

**Patronage and Professionalism in the writings of Hannah More,
Charlotte Smith and Ann Yearsley, 1770-1806.**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the changes which were occurring in the literary marketplace at the end of the eighteenth century. The place of the traditional aristocratic patrons was gradually being taken by publishers and book sellers, who were increasingly dealing with writers direct. This move away from patronage towards a new form of professionalism took place during two decades of intense political upheaval and questioning of national identity, and at a point where women writers were being seen increasingly as a natural part of literary culture.

The argument is focused on three case studies of women who came to prominence in the 1780s, and explores their different experiences of life as professional writers, patrons and protégées. Their work is placed within the context of two significant political and social events; the beginnings of the movement to abolish the slave trade in 1788, and the French Revolution. In particular, the thesis engages with the Revolution's descent into the Terror in the 1790s, and the response of British writers to this most brutal phase.

Also considered are the various ways in which a literary work could be brought into print at the end of the eighteenth century, and how the three central women were able to move from one mode of publishing to another. This thesis also sets out to offer a fresh perspective on the careers of these women, and in particular to recover the reputation of Ann Yearsley as a writer of note in the 1790s.

It is proposed that a broader view needs to be taken of the factors influencing literary production in the 1780s and 90s than is currently the case, and the argument is concluded with a consideration of the relationship between patronage and professionalism at the end of the eighteenth century, and an assessment of the significance of patronage in an increasingly professional literary marketplace.

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Patronage and Professionalism in the writings of Hannah More, Charlotte Smith and Ann Yearsley, 1770-1806.

Introduction

The last decades of the eighteenth century saw significant changes in the way material was brought into print. Increasingly, writers were able to choose how to fund publication, and many more were dealing directly with publishers. Scott Hess considers the legal case of *Donaldson v. Becket* in 1774 a crucial moment in defining the relationships between authors and publishers which existed at the end of the eighteenth century:

When [this case] struck down the precedent of perpetual copyright under common law and defined The Statute of Anne's twenty-eight year limit as the maximum extent of such monopoly, it opened the way for authors to claim increased control over their authorial property and greater earning potential in the marketplace. The book trade was revitalized by the development of a public domain of material whose copyright had expired and which was now available for cheap reprints, and publishers were forced to court living authors more actively in order to secure new copyrights. The book boom in the late 1780s was fuelled by this development, then further fanned by the events of the French Revolution.¹

This shift of control in the literary marketplace towards the writers and away from the publishers occurred at the same time as one of the traditional ways for a writer to have their work published was undergoing significant change. In his study *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* Dustin Griffin has noted that patronage of a young writer had been common earlier in the century, but its influence went into decline as the century drew to a close.² Yet, as Griffin also notes, it did not disappear entirely. In place of the earlier aristocratic patrons came knowledgeable, well-connected middling-class patrons

¹ Scott Hess, *Authoring the Self: Self-Representation, Authorship, and the Print Market in British Poetry from Pope through Wordsworth* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 5.

² Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

who, instead of a famous name, could offer their protégés contacts, friendship and advice. More informal patronage relationships also developed, where writers might receive help in the promotion of their latest work or financial assistance in times of difficulty. Hess suggests that certain writers in particular needed to continue with patronage in order to succeed: 'Poets never had an easy time earning their living through sale of their works, and even in the Romantic period of supposed independence most were forced to rely on various forms of patronage or on their own independent resources.'³ I would certainly agree that writers continued to need patronage in some way, but Hess's suggestion that they were 'forced to rely' on it does not accommodate the increasing fluidity of the literary marketplace at the end of the eighteenth century which meant patronage was but one of several options available to writers, none of which were necessarily mutually exclusive: writers could also opt to raise subscribers, a task which may have fallen to a small group of informal patrons; they could sell the copyright direct to the publisher for a fixed sum; or they could enter into a deal which saw them receive royalties should a particular book do well, choices which have been described by Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus.⁴

These changes to publishing culture were occurring in an increasingly fraught political climate: 1788 saw the first parliamentary debates considering the abolition of slavery, a topic that greatly concerned writers, many of whom, on both sides of the argument, rushed into print, and the last years of the eighteenth century are dominated by the French Revolution. Its early promise of 'liberté, égalité et fraternité' initially inspired affection in liberal Britain, which, as Linda Colley's now standard history of the period makes clear, wished to see France rebuilt along British lines in abandoning

³ Hess, pp. 5-6.

⁴ Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus, 'Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 17 (1987), 191-207 (193).

the absolute rule of the monarchy and adopting a more constitutional political system.⁵ But the descent towards Robespierre's reign of Terror meant that affection for the Revolution became fear in all but the most radical of observers. A new patriotism began to emerge, anxious about discord in Britain and keen to figure French sympathies as disloyalty. The relationship between this climate and the literature being produced has been examined in detail by critics including Gary Kelly, Claudia Johnson, Harriet Guest and M.O. Grenby.⁶ Indeed, Gary Kelly's 1993 text, *Women, Writing, and Revolution* is the platform on which our understanding of women's centrality to the Revolutionary debate has been built. Claudia Johnson and Harriet Guest have both usefully explored how patriotism was constructed and deployed, and in particular how women responded to the new loyalism. A more general exploration of British loyalism has been conducted by M.O. Grenby, whose work charts the various shifts which occurred as the Revolution developed, and disintegrated.

The emergence of a new literary culture during this period of increasing political disquiet had a profound impact on what it meant to be female and a professional writer. As Betty Schellenberg has noted, professional authorship was understood 'as working for financial gain, seeing the publication of a novel or the production of a play as a means of economic support and, ideally, independence.'⁷ Although women writers still attracted negative comments for involving themselves too forcefully in public debates (Richard Polwhele's infamous *The Unsex'd Females* [1798]

⁵ See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

⁶ See Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution 1790-1827* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (London and New York: Longman, 1989), 'Revolution, Reaction, and the Expropriation of Popular Culture: Hannah More's Cheap Repository', *Man and Nature* 6 (1987), 147-159, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000); M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷ Betty A. Schellenberg, 'From Propensity to Profession: Female Authorship and the Early Career of Frances Burney', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 3-4 (2002), 345-370 (351).

being perhaps the best known example), in many instances women's opinions were actively sought. Viewed as moral arbiters as discussion raged about the virtues of abolition, women were perceived to be the natural commentators on the question. Beyond these specific moments, women were increasingly involving themselves directly with print culture, and rather than their right to do so being questioned, women were assumed to be part of the emerging literary culture, with all the challenges and difficulties of engaging with publishers and the public that that entailed. Cheryl Turner has noted that 'writing was still a very precarious option for women. Market preferences for particular writers or genres were hard to predict, and publishers with a plentiful supply of manuscripts could be selective and parsimonious towards the material on offer.'⁸ As Turner suggests, the perils of publishing were very real, but there were a number of women who successfully negotiated this buyers' market through a combination of deft management and good fortune to become truly 'professional' writers, as Schellenberg defines the term.

In the last decades of the eighteenth century, three women emerged who offer useful contrasting case-studies allowing us to examine these opportunities, possibilities and dilemmas attendant upon professional authorship. The first of these is Charlotte Smith, who would become one of the most celebrated writers of the time, and who would influence Wordsworth and Coleridge. She was born Charlotte Turner in 1746 into a wealthy family with a rural seat at Bignor Park in Sussex. As a result of tensions at home between Charlotte and her new step-mother, she was married off at fifteen to Benjamin Smith, son of Richard Smith who had made his fortune in stocks and sugar. As well as a large and increasing family (Smith would have twelve pregnancies), she had also to deal with an abusive husband whose profligacy eventually led to a spell in

⁸ Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 79.

King's Bench Prison, where Smith joined him in 1783. With the estate of £36,000 bequeathed to her children by Richard Smith on his death in 1776 tied up in legal wrangling over its ambiguous disposal, Smith was forced to turn to other means to support her family. The result was her first venture into print. Her *Elegiac Sonnets* were published to great acclaim in 1784.

In contrast to the family traumas which forced Charlotte Smith into print, Hannah More's emergence as a professional writer was serene. Born in 1745, More found fame as a playwright with *Percy* [1777] under the tutelage and protection of David Garrick. Although he had rejected an earlier play, Garrick's determination to nurture More's fledgling career meant that within weeks of arriving in London More and her sisters had met Edmund Burke, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Samuel Johnson.⁹ As Anne Stott, More's most recent biographer has noted, her association with Garrick meant that More's 'entrée to literary London was [...] assured.'¹⁰ Shortly before meeting Garrick, More's engagement to William Turner had ended without marriage after Turner delayed the wedding three times. As a form of recompense for his vacillation, Turner granted an annuity of £200 per annum to More, which she initially rejected. Faced with the 'brutal truth' that ' "the malicious world [...] would not provide for her,"' More was persuaded to change her mind by her friends.¹¹ Her decision would come to greatly influence her career. As she entered middle age in the 1780s, More felt the beginnings of a spiritual awakening which led to a change of direction. Increasingly concerned with philanthropic projects and the health of the nation's Christian faith, More was able to combine both elements when she entered into the debate on the abolition of slavery. Relatively quiet at the start of the French Revolution

⁹ Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 24-28.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 27.

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 17-20.

in 1789, More found her brand of religious and social responsibility in demand once the Revolutionary wars began and public concern about the possibility of defeat by France started to grow. The early part of More's career had been as a protégée, but once established upon the literary scene, More would make use of her society contacts throughout her career to further both her philanthropic projects and her literary ambitions, which were on more than one occasion the same thing.

One of those occasions came, in 1784, when More was introduced by chance to the poetry of a local milkwoman who bought pigswill from More's housekeeper. Ann Yearsley became famous the following year when More arranged to have her poetry published by a subscription raised amongst her extended circle of acquaintances. Yearsley's experience as More's protégée was a difficult one. Almost from the beginning of their partnership tensions arose because of More's desire to maintain a version of the traditional relationship between a socially superior patron and an inferior protégée, and Yearsley's urge to be recognised as a professional writer of independent merit. More perhaps mistook Yearsley's ambition to be an independent professional writer as a desire to rise socially, a move which would have been incompatible with More's newly-discovered evangelical Christianity and its belief that God had ordered the world in a particular, and unchangeable, way. This perhaps caused More to take it upon herself to ensure Yearsley remained a labouring-class milkwoman, instead of risking an independent Yearsley being able to change her class status; More edited Yearsley's poetry, then burnt the original manuscripts upon publication, and finally set up a trust fund for Yearsley's earnings, of which More and her friend Elizabeth Montagu were trustees. Yearsley could only access her earnings if More gave her the money. Only when the partnership broke down the following year was Yearsley able to gain independent access to the product of her work. More's response to Yearsley's demands

for access to what was her own is perhaps indicative of More's fear of the consequences of the deracination of her protégée. Writing to Elizabeth Montagu, she exclaims, 'Is such a Woman to be trusted with [her] poor Children's Money?'¹² The failure of the partnership between Yearsley and More, and the reasons which lay behind it, would come to have a significant influence on both of their publishing careers during the subsequent decade.

These three writers will form the centre of this thesis in order to locate, through a series of comparative close readings, the interconnections between personal circumstances, literary ambition, political climate and publishing method. In many ways, Yearsley is the key figure. The trajectory of her career encompasses the majority of options available to writers. Moving through different texts and political moments, her publishing options reflect both the status of the professional writer, and the political climate. Through a series of differently charged patronage relationships, Yearsley also represents the benefits this older arrangement had to offer over independent publishing, but also identifies its limitations. Around Yearsley move Hannah More and Charlotte Smith, who are at opposite ends of the political spectrum during the 1780s and early 1790s, but were pulled closer together as the 1790s progress, through a combination of personal circumstance, publishing method and political climate. The significance of this shift in their positions relative to each other and Ann Yearsley will be the focus of the final chapter of this thesis, which will also attempt to identify the factors which caused this shift.

The thesis begins, however, with an exploration of the early patronage relationship between Hannah More and Ann Yearsley as an example of how patronage

¹² More to Elizabeth Montagu, 21 July 1785 in Stott, p. 76.

functioned in the late eighteenth century, and as a way of investigating who could, or should, have control over literary production as the century came to a close. The second chapter takes patronage and places it within the context of the national debate about the abolition of slavery, and considers the impact on the national debate when the partnership between More and Yearsley fails. Chapter Three is concerned with the ways in which the personal traumas experienced by Smith and Yearsley are brought into their professional lives, and the impact on their professional status, and their potential audiences. Chapter Four focuses on the interaction of the French Revolution and increasing British nationalism, and considers what people are prepared to publish and buy in a fraught political climate. The thesis concludes with an assessment of what happens to patronage and professionalism under political pressures, and will propose that this examination of the careers and experiences of More, Smith and Yearsley can inform a broader understanding of how professional authorship functions at the end of the eighteenth century.

By the time of the French Revolution, many women were supporting themselves by their literary endeavours. Although there are examples of individuals, including members of the Bluestockings, expressing dislike of writing for financial gain, the end of the eighteenth century saw an increasing professionalism amongst literary women. Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus in their 1987 essay 'Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820' chart this trend and offer a thorough overview of what and how writers published, using the examples of Amelia Opie and Mary Robinson. Fergus and Thaddeus propose that the most common way for a 'run-of-the-mill beginning author' to launch their publishing career would be to solicit

subscriptions for their work ‘to test the waters.’¹³ Although this is a useful starting point, subsequent work in this area by Judith Phillips Stanton, Dustin Griffin and Edward Copeland, amongst others, has developed the ideas of Fergus and Thaddeus and helped to reveal an even greater complexity of publishing practices, and the significance of choosing specific publishers and publishing methods.¹⁴ As Stanton’s article explains, Charlotte Smith, for example, made use of subscription three times during her career, long after she had established herself as a writer of merit.

Subscription meant that the costs of publishing a work which a writer was unsure would do well in the general market would not be borne by them; only as many copies as were needed would be produced, and the readers would be the ones to pay. Indeed, Cheryl Turner has suggested that subscription was useful as a way ‘to bypass “the Trade,”’¹⁵ removing the publishers from the equation. However, subscription also bore the potential problem of a writer having to ask for money directly from her audience, and its resemblance? to begging may have lessened its appeal. Here, having a patron was an advantage, as they would be able to raise the subscription on the author’s behalf. The writer would then receive the benefit of this useful publishing method, without being seen to ask for money. This was one of the benefits enjoyed throughout her career by Yearsley, who always had friends and protectors on hand to assist when a volume of poetry was to be published by subscription. Although Fergus and Thaddeus suggest that only those new to publishing would venture a publication by subscription, the choices made by Yearsley and Smith suggest that it could be strategically deployed by more experienced writers who perhaps wished to earn money

¹³ Fergus and Thaddeus, 193.

¹⁴ See Judith Phillips Stanton, ‘Charlotte Smith’s “Literary Business”: Income, Patronage and Indigence’, *The Age of Johnson*, 1 (1987), 375-401; Edward Copeland, *Women Writing about Money: Women’s Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Turner, p. 79.

from a publication whilst maintaining a sense of intimacy by publishing only to admirers and friends.

James Raven, Cheryl Turner and others have argued that there were increasing numbers of women dealing directly with publishers to get their work into print, but older systems were still in use.¹⁶ Dustin Griffin's informative study, *Literary Patronage in England*, explores the applications at the end of the century of what had often been a patriarchal patronage system. Primarily centred on the economics of patronage, Griffin argues that both patron and protégé benefited from such arrangements: the protégé by gaining access to a higher social status, and the patron by having control of 'high' literary culture. Griffin notes that through their dedications to their patrons, poets speak of their "right" to receive the support of the great, and of the sole "right" of the great to provide such support.¹⁷ Griffin calls this 'reciprocity', evidence that 'literary patronage is a systematic economic arrangement, a complex exchange of benefit to both patron and client.'¹⁸ Nor was patronage static, but was 'constantly in flux, as authors resisted or challenged the claims of patrons, and patrons reaffirmed their traditional privileges.'¹⁹ A dynamic relationship, the ability to patronise writers was a privilege of the aristocratic. Yet a fundamental aspect of the relationship was the element of challenge, according to Griffin, of being able to test boundaries. Both of these features of patronage are central to perhaps the best known, and at the time most notorious, patronage relationship, of Ann Yearsley and Hannah More, where the patron was not aristocratic but claimed this privilege, and seemed to resent the challenges offered by Yearsley which were as much part of patronage as More's

¹⁶ See Turner, pp. 65-108, and Isobel Rivers, ed., *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays* [2001] (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), in particular the essay by James Raven, 'The Book Trades' (pp. 1-34).

¹⁷ Griffin, p. 17.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 44.

protection. The breakdown of their relationship resulted in a spectacular media spat, and the bitterness and recriminations expressed by both women have eventually led to a recovery of Ann Yearsley's history, in particular the months before Yearsley became connected with More and the tale of how the Yearsley family, including Mrs. Cromartie, Yearsley's mother, nearly starved to death in a Clifton barn because the family would not ask for help. They were rescued by a local man, a story which seems to have thrilled More, though Mrs. Cromartie was past aid by the time help arrived.

This, and other details of Yearsley's life and works have been dealt with by Mary Waldron, Moira Ferguson, Tim Burke and Frank Felsenstein, who have contributed to a better understanding of the events which culminated in the working-class protégée demanding recognition from her patron of her ability to manage her own finances, and her own career.²⁰ The earlier work of Waldron and Ferguson tends to favour one woman over the other (More for Waldron, Yearsley for Ferguson). Waldron asserts that Yearsley broke the rules of patronage by demonstrating ingratitude, and Ferguson claims Yearsley as an emblem of working-class resistance against their superiors. However, the recent work of Tim Burke and Frank Felsenstein has offered a more nuanced consideration of the two women. Both argue that the class status of Yearsley and More was closer than More was prepared to acknowledge: a consequence, Tim

²⁰ See Mary Waldron, 'A Different Kind of Patronage: Ann Yearsley's Later Friends', *The Age of Johnson*, 13 (2002), 283-335, "'This Muse-born Wonder': the Occluded Voice of Ann Yearsley, Milkwoman and Poet of Clifton", in *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730-1820*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 113-126, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753-1806* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 'Ann Yearsley: the Bristol Manuscript Revisited', *Women's Writing*, 3 (1996), 35-45, "'By no Means Milk and Water Matters": the Contribution to English Poetry of Ann Yearsley, Milkwoman of Clifton, 1753-1806', *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 304 (1992), 801-804, 'Ann Yearsley and the Clifton Records', *The Age of Johnson* 3 (1990), 301-29; Moira Ferguson, 'The Unpublished Poems of Ann Yearsley', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 12:1 (1993), 13-29, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Tim Burke, 'Ann Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius in Early Romantic Culture', in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, ed. by Thomas Woodman (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 215-230; Frank Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage', parts I and II, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 21:1 (2002), 347-392, and 22:1 (2003), 13-56 respectively.

Burke has suggested, of the replacement of traditional upper-class patrons by middling-class benefactors. Burke has also argued that an increasing presence in anthologies demonstrates a new interest in Yearsley as a poet, rather than as the figure at the centre of a sensational story.²¹ Yet the interest of many scholars has been focussed on the very small part of Yearsley's career during which she was More's protégée. Her partnership with Hannah More (whose own reputation has endured more consistently than that of her protégée) lasted only eighteen months of a career which would span more than a decade. Significantly less work has been done on other areas of Yearsley's writing, with the exception of her contribution to the abolition debate of 1788, which has been commented upon by Moira Ferguson and Alan Richardson.²²

Despite a biography of Yearsley written in 1996 by Mary Waldron, relatively little is known about Yearsley's relationship with her second patron, Frederick Hervey, 4th Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry, though the collection of Yearsley's correspondence published by Frank Felsenstein in 2002 has helped to illuminate More's and Bristol's different methods of patronage, as well as the significance of Yearsley taking an aristocratic patron to replace More.²³ If there is little information about parts of Yearsley's career to 1789, almost nothing has been written on the latter part of her career as a professional writer. Mary Waldron's biography sketches in what few details are known, and lists Yearsley's final publications: a novel, *The Royal Captives*,

²¹ See Tim Burke, ed., *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets 1700-1800* vol. III (1780-1800) (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), and Burke's introduction to *Selected Poems of Ann Yearsley* (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2003); David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (London: Blackwell, 1998).

²² See Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834*; Alan Richardson, ed., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period* vol. 4 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), 'Darkness Visible? Race and Representation in Bristol Abolitionist Poetry, 1770-1810', in *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830*, ed. by Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 129-147, 'Women Poets and Colonial Discourse: Teaching More and Yearsley on the Slave Trade', in *Approaches to Teaching: British Women Poets of the Romantic Period*, ed. by Stephen C. Behrendt and Harriet Kramer Linkin (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1997), pp. 75-79.

²³ See Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage', part I.

and a volume of poetry, *The Rural Lyre*. Although fragments of her later poetry have been reprinted by Tim Burke in his collection of Yearsley's poetry, published in 2004, the novel has been almost entirely forgotten.²⁴ Testament to Yearsley's engagement with the political climate of post-Revolutionary France, it is barely mentioned by Waldron in her biography, and has attracted critical comment from only two writers, Judith Dorn and Cheryl Turner.²⁵ It is part of the project of this thesis to recover this novel and give it the fullest critical attention it has yet received, in order to expand our understanding of how Yearsley's publishing choices in the 1790s illuminate the wider question of what was possible for professional writers during this decade of political turmoil.

Although a far greater knowledge of Hannah More's writing has survived than that of her one-time protégée, she has suffered in a different way by being often figured in opposition to Mary Wollstonecraft. Some critical readings of texts such as her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* and her series of *Cheap Repository Tracts* have led to the creation of a profoundly conservative figure, the antithesis of the proto-feminism represented most clearly by Wollstonecraft, an image only reinforced, for some, by her disastrous patronage of Ann Yearsley. The list of More's critics is long, with works by Moira Ferguson denouncing More in favour of Yearsley, Olivia Smith critical of More's motives, and Mona Scheuermann figuring her as an enemy of the lower classes because of her acceptance of class difference.²⁶ The work of Mitzi Myers and Harriet Guest begins to reassess the automatic positioning of More as the polar

²⁴ See Burke, ed., *Ann Yearsley: Selected Poems*.

²⁵ See Turner, p. 114, and Judith Dorn, 'The Royal Captives, A Fragment of History: Ann Yearsley's "Unnecessary Curiosity"', in *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era* vol. 5, ed. by Kevin L. Cope and Anna Battigelli (New York: AMS Press, 2000), pp. 163-189.

²⁶ See Moira Ferguson, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) and 'Resistance and Power in the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley', *The Eighteenth-Century*, 27:3 (1986), 247-268; Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* [1984] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Mona Scheuermann, 'Ferocious Countenances: The Upper Classes Look at the Poor', *The Age of Johnson*, 11 (2000), 53-79.

opposite to Wollstonecraft, and opens up the possibility of a more nuanced reading of a highly influential figure.²⁷ Work by Anne Mellor has added further understanding, as has the most recent biography of More by Anne Stott.²⁸ Stott highlights the potential radicalism of a number of More's projects, including the Sunday School programme which sought to teach the poor to read. Stott also points to the many contradictions represented by More's own writing: her dual beliefs that women were to attend to their domestic duties, but that in some instances a woman might also have some right to participate in the political arena.

More was a professional woman writer, with a clear understanding of the publishing industry. Through her own early patronage by David Garrick when she was beginning her literary career as a playwright in London, More's circle of acquaintance was extensive, and continued to expand along with her influence. The extent of her importance was clearly demonstrated by the length of the subscribers list More and her close friend, founder of the Bluestockings Elizabeth Montagu, were able to generate on behalf of Ann Yearsley. More was featured by Richard Samuel as one of *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* [1779],²⁹ and was acquainted and corresponded with politicians, religious leaders and literary greats. The combination of her literary abilities and extensive literary contacts meant that More was invited to comment publicly on the abolition of the slave trade, was hailed as a key factor in the quieting of social unrest in Britain after the French Revolution, and published works including *Tracts* for the poor,

²⁷ See Mitzi Myers, 'Reform or Ruin: "A Revolution in Female Manners"', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 11 (1982), 199-216; Harriet Guest, 'The Dream of a Common Language: Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft', *Textual Practice*, 9 (1995), 303-323.

²⁸ In particular Anne Mellor's *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writings in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000). Anne Stott's biography, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), allows room for a nuanced and sensitive reading of More's various projects.

²⁹ This painting is reproduced by Anne Stott, image 6 in her biography of More. See also Elizabeth Eger, 'Representing Culture: *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain*', in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clóna Ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 104-132.

suggestions for the education of royal children, a novel, and a play as well as social and political commentary. Truly a major professional woman writer, the recovery of More from earlier critical stereotypes has been made possible by the likes of Clare Midgely, Harriet Guest, Madeleine Kahn, Anne Mellor, and most recently, Angela Keane.³⁰

Charlotte Smith has also been rehabilitated by recent critical work, but from obscurity rather than an unflattering reputation. Judith Phillips Stanton's 1987 article on Charlotte Smith and her 'literary business' breaks down Smith's long and varied career into a list of her earnings, through which it is possible to see the importance of Smith's knowledge of the book trade. Critics, including Stuart Curran, Jacqueline Labbe and Daniel Robinson, have continued the revival of interest in Smith and her varied oeuvre.³¹ With the publication in 2003 of a collection of Smith's correspondence edited by Stanton, the minutiae of Smith's relationships with her publishers, Thomas Cadell (both father and son, the latter in partnership with William Davies), and the

³⁰ See Claire Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Guest, 'The Dream of a Common Language: Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft'; Madeleine Kahn, 'Hannah More and Ann Yearsley: A Collaboration Across the Class Divide', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 25 (1996), 203-223; Anne Mellor, '“Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?”: Slavery, Romanticism and Gender', in *Romanticism, Race, and Imperialist Culture, 1780-1834*, ed. by Alan Richardson and Sonia Hofkosh (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 311-329; *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writings in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000); Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³¹ Stuart Curran argues in his essay 'Charlotte Smith and British Romanticism', *South Central Review*, 11:2 (1994), 66-78, for Smith's reinstatement as a major Romantic poet, though an earlier article, 'Romantic Poetry: The I Altered', in *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. by Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 279-293, and his book *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) had identified Smith's work as important. Curran has been joined by others, in particular Jacqueline Labbe, who has contributed a significant amount of work to our understanding of Smith. See *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003); 'The Romance of Motherhood: Generation and the Literary Text', *Romanticism on the Net*, 26 (2002); 'Metaphoricity and the Romance of Property in *The Old Manor House*', *Novel*, 34:2 (2001), 216-231; 'The Exiled Self: Images of War in Charlotte Smith's *The Emigrants*', in *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict 1793-1822*, ed. by Peter Shaw (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 37-56. See also Daniel Robinson, 'Elegiac Sonnets: Charlotte Smith's Formal Paradox', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 39:2 (2003), 185-220.

Robinson brothers, are revealed.³² What is most striking about Smith is her perhaps unrivalled ability to manage her career. Although Edward Copeland's useful study has suggested that, because of a persistent need for ready cash, Smith was never able to sell the copyright for her work at its full value, she was nevertheless an astute business woman. Writer of many genres, Smith published work using most available methods, including publishing by subscription, and was patronised to a certain extent by William Hayley.

Central to this thesis is the understanding not only that Smith was aware of which publishing method best suited which genre, but that she also had a keen understanding of her own market value. Pressed in the mid-1790s by the most urgent financial need of her career, Smith placed an advert of sorts in the conclusion of her 1794 novel, *The Banished Man*, for her next work, *Rural Walks*; apparently confident that her reputation would secure a readership if they were aware another publication was being prepared. Indeed, from the triumph of her first adventure into print (the first volume of the *Elegiac Sonnets* was published to great acclaim in 1784), Smith was extremely adept at ensuring her own literary and financial interests were served. As Stuart Curran, editor of her poetry, has noted, Smith was to bring out a further eight editions of the *Elegiac Sonnets* which were 'continually expanding', before 1800.³³ As impressive as this sounds, financial remuneration could not be the reward for Smith's poetic endeavours. Far better money was to be had by publishing prose, and Smith was to publish a series of eleven novels, starting in 1788 with *Emmeline*, and ending with *The Young Philosopher* in 1798. However, her reputation as a poet was crucial to her commercial success as a novel writer; her fame as a poet helped ensure healthy sales of

³² Judith Phillips Stanton, ed., *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003).

³³ Stuart Curran, ed., *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. xxiii.

her prose. Although Smith was normally able to accurately gauge both the public mood and that of her publishers, however, her correspondence marks periods in her career where Smith's judgement failed her. In 1797, Smith stood accused by her publishers of deliberately withholding poems from a recent edition of the second volume of the *Elegiac Sonnets* in order to publish, and be paid for, another. The increasingly bitter exchange of letters between Smith and her publishers (Thomas Cadell Jnr. and William Davies) on this occasion is characterised by claims on both sides that they have lost out to the other. Testament to the extensive knowledge of the print trade possessed by Smith, the letters also demonstrate the fragility of the relationship between professional author and publisher.

Indeed, much about the literary culture in which Smith, More and Yearsley were working was 'fragile'. From everyday relationships with patrons, protégées and publishers to the political fabric of society, none remained in 1806 as they had been in 1788. Yet the following five chapters will show that despite the changes in professional authorship and the political climate, all three women were able to ensure the survival of their careers. However, this survival did not come without a cost, and this thesis will also assess how Hannah More, Charlotte Smith and Ann Yearsley paid for their continued existence as professional writers.

Chapter 1

'The sad swain deceiv'd': Ann Yearsley, class, and the friendship of women

The partnership between More and Yearsley raises questions about who is entitled to act as protector to emerging poets, and whether any such protection is required at the end of the eighteenth century. Offering their protégées a stipend and the benefit of a noble name, aristocratic patrons took pleasure from the renown brought by sheltering celebrated writers. As the century progressed, this began to change, and as Tim Burke, the most recent editor of Ann Yearsley's poetry, has noted, towards the end of the century 'patronage [...] had, to a great extent, become a signature of middling-class sensibility, as ministerial and aristocratic patronage waned.'¹ Part of the earlier culture of patronage had been the 'discovery' of working-class poets, the most famous example being Stephen Duck's patronage by Queen Caroline. Duck's climb from agricultural labourer to court favourite was an extreme case of aristocratic patronage; he would become famous as much for the rarity of his situation as for his poetic talents. Indeed, he rose so far that he was at one time considered for poet laureate, but his subsequent, spectacular, fall from grace and his eventual suicide served as a warning for the deracination of labouring-class poets by their social superiors. Hannah More was very much aware of this precedent, and wrote to her close friend Elizabeth Montagu soon after coming to know Yearsley, 'I am utterly against taking her out of her station. *Stephen* was an excellent Bard as a *Thresher*, but as the Court Poet and Rival of Pope, detestable.'² Yet Duck was not the only example of patronage of labouring-class poets, and More's focus on his position, exclusive of all others, is

¹ Tim Burke, ed., *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets 1700-1800*, vol. III 1780-1800 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), p. xvii.

² Hannah More to Elizabeth Montagu, 27th September 1784, cited in Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 72.

revealing. A happier partnership existed between Mary Leapor and Bridget Freemantle, a well-born clergyman's daughter. Donna Landry offers an account of their relationship, which seems to have been based upon mutual admiration and esteem.³ In contrast to More's wary attitude to Yearsley, Freemantle writes:

[...] I was so far from thinking it a Condescension to cultivate an Acquaintance with a Person in her Station, that I rather esteem'd it an Honour to be call'd a Friend to one in whom there appear'd such a true Greatness of Soul as with me far outweigh'd all the Advantages of Birth and Fortune.⁴

Freemantle proposed, as Landry describes, the publication of a volume of poetry by subscription, so that Leapor 'might be able to buy herself more time in which to write.'⁵ Freemantle's social position was very similar to More's, yet their responses to their respective protégées could not have been more different. Central to More's concerns as a middling-class poet-maker is the need to ensure Yearsley remains labouring class, because, as Tim Burke has suggested, More 'envisaged herself as being close to the front line in the policing of labouring-class behaviour.'⁶ The relationships between More and Yearsley, Freemantle and Leapor, serve to illustrate that one of the consequences of patronage by the middling classes was the breaking down of the clear class boundaries which had separated patrons from their protégées. No longer were peasants being patronised by queens, but by those whose claims to social superiority were harder to define. This shift could bring about the closest of friendships if it was embraced, but would result in disaster if it went unacknowledged.

In our own time, critics have been most fascinated by the extremely public and personally damaging breakdown of relations between Hannah More and Ann Yearsley, often defending the conduct of one to the exclusion of the other. This approach to the

³ Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 95-107.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶ Burke, ed., *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets*, p. xxi.

claims and counter claims made in 1785, both personally and in the press, has created a sense that the arrangement between the two women was only ever short-term, and was always likely to end as it did. Mary Waldron is at the forefront of these critics, writing defensively against what she perceives as Yearsley's overly aspirational and implicitly opportunistic conduct towards her benefactor and patron. Waldron describes Yearsley's early years, stating that she 'joined her mother in the milk-trade when she was old enough, but it is clear that she was always discontented, really despising those, apart from her own family, among whom she lived.'⁷ Waldron's broader examination of patronage relationships in the period allows us to place this comment in context. Of Mary Collier and Phyllis Wheatley she writes that 'they behaved with commendable submission towards their patrons.'⁸ For Waldron, Yearsley's unease with the dynamics of her patronage relationship with More is equivalent to class unrest; the only good protégée is an obedient one.

The defenders of Yearsley are no more helpful in creating a sense of the dynamics of the partnership between More and her protégée. In one of her earlier essays, Moira Ferguson trumpets Yearsley's working-class credentials, holding her aloft as a defender of the poor who 'shared compassion for abused men and women around the world.'⁹ A decade later and the debate has not moved much further. This time, Ferguson has Yearsley championing the cause of women, as, 'despite restrictions on female behaviour, Yearsley urged women to resist imposed restraint.'¹⁰ Her defence of Yearsley is as lacking in nuance as Waldron's is of More. Ferguson characterises the

⁷ Mary Waldron, '“By no means milk and water matters”: the Contribution to English Poetry of Ann Yearsley, Milkwoman of Clifton, 1753-1806', *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 304 (1992), 801-804 (802).

⁸ Mary Waldron, 'Ann Yearsley and the Clifton Records', *The Age of Johnson*, 3 (1990), 301-29 (311).

⁹ Moira Ferguson, 'Resistance and Power in the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley', *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 27:3 (1986), 247-268 (247).

¹⁰ Moira Ferguson, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 49.

events of the relationship as ‘how Hannah More tried to limit Ann Yearsley’s possibilities and how Yearsley resisted More’s hegemonic practices.’¹¹ This reduction of the complex partnership has prevented a fuller understanding of how Yearsley and More really related to each other, and how their reactions connected to wider contemporary views of friendship, class, intellectual companionship, and the dynamics of patronage. In order to appreciate these interconnections, this chapter will seek to reassess the partnership. Instead of the commonly held view that all interaction between the two women ended with their acrimonious break in 1786, I argue that More and Yearsley continued to be keenly interested in each other as rivals for several years. When their paths finally diverged, Yearsley’s attitudes towards friendship demonstrated under the patronage of More continued to be important as she made her own way as a writer. The poems dedicated to her later patrons, particularly Wilmer Gossip and Bishop Frederick Hervey, Fourth Earl of Bristol, contain similar demands for a friendship based on intellect, not charity. In the correspondence between Gossip and Yearsley, recently published by Frank Felsenstein, it is made clear that Yearsley’s quest for friendship from More was not because of ambition, but something far more fundamental to her sense of herself.¹² Thus, this chapter approaches the relationship between Ann Yearsley and Hannah More not by anticipating the breakdown of their partnership, but by attempting to understand what I believe underpins both women’s careers: friendship, their attitudes towards it, and their access to it.

Friendship had probably been far from the thoughts of Ann Yearsley as she lay on the brink of starvation with her husband, mother and young children at the

¹¹ Moira Ferguson, ‘The Unpublished Poems of Ann Yearsley’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 12:1 (1993), 13-29 (25).

¹² Frank Felsenstein, ‘Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage: The Thorp Arch Archive: Part II’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 22:1 (2003), 13-56. Also see part 1 of this article, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 21:2 (2002), 347-92.

beginning of 1784, only a few months before her poems found their way to Hannah More. Enamoured by the tragic tale of the Yearsley family and of Mrs Cromartie, Ann's mother, being rescued by a benevolent local man, only for her to die shortly afterwards, More set about providing relief for the woman who would become known as 'The Bristol Milkwoman'. Along with her good friend and fellow 'Bluestocking' Elizabeth Montagu, More began preparing a volume of Yearsley's poetry by subscription, eventually attracting the support of over a thousand people, a number of them associated with the Bluestocking circle of intellectual women. Sylvia Harcstark Myers has described the Bluestockings as a group of friends who 'wished to feel that they were pursuing their intellectual interests because such activity gave them pleasure, self-respect, and a way of influencing others for good.'¹³ Supporting More's efforts on Yearsley's behalf would have fallen within this remit, as well as with the more general culture of the Bluestockings to encourage the literary endeavours of the other members. The result was a loose internal patronage system. As Myers has noted, it was important to the Bluestockings that 'they had a sense that their friends were interested in their work and supported it.'¹⁴ For the Bluestockings, demonstrating their 'interest' in More's project helped to support a lower-class poet in need, and helped reaffirm their friendship for More.

For More, the reasons driving her intervention with the Yearsley family were more complicated. As Anne Stott notes in her recent biography of More, her patronage of Yearsley 'followed a tradition begun by Queen Caroline, the wife of George II, who had patronized the agricultural labourer Stephen Duck [...] More felt an understandable triumph at the thought that she had a protégée of her own to bring

¹³ Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 155.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 156.

forward.¹⁵ Bringing Yearsley to public attention served two purposes. It firstly provided a woman in proven need with some measure of financial security. But it also gave More a certain cultural pride at the discovery of this ‘natural genius’. In addition, More’s demonstration of sensibility, in coming to the aid of the distressed, was, according to Gillian Skinner, a form of display: ‘In the sentimental scale of value, the ability to dispose of money charitably becomes a measure of personal worth. The more you give, the more you prove your feeling response to the sentimental stimuli of suffering and distress.’¹⁶ Skinner notes the dangers of an ‘excessive response’, of ‘extravagant’ giving, a charge More adroitly avoids by ‘giving’ her energies in encouraging others to contribute money.¹⁷ It would appear, therefore, that the beginnings of the arrangement between More and Yearsley were founded on a charitable act, as well as, perhaps, in aesthetic sympathy. As Stott suggests, Yearsley’s ‘spontaneous love of Virgil’s great pastoral poem (in translation) harmonized with Hannah More’s own preference for natural untaught feelings.’¹⁸

The publication of Yearsley’s first volume of poetry, *Poems on Several Occasions*, to much acclaim in 1785, was the result of a recognisable patronage relationship between More and Yearsley, but it is also indicative of the significance of More’s relationships with her friends. The decision to publish Yearsley’s poetry by subscription was an important one. By using this method, More ensured that there would be no risk to her or her publisher (More had used Thomas Cadell since he published her early play, *The Inflexible Captive*, in 1774, before she had established herself in London), should the work fail.¹⁹ However, with the publication of the lists of subscribers,

¹⁵ Stott, p. 72.

¹⁶ Gillian Skinner, *Sensibility and the Economics of the Novel, 1740-1800: The Price of a Tear* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1999), p. 4.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁸ Stott, p. 72.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 23.

subscription publication could also be an opportunity to showcase any illustrious names who had bought copies. George Justice has noted:

With publishing by subscription a number of 'patrons' could buy copies of a book in advance of publication - multiple copies if desired, or even with an additional contribution above the price of subscription. In return, subscribers might receive specially printed copies of a book and would usually have their names included in a list of subscribers (with the number of copies purchased by each) prefacing the work. In some cases, subscriptions would function politically or socially, as a public signal of support for an author or that author's political views.²⁰

The subscriber's list for *Poems on Several Occasions* certainly seems to have had a social function, but not for the benefit of the poems' writer. Amongst the many dozens of names on the list are those of many of More's Bluestocking friends, including Frances Boscawen, Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, Frances Burney and Anna Seward.

Also prominent are the names of the Duchess of Devonshire and the Bishop of London, along with a host of Earls, Lords, Ladies and Viscounts. Such illustrious figures have not subscribed for Yearsley's benefit, as More had no desire for her protégée to earn a living from the publication of the poems, but for More's sake. They have subscribed in order to support More's charitable project of alleviating Yearsley's suffering; the fact that nearly all of these ennobled subscribers have vanished from the list for *Poems on Various Subjects* in 1787 only emphasises the minor role played by Yearsley's literary talents in garnering such a dazzling array of names in 1785. More's choice of subscription as the mode of publication for Yearsley's first volume of poetry was shrewd; there was no risk to More or any of her circle, but she and her friends could enjoy the opportunity for public recognition of their charitable act that subscription publishing offered.

²⁰ George Justice, *The Manufacturers of Literature: Writing and the Literary Marketplace in Eighteenth-Century England* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 205.

More may have stepped beyond the usual boundaries of the patron-client relationship on this occasion, but the withholding of Yearsley's earnings had no basis within a patronage relationship. Instead, More's decision to set up a trust fund with Elizabeth Montagu was founded upon her unease that Yearsley might be supplied with the means to escape her lowly circumstances, and a conflation of professional authorship with a middling-class identity. Despite these inconsistencies in More's interpretation of what it was to be a patron, Dustin Griffin's definition of the patronage relationship as it stood in the later eighteenth century is still extremely helpful. He states that 'literary patronage is a systematic economic arrangement, a complex exchange of benefit to both patron and client.'²¹ Both parties benefited immensely from this connection and as Griffin succinctly phrases it, 'it is very likely that poets like [...] Ann Yearsley [...] would have wasted their sweetness on the desert air if they had not been adopted by patrons.'²² That Yearsley was also aware of the fundamental role played by More in her new situation is clear from the very beginning of the 1785 volume, with the poem 'Night. To Stella'.

The opening gloomy, nocturnal scene in this poem, full of toil and a sense of sorrow, has Yearsley holding More's benevolence aloft, echoing Mary Leapor's celebration of her patron 'Artemisia' (Bridget Freemantle) and her attempts 'to make your luckless *Mira* thrive' forty years earlier.²³ More, or 'Stella' as she is named throughout Yearsley's 1785 poems, is the embodiment both of Yearsley's physical relief, and of her intellectual release. 'That eye where pity tips the pointed beam / With treble softness - Oh! that eye is hers' exclaims Yearsley after having called for help from

²¹ Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 13.

²² *ibid.*, p. 289.

²³ Mary Leapor, 'An Epistle to a Lady' in *Poems upon Several Occasions by Mrs Leapor* (London: J. Roberts, 1748), p. 38, l. 2.

participating in this friendly embrace would be to rise beyond Yearsley's designated station. Almost as a dog told to sit until its master returns, so Yearsley is told to remain in her impoverished state. Again, Yearsley's verse echoes the earlier relationship between Bridget Freemantle and Mary Leapor. Donna Landry has suggested that 'female friendship was crucial to [Leapor's] literary enterprise,'²⁵ much as it seems to have been to Yearsley's. The difference was, as Landry has also noted, 'in the cultivation of a strong friendship that allowed each woman access to the other's sensitivities'²⁶ which characterised Leapor's relationship with Freemantle, but not Yearsley's with More.

More's own 'Prefatory Letter' to the 1785 volume, written ostensibly to Elizabeth Montagu, suggests that Yearsley's quietly spoken misgivings were not misplaced:

It is not intended to place her in such a state of independence as might seduce her to devote her time to the idleness of Poetry. I hope she is convinced that the making of verses is not the great business of human life; and that, as a wife and a mother, she has duties to fill, the smallest of which is of more value than the finest verses she can write.²⁷

More places herself in a difficult position here. She had, after all, determined to remain single and was therefore without the cares of wife and mother she so strongly urges Yearsley to mind. Had she been subject to her own argument, she would perhaps have had to sacrifice her literary activities in order to find and maintain her husband. That she was not is the first hint at what may have driven the collapse of their relationship: one rule for the more financially secure middle-class writer, and another for her labouring-class protégée. More was later to develop her thoughts on duty in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, written several years after the falling-out with Yearsley. By the time *Strictures* was published in 1799, there is a distinct hardening of

²⁵ Landry, p. 94.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 95.

²⁷ More, '“Prefatory Letter” to Mrs. Montagu', in Yearsley, *Poems on Several Occasions*, p. xi.

her views about the poor and their needs, and More laments that ‘poverty is represented as the greatest of evils, and the restraints which tend to keep the poor honest as the most flagrant injustice.’²⁸ Her disdain of the poor is made clear with her astonishment that, according to ‘the new German enlighteners, [...] you need no longer remain in that situation in which Providence has placed you.’²⁹ The way in which she aims to keep people in their divinely ordained station is to urge the domestic calling of women:

The chief end to be proposed in cultivating the understandings of women is to qualify them for the practical purposes in life. Their knowledge is not often like the learning of men, to be reproduced in some literary composition, nor ever in any learned profession; but it is to come out in conduct.³⁰

This conduct is to be centred on the cultivation of ‘proper’ female roles: ‘The profession of ladies, to which the best of *their* instruction should be turned, is that of daughters, wives, mothers, and mistresses of families.’³¹ *Strictures* argues that a middle-class woman gains her power because she is a wife and mother, yet More, the source of these ideas, fulfils neither of these positions. She leaves herself a get-out clause, that women’s ‘knowledge is not *often* like the learning of men’ (emphasis mine). But as More makes clear, poor women are not to gain any power through fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers; they are rather to accept their positions. With Yearsley, it seems, More was unable to reconcile her feelings that the poor ought to remain where god has put them, with Yearsley’s claim to the right of a flourishing literary life of the sort enjoyed by More.

²⁸ Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 2 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1799), I, 35-36.

²⁹ More, *Strictures*, I, 42.

³⁰ More, *Strictures*, II, 1.

³¹ More, *Strictures*, I, 97-8.

Yearsley in her own writing takes full advantage of mixed messages from More by subtly subverting them. In 'Night. To Stella', Yearsley imagines herself 'like the poor beetle', capable only of existing in the animal kingdom, lower than human, because she is without learning, rather than the 'proper' woman of More's imagination. Yearsley also neatly undermines More's argument in her 'Prefatory Letter'. After having reassured Montagu that social advancement will not be the result of her patronage, More writes that 'it has pleased God to give her these talents.'³² Yearsley in her turn claims that 'learning' is 'Heaven's best gift' (l. 80), not poetic skill. Where More sees the divine at work, Yearsley sees only lack: a sense of lack mingled with class tension, personal disappointment, and loneliness. This idea of loneliness, and the consequent importance of friendship to Ann Yearsley, is made apparent in the selection of poems within this 1785 volume. Two poems are dedicated to anonymous friends, another three to Hannah More, or 'Stella', and the volume contains a further direct 'Address to Friendship'. It is this last poem, and 'To Stella; on a Visit to Mrs Montagu' which seem to speak most clearly of the developing tensions between Yearsley and More. Yet Yearsley's demands for an intellectual friendship also extend to the Bluestockings, More's own circle of friends. I will argue that admission to the Bluestockings depended upon class, and that Yearsley's protests against class preconceptions are amplified when she deals with More's friends. Her compelling arguments for inclusion to this circle of social and intellectual friendship begin to undermine the class-specific nature of the circle, and create a sexual dynamic which invites a reappraisal of modern definitions of how female friendships function in this period.

³² More, 'Prefatory Letter', p. xi.

The nature of female friendship in the second half of the eighteenth century has been the subject of a variety of studies, and interest has been focussed on a series of intense single-sex friendships which flourished in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The Bluestocking circle with its off-shoots, as well as the well-born Ladies of Llangollen, have received much of the attention given to female friendships of this period. Betty Rizzo has catalogued a variety of relationships enjoyed by women, including instances of business partners, artistic companions, and, of course, a social institution of its day, the respectable female companion who was often a mixture of confidante, servant, sister and chaperone.³³ What most of those working in this area have pointed to is a class-specific dynamic operating within these relationships. It is a dynamic not wholly unexpected, given that only those women affluent enough to have time to spare would be able to forge such deep relationships amongst their own sex. As Elizabeth Mavor has phrased it, these friendships, '[d]epending as they did upon time and leisure, were aristocratic, they were idealistic, blissfully free, allowing for a dimension of sympathy between women'.³⁴ The work of Sylvia Harcstark Myers shares this view, as she traces the foundations of the friendships enjoyed by the women of the Bluestocking circle and others like them to their positions at birth.

The personal development of these women was the end result of the decision making which had started in girlhood, when they had begun to try to shape their lives in a particular direction. This direction was affected by mentors, family ties, marriage or its absence, and by friendship.³⁵

Myers suggests that a particular combination of class, upbringing, affluence and leisure time creates a climate in which female friendship can thrive. Only those of relatively

³³ See Betty Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows: Relationships Among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1994).

³⁴ Elizabeth Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen: A Study in Romantic Friendship* [1971] (London: Penguin Books, 1973), p. xvii.

³⁵ Myers, p. 15.

high birth would be wealthy enough to have the leisure time in which to maintain close personal connections, and only those raised to expect a life which would provide leisure time would be socialised to pursue such close personal connections, as Stuart Curran has noted:

The ethos around the dynamics of female friendship, as forceful, moving, and beautiful as it can be, is at the same time constructed within an upper-middle-class environment of privilege and leisure, poetry and music, from which, either by birth, fortune, or accident, the vast majority of women in Britain are excluded.³⁶

But what exactly was the nature of this relationship between women that made it so seemingly dependent upon a strict class identity? What exactly was understood in the latter part of the eighteenth century by the term 'friendship'?

Friendship for many commentators was a great blessing, and few accounts are as effusive as that of Mary Wollstonecraft, for whom friendship is a near-heavenly thing:

Friendship founded upon virtue Truth and love; – it sweetens the cares, lessens the sorrows, and adds to the joys of life. – It corrects our foibles and errors, refines the pleasures of sense and improves the faculties of the mind. – It is adapted to all the various changes and exigencies of life, and by a kind of sympathy flowing from mutual sincerity, it bears a part of pain or pleasure as different events affect the mind. – Its pleasures are permanent and increase by reflection, so that a view of the past adds to the enjoyment of the present, opening to the mind the prospect of endless bliss. – Such was the friendship, intended by providence to adorn the most solemn sacred union, displaying itself in all the offices of true affection and esteem. – Happy beyond expression is that pair who are thus united; how rational are their pleasures, how solid their joys, how certain their hopes: – dispositions so excellent are guardian angels to each other, and in a finite degree resemble the harmony above.³⁷

This celebration of friendship reinforces the views of modern critics like Rizzo and Curran that the institution of friendship was predicated on the union of two wholly

³⁶ Stuart Curran, 'Dynamics of Female Friendship in the Later Eighteenth Century', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 23:2 (2001), 221-239 (237).

³⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, Letter 6 [Beverley c. mid to late 1773 – November 16, 1774] in *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 16.

compatible parties. The description is of an ideal marriage; friends are to be united in every possible way, to truly create 'a harmony' between them, and the commonalities between true friendship and marriage are apparent in Yearsley's poetry. In her letter, Mary Wollstonecraft makes clear the potential beauty of friendship between women, and Yearsley too saw it as a blissful state. Her 'Address to Friendship' and 'To Stella; On a Visit to Mrs Montagu' both celebrate the potential of female friendship when shared in the way Wollstonecraft describes, where 'soul-expanding notes in rapture flow' (p. 67, l. 24). However, a warning note about the nature of friendship in this period is sounded by Gurion Taussig, who claims that 'friendship represents an Idea whose realization is precarious is the extreme.'³⁸ Taussig suggests that despite the effusive celebrations of female friendship by Mary Wollstonecraft and others, this period is one 'where protestations and professions of friendship abound but where the relationship itself either proves elusive or easily destroyed.'³⁹ Yearsley's 'Address to Friendship' in particular, whilst clearly revelling in the idea of devoted friendships, seems to reveal aspects of this darker side of female relations. The poem chronicles how bitterness results when friendship is spurned, and how this bitterness is multiplied when the rejection is as a result of class-based preconceptions.

The opening of 'Address to Friendship' shares its language with Wollstonecraft's letter. Indeed, Yearsley's praise of friendship is even greater in places, using the divine to further her description:

FRIENDSHIP! thou noblest ardor of the soul!
 Immortal essence! languor's best support!
 Chief dignifying proof of glorious man!
 Firm cement of the world! endearing tie,

³⁸ Gurion Taussig, *Coleridge and the Idea of Friendship, 1789-1804* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 2002), p. 15.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 15.

Which binds the willing soul, and brings along
 Her chastest, strongest, and sublimest powers!
 All else the dregs of spirit.
 (p. 79, ll. 1-7)

As Yearsley develops her opening verse paragraph, she blends the language of religion with that of love. The friend is 'infatuated' (p. 80, l. 8), and has drunk of 'Th'inflaming draught' and its 'intoxicating charm' (ll. 13 and 14). Breaking the metaphor of a kind of friendly inebriation, Yearsley also hails friendship 'As incense' which 'in its grateful circles mounts' (l. 15). The state of friendship is profoundly affecting, but having just hailed it almost as a gift from heaven, Yearsley immediately calls it 'Thou unfound blessing' (l. 17). The change of tone following this break is stark, the structuring of the paragraphs adding to the unsettlement of the reader. The friends are no longer wrapped in the 'endless mists' of line 9, but are in the midst of an intangible 'nightly vapour'. Friendship has become 'rare', 'unfound', a 'delusion' which leaves people 'deceiv'd'. Significantly, the figure Yearsley describes as 'deceiv'd' by friendship is a poor man, who after his disappointment 'now cautious treads/The common beaten track, nor quits it more' (p. 81, ll. 22-3). Whilst acknowledging the power of friendship, Yearsley also feels its fleetingness for the lower classes when befriended by their betters. Friendship has lifted the swain from the mediocre, and transformed him, albeit temporarily, into something better. The poem hints also that this momentary improvement need not have been so transient. Through the final four words of this verse paragraph, Yearsley indicates that the making, and subsequent breaking of a friendly relationship with those like the swain has long-term consequences. He will no longer risk looking beyond himself to something bigger. In these few words, it may be possible to detect fear for all creativity among the lower classes if their social betters continue to let them down in the fashion experienced by the swain of this poem.

The sense that the narrative voice is articulating the feelings of Yearsley herself is heightened by the poem's move towards an examination of the perils of false friendship. The words and phrases, coupled with the knowledge we possess of Yearsley's anger at the content of More's 'Prefatory Letter', to be demonstrated so famously when Yearsley published her response, her 'Narrative', in the 1787 volume *Poems on Various Subjects*, mean that at this point there is little distance between the narrative voice and the poet. Nowhere is this clearer than when Yearsley characterises the false friend as a 'serpent'. What is most interesting, though, is the tense Yearsley chooses:

Like an insidious serpent softly creep
 To the poor, guileless, unsuspecting heart, 50
 Wind round in wily folds, and sinking deep
 Explore her sacred treasures, basely heave
 Her hoard of woes to an unpitying world:
 First soothes, ensnares, exposes and betrays.
 What art thou, fiend, who thus usurp'st the form 55
 Of the soft Cherub? Tell me, by what name
 The ostentatious call thee, thou who wreck'st
 The gloomy peace of sorrow-loving souls?
 (pp. 82-3, ll. 49-58)

The betrayal is occurring now, in the present tense. It is not a hypothetical examination of false friendship, but a personal and immediate response to a real situation, within the poem at least, and quite reasonably beyond. However, the real tragedy does not occur here, but in the cynicism this experience generates for the narrator, a cynicism that Gurion Taussig argues is not misplaced. Taussig writes that '[w]here true friendship would encompass an unworldly, altruistic benevolence of spirit, in encountering "human nature" it is easily marred by prudential self-interest.'⁴⁰ Exactly as the swain is

⁴⁰ Taussig, pp. 15-16.

described earlier as only keeping to the 'common beaten track' after friendship has faltered, so this voice, that of another disadvantaged person seeking true companionship, loses hope in the inspirational capacity of friendship:

O, 'tis the deepest error man can prove,
 To fancy joys disinterested can live,
 Indissoluble, pure, unmix'd with self;
 Why, 'twere to be immortal, 'twere to own
 No part but spirit in this chilling gloom.
 (p. 84, ll. 67-71)

This cynicism, as poignant as it is, only serves to contrast with the poem's final motif. By showing herself as the one disappointed in her hopes for the nature of friendship, the narrator is able to occupy a position of sympathy. By not dwelling on this cynical mood, the poem utilises the sympathy generated to fashion a rebuke to the readers who subscribed to the volume of poetry. If this is Yearsley herself, as it would seem to be, this movement is rather bold, as she admits within the poem.

Yearsley makes it plain that although she deserves the sympathy of her audience, she requires their friendship, and they have failed to give it. She undercuts the traditional obligations of charity, to wish for intellectual comfort beyond the worldly, and is able to play with the dynamics this will generate in her readers, for whom the very act of reading the poem constitutes the physical aid Yearsley seems to despise. It is an intriguing and revealing way of manipulating her readership:

My soul's ambitious, and its utmost stretch
 Wou'd be, to own a friend - but that's deny'd.
 Now, at this bold avowal, gaze, ye eyes,
 Which kindly melted at my woe-fraught tale; 75
 Start back, Benevolence, and shun the charge;

possibilities, the reader is deliberately left wondering whether this form of short-term giving is really 'Charity' at all.

The subscribers to her poetry Yearsley calls 'kindly' for having felt for her, but she grows increasingly frustrated that this kindness means nothing more to them. Their contributions are more and more transient for Yearsley, and increasingly meaningless, being 'momentary', 'instantaneous' (and by implication lacking in true consideration), and ultimately 'bland'. The idea of 'bounty' being 'bland' is a powerful oxymoron, epitomising Yearsley's disdain for these people who are capable of giving materially but not personally. Indeed, the description of her circumstances as 'abject' may refer to the fact that she is obliged to receive money instead of true friendship, not intrinsically because she is poor. This idea is fully realised by the poem's potent closing phrase where Yearsley announces that friendship can only exist 'in equality'. This is absolutely key to how Yearsley perceives friendship. Through this ending she seems to disclaim the relationship with More as impossible to sustain because of the obligations Yearsley feels herself to be under, and the way in which More advertises these obligations. I would argue that Yearsley is not concluding that friendship can never exist between people of different classes, but that it can never exist between people who *feel* themselves to be of different classes. As Yearsley's recent editor Tim Burke states, her 'precise class orientation [...] shifted dramatically throughout the 1780s and 90s'.⁴² Burke goes on to suggest that Yearsley 'quarrelled with More from a position of closer class approximation than is usually credited by Yearsley's recent readers.'⁴³ Indeed, More's annual income of £200 (bestowed upon her by a suitor who promised marriage but rescinded after a number of years), was enough only to earn a 'grudging admission

⁴² Burke, *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets*, p. 58.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 58.

among some authors that such a competence might just achieve gentility.⁴⁴ Yearsley's words gain greater significance through this understanding of More's own precarious class position. Friendship can only exist 'in equality'; More has a choice to either accept that she is not so much higher than Yearsley, or to admit that Yearsley is not so much lower. Yearsley herself was capable of altering her class status to suit her purpose. As the victim of More's officious patronage in her defence of her conduct, Yearsley is the lowly milkwoman. As an independent poet, she claims a middling class identity. In many ways, it is the perceptions of class, rather than the reality, which are fundamental to understanding the infamous breakdown of the relationship between Yearsley and More.

Also at stake here is Yearsley's keenness to refute the allegation of ingratitude which she does partly through her clever use of the word 'ambiti6n'. Following the breakdown of her relationship with More, this was one of the key charges she was faced with, and one which some modern critics continue to level at her. Mary Waldron's comment, quoted above, that 'she joined her mother in the milk-trade when she was old enough, but it is clear that she was always discontented, really despising those, apart from her own family, among whom she lived' is fairly typical.⁴⁵ However, just as Yearsley undercuts the notion of charity in this poem, she also twists the reader's perceptions of ambition. Far from being a move for a higher class status, Yearsley's

⁴⁴ Edward Copeland, *Women Writing about Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 28.

⁴⁵ Waldron, 'By No Means Milk and Water Matters', p. 802. See also Patricia Demers's argument in "'For Mine's a Stubborn and a Savage Will": "Lactilla" (Ann Yearsley) and "Stella" (Hannah More) Reconsidered', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 56 (1993), 135-50. Demers deals with the two women more even-handedly than Waldron, and her examination of the class dynamics of the relationship is very useful. See also William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 2001); Gustav H. Klaus, *The Literature of Labour: 200 Years of Working Class Writing* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1985); Tim Burke, 'Ann Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius in Early Romantic Culture', in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, ed. by Thomas Woodman (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1998), pp. 215-230; and Tim Burke's introduction to *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets 1700-1800* vol. III.

hope for companionship is deeply human, grounded in reason, and the simplicity of the statement challenges to those who were to insult her by labelling her as ambitious.

Crucial to understanding the possibilities of Yearsley's poetry is the concept of 'romantic friendship': two women living together for life, as summarised by Lillian Faderman:

Romantic friends courted each other, flirted, were anxious about the beloved's responses and about reciprocity. They believed their relationship to be eternal [...] The fondest dream of many romantic friends, which was not often realized, was to establish a home with the beloved. To that end they were willing to make the greatest sacrifices, and were devastated if their hopes were disappointed. There is nothing to suggest that they were self-conscious about these passions or saw them as being abnormal in any way.⁴⁶

An early study of the sexual possibilities within female friendship, Faderman's work has since been built upon by scholars who have examined how the erotic dynamics of female friendship manifest themselves within women's poetry of this period. Harriette Andreadis argues that women employed a second language for communicating their feelings:

there developed an erotically charged yet shadowed language of female same-sex friendship by women seeking the rewards of 'respectability' at the same time that they gesture against conventional confinement. This splitting off, or doubling, of discourses created a space for the development, in the mid- to later eighteenth century, of the language of female romantic friendship as the dominant discourse defining 'virtuous' and socially impeccable female friends.⁴⁷

Andreadis' argument implies that inherent within any discourse on close female friendship is an erotically charged subtext, regardless of any physical evidence for sexualised feelings. By writing a poem such as 'To Stella; On a Visit to Mrs Montagu',

⁴⁶ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* [1981] (London: The Women's Press, 1991), p. 125.

⁴⁷ Harriette Andreadis, 'The Erotics of Female Friendship in Early Modern England', in *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*, ed. by Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 241-258 (pp. 244-5).

Yearsley is thus making use of pre-existing codes for conveying ideas about same-sex intimacy. In the poem's opening, Yearsley commands More to 'pour out your soul with your lov'd MONTAGU' (p. 65, l. 6), a phrase more reminiscent of a jealous lover than a protégée. Yearsley later conjures an image of herself sitting at home waiting for More to return from Montagu. She does not state whose home it is, allowing the ambiguity to suggest a shared abode. Yearsley alters her relationship to More as a protégée by figuring herself as highly feminized, domestic and house-bound, and More as masculine, roving, existing in a world outside the (shared?) home.

The power dynamics of the patronage relationship are maintained, but are sublimated into those of a heterosexual marriage. It seems that Yearsley is prepared, as Faderman suggests, to make sacrifices in order to achieve her desire of a life with More: tolerating a feminized subjectivity and accepting More's life outside the home. Gurion Taussig, though, sees Yearsley's choice of language in a different light. Far from there being an ironic use of Yearsley's lowly state, Taussig sees this as a poem charting Yearsley's resignation to the lack of access to these privileged relationships caused by her low birth. Taussig concludes that 'Yearsley accepts in this poem that friendship is the exclusive property of the leisured upper orders.'⁴⁸ What I would argue Yearsley 'accepts' here is not that she can never achieve a full intellectual friendship with More, but that she can never compete with the appeal of Elizabeth Montagu. She may compromise on the nature of their relationship, but she still seeks a relationship. Taussig's final thought on Yearsley's position is that she 'is terrified by More and Montagu's alien, awe-inspiring intercourse.'⁴⁹ As Yearsley demonstrates by her range of knowledge, using figures from classical history, literature and myth, this level of intercourse is far from alien to her. What Yearsley seeks to do with these motifs is to

⁴⁸ Taussig, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Taussig, p. 69.

stake her claim for equality through the strength of her verse. She sees herself as intellectually, if not socially, equal and this provides her with the drive away from the patronage system towards the glories of female friendship.

Following Faderman, the possibility exists that Yearsley imagined herself as the feminine partner within a heterosexual marriage. As Faderman points out, the boundaries between an exclusive female partnership and the sexual tensions of a lesbian relationships are considerably blurred within a romantic friendship:

What romantic friends wanted was to share their lives, to confide in and trust and depend upon each other, to be there always for each other. Sometimes their relationships were tense and as fraught with ambivalence as any demanding emotional relationship is. Almost always they envisioned themselves together forever. In these ways, surely, there is little to distinguish romantic friendship from lesbianism.⁵⁰

To suggest that Yearsley was seeking a full lesbian relationship with More is not the purpose of this chapter. However, as shown by Faderman and Andreadis, to attempt to understand their relationship using the terms of an eroticised romantic friendship is perfectly reasonable. As Gurion Taussig has suggested, 'Yearsley's friendship represents a prelapsarian state of moral purity in which the individual is free from self-interest or bodily Eros. She follows a long tradition celebrating friendship as a spiritual alternative to bodily love.'⁵¹ It is possible to read the poems in the 1785 volume featuring either friendship or the two patrons as parts of a story charting Yearsley's desires for an intimate and life-fulfilling friendship with More, like those described by Faderman and Wollstonecraft. Andreadis illustrates the frequency with which the language of erotic female friendship was used, writing that 'of the kinds of poems written by women to each other, poems of friendship [...] offered forms of expression through which an

⁵⁰ Faderman, p. 142.

⁵¹ Taussig, p. 55.

erotically charged poetry of intimacy could and did emerge.⁵² She concludes by claiming that ‘an eroticised discourse of intimate relations evolved, most often in the guise of patronage or friendship poetry, among literate women.’⁵³ We can only speculate as to the precise nature of the relationship which existed between Ann Yearsley and Hannah More. What is clear is that Yearsley was a deeply frustrated, intellectually capable woman, unable to secure the romantic friendship of the woman of whom she considered herself the equal. Indeed, Yearsley was to struggle to find a truly satisfying, intimate intellectual friendship well after her time with More came to a close.

Yearsley’s concept of equality has far-reaching consequences. As has been seen, some critics have argued that Yearsley sought equality by claiming more than she was entitled to.⁵⁴ She has been accused of betraying her lower-class roots and of being overly ambitious in her attempts to make others see her as more than a ‘poetical milkwoman’.⁵⁵ Mary Waldron paints a rather sad picture of Yearsley as a woman who over-reached herself and found herself stuck without a class identity of any sort, and claims that ‘she obviously felt increasingly at home with the intellectuals who were becoming her friends, but tried to relate also to the poor and needy, without much conviction, nor on equal terms.’⁵⁶ Although Waldron is generally hostile towards Yearsley, her description of her class ‘limbo’ may be close to the truth. However, the ambiguity of Yearsley’s class position (her attempts to move higher, and the extent of her ambition) has generated much disagreement amongst modern critics. Betty Rizzo,

⁵² Andreadis, p. 245.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 255.

⁵⁴ Again, the work of Tim Burke, William Christmas, Gustav Klaus and Patricia Demers provides useful explorations of Yearsley’s class status.

⁵⁵ See Mary Waldron’s considerable body of work on Yearsley, in particular her biography *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753-1806* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996). As can be seen by the titles of many articles and books about Yearsley, including those by Mary Waldron, the idea of her as ‘Lactilla’ still fascinates.

⁵⁶ Waldron, ‘By No Means Milk and Water Matters’, 802.

in an illuminating article analysing the politics of patronage and literary production, calls Yearsley ‘the bravest patronized poet of all.’⁵⁷ For Rizzo, this is because she manages to subvert the typical situation of a plebeian poet. Of these ‘primitive poets’, as Rizzo calls them, she writes that they ‘made splendid household pets [...] they were effectively muzzled, incapable of developing their own voices’ because they were ‘confined to eternal gratitude.’⁵⁸ Waldron is also keen to refute the possibility of Yearsley being able to publish anything that would have been in any way threatening, either to More or the group of subscribers amassed by More and Montagu. She writes, ‘if More had recognized anything even approaching the dispute that finally ended their association, she would never have allowed the poem to be included: she had, after all, complete control over the selection.’⁵⁹ Waldron sees More’s editorship as a gift, as does Madeleine Kahn who claims that the ‘selecting, arranging, and perhaps altering the poems, and having them published’ arose from ‘generosity’.⁶⁰ This may well have been the way in which More approached her role, as she writes in her ‘Prefatory Letter’ to Elizabeth Montagu that ‘the ambition of bringing to light a genius buried in obscurity, operates much less powerfully on my mind, than the wish to rescue a meritorious woman from misery.’⁶¹ However, I would argue that, contrary to the views of Rizzo or Waldron, Yearsley, as Kahn suggests, was able to express ‘the perspectives of both the milkwoman and the poet, at different times.’⁶² Indeed, I would go further than this and suggest that Yearsley fuses these two identities and demands that her reader does the

⁵⁷ Betty Rizzo, ‘The Patron as Poet Maker: The Politics of Benefaction’, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 20 (1991), 241-266 (258).

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 242.

⁵⁹ Waldron, *Lactilla*, p. 89.

⁶⁰ Madeleine Kahn, ‘Hannah More and Ann Yearsley: A Collaboration Across the Class Divide’, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 25 (1996), 203-23 (207).

⁶¹ More, ‘Prefatory Letter’ in Yearsley, *Poems on Several Occasions*, pp. xi-xii.

⁶² Kahn, 204.

same. She can be both labouring class and a true poet, and should have access to all the companionship available to other women poets, and remain labouring class.

In the 'Narrative', it is More who is unhappy when Yearsley continues to collect hogwash from More's cook, as she has been contracted to do: More who is unhappy with Yearsley's labouring. In a footnote to her explanation of the events surrounding the signing of the Deed of Trust, Yearsley writes,

From this time, I became very obnoxious to Miss H. More, on account of a very trifling additional circumstance, the discovery of my buying what is called the hogwash of her kitchen; and I am charged with the publication of it. I told her, when she charged me with it, that I could not see how it could offend her, as it was the perquisite of her Cook, and had been paid for by the person who had it before I had the honour of knowing her.⁶³

This footnote typifies the strategic duality of Yearsley's identity. She must explain that the substance she has been found procuring is called 'hogwash' for her gentle readers, but she is also the one capable of understanding the etiquette of contracts. It is Yearsley who, despite the alteration in her circumstances, honours earlier agreements, and it is More who wishes to break them. Very simply, Yearsley is undeniably labouring class, and has more common good manners than her former patron. That More should be seen wishing to break agreements here because they do not suit her demonstrates a history of promise-breaking which may further Yearsley's attempts to remove the blame from her own shoulders.

However, Yearsley finally inverts the common conceptions of the standards of the poor, their inconstancy and immorality, loading these characteristics onto More and gaining both moral and class superiority in the process:

I have to lament, that it does not require one short hour for this expeditious lady to make her wonderful transit from the zenith of praise to the center [sic] of malicious detraction. - For all

⁶³ Ann Yearsley, 'Mrs Yearsley's Narrative', prefaced to the fourth edition of *Poems on Various Subjects* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1787), p. xvii.

the perfection, fame, or virtues she can boast of possessing, I would not be so much a Proteus!

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The polish of More's middle-class persona is here cast away as a sign of moral disintegration, something Yearsley (again making a play of her readers' perceptions of her class standing), disdains. The final blow, Yearsley's use of the word 'boast', condemns More utterly as a vainglorious woman who has attempted to take advantage of someone worse off than herself to her cost. Clearly, Yearsley was not simply a pliable, quiescent woman who could happily be enchained by a heavily restrictive patronage relationship, as critics such as Moira Ferguson have suggested it was.⁶⁵

Though Tim Burke rightly notes that 'Yearsley was by all accounts a woman thoroughly prepared to speak out against perceived injustice to herself,'⁶⁶ many others hold that the relationship between More and Yearsley came about because the latter had no choice, and the former wished to control her protégée as a kind of poetic pet. This is an oversimplistic assessment of the arrangement which does not take into account the complexities either of Yearsley's class position, or of More's.

Following the break, Yearsley continued to publish with the radically-minded Robinson family, long after she was dropped by More's publisher, the more conservative Cadell, and critics have pointed to a strong sense of independence, even while More was acting as her overall editor.⁶⁷ Although there are points where Yearsley

⁶⁴ 'Mrs Yearsley's Narrative', p. xxiv.

⁶⁵ See 'The Unpublished Poems of Ann Yearsley' and 'Resistance and Power in the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley', *The Eighteenth Century*, 27:3 (1986), 247-268. Although reservations have been expressed about the accuracy of some of Ferguson's research by Frank Felsenstein, her overall argument in both these articles is that Yearsley resisted the restrictions of what she calls 'More's hegemonic practices'.

⁶⁶ Burke, 'Ann Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius', p. 223.

⁶⁷ Cadell actually published three editions of Yearsley's second volume of poetry, after the breakdown of the relationship with More. He eventually refused to publish the volume when Yearsley wished to attach 'Mrs Yearsley's Narrative' to the fourth edition. Although Tim Burke claims that by publishing her work after she was dropped by Cadell the Robinsons sided with Yearsley it would seem that Cadell's problem was not necessarily that Yearsley had no grounds for complaint, but that she should not be making that complaint public: 'it is a measure of Yearsley's courage and talent that she rose

is clearly performing the role of a patronised poet dutifully, elsewhere it seems her forthright opinions are barely contained. Interestingly, Yearsley chooses a poem written in response to More's accusation of flattery in which to give a flash of independence. The unwieldy title, 'To the Same; on her accusing the author of flattery, and of ascribing to the Creature that Praise which is due only to the Creator', sets the scene for a poem where Yearsley does exactly the opposite to offering excessive flattery. She states that 'With more than needful awe I view the great' (p. 71, l. 2), despite the apparent reprimand from More for Yearsley's excessive praise of herself and Montagu.

My friends I've prais'd – they stood in heavenly guise 5
 When first I saw them, and my mental eyes
 Shall in that heavenly rapture view them still,
 For mine's a stubborn and a savage will;
 No customs, manners, or soft arts I boast,
 On my rough soul your nicest rules are lost; 10
 Yet shall unpolish'd gratitude be mine,
 While STELLA deigns to nurse the spark divine.
 (p. 72, ll. 5-12)

Much comment has been given to the line 'For mine's a stubborn and a savage will', which does indeed seem to fire a warning shot at More.⁶⁸ The most interesting aspects of these lines, though, are the insinuation that 'Stella' will not necessarily always 'nurse the spark divine' (and the implied threat if she does not), and Yearsley's mention of her 'friends'. These two moments are, I believe, intrinsically connected for Yearsley. Madeleine Kahn, writing about 'Night. To Stella', makes a very interesting point which can also be applied to this poem: 'More is the goddess-like patron who has enabled

above the scandal surrounding the bold exposé of the wrongs of patronage to publish several further works' (Introduction to *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets*, p. xxi).

⁶⁸ This line has excited much comment. Patricia Demers uses it to title her 1993 article in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, and Mary Waldron also deals with it, although she denies that More, as editor, would have allowed any hint of dissension into the published poems.

Yearsley to write, but she might at any moment become the unsympathetic reader who would abandon Yearsley to her former state of destitution and silent frustration.⁶⁹ For Yearsley, it seems, as long as Stella does continue to ‘nurse the spark divine’, and not ‘abandon’ her, they will remain friends, and Yearsley will remain grateful.

However, what Ann Yearsley was looking for was not simply a close, intellectually rewarding friendship with Hannah More. As part of the much wider Bluestocking circle, More’s friendship would have meant at least nominal access to the camaraderie and support of the other women in the circle. Looking back at this influential group of women from two hundred years’ distance, some examination of what, and who, the Bluestockings really were must be attempted for then, as now, what it meant to be a Bluestocking carried different connotations for different people. The rules for becoming a ‘Blue’ also seem to have been changeable, with severe consequences for Ann Yearsley. Harriet Guest defines the term ‘Bluestocking’:

In its broadest sense, the term refers to women who are socially prominent not because they are aristocratic, and not always because they are wealthy, but because of their learning, because they are women of letters.⁷⁰

The picture Guest paints here is of a group of women who have come together in opposition to the more traditional entertainments available to women, especially those of rank. Guest’s Bluestockings are devoted to sober self-improvement and a meritocratic organisation of friends united by their love of literature. Making use of the work of Sylvia Harcstark Myers, the modern reader might be excused for expecting a sisterhood of women writers intent on mutual support, camaraderie and friendship to all those whose talents warranted their inclusion. However, neither Myers nor Guest

⁶⁹ Kahn, 213.

⁷⁰ Harriet Guest, ‘Bluestocking Feminism’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65 (2002), 59-80 (60).

have, I argue, engaged with the potentially exclusive nature of the Bluestocking circle towards prospective members. Far from being a meritocratic society, there is considerable evidence which points to a reactionary, elitist and frequently divided group of women who thought little of turning their considerable intellectual gifts on any within the circle whose conduct did not match up to certain ideals. Hester Piozzi, as she became, was heavily condemned by Elizabeth Montagu for marrying the Italian musician who tutored her daughter. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, in their introduction to the edition of *Huntington Library Quarterly* devoted specifically to studies of the Bluestockings, suggest a more formalised class dynamic than that proposed by Guest:

These informal gatherings united men and women primarily of the gentry and upper classes, with the participation of a number of more middle-class professionals, in the pursuit of intellectual improvement, polite sociability, the refinement of the arts through patronage, and national stability through philanthropy [...] the supposedly informal intellectual meritocracy of the Bluestocking circle [...] could rather be understood as an exclusive and hierarchically ordered hegemonic construct.⁷¹

Susan S. Lanser is similarly sceptical of the rules underlying the conduct of and entry to the Bluestockings. In her nuanced examination of the society, she asks why some women were able to become Blues, whilst others were excluded. She writes that ‘it may not be simply that the Blues behaved in a certain manner but that those who behaved (or were perceived to behave) in a certain manner got to be Blue.’⁷²

There are key concepts here which may help a modern reader to understand why someone like Yearsley was unable to gain access to what was supposedly a meritocratic group. Pohl and Schellenberg point to ‘the refinement of the arts through

⁷¹ Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg, ‘A Bluestocking Historiography’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65 (2002), 1-19 (2).

⁷² Susan S. Lanser, ‘Bluestocking Sapphism and the Economics of Desire’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65 (2002), 257-275 (258).

patronage' as one of the goals of the Bluestockings. Through what we know about the class makeup of the circle, allowing for Guest's assertion that the participants were not necessarily wealthy or of the gentry, it seems that entry was restricted to respectable middle-class intellectuals upwards. Those protégées who, like Hannah More (loosely patronised by Elizabeth Montagu), fell within the unofficial class criteria, frequently gained admission to the society. The admittance of a lower-class writer like Yearsley seems to have been a step too far for the Blues, however enlightened their philosophy. That her own patron should have been able to access all the benefits which were clearly to be gained from friendship within the Bluestockings, seems to have fallen hard with Yearsley.

The very real class-specific rules governing the Bluestocking circle are well demonstrated by one of More's better known poems, *The Bas-Bleu, or conversation*. Published in the same year as her former protégée published her first independent volume of poems, complete with the now famous 'Narrative', the poem forms a direct response to Yearsley's anger at the Bluestockings for refusing her. Although most likely written in 1783, long before her entanglement with Yearsley, the timing of the publication of *The Bas Bleu* seems designed to show both what Yearsley might have enjoyed, and how unworthy of the circle's considerable pleasures Yearsley was. As Emma Major notes, '[t]he idealized conversation of More's poem is emphatically polite rather than classical, and it is the property of a select few: its move into the social belongs to conservative hostesses rather than republican mothers.'⁷³ It remains the 'property of the few' even after its introduction to a wider audience.

Only those allowed admittance to the inner circle can truly understand the extensive series of in-jokes and the significance of personal references. As More says in

⁷³ Emma Major, 'The Politics of Sensibility: Public Dimensions of the Bluestocking Millennium', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65 (2002), 175-192 (180).

poetic talent, must remain a milk woman.⁷⁵ Yearsley also clearly points to the arbitrariness of her exclusion, blaming 'Fortune's adverse power'. Although she holds that the Bluestockings are 'Of soul superior', there is nevertheless a moment where Yearsley hints at something less pleasant. She describes the conversation as 'polish'd' and 'drest', and couples this with a suggestion that the grace More so celebrates contains an element of violence, where 'grace assaults the yielding breast'. Comprising only two or three words, this idea is never more than an undertone in an otherwise seemingly envious look at the bounties open to those with access to the 'polish'd diction'. Through a subtle playing with the meaning of her words, Yearsley mounts a definite challenge to the Bluestockings.

This is the challenge carried forward by 'To Stella; On A Visit to Mrs Montagu'. And elsewhere, Yearsley showcases compelling arguments for her inclusion which undermine the class-specific nature of the circle. The fact that she has been excluded also creates a sexual dynamic which enables Yearsley to employ a very different vocabulary to that seen in More's *Bas Bleu*. Where More uses the language of polite, educated society, Yearsley, in 'To Indifference', makes full use of the sexualised, eroticised language seen in 'On A Visit', but instead of using it to solicit affection and respect, turns this vocabulary into a weapon which More is unable to counter. Sylvia Harcstark Myers may offer some explanation, writing that 'the bluestockings resisted the erotic element, although they were aware of its importance to other members of their society [...] As respectable women of the eighteenth century, committed to virtue and chastity, the bluestockings resisted the intrusion of eroticism into both their male and female friendships.'⁷⁶ This may be why More's poem, quite clearly a response to

⁷⁵ William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 2001), p. 240.

⁷⁶ Myers, p. 17.

of her disappointment, and also the fault of More. By so doing, Yearsley figures herself as 'the sad swain deceiv'd' in 'Address to Friendship', and her fall from the nobler aims in life is the responsibility of her supposed betters. Indeed, the 'Virtue' beloved by More and the Bluestockings is to blame for what disputes have taken place:

Virtue never lives,
 But in the bosom, struggling with its wound ;
 There she supports the conflict, there augments
 The pang of hopeless Love, the senseless stab
 Of gaudy Ign'rance, and more deeply drives
 The poison'd dart, hurl'd by the long-lov'd friend.
 (p. 19, ll. 16-21)

In fact, there is a sardonic twist to Yearsley's attack on 'Virtue'. As the passage progresses, Yearsley moves from 'Virtue' in general to More's personal sense of virtue. What results is a return of the 'poison'd dart' thrown by More, a strike on More's personal morality. The use of the word 'gaudy' connects to the implications of 'polish'd' and 'drest' in 'On a Visit', and also links to allegations that More made in the aftermath of the breakdown of their relationship. In a letter to Mrs Montagu, she wrote that 'I hear she wears very fine Gauze Bonnets, long lappets, gold Pins etc' and More used this behaviour as justification to cast doubt on Yearsley's moral qualities: 'Is such a Woman to be trusted with the poor Children's Money?'⁷⁹ It is not certain whether Yearsley would have known of the content of this letter, but given the strength of the battle that was conducted in the press when the women went their separate ways, Yearsley was most likely aware of similar comments made by More through more public channels. That Yearsley chooses to call 'Ign'rance' 'gaudy' suggests an attempt to reverse More's efforts in the newspapers and other media to discredit her former

⁷⁹ More to Elizabeth Montagu, 21st July 1785, cited in Stott, p. 76.

protégée. It is More's lack of knowledge about Yearsley, her conduct and the reasonable nature of her ambitions, which is being shown off for all to see, not her supposedly superior learning.

The barbed dart that Yearsley seems to throw back at More is one which is potentially double: Yearsley is also taking the opportunity to level an assault on the Bluestockings in general for their hypocritical notions of virtue:

[...] is it possible that [the Blues] were also proper and virtuous – or reinvented as proper and virtuous – in part because of their sapphic desires? That is, were Blues proprieties what I have called [...] a 'compensatory conservatism' for managing not only intellectual interests but erotic and affectional interests as well? If so, true Blue might itself be a little queer.⁸⁰

Lanser implies that the Blues reacted conservatively towards many things in order to provide respectability for their own feelings. Thus, Yearsley, who was seemingly excluded because of her class, and perhaps because of her eroticised approaches to More, was denied access to the circle by people who may have wanted even more from their relationships with their female friends than Yearsley did. By refusing to openly admit the presence of eroticism in their relationships, as Myers claims, the Blues are left open to Yearsley's attack on their hypocrisy, her appropriation of their ideals, and the use of the very erotic language they fail to acknowledge. This idea is confirmed when Yearsley dismisses sensibility alongside virtue:

On her high heights

Our souls can never sit; the point so nice,

We quick fly off – secure, but in descent.

(p. 19, ll. 27-29)

⁸⁰ Lanser, 275.

Gillian Skinner argues that '[c]haritable impulses and benevolence, the feeling heart and the speaking body are all the proper attributes of the sensible female.'⁸¹ By denying sensibility, Yearsley is in many ways denying appropriate female behaviour, but Skinner also notes that 'the moral as well as the financial power is on the side of the benefactor rather than the recipient.' Yearsley is electing here to be neither. Instead, she opts for her original class position, away from those who are 'high' and 'nice', choosing to 'descend'. By making a connection to her earlier poems, here to her description of the lofty souls of More and Montagu compared to her own lowly state, Yearsley lends a sardonic edge to this passage. By cleverly manipulating the subject position of the speaker in this poem, Yearsley appropriates the moral high ground reserved for middling-class benefactors for others like her. No longer is it a solitary 'I', struck through with misery because of her betrayal by the 'long-lov'd friend', but the general 'Our'. Coupled with her reassertion that she is too base to sit on sensibility's 'high heights', the reader is forced to conclude that the people included in 'Our souls' are other members of the lower classes. Yearsley sets up the possibility of a united and sizeable group of people like her who are capable of organising themselves. If the Bluestockings feared to admit Yearsley on her own because of her class status, the thought of others thinking the same way must have had some sort of impact. No longer is it Yearsley who has been excluded. Now it is the Bluestockings who are on the outside of a group of like-minded people, looking in.

By dismissing sensibility in this way, Yearsley is making clever strategic use of the convention which governs much of her poetry. G.J. Barker-Benfield's description of sensibility is that it 'signified revolution, promised freedom, threatened subversion, and

⁸¹ Skinner, p. 10.

became convention⁸² and Yearsley seems to be well aware of the ways in which sensibility works:

Women's minds, bodies, and domestic spaces were its sanctums (one 'shrine' therein was the tea table), where [sensibility] could be consolidated and developed into self-consciousness and authoritative convention, before issuing outward in demands for heterosocial politeness.⁸³

However, Yearsley resists allowing sensibility to enter her domestic spaces. She dismisses sensibility and invites 'Indifference' instead in a conscious move to deny everything held dear by the higher classes. By refusing sensibility, which Barker-Benfield describes as once having had subversive potential, Yearsley is defying convention, and is certainly denying the politeness demanded by genteel society, and by More's own verse.

The moment of resistance does not last, however, and although Yearsley is able to use her class status again in order to make her point, the sense of unity with others is lost. She is once again alone, waiting for a real death, not accompanied this time by the metaphors which characterised the opening of the poem. Although it is also clear that Yearsley harbours a great deal of anger as she visualises herself at home wishing for death to come, dismissing sensibility utterly by exclaiming 'I hate thee!' (p. 20, l. 45), her appeal to 'Indifference' is now as a protection from 'Those dear intruding images' of 'Friendship, Love, or Hope' which, she says, 'Must ne'er approach' (p. 20, ll. 53, 50 and 51). Yearsley's final verse paragraph, though, utilises this image of her still longing for the friendship of her former patrons, and turns it into a damning indictment of their treatment of a woman who is destined to sit 'In this low cottage' with only 'Indifference' for company (p. 20, l. 47). In a final piece of linguistic manipulation, Yearsley attempts to turn More's wholehearted celebration of the mind in *The Bas Bleu*

⁸² G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. xvii.

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 263.

into a distasteful joke. While the patron is free to enjoy the many pleasures of challenging the mind, the protégée is left bereft of hers:

Idea, smother'd, leaves my mind a waste,
 Where Sensibility must lose her prey.
 (p. 20, ll. 55-6)

Yearsley figures herself as the 'prey' of sensibility, a self-gratifying sensibility practised by More and those who subscribed to the 1785 volume. The scale of the violence in the poem's close, all of it generated by sensibility, is disturbing. Thomas Lacqueur has commented that the 'humanitarian narrative' creates 'a sense of property in the objects of compassion.'⁸⁴ Not only is Yearsley made a possession through the benevolence of her patron, but she has become sport to be hunted; she is disposable, serving the purpose of a moment, to be captured, contained, killed.

In some ways, Yearsley presents herself as 'the sad swain deceiv'd', destined never again to reach the heights gained whilst enjoying the protection of those of higher class status. But even here, she is able to undercut the reader's (and perhaps More's) perceptions of her situation through the very act of publishing the volume in which this poem lies. Yearsley, along with her 'Narrative', seems to lay down a challenge to the reader to deny that her unaided publication is just as good, if not better, than her first. Part of this effect is created by Yearsley's decision to publish this second volume by subscription. Following the publicity of the breakdown of the relationship between More and Yearsley, it was a bold move on Yearsley's part to effectively consult the market directly to see if there was enough interest in her work for her to have a career as a professional writer. As Scott Hess has noted, subscription

⁸⁴ Thomas Lacqueur, 'Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative', *The New Cultural History*, ed. by Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 176-204 (pp. 176-177, 179).

functioned ‘by establishing a market for [a] book in advance.’⁸⁵ Had insufficient subscribers come forward, Yearsley would have been unable to publish. Although deserted by the majority of the titled subscribers to the 1785 volume, Yearsley’s boldness was rewarded, so much so that a potential subscriber, being courted on her behalf in 1789, declined the opportunity because ‘Her acquisitions by her Poems are not inconsiderable. Her neighbourhood to Bath: the Patronage of many Friends, exclusive of the two fair Deserters, & the strong party in her favour, must insure her something beyond the bare necessities of Life.’⁸⁶ Interestingly, Yearsley had not been ‘deserted’ by Elizabeth Montagu (one of the ‘two fair Deserters’ described here), as she had subscribed to Yearsley’s next volume regardless of her falling out with More, and there were others who had kept faith with Yearsley during the turmoil. Publishing by subscription therefore functioned to prove to Yearsley that there was sufficient demand for her work. The subscriber’s list would also have been a very public demonstration to More that Yearsley was perfectly capable of continuing her career independent of protection; the very convention which had showcased the support for More’s charitable venture was now being used to show how unnecessary that venture had been.

Although the choice of publishing method allows Yearsley to make this public statement, it is not completely convincing. Madeleine Kahn has argued that ‘[i]n Yearsley’s poems [we can see] the multiple subjectivities – or provisional selves – which her work with More gave her access to, and which allow Yearsley to express in her poems the perspectives of both the milkwoman and the poet, at different times.’⁸⁷ It is perhaps ironic that had Yearsley been allowed access to the *Bluestockings*, as it seems

⁸⁵ Hess, p. 57.

⁸⁶ Robert Fairfax to Wilmer Gossip, 5 February 1789, Felsenstein ‘The Politics of Patronage’ II, 48.

⁸⁷ Kahn, ‘Hannah More and Ann Yearsley: A Collaboration Across the Class Divide’, 204.

was her ardent wish, fewer of these various subject positions would have been open to her.

The continuing dialogue between More and Yearsley, in 'Mrs Yearsley's Narrative', the 'Prefatory Letter' or *The Bas-Bleu* is indicative of an ongoing battle between the two women to assert their right to have control over literary production. For both, the stakes are high. With the publicity attached to the outcome of their continuing dispute, its resolution inevitable has consequences for literary culture as a whole. If More is in the right, patrons are entitled to edit and control the productions of their protégées, to decide what constitutes poetry, and who may be a poet. If Yearsley is in the right, patrons certainly have a role to play in furthering the development of their protégées' careers, but a limited one. The rights of the protégée to be recognised as a professional writer, not a philanthropic project, must be acknowledged.

Indeed, the breakdown of the relationship between Yearsley and More was far from the end either of the connection between the two women, or of Yearsley's search for an intimate friend who would see and treat her as an intellectual equal. The 1787 volume of poetry was published under the auspices of Frederick Hervey, 4th Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry, a man who had a long tradition of patronising the arts. However, his eccentricity was well known, and though Yearsley dedicated a number of the poems in the volume to him, including a heartrending pair on the christening, and then death, of the son named after his mother's patron, eventually it was to the shadowy figure of William Gossip that Yearsley turned. The nature of this relationship has only recently been investigated, primarily by Frank Felsenstein in two recent articles.⁸⁸ Gossip was a minor landowner in Thorpe Arch, near Wetherby in Yorkshire,

⁸⁸ See Frank Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage', parts I and II.

and Felsenstein records Yearsley's dedication of poems to this new figure. Gossip patronised Yearsley, though on a smaller scale to the Earl of Bristol, and Felsenstein focuses especially on her poem, 'To Mr. G_____ who declined making himself known to the Author':

In terms of the politics of patronage, it is a personal plea, couched in *carpe diem* terms by Yearsley, for a relationship between poet and benefactor that can be grounded in intellectual friendship rather than financial obligation. It is a fairly audacious attempt to redefine the nature of patronage by cutting through its inherent hierarchical assumptions and arguing that 'sympathy of soul' is far more vital to the relationship than social background. As Yearsley herself admits, she may be 'a rustic stranger' and 'one of trifling cast,' yet what she is seeking in her anonymous patron is a friendship that transcends their social difference.⁸⁹

It is clear that Yearsley continues to seek from her subsequent patrons what she sought from the first, and contrary to what some critics have written, Yearsley did not vanish into obscurity once the initial interest over her, as the woman who had stood up so proudly to her patron, had faded. Although, as Felsenstein describes, the number of people subscribing to her work clearly falls, this is explained in terms of a shift in the means by which Yearsley found support for her work:

All three of Yearsley's volumes of poetry were published by subscription, with well over a thousand subscribers for *Poems on Several Occasions* (1785), just under five hundred for *Poems on Various Subjects* (1787), and one hundred and twenty-eight listed names for *The Rural Lyre* (1796) [...] As [Mary] Waldron comments, the reduction in the number of subscribers to each subsequent volume 'may reflect increasing confidence on the part of the publisher in the saleability of her work.' It also suggests that direct support from literary patrons made it less necessary for Yearsley to seek additional subscribers for her later volumes.⁹⁰

Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus suggest another reason for the apparent switch from subscribers to regular, small-scale, literary patrons. Subscription, they explain,

⁸⁹ Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage', 356.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 384.

'could be the most lucrative method [of publishing], but it was demeaning, especially for women, since it required direct solicitation for payment,' and this may have been distasteful for a woman wishing to construct an identity for herself which did not depend on such obvious giving of money.⁹¹ In this respect, patronage would seem to have distinct advantages. Although there were alternatives available to Yearsley, it is significant that her poetry was always published by subscription, but that the subscription was raised chiefly by a patron. The patron may have been wrong for Yearsley in 1785, but the amalgamation of patronage and publication by subscription seems to have been to her liking. More's patronage had been a painful experience, but it is clear that patronage itself offered possibilities, both for Yearsley and any other writer who declined direct negotiations with the public or the publisher.

Post-More, Yearsley was not 'continually thwarted in utterance' as some have supposed,⁹² but continued to build a publishing career, exploring a variety of genres and writing some overtly political works, including poems following the executions of the King and Queen of France decrying their murders. Neither, as I suggested at the beginning of the chapter, did the public breakdown with More mean the end of all connections between the two women. The competition between them really came to the fore the following year. Both women were consciously Bristol poets, though Yearsley was strictly a resident of Clifton, then a small way outside the city. As one of the major ports for conducting the slave-trade in Britain, Bristol rapidly became the focus for much of the campaigning prior to the reading of William Wilberforce's Bill to regulate the trade. In 1788, Hannah More was approached by the Abolition Committee and was asked to write a poem in order to ensure the highest possible profile for the Bill as the

⁹¹ Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus, 'Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 17 (1987), 191-207 (193).

⁹² J.M.S. Tompkins, *The Polite Marriage: Eighteenth Century Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 59.

result of her prominent position in literary circles. More published the apparently rushed *Slavery: A Poem* as a result. At almost the same time, Yearsley published her own attack on the controversial issue, *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade*. So well known was the rivalry between the two women that Eliza Dawson, a young neighbour of Yearsley's new patron William Gossip, published a poem of her own in the *Bristol Gazette* at the end of May that year:

Two *Sapphos* in one city bred and born,
 Sufficient a whole kingdom to adorn.
 Tis hard to say, which we must most admire,
More's polish'd muse, or *Yearsley's* muse of fire.
Yearsley self-taught, uncramp'd by art or rhyme,
 Is forcible, pathetic, and sublime -
 But *More's* trim muse subdues the critic's heart,
 And leads it captive, by the rules of art.⁹³

Dawson's decision to describe both More and Yearsley as '*Sapphos*' is replete with meaning, as Margaret Reynolds' recent study of Sappho as woman and symbol has suggested. Reynolds proposes that 'those women who receive [Sappho's] confidences are her own kind, other intellectual women [...] other women poets.'⁹⁴ To label More and Yearsley as '*Sapphos*' is to make them part of a long-enduring poetic tradition, a tradition which, Reynolds argues, became closely associated with the sublime by writers in the eighteenth century. As Reynolds notes, it was 'the re-discovery of the notion of "the sublime" in art that made Sappho into a popular icon in the eighteenth century.'⁹⁵ Dawson's poem relies heavily on the eighteenth-century values attached to Sappho in her description of Yearsley and More. Their poetry, because it is of this tradition, is

⁹³ *The Bristol Gazette*, May 29th, 1788. The poem was inscribed only with Eliza Dawson's initials at the time of its original publication.

⁹⁴ Margaret Reynolds, *The Sappho History* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 46.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 39.

imbued with power, feeling, and a moral purpose, as becomes poetry urging the abolition of the slave trade. Yet there is also the potential for an additional charge to Dawson's words. Reynolds, writing about Mary Robinson's use of Sappho in her poetry, notes: 'Under the many layers of her guise as Sappho [Robinson] succeeds in writing a love poem by a woman to a woman.'⁹⁶ It is possible that Yearsley and More are performing the same 'sleight of hand', to use Reynold's phrase, as Robinson; their political poems are written as much to each other as they are to the people of Bristol, or the members of parliament the poems each claims to address.⁹⁷

With the ability to create so many potential meanings from a single noun, Dawson continues to employ her words with great care and skill throughout her poem. She clearly acknowledges More's abilities, but subtly undermines her status by describing More leading the 'critic's heart' *'captive'* (italics mine). It is difficult to imagine a more emotionally fraught term to use in a piece dealing with anti slave-trade poems. By having More 'subduing' 'the critic's heart' Dawson initially seems to be praising her skill in verse. However, coupled with the word 'captive', there is a sense that force is involved. She refers to 'More's trim Muse' which despite a lack of an explicit reference, I would argue is an inference that the influence of the Bluestocking circle is responsible. The word 'trim' is significant in this argument, suggesting propriety, firmness and elegance. A 'trim Muse' is therefore refined, socially upstanding and respectable. As Gary Kelly has stated, '[t]hrough family and professional connections, the Bluestockings were also involved in [...] the management of the state.'⁹⁸ More, then, potentially has those running the country on her side: an extremely powerful persuasive tool for commanding the critics, Dawson suggests. In an

⁹⁶ Reynolds, p. 46.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁹⁸ Gary Kelly, 'General Introduction – Bluestocking Feminism and Writing in Context: The Bluestocking Moment', in *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785 vol. 1 Elizabeth Montagu*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), pp. xx-liv (p. ix).

interesting parallel, Yearsley's use of force is a positive aspect of her work. It is her poetry that is forcible, not Yearsley herself, in contrast to More, who uses force to coerce the public.

Dawson's clever manipulation of language is most fully seen in her use of the word 'art'. The poem evokes an image of the critic being led by a chain which Dawson figures as being the 'rules of art'. Yearsley, though, is 'unclamp'd by art or rhyme', a phrase which has a dual meaning. The first, and most obvious, is that her verse is more simple, rustic, less refined and more plain speaking. The second is that Yearsley is 'unclamp'd' by art because she is not subject to the influence wielded by More and her circle. It is not Yearsley who is in thrall to the force More is able to exert, and it is not Yearsley who is slave to her demands. With her 'muse of fire', Yearsley is figured as both burning for her cause, and destroying the ties of influence and patronage that bound her to More. In a poem that initially seems even-handed, Dawson draws attention to some far-reaching social concerns, and also demonstrates that the nature of the relationship between More and Yearsley was such, and so well known, that the audience would have been able to understand the multiple meanings of the opening line. As a means of revealing the dynamics of this relationship, Dawson's poem is explosive in its implications.

Dawson was not the only one to put the two women side by side in public. In *The Monthly Review* for March 1788, the reviewer placed the poems of More and Yearsley alongside each other, a further indication that a rivalry between these two women following their disagreement was understood. Significant within the review is the writer's use of benevolence to describe the actions of the two women. Lactilla, he says, has 'joined the benevolent band', whereas More is already a full member.⁹⁹ In a

⁹⁹ *The Monthly Review*, 78 (March 1788), 246.

phrase that seems to damn by faint praise, he also allows that the poem, ‘on the whole, does not disgrace [Yearsley’s] former works, though it is by no means free from faults.’¹⁰⁰ More, he writes, ‘appears in a more elegant garb [...] in strains not less persuasive, though perhaps less vigorous and energetic than those of the more animated Lactilla.’¹⁰¹ The reviewer seems to be highlighting the differences between Yearsley’s patronised works and her most recent efforts, without the guidance of More, suggesting that not only were both women intensely interested in what the other was doing, but that the class dynamic between them was far from settled. The writer in *The Monthly Review* draws attention to the class-differentiated styles in the two poems, which have wider ramifications for More’s reasons for publishing on behalf of the abolitionist movement. The next chapter will explore these reasons, and also examine how the altered, but still existing, relationship between these two women, manifests itself in their anti slave-trade poems. We have so far seen that patronage was a fluid form of professional publishing which had great creative potential if the partnership was successful. I will now go on to consider how its failure and collapse affect our understanding of how More and Yearsley became involved in the abolition debate, and, more generally, how professional authorship responds under personal and political pressures.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 246.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, 246.

Chapter 2

Hannah More, Ann Yearsley and the Abolitionist movement

The successful introduction in 1788 of Sir William Dolben's bill to limit the number of slaves in British ships was the first parliamentary victory for the newly-formed Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. The event prompted Helen Maria Williams to publish *A Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade*, a patriotic celebration of this demonstration of Britain's capacity for mercy and reason:

BRITAIN! the noble, blest decree
 That soothes despair, is fram'd by Thee!
 Thy powerful arm has interpos'd,
 And *one* dire scene for ever clos'd;
 Its horror shall no more belong
 To that foul drama, deep with wrong.
 Oh first of EUROPE'S polish'd lands,
 To ease the Captive's iron bands!
 Long as thy glorious annals shine,
 This proud distinction shall be thine.¹

Earlier in the year, abolitionists had been mobilised to 'soften up public opinion', as Anne Stott has phrased it, ahead of the parliamentary debate of Dolben's Bill.² John Newton, a former slaver converted to Christianity and now a reverend, published his *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, based on his experiences as a young man on a slave ship. His account of the wretchedness of life on board such a vessel was a powerful one, cataloguing beatings, rapes, and one incident where 'more than a hundred grown slaves [were] thrown into the sea [...] when fresh water was scarce [...] to fix the loss upon the Underwriters, which otherwise, had they died on board, must

¹ Helen Maria Williams, *A Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulation the Slave Trade* (London: T. Cadell, 1788), ll. 31-40.

² Anne Stott, *Hannah More: the First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 92.

have fallen upon the Owners of the vessel.³ Few writers could emulate the force of Newton's personal revulsion at activities he had been party to, or the strength of his faith found whilst he worked on a slaving ship. Instead, Newton was only one writer involved in a great 'rush of activity' to support the parliamentary motions against the slave trade.⁴ As Newton went into print, so too did his friend Hannah More, at the request of the Committee. *Slavery: A Poem*, although not written as the result of personal experience, shared a common language with Newton's account. Speaking through sensibility of the consequences for Britain if the trade were not abolished, both works demonstrated what Anne Stott terms 'a patriotic providentialism that took it for granted that Britain was a chosen nation with a special destiny.'⁵ Alongside this patriotism, both Newton and More relied heavily on their evangelical Christianity to demonstrate the wrongs of the slave trade. It had been their mutual conversion to evangelicalism which had begun their friendship, and More was 'profoundly influenced' by 'the old African blasphemer', as Newton termed himself.⁶ Anne Stott describes More's evangelicalism as being rooted in the belief that 'because human beings were fallen creatures incapable of rescuing themselves, salvation was gained not through intellectual assent to Christian doctrine, not even through a life of strict morality, but through faith alone.'⁷ The combination of Newton's religious guidance (More at this point was continuing to explore her developing evangelical beliefs), and his increasing concern with the slave trade, meant that More's faith was inextricably linked to abolition. For More, as for many, slavery was incompatible with the teachings of Christ, and she felt as others did that a such a trade being perpetuated by Christians

³ John Newton, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* (London: J. Buckland and J. Johnson, 1788), p. 19.

⁴ Stott, p. 92.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 93.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 82.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 81.

would damage the church's reputation in Africa and the Caribbean, where missionaries were becoming active. As part of the wider drive to push Dolben's Bill through parliament, John Wesley, as Anne Stott notes, 'delivered a fierce anti-slavery sermon at the New Rooms in Bristol.'⁸

Amidst the business of publishing and preaching within the upper reaches of the evangelical and Methodist circles where More's poem had been published 'handsomely bound, priced at half a crown' to influence the members in parliament,⁹ Ann Yearsley had published her own poem of protest against the slave trade. An altogether more humble affair, Yearsley's poem was distributed in part by her young friend Eliza Dawson, who wrote to her neighbour in Yorkshire, Wilmer Gossip, that 'I have sent to M^r Shiells for 50 copies of her poem on the Slave Trade.'¹⁰ Tim Burke has rather waspishly commented that Yearsley's is 'a more effective piece of rhetoric than the rather dry theological critique of slavery found in Hannah More's anti-slavery poem.'¹¹ Excluded from the circles in which More moved, Yearsley instead addressed her poem directly to Bristol; to the people of the city and those merchants who were opposed to Dolben's Bill, and to the Earl of Bristol himself. With the Earl's name prominently displayed on the frontispiece, Yearsley's dedicatory letter to her patron is revealing:

My Lord,
Being convinced that your Ideas of Justice and Humanity are not confined to *one* Race, I have endeavoured to lead you to the Indian Coast. My Intention is not to cause that Anguish in

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 92.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁰ Eliza Dawson to Wilmer Gossip, 23rd March 1788, in 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage: The Thorp Arch Archive: Part II' by Frank Felsenstein, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 22:1 (2003) 13-56 (18).

¹¹ Tim Burke, ed., introduction to *Selected Poems of Ann Yearsley* (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2003), p. xvii.

your Bosom that powerless Compassion ever gives; yet, my Vanity is flattered, when I but *fancy* that your Lordship feels as I do.¹²

Yearsley may not have been asked to publish her poem in support of the cause in parliament, but her dedicatory letter demonstrates her right to join the debate. The humble and the great are shown to share a moral revulsion of the slave trade, but more importantly, Yearsley feels as her patron does. Yearsley thereby confirms her right to publish on this topic, and also makes public the fact that there is a concord between patron and protégée; Yearsley is declaring a shared sensibility with her aristocratic patron, a barb indeed for her former middling-class patron with whom the whole of Bristol by this point knew there was no such harmony of feeling. As Tim Burke has commented, “[t]he appearance of these two “competing” abolitionist texts in the space of just a few weeks inevitably served to widen further the breach between Bristol’s principle female poets.”¹³

For Ann Yearsley, the very act of contributing to the abolitionist argument demonstrated her right to be part of a wider literary culture and, as such, continued her textual rivalry with More. This later stage in their relationship is a moment where political concerns, personal ambitions and publishing choices combine. This conjunction is an opportunity to examine how able women writers are to respond to these factors, and how important the choice of publishing method is to a successful engagement with national debate. Indeed, with both women choosing to publish using a loose version of subscription, with no formal lists of subscribers drawn up in advance, and therefore no guarantee that there would be a market for either poem, both Yearsley and More were, in a way, competing to see who had a better sense of Bristol’s mood. By choosing not to sell the copyright of their work to a publisher, both

¹² *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* by Ann Yearsley (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1788), p. 1.

¹³ Burke, *Selected Poems*, p. xvii.

writers have placed themselves in the hands of their readers, whose purchase of either poem confers upon that writer the privilege of speaking for the reader, and the entitlement to exist as a professional author. Earlier, we saw Ann Yearsley choosing to publish *Poems on Various Subjects* by subscription as a way of demonstrating the viability of her career after her break with More. By choosing an unusual form of subscription publishing for her abolition poetry, Yearsley is again demonstrating the viability of her career: she has no need of the guarantees offered by having a list of subscribers in advance of publication. It is also possible that Yearsley is making a statement about the circle of friends she has acquired since she broke from More: they are the equals of More's influential acquaintances when it comes to recruiting subscribers. This would be especially important to Yearsley as many of those supporting More would have been the same people who had abandoned Yearsley in 1785. Subscription publishing, this chapter will argue, becomes a powerful tool during the abolition debate, with particular symbolism for Hannah More and Ann Yearsley. I will also argue that as Hannah More's career develops, her personal circumstances allow her to step further and further away from the normal methods of publishing, with consequences for the sort of material More seeks to have printed, and her sense of her own professional identity.

As a major political and social movement, the abolitionist debate provoked contributions throughout society, from both supporters and opponents of the slave trade. Teachers, politicians, plantation owners, ex-slaver captains, scientists and poets all published on the topic, as did a number of anonymous writers, producing pieces of poetry, letter sequences and tracts. The abolition movement had been growing in size for a number of years, and 1787 saw the formation of the London Committee. Particularly prominent within the abolition movement were Quakers, Calvinists,

Unitarians, and the more conservative Evangelicals with their Anglican reformist agenda. As a member of the highly influential and overtly evangelical Clapham Sect, Hannah More was at the centre of much of the abolition debate. As well as William Wilberforce, other members included Thomas Clarkson, winner of a university competition for his essay on slavery, John Newton, the Wesley brothers, and William Cowper.

Though surrounded by illustrious colleagues, More's sex rendered her own position as a publishing woman especially privileged. Clare Midgley quotes Ignatius C. Lahore, a family friend of More's correspondent and confidant Lady Middleton as saying 'the abolition of the slave trade was...the work of a *woman*'. Writing in response to this comment, Midgley asks:

How is such a high assessment of the power of feminine influence to be interpreted? It is tempting to simply dismiss it as an example of male chivalry. However, the praise accords with the importance which evangelicals attached to women's role as guardians of religion and morality, an attitude which encouraged men to take heed of women's views on a topic such as slavery.¹⁴

More's selection by the Committee to publicly support Wilberforce's Bill illustrates Midgley's point, and was part of a wider cultural movement rooted in sensibility that began to see women as the guardians of morality.¹⁵ Increasingly, women were thought to have the capacity for social reform, both at home and abroad, not least through their power as consumers. One of the most famous symbols of the abolition movement were the china figures produced by Josiah Wedgwood in 1787, first of a male slave and subsequently of a female slave, bearing the phrase 'Am I Not a *Woman* and A Sister?' As G. J. Barker Benfield writes, '[t]hese figures asked the same question sentimental

¹⁴ Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 16.

¹⁵ See Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

fiction asked on behalf of women, and stood for the possibility that sensibility expressed in the home could be an instrument for reform.¹⁶ Charlotte Sussman develops this argument, suggesting that '[a]bolitionists took seriously the efficacy of moral influence, and emphasized its conjunction with the female capacity for compassion; they explicitly attempted to harness these qualities as tools for changing the colonial world.'¹⁷ The Abolition Committee had therefore chosen a representative with perfect credentials. As a writer, More already had the ability to make the case well for the abolition movement, but as a woman, she would be granted a moral authority even beyond that inherent in the cause. Yearsley's position was not quite so clear. Although as another female abolitionist the privileged position was open to her, as we have seen Yearsley had not long since publicly rejected sensibility, urging it to 'be gone', and claiming:

[Indifference] I'd rather lose myself with thee, and share
 Thine happy indolence, for one short hour,
 Than live of Sensibility the tool
 For endless ages. Oh! her points have pierc'd
 My soul, till, like a sponge, it drinks up woe.¹⁸

Sensibility is what has left her open to great hurt by More. To accept the position granted to her by sensibility would leave her similarly exposed a second time. Yearsley's appeal to indifference was also a deliberate move to reject what More stood for and to then embrace sensibility is to weaken that opposition. Yearsley's poem does not seem to find a way of completely reconciling these conflicting elements, though her opening remarks as one of the enslaved, rather than as an external moral voice, serve in part to

¹⁶ G.J. Barker Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 213.

¹⁷ Charlotte Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713-1833* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 123.

¹⁸ Ann Yearsley, 'To Indifference', *Poems on Various Subjects in Selected Poems* [1787], ed. by Tim Burke (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2003, p. 20, l. 43 and ll. 38-42.

distinguish between More's engagement with sensibility and Yearsley's. In any event, it is apparent that Yearsley was unable to access all the opportunities available to More when calling for abolition.

As well as making use of a writer who could command the power of sensibility, the Abolition Committee also lent that sensibility a political edge. The target audience of *Slavery: a Poem* was clearly those who were to vote on Wilberforce's Bill: the men of parliament. Thus through the conventions of sensibility, women are granted the ability to influence men at both a domestic and a national level. As Barker-Benfield notes, sensibility's 'fundamental intention was to reshape men.'¹⁹ However, More's religious orientation may have been key. Although the conventions of sensibility are being utilised on a national level by the committee, Paul Langford argues that 'the new sensibility was not sufficient to bring about change. It needed the somewhat harder core of moral earnestness provided by the evangelicals to turn it into a weapon of real weight and effectiveness.'²⁰ To take this argument at face value would suggest that Yearsley, writing in the mode of sensibility but without this 'harder core', would find her words are simply not incisive enough. However, as the language of her reviewer makes plain, Yearsley's argument did not suffer from a lack of force. He writes 'we think, that, in the heat of the invective, she mingles too many curses and execrations with her arguments; so that her poetry is apt to degenerate into something like scolding.'²¹ If More burns with evangelical zeal, Yearsley appears incandescent with righteous anger, though not necessarily on behalf of the slaves she writes of.

¹⁹ Barker-Benfield, p. 263.

²⁰ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 518.

²¹ *The Monthly Review*, 78 (1788), 246.

Involvement in the abolitionist movement was also for Hannah More a complicated affair. The campaign against slavery was a cause beloved by liberals, but on this occasion, More's instinctive conservative opinions were subsumed by her belief in the equality of all before God. However, the example of an earlier attempt at charity serves to raise questions about the effectiveness of More's assistance. In 1781, More had been moved by stories of 'The Lady of the Haystack', or 'Louisa' as she was to become known. A local celebrity, rumours of foreign and possibly royal blood (she was variously reputed to be half-Italian and half-German, or the illegitimate half-sister of Marie Antoinette²²), brought Louisa to the attention of a wider audience. Hannah More paid to have Louisa moved (into an asylum) from the haystack in which she had made her residence for four years, and maintained her until her death in 1801. More's recent biographer, Anne Stott, points to the connection between Yearsley and Louisa: 'The pattern established in her dealings with "Louisa" [...] repeated itself, and in her impulsive, well-meaning, managing fashion, she rushed in to help.'²³ Stott also notes that More 'could easily have walked away; instead she devoted time, money, and emotional energy in trying to alleviate her condition.'²⁴ Stott is right to note that More devoted a considerable amount of her time to charitable projects, but her use of words such as 'impulsive', 'rushed' and 'managed' indicates a lack of consideration on More's part when becoming involved, which leads ultimately to questions over the success of More's earnest desire to help.

However, involvement with abolition was different. The role of sole support for those in need, played for the benefit of Yearsley and 'Louisa', was excluded by the number of people involved in the anti-slavery movement, who were already receiving

²² Stott, p. 55.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 71

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 57

considerable support from a variety of sources. Indeed, More's intervention in the abolition debate could not be further removed from the 'impulsive' urge of some of her other projects. More undoubtedly embraced the opportunity to assist the case of abolition in parliament, but her religious devotion led her to spot in the campaign an opportunity to promote these beliefs to a much wider, and literally captive, audience. 'The Sorrows of Yamba or, the Negro Woman's Lament', published as part of More's *Cheap Repository* tracts in 1795, demonstrates the culmination of her conversionary zeal. By this time, the abolition campaign had been active for nearly two decades with few legislative victories to its name. Focussed less on the inequities of slavery than on the potential for missionaries in both the Caribbean and in Africa to spread the Christian message, 'The Sorrows of Yamba' is a poem which seems to be conflicted about whether the freeing of slaves is a valid goal in its own right, or whether it should be used as an opportunity to swell the numbers of the faithful. The purpose was not to influence the great and the good to vote for a Bill in parliament as was the case with her 1788 work, *Slavery: A Poem*, but to influence ordinary people of the working and middling classes towards accepting their respective stations and duties through trust in the providence of God. Nor were the tracts meant to generate a profit for More. Instead, her position as a comfortable, professional writer surrounded by connections in the uppermost regions of government allowed her to publish the tracts at a loss in order that they reached as wide an audience as possible. In these circumstances, there are occasions when More's argument for the removal of slavery is lost as she pushes instead her conversion message.

Deirdre Coleman has argued that such blurring between writing for the benefit of the slaves, and promotion of a more personal agenda is common where women become involved in the abolition movement. Rather than seeing women abolitionists

as a force for good within the movement, Coleman suggests that these women are seeking 'to capitalize upon fashionable anti-slavery rhetoric for their own political objectives [and they] only increased the general murkiness of abolitionist rhetoric', the effect of which, she says, is 'most evident in their employment of the emotive but clichéd analogy between their own disenfranchised lot and the plight of enslaved Africans.'²⁵ Although Coleman's broader argument is not without flaws, the suggestion that some women appropriated the campaign for their own ends does seem to have merit.

Coleman identifies More's second work to engage with slavery, *The White Slave Trade*, published in 1792, as one of the texts by women abolitionists which makes use of anti-slavery arguments for its own purposes. Indeed, More in this piece names 'FASHION' as the chief agent for the enslavement of white women; these women, More claims, are forced to follow 'Fashion' to the detriment of society because they are 'separated from their husbands, dragged from their children, until these last are old enough to be also engaged as slaves in the same labour.'²⁶ The similarity in language between this work and *Slavery: A Poem*, where she condemns the slavers for destroying families is obvious. More connects her two arguments deliberately, paralleling what she sees as the plight of the white woman with that of her black sister: 'the sable complexion of the negro affords no justifiable grounds for his being compelled to slavery, so, on the other hand, it is presumed, that the mere circumstance of a fair skin is not a crime of sufficient magnitude to justify such grievous oppression in the case of the White Slave.'²⁷ This argument may seem crass to the modern reader, and Coleman's

²⁵ Deirdre Coleman, 'Conspicuous Consumption: White Abolitionism and English Women's Protest Writing in the 1790s', *ELH*, 61 (1994), 341-361 (341).

²⁶ Hannah More, *The White Slave Trade* (1792) in *The Works of Hannah More*, 18 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1818), vol. 1, p. 393.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 392.

response is to suggest that it ‘strikes us as obscene.’²⁸ However, such is the obviousness of the connection between the two types of slave being made by More that the apparent clumsiness of argument is actually part of an ironic attack. Indeed, in the 1818 edition of her collected works, *Slavery* (reissued as *The Black Slave Trade* soon after it was published in 1788) is placed directly before *The White Slave Trade*. Strategically set alongside each other, the reader is expected to take them together. By opening *The White Slave Trade* with an ironic and sometimes satirical tone, More enters into an understanding with the reader. Her project is one of subversion, using the connections with the black slave trade to highlight the more figurative enslavement of white middle and upper-class women. Far from being ‘obscene’, it is the institution of ‘Fashion’ which More seeks to subvert and not the reader’s perceptions of the seriousness of the Atlantic slave trade. More expects her readers to see the slave trade as the more grave social problem, but by utilising the same arguments for both slave trades, ensures that the restrictions upon women dictated by ‘Fashion’ are seen in a far more severe light than an isolated attack could have achieved. More’s project here is a risky one, anticipating that the reader will be able to see the connections without being morally repulsed. However, when she writes that ‘in some respects, [white women’s] condition is worse than that of their African brethren, for if they are less restricted in the article of food, they are more abridged in that of clothing and rest’,²⁹ More is not suggesting that ‘the young English woman is a greater sufferer than the African’ as Coleman argues,³⁰ but is attempting to make the reader realise that the ‘young English woman’ is a sufferer at all. The reservations Coleman expresses about More’s motivations towards

²⁸ Coleman, 354.

²⁹ More, *The White Slave Trade*, p. 393.

³⁰ Coleman, 354.

the abolition movement are, despite this, worth bearing in mind, especially given the reaction to More's first anti-slavery poem from the supporters of her former protégée.

Within the correspondence between Wilmer Gossip and Eliza Dawson are indications that *Slavery: a Poem* has an object other than providing aid to the African slaves in mind, as indeed does Yearsley's offering to the abolition cause. Dawson directs Gossip to:

tell [Mrs Yearsley] I have sent to Mr Shiells for 50 copies of her poem on the Slave Trade – and say I'm determined from the sweet spirit of *contradiction* to like *Miss Mores* [sic] *far better* – her last production gave such general satisfaction that I do not in the least doubt to dispose of these.³¹

Dawson makes it clear that the two women are in competition, despite the light tone of the letter. Dawson's humorous comment that she will 'like *Miss Mores far better*' suggests that beyond the friendly joking More and Yearsley are determined to establish a consideration of which of them is 'liked better' by their audience and a direct comparison is deliberately invited. The confidence felt by Yearsley's supporters in the superiority of her verse makes possible Dawson's joke about preferring More's poem. Yet we must not lose sight of the fact that Eliza Dawson clearly refers to the commercial value of Yearsley's work. It is, fundamentally, a commodity to be 'produced' and 'disposed of'. As well as celebrating its artistic qualities, Dawson emphasises the importance of its marketability. What she does not mention here is its political content. Though Yearsley clearly meant it to make a political statement, the poem's roles as artistic vehicle, mode of attack and commercial object seem, at least for Dawson, to be more important.

³¹ Eliza Dawson to Wilmer Gossip, 23rd March, 1788, in 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage: The Thorp Arch Archive: Part II' by Frank Felsenstein in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 22:1 (2003) 13-56, (18), original emphasis.

As we have seen, More's evangelical beliefs were central to the way in which she conducted herself towards the abolition debate, and they certainly gave her work a 'moral earnestness', to use Paul Langford's phrase. For believers in evangelical doctrine like More, John Newton and William Wilberforce, abolitionism sat neatly with their faith on two counts. Firstly, their duty to alleviate the suffering of those less fortunate than themselves was catered for through campaigning for improved conditions in the colonies. Secondly, the abolition of the slave trade would help to dispel some of the corrupting influence of trade from England, promoting the Evangelical project of the moral regeneration of the population in order to rebuild the Church from within. Roger Anstey deals with the particular connection between Evangelicals and anti-slavery thought:

Evangelical theology [...marked] down slavery, and in the immediate [future], the slave trade, as the object of attack. An important consequence followed: the heightened Evangelical sense of providential judgement on national wickedness came necessarily to be focussed on the slave trade as the most crying national sin [...] The presentation of the slave trade as an affront to the moral government of God, and as an evil which had necessarily invited his wrath and which must be ended lest still worse national tribulations befall, henceforth became an important theme in Evangelical thought and writing.³²

The evangelicals were not alone in these beliefs. Other religious groups, including the Unitarians who could scarcely be more different from the Anglican evangelists in many areas of their doctrine, believed in the need for benevolence, and saw it as a duty of the better off. Both Hannah More and the prominent Unitarian Anna Laetitia Barbauld give testimony to this aspect of their religious faiths in their work.

Linda Colley similarly holds faith to be crucial to the formation of the abolition movement. However, the faith Colley is concerned with is not that of a few

³² Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 193.

select, well educated, people, but of the entire nation. Crucial to her understanding of the role religious beliefs played in people's responses to the slave trade is the recent defeat of the British at the hands of the American colonists, an event which Colley argues provided an impetus for the need for moral improvement in Britain; abolition presented the ideal challenge. They were, Colley writes, enthusiastic 'for virtually any change, in fact, that might prevent a similar national humiliation in the future':

[...] Britons retained a strong belief in Providence. Just as they had attributed their successes in earlier wars to Divine favour for the leading Protestant nation, many of them now sought to explain what appeared an almost inexplicable defeat at the hands of the colonists by reference to their own failings in the sight of God. They had been corrupt and presumptuous, and they had warred against fellow Protestants. And they had been duly punished. In this mood, the slave trade, so obviously questionable in moral terms, and so productive of worldly profit and luxury, seemed far more of a liability [...] For this overwhelmingly Protestant culture, anti-slavery became a particularly rigorous contract with the Almighty. If Great Britain prospered, then clearly it must persevere with the good work. But if it failed, it must still persevere, in the hope that this might serve as an atonement.³³

For Colley, a strong and perhaps reinvigorated sense of a religiously based patriotism provided the basis from which the prominent campaigners and Dissenters could set about attacking the slave trade. As Hannah More declares in *Slavery: A Poem*, 'In all the love of HOME and FREEDOM reign'.³⁴ William Cowper's argument against slavery in *The Task* similarly revolves around appeals to patriotism:

Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs
Receive our air, that moment they are free,
They touch our country and their shackles fall.
That's noble, and bespeaks a nation proud
And jealous of the blessing. Spread it then,

³³ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 353.

³⁴ Hannah More, *Slavery: A Poem* (London: T. Cadell, 1788), p. 9, l.120. All subsequent references to this poem will be made in the body of the text after the relevant quotation.

And let it circulate through ev'ry vein
 Of all your empire. That where Britain's pow'r
 Is felt, mankind may feel her mercy too.³⁵

Using what he calls 'Britain's pow'r' in order to flatter those with influence, Cowper makes a deliberate play on those patriotic feelings described by Colley and revealed by More. By equating power with benevolence, Cowper is able to satisfy British imperial ambition and the need for Christian charity. However, where Colley suggests a broad religious faith underpinning the wider movement, it was a very specific set of beliefs that characterised many of those who published on the subject of abolition: equality before God, a wider belief in natural rights and a duty to do good to those less fortunate than yourself.

These beliefs were held by many dissenters, in particular the Unitarians, whose language of equality would become the language of abolition over the course of two decades. Excluded from many public offices, equality was a central concern for many dissenters, but few writers were more concerned with these issues than Anna Laetitia Barbauld, a Unitarian who, during the course of her literary career urged these beliefs on behalf of children, the poor and the enslaved. In her 1792 prose work, *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert's Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship*, Barbauld writes:

Here [during public worship] the poor man learns that, in spite of the distinctions of rank, and the apparent inferiority of his condition, all the true goods of life, all that men dare petition for when in the presence of their Maker - a sound mind, a healthful body, and daily bread, - lie

³⁵ William Cowper, *The Task, a Poem in Six Books* (London: J. Johnson, 1785), Book II, 'The Time-Piece', p. 47.

within the scope of his own hopes and endeavours; and that in the large inheritance to come, his expectations are no less ample than theirs.³⁶

'The Mouse's Petition', published as part of her 1773 collection *Poems*, is the embodiment of the principles which would be central to abolition. As Barbauld has the mouse say to Priestley,

The well taught philosophic mind
To all compassion gives;
Casts round the world an equal eye,
And feels for all that lives.³⁷

Barbauld, through the mouse, rejoices in compassion and sensibility, urging these qualities as characteristics of well educated and broad minds, such as Priestley's. These are all attributes to which Barbauld suggests we should aspire, ably connecting the plight of one small mouse to the wider world. As Josephine McDonagh has noted, '[t]he separation of private and public acts represented a rupture in Barbauld's moral universe. For her, the domestic provided a model for conceptualising social and economic relations within the nation, and beyond.'³⁸ At the end of the poem, Barbauld makes explicit this connection between the microcosm of the mouse's cage and the macrocosm of human experience. Before she gets there, though, Barbauld ranges through time and a wide variety of philosophic ideas in order to demonstrate how thoroughly the mouse (together, of course, with all those unfortunates who endure captivity of whatever sort) deserves its freedom. She invokes a nationalistic pride in liberty in order to achieve her goal, demanding that

³⁶ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert's Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* [1792], in *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld*, 2 vols., ed. by Lucy Aikin (London: Longman, 1825), II, p. 448.

³⁷ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 'The Mouse's Petition' (1773) in *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 36 (stanza 7).

³⁸ Josephine McDonagh, 'Barbauld's Domestic Economy', *Essays and Studies*, 51 (1998), 62-77 (72).

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.

(p. 36, stanza 3)

Barbauld also claims that Priestley is actually the mouse's host, and therefore has a duty to provide hospitality, before moving between the ancient philosophers and their theories on the origins of the human soul, where she warns Priestley of the potential consequences of killing the mouse:

Beware, lest in the worm you crush
 A brother's soul you find;
 And tremble lest thy luckless hand
 Dislodge a kindred mind.

(p. 37, stanza 9)

Again, the word 'brother' appears, and it carries a special significance. The mouse is more than equal; he is a brother, as are the worshippers in a common Unitarian creed. The figure of the 'Brother' is used by Barbauld in the conclusion of the poem, where she connects the fate of the mouse with the fate that may await any human:

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

(p. 37, stanza 12)

Barbauld shows the mouse and the human as brothers in every sense, sharing the same feelings, the same needs, and in this last stanza, the potential to share the same fate. By releasing the mouse, Priestley, Barbauld suggests, proves himself worthy of the same

benevolence in his moment of need. However, in a final irony, Barbauld footnotes the title of her poem by describing the circumstances of the mouse's capture, stating that it was 'Found in the trap where it had been confined all night by Priestley, for the sake of making experiments with different kinds of air' (p. 36). As Priestley was the discoverer of oxygen, it is reasonable to assume that many other mice died in the cause of this scientific study, the results of which were and have been of great import for humanity. That the enslavement of the mouse should have such profound benefits for the slaver perhaps adds an ironic edge to the poem's proto-abolitionist argument.

By the time More, Yearsley and many other abolitionist writers published their various contributions to the cause in 1788, the arguments of Barbauld's poem had been developed into a far more explicit, and often shocking, description of what it was to be enslaved. They claimed that not only were there no grounds on which it was right to enslave 'brothers' (to use Barbauld's description of the mouse), but the trade was morally damaging to everyone and everything that came into contact with it. Where slaves were figured as fellow human beings suffering at the hands of their 'brothers', many writers also showed England's sons and brothers dying through the pernicious nature of the trade. For every African family who lost a loved one, Hannah More and Ann Yearsley show an English family lamenting their own calamity. Just as Barbauld gives the mouse a voice, thereby preventing the reader from seeing it as an insignificant, expendable animal, so More and Yearsley tell the (mostly fictitious) stories of the slaves. By playing with notions of what it is to be 'savage' in these stories, both women provide an identifiable individual human face for a tragedy involving thousands.

However, the concept of the 'savage', which runs through both *Slavery: A Poem* by More and Yearsley's *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* is greatly complicated by the history of the word's use during the relationship between the two women. Loaded with the sense of challenge bestowed upon it by Yearsley in 1785, the word acquires a new dynamic in this setting. In her original use of the word to describe herself, Yearsley implied that by being a 'savage', on whom More's 'nicest rules are lost', she could claim some form of independence for herself.³⁹ Through the use of the same word in her abolition poetry, Yearsley allows similar possibilities for her characters. At the same time, Yearsley is able to make a claim for the power of earlier figuring herself as a pleading 'savage'; Yearsley, as a 'savage', is in a far better position to understand the situation of the slaves than the inherently exploitative, and somewhat cold, More. Through her birth, Yearsley can speak for a city; through her patronage, she feels she can speak for a continent. Alan Richardson comes to a similar conclusion:

Asserting her independence from More by producing an abolitionist work of her own, Yearsley [...] projects the 'savage' character she had adopted to please More (and with which More eventually came to taunt her) onto a native other, who is seemingly both African and not African, and whose racial status is significantly vague.⁴⁰

Richardson's interpretation of Yearsley's actions suggests that in *Inhumanity* she becomes the 'savage' who forms the centre of the narrative.

In some ways, the way in which Yearsley connects her earlier struggles as a patronised poet with the plight of the African slaves, seems to demonstrate the argument of Deirdre Coleman: the figure of the suffering slave is appropriated so that Yearsley can score points off More. However, I propose that Yearsley's tactics are far more sophisticated than this. Although it is clear that her connections with More are fundamental to her subject position, Yearsley demonstrates that hers is a more

³⁹ Ann Yearsley, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: T. Cadell, 1785), p. 72 (l. 8, l. 10).

⁴⁰ Alan Richardson, 'Darkness Visible: Race and Representation in Bristol Abolitionist Poetry, 1770-1810', in *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830*, ed. by Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 129-147 (p. 141).

enlightened sensibility from the opening of her poem. Richardson points out that the racial origins of Luco, the slave central to Yearsley's poem who suffers a terrible death at the stake, are 'vague'. Although he has some reservations about Yearsley's conflation of African and Indian, this 'vagueness' is key to Yearsley's claim that her argument is superior:

Bristol, thine heart hath throbb'd to glory. – Slaves,
E'en Christian slaves, have shook their chains, and gaz'd
With wonder and amazement on thee. Hence
Ye grov'ling souls, who think the term I give,
Of Christian slave, a paradox! to you
I do not turn, but leave you to conception
Narrow; with that be blest, nor dare to stretch
Your shackled souls along the course of Freedom.⁴¹

No mention is made of the race to which these slaves belong. That they are enslaved is enough, and the term 'Christian slave' raises two destabilising possibilities. The reader is confronted with the existence of white slaves, and with the thought that black slaves are being converted. Where ideas of human ties may not have moved some people, Yearsley forces the reader to consider their obligations to their own countrymen and, more importantly, to their spiritual brothers. Indeed, the colour of a slave is only mentioned when Yearsley begins telling the story of Luco and Incilanda, a specific example of the brutality towards slaves in the colonies. This is in direct contrast to More, who deals exclusively with the enslavement of 'the sable race'. For Yearsley, racial distinctions are unimportant to the campaign to abolish slavery so she does not make them; all forms of slavery are targets.

⁴¹ Yearsley, *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* [1788], in *Ann Yearsley. Selected Poems*, ed. by Tim Burke (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2003), p. 28, ll. 1-8. All subsequent references to this poem will be made in the body of the text following the relevant quotation.

Yearsley develops the uncertainty generated by her treatment of race by undermining the reader's conceptions of both savages and slaves. For several pages, Luco is not identified specifically as a slave, although the circumstances and consequences of his bondage are made explicit. The person Yearsley does identify clearly as a slave, though, is the reader. Moving from the use of syntax to describe the reader as being 'drest in savage guise' (p. 29, l. 32), Yearsley boldly bids them look at the scene she is laying, commanding 'Approach / Thou slave of avarice' (p. 29, ll. 38-9). She continues in this strong vein:

Spare me, thou God
Of all-indulgent Mercy, if I scorn
This gloomy wretch, and turn my tearful eye
To more enlighten'd beings. (p. 29, ll. 40-43)

The cause of Yearsley's turning away is the reader's capacity to witness human suffering without stepping in to relieve it. The reader's distinct lack of sympathy is contrasted with the poet's own sensibility. 'My soul', Yearsley writes, 'with sorrow bends' (p. 29, l. 48). There are echoes of 'Address to Friendship' here, where the reader was witness to the intellectual suffering of a fellow human whom they did nothing to assist. Although Yearsley was provided with financial relief, it would seem that those readers who gave money instead of friendship are no different from the nominal supporters of abolition who bought Wedgwood's slave medallions because they were fashionable.⁴²

The fundamental importance of genuine sympathy with the suffering of the slaves is shown as Yearsley urges the reader, lacking in sensibility, to sell their own flesh if slavery is such a desirable institution. In so doing, Yearsley picks up on a section in More's poem:

⁴² See Claire Midgley, for a more detailed examination of the fashionable status of the abolition campaign's emblems.

See the dire victim torn from social life,
 The shrieking babe, the agonizing wife! 100
 She, wretch forlorn! is dragg'd by hostile hands,
 To distant tyrants sold, in distant lands!
 Transmitted miseries, and successive chains,
 The sole sad heritage her child obtains!
 Ev'n this last wretched boon their foes deny, 105
 To weep together, or together die.
 By felon hands, by one relentless stroke,
 See the fond links of feeling Nature broke!
 The fibres twisting round a parent's heart,
 Torn from their grasp, and bleeding as they part. 110
 (p. 8, ll. 99-110)

More conjures a particularly powerful image of the separation experienced when the slaves are taken from their African homes. All the senses are assailed simultaneously; the reader can hear the baby, feel the 'hostile hands', smell the disease that More implies in 'transmitted miseries'. The reader is almost forced to share these sensations alongside the slaves. More constructs a compelling appeal, not to the intellect, but to a sense of common humanity made through the heart. However, it is not a personal appeal and a certain narrative detachment can be felt in the command for the reader to 'see'. Yearsley, in her version, introduces herself, and therefore her sensibility, into her appeal in order to relate it directly to the individual, so far unfeeling, reader:

I know the crafty merchant will oppose 75
 The plea of nature to my strain, and urge
 His toils are for his children: the soft plea
 Dissolves my soul – but when I sell a son,
 Thou God of nature, let it be my own!
 Behold that Christian! see what horrid joy 80
 Lights up his moody features, while he grasps

The wish'd-for gold, purchase of human blood!
 Away, thou seller of mankind! Bring on
 Thy daughter to this market! bring thy wife!
 Thine aged mother, though of little worth, 85
 With all thy ruddy boys! Sell them, thou wretch,
 And swell the price of Luco! Why that start?
 Why gaze as thou wouldst fright me from my challenge
 With look of anguish? Is it Nature strains
 Thine heart-strings at the image? Yes, my charge 90
 Is full against her, and she rends thy soul,
 While I but strike upon thy pityless ear,
 Fearing her rights are violated. – Speak,
 Astound the voice of Justice! bid thy tears
 Melt the un pitying pow'r, while thus she claims 95
 The pledges of thy love. Oh, throw thine arm
 Around thy little ones, and loudly plead
 Thou canst not sell thy children. – Yet, beware
 Lest Luco's groan be heard; should that prevail,
 Justice will scorn thee in her turn, and hold 100
 Thine act against thy pray'r.
 (p. 30, ll. 75-101)

Again, Yearsley's syntax makes the reader the subject. As Alan Richardson rightly notes, where More's view is 'nationalistic and Christian', Yearsley's is much closer to home.⁴³

Though Yearsley uses her personal circumstances to gain political power through sensibility, More reverses this and suggests in her poem that only sensibility itself has a political power:

Tho' wounds there are which reason's force may heal,
 There needs no logic sure to make us feel.
 The nerve, howe'er untutor'd, can sustain

⁴³ Richardson, 'Darkness Visible', p. 140.

A sharp, unutterable sense of pain; 160
 As exquisitely fashion'd in a slave,
 As where unequal fate a sceptre gave.
 Sense is as keen where Congo's sons preside,
 As where proud Tiber rolls his classic tide.
 Rhetoric or verse may point the feeling line, 165
 They do not whet sensation, but define.
 Did ever a slave less feel the galling chain,
 When Zeno prov'd there was no ill in pain?
Their miseries philosophic quirks deride,
 Slaves groan in pangs disown'd by Stoic pride. 170
 (p. 12, ll. 157-170)

In a powerful display of poetic accomplishment and learning, More is able to dismiss those who argue that slaves, being less than human, feel less. By suggesting that this sort of argument arises solely from 'philosophic quirks', More simultaneously dismisses the over intellectualising of the wrongs of the slave trade and appeals to the intellect of her reader with her demanding examination of classical culture. However, what this poem actually manages to achieve on behalf of the slaves is open to some debate.

Moira Ferguson has a rather cynical view of More's work here:

Assuming open-minded readers, the author-narrator turns a dominative gaze upon those powerless unfortunates in what amounts to a paradigmatic first encounter between a female author, handpicked by the Abolition Committee, and the construct of depersonalized, uniform slaves. Charitably motivated, the genealogist of these new motifs pronounces what 'the slave' is, since slaves cannot speak or act on their own behalf. The distillation and visibility of the representative slave attracts supporters to a now identifiable, worthy cause. Though a sound strategy in political terms, the attitudes propagated by such a strategy reinforce traditional perspectives toward Africans. What is said about 'the slave' becomes, for an indoctrinated British public, what the slave is - a non-sovereign, passive, alien individual in need of European allies.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Ferguson, pp. 146-7.

This is a very inclusive series of appeals, designed to make the cause and suffering of the slaves the cause of the British people, and of the entire world. More also appeals to 'human rights' which have been broken through the proliferation of the slave trade. Through her capitalisation of 'our' twice in line 262, More creates a sense of a common goal, of a common stake in the consequences of the slave trade. She diverts any accusations of preaching to people by making it plain that the poet too needs to heed the arguments laid out here. More also cleverly appeals to the reader's vanity in this matter, asking them to consider the reputation of 'OUR age!' in their decision-making on the Bill. The act of abolition is 'god-like', the 'brightest deed' that can be recorded. The nominal point is the restoration of human rights, but the appeal is made through the pride in their reputations of those in power.

Where pride is the means through which More seeks to conquer the resistance of parliament to arguments against the slave trade, and the emotion which the poet feels most strongly towards her country, the overwhelming emotion for Yearsley is one of shame. For her, abolition does not connect those who vote for it with immortality, or godliness, or with any lasting reputation which will be trumpeted through the generations. Instead, abolition is the only thing which can save a country Yearsley portrays as corrupted, polluted and debased almost beyond all hope of redemption. Her descriptions of Britain as 'great' are ironic, and the Christian faith is represented as a sham:

[England's] laws, with prudence, hang the meagre thief 370
 That from his neighbour steals a slender sum,
 Tho' famine drove him on. O'er him the priest,
 Beneath the fatal tree, laments the crime,
 Approves the law, and bids him calmly die.
 Say, doth this law, that dooms the thief, protect 375

The wretch who makes another's life his prey,
 By hellish force to take it at his will?
 Is this an English law, whose guidance fails
 When crimes are swell'd to magnitude so vast,
 That Justice dare not scan them? Or does Law 380
 Bid Justice an eternal distance keep
 From England's great tribunal, when the slave
 Calls loud on Justice only? Speak, ye few
 Who fill Britannia's senate, and are deem'd
 The fathers of your country! Boast your laws, 385
 Defend the honour of a land so fall'n,
 That Fame from ev'ry battlement is flown,
 And Heathens start, e'en at a Christian's name.
 (p. 38, ll. 370-388)

At times, the irony becomes sarcasm, a tone which is the clearest distinction between Yearsley and her former patron. Where More envisages a gleaming country basking in the light of its humanity, leading the way in the world as an enlightened nation, Yearsley's tone suggests a country damaged by far more than the slave trade alone. More speaks respectfully to the MPs, imploring them to deliver the golden future she conjures for the country. Yearsley excoriates them, her mocking tone delivering a bitterly ironic challenge which takes in More's approach towards those same politicians. Patriotism, for Yearsley, is an unforgivable vanity. The image of the priest, faithful to his country and who 'Approves the law, and bids [the thief] calmly die' (l. 374) is an emblem both of the stupidity of supporting a country with such laws, and of the complete degradation of the Christian faith as practised in England. It is not patriotic zeal which Yearsley seeks to inflame, but a more parochial pride in the city of Bristol. As Richardson has noted, her aim is much closer to home, and she is targeting ordinary people, rather than the 'fathers of your country' she dismisses as morally

failing, and whom More's poem courts. Change, for Yearsley, can occur only at the local level, with the implication that the nation is too corrupt, too involved in unjust practices upon its own citizens, to be able to combat slavery. More radically, Yearsley implies that the power for change rests with the people, and not with the government, suggesting a sympathy with those calling for reform in Britain. However, Yearsley's project has been Bristol, not Britain. She remains 'the Bristol Milkwoman', deploying the identity imposed upon her for her own ends, and turning the limitations it implies into the reasons for her continued existence as a professional woman writer.

It may be possible to see this as being directly connected to Yearsley's exclusion from the *Bluestockings*, and therefore those influential in society. As Yearsley turned this exclusion into a weapon against her former patron and her friends in her 1787 volume, so she does here. More might be able to use her more elevated social position to appeal directly to the MPs, but Yearsley makes plain how she views their influence. They are, after all, 'ye few / Who fill Britannia's senate' (ll. 383-4). Instead, Yearsley aims to speak to the inhabitants of Bristol, and it is the people of the city itself who are able to make a difference to the slave trade:

touch the soul of man;
 Subdue him; make a fellow-creature's woe
 His own by heart-felt sympathy, whilst wealth
 Is made subservient to his soft disease.
 And when thou hast to high perfection wrought
 This mighty work, says, 'such is Bristol's soul.'
 (p. 39, ll. 420-425)

The contrast between Yearsley's and More's use of language is quite clear. It is the work which is 'mighty' here, not the person who votes for abolition, and Yearsley shows the

power available to the people by demonstrating that they are capable of shaping the city's soul, and, by extension, their own.

More's and Yearsley's attitudes towards patriotism and the moral rejuvenation of Britain depend in part on their class position. However, both versions of patriotism offered by More and Yearsley are open to attack from pro-slavery campaigners. James Adair's defence of slavery and the slave trade rests upon a comparison with circumstances in Britain. Where More writes 'Shall Britain, where the soul of freedom reigns, / Forge chains for others she herself disdains' (p. 18, ll. 251-2), Adair counters with an argument which claims that although there have been incidents of cruelty towards slaves, things are no better in Britain:

It has however happened, that proprietors of harsh or capricious tempers, mistaking or neglecting their true interests, and brutal overseers, disregarding the interest of their employer, have occasionally exercised much severity towards the slaves. But are their [sic] no cruel fathers, husbands, and masters in this country of liberty?⁴⁵

Adair justifies the continued existence of slavery by claiming that it violates no more family ties than people in Britain, and especially women, experience as a matter of course. Through this deft reversal of abolitionist rhetoric, Adair is able to exploit the condemnation of Britain by abolitionist poets such as Yearsley. According to Adair's logic, the denial of Britain's right to see itself as a moral force leads directly to a denial of the need to abolish slavery. Excessive cruelty, he argues, was contrary to the best interests of the slavers and the masters of the plantations; therefore it would not, and did not, occur to any significant extent. Economic self interest would arrest any cruelty towards the slaves from the plantation owners and overseers. Indeed, Adair insinuates that there is a much deeper hypocrisy on the part of male abolitionist campaigners

⁴⁵ James M. Adair, *Unanswerable Arguments Against the Abolition of the Slave Trade. With a Defence of the Proprietors of the British Sugar Colonies* (London: J.P. Bateman, 1790?), p. 149.

towards their wives and daughters at home, turning attention from the plight of slaves in the colonies to the misfortunes of British women, and removing the abolitionists' moral authority over the debate.

As a way of ensuring the abolition movement moral superiority over the arguments of those like Adair, Hannah More's poetry blends the physical freedom of the slaves with a spiritual freedom. Where Yearsley wishes the people of Bristol to feel sympathy with the slaves passing through their city, thereby giving them the power to change the situation, it is not enough for More that the slaves are released from servitude, as she makes clear by stating that mercy 'bursts their two-fold bands'.⁴⁶ Her final description of the effects of abolition is that 'FAITH and FREEDOM spring from Mercy's hand' (l. 294). More's final argument for the removal of the slave trade is therefore not based in sensibility, but in a desire for the spread of conversion amongst slaves, for which abolition is a golden opportunity. By voting for abolition, she says, British politicians will help to add thousands to the Christian church, again appealing to the vanity of the men in parliament.

The poetry that appeared after the failure of Wilberforce's bill later in 1788 and subsequent events in Europe may account at least partially for the shift towards quiescence in More's abolition writing. Britain had to come to terms with its failure to abolish the slave trade, and the sense of shock that the abolition movement had failed led to a loss of hope in some writers that slavery would ever be abolished. If abolition was impossible, More's offer of the comfort of Christian beliefs in 'The Sorrows of Yamba', published as part of the *Cheap Repository Tracts* in 1795, may have been all she felt it was possible to do to relieve the earthly suffering of the slaves.

⁴⁶ More, *Slavery: A Poem*, p. 20 (l. 293).

And on her harden'd forehead seals the crime.⁴⁷

Conscious of the importance, both religious and secular, of abolition, it is quite possible that Barbauld resented the poor decision returned by parliament when so many right thinking men (at least to the abolitionists) were excluded totally from expressing their opinions at a national level. Indeed, the poem shows Barbauld engaging in a general condemnation of a country incapable of doing what she sees as the right thing, a country which has lost its morality and religion, a country guilty of committing 'sin' and 'crime'. Sharing a clear connection with the arguments of both More and Yearsley, Barbauld's invective at this point perhaps has more in common with Yearsley's uncompromising condemnation. The opening line, though, gives the reader a clue as to a key factor Barbauld holds as being responsible for the failure of the Bill in parliament. By using the word 'generous' to refer to Wilberforce's project, Barbauld makes use of the word's financial associations. Wilberforce's act of giving is thereby loaded with meaning that comes into play when Barbauld writes, 'Where seasoned tools of Avarice prevail, / A Nation's eloquence, combined, must fail' (ll. 25-6). This is really the crux of the matter for Barbauld. The manner of voting has been determined not by a genuine belief in the morality of slavery, but by selfish interests. Wilberforce is 'generous', and is held up in contrast with those whose politics are decided by greed.

As Barbauld builds her case against the 'no' voters in parliament, she threatens them not only with the scorn of those like her in the immediate future, but with much more long-lasting consequences. Her ultimate threat is that their actions will not have gone unnoticed by heaven, and that there will eventually be a score to be redressed against them. This is the culmination of a long list of the crimes which have been

⁴⁷ Anna Barbauld, 'Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq', [1788] in *The Poems of Anna Laetitia Barbauld*, p. 114 ll. 1-18.

committed during the pro-slavery campaign, both before the vote and as a consequence of it:

Each flimsy sophistry by turns they try;
 The plausible argument, the daring lye,
 The artful gloss, that moral sense confounds,
 Th' acknowledged thirst of gain that honour wounds: 30
 Bane of ingenuous minds, th' unfeeling sneer,
 Which, sudden, turns to stone the falling tear:
 They search assiduous, with inverted skill,
 For forms of wrong, and precedents of ill;
 With impious mockery wrest the sacred page, 35
 And glean up crimes from each remoter age:
 Wrung Nature's tortures, shuddering, while you tell,
 From scoffing fiends bursts forth the laugh of hell;
 In Britain's senate, Misery's pangs give birth
 To jests unseemly, and to horrid mirth - 40
 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, condemn his fellow-man?
 (p. 116, ll. 27-44)

Barbauld condemns the argument that there is Biblical precedent for the existence of slavery and, therefore, a slave trade. It is a passage fuelled by both anger at the attitudes of those in power, and a sense of outraged faith. She unites them both when she calls man 'worm', obliquely insulting the anti-abolitionists, and returning humankind to what she sees as its proper place. Though Barbauld continues with her demolition of the character of the pro-slavery camp by likening the pursuit of wealth to a 'contagion' (p. 117, l. 87) and 'leprosy' (p. 117, l. 98) which is spreading through the country in the same way as the 'moral disease' of Yearsley's poem, Barbauld's *Epistle* ends on a rather

flat note, at least in contrast to the dynamic beginning. There is no hope for the abolitionists, either now or in the future. Though they are accorded the honour of being those 'whose efforts yet arrest Heav'n's lifted hand' (p. 118, l. 111) against a country Barbauld holds as being entirely morally corrupt, there is no celebration. Instead, she closes the poem simply, with history recording the failure of the campaign:

Succeeding times your struggles, and their fate,
 With mingled shame and triumph shall relate,
 While faithful History, in her various page,
 Marking the features of this motley age,
 To shed a glory, and to fix a stain,
 Tells how you strove, and that you strove in vain.

As Barbauld notes, the reader is left with a very 'mingled' view of the successes of the abolition campaign. What is clear, though, is a sense of complete deflation at the failure of the Bill to be passed through parliament.

The sense of loss, even grief, at the abolition movement's failure in parliament is demonstrated by the anonymous poem *An Elegy Occasioned by the rejection of Mr. Wilberforce's motion for the abolition of the African slave trade*, published in 1791. The poet shares many concerns with Barbauld about the members of parliament who rejected the Bill. Instead of Barbauld's ironic tone, the author of this poem imagines what might have happened if the Bill had been accepted. But this is not simple fantasy. It is a direct assault on the short-sightedness of the 'no' voters, using images of personal glory which will not be theirs:

Had ye but dar'd, like Britons, to be free,
 And shut your Ears to Int'rest's sordid voice;
 Had ye but listened now to Nature's Plea,
 And made Humanity's blest Cause your Choice;

Then – Then, ye Senators! your Names enroll'd
 In Mercy's Book had long conspicuous stood;
 And fame (a far more lasting Wealth than Gold)
 Had purg'd your Annals from the stain of Blood.⁴⁸

The implications of the first line are clear. Those who voted against the motion are not Britons – they are urged by the poet to be 'like Britons', equating Britishness with moral rectitude as Hannah More would do increasingly as the Revolutionary Wars began. The poet claims that these 'no' voters are not brave enough either to be British and therefore patriotic, or even to be free themselves. The double meaning of 'Int'rest' shows that, for the poet, money is equated with moral laxity and selfishness, and this line also suggests that it is not only those from Africa who are subject to slavery, but those who allow themselves to be governed by financial motivations.

The poet also speaks directly to those whose endeavours have failed, distinguishing between the various groups. When the poet touches on the actions of the anti-abolitionists, the condemnation is clear to see:

And when the grov'ling Race, by Int'rest sway'd,
 Shall, hurl'd by scornful Virtue, die away,
 Despis'd by those they serv'd; by Friends betray'd;
 Your hallowed Names shall shine with Glory's ray.
 (p. 8, stanza 21)

According to the poet, the type of person who votes against the Bill for abolition will find their reward in a betrayal similar to that which they have committed against their country. In a comparable move to that of Barbauld, the inference is also one of a far more lasting reckoning. Where the abolitionists' names continue to 'shine with Glory's

⁴⁸ *An Elegy Occasioned by the Rejection of Mr. Wilberforce's Motion for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade* (London: Hughes and Walsh et al., 1791), pp. 2-3, stanzas 7-8.

ray', those held as traitors will simply 'die away'. With the use of the word 'hallowed', the implication is that the abolitionists are destined to enjoy life everlasting through their faith, while the others are to die a mortal death and are not to be saved. The poet continues to demonstrate the very different qualities of the two parties. In the final stanza, where the poet imagines a world where the Bill has been passed, and Wilberforce is alive to see it, Wilberforce is elevated to a station not of national, but of global, importance:

Then shall the World's great Patriot, pleas'd, exclaim,
 'EUROPE NO TYRANT HAS! THE WEST NO SLAVE!
 ENOUGH KIND HEAVEN, NO MORE ON EARTH I CLAIM;
 Then yield his honoured Locks triumphant to the Grave.
 (p. 10, final stanza)

Not only is Wilberforce a British patriot, he is a global patriot. The poet creates an image of the abolitionist movement as entirely unselfish, noble, brave, glorious, patriotic and most importantly, pious. The efforts of the movement are clearly linked by the poet with God's work. Again, connections are made with the unpatriotic pro-slave trade voters who have to be urged to be British. Not only does Wilberforce need no urging towards the poem's vision of patriotism, he has such faith that he has no further need of any other reward. Wilberforce has taken the best interests of his country so much to heart that on their satisfaction his life has no other purpose.

As an elegy, the poem has the capacity to end with a far greater sense of hope than Barbauld's can muster. The author of this second poem is able to demonstrate that mourning is only necessary if things do not change. Crucially, though, the author of the poem is able to imagine a change, whereas Barbauld can only see unrewarded toil as the ultimate result of the movement. The elegy may well end with the death of

Wilberforce, but it is a glorious death at the end of a life the poet imagines to be filled with triumph and the achievement of ambition. It is also a pious death, suggesting heaven awaits him as his award for his unselfish actions. Wilberforce has not 'toiled in vain', as Barbauld mournfully concludes. However, the level of anger at the failure of the Bill and those behind its fall is demonstrated by the eternal damnation imagined by both writers for the anti-abolitionists. For other writers, though, it was not only their own souls the 'no' voters had lost, but the souls of the slaves. For Hannah More, among others, abolishing the slave trade would create an opportunity to convert many slaves to Christianity when they saw how benevolent Christians were. For still more writers, failure to abolish the slave trade meant a continuance of what they saw as the barbarous behaviour of the slaves and their nations. Through conversion and improved conditions during slavery and eventually emancipation, this behaviour could be eradicated.

When More broached the subject of African slavery for the second time in 1795, she did so alone. Although the abolition movement was still arguing its case through parliament until abolition was achieved in 1807, the massive outpouring of opinions into print did not recur. Indeed, much British attention was focussed on France, and it was on matters there that Ann Yearsley chose to write in her 1796 volume, *The Rural Lyre*, rather than publish another anti-slavery poem to compete with her former patron. 'The Sorrows of Yamba', the story of a brutalised slave woman converted to Christianity in the colonies, was published as part of More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*, which became well known for its explicitly Christian message, promoting benevolence in the rich and forbearance in the poor, to whom the publications were primarily directed. Many of the stories featured the poor finding

relief from their condition through hard work and piety, or blessings if they submit uncomplainingly to their lots. More was able to afford to publish this material, despite the likelihood that it would not be a profitable venture; with the £200 from her former fiancé providing a regular and guaranteed income, More had also earned £750 from *Percy* in the 1770s, £600 of which Anne Stott notes ‘Garrick had invested for her.’⁴⁹

More would not be made wealthy until she published *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* [1808] which brought in £2000 in the first year,⁵⁰ but her earlier successes meant she was comfortable, and able to fund various philanthropic projects. The conversion of slaves to Christianity certainly fell into this category for More. Her financial status meant that More had the freedom to ignore aspects of the print trade usually essential for the survival of a professional writer: More had no particular need of a readership, or of payment from a publisher. All she required for this project was a printer and a network of traders who would distribute the tales included in *Cheap Repository Tracts*.

Unconstrained by the literary marketplace, More’s message in the Tracts was one of endurance and patient suffering, both for the British poor who were the target audience for the Tracts, and for the slaves who featured in ‘The Sorrows of Yamba’.

The inclusion of ‘The Sorrows of Yamba’ in the Tracts was also significant because of its complicated and rather confused genesis. Alan Richardson has proposed that Hannah More was not the original author of the poem, but altered an earlier, more radical, version to suit her own conservative ends. He suggests that one can see ‘two distinct strains of British anti-slavery at work, one tragic and sentimental (and vaguely liberal), the other Christianizing and infantilizing (and distinctly reactionary).’⁵¹ That More would alter a poem already advocating abolition because its

⁴⁹ Stott, p. 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁵¹ Alan Richardson, ‘“The Sorrows of Yamba” by Eaglefield Smith and Hannah More: Authorship, Ideology, and the Fractures of Antislavery Discourse’, *Romanticism on the Net*, 28 (2002), 1-17 (1).

conversion message is not strong enough forces the conclusion that it was conversion of the slaves which had gained primacy over the urge to free them. However, Richardson himself allows that his argument is not conclusive, and there are key points in the poem which suggest a different interpretation.

Critical of the inclusion of the figure of the missionary who provides Yamba with spiritual comfort, Richardson writes that 'More's additions introduce authoritative male figures who function to limit Yamba's autonomy and redirect her desires.'⁵² It is true that the missionary, who appears in the more conservative half Richardson suggests was altered by More, is crucial to the function of this poem. However, Charles H. Lyons, a critic used in Richardson's own argument to bolster his case for dual authorship of 'Yamba', suggests the role of the 'authoritative' missionary is more radical than Richardson allows: 'As a result of fears of rebellion and uncertainty about what conversion might imply, a number of American colonies passed laws severely restricting the operations of teachers and evangelists.'⁵³ Although the missionary's message might be distasteful to modern readers, the message still has the potential to be radical, as Lyons makes clear. The attempts in the colonies to limit the influence of the evangelists reveals the fear of being made spiritually equal to the slaves, and the significance of the drive for conversion as a means to liberating them. Julia Saunders rightly notes about More that 'though her opinions locate her amongst the conservatives when compared to radical contemporaries, the implications of her educational and literary practice place her amongst the most progressive writers of her day.'⁵⁴ Despite the potential of the poem to be radical, a close reading of 'The Sorrows of Yamba' results in a complicated picture of More's aims for the poem. Ultimately,

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵³ Charles H. Lyons, *To Wash an Aethiop White: British Ideas about Black African Educability 1530-1960* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1975), p. 48.

⁵⁴ Julia Saunders, 'Putting the Reader Right: Reassessing Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*', *Romanticism on the Net*, 16 (1999), 1-15 (13).

uncomfortable questions are raised about the role of conversion in anti-slavery literature.

As one of the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, 'The Sorrows of Yamba' is part of a larger argument which offers the same comfort to the British poor and the African slaves; their situations are to be relieved if possible as the duty of the more fortunate, but the poor's own duty is to endure their lots regardless of whether aid is given. However, Moira Ferguson indicates a deeper political motivation for the publication of this poem:

More tries to blend a now politically jeopardizing commitment to abolition with the primacy she accords conversion. Although Yamba remains a slave, she will ultimately return to an earlier state of freedom in the divine presence. To workers who will hopefully be instructed and to middle-class readers who will concur, the same message takes on a class-differentiated meaning: be content with life's lot despite hardships, and recognize God's love and spiritual equality.⁵⁵

Although, as Ferguson makes clear, More placed a great importance on the conversion of slaves, the scheme may have developed a political urgency, as well as a spiritual one following the upheaval in France. Indeed, it might be suggested that More included 'The Sorrows of Yamba' in the tracts in order to demonstrate to the target audience, the disenfranchised poor, that if a slave in the worst of all positions can learn to forgive wrongs and become happy with her lot in the knowledge of the life to come, so can they; More is anxious to secure the conversion of the slaves, but may well be more anxious to prevent revolution on the scale of that in France.

More's poem also rose out of a wider sense of religiously motivated social duty. According to James Walvin, 'it was the accepted obligation of philanthropy which provided the essential lubricant for the workings of eighteenth-century English society.'

⁵⁵ Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 219.

It is from here Walvin argues that some of the 'roots of abolition can also be traced.'⁵⁶

More's was a specific form of philanthropy, her religion playing a key role in her attitudes towards the poor, and as can be seen in 'The Sorrows of Yamba', to the plight of the slaves as well. However, the philanthropic drive towards the slaves was not More's alone. Progressive in some ways and very much restrictive in others, one anonymous writer imagines a general scheme of improvement in which education in Christianity is fundamental:

[T]he slaves who are now in the West India Islands should be better treated, and (if possible) Freedom given them; hired as Servants, wrought moderately, fed properly, perfectly instructed in the *Christian* Religion, and treated as Fellow-citizens of a free People, according to their Rank.⁵⁷

It is clear that these improvements are to be seen as a generous gift to the Africans in the West Indies. Christianity is part of this gift to the people, a gift which, the writer seems to feel, reveals the true benevolence of the abolitionist campaign in all aspects of improving the lot of the slaves.

Initially, More's poem is compelling in its depiction of the hardships and suffering endured by Yamba and those travelling with her. More has Yamba, the narrator, rejoicing that her child is dead, such is the scale of the hardships Yamba must endure, a response which must appal:

I, in groaning pass'd the night,
And did roll my aching head;
At the break of morning light,
My poor child was cold and dead.

⁵⁶ James Walvin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 100.

⁵⁷ *A Short Treatise on the Unfair Purchase of Slaves, and their Barbarous Usage from Africa to the West Indies...That the Slave Trade is a Disgrace to Rational Humanity,...That the Trade is Abolishable only by an Act of Parliament* (Hull: [no publisher], 1794), pp. 3-4.

Happy, happy, there she lies,
 Thou shalt feel the lash no more;
 Thus full many a Negro dies,
 Ere we reach the destin'd shore.⁵⁸

More also combines the specific case of Yamba and her child with the more general situation of those transported from Africa to the slave stations, a political point made very real through the pain suffered by one family. Yamba's longing for death is almost as poignant as her joy at the death of her child.

Down my cheeks the tears are dripping,
 Broken is my heart with grief;
 Mangled my poor flesh with whipping,
 Come, kind death! and bring relief.
 (p. 422, stanza 3)

By voicing her poem through the sufferer, More is making use of a recognized mode within the poetry of sensibility. However, More has greater ambition for the poem than to simply make her reader feel for the victim. Indeed, in contrast to the opinions of some of her fellow abolitionists, More's project is to present Yamba as an equal, entitled to treatment as an equal, and not in need of a paternalistic authority to determine when she is intellectually capable of appreciating liberty. Thus, when More has Yamba denounce British law for failing to protect her from murder and brutality at the hands of her master, it is the crime that is 'savage', not her:

What, and if to death he send me,
 Savage murder tho' it be,

⁵⁸ Hannah More, 'The Sorrows of Yamba, or, the Negro Woman's Lamentation' [1795] in *Cheap Repository Tracts; Entertaining, Moral and Religious* (London: F. and C. Rivington et al., 1798), p. 424 stanzas 1-2.

British laws shall ne'er befriend me,
 They protect not slaves like me.
 (p. 424, stanza 7)

By this point, the reader has been given ample time to experience the descriptions of Yamba's plight; the humiliations on board ship, the loss of her child, and the original grief at being torn from her home and family. On top of this catalogue of suffering More suggests that a slave's life, and more particularly Yamba's, does not warrant even the most basic protection under law. Having listened to the clearly human voice of Yamba relate her tale, the reader cannot escape the horror of her precarious state of existence. More allows no room for the reader to believe Yamba anything other than an equal human being, with an equal need to be protected by the law. She is not an inferior being because she is black. Rather, she is presented as an intelligent, articulate mother and wife, a powerful advocate for the rights of slaves, but whether the reader believes that this ability to speak for other slaves has any real significance in this poem is affected by Yamba's conversion in the second half of the poem.

The reader is led by More to believe that Yamba's death, or 'kind death' (p. 422, stanza 2), as Yamba describes it, is a near certainty. Yet Yamba is not killed by her 'Massa', or even at her own hands, as might be expected. Instead, she is saved on the shore by a British missionary. And what More has this missionary preach to Yamba is what almost undoes the good work earlier in the poem. The missionary does not condemn slavery as against god's laws. Nor does he offer to help her in any material way, except to dress her existing wounds. Instead, More stages a scene of conversion where Yamba's suffering at the hands of her master is justified because ' 'twas the Christian's lot, / Much to suffer here below' (p. 425, stanza 6). More goes even further than this, however. With Yamba relating the sacrifice made by Christ, More makes a

truly startling series of suggestions, given the strength of her argument against slavers and the trade in them only a few stanzas before:

Wicked deed full many a time,
Sinful Yamba too hath done;
But she wails to God her crime,
But she trusts his only Son.

O, ye slaves whom Massas beat,
Ye are stain'd with guilt within,
As ye hope for mercy sweet,
So forgive your Massas' sin.

(p.426, stanzas 3-4)

More suggests that the slaves are equally guilty of sin as their masters, that Yamba and those like her must forgive the men who beat them nearly to death, because they are all sinners. In a matter of a few lines, More has slashed the moral distance she sets up at the beginning of the poem between the victims of slavery and those who profit from it. Perhaps the most sinister aspect of this change, though, is the language More uses to effect it. By the time that More has Yamba claiming slaves to be as sinful as their masters, her character is not relating the story to a white, British readership, More's target audience for her anti-slavery rhetoric, but to her fellow slaves: to other Africans kidnapped and brutalised in reality as she has been in fiction. Her mode of speech is now to induce a sense of a common experience, a common outlook with shared aspirations. Yamba is supposed to be speaking out as a slave for her freedom, but is now urging her fellow slaves to forgive those who have inflicted the terrible cruelties so graphically represented in the early stanzas of this poem.

It would seem that in 'The Sorrows of Yamba', More wants both to convince the British public of the evils of slavery, and to convert the slaves into accepting those

same evils as their lot on earth. This produces an unpleasant limitation of what slaves can expect, and the greatest shock of all is perhaps when More has Yamba say she is glad to have been made a slave:

Now I'll bless my cruel capture,
 (Hence I've know a Saviour's name)
 Till my grief is turn'd to rapture,
 And I half forget the blame.
 (p. 426, stanza 7)

Although More qualifies Yamba's response to her capture as a new convert by calling that capture 'cruel', slavery is still shown to be a possible road to Christianity. Yamba will only 'half forget the blame' of the slavers for their mistreatment of her, but there remains a sense of unease at this type of conversion. This view is bolstered two stanzas later:

Here an injured Slave forgives,
 There a host for vengeance cry;
 Here a single Yamba lives,
 There a thousand droop and die.

Duly now baptiz'd am I,
 By good Missionary man:
 Lord, my nature purify,
 As no outward water can!
 (p. 427, stanzas 2-3)

On the surface, More continues to show the reader the appalling reality of slavery, writing that 'There a thousand droop and die'. However, I would suggest that these thousand have not been beaten to death or otherwise died from their captivity. These thousand have died because they were unbaptised, incapable of forgiveness because they

have not been converted. They have died in the eternal and religious sense of the word – with no hope for the salvation of their souls. More’s pairing of these two stanzas, outlining that Yamba lives, then revealing that she is baptized, is not coincidence: it is a point about the possibilities of eternal life that More is making here.

Alan Richardson’s assessment of the poem is cynical about the religious emphasis, and he concludes that ‘the exchange of missionaries for slavers in More’s revised conclusion leaves Africa subordinate and passive.’⁵⁹ More seems to ask the slaves to forgive their oppressors as much, if not more than, asking the oppressors to act with more humanity to the slaves. The slaves are to be model Christians; they are to turn the other cheek, to bear quietly and piously their suffering, and to await with eagerness their reward in heaven. This presents the possibility of an awful irony. Through their conversion, the slaves are granted a position of moral authority. They (not the slavers who profess to be Christians) are to be the model of pious Christianity. Though supposedly of a superior race, the slavers in this poem are inferior to the slaves in every way, and in desperate need of their forgiveness:

But tho’ here a Convert rare,
Thanks her God for Grace divine;
Let not man the glory share;
Sinner, still the guilt is thine.

(p. 427, stanza 1)

In this way, More is curiously being more progressive than some other commentators pushing for the conversion of the slaves in the colonies. More’s argument here, having Yamba clearly forgive and nearly forget the great wrongs done her in the face of divine deliverance, may well have the intention of shaming those in power by suggesting that

⁵⁹ Richardson, ‘“The Sorrows of Yamba”’, p. 8.

they are in need of forgiveness from a race of people many of them hold to be inferior to themselves.

However, the reader is still left with a tricky reverse to this line of reasoning. More leaves the reader uncertain which aspect is more important – that the slaves' earthly troubles are genuinely relieved through change, or that they will find God in the end, rendering all earthly concerns immaterial. Yamba's comment that when her 'grief is turn'd to rapture' she will 'half forget the blame' (p. 426, stanza 7) does not ease this ambiguity. Though More closes the poem by urging the ending of slavery, there is the expectation that slavery will not end immediately. Nor can its consequences necessarily be reversed. Yamba shows no hope of returning to Africa, though she says 'Still to native land I turn' (p. 427, stanza 7). Instead, she places her hope in the conversion of her husband to Christianity in Africa in order to see him again. More's ambitions for the conversion of the slaves have moved beyond the colonies, and are now turned towards Africa itself:

Where ye gave to war its birth,
 Where your traders fix'd their den,
 There go publish '*Peace on Earth,*'
 Go, proclaim '*good-will to men.*'

Where ye once carried slaughter,
 Vice, and slavery, and sin;
 Seiz'd on Husband, Wife, and Daughter,
 Let the Gospel enter in.
 (p. 428, stanzas 4-5)

Alan Richardson calls this a 'familiar Anglo-Africanist ethos of "colonization, Christianization, and commercialization"',⁶⁰ and this colonial aspiration has the effect

⁶⁰ Richardson, 'The Sorrows of Yamba', p. 6.

of undermining the anti-slavery message of this poem; it is no longer sufficient to convert the slaves in the colonies in order that their captors see them as equals and question the institution of slavery. By this point in the poem, conversion is its own end.

More, however, retains an ironic edge to the end which cuts through and beyond the extended conversion system that has been laid out. Her message about the possibilities of promoting Christianity in Africa through the improved behaviour of white traders aims a barb much closer to home. Not only, as has been discussed, does More use the shame of being forgiven by the slaves as a weapon in order to get those in power to listen, but she actually reverses the entire conversion scheme. No longer is it the heathen slaves in need of conversion to Christianity. Instead, it is those who are supposedly already of the faith who need to be converted by the slaves. In her exhortation for them to 'Mock your Saviour's name no further' (p. 428, stanza 2), it is Yamba who sends the corrective message to her white masters. In her closure of the poem, More ensures that this point is unmistakable:

There no fiend again shall sever
 Those whom God hath join'd and blest:
 There they dwell with him for ever,
 There '*the weary are at rest.*'
 (p. 429, stanza 1)

In this stanza, those who separate husband and wife are categorized with the devil, and by implication, are to be denied access to the heaven enjoyed by converted slaves such as Yamba.

More shows clearly the distance she feels exists between the Christianity to be promoted to the slaves, and that actually practised in the colonies; the converted slave is so far the superior of the white slaver or master that it is they who are now entrusted

with the reformation and conversion of others. This approach offers little by way of physical relief on one level, but if it should shame the powerful into action, physical relief becomes possible through a focus on the spiritual situation. Thus More manages to bring together her two main projects – the emancipation and the conversion of the slaves – into a powerful, compelling, and often biting, piece of abolitionist polemic. Indeed, the goal of converting slaves was to develop into the focus on missionary work which lay behind the foundation of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804 and the Church Missionary Society (1799): both of these organisations were to emerge out of the Clapham Sect. In ‘The Sorrows of Yamba’, More is anticipating the aims of these organisations. However, the more dubious motives which may underlie the positive intentions of this poem, and indeed the wider drive towards missionary work, should not be ignored. Although More’s poem is undoubtedly designed to promote the cause of emancipation, it was also written to help curb rebellious feelings in the lower classes and to promote Christianity in Africa and the colonies. The reader is left to ponder whether, had the situation demanded it, More would have sacrificed her abolition agenda to better maintain order among the lower classes in Britain and to push for Christianity’s spread through Africa.

The relationship between Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, the abolition movement and religion is a complicated one. Under the pressure of attempting to earn her place amongst the ‘benevolent band’ who the critics see as the most influential commentators upon abolition, Yearsley’s efforts to carve out her own identity seem to result in the radicalisation of her views beyond what might be expected. The patronage relationship between More and Yearsley may have failed, but Yearsley has not yet been able to entirely leave her patron’s influence behind, despite her claims to a right to be recognised as an independent professional writer. More is similarly unable to break free

from her former protégée, and her religion is increasingly central to her responses to public matters. Indeed, it becomes the most important element of More's identity as a professional writer, and by 1795, More is considering not just the religious health of the nation, as she had in 1788, but of the world. Financially independent of the demands of the print trade, More is at liberty to respond directly to the requirements of her faith, and her ambitions for the spread of Christianity are not limited by the need to accommodate the tastes of her readers. In 1788, Yearsley and More had fought for the right to exist as professional writers by choosing informal subscription as the method of publication, but by 1795, More has no need of such validation as a professional writer. She can instead concentrate on ensuring her work is available to as wide an audience as possible.

For Yearsley, it may be significant that her next ventures into print were not sold by subscription. The success of her abolition poetry may well have been enough to suggest that Yearsley could afford to take more risks, by trying other modes of writing, and other means of publishing. In 1787, Ann Yearsley's existence as a professional writer had also been dependent upon her ability to balance the demands of poetic convention with other concerns. Yearsley had made great show of her new patron, the Earl of Bristol, who rather flamboyantly subscribed for 20 copies of *Poems on Various Subjects*, and she was also keen to demonstrate that she could attract a substantial number of subscribers without the help of Hannah More. These external concerns combine in 1787 with poetry mourning the loss of her infant son, which causes the reader to ask the same questions of Yearsley as those prompted by 'The Sorrows of Yamba': is the subject of the poem being made use of for other ends? In 1796, Charlotte Smith also published poems lamenting the loss of a child. The sonnet series that resulted deals with the death of her favourite daughter, but in its exploration of

maternal grief, challenges the conventions of the elegiac sonnet. Yet both Ann Yearsley and Charlotte Smith had to negotiate the complicated relationship between the artistic merit of the work, and its commercial value. Yearsley was attempting to build a successful career without the influence of Hannah More, and Smith had to ensure that her poems gained enough interest in order to support her several children still living. By bringing together the poetry of grief of Smith and Yearsley in the next chapter, I hope to demonstrate that in the hands of these two women, the elegy becomes politically charged, and that this challenges perceptions of the professional status of both Charlotte Smith and Ann Yearsley.

Chapter 3

Charlotte Smith and Ann Yearsley, 'Triumphantly Distressed': grief, power and resistance

In this chapter, my aim is to explore how both Ann Yearsley and Charlotte Smith make use of fluid concepts of public and private, and the ways in which both women are able to utilise one of the most socially prescribed states, mourning, and its correspondingly regulated poetic form, the elegy. In attempting to understand what is at stake for each woman as they strive to be both mother and poet, vulnerable woman and professional writer, I hope to examine how the dual demands of artistic merit and commercial value influence the publishing choices of Yearsley and Smith. The previous chapter discussed some of the implications of Yearsley's decision to publish *Poems on Various Subjects* by subscription, but the nature of the poetry Yearsley chooses to include in the volume adds a particular resonance to her decision. Scott Hess has noted that '[s]ubscription publishing [...] maintained a closer sense of audience, allowing authors to know the names of subscribers who sponsored (and presumably read) their book.'¹ I have already argued that the subscription list for Yearsley 1787 poems may have functioned as a public display for Hannah More's benefit, but it would also have served for Yearsley's; she would have been able to see who had stayed with her, and who had not, following the break with More, as well as who was a new subscriber. Her decision to include intimate poetry about her maternal grief at the death of her infant son Frederick, may therefore have had two purposes. It firstly reinforced the sense of familiarity which Hess identifies as an element of subscription publishing, revealing the poet in a private mode reserved for her close friends. However, the mournful poetry perhaps also serves to soften the image of an obstinate, angry and combative woman

¹ Scott Hess, *Authoring the Self: Self-Representation, Authorship, and the Print Market in British Poetry from Pope through Wordsworth* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 57.

created by the public breakdown between Yearsley and More, for the benefit of new subscribers who might be concerned by such public behaviour. Publishing by subscription allows Yearsley to know in advance who will be reading her work, and perhaps grants the opportunity to respond to this information.

Charlotte Smith did not publish the eighth edition of the *Elegiac Sonnets* by subscription. In 1789, Smith had published the fifth edition by subscription, and amongst her subscribers were the Archbishop of Canterbury and William Pitt, as well as a host of nobles and prominent public figures. Judith Phillips Stanton estimates that Smith earned £180 from this,² and although it was far less than the £350 More placed in the trust fund she had set up for Yearsley's earnings from *Poems on Several Occasions* in 1785, it was enough to encourage Smith to publish the first edition of the second volume of sonnets by subscription in 1797. However, the fifth edition was the first poetry Smith had published with Thomas Cadell. Her first publisher had been Dodsley, but in 1787 Cadell had published the *Romance of Real Life*, and until 1792 when Smith published the radical novel *Desmond*, she used no one but Cadell.³ As the first edition of the *Elegiac Sonnets* for three years, and the first with Cadell, there was considerable interest in the poetry, but Smith reserved subscription publishing for these particular occasions; Smith would next use it for the first edition of the second volume. In between, the sixth, seventh and eighth editions of the first volume brought in modest sums of around £30 or £40, suggesting their purpose was more to maintain interest in Smith's poetry, rather than to earn her vast sums.⁴ This sense is reinforced by Smith's habit of prefacing each edition with all earlier prefaces, as well as any new prefaces, apparently to keep the reader informed of the difficulties of her personal

² Judith Phillips Stanton, 'Charlotte Smith's "Literary Business": Income, Patronage, and Indigence', *The Age of Johnson* 1 (1987), 375-401 (391).

³ *ibid.*, 391.

⁴ *ibid.*, 391.

situation. It is possible, therefore, that the eighth edition was intended to maintain interest in the readers who would subscribe to the second volume, published later in the same year. The inclusion of poems describing profound maternal grief would fit into this strategy, revealing the poet in great distress. However, the relationship between Smith's personal and professional lives is particularly complicated here by the fact that Smith was grieving the recent and devastating loss of her favourite daughter, Anna Augusta, whilst attempting to market that same grief for financial gain.

My particular focus on elegies written for children raises larger questions about the interaction between the professional and the personal, particularly for women, how this affects what professional women writers may be prepared to publish, and what people may be prepared to buy. Indeed, Jacqueline Labbe has suggested that 'each writer finds in motherhood both a screen and an excuse for publicity.'⁵ One of the questions this chapter will attempt to answer is what happens to the need for publicity when that writer explores in print her relationship with a child who has died. However, it is this idea that motherhood both 'screens' Yearsley and Smith from public view, and allows them to appear in public, which means an exploration of their elegiac poetry reveals the relationship between the poet's perceptions of her work, and the reader's perceptions of the poet. Stephen Behrendt has supplied a useful summary of the fluidity of these perceptions in the sonnet form:

while the sonneteer maintains the ostensible fiction that her discourse is personal and private, she knows full well (as does the reader) that she is performing this fiction within a formal poetic form that is fully intended for 'public-ation' [sic] – for being read 'publicly' as ostensibly 'private' discourse. For every moment that the readers are invited to regard as 'confessional' in the Romantic sonnet, there exists a counter-invitation to remember that the disclosure is taking

⁵ Jacqueline Labbe, 'The Romance of Motherhood: Generation and the Literary Text', *Romanticism on the Net*, 26 (2002), paragraph 3 (as printed: references will be made to the numbered paragraphs within the body of the text).

place not in the confessional but in the public square in the market place of the print medium.⁶

Although Behrendt is speaking only of the sonnet, I would argue that the same fluidity exists within Yearsley's poem to her son, Frederick Yearsley. The elegiac quatrains are presented as Yearsley speaking directly to her son, only the conversation is overheard by the reader who has purchased a volume of poetry from a professional writer for the purposes of entertainment. The complexities which arise from 'confessing in the market' affect and inform the writing of both Charlotte Smith and Ann Yearsley.

From the very beginnings of the literary career which started with the publication of *Elegiac Sonnets* in 1784, Charlotte Smith was constructing a very specific public image of herself. At the time her early poems were published, Smith was in debtors' prison with her husband Benjamin, having joined him there when his financial affairs became desperate. However, in identifying herself as author of the sonnets, Smith also announces the status to which she was born. She is 'Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park, in Sussex', not Charlotte Smith of King's Bench Prison, nor Charlotte Smith of Dieppe, the next stop in her husband's flight from debt. Stuart Curran, editor of her collected poems, sees the deliberate construction of what is in many ways an artificial identity as an attempt to reclaim a lost birthright by refusing to 'deny herself the estate where she grew up and where her children remained under her brother's protection, so far distant from the actual prison to which marriage had reduced her.'⁷ As Jacqueline Labbe has subsequently noted, however, 'even in 1784 Bignor Park is not Smith's home, but her younger brother's (the legal heir), and her

⁶ Stephen C. Behrendt, 'Telling Secrets: The Sonnets of Anna Maria Smallpiece and Mary F. Johnson', *European Romantic Review*, 13. 4 (2002), 393-410 (393).

⁷ *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Stuart Curran (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. xxii.

claim [in *Sonnets*] resonates with its own impossibility.⁸ The impossibility of Smith, a married woman, being *of* Bignor Park is also tinged with irony. As she seems to usurp her brother's legal claim to the property in order to assert her gentility, so her own (proven after her death) legal right to her father-in-law's bequest was being usurped by her spendthrift husband; the very cause, it is reasonable to surmise, for Smith's false claim at the beginning of *Sonnets*.

Tied in to Smith's insistence on the reader believing her to be of gentle birth is, perhaps unsurprisingly, anxiety about class status. This seems to be based on more than simple pride, of not wanting to be thought of as having originated in the lowly circumstances in which Smith now found herself. Curran notes that Smith's desire to write poetry, even though the prose market was far more lucrative for a woman seeking to support herself and her family (including, originally, her husband), is itself an assertion of a particular class identity: 'Smith's sense of her genteel heritage and her claims to artistry never allowed her to abandon a commitment to poetry.'⁹ For Smith, the writing of poetry is essentially the domain of the higher classes. Therefore, when her current social position did not match that which she imagined she ought to occupy (through both birth and her literary activities), Smith manipulated the reality to construct a more appropriate identity with which the public was to be presented.

The choice of poetic genre is also indicative of the image Smith was attempting to project to her readers. By writing sonnets, a traditional form whose few successful exponents included such figures as Petrarch, Shakespeare, Milton and, more recently, Thomas Gray, Smith was setting herself apart, both from the rash of lower-class poets appearing in print, and other female poets. However, the sonnet tradition, while

⁸ Jacqueline M. Labbe, 'The exiled self: images of war in Charlotte Smith's *The Emigrants*', in *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict 1793-1822*, ed. by Peter Shaw (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 37-56 (p. 37).

⁹ Curran, ed., *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, p. xxiii.

illustrious, was also associated with intense emotion and, occasionally, scandal. As Sylvia Mergenthal has pointed out, 'eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare deliberately exclude his sonnets, on literary as well as moral grounds, and those poets who, like Gray, use the form, draw on Milton and through him on the less disreputable Italian traditions.'¹⁰ As a poetic mode, the sonnet was a form with a distinctly ambiguous tradition. Indeed, Smith's response to the form was ambiguous. As Mergenthal also notes, Smith favoured the variation of the sonnet which followed 'the rhyme pattern [...] established by Petrarch and Milton', but this was 'a rhyme pattern from which she herself will depart.'¹¹ Smith, therefore, would appear to simultaneously accept and reject the more decorous version of the form, and this duality has implications. When used to write of her favourite daughter, Anna Augusta, who died in 1795 a few months after giving birth to a short-lived son, the sonnet in Smith's hands retains this sense of ambiguity. Yet even as Smith appears to use the form daringly, the reader is left with the possibility that Smith's unconventionality has another purpose, indicated by Diane Boyd:

Her dedication to her poetry (despite its less lucrative remuneration) attests to Smith's interest in retaining some measure of her eroded rank in two ways: through the more aesthetically-valued genre of poetry and the more culturally valued representation of professional writer who produces art in response to inspiration, as opposed to the drudge who reconstitutes texts.¹²

Although Smith was destitute, the publication of the sonnets proclaims her belief in her right to a higher literary status than that accorded to the 'natural genius' of the lower class. Not for Smith the measured praise given to the uneducated poet, but the

¹⁰ Sylvia Mergenthal, 'Charlotte Smith and the Romantic Sonnet Revival', in *Feminist Contributions to the Literary Canon: Setting Standards of Taste*, ed. by Susanne Fendler (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), pp. 65-79 (p. 68).

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 68.

¹² Diane E. Boyd, ' "Professing Drudge": Charlotte Smith's Negotiation of a Mother-writer Author Function', *South Atlantic Review*, 66:1 (2001), 145-166 (164).

genuine praise given to one who is able to keep Milton and Petrarch company, achieved by marketing poetry written about her daughter's death.

Smith's claim for artistic status beyond the ordinary is not without difficulties. The preface to the first volume of *Elegiac Sonnets*, which Smith uses to locate herself at Bignor Park, also establishes her as a domestic figure and, Jacqueline Labbe argues, 'reveals Smith's own dependence on – or awareness of – a woman's need for a domestic identity, especially in the public eye.'¹³ The question Labbe raises is an interesting one. Is Smith's use of the estate in Sussex evidence of a 'dependence' on her identity as a domestic woman in order to justify to herself her actions in publishing this volume, or is it a self-conscious, strategic move, demonstrating a keen knowledge of the circumstances in which women were preferred to publish? Smith's preface to the first volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* largely follows the standard apologies for having brought this material to public attention, and ends with the usual authorial reluctance in publishing at all. Where Smith does deviate from the norm is when, blaming the poor copying of her poems by her 'friends' for their restorative publication, she mentions the concurrence of 'other circumstances' which finally persuaded her to publish.¹⁴ Although it is doubtful that this reference to her financial circumstances would have been recognised in the first edition of these poems, it does indicate that Smith is not necessarily the 'professional writer who produces art in response to inspiration' of Diane Boyd's description, but is, on occasion, 'the drudge who reconstitutes texts' out of financial necessity. However, even as Smith seems to be losing her grip on the elevated class and professional status she craves, her acknowledgement that 'some very melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought' demonstrates that her motives for publishing are not born entirely

¹³ Labbe, 'The exiled self', p. 37.

¹⁴ Charlotte Smith, 'Preface' to the first edition of *Elegiac Sonnets in Poems*, p. 3.

out of financial necessity.¹⁵ Intriguingly, Smith's statement introduces the possibility that the poems are autobiographical, giving the reader a taste of the potentially voyeuristic pleasures to come, and an opportunity for Smith to claim the praise that is, she declares through her preface, her due.

Smith, it would seem, is not 'dependent' on her domestic identity to justify her role to herself as a public, publishing woman. She is reliant on being seen as a domestic woman in order to publish initially, but Smith here makes deliberate use of the identity she is compelled to adopt in order to titillate the reader. By presenting a highly respectable exterior through her supposed origins in Bignor Park, Smith is able to project a second quasi-fictional identity to the reader, one which allows the reader to believe, if they choose, that they are reading a genuine account of grief. In many ways, Smith and her readers have entered into an agreement. The reader is allowed the voyeuristic pleasure of believing they are watching a real woman in the landscape, and Smith is in return accorded by the reader the status she craves from being a well-born poet. Kandi Tayebi has suggested that the way in which Smith writes her sonnets is a 'self-denial of her creative position', but the opposite would seem to be true.¹⁶ By an imaginative manipulation of what the reader believes they are seeing, Smith generates a huge amount of interest in the person(ae) behind the poems: interest which she then used to sell the considerable output that followed in order to support her large family.

The modern reader's perceptions of Smith's ability to make use of the various guises she assumes is perhaps modified by the access we now have to the considerable personal correspondence written throughout her career. Where the prefaces to her works and letters to her publishers all claim a genuine need to support her family,

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁶ Kandi Tayebi, 'Charlotte Smith and the Quest for the Romantic Prophetic Voice', *Women's Writing*, 11.3 (2004), 421-438 (423).

Smith's personal correspondence suggests she held a different view of her career. Indeed, if she was dependent upon anything, it was the ability to write and publish poetry, rather than any of the other genres in which she wrote. In a letter to her publishers in 1805, shortly before her death, she writes 'it is on the Poetry I have written that I trust for the little reputation I may hereafter have & I know that it is not the least likely among the works of modern Poets to reach another period - if Any judgement can be formed from the success it has had in this.'¹⁷ Smith has a definite eye on posterity, and it is through the body of her poetic work that she seeks her lasting fame (rather than through her children). She is hoping to have written great work which will be remembered and, with this knowledge, the way in which Smith conducts her self-display acquires additional significance for her reader. Revealing this element in a letter written in 1802, again to a publisher, Smith seems to deny the fundamental reason why she set out on her literary career. 'From long habit & I may say from general success, tho under very great disadvantages, I am never so well pleased as when I have a good deal of work to do & my greatest vexation is that the affairs of my family require so much of my attention that I cannot work at my literary business & that only.'¹⁸ By 1802, many of her children had grown up, though Smith still required money to purchase commissions for two of her sons, and, despite their marriages, her daughters still needed financial support from time to time. Smith may no longer have been writing to feed a young family, as she was in 1784, but she was still not free from financial constraints. Having been the main breadwinner for her family for nearly 20 years, it is perhaps understandable that Smith, who so early placed such obvious importance on her reputation as a poet, was frustrated that she could not pursue her

¹⁷ Charlotte Smith to Thomas Cadell Jr. and William Davis signed from Bignor Park, August 18th, 1805 in *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), pp. 705-6.

¹⁸ Smith to William Davies, London, 18th February, 1802, *Collected Letters*, p. 404.

artistic inclinations to the full even at this late stage. Yet to a certain extent, her reputation was based on her ability to bring her family struggles into her poetry. Many of the poems published in the various editions of *Elegiac Sonnets* are deliberately rooted in the very real difficulties faced by Smith and her children, although a certain degree of caution should be retained when deciding exactly how autobiographical Smith allows these poems to be. Despite her professed regret at being unable to devote all her time to her writing instead of to her family, Smith's writing depends upon that family, both for its creation and its success. In 1797, two years after the favoured daughter, Anna Augusta, had died, Smith writes her most deliberately and most poignant sonnets; deliberate because even in what seems to be her most intense personal grief Smith, ever the professional poet, is still marketing herself to her readers, and her status as grieving mother allows it.¹⁹

The circumstances of Yearsley's venture into elegiac poetry were rather different. Where Smith was writing to a potential audience of thousands, and with the need to make sure that enough people bought her work to maintain her family, Yearsley was operating under the patronage of Frederick Hervey, 4th Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry. Her immediate financial needs were taken care of and Yearsley ostensibly needed to please only one reader with her output. That some of her poems should praise her patron is surprising neither within the standards of poetic convention, nor perhaps on a more personal level. Bristol had been a subscriber to Yearsley's first volume of poetry, and appears to have offered his protection when More withdrew hers, despite the clamour caused by the dissolution of relations between More and Yearsley. Indeed, Bristol was no stranger to the role of protector and patron to projects and individuals.

¹⁹ See the work on Smith by Jacqueline Labbe, Loraine Fletcher and Judith Phillips Stanton for an extensive exploration of how Smith 'markets' herself to her readers.

A Whig and social reformer, Bristol had received praise and thanks from many of those with whom he dealt, especially the inhabitants of his See in Ireland. The previous year, in 1786, Bristol's return to Ireland prompted a rather effusive poem to be written in praise of him. It declares him to be 'With mildest manners, and gentlest virtues blest, / And lov'd and honour'd by each feeling breast!'²⁰ He is 'The Guardian and Protector of mankind' (p. 5), and his 'lib'ral thought expands the public mind' (p. 4). Rather more considered praise of Bristol is recorded by John Walsh, in the form of an obelisk erected at Ickworth Park in his memory by the inhabitants of Derry bearing this inscription: 'His great patronage was / Uniformly administered upon the purest and / Most disinterested principles.'²¹ Walsh also notes how, whilst Bishop of Derry, Bristol's energy in the role meant that he visited every one of the forty-eight parishes within his See, 'encouraged new methods of farming', and instituted the building of bridges and roads.²²

Bristol was a man of vigour, who devoted considerable time and energy in aid of the causes he took under his wing, including his literary project, Ann Yearsley, and it appears that she truly admired the famously liberal (and somewhat eccentric) Earl, who had a passions for 'art and architecture.'²³ He was 'one of the great personalities of his age',²⁴ though it has also been said that 'throughout his life fresh schemes and ideas were to excite his imagination and lure him away from projects nearly completed and thus no longer new.'²⁵ It is worth noting that Bristol's association with Yearsley

²⁰ Newburgh Burroughs, *Lines Addressed to the Earl of Bristol, on his Return to Ireland; in the Year 1786* (Thomas Byrne: Dublin, 1786), p. 7.

²¹ Inscription quoted in John R. Walsh, *Frederick Augustus Hervey 1730-1803* (Maynoth's Department of Modern History, St. Patrick's College, 1972), p. 44.

²² *ibid.*, p. 31.

²³ Gerard O'Brien, 'Hervey, Frederick Augustus, fourth Earl of Bristol (1730-1803)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/view/article/13111>.

²⁴ Peter Rankin, *Irish Building Ventures of the Earl Bishop of Derry* (Belfast: Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, 1972), p. 3.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 36.

continued for almost a decade, until Yearsley retired from her literary career to run a circulating library in the Bath area. His reputation for being rather flighty seems to have been well earned, yet despite a hiatus when Yearsley expressed sympathies for the French Revolution, Bristol seems to have been steadfast in his support of Yearsley's poetic efforts; he is the only person to have subscribed to all three volumes published by Yearsley during the course of her career. He appears to have been an extremely charismatic man and, for Yearsley at least, a staunch supporter. He was, in short, a man who would have been the antithesis of More's stern piety, and an attractive figure as Yearsley's new patron. On her behalf, Bristol employed his daughter, Lady Elizabeth Foster, to promote Yearsley's play *Earl Goodwin* around the London theatres, where, Lady Foster writes, 'Mr Sheridan has been so good, as to promise me, that He will read your play, and have it Acted, if it is likely to succeed on the Stage.'²⁶ His correspondence with Yearsley indicates a man keenly interested in both the artistic merits of his protégée's output and the furtherance of her career. With such a man providing financial protection and influence, Yearsley was more insulated from the necessity of finding and maintaining a readership than Smith, though her use of the elegy is no less deliberate than Smith's.

Although Bristol and Yearsley had formed a traditional patronage relationship, Yearsley was still a professional writer, with a reputation which needed considerable restorative work following her damaging break with More. It was also a career which would potentially run beyond Bristol's involvement and therefore needed continual cultivation; although Bristol was an active patron, Yearsley could not afford to be complacent about her status. Even with the efforts of Bristol and his daughter in the

²⁶ Letter from Lady Elizabeth Foster, November 27th 1788 to Ann Yearsley, enclosed in a letter from Yearsley to Wilmer Gossip dated January 1789 in Frank Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage: The Thorp Arch Archive: Part II', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 22:1 (2003), 13-56 (37).

promotion of *Earl Goodwin* in the London playhouses, Sheridan will still only have it acted 'if it is likely to succeed on the Stage'. Aristocratic patronage does not remove the need for Yearsley's writing to make money, both for her, and the publishers and playhouse managers with whom she was involved. Similarly, even the mourning of Smith and Yearsley had to be of interest to the reader in order that they would buy the next publication, and the next. This inevitably complicates our reading of the two women's representations of maternal grief, and forces us to ask questions about the nature and purpose of poetic construction. Although the reader to a certain degree is invited to see the subject matter of the poetry as 'real', Smith and Yearsley take this accepted aspect of poetry and make use of it for their own purposes. As both women were famous, even notorious in some circles, the prospect of being able to glimpse the 'real' poets who have stood up to husbands and patrons was surely an inviting prospect. I will argue, first with Ann Yearsley, then with Charlotte Smith, that from poetry's negotiation between poet and reader, the two women are able to fashion a means of gaining further artistic authority and continued income.

Yearsley's 1787 volume of poetry has provoked a rather mixed response from modern critics. Mary Waldron has suggested that within the volume '[b]itter criticisms of her erstwhile patrons alternate with conformist, paternalist poems',²⁷ and argues that these poems form a paradoxical mix bitterly criticising her first patrons, More and Montagu, and expressing abject profusions of gratitude for her newest patron. For Waldron, Yearsley is continuing her attempt to claim for herself a higher class status than that to which she is entitled by her birth. The first of the two poems dedicated to

²⁷ Waldron, "By no means milk and water matters": the contribution to English poetry of Ann Yearsley, milkwoman of Clifton, 1753-1806', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 304 (1992), 801-804 (803).

Frederick Yearsley does indeed seem to fit the description of Waldron, the full title of the poem reading, 'To Frederick Yearsley, On his return from the Sacred Font, where the Right Honourable the Earl of Bristol stood Sponsor, the Child being distinguished by taking his Lordship's Name'. There seems to be a hint of one-upmanship to this lengthy title. More may have broken with Yearsley, but, Yearsley proclaims through the sponsorship of her son by Bristol, it has only been to her advantage. At the same time comes the compliment to the Earl, her son being 'distinguished' by being named Frederick.

The poem itself is an apparent blend of genuine delight at imagining the future of a life so new to the world, and praise of her patron, whose 'glories, blazing on the day / By strong reflection, strike thine infant brow' (p. 61, ll. 4-5), as she says to Frederick Yearsley. Yet despite its complimentary elements, the poem is principally about the relationship between a mother and her son. Yearsley creates a moving description of a mother's wishes for her son who, she declares, 'Affliction, Poverty, or Ill / Shall never own' (ll. 11-12), and the person she hopes her son will become:

then come, ye brightest forms,
 Who, viewless, from the bosom of the air,
 Behold fond man stretch out the web of Hope,
 Ne'er to attain completion: quick direct
 My lovely Boy to catch the pious deed,
 White-wing'd Idea, Faith, and firm Resolve.
 (ll. 12-17)

Yearsley summons a host of ethereal spirits, marshalling them to her son's protection and improvement. However, as the poem reaches its conclusion, the reader of the original 1787 volume cannot help but notice the title of the next poem, 'On the Death

of Frederick Yearsley' and the lines with which Yearsley has just closed the first poem are suddenly imbued with pathetic power:

For me the wing of Time is nearly plum'd;
 For thee, yet scarcely fledg'd; yet, when the hour
 Of Judgement comes, with filial feeling join'd,
 Remember, Frederick, 'twas a Mother's wish,
 That self-denying Virtue, rigid Rule,
 And Heaven-attempting Hope be ever *thine*.
 (ll. 49-54)

The reader is presented with the horrible irony that it is Frederick's time which is short, not his mother's, as she imagines it to be. This lends a disturbing sense of futility to the entire poem, dedicated as it is to a boy who, the reader learns, has died never knowing of the dreams entertained by his mother on his behalf.

Indeed, this irony, this sense of futility, is cultivated by Yearsley, who has deliberately placed these two poems alongside each other. In many ways, the two poems are two halves of a story, the hoped-for ending of the first half having to be tragically rewritten. In place of the blank verse of the first poem, the death of Frederick is lamented in elegiac, or heroic, quatrains.²⁸ The invocation of spirits to aid Frederick has been replaced by Yearsley's heartfelt plea to the angel of death not to take her infant son who, in the first stanza, seems yet to live. Yearsley's description of his death, and of her own inability to save her son, is deeply moving. She seeks to deter Death with Frederick's 'infant smile' and 'innocence' which 'will dull thy barbed dart, / And ev'ry horror of its sting beguile' (p. 65, ll. 2-4). Yet neither his charms nor his mother's love can save the boy, despite Yearsley's desperate appeal:

²⁸ Daniel Robinson, 'Elegiac Sonnets: Charlotte Smith's formal paradoxy', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 39.2 (2003), 185-220 (unpaginated in LION).

Oh clasp him not within thine icy arms!
 But give him to my tender warm embrace;
 Let me but breathe upon his op'ning charms,
 And call the flying beauties to his face.
 (ll. 5-8)

Frederick, dying, is inattentive 'to the voice of Fame', and Glory, which in the first poem Yearsley holds as that which gives meaning to existence, is left weeping and 'from his infant crest, / Bears back to *Bristol* his too mighty name' (ll. 10-12). Her patron's name is simply too much for Yearsley's young son and the poem laments that the gift of that name, so recently bestowed, must be returned with its potential unfulfilled. What Yearsley also seems to be mourning is the failure of her attempt to demonstrate her esteem for the patron upon whom her immediate publishing future depends. Frederick, the 'Distinguished Babe' (l. 13), will no longer be a living display of her gratitude, and the fine verses composed to celebrate the boy's christening are all for nought.

The poem closes with Yearsley wishing for death, taking comfort in the belief that her course has little left to run, a final inversion of her closing remarks to Frederick in the first poem. The seeming lack of distance between the poet and the subject of the poem is discomfiting for the reader, and creates the sense, despite the fact that this poem has been published for public consumption, that the reader is somehow intruding on an intensely personal grief which has left Yearsley longing for death:

Distinguish'd Babe, farewell! a few short years,
 And I will meet thee on a happier shore;
 Thy angel smile shall there repay my tears,
 Then shall this anguish of the soul be o'er.

(ll. 13-16)

There is nothing for Yearsley beyond her grief and hope for her own death. Nor is the reader offered any consolation, as might be expected of other elegiac poems. Indeed, although the poet is inconsolable, she will eventually find release from her suffering, and have her tears repaid by her son's 'angel smile'. The reader, excluded from this reconciliation, is offered nothing but his or her own earth-bound sadness.

In this respect, the final refusal of comfort for the reader and, for the moment at least, for the suffering poet, functions in the same fashion as Charlotte Smith's elegiac sonnets which deal with the death of her daughter. As Daniel Robinson has noted, '[t]he progress of Smith's series is unrelentingly dark, as she denies her speaker the anagnorisis - the discovery [...] - of traditional elegiac poetry. The sonnets seem oppressive because Smith offers little consolation compared with [...] other elegies.'²⁹ In the series of six sonnets which are recognised as being about the death of Anna Augusta and Smith's response to that death, there are several occasions in which conventions are shared by Smith and Yearsley.

But wherefore fear existence such as mine,
 To change for long and undisturb'd repose?
 Ah! when this suffering being I resign,
 And o'er my miseries the tomb shall close,
 By her, whose loss in anguish I deplore,
 I shall be laid, and feel that loss no more!³⁰

Smith, too, laments her continued life, as 'While dragging thus unwish'd a length of days, / "Death seems prepared to strike, yet still delays"'(p. 77, ll. 13-14). However, Smith differs from Yearsley in that her poem lacks even the delayed ending of her

²⁹ Robinson, unpaginated.

³⁰ *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, Sonnet 74, p. 64, ll. 9-14.

deliberate structuring which may suggest a scheme beyond the simple, and genuine, sorrow of Smith at the loss of her daughter. Daniel Robinson points out:

The contemporary response evident in the reviews and certain poetic tributes to Smith is founded to a large degree in sympathy for the suffering expressed in the sonnets, combined with either a real or imagined comprehension of the poet's personal misfortunes. This essential act of sympathy [...] goes a long way to explain why the sonnets were so popular.³¹

What Robinson suggests here is a fluid boundary between poet and public, poet and persona, and the ability of the reader and poet to move between these categories is essential to the popularity of the poems. Indeed, by publishing poems such as these sonnets, Smith expects her reader to see, and to want to cross, these normally impermeable boundaries. The act of selling her work simultaneously requires the reader to feel sympathy with Smith herself, and to feel they are somehow witnessing that which has made their sympathy necessary. As Jacqueline Labbe has noted, Smith 'requires a certain kind of response. She needs to be rescued. If her readers find her persona attractive enough, they will buy her poetry; her financial troubles will ease; she will live happily ever after.'³² Labbe also argues that Smith 'comports herself as a romantic female figure, an abandoned wife, a needy but devoted mother: she inhabits roles all consonant with proper femininity, and advertises her feminine need each time she pleads for death or gasps for assistance.'³³ As both Labbe and Robinson indicate, Smith allows her readers to fill a certain role which has been created in order to ensure the continued popularity, and therefore continued income, of the *Elegiac Sonnets*. Her grief within the sonnet series dealing with Anna Augusta's death is on display, at least

³¹ Robinson, unpaginated.

³² Jacqueline Labbe, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, poetry and the culture of gender* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 6.

³³ Labbe, *Romanticism*, pp. 12-13.

in part, so that the reader can chivalrously come to her rescue, and attempt, through the purchase of the poems, to relieve her from her misery.

Smith's contemporary audience registered mixed opinions about the construction of the poems as commodities as well as expressions of mourning, many seeing this as artificial and distasteful. The continued sadness of the sonnets also served to alienate some readers. *The Critical Review*, in particular, criticised Smith: 'Poor Charlotte – still weeping and wailing, and gnashing thy poetical teeth.'³⁴ The reviewer satirises the apparent artificiality of Smith's feelings, and the attack on Smith's poetic credibility is severe:

The forced inversions, the unnatural conceits, the remote allusions, the splendid metaphors, and pompous epithets, have convinced us that the *head*, instead of the *heart*, has been the parent of most of our whining productions. The language of wounded nature is simplicity: the gaudy flowers of poetry spring not from the soil of despair.³⁵

The accumulation of damning adjectives is very powerful. The reviewer's remarks are tantamount to accusing Smith of fabricating the sentiment in her poetry in order that she can manipulate her readers. That her apparent grief arises from her '*head*, instead of the *heart*' is a powerful indictment of a celebrated poet. Generally conservative, *The Critical Review* may have had cause to take exception to Smith's famously radical politics, demonstrated in 1792 and 1793 with the publication first of the pro-Revolutionary novel *Desmond* and then the poem *The Emigrants*. However, the review of *Desmond* indicates a respect for Smith's talents as a writer, and even concludes, 'We trust that Mrs. Smith's invention is not yet exhausted, and that we may be again entertained by her very interesting narratives.'³⁶ That the more liberal and perhaps more sympathetic *Monthly Review* also seems wearied by the constant misery of the material

³⁴ *The Critical Review*, (October 1797), 149.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 151.

³⁶ *The Critical Review* 6 (September 1792), 104-5.

published by Smith, is significant. Even though the reviewer has felt that her previous status as a poet was well-deserved, there are criticisms levelled at Smith:

The general merits of Mrs Smith as a writer, and the characteristics of her Sonnets in particular, are well known. The present volume is said to have been composed under the heavy pressure of difficulties, and amid heart-rending sorrows. It pains us to hear so frequently of this lady's misfortunes, and, unable as we are to remove them, to find no others equally willing, and more empowered, to alleviate them. In the preface [of the sonnets], Mrs S. intimates that she may probably never again address the public. Why has this idea been formed? The world has not been inattentive to this lady's compositions.³⁷

Clearly, the tone of this second review is by no means as scathing as the first, but there is still the general sense that Smith's insistent representation of her life as miserable is beginning to wear out her audience: the very audience she needs to make sure comes back for more poetry, more fiction, and so pays her bills. What the reviewer seems to object to, though, is not the sadness of the poetry itself, but rather what he sees as the melodramatic determination not to 'again address the public.' The reviewer expresses apparently genuine sympathy and concern that Smith labours under her difficulties still, and that the review itself is unable to aid her. Indeed, implicit within its lamentation at Smith's struggles is a rebuke of Smith's other readers who may be better placed to help, but who do not.

What triggers *The Critical Review's* dislike of Smith's sonnets may be an aspect of the particular sonnets dealing with the loss of Anna Augusta. In many of her works Smith is able to blur that boundary between the poet and the reader by allowing the reader to believe they are seeing the poet when, in fact, Smith herself is hidden from view. In the poems about her daughter, however, Smith is no longer using the filter of a fictional persona, but is making use of her own private grief. Without the pretence of

³⁷ *The Monthly Review* 24 (December 1797), 458-9.

a persona through which the reader can view the poetic figure, which ensures that the sorrows seem real but are not unpleasantly so, the knowledge that these are genuine emotions on display somehow seems to upset the reader's appreciation of the poetry. Daniel Robinson has noted, '[t]here are a few sonnets that mourn particular deaths [but these] are uncharacteristic of the sonnets as a whole.'³⁸ These unusual moments where Smith is writing about a real person, and one who was dear to her, may be the cause of the reviewer's criticisms. The writer in *The Critical Review* suggests that 'the gaudy flowers of poetry spring not from the soil of despair', yet calling poetry 'gaudy' implies that it is showy, artificial, immaterial and might suggest a pre-existing dislike of poetry in general, rather than a particular criticism of Smith's verse. Indeed, despair seems to be exactly where poetic inspiration lies for Smith. As Sylvia Mergenthal has noted, 'Smith's sonnets do not drown in melancholy, but achieve a degree of emotional detachment through the very act of literary creation.'³⁹ Far from being 'gaudy flowers', the Anna Augusta sonnets inhabit a complicated role. They are at once commercial device, literary statement, inspired poetry and, perhaps, a process of personal catharsis for the poet herself.

Precisely how significant were the identities chosen by Smith, both for her poetry and for herself, is clearly shown in the unpleasant and damaging row between the poet and her publishers which erupted shortly after the second volume of *Elegiac Sonnets* was printed in 1797 by Thomas Cadell Junior and William Davies. Reliant for many years on an intimate and understanding relationship with her publisher, Thomas Cadell Senior and later his son, and lacking the protection offered by an aristocratic patron, Smith suddenly found herself in a dispute which led to Cadell Junior and Davies threatening to withdraw their services. Attempting to play simultaneously the

³⁸ Robinson, unpaginated.

³⁹ Mergenthal, p. 72.

roles of impoverished and wronged single mother and professional poet, Smith seems to have been caught out when her proposal to issue another volume of poems was met with anger by her publishers. Smith, claiming that the poems she proposed to publish after volume two of the *Elegiac Sonnets* had only recently been made fit for public consumption, was accused of deliberately withholding them from the recent edition. Cadell Jnr. and his partner Davies felt that Smith had attempted to cheat them out of poetry which could have fortified the recent volume, in order to dishonestly generate further income for herself. Having featured Anna Augusta in a series of sonnets in that volume, Smith seems to have been only too aware of the need to provide for the several children, and their increasing families, who remained. Profiting, perhaps intentionally, from her role as grief-stricken mother, Smith's wish to publish another volume of poetry so soon indicates the blurred boundaries between her various roles, and, on this occasion, Smith fails to fulfil them all. Her publishers are not convinced of her professionalism; nor are they moved by her status as an unfortunate single mother. Both in life and within her poetry, Smith demonstrates a willingness to move beyond the conventional relationship between audience and poet in order to pursue her own agenda, and further shows that this was fraught with dangers.

In a series of letters between Smith and Cadell Jnr. and William Davies, the dispute is played out in full. Smith's defence of her conduct is robust and alternately resentful and placatory. The exchange of letters is testament to the break of a highly profitable relationship (at least for Cadell Senior, as Smith waspishly points out) between Cadell and Davies and Charlotte Smith:

Gentlemen,

I cannot help saying that I feel hurt at the intimation in your Letter last received that it would not be dealing quite fairly with you to publish so soon any other poems, and by the word withheld, you seem to intimate that a suspicion arises that I either kept back some verses

I might have added to the Subscription volume (with a view to make a farther & unfair advantage of them) or should defraud of poetry that might figure there the new work on which you have made an advance.

I did not intend to publish the Sonnets till Spring, & very surely I not only did not withhold any from the Vol of which you purchas'd the Copy right but did my utmost to make it worthy the former, of whose success, and the proffit that has arisen from it, I think M^r Cadell Sen^r has had no reason to complain. Perhaps my saying I had received some sketches among my books out of Sussex might have given rise to the idea you intimate, but nothing can be less correct, for so far from withholding I had forgotten (in the miseries I have gone thro since) what I had in some old memorandum books which were merely notes of subjects or half a dozⁿ unconnected lines. As to any verses whatever that I have compos'd since, surely neither the Subscribers nor the holders of the Copy right of the former volume have any right to complain of my making the most I can of them, nor can I see ~~how~~, if I published them tomorrow instead of four or five months hence, that any mortal would have cause to say I had injured ~~them~~ him. As well might a farmer who buys a crop of wheat of another complain that he the Seller look'd out for the sale of a crop of oats a year after. So it strikes me however.⁴⁰

Smith's defence of herself is perhaps not particularly convincing, but what does emerge from this letter is a sense of how little power she has over the publication of her work, and consequently her income from it. Later in the letter, she writes:

I am sensible Gentlemen, Alas! but too acutely sensible of the misery, the humiliation of being compelled, with so handsome a fortune of my own and such claims on behalf of my children, to be dependent on my writing for [...], being distracted by business, but the cares of so large a family & yet doom'd from year to year to invent fables for the public & to take as a favor any price offerd me because I am necessitated to ask advances — It would certainly add to this humiliation if I were therefore to be deprived of the liberty of printing any thing else while I was so engaged. But certainly you can't mean this.⁴¹

Smith's resentment at being so beholden to her publishers is clear to see, and as the matter progresses over the next few letters, this resentment becomes more palpable, and increasingly bitter. In a letter sent to her publishers only two days later, Smith responds

⁴⁰ Letter to Thomas Cadell, Jr., and William Davies, Headington, Oct^r 20th 1797, *Collected Letters*, pp. 294-5.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 295.

to her accusers with strong words and a reminder that she is a seasoned author, one not ignorant, though at the mercy of, the ways of publishing:

[...] since you seem so decidedly of opinion that I shall injure you materially, I shall give up the half form'd plan I had conceived of a publication, by which I did suppose I might have gain'd a few Guineas without injury to any human being. No, Gentlemen, it is not that you are at my mercy; the reverse is the fact: I am evidently at yours.

I have not been condemn'd in the character of a necessitous Author to deal with Booksellers for about nine years without understanding how much it is in the power of the eminent of them to combine in crushing an Author who attempts to derive proffit, either by publishing for himself, or sells his works to less establishd Characters in the Trade.⁴²

Of course, almost Smith's only hope of being able to sell her work successfully is to ensure that prospective publishers are convinced of the possibility that her work will sell, and Smith may have had genuine cause to complain about her publishers' treatment of her. Yet as she may have generated sympathy in her readers to ensure the continued selling of her books, so she may have attempted to generate the need for another volume of poetry.

However, as Edward Copeland has pointed out, Smith gained far less from her work than other, less financially insecure writers may have been able to procure from their publishers: '[Smith] generally received £50 a volume for her novels, that is £150 to £200 each. If she had not been hamstrung by pretensions to gentility [...] she might have negotiated for still more.'⁴³ Copeland misses the point I believe by suggesting that Smith's inability to profit to the full from her writing was as a result of concerns about her 'gentility'. Jan Fergus has noted that '[e]stablished authors, unwilling to leave themselves at the mercy of publishers' generosity, might contract for additional

⁴² Letter to Thomas Cadell, Jr., and William Davies, Headington, 22nd Oct^r 1797, *Collected Letters*, p. 297.

⁴³ Edward Copeland, *Women Writing about Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 202.

payments once a specified number of copies or editions were printed or sold.⁴⁴ Smith, in need of money quickly because of her financial circumstances, was often advanced sums of money on the copyright of future projects and was, I would argue, in an extremely weak position from which to hammer out a better deal with her publishers should her work prove successful. James Raven has noted that there was a 'heavy responsibility upon authors to choose, in what was largely a buyer's not a seller's manuscript market, the best option for having their work published.'⁴⁵ Smith, as she states in her letter to her publishers, was more at their mercy than they were at hers. Smith only published her poetry twice by subscription, perhaps because, as Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus indicate, although it 'could be the most lucrative method', it was also 'demeaning [...] since it required direct solicitation for payments,' and may have been viewed with an element of distaste by Smith.⁴⁶ Nor was poetry the best paid genre she attempted. Smith, therefore, seems to have been in a fairly poor position when it came to publishing her work, although in their reply to Smith's first letter proposing a new collection of poems, her publishers suggest otherwise: 'we are wholly at your Mercy, Madam - We certainly made no Stipulation that you should not publish whatever you pleased whenever you pleased.'⁴⁷ There may well not have been any stipulation written into their dealings, but the necessity of maintaining a working relationship with her publishers is demonstrated in the correspondence from Smith later in the year, where she borrows £50 of Cadell and Davies and begs for £20 more

⁴⁴ Jan Fergus, 'The Professional women [sic] writer', in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 12-31 (p. 17).

⁴⁵ James Raven, 'The Book Trades', in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England: New Essays* [2001], ed. by Isabel Rivers (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 1-34 (p. 20).

⁴⁶ Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus, 'Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 17 (1987), 191-207 (193).

⁴⁷ Letter from Cadell and Davies to Charlotte Smith, postmarked OXFORD: OC/23/97, identified by Stanton, *Collected Letters*, p. 299, n. 1.

before the year is out.⁴⁸ With her publishers also claiming that they had ‘not derived from [Smith’s work] a single Guinea of advantage’, Smith seems to have been utterly constrained by her financial circumstances.⁴⁹ Her ability to provide for her family hinges on her profitability for her publishers and, as Sarah Zimmerman points out, ‘Smith was sharply aware that her continuing success was generated largely by her readers’ sympathetic response to a figure of herself as elegiac poet.’⁵⁰ Despite these apparently crippling financial pressures, I argue that both Smith and Ann Yearsley resist the very conventions of the elegiac poetry upon which their incomes depend, specifically, the convention which requires a focus on the future, on the positive that can be gained from what has been lost. I contend that both Yearsley and Smith refuse this aspect of the elegy, gaining a power independent of their financial needs from their representations of grief.

One of the features of the Anna Augusta sonnets is their position within a poetic tradition stretching back towards the beginning of the eighteenth century. In many of the elegiac sonnets, and in particular the series engaging with her daughter’s death, Smith is building upon the work of a series of writers who can be grouped loosely together as the ‘graveyard poets’. She is also engaging with, and resisting, the various conventions of the elegiac form as it has been used from Petrarch to the ‘graveyard poets’ themselves. Characterised, not surprisingly, by a focus on death, the poems of this group were also interested in the nature of grief, superstition and religion. It is this last which Patricia Meyer Spacks sees as crucial: ‘The “graveyard

⁴⁸ Letters to Cadell Jr. and Davies dated Headington, 27 November 1797 and London, 30 December 1797, *Collected Letters*, pp. 300, 301.

⁴⁹ Letter from Cadell and Davies to Charlotte Smith, postmarked OXFORD: OC/23/97, *Collected Letters*, p. 299.

⁵⁰ Sarah Zimmerman, ‘Charlotte Smith’s Letters and the Practice of Self-Presentation’, *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 53.1 (1991), 50-77 (50).

school,” one might expect, would encourage poetic addiction to the other-worldly; yet a serious religious context seems to prevent frequent reference even to ghosts.⁵¹ In Smith’s poetry, neither overtly supernatural nor religious elements are in evidence, but the general tone of reasoned enquiry into the significance of death in the Anna Augusta sonnets belongs with that of the ‘graveyard poets’. Within the work of Thomas Gray, Edward Young and Thomas Parnell lies an anxiety about death, and what it is to grieve. Often credited as the forebears of the gothic movement, some of the ‘graveyard poets’ also question the more traditional ideas of death as rest and release into God’s care. Death, for the poets within this school and, later, for Charlotte Smith, is a mobile concept. It is, for some poets, nightmarish; for others it is a perfectly natural process. The experience of grief is similarly mobile. It, too, is written of as natural, but some of the ‘graveyard poets’ also introduce the possibility of satirising grief as something with no practical purpose; grief has the potential to be an exercise in self-indulgence with little connection to the person who has died. Smith builds on the legacy of these poets, with interesting consequences.

Thomas Parnell’s 1721 poem, ‘A Night-Piece on Death’, is one of the earliest examples of ‘the graveyard school’. With a more obvious emphasis on the importance of religious tradition than is evident in some of the later poets of the group, Parnell constructs a poem which seeks to refamiliarise its audience with the idea that death is a part of human existence. Death itself is the voice of the final third of the poem, urging humanity to remember that death is the only way to God: ‘Death’s but a path that must be trod / If Man wou’d ever pass to God.’⁵² The poem bears a note of scepticism

⁵¹ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Insistence of Horror: Aspects of the Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 82.

⁵² Thomas Parnell, *A Night-Piece on Death* in *Collected Poems of Thomas Parnell*, ed. by Claude Rawson and F.P. Lock (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), p. 170, ll. 67-8.

about humanity's response to mortality and their obsession with earth-bound ambitions, even in death:

The flat smooth Stones that bear a Name,
 The Chissel's slender help to fame
 (Which ere our set of friends decay
 Their frequent steps may wear away),
 A *middle race* of mortals own,
 Men, half ambitious, all unknown.
 (ll. 33-8)

The tone of this brief verse paragraph is jarring in the wider context of the poem.

Parnell's attack is far-reaching, encompassing both the 'half ambitious' dead, and the mourners who, in the process of demonstrating their grief, actually remove all trace of the person for whom they grieve. This type of conduct, Parnell argues, will ensure that men are 'all unknown'. For Robert Blair, writing *The Grave* twenty years later, death is full of horrors. Parnell satirises the graveyard and its customs. Blair can only imagine it full of phantoms and the restless dead. It is a place 'Where light-heeled ghosts and visionary shades, / [...] perform their mystic rounds,' full of 'gloomy horrors', and death itself is 'night, dark night.'⁵³ The grave is dreadful, both for the dead doomed to behave like this, and for the living who must endure them. Blair describes death as perhaps the most unnatural state possible for a human being, and more likely the path to hell, than Parnell's path to God.

It is in the poetry of Thomas Gray, more than any other 'graveyard poet', that the similarities with Smith come to the fore. Of particular interest is Gray's poem 'Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West', written in 1742 but not published until 1775. Delayed until four years after Gray's death, the publication of this poem was contemporaneous for Smith. Gray's sonnet is an interesting mixture of ideas, but the

⁵³ Robert Blair, *The Grave: A Poem* (London: J. Waugh, 1753), p. 4 (ll. 24-6, l. 5, l. 13).

reader is initially struck by how many things are labelled as being 'in vain'.⁵⁴ The morning is 'in vain' (l. 1), as is the birds' singing (l. 3). Gray describes his own mourning in this way; the world continues without West despite Gray's sorrow: 'My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine.' He condemns his own mourning as being entirely pointless. It brings no benefit, either to West or himself, and only enhances his sense of loss. Even with the level of awareness demonstrated of the futility of grief the poet is still trapped within a self-defeating cycle of sadness, a cycle which the mourner is unable to escape. Gray is not 'Triumphantly distrest', as Edward Young writes, through mourning:⁵⁵ rather, the speaker is left removed and cut off from the rest of the world. The world continues oblivious, but the mourner cannot participate because the object of grief is not there. Without West for Gray or Anna Augusta for Smith, events elsewhere are meaningless. As Gray writes, 'These ears, alas! for other notes repine, / A different object do these ears require' (ll. 5-6). All the beauties of the natural world which Gray describes are meant for other 'happier men' (l. 10) who are cheered by 'morning smiles' (l.9) where 'In vain to me the smiling mornings shine' (l.1). Gray finds no comfort in the knowledge that life continues after death. The 'Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West' expresses important frustrations about the inadequacy of the poet himself when confronted with death, but where Gray closes his poem with the speaker cut adrift from society, Smith uses the futility of grief to add power to her poetry. The maternal grief contained within the poems is inconsolable, but the poetry itself is evidence that Smith remains in control both of her art form and her professional identity. Smith ultimately becomes '[t]riumphantly distrest'; the reader

⁵⁴ Thomas Gray, 'Sonnet on the Death of Mr. Richard West' in *The Poems of Thomas Gray*, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (London and Harlow: Longmans, 1969), pp. 67-68.

⁵⁵ Edward Young, 'Night I', *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (London: R. Dodsley, 1742), p. 6, l. 85.

cannot save Anna Augusta or relieve Smith's grief at her loss, but the reader can ensure that Smith's artistic legacy continues by purchasing her poetry.

The snowdrops of sonnet LXXVIII are an excuse for the contemplation of death and mourning. They serve as a reminder of previous pleasures enjoyed by the speaker before this almost unutterable loss, just as they do in Gray's poem, but here the speaker's inability to take pleasure in their appearance is also a sign of resistance:

Wan Heralds of the Sun and Summer gale!
 That seem just fallen from infant Zephyrs' wing;
 Not now, as once, with heart revived I hail
 Your modest buds, that for the brow of Spring
 Form the first simple garland[.] - Now no more
 Escaping for a moment all my cares,
 Shall I, with pensive, silent step, explore
 The woods yet leafless; where to chilling airs
 Your green and pencil'd blossoms, trembling, wave.
 Ah! ye soft, transient children of the ground,
 More fair was she on whose untimely grave
 Flow my unceasing tears! Their varied round
 The Seasons go; while I through all repine:
 For fixt regret, and hopeless grief are mine.⁵⁶

Smith proclaims that 'fixt regret and hopeless grief are mine', a statement which denies one of the features of elegiac poetry: the discovery of consolation in death, and of hope for the future. Unlike Gray's, though, Smith's grief is not 'in vain'. Her grief has provided her with material for her latest volume of poetry, thereby enabling her to support the children that are left. Although Smith resists the convention to find consolation after death within the poem, the very act of publishing these poems means

⁵⁶ Smith, 'Snowdrops', sonnet LXXVIII, *Poems*, p. 67.

that, in part at least, Smith acknowledges there is a life after Anna Augusta's death. This has connections with the argument proposed by Jacqueline Labbe:

the lost body of the dead child or mother is reconstructed through the private act of reading and the public one of the writing and publishing. Even as Smith reconstitutes her daughter's life and establishes her mother-love, she also creates a public memorial.⁵⁷

Smith's elegiac poetry serves to memorialise both her and her daughter. The poem may deny the comfort offered by the form, but it still attempts to speak to those who will follow the grieving poet and her tragic daughter. As Margaret Anne Doody has suggested, quoting from Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard',

Poetry not only staves off 'dumb Forgetfulness' in that the poet can hope not to be silent to posterity and forgotten by them; the making of poetry itself also staves off dumb Forgetfulness by being articulate, employing the powers of the mind [...] The poetry is a spell against death, oblivion, coldness, night and muteness.⁵⁸

In some respects, the act of writing the *Elegiac Sonnets* is an exercise in ensuring the continuation of Smith's poetic legacy, as much as to lament the failure of part of her biological legacy.

Within the poems themselves, the idea that Smith is somehow looking towards the future seems rather improbable. All around the poet-speaker the world changes and continues, but the grief is unending. It transcends normal existence, and only in death does the speaker find constancy. The snowdrops are, like Anna Augusta, 'transient children', but death renders them a fixed and static object which can be lamented regardless of everyday occurrences, as Judith Hawley notes:

[Smith] resists the traditional consolation of elegy, preferring to remain defeated and alienated [...] Smith exists in a continual present of suffering, refusing nostalgic assimilation to a past

⁵⁷ Labbe, 'The Romance of Motherhood', 3.

⁵⁸ Margaret Anne Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 195-6.

imagined as whole, or an idealistic transcendence in the future; rather she makes an eternity of her present woe.⁵⁹

This element of choice identified by Hawley is particularly interesting. As she writes, Smith 'prefers' to exist in this state of unmitigated grief, suggesting a conscious move away from the traditional consolation offered by this poetry. The idea of choice which Hawley proposes may be indicative of a wider literary, and perhaps personal, goal. By resisting the consolation on offer, Smith is able to transcend the balance between personal, or artistic demands, and professional considerations. Smith is not simply performing her grief for her readers through her sonnets: the elegy is in itself inadequate as a vessel for her mourning.

Although the expression of grief and sorrow in Ann Yearsley's poetry bears many similarities to that of Smith, Yearsley's position as a melancholic poet is different. Smith chooses to assume the role, but no such choice is immediately available to Yearsley in her first appearance in melancholic guise; Yearsley has the role pressed upon her by her first patrons. In the 'Prefatory Letter' from Hannah More and Elizabeth Montagu published at the beginning of Yearsley's first volume of poems, repeated mention is made of Yearsley's sorrow, and the attraction of this misery for More is clearly evident. As More writes, the verses 'were rendered still more interesting, by a certain natural and strong expression of misery, which seemed to fill the heart and mind of the author.'⁶⁰ More states that Yearsley's verse must be read within the context of the suffering she has endured through the loss of her mother and the near-starvation of her entire family. Not completely honestly, More writes that 'I wish I could entirely

⁵⁹ Judith Hawley, 'Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets: Losses and Gains*', in *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730-1820*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 184-198 (p. 195).

⁶⁰ Hannah More, 'Prefatory Letter' in *Poems on Several Occasions* by Ann Yearsley (London: T. Cadell, 1785), p. iv.

pass over this part of her story; but some of her most affecting verses would be unintelligible without it.⁶¹ As a result of More's intervention, Yearsley cannot help but be seen as a melancholic poet, denied the ability as a professional writer to be able to manipulate what the reader sees of her. She is prevented from making use of the poetic conventions open to Charlotte Smith which allow that a poet can hide behind a constructed identity, or the power to resist poetic conventions if it suits her purpose. Instead, Yearsley's poetry is validated by More on the understanding that Yearsley can inhabit only one role: that of the grief-stricken, devoted daughter mourning the death of her mother, the loss of whom 'has left a settled impression of sorrow' on her mind.⁶² The reader is prepared even for the form this melancholic poetry will take. Describing Yearsley as 'well acquainted' with Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, More locates Yearsley in a poetic mode with specific connotations, including a religious element. As Anne Stott notes, Young's poem was 'particularly admired by Anglican clergymen.'⁶³ Before the reader has had a chance to glimpse the work of the poet, they are being told what that work will be, and what it will mean. Author and, to a lesser extent, reader are denied a full and active role in the creation of the poetry bearing Yearsley's name.

The inclusion of a poem entitled 'Thoughts on the Author's own Death' which, the title proclaims, was 'Written when very young', in this first volume of poetry is unsurprising after the sort of introduction More has given, despite the reader being told that it seems to have been written long before the death of Yearsley's mother. The poem, a long meditation on what it is to die, clearly shows the influence of Young. At the same time, though, Young's influence also serves to undo some of the assumptions More sets up about Yearsley. This is not a poem which is concerned with mourning

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. v.

⁶² More, 'Prefatory Letter', p. v.

⁶³ Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 72.

those who die or lamenting mortality, but with using mortality to make a case for living life as fully as possible. In its attitudes towards death, Yearsley's poem resembles not only Young's poetry, but also that of Thomas Parnell. Clearly aware of the literary climate, Yearsley also appropriates the new gothic images of poets like Robert Blair to construct a piece more to do with religion than the sorrow More argues permeates Yearsley's work. The decision to make use of the gothic in this poem seeks to resist the claims made for Yearsley by Hannah More and her circle, who felt her natural 'genius' sufficient to allow her to write about death, but who thought an understanding of this mode of writing beyond her. More's good friend and correspondent Horace Walpole, author *The Castle of Otranto* twenty years previously, claimed that Yearsley was intellectually incapable of seeing the narrative machinery behind his gothic novel, and would instead be terrified by his work. His letter to More on 13th November 1784 rebuking her for this decision culminates in an oft-quoted phrase, indicative both of Walpole's and More's attitudes towards Yearsley, and of the significance of the gothic mode in Yearsley's poem:

What! if I should go a step further, dear Madam, and take the liberty of reproving you for putting into this poor woman's hands such a frantic thing as the 'Castle of Otranto'? It was fit for nothing but the age in which it was written, an age in which much was known; that required only to be amused, nor cared whether its amusements were conformable to truth and models of good sense; that could not be spoiled; was in no danger of being too credulous; and rather wanted to be brought back to imagination, than to be led astray by it – but you will have set a hurly-burly in this poor woman's head which it cannot develop and digest.⁶⁴

Instead of having a 'hurly-burly' in her head, Yearsley answered Walpole directly after reading the novel in an arch and extremely witty verse response, also published in 1785, 'To the Honourable H___e W___e, On Reading The Castle of Otranto'. In this poem,

⁶⁴ Letter from Horace Walpole to Hannah More, 13 November 1784 in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* vol. 31, ed. by W.S. Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 221.

vocalised by a character reminiscent of Walpole's own Bianca, Yearsley concludes, tongue firmly in cheek, by figuring More as the one in need of rescuing from all the excitement generated by the novel:

STELLA! if WALPOLE'S spectres thus can scare,
 Then near that great Magician's walls ne'er tread,
 He'll surely conjure many a spirit there,
 Till, fear-struck, thou art number'd with the dead.

Oh! with this noble Sorcerer ne'er converse,
 Fly, STELLA, quickly from the magic storm;
 Or, soon he'll close thee in some high-plum'd hearse,
 Then raise another Angel in thy form.⁶⁵

The poem as a whole is a cleverly written riposte to the suggestion that Yearsley may not have had the intellectual ability to read something like Walpole's novel. More importantly, her handling of the gothic material in this semi-satirical mode demonstrates Yearsley's grasp of how to make use of gothic material for her own poetical ends. She concludes with the lines, 'To thee, Oh, balmy God! I'm all resign'd, / To thee e'en WALPOLE'S wand resigns its power' (p. 7, ll. 107-8), adding the religious element to her engagement with the gothic which, I will argue, provides 'Thoughts on the Author's own Death' with a momentum independent of the controlling influence of More.

The opening of 'Thoughts on the Author's own Death' is stereotypically gothic. In his introduction to the gothic, Fred Botting lists some of the stock features of gothic literature, many of which can be found in Yearsley's poem: 'Spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits populate Gothic landscapes as suggestive figures of imagined and realistic

⁶⁵ Ann Yearsley, 'To the Honourable H___e W___e, On Reading The Castle of Otranto, December 1784' in *Selected Poems*, ed. by Tim Burke, p. 6 (ll. 81-88).

threats.⁶⁶ That the 'heroine' of this poem, the female speaker braving the gothic landscape, is far from 'fainting' is the first indication that Yearsley's version of the gothic is designed to do more than describe 'marvellous beings and fantastic events.'⁶⁷ She seems instead to be following the directive of Patricia Meyer Spacks for ensuring poetic authority in the gothic: 'The marvelous must be employed with discretion, must be adjusted properly with the probable.'⁶⁸ Yearsley's engagement with gothic modes is, I would argue, an attempt to regain control of her poetic productions from More, and therefore to secure the power to determine how her work will be read which is denied her by More's 'Prefatory Letter'.

Initially in Yearsley's poem, death is everywhere, and the slow vowels give the first verse paragraph a funereal feel:

Thus, when the fatal stroke of Death's design'd,
 On oozy banks th' expiring swan reclin'd,
 Her own sad requiem sings in languid note,
 While o'er the stream the dying echoes float.⁶⁹

But this is not simply a gothic poem, and the scene is interrupted by the poetic voice interjecting to answer the assumed question of the reader:

But, ah! can youth dwell on the tragic part?
 Can I describe the trembling, panting heart?
 In Fancy's frolic age can I relate
 The pangs, the terrors of a dying state?
 Yes - tho' unskill'd, I'll the grim shade pursue,
 And bring the distant terror to my view;
 Dwell on the horrors of that gloomy hour;
 Death, made familiar, loses half his power.

⁶⁶ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 2.

⁶⁷ Botting, p. 6.

⁶⁸ Spacks, pp. 85-6.

⁶⁹ Ann Yearsley, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: T. Cadell, 1785), p. 17, ll. 1-4. All subsequent references to this poem will be in parentheses within the main body of the text.

(pp. 17-8, ll. 5-12)

Yearsley's claim is a bold one. She announces that she is brave enough, both poetically and intellectually, to pursue the topic of death as a subject for a poem; the existence of death is not enough to fill her with the 'sorrow' or 'misery' which so delighted More. Yearsley also aligns herself with Thomas Parnell by refusing to fear death itself and she imbues death with a profound social and religious significance which is, the poem argues, greater than earthly grief. As Fred Botting has commented, '[t]o contemplate death and its accompanying signs is to recognise the transience of physical things and pleasures.'⁷⁰ It is also, perhaps, to recognise the transience of imposed authority. Yearsley may be subtly stating that More's influence cannot last forever and is as much subject to death as Yearsley is.

The poem's trajectory is one of religiously informed rationality. The superstitious elements which are featured are dismissed, or at the least engaged with directly. Robert Blair describes how 'Again the screech-owl shrieks - ungracious sound! / I'll hear no more; it makes one's blood run chill' (p. 369, ll. 43-4), but Yearsley turns away from his gothic owl towards the owl in Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. Both Gray and Yearsley consider the night-birds more carefully, Gray writing that 'The moping owl does to the moon complain / Of such as, wand'ring near her secret bow'r, / Molest her ancient solitary reign' (p. 355, ll. 10-12). Gray uses the owl as an opportunity to explore mortality, and Yearsley chooses to do the same. The owl is an introduction for Yearsley into the spirit world. She does not, as Blair does, feel her 'blood run chill', but seeks closer contact. For Yearsley, there is no horror:

Come, restless souls,
Relax from torture; you whom Fate controuls
To purge your earthly crimes in liquid fire,

⁷⁰ Fred Botting, *Gothic*, p. 33.

In anguish plung'd, till ages shall expire;
 (This, ROME's grand tenet) sin thus wash'd away,
 Pure, bright, and cleans'd, you'll wing to endless day.
 (ll. 27-32)

Death is here, as it is in Parnell's poem, an experience of profound religious significance. Even the souls in purgatory Yearsley imagines are eventually able to find their way to God, cleansed of sin. Parnell's view is even stronger as he concludes his poem:

Such Joy, tho' far transcending Sense,
 Have pious Souls at parting hence.
 On Earth, and in the Body plac't,
 A few, and evil Years they wast:
 But when their Chains are cast aside,
 See the glad Scene unfolding wide,
 Clap the glad Wing and tow'r away,
 And mingle with the Blaze of Day.
 (p. 170-1, ll. 83-90)

The similarities between the two poems are clear. Neither speaker is sorrowful or mournful about the existence of death. Indeed, what characterises the speaker in Yearsley's poem is her inquisitiveness, culminating in a conversation with one of the ghosts of the churchyard. Much as Death speaks directly in Parnell's poem, Yearsley makes use of the ghost in her poem to illustrate the importance of faith in death. The ghost who is leaning, in a wonderfully gothic image, 'o'er yon misty tomb' (l. 33), is questioned by the speaker about the nature of death. This ghost is a sinner, one who 'bemoans the doom / Of never-erring Justice' which keeps him earth-bound (ll. 34-5). He is to be pitied, but the moral point is made, as it is in Parnell's poem. And as in Parnell's poem, the gothic is to be commanded, not feared. Parnell bids the ravens to

‘cease your croaking Din’ and ‘ye tolling Clocks, no Time resound’ (p. 170, ll. 56-7) so that the most important figure, Death, is able to make himself heard. Yearsley’s speaker commands the ghost to reveal the secrets of death, and receives a lesson in the absurdity of superstition, a lesson the reader must also heed:

Did’st tread soft lawns, or seek Elysian groves,
 Where Poets feign the lover’s spirit roves?
 Or, on light pinions cut the closing air,
 And to each planetary world repair?
 Or, guideless, stray where dismal groans resound,
 And forked lightnings quiver on the ground?
 Or did sad fiends thy unhous’d spirit meet,
 And with shrill yellings the poor trembler greet
 To the dark world?
 (ll. 41-49)

Death is none of these things, and the ghost’s blunt response that with ‘One gasp, and deep eternity [is] in view’ (p. 21, l. 57), is meant as a rejoinder to the reader as much as for the speaker of the poem.

The knowledge the shade gives that “‘The pangs of death too sure shall be thy own’” (p. 20, l. 52) does not lend what might be the expected melancholy tone. Instead, it inspires the most Youngian section of the poem as Yearsley’s speaker has a sort of epiphany, and vows to ‘renounce’ ‘vain Pleasure’ who is the ‘Enchanting Fair, who temp’st but to destroy’ (p. 22, ll. 69-70). She determines that ‘No more my moments must be lost with you; / No more my soul in empty mirth shall share’ (p. 22, ll. 72-3). The speaker (and perhaps also the reader), now conscious that death must eventually come, is aware of the passage of time, and the importance of making the best use possible of the time that remains. Indeed, the conclusion to Yearsley’s poem takes its cue directly from Young’s *Night I* in *Night Thoughts*:

The Bell strikes *one*. We take no note of Time,
 But from its Loss. To give it then a Tongue,
 Is wise in man. As if an Angel spoke,
 I feel the solemn Sound. If heard aright,
 It is the *Knell* of my departed Hours;
 Where are they? With the years beyond the Flood:
 It is the *Signal* that demands Dispatch:
 How Much is to be done? my Hopes and Fears
 Start up alarmed, and o'er life's narrow Verge
 Look down - on what? A fathomless Abyss;
 A dread Eternity! how surely *mine*!
 And can Eternity belong to me,
 Poor Pensioner on the mercies of an Hour?⁷¹

The importance of time is clearly evident in the conclusion to Yearsley's poem, but her plea for more time is tempered by the use of religious language and faith that death is not the end; when time runs out for Yearsley, there will be more to come in the care of God. Implicit within this is that although time has run out for Yearsley's mother, whose death is claimed by More as the spur for Yearsley's melancholia, they will meet again, and this is a source of strength for Yearsley. Indeed, Parnell's poem lacks this faith, and seems rather to be fearful of eternity, than able to accept its inevitability as Yearsley does:

And thou, all-merciful! omniscient Power!
 O teach me to redeem each mis-spent hour;
 In youth the mind's best gifts most strongly shine,
 Ah! let them not too suddenly decline!
 In mercy add a few remaining years,
 The grave shall lose its sting, my soul shall lose its fears.
 (p. 22, ll. 75-80)

⁷¹ Young, p. 5, ll. 54-66.

Quite clearly, death is not the source of concern for Yearsley. Her closing lines express a desire to make the most of the time granted to her, and an acceptance that at the end of a full life, death itself should not be cause for grief and mourning. Yearsley is in no hurry to meet her mother, and is happy for her life to run its course. Following the death of Frederick Yearsley, Yearsley concludes the elegy to her son with a wish for the 'few short years' of her life to elapse, but here, when the old die before the young as they are supposed to, Yearsley resists the melancholic mode being pressed upon her by her patrons. In contrast, Young's poem expresses surprise at the realisation that eternity can 'belong' to a person and although Young's poem contains the same plea as Yearsley's, to be able to make the best use of the time given, the meanings of the two poets are entirely different. Young's description of a 'Poor Pensioner on the mercies of an Hour' (l. 65) suggests that Time is a beneficent giver, allowing a human to eke out an existence on the 'abyss' of eternity, living on the charity of a deity. Although taking her lead from Young in her contemplation of death, Yearsley's poem comes to a somewhat different conclusion. Faith is the determining factor in whether these two poets are able to embrace death and the eternity to follow. Yearsley's ability to accept the inevitability of death enables her to move beyond the role created for her by More's 'Prefatory Letter'. By making use of the gothic mode to resist the authority of her patrons, Yearsley regains the power of authorship, and the right to determine how her work will be read. It is a power of the same kind achieved by Smith in resisting the consolation offered by the elegy, and it enables both women to retain control over their work.

The effects of this experience are evident in Yearsley's subsequent career. Having been involuntarily cast in the role of melancholy poet by More, Yearsley, after their break, chooses to occupy this subject position when it suits her purpose. These later

appropriations of melancholy are not always as successful in granting Yearsley power as her initial attempt. In a letter to Eliza Dawson, Yearsley laments the hardships of her lot and describes a plan to give up verse and to become a publican:

My mind indeed is as a troubled stream whose movements I can scarcely command or penetrate the depth of its agitated powers! - your kind and friendly hope of L__ B__'s support is too sanguine: at least my heart has been too often chill'd to feel a warmth *now* from my distant prospect as an instance of this. I mean to quit my little Cotage [sic]; wherein I have known tranquillity, and which I would never leave, was my settled income eqall [sic] to the expenditure of my family: I find it not so, and to subsist upon temporary obligations wounds me: therefore think of entering upon a business which promises fair as to worldly interest but is the worst adapted to my sentiments of any; it being that of a large public House. I am well aware that the measure will be directly opposite to my present Character, simplicity, or purity never being considered as requisites in such a line, nor may I enjoy in the busy scene of life, the solitary happiness which composition affords: *but* my Children plead loud against Inactivity: not one of them is Camelean [sic], enough to live on a *Mother's fame*: then is it not my Duty to exchange it for *their* external Comfort?⁷²

Similar in many ways to the preface Smith wrote and which was deplored for its threat to cease writing, this letter of Yearsley's is far more successful than Smith's warning. In response to the plan it proposes, Yearsley received the substantial sum of £40 (the yearly income for Goldsmith's priest in *The Deserted Village*) to enable her to continue writing. However, it is her somewhat evasive response to this gift from her patron and friend Wilmer Gossip, and the kindnesses shown to her by other friends, which are most interesting. A month later, Yearsley writes to Gossip:

My Dear Friend

How have you oppress'd me! [...] when in pleasing Confidence I imparted my sentiments to you and Miss Dawson I did not Consider that Confidence as *Solicitation*.

It is thus the afflicted Mind, is too oft kept back from tasting that happiness, which Sympathy alone could afford, because if we Complain, we are look'd upon as Supplicants for

⁷² Ann Yearsley to Eliza Dawson, dated as 29 December, 1788 by Frank Felsenstein, in Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage: The Thorp Arch Archives: Part II', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 22:1 (2003), 13-56 (35).

Releif [sic]; most true we are so! but it is that Releif we seek, which arises from *monopolizing* the Remembrance of those we love, and sealing the richest treasures they possess, as our own.

Such antidotes to sorrow, can you and Eliza [Dawson], ever afford Lactilla, without taking the surest way of throwing Me from You, by robbing me of *Language*.

[...] This is a singular method of thanking you my generous Friend, for £40! — it may be so, for I have no words whose sounds are strong enough to please me (,) therefore will only say, that in the Names of my whole Family, *I thank you*, and will teach them, never to forget M^r Gossip.⁷³

It seems difficult to believe that Yearsley did not realise that her earlier letter would provoke such a response from Gossip and there seems to be an element of disingenuousness in her conduct here. This sense is only heightened by the comments of Robert Fairfax, some of which have been discussed, to whom Gossip had applied to encourage Fairfax to support Yearsley. As he rather waspishly notes to Gossip, 'I rather suspect, that you had some intentions upon my purse.'⁷⁴ He continues:

Your intentions, I daresay, were perfectly charitable; but I must own, I do not look upon M^s Yearsley, as an object for distant contributions: Her acquisitions by her Poems are not inconsiderable. Her Neighbourhood to Bath: the Patronage of many Friends, exclusive of the two fair Deserters, & the strong party in her favour, must insure her something beyond the bare necessaries of life.⁷⁵

Fairfax instead recommends the poetry of a certain Robert Burns to Gossip, demonstrating that Yearsley's attempts to appear melancholic have not worked.

Yearsley's prospective patron is as unmoved as Smith's publishers; all are unconvinced by the poses being struck by the writers with whom they must deal. With an illustrious nobleman as her main patron and several lesser known contributors, Yearsley, Fairfax suggests, has no need of any more. Smith, on the other hand, can never have too many readers, and the melancholic representation she chooses helps her to acquire more, but

⁷³ Ann Yearsley to Wilmer Gossip, 25 January 1789 in Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage', 41.

⁷⁴ Robert Fairfax to Wilmer Gossip, 5 February 1789 in Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage', 48.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 48.

the interest of these new readers must also be maintained through further melancholic moments. The consequences for Smith can be, as we have seen, unpleasant.

Although Yearsley receives the £40 from Gossip as a result of representing herself as overwrought by her trials, she loses a reader. The reasons for this can perhaps be found in a letter to Gossip after announcing her plans to be a publican, but before she has received his generous gift. This letter from earlier in January 1789 shows Yearsley withdrawing from her scheme. The ease with which she changes her mind, having painted the most desperate situation for her children if she did not take on a public house, adds to suspicion about her incredulity that Gossip was moved to give her money:

My late Resolve not agreeing with my best Sentiments was easily Over ruled by M^r Eagles. I candidly declared to him, with the view of sacrificing the happiness I had so long enjoyed in his improving Conversation. The silent perplexity into which that gentleman was thrown, gave me pain mixed with admiration, and Esteem. I felt an emotion which might be truly termed Melancholy pleasure.⁷⁶

It is this idea of 'Melancholy pleasure' which seems to be the cause for Fairfax's, and perhaps also the reader's, discomfort with the way in which Yearsley describes her situation over the course of these letters. Bristol, too, warns Yearsley to beware of melancholy in her work. He writes, 'but let me entreat you, not to yield to the impression of melancholy! A little portion of it is congenial with your Frame, and perhaps essential to your Poesy; as a small pang of the gout is necessary to my Constitution, it clears the head and raises the spirits.'⁷⁷ Bristol's warning is based on the supposition that melancholy, beyond that required for poetry, is bad for the health. He directs her to 'Believe me, Lactilla, govern your Frame like a Clock. Like a Harpsichord,

⁷⁶ Ann Yearsley to Wilmer Gossip, January 1789, in Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage', 37.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, encl. Novr 27 [17]88, 38.

keep it well, rosin it well, and shield it from damp'.⁷⁸ How necessary melancholy is to Yearsley's poetry is a key question. Much in the same way as Smith is 'triumphantly distressed' in her poetry, it may be the case that Yearsley derives 'Melancholy pleasure' both from using the melancholic in her poetry, and from presenting herself as suffering severe hardships. This taking of pleasure in her own melancholia may be a source of power for Yearsley, as it is for Smith. However, the extent to which Yearsley is able to gain power from the poetry about the death of her son Frederick is open to debate.

The conclusion to Yearsley's poem on the death of her son shows the poetic voice refusing to be consoled, much as Smith's poetic voice operates in her sonnets. The tone of Yearsley's poem is defiant and pleading in turns, but by the final stanza, the resignation is palpable, the lack of comfort to be found in this world clear. Initially, the angel of death is 'obdurate', hard-hearted and unfeeling. But when it becomes apparent that no entreaty will be able to save her son, death is the only thing which can allow 'this anguish of the soul to be o'er' (l. 16). Indeed, it is this complicated relationship with death within this poem that I argue gives Yearsley a similar power to that available to Smith. In particular, Yearsley's vision of death is one which seems to grant power to the poet. Death is not a figure of fear, nor a monster, but a thief. Frederick too has a power which death, should he 'behold that infant smile' (l. 2), cannot help but acknowledge and in this way, Yearsley denies death's natural process. As a result, no comfort can be found in a world where a child's innocence is no protection from this great thief: Frederick 'will dull thy barbed dart / And ev'ry horror of its sting beguile' (ll. 3-4). This phrase carries an ironic echo of the earlier 'Thoughts on the Author's Own Death', which Yearsley closes by writing that 'The

⁷⁸ Ann Yearsley to Wilmer Gossip, January 1789, in Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage', 37.

grave shall lose its sting, my soul shall lose its fears' (p. 22, l. 80). There, an acceptance of death as a part of life was a form of resistance to the reading imposed upon Yearsley by her patron. Here, death is a place of forgetfulness and oblivion away from the pain of life. It is a sentiment redolent of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* where he declares 'how happy they who wake no more!',⁷⁹ suggesting that, for Yearsley, life has nothing to offer; no consolation, no hope, no future. That death has chosen the young where, as Yearsley herself writes, 'For me the wing of Time is nearly plum'd' (p. 64, l. 49), implies that far from being a natural part of life, death is morally suspect. Yearsley's poem, although sunk, by the end, into a deeply moving grief for the loss of her son, is also a defiant denial of death's right to inflict this pain with no hope other than that death will seek them out as well. It is a poem that seems initially to acknowledge death as a natural process, but which vehemently opposes its power to take the young before the old. This, the poem argues, is the reverse of natural order, and as a result, the poet refuses to take the traditional consolation offered by the elegy.

Both Smith and Yearsley seek to do more with their elegiac poetry than at first seems possible. Although Yearsley's position as an author was less precarious than Smith's in many respects, the legacy of More's enforced reading of her as a melancholic poet focussed seemingly exclusively on death is something which, certainly in the 1785 volume of poems, was perhaps difficult to challenge. When she does focus on death in the 1787 collection, it is in a direct confrontation.

Smith may have been beholden to her publishers and dependent upon the good graces of her readership, but behind the maternal grief she is able to continue to be daring in her poetry. As noted by Mergenthal, 'Smith's sonnets do not drown in

⁷⁹ Young, p. 3, l. 7.

melancholy, but achieve a degree of emotional detachment through the very act of literary creation.⁸⁰ By writing about intense personal grief, Smith is able to retain her professionalism, making use of material at hand in order to maintain her career and reputation as the writer of exceptional poetry. However, Smith's existence as a poet became more challenging after this point, and Judith Phillips Stanton has described the difficulties Smith was already facing in trying to bring the second volume of the *Elegiac Sonnets* into print by subscription:

The Reverends Samuel Greathead and Joseph Cooper Walker, the Duchess of Devonshire and Mrs. Olmius, as well as Smith and Cadell and Davies received the money. It trickled in, 10 to 12 guineas at a time (23 July 1794; 24 Sept. 1794). Sometimes lists of names and money were separated, and some subscribers signed up but did not pay. Mrs. Olmius was upset when the publication was delayed – as it was for almost three years – but she had money for only one-third of the subscribers on her list (10 May 1796). The Duchess lost her list. Volume II did not repay rapidly. A year after the subscription was announced, Cadell and Davies had £60.7.6 at their house (Cadell 1795), and well over another year later ‘not more than £150’ (20 Nov. 1796).⁸¹

Scott Hess' work on publishing in the 1790s offers useful insights into why Smith's popularity seems to have gone into decline since the heady days of 1789, when the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Prime Minister were subscribers. Hess quotes Paul Keen, writing that Keen argues ‘that both radical and conservative writers in the 1790s authorized themselves by claiming a position of disinterestedness and public service [...] Such writers disclaimed commercial motives.’⁸² Smith had based her entire literary career on her financial problems, upon her reader seeing her literary productions, including those detailing her maternal grief, as commercial objects available for purchase. As Hess notes, ‘professional writers could not define themselves primarily as

⁸⁰ Mergenthal, p. 72.

⁸¹ Stanton, ‘Charlotte Smith's “Literary Business”, 387-388.

⁸² Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* quoted in Hess, p. 53.

commodity producers without losing their respectability.⁸³ The popularity of the *Elegiac Sonnets* in particular suffered. Where Smith had published six editions of the first volume in the six years between 1784 and 1790, with a reprint of the sixth edition in 1792, the second volume had only three editions between 1797 and 1806,⁸⁴ suggesting that between 1792 and 1797 there was a change in attitude towards Smith's overt use of her situation to justify her existence as a professional writer.

Marketing oneself by allowing an audience to read your life in your poetry was, as the cases of Yearsley and Smith show, a sound strategy for the professional woman writer to a certain extent, but the move towards 'disinterestedness' in commercial gain in the print market caused complications for Smith in particular. However, Yearsley's poetry is no less problematic. Her 'Thoughts on the Death of the Author' is a spirited reposte to More's attempts at controlling literary production, but the elegy to Frederick demonstrates that the presence of a patron creates ambiguities; at least part of the poem's grief is that the poet cannot honour her patron as she has intended. For a moment, it is a poem of apology rather than of personal mourning, a complexity unknown to an independent, professional poet. Smith's poetry, though, makes evident that the revealing of the poet should be done only sparingly. The *Elegiac Sonnets* may have been popular, but when Smith invites the reader to see her in *The Emigrants* in 1793, the autobiographical element reinforcing Smith's difficulties means her readers begin to tire of her appearances.

Smith's ability to manipulate her literary persona was crucial if she was to ensure the continuation of her career after being heavily criticised for publishing a pro-Revolutionary novel. As the Revolution began its descent into Terror, Britain saw the

⁸³ Hess, p. 53.

⁸⁴ Stanton, 'Charlotte Smith's "Literary Business"', 391-392.

beginnings of an increasingly loyalist sense of patriotism, with France the enemy against whom Britons were to be united. Those who remained advocates of France as a model for British government, like Smith with her 1792 novel *Desmond*, were in an ever more precarious position. By the next year, with the executions of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in January and October, many writers had renounced their earlier support for the Revolution. The next chapter will explore how, for both Charlotte Smith and Ann Yearsley, engagement with the Revolution and the shifting literary culture in Britain was more complicated than simply changing sides when circumstances became difficult; Smith's 1793 poem *The Emigrants* combines condemnation of France with criticism of England in equal measure, and Yearsley's two elegies on the deaths of the king and queen condemn the royal family's treatment at the hands of the Revolutionaries, very much in line with increasing anti-Revolutionary sentiment, but still with room to criticise Britain.

Chapter 4

Ann Yearsley, Charlotte Smith and Revolutionary autobiography: publishing in the 1790s

In 1796, Ann Yearsley posed as Britannia on the frontispiece of her final volume of poetry *The Rural Lyre*. Yearsley also included in the volume the poem, 'The Genius of England, *On the Rock of Ages*, Recommending Order, Commerce, and Union to the Britons'. Both frontispiece and poem, with its ostentatiously long title, were very public displays of loyalism at the point when 'anxieties about the expansionism of Revolutionary France were approaching their height.'¹ The poem asks Britain:

Would you
Give up your sages, or forsake the tombs
Of your brave ancestors? Would you receive
Anarchy's furious and disloyal brood,
More fell than harpies of the gorgon race,
Whose glances freeze the channels of the blood?
Order, for ever hail!²

Undoubtedly 'her most patriotic collection of poems',³ Yearsley ensures that her loyalism is displayed as prominently as possible. Yet this overt nationalism had its roots earlier in Yearsley's career, as Tim Burke has noted:

The poet who had once excoriated the Bristol (and by implication the national) concern for profit over humanity was by 1793 regularly asserting her loyalism, perhaps to forestall any attempts by radicals or reformers to recruit her as a champion to the poor against the overbearing acts of the wealthy.⁴

¹ Tim Burke, ed., introduction to *Selected Poems of Ann Yearsley* (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2003), p. xviii.

² Ann Yearsley, *The Rural Lyre* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1796), pp. 98-99.

³ Burke, p. xviii.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. xviii.

Burke here gestures towards the complex combination of ideals resulting from the French Revolution which shaped the ways in which Yearsley tackled both France and England in her writing. With her sympathies for both pro-Revolutionaries and more loyalist groups, Burke has suggested that Yearsley's poems on the deaths of Louis and his queen, published individually in 1793 and 1794, were instead the result of a more general desire to tackle inequity which had manifested itself most clearly in her anti-slavery poetry:

[Yearsley] persisted in her project of exposing corruption and injustice to the end of her career. When she happened to find these errors amongst the French revolutionaries (with whom Yearsley might be expected to be generally sympathetic), as she did their callous and barbarous treatment of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, she did not hesitate to say so.⁵

Yearsley's two elegies are not simply cautious responses to a more reactionary literary climate, but are an attempt to negotiate a desire to right wrongs, attempts by radicals to appropriate Yearsley to their cause and, perhaps, an acknowledgement that the Revolution's ideals had gone too far by executing Louis and Marie Antoinette.

Similarly, when Charlotte Smith first entered into the public discussion of the French Revolution and its consequences in 1792, claims were made from both sides of the political divide for Smith's novel *Desmond* to act as a teaching aid for the nation's women. The *Monthly Review* writes:

Mrs. Smith, who has already favoured the public with several instructive as well as entertaining works of this kind, has, in the present publication, ventured beyond the beaten track, so far as to interweave with her narrative many political discussions. Being very justly of the opinion, that the great events which are passing in the world are no less interesting to women than to men [...] Mrs. Smith introduces, where the course of the tale will easily admit of such interruptions, conversations on the principles and occurrences on the French revolution.⁶

⁵ *ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁶ *The Monthly Review* 9 (December 1792), 406.

The Monthly's more conservative counterpart *The Critical Review* was somewhat more circumspect about the novel, but also felt that, with some modifications, Smith's text could have acted as a form of instruction for upper class women:

Mrs Smith has spoken as she thought, and represented the conduct and sentiments of the democrats as they appeared to her. History may confirm her sentiments, and confound ours. The principle subject of enquiry is how far they ought to be introduced into a work of this kind. We have often had occasion to observe, that the opportunities of modern fine ladies for information are so few, that every means of their obtaining it, incidentally, should be approved of. On the other hand, it may be asked, ought not the state of the question, in such situations, to be given more impartially, or at least the arguments on each side fairly stated?⁷

As with Yearsley, Smith's work resists simple categorisation. Yet where Yearsley's writing is informed in part by a desire to 'expose corruption and justice', Smith's is complicated by the need to maintain her literary reputation after participating in the bruising public debate about the French Revolution.

By the time *Desmond* was published, the discussion had been muddied by the expression of personal grievances and grudges alongside the inevitably heated political arguments amongst some of the earliest commentators on events in France. In 1791, Thomas Paine had written in the first part of his famous (and notorious) *Rights of Man*, a scathing response to Edmund Burke's condemnation of the French Revolution. Burke had supported the American Revolution but held a more conservative line when the French took their turn, and Paine's attack appears to be based as much on disappointment at Burke's about-face as on political objections:

I know a place in America called Point-no-Point; because as you proceed along the shore, gay and flowery as Mr. Burke's language, it continually recedes and presents itself at a distance a head [sic]; and when you have got as far as you can go, there is no point at all. Just thus it is with Mr. Burke's three hundred and fifty-six pages.⁸

⁷ *The Critical Review* 6 (September 1792), 100.

⁸ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution* (London: J. S. Jordan, 1791), p. 21.

Mary Wollstonecraft opens *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, addressed to Burke, by mocking the man before engaging with his political views:

it is natural to conclude, that all your pretty flights arise from your pampered sensibility; and that, vain of this fancied pre-eminence of organs, you foster every emotion till the fumes, mounting to your brain, dispel the sober suggestions of reason.⁹

Amongst some writers, debate about the French Revolution was characterised as much by scathing personal attacks as by strident disagreement. In 1792, Charlotte Smith chose to enter into this often fractious discussion, staking her literary reputation (which now included fame as a novelist as well as a poet) and her personal reputation on the success of her fourth novel, *Desmond*. For a woman who had built a career by carefully crafting a particular version of herself for her readers, Smith risked a great deal by exposing herself to the seemingly unrestrained vocabulary of the Revolutionary debate. Indeed, the Preface given to *Desmond* seems to be an attempt to deflect any personal attacks that may have come Smith's way. The author positions herself as the unbiased chronicler of the momentous events in France, an author who is daring to try something new because of these events. She admits to vulnerability and to nervousness for the success of her attempt, and by so doing claims the reader's sympathy:

In sending into the world a work so unlike those of my former writings, which have been honoured by its approbation, I feel some degree of that apprehension which an Author is sensible of on a first publication. This arises partly from my doubts of succeeding so well in letters as in narrative; and partly from a supposition, that there are Readers, [...] to whom the political remarks in these volumes may be displeasing [...the political passages] are for the most part, drawn from conversations to which I have been a witness, in England, and France, during the last twelve months. In carrying on my story in those countries, and at a period when their political situation (but particularly that of the latter) is the general topic of discourse in both; I have given to my imaginary characters the arguments I have heard on both sides; and if those

⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Meen* [1791], ed. by Janet Todd (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 6-7.

in favour of one party have evidently the advantage, it is not owing to my partial representation but to the predominant power of truth and reason, which can be neither altered nor concealed.¹⁰

Smith deftly denies all responsibility for bias in this novel; it is the inevitable result of the strength of the argument itself.

Even this delicate side-stepping did not guarantee that Smith would be able to remove all risk from engaging with the consequences of the French Revolution, and the closing remarks of the Preface to *Desmond* indicate that Smith was also aware of this. She states simply that '[f]or that asperity of remark, which will arise on the part of those whose political tenets I may offend, I am prepared' (p. 7). True to her word, the previous paragraph makes reference to 'troubles' which have affected the production of this text:

If I may be indulged a moment longer in my egotism, it shall be only while I apologize for the typographical errors of the work, which may have been in some measure occasioned by the detached and hurried way, in which the sheets were sometimes sent to the press when I was at a distance from it; and when my attention was distracted by the troubles, which it seems to be the peculiar delight of the persons who are concerned in the management of my children's affairs, to inflict upon me. (p. 7)

Again, Smith requires her reader to sympathise with her before there is an opportunity to criticise her, and they are further reminded that Smith is a mother whose children depend on her literary success. Any reader critical of Smith is therefore forced to remember that an attack made on the author will necessarily affect her children; Smith's status as a mother becomes a powerful talisman with which to ward off those who would damage her reputation.

However, it was protection expensively bought. Smith was indeed entangled with the trustees of her children's inheritance throughout the production of *Desmond*, a

¹⁰ Charlotte Smith, *Desmond* [1792], ed. by Antje Blank and Janet Todd (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1997), pp. 5-6. All subsequent references will be made in the body of the text.

flare-up of the legal wrangle which had surrounded her for nearly a decade. As a result, the failure of *Desmond* would have had profound consequences for Smith and her family. Equally importantly, any damage done to her literary or personal reputations by anti-Revolutionary commentators would have threatened the fortunes of any future publications Smith chose to attempt. Ironically, Smith's personal circumstances become both burden and charm, creating both the need for success, and the means by which success can be achieved.

Where the deployment of her family worked well in the Preface to *Desmond* in 1792, a portion of Smith's readers were less receptive to the tactic following the publication of *The Emigrants* in 1793. As the Revolution swung away from the ideals which had attracted the vociferous support of Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft, the danger for Smith was no longer the bruising nature of the debate, but the debate itself. As violence increased across the Channel, British political thought became increasingly characterised by what M.O. Grenby has called 'a near unanimous and highly militant anti-Jacobinism.'¹¹ Supporters of the Revolution now held 'dangerously unorthodox opinions', and many commentators 'with just one or two exceptions', recanted.¹² Within this very different political climate, Smith's tactic of flaunting her maternal struggles began to attract criticism rather than sympathy, the plight of the French citizens being felt by many as deserving primacy over all other considerations. In 1792, *The Critical Review* had concluded after reviewing *Desmond*, that '[w]e trust that Mrs. Smith's invention is not yet exhausted, and that we may be again entertained by her very interesting narratives.'¹³ By the time Smith had prepared the long narrative poem *The Emigrants*, the reaction from *The Critical* has altered:

¹¹ M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 5.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 5.

¹³ *The Critical Review*, September (1792), 104-5.

[...] when a subject so new and interesting as the misfortunes of the French emigrants came under her pen, we expected to be highly gratified. We will not say that we are entirely disappointed: there is in this Poem good scenery and well-discriminated groups of figures, but there is too much reflection, verging towards humble prose; and the pathos is weakened by the author's adverting too often to perplexities in her own situation. Whatever these may be, the public, by whom this lady's productions have always been peculiarly well received, is not answerable for them, and the plaintive strain, though interesting when lightly touched, is too monotonous to be long dwelt upon, though by the most skilful finger.¹⁴

Smith's fault, according to her reviewer, is to make too much use of her domestic distress within the poem, although it is implied that a lesser amount of autobiography would not have been misplaced. However, a tension does make itself apparent when the reviewer states that the public 'is not answerable' for Smith's personal problems. Smith must make sure that the reader *does* feel responsible for her position, or they may not continue to purchase her work. The difficulty Smith faces is 'striking the balance between her autobiography and the poem's narrative. *The Critical Review* claims that Smith, on this occasion, has completely misjudged the balance:

Herself, and not the French emigrant, fills the foreground; begins and ends the piece; and the pity we should naturally feel for those overwhelming and uncommon distresses she describes, is lessened by their being brought into parallel with the inconveniences of a narrow income or a protracted law-suit. (299-300)

Navigating the shifting political scene of the 1790s successfully was crucial if Smith was to retain her reputation as one of the foremost writers of her generation. This chapter will consider the ways in which Smith attempts to protect this reputation, whilst at the same time making *Desmond* a political and a commercial success. The chapter will then turn to the different challenges posed by an increasingly loyalist Britain upon both Smith and Ann Yearsley, and whether their poetry, published after the execution of Louis XVI, is able to navigate these challenges.

¹⁴ *The Critical Review*, 9 (1793), 299.

In 1792, *Desmond* may have been Smith's answer to the initial difficulties of writing to support her family and pursuing the complex suit engulfing her children's legacy. By writing a novel which was overtly and knowingly controversial in its content, Smith seems to have been making a statement as much to herself as to her readership about her ability to publish according to her artistic desires, rather than for more material considerations. Indeed, recent work by critics including Jacqueline Labbe and Stuart Curran has done much to reclaim Charlotte Smith's credentials as an outspoken, talented and politically radical writer for modern readers. With this in mind, we might expect that Smith's first textual engagement with the French Revolution, her fourth novel, *Desmond*, published in 1792, would be more widely recognised as one of the most radical of all Smith's works. Nicola Watson has noted that:

Desmond pointedly juxtaposes politics and the sentimental plot, binding its analysis of the tyranny of the *ancien regime* and its supposedly on-the-spot reportage in Paris to a demonstration of domestic tyranny which is clearly identified as an analogous system.¹⁵

Instead, some critics have expressed unease at the apparently conservative sub-plot centred on those the central character, Lionel Desmond, leaves behind in England; in particular the beautiful, clever and married Geraldine Verney, the object of Desmond's chaste affections. Katherine Rogers summarises the sub-plot thus: '[t]he virtuous heroine, married to a worthless husband, blindly sacrifices everything for him; we are supposed to admire her resolve,'¹⁶ and Katherine Binhammer writes of 'Geraldine's nauseating submission.'¹⁷ Yet Jacqueline Labbe has noted that far from being evidence

¹⁵ Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford and New York: The Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 36.

¹⁶ Katherine M. Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 200.

¹⁷ Katherine Binhammer, 'Revolutionary Domesticity in Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*', in *Women, Revolution, and the Novels of the 1790s*, ed. by Linda Lang-Peralta (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1999), pp. 25-46 (p. 32).

of conservatism in Smith's work, the domestic sub-plot serves to 'destabilize and defamiliarize' the reader,¹⁸ a point also made by Pat Elliott:

With *Desmond* she further politicized the novel as a vehicle for social action, consciousness raising, and change. She used the language available to women while at the same time offering an alternative to the popular, sentimental mindless novel that both she and Wollstonecraft deplored. She knew exactly who her audience was, what they read, and what they were allowed to read.¹⁹

Whilst the reader thinks they are being shown a conventional love story featuring a distressingly virtuous heroine, or simply being asked to deal with another 'mindless novel', to use Elliott's phrase, Smith's readers actually find themselves involved in a pro-Revolutionary argument which uses the domestic sub-plot both to distance the reader from, and engage them with, the determinedly political content of the wider novel.

Smith's first political move comes in the preface. She apologises for errors in the script, and claims to be anxious for the success of the novel with her faithful readers. So far, so conventional, yet her aim is actually to pre-empt the criticism of these faithful readers. Smith states that she has a supposition that 'there are Readers, to whom the fictitious occurrences and others to whom the political remarks in these volumes may be displeasing' (p. 5). Immediately, the reader is on the lookout for controversial material. In a way, Smith almost guarantees that the reader will be 'displeased' at what they find in the story of Desmond and his journey through Revolutionary France. But as Elizabeth Howells writes in an article examining the classical tradition of the preface and its more modern application in the eighteenth

¹⁸ Jacqueline Labbe, 'The Exiled Self: Images of War in Charlotte Smith's *The Emigrants*', in *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict 1793-1822*, ed. by Peter Shaw (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 37-56 (p. 44).

¹⁹ Pat Elliott, 'Charlotte Smith's Feminism: A Study of *Emmeline* and *Desmond*', in *Living by the Pen: Early British Women Writers*, ed. by Dale Spender (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1992), pp. 91-112 (pp. 92-3).

century, 'the preface was originally a location for an orator to disarm the audience.'²⁰ This, I propose, is exactly what Smith is doing with her preface to *Desmond*. By announcing the presence of potentially inflammatory material within the novel, Smith guarantees not only the reader's interest (vital from her perspective as a jobbing writer), but that the reader, once inside the story, will focus their attention (and any anger) on the explicitly political material. In this fashion, Smith is able to make the reader take in the more radical part of her political agenda almost without noticing that this is what they are being made to do. Whilst the reader's attention is focussed on the story of Desmond in France, Smith infuses the domestic sub-plot with radical political intent.

As Smith anticipates in her Preface, the domestic plot in *Desmond* did not pass without condemnation from some readers who thought the tale of a young man in love with a married woman too much for public consumption, but in Geraldine Verney Smith created a character of near unsurpassable virtue. Until her person is placed in danger by her husband's conduct, Geraldine censures every action, every thought, in search of anything which might reveal some undutiful sentiment within her. She bears all the financial hardships brought upon her and her children through her husband's reckless behaviour with unequalled self-mastery and dignity. That she should be the main vehicle for Smith's covert political message only makes that message more powerful, rather than weakening it, as has been suggested. Geraldine is a woman whose conduct cannot be questioned; with unimpeachable moral values, devotion to filial and conjugal duty and full of maternal tenderness, Geraldine at first glance seems to belong in a conduct book, not a political novel, and it is precisely this undeniable virtue which renders so powerful the position Smith creates for her heroine.

²⁰ Elizabeth Howells, 'Apologizing for Authority: The Rhetoric of the Prefaces of Eliza Cook, Isabelle Bird and Hannah More', in *Professing Rhetoric: Selected Papers from the 2000 Rhetoric Society of America Conference*, ed. by Frederick J. Antczak, Cinda Goggins and Geoffrey D. Klinger (Mahwah, New Jersey and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000), pp. 131-138 (p. 135).

By directly contrasting the behaviour of Geraldine against that of her odious monarchist husband, Smith signals the political values of this sub-plot, something also noted by Alison Conway, who writes that 'Smith represents Geraldine's husband as a vulgar, tyrannizing aristocrat, and the novel's placement of long political treatises supporting revolution alongside the domestic narrative effectively identifies wife-abuse as a political crime.'²¹ Following the dissolution of the family's finances, Verney, intent on pursuing his libertine lifestyle, agrees to sell his wife to an acquaintance in exchange for a return to credit. In spite of his wife's refusal of this man, Colonel Scarsdale, Verney later writes to his wife:

MY DEAR,

My very worthy friends, Monsieur le Duc de Romagencourt, and Monsieur le Chevalier de Boisbelle, are this day setting off for England on a journey, relative to the affairs of the King of France, their master [...] I shall expect the pleasure of your arrival with impatience, where all things are going well for the suppression of the present vile proceedings. (pp. 238-9)

It is clear in this letter that Verney has come to a similar arrangement with one, or perhaps both, Frenchmen to that he made with Colonel Scarsdale; Verney's insistence that Geraldine should leave immediately and alone with two strange men, where even taking a female servant as company (and protection) is forbidden because, Verney writes, Geraldine 'will find English women only encumbrances' (p. 238), points to only one conclusion. By having Verney call these fine upstanding men the servants of the king of France, Smith makes her meaning quite plain, and she even has the audacity to add irony to her politics. When Verney uses the phrase 'the present vile proceedings', the reader cannot help but think of Verney's own conduct towards his wife, rather than the Revolution, to which he is actually alluding.

²¹ Alison Conway, 'Nationalism, Revolution, and the Female Body: Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*', *Women's Studies*, 24:5 (1995), 395-409 (399).

Furthering her attack on Verney and his circle, Smith's characterisation of the repulsive and vulgar Lord Newminster demonstrates the hypocrisy of the upper classes within the novel. A figure rarely seen away from his couch, Newminster's only engagement with politics at home is to ensure that his assets are unharmed by government:

'Oh! the devil may take the British senate for me,' answered [Lord Newminster]; 'I never put my head into it, but when I am sent for on some points that there are doubts about; and then, I go, if ministry desire it: but otherwise, I don't even care a curse for their damned politics. - As long as I keep the reversion of the sinecures my father got for me, and two or three little snug additions I've had given me since for the borough of interest I'm able to carry them; not one single guinea do I care for their parties or their projects.' (pp. 145-6)

That he does not 'care a curse' about the many problems facing his own country forces the reader to question why his friends are interfering so actively in the concerns of a foreign country. As Newminster's sense of politics is entirely self-motivated so, Smith suggests, are those of his friends. In a further irony, Newminster's concern with his inheritance is placed alongside the behaviour of Verney which has almost certainly ensured that his children will have no such inheritance upon his death because of his profligacy. Both Newminster and Verney are members of a party which defends the right to inheritance, a right Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) argues was threatened by the Revolution, yet Verney and Newminster also subscribe to a social code which permits the sort of extravagance which is certain to destroy their legacies for their families. The reader is forced to confront this incompatibility, the first in a series of connections with Burke's work.

Verney's actions within the novel are, unsurprisingly, the source of much of Smith's pro-Revolution politics, but he and his set are not the only targets of her rhetoric; she makes clear just how closely connected the barbarous behaviour of the

monarchists is to the barbarous behaviour experienced by women in Britain. Through Geraldine as the epitome of duty and forbearance, Smith is able to call into question marriage practices which expose such a conventionally good woman to misery.

Geraldine exclaims to her sister Fanny, 'Alas! why are our pleasures, our tastes, our views of life, so different?' (p.131). Verney himself, although in the coarse language through which much of his character is related to the reader, also seriously contemplates and laments his disastrous marriage. When asked why he married Geraldine, whom he has just called an 'incumbrance', he responds,

Because I was a green-horn, drawn in by a pretty face, and a fine figure. The old woman, her mother, had the art of Jezebel, and I was a raw boy from College, and fancied it very knowing to marry a girl that all the young fellows of my acquaintance reckoned so confounded handsome.

(p. 145)

The miserable situation in which Geraldine currently finds herself is not entirely the fault of her husband, although it is made clear throughout the scene in which this speech is made, that he must bear a considerable part of the blame. A portion of Smith's criticism is reserved for Geraldine's mother who selected such a poor candidate as her daughter's husband, and, through Geraldine's conspicuous sense of filial duty, made her marry him. So badly has Mrs Waverley managed her daughter's marriage that she is complicit in the very activities which threaten the sanctity of marriage in wider society, and the enforced adultery of Geraldine so assiduously pursued by Verney. As a member of the ruling class of the country, his behaviour stands as a microcosm for a much wider social malaise. Smith's attack on the behaviour of Mrs Waverley, and on other women in society who behave like this, demonstrates that Smith's intent is not solely to defend the French Revolution. Indeed, Judith Davis Miller has proposed that Smith is also making a point about the circumstances which brought about her own

unfortunate marriage, an aspect that was not missed even by the critics of Smith's controversial views: 'These detractors seemed to understand that Smith was rebelling against a society that represented the parental pressure that had circumscribed her life through her early disastrous arranged marriage while providing further apologia for her own life.'²² Having separated from her husband after twenty years of marriage and twelve pregnancies, Smith suffered until his death from his plundering of her writing income which was, like everything else she owned, legally his. As a result, it is perhaps unsurprising that in *Desmond* Smith seems to be arguing for a reconsideration of the political institutions of Britain, to reform politics at both the national and personal level. Indeed, Smith attempts to show throughout *Desmond* that what affects an individual is fundamentally connected to the happenings of the wider world.

Smith demonstrates this yet again with her choice of form for her novel. As with her *Elegiac Sonnets*, the mode of writing signifies a political statement. Where Smith was consciously constructing a class, and therefore literary, identity with her first publication, here she is choosing a form which is the physical embodiment of her broader political scheme. This tactic works on two fronts. Firstly, by framing her political novel within clearly personal (though fictitious) letters, Smith announces to the reader the fact that the intensely personal can be, and often is, intensely political. Secondly, Smith stakes her claim in the wider intellectual debate about the French Revolution and its implications. As Anne Mellor notes, '[i]n adopting Burke's epistolary format (this is the only epistolary novel which Smith wrote), Smith acknowledged the impact of Helen Maria Williams's *Letters from France* (1790-96).'²³ As

²² Judith Davis Miller, 'The Politics of Truth and Deception: Charlotte Smith and the French Revolution', in *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, ed. by Adriana Craciun and Kari E. Lokke (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp. 337-363 (p. 342).

²³ Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writings in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 107. See also Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel*.

Adriana Craciun has noted, '[I]ike Williams, Smith claims authority as an eye-witness, and a participant in those increasingly circumscribed activities, international correspondence and conversation.'²⁴ It is not only to Helen Maria Williams that Smith is tipping her cap. Mary Wollstonecraft's reply to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France, A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, is also written in the form of a letter. By using the epistolary form for her novel, Smith makes it impossible for the reader not to see both the novel's internal political ideas and its author's views about its place in the wider debate.

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the novel's climax, with Geraldine journeying to the side of her mortally wounded husband, deep in an area of France over-run with outlaws. Writing to her sister, Geraldine Verney relates the story of her detention by monarchist *banditti* and subsequent rescue by Desmond:

'Will you, dearest Mrs Verney?' said he, 'will you only oblige me so far as not to ask [about her rescue] till you are in a place of safety?' - 'Am I not safe,' cried I, 'any where with you? - 'You should be,' answered he, 'if my arm, or those of my servants could serve you - if we were sure of being able to protect you against numbers, our lives would be held well sacrificed in the attempt. But the men with whom we engaged last night at the door of this cottage, little knowing the dear invaluable life it contained, are free-booters; men, who having been armed by the resisting aristocracy against the *liberties* of the country, have thrown off their allegiance to their employers, and now prey on its *property*'. (p. 380)

By having Geraldine waylaid by these ruffians, Smith is able to point out that the rebellion of the aristocracy serves to harm those of a similar rank as much as it does the Revolutionaries. As Desmond says, the men were 'little knowing' of the person they had captured and robbed, unaware, and probably uncaring had they known that Geraldine was a member of their employer's class. Smith is also able to make what may

²⁴ Adriana Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 139.

be an ironic point about the dangers of Geraldine's journey to Verney's side. Yet again, he has placed his wife in danger of sexual affronts by his actions. Only this time, because he has decided to escape his debts entirely rather than assuaging his creditors with the promise of his wife's favours, Geraldine has no escape. There is no way in which she can retain her modesty by feigning ignorance of the nature of the advance, as has been her previous tactic when faced with the visitations first of Colonel Scarsdale, then with de Boisbelle. The conscious ignorance which has served in the past to maintain Geraldine's sense of dignity is now impossible. Finally Geraldine, and the reader, are forced to face the consequences of her husband's sordid activities, undertaken in the name of the French king. In the clearest possible way, Smith demonstrates both the moral weakness of the monarchist cause, and the weakness of this kind of marriage in protecting the very property supposedly under the husband's protection: his wife's body. Geraldine relates that she has just handed over all the assignats she has been carrying for her journey to one of the women in the cottage to which she has been forcibly taken, who 'immediately seized them, and carried them to one of the men, who looked at them by the fire-light, then turned towards me his hideous countenance, and grinning horribly, nodded to me, and thrust them all in his pocket. This seemed as if it would have been the signal to plunder me' (p. 378). There is no ambiguity in this statement. The only thing left of value on Geraldine's person is her person. Only through the lucky arrival of Desmond and the ineptness of the men chosen as the tools for the upper class's resistance to the Revolution does Geraldine escape that which she has long feared to be the result of her husband's behaviour.

This sequence may have yet greater ambitions, as indicated by Anne Mellor's work on this novel. By comparing the near-rape of Geraldine with Edmund Burke's

famous Marie Antoinette tableau in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Mellor suggests, it is possible to see the scope of Smith's political argument:²⁵

History will record, that on the morning of the 6th of October 1789, the king and queen of France, after a day of confusion, alarm, dismay, and slaughter, lay down, under the pledged security of public faith, to indulge nature in a few hours of respite, and troubled melancholy repose. From this sleep the queen was first startled by the voice of the centinel at her door, who cried out to her, to save herself by flight - that this was the last proof of fidelity he could give - that they were upon him, and he was dead. Instantly he was cut down. A band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with his blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen, and pierced with an hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked.²⁶

Initially it may seem that Smith is simply recycling and inverting Burke's argument, replacing his Revolutionary 'ruffians' with the hired thugs of her upper class rebellion, and switching Burke's heroine Marie Antoinette for the Girondist Geraldine. I suggest that Smith does far more with Burke's argument. The parallels between Burke's version of the Revolution and Smith's are deliberate. As is indicated by the number of critics to make note of the point, Smith is expecting her readers to have read Burke, and to find him in her narrative. Burke writes,

I saw [the queen of France] just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, - glittering like the morning-star, full of life, and splendor, and joy. Oh! What a revolution! and what an heart must I have, to contemplate without emotion that elevation and that fall! Little did I dream when she added titles of veneration to those of enthusiastic, distant, respectful love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; little did I dream that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. - But the age of chivalry is gone.²⁷

²⁵ See Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, pp. 107-8.

²⁶ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [1790], ed. by Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 164.

²⁷ Burke, pp. 169-70.

What Burke speaks of here is exactly those feelings under which Smith represents Desmond to be acting: 'enthusiastic, distant, respectful love'. Where Burke laments the absence of chivalry and the failure of anyone to go to the queen's aid, for the lack of which she is left to her fate, Desmond is able not only to confront those who would attack his heroine, but to defeat them and save her. Burke is wholly impotent, both to make any political stand against the people he feels have attacked the queen, or to make the physical stand he feels any gallant and honourable man should make to protect her. Not only does Smith reveal the rebellion of the nobles to be as damaging to the social fabric as the incidents related by Burke in his version of the French Revolution, but she reveals the counter-revolutionary argument to be mere theory, since it fails so clearly in practice. It is capable of lamenting what it sees as the excesses of the Revolutionaries, but incapable of proposing a practical solution, or affecting any rescue of the regime it claims to hold so dear. Burke can only watch from afar; Desmond is able to act decisively.

By appropriating Burke's sense of chivalry as she has appropriated the Marie Antoinette tableau, Smith furthers her attempts to make Burke's objection to the Revolution seem irrational and irrelevant. However, despite similarities which would suggest the contrary, Desmond is not an example of Burkean chivalry, dislocated from Burke's text and rescuing his idol as Burke wishes he could his. Desmond certainly does 'nurse manly sentiments' and engages in 'heroic enterprize', but for Charlotte Smith, this is a sign of humanity, not chivalry.²⁸ Claudia Jonson has suggested that, '[s]marting from the charge of effeminacy, Burke touts the manfulness of his sensitivity: he parades his prostrate homage and vaunts the ever-ready wellspring of his

²⁸ Burke, p. 170.

tears.²⁹ Johnson's comments imply that there is something artificial about Burke's brand of chivalry: it can be switched on and off to suit the occasion. No such suggestion can be made of Desmond, who is always sensitive to the feelings of Geraldine. Indeed, Desmond is even further removed from Burke's limited chivalry through his attention to Geraldine's entire family. He is anxious for her sister Fanny, and engages to look after her brother Waverley on the Continent. Burke's sense of chivalry hinges upon 'that generous loyalty to rank and sex', but Desmond acts with sensitivity towards both men and women, and to his equals as well as his superiors.³⁰ Johnson has suggested that '[t]o political opponents, Burke's adoration of Marie-Antoinette seemed both beside the point [...] and also unwholesomely servile.'³¹ Desmond's behaviour towards Geraldine and her family is always to Smith's point.

Significantly, the letters which close the novel do not share this confident dismissal of anti-Revolutionary thought. Although nominally a happy ending, where both Geraldine (now a widow) and her sister Fanny are to marry Girondists in the form of Desmond and his friend Montfleuri, there is a sense that these pairings are extremely fragile. This is odd, given that Smith makes use of these marriages to condemn the anti-Revolutionaries to a final failure. Earlier in the novel, Verney, explaining why he chose to marry Geraldine, says that 'a man must marry at some time or other'. Lord Newminster responds by saying 'that I deny - 'tis a damned folly, and nobody in his senses will commit it' (p. 145). Smith has Desmond's closest friend Bethel respond by exclaiming,

It is unfortunate, my Lord [...] that these are your sentiments, since by them the world is likely to be deprived of the worth you might transmit for its general benefit, and your country, in

²⁹ Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 4.

³⁰ Burke, p. 170.

³¹ Johnson, p. 3.

particular, of talents which might adorn its legislature. – Your Lordship’s contemporaries must, I am sure, reflect with concern on the little prospect there thus remains, that your virtues and abilities will not descend to dignify the future annals of the British senate. (p. 145)

The biting irony of this passage is unmissable. Lord Newminster’s contemporaries, including those reading the novel, are not sorry that such a wastrel will be passing nothing on to the next generation. The implication of this irony is that the next generation, represented by the children of the two sisters and their husbands, will be free of the only inheritance these profligate men can bequeath: bad debts and bad politics.

As yet, however, there are no children. Although, as Desmond writes, Geraldine has love which ‘she bestows equally on her own children, and on my little girl’ (p. 407), a natural child born following Desmond’s affair with a Frenchwoman, theirs is a highly irregular family, and its survival is by no means guaranteed, as Susan Allen Ford notes:

[...] even at best the fictional marriages [Smith] projects can only promise the possibility of respect, companionship, and love. The situation of the nation is similarly uncertain: how will France respond to the opportunity to remake itself? how [sic] will Britain respond to this opportunity to reform?³²

Although they are no longer under the influence of their father, Geraldine still has three children belonging, in effect, to the *ancien régime*. As yet, there are no children who are English-born of Girondist parents.

The novel’s ending is rather subdued. Instead of the dynamism of Desmond’s exploration of the physical and political geography of France, or the tension induced by Geraldine’s plight at the hands of her husband and his friends, the ending sees everyone waiting for something. Desmond is waiting for the mourning period for

³² Susan Allen Ford, ‘Tales of the Times: Family and Nation in Charlotte Smith and Jane West’, in *Family Matters in the British and American Novel*, ed. by Andrea O’Reilly Herrera, Elizabeth Mahn Nollen and Sheil Reitzel Foor (Bowling Green OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1997), pp. 15-29 (pp. 25-6).

Verney to elapse so that he might marry Geraldine, and the reader is perhaps waiting for a successful cross-over of revolutionary ideas from France to England. Although there is the anticipation that there will be offspring who will carry the liberal ideas from France into Britain, it is not only the anti-Revolutionaries who suffer from a worrying sterility in Smith's ending. As Desmond writes in his final letter to his friend Bethel, 'I imagine the delight of living in that tender confidence of mutual affection' (p. 408). The experience he anticipates so keenly is yet to arrive. Nicola Watson has concluded that the ending of the novel 'displays a certain amount of caution, reflecting in its reticences something of the volatile and uncertain political mood of 1792 after the ominous arrest of the king,'³³ and it certainly seems that Smith has withdrawn the enthusiastic support for the Revolution characterised by her challenges to Burke.

Despite this anti-climax to the novel's promising radicalism, contemporary readers were quick to praise the text for its political bravery. In a review published five months after the novel appeared, *The Monthly Review* deliberately foregrounds *Desmond's* politics, and heaps praise on Smith for her boldness. The reviewer quotes at length three examples typical of what the reader can expect to find in the novel: a scene in which a ridiculous anti-Revolutionary doctor converses with a social inferior who illustrates the greed of the church; the inadequacies of the British legal system for dealing with crimes (and the review chooses a strongly satirical section); and the scene in which Desmond speaks up for truth and honesty in government where his well-to-do peers propose '*truth is not expedient*'.³⁴ Even as the novel's political content becomes worthy of celebration instead of apprehension, the importance of reputation to Smith's continued success is foregrounded. The reviewer comments that *Desmond* is particularly

³³ Nicola J. Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel 1790-1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 37.

³⁴ *The Monthly Review* 9 (December 1792), 411.

good, 'and as we have formerly had repeated occasion to express our favourable opinion of Mrs Smith's general talents for novel writing, we shall confine ourselves, in our extracts, to two or three political passages.'³⁵ Smith's earlier reputation for excellent writing creates more room for her political talents to be showcased to the reading public. Even when writing for people very much in tune with her own views, Smith cannot assume that a continuation of her most valuable commodity, her reputation, is assured. Although the story of *Desmond* does not seem to suffer unduly from its author's concerns about securing the next publication, subsequent texts, produced as the Terror in France moved towards its dreadful climax, do not fare so well with the changing political climate.

Between the publication of *Desmond* and *The Emigrants*, France and Europe had been shaken by the execution of Louis XVI on the guillotine. Robespierre's reign of Terror had begun, and the bloodshed would continue until his own execution in Thermidore 1794. The consequences of the exodus of nobles, clergy and other displaced people were being felt in Britain not only because of the large numbers of refugees, but also because of the reconsideration of national identity that their arrival occasioned. Frances Burney's pamphlet *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* is characterised by its nationalist sentiment as much as its consideration of the emigrants: No land of barbarians has been insensible to their worth, no ruthless region of the north has blighted sensibility for their misfortunes from ignorance of milder life; the land to which they sailed was Great Britain; in the fulness of its felicity, in the meridian of its glory, not more celebrated for arts and arms, than beloved for indulgent benevolence, and admired for munificence and liberty.³⁶

³⁵ *ibid.*, 406.

³⁶ Frances Burney, *Brief Reflections Relative to the Emigrant French Clergy* [1793], ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1990), pp. 16-17.

Burney's exaltation of Britain's merits follows a passage where she imagines, with some irony, the consequences of missing this opportunity to aid the emigrants, and the barbarous shores upon which the French refugees would have landed instead. Offering assistance to these people becomes an opportunity for Britain to demonstrate its greatness, and gives moral superiority to the British system of constitutional monarchy, the source of this 'benevolence [...] munificence and liberty.' The arrival of the émigrés in Britain had a profound effect upon national consciousness, the émigrés themselves being turned rapidly into a trope which, 'in nationalist hands', notes Adriana Craciun, 'offered opportunities for extending Britain's ideological superiority and national pride through an ecumenical Christian charity.'³⁷ Such was the power of this particular kind of patriotism that "“this age of revolution”" becomes an "“an age of nationalism.”"³⁸

What, then, of Charlotte Smith, whose novel had closed with the English Channel seeming an impenetrable barrier for Revolutionary ideals, but whose next work, *The Emigrants*, is informed by the plight of those forced to cross the Channel to seek safety? In a climate of increasing nationalism, how would Smith, a writer who was becoming more and more disillusioned with England,³⁹ manage the emotive figure of the emigrant in a poem which is critical of Britain as well as of France? Towards the end of the previous year, as the scale of the émigré crisis was becoming apparent, Smith wrote to Joel Barlow, a radical with ties to Thomas Paine, who had recently been made a citizen of France:

[a friend of mine] has follow'd the progress of the retreating Army in their retrog[r]ade motion, and describes the condition of the French exiles as being more deplorable even than their crimes seem to deserve. The magnitude of the Revolution is such as ought to make it embrace every great principle of Morals, & even in a Political light (with which I am afraid Morals have but little to do), it seems to me wrong for the Nation entirely to exile and abandon these

³⁷ Craciun, p. 147.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 10.

Unhappy Men. How truly great would it be, could the Convention bring about a reconciliation. They should suffer the loss of a very great part of their property & all their power. But they should still be considered as Men & Frenchmen, and tho I would not kill the fatted Calf, They should still have a plate of Bouille at home if they will take it & not be turned out indiscriminately to perish in foreign Countries and to carry every where the impression of the injustice and ferocity of the French republic - That glorious Government will soon be so firmly establish'd that five and twenty thousand emigrants or three times that number cannot affect its stability. The people will soon feel the value of what they have gain'd and will not be shaken by their efforts in arms from without, or intrigues within (even if they were to intrigue), & many of them have probably sufferd enough to be glad of returning on almost any terms. Their exile includes too that of a very great number of Women and Children who must be eventually not only a national loss but on whom, if the Sins of the Father are visited, it will be more consonant to the doctrine of scripture than of reason.⁴⁰

Although the letter concludes on a note of concern for the families of the émigrés, Smith is most anxious for the success of the Revolution. The mass dispersal of people is primarily a risk for the young French Republic: the humanitarian consequences of exile are secondary. Yet it is the parallel between Smith's attitudes in this letter and the arguments of the British nationalists which is most revealing. Smith writes, 'How truly great would it be, could the Convention bring about a reconciliation.' Just as much as in England, the emigrants represent an opportunity for the French government to demonstrate its greatness and moral superiority. The trope may have been inverted, but the language used towards the emigrants is the same in both countries. In 1793, when Smith publicly considered the émigrés, she was criticised for taking attention away from their suffering, but whether the emigrants were ever meant to form the centre of the poem is questionable. Even in a poem entitled *The Emigrants*, the French refugees are often not people, but again represent an opportunity: to criticise British shortcomings, to promote the original ideals of the Revolution, to earn a living.

⁴⁰ Letter from Charlotte Smith to Joel Barlow, Brighthelmstone [Brighton] Nov^r 3rd, [1792], in *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Judith Phillips Stanton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 49.

However, *The Emigrants* resists attempts to fit it to the politics of one group or another. As Adriana Craciun has pointed out, Smith's treatment of the émigrés in this text represents 'an important break with both conservative and radical traditions of native British liberty.'⁴¹ Despite evidence that Smith was willing to appropriate the emigrants for the same purposes as nationalist commentators, Craciun has also usefully proposed that Smith's 'acknowledgement of the émigrés' complicity was rare in a Britain polarized by fears of a domestic rebellion.'⁴² Within this newly nationalist climate, where many were increasingly afraid of the consequences of the Revolution's collapse, Smith's poem stood as a complicated blend of sympathy and judgement, of understanding and reproof for England, France, and the emigrants themselves. The dedicatory letter to William Cowper is testament to this complexity:

Your philanthropy, dear Sir, will induce you, I am persuaded, to join with me in hoping, that this painful exile may finally lead to the extirpation of the reciprocal hatred so unworthy of great and enlightened nations; that it may tend to humanize both countries, by convincing each, that good qualities exist in the other; and at length annihilate the prejudices that have so long existed to the injury of both.

Yet it is unfortunately but too true, that with the body of the English, this national aversion has acquired new force by the dreadful scenes which have been acted in France during the last summer [...] by confounding the original cause with the wretched catastrophes that have followed its ill management; the attempts of public virtue, with the outrage that guilt and folly have committed in its disguise, the very name of Liberty has not only lost the charm it used to have in British ears, but many who have written, or spoken in its defence, have been stigmatized as promoters of Anarchy, and enemies of the prosperity of their country.⁴³

Once again, Smith makes mention of the human consequences of the emigration from France, though her focus is elsewhere. Cowper (and therefore the general reader) is directed away from a consideration of those enduring 'this painful exile' towards the

⁴¹ Craciun, p. 149.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 145.

⁴³ Charlotte Smith, *The Emigrants in The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Stuart Curran (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 133-4. All subsequent references will be made in the body of the text.

benefits that exile might bring to England and to France. Another appropriation of the émigré figure, Smith complicates this by acknowledging the ‘dreadful scenes’ and ‘wretched catastrophes’ in France which have encouraged people to flee the country. Smith’s presentation of the Revolution in its current guise is similarly complicated. Whilst the dedicatory letter condemns the ‘ill management’ which has led the Revolution to this point, Smith treads a fine line by insisting that the original principles upon which the Revolution began were sound. Implicit within this claim is the suggestion that with good management the Revolution could be brought back to its former, enlightened, path. There is understanding here of the reasons behind the emigration of the French refugees, and for the increasing criticism of the Revolution, but also a certainty that the situation is recoverable.

Smith allows little room for sympathy for the émigrés in this dedicatory letter, but she does accept that they might be useful. This stands in sharp contrast with her first, brief engagement with the subject in *Desmond*. As the only émigré in the novel, de Boisbelle is a useful indicator of Smith’s varying attitudes to the emigrants over the course of 1792 and 1793. The reader is given clear directions in how to view him, but there are also clues to Smith’s feelings towards French refugees in the domestic plot that involves his wife, Josephine, who becomes the mother of Desmond’s daughter. Through the paralleling of the plot which characterises much of *Desmond*, Desmond and de Boisbelle cross the Channel and the paths of the other’s chosen partners, but not the path of the other man. Desmond crosses the Channel in order to educate himself in the standard manner; de Boisbelle with de Romagnecourt, as Angela Keane notes, ‘to escape the Revolution and to take advantage of the profligate lifestyles of

their English counterparts'.⁴⁴ The consequences of de Boisbelle's actions are grave.

Geraldine Verney is subject to his sexual advances because of his status as her husband's creditor, and de Boisbelle's own wife, Josephine, forms an attachment with Desmond in his absence. The implication from Smith is clear. Had de Boisbelle remained in France and embraced the Revolution, which, as the novel indicates, is the only morally correct choice, neither woman would have felt, or would have found, her virtue to be under threat because of him. The sanctity of two marriages would have been preserved, but his status as an émigré within *Desmond* is synonymous with abject cowardice.

The ambivalence which characterises the response to the emigrants in both *Desmond* and *The Emigrants* was a reaction to a broader literary mood which sought to question the rising fear of the foreigners arriving in Britain, whilst also expressing unease at their presence. Thomas Holcroft, noted for his political writings and translations as well as for his novels and plays, sets about exposing the English to their ridiculous and illogical prejudices in his 1791 play, *The School for Arrogance*. Holcroft's satirical attack of the English is particularly strong, but it is not convincingly sustained. Excoriating xenophobes in Britain, Holcroft's play foreshadows the xenophobia born from fear of a French victory in the war between England and France which Charlotte Smith would tackle in 1794 in *The Banished Man*. In 1792, the political environment was still stable enough to sustain an attack on the ruling classes, though the satire in *Desmond*, particularly that which features Lord Newminster, is far more low-key than the flamboyant stupidity of Holcroft's would-be aristocratic characters. With his creation Lady Peckham, Holcroft sets about creating a 'karakatoor' (to use Lady Peckham's own pronunciation of the word) capable of social and political comment.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Angela Keane, *Women Writers and the English Nation in the 1790s: Romantic Belongings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 82.

⁴⁵ Thomas Holcroft, *The School for Arrogance: A Comedy* (London: G.G.J and J. Robinson, 1791), p. 5.

Holcroft opens his play by having one of his lower class characters, Mr MacDermot, quip, “I would have been born a duke, had they been civil enough to have asked my consint [sic].”⁴⁶ Although he alters the spelling of MacDermot’s words to express his accent, the political edge does not suffer, as the peculiar speech is mostly reserved for Lady Peckham: “When you comes back, get those dismal heads of yours better powder’d; put on your noo liveries [sic] [...] These creeters [sic] are no better nor brootes [...],” she says to ‘Sir Samooel’.⁴⁷ Linguistic primacy is removed from the upper-class characters, a tactic which also implies liberal sympathies. By the time Lady Peckham comes to speak about the émigrés, imagining what she would do as queen of England, she has already been rendered ridiculous because of the way in which she speaks. That her comments are fatuous merely confirms the satirical punch of Holcroft’s characterisation. As queen, she would “transport ’em to the plantations, instead of negurs [sic].”⁴⁸ Holcroft’s play expresses a liberal political attitude, with the more fortunate younger characters electing to ignore matters of rank between them and those they would have as friends. Indeed, the play shows a society where old social rules have been swept away, and much of the comedy seems to occur when the aristocratic characters attempt to impose these defunct rules on a society now based on middling-class citizenship.

Holcroft seems to be as sympathetic to the ideals of the French Revolution as Smith is, but he also shares her ambivalence towards the French. As well as poking fun at the pomposity of Lady Peckham, Holcroft satirises the speech patterns of the French servant of the Count: “You are dee-dee factotem to dee Count. He suffare no somebody to speaka to him so I am come to speaka to you.”⁴⁹ In the conflation of

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 28.

Continental accents and modes of speech, Holcroft's treatment of the French nation is not quite so generous, though his ability to create this joke is based on a clear understanding of the French language. The ambiguity of Holcroft's French sympathies become most apparent, though, when the excesses of the French nobility are appropriated for the improvement of Britain: "Here, your dukes and your peers know nothing at all of style! Abroad, some hundreds starve, that one may eat! But, in England, they have learned the trick of aich man ating for himsilf," in the unmistakable speech of MacDermot.⁵⁰ Though the broad point is liberal, the authorial manoeuvre is not. As with the more overtly nationalist writing of Frances Burney, Holcroft cannot resist using the French characters to demonstrate England's superiority, despite his support of the Revolution. As with Smith, the French become tropes in the same way as in more conservative texts. Yet for a play with such radical potential, where the Epilogue can declare 'Much we have said – and much more implied' with its hints towards the play's pro-Revolutionary sympathies, the ending given to it by Holcroft is remarkable for its nationalist tone. England at this point remains the home of liberty for Holcroft, a place of well nourished citizens and the sensible, liberal government which cares for its them. However, this is at odds with the absurdity with which the ruling classes are characterised, and the play's somewhat contradictory ending presages wider concerns about France, the French and the British response to the coming emigrant crisis.

However, when Charlotte Smith features the émigrés in *The Emigrants*, it is not to celebrate Britain's strengths or to claim superiority over France, which has forced its clergy and nobility into exile. Instead, Smith constructs an opportunity to explore Britain's shortcomings through the poem's particular narrative voice. Frequently, it

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 92.

seems as if this voice is that of Smith herself, referring to the legal troubles she faces, and the incursions where the identity of the poetic persona seems most fluid create a peculiar tension within the text. Smith uses these moments on one level to demonstrate her capacity to make the case for the exiles: a dislocated English woman is perhaps a more powerful advocate for the exiles than their plight alone. Yet Sarah Zimmerman has pointed out that 'Smith was sharply aware that her continuing success was generated largely by her readers' sympathetic response to a figure of herself.'⁵¹ Reminding the reader yet again of her misfortunes may be less about creating poetic authority and more about ensuring future sales. The position of the poetic persona in *The Emigrants*, a dispassionate observer who becomes involved in the scenes in front of her, is perhaps an example of the kind of 'unnatural conceit' detested by Smith's reviewer in the 1797 *Critical Review*. As Jacqueline Labbe notes, the persona in *The Emigrants* does more than simply repeat Smith's complaints about the protracted legal suit she is fighting: 'Her persona [...] serves to import a distinctly politicized tone not only to Smith's renunciation of war, but also to her understanding of that microcosm of the social order, the family.'⁵² Labbe also suggests that Smith uses the émigrés in this poem 'to create an aura of sympathy which effectively disguises her increasingly engaged political tone.'⁵³ By taking an apparently undogmatic approach to the situation of France, Smith is then able to criticize with more force the conduct of Britain both at home and abroad. The sympathy for the emigrants, couched as it is in the poetic persona's supposed personal connection with their situation, serves not to disguise the political nature of the poem, but to bring it to the fore.

⁵¹ Sarah Zimmerman, 'Charlotte Smith's Letters and the Practice of Self-Presentation', *Princeton Library Chronicle*, 53:1 (1991), 50-77 (50).

⁵² Labbe, 'The exiled self', p. 43.

⁵³ Jacqueline M. Labbe, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, poetry and the culture of gender* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 118.

Yet in a letter to Thomas Cadell Snr. in December 1792, a man Smith hoped would publish some of her work, including *The Emigrants*, Smith claimed the exact opposite for her poem. She wrote, soliciting publication for the two volumes that would make up *The Emigrants*, that ‘it is quite unlike in its nature any I have printed & is, tho not on politics, on a very popular & interesting subject mingled with descriptive and characteristic excursions in the way of the *Task*, only of course inferior to it.’⁵⁴ Smith here claims to have written an apolitical poem, but her mention of *The Task*, and her dedicatory letter to its author William Cowper, reveal that politics are central to *The Emigrants*. Smith alludes to the fifth book of *The Task* in her Preface, but it is the opening book of Cowper’s poem which gives the clearest indication of what Smith is doing with this poem which is ‘not on politics’. Cowper begins his poem with a discussion about sofas and the development of various chairs through the ages, the real focus of which is the effect of luxury:

Thus first necessity invented stools,
 Convenience next suggested elbow chairs,
 And luxury th’accomplished Sofa last.
 The nurse sleeps sweetly, hired to watch the sick
 Whom snoring she disturbs.⁵⁵

The acerbic tone is mingled with a more general description of the benefits of activity, but through the use of the seemingly trivial, Cowper is able to make a fundamental point about the corruptive influence of luxury. This may be what Smith is attempting to achieve with her text, and with her dedicatory letter to Cowper, she may be inviting her reader to expect of her poem what they found in Cowper’s:

I sing the SOFA I who lately sang
 Truth, Hope and Charity; and touch’d with awe

⁵⁴ Charlotte Smith to Thomas Cadell Sr., [?Brighton, ca. 16 December, 1792], *Collected Letters*, p. 55.

⁵⁵ William Cowper, *The Task in Poems*, vol. 2 (London: J. Robinson, 1786), pp. 5-6.

The solemn chords, and with trembling hand,
 Escap'd with pain from that advent'rous flight,
 Now seek repose upon our humbler theme;
 The theme though humble, yet august and proud
 Th'occasion - for the Fair commands the song.⁵⁶

By making reference to Cowper's poem with its ability to engage with issues of national importance in her letter to Cadell, Smith is able to both reassure her publisher, and perhaps have a joke at his expense, especially as her politics are not nearly so subtly demonstrated as Cowper's.

Judith Phillips Stanton writes, that 'as Cadell published [the poem] in the end, he must not have found it as politically offensive as *Desmond*, which he refused to publish.'⁵⁷ But as Stanton also points out, the poem is clearly deeply involved with the political. In her letter to her publisher, Smith seems to be deliberately misdirecting Cadell's attention, and in her letter to Cowper, alerting her liberal readers to the political content perhaps excused by the semi-autobiographical tone. On a more mercenary level, demonstrating sympathy towards the victims of the Revolution helped ensure the publication of the poem, as well as establishing some sort of moral currency in judging the parties involved.

Indeed, the political tone of *The Emigrants* is far-ranging. Both England and France are targets, but Smith is also heavily critical of the wars that have begun because of widespread, opportunistic belligerence. Her sympathy towards the emigrants is juxtaposed with a subtle irony which, in places, is capable of generating a broad sense of condemnation of those indulging in warfare.

A group approach me, whose dejected looks,

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Collected Letters*, p. 55 (note 6).

Sad Heralds of distress! proclaim them Men
 Banish'd for ever and for conscience sake
 From their distracted Country, whence the name
 Of Freedom misapplied, and much abus'd
 By lawless Anarchy has driven them far [...]
 Thro' the wide World unshelter'd; their sole hope,
 That German spoilers, thro' that pleasant land
 May carry wide the desolating scourge
 Of War and Vengeance.

(I:ll. 95-106)

That the destruction of France is what these men have been forced to hope for is a damning indictment of every group involved in this new stage of the Revolution, and the Germans, one of the powers to go to war against France in response to the Revolution, do not escape without condemnation. They are described as 'spoilers', and it is clear that their aggression is unwelcome in this poem. Their campaign originates, more significantly, from 'Vengeance', removing all pretence of any moral agenda in the Germans' attempt to remove the Revolutionary government. What Smith does in this passage is to set up a seemingly endless series of self-reflective criticisms of the combative parties. The French exiles are forced to hope for war, and the Germans want war because of a need for revenge.

Smith's attack is generated entirely by the poetic persona's original sympathy with these 'sad heralds'. Alongside the 'German spoilers', who seek vengeance on France as well as the ending of the Terror, are their allies the British who, it is to be assumed, are also hoping for vengeance on the new republic. France itself is a land of madness, a 'distracted Country' which injures its citizens more than the monarch it has recently imprisoned, yet Smith also claims that exile will help cure the émigrés of their

'Bigotry'. Watching the émigrés arrive, the poetic persona observes the individuals on the shore:

there droops one,
 Who in a moping cloister long consum'd
 This life inactive, to obtain a better, 115
 And thought that meagre abstinence, to wake
 From his hard pallet with the midnight bell,
 To live on eleemosynary bread,
 And to renounce God's works, would please that God.
 And now the poor pale wretch receives, amaz'd, 120
 The pity, strangers give to his distress,
 Because these strangers are, by his dark creed,
 Condemn'd as Heretics - and with sick heart
 Regrets his pious prison, and his beads.
 (I:113-24)

In an enactment of the ideas she proposes in her dedicatory letter, Smith creates a contradictory image of the consequences of the Terror. The subtle irony deployed against nations is here used towards an individual, though the possibilities for wider criticism are ever present. The syntax of line 119 makes the clergyman's beliefs seem ludicrous to the point that they run contrary to nature. That his religious faith is so counter-intuitive implies that his political beliefs may be also; a man who serves a god contrary to what that god might want is quite possibly doing the same thing for his country. The strongest irony is reserved for the response of the 'Heretic' British to this man who, on receiving the aid of 'these strangers', immediately 'regrets his pious prison'. His arrival in Britain initially serves to challenge the priest's prejudice, as he stands 'amaz'd' at the response of the British. The challenge falters, and he ultimately looks back to what he has lost, rather than what he has gained, by coming to Britain.

Smith at once shows the reader someone who is suffering and therefore deserves our concern, and one who is incapable of modifying his opinions or altering his perceptions when shown compelling reasons to reassess his prejudices. Sympathy for this man manifests itself in the verse, but Smith condemns him as much as she pities him, as Jacqueline Labbe has observed:

[Smith] both identifies with, and condemns, the *émigrés*, in the same way that she both supports the Revolution's principles, and deplores its current 'distraction' from those principles. To this point, her engagement with the *émigrés* is openly textual, observational – she watches them, sympathizes, empathizes, and critiques, but she does not interact with them.⁵⁸

However, Smith's engagement with the Catholic religion suggests a more personal difficulty with that faith than the overall political agenda of *The Emigrants* might imply. The irony, which is used to such effect elsewhere in the poem, seems to cross the line into parody:

Another, of more haughty port, declines	125
The aid he needs not; while in mute despair	
His high indignant thoughts go back to France,	
Dwelling on all he lost – the Gothic dome,	
That vied with splendid palaces; the beds	
Of silk and down, the silver chalices,	130
Vestments with gold enwrought for blazing altars;	
Where, amid clouds of incense, he held forth	
To kneeling crowds the imaginary bones	
Of Saints suppos'd, in pearl and gold enchas'd,	
And still with more than living Monarch's pomp,	135
Surrounded; was believ'd by mumbling bigots	
To hold the keys of Heaven, and to admit	
Whom he thought fit to share it – Now alas!	
He [...]	

⁵⁸ Labbe, 'The exiled self', p. 43.

Is, in a Land once hostile, still prophan'd
 By disbelief, and rites un-orthodox,
 The object of compassion.
 (I:125-39, 144-6)

Smith's description of this man is filled with repugnance. The reader's response to his greed, self-indulgence and self-importance, mocked by his now being 'the object of compassion', must be that France is better off rid of a man who conducts his religion with 'imaginary bones' and 'Saints suppos'd'. There is even the sense that this priest has escaped from France lightly. He existed 'with more than living Monarch's pomp', yet that monarch is now imprisoned in fear of his life, whilst this man is only perhaps temporarily exiled. The reader is left with the impression that the wrong man is in prison, and that it is really men like this priest who are to blame for the faults which have been attributed to Louis.

Throughout the poem, the poetic persona has projected itself as being close to, if not actually being, the voice of Smith herself. Moments where the persona speaks directly to the emigrants, telling them that 'I mourn your sorrows; for I too have known /Involuntary exile' (I:155-6), which is footnoted as referring to Smith's own time in Normandy as a result of her husband's debt,⁵⁹ reinforce the conceit. For most of the poem, the poetic voice is carefully constructed, but with the sarcasm Smith employs against the wealthy priest I would argue that on occasion the poetic voice slips, and does become that of Smith herself. The point of view she has so carefully developed, of favouring neither the emigrants nor the National Assembly, seems to be under threat. As a consequence, the project that Smith forms in her dedicatory letter of making use of the French exiles to better both nations loses some of its power when Smith herself is incapable of seeing past her strong dislike of Catholicism.

⁵⁹ See Curran, *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, p. 141 footnote.

However, by the close of Book I of *The Emigrants*, this project has become a means to a rather different end. Instead of the emigrants providing a way for better relationships to be forged between Britain and France, they become, in Smith's hands, symbols of all Britain's upper classes have to fear from their social inferiors. Jacqueline Labbe has noted that the émigrés 'serve to illuminate the weakness of English culture as much as the violence of the French Revolution,'⁶⁰ but gives no indication of the force with which Smith shows Britain to itself:

Ye pamper'd Parasites! whom Britons pay
 For forging fetters for them; rather here
 Study a lesson that concerns ye much;
 And, trembling, learn, that if oppressed too long,
 The raging multitude, to madness stung,
 Will turn on their oppressors; and, no more
 By sounding titles and parading forms
 Bound like tame victims, will redress themselves!
 (I:330-7)

Britain must either reform, or find itself embroiled in bloody chaos. Yet Smith is not only addressing 'Ye pamper'd parasites', but the country itself, revealing to 'the raging multitudes' the extent of their power. Indeed, the emigrants no longer serve as means for Smith to resist the growing culture of nationalism, but are the catalysts for the creation of a new form of nationalism, one that is based on ordinary British people finding the strength to change the country around them. Labbe has usefully noted that '*The Emigrants* is a poem about war, about being at war; it is a rejection of war: and it is a declaration of war on a culture that continually seeks to marginalize and cast off - abjectify - segments of itself.'⁶¹ These 'cast off segments' who make up Smith's 'raging

⁶⁰ Labbe, 'The exiled self', p. 43.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 54.

multitude' now have the potential to be mighty. The presence of the French exiles has not served to 'humanize both countries',⁶² but has demonstrated that Britain is a country which needs to wage war on itself before considering waging war on France.

When the second book of *The Emigrants* opens, the world is in chaos and the king of France has been executed. 'Liberty', the cause so celebrated in the first book, has resigned 'To Fraud and Anarchy the infuriate crowd' (II:61). Indeed, the death of the king marks a turning point for considerations on the value of 'liberty'. As Smith remarks in her dedicatory letter, danger lies in 'confounding the original cause with the wretched catastrophes that have followed' (p. 133). For Smith, there is a difference between 'liberté', the original, fundamental virtue of the Revolution, and the polluted and tortured version now being used by the regicides to justify their actions. Oddly, however, for a woman who had favoured this early 'liberté', Ann Yearsley is not capable of the same splitting away from its corrupted form. As she condemns the 'murder' of Louis, Yearsley describes Liberty as a deceptive phantom, a siren-figure leading men from the safe path to their deaths and the deaths of thousands of others. Both Yearsley and Smith stood in support of the Revolution in its early form, but as it moved from these promising beginnings to Terror and regicide, their sympathies diverge. This was also the case for the broader literary response to the executions of the king and queen. Works bearing titles such as *The Cruel Massacre of the King and Queen of France* were published at the same time as those like *Extermination, or an Appeal to the People of England, on the Present War, with France*, which sought to remind observers of the abuses of the ancien régime:

the King was above controul, had the absolute disposal of an immense standing army, and of the whole public treasure; that the Nobility and the Priesthood, persecuted, plundered, and

⁶² Smith, Prefatory Letter to *The Emigrants*, p. 133.

bastinadoed the people at pleasure, without the latter having even the most distant prospect of redress. There was also at Paris a BASTILLE, where every man who was obnoxious to the Monarch, to the mistresses of the Monarch, to his Favourites, or to his Ministers, was shut up without any public accusation whatever [...] To overthrow this villainous combination of the FEW against the liberty, property, and happiness of the MANY, in the year 1789, the whole Nation actuated as it were by one general impulse, rose up, "*Hurled the Tyrant from his throne,*" and established the RIGHTS OF MAN.⁶³

To others, the execution of the king meant that France was now morally bankrupt, a country of untrustworthy, corrupt oath breakers. For John Bowles, Britain has no choice but to wage war on France, because if a treaty were struck, 'the horrid baneful cause of Gallic Liberty and Equality would revive, and savage Fraternity would again expand its destructive arms to embrace distant regions in its fatal clasp.'⁶⁴ In an attempt to gain a handle on the momentous events across the Channel, events which William Fox described as being similar to those experienced by the 'still more unfortunate Stuarts',⁶⁵ several 'histories' and 'narratives' of the king and queen were published, as well as translated (and sometimes embellished) state documents relating to their trials. Commentators were split by the death of the king into two broad camps: those who condemned the execution as an unforgivable outrage, and those who saw the actions of the Revolutionaries as lamentable, but founded in justice. The second book of *The Emigrants* places Smith in the second group, but Yearsley's two elegies belong in neither. Instead, she writes of a country that has been deceived by an ephemeral ideal, liberty, which can never exist, either at home or abroad.

Yearsley's poem is a peculiar mixture of the political and the personal.

Occasionally, she speaks directly to the soul of the murdered king. On others, she

⁶³ Anon., *Extermination, or an Appeal to the People of England, on the Present War, with France* (London: D.I. Eaton, 1793), pp. 4-6. Sometimes attributed to Daniel Isaac Eaton.

⁶⁴ John Bowles, *Postscript to the Real Grounds of the Present War with France, suggested by recent events* (London: J. Debrett, 1793), p. 3.

⁶⁵ William Fox, *Thoughts on the Death of the King of France* (London: J. Ridgeway et al., 1793), p. 4.

speaks to the reader, and even to the figures of Pity and War, invoked within the poem. Unlike Smith's elegant blank verse, Yearsley's form is a simple quatrain and a basic rhyme structure. At fifty-six lines in length, its brevity in comparison to Smith's verse narrative imbues it with a greater sense of immediacy, and Yearsley's choice of tone is indicative of the differences between her verse and that of Smith. Where Yearsley laments 'Ill-fated Louis!',⁶⁶ Smith speaks only to France and castigates it for allowing Louis to become a martyr, who now wears 'Thy jewel'd cirlet, lin'd with thorns' (II:99). Although Smith does not blame Louis personally for the woes of France, she sees his rule as the source of much of the country's past and present troubles:

[Louis] who, by custom's laws, obtains from thee
 Hereditary right to rule, uncheck'd,
 Submissive myriads: for untemper'd power,
 Like steel ill form'd, injures the hand
 It promis'd to protect – Unhappy France!
 If e'er thy lilies, trampled now in dust,
 And blood-bespotted, shall again revive
 In silver splendour, may the wreath be wov'n
 By voluntary hands. (II:100-108)

Echoing in part the language of the anonymous *Extermination*, Smith's vision of a potential future for France stands in contrast to the hopeless view of Yearsley. The execution of the king has broken the fundamental bonds between him and his 'children', by which Yearsley means both his biological children and his people. For Yearsley, Louis's rule was not the reign of 'steel ill form'd' that Smith sees, but is fundamentally defined by its end. What went before is irrelevant when 'Thy Children's Groans by thee are heard no more, / To hold thee back, when Murder cries "depart!"'

⁶⁶ Ann Yearsley, *Reflections on the Death of Louis XVI in Selected Poems*, ed. by Tim Burke (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2003), p. 41, l. 37. All subsequent references to this poem will be made in parentheses after the relevant quotation.

(stanza 10, ll. 39-40). Nor can the crimes of the regicides be easily assuaged. Yearsley imagines punishment for them in this world, but it is the threat of judgement in the world to come, to which Louis himself will bring them, that is most chilling:

Thy Murd'ers live, - what friendly Arm shall ease
 The Pillow which supports a guilty Head?
 When Conscience nourishes the Mind's Disease,
 And Mem'ry brings the Shadow of the Dead?

In that dread Hour, much injur'd Spirit rise!
 And breathe Forgiveness thro' thy Murd'rer's Soul:
 Ah! bid him save thy Children ere he dies,
 Then guide him to thy God, where Worlds eternal roll.

(stanzas 13-14, ll. 49-56)

The ending of the poem also holds an interesting ambiguity. Smith favours a constitutional monarchy, where the 'lilies [...] blood-bespotted', will 'revive'. In contrast, Yearsley's final two lines, with the double meaning of 'Children', appear to propose a return to the Bourbon dynasty. Indeed, it is possible to read these lines as being Yearsley's plea for the National Assembly, which she suggests will inevitably fall, to restore the biological children of Louis to the throne in order to supply a functioning government to save all French subjects.

This idea of the inevitable failure of the pursuit of freedom pervades Yearsley's poem. The goals of the French Revolution are transient at best, meaningless at worst. All that has been achieved is the deaths of thousands through the resulting wars. The central section of *Reflections on the Death of Louis XVI* is devoted to the ephemeral nature of 'liberty', and the foolishness of those who seek it:

Where fancied Liberty, with rude Excess,

being made about the state of government in these countries, which makes it impossible for Liberty to exist in any of them. Lines 26 and 27 would seem to counter this claim, but the way in which this poem resonates with Yearsley's earlier work suggests that Liberty is unable, not unwilling, to inhabit France, and indeed England. The moment where Liberty is likened to a siren harks back to Yearsley's 'Address to Friendship', where 'the sad swain deceiv'd' is led from a quiet satisfaction in his regular path by the promise of friendship from the upper classes, a promise which is never fulfilled. Yearsley's condemnation in this later poem can therefore be read as double-edged. On the one hand are those who will not allow the citizens of France, Spain and Britain to enjoy the benefits of Liberty. On the other are those who promise Liberty to those in need of it, but who never deliver. Yearsley's vision of Liberty is a bleak one, yet whilst it is as elusive as the myths the poet refers to, it also contains the magic of those myths.

Charlotte Smith's position is no less bleak, though rather different. In her poem, she urges those fighting for true Liberty to continue, rather than slip back into the type of monarchy she claims was maintained by the Bourbon dynasty. For Smith, it is not Liberty itself that is deceptive, but humanity's belief that it is not worth the price it seems they may have to pay:

- Lo! the suffering world,
 Torn by the fearful conflict, shrinks, amaz'd,
 From Freedom's name, usurp'd and misapplied
 And, cow'ring to the purple Tyrant's rod,
 Deems *that* the lesser ill - Deluded Men!
 Ere ye prophane her ever-glorious name,
 Or catalogue the thousands that have bled
 Resisting her; or those, who greatly died
 Martyrs to *Liberty* - revert awhile

To the black scroll, that tells of regal crimes
 Committed to destroy her; rather count
 The hecatombs of victims, who have fallen
 Beneath a single despot; or who gave
 Their wasted lives for some disputed claim
 Between anointed robbers: Monsters both!
 (II:79-93)

Smith's labelling of Louis as 'unfortunate' and 'luckless' (p. 152, l. 98) is similar to Yearsley's description of him as 'Ill-fated' (l. 36), but the meanings of the two women could not be more different:

Yet for this Vapour [Liberty] , gen'rous Man must die,
 For this, he ventures on a World unknown;
 For this, he braves the Crime of sanguine Dye;
 For this, he drags a Monarch from his Throne.
 (stanza 9, ll. 33-36)

For Yearsley, Liberty is not worth the battle currently being fought for it, and the price Yearsley claims for the pursuit of Liberty is to place at risk the immortal soul. The violence in the last line is indicative of Yearsley's argument throughout the poem. Initially, it connects to the meaning of her description of Louis as 'Ill-fated'. Implied is regret that Louis should have been the one to oversee such lawless times, and to be the target for years of frustration at inadequate rule, rather than being an inadequate ruler himself, as Smith suggests in her poem. Indeed, 'unfortunate' and 'luckless', as Louis is described in *The Emigrants*, seem rather to refer to his misfortune at having been caught trying to flee France, rather than any real regret at the removal of the monarch, given Smith's claims about the 'regal crimes' committed by Louis and his kin. As a result, the two poems seem to conclude in direct opposition. Yearsley shows the reader the violence that has been used against the king to remove him from power, and focuses

quite clearly on Louis, the man behind the crown. Her concern is with his murder, to the exclusion of all other consequences of the Revolution:

Yes, Millions fall, but few so high are wrought
 By Nature's working in the awful Hour,
 Few Taste the Cup with Pain so deeply fraught:
 Ah Louis! thou hast prov'd the Soul's sublimest Pow'r!
 (stanza 12, ll. 45-48)

The lesson Smith wishes the reader to take from her poetry is concern for the millions, over that of the one. Her final appeal is a prayer:

O Power Omnipotent! with mercy view
 This suffering globe, and cause thy creatures cease,
 With savage fangs, to tear her bleeding breast:
 Restrain that urge for power, that bids a Man,
 Himself a worm, desire unbounded rule
 O'er beings like himself: Teach the hard hearts
 Of rulers, that the poorest hind, who dies
 For their unrighteous quarrels, in thy sight
 Is equal to the imperious Lord, that leads
 His disciplin'd destroyers to the field.
 (II:421-430)

This marks a crucial point in the poem. Although Smith's inclusion of the phrase 'unbounded rule' suggests a stepping-back from a proposal for the dissolution of all monarchies, Smith still removes all traditional distinctions between the commoner and the king. The monarch is not ordained by god, Smith argues, but is also a 'worm' who, at most, should be allowed a limited governance over people she insists to be his equal, a people she implies any future king *must* acknowledge to be his equal.

Clearly, Smith and Yearsley have contrasting ideas of the merits of liberty in a world following the execution of the king of France. Yearsley, very different from Smith in terms of her background and her career, may have been expected, if not to condone the actions of the Revolutionaries in France, then at least to acknowledge the possibilities that now existed. She does indeed celebrate the ideal of liberty in her poem, but its realities bring about a series of far more bitter reflections about the possibility of it ever truly existing in Britain. The poem also condemns the course taken by the French in the name of 'liberty'. By the end of Yearsley's poem, neither she, nor perhaps the reader, are entirely sure about her exact position towards liberty, the phantom at the centre of the poem; it is both an ideal to be pursued in hope of a better country, and an ideal to be feared for its effect on the people. Yearsley seems to fear an episode like that seen across the Channel, and also the disappointment of the hopes of those who would come to believe some kind of liberty were truly possible. However, there is also a moral element to Yearsley's resistance to the pleasures of liberty. In this topical poem, Yearsley protests against the murder of a man in the name of liberty, and by refusing to accept the liberty offered by the Revolution, she makes it plain to her readers that the poem is ultimately a denunciation of a pursuit of liberty regardless of the cost. Both Louis and Marie Antoinette are human, whatever their crimes may have been. They are, according to the poem's moral scheme, god's creatures whom it is sin to harm, and there can be no extenuating circumstances for the Revolutionaries' actions.

Instead of the physical liberty offered by the Revolution, and its supporters, Yearsley reminds the reader of the eternal liberty offered through a love of god, and the power of her version of liberty is demonstrated in *An Elegy on Marie Antoinette, of Austria, Ci-Devant Queen of France*. Yearsley imagines the queen physically incarcerated

by the new French government, but about to be offered a liberty beyond
comprehension:

Marie! the beauteous Marie yields to Woe,
Deep in yon Cell reclines the Mourner's Head,
Her Charms are with'ring, while her Troubles grow,
Her fancy wanders round her Marble Bed.

The Moon looks pensive to her sleepless Eye, 25
Damps shine unnotic'd on her Prison Wall,
Her gentle Spirit fain would pass the Sky,
She fancies yet her murder'd Lord may call.

O never, never! Marie, may thy Lord
Look back on this injurious World!....No More 30
Love, Peace or Comfort, thee their Joys afford,
Yet, all shall greet thee on a brighter Shore.

Being shall never an Extinction know,
Tho' gloomy Guilt may 'wish eternal Sleep,'
O'er boundless Regions Mind must ever go, 35
While Nature o'er our broken Forms may weep.⁶⁷

The Revolutionaries' pursuit of liberty, which has resulted in the deaths of 'Marie' and 'Louis', not the execution of the queen and king, is revealed as an empty, transitory thing. Indeed, the ultimate victory is given to their victims, who have been hurried towards the far greater joys of heaven. They are commanded to 'Turn Death to thy Dominion!....rise ye Pair / [...] Together soar beyond the Realms of Air / And, lost in grateful Wonder, view the Whole' (p. 44, ll. 58-60). This is not to say that Yearsley has no concern for what occurs on earth. The description of Marie Antoinette's execution

⁶⁷ Ann Yearsley, *An Elegy on Marie Antoinette, of Austria, Ci-Devant Queen of France*, ed. by Tim Burke, pp. 42-44, ll. 21-36. All subsequent references to this text will be made in parentheses following the relevant quotation.

is brutal and shocking, for all that it serves as a release from prison for the queen, and reunion for the couple in heaven:

On burnish'd Spears now Phoebus strikes his Beam,
The Tone of gentle Languishment recedes;
Horror advances, all her Spectres scream,
This Moment Marie's Woe-fraught Bosom bleeds.

O'er her pale Beauties, Hist'ry stands amaz'd,
The Pencil trembles as she draws her Lines,
While Marie, on whom Crowds with Pleasure gaz'd,
On the cold Bosom of her Lord reclines.

(p. 44, ll. 49-56)

'Hist'ry' must also stand for Yearsley herself, recording the last (admittedly imagined) moments of the queen, and whose own 'pencil trembles as she draws her Lines' of poetry. In order to end her poem, Yearsley moves beyond this brutal, though brief, moment towards a conclusion which suggests that in death, both liberty and fame will last longer for the murdered couple than the bloody Revolution which has claimed their lives. The moon, Yearsley writes, will 'breathe your hapless Tale, / And o'er your slighted Grave be ever seen' (p. 44, ll. 71-2). Such is their importance, Yearsley argues, the celestial bodies themselves record their fate, as the souls of the king and queen soar amongst those same stars.

Both Yearsley and Smith decry the execution of the king and queen of France, and both use their deaths as cautionary tales for others. The story each woman tells, though, is rather different. Yearsley, humanising France's former monarchs, laments the price of liberty the French have chosen to exact on Louise and Marie Antoinette. In both poems about their executions, Yearsley uses the word 'murder' to describe the manner in which their lives are taken, clearly indicating her position towards the

Revolution gripped by the Terror. Indeed, her elegy for Marie Antoinette opens with the terrifying power of the Revolutionaries manifest:

How may I stay pale Murder's ruthless Hand!
 How plead with Men, who Mercy most despise!
 Time eager shakes for them his ebbing Sand,
 Soon shall their Spirits rove thro' troubled Skies.
 (p. 42, ll. 1-4)

Yet even in this moment of power, Yearsley warns the regicides of their own inevitable deaths. The consequences of the unfettered pursuit of liberty are made plain and, so that it may serve as an example to others who would seek freedom in this manner, Yearsley commands Time himself to continue the telling of the story:

Yet Time shall linger on this tragic Tale,
 As down the Steeps of Fate he drives the Hours;
 His Sighs be heard along the shadowy Vale,
 And Pity follow, wrapt in pearly Show'rs.
 (p. 42, ll. 5-8)

Yearsley's two poems on Louis and his queen, despite some moments where the idea of liberty is something to be celebrated, serve to warn those in Britain with a mind for a similar revolution to beware the lure of 'fancied Liberty' which 'Courts Man from sober Joy' (p. 40, ll. 17-8). Liberty leads, Yearsley's poems pronounce, to regicide and the damnation of the eternal soul.

Charlotte Smith seeks to warn an entirely different set of people. It is not those who pursue liberty whom Smith counsels with the closing lines of *The Emigrants*, but those who withhold liberty from the people of Britain. Her dislike of the Revolution's current tendency towards bloodshed is clear to see. However, her hatred of the 'pamper'd Parasites' Smith claims constitute Britain's ruling class is far greater. The depths to which the Revolution has sunk are recounted more to warn those who rule in

Britain of the consequences of their conduct, than to criticise those responsible for the violence in France:

Then swept away by the resistless torrent,
 Not only all your pomp may disappear,
 But, in the tempest lost, fair Order sink
 Her decent head, and lawless Anarchy
 O'erturn celestial Freedom's radiant throne; –
 As now in Gallia
 (I:338-343)

As the first book of *The Emigrants* reaches its conclusion, Smith steps back from this threatening statement towards an image of a peaceful Britain. The peace imagined by Smith also has its price and the implication is that Britain must grant the changes demanded by its population in order to maintain that peace. Smith, perhaps speaking to the emigrants, but perhaps also to the reader, suggests that the ruling class are at risk of rebellion from people like her, trapped within the country's anachronistic legal system in pursuit of what is rightfully theirs, only to be denied by the state which is supposed to protect them:

Respect is due to principle; and they,
 Who suffer for their conscience, have a claim,
 Whate'er that principle may be, to praise.
 (I:351-54)

The structure of the poem is ambiguous, these three lines fitting neatly into the reintroduction of the émigrés into the poem, but also standing apart from the main argument. In this rather strange moment, Smith seems to give her own warning to those in charge of the legal system which is failing her so badly, as she seeks to resolve her father-in-law's decades-old will. She states that those who 'suffer for their conscience' deserve 'praise', but it seems to be implied that without more tangible

rewards than praise alone, the nightmarish vision Smith has just conjured of a country descending into mindless anarchy will also apply to failure here.

In the conclusion of the second book of *The Emigrants*, Smith no longer speaks to the ruling classes of Britain in order to press her case, but takes her appeal directly to god:

May lovely Freedom, in her genuine charms,
 Aided by stern but equal Justice, drive
 From the ensanguin'd earth the hell-born fiends
 Of Pride, Oppression, Avarice, and Revenge,
 That ruin what thy mercy made so fair!
 (II:431-35)

These charges could as easily be made against all four groups Smith attacks through the course of *The Emigrants*. The ruling classes of both France and Britain are obvious targets for the end of 'Oppression' and the promotion of 'lovely Freedom'. Perhaps also the émigrés are included within this, as some at least of their number would have come from the French aristocracy. Yet it also speaks clearly to those within the British legal system. Although the plea for freedom to remove these vices 'From the ensanguin'd earth' indicates that Smith is thinking of the violence in France, the fact that she teams Freedom with Justice so explicitly is, I think, quite revealing. That this Justice is described particularly as being 'equal' points to all people having equal access to this 'Justice', which as yet is not guaranteed by the laws of the land. It seems possible that Smith is arguing specifically for equal legal rights for women, and that the only way for the nation to be rid of the vices which have helped propel the French towards Revolution is to acknowledge that true freedom is, as Smith writes, 'aided' by this 'equal Justice'. In concluding *The Emigrants*, Smith seems to connect the broader sense of political freedom thought of as being part of the Revolution inextricably with the

more personal freedom of the individual from unfair treatment in law. The one cannot exist without the other and, the poem concludes, neither type of freedom can be withheld without the alternative being a repeat of the death and destruction occurring in France.

Despite the poem in the end advocating peace as the ideal goal following these upheavals, the reader is still faced with several problematic elements. As the poem ends with the appeal for peace, it simultaneously makes its case for the benefits of war, and its hopeful ending for the émigrés is ironically undercut by the ever-present aspects of Smith's own distress as an exile:

Then shall these ill-starr'd wanderers, whose sad fate
 These desultory lines lament, regain
 Their native country; private vengeance then
 To public virtue yield; and the fierce feuds,
 That long have torn their desolated land,
 May (even as storms, that agitate the air,
 Drive noxious vapours from the blighted earth)
 Serve, all tremendous as they are, to fix
 The reign of Reason, Liberty, and Peace!
 (II:435-444)

War, the poem concludes, has a cleansing effect which, though violent, is nevertheless of benefit. In France, once the fighting has stopped and, presumably, when the Revolution has returned to what Smith sees as its original values, peace can 'reign'. At the very end, though, it is not war that Smith contends has this effect. The word she uses to describe the violence is 'feuds'. The French, it would seem, are not fighting anything so damaging as a war, but are involved in a series of squabbles which, once resolved, will see 'Reason' and 'Liberty' restored. Smith concedes that the fighting is 'fierce', but it is still characterised as a dispute between a people with broadly the same

views which will resolve itself in time for the benefit of the entire French nation. It is a happy ending also for the émigrés, whose exile is now at an end. By describing the war as a series of 'fierce feuds' Smith seems to imply that the emigrants were rather hasty in their flight from their homeland, but there also seems to be a genuine gladness that they will be able to return home. Ironically, Smith herself will experience no such happy ending. There is no end in sight for the fighting and squabbling over her father-in-law's estate, and there is a lack of hope within the poem that Smith will ever see the end of her own peculiar legal, and perhaps professional, exile.

Without a resolution in her own affairs, Smith also seems destined for a life as a jobbing writer, rather than an existence as an inspired poetic genius, the guise in which she wishes most to appear in public. She must continue in a kind of intellectual exile, doing battle with publishers in an attempt to make ends meet for her family whilst the money that could secure her position as an independent, upper middle-class professional writer who has no real need for the money her talent generates, is squandered on a legal suit of benefit to none of the parties involved. Although the conclusion of *The Emigrants* challenges the reader's concept of the purpose of war, what is clearest by the end of the poem is Smith's own disenchantment with rebellion. Despite the daring and strength of *Desmond*, Smith seems to have realised by the time she had finished writing *The Emigrants* that there was no prospect of a French-style revolution in Britain. Smith, as a woman, seems to have very little opportunity for such radical rebellion herself, within her writing or without.

Through the attempts by Smith and Ann Yearsley to navigate the key political moments of the early French Revolution and the criticism Smith in particular begins to attract, it is possible to see constraints being imposed upon the professional status of women writers. In some ways, Smith imposes constraints upon herself by both

rejecting her professional status (being paid for her literary output), and embracing it (as the only means of supporting her family). Caught in the middle, Smith's ability to manipulate the way in which she presents herself to her readership is compromised, as is her relationship with her implied audience, who become increasingly tired of her pleas for sympathy whilst she enjoys the career of one of the most successful and influential writers of her generation.

In contrast, Ann Yearsley's elegies to Louis and Marie Antoinette confirm her as an independently professional writer. Neither elegy bears any evidence that Bristol, Gossip or Dawson were involved in publishing or promotion. Instead, the cover to both poems bears Yearsley's name as her own publisher and patron. In 1793, Yearsley had printed a Catalogue of the contents of her public library, complete with the rules of subscription, indicating that the library had been established during the previous year. The two elegies were to be sold through the library, where the catalogue notes items 664, 665 and 666 are 'Poems, by Ann Yearsley.'⁶⁸ By becoming the proprietor of a public library at the Hotwells, one of the most fashionable areas outside London, Yearsley was supplying literature to the wealthy upper classes, who now needed her services. She had also cannily created a two-fold opportunity for self-promotion which bypassed all elements of the literary marketplace, from her own patrons to the publishers. Firstly, to advertise herself as a professional writer Yearsley had someone print her work, and then distributed her poetry herself either by selling or lending to the gentry. Secondly, to advertise her existence as owner of a public library, the publication of her poetry ensured that prominent in the announcement about who had published the work was the address for Yearsley's library. Both elegies proclaim they are 'Printed for, and sold by the AUTHOR, at her Public-Library, CRESCENT, *Hotwells*; -

⁶⁸ Ann Yearsley, *Catalogue of the Books, Tracts, &c. contained in Ann Yearsley's Public Library, No. 4, Crescent, Hotwells* (Bristol: Printed for the proprietor, 1793), p. 37.

and by the BOOKSELLERS of *Bristol, Bath, &c.*,⁶⁹ demonstrating Yearsley's considerable business acumen. It was also a shrewd career move for Yearsley, as it ensured that she was still very much involved with print culture, without being at its mercy. As Scott Hess has noted, '[a]t first seen as competitors or parasites of the booksellers, libraries became crucial to the publishing industry, especially for novels [...]. The spread of commercial lending libraries [...] provided a significant market for publishers.'⁷⁰ It was also a symbolic moment. It confirmed Yearsley as a professional woman, an important feature of local print culture, and as a woman whose class origins were irrelevant to the service she was providing; finally, she was no longer 'Lactilla' (the name she had made use of herself in 1787), but Ann Yearsley, proprietor of a well-stocked and successful library; Yearsley's library contained 666 volumes of drama, novels, poetry, travel writing, history and social commentary. Only a decade later, Charlotte Smith would be forced to sell her treasured collection 'of 500 "well selected books" for far less than their value,'⁷¹ whilst Ann Yearsley retired on the proceeds from her public library, suggesting the scope of their varying fortunes. It is also indicative of the considerable benefits of being able to step outside the usual relationships with publishers, patrons, and public.

Having moved through differently charged patronage relationships, different texts and political moments, Yearsley, as her own publisher and promoter, is now in an unusual position; she has access to the highest ranks of society, and is an integral part of the fashionable life of the Hotwells through her library. Her freedom from the literary marketplace was considerable, but it was not enough to withstand the tide of

⁶⁹ Frontispiece to *Sequel to Reflections on the Death of Louis XVI* (Bristol: Ann Yearsley, 1793) and *An Elegy on Marie Antoinette, of Austria, ci-devant Queen of France* (Bristol: Ann Yearsley, 1794).

⁷⁰ Scott Hess, *Authoring the Self: Self-Representation, Authorship, and the Print Market in British Poetry from Pope through Wordsworth* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 41.

⁷¹ Judith Phillips Stanton in 'Charlotte Smith's "Literary Business": Income, Patronage, and Indigence', *Age of Johnson* 1 (1987), 375-401 (377).

reactionary patriotism which had already begun to flow in Britain. Indeed, the hope inspired by the French Revolution in the liberal British population was gradually being destroyed by the increasing violence of the French under Robespierre. As events moved towards the eventual rise of Napoleon, a major shift began in the work of previously radical writers towards a moderated world view. Yearsley, acclaimed by some as a champion of sorts for the poor, had already produced work focussed on the monarchies of both France and England, and would write more before the end of her literary career. The final work of that career would also see Yearsley seeking the protection once more of her aristocratic patron, the Earl of Bristol, who had already been cast away twice at moments when Yearsley thought herself able to succeed on her own. Her reversion to patronage suggests a vulnerability in her position in the literary marketplace in this new political climate. Similarly, Smith's 1794 novel *The Banished Man*, after the daringness of *Desmond* and *The Emigrants*, struck a much more cautious note about the events in France. In contrast, Hannah More, always more conservative than either her former protégée or Smith, found the new political climate suited the tone of her writing perfectly. With the backlash against the excesses of the French Revolution in full flow, More found a market now existed for literature which would help guide the poor and shape their thoughts away from ideas of rebellion and revolution; the *Cheap Repository Tracts* were priced and marketed meticulously to ensure widespread circulation. The final chapter will assess how the culture of loyalism which grew in Britain following the collapse of the French Revolution was internalised by the literary productions of More, Yearsley and Smith, and how far this culture could be resisted, and challenged.

Chapter 5

After the French Revolution: reaction and publishing in the 1790s

The shockwaves generated by the scale of the Terror in France echoed around Europe throughout the 1790s. As the Revolution lurched from crisis to crisis, descending finally into dictatorship with Napoleon's rise to power, political sympathies in Britain also realigned themselves. The political turmoil now engulfing France, and the consequences for print culture in Britain, represented perhaps the most serious challenge to the professionalism of Hannah More, Ann Yearsley and Charlotte Smith. As I have noted, Betty Schellenberg has argued that professional authorship was understood 'as working for financial gain, seeing the publication of a novel or the production of a play as a means of economic support and, ideally, independence'.¹ Charlotte Smith, perhaps the epitome of Schellenberg's idea of professionalism, had followed the controversies of *Desmond* and the ambiguities of *The Emigrants* with another novel focussed on the crisis in France. *The Banished Man*, published in 1794, just 12 months after her long poem, marked, according to Chris Jones, 'a toning down of the radical criticism that characterized the authorial voice' of her earlier works.² Coming as it did in the midst of a remarkably prolific period for Smith, the publication of this novel seems to suggest that she may have been grappling particularly hard with her twin problems of financial difficulties and political scrutiny. As Judith Phillips Stanton has noted, only five years later when Smith expected the

¹ Betty A. Schellenberg, 'From Propensity to Profession: Female Authorship and the Early Career of Frances Burney', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 3-4 (2002), 345-370 (351).

² Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and ideas in the 1790s* (London and New York: 1993), p. 170.

settlement of the lawsuit against her father-in-law's estate did the pace of her writing lessen, 'for the first time since separating from her husband'.³

In the early 1790s, four novels within four years would have yielded a significant income for Smith. Her average per novel was in the order of £150-200,⁴ but as Judith Phillips Stanton notes, Smith was shrewd when it came to urging reprints of earlier works, and this period would, according to Stanton's figures, have yielded an income of approximately £900.⁵ This includes Stanton's own approximations of Smith's earnings from first editions of *Celestina* [1790, £200], *Desmond* [1792, £150], *The Old Manor House* [1793, £200] and *The Banished Man* [1794, £200] and £150 from second editions of the first three of these novels. But as Stanton argues, '[h]er literary earnings are best seen against her expenses.'⁶ 1794 was not an easy year for Smith financially, where the basics, even 'milk and butter - were not to be had.'⁷

That spring, [Smith] planned to go to a lodging house at Bath following a winter marred by gout and rheumatism but could only afford to take her maid and twelve-year-old daughter whom she was schooling. To take the family, five grown or near-grown children and a son-in-law, would have been 'an expense I could ill afford' (25 Mar. 1794).⁸

Smith's estimated income of £900 did not go far enough, and the need to produce more work must have been felt strongly.

Politically, Smith was finding it increasingly difficult to publish according to conscience, not public mood, and the publication of *The Banished Man* marks her first venture with Thomas Cadell Jnr. and William Davies, three years after she had last published a novel with Cadell Snr.. Smith had enjoyed a relatively happy relationship

³ Judith Phillips Stanton, *The Collected Letters of Charlotte Smith* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 302.

⁴ See Edward Copeland, *Women Writing about Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 202.

⁵ Judith Phillips Stanton, 'Charlotte Smith's "Literary Business": Income, Patronage and Indigence', *The Age of Johnson* 1 (1987), 375-401 (391).

⁶ *ibid.*, 378.

⁷ *ibid.*, 378.

⁸ *ibid.*, 379.

with Cadell Snr., who had 'loaned her £5 outright' to help move Anna Augusta from Bath as her daughter's health declined,⁹ but as Stanton notes, Smith's relationship with Cadell Jnr. and William Davies was much less to her taste: 'Thomas Cadell, Sr., put her works forward, and forwarded advances, but retired from his own company in 1793, leaving it to his son and William Davies, who were less willing to be publisher-gentlemen to such a demanding, needy woman.'¹⁰ Evidence is in the younger Cadell's treatment of Smith's requests for advances and loans. Stanton records an occasion where 'Smith borrowed £5 on the second volume of *The Young Philosopher*: in December they paid her, not the remaining £45, but £44.15.0.'¹¹ This charging of interest appears to have typified the nature of the relationship between Smith, Cadell and Davies, yet they were the publishers she used most often for the next eight years. That Smith would remain with publishers so uninclined to give her the kind of support she had become accustomed to, and needed, perhaps suggests that Smith's publishing options were rather limited from this point. Her brief relationships with the Robinsons (for *Desmond*) and Bell (for *The Old Manor House*) were not resumed, and neither was the radical political tone which characterised the work Smith published with them. Instead, Smith chose to remain with the more conservative firm of Cadell and Davies.

In *The Banished Man*, the confident manipulation of the anti-Revolutionary argument has gone, and in its place is a sometimes hesitant and confused plot. In his reading, Chris Jones finds Smith's novel a far from simple response to the new political climate:

It is probably the most complex of her novels in attempt, though not completely successful in execution. This complexity is due to her efforts to come to terms with the French betrayal of

⁹ *ibid.*, 390.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 395.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 390.

the ideals of the Revolution in the tyranny of Robespierre, and also to her efforts to circumvent the inquisitorial forces of reaction in Britain.¹²

It is also quite possible that Smith was also trying to establish a relationship with her new publishers, and perhaps to accept that circumstances meant that she would likely have to continue working with Cadell and Davies for some time. However, the 'forces of reaction' were not experienced only by Smith. Ann Yearsley, who had her first, and only, play performed in the very early days of the Revolution in 1789, had remarks celebrating the change of order in France and the Epilogue removed by the Lord Chamberlain.¹³ Despite this, the play enjoyed a modestly successful run of seven nights in Bristol,¹⁴ reflected perhaps by the waspish exchange of letters between Hannah More and Horace Walpole:

They that think her 'Earl Goodwin' will outgo Shakespeare, might be in the right if they specified in what way – I believe she may write worse than he sometimes did, though that is not easy; but to excellence – Oh! I have not words adequate to my contempt for those who can suppose such a possibility.¹⁵

More's own response to the play was no more charitable:

As to the tragedy you enquire about, I hear it is a very poor performance, without plot, character, or interest. There are, I dare say, some pretty passages in it, but all seems to bring it in guilty of the crime of dulness [sic], which I take to be the greatest fault in dramatic composition.¹⁶

The success of the drama, despite More's remarks, seems to have been due to its ability to capture the political mood of the audience. Mary Waldron has proposed that '[it]

¹² Jones, p. 170.

¹³ Jacqueline Pearson, 'Crushing the Convent and the Dread Bastille: the Anglo-Saxons, Revolution and Gender in Women's Plays of the 1790s', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the thirteenth to the twentieth century*, ed. by Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 122-37 (p. 137). Pearson states that it was specifically 'the lines about the Bastille [which] were excised'.

¹⁴ Mary Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753-1806* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), p. 188.

¹⁵ Horace Walpole to Hannah More, 4 November 1789 in *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence* vol. 31, ed. by W.S. Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 331.

¹⁶ Hannah More to Horace Walpole, Sunday 8 November 1789, *ibid.*, p. 335.

would be a mistake to imagine that there was anything revolutionary or even eccentric about Yearsley's [political] attitude at this time'. Most people, Waldron argues, were happy in 1789 that the French were 'about to set [their] house in order along English lines.'¹⁷ Lines such as 'the poor Frenchman, long our nation's jest, / Feels a new passion throbbing in his breast; / [...] Crushes the convent and the dread Bastile [sic]' may have been subject to the censor, but appear to have been completely in keeping with the audience's own sympathies.¹⁸ Although clearly aware of the mood of that audience, questions about Yearsley's own political orientation are raised by Waldron's statement that she 'had to write what would sell'.¹⁹ To suppose that Yearsley was capable only of servicing the views of others would be to ignore an important element both of this play, and her 1795 novel, *The Royal Captives*. In both, Yearsley demonstrates an acute awareness of the psychology of her audience and of the process of consuming words, and is able to make use of this to create an authorial persona as self-aware as that of Charlotte Smith. *The Royal Captives* is full of narrative interventions which complicate any attempts to locate Yearsley's politics.

If Yearsley and Smith found their publishing enterprises shaped by a pressure to withdraw from the excesses of the French Revolution, Hannah More's had never been so well supported. In 1788, the year of her famous anti-slavery poem, More also published *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society*. Its programme of remedying 'the religious complacency of the respectable' by making the upper classes 'recognize their obligations to those below them' was built upon the teaching of the scripture and a strict adherence to the Sabbath.²⁰ More's reasons for urging a greater consideration of religious observance arise from her Evangelical belief

¹⁷ Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Bristol*, p. 173.

¹⁸ Ann Yearsley, *Earl Goodwin* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1791), p. 90. First performed in 1789. All subsequent references will be made following the relevant quotation.

¹⁹ Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Bristol*, p. 188.

²⁰ Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 97.

that to 'expect to reform the poor while the opulent are corrupt, is to throw odours into the stream while the springs are poisoned.'²¹ Seven years later, More would attempt that reformation of the poor. Beginning in 1795, the *Cheap Repository Tracts* were to continue until the end of the eighteenth century under More's direct control.

Aggressively marketed so as to be in direct competition with the literature most commonly consumed by the poor, More's project was to sooth disquiet amongst the lower orders, a disquiet which had given rise to fears in the upper echelons of society of an English Revolution. Anne Stott claims that the 'Cheap Repository is wartime propaganda, full of all the special pleading associated with this type of literature, and More saw self-censorship as a patriotic duty at a time of national emergency'.²² Stott's assessment of the importance of the *Tracts* to English society is not shared by all critics, and Olivia Smith in particular has argued that the modern sense of their importance to maintaining the status quo has been overstated:

Hannah More's ability to write simple, calming, and vividly detailed stories describing the lives of the poor might have comforted readers who had been publicly defined as amoral, vicious, and incapable of self-control by the *Liberty and Property* series [of counter-revolutionary publications]. Without question, however, [the *Tracts*] comforted wealthier readers who grasped onto her tracts to allay fears which former conservative tracts had done their best to instill.²³

The publication of these *Tracts*, rather than being a simple attempt to shape the political views of a particular class, is actually a far more complicated affair.

Everything, from assessing who the audience was that More was writing for, to how More was able to publish such a volume of material at an affordable price, is open to question, as Olivia Smith's comments indicate:

²¹ Hannah More, *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* [1788] in *The Works of Hannah More* 18 vols. (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1818), vol. 6, p. 79.

²² Stott, p. 185.

²³ Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language 1791-1819* [1984] (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 96.

As a published poet and former friend of Lord Monboddo, Samuel Johnson, and Bishop Lowth, she did not need to prove her ability in a literary world nor did she particularly want to once she became more religious [...] She thought of writing for the poor as an act of humility appropriate to both her gender and her faith.²⁴

More's position in literary society, coupled with the security of a guaranteed annual income, places her in a different position from Charlotte Smith, who was still very much dependent on remaining fully professional writers with the attendant demands of maintaining an audience and a living. Ann Yearsley's position was somewhere between More and Smith. As has been discussed, Yearsley was able to step outside the literary marketplace as the proprietor of a public library, but when she ventured into print, it was as a professional writer, with the intention of making money from her work. Yearsley's livelihood may not have depended upon the success of her work, but her reputation as a professional writer was very much connected to how well her writing sold. The differences in these three women's professional situations seems to have played an important role in the work that they published in the mid-1790s. Interestingly, all three women chose to tackle the émigré crisis at this point, and their treatment of the subject both reinforces the differences between them, and highlights the universality the émigré was developing in the 1790s. How each woman approached this trope is determined in part by their professional position. Smith had already made use of the émigré crisis for more radical political ends, but by 1794 her views of those who left France appear to have altered. Yearsley, less encumbered by financial difficulties than Smith, is perhaps more able to tackle the topic directly in her novel, *The Royal Captives*, published in 1795, which centres on the exile of a family from their birthright, and eventually from France, and the consequences for both France and Britain. Yet it is Hannah More's appropriation of the émigré to maintain patriotic

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 91.

feelings in Britain in 1794 which is perhaps the most striking use of the Revolutionary refugees. Laying the foundations for the nationalism which was to inform the tracts of the *Cheap Repository*, More's *Considerations on Religion and Public Education* is indicative of the changing mood in Britain. This chapter seeks to investigate how, for each woman, the events of the 1790s, combined with their own political views and artistic ambitions, influenced what each woman produced, and its reception in a reactionary English society.

Ann Yearsley's tale of an eleventh-century England preparing to tear itself apart because of the brutality of a king led astray by conniving ministers was relatively popular with theatre-goers in Bristol: popular enough for Yearsley to publish the text of the play two years later. The early 1790s would seem to have still favoured the Revolution enough for Yearsley to find a market for the text, and for the politics of the text not to have aroused anger, as Smith was to do only a year later with the publication of *Desmond*. As Jeffrey N. Cox, commenting on the anti-Jacobin plays of this period, has pointed out, '[t]he earliest of [those] plays was written in 1792'.²⁵ Yearsley's timing of the play, and in particular its publication, was very fortunate, before the backlash which was to come. Although to a modern reader, and to her contemporary audience also, the political parallels between the situation created by the misrule of Edward and the events in France are clear, a version of the play was actually written over a year before the French Revolution took place. In November 1788, Yearsley's patron, the Earl of Bristol, was using all his influence to bring the play to a London stage, including having his daughter negotiate with Richard Sheridan for its

²⁵ Jeffrey N. Cox, 'Ideology and Genre in British Antirevolutionary Drama in the 1790s', in *British Romantic Drama: Historical and Critical Essays*, ed. by Terence Allan Hoagwood and Daniel P. Watkins (New Jersey and London: Associated University Presses, 1998), pp. 84-114 (p. 86).

production in the Drury Lane theatre. Despite all the efforts of Bristol and his daughter as well as his considerable praise for the play's merits, these efforts seem to have been unsuccessful. This was not necessarily a problem, though. Copied in a letter sent from Clifton on November 17th, 1788 between Yearsley and Wilmer Gossip, is the correspondence received by Yearsley from her patron about the progress of *Earl Goodwin*. The letter indicates that a successful run on the London stage was not the only way to gain acclaim for the play:

[...] I cannot express my impatience to see *Goodwin Earl of Kent*, for the Drama seems to be your *great Fort*, and is my favourite composition, it exhibits *all* the Powers of the Author's Mind, and Calls forth every feeling of the heart! God grant that Lady Elizabeth Foster, or her Friend the Duchess of Devonshire, may bring *fortunately* and lucratively, into the World, what you have so happily Conceived, but if they do not, I hope you will Confidently publish what I will venture to say is the ablest of your *Able* performances, Lord Goodwin, to my house in S^t James's Square, where he will be well received, and safely forwarded to Me at Rome, whither I am again attracted.²⁶

Yearsley seems to have held onto the hope of *Earl Goodwin* being accepted for a run in London, rather than rushing to print, as suggested by the Earl of Bristol. Her confidence of the play's success is apparent in a letter to Eliza Dawson the following month, where Yearsley states that 'I think it the best piece I have ever written and believe it to be the last I shall ever write',²⁷ a statement which pronounces her belief in both its artistic merits, and its commercial value. This confidence in the play was to prove unwarranted in London, and with the failure of her attempts to secure a run in the capital Yearsley also lost the opportunity for London earnings. Indeed, the play was far from the last piece written by Yearsley, indicating the scale of the financial cost she bore. However, Yearsley was successful in bringing it to the stage in Bristol, and with

²⁶ Undated letter from the Earl of Bristol, enclosed within Yearsley to Gossip, 17th November, 1788 in Frank Felsenstein, 'Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage: The Thorp Arch Archive: Part II', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 22.1 (2003), 13-56 (29-31).

²⁷ Letter from Ann Yearsley to Eliza Dawson, dated by Felsenstein from the postmark as being written December 29th, 1788 in Felsenstein, 35.

the Epilogue's references to the storming of the Bastille, the play was altered specifically to connect its events with those in France. This may have been at the cost of her relationship with the Earl of Bristol, who had so earnestly recommended the publication, and not necessarily the performance, of the play. Where it had been the subject of the Earl's endeavours in 1788, the play's Prologue suggests a rather sudden change in their relationship by the time of its performance the following year:

This night, from nature's wildest scene, appears
 A Muse abash'd, and trembling with her fears:
 No pow'r she brings to break your critic laws,
No witless patron thunders in her cause.
 (Prologue, ll. 1-4. Emphasis Yearsley's)

If this is indeed a barb for the Earl of Bristol, it suggests Yearsley's determination to act for her own best interests, regardless of the advice of her patron. That Yearsley felt strongly enough about her own work's merit (and perhaps its commercial potential) that she was prepared to suffer a break with her patron is indicative of a boldness demonstrated also by her decision to make her play engage directly with the French Revolution. Yearsley seems deeply unwilling to sacrifice her own view of her work, either for patron or for reward, despite Mary Waldron's comments. As Jacqueline Pearson has noted, the 'French Revolution, with its opportunities for class restructuring and a new social justice, attracted and interested her'.²⁸ For all the Earl of Bristol's famous liberality,²⁹ this may have been too much even for him, a member of the class most threatened by the events of France.

²⁸ Pearson, p. 132.

²⁹ The Earl of Bristol's support for an Oath of Allegiance acceptable to British Catholics is documented in the entry in the *Oxford National Dictionary of Biography* by Gerard O'Brien, 'Hervey, Frederick Augustus, fourth Earl of Bristol (1730-1803)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk:80/view/article/13111>. As is noted here, however, that support was not always particularly helpful. Towards Yearsley Bristol seems to have been genuinely keen to

As has been suggested, this boldness on the part of Yearsley did not come without a financial cost. Where she had written to Eliza Dawson in 1788 and implied that, with the play, she would have no need to write further, 1795 found her publishing a four volume novel. The irony of this could not be greater. In the same letter proclaiming the triumph of *Earl Goodwin*, Yearsley writes:

You have kindly enquired what Books I read - I never read *Novels* - if I may form an opinion from your style, *You do*. Soar above them my dear Girl! move not in the hackneyd trammels of the present female taste; it is light, trifling, *despicable*, and void of noble energy of thought. Playing [Word missing?] with the passions, enervate the soul, and our natur[al?] Composition is by far too soft to secure our repose, at least I find it so. - examples of the roughest and strongest fortitude inspire: we adore the beauty of self-denial tho we seldom possess it without pain; for examples of this kind, if we explore the past, and not only in this point but all others, if we do not Compare the past, with the present, we seldom form a proper estimate of Life. There is a *poverty* of thought in *Novels*: which is conceal'd under glossy diction, and their admirers *must* accept *Sound* for sterling *Wisdom*.³⁰

The way in which Yearsley discusses novels with her young patron here helps to illuminate the process of both writing and publishing *The Royal Captives*, and how to read it as a cultural document. Clearly, Yearsley's thoughts on the novel are strong; '*despicable*' is a fairly clear-cut statement of the genre's value. But the picture is far more complicated than this one word suggests. Firstly, that Yearsley was publishing again in 1795 indicates that *Earl Goodwin*, though evidently successful in many ways, was not the runaway success she hoped for. Having apparently discarded her patron in an attempt to be truly independent, Yearsley may have found herself drawn to the novel as Charlotte Smith had been in the 1780s. With a rate of around £50 paid per volume, the

help, but such a clear attack on the nobility may have forced him to see his position as Yearsley's patron as untenable.

³⁰ Ann Yearsley to Eliza Dawson, dated 29th December 1788 in Felsenstein, p. 36. Remarks in square brackets are editorial notes within the article.

novel's very size, at four volumes, indicates that Yearsley's foray into novel writing was at least in part for financial reasons. An income of £200 was substantial, giving, as Edward Copeland has noted, 'a grudging admission among some authors that such a competence might just achieve gentility.'³¹ Although Yearsley's library was apparently successful, providing a living for her family, the ability to earn such a sum at the first attempt in the genre may have acted to reinforce Yearsley's own sense of herself as a professional writer of note. Indeed, she made use of all her knowledge of the literary marketplace in order to promote her commodity, as Judith Dorn suggests: 'Where Yearsley's books of poetry had been printed by subscription, *The Royal Captives* was distributed by several booksellers at once in Ireland, England and America.'³²

Ambitious and determined for her novel to sell well, Yearsley was 'designing this prose commodity for a wider reading public', presumably confident that a historical novel set in France would be commercially viable in 1795.³³ The opportunity to earn a substantial amount of money may have helped Yearsley overcome her dislike of novels in general, but it was far from being the only factor.

Although Mary Waldron quite rightly notes that '[i]n deciding on the subject of her novel, Yearsley again typically consulted the market and tried to meet its demands from among the things she could do best', she fails to appreciate that novel-writing, in Yearsley's view, should alleviate the '*Poverty of thought*' within the genre, not further it. In her letter to Dawson, Yearsley writes that 'if we do not Compare the past, with the present, we seldom form a proper estimate of Life', and this is one reading that is invited by the subject matter of *The Royal Captives*. Set in late seventeenth-century France, Yearsley's novel is a version of the story of 'The Man in the Iron Mask'. Told

³¹ Copeland, p. 28.

³² Judith Dorn, '*The Royal Captives, A Fragment of History: Ann Yearsley's "Unnecessary Curiosity"*', in *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, vol. 5, ed. by Kevin L. Cope and Anna Battigelli (New York: AMS Press, 2000), pp. 163-189 (p. 164).

³³ *ibid.*, p. 164.

from the point of view of the nephew of Louis XIV, son of the wronged twin brother of the king, it is a tale which takes every opportunity to examine the consequences of abused power. By removing her story one hundred years into the past, Yearsley actively urges the reader to 'Compare the past, with the present', and in so doing incorporates into her text something which she claims in her correspondence was lacking in the modern novel. Judith Dorn provides a similar argument in her essay, concluding that 'Yearsley's choice of this legend as material for a book written during the Terror implies a view of history that explains the present as a result of forces that had been set in motion during Louis XIV's time, forces unknown before their effects became public knowledge'.³⁴ By asking the reader to see the present through this constructed past, Yearsley's view of what constitutes 'a proper estimate of Life' becomes deeply political. Mary Waldron may label Yearsley's political message as 'mild, non-violent reformism and common sense', but the text's often radical presentation of a faceless monarchy is anything but 'mild': a monarchy frequently employing force, and no stranger to the grossest violations of human nature.

Despite the political relevance of the text, what finally enables Yearsley to publish a novel and maintain her contempt for the form is the title she gives to her work. The subtitle reads, 'a fragment of secret history copied from an old manuscript, by Ann Yearsley'. The conceit is that Yearsley is not writing a novel at all, but is merely transcribing a much older record of (supposedly) true events. Judith Dorn picks up the importance of the words 'secret history', and usefully postulates that a "secret history" contends for a more explicitly political voice in public than a novel or romance.³⁵ Yearsley simultaneously justifies to herself her decision to publish this text, and makes a bold claim for a greater degree of engagement with her work than even she would

³⁴ Dorn, p. 164.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 178.

necessarily accord an ordinary novel. Unfortunately for Yearsley, this claim was not always paid notice. Although clearly a supporter of Yearsley, the reviewer of her work in *The Monthly Review* is not uncritical. The review makes a case in favour of Yearsley's admission into the higher literary classes, but not necessarily because of any inherent talent. Rather, it is her weaknesses as a writer that provide, for this reviewer at least, her pass into the upper salons of literature: Yearsley requires further instruction. The reviewer reads into the novel a rather moderated political content, and damns it by faint praise. It 'will be acceptable to such as weep over the calamities to which royalty is subject. Those who buy books will much more frequently buy worse than better.'³⁶ Readers are urged to purchase the novel despite the reviewer's conclusion that it is not very good, in order to support Yearsley because 'those who love to encourage an enterprising and, however abashed and subdued, no vulgar spirit, will not think their money ill bestowed.'³⁷

To elicit the kind of support proposed by *The Monthly Review* is not the aim of Yearsley's writing, and her claim for a more serious reception for her work is furthered by all the elements of the title page. She maintains the textual illusion that she has not written the words in the text by placing her name in the subtitle, and not separately following the title in the more conventional fashion. The Preface to the novel is written in the same vein. Yearsley talks about the text's narrator, 'Henry Capet', as a real person who, she states, 'if the following sheets find approbation, I may give, in future, the best answer I am capable of.'³⁸ The complexity of the façade Yearsley is attempting to present is demonstrated by the first of many authorial interjections, the voice of which is markedly different from that given to the character/narrator/author Henry Capet:

³⁶ *The Monthly Review* 16 (January 1795), 114.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 114.

³⁸ Ann Yearsley, *The Royal Captives: a fragment of secret history copied from an old manuscript*, by Ann Yearsley 4 vols (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1795), vol. 1, p. i. All subsequent references to the text will be made in parentheses after the relevant quotation.

I love Fame, though I have only heard her whispers; am sensible she incites towards the wonderful, the great and good; and that Authors, who affect to despise her, are cowards, insincere, and guilty of profanation [...] I confess myself not deaf to, nor independent of the voice of the world, except in those enraptured moments when bewitching Fancy renders me insensible to the real dependencies of life. In poetry I am her slave; in prose I wish her to be mine. In private sorrow, she has, through a gloomy passage of twenty years, proved my enchanting friend. None may condemn me; Nature herself drew delusion in the desert where I was beloved by Fancy, and tasted more delight than I have since found in the midst of proud society, where favour falls heavily on the heart from the hand of Arrogance. (p. ii)

At times, the voice here is removed completely from the tone of the novel and, instead, is the tone of the wronged Ann Yearsley, still embittered by her treatment at the hands of the literary 'greats' who have rejected her because of her class. Yearsley proudly announces that 'None may condemn me'. Combined with her labelling of authors who feign dislike of fame as 'cowards', the Preface issues a dynamic challenge to her critics. But the strength of tone here belies a more considered approach which is a hallmark of the text's construction throughout. In her Preface, Yearsley manoeuvres her reader as surely as does Charlotte Smith in *Desmond*, providing the reader with a variety of narrative persona that may or may not be the author. Here, one of those personae, apparently that of Yearsley herself, claims that her reason for publishing this work is because her life is coming to an end:

One of my motives for publishing the work unfinished, is, that the world may speak of me as I am, whilst I have power to hear. The clouds that hang over my fortunes intervene between me and the Public. I incessantly struggle to dissipate them, feel those struggles vain, and shall drop in the effort – This consolation I shall, however, bear with me to the verge of life, that to those who have guided me by the sacred and lambent flame of friendship, my memory will be dear, and that whilst Malice feebly breathes, Truth will boldly pronounce,

ANN YEARSLEY (pp. iii-iv)

The language of the conclusion to Yearsley's Preface bears more than a passing resemblance to the melancholic prefaces of Smith's work. And just as with Smith,

Yearsley is also playing with the reader's perception of the author by signing her name at the end. Judith Dorn has noted that 'Yearsley's act of signing her name in *The Royal Captives* [...] invites comparison to the potentially revolutionary identity of her protagonist in the first-person narrative that follows.'³⁹ In this text, both the identity of the author and the origin of narrative authority (which are not always the same thing) are directly connected to a radical political agenda. At the end of the Preface, Yearsley's name both reinforces the illusion of Henry Capet's having written what is to follow, and makes it clear that Yearsley is writing as Capet in order to write radically. The fluidity of narrative authority enables Yearsley to speak from the text directly to the reader, adding a radical structure to a radical content.

As with her Preface, Yearsley opens her novel in powerful style. The opening lines are full of violence, the speaker being 'Torn' from his previous life and 'plunged into this dreary abode' (1:1), which the reader does not immediately learn is a prison. Indeed, the disjointed style of the beginning of the text mirrors the confusion of the protagonist, and cleverly brings the reader into the prison with the novel's characters. Yearsley maintains the reader's sympathy with Henry's situation by not immediately revealing the charges which have led to his imprisonment. When they are made known, the weakness of those charges begins Yearsley's campaign against the corruptness of the French monarchy in 1685, and inevitably its modern counterpart. Henry is accused 'of conspiring against monarchy, of associating with the enemies of the King, and of concealing memorials which immediately concern the state' (1:9). If the reader was in any doubt about the nature of this novel, this last charge removes any possibility that the state is acting justly, even though Henry's history is still a mystery to the reader.

³⁹ Dorn, p. 171.

Such is the corruption of the state Yearsley seeks to criticise that even the jailors find themselves supporting the prisoners:

‘Deeply do I violate my feelings as a man; but should I refuse this execrable office, I must expire on the rack, nor would my death avail your friend; all here, who are supposed to be on the part of the state, are, from necessity, executioners’. (1:16-7)

The message is plain: loyalty to the state is equated with murder, and no good man is willingly loyal to that state. As Judith Dorn notes, Yearsley’s text ‘poses in public as primary documentary evidence of the existence of a man whose historicity remains a question that makes the legitimacy of the Bourbon dynasty hinge on scanty traces in private memoirs.’⁴⁰ The political potential of this is immense, and when connected to the name of Yearsley’s character becomes overtly revolutionary. The use of the name Capet for the family carries a definite irony, since it was the citizen name given to Louis XVI after his confinement, and the surname of the commoner who established the dynasty of which Louis was part. Through this naming of her characters, Yearsley demonstrates her own knowledge of history, and lends her novel historical authority.

Yet this stridently anti-monarchical tone is gradually complicated as the text progresses, reflecting Yearsley’s own responses to the executions of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in her poems of 1793 and 1794. As has been discussed, these poems are heavily critical of the French revolutionaries who have executed the royal family, and this seems to jar with the stance taken in this novel. However, Tim Burke offers a useful assessment of the elegies to the dead king and queen which explains this apparent contradiction. He writes, Yearsley ‘persisted in her project of exposing corruption and injustice to the end of her career. When she happened to find these errors amongst the French revolutionaries [...] as she did in their callous treatment of

⁴⁰ Dorn, p. 175.

Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, she did not hesitate to say so.⁴¹ As her Prologue to *Earl Goodwin* demonstrates, Yearsley had supported earlier stages of the Revolution, so was far from uncritical of the right of monarchs to rule, and again her intervention with her play may have arisen from this desire to tackle 'corruption and injustice'. On occasion, *The Royal Captives* blends these positions, and although there continues to be moments of stinging criticism, where 'royalty is the trapping of fools, given by adulation and worn in vain by mortal beings' (1:124), Yearsley also offers a more moderate view of monarchy and, it seems, of the French Revolution as Henry's history is finally related:

[my guardian] disapproved much of the constitution of this country, but he was brave, and firm to attachments he once had formed [...] as an individual [he] had no power of revoking the statutes, nor had he the wish of assassinating his King merely because he was thrown as an hereditary and guiltless emblem of *order* into the lap of pre-eminence. Law is the cement of society. Law forms degrees of power, and by necessary gradation power sinks to the cottage from the throne. Nor must power be suffered to sport wantonly on that dangerous summit; while she sits soberly, her influence is nourishing, and millions bask in her well-regulated favours. Without law, order, so beloved, so cherished by mankind, cannot exist; and a King, that thing so hated, so feared, so revered and so loved, is but by accident as a common watchman; and whether society be awakened to its duties by many watchmen, or by one, is not worthy the discussion of the wise. (1:104-6)

So far removed is this passage from her earlier condemnation of monarchy that it seems even to argue against democracy. Although Henry is relating the opinions of his guardian, Yearsley has already established the character of the Count de Marfans as noble-minded, honourable and just towards rich and poor alike. These views cannot be dismissed because they have been spoken by a character the reader is expected to dislike, but must instead be allowed to form part of the complicated representation of monarchy that develops throughout the novel. Indeed, the end of the first volume

⁴¹ Tim Burke, ed., introduction to *Selected Poems of Ann Yearsley* (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2003), p. xvii.

concludes with the elder brother of Louis XIV, chosen for suffering instead of kingship because he was born blind, rejecting the crown and renouncing ambition: “I seek not the diadem of France; my heart is not so heated by ambition, as by civil commotion, to shed the blood of thousands” (1:236). Yet even this seemingly clear renunciation of the monarchy is not without complication. The implication is that, although the rule of Louis is far from ideal, to allow the monarchy to continue as it is would be better than a revolution to place the rightful king on the throne; or perhaps Revolution, where indeed ‘the blood of thousands’ has been shed to remove the king.

The directly political is not the only element of the text Yearsley wishes the reader to absorb and sympathise with. Although the immediate family of Henry Capet is an obvious exception, there is a general failure of blood bonds, and examples abound where better relationships are formed along less formal lines than those endorsed by the state. Even where traditional relationships are formed, the characters plead for there to be a more fundamental connection present even than that offered by the usual sanctity of marriage. Indeed, some of the most radical elements of Yearsley’s text could be said to revolve around the marriages, or lack of them, between the characters. On discovering that the marriage ceremony she thought was genuine was actually conducted by her partner’s brother disguised as a priest in order to entrap her, Anna, the now pregnant and noble daughter of a shepherd, is remarkably (and perhaps radically) unconcerned about her situation: “True, I insisted on marriage as a duty to the world, but my dearer claims in you are those of disinterested love, too sublime to be enlarged, or lessened by human ties; consequently superior to the clamours of slander” (2:90-1). Even earlier in the text, Emily, daughter of the Count de Marfans, rejects marriage as a step taken only by those unsure of each other. It is certainly not

her life's ambition to find a husband: "Marriage is the only chain for two unsuspecting souls, mutually in fear of each other; invested with prerogative they are watchful and suspicious; apparently polite, they are in private coolly envenomed, and hourly becoming practised in deliberate deceit" (2:20-1). To leave the reader in no doubt of the text's view of the current state of marriage, the narrator interjects, stating that 'Oppression hangs on woman. Custom and law respecting her, are through the world unjust' (2:103). This gendered project of re-examining how women might speak of marriage were they able to do so freely is, of course, complicated by the sex of the voice used. The narrator of the text is, nominally at least, male, but Yearsley has blurred the boundaries of authorship and narratorship. The reader seems to be listening to the voice of a woman speaking as a man in order to lend weight to this proto-feminist argument. For Madeleine Kahn, though, this is not possible. In *Narrative Transvestism*, Kahn asks 'what does a woman author have to gain from using a man's voice?', and answers that, in contrast to when a man takes a female voice, '[w]omen are borrowing the voice of authority'.⁴² Yet Kahn concludes by saying that this does not happen; that 'there is no such thing as a female transvestite. Women may dress as men, but they don't seem to do so as part of a cycle of reaffirming their feminine identity'.⁴³ This, I would argue, is exactly what Yearsley is doing in the guise of Henry Capet. Her title page requires her reader to accept her 'dressed' as a man, and therefore accept her vocalisations in the same way. Yearsley, I argue, both 'reaffirms her feminine identity' and, through the broader content of the novel, politicises that identity.

This politicisation of her identity renders the eventual state of the previously-radical Emily even more unusual. Although when Henry initially falls in love with

⁴² Madeleine Kahn, *Narrative Transvestism: Rhetoric and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 2.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 2.

Emily he finds his romantic ideas in need of some feminist readjustment, he later asks “where will you find domestic bliss, if not with a woman of beauty and virtue?” (2:206). The reader finds that it is still traditional female virtue which is most highly prized. Emily undergoes the rather stereotypical questioning of her innocence by Henry, before the standard happy ending where Henry’s accusations are found to be groundless and Emily’s virtue is proven to be spotless. Though Yearsley takes the opportunity to laugh at Henry for his conduct towards his beloved, and has Emily hesitate before consenting to marriage, the conclusion of the love plot still has the feel of convention in what seems to be an act of withdrawal from her initially radical stance on the position of women in society.

The end of the novel provides the reader with no firmer impression of the message they are supposed to take away, ending as it does with a happy nuclear family. Emily has become ‘my Emily’ (4:312), tied firmly by the bonds she so strenuously renounces earlier in the novel, but the initial note of political radicalism seems to have returned. With all the plots of the king and his supporters thwarted, and some of the supporters themselves dead or imprisoned, Yearsley has a lower-class family inherit the land left behind. The monarchy is by no means improved following the events related in this text, as Henry pronounces Louis’ behaviour to be typical of ‘THE BRUTALITY OF A KING’ (4:311). However, the image Yearsley creates of the monarch ‘rocked in the chair of state’ on ‘a dangerous summit’ and never knowing ‘cheerfulness and content’, is double-edged; the monarchy is to be both pitied and rejected. The Capet family are certainly represented as being better off without the burden of the crown, but the reader is also presented with a king doing a thankless task with no obvious reward other than exclusion from ordinary human pleasures (4:311). Still, the reader witnesses a small-scale revolution: one where the impoverished and disenfranchised find

their way to comfort without the bloodshed of civil conflict. Again, though, the radicalism of this is open to question. Although the poor family have acquired the land of two traitors, there is no formal system whereby others in a similar position may be able to improve themselves. Indeed, the two noble brothers whose land has passed to the poor family serve more as a message for the upper classes than the lower: that if they do not behave properly towards others, they risk losing their land. The implication is that as long as the nobility conduct themselves fairly, there is no need for them to lose their land, and no way for the poor to gain a higher class status.

Although the attitudes towards the French may not be as extreme as the novel's opening may have suggested, Yearsley includes in her conclusion several powerful attacks on the English, attacks lent even greater strength because they are spoken by someone external to English society. The character of Henry Capet, as a Frenchman in exile in England, is a kind of émigré, a figure filled with cultural resonance for Yearsley's audience. That resonance was most often conservative and used for nationalist purposes as Adriana Craciun has noted;⁴⁴ Hannah More claims that to shelter an emigrant offers greater glory than 'all the boasted conquests of our Edwards and our Henrys over the French nation.'⁴⁵ More seems to equate the émigré crisis with another victory for Britain over France: this time a moral victory which confirms the superiority of the British way of life. However, Yearsley seeks to question this elevation of British society by placing herself as the outsider articulating her thoughts on her own society:

⁴⁴ See Adriana Craciun, *British Women Writers and the French Revolution: Citizens of the World* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 141-7.

⁴⁵ Hannah More, *Considerations of Religion and Public Education with Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont, Delivered in the National Convention of France, Together with an Address to the Ladies, &c. of Great Britain and Ireland* [1794], ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Los Angeles: The Augustan Reprint Society, 1990), p. 19.

We admire the national character of the English, who appear to think much; to execute slowly; to be wrapped in such general reserve, that they intimidate each other, whilst thousands, I believe, steal to the grave without tasting the charm of Friendship. (4:311-2)

This reference to 'the charm of Friendship' being missed by so many seems too coincidental not to be Ann Yearsley. The image of a society incapable of decisive action or original thought or, more importantly, of forging human connections, seems to come from a woman still resentful at the treatment meted out to her almost a decade previously because of rigid views of class status. Yearsley chooses a curious phrase to follow this paragraph and to conclude the novel, loaded as it seems with an element of threat:

This people will grow wiser. – Since our arrival, two sons and a daughter have blessed the bosom of my Emily; from them we have concluded to keep the secret of their descent; and I hope, should those papers, hastily filled up, be ever found, my children will obey my last command; which is, never to acknowledge themselves as the offspring of

HENRY CAPET (4:312)

For English society to become wiser as far as Yearsley is concerned, it seems necessary that it develop the ability, like the Capets, to be flexible about what constitutes a relationship, and to ignore boundaries of class, gender and family. The element of threat comes from the way this first statement, that 'This people will grow wiser' is followed by a dash before Henry's description of the family he is raising in England: a family, it is implied, who will make the 'people grow wiser'. Freed from the burden of their identities and armed with their family's ability to form unusual relationships, these children, English by birth but with a potentially revolutionary French heritage, are the vehicles by which social change can be wrought.

In other areas of the text, Yearsley seems to encourage a potentially radical dual reading of her words. She opens the second volume of the novel with Henry lamenting the fate of his family, and seems to invite both a conservative and a revolutionary

reading. Henry's ardent wish is that he and his father should be able to enjoy 'the privileges of sharing, at least, the common freedom of mankind. Must we for ever behold the sword of Death held over us, merely because we are the relatives of a King! May we not breathe with liberty? Execrable state!' (2:2-3). Is Yearsley merely referring to this kind of existence being 'execrable', or the State itself being 'execrable' because it has forced this life upon this family? Posing the reader such questions is revealing of the confidence Yearsley felt in publishing what is, even if only sporadically, an overtly radical text in 1795. Having already asked the reader to suspend their disbelief and accept the conceit that she has merely copied the words of Henry Capet, Yearsley plays with her reader, and the process of reading itself:

[I] arose with the sun, turned to my books, and lingered out the moments in perusing the following manuscript, which I found by chance.

My Reader may skip it over if he pleases, it having no connection with the story of my life. (1:170-1)

The reader is then confronted with several pages of a poem entitled 'An Original: or the Elegy of Laura, tuned to the Harp of Apollo', and the temptation is indeed there to make use of the permission granted by the narrator. However, it is at exactly this moment that the reader risks forgetting that there is no narrator relating his life story, but Ann Yearsley constructing a text, and constructing it so well that her presence is momentarily unnoticed.

This suggests a confident and accomplished author, demonstrating that though, as a professional writer, Yearsley is forced to grant an external power to the reader, she is the one with control of the reading experience. To reinforce her power over the text, Yearsley has a joke at the expense of her audience. Mid-way through the second volume, she mentions very much in passing the reader '(drowsy as he must be in reading my

story)' (2:122). Yearsley delivers a powerful blow with the prescience of the narrator/author, as the comment could refer either to the 'story' voiced either by 'Henry Capet' or Ann Yearsley. Indeed, the reader has been cleverly manipulated by an author who understands exactly how her text will be read, and who is able to make the reader aware of her understanding. With this in mind, it becomes easier to understand why Yearsley's politics in this novel are so difficult to pin down.

As with her power as an author, Yearsley compromises on her politics. The novel's conclusion allows that traditional morals still have considerable value, but Yearsley forces the serious consideration of her alternative vision. Views are represented which contravene every social boundary, and they are the views of the virtuous, not the wicked:

'Feeble custom of mankind! [...] marriage can bind, but where honour is not known, could I marry to delude the man I contemned? Would he brutally dare to seize my hand whilst conscious he was the object of disgust? There may be such a man, Sir, but with such a man I should deserve and taste dishonourable misery. The tie of marriage too often secures the dull and unimpassioned frame, but how many tender, noble and nameless blessings invisibly hang over two kindred souls unconfined by human institution? That refined and generous affection is not born of law. Heaven alone directs its inherent and increasing force, till death, for death alone dissolves it. – Speak to me of honour; let it stand unsupported by, and superior to your laws.' (2:224-5)

Similarly, Yearsley is able to imagine a situation where the poor are able to better themselves, though she refrains from making the circumstances which have allowed this to be at all typical. The time when a reader or an audience may have been prepared to wholeheartedly accept a pro-Revolutionary text may have gone, but Yearsley, through a process of shrewd compromise and authorial intervention, is still able to issue a robust challenge to society. Yearsley repeatedly demonstrates the uncertain origins of the monarch's authority; as well as connecting Louis XVI with his common ancestor, the intervening generations have based their authority on stealing the status supposedly

bestowed by God. Henry Capet is the son of the elder brother of Louis XIV, passed over for rule because of temporary blindness as a baby. Far from being the province of God, the selection of France's monarchs is determined by human hand, therefore fallible and very much open to the questioning not possible of a monarch selected through divine intervention.

The level of Yearsley's radicalism is in contrast with M.O. Grenby's assessment of the political milieu facing writers in the mid-1790s:

The 'Revolution debate' and the 'war of ideas', withered away, not because every champion of radical doctrine had been utterly converted by the logic of the conservatives, but because few of them, with just one or two exceptions, could be found who wished to defy a near unanimous and highly militant anti-Jacobinism to put forward what had suddenly become dangerously unorthodox opinions.⁴⁶

Grenby's remarks demonstrate the importance of Yearsley's novel, and, consequently, her ability to manipulate her authorial identity. That Yearsley's novel needed to be complex is clear, and it is this level of complexity which may have led *The Monthly Review* to conclude that the compromises within it indicated a weak text, and the authorial interventions a poor plot. As well as ensuring that she would be able to negotiate the increasing dangers of radical writing, these complex elements of her novel allow Yearsley to address the 'poverty of thought in Novels' and to present, instead of 'glossy diction', a truly challenging text which forces its reader to engage with both politics, and the way in which they approach their own reading of the novel.

The question of how to read the novel is no less pertinent for Charlotte Smith in *The Banished Man*. Critics such as Judith Phillips Stanton have commented on the elements of autobiography within the text, a reading invited by the obvious parallels

⁴⁶ M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 5

between Smith's own life and that of her character Mrs. Denzil. Just as Smith's own daughter Augusta had met and fallen in love with a French emigrant, the Chevalier de Foville, so Mrs. Denzil's daughter, Angelina, falls in love with the French emigrant the Chevalier d'Alonville. Similarities run deeper than characterisation or plot, though. Mrs. Denzil also feels the indignity of poverty and good birth. In the novel, this poverty results in an insulting offer being made for the already married Angelina, an offer which the would-be suitor, Mr. Brymore, proclaims Mrs. Denzil is 'not in a situation to refuse'.⁴⁷ As a consequence of this suit being made, Mrs. Denzil's new son-in-law seeks a duel with the man, risking death and imprisonment to defend the strong sense of honour felt by this family of distressed gentility. In the Preface, Smith's poverty leads to another attack on the trustees who have so disappointed her hopes for her children, and provides a clear connection between the novel's plot and the very real consequences of high birth and its coincident sense of honour not equating with actual class status:

Had I known ten years since, that instead of rescuing [my children] from the mismanagement [of their trust fund], it was the purpose of these Trustees to expose them to more direct malversation - had I known that instead of disposing of the property as the will of their Grandfather directs, it was these gentlemen's determination to let their agent put the produce into his own pocket from year to year, without question, and without account - could I have foreseen that the creditors of their Grandfather's estate to a very great amount, would have *defied* instead of paying them, I should have done wrong to have attempted raising such a family as a *gentleman's* family - I should have been wiser to have descended at once into the inferior walk of life, and have humbled them and myself to our fortunes: - but, when I have been told, from year to year, that their property would be restored; when I have been conjured to have patience yet a little longer, on this, or on that pretence, of unavoidable delay - it has seemed a part of my duty to continue my efforts for them; till at length every evasion being exhausted, and their affairs being more embroiled than when their trustees engaged in them, I am sent to Chancery by the very men, who ten years since, undertook the trust for the express purpose of saving

⁴⁷ Charlotte Smith, *The Banished Man* [1794] (Kessinger: (no place of publication given), 2005), p. 369. All subsequent references will be made after the relevant quotation.

them from that expence; and who have been telling me repeatedly, that such an appeal would be ruinous to my hopes of a speedy settlement. I am now to wait the tardy justice of a Court, which to avoid, I have suffered ten years of poverty and deprivation. (pp. 3-4)

This tale of a disappointed lawsuit is paralleled by the rather more successful suit pursued by the Rosenheim family in the novel. Although not identical, the two cases bear many similarities, the point clearly being for the reader to connect them. The suit in which Smith was entangled revolved around the exclusion of a generation from a bequest; the Rosenheim family wish to bypass the male line of inheritance, which would see distant family profit, and ensure the passing of property to the direct (female) descendant. Indeed, for the modern reader, there is a distinct irony when shown the outcome of the Rosenheim's lawsuit. D'Alonville writes in a letter to his close friend Edward Ellesmere, 'The Baron de Rosenheim has been dead some time, but before his death he had the satisfaction of seeing the law-suit decided, which secures his paternal estate to the heirs of his daughter' (p. 373). At this point, the Smith had been pursuing the family's suit unsuccessfully for more than a decade. The swift and just resolution of the Rosenheim's suit stands at odds with the impossibly slow pace of the British legal system, and highlights the inadequacies of the system the reader of this novel knows the author is battling. The report that Smith has d'Alonville send also reinforces the language Smith has used in her other prefaces, requiring the reader to rescue her from peril. On this occasion, the danger, Smith suggests, is that she will not live to see the resolution of her suit, as her character has. The irony of this for the modern reader is obvious, but for the contemporary reader, it does not seem to have been an effective appeal for justice. The autobiography within this section functions to further Smith's attempts to have her own lawsuit resolved, but for once, her readers did not, or could not, come to her rescue. The result is instead a novel which endorses the preservation of property and status by noble emigrant families, something to which

Smith had been directly opposed earlier in the Revolution in her correspondence with Joel Barlow. Smith could not have known the futility of her attempts to place herself in this way, and without an appreciation of the semi-autobiographical element of the novel, its new, rather conservative appearance would go unqualified.

Also new is Smith's attitude towards the emigrants, which has clearly altered from her previous two works. She writes, midway through the novel, of d'Alonville's reaction to being recommended by a noblewoman to a recent emigrant from France: D'Alonville accepted of her offer, without however, feeling much inclination to be introduced to a person who had lately emigrated: for such he had learned to consider as persons who had been too much connected with the men and measures of the first revolution. (p. 153)

It is not just the recent developments in France, the Terror and the execution of the king, which are being called into question here, but the entire movement from its very genesis. This is a radical departure from Smith's earlier politics, and potentially far more significant than the more general trend by early supporters of the Revolution to distance themselves from its excesses. Clearly, the particular situation of the Smith family, with the recent addition of de Foville, is one reason which would explain the more conservative tone of this text. Although Smith writes in the Preface, 'I beg leave to add, that my hero resembles in nothing but in merit, the emigrant gentleman who now makes part of my family' (p. 5), the novel's plot suggests that he features rather more prominently than Smith admits. However, I would argue that this is not the reason why Smith's tone towards the emigrants in particular, and the French government in general, has altered. Instead, the moment Mrs. Denzil, also a jobbing writer in a further parallel to Smith, receives a letter from her publisher indicates the real cause for the change of position seemingly represented by this text:

Madam,
Am much surprised at your not sending up, as promised, the end of the third volume of the new novel purchased by me. The trade expects it at the time I notified to them that it would be

ready; and the printer informs me he shall stand still if not supplied immediately. Must insist on having a hundred pages at least by Saturday night; also the Ode to Liberty, mentioned by you as a close to the same: but I shall change the title of that, having promis'd the trade that there shall be no liberty at all in the present work; manuscript (as you have had the money thereon,) at the time before-named, remain,

Madam, your humble servant,

JOSEPH CLAPPER

Holbourn,

Feb. 22, 1794

(p.169)

This letter is loaded with subtext for the reader who is prepared to acknowledge elements of Smith within the character of Mrs. Denzil. Initially, the reader is struck with the assumption by the publisher that he can simply alter a work's title without consultation with the author, perhaps a comment on Smith's own publishers, the relationship with whom was becoming increasingly fraught. More significant are the publishers' comments about 'liberty'. With at least two different readings of his statement that 'I shall change the title of that, having promis'd the trade that there shall be no liberty at all in the present work', Smith is able to comment on the problems of publishing at this point, and what might inform the politics of her own text. Initially, Smith suggests that the concept of liberty is not a welcome one in texts at the moment, and the political climate of 1794 suggests that this was an accurate observation. John Barrell describes the events of that year which may have caused Smith to show an 'Ode to Liberty' being renamed:

The mid 1790s saw a new kind of political crisis in British politics, in which the Government of William Pitt was fighting a war on two fronts, against a republican enemy abroad and a small but highly organized network of popular radical societies at home. Convinced, or claiming to be, that the popular movement for parliamentary reform was in fact a revolutionary, republican movement, on 12 May 1794 the Government began arresting and

interrogating the leaders of the two leading radical societies in London, the more polite Society for Constitutional Information and the more popular London Corresponding Society.⁴⁸

Judith Phillips Stanton observes that Smith had nearly completed *The Banished Man* by the end of July 1794, meaning the government's increased intolerance for radicals would have been known to Smith as she wrote.⁴⁹

The subtext of the curious letter from Mrs. Denzil's publisher may also be referring to the Seditious Libel Act of 1792, which was being increasingly used to prosecute prominent radicals, most notably Thomas Paine, who fled to France as a result. The Seditious Libel Act, also known as Fox's Libel Bill,

established the right of juries in cases of seditious libel to return a general verdict, comprehending the facts of publication and the criminality or otherwise of papers alleged to be libels. [...] The prosecution in cases of seditious libel proceeded either by an indictment [...] or more usually [...] by an 'information' produced ex officio by the Attorney-General on behalf of the king [...] The information in the cases of those charged in 1770 with publishing Junius's *Letter to the King* is a representative example: it alleged that the defendants had published a 'most wicked, scandalous, seditious, and malicious libel'; had done so 'unlawfully, wickedly, seditiously, and maliciously'; and had intended 'to molest and disturb the happy state, and the public peace and tranquility of this kingdom', and 'to move, excite and stir up the subjects of our lord the king to insurrection and rebellion'.⁵⁰

With the ultimate penalty upon conviction being death, as well as the considerable publicity generated by a trial, the consequences of being prosecuted for publishing seditious libel were profound. Writers already concerned about the dangers posed by the Seditious Libel Act were made even more uneasy when the end of 1792 saw 'the emergence of the Loyalist Associations and the beginning of prosecutions for seditious libel and seditious words'.⁵¹ The trial of Thomas Paine during this period, for the publication of the second part of *The Rights of Man*, and his subsequent exile, would

⁴⁸ John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 29.

⁴⁹ Stanton, 'Charlotte Smith's "Literary Business"', 383.

⁵⁰ Barrell, p. 350. Barrell quotes from *A Complete Selection of State Trials*, 30 vols., ed. by William Cobbett and T.B. Howells (London: Longman et al., 1816-22), 20:803-5.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 29.

have been potent examples of the power of the state. When Charlotte Smith notifies the reader that ‘there shall be no liberty at all in the present work’, it is not ‘Liberty’ to which she is referring, but the fact that as a writer, she feels she has absolutely no freedom to determine the content of her work. Mrs. Denzil’s publisher has to ‘promise the trade’ that there will be ‘no liberty’, such is the importance of the control of texts produced in these politically difficult times. Smith, through the guise of Mrs. Denzil, is announcing to the interested reader that the politics of this text are not of her own choosing, but have been enforced because publishers will no longer allow ‘liberty at all in the present work’, because the government is increasingly concerned about political dissent. The ambiguity of Smith’s words allows the reader to extend this explanation of her apparent conservatism to others: ‘the present work’ does not directly indicate this particular work of Smith/Mrs. Denzil, but could mean all work currently being written in England.

Yet this announcement comes nearly half way through the novel. Smith’s Preface declares that Louis was ‘a mild and well-meaning monarch’ (p. 5), a rather different interpretation of the king’s actions from *The Emigrants*, where Louis has ‘obtain[ed] from thee / Hereditary right to rule, uncheck’d’.⁵² Indeed, the reader is struck with the fervour of the anti-Revolutionary language with which Smith opens her novel. The story begins with the Rosenheim family in fear because of the proximity of the French army, in pursuit of the retreating Prussians. D’Alonville and his father find themselves outside the castle wall, the father having been grievously wounded fighting against their countrymen. Shortly after the death of d’Alonville’s father, the Rosenheims decide to flee from the advancing Revolutionaries to Austria. Amongst the family group is their priest Heurthofen, a man who from the moment d’Alonville is

⁵² Charlotte Smith, *The Emigrants* [1793] in *The Collected Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Stuart Curran (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 153, ll. 100-1.

admitted to the castle, treats him with contempt, and it is not long before it is revealed he has Revolutionary sympathies. The reader learns that several documents, crucial to the Rosenheims retaining their property in the event of the Baron de Rosenheim's death, have been left behind following their retreat from the castle towards Vienna. Heurthofen's reaction to being asked why he didn't retrieve such important documents rapidly gains political overtones:

When he arrived he answered [Madam de Rosenheim's] enquiries with great coldness; he said he had been too much hurried and occupied by her commands to attend the dying emigrant and his son, her young friend; and that if she pleased to recollect what passed on their precipitate retreat, she must do him the justice to acknowledge, that she did not allow him time to execute his duty to the Baron. That he had not the key; and never having been in habits of having the care of these parchments, it was not wonderful he should overlook the charge, in a time of so much confusion [...] Madam d'Alberg came into the room, attended by d'Alonville at this moment; she immediately saw the uneasiness under which her mother suffered, and already detesting Huerthofen, she could not let pass this opportunity of expressing her impatience and disgust. 'I am not surprised, madam,' said she addressing herself to Madam de Rosenheim, 'that you should find any difficulty in this matter; undoubtedly Monsieur Heurthofen, who is so bravely adventurous [...] will readily return to snatch from the invaders these papers, of whose consequence he is aware; besides', continued she (throwing still more irony into her manner), 'he may perhaps have interest with Messieurs les Sans Culottes, whose principles, if I am rightly informed, he does not altogether disclaim.' (p. 44)

The implication is that Huerthofen has been deliberately neglectful in his duties to the family so that they might lose their property and the privileges of their class attendant upon that property. Only a few pages later, Heurthofen is said to hold the opinion that 'these great families are no better than we ourselves' (p. 48). This is a significant departure from *The Emigrants*, where it is in the authorial voice that the nobility of England are execrated as 'Ye venal, worthless hirelings of a Court! / Ye pamper'd Parasites! whom Britons pay / For forging fetters for them' (p. 147, ll. 329-331). That the pro-Revolutionary character in *The Banished Man* is the most odious and most self-

centred is important. So too is the fact that he is very rarely allowed to speak for himself. In both these sections, his words are related to the reader by someone else. It seems that the Revolution has become so distasteful that the reader cannot be exposed directly to it.

That this is a deliberate move on Smith's part is reiterated by the extraordinary section where the 'author' is in conversation with a 'friend' who has been given the first volume of this novel to read. The friend's recommendations for the fictionality of the story do indicate that this text holds a very different view of the Revolution and of France than any of Smith's previous works:

Friend - 'I do not mean to say that you can adhere to truth in a book which is avowedly a fiction; but as you have laid much of the scene in France, and at the distance of only a few months, I think you can be at no loss for *real* horrors, if a novel must abound in horrors; your imagination however fertile, can suggest nothing of individual calamity, that has not there been exceeded. Keep therefore as nearly as you can to circumstances you have heard related, or to such as might have occurred in a country where murder stalks abroad, and calls itself patriotism; where the establishment of liberty serves as a pretence for the violation of humanity.' (p. 85)

Such an interjection seems to plainly lay out the novel's political standpoint, a hundred pages before Smith makes an appearance as Mrs. Denzil. The Revolutionaries are sanguinary, calculating and scheming, interested in their own aggrandisement above the welfare of their country. In contrast, the nobility is represented as loyal, devoted, self-sacrificing, and motivated by the finer sentiments. D'Alonville relates the life-story of his good friend, the Marquis de Touranges:

At [the commencement of the Revolution] de Touranges was among those who resisted, with the most resolution, the concessions demanded of the nobility; when they became inevitable, he still remained near the king, to whom he was personally attached; but as he could neither approve of the continual diminution of power which he had been taught to consider as sacred, nor conceal his detestation of the democratic fashion that was making such rapid strides

towards the total destruction of monarchy, he soon became so obnoxious to these men that his stay was injurious to his master, and dangerous to himself. (pp. 99-100)

No such devotion is evident from the Revolutionary side. Beyond this, though, is Smith's description of the Revolution as a 'fashion', a vogue, a passing fad with no more substance or importance. That the Revolutionaries would then wage war against Europe and execute their king for the sake of this fad makes that inconsequential ideal revolting.

The apparent oscillation in this novel between political ideas, demonstrated most plainly by the appearance of the author in various guises, renders Smith's exact position difficult to fix. Chris Jones has proposed that 'Smith, like Williams, Godwin, and Wordsworth, links the excesses of the new order with the corruption of the old regime.'⁵³ The majority of the novel would seem to contradict this view, and it is only towards the very end that Smith makes any connection of this sort explicit to the reader. Until that point, the way in which members of the old order are dealt with does not suggest a link of any kind. The description of the Marquis de Touranges in any of Smith's pre-Terror novels would suggest strident criticism of the monied upper classes, but in *The Banished Man*, things are rather different:

The Marquis de Touranges, one of the first order of nobility, was about four years older than d'Alonville. Inheriting an immense fortune, from a long line of illustrious ancestors, he had never till the period of the revolution known a wish he could not immediately gratify. (p. 78)

De Touranges, with his life of leisured luxury, is exactly the sort of nobleman Smith would have targeted in *The Emigrants*. Here, though, de Touranges is a figure of profound pity and sympathy. Smith continues:

- at that time he was rapidly approaching the highest posts of honor and profit that a military man could obtain about the court; and hardly twelve months before the time when his sovereign was compelled to dismiss him from the place he held about his person, he had

⁵³ Jones, p. 174.

married a very lovely woman. Thus forced from all that had rendered him happy, he was now one of the most miserable beings upon earth [...] He now vehemently cursed the very name of liberty, which had been used only as a pretext to effectuate the change he execrated. (pp.78-9)

I would argue that there is no indication that the horrors of the present Revolutionary government are connected by Smith with Louis's reign. Rather, there seems to be a sense of bewilderment that events have transpired in the way they have, as noted by Chris Jones:

All radicals, and especially those who clung to benevolist ideas, had to come to terms with the apparent unleashing of human evil during the reign of Robespierre and to explain why an enlightened democracy might be possible in America, yet not in France.⁵⁴

This second part of Jones's argument represents much more accurately what Smith is seeking to do with *The Banished Man*. There is no way to avoid the conclusion that Smith's politics have shifted in this text; on several occasions, Smith directly contradicts what she herself had written only months before in *The Emigrants*. Toby Ruth Bevis has commented that both Smith and her fictional embodiment Mrs. Denzil come[...] to understand narrative's limited ability to help [...] since as a form it remains the tool of the political and economic establishment. Unlike the French, the English aristocracy retains control over its nation and consequently over the production of socially and politically significant narratives.⁵⁵

This is a rather bleak assessment of the novel's ability for political comment after the execution of Louis XVI. Although it is by no means as radical as previous works, *The Banished Man* does, I would argue, serve at least one important purpose: its end does seek to 'explain', as Jones suggests, or at least to discuss, why the government of France has failed where its American counterpart has succeeded.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 174.

⁵⁵ Toby Ruth Bevis, "'A Likely Story': Charlotte Smith's Revolutionary Narratives" in *European Romantic Review* 14:3 (2003), 291-306 (302).

The closing correspondence between d'Alonville and his close English friend Edward Ellesmere suggests that Smith is attempting to do something far more powerful with her text than to demonstrate without question that Revolutionary France is a land of horrors. Ellesmere writes:

Till your king or his representative call upon you – till you are convinced your arm is demanded for the restoration of law and order, or some form of legal government in your country, I think as your Angelina does, that you should not leave her. The hour when you will thus be called upon does not seem to be at hand; and indeed, my dear Chevalier, the turn that affairs seem to take in France, makes it impossible to conjecture whether such a period will ever arrive. I hardly dare trust myself to write to you on this subject. We differ still as to the commencement of a revolution, which in its progress baffled all the reasoning which we could derive from analogy, in reflecting on the past events of the world – all the speculative opinions we could from thence build on the future. *You* think, that even in its first germinations it threatened to become the monster we now see, desolating and devouring France. I still think, that originating from the acknowledged faults of your former government, the first design, aiming only at the correction of those faults, at a limited monarchy and a mixed government, was the most sublime and most worthy of a great people that ever was recorded in the annals of mankind. (pp. 370-1)

There is clearly a difference of opinion here about the Revolution's beginnings and its progress. The relationship between d'Alonville and Ellesmere can sustain this disagreement, suggesting that a discussion about what has taken place should not be damaging. Rather, it is partly what lends strength to this fictional friendship and, therefore, possibly to both anti and pro-Revolutionaries in real life. Through these two characters, Smith also considers the ability of the different nationalities to comment upon events in France:

You, as a Frenchman, execrate the misery and devastation it has brought on the finest kingdom in Europe. You lament as an individual the death of your dearest friends, the disposition of your family, the ruin and beggary of many to whom you were attached. – I, as an Englishman, deplore the injury done to the cause of rational liberty throughout the world. I deplore, as a citizen of that world, the general devastation, the blood that has been shed in the field or on the scaffold, and the stupendous destruction that has overwhelmed a great nation. (p. 371)

An acknowledgement that being English or French is going to have a direct influence on the way in which you view events in France is an important point. It is not as simple, Smith claims, as condemning the Revolution outright, but more a matter of engaging in a rational debate in order to understand what has gone so terribly wrong. Indeed, this may be how Smith thought of *The Banished Man*: as a means of stimulating debate.

However, the way in which this proposed discussion is framed by an unexpectedly conservative response to the Revolution indicates the possibility that external factors affected how Smith wrote this particular novel. At the very end of the novel, Smith has Mrs. Denzil write part of d'Alonville's response to Ellesmere because, he claims, he cannot describe the beautiful scenery in which he finds himself:

I was going to name [the mountain plants] as Mrs. Denzil dictated, but she says no native of my country, educated as I have been, has the least taste for the unadorned beauty of nature: that she knows it will only puzzle me, perhaps punish me, and that therefore she will go on with the description herself.

'Yes dear sir, I take the pen from the Chevalier, that he may not undertake to tell you in French the names of plants which I cannot in that language find for him'. (p. 374)

This is an extremely odd moment. The reader has been used to political dialogue in this correspondence, and is suddenly confronted with an entirely new voice. The subject matter is also peculiar, again because of the political overtone to the discussion between the two men:

Figure to yourself these undescribable mountains, so various in their forms, and so magnificent in their effect; *robbed*, if I may use a woman's word, in many places with that assemblage of vegetable beauty, which in England is collected in the most ornamented gardens with difficulty. Imagine the rough features of these rocky acclivities are softened by the hand of Flora, who has often dressed them with the cistus, the variety of antirrhinums, cedums, and saxapagar; while the deep glen-like recesses, formed by these bold promontories, are shaded with every tree of the forest. (pp. 374-5)

A clue to what might be happening with this interjection is the word 'undescribable'. It is used just before Mrs. Denzil/Smith sets about doing the exact opposite, offering an eloquent and detailed description of the mountain scenery which has no obvious place in the narrative. I propose that what Smith is doing here is advertising her ability to write about nature to a high level because, as her private correspondence shows, she had determined to write *Rural Walks*, and was in the process of finding a publisher. In June 1794, only five months after receiving her advance for *The Banished Man* and a month before it was completed, Smith wrote to William Davies:

The work I propose setting about as soon as this Novel is out of my hands is design'd for the use of Young people, who being too young to read novels or romances, are yet superior to the usual run of books offer'd to children. Walks in The Country, which shall give an opportunity of discoursing on Landscape on the simple parts of botany, and natural history, with short stories of suppositious persons [...] such as may be at once interesting and moral.⁵⁶

Clearly, the 'advert' in *The Banished Man* is not aimed at the audience Smith has in mind for her next work. Instead, she seems to be demonstrating her talents in this field for the benefit of potential publishers, and her readers who, being quite likely to be parents, may then think of giving *Rural Walks* to their children. Judith Phillips Stanton notes that *The Banished Man* 'was published at the height of her financial need in July.'⁵⁷ With this in mind, it seems increasingly possible that the political message of the novel was strongly influenced by considerations of financial security. However, it may also be that Smith was being forced to consider other modes of writing now that the Seditious Libel Act of 1792 was being used to prosecute members of Smith's circle of friends and correspondents. The appeal to the reader assumes the appearance of an attempt to retain a sense of artistic integrity, but is not able to alter the reader's basic

⁵⁶ Charlotte Smith to William Davies, [Bath, 25 June 1794], *Collected Letters*, pp. 130-1.

⁵⁷ *Collected Letters*, p. 93.

perceptions of the novel's political content; the authorial interventions come too late. For Smith, publishing after the execution of Louis means the compromise of her political ideals.

Although *Village Politics* had been published the previous year, 1794 marked Hannah More's first direct public engagement with the French Revolution. Angered by the 'violently anticlerical speech' made by M. Dupont to the National Convention in December 1792, which was now being circulated in translation, More launched into print with her response.⁵⁸ Characterised by More's evangelical faith, the *Considerations on Religion and Public Education with Remarks on the Speech of M. Dupont* is the source from which many of More's other publications of the 1790s sprung. In its *Address to the Ladies &c. of Great Britain and Ireland* can be seen the ideas which would be developed to form the two-volume *Strictures on Female Education* in 1799, and its urgings for quiet at home in the face of the war declared upon England would become the basis for the *Cheap Repository Tracts* which appeared the following year. Yet for all that it was advertised as a response to M. Dupont's celebration of atheism and as a charitable publication for the benefit of the emigrant clergy, the text is more focussed on the perils facing Britain, than the grief in France.⁵⁹ With its strongly nationalist and patriotic tone mingled with strongly religious language, the text is an attempt to equate the Terror with the Apocalypse; this apocalyptic disaster in France is then connected with the impiety of Britain, before More finally presents the worship of God as an act of patriotic duty. As Linda Colley has noted, '[t]he assurance that they were Great Britain's moral arbiters gave women [...] authority and legitimation for initiatives

⁵⁸ Stott, p. 148.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 148.

outside the home.⁶⁰ Although More urges sympathy for the émigrés in her Preface, her use of them as political and religious tools is a direct forerunner of the compromise which would inform so much of 'The Sorrows of Yamba' the following year. Colley asks 'what kind of patriots could British women hope to be', and the answer for Hannah More is devout and content.⁶¹

More's financial independence meant that she was able to inform her readers 'that the profits were to go to the French clergy', and, as Ann Stott records, £240 was eventually received by the subscribers' committee.⁶² There might have been financial relief for the Catholic emigrants, but spiritual relief was reserved entirely for the British. More's decision to include a copy of the original speech as part of the pamphlet is because

it is hoped that this piece of impiety may be placed in such a light before the eyes of the Christian reader, that, in proportion as his detestation is raised, his faith, instead of being shaken, will only be so much the more strengthened.⁶³

The pamphlet's religious content also calls into question the extent to which More is truly sympathetic to the objects of her charity. In her Preface, she remarks that 'We plead not for their faith, but for their wants' (p. 5), as Charlotte Smith does in *The Emigrants*. Yet More's benevolence has the same aim here as it would have in 'The Sorrows of Yamba': the act of giving is an opportunity to show Protestantism at its best, perhaps even to gain from amongst the émigrés' new followers:

And let the more scrupulous, who look for desert [sic] as well as distress in the objects of their bounty, bear in mind, that if these men could have sacrificed their conscience to their convenience, they had not now been in this country. Let us shew [sic] them the purity of *our* religion, by the beneficence of our actions. (pp. 5-6, original emphasis)

⁶⁰ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 276.

⁶¹ See Colley, p. 276.

⁶² Anne Stott, p. 148.

⁶³ Hannah More, *Remarks*, p. 11. Subsequent references will be placed in the body of the text.

More may plead the constancy of their faith in adversity, but she later rests her claim to speak to the supporters of the Revolution on her gladness that French Catholicism was toppled:

Much, very much, is to be said in vindication of your favouring in the first instance their [the French] political projects. The cause they took in hand seemed to be the great cause of human kind. Its very name insured popularity. What English heart did not exalt at the demolition of the Bastile? What lover of his species did not triumph in the warm hope, that one of the finest countries in the world would soon be one of the most free? Popery and despotism, though chained by the gentle influence of Louis XVIth, had actually slain their thousands. (p. 13)

More even goes so far as to blame the Revolution upon the religion practised in France, asking 'Must a revolution be equally necessary in the case of two sorts of Government, and two sorts of Religion, which are the very reverse of each other?' (p. 15). The French church is 'superstitious and corrupt' (p. 15), and the fact that More seeks in the pamphlet a restoration of a church in France leads to the conclusion that her project is to encourage an English-style reformation. This thought seems to be confirmed only a little further on in the text:

That despotism, priestcraft, intolerance, and superstition, are terrible evils, no candid Christian it is presumed will deny; but, blessed be God, though these mischiefs are not yet entirely banished from the face of the earth, they have scarcely any existence in this country. (p. 15)

It is at this point that the text begins to show itself more as a propaganda tool for the benefit of Britain, than as a charitable project for the unfortunate refugees from the chaos in France. That it was able to serve both purposes may have been the intention but, just as with More's anti-slavery poetry, there are questions about whether More would have sacrificed the cause of the émigrés to better promote the nationalist and patriotic elements of the text. Given the strength of the patriotism urged by More in this pamphlet, the suspicion must be that the émigrés were much less important than

the health of Britain itself: 'Let us learn to fear the fleet and armies of the enemy, much less than those iniquities at home' (p. 21).

Indeed, towards the close of the pamphlet More's position towards the émigrés seems clear. More writes of the 'war which the French have declared against us': there is no distinction made between which elements of the French nation have declared war, implicating the emigrants in the belligerence. Nor is there any distinction made between the British. The war has been declared upon all, More suggests, rich or poor. It is therefore unpatriotic to lament your class status, a betrayal of your country in the circumstances. Class unrest has become treachery. Given the target audience of More's next major project, the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, her argument has distinct political significance. Quietism is not just a social duty, but is now a moral obligation to the nation. As More urges at the end of her *Remarks*,

[...] let the meanest of us who remains at home remember also, that even he may contribute to the internal safety of his country, by the integrity of his private life, and to the success of her defenders, by following them with fervent prayers. (p. 22)

The French émigrés, the ostensible beneficiaries of the text, are long forgotten except as a means of promoting religious belief and social duty as expressions of patriotism. Indeed, More's next publication was to focus exclusively on the poor of Britain whose acceptance of their status was now imbued with national significance.

The *Tracts* which emerged at the end of 1794 were deliberately priced and marketed so that they would be attractive to the poor alongside the more usually read chapbooks. Written by several of More's friends as well as by More herself, the *Tracts* sold over two million copies within two years. Again, More had no need to make money from the sale of these tales. Having already demonstrated her sympathy with the newly loyalist political climate, and enjoying a comfortable income, More was perfectly

placed to be able to publish exactly what she felt was needed by her audience. As a result, this publishing venture seemed certain to be successful in its aims: to provide moral and educational material cheaply to the country's labouring class.

The reputation of the *Tracts* amongst both More's peers and more modern readers has rested on the generally held belief that they served in some way to quell the political unrest which, many conservative pamphlets claimed, was bubbling in the English labouring classes following the execution of Louis and the escalation of the Revolutionary wars. Quoted earlier, Anne Stott's suggestion that '[t]he Cheap Repository is wartime propaganda, full of all the special pleading associated with this type of literature, and More saw self-censorship as a patriotic duty at a time of national emergency' seems to fit exactly, given the aims of More's previous publication.⁶⁴ Stott also proposes that More 'depicted sympathetic characters' and placed them in realistic situations. She thus gave [the poor] a dignity denied them by Burke making them individuals, rather than undifferentiated parts of a swinish multitude.'⁶⁵ Placed alongside each other, Stott's two remarks are suggestive of the complicated issues surrounding the publication of the *Tracts*. They clearly had a political role to play, noted at the time and subsequently, but there is also evidence to suggest that this role was less to do with the poor, than with creating a general feeling of nationalism and common cause against the French, as much for the upper classes as the lower.

The advertisement to the 1795 edition demonstrates how the *Tracts* have been disseminated, 'by inspecting retailers and hawkers, giving them a few [copies] in the first instance [...] also by recommending the *Tracts* to the occupier of a stall at a fair, and by sending them to hospitals, workhouses and prisons. The *Tracts* have also been liberally distributed among Soldiers and Sailors, through the influences of their

⁶⁴ Stott, p. 185.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 190.

commanders.⁶⁶ The advertisement claims that More was attempting to reach people from all walks of life, from career criminals to those in the armed forces, as well as the ordinary poor. What is less apparent is whether the *Tracts* were actually read by these people. Alan Richardson has called the *Tracts* ‘singularly ineffective at reaching their audience,’⁶⁷ and Olivia Smith has also expressed a degree of scepticism that the *Tracts* were as successful in this regard as More perhaps hoped:

From the start [...] Hannah More’s version of the vulgar life and language was regarded more highly by the upper than the lower classes, who went at them somewhat desperately. Two million tracts had been distributed by 1796 but in January that year Hannah More was worried they were not reaching their intended readers. To remedy this, she decided to publish expensive editions [...] Despite this enthusiastic activity, little evidence exists of the tracts being bought for their own enjoyment or even of being ordered by the booksellers without solicitation.⁶⁸

In many ways, the publishing of the *Tracts* was quite extraordinary. Independent of the bookselling market, More was able to aggressively promote her product, yet oddly needed a readership as much as Charlotte Smith did. In a reversal of the typical publisher-author relationship, More was able to insist on the editions she felt were required to make her work popular, as Olivia Smith’s remarks demonstrate. However, the importance of the *Tracts* to the intended audience, to the ‘Soldiers and Sailors’ who form the mainstay of the country’s war against Revolutionary France, is far from certain. As Emily Rena-Dozier has succinctly pointed out, ‘chapbooks remained much the same after the *Cheap Repository* was discontinued as they were before it was begun.’⁶⁹

One of the earliest *Tracts* published in the *Cheap Repository*, ‘The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain’ is typical both of the moral messages More was hoping to promote,

⁶⁶ More, *Cheap Repository Tracts; Entertaining, Moral, and Religious* (London: F.C. Rivington et al., 1798), p. iv.

⁶⁷ Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 213.

⁶⁸ Olivia Smith, p. 95.

⁶⁹ Emily Rena-Dozier, ‘Hannah More and the Invention of Narrative Authority’, *ELH* 71:1 (2004), 209-227 (221).

and the concerns about their relevance to the poor voiced by Richardson, Olivia Smith and others. The tale opens with a gentleman, Mr Johnson, coming across the eponymous shepherd at work on the plains. The reader is never informed of the shepherd's name: it is enough to know his occupation. Their encounter serves as a series of examples of domestic economy, submission to God's will in the form of Providence, and the power of limited and controlled learning within the poor:

'Besides, Sir, my employment has been particularly honoured - Moses was a Shepherd in the plains of Midian. It was to "Shepherds keeping their flocks by night," that the angels appeared in Bethlehem, to tell the best news, the gladdest tidings, that ever were revealed to poor sinful men: often and often has the thought warmed my poor heart in the coldest night.'⁷⁰

Demonstrating the perfect submission to his lot that More hopes for in all her readers, the shepherd showcases his knowledge of the Bible and its significance to the poor. The pretence that the shepherd is an example of how labouring people should hope to be does not last, though. More forgets to speak in his voice for a moment and exclaims without disguise 'how GOD has honoured poverty!' (p.6). The conceit is quickly recovered with the shepherd continuing ' "Sir, what great, or rich, or mighty men have had such honour put on them, or their condition, as Shepherds, Tent-makers, Fishermen, and Carpenters have had?"' (p.6), but the impression remains of something else at work within the text.

Although Mr Johnson is represented as a gentleman, the reader is made aware that there are things in his conduct upon which even he can improve. Moira Ferguson has proposed that More's writing has 'a class-differentiated meaning' for both its lower and upper-class audiences,⁷¹ and the way in which the shepherd's conduct influences Mr Johnson would seem to support this idea. Having listened to the many ways in

⁷⁰ More, 'The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain' in *Cheap Repository Tracts*, p. 5. All subsequent references to this text will be made in parentheses following the relevant quotation.

⁷¹ Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 219.

which the shepherd manages to live on his meagre wages, Mr Johnson 'secretly resolved to be more attentive to his own petty expenses than he had hitherto been; and to be more watchful that nothing was wasted in his own family' (p. 12). It is in this capacity that the poor are so important to More; they are a means by which a wider social improvement can be made. By showing that the poor can make a living from almost nothing, the lesson for the better off is that they can make a very good living from considerably less than they are doing. Although the advertisement makes no mention of the *Cheap Repository* being meant for the upper classes as well as the poor, the narrative of the text makes it clear that two different types of reader are expected. Presumably, these two different readers will also have purchased two differently priced editions of the *Cheap Repository*, reinforcing further the rigid class distinctions More articulates in the text, and assumes in her readers; More's message is not for the poor alone and, therefore, neither is the reassurance in the divine order.

However, More makes sure that the (poor) reader knows exactly what the extent of their influence will be. The shepherd certainly has regenerative powers, but he must also be humble with those powers. More stages a scene in the shepherd's cottage which is truly remarkable in the submission it expects of both the shepherd and the reader: Molly, who had picked the wool from the bushes with so much delight, cried out, Father, I wish I was big enough to say grace, for I am sure I should say it very heartily to day, for I was thinking what must *poor* people do who have no salt to their potatoes, and do but look, our dish is quite full. - That is the true way of thinking, Molly, said the Father; in whatever concerns bodily wants and bodily comforts, it is our duty to compare our own lot with the lot of those who are worse off, and this will keep us thankful: on the other hand, whenever we are tempted to set up on our own wisdom or goodness, we must compare ourselves with those who are wiser and better, and that will keep us humble. (p.19)

The power of the poor is to be contained within rigid notions of class and position, enforced by the idea articulated by Mr Johnson that this is the only way in which the

poor can find happiness. More has him say, 'Those who are raised by some sudden stroke, much above the station in which Divine Providence had placed them, seldom turn out very good, or very happy' (p. 33). Contained within this warning to the poor is a caution to the wealthy to use their powers of benevolence sparingly and with caution, to resist raising people above their 'natural condition' (p. 33). Mary Waldron has suggested that 'Anglican Evangelicalism [...] made moral and social responsibility a simple matter of duty, quietism, and example, taking far too little account of the complexity of human affairs.'⁷² More certainly seems to make social reform a matter of 'duty, quietism, and example' when she rewards the shepherd through Mr Johnson, who also goes away more careful of his affairs. However, in one respect at least, More's social project is progressive, recognising in women a latent power which can be made better use of for the benefit of the whole country.

The shepherd's wife is mother to three children under five years old, and in a broadly accurate representation of the general case for labouring-class women, More's plot sees her earning a living. Yet More's attempts to 'speak' to her lower-class readers are less successful when the shepherd's wife is considered too delicate for outside work. Where work must be done outside, it is written very much in the pastoral mode, instilling a middling-class sensibility in the tract, where life in the country involves no hard labour. Instead, children wander over hillsides for hours, plucking the wool left behind by the sheep, or sit at home quietly knitting under the auspices of their mother: 'Though my wife is not able to do any out-of-door work, yet she breeds up our children to such habits of industry that our little maids, before they are six years old can, first get a halfpenny, and then a penny a day by knitting. The boys who are too little to do hard work, get a trifle by keeping the birds off the corn; for this the farmers will give them a penny or two-pence, and

⁷² Mary Waldron, 'The Frailties of Fanny: *Mansfield Park* and the Evangelical Movement', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 6:3 (1984), 259-281 (281).

now and then a bit of bread and cheese into the bargain. When the season of crow keeping is over, then they glean or pick stones; any thing is better than idleness.' (p. 9)

There is nothing difficult or unpleasant in any of the labour More describes, and nothing can be more natural than this idyllic introduction to a life of discipline and productivity. Although the language More uses here is cause for some discomfort in the modern reader, that the shepherd's daughters are learning how to be self-sufficient is an idea whose progressive potential is realised as the moral tale continues. Impressed by the example of the shepherd's wife who has equipped her children so well for life, Mr Johnson proposes to employ her to teach others to be similarly capable of maintaining themselves:

As for honest Mary, who is not fit for hard labour, or any out-of-door work, I propose to endow a small weekly school, of which she shall be the mistress, and employ her notable turn to good account, by teaching ten or a dozen girls to knit, sew, spin, card, or any other useful way of getting their bread; for all this I shall only pay her the usual price, for I am not going to make you rich but useful. (p. 35)

Excepting the final statement, that Mary is not to be made 'rich but useful', with its obvious parallels to More's Prefatory Letter to Ann Yearsley's first volume of poetry, More's plan for working-class women is almost radical: these young women are to be equipped for a life of self-sufficiency. Olivia Smith has claimed that More 'wanted [the poor] to endure, but not to manage for themselves',⁷³ and it is certainly the case that benevolent interventions from the more wealthy are an important part of her social view. In part at least, though, working-class women are to be taught exactly how 'to manage for themselves' by being rendered financially independent, if class-bound. More is able to imagine a world where the poor, and particularly poor women, have a very

⁷³ Olivia Smith, p. 93.

real power to alter society, much as Mary Wollstonecraft can. Harriet Guest has noted the similarities between the arguments of these two women:

Wollstonecraft [...] and More might be understood, in their polemical writings, to respond to the impossible demands placed on femininity in commercial culture, and they [...] look to the possibility of professionalization to reclaim respectability for the notion of virtuous femininity.⁷⁴

Despite the obvious flaws in the ways in which More engages with her lower-class audience, this is nevertheless a project which seeks to imagine society along genuinely new lines, with women occupying a far stronger economic, and therefore social, position.

More continues her demonstration of women's social value in *The Cottage Cook*. The central character, Mrs Jones, is comfortable but far from wealthy, and is urged to work for others for the benefit of her community and her own spiritual improvement. In some ways more akin to traditional forms of feminine usefulness, benevolence and charitable work, Mrs Jones's role is far more active than might seem immediately obvious. However, as an attempt to engage with and educate would-be benefactors of the middling sort rather than the poor, the text sacrifices any realistic representation of the poor for the improvement of its more wealthy audience. As a result, the poor become a homogeneous group whose function is to serve only as the means of Mrs Jones's re-education and spiritual growth. Despite the caricature of the lower classes, the tale still contains important moral messages for both the poor and the upper classes.

Mrs Jones is involved with her local area on all levels, engaging in politics, education and economics in order to be useful to those around her, stepping at times far outside the usual sphere of wealthier females. The way in which Mrs Jones negotiates the opposing vices of the Lord and Squire, the Lord too free with his money

⁷⁴ Harriet Guest, 'The Dream of a Common Language: Hannah More and Mary Wollstonecraft', *Textual Practice*, 9 (1995), 303-323 (317).

but not with sense, the Squire the opposite, reveals the powerful potential of intelligent female influence. More writes that Mrs Jones ‘shewed her good sense by never asking Sir John for advice, or the Squire for subscriptions, and by this prudence gained the full support of both.’⁷⁵ Women, in More’s ideal moral world, provide the glue which can hold disparate views and people together, for the benefit of all. And, despite questions again being raised about the way in which More describes the lower classes, Julia Saunders has argued that the morality of this tale may well have found broad approval amongst women, even in More’s working-class audience:

It is possible [...] that More articulates a view, albeit from her privileged perspective, that would have found favour with the women and children whose interests were subordinate in some aspects of popular culture to a man’s right to drink in company. Interpreting More as a defender of the family, her recipe for lower class socializing (domestic and sober) reads, not as a curb on pleasure, but as a suggestion that the male reader should pursue less destructive forms of recreation.⁷⁶

In some ways, More assumes the very role she has opened up to the fictional women in her tales. As a woman, she has the power to comment on how men conduct themselves towards the family and, as such, has the power to affect the moral alteration of British men. As Dorice Williams Elliott has noted,

Because [More] defined the male oriented world of business and politics as merely a larger version of the domestic, where both men and women had critical roles, More was able to occupy a position from which she could participate prominently in that public world and still be considered an appropriately ‘feminine’ woman.⁷⁷

Through the character of Mrs Jones, More seems happy to allow lower to middle-class women the ability to engage directly with politics and other important issues on a local level. With More’s direct address to the female readers of her *Remarks*, there was a

⁷⁵ More, *Tracts*, p. 307.

⁷⁶ Julia Saunders, ‘Putting the Reader Right: Reassessing Hannah More’s “Cheap Repository Tracts”’, *Romanticism on the Net*, 16 (1999), 1-15 (3).

⁷⁷ Dorice Williams Elliott, “‘The Care of the Poor is Her Profession’: Hannah More and Women’s Philanthropic Work’, *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 19:2 (1995), 179-204 (196).

national importance attached to the activities of women of all classes, including those typified by Mrs Jones:

Let the sick and afflicted remember how dreadful it must be, to be exposed to sufferings, without one of the alleviations which mitigate their affliction. How dreadful it is to be without comforts, without necessaries, without a home – without a country! While the gay and prosperous would do well to recollect, how suddenly and terribly those for whom we plead, were, by the surprising vicissitudes of life, thrown from equal heights of gaiety and prosperity. And let those who have husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, or friends, reflect on the uncertainties of war, and the revolution of human affairs.⁷⁸

Sympathy and charity amongst all women are imbued with a social and patriotic power, a power which was central to More's campaign for the moral redemption of the nation in the face of the dissipated French and the wars they were prepared to wage on Europe.

Publishing in Britain after the Terror and the escalation of the war in Europe was clearly a very different process for More, Smith and Yearsley. Perhaps surprisingly, Smith and Yearsley, who might be expected to have faced similar difficulties with the reception of their writing, shared no common experience. Where in the early 1790s Smith's authorial presence was a major aspect of her writing, challenging and provoking her readers, by 1794 this voice has become a rather odd and ambiguous element of her writing. Mounting an unconvincing and late apology to her more liberal readers, *The Banished Man* seems to represent a deliberate attempt by a radical writer to ensure she remains palatable, and therefore marketable, to a more nervous, and perhaps more conservative, audience. In contrast, *The Royal Captives*, published under similarly difficult circumstances, assumes the mantle of works like *Desmond* and *The Emigrants*, though Yearsley does this by looking at the present through the past.

⁷⁸ More, *Remarks*, p. 5.

Playfully and confidently engaging with the reader, Yearsley's mixture of fictional narrators is daring in its politics and challenging in its narrative structure. It is a work which is still far from being an outright radical attack on the treatment of women by society and the corruption of monarchy, but on occasion Yearsley's tone is caustic and even aggressive. Ironically, it is between Yearsley and More, where the most differences might be expected, that some similarities at least can be seen. In their projects to reform the attitudes of society towards women, both writers are daring and, in some instances, radical in their views. More would certainly not have countenanced the speeches uttered by Yearsley's female characters renouncing marriage, but both writers demonstrate the importance of women's involvement with society.

That a reader should find more in common between Yearsley and More than between Smith and Yearsley is revealing. It suggests that the financial situation of Smith was finally having a clear effect upon what she felt able to publish. Although a biographical reading of *The Banished Man* would suggest the recent marriage of Smith's daughter Augusta to an emigrant as one cause for the change of opinion between 1793 and 1794, the arrests of radical writers for seditious libel may have had an even greater effect upon what Smith was prepared to publish. That Smith felt compelled to offer some form of apology to her readers within the body of the text suggests that she was far from comfortable with the political views she now felt forced to countenance. Yet the connection between Yearsley and More also indicates the confidence with which Yearsley is capable of writing. As the comments of recent critics have made clear, the political climate favoured writers like More who wrote for an audience eager to find reassurance that English society could be gently remodelled for everyone's benefit, without the need for a bloody revolution. This connection between More and Yearsley extends to the different ways in which they frame their schemes for the inclusion of

women in society. More's Mrs. Jones has a broad knowledge of what she must do and feel as a woman, but it is not until the vicar of her local church preaches a sermon that moves her that her ideas are clearly formed. Yearsley's female characters have more independence of thought, and Emily, the daughter of the Count de Marfans, formulates her views on marriage because of a liberal education and upbringing; the ideas of the women in the novel are encouraged by enlightened parents who are shown to be political moderates, and whose views, as a result, the reader is encouraged to see as entirely natural.

That Yearsley is prepared to be so daring in every aspect of her novel suggests that it is possible to publish according to artistic preference after the French Revolution with a supportive publisher. By using the Robinsons as her main publishers after she was dropped by Cadell and Davies, Yearsley's radical views were guaranteed a sympathetic response, as was Smith when she used the Robinsons for *Desmond*. The late and perhaps inadequate allusion to the difficulties of publishing in *The Banished Man*, indicates that the choice of publisher was crucial to the eventual political tone of an author's work; Smith, having rejected her radical publisher in favour of Cadell and Davies, is unable to break free from the restraints imposed upon her by the political sympathies of her current publishers. Given that Smith's publishers were also those used by Hannah More, this situation is perhaps unsurprising.

In the end, what might have informed Yearsley's bravery and Smith's caution were their respective attitudes towards their eventual reputations. Yearsley would publish only once more in her career: *The Rural Lyre*, her final collection of poetry, in 1796. From 1793 onwards, Yearsley made her income through her library and had no need of literary longevity, although her ventures into print during this period indicate that she continued to be concerned about maintaining her identity as a professional

writer. That she turned for the third time to the Earl of Bristol's protection to publish *The Rural Lyre* suggests that Yearsley may have decided that an independent literary career was incompatible with the political climate of the mid-1790s. As this was to be her final publication, it may be that her need for independence was too central to Yearsley's identity as a professional writer for her to publish again without it. With the apparent advert for *Rural Walks* embedded within her 1794 novel, Smith was in a very different position to Yearsley, who could at least choose whether to publish again. Instead, Smith was very concerned with maintaining her literary reputation in the short term, and perhaps in the long term. The disadvantages Smith may have felt attendant on gaining a name as a supporter of Terror-ridden France with a second *Desmond*, may be responsible, at least in part, for the sea-change found in *The Banished Man*.

With the end of the Revolution in France came the rise of Napoleon. Within a few years, Britain was occupied by his expansionist ambitions, and the nationalist mood which had emerged during the Terror had a new target. More, Yearsley and Smith had all survived the difficulties of the Revolutionary period, but the costs had not been the same for all of them. Faring the best, More would continue to be an influential literary figure until her death in 1833, though her output was much reduced by illness in her later years. Her reputation, though, had been secured by her publishing choices during the 1780s and 90s. For all her narrative invention and political engagement, Yearsley's renown still rested upon her falling-out with More, and her decision to retire following the publication of her most nationalistic poetry in 1796 suggests that the compromise necessary for maintaining a literary career became too large a cost to bear. Perhaps the largest price was paid by Smith to ensure the continuation of her career throughout the political turmoil of the 1790s. Publishing

three more novels after *The Banished Man*, writing for children and more *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith was writing until her death, and her fine *Beachy Head* was published posthumously in 1807. Yet the compromises of the 1790s could not purchase that which Smith sought the most: literary fame that would last through the ages. William Wordsworth eerily foretold the fate that awaited Smith, writing that she was ‘a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered.’⁷⁹ Ultimately, it was Hannah More whose reputation would endure, and although Yearsley and Smith have both enjoyed a reappraisal of their work in recent years, it was the woman whose political views best fit her times who would enjoy lasting fame.

⁷⁹ William Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, 5 vols, ed. by E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), vol. 4, p. 403.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explore how women writers were able to adapt to shifting political, social and personal circumstances at the end of the eighteenth century. I have used the concepts of patronage and professionalism in order to demonstrate that the two terms are not mutually exclusive, and that the older means of publishing through patronage mechanisms were being adapted to suit the individual requirements of the writers concerned. The various modes of professionalism were no less fluid, with Charlotte Smith in particular challenging and manipulating the relationship between publisher and writer, audience and poet. This thesis has also explored in part our own need to be flexible in our understanding of late eighteenth-century women writers. Hannah More has already enjoyed a re-evaluation of her reputation as a hard-line conservative, and Charlotte Smith has gone from forgotten poet to canonical writer during the past twenty years. This thesis has pushed our reassessment of these writers further still, and shown Ann Yearsley to be worthy of a place in our consciousness as one of the major figures publishing in the closing years of the century. The infamy which still surrounds Ann Yearsley's career is a legacy of the first weeks and months after her break from More, and, as this thesis has argued, should not be regarded as the defining moment of her career. Indeed, I have given the fullest treatment to Yearsley's later career that it has yet received. I have shown that rather than being treated as curiosities, *Earl Goodwin* and *The Royal Captives* should be central to our perceptions of what it was possible for women to publish in the 1790s.

Various studies have explored the state of the literary marketplace, or asked questions about the political and personal concerns confronting writers at the end of the eighteenth century, but they have tackled these issues in isolation. It is only through an understanding of how these factors interact that a thorough appreciation of

how women moved through the literary marketplace and their own culture can be achieved. Texts such as Smith's *The Banished Man* have been acknowledged as having importance for our understanding of the political landscape of the 1790s, but its demonstration of the state of the literary market, and a woman's place within that market, has gone unnoted. The early part of Ann Yearsley's career has been used to demonstrate that patronage was old-fashioned, no longer useful and no longer relevant. But patronage was a relationship that was being redefined as middling-class patrons took the place of aristocratic patrons, and writers moved from patronage to individual publishing, and indeed from patron to patron, as the needs of the writer and the literary market dictated. Yearsley's move in the opposite direction, from middling-class patron to the traditional aristocratic protection offered by the Earl of Bristol, is more an indication of the particular dynamics of her relationship with More than an indication that middling-class patronage in general could not work; taking a noble patron was, for Yearsley, a case of outdoing More. Elsewhere, the informal patronage offered by Wilmer Gossip and Eliza Dawson seems to have worked extremely well for Yearsley.

Similarly, studies which have investigated the shift in writers from Revolutionary sympathies to patriotic loyalty have not appreciated that such adaptability in the marketplace allowed women to negotiate these dangers with greater ease than has so far been understood. By acknowledging the importance of Ann Yearsley, and her ability to emerge into a new genre with a politically radical text as one of the highest-paid writers, we can begin to reconsider our current understanding of how writers responded to events such as the Terror.

At the end of the eighteenth century the literary market was characterised by a delicate balancing act between writers attempting to maximise their income, and the

publishers' power in the market. There were many ways in which women writers could negotiate between the demands of both, and successful writers made use of several. Yet there were significant penalties for the writer who was unable to strike a balance; Charlotte Smith's experiences with Cadell and Davies serve as an example for the level of power enjoyed by publishers over even their most popular authors.

Having examined the complex interactions between authors, literary genres, publishers, patrons and politics through the lives and careers of three very different writers, we can see that women were capable of interacting with the literary marketplace, and generally successful at negotiating political and personal concerns. However, Charlotte Smith's half-hearted apology to her radical readers is not convincing, especially as her sense of how to market herself is so clearly demonstrated by her 'advertisement'. Hannah More's star continued to rise during the decade because of the acceptability of her political views, but her writing continued to be informed by her encounter a decade earlier with Ann Yearsley. Yearsley herself is a far more innovative, knowledgeable and daring writer than most critics have allowed, and the continued neglect, and sometimes outright dismissal, of her oeuvre is no longer justifiable.

Through Yearsley and her moves between various patrons, we are given a demonstration of how patronage as an institution functioned at the end of the eighteenth century; a rich and fertile relationship with considerable possibilities, but also fragile, open to abuse by patrons and insufficiently flexible under political pressures. Charlotte Smith, and her continually shifting relationship with her publishers and her readers provide us with an understanding of what it meant to be an independent, professional and prominent woman writer. By examining her work, we are able to see the financial rewards for successful writers, indicated by the demand for

new editions of her work as shown in Judith Phillips Stanton's illuminating essay, but we also see the possibility that familial concerns could have a profound impact on earning capabilities. Smith also demonstrates that there was considerable political freedom for women writers, whilst the efforts of More and Yearsley for the abolition movement are evidence that on some questions, women were the preferred source of comment.

Women, as patrons, publishers, editors, writers and commentators, were clearly a major force in the literary marketplace. The conjunction at the end of the eighteenth century of patronage and professionalism, one in decline, the other on the rise, resulted in a culture rich in opportunities for women writers.

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