

6-2-2010

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Politics and Poetry: Not so Separate Spheres (Voice of the Minority Muse)

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
June 2, 2010

Keywords:

18th century, Britain, history, religion, women

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Dedication:

It is an honor to dedicate this thesis to my husband Jeff and our children, Catherine, Madison, and Luke; each of you is a blessing from God, and so is the accomplishment of this degree. I dedicate this work to each of you and to the One who led us to its completion. Jeff, thank you for your support as my husband and best friend; your sense of humor and adventure gave this journey much of its joy. To our daughters and son, thank you for your patience, cooperation, and company throughout this endeavor.

Acknowledgements:

I am grateful to my thesis director, Dr. Laura Runge, whose guidance and support has been a precious gift. I extend heartfelt thanks to my thesis committee members, Dr. Regina Hewitt and Dr. Sara M. Deats for your insights and feedback. I appreciate the English Department's administrative assistance, the opportunity for collaboration with my colleagues, and the help of the University of South Florida librarians. To my amazing family and friends, I cannot thank you enough for the help you provided through meals, prayers, childcare, company, encouragement, laughter, and listening.

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Abstract:

This thesis contributes to continuing assessments of women writers and their political activities during the long eighteenth century. Analyzing works by Aphra Behn, Hannah More, and Anna Letitia Barbauld, I assert that these writers projected their voices onto public affairs, and I explore their treatment of poetic forms. Through writing, they claimed equality with fellow authors and participated as equals beside the period's political leaders, debating about and commenting upon a wide array of concerns like the Glorious Revolution, the abolition of the slave trade, British military expansion, and religious and political liberties. This thesis argues that Behn, More, and Barbauld spoke as muses for the minority causes of their historical moment; their political-poetic participation further blurs the distinction between once held perceptions of the Habermasian public sphere.

Introduction:

Jurgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* centers on theories of class structure and public discourse related to the "public sphere in England between 1780 and 1830 to men of property" (Mellor 2). In *Mothers of the Nation*, Anne K. Mellor challenges this "conceptual limitation" as historically inaccurate, asserting that during the long eighteenth-century, "women participated fully in the public sphere as Habermas defined it" (2). Habermas's intricate theory was first published in German (1962) and then translated into English (1989); as his work's impact spread, scholars began questioning his focus upon the influence of land-owning males, and critics expanded their investigation to include women's literary works. In *Justice Interruptus*, Nancy Fraser analyzes Habermas's premises regarding the public sphere.¹ Fraser and Mellor's inquiries into the Habermasian hypothesis of the public realm inspired my argument, and Fraser synthesizes the Public Sphere as follows:

It designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is a space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of

¹ Fraser encapsulates Habermas' theory to develop her own argument in *Justice Interruptus*; her synopsis of his intricate concepts is useful to situating my thesis given the space allotted here.

discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually different from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can be critical of the state.

(70)

Scholarship on eighteenth-century women's writing has flourished particularly in the last few decades, but the complexity of the period's public and private spheres continues to be uncloaked; therefore, we continue to analyze this body of female authorship. This discovery contributes to our ongoing understanding of gender, class, politics, and authorial purpose. Women writers used poetry to be critical of the state, and this mode of communication was particularly effective for females who held nonconformist views. Aphra Behn, Hannah More, and Anna Letitia Barbauld spoke out on civic matters through poetry, and this activity itself is important from a feminist standpoint; they challenged their time's constructed social restrictions based upon gender, class, and religion; reading their poems side by side will illuminate this point. Voicing minority opinions, they confronted positions taken by Britain's government, led by representative majority rule (theoretically anyway).²

Women's poetry should be considered as a form of parliamentary speech, and for the writers I examine, I assert that they used this unofficial platform to voice dissenting views on state matters. Females, as a group, were legislated into silence, since

² The notion that Britain was governed according to majority rule is refuted by Barbauld in her sermon "Sins of the Government, Sins of the Nation; or, a Discourse for the Fast, Appointed on April 19, 1793. By a Volunteer" (McCarthy and Kraft 297). I employ the term "political minority" to refer to those who possessed less power, although they were not necessarily less in number.

Parliament denied women (age 30 and older) the right to vote until 1918; it did not equalize voting rights for women 18 years of age until 1928, nor were they permitted to be heard in the House of Commons or the House of Lords whether they agreed or disagreed with their policies. The legislated silencing of women does not imply their passive acceptance of marginalization; they spoke through the medium of print to approve or dispute policy. Female-authored works could be personal, private actions kept within coteries or passed among more intimate circles, but these pieces were also public, allowing the group to act as agents on the governmental stage.³ The unique space in history of the eighteenth-century afforded British female poets the opportunity to create a political voice that had not been possible before.⁴

Various coincident historical events created a shift which was conducive for women's authorship, opening opportunities for publication, and some writers intervened with power distinctive to the poetic genre. "The female poet could and did lay claim to a moral and literary authority equal to-- or greater than---that of those male poets who worked within the neoclassical literary tradition that looked to the battlefields of the *Iliad*

³ Agent: **2.** He who operates in a particular direction, who produces an effect. Of things: The efficient cause. **1656** tr. *Hobbes's Elem. Philos.* (1839) 131 The power of the agent is the same thing with the efficient cause. **1699** [BENTLEY](#) *Phalaris* 155 When the Samians invaded Zancle, a great Agent in that affair was Hippocrates. **1719** [DE FOE](#) *Crusoe* 31, I was still to be the wilful Agent of all my own miseries"(OED). Agency: **4.** *Comm.* The office or function of an agent or factor. **a1745** [SWIFT](#) (J.) Content to live cheap in a worse country, rather than be at the charge of exchange and agencies (OED).

⁴ Voice: "3b. Originally: a right to vote. In later use also: a right or power to take part in the control or management of something; a right to express a preference or opinion, a say. Chiefly in *to have a voice in*. Cf. sense 10b. (OED).10b. Originally: the right or privilege of speaking or voting in a legislative assembly. More generally: the right or privilege of exercising control or influence over something; influence, sway. Chiefly in *to have (also bear) voice in*. Cf. sense 3b." (OED).

or the *Aeneid* for inspiration, that produced an ideology that was inherently competitive and self-aggrandizing, and that frequently sacrificed Christian virtue to national conquest or personal glory" (Mellor 72). The woman poet aligned herself with "Christ and his martyrs," and she equated "virtue with moral rectitude, a refusal to compromise, the willingness to suffer for one's beliefs, personal sacrifice, and compassion for others," but moreover this virtuous power corresponded to "spiritual liberty and peaceful co-existence" (Mellor 72). At home and abroad, Britain faced the spirit of revolution, religious denominations developed, philosophies evolved, and the middle class was on the rise; places of discourse such as coffee houses, as well as the increase of print culture aided female publication. Books were costly; therefore people often shared the published works they owned, and Paula Backscheider explains, "Recitation and reading aloud became cultivated social skills" (*Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* 11). Genres such as novels, periodicals, and various poetic forms were heard and enjoyed as audible communication.

I will focus my argument on poetry that addresses socio-political issues, because through their verse, women gave oral expression to opinions suppressed by the male, upper class-ruled hegemony. Aphra Behn precedes Hannah More and Anna Letitia Barbauld, and she prepared the way for their minority poetic opinions. They spoke to the nation and were influenced by the nation, as scholars have noted, but I argue they should be heard as a representative minority voice of the nation; unfolding this point will further develop discourse about the canonical contributions of women writers who were almost lost to obscurity. "To a considerable extent the reassessment of the Restoration and

eighteenth-century poetry remains to be done" (Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* 402). Those poets who were cut from literary history's pages and sided with the seemingly hopeless or heretical causes of their moment present a singular opportunity for scholars to delve deeply into the poetry of the minority muse and fully grasp the multiplicity of her expressions.

Considering the vast number of females publishing in the period, we must consider their collective utterance as constituting an unofficial platform of speech. Given the boundaries of this thesis, I explore three poets whose works demonstrate dissension within the era. Like Paula Backscheider, I have discovered that because "poetry is so compressed, and the language so allusive and metaphoric, no summary can capture what is being said without being, ironically, longer than the poem" (*Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* xiv). Therefore, I focus narrowly because these writers share a commonality; they expressed their national views from a non-majority position in relationship to Parliament's ruling forces. I will analyze their poetic responses of resistance to further the progress of women's literary discourse; it is essential to investigate their poetry to expand our insight upon how vast and varied an agency these poems offered to women. I discuss their political agency in terms of each poet's role as "agent" as outlined above; this definition refers to each poet as one "who operates in a particular direction, one who produces an effect. Of things, the efficient cause" (OED).

Eighteenth-century readers "turned to poetry for investigation of such matters as how one should live not primarily because of the absence of other resources, but rather because they believed poetry a particularly authoritative mode. The assumption that verse

dealt with important concerns permeated society" (Spacks 7). I propose that if readers acknowledged that a certain respect was due to poetry, then poets knew this as well. If one discerns she possesses authority in a literary form and also realizes her audience will contemplate expressions made in this genre then she should capitalize upon this versification as a source of power. Moreover, this resource of influence would be particularly useful to the voiceless, vote-less woman poet as middle or lower class. Many writers employed poetic forms to engage in civic discourse, express dissent, point to societal ills, and eventually influence cultural change. Female-authored writing in the eighteenth-century was a public and civil force, not merely a discourse limited to the domestic sphere.

We are reminded that "current research is increasingly unwilling to assume the absolute efficacy of the public/private distinction, and is uncovering all kinds of ways in which women contributed to the complex network of communications through which public opinion is formed" (Jones 6). Public and private spheres overlap, and females exercised authority, speaking on civic matters as they could through writing, but specifically in my argument, through poetry. Print offered a platform for those who possessed little recourse to reach a wide audience and, furthermore, women who held unpopular, libertine, or heretical opinions (meaning the views of the non-powerful denominations of the moment, such as High Anglican or Catholic Church) would have been utterly silenced without the rise of print in Britain. Other genres were also read aloud, but how did Behn, More, and Barbauld employ poetry to make their individual authority heard to influence their own circles?

Aphra Behn:

This paper begins with Aphra Behn, widely known as "the first professional woman writer" (Backscheider and Ingrassia, *British Women Poets* 869). Additionally, she was one of the foremost feminists to exercise freedom of speech in her works. Opacity masks Behn's precise place and year of birth, but scholarly accounts of her youth provide as clear as possible a biography. "Published accounts of her early life were given shortly after her death and seem closely connected to each other and to her fiction, but the reference that demands the most credence is made by Thomas Colepeper in his eighteen-volume manuscript, 'Adversaria', probably written in the 1690's" (Todd, *Poems of Aphra Behn* vii).⁵ This record continues, "Mrs Aphara Behn was born at Canterbury or Sturrey, her name was Johnson. She was foster sister to the Colonell, her mother being the Colonell's nurse, she was a most beautiful woman, & a Most Excellent poet" (Culpeper as qtd. in Todd, *Poems of Aphra Behn* vii). She lived in the English colony of Surinam and "apparently married a city merchant of Dutch extraction and after his death became a spy in Antwerp for Charles II" (Ferguson, *First Feminists* 143). Behn's experience with espionage, I contend, probably factored into creating her informed and distinct perspective. Not only would this employment distinguish her from other women, but it

⁵ Thomas Colepeper's birth in December 1637, along with his cousin's contribution to her *Miscellany* (1685) establishes his close association with Aphra Behn and thus the reliability of his biographical commentary (Todd, *Poems of Aphra Behn* viii).

would make her unusual among men also. This service indicates her devotion to the Stuart monarchy, for despite shifts in Britain's reign, she maintained fidelity for the Stuart Crown, and the rise of William and Mary to the throne deterred neither her allegiance to Charles, nor to his brother James. During her career, she wrote prolifically in genres such as plays, novels and poetry, and yet endured lifelong financial difficulties. She is buried in Westminster Abbey; the epitaph bearing her name and date of death is "unusual for its brevity" and for its lack of mention of father, husband, birthplace or age; beneath Astrea Behn's name one finds these words, "Here lies a Proof That Wit can never be / Defence enough against Mortality" (Todd, *Poems of Aphra Behn* vii). Critical consensus agrees that Behn composed these lines because the inscription is "in tune with her final published poem written after the departure from England of her beloved James the II, *A Pindaric to the Rev Dr. Burnet* in which she appears to acknowledge the price of 'Immortality' is a commodification of the self and an acceptance of that self by powerful men" (Todd, *Poems of Aphra Behn* xxiii).

Some critical discussion posits that Behn's writing on national politics has "been neglected in much of the criticism thus far, which has understandably focused on issues of gender" (Salzman xx). But, I sense that both the creation of Behn's political poetry as a female and her part as a Tory backer of the Stuart royal bloodline inform one another. Behn's "A Letter to Mr Creech at Oxford Written in the Last Great Frost" (1682) favors

Charles II and his brother James II.⁶ Her ode, "A Pindaric on the Death of our Late Sovereign: With an Ancient Prophecy on His Present Majesty" (1685) laments the death of Charles II and vocalizes her hopes for James's succession to the throne (Salzman 251). While she versified the dedication to Mary, (William's wife) she declined to write for the "winning cause of William of Orange" (Salzman xx). Behn crafted, "A congratulatory poem to Her Most Sacred Majesty, on the universal hopes of all loyal persons for a Prince of Wales by Mrs. A. Behn" (1688) which praises Queen Mary's marriage to William. A proponent of William of Orange, Reverend Gilbert Burnet, sought her allegiance while he was drumming up support for the new king; her refusal signifies Behn's self-awareness of her own agency. Burnet's need to procure Behn as trophy signals her worth to him as a leading propagandist for the democracy.

Departing from the response Burnet desired, she chose instead to celebrate her power as a writer in, "A Pindaric to the Reverend Doctor Burnet, on the Honour He Did Me of Enquiring After Me and My Muse" (1689). The form is written in "the style of the ancient Greek poet Pindar (c518-438B.C.)" and Behn's follows "the style of Abraham Cowley's *Pindarique Odes* (see sense B. 1). Pindar's poems were characterized by lyricism and the use of a variety of metres" (OED). Behn's ode to Burnet incorporates elements of the classical form, and is written in six stanzas. A complimentary, respectful tone typifies much of the poem, but the mood is one of ambivalent tension, as her flattery

⁶ Thomas Creech's background information was accessed through the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online resource.

toward him is overblown. A close reading of this ode reveals the poet creating a series of classical and biblical images with which she can align herself. "When old Rome's candidates aspired to fame, / And did the people's suffrages obtain/ For some great consul, or a Caesar's name; / The victor was not half so pleased/ As I, when given the honour of your choice" (lines 1. 1-5). To begin, she depicts ancient Roman candidates who were being elected, and like Burnet they solicited allies for the current rule; she compares herself to them. She depicts his "choice" of her as an "honour", but such overblown praise reveals her deeper disdain for his opportunism (line 1.5). Repetition emphasizes Burnet's persuasive ability: "And preference had in that one single voice; / That voice, from whence immortal wit still flows" (lines 1.6-7). She causes us to focus upon his "one single voice" as a propagandist for William through His "wondr'ous pen / In all that's perfect and sublime" (1.11-12). The backdrop of the situation creates a peculiar tension between Burnet and Behn which she echoes through embattled terms. Scholar Gary De Krey explains that the Glorious Revolution (1688-9) occurred when Dutch William III overthrew Britain's James II; the Count of Nassau entered Britain with 14,000-15,000 troops, apparently outnumbered by James's 29,000-30,000 troops; however, through a series of orchestrated manipulations, many of James's troops along with leadership defected to William's side (De Krey 253-254). These desertions created an air of instability for James's soldiers who suspected that their counterparts might cut and run, and this uncertainty weakened their morale which led to a military unsteadiness, eroding their leader's assurance and thus, his power; "most shattering to James's confidence were the desertions of his youngest daughter, Anne, and of her husband

Prince George of Denmark: the royal patriarch was now at war with both his daughters and his son-in-law" (De Krey 255).

By 1687-8, William and Mary were "already friendly with such expatriates such as Gilbert Burnet, the renegade Scots divine and future historian..." (De Krey 240). Burnet sought Behn's allegiance on behalf of William and Mary, but I hold that he underestimated her devotion to the monarchy, misinterpreting her fidelity as an object to be traded or bartered. His perspective was shaped by his party affiliation with the "Whigs who remained the party of trade, business, and finance" and they were the party of "dissent and of English puritan tradition" (De Krey 266). "Two-thirds of the dioceses of England lost their bishops in the first two years after the Revolution through death, resignation, or deprivation. William and Mary filled the vacancies with moderate men, like historian Gilbert Burnet, who would have preferred accommodation with dissent rather than a mere toleration" (De Krey 301.) Behn states that Burnet's "pow'rful reasoning dressed in finest sense, / A thousand ways my soul can invade" (2.1-2). She acknowledges his role of assailing her "opinion's weak defence" which against her will, he conquers and persuades (2.3-4). How shall we interpret Behn's characterization of her own position as less powerful? Within the authoritative mode of poetry, she claims that her opinion has a weak defence, but she asserts her position here, in this way, having defied his conquest from her position on the fringe. She plays the role of the humble woman who has been wounded by Burnet, "Till now, my careless Muse no higher strove / T'inlarge her glory and extend her wings; / than underneath Parnassus grove, / To sing of shepherds and their humble loves,"(lines 3. 7-10). She heightens the sense of her

position in the prior lines by contrasting herself with fellow poet Abraham Cowley who sings "of heroes and of kings," but she has not, until now (lines 3. 12). Complicating the position she has achieved in the poem, she calls attention to images of commerce and the "current coin" of a country as compared to the exchange value of her poetry, and the "inferior metal" refers to her position as a Tory and as a woman (3.16-17).

In the next stanza, Behn shifts roles from the penitent female to "My Muse that would endeavor fain to glide/ With the fair prosperous gale, and the full driving tide/ But loyalty commands with pious force, / That stops me in the thriving course" (lines 4.6-8). Unlike Burnet, she is no fair weather friend, no opportunist. Behn is left "unpitied far behind/ On the forsaken shore" and at the edge of where he has bid her to enter (lines 4.11-12). The "fair and prosperous gale" and "loyalty" refer to her explicit refusal to forsake James II and be hired by the new government for William.

A Janus-faced self-description occurs at the end of the fourth stanza. "Thus while the chosen seed possess the promised land, / I like the excluded prophet stand," she writes, evoking an image of aging Moses (lines 4.18-19). Although Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years, he could not accompany them to the homeland God had pledged. Behn wrestled with a sense of alienation as a Tory in a new state of Whig leadership, yet Behn also "heightens disjunctions between her own texts and those on which they are based, dramatically entering and revising those texts as a female sexual subject" (Barash 103). The biblical verse about the "excluded prophet" follows: "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this

congregation into the land which I have given them" (Num. 20:12). Later in the Pentateuch, God addresses Moses just before he dies, "And the Lord said unto him, this is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither" (Deut. 34:4). This biblical trope expresses Behn's sense of marginalization; Britain has seen "wondr'ous change" that she deplors (line 6.1). She could compromise her principles, join the Whig party and benefit from the new kingdom, but this would require her to disobey her Muse. Moses cannot enter Canaan because God has prohibited it; Moses and Behn remain outsiders among their own people. She may identify with Moses, as a writer, who despite composing the first five books of the Old Testament is a man who cannot accompany the nation about which he has written. Moreover, Burnet's invitation to her pen signals the political power which she cannot use.

Behn acknowledges the "nation owes" Burnet's "great pen" for all the "good this mighty change has wrought" (lines 5.1- 2). She recalls "the wiser Greeks o'ercame their foes," and "It was not by the barbarous force of blows," equating Burnet's wisdom with Greek trickery and the Trojan horse (lines 5.14-15). "Not all their numbers the famed town could win/ 'Twas nobler stratagem that let the conqueror in" (lines 5.19-20). William entered England's borders, and he defeated James from within, echoing the classical Greek story. She credits Burnet for his orchestrations on William's behalf, "And great Nassau shall in your annals live/ To all futurity./ Your pen shall more immortalize his name,/ Than even his own renowned and celebrated fame" (lines 6. 15-18).

Hannah More:

Hannah More followed Behn, a century later, and each woman remained loyal to her personal ethics, demonstrating tenacity. Throughout their lives, both writers chose to express their points of view, challenging restrictions on female speech to champion the cause of those less powerful. Hannah More was born in 1743 in Stapleton, near Bristol. Raised the daughter of a schoolmaster, she was the second youngest of five children. Her penchant for learning languages was discovered early in her life, and initially, her father educated her. As she grew older, masters employed in a school founded by her elder sisters became her teachers. Her father prepared his five daughters to sustain themselves as educators; Hannah More eventually taught at her sisters' thriving academy. When she was 23, she became engaged to Edward Turner, who was twenty years her senior; he eventually severed their long engagement; upon his death, he left her an annuity. She had a degree of financial freedom which allowed her to "indulge her literary ambitions" (Lonsdale 323). She published her first work, *The Search after Happiness: A Pastoral Drama* (1773), which was popularly performed at boarding-schools. Her tragedy, *The Inflexible Captive* (1774) was staged at Exeter and Bath in 1775; this drama broadened her social circle to include associations with influential citizens such as, David Garrick, Edmund Burke, and Samuel Johnson, as well as literary women like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Hester Chapone, and Elizabeth Carter. She shifted from creating dramas to

works that evinced her teaching interests. In 1833, she died at the age of 88 and left 30,000 pounds to approximately seventy charities (Lonsdale 324-325).

During her lifetime, she maintained friendships with William Wilberforce and other renowned clergymen; these associations have led some critics to assess her work as growing "increasingly didactic and pious" (Lonsdale 324). Such critique seems to overlook her works' contribution within the public sphere, reflecting her steadfast devotion to God. "Since the 1780s More's theological views had been those of the evangelical party, as demonstrated by her involvement with the Clapham Sect, a group of Anglican evangelicals centered on the Battersea Rise, the Clapham home of the banker Henry Thornton, yet she continued to deplore the religious factions that divided the Church of England and the Christian church in general" (Skedd). In the mid-seventeenth century, Quakerism added to the religious climate that encouraged abolitionists and women's activists; members practiced personal faith by heeding God's direction for serving Him. "A large group of men and women were attracted and felt the call to travel and preach, not as ordained ministers but as lay messengers" (Collier). An unprecedented liberty of speech began because of this denomination; in the eighteenth-century More assumed the mantle of a counter-majority position, speaking publicly through her poetry about matters like slavery, education, and poverty. More's nonconformist perspectives further heighten the importance of her contribution to women's literary history.

The evangelical position concerning female vocal activity outside of the home contributed to More openly preaching sermons in her community. Her resolve to express her position contributed to her prolific authorship in print as well. Her 1788 "Slavery, A

Poem," a response to Parliament's defeat of William Wilberforce's bill to end the slave trade, reflects her religious, social, and parliamentary perspectives simultaneously.⁷ She aligned with Wilberforce in the Abolition Movement because of her worldview. Many shifts were taking place in England: British Parliament debated slavery; in 1783 American Independence was recognized at the Treaty of Versailles; William Pitt the Younger, a Tory was the leading Minister in Parliament; his bill to reform Parliament was defeated in 1785. She crafted her poem during this complex time and, therefore, analyzing it within this context enriches its significance as a contribution to female freedom of speech and our understanding of women's eighteenth-century poetry. More's poetry represents a female perspective, but more crucially it is one of dissidence. Scholar Moira Ferguson explains, "It is also true most pre-1800 feminists did not protest slavery. Few did. When the subject of slavery did appear in early feminist writings, aside from those of Aphra Behn and religious women, it frequently described women's condition. At the very least, this usage suggests that slavery was viewed negatively even if not actively opposed" (*First Feminists* xii). More's abolitionist authorship should be interpreted as a form of active opposition; she joined William Wilberforce who "resolved within hours of his election 'to be a no party man', indicating from the outset an absence of appetite for ministerial office and a detachment from the main political groupings which would resurface much more strongly in his later years" (Hague 36). One of More's closest

⁷ Class figured significantly in More's view as affirmed by her broken ties with Anne Yearsley. Critics Roger Lonsdale and Susan Staves have noted that Yearsley disagreed with More when the latter set up a trust to keep funds from Yearsley's husband (Lonsdale 324; Staves 439). Scholar Kerri Andrews suggests that More and Yearsley crafted abolitionist poetry because they were engaged in "a fiercely contested poetic battle to determine the right to speak for the city of Bristol" (21).

parliamentarian friends ascribed no attachment to party affiliation; if a smaller minority existed, it is not apparent what it was.

In 1789, William Wilberforce proposed abolition legislation, and its history is as follows:

In the House of Commons, Wilberforce was an eloquent and indefatigable sponsor of anti-slavery legislation. In 1789, he introduced 12 resolutions against the slave trade and gave what many newspapers at the time considered the most eloquent speeches ever delivered in the Commons. The resolutions were supported by Pitt (who was by then Prime Minister), Charles Fox (often an opponent of Pitt's), and Edmund Burke, but they failed to be enacted into law, and instead the issue was postponed until the next session of Parliament. In 1791, he again brought a motion to the House of Commons to abolish the slave trade, but it was defeated 163-88. In 1792 Wilberforce, buttressed by the support of hundreds of thousands of British subjects who had signed petitions favouring the abolition of the slave trade, put forward another motion. However, a compromise measure, supported by Home Secretary Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville, that called for the gradual abolition was agreed and passed in the House of Commons, much to the disappointment of Wilberforce and his supporters. For the next 15 years,

Wilberforce was able to achieve little progress toward ending the slave trade (in part because of the domestic preoccupation with the war against Napoleon). In 1807, however, he finally achieved success: on Feb. 23, 1807, a bill to abolish the slave trade in the West Indies was carried in the commons 283-16, and it became law on March 25. (*Britannica*)⁸

In response to the defeat of the first motion (1789), More crafted "Slavery, A Poem"; this 20 stanza poem consists of an aabb rhyme scheme in couplets with stanzas between eight and 16 lines in length and maintains a somber tone throughout. The poem condemns "her countrymen as white savages and robbers who are 'abhorred' " (*Backscheider, Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* 8). More begins, "IF heaven has into being deign'd to call/ The light, O LIBERTY! to shine on us all; / Bright intellectual Sun! why does thy ray/ To earth distribute only partial day?" (lines 1-4).⁹The speaker calls attention to an imbalance in Nature and the shining of Liberty's light caused by injustice toward the slaves. "While the chill North with thy right hand is blest, / Why should fell darkness half the South invest? Was it decreed, fair Freedom! at thy birth, / That thou shou'd'st ne'er irradiate *all* the earth?" (lines 12-15). Britain "basks in full blaze of light" and the

⁸ The history above brackets More's poem (an early response to the first act of legislation against slave trafficking), but "the 1807 statute did not, however, change the legal position of persons enslaved before its enactment..." (*Britannica*). "In 1823 younger followers of Wilberforce founded the Antislavery Society, of which Wilberforce became a vice president. Once again a prolonged period of agitation produced results...the Emancipation Act became law in August 1833" (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*).

⁹ More's "Slavery: a poem" is drawn from *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* because the poem contains 294 lines and More's footnotes which help establish her authorial intent.

speaker juxtaposes England with "sad Afric quench'd in total night," unjustly forced through the slave trade to remain in darkness of human injustice (lines 16-18). "O, plaintive Southerne! whose impasion'd strain/ So oft has wak'd my languid Muse in vain!" reminds the audience of the play based on Behn's novella *Oroonoko or the Royal Slave*. More casually aligns her piece with Behn's earlier work that the public knew well since "*Oroonoko's* popularity was enhanced by its dramatic adaptation by Thomas Southerne in 1696, an adaptation which was performed throughout the eighteenth-century" (Salzman x). According to Salzman, Behn renders a "critical analysis of the slave trade and depiction of native morality and Christian hypocrisy" in *Oroonoko*, and these themes also occur in More's poem (Salzman x). Many would argue that Behn's narrative is not anti-slavery, and therefore one must be clear, "Although Behn did not have the modern concept of slavery, then, she did have a sense of the improper commodification of human beings for money, against which she protests in many of her works, and indeed *Oroonoko* makes a distinction between enslaving battle victims and slaving for money" (Todd, *Aphra Behn Oroonoko* xxvii). Behn, Southerne, and More's views on slavery were situated in their times; it seems that More alludes to Southerne's preceding work to strengthen her own lines. We can (and should) see their works as a form of collective female speech endorsing the minority position. Rich diversity exists between Behn and More's literary contributions; they are both included in Paula Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia's 2009 anthology *British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century*. More, an evangelical Anglican and Behn, a libertine, reveal the variety that existed in the early feminist non-majority views. More interprets Behn's lines

with "For millions feel what Oronoko felt," censuring the slave trade's injustice perpetrated on the "sable race" which possesses a "native genius" that should not be allowed to be debased (lines 56, 60-61). Crafting her abolitionist argument, she asserts that enslaved persons "...have heads to think, and hearts to feel," and she builds her point by depicting a slave named Quashi who knew his own "sense of worth" (lines 67, 83). More's footnote relates his story; he was "of high spirit" and would rather die than "bear the mark of the whip" which was debasing.¹⁰ In her footnote, she excerpts a section of the book, *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of the African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* by Reverend John Ramsay (1784). It is as follows:

Qua-shi had somehow offended his master, a young planter whom he had been bred up in the endearing intimacy of a play-fellow. His services had been faithful; his attachment affectionate. The master resolved to punish him, and pursued him for that purpose. In trying to escape, Qua-shi stumbled and fell; the master fell upon him; they wrestled long with doubtful victory; at length Qua-shi got the uppermost, and being firmly seated on his master's breast, he secured his legs with one hand, and with the other drew a sharp knife; then said, "Master, I have been bred up with you from a child; I have loved you as myself: in return, you have condemned me to a

¹⁰ More's poem employs this spelling: Quashi, but Ramsay's *Essay* utilizes this version: Qua-shi. Also, it should be clear that More footnoted Ramsay's *Essay* as a secondary source in "Slavery: a poem."

punishment of which I must ever have borne the marks: thus I can only avoid them;" so saying, he drew the knife with all his strength across his own throat, and fell down dead, without a groan, on his master's body. (More 6-7)

Again, More gleans strength from an established work treating slavery for her poem's political statement. She highlights how the "savage" extends loyalty, but the planter does not; Quashi exhibits a quality of sensibility, and his integrity contrasts with the owner's lack of mercy or human kindness. Despite their long-standing connection, the planter reveals no Christian love.

More scrutinizes Christian hypocrisy throughout the poem because England, a Christian nation, had just voted to maintain slave trading for economic reasons; the majority eclipsed the minority in Parliament. More condemns the "white savage" and his "lust of gold" and "lust of conquest" for making the whole "sum of human blessings less" and sinking "the stock of general happiness" (lines 211-212, 227-228). More praises Americans who emancipated all slaves, "No blood-staine'd laurels crown'd thy virtuous toil, / No slaughter'd natives drench'd thy fair-earn'd soil. / Still thy meek spirit in thy flock survives, / Consistent still, *their* doctrines rule their lives;" (lines 245-248).¹¹

¹¹ "Still in thy meek spirit thy flock survives" is More's reference to the American Quakers who emancipated slaves throughout the colonies (line 247).

But, moving beyond mere contrast of true and false religion or piety and hypocrisy, More asserts that emancipation along with prosperity can co-occur, for her words claim that change on slavery legislation is possible: "Astonish'd echo tells the vocal shore, / Opression's fallen, and Slavery is no more!" (lines 289-290).

Anna Letitia Barbauld:

Behn and More's poetic transcendence of gender limitations forms a fellowship amid literary history with Anna Letitia Barbauld whose "contemporaries praised her 'masculine head' as well as her 'feminine heart' " (McCarthy and Kraft 24). Anna Letitia Barbauld, nee Aikin, was born in 1743, at Kibworth, Leicestershire; she was the eldest of two children of Dr. John Aikin and his wife Jane Jennings (Lonsdale 299). She credited her upbringing in the countryside and her association with boys as formulating her diffident "approach to polite society" (Lonsdale 299). When she was 15 years old, her father began working as a tutor at the new Warrington Academy for Dissenters; this was a place of "liberal intellectual life" where Dr. Joseph Priestly encouraged her to write poetry.¹² She published with her brother, quickly earning renown as an author. In 1774, she wed Rochemont Barbauld, a clergyman who had been a student at Warrington Academy. The couple worked together after they settled at Palgrave, Sussex; he led a dissenting congregation, and they began a school where she taught the younger students. During this time, she wrote several works for children, such as *Devotional Pieces* (1775), *Lessons for Children* (1778) , and *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781) (McCarthy and Kraft 10-11). The crown oppressed British residents of Presbyterian faith and

¹² Priestly was later well-known for his published works on science, theology as well as politics. For his unorthodox opinions Priestly was attacked by a mob in 1791 and so harassed thereafter that he emigrated to America in 1794" (McCarthy and Kraft 168).

characterized the group as Dissenters from the Church of England. In Scotland her denomination, the Presbyterian Kirk, was "legally supported," but England regarded the group as "threats to the state," restricting their liberties because of a Dissenter-led Civil War against the crown in the mid-1600's (McCarthy and Kraft 15). Politically outside its power structure, she sought to influence a system that marginalized her voice as a Presbyterian and as a woman. She began visiting London where her literary circle grew as she associated with Hannah More, Elizabeth Montagu, and Hester Chapone (Lonsdale 299). In 1802, the Barbauld couple moved to Stoke Newington where she continued to pursue her writing; she published widely on societal concerns (Lonsdale 300).

Barbauld penned "The Mouse's Petition to Doctor Priestly Found in the Trap where he had been confined all Night" during a visit to the Priestly family's home in 1771, publishing it later in *Poems* (1773). This "Petition" consists of 12 quatrains in length, written in "short measure" which is "the S.M. of the hymnals; a quatrain rhyming abab or abcb" (Collier). Upon the "Mouse's Petition's" debut, reviewers rebuked "Priestly for inhumanity to animals," and they praised Barbauld for "denouncing the inhumanity" of such experiments (McCarthy and Kraft 69; Ready 92). This poem, asserted Barbauld, was about mercy and justice, not humanity and cruelty (Ready 92). Critics have studied the work in numerous ways, but interpreting it within its historical context offers the most insight into its contemporaneous effects. Lines from Virgil's *Aeneid* valance the poem, setting its tone, "To spare the humbled, and to tame in war the proud!" (McCarthy and Kraft 70). The classical quotation suggests that links will be made between the following relationships: Rome and its subjects, a captor and his caged mouse, and

England and its subjects. Barbauld personifies a laboratory animal in the poem's opening quatrain, "Oh! hear a pensive captive's prayer, / For liberty that sighs; / And never let thine heart be shut/ Against the prisoner's cries" (lines 1-4). Consisting of 12 quatrains, the poem develops the theme of restricted freedom for the "forlorn and sad" captive mouse who is sitting "Within the wiry grate;" (lines 5- 6). "If e'er they breast with freedom glow'd, / And spurn'd a tyrant's chain, / Let not thy strong oppressive force/ A free-born mouse detain" (lines 9-12). The poem's "free-born mouse" alludes to a "cant phrase" used by liberals to refer to free-born Englishman; Scottish poet James Thomson coined the expression (McCarthy and Kraft 71). Barbauld dialogues with British history and the political struggle for freedom as her poetic discourse engages with Thomson's.¹³ Thomson protested in "Winter" from his book *The Seasons* (1725), "The free-born Briton to the dungeon chain'd/ Or, as the lust of cruelty prevail'd" (lines 371-372). Therefore, we should consider the "Mouse's Petition" as a civil-rights statement because it enters into a tradition of discourse on the theme of the rights of free-born Englishmen who differ from subjects of autocracies. In "The Mouse's Petition," she writes, "The cheerful light, the vital air, / Are blessings widely given; / Let nature's commoners enjoy/ The common gifts of heaven" and infers that God bestows "blessings" that should have their proper place in the lives of all British citizens (lines 21-24). Expanding upon on the idea of connectedness, her lines warn, "Beware, lest in the worm you crush/ A brother's soul

¹³ Thomson was a tutor of Scottish origin, and therefore he was not a member of the upper class. Scholar Spacks reveals that Thomson (and other poets) through "poetic accomplishment" could "speak to the educated gentry and aristocracy," often becoming "accepted members of society" (58). Issues of class and freedom are what Thomson's "Winter" considers, and Barbauld does as well, from her dissenting perspective.

you find; / And tremble lest thy luckless hand/ Dislodge a kindred mind/ (lines 33-36). Or, if this transient gleam of day/ Be *all* of life we share, / Let pity plead within thy breast/ That little *all* to spare"(lines 37-40). Her pronoun usage in these lines speaks of a kindred relationship and the unity of English people, regardless of church or party affiliation; she emphasizes that "thy hand" and "thy breast" demean the life "*we* share." So, the unmerciful and unjust assail their own people; this correlation is formed as she declares that full and free citizenship in Britain belongs to all.

Barbauld's depiction of a helpless prisoner to highlight England's cultural need for mercy toward its oppressed was not the last time she exerted literary authority for a civic cause. Barbauld, like Hannah More responded in verse to Wilberforce's defeated abolitionist efforts, and her response belongs to a tradition of poets who versified to end slavery; poets like Yearsley, Helen Maria Williams, More and others read and responded to each other's works, and Barbauld "sent a copy to Hannah More, who thanked her warmly" (McCarthy and Kraft 122). Wilberforce proposed his "formal motion on abolition" in April of 1791, and Barbauld published her "Epistle" on June 11, attempting to shape the public discourse over Wilberforce's speech.

Both Wilberforce and Barbauld spoke from the non-majority position on the issue of defeating slavery. He sought to correct England's human trafficking through verbal speech in governmental venues, whereas Barbauld took the plea directly to the populace in written poetry. Her, "Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade," consisting of 124 lines; divided into 6 sections between 14 and 38 lines long, utilizes mainly aabb rhyme scheme, and it opens with an ironic

address to, "Cease, Wilberforce, to urge thy generous aim! / Thy Country knows the sin, and stands the shame!" (lines 1-2). Barbauld does not intend that Wilberforce should really stop fighting slavery; these lines censure British citizens who will not correct its commodification of persons. "The Preacher, Poet, Senator in vain/ Has rattled in her sight the Negro's chain" (lines 3-4). Placing "Poet" between the "Preacher" and the "Senator," Barbauld claims an equal footing with religious and political leaders, and McCarthy and Kraft's commentary avers her participation in "the antislavery discourse in poems, sermons, and pamphlets in the later 1780's, along with (and in response to) testimony in Parliament on the conditions of the trade"; therefore, as a speaker she places herself within the medium of talk, empathizing with the efforts made "in vain" for freedom. Her poem's paradoxical tone is echoed through the lines, "In vain, to thy white standard gathering round, / Wit, Worth, and Parts and Eloquence are found" and the "white standard" signifies virtue (lines 19-20). Barbauld's appeal to morality as the basis for ending the trade is clear in these lines: "Each flimsy sophistry by turns they try; / Each plausible argument, the daring lye, / The artful gloss, that moral sense confounds" (lines 27-29). Here she states that the fallacious arguments are "flimsy" and plausible, but incorrect in terms of ethical principles. Dismantling the pseudo-reasoning used by slavery's adherents, she comments, "With impious mockery wrest the sacred page" (line 35). Slavery's proponents defended their position by twisting bible passages and shaping the scripture to conceal their sins; this line incorporates the transcripts of the parliamentary motion into her "Epistle."

Having disassembled the logic of the pro-slavery side from the representative's arguments, Barbauld presents her audience with a face of slavery as follows: "Of thriving industry, and faithful love: / But shrieks and yells disturb the balmy air, / Dumb sullen looks of woe announce despair, / And angry eyes thro' dusky features glare" (lines 80-83). McCarthy and Kraft point to the scarcity of "rebellious voiced Africans" in abolitionist literature, so perhaps Barbauld's poem moves beyond the time's literary conventions in the work's previous lines (125). She intends for her listener to stop and mark the solitary occurrence in the epistle of a triplet. In addition, the following couplet emphasizes slavery's brutality: "Far from the sounding lash the Muses fly, / And sensual riot drowns each finer joy" (lines 84-85). In the preceding lines, the speaker depicts the Muses, inspirations of art, music and, poetry, as they take flight from the sound of whipping blows upon slaves, for the spirit of creativity flees the brutal scene.

Closing her "Epistle," the speaker stresses the seeming futility of his fight, "By foreign wealth are British morals chang'd"; however, he deserves praise for his endeavors since he has aided the oppressed as servant of God, "Whose efforts yet arrest Heavn's lifted hand" (lines 104, 111). Wilberforce's "merit stands, no greater and no less, / Without, or with the varnish of success;" and she concludes that his virtuous fight will be remembered (lines 114-115). "But seek no more to break a Nation's fall, / For ye have sav'd yourselves-- and that is all" (lines 116-117). He had not (yet) transformed the law, but "faithful History, in her various page, / Marking the features of this motley age," will reveal that he sought "To shed a glory, and to fix a stain" (lines 120-122). But, she

laments to Wilberforce, time will recall "how you strove, and that you strove in vain" (line 123).

Her "Epistle to Wilberforce" took the form of a letter; thus the words would have been heard by another mind in a sort of conversation. She means for these words to have an audible life beyond the page. Barbauld's poem "Hymn: 'Ye are the Salt of the Earth' " (1797) is a poetic song also meant to be heard. She advocated public recitation for various reasons; in "her collection of prose and poetry called *The Female Speaker* (1811), Barbauld says that snippets of poetry are meant to be read aloud by young women, thereby indelibly impressing on their minds an association between rational moral justice and beautiful diction, beautiful sound" (Mandell 123).

In 16 quatrains of short measure, abcb rhyme scheme, the speaker purposes, in a somber tone, to respond to several European upheavals such as: the Reign of Terror (ended August 1794); the imprisonment in Olmutz, Austria of Marquis de Lafayette (the early French Revolutionary hero and American Revolutionary hero); and the "Polish national uprising of Tadeusz Kosciuszko" (McCarthy and Kraft 136).¹⁴ The opening lines echo Christ's words as He preached to a multitude, "Salt of the earth, ye virtuous few, / Who season human kind; / Light of the world, / Whose cheering ray/ Illumes the realms of the mind" (lines 1-4). Her choice of "human kind" (versus mankind) maintains the meter, but more importantly it implies a mass audience is addressed by the speaker.

¹⁴ Kosciuszko "selected the battlefield and supervised fortifications that contributed to the American victory at the Battle of Saratoga (1777)", and he "was responsible for building the defenses at West Point (1778-1790)"; he returned to Poland to lead "the failed cause for Polish Independence" (*Oxford Reference Online*).

This hymn speaks to male and female Christians who work "Where misery spreads her deepest shade, / Your strong compassion glows;" she provides the example of John Howard, whose philanthropy was found "by dying beds" and "in prison glooms" as he worked to right those human injustices (lines 5-6, 9).¹⁵ In this quatrain, pronoun forms of "ye," "you," "your," and "yours" occur 28 times and add to the rhythm of the regular beats and rhymed second and fourth lines; these pronouns point to Christians who serve self-sacrificially or are martyred for their faith. The movement of the poem proceeds to a depiction of Scottish reformers who were exiled to Australia for speaking out against the British government's oppressive practices; their call for freedom and equality was feared because of the French Revolution (lines 31-32). Barbauld evokes biblical images of a soon-to-be overturned Babylon with "Your's is the writing on the wall, / That turns the tyrant pale" (lines 35-36).¹⁶ These lines may be interpreted as referring to the rise and fall of kingdoms; Barbauld treats a serious subject in this poem as a minority voice. Outspoken, she holds steadfast to the conviction that Britain was in dire need of reform lest it be overthrown, or, perhaps, she saw her country's impending fall as the natural outcome of a nation who refused to heed God and justice in its rule.

¹⁵ Barbauld's poem praises another philanthropist and reformer of prisons John Howard (1726-90) in these lines.

¹⁶ Daniel alone could interpret this. He declared its meaning and later ruled in a high position beneath King Darius who succeeded Belshazzar. As a member of the disenfranchised class who is promoted to the ruling class, it is notable that Barbauld selects him. "This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it, TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and the Persians.' Then, Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom" (*MacArthur Study Bible*, Dan. 5:26-30).

Barbauld points to the tragic execution of Socrates, sentenced to death by drinking poison for his supposed corruption of Greece's youth: "The hemlock bowl 'tis yours to drain" ties the ancient's unjust fate to the end awaiting faithful Christians who teach non-Presbyterian children in their Presbyterian schools (line 39). Dissenting teachers were not members of the predominant upper class; however, the influence of their methods was growing. A former student at Palgrave School who was taught by Barbauld became a political leader "who drafted the Reform Act of 1832--the Act which after fifty years' agitation for it, redistricted Britain to more truly represent the electorate in Parliament" (McCarthy and Kraft 21). Despite a long life of working from a non-majority position, Barbauld eventually altered British governmental law through her educational reform. The next two stanzas render events which shook the continent, "E'en yet, the steaming scaffolds smoke/ By Seine's polluted steam" depicts The Terror, a cause for British fear toward revolutionary views. She remarks, "With your rich blood the fields are drench'd/ Where Polish sabres gleam," indicating Christians being sacrificed at the guillotine through the usage of "you" to address the "salt of the earth" (lines 43-44). The specific references to revolutionaries conclude with her mention of imprisoned Marquis de Lafayette, a French hero for the American Revolution, and at this point, one wonders if in Barbauld's view, the "salt of the earth" must be Christian and revolutionary or merely revolutionary. Close reading complicates a simple interpretation of her hymn which functions more as a battle hymn than a song of praise to God. This is no passive poem, but rather an active exhortation for faithful believers to rise up against tyranny and oppression; its focus reflects the revolutionary spirit of the period in Europe and America.

Barbauld composed "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, A Poem" after Britain's twenty-seven year period of ongoing conflict with France, employing an aabb rhyme scheme, with 17 stanzas and 334 lines. Unwaveringly, Barbauld depicts Britain's expansionism and ceaseless battle in a negative light; the honesty of the poem exhausts even the modern reader, distanced by history's passage. This poem displays her masterful poetic skill and a critical acumen about her country's endeavors; her complex patriotism risks assessing Britain's successes and failures, placing Britain's welfare over her own as she laments the country's loss of prosperity. In this poem, she situates herself in a lineage by depicting historical events methodically. Her voice integrates with each event through becoming the speaker on the page-- she connects with each hero, value or loss. The historical milieu for "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven" stems from England's battling with France since 1793, except with one brief respite; this war spanned continents, and blockades of supplies kept civilians paying inflated prices on goods, if they could obtain the provisions at all (McCarthy and Kraft 160). Russia and Austria reneged on their alliances with Britain between 1807 and 1809; when 1810 drew to a close "the British economy was near collapse," and then in 1811, "George III succumbed to permanent dementia" (McCarthy and Kraft 160). British people who desired peace had ample evidence to necessitate ending the conflicts, but the political leadership pressed on in its fight. Motivated by the tattered state of the nation, Barbauld composed her poetic response "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven," and the piece was published by the end of that year, soon after its completion. Reviews, whether in conservative or liberal publications, "ranged from cautious to patronizingly negative to outrageously abusive" (McCarthy and

Kraft 160). "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven" is a poem that derives its "polemical force" from its "representation of a country that is losing its fundamental domestic strengths" (Kaul 122).

In her "Epistle to William Wilberforce," Barbauld aligns herself with poet, preacher, and politician. I assert that she speaks like a prophet in this poem, predicting Britain's fall from glory. The opening lines of the poem tell the reader that Britain "feeds the fierce strife, the alternate hope and fear; / Bravely, though vainly, dares to strive with Fate, / And seeks by turns to prop each sinking state" (lines 4-6). Around Britain, nations were capitulating to Napoleon called the "Colossal Power" and the "Despot" (lines 7, 9). Barbauld takes the trope of "feeds the fierce strife" to condemn the starvation which ensues as supplies are diverted away from the populace to the war effort; the lack of food brought about "Disease and Rapine" and the "tramp of marching hosts disturbs the plough" and the Soldier's sword, not the Peasant's "sickle, reaps the harvest now" (lines 16-20). "War's least horror is the ensanguined field" compared to the slow death of starvation along with disease (lines 20, 22). "Barbauld's jeremiad is not only a call for pacifism in the face of an increasing national militarism inspired by the successes of Nelson at sea and Wellington on land. It is more sweepingly an apocalyptic prophecy, one that foretells the doom of an entire nation" (Mellor 78). The poet admitted, "I acknowledge it to be gloomy & I am sure I do not wish to be a true prophet; yet when one sees the ... astonishing revolutions which have changed ... the political face of the globe, what nation has a right to say ' My mountain stands strong, I shall *never* be moved?' " (Barbauld qtd. in McCarthy and Kraft 160).

Moving to address the plight of the fairer sex, she makes a feminist critique of how British conquests and colonial expansion have affected the country's minority-voiced female constituents: "Fruitful in vain, the matron counts with pride/ The blooming youths that grace her honoured side; / No son returns to press her widow'd hand" (lines 23-25). She speaks for the widows and young women who have diminished prospects to marry since their potential mates are all at war, "Fruitful in vain, she boasts her virgin race, / Whom cultured arts adorn and gentlest grace, / Defrauded of its homage, Beauty mourns, / And the rose withers on its virgin thorns" (lines 27-30). Statistics point to how little potential existed for women to marry, "...the nation was truly at war, for an astonishing number of men at arms were mobilized, both in domestic militias and in military service overseas (in 1812 there were almost a million men in the army and the navy)" (Kaul 123).

Barbauld indicts "vanity" as a cause of the military build-up, repeating the trope several times in its earlier lines. Recognizing British triumphs, she announces them only to highlight their ruin saying, "thy Midas dream is o'er; / The golden tide of Commerce leaves thy shore" (lines 61-62). Her lines convey history's repetitive nature, and she catalogues the rise and fall of nations; no empire is infallible to demise, and Barbauld delineates the ways in which countries lose their "light." Distinguishing this term for her poem's context indicates that "light" represents her country's successes and also the past achievements of other nations. She perceives, "If westward streams the light that leaves thy shores, / Still from thy lamp the streaming radiance pours" (lines 79-80). She bears "an eloquent testimony that the asymmetries confirmed and exacerbated over the long

century of European colonization came at a psychic cost for the poets of empire, who worried obsessively that, for one reason or another, the 'golden tide of Commerce' would abandon their shores" (Kaul 130). Other places are aglow besides Britain, like America's "Appalachian hills" and "Missouri's rushing waters" and "Niagara's fall," but not only will old successes illuminate the new world, the teachings of the English past will educate these settlements (lines 83, 92, 96). "The finer sense of morals and art" are "stores of knowledge the new states shall know, / And think thy thoughts and with thy fancy glow" (lines 87-88). Referring to England's drama through "loved Joanna" and "Shakespeare's noble rage," Barbauld cautions, "The tragic Muse resume her just control, / With pity and with terror purge thy soul," (lines 101,103, 110-111). Barbauld warns that even British theater based upon Aristotle will move "o'er transatlantic realms," which exist in the west (line 111). "Britain's ruins are imagined as providing crash courses in the history for young Americans on the new Grand Tour, who walk the banks of the Isis (the Thames at Oxford), the Cam, and the Avon in homage 'to the sod, by Statesmen, sages, poets, heroes trod' "(Barbauld lines 127-56; Kaul 126). Barbauld's speaker posits that "Perhaps some Briton whose musing mind/ Those ages live which Time has cast behind,/ To every spot shall lead his wandering guests/ On whose known site the beam of glory rests:" (lines 187-190). It seems that she becomes that "Briton," and her readers become her "wandering guests" through the places of fading glory. Almost undetected, the speaker leads "his wandering guests," and by this subtle pronoun shift, Barbauld assumes the mantle of a masculine role, as a leader taking us through history (line 189).

Risking her own well-being, she presented a type of farewell address. In her poem, she refers to "emigrants like Joseph Priestly, or to transported convicts like the Scottish reformers Thomas Muir and Thomas Palmer, sent to Australia in 1794" (McCarthy and Kraft 172). I contend that this poem serves as a form of self-exile since she never published independently after its reception. She was punished for her outspokenness in scathing reviews, thus damaging her reputation, and she suffered a long period of non-independent writing. Dissenting peers were exiled to Australia or sought asylum in America, but she remained in England where she lived another fourteen years and weathered the "hostile reviews" of her last "separate publication" (McCarthy and Kraft 36). Perhaps the poem signals an intentional self-imposed exile from the independence of individual publishing, or maybe outside pressures by the literary and political realms ostracized her. Like many co-dissenters, she finished her life as a captive free-born British subject. She closes by addressing the political struggles of William Pitt, Charles Fox, David Garrick (actor and friend of Hannah More), Admiral Horatio Nelson, General John Moore, and John Priestly. They co-toiled as English subjects in the same era as Barbauld; all of these men spoke and suffered persecution for arguing for the cause of freedom (lines 191-203). We witness their successes because she has led us to them; moreover, she places herself within a tradition of male activism for political equality. In this final independent publication, she positions herself alongside those who have been jailed, exiled, or escaped, and this poem can be interpreted as Barbauld's self-exile from the nation for which she independently wrote, but after "Eighteen-Hundred and Eleven," she ceased to contribute with such autonomy ever again.

Conclusion:

Habermas' theory of public and private spheres sparked the creation of talk about what women wrote and the purposes that they pursued through publication, and these blurred spheres continue to offer points for scholarly discourse. Connecting poets such as Behn, More, and Barbauld as muses of minority political voices reveals how each poet faced issues in society which may have overshadowed them through class, ideology, and gender. "The conviction they offer is of a difficult task heroically performed. The persuasive lesson they teach us is of the historical necessity of particular forms of aspiration, even when the odds seem stacked against the merchant, the nation, the poet" (Kaul 275). None of the female writers were members of the clergy, political parties, or other forms of governance, and this point is obvious, but what may be less apparent is how this "non-membership" permitted them to form a poetic and political perspective from outside of the Establishment, and thus they share this commonality. Placing their poems side by side in this analysis demonstrates that while forces from without pressed upon each writer to conform, none did; from within, each writer drew from a well of independent strength. So, although they may appear to differ upon the surface, their poems expose how alike they were as voices of independence. In recent decades, scholars have studied how women writers participated within the public sphere, but female literary contributions have yet to experience the benefit of two centuries of

scholarship, like male-authored works have; the need for furthering our investigation of the eighteenth-century woman writer can be expressed as follows:

We have had two hundred years to discover a discourse of and strategies for reading male poets. They belong to a debate, a dialectic; we know how to think about politics, epistemology, power, and language, in productive ways that, whether it is Matthew Arnold or Paul De Man who writes makes these poets mean for us. A hermeneutics has evolved. Not so with female poets. We are discovering who they are, but there are few ways of talking about them... We have not found productive historical ways of thinking about female poets either. (Armstrong 15)

The 1910 book, *Famous Blue-Stockings* mentions these women in connection with events like the Gordon Riots and The French Revolution and concludes, "But indeed, it is not on the political but on the social side that the record left by the Blue-Stockings is so rich: we may learn in minute detail the life of the times, find out what people thought, what they talked of, what they wrote of," and this critic concludes that we may know "what they ate" and how they were "always pleasant" (Ethel Rolt Wheeler 15).¹⁷ Modern critical inquiry into eighteenth-century women's political poetry builds upon scholarship of the last century. Analyzing the political views of Behn, Barbauld,

¹⁷ A 1778 act of Parliament "allowed Catholics to become property owners," and it preceded the Gordon Riots which entailed a series of attacks on wealthy Catholics and suspected Catholic-sympathizers; this act had not been enacted through parliamentary debate (Keane 32).

and More in their poetry as supporters of causes championed by marginalized voices has added to our understanding about these writers and about the literary history to which they contributed. Certain poems, as discussed in this study were not created merely as art for art's sake, but rather they were crafted as art for action's sake. My assessment provides a lens through which to interpret political poetry of the authorial underdogs of the period, women who were writing revolution.

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