

Anthologising Women Poets of the Romantic Period

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Writing to John Murray, publisher of the *Quarterly Review*, in February 1818, Byron teased him for the vicious notice of Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan's travel book, *France*, by that doberman of reviewers, John Wilson Croker: 'what cruel work you make with Lady Morgan - you should recollect that she is a woman - though to be sure they are now and then very provoking - still as authoresses they can do no great harm'.^[1] It would be hard to invent a remark that encapsulates so succinctly the condescension by which the attitude of male romantics to their female contemporaries is characterized. And yet in this case Byron is sticking up for a woman writer against one of the most notoriously bad reviews of the period. With the exception of Felicia Hemans, John Wilson Croker seems to have nursed a grudge against every woman whose work he covered; his attack on Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* had effectively put an end to her career in 1812, discouraging her from a long-meditated collected works, and the attack on *France* was intended to have a similar effect on Lady Morgan. Over 30 years later, in 1852, Morgan's biographer wrote that Croker's review was 'almost proverbial for its virulence and bitterness'.^[2] and even today it retains its power to shock. Croker assembled his arguments under the headings of 'bad taste - bombast and nonsense - blunders - ignorance of the French language and manners - general ignorance - Jacobinism - falsehood - licentiousness and impiety'.^[3] What follows is a catalogue of insult and misrepresentation - not least, under 'general ignorance', the claim that Lady Morgan 'is more ignorant than a boarding-school girl'.^[4] Admittedly, *France* does contain some errors, but that was not the true cause of Croker's exasperation. Though a travel book, Lady Morgan uses it to promote Irish nationalism and French Jacobinism. To declare such affiliations was bad enough if you were male; the fact that she was a woman compounded the impropriety. And throughout the Romantic period, the whiff of disrepute enveloped political writing by female authors. The critical demolition of Mary Wollstonecraft both before and after her death stood as an example to any woman rash enough to consider following in her footsteps.^[5] To take just one example, a reviewer of Godwin's *Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft*, published in 1798, commented: '[This book] will be read with disgust by every female who has any pretensions to delicacy; with detestation by everyone attached to the interests of religion and morality; and with indignation by anyone who might feel any regard for the unhappy woman whose frailties should have been buried in oblivion. Licentious as the times are, we trust it will obtain no imitators of the heroine in this country'. This was written over a year after her death. It would always be safer for woman writers to deal only obliquely with political matters, and then in a way that left conservatives unthreatened, as Felicia Hemans managed to do - though, even then, she was criticised for her Welsh nationalism. In short, reviewers of the day had distinct expectations and aesthetic standards when assessing the work of women.

This was not quite as gratuitous as it may sound; it would not be hard to argue that they were a special case. For one thing, Wollstonecraft was right about the inadequacy of formal education for girls, and the literature of the eighteenth, and early nineteenth, centuries is littered with the testimonies of those who suffered the consequences. Writing to Gilbert Burnet in 1710, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu complained that 'We are permitted no books but such as tend to the weakening and effeminating of the mind, our natural defects are every way indulged, and 'tis looked upon as in a degree criminal to improve our reason, or fancy we have any. We are taught to place all our art in adorning our outward forms, and permitted, without reproach, to carry that

custom even to extravagancy, while our minds are entirely neglected, and by disuse of reflections, filled with nothing but the trifling objects our eyes are daily entertained with.'^[6] Over a decade later, in his *A Letter to a Young Lady* (1723), Swift commented that 'It is a little hard that not one gentleman's daughter in a thousand should be brought to read, or understand her own natural tongue, or be judge of the easiest books that are written in it; as anyone may find, who can have the patience to hear them, when they are disposed to mangle a play or novel, where the least word out of the common road is sure to disconcert them; and it is no wonder, when they are not so much as taught to spell in their childhood, nor can ever attain to it in their whole lives.'^[7] Swift and Montagu, it should be remembered, were of the progressive class; women in the lower orders found it harder still to get educated, and most received no schooling at all. No Romantic woman writer received anything like the education enjoyed by Byron at Harrow or Shelley at Eton. Susanna Blamire was fortunate indeed in attending her village school, Sydney Owenson in being taught by Madame Terson at Clontarf, and Mary Robinson in being a pupil at the Chelsea academy of the alcoholic Meribah Lorington. They were in a minority: most women writers of the time were taught at home by unusually enlightened mothers. Theodosia Tighe, Elizabeth Batten, Catherine Grant, Felicity Hemans, Amelia Alderson: these are the women of whose labours we should be mindful this weekend, for had they not educated their daughters, the likelihood is that such works as Mary Tighe's *Psyche*, Ann Batten Cristall's *Poetical Sketches*, Ann Grant's *The Highlanders*, Felicia Hemans' *Records of Woman*, and Amelia Opie's *Father and Daughter* would not have been written. At the extreme end of the scale, Isabella Lickbarrow, the orphaned Cumbrian poetess, was an autodidact; the preface to her final volume announces that she was 'indebted to herself only, for what little knowledge she may possess'. By the 1820s the educated woman was less of an exotic, such that one reviewer of Hemans' *The Siege of Valencia* (1823) could begin with a variation on the *ubi sunt*: 'Formerly there were two styles of female education, and consequently two styles of women - the really learned, and the really simple: the first nurtured in classic lore and disciplined in scholastic exercises, the second taught to sow neatly and read the English Bible distinctly; the one skilful in drawing conclusions, the other in drawing pancakes.'^[8] An educated woman, he goes on to suggest, is a freak: 'a bluestocking is the most odious character in society; nature, sense, and hilarity fly at her approach; affectation, absurdity, and peevishness follow in her train; she sinks, wherever she is placed, like the yolk of an egg, to the bottom, and carries the filth and the lees with her.'^[9]

Such commentators were in the minority, but they serve to underline how threatening the very existence of women writers must have seemed to those who preferred to think of them making pancakes rather than composing octosyllabics on the French Revolution. By the time Princess Victoria became Queen, in 1837, they were so numerous and popular that one observer could remark: 'There have been as famous statesmen, warriors, philosophers, poets, painters, in other times as there are now; but never were the beauty and power of feminine intellect felt as they are at present.'^[10] For the likes of Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon, this was a mixed blessing. It was, no doubt, a relief not to be lumbered with the freakish status accorded Phillis Wheatley and Ann Yearsley in the late 1700s, but acceptance into the literary marketplace came at a price. Despite being the most important figures in the publishing industry, writers during the Romantic period were then, as now, the most exploited. Even the most successful suffered low rates of pay, endless working hours, over-production, and, eventually, artistic bankruptcy. In Hemans' case the pressure contributed to her decline in health and a premature death at the age of 42.

By the early nineteenth century, publishing was no longer a gentleman's pastime; it was a massive, and highly lucrative, industry. The middle of the century would see the growth of the first educated mass market for printed matter. Technological developments would enable books and periodicals to be cheaply produced, literacy was more widespread than ever, the growth of circulating libraries was fuelling the public appetite for books (there were 6,500 libraries in England by 1821), and such fads as the gothic had led to an increasing sensationalisation of subject-matter that increased demand even more (it can be no coincidence that three of the most important Romantic female poets were best known as novelists - Ann Radcliffe, Charlotte Dacre, and Sydney Owenson). And there was one other factor - a growing constituency of reader who, thanks to the spread of education, was making its demands known to publishers: women. Thus, from being a distinct oddity in the 1770s, such that Hannah More had needed a letter of recommendation, in the form of a rave review, from a senior male author, John Langhorne, to admit her to the select, and predominantly male, fraternity of publishing authors, women had by 1837 become integral to the prosperity of the publishing industry, both as supplier and consumer.

Even so, such poets as Hemans and Landon remained subject to critical judgements determined to some extent by extra-literary factors. Prejudices about the inherent attributes of the feminine, though blown apart by the incendiary rhetoric and vigour of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, continued to circulate for 150 years, generating rigid expectations of what women ought to write. Novels were their ideal province, it was believed, because fiction was thought to entail none of the 'male' skills demanded for poetry - metrical competence, the ability to rhyme, and so forth. And when women did compose poetry, they were expected to stick to subjects that left conventional notions of femininity unchallenged - love poetry, paraphrases of the Scriptures, hymns, didactic blank verse treatises, pastorals, and odes to personified virtues. In other words, readers of the period had a gender-specific view of women's writing, and this in turn had a crucial bearing on how their poetry was judged. This is obvious enough in the case of a hostile critic like Croker, but even those sympathetic to women writers were unable to reach literary judgements without taking into account the author's sex. Francis Jeffrey's enthusiastic 1829 review of Hemans' *Records of Woman* is a case in point.

Women, we fear, cannot do everything; nor even everything they attempt. But what they can do, they do, for the most part, excellently - and much more frequently with an absolute and perfect success, than the aspirants of our rougher and more ambitious sex. They cannot, we think, represent naturally the fierce and sullen passions of men - nor their coarser vices - nor even scenes of actual business or contention - and the mixed motives, and strong and faulty characters, by which affairs of moment are usually conducted on the great theatre of the world. For much of this they are disqualified by the delicacy of their training and habits, and the still more disabling delicacy which pervades their conceptions and feelings; and from much they are excluded by their actual inexperience of the realities they might wish to describe - by their substantial and incurable ignorance of business - of the way in which serious affairs are actually managed - and the true nature of the agents and impulses that give movement and direction to the stronger currents of ordinary life.^[1]

You have to remind yourself that there's nothing hostile about this. Hemans was friendly with Jeffrey, and he goes on to portray her as an exemplar of the woman writer. But it would be hard

to concoct a statement less receptive to Hemans' aims. With only one exception, all the heroines of *Records of Woman* are in states of extreme emotional anguish, and each poem concludes with the death of either her or her lover. In fact, 'the true nature of the agents and impulses that give movement and direction to the stronger currents of ordinary life' accurately describes one of the central preoccupations of her volume. But Jeffrey can justify her only as a *female* writer, and in order to do this he has no choice but to ignore the controlling logic of the volume, commending it as 'infinitely sweet, elegant, and tender'.^[12] It was when women openly flouted these gender-driven expectations that they landed themselves in hot water. By the time it became generally known that Helen Maria Williams (one of the most distinguished of these writers) was living with the divorced John Hurford Stone, her radicalism had removed her beyond the pale of literary London, such that the perceived immorality of her conduct only confirmed the literary establishment in their rejection of her; for her Jacobinism, as much as anything else, she was to remain an exile in that well-known den of iniquity, Paris, for the remainder of her life. And to the best of my knowledge, no reviewer ever faced up to Sydney Owenson's Irish republicanism. There are exceptions, such as Mary Scott, whose feminist poem *The Female Advocate* attracted surprisingly favourable notices, but these are few and far between. More typically, reviewers condemned such works as Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* not just because their radical sentiments made them unacceptable, but because it was mildly indecent that a woman should express them at all. Croker argued that political satire was not a feminine mode, trotting out the injunction that women should stick to writing childrens' books, hymns, and the like:

Mrs Barbauld's former works have been of some utility; her *Lessons for Children*, her *Hymns in Prose*, her *Selections from the Spectator*, *et id genus omne*, though they display not much of either taste or talents, are yet something better than harmless: but we must take the liberty of warning her to desist from satire, which indeed is satire on herself alone; and of entreating, with great earnestness, that she will not, for the sake of this ungrateful generation, put herself to the trouble of writing any more party pamphlets in verse.^[13]

Keats was the poet commonly thought to have been killed by a review (another of Croker's, as it happens^[14]) - but this was a myth propagated largely by Shelley for his own purposes;^[15] in fact, the poet whose career Croker really brought to a premature end was that of Barbauld, and that must count as one of the great injustices perpetrated by any of the romantic reviewers.^[16] It might be argued that Barbauld should have been more resilient, like Lady Morgan, but Lucy Aikin's comments suggest that friends and family may have helped bring about her retirement from the fray. 'Who indeed, that knew and loved her', wrote Aikin in her 1825 memoir, 'could have wished her to expose again that honoured head to the scorns of the unmanly, the malignant, and the base?'^[17]

The silencing of Barbauld tells us a good deal more than that certain male reviewers of the time sharpened their axes when they saw a new poem by a woman. It may seem odd to regard Croker as a proto-feminist - but that, at least in theoretical terms, is what he was. In applying the argument that, as a woman, Barbauld was best-equipped to write about 'female' subjects, he took precisely the same line as some modern-day gender critics. Anne K. Mellor has recently argued that it is possible to distinguish male and female romanticisms, the former epitomized by the sublime excursions of Wordsworth, the latter associated with reason, practicality, and such concepts as duty and domestic affection; as she puts it, 'the tension created by gender difference remains central to the structure, the content and the production of Romantic literary

texts'.^[18] Mellor argues for a kind of aesthetic separatism based on the dubious thesis that the arts are qualified by gender, and nominates Hemans as the poet whose work best encapsulates a 'domestic ideology'.^[19] Admittedly, Hemans did write about duty and filial affection, but Mellor's category fails to accommodate such fundamental aspects of Hemans' poetic identity as her Welsh nationalism.

Contemporary reviewers perpetrated a similar error: one critic of Hemans' *Siege of Valencia* - a war poem, no less - observed that its author 'is especially excellent in painting the strength and the weaknesses of her own lovely sex, and there is a womanly nature throughout all her thoughts and her aspirations, which is new and inexpressibly touching. A mother *only* could have poured forth the deep and passionate strain of eloquence which follows.'^[20] This is the standard line on Hemans' poetry, and no one deviated from it during her lifetime. For all its good intentions, it fails utterly to reflect the complexity of Hemans' literary identity.

It is central to an understanding of her poetry that Britain was at war with France from the year of her birth (1793) until 1815. There were two ways of reacting to this. If, like Anna Laetitia Barbauld, you clung to the ideals of the French Revolution, you were likely to denounce the wars, as Barbauld did in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (Hazlitt and, to a lesser extent, Byron, even tended to take a somewhat idealised view of Napoleon); if, on the other hand, your brothers and husband had seen active service, as was true of Felicia, you were more likely to strike a patriotic attitude. This was partly the cause of Felicia's popularity, and explains why her work was acceptable to Tory critics like Croker, who attacked Barbauld, Keats and Owenson for their apparent radicalism. Even so, the Tory critics seldom acknowledged, let alone accepted, Felicia's Welshness. Though her adopted home, Wales permeates the moral and spiritual world of her poetry. It controlled her formulation of heroism; in the poem to her brother, fighting in the Peninsular Wars, she says that he fights not for England, but for 'Cambria's vales and mountains far away'.^[21] And a night spent alone on a Welsh mountain, described in the 1822 poem, *The Rock of Cader Idris*, is as central to her vision as the climbing of Snowdon is to that of Wordsworth.

I lay on that rock where the storms have their dwelling,
 The birthplace of phantoms, the home of the cloud;
 Around it for ever deep music is swelling,
 The voice of the mountain-wind, solemn and loud.
 'Twas a midnight of shadows all fitfully streaming, 5
 Of wild waves and breezes that mingled their moan,
 Of dim shrouded stars, as from gulfs faintly gleaming,
 And I met the dread gloom of its grandeur alone.

I lay there in silence — a spirit came o'er me;
 Man's tongue hath no language to speak what I saw: 10
 Things glorious, unearthly, passed floating before me,
 And my heart almost fainted with rapture and awe.
 I viewed the dread beings around us that hover,
 Though veiled by the mists of mortality's breath;
 And I called upon darkness the vision to cover, 15
 For a strife was within me of madness and death.

I saw them — the powers of the wind and the ocean,

The rush of whose pinion bears onward the storms;
 Like the sweep of the white-rolling wave was their motion,
 I *felt* their dim presence, but knew not their forms! 20
 I saw them — the mighty of ages departed —
 The dead were around me that night on the hill:
 From their eyes, as they passed, a cold radiance they darted —
 There was light on my soul, but my heart's blood was chill.

 I saw what man looks on, and dies — but my spirit 25
 Was strong, and triumphantly lived through that hour;
 And as from the grave, I awoke to inherit
 A flame all immortal, a voice, and a power!
 Day burst on that rock with the purple cloud crested,
 And high Cader Idris rejoiced in the sun — 30
 But oh, what new glory all nature invested,
 When the sense which gives soul to her beauty was won!

It is easy to see why she appealed to the Victorians: the poem's unquestioning conviction; its bombastic conclusion; the evocation of jaw-dropping wonderment -- all helped make her one of the most popular poets of the nineteenth century. It is redeemed, at least for twentieth-century sensibilities, by the quality it shares with the poetry of Wordsworth: its evocation of the numinous. No doubt this is due in part to Felicia's close contact with the countryside of north Wales, where she was brought up (her hatred of Daventry, where she lived, for a short time, with her husband, stemmed partly from the lack of green spaces). In her last great poem, *Despondency and Aspiration*, composed in the midst of her final illness, she traces her poetic talents to their root, returning to the countryside she knew best:

And then a glorious mountain-chain uprose,
 Height above spiry height!
 A soaring solitude of woods and snows,
 All steeped in golden light!
 While as it passed, those regal peaks unveiling,
 I heard, methought, a waving of dread wings
 And mighty sounds, as if the vision hailing,
 From lyres that quivered through ten thousand strings. ^[22]

The 'glorious mountain-chain' is Welsh, and the lyres those of the Druid bards she so revered. It is a vision that is morally and ideologically loaded. The mountain-range exemplifies the virtues of steadfastness and fidelity she celebrates in her poetry, and which comprise

The deep religion, which hath dwelt from yore,
 Silently brooding by lone cliff and lake,
 And wildest river shore!^[23]

This, according to Anne K. Mellor, is the kind of poetry Hemans did not write. The Wordsworthian sublime, she suggests, was off limits to women, because it was a component of 'male' romanticism. Instead, says Mellor, Hemans 'constructed her self and poetry as the icon of

female domesticity, the embodiment of the “cult of true womanhood”^[24] It is a line that both relegates the feminine to a second division category (*a la* Croker), and distorts our understanding of what women writers managed to achieve.

Part of the problem is that romanticism itself is something of a red herring, and in recent years has been more elusive than ever. No longer sought after, it is positively shunned; all the certainties of earlier decades are gone, and the very act of problematising it comprises the big critical project of the late 1990s. Such widespread agnosticism bespeaks an anxiety, to which the concept of the ‘long eighteenth century’ - the fatuous idea that the romantic period is a logical extension of the preceding century - is no more than a panacea. Literature does not evolve in straight lines. It does not exist even as a single entity, and to talk of ‘discursive formations’ recognized by all writers at any given historical moment is to devise fictions just as likely to self-destruct as those it is meant to replace.^[25] No doubt the romantic movement *per se* was never much of a reality, but I wonder in what sense it might have been. Who would talk of British poets today as constituting a single movement? It would be inadvisable, to say the least, but it might be argued that most are aware of the work of their more distinguished contemporaries, and that many regard themselves as part of a community. There is a good deal of evidence to indicate that most Romantic women writers saw themselves in much the same way - as contributors to a shared culture. For one thing, they refer to each other in their writing. Anna Seward, Mary Scott, Hannah More, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, and Ann Yearsley were either adjacent to, or involved in, the bluestocking circle. They composed poems about their sister poets and artists, and identified, at some point or other, with certain common aims. One thinks also of Anna Seward’s injunctions against the Jacobinism of Helen Maria Williams and Charlotte Smith; Hannah More’s patronage of Ann Yearsley; Wollstonecraft’s promotion of Ann Batten Cristall. Barbauld, in particular, exemplifies the life of a woman of letters; she was at the centre of literary life in London and the provinces for many years, wrote and edited prolifically, and was one of the main poetry reviewers for the *Monthly Review*. She is also one of those whose career spans almost the entirety of the Romantic age; originally a bluestocking, she encouraged Isabella Lickbarrow (whom she reviewed in the *Monthly*), and may have helped promote Ann Batten Cristall (to whose *Poetical Sketches* she subscribed). Like Charlotte Smith and Helen Maria Williams, she was an early and potent influence on others.

Contact was not purely literary: Georgiana Cavendish helped bring up Lady Caroline Lamb; Lamb and Cavendish were friends of Sydney Owenson,^[26] and Owenson was a friend of Mary Tighe, whose work she read in manuscript. They moved in a shared world, read each other’s work, and often alluded to it. None of this took place, it should be emphasized, in isolation from male writers. Joanna Baillie and Felicia Hemans were both admirers of Wordsworth, and met the poet at various times. And it’s impossible to read Letitia Landon without hearing echoes of *Marmion* and *Childe Harold*. But the influence was not all one way. Wordsworth and Coleridge were fervent admirers of Smith, Williams and Barbauld while at school and university: it was they whom Wordsworth sought out when first he visited London, Brighton, and Paris, and it was to Barbauld (and Cavendish) that he and Coleridge sent first editions of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). Felicia Hemans was described as a ‘tyger’ by the young Shelley, on the basis of her 1808 *Poems* and an account of a meeting with Medwin; Tighe exerted a strong and formative influence on Keats; Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya* set the tone for Shelley’s *Zastrozzi*. No one failed to read Ann Radcliffe. In short, the literary community during the romantic period comprised distinguished female, as well as male, writers. The point is not whether this amounted to a

movement (it didn't), but that the richness of that 50 year mini-renaissance reflected a vitality to which writers of both sexes contributed.

Certain themes are common to most Romantic women poets: sensibility, slavery, Jacobinism (for and against), imagination, Sappho, the city, the gothic, the French Revolution, America, and the Lake District all recur throughout their writings. But none were the preserve of 'the feminine', as gender critics argue. If, however, as Stuart Curran has suggested, women of the time 'tended to see differently from men',^[27] it may be that their approach to these subjects was distinctive. This line of thought is developed in Curran's introduction to his edition of Charlotte Smith's poetry, where he says that Smith's *Beachy Head* volume of 1807,

with its variety of natural treatments - from the opening meditative reminiscence through fable to allegory to didactic moralism and religious exemplum, all attended by an array of botanical, geological, and ornithological learning - testifies to an alternate Romanticism that seeks not to transcend or to absorb nature but to contemplate and honor its irreducible alterity.^[28]

Well, perhaps. But how, in contemplating and honouring the irreducible alterity of the natural world, does Smith's poetry differ from Robert Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy* or any number of works by John Clare - *The Badger*, say, or *The Shepherd's Calendar*? The answer is, it doesn't. No one would seek to deny that Smith has a distinctive style and voice, but whether that distinctiveness is gender-determined is questionable. It is more likely to be the product of a combination of factors of which gender may be one.

The separatist argument collapses when one turns to the bluestockings, that formidable salon of litterateurs assembled by Mrs Montagu and Mrs Vesey in the early 1780s. Though initially a social grouping, they espoused what were effectively feminist principles, and functioned partly as the intellectual body - a sort of alternative academe - that Hannah More celebrated in her popular poems, *Sensibility* and *Bas Bleu*.^[29] But, crucially, men always comprised a large proportion of their number, including the likes of Johnson, Burke, Reynolds and Walpole. It is that assumption of centrality within the cultural life of society that modern criticism ignores - whether Anna Seward in Lichfield, Georgiana Cavendish (active in her role as patroness of other women writers), or Mary Robinson, who first found her public through association with the Della Cruscans. It is not, in other words, as 'women writers' that most of these poets saw themselves, but as operators in the cultural mainstream. And no doubt it was that confidence that so inflamed male reviewers. Attacking Lady Morgan's *France*, John Wilson Croker drew attention to 'ignorance' of her subject - she 'is more ignorant than a boarding-school girl'. Why? Because she appeared to know more about France than he did.^[30] When demolishing *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, he criticised Anna Laetitia Barbauld for not being up to political debate on an intellectual level, saying that she should stick to what she does best - 'her *Lessons for Children*, her *Hymns in Prose*, her *Selections from the Spectator*, et id genus omne'. To accept a gendered view of art is to marginalise yourself, and few women writers of the time were prepared to do that. They presumed to comment on politics and morality alongside their male contemporaries in the cockpit of literary and political debate. And that confidence is reflected in their success. The proliferation of women poets from 1770 onwards reveals that they not only became fashionable, but positively sought after. The writings of More and Hemans had a popularity that positively dwarfed those of Coleridge, Keats and Shelley, and were crucial in the development and formation of the public appetite for poetry. By the time she died in 1838, at the age of 36, Letitia

Landon had made £2,500 from her poetry -- no small sum, in those days, for 14 years' work; when Sydney Owenson died in 1859, she had made more than £16,000 out of her published writings; and by the time Hannah More died in 1833, she had generated a fortune of over £30,000. Nor were they divorced from literary developments of the time. Mary Robinson, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Landon understood, with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, that something new was happening in literature, and sought both to embody and extend that sense of newness. In their different ways, Mary Tighe in *Psyche*, Ann Batten Cristall in *Poetical Sketches*, and, less conspicuously, Isabella Lickbarrow in *Poetical Effusions*, created a verse that departed from the post-Popean norm.

Without fully knowing what they do, modern critics have perpetuated the argument that women writers are *limited* by their sex; in fact, the poetry provides ample evidence that the best of them - Hemans, Smith, Barbauld, Williams, Lickbarrow, and Robinson - could write as persuasively as their male contemporaries, whether addressing the political situation, evoking the Wordsworthian sublime, or, as they and their male contemporaries sometimes did, discussing filial or parental affection. Unpredictability is, in short, the hallmark of the true artist -- precisely the quality which critics, through their need to categorise, tend to understate. As William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft put it, in their introduction to their recent edition of Barbauld's poetry, 'She wrote what might be considered "typical" women's verse - celebrations of domestic life and character, nature poetry, hymns and prayers - but she also wrote biting satire, riddles, odes, and poems in the mock-heroic style. Her sensibility can be called neither masculine nor feminine; they are not categories that enlighten a reading of her verse, which must be taken on its own terms.'^[31]

^[1] *Byron's Letters and Journals* ed. Leslie A. Marchand (12 vols., London, 1973-82) (hereafter Marchand), vi 12-13.

^[2] *Lady Morgan's Memoirs: Autobiography, Diaries and Correspondence* (2 vols., London, 1852), i 57.

^[3] *Quarterly Review* 17 (April 1817) 260-86, p. 264.

^[4] *Ibid.*, p. 267.

^[5] *European Magazine* 33 (1798) 246-51, p. 251.

^[6] *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* ed. Robert Halsband (3 vols., Oxford, 1965), i 44-5.

^[7] Jonathan Swift, *Irish Tracts 1720-1723 and Sermons* ed. Louis Landa (Oxford, 1948), pp. 91-2.

^[8] *British Critic* 20 (1823) 50-61, pp. 50-1.

^[9] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

^[10] *Literary Gazette* 485 (6 May 1826) 275-6, p. 275.

^[11] *Edinburgh Review* 50 (1829) 32-47, p. 32.

^[12] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

^[13] *Quarterly Review* 7 (1812) 309-13, p. 313.

^[14] *Quarterly Review* 19 (1818) 204-8.

^[15] See James A. W. Heffernan, 'Adonais: Shelley's Consumption of Keats', *Romanticism: A Critical Reader* ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford, 1994), pp. 173-91.

^[16] See, among other sources, William Keach, 'A Regency Prophecy and the End of Anna Barbauld's Career', *Studies in Romanticism* 33 (1994) 569-77.

^[17] *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld. With a Memoir by Lucy Aikin* (2 vols., 1825), i. lii.

^[18] *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), p. 209.

^[19] See *ibid.*, pp. 123-43.

^[20] *British Critic* 20 (1823) 50-61, p. 52.

^[21] *To my Eldest Brother, with the British Army in Portugal* 30.

^[22] *Despondency and Aspiration* 75-82.

^[23] *Ibid.*, ll. 141-3.

^[24] Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), p. 123.

^[25] Such is the central strategy of Robert J. Griffin, *Wordsworth's Pope: A Study of Literary Historiography* (Cambridge, 1995).

^[26] 'The Duchess of Devonshire is unceasing in her attentions to me; not only is her house open to us, but she calls and takes me out to show me what is best to be seen', *Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan's Memoirs: Autobiography, Diaries, and Correspondence* (2 vols., London, 1862), ii 128-9.

^[27] 'The I Altered', *Romanticism and Feminism* ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington, 1988), pp. 185-207, p. 195.

^[28] *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* ed. Stuart Curran (New York, 1993), pp. xxvii-xxviii.

^[29] See especially Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1990).

^[30] Marchand viii 189.

³¹ *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld* ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Athens, Georgia, 1994), p. xxiii.