 8 vols.  
1901. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959.
- Mullane, Janet and Robert Thomas Wilson, eds.  
Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism. Vol. 23.  
Michigan: Gale, 1989.
- Murphy, Peter T. Poetry as an Occupation and an Art in  
Britain 1760-1830. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Myers, Sylvia Harcstarck. The Bluestocking Circle:  
Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in  
Eighteenth-Century England. Oxford: Clarendon,  
1990.
- Nagle, Christopher C., ed. Sappho and Phaon. London:  
Gosnell, 1796. Online. British Poetry 1780-1910: A  
Hypertext Archive of Scholarly Editions. Alderman  
Library: U of Virginia, 1993. Internet.  
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/britpo.html>
- 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.
- Opie, Amelia. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- . The Warrior's Return / The Black Man's Lament.  
Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry  
1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.

---. Poems. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.

Owenson, Sydney. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.

Pascoe, Judith Marie. "The Spectacular Flaneuse: Mary Robinson and the City of London." Wordsworth Circle 23.3 (1992): 165-71.

---. Staging Romanticism: Self-Representation in the 1790s. Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1992. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1994. 9308642.

Peterson, Linda H. "Female Autobiographer, Narrative Duplicity." Studies in the Literary Imagination 23 (1990): 165-76.

Plotz, Judith A. Ideas of the Decline of Poetry: A Study in English Criticism from 1700 to 1830. New York: Garland, 1987.

Pollak, Ellen. "Feminism and the New Historicism: A Tale of Difference or the Same Old Story?" The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation 29 (1988): 281-86.

Polwhele, Richard. The Unsex'd Females: A Poem by Richard Polwhele. 1798. New York: Garland, 1974.

Poovey, Mary. 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.

- Prefatory Memoir. The Poetical Works of Mrs Hemans. By Felicia Hemans. London: Frederick Warne, n.d. xv-xxiv.
- Ralston, Ramona Marie. "Wordsworth and the Feminized Sonnet: A Suppression of Eighteenth-Century Poetic Influences." Diss. University of Southern California, 1987.
- 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. The Family Legend and Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters. By Joanna Baillie. 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. By Amelia Opie. 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. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1993. 8528204.
- Rev. of Poems, by Anne Bannerman. The British Critic 16 Aug. 1800: 139-41.
- Rev. of Poems and Plays, by Mrs West. The British Critic 14 Sept. 1799: 279-84.
- Rev. of Memoirs of the Late Mrs Robinson, Written by Herself; with some Posthumous Pieces, by Mary Robinson. The British Critic 18 Aug. 1801: 217-18.
- Rev. of Sappho and Phaon; in a Series of Legitimate Sonnets. With Thoughts on Poetical Subjects and Anecdotes of the Grecian Poetess, by Mary Robinson. The British Critic vii Dec. 1796: 627-29.
- Rizzo, Betty. "The Patron as Poet Maker: The Politics of Benefaction." Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 20 (1990): 241-66.
- Robinson, Mary. See The Eighteenth Century.
- . See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- . Lyrical Tales 1800. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1989.
- . Memoirs of the Late Mrs Robinson: Written by Herself. 1801. London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1930.
- . Perdita, The Memoirs of Mary Robinson. Ed. M. J. Levy. 1801. London: Peter Owen, 1994.
- . Poems. London: Bell, 1791.
- . Poems 1791. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1994.

- Rodgers, Betsy. Georgian Chronicle: Mrs Barbauld and her Family. London: Methuen, 1958.
- Ross, Marlon B. The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.
- Rowton, Frederic. The Female Poets of Great Britain, Chronologically Arranged with Copious Selections and Critical Remarks. 1848. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1981.
- Scott, Walter. Biographical Preface. The Poetical Works of Anna Seward; with Extracts from her Literary Correspondence. By Anna Seward. 1810. 3 vols. New York: AMS, 1974.
- Seward, Anna. See The Eighteenth Century.
- . See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- . Llangollen Vale. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1990.
- . Original Sonnets on Various Subjects; and Odes Paraphrased from Horace. London: Sael, 1799.
- . The Poetical Works of Anna Seward; with Extracts from her Literary Correspondence. Ed. Walter Scott. 1810. 3 vols. New York: AMS, 1974.
- Shevelov, Kathryn. Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical. London: Routledge, 1989.
- Shiach, Morag. Discourse on Popular Culture: Class, Gender and History in Cultural Analysis, 1730 to the Present. Cambridge: Polity, 1989.

- Smith, Charlotte. Elegiac Sonnets 1789. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1992.
- . See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- . The Poems of Charlotte Smith. Ed. Stuart Curran. Women Writers in English 1350-1850. New York: Oxford UP, 1993.
- Spender, Dale. Man Made Language. 2nd ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.
- de Staël, Madame. Corinne: or Italy. London: Bell, 1888.
- Stanton, Judith Phillips. "Charlotte Smith's 'Literary Business': Income, Patronage, and Indigence." The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual 1 (1987): 375-401.
- Stephenson, Glennis. "Letitia Landon and The Victorian Improvisatrice: The Construction of L.E.L." Victorian Poetry 30.1 (1992): 1-17.
- Stevenson, Jane. Women Writers in English Literature. Harlow: Longman, 1993.
- Stevenson, Lionel. "Miss Landon, 'The Milk-and-Watery Moon of Our Darkness,' 1824-30." Modern Language Quarterly 8 (1947): 355-63.
- Stone, Lawrence. The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500- 1800. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985.
- Sullivan, Alvin, ed. British Literary Magazines: The Augustan Age and the Age of Johnson, 1698-1788. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1983.

- Sweet, Nanora Louise Zieb. The Bowl of Liberty: Felicia Hemans and the Romantic Mediterranean. Diss. University of Michigan, 1993. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1994. 9332173.
- Sypher, F. J. "The Magical Letters L.E.L." Columbia Library Columns 39.3 (1990): 3-9.
- Taylor, Irene and Gina Luria. "Gender and Genre: Women in British Romantic Literature." What Manner of Woman: Essays on English and American Life and Literature. Ed. Marlene Springer. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978. 98-123.
- Taylor, Ann. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- Taylor, Richard C. "Charlotte Smith to Thomas Cadell: A New Letter." Modern Philology 88 (1990): 149-52.
- . "'The Evils I was Born to Bear': Two Letters from Charlotte Smith to Thomas Cadell." Modern Philology 91 (1994): 312-18.
- Tighe, Mary. See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.
- . Psyche, or The Legend of Love. Romantic Context: Poetry, Significant Minor Poetry 1789-1830. New York: Garland, 1978.
- Todd, Janet, ed. British Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide. New York: Continuum, 1989.
- , ed. A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660- 1800. New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985.
- . Sensibility: An Introduction. London: Methuen, 1986.

- . The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800. London: Virago, 1989.
- Tompkins, Joyce Marjorie Sanxter. The Polite Marriage. New York: Books for Libraries, 1969.
- Trinder, Peter W. Mrs Hemans. Writers of Wales. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 1984.
- Turner, Cheryl. Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century. London: Routledge, 1992.
- West, Jane. See The Eighteenth Century.
- Whyte, Walter. "Joanna Baillie 1762-1851." Joanna Baillie to Jean Ingelow. Ed. Alfred H. Miles. The Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century 8. 1905. New York: AMS, 1967. 1-4.
- Williams, Helen Maria. Poems 1786. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1994.
- Williamson, Karina. "The Eighteenth Century and the Sister Choir." Essays in Criticism xl (1990): 271-86.
- Williamson, Marilyn. Introduction. The Female Poets of Great Britain, Chronologically Arranged with Copious Selections and Critical Notes. Ed. Frederick Rowton. 1853. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1981.
- . "Who's Afraid of Mrs Barbauld? The Blue Stockings and Feminism." International Journal of Women's Studies 3 (1980): 89-102.
- Wordsworth, Jonathan. Introduction. Elegiac Sonnets 1789. By Charlotte Smith. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1992.

- . Introduction. Llangollen Vale 1796. By Anna Seward. *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834*. Oxford: Woodstock, 1994.
- . Introduction. Lyrical Tales 1800. By Mary Robinson. *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834*. Oxford: Woodstock, 1989.
- . Introduction. Poems on Various Subjects 1787. By Ann Yearsley. *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834*. Oxford: Woodstock, 1994.
- . Introduction. Poems 1786. By Helen Maria Williams. *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834*. Oxford: Woodstock, 1994.
- . Introduction. Poems 1791. By Mary Robinson. *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834*. Oxford: Woodstock, 1994.
- . Introduction. Records of Woman 1828. By Felicia Hemans. *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834*. Oxford: Woodstock, 1991.
- . Introduction. Sonnets and Metrical Tales 1815. By Mary Bryan. *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834*. Oxford: Woodstock, 1996.
- Wordsworth, Jonathan and Stephen Hebron. Romantic Women Writers. Grasmere: The Wordsworth Trust, 1994.
- Wu, Duncan. "Isabella Lickbarrow and the Westmorland Advertiser: A Literary Partnership." The Wordsworth Circle 27.2 (1996): 118-26.
- Yearsley, Ann. See The Eighteenth Century.
- . See The English Poetry Full-Text Database.

- . Poems on Various Subjects 1787. Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834. Oxford: Woodstock, 1994.
- . Preface. The Royal Captives. By Yearsley. The Feminist Controversy in England 1788-1810. New York: Garland, 1974. i-iv.