

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

**Four Literary Protégées of the Lake Poets:
Caroline Bowles, Maria Gowen Brooks, Sara Coleridge
and Maria Jane Jewsbury**

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Dennis Jun-Yu Low, BA (Oxon)

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*Therefore, although it be a history
Homely and rude, I will relate the same
For the delight of a few natural hearts;
And, with yet fonder feeling, for the sake
Of youthful Poets, who among these hills
Will be my second self when I am gone.*

Wordsworth

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List of Abbreviations

- BD Caroline Bowles, 'The Birth-Day'. *The Poetical Works* (London, 1867)
- CT Caroline Bowles, *The Cat's Tail: being the history of Childe Merlin* (Edinburgh, 1831)
- EF Caroline Bowles, *Ellen Fitzarthur: a metrical tale, in five cantos* (London, 1820)
- HRHRC Harry Ransom Humanities Resource Center, University of Austin, Texas
- JE Maria Gowen Brooks, *Judith, Esther and Other Poems* (Boston, 1820)
- RSCB *The Correspondence of Robert Southey and Caroline Bowles*, ed. Edward Dowden (Dublin and London, 1881)
- SCML *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge*. 2 vols., ed. Edith Coleridge (London, 1873)
- SH Caroline Bowles, *Solitary Hours* (New York, 1846)
- WL *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*. 8 vols., ed. Alan G. Hill and Mary Moorman (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1967-93)

Preface

Sailing to Bombay aboard the *HMS Victory* in 1833, the Revd. William Fletcher wrote to his sister-in-law, Geraldine Jewsbury. He enclosed, with his letter, a stuffed albatross. 'The admirable journal of your sister will give you some account of albatross shooting, and a specimen of its plumage', he explained, 'Since then a gentleman has most politely presented a real albatross though rather a small one, to her & she now gives it to you. There, my dear Girl, I know you will now repeat 'The Ancient Mariner' with more knowledge though not better taste than you used to do.'¹ At some stage in the 1820s and 30s, Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner', a cautionary tale about an old sailor who is severely punished for shooting an albatross, had, it seems, gone on to inspire a generation of sea-faring readers to take up albatross shooting for themselves. Word of this never reached Coleridge himself but, given his low opinion of the contemporary reading public, he would not have been at all surprised at how divorced readings of his poetry had become from his original intentions².

If the 1820s and 30s proved to be difficult years for Coleridge and his contemporaries, they have, subsequently, proved difficult for modern literary scholarship. Falling chronologically between received notions of Romanticism and Victorianism, the 1820s and 30s remain something

¹ 'Letter from William Fletcher to Geraldine Jewsbury', Jewsbury archives, English MS1320/62, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

² Alexander Dyce recalled that, '[W]henever they were guilty of any unfortunate piece of awkwardness, - such as breaking a wine-glass, or spilling a cup of coffee, - [Byron, Hodgson, and Harness] would exclaim, in allusion to their favourite poem, "Dear me, I have shot an albatross!"' (Schrader 1972: 177)

of 'an embarrassment to the historian of English literature' (Nemoianu 1984: 41), a nondescript 'twilight' (Leighton 1992: 20) that constitutes 'a quiet buffer between more turbulent Romantic and Victorian zones' (Tucker 1995, quoted in Cronin 2002: 260), 'a shadowy stretch of time sandwiched between two far more colourful periods' (Cronin 2002: 1).

Virgil Nemoianu, Angela Leighton, Herbert Tucker and Richard Cronin have all made valuable incursions into understanding the literature of the 1820s and 30s: Virgil Nemoianu's *The Taming of Romanticism* (1984) identifies and deploys the aesthetic impulses of Germany's Biedermeier as a frame for a larger, pan-European phenomenon; Angela Leighton's *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (1992) has become seminal reading for those studying Felicia Hemans or Letitia Elizabeth Landon, two of the most celebrated and prolific poets of the period; Herbert Tucker has written a substantial article about the domestication of poetry in the 1820s (1995); and, most recently, Richard Cronin's *Romantic Victorians* (2002) has traced the way in which the ideas of femininity, fashion, citizenship, nature and religion, present in the literature of the period, metamorphosed into ideologies that came to underpin the literature of post-1840s England. Yet, in spite of their collective sphere of influence, the work on the 1820s and 30s that these critics have produced continues to run counter-intuitively to traditional conceptions of Romanticism and Victorianism.

Traditional notions of British Romanticism are 'based...almost exclusively upon the writings and thought of six male poets' (Mellor 1993: 1) and it is perhaps due to this received convention that the literary activities of the 1820s and 30s have so often been overlooked. The 'six poets neatly divided into two generations' (Cronin 2002: 5) are, of course, a first generation consisting of Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge, and then a second, consisting of Keats, Shelley and Byron. Had the lives of these latter, second-generation Romantics been a few years longer, there might be no chronological gap for literary history to account for, but the strikingly early deaths of Keats, Shelley and Byron, in 1821, -22 and -24 respectively, have meant that scholars of Romanticism have usually been reluctant to engage in research topics that stretch beyond the mid-1820s. Whatever lies beyond is left for Victorian studies to deal with, even if Victorian

studies is historically defined by the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837 and only tends to gather pace with the publications of the Brontë sisters in the late 1840s.

Undeniably, much modern scholarship has been committed to expanding the boundaries of the traditional canon of nineteenth-century literature, and by far the greatest challenge has come from Anglo-American feminist scholars who have sought to recuperate the lives and works of previously neglected women writers. This feminist reclamation project, now in its fourth decade, has met with a great deal of success and yet, too often, what has resulted from it is not the genuine integration of women writers into existing literary canons, but the setting up of alternative canons of women writers that attempt to mirror and compete with the existing ones. In Romantic studies especially, where the likes of Anne Mellor have argued forcefully for a separatist tradition of women's writing, 'the result has been, very often, simply to offer a choice between one version of Romanticism and another, each served by its own textbooks and anthologies' (Cronin 2002: 3). While such a strategy has been suitable insofar as it fulfils the feminist aim of re-inscribing literary importance onto a number of women writers, it has also had the detrimental side-effect of duplicating the chronological oversights inherent in the traditional canon.

The feminist neglect of the 1820s and 30s can clearly be traced back to the 1970s when literary feminism, then still in its infancy, was particularly concerned with recovering Victorian women novelists, the original mainstay of their recuperation project. In her seminal study of women novelists, *A Literature of their Own* (1977), Elaine Showalter began by explaining that, 'In the atlas of the English novel, women's territory is usually depicted as desert bounded by mountains on four sides: the Austen peaks, the Brontë cliffs, the Eliot range, and the Woolf hills' (Showalter [1977] 1988: vii). Showalter professed that her primary aim was to 'attempt to fill in the terrain between these literary landmarks and to construct a more reliable map from which to explore the achievements of English women novelists' (Showalter 1998: vii). But, in concentrating on the 1840-1840 'terrain' between Brontë, Eliot and Woolf (not coincidentally the same terrain occupied by canonical male heavyweights such as Thackeray, Dickens and Joyce),

Showalter all but ignored the 1820s and 30s, the 'no-man's land' (quoted in Cronin 2002: 3) that stretches between the posthumous publication of Austen's *Persuasion* in 1818 and the publication of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in 1847.

With no canonical opposition existing in these earlier decades to buck against, Showalter felt little remorse in all but ignoring, in her book, the women writers of the 1820s and 30s in favour of 'women born after 1800, who began to publish fiction during the 1840s' (Showalter 1998: 19). In spite of its opening gambit about filling in all the terrain between Austen and Woolf, her book proved all too faithful to its subtitle, 'British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing'.

Other equally influential studies (notably Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979)) soon followed Showalter's suit in constructing traditions of nineteenth-century women's writing that were heavily reliant on the post-1840 novel and, by 1992, Angela Leighton felt the need to comment on feminist scholarship's predilection for women novelists over women poets, arguing that 'the demand for "a literature of their own" has tended to overshadow "a poetry of their own"' (Leighton 1992: 1). Leighton never explicitly pointed out Showalter and her contemporaries' systematic neglect of the 'post-Romantic decades of the 1820s and 30s' (Leighton 1992: 2). Nevertheless, she did acknowledge the crucial importance of these years with regard to women's writing, arguing that:

The mystique of the woman poet which develops at this time, partly as a response to the economic expansion of the literary market, offers to subsequent generations of women both an enthusiastic invective to write and a subtly determining myth of what being a woman poet means... Through Hemans and L.E.L. sensibility becomes, not only fashionable and profitable again in the 1820s and 30s, but it also accrues certain strongly prescriptive, gender-specific values of sincerity and purity. (Leighton 1992: 3)

Implicit in Leighton's inclusion of Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon in her study of *Victorian Women Poets* was an attempt to further question and destabilise the chronological cut-off dates of literary periods: '[L]iterary movements do not start or end at certain fixed dates',

Leighton maintained, 'Victorianism begins before 1837 and continues after 1901' (Leighton 1992: 2-3).

The feminist scholarship that was to come after, however, was reluctant to carry out the re-evaluation of the 1820s and 30s that Leighton had suggested, and preferred, more simply, to concede that Hemans and Landon were interesting poets who deserved more critical attention than they had hitherto received. As a result, the attention received by Hemans and Landon was, more often than not, characterised by a marked uncertainty as to how they might be handled. Writing about Hemans specifically (although the observation applies equally to Landon), Richard Cronin observes that 'the new readiness to accept that her poetry ought to be discussed has been matched by a widespread puzzlement as to what kinds of thing might be said about it' (Cronin 2002: 1).

Hemans and Landon studies are characterised by a 'widespread puzzlement' because the standard complement of feminist recuperation techniques falters in the no-man's land of the 1820s and 30s. Specifically designed to be used in direct opposition to a male-dominated canon, the critical strategies deployed by feminist scholarship in other periods become almost inoperable when applied to women writers from this period: chronologically and aesthetically, the texts of the traditional Romantic canon are too distant and different to yield any meaningful point of comparison or positive contrast; the usual tactics of identifying the ways in which women writers of a given period subversively re-write their better-known contemporaries fail in the 1820s and 30s because there are, in this period, no better-known contemporaries to be had; and literary feminism's primary argument - that women writers are literary voices singled out and systematically marginalized by a dominant patriarchy - falls flat because the period has no literary voice and, therefore, no margins for women to be shoved into.

If the 1820s and 30s are an inhospitable terrain, they are also a dark continent, a lost world that offers a new and exciting possibility for literary scholarship. Almost untouched by modern criticism, the 1820s and 30s have yet to be locked into the oppositional and confrontational game

of one-upmanship that is constantly played out between our feminist and our canonical scholars. The period offers itself to these rival institutional factions as a *tabula rasa*, a neutral territory upon which to lay down arms and explore, instead, the possibilities of working in collaboration. Moreover, being the very period in which one might identify the emergence of the modern literary canon, the emergence of the professional woman writer, and the first attempts to piece together a tradition of women's writing, the 1820s and 30s seem to invite scholars to learn about the origins of their discipline and reflect upon the forms that it has subsequently taken.

This thesis is intended as a demonstration of the synergistic potential that collaboration between canonical and feminist criticism might afford. It aims to show how feminist scholars might profit by taking an unfrontational interest in the subjects of their canonical colleagues, and vice versa. Above all, though, it seeks to encourage feminist and canonical scholars to put to rest their traditional differences for good and, in doing so, gain a more holistic and complete understanding of literary history than can currently be achieved.

At its most basic, this thesis is simply a series of literary biographical (but often critical) sketches, designed to introduce four little-known women writers into the sparsely populated literary landscape of the 1820s and 30s. The writers that I have chosen are Caroline Bowles, Maria Gowen Brooks, Sara Coleridge and Maria Jane Jewsbury. With their work spanning a diverse range of genres and styles, these writers could not, in many ways, be more dissimilar from one another. Amongst other things, Caroline Bowles wrote an autobiographical epic poem about her childhood; Maria Gowen Brooks wrote a six-canto versification of the Apocryphal book of *Tobit*; Sara Coleridge wrote a three-volume translation of a treatise about equestrian tribes in Paraguay; and Maria Jane Jewsbury was one of the chief reviewers for the *Athenaeum* magazine. What groups these writers together, however, is the fact that they were all literary protégées of the Lake Poets, that is to say, of Wordsworth, Coleridge and, most importantly to this thesis, the often-

overlooked Robert Southey. The mentoring activities of the Lake Poets are as little known as the lives and works of their protégées. The few studies that have appeared on Bowles, Coleridge and Jewsbury³ have consistently attempted to discredit or erase their subjects' relationships to their canonical mentors. It is my hope that, in exploring the lives and works of the mentors and their protégées together, we might learn a little more than otherwise about both groups.

Throughout this thesis, I also want to consider the relationships that existed between the protégées themselves. In *A Literature of their Own*, Elaine Showalter asserted that 'almost no sense of communality and self-awareness is apparent among women writers before the 1840s' (Showalter 1998: 18). The distinction between 'almost' and none has a crucial bearing in the context of this thesis for, despite their wildly differing literary interests, the protégées were generally supportive of one another, and often corresponded to each other, and read one another's work. The network that existed between them and other contemporary women writers is too fragile to bear the weight of a full scholarly inquiry at present, especially since they themselves have yet to be properly recovered from obscurity. But those occasions when the lives of the protégées did touch - their meetings, letters, compliments, and their readings of one another's work - will be elaborated on here in the following chapters and it is hoped that, in doing this, something of an emerging 'sense of communality' might be captured. But, before turning my

³ Virginia Blain's biography/critical appraisal/anthology *Caroline Bowles Southey, 1786-1854: The Making of a Woman Writer* (1997); Bradford Keyes Mudge's study of Sara Coleridge, *A Victorian Daughter* (1989); Kathleen Jones's group biography, *A Passionate Sisterhood: The sisters, wives and daughters of the Lake Poets* (1997); Norma Clarke's *Ambitious Heights: Writing, Friendship, Love - The Jewsbury Sisters, Felicia Hemans and Jane Welsh Carlyle* (1990). Any reader at all familiar with these books will appreciate how my narrative accounts of my subjects differ from them. In the spirit of literary biography, I have only made reference to these biographers and critics on those occasions where I have been directly indebted to them or where I have engaged in a dialogue with their critical readings.

attention to Bowles, Brooks, Coleridge and Jewsbury, I shall begin with a closer examination of the sense of alienation and displacement from the literary marketplace of the 1820s and 30s felt by all three of the Lake Poets.

Chapter 1: The Lake Poets and 'The Era of Accomplished Women'

'As to Poetry, I am sick of it', wrote Wordsworth in 1821, ' -- it overruns the Country in all the shapes of the Plagues of Egypt... But let us desist or we shall be accused of envying the rising generation' (WL: III. 44)⁴. Wordsworth was not the only Lake Poet to be disillusioned by the literary marketplace of the 1820s. Writing to a Mrs. Hodson in 1828, Southey noted that

The sale of books is grievously diminished within the last six or eight years (I speak feelingly). To have any success, a book must now be new - a single season antiquates it; it must come from a fashionable name (nobility is now turned to a marketable account in this way); or it must be personal, if not slanderous; but, if slanderous, then best of all. (C. Southey 1855: 461)

Coleridge, who shared in Wordsworth and Southey's sense of malaise, considered its origins in *Biographia Literaria* (1817):

But, alas! the multitude of books, and the general diffusion of literature, have produced...lamentable effects in the world of letters...now, partly by the labours of successive poets, and in part by the more artificial state of society and social intercourse, language, mechanized as it were into a barrel-organ, supplies at once both instrument and tune. Thus even the deaf may play, so as to delight the many... [O]f all trades, literature at present demands the least talent or information; and, of all modes of literature, the manufacturing of poems. (Coleridge [1817] 1997: 24-5)

⁴ All 'WL' references refer to *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, eds. Alan G. Hill and Mary Moorman (1967-93).

Although all three Lake Poets had always been well aware of the financial aspects of their work, the idea of writing literature solely as 'trade' or 'manufacturing' was one that very much grated on their aesthetic and ideological sensibilities. The immensely popular 'annuals' perhaps most fully encapsulated, for them, this new, industrialised approach to literature. The editors of the annual gift-books, nineteenth-century precursors to the modern coffee-table book, commissioned poems and other literary pieces by the page and often dictated their subject matter. Moreover, rather than being sold on the quality of their writing, the annuals were primarily marketed as icons of elegance and tastefulness, as suggested by the lavishness of their illustrations and the sumptuousness of their bindings. '[T]he literary department, make what exertions you will, must be as inferior in its effect upon the sale to the pictorial one as it is in its cost', wrote Southey in 1828 to his friend, Allan Cunningham, editor of the *Anniversary* annual, 'At the best, Allan, these Annuals are picture-books for grown children... I am very sure that you will make it as good as a thing of its kind can be made; but, at the best, this is what it must be' (C. Southey 1855: 464). In *Middlemarch* (set in the 1830s), George Eliot would note that these annuals were 'the very best thing in art and literature as a medium for "paying addresses" - the very thing to please a nice girl' (Eliot [1871-2] 1994: 269).

With such books being indicative of the state of literature in the 1820s, it is little wonder that Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth grew despondent. Worse still was the possibility that they themselves were responsible for the changes in literary taste that facilitated the rise of such books: in the above quotation from *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge counts the Lake Poets among the 'successive poets' by whose 'labours...language, mechanized as it were into a barrel-organ, supplies at once both instrument and tune'. Of all three poets, though, it was Wordsworth who had the greatest impact on the poetry of the 1820s.

As early as 1822, critics began to recognise that imitating Wordsworth had become a tendency amongst new poets. In a review of Caroline Bowles's *The Widow's Tale and Other Poems*, one critic for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* wrote:

It is worth notice that scarcely any one of the poets of our days who has received the guerdon of popularity, has neglected the study of rural nature. It seems now to be an established canon, that the poet shall have his eyes and ears open and alert wherever the beauties or the sublimities of the country are perceptible, taking the term in an ample signification, as embracing earth, and ocean, and sky. (*Blackwood's* 1822: 285-6)

A few years later, in 1826, John Wilson ('Christopher North'), again in *Blackwood's*, presented a useful if somewhat sardonic overview of the emergence of this new 'established canon' and explicitly implicated Wordsworth in its creation:

...[I]n course of time, an honest man of the name of Wordsworth was born, who had too much integrity to submit to the law of their [the eighteenth century's] lingo, and, to the anger and astonishment of the order, began to speak in good, sound, sober, intelligible prose. Then was a revolution. All who adhered to the ancient regime became in a few years utterly incomprehensible, and were coughed down by the public. On the other hand, all those who adopted the new theory observed that they were merely accommodating themselves to the language of their brethren of mankind. (Wilson 1826: 98-9)

In referring to the 'revolution' and the 'ancient regime', Wilson suggests a distinction between the poets of the 1790s, like Wordsworth, who were inspired by the French Revolution, and those of the 1820s who were 'merely accommodating themselves to the language of their brethren of mankind'. In Wilson's estimation, the poets of the 1820s offered their literary forefathers nothing but pale imitations of their former selves: they were tasteful and elegant, rather than radical and passionate.

While Wordsworth was credited with at least a degree of literary permanence, his immediate successors were not. Looking at several of the annuals in 1828, the *Quarterly Review* asserted that: 'It is very natural for the manufacturers of poetry, would-be-Byronic or

Wordsworthian...to be astonished that their performances are so often allowed to enjoy for a brief interval the puffery of daily, weekly, and monthly trumpeters, and then sink into the abyss of eternal forgetfulness, without our making any effort either to keep them above the horizon, or plunge them, ere the time, below it' (*Quarterly Review* 1828: 84-5).

Paradoxically, even though it had been built upon their own 'successive labours', the Lake Poets found themselves alienated from the literary scene of the 1820s, populated as it was with 'would-be' mimics. To certain degrees, they did try to re-fashion themselves to suit this new literary marketplace and, as Virgil Nemoianu argues, their marked shifts towards political and religious conservatism during this decade had something, at least, to do with a desire to find for themselves a place amongst, what Wordsworth called, the 'rising generation' (Nemoianu 1984: 44). In this respect, however, the Lake Poets proved to be less than entirely successful, as certain events of 1828 would demonstrate.

In 1828, Frederick Reynolds solicited contributions from all three poets for the 1829 *Keepsake* annual. Unwilling to refuse the fee of £50 for seven pages that Reynolds was offering (Vincent 1944: 59), Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge all accepted. Wordsworth wrote to his wife and justified his actions by itemising their son's university expenses:

Bills to the amount of upwards of 60 pounds including the one paid by Mr Jackson, have been sent for Battles [i.e. university college fees], the Taylor's bill not included, 7 pounds for a new suit, one also left at Cambridge, so that with Whitwick furniture, and John's journey and settling etc the expenses on John's account will be very formidable. This was my main inducement for closing with Mr. Reynolds's offer for the Keepsake. (WL: III.590)

In confidence, Wordsworth's daughter, Dora, wrote to her friend, Maria Jane Jewsbury, and explained her father's actions: 'Father could not feel himself justified in refusing so advantageous an offer - degrading enough I confess - but necessity has no law, and galling enough but we must pocket our pride sometimes and it is good for us' (Vincent 1944: 39).

Writing to Grosvenor Bedford in December, Southey also reviewed his own finances, explaining that the total royalties from the previous year, for all his works combined, amounted to less than £30. '[I]f it were not for reviewing, it would be impossible for me to pay my current expenses', he admitted, before going on to consider why the sales of his work were dwindling: 'The Annuals are now the only books bought for presents to young ladies, in which way poems formerly had their chief vent. People ask for what is new' (C. Southey 1855: 463).

Coleridge was, perhaps, the most astonished that anyone would offer £50 for two poems, an amount of money that was, he explained in one letter, 'more than all / ever made by all my Publications, my week's Salary of 5£ as writer of the Leading Articles in the Morning Post during the Peace of Amiens excepted' (Griggs 1932: II. 410)⁵. But, while Wordsworth and Southey contributed to the *Keepsake* purely for financial reasons, Coleridge had other motives for contributing, as he explained to Alaric Watts in September: 'I caught at the opportunity for spite of the Fifty Pound and its convenience, the disinclination to reject W[ordsworth]'s request and advice, and in part from the fear of my refusal to add my name to his and Southey's being misinterpreted at Keswick was beyond all comparison the more efficient motive' (Griggs 1932: II.416). The following month, Coleridge wrote again to Watts, reaffirming his obligation to Wordsworth and Southey: 'It was in the strict truth, that I told you, that Wordsworth's urgent letter, and the peculiar relation in which (n.b. by her own choice) the mother of my children and my dearest daughter have stood and stand in to Mr. Southey, formed so very large a portion of my

⁵ Coleridge was factoring into his calculations the loss that he had incurred with the publication of *The Friend* as well as the cost of purchasing its copyright and the cost of purchasing unsold copies after the publisher declared bankruptcy.

reason for assenting to the proposal, that Mr. Heath's 50£ was at best but a make-weight' (Griggs 1932: II.420).

Although Coleridge had no financial dependants (his estranged wife and children lived with Southey), he may not have been as disinterested as he seems to be here; these letters, after all, form part of his on-going negotiation to secure contribution fees from Alaric Watts's *Literary Souvenir* annual. Nevertheless, Coleridge's letters to Watts do highlight a need felt amongst the Lake Poets for a tentative solidarity and a certain unanimity of action. In contributing to the annuals, there was, for all three poets, more at stake than merely a handful of poems; in contributing, they were also compromising on poetic ideologies that they had spent a lifetime constructing.

In private, Southey good-humouredly admitted that his contributions to the *Keepsake* were not particularly good: 'They are good for little', he explained to the poet, Caroline Bowles, ' - so little, that I do not think they are worth sending to you: just as much task-work as a school exercise, and performed with no better liking for the occupation. The prints no doubt are better than the verses' (RSCB: 147)⁶. Coleridge, too, acknowledged the low quality of his own contributions: 'I was showing Mr. Reynolds the two or three things that happened to be in the two or three little commonplace or memorandum books on my table,' he recollected, 'and gave it as my opinion that they would not answer to his purpose - he fixed on the rough imperfect poem...and offered to close the bargain for this poem and a shorter one' (Griggs 1932: II.416). To some extent, these self-deprecatory comments from Southey and Coleridge were designed to pre-empt and deflect any criticism that might have followed but, as poetry had never been the *Keepsake's* main selling point, Southey was quite right to maintain that his contributions were 'good enough for their place and their company, I suppose' (RSCB: 151).

⁶ All 'RSCB' references refer to *The Correspondence of Robert Southey with Caroline Bowles*, ed. Edward Dowden, 1881.

Wordsworth, however, had far more difficulty than either Coleridge or Southey in fulfilling his contractual obligations to the *Keepsake*. Two of his poems, namely 'To a Skylark' and 'Memory', had already been published in the *Winter's Wreath* annual of 1828, but this had been allowed unwittingly. 'I had never been engaged in any periodical nor meant to be', Wordsworth explained when Allan Cunningham applied to him for contributions for the *Anniversary*,

I have, however, been smuggled into the 'Winter's Wreath' to which I contributed three years ago; it being then intended as a solitary Publication for charitable purposes... This having broken the ice, I had less reluctance to close with a proposal the other day made me by Mr Reynolds, the terms of which were too liberal to be easily resisted, especially as coming from a Gentleman who had put me on the use of an application to my eyes, from which, I believe, I derived very great benefit. (WL: III.i.583-4)

The *Keepsake* was, then, Wordsworth's first conscious foray into the world of the annuals and he was soon overwhelmed by the task of having to write to order. As he told George Huntly Gordon, he felt a keen creative detachment from his poems and was painfully conscious, too, of his lack of copyright ownership over them:

The remainder of this Page shall receive a few stanzas to which you must be indulgent as they were *strictly* extempore - and no older than yesterday evening. I scarcely seem to have a right to send them to you - because as I des[i]gn them for the *Keepsake* of next year, - they are not strictly my own - therefore be so good as to destroy the Copy as soon as you have read them... My little Romance is an odd thing and I can scarcely guess how any one could relish it - I do not consider *that* my own nor any detached Poem which I am now writing. (WL: III.i.689)

Unable to dismiss writing for the *Keepsake* as meaningless 'task-work' in the way that Southey and Coleridge had done, Wordsworth tried, instead, to assume an undue authority over the annual's production. Soon after writing to Gordon, he wrote to Reynolds:

The Keepsake must be better stitched or its sale will suffer in the Country. A neighbour of mine has had to send his 1829 [1828?] Copy 20 miles - to have the leaves refastened. The Copy Mr Heath gave me had several leaves started. In London you may not so much mind this - but in many places it would be fatal to the work. I have not seen it - and in winter we live so much to ourselves that I have scarcely heard of it or any of its Brethren. You do well to point out to me what would suit you... Such articles cannot be bespoke [-] with the probability of the Contract being fulfilled... You must take what comes and be content... And here let me remind you that I consider myself quite at liberty to contribute to any of these works that will pay me as you have done, and have engaged to do so. I care not a straw whether they will or no, but that liberty I reserve, also the right of reprinting the Pieces in any New Edition of my Works that may be called for. (WL: III.i.692-3)

The letter was a desperate act. In criticising the very production values that the *Keepsake* prided itself on (the *Quarterly Review* had declared the *Keepsake* 'the most splendid of its class as to the embellishments' (*Quarterly Review* 1828: 89)), Wordsworth sought to undermine Reynolds in order to reassert his own autonomy as a writer, a writer who had 'scarcely heard' of the annuals; who 'care[d] not a straw' for their fees; and who worked, first and foremost, in the service of his own poetic vision, 'any New Edition of my Works that may be called for'.

Wordsworth's vying for respect seems to have gone largely ignored by Reynolds who, without telling him, eventually omitted several of his contributions from the finished *Keepsake* and then requested other poems in lieu of the ones that had been omitted. 'I find that four Sonnets of mine have not been inserted - which would have occupied at least two pages, making altogether 13 - and a half pages', wrote Wordsworth:

Now I care nothing about my Contributions being inserted - I mean on the score of personal vanity - but I certainly don't expect that a claim for more should be grounded upon rejection, for you clearly see, if this principle be admitted - I might write on for ever, before my part of the Contract were

fulfilled. You rely upon my fair dealing not to send anything I deem unworthy of myself - You have this confidence in me - and I shall take care not to abuse it - (WL: V.ii.15)

The dispute continued well into the year. In May 1829, Wordsworth wrote again to Reynolds:

I consider myself bound to you upon the same terms as last year, and I am certain upon second thoughts you will acknowledge the reasonableness of my objecting to the *Principle* of being called upon (as in your last) to supply by new contributions the place of my own rejected articles - a little in this way might be done by an arrangement *between ourselves as friends*, but to admit the rule with you or anyone in the abstract character of *Editor*, is what I cannot consent to on the grounds before stated. (WL: V.ii.75)

By August, however, Wordsworth had put an end to any possibility of his writing for the *Keepsake* again: 'Those *Gentlemen* have used me between them most scurvily,' he explained to his future son-in-law, Edward Quillinan, 'and I am rightly served for having degraded the Muses, by having any thing [to] do with the venal' (WL: V.ii.103). Dora Wordsworth, who had acted as her father's amanuensis during his dispute with Reynolds, was quietly smug: 'I am ashamed to say I now feel a (wicked I know) satisfaction in having always disliked that man - ' (Vincent 1944: 53).

Despite his obvious contempt for them, Wordsworth recognised the importance of the annuals as a source of income for poets, and he explained as much to Maria Jane Jewsbury in 1829, following her decision to contribute to the juvenile *Forget-me-Not* annual:

I think you do quite right in connecting yourself with these light things. An Author has not fair play who has no share in their profits - for the money given for them leaves so much less to spare for separate volumes. Look at my own - Gagliani [Galignani] has just published all my poems in one volume for 20 francs - here few will give £2 5 / - for my five volumes when every body is going to and fro between London and Paris - as between town & country in

their own Island. Therefore let the Annuals pay - and with whomsoever you deal make hard bargain. Humility with these Gentry is downright simpleness. (Vincent 1944: 51)

Like Southey, Wordsworth too felt that the annuals had eaten into the market for single-authored volumes of poetry but he also identifies, in the above letter, a second source of competition in the pirate editions of his work. By 1829, the Paris-based publisher, Galignani, had already published *The Poetical Works of Charles Lamb; The Poetical Works of Robert Southey, and The Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats: complete in one volume*.

Predictably, Wordsworth was dismayed when he heard that Galignani's edition of his own works was being sold in England. 'I know...that many Copies have found their way into England', he wrote to John Gardner, 'but how it can be publickly sold here I cannot understand. For any Bookseller to import it, or for any one to do so with that view, would, I imagine, be a breach of the Law' (WL: II.ii.224). Wordsworth later conceded that the Galignani edition 'neither violates the law of France nor of England' (WL: II.ii.268) and instead responded to it by looking into the possibility of undercutting its price, asking George Huntly Gordon if 'you be so kind as to trouble yourself in your rambles to make enquiries occasionally among the Retail Booksellers whether they are of opinion that a cheap Edit[ion] of my poems would answer for me' (WL: II.ii.261).

This new, cheaper edition finally came into existence in 1831 when Moxon published a selection of Wordsworth's poems. 'A selection from my poems has just been edited by a Dr. Hine for the benefit chiefly of schools and young persons, and it is published by Moxon, of Bond-street,' Wordsworth told the poet, Eliza Hamilton, '...1500 copies have been struck off... The retail price (bound) is only 5s. 6d., and the volume contains, I should suppose, at least 1100 verses...and it would be found a good travelling companion for those who like my poetry' (WL: V.ii.399).

Moxon's 1831 edition failed to allow Wordsworth to reclaim what he considered to be his rightful share of the market. 'In other times, however, I think the one [selection] made from my Poems would sell, were it only for its cheapness', Wordsworth wrote to Moxon in 1833, 'but as the

whole of my Poems are sold at a much lower price than formerly, by means of the Pirated French Edition, and my own last, the Selections are not even in respect of price so well off as before. - It is a disgrace to the age that Poetry won[']t sell without prints - I am a little too proud to let my Ship sail in the wake of Engravers and the drawing-mongers' (WL: V.ii.616-617).

Fuelled by the annual craze, the demand for cheaper, ever more lavishly illustrated books persisted and, soon, even the cut-price editions of the Lake Poets were jostling with each other for sales, as Dora Wordsworth noted: 'Have you seen "Southey's Selections" - printed uniform with Father's[?]' she asked Maria Jane Jewsbury in 1832,

it is a nice book - published by Moxon - but I fear if there be any more of them [they] will cut each other's throats as the Ann[uj]als have done before them... We hear that book selling is at an end - & that it is to be feared there will soon be a great crash amongst the first & longest established Publishers & book sellers. (Vincent 1944: 94)

As it happened, the long-term future - for the Lake Poets and for the bookselling industry in general - proved better than Dora envisioned. Nevertheless, her letter reveals just how bleak and uncertain a prospect it was that the Lake Poets confronted in the 1820s and 30s, and it is little wonder that they felt so ill at ease. Reviewing Edward Bulwer Lytton's novels for the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1831, Letitia Elizabeth Landon declared, not without regret, that the 'poetical age' of the Lake Poets was over:

The great writers, we can scarcely say of our time, embodied the excitement, the morbid sensibility, the visionary philosophy, the melancholy ever attendant upon imaginative feeling, which were the characteristics of an essentially poetical age; and such was the one just departed. Another great change is now passing over our literature, because it is also passing over our time; not less powerful, though perhaps less marked... Today has nothing in common with Yesterday. (Landon 1831: 437)

In some respects, the tone of this review might seem incongruously mournful for Landon. She was, after all, one of the most successful poets of the 1820s and her first collection, *The Improvisatrice* (1824), gained the kind of immense popularity that had been unseen since the publication of Byron's *Childe Harold*. Regularly appearing, throughout the 1820s, in *The Amulet*, *The Bijou* and *The Literary Souvenir*, Landon was also one of the most prolific contributors to the annuals, and, in the 1830s, she went on to edit *Heath's Book of Beauty* (1833) and *Fisher's Drawing-Room Scrapbook* (1832-9). But Landon herself did not regard her career as a success so much as a constant struggle against absolute failure: 'Believe me I know too well the harassments of a literary career, not to sympathise with those of another', she wrote to the novelist, Anna Eliza Bray, in 1831,

I often think of the old saying of George Withers that "the booksellers are the wasps that live on the poor Athenian bees". The comparison of literary life to Indian warfare is a very just one, you are assailed at once by the tomahawk, and the arrow; one review runs you down, and another smears you to death: and after all your best success is luck. My *Improvisatrice* was refused by three principle booksellers, and after all was published by a small channel.⁷

⁷ 'Letter from Letitia Elizabeth Landon to Anna Eliza Bray', 22 August 1831, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester. I would like to acknowledge my thanks to: Dr David Kempe, for his assistance in locating this, as yet, uncatalogued six-box cache of Anna Eliza Bray's books, manuscripts and letters; Mr Martin Kempe, for his generosity in allowing the papers to be housed at the West Sussex County Records Office; and the staff of the Records Office for driving out to East Anglia to collect the letters at such short notice from me, despite the warnings of severe flooding issued at the time (2000).

By October 1832, Landon was increasingly anxious about herself and, like Dora Wordsworth, concerned, also, for the future of the publishing industry:

I believe I have been completely overworked. But nowadays if you do not take instant advantage of anything that may offer [itself] - the opportunity is lost, and there is too little demand for literature, for the loss not to be irreparable. The penny publications affect works far more [than] they do periodicals... It destroys original composition, and I do verily believe in two years time, it will not be worth any bookseller[']s while to publish any original composition.⁸

By the beginning of the 1830s, when even 'the three magical letters "L.E.L."' (Edward Bulwer Lytton quoted in Greer 1996: 267) were no guarantee against the unstoppable commodification of literature, the Lake Poets found it hard to recommend authorship as a legitimate, professional occupation. Many of the aspiring writers who sought Southey's literary patronage, for example, were turned away: when James Dusautoy sought advice on publishing his poems in 1813, Southey advised against it and instead helped secure a place for him to read law at Emmanuel College, Cambridge (C. Southey 1855: 292); and, rather than helping the Yorkshire-born orphan Herbert Knowles to find a publisher in 1816, Southey raised £120 to pay towards the cost of his university tuition, contributing £10 per year for four years himself (C. Southey 1855: 343). 'Herbert Knowles, God help him! thought the sure way to help himself was to write a poem', he explained to Grosvenor Bedford, '... Of course I represented to him the folly of such a scheme...and I now want to secure for him that trifling assistance which may put him in the right path, and give him at least a fair chance of rendering the talents, with which God has endowed him, useful to himself and beneficial to others' (C. Southey 1855: 343).

⁸ 'Letter from Letitia Elizabeth Landon to Anne Eliza Bray', 2 October 1832, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

It was out of genuine concern that Southey did all he could to discourage young men from taking up authorship as their means of financial support. Writing for the *Quarterly Review*, he argued that

It is a difficult as well as a delicate task to advise a youth of ardent mind and aspiring thoughts in the choice of a profession; but a wise man will have no hesitation in exhorting him to choose anything rather than literature. Better that he should seek his fortune before the mast, or with a musket on his shoulder and a knapsack on his back, better that he should follow the plough, or work at the loom or the lathe, or sweat over the anvil, than trust to literature as the only means of his support. (Quoted in Dowden 1909: 97)

For many aspiring writers, however, there was more to authorship than the possibility of financial reward. Many were attracted to its glamour and were, when they failed to realise their dreams, often consumed by their personal ambitions for fame and celebrity; Isaac D'Israeli (Benjamin Disraeli's father) had documented a number of such cases in his *Calamities of the Authors; including some Inquiries respecting their moral and literary Characters* (1812). Reviewing D'Israeli's book for the *Quarterly Review* in 1812, Southey came to the conclusion that:

If indeed an author suffers in his health from his profession, it is because of the foolish habits which he connects with it, or the ill passions which he indulges in it. If he chuses the night for employment and the morning for sleep, he has not even the same excuse that the gambler or the fool of fashion might plead in the same folly. If he feels a feverish anxiety for the success of his works, and disappointment vexes and irritates and grieves him, this also is a folly... (Southey 1812: 100)

For Southey, there were, then, three major reasons as to why the 'wise man will have no hesitation in exhorting [the youth] to choose anything rather than literature'. Firstly, authorship was unlikely to provide the youth with a viable and stable source of income; secondly, those attracted to authorship were often those with a temperament that predisposed them to be much

disappointed and grieved by the failures they would almost inevitably encounter; and, thirdly, there was a danger of mental over-exertion synonymous with choosing 'the night for employment and the morning for sleep'. Southey himself was cautious of overworking and others, too, were quick to remind him of its dangers. In 1819, he received sage advice from Sir Walter Scott: 'He entreats me to take warning, and beware of overworking myself' (C. Southey 1855: 373); in 1833, when he was particularly inundated with work for the second volume of his *Naval History* for Dionysius Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia of Eminent Literary and Scientific Men*, Caroline Bowles gave him advice along similar lines. 'Will you behave better for the future?' she implored,

I mean to yourself and Providence, which has so far, thank God for it, kept you in health and safety, spite of your own endeavours to bring on some horrid seizure, or organic disease of the head (as poor Sir Walter did) by over-writing, over-tension of those precious faculties so dependent in this our imperfect state on the organs of sense. (RSCB: 286)

In his reply to Bowles, Southey gave assurances that he would not overwork:

Do not be apprehensive that I shall ever over-task myself. It was but for three or four days that I sate so closely at my work, and even on those days I never omitted my daily exercise; nor should I have been run so hard had it not been for some previous idleness, most part of which was employed in walking... I am in no danger of being over-wrought, though it is very likely that in a frame so highly sensitive as I know mine to be, the seat of sensation is the part which is most liable to give way. My occupations are far too various for them to be injurious. The injury is where one subject takes possession either of head or heart: in the first case it strains and injures the faculties; in the latter it eats up the affections. Poor Scott employed himself always in one strain of invention, and that of a nature to excite him. (RSCB: 289)

The difficulties of obtaining a stable income from writing, the dangers of being consumed by a desire for literary celebrity and the perils of over-working were not, however, problems that only

men faced, and, at various times, Southey acknowledged that women writers faced identical problems.

Writing a review of *Amir Khan, and other Poems: the Remains of Lucretia Maria Davidson, who died at Plattsburg, N. Y., August 27, 1825, aged Sixteen Years and Eleven Months* (1829) in 1829, Southey provided a sketch of Lucretia Davidson's life. From an early age, she enjoyed 'intellectual and imaginative pursuits' (Southey 1829: 288) and her parents encouraged these activities, even though certain 'friends, as they are called...remonstrated with them on the course they were pursuing in her education, and advised that she should be deprived of books, pen, ink, and paper, and rigorously confined to domestic concerns' (Southey 1829: 291). Although her parents had attempted to keep their friends' advice secret from her, Lucretia soon learnt of it and,

Without declaring any such intention, she gave up her pen and her books, and applied herself exclusively to household business, for several months, till her body as well as her spirits failed. She became emaciated, her countenance bore marks of deep dejection, and often, while actively employed in domestic duties, she could neither restrain nor conceal her tears... On this occasion, Mrs. Davidson acted with equal discretion and tenderness; she advised her to take a middle course, neither to forsake her favourite pursuits, nor devote herself to them, but use them in that wholesome alternation with the everyday business of the world, which is alike salutary for the body and the mind.
(Southey 1829: 292)

Lucretia soon recovered but, in 1824, aged sixteen, she attracted the attention of one well-meaning patron who had her placed at Troy Female Seminary in Plattsburgh:

There, she had all the advantages for which she had hungered and thirsted; and, like one who had long hungered and thirsted, she devoured them with fatal eagerness. Her application was incessant; and its effects on her constitution, already somewhat debilitated by previous disease, became

apparent in increased nervous sensibility... The story of Kirke White should operate not more as an example than a warning; but the example is followed and the warning overlooked. Stimulants are administered to minds which are already in a state of feverish excitement. Hot-beds and glasses are used for plants which can only acquire strength in the shade; and they are drenched with instruction, which ought to 'drop as the rain and distil as the dew...'

(Southey 1829: 297-8)

In Southey's estimation, the intellectual hot-housing Lucretia was subjected to was the principal cause of her tragically early death: 'Gradually sinking under her malady, she passed away on the 28th August 1825, before she had completed her seventeenth year' (Southey 1829: 300).

Had Lucretia's circumstances been different, her biography might have been served up as yet another cautionary tale for young women who wanted to be writers. Yet, although Lucretia's eagerness and incessant application proved 'fatal', her earlier renunciation (resulting as it did in her body and spirits failing, her becoming emaciated, and a deep dejection) might also have proved fatal, it seemed, had it been allowed to go unchecked. Southey was acutely aware of this possibility: 'To those parents who may have the fearful charge of a child like Lucretia Davidson, these memoirs will have a deep and painful interest', he wrote in his conclusion,

They clearly indicate the danger, but afford no clue to the means of averting it. It is as perilous to repress the ardour of such a mind as to encourage it... The difficulty is to indulge such a mind without pampering it; to regulate it, without forcing it from its natural and proper bent. The first step toward this is, that we should ourselves estimate mental endowments not too highly, but at their just worth; and then teach others, in whom the dawn of genius appears, that the gift is not so rare as it has been deemed to be: that it is becoming less so in every generation, because wherever it exists it is now called forth by the wide extension of education (such as it is), and by the general diffusion of books; and that as it becomes common the conventional value which it has hitherto borne will, like that of precious stones, be necessarily abated. This may be a humiliating lesson, but it is a wholesome one; and many there are for whom it will be well if they receive it, and lay it to heart in time. (Southey 1829: 301)

Two years later, in 1831, another writer prompted Southey to be reminded of Lucretia Davidson. That year, he had lent his support to the publication of *Fables and Other Pieces in Verse, by Mary Maria Colling. With some account of the author, in letters to Robert Southey, Esq. Poet Laureate, etc. By Mrs. Bray* (1831). Southey not only helped round up subscribers (including Thomas Croker and Chauncey Hare Townshend) but also wrote a favourable review of Colling's work⁹ in the *Quarterly Review* even though, in some quarters, it was felt that Colling was too trivial a subject for that periodical. Writing from Clare College, Cambridge in 1832, Anna Eliza Bray's nephew, John Kempe, reported that the very prospect of Southey's review had been badly received:

And now, Aunt, I am going to confess a heavy conviction forced upon me by the sifting which Mary Colling has undergone among my Cambridge friends - it is this, that she is not worthy of the *Quarterly* (not that I think now she will get in) nor likely to obtain any reputation beyond the circle of the 'splendid dish'. To me & to those who know her & all about her the book is very interesting, but put it into the hand of an unprejudiced observer & he is sure to call it 'humbug'.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Anna Eliza Bray, was also using her influence to help secure an unduly grand reception for Colling. In 1831, Bray journeyed to London in an attempt to find a publisher for Colling's poetry and, while she was there, she met the literary socialite, Mrs S. C. Hall. Knowing that her husband was the vicar of Tavistock, Mrs Hall approached Bray on behalf of Letitia Elizabeth Landon's younger brother, Whittington (later Dean of Exeter), for a curacy. Mrs Hall and Whittington soon subscribed to Colling's book but, more importantly, so did Landon. There is

⁹ Robert Southey, 'Poetry by Mary Colling', *Quarterly Review* 47(1832), 80-103.

¹⁰ 'Letter from John E. Kempe to Anna Eliza Bray', 3 March 1832, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

no evidence to suggest a direct link between Landon and the review of Colling that appeared in the *Literary Gazette* but, given that Landon was a reviewer for the *Literary Gazette* and well acquainted with its editor, William Jerdan (Lawford 2000: 36), it is most probable that she wrote the review herself. At any rate, Landon was soon able to inform Bray of Jerdan and the *Literary Gazette's* unfailing support: 'Your protégé, Mary Colling, was announced in the "Literary Gazette"', she wrote, 'but Mr. Jerdon advises your not forestalling the contents of the volume by previously publishing any of the poems. He desired his very best compliments, and an assurance that when the work came out, he would do everything he could to forward its interest' (Bray 1884: 237-8).

Considering that Colling was an unknown and uneducated maid-servant from Devonshire, the combined influence of Southey, Bray, Landon and Jerdan was a particularly fine example of the 'puffery' that was commonplace amongst the 1820s' literati. Colling's success, however, seemed to have had a negative bearing on her state of health and, writing to Bray in 1831, Southey expressed his anxieties about this. 'One caution I am led to give by what you say of Mary's health', he wrote,

Nervous as she is, & easily made ill, it will be most desirable to avoid any thing that might be likely strongly to excite a nervous disposition: ...there is great danger of doing this if an expectation is held out in your letters, of her becoming proficient in the art of poetry. That sweet American girl Lucretia Davidson was beyond all doubt killed by excitement of this kind. If she can be provided with books & a wholesome portion of leisure, there is no fear of her failing to make good use of both. But I earnestly hope that she will continue to exercise her gifts for the pure pleasure which she has hitherto taken in exercising them; & not with any view of obtaining celebrity. If that comes, be it welcome! - But to seek it, would be to make herself a prey to hopes & fears & anxieties, which if they did not injure her constitution would destroy her health of mind. - You will not misunderstand me.¹¹

¹¹ 'Letter from Robert Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 14 July 1831, British Library.

Others, too, shared Southey's concerns: 'If Mary Colling, after this glittering introduction and publicity, can continue in her present humble shere (that of a domestic servant), happy, useful, and tranquil as heretofore,' wrote Maria Jane Jewsbury, 'she will be better than a poetess, for she will be almost an angel' (Jewsbury 1831: 762).

Years later, following the death of her employer in 1845, Colling was taken to an asylum¹². The diagnosis of her condition remains unknown but, in all probability, her illness was triggered by her master's heirs being unwilling to keep her on, even though she had faithfully spent a lifetime in their father's service. As Southey's widow, Caroline Bowles, wrote to Anna Eliza Bray to express her sympathy for Mary in her time of crisis: 'Poor, poor Mary Colling! One knows not what to desire for her - so doubtful is it, under her circumstances, whether restored success would be a blessing - or could be permanent'. Yet, even as she expressed her sympathy, Bowles attributed the fragility of Mary's state of health to her earlier literary endeavours:

Dear Mrs Bray [would] you be surprised if I say I was not, or but little so - at what you told me of this poor thing - one of the very, very few subjects on which there was a shade of difference of opinion between my Beloved & me - was in relation to Mary - I could never divest myself of a doubt whether in her station of life, there was not more of damage than promise in a sort of distinction which in a manner isolated her - Such conduct as you describe on the part of her old Master's relatives were too much to be expected - well did Grey write "A favourite has no friend -" and poor Mary's mind had not been

¹² 'Letter from Caroline Bowles Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 7 April 1845, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

preparing for endurance [properly?] by the cultivation of her imaginative faculty - ¹³

Southey was dead by the time Colling's life became marked by unemployment, poverty and mental illness, and his involvement with her, like his interest in Lucretia Davidson, went only so far as to showcase his firm convictions that women were just as susceptible as men to the negative consequences of mental over-exertion and a consuming desire for fame. As far as Southey was concerned, the issue of women actually earning a living from their writing was never raised by the case of either writer. Nevertheless, replying to a letter from the young Charlotte Brontë in 1836, he did acknowledge that the problems faced by aspiring women wishing to become financially independent by writing were also similar to those faced by men:

I, who have made literature my profession, and devoted my life to it, and have never for a moment repented of the deliberate choice, think myself, nevertheless, bound in duty to caution every young man who applies as an aspirant to me for encouragement and advice against taking so perilous a course. You will say that a woman has no need of such a caution; there can be no peril in it for her. In a certain sense this is true; but there is a danger of which I would, with all kindness and all earnestness, warn you. The day dreams in which you habitually indulge are likely to induce a distempered state of mind; and, in proportion as all the ordinary uses of the world seem to you flat and unprofitable, you will be unfitted for them without becoming fitted for anything else. Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. (Gaskell 1987: 172-173)

This last sentence, taken out of context, has been one of the principal causes of Southey's critical neglect. In 1967, Winifred Gerin, in her biography of Charlotte Brontë, melodramatically depicted Southey's letter as 'the bitter potion swallowed' (Gerin 1967: 111). Twenty years later, Rebecca

¹³ 'Letter from Caroline Bowles Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 1 April 1845, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

Fraser's biography of Brontë was only slightly less harsh; for Fraser, Southey was only 'expressing the general nineteenth-century view of women, which was only very slowly being undermined among a few enlightened critics by the time of Charlotte Brontë's death' (Fraser 1988: 110). Fraser was thankful, all the same, that 'Southey's words did not stop the dream continuing' (Fraser 1988: 112).

Too explosively provocative to be restricted to Brontë studies alone, Southey's 'business of a woman's life' quotation became, for many feminist critics, 'the key expression to cultural misogyny' (Clarke 1990: 65), a trend which culminated in 1995 when the University of Sheffield staged a conference entitled 'Literature: a woman's business'. Designed to repudiate the misogynist claims that Southey's letter was thought to have contained, neither the conference nor the book that stemmed from it¹⁴ ever stopped to consider what it was that Southey had actually been trying to say.

Far from being 'still a misogynist at heart' (Jones 1998: 226) who believed in the 'simple and uncontested fact that "literature is not," as he would later tell Charlotte Brontë, "the business of a woman's life"' (Mudge 1989: 38), Southey clearly sought in his letter only to warn Charlotte Brontë, as he had done many others, of the general perils of authorship, particularly those related to making it one's 'business', that is to say, one's sole source of income, one's 'profession'¹⁵.

In his letter, Southey explains that he advises 'every young man' against 'taking so perilous a course' as making authorship their profession. He then anticipates that Brontë will think of this 'peril' in purely financial terms and, as such, it will be one by which she, as a woman, will not be endangered: 'You will say that a woman has no need of such a caution', he writes,

¹⁴ Judy Simons and Kate Fulbrook, eds. *Writing: a Woman's Business: Women, Writing and the Marketplace* (1998).

¹⁵ Writing to C. W. W. Wynn in 1818, Southey uses the word 'business' in the sense of 'profession', referring to the 'One happy choice...I made when I betook myself to literature as my business in life' (C. Southey 1855: 367).

'there can be no peril in it for her'. Southey concedes that, on a financial level, Brontë might be right ('In a certain sense this is true'), but goes on to remind her of the more hidden dangers of being consumed by 'day dreams' of fame and celebrity that 'are likely to induce a distempered state of mind' and make 'all the ordinary uses of the world seem...flat and unprofitable'. Never does Southey imply that these 'day dreams' are specific to Brontë as a woman, and never is he so patronising as to assert that they are indicative of whatever feminine frailty she might possess, as a massive corpus of feminist criticism would have us believe. Indeed, writing this part of the letter, Southey may have been thinking specifically of the very similar advice Sir Walter Scott had offered James Dusautoy in 1811:

I would caution you against an enthusiasm which, while it argues an excellent disposition and feeling heart, requires to be watched and restrained, though not repressed. It is apt, if too much indulged, to engender a fastidious contempt for the ordinary business of the world, and gradually to render us unfit for the exercise of useful and domestic virtues, which depends greatly upon our not exalting our feelings above the temper of well-ordered and well-educated society. No good man can ever be happy when he is unfit for the career of simple and common-place duty. (Quoted in C. Southey 1855: 292n)

Or perhaps Southey knew of Wordsworth's 1828 letter to the aspiring poet, Robert Cotton Money: 'I should have no scruple in encouraging you to write,' Wordsworth had written, 'were I convinced that Poetry co[u]ld be followed by you, without encroaching too much upon your time, and a risk of dispositions being generated by the practice of the art which might make business distasteful to you' (WL: VIII.194).

Whatever his sources, Southey, by the end of his of his letter, went as far as to profess not a gendered difference, but a strong affinity to Brontë: 'It is not because I have forgotten that I was once young myself, that I write to you in this strain', he wrote, 'but because I remember it' (Gaskell 1987: 173).

While Southey appreciated that the problems associated with writing (over-exertion, being consumed by a desire for fame, the difficulties of making money) were largely the same for women as they were for men, what he perhaps had less awareness of was the limited number of alternatives towards which the female 'youth of ardent mind' could direct her energies. In her last article for her *Athenaeum* series 'On Modern Female Cultivation', Maria Jane Jewsbury¹⁶ declared that:

The great misfortune...that lies in the path of highly-cultivated women, is the absence of active occupation for her mental energy, which, when combined with ambition, as it too generally is, lays waste and consumes them. Men have professions and offices; to them belong, of right and courtesy, all the activities and authorities of life. Authorship is the only accredited vent for a woman's intellect. (Jewsbury 1832: 521)

For Jewsbury, the fact that authorship was the 'only accredited vent for a woman's intellect' made it not so much a liberating experience in which women could participate in something hitherto dominated by men, but made it, instead, a poignant reminder of women's lack of access to legitimate 'professions and offices':

The constant cry of all young imaginative minds, is, 'What shall I do to be for ever known?' but her next is, if a female, 'there is nothing for women to do.' She feels in the position of Esau: man has taken the birthright; and she fancies that for her no blessing is left. Those who would comfort the grieving enthusiast by pointing out literary fame, would act neither wisely nor kindly: few of the many who feel the yearning are equal to the attainment of that fame. (Jewsbury 1832: 521)

¹⁶ I agree with Norma Clarke's assertion that the anonymous *Athenaeum* articles 'On Modern Female Cultivation' were written by Jewsbury (Clarke 1990: 94).

Not only, then, was authorship a sorry consolation in making up for women's lack of other 'professions and offices', it was largely a false consolation, seeing that 'literary fame' was something only 'few of the many who feel the yearning' would ever be able even to glimpse.

The young aspiring writers of the 1820s and 30s faced, though, an even greater problem than the sheer number of other writers they had to compete with. With a literary marketplace highly focused on satisfying an apparently insatiable demand for formulaic, anodyne literature, more challenging writers, who were perhaps worthy of distinction, often failed to sell, assuming that they were taken up by publishers at all; achieving literary fame by producing the kind of undifferentiated writing demanded by the marketplace proved a struggle, if not altogether impossible. 'Surely, in this day, when there is not a *writing* poet worth a sixpence, the field must be open, if a better man can step forward', (Gaskell 1987: 168) complained Branwell Brontë in 1837 in a letter to Wordsworth; only, what Branwell Brontë had failed to realise was that publishers hadn't even been looking for 'a better man', only those who could competently duplicate what was already selling. The 1820s and 30s were, then, harsh times for the 'better man' as far as authorship was concerned but, as a closer look at the period will show, they were even worse for the better woman.

In *Four Ages of Poetry*, Thomas Love Peacock declared that contemporary poetry had declined to the lowest 'age of brass':

To some such perversion of intellect we owe that egregious confraternity of rhymesters, known by the name of the Lake Poets; who certainly did receive and communicate to the world some of the most extraordinary poetical impressions that ever were heard of, and ripened into models of public virtue, too splendid to need illustration. They wrote verses on a new principle; saw rocks and rivers in a new light; and remaining studiously ignorant of history,

society, and human nature, cultivated the phantasy only at the expence of the memory and the reason; and contrived, though they had retreated from the world for the express purpose of seeing nature as she was, to see her only as she was not, converting the land they lived in into a sort of fairy-land, which they peopled with mysticisms and chimaeras. This gave what is called a new tone to poetry, and conjured up a herd of desperate imitators, who have brought the age of brass prematurely to its dotage. (Peacock 1820: 196)

For Peacock, the Lake Poets and their imitators lacked an understanding of 'history, society and human nature', as well as 'the memory and the reason'. In failing to be socially relevant, poetry had become profoundly useless, he argued. There were, of course, counter-arguments pitched against Peacock and his sympathisers. In Shelley's hands, poets became the 'unacknowledged legislators of the World' ('Defence of Poetry') and the words of the greatest poets became 'electric life' that belonged solely to the 'spirit of their age' ('A Philosophical View of Reform'); Hazlitt, meanwhile, asserted that the Lake Poets and other writers were an integral part of the *Spirit of the Age* (1825).

So successful were these counter-arguments about the 'spirit of the age', that it is hard, now, to think of the formation of the modern literary canon, set in motion as a direct result of these discussions, as being the product of a defensive strategy, deployed by writers in order to preserve literature's cultural importance. Moreover, especially after literary critics, from the 1840s onwards, adopted into their vocabulary the German counterpart-notion of *zeitgeist*, it is difficult, too, to think about the 'spirit of the age' in a context other than that of literary or cultural studies. Shelley, Hazlitt and subsequent literary writers were so complete in their appropriation of the 'spirit of the age' discourse that one easily forgets that it did not have its origins in literary criticism but in political unrest.

Characterised by the rise of Chartism and heated debate about Reform, punctuated by events such as the Swing Riots, the massacre at Peterloo and the case of the Tolpuddle martyrs, England in the 1820s and 30s was, to use David Butts's phrase, the very 'picture of a society on the edge of catastrophe' (Butts 1997: 161-2). When most people thought of the 'spirit of the age',

it was this uneasy political climate rather than the literary 'spirit of the age' of Shelley and Hazlitt, that sprang to mind: 'That which, in the slang of faction, is called the Spirit of the Age, absorbs, at present, the attention of the world', wrote Henry Crabb Robinson in 1830, 'All confess its omnipotence, advise submission to it, and proclaim that it will produce, at least, a season of chaos and horrors; even its worshippers assert that it must carry sweeping revolution into every quarter, which can only be prevented from taking the most fatal character by such concessions, as in the nature of things are impossible' (*Blackwood's* 1830: 900).

In choosing to appropriate such a well-established political discourse, Shelley and Hazlitt had, in part at least, hoped to colour literature with the social relevance that Peacock had found so wanting. The effect of their efforts did not stop at Peacock, however. In taking over the 'spirit of the age' for literary ends, Shelley and Hazlitt also sought to deflect attention away from the political scene and back onto literature; for, with the world's attention fixed on the emergent spirit of revolution, no-one, it seemed, had either the time, or the inclination, to take literature seriously.

It is difficult to gauge exactly the effect contemporary politics had on the sale and popularity of literary works in the 1820s and 30s. The Lake Poets themselves seemed reluctant to comment on any relationship that may have existed between the two, perhaps because it might have seemed callous to complain about declining sales figures in the wake of revolution. In one letter to Caroline Bowles, Southey (himself an active supporter of Reform) was happy to go from discussing how 'persons who purchased books can no longer afford to do so' (RSCB: 199) in one paragraph to explaining, in the next, how '[p]ublic affairs were never so fearful, to those who have eyes to see, and hearts to reason with' (RSCB: 199). Southey stopped short, however, of drawing an explicit link between the two. His publisher, John Murray, was, though, less scrupulous, as Southey explained in a letter to Anna Eliza Bray after the late publication of his two volume *Essays, moral and political* (1832):

It was his [Murray's] fault that the *Essays* did not appear much sooner. He has been urged to let me collect them for more than seven years. They went

to the press in November 1830 & might have been out in the ensuing spring: but as soon as the letters to Lord Byron were introduced he delayed them in the press, upon the pretext that the papers on the Catholic question would ruin the sale of the volume. And when that objection was [put down?] & the book ready, he kept it back from publication about three months for no possible reason (being the very best months for publication) except that he apprehended it might produce some effect in checking the sale of his complete edition of Lord Byron's work. - filth - blasphemy & all. However, he is as much to be pitied as condemned; I fear he is deplorably embarrassed, & this edition has been a desperate throw in the hope of retrieving his fortune at the cost of his character.¹⁷

If Southey's letter to Caroline Bowles intimates, at all, about how the declining sale of books was directly related to the fearfulness of public affairs, Murray's actions reveal another side of the equation. While Murray's true motivations for delaying the publication of Southey's work may have largely been connected to his concerns for the success of his edition of Byron, the questions he raises about the political sensitivity of Southey's Catholic Question essays do, nevertheless, draw upon a real, if somewhat exaggerated reluctance to engage with the contemporary political scene. The literature of the 1820s and 30s was, it appears, trapped in a double bind: on the one hand, political affairs worried the public too much for them to be entertained by books; on the other, publishers like Murray, already 'desperate' and in need of 'retrieving [their] fortune', were unsure of printing anything that might be politically contentious for fear that it would not sell.

Whatever the finer nuances of the relationship, at least one writer felt that the state of political flux in 1820s and 30s England had a definite, negative effect on the sale of books. With far less personal investment in political affairs, and far less reserve than Southey when it came to discussing such matters, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, writing to Anna Eliza Bray in 1831, openly

¹⁷ 'Letter from Robert Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 14 July 1832, MS Facs 615 unbound, 1831-1839, British Library.

complained about the impact of politics on the literary marketplace: 'Everything is absorbed in politics,' she wrote, 'no works sell, and nothing is talked about but reform'¹⁸.

Not wishing to alienate what was, apparently, a diminishing audience, literature in the 1820s and 30s increasingly defined itself against the public sphere of political debate, turning its attention, instead, to the private sphere of 'peaceful domestic values, idyllic intimacy, lack of passion, coziness, [and] contentedness' (Nemoianu 1984: 4). Looking mournfully on in *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge commented on the very beginnings of this marked shift in focus:

For as to the devotees of the circulating libraries, I dare not compliment their *pass-time*, or rather *kill-time*, with the name of *reading*. Call it rather a sort of beggarly day-dreaming, during which the mind of the dreamer furnishes for itself nothing but laziness, and a little mawkish sensibility... We should therefore transfer this species of *amusement*...from the genus, *reading*, to that comprehensive class characterised by the power of reconciling two contrary yet co-existing propensities of human nature, namely, indulgence of sloth, and hatred of vacancy. In addition to novels and tales of chivalry in prose or rhyme (by which last I mean neither rhythm nor metre) this genus comprises as its species, gaming, swinging, or swaying on a chair or gate; spitting over a bridge...conning word by word all the advertisements of the daily advertiser in a public house on a rainy day, etc. etc. etc. (Coleridge 1997: 32n)

The consequences of Shelley and Hazlitt's attempts to re-inscribe importance onto literature would become apparent later on in the nineteenth century but, taking its cue from the scrapbooks, visitors' albums and commonplace books that bourgeois girls and unmarried women had often entertained themselves by making, the literature of the 1820s and 30s became firmly bound by an aesthetic of domestic innocuousness. Emma Woodhouse's collection of riddles, 'a thin quarto of

¹⁸ 'Letter from Letitia Elizabeth Landon to Anna Eliza Bray', 31 December 1831, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

hot-pressed paper...ornamented with ciphers and trophies' (Austen [1816]1995: 55), was Jane Austen's nod of acknowledgement to this pastime but the best and most ambitious example of it was Dora Wordsworth's album that, as well as all the Lake Poets, included original contributions from Felicia Hemans, Walter Scott, Matthew Arnold and Alfred Tennyson (Morley 1924: 3).

So pervasive was the influence of these homely productions that even the annuals, ironically the most professional and ruthlessly managed publications to date, took their winning formula from them, as is clearly indicated, for example, by Montgomery's poem, 'The First Leaf of an Album' (printed in the 1829 edition of *Friendship's Offering*), or the title of *Fisher's Drawing-Room Scrapbook* annual, edited by Landon in the 1830s.

Given the vogue amongst the book industry for this peculiar quasi-amateurishness, it is hardly surprising that the literary marketplace of the 1820s and 30s came to be dominated by women writers. 'Indeed,' wrote Maria Jane Jewsbury in 1825, 'authorship has become such a mere everyday occupation, for mere every-day people...your youngest daughter may, unknown to you, write all the poetry for a magazine, besides having a volume of "Fragments in prose and verse"' (Jewsbury 1825: 3). For Jewsbury (writing in *Phantasmagoria*, her own debut 'volume of "Fragments in prose and verse"'), the sheer number of women publishing was not, in itself, a cause for celebration; the distinctly unliterary quality of their productions was, however, a cause for concern. Reviewing Joanna Baillie's *The Nature and Dignity of Christ* in 1831, she bitterly contrasted contemporary women writers with those of the 1790s:

[T]hose who have not perused their writings in connexion, will hardly believe how great is the difference... Amongst the elders...the distinguishing features are nerve, simplicity, vigour, continuity, and good English. We find also elaborate and skilfully-developed plots. Amongst our distinguished women of later date, we find accomplishment, grace, brilliancy, sentiment, scenery poetically sketched, and character acutely handled; talent in all shapes and ways, but not so much that can claim the name of genius... In the female poetry too of the present day, fascinating tenderness, brilliancy of fancy, and beauty of feeling, stand in the place of sustained loftiness of imagination, and

compact artist-like diction. Our elderly literary women, were, in the spirit of their intellect, more essentially masculine; our younger ones integrally feminine - women of fashionable as well as studious life, women generally, who not only write books but abound in elegant accomplishments. (Jewsbury 1831: 337)

In Jewsbury's estimation, the very act of writing for publication had become an innocuous pastime, just one of many 'elegant accomplishments' in which a young woman might harmlessly indulge. Her use of the word 'accomplishment' is not incidental, however. In describing women's writing in terms of accomplishment, Jewsbury intimates that women's writing was an activity stifled and constrained, very specifically, by a distinct cultural ideology of the period.

In early nineteenth-century England, the idea of accomplishment was central to debates about female education. In her chapter 'On Female Accomplishments, Masters, and Governesses' in *Practical Education* (1798), Maria Edgeworth argued that accomplishments, such as dancing, drawing and playing piano, were to be whole-heartedly fostered:

Women are peculiarly restrained in their situation, and in their employments, by the customs of society: to diminish the number of these employments, therefore, would be cruel; they should rather be encouraged, by all means, to cultivate those tastes which can attach them to their home, and which can preserve them from the miseries of dissipation. Every sedentary occupation must be valuable to those who are to lead sedentary lives; and every art, however trifling in itself, which tends to enliven and embellish domestic life, must be advantageous, not only to the female sex, but to society in general. As far as accomplishments can contribute to all or any of these excellent purposes, they must be just objects of attention in early education. (Edgeworth 1801: III.7)

While this view may appear sober and conservative, it should be remembered that Edgeworth wrote in opposition to the more common consensus that claimed that accomplishments were

'supposed to increase a young lady's chance of a prize in the matrimonial lottery' (Edgeworth 1801: III.6):

"A young lady," they say, "is nobody, and nothing, without accomplishments; they are as necessary to her as a fortune: they are indeed considered as part of her fortune, and sometimes are even found to supply the place of it. Next to beauty, they are the best tickets of admission into society which she can produce; and every body knows, that on the company she keeps depends the chance of a young woman's settling advantageously in the world." (Edgeworth 1801: III.11)

Despite her efforts, Edgeworth never did overturn the conventional wisdom of what she disparagingly called 'the cabinet council of mothers' (Edgeworth 1801: III.11) and books such as John Williams's *Youth's virtuous guide: a treatise on dancing and on various other matters which are connected with that accomplishment* (1818), or John Armstrong's *The young woman's guide to virtue, economy and happiness... the whole combining all that is essential to the attainment of every domestic elegant and intellectual accomplishment* (1817, rpt. 1825) grew more popular than ever.

In due course, accomplishments threatened to replace more substantial and more rigorous forms of female education altogether. '[T]he young girl...is taught to believe that solid information is unbecoming to her sex; almost her whole time is expended on light accomplishments,' wrote Harriet Martineau in her essay 'On Female Education' (1822), 'and thus before she is sensible of her powers, they are checked in their growth, chained down to mean objects, to rise no more' (Jump 1997: 138). In her popular conduct book, *The Women of England, their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839), Mrs Ellis laid out a set of corrective measures with which to overcome the negative effects of society's obsession with 'useless accomplishments' (Ellis 1839: 77). While one might wisely question the relevance to women's education of 'the art of engraving, which might very properly call into exercise the taste and

ingenuity of the female sex, without taxing too severely their mental or bodily powers' (Ellis 1839: 346), Ellis does, in her final chapter, incisively point out the superficiality of accomplishment learning:

It appears to me, in looking abroad upon society, and contemplating the immense variety of mental attainments which prevail amongst the young women of the present day, that they are in imminent danger of supposing, when they have acquired a vast amount of verbal knowledge, that the great work of education is done. They are, in short, in danger of mistaking the means for the end; and of resting satisfied that they are wiser than the generation before them...

Our young ladies are made acquainted while at school, with the dates of most of the leading events of history, with the years when certain kings began to reign, and the precise time of their holding the reins of government. The various devices for impressing these events upon their recollection, are no less ingenious than commendable; but could any plan be adopted for enabling them to draw conclusions from such facts, to compare historical events with each other, to trace the progress of civilization, and to ascertain what circumstances have most invariably led to the rise or the fall of different empires - instead of being confined to isolated facts, their conversation would then be fraught with the richer burden of those important truths, for which history supplies nothing more than illustration. (Ellis 1839: 335-6)

Jewsbury, following Martineau and anticipating Ellis, also found accomplishment learning to be, for all its 'verbal knowledge', an ultimately vacuous form of education:

[N]ever were our women so - accomplished. We do not limit this term to music, dancing, and drawing: by accomplished, we mean that peculiar mental elegance which is the real or supposed result of much tuition, some travel, and great intercourse with society. Accomplishment is the intellectual shadow of an intellectual substance; it is not attainments, not science, not even knowledge in its simple form, but the combined phantasm of it all; it is less a

cultivation of understanding than a preparation for society, a fashioner of deportment, and a teacher of conversation. (Jewsbury 1832: 79)

The accomplishment system of education was nothing less than intellectual corsetry. Affected, showy and insubstantial, accomplishments were less than useless because, in allowing girls who had them to think themselves educated, they blocked out even the possibility of other, more 'solid' forms of education:

Amongst the highly-finished young women who have past eight or nine years as the recipients of tuition, how many shall we find who have thought out for themselves a single thought, or have any notion of the value of knowledge beyond the mere credit of possessing it? ... [W]e cultivate our women to the highest pitch that can make them fascinating, with a careful abstinence from that which would make them wise. We overlay the idol with gold, but should grieve if a Prometheus gave it life... Is the painted, gilded, varnished thing which we call education, and which some call over-education, worth presenting to the minds and hearts of a race of beings as influential as women? (Jewsbury 1832: 95)

And, although authorship may have been the 'only accredited vent for a woman's intellect' (Jewsbury 1832: 521), it, too, failed to escape the restricting parameters, invisibly set out by notions of accomplishment. 'Literary knowledge...in men, is often an indispensable duty', remarked Anna Barbauld in her essay 'On Female Studies' (1826), 'in women it can be only a desirable accomplishment' (Jump 1997: 159). Later in her essay, Barbauld goes on to explain to her female readers that 'all in general that is comprised under the term of polite literature, lie particularly open, and you cannot neglect them without neglecting a very copious source of enjoyment' (Jump 1997: 159). Commenting obliquely on the ubiquity of the annuals, Ellis also considered reading in terms of accomplishment:

We have probably all seen elegant and accomplished young ladies doing the honours of the house to their guests, by spreading before them that lavish profusion of books and pictures, with which every table of every drawing-room is, in these modern times, adorned. We have heard them expatiate with taste and enthusiasm upon the works of art, upon the beauties of foreign scenery, and the delights of travelling abroad; while the mother is simultaneously engaged in superintending the management of the viands about to be spread before the company, or in placing the last leaf of garniture around the dessert, upon which her daughters have never condescended to bestow a thought. (Ellis 1839: 243)

Barbauld and Ellis are, admittedly, concerned with reading rather than writing but, so innocuous had literature become by the 1820s and 30s, that the two activities were soon conflated, as Sara Coleridge's comments on women's poetry indicate:

As for poetry, in the strict sense of the word, I cannot think that any woman of the present day, whose productions I have seen, has furnished the genuine article from her brain-warehouse, except Mrs Joanna Baillie. I have read many of Mrs. Hemans' most mature productions with a due degree of attention. I think them interesting, full of poetical feeling, displaying much accomplishment, and a very general acquaintance with poetry, and some proficiency in the art of versifying... Of poetical imagination, it appears to me that a very small portion is to be found in the works of Mrs. Hemans. Yet this lady has given delight to thousands by her verses; and they must have been seen as the source of great delight and improvement to herself. Just as I would have any one learn music who has an opportunity, though few can be composers, or even performers of great merit, I would have any one, who really and truly has leisure and ability, make verses. I think it a more refining and happy-making occupation than any other pastime-accomplishment. (E. Coleridge 1874: I.128)

Returning, then, to the earlier observation that the women writers of the 1820s were 'women generally, who not only write books but abound in elegant accomplishments', we find Jewsbury

not simply describing the recreational habits of her contemporaries, but intimating, also, that women's writing had become superficial and useless, boxed in, as it was, by a cultural ideology of accomplishment. And, although accomplishment was a heavily gendered term, more often used with regard to women than to men, male writers were, by no means, exempt from the problems that writing for a culture of accomplishment raised. It was, after all, the accomplishment aesthetic that Wordsworth struggled with when it came to writing for the *Keepsake*, as Sara Coleridge's reaction to his longest contribution, 'Triad', indicated. As Aubrey de Vere recalled, 'No one could be a true Wordsworthian, she maintained, who admired so much some of his later poems, his poems of accomplishment, such as the 'Triad'. It implied a disparagement of his earlier poems, such as 'Resolution and Independence,' in which the genuine Wordsworthian inspiration, and that alone, uttered itself!' (E. Coleridge 1873: 1.50-1)

If the popular writers of the 1820s (whom Wordsworth wrote his 'poems of accomplishment' in imitation of) were themselves writing a literature of accomplishment, they were also reinforcing and helping to disseminate accomplishment values. For Jewsbury, this was most apparent in their representations of women:

[A]midst all the bevvies of angels they have drawn, how passing few of them have been rational creatures; their heroines have mainly become such personifications of tears, love, death, poetry, and helplessness, that an honest man, linked to such in real life, would surely be at his wits' ends before the end of the honey-moon... Examine the whole range of imaginative literature... has it done justice to, has it benefited WOMEN? We trow not. They have received from poetry and fiction lip homage and knee reverence, adulation, incense, every concomitant of idol-worship, with *only* the absence of fervent rational respect. The process of degradation has taken the semblance of adoration; compliments to their love has veiled contempt of their understanding - for one female portrait that society would be benefited by its having life, how many hundreds have we who would only be less intensely, ethereally useless than the ghost of a rose or the phantasm of a lily.
(Jewsbury 1832: 95-96)

The decline of literature as identified by Peacock and the Lake Poets, the inadequacy of female education and the implications of this for women's writing, were not, then, distinctly separate issues but complexly interrelated, as Jewsbury herself would argue:

Re-asserting that female cultivation will accord with the predominant masculine taste, the existing era cannot be passed without remark. What are the most intellectual possessions now most in vogue, most marketable, and soonest recognized? General knowledge - versatility - and, both in writing and conversation, "the gift of utterance." What most strikingly characterizes our literature? Universal inquiry, and universal readiness at meeting inquiry; or, to venture description by an epithet, and that a coined one, our literature is encyclopaedic - a brief description of all things - a colloquial commentary on whatsoever is, has been, or is to come. To this, female cultivation affords a precise parallel, for never were our women so - accomplished... were a census taken of all the educated women under thirty, the result would justify our calling the present THE ERA OF ACCOMPLISHED WOMEN... (Jewsbury 1832: 79)

With literary representations of women, women's writing, women readers, and, also, women as the purchasers, providers and recipients of accomplishment tuition, forming so significant a cultural nexus in the period, the Lake Poets, hoping that literature in the 1820s and 30s might be rescued from further degradation, could not but take an active interest in certain young, aspiring women writers who looked set to challenge and break the mould of accomplishment literature. To these select writers, the Lake Poets offered their expertise and influence: they offered suggestions for new projects; they helped with proof-reading; found them publishers; and wholeheartedly recommended them to their friends and the reading public at large. This thesis

explores, in turn, the lives and works of four of these protégées, namely Caroline Bowles, Maria Gowen Brooks, Sara Coleridge and Maria Jane Jewsbury.

Chapter 2: Caroline Bowles

'Of the Selections which have been made from the chaos of our past Poetry, the majority has been confined almost entirely to the writings of men', wrote Alexander Dyce in his anthology, *Specimens of British Poetesses* (1825), 'and from the great Collections of English Poets, where so many worthless compositions find a place, the productions of women have been carefully excluded. The small quantity of female effusions, and their concealment in obscure publications, have perhaps contributed to this neglect; and the object of the present volume is to exhibit the growth and progress of the genius of our country-women in the department of Poetry' (Dyce 1827: i).

Writing for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* a decade later in 1837, John Wilson ('Christopher North') was only semi-sympathetic towards Dyce's 'tedious chase through the jungles of forgotten literature' (Dyce 1826: i) in pursuit of 'female effusions'. While Dyce aimed to present a tradition of women's poetry that stretched unbroken from Juliana Berners in the fifteenth century to Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Wilson preferred to regard women's poetry as a newly emergent tradition; his own age, he argued, was unique in English literary history since, for the first time, '[woman's] genius has gradually risen with the opportunities which facilitated its ascent... Probably, till we come near our own times,' he writes, 'there is but little of what one would call poetry' (Wilson 1837: 404).

At the same time that he dismissed the work of Dyce's earlier poetesses as 'not poetry' (Wilson 1837: 404), Wilson also questioned the primacy of high Romantic aesthetics in the emergent poetical canon:

Why should we always be desiring Fancy, Imagination, Passion, Intellect, Power, in Poetry, as if these were essential to it, and none were poets but those gifted with "the vision and the faculty divine?" Surely the pure expression of pure thoughts and feelings - the staple of common life -- if imbued with a certain sweetness of soul-felt sound beyond that of ordinary speech - coloured, if that image please you better, with a somewhat greener light than is usual to our eyes -- *is* poetry. Surely they who are moved so to commune with their own hearts, or with the hearts of them they love - since forms and hues of sentiment are thus produced that else had not been - *are* poets. (Wilson 1837: 404)

Perhaps it was because his own work was unkindly reviewed as the work of 'a *female* Wordsworth...without riches or strength of imagination' (quoted in Morrison 2000) that Wilson, fervent admirer of Wordsworth though he was, felt compelled to broaden the definition of poetry, beyond its increasingly canonical high Romantic sensibilities, to include other styles and subjects favoured by himself and many women writers. Whatever his motivations, Wilson demanded that his readers regard the 1820s and 30s as an under-acknowledged hotbed of women's literary creativity. And, to prove his point, he flagged up one of the first writers to emerge from this hotbed, a 'fairer spirit' than any found in Dyce's anthology: his fellow *Blackwood's* contributor, Caroline Bowles. Bowles's autobiographical epic poem, *The Birth-Day* (1836), was, he considered, nothing less than 'the autobiography of the childhood of Genius' (Wilson 1837: 409) and, in his opinion, 'equal...to any thing of the kind in our modern poetry' (Wilson 1837: 426).

The Birth-Day, published in 1836, was, in many ways, the crowning achievement of Bowles's career. For her, though, it was as much a private triumph as it was a public one. In order to understand Bowles's achievement more fully, we must look to her life-story that she refused to give us, even in her autobiographical epic: 'My autobiography would not be unentertaining,' she wrote in 1828, 'but I will take special care not to favour the public with it' (RSCB: 135).

Caroline Bowles was born in Hampshire in 1786. Her father died in 1801 and her mother died in 1817. Within a year of her mother's death, a 'very sudden reverse of fortune' (RSCB: 2) left her, aged 32, with no source of income and little in the way of money, save for that tied up in her home, Buckland Cottage. Unwilling to sell her house and yet desperate for money, she wrote to Southey:

I am startled at my own temerity, in venturing to approach Mr. Southey with a request which yet emanates from the very reverse of a presumptuous feeling with a request that he will charitably devote some leisure hour to the perusal of the manuscript which accompanies this petition, the contents of which I scarcely venture to dignify with the title poem... A very sudden reverse of fortune, occasioned by the unfaithful conduct of a person who had acted as my guardian, threatens to deprive me of a house most dear to me from infancy. I am still struggling to retain it, and would, if possible, obtain from my own efforts some trifling pecuniary assistance, which, in its most limited extent, would be of temporary convenience to me, and might thus contribute to my grand desideratum, that of continuing to live where I have lived so happily. (RSCB: 1-2)

Caroline's letter, sent care of Longman & Co. publishers, lay untouched for a number of days at their London office on Paternoster Row, before being collected up, with the rest of Southey's letters and parcels, to begin its eighteen day wagon journey to the Lake District. Receiving the letter in May 1818, almost a month after it had been written, Southey, sensing the urgency of Caroline's situation, replied immediately to explain the harsh realities of the publishing industry:

The success of a poem, indeed of any composition whatsoever, does not depend upon its merit - or less upon its merit than upon any other cause. Of

the volumes of poetry which are published, not one in twenty - perhaps I might say in fifty - pays the expense of publication, though there is not one of the whole number which would not have excited attention and secured remuneration to the author had it been published thirty years ago. No persons, therefore, should risk the publication of a poem on their own account unless the sacrifice of the money so expended were a matter of indifference. For the same reason booksellers will not purchase poetry, unless from some writer who is in vogue... Booksellers are not the most liberal, nor the most amiable of men. They are necessarily *tradesmen*; and a constant attention to profit and loss is neither wholesome for the heart nor the understanding.
(RSCB: 5)

Southey's advice was as pragmatic as it was succinct: Caroline had written to him in the hope of obtaining 'pecuniary assistance' from her poetry; he, in turn, had sent her a fair if somewhat bleak estimation of her chances of success. Estimating that only one in fifty published volumes of poetry ever paid the expense of publication, Southey went on to tentatively suggest that a novel might be better suited than a long poem for earning money: 'It is provoking to think', he wrote, 'that if the same powers had been displayed in prose, instead of verse, in a novel instead of a poem, there would have been little or no doubt of finding a publisher; for let the supply of novels be what it will, the demand is sure to outrun it' (RSCB: 6).

What was most significant to Caroline, however, was not that Southey divulged truths that were already commonplace to everyone connected to the publishing industry, but that he offered, in his very first letter, to become her mentor. Despite feeling that her poem was too melancholy ('I do not like such poems,' he explained, 'because I am old enough to avoid all unnecessary pain' (RSCB: 6)), Southey nevertheless found, in her work, 'a great deal of beauty...a womanly fluency, a womanly sweetness, a womanly truth and tenderness of feeling which I have enough of my mother in me to understand' (RSCB: 6). Struck by these qualities, he offered to proof read for her, to contact a publisher on her behalf and to give her suggestions for future projects. 'I wish I were near enough now to see and converse with you', he wrote,

It is in planning a work that advice is useful; a single remark may then induce an author to avoid a fault which cannot afterwards be got rid of by any laborious correction. I do not mean to say that this poem has such faults: a few verbal alterations are all I should suggest here, and a few omissions where they can be made without injury, chiefly for the sake of shortening it, because I foresee that its length will be a bookseller's objection. But to the point: if you think it proper, I will write to Murray and ask him whether he will publish it; this I would wish you to consider as extremely doubtful; but if the application fails, it will not be for any want of warmth and sincerity in the recommendation. And if it should fail, you must not be discouraged, but turn your thoughts to something else, in prose or verse, in which, if I can assist you by any advice, or direct you to any subjects which carry with them some attraction, I shall be very happy to show that you have not honoured with your confidence one who is unfeeling, and therefore unworthy of it. (RSCB: 5-6)

Caroline replied to accept Southey's generous offer immediately. 'How willingly will I accept your offer!' she wrote,

How thankfully shall I avail myself of your directions to alter or curtail, and how eager should I be to claim your future advice and the guidance of your judgment, if I felt a hope of being able to profit by it; but I mistrust myself too entirely. Poor as are my powers of composition in verse, I should find it still more difficult to write in prose; and for a novel! I could as easily compose a treatise on chemistry. See on what a feeble and poorly-gifted mind you would bestow the honour of your encouragement. (RSCB: 8)

Caroline's self-deprecating comments stem partly from her sense of modesty and etiquette and partly, also, from the overwhelming feeling of awe that she felt when writing to so respected a literary figure as Southey. Beneath all the modesty, etiquette and awe, however, lay a genuine sense of inadequacy and failure. Addressing Southey's criticism that her poem had been too melancholy for his taste, Caroline, by her second letter, was already prepared to disclose something intensely personal that had dominated, and would continue to dominate her life. 'I entirely agree with you', she wrote,

we need not create for ourselves fictitious griefs; life has too many real sorrows; but the mind recently afflicted colours everything with its own sadness. I wrote under such impressions, oppressed besides by the languor of a very trying nervous disorder. These circumstances may excuse me.
(RSCB: 8)

In writing about 'real sorrows' and recent afflictions, Caroline probably referred to the death of her mother but she may also have been thinking of a number of other deaths in the family: the death of her cousins, Paul and John Burrard, in 1809; the death of a third cousin, William Burrard, in 1813; and, in the same year, the death of her uncle, Sir Harry Burrard. Caroline's 'very trying nervous disorder' was, however, a more long-standing trial. In another letter to Southey, she would explain that, at its worst,

It is an almost total loss of memory, a confusion of ideas, a deprivation of all comprehensive power, with such a darkness of spirit as would, indeed, "turn my day into night," were it not for the one heavenly ray that pierceth all darkness... When the dark hour is on me, I can hardly see, hear, or understand; when it passes away, for a few days, a week, or fortnight, I enjoy the mere feeling of unoppressed existence so exquisitely, that freely to breathe the blessed air, steadily to gaze on the fleet clouds and waving branches, to tread firmly on the earth, to comprehend what I read and hear, is enough for me, and I am too happy to be a very idler. And then I dare not look forward to better things, lest the anticipation of evil to come should follow in the train of thought, and cloud my little moment of sunshine. (RSCB: 29-30)

Southey did proof-read Caroline's manuscript, pointing out grammatical slips, occasional errors in scansion, and inconsistencies that had been overlooked: 'Have you made your father too old?' he asked, 'Having been a pastor for Sixty years he must be at least 82 - but you do not mean Ellen

to be more [than] one or two & twenty'¹⁹. The poem, rejected by Murray in 1819, was eventually taken up by Longmans in 1820. Given the title *Ellen Fitzarthur*, the poem remained, even after all its revisions, a reflection of Caroline's state of mind, a product of her depressive 'dark hours'.

Bowles's plot is a conservative one. *Ellen Fitzarthur* narrates the story of a motherless girl, Ellen, who grows up with her aged father in an idyllic little cottage. Ellen falls in love with a shipwrecked pseudo-aristocrat called De Morton and is duped into eloping with him. Soon after, Ellen becomes pregnant, at which point De Morton denies all responsibility and abandons her:

"Twas vain," he said, "with vows to bind
The roving heart, the free-born mind;"
And then he spoke of love, "that flies
Far off at sight of human ties;" (EF: 77)²⁰

After months of remorse, and upon hearing a sermon on the prodigal son, a very ill Ellen returns home where she finds her father dead and buried and there, upon his grave, she dies of both sadness and sickness, leaving her baby to be found and cared for by the son of her childhood nurse.

Reflecting a growing concern about the increasing number of extra-marital pregnancies (in the period 1800-49, between 20% and 40% of pregnancies in England were conceived outside marriage (Kane 1995: 98)), *Ellen Fitzarthur* upholds the importance of the family unit, the infallibility of the established church, and the fatal instability of sexual relationships outside marriage; Ellen's tragedy is more of a cautionary tale than a call for social reform with respect to

¹⁹ 'Letter from Robert Southey to Caroline Bowles', 12 August 1818, Southey papers, Vol VII, Add MS 47889/3-4, British Library.

²⁰ Quotations taken from [Caroline Bowles], *Ellen Fitzarthur*, London: 1820.

mothers abandoned by their husbands. Yet, even though Bowles is rigidly conformist in her views, she nevertheless wants her readers to sympathise with Ellen, rather than moralise about her. This she achieves by inviting her readers to focus, not so much on the outward circumstances and consequences of Ellen's decisions, but on the nature of her inner turmoil:

To man, aspiring man! we yield
The trophies of the battlefield;
To *him* be valour's lofty meed,
To *him*, her blood-stained wreath decreed;
The humbler garland, woman wears
Unsprinkled, but by pity's tears;
...
But not in battle's bloody strife,
Nor in the mountain storms of life,
The noblest conflicts may be view'd
Of the pale martyr, fortitude.
Oft in the low and lonely glen,
She shuns the vain applause of men...
There seek her in her loveliest dress,
(Long suff'ring, mild, meek tenderness)
In woman's fair and fragile form,
That bends, but breaks not in the storm. (EF: 49-50)

Living in her father's isolated cottage in Malwood Vale, Ellen becomes Bowles's epitome of 'woman', found in a 'low and lonely glen'. For Bowles, it is women who endure the 'noblest conflicts' but, interestingly, she transforms, in her poem, the hidden, inner life of 'long suff'ring, mild, meek tenderness' into an exterior, visible show of 'loveliest dress' and 'fair and fragile form'. In doing so, Bowles invites her readers to view Ellen's internal, unseen suffering that, a little further on in the poem, begins to mimic her own biographical 'dark hours':

Behold her in the hour of pain

Her groans of agony restrain,
Lest, haply, the afflicting sound
Some anxious hearer's heart may wound.

...

In the dark hour of mental woe,
Behold her tears in secret flow... (EF: 50-1)

As an unmarried mother with no financial means of support, Ellen may be a social outcast but Bowles seems only to be interested in Ellen's outcast state insofar as it allows her to explore Ellen's silent and unseen 'dark hour of mental woe' where 'tears in secret flow'. Trying to attend church one Sunday, Ellen is racked by a mixture of self-loathing and fear of the opinion of others. In Bowles's mind, it is this imaginative, self-inflicted isolation that turns Ellen into an outcast:

But tho' its portals opened wide
To ent'ring crowds, they seemed denied
To her, as if a barrier rose
Unseen, her entrance to oppose -
Unseen, but felt - for care half-crazed
Th'appalling interdiction raised,
And fancy's wildly-roving eye,
From the gay crowds that passed her by,
Caught many a glance of insult proud. (EF: 80-1)

By the end of the poem, there is no sense of hope or redemption for Ellen who, exhausted and fatally ill, returns home only to discover her father's grave and die. The poem concludes with the following lines:

And she, whose Lyre (faint echoing) still
Sends feebly forth, one last low thrill,
Would fain attune to sweeter lays,
A Requiem for departed days -
Would fain of social blessings tell,

She knows - alas! she *knew* so well.
But sorrow mars the strain she wakes,
Her hand in nerveless languor shakes,
Her tears are falling on the string,
And jarring sounds discordant ring. (EF: 120)

The poem never specifies who this 'she' is: Bowles seems to refer, at once, to the 'faint echoing' of a ghostly Ellen, playing a song on her lyre; and herself, as poet, asserting her presence as the poem's narrator. In the final analysis, Ellen Fitzarthur and Caroline Bowles, bound by their mutual 'dark hours of mental woe', blur into one.

Following the death of her son Herbert in 1816, Southey's wife, Edith, had her own dejection to contend with: 'Mrs Southey supported herself wonderfully at first, but she is in great dejection,' wrote Wordsworth, 'and I fear that it will long continue; she is not of that turn of mind which makes her, under less afflictions than this, struggle through and bear up' (WL: II.ii.320). Just as she began to recover, Edith found another source of anxiety and depression in becoming pregnant with her second son, Cuthbert: '[F]or many months this has occasioned so much bodily ailment and so much depression of spirits' (Curry 1965: II.192) noted Southey in 1818. (Edith's 'great dejection' and 'depression of spirits' would continue for the rest of her life and, later in 1834, Southey would be compelled to take 'poor Edith to the Quaker's 'Retreat' near York, - an institution so excellent in its principle, & so excellently conducted,' he wrote, 'that the Quakers have made amends by it for all the mischiefs that their fanaticism & bigotry have produced'²¹.)

²¹ 'Letter from Robert Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 6 October 1834, MS Facs 615 unbound, British Library.

Perhaps Southey's domestic circumstances predisposed him to being sympathetic towards Caroline. Having never met his correspondent, Southey may have been struck at how relatively easy it was for him to dispel Caroline's 'dark hours'. 'Your letter has imparted to me the most pleasurable [feelings] I have known for many a day', she had told him, upon receiving his first letter, 'Such a heart as yours will not be insensible to the assurance' (RSCB: 8). Whatever his reasons, Southey was exceptionally enthusiastic about mentoring Bowles. 'You have the eye, the ear, and the heart of a poetess', he told her,

What is wanting in you is that which I was twenty years in learning...
Competent criticism might most materially have abridged my course, but it was not my fortune to meet with it. Your poem deserves to be carefully corrected... Tell me that you will correct your poem valiantly, and if you will make up your mind by this resolution, I will go through it severely, book by book. (RSCB: 10)

Even while they both waited for Murray's response to the manuscript ('As for the incivility of Murray's long delay,' explained Southey, 'you must remember that a great bookseller is a much greater man than the Prime Minister' (RSCB: 14)), Southey, at Bowles's request, began helping to plan other projects. 'I have nothing planned, and I have no courage to plan,' Bowles had explained,

for my stores of information are so scanty, and I have so little confidence in my own taste and judgment, that I can hardly hope to select any attractive subject. One of *your* suggesting might perhaps inspire me with more confidence (or rather hope) of success, and from your abundance of ideas you may venture to supply the destitute. See what a bold beggar you have made me. (RSCB: 13)

With at least half an eye on the need for Caroline to earn money still, Southey suggested a long poem that pandered to the consumer demands of the tourism industry:

The New Forest is, both in its history and scenery, a rich subject; and with the help of prints a book might be made which would be bought by idlers at Lymington, Southampton, &c.; booksellers must look to the sale of what they publish, and this is a kind of sale on which they can in some degree calculate. The Isle of Wight is not so extensive a subject; but it would have the same advantage. The Forest, however, affords more scope, and would supply matter for a very interesting poem, especially to one who has so many feelings connected with it as you needs must have. Have you ever accustomed yourself to write blank verse? for that would be the most suitable metre. (RSCB: 14)

Bowles never did write a poem about the New Forest or the Isle of Wight but, nevertheless, she did take on board Southey's suggestion of a blank verse poem. In November 1819, Southey received from her an early version of part of her autobiographical epic, *The Birth-Day*. Immediately, Southey recognised something extraordinary in the making. 'I read it this morning, and will rather despatch a hasty letter than let a post elapse without telling you of its arrival, and exhorting you, by all means, to proceed with the poem', he wrote,

It is in a very sweet strain; go on with it, and you will produce something which may hold a permanent place in English literature...The flow of verse is natural, and the language unconstrained - both as they should be. Everybody will recognize the truth of the feeling which produces it, and there is a charm in the pictures, the imagery, and the expression, which cannot fail to be felt... I am too busy at present to say more; only understand these hurried lines as encouraging you in the strongest and most unequivocal manner to proceed. (RSCB: 16-17)

'Encouraged thus by you,' replied Caroline, 'I cannot but proceed with it' (RSCB: 18).

That same year, in 1819, Caroline received from her step-brother a £150 annuity which made it unnecessary for her to seek an income of her own by writing. It was just as well; *Ellen Fitzarthur*, anonymously published the following year, was warmly but only quietly received. It never reached a second edition and, although the size of the original print-run is uncertain, it was, most likely, cautiously small. Twenty years later, there were, probably, still copies that remained unsold: 'My Bookseller writes me word he could not get Ellen Fitzarthur "all over London" so I suppose she is out of print', Bowles told Anna Eliza Bray in 1840, ' - yet I have a suspicion that Longman may have some copies - & if I find that to be the case your set shall be completed'²².

Even though her house had been secured by her annuity, Southey was, by the time *Ellen Fitzarthur* was published, entirely committed to nurturing Bowles as a poet, especially having enjoyed their first meeting in person that had taken place while he was passing through London on business in early 1820. It was clear by the end of that year, certainly to his niece, Sara Coleridge, that Bowles was more than an occasional correspondent for Southey: 'I have just finished reading a sweet pathetic poem, *Ellen Fitzarthur*', Sara Coleridge wrote to her friend, Elizabeth Crumpe, 'the authoress is a literary protégée of my uncle's which made me parts in large interested about it'²³.

Wholly dedicated to the success of his protégée, Southey did all he could to generate interest in *Ellen Fitzarthur*: 'I have shown it to many persons,' he told Bowles, 'and in no one instance have I been disappointed of seeing it produce the effect which I expected' (RSCB: 27). Despite these recommendations, *Ellen Fitzarthur* was, by 1822, all but unheard of in fashionable circles, as the poet and Caroline's namesake, William Bowles, explained:

²² 'Letter from Caroline Bowles to Anna Eliza Bray', 21 December 1840, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

²³ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Crumpe', 13 November 1820, Dove Cottage.

Have I read 'Ellen Fitzarthur'? There was only one copy in Bath; no one read a word of it; no one thought of buying it; no one spoke of it. I was the first in this neighbourhood to bring it into notice... I think a poem so remote from the golden-silvery-diamond-alabaster-Pontypoolstyle of the present Cockney race of poetasters cannot be too much noticed. (RSCB: 26)

As well as recommending her work to others, Southey also offered professional introductions to Bowles. He had, in 1819, offered to introduce her to his friend Dr King ('by profession a surgeon, by birth a Swiss, and his wife, a sister of Miss Edgeworth' (RSCB: 16)) but Bowles's most significant introduction, by far, was her introduction to William Blackwood, editor of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, to whom she sent several poems in 1821. Blackwood was restrained in his praise for her work: 'Your M.S. did not contain more than the usual grammatical slips which ought to be expected from a female pen' (Tredrey 1954: 60), he told her. Nevertheless, finding the poems to be suitable for his magazine, he asked Bowles to become a regular contributor. 'My Pegasus is a very wayward palfrey, and will by no means go thro' his paces at my will and pleasure', she replied, 'I can only say that when I find him in a hackable mood, he shall do his best for Mr B's service'²⁴. Disregarding this non-committal reply, Blackwood asked again and, in due course, Bowles consented: 'Now and then,' she explained to Southey, 'during a sunny interval (and, thank God, the natural brightness of my spirit still shines out at such times), I compose a few scraps of verse or prose, most of which remain incomplete, and a few find their way to Blackwood - all idle nothings' (RSCB: 30). Regularly contributing poems to *Blackwood's* did not, however, constitute the makings of a professional literary career. Generous parcels of new books notwithstanding, Blackwood seldom paid any of his poetry contributors. Years later, in

²⁴ 'Letter from Caroline Bowles to Blackwood', 1821, MS 4007 f236-7, National Library of Scotland.

1833, Wordsworth wrote to *Blackwood's* in an attempt to secure fees for the poet, Eliza Hamilton²⁵. He did, however, warn her that

- but for pecuniary recompense in literature, especially poetical, nothing can be more unpromising than the present state of affairs except what we have to fear for the future. Mrs [Catherine Grace] Godwyn who sends verses to Blackwood is our neighbour. I have had no conversation with her myself upon the Subject, but a friend of hers says she has reason to believe that she has got nothing but a present of Books. This however is of no moment, as Mrs. G., being a person of easy fortune she has not probably bargained for a return in money. (WL: V.612)

It comes as less surprise, then, that, with the exception of the initial introduction, Southey had little further involvement in Bowles's work for *Blackwood's*. However, he did encourage her other projects, particularly her autobiographical epic, *The Birth-Day*. 'Go on with your blank-verse poem', he advised in February 1821, 'if I am not deceived, the subject will secure for it a favourable acceptance, relating as it does to feelings which will find sympathy in every kind heart' (RSCB: 21). The encouragement had its desired effect; the following month, Bowles reported, 'The blank verse poem with which you encourage me to proceed has extended itself to twice the length of what you read' (RSCB: 22).

By 1821, Bowles had gathered enough material for a second volume that was entitled *The Widow's Tale, and other Poems* which was published by Longman the following year. '[!]It is not

²⁵ See 'Letter from Eliza Hamilton to William Blackwood', n.d. [circa 1833], Blackwood Correspondence, MS 4036 f44-45, National Library of Scotland. See also WL: V.580 and V.596.

too much to say that you have become such a poetess as I believed and hoped from the first', wrote Southey when he received his copy that February,

You have the ear and the eye and the heart of poetry, and you have them in perfection. Had this volume appeared thirty years ago, England would have rung from side to side with its praises. And gay as the flower-market now is, take my word for it, it will flourish when all the annuals of the season have faded. (RSCB: 24)

The Widow's Tale, published anonymously as a work 'By the author of Ellen Fitzarthur', was better received than *Ellen Fitzarthur* largely because of support from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. *The Widow's Tale* was another product of Bowles's melancholy 'dark hours', penned, like her contributions to *Blackwood's*, in the rare 'sunny intervals' that punctuated her depression; and, largely, it shares the same uncompromisingly tragic tone of *Ellen Fitzarthur*. Reviewing the volume in 1822, *Blackwood's* did, however, notice a hint of something more optimistic in the melodramatic sketch, 'Editha', which ends the collection.

The sketch presents us with the terminally ill Editha, the only child of a father who has already lost two other children and his wife to some unspecified hereditary illness; Editha's fiancé returns home after five years overseas earning enough money to marry and all looks promising until Editha dies in his arms the morning after his arrival. The *Blackwood's* review considered the poem 'an exemplification of earthly instability, and of the fragility of all that is beautiful and graceful in this world' but felt that the sketch also presented the idea that, 'However dark be the night of grief, when the good are mourning for the good, there is sure to be such a morn of present refreshment and gladness of heart, and hope of enjoying the perfect day' (*Blackwood's* 1822: 290).

Whatever faint ray of sunshine and hope could be detected in Caroline's dark hour poetry was carefully nurtured by Southey but he found none in *The Widow's Tale*, and complained that 'Editha' was 'perhaps the more painful to me because I have a daughter of that name' (RSCB:

25). Southey found Bowles's relentless melancholy oppressive. 'Your tragedy is always in the right tone... Yet it is too painful' (RSCB: 24) he told her and he urged her to consider, instead,

a picture in summer and sunshine - a tale that in its progress and termination shall answer to the wishes of the reader. Make the creatures of your imagination as happy as you would make them if they were real beings, whose fortunes depended upon your will; your poem will then be read again and again with delight. You will please more readers, and please them more. It is a road to popular favour which has not been tried in this country, and it is a sure one. (RSCB: 25)

Southey, doing all he could to foster this hopeful sunshine in Caroline's own life, invited her to stay at his house at Keswick one summer. The invitation had the right effect: 'To visit you in your own world of lakes and mountains!' she wrote, 'Sometimes, in a sunshiny mood of the mind, I say to myself, "Well, who knows? - perhaps" - and then I stop, and the wide interval of time and distance spreads drearily before me, not impassably, however, and I *will* hope for once' (RSCB: 23).

Caroline eventually went to Keswick two years later in September 1823. Although she was only there for a few weeks, the visit had such an extraordinary effect on her that she would dwell on it constantly for years to come. 'I often shut my eyes, and see myself standing with you on the point of Frair's Crag, the spot to which we walked so frequently', she would write to Southey, a year after her visit,

I see the fretwork pavement as plain as when I stood upon it; the crags and stones beneath; the red boles of the tall firs, through which we looked up towards the grand pass into Borrodale, and that conical mountain that stood like a sentinel at its entrance, always more darkly blue than its surrounding brethren. Such visions often fill me with a strange impatience that I cannot, like a glance of the mind, overleap time and space, and be corporeally where I

am in spirit. My present state is a very restless one. I am suffering terribly, night and day, from past over-excitement and the dead calm which has succeeded to it. (RSCB: 67-8)

Perhaps it was because her trip to Keswick contrasted so much with her 'present state' that she dwelt on it so much: in 1825, Caroline would send Southey a lithograph she had made of her sketch of a picnic they had had on Honister Crag, for which 'Sara Coleridge, who was then in the bloom of her ethereal beauty, had made a basketful of remarkably nice cakes' (Orlebar 1874: 224); as late as 1826, Caroline would continue to long for Southey's 'haunts among the windings of Greta, or the mountain dells, where methinks there must be healing in the very air, and music, I am sure, in the voice of a friend' (RSCB: 106) and, less sentimentally, she would also 'have a great mind to publish my visit to Keswick' (RSCB: 99).

In any event, Caroline was in such high spirits after her visit that, even when her house was burgled soon after her return, she refused 'to be frightened out of an hour's sleep'. Anticipating a second attack, she bought, instead, 'a great fierce bull-dog', powder and shot for her German rifle, and 'a pair of pistols, with which I dare make a noise at least; for you know I told you my father had taught me to stand fire' (RSCB: 39).

Southey, eager to help sustain this latest 'sunny interval' and wanting to persuade Caroline 'that there are yet hopes and enjoyments in store for you in this world' (RSCB: 41), wrote to ask her if she would co-write, with him, an epic poem about *Robin Hood*:

Will you form an intellectual union with me that it may be executed? We will keep our own secret as well as Sir Walter Scott has done. Murray shall publish it, and not know the whole mystery that he may make the more of it, and the result will be means in abundance for a summer's abode at Keswick, and an additional motive for it that we may form other schemes of the same nature. Am I dreaming when I think that we may derive this much high enjoyment, and that you may see in the prospect something which is worth living for? The secret itself would be delightful while we thought proper to keep it still more so the spiritual union which death would not part... As there

can be no just cause or impediment why these two persons should not be thus joined together, tell me that you consent to the union, and I will send you the rude outline of the story and of the characters. (RSCB: 42)

Literary collaboration was, by no means, a new idea but underpinning Southey's suggestion is a barely suppressed emotional energy. Southey couches his *Robin Hood* proposition in the language of lovers and secret marriage, something better than marriage even, a 'spiritual union which death would not part'. Bowles's immediate reply was no less passionate: 'How you have set me thinking! Thinking, wondering, wishing, debating, doubting, almost - yet, almost - despairing', she wrote, '...I can find no language to express more warmly how, with heart and soul, I would say "Yes" - promptly and eagerly, "Yes" - to your tempting, tantalizing proposition' (RSCB: 43). As promised, Southey soon sent her the 'rude outline' of the poem: 'How like you this, my friend and partner dear?' (RSCB: 46) he asked, in words that recall the sexual tension of the second stanza of Thomas Wyatt's 'They Flee From Me'²⁶.

The emotional intensity of Southey's letters continued and, over time, they became less comically mannered and more in earnest. 'Dear Caroline,' he wrote, in 1825,

...my spirits are not raised when I think of your loneliness, and the frequent accesses of illness, which seem to be the only things that vary it. Not a day passes that that thought does not come across me. Never was a creature more formed to be happy herself, and to make others happy, if Fortune had not in our case played strangely at cross purposes with Nature. At present it is only when I shut my eyes that I can see you; in this the absent are like the dead. (RSCB: 90)

²⁶ And she me caught in her arms long and small,
Therewithal sweetly did me kiss
And softly said, "Dear heart, how like you this?"
(*'They Flee From Me'*, Abrams 2000: 529)

On another occasion, he wrote:

You are lonely, God knows, if you could know how often I was with you in thought, you would feel that there is one person in the world who regards you as you ought to be regarded - as you would wish him to regard you. How difficult is it when we mean a great deal, not to say either too little or too much.
(RSCB: 77)

Southey's letters to Caroline were not love-letters; bound by his existing marriage, Southey found it difficult not 'to say either too little or too much'. Nevertheless, the way in which he writes about happiness and regard was clearly derived from his own, personal notions of what constituted a successful marriage. Writing to Anna Eliza Bray in 1833, Southey described, in terms strikingly similar, his meeting with Maria Gowen Brooks, an American poet whose life had been racked by her unhappy marriage: 'Mrs B. I doubt not, always has been, & shall be haunted by the feeling that if she had been mated with one capable of esteeming & loving her as she deserved to be esteemed & loved, she should have been one of the happiest of God's creatures'²⁷. Nor was this a new way for Southey to consider marriage; earlier, in 1808, he had advised Walter Savage Landor to 'Find out a woman whom you can esteem, and love will grow more surely out of esteem than esteem will out of love' (C. Southey 1855: 247).

If Caroline understood the import of Southey's gentle innuendoes, she never questioned their propriety, or responded directly to them. Her letters were markedly more platonic than Southey's, though none the less passionate when they expressed, not romantic love, but her immense gratitude for Southey's constancy as a friend. 'You are almost the only living creature in whom I never found myself mistaken or disappointed,' she wrote,

²⁷ 'Letter from Robert Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 13 October 1833, MS Facs 615 unbound, 1831-1839, British Library.

and you do not shun me because I am in sorrow, as is the world's way, and as I have bitterly experienced in times past from some who had sought and caressed me in my happier days. Well, one friend of all weathers would compensate for the unkindness of fifty such worlds; and if I have found you late, it is not too late, for, as you say, we shall meet "surely and lastingly hereafter." (RSCB: 67)

Whether or not he was motivated by his half-articulated feelings for Caroline, Southey did succeed in persuading her that 'there are yet hopes and enjoyments in store for you in this world'. For Caroline, Southey's friendship marked a watershed in her life. 'I seem to have stepped over a great gulf dividing me from my early years and from my early friends', she explained,

My wish would have been, I think, *not* to overstep it, *not* to have gone further. But you met and took me by the hand on the brink of that dreary, unknown country; I found in you what I had never met with, even in my lost Eden, and while you hold me fast I shall not want courage to go on, nor inclination to tarry yet a little longer should it be God's pleasure. (RSCB: 79)

Although Bowles's first two volumes of poetry, *Ellen Fitzarthur* and *The Widow's Tale*, had been deeply inspired by her own, personal 'dark hours', they did, nevertheless, read very conventionally. *Blackwood's*, even with its flattering praise, had ranked *The Widow's Tale* firmly in 'the general spirit of the age' and felt that Bowles, 'putting forth no pretensions to be ranked among the greater lights of the poetic sky, is, notwithstanding, fully participant in what Southey calls the great *revival* of our days' (*Blackwood's* 1822: 287). Bolstered by the confidence that Southey's friendship and mentoring gave her, however, Bowles began to find herself restricted by the post-Wordsworthian 'spirit of the age' that she had, simultaneously and unwittingly, been hemmed in by and also helped maintain. Accordingly, Caroline made moves to distance herself

from Wordsworth. In 1827, William Bowles forwarded her an invitation from Wordsworth's patron, Lady Beaumont, who, Caroline explained to Southey,

hearing (heavens knows how or where) that I "adored Mr. Wordsworth," felt assured that she and I were "kindred spirits," and had decided to write to me, and propose that I should take up my abode with her... No indeed I am not likely to do so, nor should I have felt much flattered by the motive of Lady B.'s invitation. Admire and delight in Mr Wordsworth's noble poetry I certainly do. "Adore Mr. Wordsworth" I certainly do not; and though I fear mine may be an enthusiastic and rather romantic nature, I never did or could feel that sort of enthusiasm which seems now and then to make women forget they are women, and have some little feminine dignity and propriety to maintain, and have no business to run about the world "adoring" poets or any such golden calves. (RSCB: 124-5)

This being 'a little bit of a virago' (RSCB: 125) was, undoubtedly, Caroline's way of re-affirming exactly which Lake Poet's protégée she was, though Southey was confused by her behaviour, thinking himself that Lady Beaumont was 'an excellent woman, with a warm heart and a warmth of manners which even high life has hardly subdued' (RSCB: 125). 'I wish you knew her', he wrote, especially since he had written to Caroline earlier in May and told her that 'Lady Beaumont has fallen in love with your poems'²⁸.

Bowles's third book, *Solitary Hours*, published by Blackwood in 1826, also betrayed signs of her indignant 'virago' rebellion against the post-Wordsworthian 'spirit of the age'. Although many of the pieces in the volume were in the same vein of conventional, lyric melancholy that Bowles had always written, *Solitary Hours* also contained two uncharacteristically caustic essays in prose, that were entitled 'Thoughts on Letter-Writing' and 'Beauty'.

²⁸ 'Letter from Robert Southey to Caroline Bowles', 29 May 1827, Add MS 47889/133-4, British Library. Not in RSCB.

'Thoughts on Letter-Writing' begins by attacking the need for the 'formal letter' which is 'for the most part made up of unmeaning phrases, trite observations, complimentary flourishes, and protestations of respect and attachment, so far not deceitful, that they never deceive anybody' (SH: 91)²⁹. Bowles then goes on to complain about 'the misery of having to compose a set, proper, well-worded, correctly pointed, polite, elegant epistle' (SH: 91), before calling for a modern invention to perform the task automatically: '[S]uppose there were to be an epistolary steam-engine!' she writes, 'Steam does everything nowadays. Worthy Mr. Brunel, take the matter into serious consideration, I beseech you!' (SH: 92). Bowles soon wonders, however, how popular her invention would be with most women:

I am not so sure that the female sex in general may quite enter into my views of the subject. Those who pique themselves on "l'éloquence du billet;" those fair Scribblerinas just emancipated from boarding-school restraint, or from the dragonism of their governesses, just beginning to pour out their pretty souls in the refined intercourse of sentimental, confidential, ineffable correspondence, with some Angelina, Seraphina, or Laura Matilda, dwelling at Rosemount Cottage, or Myrtle Villa, or Eglantine Vale; to indite beautiful little notes with long-tailed letters, upon vellum-paper with pink margins, sealed with sweet mottoes and dainty devices...young ladies who collect "copies of verses" and charades, receipts for painting boxes, and making alum-baskets and bead-necklaces; keep albums, copy patterns, make bread-seals, work little dogs upon footstools, and paint flowers without shadow - Oh no! the epistolary steam-engine will never come into favour with those dear industrious creatures, whose minds are in a constant state of activity, like the little eels in rain-water, and must work off their exuberant energies somehow. *They* must luxuriate in "the feast of reason and the flow of soul" and they must write - ye gods - how they *do* write! (SH: 92-93)

²⁹ Quotations taken from Caroline Bowles, *Solitary Hours*. New York, 1846.

In turning her attention to the 'fair Scribbleras', who 'collect "copies of verses" and charades', 'keep albums' and 'work little dogs upon footstools', Bowles ceases her attack on the haughty conventions of letter-writing and turns, instead, to the young accomplished women of the 1820s who would have constituted her primary audience. Bowles sets herself up in opposition to these women who have a marked preference for all things 'pink', 'sweet' and 'dainty'; aligning herself, instead, with the 'female scribes' who 'groan in spirit at the dire necessity of having to hammer out one of those aforesaid epistles' (SH: 93). She concludes the essay with 'a few hints' for reluctant letter-writers, such as: '[I]t will be expedient to stock your memory with a large assortment of those precious words of many syllables that fill whole lines at once' (SH: 95). Despite her tirade against them, Bowles finds that she is unable to extricate herself from the conventions that are required of her, even though she finds them meaningless and unnecessary. In 'Thoughts on Letter-Writing', those who find themselves not fitting within socially prescribed limits and conventions must seek to emulate those who do.

Bowles also reaches a similar conclusion in 'Beauty', in which she maintains that 'pretty women are the happiest, as well as the most agreeable, of the species' (SH: 55). Bowles finds nothing intrinsically special in '[t]he fair engaging girl [who] expands into womanhood, in the warm sunshine of affectionate encouragement' (SH: 57) but, instead, credits her happiness and agreeableness to those around her who credit her with beauty. The brunt of Bowles's attack is against 'the most sickening taste...of some parents who pretend (I give them little credit for their sincerity) to deprecate for their female offspring that precious, as it *really* is, or, as they are pleased to term it, "that dangerous distinction," - personal beauty' (SH: 55).

Taking their 'cant' logic to extremes, Bowles suggests 'to all parents who are really sincere in deprecating for their female offspring, what *they* are pleased to term so fatal an endowment', that they 'adopt the practice of those unsophisticated savages, who (for very opposite purposes, indeed) flatten the noses, depress the skulls, and slit the lips and ears of their new-born females' (SH: 60). As in 'Thoughts on Letter-Writing', however, Bowles wonders how

her 'speculative genius' (SH: 62) would be received and decides that, were her plans executed, existing standards of female beauty would simply be replaced by others:

[I]n their stead would grow up a new standard of perfection, not less the object of dangerous and profane worship for being the very reverse of its present idol...the first glance of a flat nose, thick lips, flapping ears, and depressed pericranium, in his new-born babe, may strike into the heart of an anxious parent the same pious horror with which he now contemplates the Grecian outline and delicate proportions of the infant Beauty, who smiles in his face with such innocent and pitiable unconsciousness of the fatal charms with which nature has endowed her. (SH: 62)

In recognising that different cultures value different characteristics when it comes to their notions of female beauty, Bowles acknowledges that female beauty, rather than being a fixed and stable set of values, is a social construction. However, as with the social conventions which she attacks in 'Thoughts on Letter-Writing', while Bowles may recognise the arbitrariness of socially constructed notions of beauty, she cannot see her way to visualising an alternative culture which resists prescribing such values in the first instance. In *Solitary Hours*, Bowles is left throwing herself against the ideological boundaries that surround her but, ultimately, her 'speculative genius' lacks the power to move her beyond them.

Although the original publication of 'Thoughts on Letter-Writing' and 'Beauty' in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in March 1822 and December 1823 had gone without comment, their inclusion in *Solitary Hours* proved to be more contentious. Bowles, however, refused to back down on their inclusion: 'The two other papers you propose cashiering - viz 'Beauty' & 'Thoughts on L. Wg' are by no means darlings of mine,' she told Blackwood, 'and I would say 'let them go to the dogs too' if their condemnation did not involve the sacrifice of my whole plan' (quoted in Blain 1998: 79). The plan that Bowles refers to, as Virginia Blain points out, was principally to do with protecting the contents of a collection, in progress, of essays and short stories that was to

appear, later in 1829, as *Chapters on Churchyards*. Equally, though, in specifically choosing 'Beauty' and 'Thoughts on Letter-Writing', Bowles was, on one level, out to challenge the innocuousness of the conventional miscellany or, to use one of her rejected title suggestions, of the *Woman's Portfolio* (RSCB: 99).

Bowles eventually won her editorial dispute with Blackwood but the victory was, in some ways, a hollow one: 'The Monster [Blackwood] is going to publish my bundle of scraps this month', she explained to Southey, 'Indifference and silence have fought my battle for me - brought him to terms - that is, to publish only what I stipulate for, instead of the thumping volume he wanted to make' (RSCB: 95). Bowles succeeded in making *Solitary Hours* into the volume she 'stipulate[d] for' but, nevertheless, it was, in her eyes, still a 'bundle of scraps'. By 1828, she was eager to write and publish something far removed from the lyric melancholy of her first three volumes, something decidedly comic rather than tragic. 'Such things are rather entertaining and mighty easy to compose,' she explained, following the publication of her tragic-comic poem 'The Inflexible' in the *Literary Souvenir* (1828),

but somehow all the worthies I have ever written for think it fit to discourage my comic vein. Whenever I treat the Monster in that way he thanks me for "the admirable production," but hints that "in the pathetic I am super-admirable". I sent "Inflexibility" to the Goth [Alaric Watts, editor of *Literary Souvenir*], and he thanked me too - "It was very clever, but unfortunately he was overpowered with contributions of that description: would I write him something serious?" So you see they *will* have me "like Niobe, all tears."
(RSCB: 149)

Noted amongst publishers and editors but still largely unknown to the public since all her publications to date had been anonymous, Bowles seemed bound to writing the 'pathetic' and being 'like Niobe, all tears' to order. Within weeks, Southey had hatched a plan to catapult the

name of Caroline Bowles into the public eye. In 1829, he dedicated his book, *All for Love, and The Pilgrim to Compostella* (1829) to her with the following poem:

TO CAROLINE BOWLES.

Could I look forward to a distant day
With hope of building some elaborate lay,
Then would I wait till worthier strains of mine
Might bear inscribed thy name, O Caroline;
For I would, while my voice is heard on earth,
Bear witness to thy genius and thy worth.

But we have both been taught to feel with fear
How frail the tenure of existence here;
What unforeseen calamities prevent,
Alas how oft! the best resolved intent;
And therefore this poor volume I address
To thee, dear friend, and sister Poetess³⁰. (RSCB: 154-5)

Upon reading the dedication, Caroline was overwhelmed by 'a sense of deep unworthiness, a gush of tears, and an inward prayer to become more worthy of such friendship' (RSCB: 155) but Southey wrote to her immediately to explain his true intention: 'You have taken those verses more to heart than they deserved, or could have deserved, had the execution been as good as the intention', he wrote, 'They tell you nothing but what you knew before; but they may tell many persons what they did not know before - that there is a certain Caroline Bowles whose poems they ought to send for; and if they have this effect they will be good verses, according to the old saying, that "handsome is that handsome does"' (RSCB: 155n). Within weeks of Southey's dedication being published, Bowles began to notice its effect:

³⁰ Southey had first addressed Bowles as his 'sister Poetess' in a letter in 1822 (RSCB: 26).

That dedication of yours (it must be *that*) has opened to my merits, genius, and so-forth, eyes many that would never otherwise have honoured me with a glance... *The Spectator*, after calling me an ornament to my sex, and so on, finished by remarking, with infinite naivete, "Why have we never read Ellen Fitzarthur, *The Widow's Tale*, &c., &c.?" Is not that good? (RSCB: 165)

In the same month, Maria Jane Jewsbury wrote to Bowles to introduce herself. 'I have had a letter from a "womankind" that rather troubles me, a friend of Mr. Wordsworth's', Bowles told Southey,

I think you know something of her, Miss Jewsbury. Said Miss Jewsbury has been so good as to take a fancy to "A Brook and a little Star" of my writing, and "A Story of a Broken Heart," and thereupon she sends me two books of hers - "Lays of Leisure Hours," and "Letters to the Young," and writes me sweet things and fine things - so fine I do not know how to answer her, about life and a wilderness, two Ravens, and a brook Cherith! But I have read clever things of hers, and being a friend of Mr. Wordsworth she must be good for something, and I am obliged to her. (RSCB: 162)

In spite of this initial embarrassment, Bowles did, evidently, strike up a correspondence with Jewsbury. 'I had a delightful letter the other day from Miss Bowles', wrote Jewsbury to her sister, Geraldine, 'saying she should like to stick my "Lost Spirit" between the leaves of her Bible - & speaking very solemnly on the grief she had felt in seeing the mind of a friend overcast in its [pain?], when it was no longer possible to care for a soul uncared for before'³¹. The connection, (although Bowles never seems to have actually met Jewsbury in person) was, it seems, one that benefited Bowles's reputation. Writing in her series on 'Literary Women' for the *Athenaeum* in

³¹ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Geraldine Jewsbury', [n.d. 1831?], English MS1320//38/2, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

1831, Jewsbury named Bowles as Jane Austen's successor: 'Hampshire (Miss Austen's country) still possesses a female writer richly endowed with some of her predecessor's qualifications for this species of writing, possessing on her own account a higher faculty of imagination. We allude to Caroline Bowles' (Jewsbury 1831: 554).

The poet Mary Howitt also followed up Southey's dedication and wrote to Bowles. Within a month, Howitt (having requested and received a contribution from Bowles for her *Winter's Wreath* annual) was convinced that Bowles was one of the 'choice spirits of our age'. 'How I wish thou wast near us!' she wrote,

- We have lived in thy spirit for many summers, we have had the strongest sympathy with thee though thou hast not known it - & when enjoying ourselves in the luxury of summer idleness among green trees - or reading delicious poetry in some green nook, we have made the idea of our little Arcadian pleasure perfect, by assembling about us the choice spirits of our age, with whom we longed most to be acquainted - Southey, Wordsworth, Mrs Hemans, thyself & one or two others - what on earth could be more delightful?³²

Howitt went on in her letter to offer Bowles an introduction to Hemans:

Thou know'st perhaps that Mrs Hemans resides now near Liverpool, & gives a life of splendour to their little literary circle. I had the pleasure of making her acquaintance there last summer. We had a deal of chat about poets & poetesses & I am glad to tell thee that she accords with us in our estimation of thy writings & rejoices as we in their peculiar [breathings?] of nature. I do not know whether William Chorley told thee, though I should think he would for his own credit, that thou wilt be in most good company. Mrs Hemans, who has

³² 'Letter from Mary Howitt to Caroline Bowles', 28 June 1829, DD976/2, Nottinghamshire Archives.

many literary friends, has used her influence for them, & they have been very successful in their own application to many first-rate authors.³³

Caroline was a great admirer of Hemans who was, she explained upon hearing about her death in 1835, 'one of the very few female writers of our time with whom I had felt a wish to be acquainted' (RSCB: 324-5), especially since their poems had 'often succeeded each other on the same pages in *Blackwood's*' (RSCB: 325). Nevertheless, Caroline turned down the opportunity to be properly admitted into the ranks of literary celebrity that were determined and maintained primarily by the 'influence' of well-known writers like Hemans and her 'many literary friends'. (By 1835, when Bowles unenthusiastically reviewed Howitt's *The Seven Temptations* in *Blackwood's* as 'not a novel [book]; nor, we must take leave to say...one which we should willingly have selected for illustration from the pen of a female' (Bowles 1835: 644), the temporary friendship that had been struck up between her and Howitt had all but fizzled out.)

What Jewsbury and Howitt had offered Bowles was access to the network of editors, writers and literary patrons who dominated mainstream literature. Through this, with the support of her fellow 'womankind', Bowles might have found her way to becoming one of the 'first-rate authors'. This promised success, however, would have been a distinction that was based very much on celebrity status and whom she knew, rather than what she wrote. Moreover, her writing would most likely have been channelled into annuals such as the *Winter's Wreath*, and confined to being 'like Niobe, all tears' - the very thing she was trying to avoid.

Yet, even though Bowles rejected many of the offers of introduction she received, she did acquire, through Southey's efforts, a greater degree of leverage within the publishing industry itself and, consequently, a greater say in the kind of poetry that she wrote. Moreover, Southey's dedication also fuelled even more Bowles's desire to hammer out her own, individual poetic identity. 'I think my name looks lovely in print.' she told Southey when she received *All for Love*, 'I

³³ Ibid.

never liked it so well before' (RSCB: 160). Before Bowles could begin work on writing as 'Caroline Bowles', however, she had to dismantle the anonymous 'Authoress of Ellen Fitzarthur'. This she did in her next book, *Cat's Tail* (1831).

My dear little friends! if you'll listen to me,
I'll tell you a story as true as can be,
Of the life and adventures, and tragical death,
Of the prettiest cat, loves! that ever drew breath.
You must know, then, this darling was given to me
Such a very small kitten, it could but just see... (CT: 12)³⁴

Recounting the 'life and adventures, and tragical death' of a cat named Childe Merlin the Second, *Cat's Tail* is wilfully light-hearted and comical. Bowles tells the story of Merlin, a black cat with white socks, who, 'cuddled up' on the 'great kitchen coal-box', is mistaken for a coal by the cook and thrown into the fire. Narrowly escaping death, he takes an elder tortoiseshell cat for his wife (some cats 'Went so far, with a boldness no scruples could daunt, / As to whisper that Merlin had married his aunt!' (CT: 17)). Merlin soon has a 'second adventure' (CT: 18) in which he is thrown into another fire, this time by an elderly French serving-man called Pierrot. Although Merlin escapes again, he blames his wife for the loss of his ears and tail who, 'struck to the heart --- sickened --- took to her bed' (CT: 23) and dies of grief. Merlin soon marries his cousin, Miss Grizzy, but also takes a mistress:

For his amie du coeur, he selected --- a mare! ---
A great female Houyhnhnm! Ay! well you may stare,
As all the world did, at that bizarre selection... (CT: 30)

³⁴ Quotations taken from Caroline Bowles, *The Cat's Tail*, London, 1831.

On the morning of Valentine's Day, the horse, Mrs Dapple, 'was found in a very strange way' and it is soon discovered that she has bitten off and swallowed Merlin's head, leaving the rest of his body in a manger. The tale ends with the following plea:

Refuse not your tears to this tale of disasters;
Weep, Billy and Bobny! weep, Susy and Sophy!
"Cry quarts," if you can, for the cat's catastrophe. (CT: 32).

Although the subject might appear quirky or idiosyncratic to modern readers, poems about cats enjoyed great popularity in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century. Thomas Gray's memorial to Horace Walpole's cat, 'Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes' (1747) is perhaps the most outstanding example of this often-overlooked genre, but there are many others. In 1791, for example, William Cowper wrote 'The Retired Cat'; in 1793, Southey himself wrote a poem entitled 'To a College Cat. Written soon after the installation at Oxford'; George Huddesford devoted fourteen pages of his *Poems* (1801) to 'Monody on the Death of Dick, an Academical Cat'; in 1806, Mary Robinson deployed the same tale/tail pun that Bowles uses, in her poem 'Mistress Gurton's Cat. A Domestic Tale'; in 1818, Keats's poem, 'To a Cat', celebrated a cat with 'wheezy asthma' and whose 'tail's tip is nick'd off' (Keats 1992: 242)³⁵; later, in 1873, Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber wrote 'To a Cat. On finding one turned up in a corner of my front yard very dead'.

As well as being about cats, what all these have in common is that they are all fairly short, humorous poems, typically embedded in collections written in, generally, a more serious register, and all are the product of poets who, having fun for a few pages, wanted to cast aside their usual writing personae. To the extent that these characteristics constitute a genre in

³⁵ My thanks to Rachel Sarsfield, University of Swansea, for introducing me to Keats's poem.

themselves, it can be said that Bowles's *Cat's Tail* exploded the conventions of the nineteenth-century cat-poem.

Thirty one pages long, bound in an expensive volume (1s 6d) on its own and illustrated with engravings by George Cruikshank (made during his transition from satirist to illustrator), *Cat's Tail* was bigger and brighter than any cat-poem that had come before. Bowles had even grander designs for her book, as she told Southey:

I *got up* the story of my cat in sublime style - a feline epic - illustrated it with appropriate pen etchings, wrote a very solemn preface, and pleased myself all the while with the thought of the said epic's presenting itself at Keswick all unannounced, if I could get it published without betraying my own identity, or, rather, that it was from the pen of the authoress of --- [Ellen Fitzarthur]. Then, I had been told that your great man, the Hybrid [John Murray], was the most likely gudgeon in the world to bite at any hook baited with rank and fashion, and half my sport was the idea of getting him to bring out my nonsense. So, I took a foreign title, sealed with a foreign coat-of-arms, all coronet, and sent my MSS. in a dashing carriage, to match, through the hands of a fair friend who was charmed to manage the intrigue, and whose air of fashion must have its weight, I fancied. (RSCB: 196)

Bowles's elaborate staging for her manuscript's delivery recalls the myths that surround the manuscript of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. And, like *Gulliver's Travels* (an influence duly acknowledged in Merlin's unlikely choice of a 'female Houyhnhnm' for his mate), Bowles intends her book to be a pointed satirical comment, not, though, on the state of national politics like Swift's, but on the state of the publishing industry, specifically its obsession with, as Wordsworth put it, 'Authors of prime celebrity - and persons distinguished by rank or fashion, or station or anything else that might have as little to do with good writing' (Vincent 1944: 51).

Had Murray fallen for Bowles's deception, he would have been the focus of at least 'half [her] sport' in being publicly outed as 'the most likely gudgeon in the world to bite at any hook

baited with rank and fashion'. On one level, then, Bowles intended her book of 'nonsense' to bear testimony to non-literary preoccupations of publishers like Murray and, at the same time, parody the undeservedly popular writers of 'rank and fashion', whom, in one letter, she would later disparagingly refer to as the 'Scribbling lords and ladies' (RSCB: 266). Bowles's mock 'solemn preface' attempts to disguise any suggestion of parody in *Cat's Tail* by deflecting attention not away from, but directly onto the text itself: 'The authoress of 'The Cat's Tail'', it reads, 'thinks fit hereby to disclaim not only all personality, but all covert meaning, religious or political, &c. &c., which might be suspected to lie perdu in the veracious and affecting 'History of the Life and Adventures of Childe Merlin'. In misdirecting them into looking for a Swiftian satiricalism within the text of the poem, Bowles seems to hope that publishers and readers will overlook the true method of her attack, which lies in the very material existence of the book itself. (Bowles's double-bluff may or may not have been entirely successful but, on her side, she could, perhaps, rely on expectations from her audience's readings of cat-poems that were filled with 'covert meaning': Thomas Holcroft's two volume *Tales in Verse; Critical, Satirical and Humorous* (1806), for instance, contained his 'Politeness; or, The Cat O'Nine Tails. A Tale. Tale V.' which was as critical, satirical and humorous as it purported to be.)

Even while the 'solemn preface' misdirects, however, it also points to another function of *Cat's Tail*, namely that (like many nineteenth-century cat-poems) it is a creative space in which its author can 'disclaim...all personality'. In the above letter to Southey, Bowles is careful to differentiate between her 'own identity' and 'the pen of the authoress of - [Ellen Fitzarthur]', and she is eager to protect *Cat's Tail* from being known as the work of the latter. To do so, Bowles assumes a *nom de plume*, the 'foreign title' of 'Baroness de Katzleben', complete with 'dashing carriage' and a 'foreign coat-of-arms, all coronet'. The Baroness is, of course, part of Bowles's joke at the expense of 'scribbling Lords and Ladies' of 'rank and fashion' but 'Baroness de Katzleben, authoress of other touching tales and pathetic pieces' is also, at once, a parody and an assassination of 'The authoress of Ellen Fitzarthur'. If *Cat's Tail* is anything to go by, the

Baroness's 'other touching tales and pathetic pieces' are hardly going to be very touching or pathetic.

In the end, Murray did not take up *Cat's Tail*. Southey, always attuned to the literary marketplace, saw its problems immediately. 'Your cat-book must have amused (and will amuse) me - ' he wrote,

but of course I should at once have known from whom it came. If your lady-agent had seen Murray he might have been dazzled, cautious as publishers are now become. The former class of persons who purchased books can no longer afford to do so; the booksellers therefore are turning almost their whole attention to publications for those who buy cheap books; for those people they will provide plenty of trash, crude and unwholesome, undigested and indigestible, and sometimes (unconsciously on the publishers' parts) carrying poison with it, as in Milman's History of the Jews - where, not being an infidel, shallowness and coxcombry have made him like one. (RSCB: 199)

Cat's Tail, finally published by Blackwood in 1831, was a disaster. Of the print run of 1000, only 152 copies were sold in the seven year period up to July 1838³⁶. Aside from being overpriced and the fact that the Baroness de Katzeben joke was, perhaps a little too subtle and private, *Cat's Tail's* failure also rested on Bowles's decisions as a poet; though the cat-poem would be a popular genre for the rest of Bowles's life, it was not so popular that readers would buy a book wholly consisting of just one, five hundred line cat-poem. But exploring reasons for *Cat's Tail's* commercial failure also casts light on its successes in terms of Bowles's own corpus. The cat-poem was a genre in which writers could take a break from their usual work - and, in overdoing her poem completely, Bowles was seizing on the opportunity to reclaim her 'own identity', once and for all, from 'The authoress of Ellen Fitzarthur'.

³⁶ All sales figures in this chapter are taken from 'Transcript of the statement of account issued to Caroline Bowles by Blackwood's in July 1838' in 'Blain's Appendix 3' (Blain 1998: 275-7).

By 1830, Bowles was tired of *Blackwood's*, accomplishment "drawing-room" genres, and the entire literary arena in which her work appeared in the 1820s. 'I am tired to death of scribbling Lords and Ladies, such as Lord Nugent, Lord Mulgrave, Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley, and Lady C. Burney', she explained to Southey in 1833,

and I suppose Blackwood will set me down for a Republican, for I told him I was sick of his Helicon bag of fashion, and did not care to keep such company. Those people have no feeling for truth and nature - how should they in their artificial atmosphere? And yet they pretend to "babble about green fields!"... I like lords and ladies in drawing-rooms very much, in their own element; but let them keep it, and not prate about what they cannot comprehend - poor souls. Their attempts at rural simplicity always remind me of the young Cockney lady who, being for the first time in a country farm-yard, asked what those creatures were - meaning the cocks and hens; and on being told they were fowls, exclaimed: "La! where are their livers and gizzards?" Your Lord Ashley seems made of better stuff, however. Some plants, bury them how you will in rubbish and darkness, will force their way into light and life. (RSCB: 268)

Following the commercial failure of *Cat's Tail*, Bowles became a little indecisive insofar as her work was concerned. Nevertheless, she remained determined to force her way 'into light and life' in the way that Lord Ashley had done. (Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper was a key supporter of the failed 1833 Ten Hours Bill designed to restrict the number of hours a day that children in factories were allowed to work).

In 1833, Bowles published a fourth volume of poetry, entitled *Tales of the Factories*, but not before she had contacted Southey for encouragement: 'I should be glad of encouragement from you, if you can give it me,' she wrote, 'or thankful for discouragement if my attempt deserves

no better' (RSCB: 265). Later she explained to him that 'I become more and more cowardly, and could not resolve to print my little stories without some encouragement from you' (RSCB: 267).

Southey's encouragement was unequivocal:

Print your poems by all means. This is a most painful and most true [subject], and cannot but be felt at this time, when it is of the greatest importance that the nation should be made to feel. You have written like yourself. I could not find any words that would express higher praise. (RSCB: 265-266)

Even though *Tales of the Factories* declared itself, on its frontispiece, to be the work of 'the Authoress of *Ellen Fitzarthur*, *Widow's Tale*, *Solitary Hours*, *Chapters on Churchyards*, etc.', Southey recognised that, in *Tales of the Factories*, Bowles had found her poetic identity, had 'written like [her]self'. Although she continued to be as 'super-admirable' as she had always been in writing melancholy tragedy, these tragic elements no longer constituted an end in themselves, as they had in previous works. In *Tales of the Factories*, Bowles set out, very specifically, to bring to public attention the maltreatment of children in English factories: 'I have', she told Southey, 'been reading accounts of the factory atrocities, and proofs of them in minutes of evidence taken before the House of Commons, that worked me up to a fever of indignation, which vented itself in verse' (RSCB: 265).

Tales of the Factories looked very different from Bowles's earlier books; certainly, it was the complete opposite of that which she had attempted to parody in *Cat's Tail*. Bound in paper rather than boards, printed on cheap paper, the physical look and feel of the 1/8 octavo *Tales of the Factories* recalls that of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* which, in turn, sought to resemble a political pamphlet. Bowles's 85 page appendix of original documents, including minutes from the House of Commons, however, marked her book out as one far more overtly political than *Lyrical Ballads*.

Bowles's *Tales of the Factories* consists of three poems: 'The Father's tale', 'The Grandmother's tale' and a dramatic sketch called 'Pestilence'. In 'The Father's tale', a father recounts to his children a conversation he has had earlier in the day in a graveyard, during which

he admonished a poor man for being thankful that his child was dead, only to learn of the conditions she had to work in while she was alive:

'Ye're of the Fact'ries,' I began, but he
 Broke in with horrid laugh - 'Aye, who can doubt
That same that sees us? Fact'ry hands are we -
 Their mark's upon us - and it don't wear out.'
And dragging forward one poor girl - 'Look there!
He shouted out, and laid her shoulders bare.

Tearing the ragged shawl off - '*That's* fresh done!
 They sent her home scored black and blue last night,
To serve as mourning for the little one - (Blain 1998: 106)

'The Grandmother's tale' follows a similar pattern: a mother scolds her daughter for wishing that she was a poor child so no-one would tell her what to do. Poor Granny Jones with her dying grandchild becomes an object lesson for the privileged girl: Granny Jones relates to the mother and daughter how she was assured that her own grandchildren would be treated well in the factory and how this, in actuality, had not been the case; she tells of how they were 'strapped and wealed, / And forced to keep on - on' (Blain 1998: 109) and also of her granddaughter, Jean, who:

'By some great shaft her arm was caught -
 Only *one* scream she gave,
And the wheel whirled her round and round,
They told me, with a crunching sound... (Blain 1998: 110)

'Pestilence' is slightly different: in this dramatic sketch, a factory owner, Master Harrington, feels the equalising influence of the plague. '[S]taggering under the weight of two dead children' (Blain 1998: 112), he does not receive sympathy from the driver of the dead-cart but scornful mockery.

Soon, other factory workers gather and a riot almost ensues but, instead, one kindly woman, Martha, returns with him to his house to nurse his dying daughter. The father overhears his daughter praying with Martha for his forgiveness. The sketch concludes with Harrington's realisation of what he has done and his remorse: 'My blessed child! the stony heart is touched! / That prayer has mounted to the Mercy-seat' (Blain 1998: 119).

All three poems focus very specifically, not on the actual factory atrocities themselves, but on the revelation of them to ignorant parties. Bowles may have 'written like [her]self' but she was also well removed from her chosen subject and it is, perhaps, for this reason, that *Tales of the Factories* was very indifferently received. Out of the print run of 500, only 105 copies were sold in 1833. Always unflagging in his encouragement, Southey reminded Bowles of the non-commercial value of her poems: 'You ought not to have felt any misgivings about your *Tales of the Factories*', he wrote,

The question *cui bono* is very easily answered there. It is doing great good to impress, as you will do, upon all those into whose hands your verses will come, a deep sense of their abominable inhumanity - the great national sin - for it is such, more truly a national sin than ever the Slave Trade has been.
(RSCB: 270)

The extent of the direct social benefit of *Tales of the Factories* remains uncertain. Bowles's book did, however, appear to have sparked off a new genre: in 1835, Letitia Elizabeth Landon tried her hand at writing poetry about factory atrocities in *Vows of the Peacock* and Mary Howitt tried in the 1840s. Most well-known, of course, was Caroline Norton's *A Voice from the Factories* (1836), often hailed as the first volume of its kind. None of this was any consolation for Bowles in 1833. With *Tales of the Factories* being her second book in succession to fare badly, she became far from certain of her skills as a poet: 'To say the truth,' she told Blackwood, 'I believe authorship is not my vocation - tho' rhyming may be my disease' (quoted in Blain 1998: 85).

Following the failure of *Tales of the Factories*, Bowles was more indignant than ever about the state of contemporary poetry: 'I begin to detest Annuals as well as albums', she told Southey,

Such a flood of very pretty poetry have they let in upon us. Seldom do I now venture upon a page wherein I see the lines arranged in the suspicious form of metre. I am sick to death of the sweet Swans my sisters (all save one or two)... Think of my Monster [Blackwood] very seriously requesting he might be permitted to affix my name at full length to whatever I sent him in future - because the Hon. Mrs. N. [Norton?] and Lady E. S. W. [Emmeline Stuart Wortley], &c. &c., put theirs! (RSCB: 287)

Writing to Blackwood, Bowles had modestly asserted that 'no name less distinguished than that of Mrs Hemans - no female name I should say - bears being perpetually placarded' (quoted in Blain 1998: 84). In actuality, Bowles was simply unwilling to put her name to innocuous, 'pretty poetry' often written by women ('the sweet Swans my sisters') and often in iambic hexameters, that 'suspicious form of metre' so much favoured by annuals and the periodical press.

Bowles's determination to assert her 'own identity' as "Caroline Bowles" continued to be as strong as it had been but the commercial failure of, firstly, *Cat's Tail*, and then *Tales of the Factories*, was understandably discouraging. Southey mentioned her in his anonymous miscellany *The Doctor &c.*, saying that she was a poet 'whom no authoress or author has ever surpassed in truth, and tenderness, and sanctity of feeling' (quoted in RSCB: 323), but this in itself was not enough to persuade Bowles to think about publishing again.

The three years that followed the publication of *Tales of the Factories* were decidedly fallow ones for Bowles, punctuated, as they were for her, with extended periods of serious illness. To make matters worse for her, William Blackwood also became ill, and died in late 1834, leaving her without a publisher with whom she was used to dealing: 'My poor Monster!' she recalled, 'Always a kind Monster to me he has been' (RSCB: 310). Moreover, at about the same time,

Southey was inundated with work for the *Quarterly Review* and had clearly stopped writing poetry: 'Perhaps we shall publish our book some day - what do you say to that? - if I outlive all your task-work', Bowles complained, referring to their never-completed *Robin Hood*, 'Never, never one line of verse from you now; I am obliged to go back perpetually to the sixteen volumes you have given me, to keep alive the assurance that you are a Poet' (RSCB: 292).

In 1836, however, seventeen years after its original conception, Bowles revived her plans for her autobiographical blank-verse poem, *The Birth-Day*. On 3rd April, she wrote to William Blackwood's sons, Alexander and Robert, who had inherited their father's empire:

I am desirous of publishing a blank verse poem of about 3,000 lines - to be entitled (I believe) 'The Birth-day' - or something of this sort - and I have been encouraged to hope the production has some originality - of design - I may find some favours - even in this age so niggardly of [praise?] To practical ventures - of course - I cannot give - indeed I can hardly form - an opinion of my own - but I may venture to say that Mr Southey is one of those persons whose favourable reviewal of my little work has principally decided me on sending in the proofs - I no longer as an anonymous writer...³⁷

The veneer of modesty and indecision in this letter betrays a volition and conviction unseen in Bowles's negotiation of any of her earlier projects. *The Birth-Day*, she asserts, has an 'originality - of design'; she suggests that, if it should fail, it will not be the fault of the poem itself but because the contemporary audience, 'the age [is] so niggardly of praise'. Ignoring the dominant demands of the marketplace entirely, *The Birth-Day* becomes a book in which Bowles finally asserts her own authorial identity, a book in which she is 'no longer...an anonymous writer'.

³⁷ 'Letter from Caroline Bowles to Messrs. Blackwoods', 3 April 1836, MS 4043 f261-262, National Library of Scotland.

The Birth-Day, an extensive collection of Bowles's reminiscences about her childhood written across three books in blank verse, has proved difficult to even its most sympathetic and enthusiastic readers. Desperately wanting to recuperate Bowles in her study *The Adventurous Thirties: A Chapter in the Women's Movement* (1933), even Janet Courtney had to concede that she found *The Birth-Day*, 'not only prosaic but much of it, one cannot but feel, of an infantile dulness' (Courtney [1933] 1937: 33); for her, Bowles's inability to 'distinguish between simplicity and banality' (Courtney 1937: 34) had resulted in 'ninety-six pages of triviality' (Courtney 1937: 33).

Courtney, in her section on Bowles, never mentions Wordsworth's *Prelude*; but comparisons to this better-known poem offer the feminist reader a convenient literary context within which to place and read *The Birth-Day*. Moreover, because it was published fourteen years before *The Prelude* (1850) first appeared, *The Birth-Day*, read alongside *Prelude*, begins to steal some of the credit that Wordsworth has been awarded for writing the first autobiographical epic poem; this, in turn, feeds back into the feminist preoccupation with challenging the exclusivity of more traditional, male-dominated literary canons and histories.

Comparisons between *The Birth-Day* and *The Prelude* are, however, as problematic as they are appealing, not least because *Prelude* is considerably longer, and covers considerably more years of its author's life. Virginia Blain tries to account for this crucial difference by making the case that *The Birth-Day* is an unfinished poem that might have rivalled *The Prelude*, had it not been let down by poor and patronising mentorship: 'Wordsworth had his friend Coleridge as ideal audience:' she argues, 'Bowles had her friend Southey, who thought her major poem 'very sweet'' (Blain 1998: 133). Aside from Southey's decades of unflinching support, what Blain overlooks, of course, is that it had been Southey who, as we have seen, had found *The Birth-Day* to be 'in a very sweet strain...which may hold a permanent place in English literature' and had encouraged Bowles 'in the strongest and most unequivocal manner to proceed' (RSCB: 16-17) with her poem.

A second problem that arises when trying to fit *The Birth-Day* into the literary tradition carved out by *The Prelude* is that the literary importance Bowles gains by usurping Wordsworth, as the pioneer of the autobiographical epic poem, is temporary at best, and liable to be challenged and withdrawn as soon as an even earlier autobiographical poem can be found: such as *Boyhood* (1835) by Charles Abraham Elton.

Reviewing *The Birth-Day* in 1837, John Wilson compares Bowles's work with that of Charles Abraham Elton, author of *Boyhood: with other poems and translations* (1835): 'Mr Elton, in his beautiful poem of *Boyhood*, has shown us Harry,' he writes, 'and here Miss Bowles, has shown us Carry' (Wilson 1837: 410). In drawing this comparison, Wilson does not mean to suggest that Bowles's poem is a reply to Elton's; what he does do, however, is begin to offer a way of reading *The Birth-Day*, uninfluenced by Wordsworth's *Prelude* but overlooked by Bowles's modern critics.

For Wilson, *The Birth-Day* is, like *Boyhood*, a complete poem in itself, rather than the fragment of a larger, *Prelude*-like poem: 'The plan of the poem might be extended so as to include another season - or age of life', he concedes, 'Yet is it now a whole; and we believe that it is best it should remain in its present shape' (Wilson 1837: 428). The absence of a narrative leading from the existing reminiscences about childhood to adulthood (or a later 'age of life') does not trouble Wilson who finds, in the very act of reminiscence, a correspondence between past and present: the poet, in order

To imagine what he heard and saw...must imagine his own nature. He must collect from many vanished hours the power of his untamed heart, and he must, perhaps, transfuse also something of his maturer mind into these dreams of his former being thus linking the past with the present by a continuous chain, which, though often invisible, is never broken. (Wilson 1837: 410)

For Wilson, Bowles's poem is no exception:

You must not think that the whole poem is about the author's childhood. How could it? Herself of the Present speaks of her own thoughts and feelings, even when in contrast, still harmonious with those of herself of the Past...
(Wilson: 1837: 420)

Through the lens of Wilson's pre-*Prelude* review, *The Birth-Day* turns from being a pitiful shred of a grander, unfinished work, to a complete and assured poem in which Bowles, writing in her element, does nothing less than reclaim the past of her own childhood for the present day audience of the 1820s and 30s. Though Bowles is necessarily selective in what she includes in *The Birth-Day*, the reader is nevertheless offered a huge amount of information. Bowles gives descriptions of her nurse, her grandmother, her great-grandmother and her parents; she tells us about all her pets, 'her wild-tame hare, and her rabbits, and dormice, and squirrel, and cats, and kittens, and dogs of many a race, from ancient Di to Black Mungro, and her own gentle playfellow Chloe, and her gallant Juba, and her pet sheep called Willy, a palfrey of mettled blood, not to mention jackdaws, magpies, bullfinches, and owls, and many other manner of birds' (Wilson 1837: 419); she also tells us about drawing a house, cutting things out, needlework, her first writing lesson, gardening and fishing - to name but a few things.

Reading *The Birth-Day*, Janet Courtney finds 'triviality' and 'banality' in what Bowles chooses to recover from the past. What Courtney does, however, is assume that the poem's detail ought to be related, somehow, to something of a linear progression within the poem's narrative, some kind of larger significance or meaning. For instance, here is Bowles recalling her first writing lesson:

... at last

My long restrained ambition was indulged
In higher flights, with nicer art to shape
The involutions of the alphabet,
Unsteady and perplexed the first attempts

Great A's, that with colossal strides encroached
On twice the space they should have occupied... (BD: 22)³⁸

Assuming a *Prelude*-like development in the poem from childhood to adulthood, we might expect the passage to have some relevance, perhaps, to Bowles's development as a poet but, although she later remembers the early poetic effusions of her childhood, she concedes that:

...I too smile
In sad humility, experience-taught,
At thought of the young daring, by fond hearts
Built on exultingly. Alas, dear friends!
No heaven-born genius, as ye simply deemed,
Stirred in my childish heart the love of song. (BD: 23)

Here, Bowles very deliberately and explicitly thwarts her readers' expectations for any straightforward child-to-adult progression. In failing to acknowledge this deliberateness, Janet Courtney cannot but find Bowles's many descriptions trivial and banal; it is, however, this very deliberateness that imposes design and coherence onto *The Birth-Day* as a whole.

Following, particularly, the failures of *Cat's Tail* and *Tales of the Factories*, Bowles was, as we have seen, frustrated with the contemporary literary marketplace of the 1820s and 30s. In some sense, *The Birth-Day* is written in defiance of that marketplace but what it does, more devastatingly, is attack the very ideologies of accomplishment that underpin that marketplace. Upholding the unpretentious and earthy education given to her by Ephraim the gardener over the favoured accomplishment training of the 1820s and 30s, Bowles writes:

Young ladies! how especially for you
'Twould simplify the training! No she-Crichtons,

³⁸ Quotations are from 'The Birth-Day', *The Poetical Works*, London: 1867.

No petticoat professors would engage
To teach all 'OLOGIES and 'OGRAPHIES,
And everything in all the world (of course
Accomplishments included), all complete
In all their branches. What a load of rubbish,
Now crammed, poor dears! into your hapless brains,
Would leave the much abused organ room
To expand, and take in healthful nutriment. (BD: 54)

Writing in *The Birth-Day*, Bowles is certainly aware that she lives in Jewsbury's 'Era of Accomplishment' although she may couch it in slightly different terms:

Where'er I turn me, wheresoe'er I look,
Change, change, change, change, is everywhere at work
In all mine ancient haunts. Grammercie, though!
Reform --- improvement, is the proper word.
We live, God wot! in an improving age... (BD: 62)

In reclaiming the directionless profusion and excess of her own childhood, Bowles challenges the directedness of the 'improving age' in which she writes; she stresses, for example, the importance to childhood of fairytales and fantasy-play with dolls in an age when these are frowned upon by parents and educationalists who prefer, for their children, 'OLOGIES and 'OGRAPHIES' and accomplishments 'in all their branches'. 'Strange infatuation!' writes Wilson, parodying this audience,

that a person of acknowledged good sense, as well as genius, like Caroline Bowles, should even yet at her mature age, thus more than contenance, nay, recommend such absurd tales - fairy tales - as fit reading for children in an enlightened age like this, the age of reason.

...Pray, are little girls yet allowed to have dolls? 'Tis hardly correct. The spirit of the age is impatient of such precocity of the maternal affection, and regards with favour only the cultivation of intellect. (Wilson 1837: 414)

Like Jewsbury's 'Era of Accomplishment', Bowles's 'improving age' also extends to other aspects of everyday life. Bowles even laments the loss of an old-fashioned milestone: 'Old friend!' she writes, 'old stone! old way-mark! art thou gone?' (BD: 62). A milestone may be an odd subject for a poem but its loss does offer Bowles opportunity for a particularly vivid image that encapsulates the dogged purposefulness of the 'improving age':

...the poor milestone falls,
And in its place this smooth, white, perked-up thing,
With its great staring figures.

Well, well, well!
All's doubtless as it should be.. Were *my* will
The rule of action, strange results, I doubt,
Would shock the rational community.
No farmer round should clip one straggling hedge,
No road-surveyor change one rugged stone,
Howe'er illegible its letter face... (BD: 64).

What Bowles values in the milestone is its character, its 'familiar shapeless form, / Defaced and weather-stained' (BD: 62); its illegible ruggedness contrasts distinctly with the starkness of the new signpost that replaces it, the 'smooth, white perked-up thing, / With its great staring figures'. The milestone's character is incidental, even detrimental to its function, but it is this non-functional detail that Bowles wishes to reclaim in her poem, as we see in the following description of a fallen elm tree:

...Only of thee
The huge old trunk, still verdant in decay
With ivy garlands, and a tender growth -
Like a second childhood --- of thine own young shoots;
And there, like a giant guardian of the pass,

Thou stoodst, majestic ruin! thy huge roots,
Whose every fretted niche and mossy cave
Harboured a primrose, grappling the step bank,
A wayside rampart. Lo! they've rent away
The living bulwark now ---- a ghastly breach,
A crumbling hollow left to mark its site
And the proud march of utilitarian zeal. (BD: 63)

Even from this necessarily cursory look at *The Birth-Day* what emerges is nothing less than a damning indictment of the 'proud march of utilitarian zeal' that, in the name of 'reform' and 'improvement', destroys everything that Bowles prizes and wishes to preserve. *The Birth-Day* comes to dwell on a range of subjects (milestones, trees, pets, dolls, fairytales to name but a few) but, throughout, it champions the incidental and bears testimony to the beauty and value of things without specific function or purpose. It is these things, Bowles suggests, that memory clings to predominantly and, by implication, it is these things that add colour and character to life itself.

With its lengthy, discursive descriptions and narratives, *The Birth-Day* weaves itself into the very profusion, and excess beyond strict utilitarian function, that it celebrates. Those readers who complain about its triviality and banality, and those who seek progression and linear development from the poem, find themselves implicated in maintaining the 'improving age' that it condemns. This is an uncompromisingly defiant logic, imposed on the reader, not by 'The Authoress of Ellen Fitzarthur' but by the poet, 'Caroline Bowles'.

The Birth-Day was the first and only book to be published under the name of Caroline Bowles and it was, at once, the culmination and the end of Bowles's literary career. In November 1837, Southey's wife died. Bowles's letters to Southey, from June 1836 onwards, were inadvertently destroyed (RSCB: 340-1n) but a newly discovered cache of papers reveals that, within only weeks of his wife's death, Southey asked Caroline to marry him. 'I should have preferred, and thought it best for both, to remain as we were - and no more', reflected Caroline in her privately

circulated autobiographical narrative of 1840, 'Fast friends for this life and for Eternity - what more (looking to the end so near) was to be desired?' Southey was, however, insistent:

[W]e [are] already one, all that I desire in woman I should in you, and sure I am, that in me you would not find a wish ungratified - you would participate in all my thoughts and feelings. There would be but one heart and one will. The one person in the world to whom I could look with perfect confidence for advice in all things, for encouragement in all my pursuits - and material help and cooperation in many of them would be the wife of my Bosom! - Dearest, dearest Caroline of whom could I say this but of you? In whom but you, could I find all my heart desires all my nature craves for? Morally - intellectually - and to you I may say, religiously - we are already one.³⁹

When Caroline still refused, thinking herself too ill to be a good companion in his later life, Southey resorted to emotional blackmail: 'I shall have heart and hope and strength enough for everything, if you will be but mine - and nothing seems to me so incredible than that you should take away that hope, and that strength, and cast me from the top of all my trust[.] You can never have the heart to do that my Caroline - you cannot, will not lay up such a store of unhappiness for me'. Caroline eventually buckled: 'He was right,' she wrote, 'I could not do so - We were then at the close of June 1838. I wrote to him, that if he would be content to wait till that time twelvemonth, I would then consent to unite my fate with his, provided the amendment in my health continued and his wishes remained unchanged.' Delighted, Southey declared that he could 'wait as long as Jacob waited for Rachel with such a reward in view' and, a year later, they were married. As we shall see in my final chapter, their marriage could not have been further from the happy ending they had both anticipated.

³⁹ 'Caroline Bowles's Marriage Narrative', New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

Chapter 3: Maria Gowen Brooks

In a letter to a friend, the modernist writer, Djuna Barnes, recalled that her grandmother, Zadel Barnes Gustafson (1841-1917), 'believed in free love - everybody screwing each other' (Herring 1995: 58). Gustafson's life story was certainly an unconventional one, complete with a scandalous marriage, aged sixteen, to her Latin tutor and, subsequently, an even more scandalous divorce; she was an adept spiritual medium, and, upon relocating with her second husband to London in 1880, she hosted a popular literary salon that was frequented by the likes of Oscar Wilde and his mother. Learning much of what she knew about writing and journalism from Gustafson, Djuna Barnes was every bit her grandmother's protégée, and it is her grandmother's radicalism, and her grandmother's sexual libertinism, that one finds underpinning many of her works, including *Nightwood* and *The Antiphon*.

Gustafson's unconventional ideas did not, however, stem from nothing. Born in 1841, in Middletown, Massachusetts, she grew up less than thirty miles away from the town of Medford, the birthplace of Maria Gowen Brooks, for a time one of America's most critically acclaimed women poets. The epic poem for which Brooks was best known, *Zóphiël, or the Bride of Seven* (1833), had proved most challenging for its contemporary readers and critics: 'Some were astounded to find a woman of the nineteenth-century evincing more knowledge of Plato and Harfiz than of Bulwer or Hannah More', recalled one review in 1844, 'others were shocked, that she should wander from the "legitimate sphere" of female composition' (*North American Review* 1844: 33-4).

Undoubtedly, it was this wandering from the "legitimate sphere" of female composition' that most attracted Gustafson to Brooks's work, *Zóphiël* in particular. Exploding the story of the Apocrypha's *Book of Tobit* into a six canto poem, Brooks's *Zóphiël* loosely weaves a new

narrative around the Biblical character of Sara who, possessed by a demon that kills her first six husbands on their respective wedding nights, finally marries the son of the morally upstanding Tobit, according to the will of God. In *Zóphiël*, Brooks presents the first six husbands of Eglá (Sara's fictional counterpart) as deceitful adulterers at best, and murdering serial rapists at worst: they are almost always unfeeling and predatory, violent and sadistic.

Zóphiël had fascinated Gustafson since her childhood but Brooks's treatment of men, marriage and the way in which they impinged on the freedom of young women, could not have failed to strike a chord with the adult Gustafson, whose own marriage had, by 1865, become unbearable. According to Phillip Herring, who draws upon Gustafson's own account, her husband, Henry Buddington, had become violent and abusive: he had 'thrown her down a hall so forcefully that she fell against a door'; he had often threatened her with a gun; and he 'was a brute in sexual matters... demand[ing] intercourse during menstruation' (Herring 1995: 5).

In the early 1870s, Gustafson began writing for *Harper's Magazine* and, almost at once, began research for an article on Brooks. Rather than a piece of hackwork quickly dashed off, the article was to be an act of empathy and tribute from one woman writer, trapped in an unhappy marriage, to another. Although Brooks's posterity had looked fairly secure in the 1840s, she was, thirty years on, all but forgotten and Gustafson later recalled that her research had been 'very difficult research, involving seven years of investigation & correspondence'⁴⁰. The article finally appeared in 1879 and Gustafson used a version of it to introduce her edition of *Zóphiël*, published in Boston the same year.

The 1879 *Zóphiël* failed to revive any lasting interest in Brooks and, to this date, it remains the only posthumous edition of any of her work. Gustafson herself, however, remained utterly convinced of Brooks's literary importance and, in 1911, declared that: "Zóphiël" is, & I am

⁴⁰ 'Letter from Zadel Gustafson to Ruth Granniss', 14 February 1933, Ruth S. Granniss Correspondence, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

sure that at some later day than ours - it will be acknowledged to be[,] the grandest poem which appeared from any American pen, previous to 1900'⁴¹.

Gustafson's claim continues to go uncorroborated by modern academics but literary scholarship's fascination with mapping a pre-Dickinson tradition of American poetry and, more generally, with women's writing, certainly makes conditions favourable for a recuperation of Brooks's work. Whether there will ever be one remains to be seen, but perhaps the mere existence of this chapter is, in itself, indicative of some kind of new hope for Brooks. Earlier, in 1946, the plans of one student to pursue his interests in Brooks whilst studying at Columbia University, New York, were thwarted: 'I regret to inform you', he told Thomas Mabbott, an avid, if eccentric collector of Brooks's manuscripts, 'that the director of my pro-seminar work here at Columbia does not consider Mrs. Brooks a sufficient subject for a master's essay, and it has been necessary for me to curtail my research on that lady'⁴².

'I should like to show you a letter', wrote Southey to Caroline Bowles in 1826, '...from an American poetess - a widow - telling me how she has been crossed in love' (RSCB: 110). Years later, after the letter had long since been either lost or destroyed, Southey would recall that it had been 'a most wild letter - certainly the strangest letter I ever received' (RSCB: 221).

Little has been written about the American poet who wrote to Southey. Her name was Maria Gowen Brooks and she was born in Massachusetts in 1794. When she was fourteen, John Brooks, her legal guardian and widowed brother-in-law, proposed to her and, by the time she was

⁴¹ 'Letter from Zadel Gustafson to Ruth Granniss', 16 September 1911, Ruth S. Granniss Correspondence, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

⁴² '[Unidentified] to Thomas Mabbott', 11 March 1946, Maria Gowen Brooks MSS Collection, New York Public Library.

sixteen, they were married. The marriage, a failed relationship from the outset, took its toll on the young poet: 'The history of her mind I can very well understand', wrote Southey to Bowles,

She was married when almost a child to an elderly, if not an old man, who had no mental accomplishments in any degree to make amends for the disparity of years. She was passionately fond of poetry, and had a heart full of it; he thought of nothing but his affairs. (RSCB: 226)

In a letter to Anna Eliza Bray, Southey went on to add that: 'Mrs B. I doubt not, always has been, & shall be haunted by the feeling that if she had been mated with one capable of esteeming & loving her as she deserved to be esteemed & loved, she should have been one of the happiest of God's creatures'⁴³.

Living a life that, in her own words, was 'a succession of arduous though minute duties in which, oftentimes, there is nothing to charm and little to distract' (Brooks 1825: 9), Brooks felt keenly the discrepancies between her own life and her alternate, idealised version of it in which she was 'the happiest of God's creatures'. She did, however, find some comfort in writing poetry: '[M]y lyre has been a solace when every thing else has failed', she wrote, 'soothing when agitated, and when at peace furnishing that exercise and excitement without which the mind becomes sick, and all her faculties retrograde' (Brooks 1825: 9).

On one level, Brooks was a self-professed 'lady of ennui'⁴⁴, writing poetry simply for want of something to do and, reading the opening 'Introduction' to her first collection, *Judith, Esther and Other Poems* (1820), one would be forgiven for thinking that this was all there was to her work. Having directed readers seeking either the 'lofty-moving strain' of epic verse, or the 'wizard

⁴³ 'Letter from Robert Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 13 October 1833, MS Facs 615 unbound, 1831-1839, British Library.

⁴⁴ 'Maria Gowen Brooks to Robert Southey', 23 October 1837, Maria Gowen Brooks MSS Collection, New York Public Library.

grim and goblin sprite' of the gothic supernatural to more suitable books, Brooks addresses those whom she regards as her primary audience:

But, native youths and maids, with forms as bright
As rosy dreams that crown the summer night,
When angry winds against your casements throw
The tinkling sleet or softly-falling snow,
Or when the moon wandering o'er frozen streams
Coldly upon dismantled willow gleams,
When no congenial, kindly heart is nigh
And your lone bosoms heave th'unbidden sigh,
Or, youthful mothers, who soft vigils keep
O'er smiling cherubs wrapt in dewy sleep,
And silent sit, the live-long eve, and hear
Every sweet breath that warms the pallet near,
On such a night if my rude lay has power
To mitigate the drear'ness of the hour,
Or lend one melancholy moment speed -
Bless thee, my harp! I ask no other meed. (JE: 2-3)⁴⁵

Brooks's 'Introduction' looks forward to an innocuous and conventional volume of poetry that will relieve a dull evening, 'mitigate the drear'ness of the hour'. The other poems, we are led to think, will be reassuringly homely and sentimental; they will keep out the 'angry winds' and the cold, and they will complement the feelings of 'youthful mothers' keeping watch 'O'er smiling cherubs wrapt in dewy sleep'.

Equally though, poetry was also Brooks's escape from more emotionally charged circumstances, her 'solace when every thing else has failed'. 'Dedication', the second poem in

⁴⁵ Quotations taken from Maria Gowen Brooks, *Judith, Esther and Other Poems*, Boston, 1820.

Judith, Esther and Other Poems, explores this darker element that almost always lurks close to the surface of her work:

Scarce in my cradle was I laid
 Ere Fate relentless bound me,
Deep in a narrow vale of shade
 Where prisoning rocks surround me.

Lady, I've culled a wreath for you,
 From the few flowers that grow there,
Because 'twas all that I could do
 To lull the sense of woe there.

Yet, Lady, I have known delight
 The heart with bliss o'erflowing,
Endearing forms have blest my sight
 With soul and beauty glowing.

...

Oh, pleasures dead as soon as born,
 To be forgotten never!
Oh, moments - fleeting - few - and gone
 To be regretted ever!

A few sweet waves of glowing light
 Upon time's dreary ocean -
Light gales that wake the dead calm night
 To momentary motion -

Bright beams that in their beauty bless
 A dark and desert plain -
To show its fearful loneliness -
 And disappear again.

Yet oft she [Hope] hovers o'er me now,
Each soothing effort making,
So mothers kiss the infant's brow
But cannot cure its aching.

Then, Lady, oh, accept my wreath,
Though all besides condemn it,
Think of the gloom it grew beneath,
Nor utterly contemn it. (JE: 7-9)

Describing a poetry born out of lost hope and underpinned by 'gloom', Brooks offers, in the 'Dedication', an alternative perspective on her work: from being the innocuous kind of verse that 'youthful mothers' should read to 'mitigate the drear'ness of the hour', her poetry becomes a muffled cry from 'Deep in a narrow vale of shade / Where prisoning rocks surround me'; it becomes a painful articulation of hopelessness, veiled thinly by a 'few flowers' and 'a few sweet waves of glowing light'.

In juxtaposing her 'Introduction' with her 'Dedication', Brooks locks her readers into the tension that exists between the two. We may want to continue thinking of Brooks's audience purely in terms of the 'youths and maids, with forms as bright / As rosy dreams' but we cannot but catch, here and there, the darker elements of the 'Dedication', flickering ominously behind them. For, although the idyllic 'youths and maids, with forms as bright / As rosy dreams' continue to be present in the 'Endearing forms [...] / With soul and beauty glowing', they are, in 'Dedication', 'pleasures dead as soon as born' and 'moments - fleeting - few - and gone'. Similarly, the 'youthful mothers' of the 'Introduction' who hover over their cherub-children are, in 'Dedication', stripped of their angelic power and turned into helpless 'mothers [who] kiss the infant's brow / But cannot cure its aching'. Brooks never tries to reconcile the two opposing types of poetry set out in her 'Introduction' and 'Dedication' but, instead, asks that her readers simultaneously accept both, together with the fractures that exist in between:

[...]oh, accept my wreath,
Though all besides condemn it,
Think of the gloom it grew beneath
Nor utterly contemn it.

And yet, too often in *Judith, Esther and Other Poems*, Brooks fails to provide her reader with verse that expresses anything other than a self-indulgent and unrelenting melancholy, as even a brief survey of some of her opening lines will demonstrate: 'Thou art gone, again reflection / Tells me I am sad and lorn' (JE: 55) she writes; 'No longer will I weep or sigh: / Though many a bramble cross my way' (JE: 59); 'Not e'en a lonely star will shine, / The cold rain dashes on the pine' (JE: 106); 'Yes, thou art sad - I know not why, / And care not' (JE: 104).

Nevertheless, at her most interesting, Brooks explores and exploits the instability of the reading position that she so carefully sets up between her 'Introduction' and 'Dedication'. For example, in 'To One, who had taken laudanum to enliven himself', her concern for a friend (who has succumbed to the temptations of 'Th'infernal poppy's black and baleful juice') soon becomes a strange and vicarious form of wish-fulfilment:

No, Edwin, no! thou wert not formed for this,
For I have heard such accents from thy lips
As sure a soul polluted could not dictate.
Then guard thy heart susceptible and learn
To love such calm delights as hide not death.
Think of a matron who, like Virtue's self,
Grows lovelier from having known her long;
Whose brightly beaming eye and dulcet voice
Heightens thy filial love to adoration;
Whom even Time admires, and will not touch
Rudely enough to leave his cruel traces.
Think of the hour that gave thee to her arms
When her soft form had scarcely banished childhood.
Think with what joy she clasped thee to her heart,
Just entering on a world, till then unknown,

Of new and dear emotion, wordless bliss.
Think how thou trembled'st in her raptured arms
That feared to hurt thee with their warm embrace,
While heaven-refined, swift coursing through her veins
The sweet draught sought thy lip, by heaven instructed.
Think how her love could meet thine early doom,
And scorn not the remonstrance of a friend. (JE: 30-31)

While Edwin may do well to think of his wife while on the very brink of opium addiction, Brooks surely oversteps the mark in reminding him of his wife's 'wordless bliss' and how 'thou trembled'st in her raptured arms'. '[A]lways [...] dreaming what a happy creature she might have been if she had been united to one who would have loved her as she could have loved him' (RSCB: 226), Brooks does not offer friendly advice so much as an outpouring of her own private preoccupations and obsessions with love and marital bliss. It is these concerns, however, that pulse at the very heart of Brooks's poetry; and, curiously, it is in Bible versification that Brooks found her preferred vehicle for articulating them.

Brooks's modern critical neglect owes at least something to her interest in Bible versification, a genre that, today, is often thought to have 'left conventional notions of femininity unchallenged' (Wu 1997: 7); associated, as it is, with religious orthodoxy and social conservatism, it is often passed over as a legitimate subject for modern critical enquiry. Brooks's exclusive focus on the female characters of the Bible might, momentarily, pique the interest of some quarters but, in itself, this gendered focus does little to unsettle the apparent orthodoxy of the genre: writing *Middlemarch*, George Eliot was clearly unimpressed with the polite genteelness of Frances Elizabeth King's *Female Scripture Characters* (Eliot [1871-2]1994: 28).

Reading the 'Advertisement' in *Judith, Esther and Other Poems*, one might readily begin to conclude that Brooks conforms to many of the expectations of orthodoxy, conservatism and genteelness often associated with nineteenth-century religious verse:

In the short poems of Judith and Esther, the author has merely attempted the description of two females differing entirely in mind and person, yet equal in excellence; and has chosen only so much of their respective histories as might serve to produce the most striking picture of each. In Judith, it was intended to delineate prudence, fortitude, and decision, softened by a tincture of feminine sensibility... (JE: iii)

This is all well and good, except that the book of *Judith* in the Apocrypha tells of how the Assyrians lay siege to the city of Bethulia, and how Judith, a young and beautiful widow, firstly seduces the Assyrian general, Holofernes, and then, when he is drunk and sleeping, cuts off his head. Despite her claims to be selective in what she includes in her two title poems, Brooks does not shrink from describing the decapitation:

Then, his last breath the proud oppressor drew;
The blade her right hand wielded high in air
Descends: his neck was bare, her hand was true.

Mid the gush she smote his yet again,
And when the quivering visage severed lay,
Wiped from her ivory arms the steaming stain,
And took the costly canopy away.

Then wrapping carefully the steaming head,
Lest crimson traces might declare the tale,
Gave them in silence to her trembling maid,
And as accustomed, nightly sought the vale. (JE: 22)

Brooks ends her poem with Judith calling the men of Bethulia to arms:

"While yet the sight congeals their pampered blood,
Rush on them! all in their confusion, smite!
Nor rest nor respite till the impious brood
Lie like plucked grapes, in heaps before your sight." (JE: 23)

Although she is authorised by the original text to present Judith as a woman who is as brutal as she is righteous, Brooks feels the need to flesh out the Apocryphal story with inventions of her own that go some way in providing an explanation for Judith's uncompromising sternness.

Firstly, Brooks turns Judith into a mother, giving her a son to protect from the Assyrians:

Now, all the needful preparation done,
Her handmaid waits the moment to depart;
But in sweet slumber rests her little son,
And all the mother struggles at her heart.

"He will be safe," she said, "or should he not,
His life is heaven's - be it what it may."
Thus spake Religion, but the tender thought
Evades its power, she sought him as he lay.

...

She kissed his fragrant lips, and that high soul
Had melted, but Sapphira's [the maid's] bursting sigh
Recalled her slumbering wisdom to control,
The tear that almost trembled in her eye. (JE: 13-14)

In these stanzas, Brooks deftly frees her poem from being a straightforward recounting of the Apocryphal story, expanding it to allow for 'tender thought' that 'evades [Religion's] power'; the Apocryphal tale of God protecting his people also becomes, in Brooks's hands, a personal tale of Judith and 'all the mother [that] struggles at her heart' protecting her infant, and it is in this maternal instinct that Judith finds the courage to approach the Assyrian camp.

As in the original story, Judith's beauty captivates the Assyrian troops and she is soon invited to join the soldiers in a feast. The Apocrypha recounts simply that 'she arose, and decked herself with her apparel and all her woman's attire' and that 'Holofernes's heart was ravished with

her, and his soul was moved, and he desired exceedingly her company: and he was watching for a time to deceive her' (*Judith* XII). Brooks, however, shifts the emphasis of her poem directly onto Judith's own trials. Although her 'limbs have ne'er in soft allurements moved' (JE: 13) and her 'face could never smile with syren art' (JE: 13), Brooks's Judith has to dress up for and subject herself to the gazing eyes of the lascivious Holofernes:

In expectation saw the noble dame,
For well she knew th'eventful hour drew nigh;
And rose and deckt her, when the summons came,
With every pleasing art to lure the eye.

...

Near the enamoured chief with wine elate,
Her hair, save what composed the platted wreath,
In glossy waves descending, Judith sate
On skins of silky softness spread beneath.

Above her forehead, fair, mid many a tress,
Her graceful head a bright tiara wore,
Yet seemed, so much was there of loftiness,
As it disdained the ornaments it bore.

While holy scorn and detestation high,
Oft as the treacherous streams she bows to sip,
Fires the bright convex of her jetty eye,
And curls the living vermeil of her lip.

The cheif [sic] beheld her heightened beauties glow,
And his devoted temples ached to rest,
Temples, which oft dark ire's suffusion shew,
On the smooth arch of her majestic breast.

Her soul recoiled - o'er all the gorgeous place

Profusion fed luxurious revelry -
A little distant, her afflicted race
Have nought to drink but tears of agony.

But the blest thought, to see them all repose
On Plenty's couch; their wounded souls to cure;
To drown, in the impious tyrant's blood, their woes;
Gave renovated patience to endure. (JE: 19-21)

In the Apocrypha, Judith's beauty is little more than a convenient plot device but Brooks transforms it, in her poem, into something far more central to the story, and something altogether more complex. In Brooks, Judith's beauty becomes far more recognisable as a source of power. The very outcome of her narrative is exerted through it: the more Judith longs for 'the impious tyrant's blood', the more beautiful she becomes; and the more beautiful she becomes, the more power she has over the Assyrian men. Already captivated by her 'cheek / Crimsoned by scorn' (JE: 16), Holofernes is so far gone in love that he is oblivious to even the possibility that Judith's 'heightened beauties glow' with 'holy scorn and detestation high'.

In emphasising the role of Judith's beauty and also her personal need for 'renovated patience to endure', Brooks turns Judith from the passive instrument of God, found in the Apocrypha, into the heroine proper of her own story. In charge of her own actions, Judith becomes herself the saviour of the Beluthian people, and the only miracle worked by God, in Brooks's narrative, is that Judith escapes from Holofernes, unscathed and unmolested:

"Behold," she cries, "proud Holofernes' head,
Ta'en by my hand, as in his wine he slept;
Behold his canopy: it deckt his bed,
Yet by my God from every stain I'm kept..." (JE: 23)

Ultimately, Brooks's departures from the original text allow her to find, in a tale about God exacting vengeance on those who attack his people, a parallel story about a beautiful woman

who kills an unwanted admirer. As in 'To One, who had taken laudanum to enliven himself', 'Judith' becomes a form of vicarious wish-fulfilment that stems from Brooks's all-consuming obsession with love.

At a glance, 'Esther' appears to be a response to the treachery and scorn so defiantly offered in 'Judith'. In the Old Testament, the book of *Esther* tells the story of how Xerxes, the Persian king, deposes his wife Vashti and makes Esther, a young Jewish girl, his queen instead. Haman, one of the king's court, successfully petitions the king to authorise the extirpation of all the Jews in his territories because Esther's uncle, Mordecai, refuses to kneel down to him and pay him honour. Risking death, Esther approaches the king (those who approach the king without invitation are put to death unless he extends to them a gold sceptre) and asks for his presence at a banquet. At the banquet, Esther then asks the king to spare her people and, as a result, the king orders Haman and his family to be hanged. In her 'Advertisement', Brooks expresses a wish to describe,

[I]n Esther, a soul, painfully alive to every tender emotion; a noble elevation of mind, struggling with constitutional softness and timidity. Such a character must the reader imagine before he can enter into her distress, her irresolution, her hopes and her fears, ere she subdues them all, and voluntarily braves death, (or what is worse to her, the displeasure of him who had raised her from poverty to splendour,) for her friends and for her country. (JE: iii-iv)

'Esther', a much shorter poem than 'Judith', takes up only a fragment of its original story. It begins with Esther wondering what she can do to mend Xerxes's decree. "I must avert the fell design - yet how? / What can a weak and artless woman do?" (JE: 24) she asks herself, fearing the death-penalty if she approaches the king:

"But, I am loved, my monarch says, most dear,
And the soft word was softened by his look -

Esther, be firm and banish every fear!
Can he who loves, so well, thy death-blow brook?

"Ah treacherous hope! - turn thou, my soul, with dread,
Those words, those melting looks, another's were -
Yes, hapless queen, thine were my throne and bed;
Another still - full soon may triumph there..." (JE: 25)

Laying aside her fears, Esther, like Judith, makes herself look beautiful so that she can approach the king:

"Take ye, my maids, this mournful garb away,
Bring all my glowing gems and garments fair,
A nation's fate impending, hangs to day,
But on my beauty and your duteous care."

Prompt to obey, her ivory form they lave;
Some comb and braid her hair of wavy gold,
Some softly wipe away the limpid wave
That o'er her dimply limbs in drops of fragrance rolled.

Refreshed and faultless from their hands she came,
Like form celestial clad in raiment bright,
O'er all her garb rich India's treasures flame,
In mingling beams of rain-bow coloured light. (JE: 26)

Esther's preparations succeed in their aim and the king, not in the least displeased with her appearance, promptly asks:

'What would my Queen, and what is her desire?
Tremble not, Esther, tell thy wish to me,
For shouldst thou half fair Persia's realm require,
Speak but a word, and I will give it thee.' (JE: 27)

The poem ends with the king gladly consenting to go to Esther's banquet and Esther 'join[ing] her maidens in the thankful prayer' and plotting, also, how she can 'undeceive her lord's too ready ear' (JE: 28).

Despite her reservations about the king's loyalty to her in view of Vashti's sudden and undeserved deposition, Brooks's *Esther* seems to be very much the picture of a wife in love with her husband, one who values his 'soft word' and 'melting looks', one (as the 'Advertisement' maintains) who fears, more than death, 'the displeasure of him who had raised her from poverty to splendour'. Strangely, in the poem itself, there never appears to be any real danger for Esther; her reservations and fears about approaching Xerxes in his inner court seem awkward and unnecessary and, judging from his immediate and congenial response, are occasioned only by the ritualistic formalities of the Persian court. Read in the light of the Old Testament, 'Esther' is a rather ungainly poem, a poorly-framed object lesson, not in destroying unwanted admirers like 'Judith', but in wielding and exercising a gentle power over one's husband through feminine coercion. If we accept such a reading, however, we, like Xerxes, cannot but misunderstand Esther.

Although it may seem so, Brooks's 'Esther' is not drawn from the Old Testament. Notably, the Old Testament *Esther* never once mentions God and so, in having Esther offer a 'thankful prayer' in the penultimate stanza of the poem, Brooks begins to point to another, lesser-known version of *Esther* in which God does figure, namely 'The Rest of the Chapters of the Book of Esther' in the Apocrypha. On closer inspection, the entire narrative structure of Brooks's poem (Esther's indecision and contemplation; followed by her preparations; followed by her audience with the king) is very clearly derived from Chapters 14 and 15 of the Apocryphal *Esther* rather than the *Esther* of the Old Testament. Read in the light of the Apocrypha, Esther's reservations and fears that before seemed implausible and unwarranted, suddenly make sense; for, in the Apocryphal version (and only in the Apocryphal version) of the story, Esther clearly despises the king as much as she mistrusts him, as she herself reveals in one of her prayers:

O King of the gods, and holder of all dominion...[t]hou hast knowledge of all things: and thou knowest that I hate the glory of the wicked, and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised, and of every alien. Thou knowest my necessity: that I abhor the sign of my high estate, which is upon mine head in the days wherein I shew myself. I abhor it as a menstruous rag, and I wear it not when I am private by myself. (*Apocryphal Esther XIV*)

Alongside its Apocryphal source, Brooks's 'Esther' becomes a variation on 'Judith', a second story about a woman who, with her beauty, overcomes an admiring tyrant whom she does not love, and is pivotal in the execution of her enemies.

Whether she does it by grafting the power of God onto Judith, or by exploiting the variations between the Old Testament and Apocryphal versions of *Esther*, Brooks goes to great lengths to forge a legitimate space in which she can write this story which, for one wishing that 'she had been mated with one capable of esteeming & loving her as she deserved to be esteemed & loved' is as empowering as it is fantastic. The satisfaction that the story offers is, however, illusory, as Brooks's treatment of feminine beauty in the two poems highlights.

What we are expected to make of Judith and Esther's beauty is undeniably problematic. Brooks's own personal notions of femininity demanded that women be beautiful and, moreover, that they enjoy being beautiful. Writing to Zadel Barnes Gustafson, Brooks's niece, Ellen Parker, recalled that to her

girlish vision [her aunt] always appeared a being of the most romantic loveliness and grace. She *always* dressed in white or gray, wearing transparent sleeves, through which her beautiful arms were seen; and her hands were almost always covered in white-kid gloves. She seemed to *reverence* her own personal charms, and felt it a duty to preserve her own sweetness. (Gustafson 1879: xiv)

True to character, Brooks delights in Judith's 'majestic breast' and 'timid charms' (JE: 16), in the same way that she revels, too, in Esther's 'gentle breast' (JE: 26) and 'soft ringlets' (JE: 27); in 'Esther' especially, the diction of her narrative voice, rich in long vowel-sounds ('all my glowing gems and garments fair'; 'her ivory form they lave'; 'comb and braid her hair of wavy gold') seems to positively linger over and express much pleasure in Esther's physical attributes.

Clearly, Brooks wants the reader to find Judith and Esther beautiful but, in the contexts of their stories, the reader's is an uncomfortable appreciation at best. It is, after all, for Holofernes that Judith 'rose and deckt her... / With every pleasing art to lure the eye' (JE: 19); and for King Xerxes that Esther calls for the 'duteous care' of her maids. Subjected to the gaze of these men, Judith and Esther, at their most beautiful, come to be disdainful of their own beauty: Judith's

...graceful head a bright tiara wore,
Yet seemed, so much was there of loftiness,
As it disdained the ornaments... (JE: 20)

And, presumably, Brooks's Esther despises her 'garb rich [in] India's treasures' (JE: 26) as much as her Apocryphal counterpart does the 'menstruous rag'. Brooks does not, of course, ever try to restrict Judith and Esther's personalities to the conventional and innocuous femininity that Holofernes and Xerxes come to expect from their outward appearance. Their assassination and machinations, respectively, are clearly proof that there is (to borrow phrases from the 'Advertisement') more to them than just their 'tincture of feminine sensibility' or 'constitutional softness and timidity'; Brooks also endows them with an inner core of 'prudence, fortitude, and decision', a 'noble elevation of mind' (JE: iii). But, if 'Judith' and 'Esther' are celebrations of their heroines' triumphs, they are also poignant reminders of their tragic circumstances; and, if Brooks is unapologetic about allowing her characters 'fortitude' and 'elevation of mind', she also finds it pitiable that they are, in the first instance, trapped in situations where they are forced to draw upon these inner qualities. Committed, at once, to both the value of the 'constitutional softness

and timidity' of femininity, and to acknowledging and celebrating her characters' distinctly unfeminine 'fortitude' and 'elevation of mind', Brooks seems, in her poetry, to clamber after the apparently irreconcilable.

The contradiction struck up in celebrating both Judith's femininity as well as her unfeminine deeds, is one that other Bible versifiers also faced. In his poem, 'Hebrew Idylls. No. XII. Judith' (1836), M. J. Chapman sidesteps the contradiction by denying any relationship at all between the feminine and unfeminine aspects of Judith's character. For him, feminine 'softness' was something to be put on and cast off:

Is woman but a plaything for soft hours?
A pretty toy for intervals of leisure?
A thing to dally with on beds of flowers?
...
Yet can she, sometimes, lay her softness by,
Stern in resolve, unconquerably free,
Suffer for conscience, for her country die,
Or for her loved a willing victim be. (Chapman 1836: 18-9)

Rebekah Gumpert Hyneman, writing her own sketch of 'Judith' in her series of 'Female Scriptural Characters' in *The Leper and Other Poems* (1853), ends her version of the story unable to resolve the contradiction that she had found:

Oh! not by gentle woman's hand
Should blood be shed or victory won;
Yet, for her God, her love, her land,
What hath not woman done? (Gray 1997: 58)

Brooks's 'Judith' and 'Esther' do go a little further in resolving the contradiction than either Chapman or Hyneman, in that both her heroines act in order to protect a homeland in which they can be all 'softness and timidity'; amongst the Jewish people, Esther is but 'a weak and artless

woman' (JE: 24) while, in Beluthia, Judith can be left in peace to mourn for her dead husband and be 'fair' without being preyed upon sexually (JE: 10).

Yet, while the Apocryphal stories unambiguously tell of victories for the Jewish nation as a whole, Brooks's more personal and fragmentary narratives cast into doubt their heroines' own successes in preserving the idyllic, non-confrontational space their homes once afforded: Esther will still have to be Xerxes's wife; Judith takes her unfeminine behaviour right up to the city gates, telling her people not to 'rest nor respite till the impious brood / Lie like plucked grapes, in heaps before your sight'. In doing so, she raises in the reader's mind, the doubt of whether she can ever be 'softness and timidity' in Beluthia again.

Ultimately, what 'Judith' and 'Esther' point out for Brooks is the need for a different kind of heroine, a feminine woman who, while clearly bearing a core of 'fortitude' and 'elevation of mind', actively resists the urge to compromise on her femininity, and this is what Brooks presents in her six-canto epic, *Zóphiël or the Bride of Seven*.

The first canto of *Zóphiël* was published in Boston as a slim, seventy-page volume in 1825. This edition was not, however, part of the grand design that Brooks had in mind for what was to be, by far, her most ambitious poem. 'Having finished one Canto', she explained in the 1825 edition's *Preface*,

I left the United States for the West Indies in the hope of being able to sail thence for Great Britain, where I might submit what I had done to the candour of some able writer; publish it, if thought expedient; and obtain advice and materials for the improvement and prosecution of my work. (Brooks 1825: 5-6)

Brooks's desire to publish in Britain stemmed from the simple fact that 1820s' America, in spite of her political independence, remained culturally subordinate to Europe, at least insofar as literature was concerned. In 1818, Southey expressed some surprise that, in terms of poetic activity, 'America should be so utterly barren: since the Revolution', he wrote, 'they have not produced a single poet who has been heard of on this side of the Atlantic' (C. Southey 1855: 364). In part, America's apparent silence in Europe was a direct result of cultural snobbery: 'The term, "infancy of poetry," as applied to the American muse, has neither force nor intelligible signification', remarked one writer in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1839,

yet the phrase is constantly on the lips of both Englishmen and Americans - by the one used apologetically - by the other in a sense of lofty superiority... England is reluctant to give us credit for any thing better than the crude effusions and irregular compositions alone, which marked the earliest era of her own demi-savage state, when her untaught ancestors gave vent to their warlike enthusiasm and fierce passions in bursts of wild verse... This arises, doubtless, from her habit of forgetting, in her jealous maternal anxiety to keep us in remembrance of our political childhood, that, as members of the social compact, we are not a whit less civilized or less instructed than herself. (*Southern Literary Messenger* 1839: 541)

Without an established national literature of her own to participate in, the only way in which Brooks could realistically become a literary success was by establishing for herself a reputation in England and Europe. Her first attempt to reach England in the early 1820s failed ('events have transpired to frustrate that intention' (Brooks 1825: 6)) but, soon afterwards, she wrote to Southey and introduced herself, enclosing with her letter, copies of *Judith, Esther and Other Poems* and the 1825 *Zóphiël*. 'I should like to show you a letter', wrote Southey to Caroline Bowles in 1826, 'which I have received from an American poetess - a widow - telling me how she has been crossed in love' (RSCB: 110). Few, if any letters at all, were exchanged between Southey and

Brooks over the next few years and, understandably, Southey was somewhat taken aback by her sudden and unannounced appearance in Keswick six years later in 1831.

'April 7th. - An American lady is lodging in Keswick, who introduced herself to me five or six years ago by two little volumes of poetry and by a most wild letter - certainly the strangest letter I ever received', Southey noted in a letter to Caroline Bowles,

She has now accompanied her brother to Europe, and while he is travelling about on his mercantile business, she thought Keswick would be a good place in which to await, and accordingly here she came, with a longish poem which she wants to publish, but for which she can find no publisher. Her name is Mrs. Brooks... (RSCB: 221-2)

Writing to Lord Mahon, Southey later recalled that 'When she came to this place, and sent up a note to say she had taken lodgings here, I never was more surprised, and went to call upon her with no favourable expectations' (C. Southey 1855: 523). In a similar account of Brooks's visit for Bowles, Southey recalled that: 'I had no wish to see her, and was almost as much vexed as surprised when she let me know that she was in Keswick. I went to call upon her unwillingly; but my visit was an hour long, and during the few weeks that she continued here she won the liking of all this household in a very great degree' (RSCB: 285).

Brooks cut a strange figure with Southey. Even by the time she left Keswick for Liverpool, he was 'not without suspicion that there may be a little flightiness about her; her eyes', he felt, 'had an expression which looked that way' (RSCB: 226). Yet, in person, Brooks was also so much the epitome of femininity that Southey couldn't help but like her: 'The more we saw her, the better we liked her', he told Bowles, 'You *would* have liked her, and could not have helped liking her' (RSCB: 226); 'how gentle and how feminine she is, how sensible of any little kindness, and how full of feeling' (RSCB: 285) he recalled in another letter. And, as for the *Zóphiël* manuscript: 'Her poem is very fanciful and, on the whole, beautifully written', remarked Southey,

The subject is like the story of Tobias - the love of a fallen angel for a Jewish girl. I believe [Mrs. Brooks] means to leave it in my hands, in the hope of its getting into the press at some time or other. But by what I have seen of it, it would in some places require cooling, and if it should be necessary for me to let her know this, you may suppose that I shall be in a state which novelists might call delicate embarrassment; yet you could not help liking her were you to see her - not for beauty, nor for any other attractiveness than what proceeds from a meek, gentle, unassuming, unaffected, kind nature, and from perfect simplicity of manners. (RSCB: 221-2)

For Southey, Brooks's 'kind nature' and 'perfect simplicity of manners' in real life were at odds with the inappropriately impassioned tone of her poetry which 'in some places require[s] cooling'. In his mind, these two aspects of her jarred; pointing out to a woman as distinctly feminine as Brooks that her poetry was, in places, distinctly unfeminine and would 'require cooling' would result 'in a state which novelists might call delicate embarrassment'.

True to her original design as set out in her 1825 *Preface*, Brooks left her manuscript with Southey. 'When I had failed to obtain a publisher for it,' Southey recounted in his letter to Lord Mahon, 'some of her American connections engaged with a bookseller in Great Queen Street, and I corrected the proof-sheets' (C. Southey 1855: 523). The full-length six-canto *Zóphiël* was published in 1833.

As for the original manuscript, that remained with Southey. Upon his death, it was auctioned and, at his eldest daughter's request, was purchased by his son-in-law, the Revd. John Wood Warter, who thought it 'perhaps the greatest scrawl you ever saw' (Brooks 1879: xix). The manuscript is now housed in the Rare Books and Manuscripts department of the New York Public Library. On almost all of its pages, numerous pieces of paper (sometimes as many as seven or eight) bearing revised or corrected verses have been glued over existing verses. The manuscript is in a most delicate condition but, with care, the original text of each page can be read when an intense torchlight is shone through the page at certain angles. The variations between the printed

text of 1833 and the original text of the palimpsestic manuscript are too numerous to be mentioned here but what is clear is that, aside from minor corrections in diction, grammar and scansion, the published 1833 text is essentially identical to the manuscript that Southey first read. In fact, Southey's own handwriting only appears once on the entire manuscript. At the beginning of Canto II, 'Death of Euphion' (renamed 'Death of Altheëtor' in the published version), he revises the original second stanza from:

Bridegrooms like him they knew his fate; but yet
Maddened by hope of bliss, they dared the ill
He suffered...⁴⁶

to the lines of the published text, 'Bridegrooms like him, they knew his fate, yet, bent / On their desires, resolved that fate to brave'. In revising 'hope of bliss' to 'their desires', Southey was not 'cooling' down the stanza so much as making it more accurate with regard to the poem's plot: the motives of three of the five bridegrooms mentioned have nothing at all to do with a sexual 'hope of bliss'.

Whatever 'cooling' revisions Southey, at one time, may have felt were necessary, were, in the end, almost certainly never executed. Moreover, as the reader who 'corrected the proof-sheets', it was Southey who finally allowed the impassioned, 'un-refrigerated' text to go to print: 'I have never seen a more passionate work,' he wrote upon its publication, 'rarely one so imaginative and original' (RSCB: 285).

⁴⁶ Maria Gowen Brooks, '*Zóphiël, or the Bride of Seven*, THE ORIGINAL HOLOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT, WITH MANY ERASURES AND CORRECTIONS BY THE AUTHORESS; also a LONG AND INTERESTING AUTOGRAPH LETTER SIGNED, FROM MRS. BROOKS TO ROBERT SOUTHEY', Maria Gowen Brooks MSS Collection, New York Public Library.

The published *Zóphiël* is so brimful with passion that, mentioning it in passing in her book on American women's poetry, Alicia Ostriker refers to its 'six cantos of steamy pseudo-mythology' (Ostriker 1987: 214). Its very chronology, 'occupy[ing] the time of nine months: from the blooming of roses at Ecbatana to the coming in of spices at Babylon' (*Graham's Magazine* 1848: 62) seems almost pregnant with longing. Despite its obvious borrowings from the Apocryphal *Book of Tobit*, Southey stopped short of calling *Zóphiël* a Bible versification ('The subject is like the story of Tobias' was as far as he was willing to stretch the association), remembering as he did, perhaps, the startling admission with which Brooks had begun her 1825 *Preface*. 'Wishing to make a continued effort, in an art which, though almost in secret, has been adored and assiduously cultivated from earliest infancy,' she had written,

it was my intention to have chosen some incident from Pagan history, as the foundation of my contemplated poem. But, looking over the Jewish annals, I was induced to select for my purpose, one of their well-known stories which besides its extreme beauty, seemed to open an extensive field for the imagination which might therein avail itself not only of important and elevated truths but pleasing and popular superstitions. (Brooks 1825: 5)

By claiming that *Zóphiël* is a poem of her own design that was only later grafted onto a Biblical source, and by suggesting that 'some incident from Pagan history' might, in many ways, have served her purposes just as well, Brooks pushes the conventions of Bible versification to their limits. Her apparent disregard for the religious sanctity of her source enables her to shake off the piety and devotional flavour so often indicative of Bible versification as a genre. *Zóphiël* takes nothing from the Apocrypha, except a convenient framing device for its already chosen themes and story: 'The germ of the story is the tale contained in the 6th, 7th, and 8th chapters of the apocryphal book of Tobit', remarked Henry Nelson Coleridge in his review of 'Modern English Poetesses' (1840), 'but it is so Grecised and Talmudised, so eudemised and cacodemised,

that neither Tobias, the Fish, nor the Wicked Spirit would know themselves again under the manipulation of 'Mary of the West' ([H. N. Coleridge] 1840: 389⁴⁷).

With far more abandon than either 'Judith' or 'Esther', *Zóphiël* is not a conventional Bible versification but an overflow of Brooks's own obsessions and fantasies. Interestingly, Brooks makes a case in the 1825 *Preface* for this essentially private act of overflow being both a characteristic and a prerogative of women's writing in general:

Men, when they feel that nature has kindled in their bosoms a flame which must incessantly be fed, can cultivate eloquence and exert it, in aid of the unfortunate before the judgment seats of their country; or endeavour to "lure to the skies" such as enter the temples of their god; but woman, alike subject to trials and vicissitudes and endowed with the same wishes, (for the observation, "there is no sex to the soul," is certainly not untrue) condemned, perhaps, to a succession of arduous though minute duties in which, oftentimes, there is nothing to charm and little to distract, unless she be allowed the exercise of her pen must fall into melancholy and despair, and perish, (to use the language of Mad. de Staël,) "consumed by her own energies." (Brooks 1825: 8)

In laying claim to both the inner 'flame' of the sexless soul and the social femininity of 'woman', Brooks casts herself in the role of the idealised heroine who, bridging an inner 'prudence, fortitude, and decision' with 'constitutional softness and timidity', is called for by the uncomfortable ambiguity of 'Judith' and 'Esther'. Unsurprisingly, the same idealised heroine that Brooks herself assumes the role of in writing *Zóphiël* figures in the poem itself.

⁴⁷ Mudge (1989: 96) identifies the author of this article as J. G. Lockhart. However, a manuscript list located amongst Henry Nelson Coleridge's letters to various recipients (Add MSS 47558, British Library.) provides a complete list of his contributions to the *Quarterly Review* that includes the 'Modern English Poetesses' review.

Egla, the central character of *Zóphiël*, is the very embodiment of Brooks's sexless soul combined with the 'constitutional softness' of femininity:

A child of passion - tenderest and best
Of all that heart has inly loved and felt;
Adorned the fair enclosure of her breast -
Where passion is not found, no virtue ever dwelt.

Yet not, perverted, would my words imply
The impulse given by Heaven's great Artizan
Alike to man and worm - mere spring, whereby
The distant wheels of life, while time endures, roll on -

But the collective ministry that fill
About the soul, their all-important place -
That feed her fires - empower her fainting will -
And write the god on feeble mortal['] s face. (22-23)⁴⁸

Defly in this passage, Brooks refigures passion into an otherworldly quality, making it inextricable from virtue ('Where passion is not found, no virtue ever dwelt'). Given the sexual overtones of the *Tobit* story, Brooks is particularly careful to present Egla as a heroine who is as chaste as she is passionate:

Yet anger, or revenge, envy or hate
The damsel knew not: when her bosom burned
And injury darkened the decrees of fate,

⁴⁸ All my page references from Canto I of *Zóphiël* are taken from the 1825 *Zóphiël*. The rest are taken from Gustafson's 1879 edition.

She had more piteous wept to see that pain returned.

Or if, perchance, tho' formed most just and pure,
Amid their virtue's wild luxuriance hid,
Such germ all mortal bosoms must immure
Which sometimes show their poisonous heads unbid -

If haply such the lovely Hebrew finds,
Self knowledge wept th' abasing truth to know,
And *innate pride*, that *queen of noble minds*,
Crushed them indignant ere a bud could grow.

...

And yet, despite of all the gushing tear -
The melting tone - the darting heart-stream - proved,
The soul that in them spoke, could spurn at fear
Of death or danger... (23-4)

Zóphiël subjects Egla's character to a series of trials and her incapacity for 'anger, or revenge, envy or hate', her 'gushing tear' and 'melting tone', and her soul's ability to 'spurn at fear / Of death or danger' are critical to the outcome of the poem's narrative. However, unlike Judith or Esther, Egla's strength of character is not to be demonstrated through a decisiveness of action but through a statue-like passivity:

...had those she loved
Required it at their need, she could have stood,
Unmoved, as some fair-sculptured statue, while
The dome that guards it, earth's convulsions, rude
Are shivering - meeting ruin with a smile. (24)

The first canto of *Zóphiël* tells the story of how Egla is made to marry Meles, a handsome Median gentleman whom she does not love. Wishing to 'renovate her race from beauteous Egla's bed',

Egla's mother insists that the time has come for her to 'hush each idle wish and learn to be a wife' (25). Egla responds by revealing the secret meeting she had as a child with an angel in disguise who assures her that the (Jewish) husband God intends for her is, having escaped the recent massacre of the Jews, alive and well. While the reader might be convinced of the authenticity of Egla's epiphany, her mother is not and continues to insist upon her marrying Meles. Torn between loyalty to the predestined will of God and her filial obligations to her mother, Egla chooses the latter: '[T]he Mede I'll wed - ' she says, 'but yet / I cannot stay these tears that gush to pain thy view' (36). Left in her favourite grove of trees, Egla cries herself to sleep and, it is at this point that she unwittingly attracts the attention and love of a passing fallen spirit named Zóphiël.

'[N]ow minister of ill; but ere / He sinned, a heavenly angel' (39), Zóphiël is the fictional counterpart of Asmodeus, the 'Wicked Spirit' of the book of *Tobit*. Unlike that spirit, however, Zóphiël's wickedness is far less clear-cut and his very name resonates with moral ambiguity. In her survey of *Sacred and Legendary Art* (1848), Anna Jameson noted that the seven archangels (notably mentioned in the book of *Tobit*) had 'assigned to them distinct vocations and distinct appellations, each terminating with the syllable *El*, which signifies God' (Jameson [1848] 1890: 88). Zóphiël's name is an angelic one: in Book VI of *Paradise Lost*, Milton invokes Zóphiël, ruler of the order of cherubim, to warn heaven of a second attack from Satan's legions; in Dionysian systems of theology, another Zóphiël ('the wrath of God') features as the fifth of the unholy sefiroth, an angel of death, as often regarded as a force of evil as a force of good. Brooks's Zóphiël comes to embody all the ambiguities that his name suggests and, in her poem, he is like a 'heavenly angel', a fallen angel and an unholy sefiroth angel all at once.

In the poem, Zóphiël is driven by the desire 'To find, amid the loveliest spots of earth, / Faint likeness of the heaven he had lost' (41). It is on this perpetual quest that he stumbles upon Egla and the 'colours in her face - / Her bare white arms - her lips - her shining hair' (42) seem to offer him a consoling solace. The love that Zóphiël has to offer is, however, necessarily

destructive, as his recounting of his previous relationship with the Witch of Endor (cf. *I Samuel* 28) reveals:

"The few I've seen and deemed of worth to win
Like some sweet flowret mildewed, in my arms,
Withered to hidiousness - foul e'vn as sin -
Grew fearful hags; and then with potent charm

"Of muttered word and harmful drug, did learn
To force me to their will. Down the damp grave
Loathing, I went at Endor, and uptorn
Brought back the dead; when tortured Saul did crave,

"To view his pending fate. Fair - nay, as this
Young slumberer, that dread witch; when, I arrayed
In lovely shape, to meet my guileful kiss
She yielded first her lip. (44)

The moral and physical corruption suffered by the Witch of Endor is a fate that will necessarily befall any of Zóphiël's lovers. Appending a footnote to the above stanzas, Brooks writes:

One of the most striking absurdities in the lately-dispelled superstition of witchcraft, is the extreme hidiousness and misery usually ascribed to such as made use of the agency of evil spirits. I have therefore made it the result of an unforeseen necessity: no female can be supposed to purchase, voluntarily, the power of doing mischief to others at the price of beauty and every thing like happiness on her own part. (44n)

Zóphiël, however, cares little about the consequences of his passions insofar as Eglá's fate is concerned: 'She may be mine a little year - ev'n fair / And sweet as now', he tells himself,

...And wherefore grieve to cloud her little day
Of fleeting life? - What doom from power divine

I bear eternal! (45)

Yet, although Zóphiël's ultimate end is to be self-serving, he is the one who offers Egla (when she awakes) the truth about her future husband's infidelity and the means by which to escape her impending marriage:

'Say, doth thy soul in all its sweet excess
Rush to this bridegroom, smooth and falsehood-taught.
Ah, no! thou yield'st thee to a loathed caress -
While thy heart tells thee loud it owns him not.

'Hadst thou but seen, on Tigris' banks, this morn
Wasting her wild complaints, a wretched maid,
Stung with her wrongs - lone - beauty-reft - forlorn -
And learned 'twas ev'n thy Meles who betrayed,

'Well hadst thou then shrunk to return his love
But wherefore now, on theme of sorrow bide? -
What would thy beauty? here I wait - nay, prove
A spirit's power, nor be my boon denied!

"I'll tell thee secrets of the nether earth
And highest heaven - or dost some service crave?
Declare thy bidding, best of mortal birth,
I'll be thy winged messenger, thy slave." (50-1)

Oblivious to the Faustian implications of his offer, Egla simply asks Zóphiël to tell her father about Meles's infidelity. Zóphiël, however, suggests a more aggressive plan of action:

"Thy plight to Meles little need avail."
Zóphiël replies: "ere more, if't be thy will
To Lybian deserts he shall howl his tale
I'll hurl him, at thy word, o'er forest, sea and hill.

"By all the frauds, which forged in his black breast,
Come forth so white and silvery from his tongue,
My potency he soon shall prove; nor rest
To banquet on the blood of hearts by him unstrung,

"And reft of all their music. Every pain
By him inflicted for his own vile joys
Rend his vile self! fruition not again
Shall crown such arts as now the slave employs! (52)

Egla's situation becomes an echo of Esther's in that she too only has to ask in order to command the power of an apparently all-powerful being. But Egla is, however, Brooks's response to the uneasiness with which she celebrated Esther's willingness to act and, as a result, it is not in Egla's character to compromise on her femininity and seek the revenge that Zóphiël suggests. As mentioned earlier, when 'injury darkened the decrees of fate, / She had more piteous wept to see that pain returned'; and the fantasy world which Brooks creates is one in which 'no female can be supposed to purchase, voluntarily, the power of doing mischief to others at the price of beauty and every thing like happiness on her own part' (44n). Canto I ends with Egla's decision to go through with the marriage to Meles:

But ere he yet, in haste, could throw aside
His broidered belt and sandals - dread to tell
Eager he sprang - he sought to clasp his bride -
He stopt - a groan was heard - he gasped and fell

Low by the couch of her who widowed lay
Her ivory hands convulsive clasped in prayer,
But lacking power to move; and when 'twas day,
A cold black corse was all of Meles, there. (57)

If Canto I resonates with echoes of 'Esther', Canto II does the same with 'Judith'. In Canto II, Eglia is taken to Sardijs, king of Media, to answer charges relating to Meles's death. 'Of late his harem tired', Sardijs falls in love with the 'snow-white Eglia, mild and chaste and fair' (50) and invites her to a banquet. An entourage of maids are duly sent to prepare her for it:

Then came an ancient dame, skilled in those arts
Employed by Beauty's daughters to enchain
Or lightly touch the soft voluptuous hearts
Of youths that seem, as they, of curl and eyebrow vain:

And, pouring perfumes in the bath, she told
Wild tales of a Chaldean princess, loved
By the fair sprite Eroziel, who, of old,
Taught all those trims to heighten beauty, proved

By Lydian, Median, Perse, and Greek...

...

This story o'er, the dainty maids were fain
To take the white rose of her hand, and tip
Each taper finger with a ruddy stain
To make it like the coral of her lip.

But Eglia refused them, and forbore
The folded turban twined with many a string
Of gems; and, as in tender memory, wore
Her country's simpler garb to meet the youthful king. (52-3)

The parallels with 'Judith' falter here in that Eglia refuses the maids' cosmetic treatments. While Judith and Esther's plans of action are dependent upon their enchaining the hearts of the men they banquet with, Eglia, passive as she is, has no need of 'all those trims to heighten beauty'

designed 'to enchain / Or lightly touch the soft voluptuous hearts / Of youths'. Her refusal of the maids' cosmetics does not, however, make her any less attractive to her Median audience:

With unassured yet graceful step advancing,
The light vermilion of her cheek more warm
For doubting modesty; while all were glancing
Over the strange attire that well became such form.

...

He who beheld her hand forgot her face;
Yet in that face was all beside forgot:
And he who, as she went, beheld her pace,
And locks profuse, had said, "Nay, turn thee not."

Placed on a banquet-couch beside the king,
'Mid many a sparkling guest no eye forbore;
But, like their darts, the warrior-princes fling
Such looks as seemed to pierce, and scan her o'er and o'er:

Nor met alone the glare of lip and eye -
Charms, but not rare: the gazer stern and cool,
Who sought but faults, nor fault or spot could spy:
In every limb, joint, vein, the maid was beautiful;

Save that her lip, like some bud-bursting flower,
Just scorned the bounds of symmetry perchance,
But by its rashness gained an added power,
Heightening perfection to luxuriance.

But that was only when she smiled, and when
Dissolved the intense expression of her eye;
And, had her spirit-love first seen her then,
He had not doubted her mortality. (54-5)

Without Judith's capacity for action, Eglia cuts a substantially different figure at her banquet. 'The light vermilion of her cheek [is] more warm / For doubting modesty' unlike Judith's 'cheek / Crimsoned by scorn' (JE: 16) and 'holy scorn and detestation high' (JE: 19). Far from being repelled by Sardijs's advances in the way that Judith is repelled by Holofernes, Eglia even smiles because of them:

And could she smile for that a stranger hung
O'er her fair form, and spoke to her of love?
Where is the youth who scorned a court, and sprung
Mid Euphrate's waves, as told her in her grove?

Haply she did, and for a while forgot
Those dark acacias, where so oft was wept
Her lone, uncertain, visionary lot;
Yet where an angel watched her as she slept. (55-6)

Brooks can only flag up the differences that mark Eglia out from Judith because she chooses not to place Eglia in any danger until the end of her banquet. The narrative force of the poem, however, soon dissolves the questions raised by Eglia's behaviour about the nature of 'honoured Constancy' (55) and propels Eglia into her next adventure. Towards the end of the banquet, Sardijs resolves to marry her but Idaspes, his old advisor, thinking about the circumstances of Meles's death, advises caution and suggests that

"...ere this dangerous beauty be thy bride,
Let him who loves thee best come forth and prove
The peril first."

As in the first canto, it is up to Zóphiël to protect Eglia from the succession of men who step forward to claim her as their bride. The guardian 'angel' Brooks refers to above is not Zóphiël but the barely mentioned and easily overlooked 'higher power' (46) who prevents him from harming

Egla with his 'evil touch' in the first canto. Zóphiël, however, assumes the role of that guardian angel, firstly killing Alcestes who, underestimating the danger of Idaspe's challenge, wrongly assumes that Meles died at the hands of his jilted lover (58); then Zóphiël kills Ripheus who weds Egla in order 'to a rival court to prove his fearlessness' (59). Sardius's merciless general, Philomars, and his young and vainglorious protégé, Rosanes, are next to share in 'the common fate' (63) of Egla's husbands. Only Egla's sixth husband, Altheëtor, is left unharmed by Zóphiël. Unable to bear the horror of seeing yet another man murdered before her, Egla petitions for Altheëtor's life and entwines him in her 'white arms and hair' (69). Zóphiël does take pity on him but, overcome by such a 'sea of sweets' (69), Altheëtor dies instead 'of love, - of the o'er-perfect joy / Of being pitied, prayed for, prest by [her]' (70).

The death of Meles in the first canto, and then Alcestes, Ripheus, Philomars and Rosanes in the second, are clearly variations of the unsettling wish-fulfilment plot found in 'Judith' and 'Esther'. Crucially, though, it is Zóphiël and not Egla who is the perpetrator of this string of murders. While Altheëtor's fate might flag up the possibility of at least reading Zóphiël as some kind of psychic manifestation of Egla's unspoken desires (he is spared by Zóphiël and the only husband whom Egla positively wants to have spared), the structure of Brooks's plot ensures that Zóphiël and Egla always remain unambiguously distinct characters. In freighting Zóphiël with the murderous fantasies that cast a shadow over the 'constitutional softness and timidity' of her earlier heroines, Brooks is able to both retain a place for those fantasies and present Egla as an idealised heroine whose femininity remains intact and unquestioned.

Cantos III and IV of *Zóphiël* are taken up with a self-contained element of the main plot that showcases the supernatural machinery of the poem. Zóphiël travels to the submarine Palace of Gnomes in order to obtain a secret elixir of life from Tahathyam, the child of an angel father and a human mother (that is to say, a Rosicrucian 'gnome') condemned to live forever beneath the sea. Zóphiël obtains the elixir after promising to find, sedate and bring back from the land a wife for Tahathyam, a wife who, by Tahathyam's own wishes, shall be 'Fair-haired and beauteous

like my mother' (114). Zóphiël's plans to make Eglá immortal are, however, thwarted by a storm (invoked by heavenly powers in Canto IV) during which he loses his vial of elixir.

It is in Canto V that Brooks returns to the human interests of her poem. Here, she introduces Helon, the husband promised to Eglá in her childhood by the angel Raphael. Accompanied by Raphael (who is in disguise as an elderly guide named Hariph), Helon stumbles across Meles's jilted lover, Zameia, asleep in a cave, watched over by Neantes, her eunuch slave. The eunuch soon relates Zameia's tale to Helon: how she is a Babylonian princess and one of the many wives of the cruel and elderly Imlec; how she met Meles and fell in love with him; how Meles, fearing Imlec's wrath, soon stopped returning her affections but falsely promised, nevertheless, to return to her; and, finally, how Zameia, half-crazed, insisted on leaving the gardens in which she had been imprisoned by Imlec and searching for Meles, even with Imlec's men in pursuit.

Almost as soon as she is introduced, Zameia comes to embody what Eglá might be in different circumstances. In Canto I, Brooks describes Eglá sleeping:

Now all the mortal maid lies indolent
Save one sweet cheek which the cool velvet turf
Had touched too rude, tho' all with blooms besprent,
One soft arm pillowed. Whiter than surf

That foams against the sea-rock, looked her neck,
By the dark, glossy, odorous shrubs relieved,
That close inclining o'er her seemed to reck
What 'twas they canopied; and quickly heaved

Beneath her robe's white folds and azure zone,
Her heart yet incomposed; a fillet thro'
Peeped brightly azure, while with tender moan
As if of bliss, Zephyr her ringlets blew

Sportive; - about her neck their gold he twined,

Kissed the soft violet of her temples warm,
And eye brow - just so dark might well define
Its flexile arch; - throne of expression's charm. (37-8).

Consciously echoing this earlier passage, Brooks presents the sleeping Zameia of Canto V as a mirror-image of Eglá, but an image that is, at once, distorted and tainted:

Pallid and worn, but beautiful and young,
Though marked her charms by wildest passion's trace:
Her long round arms, over a fragment flung,
From pillow all too rude protect a face

Whose dark and high-arched brows gave to the thought
To deem what radiance once they towered above;
But all its proudly beauteous outline taught
That anger there had shared the throne of love.

Rich are her robes, but torn and soiled; and gleams
Above her belt a dagger set with gems:
Her long black hair, 'scaped from its braiding, streams,
Black as a serpent, to her garments' hems.

...

Her sandaled feet were scarred, and drops of blood
Still rested fresh on them, by tooth of thorn
Expressed; and, let day's eye look where it would,
'Twere hard to find such beauty so forlorn. (146-7)

Although both women use their arms for pillows, Eglá sleeps on 'cool velvet turf / ...with blooms besprent' while Zameia's bed of rock truly is 'too rude'. And, while the 'flexile arch' of Eglá's eyebrow is 'throne of expression's charm', Zameia's 'dark and high-arched brows' betray 'That anger there had shared the throne of love'. Also, by point of contrast, Zameia's clothes are 'torn

and soiled'; rather than drawing the reader's attention to anything like the feminine azure fillet (or bow) that peeps through Eglá's clothes, Brooks highlights Zameia's 'dagger set with gems', and endows her with hair as 'Black as a serpent' rather than Eglá's golden ringlets about which the winds blow sportively, with 'tender moan / As if of bliss'. Without Eglá's resilient passivity, Zameia jeopardises the constitutional femininity that is expressed by her appearance: anger marks her expression and her beauty is 'forlorn'.

Learning about her in Canto VI from Orpha, the dead Rosanes's slave-girl lover, Zameia tries to kill Eglá, only to be struck down dead by Zóphiël. Yet, even while Brooks seems to be wholly in favour of Eglá's passivity, even this, by the last canto, is called into question. Unable to reconcile herself to the way in which 'Her own scorned life [is] the cause of so much death' (181), Eglá, under the influence of an unnamed evil spirit ('one of those dark things that... / ...whispered thoughts of horror in her ear' (181)) resolves, like so many heroines of nineteenth-century poetry, to kill herself:

...from her waist she took the girdle blue
Looked on the world without, but breathed no sigh;
Then calmly o'er the window's carving threw
That scarf, and round her neck wound thrice the silken tie.

...

...Now her hands intwine
The guilty knot; she springs. "Hold, hold! thy life,
Maiden, is not thy own, but God's and mine!"

'Twas Helon's voice: but still the legate fiend,
Reluctant to resign her, would not part;
But by his secret, subtle nature screened,
Even from Spirits, through her brain and heart

Darted like pain...

...
She seemed to listen: soon her moans were hushed;
She caught his words thus suffering and possest;
From her torn heart a grateful torrent gushed,
And love expelled the demon from her breast. (183-4)

The poem ends with Helon marrying Egla and Zóphiël being cast into the desert of 'the remotest of Egyptia's bounds'. Ultimately, though, this conclusion is not brought about by Egla's passivity, laudable a quality though that is meant to be. Egla's happy ending transpires not through her own efforts or decisions as a character, but by the actions of a number of supernatural beings, good and evil, that combine in a heavenly grand design that is as unpredictable as it is predestined. While Brooks metes out poetic justice to every one of her poem's characters, it remains clear that this justice is a feature of their particular narrative rather than the world in which they inhabit. For example, while Sardius's general, Philomars, may get his comeuppance in Canto II, his brand of cruelty lives on:

...when he sacked a city, he could tear
The screaming infant from its mother's arms,
Dash it to earth, and, while 'twas weltering there,
With demon grasp impress her shuddering charms;

Then, as she faints with shrieks and struggles vain,
Coolly recall her with the ruffian blow;
And look, and pause, insatiate of her pain;
Then gash her tender throat, and see the life-blood flow.

O Nature! can it be? The thought alone
Chills the quick pulse: Belief retires afar;
Reason grows angry; Pity breathes a groan;
And each distrusts the truth: yet "such things are." (49)

The uncompromising truth that 'such things are' creates something of a dilemma for Brooks. On the one hand, she wants to write a heroine that shies away from the decisive action of Judith and Esther; on the other hand, Eglá's passivity, when pushed to its limits, drives her to commit suicide. In peril if they act, and in peril if they do not, Brooks's heroines are simultaneously trapped by and forced into maintaining the world that surrounds them. For all the misfortune they have suffered at the hands of the world, explains Neantes,

"Yet have we lived adorers of that Power
Which to the death-reaped world a race supplies
As numerous as the stars of midnight skies,
Or desert sands, or dust from every flower
That blossoms by the stream that flowed from Paradise..." (148)

Trapped in a world in which she has no way of assuming any control, Eglá's only chance of happiness rests exclusively in the hands of fate and circumstance. The pre-Christian chronos of Brooks's poem might go some way in rendering this fatalistic conclusion into a more conventional, implicit plea for the contemporary, Christian reader to place their trust in God but, as I argued earlier, *Zóphiël* was never written as a true Bible versification. The religious elements of the poem serve as but a gloss for Brooks's own narrative and the supernatural machinery, in which the reader is urged to put their faith, certainly has no place in the orthodox Anglican theology that Brooks subscribed to in her own life.

Treading a fine line between two extremes, Brooks ultimately left her readers to decide whether *Zóphiël* ought to be read as an optimistic moral fable that attested to the existence of a benevolent divine order, or whether it was, more fatalistically, a fiction that served only to highlight how much one's life was slave to chance and random probability, regardless of what decisions one made. As Brooks reminded her readers in her preface, '*Zóphiël* may or may not be called entirely a creature of imagination, as comports with the faith of the reader' (Brooks 1825: 10).

Brooks's religious gloss failed to make some of her readers any less uneasy about *Zóphiël's* passionate blend of marriages, murders, demons and angels. Writing to Southey of 'the extraordinary powers evinced in [*Zóphiël*], of its originality, of its exuberant fancy, its richness of diction', Caroline Bowles found herself as much horrified by it as she was captivated:

Byron and Moore have their full share of worshippers, neither of whom I should say, have written anything so impassioned as *Zóphiël*, or, I could almost add, more licentious... How could a woman, and such a one as you describe, select such a subject...and how could she treat it as she has done with such unwomanly license? You say I should like the poem - her poem - the better if I had seen her. If I knew and loved her I should be grieved she had written it; splendid as it is. You do not think me prudish I am sure; but what woman, pure-minded as woman should be, could read that poem aloud with an unembarrassed voice? And can it become a woman to write anything that may not be brought fearlessly to this test? (RSCB: 293-4)

Brooks's religious gloss was her only defence against such charges and Southey replied, arguing that, while Bowles's opinion 'accords altogether with [his] own...the licentiousness is in the subject, and is, as it were, so rarefied and sublimed (not to say spiritualised) by the imaginative manner in which the whole story is treated, that it is quite harmless' (RSCB: 295).

With 'a burning thirst for fame, which seems now to have become the absorbing passion of her most ardent mind' (C. Southey 1855: 523), Brooks had high hopes for her *Zóphiël*. Following its publication in London, she wrote, in 1834, to the Marquis de Lafayette (who, as well as being instrumental in the American and French Revolutions, had also helped secure a place for Brooks's son at the military academy at West Point), detailing her plans to bring out an edition in France, the profits of which would go to benefit Polish exiles: 'I am having the poem printed in Paris by Monsieur Galignani at my own expense,' she explained, 'and all those who want to

benefit the project have only to purchase these verses from the *New World*⁴⁹. She wrote also of a plan to republish *Zóphiël* in America: 'Mr J. Q. Adams, a man of discernment approves my project and if it is possible I shall print for the Poles an edition of my poem in all the capital cities of the United States'⁵⁰. (As president of the United States between 1825 and 1829, John Quincy Adams called for the establishment of a national university that would transform America into a world-class centre for the study of arts and sciences.) Southey too was enthusiastic about Brooks's plans for reprinting *Zóphiël*: 'I shall be glad if *Zóphiël* is reprinted in Philadelphia,' he wrote, ' - & shall [be] more so if the Americans show us that a poetess may be honoured in her own country' (Albrecht 1978: 195).

Neither the Galignani edition nor the plans to publish in every major American city were ever realised. In 1834, Brooks engaged the Boston-based firm, Hilliard, Gray & Co., to publish - at her own expense - the first in her ambitious string of editions. Out of the original print run of 500 copies, only 20 were sold in the first month (Griswold 1848: 67) and, disappointed, Brooks promptly withdrew the remainder from the market and was never again to see her 'poor neglected "bride of seven"⁵¹ in print.

Despite having published in England, Brooks was unable to win over an American reading public that refused to honour their own poets. Rufus Griswold later recalled that '[t]here were at that time too few readers among us of sufficiently cultivated and independent taste to

⁴⁹ 'Letter from Maria Gowen Brooks to General Lafayette', 18 August 1833, A. Kroch Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. The original letter is in French. My thanks to Giles Montagnon of the Foreign Commonwealth Office, London, for his help in translating this letter.

⁵⁰ 'Letter from Maria Gowen Brooks to General Lafayette', 18 August 1833, A. Kroch Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

⁵¹ 'Letter from Maria Gowen Brooks to Park Benjamin of *The New World*', 17 January 1843, *Maria Gowen Brooks Manuscripts and Correspondence* (1834-43, nd), 7534, -a, University of Virginia Library, Virginia.

appreciate a work of art which time or accident had not commended to the popular applause' (Griswold 1848: 67). As an American and a woman poet, Brooks was doubly likely to be overlooked. Certainly, there were those who read *Zóphiël* who were surprised when they learned about its author: 'Southey says it is by some Yankee woman:' wrote Charles Lamb, 'as if there had ever been a woman capable of any thing so great!' (quoted in Brooks 1879: vii).

Brooks never visited England again but she continued to write to Southey, to tell him about news of her son, and about *Beatricead*, a planned but never-written sequel to *Zóphiël* that concentrated on the story of Christopher Columbus's jilted lover. These letters were carefully stored away by Southey, between the leaves of the *Zóphiël* manuscript; and Brooks's regular gifts of guava jelly and ornamental trinkets were gratefully received by his household (Brooks 1879: xix). But, with the exception of a single letter written in 1834, Brooks never heard from Southey again. The cause of this silence remains uncertain. Possibly, Southey was inundated by work and lost the inclination to write but, more likely, his letters were lost by the irregular postal service that ran between Keswick and Cuba. Brooks hoped it was the latter: '[D]istance still is distance,' she wrote in one of her many letters, '& absence always will be absence' (Granniss 1913: 40).

Chapter 4: Sara Coleridge

'I used to see my father and Mr. De Quincey pace up and down the room in conversation', recalled Sara Coleridge in 1851, just eight months before she died of breast cancer,

I understood not, nor listened to a word they said, but used to note the hankerchief hanging out of the pocket behind, and long to clutch it. Mr. Wordsworth, too, must have been one of the room walkers. How gravely and earnestly used Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth and my Uncle Southey also to discuss the affairs of the nation, as if it all came home to their business and bosoms, as if it were their private concern! Men do not canvass these matters now-a-days, I think, quite in the same tone. Domestic concerns absorb their deeper feelings, national ones are treated more as things aloof, the speculative rather than the practical. (SCML: I.19)

As a child, Sara had been oblivious to the goings-on of the adults about her and it was only as an adult herself, writing her memoirs in the form of a letter to her own daughter, that she began to retrace and make sense of her past. Having edited nine volumes of her father's work and published seven of her own, she brought both her editorial and her writerly experience to bear on the task of ordering her life, 'into childhood, earlier and later, youth, earlier and later, wedded life, ditto, widowhood, ditto' (SCML: I.1).

Amongst the mass of family papers that she was so familiar with from her work, Sara found occasional mentions of herself, 'seven months old, *very sweet*', nicknamed 'Fat Sal' by her uncle (SCML I.8). But, writing up her memoirs, Sara also betrayed glimpses of her family's less than happy circumstances, described in those papers. Her father, she revealed, was absent in the weeks leading up to her birth, 'travelling in Cornwall with Mr. Tom Wedgewood, as I learn by

letters from him to my mother' (SCML: I.3). Turning to the frontispiece of the family Bible, she noted that, while her father had recorded on it, 'with some particularity', the details of his marriage and the births of his three sons, the details of her own birth had been penned in by her mother. The entry became, for her, emblematic of her father's absence, 'an omen of our lifelong separation, for I never lived with him for more than a few weeks at a time' (SCML: I.1-2). Nor were many of Sara's own memories particularly fond. '[S]ome of my recollections are tinged with pain', she explained, recalling an extended visit, aged five, to the Wordsworths:

I think my dear father was anxious that I should learn to love him and the Wordsworths and their children, and not cling so exclusively to my mother... I remember his showing displeasure to me, and accusing me of want of affections... The sense that you have done very wrong, or at least given great offence, you know not how or why - that you are dunned for some payment of love or feeling which you know not how to produce or to demonstrate on a sudden, chills the heart, and fills it with perplexity and bitterness. (SCML: I.18-9)

On this particular occasion, the family papers, strewn in great piles across the study of her house in Hampstead, contested the accuracy of her recollections: 'Sara sleeps with me - ' read one of her father's letters, 'She has made the children as happy as happy can be. Every one is delighted with her - indeed, it is absolutely impossible that there can be a sweeter or a sweetlier behaved Child - ' (Mudge 1988: 261)⁵². Duly, Sara quoted the letter, putting down the discrepancy between it and her memory to 'How much more vividly we remember the painful than the pleasurable' (Mudge 1988: 261).

⁵² This section of Sara Coleridge's memoirs was not reproduced in Edith Coleridge's *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge* (1873) but can be found in the appendices of Bradford Keyes Mudge's *Sara Coleridge: A Victorian Daughter* (1988).

The incidents that Sara describes are, of course, set against the story of the breakdown of her parents' marriage, the biographical details of which are, by now, well known. Coleridge's addiction to *Kendal Black Drop* laudanum (Jones 1998: 142), together with his infatuation with Wordsworth's sister-in-law, Sara Hutchinson, placed a great strain on his marriage to his wife, Sarah Fricker. And when Sarah, ignoring her husband's protestations that their 'common love and happiness depends on your loving those whom I love' (quoted in Jones 1998: 149), had refused to have Sara Hutchinson nurse her in the final stages of her pregnancy, Coleridge effectively terminated their marriage. The estrangement was probably for the best: 'I am only surprised Mrs C is not rejoiced at being rid of him.' wrote Sara Fricker's brother-in-law, Robert Southey, 'He besots himself with opium, or with spirits, till his eyes look like a Turks who is half reduced to idiotcy by the practise' (quoted in Jones 1998: 174). Thus, Coleridge abandoned his wife and, fond as he was of them, his two sons, Hartley and Derwent also: 'Those little Angel Children (woe is me!)' he confided to his poetry,

There have been hours, when feeling how they bind
And pluck out the Wing-feathers of my Mind,
Turning my Error to Necessity,
I have half-wish'd, they never had been born!
(*'Letter to - '* (1802), (Coleridge 1969: I.2.289))

On 22nd December 1802, Sarah gave birth to a daughter. As a reminder of their failed marriage, Coleridge, when he visited the next day, was adamant that the baby should be called Sara and soon left again so as to usher in the New Year in the company of Sara Hutchinson and the Wordsworths. In due course, Southey took over the lease for Greta Hall, Keswick, where Sarah and her children had been staying and, seeing that they had no-one else, took it upon himself to care and provide for them. To him, Sara was a poignant reminder, not of a failed marriage, but of an altogether different order: 'I feel more pain at the sight of little Sara than I had apprehended...' he wrote, remembering Margaret, his own baby daughter who had died that year, 'Her age, her

little voice sting me to recollections that I must blunt and wear out, for they are unavoidable' (Curry 1965: 1.324).

Although Sara knew all about her parents' lives, such details were extraneous insofar as writing memoirs of her own childhood were concerned. Oblivious, then, to the circumstances of her parents' marriage and her uncle's mournful sense of loss, Sara, self-contained in her own baby universe, soon laid claim to the affections of those around her. As her mother was to remind her in later years, even her father could not help but be a little proud: 'My meek little Sara is a remarkably interesting baby, with the finest possible skin, and large blue eyes', he had written, 'and she smiles as if she were basking in the sunshine, as mild as moonlight, of her own quiet happiness' (SCML: 1.5).

Despite the fraught circumstances surrounding her birth, Sara's childhood was, on the whole, a happy one. By her own account, it was filled with walks, picnics, and frequent trips to Allonby where she stayed with her lifelong friend, Mary Calvert, with whom she galloped ponies over the beach, poked at crabs in rockpools, and made 'hideous necklaces' from the seaweed's 'ugly berries' (SCML: 1.22). 'She seemed so very little, such a slender delicate creature, fair as a snow-drop, and was then almost as pale', recalled the usually more prosaic Dorothy Wordsworth in 1804, 'But when she twirled about upon the carpet the exquisite grace of her motions, half Lady, half Spirit Form; and her interesting countenance made her an object of pure delight' (WL: 1.482). Later, in 1818, Wilkie Collins's father, the celebrated oil painter, William Collins, depicted Sara, aged fifteen, as Wordsworth's 'Highland Girl'. After a warm reception in the Lakes, the painting went on to be exhibited in London, at the Royal Academy, the following Spring. Collins's admirers lavished praise on his model, 'a form of compacted light, not of flesh and blood', and

Sara soon became known as the 'Flower of the Lakes', the 'Sylph of Ullswater' (quoted in Jones 1998: 202) and the 'Beauty of Buttermere'⁵³.

If the reception of Collins's picture strikes all too ethereal an impression of Sara, it is counterbalanced by her earliest surviving letter, also from 1818. Written to Dora Wordsworth, the letter reveals the breathless exuberance of a more real, more everyday character:

Miss Fletcher spent 3 weeks or a month at Greta Lodge and dined with us every day she taught us music while she staid, we used those lovely duets in Don Juan every evening. she and I used to read latin together I daresay you wouldn't have wished to have been of the party when she went away I agreed to write her a french letter every Saturday... Mr [Humphry] Senhouse was here a week or two ago. he brought me a letter from Elizabeth also he brought from London a curious toy called a Kaleidoscope... Mr Senhouse says every lady's mad after them in London. we showed it to Mrs Crothers and left it at her house for a day or two and [when] we came to fetch she said she had nearly blinded herself with looking at it... We have got ten new pieces of music from Mr Parris, some of it is very difficult especially 'Tout Ensemble' which I am learning. don't you hate to play demisemiquavers with the left hand or octaves with the right?⁵⁴

One of the most striking aspects of life at Greta Hall that Sara's letter also illuminates is the sheer number of visitors that it received. While it is true that Sara did not often leave Keswick and true also that the local population, with its unruly 'girls [who] die of consumption occasioned by cotton stockings & thin clothing' (quoted in Jones 1998: 202), afforded little company for her, Kathleen Jones's assertion that, until 1822, 'visits to Rydal Mount and a single excursion to Liverpool were the sum of [Sara's] social round' (Jones 1998: 237), ignores this large number of visitors.

⁵³ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Edith Coleridge', 24 August 1849, Harry Ransom Humanities Resource Center, University of Austin, Texas (HRHRC).

⁵⁴ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Dora Wordsworth', 28 May 1818, Dove Cottage.

In 1818, just months after Sara had sat for Collins's painting, one visitor enlarged her social circle even more. Having corresponded with Southey for three years, the Cambridge undergraduate, Chauncey Hare Townshend, was finally given permission by his parents to visit Southey. Townshend himself is unremarkable, despite the romantic claims of his earliest letter to Southey, in which he professed to be 'a spoilt child of Affluence with no human being within my reach to whom I can communicate my thought & feelings' (Potter 1973: 66). But Townshend, it seems, consolidated a tradition held amongst the students at Cambridge of whiling away their summer breaks on reading parties in Keswick. Writing to her daughter in 1849, Coleridge recalls those summers:

I can scarce think of those days, when Charles Kennaway was one of our Keswick beaux - one of the "Cathedrals" as the Keswick people called them instead of Cantabs - came on a reading party, which turned out a boating, pic-nic-ing, tea-drinking, carpet-hop-dancing party & without a lacrymose tendency. These Cathedral visitations took place year after year...⁵⁵

(The students were usually welcomed by the local population but, in 1834, Southey was compelled to write a stern letter to them, berating them for their cruelty towards the local cats (C. Southey 1855: 524).) Not only, then, did Sara regularly come into contact with all the writers, artists, editors and critics who were her uncle's better-known visitors, she also spent her summers in the company of now long-forgotten young students from Cambridge. She may never have travelled far but the growing celebrity status of the Lake Poets ensured that, from 1818 onwards, Keswick constituted, for her, an alternative but nevertheless legitimate 'social round'.

As a celebrated beauty who spent her summers 'boating [and] carpet-hop-dancing', and the rest of her time indulging her enthusiasms for letter-writing, piano music and the latest in toys from London, Sara Coleridge in 1818 seems the apotheosis of Martineau and Jewsbury's

⁵⁵ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Edith Coleridge', 21 July 1849, HRHRC.

conception of the young, accomplished woman, as outlined in my first chapter. Such a judgement, however, would ignore the fact that, in that same year, she began work on her first publication, *An Account of the Abipones, an Equestrian People of Paraguay*, a three volume translation, from the Latin, of Martin Dobritzhoffer's treatise, *Historia de Abiponibus* (1784). 'Perhaps you will be surprized that [so] young a female should undertake a work of this kind', wrote her mother in a letter to Thomas Poole in 1821, just as the work was being published,

[T]his is the history of the thing. When Derwent left School, and there was little prospect of his going to Cambridge, his uncle thought, if he could induce Murray to publish it, it might *possibly* bring some profit to him if he translated this book; accordingly Derwent began the first vol: and Sara, wishing to assist him, began the third vol: when each had done about 200 pages, Mr F[rere]'s kind offer of assistance reached us, and Derwent being then at Mr Hopwood's instructing his 2 sons, it was thought too much for his health to pursue the translation, and by Mr Wordsworth's advice it was withdrawn.

When Sara found a stop was put to it, she felt disappointed, and said, she liked the employment "of all things", and her uncle approving of her specimen, said, if she chose, to finish it, at her *leisure*, she might, but she must not be disappointed if nothing was gained by it, and she must not *work too hard*.

My dear Mr Poole you must not imagine that Sara's health has suffered from too intense application to this work, for I am happy to say, she is at present in better health than I have ever known her, and so fond is she of literary employments that she feels quite at a loss for her last winter's amusement... (Potter 1973: 89-90)

Too often, parts of this letter are taken by Sara Coleridge's biographers as evidence that Southey was, at most, only half-sympathetic to her literary endeavours, being 'still a misogynist at heart' (Jones 1998: 226) who believed in the 'simple and uncontested fact that "literature is not," as he would later tell Charlotte Brontë, "the business of a woman's life"' (Mudge 1989: 38). But, read in context, Southey's advice to his niece, that she 'must not be disappointed if nothing was gained by [the work], and she must not *work too hard*' but rather 'finish it, at her *leisure*', is clearly not

prompted by concerns about her being female as Mudge and Jones both try to maintain. After all, Derwent is given near identical advice about the translation and told that 'if [Southey] could induce Murray to publish it, it might *possibly* bring some profit'; Derwent's health is, like his sister's, also threatened by working too hard, to the extent that 'it was thought too much for his health to pursue the translation, and by Mr Wordsworth's advice it was withdrawn'. Overworking, it will be remembered, was something to be avoided by everyone, male or female, young or old: in 1819, Sir Walter Scott had urged Southey himself 'to take warning, and beware of overworking' (C. Southey 1855: 373).

Tempting as it might be to turn Southey into a patriarch uneasy with the idea of young girls being at all acquainted with authorship, publishing or Latin, to do so is to misunderstand both him and the significance of the *Account*. By suggesting that he writes and publishes a translation, Southey invites Derwent to participate in an activity that was regarded by the young Lake Poets of the 1790s as a more reliable means of earning a living from literature than writing poetry. Notably, it will be remembered, it was the success of Coleridge's translation of *Wallenstein* that prompted Wordsworth to want to go to Germany and acquire the language skills necessary for translation work, and it was in order to fund this trip that the *Lyrical Ballads* were originally conceived.

If Southey expresses any ambivalence about the Dobritzhoffer project, it is nothing to do with Sara Coleridge being a girl but rather about the instability of the translation market. 'Translation is of all literary labor the worst paid - that is, of all such labor as is paid at all', he told John Taylor Coleridge in 1818, who had written to him, seeking advice about a possible career in literature, 'and yet there are so many poor hungry brethren and sisters of the gray goose-quill upon the alert, that new books are sent out from France and Germany by the sheet as they pass through the press, lest the translation should be forestalled' (C. Southey 1855: 366).

Translating Dobritzhoffer, assuming a publisher would even want it, 'might *possibly* [have brought] some profit' to Derwent who, without a means of funding, had 'little prospect of...going to Cambridge' at all. For Sara, the translation was only worth doing '*at leisure*' because it was very

unlikely that the finished work, no matter how well executed, would reap professional rewards. Writing to Caroline Bowles in 1832, Southey once again articulated the idea that no-one, male or female ('hungry brethren and sister'), could reasonably hope to eke out a decent living from translation. 'I can but too well understand the situation of the young ladies concerning whom you speak', he wrote,

Every publisher is beset by persons seeking for this sort of employment, miserably as it is paid, and uncertain as it is. Few books are now translated, except such as from some immediate interest in the subject are sure of present sale; and then, lest another publisher should get the start, the poor translator is unmercifully hurried in his task. So little is to be done in this way at any time, that at this time I see no hope of doing anything. There are but two courses open to women thus unhappily circumstanced - that of setting up a school, or of seeking a livelihood in the manner you mention... Ah, dear Caroline, this is a hard-hearted, I had almost said a merciless, society in which we are living. (RSCB: 260)

Far from being a 'misogynist at heart', Southey enabled his niece to undertake 'literary employments' without a single regard for the highly exploitative, not to mention, rapidly diminishing and very precarious literary marketplace of the 1820s. By writing primarily for her own 'amusement', Coleridge is put in a position to pursue the intellectually demanding but, nevertheless, unmarketable literary work that she prefers 'of all things'. Moreover, if Southey's calling Coleridge's translation a product of 'amusement' sounds patronising to the modern reader, then it is only because Coleridge's idea of amusement was so radically different from the less demanding amusements of many other young girls in 1818. 'How she Dobritzhofferred it all out, it puzzles my slender Latinity to conjecture,' wrote Charles Lamb in one letter (quoted in Jones 1998: 227) and, elsewhere,

God love her - to think that she should have had to toil thro' five octavos of that cursed (I forget I write to a Quaker) *Abbeypny History*, and then to

abridge them to 3, and all for £113. At her years, to be doing stupid Jesuit's Latin into English, when she should be reading or writing Romances. Heaven send her Uncle do not breed her up a Quarterly Reviewer! (Lucas 1935: II.270)

Like many other translations, the *Account* went on to receive only a luke-warm reception despite the sustained effort and scholarship that went into it. Coleridge's breathless, torrent-like writing style got the better of her translation: 'The Literary Gazette is rather severe upon poor old Dobritzhoffer & "his ponies"', she told Dora Wordsworth, 'they say this book can only have been translated by no other than Dr Prolix.'⁵⁶ Nevertheless, such unfavourable reviews were counterbalanced, in part at least, by a lengthy article that appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, full of praise for the *Account's* anonymous translator who had, 'not injudiciously, curtailed the work by omitting controversial parts in defence of the calumniated order, an abundance of quotations which might well be spared, and a few passages of repetition, or of a matter uninteresting' (Southey 1822: 279). The article was written by none other than Coleridge's Uncle Southey.

But even while Southey was lending his full support to the Dobritzhoffer project, and being sympathetic to the establishment of women's colleges (C. Southey 1855: 385), many others were not so liberal about either female education in general or his niece's amusements. In 1822, using the proceeds from the *Account*, Coleridge travelled with her mother to London and arrived to find that: 'My bluestockingism is gone abroad... One gentleman expatiated most pathetically on the *fright* he was in when he first approached our house, the den of the monster' (quoted in Jones 1998: 238). Even when her 'bluestockingism' didn't transform the 'Sylph of Ullswater' into a 'monster', it had to be ignored or at least made innocuous, as demonstrated by Henry Taylor's recollections of his meeting Coleridge on a visit to Keswick in 1823:

⁵⁶ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Dora Wordsworth', 1 April 1821, Dove Cottage.

The features were perfectly shaped, and almost minutely delicate, and the complexion delicate also, but not wanting in colour, and the general effect was that of gentleness, indeed I may say of composure, even to stillness. Her eyes were large, and they had the sort of serene lustre which I remember in her father's...the admirable strength and subtlety of her reasoning faculty shown in her writings and conversation, were less to me than the beauty and simplicity and feminine tenderness of her face. (E. Coleridge 1873: l.28-29)

Coleridge's cousin, Henry Nelson Coleridge, with whom Coleridge became secretly engaged within weeks of their first meeting in London and would much later marry, was perhaps the least intimidated by her intellect, having, in 1819, held the distinction of coming second in his year at King's College, Cambridge, where he was examined upon the quality of his translations into English of Plato and his translations into Latin hexameters of Milton's 'Morning Hymn'⁵⁷. But, writing to his sister, even he felt some need to explain away her intellect:

[A] lovely creature...eyes like a dove's... She does not seem at all formidable; you need not alarm yourself. She uses no hard words and seems very ordinary in her wishes and thoughts. I will engage five to one, she commits waste in the heart of the Special before the week is over...he will find this little sylph of Ulleswater sufficiently susceptible... How I *romanced* her! (quoted in Jones 1998: 240)

Although very different from one another, what is implicit in all these responses is the underlying assumption that Sara's physical beauty ought to have reliably indicated that she was a stereotypically elegant and feminine woman of accomplishment, such as those found in the novels of the time, in fact, exactly like the novels of the time, according to Sir Walter Scott who, writing of his visit to Keswick in late 1825, remarked that: 'Miss Coleridge *is* really a lovely vision

⁵⁷ 'Letter from Henry Nelson Coleridge to John Coleridge', 8 February 1819, Add MS 47558, British Library.

of a creature...and altogether, face and figure and manner, the very ideal of a novel heroine. They say she is very clever and accomplished' (quoted in Griggs 1940: 39).

Unwilling to sacrifice her monstrous bluestockingism to her novel-heroine appearance, Sara became more and more preoccupied with the relationship between intellect and beauty, much to the annoyance of Sara Hutchinson who, looking on disapprovingly, noted that: 'Sara is somewhat spoilt by so much learning - she has no enjoyment of any thing else & never seems interested but when she has a classical author in her hands - takes no part in any conversation but what relates to books, & *personal beauty* - and she is perfectly useless & helpless as far as regards the ordinary occupations of life' (quoted in Jones 1998: 229). As early as 1821, Sara was attempting to resolve her feelings on the relationships between female beauty and intellect. 'I perfectly agree with you in your strictures on external loveliness', she wrote in a letter to Elizabeth Crumpe, 'You will think me trite perhaps if I say that beauty unaccompanied by mental endowments is a mere toy "that wears but till the gilding frets away;" as your favourite poet has it...Pygmalion was the only man that ever fell in love with a statue, & that was of his own making you know.'⁵⁸

Coleridge's preoccupation with the social significance of 'personal beauty' culminated in 1826 in her reply to Caroline Bowles's essay, 'Beauty' (1823), reprinted that year in her *Solitary Hours* miscellany. As I explained in Chapter 2, the tentatively suggested conclusion of Bowles's essay begins to challenge and destabilise the very notion of ideal beauty, by hinting at the temporal and cultural specificity of any such standard. Coleridge takes Bowles's conclusion as the starting point of her essay, arguing that her own times, of all historical periods, most espouse these arbitrary standards:

⁵⁸ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Crumpe', 19 February 1821, Dove Cottage.

For this is the Age of Taste if not of Reason: we all visit picturesque scenery, scramble up rocks, & brave "the pelting of the pitiless storm" in hunting lakes & waterfalls; we pore over collections of pictures, striving with might & main to admire what ought to be admired and *vice versa*; we discuss the merits of actors, dancers & singers with a view to display our own exquisite taste if not profound knowledge of the arts of acting, dancing, & singing; and [we] acquire weak eyes (one of the most fashionable juvenile diseases) by hurrying through; in such an age it is not wonderful that Beauty, the great object of Taste, should be more than ever the theme of admiring eyes & tongues: - our mothers tell us a pretty face was not half so much extolled nor a plain one criticized when they were young as is the case at present. The subject of personal appearance, they complain is perpetually on the carpet, the bad tendency of which is to render beauty daily more & more the object of their daughters' aims and wishes, indeed the engrossing concern of their thoughts & lives. The rage for novel reading too fosters this evil: - it is natural for the young female reader to long for the silken lashes & the Grecian features which generally constitute the chief charm of the heroine, and enable her to reign triumphantly in all hearts. (Mudge 1989: 187-188)

Exploring the nature of what she calls the 'beauty myth', Naomi Wolf locates the origins of modern day attitudes towards female beauty in the early nineteenth-century, arguing that: 'Before the Industrial Revolution, the average woman could not have had the same feelings about "beauty" that modern women do who experience the myth as continual comparison to a mass-disseminated physical ideal... Most of our assumptions about the way women have always thought about "beauty" date from no earlier than the 1830s, when the cult of domesticity was first consolidated' (Wolf 1990: 14-15).

Writing from the very brink of, if not slightly before, the period that Wolf identifies, Coleridge articulates what is, by now, a well-trodden argument: the mass media, through its 'endless succession of novels, poems, & new publications', bombards 'young female readers' with depictions of idealised female beauty which, given validation by the highly aesthete culture they are produced by, draw their female readers into aspiring towards an aesthetic ideal, to the

extent that their personal appearance becomes, at the expense of anything more meaningful, 'the engrossing concern of their thoughts & lives'.

While it may be interesting to note that women were contesting modern day notions of female beauty even as they originated, reading Coleridge's essay purely as a piece of detached social criticism ignores a substantial part of its meaning. For Coleridge does not claim to be a detached and objective commentator but is as guilty as anyone else of buying into the 'Age of Taste', of 'hunting lakes & waterfalls' and reading until she acquires 'weak eyes'. Her unpublished letters from the 1820s are punctuated with descriptions of walks, for example, 'by the side of a little brook that flittered in the sun like liquid silver, & formed itself here & there into beautiful cascades'⁵⁹; they are filled with eager observations and questions about the newest poems and novels, that 'Shelley's Cenci is a more horrid production & the Prometheus unbound is a strange wild poem, but very beautiful', or 'Have you read the Abbot? & do you think there is any truth in the story of their being written by Scott's sister-in-law?'⁶⁰ And, doubtless, Coleridge would have related her reading to her numerous complaints about how 'my eyes render me rather idle after dark'⁶¹, even while she insisted on 'doing what is very naughty - writing by candlelight'⁶².

But, if Coleridge, like the other daughters of the 'Age of Taste', felt disconnected from the unhelpful heritage that could only 'tell us a pretty face was not half so much extolled nor a plain one criticized when they were young as is the case at present', she also felt equally alienated from the 'Age of Taste'. Looking like 'the very ideal of a novel heroine' amongst a generation of women obsessed with looking like novel heroines, Coleridge found herself removed from the otherwise 'engrossing concern' of personal appearance. In her essay, being beautiful in itself is a dead end: 'But does the possession of Beauty *tend* to inspire cordial peace into the bosom of its

⁵⁹ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Crumpe', 13 November 1820, Dove Cottage.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge', 23 December 1825, HRHRC.

⁶² 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Crumpe', 15 April 1825, Dove Cottage.

owner?' she writes, 'Does cheerfulness, the sunshine of the soul, more willingly irradiate an elegant than homely tenement? I think not. - like all the other good things of this life[,] personal advantages, I believe, are more craved for when unattainable than enjoyed when possessed' (Mudge 1989: 189). And yet, Coleridge's essay is less about attacking beauty itself, than it is about criticising the social perceptions that perpetuate its myth and criticising, also, the behaviour that is prescribed to those aspiring towards an ideal 'craved for when unattainable':

[S]ome attention is surely due to Lord Bacon's maxim, which however is not unqualified, that "very beautiful persons are scarcely ever seen to be otherwise of great virtue, that they prove accomplished but not of great spirit, and study behaviour rather than virtue."... If we address the conscious fair ones we shall generally be regaled with syllables gently ejected as if they were too large and coarse & rough hewn for the delicate mouth: - we must listen to dying falls of a sustained falsetto treble key more wearisome to any but spell-bound ears than the roughest intonations breathed forth more naturally and without attempt: the desire and consciousness of admiration is seen to influence every look and gesture - their very gait betrays it - they mince as they go and put out their feet as if each step were to fall under the cognizance of observing eyes. By nothing are sense & dignity so completely banished from the countenance and demeanour as by vanity... (Mudge 1989: 192-195)

At first glance, the quotation from Bacon's 'Of Beauty' essay seems to be a rhetorical device that lends a certain credibility and scholarly gravitas to Coleridge's argument. But Coleridge's use of Bacon is actually more complicated than this: Bacon's use of the word 'accomplished' allows Coleridge to transplant his thoughts about Renaissance conceptions of male beauty into her own essay on early nineteenth-century women. If Coleridge is leaning her own argument on Bacon's authority, she is also contesting the opinions of his essay when (picking up in part on Bowles's imaginary race of women, 'divested of legs and feet') she goes on to explore the behaviour of the 'conscious fair ones'. While Bacon's essay extends the definition of beauty from meaning the geometric proportions and colour of a face to include 'that of decent and gracious motion...the

best part of beauty which a picture cannot express' (Bacon 1883: 235), Coleridge mercilessly satirises such 'motion' as pure affectation and exposes the accomplishment aesthetics of the 'conscious fair ones' as not only banal but unnatural, and in direct opposition to 'sense & dignity'.

It is in counterbalancing the senselessness of accomplishment aesthetics that Coleridge sees a place for intellect, arguing that 'mental adornments natural or acquired contain in themselves an antidote to that vanity' (Mudge 1989: 193). Looking at the lifestyles of men, Coleridge finds evidence to substantiate her argument for an inverse relationship between 'outward adornments' and inner, more substantial 'mental adornments', writing that:

All men are apt to spend most on that object which is the most interesting to them & occupies most of their thoughts: - the lover of books will pinch himself "black & blue" to add some favourite author to his library: - the painter who scarcely dares indulge in the commonest luxuries of food and clothing will grudge no sum he can by any means command in the furtherance of his art: - and the beauty who pants to repeat and extend her conquests will be strongly tempted to bestow an undue portion of her time and means in outward adornments, in heightening those personal attractions which are her all in all.
(Mudge 1989: 195)

Coleridge stops short of explicitly feminist protest, sidestepping the issue of exactly why it is that men are only occasionally 'voluntary slaves to their glass & toilet' (Mudge 1989: 190), in favour of erasing gender distinctions altogether. The men in Coleridge's essay differ from the women only in that they possess a more sober attitude towards their own 'personal attractions'. The daughters of Coleridge's 'Age of Taste' are not 'chained down' like Martineau's women or deprived like Jewsbury's; and their brothers do not revel in a wealth of 'professions and offices' (Jewsbury 1832: 521) like Jewsbury's men but are simply free to pursue their interests in art and literature. Doubtless, as we shall see later, Coleridge herself would have regarded this as a rather naïve representation of the gender divide but the primary aim of her essay was not to engage in a battle of the sexes but to forge for herself a space in which she could exercise her own

'bluestockingism' without it being regarded as 'monstrous', a space in which she could be allowed to be more than an exterior shell of 'silken lashes & Grecian features'. '[B]y fastening our attention too exclusively on what is external', she concluded, 'we overlook in the woman what we are in no danger of doing with regard to the flower and the landscape - the beauty of the soul' (Mudge 1989: 200).

'On the Disadvantages Resulting from the Possession of Beauty' was never published and the periodical press, to which it was best suited, went on to issue a near relentless stream of literature which consolidated, rather than questioned, the validity of the beauty myth: 'Let moralists moralize as they please,' declared the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1863, 'Beauty is a beautiful thing, an enviable thing, drawing admiration and kindness after it, flattering the eye, raising pleasant thoughts, and giving its possessors a thousand advantages in the "struggle for existence"' (*Cornhill Magazine* 1863: 390).

Even while she argued to justify the intellectual space that it afforded her, Coleridge was, by 1826, also aware that there was but the remotest possibility of continuing with her translation work. Coleridge's translation career had, after *Account of the Abipones*, looked promising and she did not suffer from want of enthusiasm for her second project, a translation from the fifteenth-century French sources of the memoirs of the Chevalier Bayard. 'I am quite enamoured with my hero the good Knight Bayard - he is the very mirror of courtesy and [pattern?] of prowess', she told her friend Elizabeth Crumpe,

- After the contemplation of his heroic virtues I shall quite look down upon all the modern youths, however irresistible they may be - in their own eyes. Bayard was really & truly irresistible [sic] in war[;] in the peaceful scenes where female hearts are to be won he "professed" qualities which must have

rendered him equally so[,] at least if the Ladies of the fifteenth century had the same ideas on the subject as the humble narrator of his valorous & virtuous actions [in] your time.⁶³

But, true to Southey's predictions, the market for translations in the 1820s became over-saturated and, combined with an increasing awareness of her own limitations and her 'Dr Prolix' tendencies as a translator, the charms of translation became more and more lacklustre for Coleridge. 'The first proof sheet of "Bayard" arrived a week ago - it appears much worse to me in print than [sic] it did in manuscript', she wrote in a letter to Derwent in 1824, ' - I suppose that my ear & eye are now more wise than they were when I was constantly poring over my easy production, & was accustomed to the rhambling, translationy (I know Johnson has not this word but he's a blockhead therefore) style of it'⁶⁴.

Coleridge's *The Right Joyous and Pleasant History of the Feats, Gests, and Prowesses of the Chevalier Bayard* was finally published in 1825 'after being a most tedious time in the press'⁶⁵ but her third and final translation, the *Memoirs of Jean de Troye*, completed in the winter of 1824, was never published. 'It will never do I think for publication,' Coleridge wrote to Derwent in June 1825, 'but I had rather do this than nothing, if it is only for the sake of keeping my hand in'. What immediately follows in this letter begins to cast light on why it was that Coleridge gave up her translation career altogether:

You will remind me of the fable of the sprites & the husbandman who prayed to have the weather under his direction when I tell you how convinced I am that I should have been much happier, with my tastes, temper & habits, had I been of your sex instead of the helpless dependant being I am. The thing that would suit me best in the world would be the life of a country Clergyman - I

⁶³ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Crumpe', 17 April 1823, Dove Cottage.

⁶⁴ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge', 27 June 1824, HRHRC.

⁶⁵ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Crumpe', 15 April 1825, Dove Cottage.

should delight in the studies necessary to the profession, & I am sure I should not dislike nor shrink from the active duties of it - I would not compose my own sermons, but select, adapt, & arrange from others... I think I would not marry, but in my conduct toward the more sensitive sex could not but carry my present experience with me, how guarded would I be! No poor helpless affectionate maiden should ever shed a bitter tear, or have her daily task rendered wearisome, her nightly couch uneasy by any fault of mine.⁶⁶

Coleridge's translation work did not exist apart from the context of the rest of her life. 'Could we see the private correspondence of many a smiling mortal', she wrote at the beginning of the letter from which the above is taken, 'we should find more groaning and grumbling than our unthinking observer would perhaps expect'. Her own letter is no exception and, in the above quotation, she simultaneously alludes to all the unhappy issues in her life that preoccupy her most: how unfeminine her 'tastes, temper & habits' are; how she is a 'helpless dependant being' in the Southey household; and, perhaps most significantly, how unlikely it is at this time that her protracted, turbulent and, as yet, still secret engagement to Henry Coleridge (already in its fourth year) would end well, in view of her 'present experience' of it.

In writing to Derwent, her 'confidential friend' to whom 'it is natural to recur to the most prominent features of one's mental existence', these issues become interconnected for Coleridge. Her long-awaited chance to see Henry for a second time is thwarted because she can only be received in London 'at a time when Edith & my Uncle's absence renders it doubly necessary for me to attend to the education of my young pupils here'; and, insofar as it promises to be an escape from her domestic duties, translation work proves to be a dead end.

Newly alert to the existence of an unbridgeable gender divide, wary of the precariousness of her position as a woman translator, Coleridge struggled uncomfortably with choosing new sources to translate. In August that year, she briefly considered embarking on more 'pen-employment'. As she explains to Derwent:

⁶⁶ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge', 6 June 1825, HRHRC.

The Quarterly Review is arrived & there is a Review of the Irish Stories [Thomas Croker's *Fairy Legends of Southern Ireland* (1825)], but I fear not by your hand & pray tell me whether it is yours or no when you write. How glad I should be to write Reviews if I could! I would fain have some pen-employment this winter - At one time a thought entered my mind about translating a Tale by Cervantes, & putting it into some Magazine, as Henry put one or two of Boccaccios into the Etonian: but these tales are too long to appear all at once, & even if it could be thought worthy of admittance into Knights LM [i.e. *Knight's Quarterly Magazine*] it would not do to insert an unfinished tale in a Magazine that comes out Quarterly. The interval would be too long. Then again the most amusing of them are rather too waggish for a damsel's pen to have anything to do with: there are some that are free from this fault, but I know not whether they would be liked. They are of course in Spanish. Your being so intimate with the Editor of the Magazine made me think of this, but I fear the scheme is not feasible.⁶⁷

Although it is also underscored by the idea of being a woman translator, Coleridge's talk of a 'damsel's pen' in this letter is markedly different in tone from her earlier pronouncement that she, like the ladies of the fifteenth century, was 'enamoured' of her male subjects. Here, in her private correspondence, we find Coleridge acutely aware of the expectation for her to be a decorously feminine 'damsel'. Clearly, she knew even the most 'waggish' of Cervantes's tales, but found that her reading and enjoyment of them had to remain private, given what the Countess of Blessington would later call 'the false prudery of public taste' (quoted in Jump 2001: 8). Several months later, Derwent wrote to tell her that he had contacted the editor of *Knight's Quarterly Magazine* but, by that time, Coleridge had already decided against the entire idea. '[W]hen I mentioned the subject to you I was quite hopeless about it, but merely stated what I did to you to shew how anxious I was to be employed - ' she replied, ' I should have consulted my Uncle first; -

⁶⁷ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge', 30 August 1825, HRHRC.

on my mentioning the matter to him he said that the plays of Cervantes must be translated into verse, this together with my fear of offensive passages such as a female would hardly like to undertake made me abandon the idea⁶⁸. Coleridge never contemplated publishing another translation again and inner, 'mental resources' gradually became, for her, both strictly private and limited in scope and ambition: '[T]he older I grow the more I feel the importance of them to one's own happiness & contentment', she told Derwent,

By mental resources I mean not books alone, but whatever pleasures are independent of the accidents of this unhappy world (you will see I am thinking of Aids to Reflection, p.32). I should say Fanny Patteson had cultivated her mental resources, because by a consistent & persevering course of amiable conduct, & by diffusing as much good & happiness as it was possible for her to do within her sphere of action she has laid up for herself, & is still continuing to lay up, a [heritance] of happy thoughts & reflections - an independent treasure, sealed in the mind.⁶⁹

Read in this light, Coleridge's 'Disadvantages Resulting from the Possession of Beauty' essay, written a year after this letter in 1826, begins to articulate a nostalgic desire for the intellectual freedom that Coleridge experienced in the early 1820s when she was, as yet, unconstrained by the 'sphere of action...laid up for herself'.

In 1826, however, Sara left her intellectual pursuits 'sealed in the mind' and, instead, turned her energies towards her relationship with her fiancé. That year, Henry Nelson Coleridge anonymously published his *Six Months in the West Indies in 1825*, a travel journal which is haunted by the ghostly absence of 'Eugenia', 'a cousin...almost my sister ere my wife' (quoted in Mudge 1989: 40) whose 'loved form...for ever prevails in its real and natural beauty' (H. N. Coleridge 1832: 5), and whose 'fair and languid shape rose ever and anon between the foamy

⁶⁸ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge', Guy Fawk[e]'s Day [1825], HRHRC.

⁶⁹ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge', 30 August 1825, HRHRC.

crests of the purple waves...beckoning and speaking, though I could not hear' (H. N. Coleridge 1832: 31-32). Sara found the references '[m]ost gratifying'⁷⁰ but the same references also alerted her father to her secret engagement: 'O Henry Coleridge! Henry Coleridge', he wrote in the margins of his own copy of *Six Months in the West Indies* as he read it, 'If this be all a romance, it is very *Derwentish* - i.e. gallocristan, if true, most ruthlessly indiscreet. I myself know the misery & persecution which Blabs of this sort have brought on individuals & whole families in Sicily & Minorca' (S. T. Coleridge 1969-98: XII.93). In due course, the engagement became public knowledge and, despite reservations about the match from both sides of the family, the marriage soon looked certain to go ahead and Coleridge redirected her energies from her translation work to her domestic 'sphere of action'.

Sara was not best suited to household duties, as she herself admitted in 1828 in a letter to her friend Elizabeth Crumpe: 'I have a great deal of sewing to do at present, and alas! I am slow with my needle'⁷¹. Nevertheless, she persevered with becoming acquainted with her new lifestyle and was determined to make a success of it:

You can't think Elizabeth how glad I should be of a little opportunity of learning housekeeping before I am launched on the sea of matrimony; I fear at first I shall manage the ship not indifferently inexperienced in navigation as I shall be; I am naturally not observant, & here I am unable to acquire any knowledge of the kind: you once mentioned to me a publication intended for the instruction of young housekeepers - I believe by Mrs King - do you think it contains much that is not to be found in Mrs Rundell?⁷²... If you could mention to me any dishes desirable for a very small family, or give me any useful hints I should be greatly obliged to you. I remember a very nice dish at your table

⁷⁰ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge', 2 February 1826, HRHRC.

⁷¹ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Crumpe', 2 February 1828, Dove Cottage.

⁷² Mrs Rundell's *A New System of Domestic Cookery* (1806) was Murray's best-selling book after Byron's *Child Harold's Pilgrimage* (cf. Pearson 1999: 39).

of a small piece of beef shaped in a particular manner. You told me how it was done, but I have forgotten.⁷³

Effectively, Sara renounced her intellectual pursuits, exchanging her classical authors for books on housekeeping by Mrs King and Mrs Rundell. For her, it was not a change entirely without regrets: '[T]he prospect of leaving this dear house and dear vale so much sooner than I expected when I last saw you makes me eager to toss about the hay while the sun shines', she confided in a letter to Elizabeth Crumpe: 'I regret that I cannot make more use of this [Southey's] noble library while I still have the advantage of it than I am at present able to do; and there is so much that I should like to do & to see and to copy and to transcribe before I lose the opportunity for ever!'⁷⁴

Eventually, though, a date for the wedding was set and Sara wrote to her fiancé, confirming her renunciation: 'My childish and girlish castles in the air are now exchanged for others which have you for their object - to contribute to your daily comfort and pleasure - that is the earthly goal towards which all my hopes and wishes are turned' (quoted in Mudge 1989: 47). On 3rd September 1829, seven years after they had first met, Sara and Henry were married. Maria Jane Jewsbury commemorated the occasion by writing a poem called 'The Bridal Band' which was sent to Sara, care of Dora Wordsworth, by way of a wedding gift:

...The bridal band! not mean & few,
But beautiful & many too,
A wreath of human flowers; -
Offspring of poetry they stand,
And she, the Rose-queen of the band,
A child of classic bowers.

Just such a bride, "red as a rose"

⁷³ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Crumpe', 2 February 1828, Dove Cottage.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Lives mid the wonders & the woes
Of the "Ancient Mariner,"
That tale told to a wedding guest
Who turned & beat upon his breast,
Yet could not chuse but hear!

But no old man "with skinny hand"
Will mar I trow thy wedding band,
Will utter words of moan; -
And if perchance a "glittering eye"
Should with its gaze the passer by,
That eye will be thine own!⁷⁵

Wordsworth, too, sent Sara his best wishes: 'My dear Sara,' he wrote, 'I wish you were back again in Cumberland - and take care that you keep your health, and the good looks of which I hear so much - farewell my very dear Friend - Wm Wordsworth' (WL: V. 186).

It was left to Sara's father, absent from the wedding, to take stock of her intellectual achievements rather than her 'glittering eye' or 'good looks'. With the exception of her brief trip to London in 1822 and a short visit in 1826, S. T. Coleridge had not seen his daughter for almost twenty years. But he had a copy of her *Account of the Abipones* and proudly declared that: 'My dear daughter's translation of this book is, in my judgement, unsurpassed for pure mother-English, by anything I have read for a long time' (SCML: I.34). And, aside from the book, he also had William Collins's *Highland Girl* painting hanging over the desk in his study, which had been presented to him after its exhibition at the Royal Academy. His wedding present was a copy of William Sotheby's *Georgica-Heptaglotta*, 'the most splendid way, that I can command, of marking my sense of the Talent and Industry, that have made her Mistress of the Six Languages comprised in the volume' (quoted in Griggs 1940: 66). In his will, he mentioned the book again, stressing that:

⁷⁵ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 3 September 1829, Dove Cottage

it is my wish that Sara should never part with this volume but that if she marry and should have a daughter, it may descend to her...as a Memento that her Mother's Accomplishments and her unusual attainments in ancient and modern languages were not so much nor so justly the object of admiration, as their co-existence with piety, simplicity, and a characteristic meekness, - in short - with mind, manners and character so perfectly feminine. (Quoted in Griggs 1940: 66)

Sara, it seemed, needn't have made the conscious decision to renounce her scholarly interests, her 'childish and girlish castles in the air'. In her father's estimation, they had co-existed perfectly with a 'character so perfectly feminine'.

Sara seemed at first to settle easily into her new lifestyle. Within months of being married, she moved with Henry from their rented lodgings in Gower Street to a larger house in Hampstead and became increasingly pragmatic about her role as the mistress of the house: 'In regard to Miss Jewsbury I hope and trust she may not come but shall not make myself unhappy on the subject - ' she told Henry at a time when their household had become inconvenienced by the lack of a cook, '...Miss J. may go away thinking that we live in a funny style, which perhaps does not missignify'⁷⁶. In October 1830, she gave birth to a son, Herbert. (Jewsbury, apparently unoffended with the Coleridges' 'funny style' of living, sent Herbert a baby bonnet. Sara liked it very much; it made him look 'like the knave of spades'⁷⁷, she said.)

⁷⁶ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge', 15 July 1830, HRHC.

⁷⁷ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Geraldine Jewsbury', u.d. [c.1830], English MS1320/38. John Rylands Library, Manchester.

According to the general advice given by doctors, Sara kept a meticulous diary of Herbert's every movement, recording everything from his 'crumpled right ear bent downward' and how this was rectified by the simple means of a 'sticking plaster' to 'attempts at articulation saying blub blub' and how 'he has been able to swim along on the floor & tries to get up by a chair'⁷⁸. With long office hours, and the journey between Lincoln's Inn and Hampstead being as substantial as it was, Henry lived in London during the week leaving his wife longing for the weekends when he would return: 'I know not how I shall live till Saturday without you, my duck', she wrote on one occasion, ' - I hope you are miserable without me no, my dearest, I really hope you are comfortable, but not so happy as you are when I am with you. I am very well & if thinking of you & loving you constitutes a good girl I certainly am one - I cannot boast of much goodness in any other way.'⁷⁹

Despite her husband's frequent absence, Sara continued to be enthusiastic about her new 'sphere of action' and continued eagerly to chase up recipe ideas from Elizabeth Crumpe, now Elizabeth Wardell. 'P.S Now I am going to ask you a housekeeping question', she wrote in 1831, 'it relates to that nice mode of dressing beef...do you soak the meat in the port wine gravy?'⁸⁰ By the time her second child, Edith, was born in June 1832, it seemed that Sara had very much settled into her domestic routines: 'You cannot imagine how odd the change in Sara's habits appear to me - so different to those of her maiden days', wrote her mother to Emily Trevenen, 'Reading, writing, walking, teaching, dressing, mountaineering, and - I may add, for the latter 10 years of that state - *weeping* - were her daily occupations with occasional visiting - Now, house orders, suckling, dress and undress - walking, sewing - morning visit and receiving - with very little study of Greek, Latin, and English - (no weeping!) make up...her busy day' (quoted in Mudge 1989: 58).

⁷⁸ 'Sara Coleridge's Baby Diary', 4 June 1831, 7 August 1831, HRHRC.

⁷⁹ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge', 29 June 1830, HRHRC.

⁸⁰ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Crumpe', 2 November 1831, Dove Cottage.

Within months, however, Sara had become extremely unhappy. At first, her symptoms were trivialised and brushed aside. The entry for 12th September 1832 reads: 'My nervous debility & other unpleasant symptoms increased so much that I was obliged to [leave off] feeding my darling & now she takes milk & oates with a little sugar in it out of the bottle. She was frightened by the spoon & at first there was some repugnance with bottle - but she now takes it very well'⁸¹. A fortnight later, Coleridge recorded a huge change for the worse in her health: 'Since the 12th I have been going on very sadly. Disordered bile accompanied with derangement of the nervous system is my complaint. Stomach & bowels out of order great weakness - nervousness, shiverings & gloomys & c.'⁸². The following week, Coleridge travelled with her mother to Brighton in the hope that the change of scene and the sea air would be beneficial to her health but she found the coach journey intolerable: '[S]he said, oh, I shall go into convulsions if I cannot get out! the rain pouring the whole way, yet, at any change of horses she darted out and walked rapidly up and down the road like one distracted... I shall never forget that night' (quoted in Jones 1998: 274), her mother recalled.

The winter weather also took its toll. In 1829, Henry had mentioned in a letter to his brother, Francis, how he was 'a great deal dependent on the weather for my feelings'⁸³ and, in this respect, he and his wife were very similar. 'The weather is soft & wet & foggy', she complained to her diary on the 14th November 1832, 'I have felt languid & sad for some days.' December 2nd was 'A very low spirited hysterical day with me... O when will my deliverance come?' she asked, 'tears relieve me not'. On 13th December, she recorded: 'Yesterday was the worst day since my illness. Having slept only 3 hours my gloom was intense in the morning & the irritability dreadful afterward. For two hours I could not sit still. Dear Mrs G[ilman] who is all

⁸¹ 'Sara Coleridge's Baby Diary', 12 September 1832, HRHRC.

⁸² 'Sara's Coleridge's Baby Diary', 20 September 1832, HRHRC.

⁸³ 'Letter from Henry Nelson Coleridge to Francis G. Coleridge', 12 June 1829, Add MSS 47558, British Library.

kindness sent me an opiate it calmed me & I slept after 1 o'clock.' Nor did Coleridge's depression ease up the following year; the 'sad frightened feeling all last evening' recorded in her diary on the 13th February, the 'yawny hollow feeling' recorded on the 2nd April, are indicative of her condition during this period.

It is in her correspondence that we find the most probable cause for what might nowadays be diagnosed as post-natal depression. Sara found herself completely unsuited to the domestic 'sphere of action', especially when it came to motherhood: '[The children] have a most excellent nurse in kind grandmama', she explained to Elizabeth Wardell, 'Yet I cannot look at their dear faces without anguish. I seem like another & a stranger, with all my faculties suspended.'⁸⁴ Perhaps her use of the word 'faculties' here has a more general meaning but, nevertheless, Sara must, at least in part, be referring to her intellectual faculties, in the same way that Henry Taylor would later remark about her 'reasoning faculty' (SCML: I.29). In any event, she attempted to re-engage with her old intellectual interests, explaining to Elizabeth Wardell that: 'I force myself to read & now I do a little bit of easy work - but everything is a labour - everything is without interest or enjoyment. Religious considerations are my only support.'⁸⁵ Still, the reading did have a positive effect: 'I am reading Boswell & much pleased with it', Sara noted a few months later, 'Books of fiction too do me good'⁸⁶. Writing to Elizabeth Wardell once again in late October, she seemed to be more aware of the psychological nature of her illness:

Soon after I wrote to you, I spent weeks with my family in Bedford Square, occupying my sister's house while she was in the country: there I had the advice of Sir H. Halford whose manners are as polished as his station in his profession is high - he was soothing & hopeful but could do no more for me than the various other medical men whom I have consulted: medicines in my

⁸⁴ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Wardell', 28 March 1833, Dove Cottage.

⁸⁵ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Elizabeth Wardell', 20 October 1833, Dove Cottage.

⁸⁶ 'Sara Coleridge's Baby Diary', 4 May 1833, HRHRC.

disorder are generally unavailing & physicians can only give regulations as to diet & general management, they cannot cure the complaint but may prevent your needlessly aggravating it. My case is one of hysteria, & I fear will prove very obstinate. I have no disease, & I think my stomach is only occasionally deranged it is completely & solely an affection of the nervous system, & where that is out of order a thousand miserable symptoms appear according to the constitution & habits of the sufferer. Sir Henry confirmed what indeed I knew well that my spine is not diseased: the spinal nerves have been affected in sympathy with the general derangement of the system & thence all the weakness proceeds. I lie constantly on the sofa, & have difficulty in sitting up to meals: but I can walk up & down the stairs though tremulously... My spirits, the affection of which is the main grievance, vary continually - always weak & low, & at times dreadfully overflowed, but in general they are not in a more natural state than at the beginning of this sad breaking down.⁸⁷

Coleridge seems to have been largely unaware of the financial difficulties her family incurred as a result of her illness. The larger house in Hampstead, the children's nurse, Henry's travel expenses on 'the circuit' to Lincoln's Inn, and fees for doctors and medicines all added up and Henry was forced to borrow money from his family. 'I want some money, & would fain borrow as much as fifty pounds from you, if you can lend it', he wrote to his elder brother, Jack, in January 1833, ' - but I am almost ashamed to ask you'⁸⁸. By April, Henry had taken on an additional job of marking no less than 690 examination scripts from Eton (remarking that, 'indeed it is very laborious'⁸⁹) and expressed his gratitude for the loan, writing: 'As to my money matters, I also

⁸⁸ 'Letter from Henry Nelson Coleridge to John Coleridge', 22 January 1833, Add MS 47558, British Library.

⁸⁹ 'Letter from Henry Nelson Coleridge to John Coleridge', 2 April 1833, Add MS 47558, British Library.

have much to thank you for... We will discuss them more on your return'⁹⁰. And perhaps it was this £50 from Jack that Henry sought to repay when he hatched the idea of publishing some of Coleridge's children's verse: 'I am arranging a child's book out of Sara's compositions for Herbert', he explained in March 1834,

Of course they have a peculiar interest for him; yet really, upon the whole, they seem to me so much better than all the things I buy for the child, that I think with Parker's getting up, they would sell well; especially for the Latin parts. If P. will give me 50 guineas for the copy, he shall have it - but not [for less?]. However don't tell of this - for Sara is rather forced to it by my marital tyranny. I shall call it - not Darling &c - but Benoni - for truly it has been a child of grief.⁹¹

The allusion to 'Benoni', the child whom Jacob's wife, Rachel, dies giving birth to in Genesis 35, is a poignant one in the light of Coleridge's precarious state of health but especially so in the light of the fact that, only months before, Coleridge 'gave birth to a baby boy & girl - both of whom gave up their little feeble lives on Thursday 16th [January] one in the morning the other in the evening'⁹². The name 'Benoni' also creeps mysteriously into the book itself, printed in capitals, unconnected and without explanation, over the 'Dedication' poem of the first page.

The finished book, *Pretty Lessons in Verse for Good Children; with some Lessons in Latin in Easy Rhyme* (1834), was, then, a 'child of grief', conceived amidst depression, infant death and financial difficulties. But, to the public, and even to her brother Hartley, Coleridge downplayed the troublesome circumstances that surrounded the writing of the book. 'Henry had a fancy for having some of them [poems] printed,' she wrote,

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ 'Letter from Henry Nelson Coleridge to John Coleridge', 20 March 1834, Add MS 47558, British Library.

⁹² 'Sara Coleridge's Baby Diary', January 1834, HRHRC.

as a little record of some of my occupations during a season of weakness and suffering, when I was shut out from almost all pleasures and means of usefulness. In this view you will look at the little book which I send you. It is worth nothing in any other'. (E. Coleridge 1873: l. 97)

Pretty Lessons was a modest success, going through four editions in ten years and last reprinted in 1927. Its opening poem 'January Brings the Snow' was re-issued separately in an illustrated edition in 1986 and seems to have enjoyed a sustained success in America.

The reasons for the success of the *Pretty Lessons* has little to do with the quality of its poetry and more to do with the growing market for children's educational literature in the 1830s. *Pretty Lessons* may, as Dora Wordsworth asserted, be 'wretched doggerel' (quoted in Jones 1998: 282), but its primary aim is not to be appreciated as poetry but to educate children. And so, while the following poems on 'Trees' and 'The Five Declensions' (both typical of the collection) could never be regarded as exceptional poetry, they do, nonetheless, capably fulfil a number of home schooling needs for their target audience:

The Oak is called the king of trees,
The Aspen quivers in the breeze,
The Poplar grows up straight and tall,
The Peach-tree spreads along the wall,
The Sycamore gives pleasant shade,
The Willow droops in watery glade,
The Fir-tree useful timber gives,
The Beech amid the Forest lives.

('The Tree', Coleridge 1853: 15)

In words of declension the first -
Attend, little scholar to me -
The singular genitive case
Doth constantly end in an æ.

In the words of declension the second -

To learn it I beg you will try -

The singular genitive case

Doth constantly end in an *i*.

(From 'The Five Declensions', Coleridge 1853: 188)

Coleridge herself had no delusions about the literary quality of her poems: '[D]on't fancy I think them [worthy of] real flattery - ' she wrote to Dora Wordsworth, 'nor can they be to any other chick what they have been to Herby'⁹³ before expressing how she 'should like to see Miss Howitt's Sketches of N. History for children - I think Mr and Mrs Wordsworth know that lady. Natural History is pleasing & is [in] all respect safe subject for children'⁹⁴. Even though she has not read Howitt's *Sketches of Natural History* (1834), Coleridge is already well aware of the market *Pretty Lessons* is best aimed at and aware also of her competition within that market. Much later (circa 1848), whilst toying with the idea of a second volume of poems, Coleridge wrote to Derwent, making explicit her views on, firstly, what she thought of her children's verses and, secondly, her place within the marketplace for those kinds of productions:

You understand, tho' one cannot quite state that plainly for fear of hurting one's bargain, that my sole [interest?] is the little sum of money I may gain by the booklet.

I have two sorts [of poem] - very childish, fit for four-years old, & some rather more advanced. There are but two or three of a religious cast. Those always felt timid - and [imparted] no truth though I do not say so much about profaneness & reverence as some talkers. I have been restrained by a

⁹³ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Dora Wordsworth', u.d. [c. July 1834], Dove Cottage.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

reverential feeling and a fear to vulgarize and trivialize & desecrate, from writing much in that way - the easiest of all to write commonplacishly - the hardest to write worthily in. Now Parker must have gained by the *Pretty Lessons*, as two years ago it was in the fourth edition: therefore if you did not think it best to apply to the society, I think I shall write to him at once & ask if he could undertake the thing. But if you can speak for me to Mr E. so much the better. My child verses in general are illustrative of natural history - I am careful (more so I think *entre nous* than Mary Howitt) about metre & rhyme.⁹⁵

(Eventually, Coleridge's proposed book turned into *Christmas Tyde* (1849), not a volume of poetry for children but an edited anthology of seasonal hymns and prayers.) In many ways, *Pretty Lessons* was, as Dora Wordsworth had said, 'wretched doggerel'; like the projected second book for children described above, it was 'commonplacish' and had been put together first and foremost for the sake of the 'little sum of money' to be gained from it. Yet, for all its ephemerality, *Pretty Lessons* does, nevertheless, take up a place in a distinctly Romantic poetic tradition, albeit a very private, domestic and long-forgotten one.

The very assumption that classical literature, rather than modern English writers, should be an integral part of a young boy's education was, itself, an assumption that Coleridge inherited from Greta Hall and was something that she found herself defending more than once after the publication of *Pretty Lessons*. 'I feel quite against the notion of substituting a lower set of books for the classical poets, in the instruction of youth', she wrote in 1834,

Purity and force of language and of thought are not so much learned by rule as imbibed by early and long habit, so far as they are to be gained from without... Such works present clear and pleasing images to the intellect in its very first stage; and the absence of all that is false in logic and corrupt in taste is a vast advantage.

⁹⁵ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge', n.d., c.1848, HRHRC.

Such, I think, is the effect of early classical reading in those who possess a sensibility and aptness for literature; and those who find no stimulus in the pursuit sufficient to make them recur to it in after years, are surely better furnished with a little Homer, Virgil, and Horace, than with the words of an inferior writer. (E. Coleridge 1873: 1.78)

Although women writers such as Ann and Jane Taylor or Mary Howitt dominated the educational literature marketplace in the 1830s, none of their books broached the subjects of Latin and Greek grammar and vocabulary. The task of writing about these fell, understandably, to men who had themselves received a classical education. Having published *Introductions to the Study of Greek Classic Poets. Designed Principally for the Use of Young Persons at School and College* in 1830⁹⁶, Henry Nelson Coleridge was one of these men and it is perhaps due to the success of his own work that he was keen to see his wife's 'Lessons in Latin' published. Inspired by the mnemonic verse of the unpublished Greek grammars that her father⁹⁷ and Southey⁹⁸ had written for home-schooling purposes at Greta Hall (the likes of which had never been seen in print), Coleridge's 'Lessons in Latin' were destined to be a commercial success, not only because they offered a new and innovative approach to classical education but because this approach, uniquely, catered for the hitherto untapped audience of the very youngest of readers.

And, seeing that they were the product of a mother wanting to provide her son with a grounding in preparation for Eton, the 'Lessons in Latin' also helped validate Coleridge's reclaiming of the knowledge and enjoyment of classical languages that she had tried so carefully

⁹⁶ See WL: V.ii.318 for Wordsworth's response.

⁹⁷ John Lennard quotes Coleridge's 'Metrical Feet' poem:

Trochee trips from long to short;
From long to long in solemn sort
Slow Spondee stalks; strong foot! Yet ill able
Ever to come up with Dactyl trisyllable... (Lennard 1996: 4n).

⁹⁸ Southey's grammar for his son, Cuthbert, is housed at the Keswick Museum, Cumbria.

to renounce in 1829 when she got married. Moreover, although they were written primarily for her son, Herbert, the inclusion of poems about his younger sister, Edith, in the collection began to turn classical language learning into an everyday, rather than monstrous, part of a young girl's education, thus giving, retrospectively, more credence to Coleridge's own intellectually rigorous education. In an undated letter from around this time, Coleridge expressed a fervent wish that Edith should be given a classical education similar to the one that she herself had received:

I shall certainly give E[dith] - an opportunity of learning music - but the main points with me will be the Bible, sewing, & the ancient languages. Of course Knowledge of them can never be necessary to form the manners of a lady, - the formation of ladylike manners depends on something else: but it is not by views in regard to my little maid's manners & external attractiveness that I am so much influenced in this matter, as by a regard to her own independence & comfort...In regard to the disposal of her little time I think I am not activated by vanity or attachment to an idolized theory: I really in my heart believe that by giving her a foundation in Latin & Greek I shall be consulting her happiness - doing that which will be the means of promoting [sic] her future tranquillity & cheerfulness.⁹⁹

By 1840, Coleridge was arguing with her brother, Hartley, that classical languages were a perfectly valid form of recreation for adult women as well:

A woman *may* house-keep, if she chooses, from morning to night, or she may be constantly at her needle, or she may be always either receiving or preparing for company, but whatever those who practice these things may say, it is not necessary in most cases for a woman to spend her *whole* time in this manner. Now, I cannot but think that the knowledge of ancient languages very greatly enhances the pleasure taken in literature - that it gives depth and variety to reading, and makes almost every book, in whatever language, more

⁹⁹ 'Letter [fragment] from Sara Coleridge to [UNIDENTIFIED RECEIPIENT]', n.d., HRHRC.

thoroughly understood. I observe that music and drawing are seldom pursued after marriage. In many cases of weak health they cannot be pursued, and they do not tell in the intercourse of society and in conversation as this sort of information does, even when not a word of Greek or Latin is either uttered or alluded to. (E. Coleridge 1873: I.239-240)

It remains uncertain whether Coleridge ever considered the success of *Pretty Lessons* to be dependent on the *Latin Lessons* section. Certainly, the success might have prompted some reflection, being far greater than anyone had anticipated: Earl Leslie Griggs notes that Henry 'was vexed at having sold the copyright so cheaply' (Griggs 1940: 86).

The success of *Pretty Lessons* might have been secured by the inclusion of the 'Lessons in Latin', but one poem, 'Poppies', caused a degree of contention amongst Coleridge's family readers:

The Poppies blooming all around
My Herbert loves to see;
Some pearly white, some dark as night,
Some red as cramasie:

He loves their colours fresh and fine,
As fair as fair may be;
But little does my darling know
How good they are to me.

He views their clust'ring petals gay,
And shakes their nut-brown seeds;
But they to him are nothing more
Than other brilliant weeds.

O! how shouldst thou, with beaming brow,
With eye and cheek so bright,
Know aught of that gay blossom's power,

Or sorrows of the night?

When poor mama long restless lies,
She drinks the poppy's juice;
That liquor soon can close her eyes,
And slumber soft produce:

O then my sweet, my happy boy
Will thank the Poppy-flower,
Which brings the sleep to dear Mama,
At midnight's darksome hour. (Coleridge [1834] 1853: 74)

Kathleen Jones notes that Derwent was unhappy with such an explicit reference to his sister's laudanum dependency, especially given the recent revelations in the public eye about their father's addiction (Jones 1998: 238), and Bradford Keyes Mudge quotes Coleridge agreeing that: 'the Poppy poem in 'Pretty Lessons' should have been left out - some other doggerel substituted - but I was poorly' (Mudge 1988: 67). But, in spite of ample opportunity to do so, at least from the fourth edition when significant cuts to the number of poems were made, 'Poppies' retained its place in the collection. Given the public revelations about her father's opium addiction and the light in which such addiction was regarded following the publication of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822), 'Poppies' may have been a little tactless, but the sentiments it expresses are far from original or subversive and, in fact, in many ways, 'Poppies' owes more to Coleridge's poetic heritage than even the 'Lessons in Latin'. As the following extract from a letter to Derwent in 1825 demonstrates, Coleridge clearly knew about the effects of laudanum and at least one poem that it inspired:

Mr Dequincey is again on sociable terms with the Wordsworths - he is well in tolerable spirits & has left off opium, but Miss W[ordsworth]. now fears he will take to the horrid drug again - horrid I call it when thinking of him & some others, in me that is rather ungrateful, as it has done me much good & no harm and I might exclaim with Mrs O Neil "Hail lovely blossom that can't st

ease, the wretched victim of disease” rather strong terms you’ll say for one suffering under [w]hooping cough...To return to the poppy I could not add with the poetess, “Canst close those weary eyes in sleep that never open but to weep.” This happened the summer before last. Night after night has grief & anxiety kept me awake spite of laudanum itself - you will say the dose was not large enough.¹⁰⁰

Although Southey had corresponded regularly with Anna Seward¹⁰¹, it is not known whether Coleridge knew her sonnet, ‘To the Poppy’, to which Mrs O’Neill’s ‘Hail lovely blossom’ seems to be a reply; or whether she had read Maria Gowen Brooks’s ‘To One, who had taken laudanum to enliven himself’ (1820); or what she later thought of Letitia Elizabeth Landon’s ‘The Poppy’ (1838). Nevertheless, together with the ballad metre of ‘We are Seven’ and the quasi-archaic use of ‘cramasie’ most probably borrowed from Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765)¹⁰², the borrowings from Mrs O’Neill’s poem begin to place Coleridge’s ‘Poppies’ in an intricate intertextual web amongst her father’s contemporaries and influences.

Mrs O’Neill’s ‘Hail lovely blossoms’ was first published in Charlotte Smith’s *Elegaic Sonnets* (1784) under the title ‘Ode to the Poppy. Written by a Deceased Friend’. Its second stanza, in particular, seems to be an important source for Coleridge’s ‘Poppies’:

I hail the goddess for her scarlet flower!
 Thou brilliant weed,
 That dost so far exceed
 The richest gifts gay Flora can bestow:
Heedless I pass’d thee in life’s morning hour,
 (Thou comforter of woe)

¹⁰⁰ ‘Letter from Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge’, Guy Fawk[e]’s Day, 1825, HRHRC.

¹⁰¹ See ‘Preface’ to Volume V, *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey*, 10 vols., London: 1841, xv.

¹⁰² e.g. ‘My love was cled i’t’h black velvet, / And I my sell in cramasie.’ (‘Waly Waly, Love Be Bonny’); ‘Sae put on zour pearlins, Marion, / And kirtle oth cramasie’ (‘The Ew-Bughts Marion’).

Till sorrow taught me to confess thy power. (Smith 1797-1800: II. 78)

O'Neill's 'scarlet flower', 'weed', 'gifts gay', 'comforter of woe' and 'power' are all ideas which are echoed in 'Poppies' but, ultimately, Coleridge shies away from mentioning laudanum's addictive nature, how it can be taken, as it is in the later stanzas of O'Neill's poem, not for '*palliative aid*' but for its 'dear Leathean power' that can 'Burst these terrestrial bonds, and other regions try'.

Read in the context of O'Neill's poem, Coleridge's poem becomes distinctly moderate in tone and less something to be justly censured. Coleridge's moderation is, in part, a result of her writing specifically for children but perhaps it is also a result of the moderation in her own use of laudanum. In the letter that accompanied Dora Wordsworth's copy of *Pretty Lessons*, she wrote:

I had hoped to tell Miss Hutchinson that I had entirely taken leave of black drop... "But why don't you take a sedative?" was the inquiry when I am going without them & doing very ill. But I know that to abstain would be the safer side - or rather I conjecture so for the longer I am ill the more puzzling my complaint is to me & the less I know how to act for the best.¹⁰³

Another poppy poem that Coleridge knew is one by her father which only survives because she herself noted it down in the margins of her copy of *The Poetical Works of S. T. Coleridge* called 'Fireside Anacreontic':

Come damn it, Girls, don't let's be sad,
The bottle stands so handy;
Drink gin, if brandy can't be had,
 But if it can, drink brandy.
And if old aunts, oh d- their chops,
 In scolding vent their phtisick,
Drop in of laudanum thirty drops,

¹⁰³ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Dora Wordsworth', July [1834?], Dove Cottage.

And call it opening physic. -
For it opens the heart & it opens the brain,
And if you once take it, you'll take it again,
Oh! Jacky, Jacky, Jacky Dandy,
Laudanum's a great improver of Brandy. (Woolf 1993: 14)

In comparison with her father's poem (which brashly espouses the joys of laudanum use alongside the more usual, alcoholic concerns of the traditional anacreontic), Coleridge's 'Poppies' is positively conservative. In distilling the concerns of 'Fireside Anacreontic' into 'Poppies', Coleridge, in a publicly acceptable way, brings her father's sentiments back into the fold of the Romantic tradition to which he belongs, alongside Mrs O'Neill and Anna Seward. And, at once articulating the private utterances of her father, her own concerns and the past voices of a Romantic tradition, 'Poppies', like the *Lessons in Latin*, enables Coleridge, albeit fleetingly, to participate in the 'commonplacish' marketplace of the 'Age of Taste' while continuing to be a true 'second self' of the Lake Poets. Her next project, *Phantasmion* (1837), would operate along similar lines but would prove far more ambitious in scale.

On the 25th July 1834, soon after the publication of *Pretty Lessons*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge died. Within weeks, Sara had drawn up plans to edit a comprehensive edition of his works: 'Henry will arrange literary and critical pieces - notes on the margins of books, or any miscellaneous productions of that kind that may be met with among his MSS., and probably some letters will appear if they can be collected' (E. Coleridge 1873: l.111), she told her friend, Louisa Plummer. The projected edition, she knew, was unlikely to be commercially profitable: 'It is not to be expected that speculations which demand so much effort of mind and such continuous attention, to be fully understood, can ever be *immediately* popular,' she explained, ' - the written works of

master spirits are not perused by the bulk of society whose feelings they tincture, and whose belief they contribute to form and modify' (E. Coleridge 1873: I.113-4).

Attempting a series of publications without a view to commercial success clearly went against the grain of the demand-driven literary marketplace of the 1830s but, at the very start of her career, Sara had witnessed a precedent for her shamelessly anti-economic attitudes in the activities of her uncle. In 1819, as she had proceeded with her Dobritzhoffer translation, Southey had been preparing the final volume of his *History of Brazil* for publication. 'The third and last volume of my Opus Magnum will be published in two or three weeks; they are printing the index', he had written in a letter to Chauncey Hare Townshend,

What effect will it produce? ... None that will be heard of. It will move quietly from the publishers to a certain number of private libraries; enough between them to pay the expenses of the publication. Some twenty persons in England, and some half a dozen in Portugal and Brazil, will peruse it with avidity and delight. Some fifty, perhaps, will buy the book because of the subject, and ask one another if they have had time to look into it... some of those who do not know me will marvel that in the ripe season of my mind, in the summer of reputation, I should have bestowed so large a portion of life upon a work which could not possibly become either popular or profitable. (C. Southey 1855: 376)

As it happened, Southey underestimated the size of the readership for *History of Brazil*. By June 1819, 680 copies of the first volume and 473 of the second had been sold at the cost of 30 and 34 shillings a piece. But, generating a little under £120 in royalties¹⁰⁴ (a decidedly modest sum considering that, in 1834, the *Quarterly Review* offered Southey £100 for an article on the Corn Laws (Curry 1965: II.406)), these sales figures did confirm the lack of popularity that Southey had been anticipating; as did the *Quarterly Review* which found parts of the second volume

¹⁰⁴ My thanks to Dr Lynda Pratt, Queen's University, Belfast, for sending me this information from the Divide Ledgers in the Longman Archive, University of Reading.

'comparatively obscure and uninteresting, but necessary', and noticed that the books had not 'attained the degree of popularity to which they are entitled' (*Quarterly Review* 1817: 126-7). In other circumstances, such a reception might have been a disappointment, but Southey did not, however, write *History of Brazil* with a view to immediate commercial success. As he went on to tell Chauncey Hare Townshend, he was aiming at an altogether higher purpose:

[A]ges hence it will be found among those works which are not destined to perish, and secure for me a remembrance in other countries as well as my own; that it will be read in the heart of S. America, and communicate to the Brazilians, when they shall have become a powerful nation, much of their history which would otherwise have perished, and be to them what the work of Herodotus is to Europe. (C. Southey 1855: 376)

With her uncle's example in mind, it was clear to Sara that there was more to literature than being 'popular or profitable'; and, later, when she knew, from her own experience, that 'No work is so inadequately rewarded either by money or credit than that of editing miscellaneous, fragmentary, unmethodical literary remains like those of STC' (quoted in Jones 1998: 313f), she would go on with it all the same, undeterred. Her husband, too, shared in her anti-economic values: '[H]is literary undertakings bring credit - though as Mr Wordsworth says we should like a little of the tangible in addition to that interesting abstraction', Sara remarked in a letter to her friend, Mary Stanger,

But Henry is one of those who thinks that literature, pursued worthily, is its own reward, and as he is of a contented disposition and heartily enjoys the superior prosperity of his friends and brothers, he can wait for "the nice house in Regent's Park with plenty of bookshelves" which we are to have some day or other without being at all out of humour in the mean time.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Mary Stanger', 25 March 1835, Dove Cottage.

The task of editing her father's works soon came to dominate Sara's life: '[J]ust now', she explained, 'I have a long pen-and-ink task to get through... I mean transcribing marginal notes of my Father's which Henry's clerk cannot do without continually interrupting his busy Master for directions.'¹⁰⁶

If the act of transcribing began as a repetitive and laborious exercise for Sara, it soon took on a far greater significance: 'I suffered much in parting with my beloved father,' she recalled, '...[but] so accustomed had I been to commune with him in his books more than face to face that even now I never feel, while I peruse his sayings, chiefly on religious subjects, as if he were no more of this world'¹⁰⁷. The poignant sense of connectedness she articulated here would, in years to come, only increase in intensity: 'Indeed,' she would confess after Wordsworth's death in 1850, 'he seems ever at my ear, in his books, more especially his marginalia - speaking not personally to me, and yet in a way so natural to my feelings, that *finds* me so fully, and awakens such a strong echo in my mind and heart, that I seem more intimate with him now than I ever was in life' (E. Coleridge 1873: II.257).

Table-Talk, a series of Coleridge's remarks carefully noted down in the last years of his life by Henry, was the first book in the projected edition to be published and many of the literary reviews were less than enthusiastic about it: 'The *Printing Machine* and other critical publications find fault with the editor of "Table Talk" for not having done what they themselves admit no reporter upon earth could do', Sara told Mrs Henry Jones in July 1835,

They all allow that it was impossible to represent on paper the ample sweeping current of my father's discourse. They add, however, that the work

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. In a letter to Mrs Henry Jones from approximately the same time, Coleridge mentioned that it was her 'father's notes on Southey's *Life of Wesley*' (E. Coleridge 1873: I.136) that she was transcribing.

¹⁰⁷ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Mary Stanger', 16 July 1838, Dove Cottage.

has preserved much valuable matter, which would otherwise have perished; that it serves in some measure to confirm and elucidate my father's written works... This was all that Henry expected to do; he dreamt not of placing Coleridge *the talker* before his readers, but merely hoped to preserve some part of his talk. (E. Coleridge 1873: I. 129)

Like *History of Brazil*, *Table-Talk* was neither 'popular or profitable' but, then, it was not written to be. To Sara and Henry, the book was a success simply because it had realised their aim to 'preserve much valuable matter, which would otherwise have perished'. Their confidence in the work was bolstered, too, by Southey's unfailing support: '[M]y Uncle Southey is pleased with "Table Talk"', wrote Sara (E. Coleridge 1873: I.130). It was soon after the publication of *Table-Talk* that Sara began work on her long fairytale, *Phantasmion*.

Returning to London after a two-month visit to Henry's family at Ottery, St Mary in October 1836, Sara fell ill and, thirty five miles into her journey, 'detained...by utter failure of nervous power'¹⁰⁸, was forced to take a room at the Castle Inn, Ilchester. Hysterical, she wrote to her husband: 'Tell me what to do - but O do not tell me to proceed as originally intended'¹⁰⁹; and the next day, 'Alas my love my life is blighted...I shall never see Hampstead more. I must be separated from my husband & children & how can I live here?'¹¹⁰ The doctor who attended her, noted her medical nurse, 'Expressly Declared that if she had proceeded on her journey in the state of her

¹⁰⁸ 'Sara Coleridge's Baby Diary', 16 October 1836, HRHRC.

¹⁰⁹ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge', 16 October 1836, HRHRC.

¹¹⁰ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge', 17 October 1836, HRHRC.

Excitement in which she Arrived here the worst Consequences, even Death itself, might have Ensued'¹¹¹.

Benefiting from rest and the regular doses of laudanum prescribed for her, she began to recover and began taking a bored interest in the few distractions her room had to offer: 'Mr B[oydell] has lent me Mrs Hemans Hymns and Mrs Howitts "Seven Temptations" which Mr Wordsworth, if forced to read, would say were seven temptations of his patience.' she told Henry, 'I see a meadow with sheep from my window as I lie on the bed.' she continued, 'From the window I see a neglected garden a low spirited sight no! not very neglected'¹¹². Still fragile, she remained confined to her room for the five-week duration of her stay; even the prospect of the inn's downstairs sitting room made her 'feel like a canary bird let out of its cage into the wild wood: in that great room, away from the bed. Of course', she added, trying to be optimistic, 'there is a sofa'¹¹³.

It is during her time in Ilchester that Coleridge is often thought to have written much of her long fairytale, *Phantasmion* (Mudge 1989: 95-7; Jones 1998: 297), and reading *Phantasmion* as a product of those weeks certainly adds to it a sense of romantic drama: 'Continually grieving at the separation from her children,' writes Kathleen Jones,

driven by the desire to have the time and privacy to work, Sara calmed her night terrors with large doses of laudanum and during the day she wrote. The fears and phantoms of her mind were spilled on to paper in a fantastic tale, 'a string of waking dreams', that became her fairy-tale *Phantasmion*. (Jones 1998: 297)

¹¹¹ 'Note from Sara Coleridge's medical nurse to Henry Nelson Coleridge', 18 October 1836, HRHRC.

¹¹² 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge', 23 October 1836, HRHRC.

¹¹³ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge', 26 October 1836, HRHRC.

Certainly, Coleridge made revisions to *Phantasmion* while she was in Ilchester: 'Beloved, you are too busy, I dare say to read [with] any caution about the concerns of my little M.S.' she wrote in a letter to Henry in early November, 'otherwise, I would tell you not to insert the verses I gave you with the 11th chapter of the third part. I am altering the chapter altogether: aiming to make fewer strokes tell the story: if I succeed in this the strokes will be better for being fewer even if not stronger in themselves'¹¹⁴. The truth is, however, that these revisions were being made to a manuscript that had, essentially, been completed for months.

Phantasmion is first mentioned by Sara in the following, somewhat disjointed entry from her 'Baby Diary':

Phantasmion finished Jan 31 - 1836 - began after HNC's return from revising. October 20th 1835 - I had written a burlesque child's tale on the subject of the Insect part - during a part of the last fortnight or 3 weeks of his absence - but then aside till a week or some days or more after his return.¹¹⁵

This earlier date of authorship may detract from the sense of romantic drama that Kathleen Jones inscribes onto *Phantasmion* but, in doing so, it also aligns it far more closely with the projected edition of her father's work that Coleridge was planning and executing in 1835.

Like that projected edition, *Phantasmion* was never to be 'immediately popular'; like Southey's *History of Brazil*, it was not written to be either 'popular or profitable'. The circumstances of its publication went some way in ensuring this: it was anonymously authored, had no illustrations and a print-run of a mere 250 copies. But, above all, what barred

¹¹⁴ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge', 3 November 1836, HRHRC.

¹¹⁵ 'Sara Coleridge's Baby Diary', HRHRC

Phantasmion from being a commercial success was its being a long fairy tale. Even in the unlikely event that Coleridge had not recognised how the way in which her book was published would have an adverse effect on its popularity, she certainly understood that a long fairytale would not, in all likelihood, be positively received in the contemporary marketplace. 'It requires no great face to publish now-a-days', she explained to Arabella Brooke,

it is not stepping upon a stage where the eyes of an audience are upon you, but entering a crowd, where you must be very tall, strong, and striking indeed, to obtain the slightest attention. In these days too, to print a fairy tale is the very way to be *not read*, but shoved aside with contempt. I wish, however, I were only as sure that my fairy tale is worth printing, as I am that works of this class are wholesome food, by way of variety, for the childish mind. It is curious that on this point Sir Walter Scott, and Charles Lamb, my father, my Uncle Southey, and Mr. Wordsworth, were all agreed. Those names are not so great an authority to all people as they are to me; yet I think they might be set against that of Miss Edgeworth, powerfully as she was able to follow up her own view (E. Coleridge 1873: I.175).

Coleridge's assertion that 'to print a fairy tale is the very way to be *not read*, but shoved aside with contempt' echoes Maria Edgeworth who, in her overview of children's literature in *Practical Education* (1798), all but ignored the fairytale, writing that: 'We do not allude to fairy tales, for we apprehend that these are not now much read' (Edgeworth 1801: II. 110). Edgeworth's comment is part of the early nineteenth-century debate on the importance of fairytale and it is this debate in which Coleridge places *Phantasmion*, aligning herself to her father, Scott, Lamb, Southey and Wordsworth, and in opposition to dominant, utilitarian attitudes as propounded by Edgeworth and, one might add, Anna Barbauld and Sarah Trimmer.

Coleridge's position is, however, complicated by the fact that, by 1837, arguments about the importance of fairytale had long since drawn to a close. The publication in 1823 of Edgar Taylor's selection of tales from the Grimm brothers entitled *German Popular Stories*, paved the way for a stream of fairytale publications, and marked the beginning of the end for the cultural

dominance (Zipes 1993: 46-7) held by utilitarian literature, what Charles Lamb disparagingly called 'Mrs Barbauld's stuff' and 'Mrs Trimmer's nonsense' (quoted in Towle 1912: 175). In 1825, Thomas Croker published his *Fairy Legends of Southern Ireland* in 1828, Thomas Keightley published *Fairy Mythology* in 1833; and, in 1836, Anna Eliza Bray published a series of letters to Southey, *A Description of the Part of the Devonshire Bordering on the Tamar and the Tavy*, which contained substantial chapters on Devonshire folklore and pixie legends. In addition to these books, there was also, during the 1820s and 30s, a proliferation of Fouqué, Tieck and Novalis translations (Durrant 1994: 336) from both the periodical and the publishing press (Zipes 1991: xviii), as well as a corresponding fascination in fairytale in contemporary art, ballet and theatre¹¹⁶. By 1834, the consumer demand for fairytale was so great that even Samuel Goodrich, the then much celebrated utilitarian author of the educationalist *Peter Parley* series, swallowed his 'vehement dislike of fairy tale' and brought out *Peter Parley's Book of Fables*, explaining in his preface that:

These stories...are not histories; and I do not pretend that these things actually happen. I only imagine them to have happened... I will tell you a story of some mice who talked together and disobeyed their mother, and one of them got his leg torn off in a trap... I do not wish to make you believe that this adventure of the mice actually happened...my real design is to give you lessons of importance.¹¹⁷

The moral didacticism (with which Goodrich is obviously very uncomfortable) was something of a concession to the utilitarian impulse that had characterised Edgeworth and Barbauld's writing,

¹¹⁶ See Jane Martineau, ed., *Victorian Fairy Painting*, London: Merrell Holberton, 1998.

¹¹⁷ S. G. Goodrich, *Peter Parley's Book of Fables* (Hartford, CT, 1850), p.7-8 quoted in M. I. West's 'Toward a Reappraisal of the Views of Early American Children's Authors concerning Fantasy Literature', *The Lion and the Unicorn* 22.2 (1998), 141-146, 142.

and it quickly became the primary characteristic of mid-nineteenth century fairytale. As Jack Zipes notes, 'Almost all the fairy tales of the 1840s and 1850s use allegorical forms to make a statement about Christian goodness in contrast to greed and materialism' (Zipes 1991: xx).

It was not, then, for want of a willing readership for fairytale generally that *Phantasmion* was to be 'shoved aside with contempt'. In writing a fairytale, Coleridge knew that she was participating in a heavily saturated market-niche, 'entering a crowd, where you must be very tall, strong, and striking indeed, to obtain the slightest attention'. Assuming, then, that Coleridge did not write *Phantasmion* to be 'popular or profitable', despite the fact that fairytale was an eminently popular and profitable genre, one must ask what it was that Coleridge was hoping to achieve by publishing it. To explore this, we, like Coleridge, have to recognise an important distinction between her father's idea of fairytale and the morally didactic fairytale of the 1830s marketplace as typified by Goodrich.

As co-editor of *Table-Talk*, Coleridge would have known that her father disapproved of the explicitly morally didactic element of contemporary fairytale. *Table-Talk* records a conversation from 1830 in which her father, with reference to his own 'Ancient Mariner', made his position on this clear, recalling that:

Mrs Barbauld once told me that she admired the Ancient Mariner very much, but that there were two faults in it, - it was improbable, and had no moral. As for probability, I owned that that might admit some question; but as to want of a moral, I told her that in my own judgment the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief fault, if I may say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the Arabian Nights' tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant, *because* one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son. (S. T. Coleridge 1969-98: XIV.100, May 31 1830)

While the utilitarian Barbauld found fault in its lack of moral, Coleridge himself found 'Ancient Mariner' far too heavily freighted with moral. Another entry in *Table Talk* which is pertinent to this discussion of *Phantasmion* is one which records a conversation that he had, only weeks before his death, about the eighteenth-century utopian fantasy, *Peter Wilkins*:

Peter Wilkins is to my mind a work of uncommon beauty... I believe that Robinson Crusoe and Peter Wilkins could only have been written by islanders. No continentalist could have conceived either tale... It would require a very peculiar genius to add another tale, *ejusdem generis*, to Robinson Crusoe and Peter Wilkins. I once projected such a thing; but the difficulty of a pre-occupied ground stopped me. Perhaps La Motte Foqué [sic] might effect something; but I should fear that neither he, nor any other German, could entirely understand what may be called the "desert island" feeling. I would try the marvellous line of Peter Wilkins, if I attempted it, rather than the *real* fiction of Robinson Crusoe. (S. T. Coleridge 1969-98: XIV.295, July 5 1834)

Exactly when it was that Coleridge thought of writing something like *Peter Wilkins* remains unknown but the following entry, made in one of his notebooks in 1829, almost certainly had some bearing on the abandoned project. After noting down his thoughts on *Rabelais* and *Gulliver's Travels*, Coleridge wrote:

Mem. The prominent characters of the phantasmagoric Allegory are its' breadth, or amplifitude, & its' rapid Auroraborealis-like Shifting & thorough flushing of its Cones & Pyramids - yet still within a loosely predetermined Sphere, and with a unity of direction... The Allegoric does not exclude the Liberal, nor the one Allegory another. The solution is given in the name,

phantasmagoric - Inconsistency is prevented by Motion - the Columns shift
[across?]¹¹⁸

In writing *Phantasmion*, Sara Coleridge attempts to sidestep the 'obtrusion of the moral sentiment' which, in her father's eyes, crippled the 'Ancient Mariner'. In length and style more akin to *Peter Wilkins*, *Gulliver's Travels* and *Rabelais* than the shorter fairytales of Fouqué or Novalis, Coleridge attempted to capture, in *Phantasmion*, her father's vision of 'Aurora-borealis-like Shifting' whilst maintaining, at the same time, a certain 'unity of direction'. In short, in writing *Phantasmion* in late 1835, Coleridge was attempting to do nothing less than write her father's unwritten 'phantasmagoric allegory'.

Set on an imaginary continent made up of five countries each with their own history and geography, *Phantasmion's* storyline is unequivocally ambitious. Over 387 pages divided into four parts of twelve chapters or more, Coleridge weaves a romance plot around her eponymous hero, the young Prince Phantasmion of Palmland who, having fallen in love with the Princess Iarine, rapidly becomes aware of, and embroiled in, an immensely complicated and drawn-out political and supernatural power struggle. Phantasmion uncovers a conspiracy between Maudra (a prisoner from Rockland's recent invasion of Tigridia) and Seshelma (an evil 'fishy woman' with magical powers) to snare the affections of Glandreth, the leading general and protectorate of Rockland's army, before disposing of Rockland's King Albinian, who has already been bewitched by Seshelma and struck down by a debilitating illness. Because Glandreth seems to be taking a fancy to Iarine, the king's daughter, and because the house of Magnart in Polyanthida in

¹¹⁸ 'Coleridge's Notebook (No. 42)', 4 September 1829, Brit. Mus Additional MS 47537, British Library.

Almaterra is in opposition to Glandreth's plan, Seshelma agrees to help dispose of both Magnart and Iarine in exchange for Maudra's infant son. Phantasmion's adventures revolve around his attempts to thwart Rockland's plans for invasion.

Phantasmion travels in disguise to Polyanthida in the quest for political allies and there he meets Magnart's children, including his two daughters, Zelneth and Leucoia, and his son, Karadan. Zelneth, who from birth has been infatuated with Penselimer, the king of Almaterra, falls in love with Phantasmion who himself is angered by finding another rival for Iarine's affections in Karadan. It is during his stay at the house of Magnart that Phantasmion first learns of the enchanted silver pitcher.

Created by Feydeleen, the Spirit of Flowers and guardian of the house of Thalimo, the silver pitcher was originally intended to safeguard the affections of Iarine's mother, Anthemmina, for King Penselimer. Anthemmina, though originally willing to marry Penselimer, soon recovers the pitcher and gives it to Phantasmion's father, Dorimant who, in exchange for a part of the Black Mountains which form a natural border between Palmland and Rockland, gives up the pitcher to Albinian. Unable to find the metals in which his country is so desperately lacking in the newly acquired territory, Dorimant marries Phantasmion's mother, Zalia, heiress of Gemmaura, in the hope that he will find metals there. Anthemmina, on the way to a celebration at the Isle of Birds, is lost at sea and thought dead at which point, it is presumed, the pitcher's powers are transferred to her daughter, Iarine. Possession of the pitcher thus becomes a point of contestation between Phantasmion and Karadan, even though, as we discover towards the end of the book, Anthemmina is actually still alive but living in isolation and the pitcher has had, for the duration of the book, no power over her daughter at all.

Phantasmion's progress in both winning Iarine's heart and rallying forces to oppose Glandreth are slowed by another party, Maudra's mother, Malderyl, who has her own plans for world domination on behalf of her kinsman, Ulander, and enlists the help of Melledine, the witch who lives in the Deserted Palace. Eventually, though, Phantasmion does face Glandreth. The ghost of Phantasmion's mother entreats Valhorga, the Spirit of the Earth, to equip her son's army

with all the metal armour that he needs to fight Glandreth. This he does but, at the end of the day, to little avail. Because of Anthemmina's decision to end her life by starvation, Glandreth's reluctant supernatural guardian, Oloola, the Spirit of the Blast, is able to switch allegiances at the last moment before the battle and strikes Glandreth dead with a bolt of lightning. The story concludes with a peaceful resolution of all the concerns of the warring parties and the promise of Phantasmion's marriage to Iarine.

Even from this heavily simplified précis, it is plain to see why many of Coleridge's readers have struggled with *Phantasmion*. Reviewing it for *The Examiner*, Herbert Wilson criticised its difficulty:

It has barely a plot, barely a distinct character, barely an exciting episode. It grows monotonous before we have read fifty pages, and we are soon painfully aware that its many beautiful passages ought to have been presented to us in a book of elegant extracts, rather than in a connected story. For the connection itself is of the slenderest kind... a fairy tale without allegory, without humour, with meagre fancy and imagery, and still more meagre wonders and excitement, is to our mind unendurably heavy... There are old-fashioned children who like old-fashioned books, and here and there perhaps one might be found to like this one; but the stock boy or girl of the present generation would undoubtedly vote it a bore. (*Examiner*, April 11, 1874)

Ironically, the aspects of *Phantasmion* that Wilson so criticises are exactly those which make it a 'phantasmagoric allegory'. Wilson is uncomfortable with a plot that depends on its 'unity of direction' where the connections are those 'of the slenderest kind'; but what makes Wilson even more uncomfortable is the prospect of reading 'a fairy tale without allegory'. Such a prospect would have also made Coleridge uncomfortable, albeit in a different way, as she herself intimated in a letter to her husband, written during her confinement at Ilchester: 'The old cook here cannot make a semolina pudding', she complained, '- the egg goes to the left and the semolina to the

right, like some literary productions where the story and the moral stand distinctly apart, the author not having skill to interpenetrate one with the other'¹¹⁹.

The following year, Sara's brother, Derwent, also criticised *Phantasmion's* apparent want of allegory or moral. In reply, Coleridge defended her work: 'The objections in regard to a want of moral... I cannot so readily admit', she wrote,

On this head indeed there are two points to be considered - the main general purport of the story, the truth, moral, political or of any other description, which it aims to embody, & the benefit to be derived to the mind from the personal. Now I fairly admit that the tale in question was written to illustrate no one general truth: I thought it sufficient for the soul and individuality of the piece that there should be upon the whole a unity of conception and feeling throughout... whenever the poetical beauty of things is vividly displayed truth is exhibited, and thus the imagination of the youthful reader is stimulated to find such truths for itself... There is no fear of their mistaking the people or events of Fairy Tales for realities, but they may and should perceive the truths & realities both of the human mind & of nature which may be conveyed under such fictions, where each page has its own moral, & every description has a portion of interest which we find in the contemplation of the human mind or of nature itself... though the story was not written to illustrate one moral in particular, like Miss Edgeworth's Tales, yet that there are plenty of morals in the several parts of it - Anthemmina's story is a moral, - so are the disappointment of Dorimant, the miseries of Albinian, and the despair of Karadan, the death of Arzene too may shew that the excess of maternal affection has a tendency to produce unhappy consequences: but thinking as I do that an ostensible or predeterminate moral would quench the spirit of a Fairy tale I cannot wish that I had done more in this line.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Henry Nelson Coleridge', 23 October 1836, HRHRC.

¹²⁰ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Derwent Coleridge', 16 August 1837, HRHRC.

In Coleridge's estimation, *Phantasmion* strikes a precarious balance: it touches on a number of morals or truths, even 'political' truths, but it is not written simply as a vehicle for any one of these. Where its real moral worth lies is in the way 'the imagination of the youthful reader is stimulated to find such truths for itself'. Whatever morals are espoused by *Phantasmion*, then, are not 'ostensible or predeterminate' but ones that are generated by the readers' response to and imaginative interaction with it. Coleridge's *Phantasmion* lends itself to moral readings but, like her father's unwritten 'phantasmagoric allegory', 'The Allegory... does not exclude the Literal, nor one Allegory another'. Her father would have approved: 'Should children be permitted to read romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii?' he had once asked, '...I know no other way of giving the mind a love of "the Great", & "the Whole". - Those who have been led to the same truths step by step thro' the constant testimony of their sense, seem to me to want a sense which I possess - They contemplate nothing but *parts* - and all *parts* are necessarily little - and the Universe to them is but a mass of *little things*' (Griggs 1956: I.210).

By September 1837, Coleridge had become even more confident about the validity of her work. Writing to her husband, Coleridge was far less tentative about what she had achieved in *Phantasmion*:

In regard to "Phantasmion's" want of general purpose and meaning, I can only say that it does not belong to that class of fictions in which a single truth or moral is to be illustrated by a sequence of events, of which Miss Edgeworth's and Miss Martineau's tales are instances, or in which, as in the "Fairy Queen" and the "Pilgrim's Progress," the character and descriptions are all for the sake of an allegory, which not only shines through them, but determines the general form to be produced, as the osseous system of an animal under the flesh. It belongs to that class of fictions, of which Robinson Crusoe, Peter Wilkins, Faust, Undine, Peter Schlemil, and the Magic Ring or the White Cat, and many other fairy tales are instances; where the ostensible moral, even if there be one, is not the author's chief end and aim, which rather consists in cultivating the imagination... It may be a defect in "Phantasmion" that one thought is not as predominant throughout the narrative as in some of the

above-mentioned tales; and I may venture to say (comparing little things with great), that this want of unity, exhibited in a somewhat different way, is also perceptible in *Faust*. (E. Coleridge 1873: I. 190-191)

With only a parenthesis to shield her from immodesty, Coleridge explicitly roots *Phantasmion* in a late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century tradition alongside *Robinson Crusoe*, *Peter Wilkins*, *Faust* and *Undine*¹²¹. *Phantasmion* may owe something to some contemporary publications of the 1830s; for example, the fantastical metamorphoses that *Phantasmion* undergoes all involve insects described in the two volume *History of Insects* (1830) which was published in Murray's *Family Library* series alongside Henry Coleridge's *Six Months in the West Indies*; and Valhorga's gemmy underworld seems to have much in common with the submarine 'Palace of Gnomes' of Brooks's *Zóphiël*¹²². But, nevertheless, *Phantasmion* remains, at heart, what John Duke Coleridge called, 'an example of a kind of composition old-fashioned, out of date, and entirely at odds with the spirit and temper of the time we live in' (J. D. Coleridge 1874: iv); or, to use Herbert Wilson's words quoted earlier, a book for 'old-fashioned children who like old-fashioned books'.

¹²¹ Coleridge's copy of *Undine*, published by E. Littlel, Philadelphia, 1824) is currently lodged in the British Library (C.132.c.9).

¹²² A copy of *Zóphiël*, now in the British Library (1509/4067) was given to Coleridge in 1847 but this does not preclude her from having had access to it beforehand. Coleridge certainly admired the Apocryphal book of *Tobit*, thinking it had much in common with the *Arabian Nights*: 'How natural the story is in style, doubtless as to the manners!' she wrote, 'how much more like an Arabian Tale than a reality as to the substance & frame of the narrative! seven husbands to follow one another into the fatal chamber like gudgeons into a water-trap! There seems something mesmerising in the mention of the dog, which says nothing & does nothing' ('Letter from Sara Coleridge to Arabella Brooke', 29 July 1836, HRHRC).

After *Phantasmion*, Coleridge returned to the enormous task of preserving her father's literary remains, poring over every scrap of writing, no matter how incomplete, that he had left behind: 'My Father did sometimes forget to finish a note - in some instances most tantalizingly', she explained to Henry Taylor in 1846, 'Perhaps he broke off to think - & then either did not satisfy himself or forgot to record his conclusions...My Uncle Southey used to ink over his pencilled notes - that "nothing be lost" as he said - with his usual diligence.'¹²³ To this day, scholarship remains indebted to the years of work that Coleridge put into her editions of *Biographia Literaria* (1847), *Essays on His Own Times* (1850) and *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1852).

Like these other works, *Phantasmion*, too, was an act of preservation except that Samuel Taylor Coleridge had never written his 'phantasmagoric allegory' and, consequently, there was no text for Sara Coleridge to recover, no pencilled notes to 'ink over'. Uniquely, *Phantasmion* demanded, from her, an actively creative correspondence with her father's ideas and values; it demanded that she became imaginatively transported to the time of her birth, in which she would have been writing in opposition to Edgeworth in the live debate on the value of fairytale. *Phantasmion* may be an act of looking backwards but, although shamelessly 'old-fashioned', it was also intended as a live, imaginative extension, rather than a nostalgia-driven imitation, of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's literary corpus. 'There is certainly much to be discovered in the work, of which that great poet might well have been proud to claim the parentage', remarked Grenville Mellen in his preface to the pirated, American edition of *Phantasmion*, 'and perhaps this may be rendering it a sufficient eulogy' (Coleridge 1839: xi).

¹²³ 'Letter from Sara Coleridge to Henry Taylor', 26 February 1846, MS Eng letters c.1.(150-1), Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Chapter 5: Maria Jane Jewsbury

'You desire my opinion on the merits of the Contents of your publication', wrote Wordsworth in January 1829 to the editor of the *Keepsake* annual, Frederick Reynolds,

at present I could not give it - for a severe accident shut me out from the use of Books for some time - a fall upon my head - and since my recovery I have been absent from home. I have the less regret in making this statement - because, supposing me to be a judge of the *absolute* merit of works of this kind, which I really am not, I deem such judgement of little Value. What you have to consider is the fitness of the Articles for the Market, everything else is comparatively insignificant... Allan Cunningham talked about making his Annual reflect the Literature of the Age - and Southey told him in a friendly way, after all, dear C -, the best you can make of these, is picture-books for grown Children. - I am something of his mind - (WL: V.ii.14)

As has already been explored in my first chapter, contributing to the 1829 *Keepsake* crystallised, for Wordsworth, the differences between real literature and consumer-led publications like the *Keepsake*. The latter were ephemeral and to be considered only in terms of their 'fitness...for the Market', the implication being that 'works of this kind' could never genuinely aspire to being 'Literature of the Age' and questions of literary value or '*absolute* merit' were always to be, in their case, 'comparatively insignificant'.

Yet, despite his low opinion of the annuals, Wordsworth encouraged his literary protégée, the essayist and poet, Maria Jane Jewsbury, to contribute to them, maintaining that 'An Author has not fair play who has no share in their Profits' (Vincent 1944: 52). Wordsworth even asked

Reynolds to give due consideration to Jewsbury's work and, at the beginning of the letter from which the above quotation is taken, Wordsworth thanked him 'for granting [his] wish in behalf of Miss Jewsbury' (WL: V.ii.13). Yet, even though he had secured Reynolds's promise to at least consider her work, Wordsworth realised that it was all too unlikely that Jewsbury would be asked to contribute to the *Keepsake* and he soon wrote to her to prepare her for the possibility of rejection:

When Mr. Reynolds called upon me during his Editorial Tour early in the Spring of last year [1828] I was not unmindful of you, and mentioned your name to him in such terms as I am accustomed to use in speaking of you. He replied to my recommendation that their object was Authors of prime celebrity - and persons distinguished by rank or fashion, or station or anything else that might have as little to do with good writing. This stopped any further endeavour at that time - when I was in Town late in the Spring I frequently thought of you in connection with the *Keepsake*, but Mr. R. shewed me such an overflow of materials that I saw there was no room for any fresh Person - therefore I did not court a refusal. All this is mentioned that you may not be disappointed (I will not say mortified, for under such circumstances how is that possible?) if you hear, as I am afraid you will, that the application which I mean to make by the first opportunity proves fruitless. (Vincent 1944: 51)

Jewsbury was most honoured by Wordsworth's personal attention: 'That your father should have written to me with his own hand is what I consider no slight honour', she wrote in a letter to his daughter, Dora, 'indeed it will compensate for many mortifications... I feel his kindness most sensibly - Mr Reynolds may depend on my "[discretion?]" the permission to send any thing, is valuable, however grudgingly given'¹²⁴.

¹²⁴ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 20 January 1829, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

True to Wordsworth's predictions, the *Keepsake* did not ask Jewsbury to become a contributor. Nevertheless, regardless of the actual outcome of his efforts, the fact remains that, in January 1829, Wordsworth found himself in an uncomfortable position, in that he was encouraging Jewsbury, a writer whom he associated with 'good writing', to participate in the annual industry, whose market-driven products had no claim on the '*absolute* merit' that belonged solely to the genuine 'Literature of the Age' she might have otherwise aspired to. It was, perhaps, this predicament that spurred Wordsworth, in the same month, to attempt to establish a tradition of women's poetry that would have given women writers, like Jewsbury, the creative space to do more 'good writing'.

In January 1829, as Dionysius Lardner began putting together *The Cabinet Cyclopaedia of Eminent Literary and Scientific Men*, Wordsworth suggested to him that at least one volume might be usefully set aside to redress the neglect of literary women. 'The subject which I had thought of is much more limited than you suppose', explained Wordsworth,

- being nothing more than an Account of the Deceased Poetesses of Great Britain - with an Estimate of their Works... I still am of opinion that something is wanted upon the subject - neither Dr Johnson, nor Dr Anderson, nor Chalmers, nor the Editor I believe of any other Corpus of English Poetry takes the least notice of female Writers - this, to say nothing harsher, is very ungallant. The best way of giving a comprehensive interest to the subject would be to begin with Sappho and proceed downwards through Italy antient and Modern, Spain, Germany France and England - but, for myself, I could not venture to undertake the employment, two requisites being wanting - Books (I mean access to Libraries) and industry to use them. (WL: V.ii.4-5)

Within the space of a paragraph, Wordsworth's original proposal of 'an Account of the Deceased Poetesses of Great Britain' explodes into an even more ambitious project, nothing less than a complete literary history of women's writing in western Europe, ranging from Sappho to the

present day. Lardner never took up either of Wordsworth's suggestions and, when the *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* project was completed in 1849, all one hundred and thirty three volumes were entirely devoted to assessing the lives and works of men, with the exception of a handful of entries dealing with women writers that Mary Shelley slipped into her volumes on the *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain and Portugal* (vols 86-8, 1835-7).

Nevertheless, Wordsworth clung tenaciously to his idea for a reclamation project. He was mistaken in his assertion that no editor had ever turned their attention to women's poetry and, when he stumbled, in October that year, on the *Specimens of British Poetesses* anthology, he immediately wrote to its editor, Alexander Dyce, to offer his assistance:

By accident, I learned lately that you had made a Book of Extracts, which I had long wished for opportunity and industry to execute myself. I am happy it has fallen into so much better hands. I allude to your Selections from the Poetry of English Ladies [i.e. *Specimens of British Poetesses* (1825)]. I had but a glance at your work; but I will take this opportunity of saying, that should a second Edition be called for, I should be pleased with the honor of being consulted by you about it. There is one Poetess to whose writings I am especially partial, the Countess of Winchelsea. I have perused her Poems frequently, and should be happy to name such passages as I think most characteristic of her Genius, and most fit to be selected. (WL: V.ii.157)

Four years on, Wordsworth still continued to send Dyce reminders of his offer of assistance: 'And is there any prospect of a future edition of your *Specimens of British Poetesses*?' he asked in 1833,

If I could get at the original works of the elder Poetesses, such as the Duchess of Newcastle, Mrs Behn, Orinda, etc., I should be happy to assist you with my judgment in such a Publication, which, I think, might be made still more interesting than this first Ed: especially if more matter were crowded into a Page. The two volumes of Extracts of Poems by Eminent Ladies, Helen Maria Williams's Works, Mrs Smith's Sonnets, and Lady Winchelsea's Poems, form

the scanty materials which I possess for assisting such a Publication. It is a remarkable thing that the two best Ballads, perhaps, of modern times, viz. Auld Robin Grey, and the Lament for the Defeat of the Scots at Floddenfield, are both from the Pens of Females. (WL: V.ii.664)

Whatever his motivations were, Wordsworth's attempts to establish a tradition of women's writing did not succeed; and, rather than having a creative space in which she could do 'good writing', Jewsbury, who was well aware of how valuable a publicly acknowledged tradition of women's writing might be to women writers, remained, in 1829, bound to the monotonous task of writing for the market or, as she herself called it, 'the *trade*' (Vincent 1944: 94). In examining her life and work, this chapter explores how Jewsbury came to be in that market in the first instance, and the solution that she engineered, with Wordsworth's assistance, to remove herself from it.

From the outset of her career, Maria Jane Jewsbury did all she could to redress the distinct lack of a tradition of women's writing and her first known book proposal, sent to the Library of General Knowledge in 1820, was aimed towards this end. 'I am sorry to say...that the subject on which you have pitched, is already in other hands', replied its editor, George R. Gleig, 'Sir E. Brydges is writing for me a volume of *Female Biography*, into which all the distinguished authoresses of our country are introduced... Sir E. Brydges will do his volume well, but I own that I should have been better pleased to entrust it to a woman of genius' (Gillett 1932: xviii-xix). Gleig's own encyclopaedia never materialised and, towards the end of the 1820s, he would write the volumes on the *Lives of the Most Eminent British Military Commanders* for Dionysius Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*. Similarly, Sir Egerton Brydges's volume on 'Female Biography' was never published.

Having already edited *A true relation of the birth, breeding, and life, of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (1814) and *Censura literaria containing titles, abstracts, and*

opinions of old English books (1815), Brydges (despite the disdain with which Virginia Woolf later treated him in *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf [1929] 1993: 56, 68)) was, in 1820, a well-respected authority both on female biography and, more generally, on literary reference books; and he was undeniably formidable competition for the nineteen year old Jane, whose only publication at this time was a short poem in the *Coventry Herald*.

That Jane had even managed to put together a book proposal was, in itself, something of an achievement. Her mother had died the previous year and had left her, the eldest daughter, in charge of six younger siblings, together with all the other duties usually undertaken by the mistress of the house. Jane was well acquainted with the maternal role that she was expected to play, having already experienced something of it during the period of illness that preceded her mother's death. Her earliest surviving letter, written to her mother in 1818, offers a glimpse at the kinds of responsibilities that she undertook:

Geraldine looked very yellow & complained of constant sickness, I gave her two more Grains of Calomel, & a little Magnesia & Rhubarb twice since, & got her not to be so moping but run & play with her cousins, & it is surprising how she has altered, she looks [good?] & well, & she has had her haircut, & now is as nimble & full of spirits as anyone...¹²⁵

With so many domestic concerns in need of her attention, Jane found little time to tend to her literary aspirations: 'Three dear children are catechising me at the rate of ten questions in every five minutes', she explained to one friend,

I am within hearing of one servant stoning a kitchen floor; and of another practising a hymn; and of a very turbulent child and unsympathetic nurse next door. I think I could make a decent paper descriptive of the miseries of

¹²⁵ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to her mother', 30 August 1818, English MS1320/19, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

combining literary tastes with domestic duties. (Quoted in Gillett 1932: xvii-xviii)

Like many women writers of the nineteenth-century, Jane felt keenly the way in which her many 'domestic duties' often took priority over her 'literary tastes' and, writing to Felicia Hemans years later, she was unable to recall this early stage of her career without a sense of bitterness: 'My life after eighteen', she wrote, 'became so painfully, laboriously domestic, that it was an absolute duty to crush intellectual tastes' (Chorley 1836: 67). Managing her domestic duties may have been difficult for Jane but, by the time of her writing this letter to Hemans, Jane had identified an even greater obstacle in her early development as a writer:

I not only did not know a single author, but I did not know a single person of superior mind, - I did not even know how wretchedly deficient my own cultivation was. I wrote and wrote, and wrote faster than I can now, and without a tenth part of the timidity. I was twenty-one before I gained any desire for knowledge, as the natural road to the emancipation I craved; this was consequent on forming a friendship with two individuals, not writers, but highly gifted: they suggested study to me, and by their conversation, awoke me to a sense of my own deficiency. My domestic occupations continued as laborious as ever. I could neither read nor write legitimately till the day was over. (Chorley 1836: 67)

The 'two individuals' Jane refers to here are Alaric Watts and his wife; in 1821, Watts had spotted some of Jewsbury's contributions to the *Manchester Gazette* and had promptly taken it upon himself to nurture her literary talents. In Jewsbury's narrative, Watts's friendship gives shape to what is, previously, an indistinct sense of isolation. In looking back to when she did 'not know a single author' or 'person of superior mind', Jewsbury sees her earlier self not only living but, fatally, writing from within an intellectual vacuum that was oblivious to anything beyond itself. She may have had fervent literary aspirations but her juvenilia, dashed off 'without a tenth part of the timidity' of her later work, was written even while she was essentially ignorant of the very nature

of the intellectual and literary traditions in which she was attempting to stake her claim. Worse still, she 'did not even know how wretchedly deficient [her] own cultivation was' and 'wrote and wrote' blindly without 'any desire for knowledge' and, when she finally became aware of her 'deficiency', she later recalled in a letter to Hemans, writing became even more difficult:

Unfortunately, I was twenty-one before I became a reader, and I became a writer almost as soon; it is the ruin of all young talent today, that reading and writing are simultaneous. We do not educate ourselves for literary enterprise. Some never awake to the consciousness of better things neglected; and if one, like myself, is at last seized upon by a blended passion for knowledge and for truth, he has probably committed himself by a series of jejune efforts, - the standard of inferiority is erected, and the curse of mere cleverness clings to his name. I would gladly burn *almost* every thing I ever wrote, if so be that I might start now with a mind that has seen, read, thought, and suffered, something at least approaching to a preparation. (Chorley 1836: 69)

But this is Jewsbury writing with hindsight. In the early 1820s, with Alaric Watts as her mentor, she was soon swept up in the new fashion for 'young, spontaneous, untutored genius' and 'young talent...not educate[d]...for literary enterprise' (Greer 1996: 260), as epitomised by the likes of Letitia Elizabeth Landon.

LEL's first collection, *The Improvisatrice*, was published in 1824 and went through no less than six editions in its first year. Flushed with its early success, LEL's publishers, Hurst and Robinson, were keen to add other young women writers to their publishing list and, when Watts approached them that year with Jewsbury's first book, they promptly snapped it up for £100 (LEL had received £300). Within months, the first volume of Jewsbury's two-volume miscellany of prose and verse, *Phantasmagoria; or sketches of life and literature*, was ready to go to print.

With a rapidly developing understanding of her own 'deficiencies', the irony of writing and publishing a book that, in all likelihood, would be as commercially successful as it was 'wretchedly deficient' was not lost on Jewsbury and it is this irony that stands as the central theme of *Phantasmagoria*.

Eric Gillett asserts that *Phantasmagoria* was 'clumsily-named' (Gillett 1932: xix). Perhaps this is so but, nevertheless, the title does suggest something of the problem that Jewsbury wished to address in her book. On one level, Jewsbury likens her writing to the popular optical illusion devices, called 'phantasmagoria', that proliferated after the invention of the magic lantern at the turn of the nineteenth-century; like them, her own *Phantasmagoria* is, in part at least, a response to the public demand for whimsical, entertaining but, ultimately, innocuous novelty. At the same time, the title refers also to the Greek idea of 'phantasia', 'a making visible'; and, at its best, *Phantasmagoria* offers a scathing critique (or 'making visible') of the mechanisms that underpin the 'life and literature' of its subtitle. In her opening essay, 'The Age of Books', Jewsbury forcefully delineates the nature of the literary marketplace in the 1820s:

Surely no one will deny the propriety of the distinguishing the present age as an age of books! of book making! book reading! book reviewing! and book forgetting! ... Indeed authorship has become such a mere every day occupation, for mere everyday people, that it is rather hazardous to point out any one of your acquaintances as a person who you are sure "does not write, and has no thoughts of publishing". Your most intimate friend, however dull, may be guilty of a statistical quarto; your youngest daughter may, unknown to you, write all the poetry for a magazine, besides having a volume of "Fragments in prose and verse" almost ready for publication. You may have a talented washerwoman quite clever at composition, and even your barber's apprentice may be a rising genius... (Gillett 1932: 2-3)

For all her apparent disinterestedness and objectivity, though, Jewsbury is far from removed from the 'Age of Books'. She may distance herself from the rise of what Southey termed the 'working-

class poets', but, while the above allusion to the 'youngest daughter' who writes 'all the poetry for a magazine' may, in part, be a nod of acknowledgement to the likes of LEL, Jewsbury, writing in her own 'volume of Fragments in prose and verse', also implicates herself in sustaining the 'present age'.

Jewsbury may criticise 'popular authors, who, having pleased the public once, conceive they have a legitimate right to plague it as often as they choose afterwards' (Gillett 1932: 3); she may also attack 'disappointed writers, imitating the patient pedlar who continues to call at your house, however, frequently repulsed' (Gillett 1932: 4); but, by far her most frequent objects of scrutiny are new writers like herself, 'young authors, more in number and greater plagues than all the rest of the tribe...short-lived as motes in a sunbeam' (Gillett 1932: 4). As she indicates in the following sketch of the career trajectory that 'young writers' seemed destined to follow, Jewsbury does not so much resent the authors themselves as she does the society that induces them to become writers in the first instance:

A young lady or gentleman leaves school where each has been celebrated for indifferent spelling, never dotting an i, or crossing a t. Of course they are both turned out "highly accomplished", that is, the young lady paints flowers, and the gentleman plays on the German flute. But after the parties have read selections from the modern poets, a few reviews of the ancient ones, Hazlitt's Essays on Shakespeare, and all the periodicals for a twelvemonth;- after having regularly given a decided opinion on every subject, written various songs and sonnets in various Albums, and seemed rather more unreasonable than other people, - it is at length whispered abroad that Mr. So-and-so and Miss Such-an-one, are "highly gifted individuals"... Presently we hear of these highly gifted individuals writing poetry for a fashionable newspaper, and contributing the minor articles to a leading periodical; till at last, some misguided literary man takes them under his wing and presents them to some more misguided publisher as "rising geniuses", "flowers not born to blush unseen", but whom, to his everlasting renown, he is to transplant, and cherish, and so forth... Now are they puffed, and *protégéd* in all directions; till suddenly the pretty bubble bursts; a hundred faults which were before considered

beauties, are discovered; they are abused for not having fulfilled the promises which their literary Godfathers and Godmothers made for them; and at last sink into their primitive insignificance; the lady to paint flowers, and the gentleman to play on the German flute. (Gillett 1932: 4-5)

The parallels in this passage with Jewsbury's own career up to 1824 are unmistakable: Jewsbury wrote 'poetry for a fashionable newspaper' and contributed 'minor articles to a leading periodical'; Watts, a 'literary man', did take her 'under his wing' and, in all probability, pitched her to publishers Hurst and Robinson as a 'rising genius' who was not 'born to blush unseen'. In writing *Phantasmagoria*, Jewsbury finds herself at the midpoint of the trajectory that she envisions, ready to be 'protégèd in all directions', before 'the pretty bubble bursts' and she sinks into 'primitive insignificance'.

As I have already explored in my opening chapter, Jewsbury would later rail against the way in which society revered the 'highly accomplished' at the expense of anything more meaningful. Jewsbury's notions of accomplishment are less explicit in 'The Age of Books' than her later articles 'On Female Cultivation' but, nevertheless, in this earlier essay we still find Jewsbury delineating the limitations of accomplishment, and find, in her recurring image of her young lady painting flowers and gentleman playing the German flute, a sense of immovable monotony and uncompromising stasis.

In 'The Age of Books', Jewsbury's focus is not so much on the nature of accomplishment but the status of contemporary literature. For her, though, the two remain intrinsically connected. In the same way that the 'highly accomplished' are penned in by their narrow, hermeneutic sense of what 'accomplishment' is, Jewsbury feels that contemporary literature is similarly stifled because of its reluctance to look to anything beyond itself. 'It is doubtless, very natural to suppose, that we have attained the high noon of intellectual greatness, and are living at the only period in which it has been desirable to live since the day Adam left Paradise', she argues,

But it is this very overweening estimate of our own selves, and our own times, which will prevent our production being of a nature to endure the strict test of time, and the stricter test, of

Time's old daughter, Truth.

Our writers are for the most part full of themselves, and their writings are a tissue of localities. The strength of modern intellect is given to the flitting fancies and evanescent interests, which alternately rise and fall on the surface of the present moment, while the silent depths of human nature, those principles, and powers, and passions, which neither change nor pass away, are left comparatively unfathomed and unsearched. (Gillett 1932: 6)

Far from feeling any oppositional anxiety of influence, Jewsbury seeks a re-engagement with 'the silent depths of human nature' that, in her eyes, so animated the literary work of earlier generations. Like Sara Coleridge who, in editing her father's work, sought to 'discern the Future in the Past'¹²⁶, Jewsbury finds a quality in 'the elder divines and poets of our own country' that is distinctly lacking in the complacent, contemporary literature of 'the present moment'. 'We see from their writings that they have at least studied the spirit of Moses, and Job, and David, and have learned to think more of their subjects than themselves', she writes,

Profound and energetic in their thoughts, pure and childlike in their imagery, the union reminds us of the manna and the morning dew, which fell together round the Jewish camp in the wilderness. Alas! they are no longer showered. The manna is dissolved - the dew is exhaled - and but for the little which has been preserved as a memorial in the golden ark of their writings, there would remain but a shadowy tradition of those days in which "our fathers did eat angels' food". (Gillett 1932: 7)

¹²⁶ 'For my Father on his lines called "Work without Hope", Poems of Sara Coleridge in Widowhood, MSS' (1845), HRHRC.

Jewsbury's understanding of literary history may have been reductionist, involving as it did only a relatively small number of standard authors but, whether rightly or wrongly, there is no mistaking her admiration for the Romantic poets, 'Profound and energetic in their thoughts, pure and childlike in their imagery' who, by the mid-1820s, were unfashionable and 'no longer showered'.

In 1820, Alaric Watts's brother-in-law, Jeremiah Holmes Wiffen, included a 'Sonnet to W. Wordsworth, Esq' in his collection of poems, *Julia Alpinala* (1820). The sonnet was kindly received by Wordsworth (WL: VIII: 176)¹²⁷. It was perhaps because of her knowledge of this, coupled with her admiration for him, that Jewsbury finally decided to dedicate *Phantasmagoria* to Wordsworth.

Unlike Southey, who, with his laureateship and his articles in the widely read *Quarterly Review* was more immediately accessible to the public, Wordsworth never had many protégées. Writing to Sir Walter Scott in June 1818, the young poet Mary Bryant (later Bedingfield) explained to her future mentor Sir Walter Scott that she had 'received from Mr Wordsworth and others very soothing testimonies of the quality of some of my compositions: but', she went on, 'it is well known that Mr W is not popular enough to give public weight to his opinion' (quoted in Shiraz 2002). In fact, the only writer other than Jewsbury who might be regarded as Wordsworth's literary protégée was the unsuccessful Robert Gilles who, after speculating away his money in the mid-1820s, gave up on his literary aspirations and contented himself with editorial work. Wordsworth's mentorship with Gilles may have been largely unsuccessful as far as literature was

¹²⁷ 'W.W. to UNKNOWN CORRESPONDENT' (1 May 1820): 176-7. Given that Wordsworth mentions an 'Elegant Sonnet...to the Author of the Excursion' and seems also to respond to the remarks about Byron in *Julia Alpinala* (1820), it is almost certain that this hitherto unattributed letter was addressed to Jeremiah Holmes Wiffen.

concerned (WL: II.ii.167) but one of Wordsworth's earliest letters to Gilles, written in 1816, begins to shed light on why Jewsbury so appealed to Wordsworth, anticipating, as it does so clearly, Jewsbury's sentiments in 'The Age of Books':

There are Poems now existing which all the World ran after at their first appearance (and it will continue to run after their like) that do not deserve to be thought of as *literary* Works - every thing in them being skin deep merely, as to thought and feeling, the juncture or suture of the composition not [a jot] more cunning or more fitted for endurance than the first fastening together of fig-leaves in Paradise... I assure you that if I had not had a very high opinion of your heart and head, I should not have ventured to dissuade you from Publishing at a time when I was upon the point of committing the act myself. (WL: II.ii.301)

That Jewsbury's opinions were so in accord with his own doubtless went some way towards encouraging Wordsworth to be receptive to her. More straightforwardly, Wordsworth was simply flattered by Jewsbury's unsolicited attention. 'To William Wordsworth, Esquire,' read her dedication, 'these Volumes are most respectfully inscribed; as a testimony of grateful feeling, for the high delight, and essential benefit, which the author has derived from the study of his poems.' In a second dedication, a poem entitled 'To William Wordsworth, Esquire', Jewsbury went on to assert that Wordsworth was her 'spirit's father':

O long unrecked of, and unseen
Hast thou my spirit's father been
In pleasure and in sadness; -
For by the lamp, and on the shore, -
Hours have I mused thy musings o'er,
That ever on my heart could pour
Their own deep quiet gladness. (Jewsbury 1825: i)

And, as if these two dedications were not in themselves flattering enough, Jewsbury wrote a letter to Wordsworth, declaring herself to be his 'pupil' and assuring her 'so illustrious a master' that her dedications were nothing but sincere: 'My poetical dedication is not hyperbolic', she wrote, 'it is simply, quite literally, true' (Vincent 1944: 17).

Unsurprisingly, then, Wordsworth was, at once, flattered, intrigued and a little surprised by Jewsbury's attention: 'Yesterday I had the honor of receiving a book dedicated to my dear Self - ' he told one friend, 'by a Lady, a fair one I hope, but I have never seen or heard of her before' (WL: III.i.342). Wordsworth was certainly impressed by *Phantasmagoria*; he admired 'the good sense, the vivacity the versatility & the ease & vigour' that he found in it, and praised Jewsbury for her 'acquaintance with the human heart & a power of the feelings from which no common things may be augured' (Vincent 1944: 20). His sister, Dorothy, also enjoyed *Phantasmagoria* and recommended it to her friends for its 'uncommon aptitude in discerning the absurd or ridiculous in manners' (WL: III.i.342). The only person who seemed to take any dislike to it was Southey. In 'First Efforts at Criticism', Jewsbury had written a parody of Southey's reviews which were often long, discursive and characterised by the large number of books he reviewed at once: 'This arrangement precludes, it is true, the necessity of noticing any of the works themselves,' wrote Jewsbury, 'but affords ample scope for some highly important remarks on a subject, which having long employed our thoughts, appears well worth the attention of every reflective and well principled mind' (Gillett 1932: 17). The piece ended with the promise of 'a disquisition of twenty pages on things in general, with particular mention of the Brazils, the Peninsular War, and Church History' (Gillett 1932: 18), thus confirming that it was Southey who was the focus of the parody rather than the house-style of the *Quarterly Review* in general. 'The Wordsworths were unlucky enough to bring this to my knowledge, for otherwise I should never have heard of it', Southey recalled years later in a letter to Caroline Bowles,

They sent over the book in which this little piece of indiscretion was contained for my inspection, in the hope that I would say something civil of it in the

Quarterly Review. I wrote back word that the only kindness I could show to a young lady who in what she had said of me had shown as little sense of modesty as of truth, would be to say nothing of her. There of course ended my resentment. (RSCB:164)

Southey's disapproval did nothing to dampen Wordsworth's enthusiasm for Jewsbury, perhaps because, most opportunely, her admiration had come when Wordsworth was in most need of it. 'I am not altogether free from reflections natural to my time of life, such as, that I have lived & laboured to little purpose,' he explained to her, ' - assurances like yours are correctives of this mistake, for how can it be other than one, when I receive blossoms of such promise with declarations so fervent, yet evidently sincere!' (Vincent 1944: 19)

Despite his enthusiasm, however, Wordsworth felt duty-bound to give a word of caution to Jewsbury, in the same way that he had to his previous protégé, Robert Gilles. '[L]et me caution you, who are probably young, not to rest your hopes of happiness upon Authorship', he admonished,

I am aware that nothing can be done in literature without enthusiasm, & therefore it costs me more to write in this strain - but of even successful Authors how few have become happier Men - how few I am afraid have become better by their labours. Why should this be? & yet I cannot but feel persuaded that it is so with our sex, and your's [sic] is, I think, full as much exposed to evils that beset the condition (Vincent 1944: 20)

In this refreshingly honest response, Jewsbury found the kind of mentorship that she had wanted. Unlike the 'literary Godfathers' of other young writers, Wordsworth had no intention of having Jewsbury prematurely 'puffed, and *protégéd* in all directions' until 'the pretty bubble burst'. Instead, what Wordsworth seemed to offer was a longer term view of writerly development, one that privileged literary quality and personal happiness over and above meeting the immediate and

ever-changing demands of the literary marketplace. Thus was a lifelong friendship begun and, soon after, Wordsworth invited Jewsbury to visit him and his family in the Lake District.

Jewsbury's week-long stay at Rydal Mount and Kent's Bank in the summer of 1825 did nothing to dampen her admiration for Wordsworth; if anything, she was even more admiring of him when she returned to Manchester. 'When I determined to inscribe my little work to yourself, I was under the influence which prevented my considering whether the offerings were worthy of your acceptance', Jewsbury wrote in a letter to Wordsworth at the end of July,

...not, until I had been admitted with[in?] to the honor of your acquaintance, did I discover, or even suspect, the boldness of the step I had taken. Nevertheless, you repaid my worthless gift with a kindness which I am equally unable to acknowledge and to forget.

Were I now to follow the dictates of my inclination, I should with-hold my second volume, because I am no longer ignorant that a tribute should bear some proportion to the dignity of him to whom it is presented - but I dread even the appearance of affectation, and therefore venture to enclose a complete copy of my work.¹²⁸

In becoming personally acquainted with Wordsworth, Jewsbury had become even more acutely aware of what she would describe, later on in the letter, as her own 'manifold deficiencies & errors'¹²⁹. As fitting in a Wordsworth protégée, Jewsbury began to feel that, had it been in her

¹²⁸ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to William Wordsworth', 23 July 1825, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

power, withholding publication might have been the best way of addressing her anxieties: 'I am constrained to make a few remarks on the second volume', she continued,

It contains I am sorry to admit, very much, that is not only quite beneath your notice, but of which I am myself heartily ashamed of;- many juvenile productions, which were only admitted in despair, when my time became too limited, and my health too seriously injured, to allow me to furnish better. There are a few other papers, the insertion of which I deeply regret, on higher grounds, than mere regard for my literary credit; I regret it the more, because the unlooked for delay in the publication would have enabled me to furnish others in their place.¹³⁰

Jewsbury strikes upon a relationship between 'delay' and 'literary credit'. As she explains, some of her 'juvenile productions' only made it into *Phantasmagoria* because they were 'admitted in despair, when [her] time became too limited'; and taking advantage of the 'unlooked for delay in the publication' would have allowed her to write a better book. In meeting Wordsworth, then, Jewsbury began to recognise the differences between a mature literary work and one that had been prematurely released to the public: 'I have heard an anecdote of a young French painter which at this instant strikes me very forcibly', she went on in her letter,

"You will gain the prize for this," said his master taking up the picture which the youth had just finished - "Yes" - replied the enthusiast, at the same instant cutting the picture to pieces - "Yes - but next year I shall deserve it!" How gladly did circumstances warrant my doing so - how gladly would I imitate the young painter. My work may meet with success - how much rather would I wait, till I could claim it as my due.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Catalysed by her discussions with Wordsworth, Jewsbury's new-found desire for self-censorship had everything to do with wishing to write 'good literature' and being deserving of literary success. Even the second volume of *Phantasmagoria*, which Jewsbury was unable to suppress altogether, was affected to some degree. 'The recollection of the conversations you have condescended to hold with me during the past week make[s] me more dissatisfied than ever with this Volume', explained Jewsbury in her postscript, '...I am ashamed & angry - with my self - indeed: one passage of injudicious commendation of poems reflecting which you have changed my opinion- I have cut out - could I have cancelled one half of the Essay I would have done so'¹³². Writing to Dora Wordsworth that October, Jewsbury confirmed her resolve to 'wait' until she could 'claim [success] as [her] due' and enclosed the following poem, entitled 'A Farewell to the Muse':

Not in envy, ire, or grief,
 Bid I now the Muse farewell;
'Tis no childish fancy brief,
 & lured away by newer spell, -
As earthly good the chief,
 I have sought her, long and well.

Not in anger; - inward joys,
Have been mine, and need of praise;
Payment vast for idle toys,
 Fleeting, unsubstantial lays, -
Sand columns - wind destroys,
 And that wind again can raise.

No, - nor yet in grief we part;
 Never unto bard like me,
Gave the Muse a broken heart;
 But to noble votaries, - she
Doth that awful gift impart,
 Pledge of Immortality!

Not in envy; - thought around
 Like the stars a radiant throng,
In their several orbits found,
 I behold the sons of song; -
Every bow with laurel bound,
 And a few as giants strong.

¹³² Ibid.

Not in envy; - though I know,
Neither the wreath nor radiance mine,
I will yet pay[,] pay homage low,
Pilgrim-like, at every shrine;
Seek where buds and blossoms grow,
And for others garlands twine.

Never hath the Muse bereaved me;
Song, hath lightened hours of pain;
Never Poet yet deceived me,
Truer friends I scarce could gain; -
Never, among things that grieved me,
Ranked the minstrel lute & strain.

Yet, I bid the Art adieu,
It may be, Adieu for ever!
I abjure the Syren too;
Vain, I own my best endeavour
Weak to grasp though keen to view
Climbing alway - rising never

Though I smite the rock of song,
At my stroke no stream will flow; -
At my spell, no spirits strong
Bidden came or mastered go;-
Nor the world of passion throng,
With its wild waves, to and fro.

Farewell Muse - vouchsafing never
But dim glance, and veiled brow;
Farewell Lute - a rude toy ever,
Broken, stringless, soon art thou;
Farewell Song - thy last notes given,
Muse - Lute - Music - farewell now!¹³³

In her introduction to the above poem in her anthology, Margaret Reynolds (taking her cue from Norma Clarke's study) finds it 'a strange and miserable poem' (Leighton and Reynolds 1995: 26), one which Jewsbury wrote only 'to show that she really had learnt the womanly qualities of renunciation, self-abasement and humility...a classic of the kind discerned by Gilbert and Gubar

¹³³ "'Farewell to the Muse" in letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 8 October 1825, WLMS A./Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage. This poem has already been printed in Leighton and Reynolds 1995: 32 but has been reproduced here in order to preserve its original punctuation.

as gendered by "anxiety of authorship" (Leighton and Reynolds 1995: 26-27). Jewsbury herself was well aware that, by removing the poem from its original context, it could be read, in this way, as a highly generic and conventional poem about 'womanly' renunciation; and, interestingly, she later capitalised on its flexibility when she contributed it to Alaric Watts's *The Poetical Album* (1828-9). But only when the poem is divorced from its original context does it become an 'unsubstantial lay', an indifferent poem amongst many 'of the kind discerned by Gilbert and Gubar'. Restored to the letter in which it was first written, 'A Farewell to the Muse' becomes a far more curious and unconventional poem.

'Womanly qualities' (not mentioned in the poem itself) never figured in Jewsbury's decision to give up writing poetry. The reason for her doing so was, however, disarmingly straightforward: in October 1826, Jewsbury came to realise, quite simply, that she was not particularly good at writing poetry, that 'Though I smite the rock of song, / At my stroke no stream will flow'. Interestingly, 'A Farewell to the Muse' does not express the sense of futility or despair one might expect but, then, the poem is not about Jewsbury coming to the conclusion that she 'had no gift' (Leighton and Reynolds 1995: 27) in the way that Reynolds suggests. Jewsbury is able to renounce poetry, without 'envy, ire, or grief', not because she is trying hard to uphold 'womanly qualities', but because she does so very deliberately in order to consolidate her other literary talents. In continuing to write poetry, she would be 'Climbing alway - rising never' but, in writing other things, however, her 'best endeavour' might be less 'vain'.

The generic conventions of renunciation poems that made 'A Farewell to the Muse' such apt fodder for *The Poetical Album* all but eradicated the possibility of such a reading. Jewsbury's letter to Dora Wordsworth, in which the poem was first written, however, makes it abundantly clear that her giving up poetry was part of a larger strategy to give herself the creative time and space within which to write works of greater 'literary credit' and permanence than her 'Fleeting, unsubstantial lays'. By October 1826, Jewsbury had reached the stage when her poetry, well executed though it was, simply bored her. 'My friends make many objections but I am firm - ' she

explained, 'I am tired of writing pretty verses. Admire my heroism. I really am going to read Geoffrey Chaucer'¹³⁴. Jewsbury went on to describe her new literary aspirations:

Alas, if duty and not keep [ruled] me I would take a cottage in the North, & become, not a Lake Poet, but a Lake Prose, forthwith. Hitherto my life has been a series of sacrifices so must it be to the end. I do not live for myself but against myself & for others...I think if I lived ten miles from Rydal I should never grieve again - but I should soon tire of you all.¹³⁵

Hampered though she was by the financial 'keep' of her family and the continued writing for the market that this implied, Jewsbury had, within months of meeting Wordsworth, discovered that her true 'duty' was not, as one might expect, to 'live...against myself & for others', but to become 'not a Lake Poet, but a Lake Prose'. Writing on her own birthday to Dora Wordsworth at the end of October, Jewsbury consciously distanced herself from the material values of her early career: 'I knew a being (& you know her too) who struggled long & resolutely against this conviction, - & she was wretched - more wretched than the beggar who has not where to lay his head!' she wrote,

Every desire of her was gratified and soon as she formed, she made herself idols after her own heart & when she had made them she worshipped them - she set before her specific attainments she desired certain good things - it was now gaiety, & now friendship, & now honor, & now ambition, - & she grasped them all - & it was not in the hour of disappointment - & of [despair?] - it was always in the moment of unalloy'd success - that she was most wretched - And why? - Because this misguided being sought to satisfy the immortal spirit within her, with mortal & therefore perishing objects she sought

¹³⁴ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 24 October 1826, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

to fill an infinite gulf - with finite matter! - the eternal with the temporal! she gave her heart to the world the heart that God only was able to satisfy fully & for ever! But there came a time when the sickening strife ceased - the tempest became a calm - the veil was rent from the heart - the scales dropped from the eyes - & this vain misguided being came to her "right mind" - and tho' since then long painful wearying sickness has been her lot - many [real?] afflictions - yet now for the first time in her life can she say solemnly & with truth...I am happy.¹³⁶

On first glance, Jewsbury's birthday letter may appear, like 'A Farewell to the Muse', to be yet another fatalistic renunciation of literature; and it is tempting to cast Jewsbury into the role (so much discussed by feminist criticism) of the young, ambitious woman who rejects worldly success in favour of the more womanly duties of house and home, only to collapse under the weight of her overwhelming inward distress. Certainly, it makes for compelling biography to read of Jewsbury 'disabled by guilt, tormented by fear of death, and painfully anxious to agree that her writings had been motivated by a love of self and self-aggrandisement' (Clarke 1990: 69), or of her suffering interminably, '[h]er only prayer...to keep just "well enough to fulfil my home *duties*"', all the while scolding herself for being such a 'misguided being' (Leighton and Reynolds 1995: 27).

But in the same way that she renounced poetry but not prose in 'A Farewell to the Muse', Jewsbury, in her birthday letter, rejects not writing itself but the material values, demands and expectations of her early career, that had less to do with good writing than with literary celebrity. Jewsbury's birthday letter is not a fatalistic renunciation of literature but another very conscious attempt, on her part, to distance herself from the literary market in order to write well. Jewsbury's overwhelming sense of religious revelation came, not from renouncing literature, but in her finally acquiring this new perspective.

'[O]f even successful Authors how few have become happier Men', Wordsworth had written in his first letter to her, the implication being that successful authorship did not,

¹³⁶ Ibid.

necessarily, make one happy. In Wordsworth's estimation, true literary success - rather than simply commercial success, was both writing and being happy, the first being a futile activity without the second. Being caught up in the commercial successfulness of one's literary work, it seemed, invariably made one unhappy and so one had to renounce this material interest before being truly successful. In her birthday letter, Jewsbury achieved this, and, 'for the first time in her life can she say solemnly & with truth...I am happy'. In October 1826, having turned her back on the more innocuous and 'unsubstantial' elements of her writing, and having shunned also the enticing lures of commercial success, Jewsbury would have been ready to start becoming 'a Lake Prose', except that, by this time, she was seriously ill.

It would be misleading to consider any overriding psychological crisis as being the cause of Jewsbury's 'long painful wearying sickness'. Some women in the early nineteenth-century did, after all, just get sick. Jewsbury faced her illness with the minimum of self-pity, and it was with good humour and pragmatism that she wrote to Dora Wordsworth to report that: 'I have had other advice since I last wrote - which has only corroborated the old - that a divan of doctors and a deluge of mediciners would do my ailments no good'¹³⁷. Convalescing at Leamington Spa seemed to do her some good but her journey home to Manchester wearied her: 'I have made a long journey,' she wrote in the spring of 1827, 'which implies fatigue, which induces laziness, which involves indisposedness for exertion'¹³⁸. True it is that, at this time, Jewsbury felt that, 'If I can only keep well enough to fulfil my house duties, [I] will gladly compound for the diminution of

¹³⁷ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 10 August 1826, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

¹³⁸ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', [Spring] 1827, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

strength which cuts off many pleasures¹³⁹; but it is wrong to regard this as her 'strongest desire' (Clarke 1990: 69), or 'only prayer' (Leighton and Reynolds 1995: 27) at the expense of her writerly ambitions.

In the same letter, Jewsbury thanked Dora for some presents she had sent and mentioned how nice they would be in her new 'writing room': 'My father is so delighted that he will [make] the glass casings himself & beautifully will they ornament the chimney piece of my new & pretty writing room. My dear father has spared no expense to fit up the house so as to contribute to my comfort & pleasure'¹⁴⁰. Certainly, then, Jewsbury's own family, sparing 'no expense to fit up' a 'new & pretty writing room', had no reason to suspect that she had renounced her writing; for, rather than being ill because she had stopped writing, Jewsbury had, conversely, been unable to write because she was ill. Interestingly, even she understood how this subtle but, nevertheless, crucial distinction might be overlooked and was, herself, aware of how her illness and inactivity might have been mistaken for archetypally feminine behaviour: 'I fear my diary of useful occupations would be lady in character - inasmuch as the chief item would be "taking care of myself"', she told Dora Wordsworth,

- It is true I pleasure [myself?] with planning what I will do if I get strong, but meanwhile life is ebbing away - I am scheming & dreaming. Your illness has evidently not damped your energy & animation - indeed my love I rejoice in this - I fear you will find me become very inanimate very full of immobility - very toadlike!!! However, who knows, but you may be a magician - a splendid bunch of roses really did set me to write poetry the other day - who knows but you may inspire me to write prose. Errata - instead of poetry in the last sentence, read - "verses".¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 10 July 1827, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

Far from being a period of writerly crisis, then, Jewsbury's years of illness were, for her, a time of 'scheming & dreaming' and 'planning what I will do if I get strong'. Clearly from the above, her renunciation of poetry turned out to be only temporary but, nevertheless, she continued to maintain her new perspective on it by carefully distinguishing between real 'poetry' and mere 'verses'. In fact, as the state of her health improved, Jewsbury took to writing 'unsubstantial lays' again: 'I have lately been applied to to contribute to a juvenile Annual - ' she told Dora Wordsworth in March 1828, '...it is to contain no giants - no ghosts - & only very well behaved fairies'. The result was 'The Song of the Rocking-Horse' which, despite an epithet from Milton ('Not of the wondrous horse of brass / On which the Tartan king did ride'), had no pretensions of being anything other than innocuous verse. The following lines are indicative of the poem as a whole:

There was a Pegasus famed in old story,
A Dragon too turned by a screw,
What were they & their wonderful glory,
Compared wooden Dobbin with you?
You need neither manger nor brim,
You are shod without shoes to your feet,
You starve & yet never grow thin,
You work, & want nothing to eat.

...

The Greeks gave the Trojans a shock
With a horse, that like mine was of wood,
But being unable to rock,
Though larger, it was not so good.¹⁴²

¹⁴² 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 4 March 1828, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

Somewhat bizarrely, the Wordsworths were very fond of 'The Song of the Rocking-Horse' when it later appeared in a Lancaster newspaper: 'I have just been enlivening our after dinner fire side by your lively & spirited thing on the rocking horse from the Lancaster Paper - ' Dora Wordsworth reported, 'such a favourite here that were we to stumble upon it every day, every day it must be read pro bono publico' (Vincent 1944: 44).

Jewsbury went on to contribute to a large number of annuals (including *Friendship's Offering*, *Winter's Wreath*, *Forget me Not*, *Amulet* and Alaric Watts's *Literary Souvenir*) and even encouraged several of them to approach Wordsworth for contributions. For instance, she told Mr Hall of the *Amulet* 'that if he could make a definite & very handsome offer - the coast was clear' for him to solicit a contribution from Wordsworth. 'My letter was a pattern of diplomacy' she gently boasted to Dora Wordsworth¹⁴³, 'It is a profane question - ' she continued, 'but what would your father sell the "Tuft of Primroses" for[?]' ¹⁴⁴

Despite being so engaged and prolific in the annual market, writing verse remained, for Jewsbury, little more than an effective way of earning money (the *Amulet* paid her £6 for her 'Lucy de Vere'¹⁴⁵), what she herself often referred to as a mere '*trade*' (Vincent 1944: 94). Although she continued to maintain a friendly relationship with the annuals, she was as disillusioned with them as Wordsworth was, especially when it came to the 'puppy-rascal'¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴³ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 23 July 1829, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. Jewsbury is probably referring to Wordsworth's 'The Primrose of the Rock' (in which Wordsworth mentions 'a tuft of primrose'). This poem, hitherto undated, can now, therefore, be provisionally dated to c.1828-9.

¹⁴⁵ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Geraldine Jewsbury', 23 November [no year], English MS1320/28, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

¹⁴⁶ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 23 July 1829, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

Frederick Reynolds, whom she satirised in an unpublished poem entitled 'The Editor's Lament', written during a visit to Rydal Mount in June 1829:

I'm Emperor of an Annual
I'm ozar of silk and gold,
And rule with my [light?] Manual
Full many an author bold;
My book is a magazine
Where poet-lions roar,
And tis for birds a cagery,
I've mocking birds a store;
I ruled them like a keeper,
But my reign of peace is done,
And I could turn a weeper,
For the change that is begun!
...
Oh, my public, cheer me, cheer me,
I'm going to decay!
Mr Wordsworth take your thought -
Mr Southey here's your sense -
They would bring my book to nought
And so I drive them hence;
Mr Coleridge[,] this reason
Still lispig ladies buy?
We must wait another season
At least before we try!"¹⁴⁷

Although 'The Editor's Lament' was never published, it was clearly apparent to on-lookers whom Jewsbury had pinned her colours to. Writing about her in the *Noctes Ambrosianae* column for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1829, John Wilson ('Christopher North') continued to think of Jewsbury primarily in terms of her relationship with Wordsworth:

¹⁴⁷ "'The Editor's Lament' MSS', June 1829, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

Mounted on a pretty pony, in a pretty rural straw-hat, and pretty rural riding-habit, with the sunshine of a cloudless heaven blended on her countenance with that of her own cloudless soul, the young author of *Phantasmagoria* rode smilingly along a beautiful vale, with the illustrious Wordsworth, whom she venerates, pacing in his poetical way by her side, and pouring out poetry in that glorious recitative of his, till "the vale was overflowing with the sound."
(Wilson 1863: II.317)

In spite of her work for the annuals, Jewsbury remained, at heart, 'the young author' (she was 28) beside 'the illustrious Wordsworth, whom she venerates'. In 1829, Jewsbury published her first and only book of verse, *Lays of Leisure Hours*, and, in many respects, this was the culmination of her verse-writing career; but, even before the book had appeared, Jewsbury was taking care to distance herself from it: 'If in the course of a fortnight you see "Lays of Leisure Hours" advertised - pray remember, that I only write verse to improve my prose'¹⁴⁸ she told Dora Wordsworth.

Insofar as becoming a 'Lake Prose' was concerned, the annuals and the kind of verse-writing that they demanded were a dead end for Jewsbury. Worse still, the annuals seemed, to her, not an aberration but a microcosm of the literary market in its entirety: '[T]he fact is this - ' the editor of the *Amulet* annual explained to her, 'it is useless to publish a book unless money is made by it - it is for this we all labour, & without it, reflection is empty & worth nought - I speak with an editor's not an author's feeling'¹⁴⁹. Going to Wales in 1828 to visit Felicia Hemans (to whom she dedicated *Lays of Leisure Hours* the following year) only served to consolidate her gloomy outlook which had already been authorised by Wordsworth's opinions: 'You cannot think

¹⁴⁸ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 20 January 1829, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

¹⁴⁹ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 23 July 1829, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

how often & how fondly I look back to Kent's Bank, & your Father's conversations there - ' wrote
Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth in January 1829.

when in Wales I repeated some of his opinions on the pains & penalties of
[formal?] authorship & Mrs Hemans agreed to them, in the [same] sadness
that I do. Her fame has gilded the chain, but it has not lost its clank. I cannot
conceive, how, unless any necessity be laid upon her, any woman of acute
sensitivity & refined imagination can brook the fever & strife of authorship.¹⁵⁰

Increasingly, Jewsbury found 'the fever & strife of authorship' more and more difficult to bear: 'I
suppose in the last fortnight I have seen somewhere about 120 people', she wrote to her sister,
nonchalantly, ' - you I doubt not wd think it a very fine thing to be made a lion but I can tell you,
that it is much more comfortable to be Unicorn'¹⁵¹. Following her visit to Rydal Mount in June, the
Wordsworths' almost otherworldly lifestyle became more appealing than it had ever been:
'[D]earest Dora - you are in my thoughts too much, rather than too little - ' she wrote, 'I remember
now with pleasure unalloy'd my Visit - my "monthling" - I find it hard to believe now that whilst with
you I was ever sad - ever cross - ever Reynoldised'¹⁵². By December, Jewsbury had all but
abandoned hope of ever fitting into the world of 'Reynoldised' literati:

I return to what suits me best, occupation from 7 in the morning till 9 at night -
& solitude, & arbitrary visiting - whom, when, - & for as long as I please...I
think away enthusiasm & work away feeling - I escape from friends for their

¹⁵⁰ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 20 January 1829, WLMS A/Jewsbury,
Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

¹⁵¹ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Geraldine Jewsbury', 16 May 1829, English MS1320/2:
/25, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

¹⁵² 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 10 July 1829, WLMS A/Jewsbury,
Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

eyes torture me, & environ myself with strangers for the gay amenities & indifferent conversation of society, whilst they occupy the head leave the heart untouched - & mine is now a "fountain sealed" that I desire to have opened no more, for no one... ¹⁵³

It is with these feelings of alienation that Jewsbury sat down in 'solitude' to write her 'History of an Enthusiast'.

'History of an Enthusiast' is Jewsbury's most sustained piece of prose-writing and forms the most substantial part of her book, *Three Histories*, published in 1830. The story opens by finding the eight year old 'enthusiast', Julia Osbourne, caught sitting in her grandmother's apple tree:

"So, so; - more mischief I perceive - why could you not wait till the apples were ripe?"

"The apples! O grandmamma, just as if I cared for *them!*"

"Don't speak so scornfully, if you please, of my golden pippins, the finest tree in the country; but tell me at once what you were doing here - and be so good, child, as to bring that hand from behind your back."

The child obeyed slowly, and with evident reluctance produced a book.

"Shakespeare, as I live! Well to be sure!"

"Mercy upon us, Miss! but heathen play-acting books are not for babes like you." (Jewsbury 1838: 11)

Unlike her very domestic and saccharine friend, Annette, Julia grows up bent on establishing literary fame for herself. After writing an instantly successful book, moving to London and

¹⁵³ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 28 December 1829, WLMS

A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

establishing herself in the heart of the literati, Julia discovers that her decision to become famous has been made at the expense of the affections of her childhood friend, Cecil Percy.

Disillusioned with the glamorous world she inhabits, Julia visits the peacefully settled Annette, finds that she does not belong to her world either, and the story ends with Julia leaving for the continent to consider what she should do. Of course, 'History of an Enthusiast' borrows from Jewsbury's own life in the same way that it does from Madame de Staël's *Corinne*; but what is most interesting about it is not where it aligns itself with either of these sources, but where it departs from them.

The autobiographical elements of 'History of an Enthusiast' are as brief as they are important: 'My 'Three Histories,' have most of myself in them, but they are fragmentary', Jewsbury explained to Felicia Hemans, 'Public report has fastened the "Julia," upon me; the childhood, the opening years, and many of the after opinions are correct; but all else is fabulous' (Chorley 1836: 69). Hemans, however, would have been amongst the first readers to realise that this, even with its qualifications, was not strictly accurate. The quoted passage above is footnoted 'Fact of a child seven years old, a year younger than Julia' but, in this instance, Julia's real-life counterpart was not Jewsbury but Hemans. 'One of her earliest tastes', recalled Hemans's sister, 'was a passion for Shakespeare which she read, as her choicest recreation, at least six years old; and in later days she would often refer to the hours of romance she had passed in a secret haunt of her own - a seat amongst the branches of an old apple-tree - where, revelling in the treasures of the cherished volume, she would become completely absorbed in the imaginative world revealed to her' (Hughes 1839: 6-7). Jewsbury also knew of this anecdote and, soon after her visit to Wales, told Dora Wordsworth that Hemans 'was in childhood a regular romp - at seven years old used to climb into an apple tree to read Shakespeare' (quoted in Clarke 1995: 75).

Hemans's inclusion in the character of Julia Osbourne was crucial to Jewsbury in the recasting of De Staël's *Corinne* myth for, in many ways, Hemans's personality could be regarded as the very opposite of Jewsbury's: '[I]t was scarcely possible to imagine two individual natures

more strikingly contrasted', wrote Hemans's sister, recalling Jewsbury's visit (during which she erected a tent in the garden to give herself more room),

the one so intensely feminine, so susceptible and imaginative, so devoted to the tender and the beautiful; the other endowed with masculine energies, with a spirit that seemed born for ascendancy, with strong powers of reasoning, fathomless profundity of thought and feelings, like those of her own Julia, "flashing forth at intervals with sudden and Vesuvian splendour". (Hughes 1839: 142)

In fusing Hemans's contrasting personality with her own in writing the semi-autobiographical Julia Osbourne, Jewsbury begins to see beyond the dualistic fame-or-affection dilemma that binds De Staël's *Corinne*.

Whether or not it was warranted, Jewsbury regarded Hemans as a way of stepping beyond the limitations of *Corinne*-style female authorship. For Hemans, in her eyes at least, had succeeded in giving up the bustle and pettiness of the literati without renouncing the act of writing itself: 'In Edinburgh she lived the life of a *Corinne*- & hated it', Jewsbury told Dora Wordsworth in 1829, 'She is without exception the most perilously charming creature I know[,] even Miss [North?] was fascinated - & said she was "as charming as if she did not write poetry!"'¹⁵⁴ Accordingly, Julia Osbourne's problem evolves, into not choosing between fame and affection, but negotiating a balance between the two. It is no coincidence that the passage in which this key sentiment is expressed is, with its proto-modern stream-of-consciousness qualities, amongst the most assured and strikingly innovative pieces of prose that Jewsbury ever wrote:

Fame and affection, the desire of one and a presentiment of the other, have now a blent existence. I aspire as formerly, but a new motive is enkindled -

¹⁵⁴ 'Letter [fragment] from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 19 July 1829, WLMS A/ Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

there is a new light gathered over the old object; I am tired of the dry knowledge of facts, they have no lustre; formerly, I shrunk from the more passionate imaginings of poetry; long after the days of the apple-tree, I read Shakespeare more for his plots than his poetry, but latterly, a curtain has been, as it were, uplifted from the face of creation, and disclosed to me enchantment; and yet I want something more and more immaterial - I want communion of spirit. Annette is beautiful and loving, but she does not understand me; will there ever come a moment when my heart will find breath and utterance for its visions? O for a superior being ever near me, kindly superior, yet human; not so much stronger than myself, as wiser, better, gentler, graver; the idea that I may some time or other find such a being, and that such will be to me a dear and ever present friend, seems to give my soul wings; even the hope is a joy. (Jewsbury 1839: 61-62)

The narrative force of the romance story drives Julia towards Cecil Percy but, although he fulfils the role of 'a superior being' in many respects, Cecil is ultimately incapable of granting Julia the 'communion of spirit' that she desires:

Cecil is come back from college, to return there no more, and we read and walk together as usual; certainly I feel my mind open more with him than with his father. Good old Mr. Percy has somewhat about him that I fancy might have belonged to a Roman centurion when converted to Christianity; but Cecil is so grave, and gentle, and kind, and serene! - yet he differs from me on many points; nay, he is so very different from myself...I wish I had a brother just like him, only a little more imaginative, a little more impetuous... It may be a foolish metaphor, but he always seems to me human moonlight; yet he will not like my German and present English favourites as I want him to do. They speak to my spirit and they are silent to his. Why is this? (Jewsbury 1839: 63-64)

For all the heartbreak he might cause her, Cecil is never the true object of Julia's affections. Her desire for 'a communion of spirit' points to a character that is never introduced: Julia wants a mentor, a Wordsworthian figure but the story does not give her one. Being a composite of

Jewsbury's masculine energies' and the 'intensely feminine' Hemans, Julia can successfully move herself beyond the *Corinne* dilemma and, though her future remains unresolved, her decision to visit the continent bodes far better for her than a tragic death like Corinne's or a Sappho-inspired suicide would. If Julia has a 'communion of spirit' with anyone, it is not Cecil, nor Wordsworth, but the spirit of Hemans that she finds within herself, and it is this that allows her to step beyond the conventional dichotomous choice between fame and affection.

Years later, Elizabeth Barrett Browning would search in vain for an established tradition of women's writing, would 'look everywhere for grandmothers but see none' (quoted in Browning 1998: xvii) and her *Aurora Leigh*, itself another re-writing of *Corinne*, would call for a body of experience, knowledge and work by women writers which younger writers could draw upon and learn from. Reading about her in Chorley's *Memorials of Mrs Hemans*, Barrett Browning would reject Jewsbury as a potential 'grandmother': 'The sister Jewsbury was a woman of more comprehensiveness of mind & of a higher logical faculty than are commonly found among women', she would write to Mary Mitford in 1845, ' - but it is true, what you observe, that she has done little, if anything. Her life was an aspiration: noble indeed, in its kind, & affecting (to my thoughts) as a remembrance - but no more!' (Raymond and Sullivan 1983: 118). Barrett Browning never read 'History of an Enthusiast' and might have been pleasantly surprised at how, in quietly eulogizing Hemans, Jewsbury too called for the establishment of a women's writing tradition, just as she had done in her very first book proposal, written a decade earlier in 1820.

Wordsworth's proposing *An Account of the Deceased Poetesses of Great Britain* to Dionysius Lardner was, most likely, a direct response to Jewsbury's renewed enthusiasm for a tradition of women's writing. Although he put the proposal forward, Wordsworth never suggested that he himself ought to write the book: '[F]or myself, I could not venture to undertake the employment, two requisites being wanting - ' he had told Dionysius Lardner, 'Books (I mean access to

Libraries) and industry to use them' (WL: V.ii:4-5). It is a distinct possibility that, having tried to persuade Frederick Reynolds to take Jewsbury on as a *Keepsake* contributor, Wordsworth went on to try to land Jewsbury a book contract for her new tradition of women's writing. Certainly, Jewsbury's relationship with Wordsworth continued on the best of terms and, during 1829, she sent him, as tokens of her esteem, a 'pretty <dandy> shoe horn' (Vincent 1944: 61) and, later, some goldfish. Although they had been bred in Holland since the 1730s, goldfish were, at this time, still something of a novelty in England (they were not introduced to America until the 1870s). Wordsworth commemorated the occasion with the poem 'Gold and Silver Fishes in a Vase':

Yet might your glassy prison seem
A place where joy is known,
Where golden flash and silver gleam
Have meanings of their own;
While, high and low, and all about,
Your motions, glittering Elves!
Ye weave -- no danger from without,
And peace among yourselves.

For some months, the goldfish occupied a disproportionate amount of the Wordsworths' correspondence: '[P]lease to take notice', warned Jewsbury, 'that if you fill up my letters with any more praises of those Gold Fish - I will certainly come & make them happy in a forging hall. I am jealous of them'¹⁵⁵. Albeit lightheartedly, Jewsbury's poem 'The Gold and Silver Fish to their Poet', her poetic reply to 'Gold and Silver Fishes in a Vase', articulates her renewed interest in women's writing and hints, also, at how this had become the new focus of her discussions with Wordsworth:

From the great globe wherein we dwell,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

And from our ocean undiminished,
Your verses, having studied well,
We do pronounce extremely fin-ished;

...

And now we're gossiping, we & you,
(The greatest always gossip best)
Play Bard where you have quite read through,
Dear Lady Morgan, Typeland's pest,
Will you inform us what you think
Of Mrs Jameson's new book? -
"Loves of the Poets-" - (needn[']t shrink)
Her Ennuyée your fancy took
May it be properly admitted
Into our club? May I propose?
We hear tis elegant - brightwitted -
From the commencement to the close.
The Annuals were so full of passion
They turned our water into blood,
They really are not in our fashion,
Though very much in them was good.

...

We think you do deserve the bays,
And know, like justice we have scales.
We only wish that you would write
Just as we swim - from morn till night.¹⁵⁶

Always willing to discuss such subjects as Lady Morgan, Anna Jameson's *Diary of an Ennuyée*, or the annuals, Wordsworth actively encouraged Jewsbury's interest in women's writing. Jewsbury's greatest achievement, however, was done independently of Wordsworth's assistance. Sometime in 1829 or 1830, Jewsbury became a reviewer for the new *Athenaeum* magazine. In

¹⁵⁶ "The Gold and Silver Fish to their Poet" MSS', 9 December 1829, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

the same way that she had done with Wordsworth in respect of the annuals, Jewsbury tried to involve Hemans in the *Athenaeum* as much as she could: 'It is their great pleasure to recognise you, as I so often do, in the *Athenaeum*', wrote Hemans, 'I have not forgotten my promise of sending a song for it, but illness has caused my thing to be delayed'¹⁵⁷. Unlike the annuals, though, the *Athenaeum* was far more than simply a source of income for Jewsbury; it was the perfect platform from which to begin establishing a tradition of women's writing.

As soon as she began reviewing, Jewsbury found reflections of herself amongst the books she read. Her review of '*The Suttees; a Prize Poem. By Percy Ashworth, of Wadham College, Oxford. 1831*' echoes her first letters to Wordsworth in which she expressed a preference for deserving prizes rather than gaining them: "'A Prize Poem" need not of necessity be a good poem: it may be the best of many indifferent ones' she comments, '...even if accustomed to poetic composition, the having to write "to order," is almost enough to extinguish inspiration' (Jewsbury 1831: 643). In another article, Jewsbury sympathises with Thomas Chatterton because his 'was a fiery and determined spirit' (Jewsbury 1830: 618), and finds affinities with his being 'neglected, yet self-consumed by consciousness of genius, and a passion for distinction that could only be likened to hunger and thirst with no guide during a gleam of success better than his own wild heart's yet wilder hopes' (Jewsbury 1830: 619). It was, however, in her work on women writers that Jewsbury really came into her element. Reviewing the *Brief Memorials of Jean Frederic Oberlin and of Auguste Baron de Stael-Holstein*, Jewsbury was quick to stray onto the subject of Madame de Staël.

Again, Jewsbury found elements of herself in De Staël, sharing as she did De Staël's 'exaggerated estimate of the value of brilliant society and conversation - her total incapacity for sustaining retirement - her perpetual need of a crowd, and, in a crowd, of admirers and

¹⁵⁷ 'Letter from Felicia Hemans to Maria Jane Jewsbury', [c.1829/30], Miriam Coffin Canaday Library, Bryn Mawr, PA.

admiration'. But, for Jewsbury, De Staël's true genius lay not in her bookish intellect but (like Hemans's) in her ability to balance the artificial life of the literati with more simple pleasures: 'a life and habits intensely artificial, had not hidden from her the worth of the first and simplest blessing of life - that all her other ambition quailed before that of the heart', wrote Jewsbury,

It is here that we do not think she has general justice done her: she loved admiration, required homage, and enjoyed the éclat of her circumstances; but she loved her father, children, and friends more: she was seen to most advantage in private life - there her brilliancy could give place to sympathy and active service - there she was kind, patient, forbearing, indulgent - and there she not only loved with all her heart, but with all the powers of her mind.
(Jewsbury 1831: 87)

And yet, if De Staël was a role model for Jewsbury, she was also a cautionary example, for

[I]n ceasing to be a woman, she [De Staël] did not become a man; while she drew upon her own heart, her own observation, she gave us works that a man will find it easier to admire than to imitate; but when she came to politics and metaphysics, she laid herself open to assault. On her own ground, she was a sorceress; elsewhere, she was a sorceress deprived of her spells. (Jewsbury 1831: 87)

Identifying exactly where that 'own ground' of 'heart' and 'observation' was for woman writers was of primary concern for Jewsbury. Having laid aside her plans for a volume of 'Female Biography' for eleven years, she finally got her chance, writing for the *Athenaeum*, to begin mapping that 'ground' by constructing a tradition of women's writing.

A week after her De Staël review, Jewsbury published an article entitled 'Original Papers. Literary Sketches. No. I. "Felicia Hemans"'. 'Were there to be a feminine literary house of commons,' she began, 'Felicia Hemans might very worthily be called to fill the chair as the speaker - a representative of the whole body' (Jewsbury 1831: 104). Jewsbury goes on to present Hemans as an outstanding example of women writers at their best. Courageous enough to resist 'reposit[ing] under the shadow of mighty names', the mature Hemans, in Jewsbury's estimation, 'has acquired the courage which leads to simplicity'; she has shrugged off the awkward 'air of translation' that detracted from her earlier work and can, instead, 'write from the heart' (Jewsbury 1831: 104). Jewsbury goes on to praise Hemans's 'matronly delicacy of thought, her chastened style of expression, her hallowed ideas of happiness as connected with home, and home-enjoyments...in one emphatic word, her *womanliness*' (Jewsbury 1831: 105).

There is no reason to suspect that Jewsbury's admiration for her friend Hemans was anything but sincere but, if choosing her as the speaker of a new 'feminine literary house of commons' was meant as a compliment, it was also designed as a strategic act of diplomacy. Widely read and enjoyed, too inoffensive to attract much negative comment from even the harshest of critics, and free from the kind of public scandal that was beginning to make Letitia Elizabeth Landon look morally suspect, Hemans was the very figure that Jewsbury needed to introduce her new tradition of women's writing: 'Mrs. Hemans throws herself into her poetry,' she declared, 'and the said self is an English gentlewoman' (Jewsbury 1831: 105).

While Hemans was by no means without her faults (Jewsbury criticises, in her work, a tendency to veer towards 'diffuseness, over-ornament, and want of force' (Jewsbury 1831: 105)), she constituted, in both her work and her life, the approachable, accessible and acceptable face of women's writing. Knowing that conservative gentlewomen were the limit of what much of the reading public would accept in the way of a new tradition of women's writing, it made sense to begin its construction with Hemans, the very epitome of the 'English gentlewoman'. On one level in her essay, Jewsbury argues for this conservative paradigm:

Imagination says, that a poetess ought to be ladylike... If, after sighing away your soul over some poetic effusion of female genius, a personal introduction took place, and you found the fair author a dashing dragoon-kind of woman - one who could with ease rid her house of a couple of robbers - would you not be startled? ...Your understanding might in time be converted: you might bow at the very feet, and solicit the very hand, the proportions of which at first inspired terror, but your Imagination a recreant to the last, would die maintaining that a poetess ought to be feminine. All that we know are so: and Mrs. Hemans especially. (Jewsbury 1831: 105)

Here, Jewsbury opens up a space within which to begin constructing her 'feminine literary house of commons'. She argues that women writers, well liked by all (if Hemans is any guide), offer the reader a literature that is distinct and unique in its feminine '*womanliness*' and a tradition that recognises these writers, she argues, would be a literary asset because

female wit differs as much from a man's, as Coeur de Lion chopping the iron mace by a single blow of his straight ponderous sword, differed from Sultan Saladin severing the down pillow with his thin shining scimitar... It is ridiculous to compare poets who have no points in common - equally vain to settle their priority of rank: each has his own character and his own station without reference to others. There will always be a difference between the poetry of men and women - so let it be; we have two kinds of excellence instead of one; we have also the pleasure of contrast... (Jewsbury 1831: 104)

The tradition of women's writing called for here is a distinctly separatist tradition and one grounded in the assumption that 'female genius' is 'ladylike' and 'feminine'. This is not, however, an assumption that Jewsbury adheres to. Her image of the poetess turned 'dashing dragoon-kind of woman' is presented as an imaginary point of contrast that adds credence to the myth of the feminine poetess. But at the same time, Jewsbury's 'dragoon-kind of woman' also alludes, albeit obliquely and in an exaggerated manner, to Caroline Bowles, with whom Jewsbury had struck up a correspondence in 1829 and whom she would hail as Jane Austen's successor in the next in

her series of 'Literary Sketches'. After being burgled in 1823, it will be remembered, Bowles had equipped herself with a man-trap, a German blunderbuss and a pair of pistols to use in the event of a second attack (RSCB: 39).

As a true representation of Bowles, Jewsbury's 'dragoon-kind of woman' is inaccurate: Bowles never proved that she could 'rid her house of a couple of robbers' and, by her own account, she had uncommonly small hands and feet¹⁵⁸. However, the fact that her 'dragoon-kind of woman' is not imaginary but based on a real woman poet, suggests that, much as Jewsbury admired Hemans, she wanted to construct a tradition of women's writing that would be inclusive of the women writers who did not fit into the 'English gentlewoman' mould to which Hemans belonged: 'There will always be a difference between the poetry of men and women - so let it be; we have two excellences instead of one', she wrote, 'we have also the pleasure of contrast: we discover that power is the element of man's genius - beauty that of woman's; - and occasionally we reciprocate their respective influence, by discerning the beauty of power, and feeling the power of beauty' (Jewsbury 1831: 104).

A hundred years later, another *Athenaeum* reviewer, Virginia Woolf, would also think that 'It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men' because the 'creative power [of women] differs greatly from the creative power of men'; Woolf, too, would advocate a kind of writing that was 'woman-manly or man-womanly' (Woolf [1929] 1993: 94), the very kind of writing which, in Jewsbury's words, would discern the 'beauty of power and the power of beauty'.

¹⁵⁸ 'My head, hands & feet have been my plagues as long as I have had the luck of providing for them in the way of bonnets, gloves & shoes - I have a sure way of ingratiating myself with all children from 6 to 8 years old - by letting them try my gloves & rings - the delight of the little Warters is to make "Grandmama" put on the glasses & to borrow her rings for their own fingers - ' ('Letter from Caroline Bowles Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 16 December 1845, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester).

When Jewsbury came to write the second article in her series of 'Literary Sketches', she changed the name to 'Literary Women' as if to consolidate her aims. This second paper, focusing on Jane Austen, seemed to call for a defiance of the demands of the literary marketplace:

[Austen] was not irrational enough to despise reputation and profit when they sought her, but she became an authoress entirely from taste and inclination; and as her judgement made her severely critical before she published her works, her unambitious temper was amply satisfied with the attention bestowed upon them by the public. (Jewsbury 1831: 553)

Jewsbury never wrote a third 'Literary Women' paper. In 1830, she had moved to London, believing that 'when tired of it, I can go to the country, which is a kind of featherbed for both body & mind!!!!!!' ¹⁵⁹ But, although the offers of work from the annuals and periodicals had continued to roll in as expected ('I have had more literary offers made me than I well know what to do with'¹⁶⁰), Jewsbury found it impossible to both move in literary or fashionable society and be oneself at the same time. It is at this stage that Jewsbury decided to give up everything and marry:

My gentleman has not had very fine times of it, seeing that in the last three months he has been refused recalled - & is now only accepted subject to a twelvemonths probation, & the fulfilment of certain conditions...the affections of a woman of thirty who has suffered as I have, are not so easily got hold of as those of unsuspecting & romantic seventeen. And who is he? Nobody you

¹⁵⁹ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 21 August 1830, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

ever heard me mention - none of my flirts - none of my favourites - none of my shewy, talking, talked about appendages - nobody in London - nobody who paints, or (thank Providence) who edits, or who says smart things; - but one who was a smoker but flung away cigars long before he came & asked me to think about him - who was a sloven, but is trying his very best to be one no longer - & who has promised to make a sacrifice of his present tailor & take upon in tying his cravat like a gentleman - one, who in point of worth is gold; in point of mind silver; in point of manners iron - but in nothing pinchbeck - one who loves me as strong, rugged, yet noble natures only love when they break up under the influence of emotion that they have never made a plaything of - one who wants a great deal of polishing & softening & mellowing, but gives promise of all I could ultimately love truly & lean upon safely...¹⁶¹

Jewsbury's friends were neither convinced of her choice of husband, nor of her decision to marry: 'they doubt my power of ceasing to be ambitious, of being satisfied with a life of "homebound happiness - & fine enjoyments" they scarcely believe that I am so far advanced in goodness as to prefer the solid to the sparkling - but I am - the world is too strong for me - literary life poisons my moral being, at once by its blandishments & cares "Me this unchartered freedom tires" - '¹⁶²

It was not, however, the opinion of her friends that concerned her most but that of her father: 'my Father had set his heart on somebody very grand, forgetting that grand people do not take fancies to tradesman' daughters', she wrote,

& as he had never contemplated the possibility of "my daughter [gone?]" - arrived at thirty, thinking of settling, & being maintained instead of having to maintain herself - he has been very angry, & is now very wretched - too wretched to be reasonable...he takes refuge in lamenting how I can possibly think of leaving him - & the children - forgetting that the children have had the

¹⁶¹ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 12 March 1831, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

¹⁶² Ibid.

best of me, & that Geraldine is nearly nineteen The purport of this letter, is partly to inquire whether when you return to Trinity Lodge your father would allow me to give my friend a letter of introduction [to] return to Cambridge - but I believe your father's sanction & notice would do more to pacify my father [than] any thing I know - I throw myself upon your friendship - & only beg you will write me a line directly. I am quite sure, I have decided aright - because Reason led my feelings, not my feelings by Reason. ¹⁶³

Wordsworth soon persuaded Jewsbury's father to allow the marriage and soon his sister, Dorothy, was ordering silks, while he himself had a copy of his collected works prepared as a wedding present. The only decision that had not been made was where Jewsbury's future husband, the Revd. William Fletcher, would work. Jewsbury had hoped to settle in Cambridge but Fletcher's family had other ideas: '[H]is own family interest would have little difficulty in procuring him an appointment to America or the Colonies - but that is not what I want. I want a European one - A Chaplaincy at some of the Consular stations in Italy...Chaplaincies in the European Ambassadors are not so easily had, though of course much more delightful. By the way, did you not say the gentleman E. Southey is engaged to, is Chaplain to the Embassy in Denmark'¹⁶⁴. None of Jewsbury's wishful thinking came to anything, however, and eventually Fletcher settled on a position in East India. On the 1st August 1831, they were married by Hemans's brother in a small church in Wales.

By September 1832, Jane and William Fletcher were on board the *HMS Victory*. 'So far, I should say, voyaging is delightful. [O]f course we shall have gales before we end, but I am in excellent heart as to the issue... Our Table is good now, & will be better when all are on board -

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 24 March 1831, WLMS A/Jewsbury, Maria Jane, Dove Cottage.

yesterday our dinner, was roast beef, stewed beef, soup, quarter of lamb, cutlets, made dishes, rice pudding, fruit pies...¹⁶⁵ Soon, she became, as William told her father in a letter from Ceylon,

as curious & lively as a child - She is now sitting opposite to me writing I believe to her friend Miss Wordsworth - every leaf & flower she sees she longs to have and at breakfast & dinner she feeds the crows & goats. A squirrel ran past this morning - 'Oh I've seen a squirrel. pretty creature. do catch it for me' "Oh there's a jackal at play. Oh let me have one - that one". This will show you my dear sir that your daughter is happy...¹⁶⁶

It was all to end too soon. On the 10th June 1833, Jewsbury contracted cholera, 'demi-semi-cholera, only demi-semi', her journal recorded, but it proved fatal nonetheless. Jewsbury died on 4th October and was buried at Poona. Her writing chest, the only complete record of everything that she had ever published, was never recovered.

¹⁶⁵ 'Letter from Maria Jane Jewsbury to Dora Wordsworth', 22 September 1832, English MS1320/54, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

¹⁶⁶ 'Letter from William Fletcher to Maria Jane Jewsbury's father', 22 January 1833, English MS1320/60, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Perpetually his playmate, the young Anna Eliza Bray (née Kempe, 1789-1883) was often called upon to act opposite her elder brother, playing the ghost to his Hamlet, Brutus to his Cassius, or any other lesser part in his copy of *Enfield's Speaker* that took his fancy. As they got older, these dramatic productions became increasingly elaborate and, in 1815, their home-staged production of Otway's *Venice Preserved*, attracted the attention of a number of theatre managers. Struck by her rendition of Belivedera, the proprietors of Bath Theatre offered Eliza the opportunity to play Desdemona alongside Edmund Kean's Othello. She accepted but she soon became ill; her performance was called off, and there ended whatever theatrical aspirations she might have held.

Eliza also tried her hand at drawing. Her father, so very proud of her untrained talents, took her depiction of a Madonna and child to a gentleman's club to which he belonged and subjected it to the judgement of a number of his friends there. Amongst these friends was the influential antiquarian illustrator, Thomas Stothard, who, in due course, arranged to meet Eliza in order to see the rest of her efforts. 'Stothard was not the man to discourage or dishearten any one', Eliza recalled,

in him I soon found, as in all truly great men, that there was a good nature about him towards the student... He considered the attempts of an uneducated artist as attempts only, and estimated them not for what they were, but for what they indicated the hand that had achieved them might become under judicious schooling in the pursuit of arts. Stothard, in this respect, resembled some great men I could name in literature, who are ever more ready to commend and to encourage than are the little critics... (Bray 1836: 672)

The meeting Eliza describes here took place circa 1810 but she only wrote and published the above account in 1836. By then, her enthusiasm for drawing had long since gone the way of her acting and had come to nothing, but much else had happened in her life besides.

In 1818, she had married Stothard's youngest son, Charles. An antiquarian illustrator like his father, Charles provided the illustrations for Eliza's first book, *Letters Written During a Tour Through Normandy, Brittany and Other Parts of France* (1820), a collection of letters written to her mother that detailed the sights she had seen and enjoyed on her honeymoon. Encouraged by the success of their first joint effort, Eliza and Charles had begun to form plans on how to further capitalise on their marketability as a literary couple (like Charles and Mary Lamb, or William and Mary Howitt) but, a year later, in 1821, Charles died while tracing a stained-glass window at Beer Ferrers, falling from a ladder and striking his head upon an effigy of a knight and a lady that lay on the chapel floor, three feet from the ground. 'The books we read together, the little study in which we used to sit remain as he left them', wrote Eliza, mournfully, '...and I am widowed, alone, in the early part of my life, to mourn the ruined hopes of all my best affections'¹⁶⁷.

Many people rushed to assist Eliza in whatever way they could: Mr Rees, one of the editors at Longman & Co., told her that £60 of profits from the sale of her *Letters*, was available as and when she chose to draw it; Sir Henry Ellis awarded her £30 from the British Museum's Literary Fund as a mark of respect to her husband's services (Bray 1884: 174); and two gentleman, John Hawkins and Daniel Lysons discussed sponsoring Eliza's baby daughter (Steer 1966: [13 December 1821]), born only weeks after Charles's death. In the end, there was no need for such sponsorship: the baby soon grew sick and died. 'I need not say what are my

¹⁶⁷ 'Letter from Anna Eliza Bray to Sir Henry Ellis', 15 November 1821, Add MS 38626 ff.100, British Library.

feelings,' Eliza wrote to Henry Ellis, 'this last blow is almost more than I can bear. I have now no wish for life [-] it seems without an object -'¹⁶⁸

In the same way that Sara Coleridge would find a certain consolation in editing her father's works, Eliza, too, found some comfort in putting in order her husband's literary and artistic remains: 'I have undertaken the work', she told Mary Dawson-Turner (wife of the eminent Saxon historian), 'and I do not doubt that it will afford me a great relief, as a refuge from my own miserable reflections by occupation especially in doing what I trust, in some measure, may prove (however humble) an affection[ate] tribute to his memory.'¹⁶⁹ To this end, Eliza worked on two projects simultaneously: in 1823, she published *Memoirs, including Original Journals, Letters, Papers and Antiquarian Tracts of the Late C. A. Stothard* and, at the same time, she also oversaw the printing, colouring and distribution of the final two illustrations of her late husband's subscription-based series, *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*. This second project proved by far the most difficult for Eliza: 'Only those who have experience in such matters,' she later explained, 'can be at all aware how much there is to do in the conduct and publication of a splendid graphic work, more especially of a coloured and illuminated one' (Bray 1884: 173).

The work on the *Memoirs* and the *Monumental Effigies* combined did afford Eliza 'a great relief' and, in 1823, she married the Revd. Edward Atkyns Bray, the vicar of Tavistock. Although this 'second marriage was a happy one' (Bray 1884: 181) by her own account, Eliza Stothard - now Bray - continued to dwell, in her literary work, on the plans that she had hatched with Charles. In the winter of 1820, Charles had encouraged her to write a historical novel, based on the story of the Count De Foix as related in Froissart's *Chronicles* and had 'proposed to give [her]

¹⁶⁸ 'Letter from Anna Eliza Bray to Sir Henry Ellis', 9 March 1822, Add MS 38626 ff.102, British Library.

¹⁶⁹ 'Letter from Anna Eliza Bray to Mary Dawson-Turner', 15 January 1822, O.13.23.9, Trinity College, Cambridge.

information respecting the armour, buildings, and many other points connected with the period' (Bray 1884: 194). Bray revived her plans for this novel, writing up to three chapters a week, and completed the triple-decker *De Foix, or Sketches of the Manners and Customs of the Fourteenth Century* within a year, finally publishing it in 1826. This extreme speed of composition was to characterise her literary career: 'Do you write by steam?' Caroline Bowles would later ask her, 'In no other way can I account your finding time to supply the press with so much work'¹⁷⁰. With often less than a fortnight separating work on the end of one novel and the beginning of the next, Bray, whose popularity rode on that of Sir Walter Scott's novels, brought out four more novels in rapid succession, namely: *The White Hoods* (1828); *The Protestant: a Tale of the Reign of Queen Mary* (1828); *Fitz of Fitz-ford: A Legend of Devon* (1830); and *The Talba, or Moor of Portugal* (1830). It was after this fifth novel that Bray came into contact with Robert Southey, undoubtedly one of the 'great men [she] could name in literature' alluded to in her 'Reminiscences of Stothard' (1836) article.

Southey's *Letters from Portugal* had been one of the primary sources for *The Talba* and Bray had written to him to acknowledge this literary debt, as well as to extend to him an open invitation to her house in Tavistock. Having read the copies of *Fitz of Fitz-ford* and *The Talba* that she had had sent to him, Southey replied to her letter, writing:

You have been in the south of Europe, but not I think in Portugal: Fitz-ford has the advantage therefore over the Talba that in it you describe scenery with which you are well acquainted, - & not only your sketches are taken upon the spot, but your colouring also. No one who has not lived in Portugal would discover that this was not the case with your Portuguese pictures; & I am not so unreasonable as to require from any author what is inevitably impossible. I have myself painted too much from books, to censure you for doing the same:

¹⁷⁰ 'Letter from Caroline Bowles Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 4 February 1842, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

& in my own case have always felt how very different it is from painting from the life.

Finding both novels 'abundantly interesting as to characters, situations & events' despite their faults, Southey suggested a plan for a new project:

If you would stoop from Fancys recluse to truth, I should like to see from you - what English literature yet wants, a good specimen of local history; - not the antiquities only, nor the natural history, nor both together (as is Whites delightful book about Selbourne) nor the sketches - but every thing about a parish that can be made interesting, - all of its history, tradition & manners that can be saved from oblivion (for every generation sweeps away much) the changes that have been & that are in progress: every thing in short that belongs to the pursuits either of the historian, biographer, naturalist, philosopher or poet - & not omitting some of those "short & simple annals" of domestic life, which ought not to be forgotten. Such works in general have been undertaken by dull men, - but there are few tasks upon which a lively, & feeling & spiritual mind might be more agreeably, or usefully employed.¹⁷¹

Without any further need of encouragement, Bray took up the project immediately and proposed that her chapters should take the form of letters addressed to Southey. Southey agreed:

The epistolary form is at the same time pleasing & convenient. - it allows of as much miscellaneous matter as you like to introduce, & transition can [be] made in it from one subject to another with less difficulty & more grace than in any other mode of composition. Of course I cannot but feel gratified at your proposal of addressing them to me; - & I may as well take this opportunity of saying that letters of any weight will reach me if they are sent under cover to Henry Taylor Esqre - & under an outer cover to "the Under Secretary of State

¹⁷¹ 'Letter from Robert Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 26 February 1831, MS Facs 615 unbound, 1831-1839, British Library.

&c &c &c. Colonial Office, London. So you see I may receive the Letters as Letters, & return them thro the same channel with any comments should any occur which may seem useful.¹⁷²

Although Bray's previous literary works had been quickly written (the first drafts of *The Protestant* and *Fitz of Fitz-ford* had each taken two months), the antiquarian project she was to embark on at Southey's suggestion took no less than five years. The completed work, *A Description of the Part of the Devonshire Bordering on the Tamar and the Tavy in a Series of Letters to Robert Southey, Esq.*, was published by Murray in 1836 and went on to become Bray's most enduring work, informing as it did, many important nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthologies and studies of English folklore, including a revised edition of Thomas Keightley's *Fairy Mythology* (1850), Robert Hunt's *Popular Romances of the West of England* (1865) and Katherine Briggs's *A Dictionary of Fairies* (1976).¹⁷³

Perhaps it was by way of celebration that Southey went to stay with Bray over Christmas the year *Description* was published. Writing Chapter XXV of her *Autobiography* years later, Bray recalled many of the conversations she had with Southey, about Chatterton, the questionable authenticity of *Ossian*, and numerous other subjects. Her most interesting recollection is also the most intimate and the most personal, and describes Southey waiting for his coach to leave:

¹⁷² 'Letter from Robert Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 14 March 1831, MS Facs 615 unbound, 1831-1839, British Library.

¹⁷³ In 1854, Bray rewrote a selection of folklore from the *Description* into a book for children called *A Peep at the Pixies, or Legends of the West* (1854). Christina Rossetti later confirmed that this had been one of her primary sources for *Goblin Market*: 'In the first instance I named it "A Peep at the Goblins" in imitation of my Cousin Mrs Bray's "A Peep at the Pixies"', she would explain, 'but my brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti substituted the greatly improved title as it now stands' (quoted in Marsh 1994: 230).

[I]n making some allusions to his childhood, he said that he still wore the same sort of night-cap as he did when a child; and so saying he pulled it out of his pocket, put it on and tied it under his chin, joining in the good-humoured laugh which went round. (Bray 1884: 326)

Bray's correspondence with Southey continued until March 1839, when he announced the news of his second marriage to Caroline Bowles:

My place will be secured for me in the Southampton Coach [after my daughter's wedding], & I shall not return to Keswick till I bring Miss Bowles home with me as my wife in June.

I have often said that a second marriage must be either the wisest or the weakest act of a man[']s life. Our friendship has been of two & twenty years standing. We are of suitable years; the difference being, that she is twelve years younger than myself. Two persons more comfortable to each other in all material points, it would not be possible to find[.] And fortunate indeed may I think myself in having formed an engagement which if it please God to keep us in health, will make my home once more a chearful one.¹⁷⁴

By the time Southey returned to Keswick in August 1839, he was too ill to write letters. Finding walking, reading, writing and even speaking increasingly difficult, he was soon too ill to do anything for himself.

¹⁷⁴ 'Letter from Robert Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 11 March 1839, MS Facs 615 unbound, 1831-1839, British Library.

During their honeymoon in the Isle of Wight, Caroline had noticed that Southey had, very suddenly, grown increasingly absent-minded and forgetful: '[S]ymptoms of failure in him began to manifest themselves more unequivocally - of physical and mental failure - ' she later recalled,

- I began to perceive then his disinclination to answer letters, and to write for the press had now a more serious cause than mere languid inertness[,] that it was difficult [for] him to arrange his thoughts on paper - though when he did make the effort with success[,] the arrangement was as clear and perfect as possible, and he was as critically nice as ever, in detecting and altering a defective expression. On talking over our travelling plans, I found him strangely at a loss about routes &c &c¹⁷⁵

On their return to the mainland, Southey's brother, Henry, a medical doctor, confirmed Caroline's suspicions that there was a 'degree of mental failure' but suggested that Keswick, with its familiarity and mountain air, might be the best prescription for reverting the symptoms. Accordingly, on 31st August, Southey and Caroline returned to Greta Hall. 'Restoration to his home and family' Caroline recalled, 'did not produce the happy effects anticipated'¹⁷⁶.

With Southey's second marriage being announced so soon after their mother's death, many of his children bore a great deal of resentment towards Caroline, who was greeted, upon her arrival at Keswick, with 'a show - a parade of cold politeness' (Schonert 197: 30). 'And could you for a moment suppose Mrs Southey that any family of grown up Children could wish their Father to marry again - one of those children being an unmarried daughter of nine & twenty years

¹⁷⁵ 'Caroline Bowles's Marriage Narrative', 19 October 1840, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

of age[?]¹⁷⁷ asked Southey's youngest daughter, Kate, referring to herself, 'I wonder you could be so credulous'¹⁷⁸.

Kate, particularly, resented Caroline's presence at Greta Hall since, owing to her mother's illness, she had effectively been the mistress of the house for many years. Southey's head servant, Betty, also resented the sudden change of mistress. '[I]n fact', Caroline wrote in a letter to her long-standing friend, Mary Anne Watts Hughes, 'I found her virtually Mistress of the family, Miss Southey doing all under her influence - & to this woman and her young Mistress, I found myself from the hour of my entrance into this house an object of aversion' (Schonert 1957: 30). Certainly, Caroline's inability to get along with Betty fuelled Kate's anger: 'You will remember[,] Mrs Southey[,] how you speak of Betty, when you speak of her to me', Kate once said during an argument about unpacking, ' - you will remember if you please, that she has been with us eight & twenty years! - that for three of those years she was my Mother's nurse by day & night - for six months was alone with her in the Retreat - not hesitating once when my Father asked her to remain'¹⁷⁹.

Unresolved, small, heated arguments about domestic arrangements, trivial in themselves, escalated into a fully-fledged domestic feud. Kate said that she would always consider her father's marriage 'an act of gross injustice to his Children, and look upon [Caroline]

¹⁷⁷ 'Statement of Kate Southey about the affairs connected with her father's second marriage', Victoria University, Toronto.

¹⁷⁸ 'Caroline Bowles's Marriage Narrative', 19 October 1840, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

¹⁷⁹ 'Statement of Kate Southey about the affairs connected with her father's second marriage', Victoria University, Toronto.

as an intruder who came to take away her Birthright'¹⁸⁰; Betty, meanwhile, spread rumours about Southey's impotence and senility and suggested to Caroline's maid, Honore, 'that her Mistress's marriage might be annulled if some people saw fit to come forward' (Schonert 1957: 91); Caroline, meanwhile, accused Kate's brother, Cuthbert, of raising his hand to strike her.

Whatever the true facts of the domestic feud, it was soon apparent, as Wordsworth noted, 'that there was no domestic harmony between the old and new Female Inmates of Greta Hall' (WL: VII. 170). News of the feud began to spread beyond Southey and Wordsworth's households. 'I read over the latter part of your friendly note with concern & interest', Joanna Baillie, living in Hampstead, wrote in a note to Sara Coleridge, 'The account you give of your Uncle's family is very sad. The circumstances are all together very peculiar; his own state, the romantic devotion of his new Wife, and the distress & anxiety of poor Mrs Lovel[!] & the rest of the family for this mysterious disappearance of her son!'¹⁸¹

As an act of support, Henry Nelson Coleridge included Bowles in his essay for the *Quarterly Review* on 'Modern English Poetesses', alongside several of Southey's other protégées, praising her as 'the Cowper of our modern poetesses' (H. N. Coleridge 1840: 400). This expression of solidarity was, however, lost on Caroline who, unaware of the essay's author, thought it was by Murray's wish that she had been included (Schonert 1957: 154). Ironically, the review became a focal point of yet another trivial argument, for Caroline was unsure whether her copy of the *Quarterly* was the subscription copy the Southey household usually received and, assuming it wasn't, was unsure of whether bringing her own copy down from her room would be misconstrued as 'vanity about this paltry critique' (Schonert 1957: 155).

¹⁸⁰ 'Letter from Caroline Bowles Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 11 August 1840, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

¹⁸¹ 'Letter from Joanna Baillie to Sara Coleridge', 7 May [circa 1840], HRHRC.

In November 1840, Wordsworth, thinking it would make reconciliation at a later date easier, suggested to Kate and her brother, Cuthbert, that they 'shd. draw up an account concerning the sad occurrences that had taken place in [their] Father's house since his marriage'¹⁸². In detailing the circumstances of arguments and insults that had been traded, Kate intimated that Caroline had tried to restrict access to her father. Rather than remaining private as Wordsworth had expected, the statement was soon copied and circulated around the country. Meanwhile, the vicar of Keswick, Revd. Frederick Myers, advised Caroline to draw up a similar statement so she could draw upon it if the need ever arose. Originally sent only to Mary Anne Watts Hughes and Anna Eliza Bray, this second statement was also copied and widely circulated. With the two narratives pitted in competition with one another, Kate and Caroline's argument soon transformed from being an essentially domestic concern, into a lively subject of national gossip and debate. Caroline miserably reported to Bray that, 'About three months ago Mrs Henry Coleridge told a Lady who afterwards came to Keswick, that she had been at first quite inclined "to sympathise with Mrs Southey untill she read a statement of Kate's - & one of her Stepmother's which had quite [altered her opinions] on the subject."¹⁸³

To make matters even worse for Caroline, Wordsworth, who had hitherto tried to remain impartial, also took Kate's side and resolved 'to do all in my power to comfort the Children of my afflicted Friend' (VII.174). With Wordsworth taking sides, the scale of the feud exploded: 'He [Wordsworth] is the oracle of his party - a legion' explained Caroline, ' - Mr [John] Kenyon (I believe) included - Mr. H[enry] C[rabb] Robinson - Mr. H[enry] Taylor - etc etc -- & all the Coleridges.. I know that so late as last week - the most cruel charges were brought against me in

¹⁸² 'Statement of Kate Southey about the affairs connected with her father's second marriage', Victoria University, Toronto.

¹⁸³ 'Letter [fragment] from Caroline Bowles Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', [undated], New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

a large London assembly, by a division of that party - a fragment of Mr. Wordsworth's tail - ' (Schonert 1957:105-6). Caroline felt that her enemies were politically motivated to support Kate and

all those persons to whom extends the wide and powerful influence of that other Star of the Lakes - whose orb is setting in light & glory - not like [Southey's] friends - in mist & darkness. To be Mr. Wordsworth's friend - is still an honour & a desideratum. To have been Mr. Southey's was equally so - but the present & the past tense make all the difference. My beloved is now as if he were not - Only those who loved him for himself, will support me for his sake - believing that she cannot be wholly unworthy, who was honoured for 20 years with his friendship & full confidence, till circumstances enabled him to stamp his opinion of her, by making her his wife. (Schonert 1957: 52)

Caroline did, however, find support in some of Southey's friends, particularly in Walter Savage Landor. 'What bitterness of grief, what intensity of indignation, swells my heart, at those unworthy children of a father so gentle and affectionate', he wrote, 'Little do they imagine what burning coals they are heaving on their heads, in trying to wound the chosen of his wise considerate love, the only woman on earth deserving of it'¹⁸⁴. As for his opinion of Wordsworth: 'Wordsworth is a sad hybrid of sheep and wolf: one eye upon a daffodil the other on a canal-shore; turning his back on the house of an ancient friend; over-flowing with tenderness at a sheepcote or a turnpike-gate'¹⁸⁵.

To demonstrate his allegiances, Landor deployed one of his 'Imaginary Conversations' in damning Wordsworth. The 'Imaginary Conversation' between Southey and Porson was

¹⁸⁴ 'Letter from Walter Savage Landor to Caroline Bowles Southey', u.d. MS 47891 ff.140, British Library.

¹⁸⁵ 'Letter from Walter Savage Landor to Caroline Bowles Southey', 12 September 1841, MS 47981 ff144, British Library.

published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1842. Landor refers to the feud in the Lake District, where 'the nearest neighbours in the most romantic scenery, where every thing seems peace, repose, and harmony, are captious and carping one another'. Landor goes on to rail at Wordsworth's conduct, declaring that 'Wherever the poet is, there also must the man obtrude obliquely his ill-favoured visage...In no two poets that ever lived do we find the fact so remarkably exemplified as in Byron and Wordsworth' (Landor 1842: 687). 'The buff jerkins we saw in Chevy Chase', he concludes, 'please me better than the linsy-woolsy which enwraps the puffy limbs of our worthy host at Grasmere' (Landor 1842: 691).

Anna Eliza Bray would also lend her public support to Caroline by dedicating, in 1845, the second edition of her novel, *Warleigh, or The Fatal Oak*, to her, having dedicated the original 1834 edition to Southey. By this time, however, Southey had been dead for two years and Caroline was living, once again, in her childhood home of Buckland Cottage. 'I hope you are sharing with me the delightfulness of this "Indian summer" - this relenting of a cruel season - a sequence of seasons - ' she wrote in a letter to Bray, 'I bask in the sun, like an old cat - with much the sort of eager enjoyment - felt no doubt by the feline sensualist - But then I would do...' ¹⁸⁶

Living in Cuba, Maria Gowen Brooks was oblivious to the state of Southey's household. It was only by chance that she heard of Southey's marriage at all, as she explained in a letter to him in 1840:

I heard of the illness & death of the Mrs Southey whom I knew. When travelling in deep mourning, a young man showed me a little book, in wh: were

¹⁸⁶ 'Letter from Caroline Bowles Southey to Anna Eliza Bray', 25 October 1845, New Bray Archive, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

some lines of yours beginning, "They sin who tell us love can die," & some stanzas by Miss Bowles beginning, "Sleep, little baby, sleep." The traveller admired both the specimens, & said that Mr. Southey was now united to Miss Bowles. That I knew not before, but had no doubt that the union was crowned with that happiness wh: two excellent persons have the power to bestow on each other. (Granniss 1913: 40-1)

Brooks died in 1844 and, for a while, her literary fame seemed secure. Writing about Elizabeth Oakes Smith's long poem, *The Sinless Child*, Edgar Allan Poe thought immediately of Brooks's *Zóphië*: 'Undoubtedly [*The Sinless Child*] is one of the most original of American poems', he would write, '— surpassed in this respect, we think, only by Maria del Occidente's "Bride of Seven."' (Poe [1845] 1850: III.129). Rufus Griswold's obituary for Brooks in *Graham's Magazine* was also equally optimistic about Brooks's posterity: '[I]t may be doubted whether...there are many names that will shine with a clearer, steadier, and more enduring lustre than that of Maria Del Occidente' (Griswold 1848: 61). All too quickly, however, Brooks faded into obscurity.

Settled permanently in Hampstead, Sara Coleridge's knowledge of classical languages proved a constant source of astonishment for those who met her. 'Yesterday, when I was in Bohn's shop, in came Mrs N. Coleridge, to inquire the price of Potter's Clemens Alex.: which she wished to read through, having just finished Irenaeus!' Alexander Dyce reported in a letter to his friend, Rev. John Mitford, in 1843, 'What think you of that in a most beautiful young widow of six and twenty?'¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ 'Letter from Alexander Dyce to Rev. John Mitford', [Jan/Feb 1843?], 86.Y.100 (65), Correspondence of Alexander Dyce MSS, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. (By this time, Coleridge was 41 rather than 26 years old.)

Even Elizabeth Barrett Browning was impressed: 'But speaking of Mrs Coleridge', she wrote to John Kenyon in 1838, ' - I won't lose another opportunity of begging you to disclaim for me, whenever you have any, *the knowing more Greek than she does*. Indeed, it is very improbable' (Kelley and Hudson 1984-91: IV.63). Later, in 1844, Barrett Browning went on to assert that Coleridge 'possesses perhaps more learning in the strict sense, than any female writer of the day' (Kelley and Hudson 1984-91: VIII.247) and, writing to her the following year, she was overcome with a sense of awe:

I may say also that owing you much personal esteem, it is pleasant to me to [credit] this sense of [your] goodness to my reverence for the illustrious name you bear, which presented one of the earliest shrines of my hero worship, as it must do one of the latest. Of course you are accustomed to hear such allusions - as all members of royal houses are - but I am writing to you for the first time & I cannot arrest it on my pen - ¹⁸⁸

Sara Coleridge died in 1852. Years later, her daughter, Edith, set about arranging her memoir together with a selection of letters for publication. In putting together her *Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge* (1873), Edith had made the editorial decision to concentrate on her mother's intellect. And it was for good reason that she did this: with the founding of Girton College, Cambridge, in 1869, and Somerville College, Oxford (founded in 1879), already under discussion, women's education was a subject at the very forefront of public interest. Some of the critics responded well to *Memoir and Letters*: '[W]ere some such ungracious cynic disposed to sneer at woman's intellect and to doubt her ability to pursue abstract and philosophical studies, we would commend such one to the perusal of Sara Coleridge's thoughtful writings. Followed up by a study of Mary Somerville's works in astronomy and the higher mathematics, he might in time be pretty well cured of his scepticism', wrote one critic in *The New Englander*,

¹⁸⁸ 'Letter from Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Sara Coleridge', 19 March 1845, HRHRC.

At this day, when the higher education of women is discussed often with a great deal of intemperate zeal on the one side and scorn or indifference on the other, do not the wise life and diligent works of such a mind as that of Sara Coleridge exhibit a type and in some sense utter a prophecy of what in time to come Christianity may do for woman?' (*The New Englander* 1875: 201, 221)

Ultimately, though, the polemical way in which her daughter had edited her letters proved to be Sara Coleridge's downfall. 'These letters show her to us as a serious-minded, good woman, with unusual intellectual powers,' concluded *The Nation*, '...But of the woman complete in all sweet feminine gifts, and charms, free from self-consciousness, free from dogmatism and vanity...of such a woman the traces are slight in the "Memoir and Letters of Sara Coleridge"' (*The Nation* 1873: 426). Some readers did not mind the stern way in which Sara Coleridge had been presented: meeting Edith in Torquay in 1886, Christina Rossetti and her mother very much enjoyed reading *Memoir and Letters* (Marsh 1994: 545). Mostly, though, readers were put off by the stiffness of Edith's depiction of her mother and were unwilling to distinguish between the impression given of her by the edited letters and the figure of Sara Coleridge herself. Mary E. Coleridge's response, recorded in 1887, was all too typical:

Mary [Shelley] is a dreadful bore with her eternal 'Read Greek' and her journal. She reminds me oddly of Sarah [sic] Coleridge, in whose letters I can see no charm whatever. They are both so Englishwomanly. They certainly have imagination, and when they set it to work it works successfully. I love Phantasmion, I dare say I should love Frankenstein. But it does not play about their ordinary writings or lend any grace to their lives. It is all cold. (M. Coleridge 1910: 219)

As for Anna Eliza Bray, she outlived Southey and all his protégées and, in 1881, she gave instructions in her will that, upon her death, 1500 copies of a new edition of her complete novels were to be edited and printed at the expense of £3400, £400 of which was to be paid to her nephew and godson, John Arrow Kempe, for his services rendered as editor. 'But one thing I must say – ' she told him,

I hope you do not show what is going on about my will to any one – your father from the habit he has of telling others what they ought to do – too often forgets with me that I am his Elder, and his aunt, and his aged aunt also... From the time I could call any thing my own, I have heart and soul endeavoured to serve others – True I have not always met with the kindest return... But I must at last say a word or two about myself. I feel no one now living has any authority to dictate to me in respect to the disposal of my property – For that I am answerable to God alone and that I have not forgotten. I have felt and do feel that I am fully entitled to gratify a wish of my own, consistent with the Labours of my whole life.¹⁸⁹

Two years later, aged 93, Eliza died. The *Athenaeum* found space for a small obituary. 'The death is announced of the oldest lady who claimed a considerable place among living writers. Mrs. Bray, who has passed away in her ninety-third year, was the last link between us and the generation which was in its prime in the early years of this century.'

This thesis must, necessarily, end on a note of disappointment: Caroline Bowles, Maria Gowen Brooks, Sara Coleridge, Maria Jane Jewsbury and, one might add, Anna Eliza Bray, ultimately

¹⁸⁹ 'Letter from Anna Eliza Bray to John Arrow Kempe', 25 July 1881, Kempe MSS 15/27, West Sussex County Records Office, Chichester.

failed to make a lasting or memorable impression on literature. Or, more precisely, perhaps I should say that they failed to make a lasting impression on a specifically post-Romantic conception of literature that we, in the early twenty-first century, have subsequently inherited.

The Lake Poet protégées found themselves uncomfortably straddling two very different notions of what literature was. On the one hand, they were committed to an ideology, espoused by their mentors, that located, in the act of writing, an imaginative otherworldliness that offered profound communion with the very depths of the human condition; yet, on the other hand, they found themselves bereft of the culture of manuscript circulation and literary patronage that their mentors had seen the last of, and confronted, instead, with a more contemporary notion of literature as 'manufacturing' and 'trade'.

At their worst, the protégées floundered when they were forced to speak in the language of commerce. When Alaric Watts suggested to Caroline Bowles that she might want 'worthier remuneration in a pecuniary sense' for her contributions to the 1829 *Literary Souvenir*, she wrote at once to Southey, agitated and confused. 'But really', she asked, 'if I only give him some four or five stanzas, what *can* the man pay for them, or I accept conscientiously, for you know my poetic steed is no "Pegasa", only a Peggy?' (RSCB: 137) Four months later, she was still very much flustered by the proposal: 'I cannot tell what to answer', she wrote, '...I cannot value my goods...I wish there were literary agents to sell for one upon commission' (RSCB: 142). On other occasions, such as when Henry Nelson Coleridge sold his wife's *Pretty Lessons for Children*, negotiations went more smoothly, only to end, months later, with the realisation that work had been readily sold for far less than its market value. At their best, though, such as when Jewsbury extracted 'Farewell to the Muse' from one of her letters to Dora Wordsworth and submitted it to the *Literary Souvenir* as a conventional renunciation poem, some of the protégées displayed a pragmatism that marked them out as adept participants in the cut-throat world of publishing.

Yet, even while they worked the literary marketplace, remembering their commitment to Romantic notions of authorship, the Lake Poet protégées wrote essays that railed against the 'commonplacish' milieu of the age in which they found themselves (Bowles's 'Thoughts on Letter-

Writing', Coleridge's 'Disadvantages of the Possession of Beauty', Jewsbury's 'Age of Books'); and they performed often highly experimental tropes across a diverse range of genres in repeated attempts to loosen the stranglehold this same milieu had on literary production (Bowles's *Cat's Tail*, Brooks's *Zóphiël*, Coleridge's *Phantasmion*, Jewsbury's *History of an Enthusiast*, Bray's *Description of the Tamar and the Tavy*). Independently, but with an increasing knowledge of, and acquaintance with one another, they set about trying to infuse the commercialised, industrialised landscape of contemporary 1820s and 30s literature with the spirit of Romanticism, as embodied in their mentors' past. Undeterred by the magnitude of the task, even as she struggled daily with her edition of her father's work, Sara Coleridge articulated the unshakeable conviction that they all held in common:

Yet Hope still lives, and oft to objects fair
In prospect pointing, bids me still pursue
My humble tasks - I list - but backward cast
Fain would mine eye discern the Future in the Past.¹⁹⁰

Ultimately, though, the efforts of the Lake Poet protégées went unrecorded. Led firstly by the likes of Shelley and then, later, by the likes of Matthew Arnold, a second backlash against industrialism and utilitarianism came into operation, that sought not to reconcile contemporary literature with, but to rid it of anything that remotely threatened the sanctity of the Romantic vision. Within a matter of decades, this second backlash had catapulted literature into a position of unprecedented cultural importance.

This cultural primacy came at a price, however. The sprawling and disparate collection of generic forms and subjects that the notion of literature had once encompassed had to be sternly reined in, to the exclusion of everything apart from the imaginative and the visionary, as found in

¹⁹⁰ 'For my Father on his lines called "Work without Hope"' in 'Poems of Sara Coleridge in Widowhood', 1845-52, HRHRC.

poetry, plays and novels, and even then, only in certain types of poetry, plays and novels (Eagleton 1996: 16). The number of literary writers had to be reduced to a select but formidable canon that would, in due course, become enshrined, firstly in our working men's colleges, and then, in our schools and universities. Wordsworth and Coleridge were central figures in this new canon; Southey hovered on its margins; their protégées, cut adrift, were lost to obscurity.

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