RAISING A NATION: ANNA LETITIA BARBAULD AS ARTISTIC AND PEDAGOGIC MOTHER OF THE ROMANTIC CITIZEN

A dissertation presented

by

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to
The Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

In the field of

English

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
May, 2010
RAISING A NATION: ANNA LETITIA BARBAULD AS ARTISTIC AND PEDAGOGIC MOTHER OF THE ROMANTIC CITIZEN

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Northeastern University, May, 2010
ABSTRACT

In addition to artistically representing the ideal human, a.k.a. the Romantic citizen, and his development, Anna Barbauld was invested in the actual practice of raising him, devoting much of her life to co-directing the Palgrave School for Boys, a Dissenting academy. Her pupil Lord Denman ultimately drafted the Reform Act of 1832. As Barbauld recapitulates the path of human development through her Lessons for Children, Hymns in Prose for Children, political treatises, and poetry, she traces the process of becoming a poet, a citizen, an ideal human being, a nation, and a global community. Her career of artistic and pedagogical intervention causes the term revolution, which is so often used by Romantic writers to designate artistic and political innovation and independence in a sublime moment, to return to its pre-French Revolution sense in the discourse of astronomy—a slow, gradual, revolving, process or continuation, in which (with a little help from Wordsworth’s “My heart leaps up”) the “child is father of the citizen.”

At the heart of this dissertation is a fascination with Barbauld’s double power: her power as someone interested in the development of individuals, witness her teaching and pedagogical writing, and her power as an artist having a more abstract, Romantic interest in the development of the ideal human. For Barbauld, the culture of dissent provided access to the public square and the exercise of this double power—a situation in which the public discourse of religious Dissent could be conflated with the political and social experimentations of a woman, doubly marginalized by law. Barbauld’s historical location at the epicenter of British subjectivity and nationalism inflects not only her sense of citizenship and community, but also the generic scale in which she wrote. Barbauld’s Hymns in Prose for Children are analytically fruitful examples of texts that actually mediate this change in Britain, as widespread, frequently recited texts that are
both religious, however Dissenting in their world-view, and concerned with the development of
the child-citizen as a national—and even transnational or post-national—subject. This study is
thus entitled “Raising a Nation,” because of what I consider to be Barbauld’s Romantic
organicism: she follows a path of human development through her *Lessons for Children, Hymns
in Prose for Children*, on to poetry and political treatise. In fact, Barbauld seems to model the
doctrine of recapitulation—a thematic interest of Blake’s and Wordsworth’s—through genre in
her collection of works.

The time has come for scholars to notice that Barbauld is far beyond a secondary or
tertiary influence in Romanticism and to realize that in many respects she mothered some of its
primary and characteristic genres as well as ideas, and real-life citizens. She functions as a
transitional writer, falling between eighteenth-century Enlightenment and Romantic aesthetics.
This dissertation is responding to a dramatic increase in Barbauld scholarship, and will be
pitched as the first book-length study of her wide-ranging works.

**Chapter One, “Barbauld’s Culture and Aesthetics of Dissent,”** examines the culture
of dissent in which Barbauld operated; it discusses the relevant historical context of religious
Dissent in England and Barbauld’s own position within the Dissenting community, in order to
demonstrate the internal, artistic choices that make up Barbauld’s signature aesthetics of dissent.
Her *Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790), and
*Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry Into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or
Social Worship* (1792) are exemplary conflations of what appears to be, the narrow, particular
discourse of the propriety of private and public religious practice and the national, legislative
discourse over the rights of citizens. By joining, or mediating, congregational interests and
national interests in her *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry*, Barbauld deftly conflates the identities of devout Christian and democratic citizen. This conflation occurs through prayer—the central act of private and public worship, i.e. the natural, human, instinct to petition to God. She frames worship, i.e. prayer, as a naturally public act; not only is prayer an instinctual act, but prayer as *petition*, is the expected and necessary means for bridging the inevitable distance between God and man. Her introduction of the term “petition” to a discourse on public worship, already inflected with the values of community and nation, revealingly contrasts with the controversial value of legal petition in the political reality of 1790 England.

Chapter Two, “‘To prepare, not to bring about revolutions:’ The developmental relationship between Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781) and *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation; or a Discourse for the Fast, Appointed on April 19, 1793,*” focuses on the developmental relationship between *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation* and *Hymns in Prose for Children*. Barbauld’s widely popular *Hymns*, reprinted in England for over 120 years, provides astonishing evidence of her position at the origins of British nationalism. The *Hymns*, composed for daily recitation, function as a transitional ritual between the Church-scripted daily prayer and the products of secular print culture to follow. In *Sins of Government* the primary ideas and strategies of *Hymns* rhetorically “grow up”; *Sins of Government* functions as a rhetorical model of reform through its inheritance and development of youth community values established in *Hymns*. Barbauld’s call for a “national religion” in *Sins of Government* is not a religiously dogmatic injunction, but the desire for a framework of national morality. The primary doctrine for this “national religion” is documented and taught in her *Hymns*. Both texts mediate between religious dogma and national community. The *Hymns* mediates the genres of
religious catechism and literacy pedagogy; *Sins of Government* mediates the genres of sermon and political treatise, and represents an evolution of the *Hymns*. Barbauld plants the seeds of freedom in her *Hymns in Prose for Children*, and harvests them vigorously in her career-jeopardizing anti-war sermon, *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*.

Chapter Three, “Of Caterpillars and Baby-Houses: Barbauld’s Signature Aesthetics of Contractions and Bubble Spaces,” focuses on Barbauld’s signature aesthetics developed in her poetry—particularly her aesthetics of bubble spaces and the technique of rhetorical and symbolic contraction. In “To a Little Invisible Being” (1825), the “infant bud of being” that the poet-speaker hastens “to blow” from the womb into a little visible being resides in a critically delicate bubble space. Within the physically pregnant space, a primarily sexed (and gendered) woman’s experience, the ode identifies a subject whose key moment of existence is pre-gendered, pre-sexed, pre-lingual—conceived, and yet unspoken. This space is not unlike the Romantic poet’s fleeting moment of creative imagination between encounter and response, thought and utterance (a condition repeatedly treated by poets such as Wordsworth and Shelley, following Barbauld). This chapter closely examines the so far under-examined Woman in Barbauld’s poetry, and specifically, at those bubble-like moments of concentration in her texts that elucidate the Woman, but also happen to mirror the delicate thought-space between inarticulate, infinite perception, and articulated, visible, embodiment. “Washing Day” (1797) is a critical example of how Barbauld uses bubble imagery to represent the creative imagination and employ her signature technique of contracting gradations or stages of things; she contracts, and therefore aesthetically mediates the experience of children and men. Barbauld’s bubble imagery and the technique of contraction reorder the space and time for conventionally and
developmentally separate mediums: the public realm of national identification and reform, and
the (seemingly) juvenile discourse of caterpillars and “Baby-Houses.” Her poem, “A Summer
Evening’s Meditation” (1773), segues to chapter four as it treats the nature of: revolution, the
female soul, the sublime and poetic imagination, human nature (as ‘embryo Gods’), and the
gynotopic, even post-national experience in “trackless deeps of space.”

Chapter Four, “Towards a Post-National Romantic Citizen: Sublime Alternations
Between a Pre-Symbolic Feminine Subjectivity in ‘A Summer Evening’s Meditation’ and a
Post-National Romantic Citizen in Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” considers Barbauld’s
addresses to the nation, and the possible post-nation state, in what seem to be their generic
maturity. That is, her image of a seed taking root and growing up to an oak tree from her Hymns
in Prose for Children, which prosaically develops in her sermon on national character and proper
revolution, Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation, matures in her epic poem Eighteen Hundred
and Eleven, the last poem she would publish in her career, the primary subject of chapter four.
In Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, England will fall into ruin because the best of English culture
has left and found root in the more fertile soil of the U.S. In time, the once postcolonial other
(American) will return in pilgrimage to pay homage to the graves and ruins of England. Since
Eighteen Hundred and Eleven has come to represent the end of Barbauld’s public writing career,
it is interesting to read alongside possible inheritance texts, such as Mary Shelley’s novel The
Last Man. The final chapter takes up the condition of the post-national described in Eighteen
Hundred and Eleven and The Last Man, considering Barbauld’s ultimate, artistic and ideological,
trajectory towards a post-national sublime. An epilogue suggests that conceiving of Barbauld’s
aesthetics as post-national also involves examination of her abolitionist work, including her 1791
“Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade.” Her aesthetics of the post-national, as well as her political involvement in abolitionism, also derives from work in her *Hymns in Prose for Children*. The study concludes with a discussion of Barbauld’s poem “On the Death of Mrs. Martineau” (1820), which commemorates the legacy of the good matriarch as perhaps more powerful than any other figure in civilization. Thus, the epilogue mediates the content of the beginning chapters, as the figure of mother that mediated (as narrator) the child’s experience and development in *Hymns in Prose for Children* and *Lessons for Children* in order to foster the values of the Romantic national and global citizen, returns as the subject of Romantic ode and preeminent medium of civilization’s continuity and progress.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Enormous thanks go out to my dissertation advisors who encouraged and supported this endeavor. The seeds of this project were planted during my Master’s study with Professor Libby Fay at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her feminist scholarship in Romanticism inspired my initial interest in women Romantic writers and she generously served as an additional reader on my dissertation committee. Many thanks go to Professor Laura Green for her kind mentoring and generous feedback on various projects throughout my doctoral coursework. Her course on feminist theory helped inform this project. Professor Mary Loeffelholz has served as a model of erudite teaching and scholarship, and I am grateful for her expertness and encouragement. To my director, Professor Stuart Peterfreund, I am greatly indebted for his expertise, long-term investment in this project, guidance and mentorship throughout my doctoral study, and perhaps above all, patience.

I am grateful for the lifetime of support from my parents and brothers.

I thank my two young sons, Seth and Finn, for not really caring about any of this. Throughout my graduate study they have only recognized me as Mommy. They have provided me with a profound sense of grounding, preventing me from slipping into the heady, isolating world of academic work. Likewise, my fortunate experience as their mother has directly influenced my scholarship and teaching (mostly for the better, I think).

Finally, I thank Andy for surviving. His love, partnership, sacrifice, encouragement, support, brilliance, and humor have sustained me throughout this process. Andy made this entire thing possible.
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Introduction:

Theories and Aesthetics of Mediation

Germ of new life, whose powers expanding slow
For many a moon their full perfection wait,—
Haste, precious pledge of happy love, to go
Auspicious borne through life’s mysterious gate.

What powers lie folded in thy curious frame,—
Senses from objects locked, and mind from thought!
How little canst thou guess thy lofty claim
To grasp at all the worlds the Almighty wrought!

And see, the genial season’s warmth to share,
Fresh younglings shoot, and opening roses glow!
Swarms of new life exulting fill the air,—
Haste, infant bud of being, haste to blow!

Haste, little captive, burst thy prison doors!
Launch on the living world, and spring to light!
Nature for thee displays her various stores,
Opens her thousand inlets of delight.

If charmed verse or muttered prayers had power,
With favouring spells to speed thee on thy way,
Anxious I’d bid my beads each passing hour,
Till thy wished smile thy mother’s pangs o’erpay.

(from Anna Letitia Barbauld’s “To a Little Invisible Being who is Expected Soon to Become Visible” 1-12, 29-36)

By the late eighteenth century, fancy was established in aesthetic writings as an inferior but therapeutic faculty. Definitions of fancy take the form of catalogues of verbs referring to things done to images and ideas: aggregating, associating, collecting, combining, connecting, disposing, embellishing, mixing. Fancy treats experience as matter that can be manipulated but not transformed. It conforms to the process of intellectual sorting—arrangement, classification, and comparison—that constituted the methodological core of the human sciences. When speeded up, these pleasurable and empowering mental acts give fancy its dynamic structure…. As the motion from one image to another, it has no substance or content of its own, despite the materiality of the particular representations in which it deals.

(Julie Ellison, “The Politics of Fancy in the Age of Sensibility” 228)
When I first encountered the poetry of Anna Letitia Barbauld as an undergraduate thumbing through an anthology of English Romanticism, I read with a sense of self-indulgence, postponing my assigned term paper. Since that time I have found myself handing out copies of her poems such as “To a Little Invisible Being Who is Expected Soon to Become Visible” as little gifts to friends, especially to expectant mothers. Thus, it was with gratification and delight that I later discovered I had been unwittingly re-enacting the original scheme of manuscript distribution. Barbauld had, in fact, written many of her poems not for publication, but as personal gifts, bestowing them as such on select individuals. Now, I am prompted to ask why my unwitting but thoroughly spontaneous duplication of her poetry’s original method of circulation some two hundred years later is significant.

One way to answer this question is to consider the two-hundred-year lapse in Barbauld’s popularity. Scholars’ recently renewed interest in her as a writer has made possible this dissertation, which now becomes part of her recovery. At this time it is safe to say that Barbauld’s increased visibility since the 1990’s in anthologies, conference programs, journals, and course syllabi has established her initial recovery by eighteenth-century and Romantic studies. While some of the scholarship making this recovery has proceeded in dialogical fashion, much has emerged in isolation, maintaining the kind of circuitous or fanciful economy that marked my own early response to her work. Indeed, the traditional division between the periods of eighteenth-century literature and Romanticism has, in the case of Barbauld, encouraged exegetical loyalties that may not always allow for the myriad ways her works influenced, and were influenced by, both.
This project, then, resembles Julie Ellison’s definition of the Romantic aesthetic, fancy. Indeed, any recovery project in literary studies necessarily assesses the methodological core of the imaginatively scientific system of literary canonization, as it strives to aggregate, associate, collect, combine, connect, dispose, embellish, and mix recoverable and long-established material, in what is surely a fanciful, albeit rigorous, act. Surely, the work of scholars, editors of anthologies, and educators should be represented as more than mere flights of fancy. And yet, the actual career and critical legacy of Anna Barbauld are bound up with and by such imaginative exercises.

It is time for scholars to notice that Barbauld is important far beyond being a secondary or tertiary influence in Romanticism and realize that in many respects she mothered some of its primary and characteristic genres, as well as its key ideas, and its real-life citizens. Barbauld scholarship may also move forward ever more productively than it has to date if scholars resist seeing her material as representative of either eighteenth-century or Romantic studies. Barbauld functions as a transitional writer, between eighteenth-century Enlightenment and Romantic aesthetics. This role is the result of far more than a chronological circumstance. She was a transitional writer in multiple senses. Just as her Romantic interest in the ideal citizen manifested itself aesthetically as well as practically, the transitional qualities of her texts are both aesthetic and material. That is, her texts consistently display imagery, spaces, genres, and language that are concerned with transition. And as a writer she neither fits exclusively into an Enlightenment or Romantic category. More commonly, she has been read as an eighteenth-century writer.¹

¹ William McCarthy’s biography, Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment (2008) has had some responsibility for encouraging this interpretation.
However, to see Barbauld primarily as an Enlightenment writer is to miss a lot of her proto-Romantic, even proto-Wordsworthian, aesthetics and their lasting influence on those who followed her. Introductory Romanticism syllabi have found the contrast between the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* along with poems such as “The Rime of the Ancyent Mariner” and “Simon Lee” and exemplary eighteenth-century texts such as Johnson’s “The Vanity of Human Wishes” a convenient mechanism for distinguishing the periods. Supplying these texts at the beginning of a Romanticism course allows students to appreciate a considerable gap between eighteenth-century classicism and the revolutionary innovation of *Lyrical Ballads*.\(^2\) To grant more attention to Barbauld’s works is to see more of a complex transition occurring between Johnson and Wordsworth. Barbauld’s texts provide a transition that occupies an apparent space rather than a remarkable gap between two divergent aesthetics. Not only did her works conduct a transition between literary periods that anthologies have traditionally categorized, her works exhibit an internal fascination with transitional spaces and concepts.

Barbauld mediated eighteenth-century Enlightenment and Romantic aesthetics. In Barbauld’s hands, acts of fancy range from poetical topic selection as in Contemplation’s cosmic flight in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” to aesthetic structures that can simultaneously playfully and seriously contract seemingly disparate concepts or subjectivities such as a gardener’s encounter with a caterpillar and military warfare in “The Caterpillar.” “To a Little

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Invisible Being,” cited in part in the epigraph above, is significant not just because it imagines the unique subjectivity of the fetus and woman’s experience of pregnancy, but also because of the artistic focus on the pre-subject, and the focus on pre-identification, pure possibility, the power of expectation, and transition. This poem is emblematic of what I call Barbauld’s aesthetics of bubbles, whether they are soap bubbles, balloons, or wombs. These bubbles are common moments and enclosed spaces of concentration in her texts that represent the delicate thought-space between chaotic, disorganized, infinite perception, and articulation, visibility, or coming into being.

Her signature bubble imagery, as in “Washing-Day,” repeatedly explores the delicate, ambiguous mixture of different artistic values such as eighteenth-century emphases on Greek and Miltonic classical forms and Romantic distinctions between material form and immaterial inspiration. One of the things that characterizes Barbauld as an early Romantic writer is her preoccupation with the sublime tension contained within these spaces. In many cases, her poems do not so much represent linear transition from one concept or space to another, as they do the reflexive ambiguity between disparate yet contracted forms. For instance, a caged mouse imbued with the power of Enlightenment-style eloquence is the ambassador of Romantic citizenship in “The Mouse’s Petition.”

In addition to representing the ideal human, a.k.a. the Romantic citizen, and his development artistically, Barbauld was invested in the actual practice of raising him. She devoted much of her life to co-directing the Palgrave School for Boys, a Dissenting academy. One of her pupils, Lord Denman, ultimately drafted the Reform Act of 1832. As Barbauld recapitulates the path of human development through her Lessons for Children, Hymns in Prose
for Children, political treatises, and poetry, she traces the process of becoming a poet, a citizen, an ideal human being, a nation, and a global community. Her career of artistic and pedagogical interventions causes the term revolution, that is so often used by Romantic writers to designate artistic and political innovation and independence in a sublime moment, to return to its pre-French Revolution sense in the discourse of astronomy. For Barbauld, revolution as reform is a slow, gradual, revolving, process or continuation in which (with a little help from Wordsworth’s “My heart leaps up”) the “child is father of the citizen.”

One focus of this dissertation is on Barbauld’s double power: her power as someone interested in the development of individuals, according to her teaching and pedagogical writing, and her power as an artist having a more abstract, Romantic interest in the development of the ideal human. For Barbauld, the culture of dissent provided access to the public square and the exercise of this double power, or a situation in which the public discourse of religious Dissent could be conflated with the political and social experimentations of a woman, doubly marginalized by law. What the perspective of Dissenter allowed Barbauld to show was the inherent sovereignty of the individual in that democratic access, or petitions to God, had real-life, political correlates. And the enduring consequences of these connections did not have to occur through revolution (in the violent manner of the French, or in the fleeting manner of the Romantically sublime moment) but could be literally home-grown. For her, true revolution did not ignite in a moment, so as to burn out or consume its participants. It was nurtured in cradles, nurseries, and schoolrooms, so as to abide by its natural, law-abiding (astronomical) course.

Barbauld’s historical location at the epicenter of British subjectivity and nationalism inflects not only her sense of citizenship and community, but also the generic scale on which she
wrote. Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children* are analytically fruitful examples of texts that actually mediate this change in Britain as widespread, frequently recited texts that are both religious, however Dissenting in their world-view, and concerned with the development of the child-citizen as a national, and even transnational or post-national, subject. This study is thus entitled “Raising a Nation,” because of what I consider to be Barbauld’s Romantic organicism: she follows a path of human development through her *Lessons for Children, Hymns in Prose for Children*, on to the poem and the political treatise. In fact, Barbauld seems to model the doctrine of recapitulation (a thematic interest of Blake’s and Wordsworth’s) through genre in her collection of works.

Significantly, *recovery* has real meaning to Barbauld studies, as she was not merely lost to public or scholarly attention due to any original obscurity or critical oversight. She was, in fact, consciously defamed and deposed from public view by critics such as John Wilson Croker of the Tory *Quarterly Review*, after enjoying immense transatlantic fame (admired by the likes of young Wordsworth and Coleridge) as a children’s writer and educator, as well as a lyric and epic poet, and social and political philosopher. Works such as her inflammatory pamphlet *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* (1793), and the poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812), exposed her to the ridicule of a public that perceived her as an overly Jacobin, anti-war, female interloper in British political discourse. Thus, to incorporate Anna Barbauld in Romantic and eighteenth-century studies, is to engage directly with historical and critical forces of British nationalism and conservatism that devalued her work, not just contemporary issues of canonization.
My initial question regarding my unwitting reenactment of Barbauld’s original method of circulation has led me to wonder at the underlying complexities of recovery scholarship, as the theories and methods of modern recovery seem to arise in the critical (or rather, precritical) moment between encounter and response, thought and utterance, uncovery and recovery. This is not unlike the fancied experience of the expected pre-visible being in “To a Little Invisible Being” above. It is clear that our system of recovery of long-lost or long-forgotten literature is intimately bound up with our system of canonization. It is also clear that feminist scholarship (and here, I’m specifically considering feminist scholarship within Romantic studies), in the vanguard of recovery work and seeking to interrogate and alter the established system of canonization, has had to navigate tensions between new historicist studies of women in the eighteenth century, and more internal-formalist studies of fémininité or l’écriture féminine, the Woman.³ While the relationship between these two critical trajectories has reached a kind of functional harmony in terms of meaningful intersection and chordal play on both approaches in our reading of texts that have experienced something like a life-cycle of feminist theory (i.e., Jane Eyre), uncovery-recovery seems to rehearse the separation-harmony continuum. Such has been the pattern of recovery criticism of Barbauld, herself a literary critic in the late eighteenth century.

Despite increased scholarly attention in conference proceedings, journal articles, and anthologies, Barbauld studies lacks a full-length critical book, suggesting that our recovery of

³ I am thinking of work informed by French feminists like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray discussed later in this Introduction as well as my third chapter.
this writer remains tentative. McCarthy’s very thorough *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* is primarily biographical and oriented toward a more general audience. There is still an impulse to recover women writers en masse, by means of comparative studies of two or more women that may boost or further legitimize scholarly attention to both. Her inclusion in general literary anthologies has also expanded. Increasingly, her texts are functioning as sites for understanding not only the mechanics and politics of modern, feminist recovery scholarship, but also late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century perspectives on national identity in literature, the uses of revolution in education and cultural products, and ideas on the Romantic sublime. I must acknowledge that one book will hardly do the job that I suggest is needed in Barbauld literary scholarship.

If we abide by Jane Tompkins’s admissions, understanding that how we interpret Barbauld’s texts will always be a function of choices we make in how to see her, then what

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6 See Tompkins’s essay, “‘Indians’: Textualism, Morality, and the Problem of History” (1986) in which she exposes some of the primary (and often secret, or ignored) dilemmas of any scholar dealing with historical texts (i.e.
choices should we make? Barbauld was a Dissenter living in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, meaning that the ideology of choice was part of who she was and what she produced. By the ideology of choice, I am referring to her belief in the sovereignty of the individual, and her belief that government should exist to protect human freedom and would be improved by divorcing the Church. This is her explicit sentiment regarding the “ill-sorted union” of government and church in her *Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790).

Further, linking the ideology of choice with her identity as Dissenting woman writer complicates Barbauld’s identity usefully, making it difficult for Barbauld scholarship to identify or classify her as either sub-Wollstonecraftian feminist, non-feminist, or an exclusively Enlightenment writer, rather than a Romantic writer. Certainly, identification is a primary and natural action of recovery scholarship. But as John Guillory points out, a liberal pluralist critique of the canon can elevate the social identity of the author to the extent that the revaluation of texts cannot avoid rooting itself in “the author’s experience, conceived as the experience of a marginalized race, class, or gender identity. The author returns in the critique of the canon, not as the genius, but as the representative of a social identity” (10).  

Guillory’s warning applies to scholarship on Barbauld:

… it is precisely the fit between the author’s social identity and his or her experience that is seen to determine canonical or noncanonical status. The typical cultural forces will always inform the composition of a text, and historians or scholars seeking to interpret historical texts/events must always recognize how their own choices are affected by their own cultural moment.

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valorization of the noncanonical author’s experience as a marginalized social identity necessarily reasserts the transparency of the text to the experience it represents. If the practice of canonical revision cannot pause to indulge theoretical scruples about such assertions, its urgency betrays an apparently unavoidable discrepancy between theory and practice at the site of the institutional practices. Hence the critique of the canon remains quite vulnerable to certain elementary theoretical objections, but this fact is itself symptomatic of a political dilemma generated by the very logic of liberal pluralism. It suggests that the category of social identity is too important politically to yield any ground to theoretical arguments which might complicate the status of representation in literary texts, for the simple reason that the latter mode of representation is standing in for representation in the political sphere…. A politics presuming the ontological indifference of all minority social identities as defining oppressed or dominated groups, a politics in which differences are sublimated in the constitution of a minority identity (the identity politics which is increasingly being questioned within feminism itself) can recover the differences between the social identities only on the basis of common and therefore commensurable experiences of marginalization, which experiences in turn yield a political practice that consists largely of affirming the identities specific to those experiences. (10-12)

Guillory’s emphasis on the role of institutional politics in literary canonization should not be overlooked here, for it resonates not only with the current debate climate, but Barbauld’s own.
Barbauld was the educational product of the Warrington Academy, the leading Dissenting institution of the time, at which her father, Dr. John Aikin, as well as Joseph Priestley taught. Warrington operated as a site for revaluing cultural capital through a vernacular curriculum intended to elevate (Dissenting) bourgeoisie. Barbauld’s brother, Dr. John Aikin, MD, had literary ambitions of his own and collaborated with Barbauld on the six volume miscellany *Evenings at Home* (1792-96). As an adult, Barbauld spent most of her career in the work of cultural dissemination as pedagogue, literary anthology editor, and critic. She taught in her own Dissenting academy which she headed with her husband—the Palgrave School for boys. She produced a critical anthology of English novelists in fifty volumes which included many women writers, and a companion to one of Warrington’s primary texts, William Enfield’s *The Speaker* (1774), entitled *The Female Speaker* (1811). And so any discussion of canonization in Barbauld studies cannot be elided for two reasons: the obvious consideration of Barbauld’s work in modern scholarship, and her own preeminent role in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ systems of cultural capital.

Getting back then to my unwitting replication of Barbauld’s original mode of manuscript distribution: my answer is concerned not so much with the details of eighteenth-century gift economy, but with the relevance of Mary Poovey’s theory of mediation. Poovey clearly

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8 Guillory mentions, although briefly, the Warrington Academy in his chapter, “Mute Inglorious Miltons.” Also, for a more focused examination of Dissent and the Warrington Academy, see Daniel White’s article, “’The Joineriana’: Anna Barbauld, the Aikin Family Circle, and the Dissenting Public Sphere,” and his book, *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (2006).

9 See William Enfield, *The Speaker: or Miscellaneous Pieces, Selected from the Best English Writers, and disposed under proper heads, with a view to facilitate the improvement of youth in reading and speaking* (1774). This text is considered to be “the Adamic ancestor of the Norton anthologies” (Guillory 101).
extends the legacy of Tompkins’s and Guillory’s concern for scholarship’s conscientious stake in the interpretation of texts. However, Poovey’s concept of mediation describes the ways that absence can be said to figure as presence in a literary or visual text. Or, more precisely, thinking about mediation involves conceptualizing both the difference introduced by the scholar’s interpretation and the literary or painterly effects that make absence present in the artwork in some form other than the original. (249-50)

I wish to take up her suggestion that “literary and art historians should not simply shift our attention from message to media, but pause a moment over the relationship between the two—and the role that our place in this relationship adds to it” (254). Indeed, it is not my intention to represent the traditional gap between formalist and historicist ways of reading. Rather, such a gap or choice cannot abide in Barbauld scholarship, since she was also a conscious mediator of external, historical development and internal, aesthetic impulse. Barbauld’s texts exceed their normal communicative function when readers see them as a body of work that provokes aesthetic and philosophical elaboration, as meaning is mediated between genres and audiences.

Thus, my analysis involves the “fanciful” collation of three large organizing centers of knowledge that always come into play in Barbauld research, however usually in isolation, or incompletion, or as unarticulated assumptions. These knowledge centers are the following: 1) the culture of dissent, as both the historical narrative of eighteenth-century religious Dissent, and dissent as a political, social, gendered position and action; 2) the play between imagined or

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discursive communities, i.e. the significance of Barbauld’s real communities, often informed by Dissent—communities such as the Warrington Academy, the Palgrave School, Joseph Johnson’s publishing/artistic circle, and domestic/family relationships as well as nation-ness; and 3) the actual practice and theory of recovery scholarship.

All three of these centers of knowledge have in common an interest in understanding reality, whether it be an object of recovery scholarship, the nature of social reform or material change, or the nature of personal development and artistic production, in terms of a paradigmatic tension between process and event. Since Romantic studies is inflected with theories of historicization due to the prominence of the French Revolution in the period’s cultural production, it helps readers to take into account how contemporary and modern observers of the revolution may contribute to this paradigmatic tension. In *Democracy in America* (1835), Tocqueville proclaimed that the French Revolution was not a sudden breach in national history, but a fruition of its past, that: “Far from being a break, it can be understood only within and by historical continuity.”11 In her own instructions in “On the Uses of History,” Barbauld acknowledges that the course and termination of the French Revolution could not have been predicted by even “the deepest politician”; and yet, later in the same collection of texts, she observes that “in fact we can scarcely open a page of [French] history without being struck with similar and equal enormities” (132).

Later, twentieth-century historian François Furet indicated that historians fall into two camps when interpreting the French Revolution: those who see it as continuity, or process, and

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those who see it as a break, or event (or series of events).  

Another modern scholar, Ronald Paulson, sees the binary conflict of historical representation as either sequential event or undifferentiated process as contiguous with aesthetic categorization and development. The same tension that characterizes historians’ opposed understandings of the French Revolution characterizes Romantic writers’ understandings of artistic originality; personal, national, and artistic subjectivity; and reality as process or event.

In the case of Barbauld, any discussion of eighteenth-century religious Dissent—and more generally, cultural dissent—involves ideologies of reform as either the function of dramatic and possibly violent, revolution (change occurs through a sudden event), or the function of tempered, nurtured, gradual (law-abiding) progress. And because of Barbauld’s status as a Dissenter, she was naturally part of certain discourse communities, while promoting her own vision of ideal community and ideal community members. This study must navigate between understanding discourse communities as discrete, or clearly bound groups, and understanding such communities as continuities, responding to contingent experiences. The content of Barbauld’s texts, being largely preoccupied with the nature of human development and the nature of change, bears out this larger, paradigmatic tension in close reading.

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13 In his 1983 book, *Representations of Revolution* (1789-1820), Paulson argues for the correlative continuity of historical events and romantic aesthetic categories (such as the progression from the sublime to the beautiful, and from the picturesque to the grotesque). He describes two basic interpretations of the phenomenon of revolution. In the first, “the son kills, devours, and internalizes the father, becoming himself the authority figure, producing a rational sequence of events.” In the second, “the revolution is seen—in practice, in the very midst of it—as merely a regression to earlier stages of being” (1-10).

14 For a classic discussion of Romantic writers’ struggle with the influence of the past and artistic originality, see Leslie Brisman’s *Romantic Origins* (1978).
Barbauld’s historical location at the developmental origins of modern British subjectivity and nationalism informs her experience and vision of citizenship and community, as well as the genres in which she wrote. I cannot help but notice the aptness of Benedict Anderson’s diction in his *Imagined Communities* as he calls for “a reorientation of perspective in, as it were, a Copernican spirit” towards an understanding of modern nationality or “nation-ness” as cultural artifact (rather than class forces as Marxists would theorize), asserting that not only was the artifact of nationalism created at the end of the eighteenth century, but it became “‘modular,’ capable of being transplanted . . . to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations” (4). Anderson identifies the cultural roots of nationalism in the corresponding decline of religious modes of thought in Western Europe and rise of Enlightenment rationalist secularism (the latter, however, brought its own “modern darkness,” or lack of relief to the kind of suffering inherent in religious belief). If suffering, “which belief in part composed did not disappear,” then what was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning.

As we shall see, few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation. If nation-states are widely conceded to be “new” and “historical,” the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. (11-12)

Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children* contains examples of texts that actually mediate this change in Britain. These were widespread texts, daily recited, that mediated religious, even Dissenting, world views as well as nation-ness in their concern for the development of the child-citizen as a national, and even—exceeding Anderson’s theoretical framework—transnational or
post-national, subject. Barbauld was obviously in favor of reform in 1793 Britain, but she cautions against the hastiness of would-be reformers in *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* (1793):

> Stimulated by newly discovered truths, of which they [Reformers] feel the full force, they are not willing to wait for the gradual spread of knowledge, the subsiding of passion, and the undermining of prejudices…. It is their business to sow the seed, and let it lie patiently in the bosom of the ground, perhaps for ages—to prepare, not to bring about revolutions. (Barbauld 304)

Significantly, this is exactly what Barbauld is doing here: she had, in fact, planted the seeds of freedom in her *Hymns in Prose for Children* and harvests them vehemently in her career-jeopardizing, anti-war sermon, *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*, and ultimately in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, the last poem she would publish in her lifetime. Anderson might suggest it is the seeds of nationalism she is planting here in projecting an immemorial Englishness.

In the 1980’s and 90’s Barbauld’s work gained scholarly attention, mostly owing to a mission to identify and distinguish a Romantic feminist tradition. Roger Lonsdale has described Barbauld as having “little sense of a tradition of women’s writing,” charging that she “felt no common cause with other literary women” (Lonsdale 300). Marlon Ross qualifies her as a “sentimental poetess” (13), judging that “the limits of Barbauld’s feminism are also the limits of her poetics” (215). Anne K. Mellor and Richard E. Matlak anthologize Barbauld as a “conservative thinker” when compared to leading Romantic feminist thinkers such as Catherine Macaulay, Mary Hays, and Mary Wollstonecraft (31). Haley Bordo asserts that “What all of
these criticisms have in common is the degree to which they measure Barbauld’s merits against a radical-feminist framework, thereby eliding the possibility of other modes of feminism, such as one that is not so much about a united women’s resistance as it is about enabling difference and critiquing the biological essentialism at the root of sexism” (187). To date, William McCarthy has provided the strongest voice complicating these readings through more comprehensive historical comparisons and biographical information.¹⁵

The works of Barbauld have long resided in a kind of scholarly vacuuum, as Romanticists such as Leslie Brisman and, more recently, Alan Richardson discuss the artistic shift from Enlightenment cultural production to Romantic aesthetics in terms of Wordsworth and his (male) heirs, ignoring Barbauld’s publications that bear directly on this transition and the origins of Romanticism. Likewise, feminist scholars, seeking to bridge the gap left by twentieth-century formalists, have raided Barbauld’s poetry for anything connecting her to a female poetic tradition characterized by Wollstonecraftian ideals, and naturally settling into a slightly disappointed tone after looking for something that couldn’t possibly be there.

Barbauld’s “stranger” found deep within the “self-collected” (female) soul, or the experience of a stranger within a would-be familiar space, is a signature image appearing in multiple poems such as “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” and “Washing-Day.” Barbauld’s stranger-familiar dynamic gains meaning for us today in part from the theoretical attributes of féminité or l’écriture féminine of the 1970’s French feminists. While writers like Cixous and

Irigaray have since drawn fire from other feminists critical of the abstracted and isolating effect of praising women’s difference and writing the female body, threads of their theories are nonetheless apparent in Barbauld’s striking anticipations or anticipatory poetics of what we might consider the feminine Romantic sublime, and even her ambivalent exploration of a feminine Romantic sublime. Just as I am concerned with showing the ways in which Barbauld was a Romanticist, not just an Enlightenment writer, I am also concerned with uncovering her poetics, which prefigure the l’écriture féminine sought by twentieth-century feminists.

In fact, Barbauld’s own “body” of writing, generically diffuse as it is, involving a significantly private, as in unpublished as well as personal, poetics alongside published, highly rhetorical political and educational prose and hymns, offers a qualifying crux to the arguments critical of l’écriture féminine. That is, l’écriture féminine is a kind of feminism most at home in, and most aptly suited to the often abstract, often personal, symbolic genre of poetry.\(^\text{16}\) (I apply the term *genre* with care, as l’écriture féminine is profoundly anti-generic.) Barbauld’s poetry is, in fact, conscientiously generic, abiding by prominent eighteenth-century classificatory modes, full of classical allusions, tropes, and turns in order at times to critique these things. And yet how we have chosen and chose to read her strikes at the heart of and pries open the chiefly academic genre of Romanticism.

Barbauld’s point of entry into what developed through the nineteenth century as the canon of Romantic poetry was a conventional eighteenth-century ode, “On Life,” that contains

\(^{16}\) Cixous was conscious of this optimum generic location for l’écriture féminine, writing: “But only the poets—not the novelists, allies of representationalism. Because poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious and because the unconscious, that other limitless country, is the place where the repressed manage to survive.” See Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa.”
few if any hooks for any kind of fémininité or other feminist criticism.\textsuperscript{17} Her movement into anthologies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has depended largely on the discovery of possible feminist applications in other works. The body of Barbauld criticism that has developed largely since the 1990’s has invested much in securing a grip on her feminism, searching for markers in her writing that identify her as a conscientious women’s writer, and critically constructing a figure in which to gauge eighteenth-century feminism with the tools of today.

While critical hooks are often necessary for those discovering and recovering forgotten material, I wonder if scholars engaged in such efforts have been somewhat buoyed by precedent.\textsuperscript{18} Specifically, I am concerned with the tendency for feminist criticism to wedge itself into a reflexive debate over whether Barbauld is one of three things: a conservative, a moderate feminist, or a closet radical feminist.\textsuperscript{19} The question exists because the answer to it bears directly on a feminist assessment of her canonicity. This canonical implication is clear when she is compared with other women writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, in attempts to shape the field of Romanticism into exegetical divisions: first- and second-generation male romantic writers, and the women writers who critiqued them.\textsuperscript{20} If Barbauld’s poetry has been criticized for “the

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\textsuperscript{17} See McCarthy, “A ‘High-Minded Christian Lady’: The Posthumous Reception of Anna Letitia Barbauld.”
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\textsuperscript{18} The work of scholars like Anne Mellor and Marlon Ross has been invaluable, but their arguments which focused on gaining more momentum for feminist debates in Romanticism set up patterns of evaluation that could be further complicated in today’s critical landscape. See Mellor, “A Criticism of Their Own: Romantic Women Literary Critics” (1995), and Ross, \textit{The Contours of Masculine Desire} (1989).
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\textsuperscript{19} Critical exemplars of this debate who have categorized Barbauld as a conservative include Marilyn Williamson who declares “Barbauld was no feminist” (90) in “Who’s Afraid of Mrs. Barbauld?” also Mary Mahl and Helene Koon in their anthology \textit{The Female Spectator}. Those categorizing Barbauld as a limited or moderate feminist include Mellor and Ross. McCarthy identifies Barbauld as a closet radical feminist.
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limits of [her] feminism,” it has likely been the result of searching for Wollstonecraftian vehemence in verse.\textsuperscript{21} And yet, Barbauld’s early poems predate the \textit{Vindication} by twenty years. As McCarthy rightly insists, “the discourses among which we must situate them [Barbauld’s poems] do not include Wollstonecraft” (131).\textsuperscript{22} And this, of course, is relevant as long as what we’re doing is limited to new historicist approaches to texts.

There has been some scholarly debate over Barbauld’s attitude about a “separate” women’s writing. Her feelings on this issue were complicated and ambiguous, just as her resistance to taking on the projects of heading a college for women and participating in a ladies’ literary journal was more than just a function of anti-feminist sentiment. McCarthy has convincingly shown that Barbauld’s refusal of the women’s college project came from her desire for her husband to step up his own career and income. And Bordo has spoken to her reservations about the ladies’ journals. Thus on the one hand, Barbauld’s resistance to a community of women writers writing for women would seem to absent her from analysis of l’écriture féminine. On the other hand, her poetry reveals an intense interest in Woman as she repeatedly invokes themes and imagery of desire, pleasure, and female sensuality.\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{21} Critic Marlon Ross writes of Barbauld that “a woman who cannot grant women absolute equal rights with men also cannot grant them the right to write freely from the dictates of their own desire” and the poems suffer from “the limits of Barbauld’s feminism” in \textit{The Contours of Masculine Desire}. For further discussion on how contemporary and modern critics and readers have appraised Barbauld’s feminism see McCarthy “‘We Hoped the Woman Was Going to Appear’.”

\textsuperscript{22} McCarthy, “‘We Hoped the Woman Was Going to Appear’”
Either feminists have swung a pendulum including Barbauld’s poems and the *Vindication* to a point devoid of historical as well as generic calibration, or new historicists have offered some useful commentary on what Barbauld’s eighteenth century idea of “woman” may have been, but largely at the expense of feminist criticism. For instance, McCarthy calls her “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” an appropriation of “the Miltonic sublime for a feminist ‘sally of the soul’” (130). This gloss exemplifies what has become a kind of classic conflict in feminist criticism’s negotiation of the academy. Exploring Barbauld’s signature techniques of rhetorical and conceptual contraction and bubble imagery is a key to understanding her exploration and representation of ambiguity and ambivalence regarding material-female form, poetic form, and artistic-spiritual form.

“A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” published in Barbauld’s *Poems* (1773), has lately served (or suffered) as a common site for attempts at feminist *trisection*: good feminist, bad feminist, not really a feminist at all. This poem is perhaps the most often discussed of her works, and the criticism reflects the use of basic critical hooks to achieve three types of statements: the poem progressively describes/prescribes a gynotopia; rather than a gynotopia, it presents a fanciful and depressing escape from a patriarchal universe into a chaotic void; it does neither of these, and Barbauld is purely a function of classical, masculinist discourse.24 I am an advocate

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23 Regarding Barbauld’s writing from the body and pleasure, McCarthy’s “We Hoped the Woman was going to Appear,” provides a thorough discussion of Barbauld’s resistant attitude toward her parents’ Puritanism and desire for pleasure revealed in her early poetry.

24 The critics that come to these conclusions (in the order I named them) are: McCarthy (however, I should point out that he offers up the idea of a gynotopia, but then modifies his position, favoring historicist explanations of Barbauld’s verse, rather than positing in the end any truly radical feminism) in his essay, “‘We Hoped the Woman Was Going to Appear’,“ Julie Ellison, “The Politics of Fancy in the Age of Sensibility,” and Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire*. 
of what Annette Kolodny has called “playful pluralism” (184), but scholars must consider how three such seemingly exclusive interpretations can be achieved bearing in mind Guillory’s warning against pluralism’s categorizing impulse, along with why they have been (and so quickly, in the relatively short chronology of serious Barbauld scholarship). In short, I believe this pattern has persisted because Barbauld scholarship has not fully taken the lead of Barbauld’s own texts. I realize that in saying this, I risk drawing criticism from those like Jerome McGann, who in *Romantic Ideology* (1983) argued that Romantic critics have been guilty of adopting the “self-representations” of Romantic writers and assimilating these into an ideology of Romanticism; in other words, the traditional vice of, in essence, becoming too romantically involved with their subjects. However, I wish to point out that in the case of Barbauld, who was so much more than an aesthete, scholarship should strive for a mediating approach not bound by any one theoretical framework, and heavily conscious of a pluralistic critical exchange that elucidates while representing her own authorial, pedagogical, editorial, and personal organicism.

I have organized the chapters that follow to reflect Barbauld’s own sense of generic growth or organicism, rather than to emphasize the chronology of publication, as this is less important than a sense of development sustained by choices in genre and style. This first chapter will go on to explore the culture of dissent in which Barbauld operated. It discusses the relevant historical context of religious Dissent in England and Barbauld’s own position within the Dissenting community in order to demonstrate the internal, artistic choices that make up her signature aesthetics of dissent. For much of this, I am indebted to the scholarship of Daniel White, as he examines in more detail than I do here the specific historical and ideological relationships between Presbyterian philosophy, the positions of the Aikin family in the context of
the environment at Warrington Academy, and the dissenting tenor of Joseph Johnson’s subsequent publishing community after Johnson and others met and first collaborated at Warrington. I will shift away from White’s more historicist emphasis on identifying and defining what brand of Dissenter Barbauld was, and focus the bulk of my analysis on two texts demonstrate the internal, artistic choices that make up Barbauld’s signature aesthetics of dissent.

Barbauld’s *Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790) and *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry Into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1792) are exemplary conflations of what appears to be the narrow, particular discourse of the propriety of private and public religious practice and the national, legislative discourse over the rights of citizens. By joining, or mediating, congregational interests and national interests through her use of prayer as “petition” in her *Remarks*, Barbauld deftly conflates the identities of devout Christian and democratic citizen. I will show in this chapter the ways in which *Address* lays the groundwork for the later *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812). The first two texts provide effective bookends to this project, as the *Address* prophesies of “the genius of Philosophy” and “the spirit of Enquiry” that would usher inevitable reform in England. By *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, this genius or spirit regrettably appears to have forsaken the shores of England in favor of the liberated Americas.

The second chapter builds on Benedict Anderson’s philosophical framework for community in his *Imagined Communities*, wherein a modern sense of nationality, or nationalism, arguably originated towards the end of the eighteenth century, and is marked by the fall of Latin or pluralization of sacred languages. Imagined communities centered around religious authority are broken down by literacy in the vernacular and replaced by the powers of print capitalism via
new, mass, secular ceremonies like the daily newspaper (the modern substitute for morning prayers). Barbauld’s widely popular *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781) which were reprinted in England for over 120 years, provide astonishing evidence of her position at the origins of British nationalism. Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose* were influenced by Dissent, composed as uniquely optimistic celebrations of a God of love, evoked through images of the natural world. Barbauld’s intent was to combine the spirit of philosophy with the spirit of devotion. The *Hymns* composed for daily recital became a transition ritual between the Church-scripted daily prayer and the products of secular print culture to follow.

In *Sins of Government* the primary ideas and strategies of *Hymns* rhetorically “grow up” as *Sins of Government* functions as a rhetorical model of reform through its inheritance and development of youth community values established in *Hymns*. Barbauld’s call for a “national religion” in *Sins of Government*, is not a religiously dogmatic injunction, but the desire for a framework of national morality. The primary doctrine for this “national religion” is documented and taught in her *Hymns*. Both texts mediate between religious dogma and national community.

This chapter also observes Barbauld’s culture of benevolence, bred in her two children’s books, *Lessons for Children* (designed for children ages two to three) and *Hymns in Prose for Children* (designed for children ages four to five). As an admirer of Francis Hutcheson’s works, Barbauld ostensibly modeled these projects on his outline of “Our Duties toward Mankind” in his *Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (1747). Barbauld, like Hutcheson, identifies an epicenter of human relationships in the nuclear family, whose “benevolent affections” (Hutcheson) spread outward in ever-widening circles of acquaintance into the global community. *Lessons* begins with a mother and her two-year-old son on her lap as she inducts him into the
world of things and symbols, leading the child through ever-widening informational, ethical, and geographical horizons. In *Hymns*, the mediator between child and world is not specified, but as McCarthy notes: “the child who had just finished *Lessons* would probably assume the continuity of Mother into *Hymns*. Thus the two books themselves move outward, staging the family (in which, textually, Mother presides) as the place from which the world, and even the universe, is conceptually grasped” (19). Whether Hutcheson provides explanatory precedent, or the theories of cognitive anthropologists pointing to the science of “schema theory” or the human urge to categorize “natural kinds” and “artifacts” (a thread developed by Lisa Zunshine), what this chapter hinges on is the organizing force of progression or reality as continuity of experience, rather than a succession of isolated events, or sublime *moments*. Indeed, as I will show through the succession of chapters, Barbauld is laying the groundwork for slow-paced, and nonetheless practical and effective revolution.

As the first and second chapters reveal Barbauld’s aesthetics of dissent by exploring her relationship with the historical and artistic culture of Dissent, the third chapter focuses on Barbauld’s other signature aesthetics as developed in her poetry. These include her aesthetics of bubble spaces and the technique of rhetorical and symbolic contraction. In “To a Little Invisible Being,” the “infant bud of being” that the poet-speaker urges “haste to blow” (meaning bloom) from the womb into a little visible being resides in a critically delicate bubble space. Within the physical pregnant space, a primarily sexed (and gendered) woman’s experience, the ode identifies a subject whose key moment of existence is pre Gender, pre-sexed, pre-lingual—conceived, and yet unspoken. This space is not unlike the Romantic poet’s fleeting moment of
creative imagination between encounter and response, thought and utterance (a condition repeatedly treated by poets such as Wordsworth and Shelley, following Barbauld).

This chapter closely examines the woman in Barbauld’s poetry, and specifically, at those bubble-like moments (a common image of hers in poems such as “Washing Day” (1797)) of concentration in her texts which elucidate the woman, but also happen to mirror the delicate thought-space between inarticulate, infinite perception, and articulated, visible, embodiment. “Washing Day” is a critical example of how Barbauld uses bubble imagery to represent the creative imagination and employ her signature technique of contracting gradations or stages of things; she contracts, and therefore aesthetically mediates the experience of children and men. In “The Caterpillar,” the speaker holds a single caterpillar in her hand and realizes that as an individual she cannot kill it (like all the others), and likens this revelation to the condition of war. The poem’s contracted perspective suggests that if the view and feeling of an army is simply reduced to an individual, suffering member, war becomes impossible. This poem mediates the content and rhetoric of her *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* in which she renders the mandated national fast on behalf of the British military campaign against France morally ridiculous by contracting the morals of a nation and the morals of the individual: “there are men who appear not insensible to the rules of morality as they respect individuals, and who unaccountably disclaim them with respect to nations” (301). Barbauld’s bubble imagery and the technique of contraction reorder the space and time for conventionally and developmentally separate mediums: the public realm of national identification and reform, and the (seemingly) juvenile discourse of caterpillars and “Baby Houses.”
The fourth chapter begins with her poem, “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” (1773), which provides a segue from chapter three to chapter four in its representation of: revolution, the female soul, the sublime and poetic imagination, human nature (as ‘embryo Gods’), and the gynotopic, even post-national experience in “trackless deeps of space.” The final chapter takes up the condition of the post-national described in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* and Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*, considering Barbauld’s ultimate, artistic and ideological, trajectory towards a post-national sublime. In the poem, “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” the poet-speaker, in a quiet, midnight moment of introspection, traces Contemplation’s astronomical journey beyond the terrestrial and through the cosmos (represented as a kind of gynotopia). She goes further, launching past the known universe,

To the dread confines of eternal night,
To solitudes of vast unpeopled space,
The desarts of creation, wide and wild;
Where embryo systems and unkindled suns
Sleep in the womb of chaos. (93-97)

But eventually she withdraws and returns, as “my soul unus’d to stretch her powers / In flight so daring, drops her weary wing…” and contentedly and gratefully awaits “th’appointed time And ripen for the skies” (112-13).

While the third chapter mainly considers the details of Barbauld’s poetic aesthetics, the final chapter goes on to discuss Barbauld’s addresses to the nation, and the possible post-nation state, in what seem to be their generic maturity. That is, her image of a seed taking root and growing up to an oak tree from her *Hymns in Prose for Children*, that develops in prose in her
sermon on national character and proper revolution, *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation*, matures in her epic poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, the primary subject of chapter four. Similarly, the concepts and precise discourse used in her earlier *Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* reappear in this poem. In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, England will fall into ruin because the best of English culture has left and found root in the more fertile soil of the U.S. In time, the once postcolonial other (American) will return in pilgrimage to pay homage to the graves and ruins of England.

Since *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* has come to represent the end of Barbauld’s public writing career, it is interesting to read alongside possible inheritance texts, such as Shelley’s novel *The Last Man*. By contrast, in *The Last Man*, colonization has allowed the worst of English culture to be exported and grow in foreign circumstances; in time, these things close back in on the center of the empire (in the form of the plague) and cannot be contained or quarantined. The ultimate effect is a sort of reverse colonization where the empire is turned in upon itself, collapsing and actually resulting in vagrancy—the loss of home. All nations are dissolved and Shelley’s book laments the loss of the family as the primary social unit; its content and structure trace in reverse the widening circles of civilization and connectivity depicted in Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children*. As in the beginning of Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, nature is mockingly fertile, lush, and beautiful in the face of this devastation and the decline of humankind. The prospect of mediation returns the discussion to issues of canonicity in this chapter, as *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* is among a select few texts that enjoy consistent anthologizing (out of the vast number that total her career) by a still largely unknown writer, and
*The Last Man* remains a lesser known work by one of the most highly popular and anthologized writers of Romanticism.

An epilogue suggests that conceiving of Barbauld’s aesthetics as post-national also involves examination of her abolitionist work, including her 1791 “Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade.” Her aesthetics of the post-national, as well as her political involvement in abolitionism, also derive from work in her *Hymns in Prose for Children*. The study concludes with a discussion of Barbauld’s poem “On the Death of Mrs. Martineau” (1820) which commemorates the legacy of the good matriarch as perhaps more powerful than any other figure in civilization. Thus, the final chapter mediates the content of the beginning chapters, as the figure of mother that mediated (as narrator) the child’s experience and development in *Hymns in Prose for Children* and *Lessons for Children* in order to foster the values of the Romantic national and global citizen, returns as the subject of Romantic ode and preeminent medium of civilization’s continuity and progress.
Chapter One:

Barbauld’s Culture and Aesthetics of Dissent

But who their mingled feelings shall pursue

When London’s faded glories rise to view?

The mighty city, which by every road,

In floods of people poured itself abroad;

Ungirt by walls, irregularly great,

No jealous drawbridge, and no closing gate;

Whose merchants (such the state which commerce brings)

Sent forth their mandates to dependent kings;

Streets, where the turban’d Moslem, bearded Jew,

And woolly Afric, met the brown Hindu;

Where through each vein spontaneous plenty flowed,

Where Wealth enjoyed, and Charity bestowed.

(Eighteen Hundred and Eleven 157-68)

In these lines from her poem Eighteen Hundred and Eleven (1812), Barbauld celebrates the best of London’s virtues. In the poem, the warning voice of the patriot sadly imagines the future fall of England’s empire and what might remain of its legacy to be remembered and celebrated by pilgrims from the freshly dedicated republics in the Americas. But Barbauld’s patriotism, while earnest and greatly risking her public reputation, is dangerously subversive. In
these lines, the glory of London is the ungirt and irregular anti-state. England’s power is not only transnational, but perhaps postnational, as trade merchants dictate to kings. She likely imagined many of these merchants as fellow religious Dissenters, as these groups were locked out of traditionally pedigreed vocations in eighteenth-century England. The marginalized subjects of empire such as the Moslem, Jew, Afric, and Hindu, are rendered citizens of trade more than nation. The public streets of London, rather than its institutions, are the life-blood of England.

When Barbauld published *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* in the beginning of 1812, her brother John Aikin, writing to James Montgomery on 29 February 1812, predicted that “its view of present & vaticination of future evils will not please those patriots who think their country just in all her projects.” Indeed, Barbauld took great risk with her public reputation in this poem, as it contained multiple offenses toward the traditional British understanding of patriotism. Not only would the idea of declining empire have been difficult for political conservatives to accept, but also the apparent paradoxical glorification of the anti-citizen, in the nation of which the marginalized and disenfranchised are the true patriot-citizens.

An anonymous critic, later identified as John Wilson Croker, was doubly horrified by Barbauld’s claims as well as gender. Croker chastised her weakness toward “an irresistible impulse of public duty,” and mocked that “a confident sense of commanding talents—have induced her to dash down her shagreen spectacles and her knitting needles, and to sally forth . . . in the magnanimous resolution of saving a sinking state” (*Quarterly Review* 1812).²⁵ For

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²⁵ See *The Quarterly Review* 7 (1812): 309. William Keach explains that the review’s authorship was in question because the article was long thought to have been written by Southey. Keach points to further evidence of Croker’s authorship in Hill Shine and Helen Chadwick Shine, *The Quarterly Review Under Gifford: Identification of Contributors, 1809-1824* (1949), and Geoffrey Carnall, *Robert Southey and His Age: The Development of a Conservative Mind* (1960). See Keach, “A Regency Prophecy” (569).
conservative critics who knew Barbauld’s work, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* would have appeared to be an uncharacteristic, impulsive poem that belied her respectable work as a children’s educator and author. How then, did *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* come about? How did Barbauld, as a domestic figure, pedagogue, and artist, reach such an extreme position in her career?

The variety of Barbauld’s published, unpublished, and anonymously published texts may have obscured the observable development of her reformist interests for present-day readers. Again, just as it would not be entirely accurate for British literature anthologies to proclaim an artistic gap between the works of Johnson and eighteenth-century classicism, and the Romantic innovations of *Lyrical Ballads*, it would not be accurate to see a surprising or irreconcilable gap between *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* and Barbauld’s previous work. A close reading of a variety of her texts bears witness to significant cross-pollination and aesthetic intersection in the developmental relationship between her own texts as well as those of others. For instance, the excerpt below from *Hymns* is anticipated by Blake’s “Little Black Boy.” What her contemporary reviewers failed to acknowledge was that Barbauld had long since sowed the seeds of revolution in works such as *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781), from which the children of England (and America) recited daily verses such as the following:

> Negro woman, who sittest pining in captivity, and weepest over thy sick child; though no one seeth thee, God seeth thee; though no one pitieth thee, God pitieth thee: raise thy voice, forlorn and abandoned one; call upon him from amidst thy bonds, for assuredly he will hear thee.
Monarch, that rulest over an hundred states; whose frown is terrible as death, and whose armies cover the land, boast not thyself as though there were none above thee:—God is above thee; his powerful arm is always over thee; and if thou doest ill, assuredly he will punish thee. (Hymn VIII 249)

We can find another clue to Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’s seeming extremism in her developmental aesthetics of Hymns and the image of an acorn, wherein an organism’s entire, long-term potential is contained from the beginning: “Such an acorn, whose cup can only contain a drop or two of dew, contained the whole oak. All its massy trunk, all its knotted branches, all its multitude of leaves were in that acorn; it grew, it spread, it unfolded itself by degrees, it received nourishment from the rain, and the dews, and the well adapted soil, but it was all there” (Hymn X 252). Barbauld’s sense of organicism in Hymns provides a working framework for understanding a career that might otherwise appear as inconsistent iterations of eighteenth-century classicism, Romantic innovation, juvenile-oriented educational texts and pedagogy, political treatise, and cultural editor-anthologizer.

If Hymns in Prose for Children represent the juvenile origins of Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’s post-national epic, then her anonymously published Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts (1790) serves as the explicit bedrock for her political writing. This chapter will go on to show how the Address was Barbauld’s most significant prose precursor to Eighteen Hundred and Eleven.

Barbauld’s Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts and Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry Into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship (1792) are prototypical conflations of what appears to be 1) the narrow discourse
of the appropriateness of private and public religious practice, and 2) the national, legislative argument over the rights of citizens. By mediating congregational interests and national interests in *Remarks*, Barbauld rhetorically conflates the identities of the devout Christian and the democratic citizen. This conflation occurs through prayer, the central act of private and public worship, and also the manifestation of the natural human instinct to petition to God. She frames prayer-worship as an instinctively public act. Not only is prayer an instinctual act, but prayer as *petition* is the expected and necessary means for bridging the inevitable distance between God and humanity. Barbauld’s introduction of the term “petition” to a discourse on public worship, already inflected with the values of community and nation, revealingly contrasts with the controversial value of legal petition in the political reality of England at that time.²⁶

In keeping with her acorn imagery, Barbauld as the individual and as the public voice was nourished by the roots of Dissent in England. No family of the period was more closely identified with Dissent than the Aikins. In order to understand how Barbauld came by her position(s), I will briefly consider her family’s history, development, and position within this culture.

**On the Aikin Family and the History of Dissent**

²⁶ For more on Parliamentary restrictions on petitions and linguistic hegemony see Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language*. Smith observes that Parliament, at this time, refused petitions written in non-Oxbridge English. Social conflict dwelt then on the level of the linguistic, as William Cobbett, for instance, “considered grammar, in short, as an integral part of the class structure of England, and the act of learning grammar by one of his readers as an act of class warfare” (1).

I would add that Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley, each engaged with the eighteenth-century notion that the quality of one’s language revealed the quality of the mind. Barbauld, along with any woman writer of the period, was automatically bound to address linguistic hegemony; for her, the artistic impulse could not be separated from the political action of publication.
Contrary to what the term Dissenter implies and was assuredly meant to imply by authorities who imposed its legal status, Dissenters in the eighteenth century often identified themselves by forming close communities. The Corporation Act (1661) and the Test Act (1673) classified Dissenters as non-members of the Church of England who must thereby be excluded from elective office in towns (corporations) and appointive offices in places such as the church and universities. Violating these Acts could bring harsh punishments, as Henry Beaufoy pointed out in his speech before the House of Commons, attempting to repeal the acts in 1787. For instance, a person attempting to hold a civil office or commission in violation of the Test Act (refusing to take the Sacrament or swear the Oaths of the Church, and subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles) could incur not only “a large pecuniary penalty, but is disabled from thenceforth, for ever, from bringing any action in course of law, from prosecuting any suit in any court of equity, from being guardian of any child, or executor or administrator of any person, as well as from receiving any legacy” (488). The Acts remained in force until 1828 (and until 1868 at Oxford and Cambridge, surviving repeal motions in Parliament in 1787, 1789, and 1790.

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27 McCarthy and Kraft include a portion of Henry Beaufoy’s speech in their Appendix B so I use their pagination. The source is The Substance of the Speech delivered by Henry Beaufoy, Esq. in the House of Commons, Upon the 28th of March, 1787, on his Motion for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts (1787).


In 1758, Barbauld’s father, Dr. John Aikin, accepted the post of Tutor in Classics at the Warrington Academy, known as the leading college for Dissenters. Aikin’s position brought Anna along with her brother John, who would become a physician and popular writer in his own right, and with whom Barbauld collaborated on several prose pieces for children, into close contact with Joseph Priestley, Gilbert Wakefield, and William Enfield, who were among the other tutors at the Academy. The establishment of William Eyres’s printing press at Warrington coincided with the foundation of Warrington Academy. Eyres’s press published the works of many of the students, tutors, and associates of the Academy, often in conjunction with Joseph Johnson’s London press. And, as Daniel White observes, “By printing and publishing nationally recognized works by John Aikin, Anna Barbauld, Joseph Priestley, William Enfield, Thomas Pennant, William Roscoe, and the prison reformer John Howard, Eyres and Johnson provided a coherent identity for the network of authors associated with Warrington” (512). White makes this point not only to demonstrate the sense of community among Dissenters associated with Warrington Academy, but to assert that many of the publications that resulted from this community were collaborative by design.

White offers a definition of what he considers the Aikins’ collaborative mode as: “an integral connection between the ‘intimate sphere’ of the family, the austere virtues of religious nonconformity, and the progressive market ethos of middle-class eighteenth-century life, especially in the commercial centers of northern England” (512). Given this complexity, White

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29 Dr. Aikin held the position of tutor in Classics at Warrington Academy from 1758-61, then became tutor in Divinity from 1761-80. Warrington is located between Manchester and Liverpool, along the Mersey River.
carefully qualifies his definition of the Dissenting public sphere as not necessarily a “counterpublic”:

Rather than constituting a counterpublic, however, the Dissenting public sphere represents a sub-category of the classical public sphere, a fragment that exerted critical pressure from within. At the same time as middle-class Dissenters such as the Aikins and their affiliates were largely excluded by the Corporation and Test Acts from the universities and from ecclesiastical, military, and political avenues of advancement within the English establishment, they nonetheless participated at every level in the centers of economic and cultural public life. Their sphere of intervention was necessarily an intermediate space between the private realm and the state, and the legal status of nonconformity thus gave added impetus to their engagement with public opinion. (513)

White observes that McCarthy’s identification of the Aikin family with Presbyterianism is not accurate, instead identifying them as being closer to Arian Dissent than to the disagreements between Calvinism and the Church of England.30

White cautions against a feminist/antifeminist identification debate, and I agree. By formulating Barbauld criticism in not just a potentially binary mode, but a mode that derives value from feminist classification, Barbauld studies risks a loss of dimensionality. McCarthy defends Barbauld’s imaginative feminism in terms of the pre-Wollstonecraft limits of the

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30 White asserts: “Integral to the process by which the Aikins sought to temper the bourgeois sphere of civil society with the human values of the family was their sociotheological assertion of Arian Dissent as a middle way between Calvinism and the Church of England” (“The ‘Joineriana’: Anna Barbald, the Aikin Family Circle, and the Dissenting Public Sphere” 513-14).
eighteenth century, while Ross critiques her less-than-Wollstonecraftian vehemence, and students of Romanticism risk being divested of interest in her texts for all the wrong reasons. I owe much to these scholars’ pioneering work and would not be writing this project were it not for their archival and critical efforts to bring Barbauld to public attention. These critics created an initial and fruitful debate regarding the feminist classification of a woman writer and what might be the contingent value of her texts. This debate continues to become even more fruitfully complicated.

Indeed, even as White cautions against this debate, he doesn’t quite escape the urge to identify Barbauld the writer, and place her along a kind of feminist continuum. Thus:

Rather than countering the masculinist values of Dissent with a subversive and coded aesthetic of desire, Barbauld advocated Dissenting values on her own moderate grounds: her poetry and prose represent a determined and sustained attempt to “domesticate” the oppositional and rigorous identities of rational Dissent, to color its austere religious and civil values with familial and domestic hues that would endear virtue, piety, and commerce to the affections of her readers. (515)

What interests me particularly, here, is the observation of the Aikin/Barbauld position as intermediary or in the middle of versions of Dissenting doctrine and that of the Church of England. Further, depicting Dissenters’ “sphere of intervention” as essentially a middle, or mediating, space between the private and public realms lends a sublime aspect to the historical condition of Dissenter. That is, the Dissenting “intermediate space” resembles the Romantic aesthetic condition of the sublime as an intermediate dynamic between the artist’s internal,
immaterial, inspiration and external, visible, or object. Barbauld’s family history bred a state of mind that may have more naturally inclined her toward aesthetics of the sublime space as mediation and transition.

The image of the middle space or middle state was a preoccupying condition for Romantic writers following Barbauld, such as Blake and Shelley, and characterizes a prominent metaphor in her poetry: the bubble space in, for instance, “Washing Day.” Similarly, “The Mouses’s Petition” mediates the condition of mice and men in a poetic iteration of An Address. While I make no attempts to duplicate White’s thorough historical work and locate Barbauld within a large and complex Dissenting culture, the following texts help us understand how she used the term Dissenter, what it meant for her practically and aesthetically.

An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts

Barbauld is the only woman known to have entered into the public debate over the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. When Parliament rejected the motion to repeal the Acts in 1790, the third rejection in four years, Barbauld published her An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts in a newspaper that same month, signing only “A Dissenter.” Much like Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, the Address is written in a prophetic tone that warns of the inevitability of change, while lamenting conservatives’ refusal to acknowledge it. In fact, several strategies that appear elsewhere in Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation (1793) and “The Mouse’s Petition” (1773), reverberate in the Address, such as Barbauld’s emphasis on rhetorical precision, “to call things by their proper names” (Address 267), and the conflation of Enlightenment social and biological discourse. Burke’s arguments against the repeal of the Acts relied on images of biological difference and classification. In turn,
Barbauld’s *Address* drew on greater forces in the natural world such as the sea tide to rhetorically overwhelm resistance to the imagined biological contagion of reform.

By the time Barbauld wrote *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, its prophetic warning that England’s warmongering risked losing the nation’s distinction as host to the Genius of Civilization was read by critics with alarm and anger. The poem is set in the future, imagining that the glory of England has already passed. For this setting Barbauld was accused of unpatriotic pessimism. In the *Address* we witness her issuing the same warning twenty-two years earlier, making it appear as though *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* was later written as a reluctant fulfillment of prophecy. She exhorts readers of the *Address*:

> Can ye not discern the signs of the times? The minds of men are in movement from the Borysthenes to the Atlantic. Agitated with new and strong emotions, they swell and heave beneath oppression, as the seas. . . . The genius of Philosophy is walking abroad, and with the touch of Ithuriel’s spear is trying the establishments of the earth. . . . Obscure murmurs gather, and swell into a tempest; the spirit of Enquiry, like a severe and searching wind, penetrates every part of the great body politic. . . . Cause to succeed to the mad ambition of conquest the pacific industry of commerce, and the simple, useful toils of agriculture. While your corn springs up under the shade of your Olives, may bread and peace be the portion of the Husbandman. . . . Let the wandering pilgrims of every tribe and complexion, who in other lands find only an asylum, find with you a country. . . . (277-80)
The *Address* warns against a lack of harmony between nature and man’s imperialism, imagines a spirit or genius of civilization that is not bound by national fidelity, and embraces ethnic diversity as a source for greater commerce and equality. All these things are examined and reassessed in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*.

In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, Barbauld calls attention to Britain’s destructive path and neglect of nature using the same imagery from the *Address*. Amid the war with France, nature is “bounteous in vain . . . The hills with olives clothes, with corn the vale . . . The tramp of marching hosts disturbs the plough, / The sword, not sickle, reaps the harvest now” (11, 14, 17-18). The poem imagines a future, the inevitable outcome of Britain’s political, economic, religious, artistic, and social trajectory, in which “thy Midas dream is o’er; / The golden tide of Commerce leaves thy shore” (61-62). And, in a poet-prophet tone reminiscent of the *Address*, Barbauld observes: “There walks a Spirit o’er the peopled earth, / Secret his progress is, unknown his birth; / Moody and viewless as the changing wind, / . . . The Genius now forsakes the favoured shore, / And hates, capricious, what he loved before; / . . . to other climes the Genius soars, / He turns from Europe’s desolated shores” (215-17, 241-42, 321-22) to fan “the noble strife” (331) in the Americas.\(^{31}\) Rather than fulfilling the *Address*’s inclusionist charge to gather diverse “wandering pilgrims” into a nation of unbounded commerce and equality, Britain’s exclusionist policies have actually exiled some of its own native citizens by *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*: “on London Art bestows / Her summer ices and her winter rose; . . . And Plenty at her feet pours forth her horn; / While even the exiles her just laws disclaim, / People a

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\(^{31}\) These passages are also conducive to comparison with Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” (1820).
continent, and build a name” (305-6, 308-9). Notably, by then Joseph Priestley had been socially exiled to the United States.\(^{32}\)

Much like Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind,” the great wind that sweeps the body politic and propels the spirit of civilization in both Barbauld texts is akin to the Address’s other image of reform’s inevitability: the sea current. In her introduction, Barbauld sarcastically rebukes conservatives for their flattering fear of Dissenters gaining political ground should they be granted representation in Parliament:

> We thank you for the compliment paid the Dissenters, when you suppose that the moment they are eligible to places of power and profit, all such places will at once be filled with them. . . . Is then the Test Act, your boasted bulwark, of equal necessity with the dykes in Holland; and do we wait, like an impetuous sea, to rush in and overwhelm the land? (263)

Barbauld’s tide conceit, promoting reform as a natural and inevitable phenomenon that is ultimately beyond the control of individual men, exists in contradistinction to Burke’s conservative argument grounded in the need for hegemonic status quo.

When Burke made his speech in Parliament against the repeal in February 1790, his strategy of noting the differentiations between the dangerous example of tyrannical democracy in France, the anarchic implications of the Dissenters’ motion for repeal, and the safety and order of the British state, employed the image of species classification. Of the British reformers he wrote: “[I]f they should perfectly succeed in what they propose, as they are likely enough to do, and

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\(^{32}\) Joseph Priestley may have been one exile in Barbauld’s mind, as he had emigrated to the U.S. to avoid political persecution.
establish a democracy, or a mob of democracies, in a country circumstanced like France, they will establish a very bad government; a very bad species of tyranny” (492-93). Burke’s image of biological difference, suggesting that such reform would result in something worse than the average tyranny, seems to fuel Barbauld’s sarcasm in the Address. She allows biologism to represent a lower order of human thinking and behavior, instilling her own hierarchy of natural forces in which Enlightenment reform is paramount. Her images of inevitable spreading change differentiate between the natural, irresistible movement of the sea tide and the biological threat of disease.

Interpreting conservative arguments, including Burke’s, as a kind of “jealous” (273), protectionist materialism, Barbauld mockingly thanks the opposers for unwittingly providing a “seasonable check” on what may have been a similar plague for reformers: the “infection” of greed and “worldliness” (274). While the Dissenters’ movement of democratic reform is represented as a natural tide, or as a force that is of planetary and greater than biological circumstance, the resistance of conservatives is reduced to the microcosmic level of corrupting germs. Barbauld seems to turn Burke’s urge to judge political systems according to biological classification inward on itself, representing conservatives’ status quo as “languishing” and diseased:

With regard to ourselves, you have by your late determination given perhaps a salutary, perhaps a seasonable check to that spirit of worldliness, which of late has gained but too much ground amongst us. Before you—before the world—we have

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33 From the report of Edmund Burke’s speech in Parliament during the Debate on the Army Estimates, 5 February 1790 in The Parliamentary History of England as qtd. in McCarthy and Kraft.
a right to bear the brow erect, to talk of rights and services; but there is a place and a presence where it will become us to make no boast. We, as well as you, are infected. We as well as you, have breathed in the universal contagion—a contagion more noxious, and more difficult to escape than that which on the plains of Cherson has just swept from the world the martyr of humanity. The contagion of selfish indifference, and fashionable manners has seized us: and our languishing virtue feels the debilitating influence. (273-74)

The threat of the “spirit of worldliness” to the idealist “spirit of enquiry” in the Address which is reiterated as the Westward-moving Genius in Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, may be compared with any number of texts featuring translatio imperii (the movement of empire from east to west). However, the Address’s biologism lends itself to Mary Shelley’s Westward-spreading plague in The Last Man. Shelley also imagines the demise of civilization in terms of biological-political contagion, as the far reaches of the British empire gradually infect and destabilize British domestic power. Shelley’s relevance to Barbauld Studies will be later examined in Chapter Four.

Barbauld’s Address echoes elements of her poem “The Mouse’s Petition,” in which a captured mouse employs an eloquent Enlightenment social argument for its right to freedom. As the mouse endeavors to show that liberty is a natural right of life, indifferent to biological difference, Barbauld, with a difference, observes in the Address that “she [Liberty] diffuses her blessings to every class of men; and even extends a smile of hope and promise to the poor

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34 McCarthy and Kraft note: John Howard, philanthropist, who died in the Crimea doing hospital work during the Russian-Turkish War. His death was announced by one of the speakers during the 1790 debate.
African . . . Man, as man, becomes an object of respect” (278), “they [conservatives] have no power to put back the important hour, when nature is labouring with the birth of great events” (278), and “Millions of men exist there [in liberated France] who, only now, truly begin to exist” (279). To exist without liberty is to occupy a subhuman condition.

Barbauld returns to the tide conceit to rhetorically overpower the merely human resistance of conservatives:

You will grant us all we ask. The only question between us is, whether you will do it to-day—Tomorrow you certainly will. . . . We appeal to the certain, sure operation of increasing light and knowledge, which it is no more in your power to stop, than to repel the tide with your naked hand, or to wither with your breath the genial influence of vegetation. (276)

Barbauld also explicitly disputes the terms of the repeal debate. She argues that Parliament’s inappropriate use of the word Dissenter and the debate over the format of the motion to repeal the Corporation and Test Acts supports a linguistic hegemony designed to obscure any chances for reform. Turning her concern to the format and diction of the motion to repeal was not an unexpected tactic given the eighteenth century’s obsessive study and manipulation of language.35 Smith observes that

Because both suffrage and ideas about language depended on the question of who was considered to be capable of participating in public life, the two were vitally

35 Olivia Smith argues: “The hegemonic understanding of language was efficiently self-protecting. By defining a theory of the mind according to a theory of language, both needed to be disproved in order for the one to be discredited” (28). Smith esteems Priestley’s work on aesthetics, A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism (1777) as a slight precursor to the Preface to Lyrical Ballads in its, albeit unsuccessful, attempts to align the prevailing theory of the mind and aesthetic theory (28).
connected. The ability to define simultaneously a class, its moral worth, and its language presented a formidable stumbling block to the possibility of discussion between classes. If one’s language is condemned, no means exist of refuting the charge. (29-30)

Barbauld argues:

But it is objected to us that we have sinned in the manner of making our request; we have brought it forward as a claim instead of asking it as a favour. . . . We claim it as men, we claim it as citizens, we claim it as good subjects. . . . It is surely time to speak with precision, and to call things by their proper names. What you call toleration, we call the exercise of a natural and unalienable right.36 (266-67)

This tactic of “call[ing] things by their proper names” was a consistent favorite of Barbauld’s as it appeared both as a title to her children’s story, *Things by Their Right Names* (1792), and as a key rhetorical feature in her *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* (1793). In these texts, her purpose was to identify the “true” meaning of war as it applied to the real experience of individuals, not just the abstract concept proclaimed by impersonal governments.37

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36 The distinction between a petition as request, and a claim as demand heated the debate over repeal. McCarthy and Kraft note: In the 1787 debate Lord North wished that “the Dissenters had proceeded in a more regular manner . . . by a petition to the House,” and regretted that had “chosen to adopt another mode” instead.

37 I discuss these other texts in detail in Chapter two.
Not only does Barbauld dispute the application of claim versus petition in terms of the rights of citizens, but she disputes the application of the label Dissenter. She argues that the motion for repeal is not

a contention for power between Churchmen and Dissenters, nor is it as Dissenters we wish to enter the lists; we wish to bury every name of distinction in the common appellation of Citizen. We wish not the name of Dissenter to be pronounced, except in our theological researches and religious assemblies. It is you, who by considering us as Aliens, make us so. It is you who force us to make our dissent a prominent feature in our character. (269-70)

In Barbauld’s conclusion, she renews the wish for a future in which “the name of Dissenter shall no more be heard of, than that of Romanist or Episcopalian” (281) and yet, she signs the Address anonymously as “A Dissenter.” It is easy to understand why she would be reluctant to sign her name to the Address, as her identity as a woman would likely detract from its persuasiveness more than any other form of identification. Indeed, when one initially favorable reviewer, clergyman William Keate, learned that the Address’s author was a woman, he changed his view, exclaiming “Since the above [review] was at the press, the author hears, with infinite surprise, not unmixed with concern, that the Address to the Opposers of the Repeal is from a female pen!” (262). Still, after endeavoring to dismiss the name Dissenter from civic discourse and “call things by their proper names,” it seems incongruous for Barbauld to sign with the term instead of

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38 McCarthy and Kraft note of Keate’s review that he initially conceded (before learning the author’s identity) that the author’s “abilities certainly command respect; his conceptions are strong, and his language, in general, elegant and nervous. I could only wish that his sentiments were more moderate, and his charity less confined” (262).
some alternative such as Citizen, or in the case of her *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*, “A Volunteer.”

Her signature is both sarcastic and resigned as she has just made a laudable case for Dissenters as patriots of human freedom as well as conceded the loss of the repeal (only) in light of slow moving, yet inevitable, reform. From the text’s beginning to end, Barbauld plays with the tension between the realities of the Corporation and Test Acts, the hegemonic discourse in which they are enshrined, and the movement for reform. In the long view of her writing career, incongruity seems to be her specialty. The incongruities in her *Address* are exemplary of the overall aesthetic I trace through most of her texts featured in the following chapters—her dual artistic and political interest in containing and managing seemingly disparate concepts. Whereas the conservatives have “been betrayed into this incongruity of expression” (268), Barbauld exhibits how easily to navigate incongruity and manage it for one’s own ends. Her emphasis on linguistic hegemony persists in her *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry Into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* published two years later.

*Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry Into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship*

Two years after publishing *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts*, Barbauld renewed her rhetorical-political-religious conflation of the term “petition” in *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry Into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1792). This time she addressed fellow Dissenters as her primary

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39 For citations I’m referring to the facsimile text of *Remarks* available online at http://www.orgs.muohio.edu/womenpoets/barbauld/remarks.html.
audience. In her *Address*, she assures Parliament and the public that religious Dissenters are politically non-threatening because of their unwillingness to act within the terms of a cohesive group consciousness that supersedes the will of the individual citizen. In a somewhat ironic turn, Barbauld’s 1792 pamphlet imagines the Dissenting community according to its cohesiveness and sublime-revolutionary power (à la Rousseau) most effectively achieved through public, congregational worship. While much of her pamphlet is devoted to rebutting Wakefield by showcasing scriptural evidence for greater spiritual growth through group worship, her rhetorical technique exposes the governmental-national applications of her argument. *Remarks* exemplifies her consistent ability to confl ate, what appear to be, the narrow, particular discourse of the propriety of private and public religious practice and the national, legislative discourse over the rights of citizens.

When prominent Dissenter Gilbert Wakefield published his *Enquiry Into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1773), he emphasized the drawbacks of public worship, as it tended to risk insincerity, distance from the genuine spiritual experience, and corruption of institutions. Barbauld was confounded by Wakefield’s position, as she viewed abstaining from organized religion as a riskier prospect than exclusive, individual practice; she feared that lack of the public worship experience could lead to having “no religion at all” (Barbauld 416).

She opens her remarks with a passage from James Thomson’s “A Hymn on the Seasons” (1730):

… in swarming cities vast,

Assembled men, to the deep organ join
The long resounding voice, oft breaking clear,
At solemn pauses, through the swelling base;
And, as each mingling flame increases each,
In one united ardour rise to heaven. (413)

With just the epigraph, Barbauld introduces a charged image of community or “unisonance,”\footnote{Anderson’s idea of “unisonance” is treated more in depth in chapter 2 as it relates to Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children*. On the image of “unisonance,” Anderson observes: “Singing the Marseillaise, Waltzing Matilda, and Indonesia Raya provide occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realization of the imagined community. (So does listening to [and maybe silently chiming in with] the recitation of ceremonial poetry, such as sections of *The Book of Common Prayer.*)” (145).} as well as a politicized, revolutionary image of the Romantic sublime. Between 1730, when Thomson first published this poem and 1792, the cultural connotations of verses like this in “Seasons,” had expanded in their range of meaning from a purely aesthetic application to politically inflammatory discourses on the voice of “assembled men.”\footnote{In *Cultural Capital*, Guillory discusses the tradition of invoking Thomson’s “Seasons” and uses the example of Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (1751) which was also a text Barbauld would have known well (90).}

As was the case in the most recent debate over the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts in 1790, England was still reeling from the shockwave of the violence and the alarming course of the French Revolution. Thomson’s images of “vast,” “swarming cities,” of “assembled men,” joining “the long resounding voice,” “as each mingling flame increases each,” and “in one united ardour rise to heaven” surely did not evoke a sense of congregational worship in the general reading public any more than it evoked images of political revolution, even Rousseau’s *Social Contract.*\footnote{In *On Social Contract or Principles of Political Right* (1762), Rousseau puts}
forth an idea of the general will that seems to embody the Romantic sublime.\textsuperscript{43} The rhetoric in *Social Contract* effectively opens the door for what conservatives might see as a dangerous conflation of aesthetic and political principles and power. The sovereignty of each citizen is inalienable, except in the act that constitutes a nation, as each individual citizen acts to establish the general will.

For Rousseau, sovereignty’s behavior, like Thomson’s “mingling flame” or Barbauld’s “separate tapers, burning . . . into one common flame” (420), resides in the individual and flows through an assembly or nation of free people. The general will is a political ideal as well as an aesthetic, sublime power, as sovereignty flows from the individual through the nation and back to the citizen who now transcends to the dually liberated state: of mind and nation. *Remarks* quickly bears out the connection between national discourse, private and public spirituality, and the sublime experience, arguing: “We neither laugh alone, nor weep alone,—why then should we pray alone? . . . If devotion really exists in the heart of each individual, it is morally impossible it should exist there apart and single. So many separate tapers, burning so near each other, in the very nature of things must catch, and spread into one common flame” (420). It is hard to imagine

\textsuperscript{42} Of course Rousseau was not solely responsible for the phenomenon of conflating aesthetics and political events like the revolution. Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man*, and Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* contribute to this as well.

\textsuperscript{43} In Book II of *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), Kant describes the sublime as a vibratory phenomenon: “The mind feels itself set in motion in the representation of the sublime in nature; whereas in the aesthetic judgement upon what is beautiful therein it is in restful contemplation. This movement, especially in its inception, may be compared with a vibration, i.e. with a rapidly alternating repulsion and attraction to the same Object.” I suggest this movement can be likened to the often conflicting forces of representation and the forces of materiality. It contributes to a paradigm of social conflict, to a (process-event) paradigm of historical understanding, and to a paradigm of revolution.
that contemporary audiences would not have appreciated this imagery’s conflation of devotional, artistic, and revolutionary contexts in this statement.

Barbauld quickly introduces the subject of public worship as a national interest, providing a working definition of public worship that focuses on the unity of a national community:

Public worship is the public expression of homage to the Sovereign of the Universe. It is that tribute from men united in families, in towns, in communities, which individually men owe to their Maker. Every nation has therefore found some organ by which to express this homage, some language, rite, or symbol, by which to make known their religious feelings; but this organ has not always, nor chiefly, been words. (417)

By joining congregational interests with national interests, Barbauld easily moves into her next rhetorical turn that deftly conflates the identities of devout Christian and democratic citizen. This conflation is a function of prayer understood as the central act of private and public worship and the natural, human, instinct to petition to God. In the following passages, Barbauld argues that: worship, i.e. prayer, is naturally a public act. Not only is prayer an instinctual act, but prayer as petition, is the expected and necessary means for bridging the inevitable distance between God and man. When petitioning to God, it is acceptable, and even more reasonable, to petition for temporal issues (over spiritual):

Religion, says Mr. Wakefield, is a personal thing: so is marriage, so is the birth of a child, so is the loss of a beloved relative; yet on all these occasions we are
strongly impelled to public solemnization. . . . why then should we pray alone?

(419-20)

As to the potential “importunity of petition” which Wakefield suggests, Barbauld replies:

if there exists a man who, believing himself to be in the continual presence of
Infinite Power, directed by infinite love and tender compassion to all his creatures
. . . can in every vicissitude of his life . . . all the trying circumstances of humanity
that flesh is heir to; forbear, for himself or for those dearer to him than himself, to
put up one petition to the throne of God, -- such a one may be allowed to strike
out every petition in the Lord’s Prayer but that comprehensive one, “thy will be
done.” (423)

Since this is not the case for most people, whose “instinct” it is to pray (424), Barbauld
further observes

that petitions for temporal advantages … are not liable to more objections than
petitions for spiritual blessings…. Indeed, as temporal blessings are less in our
power than dispositions, and are sometimes entirely out of it, it seems more
reasonable of the two to pray for the former than for the latter; and it is
remarkable that, in the model given us in the Lord’s Prayer, there is not a single
petition for any virtue or good disposition, but there is one for daily bread. (425)

What is remarkable about her introduction of the terms “instinct” and “petition” to a
discourse on public worship, already inflected with the values of community and nation, is the
glaring contrast of the value of “petition” in the political reality of 1790’s England. As Smith has
shown, the ability to make a public petition of any kind was highly restricted by Parliament. As
Dissenters could be excluded from petitioning for the expansion of suffrage, Barbauld insists here on expanding the linguistic purview of worship to include that right or “instinct.”

Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children* and her poem, “The Mouse’s Petition,” which I discuss later, are other examples of her conflation of the ideas of instinct, petition, and the right to voice. Furthermore, the discursive shift from humanity’s instinct to incur spiritual blessings to the (perhaps more valid) desire for temporal blessings, and specifically the “petition” for “daily bread” in the Lord’s Prayer arguably implicates the infamous need of the French peasants brought to revolution by a withholding monarch.

If the connection between spiritual/religious petition to God and political petition to Parliament/the king might still be considered cloudy at this point in the text, the following pages put it sharply into focus:

It cannot be denied, however, that great reserve is necessary in putting up specific petitions, especially of a public nature; but generally the fault lies in our engaging in wrong pursuits, rather than in imploring upon our pursuits the favour of Heaven. Humanity is shocked to hear prayers for the success of an unjust war; but humanity and Heaven were then offended when the war was engaged in; for war is of a nature sufficiently serious to warrant our prayers to be preserved from the calamities of it, if we have not voluntarily exposed ourselves to them. The frivolous nature of most national contests appears strongly in this very circumstance, that petitions from either side have the air of profanation…. (426-27)
This allusion to prayer in war is picked up again one year later in Barbauld’s *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation; or, a Discourse for the Fast, Appointed on April 19, 1793*. The tactics employed in Barbauld’s explicitly political and religious pamphlets would be modified and developed in her ostensible literacy and basic social instructions for a youth readership.
Chapter Two:

“To prepare, not to bring about revolutions:” The Developmental Relationship Between Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781) and *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation; or a Discourse for the Fast, Appointed on April 19, 1793*

Barbauld employs her technique of rhetorical conflation in multiple genres. The following discussion focuses on the developmental relationship between *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation; or a Discourse for the Fast, Appointed on April 19, 1793* and *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781). In *Sins of Government* the primary ideas and strategies of *Hymns* rhetorically “grow up.” *Sins of Government* functions as a rhetorical model of reform through its inheritance and development of youthful community values established in *Hymns*.

When war broke out between Britain and France in February, 1793, the British government, in an effort to implore divine aid for success in the war, re-established a wartime custom with the “Proclamation For a General Fast” by the King:

> putting our trust in Almighty God that he will vouchsafe a special blessing on our arms both by sea and land, [we] have resolved, and do, by and with the advice of our Privy Council, hereby command, that a Public Fast and Humiliation be observed throughout that part of our kingdom of Great Britain called England . . . so both we and our people may humble ourselves before Almighty God, in order to obtain pardon of our sins. . . . (The London Chronicle, Barbauld 495)
This proclamation presented someone already located within a culture of dissent, like Barbauld, with an opportunity. Not only did she dissent from the decision to go to war, she was also a religious Dissenter, and as a woman (heretofore well known as a children’s educator and publisher of children’s pedagogical literature and hymns), she was further removed from the platforms of public voice, or in Marlon Ross’s terms, a “double dissenter.”

Despite the proclamation’s discursive origins in monarchical power, it goes on to describe a national community that shares the following: a trust in, and humility before, God, a geographic boundary “called England,” and the responsibility for success in war.

The King’s proclamation contained a substantial loophole within the idea of British sovereignty that Barbauld vehemently exploited in her response published in The London Chronicle 25-28 May 1793, as “A Volunteer,” entitled Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation; or a Discourse for the Fast, Appointed on April 19, 1793:

If, therefore, the nation at large had nothing to do in the affairs of the nation, the piety of our rulers would have led them to fast and pray by themselves alone, without inviting us to concur in this salutary work. But we are called upon to repent of national sins, because we can help them, and because we ought to help them. We are not fondly to imagine we can make of kings, or of lawgivers, the scape-goats to answer for our follies and our crimes: by the services of this day they call upon us to answer for them; they throw the blame where it ought ultimately to rest; that is, where the power ultimately rests. (Barbauld 300)

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Barbauld turns the monarchical command into a democratic event, in which shared responsibility for “national sins” indicates shared power. Thus, she rewrites not only the moral stakes of the war, but also the stakes of individual, national, and global citizenship. And the manner in which she describes – and more importantly, develops – these stakes is the subject of this chapter.

Barbauld’s Hymns invest in ideas that inform Sins of Government. These ideas include the following: the individual’s place and duty in the world and the universe; the power of the individual, and the power of voice; the family as the nexus of civilization (and the basis of all interconnectedness); change as a gradual, ordered, developmental process (as seen in nature); the role and power of the King and its limits, depicted as superficial, and outside of the natural order of things. Indeed, Hymns represents anti-war sentiments in an idealized, heavenly country; these sentiments are directed at English policies in the 1793 Discourse. Barbauld’s call for a “national religion” in Sins of Government is not a religiously dogmatic injunction, but the desire for a framework of national morality. The primary doctrine for this “national religion” is documented and taught in her Hymns. Both texts mediate between religious dogma and national community. The Hymns mediates the genres of religious catechism and literacy pedagogy. Sins of Government mediates the genres of sermon and political treatise, and represents an evolution of the Hymns.

Barbauld plants the seeds of freedom in her Hymns in Prose for Children, and harvests them vigorously in her career-jeopardizing anti-war sermon, Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation. Barbauld’s Hymns, composed for daily recital, function as a transitional ritual between the Church-scripted daily prayer and the products of secular print culture to follow. The Hymns were published during what Benedict Anderson considers the historical decrescendo of Latin, the
unity of its sacred communities, and the legitimacy of sacral monarchy. As the power of print capitalism grew, new secular communities, even nations, were imagined via the shared consumption of print. Anderson, citing Hegel, characterizes the development of national community as partly a function of the newspaper:

We know that particular morning and evening editions will overwhelmingly be consumed between this hour and that, only on this day, not that. . . . The significance of this mass ceremony – Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers – is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. . . . Fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations. (Anderson 35-36)

Close analysis reveals that Barbauld’s *Hymns* actually mediate traditional catechetical structure and innovative pedagogical philosophies on the development of the young mind. While conservative religious pedagogues in the eighteenth century such as Sarah Trimmer and those involved in the Sunday School movement and Charity Schools maintained catechism as the central device for control of literacy, and thereby social class, Barbauld deftly inflects catechetical conventions with the individual’s power of inquiry and self reflection, in addition to Dissenting perspectives.

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45 Anderson 18-19.
As widespread, regularly recited texts that are religious, however Dissenting in their world-view, the *Hymns* are also concerned with the development of the child-citizen as a national, and even transnational subject. Having nurtured and educated the young romantic citizen in *Hymns*, Barbauld exposes the British adult’s dereliction of duty, arguing in *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation*: “Those sins which, as a nation, we have to repent of, belong to national acts.” If it is the business of reformers, “to prepare, not to bring about revolutions,” then Barbauld’s concept and practice of liberation, whether it be political or intellectual/artistic liberation, is more of a comparative, reflexive process, than a linear, forceful thrust of society. Her career of artistic and pedagogical intervention is exemplified by the juxtaposition of these two texts.

In *Sins of Government*, rather than calling for abrupt, political revolution as the French do, or calling for artistic revolution as Blake does in his injunction to painters, sculptors, and architects in his Preface to *Milton*, Barbauld cautions against the hastiness of would-be reformers, calling instead for revolutionary education. She writes:

Reformers, conceiving of themselves, as of a more enlightened class than the bulk of mankind, are likewise apt to forget the deference due to them. Stimulated by newly discovered truths, of which they feel the full force, they are not willing to wait for the gradual spread of knowledge, the subsiding of passion, and the undermining of prejudices. . . . It is their business to sow the seed, and let it lie patiently in the bosom of the ground, perhaps for ages – to prepare, not to bring about revolutions. (304)
This was not empty, abstract rhetoric coming from Barbauld. She was, in fact, already engaged
in sowing the seeds of revolution through the education of England’s youth community in *Hymns in Prose for Children*. On its own, the thirty-one-page *Sins of Government* posed sufficient threat
to conservatives. Apparently unaware of the possible connections between Barbauld’s *Hymns in
Prose for Children* and *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*, the latter text’s contemporary
critics were severe, creating a mixed cultural reception. As McCarthy and Kraft note, the anti-
Jacobin *The British Critic* was alarmed by Barbauld rhetorically granting the public
responsibility for the transactions of the nation, arguing the doctrine was “perfectly French . . . .
Here we have organ, and national will, and all the jargon of French republicanism” (qtd. in
McCarthy and Kraft 298). In turn, *Sins of Government* was praised by the Jacobin-inclined
*Analytical Review*. J.E. Cookson, historian of the British antiwar movement identifies it as “the
most famous” of all anti-war sermons and Edward Said characterizes it as “speaking truth to

Barbauld asks a series of rhetorical questions in *Sins of Government* including, “Can we
look round from sea to sea, and from east to west, and say, that our brother hath not aught
against us?” (308). These questions echo both the ideology of a global, human family\(^46\) and the
method of rhetorical inquiry applied to “the child of little observation” in the *Hymns*. In *Sins of
Government* when she asks, “Are there not some darker-coloured children of the same family,
over whom we assume a hard and unjust controul? And have not these our brethren aught

\(^{46}\) Francis Hutcheson’s work in the Scottish Enlightenment, such as his *A System of Moral Philosophy*, informs
Barbauld’s early understanding of global human interconnectedness.
against us?” (308) she is leveraging not only the lesson in Matthew 5:23-24, but the lesson previously sown in the child’s mind of the Hymns. Hymn VIII urges:

All are God’s family; he knoweth every one of them, as a Shepard knoweth his flock. . . . Negro woman, who sittest pining in captivity, and weepeth over thy sick child; though no one seeth thee, God seeth thee; though no one pitieth thee, God pitieth thee: raise thy voice forlorn and abandoned one; call upon him from amidst thy bonds, for assuredly he will hear thee. (249)

The adult reader of Sins of Government is no longer eligible for the patient explanations made to the “child of little observation” in Hymns. The adult British citizen is not only expected to see injustice, but to take action: “lay aside the grimace of hypocrisy, stand up for what we are” (309).

Sins of Government does not launch into a full-blown abolitionist treatise, but concentrates on broader themes of national morality and citizenship. Yet, these passages refer to William Wilberforce’s formal motion in Parliament in 1791 to end the slave trade, as well as Barbauld’s supportive poem published soon after in The Morning Chronicle, entitled “Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade.” Indeed, the image of seeing persists as a useful abolitionist trope invoked by Wilberforce and Barbauld. As Wilberforce argues against the horrors of slavery, “but now, when our eyes are opened, can we tolerate them for a moment, much less sanction them . . .?” (Debate on a Motion for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade 40) Barbauld exasperatingly responds:

Cease, Wilberforce, to urge thy generous aim!

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47 This passage is from William Wilberforce’s address to Parliament as seen in The Debate on a Motion for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, in the House of Commons, . . . on April 18 and 19, 1791 (1791).
Thy Country knows the sin, and stands the shame!
The Preacher, Poet, Senator in vain
Has rattled in her sight the Negro’s chain. (1-4)

Even this small example of textual interplay shows how slippery the task of simply connecting Barbauld’s *Hymns* and *Sins of Government* can often be. The ways in which both texts exert influence upon other cultural products, that in turn exert influence upon Barbauld’s work are, of course, immeasureable.

If the critics of *Sins of Government* had been fully aware of the ways in which Barbauld’s inflammatory, anti-war, republican rhetoric identified with her *Hymns in Prose*, they surely would have been horrified. My point of connection between these texts originates here: early in *Sins of Government*, Barbauld evokes the full tenor of the sermon genre in pointing out that while the nation is in the process of humiliating itself before God, “we” should address the conspicuous need for a “national religion:”

You will probably assert that most nations have one; but, by a national religion, I do not mean the burning of a few wretches twice or thrice a year in honour of God, nor yet the exacting subscription to some obscure tenets, believed by few, and understood by none; nor yet the investing a certain order of men dressed in a particular habit, with civil privileges and secular emolument; by national religion I understand, the extending to those affairs in which we act in common and as a body, that regard to religion, by which, when we act singly, we all profess to be guided. Nothing seems more obvious; and yet there are men who appear not insensible to the rules of morality as they respect individuals, and who
unaccountably disclaim them with respect to nations. They will not cheat their opposite neighbor, but they will take a pride in over-reaching a neighbouring state; they would scorn to foment dissensions in the family of an acquaintance, but they will do so by a community without scruple; they would not join with a gang of house-breakers to plunder a private dwelling, but they have no principle which prevents them from joining with a confederacy of princes to plunder a province. As private individuals, they think it right to pass by little injuries, but as a people they think they cannot carry too high a principle of proud defiance and sanguinary revenge. This sufficiently shews, that whatever rule they may acknowledge for their private conduct, they have nothing that can be properly called national religion. . . . (301-02)

The primary doctrine of the “national religion” Barbauld is calling for in 1793 is presented in her 1781 *Hymns in Prose for Children*. Further, her rhetorical strategies in the *Sins of Government*, such as the use of social analogies to illustrate the consequences of private and public actions (above), evolved from those employed in the *Hymns*. In order to illustrate Barbauld’s sense of social progression, I shall explore the *Hymns* in depth first and then return to a discussion of *Sins of Government*.

*Hymns in Prose for Children*

Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children* may lie closer to the heart of modern British nationalism than previously observed. Designed for daily recital by children ages four and older, and reprinted in England for over 120 years, the *Hymns* were designed as follow-up material to her 1778 *Lessons for Children*, taught to ages two to three years old. Together, her *Lessons for*
Children and Hymns in Prose for Children begin what Mitzi Myers considers a tradition of domestic realism: “a mode elastic enough to move from a quotidian mimetism of mother-child instructional interaction to a quasi-Wordsworthian Romanticism grounded in reverence for the common things of nature” (261). In fact, Myers credits Barbauld with supplying a model for numerous educational projects in her time. Myers asserts:

Barbauld provided a model for many other educational ventures: Sarah Trimmer and Hannah More’s work with the charity and Sunday schools that became the main providers of working-class literacy through much of the nineteenth century; Lady Ellenor Fenn’s ambitious series of readers and ingenious learning games for middle-class rational mothers; the multidecade, multivolume Edgeworth family project, grounded in the pioneering child study notebooks still among the Bodleian Library’s manuscripts, anecdotes from which were incorporated into the influential 1798 manual for parents, Practical Education. All of this experimentation was directly and frankly inspired by Barbauld. A whole tradition of mother-teachers anticipated the reforms historians typically associate with Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Dewey. (261)

Lessons has so far received more scholarly attention than Hymns, thanks to the invaluable work of William McCarthy, Mitzi Myers, and Sarah Robbins. While Hymns has received some attention for its obvious connections with Blake’s Songs of Innocence and of Experience in the scholarship of Thomas Kennedy and Porter Williams, Jr., aside from Samuel Pickering Jr.’s brief 1975 article on Hymns, Lisa Zunshine has stood relatively alone in her recent examination of the
text, albeit approaching *Hymns* as a cognitive anthropologist. Simply put, Zunshine’s study is useful here for the ways it discourages an entirely Lockean interpretation of Barbauld’s beliefs about the infant mind.

Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose* were composed from a Dissenting perspective as optimistic celebrations of a God of love, evoked through images of the natural world. Her intent was to combine the spirit of philosophy with the spirit of devotion. In her preface to the *Hymns*, she describes their overall design as meant to impress the “infant mind” with devotional feelings, so that

a child, to feel the full force of the idea of God, ought never to remember the time when he had no such idea—to impress them by connecting religion with a variety of sensible objects; with all that he sees, all he hears, all that affects his young mind with wonder or delight; and thus by deep, strong, and permanent associations, to lay the best foundation for practical devotion in future life. (238)

It is important to note that Barbauld’s ideas on “practical devotion,” echoed in her *Remarks on Gilbert Wakefield*, were less dogmatic than we might now think. If we bear in mind Barbauld’s other work (for example, *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*), and extend Zunshine’s discourse on natural kinds and artifacts, *Hymns* serves as a primer for citizen identity and duty. That is, Barbauld’s child reader of *Hymns* is represented as both a natural kind and artifact that is made for good citizenship. The child is a natural kind, *made* by God and bearing an essence,

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48 See Lisa Zunshine, “Rhetoric Cognition, and Ideology in A.L. Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781)” (2002). Zunshine observes Barbauld’s rhetorical complication of the eighteenth-century understanding of the child as either “natural kind” (bearing an essence) or “artifact” (something that is made and having a distinct function), establishes “new connections between different conceptual domains” (131), ultimately presenting us with “a cognitive challenge . . . [or] ambiguity” (133).
learning a sense of individuation necessary for the Romantic citizen. And, the child is artifact
with a distinct function to worship God and love nature and family, developing an early sense of
civic duty.

On Catechism

Barbauld’s catechetical strategy in *Hymns in Prose* has so far been overlooked as a
significant framework for analysis. However, the *Hymns*’ obvious use of the highly traditional
religious genre of catechism begs closer examination of how writers, including Barbauld, have
maneuvered within convention to produce a discourse that may alternately be described as
socially subversive and/or pedagogically innovative. That is, Barbauld’s *Hymns* clearly
participate in catechistic discourse in their developmental introduction of ideas, i.e. “precept
upon precept; line upon line” (Isaiah 28:10), use of dialogical format, reliance on
Christian/biblical imagery, and intention to instruct.⁴⁹ And yet, aside from their celebration of a
loving Creator, the *Hymns* do not focus on Christian dogma, performing more enculturation than
indoctrination. The most significant catechistic feature that connects the *Hymns* with the later
*Sins of Government* is the progression dynamic. Barbauld carefully builds from simple ideas and
simple, personal subjectivities (the “I” first person perspective of the child) to more complex
ideas and communal subjectivities in *Hymns*. *Sins of Government* not only makes the same
rhetorical moves as *Hymns*, but it distinctly inherits and further develops the ideas and
subjectivities from *Hymns*. In the end, *Sins of Government* functions as a kind of adult

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⁴⁹ See Patricia Demers, *Heaven upon Earth: The Form of Moral and Religious Children’s Literature*, particularly,
her fourth chapter, “The Catechism: ‘Whatsoever a Christian Ought to Know.’”
catechism; however, Barbauld created a very distinctive variant of this highly traditional genre, and I have yet to discuss what “catechism” really means in the purview of her texts.

Modern analyses of catechetical forms tend to be dualistic. For example, on the one hand, Bakhtin describes catechism as a perversion of the Socratic dialogue, which degenerated from the process of apprehending truth as discursively “born between people” to “official monologism, which pretends to possess a ready-made truth” (110). He argues that:

When the genre of the Socratic dialogue entered the service of the established, dogmatic worldviews of various philosophical schools and religious doctrines, it lost all connection with a carnival sense of the world and was transformed into a simple form for expounding already found, ready-made irrefutable truth; ultimately, it degenerated completely into a question-and-answer form for training neophytes (catechism). (110)

Eighteenth-century examplars of Bakhtin’s argument include the work of Sarah Trimmer and Isaac Watts. On the other hand, Patricia Demers argues that while “catechisms may not celebrate the plurivocity dear to postmoderns, they do more than repeat and harangue. . . . Rather than static, petrified codifications, catechisms can be energizing, even catalytic agents” (74). In fact, Demers goes so far as to emphasize the “empowering aspect of true catechesis” and its “potential for self-knowledge” (53).

On an imagined continuum of catechism and its literary influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Barbauld’s Hymns may actually be read as progressively innovating beyond

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50 See Trimmer’s A comment on Dr. Watts’s Divine songs for children, with questions; designed to illustrate the doctrines and precepts to which they refer (1789) and The guardian of education (2002).
the traditional renditions of Isaac Watts and Sarah Trimmer, and as precursors of the more severe critique and subversion Alan Richardson has identified in Blake’s and Wordsworth’s poetry.\footnote{I will be referring to Alan Richardson’s article, “The Politics of Childhood: Wordsworth, Blake, and Catechistic Method” (1989).}

Traditionally, most catechisms are concerned with two principle topics: expositions of the Creed and the Decalogue. The most prominent catechetical conventions employed in the overall goal of equipping learners with basic religious precepts are “the insistence on the doubleness of choices, the feasibility of biblical models, and the inherent drama of the exchange between teacher and pupil, who did not always fill the roles of querist and respondent” (Demers 61). George Herbert’s poem “The Water-Course” and Thomas Gouge’s The Young Man’s Guide, through the Wilderness of this World to the Heavenly Canaan (1670) are offered by Demers as representations of catechetical choices between salvation and damnation, life and death, happiness and misery. I suggest that these poems can be read as catechetical precursors to Barbauld’s alternating subjectivity, between the “child of mortality” of Hymn XIII and the “child of immortality” of Hymn XIV, which are then followed by similar alterities in Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Experience.

Alan Richardson represents Sarah Trimmer as the champion of catechism’s role in social conservatism. While Richardson holds up Barbauld as “a fairly progressive example” of a children’s writer using the catechistic method with a slightly more secular perspective, he seems to align Barbauld’s 1781 Hymns in Prose for Children with Isaac Watts’s earlier, 1730 Catechisms, whose representations of catechistic conversation and dialogue are deemed mere
mimics of an authentic (Bakhtinian) dialogic process (Richardson 856). It is important to understand how Barbauld’s work was distinguished from Trimmer’s.

As education and wealth were extended through the eighteenth century due to industrialization and the rise of the bourgeoisie, conservatives like Sarah Trimmer sought to contain the new literacy’s perceived threat to Christianity and the social order by using catechistic educational methods. Trimmer’s involvement in the Sunday school movement began in the 1780’s. Trimmer’s object, as evidenced by her 1788 *Sunday-School Catechist*, was to use literacy as a means of maintaining class distinctions rather than fostering social mobility. For example, her catechism lectures “It is no uncommon thing to see persons who can read setting themselves up above the station in life it hath pleased GOD to place them . . . I hope this will not be the case with any of you,” and asks “Should people who can read grow proud, and be above going to cart and to plough and common services?” (Trimmer 2, 4). Richardson observes: “If literacy gave the ‘lower orders’ some measure of power, Trimmer’s ‘catechetical method’ was designed to teach them not to use it” (Richardson 855).

Richardson likens Trimmer’s approach to that of The Charity Schools, or “Catecheticall schools,” set up by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, observing that both The Charity school movement and Sunday school movement in the eighteenth century, held mandates:

to buttress rather than facilitate the relaxation of class distinctions: an 1801 Account of the S.P.C.K. happily noted that “as early as the Year 1712” the Society had “particularly recommended, ‘That however these Children are disposed of, it will be very necessary before-hand to teach them that great Lesson
of true Humility . . . lest the Advantages they receive from a pious Education, should incline them to put too great a Value upon themselves; and therefore that the masters be often put in Mind of guarding the children under their Care, as much as possible, against such dangerous Conceits; and in order thereunto, to instruct them very carefully in the Duties of Servants, and Submission to Superiors.” (Richardson 855)

To Trimmer’s frustration, Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose* represented the power of the child as potentially infinite and dependent mainly on one’s relationship to God, rather than social mandates.

We know from Barbauld’s statements on reform in *Sins of Government* that she favored gradual mediating change over violent overhaul. In *Hymns*, she mediates the conventional catechetical voice – the real voice of the merely obedient child reciter – and the imagined voice of the religious and political dissenter-ideologue. Her emphasis on the power of the child’s voice in *Hymns* destabilizes the notion that her texts are conventionally catechetical. As Demers observes:

In catechesis the opportunity to speak, albeit often through the medium of a prescribed text, impresses me as one of its most attractive features. More than dusty relics of imprisoning codifications, catechisms resemble the declension and conjugation paradigms that all of us have probably struggled with in second-language classes: a necessary grid by which to verbalize, translate, and interpret. Yet there is a built-in perplexity in moral codes, in their attempts to prepare the learner for the variety as well as the unpredictability of experience. (56-57)
The few precursors to Barbauld’s program of publishing texts that were developmentally appropriate for children include English seventeenth-century writers John Paget and John Bunyan. Demers credits Paget and Bunyan with tailoring catechetical material to the capacities and awareness of the child. Both Paget’s *Primer of Christian Religion, Or a forme of catchising, drawne from the beholding of Gods works in the creation of the world* (1601) and Bunyan’s *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686) gather lessons “from every imaginable source under the sun,” and ground their exercises in the familiar and the recognizable (Demers 60). Demers points to multiple catechetical variations of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries that lend weight to the idea that catechism, like so many other traditional cultural products, may be just as much an instrument of authoritative indoctrination as a vehicle for critical inquiry.\(^5\)

Barbauld – Blake comparative studies have only scratched the surface of meaningful intersection. The point remains overlooked that Blake’s subversive structure (particularly in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*) actually inherits that of Barbauld’s *Hymns*. Barbauld’s reputation suffers perhaps unfairly as Richardson uses excerpts from *Hymns in Prose* in order to bring Wordsworth’s and Blake’s poetry into relief as subversive critiques of catechistic structure and ideology. Richardson shows how Wordsworth and Blake critiqued and undermined the catechetical form, however, leaving Barbauld in the contextual dust along with Trimmer and Watts as anti-Rousseauvian examples of monological, disciplinary, catechistic instruction.

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\(^5\) Dorothy Kilner’s *First Principles of Religion, and the Existence of a Deity, Explained in a Series of Dialogues Adapted to the Capacity of the Infant Mind* (c. 1795) illustrates the dialogue between an animated and headstrong child, Maria, and her Mamma. Demers asserts that such a realistic dialogue “recognizes the impertinence and willfulness of children in a way that would have incensed a critical doyenne like Mrs. Trimmer” (73-75).
Blake’s poems display evidence of being more than just casually (or nostalgically) influenced by the critically appraised old-fashioned hymns of this children’s writer. *Songs of Innocence and Experience* continue and develop a theme of catechistic revisionism performed in *Hymns in Prose*. Ultimately, of course, Blake argues “there is no natural religion,” while Barbauld calls for a “national religion.” Both are skeptical of religion as an institutional power, but Barbauld seeks, more conservatively than Blake, to apply principles of morality informing a common understanding of religion to a national, civil interest. Demers’s conclusion that, “rather than static, petrified codifications, catechisms can be energizing, even catalytic agents” (75), provides a good starting point for critical analysis of Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children*.

*Hymn X* offers the best illustration of Barbauld’s philosophy of the child’s mind and development, and thus, the rationale for the entire project and layout of *Hymns*. In *Hymn X*, the mother-speaker and Charles (the imagined child-subject) behold a large oak tree:

> Yet this large tree was once a little acorn; small in size, insignificant in appearance; such as you are now picking up upon the grass beneath it. Such an acorn, whose cup can only contain a drop or two of dew, contained the whole oak. All its massy trunk, all its knotted branches, all its multitude of leaves were in that acorn; it grew, it spread, it unfolded itself by degrees, it received nourishment from the rain, and the dews, and the well adapted soil, but it was all there. . . .

> The mind of a child is like the acorn; its powers are folded up, they do not yet appear, but they are all there. The memory, the judgment, the invention, the feeling of right and wrong, are all in the mind of a child; of a little infant just born; but they are not expanded, you cannot perceive them. . . .
Instruction is the food of the mind; it is like the dew and the rain and the rich soil. As the soil and the rain and the dew cause the tree to swell and put forth its tender shoots, so do books and study and discourse feed the mind, and make it unfold its hidden powers. (252-53)

*Hymn X* echoes the message in her preface, namely: Barbauld’s progressive anti-Lockean conviction that “the infant mind” exists, has ideas, and that these are, in her estimation, so powerful as to affect one’s development and “future life,” and thereby warrant extremely careful attention and guidance. This hymn is also emblematic of the collection’s larger effect: the *Hymns* constitute *Romantic* catechism, set apart from their eighteenth century precursors and contemporaries, in their deliberate resistance to catechism’s traditional roots in religious indoctrination, and their proto-Wordsworthian focus on the similitude of natural forms and imagery. That is, Isaiah’s “line upon line” progressive strategy finds a more natural illustration in the oak tree, whose growth is actually delineated by the power of internal development than what Demers deems the “petrified codifications,” or religious catechetical instruction that is imposed as an external, inorganic agent of growth. I will return to a more in-depth discussion of *Hymn X* later, as it also represents a noticeable (albeit prosaic) crescendo in the recital order of the *Hymns*.

If we move through the *Hymns* in sequence, we can trace a profound progression of ideas. The first Hymn opening the child’s daily recital invites:

Come, let us praise God, for he is exceeding great; let us bless God, for he is very good.

I will praise God with my voice; for I may praise him,
though I am but a little child.

A few years ago, and I was a little infant, and my tongue was
dumb within my mouth:

And I did not know the great name of God, for my reason
was not come unto me.

But now I can speak, and my tongue shall praise him; I can
think of all his kindness, and my heart shall love him. . . .

When I am older, I will praise him better; and I will never
forget God, so long as my life remaineth in me. (238-239)

The third word of the first hymn, “us,” reinforces the identification of the individual child
speaker as part of a community defined by a shared desire to praise God through the power of
voice and the shared experience of childhood. The first hymn’s emphasis on voice enables larger
values of the Dissenting community to enter children’s discourse. Parliament’s exclusive
parameters of representation based on linguistic merits, exampled by its prohibitive standards for
legal petition,\(^53\) as well as the disenfranchisement of all religious Dissenters, were apt contexts
for any eighteenth-century Dissenting writer featuring the power of voice. In the hymn, it is
assumed that the right to communicate with God is linked with the physical ability to speak to
him. Thousands of children in England (and America) during the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries started their mornings by reciting a hymn that connected them to each other, while
teaching the value of (early) self-representation; the first hymn defines a community of children

\(^53\) See Smith.
in the rhetorical act of recognizing their basic linguistic abilities and contingent responsibilities in communicating with God.

While the recitation of these hymns may not conjure the entirely formal “unisonance”\textsuperscript{54} that Benedict Anderson associates with the singing of national anthems or recitation of ceremonial poetry, these daily exercises certainly imagine “a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests—above all in the form of poetry and songs” (145). Barbauld’s \textit{Hymns} progressively demonstrate the child-speaker’s connection to an ever-widening community, in effect, moving from the carefully defined, young speaker-self to a more communal, selfless subjectivity. Indeed, what \textit{Hymn I} establishes through its emphasis on the power of voice, prayer, poetry, and song, is a useful feeling of unisonance, wherein, “If we are aware that others are singing these songs precisely when and as we are, we have no idea who they may be, or even where, out of earshot, they are singing. Nothing connects us all but imagined sound” (Anderson 145). Based on the content of \textit{Hymn I}, Barbauld’s intent is to connect children to an imagined God through the real sound of voice. One of the hymn’s effects was certainly to connect children to other children through imagined sound of voice. The \textit{Hymns} are neither wholly religious in their depiction of community, nor are they wholly secular or nationalist. They can be read as mediating these forces. They represent a transition between religious catechism and secular, nationalist print culture.

\textsuperscript{54} Anderson observes: “Singing the \textit{Marseillaise}, Waltzing Matilda, and \textit{Indonesia Raya} provide occasions for unisonality, for the echoed physical realization of the imagined community. (So does listening to [and maybe silently chiming in with] the recitation of ceremonial poetry, such as sections of \textit{The Book of Common Prayer}.)” (145).
Further, the effects of simultaneity are not limited to a larger unisonance in the hymns’ practice. The different ages of the speaker-child’s own life are brought into a kind of developmental unison through the power of individual voice. The child’s independent development, represented as a function of voice’s power to draw him closer to God, is simultaneously a dependent product of his performance in each age. The past, little infant’s tongue is dumb, while the present child-speaker shall praise him, “think of all his kindness,” and love him. And the future adult’s duty is memorably projected: “when I am older, I will praise him better; and I will never forget God, so long as my life remaineth in me” (239). Indeed, the 1793 adult’s failure to remember his responsibilities is taken up and examined in Barbauld’s sermon *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation*. The sequencing of hymns and increasing topical and rhetorical sophistication reflects this sense of growth and expansion of powers.55

*Hymn II* extends the community of “us” child-speakers to “animals of every kind:”

The young animals of every kind are sporting about, they feel themselves happy, they are glad to be alive, -- they thank him that has made them alive.

They may thank him in their hearts, but we can thank him with our tongues; we are better than they, and can praise him better.

The birds warble, and the young lambs can bleat; but we can open our lips in his praise, we can speak of all his goodness.

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55 The *Hymns’* developmental structure is continuous with that of *Lessons*. As Sarah Robbins points out in her discussion of *Lessons*, “Barbauld reiterates increasingly complex versions of a paradigm depicting humanizing education as based on maternally monitored productive restraint” (140).
Therefore we will thank him for ourselves, and we will thank him for those that cannot speak.

Trees that blossom, and little lambs that skip about, if you could, you would say how good he is; but you are dumb, we will say it for you. (240)

The second hymn’s most significant contribution to the first hymn’s discourse on self-representation is the democratic value of representation for all, including those who cannot speak for themselves (and non-human species). While the “we” community of speaking children is linguistically elevated above the “they” animals, the repetition of “we” (as the previously defined child-community) and “young” animals creates a rhetorical solidarity of youth culture that is unimpaired by species difference. The child’s privileged ability to praise God better than animals does not, however, entitle him to anything. Rather, increased ability merely signifies increased responsibility to represent those lacking such abilities. And by the end of the hymn, community lines are blurred further, extending beyond just sentient animals, to the larger natural world, including “trees that blossom.”

McCarthy and Kraft observe that Sarah Trimmer raised objections to Barbauld’s concluding verse of Hymn II which reads: “We will not offer you [trees and lambs] in sacrifice, but we will offer sacrifice for you, on every hill, and in every green field, we will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and the incense of praise” (240). Trimmer protested:

May not children be led from this promise to the little lambs, to infer, when they read in the Bible an account of the sacrifices of Abel and of the Mosaic Law, that it was cruel in the Almighty to ordain the sacrifice of a lamb as an offering of atonement; that an offering chosen by mankind will be as acceptable to the Deity
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as one expressly ordained by Himself. . . . [N]or do we read in Scripture that human beings, who stand in constant need of a Mediator themselves, have ever been appointed to officiate as Priests for any of the brute creation. (Trimmer 47)

Trimmer’s objections highlight the distance between Barbauld’s *Hymns* and what Bakhtin would consider the degenerative-institutional impulse to toe the dogmatic line. Barbauld’s beginning *Hymns* clearly adapt traditional catechism’s emphasis on God and the human obligation to worship him. However, they ignore specific elements of any Creed. To Trimmer’s dismay, these *Hymns* represent a compassionate social structure that fails to reinforce the values of institutional authority, i.e. the Church of England.

In the first two hymns, the child-speaker’s community has mainly consisted of other children and lower orders of the natural world. *Hymn III* begins to mediate the discourses of childhood domestic order, the divine order of the universe, and British social order more explicitly. Here, the figure who has so far presided over, yet outside the text of *Hymns*, mother (the presumed teacher of *Hymns*), formally enters as the shared parent in the child-community, whose actions and responsibilities are transcribed as God’s:

The mother loveth her little child; she bringeth it up on her knees; she nourisheth its body with food; she feedeth its mind with knowledge: if it is sick, she nurseth it with tender love; she watcheth over it when asleep; she forfgetteth it not for a moment; she teacheth it how to be good; she rejoiceth daily in its growth.

But who is the parent of the mother? who nourisheth her with good things, and watcheth over her with tender love, and remembereth her every moment?
Whose arms are about her to guard her from harm? and if she is sick, who shall heal her?

God is the parent of the mother; he is the parent of all, for he created all. . . .

The king governeth his people; he hath a golden crown upon his head, and the royal scepter is in his hand; he sitteth upon a throne, and sendeth forth his demands; his subjects fear before him; if they do well, he protecteth them from danger; and if they do evil, he punisheth them.

But who is the sovereign of the king? who commandeth him what he must do? whose hand is reached out to protect him from danger? and if he doeth evil, who shall punish him?

God is the sovereign of the king; his crown is of rays of light, and his throne is amongst the stars. He is King of kings, and Lord of lords. . . . (241)

Barbauld’s philosophy of human development informs her depiction of God in terms that are closest to the child’s own experiential understanding: God is imagined as parent. Though the representation of God as parent is a conventional image, the conflation of God’s role with the child-centered discourse of domestic mothering is highly significant. Further, mother takes the place of both parents in the hymn, as there is no separate mention of the role of father. The only “father” in the hymn is God: “God is our Father, therefore we will love him” (242). The mother in Hymns is following up on her work in Lessons for Children, wherein the younger child subject, Charles, learns to make sense of the world through basic comparative, sensory encounters at home and in nature, with mother. As Myers observes of Barbauld’s earlier Lessons:
Helping Charles name the world, giving him a voice (thematic in the *Hymns* as well), the mother’s speech is at first dominant, Charles’s questions embedded in her replies, as a child has been literally embedded in its mother’s body: As the age-graded primer progresses, Charles’s voice is heard more clearly, helped from orality to fuller literacy by the mother’s tongue. (270-71)

Robbins and Myers have given us compelling explorations and explanations of Barbauld’s representations of mother in her *Lessons for Children*. The nature of these representations changes subtly in *Hymns*. For instance, mother is no longer an active speaker, with dialogue, as in *Lessons*. But, the essential power of mother in *Hymns* cannot be fully appreciated without some context of her initial appearance in *Lessons*:

Barbauld’s *Lessons* thus embody the process of learning to read the world as text – and of doing so through maternal mediation. She was the first to conceptualize the act of writing a reader and the formation of the child’s subjectivity as coexistent, both products of the mother-child dialogue that constitutes her text. It is a bonus that in her tutelage she inscribes feminine subjectivity as well, instructing us in the subtle uses of the educational stance for the woman writer. As teacher, Barbauld can represent woman as the powerful mother who controls access to literacy and culture, naming the world and defining reality, and, through the analogical hierarchies of child-adult, animal-human, female-male, can simultaneously recreate the relative vulnerabilities of the female situation encoded in the plights of the miniature, the unhoused, the entrapped. (Myers 269)
Certainly, a significant amount of Barbauld’s poetry, outside of *Lessons* and *Hymns*, supports the thesis that Barbauld encodes the late-eighteenth-early-nineteenth century female situation in, for instance, the small animal condition of the mouse or the caterpillar. I will discuss her signature technique of discursive contraction in my third chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to show, on the scale of her career, the ways in which Barbauld embeds the seeds for her grand, political treatises in her texts for children.

The mother in Barbauld’s *Lessons* is both a literary and embodied pioneer of the power of text suggesting that a child’s subjectivity is affected by the process of literacy. The older child who is learning the *Hymns* — again, from his or her mother—no longer needs the dialogic interface of *Lessons*, and now recites hymns that use the third-person figure of mother as relational marker for the abstract landscapes of nation, globe, universe/heaven.

Mother’s seeming withdrawal into background relational marker belies the ways in which this new role deviates from the social norms the text would appear to teach. The figure of mother is unusually god-like, not only in terms of her power and influence over the child, but in the similitude of her actions and responsibilities with God’s. Her role in the text also appears to exclude other standard domestic figures one would expect to serve as key relational markers in the child’s developing sociality: namely, father. The absence of father in the text elides and perhaps diminishes the concept of patriarchal social order within the scope of the child’s developing subjectivity. Just as there is no undue attention centered on the king in *Hymn III*, there is no special attempt to include father. Perhaps this is merely according to eighteenth-century middle-class realities in Britain: father (like the king) would not have played an immediate part in most of the child’s daily, domestic experience. Beyond the father’s lack of
mention, this Hymn alone offers little more that could amount to a clear attack on the existing domestic order. However, the representation of the king outside of the larger social order is far more controversial.

As the progression of *Hymn III* generally traces outward the Hutchensonian circles of social influence, the representation of the king subtly disrupts the pattern of rhetorical overlap between authorities; this pattern is: mother is parent of the child, God is parent of the mother, God is parent of all. In this carefully constructed, familial community of child-reciters, their mothers, and God, the king contrastingly lacks the traditional description of parent, or clear connection within the familial community.

Based on the rhetorical trajectory of community in this hymn, and the external tradition of the king’s divine sanction and highly conventional figuration as parent of his people, Barbauld effectively demotes the king within the seemingly innocuous medium of the child’s hymn and its imagined community. This may seem like a barely perceptible turn of verse in the text of a child’s daily devotional, and clearly was, based on the Hymns’ uncontroversial popularity; but, however conscious the mother-teacher and child-reciter were of the king’s lackluster description in *Hymns*, the fact was multiple generations of children imbibed and appropriated this rhetoric for 120 years. Surely, this is what Barbauld was about when she admonished would-be reformers in her *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation* to “sow the seed[s]” of revolution (Barbauld 304). This kind of mediation – between familial domestic discourse, religious discourse, national community, and political sovereignty – constitutes the pragmatic reform Barbauld had in mind in her fiery political sermon of 1793.
The contiguity of mother and God is reinforced in *Hymn V* as it depicts the onset of night in the natural world, of plants, creatures, and people alike, sinking into sleep as God watches over with outstretched hand:

As the mother moveth about the house with her finger on her lips, and stilleth every little noise, that her infant be not disturbed; as she draweth the curtains around its bed, and shutteth out the light from its tender eyes; so God draweth the curtains of darkness around us; so he maketh all things to be hushed and still, that his large family may sleep in peace. (244)

As her Preface indicates, Barbauld’s intention is to illustrate the figure and love of God through images closest to the young child’s experience (i.e. the figure of mother) for the purposes of basic understanding. And, as Myers credits Barbauld with being the first English writer to “represent woman as the powerful mother who controls access to literacy and culture, naming the world and defining reality,” in *Lessons for Children*, surely the mother represented in *Hymns in Prose for Children* occupies a culturally groundbreaking position as the preeminent referent to God; she remains the consistent parallel to God in the *Hymns*, and therefore, the imagined community defined by them. Like *Hymn III*, *Hymn V* also fails to mention the human father specifically. While *Hymn V* uses the general term “family” to describe those who sleep at night and those whom God watches over, it only mentions mother and child in specific terms. Once again, the omission of father is not as narratologically expressive as the irregular description of the king in *Hymn III*. Yet, the father’s non-mention indicates no particular concern for his role despite his eighteenth-century social and legal entitlements.
If the existence of unisonance, or a youth culture, or an imagined community, is doubtful to the modern reader up to this point in the *Hymns*, observe how the “us” and the “we” that have thus far subtly conducted the verses, choruses in *Hymn VII*:

Come, let us go into the thick shade, for it is the noon of day, and the summer sun beats hot upon our heads.

The shade is pleasant, and cool; the branches meet above our heads, and shut out the sun, as with a green curtain; the grass is soft to our feet, and a clear brook washes the roots of the trees.

The cattle can lie down to sleep in the cool shade, but we can do what is better; we can raise our voices to heaven; we can praise the great God who made us.

Can we raise our voices up to the high heaven? can we make him hear who is above the stars? We need not raise our voices to the stars, for he heareth us when we only whisper; when we breathe out words softly with a low voice. He that filleth the heavens is here also.

May we that are so young, speak to him that always was? May we that can hardly speak plain, speak to God?

We that are so young, are but lately made alive; therefore we should not forget his forming hand, who hath made us alive. We that cannot speak plain, should lisp out praises to him who teacheth us how to speak, and hath opened our dumb lips.
Every day we are more active than the former day, therefore every day we ought to praise him better than the former day.

The buds spread into leaves, and the blossoms swell to fruit; but they know not how they grow, nor who caused them to spring up from the bosom of the earth. . . .

We cannot be good, as God is good, to all persons every where; but we can rejoice, that every where there is a God to do them good.

*(Hymn VII 246-247)*

A crescendo is building in Hymn VII. The length of the hymn exceeds those before it, the rhetorical complexity is growing, the ideological complexity is growing, and all these things continue to grow in the hymns that follow. While the content of *Hymn VII* appeals to whisper and the power of a soft voice, the rhetorical compounding of the “we” subjectivity and repetative inquiry effect growth in the awareness of the speaker – that he/she is in chorus with peers – and as such, are directing their questions to themselves, individually and collectively, allowing for not only youth’s ability to ask such questions, but to provide the answers. This mode of inquiry hardly abides by eighteenth century catechistic standards upheld by Watts and Trimmer. Barbauld discourages monologism and emphasizes the need for consistent personal development and progression. Further, the hymn’s emphasis on the power of the child’s voice to speak to God implicates the subject of public voice and the conflation of prayer and petition in Barbauld’s *Address* and Remarks discussed in my first chapter. Olivia Smith’s arguments regarding Parliamentary restrictions on suffrage and the lack of means to petition for suffrage creating a
system of linguistic hegemony in England contribute to an understanding of *Hymn VII*’s insistence that even children “who can hardly speak plain” can speak to God.

As noted above, Barbauld scholarship is preoccupied with the affinity of her *Hymns* to Blake’s poetry, particularly his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. And this hymn is an appropriate marker for a Barbauld-Blake comparatison. Blake’s “The Little Black Boy” (1789) appears derived from *Hymn VII* as it depicts a similar temporal setting as well as an inquiry into the topics of individual worth and the right to access God:

> My mother bore me in the southern wild,
> And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
> White as an angel is the English child:
> But I am black as if bereav’d of light.

> My mother taught me underneath a tree
> And sitting down before the heat of day,
> She took me on her lap and kissed me,
> And pointing to the east began to say.

> Look on the rising sun: there God does live
> And gives his light, and gives his heat away.
> And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive
> Comfort in morning joy in the noon day. (Blake 1-12)
In Barbauld’s *Hymn I*, the inarticulate are clearly the sub-human species (animals and plants), not just lower orders of human. Barbauld’s *Hymn I* also seems to preface Blake’s “London” (1794) although there are critical adjustments. While “London” exposes a lack of public voice “In every cry of every Man / In every Infants cry of fear” (5-6), the “Chimney-sweeper’s cry” (9) and “hapless soldier’s sigh” (11), Barbauld’s *Hymns* and “The Little Black Boy” extend the plight and the rights of the inarticulate beyond humanity. Moreover, the sub-human, inarticulate species deserving of representation and social protection in *Hymn I*, along with the “all persons every where” subjectivity in *Hymn VII* contributes to a global understanding of citizenship, rather than merely national. Whereas, Blake’s “The Little Black Boy” and “London” explicitly engage with national subjectivity and representation. All of these texts by Barbauld and Blake share common representations of citizenship, voice, and disenfranchisement. I will return to a discussion of “London” along with Barbauld’s poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* in my final chapter.

The plausibility and value of a Barbauld-Blake comparative reading are further enhanced by Barbauld’s next hymn, *Hymn VIII*. This focuses on the plight of a “negro” woman pining in captivity, weeping over her sick child. Thus, elements of Barbauld’s *Hymn VII* and *Hymn VIII* are combined in Blake’s “The Little Black Boy.”

*Hymn VIII* begins and ends with family. The hymn opens with family as the most immediate reference for a child’s understanding of community. Each verse extends outward, through Hutchensonian concentric circles: family, village, town, country. Then the speaker’s lens telescopes back down to the individual mother:
Negro woman, who sittest pining in captivity, and weepest over thy sick child; though no one seeth thee, God seeth thee; though no one pitieth thee, God pitieth thee: raise thy voice, forlorn and abandoned one; call upon him from amidst thy bonds, for assuredly he will hear thee.

Monarch, that rulest over an hundred states; whose frown is terrible as death, and whose armies cover the land, boast not thyself as though there were none above thee:—God is above thee; his powerful arm is always over thee; and if thou doest ill, assuredly he will punish thee.

Nations of the earth, fear the Lord; families of men, call upon the name of your God. (*Hymn VIII* 249)

In this rhetorical sequence, the negro slave woman, as mother, is marvelously seen as a mother. Notably, the figure of mother represented in *Hymns III, V, and XI* is behaviorally likened to God in the child speaker’s imagination; the inclusion of this mother within the *Hymns’* imagined community spanning nations and species diminishes her racial and social isolation. Here, the youth community of child speakers discursively expands their traditional definition of family to include transatlantic and subjugated subjectivities.

*Hymn X* introduces a rhetorical, ideological crescendo to the sequence of the *Hymns*. As noted earlier, it introduces the metaphor of the child’s mind as an acorn, destined to grow and flourish into the great oak tree. Its ideas and syntax become noticeably more complex from the preceding hymns. And, except for this feature of conceptual and structural progression, it appears to enthusiastically abandon the genre of catechism altogether. While it appears that monologism
replaces dialogism in this hymn, it performs more as mantra intended to inspire unlimited personal potential than dogmatic instruction:

Think of the wisest man you ever knew or heard of; think of the greatest man; think of the most learned man, who speaks a number of languages and can find out hidden things; think of a man who stands like that tree, sheltering and protecting a number of his fellow men, and then say to yourself, the mind of that man was once like mine, his thoughts were childish like my thoughts. . . .

Reverence therefore your own mind; receive the nurture of instruction, that the man within you may grow and flourish. You cannot guess how excellent he may become. . . .

O cherish then this precious mind, feed it with truth, nourish it with knowledge; it comes from God, it is made in his image; the oak will last for centuries of years, but the mind of man is made for immortality.

Respect in the infant the future man. Destroy not in the man the rudiments of an angel. (Hymn X 252-254)

Demers argues that “true catechesis” is empowering, rather than enfeebling through “its potential for self-knowledge” (Demers 53). Thus, on the one hand we could read this hymn as an essentialist representative of catechesis. On the other hand, even as Barbauld encourages the child speaker to “receive the nurture of instruction,” she reminds him of his angelic, god-like capacity to surpass known systems of knowledge. Whether we read this as catechetical essentialism, variation, or total generic deviation, this hymn builds on the ideas of earlier hymns which have been collectively silent on the Creed and the Decalogue as relevant frameworks for
child development. A notion of global citizenship has emerged wherein the “wisest” and “greatest” man is one who “speaks a number of languages and can find out hidden things,” who shelters and protects “a number of his fellow men” and is fed on “truth” and “knowledge.”

*Hymn XI* is truly a representative “seed” hymn, as it introduces images and themes that are expressed later in *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation*, such as: the image of the slow, planetary orbit, guided by God’s finger which invokes the process of gradual, natural revolution; and defining civilization on an astronomical scale, as God’s family extends beyond earth into infinite regions of space – raising awareness of universal citizenship as well as earthly citizenship. Indeed, *Hymn XI* continues to push past notions of the merely national subject.

In this hymn, the “Child of little observation” is encouraged to look closer at the night sky and witness the infinitude of God’s astronomical creation and civilization, urging “there are thousands and ten thousands of stars which no telescope has ever reached,” as the speaker surveys the visible planets and constellations, and those beyond:

All these are God’s families; he gives the sun to shine with a ray of his own glory; he marks the path of the planets, he guides their wanderings through the sky, and traces out their orbit with the finger of his power. . . .

Lift up thine eyes, child of earth, for God has given thee a glimpse of heaven. . . .

This earth has a variety of inhabitants; the sea, the air, the surface of the ground, swarm with creatures of different natures, sizes, and powers; to know a very little of them is to be wise among the sons of men.
What then, thinkest thou, are the various forms and natures and senses and occupations of the peopled universe?

Who can tell the birth and generation of so many worlds? Who can relate their histories? Who can describe their inhabitants? . . .

Yet these all depend upon God, they hang upon him as a child upon the breast of its mother; he tempereth the heat to the inhabitant of Mercury; he provideth resources against the cold in the frozen orb of Saturn. Doubt not that he provideth for all beings that he has made. (Hymn XI 254-255)

As in previous hymns, God is imagined in terms of mother. Moreover, he is imagined in terms of a mother’s nourishing body. A sense of dialogism returns in this hymn, but in the form of genuine, unconventional inquiry that invokes a Socratic endeavor for truth. Barbauld may be returning somewhat to a catechetical form, but these questions have no anticipation of a ready-made truth. They build on the premise of Hymn X: the mind has the capability and the moral imperative to reach beyond preset conditions of knowledge. Certainly, part of Barbauld’s intent in this hymn must also be to rhetorically demonstrate that such questions are perhaps inconceivable and should properly reside in the infinite scope of God’s perspective – that man must not assume too much wisdom, given the infinitude of that which is not known. Nonetheless, the effect of this hymn is a critical ambivalence between encouraging a sense of humility and egalitarianism given man’s relative ignorance concerning nature and the universe, and encouraging an unbounded spirit of inquiry. Both of these perspectives inform the Hymns in Prose and function as key assumptions in her later Discourse on Sins of Government.
The concluding *Hymn XV* is the only hymn in the collection that slightly approaches Trimmer’s version of catechism in that it mentions biblical prophets by name and talks about Heaven specifically. This is the most theological of all the hymns as it depicts Heaven as “our” ultimate, angelic home with God, surrounded by all the good and faithful that ever lived (i.e. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Daniel, and David). Barbauld’s key variation on an otherwise conventional portrayal of Heaven is the use of the word “country” to describe it. The space of Heaven is represented by a term typically used to imagine national community:

There is a land, where the roses are without thorns, where the flowers are not mixed with brambles. . . .

This country is Heaven: it is the country of those that are good; and nothing that is wicked must inhabit there.

The toad must not spit its venom amongst turtle doves; nor the poisonous hen-bane grow amongst sweet flowers. . . .

But that country is far better; there we shall not grieve any more, nor be sick any more, nor do wrong any more; there the cold of winter shall not wither us, or the heats of summer scorch us.

In that country there are no wars nor quarrels, but all one one another with dear love. (*Hymn XV* 259-260)

Barbauld uses the socially proximate reference of “country” to describe Heaven just as she used the developmentally appropriate reference point of mother to help the child imagine the actions and love of God. However, a child of only four or five years has no useful understanding of country in the way that he has of mother. Why would Barbauld use a term that is dependent on
almost or as much abstract thinking and evaluation as “Heaven?” Barbauld takes advantage of the child’s unformed knowledge of each of these spaces, country and Heaven, to create an early association of both concepts as utopian. When she later calls in her Sins of Government for a national morality, she is building on the concept of Heavenly citizenship introduced here. The political righteousness that motivates her Sins of Government is derived from the Hymns’ progressive logic that a man’s individual capacity to develop infinitely (Hymn X) must be mirrored in the developmental capacity of his social systems, that any country should aspire to the values esteemed in Hymn XV.

Even as the Hymns become increasingly sophisticated, they invest continually in ideas intended to inform the discourse of the Sins of Government adult reader-community. These ideas are the individual’s place and duty in the world and the universe; the power of the individual, and the power of voice; the family as the nexus of civilization (and the basis of all interconnectedness); change as a gradual, ordered, developmental process (as seen in nature); the role and power of the King as limited, depicted as superficial and lying outside of the natural order of things. Indeed, Hymns represents anti-war sentiments in an idealized, heavenly country; these sentiments are directed at English policies in the 1793 sermon.

In her poem “Washing Day” (1797), Barbauld’s nostalgic speaker muses, “so near approach / The sports of children and the toils of men” (lines 83-84), a position vehemently resisted by two of her most famous critics, Samuel Johnson and Charles Lamb. While there was certainly contemporary support for, and preoccupation with the nature and importance of youth
education, particularly within the Dissenting community, cultural authorities such as Johnson and Lamb saw little reason for Barbauld’s developmental, domestic pedagogy. Johnson credited Barbauld (then still Anna Aikin) with literary talent, but found her educational work trivial, even wasted effort, declaring that:

Education is as well known, and has long been as well known, as ever it can be. . . . Endeavoring to make children prematurely wise is useless labour. . . . Miss [Aikin] was an instance of early cultivation, but in what did it terminate? In marrying a little Presbyterian parson, who keeps an infant boarding-school, so that all her employment now is, “To suckle fools, and chronicle small-beer.” She tells the children, “This is a cat and that is a dog, with four legs and a tail; see there! you are much better than a cat or a dog, for you can speak.” If I had bestowed such an education on a daughter, and had discovered that she thought of marrying such a fellow, I would have sent her to the Congress. (Boswell 2: 407-09)

Johnson’s association of congress with infantilized, female behavior is more than humorously apt, as Barbauld’s seemingly childish tactics of identification, “this is a cat and that is a dog,” develop into significant rhetorical strategy in her sermon Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation. Whether it is a cat or a dog, a hero or a villain, a patriot or a traitor, a reformer or an oppressor, Barbauld was concerned throughout her career with calling things by their right names. In fact,

she wrote a short dialogue entitled “Things by their Right Names,” which was ultimately published in the 1792 six-volume collection of stories and dialogues for children, *Evenings at Home* (a collaborative production with her brother Dr. John Aikin). This dialogue is worth reprinting here, as it demonstrates not only how Barbauld mediates between the very basic, naming pedagogy for the young child, the allegorical and moral thinking of the slightly older child, the advanced political rhetoric of *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*, and anti-war sensibilities.

*Things by their Right Names*

*Charles*. Papa, you grow very lazy. Last winter you used to tell us stories, and now you never tell us any; and we are all got round the fire quite ready to hear you. Pray, dear papa, let us have a very pretty one?

*Father*. With all my heart – What shall it be?

C. A bloody murder, papa!

F. A bloody murder! Well then – Once upon a time, some men, dressed all alike…

C. With black crapes over their faces.

F. No; they had steel caps on: --having crossed a dark heath, wound cautiously along the skirts of a deep forest…

C. They were ill-looking fellows, I dare say.

F. I cannot say so; on the contrary, they were tall personable men as most one shall see: -- leaving on their right hand an old ruined tower on the hill…

C. At midnight, just as the clock struck twelve; was it not, papa?
F. No, really; it was on a fine, balmy summer’s morning: --and moved forwards, one behind another….

C. As still as death, creeping along under the hedges.

F. On the contrary – they walked remarkably upright; and so far from endeavouring to be hushed and still, they made a loud noise as they came along, with several sorts of instruments.

C. But, papa, they would be found out immediately.

F. They did not seem to wish to conceal themselves: on the contrary, they gloried in what they were about. –They moved forwards, I say, to a large plain, where stood a neat pretty village, which they set on fire….

C. Set a village on fire? wicked wretches!

F. And while it was burning, they murdered – twenty thousand men.

C. O fie! Papa! You do not intend I should believe this! I thought all along you were making up a tale, as you often do; but you shall not catch me this time. What! they lay still, I suppose, and let these fellows cut their throats!

F. No, truly – they resisted as long as they could.

C. How should these men kill twenty thousand people, pray?

F. Why not? the murderers were thirty thousand.

C. O, now I have found you out! You mean a BATTLE.

F. Indeed I do. I do not know of any murders half so bloody.

This story and Barbauld’s poem “Washing Day” represent two of the most significant and pervasive rhetorical strategies that connect much of her career’s work and particularly her 

*Hymns in Prose for Children* and *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*. While her insistence on
1) calling things by their right names and 2) the understanding that “the sports of children and the toils of men” are indeed connected, has been considered juvenile and vapid by her toughest critics, I contend that they were politically and literarily innovative beyond prior reckoning.

In this fireside tale, the scale of international action is contracted to individual action and national policy is contracted to personal morality as war is discovered to be no more than “tall personable men” encroaching on any given village, and no less than “wicked wretches” committing bloody murder against those who “resisted as long as they could.” Even as critics such as Johnson and Lamb\(^57\) devalued what they considered rudimentary reproductions of culture for childish audiences in Barbauld’s *Hymns* and *Lessons*, her *Discourse on Sins of Government*, *Sins of the Nation* derives its startling rhetorical power from the same method. The *Discourse* not only promotes elementary rhetoric by, for instance, examining the King’s Proclamation and ‘calling it by its right name,’ but ultimately justifies and brings to fruition the basic ideas laid out carefully for Britain’s youth culture in the *Hymns*. When she calls for a “national religion” in the *Discourse*, she is simply echoing her previous sentiments, made years before, in simple terms, to an audience that was instructed to remember their individual worth and responsibilities.

*Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*  
(alternately referred to as the *Discourse*)

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\(^57\) Most discussions of Barbauld, and certainly all of those concerned with her children’s literature, mention Charles Lamb’s famous tirade against the “cursed Barbauld Crew,” in his letter to Coleridge written on October 23, 1802. This letter is commonly quoted in Barbauld studies as an opportune point of scholarly recalibration. Mitzi Myers asserts: “Seriously misrepresenting the content of late eighteenth-century women’s texts, Lamb polarizes science and poetry, dichotomizes educators into the merely instructive and the mentally emancipatory, and reifies imagination as a separable mental faculty. He thus expresses in embryonic form ways of thinking about children, teaching, and literature that have long since been institutionalized in historical account and classroom practice” (266).
When the King issued the “Proclamation For a General Fast” on behalf of the war in 1793, Barbauld must have considered how best to respond. Her goal of encouraging the British public to recognize and strengthen its democratic power and ultimately resist not only the call to war but the abhorrent practice of mixing religion and violent agendas, involved the delicate task of rendering the unpalatable, palatable and the unfamiliar, familiar to her broadly disenfranchised public. The relationship between Barbauld’s *Discourse* to the nation and her 1781 *Hymns in Prose for Children* is itself catechistic in the way the later, adult, text inherits and dialogically remembers the child’s primer, chiefly characterized as a text already dedicated to exploring the palatable and familiar in order to grasp the complex and abstract.

In the conclusion to *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*, Barbauld calls for every man to closely examine his principles:

> We want principles, not to figure in a book of ethics, or to delight us with “grand and swelling sentiments;” but principles by which we may act, and by which we may suffer. Principles of benevolence, to dispose us to real sacrifices; political principles, of practical utility; principles of religion, to comfort and support us under all the trying vicissitudes we see around us. . . . Principles, such as I have been recommending, are not the work of a day; they are not to be acquired by any formal act of worship, or manual of devotion adapted to the exigency; and it will little avail us, that we have stood here, as a nation, before the Lord, if, individually, we do not remember that we are always so. (320)

In fact, this is the purpose and method for the *Hymns*—to nurture over time the system of individual principles that constitute a nation. If we read the *Hymns* in search of principles of
benevolence, political principles, and principles of religion, we see how apparent it is that the
*Hymns* function as an elementary blueprint for *Sins of Government*. The table below indicates
where ideas and images referencing any of these three categories of principles may be found in
the *Hymns*. *Hymn VIII* is a rather strange exception from this system, as it is pure despondency
(over death). In the table, the principles of religion are defined as Barbauld would generally
define them according to her sermon: not as dogma, but principles of morality.

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Barbauld’s final injunction in her sermon, to “remember” that ‘we, as a nation and as
individuals, are always before the Lord,’ echoes *Hymn I*’s dual counsel to find your voice and
remember God: “But now I can speak, and my tongue shall praise him . . . . When I am older, I
will praise him better; and I will never forget God, so long as my life remaineth in me” (239).
While the admonition to “remember” God is a standard topic for biblical prophets, made by
Jesus himself, Barbauld’s use of the term in a context that contracts the subjectivities of the
individual and the nation approaches Blake’s *Milton re-membering*, reconnecting or
reassembling, in this case, the (Christian) body politic. Barbauld’s emphasis in the sermon on the
need for a national religion and principles that are not characterized by dogmatic codes, but action-oriented, self-aware morals, rhetorically remembers the *Hymns’* concentration on the role of the individual in an interconnected universe, the power of voice, the beauty and peace in the natural world, the developmental nature of growth and change, and the rule of love.

Early in *Sins of Government* Barbauld employs her signature technique of calling things by their right names. In the same mode as a schoolteacher, or the instructive mother in her *Lessons* and *Hymns*, Barbauld takes the language of the Proclamation and renders it startlingly familiar. That is, the authoritative declaration of the King is translated according to the individual’s genuine, democratic stake in the national situation. She invokes the catechistic technique of progression dynamics in order to show that the individual does have a stake in the nation, arguing that:

> It were trifling with our consciences to endeavor to separate the acts of governors sanctioned by the nation, from the acts of the nation. . . . If the maxim that the king can do no wrong throws upon ministers the responsibility, because without ministers no wrong could be done, the same reason throws it from them upon the people, without whom ministers could do no wrong. (300)

Barbauld draws this rhetorical diagram that exploits British public assumptions about social circles of influence extending from the individual to the family, to the village, to the nation, and beyond; these assumptions had been reinforced in the youth culture of her *Hymns in Prose*. If the height of British political power is divinely sanctioned and conserved in one position, effectively preventing it from trickling down through other governors, but human fallibility has the ability to trickle up through British society into its governors, there is an unresolved gap. The loophole of
sovereignty identified in the beginning of this chapter is exposed by this synonymous loophole of fallibility, as the King commands that “we and our people may humble ourselves before Almighty God, in order to obtain pardon of our sins” (495).

If sin is the unavoidable feature of personal and public existence, and the highest national authority is proclaiming a national day of fasting in order to gain divine sanction for war, the royal “we” issuing the Proclamation, the collective, aristocratic governing “we,” the public non-governing “we,” and the everyone in the nation of all ranks “we” become easily conflated subjectivities. Barbauld boldly asserts:

The language of the Proclamation then may be thus interpreted—People! who in your individual capacities are rich and poor, high and low, governors and governed, assemble yourselves in the unity of your public existence; rest from your ordinary occupations, give a different direction to the exercises of your public worship, confess – not every man his own sins, but all the sins of all. We, your appointed rulers, before we allow ourselves to go on executing your will in a conjuncture so important, force you to make a pause, that you may be constrained to reflect, that you may bring this will, paramount [to] every thing else, into the sacred presence of God. . . . (300-01)

Of course, the language of a royal proclamation in 1793 England was not up for interpretation. But, its unexpectedly fallible and socially dependent, royal “we” subjectivity, made it vulnerable to interpretation, particularly when the national consciousness had been primed for twelve years by a pervasive text that systematically enculterated democratic values through unisonance. Thus, when Barbauld calls the Proclamation by its right name, as an injunction to everyone in the
nation to “assemble yourselves in the unity of your public existence,” again she is leveraging her progressive investment in middle-class culture. Barbauld’s *Hymns II, III, V, VII, VIII, XI*, and *XV*, explicitly engage and progressively build up the public “we” subjectivity as a community defined by its religious/spiritual voice, its social voice, and its political voice; ultimately, *Hymn XV* posits that the spiritually and socially conscious “we” can progress to become a *country* of heaven: “In that country there are no wars nor quarrels, but all love one another with dear love” (260).

Barbauld effectively renames and reorients the King’s statement from authoritarian Proclamation to collective awakening. The “we” subjectivity that persists in her *Sins of Government* undergoes an exercise in self-inquiry that is reminiscent of the Socratic catechetical technique in her *Hymns VII*, and *XI*. In these *Hymns* Barbauld deviates from eighteenth-century catechetical tradition as the speaker child asks himself, and the rest of his imagined youth community, a series of genuine questions that are intended to apprehend truth through self-realization and self-contemplation, rather than rehearse what would be perceived as anti-Socratic, prescribed, dogmatic false-dialogue: “May we that are so young, speak to him that always was? May we that can hardly speak plain, speak to God?” (*Hymn VII* 246); “What then, thinkest thou, are the various forms and natures and senses and occupations of the peopled universe?” (*Hymn XI* 255). In the *Hymns*, the questions progress from self contemplation to communal, social contemplation; and they do this through a mode of inquiry that discourages traditionally catechistic dogmatic response. In *Sins of Government*, Barbauld issues a series of rhetorical questions that explicitly problematize and denounce the morality of eighteenth century catechism itself. The following passage helps contextualize what must have been Barbauld’s
own feelings on Dissent as well as her decision process when conceiving of the project and method of her *Hymns* years earlier:

> Have we calculated the wound which is given to the peace of a good man, the thorns that are strewed upon his pillow, when through hard necessity, he complies with what his soul abhors? Have we calculated the harm done to the morals of a nation, by the established *necessity* of perjury? We shall do well, being now by the command of our rulers before the Lord, to reflect on these things; and if we want food for our national penitence, perhaps we may here find it. (306)

Barbauld’s implied argument against mandatory subscription to the thirty-nine articles of faith of the Church of England in order to obtain full national citizenship is similar to Bahktin’s generic criticism of traditional catechism. The civic requirement of the thirty-nine articles is akin to the fundamental flaw in catechism. In the one, annihilation of self is interpreted as patriotism, and in the other, annihilation of a genuinely dialogic pursuit of truth is lauded as righteous faith. In the passage above, Barbauld deftly conflates the progression dynamics of traditional catechism, the same dynamics used in her *Hymns* that draws the focus of the reader-inquirer from individual experience to the collective experience, and the rhetorical ideology of Socratic catechetical dialogue (also from *Hymns*), to engage with the precept of national law.

This passage of *Sins of Government* also indicates a strategic inversion. While her early goal in this text resembled that of *Hymns* as it rendered unfamiliar concepts of authority familiar and palatable by democratizing the fast and unveiling the individual’s authentic stake in the nation, her remaining goal becomes the systematic inversion of palatable mainstream assumptions into unpalatable shocks. Barbauld maintains structural continuity with her reliance
on progression dynamics resembling the *Hymns* and her story *Calling Things By Their Right Names*. The logical progression of her passage establishes individual compliance with abhorrent precepts as a moral failure, much like a sin of omission wherein one does not act on conscience. Not acting on conscience is likened to perjury. Thus, the existing laws attaching national citizenship with subscription in the state church are deconstructed as antithetical designs. As this phenomenon of lawful perjury compounds on a national scale, the nation is necessarily filled with law-abiding individuals who are nonetheless unlawful sinners. Consequently, the familiar cultural value of obeying the law is interpreted as morally perjurious and sinful. This naturally implies that conscientious dissent would be the supremely courageous action.

Barbauld indexes the more glaring national sins that are, very simply, overblown versions of typical personal sins: extravagance, pride, and cruelty/oppression. She progressively tracks the development of national sins to their inevitable outcome, the sinful state of war:

*When the workings of these bad passions are swelled to their height by mutual animosity and opposition, war ensues. War is a state in which all our feelings and our duties suffer a total and strange inversion; a state, in which Life dies, Death lives, and Nature breeds Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things. . . . war may be said to be, with regard to nations, the sin which most easily besets them. We, my friends, in common with other nations, have much guilt to repent of*
from this cause, and it ought to make a large part of our humiliations on this day.

(311-312)

In order to demonstrate her case that war is a national sin, Barbauld catechistically focuses on the nature of personal sin and develops this perspective on a national scale. Once she rhetorically positions her Discourse on war in the public space of egalitarian guilt, she quickly contracts the purview back to individual experience. Barbauld invokes her introductory technique in Sins of Government, of demonstrating the individual’s stake in the nation thereby democratizing the proclamation for a fast, as she parses the word “war,” demonstrating its individuated elements:

Our wars have been wars of cool calculating interest, as free from hatred as from love of mankind. . . . We should, therefore, do well to translate this word war into language more intelligible to us. When we pay our army and our navy estimates, let us set down—so much for killing, so much for maiming, so much for making widows and orphans, so much for bringing famine upon a district, so much for corrupting citizens and subjects into spies and traitors, so much for ruining industrious tradesmen and making bankrupts, (of that species of distress at least, we can form an idea,) so much for letting loose the demons of fury, rapine, and lust, within the fold of cultivated society, and giving to the brutal ferocity of the most ferocious, its full scope and range of invention. We shall by this means know what we have paid our money for, whether we have made a good bargain, and whether the account is likely to pass – elsewhere. (312-313)

58 Milton, Paradise Lost (4: 588-89).
Barbauld elaborates the theme of her domestic evening story, *Calling Things By Their Right Names*, as she calls war “what it is” in terms of individual and social consequence. Her technique is highly sentimental, not unlike other representations of war made by contemporary women writers such as Helen Maria Williams. In the spirit of her *Hymns in Prose*, Barbauld attempts to identify an abstract concept by reducing it to personal effects. However, the familiarization of “war” renders it unpalatable and demonic.

Barbauld does not limit her translation of authoritative statement to the King’s political power to issue a nation-wide proclamation. She also rewrites the Church’s prayer for divine aid in war:

> In this guilty business there is a circumstance which greatly aggravates its guilt, and that is the impiety of calling upon the Divine Being to assist us in it…. Their prayer, if put into plain language, would run thus: God of love, father of all the families of the earth, we are going to tear in pieces our brethren of mankind, but our strength is not equal to our fury, we beseech thee to assist us in the work of slaughter. Go out we pray thee with our fleets and armies; we call them christian. . . . (314)

Like the King’s proclamation, any public prayer issued on behalf of the King’s proclamation is not up for interpretation.

She is careful to note the significance of the rule of law, arguing that “Society could not exist, if every individual took it upon himself not only to judge, but to act from his own judgment in those things in which a nation acts collectively” (315). However, Barbauld anticipates and
debunks what we now call the “Nuremburg Defense”—deeming it criminal to concur with any “duties” that were, indeed, cruel. She goes as far as to argue for the patriotism of dissent:

But though, for the sake of peace and order, we ought, in general cases, to give our passive concurrence to measures which we may think wrong, peace and order do not require us to give them the sanction of our approbation. On the contrary, the more strictly we are bound to acquiesce, the more it is incumbent on us to remonstrate. Every good man owes it to his country and to his own character, to lift his voice against a ruinous war, an unequal tax, or an edict of persecution: and to oppose them, temperately, but firmly, by all the means in his power; and indeed this is the only way reformations can ever be brought about, or that government can enjoy the advantage of general opinion. (317)

This form of patriotism appears again in her poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, where it results in her public humiliation and silencing, and perhaps accounts for her long-term disappearance from the British literary canon. In *Sins of Government*, Barbauld refers to the same fundamental power that underlies her *Hymns in Prose* as the true means for change: the power of voice. While the bulk of the *Hymns in Prose* is occupied with awakening the child to the legitimacy and power of his voice as a good citizen of nature and lover of God, *Sins of Government* is perhaps more rhetorically catechistic in its repudiation of the British citizen’s failure to remember his most significant and deeply inherent duty.
Chapter Three:

What “men, like mice, may share”: Barbauld’s Signature Aesthetics of Contractions and Bubble Spaces

While *Hymns in Prose for Children* establish Barbauld at the origins of modern British nationalism, her poetry similarly establishes Barbauld at the origins of what we have come to define as Romanticism—as her poems mediate eighteenth-century Establishment aesthetics and the revolutionary Romantic aesthetics of, for instance, *Lyrical Ballads*. Indeed, I would not be the first to suggest that Barbauld consciously coopts the language and imagery of Pope and Johnson. In fact, William McCarthy, Vassiliki Markidou, Haley Bordo and others have already demonstrated the ways in which Barbauld’s poetry does not merely inherit Miltonic and eighteenth-century poetic traditions, but explores ambiguity and revision of these traditions. I do not wish to repeat work that has already been done on this front. My larger argument is that Barbauld was a transitional poet, working between Enlightenment and Romantic aesthetics. Her techniques of contraction and bubble imagery entertain the delicate dynamic between pre- and post-, and allow for the examination of pure potential sans attributes such as corporeal form, species, gender, religion, social class, and nationality.

As I indicated above, there is a profound connection between the Romantic tension that gives rise to understanding artistic originality as a function of the radical power of the mind to discover something entirely new or artistic production as a function of inheritance, imitation, and

59 See Vassiliki Markidou, “‘Bubble[s]’ and Female Verse: A Reading of Anna Laetitia Barbauld’s ‘Washing Day’” (2007), Bordo, “Reinvoking the ‘Domestic Muse’: Anna Laetitia Barbauld and the Performance of Genre” (2000), and McCarthy, “‘We Hoped the Woman Was Going to Appear’.”
process, and the tension that gives rise to the attempt by historians and literary scholars to understand history and the development of our literary canon as functions of either continuous influence or isolated, unique events. Now I will add feminist theory and the patterns of late twentieth-century recovery scholarship to complicate this intersection of Romantic, historic, and literary paradigmatic tensions. Specifically, feminism has struggled with the critical recovery of Barbauld either in a synchronic focus, attempting to analyze her texts in isolation and as representative of the “Woman” in the eighteenth century, or in a diachronic focus, looking at her texts in the context of the process of general cultural production and the role of influence. In addition to commenting on the narrative of Barbauld scholarship, I will analyze the ways her poetry imagines and represents these tensions that contextualize her work. Concentrating on her techniques of contraction and bubble imagery allows us to see Barbauld’s interest in the state of ambivalence.

While feminist scholars in the last third of the twentieth century have debated the existence of what Ann Rosalind Jones calls “a bedrock female nature” (370), which might produce texts that uniquely express a pure feminine experience in purely feminine discourse (uncorrupted by the practices and perspectives of patriarchal culture), more archival material has emerged in the field of literary studies, indicating that theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig may have overlooked previous incarnations of féminité or l’écriture féminine.60 These are examples of women’s writing that are products of genuine female experience, whether they are the expression of female difference by means of a

bodily subjectivity, or the systematic disruption of masculine discourse and genres. As Cixous demands that women write as a woman toward women, she expresses a rather Romantic goal—the desire to break away from the old, to create something totally new without precedent, to be prophetic. Whether or not she is conscious of the comparison, Cixous’ argument appropriates Wordsworth’s definition of the Poet as “a man speaking to men” in his “Preface” to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. She writes that since these twentieth-century feminist reflections on women’s writing are taking shape in an area just on the point of being discovered, they necessarily bear the mark of our time—a time during which the new breaks away from the old, and, more precisely, the (feminine) new from the old (*la nouvelle de l’ancien*). Thus, as there are no grounds for establishing a discourse, but rather an arid millennial ground to break, what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project. (347)

Cixous promotes two myths: first, that there is such a thing as original Woman, capable of utterly unique expression; and second, that prior to the 1970s there really were no examples of women writing as woman. By 1981, Jones takes the following position: “Indeed, feminist research suggests that the French may have been too hasty in their claim that women are only now beginning to challenge the symbolic order” (378).

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61 Cixous explains that “Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies. . . . Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” (345).
Barbauld may have been approaching a version of, or a quest for, l’écriture féminine. The “myth” of l’écriture féminine, that is, the desire for an original feminine experience uncorrupted by male/patriarchal/cultural influence, bears a striking resemblance to the myth of origins pursued by Romantic poets. The hypothesis that Barbauld was pursuing an early écriture féminine that was also inherently Romantic as a quest for (mythic) antecedence or pure originality in art and personal-feminine subjectivity reveals the potential for an even richer discourse on her poetry and its simultaneously groundbreaking and mediating role within our established Romantic literary canon.

Few discussions have analyzed connections between Barbauld’s poetry and Wordsworth’s, and there has been little focus on the links between Barbauld’s poetics and *Lyrical Ballads*. Critics seem to have been put off the trail by Barbauld’s puzzling statement to Coleridge that *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was “improbable and had no moral” (McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* xv). McCarthy has recently laid this rumor to rest in his 2008 biography of Barbauld, insisting that Anglo-American New Critics of the 1930’s and later did not take into account that Barbauld was commenting on an early draft of the poem, which would have differed greatly from the final product. McCarthy suggests that “it may well be to Barbauld’s criticism that we owe the Mariner we know today” (xv). Brief articles on the connections between Barbauld and Wordsworth have mostly appeared in *Notes and Queries*

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62 McCarthy points to Coleridge’s *Table Talk* (1835) as a source for Barbauld’s statement, and Thomas M. Raysor as a proponent of the critical trend to dismiss Barbauld as “literal minded.” McCarthy asserts that the “Mariner” was revised repeatedly and any version Barbauld discussed with Coleridge would have differed from the poem we know dating from 1817 (*Voice of the Enlightenment* xv). Revisions of “The Ancient Mariner” are tracked in Jack Stillinger, *Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems* (1994). Also see Thomas M. Raysor, “Coleridge’s Comment on the Moral of ‘The Ancient Mariner’” (1952).
tend to concentrate on her long poem, “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” (1773).\(^6\) In her conclusion to a 1995 article on “Washing-Day,” Elizabeth Kraft offers an apt launching point for my discussion:

While Barbauld is more usually associated with the Enlightenment than with the Romantic period, she shares with her younger contemporaries, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a conviction that the imagination operates through the association of image and thought to grasp prophetic insight that can transform existence or perception permanently. “Washing-Day” stands with Coleridge’s conversation poems as a testament to the power of the imagination as it operates upon the homely occasion—the frost, an enforced solitude in a lime-tree bower, the necessity of washing. It also shares with Wordsworth’s *Prelude* the awareness that epiphanic moments of childhood reverberate through the course of one’s life. (37)

This chapter closely examines the Woman in Barbauld’s poetry, and specifically, at those bubble-like moments, a common image of hers in poems such as “Washing Day” (1797), of concentration in her texts which elucidate the Woman, but also happen to mirror the delicate thought-space between inarticulate, infinite perception, and articulated, visible, embodiment.

“Washing Day” is a crucial example of how Barbauld uses bubble imagery to represent the creative imagination and employ her signature technique of contracting gradations or stages of things. She contracts, and therefore aesthetically mediates the experience of children and men.

Further, Barbauld’s rhetorical contraction of the concepts of general suffering and the subjectivity of a minute creature extends beyond “The Mouse’s Petition” (1773). In “The Caterpillar,” (1825) the speaker holds a single caterpillar in her hand and realizes that as an individual she cannot kill it (like all the others that she previously killed), and likens this revelation to the condition of war, wherein the victor can unfeelingly slaughter whole armies of men. However, if the view and feeling of an army is simply contracted to an individual suffering soldier, war becomes impossible. This poem mediates the content and rhetoric of her *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*, in which she renders the mandated national fast on behalf of the British military campaign against France morally ridiculous by contrasting and contracting the morals of a nation to the morals of the individual: “there are men who appear not insensible to the rules of morality as they respect individuals, and who unaccountably disclaim them with respect to nations” (301). Barbauld’s technique of contraction reorders the space and time for conventionally and developmentally separate mediums: the public realm of national identification and reform, and the (seemingly) juvenile discourse of caterpillars and “Baby-Houses.” Further, her “small” poems that contract adult-public-Enlightenment topics and miniature subjectivity, such as “The Mouse’s Petition” and “The Caterpillar,” posit the existence of a soul in these creatures, predating the Wollstonecraftian argument for the existence, and respect of women’s souls. Stuart Peterfreund argues that Wollstonecraft’s persistent argument for the existence of women’s souls in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* may have been
based on a misconception of Islamic (and subsequent Christian) misogyny. Nonetheless, Wollstonecraft regarded the anxiety over the status of female souls as culturally pervasive through such Western texts as *Paradise Lost.* Further, Peterfreund notes along with Mary Poovey and Janet Todd that Wollstonecraft’s effort to establish the full equality of souls involved denying women’s sexuality. Wollstonecraft felt compelled to reclaim the female soul at the expense of acknowledging female sexuality (Peterfreund 15). Interestingly, while she is in line with Wollstonecraft’s reclamation of the female soul, Barbauld makes no effort to deny women’s sexuality—rather, the opposite is true. In “To a Little Invisible Being,” an ode to an unborn child and the obviously sexed condition of pregnancy, and “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” a gynotopic, highly sexualized, exploration of female contemplation, Barbauld integrates the topics of female souls and sexuality.

In “To a Little Invisible Being,” the “infant bud of being” that the poet-speaker “haste[s] to blow” from the womb and unfold into a little visible being resides in a critically delicate bubble space. Within the physical pregnant space, a primarily sexed (and gendered) woman’s experience, the ode identifies a subject whose key moment of existence is pre-gender, pre-sexed, pre-lingual—conceived and yet unspoken. This space is not unlike the Romantic poet’s fleeting moment of creative imagination between encounter and response, thought and utterance (a condition repeatedly treated by poets such as Wordsworth and Shelley, following Barbauld).

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“The Mouse’s Petition”

As the title indicates, “The Mouse’s Petition” is an example of Barbauld’s aesthetic contraction of normally disparate concepts or forms—small and large, animal and human, inarticulate and rhetorically complex, material and immaterial. McCarthy and Kraft note that this poem was composed in the summer of 1771, during a visit to Joseph Priestley. At the time, he was performing scientific experiments involving live mice, and this poem was found in the cage of a mouse “where he had been confined all night by Dr. Priestley, for the sake of making experiments with different kinds of air” (Barbauld’s note, Poems 1792, qtd. by McCarthy and Kraft 69). The poem was first published in Poems (1773), and was received, and has continued to be read, as chiefly a comment on the inhumane treatment of animals. However, Barbauld cautioned against this misreading, adding a footnote in the third edition of Poems in which she clarifies:

The author is concerned to find, that what was intended as the petition of mercy against justice, has been construed as the plea of humanity against cruelty. She is certain that cruelty could never be apprehended from the Gentleman to whom this is addressed; and the poor animal would have suffered more as the victim of domestic economy [i.e., in a mouse trap], than of philosophical [scientific] curiosity. (qtd. in McCarthy and Kraft 69)

In his biography, which is largely sympathetic and aims to redeem Barbauld of the harsh critiques of some of her contemporaries as well as twentieth-century scholars, McCarthy reveals his skepticism of Barbauld’s caveat—finding it hard to believe that she could not have been
aware of the poem’s obvious theme of animal cruelty (79). For the sake of this discussion, the poem is reprinted below:

\[\textit{Parcere subjectis, & debellare superbos.}\]

\textit{Virgil}.\(^{65}\)

Oh! hear a pensive prisoner’s prayer,

For liberty that sighs;

And never let thine heart be shut

Against the wretch’s cries.

For here forlorn and sad I sit,

Within the wiry grate;

And tremble at th’approaching morn,

Which brings impending fate.

If e’er thy breast with freedom glow’d,

And spurn’d a tyrant’s chain,

Let not thy strong oppressive force

A free-born mouse detain.

Oh! do not stain with guiltless blood

Thy hospitable hearth;

\(^{65}\) \textit{Aeneid}, 6:853. To spare the humbled, and to tame in war the proud! (Loeb translation).
Nor triumph that thy wiles betray’d
A prize so little worth.

The scatter’d gleanings of a feast
My frugal meals supply;
But if thine unrelenting heart
That slender boon deny,

The cheerful light, the vital air,
Are blessings widely given;
Let nature’s commoners enjoy
The common gifts of heaven.

The well taught philosophic mind
To all compassion gives;
Casts round the world an equal eye,
And feels for all that lives.

If mind, as ancient sages taught,
A never dying flame,
Still shifts thro’ matter’s varying forms
In every form the same,
Beware, lest in the worm you crush
A brother’s soul you find;
And tremble lest thy luckless hand
Dislodge a kindred mind.

Or, if this transient gleam of day
Be all of life we share,
Let pity plead within they breast
That little all to spare.

So may thy hospitable board
With health and peace be crown’d;
And every charm of heartfelt ease
Beneath thy roof be found.

So, when destruction lurks unseen,
Which men, like mice, may share,
May some kind angel clear thy path,
And break the hidden snare.

My reading of this poem hinges on three points that have either been overlooked by critics or inadequately represented. First, while this poem is not conventionally Romantic
according to more lyrical examples put forth by writers such as Robert Burns in “To a Mouse,” it is not a cleanly contrasting example of eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourse either. Rather, it is an example of transitional writing in which Enlightenment discourse and Romantic subjectivities are mediated. Second, the poem’s intimation of gendered experience and the question of women’s souls have not been adequately discussed. As the mouse posits the existence and transitory nature of animal souls, it is likewise implicating the controversy over the existence of women’s souls—questions that Wollstonecraft would later address in Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). Third, the poem as penal petition implicates not only the British prison system, but the possible entrapment—the “hidden snare”—of “nature’s commoners,” or those outside of the higher orders of social and political power. The poem extends the logic of Locke’s Second Essay on Civil Government (1689) to the animal world.66

Critical readings of “The Mouse’s Petition” have predominantly used the poem to feature larger argumentative contrasts such as its generic difference from Romantic lyric, or its embedded contest between social and artistic authority and those oppressed by such authority. David Perkins sets up a sharp contrast between Barbauld’s eighteenth-century rationalist discourse in “The Mouse’s Petition” and what he reads as a more traditionally Romantic iteration of the mouse subject in Robert Burns’s “To a Mouse.”67 Of the artistic use of animals in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Perkins observes,

66 In Two Treatises of Government, Locke famously argues that “the natural state is also one of equality in which all power and jurisdiction is reciprocal and no one has more than another. It is evident that all human beings—as creatures belonging to the same species and rank and born indiscriminately with all the same natural advantages and faculties — are equal amongst themselves” (70).

for many persons, animals offered themselves as a conscience-appeasing
surrogate for human sufferers, whose relief they were less ready to champion,
perhaps because it might involve or symbolize a riskier alteration of the social
order. In terms of practical politics, so to speak, it was clear that the baited,
plucked, ridden, hunted creatures could not threaten their masters as humans
might and lately had in the French Revolution. If animals had rights, they could
not enforce them. (4)

This much is true not only of Barbauld’s imprisoned mouse in “The Mouse’s Petition,” but of
Barbauld herself as a publicly disenfranchised young woman writer benefiting from an unusually
advanced education with limited career opportunities.

Mitzi Myers insists that Barbauld, “through the analogical hierarchies of child-adult,
animal-human, female-male, can simultaneously recreate the relative vulnerabilities of the
female situation encoded in the plights of the miniature, the unhoused, the entrapped” (269). In
an analysis similar to that of Perkins, Myers reads “The Mouse’s Petition” through the lens of
Foucault, observing that

a precariously domiciled populace within and subsidiary to a larger community,
mice are readily available to satirize the human world they see, to constitute an
alternative society, and to embody the plight of the displaced or marginal – the
orphan and the poor, the juvenile and the feminine. Michel Foucault helps us
think about how a mouse means, reminding us that “power is exercised from innumerable points,” that it “comes from below,” too (94).68 (Myers 276)

This perspective, while useful in reading her children’s literature, or supporting a defensive stance to counter and overturn the dismissals of Barbauld by Johnson, Lamb, and others, may limit readings to a bottom-up perspective. That is, invoking Foucault in this way risks reading Barbauld’s “juvenile trivia” as encoded critique of social and artistic power, set up to “deflate and contest high Romantic claims to the oracular and transcendent” (Myers 272). This reading sees a poem like “The Mouse’s Petition” as showcasing a contest between those with authority and those without.69

Myers’s term, “encoding,” may be questionable in describing this poem. The mouse, quite obviously, by virtue of its eloquence and Enlightenment-rationalist discourse regarding tyranny and oppression, lays bare the universal condition and sentiments of the oppressed. That is, the mouse’s diminutive state and perspective do not really function as ‘cover’ for authorial interjections of social truths. Rather, the mouse exhibits a lofty mode of expression derived from an innate sense of egalitarianism resulting in outright warnings to the presumptive captor:

“Beware, lest in the worm you crush / A brother’s soul you find” (33-34). These lines seem to identify with Blake’s “Auguries of Innocence” (1803) in which, “The Lamb misusd breeds Public Strife / And yet forgives the Butchers Knife” (23-24), or his conclusion to “A Song of

68 Myers uses Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*.

69 In addition to Myers, studies on eighteenth-century uses of animals to represent the condition and causes of variously oppressed peoples such as children, women, the poor, the colonized, include: Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (1992), and Moira Ferguson, *Animal Advocacy and Englishwomen, 1780-1900: Patriots, Nation, and Empire* (1998).
Liberty” in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93): “For every thing that lives is Holy.” The mouse exemplifies the natural nobility and eloquence of all creatures who are allowed to speak.

On the one hand, I do not agree that Barbauld’s poetry supports a reading that the plight of the encoded miniature subject is intended to call the Romantic sublime into question—positioning Barbauld in mere contest with high Romanticism (high Romanticism, being an aesthetic stance that was not really publicly circulated in 1773). On the other hand, I agree with Myers that “the mouse redefines reality and makes its audience see from its tiny vantage point” (276), but not just for the sake of encoding feminine sensibility into its argument, as Myers insists. The mouse’s voice raises several profound issues, not least of which, is the Pythagorean transmigration of souls and the consequential equality of all living creatures, or “matter’s varying forms / In every form the same” (31-32). What is perhaps most remarkable about this poem is its complication of eighteenth-century masculinist assumptions regarding the existence of souls. Later, in her *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft made a specific case for the existence and necessary rights of the souls of women. Here, Barbauld represents the soul of a non-human creature, naturally implicating any contextual, philosophical debate over gender and souls.

Barbauld may have publicly attempted to dissociate her poem from the eighteenth-century debate over animal cruelty, but as David Perkins’s book, *Romanticism and Animal Rights*, indicates, it is difficult to understand this poem without taking somewhat into account

70 James Thomson’s influence on Barbauld’s writings is consistently apparent. In his 1735 poem, *Liberty*, Thomson makes a plea for animal rights in terms of the Pythagorean philosophy on the unbounded and eternal nature of souls, or transmigration of souls: “He [Pythagoras] taught that Life’s indissoluble Flame, / From Brute to Man, and Man to Brute again, / For ever shifting, runs th’ eternal round; / Thence try’d against the blood-polluted Meal . . . To turn the human Heart” (63-68).
Cartesian, Enlightenment, Parliamentary, and Romantic discourses on animal souls and rights. As there was almost no legal protection of animals in Britain until 1822 when Parliament passed a bill to “Prevent the Cruel Treatment of Cattle,” it would seem that the Cartesian view of animals as automata without language or self-consciousness informed public policy. Yet, as Peter Harrison notes, Descartes’ own views on the existence of animal souls were not simple. In a letter to Henry More, Descartes admitted “though I regard it as established that we cannot prove there is any thought in animals, I do not think it is thereby proved that there is not, since the human mind does not reach into their hearts” (Harrison 226). Later on, Descartes’s English disciple, John Norris, in his Essay Towards the Theory of the Ideal or Intelligible World (1704), promoted the Cartesian view, but preferred erring in kindness towards animals: “Reason does most favour the side which denies all Thought and Perception to animals, yet, . . . our Reason [may] deceive us, as ‘tis easy to err in the Dark” (Harrison 226).

Descartes’s cautious ambivalence regarding the existence of animal souls reverberates in Barbauld’s sequence of conditional clauses in “The Mouse’s Petition.” The poem’s suppositions ask that if readers cannot accept the idea of transmigration of souls, can they not, at least, accept the possibility of animal souls? Like Norris’s hedging on behalf of the unknown, the conditional clauses “If mind . . . / Still shifts . . . / Beware, lest . . . / A brother’s soul you find; / Or, if this transient gleam of day / Be all of life we share (29-38), at minimum, anticipate a Bentham-esque

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71 See René Descartes, Discourse on Method.

sentiment that we should not inflict pain on something (or someone) we do not fully understand.\textsuperscript{73}

Both Francis Hutcheson and Locke deplored animal cruelty because of its developmental implications for human relations. That is, cruelty toward animals could produce bad habits toward fellow human beings, and childish tormenting of animals could lead to adult hardness of heart.\textsuperscript{74} Locke’s developmental perspective on animal cruelty is akin to Barbauld’s themes and strategies in \textit{Hymns in Prose for Children}. The collection of \textit{Hymns} devotes significant space to the values of childhood animal caretaking and themes of Hutchesonian interconnectedness. While Enlightenment views on developmental psychology and interconnection inform Barbauld’s representation of animals according to democratic values as in this passage from \textit{Hymn II},

\begin{quote}
The birds can warble, and the young lambs can bleat; but we can open our lips in his praise, we can speak of all his goodness. Therefore we will thank him for ourselves, and we will thank him for those that cannot speak. (\textit{Hymn II} 240)
\end{quote}

the use of animals in nearly every hymn is also a strategy for early child identification—being able to locate the self first \textit{in} the small and the familiar, then \textit{in relation to} the small and familiar,

\textsuperscript{73} See Bentham’s classic statement concerning the humane treatment of not only slaves, but all living creatures: “The question is not, can they reason? Nor, Can they \textit{talk}, but Can they \textit{suffer}?” in \textit{An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation} (1789).

\textsuperscript{74} Perkins observes that Francis Hutcheson “echoed the traditional statements in 1755: ‘frequent cruelty to brutes may produce such a bad habit of mind as may break out in like treatment of our fellows.’ Thanks to John Locke, whose psychological theories were widely accepted, the argument acquired a developmental perspective (20). See Locke, \textit{Thoughts on Education} (1693).
in order to explore and understand larger and more abstract questions regarding God, family, society, and citizenship. As in *Hymns in Prose*, “The Mouse’s Petition” mediates Enlightenment philosophies of Hutcheson and Locke and Romantic aesthetics, such as the championing of the common or low subject in the associated portrayal of mice and men.

In fact, Barbauld’s final verse suggesting the unseen destruction, “Which men, like mice, may share” (46), appeared fourteen years prior to Robert Burns’s famous poem, “To a Mouse.” Despite “The Mouse’s Petition’s” implied Enlightenment interest in developmental consciousness overlapping with her *Hymns in Prose*, this aesthetic of dramatically contracting the experience and sensibilities of mice and men accounts for my decision to include this poem in the same chapter discussion as Barbauld’s “Washing Day,” in which soap bubbles are likened to the Mongolfier balloon: “so near approach / The sports of children and the toils of men” (83-84). Perkins’s comparative reading of Barbauld’s and Burns’s poems contributes to the pattern in Barbauld scholarship that I seek to complicate, namely, the tendency to read Barbauld as primarily an eighteenth-century writer, a thorough reproducer of Johnson and Pope, a point of distinction against which to read Romantic artistic innovations. My larger argument that Barbauld is a transitional writer containing both eighteenth-century and Romantic aesthetics and concerns in the collection of her writing is distilled in individual poems such as “The Mouse’s Petition,” “Washing Day,” and “To a Little Invisible Being who is Expected Soon to Become Visible.” These poems serve as condensed case studies in the effect of her career, as ‘caged,’ ‘bubble,’ and ‘womb’ spaces, that contain and contract supposed contradictory or opposing concepts such as the experience of mice and men.
The opening lines to “The Mouse’s Petition” prefigure the rhetorical move of Barbauld’s *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry Into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1792), in which she likens an individual’s prayer to a public petition. Describing prayer as petition imbues the speaker subject with the democratic right to access God, or in this case, access to the moral authority who controls the life and death of its mouse subject. Here, the mouse’s prayer reads as a penal petition rather than a religious petition. The mouse’s “wiry grate,” allusions to “a tyrant’s chain,” and “impending fate” refer to conditions of the British penal system, the practice of hanging in chains, and other forms of execution. Species difference takes a back seat to the lofty introductory personifications of the “pensive prisoner” consciously anticipating the morning’s execution, “liberty that sighs,” and the “wretch [who] cries.” These personifications reveal that the soul, even “nature’s commoner,” is naturally: free-born, guiltless, pensive, liberty-minded, and resentful of physical as well as intellectual hindrance.

Certainly, Burns’s “To a Mouse” represents a more Romantic lyric aesthetic and “realistic description” of the mouse for the reader’s imagination than Barbauld’s poem (Perkins 9). However, to read “The Mouse’s Petition” in pure contradistinction to Burns’s “To a Mouse” for the sake of representing eighteenth-century rationalist discourse versus Romantic lyric, may overlook innovations of Barbauld’s that prefigure writers such as Wordsworth, Blake, and Shelley, for whom acts leading to any kind of personal hindrance constituted true evil.

75 In the “spots of time” passage of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth alludes to the practice of hanging in chains as punishment for particularly heinous crimes when describing the site near his father’s house where “A murderer had been hung in chains” (*The Prelude* 1850, XII.236).
Perkins’s assessment that Barbauld’s strategy in inventing a mouse speaker was less “daring” than Burns’s “To a Mouse,” because her mouse “cannot plausibly picture itself in much detail,” seems more for the sake of argument than to promote analysis: “Barbauld lacks the ample, realistic description that brings the mouse vividly before the imagination of Burns’s reader, and of course her reasoning mouse cannot create the lyric illusion that was important to Romantic poetry—the illusion of the presence of the speaker and of the reality of the occasion” (9). This is a significant criticism as it reveals an unintentional, hegemonic parallel between generic discrepancy based on a poem’s implausible voice and political discrepancies waged by Parliament based on the implausible petitioning voice of social commoners. For Perkins, it as if the mouse as implausible speaker invalidates or diminishes the function of the poem within Romantic genre, not unlike the effect of a peasant’s petition to Parliament in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Of course, I make this point not so much to insist that readers suspend disbelief and give themselves over to the plausibility of a mouse speaker for moral reasons, but rather to point out a surprising parallel in the way critics may choose to classify artistic products and the way actual social classes were stratified in the centuries that produced these poems.

The critical comparison of poetic daring or radicalism is soon complicated when Perkins considers the implied class relations between Burns’s sensitive ploughman and the field mouse. Perkins observes that Burns’s ploughman reads as compassionate and reassuring towards the field mouse because of the implied social hierarchy—the superior speaking to the inferior.

76 I’m referring to Smith who observes that the hegemony of language impacted the viability of cultural products as well as citizenship (3).
Whereas, if the discourse were reversed and the low was speaking to the high, the poem “would be radically democratic, leveling. However poor the ploughman may be, he is obviously better off than the mouse, and thus can kindly afford to grant the mouse his ‘daimen-icker’” (12). By this standard, the radicalism of Barbauld’s poem has been underestimated. Her mouse not only speaks up to its human captor, but it further defies the implied hierarchy by assuming a higher moral and philosophical ground from which to make its case. The boldness of “The Mouse’s Petition” is not diminished when the reader overlooks the mouse’s voice entirely and considers the similar hierarchy functioning between Barbauld, the young woman writer (and houseguest) who tied the note-poem to the cage on the mouse’s behalf, and the married, scholar-scientist Priestley, to whom the appeal was addressed.

This point brings my discussion back to the necessary consideration of gender in reading “The Mouse’s Petition.” Surprisingly, Perkins asserts: “Incidentally, unless we feel that Barbauld, as a woman, especially sympathized with an animal in a cage, the differences between the two poems do not reflect gender differences of the poets” (9). Here is an interesting gloss, as Barbauld was a young, unmarried woman, around twenty-eight years old when she composed this poem while visiting the Priestleys in 1771. Although she grew up in a Warrington Academy household and was privileged with an education akin to that of the Warrington boys, Barbauld’s (over)education held limited career prospects for her.

Another example from Barbauld’s lesser-known works provides further evidence on her feelings about women and forms of hindrance that may amplify the discussion of “The Mouse’s Petition” and gender. Akin to Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* in its intolerance of women’s superficial preoccupation with appearance, Barbauld’s letter to her trendy niece was published as
“Fashion, A Vision” in *The Monthly Magazine*, 1797. Perhaps what is most striking about
“Fashion, A Vision” is its anticipation of *Alice in Wonderland* in the speaker’s depiction of a
strange dream kingdom populated by people with astonishingly swollen heads and absurdist self-
imposed deformities, ruled by a fickle and merciless Queen.

Depicting women’s fashion—in this case the corset—as torture, Barbauld writes:

But the most common, and one of the worst instruments of torture, was a small
machine, armed with fish-bone and ribs of steel, wide at the top, but extremely
small at the bottom. In this detestable invention, the queen orders the bodies of
her female subjects to be inclosed: it is then, by means of silk cords, drawn closer
and closer, at intervals, till the unhappy victim can scarcely breathe; and they
have found the exact point that can be borne without fainting, which, however,
not unfrequently happens. The flesh is often excoriated, and the very ribs bent, by
this cruel process; yet, what astonished me more than all the rest, these sufferings
are borne with a degree of fortitude, which, in a better cause, would immortalize a
hero, or canonize a saint. (287)

Barbauld may not spell out the connection between gender and forms of restraint, even
imprisonment, in “The Mouse’s Petition,” but the caged condition of the mouse awaiting
experimental asphyxiation (the mouse desires “The cheerful light, the vital air” [line 21], and
Priestley was known for his experiments using various gases on animals) is significantly
analogous to the woman enclosed in a corset’s “ribs of steel” so tight “the unhappy victim can
scarcely breathe.”
The issue of gender and souls is not an explicit concern in “The Mouse’s Petition”; however, it is an implied byproduct of the poem’s aesthetic of contraction and representation of physical, spiritual, and artistic forms as under-evaluated, interdependent constructs—what would become, in the works of Blake, Wordsworth, and Shelley, the “high” Romantic concentration on the relationship between material form (a natural, physical state) and immaterial transcendence (the soul’s/spirit’s liberation from the naturally-birthed, material state) and artistic form (the poem, genre). The mouse’s tiny vantage point does not particularly serve to undercut or diminish Romantic sensibilities and forms. Rather, it is a part of Barbauld’s poetic contraction of extremely low and helpless subjectivity. The mouse, as Cartesian automata, represents pure material object, or apparatus of scientific method that is utterly contained by man’s higher thinking, purposes, and Enlightenment rationalism.

As in the *Hymns in Prose for Children* and “The Caterpillar,” the mouse’s individuation and power of voice are the remarkable effects of the poem. Barbauld’s poetic contraction of subjectivity in “The Mouse’s Petition” and “The Caterpillar” inverts the rhetorical progression of *Hymns* but creates a similar outcome: showcasing the individuated, and thereby legitimate, subject either through the power of voice, in the cases of the mouse and the children speakers in *Hymns*, or poet-speaker awareness, in the case of the mute, albeit alive and vulnerable caterpillar. “The Mouse’s Petition” and “The Caterpillar” bring the large-scale issues of social justice and war down to the acute expression, or enlightened observation, of the individual, while *Hymns* builds developmentally upward and rhetorically expands the child-speaker’s persona from mute infant to philosophically reflective child-citizen.
Moreover, Barbauld’s aesthetic contraction of individual subjectivity to such miniatures as the mouse and the caterpillar burrows beneath a hierarchy of material forms, representing a primitive condition of the soul that is evolutionarily antecedent to human attributes and experience:

If mind, as ancient sages taught,
A never dying flame,
Still shifts thro’ matter’s varying forms,
In every form the same,

Beware, lest in the worm you crush
A brother’s soul you find; (29-34)

Applying the Pythagorean notion of the soul’s immateriality and possible movement between forms, Barbauld taps into what would later develop as a large Romantic theme: the relationship between material forms and immaterial essence or imagination. To suggest in these verses that there is a kind of basic life force antecedent to physical forms like species, is a de facto feminist argument in favor of women’s souls. This idea is explored in greater detail in her ode to an unborn child “To a Little Invisible Being.”

Based on her own description of “The Mouse’s Petition,” readers can believe that Barbauld was primarily using the mouse as a uniquely neutral representative for Enlightenment rationalist values. And yet, alongside what we see in her poem, “To a Little Invisible Being who

77 Blake’s *The Book of Thel* (1789) can be compared to Barbauld’s poem. Every lowly thing that Thel interviews speaks praise and speaks of the transcendence of the immaterial. What Thel sees is her own problem. She is an early avatar of the female will.
is Expected Soon to Become Visible,” the mouse (and the caterpillar) occupy a material-
evolutionary space akin to the “Invisible Being” fetus, and the “embryo God” in “A Summer
Evening’s Meditation.” All of these subjectivities, the mouse, the fetus, and the embryo God,
share the characteristic of unrealized potential and hindered development, as if to show that the
immaterial, eternal soul is an energized, individualized force of liberty.

“The Caterpillar”

In “The Caterpillar” (1825), the speaker holds a single caterpillar in her hand, observes its
individuality, and realizes that she cannot kill it like all the others. The speaker likens this
revelation to understanding the condition of war, wherein the victor can unfeelingly slaughter a
whole army of men. Incidentally, if Barbauld’s caterpillar is ontologically similar to the acorn
that contains the potentiality of the whole oak tree within it in her Hymn X, then the caterpillar
may in its turn allude to the development of the butterfly within. The reference to “a brother’s
soul” allegorizes that development by way of an implicit Greek pun: psyche in Greek means both
‘butterfly’ and ‘soul.’

After initially addressing the individual caterpillar, the poem’s speaker goes on:

Yet I have sworn perdition to thy race,

And recent from the slaughter am I come

Of tribes and embryo nations: I have sought

With sharpened eye and persecuting zeal,

Where, folded in their silken webs they lay

Thriving and happy; swept them from the tree

And crushed whole families beneath my foot;
Or, sudden, poured on their devoted heads
The vials of destruction. –This I’ve done,
Nor felt the touch of pity: but when thou,—
A single wretch, escaped the general doom,
Making me feel and clearly recognize
Thine individual existence, life,
And fellowship of sense with all that breathes,—
Present’st thyself before me, I relent,
And cannot hurt thy weakness, —So the storm
Of horrid war, o’erwhelming cities, fields,
And peaceful villages, rolls dreadful on:
The victor shouts triumphant; he enjoys
The roar of cannon and the clang of arms,
And urges, by no soft relentings stopped,
The work of death and carnage. Yet should one,
A single sufferer from the field escaped,
Panting and pale, and bleeding at his feet,
Lift his imploring eyes, —the hero weeps;
He is grown human, and capricious Pity,
Which would not stir for thousands, melts for one
With sympathy spontaneous: —‘Tis not Virtue,
Yet ‘tis the weakness of a virtuous mind. (14-42)
This poem mediates the content and rhetoric of her *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* in which Barbauld renders the mandated national fast on behalf of the British military campaign against France morally ridiculous by contrasting the morals of a nation and the morals of the individual: “there are men who appear not insensible to the rules of morality as they respect individuals, and who unaccountably disclaim them with respect to nations” (301). Barbauld’s bubble imagery and the use of contrast and contraction reorder space and time for conventionally and developmentally separate mediums: the public realm of national identification and reform, and the domestic-pastoral discourse of caterpillars.

While Myers is reluctant to read Barbauld’s juvenile poetry (*Hymns in Prose*) as transitional text, between Enlightenment rationalism and Romanticism, other poems, including “The Mouse’s Petition,” “The Caterpillar,” and “The Baby-House,” are rich with evidence for this way of reading. By insisting on a “female tradition of Romanticism” (271), Myers argues that Barbauld’s “juvenile trivia” consistently emblematizes “larger issues at the same time that they deflate and contest high Romantic claims to the oracular and transcendent” (Myers 272). However, I believe her poetry exposes even more ambivalence and ambiguity regarding these “high” and “low” forms of Romanticism. After all, these value judgments concerning Barbauld’s attitude toward Romanticism (particularly in her early poetry which dates mostly from the 1770’s-1790’s) hardly acknowledge the historical fact that “high” Romanticism, as we have come to consider it, did not exist as an organized, aesthetic movement.

Despite his broad strokes concerning the so-called (and presumptively male) origins of Romanticism, Leslie Brisman’s observations can usefully complicate Myers’s in favor of reading Barbauld with greater subtlety. Brisman argues that Wordsworth and his heirs believed: “that
both everyday incidents and the new forms of romance they explored could compete with the old high art for an original—an earlier—place in consciousness. Hence the rich ambiguity available to the poet . . . when he attempts to adhere to a notion of the small and the natural as the beginnings of the awesome” (19). Rather than reading Barbauld’s poetry as containing “small,”

domestic, everyday subjects as necessarily abiding by a female tradition that also functions as a counter-culture to male Romantics’ preoccupation with the prophet-poet and the transcendental sublime, perhaps it is possible to acknowledge what Brisman calls a “rich ambiguity” in her poetry, that plays with, or deliberately focuses on the reflexive/organic relationship between different poetic subjectivities and aesthetic values, instead of pedantically claiming one over another.

“Washing-Day”

McCarthy and Kraft point to Macbeth as the source material for these closing lines of Barbauld’s poem on an adult’s ruminations of her childhood experience among women on washing day. However, Jaques’s “All the world’s a stage” speech in Shakespeare’s As You Like It may serve as a more fruitful comparison. The OED points to Jaques’s speech on the soldier

78 Shakespeare, Macbeth, I.iii.79: “The earth hath bubbles, as the water has.”

79 Jaques:
All the world’s a stage
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms;
Then the whining schoolboy with his satchel
. . . then a soldier,
“seeking the bubble ‘reputation’” as an early seventeenth-century use of “bubble” denoting insubstantiality or delusiveness.\textsuperscript{80} The Shakespearean “bubble ‘reputation’,” part of a larger discourse on the theatricality of humanity’s sense of importance and permanence and the “strange” connection between the endeavors of children and men, is a closer fit to Barbauld’s implication that the poetic form may not only be insubstantial, lacking material consequence, but the form’s delusory ability to sublimely mediate immaterial and material. Barbauld’s poems are, in effect, bubbles or insubstantial verse containers of experimental and seemingly contradictory aesthetics and subjectivities. As these poems have gone for so long being under-recognized and under-read, they maintained a bubble-like status. Jaques’s speech seems to circumscribe many reasons why the bubble becomes Barbauld’s conceit of choice. For her the bubble functions as a conceit for women’s space, and to an extent, for a secret existence that may ultimately be insubstantial, once the bubble bursts. The bubble is a symbol of individual consciousness, even as it can represent a microcosm of the globe, as well as a convex reflection and distorter of the world. And the bubble, much like Jaques’s description, represents the strange cycle of human development wherein the “sports of children and the toils of men” are spherically contained.

\begin{lstlisting}[language=English]
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble ‘reputation’
Even in the cannon’s mouth
\ldots And so he plays his part; the sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
\ldots Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound; last scene of all
That ends this strange eventful history
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. (As You Like It II.vii.139-45; 149-53; 157-59; 162-66)
\end{lstlisting}

In 1807, Francis Jeffrey, founding editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, published a review of Wordsworth’s *Poems in Two Volumes* in which he accused Wordsworth, Barbauld, and Southey of all writing irrelevant, low poetry: “All the world laughs at Elegaic stanzas to a sucking-pig—a Hymn on Washing-day—Sonnets to one’s grandmother—or Pindarics on gooseberry-pye” (Jeffrey 218). As late as 1995, Elizabeth Kraft took allegedly inaccurate twentieth-century scholars to task for not sufficiently rescuing Barbauld from continued misrepresentation, charging that “Anna Barbauld’s ‘Washing-Day’ is a poem endangered by misreading,” as the significant critical comments issued in the 1980’s and 90’s have been “all well-intentioned and all off the mark” (25). Kraft backs up these allegations with a compelling reading of the poem that certainly turns the path of scholarship toward more fruitful territory, yet the track record of feminist scholars in question simply demonstrates what I have observed as a useful *early* strategy for recovery work: differentiation. In straining to read the mock epic poem’s focus on women’s domestic work, feminist critics have risked overcompensating for Jeffrey’s original accusation.

It is worth surveying the narrative of Barbauld scholarship regarding this particular poem, because that narrative rehearses the pattern of 1980s and 90s recovery scholarship and, in its turn, underscores the contested nature of this “recovery” work as it applies to our understanding of this poem. The poem is concerned with the same issues that occupy Romantic scholars, such as the understanding of the production of historical record, or literature as sublime model of the tensions between process-event, continuity-isolation, tradition-individual talent, or women’s literature-the Woman.

Barbauld’s poem “Washing-Day” was published in *The Monthly Magazine* in December 1797. In this poem, “The Muses are turned gossips” as an army of “red-arm’d washers” go
through their weekly labor (1,14). The child-speaker who is shunned for the day, hearing her “mother’s voice . . . urging dispatch” (74, 75) to the other women, sits down with her small companions at the end of the poem to

ponder much

Why washings were. Sometimes thro’ hollow bole

Of pipe amused we blew, and sent aloft

The floating bubbles, little dreaming then

To see, Mongolfier, thy silken ball

Ride buoyant thro’ the clouds—so near approach

The sports of children and the toils of men.

Earth, air, and sky, and ocean, hath its bubbles,

And verse is one of them—this most of all. (78-86)

Joseph Montgolfier and his brother Jacques Étienne were the first to successfully launch a hot-air balloon in 1783. As McCarthy and Kraft note, this launch gave rise to a number of experiments in ballooning throughout England and Europe. Barbauld was enthralled by a balloon demonstration she attended in London in 1784.81 The Montgolfier experiment provided the historical context for Barbauld’s poem regarding bubbles as both child’s toys and the basis of a visionary breakthrough—the hot-air balloon.

Ann Messenger contends that in “Washing-Day” Barbauld “stuck a pin in the balloon of masculine pride and simultaneously glorified the endless drudgery of women” (186). She reads

81 McCarthy and Kraft note Barbauld’s enthusiastic record of the balloon exhibit she attended in London in 1784: “When set loose from the weight which keeps it to the ground, it mounts to the top of that magnificent dome with such an easy motion as put me in mind of Milton’s line, ‘rose like an exhalation’” (Works, 2:22-23).
the poem’s comparison of the Montgolfier balloon to a soap bubble as a reductionist tactic in which the “greatest exploits” of men are “reduced to the level of children’s games,” and argues that the poem turns cultural assumptions upside down as, “The women’s washing is heroic; the men’s exploits are child’s play” (192). Donna Landry, who, along with Messenger, praises Barbauld for recognizing “washing-day as a scene of women’s power,” argues however that “Such male escapades as the Montgolfier brothers’ experiments in ballooning are shown to be no greater imaginative achievements than the whimsy represented by women’s domestic verse, and achievements of less importance than the material necessity of washing” (273). And Terry Castle observes that after a “straightforward exercise in domestic scene-setting,” the poet “enters a space of reverie that culminates in the transformation of [the] child’s soap bubble into the silken ball of the balloonist;” then “the poem lifts off into the stratosphere, a realm of wonder and pure joy” (1228).

I agree with Kraft who deems Messenger’s and Landry’s readings as bound up in a masculine-feminine dichotomy: “Their readings are determined to celebrate ‘women’s work’ and determined to find that celebration proffered by the poem in contradistinction to mens’ work, represented, they assume, by the Montgolfier balloon” (26). Kraft seeks to correct Castle’s invocation of another false duality, “this time between domesticity and creativity”: “Like Messenger and Landry, Castle reads ‘Washing-Day’ as the positing of exclusive alternatives: masculine or feminine, privileged class or laboring class, drudgery or creativity. The poem invokes these categories, but it is the reader who sees them as choices” (26). Kraft locates the site of all the misreadings at the image of the Montgolfier balloon, arguing that a New Historical understanding of the significance of ballooning in the eighteenth century allows us to see this
image “actually fuses what Messenger, Landry, and Castle regard as irreconcilable dualities” (Kraft 26). While Messenger, Landry, and Castle make key contributions to the scholarly recovery of this poem using tried-and-true methods of feminist dichotomizing, Kraft moves the discussion forward by focusing on the poem’s celebration of the creative imagination. In recognizing that a central theme of the poem is the nature of imagination, Kraft brings “Washing-Day” into discursive contact with Romantic preoccupations previously relegated to the likes of Wordsworth and Coleridge and their male contemporaries. But Barbauld at once presents and configures the notion of the transcendental imagination, unlike Coleridge in “Lime-Tree Bower,” where he celebrates it.

Rather than reading the poem as a satiric contradistinction between the endless torture of housework, per Simone de Beauvoir’s example of Sisyphus in *The Second Sex*, and the imagination, Kraft argues that there is a functional relationship between the two in the poem: “that the imagination can flourish amidst the ‘endless repetition’ of housework, that drudgery itself can be the scene of an inspiration that launches one toward the ‘mysterious unknown summit’ known as the future” (Kraft 35). The drudgery contains an element of comforting familiarity. This reading opens the door for Bordo’s, which examines the role of genre, and particularly the performative power of language and genre.

Bordo argues that

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82 Kraft alludes to Simone de Beauvoir’s formulation in *The Second Sex* as a definitive statement informing the scholarly tendencies of twentieth-century feminist critics: “Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day” (de Beauvoir 170).
Barbauld lifts the “verse” of her male counterparts and predecessors into a new and as-it-were non-legitimized form (“Washing-Day” 86): she “repeats” it, occupies it with her own female voice, varies it, and transposes it onto a domestic plane. In other words, she performs genre. Her primary target is the epic genre . . . In her hands, genre becomes nothing more (indeed nothing less) than artificial performance and, by extension, a normative construct . . . (188)

However Vassiliki Markidou, writing some seven years after Bordo, reverts to simplified feminist strategies and ignores McCarthy’s previous work on overlapping topics. At this stage in Barbauld’s and this poem’s recovery, the argument that the poem declares “the supremacy of ‘Washing Day’—as well as of female poetry in general—over men’s poetic products” (32) is hardly convincing.83 This ‘supremacy’ argument indicates that while interest in the poem persists and would seem to be spreading, there is nothing approaching agreement as to its scholarly context, and the conversation is still somewhat disjointed.

“Washing-Day” functions as, even as it simultaneously represents, a transitional or bubble-like verse-space containing Shakespearean, Miltonic, and eighteenth-century (Popean) poetic conventions and something new and innovative, i.e. a Romantic, proto-Wordsworthian and proto-Lyrical Ballads aesthetic that is concerned with the relationship between continuity and individuation, process, and event. “Washing-Day” does not just represent the drudgery of domestic work as a space or behavior to be counteracted or overcome by the artist, nor does it

83 See Markidou, “‘Bubble[s]’ and Female Verse: A Reading of Anna Laeticia Barbauld’s ‘Washing Day’.” Unconsidered in this study are two important sources: First, McCarthy performs several thorough readings of Barbauld’s early poems and their uses of Shakespeare and Pope in “‘We Hoped the Woman Was Going to Appear’”; second, see Bordo’s “Reinvoking the ‘Domestic Muse’.”
just represent domestic work as necessarily a space in which the imagination can miraculously survive and ultimately produce art that sublimely transcends this mundane condition. Bordo, Kraft, and others make compelling arguments for these readings. But the poem allows for further thinking. Indeed, the poem (to use Bordo’s tactic regarding performance genre) performs the Romantic theme concerned with both history and the imagination as paradigmatic functions of process or event.

In *Romantic Origins* Brisman observes that Romantic poets, being definitionally preoccupied with the myths of origins and artistic originality, inherit the Rousseauvian notion of two births—the first birth, meaning “not simply literal emergence into life but emergence into a bondage to nature like that Blake images in caterpillar babies,” and the second birth, referring to the breaking of a cycle of repetition, “whether pictured as a winged child breaking out of a mundane shell or Albion reemerging after having cast himself into the Furnaces of Affliction” (Brisman 16). Brisman argues, with the help of Condillac, that often “Romantic poets associate ordinary language and ordinary experience with the first birth and reserve the development of symbolic language and poetic experience for the second” (Brisman 17).84 “Washing-Day,” along with “To a Little Invisible Being” (discussed below) and “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” (discussed in chapter four), provide evidence that Barbauld is similarly preoccupied and yet complicates this model of Romantic mythmaking.

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84 Brisman goes on: “‘As soon as the memory is formed, and the habit of the imagination is in our power, the signs recollected by the former, and the ideas revived by the latter, begin to free the soul from her dependence in regard to the objects by which she was surrounded.’ For the poets, anxiety associated with a failure to originate could thus be diffused by supposing the soul not yet freed from her earlier dependence” (17).
“Washing-Day” begins with the confounding of epic tradition and decorum. Rather than invoking the muse(s) of epic poetry, the speaker invokes the “domestic muse,” thereby calling into question the possibility of epic poetry in the domestic space she surveys:

The Muses are turned gossips; they have lost
The buskin’d step, and clear high-sounding phrase,
Language of gods. Come, then, domestic Muse,
In slip-shod measure loosely Prattling on
Of farm or orchard, pleasant curds and cream,
Or drowning flies, or shoe lost in the mire
By little wimpering boy, with rueful face;
Come, Muse, and sing the dreaded Washing-Day.
--Ye who beneath the yoke of wedlock bend,
With bowed soul, full well ye ken the day
Which week, smooth sliding after week, brings on
Too soon; for to that day nor peace belongs
Nor comfort; ere the first grey streak of dawn,
The red-arm’d washers come and chase repose. (1-14)

In these opening lines, Barbauld’s Muse seems to descend, but not in the sense usually expected in an epic invocation. Barbauld subverts the epic by confounding with the pastoral, as her Muses “prattle” on “Of farm or orchard, pleasant curds and cream, / Or drowning flies, or shoe lost in the mire” (lines 5-6). Her domestication of the high epic Muse actually resembles the etymological descent of the term “gossip” as it is described in the OED. The earliest meaning of
the word gossip, which originated as *godsib* (or *godsyb*), refers to “one who has contracted spiritual affinity with another by acting as a sponsor at a baptism” i.e. “a godfather or godmother.” This meaning persisted from the fourteenth century through the sixteenth century. During this time the term could refer to a “familiar acquaintance, friend, chum” of either sex, but by the seventeenth century it began to apply mainly to women. The early use of the term also applied to “a woman’s female friends invited to be present at birth.” The later meaning that applies to the sixteenth century through the eighteenth century refers to “a person, mostly a woman, of light and trifling character, esp. one who delights in idle talk; a newsmonger, a tattler.” Whether or not Barbauld was aware of the history of the word, her description of the domestic Muse-gossip “With bowed soul” (line 10) resembles “gossip’s” etymological shift away from an honored spiritual authority of either sex, to a woman of “trifling character” delighting in “idle talk.”

Certainly, the women whose “bowed souls” are represented are bowed beneath the social obligations of the marriage state. Yokes are meant to join teams of draft animals. Wedlock suggests that the team should be husband and wife, but the ironic metaphor “yoke of wedlock” suggests this is not so. Barbauld’s letters to her brother Dr. Aikin contain her personal lamentations regarding the society’s limited expectations for the professional/educated woman, outside the home. Barbauld, along with Wollstonecraft in the *Vindication*, proposes, first of all that women *have* souls (the first birth). Second, Brisman’s comments on the ways in which Blake and other Romantic poets view the condition of the soul as either bound to its material

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85 Oxford English Dictionary

86 McCarthy’s biography addresses Barbauld’s letters.
state (as in the first birth) or liberated from the material state (as in the second birth) so as to transcend the limits of material as well as aesthetic expectations seem to apply to Barbauld’s setting up the possibility of a similar aesthetic inquiry concerning the female, domesticated soul.

The first birth occupies a natural state of development, from which the soul can voluntarily emerge, through a second birth via a sublime/transcendent experience and/or the supreme powers of an artistic mind. Whereas in “Washing-Day,” the female soul’s existence, its first birth, is an artistic event, the poet renders it a fact within the poem. Heretofore a woman’s soul has been a controversial subject, witness Wollstonecraft’s comments in the Vindication. In this case, the soul exists in a bound state, but not necessarily the developmental kind that Blake and Wordsworth describe. Here, the female soul is bound by the social condition of wedlock. In the poem, a woman’s soul is in a bowed posture. A social institution that in the eighteenth century focuses exclusively on the bodily circumstance of a woman translates to the condition of her interior soul. The word “bowed” may also be a pun as the soul is bent over and played to produce music in a diminuitive version of the conventional Muse’s song.

The theme of transformation or continuity and the theme of interruption are each discussed by critics, but not in terms of a relational dynamic. Kraft reads the poem’s representation of transformation as the muses are turned gossips and the soap bubble later turns into the balloon. Separately, Bordo focuses on the poem’s technique of interruption as imitating the actions of the laundry day, which are interruptive to the rest of the household, and interruptive to conventions of the Miltonic epic.

I agree that there is a kind of interruption happening in the poem, but in these first few lines the concept of washing day as an event, even an interruptive, feminist event in which the
work of women displaces the needs of the rest of the household, is complicated by its position within a larger scale of domestic continuity. Washing day is an event insomuch as it is considered falling within the scope of any given week. However, it is also a repetitive process in the ongoing routine of life: “the day / Which week, smooth sliding after week, brings on / Too soon” (lines 10-12). Already, within the first few lines of the poem, there is a tension between the Greek/Miltonic epic and domestic verse—should poetry be on a grand historical scale, or a small everyday scale?—between material experience/reality as endless continuity or interruptive events, aesthetic/idealized woman as (transcendent) muse or domestic, working woman (bowed beneath the obligations of wedlock).

Washing day also implies that women are in tune with the calendar, and certainly the month. The rhythms of these women are the rhythms of time itself passing. I have suggested that Barbauld’s poem represents innovation on eighteenth-century aesthetics, even proto-Wordsworthian features. The women in the poem, in their bowed posture, function as forms in time much as Wordsworth’s River Duddon, and less like his sublimely positioned and thoughtful surveyor of the River, where

As I cast my eyes,

I see what was, and is, and will abide;

Still glides the Stream, and shall forever glide;

The Form remains, the Function never dies;

While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,

We Men, who in our morn of youth defied

The elements, must vanish;—be it so!
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith’s transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know. (“Valedictory Sonnet to the River Duddon” 3-14)

Wordsworth surveys the river from a removed and lofty position in the landscape, better able to observe the river’s function and form of time and continuity. The river provides the relief against which Wordsworth can mark the heroism of the work of men. Men’s work is heroic in its ability to transcend the material form of the worker. While the youth’s delusion of immortality must eventually give in to the reality of the mortality of nature, he derives hope from the idea that something he produces, “something from our hands,” may have the power to persist through time and “serve the future hour.” Whereas, the work of women’s washing is a repetitive construct of materiality, fundamentally unable to transcend time, serving only the basic and immediate needs of mortal experience.

The possibility of rain on washing day is akin to the threat of epic torture:

   From that last evil, oh preserve us, heavens!
   For should the skies pour down, adieu to all
   Remains of quiet; then expect to hear
   Of sad disasters—dirt and gravel stains
   Hard to efface, and loaded lines at once
   Snapped short—and linen-horse by dog thrown down,
And all the petty miseries of life.
Saints have been calm while stretched upon the rack,
And Guatimozin smil’d on burning coals;
But never yet did housewife notable
Greet with a smile a rainy washing-day. (22-32)

Lines 26-27 offer irresistible fodder for reading Barbauld’s critique of conventional, male poetry as her lines have been clearly loaded with Shakespearean, Miltonic, and Popean references in the poem. For instance, a portion of the poem’s epigraph,

and their voice,

Turning again towards childish treble, pipes
And whistles in its sound,
is a slightly modified verse from Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (II.vii.161-63). Her Muse alludes both to the Miltonic muses and to the “slip-shod Sybil” of Pope’s *Dunciad* (3:15). Her line, “Earth, air, and sky, and ocean, hath its bubbles” (85), is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s “The earth hath bubbles, as the water has” in *Macbeth* (I.iii.79). 87

Bordo is particularly concerned with the tropological maneuver of “interruption” in the poem, noting that figures of interruption appear throughout the poem. For instance, as lines 26-27 describe “loaded lines at once / Snapped short,” Bordo notes that:

the “loaded lines” not only refer to the women’s loaded clotheslines but also to the loaded lines of the poem itself which are, in turn, composed of the loaded lines of literary men. What the poem does, then, coincides with what it says: it

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87 The *Dunciad* and *Macbeth* inter-text notes are courtesy of McCarthy and Kraft (144, 147).
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performatively interrupts the loaded lines of men’s verse while constatively describing the interruptive “petty miseries” of the “dreaded” washing-day. (191)

On the one hand, I agree with Bordo. Certainly, Barbauld would have been mindful of the ways in which her domestic muse co-opt s patriarchal, discourse of epic poetry. On the other hand, Barbauld’s poem does more than merely interrupt the genre and the traditions of its male authors. The loaded lines also fetishize the bodies that typically occupy an otherwise male life of the items washed. Barbauld’s poem takes the next step beyond Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard.” In her poem the “mute inglorious Milton,” or closer to the truth his silenced wife, gets to speak. 88

The poem’s Miltonic concerns can be characterized less as posing interruption to the venerable poetic tradition, and more as representing process in a way that critiques Milton’s preoccupation with his own interruptive, poetic power. As Brisman points out, “Milton wrote the central elegy about experiential loss and spiritual renewal, and he wrote the epic about man falling out with nature. Most important, he represented in his own person the alienation from the continuity of nature, lamenting that ‘with the Year / Seasons return, but not to me returns / Day’” (Brisman 55-56). Barbauld’s poem reveals that Keats and Wordsworth were not the only poets concerned with countering Miltonic themes of discontinuity between man and nature. Barbauld centers the poem around an experience that is endlessly renewable. That the muse should sing the dreaded Washing-Day is a mockery, making it out to be a bona fide event when, in fact, the

88 Keats’s opening lines in “To Autumn” are also reminiscent of Barbauld’s “loaded lines:”
Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run (1-4)
day of washing is only superficially interruptive. In the longer view, it is a regularly renewable feature “Which week, smooth sliding after week, brings on” (11).

If the poem’s soap bubbles are ambiguous representatives of (artistic) vision and delusion/deception, then washing day, understood as an event, is a similar domestic delusion because washing is never done. The work of washing is an ongoing, never-ending process, and washing “day” is not a true interruption of the domestic social scene, it is built into the cyclical routine of never-ending, daily life. The “event” of washing day is merely an attempt to manage an uninterruptible process. Washing is domestic work created by domestic work, and sometimes not so domestic work, if one also considers the garments/linens used by men in public spaces.

Regarding lines 29-32:

Saints have been calm while stretched upon the rack,
And Guatimozin smil’d on burning coals;
But never yet did housewife notable
Greet with a smile a rainy washing-day

Why compare a rainy washing day to torture? As another example of the poem’s conflation of pastoral and epic conventions, the rainy washing day presents the washerwomen with torture comparable to epic torture along the lines of Sisyphus in de Beauvoir’s analysis. In fact, an allusion to Sisyphus appears to be a possible omission by Barbauld alongside the poem’s array of allusions to Greek poetry. There are a few key differences between these examples of the torture of “Saints” and “Guatimozin” (Montezuma), and the housewife’s condition is torture as event or process. Perhaps the “Saints” and Montezuma can remain calm and even smile

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89 Bordo makes this point.
because the experience of their torture is eventful, a one-time (or at least limited) incident with a finite end, even if that end is death. Whereas, there is an epic scope to the housewife’s torture, in that her experience has no end in sight. The washing is a continuous, protracted process that will “end” only with the end of in her life. Thus, she does not greet a rainy washing-day with a smile because the “day,” rainy or fair is not an isolated event, to be heroically endured and ultimately completed. What role does heroism play in the face of continuity?

What follows is a description of the male condition on washing day:

—But grant the welkin fair, require not thou

Who call’st thyself perchance the master there,

Or study swept, or nicely dusted coat,

Or usual ‘tendance; ask not, indiscreet,

Thy stockings mended, tho’ the yawning rents

Gape wide as Erebus, nor hope to find

Some snug recess impervious; should’st thou try

The ‘customed garden walks, thine eye shall rue

The budding fragrance of thy tender shrubs,

Myrtle or rose, all crushed beneath the weight

Of coarse check’d apron, with impatient hand

Twitch’d off when showers impend: or crossing lines

Shall mar thy musings, as the wet cold sheet

Flaps in thy face abrupt. Woe to the friend

Whose evil stars have urged him forth to claim
On such a day the hospitable rites;
Looks, blank at best, and stinted courtesy,
Shall he receive. (33-50)

The work of washing affects the entire property, as even the master cannot find respite, either within the house or in the garden. As far as Bordo’s interruption theory goes, it seems to be mainly the master and male children who feel a disruption in their customs for the day. The term “perchance” calls into question the legitimacy of male hegemony. The “wet cold sheet” that flaps abruptly in his face reminds the master just how far he is removed from the domestic process.

But there is a greater problem than just the interruption of domestic relationships created by domestic work. Barbauld’s images of “the wet cold sheet” and “Looks, blank at best” echo the general decline of artistic-literary production effected by Muses who are turned “gossips” and “loaded lines at once / Snapped short.” In fact, the master is warned that if he should try and seek refuge in nature, he will be disappointed by the myrtle’s and rose’s recruitment into practical service. The myrtle and rose become apron racks. Unlike the Wordsworthian surveyor in the “River Duddon,” the master’s “musings” will be “mar[red],” his lines crossed, and the bed sheet or paper “sheet” wet and cold, as the natural landscape is “crushed beneath the weight” of an apron’s practicality. Washing day seems to presuppose any artistic inspiration.

Thus, I do not read this poem as a feminist homage to the under-recognized power of the domestic woman. The bulk of the poem provides no evidence that any adult, man or woman, can make the Romantic shift from the drudgery “first birth” experience of materiality to the “second birth” of poetic transcendence. But there is one exception to this: the child. The child’s power of imagination showcases the risk to artistic innovation posed by the adult commitment to material
forms. While Blake’s caterpillar babies and Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” may regard the artistic trajectory as a movement from the youthful-material view to the mature poet’s transcendent perspective, “Washing-Day” presents a developmental pattern closer to Wordsworth’s Intimations Ode as adult domestic obligations represent a loss of early imaginative power. In the lines below, the child’s “dear grandmother” is referred to as the “eldest of forms,” emphasizing her aged materiality:

    I well remember, when a child, the awe
    This day struck into me; for then the maids,
    I scarce knew why, looked cross, and drove me from them;
    Nor soft caress could I obtain, nor hope
    Usual indulgencies; jelly or creams,
    Relique of costly suppers, and set by
    For me their petted one; or butter’d toast,
    When butter was forbid; or thrilling tale
    Of ghost, or witch, or murder—so I went
    And shelter’d me beside the parlour fire:
    There my dear grandmother, eldest of forms,
    Tended the little ones, and watched from harm,
    Anxiously fond, tho’ oft her spectacles
    With elfin cunning hid, and oft the pins
    Drawn from her ravell’d stocking, might have sour’d
    One less indulgent.—
At intervals my mother’s voice was heard,

Urging dispatch; briskly the work went on,

All hands employed to wash, to rinse, to wring,

To fold, and starch, and clap, and iron, and plait. (58-77)

Like the master, the child is somewhat displaced on this day. But her memorable condition of feeling awestruck speaks to larger arguments concerning the aesthetic of the sublime, namely Burke. Is the child awestruck in the same way that Wordsworth’s speaker is in his encounter with Mt. Snowden or Shelley’s speaker is in his encounter with Mont Blanc? Does this domestic washing scene create the same experience? Yes, in the way it provokes a transcendent, poetic reflection on subjects beyond the immediate scene. The work of washing day provokes imaginative contemplation in the child, not unlike the effect of Mt. Snowden on the speaker, in that the results of both types of encounters are visionary.

The description of the detailed, material process of washing “to wash, to rinse, to wring, / To fold, and starch, and clap, and iron, and plait” conducts the speaker’s conclusive state of transcendent contemplation:

Then would I sit me down, and ponder much

Why washings were. Sometimes thro’ hollow bole

Of pipe amused we blew, and sent aloft

The floating bubbles, little dreaming then

To see, Montgolfier, thy silken ball

Ride buoyant thro’ the clouds—so near approach

The sports of children and the toils of men.
Earth, air, and sky, and ocean, hath its bubbles,
And verse is one of them—this most of all. (78-86)

If the power of artistic imagination has been represented as declining in “Washing-Day,” which presents “Muses [who] are turned gossips,” “prattling . . . In slip-shod measure,” snapping and crossing lines, marring musings, and giving “Looks, blank at best,” then the buoyant soap bubbles represent a contrasting ascent of imaginative vision blown through the “pipe” of a child. The child’s soap bubbles symbolize a fragile, visionary space that, according to Barbauld’s last line, is first and foremost verse-like. The verse, in this case, is written in serviceable iambic pentameter. As the child sits down near the scene of adult toil to “ponder much / Why washings were” she represents the question: what is the relationship between women’s work and creativity? So far I have read this poem as a confounding of the epic and the pastoral, another example of Barbauld as a transitional writer between eighteenth-century and Romantic sensibilities. If verse is a bubble-like phenomenon approximating the “The sports of children and the toils of men,” then the soap bubbles seem to implicate the process of poetic production as some combination of spontaneous imagination and the process of composing. *Pneuma*, or the breath of life, also plays a role in producing these bubbles. The fragility of the bubbles is also a comment on humanity’s ability to ensoul anything, be it a bubble or a poem. On the one hand, it would seem that poetic production must approach toil, like the “loaded lines” of epic poets. On the other hand, it would seem that poetic production, as bubble-like, is a more Romantic event, of spontaneous imaginative possibility. Barbauld’s bubbles are fragile shapes held together by the seemingly opposite aesthetic ideologies of toil and imagination, of process and spontaneity.
The soap bubbles also exist in a delicate space of material visibility. Like Mongolfier’s balloon, constructed of silk and propelled upward by hot air heated within the balloon, the bubble is propelled upward by the child’s breath, until the dissipation of the soap causes it to burst. This is not unlike the Romantic concern, represented famously by Shelley in *Mont Blanc* and *A Defence of Poetry*, with verse’s limited ability to capture the immaterial, imaginative vision of the poet. The verse-bubble exists in a delicate balance between word and thought, trying to contain if only briefly the linguistic signifier and its cognitive counterpart.

Barbauld’s poetry is interested in bubble-like spaces and moments. What I want to consider next is how and why the bubbles are inflected with feminine or female subjectivity. As Cixous observes, “writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (350). This critical space appears elsewhere in Barbauld’s poetry. We can trace it in Contemplation’s emergence in the womb of the “self-collected soul” in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” and in “the infant bud of being” that the poet “haste[s] to blow” from the womb in “To a Little Invisible Being.”

“To a Little Invisible Being Who Is Expected Soon to Become Visible”

As “Washing-Day” reflects on the developmentally fragile visionary power of the child, “To a Little Invisible Being who is Expected Soon to Become Visible” adjusts the platform of imaginative potential even further back, to the prenatal state. Barbauld’s bubble motif is recast here as an individual woman’s own, physical womb. It appears again in the image of the cosmic womb in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation.” Published posthumously, “To a Little Invisible Being” is also one of her least critically treated and anthologized, especially when compared to
poems such as “Washing-Day” and “A Summer Evening’s Meditation.” Its own status is still, in a sense, bubble-like. Given Barbauld’s decision not to publish it during her lifetime, we can infer that she intended it to reside in this delicate space.

Unlike the two poems just mentioned, “To a Little Invisible Being” is an ode. What the poem is an ode to, however, is not clear. McCarthy and Kraft provide separate manuscript evidence that the poem was, in fact, written with Barbauld’s neighbor, Frances Carr, in mind. Carr’s first child was born in 1799. Here, perhaps, is the “woman” critic William Woodfall was looking for, but could not find.90 The focal site of the poem is Carr’s own pregnant body, and Barbauld emphasizes the spatial relationship between the invisible being bubbled in the womb, the expectant mother-creator/nurturer, and the nearby, expectant poet-speaker. Although it is centered in the experience of pregnancy, a profound marker of female sexual/biological experience, the poem emphasizes the generic relationship between poet and object/subject, or the little invisible being.

There are at least two subjectivities (the mother and poet-speaker) and one subject (the invisible being) in this poem and it is possible to argue that there are, in fact, three subjectivities, if the invisible being is read as a fetal self that is not only spoken to as if it listens, but exerts a physical, kicking presence within the womb. The poem begins by addressing the invisible being:

Germ of new life, whose powers expanding slow
For many a moon their full perfection wait,—

90 William Woodfall, the 1773 reviewer of Barbauld’s Poems and otherwise a fan, was disappointed by what he perceived as Barbauld’s failure to represent “the Woman,” exclaiming: “We hoped the Woman was going to appear,” and wishing “that [Barbauld] had breathed her wishes, her desires, and given, from nature, what has been hitherto only guessed at . . . by the imagination of men.” Woodfall’s comments excerpted from McCarthy, “‘We Hoped the Woman Was Going to Appear’” (113).
Haste, precious pledge of happy love, to go
Auspicious borne through life’s mysterious gate.

What powers lie folded in thy curious frame,—
Senses from objects locked, and mind from thought!
How little canst thou guess thy lofty claim
To grasp at all the worlds the Almighty wrought!

And see, the genial season’s warmth to share,
Fresh younglings shoot, and opening roses glow!
Swarms of new life exulting fill the air,—
Haste, infant bud of being, haste to blow! (1-12)

The invisible being remains unnamed and therefore ungendered in its position, which makes its position similar to that of Contemplation in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” that is a “womb of chaos.” Just as “Washing-Day” confounded the conventions of pastoral and epic, this poem also plays with convention: it is a conventional ode to an unconventional, identified but unnamed, subject. Here, the invisible being of the ode suggests aesthetic innovation and ambiguity in that it is pre-existent, pre-object, and therefore should be pre-poetic, or pre-ode’s ability to versify the thing. The woman’s womb is like the child’s soap bubbles in “Washing-Day” in that it represents the delicate space of possibility, containing something that is in between conception and realization, between imagination and labor. The invisible being occupies a contracted state of potential between material birth and the world’s ability to name it,
or linguistically reify it, and unknowable power: “What powers lie folded in thy curious frame,—/Senses from objects locked, and mind from thought!” (5-6). The womb, bubble-like in its mediation of vision and function, represents and contains the creative power of conception and the power to deliver material form. The speaker urges, “Haste, infant bud of being, haste to blow!” (12), as if she is vainly trying to linguistically birth the object.

The condition of this invisible being as a fetal human seems almost incidental in a diachronic reading. The presence of a mother is not indicated until stanza four:

For thee the nurse prepares her lulling songs,
The eager matrons count the lingering day;
But far the most thy anxious parent longs
On thy soft cheek a mother’s kiss to lay. (13-16)

Up until this point, the subject as fetus is so indistinct that Barbauld could be speaking to the poetic impulse itself, hastening it into being. With this stanza the condition of creation, and the pre-lingual being, is located within woman. Within the physically pregnant space, a primarily sexed (and gendered) woman’s experience, the ode identifies a subject whose key moment of existence is pre-gender, pre-sexed, pre-lingual—conceived, and yet unspoken.

And what would be spoken? What is to come? The most immediate physical inheritance of this little being, the birthright that is elided by the use of indeterminate pronouns, but will nonetheless mark the experience of the little being far before any flight through the gates of life, is gender. While Barbauld obviously anticipates or fancies a future day when the prospects of men and women are not limited by gender, she is sharply aware of a unique bubble-existence where such prospects are not yet circumscribed. The bubble womb is a critical but fleeting time-
space containing infinite prospect. And yet, the bubble-womb is not just representative of this time-space. It is not only metaphorical, but an actual bodily space, a physical location in a poem that seems to conflate the oft disparate principles of gynocriticism and gender studies. The notion of conflation is certainly in line with the thinking of Cixous, who offers the following comment on writing: “Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive—all these drives are our strengths, and among them is the gestation drive—just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood” (359). In the eighteenth century, Barbauld was writing from the body, from woman’s experience, while implicating the major issues of sex and self we grant gender studies today, such as Lacanian linguistic identification and becoming through the law of the father.  

Aside from gender, the little being’s first noticeable physical inheritance, there are other inheritances. In fact, the poem is loaded with the discourse of natural birthright and inheritance:

She only asks to lay her burden down,
That her glad arms that burden may resume;
And nature’s sharpest pangs her wishes crown,
That free thee living from thy living tomb.

She longs to fold to her maternal breast
Part of herself, yet to herself unknown;
To see and to salute the stranger guest,

91 I cannot help but wonder what this says about our own age—in which ultrasound technology, developed in order to give insight into fetal health, is perhaps more commonly considered by anxious and eager parents as the means of gender identification.
Fed with her life through many a tedious moon.

Come, reap thy rich inheritance of love!
Bask in the fondness of a Mother’s eye!
Nor wit nor eloquence her heart shall move
Like the first accents of thy feeble cry.

Haste, little captive, burst thy prison doors!
Launch on the living world, and spring to light!
Nature for thee displays her various stores,
Opens her thousand inlets of delight.

If charmed verse or muttered prayers had power,
With favouring spells to speed thee on thy way,
Anxious I’d bid my beads each passing hour,
Till thy wished smile thy mother’s pangs o’erpay. (17-36)

Projected so many natural inheritances on the moment of birth, before social values tied
to personal development, class, education, and accomplishment can help to determine whether
they are merited, has a democratizing effect on the understanding of basic life. The invisible
being who can only be identified as alive is nonetheless described as gestation’s “full
perfection,” having a “lofty claim / To grasp at all the worlds the Almighty wrought,” an
imprisoned “captive” to be “free[‘d],” and “Launch[ed] on the living world,” heir to “thy rich
inheritance of love,” the subject of Nature’s reverent exultation, displaying “for thee . . . her various stores” and delights. In a fashion similar to that of “The Mouse’s Petition,” which insists that the value of personal liberty is a natural right, indifferent to species, “To a Little Invisible Being” suggests this claim applies to anyone born, prior to determinable measurements of liberty such as gender, race, class, religion, citizenship, and personal choice.

Again, the Romantic theme of language’s inadequacy to match or speak to the state of pre-material conception is at work in this poem. “Nor wit nor eloquence” can compare to the inarticulate “cry” of the anticipated infant. Likewise, the poet’s attempts to create “verse” or “muttered prayers” to “speed” the process of the little being’s delivery are irrelevant. Even the poet’s commands, “Haste, infant bud of being, haste to blow,” and “Haste, little captive, burst thy prison doors” testify to the difficulties involved in bridging unknowable and material and rendering the invisible visible. The poet’s commands may be delusory in the original Shakespearean sense of “bubble.”

Barbauld’s fascination with the connection between the process of writing as movement from unknown, pre-conception toward reification, and birth and the body is corroborated in an earlier, unpublished poem, “An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley’s Study.” The poem was likely composed during the same visit to the Priestleys (1771) that gave rise to “The Mouse’s Petition.” Among “Forgotten rimes, and college themes” she describes her findings in Priestley’s study:

Worm-eaten plans, and embryo schemes;—

A mass of heterogeneous matter,

A chaos dark, nor land nor water;—
New books, like new-born infants, stand,
Waiting the printer’s clothing hand;—
Others, a motley ragged brood,
Their limbs unfashioned all, and rude,
Like Cadmus’ half-formed men appear;
One rears a helm, one lifts a spear,
And feet were lopped and fingers torn
Before their fellow limbs were born;
A leg began to kick and sprawl
Before the head was seen at all,
Which quiet as a mushroom lay
Till crumbling hillocks gave it way;
And all, like controversial writing,
Were born with teeth, and sprung up fighting.

“But what is this,” I hear you cry,
“Which saucily provokes my eye?”—
A thing unknown, without a name,
Born of the air and doomed to flame. (38-58)

In the conclusion Barbauld is describing her observation of Priestley at the moment of some discovery. This is another example of what I have been calling bubble-like moments or spaces wherein conception and potential are yet unknown and unnamed. In contrast to the natural, and more perfect, creative process represented by the woman’s womb in “To a Little Invisible
Being,” man’s artificial attempts to create out of “A mass of heterogeneous matter, / A chaos dark” produce some disjointed material forms.

“To a Little Invisible Being” is about a kind of recovery performed by a mother, not wholly unlike acts of feminist scholarship. The being’s birth is not so much “birth” ex nihilo, but a translation, from invisible to visible, a putting down to take up again in another form. Mary Poovey has suggested that we recover literature because we want sites for discussion, to enact our critical debates and explore our terms. Barbauld’s poems are bubbles, containers, sites for this kind of concocting and experimentation by virtue of being unrecognized and under-read. But they prefigure the self-referencing act of potential feminist canonical judgements in that they appear to deal with the very problems and uncertainties such criticism may raise. To recover is to regain, but this is not always a direct, clean act, just as birthing a baby. Making the invisible visible may be more of an act of translation than uncovering or recovering. To try to bring Barbauld into the canon is likewise to “birth” her poetry into a system that she resisted and wasn’t totally in place during her time. To do this would be to translate it into a new world, as the fetus comes into a new existence, to make an invisible being visible based entirely on the lens or the agent of vision, rather than the manifestation of the object itself. It is an awkward, difficult, painful, and at times, unnatural and dangerous procedure, particularly when the reputation of an actual woman and the visibility of women's literature is at stake.
Chapter Four:

Towards a Post-National Romantic Citizen: Sublime Alternations Between a Pre-Symbolic Feminine Subjectivity in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” and a Post-National Romantic Citizen in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*

Barbauld is not a "conservative" because she chooses to focus on merely the contemplative act. And she is not necessarily a "radical" for positing women's self-fulfilling erotic and intellectual exploration. As conventional a figurative agent as contemplation may be in metaphysical and Romantic poetry, it nonetheless simultaneously contains and unleashes possibility in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” (1773). This poem treats the nature of revolution, the female soul, the sublme and poetic imagination, human nature (as “embryo Gods”), and the gynotopic, even post-national experience in “trackless deeps of space.” In “Meditation,” the poet-speaker, in a quiet, midnight moment of introspection, traces Contemplation’s astronomical journey beyond terrestrial space and through the cosmos represented as a kind of gynotopia. She goes further, launching past the known universe,

To the dread confines of eternal night,
To solitudes of vast unpeopled space,
The desarts of creation, wide and wild;
Where embryo systems and unkindled suns
Sleep in the womb of chaos (93-97)

But, eventually Contemplation withdraws and returns as “my soul unus’d to stretch her powers /
In flight so daring, drops her weary wing” (112-13) and contentedly and gratefully awaits
“th’appointed time / And ripen for the skies” (118-19). This chapter also considers Barbauld’s addresses to the nation, and the possible post-nation state, in what seem to be their generic maturity. That is, her image of a seed taking root and growing up to an oak tree from her *Hymns in Prose for Children*, that discursively develops in her sermon on national character and revolution, *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation*, matures in her epic poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*.

In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, Barbauld argues that England will fall into ruin because the best of English culture has left and found root in the more fertile soil of the United States. In time, the once postcolonial (American) other will return in pilgrimage to pay homage at the graves and ruins of England. Since *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* has come to represent the end of Barbauld’s public writing career, it is interesting to read alongside possible inheritance texts, such as Mary Shelley’s novel *The Last Man*. By contrast, in *The Last Man*, colonization has allowed the worst of English culture to be exported and grow in foreign circumstances. In time, these things close back in on the center of the empire, in the form of the plague, which cannot be contained or quarantined. The ultimate effect is a sort of reverse colonization where the empire is turned in upon itself, collapsing and actually resulting in vagrancy, the loss of home.

An epilogue suggests that conceiving of Barbauld’s aesthetics as post-national also involves examination of her abolitionist work, including her 1791 “Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade.” Her aesthetics of the post-national, as well as her political involvement in abolitionism, also derive from work in her *Hymns in Prose for Children*. The study concludes with a discussion of Barbauld’s poem “On the Death of Mrs. Martineau” (1820) which commemorates the legacy of the good matriarch.
as perhaps more powerful than any other figure in civilization. Thus, the epilogue mediates the content of the beginning chapters, as the figure of mother that mediated the child’s experience and development in *Hymns in Prose for Children* and *Lessons for Children* in order to foster the values of the Romantic national and global citizen, returns as the subject of Romantic ode and preeminent medium of civilization’s continuity and progress.

“A Summer Evening’s Meditation”

Barbauld’s “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” published in her 1773 *Poems*, has served as a site for what I have called attempts at feminist *trisection*: good feminist, bad feminist, not really a feminist at all. “Meditation,” like many of Barbauld’s other poems, participates in eighteenth-century and Miltonic traditions. However, her title could as easily be “Mediation,” as she works out a startlingly progressive l’écriture féminine of Woman’s sensually divine and “self-collected soul” that exhibits the fearlessness of the Miltonic hero.

Robert Jones and David Fairer challenge the exclusivity of Marshall Brown’s readings of the poetry of the mid-eighteenth-century as merely preromanticism.\(^92\) Instead, Jones, along with Fairer, sees Burke’s *Reflections* (though published in 1791) as “a paradigmatic case for understanding how British poetic traditions developed in the mid-century as a practice of continuous intertextuality” (120). I favor an approach that mediates Jones/Fairer and Brown in reading Barbauld’s poetry as a marked transition between Miltonic and eighteenth-century traditions on the one hand, and the Romantic aesthetics developing out of, and alongside, her works on the other. Jones and Fairer’s stress on Burke’s organicism and his belief in poetry as a

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function of retrospection and incorporation, which can ultimately give rise to a national inheritance, is useful to any discussion striving for ways to read Barbauld’s vast textual interplay.

Jones looks at Barbauld’s inheritance of both Milton and James Thomson, observing: “Although influenced by L’Allegro and Il Penseroso, Barbauld is more excited by the images of struggle and resistance in Milton’s epic poem and engages, albeit skeptically, with the predicament of Satan and his comrades. She is indeed prepared to risk the language of the fallen angels to realize the politics of liberal dissent” (Jones 120). When it comes to “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” I assert that Il Penseroso is the key Miltonic source. Barbauld takes the female subject that Milton speaks for and gives that subject her own voice.

Specifically, Jones identifies Barbauld’s “allegiance” to Milton and, to a certain extent, Thomson, in the way her early writing makes use of the negative prefix “un-.” Jones is most concerned with her use of “un-“ to “define moments of contest and resistance, requiring both an agent and an object: ‘uninjured,’ ‘unpierced.’ . . . [These uses] disclose her willingness to use, as Milton does, words that paradoxically suggest their own antithesis. An action is hinted at, piercing, say, but only to imply that it has not yet occurred” (121).

The negative prefix allows

the establishment of two apparently opposing but temporarily related terms, words that require the reader to imagine a condition in relation to its contrary. . . . For example, in “The Invitation” snowdrops are described as the “first pale blossom of th’ unripen’d year” (l. 42). Like Thomson’s “unfrozen” [in his poem Winter], the idea is to suggest a narrow distance between two ideas rather than an antipathy: ripe and unripe are stages, relative terms not opposites. This unique
separation becomes crucial once Barbauld connects these ideas to ethical situations. (Jones 123)

This technique is manifest in her contractions and bubble spaces wherein she discursively connects and subtly contains two seemingly opposing or disconnected conditions or concepts. Even her epic poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* is organized around a sublime tension between the “alternate hope and fear” of a nation (4).

Several markers for feminist criticism appear in the beginning of “Meditation.” It opens with an epigraph: “One sun by day, by night ten thousand shine,” from Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* (1742). Young’s poem is about the meaning of life and death, and it is also a meditation. Right away, Barbauld is not only setting foot into the principles of astronomy—and this is even more apparent in her characterization of the planets later on—but setting up space and power in terms of alternatives. More particularly, Barbauld sets up diffuse alternatives, rather than one-to-one correlation. The opening lines of the poem depict this astronomical alternateness, even conflict, in terms of gender. Heavenly spheres are conventionally gendered in the conflict, and Barbauld is, no doubt, consciously implicating the problematic doctrine of social spheres:

‘Tis past! The sultry tyrant of the south
Has spent his short-liv’d rage; more grateful hours
Move silent on; the skies no more repel
The dazzled sight, but with mild maiden beams
Of temper’d luster, court the cherish’d eye
To wander o’er their sphere; where hung aloft
Dian's bright crescent, like a silver bow
New strung in heaven, lifts high its beamy horns
Impatient for the night, and seems to push
Her brother down the sky. (1-10)

The triumph of Venus and “Dian’s bright crescent” over the “sultry tyrant of the south,” invokes a liberation and celebration of evening along with the emergence of female Contemplation, all corresponding with feminine release. The first ten lines of the poem introduce the Kristevan conditioning of woman as difference: she is not the day, not the singular sun, not her brother.

What immediately follows these lines, however, the extended scene of Contemplation’s awakening, has either been problematic for critics or been avoided altogether and therefore warrants closer examination. This scene contains numerous subtle images of female, private, even erotic space and experience that the figure of Contemplation explores during the night, while “Nature’s self is hush’d.” First, Venus

Shakes a trembling flood
Of soften’d radiance from her dewy locks.

The shadows spread apace; while meeken’d Eve,
Her cheek yet warm with blushes, slow retires
Thro’ the Hesperian gardens of the west,
And shuts the gates of day. (12-17)

That this description of evening involves Venus and Eve who are shaking, trembling, flooding, softening, dewy, spreading, and warmly blushing, is not particularly noteworthy since Barbauld is not the first poet to invoke feminized and sexualized images to characterize conditions in
nature. She is, of course, partaking in a vast male tradition of poetry. However, that the poet partaking in this feminizing and sexualizing tradition is a woman in the eighteenth century is noteworthy. Further, she is carefully conditioning sexuality within the female sphere. Here, feminine sexuality emerges after it has been distinctly removed or protected from the influence of the masculine “sultry tyrant.” This is a political critical move that seems to anticipate theorists like Cixous and Irigaray by a good two hundred years. She is not just seizing the pen and the patterns that have so long circumscribed feminine sexuality, but in the fashion of féminité,93 appears to focus in on woman by virtue of excluding man. Barbauld fully disrupts the symbolic order as she begins to write the female body as it operates in a realm totally devoid of the phallus.

The Lacanian concept of the phallus is apt for interpreting the consciousness of this eighteenth-century poem—for female Contemplation has thus far lain at a lonely impenetrable, “unpierc’d” depth. Once the gates of day are shut,

Contemplation, from her sunless haunts,
The cool damp grotto, or the lonely depth
Of unpierc’d woods, where wrapt in solid shade
She mused away the gaudy hours of noon,
And fed on thoughts unripen’d by the sun,
Moves forward; and with radiant finger points

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93 Feminist scholars in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s have debated the existence of what Ann Rosalind Jones calls “a bedrock female nature” (370), which might produce texts that uniquely express a pure feminine experience, in purely feminine discourse (uncorrupted by the practices and perspectives of patriarchal culture). Theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig may have overlooked previous incarnations of féminité or l’écriture féminine.
To yon blue concave swell’d by breath divine,
Where, one by one, the living eyes of heaven
Awake, quick kindling o’er the face of ether
One boundless blaze; ten thousand trembling fires,
And dancing lustres, where th’unsteady eye
Restless and dazzled, wanders unconfin’d
O’er all this field of glories: spacious field!

. . . From what pure wells
Of milky light, what soft o’erflowing urn,

Are all these lamps so fill’d? these friendly lamps, (18-30)

Referring to lines 17-27, Jones submits that the “sunless haunts,” “unpierc’d woods,” and “solid shade” characterizing Contemplation’s seclusion may be “perhaps equivocal” references to Milton’s description of the garden into which comes Satan when “he overleaps the bounds” in Paradise Lost (4: l.245).

Jones attributes Barbauld’s invocation of the sublime in lines 27-31, and the scene’s eroticized premise in lines 10-17, to Burke’s description of the effect of a beautiful woman on a male spectator in the Enquiry.94 Jones asserts that Barbauld confounds her subject’s vision in terms of erotic experience, “risk[ing] the immoral in order to disengage the ethical from the sensual (or at least question the relationship between them)” (129). He notes that in Barbauld,

94 See Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful: “Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried?” (115).
“Religion vies always with the erotic . . . . Though Barbauld intends a religious message, she chooses, with logic much like Burke’s, to risk dissolution before she reaches understanding” (130). He concludes that this poem investigates how humans understand the divine, ultimately reading the sublime in lines 112-22 in a way that secures her description of religious revelation, her “ravish’d sense,” from erotic contamination (Jones 131). However, Jones’s conclusions risk a similarly unsatisfactory resignation to the poem’s.

I believe these early lines introduce the poem’s more significant reliance on Il Penseroso, rather than Paradise Lost. Il Penseroso is not only more thematically suited to the scope of “Meditation,” but it provides a syntactical register for artistic, even feminist, mediation. Milton, accompanied by Melancholy and the Cherub Contemplation, among others, beholds “the wandering Moon, / Riding near her highest noon” (67-68) and,

The spirit of Plato to unfold
What Worlds, or what vast Regions hold
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook (89-92)

Similarly, Barbauld’s Contemplation emerges from her “cool damp grotto” (19), travels into “yon blue concave swell’d by breath divine”(24), and past “citadels of light, and seats of GODS!” (61). While the dreaming Milton and the spirit of Plato forsake material flesh in Il Penseroso, Barbauld’s Contemplation is actually elevated by a conflation of sensory experience: “tho’ the rais’d ear, / Intensely listening, drinks in every breath” (45-46). This synesthesia is a kind of l’écriture féminine response to the Platonic-Miltonic aesthetic of enlightenment that
seeks to escape corporeality. Barbauld’s Contemplation, as well as the universe into which she travels, exudes quasi-corporeal subjectivity: “is there not / A tongue in every star” (48-49).

In “Meditation,” “Nature’s self is hush’d, / And, but a scatter’d leaf, which rustles thro’ / The thick-wove foliage” (42-43) after “The sultry tyrant of the south / Has spent his short-liv’d rage” (1-2). In Il Penseroso,

When the gust hath blown his fill,
Ending on the rustling Leaves, . . .
And when the Sun begins to fling
His flaring beams, me, Goddess, bring
To archèd walks of twilight groves,
And shadows brown, that Sylvan loves (128-34)

Ultimately, Milton in his old age, contemplates the constellations and their heavenly chorus stirring him to rapture,

Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.
And may at last my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage,
The Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell
Of every Star that Heaven doth shew,
And every Herb that sips the dew (165-72)
Milton the poet materially anchors the ecstasy. That is, he wants to be able to write about it. This does not seem to be the primary goal for Barbauld’s Contemplation, at least within the poem. In *Il Penseroso*, the “vast Regions” of space are also crowded with spirits, cherubs, gods, goddesses, and philosophers, whereas in “Meditation,” space is “vast” and “unpeopled,” “The desarts of creation, wide and wild” (94-95) except for Barbauld’s “self-collected soul” (53).

Contemplation’s awakening is at once classical, invested with Miltonic language, and expressively feminine. She has “fed on thoughts unripen’d” by man, and these thoughts have the power to move at the speed of light, “quick kindling” “the living eyes of heaven” as if they are all part of a vast synoptic network. The “spacious field” of heaven “swell’d” and filled with “milky light” as if from some “soft o’erflowing urn” is a sensuously feminine space. It is hard to believe that William Woodfall, the 1773 reviewer of Barbauld’s *Poems* and otherwise a fan, was disappointed by what he perceived as Barbauld’s failure to represent “the Woman,” exclaiming: “We hoped the Woman was going to appear,” and wishing “that [Barbauld] had breathed her wishes, her desires, and given, from nature, what has been hitherto only guessed at . . . by the imagination of men” (qtd. in McCarthy 113). For one who admits that the imagination of men is insufficient for guessing at the true nature of women’s experience, Woodfall seems certain that Barbauld has not expressed it.

This is a telling irony. Have the expectations of today’s feminist critics also been disappointed? Luce Irigaray has asked, “if the female imaginary were to deploy itself, if it could bring itself into play otherwise than as scraps, uncollected debris, would it represent itself, even so, in the form of one universe?” (367). Irigaray cannot even pin down the female imaginary to one universe. In fact, Barbauld cannot either, as the flight of Contemplation shows.
Contemplation’s figuration seems to frustrate those that would attempt to characterize the poet’s feminism reductively.

Woodfall’s confusion and disappointment at Woman’s failure to appear may come from an inability to see Contemplation as anything besides a classical figure of action, or Miltonic hero. After all, she is partially embodied, having a finger which mystically mediates between her residence in the deep, dark “unpierc’d woods” and the “boundless blaze” of universe. And, Barbauld gestures toward another mystically mediating finger, judging that the “glories” of the “spacious field” are worthy of,

\[\ldots \text{he, whose hand} \]

With hieroglyphics elder than the Nile,

Inscribed the mystic tablet;

\[\ldots \text{Adore, O man!} \]

The finger of thy God (31-33, 34-35)

Woodfall and others who read Barbauld as a conservative would regard this passage as a key point of deference to a higher institutional (male) power. But, this possibility is unclear. There is a noticeable difference between the performative values of these two fingers. God’s finger was made manifest to Moses as the inscriber and delimiter of Judaic law, a symbolic extension of patriarchal order. Contemplation’s finger enlightens a boundless, spacious field of trackless space synonymous with the female erotic experience. While the finger of God penetrates the visible, tablet world through written word, Contemplation elicits an orgasmic “o’erflowing” of “milky light” (36). God’s finger is a visible appendage of language and law. Contemplation’s finger points and kindles beyond or above the symbolic order. Cixous writes
that woman’s body is “without end, without appendage . . . a cosmos tirelessly traversed by Eros, an immense astral space not organized around any one sun that’s any more of a star than the others . . . . Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide” (357-58). Barbauld’s Contemplation thus presents a problem of figuration for critics. As a representative figure, she would seem to compete with the figure of God. But, to identify her finger with the finger of the Old Testament is a mistake, because it belies the pre-figured nature of Contemplation.

Contemplation at once moves through and takes in the cosmos. As Barbauld writes,

This dead of midnight is the noon of thought,
And wisdom mounts her zenith with the stars.
At this still hour the self-collected soul
Turns inward, and beholds a stranger there
Of high descent, and more than mortal rank;
An embryo God; a spark of fire divine,
Which must burn on for ages, when the sun,
(Fair transitory creature of a day!)
Has clos’d his golden eye, and wrapt in shades
Forgets his wonted journey thro’ the east. (51-60)

Barbauld was the daughter of a Dissenting minister and an active, though at times critical, member of the Dissenting community herself. Not only is the God of such a religious point of view friendly toward man, but in the contemplative space of “Meditation,” the idea of god is born and contained within the “self-collected soul” of a female inflected subjectivity. This soul in Contemplation, desiring to be with the “Gods” (61), takes flight “Seiz’d in thought, / On
fancy’s wild and roving wing” through and beyond the known universe. The journey has provoked controversy about Contemplation’s gendered cosmos and Barbauld’s feminism. The edition of this poem reprinted by McCarthy and Kraft reads,

> From the green borders of the peopled earth,
> And the pale moon, her duteous fair attendant;
> From solitary Mars; from the vast orb
> Of Jupiter, whose huge gigantic bulk
> Dances in ether like the lightest leaf;
> To the dim verge, the suburbs of the system,
> Where cheerless Saturn ‘midst his wat’ry moons
> Girt with a lucid zone, in gloomy pomp,
> Sits like an exil’d monarch: fearless thence
> I launch into the trackless deeps of space,
> Where, burning round, ten thousand suns appear (73-83)

In this passage Contemplation travels through and beyond, as if escaping, a patriarchal system bounded by Saturn, the outermost planet of the solar system as it was known in 1773. And, the “exil’d monarch” is likely an allusion to the folly of the Titans at the hands of the Greek Gods. However, in the first two editions of *Poems*, lines 79-81 read, “Saturn ‘midst her wat’ry moons / Girt with a lucid zone, majestic sits / In gloomy grandeur; like an exil’d queen / Amongst her weeping handmaids.” The reason for the change was Woodfall’s review. He complained that

95 McCarthy and Kraft 101.
Barbauld “speaks of Saturn in the feminine,” and “offence against ancient mythology,” and so the poet revised accordingly. This textual difference presents a quandary for feminist recovery scholarship. If we read Barbauld diachronically as a conservative in the overall political scene of publication and reception in the eighteenth century, it would make sense to stick with the latter version of the poem. If we are synchronically engaged with the representation of Woman, which lies closer to the poem’s content, we can interpret the female Saturn as an element in a cosmic gynotopia that propels, rather than repels, Contemplation through space.

Reading the poem diachronically as a Romantic intertext, “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” partakes of Milton, Pope, and Cowper, and looks forward to Coleridge and Wordsworth. And yet, it bursts out of this generic universe, beyond the “suburbs of the system”:

To the dread confines of eternal night,
To solitudes of vast unpeopled space,
The desarts of creation, wide and wild;
Where embryo systems and unkindled suns
Sleep in the womb of chaos (93-97)

The poet flies “on fancy’s wild and roving wing” (72) not unlike the Miltonic Satan to a pre-developed, pre-classified, pre-genred, and, might I suggest, pre-gendered (as it is embryonic) realm. Cixous would consider these types of pre-conditions representational of l’écriture féminine, as she argues,

If woman has always functioned “within” the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy . . . it is time for her to
dislocate this “within,” to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers. . .. For us the point is not to take possession in order to internalize or manipulate, but rather to dash through and to “fly.” Flying is woman’s gesture – flying in language and making it fly. (356)

While Cixous was referring to the upsetting of things like conventional syntax and symbols in language, and not necessarily to the kind of figurative flying performed by Barbauld’s Contemplation, her comment applies because the form of the poem performs an explosion of the symbolic order that is explicitly physical and erotic. Whether Contemplation is propelled through a gynotopia or repelled from a patriarchal cosmos, she is still in the infinite space deep down in the “self-collected soul,” and concludes her flight by longing to “behold her Maker” who “hast a gentler voice” than “those thunders arm’d / That conscious Sinai felt” (111, 110, 107-108).

Whereas Milton is led on through space by Plato and others in Il Penseroso, Barbauld’s speaker seems solitary, except for the “hand unseen / [That] Impels me onward thro’ the glowing orbs.” Yet, even this mysterious hand is explained by her anti-Platonic, quasi-corporeal subjectivity of the “self-collected soul” who “Turns inward, and beholds a stranger there.” In what would seem to be a proto-Cixous féminité, the inwardly-located Contemplation, looks even further within to behold an “embryo GOD” self whose “spark of fire divine” burns “on for ages, when the sun, / (Fair transitory creature of a day!) / Has clos’d his golden eye” (57-59. Further, as Barbauld’s Contemplation journeys through the celestial “field of glories,” the subjectivity changes from the third-person “she” to the Miltonic-heroic “I”: “On fancy’s wild
and roving wing I sail,” (72), “fearless thence / I launch into the trackless deeps of space” (81-82).

This speaker is not contemplating a male god who resides in a symbolic order outside of her own consciousness. She is seeking to behold female divinity within. And this ambitious desire culminates in an orgasmic, ripening, burst of sensation, as she contemplates the hour, “When all these splendours bursting on my sight / Shall stand unveil’d, and to my ravish’d sense / Unlock the glories of the world unknown” (120-22). If we qualify Barbauld's verse according to the principles of féminité, then Contemplation appears to perform a critique of the (male) sublime. The alternative, or feminized/female sublime, is a kind of reverse transcendentalism. In this experience, the poet-consciousness moves further and deeper inside the self, following an inward trajectory toward meaning. But, to consider that Contemplation is performing anything may be to grant it too much of what it merely signifies. That is, the figure of Contemplation may signify action, or flight into changed circumstance and awareness—what McCarthy calls "compensatory fantasy”—but, by virtue of being merely Contemplation, it does not really act. Contemplation is by nature pre-action, pre-choice, pre-order, pre-symbolic, and pre-lingual.

_Eighteen Hundred and Eleven_

While Contemplation in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” is pre-symbolic and pre-order, the scene in Barbauld’s epic poem _Eighteen Hundred and Eleven_ is contrastingly, post-order. _Eighteen Hundred and Eleven_ is Barbauld’s ruins of Pompeii. The poem, which in large part was constructed as a monument to British civilization, incurred such a devastating critical reaction that Barbauld’s reputation and publishing career were effectively buried on impact. _Eighteen Hundred and Eleven_’s internal monumentality is eerily far-reaching in its service to
Barbauld’s recent scholarly exhumation. That is, the poem imagines a kind of cultural excavation, appearing to be a literary monument to the glories of England. And this is what gets her into trouble with political conservatives such as the *Quarterly Review*’s John Wilson Croker. Likewise, the poem serves as the key artifact in understanding Barbauld’s writing career and her present situation in the literary canon, or what I have discussed as the anthologized, imagined gap between eighteenth-century literary traditions and Romanticism. Just as it would be incorrect to ignore her mediating role between these two literary eras, it would also be limiting to ignore the continuity within the canon of her own work. Her contemporary readers and critics, along with modern critics, have expressed surprise at the apparent break in form, attitude, and liberalism that *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* seems to represent in comparison with her other writing. Yet, if we read her earlier works carefully, there is no significant gap between Barbauld the children’s writer and educator, Barbauld the political pamphleteer, and Barbauld the lyric and epic poet.

William Keach is one who reads *Eighteen Hundred Eleven* as a break in Barbauld’s career, concluding,

It’s understandable that readers accustomed to the views characteristic of Barbauld’s previous writing—unwavering in defense of the French Revolution and in opposition to the slave trade but consistently balanced, sensible, moderately reformist (Barbauld’s friend Mary Wollstonecraft famously attacks her conventionality on the woman question)—should have been surprised and put off by her vision of the ruins of empire. Though rooted in the progressive Dissenting ideology that motivates all her work, “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven”
marks a decisive break with the meliorist historical perspective to which that ideology had previously been attached. (577)

What may appear as a break in Barbauld’s perspective may only look that way through a symbolic order of nationalism. While her earlier works arguably contributed to the development of a British national subjectivity, they also contained the seeds for a much broader social evolutionary process that would encourage human development beyond known orders of government. Barbauld contributed to the development of Britain’s national consciousness through earlier works as *Hymns in Prose* and *Sins of Government. Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* advances her aesthetic organicism in presenting the possibility of the next stage of development along the social continuum, the post-nation state. The poem posits the higher ideal of a post-national, Romantic citizen of humanity. It does this by engaging in monumentality and a pilgrimage or touristic time-space, the sublime tension between fear and hope, and appropriating traditional influences such as Pope’s “Windsor Forest.”

In the spirit of marking *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*’s canonical mediation, pointing back to influential texts such as Johnson’s “Vanity of Human Wishes,” Pope’s “Windsor Forest,” Volney’s *Ruins of Empire*, and Blake’s poetry, in addition to her own earlier work such as “To A Great Nation,” “Corsica,” *Sins of Government, Sins of a Nation*, and her *Hymns in Prose for Children*, is as fruitful as gesturing forward to the Shelleys and texts such as *The Last Man*. Even as *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* and its author were originally maligned for what seemed to be the premature archeology of the unimaginable decline of British culture, the uncanny validation

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of its prophecies and, more importantly, its artistic scope, reveal Barbauld’s true scale as a writer concerned with social, political, and artistic evolution.

The following concerns continue to drive today’s scholarly debate about the poem: 1) What is Barbauld suggesting overall in the poem about the future of Britain; i.e., is its decline an inevitable part of a global pattern and is there no such thing as real progress, can nothing different happen in the future? 2) Is the poem calling for any kind of action, or is it passively resigned to a certain fate? 3) Does it mark a change of direction in her writing career? 4) Is it promoting nationalism or criticizing it? 5) What is the real cultural relationship between England and the New World, i.e. simple transfer, appropriation, or development? 6) What are the roles and meanings of specific personified elements such as Fancy and Genius? I will address all of these questions here.

First, I will discuss the poem’s extreme controversy in its time. It generated harsh criticism from both liberals and conservatives. As Keach points out, “When they’re seriously unsettled, Tories can be quick to dispense with the traditions of gentlemanly respect and courtesy they say they cherish” (“A Regency Prophecy” 569). So it was with John Wilson Croker in his Quarterly Review censure of Eighteen Hundred and Eleven.97 Croker assures, “it really is with no disposition to retaliate on the fair pedagogue of our former life,” but he cannot “comprehend the meaning of all the verses which this fatidical spinster has drawn from her poetical distaff” (309). “Spinster” was surely a low blow to the recently widowed, sixty-nine-year-old Barbauld, who had endured difficulties in her long marriage. Croker must have been so unsettled that he dispensed with accurate representation, exclaiming of the poem,

97 The Quarterly Review 7 (1812).
England . . . is undone . . . while America is to go on increasing and improving in arts, in arms, and even, if that be possible, in virtue. . . . Mrs. Barbauld’s former works have been of some utility; her ‘Lessons for Children’, her ‘Hymns in Prose’, her Selections from the Spectator’, et id genus omne, though they display not much of either taste or talents, are yet something better than harmless: but we must take the liberty of warning her to desist from satire, which indeed is satire on herself alone; and of entreati ng, with great earnestness, that she will not, for the sake of this ungrateful generation, put herself to the trouble of writing any more party pamphlets in verse. (310, 313)

One would think that Barbauld’s friends and supporters would speak out on her behalf in response to such a scathing, personal attack. After all, what is perhaps more disconcerting about Croker’s vitriol is not so much its personal nature (Wollstonecraft had withstood being called a “hyena in petticoats” by a reviewer), but its utter partisanship. Indeed, Croker is guilty of satire and party pamphleteering in his role as reviewer. This speaks to a much larger issue of the day concerning the role of the poet and the Romantic aesthetic of fusing social and political event and art. In this review, Croker reveals his role is less about culture cultivation and more about protecting the sovereignty of state.

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98 Based on some of the reviews of the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft was a virtual eighteenth-century Jane Fonda – unique as a champion of mind-body fitness and political commentator-activist. Alice Rossi points out that Horace Walpole demonstrated a predictable contemporary English response to Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* in describing her as a “‘hyena in petticoats’ and classed her with Tom Paine as one of the ‘philosophizing serpents we have in our bosom’” (32). See The Feminist Papers, ed. Rossi (1973).
Even so, Barbauld’s poem was not prescribing the destruction of state, and those who knew her not only failed to do her justice, but criticized her as well. Barbauld’s friend Henry Crabb Robinson confessed in his *Diaries*,

> I certainly wish she had not written it, though it is written in a pleasing style. For the tone and spirit of it are certainly very bad. She does not content herself with expressing her fears lest England should perish in the present struggle; she speaks with the confidence of a prophet of the fall of the country as if she had seen in a vision the very process of its ruin. (63-64)

Maria Edgeworth defended her in private, but remained silent in public. In a letter to Barbauld, she described her family’s “disgust” and “indignation” at “so insolent a review,” assuring:

> My father and I, in the moment of provocation, snatched up our pens to answer it, but a minute’s reflection convinced us, that silent contempt is the best answer—that we should not suppose it possible, that it can hurt anybody with the generous British public, but the reviewers themselves. . . . The public, the *public* will do you justice! (155-56)

It is startling that she would think the anonymous “public” would do Barbauld justice when someone in Edgeworth’s position, with full access to the power of publication and audience, favors mere silence. If someone like her would not defend Barbauld, who would?

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100 Quoted in Anna Letitia Le Breton, *Memoir of Mrs. Barbauld, Including Letters and Notices of Her Family and Friends* (1874).
Despite readers’ astonishment at Barbauld’s cultural politics, the immediate historical-material contexts for *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, alluded to in the first 70 lines, ranged wildly from the King being declared unable to rule due to mental instability, to widespread unemployment, food shortages, uprisings, general economic instability, the war itself, and the assassination of the Prime Minister in the House of Commons.\(^1\) Twentieth and twenty-first century critics have found it hard to resist drawing comparisons between the highly distressed period of the Regency, Barbauld’s prophecies, and modern conditions in Europe and America.

Of course, any validation of the poem’s prophecies is largely irrelevant to this kind of analysis. However, contemporary critics such as Birns and Keach cannot resist plucking the low-hanging fruit—the poem’s obviously accurate indictment of imperial warfare and domestic inequality. Birns draws connections between the poem’s depiction of war and the Second Gulf War.\(^2\) Keach points out that, looking at Barbauld’s poem from the perspective of 1994, “in the long run, Barbauld got more things right than she got wrong. England would continue to suffer—has been suffering now for some fourteen years [i.e., since 1980]—under the Tories, or the ‘Conservatives’ as Croker himself would be instrumental in getting his party called” (576).\(^3\) These events seem to echo her charge:

\(^1\) Keach provides an excellent summary of events surrounding the year 1811: “the year in which the King was declared mentally incapable of ruling, the year of the Luddite uprisings, of massive unemployment, of terrible food shortages and soaring food prices, of mounting sentiment against the war because of its disruptive effect on trade and finance capital . . . the Prime Minister was murdered in the House of Commons, the Penninsular War entered its critical phase, Napoleon invaded Russia” (573). See Keach’s “A Regency Prophecy and the End of Anna Barbauld’s Career.”

\(^2\) Birns suggests that the passage, “The sons of Odin tread on Persioan looms / And Odin’s daughters breathe distilled perfumes,” should, in the wake of the Second Gulf War of 2003, perhaps, be “Mesopotamian looms” (546).
And think'st thou, Britain, still to sit at ease,
An island Queen amidst thy subject seas,
While the vext billows, in their distant roar,
But soothe thy slumbers, and but kiss thy shore?
To sport in wars, while danger keeps aloof,
Thy grassy turf unbruised by hostile hoof?
So sing thy flatterers; but, Britain, know,
Thou who has shared the guilt must share the woe.
Nor distant is the hour; low murmurs spread,
And whispered fears, creating what they dread;
Ruin, as with an earthquake shock, is here,
There, the heart-witherings of unuttered fear,
And that sad death, whence most affection bleeds,
Which sickness, only of the soul, precedes.¹⁰⁴
Thy baseless wealth dissolves in air away,
Like mists that melt before the morning ray:

¹⁰³ Keach further explains that “Barbauld lived from 1802 until her death in 1825 in Stoke Newington—then a peaceful village just north of London, now a depressed area that has quite recently seen savage police brutality against the black community there. Barbauld wasn’t so much wrong as premature in her gloomy vision of the future Britain” (576).

¹⁰⁴ McCarthy and Kraft note that this is likely an “allusion to the suicide in 1810 of Abraham Goldsmid, financier and philanthropist; more generally, to the sufferings of bankrupts in the fall of 1810. ‘Thoroughly to understand and feel this passage [II. 47-52] requires, perhaps, some acquaintance with those silent miseries which have abounded during the last seven years . . . in . . . the commercial world. They who have witnessed the dumb despair of broken-hearted merchants, and the grief of their wives and daughters will be able to appreciate the matchless beauty of [II. 51-52]’ (New British Lady’s Magazine, p. 320)” (163).
No more on crowded mart or busy street
Friends, meeting friends, with cheerful hurry greet;
Sad, on the ground thy princely merchants bend
Their altered looks, and evil days portend,
And fold their arms, and watch with anxious breast
The tempest blackening in the distant West. (39-60)

The British government in 1810 began an attempt to counteract the phenomenon of widespread bankruptcies by rolling out its own bailout plan. However, this sharply damaged the currency. McCarthy and Kraft note, “In January 1811 a Select Committee of the House of Commons reported that the British government had issued paper currency in excess of its gold reserves and that the currency therefore lacked credibility” (163). Meanwhile, the “tempest blackening in the distant West” was the threat of war with the U.S. that began in June of 1812.

Yet to dwell on the poem’s prophetic qualities is to diminish its relevance to politics in much the same way that its contemporary critics read it as no more than “satire” and “party pamphlets in verse.”

Marlon Ross observes that “doom is presented as a foregone conclusion” in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, and that Barbauld “does not seem interested in spurring individuals to action” (224). Christoph Bode glosses *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* as an equal indictment of imperial war-mongering and “the growth and spread of the mercantile spirit (money and profit as the end of all things)—unmistakable, ominous signs of an imminent outward decline and fall of

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106 Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire*. 
the Empire” (14). While pointing out that Barbauld’s vehement critics were likely spurred by the poem’s sense of inevitable British decline, akin to natural laws and trajectories such as the rising and setting of the sun, Bode risks a slight misreading as she does not, in fact, indict mercantilism in the poem.

On the one hand, Bode’s point would seem to be supported by the following passage:

Yes, thou [Britain] must droop; thy Midas dream is o’er,
The golden tide of Commerce leaves thy shore,
Leaves thee to prove the alternate ills that haunt
Enfeebling Luxury and ghastly Want;
Leaves thee, perhaps, to visit distant lands,
And deal the gifts of Heaven with equal hands. (61-66)

But Barbauld quickly turns to patriotic nostalgia in the following verse, locating nation within personal memory. Her nostalgia locates nation within childhood, formative experience. The concept of country is a developmental one as also shown by her Hymns in Prose. The speaker appears to wax patriotic in the lines below that mark a shift in the poem toward an extended homage to British culture. Yet, in the way that Hymns in Prose discursively represents the developmental concepts of self, God, family, a youth community, a village, national, and international community, and ever-broadening, Hutchesonian, circles of influence and experience, even beyond the constraints of the globe to a “country” of Heaven, these would-be patriotic lines also locate national subjectivity within the youth stage of human development.

107 Christoph Bode, “Ad fontes! Remarks on the Temporalization of Space in Hemans (1829), Bruce (1790), and Barbauld (1812)” (2004).
To view nationalism as a stage of cultural development has subtle but significant implications, as Barbauld was not only accused of being unpatriotic, but also of promoting the argument that Britain’s decline is inevitable and conformable to the course of nature. What readers may have failed to see or acknowledge, precisely because of the profound, ingrained sense of national identity that Barbauld had in part helped to create, were the poem’s gestures toward a successive, global identity, or evolution to post-national humanity:

Yet, O my Country, name beloved, revered,
By every tie that binds the soul endeared,
Whose image to my infant senses came
Mixt with Religion’s light and Freedom’s holy flame! (67-70)

For Barbauld’s speaker in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, the idea of nation or “country” is associated with her childhood implicating the developmental role of national subjectivity.

The poem shifts into an imagined future, when “curious pilgrim[s]” (151) from the Americas will tread with “throbbing bosoms” (177) upon the “faded glories” (158) of London. There, they behold

The mighty city, which by every road,
In floods of people poured itself abroad;
Ungirt by walls, irregularly great,
No jealous drawbridge, and no closing gate;
Whose merchants (such the state which commerce brings)
Sent forth their mandates to dependant kings;
Streets, where the turban’d Moslem, bearded Jew,
And woolly Afric, met the brown Hindu;
Where through each vein spontaneous plenty flowed,
Where Wealth enjoyed, and Charity bestowed.
Pensive and thoughtful shall the wanderers greet
Each splendid square, and still, untrodden street (159-70)

In celebrating the best of London, the speaker deviates from the eighteenth-century poetic tradition exemplified by poems such as Pope’s “Windsor Forest” (1713) that focus on the majesty of centralized British power, and instead observes the ways in which the city’s success occurred through commercial resistance to centralized power. Barbauld’s poem upsets the definition of sovereignty as well, as commerce creates a state superior to political orders and “dependent kings.” London is, in fact, glorified by its internationality or transnationality. To be more precise, the “turban’d Moslem,” “bearded Jew,” “woolly Afric,” and “brown Hindu” who encounter one another on the streets of London are not national identities, but religious, ethnic, or continental subjectivities.

The multi-ethnic personified body of trade through whose “vein[s] spontaneous plenty flowed” while “ungirt” by national boundaries, also represents a pilgrimage community embedded in the poem. The pilgrimage community of transnational merchants is framed by the imagined future pilgrimage of the “pensive and thoughtful . . . wanderers.” The traditional connotation of the ‘body politic’ is upset by the body of commerce. The passage above reveals at least two poetic innovations in play: the personification of London as an “irregularly great” body that draws in “floods of people” while porously distributing wealth, and a new kind of monumentality featuring transnational and postnational futurization rather than national
historicization. The personification of London as a body of multiethnic, merchant-pilgrims is an image that disrupts eighteenth-century artistic patterns of homage to the British state as well as monarchies’ relevance to wealth and prosperity. And Barbauld’s new kind of monumentality is constructed by an imagined touristic pilgrimage that sees what James Young would call the cultural “texture of memory” as both an assemblage of past experience and futuristic memory.

First, regarding *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*’s pilgrimages and personifications: the poem engages with the evolution of the pilgrimage and the pilgrim community from the sacred religious, to the imperial, to the commercial. Whereas in a sacred-religious pilgrimage, the resulting community is made up of various ethnic or national subjectivities united in the imagined community of religious belief, the poem upsets this concept by arranging formerly diverse and distinct pilgrim communities as united in the imagined community of global commerce. Further, the imagination of the “holy land” or “holy city” to which any pilgrims travel is here anthropomorphized with benevolent virtues unrestricted by social or religious politics. Anderson observes of the modal journey of the pilgrimage:

> It is not simply that in the minds of Christians, Muslims or Hindus the cities of Rome, Mecca, or Benares were the centres of sacred geographies, but that their centrality was experienced and “realized” (in the stagecraft sense) by the constant flow of pilgrims moving towards them from remote and *otherwise unrelated* localities. Indeed, in some sense the outer limits of the old religious communities
of the imagination were determined by which pilgrimages people made.\textsuperscript{108} (53-54)

According to Anderson, the old religious pilgrimages eventually gave way to “secular counterparts” as different journeys were created by the rise of “absolutizing monarchies, and, eventually, Europe-centred world imperial states. The inner thrust of absolutism was to create a unified apparatus of power, controlled directly by, and loyal to, the ruler over against a decentralized, particularistic feudal nobility” (55). \textit{Eighteen Hundred and Eleven} recalls the next historical step and memorializes the age of pilgrimages that succeeded, or at least began to disrupt, this age of monarchical-imperial pilgrimage conducted by political and military diplomats and beaurocrats. The “turban’d Moslem,” “bearded Jew,” “woolly Afric,” and “brown Hindu,” in London are pilgrims of the post-state, once again decentralizing the “unified apparatus of power,” only this time, in the interest of a diversified, commercial community.

Adding to Adam Smith’s ideas in \textit{Wealth of Nations} (1776), the idea of the power of the state in \textit{Eighteen Hundred and Eleven} is subordinate to not only the power of privatized commerce, but postnational forces of commerce. Laura Mandell complicates Ross’s reading of the poem’s passive acceptance of inevitable decline by tying the poem’s personification, and specifically the metonymy of the spirit of equality, “deal[ing] the gifts of Heaven with equal hands” (66) in “distant lands” (65), to Smith’s ideas\textsuperscript{109} on the division of labor and Karl Marx’s analyses of oppression and revolt.\textsuperscript{110} She argues:

\textsuperscript{108} Anderson 54.

\textsuperscript{109} See Laura Mandell, “‘Those Limbs Disjointed of Gigantic Power’: Barbauld’s Personifications and the (Mis)Attribution of Political Agency” (1998). She observes: “Smith’s metonymy has been seen as symptomatic of
Both Barbauld’s and Marx’s analyses of personification suggest that, if oppression operates by falsely reifying people’s own actions into a solid external reality, then teaching people to personify and depersonify abstractions teaches them to revolt. If people can be brought to see themselves as an aggregate of hands personifying Liberty, Equality, and Nation, a legitimate body of people will overturn oppressive forms. Like Marx, Barbauld writes to revise modes of personification that she sees taking place—not in people’s writing alone—but in the medium of history. (41)

For Barbauld’s contemporaries as well as modern scholars, Mandell makes a compelling case against interpretations of the poem as a prophecy of inevitable British decline. I suggest that London’s existence with the streets as “veins” wherein diverse subjectivities blend to make up the lifeblood of the city, resists reification through interests of the state. If the poem’s representation of tyranny “deanimates the social body,” as Mandell suggests, then multicultural trade would seem to stimulate life.

There is another key term in the poem, contributing to an aesthetic tension between the conditional or animated and the reified or fatalistic: fear. Even more fundamentally threatening than the “Colossal Power” of material tyranny is the power of fear in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. Above all other evidence, I read Barbauld’s depiction of reifying fear as the greatest evil and agent of national decline, lending credence to the argument that the poem is not simply a

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the alienation that people (whole bodies) feel in the division of labor. Barbauld’s personification and metonymy challenge the reader with a veritable thicket obscuring cause and effect” (38-39).

110 Mandell 37.
malcontent prophecy of ruin, but an alternating warning against nationalist fear and embrace of postnational human potential.

The poem opens as follows:

Still the loud death drum, thundering from afar,
O’er the vext nations pours the storm of war:
To the stern call still Britain bends her ear,
Feels the fierce strife, the alternate hope and fear;
Bravely, though vainly, dares to strive with Fate,
And seeks by turns to prop each sinking state. (1-6)

All this occurs while nature continues “Bounteous in vain . . . / Glad Nature pours the means—the joys of life; / In vain with orange blossoms scents the gale, / The hills with olives clothes, with corn the vale” (11-14). The poem thus sets up an aesthetic of alterity, “the alternate hope and fear,” along with the idea that the perpetuation of nation states may, at best, be an artificial success. The speaker later points to the damage caused by reified fear:

Nor distant is the hour; low murmurs spread,
And whispered fears, creating what they dread;
Ruin, as with an earthquake shock, is here,
There, the heart-witherings of unuttered fear (47-50)

Barbauld espouses a philosophy of fear, pointing to its reifying power to create the material outcome it imagines. Barbauld draws attention to the overlooked, continuous potential of natural resources while condemning fear as the enemy of progress. In the opening stanzas, Barbauld participates in what sounds like Wordsworthian nature writing wherein “Man calls to Famine” as
“The sword, not sickle, reaps the harvest now” (15, 18). And following Blake’s representation of the relationship between material forms and the power of the poetic imagination in characters such as Urizen and Orc, Barbauld appears to implicate of the power of the imagination to reify forms that inherently hinder humanity. Further, even as Barbauld’s poem decries nationalist forces of culture-reification, it performs its own version of monumentality.

Second, regarding monumentality in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*: in contrast to Pope’s “Windsor Forest,” Barbauld’s future pilgrims participate in a postnational monumentality of London’s open, public spaces in the “splendid square” and “untrodden street,” and the cultural products and ideals that promote global progress. In addition to material touring represented in the poem, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* also discursively “tours” eighteenth-century literary monumentality in “Windsor Forest.” Thus, the poem not only engages with competing claims on interpretations of British history and culture, it engages with prevailing theories of monumentality that favor material emblems of power, or in Pope’s case, poetic homage that seeks to co-locate the power of monarch and muse.

If, as James Young writes, “national memory comprises many, often competing recollections,” creating what he calls the “texture of memory” (9, 11),

111 then *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* may be analyzed not only as the literary historiography of a nation, but as part of the texture of British and British-influenced transnational and postnational culture. Indeed, as Young pursues the narrative, even poetic, configuration of the literary historiography of the Holocaust, he suggests that a knowledge of “the facts” is not enough. He is concerned with the

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consequences of interpretation, and “how particular representations may have guided writers in both their interpretations of events and their worldly responses to them” (4).  

The texture of memory in Barbauld’s hands is more than what Young describes as “competing recollections” of national memory. In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, the texture of memory is constructed by the competing claims and interpretations of chronologically past events and cultural products as well as the competing claims and interpretations of present and imagined future events and cultural products—for instance, the imaginative, historicized collegiality of Baillie and Shakespeare or Franklin and Priestley. The speaker observes that the best of British culture would be exported “wide o’er transatlantic realms” (111) and beyond:

Wide spreads thy race from Ganges to the pole,
O’er half the western world thy accents roll: . . .
Thy Lockes, thy Paleys shall instruct their youth, . . .
And Milton’s tones the raptured ear enthrall,
Mixt with the roar of Niagara’s fall; . . .
Nor of the Bards that swept the British lyre
Shall fade one laurel, or one note expire.
Then, loved Joanna, to admiring eyes
Thy storied groups in scenic pomp shall rise;
Their high soul’d strains and Shakespeare’s noble rage
Shall with alternate passion shake the stage. (81-82, “89, “95-96, “99-104)

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112 See Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (1988).
Barbauld’s description of transatlantic British legacies continues to fuel critical debate over the poem’s participation in British nationalism and historiography. Emily Rohrbach asks if Barbauld’s depictions of England’s past and future “appear contained by a philosophy of historical progress that allows nothing outside the normativity of the past into its purview” (179), concluding that Barbauld’s vision of England in a global context presents not a world in which something new might enter from either the future or from a geographically remote place, but rather a world in which a single model of progress would apply to every nation and culture. . . . [And that] the poem’s specific future comes out of its survey of the past; and in this case, to accept the poem’s stated wisdom . . . one must assume the future will bring nothing essentially new. (179, 181)

However, in passages like the one above, Barbauld creates a picture closer to the kind of developmental continuity, one idea or accomplishment building on another, she portrays in *Hymns in Prose*. “Milton’s tones . . . mix[ing with] . . . the roar of Niagara’s fall” implies an organic evolution of something new, rather than predictable historical pattern. Barbauld’s own essay “On the Uses of History” complicates the argument that she interpreted the past and the future as inevitably bound.¹¹³

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¹¹³ In “On the Uses of History,” Barbauld observes “with regard to events, that a knowledge of History does not seem to give us any great advantage in foreseeing and preparing for them. . . . There are, always, combinations of circumstances, which have never met before, from the creation of the world, and which mock all power of calculation” (146-48). See Sarah J. Hale, *Selections from the Writings of Mrs. Barbauld* (1840).
The trans-Atlantic, future pilgrims along with the speaker-surveyor in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* create an organizing force in the poem that I call touristic-time. The poem anticipates an aged, remaining native that might guide the pilgrims on their tour:

> Perhaps some Briton, in whose musing mind  
> Those ages live which Time has cast behind,  
> To every spot shall lead his wondering guests  
> On whose known site the beam of glory rests (187-90)

The wanderer-tourists selectively visit physical areas of Britain and memorials of British history and the speaker surveys the human monuments of Britain, ranging from Locke, Paley, Milton, Thomson, Cowper, Roscoe, and others, in more hagiography than historiography. The speaker and pilgrims create a survey that fold in Enlightenment political writing, democratic heroism, and Dissenting values. The pilgrims’ site visits along with the speaker’s cultural tour are functions of a larger phenomenon of foreign travel. That is, a travel itinerary is largely subjective, tourists see what they want to see in the place they visit and they use this vision of a country to form an understanding of a culture.

In the touristic time-space of the poem, the *space* is Britain itself, put through a kind of condensed biographical *time*: the historical highlights of a nation are represented through physical and literary memorial, becoming the internal markers of a nation’s development. These historical highlights are collected and brought to life at once, in a compressed, biographical survey by the tourist who is also reader. The pilgrims with “fond adoring steps” (131) visit Runnymede, Newton’s tomb, and Avon, along their journey. The tourist-reader is coming to all these spaces and historically significant events perhaps for the first time and at the *same* time.
The past, and particularly a representation of the past comes alive, or is re-created in the tourist-reader’s present, which in this case, is also contextualized by the circumstances in 1811 and the poem’s projection into the future.

As an artistic precursor, Pope’s “Windsor Forest” contributes to Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’s memorial texture. Windsor, also the starting point in Shelley’s The Last Man, is Pope’s platform for staging a grand tour of Britain’s cultural evolution. “Windsor Forest” promotes the theory of continual, unending progress and power in terms of British nationalism. Pope’s survey is not without moments of subtle critique of things like the nature of war, but overall it represents an eighteenth-century monarchism, against which Barbauld increases the coarseness of the published texture of British national perception.

While Pope proclaims,

Let India boast her plants, nor envy we
The weeping amber or the balmy tree,
While by our oaks the precious loads are born,
And realms commanded which those trees adorn.
Not proud Olympus yields a nobler sight,
. . . Rich Industry sits smiling on the plains,
And peace and plenty tell, a Stuart reigns. (29-33, 41-41)

Barbauld conversely points to English culture as a function of previous empires and gestures to how new spaces may integrate British cultural products. Pope conflates artistic inspiration, monarchical rule, and imperial heroism:

Happy the man whom this bright Court approves,
His Sov’reign favours, and his Country loves:

Happy next him, who to these shades retires,

Whom Nature charms, and whom the Muse inspires . . .

Oh would’st thou sing what Heroes Windsor bore,

What Kings first breath’d upon her winding shore,

Or raise old warriours, whose ador’d remains

In weeping vaults her hallow’d earth contains! . . .

Still in thy song should vanquish’d France appear,

And bleed for ever under Britain’s spear (233-36, ’297-300, ”307-08)

When Pope’s speaker hails “sacred Peace!” (353) he is promoting a peaceful form of British imperialism, a successful result of past conquests. In contrast to “Windsor Forest,” Eighteen Hundred and Eleven may appear to check Pope’s patriotic optimism for unending, British glory and supremacy.

When detailing of the international as well as domestic toll of the Napoleonic wars in Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, the speaker observes:

Defrauded of its homage, Beauty morns,

And the rose withers on its virgin thorns.

Frequent, some stream obscure, some uncouth name

By deeds of blood is lifted into fame;

Oft o’er the daily page some soft-one bends

To learn the fate of husband, brothers, friends,

Or the spread map with anxious eye explores,
Its dotted boundaries and penciled shores,

Asks where the spot that wrecked her bliss is found,

And learns its name but to detest the sound. (Barbauld 29-38)

I have observed that Blake seems to borrow from Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose for Children* when composing his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and it might be said that this verse, in turn, would seem to borrow from Blake’s “London.” The hostile “spot” resembles Blake’s cartographic and anthropomorphic “marks of woe” encountered along the “charter’d” streets of London. However, unlike Blake’s more fixed “charter’d Thames” and “charter’d” streets of London, Barbauld’s maps reveal war-time international instability as boundaries and shorelines are less fixedly “dotted” and “penciled.” In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, the “dotted boundaries and penciled shores” contest the national impulse to delineate and claim physical territory via pencil and paper. National *space* is rendered imaginative and malleable, rhetorically opening the possibility of re-imagining nationhood itself.

By 1811, Barbauld must have regarded some of her earlier pedagogic works intended for the development of a culture of post-national benevolence, such as her *Hymns in Prose*, as a generation’s lost opportunity. Since 1773 the *Hymns* had performed as a daily, national unisonance for youthful reciters. In 1811, as the “soft-one bends” “o’er the daily page” of the newspaper reports of war and casualties, her knowledge of the world is expanded on the basis of mapped battlefields represent hostilities between nations rather than the Hutchensonian spirit of interconnectedness taught in *Hymns*. 
The final stanza remains an object of scholarly conversation, as it seems to provide evidence of Barbuald’s lack of patriotism, or resignation to civilization’s inevitable pattern of westward rise and decline:

But fairest flowers expand but to decay;
The worm is in thy core, thy glories pass away;
Arts, arms and wealth destroy the fruits they bring;
. . . For see, —to other climes the Genius soars,
He turns from Europe’s desolated shores;
And lo, even now, midst mountains wrapt in storm,
On Andes’ heights he shrouds his awful form;
On Chimborazo’s summits treads sublime,
Measuring in lofty thought the march of Time;
Sudden he calls:—“‘Tis now the hour!” he cries,
Spreads his broad hand, and bids the nations rise.
La Plata hears amidst her torrents’ roar,
Potosi hears it, as she digs the ore:
Ardent, the Genius fans the noble strife,
And pours through feeble souls a higher life,
Shouts to the mingled tribes from sea to sea,
And swears—Thy world, Columbus, shall be free. (313-15, 331-34)

The Genius is also the “Spirit” that walks

o’er the peopled earth,
Secret his progress is, unknown his birth;
Moody and viewless as the changing wind,
No force arrests his foot, no chains can bind;
Where’er he turns, the human brute awakes,
And, roused to better life, his sordid hut forsakes:
He thinks, he reasons, glows with purer fires,
Feels finer wants, and burns with new desires. (215-22)

This Genius or Spirit of civilization is a force of evolution, tracing human and social
development and progress. Though the Genius is characterized as “capricious,” capable of
forsaking “the favoured shore” and hating “what he loved before” (241-42), I submit that it may
not be enough to interpret him as agent of shifting cyclic patterns that reinforce human stasis.
The “Power” is also “vagrant” and “playful” (259, 63), “Stirring the soul” (272) such that
interpreting him as also an agent of nationhood may also be incomplete.

The conclusion to *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* resists the arguments that Barbauld is exclusively promoting a national interest, or that she is prophesying doom and destruction.

Columbus’s world is not a national designation, but at once a pre-national or post-national
“mingl”ing of tribes depending on one’s post-colonial vision of the New World. Chimborazo, a mountain in Ecuador, La Plata and Potosi, cities in Argentina and Bolivia, respectively, comprise a blend of post-colonial spaces whose inhabitant souls the Genius is calling to “a higher life.”

Whether the Genius intends for them to rise as nations, or “bids the nations rise” to a higher state devoid of hostile “dotted boundaries and penciled shores” (36) is a contestable point. I argue that while Barbauld devoted much of her career to building a national subjectivity that would
ultimately inform critics’ backlash to *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, the poem inherits and fosters national pride in England’s accomplishments even as it imagines the nation’s evolution into a less bounded, global subjectivity. Earlier texts such as her *Hymns in Prose* support the understanding of Barbauld’s version of nationalism as a developmental phenomenon of humanity along a continuum of civilization.

Looking chronologically forward to possible inheritance texts of Barbauld’s poetry: in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826) all nations are dissolved, and the text laments the loss of the family as the primary social unit. Its content and structure trace in reverse the widening circles of civilization and connectivity depicted in Barbauld’s *Hymns in Prose*. As in the beginning of Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, nature is mockingly fertile, lush, and beautiful in the face of this devastation and the decline of humankind. Both *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* and *The Last Man* take up the condition of the post-national. Barbauld explores an artistic-ideological trajectory towards a post-national world in which the “vagrancy” of the Genius of civilization may positively discourage the permanence of nation states for the betterment of humanity, while Shelley imagines a world in which the rise of nation states is checked by imperial backlash in the form of the plague resulting in a tragic interpretation of vagrancy.

Reading *The Last Man* and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* alongside each other would add depth to Romanticism syllabi featuring the rise and problematization of national, postcolonial, and post-national communities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Richardson draws a brief comparison between Barbauld’s poem and Shelley’s novel *The Last Man* while situating the novel firmly in postcolonial discourse that, while somewhat ambivalent
toward empire and colonization, ultimately affirms the British civilizing spirit.\(^{114}\) For Richardson, the novel provides a kind of counterpoint to Barbauld’s poem which anticipates a near-future decline of the British empire, observing the “novel's almost jingoistic Anglo-centrism, its evident disgust at the spectacle of the colonial other, and its strident Orientalism. *The Last Man* guarantees Shelley a noteworthy place in the ranks of nineteenth-century British colonialist writers. The last man, for Shelley, must be an Englishman, and a chauvinistic one at that” (4). *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* imagines national identity as a possible feature of social evolution, begging the question of whether or not it’s time to collectively move on to the next stage. In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, civilization is conceived as organic on the basis of core Enlightenment ideals of freedom. This is a major point of difference from *The Last Man* which imagines the end of civilization as it turns in on itself, diseased and producing vagrancy that is not liberating but extinguishing.

\(^{114}\) See Alan Richardson, “*The Last Man* and the Plague of Empire” (1997).
Epilogue:

The Mother of the Romantic Citizen

Barbauld’s poem, “Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade,” composed in 1789 in response to Wilberforce’s abolitionist speech before the House of Commons, involves elements found in “The Mouse’s Petition,” *Hymns in Prose for Children*, “On the Death of Mrs. Martineau,” and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. Part of Wilberforce’s argument rested on the idea that if in the past the British people were genuinely unaware of the suffering caused by the slave trade, surely “now, when our eyes are opened” to the reality, no one could continue to support, directly or indirectly, such an enterprise. Yet, Wilberforce’s motion on abolition was defeated by a vote of 163 to 88.¹¹⁵

Barbauld opens her poem indignant at the nation’s clear-sighted sanction of material gain’s human cost:

Cease Wilberforce, to urge thy generous aim!

Thy Country knows the sin, and stands the shame!

The Preacher, Poet, Senator in vain

Has rattled in her sight the Negro’s chain;

. . . Still Afric bleeds,

Uncheck’d, the human traffic still proceeds (1-4, 15-16)

Barbauld invokes an argument also found in “The Mouse’s Petition” and *Address to the Opposers* wherein moral degradation is a shared outcome between oppressed and oppressor:

¹¹⁵ McCarthy and Kraft 121-22.
Forbear!—thy virtues but provoke our doom,
And swell th’ account of vengeance yet to come;
For, not unmark’d in Heaven’s impartial plan,
Shall man, proud worm, contemn his fellow-man?
And injur’d Afric, by herself redrest,
Darts her own serpents at her Tyrant’s breast.
Each vice, to minds deprav’d by bondage known,
With sure contagion fastens on his own;
In sickly langours melts his nerveless frame . . .
Fermenting swift, the fiery venom gains
The milky innocence of infant veins . . .
Sears the young heart to images of woe,
And blasts the buds of Virtue as they blow. (41-49, “51-52, “55-56)

The image of the slave trade resulting in a kind of imperial infection, connects to Shelley’s reverse-colonization plague in *The Last Man* and can also be read as a petrifying inversion of *Hymns in Prose*’s developmental growth of the infant mind.

In a passage that seems to rhetorically anticipate and then conflate images from Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* and Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Barbauld targets women’s “monstrous” imperialism conducted via domestic luxury. The speaker chastises:

Lo! Where reclin’d, pale Beauty courts the breeze,
Diffus’d on sofas of voluptuous ease;
With anxious awe, her menial train around,
Catch her faint whispers of half-utter’d sound;

See her, in monstrous fellowship, unite

At once the Scythian, and the Sybarite;\footnote{McCarthy and Kraft note that Scythian and Sybarite are associated with savagery and voluptuousness, respectively (124).}

Blending repugnant vices, misally’d,

Which *frugal* nature purpos’d to divide;

See her, with indolence to fierceness join’d,

Of body delicate, infirm of mind,

With languid tones imperious mandates urge;

With arm recumbent wield the household scourge;

And with unruffled mien, and placid sounds,

Contriving torture, and inflicting wounds. (57-70)

In a way similar to Wollstonecraft’s condemnation of feminine weakness and passivity, Barbauld emphasizes the damage caused by female frailty of mind and body. Women’s delicate mien and languid tones are harshly exposed as repugnant, deceptive sources of torture and injury. Beauty’s illicit power is akin to Victor Frankenstein’s, in the sense that both possess a monstrous ability to blend or “misally” what “frugal nature purpos’d to divide.” Beauty, as metonym for superficial woman, exerts a power similar to Barbauld’s poetic aesthetic of contraction whereby seemingly contrasting or opposing elements are unnaturally contracted, such as savagery and voluptuousness, indolence and fierceness, languid tones and imperious mandates, and recumbent scourges. The image of Beauty’s arm that is contrivably recumbent and dangerous appears
delightfully anticipatory of Frankenstein’s crude attachment of miscellaneous and otherwise incompatible limbs to form his creature, as well as Barbauld’s own image of monumental, yet ruined “limbs disjointed of gigantic power” (254) in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. Whereas Wollstonecraft accuses women’s focus on beauty and delicateness of ultimately hindering their own social progress and by extension the social education of their children, Barbauld credits this condition with nothing less than globalized torture.

On the one hand, contemporaries of Barbauld’s such as Helen Maria Williams, saw revolution as an event, even a sublime moment in which citizens of the new Republic are instantly generated. According to writers like Williams in her *Letters from France*, or Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, the Romantic citizen can be born instantly through the power of ideology and organizing time in revolution. On the other hand, spontaneous revolution can be interpreted as more monstrous than sublime, as Mary Shelley later illustrates with Frankenstein’s creature. As a function of instant creation, seemingly an event devoid of historical or ontological continuity, the creature is hardly a successful revolution in the history of nature. He is monstrous.\(^{117}\)

Barbauld does more than represent the mother-teacher figure that Frankenstein’s creature always needed and never had. She is that force on both an individual and national scale.

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\(^{117}\) This is part of Fred Botting’s thesis in “Reflections of Excess: *Frankenstein*, the French Revolution, and monstrosity” (1993). I connect Barbauld to Frankenstein’s creature in at least two ways: first, is the way she operates in society as an educator and mother to promote the kind of personal and literary development that the creature ontologically lacks; second, when Botting states: “Like the Revolution in France which, in the name of liberty, overthrew tyranny only to repeat tyrannical practices, the revolving momentum of monsters and monster-makers releases forces that exceed the determining limits of binary oppositions and raise the possibility of other positions” (31), he introduces an image resembling valence electrons that risk a sling-shot effect (or atomic excess) akin to Barbauld’s subject-speaker in her poem, “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” who propels beyond the known systems of the cosmos, through “the womb of chaos” (97).
Anthologizing the most influential women of the first half of the nineteenth century, Clara Balfour noted of Barbauld’s teaching legacy:

Several pupils, who became distinguished men, were reared under her judicious care—William Taylor, of Norwich, known as a literary man of eminence; Dr. Sayers, author of “Sketches of Northern Mythology”; Sir William Gell, the celebrated antiquarian and topographer; Thomas, afterwards Lord Denman, who before he completed his fourth year, was consigned to her care; and many other noble and distinguished pupils attested in lives of usefulness the admirable methods she adopted in their culture. By these she was fondly and gratefully regarded as ‘the mother of their mind.’ (Balfour 15)

To identify someone as the “mother” of anything is to acknowledge her role as fundamentally complex and multi-faceted, typically involving creative, innovative, or generative power along with a sustained, influential, rearing process. This definition of mother brings me back to the discussion of Romantic writers’ interest in the sublime, paradigmatic tension between the synchronic phenomenon or spontaneity of inspiration and event on the one hand, and the gradual, diachronic phenomenon of process and continuity on the other. Considered within this aesthetic-theoretical framework, the identity of mother is rather Romantic. Former pupils such as William Taylor and Lord Denman considering Barbauld ‘the mother of their mind’, connotes her relationship with the power of conception and inspiration, as well as her sustaining nurture, guidance, and example. Thus, identifying her in my title as “the artistic and pedagogic mother of the Romantic citizen” may somewhat redundantly insist on unnecessary rhetorical classifications when considered in the scheme of Romantic motherhood.
Ideologues such as Trimmer, Watts, and even Wollstonecraft, may have prescribed their own visions of motherhood according to politicized sets of duties, but Barbauld may be among the first to imagine a more comprehensive theory of motherhood that blended with her own innovative pedagogical principles. Her circumstance as an adoptive mother, i.e. someone who approached the role purely through conscious choice, who was also a Dissenter, writer, and teacher may have influenced her ability to frame the realistic, practical, and emotional experience of motherhood with aesthetic, pedagogical, social, political, and spiritual referents.

When her friend, Sarah Meadows Martineau, matriarch of the Martineau family, died in 1800 at age 75, Barbauld composed “On the Death of Mrs. Martineau” and distributed it privately to the family. It was later published in 1820. Mrs. Martineau appears to be the opposite of the kind of superficial woman Barbauld decries in “Epistle to William Wilberforce.” Whereas the latter type of woman, represented as “pale Beauty” foolishly contributes to the possibility of civilization’s decline, “The Death of Mrs. Martineau” exalts a woman whose virtuous matriarchy creates a heritage that “From race to race” will descend, and “from age to age” (28). Percy Shelley’s later “Ozymandias” (1816), and its representation of tyrannical power, could be read in comparison to the eternal, infinitely expanding legacy of Mrs. Martineau. Taking these two poems together in a study of Romantic attitudes towards power, the “treasured birthright” (30) of the honorable matriarch has more staying power than a king’s empire.

Barbauld offers encouragement to the mourners:

’Tis Virtue’s triumph, Nature’s doom,

When honoured Age, slow bending to the tomb,

... Tastes the long Sabbath of well-earned repose.
No blossom here, in vernal beauty shed,
No lover lies, warm from the nuptial bed;
Here rests the full of days,—each task fulfilled,
Each wish accomplished, and each passion stilled.

Barbauld’s invocation of the Old Testament phrase, “the full of days” (I Chron. 23:1), in reference to a life well-lived is echoed in Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’s memorialization of Britain’s “full harvest of the mental year” (76):

Not like the dim cold Crescent shalt thou fade,
Thy debt to Science and the Muse unpaid;
Thine are the laws surrounding states revere,
Thine the full harvest of the mental year (Eighteen Hundred and Eleven 73-76)

Both Eighteen Hundred and Eleven and “On the Death of Mrs. Martineau” participate in a post-national consciousness as the poems imagine ways in which the de-materialized essence of British nationalism and a virtuous mother, respectively, are spread and evolved through space and time. Of Mrs. Martineau’s descendents, Barbauld writes,

On the loved theme your lips unblamed shall dwell;
Your lives, more eloquent, her worth shall tell.
—Long may that worth, fair Virtue’s heritage,
From race to race descend, from age to age!
Still purer with transmitted lustre shine
The treasured birthright of the spreading line! (25-30)
The legacy of the good matriarch is not limited here to contemporary boundaries of national or cultural subjectivity. Barbauld seems to explicitly resist nationalist terms for Martineau’s heritage, as the worth of the spreading line projects “from race to race” and is organically sustained in the lives and deeds of her loved ones. This poem is an example of Barbauld’s representation of the Romantic citizen as similarly “Ungirt by walls, irregularly great” (*Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* 161) and unbound by specific political or cultural frameworks.

An examination of Barbauld’s literary heritage reveals infinite ways to read her works into our modern sensibilities, practices, and discourses. I see her patient though passionate technique of raising her own advocates for change employed in my own state of Massachusetts today as professionals and citizens who seek political advocacy for causes such as public education reforms, turn to raising their students and children to perform such change. Cultural-literary conversations might explore how the American, political or social movement model of grass roots campaigning is discursively or metaphorically related to a kind of Barbauldian “oak tree” model that may effect change at a slower pace, but involve a similar organicism. At any rate, I hope that this study contributes to the ever-growing scholarly interest in Barbauld as a mediator of not only historical-canonical categories of eighteenth-century and Romantic literature and thought, but as a unique mediator of aesthetic principle and practical action.
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