The Progressive Ideas of Anna Letitia Barbauld

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Abstract

In an age of Revolution, when the rights of the individual were being fought for, Anna Letitia Barbauld was at the centre of the ideological debate. This thesis focuses on her political writing; it argues that she was more radical than previously thought. It provides new evidence of Barbauld’s close connection to an international network of reformers. Motivated by her Dissenting faith, her poems suggest that she made topical interventions which linked humanitarian concerns to wider abuses of power. This thesis traces Barbauld’s intellectual connections to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious and political thought. It examines her dialogues with the leading thinkers of her era, in particular Joseph Priestley. Setting her political writing in the context of the 1790s pamphlet wars, I argue that it is surprising that her 1792 pamphlet, *Civic Sermons*, escaped prosecution; its criticism of the government has similarities to the ideas of writers who were tried. My analysis of Barbauld’s political and socio-economic ideas suggests that, unlike many of her contemporaries, she trusted ordinary people, believing that they had a right to be involved in government. She argued that intellectuals should provide them with information but not tell them what to think. These democratic ideas were reflected in her literary approach; she employed different genres to reach different audiences. She critiqued and used the discourses of enthusiasm and sensibility to appeal to the emotions of her readers. I argue that, by adapting the traditionally male genre of political pamphlets, her work was part of a tradition of progressive female political thought dating back to the seventeenth century. Her innovative defence of civil liberties contributed to the development of liberalism.
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Introduction

In 1822 Harriet Martineau wrote about Anna Letitia Barbauld: “She meets our ideas, and seems to express what had passed through our own minds, much more forcibly than we ourselves could have done. We have a fellow-feeling with her”.¹

Reading Barbauld nearly two centuries later, I share Martineau’s sentiments. As someone who was born into a nonconformist, liberal family and had stood for Parliament for the Liberal Democrats, I felt she provided one of the most articulate expressions of my values. The political issues she addressed were topical but also timeless. Her rhetoric was steeped in the political discourse of her day, but its simplicity, clarity and precision means it still speaks to us today.

In my thesis I intend to examine in detail her progressive politics and the way in which she communicated her ideas. I will argue that Barbauld was more radical and important to the reform movements of the late eighteenth century than previously thought. My research suggests that from the late 1760s she used her writing to campaign for fundamental reform of British society. Throughout her life she was politically engaged, working collaboratively with like-minded reformers whose connections were based on shared religious and political values, education and friendships. During the clash between reaction and reform in the 1790s, at a time when championing progressive ideas was dangerous, she was at the centre of an international network of reformers.

Until the 1990s Barbauld was a largely forgotten figure. In his definitive biography, Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment, William McCarthy blames the demise of her reputation, from being one of the most famous female poets of the late eighteenth century, on a combination of factors.² Her progressive political views in the 1790s led to violent opposition from the established order.³ Her eighteenth-century style of poetry and didactic children's literature was

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³ Ibid. xiv.
disparaged by the first generation of Romantic writers and their Victorian disciples.\textsuperscript{4}
Nor did her allies help; Lucy Aikin’s memoir of her aunt played down her radical credentials and contributed to an anti-feminist image, so that when feminists were reshaping the canon, Barbauld was excluded.\textsuperscript{5}

In recent years much work has been done to reassess Barbauld’s reputation. McCarthy’s biography establishes her importance as a poet, educator, critic and political writer. After the publication of her debut volume of “highly accomplished poems” in 1773 she became one of the most famous female poets and intellectuals of her era.\textsuperscript{6} Comparing her work to Samuel Johnson’s, McCarthy argues that her career resembled that of a male writer in its range of subjects and genres.\textsuperscript{7} Recent research by Daniel P. Watkins in *Anna Letitia Barbauld and Eighteenth-Century Visionary Poetics* adds to our understanding of her importance. Providing a detailed examination of the form and content of her poems, he argues that she developed a visionary poetic. Her arrangement of the poems in her 1773 volume creates a coherent literary, political and social vision. He emphasises the tension in her poetry between the desire to engage with the political realities of the world and the attraction of a pastoral world away from the political fray.\textsuperscript{8}

Critics have also established her importance to educational writing. Mitzi Myers describes Barbauld as a “pioneering writer for children”. She argues that her *Lessons for Children* founded a female tradition in writing and pedagogy. Her “implicit reformist critique” of late eighteenth-century pedagogy energised educational practices by privileging the vernacular and experiential over rote memorisation.\textsuperscript{9} Sarah Robbins describes Barbauld as successfully serving and shaping “the evolving pedagogical values of the emerging English middle class”.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid. xv.
\textsuperscript{6} McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* ix, 114–15.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid. x.
I recognise the importance of this work by previous critics and I agree with their findings, but the focus of my thesis will be on Barbauld as a political writer. Before examining Barbauld’s contribution it is necessary to outline the political background. Caroline Robbins claims that the “revolution politics, which had seemed to be dying in England, achieved a new vigour in the first half of the reign of George III”.

As Duncan Watts explains, George III was determined to assert the power of the monarchy. Retaining his constitutional right to select ministers and influence policies, he ruled with the support of favourite ministers, thus undermining the balance of the mixed constitution established in 1688. In reaction there was a renewed impetus for the protection of the liberty of the individual, reform of the parliamentary system, amelioration of the law and the achievement of unlimited toleration. These preoccupations were evident in theoretical and practical politics; there were discussions about the nature of the constitution and a series of overlapping extra-parliamentary reform movements developed. J.W. Burrow describes the Wilkes crisis of 1769 as “in one sense the beginning of a new, populist kind of politics.” Albert Goodwin explains how in a new political departure the Rational Dissenters, led by Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, became involved in the extra-parliamentary opposition. From 1770, J. E. Cookson describes the formation of “a body of liberal opinion which had been shaped and hardened” by opposition to clerical subscription, the Thirty-Nine Articles, and the American War. Calling themselves “Friends”, these groups campaigned on the four great public issues at the end of the eighteenth century: the abolition of the slave trade, civil rights for non-Anglicans, parliamentary reform and peace.

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After the French Revolution British politics became increasingly polarised. The Foxite Whigs, under Charles James Fox (1749–1806), symbolised resistance to the King, to Pitt’s government and to repression. They opposed the power of the Crown and attacked the conduct of hostilities. Although largely an aristocratic group, they represented the interests of religious dissenters, industrialists and all those who sought reform. Outside Parliament political movements like the Friends of Liberty, the Friends of Peace and the London Corresponding Society opposed the war and called for reform of British society; their actions were curtailed by the government's increasingly repressive policies.

It is important to define the terms of the political debate. “Conservative”, “Tory”, “right-wing”, “left-wing”, “Whig”, “radical” and “liberal” are imprecise or anachronistic terms to describe the political and philosophical tendencies of the late eighteenth century. Before the 1832 Reform Act, politics was based on aristocratic cliques rather than modern parties with defined policies and a disciplined following. In the late eighteenth century, alliances shifted and realigned according to issues and personalities. William Pitt was nominally a Whig, but he was increasingly seen as representing the conservative cause. Similarly, although Edmund Burke had been a friend and close associate of Charles James Fox, as one of the more conservative Whigs, he joined Pitt and became the philosopher of this new “conservative coalition”. However, although I accept the imperfection of the terms it is necessary to use a recognisable political vocabulary to discuss the political views of the period.

The term “Tory” is used to describe the followers of Lord North and George III. James Sack argues that, however much temporary issues such as fear of domestic radicalism and dislike of the French intervened, “Toryism as a practical idea and as a philosophy” was primarily defined by its commitment to preserving the Christian, Anglican basis of English political life; this attitude gave “the Right’
its identity and its abiding character".\textsuperscript{23} The term “conservative” is used retrospectively by later generations to describe the value system adopted by loyalist politicians, Bute, North, Burke and Pitt.\textsuperscript{24} John Weiss defines a conservative as “a person who hopes to preserve or restore some significant part of the political structures, social arrangements, economic relationships or cultural values of the past”.\textsuperscript{25} Sack describes this “right-wing perspective” as “disposition; (...) a common historical vision; collective likes and, especially, dislikes”.\textsuperscript{26} Drawing on Weiss’ and Sack’s definitions, I will generally use the terms right-wing and conservative to describe supporters of the established order. However, in certain cases the word “Tory” is more appropriate; in the early nineteenth century the use of “Tory” was legitimised and domesticated by the \textit{Quarterly} and its leading spokesman, John Wilson Croker.\textsuperscript{27}

The terms to describe progressive views are equally imperfect. Although in the eighteenth century “Whig” was used to describe supporters of a limited monarchy who guarded the rights of Parliament against royal encroachment, as Burrow explains, there were many different types of Whigs; historians define true or real Whigs, court Whigs, establishment Whigs, country Whigs, radical Whigs, old and new Whigs.\textsuperscript{28} Most relevant to the arguments about the development of radicalism are the ideas of the early eighteenth-century republican Whigs of the country party opposition. Inspired by Machiavelli, Aristotle and the seventeenth-century writing of James Harrington and Algernon Sidney, their stance reflected the neo-classical, civic-humanist, republican tradition. Burrow defines these ideas as focusing on political virtue shown in public spirit, patriotism and the sacrifice of private interest to civic duty.\textsuperscript{29} Freedom involved the full political participation of the free citizen in the public life of a balanced constitutional polity. Fluctuations in power and property and the growth of opulence were threats because luxury diverted men from exercising patriotic virtue. Independence was fundamental to political health; “effeminacy” was cited as the opposite of public spirit and one of

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. 45.
\textsuperscript{25} Weiss 7.
\textsuperscript{26} Sack 2.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. 67–8.
\textsuperscript{28} Burrow 7.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. 86.
the corrupting effects of luxury. The liberty this rhetoric emphasised was not negative freedom from interference, but free political participation as the highest life for man.\textsuperscript{30}

Like the use of “conservative”, the terms “liberal” and “radical” are used retrospectively by historians to describe progressive ideas in the late eighteenth century. Watts defines liberalism as stressing individual liberty, compassion and tolerance. He writes: “As the doctrine developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, liberalism placed its major emphasis on the freedom of individuals to control their own destinies.”\textsuperscript{31} However, F. Rosen explains that even when the non-political senses of “liberal” (meaning generous and freely giving) are excluded, “many scholars subscribe to the view that there is more than one ‘liberalism’ and numerous ways of being ‘liberal’.”\textsuperscript{32}

Although the Liberal Party was not formed until 1859, “liberal” ideas were in circulation earlier. Historians disagree about the precise moment when the term can be used appropriately. Rosen argues that the emergence of liberalism as a political ideology, linked closely to practice, did not begin to emerge much before the 1820s.\textsuperscript{33} However, J. E. Cookson claims that although “liberals” and “liberalism” as substantive nouns belong to a later period, the adjective “liberal” was a favourite word employed by the reform movements of the late eighteenth century to describe what they stood for in politics, religion, education and economics. The belief that they held “liberal views” and supported “liberal principles” was an important part of group consciousness. He therefore argues that “it cannot be wrong to call them liberals”\textsuperscript{34}

The debate about when “liberalism” first developed has been influenced by modern political agendas. As Rosen explains, neo-Lockeans and Marxist historians detect a “so-called liberal tradition from the seventeenth century”.\textsuperscript{35} In this reading, liberalism is seen as the ideology which justified bourgeois capitalism; the thinkers John Locke, Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham are portrayed as bourgeois.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. 27.
\textsuperscript{31} Watts 1.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. 5.
\textsuperscript{34} Cookson 2–4.
\textsuperscript{35} Rosen 289–90.
ideologists and their theories “can only be seen to the extent that they do or do not transcend these ideological constraints in foreshadowing socialism”.

The term “radical” is also used to describe the progressive ideas of this era. Although there are nuanced differences in the meaning of “liberal” and “radical”, as Rosen points out, it is difficult to draw a distinction between the terms in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He writes: “For the most part no such distinction was drawn”. Sack defines radicalism as implying “some sort of commitment to popular participatory politics and an enlarged suffrage, and an opening to various and sundry reforming impulses relating to Church and state, employers and employees, rich and poor, free men and slaves”. Watts argues that there was a broad band of opinion to which the name radical had been given before 1815. In varying degrees, and for different reasons, these radicals wished to go further and faster than the Whigs. He claims that they formed a diverse group who had little in common other than a desire for “root and branch reform of one sort or another”. Although I recognise the limitations of the vocabulary, I will use the terms “radical” and “liberal” to describe Barbauld and her fellow reformers. As I intend to show in my thesis, she drew on the seventeenth-century political traditions which laid the foundation for later liberalism. Her involvement in the late eighteenth-century reform movements place her within Cookson’s definition of “liberal”. She also conforms to Sack’s and Watts’ descriptions of radicalism; her 1790s pamphlets demonstrate her commitment to participatory politics and fundamental reforms of society.

In the late eighteenth century, religion and politics were inextricably linked. In recent decades there has been extensive research into the religious and political importance of Rational Dissent. A detailed examination of the development of religion from the seventeenth to the late eighteenth century is provided by Isabel Rivers’ *Reason Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780*. She describes how from the late seventeenth century an emphasis on the capacity of human reason and free will and an

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36 Ibid. 290.  
37 Ibid. 293.  
38 Sack 156.  
39 Watts 3.  
40 Ibid. 5, 17.
optimistic image of human nature came to represent a new orthodoxy. These ideas were accepted by many Anglicans as well as Rational Dissenters, allowing a “Latitudinarian Consensus” to develop between the different denominations.  

Daniel E. White’s *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* argues that the “very openness and fluidity of this denominationalism” in this period allowed religious thinkers and writers “to shape and reshape their aesthetic, political and moral values through encounters with the range of theologies.”

Recent research has focused on the centrality of religious discourses to the enlightened debates about gender. The collection of essays *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (2005) demonstrates that faith lay at the heart of the political ideas of progressive female thinkers including Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays and Catharine Macaulay. Karen O’Brien’s *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* also examines how Rational Dissent or Unitarianism was “uniquely important” for the development of feminism in the late eighteenth century. This new emphasis in research has led to reinterpretations of Barbauld’s contribution to feminism and religion. In his chapter “ ‘With Mrs Barbauld it is Different’: Dissenting Heritage and the Devotional Taste” Daniel E. White argues that feminism was not a central element of Barbauld’s literary work; the binary terms of feminist/anti-feminist are not sufficient to provide an understanding of her thought. Instead he turns to her religious writing. Establishing her importance to the development of Rational Dissent, he claims that she produced “a daring analysis” of eighteenth-century devotional theory and denominational cultures.

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45 White 474.
Doddridge, she feminised and domesticated the cold abstractions and rationalism of Rational Dissent to produce “an open and warm religion that would be more endearing and personal”.46

The importance of Rational Dissent’s contribution to the radical reform movements of the late eighteenth century is also a focus of research. Caroline Robbins traces the transmission of liberal thought from the Commonwealthmen of the seventeenth century, through the “second generation” of “Real Whigs” and Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, to the “third generation” of early radicals in the Price and Priestley circles, including Barbauld. She describes how the English tradition of liberty promoted by John Milton, John Locke, James Harrington and Algernon Sidney was developed by eighteenth-century reformers in their theories about religious tolerance, natural rights, the right to resist tyranny and the need for mixed government achieved through parliamentary reform.47 She concludes that reformers in the Commonwealth tradition were not revolutionary: “Revolution Politics as professed in the eighteenth century were not of a very drastic kind”.48

In Republicanism and Bourgeois Liberalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America, Isaac Kramnick provides a more radical interpretation, arguing that the English radicals were determined to overturn the existing stratified society.49 He claims that in the late eighteenth century radicals in Joseph Priestley’s circle developed a new type of “bourgeois liberalism”. It was an ideology of work. Instead of the republican, civic humanist tradition which defined moral and virtuous man by his civic activity, it emphasised his economic activity. It attributed virtue to people who were industrious and diligent and condemned privileged aristocrats as corrupt.50 He argues that late eighteenth-century radicals were less concerned with nostalgic historical rights than with modern middle-class socio-economic grievances. They wanted to create “a liberal capitalist order” based on Locke’s idea that the unlimited acquisition of money and wealth was neither unjust nor morally wrong. They believed in a minimal state, laissez faire economics

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46 Ibid.
48 Ibid. 383–4.
50 Ibid. 1, 196.
and competitive individualism. Kramnick emphasises the “progressive and revolutionary fervor” of Joseph Priestley’s circle, arguing that they sought to destroy the existing social order of rank and privilege. He claims that they “nearly destroyed aristocratic England and its traditional values.”

Scholars contributing to the collection of essays edited by Knud Haakonssen, Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth Century Britain argue that Kramnick overemphasises the radicalism of Dissent. Haakonssen contends that, although it is tempting to see enlightened Dissent “as a Trojan horse full of continental-style philosophes ready to burst upon the English ancien regime” that picture “is too neat to capture the complexity of enlightened Dissent as a whole”. John Seed argues that from the end of the 1770s to the 1790s, Rational Dissent was a significant force in radical politics with considerable electoral influence. Opponents, like Burke, were right to identify Dissenters as “a dangerous political grouping”. However, Seed argues that there were ambiguities; although their involvement in a range of campaigns and commitment to anti-state positions on civil and religious liberties, struck at powerful vested interests, they did not threaten the rule of property and existing social hierarchies. Even if they were committed to parliamentary reform, they were not, generally democrats; many of them had anxiety about “the crowd” of “common people”. Seed describes them as threatened on all sides; they were caught by the intimidating repressive measures of the government and outflanked by the egalitarianism of Painite organisations. At this point the radical rhetoric of propertied Dissent reached its real limits; their reaction was to withdraw into “uneasy stoicism”.

Alan Saunders’ chapter supports this argument. He argues that however enlightened their philosophy may have been their aspirations were modest. Rather than portraying Priestley as revolutionary, Alan Tapper describes

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51 Ibid. 7–8.
52 Ibid. 43.
53 Ibid. 44.
57 Ibid. 164.
58 Ibid. 165.
59 Ibid. 167–8.
60 Saunders 242.
his historical progressivism as "a kind of gradualist conservatism; change is justifiable only if it preserves the accumulated achievements of past generations". It must come through enlightenment not violent revolution.\(^{61}\) Priestley was a radical in his rejection of aristocracy, but he sided with Burke and rejected the economic assumptions of the radicals that economic progress was detrimental to political liberty.\(^{62}\) Nor did he support the economic redistribution of wealth.\(^{63}\)

As a leading figure in Rational Dissent and the reform movements, and a close associate of Priestley’s, Barbauld is a significant figure for the debate about the extent of this circle’s radicalism. Critics dispute her position on the political spectrum. Barbara Taylor argues that Barbauld’s “democratic instincts were always weaker than most of her fellow Jacobins, and she had none of Wollstonecraft’s Rousseauist passion for equality. ‘Levelling’ notions were as unwelcome to her as to any anti-Jacobin propagandist”.\(^{64}\) In contrast, Kramnick considers Barbauld was, “next to Wollstonecraft, perhaps the most important woman radical in the 1790s”.\(^{65}\) He argues that she “articulated the very core of liberal bourgeois social theory”.\(^{66}\) Citing her *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* he writes: “It is easy to forget the explosive radical thrust of this praise of talent, its progressive assault on the world of privilege and artificial distinction”.\(^{67}\) McCarthy also recognises her radicalism; he argues that during the 1790s “she wrote politics at the risk – had she been male – of being prosecuted for sedition”.\(^{68}\) However, he points out that, in comparison to the work of theorists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin and Thomas Paine, her work was “conservative”; it aimed to conserve “a politics of reason and liberalality”. Rather than providing grand theories and elaborate visions, Barbauld “carried on the humbler work of defending Enlightenment’s existing gains”. She was defending the ideas of the generous reformist movements of the 1780s against political repression.\(^{69}\)

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\(^{61}\) Alan Tapper, “Priestley on Politics, Progress and Moral Theology”, Haakonsen 275.
\(^{62}\) Ibid. 279.
\(^{63}\) Ibid. 282.
\(^{65}\) Kramnick 124.
\(^{66}\) Ibid. 56.
\(^{67}\) Ibid. 50.
\(^{68}\) McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* xiv.
\(^{69}\) Ibid. 309.
J. E. Cookson and Albert Goodwin have provided definitive accounts of the late eighteenth-century reform movements. Goodwin claims that their vital significance was in their impact on the evolution of provincial radicalism at the “grass-roots level”. He argues that nonconformist leaders were deeply interested in the social and economic welfare of the local communities in which they lived.\(^\text{70}\) In the early 1790s Dissenters organised new types of radical societies, open to working men, with exclusively political objectives. They provided the new working-class reformers with the political leadership that enabled them to acquire political stability.\(^\text{71}\) Cookson argues that by using the term “Friends” these movements declared a unity of opinion and sentiment. When the Friends of Peace was formed many members had already worked together in the campaigns for abolition of the slave trade, for repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts and for parliamentary reform. Their fellowship was based on ties of family, friendship and religion.\(^\text{72}\)

The importance of sociable networks and modes of collaboration has been a recent critical preoccupation. Gillian Russell and Claire Tuite’s collection of essays has challenged Romanticism’s traditional identification with the lone poet by emphasising the significance of sociability.\(^\text{73}\) Barbauld scholarship adds to the research into sociable networks by examining her work as part of a larger context of family and friends. Anne Janowitz cites Barbauld as “an exemplary case” of two models of sociability in the late eighteenth century.\(^\text{74}\) The first model is epitomised by the “free familiar conversation” advocated by her father, the educationalist John Aikin, which was evident in the pedagogy and manners of Warrington Academy. Janowitz argues that the ideal of social intercourse as an informal, familiar way of teaching virtue and an active mind was formative for Barbauld’s poetic style in the 1760s and 1770s.\(^\text{75}\) The second model of sociability is more urban and militant, linked to political activism. This version of sociability structured Barbauld’s “interventionist poetic” in the early 1790s. It was centred in the publisher Joseph Johnson’s radical intellectual circle, based in London. Janowitz writes that the

\(^{70}\) Goodwin 67–8.
\(^{71}\) Ibid. 98.
\(^{72}\) Cookson 1–2.
\(^{73}\) Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770–1840 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
\(^{74}\) Anne Janowitz, “Amiable and Radical Sociability: Anna Barbauld’s ‘Free Familiar Conversation’”, Russell and Tuite 62.
\(^{75}\) Ibid.
move from Warrington to London “can be described as Barbauld’s shift from sensibility to Romanticism, from ‘amiability’ to ‘ardour’ (...) In her urban poetry of the late 1780s and early 1790s, Barbauld (...) dialectically criticized the abstractions of Warrington values and manners”.76

Daniel E. White, Scott Krawczyk and Michele Levy have examined in detail Barbauld’s collaborative relationship with her brother, John Aikin. In “The ‘Joineriana’: Anna Barbauld, the Aikin Family Circle, and the Dissenting Public Sphere”, White describes their “distinctly domestic kind of literary collaboration” which, by allying middle-class civil and nonconformist values with sensibility and the “plenitude of the intimate sphere”, domesticated progressive values and authorised Barbauld “to disseminate them to the nation”.77 In his study of Romantic literary families, Krawczyk introduces the term “collaborative consciousness” to denote “a collective will to effect reform, that reform being the ultimate objective of consciousness raising in response to social and /or political ills”.78 Using Aikin and Barbauld as a prime example, he argues that for Dissenting communities the pursuit of reform was “a cooperative and communal effort”.79 In her survey of family authorship, Levy emphasises the radicalism of Barbauld and Aikin’s children’s literature Evenings at Home. She explains that, for them, “the home is part of the public sphere, and the family itself is the institution most capable of effecting profound national change. Both girls and boys (...) must be taught to scrutinize and, where necessary, challenge the government under which they lived”.80

The recent collection of essays Religious Dissent and the Aikin–Barbauld Circle, 1740–1860, edited by Felicity James and Ian Inkster, extends this research by examining the work of several generations of the Aikin family. Their achievements are set in a broader context of the religious beliefs, family creativity and sociable networks of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By providing a

76 Ibid. 63.
79 Ibid.
form of group biography these essays suggest the continuity of ideas throughout the different periods and different forms of writing.\textsuperscript{81}

Against this critical background my thesis will build on the recent research, adding to the scholarship on Rational Dissent, and the role of religion in female political thought and sociable networks. My research methodology will draw on historical studies, especially the history of ideas, in order to inform my research on Barbauld’s political position. Continuing the historical turn in Romantic studies which began in the 1980s with Nicholas Roe’s and Marilyn Butler’s acknowledgement that the Romantic poets were deeply involved in the social and political and not just the transcendental realm, it will be based in historically inflected literary scholarship.\textsuperscript{82}

My thesis places Barbauld at the heart of the progressive networks, involved in both the development of ideas and the practical politics of late eighteenth-century reform movements. I argue that although she wanted reform not revolution, her views were extremely radical and, if implemented, would have totally transformed the existing aristocratic order. However, my research suggests that Barbauld’s ideas do not completely fit Kramnick’s definition of “bourgeois liberalism”. He argues that “a full-fledged sense of class-consciousness” emerged in Priestley’s circle.\textsuperscript{83} Asserting their interests as different from the ruling aristocracy and gentry, they also differentiated themselves from what they considered to be the less virtuous poor.\textsuperscript{84} Their attitude to the poor was authoritarian.\textsuperscript{85} In theory they believed in equality of opportunity but they sought to replace the existing aristocratic order with a new elite based on talent and merit.\textsuperscript{86} It seems that Kramnick’s analysis is closely based on Joseph Priestley’s ideas; my thesis argues that there were differences between Barbauld’s and Priestley’s approach to socio-economic issues. Barbauld’s attack on aristocratic rule and


\textsuperscript{83} Kramnick 25.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid. 19.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid. 34.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid. 14.
praise of the middle-class work ethic was the same as this group, but her attitude to
the poor was more nuanced. Rather than use the term “bourgeois liberalism”,
with its Marxist connotations, I agree with William McCarthy that the term “middle-
class liberalism” is more suitable to describe Barbauld’s position.\(^87\)

My research into the genesis of her political thought will demonstrate the
complexity of her ideas; she does not fit neatly into one tradition. She drew on
Lockean, civic humanist and Scottish Enlightenment concepts. Her ideas conform
to the “Commonwealthman” tradition described by Caroline Robbins, who
emphasises the importance of the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Francis
Hutcheson to the development of liberal thought. From an Irish Presbyterian
background, Hutcheson became professor of moral philosophy at Glasgow in
1729; his ideas provided the ideology for many Rational Dissenters.\(^88\) Although
there are many philosophical influences on Barbauld, I consider that Hutcheson
was the most important. Throughout my thesis I will demonstrate how her ideas
drew on his attitudes to individual rights, the right of resistance, the economic
foundations of power and his emphasis on sociability and the importance of family
life in the development of virtue.

My examination of her position on the late eighteenth-century political
spectrum places her closer to the most radical thinkers than previously thought. I
suggest that her religious and political ideas were more democratic than many of
her contemporaries; most of them talked about spiritual egalitarianism, but few put
this theory into practice as consistently as Barbauld. Her work shows that she
trusted the majority of people enough to involve them in the political process. She
believed that, given information and education, people should be allowed to make
up their own minds and not be dictated to by intellectuals. Reformist ideas had to
be accepted by the majority, not imposed on them. However, unlike Richard Price
and Jeremy Bentham, her ideas on how this would work in practice were vague;
she did not provide a detailed programme for political reform.

Throughout her writing, she demonstrates an early awareness of the
importance of public opinion; for society to be changed the intellectual elite must

\(^87\) William McCarthy. Personal communication 18 October 2012.
\(^88\) For a full discussion of Hutcheson’s values see Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealth* 185.
communicate with ordinary people. As Burrow explains, the growth of towns, newspapers and the speed of communication in eighteenth-century society emphasised the power of public opinion. With the ultimate sanction of rebellion behind it, public opinion was seen as the pressure society exerts on government. Barbauld’s ideas reflected William Paley’s *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785). He argued that governors needed to recognise that civil authority is founded in opinion and that “general opinion” therefore ought to be treated with deference and managed with care. To influence public opinion Barbauld used a variety of genres; in my thesis I will examine her use of the political discourse of the era to appeal to a wide audience. I suggest that she employed enthusiasm and sensibility in a carefully controlled way to appeal to the emotions of her readership. Reflecting her democratic approach to language, in her political pamphlets she drew on biblical associations and everyday language to make her ideas accessible to all.

As Barbauld’s faith laid the foundation for her political views and provided her with the ideological networks and motivation to put them into practice, Chapter 1 examines her religious views in detail. It analyses her distinctive contribution to the development of Rational Dissent at a time of change and challenge; Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestley had formed the Unitarians in the early 1770s, but their rational religion had less mass appeal than the more enthusiastic Methodism.

This chapter explores how Barbauld’s ideas were aimed at making Rational Dissent more attractive to ordinary people. It examines Barbauld’s involvement in the debate which was at the heart of nonconformity throughout the eighteenth century: the tension between reason and emotion in religion and the argument about the use of enthusiasm in religious experience. My analysis of Barbauld’s essay “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, on Sects, and on Establishments” (1775), which traces the history of Dissent from the seventeenth century, suggests that she was promoting a form of devotional practice which would widen the appeal of Rational Dissent. Building on Daniel E. White’s research, I argue that she personified and feminised the affective religion of Jennings and Doddridge by drawing on Elizabeth Rowe’s neo-platonic approach to devotional taste. I argue

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89 Burrow 43–4.
90 Ibid. 54.
that, as one of the leading Whig poets of the early eighteenth century, Rowe influenced Barbauld’s attitudes about the use of aesthetic taste and enthusiasm to heighten devotion.

Barbauld’s distinctive approach to these issues led her into conflict with Joseph Priestley. This chapter analyses in detail the development of their relationship. Comparing her essay “The Hill of Science” (1773) and her poem “The Mouse’s Petition” (1773) to Priestley’s ideas at this time, I demonstrate that their work was in dialogue and that Barbauld influenced one of the leading thinkers of the age. Establishing the dynamics of their relationship is important for the rest of the thesis; her close association with Priestley had implications for her political actions and the way she was perceived in the 1790s.

In this chapter I also develop a theme which will be continued in successive chapters. I suggest that Barbauld’s religious ideas were spiritually egalitarian, aimed at inspiring ordinary people rather than just the intellectual elite. She emphasised the importance of practical, simple Christianity rather than metaphysical speculation. It needed to be communicated to ordinary people to promote the virtue and happiness of the majority.

Chapter 2 examines Barbauld’s attitude to feminism. Until recently Barbauld’s apparent lack of enthusiasm for feminism was used by critics, such as Barbara Taylor, to undermine her progressive credentials. However, drawing on the recent scholarship on the importance of religion to the development of early feminism and female political thought, this chapter places Barbauld alongside Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays as radical women whose faith provided them with a springboard for their politics. It also recognises that there were differences in approach between Barbauld and the more overtly feminist thinkers. Rather than seeing her work in terms of Wollstonecraft’s type of “modern feminism” I consider that she identified with earlier traditions of female political thought. This chapter argues that although she was acutely aware of the limitations placed on women because of their gender, her tactics to deal with the problem differed from Wollstonecraft’s; rather than a direct confrontation she used more subtle methods, promoting female friendship and a matriarchal literary kinship network.

91 Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 184.
To pinpoint her position within traditions of female political thought I examine her female literary role models. In her early career Elizabeth Carter and Elizabeth Rowe were her muses, providing Barbauld with examples of how to combine piety with intellectual endeavour. I agree with Janowitz that, as politics became more polarised in the 1790s, her “voice” changed from polite to more overtly political. I suggest that her political pamphlets should be seen as in the tradition of radical seventeenth-century sectarian women, particularly Katherine Chidley and Margaret Fell Fox. They provided her with precedents for how women could combine religion and politics. Like Barbauld, these women were politically progressive but their priority was fighting for civil liberties for men and women rather than promoting feminism. However, by writing political tracts they practised a form of feminism in action which widened the genres open to women and demonstrated their intellectual equality with men.

In Chapter 3 I build on the recent research into networks to demonstrate that Barbauld was at the centre of the major progressive campaigns of the late eighteenth century. This chapter examines her attitude to humanitarian concerns, particularly animal rights and anti-slavery. I analyse in detail “The Mouse’s Petition” and Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade (1791) to show how Barbauld used her poetry for multi-layered political purposes. My analysis of these poems emphasises their topicality; they were reacting to specific events. I suggest that “The Mouse’s Petition” was written in response to the government’s treatment of John Wilkes, Rational Dissenters and American colonists. I examine the significance of the timing of her Epistle to William Wilberforce; it was written when parliamentary attempts to end slavery had failed. It should be seen as part of a propaganda campaign to launch extra-parliamentary abolitionist action. Through highlighting specific issues, Barbauld’s work created a damning indictment of the state of British representative government. It suggests that she believed that as well as individual reforms there was a need for wholesale reform of British society. This research emphasises that rather than being just a visionary political thinker she used her writing for practical political purposes.

This chapter also examines how Barbauld critiqued and used sensibility to communicate her message to a wide audience. I suggest that her involvement in
the anti-slavery campaign provided her with a collaborative working model which she continued in her political campaigning in the 1790s and in 1812. Throughout her life she was deeply political and, although she used a different tone to suit the different demands of the era, her commitment to fundamentally reforming society remained constant.

Chapter 4 argues that Barbauld’s reformist ideas and networks developed in even more radical directions in the fervid political climate of the 1790s. My examination of the publication in Dundee of her radical political pamphlet *Civic Sermons* (1792), with an inflammatory addendum, suggests that Barbauld was a leading figure in a radical network of reformers in England, Scotland, Ireland and France. My research provides new evidence for links between Barbauld and the Scottish martyrs Thomas Muir and Thomas Fyshe Palmer, who were found guilty of sedition.

Building on McCarthy’s argument, I suggest that under the government’s repressive regime it is surprising that her political pamphlets escaped prosecution. To illustrate this I analyse in detail *Civic Sermons*, which aimed to educate ordinary people to prepare them for political involvement. I argue that there are many similarities between her ideas and those of the most radical writers of the day, most notably Thomas Paine. In her pamphlet she suggested that the government governed in the interest of the few not the many. In *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* (1793) she supported the democratic rights of the majority to choose their government and championed the right of resistance against authoritarian rule. In this chapter I contend that Barbauld’s political ideas were reflected in her democratic use of language. I claim that her determination to reach a mass audience with her radical ideas suggests that she was less intellectually elitist than some of her fellow middle-class reformers such as William Godwin.

Continuing the examination of Barbauld’s sociability, Chapter 5 focuses on her collaborative relationship with her brother, John Aikin. It explores how Rational Dissenters like Barbauld, Aikin and Priestley responded to the political disillusionment of the 1790s by turning their focus from immediate reform to educating the citizens of the future. It examines the continuity between her *Lessons for Children* and the children’s literature written with her brother, *Evenings at Home*, to emphasise her consistent educational ethos. Developing the theme of
earlier chapters, it argues that Barbauld’s children’s literature was an important example of her belief in involving all classes and age groups in the national debate and encouraging them to think for themselves.

Drawing on Scott Krawczyk’s idea of collaborative consciousness, this chapter explores Barbauld’s and Aikin’s joint and separate works on inequality and socio-economic issues to gain a fuller picture of their views. Barbauld’s and Aikin’s attitudes are set in context by comparing them to those of Priestley, Paine, Smith, Godwin and Burke’s ideas. Unlike these writers, the siblings do not come up with detailed blueprints for changing society. However, my research suggests that they were on the radical side of the debate on socio-economic issues. I consider that their attitude to inequality subtly differed from Priestley’s; Barbauld tempered what Kramnick describes as “bourgeois liberal ideas” with older civic humanist traditions. Her analysis of inequality indicates an early understanding of class consciousness. Unlike many of the middle class, she saw the working class as allies, not enemies, and she emphasised their shared values.

Chapter 6 develops further my investigation of Barbauld’s involvement in radical reform networks through a detailed analysis of her poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812). It adds to my argument that Barbauld used her public poetry for specific topical interventions while at the same time making wider criticisms of British society. Emma Clery’s recent research argues that Barbauld used this poem to promote the campaign against the Orders in Council, which stifled European trade with America. I add to her ideas by examining in detail how Barbauld worked collaboratively with the philanthropist, poet and abolitionist William Roscoe; I suggest that they continued the working practices developed in the anti-slavery movement. I argue that Barbauld was once again involved in a propaganda campaign; her poem’s opposition to the dominant values of an increasingly militaristic society reads like a manifesto in verse for the Friends of Peace. This chapter contends that through her poem she defended liberal values when they were under threat.

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My thesis concludes that although Barbauld and her fellow reformers did not achieve their aims in the short term, their campaigns came to fruition in the next generation. Within a decade of Barbauld’s death legislation was passed to emancipate Dissenters, abolish slavery and reform Parliament. I argue that Barbauld contributed to the development of early liberal ideas, bridging the gap between the seventeenth-century Commonwealth tradition and the development of liberalism in the nineteenth century.

Her political writing also had a literary impact. She was one of the late eighteenth century authors who experimented with the ways in which political ideas could be expressed. By writing religious and political pamphlets she challenged attitudes about suitable genres for women. Her use of poetry for oppositional political ends influenced the poetry of the second generation of Romantics. Never one to emphasise the importance of individual genius, Barbauld had played an important part in the movements which made the modernisation of politics and literature possible. She had helped to sow the seeds of change; the next generation reaped the harvest.
Chapter 1
“A devotion generous, liberal, and humane”:
Anna Letitia Barbauld’s religious beliefs

In “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, on Sects, and on Establishments” (1775) Barbauld expressed her admiration for “a devotion generous, liberal, and humane”.¹ This quotation demonstrates how the secular and spiritual were intertwined in her work. For Barbauld the purpose of religion was to express “devotion” to God but it was also to inspire “generous, liberal, and humane” actions. Her aim was inclusive; she wanted to provide “the common class of pious christians” with a simple, practical faith which would help them to lead virtuous and happy lives and thus create a more united society.² Understanding Barbauld’s religious beliefs lays the foundation for the rest of my thesis. Her faith was central to her political thought, providing the inspiration, motivation and networks to bring her ideas to fruition.

This chapter will have three overlapping themes. Firstly, it will examine in detail Barbauld’s religious beliefs and pinpoint her position within Rational Dissent. Born into what Daniel E. White describes as “perhaps the single-most influential family of eighteenth-century Calvinist Independents and Presbyterians”, Barbauld was at the centre of an inter-generational nonconformist network.³ This chapter will establish the influence of the affectionate religion of her grandfather, John Jennings (1687–1723) and Philip Doddridge (1702–51) and the Warringtonian faith of her father John Aikin on her religious thought. Her life at Warrington, from the age of fifteen to thirty one, provides the first example of the sociability which will be a major theme of my thesis; the connections she made at this time linked her to the reform movements of the late eighteenth century. Most important among these affiliations was her friendship with Joseph Priestley; a detailed study of the development of their relationship provides the second major strand of this chapter.

² Ibid. 215.
³ Daniel E. White, “With Mrs Barbauld it is Different” 476.
A prolific author, theologian, philosopher and educationalist, he was “one of the most remarkable thinkers of the eighteenth century”. His scientific experiments revolutionised chemistry while his theological writing was crucial to the development of Unitarianism. James Dybikowski claims that what makes Priestley distinctive was his “sustained determination to repatriate for Christianity metaphysical and epistemological positions that other Christian thinkers rejected as dangerous and tantamount to infidelity and atheism”. Interacting with this controversial polymath brought Barbauld into contact with cutting-edge ideas. It is important to establish the terms of their relationship because it influenced her reaction to politics and religion from the late 1760s to the 1790s and affected the way she was perceived.

The third major theme of this chapter will be to assess Barbauld’s contribution to the development of Rational Dissent in the late eighteenth century. Barbauld was at the centre of the religious debate at a crucial time for the movement. John Seed describes it as “in massive and irreversible decline” by the late eighteenth century. Wykes and Rivers claim that Rational Dissent lacked popular appeal. It had rejected religious enthusiasm and suffered significant loss of members to the Congregationalists and the Methodists. At the beginning of the nineteenth century only about a third of the congregations which had been Presbyterian at the start of the eighteenth century had become Unitarians. However, influence was not purely a matter of numbers; many Rational Dissenting congregations had wealth and influence. As Martin Priestman explains, Unitarianism was “one of the most powerful intellectual forces in the country”.

I will argue that Barbauld’s essays “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, on Sects, and on Establishments” and her *Remarks on Mr Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1792) offered a

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5 Ibid. 1–2.
7 Seed, “A Set of Men Powerful Enough in Many Things” 142.
8 Wykes and Rivers 9.
9 Ibid.
blueprint for the development of modern Dissent. Published in 1775, “On the Devotional Taste” prefaced her third book, *Devotional Pieces, Compiled from the Psalms and the Book of Job*, which was a collection of psalms and passages from Job arranged under the headings “Moral Psalms”, “Psalms of Praise, Penitence and Prayer” and “Occasional and Prophetic Psalms”. Using the Enlightenment genre of a “philosophical enquiry” and a “natural history”, her first major essay on religion explored the importance of “taste” in devotion.\(^\text{11}\) In its most controversial section Barbauld critiqued the Rational Dissent of her own era for engaging in philosophical disputation more than devotion. She suggested that an increased emphasis on religious feeling could reinvigorate the movement to suit the psychological and spiritual tastes of the late eighteenth century.\(^\text{12}\) The second section developed a detailed “sociological” analysis of the rise and fall of sects from the persecution of the seventeenth century to the late eighteenth century.\(^\text{13}\)

In 1792 Barbauld published a second major essay on religion. Her *Remarks* were written in response to the public worship controversy which divided radical Dissenters. In her pamphlet she challenged the outspoken, intellectual Dissenter Gilbert Wakefield’s arguments against participating in public worship. In the polarised political and religious climate of the decade following the French Revolution, Barbauld emphasised her spiritual egalitarianism and argued for the beneficial social and spiritual effects of all sections of the community worshipping together.

The challenging ideas expressed in both pamphlets brought Barbauld into conflict with some of her co-religionists. I will argue that these clashes should be seen as a continuation and development of the tensions between emotion and reason which were pivotal to the debate about the future of Dissent throughout the eighteenth century. However, the disagreements went beyond these binaries to encompass different approaches to aesthetics, enthusiasm and sociability.

Before examining Barbauld’s religious ideas in detail, it is important to define the complex terms of the debate. As Knud Haakonsen explains, Rational Dissent is often taken to be more or less synonymous with intellectual Unitarianism.

\(^{11}\) McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 149.  
\(^{12}\) Ibid.  
\(^{13}\) McCarthy and Kraft 210.
However, this definition excludes many “Enlightened Dissenters” who did not go as far as Unitarians in challenging established doctrines. He defines Rational or Enlightened Dissent as “a broadly based rational religion” which combined reason and faith and tolerated different ways of doing so. As Wykes and Rivers establish, many Rational Dissenters questioned established doctrines, particularly Calvinism, which was based on belief in the Trinity; predestination to glory or perdition; original sin and the total dependence of human beings on free grace; and the atonement or role of Christ as mediator or sacrifice. However, efforts to moderate Calvinist beliefs were perceived by many as an attack upon fundamental truths and seen as heresy. Within Barbauld’s circle there were Arminians, Arians and Socinians. Arminians argued that grace and salvation were available to all, not just the elect, and that faith was conditional on repentance. Arians believed that Christ was created by God and subordinate to him, though still divine. More extreme were Socinians who elevated reason above faith and emphasised the humanity of Christ. In the 1770s Socinianism became a central doctrine of Unitarianism.

In “With Mrs Barbauld it is Different”, White emphasises that late eighteenth-century Unitarianism was “a discrete phenomenon” from other branches of Dissent. It only became recognisable in the 1770s with Priestley’s defence of Socinianism and the formation of the Essex Street congregation by Theophilus Lindsey in 1774. Even after this time people could worship as Unitarians and simultaneously be members of other congregations such as Presbyterians or General Baptists. Converts were usually from Presbyterian Calvinist Dissent, although some members of the Church of England became Unitarians. White explains that although Barbauld is frequently labelled a Unitarian, her sectarian affiliations were complex. He describes her as “a liberal (i.e. Arminian) Presbyterian and a

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15 Ibid. 5.
16 Wykes and Rivers 6.
17 Ibid. 7.
18 White, “With Mrs Barbauld it is Different” 476.
19 Wykes and Rivers 7.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid. 8.
Unitarian”. She was critical of the philosophical and abstract Unitarian culture. Theologically she was an Arian, not a Socinian; her most coherent position was anti-Calvinist. White argues that from the 1770s to the 1790s she was writing from “a perspective that does not easily reside within Rational Dissent in general or Unitarianism in particular”.

Recent Barbauld studies have been influenced by scholarship that identifies a shift in eighteenth-century opinion, which saw religious belief become increasingly linked to the feminine and sentiment. As Barbara Taylor establishes, from the middle of the century ministers from all denominations argued that female religious feeling was intrinsically more powerful than male faith. Setting Barbauld in the context of this analysis, White argues that in “On the Devotional Taste” she applied eighteenth-century ideas of sensibility to “domesticate” the “extremely virile and austere” set of values associated with Rational Dissent and Puritanism. By doing this she hoped to produce “an open and warm religion that would be more endearing and personal than Socinian Dissent”.

White claims that we can trace an ideological and cultural inheritance from Puritan Calvinism in Barbauld’s work. She tried to regulate and invigorate devotion by drawing on the form of Dissent promoted by her grandfather, John Jennings and Philip Doddridge. Their affective faith combined eighteenth-century rational religion with the seventeenth-century Puritan idea of experimental preaching which involved appealing to the emotions and attuning discourses to the individual needs of the congregation.

Deirdre Coleman portrays the clash between Priestley and Barbauld in terms of gender. She argues that much as Barbauld admired Priestley and was influenced by him she “was never a disciple, holding strongly in her early writings to a belief in the virtues ascribed to her sex, such as sympathy and affection,

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22 White, “With Mrs Barbauld it is Different” 476–7.
23 Ibid. 477.
24 Ibid. 482.
26 White, “With Mrs Barbauld it is Different” 483.
27 Ibid. 475.
28 Ibid. 478.
29 Ibid. 481–2.
sociability, and conversation, and innate delicacy of taste"). She argues that in the 1770s Barbauld softened Priestley’s rigour by subjecting it to an aesthetic discourse of beauty. Rather than focusing on Barbauld’s relationship with Priestley, William McCarthy sees “On the Devotional Taste” as an attack on her Warrington upbringing. He writes that the essay “surveys Dissent as she had experienced it at Warrington and finds it wanting”. McCarthy claims that in her religious life she had always felt “doubly out of place”: as a Dissenter against the establishment and as a woman against the male intellectual version of Dissent her father and his colleagues represented.

Jon Mee challenges McCarthy’s analysis. He argues that Barbauld’s position was closer to the mainstream of opinion at Warrington Academy than McCarthy allows. He describes the clash between Barbauld and Priestley in terms of enthusiasm; Priestley’s controversial nature differed from Warrington Academy’s ideas of ecumenical politeness which Barbauld respected in the 1770s. What Priestley lacked in Barbauld’s view was not feeling, but “the regulatory manners of sensibility”. However, Mee’s research moves away from seeing Barbauld’s religious ideas primarily in terms of feminine-gendered sensibility versus masculine-gendered reason. Laura Mandell also rejects this equation; she argues that it confines eighteenth-century female thinkers “anew to the private sphere, disarming them of public power”. In her analysis of Barbauld’s pamphlet to Gilbert Wakefield, she stresses that there were various types of Enlightenment rationalism; Barbauld’s theology demonstrated both affect and reason and therefore Barbauld should be described as “an affective rationalist”.

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31 Ibid.
32 McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 150.
33 Ibid. 151.
36 Ibid. 175.
38 Ibid. 131.
In this chapter I will build on the research of previous scholars. My analysis of Barbauld’s religious ideas supports White’s and McCarthy’s view that she does not easily fit within Priestley’s version of Unitarianism. Like Coleman, I argue that Barbauld was never merely Priestley’s disciple; their relationship involved an exchange of ideas between equals. During the 1760s, when they were both at Warrington, there were similarities in their beliefs, but my comparison of Priestley’s ideas with Barbauld’s in her essay “The Hill of Science, A Vision” (1773) and her poem “The Mouse’s Petition” (1773) suggests that during the 1770s their views on the relationship between science and religion, the nature of the soul, and the requirements of a virtuous Christian life were diverging. This divergence culminated in 1775 with the publication of Barbauld’s essay “On the Devotional Taste”. As well as developing further previous critics’ analysis of this essay, I will argue that Barbauld was responding to specific, topical issues involving Priestley and the formation of Unitarianism.

Like McCarthy, my assessment of her religious ideas suggests that she was not concerned with abstract theological doctrines. I argue that, although Barbauld was an intellectual, there is an anti-intellectual elitist attitude in her early religious writing which would be developed further in her political and religious pamphlets in the 1790s. Her belief in spiritual equality, as set out in Remarks, convinced her that religion and politics were the business of ordinary people and therefore intellectuals must communicate their ideas in a simple way which could appeal to all sections of society. This is reflected in her debates with Priestley and Wakefield about the relative importance of metaphysical speculation and practical Christianity.

In this chapter I will examine McCarthy’s claim that Barbauld’s essay was a rebellion against her Warrington, patriarchal religious inheritance. As the debate depends on the definition of “Warrington values”, I will explore their meaning. While I accept that Barbauld was critical of the Academy’s abstract theological debates, my research suggests that it is important to differentiate between the attitudes of

40 McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 151–64.
different Warringtonians. I argue that Barbauld’s criticism was directed at Priestley and Wakefield more than at her father and the Warrington tutor William Enfield. Like Mee, I consider Barbauld was closer to Warrington values than Joseph Priestley was by the mid-1770s, and it was he who had had “a complete revolution” in his religious thought, not she.  

Rather than rejecting her patriarchal religious heritage, I suggest that she was trying to make it complete by including female as well as male influences. Building on White’s argument that she domesticated Dissent, I claim that she personified Jennings’ and Doddridge’s tradition by drawing on the work of the devotional poet Elizabeth Rowe. As a friend of Isaac Watts, Rowe was closely affiliated to affectionate religion. By emphasising Rowe’s influence on her religious and literary thought, I suggest that Barbauld was subtly demonstrating the role of women, as well as men, in the development of religion.

I will argue that, as a woman, Barbauld had a distinctive perspective; unable to found or lead sects her gender gave her a disinterested position. In her debate with Priestley and Wakefield Barbauld warned against what she evidently saw as a male tendency to over-intellectualise the faith. However, like Mee and Mandell, I think that trying to understand Barbauld’s theology through the binaries of feminine-gendered sensibility and masculine-gendered reason fails to reflect the nuances of her ideas. It was not about valorising female religious experience at the expense of male but about valuing the contributions of both sexes. Nor was she arguing against reason in religion; her attack was on the abstract intellectualising of faith which went beyond reason into the realms of enthusiasm.

Drawing on Mee’s research, this chapter will analyse Barbauld’s attitude to enthusiasm, contrasting Priestley’s and Barbauld’s different definitions of the term. I will argue that Rowe provided Barbauld with an alternative model of enthusiasm to Priestley’s. Mee notes Barbauld’s admiration of Rowe’s style and suggests that “On the Devotional Taste” was part of an ongoing project within Rational Dissent “to remove the disgrace which enthusiasm in its several forms had brought upon

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devotion”.

McCarthy contends that Rowe linked Barbauld to a female tradition of religious enthusiasm. In this chapter I will develop Mee and McCarthy’s ideas in more detail. I will argue that Rowe’s portrayal of an intimate relationship with God was imaginatively appealing to Barbauld; it connected her to the neo-platonic tradition which compared erotic love to the love of God. Drawing on the work of Abigail Williams and Sarah Prescott, I will explore how Rowe also linked Barbauld to the early eighteenth-century Whig poets who used a personal, private type of enthusiasm to advance devotional practice.

In her analysis of Barbauld’s poem “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” (1773), Anne Janowitz argues that Barbauld drew on an Addisonian concept of the sublime. I will develop this idea further to show how the Whig poets influenced her use of this aesthetic concept to heighten religious experience.

Janowitz argues that in Barbauld’s work the secular and the religious “appear to be the same thing”. She claims that she created “an aestheticized religion or a Christianized aestheticism”. I agree to a certain extent with Janowitz’s assessment. For Barbauld religion had to serve a practical purpose in the real world. As my analysis of her pamphlet to Gilbert Wakefield shows, by the 1790s she had created a politicised religion. Public worship and images of God and Christ were described in radical political terms. The language she used reflects the French revolutionary debate. I conclude that Barbauld developed a very radical version of Dissent to suit the circumstances of the late eighteenth century. However, I will argue that Barbauld was also aware of the mystery of faith; there were spiritual dimensions which went beyond secular understanding.

46 Ibid. 224.
RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

To understand the development of Barbauld’s religious ideas involves setting them in historical context. Isabel Rivers describes two crucial shifts in ideas between 1660 and 1780. The first was an emphasis in Anglican thought on human reason and free will working with divine grace to achieve a holy and happy life. Rejecting orthodox Calvinist doctrine, which stressed the depravity of man, an optimistic image of human nature became more common. The second shift was an attempt to separate ethics from religion to find the motivation of human action in human nature alone.47

From the seventeenth century onwards there were tensions between reason and emotion and the use of enthusiasm within Dissent. Mee establishes that their seventeenth-century roots made all Dissenters open to accusations of enthusiasm. During the Civil War the religious enthusiasm of sectarians was blamed for tearing the country apart. By the end of the century, in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke described enthusiasm as the antithesis of enlightenment; the enthusiast believed he/she had an immediate link with God which was founded neither on reason nor on divine revelation.48 At one end of the scale enthusiasm was associated with an individual retiring into isolation to indulge in gloomy introspection or unworldly speculation. At the other extreme it described the vulgar mania of the crowd.49

Reason was used as a weapon against enthusiasm.50 In the late seventeenth century, inspired by Newtonian physics and Lockean philosophy, most religious and scientific opinion held that religious questions could be resolved through the exercise of rational analysis.51 The Calvinistic image of God was replaced with a more benign image of the Deity who had designed the world as a system of benevolence. According to Colin Jager, “an intellectual consensus” developed across the denominations supporting the idea of natural theology. It taught that God’s benevolence was illustrated by the plenitude of his design; every

49 Ibid. 13–15.
51 Ibid.
detail of nature had a unique but interrelated role to achieve a pre-ordained end. However, natural theology became the controversial doctrine of deism if discovering the laws of the universe was treated as the only prerequisite for understanding God. While natural theologians saw nature as just one form of revelation, because God also had qualities such as grace, love and compassion which could not be rationally demonstrated, deists denied that God spoke through revelations other than nature.

In *Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain* Karen O’Brien shows how during the eighteenth century a “latitudinarian consensus” grew up between liberal Anglicans and Rational Dissenters, who shared “self-consciously Enlightened perspectives” on tolerance, rationality and beliefs in a benevolent God. This middle ground could accommodate radicals such as Catharine Macaulay but was closed to deism, freethinking and other forms of unbelief. As Rivers argues, the latitudinarian consensus threatened Dissenters with the potential loss of identity. The period of persecution in the seventeenth century gave a sense of solidarity which was not shared by succeeding generations of Dissenters. Many Rational Dissenters were more sympathetic to Anglican latitudinarians than to Calvinists among themselves.

Barbauld’s analysis of the history of Dissent in “On the Devotional Taste” examined these developments. Describing “the living spirit of devotion” as strong in persecuted sects, she described the unity persecution produced. She wrote: “The social principle mixes with the flame, and renders it more intense; strong parties are formed, and friends or lovers are not more loosely connected than the members of these little communities”. Continuing the metaphor of religious fervour as like a flame, she explained that once “the heat of persecution abates” a second period of reasoning, examination and argument replaces it. A third stage develops as “men grow tired of a controversy which becomes insipid from being

53 Ibid. 44–6.
55 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
exhausted” and persecution is forgotten.59 “Spiritless indifference” occurs as members of the sect become open to “all the seductions” of the world; no longer separated by “their abstinence from fashionable pleasures” they make connections with the establishment.60 Demonstrating an awareness of the danger of latitudinarianism, Barbauld wrote:

Those who a little before, soured by the memory of recent suffering, betrayed perhaps an aversion from having any thing in common with the Church, now affect to come as near it as possible; and, like a little boat that takes a large vessel in tow, the sure consequence is, the being drawn into its vortex.61

She argued that when “things are come to this crisis” a sect must in “a short course of years melt away into the establishment, the womb and the grave of all other modes of religion”.62

Barbauld’s essay provided an accurate analysis of Dissenting history. From the early eighteenth century the numbers of Rational Dissenters were declining, particularly among the gentry.59 The movement’s leaders needed to take their tradition in directions which would attract members without losing their distinctiveness.60 Rivers identifies two basic tendencies within the attitudes and language of Dissent in the first half of the eighteenth century, the first rational, the second evangelical. The rational tendency emphasised toleration, liberty of conscience, free enquiry, hostility to imposition of doctrines and the separation of church and state. As the eighteenth century progressed it came to imply hostility to appealing to the emotions and the influence of the spirit in religion. The evangelical tendency drew on its Puritan heritage and emphasised the doctrines of grace, atonement, justification by faith and the importance of the believers’ own experience and the affections in religion.61

Moderates like Barbauld’s grandfather John Jennings and his friends Philip Doddridge and Isaac Watts (1674–1748) kept the rational and evangelical

59 Ibid. 224.
60 Ibid. 224-5.
61 Ibid. 225.
62 Ibid. 226.
59 Rivers, Reason, Grace and Sentiment 1:169.
60 Ibid. 170.
61 Ibid. 165–7.
tendencies of Dissent in equilibrium in their “affectionate religion”. They distinguished between the cold, rational language of philosophy, which appealed to the listener’s intellect, and the warm, affectionate language of evangelical preaching which inspired the passions. Although Doddridge and Jennings saw Dissent as a “distinct and superior religious tradition”, they believed Dissenters could be friendly to other movements without sharing all their values. They maintained close links with the established church and demonstrated an interest in Methodism. Doddridge described this open-mindedness as “candour and catholicism”.

The ideas of Jennings and Doddridge passed from one generation to another through the network of Dissenting academies. Their curriculum was based on free enquiry and involved examining both sides of an argument to get closer to the truth. Doddridge was Jennings’ student at Kibworth Harcourt, Leicestershire. After Jennings’ early death, in 1729 Doddridge re-established his academy at Northampton and developed Jennings’ intellectual tradition. Doddridge taught Barbauld’s father, John Aikin. After Doddridge died in 1751 his academy moved to Daventry under Caleb Ashworth, but Doddridge’s teaching methods continued. Priestley arrived the following year; like John Aikin, he was steeped in Doddridge/Jennings ideas. When Warrington Academy was founded in 1757, their ecumenical ethos continued. From 1758 Aikin served as tutor first in belles lettres and then theology. In 1761 Priestley took over from Aikin as tutor in languages and belles lettres.

WARRINGTON VALUES
Although, as Mee argues, it is important not to make the culture at Warrington seem “too cosy and homogenous”, there was a set of values which critics identify with the academy. Its ethos was ecumenical and sociable. Abstract theological

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62 Ibid. 167–75.
63 Ibid. 172.
64 Ibid. 182.
65 Ibid. 168.
67 Ibid. 30–1.
68 Mee, Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation 182.
debate took place among the tutors, but this was not a sign of detachment from the real world; their religious beliefs encouraged them to take political action.

The ecumenicalism of the academy has been emphasised in recent scholarship. Warrington gained the reputation as the most heterodox and diverse of the Dissenting academies in both its students and its curriculum.\textsuperscript{69} White describes it as officially Presbyterian but essentially non-denominational.\textsuperscript{70} Its high intellectual standards made it a rival to Oxford and Cambridge.\textsuperscript{71} Aimed at preparing Dissenters for an active, civil life, Warrington offered a modern curriculum which included French, mathematics, science, geography and politics as well as classical languages, \textit{belles lettres}, moral philosophy and divinity.\textsuperscript{72} Wykes argues that Warrington’s reputation was founded on excellence in teaching secular subjects rather than theology, metaphysics or ethics. Evidence for the secular nature of Warrington is demonstrated by the fact that very few students were educated for the ministry.\textsuperscript{73} Wykes suggests that this was partly due to Barbauld’s father; Aikin was more “outstanding” in language and literature than as a theological tutor.\textsuperscript{74}

Sociability was central to Warrington’s culture; as Janowitz explains, it taught the importance of “candid manners” and “an active mind”. Tutors encouraged “an ideal of social intercourse conceived of as informal, familiar and amiable”.\textsuperscript{75} Doctrinal issues were debated, but these discussions were conducted in a friendly atmosphere. Nor was there much division in opinions among the tutors. According to Priestley’s \textit{Autobiography}, at this time he shared the same opinions on Christ’s divinity as the other tutors and they were all Arians.\textsuperscript{76} They did not enter into a close examination of the question of the Trinity; John Aikin had some “obscure notions” on atonement, but the only Socinian was the secretary to the board of trustees, John Seddon, and Priestley commented “we all wondered at

\begin{footnotes}
\item[69] Janowitz, “The Aikin Family, Retrospectively” 214.
\item[70] White, “With Mrs Barbauld it is different” 478.
\item[72] Ibid.
\item[73] Ibid. 38–43.
\item[74] Ibid. 43.
\item[75] Janowitz, “Amiable and Radical Sociability” 62.
\end{footnotes}
Arminianism was in the ascendancy at Warrington. Both Barbauld and Priestley rejected the “tremendous horrors” of Calvinism for belief in a benevolent God who expressed his plenitude through the design of nature. Anti-Calvinism can be found consistently throughout Barbauld’s work. However, she set out her ideas most comprehensively in her Remarks. She wrote:

No one who embraces the common idea of future torments, together with the doctrine of election and reprobation, the insufficiency of virtue to escape the wrath of God, and the strange absurdity (...) that sins committed against an Infinite Being do therefore deserve infinite punishment – no one, I will venture to assert, can believe such tenets, and have them often in his thoughts, and yet be cheerful. Whence a system has arisen so incompatible with that justice and benevolence, which in the discourses of our Saviour are represented as the most essential attributes of the Divine Being, is not easy to trace. (emphasis original)

At Warrington, theological debate had political implications. Rejecting Calvinist beliefs in the natural depravity of man led to the idea that humans were shaped by their environment and thus capable of reaching perfection on earth. McCarthy emphasises the connection between religion and radical politics at the academy as tutors promoted concern for the true principles of liberty and the freedom of the individual to follow the dictates of their conscience. Topical issues such as the Corsican campaign for independence were debated at the college. Like other Warringtonians, for Priestley the practical conclusions he drew from his religious beliefs included a deep-seated commitment to religious, political and civil liberty. He opposed religious bigotry and political corruption and thus became actively involved in all the major reform movements of his day including parliamentary reform, abolition of the slave trade, and support for the American and French Revolutions.

The foundation of Barbauld’s political and religious beliefs was laid at Warrington. Janowitz claims that the “chief influence” on Anna Aikin was her

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77 Ibid.
78 Barbauld, Remarks on Mr Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship (London, 1792) 69.
79 Ibid. 67–8.
80 Wykes, “Joseph Priestley, Minister and Teacher” 27.
81 McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 63.
82 Wykes and Rivers 12.
father. At Warrington she became involved in the religious and political debates and met the leading thinkers of Rational Dissent, most importantly Priestley. At this stage Priestley portrayed himself as Barbauld’s mentor. However, I suggest that this is only partially true; he introduced her to new ideas but the majority of her fundamental beliefs were mainstream, and held by her father and most of the Warrington tutors.

According to Priestley’s autobiography, he first encouraged Barbauld to write poetry. Eight poems were addressed to Priestley or his wife Mary, and at least six other poems stem from her relationship with them. One of Barbauld’s most famous poems “An Address to the Deity” (1773) was inspired by Priestley’s 1767 sermon “On Habitual Devotion”. Priestley’s most distinctive contribution to Barbauld’s thought was the association of ideas and philosophical necessity. Influenced by the philosopher David Hartley’s *Observations on Man* (1749), Priestley believed that the mind’s properties were a mechanical function of sensory experience and the association of ideas rather than a result of innate ideas. In his *Two Discourses* Priestley applied this theory to devotional practice. He suggested that if believers expressed their gratitude to God upon agreeable occurrences and their resignation to his will upon calamitous events, strong emotions would be associated with the idea of God. Describing the consolation this practice would bring, he wrote:

> Your perturbation of mind will subside, as by a charm, and the storm will become settled calm. Tumultuous and excessive joy will also be moderated (...) and thus all your emotions will be rendered more equable, more pleasurable and more lasting.

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84 McCarthy and Kraft 33.
85 Priestley wrote: “Mrs Barbauld has told me that it was the perusal of some verses of mine, that first induced her to write any thing in verse, so that this country is in some measure indebted to me for one of the best poets it can boast of.” Priestley, *Autobiography* 89.
86 Coleman, “Fire Brands, Letters and Flowers” 86.
89 Joseph Priestley, *Two Discourses; i. On Habitual Devotion: ii. On the Duty of not Living to Ourselves; Both Preached to Assemblies of Protestant Dissenting Ministers* (Birmingham, 1782).
90 Ibid. 22.
91 Ibid. 24.
Barbauld echoed Priestley’s sentiments and language in her poem “An Address to the Deity”:

    I feel that name my inmost thoughts controul,
    And breathe an awful stillness thro’ my soul;
    As by a charm, the waves of grief subside;
    Impetuous passion stops her headlong tide. (11–14)

Priestley also promoted the idea of philosophical necessity. Brock defines this as the belief that all human actions were ultimately determined by or necessitated by God’s system of laws which was intelligible to man.\(^{92}\) According to Priestley most of his fellow tutors, including John Aikin, were Necessarians.\(^{93}\) Barbauld’s essay “Against Inconsistency in our Expectations” (1769) supported this philosophical idea. She argued it was “of the utmost consequence to attain just notions of the laws and order of the universe (...) Now, upon an accurate inspection, we shall find, in the moral government of the world, and the order of the intellectual system, laws as determinate, fixed, and invariable as any in Newton's *Principia*”.\(^{94}\)

As this brief survey suggests, during the 1760s Barbauld and Priestley held similar beliefs to the other tutors at Warrington. However, when Priestley left the academy in 1767 to become minister at Mill Hill, Leeds some of his views began to change.\(^{95}\) In his 1775 letter to Barbauld, Priestley claimed that until she wrote “On the Devotional Taste” “I used to flatter myself that yours [notions] were nearly the same with mine”, but if he had examined Barbauld’s work in the early 1770s more closely he would have realised their views were already diverging.\(^{96}\) Barbauld’s poems and essays in her 1773 collections challenged his more controversial ideas.

THE ROLE OF SCIENCE IN RELIGION

Although Priestley and Barbauld valued scientific experimentation as an illustration of God’s design and a means of progress, their attitudes to the extent of its potential differed. Whereas Priestley believed it was possible to discover the laws of nature and thus glorify God, by the early 1770s Barbauld was no longer sure whether finding these truths was possible or even desirable. The divergence in

\(^{92}\) Brock 69.
\(^{93}\) Priestley, *Autobiography* 91.
\(^{94}\) Barbauld, “Against Inconsistency in our Expectations", McCarthy and Kraft 187.
\(^{95}\) Coleman, “Fire Brands, Letters and Flowers” 86.
\(^{96}\) Priestley to Barbauld, 20 December 1775, Priestley and Rutt 1:204
Priestley’s and Barbauld’s views is illustrated by a literary dialogue between them. In his *The history and present state of electricity with original experiments* (1769) Priestley exalted the role of the scientist and scientific discovery. Using the image of the scientist looking down from the mountain top, Priestley wrote:

> It is here that we see the human understanding to its greatest advantage, grasping at the noblest objects, and increasing its own powers, by acquiring to itself the powers of nature; and directing them to the accomplishment of its own views: whereby the security, and happiness of mankind are daily improved.\(^97\)

The focus in this passage is on the potential of human understanding, not on God. The word “grasping” suggests the scientist is using force against nature and attempting to increase “its own powers” at the expense of the natural world. The mention of improving the “security, and happiness of mankind” shows Priestley justified his scientific research as promoting progress. Influenced by Hartley, he concluded, if the pursuit of truth was to promote the glory of God “there is no employment more worthy of our natures, or more conducive to their purification and perfection”.\(^98\)

As Mary Ellen Bellanca argues Barbauld challenged Priestley’s ideas in her essay “The Hill of Science, A Vision” (1773); even the title belittled Priestley’s sense of achievement by turning his “mountain” into a “hill”.\(^99\) Unlike him, Barbauld dwelt less on the potential and more on the pitfalls of scientific experimentation. Using the extended metaphor of climbing the “Hill of Science” to reach the “Temple of Truth”, she described obstacles which prevented scientists from reaching the summit. The road was at times rough and stony with heaps of rubbish. When the climbers thought they were near the top new hills appeared, until the summit seemed “to lose itself in the clouds”; this suggests that there was no guarantee scientists would ever discover the truth.\(^100\) The danger of becoming engrossed in abstract thought is shown in “the Genius”, who ventures to “the tottering edge” of

\(^{97}\) Joseph Priestley, *The history and present state of electricity with original experiments* (London, 1769) iv.
\(^{98}\) Ibid. xxii.
\(^{100}\) Aikin, “The Hill of Science” 29.
the precipice. "Tottering" suggests he is not in control; he risks losing his balance and his reason.

Barbauld’s imagery drew on John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. He described Christian coming to the “Hill of Difficulty” with his two associates, Formalist and Hypocrisie, who were born in the Land of Vainglory. When Christian got to the hill he took the narrow route called “Difficulty” because he perceived “the way to life lies here”. The two other routes, “Danger” and “Destruction”, were taken by Formalist and Hypocrisie. Bunyan’s way to “Destruction” led into “a wide field full of dark mountains”. In her essay Barbauld expanded this description, writing: “I immediately found myself in a vast extended plain, in the middle of which arose a mountain higher than I had before any conception of”. This plain was full of young scientists who thought they were already near the summit. Bunyan described the route called “Danger” as leading into “a great dark Wood”. Barbauld developed this image describing the “wood of error” which was shrouded in fog, cut into labyrinths and “entangled with thorns and briars”. This description echoes her lines in “An Address to the Deity” of being “friendless, in a vale of tears I stray, Where briars wound, and thorns perplex my way” (49–50). It suggested that scientific exploration could be spiritually dangerous for the individual. By adapting Bunyan’s ideas, Barbauld implied that although some scientists were, like Christian, on the right path, making scientific advances as part of a pious religious journey, others were like Formalist and Hypocrisie, making their discoveries for vainglory and praise; such motives led to spiritual danger and destruction.

101 Ibid. 33.
102 Daniel E. White refers to the Bunyanesque host of friends and obstacles in Barbauld’s essay. However, he provides a different reading of the essay. He writes: “After passing through ‘the gates of languages’, then, the aspirants ascend or fall on the basis of values the Aikins and their readers would have associated with contemporary Dissenting academies in direct opposition to the universities.” Universities were criticised for their loose moral standards and propensity for eccentricity and indolence, while the nonconformist academies were perceived as pedagogically innovative and morally rigorous. “The ‘Joineriana’” 521.
104 Ibid. 41.
105 Ibid. 42
107 Bunyan 41.
Barbauld disputed Priestley’s valorisation of philosophical investigation over other ways of life. Priestley claimed: “A PHILOSOPHER ought to be something greater, and better than another man”.  

Bellanca contends that Barbauld reminded Priestley of his own assertion that the claims of benevolence and moral virtue supersede the quest for power over nature. Barbauld claimed that possessing virtue is more important than scientific knowledge. In her essay Barbauld created the allegorical figure of Virtue who says:

> Happier (…) are those whom VIRTUE conducts to the mansions of Content. What, said I, does Virtue then reside in the vale? I am found, said she, in the vale, and I illuminate the mountain, I cheer the cottager at his toil and inspire the sage at his meditation (…) Science may raise you to eminence, but I alone can guide you to felicity.

Indicating her belief in spiritual equality, Barbauld argued that virtue is as accessible to the ordinary person as to the natural philosopher. The nature of God is revealed not only through intellectual exploration but in everyday life. Demonstrating that she was not a deist, she emphasised that the scientific examination of nature provided one form of revelation, but other more personal ones were equally important. Her emphasis on finding “felicity” reflected her belief that God’s fundamental desire was for his creation to be happy, and happiness was more likely to be found through the sociability of the domestic environment, in the “mansions of Content”, than through the “eminence” of isolated scientific study.

In his *Experiments and observations on different kinds of air* (1774), Priestley clarified his ideas to demonstrate greater humility. Concentrating less on the elevated eminence of the scientist and more on the underlying religious purpose of experimentation, he described the dangers to scientists of self-absorption and vanity, thinking that they could “astonish the world with a system as complete as it is new”. Quoting Pope’s “Essay on Criticism”, he described himself as at the foot of the Alps, facing a difficult journey over many mountains, which represent a succession of new difficulties. This description suggests that he saw himself following a pious route like Bunyan’s Christian. Through God’s will, the progress of knowledge would eventually put an end to error and prejudice, but at

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109 Priestley, *The history and present state of electricity* xviii.
110 Bellanca 54.
111 Aikin, “The Hill of Science” 38.
112 Priestley, *Experiments and observations on different kinds of air* (London, 1774) vi.
the moment scientific knowledge remained incomplete and imperfect. The natural philosopher should accept the infinite capacity of God and his own ignorance. However, he claimed that by “pursuing even false lights, real and important truths may be discovered”.

THE NATURE OF THE SOUL

Barbauld and Priestley’s different attitudes to the potential of knowledge to unlock ultimate truths also informed their dialogue about fundamental religious beliefs. As Dybikowski establishes, Priestley determined to remove the “corruptions of Christianity” which he claimed led to the doctrine of the Trinity and the dualism of matter and spirit, by exposing them to the same standards of evidence and enquiry demanded by natural investigations. The ancient doctrine of dualism, based on the idea that body and soul are separate and the immaterial soul survives at death, was questioned by materialists or monists. While dualists argued that the immaterial soul had powers of thought which led to the continuation of personal identity, monists claimed that consciousness is a property that arises from the material and corporeal organisation of creatures. Arguing that human perception and thought are never found apart from organised systems of matter, they believed the soul is created at the same time as the body and when that system dissolves so does the soul.

During the 1770s Priestley’s ideas on the nature of the soul and the status of Christ evolved. Critics debate exactly when he changed from Arianism to Socinianism. Wykes argues that his rejection of the Trinity, original sin and

113 Ibid. vii–viii.
114 Ibid. x.
116 Ibid. 100–2.
117 Wykes claims that Priestley did not adopt Unitarian opinions until about 1769. He published Unitarian works in the 1770s but it was not until later in this decade that he concluded that Christ was human like us. Wykes, “Joseph Priestley, Minister and Teacher” 48; According to Simon Schaffer, Priestley “only moved away from traditional dualism in 1774”. In 1772, in his first volume of his Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion, he can be read as still accepting the tradition that matter was inert and thus not capable of being the original cause of life and action. Simon Schaffer, “Priestley and the Politics of Spirit”, Science, Medicine and Dissent: Joseph Priestley (1733–1804). Papers Celebrating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Joseph Priestley together with a catalogue of an exhibition held at the Royal Society and the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, eds. R. G. W. Anderson and Christopher Lawrence (London: Welcome Trust/Science Museum, 1983) 45. Robert E. Schofield shows that by volume two he argued that belief in the existence of
atonement provoked anger but it was the way he applied Hartley’s materialist psychology that caused most controversy. In his *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777) he argued that the mind did not exist separate from the body and that Christ was human; this led to accusations that he was encouraging the growth of atheism. For most Christians, belief in the immateriality of the soul was essential to belief in the afterlife.\footnote{Wykes, "Joseph Priestley, Minister and Teacher" 42. See also Robert E. Schofield, *The Enlightened Joseph Priestley: A Study of his Life and Work from 1773 to 1804* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004) 59–66.} However, as Dybikowski explains, Priestley argued that primitive Christianity did not promote the idea of a separate soul which was the foundation of the belief in Christ’s pre-existence and deification.\footnote{Dybikowski 100–2.} Instead of the Christian belief that the immaterial soul is freed from the body after death, he argued that they were inseparable and the body would be reconstituted at the resurrection.\footnote{Ibid. 103.}

His idiosyncratic views were challenged even by his friends. Richard Price believed in the pre-existence of the soul and remained an Arian. He engaged in a lengthy debate with Priestley.\footnote{Schofield, *The Enlightened Joseph Priestley* 60–1.} Barbauld’s poem “The Mouse’s Petition” suggests that she was involved in the evolution of Priestley’s ideas. Written during a visit to Priestley in 1771, Barbauld’s poem shows that she entered into a dialogue with him about the nature of the soul. Her views were also unorthodox but they represent a different unorthodoxy from Priestley’s. She wrote:

If mind, as ancient sages taught,  
A never dying flame,  
Still shifts thro’ matter’s varying forms,  
In every form the same,  
Beware, lest in the worm you crush  
A brother’s soul you find;  
And tremble lest thy luckless hand  
Dislodge a kindred mind. (29–36)

the soul separate from the body is based on the false philosophy of the East and is wholly without scriptural authority. Robert E. Schofield, *The Enlightenment of Joseph Priestley: A Study of his Life and Work from 1733 to 1773* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) 176. Dybikowski argues that his materialism became more fully developed and widely publicised first in his *Examination of Reid’s Inquiry* (1774) and in the introductory essays to his edition of Hartley’s *Theory of the Human Mind* (1775). Dybikowski 85–90.
Margaret Anne Doody claims that the moral-philosophical perspective of the poem is remote from Christianity but closely resembles Jainism, and certain branches of Buddhism. It also explores the Epicurean idea that there is no life after death and that the bodily life on earth is all there is. I suggest that by discussing these controversial ideas in her poem, Barbauld was encouraging Priestley to consider alternative hypotheses. Whereas Priestley rejected the pre-existence of souls as a false doctrine, Barbauld treated it with respect as the idea of “ancient sages”. She suggested the soul may be a “never dying flame”, moving through different physical forms. However, by using the tentative word “if” Barbauld indicated that she was considering the possibility of transmigration of souls, not promoting it as a certainty.

Throughout her work Barbauld explored hypotheses about the nature of the soul without coming to a conclusion. This was typical of her approach to religion and politics, she encouraged people to think for themselves and find their own answers. It seems that she believed the soul was immortal but she was not sure exactly what happened to it after death. In one of her last poems, “Life” (1825), she was still questioning the relationship of life, identity and the afterlife. She wrote:

Life! I know not what thou art,
But know that thou and I must part;
And when, or how, or where we met,
I own to me’s a secret yet. (1–4)

These lines suggest she was unsure about when the soul enters the body or what form it will take after death. However, her comments that she does “know” the dead body is “valueless” (7) and that the soul is “freed,/From matter’s base encumbering weed” (15/16) in a “strange divorce” (11) at death suggests that she was a dualist. In the second stanza she posed a series of questions, exploring ideas about where the soul goes after death. Echoing her description in “The Mouse’s Petition” of the soul as “a never dying flame” (30), she speculated whether it entered “the vast ocean of empyreal flame,/From whence thy essence came” (13–14). The imagery

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of joining “the vast ocean” suggests that the individual soul might lose its identity to become part of a larger spiritual whole.\textsuperscript{125} Or was Priestley’s idea, that the spirit and flesh die and are resurrected together, right? Drawing on his idea of the sleep of the soul before resurrection with the body, \textsuperscript{126} she wrote:

> Or dost thou, hid from sight, 
> Wait, like some spell-bound knight, 
> Through blank oblivious years th’ appointed hour, 
> To break thy trance and reassume thy power? (17–20).

Barbauld seemed to find this idea implausible because her next question was: “Yet canst thou without thought or feeling be?” (21); this suggests that she thought the soul continued to exist separately from the body after death.

In the final stanza Barbauld stopped debating metaphysical questions and turned her attention to the practicalities of dying. Portraying “Life” as like an old friend, she hoped it would:

> Then steal away, give little warning, 
> Choose thine own time; 
> Say not Good night, but in some brighter clime 
> Bid me Good morning. (27–30)

By concluding with this simple hope in an afterlife, Barbauld implied that we do not need to know all the answers to spiritual questions in this life; it is the positive end result that matters.

Accepting a degree of mystery in faith, Barbauld thought it was “presumptuous” to strive to understand God’s “essence”.\textsuperscript{127} Her attitude to the debate on the status of Christ reflected this view. Although her description of “the man of Calvary” (23) in her “Hymn V” suggests that she considered Christ was human not divine, her doctrinal stance is unclear.\textsuperscript{128} White argues that she was “deeply suspicious” of Socinianism”; she is considered to have remained an Arian but her writing on this subject is minimal and inconclusive.\textsuperscript{129} McCarthy claims that on most creedal questions it was not clear what she believed, nor did she take theologically precise care of her religious language. She considered Unitarians to be more interested in doctrine than devotion, which was the reverse of her own

\textsuperscript{125} For Barbauld this image of the afterlife was not negative; reflecting her sociable attitudes, in her work she emphasised the positive effects of people uniting together rather than acting individually.\textsuperscript{126} McCarthy and Kraft n.1 175. \textsuperscript{127} Barbauld, “The Unknown God”, The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld 229. \textsuperscript{128} “Hymn V”, McCarthy and Kraft 82. \textsuperscript{129} White, “With Mrs Barbauld it is Different” 477.
preferences. In her *Remarks on Gilbert Wakefield* she explained that men defined God in different ways. She wrote that the Calvinistic God of the catechism “is not the same God with the deity of Thomson’s *Seasons* or Hutcheson’s Ethics. Unity of character is what we adore, is much more essential than unity of person” (emphasis original). James Thomson was one of Barbauld’s favourite poets; his verse championed political liberty and the divine origin of poetry. Hutcheson’s ethics, based on the concept of God’s benevolence and man’s natural goodness, was a major influence on Barbauld’s thought. I suggest that by selecting the poet and the philosopher Barbauld was indicating that imaginative and ethical portrayals of a benevolent God were more likely to inspire people to live virtuous lives than theologians’ debates about the Trinity.

**ACTIVE CHRISTIANITY VERSUS PHILOSOPHICAL SPECULATION**

One of the main differences between Barbauld and Priestley was the different emphases they placed on practical Christianity and philosophical speculation. Barbauld reminded Priestley not to get distracted from active ministry by abstract theorising. The balance in Priestley’s life between these two competing claims altered over the decade. During the early 1770s, although Priestley was developing his theological theory, he was not preoccupied with metaphysical speculation. He still considered an emotional response to religion was more important. Aware that metaphysical discussions were irrelevant to the ordinary believer, he wrote that understanding the gospel did not require intellectual acuteness and that attempts to explain these theories could “lead to nothing but endless and unprofitable controversy.”

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131 Barbauld, *Remarks* 70.
132 Williams 244.
133 In his *An Appeal* Priestley wrote: “The sound knowledge of Christianity is not of importance as a matter of speculation merely, though abstract truths (…) that relate to God, and the maxims of his moral government, are not without their utility and obligation; but the truths that I have cited far nearly affect the sentiments of our hearts, and our conduct in life” (emphasis original). Priestley, *An Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity* (London, 1771) 19.
134 Priestley wrote: “What is obedience without love. It cannot be that of the heart, which, however, is the only thing that is of any real value in religion.” Ibid. 20 (emphasis original).
135 Priestley wrote: “It requires more subtlety and refinement to enter into the principles above mentioned, than the common people are masters of (…) Men of plain understandings, in fact, never do believe any such thing; nor can it be supposed that the gospel, which was intended to be the
When Priestley left his Leeds ministry in 1773 to become companion-librarian to William Petty, second earl of Shelburne, the balance changed. Increasingly his work was aimed at converting atheist philosophes, whom he met in his 1774–5 trip to Paris with Shelburne. Between 1774 and 1778 Priestley wrote his major metaphysical works. I suggest that “On the Devotional Taste” responded to this alteration in Priestley’s life; Barbauld was reminding him of the importance of practical ministry and his duty to ordinary people.

As “On the Devotional Taste” was written in the genre of a “philosophical enquiry” its aim was to provide a carefully reasoned, systematic investigation into the nature, workings and origins of a social or psychological phenomenon. Barbauld had already used this genre in her “An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite agreeable Sensations”, which was published in Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose (1773). In “On the Devotional Taste” she systematically examined the emotions involved in religious devotion and the forms of worship which could encourage or stifle it. She argued that religion could be seen in three different ways. Firstly, as a system of opinions “its sole object is truth, and the only faculty that has any thing to do with it is Reason, exerted in the freest and most dispassionate inquiry”. Secondly, religion’s purpose could be seen as regulating conduct; it was a habit which required “repeated exertions”. Alternatively, it could be “considered as a taste, an affair of sentiment and feeling”. She wrote: “Its seat is in the imagination and the passions, and it has its source in that relish for the sublime, the vast, and the beautiful, by which we taste the charms of poetry and other compositions that address our finer feelings.”

solid foundation of the faith, hope and joy of common people, should require so much acuteness, as is necessary to give even a plausible colour to these strange assertions.” Ibid. 21.

136 Shelburne was a leading politician. For a brief time he had been aide-de-camp to George III. In 1766 he became a member of the earl of Chatham’s cabinet, but he opposed the government’s treatment of the American colonies and was dismissed from office in 1768. Out of office he opposed Lord North’s colonial policy. In 1782 Shelburne became Prime Minister. F. W. Gibbs, Joseph Priestley: Adventurer in Science and Champion of Truth (London: Nelson, 1965) 84.

137 Ibid. 84.

138 McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 149.

139 Ibid. 149–50.


141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid.
Although Barbauld treated her analysis of religion as like a scientific inquiry, reflecting the ambiguity of her attitude to science/philosophy, she also critiqued the limitations of applying these standards to matters of faith. She suggested that philosophy could be “an enemy to religion” because it exerted an influence “perhaps rather unfavourable to the fervor of simple piety”. She implied that philosophical or scientific laws could never fully encompass spiritual experience.

One of the main purposes of her essay was to discover why “the spirit of Devotion” which had been so strong during Dissenters’ period of persecution in the seventeenth century had fallen into disrepute among her late eighteenth-century co-religionists. She wrote that although religion’s tenets had been defended “its affections languish, the spirit of Devotion is certainly at very low ebb amongst us”. She claimed that it was “treated with great indifference, amongst many of those who value themselves on the purity of their faith, and who are distinguished by the sweetness of their morals”.

Her essay was seen by Priestley as an attack on rational religion. However, Barbauld was not rejecting the use of reason, but was only critical if the intellectualisation of faith was taken too far. She claimed that it was safer to trust to our God-given “genuine feelings” than to “any metaphysical subtleties”. She wrote: "It is the character of the present age to allow little to sentiment, and all the warm and generous emotions are treated as romantic by the supercilious brow of a cold-hearted philosophy". Echoing “The Hill of Science”, this passage criticises the “man of science” who sees himself as superior to the ordinary person and thus leaves a vacuum in religion which is filled by some “florid declaimer”; McCarthy and Kraft read this as referring to the Methodists, who were seen as exploiting the emotions of the masses. Barbauld wanted a faith which combined emotion and reason to create a balanced religious experience. I agree with White that Barbauld found a model for her ideas in the affective religion of Doddridge and Jennings. There are many passages in “On the Devotional Taste” which demonstrate the

144 Ibid. 215.
145 Ibid. 211.
146 Ibid. 211–12.
147 Ibid. 217–18.
148 Ibid. 212.
149 McCarthy and Kraft n.3 212.
150 White, “‘With Mrs Barbauld it is Different’” 481–2.
influence of affective religion on Barbauld’s thought. For example she writes: “In compositions addressed to the heart, let us give freer scope to the language of the affections, and the overflowing of a warm and generous disposition”. 151 She criticised “philosophical” prayers which “reject all warm and pathetic imagery and in short, every thing that strikes upon the heart and the senses”. 152

Rivers establishes that Doddridge and Jennings considered that a believer needed to satisfy his reason before he would act on his beliefs. However, they saw the passions or affections as the instigators of action. Without an emotional response religion would have no practical effect, and reaching a person’s heart was the main aim of a preacher. 153 Unlike Priestley during the Shelburne years, Doddridge remained a practical theologian. He considered his primary role was to be a minister and run his academy. 154 Arguing there was no place for doctrinal disputation and speculation in sermons, his addresses were related directly to Christ’s life and its effect on the pious believer. 155 In The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul (1745) Doddridge described his addresses as “suited to persons of every character and circumstance”. Apologising to those of “more elegant taste and refined education” for his plainness of speech, he explained that it was to make his message available to the lowest readers. 156 He insisted that the strength of Dissent lay in reaching a wide range of ordinary people who were distinguished by the seriousness of their faith, not their education or refinement. 157 His emphasis was similar to Barbauld’s in her essay; she considered the spiritual needs of “the common class of pious christians”. 158 Suggesting that a simple faith was more reverent than one based on intellectual arguments, she wrote:

Those who think seldomer of religious subjects, often treat them with more respect than those whose profession keeps them constantly in their view. A plain man of a serious turn would be shocked to hear questions of this nature [God’s attributes and existence] treated with that ease and
negligence with which they are generally discussed by the practised Theologian, or the young lively Academic.\textsuperscript{159}

This anti-intellectual attitude was to recur in her 1790s pamphlets; I suggest that Doddridge’s example was to inspire Barbauld’s democratic approach to politics and religion. She would extend his ideas of communicating religious ideas to ordinary people in simple language to political education.

In her essay, Barbauld distinguished between “free inquiry”, which was advocated by Doddridge and Jennings, and acrimonious disputes which were not. She commented: “Free inquiry is undoubtedly necessary to establish a rational belief; but a disputatious spirit, and fondness for controversy, give the mind a sceptical turn, with an aptness to call in question the most established truths”.\textsuperscript{160} She argued that it was “impossible to preserve that deep reverence for the Deity with which we ought to regard him, when all his attributes, and even his very existence, become the subject of familiar debate”.\textsuperscript{161} I suggest that she considered Priestley had gone too far in questioning the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. 

His “disputatious spirit” risked undermining his faith. She wrote:

\begin{quote}
It is happy for a man when he does not find much to alter in the religious system he has embraced; for if that undergoes a total revolution, his religious feelings are too generally so weakened by the shock, that they hardly recover again their original tone and vigour.\textsuperscript{162}
\end{quote}

She argued that a person should explore their religious doubts in private, not make them a matter of public debate. The implication is that otherwise it could threaten not just the happiness and well-being of the individual but society. She wrote:

\begin{quote}
A state of doubt is not a pleasant state. It is painful, anxious, and distressing beyond most others: it disposes the mind to dejection and modesty. Whoever therefore is so unfortunate as not to have settled his opinions in important points, will proceed in the search of truth with deep humility, unaffected earnestness, and a serious attention to every argument that may be offered, which he will be much rather inclined to revolve in his own mind, than to use as materials for dispute.\textsuperscript{163}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid. 213–14.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid. 213.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid. 215.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid. 214–15.
As well as being a general criticism, I consider Barbauld's attack on acrimonious debate had a specific, topical impetus; in 1774 Priestley had written a heated polemic against the Scottish common sense philosophers, Thomas Reid (1710–96), James Beattie (1735–1803) and James Oswald (1715–69). As Schofield establishes, the Scottish philosophers argued that common sense superseded almost all reasoning. They suggested a system of innate perceptive principles; absolute knowledge in religion was to be gained through the irresistible power of simple belief, or common sense, not through reasoning. Priestley fundamentally disagreed with their views which challenged his ideas of associationism. Dybikowski argues that Priestley's basic objection to Reid was that his appeal to common sense effectively checked all further inquiry. He argued that setting aside reasoning about the principles of religion would lead to credulity, enthusiasm and mysticism. Nor were the effects restricted to religion because these ideas could be used to support conservatism in politics.

Barbauld's argument in her essay sounded more similar to the common sense philosophy than Priestley's ideas. She wrote that devotion is "in a great degree constitutional", and religious superstitions are some of "the strongest instincts in our nature". Similarities were not surprising because Barbauld was influenced by Hutcheson; as O'Brien establishes, the Scottish moral philosophical line stretched from Hutcheson and Kames to Reid and Beattie. It seems that Barbauld disagreed with the contents and style of Priestley's attack; she was warning Priestley not to take such a strident tone with his opponents. His lack of politeness went against the Warrington culture of sociability. Priestley's attack on the common sense philosophers had led to reviewers accusing him of being arrogant, contemptuous and illiberal. In his letter to Barbauld, Priestley defended his argumentative style as essential to the process of reaching the religious truth.

165 Dybikowski 87–9.
166 Barbauld, "On the Devotional Taste" 211, 220.
168 This accusation was made in the Monthly Review 52 (1775): 289–96. Schofield, The Enlightened Joseph Priestley n.5 45.
169 Priestley, The Theological and Miscellaneous Works 1: 207.
DENOMINATIONAL DEMANDS VERSUS ECUMENICALISM

Priestley’s opposition to Barbauld’s essay was not just ideological; it was also for topical, practical reasons. Priestley and Lindsey had recently established Unitarianism and needed to attract members. As G. M. Ditchfield demonstrates, by the 1770s the latitudinarian consensus was under strain. No individual took a more visible and important role in exposing the fundamental differences between Anglican latitudinarianism and Rational Dissent than Priestley. He believed that Rational Dissent would become isolated, in a dangerous position between a more “comprehensive and authoritarian” established church on one side and an evangelically revived orthodox Dissent on the other.¹⁷⁰

By the 1770s Rational Dissenters felt a sense of grievance at the civil and political disabilities placed on them. There was potential for a religious realignment as some Anglican clergy were dissatisfied about their obligation to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Priestley’s writings from 1767 to 1769 inflamed their sense of dissatisfaction. Calling on honest clergy to repudiate man-made creeds, he doubted that any thinking person could subscribe to the majority of the articles.¹⁷¹ In July 1771 a group of Anglican clergy, led by Lindsey, met at the Feathers Tavern in London to petition Parliament to abolish subscription to the Thirty Nine articles.¹⁷² In 1772 a bill was debated and defeated. In 1773 it was introduced and defeated in the Lords again.¹⁷³ After this failure, some Anglican ministers who disagreed with the Thirty-Nine Articles chose to stay within the Church of England. However, Lindsey resigned and in April 1774 set up the first Unitarian congregation in Essex Street, London.¹⁷⁴

At this time Priestley published a letter aimed at the lay members of the Church of England, who liked the social side of the established church but were unhappy with the doctrine. Priestley warned them not to imagine that they could change the church from within because the bishops would not permit reforms.¹⁷⁵ Barbauld’s essay commented on these recent events. She wrote:

¹⁷² Ditchfield 150–63.
¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 27.
As to the much larger number, on whom she [Religion] has only an imperfect influence, making them decent if not virtuous (…) for all these the genius of an establishment is more eligible, and better fitted to cherish that moderate devotion of which alone they are capable. All those who have not strength of mind to think for themselves, who would live to virtue without denying the world, who wish much to be religious, but more to be genteel – naturally flow into the establishment (…) it is better their minds should receive only a tincture of religion, than be wholly without it.\textsuperscript{176}

Although her tone was ironic, damning such conformists with faint praise as “decent if not virtuous”, capable of only “moderate devotion” and lacking “strength of mind”, Priestley took her comments as an endorsement of remaining in the Church of England. As White shows, in Priestley’s view Barbauld’s “new-fangled Dissent” blurred the lines between nonconformity and the establishment.\textsuperscript{177} He claimed that Barbauld’s essay had secured the applause of:

Those Dissenters in particular who wish to have their defection from us made easier to them than it would otherwise have been. On this account I cannot help wishing that you had, at least, qualified what you have said on these subjects, with some intimation of the stress, which I am sure you cannot but lay, on religious truth, and the rights of conscience.\textsuperscript{178}

Barbauld valued religious truth and rights of conscience, but she did not believe one denomination had a monopoly on truth. She had a tolerant, pragmatic attitude to the established churches. In her essay “On Monastic Institutions” (1773), instead of dwelling on the doctrines of Catholicism, she praised the positive effects monasteries had on society through their educational and charitable contribution. In “On the Devotional Taste” she argued that different modes of religion, even with their faults, were “mutually useful”.\textsuperscript{179} As in “On Monastic Institutions” she set her argument in a progressive historical context, writing: “Perhaps there is not an establishment so corrupt, as not to make the gross of mankind better than they would be without it (…) They answer their end; they die away; others spring up, and take their place”.\textsuperscript{180}

\textsuperscript{176} Barbauld, “On the Devotional Taste” 228–9

\textsuperscript{177} White writes: “There was a good deal of truth in Priestley’s accusations and Barbauld’s essay did pose a challenge to rational Dissent in general and Unitarianism in particular. But at the same time it presented as much of a threat to the Established Church by calling for a devotional culture which if anything revived and updated an earlier affective and populist brand of non-conformity.” “With Mrs Barbauld it is Different” 488.

\textsuperscript{178} Priestley, \textit{The Theological and Miscellaneous Works} 1: 208.


\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
Her analysis of the utility of other denominations was read by Priestley as praise of the Church of England and Catholicism.\textsuperscript{181} He accused her of adopting “the maxim ascribed to the Papists, viz. that ‘ignorance is the mother of devotion’”.\textsuperscript{182} In \textit{An Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity} (1771) Priestley argued that the Protestants’ attachment to reason in religion was one of the most important differences from Catholicism. He explained that if a “Popish priest” persuaded a person to abandon reason “they can lead you whither they please, and impose upon you every absurdity which their sinister views may make it expedient for them that you should embrace”.\textsuperscript{183} In her essay Barbauld claimed that there is a place for superstition within faith, an idea abhorrent to Rational Dissenters, but she argued this from a Hartleyan, associationist perspective. Turning Priestley’s argument about the use of associationism in religious devotion against him, she wrote: “The root of all superstition is the principle of the association of ideas, by which, objects naturally indifferent become dear and venerable, through their connection with interesting ones.”\textsuperscript{184} She added the caveat that superstition has been “much abused” giving rise to the worship of relics, pilgrimages and priestly power.\textsuperscript{185} Making her feeling about the Church of Rome plain, she described it as “that accumulated mass of error”.\textsuperscript{186}

Priestley took Barbauld’s essay personally. He explained that his views were “in almost every respect the very reverse of those in your essay”.\textsuperscript{187} His serious acquaintances, who were also Barbauld’s best friends, were “exceedingly hurt” and agreed with him in opposing it.\textsuperscript{188} This was not completely accurate; although Andrew Kippis and Theophilus Lindsey attacked her views, some

\textsuperscript{181} Barbauld wrote: “An \textit{Establishment} affects the mind by splendid buildings, music, the mysterious pomp of antient ceremonies; by the sacredness of peculiar orders, habits, and titles; by its secular importance; and by connecting with religion, ideas of order, dignity, and antiquity. It speaks to the heart, through the imagination and the senses; and though it never can raise devotion so high as we have described it in a beginning sect, it will preserve it from ever sinking into contempt.” “On the Devotional Taste” 226 (emphasis original).
\textsuperscript{182} Priestley, \textit{The Theological and Miscellaneous Works} 1: 206.
\textsuperscript{183} Priestley, \textit{An Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity} 5.
\textsuperscript{184} Barbauld, “On the Devotional Taste” 220.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid. 227.
\textsuperscript{187} Priestley, \textit{The Theological and Miscellaneous Works} 1: 204.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid. 208.
Warringtonians, including William Enfield and her brother John Aikin, praised her essay.\textsuperscript{189}

Mee argues that by the 1770s Barbauld had “more affinity with Enfield’s amiability than Priestley’s zeal”.\textsuperscript{190} Drawing on Martin Fitzpatrick’s research, I agree with Mee’s assessment. As both friend and critic of Priestley, Enfield objected to his attacks on the Anglican establishment because he considered that an established religion was justified on utilitarian grounds. He wanted all denominations to meet on the ground of “Common Sense”. Rather than advancing the cause of truth, Enfield thought controversy might have the opposite effect of increasing prejudice.\textsuperscript{191}

Mee claims that Barbauld was closer to the mainstream opinion at Warrington than Priestley at this time. Her approach was sociable, polite and ecumenical.\textsuperscript{192} However, McCarthy argues that Barbauld’s essay rejected her Warrington heritage. He claims that Barbauld’s “problem” with her father and Warrington was “its academic keenness to worry nuances of doctrine, its eagerness to theorize, define, and dispute at the cost (to her) of chilling the expression of religious emotion”.\textsuperscript{193} As Mee’s and McCarthy’s readings demonstrate, views on this debate depend on which “Warrington values” are treated as paramount. I agree with McCarthy that Barbauld would have found Warrington tutors’ over-intellectualised debates, such as her father’s complicated ideas on the atonement, unpalatable. However, his argument that she found the lack of emotion in the Warrington model of Dissent “wanting” requires closer scrutiny.\textsuperscript{194} It was applicable to some tutors and not others. At times this criticism could be made of Priestley but contemporary portrayals suggest her father valued emotion. Enfield’s funeral sermon to the Reverend Aikin suggests that he continued the Doddridge/Jennings tradition. Aikin’s lectures “were adapted to

\textsuperscript{189} Enfield wrote a favourable article in the \textit{Monthly Review}. For a discussion of contemporary views on the essay see McCarthy, \textit{Voice of the Enlightenment} 162–4.
\textsuperscript{190} Mee, \textit{Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation} 184.
\textsuperscript{192} Mee, \textit{Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation} 174.
\textsuperscript{193} McCarthy, \textit{Voice of the Enlightenment} 154.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid. 150.
improve the heart, as well as to inform the understanding”. Perhaps alluding to the dispute between Priestley and the common sense philosophers, and reflecting Aikin’s belief in polite debate rather than confrontation, Enfield continued:

He was no advocate for that indolent philosophy (so well adapted to the spirit and manners of the present age) which has raised an unnatural contest between ‘Reason and Common Sense’, and instructed men to trust to their feelings rather than to their understandings. (emphasis original)

Important aspects of Barbauld’s faith were inherited from her father, as is demonstrated by her dedication of “On the Devotional Taste” to him as “a testimony of veneration” and “a tribute of duty” from “his grateful and obedient daughter”. She explained that her essay was “intended to serve that cause to which the labours of his life have been so honourably and successfully devoted, the cause of religion and virtue”. I suggest her belief in the primary importance of Christianity in action came from her father. Enfield stated: “He regarded it as the first Christian duty to ‘seek for glory, honour, and immortality by a patient continuance in well doing’.”

Barbauld’s appreciation of the importance of aesthetics was also influenced by her father. He was described as having a deep passion for literature, drama and poetry. The classicist Gilbert Wakefield noted that Aikin “had an intimacy with the best authors of Greece and Rome, superior to what I have ever known in any dissenting minister (…) His taste for composition was correct and elegant and his repetition of beautiful passages (…) highly animated, and expressive of sensibility” (emphases original). Enfield’s funeral sermon concluded he was a person “with all the discernment and feeling of a man of true taste”. In her essay Barbauld emphasised the role of aesthetic taste and sensibility in religious devotion; this was a major difference between her and Priestley. As Coleman sets out, although Priestley was well read, he saw literature as non-essential and artificial. In contrast,

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196 Ibid. 8.
197 Qtd. in Priestley *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works* 1: 204.
198 Qtd. in ibid. 204.
for Barbauld it was a fundamental human need and thus a means to heighten religious experience.\(^{203}\)

I argue that Barbauld, rather than rejecting her patriarchal tradition, was adding female influences to the equation to make a whole. Lucy Newlyn claims that Barbauld explores “the possibility of an aesthetic which mediates between the masculine and the feminine (each needing the other for its completion)”.\(^{204}\) Building on Newlyn’s assessment and White’s argument that Barbauld domesticated masculine elements of Dissent, using the affectionate religion of Doddridge, Jennings and Watts, I claim that the devotional poet Elizabeth Singer Rowe personified that tradition for Barbauld.\(^{205}\) She provided a female role model whose use of poetry to promote her faith was aesthetically and emotionally appealing to Barbauld. In her poem “Verses on Mrs Rowe” (1773) Barbauld described Rowe as her “muse” (39). She wrote:

\[
\text{Thy gentle sweetness thro’ my soul diffuse:} \\
\text{Let me thy palm, tho’ not thy laurel share,} \\
\text{And copy thee in charity and prayer.} \\
\text{Tho’ for the bard my lines are far too faint,} \\
\text{Yet in my life let me transcribe the saint. (40–4)}\]

As the words “soul”, “palm” “saint” and “prayer” demonstrate Rowe was a religious as well as a literary muse. As a close friend and literary collaborator with Isaac Watts, Rowe was a leading female figure in affectionate religion. Barbauld’s acknowledgement of the centrality of Rowe’s influence on her religious and aesthetic ideas emphasised the contribution of women to Dissent. As one of the most prominent Whig poets of the early eighteenth century, Rowe connected Barbauld to an aesthetic movement which used poetry for political and religious purposes. Prescott explains that the Whig poets presented poetry as a reformist mission; biblical verse was to save the nation through the moral rejuvenation of literature and society.\(^{207}\) As Williams establishes, in The Advancement and

\(^{203}\) Coleman writes: “Priestley’s low opinion of aesthetics and the fine arts, his scorn for ‘the elegant enjoyments of life,’ are wit large in his sermons and published writings.” “Fire Brands, Letters and Flowers” 88.


\(^{205}\) White, “With Mrs Barbauld it is Different” 481–4.


\(^{207}\) Prescott, Women, Authorship and Literary Culture 157–8.
Reformation of Poetry (1702) and “The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry” (1704) John Dennis argued that the Bible showed poetry was the natural language of religion. The aim of poetry and Christianity was the same; to delight and reform mankind by exciting the passions in a way that reconciled them to reason. 208 In the preface to Divine Hymns and Poems, Rowe and her collaborators argued that poetry could affect people more than “abstract reasoning and philosophy”. 209

Many of Barbauld’s early poems show Rowe’s influence. The 1773 collection of her poems is very similar to Rowe’s work in style vocabulary and contents. “An Address to the Deity”, although inspired by Priestley’s sermon, was also influenced by Rowe. In the poem Barbauld echoed Rowe’s intense language of devotion. Barbauld wrote: “Till all my sense is lost in infinite, / And one vast object fills my aching sight” (19–20). 210 The idea of “aching” for God is reminiscent of Rowe’s passionate desire for his presence.

NEO-PLATONISM

Rowe’s relationship with Christ was at the centre of her work and is expressed through the divine love metaphor. Instead of using argument to appeal to the mind of her reader, she employed affective or pathetic language to engage the reader’s heart. However, Sharon Achinstein argues that, after the early death of her husband Thomas in 1715, Rowe’s poetry at times suggested confusion between love of Christ and love of her husband. 211 Drawing on the Canticles in which Christ is the bridegroom and the church the bride, she adapted this common metaphor to the image of the bride searching for her Lord. 212 Although it was controversial, Isaac Watts endorsed Rowe’s approach. 213 In his Horae Lyricae he referred to Solomon’s “Song of Songs” and the Psalms of David. He wrote: “Are not the noblest instances of the Grace of Christ represented under the figure of a Conjugal

209 Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions (London, 1704) 4.
213 Watts addressed the criticism of Rowe’s type of poetry in his preface to Rowe’s Devout exercises of the heart in meditation and soliloquy, Prayer and Praise (London, 1738) xiii.
State?"^{214} By reclaiming the language used in love poetry for devotional verse from "the Hands of Impure writers" Rowe and Watts aimed "to make it appear that Virtue and Love are not such strangers as they are represented".^{215}

Barbauld’s essay suggests that she agreed with Rowe that marital love was an intimation of immortality.^{216} Writing shortly after her marriage to Rochemont in 1774, Barbauld claimed in “On the Devotional Taste”:

You can hardly address the greatest of all Beings in a strain of more profound adoration than the lover uses to the object of his attachment. But the truth is, Devotion does in no small degree resemble that fanciful and elevated kind of love which depends not on the senses.^{217}

Christian Platonists argued that the erotic imagination was given by God to lead us to Him; the passions could help a believer to achieve transcendent devotion. These ideas gained popularity through the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau; in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, he argued that erotic earthly love is an intimation of heavenly devotion.^{218} Barbauld had read *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and it suited her philosophical and personal state of mind at this time.^{219} Barbauld’s approach reflected late eighteenth-century “taste” and thus had the potential to widen the appeal of Dissent. Newlyn argues that her writing reached a wide readership which had enjoyed *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and were responsive to the claims of sensibility.^{220} As Taylor explains, Mary Wollstonecraft was also attracted by Rousseau’s ideas; it seems likely that Barbauld’s essay influenced her as she reprinted passages from “On the Devotional Taste” in her *Female Reader* and praised it for having done honour to the female pen. Like Barbauld, she believed in a faith based in reason but she found some aspects of Rational Dissent cold.^{221}

Barbauld realised that she was entering dangerous territory by comparing sexual and heavenly love. She wrote: “But it is time to retire; we are treading upon enchanted ground”.^{222} The word “enchanted” indicates “fairy” and by implication hallowed and forbidden ground. Her assessment of the risk was confirmed by

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215 Ibid. xix.
219 McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 137.
220 Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism* 144.
Priestley’s response; he was outraged at Barbauld’s suggestion that devotion could be compared to the passion of love. He called her idea “a profanation” and added: “If there be any person who apply the language of ‘profound adoration’ to a human being, I consider it as a most abominable practice, as nothing less than direct impiety”. According to Coleman, what disturbed Priestley was Barbauld’s “desire to shift devotion away from a hierarchical/filial model to a more egalitarian/Romantic model”. Priestley thought devotion should reflect the mixture of love and reverence that a child felt for his parent; in contrast Barbauld modelled devotion upon the passion of heterosexual love.

ENTHUSIASM

Priestley considered Barbauld’s intimate approach to religion was too enthusiastic. In his 1767 sermon on habitual devotion, he had warned against developing “a kind of familiarity in our conceptions of God, which leads to such a passionate joy, as we naturally indulge with respect to beings like ourselves” (emphasis original).

Such warmth of devotion could be misleading and of short duration.

As critics demonstrate, Barbauld’s attitude to enthusiasm was complex. McCarthy claims that she “had a tendency to the upper end of enthusiasm”. He argues that Barbauld’s and Rowe’s attitudes to enthusiasm were similar and linked to a tradition of female mysticism. Mee claims that it would be wrong to see Barbauld as an unqualified proponent of moderation; she realised the potential of enthusiasm to promote intensity of religious and political feeling in her work.

Barbauld distinguished between the different types and degrees of enthusiasm. She denounced the public, crowd-rousing aspects of Methodism, and at the other extreme isolated intellectual speculation, but she admired the private, ecstatic writing of poets like Rowe. I suggest that her distinctions reflected the Whig poets’ attitude to enthusiasm. As Prescott establishes, critics of the Whig agenda claimed that biblical verse could inspire a “pernicious enthusiasm” linked to extreme passion and irrationality. However, Dennis and Watts countered these

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227 Ibid. 156.
228 Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation* 176
criticisms by emphasising the explicitly reformist and moral agenda of their religious verse.\textsuperscript{229}

In “On the Devotional Taste”, Barbauld defined “dangerous” enthusiasm as when religious thoughts engrossed the mind to the exclusion of real life. She wrote:

Religion is a sentiment which takes such strong hold on all the most powerful principles of our nature, that it may easily be carried to excess. The Deity never meant our regards to him should engross the mind: that indifference to sensible objects (...) is not perhaps desirable.\textsuperscript{230}

It seems that she was aware of the attacks made on Rowe for her rapturous verse.\textsuperscript{231} Defending this type of enthusiasm, she wrote: “I may make use of an inaccurate expression, I may paint Him to my imagination too much in the fashion of humanity; but while my heart is pure, while I depart not from the line of moral duty, the error is not dangerous”.\textsuperscript{232} “Moral duty” suggests the Whig poets’ justification of enthusiastic verse. The mention of a pure heart recalls her emphasis on Rowe’s purity in her “Verses on Mrs Rowe”.\textsuperscript{233}

Barbauld knew that Dissenters, particularly women, were often criticised for over-enthusiasm. As Mee explains, women were caricatured as confusing erotic and ecstatic emotions.\textsuperscript{234} Barbauld directly confronted these prejudices. Reversing the idea that expressing strong religious emotions was a weakness, she argued that, if properly regulated, devotional enthusiasm could be a strength; it could enhance religious experience without excluding reason.\textsuperscript{235}

Drawing on the earl of Shaftesbury’s ideas, Barbauld saw sociability as one of the ways of regulating enthusiasm. Mee explains that Shaftesbury saw enthusiasm as natural, but it had to be cultivated and regulated if it was not to degenerate into the vulgar enthusiasm of the crowd. Although retirement to prepare for integration in the world was necessary, prolonged isolation was unnatural as human beings are sociable. An individual had to apply self-regulation

\textsuperscript{229} Prescott, \textit{Women, Authorship and Literary Culture} 157.
\textsuperscript{231} McCarthy, \textit{Voice of the Enlightenment} 157.
\textsuperscript{232} Barbauld, “On the Devotional Taste” 218.
\textsuperscript{233} Describing Rowe’s life she wrote: “What purer heaven could angels taste below?” (18), Barbauld, “Verses on Mrs Rowe” 97.
\textsuperscript{234} Mee, \textit{Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation} 35–6.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid. 176.
and “taste” to get the right balance of social passions.\textsuperscript{236} In her essay Barbauld wrote: “There cannot be any danger of such excesses, where the mind is guarded by a rational faith, and the social affections have full scope in the free commerce and legitimate connections of society.”\textsuperscript{237} Her “Verses on Mrs Rowe” suggests that her muse regulated her enthusiasm by combining “charity and prayer” (42).

Barbauld’s view of enthusiasm differed from Priestley’s. Drawing on Mee’s argument, I suggest that she considered two aspects of his approach demonstrated excessive enthusiasm; his pursuit of abstract ideas and the zealous way in which he then promoted those ideas.\textsuperscript{238} Barbauld’s view had similarities to Hume’s and Burke’s ideas. Mee explains, they considered “the zealot who will sacrifice everything to the dominant productions of his brain (here the products of Reason)” was displaying a form of enthusiasm. In the 1790s Burke represented reformers like Priestley as “cold system-builders, cut off from feeling and experience by the solitude of metaphysical abstractions”.\textsuperscript{239} However, Mee writes:

If she [Barbauld] is concerned about the intellectualization of religion in her responses to Priestley, that is not the same thing as suggesting that she thought him cold. Quite the contrary was the case in fact (…) What he lacks in Barbauld’s estimation is not feeling, but the regulatory manners of sensibility as she understood them in the 1770s.\textsuperscript{240}

Priestley’s argumentative style reminded Barbauld of the vehement enthusiasm of the militant Civil War sects.\textsuperscript{241}

Associating vulgar enthusiasm with ignorance, Priestley believed that his careful historical and textual scholarship made his work the antithesis of enthusiastic.\textsuperscript{242} However, Barbauld believed that this detailed scholarship, if it became too all-consuming and isolating, could turn into a form of enthusiasm which she equated with illness. In “On the Devotional Taste” she emphasised the mental and spiritual dangers involved in trying to discover the laws which govern the universe. She wrote: “When we trace the footsteps of creative energy through regions of unmeasured space, and still find new wonders disclosed and pressing

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{236} Ibid. 39–40.
\item \textsuperscript{237} Barbauld, “On the Devotional Taste” 222.
\item \textsuperscript{238} Mee, \\textit{Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation} 175.
\item \textsuperscript{239} Ibid. 87.
\item \textsuperscript{240} Ibid. 175.
\item \textsuperscript{241} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{242} Ibid. 83.
\end{itemize}
upon the view – we grow giddy with the prospect.” The physical symptom of giddiness was a sign of lack of balance. The vastness of the “regions of unmeasured space” links this type of enthusiasm to sublime experience.

BARBAULD’S USE OF THE SUBLIME
Throughout Barbauld’s work the aesthetic theory of the sublime is used to examine the potential and risks of enthusiasm. In her analysis of “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” Janowitz explains that Barbauld believed the power of the sublime could prompt “our finer feelings” in the same way as aesthetically pleasing writing. She argues that Barbauld was drawing on Addison’s Spectator essays in 1712 more than Edmund Burke in her sense of the sublime. Influenced by Newtonian science, Addison compared the power of the cosmos and our inability to synthesise it into a single concept or image to our inability to know God.

Developing Janowitz’s ideas further, I suggest that Barbauld’s poem was influenced by the Whig poets, John Dennis, Richard Blackmore and Rowe. According to Williams, they examined the sublime quality of human perception and transcendent flight, linking it to divine providence and scientific discovery. What appealed to them was not the idea of the universe as a fixed order based on reason but the imaginative potential of the complexities of Newton’s divine structure. Barbauld subtly acknowledged the influence of the Whig poets in her title; by calling it a meditation she reflected Dennis’ idea that meditating on an ordinary object could transform it to release the enthusiastic passions of admiration, joy, terror, sadness, horror and desire. Dennis’ type of enthusiasm was based in the awe and admiration a real object could inspire. He used the example of the sun; in her poem Barbauld used the planets.

As Barbauld’s nocturne makes a mental journey which explores the potential of abstract thought and sublime experience there are similarities to Richard Blackmore’s “Creation: A Philosophical Poem”. It examined the sublime quality of human perception as the poet imagines himself soaring to the outer limits

244 Janowitz, “The Aikin Family, Retrospectively” 224.
245 Ibid. 219–23.
246 Williams 188
247 Ibid. 185.
of the universe. Like Barbauld, Blackmore juxtaposed the human and divine, large and small, to emphasise the dynamism of the universe.\textsuperscript{248}

Approaching the limits of the known universe inspired Barbauld’s intellectual imagination but there was danger involved. In the poem Barbauld expressed her fear that entering this infinite landscape she was separated from God:

\begin{quote}
But oh thou mighty mind! Whose powerful word
Said, thus let all things be, and thus they were,
Where shall I seek thy presence? (99–101)\textsuperscript{249}
\end{quote}

By invoking God and using the Biblical language of how He created the world through his Word, Barbauld was drawing on the Whig model of poetry. Whig poems often explored the terrifying aspects of the sublime, inviting visions of apocalypse, but then countered it by introducing a controlling figure at the centre of the chaos.\textsuperscript{250} Barbauld subtly acknowledged her debt to the earlier tradition at the end of the poem when she wrote:

\begin{quote}
The hour will come
When all these splendours bursting on my sight
Shall stand unveil’d, and to my ravish’d sense
Unlock the glories of the world unknown. (119–22)
\end{quote}

“Ravish’d” was a word closely associated with Rowe as she used it frequently in her devotional verse. According to Williams, this language was typical of much early eighteenth-century Whig poetry which used the vocabulary of sublime affect to denote the magnitude of the subject matter, placing it beyond comprehension. It depended on the reader being overwhelmed by a linguistic force which transcended logical reason.\textsuperscript{251} By using the word “ravish’d” Barbauld was implying that the afterlife was beyond human understanding; any intimation of it could only be gained through sublime emotional experience, not reason.

Barbauld explored the religious potential of the sublime in more detail in “On the Devotional Taste”. Rowe’s influence can be detected in her argument that a human-scale image of God was more likely to inspire adoration. She wrote:

\begin{quote}
A Being without hatred and without fondness, going on in one steady course of even benevolence, neither delighted with praises, nor moved by
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{248} Ibid. 186–9.
\item \textsuperscript{249} Barbauld, “A Summer Evening’s Meditation”, McCarthy and Kraft 101.
\item \textsuperscript{250} Williams 193.
\item \textsuperscript{251} Ibid. 191.
\end{itemize}
importunity, does not interest us so much as a character open to the feelings of indignation, the soft relentings of mercy, and the partialities of particular affections. We require some common nature, or at least the appearance of it, on which to build our intercourse.  

She argued that the human mind is “overwhelmed with the indistinct vastness” of a sublime image of the Deity. It made God too distant for our imaginations; in contrast to His complexity, a human seemed insignificant and unworthy. Representing the Deity in too abstract form destroyed “that affectionate regard which is felt by the common class of pious christians”.

Rejecting her earlier comments in her essay “Against Inconsistency in our Expectations”, she criticised philosophers who tried to reduce everything to the operation of general laws. She wrote: “They turn our attention to larger views, attempt to grasp the whole order of the universe and in the zeal of a systematic spirit seldom leave room for those particular and personal mercies which are the food of gratitude”. The word “grasp” recalled Priestley’s description of how scientific discovery extended knowledge in The history and present state of electricity. “Zeal” suggested these philosophers displayed excessive enthusiasm. The “systematic spirit” which does not understand other forms of revelation implies deism. Using the extended metaphor of the philosopher as a landscape painter, she wrote:

They [philosophers] trace the great outline of nature, but neglect the colouring which gives warmth and beauty to the piece (...) As in a landscape it is not such a vast extensive range of country as pains the eye to stretch to its limits, but a beautiful well-defined prospect, which gives the most pleasure – so neither are those unbounded views in which philosophy delights, so much calculated to touch the heart as home views and nearer objects.

The philosopher/painter missed the domestic detail which moves the emotions. Barbauld suggested that “attention to larger views” prevented a person experiencing the smaller-scale “particular and personal mercies” of God.

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253 Ibid. 217.
254 Ibid. 215.
255 Ibid. 216.
256 Ibid. 216–17.
In a 1776 letter to Nicholas Clayton, Barbauld explained her views in more detail. Repeating her idea of sublime experience being dangerous to the mental health of the individual, she claimed that although “current philosophy” had made possible “a more magnificent idea of the Deity” putting God at this distance might be “attended with such an annihilation of ourselves as is nearly painful”. However, philosophical views should not be avoided because “they enlarge the mind, give some high pleasures and set religion upon a broad and firm basis”. Instead they should be balanced “by often suffering our minds to dwell on those more affecting circumstances which arise in (…) the more personal intercourse of a devout heart with its maker. The former is the sublime, the latter the pathetic of Religion” (emphasis original). For Barbauld, Priestley’s approach personified the sublime, while Rowe represented the pathetic; her mention of the “more personal intercourse of a devout heart” recalled the title of Rowe’s religious poems Devout exercises of the heart in meditation and soliloquy, Prayer and Praise (1738).

RAPPROCHMENT BETWEEN BARBAULD AND PRIESTLEY

“On the Devotional Taste” marked a major divergence of Barbauld and Priestley’s spiritual, philosophical and aesthetic views but the personal breach between them was temporary. When Priestley returned to active ministry at New Meeting, Birmingham in 1780, the friends drew closer. Priestley was doing what Barbauld believed was a Christian’s moral duty: practising Christianity in action and teaching his faith. Wykes argues that at this time Priestley was more involved in politics than he subsequently chose to acknowledge. During the 1780s, New Meeting was one of the leading congregations to engage in politics and reform. From the mid-1780s Priestley published a series of overtly political works. These actions were more in tune with Barbauld’s concept of Christian duty than his metaphysical speculations.

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258 Priestley published The Importance and Extent of Free Inquiry in Matters of Religion (1785), Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt (1787) and The Conduct to be Observed by Dissenters in Order to Procure the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts (1789). Wykes, “Joseph Priestley, Minister and Teacher” 42.
A literary acknowledgement of the rapprochement between Barbauld and Priestley came in 1782; the preface to Priestley’s *Two Discourses* suggests that he was addressing Barbauld’s criticisms.\(^{259}\)

If my theological publications have been more of a *speculative* than a *practical* nature, it is merely because circumstances have led me to it, and by no means because the former are more pleasing to me. I hope I shall always consider speculation as subservient to practice. The most exact knowledge of truth, and the greatest zeal for it will avail nothing without the practice of those virtues which the most uninstructed of mankind perfectly understand. (emphases original)\(^{260}\)

He acknowledged the danger of an over-enthusiastic approach to discovering the truth in the words “greatest zeal”. Later in the preface he recognised the role of the passions in religious worship. Showing he valued everyday life as well as the sublime heights, he wrote that the world is wonderfully adapted “to our faculties, and to our passions and affections, to *establish, strengthen and settle us* in the habit and practice of all virtue, and to raise us to a pitch of excellence to which Adam in paradise could never have attained” (emphasis original).\(^{261}\)

He concluded the preface with an extract from Barbauld’s poem “An Address to the Deity”, which he described as “peculiarly practical, and therefore suiting my present purpose”.\(^{262}\)

It seems that part of his purpose was to signal Barbauld’s influence on his religious thought and perhaps to acknowledge that he no longer saw himself as the mentor; instead they were equals.

Barbauld responded in 1792 by reissuing “On the Devotional Taste” in *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* with some of the revisions Priestley suggested in his 1775 letter. She clarified her pragmatic attitude to different denominations and religious truth. Barbauld wrote:

There remains only to add (...) that it has nothing to do with the *truth* of opinions, and relates only to the influence which the adventitious circumstances attending them may have upon the manners and morals of their followers (...) We may see much good in an Establishment, the doctrines of which we cannot give our assent to without violating our

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\(^{259}\) This was also suggested by Priestley’s comment in 1787 that he considered being a public teacher of Christianity “to be the most truly honourable of any character, office, or employment, in this world”. Joseph Priestley, *Discourses on various subjects, including several on particular occasions* (Birmingham, 1787). Qtd. in Schofield, *The Enlightened Joseph Priestley* 195.

\(^{260}\) Priestley, *Two Discourses* v–vi.

\(^{261}\) Ibid. vii.

\(^{262}\) Ibid. viii.
integrity; we may respect the tendencies of a Sect, the tenets of which we utterly disapprove. We may think practices useful which we cannot adopt without hypocrisy. We may think all religions beneficial, and believe of one alone that is true. (emphasis original)\textsuperscript{263}

In an era when the latitudinarian consensus had broken down, her call for tolerance and mutual respect between the different denominations was needed. She did not remove her promotion of Rowe’s style of devotion, nor did she tone down her attack on abstruse metaphysical thought. As her debate with Wakefield demonstrates, her opposition to this type of distraction from practical faith was stronger than ever in the 1790s. As the revolutionary decade demanded political action abstruse speculation became, in Barbauld’s view, an even greater self-indulgence. She wrote: “Public Worship, as well as every other practice, must stand on the basis of utility and good sense, or it must not stand at all”.\textsuperscript{264}

Educated to be an Anglican minister, Wakefield was extremely erudite. From 1779 he taught Classics at Warrington Academy; in 1790 he moved to New College at Hackney but left after clashing with Richard Price and Priestley for refusing to attend religious services. Noted for his outspokenness, in 1791 Wakefield wrote \textit{An Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship} in which he rejected public worship in favour of worshiping alone.\textsuperscript{265} Barbauld replied in her \textit{Remarks on Mr Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship}. Barbauld was not the only woman to take part in the public worship controversy; Mary Hays also wrote a pamphlet in opposition to Wakefield. As Gina Luria Walker argues, there were similarities between her arguments and Barbauld’s; Hays also emphasised the emotional and domestic aspects of communal worship.\textsuperscript{266}

Mandell argues convincingly that Barbauld’s criticism of Wakefield was that his intense, metaphysical thought was not too rational, but too enthusiastic.\textsuperscript{267} I

\textsuperscript{263} Barbauld, “On the Devotional Taste” 231.
\textsuperscript{264} Barbauld, \textit{Remarks} 3.
\textsuperscript{265} Mandell, “Prayer, Feeling, Action” 119.
\textsuperscript{266} Walker 498.
\textsuperscript{267} Mandell, “Prayer, Feeling, Action” 131. Barbauld wrote: “From the gloom of the cloister and the loneliness of the cell, have proceeded the most extravagant deviations from nature and reason. Enthusiasm is indeed most dangerous in a crowd, but it seldom originates there. The mind, heated with intense thinking, adopts illusions to which it is not exposed when its devotion is guided and bounded by addresses which are intended to meet the common sentiments of a numerous assembly. Religion then appears with the most benignant aspect, is then least likely to be mistaken,
suggest that Barbauld perceived Wakefield’s preoccupation with abstractions as like Priestley in his Shelburne years; his intellectual enthusiasm needed to be regulated by sociability. In this pamphlet Barbauld used the same imagery of giddiness as two decades earlier in “On the Devotional Taste”, to warn Wakefield of the dangers:

The metaphysical reasoner, entangled in the nets of sophistry, may involve himself in the intricacies of contradictory syllogisms till reason grows giddy, and scarcely able to hold the balance; but when he acts in the presence of his fellow-creatures, his mind resumes its tone and vigour, and social devotion gives a colour and body to the deductions of his reason.268

In “On the Devotional Taste” she had discussed the “tone and vigour” of Priestley’s mind being weakened by abstract thought. As in her earlier essay “The Hill of Science”, she emphasised the limitations of intellectual argument and questioned the potential of the individual investigator to find the truth.269 Even if the philosopher was successful, he often could not communicate his ideas to ordinary people, which was the prerequisite of a practical faith. She wrote:

As for the multitude, so unaccustomed are they to any process of abstruse reasoning, and so much do they require the assistance of some object within the grasp of their senses, that it is to be doubted whether they could be at all persuaded of the existence of a spiritual invisible power, if that existence was not statedly acknowledged by some act which should impress the reality of it upon their minds, by connecting it with places, persons, and times.270

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268 Barbauld, Remarks 41–2. In response Wakefield accused Barbauld and Priestley of enthusiasm. In his A general Reply to the Arguments against the Enquiry into Public Worship (London, 1792) he treated Barbauld’s and Priestley’s ideas on devotion as indistinguishable. He claimed Barbauld’s ideas had no foundation in scripture or philosophy and instead “favour all that is visionary, fanatical and superstitious” (20). He denigrated her devotion as “Bacchanalian”, which has sexual and pagan overtones (20). He argued that Priestley was also an enthusiast. He wrote: “The Doctor [Priestley], like Mrs Barbauld, entertains certain conceits of habitual devotion, which are, to my apprehension at least, romantic and mysterious; intoxicating vapours from the chasm of puritanical fanaticism” (26). This debate emphasises the widespread use of the word enthusiasm as a pejorative term after the French Revolution; it was used imprecisely to cover a wide range of approaches. Mee writes: “For Gilbert Wakefield, just about any sign of affect in relation to religious worship was tainted with enthusiasm.” Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation 42.

269 Barbauld wrote: “Though argument be one means of generating belief, and that on which all belief must ultimately rest, it is not the only means, nor, with many minds, the most efficacious. Practical faith is greatly assisted by joining in some act in which the preference and persuasion of others gives a sort of reality to our perceptions of invisible things.” Remarks 41.

270 Barbauld, Remarks 42–3.
Barbauld was emphasising the importance of the association of ideas in devotion; abstract ideas had to be connected to reality to have meaning to the masses.\(^{271}\)

*Remarks* is Barbauld most clear statement of the connection between her political and religious ideas. What her earlier work suggested is set out plainly and simply in this pamphlet in a language which was accessible to all. She described Christ as a “great reformer” who exposed corruption.\(^{272}\) She drew parallels between the tyranny of absolute monarchs and the image of a cruel Calvinist God.\(^{273}\) Stressing the sociability of her faith, she argued that religion teaches us not to seek “exclusive advantages” but to consider ourselves as members of a community.\(^{274}\) It is the duty of “men of literature and knowledge” to worship alongside “the unenlightened”.\(^{275}\) Through religion the “lower orders” can be made more virtuous. As in her earlier debate with Priestley, she was critical of intellectuals who distanced themselves from real life. She wrote:

> There is harshness in saying to the bulk of mankind, Stand aside, we are wiser than you. There is harshness in saying, Our affections do not move in concert; what edifies you disgusts us; we cannot feel in common, even where we have a common interest.\(^{276}\)

In this pamphlet she emphasised the importance of public worship for promoting spiritual equality. It is the only place where “human beings, of every rank and sex and age” meet “not only as an equal but a brother; and where, by contemplating his duties, he may become sensible of his rights”.\(^{277}\) She argued that it is of service to the cause of freedom as well as virtue “that there is one place where the invidious distinctions of wealth and titles are not admitted”.\(^{278}\) She concluded: “Every time Social Worship is celebrated, it includes a virtual declaration of the rights of man”.\(^{279}\) By using the language of freedom, equality, fraternity and rights, her language reflected the French revolutionary debate. In reaction to conservatives’ defence of the established church, she emphasised the radical, even revolutionary, implications of Christianity.
CONCLUSION

In his pamphlet Wakefield vilified Barbauld as “a modern adventurer in devotion”, but this trivialised her serious mission.\(^\text{280}\) In her conclusion to “On the Devotional Taste”, Barbauld called for “some free and enlarged genius” to help reshape Dissent.\(^\text{281}\) Through the contribution this work and her later pamphlet to Wakefield make to religious thought, I suggest Barbauld becomes that genius. After examining the ideas of others, in particular the theological thought of Priestley and the devotional practice of Rowe, Barbauld developed her own ideas for a practical, political faith. By offering a simple, accessible religion, which combined sensibility with emotion, she offered a modern version of Dissent which could attract the masses. Although Barbauld preferred a sociable, collaborative approach to the concept of solitary genius, many of her co-religionists believed her work showed a touch of genius.\(^\text{282}\) Priestley admitted her essay on the devotional taste was written by an “acknowledged genius.”\(^\text{283}\) Her brother John Aikin described it as “a masterpiece of its kind”.\(^\text{284}\) As Enfield wrote, it was her thoughts that were those of an enlarged and independent mind”.\(^\text{285}\) Although as a woman she could not be a minister, this gave her the freedom to develop religious ideas without the restrictions of denominational self-interest. Her ideas influenced those who were leaders, most notably Priestley. Her attitude that women had an equally important part to play in religion as men and her emphasis on the emotional and domestic

\(^{280}\) Wakefield 20.

\(^{281}\) Barbauld wrote: “Perhaps a time may come, when our worship (…) shall be new modeled by some free and enlarged genius. Perhaps the time may come, when the spirit of philosophy, and the spirit of devotion, shall join to conduct our public assemblies; when to all that is graceful in order and well-regulated pomp, we shall add whatever is affecting in the warmth of zeal, and all that is delightful in the beauty of holiness.” “On the Devotional Taste” 233–4.

\(^{282}\) Full discussion of her preference for a collaborative approach rather than the idea of solitary genius in Chapter 5.


\(^{284}\) John Aikin wrote: “The truly philosophical view it [Barbauld’s essay] has taken of the subject and the novel and acute observations with which it abounds, expressed with a characteristic force and brilliancy of language, have fairly entitled it to the rank of a masterpiece of its kind. The home truths it contains have not, I believe, been universally relished, but they have commanded the assent of impartial observers.” John Aikin, Letters from a father to his son, on various topics, relative to literature and the conduct of life. Written in the years 1792 and 1793 (London, 1793) 98.

aspects of faith inspired other important female thinkers, including Hays and Wollstonecraft. Unlike her male co-religionists she was not distracted by the sublime intellectual heights; her vocation was among ordinary people in the real world.
Chapter 2

Breaking through her “bounded sphere”: Barbauld’s tradition of feminism

There is no bond of union among literary women, any more than among literary men; different sentiments and different connections separate them much more than the joint interest of their sex would unite them. Mrs Hannah More would not write along with you or me, and we should probably hesitate at joining Miss Hays, or if she were living, Mrs Godwin.¹

This statement from Barbauld, written to Maria Edgeworth in 1804, in response to her proposal to set up a female journal, is essential to understanding Barbauld’s attitude to feminism. It demonstrates that she recognised the “joint interest” of women but she believed that this interest was overridden by other considerations. In the 1790s there were several strands to female-centred thought which divided according to a complex combination of political, denominational and personal affinities. As Barbara Taylor establishes, even at the height of popular radicalism, “explicit feminism” of the Mary Wollstonecraft form attracted only limited support among women writers. Conservative women like the evangelical Hannah More, condemned Wollstonecraft’s ideas outright, while liberals like Anna Seward and the bluestocking Hester Chapone gave only a qualified endorsement. Nor were all radical women supportive; only Mary Hays and Mary Robinson totally agreed with Wollstonecraft.²

The “different connections” Barbauld mentions do not just refer to her own era; affiliations span the generations linking women writers of this period with different traditions of “feminism” which went back to the previous century. As recent scholarship establishes, female thought was divided along ideological lines; Mary Astell’s High Church, Tory “feminism” was different from seventeenth-century, nonconformist, radical female thought, which in turn differed from Restoration, martial “feminism” or eighteenth-century bluestocking, latitudinarian, attitudes.³

¹ Barbauld, letter to Maria Edgeworth, 30 August 1804, Anna Letitia Le Breton, Memoir of Mrs Barbauld, Including Letters and Notices of her Family and Friends (London, 1874) www.General-books.net 27.
² Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 182.
³ See Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, eds., Virtue, Liberty, and Toleration: Political Ideas of European Women, 1400–1800 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007); Margaret J. M. Ezell, Writing Women’s Literary History (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Moira Ferguson,
contend that Barbauld was well aware of this nuanced history of feminism and she
drew on distinct traditions of female thought which reflected her ideological
concerns.

For the overall argument of my thesis it is important to establish Barbauld’s
attitude to feminism because it became a key element in critical assessments of
her progressive credentials. As McCarthy explains, the perception of her as anti-
feminist exposed her to attacks from the left. It affected her reputation amongst
1970s feminist critics and undermined her acceptance as a leading female radical. Her allegedly anti-feminist views have been seen as an aberration. In Mary
Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination Taylor argues that as probably the
most respected radical woman writer, her antagonism to feminism was particularly
significant. She accuses Barbauld of rejecting all gender-based initiatives because
she argued that women as women had nothing of which to complain, and thus no
common cause to unite them. Taylor asks: “Why did such a vigorous radicalism
falter when it came to her own sex?” My chapter will challenge Taylor’s view; I will
suggest that Barbauld believed women experienced unfair treatment but she
developed different tactics from Wollstonecraft to deal with the problem. Through
emphasising female friendship and literary kinship networks she promoted her own
form of female solidarity. I will argue that when Barbauld’s views are situated within
earlier traditions of female political thought it confirms rather than undermines her
position as a leading female, progressive thinker. I suggest that during the 1790s
her political writing drew on the precedent set by seventeenth-century female
sectarian writers; this was a reflection of, not an aberration from, her religious and
political ideas. By emphasising the role of religion in Barbauld’s feminist thought
this chapter contributes to the argument of the rest of the thesis that Barbauld’s
faith was central to the development of her ideas. It reinforces the argument in
Chapter 1 that Barbauld was influenced by seventeenth- and early eighteenth-
century nonconformist traditions.


5 Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 182.

6 Ibid. 184.
To situate Barbauld within feminism, it is important to define the terms of the debate. It is anachronistic to use the word “feminism” in this period because the first recorded use of the term was not until the late nineteenth century. However, Jane Rendall claims that the word is an essential tool for analysing female thought. Her broad definition of feminism is “women who claimed for themselves the right to define their own place in society (...) Yet it should be stressed that the women described here did not necessarily believe that implied an equality of roles between men and women”. They interpreted the word “equality” in terms of rational and moral worth, not equality of labour. This type of “feminism” had a long tradition dating back to the fifteenth century. Rendall distinguishes it from “modern feminism” which she defines as the way in which women from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, began to associate together to assert their common interest as women. These women had a feminist purpose; they organised a range of activities, campaigns and writing to promote women’s right to self-determination and autonomy.

The main advocate of what Rendall terms “modern feminism” was Mary Wollstonecraft. Mary Lyndon Shanley defines Wollstonecraftian feminism. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft argued that private relationships and public power were interdependent and historically gave men power over women in both the family and the state. Opposing socially constructed gender roles, she claimed that popular cultural notions of female sexuality and “sensibility” corrupted both women and men. Arguing that all human beings shared reason, she called for civil and political rights for women and a reformation of manners in both sexes. Her programme involved educating boys and girls together and opening the professions to women so that they could earn their own living and be independent. However, she accepted some sexual division of labour, arguing that the care of children was one of women’s primary roles. *The Wrongs of Woman: or Maria* emphasised that legal and social change were intertwined. Attacking the obliteration of a woman’s legal status on marriage, she argued that

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid. 1–2.
women should be able to separate from their husbands and retain custody of their children.\textsuperscript{10}

Using Rendall’s categories as a starting point, it is easier to situate Barbauld within the earlier, historical tradition of “feminism” rather than “modern” or Wollstonecraftian feminism. As Daniel E. White explains, feminism, in the sense of an active and conscious effort to theorise and realise educational, social, economic and political equality for women, was not a central element of Barbauld’s literary work.\textsuperscript{11} Instead, Barbauld’s approach should be set in the context of the history of political thought written by women. Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green establish that women who wrote political texts had “a strong conception of women as political commentators or political agents”; they were inspired by powerful women depicted in the Old and New Testaments.\textsuperscript{12} Faith was at the centre of their political thought and they often blurred the divisions between religion and politics. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries much of their writing focused on women’s spiritual liberty and autonomy and this inevitably led them to question patriarchal authority.\textsuperscript{13} Barbauld fits into this broad female tradition, but in this chapter I will refine the category further to demonstrate the specific female legacies she drew on.

Until recently Barbauld’s feminist credentials have been primarily defined by her clash with Mary Wollstonecraft. In her \textit{Vindication of the Rights of Woman} Wollstonecraft attacked Barbauld’s poem “To a Lady, with some painted Flowers”\textsuperscript{14} because it compared women to sweet, delicate flowers whose purpose was to please. Wollstonecraft claimed that Barbauld was adopting the language of men which created a “false system of female manners” and robbed women of their dignity.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{11} White, “With Mrs Barbauld is is Different” 474.
\bibitem{12} Broad and Green xvi.
\bibitem{13} Ibid. xvii.
\bibitem{14} Wollstonecraft wrote: “On this sensual error (…) has the false system of female manners been reared, which robs the whole sex of its dignity, and classes the brown and fair with the smiling flowers that only adorn the land. This has ever been the language of men, and the fear of departing from a supposed sexual character, has made even women of superiour [sic] sense adopt the same sentiments.” Wollstonecraft then cites Barbauld in her footnotes: “‘Pleasure’s the portion of th’inferior kind;/But glory, virtue, Heaven for man design’d.’ After writing these lines how could Mrs
\end{thebibliography}
has been read as satirising Wollstonecraft’s feminist beliefs. The image of Barbauld as anti-feminist was further reinforced by the claim that she rejected the bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu’s proposal to establish a literary academy for young ladies, and her refusal to set up a female journal with Maria Edgeworth. William McCarthy reassesses the anti-feminist perception of Barbauld. Portraying her as more feminist and supportive of women than previously thought, he claims that on many issues Wollstonecraft and Barbauld agreed; their differences were more of style than of substance. However, White argues that although McCarthy has done useful work at critiquing the “cardboard anti-feminist” image of Barbauld, we should not go to the other extreme of creating a “cardboard feminist” image of her. He claims that “the binary terms of feminist/anti-feminist may not be sufficient to a contemporary understanding of her literary, political and religious writings”. Daniel P. Watkins supports White’s argument. He stresses that Barbauld’s work should be set in the context of recent scholarship which, while recognising the important ways that gender influenced the poems written by women, also accepts that gender was not “the dominant conceptual category for

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Barbauld write the following ignoble comparison?” She then quoted Barbauld’s poem “To a Lady, with some painted Flowers.” Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1996) 53. Barbara Taylor writes that “the two women directly clashed”. However, she does not seem to have realised that the poem was not written by Barbauld for publication; it was only published posthumously by Lucy Aikin. Taylor writes: “What Wollstonecraft made of the work is unrecorded.” In fact by the time of publication Barbauld and Wollstonecraft were both dead. Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 185. For Barbauld’s explanation of why she did not wish to head a female academy see her letter to her husband Rochemont in Lucy Aikin’s Memoir of her aunt. The Works of Anna Letitia Barbauld. With a Memoir by Lucy Aikin 1: xviii–xxiv. Aikin implied that this letter was written to Elizabeth Montagu, but McCarthy’s research demonstrates that it was written to Rochemont, firmly rejecting a proposal he had made that she should set up an academy for young ladies. The letter is undated but was probably written in the mid-1770s as Rochemont wanted to capitalise on the success of Barbauld’s 1773 book of poems. McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 141. McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment. On Barbauld’s refusal to head a college for young women, McCarthy argues that there were social reasons for her reluctance. Her upbringing made her uneasy about her gender and left her with a residual social awkwardness which made her unwilling to mentor young ladies in feminine graces (141–2). There were also class reasons for the rejection of the project; it relied on the patronage of the aristocracy at a time when the House of Lords had rejected Dissenters’ demands. Barbauld was a champion of the middle class and often critical of aristocrats, so for her religious and class loyalties she had no wish to train their daughters at this time (144–6). McCarthy’s argument is convincing. It is understandable that a woman of Barbauld’s intellectual prowess would find it unchallenging to teach genteel young ladies a limited curriculum. On Barbauld’s rejection of Maria Edgeworth’s proposal for a women’s literary magazine, McCarthy points out that, instead, she suggested a periodical in which writers of both sexes with compatible politics would contribute (360). White, “With Mrs Barbauld it is Different” 474.
many women poets”.

In the first part of this chapter I will examine the development of Barbauld’s distinctive strand of female thought. Like White, I believe that speaking as a woman was central to her work but she did not wish to be defined by her gender. She was a woman-centred radical, aware of the restrictions placed on women and opposed to them, but she was not a “Rights of Woman” Wollstonecraftian feminist; her pragmatic attitude made her adopt different strategies. Although I do not think it is constructive to set one late eighteenth-century woman thinker antagonistically against another, it is necessary to compare Barbauld’s attitudes to the feminist issues of her era with the ideas of other women writers to set her in a contemporary context. However, this part of the chapter will be brief because my research suggests that Barbauld’s female thought was influenced more by women thinkers from the past than by her contemporaries’ views.

Critics have concentrated on analysing Barbauld’s poem “The Rights of Woman” to provide an insight into her attitude to feminism; this puzzling poem has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Taylor considers it is “a desperately arch depiction of the female struggle for sexual conquest”, in which coquettish behaviour serves as a woman’s weapon until romance overcomes her, and she discovers “separate rights are lost in mutual love”. Marlon Ross describes it as a poem against women’s rights. He claims that while it appears to tell women to “rise, assert thy right”, it actually ridicules this idea by assuming women’s rule to be only over “the empire of beauty”. Carol Shiner Wilson claims it emphasises female moral superiority as Barbauld uses military tropes “to reinforce the moral domain of the feminine idea”. Other critics detect ambivalence in Barbauld’s attitude. Harriet Guest describes the poem as “a troubling text” because its use of the language of rights differs from its conclusion; the violence in the language is at

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19 Watkins 5.
20 Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 185.
odds with the praise of mutual love.\textsuperscript{23} I consider Lucy Newlyn’s analysis of the poem is most convincing. She argues that in this poem Barbauld’s position is ambiguous. By using the language of rights she disorients her readers, making them uncertain whether or not there is irony in the commands which follow. Newlyn writes: “Whichever way this question is answered the poem is disconcerting”.\textsuperscript{24} The ambiguity Newlyn detects is typical of Barbauld’s work; as I demonstrate throughout the thesis, Barbauld encourages her readers to question rather than providing them with definitive answers. Her ambivalence also reflects the degree to which she struggled with feminist ideas. As McCarthy argues, the poem shows her working out her position within the new agenda set by Wollstonecraft.\textsuperscript{25} Although I will allude to this poem when relevant to my argument, I do not intend to provide a detailed analysis. I do not consider that it should be seen as the definitive statement of Barbauld’s attitude to feminism as she chose not to make it public; Lucy Aikin first published the poem after her aunt’s death.\textsuperscript{26} Instead I will focus on Barbauld’s early poetry and her later political pamphlets to discover the female traditions which influenced her. I will then examine how her predecessors’ example affected her attitudes to women’s position in eighteenth-century society.

My interpretation is supported by Barbauld’s advice to young women in \textit{A Legacy for Young Ladies}. Published posthumously by Lucy Aikin in 1826, this miscellaneous selection of allegories, essays and letters was found among Barbauld’s papers. Aimed specifically at young women, they cover a range of subjects. In her “Preface” Lucy Aikin wrote: “Some of them enforce moral truths; others contain instruction in history and other branches of the graver studies of youth; but the greater number are of a light and elegant cast”.\textsuperscript{27} In a letter on the uses of history to one of her pupils, Lydia Rickards, Barbauld emphasised the need for women to be aware of historical precedents. She wrote:

\begin{quote}
It [is] particularly proper that \textit{ladies} who interest themselves in the events of public life should have their minds cultivated by an acquaintance with
\end{quote}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Newlyn, \textit{Reading, Writing, and Romanticism} 159.
\item \textsuperscript{25} McCarthy, \textit{Voice of the Enlightenment} 352–3.
\item \textsuperscript{26} It was first published in \textit{Works} (1825), McCarthy and Kraft 130.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Anna Letitia Barbauld, Lucy Aikin and Timothy Stansfield Engleheart and John Massey Wright, \textit{A Legacy for Young Ladies; Consisting of Miscellaneous Pieces, in Prose and Verse} (London, 1826). General Books: www.General-books.net 1.
\end{itemize}
history, without which, they are apt to let the whole warmth of their natures flow out, upon party matters, in an ardour more honest than wise, more zealous than candid. (emphasis original)  

In her essay on the Classics, she wrote that books from the past are “of essential service in forming our taste and giving a direction to the recovered energies of the human mind. Oral instruction can benefit but one age and one set of hearers; but these silent teachers address all ages and all nations.” As Karen O’Brien argues, Barbauld’s interest in women’s history and literature had an ideological purpose; she wanted to foster women’s sense of belonging to a civic and Protestant public sphere. When selecting her own “silent teachers” she turned to a select group of outstanding women who spanned the generations. 

As McCarthy establishes, in her youth Barbauld drew on Stoical feminism, particularly the work of the bluestocking Elizabeth Carter. Carter was not a Dissenter, nor did she share Barbauld’s progressive political beliefs, but during the period of the latitudinarian consensus these differences were not highlighted. Although in different denominations, Carter and Barbauld shared similar attitudes to devotion and the older woman’s writing provided Barbauld with an example of how women could use their intellect to promote their religious beliefs. At this time Barbauld also turned to Elizabeth Rowe. As well as providing a standard, pious literary role model, Rowe particularly appealed to Barbauld because of their shared Dissenting faith and political attitudes. She provided Barbauld with a precedent of how to combine piety and politics. 

Building on Anne Janowitz’s argument that in the 1790s Barbauld’s “voice” altered from the polite Warrington tones of her early poetry to the more passionate, politicised voice of her 1790s pamphlets, I will argue that her new “voice” was influenced by seventeenth-century precedents. In the 1790s Barbauld drew on a tradition of female thought which reflected the religious and political divisions of the era. At this time her work had strong echoes of the Civil War and Restoration women from nonconformist sects who developed what Moira Ferguson describes

28 Ibid. 52.  
29 Ibid. 35.  
30 O’Brien, Women and Enlightenment 204.  
32 O’Brien, Women and Enlightenment 5.  
33 Janowitz, “Amiable and Radical Sociability” 69.
as a form of “feminism in action” by writing religious pamphlets with political overtones. Critics have established that their ideas were based on the duties rather than the rights of women, but their interpretation of women’s duty challenged patriarchal authority because it led to them taking an active role in the political sphere. In this chapter I will focus on the similarities between Barbauld and the Leveller writer Katherine Chidley (act. 1616–53) and the Quaker leader Margaret Fell Fox (1614–1702) because their position as leading members of their sects is most similar to Barbauld’s situation; they represent the rational rather than the most enthusiastic tradition of seventeenth-century female sectarian thought.

By setting Barbauld in this earlier historical context I believe we will come closer to understanding the reality of her female-centred radicalism. She was exploring what it meant to be a woman in a radical religious sect in a time of political ferment. When writing her controversial religious and political pamphlets, she could draw on the knowledge that similar work had been done before. Carter, Rowe, Chidley and Fox provided historical precedents; they were women who wrote about the same issues as their male co-religionists, carefully negotiating the prejudices against women taking such unconventional action.

By making this comparison I am not implying that other 1790s women writers were not religious and radical. As recent research demonstrates, religion was at the centre of radical feminists’ ideas. In Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination, Taylor establishes the importance of religion to Wollstonecraft’s thought. The role of religion in the lives of eighteenth-century women is examined in detail in Women, Gender and Enlightenment. This collection of essays emphasises the centrality of religious discourses to enlightened debates about gender. In Women and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Britain, O’Brien examines the unique importance of Rational Dissent for the development of religious thought.

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34 Ferguson, First Feminists 11.
36 Knott and Taylor, Women, Gender and Enlightenment.
of feminism. Many of the major figures were either Rational Dissenters, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, or Anglicans sympathetic to dissenting views, such as Catharine Macaulay. Sarah Hutton establishes that there were many women thinkers, including Elizabeth Carter and Catharine Macaulay, who talked of virtue more than rights. Taylor and Phyllis Mack emphasise that even the most radical feminists were different from modern feminists, because their quest for equal rights was about acquiring the virtue and freedom to allow them to do what was right, not what they wanted. However, although these women shared many ethical values, the order in which they prioritised them differed. What makes Barbauld more like Fox and Chidley than many of the other 1790s women writers was that she wrote from the perspective of being a Dissenter first and a woman second. She was the only woman to write a pamphlet when Parliament rejected the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts in 1790. She was also the only one to style her political pamphlets as sermons. For Barbauld religious issues were overt in her writing, feminist ones covert; for many other female writers at this time the reverse was true. Her priorities were similar to her seventeenth-century predecessors because, for her, fighting for religious toleration came first, before gender issues. This does not mean that these writers did not care about the oppression of women; it just was not their primary concern.

McCarthy argues convincingly that “in Barbauld’s thinking, politics usually trumped gender”. She played down gender issues in her work because she did not want to be ghettoised as a woman writer. Instead, she wanted to participate in the major political debates of her day and be taken as seriously as the male writers who shared her priorities. As she told Maria Edgeworth in 1804, she would prefer to write for a periodical in which leading writers of both sexes with similar political views contributed than for an all female journal. She asked whether women had to write as women, because this would constrain their intellectual freedom and lead
readers to expect a certain type of writing. As her political pamphlets demonstrate, she often wrote anonymously or androgynously as “a Dissenter”, or “a volunteer”, because she was more concerned with getting her message across than emphasising the gender of the messenger. Like her seventeenth-century predecessors, she was “an instrument” to communicate essential ideas; highlighting her female authorship would have deflected from this aim.

COMING TO TERMS WITH HER “BOUNDED SPHERE”

In her youth Barbauld had to come to terms with the limitations placed on her because she was a woman. Describing her as “emotionally conflicted”, McCarthy argues that her early poems reveal her resentment about women’s restricted fate. Her 1768 poem “To [her brother] Dr Aikin on his Complaining that she neglected him” shows how she dealt with the fact that, although in terms of intellect and education she was her brother John’s equal, she had to remain within her “bounded sphere”. She wrote:

Our path divides – to thee fair fate assign’d
The nobler labours of a manly mind;
While mine, more humble works, and lower cares,
Less shining toils, and meaner praises shares.(50-3)

“Divides” suggests that the different professional opportunities open to her brother, because he was male, were divisive, undermining the naturally loving relationships between men and women. The words “humble”, “lower” and “meaner” to describe Barbauld’s work are negative, contrasted with the positive terms “nobler” and “shining” for Aikin’s profession as a doctor. However, the humility of Barbauld’s work implies its spiritual integrity.

This poem suggests that as a young woman Barbauld suffered a similar internal conflict to Wollstonecraft. As Taylor explains, a question that is asked repeatedly in the Rights of Woman is: “Why should women’s mental reach be

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42 Barbauld wrote: “There is a great difference between a paper written by a lady, and as a lady. To write professedly as a female junto seems in some measure to suggest a certain cast of sentiment, and you would write in trammels.” Le Breton 27.


44 Barbauld, “To Dr Aikin on his Complaining that she neglected him, October 20th 1768”, McCarthy and Kraft 55–8.
artificially curtailed, when their capacities are naturally equal to those of men? And, even more daringly, why should women’s minds be given over to domestic affairs when higher intellectual concerns beckon?” Barbauld questioned the injustice of her situation in similar terms: “Yet sure in different moulds they [their minds] were not cast/ Nor stampt with separate sentiments and taste” (54–5). However, having acknowledged evidence that male and female minds are not different, she repressed such feminist thoughts in the lines:

But hush my heart! Nor strive to soar too high,  
Nor for the tree of knowledge vainly sigh;  
Check the fond love of science and of fame,  
A bright, but ah! A too devouring flame. (56–9)

The breathless tone and exclamations show the power of her feelings. However, she saw her ambitions as dangerous; the use of the biblical image of the “tree of knowledge” reminds the reader of the negative repercussions of Eve’s search for knowledge. The imagery of fame as “a too devouring flame” reinforces the devastation her desires could bring, suggesting that she could become eaten up by them. This idea is reminiscent of her debate with Priestley about how far ambition and the enthusiastic quest for abstract knowledge should be allowed to take over from everyday concerns.

Although it is evident that Barbauld shared Wollstonecraft’s frustration about her limited opportunities, she decided to deal with her situation using different tactics; this was a result not only of personality differences but also of the different eras in which they came to political maturity; there was a generation between Wollstonecraft and Barbauld, and the political climate in the 1760s and 1770s was very different from twenty years later. Feminine grievances, which were beneath the surface in the earlier period, erupted in the “fervidly creative atmosphere” of the 1790s.

EARLY ROLE MODELS: ELIZABETH ROWE AND ELIZABETH CARTER
To negotiate her position as a woman in a patriarchal society Barbauld turned to two role models, the devotional poet Elizabeth Rowe and the bluestocking poet

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45 Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 47.  
46 See Chapter 1.  
47 Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 5.
and translator Elizabeth Carter. This was signalled in Barbauld’s poem “Verses on Mrs Rowe” (1773). Carter had also written a poem “On the Death of Mrs Rowe” (1739), praising her for restoring the virtuous image of the intellectual woman through her use of female wit for religious and moral purposes. Stuart Curran argues that by writing a poem which had many similarities to Carter’s poem, Barbauld was laying claim to be the rightful successor of not just Rowe but also Carter; she was fixing herself and her predecessors within a Christian tradition. He claims that by drawing on these female muses Barbauld was creating “an enveloping and empowering network of like-minded creative and creating women”.

As Margaret Ezell establishes, choosing Rowe as a role model was standard for female writers. As one of two best-selling women authors of the early eighteenth century, she was used to establish “an ideology of the feminine”. From the time of George Ballard’s Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain (1752), an idealised image of a woman writer was created. It was based on the idea of an intellectual but modest, chaste woman who patiently endures suffering. Rowe, although not mentioned by Ballard, embodied this image of female accomplishments within socially acceptable limits. Theophilus Cibber in his five-volume Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland, to the Time of Dean Swift (1753) cited her as the epitome of womanhood for her private life as much as her poetic skill. He described her as “a character perfectly moral”.

However, I suggest that Barbauld’s affinity with Rowe went beyond the standard identification with her pious femininity and was based on more controversial aspects of the earlier poet’s career. Sarah Prescott argues that Rowe’s religious nonconformity, and her Whig politics, together with her commercial success and her provincialism, offered a different set of configurations

48 For a discussion of the religious implications of this poem see Chapter 1.
50 Ibid. 161–2.
51 Ezell 69.
53 For a discussion of Rowe’s enthusiastic attitude to religion see Chapter 1.
from those associated with conventional women’s literary history. This unusual combination mirrored Barbauld’s circumstances. Both women were the daughters of Dissenting ministers. Both were part of a network of nonconformist writers, publishers and intellectuals which provided them with important contacts. Rowe, like Barbauld, wrote political verse from a progressive perspective. Recent scholarship by Abigail Williams and Prescott examines Rowe’s political role. As The Athenian Mercury’s “Pindarick Lady”, Rowe composed political poems supporting the 1688 Revolution and portraying King William as a religious saviour who would promote liberty, freedom of conscience and government by consent. Although this culture was predominantly masculine, Prescott claims that Rowe became “a Protestant Whigish mascot”, showing that feminine virtue and Whig sentiment were not mutually exclusive. In her 1696 poem “Upon King William Passing the Boyn” Rowe celebrated William’s victory over James II in 1690 by portraying him as a hero and defender of “Albion”. She emphasised that divine powers gave the Protestant King victory and that the 1688 revolution was an example of divine providence. In this poem and her “A Pindarick Poem on Habbakuk” William was portrayed like the violent God of the Old Testament, thus validating military might. By elevating William to god-like status she also raised her own position, showing that women had a role to play in establishing the right government.

Rowe’s political poetry set a precedent for Barbauld’s first political poem “Corsica”. Written in 1769, and published in Barbauld’s Poems (1773), it championed General Pasquale Paoli’s fight for Corsican independence against France, as a virtuous battle of good against evil. Like Rowe’s poetry, its patriot enthusiasm promoted the wider cause of liberty against tyranny. As Mee demonstrates, Barbauld was writing at a time when such political verse was seen

54 Prescott, Women, Authorship and Literary Culture 12.
55 Elizabeth Singer Rowe, The miscellaneous works in prose and verse of Mrs Elizabeth Rowe (London, 1739).
56 Williams 189.
57 Prescott, Women, Authorship and Literary Culture 155.
58 Ibid. 144.
59 Williams 189.
60 Mee, Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation 195.
as the masculine domain. Like Rowe, Barbauld subtly used this poem to
demonstrate women’s political and poetic role. As McCarthy establishes, there are
echoes of Book IV of Milton’s Paradise Lost in “Corsica”. The similarities between
her descriptions of Corsica and Milton’s Eden, Paoli and the Adam of Paradise
Lost, suggest that Barbauld was drawing parallels between herself and Milton.
However, her primary role model seems to have been Rowe. Barbauld wrote “a
British muse, / Tho’ weak and powerless lifts her fervent voice” (13–14); these lines
echo Rowe’s description of her attempts to write political poetry in her 1696 poem
“A Pindaric Ode to the Athenian Society”. Rowe wrote:

But still my Muse despairs to do great Athens Right
Yet takes the zealous Tribute which I bring,
The early Products of a Female Muse. (emphasis original)

Both women emphasised their enthusiasm rather than their poetic talent; Barbauld
used the word “fervent” while Rowe described her contribution as “zealous”.
Although the political poems were not included in the standard edition of Rowe’s
work The miscellaneous works in prose and verse of Mrs Elizabeth Rowe (1739),
because they did not fit her purely pious image, an unauthorised edition of Rowe’s
poems, containing the 1690s political verse, was published by Edmund Curll in
1736. Rowe provided Barbauld with an example of how women could combine
passion, piety and politics in an acceptable feminine form.

Barbauld found another spiritual and intellectual role model in Elizabeth
Carter, the leading intellectual of the bluestocking circle. Gary Kelly examines
bluestocking feminism’s roots in the seventeenth-century anti-court traditions of the
upper and middle classes. Drawing on a heritage of female religious piety and a
private, domesticated version of humanist intellectual culture, the bluestockings,
led by Elizabeth Montagu, critiqued the court system’s trivialisation and
eroticisation of women. Kelly argues that this predominantly Anglican group was
influenced by the commonwealthmen and the classical republican traditions. He

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61 Mee includes comments from contemporary critics on “Corsica”, which claimed Barbauld was
treading “too much in the footsteps of men.” Ibid. 197.
62 McCarthy, “We Hoped” 123.
63 Barbauld, “Corsica”, McCarthy and Kraft 64.
64 Elizabeth Rowe, “A Pindaric Ode to the Athenian Society”, Philomela: or, poems by Mrs Elizabeth
Singer, (now Rowe) of Frome in Somersetshire (London, 1737) 133.
65 Prescott, Women, Authorship and Literary Culture 91.
66 Ferguson, First Feminists 21–2.
describes their politics as “progressive–aristocratic, in being anti-Pittite and anti-Wilkesite”. Mainly drawn from the gentry and upper-middle-class families, they did not want to overthrow hierarchical society, but rather wanted to modify it by feminising it. Consequently they opposed the democratisation of politics promoted by the Wilkes and liberty campaign.\(^67\)

During the 1770s the bluestockings made an effort to recruit Barbauld. Curran suggests that by indirectly paying tribute to Carter in her poem to Rowe, Barbauld had virtually solicited an invitation to their circle.\(^68\) Mee argues that the bluestockings may have influenced Barbauld’s ecumenical thinking in the 1770s. However, she was “always ambiguous” about the Montagu circle; their suppression of differences to promote harmony went against the Dissenters’ emphasis on the importance of freedom of inquiry to religious and political truths.\(^69\)

Carter did not share Rowe’s and Barbauld’s political or religious background. However as O’Brien establishes, during the latitudinarian consensus the lines between Rational Dissent and liberal Anglicanism were blurred, making cross-denominational relationships easier.\(^70\) Carter and Barbauld shared some important ideas. Carter conceded the need for insurrection against tyranny and supported humanitarian ideals, including active opposition to slavery.\(^71\) Although an Anglican, she was not dogmatic and demonstrated a strongly rational dimension to her spirituality.\(^72\)

Barbauld discovered in Carter’s work inspiration for her attitudes to religious devotion and feminist issues. Rather than openly fighting against the restrictions placed on her because of her gender, Barbauld drew on a tradition of Stoical female thought which she discovered through Carter’s poems and her 1758 translation of the works of the Stoic slave Epictetus.\(^73\) From this source Barbauld learned the importance of self-control; Carter taught her to value the female mind and the way in which exercising mental powers could be a source of liberation for


\(^{68}\) Curran 162.

\(^{69}\) Mee, “Severe Contentions of Friendship” 23.

\(^{70}\) O’Brien, Women and Enlightenment 5

\(^{71}\) Ferguson, First Feminists 22.

\(^{72}\) Hutton, “Virtue, God, and Stoicism” 140.

\(^{73}\) McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 87.
women. She also provided an example of how to code her more challenging messages. As Lisa A. Freeman explains, Carter encoded “less than conventional meanings where she appears only to conform”.74

Drawing on Mee’s argument that Barbauld was drawn to the politeness of Anglicanism at this time in a desire to distance herself from “the perceived uncouthness of her Presbyterian past”, I suggest that Barbauld found some aspects of Carter’s religious thought more appealing than her own Dissenting tradition.75 Developing McCarthy’s argument that Barbauld’s early poetry was based on the idea of pleasure in opposition to the austerity of some nonconformist attitudes, it seems that she was influenced by Carter’s ideas of what form that pleasure should take.76 Carter believed religion should be based in the everyday pleasures of virtue and benevolence and not in self-denial and mortification.77 This attitude is evident in Carter’s essay for Samuel Johnson’s periodical The Rambler in which the frightening figure of “Superstition”, dressed in black, states: “Man was born to mourn and to be wretched”.78 The figure of “Religion” then appears to contradict this advice, explaining that true religion does not require deliberate suffering nor does a benevolent God demand the avoidance of the type of pleasure which is based in being virtuous.79

Carter’s ideas were echoed in Barbauld’s poem “To Wisdom” (1773) which was written after the tutors at Warrington Academy opposed the idea of putting on private theatricals. Barbauld rejected this puritanical attitude, instead favouring cheerful sociability.80 Entitling the poem “To Wisdom” reminds the reader of Carter’s “Ode to Wisdom” which appeared in the same collection of her work as the Rambler essay.81 In Carter’s poem the speaker goes as a suppliant to the shrine of the goddess of wisdom, Pallas Athena. She wrote that the goddess, surrounded by her “list'ning Sons”:

74 Lisa A. Freeman, “‘A Dialogue’, Elizabeth Carter’s Passion for the Female Mind”, Armstrong and Blain 51.
75 Mee, “Severe Contentions of Friendship” 22.
76 McCarthy, “‘We Hoped’” 113–37.
77 O’Brien, Women and Enlightenment 60.
78 Elizabeth Carter, Poems on Several Occasions (London, 1762) 92.
79 O’Brien, Women and Enlightenment 60.
80 McCarthy, “‘We Hoped’” 113–37.
81 Carter, Poems 85–90.
Reclaim’d her wild licentious Youth,
Confest the potent Voice of Truth,
And felt it’s just Controul:
Passions ceas’d their loud Alarms,
And Virtue’s soft persuasive Charms
O’er all their Senses stole. 82

Barbauld’s poem “To Wisdom” echoes these lines. She addressed the goddess of wisdom in the hope that her influence could have a similar calming effect on her tempestuous emotions. She wrote:

O WISDOM! If thy soft controul
Can sooth the sickness of the soul,
Can bid the warring passions cease,
And breathe the calm of tender peace,
WISDOM! I bless thy gentle sway,
And ever, ever will obey. (1–6) 83

In Barbauld’s poem Carter’s “just Controul” has become “soft controul”; for Barbauld the word “soft” was associated with femininity. Her poem contrasts the female wisdom of Pallas Athena, passed on through Carter’s poetry, with the masculine wisdom represented by the Warrington tutors. She wrote of “Wisdom”:

But if thou com’st with frown austere
To nurse the brood of care and fear;
To bid our sweetest passions die,
And leave us in their room a sigh;
Or if thine aspect stern have power
To wither each poor transient flower,
That cheers this pilgrimage of woe,
And dry the springs whence hope should flow;
WISDOM, thine empire I disclaim,
Thou empty boast of pompous name!
In gloomy shade of cloisters dwell,
But never haunt my cheerful [sic] cell. (7–18)

Her description of an alternative form of “Wisdom” reflects Carter’s image of “Superstition”, suggesting that the Warrington tutors’ attitude is not genuinely wise. In her essay Carter described Superstition as having “a horrid Frown”; wherever she walked “the fading Verdure withered beneath her Steps.” 84 Superstition says to the speaker: “Fly then from the fatal Enchantments of Youth and social Delight:

82 Ibid. 89.
83 Barbauld, “To Wisdom”, McCarthy and Kraft 79.
84 Carter, “Rambler” 92.
and here consecrate the solitary Hours to Lamentation and Woe".\textsuperscript{85} Carter's speaker then described how “this melancholy Picture of Life quite sunk my spirits, and seemed to annihilate every Principle of Joy within me.”\textsuperscript{86} Her spirits were only restored when the figure of Religion appeared, “reviving Pleasure”.\textsuperscript{87} Barbauld’s use of the words “cloisters” and “cell” in her poem recalls Carter’s essay when she wrote: “Religion is not confined to Cells and Closets”.\textsuperscript{88} Barbauld’s description of the pleasures of life as “each poor transient flower” also draws on Carter’s imagery in her “Ode”. Carter contrasted the lifelong pleasure associated with having “An Empire o’er my Mind” with “Pleasures transient Roses” which “fade./And wither in the Tomb”.\textsuperscript{89} She wrote that wisdom, based in “moral Beauty of the Heart”, is an “undecaying Bloom”.\textsuperscript{90}

Both Barbauld and Carter argued that true pleasure is not hedonism; it can only be achieved through mental discipline. Carter wrote in her essay: “Whoever would be really happy, must make the diligent and regular Exercise of his superior Powers his chief Attention, adoring the Perfections of his Maker, expressing Good-will to his Fellow-creatures, and cultivating inward Rectitude.”\textsuperscript{91} Barbauld echoed Carter’s idea that a virtuous person needed to use his/her “superior powers”.\textsuperscript{92} In a dialogue between a father and his daughter Harriet, in \textit{A Legacy for Young Ladies}, Barbauld wrote: “We do not receive pleasure long from any thing that is not bought with our own labour; this is one of those permanent laws of nature which man cannot change; and therefore pleasure and exertion will never be separated even in the imagination in a well-regulated mind”.\textsuperscript{93} The use of the word “pleasure” and the idea of “a well-regulated mind” recall Carter’s philosophy in the \textit{Rambler} essay.

Carter also explored the relationship of virtue to pleasure and suffering in her translation of Epictetus. Both Barbauld and Carter admired the former slave Epictetus, because he rose above his physical circumstances to find an inner

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid. 93.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid. 98.
\textsuperscript{89} Carter, “Ode to Wisdom” 87.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Carter, “Rambler” 95.
\textsuperscript{92} In a humorous “letter” she wrote from a mother cat Grimalkin to her daughter Selma, Barbauld wrote: “Remember that the true pleasures of life consist in the exertion of our own powers.” Barbauld et al., \textit{A Legacy} 76.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid. 102.
freedom and happiness. Although Epictetus hardly mentioned women, Hutton argues that his Stoicism was particularly relevant for them because it was a “philosophy of the disempowered”, which helped them to cope with subordination.\textsuperscript{94} As McCarthy and Kraft demonstrate, Barbauld’s essay “Against Inconsistency in our Expectations”, written in or after 1769 and published in \textit{Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose} (1773), drew on Stoical ideas by focusing on what is realistically possible and within our power.\textsuperscript{95} Acknowledging Carter’s influence by beginning her essay with an epigraph from Carter’s translation of \textit{All the Works of Epictetus} (1758), Barbauld wrote:

\begin{quote}
The man, therefore, who has well studied the operations of nature in mind as well as matter, will acquire a certain moderation and equity in his claims upon Providence. He never will be disappointed either in himself or others.\textsuperscript{96}
\end{quote}

Epictetus promoted piety and taught that virtue was the basis of happiness; this idea comforted Barbauld. In her poem “To Dr Aikin” she wrote: “Content remain within they bounded sphere,/For fancy blooms, the virtues flourish there” (60–1). Bringing herself back from worldly ambitions, she reminded herself of a higher spiritual vocation, emphasising that a woman’s primary aim in life is to be virtuous.

In “Corsica” Barbauld demonstrated a more ambiguous attitude to Stoicism. Epictetus’ passive philosophy did not involve political activism or political change; instead it was about a personal metamorphosis.\textsuperscript{97} Stoicism was thus hard to reconcile to Barbauld’s Dissenting belief in the need for active Christianity. In her poem “Corsica” her praise of intervention suggests that (at least at times) she found Stoicism insufficient. However, the conclusion of the poem shows that it provided her with solace in her personal situation. Although she was not free to pursue all her ambitions, the most important freedom was intellectual. Barbauld wrote:

\begin{quote}
There yet remains a freedom, nobler far
Than kings or senates can destroy or give;
Beyond the proud oppressor’s cruel grasp
Seated secure; uninjur’d; undestroy’d;
Worthy of Gods: The freedom of the mind. (197–201)\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{94} Hutton, “Virtue, God and Stoicism” 142.
\textsuperscript{95} McCarthy and Kraft 483–5.
\textsuperscript{96} Barbauld, “Against Inconsistency in our Expectations”, McCarthy and Kraft 187.
\textsuperscript{97} Hutton, “Virtue, God and Stoicism” 143.
\textsuperscript{98} Barbauld, “Corsica”, 66.
McCarthy argues that in this poem Barbauld was making a feminist statement. The suppression of Corsican nationalism is likened to the suppression of women. Her conclusion includes a “private”, “female” meaning within a public, political one. He claims that hermeneutically it speaks to two audiences at once. To one it speaks the language of Milton and situates Barbauld in the Miltonic tradition of ethical political discourse. To the other, it speaks the language of early feminist quietism of Mary Astell or Lady Chudleigh. Astell argued that as women could not obtain power in this world their only endeavour should be to control their own behaviour.99

I agree with McCarthy’s analysis; the idea of “the proud oppressor” is similar to Barbauld’s later description of men in her poem “The Rights of Woman”. She writes: “Woman! Too long degraded, scorned, opprest; ( … )Go, bid proud Man his boasted rule resign” (2 and 7). Although the tone of “The Rights of Woman” appears to be ironic, the echo of the imagery used in “Corsica” highlights the underlying seriousness of the message: that male dominated society prevented women fulfilling their full potential. However, I suggest the main influence on this passage was Carter. In her “Ode to Wisdom”, Carter wrote in similar terms about the liberation available through the mind:

To Thee! Supreme, all-perfect Mind
My Thoughts direct their Flight:
Wisdom’s thy Gift, and all her Force
From Thee deriv’d, unchanging Source
Of intellectual Light!100

Barbauld’s aim at this time, as set out in her series of verses describing different people entitled “Characters”, was to maintain “the balance of her even mind”, and act with integrity.101 She described her ideal woman in Stoical terms: “So poised her feelings, so composed her soul,/So subject all to reason’s calm controul”.102 However, this poem suggests that she was aware how fragile this carefully contrived equilibrium was. She wrote that “passion, strong and unconfined” could shatter it, and although in the poem this refers to romantic love, it also suggests that she had experienced strong emotions about the restrictions placed on her as a

99 McCarthy, “‘We Hoped’” 123.
100 Carter, “Ode to Wisdom” 89.
102 Ibid. 1: 48.
woman. Describing passions as “despotic” suggests that she feared the destructive potential of these feelings.  

Influenced by Carter, Barbauld emphasised the importance of self-control to subdue disturbing emotions. Carter wrote in the *Rambler* essay:

> [We] must use the Regimen of a stricter Self-Government (...). In social active Life, Difficulties will perpetually occur; Restraints of many Kinds will be necessary: and studying to behave right in Respect of these, is a Discipline of the human Heart useful to others, and improving to itself.  

In an imaginary dialogue between a father and his child Harriet in *A Legacy*, Barbauld reflected Carter’s philosophy when the parent states:

> I have formed the habit of self-government, one of the most useful powers a man can be possessed of (...) [the habit of self control] can only be gained by being often in the midst of temptations, and resisting them. This is the wholesome discipline of the mind. The first time a man denies himself any thing he likes and which it is in his power to procure, there is a great struggle within him, and uneasy wishes will disturb for some time the tranquillity of his mind. He has gained the victory, but the enemy dies hard. The next time he does not wish so much, but he still thinks about it. After a while he does not think of it; he does not even see it. (emphasis original)  

Although this passage refers to how a man can overcome his desire for material temptations, it gives us an insight into how Barbauld used mental control to subdue her feminist feelings. The words “great struggle”, “uneasy”, “disturb (...) the tranquillity of his mind” are reminiscent of Barbauld’s internal battle against the enemy which “dies hard”. It required a conscious act of the will, which did not succeed immediately but required constant, prolonged and determined mental action.

Barbauld’s Stoical approach to the feminist issues of her era can be detected in her attitudes to female education, literature, careers and politics. Rather than promoting a radical programme for reform, like Wollstonecraft, Barbauld quietly and subtly tried to change the way women were perceived. As Isobel Armstrong argues, Barbauld was one of the women poets who did not consent to “the idea of a special feminine discourse” or accept that women were...

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103 Ibid. 1: 49.
105 Barbauld et al., *A Legacy* 101.
non-rational. These women developed two strategies; they used the customary “feminine” forms and language but employed them analytically. Secondly, they challenged male philosophical traditions that demeaned feminine experience and reconstructed those traditions through critique. Paul Keen agrees that female authors revised, rather than directly challenged, established cultural assumptions by encoding subversive arguments about sexual politics within accepted literary genres and styles. As Newlyn shows, Barbauld adopted this clandestine approach by camouflaging her personal or feminist agendas.

A letter to her husband Rochemont, rejecting the idea of setting up a female academy, helps to explain why Barbauld disguised her arguments. She wrote that women should not trumpet their academic achievements because it would raise the alarm with men. Instead they should “gain these accomplishments in a more quiet and unobserved manner;— subject to a regulation like that of the ancient Spartans, the thefts of knowledge in our sex are only connived at while carefully concealed, and if displayed, punished with disgrace”. The idea that women had to act like criminals, committing “theft” and “conniving” to gain an education, suggests that society makes women less virtuous than they could be if they were allowed equal access to knowledge. The claim that women might be “punished with disgrace” shows that Barbauld believed that women who displayed their intellectual capacity were perceived negatively by men. John Gregory’s conduct book A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters (1774) reinforced Barbauld’s analysis; he wrote: “If you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding”. In “The Rights of Woman” Barbauld alluded to the need to write in code. Women’s rights had to be “Felt, not

108 Newlyn, Reading, Writing, and Romanticism 144
110 Carol Shiner Wilson cites another example of Barbauld warning women to avoid intellectual self-display. In a 1777 letter to her friend Miss Dixon, thanking her for an embroidered gift and a story, she uses the story of Arachne and Minerva, to warn her that although women are capable of artistic achievement “they must be careful not to reveal genius in any way that would displease the male establishment’s sense of superiority.” Wilson 187–8.
111 Qtd. in Freeman 58.
defined, and if debated, lost;/Like sacred mysteries, which withheld from
fame,/Shunning discussion are revered the most" (14–16).

Instead of a direct battle against prejudice, Barbauld subtly promoted
women. Drawing on the precedent of Rowe and Carter she wrote many poems
celebrating female friendship and the domestic affections. In her poem “To Mrs.
P[riestley], with some Drawings of Birds and Insects” (1773), written to Joseph
Priestley’s wife Mary, Barbauld wrote that “friendship, better than a Muse inspires”
(4) her writing.112 Addressing Mary as her beloved “Amanda” she explained that it
is “at her command again/I seize the pencil, or resume the pen” (1–2). Comparing
her friendship with Mary to the complementary relationship of the “two sister
Muses” (6), painting and poetry, she wrote: “Each perfects each, in friendly union
join’d;/This gives Amanda’s form, and that her mind” (17–18). This line shows that
“Amanda’s” intellectual and spiritual qualities appeal to Barbauld. At the conclusion
of the poem Barbauld set out how important female friendship was in her life. She
wrote:

Thy friend thus strives to cheat the lonely hour,
With song, or paint, an insect, or a flower:
Yet if Amanda praise the flowing line,
And bend delighted o’er the gay design,
I envy not, nor emulate the fame
Or of the painter’s, or the poet’s name:
Could I to both with equal claim pretend,
Yet far, far dearer were the name of FRIEND. (121–8)

These lines suggest that Barbauld is “lonely” without her friend’s companionship;
the act of painting or singing is primarily a means of spending time together rather
than a meaningful end in itself. Barbauld describes a domestic scene of supportive
female friendship as “Amanda” “praises” her work and bends “delighted” over the
painting. By writing “I envy not”, Barbauld implies that genuine female friends are
not jealous of each other. The repetition of “far” and use of capitals for “friend”
emphasise that this sort of friendship is more valuable than fame. In her detailed
examination of the poetry of female friendship in the eighteenth century, Ferguson
argues that it reflected a growing self-assurance among women and resistance to
patriarchal values, physical isolation and emotional alienation.113 As McCarthy

112 Barbauld, “To Mrs P[riestley], with some Drawings of Birds and Insects”, McCarthy and Kraft 44.
113 Ferguson, First Feminists 35.
contends, by emphasising female relationships Barbauld was attacking the views of writers such as Dr James Fordyce who in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) claimed that women were competitive and that female friendships were not genuine.\(^{114}\)

Barbauld was also supportive of other female writers. McCarthy claims that one of her aims in *The British Novelists* was “to vindicate female genius”. She reprinted substantially more contemporary fictions by women than male writers.\(^{115}\)

As Curran’s assessment of her use of Rowe’s and Carter’s precedent highlights, Barbauld wanted to create a female literary kinship network.\(^{116}\) Jane Spencer emphasises the importance of establishing a heritage for eighteenth-century writers. Literary tradition was understood as a genealogy, with a structure like a patriarchal family. If a writer’s work was to have a degree of immortality the author needed a position within this family of literature. The kinship could be metaphorical, or biological.\(^{117}\) What is unusual about Barbauld is that in her “Verses on Mrs Rowe” she chose to develop a matrilineal rather than patrilineal inheritance by acknowledging a literary mother not a father; this was rare at this time and, in itself, challenging to the male literary establishment. By emphasising women’s spiritual and creative equality, Barbauld over-turned cultural myths of men representing the highest form of creativity. Her description of Rowe as “a chaster Sappho” (1) created an even longer female literary lineage. As Spencer establishes, the idea of a female source for a literary tradition was treated as a threat by some male writers. Alexander Pope was openly hostile to the mention of Sappho and the feminine model it implied.\(^{118}\) However, Barbauld’s recognition of literary women’s importance was about not the exclusion of male writers but the inclusion of female authors within the literary Pantheon.\(^{119}\)

\(^{114}\) McCarthy quotes Barbauld as saying that she was tempted “to have burnt the book [Fordyce’s] for that unkind Passage.” McCarthy, “We Hoped” 132.


\(^{116}\) Curran uses the literary relationship between Rowe, Carter and Barbauld to illustrate the importance of female networks. He describes a “sisterly community” where “women work together, and the renown of those who succeed not only bodes promisingly for novices who emulate them, but is a vital component in their coming to poetic identity.” Curran 159


\(^{118}\) Ibid. 78.

\(^{119}\) As well as female writers Barbauld drew on many male writers including James Thomson and John Milton in her work.
Although spiritually, intellectually and creatively equal, Barbauld believed that men and women had different strengths that should be valued. Her work championed traditional “female” virtues. In a letter to her brother written in 1774, she wrote: “Women are naturally inclined not only to love, but to all the soft and gentle affections, all the tender attentions and kind sympathies of nature”. The similarity between the sentiment in this letter and in her poems “To a Lady, with some painted Flowers” and “The Rights of Woman” demonstrates that this was her consistent view. In the first verse in “Characters” Barbauld described the “loveliest pattern of a female mind”. She wrote:

O BORN to soothe distress and lighten care,  
Lively as soft, and innocent as fair! (...)  
Such melting tenderness, so fond to bless,  
Her charity almost becomes excess.  
Wealth may be courted, Wisdom be revered,  
And Beauty praised, and brutal Strength be feared;  
But Goodness only can affection move,  
And love must owe its origin to love.

The repetition of the word “love” and use of the words “tenderness” and “affection” showed that she believed that women had a distinctive identity which suited them for a nurturing role that was vital to society. As Newlyn explains, Barbauld believed that Wollstonecraft’s ideas in *A Vindication of* replacing sensibility with rationality would fail because it was going against nature. The idea that women were “naturally” different was anathema to Wollstonecraft and Macaulay, who argued that differences between the sexes, beyond the physical, were due to education and cultural expectations. To Wollstonecraft, Barbauld’s descriptions of women as “soft”, “gentle” and “tender” seemed to be drawing on pernicious traditions of exaggerated female sensibility and male gallantry which kept women subordinate.

However, this criticism was unfair, as Barbauld’s “The Rights of Woman” shows that although she valued genuine female sensibility and true gallantry she

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120 Qtd. in Grace A. Ellis, *A Memoir of Mrs Anna Laetitia Barbauld, With Many of her Letters* (Boston, 1874) 62.  
121 Barbauld, “Characters”, *Works* I: 47.  
122 Ibid. 48.  
123 Newlyn 160.  
125 Shanley 150–3.
was critical of its artificial form. Her description of “angel pureness” (6) followed by the contrasting martial imagery of the imperious “courted idol” (25) suggests that she accepted Wollstonecraft’s view that false gallantry sentimentalised and sexualised women. However, unlike Wollstonecraft she undermined these images by gently mocking them rather than attacking them directly. She was realistic that relationships between the sexes often began in idolisation of the loved one or the mock battle of courtship as this antagonism was part of initial sexual attraction, but it settled into the “mutual love” (32) of marriage. This is emphasised in the final stanza of “The Rights of Woman”. Barbauld wrote:

Then, then, abandon each ambitious thought,
Conquest or rule thy heart shall feebly move,
In Nature’s school, by her soft maxims taught,
That separate rights are lost in mutual love. (29–32)

The implication is that it is natural for women to be ruled by their hearts and that separate rights are not needed if a marriage is based on mutual love. This idea was common in late eighteenth-century society; Blackstone argued that the wife’s legal existence was subsumed into her husband’s on marriage because no separate rights were needed. In practice this meant that a wife’s person as well as her children and her possessions belonged to her husband. Wollstonecraft’s The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria argued that a reliance on mutual love was inadequate; women needed legal rights to avoid “marital enslavement”.

Although late eighteenth-century women writers had very different attitudes to marriage, they were unanimous about women’s importance as mothers. On the conservative side, Hannah More championed the role of the family and women’s nurturing, redemptive powers for the reformation of manners. On the radical wing, Wollstonecraft considered being a mother was the primary role for most

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127 McCarthy claims her tone appears ironic, as if it is ridiculing the use of female wiles to gain influence over men, not supporting such methods. He claims that much of Barbauld’s poetic effort during her twenties was exploring the possibilities of female self-hood (84). He writes: “Even when she associates such terms as ‘soft’ and ‘sweet’ with women (…) she uses the term honorifically. Instead of signifying as in Pope, woman’s emptiness, they signify for Anna Letitia woman’s superior goodness.” McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 85.
128 Shanley 155–8.
women. In *A Vindication* she wrote: “Speaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next in point of importance, as citizens, is that which includes so many, of a mother”. Like More and Barbauld, she portrayed the family as the basic unit for the moral and social regeneration of society. These ideas had a philosophical basis; in his *A System of Moral Philosophy* (1755) Hutcheson promoted the domestic affections as vital to the well-being of society. He contended that marital and parental love was the natural moral foundation of all societies and that the family was the site for political socialisation. As wives and mothers, women were obliged to perform moral duties for the good of the whole community.

Rather than following Wollstonecraft’s example by calling for better career opportunities for women, Barbauld appreciated the “potential of the quotidian”. As Marlon Ross shows in his analysis of her mock-heroic poem “Washing Day” (1797), Barbauld placed a high value on women’s domestic work. She depicted the tedium of household work without demeaning the work itself, and demanded that we take such work as seriously as men’s work. Similarly, Armstrong contends that in her “Inscription for an Ice House” (1795) Barbauld challenged Adam Smith’s division of labour into unproductive and productive in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) because the idea that services are unproductive removed the labour of women from the equation and thus excluded them from the economy. Her realistic approach seems to have been that although women’s roles were limited, they should be valued because their work made an essential contribution to society.

Her attitude to female education was equally practical. Like many Bluestockings, Dissenters, Evangelicals and Quakers, she argued that education should be appropriate to women’s socio-economic status. Her pragmatic approach is emphasised in her letter to her husband Rochemont rejecting his

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130 Sylvana Tomaselli, “The Most Public Sphere of All: The Family”, Eger and Grant 241.
131 Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* 149.
132 Tomaselli 241.
134 Wilson, “Lost Needles, Tangled Threads” 180.
137 This is similar to her attitude to the different “stations” in society. See Chapter 5.
proposal that she should set up a female academy. She wrote that it was “better calculated to form such characters as the ‘Précieuses’ or the ‘Femmes savants’ of Molière, than good wives or agreeable companions”. Barbauld was reacting to the reality that marriage was the most crucial factor in determining a woman’s future position in society. Hannah More, like Barbauld, argued that women should not be educated in a way which would lead them to despise the duties of ordinary life, or turn them into “précieuses ridicules”. Wollstonecraft’s and Macaulay’s ideas differed in some aspects from Barbauld’s. Macaulay deplored the different education of the sexes based on the idea of “sexual character”; she called for mixed education. Similarly, in her A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft called for national public co-education for children up to nine years of age. However, although they put forward programmes to change it, they too were aware of the realities of their society. In her Vindication Wollstonecraft argued that equal education was vital to female emancipation, but she also believed that the purpose of education was to make women more virtuous, rational wives and mothers. In her earlier Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787) she wrote in terms similar to Barbauld’s letter to Rochemont that it was wrong for any “employment of the mind” to be regarded as an excuse for the neglect of domestic duties. She added that a woman should acquire sufficient knowledge to “fit herself to be the companion and friend of a man of sense, and yet know how to take care of his family”.

Barbauld’s nurturing role became predominant when she married Rochemont in 1774. Her energies were focused on running Palgrave school and bringing up their adopted son, Barbauld’s nephew Charles. Rowe’s example validated her choice. After her husband’s death, Rowe left London to retire to Frome. Barbauld was part of a group of eighteenth-century writers, including

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139 For the full version of her letter see Barbauld, The Works 1: xvii–xxiv.
140 Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 45.
141 Ferguson, First Feminists 25–6.
142 Rendall writes: “The starting point for women lay in the assumption that their lives and their future had to be seen in the context of their family roles. For them, in reality, there was no future outside the confines either of the family into which they were born or the one which they might themselves create, or, in default of either, the household which they might serve, as servant or governess (...) In material terms, there was virtually no employment for middle-class women outside of marriage – with the exception of poorly paid teaching and, for a few writing.” Rendall 4.
143 Qtd. in Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 47.
144 Prescott, Women, Authorship and Literary Culture 92.
Jane Brereton, Mary, Lady Chudleigh and Elizabeth Rowe, who lived away from London for much of their writing lives. Prescott claims that the Horatian trope of rural retirement allowed these women to portray their absence from city life as a feminine, virtuous retreat which distanced them from the commercial and professional world of the capital. Despite the image, Barbauld and Rowe were not isolated in their provincial lives; through their Dissenting connections they had extensive interaction with the metropolitan literary world.¹⁴⁵

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS FOR THE 1790s

In the late 1760s and early 1770s Rowe and Carter provided Barbauld with precedents for living a fulfilling, virtuous life within the existing system. However, I suggest that in the heated political atmosphere of the 1790s Barbauld turned to other traditions of female thought in which women expressed their political and religious sentiments in less polite terms. At this time she developed a more angry tone in her work. As Janowitz shows, the passion she had carefully controlled in her youth was now released.¹⁴⁶ I agree with Janowitz’s analysis but develop it further to argue that in the 1790s the polite, conservative, Stoicism of Carter did not seem an adequate response to the political situation.¹⁴⁷ Instead, Barbauld turned for inspiration to a seventeenth-century heritage of nonconformist, radical, female political activism.

In this section I will focus on the similarities between the style and contents of Barbauld’s 1790s pamphlets and the writing of the Civil War Leveller Katherine Chidley and the Quaker Margaret Fell Fox, because they occupied similar positions to Barbauld. All three women were at the heart of their denominations, seen as respectable members of the group and close to the leadership. Katherine Chidley was an original member of the Jacob Church and the founder of several separatist congregations. With her son Samuel, she took a central role in first the “Brownists” and then the Levellers.¹⁴⁸ Margaret Fell was a leading member of the Quaker movement, eventually marrying its founder George Fox in 1669. Like Barbauld,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 92–102.
¹⁴⁶ Janowitz, “Amiable and Radical Sociability” 69–70.
¹⁴⁷ Hutton writes that “Carter deplored the French Revolution.” Hutton, “Virtue, God and Stoicism” 140.
¹⁴⁸ Gillespie 11, 65–76.
they were women who wrote about the same issues as their male co-religionists and defined themselves by their faith more than their gender.

As women members of Dissenting groups in times of persecution, Barbauld, Chidley and Fox had much in common; the similarity of their situation results in similarities in their written work. Echoes of her predecessors’ polemics can be found in Barbauld’s political pamphlets *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790) and *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* (1793). The first was written in response to Parliament’s failure to repeal the two acts which prevented Dissenters holding some public offices; the second responded to the government’s call for a day of fast in all places of public worship to call for divine aid in the war against France. The question arises: was Barbauld herself aware of the precedent set by these women or do these resemblances arise simply from similar political and religious circumstances? We cannot prove that Barbauld read Fox’s and Chidley’s pamphlets and was consciously imitating them, therefore the link between her work and theirs is not as direct as Barbauld’s debt to Rowe and Carter. What we can be more confident of is that Barbauld was aware of these women’s existence and this tradition of female, nonconformist activism. She had a detailed knowledge of seventeenth-century sectarian history and there is also evidence that she was thinking about these historical precedents during the period when she was writing her political and religious pamphlets.

Barbauld’s 1775 essay “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste” analysed the development of nonconformist religion from the previous century to her own era. This detailed assessment suggests that Barbauld did extensive research. She had access to information about the history of Dissenters through her father. When John Aikin Senior became theology tutor at Warrington he introduced a course on church history. Most of his other divinity lectures were based on Doddridge’s lectures, but the church history was his own addition. Barbauld’s dedication of her essay to her father suggests that she drew on his work but supplemented it with her own research. In *A Legacy* she emphasised the importance of using primary sources, writing: “The real sources of History can only be known by some acquaintance with the original authors”. The likely sources for her essay can be

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149 Wykes, “John Aikin Senior” 41.
150 Barbauld et al., *A Legacy* 36.
found in the *Select Catalogue of Books in the Library belonging to the Warrington Academy* (1775). The library had a collection on “Politics, Commerce, and Law”, but the titles are only cursorily listed. They include Locke, Grotius, Puffendorf, and “Sidney on Government” but the section described as “Political Tracts” may also have included Civil War tracts.\(^{151}\)

Reading her essay suggests that she had studied material written by sectarianists rather than just secondary sources because she discussed the quality of the language used. She described the earliest sects as displaying “A strain of eloquence, often coarse indeed, but strong and persuasive”.\(^{152}\) She also wrote about the language of the Restoration Puritans, commenting that one of their “most striking characteristics is a beautiful simplicity of dialect” which kept up “some idea of that manly plainness with which one human being ought to address another”.\(^{153}\)

“On the Devotional Taste” establishes that Barbauld researched seventeenth-century sects in detail, but is there evidence that she knew about the role of women in these movements? In the years before she began writing “Thoughts” she was particularly interested in the influence of religious, nonconformist women, as her poems to Rowe and to her grandmother, “On the Death of Mrs Jennings”, demonstrate. In the poem to her grandmother Barbauld emphasised the matriarchal rather than patriarchal origin of her religious ideas.\(^{154}\)

As the female head of the family, Mrs Jennings passed on her values and knowledge of her religious heritage. When she died in 1770, Barbauld portrayed her death as that of a biblical matriarch “with a Patriarch’s length of days” (8). By using this term Barbauld was drawing attention to her family tradition. Anna Letitia Wingate Jennings’ father Sir Francis Wingate was an Anglican who, as a local Justice of the Peace, had sentenced John Bunyan to prison for unlicensed preaching. However, her mother, Lady Anne Annesley, was a Presbyterian and the daughter of Arthur, the first earl of Anglesea who was Lord Privy Seal under Charles II. Lady Anne was a forceful character with different political and religious

\(^{151}\) *Select Catalogue of Books in the Library belonging to Warrington Academy* (1775), Warrington Central Library. This information came from William McCarthy in a personal correspondence 10 September 2012.


\(^{153}\) Ibid. 230.

\(^{154}\) In her poem “On the Death of Mrs Jennings” she wrote: “Farewell! Thy cherish’d image, ever dear,/Shall many a heart with pious love revere:/Long, long shall mine her honour’d memory bless,/Who gave the dearest blessing I possess” (25–8), McCarthy and Kraft 66–7.
views from her father and husband. Like her mother, Mrs Jennings was a powerful religious figure in her own right. After her husband’s death she developed a close but complex relationship with the Dissenting leader Philip Doddridge which became part of family folklore. In her life and her ancestry, Mrs Jennings represented a personal link with the past tradition of Dissent, demonstrating the importance of women in nonconformity.

Although we do not have evidence that Barbauld read Fox’s and Chidley’s pamphlets, women’s tracts were available in a place which was accessible to her. From the 1760s the Thomason collection, which included Chidley’s pamphlets and women’s petitions, was housed at the British Museum. The archive was available for research, as Catherine Macaulay used it in her history. During the early 1770s Barbauld visited her uncle Arthur Jennings’ family in Bloomsbury Square, which was only a short walk from the British Museum. McCarthy speculates that she visited the Museum and saw the drawings of plants and insects by the Dutch naturalist Maria Merian.

Even if she did not read their pamphlets, Barbauld is likely to have known of Fox and Chidley through secondary sources. The persecution of Fell Fox and Barbauld’s paternal great grandfather John Jennings for their religious beliefs, are mentioned in the same book A collection of the sufferings of the people Called Quakers, for the testimony of a good conscience. Katherine Chidley is included in George Ballard’s Memoirs of British Ladies, who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and sciences (1775), which was

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155 Anna Letitia Le Breton wrote of her ancestor that she was “a stiff Presbyterian, her husband a jolly Episcopalian, who said somewhat bitterly, that when he was gone she would certainly turn his great hall into a conventicle”. Le Breton 2–7.
156 Doddridge fell in love with Mrs Jennings’s daughter Jane, who was to be Barbauld’s mother. Ibid. 6.
157 McCarthy states that in a poem she sent to Mary Priestley “with Some Drawings of Birds and Insects” she alluded to these drawings or to Merian’s writing on the subject. McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 97.
158 Joseph Beese, A collection of the sufferings of the people Called Quakers, for the testimony of a good conscience (London, 1753). Margaret Fell Fox is mentioned on pages 326 and 366, John Jennings on page 82.
widely read. Ballard mentioned Chidley’s Amazonian defence of religious toleration and cited her pamphlet *The Justification.*

An important secondary source for Barbauld’s knowledge of the seventeenth century was Catharine Macaulay’s *History of England.* McCarthy establishes that Barbauld had read this work because she recommended it to her pupil Lydia Rickards. Macaulay provided a radical reading of the seventeenth century. In volume three of her *History* she painted a positive picture of women who took an active political role in the Civil War. In 1641 gentlewomen and tradesmen’s wives petitioned Parliament “to be secured from the cruelty and persecution of Papists, prelates, and their adherents; and expressed their resentment on the cruelties committed in Ireland, in very pathetic terms.” Macaulay made it clear that although they were entering the political arena they were not taking a feminist stance. Knowing that they might face ridicule and persecution, they explained: “We do it not out of any self-conceit or pride of heart, as seeking to equal ourselves with men, either in authority or in wisdom, but, according to our places, to discharge that duty we owe to God, and the cause of the church.” Evidently Macaulay admired their action; she described them as “a company of decent virtuous matrons, acting under the influence of conscience” and compared them to the women in the Roman Republic at “its state of highest virtue.”

The portrayal of these women in Macaulay’s *History* provided a model for female-centred political action which fitted Barbauld’s attitudes to religion, politics and feminism. The petitioners’ humanitarian concerns and “pathetic” tone were updated for a new era a century and a half later in Barbauld’s political pamphlets, which combined hard-hitting political ideas with the language of sensibility. This model of women’s active citizenship, which involved acting on conscience out of religious duty, not overtly feminist motivation, finds parallels in Barbauld’s *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*; in this pamphlet she espoused a belief in the

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160 George Ballard, *Memoirs of British Ladies, who have been celebrated for their writings or skill in the learned languages, arts and sciences* (London, 1775) 198.
161 McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 100.
162 Catharine Macaulay, *The History of England from the accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line,* vol. 3 (Dublin, 1770) 197.
163 Ibid. 197–8.
164 Ibid. 198.
duties of an active citizen which was similar to Macaulay’s views. Wiseman claims that Macaulay’s republicanism placed her at the end of a tradition in which women’s writing on the public sphere was rooted in a discourse of national civic virtue, rather than the place of women in the family and home. I contend that Barbauld was continuing this tradition and updating it by combining the ideas of women taking a leading domestic role with a responsibility to demonstrate civic virtue.

Fundamental to Barbauld and seventeenth-century sectarian women’s ideas was their belief in the spiritual equality of women and the idea that they must have mental freedom to be virtuous. This freedom was vital not just for a woman’s earthly existence but to guarantee her eternal salvation. As Sharon L. Arnoult establishes, the concept of “the sovereignty of the soul” cuts across the generations and the political divide. It was the starting point for all the women mentioned in this chapter, from Astell to Wollstonecraft. Gillespie stresses that this religious idea had political implications; it challenged existing hierarchies because women began to see themselves as individuals who possessed liberties because of their spiritual status. This theory of natural rights had repercussions in the home and wider society because nonconformist women’s relationship with God and their freedom of conscience came before any earthly ties, such as duty to husbands or monarchs. It placed an onus on them to speak out if their conscience told them that something was wrong; this is what Barbauld did in her 1790s pamphlets.

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165 See Chapter 4.
166 Wiseman 194.
167 Arnoult uses the term the “sovereignty of the soul” to describe the idea that “all souls have absolute freedom and autonomy. All souls are equal and therefore have liberty in regard to each other. As one soul is not superior to another, one soul cannot bind, or have authority, over another. The soul owes obedience only to God and God’s law; therefore, because the sovereignty of God is superior to any temporal sovereignty, no temporal power which makes claims upon a person possessing a soul, such as the family or state (…) can exercise any sway over the soul.” Arnoult 228.
168 Gillespie 30.
169 Chidley set out this idea in The Justification of the Independent Churches of Christ. Being an answer to Mr Edwards (London, 1641). She wrote: “The wife may be a believer, and the husband an unbeliever, but (…) I pray you tell me, what authority this unbelieving husband hath over the conscience of his believing wife. It is true he hath authority over her in bodily and civil respects, but not to be a Lord over her conscience; and the like may be said of fathers and masters, and is the very same authority which the Soveraigne hath over all his subjects and therefore it must needs teach to families; for it is granted that the King hath power (…) over the bodies, goods and lives of all his subjects: yet it is Christ, the King of Kings that reigneth over their consciences” (26).
In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries nonconformists were the most overtly politicised women. Marlon Ross describes Dissenting women who took a political stance as having a “status of double dissent – as a political female and as a female within a nonconforming community deprived of civil liberties”. As Women, Gender and Enlightenment shows, Rational Dissenters encouraged women’s political activism, providing an “intellectual launch pad” for not only Barbauld but also Wollstonecraft and Hays. However, even among this more pro-women group there were still restrictions on female roles; Barbauld could write a sermon but not deliver it.

It took courage for women in both eras to take an active role in the public sphere. Patricia Higgins explains that women who took this unconventional path were seen by even their admirers as being masculine and comparable to mythological characters rather than ordinary women. John Lilburne wrote that his wife Elizabeth was “of a gallant and true Masculine Spirit”. The female Leveller petitioners of 1649 were described as “Amazones”. As Eleanor Ty’s research demonstrates, a century later the descriptions of women who wrote about politics remained the same: critics ridiculed them as masculine viragoes. The Reverend T. J. Matthias in his Pursuits of Literature (1797) wrote that: “Our unsexed female writers now instruct, or confuse, us and themselves, in the labyrinth of politics, or turn us wild with Gallic frenzy”. In 1798 the anti-Jacobin poet the Reverend Richard Polwhele published “The Unsex’d Females: A Poem”, which described radical women including Barbauld, Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson and Mary Hays as unnatural freaks. As Ross explains, they were portrayed as sullying the “feminine purity” of the position which gave them a moral advantage over men.

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172 Ross, “Configurations” 93.
173 Ferguson, First Feminists 2.
175 Qtd. in Eleanor Ty, Unsex’d Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1993) xiii.
176 Ibid. 4.
177 Ross, “Configurations” 94.
As well as facing social stigma, political/religious women writers in both eras also risked prosecution. In 1647 the Leveller women Mary Overton and Elizabeth Lilburne were arrested for their activities regarding seditious pamphlets. During the 1660s and 1670s Margaret Fell Fox was imprisoned several times. Women in these groups were prepared to become martyrs for their beliefs. When in 1649 Elizabeth Lilburne and a group of several hundred women petitioned Parliament demanding their political rights, they explained that they were willing “to suffer and perish” if necessary “for upholding political freedoms”. In “On the Devotional Taste” Barbauld showed an interest in the persecution of the early sects. She described sectarians' willingness to suffer martyrdom for their faith. However, she pointed out that “extraordinary situations call forth extraordinary virtues”. Such sacrifice was not called for when Barbauld wrote the essay during the latitudinarian consensus in the 1770s, but by the 1790s, when Dissenters again faced persecution, it took on a new relevance. The fact that she republished “On the Devotional Taste” in 1792 suggests that she recognised the similarities and that she was drawing on her knowledge of seventeenth-century sectarian history for precedents. A Legacy confirms that she turned to history at this time. She wrote:

A well-informed person will not be apt to exclaim at every event out of the common way, that nothing like it has ever happened since the creation of the world, that such atrocities are totally unheard of in any age or nation;—sentiments we have all of us so often heard of late on the subject of the French revolution: when in fact we can scarcely open a page of their history without being struck with similar and equal enormities.

The idea that she was thinking of a radical, religious tradition in the seventeenth-century is suggested because in the same letter she mentions Sidney, Hampden, Locke and Milton and members of her family who suffered religious persecution.

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178 Arnoult 237.
179 Her first imprisonment was for allowing illegal meetings in her home and refusing the oath of allegiance in 1663. Ferguson, First Feminists 114.
180 Qtd. in Arnoult 238.
181 Barbauld wrote: “All the greater exertions of the mind, spirit to reform, fortitude and constancy to suffer, can be expected only from those who, forsaking the common road, are exercised in a peculiar course of moral discipline.” “On the Devotional Taste” 229.
182 Ibid.
183 Barbauld et al., A Legacy 52.
184 In A Legacy Barbauld wrote: “History conducts our retrospective view through past ages! How much more has the man to love, how much to interest him in his country, in whom her image is
The fact that she republished “On the Devotional Taste” in the same year that she wrote her controversial pamphlet *Civic Sermons*, suggests that she saw parallels between the two eras; she had become like the sectarians she mentioned in her essay, who risked persecution and even martyrdom for their cause.

PARALLELS BETWEEN BARBAULD, CHIDLEY AND FOX

Barbauld, Chidley and Fox responded to the challenging political situations they faced in similar ways. Due to the restrictions placed on them because of their gender, they saw writing as one way they could turn their religious duty into practical action. Chidley and Fox were not the only women to use their radical religious beliefs in literature; as Ferguson establishes, there was a “rise in women’s aggressive self-expression” at this time.\(^{185}\) For the first time, the abolition of censorship allowed substantial numbers of women to write about political issues; it is estimated that from 1640 to 1700 between three hundred and four hundred women writers were published and that more than half wrote religio-political tracts.\(^{186}\) As Phyllis Mack demonstrates, this literature came in a variety of forms from millenarian rants to reasoned polemics.\(^{187}\) However, Chidley’s and Fox’s rational, well-argued style makes them the most similar to Barbauld’s writing.

For all three women, religious toleration was their starting point. In 1641 Chidley published *The Justification of the Independent Churches of Christ. Being an answer to Mr Edwards his book calling for toleration of the gathered churches.*\(^{188}\) Chidley opposed the Presbyterians’ efforts to control religious expression. Claiming that the state should not have power over ecclesiastical

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\(^{185}\) Ferguson, *First Feminists* 2.  
\(^{186}\) Ibid. 11.  
\(^{188}\) The *Justification* was a pamphlet written in response to the Presbyterian minister Thomas Edwards, who claimed that sectarian changes to the patriarchal household would lead to the dissolution of the English state. Opposing sects particularly because they allowed women to preach and prophesy, he singled out Chidley as a dangerous heretic. Rachel Trubowitz, “Female Preachers and Male Wives: Gender and Authority in Civil War England”, *Pamphlet Wars: Prose in the English Revolution*, ed. James Holstun (London: Frank Cass, 1992) 114.
issues and that each congregation should manage its own affairs, she asserted that scripture and the Holy Spirit were the only true religious authorities. Like Barbauld in *Remarks on Mr Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry*, she argued for the spiritual equality of the ordinary believer. In 1645 she published *A new yeares gift*. Like Barbauld in *An Address to the Opposers*, Chidley championed true toleration, not religious freedom granted only if separatists made an outward show of attending state church services. This was similar to the eighteenth-century argument that Dissenters could hold public office if they outwardly conformed by occasionally taking communion in the state church. Both Chidley and Barbauld opposed such limited toleration. Chidley argued that true religious freedom was not possible if the church governors could persecute separatists for their beliefs, even if they did not exercise this power. Chidley wrote: “We pleade for one intire government established upon sound principles, unalterable. And not a government which may looke with severall faces, in severall times, upon severall occasions, according to men’s fancies” (emphases original). A century and a half later, Barbauld also called for consistency in the government’s treatment of Dissenters, claiming that religious freedom was a right. Barbauld wrote:

Sensible that a spirit of liberality requires the indulgence to be complete, and desirous at the same time to retain the idea of our holding it through sufferance and not of right, you have been betrayed in this incongruity of expression [using the term complete toleration]. Those are always liable to be betrayed into such, who have not the courage to embrace a system in its full extent, and to follow a principle wherever it may lead them. (emphasis original)

Chidley, Fox and Barbauld portrayed nonconformists in similar ways: as innocent people, who were loyal to the government but had been goaded into action because they were denied full toleration. They compared contemporary

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189 Arnoult 231.
190 Chidley wrote: “It is fitter for well-meaning Christians than for ill-meaning Christians, for well-meaning Christians be the fittest on the earth to make Churches, and to choose their officers; whether they be Taylors, Felt-makers, Button-makers, Tent-makers, Shepherds or Ploughmen, or what honest Trade soever, if they are well-meaning Christians.” Chidley, *Justification* 22–3.
192 Katherine Chidley, *A new yeares gift, or a brief exhortation to Mr Thomas Edwards; that he may breake off his old sins, in the old yeare and begin the new yeare, with new fruits of Love, first to God, and then to his Brethren* (London, 1645) 16–17.
194 Chidley wrote: “We plead for no toleration that shall disturbe the peace of Churches and Townes.” Chidley, *Justification* 25.
nonconformists to the Old Testament Israelites who faced exile and persecution in Egypt and also the early Christians who faced martyrdom. As Donald Davie establishes, Dissenters saw themselves as a tribe of chosen people like the ancient Israelites, who were in tension with their neighbours.\(^{195}\) Demonstrating her family link to experiences of persecution, in her poem to Mrs Jennings Barbauld described her grandmother as “An Israelite indeed” (11). In An Address to the Opposers Barbauld used the Old Testament description from Exodus of the plagues sent to Egypt to compare the fear the ruling classes had of Dissenters infiltrating high office.\(^ {196}\) In her pamphlet To the Magistrates Fox also drew on Exodus for inspiration.\(^ {197}\) Fox and Barbauld also used the same biblical allusion from the Gospel of St John to emphasise that their co-religionists’ “Kingdom is not of this world”.\(^ {198}\)

Having established that nonconformist groups were unthreatening, all three women blamed the established church and government for turning them into enemies.\(^ {199}\) They claimed that the faults that undermined the church came from


\(^{196}\) Barbauld wrote: “We should make our way so readily into the secret recesses of royal favour; and, of a sudden, like the frogs of Egypt, swarm about your barns and under your canopies, and in your kneading troughs, and in the chamber of the King.” Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 263

\(^{197}\) Fox wrote: “And he [God] saw the afflictions of his people formerly, when they were afflicted in Egypt, and heard their cries, and knew their sufferings. And surely he is the same now as he was then.” Fox, To the magistrates and people of England where this may come. What is the matter with the Christians of our age (London, 1664) 1.

\(^{198}\) Fox wrote: “For no other cause but love to the Souls of all People, have our sufferings been, and therefore have we been numbered amongst the Transgressors, and been accounted as sheep for the slaughter, as our Lord and Master was (…) who said my Kingdom is not of this World.” Fox, A declaration and an information from us the people of God called Quakers, to the present governours, the King and both Houses of Parliament, and all whom it may concern (London, 1666) 7. Barbauld used the same biblical allusion from the Gospel of John in her Address to the Opposers. She wrote: “Does she [the established church] tremble at the naked and unarmed sectary? Him, whose early connections, and phrase uncouth, and unpopular opinions set him at a distance from the means of advancement (…) He is not of the world, Gentlemen, and the world loveth her own.” Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 264–5.

\(^{199}\) In Fox’s 1664 pamphlet To the magistrates and people of England, she blamed the government for alienating nonconformists by rejecting their pleas for freedom of conscience. She asked a series of rhetorical questions:

And are those [nonconformist Christians] now become the greatest enemies that England hath? And for no other cause, but because they worship God, and obey Christ’s Command (…) The Law-makers of England (…) have hardened their hearts against the Lord and his people, as if they had no other enemies but they, who never did them wrong nor hurt, nor never desired nor intended any hurt against them, but hath ever desired their good, and peace, and welfare, and that they might come to the true knowledge of the Lord. (1)
Adopting the tone of female biblical prophets, Chidley, Fox and Barbauld warned that a judgement would fall on the country for its wrong-doings. They claimed there would be divine retribution for persecuting the innocent. Fox wrote: “Oh take up Lamentation for England! Surely there is some heavy, sad, and grievous Judgment waiting upon it.” Barbauld gave a similar warning in *Sins of Government* that individuals and the country as a whole would answer before God for their actions. Quoting from Deuteronomy XXIX.10, “Ye stand this day, all of you, before the face of the Lord”, she repeated Fox’s idea of collective responsibility, writing: “for every violation of integrity, justice, or humanity in public affairs, it is incumbent upon every one of us, to humble himself personally before the tribunal of Almighty God”.

For Barbauld, Chidley and Fox the boundaries between religion and politics were indistinct. Discussions of religious toleration had political implications. Both Barbauld and Fox used the language of rights and civil liberties. In a 1666 pamphlet, Fox demanded “our Rights and Liberties of Subjects, as freeborn

Her tone and sentiments were reflected in Barbauld in *An Address to the Opposers* when she asked why the established church felt so threatened by Dissenters having equal access to office. Using rhetorical questions, like Fox, Barbauld wrote:

Does the simple removal of the Test Act involve its [the Church’s] destruction? These were not our thoughts. We had too much reverence for your establishment to imagine that the structure was so loosely put together, or so much shaken by years, as that the removal of so slight a pin should endanger the whole fabric (...) After all what is it we have asked? – to share in the rich benefices of the established church? To have the gates of her schools and universities thrown open to us? No, let her keep her golden prebends, her scarfs, her lawn, her mitres. (265; emphases original).

Chidley wrote to Edwards: “In your second Reason you say, the Toleration desired will not helpe to heale the Schisms and Rents of your Church. To which I answer that if your Church be not the Church of Christ, it will not heale it indeepe for though the Prophets would have healed Babel, it could not be healed.” Chidley, *Justification* 23. Barbauld’s warning in *An Address to the Opposers* was similar. She wrote: “Nor need you apprehend from us the slightest danger to your own establishment. If you will needs have it that it is in danger, we wish you to be aware that the danger arises from among yourselves (...) Doctrines which will not stand the test of argument and reason will not always be believed (...) If therefore there is any weak place in your system, any thing which you are obliged to gloss over, and touch with a tender hand, any thing which shrinks at investigation – Look ye to it. its extinction is not far off.” (274–5; emphasis original). Chidley and Barbauld both drew attention to the clergy’s abuses of power and exploitation of the people. Barbauld, like her predecessor, used the terms truth and light and claimed that they “must finally prevail.” (276)

Chidley wrote: “They [the nonconformists] have been proved to be a peaceable people and the suffering of such hath never been dangerous to any Nation but the not suffering of such to live quietly in a land, or to pass quietly through a land hath brought Judgement upon such lands.” Chidley, *Justification* 29.

Fox, *To the magistrates and people of England* 1.

Barbauld, “Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation; or, a Discourse for the Fast, Appointed on April 19, 1793”, McCarthy and Kraft 299.
English men”. In her *Address to the Opposers* Barbauld demanded the opening up of government posts to Dissenters in similar terms. She wrote: “We do claim it as a right. It loses otherwise half its value. We claim it as men, we claim it as citizens, we claim it as good subjects” (emphasis original). Whereas Fox used the terms of her time writing as “freeborn English men”, Barbauld used the language of her era, referring to “citizens”, which has French overtones and shows the more international climate in which Barbauld was operating.

In their pamphlets these women explored the boundaries between individual rights and state interference. Chidley promoted an early argument for the right of resistance. As Broad explains, she claimed that if the magistrate did not practise genuine obedience to God, or if he compelled his subjects to practise an anti-Christian religion, then subjects had a religious duty to “separate” themselves from the magistrate’s rule. Chidley’s ideas were developed into coherent theories by John Locke and Algernon Sidney; Barbauld’s arguments about the relationship between the individual and arbitrary authority in *Sins of Government* followed in the same political tradition.

Katharine Gillespie claims that Chidley developed an early version of contract theory in her argument that citizens confer legitimacy upon governments. She portrays Chidley as one of “liberalism’s mothers”. Opposing some feminist critics’ rejection of liberalism as an “inherently sexist tradition”, Gillespie argues that we “need to assimilate sectarian women’s voices into a history of early liberalism”. She challenges Carole Pateman’s argument in *The Sexual Contract* that liberal political theory was a masculinist tradition because John Locke modelled the individual after a privileged image of masculinity. Instead Gillespie argues that the writing of seventeenth-century sectarian women “represented an alternative source of liberal ideas”.

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204 Fox, *A declaration* 4.
205 Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 266.
206 Broad 85–6.
207 See Chapter 4.
208 Gillespie 65.
209 Gillespie 23.
210 Ibid. 13.
211 Ibid. 14, 30.
Broad disagrees with Gillespie’s analysis; she is sceptical about Civil War sectarian women’s significance for the history of liberal feminism (in particular) and liberal political theory (in general).\textsuperscript{213} She argues that they did not develop “a fully fledged theory of women’s rights”, nor did they promote a modern liberal concept of “liberty”.\textsuperscript{214} Debating in detail Chidley’s legacy to liberalism goes beyond the scope of my thesis. However, I contend that the spiritual basis for her political ideas on the right of resistance and the freedom of the individual were similar to Barbauld’s. The fact that she did not develop a complete theory of liberalism or feminism makes her more like Barbauld. Neither Chidley nor Barbauld portrayed themselves as political theorists; instead of developing fully worked-out political blueprints they dealt with more quotidian issues.

It is evident that the religious and political ideas expressed in Chidley’s, Fox’s and Barbauld’s writing are similar, and that they contributed to a nonconformist, radical tradition. However, it is the style as much as the substance that links Barbauld to her predecessors. All three women adopted an angry tone of righteous indignation in their polemics. Chidley used a succession of pejorative adjectives to describe her opponent’s writing as “a rangling – insinuating – contradictory – revengefull story”.\textsuperscript{215} Fox’s pamphlets of the 1660s were also expressed aggressively. She railed at the Magistrates: “beware what ye do and keep your hands out of the blood and persecution of the innocent”.\textsuperscript{216} Barbauld’s tone became angry when she wrote: “It is you, who by considering us as Aliens, make us so. It is you who force us to make our dissent a prominent feature in our character (…) If we are a party, remember it is you who force us to be so”.\textsuperscript{217} The repetition of “it is you” reinforces to the reader who is to blame for the situation. Accusations of anger were a common criticism of women writers in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Chidley was accused by her opponents of speaking with violence and bitterness.\textsuperscript{218} During the 1790s Barbauld was attacked in similar terms for the fury of her argument.\textsuperscript{219} Although Barbauld and her

\textsuperscript{213} Broad,78.\textsuperscript{214} Broad and Green xix.\textsuperscript{215} Chidley, A new yeares gift 2.\textsuperscript{216} Fox, To the magistrates 1.\textsuperscript{217} Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 270.\textsuperscript{218} Trubowitz 115.\textsuperscript{219} See Chapter 4.
predecessors were accused of losing control, this was not accurate; their pamphlets demonstrate that they were using a controlled form of anger for rhetorical purposes. Ezell shows that Fox used a range of “rhetorical voices”, which included “quiet reasonable persuasion”, “righteous invective” and “triumphant disputation whereby the opponent is defeated by having his own words turned back on him”. Barbauld used a similar variety of tones within her pamphlets. Both Barbauld and Chidley employed sarcasm and irony to undermine their opponents’ arguments. Chidley wrote:

And truly Mr Edwards, you might have asked the independent Ministers a question in private (for you knew where to find them) and not have propounded so silly a question before the Parliament, when there is none there to answer you.

In her Address to the Opposers Barbauld began her pamphlet with obvious irony:

We address to you our thanks for much casual light thrown upon the subject [of repeal], and for many incidental testimonies of your esteem (whether voluntary or involuntary we will not stop to examine) which in the course of this discussion you have favoured us with. We thank you for the compliment paid the Dissenters, when you suppose that the moment they are eligible to places of power and profit, all such places will at once be filled with them.

Chidley, Fox and Barbauld wrote with a confidence which suggested that they were intellectually as well as spiritually equal to men. Demonstrating their intellectual powers, they produced a carefully reasoned argument. As Arnoult argues, Chidley’s authority came from her religious belief, rather than the privileged aristocratic background of previous women writers. She used wit and rational argument to counter her male literary opponent, the Presbyterian minister Thomas Edwards. Attacking his writing for its lack of logic, she wrote:

Considering the many questions that you asked, and the weakness of your reasons and arguments and the untruths of some of them, and how contradictory they were to one another, [I] thought it very easy to undermine and overthrow them (...) I desire again to repeat the heads of some of the chiefest of your arguments, that so rational [sic] men may consider whether they be truly logical [sic].

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220 Ezell 146.
221 Chidley, Justification 22.
222 Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 263.
223 Arnoult 232
224 Ibid. 233.
225 Chidley, A new yeares gift 12
She described the “frothiness of his reasons” and added: “Now surely, I wonder that wise men can smile upon you, except it be in consideration of your folly, for you are made all of contradictions”. By undermining Edwards’ reason as “frothiness” and “folly” she emphasised his lack of intellectual substance, but she was also making the subtly feminist point that women were as rational as men. The reasoned logic of Chidley’s argument is reminiscent of Barbauld’s An Address to the Opposers. In this pamphlet she provided a detailed analysis of what true toleration involved and examined in detail the arguments used to oppose ending civil disabilities for Dissenters. Reflecting her systematic approach and careful use of language, she wrote: “It is surely time to speak with precision, and to call things by their proper names”.

However, there was some ambiguity in both Barbauld and her seventeenth-century predecessors’ attitudes to intellectual equality with men. They demonstrated that they were intellectually equal by the act of writing, by the logical way they wrote and in their attacks on the intellectual calibre of their male opponents, but they then drew back from claiming that equality. After her assured attack on Edwards’ lack of logic Chidley changed tone, portraying herself as inferior to men, writing that she answered Edwards “holding it meet for those who were more able, not to trouble themselves therewith, but to be employed in matters of farre greater and higher concernment”. Earlier in the pamphlet she suggested that because of the lack of substance of Edwards’ argument “it appeared unto me to be a taske most befitting a woman”. In “Corsica”, Barbauld showed a similar ambivalence to her position as a female writer. Portraying herself as a “muse” placed her in a traditional, subordinate female role, as did the words “weak” and “powerless”, but the fact that she wrote such a political poem, was an assertion of female intellectual and creative equality. Chidley’s, Fox’s and Barbauld’s behaviour seems contradictory, but this “contradiction” is easily explained by the demands made on them as women; although they knew women’s intellectual capacity was

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226 Ibid. 17
227 Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 267.
228 Chidley, A new yeares gift 12.
229 Ibid. 2.
equal to men, they had to conceal this knowledge to protect themselves from charges of being unfeminine.

As Hilary Hinds’ research suggests, their approach can also be seen in Christian terms as avoiding the sin of pride; they were careful to distance intellectual confidence from authorial arrogance, instead showing traditional female humility. Following the precedent of her seventeenth-century forerunners Barbauld removed much of the ego from her work; in her 1768 poem to her brother she described her “more humble works” (52). Her political pamphlets differed from the works of Thomas Paine and William Cobbett, which emphasised their authorial persona by intermingling autobiographical material with political ideas. Unlike them she played down her individual authorship, writing anonymously or as “a Dissenter” or “a volunteer”. It seems that she was trying to occupy the same position as male writers, but without drawing attention to herself in a way that would highlight her gender.

Newlyn has written about Barbauld’s androgyny, describing her “hazy ego boundaries” and how she shifted from one persona to another in her poetry. She compares her “camouflaged” or “teasingly withheld” identity to the “negative capability” and “anonymity” of the later romantic poet John Keats. I suggest that her lack of ego can also be seen in a different perspective as following in the Civil War sectarian women’s tradition. Hinds’ description of these writers could equally be applied to Barbauld. She writes: “The self of the author in these texts is, in general, unstable, and shifting, unanchored in the time and space of seventeenth-century England”. The reason for this self-abnegation was religious, as Hinds explains: rather than the self of the Romantic authors authenticating their texts, there is an absence of an authorial “self”, whose place is filled by the authorising

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230 Hinds 90.
231 Paine wrote: “It is to my advantage that I have served an apprenticeship to life. I know the value of moral instruction, and I have seen the danger of the contrary.” He then set out his autobiography. Thomas Paine, Rights of Man (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999) 152. See also William Cobbett, The Soldier’s Friend: or, Considerations on the Late Pretended Augmentation of the Subsistence of the Private Soldiers (1792). Unlike Barbauld he constantly used “I”. He wrote: “I feel an indignation at this I cannot describe – I would have you consider the nature of your situation, I would have you know that you are not the servant of one man only” (emphasis original). Qtd. in Marilyn Butler, ed., Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 135.
232 Newlyn 154.
233 Ibid. 152.
234 Hinds 121.
presence and voice of God.235 These women often wrote anonymously to emphasise that their work was inspired by God and not about expressing their own talent. Unlike modern feminists, they negated their authorship and agency.236 This approach made them appear more modest and virtuous to the men who opposed women writing about religious and political issues. It also gave their writing greater authority as it suggested that God was working through them and they were merely an “instrument” for His purposes. During the seventeenth century there was the idea that women as “the weaker vessels” were more open than men to be conduits for God’s word.237

The lack of personal agency in Barbauld’s approach to her early writing is stressed in Lucy Aikin’s Memoir. She wrote: “The spirit of devotion early inculcated upon her as a duty, opened to her by degrees an exhaustless source of tender and sublime delight; and while yet a child, she was to find herself a poet” (my emphasis).238 The idea of religious inspiration, the sense of duty and the description of Barbauld finding herself a poet, is very similar to the way Civil War women writers described their process of writing as due not to an act of premeditated personal will but to an act of God.

To emphasise the divine inspiration of their writing, Chidley, Fox and Barbauld used many scriptural references. Chidley prefaced her pamphlet with biblical verses that refer to tools from the workaday world.239 Barbauld also used scriptural but quotidian allusions; for instance the metaphor “Ye are the salt of the earth” is used in her pamphlets and poetry to describe people who were willing to sacrifice worldly security for their beliefs.240 The use of biblical terms and plain language had an egalitarian purpose, making their ideas easily accessible to ordinary people who lacked education but could read the Bible.241 As Hinds emphasises, biblical allusions universalised the political argument; it went beyond

235 Ibid. 107.
236 Ibid. 90–1.
237 Ibid. 10, 89
238 Barbauld, Works 1: ix.
239 Gillespie 77.
240 Barbauld, “Hymn: ‘Ye are the salt of the earth’”, McCarthy and Kraft 136.
241 Hinds 98.
topical debates to tap into a wider historical tradition. It gave the impression that their ideas were like the “incontestable truths” of biblical prophecy.  

Critics debate how feminist seventeenth-century sectarian women were. Keith Thomas argues that the appeal to divine inspiration was of “very questionable value” as a means of female emancipation; it emphasised the omnipotence of God and the helplessness of his “chosen handmaid”, thus perpetuating the image of women’s inferiority. Phyllis Mack supports this view; she claims that although attention was paid to women prophets during the Civil War, this did not improve women’s public status. Their prophetic activities reinforced traditional stereotypes about women’s passivity, irrationality and passion and so did not make them credible authority figures. Hinds suggests that although they wrote about liberty and justice these women’s writing fell outside the traditional literary canon because they spoke from a particular place to a specific audience and their work was thus considered “too topical and ephemeral”. However, she argues that they were of literary and political importance and feminists have been wrong to overlook them. Patricia Higgins claims that the sectarian women of the 1640s and 1650s “marked the stirrings of the movement for the emancipation of women” and were an identifiable female lobby or pressure group. Ferguson develops this idea further, arguing that these women were “the first feminist wave in British history if we allow ‘feminists in action’ as part of our definition”.

Although it is evident that there were many limitations to their feminism, I contend that Chidley and Fox contributed to a strand of feminism “in action” which would be developed further by Barbauld. Like Barbauld, they were writing from a progressive perspective about issues that were of concern to men and women. All three women spoke like religious prophets, but their prophetic passion was tempered by reasoned argument which demonstrated female intellectual equality. Their pamphlets addressed topical issues but also wider political arguments about

242 Ibid. 140.  
244 Mack, “Women as Prophets during the English Civil War” 35.  
245 Hinds 5.  
247 Ferguson, First Feminists 11.
the rights of the individual and the role of the state. They did not produce fully developed theories of liberalism or feminism, but the act itself of writing about politics was a challenge to the political establishment.\textsuperscript{248} Although they did not emphasise the point, their interventions demonstrated women’s right to play a role in politics.

CONCLUSION

Having examined Barbauld’s female-centred thought in detail, it is clear that although she was not a “modern” feminist in the same way as Wollstonecraft, she had something important to say about the role of women in society. Understanding the historical traditions she drew on helps us to create a more realistic picture of the nuanced shades of 1790s feminism. Important to this understanding are the recent revisions of late eighteenth-century feminism which demonstrate the links between religion and radical feminists. When religion is put back into feminism, Barbauld seems to have more in common with her contemporaries than previously thought. However, I contend that although it is valuable to point out that there was a consensus among the leading women writers of the 1790s on some issues, including the spiritual equality of women, their status as rational human beings, the important role of motherhood and the need for a more appropriate female education, this does not make these women’s attitudes to feminism the same; the debate was more multi-faceted. We should listen to the women writers’ perception of themselves; there is no doubt that they considered themselves to be in different places on the feminist spectrum and they were aware that they had different priorities, hence Barbauld’s comment to Edgeworth, that there was no sisterhood between More and Wollstonecraft or herself. While acknowledging the similarities of their religious ideas we must also recognise the different political and religious historical traditions these women drew on and the effect these attitudes had on their tactical approach to feminism. If we do this we will get closer to recreating the overlapping but separate links in the chain that makes up the history of feminism. Although Barbauld rejected ideas of a sisterhood between 1790s women writers, that does not make her an opponent of women’s advancement; she just did not

\textsuperscript{248} Ross, “Configurations” 92.
want to be segregated from men and thus excluded from participating in the mainstream debates of the day. From her youth she was well aware of the restrictions society placed on her as a woman, but by the time she wrote to Edgeworth she had found ways to transcend her “bounded sphere” and fulfil her potential as a person with an important message to communicate. In her political pamphlets she went beyond gender limitations, writing not as a male or female author but as one of those “few finer spirits, who make Religion their chief object”.

249 Barbauld, “On the Devotional Taste” 228. In her essay Barbauld applied this description to worshippers capable of benefitting from doctrinal strictness within a sect.
Chapter 3
“The well taught philosophic mind/To all compassion gives”:
Barbauld’s attitudes towards humanitarian concerns

Barbauld’s lines in “The Mouse’s Petition” (1773) encapsulate her attitude to humanitarianism. The word “compassion” is a key element of her ethos; combining ideas of Christianity and sensibility, for Barbauld it involved feeling sympathy and pity not just for humans but for all fellow creatures. Reflecting God’s design of the universe, each individual had an innate value. Barbauld saw humanitarian concerns as part of an integrated ethical attitude towards the whole political system. Steeped in the benevolent philosophy of Francis Hutcheson and rational Dissent, she believed that all spheres of rational and spiritual inquiry, including political theory, religious doctrine and contemporary literature, were interrelated and united in a common purpose. She hoped to see the creation of a society based on the universal values of equality, mercy and peace.¹

Barbauld’s humanitarianism needs to be set in historical and cultural context. The different humanitarian movements of the late eighteenth century were linked, motivated by benevolent, Enlightenment attitudes. As Christine Kenyon-Jones explains, an emphasis on duties of care and the promotion of happiness led to humanitarian movements which addressed the well-being of animals, slaves and oppressed people.² At the end of the eighteenth century animal cruelty became associated with questions of rights and citizenship.³ David Perkins defines “animal rights” as involving “kindly attitudes to animals and pleas for reform in the treatment of them”.⁴ Though such assertions were controversial, in the discourse of the age animals could be said to have rights to life, to justice and to happiness.⁵ Action was

³ Ibid. 40.
⁵ Ibid. 3.
taken to end a range of animal cruelty including lower-class, public-order problem sports like baiting and cock-throwing.\textsuperscript{6}

Anti-slavery activity also took a more organised form in the late eighteenth century. As Moira Ferguson establishes, there had been opposition to slavery since the seventeenth century, but in the 1790s arguments for abolition became more overtly political, based on ideas of natural rights.\textsuperscript{7} J. R. Oldfield examines how the development of organised anti-slavery, on a nationwide scale, began in 1787 when the London Committee of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade evolved an efficient structure and organisation.\textsuperscript{8} Seymour Drescher describes the period from 1787 to 1792 as a new era in the history of slavery as it involved the mass mobilisation of public opinion. Describing it as “the first and most successful human rights movement”, he claims that the abolitionist campaign altered “dramatically and forever” the terms of public discourse about institutions in Britain.\textsuperscript{9}

The humanitarian movements of the eighteenth century involved similar supporters, arguments and tactics.\textsuperscript{10} Perkins argues that although the cause of animals did not enlist dedicated figures like the anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce or the prison reformer John Howard, it was a cause individuals might take up “episodically”, among other projects.\textsuperscript{11} David Turley also stresses that many of the abolitionists were involved in other religio-philanthropic and social reform efforts. He argues that juxtaposing and analysing their range of commitments “offers entry to the distinctive forms of consciousness, religiosity and behaviour of those middle-class elements”. It demonstrates their views on the appropriate balance between liberty and control and the contest of civilisation and barbarism within England and the wider world.\textsuperscript{12} It was assumed that if the anti-slavery campaign succeeded it would be an important step towards creating a

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid. 107.
\textsuperscript{10} Perkins, \textit{Romanticism and Animal Rights} 4.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. 45.
proper moral order in the world involving greater social and political harmony."\textsuperscript{13} Supporting the view that the anti-slavery campaign played an important part in the evolution of politics in the late eighteenth century, Drescher argues that abolitionism heightened the sense of national shortcomings, and the possibility of actively changing those defects.\textsuperscript{14}

Drawing on these critics’ arguments, I will examine Barbauld’s attitude to animal rights and slavery but also use this analysis to provide a deeper understanding of her progressive ideas. An examination of Barbauld’s writing on animal cruelty and slavery adds to the rest of the thesis because it is an important example of how she put her progressive beliefs into action. For her writing was a form of political activism. By providing a political reading of Barbauld’s “The Mouse’s Petition”, I support my argument that she was politically motivated throughout her life. This builds on the research in Chapter 1 by adding another layer to our understanding of Barbauld’s and Priestley’s relationship. It shows that their dialogue included politics and the use of rhetoric. This chapter also contributes to the study of Barbauld’s networks and sociable working practices by examining her involvement in the anti-slavery campaign. In Chapter 6 I will argue that her experience of group work at this time was important to her later anti-war campaigning.

This chapter argues that Barbauld genuinely cared about animals and slaves. Influenced by her faith and Hutchesonian philosophy, throughout her life she opposed cruelty to animals, as is evident in her children’s literature and her poetry. She also consistently wrote against slavery, in her hymns for children and her later political pamphlets. I will refer to these works to illustrate her attitude to humanitarian concerns. However, the main focus of this chapter will be on how Barbauld linked humanitarian concerns to wider issues about abuses of power. To support my argument I will analyse in detail her poems “The Mouse’s Petition” and her *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq. on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade* (1791); they encapsulate her method of writing a multi-layered discourse. Both poems promote the specific humanitarian issues of animal rights or anti-slavery, but they can also be read as developing a comprehensive criticism of

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 17.
\textsuperscript{14} Drescher 143.
government; her work suggested that there was a failure within the political system in Britain which needed wholesale reform.

Recent scholarship recognises the animal rights message of “The Mouse’s Petition” but also examines the many other layers of meaning it contains. William McCarthy describes it as “a classic plea for animal rights” which challenged Priestley’s attitude to science. However, he also sees it as “a political text” which responds to Priestley’s recent writing on civil liberty and calls on him to extend those principles to mice. Mary Ellen Bellanca uses the poem to explore the late eighteenth-century dynamics of science and gender. Mitzi Myers emphasises its feminist message, arguing that it expresses female distress at women’s lack of freedom. Other critics read it as a critique of the political system. Kathryn Ready argues convincingly that Barbauld was responding to specific examples of worsening living conditions for the poor. She was also using it to highlight the links between poverty and crime and the inadequacies of the penal system. Recent critics have seen it as promoting an ethical type of politics which was influenced by her Rational Dissenting faith. Marlon Ross argues that it demonstrates Barbauld’s Dissenting perspective that politics and morality are intertwined. In her poem she “binds the aggressive act of a political demand to the submissive act of prayerful blessing”. Daniel P. Watkins agrees that in this poem Barbauld “begins to establish more complex and subtle ground for political thought and action”. She called for the reconceptualisation of power relations, basing them on the principle of peace rather than self-interest. Weldon argues that the poem seeks “to reconfigure existing political values in favour of explicitly Christian values of compassion and moral responsibility”.

Critics have also explored the complex messages of *Epistle to William Wilberforce*, reading it as a critique of Britain’s political and economic system and of literary discourse. Ferguson argues that Barbauld’s poem has “a dual message”

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16 Bellanca, “Science, Animal Sympathy, and Anna Barbauld’s ‘The Mouse’s Petition’”.
17 Myers, “Of Mice and Mothers” 264.
19 Ross, “Configurations” 100–1.
20 Watkins 88–93.
21 Weldon.
about the need to think about liberty in domestic as well as global terms. Kate Davies describes it as an “anti-commercial” abolitionist poem. She examines Barbauld’s linking of the “degenerate force of commerce” with a “corrupted and diseased femininity”. Analysing Barbauld’s attitude to the use of poetry for political purposes, Ross describes Barbauld’s *Epistle* as “a kind of anti-pastoral”. He claims that she was influenced by George Crabbe’s criticism of pastoral poets in “The Village”. Like Crabbe, Barbauld suggested that the lies propagated and sustained by pastoral poetry contributed to tyranny over the slave.

This chapter will develop further the valuable work of previous critics, to provide a primarily political reading of these poems. I will emphasise their topicality, suggesting that specific events gave an impetus to Barbauld’s fight for political reform. I will argue that she wrote at key moments for Dissenters, after critical failures of the British government made them fear that liberty was threatened. I suggest that “The Mouse’s Petition” responded to the government’s harsh treatment of John Wilkes, British Dissenters and the American colonists. In 1769 Joseph Priestley wrote a controversial pamphlet, *The Present State of Liberty in Great Britain and Her Colonies*, addressing these issues. Developing Watkins’ argument that there were links between Priestley’s pamphlet and Barbauld’s 1773 Poems, I will suggest that “The Mouse’s Petition” was in dialogue with *The Present State of Liberty*.

By arguing that Barbauld was critical of the British government from the late 1760s, my analysis engages with Anne Janowitz’s research. Janowitz divides Barbauld’s writing career into two phases; her polite Warrington period and her more militant London phase in the 1790s “which structured an interventionist poetic”. While acknowledging that current political issues were part of Barbauld’s everyday discussions at Warrington, Janowitz describes Barbauld’s political understanding as being sharpened in “the urban milieu of 1790s radical London where the abstractions of Warrington were brought to bear on actual political
events and decisions”. My reading of “The Mouse’s Petition” suggests that this is an early example of her poetry engaging with “actual political events” not just abstractions. As Chapter 2 demonstrates, I accept Janowitz’s claim that Barbauld’s “voice” was “sharply altered” in the 1790s, from “amiable” to “passionate”, but my research emphasises that Barbauld was always politically motivated. Although the way she expressed her views changed, her fundamental political sentiments remained the same in both periods. Echoes of her attitudes in “The Mouse’s Petition” can be found in her An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts (1790), Civic Sermons (1792) and Sins of Government (1793); like these later pamphlets, this poem is an indictment of the political system. I contend that from her youth Barbauld was aware of weaknesses in British democracy but she adapted her style to suit the era in which she was writing. During the latitudinarian consensus, Barbauld considered a conciliatory approach was most likely to bring about reform; as the consensus broke down after the French Revolution a more militant style became appropriate. Although her early works were coded, they should be read as precursors to her overtly political pamphlets of the 1790s. My suggestion that her poem also expresses concern about the treatment of the American colonists supports my argument in Chapter 6 that one of the main aims of her poem Eighteen Hundred and Eleven (1812) was to prevent war between Britain and America. It indicates that in both the 1770s and in 1812 Barbauld believed that a breakdown in the transatlantic relationship would have disastrous consequences for Britain.

My reading of her Epistle to William Wilberforce also emphasises Barbauld’s political motivation. Drawing on the work of Turley and David Brion Davis, which demonstrates that in the period from 1787 to 1794 both conservatives and radicals used the campaign for their political ends, I will suggest that Barbauld’s mixing of politics and humanitarianism was typical of anti-slavery campaigners. Setting Barbauld’s writing in the context of Oldfield’s and Drescher’s research into the campaigning techniques used by the anti-slavery campaign, I will argue that

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27 Ibid. 65, 69.
28 Ibid. 69.
Barbauld was part of this powerful propaganda machine. Her *Epistle* was an example of her collaborative work with her fellow campaigners.

Like my reading of “The Mouse’s Petition”, I stress the topicality of the *Epistle*. It was written after Parliament had failed to vote not only for abolition of the slave trade in April 1791 but also for repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts the year before. As Michele Levy establishes, the majority of Barbauld’s work was circulated in manuscript form; like her earlier poem “Corsica” and her later poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, her *Epistle* was among the few poems published individually by Barbauld. When she published publicly it usually indicated that her poem was to campaign for a specific issue. Her *Epistle* contributed to the debate about how the abolitionist campaign should react to parliamentary defeat. It also addressed wider issues about the failure of the political system in Britain and the moral state of the nation. As McCarthy argues, the failure of Parliament to end slavery challenged Barbauld’s fundamental beliefs, not only about the benevolence of man but also about the potential of discourse to bring about moral reform.

This chapter will examine Barbauld’s critique of the discourse of sensibility. As her essay “An Enquiry into those Kinds of Distress which Excite agreeable Sensations” (1773) reveals, she carefully calculated how to deploy sensibility to mobilise public opinion. Daniel E. White claims that Barbauld used it as “a strategic device to be applied technically and self-consciously in order to achieve her own specific cultural ends.” I will show that she put the theories set out in her early essay into practice in the anti-slavery campaign. I will also examine how the failure of the abolition campaign to sway Parliament affected her attitude to sensibility.

**BARBAULD’S COMPASSIONATE PHILOSOPHY**

Barbauld’s humanitarianism was based in traditional Christian beliefs, combined with eighteenth-century ideas about sensibility and individual rights. Christianity taught that God had given man dominion over animals but it discouraged

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30 Oldfield 2; Drescher 67.
32 See Chapter 6.
33 McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 299.
35 White, “The ‘Joineriana’” 520.
mistreating them because such behaviour might afterwards extend to human beings. This theory was first fully articulated by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa contra gentiles* (c. 1258–64). In the seventeenth century John Locke’s psychological and developmental theories also emphasised that children should be brought up to abhor cruelty to animals.\(^{36}\) Aquinean and Lockean ideas were evident in Barbauld’s children’s literature; in her *Lessons for Children* (1778–9) children who inflicted unnecessary suffering on animals experienced harsh retribution; for instance, a young boy who wilfully killed a bird went missing in a wood and was eaten by a bear.\(^{37}\)

Eighteenth-century arguments for animal rights referred habitually to religion. Rational theology projected onto God moral ideas of reasonableness and benevolence. God intended all his creatures to be happy; therefore cruelty to animals was seen as impious and against God’s will.\(^{38}\) Exploitation of fellow creatures also went against the prevailing Enlightenment moral theory. Karen Halttunen explains that an increasing awareness that all humans and animals could experience pain altered attitudes to suffering. The culture of sensibility, which influenced literature, religion and philosophy, encouraged sympathy for the suffering of other sentient beings; “the man of feelings” felt sensitivity to the pain of animals and slaves and this was a sign of his virtuous nature.\(^{39}\)

However, Chris Jones stresses that sensibility was not a unitary discourse. Jones divides proponents of sensibility into three groups, “the potentially radical, the conservative, and the self-indulgent”; he further divides these advocates into ones whose responses were primarily rational and others who were emotional.\(^{40}\) Using Jones’ categories, I contend that Barbauld was in the radical, rational group. Influenced by the ideas of Anthony Ashley Cooper, earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) and Francis Hutcheson, she believed that man was naturally drawn to showing universal benevolence for the entire system of being.\(^{41}\) Drawing on Hutcheson’s ideas, she carefully balanced reason and emotion in her

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41 Ibid. viii.
humanitarianism. Hutcheson taught that although the affections and passions, not reason, were the cause of our action, the moral sense approved of benevolent actions. A passion was the “exciting” reason of an action, but the “justifying” reason came from the moral sense. It was only through reflection that we developed useful abstract conceptions about the value of benevolent behaviour.42

Barbauld’s approach to sensibility combined an initial emotional instinct with rational reflection. In Lessons she described with compassion a hare that was hunted by hounds. She wrote: “A snail could go faster than a hare when it is dead: and its poor little heart, that beat so quick, is quite still and cold; and its round full eyes are dull and dim; and its soft furry skin is all torn and bloody”.43 However, once the hare was dead her approach was rational not sentimental. She wrote: “It is good for nothing now but to be roasted”.44 Part of her concern for the hare was about the injustice of the situation; it reflected the imbalance of power between the weak and the strong, as “the poor, harmless hare” was hunted by a pack of hounds.45

Barbauld’s mixing of political and humanitarian ideas reflected Hutcheson’s philosophy. He argued that with greater sensibility there would be a liberalisation of traditional power relationships and the natural evolution of institutions.46 As Aaron Garrett establishes, Hutcheson’s view of rights was based on the idea that the rights that are universally allowed are those perceived by the moral sense as tending to the general good of society and these are inviolable and inalienable. These rights occur when the interest of the individual is consistent with the rights of others.47 According to Garrett, Hutcheson also contributed to the idea of animal rights through his theory of animal virtue.48 He claimed that some animals demonstrated a lower kind of moral virtue, similar to children, even though they were incapable of reflection, knowing laws or being moved by sanctions or rewards.49 A well-ordered moral community could be formed between men and

42 Ibid. 25.
43 Barbauld, Lessons for children from three to four years old (London, 1788) 87–8.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid. 86.
46 Jones 8.
48 Ibid. 243–65.
49 Ibid. 255.
domestic animals based on duty and obligation. Believing that animals had a right to happiness, he argued that if they were treated mercifully and made happy, human life would also improve. Barbauld reflected Hutcheson’s ideas in her poem “To a Dog”. Suggesting that the relationship between “thou safe companion, and almost a friend” (13) could be more satisfying than many human relationships, she wrote:

Thou silent, humble flatterer, yet sincere,
More swayed by love than interest or fear;
Solely to please thy more ambitious view,
As lovers fond, and more than lovers true. (5–8)

Anthropomorphising the dog, she described him as if he had some moral virtues. He displayed “modest virtues” (4) and “social mirth” (3), and although he lacked the defining human characteristic of being able to talk, he communicated with his “dumb beseeching eyes” (9) which displayed “genuine eloquence” (10). She concluded with the rhyming couplet: “Blest were mankind if many a prouder name/Could boast thy grateful truth and spotless fame!” (15–16).

As this brief survey of Barbauld’s writing on animals demonstrates, she used them to teach moral lessons to children and to reflect her political values, but her work also showed a genuine compassion for their suffering and a “fellow-feeling” with all God’s creatures. This multi-layered approach was developed with greater complexity in “The Mouse’s Petition”.

“THE MOUSE’S PETITION”

“The Mouse’s Petition” was written in the summer of 1771 when Barbauld was visiting Priestley in Leeds. Priestley was using live mice to experiment with noxious gases. One night a mouse was brought in for an experiment the next day. The following morning Barbauld’s petition was found twisted among the wires of its cage. When it was published in 1773 contemporary critics read it as an attack on Priestley and animal experimentation. To a degree, contemporary readings were
accurate: taken at a literal level it does champion animal rights against scientific experimentation. However, it is evident that Barbauld’s authorial intention was not solely to champion animal rights or to oppose all animal experimentation. In a footnote to a third edition of her Poems, she wrote:

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

The words “mercy” and “justice” recall Hutcheson’s philosophy of animal rights but her reaction suggests that she did not consider Priestley’s air-pump experiments were gratuitous. However, these words imply that there is a wider political meaning in the poem. The title “The Mouse’s Petition” also suggests her political intent. As Ross comments, a petition was “the most radical version of a political letter, which targets the heart of established power by directly addressing the monarch and Parliament.”\footnote{Ross, “Configurations” 98.}

Perhaps the failure of Barbauld’s contemporaries to detect other layers of meaning in the poem was because it was written at a crossroads for animal poetry. Perkins explains that using writing about animals to represent subordinate groups was an age-old practice. However, in the late eighteenth century it became linked to practical reforming benevolence. Authors took up animal suffering as a humanitarian cause in its own right; their concern was for animals more than for the socially subordinate humans that animals might figuratively represent.\footnote{Perkins, Romanticism and Animal Rights x.} Ready suggests that Barbauld’s poem was taken at face value because female writers were viewed as being particularly sensitive to the plight of animals.\footnote{Ready 107.} However, as Perkins argues, seeing Barbauld as a typical woman writer, motivated by sentimental concerns for animals, was inappropriate. In a comparison of her poem to Robert Burns’ “To a Mouse”, he shows that the differences between the two sensibility, or created only for them to torment.” \textit{Critical Review} 35 March 1773: 193. William Woodfall in the \textit{Monthly Review} expressed the hope that the poem would “be of service to that gentleman as well as to other experimental philosophers, who are not remarkable for their humanity to the poor harmless animals.” \textit{Monthly Review} Jan.-Feb. 1773: 58. Qtd. in Ready 92.

\footnote{\begin{itemize}
\item [54] McCarthy and Kraft 69.
\item [55] Ross, “Configurations” 98.
\item [56] Perkins, \textit{Romanticism and Animal Rights} x.
\item [57] Ready 107.
\end{itemize}}
poems do not reflect gender differences. Perkins claims that Barbauld’s poem is at least as “manly” as Burns’. He suggests that her main aim was not to provide a realistic description of a mouse, which would have demonstrated a “feminine” concern for the animal. Instead Barbauld was more motivated by the political concepts she wished to communicate.  

My reading supports Perkins’ argument. I contend that the poem comments on the state of liberty in England from a Dissenting perspective. My reading is particularly influenced by the timing of the poem; it was written when the legitimacy of the political system was being challenged. In the early 1770s Rational Dissenters were turning their attention to rights and using a more, radical political language.  

Events at home and abroad made “Friends of Liberty”, like Barbauld and her fellow Dissenters, question the constitutional rights of British subjects.

A cause célèbre for radicals was the imprisonment of the political journalist John Wilkes for libel after he wrote a pamphlet satirising George III’s ministers. As a victim of royal, ministerial and parliamentary persecution, Wilkes personified the defence of the legal, constitutional and civic liberties of the ordinary citizen. In 1769–70 Wilkes was elected to Parliament, excluded from taking his seat, and committed to prison and fined on his previous conviction for libel. The parliamentary establishment tried to deprive Wilkes of his rightful status as a Member of Parliament, even though he had been elected as a representative of Middlesex. By rejecting the right of electors to choose their own MP the government’s action brought into question the credibility of the whole representative system. Supporters of “Wilkes and Liberty” launched a petitioning campaign; they saw their actions as defending the constitutional liberty of the subject.

Abroad, the government’s attempts to tax North American colonists without allowing them representation in Parliament raised concerns among British liberals about unconstitutional abuses of power. They also saw analogies between Wilkes'  

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59 Saunders 242.
60 Goodwin 44.
61 Ibid. 44–7.
Barbauld had personal links with the American colonists, the Corsicans’ cause and the Wilkes campaign. Through Warrington Academy she was linked to the Vaughan family. In 1766 City merchant and Jamaican landowner Samuel Vaughan and his wife Sarah sent their sons Benjamin and William to Warrington Academy. At this time Samuel was involved in the most important campaigns for liberty. He was a leading supporter of Wilkes; an admirer of Benjamin Franklin, who was involved in the negotiations that severed the political ties between London and North America; and a trustee of the subscription fund set up to support the cause of liberty in Corsica in 1768. During 1769 Vaughan sent John Seddon at the academy reports on political developments and copies of Wilkes’ speeches. It is evident that Barbauld was closely involved with the Vaughan family and shared their political concerns. As Barbauld’s father was Benjamin Vaughan’s tutor, he was living with the Aikins. Barbauld dedicated a poem to his mother, “A Character of Sarah Halowell Vaughan”, praising her as an example of maternal political power. In 1769 Barbauld wrote “Corsica” to support the Corsicans’ fight for freedom and raise money for the Corsican fund. Priestley offered to transmit it to Vaughan or Catharine Macaulay in London, but apparently it was never sent as it was only published in 1773 in *Poems*.

I contend that “The Mouse’s Petition” should be seen in the light of Barbauld’s political preoccupations at this time. As Barbauld wrote the poem to Priestley, I read it as reminding him of his political pamphlet *On the Present State of Liberty in Britain* (1769), which addressed the perceived threats to liberty in Britain and America. Priestley considered that attacks on freedom at home and abroad were linked. However, the treatment of the American colonists was particularly oppressive. Although he examined in detail government misrule in Britain, he was most alarmed by developments in America. He explained that his pamphlet was addressed “chiefly, to our late measures respecting North America,

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63 Ibid. 99–104
64 Ibid. 103.
a case in which every man, woman, and child among us, and our posterity, to the latest generation, are deeply interested”.

By the summer of 1771, when Barbauld was staying with the Priestleys, the debate about British political rights in Priestley’s pamphlet had become increasingly topical. The campaign for political reform was very active during this year. On 26 April 1771 Alderman Sawbridge, one of the secessionists, made the first of thirteen House of Commons motions for annual parliaments. On 11 June 1771 the Supporters of the Bill of Rights approved a comprehensive and radical list of political grievances and promoted a programme of reform which contained many of the same ideas as Priestley’s pamphlet. In the same year Obadiah Hulme published his *Historical Essay on the English Constitution*. His essay provided radicals with a historical argument for their battle for civil liberties. Following Hulme’s work, both Price and Priestley stressed the need to restore the Anglo-Saxon purity of the constitution. The summer of 1771 also saw Dissenters renewing their action for civil liberties. Inspired by Priestley’s pamphlets on Dissent written between 1767 and 1769, which denounced man-made creeds and called upon honest clergy to repudiate them, in July 1771, a group led by Archdeacon Blackburne and Priestley’s friend Theophilus Lindsey formed an association to petition for relief from subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Reflecting the political debate, Priestley published a second edition of his major political text *An Essay on the First Principles of Government, and on the Nature of Political, Civil, and Religious Liberty* in this year. As it is evident that the state of British liberty in general and the disabilities placed on Dissenters in particular were highly topical political issues in Barbauld’s circle in 1771, it makes sense to read Barbauld’s poem as part of this debate. On the evidence of Barbauld’s close knowledge of

66 Goodwin 48.
67 In the essay Hulme argued for a return to a “golden age” of democratic government under the Anglo-Saxon “free” constitution. He claimed that radical reform would just correct the inroads on liberty made by the feudal tyranny of the Norman Conquest and the aristocratic compromises of the 1688 revolution. Hulme emphasised that the Anglo-Saxons had an elective Crown (the King had to consult the national deliberative council annually) and that the judicial system used juries. Although it was based on historical folklore Hulme’s work had a great effect on radicals. Ibid. 50–6.
69 McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 77.
Priestley’s position on America, her discussion of liberty in this poem can also be interpreted as alluding to the plight of American colonists at this time.

There are many echoes of Priestley’s ideas in Barbauld’s poem; it seems that his pamphlet on *The Present State of Liberty* provided Barbauld with the idea of writing her poem as a petition. In his work Priestley had called upon people who considered liberty in Britain to be under threat to petition; this is what Barbauld did in her poem in a highly imaginative way. Her use of this form would have reminded her readers of the petitioning campaign following the Middlesex election; petitions were also the chosen form of action for Dissenters campaigning against subscription. However, the poem is not just a petition; it is also a prayer and this indicates that Barbauld’s poem was responding to Priestley’s concern about the situation in America. In his pamphlet Priestley had described the American colonists as “humbly petitioning for the security of their inviolable rights”. Fearing that the British government’s harsh treatment of the colonists would lead to war, he wrote: “Earnestly therefore must every friend of Great Britain and the Colonies (…) pray, that this dreadful and unnatural struggle may be prevented”. Barbauld described her poem as “a pensive prisoner’s prayer” (1). The thoughtful tone of her petition and use of the word “pensive” echoed Priestley’s call for earnestness.

Ready claims that the mouse can be seen as like British Dissenters because they led a marginalised existence, unable to obtain degrees at Oxford and Cambridge and municipal office. Mitzi Myers explains that as mice live alongside man as a subsidiary to the larger community and at risk of exclusion, they were used to satirise the human world, to constitute an alternative society, and to embody the plight of the displaced or marginal. Using mice to represent disadvantaged groups facing strong oppressors was repeated elsewhere in Barbauld’s work: in her *Evenings at Home* story “The Young Mouse: A Fable”. The
naive mouse, who thinks the mouse-trap has been created by humans to protect him from the cat, is disabused by his mother.\textsuperscript{75} I agree with Ready’s and Myers’ reading but I suggest that the mouse can also be seen as reflecting the position of the American colonists. According to Priestley’s pamphlet they were one of the greatest victims of oppression. He explained that if they were taxed by the British Parliament without representation “the colonists will be reduced to a state of as complete servitude, as any people of which there is an account in history”.\textsuperscript{76}

The unorthodox religious beliefs of the mouse in the poem suggest that he represented freethinking Dissenters and American colonists. During the previous century many nonconformists went to America because they had been persecuted for their faith. Priestley wrote in his pamphlet: “Pity it is, that the iron hand of oppression should be extended to those people [the American colonists], whom nothing but a love of freedom induced to leave their native clime, in the arbitrary reigns of our former princes!”\textsuperscript{77} Barbauld’s poem reflected his language and sentiments in her lines:

\begin{quote}
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. (9–12)
\end{quote}

Her use of the term “free-born” recalled the language of seventeenth-century Dissenters, reflecting the period during which many nonconformists had emigrated. The image of a “strong oppressive force” is similar to Priestley’s description of “the iron hand of oppression”. He described the measures being pursued by the British government in America as an extension of the arbitrary measures employed in Britain, but the treatment of the colonists was even “more arbitrary and oppressive”.\textsuperscript{78}

He argued that by taxing the colonists the British government was asserting “unjust claims”.\textsuperscript{79} He wrote that the American colonists have “always been ready, of

\textsuperscript{75} He is warned: “Though man has not so fierce a look as a cat, he is as much our enemy, and has still more cunning.” John Aikin and Anna Letitia Barbauld, “The Young Mouse: A Fable”, \textit{Evenings at Home; or, the juvenile budget opened. Consisting of a Variety of Miscellaneous Pieces}, vol. 1 (London, 1792) 18–20.

\textsuperscript{76} Priestley, \textit{The Present State of Liberty} 19.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid. iv.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. 18.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. iv.
their own account, to serve the common cause to the utmost of their ability”. But he added: “There is a degree to which any people will bear hardship without complaint; but oppression, beyond a certain degree, will make even a wise man mad”. Barbauld turned Priestley’s comments on the Americans’ situation into the mouse’s speech. The mouse argues that he is only asking for a small amount:

The scatter’d gleanings of a feast  
My frugal meals supply;  
But if thine unrelenting heart  
That slender boon deny,  
The chearful light, the vital air,  
Are blessings widely given;  
Let nature’s commoners enjoy  
The common gifts of heaven. (17–24)

In Barbauld’s and Priestley’s works the use of the word “common” suggested Hutchesonian communality. The idea of being a marginalised community that only wanted fairness was applicable to Dissenters as well as American colonists. Like Dissenters in Britain who were calling for an end to religious disabilities, the American colonists were asking for their natural rights; they only wanted a fair share of what they produced. In another pamphlet, written in 1769, entitled Remarks on Some Paragraphs in the Fourth Volume of Dr Blackstone’s Commentaries on the law of England relating to Dissenters (1769), Priestley defended the rights of Dissenters against William Blackstone’s interpretation of the law, which declared that dissent from the Church of England was a crime. In response Priestley claimed that Dissenters were loyal to the Hanoverian monarchy and the best subjects, provided that the constitution produced “a free and equal government, a government which leaves men a reasonable share of their natural rights”. In Barbauld’s Address to the Opposers, two decades later, she returned to the theme of fairness and natural rights. Describing Dissenters in imagery which compared their situation to that of the American colonists, she wrote that the

80 Ibid. 19.  
81 Ibid. 21.  
“naked and unarmed” sectary “whose early connections, and phrase uncouth, and unpopular opinions set him at a distance from the means of advancement; him, who in the intercourses of neighbourhood and common life, like new settlers, finds it necessary to clear the ground before him, and is ever obliged to root up a prejudice before he can plant affection”.84 Echoing the “scatter’d gleanings” of her earlier poem, Barbauld again returned to a harvesting metaphor in her pamphlet when she explained that Dissenters were only asking for leftovers. She wrote:

After all what is it we have asked? – to share in the rich benefices of the established church? (…) Let her still gather into barns though she neither sows nor reaps. We desire not to share in her good things (…) But having these good things, we could wish to hear her say with the generous spirit of Esau, I have enough, my brother. (emphases original)85

The ideas in both the poem and the pamphlet of sharing agricultural produce is particularly appropriate because the Church of England traditionally collected a tithe from all members of the community, even those who did not subscribe to their church. Agricultural imagery was also relevant when writing about the American colonists, because in his pamphlet Priestley argued that the government should encourage agriculture in America and manufacture in Britain.86

The idea of Americans and all Britons, irrespective of their denomination, being part of a brotherhood and members of one family can also be found in Barbauld’s poem and pamphlet. In An Address, Barbauld described society as like a family, while the relationship between church and state was like a marriage. The state was a father-figure, “the common parent of us all”, while the established church was the Dissenters’ step-mother. She explained that Dissenters “wish to be considered as children of the state, though we are not so of the Church.”87 A similar idea can be found in her poem where the mouse is described as having a “brother’s soul” (34); he was peaceable and wanted to be included as part of the family. Barbauld wrote:

So may thy hospitable board
With health and peace be crown’d;
And every charm of hearfet ease
Beneath thy roof be found. (41–4)

84 Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 264–5.
85 Ibid. 265–6.
87 Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 266.
It was “peace” between the two countries which was being threatened by the British government’s policies. Barbauld’s image of the united home reflected Priestley’s ideas about the relationship between Britons and Americans. In his pamphlet he wrote that Americans are “the genuine offspring of Britons”.88 Britain was “the Mother Country”.89 Britain’s and America’s interests should be the same and, if they were treated fairly, the colonists would want to stay as part of the wider community. If the British government treated the colonists fairly, trade would flourish and the two countries would enjoy “happy years of mutual love and confidence”.90 He wrote that the government should “consult the good of the whole, as of one united empire, each part of which has the same natural right to liberty and happiness with the other”.91 This was echoed in Barbauld’s idea in “The Mouse’s Petition” of casting “round the world an equal eye” (27).

Priestley pointed out that if the British government provoked conflict with America, it would be cutting off the greatest source of its own wealth. The result would be “the most pernicious consequences” for both countries.92 This idea of mutual destruction was reflected in Barbauld’s concluding lines in her poem:

So, when destruction lurks unseen,
Which men, like mice, may share,
May some kind angel clear thy path,
And break the hidden snare. (45–8)

Rather than criticising Priestley, these lines can be read as portraying him as the “kind angel” who by pointing out the hidden danger in his pamphlet may avert it.

Like Priestley’s pamphlet, which examined the situation in America and connected it to the threats to freedom in Britain, Barbauld’s poem can also be read on both levels. In The Present State of Liberty, Priestley contended that the government had recently “made many alarming attacks upon the rights and privileges of the subject; and there is not, as yet, any prospect of their being called to account for their illegal and arbitrary proceedings”.93 Barbauld evidently shared his concern for the freedom of the individual, as she wrote in the first lines of her

89 Ibid. 21
90 Ibid. 24.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid. iv.
93 Ibid. 15.
poem: “Oh! Hear a pensive prisoner’s prayer,/For liberty that sighs” (1–2). The
exclamation and idea of sighing for liberty suggested that it was in danger. In his
pamphlet Priestley explained why he believed there was a real risk; the judicial
system had been undermined, as demonstrated by Wilkes’ case, the government’s
attacks on habeas corpus and trial by jury for libel cases. Barbauld’s poem
personified these ideas with her “free-born” mouse being detained awaiting trial.
In her description of the mouse’s “guiltless blood” (13) she suggested that he was
innocent and therefore, according to habeas corpus, should have been bailed. As
well as making a general point about attacks on the justice system, Barbauld’s
poem also seemed to be making a specific point about Wilkes’ case. Barbauld’s
description of the “forlorn and sad” (5) imprisoned mouse, who was captured
because his adversaries used “wiles” (15) to betray him, echoed Priestley’s
description of Wilkes’ treatment in his pamphlet.

Priestley’s indictment of British society extended beyond the judicial system;
he also expressed concern about the corruption of Parliament, arguing that there
were too many MPs in the power of the court. He claimed that the Bill of Rights
had been violated by Parliament’s refusal to accept Wilkes as an MP. To remedy
the situation, Priestley’s pamphlet promoted a set of demands for parliamentary
reform and suggested that people across the country should associate together
and petition Parliament. He wrote: “Every man, who wishes well to his country,
should contribute liberally to the support of all that suffer in the common cause of
liberty, and spread the alarm thro’ the whole kingdom, in order to make all the
people thoroughly sensible of the impending danger”. Barbauld’s “The Mouse’s
Petition” can be seen as responding to this call.

94 Ibid.
95 In The Present State of Liberty, Priestley wrote that one of the great privileges of Englishmen was
habeas corpus, “whereby a person accused of any crime cannot be detained in custody, but must
be brought immediately to a court of law, and be admitted to bail (if the offence be of such a nature
as to be bailable) till he can be tried according to law” (15).
96 In The Present State of Liberty, Priestley wrote: “They have, by a general warrant, in which no
person was said to have been accused upon oath, or so much as named, arrested the person of an
Englishman, and a member of the house of Commons, removing him from the custody of one
person to that of another, and confined him without admitting his nearest friends to speak to him. By
the same warrant they seized all his private papers, and out of them, thus illegally procured,
collected evidence for a crime, which supposes that he himself published those papers” (15–16).
98 Ibid. 16.
99 Ibid. 17.
At a time when Wilkes had been imprisoned for libelling government ministers, Priestley was taking a risk to write in such a radical way. In his pamphlet he stated that the government had undermined the freedom of the press. This may explain why Priestley published this pamphlet anonymously, as by “an Englishman”; it also helps to explain why Barbauld’s poem made its political points in a coded way. The sentiments of Priestley’s pamphlet and “The Mouse’s Petition” were to be repeated more overtly by Barbauld twenty years later in her Civic Sermons and Sins of Government, when there was an even greater threat to civil liberties.

In “A Mouse’s Petition” Barbauld made her points in a light-hearted way. As McCarthy argues, she used satire to remind Priestley to apply his principles of civil liberty to the mouse.\(^{100}\) Ross debates whether it is a genuine or mock sentimental poem, aimed at satirising the “enlighteners”. He explains that, on first reading, Barbauld appears to be using a mock form of humorous occasional verse, which would seem to undermine her allegiance to the political agenda of petitioning rights. But as the poem progresses it does not take the expected direction of a topical satire which would have been to ridicule a recognisable political scapegoat. He claims that, instead of pursuing a factional political agenda, she writes of “common gifts” which have no partisan ideological interest. Ross reads this as Barbauld encouraging her readers to see themselves as joined together in humanity rather than as members of a political faction.\(^{101}\)

Although I accept much of Ross’ analysis, I consider that Barbauld was more politically partisan than he suggests; her inclusiveness was political, as it was typical of her Dissenting ideology. By repeating many of Priestley’s themes, in poetic form, she was reinforcing his extremely radical ideas. Watkins also detects a direct relation between Priestley’s work and Barbauld’s 1773 Poems. He explains that, like Poems, The Present State of Liberty begins with an epigraph taken from Virgil.\(^{102}\) Watkins argues convincingly that Barbauld was no less interested “in remaking society, and no less insistent in her push for change” than Priestley, but she adopted a less confrontational strain for two reasons. Firstly she believed that

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\(^{100}\) McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 77.

\(^{101}\) Ross, ”Configurations” 99.

\(^{102}\) Watkins 36.
outspokenness could increase governmental oppression, and secondly she thought political change must be preceded by an examination of the fundamental principles on which political vision was constructed. Radical change should not replicate the dominant structures of authority it was trying to replace. Progressives must make sure that their attitude to changing the social order was principled and dedicated to the public good and not based in self-interest or the brute exercise of power.¹⁰³ I agree with Watkins’ assessment; I consider Barbauld used this poem to indicate her support for Priestley’s analysis of the shortcomings of the British political system but, as her “On the Devotional Taste” indicated, she opposed his disputatious style. Her poem implied different tactics might be more productive in bringing about reform. This idea is similar to my argument about Barbauld’s approach to feminism in Chapter 2 in which I suggest that her tactics to deal with female oppression are different from Mary Wollstonecraft’s. As in “The Mouse’s Petition”, in “The Rights of Woman” Barbauld used a light-hearted tone to deal with a serious issue, suggesting that direct confrontation was not the best way to bring about reform. By using humour to make a serious point; Barbauld was suggesting a powerful political argument could be made politely and amiably.

Using the character of a mouse enabled Barbauld to experiment with controversial political ideas. The representational strategy of using animals to convey the human condition was common at this time; articulate animals allowed writers to explore their private and political concerns in a safe arena. If criticised they could deny the coded meaning and separate the representational space from reality.¹⁰⁴ Both radical and conservative writers wrote about animals in ways that had plural meanings which could be read on different levels by different readers. Radicals used exploited animals to represent vulnerable groups, from women to slaves.¹⁰⁵ Conservatives personified animals to support the existing hierarchical society. As Moira Ferguson shows, Sarah Trimmer’s Fabulous Histories: Designed for the Instruction of Children Respecting the Treatment of Animals (1786) used stories about a family of robins to portray England as a united country of peace and freedom. It emphasised the dominion of humans over animals and that there was a

¹⁰³ Ibid. 40.
¹⁰⁴ Kenyon-Jones 8–9.
carefully balanced hierarchy. She portrayed the existing social order as created by a benevolent providence and opposed the idea of animal rights as a "levelling system".\textsuperscript{106}

Animals were particularly suited to inspire sympathy for a political cause. Barbauld’s choice of a mouse rather than a human as her political martyr had a rhetorical reason in line with the theory she set out in “An Enquiry”. She wrote that to inspire compassion virtue must be “mixed with something of helplessness and imperfection, with an excessive sensibility, or a simplicity bordering upon weakness before it raises, in any great degree, either tenderness or familiar love”.\textsuperscript{107} By writing about a mouse, and using the language of sensibility, her work had the potential to reach a wider audience than an overtly political poem. Mitzi Myers suggests that using animals helped to create an “emotive politics”, which differed from conventional masculine notions of the civic public sphere.\textsuperscript{108}

I suggest that Barbauld’s use of the mouse to communicate complex abstract concepts was influenced by Priestley’s ideas about personification. This technique would be apt in a poem written to him and was another layer of the dialogue between them, which included animal rights, politics, religion and rhetoric. In his \textit{A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism} (1777), which was based on lectures given earlier at Warrington Academy, he suggested personification was a good way to promote abstract ideas. To win assent an orator needed to excite the passions, and affect and interest the reader; this could best be done by avoiding abstract terms, instead focusing on things which have more immediate connection with real-life experiences. He explained that it gave “some degree of \textit{colour} and \textit{life}” (emphasis original).\textsuperscript{109} to those concepts. He wrote:

\begin{quote}
It is of prodigious advantage, in treating of inanimate things, or merely of brute animals, to introduce frequent allusions to human actions and sentiments, where any resemblance will make it natural. This converts every thing we treat of into thinking and acting beings. We see \textit{life, sense, and intelligence}, every where. (emphasis original)\textsuperscript{110}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{107} Barbauld, “An Enquiry”, McCarthy and Kraft 204.
\textsuperscript{108} Myers, “Portrait of the Female Artist as a Young Robin: Maria Edgeworth’s Telltale Tailpiece”, \textit{The Lion and the Unicorn} 20:2 (1996): 232.
\textsuperscript{109} Joseph Priestley, \textit{A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism} (London, 1777) 248.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid. 247.
EPISTLE TO WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

Barbauld was to use these rhetorical skills in her writing against slavery. There are parallels between “The Mouse’s Petition” and her anti-slavery poem, Epistle to William Wilberforce. Both make a powerful case for their humanitarian cause but can also be read on other levels. Both carefully use rhetorical techniques to win the assent of the reader. Recent critics have examined in detail how Barbauld personified the cruelty of slavery in her portrayal of the sadistic slave-owner’s wife.¹¹¹

As with “The Mouse’s Petition”, to fully understand the political meaning of Barbauld’s Epistle we must look at the timing of the poem. It is about the slave trade, but like the earlier poem it is also a critique of the state of liberty in Britain at a time when Parliament had failed to reform injustices. The Epistle was written in 1791 at a turning point for the abolition movement. During the 1780s it was seen as a benevolent philanthropic campaign which was a coalition, including Dissenters, Anglican evangelicals, radicals and conservatives working for the same cause.¹¹² However, beneath the surface there were always ideological differences. For radicals it represented egalitarian ideas based on the fundamental rights of man; for conservatives, while they supported the spiritual equality of man, they believed that the social order could only be maintained by retaining hierarchical social relations.¹¹³

For Rational Dissenters, the campaign against slavery became a symbol for abuses of civil liberties at home. The American Revolution gave slavery political meaning. In the rhetoric of radicalism during the 1780s radicals likened their

¹¹¹ Coleman suggests that Barbauld’s description was inspired by the evidence heard by the House of Commons of the cruelties of planters’ wives and daughters. According to Hannah More, this was the passage in Barbauld’s poem which pleased the leading parliamentary abolitionists most. Deirdre Coleman, “Conspicuous Consumption: White Abolitionism and English Women’s Protest Writing in the 1790’s”, ELH 61:2 (1994): 352–6. Ross also analyses Barbauld’s portrayal of female cruelty. He claims that Barbauld inverts George Crabbe’s formula of universalising the feminine state of marginal luxury to show the relation between personal idleness and socio-political oppression. Instead of Crabbe’s powerful master on his couch, Barbauld portrays the beautiful mistress on her sofa. Her pale beauty is unnatural and deadly. Ross writes: “[Barbauld] argues that the woman who self-indulgently demands excessive finery at home contributes to slavery abroad.” Ross, The Contours of Masculine Desire 222–3.

¹¹² Drescher 123–4.

disenfranchisement to the plight of slaves.\textsuperscript{114} For a time it seemed that anti-slavery campaigners might become part of a wider challenge to authority. In 1780, opposition to the American War, and concern about ministerial corruption, united opposers of slavery Richard Price, Granville Sharp and Thomas Day with the reformers Major John Cartwright, John Jebb and Capel Lofft in the Society for Promoting Constitutional Information.\textsuperscript{115}

In 1787, the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade began. Oldfield claims that it created the prototype of a modern pressure group; its leaders were pragmatic and disciplined, constantly considering what actions would mobilise support.\textsuperscript{116} Dissenting circles in Liverpool, Manchester and Warrington, which included many of the Barbauld/Aikin circle, played an important part in setting up a network of local and regional contacts across the country.\textsuperscript{117} In the late 1780s there was an optimistic period, when Barbauld and her fellow abolitionists believed the anti-slavery cause was bound to succeed. They saw the country’s reaction to the movement as a test of the nation’s moral character.\textsuperscript{118} As petitions against the slave trade flowed into Parliament from around the country, there was hope that a “virtuous” Commons would listen to the opinions of the people, thus showing that the political system in England was working properly.\textsuperscript{119} In 1789 Barbauld wrote to her friend Judy Beecroft:

> Nothing, I think, for centuries past, has done the nation so much honour; because it must have proceeded from the most liberal motives, – the purest love of humanity and justice. The voice of the Negroes could not have made itself heard but by the ear of pity; they might have been oppressed for ages more with impunity, if we had so pleased.\textsuperscript{120}

Although Barbauld emphasised the purity of anti-slavery motives, she saw abolition of slavery as part of a wider movement for the progressive reform of society.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{114} Oldfield 33.
\textsuperscript{115} Davis, \textit{The Problem of Slavery} 373.
\textsuperscript{116} Oldfield 2.
\textsuperscript{118} McCarthy, \textit{Voice of the Enlightenment} 291.
\textsuperscript{119} Davis, \textit{The Problem of Slavery} 405.
\textsuperscript{120} Qtd. in McCarthy, \textit{Voice of the Enlightenment} 293.
\textsuperscript{121} Barbauld was not alone in this view. Turley writes: “At different periods and envisaging different forms of quasi-millennial change, some abolitionists looked to a wholesale transformation of the moral and institutional texture of Britain and perhaps the world. At the beginning and during the early years of the French Revolution, anti-slavery radicals, liberal and latitudinarian in religion, most
She stressed the movement’s “liberal” roots. Her focus on the British man or woman of feeling, rather than the suffering slave, emphasised that it was not so much the suffering of the negroes as the climate of radical sensibility in Britain which meant the situation might change. As in her footnote to “The Mouse’s Petition”, she mentioned “justice” as well as “humanity”, which suggested a human rights based approach to the issue, and demonstrates that Barbauld was not purely motivated by apolitical sympathy. She was hard-headed and politically motivated.

In her Memoir of her aunt, Lucy Aikin recognised this intellectual rather than instinctive approach to sensibility. She wrote:

> In some tempers sensibility appears an instinct, while in others it is the gradual result of principle and reflection, of the events and the experience of life. It was certainly so in that of Mrs Barbauld.

In An Address to the Opposers, Barbauld explained that she was excited by the potential of the era because “systems are analysed into their first principles, and principles are fairly pursued to their legitimate consequences”. Being hard-headed did not mean she was hard-hearted; she believed in “humanity and justice” and saw the cause of slavery as a fundamental matter of principle.

Horace Walpole criticised Barbauld for using the abolition campaign for her own political purposes. In September 1791, when Hannah More sent Walpole a copy of Barbauld’s Epistle, Walpole wrote:

> Deborah [Barbauld] may cant rhymes of compassion, but she is a hypocrite; and you shall not make me read her, nor, with all your sympathy and candour, can you esteem her. Your compassion for the poor blacks is genuine, sincere from your soul, most amiable; hers a measure of faction. Her party supported the abolition and regretted the disappointment as a blow to the good cause. (emphasis original)

By calling her the prophet Deborah, who led the Hebrews, Walpole emphasised her role as one of the leading women of Dissent. His mention of “the good cause” evidently evinced such hopes, even confidence. Anti-slavery was seen as part of an irresistible international wave of enlightenment which was set fair to produce rational and purified government, social and economic relations in conformity with the natural order and universal peace and harmony” (228).

Her assessment was similar to historian Brion Davis’ assessment of the movement. He writes: “If there had been no abolitionists, the injustices of slavery, which mankind had tolerated for several millennia, would hardly have seemed a serious problem” (163).

Barbauld, Works 1: liii–lv.

Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 278.

refers to anti-court, Whiggish beliefs in civil liberties which could be traced back to the Commonwealthmen of the Civil War era. In this letter Walpole accused Barbauld of cynically using the abolitionist campaign to promote her party political beliefs. However, despite Walpole’s claims for More’s compassionate purity, she also used anti-slavery for her own political ends. Ferguson shows that More’s anti-slavery poetry reinforced hierarchies. In her poem “Slavery” (1788) she made a political point by explaining that she was not motivated by fighting for the type of liberty associated with mob rule, which undermined existing authority. She portrayed the mob negatively as an “unlicensed monster” (21). Kate Davies claims that even her argument in her poetry, that all mankind can feel, had a conservative slant because she suggested that there was a hierarchy of feeling: as slaves and the lower classes were at the lower end of the chain of being, they might experience the same pain as the more refined but they remained at the brute level of sensation.

Despite the different motivations, during the 1780s both radicals and conservative abolitionists avoided drawing attention to the underlying political divisions because they wished to portray their movement as a moral crusade which was politically disinterested. As Priestley stated in his Sermon on the Subject of the Slave Trade (1788), the campaign against the slave trade was “not the cause of unitarianism, or arianism, or trinitarianism, but simply that of humanity, and our common christianity” (emphases original). Drescher claims that Dissenters hoped that by working together with Anglicans they would decrease mutual distrust and increase political harmony, which would augur well for increased civil liberties for Dissenters. The ideological truce was relatively easy to maintain during a decade when tensions between Dissenters and the established church were minimal. It seemed that even repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts might pass without much controversy. Even when religious divides began to become more

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126 For a discussion of the Commonwealth tradition’s influence on Barbauld and her fellow Dissenters see my introduction.
127 Ferguson, Subject to Others 151.
129 Davies 137–8.
130 Ibid. 134.
apparent, as the established church felt threatened after the French Revolution in 1789, abolitionists tried to maintain a cross-denominational position.\textsuperscript{132} The coalition was undermined by Parliament’s failure to repeal the Corporation and Test Acts in 1790, which emphasised the fundamental ideological divide between conservatives and radicals. However, there was still hope as Barbauld’s \textit{An Address to the Opposers} (1790) suggested. Believing that the French Revolution augured an era of greater liberty than ever experienced before, she wrote:

> With a policy, far more liberal and comprehensive than the boasted establishments of Greece and Rome, she [Liberty] diffuses her blessings to every class of men; and even extends a smile of hope and promise to the poor African, the victim of hard, impenetrable avarice.\textsuperscript{133}

But the period of optimism and consensus ended with the rejection of the Abolition Bill in 1791. On 18 April 1791, Wilberforce introduced a motion calling on the Commons to outlaw the slave trade forthwith. After a heated debate, Wilberforce’s bill was defeated by a vote of 163 to 88.\textsuperscript{134}

Within days of Parliament rejecting the bill, the London Committee for abolition began work on a petitioning campaign. On 26 April they asked Clarkson to prepare an abstract of Wilberforce’s abridgement of the evidence against the trade. Copies of the recent Commons debate were also distributed by local agents.\textsuperscript{135} McCarthy suggests that Barbauld must have started writing her poem soon after reading the published debate, as her work was in dialogue with it. The poem, which was her first new published one in eighteen years, was released less than two months later, in mid-June.\textsuperscript{136}

I suggest that Barbauld’s poem played a part in the propaganda campaign which mobilised public opinion. By informing people about what had happened in Parliament, Barbauld’s poem was preparing them for the petition. But it was also part of a wider campaign which questioned how Britain’s political system was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{132}Drescher 123–4.
\item \textsuperscript{133}Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 278.
\item \textsuperscript{134}McCarthy and Kraft 122.
\item \textsuperscript{135}Clarkson’s abstract went to press in July. Over 5,000 copies were printed and a cheap edition followed in November. It was distributed by Clarkson on his tour of the North of England in October, November and December 1791. Extracts also appeared in the London and provincial press. Oldfield 58.
\item \textsuperscript{136}McCarthy, \textit{Voice of the Enlightenment} 294–5.
\end{itemize}
working. Her poem emphasised that the hopes of radicals had been premature. In lines which addressed her misplaced euphoria in her *Address to the Opposers* the year before she wrote:

> The Muse too, soon awak’d, with ready tongue  
> At Mercy’s shrine applausive peans rung;  
> And Freedom’s eager sons, in vain foretold  
> A new Astrean reign, an age of gold. (11–14)

Astrea was the goddess of Justice in the Golden Age. Barbauld’s mention of “Mercy” and “Justice” recalled her comments in her note to “The Mouse’s Petition” and her letter to Judy Beecroft. These terms were central to Barbauld’s progressive ideas; she hoped for an age of progress based on these principles. The failure of the Abolition Bill made her doubt this new era was imminent.

Rather than rehearsing the usual portrayals of the inhumanity of slavery, Barbauld’s poem focused on the failure of Parliament. Her poem was like a poetic report of the parliamentary debate, informing her readers of what happened. She explained that even with a cross-party alliance, made up of the finest orators of the day, which included Pitt and Fox, the bill failed.137 She recorded the tactics of the supporters and opposers of abolition. During the debate Wilberforce and his fellow abolitionist MPs had set out the horror of the slave trade, using testimonies gathered from witnesses. William Smith cited a particularly shocking atrocity story.138 The captain of a slave ship tortured a ten-month-old baby to death by forcing it to eat, then, after the child died, he made the mother of the child throw the body overboard by beating her. Smith asked his fellow MPs “if ever they had heard of such a deed”, and in response some laughed.139 Smith replied that he would have thought such lack of feeling impossible and he was almost ashamed to sit in an assembly where such a disgrace could happen.140 In her poem Barbauld referred to Smith’s abolition speech and the pro-slavery MPs’ reaction:

> Wrung Nature’s tortures, shuddering, while you tell,  
> From scoffing fiends burst forth the laugh of hell;  
> In Britain’s senate, Misery’s pangs give birth  
> To jests unseemly, and to horrid mirth. (37–40)

137 In the *Epistle* Barbauld wrote: “Contending chiefs, and hostile virtues join” (22).
138 Smith was MP for Norwich. He was a friend of Barbauld’s; she wrote her poem “Inscription for an Ice-House” in 1795 after a visit to his home at Parndon, Essex. McCarthy and Kraft 140.
140 Davis, *The Problem of Slavery* 426.
The diabolical imagery of “scoffing fiends” with their “jests unseemly” and “horrid mirth” made Parliament sound like Milton’s description of the council of hell in Pandaemonium, in Book II of *Paradise Lost*; by using this imagery she was providing a literally damning indictment of Parliament.\(^\text{141}\) Barbauld built up a catalogue of pejorative terms to describe the pro-slavery MPs’ arguments:

- Each flimsy sophistry by turns they try;
- The plausible argument, the daring lye,
- The artful gloss, that moral sense confounds (…)
- They search assiduous, with inverted skill,
- For forms of wrong, and precedents of ill. (27–9 (…) 33–4)

Her description suggested that their arguments were skilful and cunning but contrary to truth and morality. She described as “impious mockery” (35) the claim by one opponent of the bill that the Bible showed that slavery was divinely ordained. For Barbauld misusing religion was one of the greatest sins. In her 1793 pamphlet *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation*, Barbauld returned to this theme following Henry Dundas’ action in 1792 to secure an amendment in the House of Commons which substituted gradual for immediate abolition of the African slave trade.\(^\text{142}\) In response she accused the nation of hypocrisy in claiming to be a Christian country. She wrote:

> Is it possible we should meet as a nation, and knowing ourselves to be guilty of these things, have the confidence to implore the blessing of God upon our commerce and our colonies: preface with prayer our legislative meetings, and then deliberate how long we shall continue human sacrifices? Rather let us “Never pray more, abandon all remorse.” (emphasis original)\(^\text{143}\)

As in the *Epistle*, she portrayed hard-hearted legislators, who were more concerned with commerce than humanity, as anti-Christian; the use of the term “human sacrifices” suggested a pagan community. However, her pamphlet could also be seen to attack some of her fellow abolitionists who favoured gradual as


\(^{142}\) Dundas suggested the year 1800 but the House agreed instead to 1796. The Lords rejected the Commons’ resolution and postponed the business until the following session. In 1793 the Commons refused to revive the subject of the slave trade, thus effectively reversing the resolution of the previous year. Oldfield 62.

\(^{143}\) McCarthy and Kraft 308–9.
opposed to immediate reform. Her comment that some legislators “preface with prayer” deliberations about how long slavery should continue, showed that she was as critical of the so-called Christian humanitarians as of the overt anti-abolitionists. Some abolitionists, particularly ones from areas like Liverpool, which were dependent economically on the slave trade, supported a gradual solution. Barbauld’s comment in *Sins* allied her with “the true Humanity Men”, and suggests that she regarded anything other than immediate abolition as a mercenary compromise.\(^{144}\)

Like other abolitionists, Barbauld could not believe that having heard the full extent of the atrocities, Parliament voted against the bill. In her poem she wrote:

> The Preacher, Poet, Senator in vain
> Has rattled in her sight the Negro’s chain;
> With his deep groans assail’d her startled ear,
> And rent the veil that hid his constant tear. (3–6)

The imagery of ripping “the veil” recalls the time when Jesus tore apart the veil in the temple to reveal corruption. By using this image she was allying the abolitionists with Christ, emphasising that they were on the side of good against evil. The fact that Parliament and the public now knew the full extent of the inhumanity added to their culpability. In her *Epistle* she wrote: “The Country knows the sin, and stands the shame!” (2) She returned to this idea in *Sins*:

> If we know it, and cannot help knowing it, if such enormities have been pressed and forced upon our notice (...) and if they are still sanctioned by our legislature, defended by our princes – deep indeed is the colour of our guilt.\(^{145}\)

Her comments reflected Wilberforce’s remark during the campaign for the bill that:

> Whilst (...) we were ignorant of all these things, our suffering them to continue, might, in some measure, be pardoned; but now, when our eyes are opened, can we tolerate them for a moment, much less sanction them, unless we are ready at once to determine that gain shall be our god, and, like the heathens of old, are prepared to offer up human victims at the shrine of our idolatry?\(^{146}\)

Barbauld, like Wilberforce, portrayed the failure to act as undermining Britain’s reputation as a Christian nation and a land of freedom. The idea of slavery leading

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\(^{144}\) Krawczyk, “Mediating Abolition” 214.  
\(^{146}\) Qtd. in McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 293.
to national guilt was common in abolitionist literature. More’s “Slavery, A Poem” (1788) also made this point. In *Sins of Government* Barbauld developed the argument further. Her pamphlet was a comprehensive indictment of the British government’s actions. However, slavery was mentioned first “amongst our national faults”, that are “instances of cruelty or oppression to repent of” (emphases original).\(^\text{147}\) It was a touchstone for the state of liberty in the country.

After the defeat of the bill, in her poem, Barbauld called on Wilberforce to desist and leave the nation to its fate. Arguing that there would be divine retribution for such flagrant abuse of God’s providential order, she foresaw “our doom” (41) and “of vengeance yet to come;/For, not unmark’d in Heaven’s impartial plan,/Shall man, proud worm, contemn his fellow man?” (42–4). Her view was in line with other abolitionists poets who hinted that retribution would come either from heaven or from slave rebellion.\(^\text{148}\)

In *Sins of Government*, Barbauld argued that Britain needed to end slavery to restore its spiritual integrity. She wrote:

> Are there not some darker-coloured children of the same family, over whom we assume a hard and unjust controul? And have not these our brethren aught against us? If we suspect they have, would it not become us anxiously to enquire into the truth, that we may deliver our souls. (emphases original)\(^\text{149}\)

In this passage she emphasised the spiritual equality of slaves as they are “of the same family” and “our brethren”. As in “The Mouse’s Petition” and *An Address to the Opposers*, she drew on Shaftesbury’s belief that we are all interdependent.

Like many abolitionist writers, Barbauld focused on the evil effects of the trade on Britons rather than on Africans.\(^\text{150}\) Using extended metaphors of mental, spiritual and physical illness, she portrayed male slave traders as having their “minds deprav’d by bondage known” (47) because they ignored the “images of woe” (55). She used the words “contagion” (48), “sickly languors” (49) and “fiery venom” (51) to suggest slavery was poisoning them. Davies emphasises that her image of the cruel woman slave mistress embodied the physical and mental

\(^{147}\) Barbauld, “Sins of Government” 308.  
\(^{149}\) Barbauld, “Sins of Government” 308.  
\(^{150}\) Coleridge expressed a similar view in his 1795 lecture on slavery. Coleman, “Conspicuous Consumption” 347.
degeneration caused by corrupting commerce. Barbauld described her as “of body delicate, infirm of mind” (66). Her attitude to the corrupting effects of slavery was consistent throughout her work; two decades earlier she promoted a similar idea in her essay “Against Inconsistency in our Expectations” (1773). She wrote:

If it be a small thing to enjoy a healthful mind, sound at the very core, that does not shrink from the keenest inspection; inward freedom from remorse and perturbation; unsullied whiteness and simplicity of manners; a genuine integrity (...) if you think these advantages an inadequate recompense for what you resign, dismiss your scruples this instant, and be a slave-merchant.

Barbauld blamed “Avarice” (25) for the failure of the Abolition Bill. In the parliamentary debate the pro-slavery MPs argued for the rights of property and the economic importance of the trade. They claimed that abolition was not in Britain’s mercantile and imperial interests. In her poem Barbauld acknowledged that money gained from the slave trade permeated the whole economic system and that much of Britain’s wealth came from this source. But the cost of material wealth was moral decline. Returning to the imagery of disease, she wrote:

Corruption follows with gigantic stride (…)
The spreading leprosy taints ev’ry part,
Infests each limb, and sickens at the heart. (96, 98–9)

She summed up the harmful effect of this form of imperialism in the line: “By foreign wealth are British morals chang’d” (104).

As her belief in progress was undermined, she looked to the past for inspiration. She praised “the sober pomp of elder days” (95), “Simplicity” (100), “Independance” (sic) (102) and “Freedom” (103), all terms associated with the seventeenth-century Commonwealth era. Turley argues that Barbauld and her fellow Dissenters saw anti-slavery as reflecting their belief in the “Real Whig” tradition of liberalism. Central to these ideas was the concept of universal natural rights, and the need to protect them by maintaining a balanced system of

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151 Davies 147–8.
152 Barbauld, “Against Inconsistency in our Expectations”, McCarthy and Kraft 190.
153 Brion Davis explains: “In the 1790s the loose anti-abolitionist alliance included the king and royal family; the admirals of the navy; leading commercial interests in London, Liverpool, and Bristol; and above all, many landed proprietors who feared any innovation that might weaken the empire, raise taxes, or set a precedent for more dangerous reforms” (102–3). Turley estimates that there were 35 MPs in a visible “West India” group in the Commons in the early 1790s (53).
government, in which concentrations of power were avoided.\(^{155}\) Her use of these terms supports Walpole’s claim that “her party” saw the failure to abolish slavery “as a blow to the good cause”.\(^{156}\)

The “good cause” had been dealt another blow the year before when Parliament rejected the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. After the failure to repeal the Act, Dissenters became more critical of the state of the political system in Britain and parliamentary reform became a priority.\(^{157}\) Barbauld warned her opponents of these consequences in *An Address to the Opposers*; she wrote that their action had made Dissenters “quick sighted to encroachments and abuses of all kinds”.\(^{158}\) She carried out this threat to scrutinise failings in the political system in her *Epistle*, and in her pamphlets *Civic Sermons* and *Sins of Government*. In her *Epistle*, Barbauld subtly reminded her readers of the links between the two parliamentary failures. Her choice of Smith’s speech as the focal point for her indictment of the Commons was apposite because Smith was a leading Dissenter who campaigned ardently for repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts.\(^{159}\) His inclusion linked the two parliamentary debates and thus suggested a more systemic failure of British politics.

Barbauld’s linking of religious disabilities and slavery was similar to Helen Maria Williams’ “Poem on the Bill Lately passed for Regulating the Slave Trade” (1788). Following the successful passage of Sir William Dolben’s bill regulating the size of slavery ships on the Middle Passage, Williams praised reformist Parliamentarians but called on the “senate” to go further to alleviate the suffering of slavery.\(^{160}\) Ferguson shows how, as a Dissenter and a supporter of parliamentary reform, Williams also used her poem to expose the persecution of Dissenters. She suggested the need for an Abolition Bill and repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts.\(^{161}\)

However, although the failure to repeal the Corporation and Test Acts influenced Barbauld’s reaction to the Abolition Bill, her judgement was not

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\(^{155}\) Turley 24–5.


\(^{157}\) Goodwin 98.

\(^{158}\) Barbauld, “Address to the Opposers” 273.

\(^{159}\) Turley 114–15.

\(^{160}\) Oldfield 136.

\(^{161}\) Ferguson, *Subject to Others* 157–9.
completely partisan. Her *Epistle* paid tribute to Wilberforce, who voted against ending Dissenters’ civil disabilities. She wrote:

> For you, whose temper’d ardour long has borne  
> Untir’d the labour, and unmov’d the scorn;  
> In Virtue’s fasti be inscrib’d your fame. (106–8)

She saw his action as uniting the “civic wreath” and “Christian’s palm” (113). Her mention of “Virtue’s fasti” showed that Barbauld saw Wilberforce in civic humanist terms as putting the needs of the whole community above sectional interest. By praising Wilberforce, she demonstrated that she was doing the same and not making the distinction between Parliamentarians with integrity and those without on purely denominational lines.

In her *Epistle*, following the failure of collective action, Barbauld returned to her Epictetan philosophy, stressing the importance of individual integrity. However, she did not withdraw into self-centred retreat; instead she took part in extra-parliamentary action. Her advice to Wilberforce to give up did not mean the fight was over; it would just take other forms. It would now move from parliamentary to extra-parliamentary action; Barbauld’s poem was part of the information campaign to make people think about what had happened. The propaganda campaign to prepare for the petition was highly effective at mobilising public opinion; 519 petitions were presented to the Commons, the largest number ever submitted to Parliament on a single subject or in a single session.

Although we do not know if Barbauld took part in the campaign to boycott West Indian sugar, her husband Rochemont was an ardent advocate. Sugar abstention included people who were excluded from parliamentary politics. Women were at the centre of this economic action as they were often in charge of the consumer choices made in their households. The boycott particularly appealed to Dissenters because it involved an individual taking the virtuous moral action of abstaining. At the peak of the boycotting campaign Thomas Clarkson claimed

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162 See Chapter 2.  
163 Oldfield 61.  
164 McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 300.  
165 Midgely 35.  
that the government’s sugar revenue fell by £200,000 in the last quarter of the year 1791.\textsuperscript{167}

Popular participation was threatening to the propertied classes. Brion Davis emphasises that the slave trade depended for support on the landed interest and the traditional system of representation which allowed the purchase of rank and political influence. Any abolitionist movement, backed by organised public opinion, was an indirect attack on the unreformed Parliament.\textsuperscript{168} Turley argues that anti-slavery practice introduced “more general innovations in permissible ways of trying to bring about change”; it tested the limits of what was considered legitimate action.\textsuperscript{169} Some of the more conservative abolitionists were wary of any direct action; Wilberforce feared that the boycott scheme was linked with the “turbulent elements” of the abolition movement.\textsuperscript{170} Abolitionism was increasingly seen as a cover for more revolutionary intentions. Activists, like Clarkson, were equated with Jacobins because they openly supported the French Revolution. Any assertion of the equality of rights for all men became associated with Thomas Paine’s radical ideas.\textsuperscript{171} In the 1790s abolitionists inspired other movements for political and social reform. A diverse range of issues, from conscription and flogging in the military to the abuse of wives and animals, was linked to slavery by reformers in pamphlets, speeches, newspapers and subversive handbills.\textsuperscript{172}

In response to these radical readings of anti-slavery, conservatives like More distanced themselves from the human rights implication of abolition. Oldfield’s analysis of More’s \textit{Cheap Repository Tracts} establishes that they taught slaves and the poor in Britain to be obedient and accept their station in this world rather than trying to change the hierarchical order. More’s advice to the oppressed was to look for Christian salvation in heaven.\textsuperscript{173} Barbauld and Aikin took a different view in the \textit{Evenings at Home} dialogue “Master and Slave”. As Scott Krawczyk explains, this work endorsed the slave’s right to fight for his own independence. The dialogue was “especially remarkable for its repeated allusions to the threat of

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\textsuperscript{167} Coleman, “Conspicuous Consumption” 344.  \\
\textsuperscript{168} Davis, \textit{The Problem of Slavery} 102.  \\
\textsuperscript{169} Turley 3.  \\
\textsuperscript{170} Davis, \textit{The Problem of Slavery} 436.  \\
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid. 364–5.  \\
\textsuperscript{172} Drescher 156.  \\
\textsuperscript{173} Oldfield 142.
\end{flushright}
violence, indeed about the legitimacy of violent resistance”. The dialogue also drew parallels between the situation of slaves and Dissenters. The slave tells his former master:

You are surrounded with implacable foes, who long for a safe opportunity to revenge upon you and the other planters all the miseries they have endured. The more generous their natures, the more indignant they feel against that cruel injustice which has dragged them hither, and doomed them to perpetual servitude (…) You have reduced them to the state of brute beasts; and if they have not the stupidity of beasts of burden, they must have the ferocity of beasts of prey. Superior force alone can give you security. As soon as that fails, you are at the mercy of the merciless. Such is the social bond between master and slave!

Krawczyk argues that, like slaves, Dissenters were in a position of persecution. Although the degree of this oppression was “a universe away” from the suffering experienced by slaves, there were similarities.

BARBAULD’S ATTITUDE TO THE DISCOURSE OF SENSIBILIT

As well as providing an insight into the political debate of the era, Barbauld’s anti-slavery writing illustrates how the discourse of sensibility was used for propaganda purposes. Barbauld was a propagandist in a movement which mobilised public opinion on an unprecedented scale. Abolitionists used books, pamphlets, artefacts and prints to create a constituency for anti-slavery. As Brycchan Carey establishes, the discourse of abolition was a group project; writers deliberately relied on intertextuality, referring to and even quoting each other’s work. Barbauld, More, William Roscoe, Samuel Jackson Pratt, Hugh Mulligan and William Cowper incorporated the same motifs in their poems to reinforce their message by repetition. The themes of atrocities, human bondage, split families, un-Christian traders, the undermining of British integrity and tributes to anti-slavery Parliamentarians, were standard contents.

174 Krawczyk, Romantic Literary Families 48.
175 Akin and Barbauld, “Master and Slave”, Evenings at Home, or, the Juvenile Budget Opened (London, 1796) 6: 87–8. This was not one of the stories attributed to Barbauld but as I argue in chapter five the stories in Evenings can be seen as reflecting their joint ideas.
176 Krawczyk, Romantic Literary Families 49.
177 Oldfield 2.
179 Ferguson, Subject to Others 150.
However, Barbauld’s *Epistle* was more than just a piece of political propaganda; as McCarthy argues, it was also a critique of the failure of benevolent humanitarian action and “sentimental rhetoric” to change society.\(^{180}\) Drescher establishes that in the late eighteenth century there was “an intensification of British popular politics”. From the 1780s, an increasingly politicised electorate developed “a clearer sense of national policy as a continuous and changeable process, susceptible to external pressures”. The mobilisation of public opinion in the anti-slavery campaign reflected this change.\(^{181}\) As Carey demonstrates, to influence this opinion, writers used the persuasive power of the “rhetoric of sensibility” which relied on tapping in to readers’ sympathy through emotive rather than intellectual arguments. Using a mixture of classical and new rhetorical techniques, it depicted physical and emotional suffering, in an attempt to move readers to agreement. Almost all the major political questions of the day were discussed in sentimental terms, but the cause of anti-slavery particularly lent itself to this rhetoric.\(^{182}\) Using the language of tears and human suffering, abolitionist poets portrayed African slaves in the most moving terms to appeal to the readers of sensibility fictions.\(^{183}\)

From her youth Barbauld was ambivalent about the use of sensibility. In her early essay “An Enquiry”, she provided a detailed critique of the right and wrong uses of it; she later applied these rules to her own writing on slavery. In her essay she analysed which types of fictional representations would be most effective at inspiring pity in her readers. She was very aware that sensibility had to be carefully used if it was not to be corrupted into self-indulgent spectatorship.

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\(^{180}\) McCarthy writes: “Beyond the fact that the trade had not been stopped was a deeply disturbing failure of discourse itself, of the psychology of moral action that Barabuld had long believed in. The abolitionists had compelled their fellow citizens to undergo a meditation in the style of Philip Doddridge: to view the sufferings of Africans, as Doddridge had invited Bible readers to view those of “our expiring Lord”, until the eye should affect the heart, and learning should occur. But this time, the eye had not affected the heart, and no learning had occurred. What did this failure signify for the project of moral education so fundamental to the hopes of Barbauld and other liberals? (…) What did the failure signify about Hutcheson’s faith in a natural tendency of humans to act morally?” McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 296.

\(^{181}\) Drescher 67–8.

\(^{182}\) Carey 2.

\(^{183}\) McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 292.
Barbauld was not alone in her ambivalent attitude to sensibility; many writers denounced certain aspects of sensibility while still using it in their work. In his analysis of Hannah More’s poem “Sensibility” (1780), Carey shows that she distinguished between “true” and “false” sensibility. She personified false sensibility as a novel-reading, play-going woman who neglected her social and domestic duties while boasting of her superior sensibility. For More, false sensibility was affected and rehearsed, while real sensibility resulted in action. Similarly, Barbauld believed that it was morally corrupting to read about fictionalised suffering without using the emotions it produced for virtuous action in real life. In her “An Enquiry” she wrote: “Nothing is more dangerous than to let virtuous impressions of any kind pass through the mind without producing their proper effect”. She believed that if such feelings did not lead to action, every time they recurred the emotions aroused would grow less vivid and eventually this would lead to callousness, apathy, and indifference to genuine suffering.

The right use of sensibility became of particular concern to the leading abolitionists. Halttunen claims that they were aware that too graphic descriptions of cruelty could degenerate into a “pornography of pain” which titillated and corrupted readers rather than encouraged action. They also realised that too sentimental an approach played into the pro-slavery lobby’s accusation that the abolitionist movement was based on emotion rather than reason. Barbauld, More and Roscoe carefully distanced themselves from the “false” sentimentality of some anti-slavery writers. Carey shows that in her poem “Slavery” More emphasised the difference between her poem and previous literary works on slavery. She pointed out that her work was not primarily an aesthetic exercise but a contribution to the

184 Jones 4.
185 Carey 39.
187 Throughout her life Barbauld promoted this belief; in a letter written in 1812 to a young friend, Sarah Carr, she criticised the work of Crabbe for causing more pain than pleasure. She wrote: “For strength and truth and variety of character no one exceeds him, but the homespun distresses of real life are not proper for the play of fancy, they should only be presented to the mind when they can be relieved.” Barbauld, letter to Sarah Carr, 16 October 1812, Letters of Maria Edgeworth and Anna Letitia Barbauld. Selected from the Lushington Papers, ed. Walter Sidney Scott (London: Golden Cockerel Press, 1953) 75.
189 Carey 73–4.
political debate about real human suffering.\textsuperscript{190} Similarly, in “The Wrongs of Africa” (1787) Roscoe attacked self-indulgent sensibility, which was only interested in imagined woes, and argued instead for genuine sympathy for real slaves.\textsuperscript{191}

Barbauld’s \textit{Epistle} reflected this distinction when she wrote that preachers, poets and senators “assail’d her [the nation’s] startled ear” \textsuperscript{(5)} with the slaves’ deep groans and “forc’d her averted eyes his stripes to scan” \textsuperscript{(7)}. She acknowledged the good intentions behind this literary action in her lines:

\begin{quote}
Beneath the bloody scourge laid bare the man,  
Claim’d Pity’s tear, urg’d Conscience’ strong controul,  
And flash’d conviction on her shrinking soul. \textsuperscript{(8–10)}
\end{quote}

However, she recognised that this rhetoric had failed: “Still Afric bleeds,/Uncheck’d, the human traffic still proceeds” \textsuperscript{(15–16)}. She wrote:

\begin{quote}
In vain (…)  
Wit, Worth, and Parts and Eloquence are found:  
In vain, to push to birth thy great design. \textsuperscript{(19–21)}
\end{quote}

The repetition of the words “in vain” tolls a lament for the failure of oratory and reason to win assent to humanitarian arguments.

Following the failure of Wilberforce’s bill, some abolitionists believed that the misuse of sensibility had undermined their cause. It gave an added impetus to discriminating between different manifestations of the discourse. Abolitionists tried to dissociate it from negative associations with self-indulgent feminine feeling.\textsuperscript{192} They emphasised that genuine humanity was linked to rational qualities of self-command and generosity.\textsuperscript{193} Davies cites a pamphlet published in May 1791 by the abolitionist William Crafton as an example of this approach. He criticised readers who felt “a certain gratification” in reading pathetic poetic descriptions of the suffering of slaves. Contrasting the artificial rhetoric of some anti-slavery poems with the “true and faithful” account of the cruelties of the slave trade given as evidence to the House of Commons, he wrote:

\begin{quote}
Humanity appertains rather to the mind than to the nerves and prompts men to real, disinterested endeavours to give happiness to their fellow creatures. It is therefore to be wished that no affectation of extreme sensibility, or real
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid. 86–7.  
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid. 93.  
\textsuperscript{192} Davies 142.  
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid. 143.
effeminacy of manners, may disincline or disqualify for the service of humanity, that extreme DELICACY which deprives us (...) of the ability to encounter suffering (...) it renders compassion a painful, useless thing and makes beneficence fruitless.  

I suggest that abolitionists adopted a common discourse to promote these distinctions, as Barbauld’s writing expressed ideas similar to Crafton’s pamphlet. In *Sins*, Barbauld criticised the type of sensibility which was a response of “the nerves” and emotions, instead praising humanitarianism which was based on political principles and reason. She wrote:

> There are some, whose nerves, rather than whose principles, cannot bear cruelty – like other nuisances, they would not chuse it in sight, but they can be well content to know it exists, and that they are indebted to if for the increase of their income, and the luxuries of their table.

She made it plain that a truly virtuous person’s reaction to suffering was based on principles, not “nerves”. For both Barbauld and Crafton, the use of the word “nerves” suggested a lack of reason; like her extended imagery of illness in her *Epistle*, it suggested a malfunction of the body rather than a healthy reaction to suffering. In her *Epistle*, which was written at the same time as Crafton’s pamphlet, Barbauld developed many of his themes; she provided a damning portrayal of “effeminacy of manners” and “extreme delicacy” in her images of the degenerate slave trader and cruel woman. In the poem she also abided by his rules by drawing on the factual evidence presented to the House of Commons, rather than imagined atrocities. Although she alluded to Smith’s description of the horrific treatment of a slave child and mother, she focused on the heartless reaction of the Parliamentarians rather than the sadistic episode itself. By doing this Barbauld avoided the sensationalism which she believed had been counter-productive for the abolitionist cause.

In “An Enquiry” she had criticised too graphic description of suffering because it could alienate readers. She explained that for misfortune to excite

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194 William Crafton, *A Short Sketch of the Evidence Delivered before a Committee of the House of Commons for the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1791). Qtd. in Davies 143.
196 In “An Enquiry” she criticised Shakespeare for presenting scenes that were too shocking. She also criticised Edward Young’s tragedies because “all his pieces are full of violent and gloomy passions, and so over-wrought with horror, that instead of awakening any pleasing sensibility, they leave on the mind an impression of sadness mixed with terror (...) Images like these will never excite the softer passions.” McCarthy and Kraft 199–200.
pity it “must not be too horrid and overwhelming. The mind is rather stunned than softened by great calamities. They are little circumstances that work most sensibly upon the tender feelings”. Explicit descriptions were more likely to terrify readers than move them to compassion. Barbauld also placed limitations on imaginative sympathy. She explained that a judicious author will never “attempt to raise pity by any thing mean or disgusting”. Readers did not want to read realistic representations of poverty because they shock “our nicer feelings”. To inspire compassion, they need sanitised images with which they could identify. Barbauld wrote: “To make pity pleasing, the object of it must not in any view be disagreeable to the imagination”. Otherwise, instead of feeling pity we will turn away in disgust. Barbauld applied this rule in her Epistle. Her only description of slaves in the poem is restrained, rather than graphic. She wrote:

But shrieks and yells disturb the balmy air,
Dumb sullen looks of woe announce despair,
And angry eyes thro’ dusky features glare. (81–3)

In this portrayal she focused on the emotions of the slaves rather than physical descriptions of their suffering; this emphasised their shared humanity.

The idea that the imagination would be revolted by “disgusting” scenes sounds unsympathetic to modern readers. Jones describes Barbauld’s comments as an example of “conservative sensibility”; she claims that “there is still often an irritating sense of elitism among some predominantly liberal writers”. However, this view was widely held in eighteenth-century society. Mary Wollstonecraft also believed that there was something disgusting in the distresses of poverty which revolted the imagination. Barbauld distinguished between reactions to fictional and real suffering. She wrote that: “We ought to remember, that misery has a claim to relief, however we may be disgusted with its appearance”. She was not ignoring the reality of suffering; she was just opposing its use for sensational purposes in literature.

197 Ibid. 198.
198 Ibid. 200.
200 Ibid. 203.
201 Jones 65-7.
202 Ibid. 65.
203 Barbauld, “An Enquiry” 207.
Barbauld was also wary of repetition which could deaden feelings of compassion. In “An Enquiry”, she wrote “sensibility does not increase with exercise”\textsuperscript{204} She believed that scenes of suffering should be used sparingly.\textsuperscript{205} In Sins of Government, she repeated this idea, criticising the tactics of some abolitionists. She wrote that knowledge of “enormities have been pressed and forced upon our notice, till they are become flat and stale in the public ear, from fulness and repetition, and satiety of proof”.\textsuperscript{206}

In Barbauld’s Hymns in Prose for Children (1781) her description of the dignified weeping slave mother conforms to her advice in “An Enquiry” that “nothing (…) must be admitted which destroys the grace and dignity of suffering; the imagination must have an amiable figure to dwell upon”.\textsuperscript{207} In this restrained image she fulfilled her own description of the best type of sentimental writing “where noble sentiments are mixed with well fancied incidents, pathetic touches with dignity and grace, and invention with chaste correctness. Such will ever interest our sweetest passions”.\textsuperscript{208}

Barbauld described the slave woman “who sittest pining in captivity, and weepest over thy sick child; though no one seeth thee, God seeth thee; though no one pitieth thee, God pitieth thee; raise thy voice, forlorn and abandoned one; call upon him from amidst thy bonds, for assuredly he will hear thee”.\textsuperscript{209}

Ferguson argues that, by drawing attention to the suffering of a single individual, in this “sentimental parable” Barbauld provided an example of the situation of a multitude. The African Madonna appealed to Christian domestic values as she emblemised the way slavery severed families and communities.\textsuperscript{210} Barbauld was abiding by the rules of rhetoric that a human story on a human scale was most likely to move her audience. It created a personal connection and sympathetic identification between the reader and the African woman.\textsuperscript{211}

Ferguson’s analysis of Barbauld’s negro mother vignette supports my thesis that Barbauld was political and strategic in her portrayal of slavery. Ferguson

\textsuperscript{204} Ibid. 205.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid. 204–5.
\textsuperscript{206} Barbauld, “Sins of Government” 308.
\textsuperscript{207} Barbauld, “An Enquiry” 200.
\textsuperscript{208} Ibid. 207.
\textsuperscript{209} Barbauld, “Hymns in Prose for Children”, McCarthy and Kraft 249.
\textsuperscript{210} Ferguson, Subject to Others 132.
\textsuperscript{211} Carey 40.
emphasises the importance of Barbauld’s “Hymn”, claiming that she was the first white woman to speak in her own voice and engage a slave as interlocutor. She sees Barbauld’s “Hymn” as shaped for political purposes and she describes it as “a transitional text that helped forge a path for formal agitation”. Ferguson claims that because the mother and child have no name and no voice and are shown in an unspecified geographical location, the “Hymn” foreshadowed the new type of narrative which was adapted for campaigning. Once abolitionists started to write verse for propaganda purposes the characteristics associated with living Africans disappeared, and in order to win support, writers fashioned their poems according to campaign demands.

Although Barbauld used individual stories to win assent from her audience for her ideas, she believed that a truly virtuous person had to draw the wider implications from the portrayal; instead of just feeling for the suffering of one individual they must feel pity for the thousands who suffer oppression. They must be able to use their reason to appreciate the abstract political ideas beneath the case study and then act on principle to change the situation; otherwise their sympathy was just another form of spectatorial sensibility informed purely by emotion.

CONCLUSION
Having examined Barbauld’s humanitarian ideas in detail, it is evident that Barbauld used humanitarian concerns from animal rights to the abolition of slavery to promote a wider critique of the way Britain was governed. However, she also

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212 Ferguson, Subject to Others 132–4.
213 Ibid. 146.
214 Barbauld made this point in her poem “The Caterpillar”. She wrote:
   A single sufferer from the field escaped,
   Panting and pale, and bleeding at his feet,
   Lift his imploring eyes, – the hero weeps;
   He is grown human, and capricious Pity,
   Which would not stir for thousands, melts for one
   With sympathy spontaneous: – ’Tis not Virtue,
   Yet ’tis the weakness of a virtuous mind. (36–42; McCarthy and Kraft 179–80)

Alice G. Den Otter claims that the poem subtly suggests that her audience lack virtue, despite having virtuous intentions. She writes: “Virtue, presumably would have acted on principle: an enemy is an enemy; a friend is a friend. The weaker mind, however, is overcome by excessive sensibility (...) Excess sensibility is too responsive to changing circumstances, whereas Virtue remains constant. Thus it is not Virtue to make exceptions for one ‘single sufferer’, although the intention may be virtuous.” Alice G. Den Otter, “Pests, Parasites, and Positionality: Anna Letitia Barbauld and ‘The Caterpillar’”, Studies in Romanticism 43:2 (2004): 224.
genuinely cared for the vulnerable. Unlike the stereotypical sensitive female, she cared about their plight in a practical and political way. She was not willing just to shed tears over their suffering; she knew that her faith demanded active virtue to change the system which caused the injustice in society. For Barbauld the suffering of slaves and animals was part of a bigger picture; it was about civil liberties and living in a state where the government did not infringe upon individual freedom. A good government, which ruled in the interests of the happiness of all, would not allow such injustices to continue. Her attitude was political, not sentimental; her action was based on permanent principles, not capricious whims. She was not alone in her approach; for most of the other humanitarian reformers of the era, both conservative and radical, the causes they championed mattered to them but were also part of a wider view about how society should be organised. Barbauld was particularly threatening to conservatives because she was so effective at producing propaganda which influenced public opinion and because she was demanding fundamental change. However, although Barbauld was campaigning for change in both “The Mouse’s Petition” and Epistle it is clear that she did not subscribe to the doctrine that the ends justify the means. Political change was necessary, but it must be achieved without progressive thinkers sacrificing their integrity, and becoming like the forces they sought to overthrow. She used sensibility but was aware of its limitations and corruptions. Her rational use of this discourse meant that she failed to conform to the stereotypical image of a sentimental woman, ruled by emotional and feminine sympathy, rather than rational sensibility. Her attitude to humanitarian concerns demonstrates that she used her writing to make political points from early in her career. There is continuity between her earlier poetry and her later overtly political pamphlets; both provided a damning indictment of the existing system.
Chapter 4

“And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage?”: Barbauld’s revolutionary decade

In the 1790 cartoon “Don Dismallo Running the Literary Gantlet”, Anna Letitia Barbauld is shown whip in hand ready to lash out at Edmund Burke, the arch-enemy of Dissent and reform. She stands alongside other leading reformers including Helen Maria Williams, Dr Richard Price, Richard Sheridan, Horne Tooke and Catharine Macaulay, but it is Barbauld who is placed closest to Burke and most likely to strike a blow against him.¹

This cartoon indicates the way Barbauld was perceived; before other radicals like Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine entered the debate, she was seen as one of the main threats to Burke and his beliefs. Burke’s *Reflections*, denouncing the French Revolution, had been published on 1 November 1790. In late November Richard Price responded; on 29 November Mary Wollstonecraft published anonymously *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*; in March 1791, Thomas Paine published Part I of his *Rights of Man*. The Don Dismallo cartoon appeared on 1 December; McCarthy claims that on the strength of Barbauld’s *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts*, “the cartoonist was looking ahead to an answer by her to *Reflections*”. No direct response by Barbauld is known to have been written, but her reputation from her earlier pamphlet shaped the perception of her as one of the leading radical writers.² Published in March 1790, *An Address to the Opposers* was written in response to Parliament’s rejection of attempts to repeal the two laws which made Dissenters ineligible for various public offices. During the campaign for repeal Dissenters had argued for the change on the grounds of their natural rights. The 1789 Revolution in France, involving the nationalisation of church property, harmed the cause for reform at home. In the parliamentary debate, Burke was one of the leading opponents of repeal. On 2 March 1790 the motion was lost by 189 votes.³

¹ Cartoon reproduced in McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* fig. 47.
² Ibid. 281–4.
³ McCarthy and Kraft 261.
Barbauld’s pamphlet attacked the opposers of repeal, while euphorically celebrating the French Revolution. The pamphlet caused controversy because of its tone as much as its content. As McCarthy explains, it was not so much that she expressed liberal political opinions that shocked previous admirers; it was that her expression was so angry.4 Reflecting the changed perception of Barbauld, on 20 December 1790 Horace Walpole described her in a letter as “the virago Barbauld”, one of the “Amazonian allies headed by Kate Macaulay”.5 In a later letter he emphasised the subversive streak beneath her pious exterior, claiming that Barbauld and her fellow Dissenters “hoist the flag of religion, while they carry a stiletto in the flag-staff”.6 The fiery nature of Barbauld’s rhetoric was also noted by William Keate, the rector of Laverton. In his review of the Dissenters’ reaction to the repeal failure, he singled out Barbauld’s pamphlet for its “intemperance” and “arrogance”.7 Hearing it was written by a woman, he quoted Alexander Pope’s satirical mock heroic poem *The Rape of the Lock*. He turned the quotation, describing Belinda’s fit of pique after her lock was cut, into a derogatory description of Barbauld: “And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage?”8

By using this quotation Keate suggested that the rage of women was incited by trivial incidents and was an over-reaction. The implied response was that the reader would join in the mockery of Barbauld, but I suggest that the joke can be turned on Keate. It is his response which seems outdated and inappropriate, not Barbauld’s reaction. This was no hysterical outburst about a personal matter which was relevant to only one woman, as in Pope’s poem; instead Barbauld’s aggressive tone reflected an era when rage became a feature of the literary response to the cataclysmic political events. In the revolutionary era, women were not to be confined to the domestic sphere and the sexual role of Keate’s quotation; instead they took their place alongside men as activists. As Anne Janowitz argues,

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6 Horace Walpole, letter to Hannah More, 29 September 1791, ibid. 72.
7 William Keate, *A free examination of Dr Price’s and Dr Priestley’s Sermons. By the Rev. William Keate, Rector of Laverton in the County of Somerset. And (author) of “William Bull’s Address to the Steward of the Manor” with a Postscript containing some strictures upon ‘An Address to the opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts’*” (London, 1790) 55.
8 Ibid. 64.
Barbauld was now acknowledged “as part of a circle defined politically rather than familiarly, and whose rhetoric was passionate rather than amiable”.9

Barbauld’s political stance needs to be seen in the wider context of the politics of the 1790s. In Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy Marilyn Butler examines the pamphlet wars of the 1790s. She establishes that the “Revolution debate” lasted for about six years, from the French Revolution in 1789 to December 1795 when Pitt’s government introduced measures to stop the spread of radicalism through the spoken and printed word. It reflected fundamental divides in British politics, dating back to the seventeenth century, about the way Britain should be governed. Key texts include Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France, aimed at rallying support for the existing aristocratic system of government, and the radical replies from Paine in Rights of Man and William Godwin in Political Justice (1793) which critiqued monarchy and aristocracy and offered alternative proposals. During these years there was a range of radical ideas circulating from the practical to the utopian, including republicanism, anarchy and agrarian socialism.10

In Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide 1793–1796 John Barrell examines the risk radicals took in expressing their ideas. He describes a new kind of political crisis in Britain, in which the government of Pitt was fighting “a war on two fronts, against a republican enemy abroad and a small but highly organised network of popular radical societies at home”.11 Conservatives claimed that the popular movement for parliamentary reform was a revolutionary, republican movement. Determined to break the movement, the government had radicals arrested and tried.12 Barrell claims that the political conflict of the period was, among other things, about the meaning of words. He shows how the English and Scottish treason trials hinged on the meaning of a clause in the English statute of treasons of 1351, which stated it was treason “when a man doth compass or imagine the death of our lord the king”.13 Foxite Whigs argued that the executive

9 Janowitz, “Amiable and Radical Sociability” 74
10 Butler, Burke, Paine, Godwin 1–2.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid. 30.
was trying to represent opposition to the government as opposition to the king, and so high treason.\textsuperscript{14}

J. E. Cookson’s research emphasises that Rational Dissenters were among those groups the government wanted to suppress. In the early 1790s reactionary forces responded with vigour and violence to Dissenters’ attempts to reform the hierarchical society. The government introduced repressive legislation undermining freedom of speech.\textsuperscript{15} Incited by Burke’s claim that church and state were in danger, Church and King mobs turned on the Dissenting community. From 1792 John Reeves’ “Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers” stirred up hatred in local communities. The unfair treatment of Dissenters radicalised this group and increased their solidarity. As Cookson writes, the experience of persecution was “nothing short of traumatic. It converted what had been a relatively quiescent and inward-looking social minority into a powerful political force.”\textsuperscript{16}

Critics dispute how revolutionary Dissenters’ ideas were. Isaac Kramnick contends that Priestley’s circle formed a radical liberal bourgeoisie which was a threat to the ruling classes. Although English Dissenters only constituted about 7 per cent of the population they “nearly destroyed aristocratic England and its traditional values” and “played an innovative role vastly disproportionate to their numbers”.\textsuperscript{17} Recent critics claim that Kramnick has exaggerated Dissenters’ radicalism; they only wanted moderate reform and were not concerned with fundamentally changing the structure of the country. Alan Saunders argues that, although their philosophy was enlightened, their aspirations were too limited to win them a place in the ranks of “the radical platoons”.\textsuperscript{18}

The position of Joseph Priestley is central to this debate. By the 1790s Priestley was considered by his opponents to be one of the most dangerous radical intellectuals of his era. As William Cobbett wrote in a 1794 pamphlet:

Those who know anything of the English Dissenters, know that they always introduce their political claims and projects under the mask of religion. The Doctor [Priestley] was one of those who entertained hopes of bringing about

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\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. 40.
\textsuperscript{15} Cookson, \textit{The Friends of Peace} 2.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 11
\textsuperscript{17} Kramnick 44.
\textsuperscript{18} Saunders 242.
a revolution in England upon the French plan; and for this purpose he found it would be very convenient for him to be at the head of a religious sect.19

A turning point came in Birmingham in July 1791, when a Church and King mob destroyed Priestley’s house and laboratory.20 Adding to my earlier research into Barbauld’s complex relationship with Priestley, this chapter examines the effect Priestley’s treatment had on Barbauld’s politics. Although, as my earlier chapters demonstrate, they had differences of opinion, when Priestley was under attack Barbauld was one of his main supporters. She shared many of his ideas and communicated them to the masses, and thus her reputation was inevitably intertwined with his. I hope that by establishing Barbauld’s importance to politics in the 1790s my research will contribute to the wider debate on the political role of Rational Dissent.

Scholarship is divided on Barbauld’s importance to the politics of the era. Reflecting the image promoted by her niece Lucy Aikin, some critics portray her as a peripheral, moderate conservative within the radical movement of the 1790s.21 The leading writers on the political movements closely linked to Dissent, J. E. Cookson and Albert Goodwin, have not seen Barbauld as central to these networks.22 Barbara Taylor argues that she was not as radical as her contemporaries; her “democratic instincts” and “passion for equality” were less strong than for most other reformers.23 However, other critics stress Barbauld’s radicalism and her centrality to the reform movements. Janowitz argues that she made “a significant intervention into the pamphlet war”.24 Emphasising Barbauld’s passionate tone, Janowitz claims that in her pamphlets of 1790–3 she “fully engaged the public arena of republican intervention”.25 Kramnick contends that Barbauld was one of the most important woman radicals in the 1790s.26 McCarthy also emphasises her centrality to the progressive politics of the era; until

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19 William Cobbett, Observations on the emigration of Dr. Joseph Priestley, and on the several addresses delivered to him on his arrival at New York (Philadelphia, 1794). Qtd. in Butler, Burke, Paine, Godwin 138.
20 McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 306.
21 In her memoir Aikin briefly outlined the political pamphlets written by Barbauld in the 1790s in one page with no analysis. Barbauld, Works xxxvi.
22 Goodwin; Cookson, The Friends of Peace.
23 Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 184.
24 Janowitz, “Amiable and Radical Sociability” 72.
25 Ibid. 74.
26 Kramnick 124.
Wollstonecraft came on the scene, it was Barbauld who “figured in the conservative imagination as the wicked female”. In his detailed analysis of her political pamphlets he establishes her radicalism. He speculates that her 1793 pamphlet *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* was so inflammatory that if Barbauld had been a man she might have been prosecuted for sedition.

The argument of this chapter builds on Janowitz’s, McCarthy’s and Kramnick’s analysis and challenges Taylor’s assessment. I will argue that the contemporary portrayals of her are accurate and that she was more radical and risk-taking than her subsequent image suggested. This claim is central to the whole thesis as it emphasises that rather than being on the periphery of progressive thinking she was at the centre of it. Contradicting Taylor’s claim, I also develop my argument, which can be found throughout the thesis, that Barbauld was more democratic than some of her fellow progressive intellectuals. I contend that Barbauld challenged what the purpose of the intellectual should be in the revolutionary era. Although she was at the heart of London’s middle-class intellectual circles her approach was inclusive, and opposed to intellectual elitism. She believed it was the Christian duty of intellectuals to educate and lead ordinary people. This chapter also provides further evidence of Barbauld’s networks and sociable working practice; it will show that she was connected to an international network of reformers who faced persecution for their beliefs.

In this chapter, I will examine the radical contents of her three religio-political pamphlets *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790), *Remarks on Mr Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry into the Expediency of Public or Social Worship* (1792) and *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation: or, a Discourse for the Fast, Appointed on April 19, 1793* (1793). However, the focus of this chapter will be Barbauld’s *Civic Sermons* because I contend that it is her most subversive work. Published in 1792, this pamphlet was written in response to the Priestley riots and government repression of reform. Its purpose was to educate ordinary people about government. The London version of *Civic Sermons* was published in two numbers: the first by mid-June, the second in

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28 Ibid. 340.
August. Another version of it was published in Dundee, appearing in a single twenty-page edition containing both numbers, with a three-page inflammatory addendum which is an angry attack on monarchs and their supporters. Although published anonymously, the main text of Civic Sermons was written by Barbauld, although the addendum cannot definitely be attributed to her. I will provide a detailed analysis of the main text, setting her writing in the context of the political ideas of her contemporaries. The affinity of her work to her fellow Dissenters Price and Priestley is to be expected, but my research reveals more surprising similarities between her pamphlet and Thomas Paine’s ideas. Although authorship of the Dundee addendum cannot be proven, I examine this part of the pamphlet to show that its ideas are similar to ones promulgated by Barbauld and John Aikin in their own writings at this time. This suggests that if she did not write it she affiliated closely with whoever did, and he (if a he) and she held very similar political preferences. The similarity of language between the addendum and Barbauld’s work suggests that there was a common discourse of reform on which they drew.

Drawing on recent scholarship by Gordon Pentland and Elaine McFarland on the links between English, Scottish and Irish radicals, I will argue that Barbauld had connections to a pan-British reform movement. The publication of her pamphlet in Dundee suggests that Scottish radicals considered Civic Sermons to be a powerful statement of their beliefs. Whether she was knowingly linked to their movement cannot be proved. However, she had personal connections with at least two of the leading Scottish reformers: her former pupil Basil William Douglas (Lord Daer) and the Scottish advocate Thomas Muir. She also had links through the Rational Dissenting network to the Unitarian minister of Dundee, Reverend Thomas Fyshe Palmer. The three men were leading members of the Scottish Friends of the People and took prominent roles in the movement’s Edinburgh Convention in December 1792.

My research suggests that Douglas, Muir and Palmer were involved in publishing or distributing the pamphlet in Dundee. Muir

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29 McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 320–3
and Palmer became known as the Scottish Martyrs; in highly political trials in 1793 they were found guilty of sedition and transported to Australia.

In this chapter I will develop further McCarthy’s argument that *Sins of Government* could have been considered seditious.\(^{32}\) Drawing on Barrell’s work, I will argue that it is even more surprising that the Dundee version of Barbauld’s *Civic Sermons* did not lead to prosecution. I will claim that the addendum could be read as “imagining the King’s death”. However, I also suggest that the main text of the pamphlet, which can definitely be attributed to Barbauld, could also have been considered seditious.

While stressing the radicalism of Barbauld’s ideas, I also recognise the limitations of her position. Unlike some of her contemporaries, she did not develop her progressive ideas in detail into a practical programme. Nor did her cause triumph in the short term. Part of the reason the importance of Dissenters in revolutionary politics has been underestimated is because they did not achieve their objectives during the 1790s. However, instead of just concentrating on their success or failure, this chapter examines the degree to which they were seen to be a threat by the ruling classes. Butler emphasises the subliminal subversive impact of the Priestley and Price circle in the 1780s and early 1790s as they evolved “a rhetoric of liberty which is international rather than patriotic, ‘levelling’ rather than hierarchical, and above all misleadingly unconstrained (…) The message that comes across, unspecific yet unmistakable, is *insubordination*” (emphasis original).\(^{33}\)

This chapter will examine Barbauld’s rhetoric to show that she was part of a movement to democratise the political discourse. As Paul Keen establishes, many reformers in the 1790s, including Godwin and Wollstonecraft, emphasised the role of literature as an engine of progress. They believed in the improving power of making knowledge available to all sections of society. Godwin insisted that unrestricted discussion was the surest guarantee of liberty.\(^{34}\) However, Godwin’s democratic tone was balanced against “the selective nature of those who were to

\(^{34}\) Keen 34–5.
be entrusted with instigating and stimulating these processes”.\(^{35}\) He emphasised the potential dangers of trying to extend the power of knowledge to those who were incapable of properly understanding the reflective nature of this power.\(^{36}\) Keen argues that in contrast, in his *Rights of Man*, Paine confused the distinctions offered by Godwin. According to Paine’s critics he used a “vulgar” writing style which catered for those who were unable to reason adequately. Keen writes: “For Paine the exchange of ideas could never be abstracted from the issue of social intervention”.\(^{37}\) I will argue that Barbauld’s democratic approach to language was more like Paine’s than Godwin’s. Her *Civic Sermons* was written in a language and sold at a price which made it accessible to ordinary people.

As is evident in this brief survey of the politics of the 1790s, ideas were evolving in response to events. Abroad, the euphoria inspired by the French Revolution turned to disillusionment as the Jacobins took over in France; in Britain, initial hopes of a golden age of reform were replaced with the repression of radical activity. I will examine how Barbauld responded to these events in her political writing.

**AN ADDRESS TO THE OPPOSERS OF THE REPEAL OF THE CORPORATION AND TEST ACTS**

Barbauld’s first major contribution to the pamphlet wars was her *An Address to the Opposers*. This pamphlet was particularly threatening to Burke and his fellow conservatives for political and religious reasons which were intertwined. Butler explains that Burke had a strong feeling for the established church, which was influenced by his family tradition of Catholicism. He disliked what he considered to be a Puritan stress in the works of Rational Dissenters on freedom of conscience, as opposed to “priestcraft” and “superstition”. Secondly, he sensed in British Rational Dissenters’ ideas “a taint of the atheism of their friends, the French philosophes".\(^{38}\) In Burke’s *Reflections* he linked Rational Dissenters to seventeenth-century regicides. Writing in response to Richard Price’s *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (1789), he likened Price’s mixing of politics and religion

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\(^{35}\) Ibid. 59.

\(^{36}\) Ibid. 58.

\(^{37}\) Ibid. 63–4.

to the fanaticism of the Civil War. Comparing Dr Price to the Reverend Hugh Peters, the Puritan minister who presided over the execution of Charles I, he described Price negatively as an enthusiastic prophet.\(^{39}\)

In her pamphlet Barbauld reinforced Burke’s fears by taking the ideas of Price’s *Discourse* further. She did this in three ways: her use of ideas about the rights of man and the language of citizenship which had French revolutionary overtones; her millenarian/religious tone with its echoes of the Civil War; her championship of equality of opportunity. McCarthy claims that Price’s *Discourse* roused Barbauld to take an active role in politics.\(^{40}\) Barbauld shared his internationalist perspective; like him she was part of an international network of Protestants, which linked her to French progressive thinkers. She was particularly inspired by the French Protestant leader Rabaut St Etienne,\(^{41}\) whom Price and Priestley knew through Lansdowne’s “Bowood Circle”.\(^{42}\) Barbauld also enthusiastically supported the French Revolution. She wrote: “You see a mighty empire breaking from bondage, and exerting the energies of recovered freedom (...) England, who has held the torch to her, is mortified to see it blaze brighter in her hands”.\(^{43}\) Foreign links and praise of France were threatening to the government; such connections suggested that Dissenters owed their loyalty to an international brotherhood rather than their homeland.

Barbauld’s pamphlet would also have reminded conservatives of Dissenters’ connections to the revolutionaries of the past. Janowitz argues that her pamphlet “explicitly linked” the domestic political questions of religious toleration that originated in the Civil War with the international ones of 1789.\(^{44}\) Her enthusiastic tone and millenarian ideas were reminiscent of the 1640s, when political events were portrayed in religious terms. Quoting from the Gospel of St Matthew, Barbauld wrote:\(^{45}\)

> Can ye not discern the signs of the times? The minds of men are in movement from the Borysthenes to the Atlantic. Agitated with new and strong emotions, they swell and heave beneath oppression, as the seas

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39 Ibid. 37–8.
41 Ibid. 285–7.
42 Goodwin 73 and 91.
44 Janowitz, “Amiable and Radical Sociability” 72.
45 McCarthy and Kraft n.1 277.
within the Polar Circle, when at the approach of Spring, they grow impatient

to burst their icy chains.46

Drawing on Price’s “nunc dimittis”, which described in similar terms the advance of
liberty, Barbauld made it plain that she saw the French Revolution as millenarian.47

Her descriptions of the revolutionary movement sweeping Europe as like a force

of nature portrayed events in apocalyptic terms. Her use of biblical quotations

established a prophetic tone. There are echoes of John Milton’s Paradise Lost in

her lines: “The genius of Philosophy is walking abroad, and with the touch of

Ithuriel’s spear is trying the establishments of the earth”.48 In Book Four of

Paradise Lost the angel Ithuriel discovers Satan in the shape of a toad and touches

him with his sword.49 This image implies that Barbauld considered the

“establishments of the earth” to be evil, like the Satanic toad. Her choice of Milton’s

poetry suggests that she shared his view of the poet’s prophetic role.

J. F. C. Harrison’s study of popular millenarianism shows that Barbauld was

one of many political writers, including Price and Priestley, to see contemporary

events in millenarian terms. However, millenarianism came in a variety of guises

from the respectable to the insane; rational Dissenters were careful to distinguish

themselves from the less respectable fringes.50 As Janowitz argues, Barbauld’s

use of millenarian rhetoric reflected the “excitement of current events”. By

eschewing her earlier “discourse of domestic sociability” it demonstrates that her

“mental mode is that of intervention now rather than mediation”.51

Dissenters’ attempt to repeal the Corporation and Test Acts was perceived

by conservatives as the first step on a revolutionary road. They believed that if the

power of the Church of England was undermined, by the abolition of ecclesiastical

privileges, the whole aristocratic order would be threatened. For conservatives, the

security of church and state was inseparable; they drew parallels between British

46 Barbauld, “An Address to Opposers” 277.
47 Price wrote: “Be encouraged, all ye friends of freedom, and writers of defence! The times are

auspicious. Your labours have not been in vain. Behold Kingdoms, admonished by you, starting

from sleep, breaking their fetters, and claiming justice from their opposers!” Richard Price, “A

Discourse on the Love of our Country”, Qtd. in Butler, Burke, Paine, Godwin 32
48 Barbauld, “An Address to the Opposers” 277.
49 McCarthy and Kraft n.3 277.

and Kegan Paul, 1979) 207.
51 Janowitz, “Amiable and Radical Sociability” 73.
Dissenters’ calls for equality of civic status with Anglicans and French egalitarianism and the confiscation of church property. Barbauld’s *Address to the Opposers* played to these fears and exposed the fundamental ideological clash between radicals and conservatives. Her pamphlet directly challenged the conservative ideology of a pre-ordained “chain of being” in which God had placed all persons in their station at birth and thus they should accept their position. Instead Barbauld and her fellow Dissenters argued for the natural equality of men, not the privilege of birth rights. Demanding the end of civil disabilities as a right, Barbauld used the language of rights and citizenship, with obvious French revolutionary overtones. She wrote: “We claim it as citizens, we claim it as good subjects (…) What you call toleration, we call the exercise of a natural and unalienable right”.

Dissenters wanted equal opportunities. Barbauld wrote: “We want civil offices – And why should citizens not aspire to civil offices? (…) nor is it as Dissenters we wish to enter the lists; we wish to bury every name of distinction in the common appellation of Citizen” (emphasis original).

Kramnick emphasises the radicalism of this argument; if implemented, it would have meant that “in the competitive scramble of the marketplace all citizens are equal in their opportunity to win”.

Unlike in her earlier poetry, Barbauld’s political message was clear, not coded. She warned that by setting a “mark of separation” on Dissenters and treating them as “aliens” the ruling classes had made them more aware of abuses: “We have no favours to blind us, no golden padlock on our tongues, and therefore it is probable enough, that if cause is given, we shall cry aloud and spare not”.

Subtly reminding Britain’s ruling elite of what happened in France, and the potential for British intellectuals to lead a mass movement for reform which might overthrow the aristocratic order, she wrote:

Doubts and difficulties, that arise first among the learned, will not stop there; they inevitably spread downwards from class to class (…) All the power and policy of man cannot continue a system long after its truth has ceased to be

52 Goodwin 67–8.
54 Ibid. 269–70.
55 Kramnick 56–7.
acknowledged, or an establishment *long* after it has ceased to contribute to utility. (emphases original)\(^{57}\)

This quotation reflected Dissenters’ beliefs that Britain’s aristocratic government was not only corrupt but inefficient. They believed that good government should be measured according to utilitarian principles of whether it promoted the greatest happiness of the greatest number. As Goodwin argues, although this concept is usually associated with Jeremy Bentham, an early form of utilitarianism circulated in Barbauld’s circle. Priestley’s *Essay on the First Principles of Government* (1768) expressed “in embryo the fundamental tenets of utilitarianism”. The idea that the object of government was the happiness of the majority had wide-ranging implications. On this assumption, governments could be expected to subordinate foreign policy to domestic reform, to provide social welfare and to put the needs of the majority above the interests of particular groups.\(^{58}\) Barbauld’s next political pamphlet, *Civic Sermons*, would develop these ideas in more detail. By writing this work for the masses she was putting her threat into action. As one of the “learned”, she was passing on her doubts about the British political system to other classes.

*CIVIC SERMONS*

*Civic Sermons* discussed fundamental questions about the role of government.

The two numbers of the London version were published anonymously and were not acknowledged by Barbauld until 1811.\(^{59}\) McCarthy’s research shows that when *Number One* was published in Paris in a French translation, initially it was attributed to Paine.\(^{60}\) It is easy to understand this attribution because the London *Civic Sermons* agrees in many points with Paine’s *Rights of Man*.

The year 1792 was the “annus mirabilis” for reformers with the appearance of Part II of *Rights of Man*, and the peak of activity of radical associations.\(^{61}\) In reaction the government repressed the reform movement; in May a proclamation

\(^{57}\) Ibid. 275–6

\(^{58}\) Goodwin 40.


\(^{60}\) It was published as *Sermons Civiques, Adresses au Peuple, par Thomas Paine* (Paris: Desenne, “l’An 4e, de la Liberte” [that is not later than September 1792]). McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* n.36 p.628.

against seditious meetings and publications was issued. Barbauld’s pamphlet responded to the government’s action. The stated purpose of Civic Sermons was to educate and enlighten ordinary people about government. In her Remarks on Mr Gilbert Wakefield, published the same year as Civic Sermons, Barbauld emphasised that the duty of Christian intellectuals was to mix with other classes and “lead their ideas in the right track”. She described Christ in radical, almost revolutionary terms as “the great reformer, the innovator of his day; and the strain of his energetic eloquence was strongly pointed against abuses of all kinds”. It seems that by attacking corruption in her own society she felt that she was following in his footsteps. The idea that people had to be educated to prepare them to participate in government was common in both Britain and France. It seems that Barbauld was inspired by Rabaut St Etienne’s La Feuille Villageoise, which was designed to educate French rural people about government. French Republicans, like Jacques Pierre Brissot, saw the revolutionary potential of political education.

There were also English precedents. In 1780 the Society for Constitutional Information was founded to educate the people and press for parliamentary reform. In August 1783 the Society circulated letters to its provincial members urging them to place short essays in country newspapers informing ordinary people of their rights “in language adapted to the comprehension of the unlearned and yet demonstrative to the most enlightened”.

The membership of the SCI was largely drawn from middle-class Dissenters. Nicholas Roe’s research reveals that Barbauld’s publisher Joseph Johnson was a member. In 1792 the writer George Dyer recorded Johnson’s involvement, writing that “National Freedom” could be encouraged by “establishing

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62 Barrell 75.
63 Barbauld, Remarks 41.
64 Ibid. 31.
65 Barbauld, letter to Judy Beecroft, September 1790. Barbauld wrote: “There is a publication of higher merit set on foot in France by Rabaut St Etienne and some others – La Feuille Villageoise, of which I have seen the first number. The respectable object of it is to instruct the country people (...) in morals, in the new laws and constitution of their country (...) and, in short, to open their minds and make them love their duties.” Qtd. in Ellis, Memoir 185.
67 Roe 29.
68 Qtd. in Goodwin 138.
69 Roe 28.
book societies throughout the kingdom, whose sole object might be the distribution of small political pamphlets among the lower ranks of people, such as *A Political Dialogue* lately published, and printed for Mr Johnson, St Paul’s Church Yard (...), and cheap editions of Mr Paine’s *Rights of Man*.

In his study of the ideology of reform, Mark Philp examines how a popular style of political discourse was developed by Paine, Eaton and Spence which communicated with an audience who had never been involved in the political debate before. To do this they rejected the refined language of politics which marked it as being exclusively intended for an educated elite. Barbauld’s *Civic Sermons* was part of this democratic movement; she used simple, everyday language, drawing on familiar scriptural references and domestic images to make her political arguments accessible. Conservatives also recognised the importance of winning the minds of the people. Hannah More began to write for a similar audience. In 1792 thousands of copies of her anonymous pamphlet *Village Politics* were given away to labouring people. Three years later her *Cheap Repository Tracts* was issued in a widespread programme of public indoctrination. In *Civic Sermons*, instead of demanding her readers accept received opinions, Barbauld encouraged them to think for themselves. The introductory quotation states: “Nay, why even of yourselves, judge ye not what is right” (emphases original).

Involving ordinary people as partners in decision making, she stated: “I will tell you what Government is, and then you will judge whether you have any thing to do with it”.

After an uneducated mob attacked Priestley’s home in 1791 and the Government Proclamation in May 1792, the need to enlighten ordinary people became more urgent. Referring directly to the proclamation, Barbauld explained to her readers that it was particularly important that they understood what sedition was: “Otherwise, through your ignorance, you may be guilty of calling by these bad

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73 Barbauld, *Civic Sermons* 1.
74 Ibid. 4.
names, practices and writings which are very harmless and lawful”. The conservative purpose of the proclamation to democratic ends by turning it into a reason why ordinary people should be educated about politics and their rights. She inverted the proclamation’s description of radicals as “wicked and seditious men”, she used the same terms to describe the ultra-loyalist forces responsible for instigating the Priestley riots. Like many progressives, she claimed it was the loyalists, not the radicals, who were undermining the peace of the nation. She blamed their actions on their political ignorance; using irony, she wrote:

The men who did this mischief wanted to be informed what the rights of their neighbours were, and what sort of behaviour Government required of them; for want of this knowledge, they called themselves (...) the Friends of the Government, and mistook the matter so far as to think, that pulling down of houses was promoting the peace and prosperity of the kingdom. (7)

In Civic Sermons, Barbauld argued that politics was the business of ordinary people. This claim was in direct opposition to Burke, who emphasised the historical mystique of monarchy, aristocracy and church. Barbauld claimed that if people could practise their own trades, there was nothing innate to prevent them understanding government. Her intellectually egalitarian sentiments resembled Paine’s in Rights of Man Part II. She wrote: “Good sense is born with us, and is found in every rank of life, in one as much as another” (3). Paine commented: “It is impossible to control Nature in her distribution of mental powers. She gives them as she pleases”. He and Barbauld agreed that government was easy to understand. He criticised politicians who “took care to represent government as a thing made up of mysteries, which only themselves understood; and they hid from the understanding of the nation, the only thing that was beneficial to know, namely, That government is nothing more than a national association acting on the principles of society” (emphasis original). These democratic ideas were threatening to the ruling elite. In August 1791, Burke expressed his fear of involving the working class in political life in his Appeal from the new to the old Whigs:

Then will be felt the full effect of encouraging doctrines which tend to make the citizens despise their constitution (...) Then will be felt, in all its

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75 Ibid. 6.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid. 3–4.
79 Ibid. 110.
aggravation, the pernicious consequence of destroying all docility in the minds of those who are not formed for finding their own way in the labyrinths of political theory.  

Barbauld’s *Civic Sermons* responded to Burke’s *Appeal.* His comments, implying inborn intellectual inferiority, were ridiculed by her. Explaining that the faculty to debate and use reason is what distinguishes humans from animals, she argued that conservatives who claimed “that you ought to be led and governed like the brutes, without knowing why or how … [are] degrading you from your species” (2–3).

She argued that the ruling classes kept ordinary people in “their place” for selfish reasons. Echoing Price, she stated: “The fact is, that in many States, I might say most, Government is an invention for the advantage of a few men, or perhaps of one man, and consequently for oppression and degradation of the rest” (16) (emphases original). In language similar to Paine’s, she highlighted the negative ways in which government imposed on ordinary people. She wrote:

> Ask those who tell you that Government is nothing to you, whether it is nothing to you how much of your wages and hard earnings are taken from you in taxes (…) for what things you may be put in prison, and for what things your life may be taken away (…) on what occasions you may be obliged to go into other countries to fight and kill people whom you never quarrelled with, or perhaps to be killed yourselves. I think you will hardly say, that these things are nothing to you. (4–5)

Barbauld argued that the ruling classes governed in their own interest and did not want ordinary people involved because: “Government is a great deal to them, and

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80 Edmund Burke, *An appeal from the new to the old Whigs, in consequence of some late discussions in Parliament relative to the reflections on the French Revolution* (London, 1791) 133.

81 In his *Appeal* Burke attacked radicals who criticised Britain’s constitution. He wrote: “They pretend that their doctrines are infinitely beneficial to mankind; but (…) they are benevolent from spite” (130). He described their writing as “operative poisons” (132) which could lead to discontent: “In such circumstances the minds of the people become sore and ulcerated. They are put out of humour with all public men, and all public parties (…) they are made easily to believe, (what much pains are taken to make them believe) that all oppositions are factious, and all courtiers base and servile” (132).

82 Her statement directly echoed Richard Price in his *Discourse on the Love of our Country.* He wrote that once citizens have true ideas of government and their rights they will no longer “submit to governments which, like most of those now in the world, are usurpations on the rights of men, and little better than contrivances for enabling the few to oppress the many” (emphasis original). Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country, delivered on Nov. 4, 1789, at the Meeting-House in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain* (London, 1789) 12.

83 Paine stated that “it can only be blinding the understanding of man, and making him believe that government is some wonderful mysterious thing, that excessive revenues are obtained.” Paine, *Rights of Man* 124.
that they find it very convenient to manage your affairs” (5). I suggest that these comments could have been considered seditious. As *Cobbett’s Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanours* demonstrates, pamphlets were considered “seditious and inflammatory” if they showed “the general tendency” to “excite a spirit of disloyalty to the king and of disaffection to the existing laws and constitution of Great Britain”.84 I contend that Barbauld knew that her ideas could be portrayed as encouraging ordinary people to despise their constitution and thus leave her open to prosecution, for in the next paragraph she was careful to state that she did not refer to the British government. Turning the accusation of cynicism back on conservatives, she argued that they were the ones who slandered the government because they claimed if people understood government they would not obey it.

She wrote:

I should rather think the contrary; and that finding, upon examination, Government to be a noble art (...) not a plot and conspiracy against you, but a plot for your welfare and happiness formed by wise and honest men (...) I say of Government, and good government is this, you will love and revere it almost beyond anything else. (5)

Barbauld argued that happiness was the chief criterion of “good government”. The idea of happiness as a measure of political success was held by many progressive thinkers in the 1790s, including Godwin, Thelwall and Paine. In her *Civic Sermons* Barbauld expressed an early form of Benthamite utilitarianism: “We do not think the happiness of a few men a sufficient object; we want the happiness of all; for this plain reason, that all have an equal desire to be happy, and an equal right to be so” (17). This egalitarian idea and her use of the word “right” are reminiscent of revolutionary France and would therefore have alarmed the ruling class.

Distinguishing between good and bad governments, she added:

In bad Governments, such as Turkey, Government is a plot against the people, and therefore in all probability they will not obey it when once they come to find out the plot; but no one, I hope, will presume to say it is so in this kingdom. (5; emphasis original)

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84 This quotation comes from the indictment in the trial of George Mealmaker in January 1798. T. B. Howell, *Cobbett’s Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanours from the earliest period to the present time*, vol. 26 (London, 1819) 1137.
I contend that Barbauld was suggesting to her readers that the government was “a plot and conspiracy” against them, for she used the word plot frequently and the tendency of her sermons demonstrated that she did not think Britain was governed by “wise and honest men”. Barbauld’s passage was typical of the way radical writers cleverly phrased their argument to make a controversial political point without facing prosecution. If charged with seditious libel, in court they could quote the phrase at face value to claim loyalty, while their readers would have comprehended the subliminal meaning.\(^{85}\) As Keen establishes, in practice, the potential for prosecution depended on whether the work was perceived to be speculative, involving an exchange of ideas, and therefore deserving protection from the law, or to be designed purely to inflame the minds of disgruntled sectors of society and therefore deserving to be punished.\(^ {86}\) Barbauld’s London version of *Civic Sermons*, was perceived by some critics to fall into the latter category; *The Gentleman’s Magazine* accused her of trying to stir up popular discontent.\(^ {87}\)

Barbauld’s *Civic Sermons* was populist and democratic. I suggest that this pamphlet demonstrates that she was more radical than some of her intellectual contemporaries. Andrew McCann claims that, paradoxically, although Godwin argued for people to be enlightened because he believed the legitimate method of achieving political reformation was through knowledge, in practice he was afraid of the process involved.\(^ {88}\) McCann explains that he supported the “ideal of communicative interaction”, but whenever he discussed the actual institutions of public interaction such as working-class organisations like the London Corresponding Society, or popular presses producing cheap editions of libertarian tracts, “the public itself becomes a pathological variant of the ideal”.\(^ {89}\) Nor were Godwin’s ideas as easily accessible to ordinary people as Barbauld’s work. As Keen shows, the size, cost and difficulty of any piece of writing affected whether or not radicals were prosecuted. The use of accessible language and a cheap price, designed to capture the attention of the disenfranchised, was “more of a crime than were the seditious ideas offered”. The *British Critic* claimed that Godwin’s *Enquiry*  

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\(^{85}\) Barrell 108–12.  
\(^{86}\) Keen 54–5.  
\(^{89}\) Ibid. 61.
Concerning Principles of Political Justice (1793) might escape prosecution because it was written in a style that was not likely to attract the attention of the most dangerous sectors of the reading public.\textsuperscript{90} Butler describes it as “a more deeply considered, researched, academic book” than Paine’s Rights of Man. She argues that it was intended for the “educated minority” rather than for the masses. Its price – thirty-six shillings for the first edition, a quarto, and fourteen shillings for the later octavo editions – also put it out of the reach of many people.\textsuperscript{91} In 1792 Part II of Rights of Man sold for six pence, the same price as Barbauld’s London version of Civic Sermons.\textsuperscript{92} In December 1792, when Paine was tried and sentenced in his absence for his authorship of a seditious libel, the Attorney General explained that Paine’s crime could not be estimated by considering his book as so many mere words on a page, or as abstract ideas. Butler writes: “Its being placed in the hands of the masses made it a political tool; the cheapness was seen as an essential part of the offence”.\textsuperscript{93} I contend that the cost and content of Barbauld’s pamphlet made it more similar to Paine’s than to Godwin’s work.

If the London version of Civic Sermons was inflammatory, the Dundee version was distinctly subversive. It sold for only one penny for the twenty-page edition containing both numbers of the London Civic Sermons, and the additional three-page addendum “On the Folly and Wickedness of War”. The Dundee version was probably published in the early autumn of 1792 as the prospect of war with France increased; the addendum was presumably intended to persuade Britain not to join the continental monarchs in their attacks on the French Republic. Simon Schama sets out the course of events. In July the Prussian and Austrian armies had gathered on the French borders, announcing their determination to protect the French monarchy from revolutionaries. On 10 August Louis XVI had been deposed by a Paris mob. In response Britain recalled its ambassador. On 19 August, the Prussian armies had crossed the French frontier and eleven days later besieged Verdun. In Paris, Danton had called on the French to demonstrate revolutionary fortitude in the face of the enemy. Priests and aristocrats were portrayed as a fifth

\textsuperscript{90} Keen 56.
\textsuperscript{91} Butler, Burke, Paine, Godwin 149–50.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid. 108.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid. 8.
column working for the coalition of international despotism. They were imprisoned and massacred. On the 21 September France was proclaimed a republic.\textsuperscript{94}

The addendum was an angry attack on monarchs and their supporters. Its republican sentiments and the vehemence of its language are reminiscent of works published by Daniel Isaac Eaton, one of the most radical London publishers, who was arrested six times between 1792 and 1795 and was finally convicted of seditious libel in 1796.\textsuperscript{95} Read even in isolation the Dundee version is radical, but in the context of the time and place in which it was published it appears open to the same charge of sedition. The addendum blamed the continental monarchs for war and “the annihilation of their subjects’ liberty” (20). In the most controversial part the author argued that the King of Prussia was “more worthy of being tried, cast, and condemned at the Old Bailey, than any shedder of blood who ever died by a halter” (18). He/she added: “But he is a king; but he is a hero; – those names fascinate us, and we enrol the butcher of mankind among their benefactors” (18–19). The focus on the King of Prussia suggests that this passage was reacting to the Prussian troops’ invasion of France in the summer of 1792. Describing him as “the butcher of mankind” insinuated that he was responsibility for mass slaughter. However, suggesting that the Prussian King should be tried at the Old Bailey implies that the attack was aimed at the British monarchy as well as continental ones, if George III were to act in a similarly tyrannical way. The idea of a king being tried in London would have reminded readers of Charles I’s fate during the Civil War.

The author argued that war should be a time of general mourning, “a mourning much more sincere than on the death of one of those princes” (19). The sentiments of the addendum are similar to an anonymous article in \textit{The British Tocsin} published three years later by Eaton:

\begin{quote}
When a crowned cormorant goes feasting to the scaffold, you can feel their sorrow, you can pity their decease and exile – and shall you not be roused into manly vengeance, when thousands fall beneath the sword of unnecessary war and when virtue and happiness are banished from the grand society of man?\textsuperscript{96}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{95} Butler, Burke, Paine, Godwin 185.
To mention the death of a prince was dangerous at a time when radicals could be prosecuted for treason merely for “imagining the King’s Death”. It became even more controversial after Louis XVI’s execution in January 1793; William Frend was prosecuted in 1793 simply for expressing indifference to Louis’ death. 97

The addendum argued that while war served the interests of monarchs and their ministers, ordinary people paid the price: “whatever mad frolics enter into the heads of kings, it is the common people (…) unoffended and unoffending, who chiefly suffer in the evil consequences” (18; emphasis original). Although the addendum only overtly criticised the European absolute monarchs, the mention of “mad frolics” would remind readers of George III’s recent bout of madness, which suggested the author was also attacking the British monarchy. 98

In sum, the addendum was loaded with political explosives. During the 1790s, radicals were being tried for seditious libel for less inflammatory material. In his detailed study of the treason trials in the 1790s, Barrell explains that prosecutions relied on the interpretation of the meaning of “imagining the King’s death”. He emphasises the instability of these interpretations; by the eighteenth century those charged with treason were very rarely supposed to have intended a direct attempt on the King’s life. Any challenge to the King’s authority or majesty

97 In Peace and Union, Frend wrote: “No Englishman need be alarmed at the execution of an individual in Paris. Louis Capet was once King of France, and entitled to the honours due to that exalted station. The supreme power in the nation declared that France should be a republic: from that moment Louis Capet lost his titles. He was accused of enormous crimes, confined as a state prisoner, tried by the national convention, found guilty, condemned, and executed. What is there wonderful in all this?” 45. Qtd. in Roe 103.

98 Radicals carefully phrased attacks on monarchy in an attempt to avoid prosecution. As John Barrell’s research shows, writers would make statements evidently critical of the King or British government, then, if charged with seditious libel, would argue that they were only criticising foreign monarchies. The most famous example of this defence came in the trial for seditious libel of the radical publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton, in 1794, for his fable “King Chaunticlere; or the Fate of Tyranny” in Politics for the People, or Hog’s Wash. The fable was about a cock who was a “restless despot” in the farmyard who was eventually decapitated. The prosecution accused Eaton of imagining the King’s death, in the weak sense. However, the defence claimed that much of the despotic behaviour of the cock could be alleged against the other European princes rather than George III. John Gurney, for the defence, claimed that it was the prosecution who saw King Chaunticlere as similar to George III, and by doing this the prosecution, not Eaton, were the ones suggesting that the King was a bloody tyrant. Gurney told the court that it was absurd to claim that “a general remark must have an universal application. If I speak of Kings in general, am I to be understood to speak of all Kings? Certainly not. My omitting to say all Kings, demonstrates that I mean to exclude some” (emphasis original). Gurney’s defence secured Eaton’s acquittal. Barrell 108–12.
could be interpreted as a threat to the existence of his “political body”.\footnote{Ibid. 39.} It could even be applied to merely “picturing in the mind” the death of the monarch. During some of the trials for high treason in the 1790s, defendants were accused “not of intending the King’s death, but merely imagining it in the weak sense, by an association of ideas, however involuntary”.\footnote{Ibid. 33, 37–9.} Using these criteria, the Dundee addendum appears open to the charge.

The fact that it was published cheaply for a mass audience also made it particularly open to prosecution; its publication in Dundee increased the likelihood because in 1792 this part of Scotland became a hot-bed of radical activity and government repression. Economic circumstances led to riots in Perth, Dundee and Aberdeen.\footnote{McFarland 66.} The government’s greatest fear was that the mob would become politicised as economic concerns were linked to political ones.\footnote{W. Hamish Fraser, \textit{Scottish Popular Politics: From Radicalism to Labour} (Edinburgh: Polygon at Edinburgh, 2000) 13.} These fears were heightened when in July the Edinburgh Society of the Friends of the People was founded to campaign for parliamentary reform; it included ordinary working people as well as upper- and middle-class members. During the summer, societies sprang up in towns across Scotland, including Dundee.\footnote{Bewley 30–4.}

However, McFarland argues that, despite the fears of the authorities, popular action owed less to Painite ideas than to the perception that the governing classes were demonstrating “an ill-judged and arrogant disregard for popular feeling”. Evidence was found in their opposition to abolition of the slave trade, and their proclamation against seditious writings.\footnote{McFarland 66.} \textit{Civic Sermons} reinforced these ideas, politicising the discontent.

During the second half of 1792 tensions escalated. The government’s manager in Scotland, Henry Dundas, the Lord President, was seen as personifying despotism and corruption; effigies of him were burned in Dundee, Peebles and Perth. In July, Pitt was sufficiently concerned at “the outrages at Dundee” to request full details from Dundas.\footnote{William Pitt to Henry Dundas, 4 July 1792. Qtd. in McFarland 66.} Fears of a Scottish insurrection supported by an international conspiracy, were inflamed when the French issued the Edict of

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\begin{itemize}
\item\footnote{Ibid. 39.} \item\footnote{Ibid. 33, 37–9.} \item\footnote{McFarland 66.} \item\footnote{W. Hamish Fraser, \textit{Scottish Popular Politics: From Radicalism to Labour} (Edinburgh: Polygon at Edinburgh, 2000) 13.} \item\footnote{Bewley 30–4.} \item\footnote{McFarland 66.} \item\footnote{William Pitt to Henry Dundas, 4 July 1792. Qtd. in McFarland 66.}
\end{itemize}
Fraternity in November offering aid to all who sought liberty.\textsuperscript{106} French victories against the invading forces were greeted with enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{107} At Perth and Dundee, French success was celebrated with bonfires, bell-ringing and trees of liberty. When a magistrate over-reacted and announced an insurrection the militia were sent to the area.\textsuperscript{108} Dundas linked the riots to the actions of the Friends of the People.\textsuperscript{109}

The government decided that the popular movement had to be curbed.\textsuperscript{110} On 24 November letters were sent to Lords Lieutenant across Britain instructing them to present seditious publications at the next quarter sessions. In early December the Treasury solicitors contacted solicitors asking them to be local agents for the prosecution of the publication or sale of libellous literature.\textsuperscript{111} In Scotland spies were employed on an unprecedented scale, paid piece rates which encouraged them to exaggerate the scale of the threat.\textsuperscript{112} In November the spy Robert Watt was sent on a tour of Dundee and the north of Scotland.\textsuperscript{113} The Dundee \textit{Civic Sermons} escaped prosecution perhaps only because of its timing; it seems likely that it appeared before November, because if it had appeared after this date it is unlikely it would have avoided the scrutiny of government spies.\textsuperscript{114}

The government net was tightening around reformers. In December 1792 Thomas Paine was tried in his absence for seditious libel in \textit{Rights of Man}, Part II, found guilty and outlawed. On 2 January Thomas Muir was arrested for sedition.\textsuperscript{115} A letter Barbauld wrote to Charles Aikin on 4 January 1793 suggests that she was aware her radical writing could be considered seditious:

\begin{quote}
Of the \textit{Dialogue & Fragment} do not give any copies and do not read and show the Historical fragment, except to our particular friends, and return it
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{106} McFarland 81.  \\
\textsuperscript{107} Fraser 13.  \\
\textsuperscript{108} Bewley 39.  \\
\textsuperscript{109} McFarland 81.  \\
\textsuperscript{110} Fraser 13.  \\
\textsuperscript{111} Goodwin 264.  \\
\textsuperscript{112} Bewley 35.  \\
\textsuperscript{113} McFarland 94.  \\
\textsuperscript{114} A letter from C. Long to Henry Dundas, 10 November 1792 states: “The Attorney General is determin’d to prosecute every libel that appears (…) Pitt supports this and believes punishment should follow the offence as quickly as possible.” Qtd. in McFarland n.93 92.  \\
\textsuperscript{115} Peter Mackenzie, \textit{The Life of Thomas Muir Esq. advocate, younger of Huntershill, near Glasgow: member of the convention of delegates for reform in Scotland etc.etc., who was tried for sedition before the High Court of Justiciary in Scotland and sentenced to transportation for fourteen years} (Glasgow, 1831) 10.
\end{flushright}
me when you have an opportunity because some things in it would appear too free if read to any but friends. Never within my memory did public affairs occupy so large a space in the minds of every one, or give such scope to conjecture (...) I do not wonder in such a state of things, that our Norwich friends, and particularly Mr W. Taylor should be pointed out as dangerous. It is a compliment I think they well deserve. (emphases original)\textsuperscript{116}

William Taylor was a former Palgrave pupil, and remained close to Barbauld, describing her as “the mother of his mind”.\textsuperscript{117} Despite the potential consequences, Barbauld considered that to be perceived as “dangerous” was a compliment.

RADICAL NETWORKS
The publication of \textit{Civic Sermons} in Dundee links Barbauld to a radical Scottish network. Whoever wrote the Dundee addendum was a risk-taking reformer whose political ideas were very similar to Barbauld’s. The tone was more strident than her style but the anti-war sentiments resembled her argument in \textit{Sins of Government} written a year later. By highlighting the similarities between Barbauld’s and the author’s ideas and language, I suggest that there was a common discourse of reform. It seems that, like in the anti-slavery campaign, it was employed to reinforce the same political message but used in different genres to reach different audiences.

In \textit{Sins} Barbauld described war as “mutual slaughter”.\textsuperscript{118} The description in the addendum of war being fought in the interest of the ruling classes who send soldiers to “coolly shed each other’s blood, without the smallest personal animosity, or the shadow of a provocation” (18) was similar to her sentiments and language in \textit{Sins}. She wrote:

\begin{quote}
We have calmly voted slaughter and merchandised destruction (…) Our wars have been wars of cool calculating interest, as free from hatred as from love of mankind; the passions which stir the blood have had no share in them.\textsuperscript{119}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{116}Barbauld to Charles Rochemont Aikin, 4 January 1793. Qtd. in Betsy Rodgers, \textit{The Georgian Chronicle: Mrs Barbauld and her Family} (London: Methuen, 1958) 211.

\textsuperscript{117}Barbauld, \textit{Works I: xxv}.

\textsuperscript{118}Barbauld, “Sins of Government” 310.

\textsuperscript{119}Ibid. 312.
The addendum’s claim that wars were caused by monarchs’ ambition and that morality was used hypocritically to support their aim resembled the argument in *Sins*. Barbauld wrote:

> While we must be perfectly conscious in our own minds, that the generality of our wars are the offspring of mere worldly ambition and interest, let us, if we must have wars, carry them on as other such things are carried on, and not think of making a prayer to be used before murder.\(^{120}\)

The language and argument of *Sins* is more complex than the Dundee addendum, reflecting its more educated audience. In *Evenings at Home, or, the Juvenile Budget Opened*, written between 1792 and 1796, the imagery and language used to convey anti-war ideas are more similar to the Dundee addendum. In *Evenings*, Barbauld and John Aikin were writing for children, hence they used a simple style similar to the one considered appropriate for uneducated people.

The addendum explored the criminality of war and argued that those, like the King of Prussia, who pursued it should be prosecuted. Similar ideas were expressed in *Evenings at Home*. In Barbauld’s dialogue “Things by their Right Names”, the use of the word “murder” for killing people in war suggested that war makers were criminals.\(^{121}\) In “The Two Robbers” the similarities between so-called war heroes and criminals is developed further.\(^{122}\) Like the King of Prussia in the addendum, Alexander the Great in *Evenings* was seen as “a hero” but in this story Barbauld and Aikin questioned the concept of heroism. A dialogue between a robber and Alexander suggested that there was little difference between them. The robber says:

> And what is a conqueror? Have not you, too, gone about the earth like an evil genius, blasting the fair fruits of peace and industry, – plundering, ravishing, killing, without law, without justice, merely to gratify an insatiable lust for dominion? (…) What is then the difference, but that as you were born a king, and I a private man, you have been able to become a mightier robber than I? (emphases original)\(^{123}\)

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120 Ibid. 315.

121 Barbauld, “Things by Their Right Names”, McCarthy and Kraft 291–2. Father describes how a village is set on fire; Charles says: “Set a village on fire? Wicked wretches!” When Charles asks his father if he means a battle he replies: “Indeed I do. I do not know of any murders half so bloody” (292; emphasis original).

122 John Aikin and Anna Letitia Barbauld, “The Two Robbers”, *Evenings at Home* 148–52. The comparison of monarchs to robbers is similar to Paine’s description in *Rights of Man* Part II. He wrote that in early society “the chief of the band contrived to lose the name of Robber in that of Monarch; and hence the origin of Monarchy and Kings” (111).

123 Aikin and Barbauld, “The Two Robbers” 150–1.
The robber concludes “neither you nor I shall ever repay to the world the mischiefs we have done it”. By setting their dialogue in the past Barbauld and Aikin could discuss these highly controversial ideas while protecting themselves from prosecution. If challenged, they could have argued that they were referring to historical not contemporary conquerors.

The ideas and the language used in “The Two Robbers” were similar to those in the Dundee addendum. The addendum author wrote that governors violate treaties “with no more scruple than oaths and bonds are broken by a cheat and a villain in the walks of private life”. Asking whether difference in rank makes any difference to the atrocity of crimes, he/she argued:

If any, it renders a thousand times more criminal than that of a thief, the villainy of them, who, by violating every sacred obligation between nation and nation, give rise to miseries and mischiefs most dreadful in their nature.

In the Dundee addendum war was described as “a most woeful tragedy” (18); the Evenings at Home story “The Price of a Victory” personified that tragedy. It portrayed the devastating effects of war on one ordinary soldier, Walter, and his family. Some passages in the story are very similar to the addendum. In the Dundee addition the author criticised exultation at news of a victory:

When a circle of eager politicians have met to congratulate each other on what is called a piece of good news just arrived (...)And what is the cause of all this joy? And for what are our windows illuminated, bonfires kindled, bells rung, and feasts celebrated? We have had a successful engagement. We have left a thousand of the enemy dead on the field of battle, and only nine hundred of our countrymen. (19)

In “The Price” the language was almost identical. Oswald cries: “Good news! Great news! Glorious news! (...) We have got a complete victory, and have killed I don’t know how many thousands of the enemy; and we are to have bonfires and

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124 Ibid. 152.
125 A similar ploy was used by John Thelwall in his historical lectures on classical history. Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner write: “The chronological and geographical distance between ancient Rome and modern Europe allowed him to address urgent political questions through the tissue of historical remoteness. Thus he lectured on the overthrow of royalty, but he spoke of the ancient Tarquin Kings. He invoked the past to serve the present.” Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner, Introduction, Selected Political Writings of John Thelwall, by John Thelwall, eds. Robert Lamb and Corinna Wagner, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009) xxiii.
illuminations!" The Dundee addendum warned: “But before you give loose to your raptures, pause a while; and consider, that to every one of these nineteen hundred, life was no less sweet than it is to you” (19). This is echoed in “The Price” when Father says: “He who rejoices in the event of a battle, rejoices in the misery of many thousands of his species; and the thought of that should make him pause a little”. The advice to “pause” and reflect is the same in both works. The use of the discourse of sensibility to communicate ideas was also employed in both to invoke sympathy. Readers were called on to consider the human consequences of war. As McCann demonstrates, blurring the public and private in pathetic literary forms was common in this era and not limited by gender or political affiliation. Burke’s famous passage on Marie Antoinette in his Reflections was one of the most sentimental of the era, while Thelwall described his work as “politico-sentimental”. Both male and female writers on both sides of the political spectrum realised sensibility had an important role to play in communicating ideas and inspiring a sympathetic response from a wide audience. Mark Philp argues that the use of rhetorical devices had a political as well as literary effect. Much of the material written in the 1790s was concerned less with “a clear-cut ideological division with well worked-out opposing principles and more with experimentations”. Rhetorical experimentation led writers to innovate in their commitments and break new ideological ground. This seems to have been the case with Barbauld; her fiery tone in her political pamphlets surprised many of her previous admirers and it seems likely that the reaction to her work helped to generate the incendiary spirit of her next contribution. However, her exact position on controversial issues, for instance republicanism, was not always clear.

Barbauld opposed the hereditary principle and attacked absolute monarchs, but it is not plain how her theory would have translated into political action in Britain. In the main text of Civic Sermons she wrote: “The son of a king being born into the world the same naked, helpless, ignorant creature that your own children

127 Ibid. 52.
128 “The Price of a Victory” and “The Two Robbers” were not among the stories attributed to Barbauld by Lucy Aikin. However, as Michele Levy argues, Barbauld and Aikin took joint responsibility for Evenings at Home and the stories expressed a “shared set of ethical and political beliefs”. Levy, Family Authorship 25.
129 McCann 67.
130 Philp, “The Fragmented Ideology of Reform” 72.
are; it will be proper to enquire why some men are set over and govern other men" (emphasis original).\textsuperscript{131} Twenty years later, in her poem "On the King's Illness" (1811), she expressed the republican idea that monarchs and their subjects are equal by addressing the King in the familiar term "thee" and "thine" and by emphasising that he was "a man with men" (12).\textsuperscript{132}

In practice, she seems to have accepted a limited constitutional monarchy but she consistently opposed absolute monarchy. In \textit{Remarks} she attacked the "human depravity" of most absolute monarchs, describing them as "tyrants, jealous of their sovereignty, averse to freedom of investigation, ordering affairs, not with a view to the happiness of their subjects, but to the advancement of their own glory".\textsuperscript{133} In her 1792 poem "On the Expected General Rising of the French Nation", she expressed her support for France against the despots of Europe writing:

\begin{verbatim}
Let thy great spirit, roused at length,
Strike hordes of despots to the ground!
Devoted land! Thy mangled breast
Eager the royal vultures tear. (3–6)
\end{verbatim}

Striking absolute monarchs to the ground was as punitive as the suggestion of trying the King of Prussia and sentencing him to death in the Dundee addendum. The predatory image of "royal vultures" in the poem was similar to the comparison of the militaristic nations of Europe to "beasts of the forest" (19) in the addendum. The dehumanised imagery was continued in her hymn "Ye are the salt of the earth" (1797), in which Barbauld described oppressors who persecuted radicals as "the dogs of hell" (37).\textsuperscript{135} Her hatred of tyrants remained vehement; in her 1811 poem to George III she described the despots of Europe being consigned to hell.\textsuperscript{136} The admiration she expressed for George in this poem was for his personal qualities,
and because he ruled as a constitutional monarch not a despot. However, in 1792 she feared that he might behave like his European counterparts. Barbauld’s ambiguous attitude to republicanism was typical of the reformers of the time. Roe explains that “Republicans were rare in 1792–3”, for instance reformers in the London Corresponding Society were careful to avoid the issue of republicanism in *Rights of Man* by calling for a peaceful reform of the parliamentary system rather than a more fundamental change.¹³⁷

Comparing Barbauld’s political views to those expressed in the addendum provides us with an insight into the range of radical ideas that were being debated in Barbauld’s circle. As the addendum was published in Scotland it is likely to have been written by a Scottish radical with connections to Barbauld. Although we cannot prove who wrote it, there is evidence which suggests how it came to be published and distributed in Dundee. Barbauld was linked to three leading Scottish radicals: Lord Daer, Thomas Muir and the Reverend Thomas Fyshe Palmer. Heir to the earldom of Selkirk, Daer was a favourite former pupil of Barbauld’s from Palgrave School.¹³⁸ Sharing her radical views, he remained in contact with her. Present during the early days of the French Revolution, on his return to England Daer inspired Barbauld with his eye-witness account of the Fall of the Bastille.¹³⁹ Muir was also personally associated with Barbauld. McCarthy suggests that they were connected through the leading Unitarian Theophilus Lindsey, or her Hampstead neighbour Richard Shiells, a close friend of Muir’s.¹⁴⁰ Although no personal link has been established, it seems that Barbauld and Palmer were connected through Unitarian circles.¹⁴¹ Born and educated in England, he corresponded with Lindsey and wrote articles for the *Theological Repository*. Although Palmer had been the minister in Dundee since 1785, he remained well informed about Priestley’s circle.¹⁴²

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¹³⁷ Roe 102.
¹³⁸ Grace Ellis wrote: “Barbauld often mentions [Daer] in her letters written long after this as one whom she knew well, and loved.” Ellis, *Memoir* 113.
¹⁴¹ Educated at Eton and Cambridge, where he became a fellow of Queens’ College, Palmer was influenced by the writings of Priestley and Theophilus Lindsey. In 1783 he forfeited preferment to become a Unitarian. Goodwin 287–9.
McCarthy speculates that it was through Daer that a version of *Civic Sermons* was published in Dundee. My research supports this theory. Evidence at the trial of Horne Tooke demonstrated that Daer was distributing radical literature from London to the provinces, and at a meeting of the Society for Constitutional Information in June 1792 he took two hundred copies of a pamphlet by Paine to forward to Liverpool. As Peter Mackenzie’s life of Muir sets out, Muir was accused at his trial of circulating and distributing radical pamphlets. It seems likely that Barbauld’s *Civic Sermons* was one of these “seditious and wicked” tracts. The prosecution claimed Muir was distributing pamphlets in September, October and November 1792; this fits the likely publication dates of Barbauld’s work, and there is also evidence that he owned a copy of *Civic Sermons*. At his trial the principal witness for the prosecution, Ann Fisher, a servant in the Muir household, claimed she “remembers of being sent to purchase a Civic Sermon”.

As the report of Palmer’s trial establishes, he was also involved in distributing radical literature from London in Scotland: in a letter to James Smiton, he offered to send a selection of political and religious pamphlets. Palmer had links with Edward Leslie, the publisher of the Dundee version of *Civic Sermons*. At Palmer’s trial, Leslie admitted that Palmer gave him more than six copies of the

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144 During the trial of Horne Tooke for treason in 1794 it was revealed that at a meeting held on 1 June 1792 it was agreed that members would distribute Paine’s *Letter, Resolutions, and Address to the Jacobins*. Howell, *Cobbett’s Complete Collection of State Trials* 154.
146 Ibid. 63.
147 Palmer wrote to Smiton, 20 July 1793: “The account you give of the pamphlets is curious. They shall soon be replaced, when I can get them in. Have you a copy of the letters to Philosophers? I send you some addresses written by a common weaver, some Wharton’s speeches, and one incomparable address on Barracks (…) Have you not Cooper’s Pamphlet; I mean his answer to Burke (…) I have got three copies of the address to Protestant Clergy to sell. If you or others have a mind to purchase a copy of letters to Philosophers I will order it from London. Both pamphlets are one shilling each.” Qtd. in *An account of the trial of Thomas Fyshe Palmer, Unitarian Minister, Dundee, before the circuit-court of justiciary, at Perth, on the 12th and 13th days of September, 1793. For Sedition* (Perth, 1793) 74–5.
148 At Palmer’s trial the prosecution claimed: “Some time in the month of July aforesaid [Palmer] deliver to each of Edward Leslie and Robert Miller, both stationers and booksellers in Dundee a number or parcel of the said seditious and inflammatory writing, to be by them distributed and circulated.” *Trial of Palmer* 6.
Friends of Liberty prosecuted pamphlet. He gave away a few, but suspecting danger burnt the remainder.\footnote{\textit{Trial of Palmer} 65. Leslie published books on religion and parliamentary reform including \textit{Answer to Payne's Age of Reason: With a Short View of the Obedience which Christians are Bound to Yield to the Powers that Be}. By David Wilson and \textit{Debates in the House of Commons on the Sixth and Seventh of May, 1793, Upon the Motion of Charles Grey, Esquire for Parliamentary Reform} (1793).}

The trials of Muir and Palmer for sedition emphasise how open to prosecution the Dundee version of \textit{Civic Sermons} would have been if detected by the authorities. Throughout Muir’s trial the prosecution tried unsuccessfully to prove he was a republican, but the sentiments of the addendum are more anti-monarchist than any of the evidence against Muir.\footnote{Even Fisher could only report that she “heard Mr Muir say, he was for a Monarchy under proper restrictions; that a republican form of Government was best; but that, as the Monarchy had been so long established in this country, it would be improper to alter it.” Mackenzie 66. \footnote{Ibid. 49.}} The indictment quoted republican passages from Paine’s works, which the prosecution claimed he had circulated.\footnote{However, unlike \textit{Civic Sermons}, Paine refers directly to England, rather than masking his anti-monarchical statements by referring to foreign monarchies. \footnote{Mackenzie 95. \footnote{Qtd. In Mackenzie 50.}}}

Measured by the virulence of the language, these quotations were no more inflammatory than the republican remarks in the Dundee addendum.\footnote{Measured by the virulence of the language, these quotations were no more inflammatory than the republican remarks in the Dundee addendum.} Muir maintained that he disagreed with Paine because the latter was a republican, whereas the aim of the societies he was involved with was to bring about reformation of the Constitution, and not a revolution.\footnote{Measured by the virulence of the language, these quotations were no more inflammatory than the republican remarks in the Dundee addendum. Muir maintained that he disagreed with Paine because the latter was a republican, whereas the aim of the societies he was involved with was to bring about reformation of the Constitution, and not a revolution.}

The idea that the prosecution had not seen a copy of \textit{Civic Sermons}, and that if they had would have considered it seditious, is supported by evidence from Muir’s trial. A quotation from \textit{A Declaration of Rights, and Address to the People, approved of by a number of the Friends of Reform in Paisley}, cited in the indictment, is similar to the main text of the \textit{Civic Sermons}, which can definitely be attributed to Barbauld. Calling for parliamentary reform, the \textit{Declaration} stated:

\begin{quote}
You are constantly taxed without being represented and compelled to obey laws to which you never gave assent. Are not these the very definitions of slavery? And are you not thus degraded to a level with the very cattle in the field, and the sheep in the fold; which are a property to those who rule over them, and have no power to say, why are we bought and sold? Why are we yoked and laded with heavy burdens? Why are we fleeced and led to the slaughter? (15)\footnote{Qtd. In Mackenzie 50.}
\end{quote}
Despite the lack of evidence, Muir was found guilty and transported to Australia. Bewley argues that his treatment was intended to deter other reformers. The danger of being involved in any part of the process of disseminating radical ideas was reinforced at Palmer’s trial. He was charged with writing, publishing and circulating an address from the Dundee Friends of Liberty. In fact, a weaver, George Mealmaker, admitted writing the address, but he was not charged. The prosecution argued that the literary quality of the final pamphlet suggested that a person of “liberal education” was responsible for much of the argument. Like Muir, Palmer was penalised for being a middle-class leader of reform; he was found guilty and transported.

The publication of Civic Sermons in Dundee suggests that Barbauld was seen as a leading figure in a radical international network. Her contribution to the fight for liberty was also recognised at the White’s Dinner in Paris, in November 1792, to celebrate the French patriot army’s success. Here, British expatriates, who were hoping for an imminent revolution in Britain, toasted Barbauld and “the Lady Defenders of the Revolution” alongside the French Republic, the French Armies and the National Convention.

It also seems that Barbauld had links to the campaign to prevent war with France. Her friend, the French-born John Scipio Sabonadiere, was one of the leading figures in this initiative. McCarthy provides details of Barbauld’s relationship with Sabonadiere. The former pupil of Rabaut St Etienne was minister in the French Protestant Church in London, and was related to the Barbaulds by marriage. In September 1792, as the prospect of Britain joining the war became more likely, Sabonadiere began working with François Noel, an agent sent to England by the French republican government to investigate British public opinion. Noel tried to assess the Friends of the People’s influence on the government. In October, he sent a dispatch to the Foreign Ministry in Paris via Sabonadiere,

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155 Bewley 84.
156 Ibid. 87.
157 The prosecution underestimated George Mealmaker. In subsequent years he became an important radical in his own right as a leader of the United Scotsmen. For a full discussion of Mealmaker’s career see McFarland 161; Fraser 19–20.
158 Roe 81.
159 Sabonadiere was married to Rochemont’s cousin Louisa Barbauld. In December 1790 Barbauld recommended Sabonadiere to a teaching post at New College, Hackney. McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 286.
describing Sabonadiere as closely connected to Priestley, Rochemont Barbauld and “all the defenders of liberty”. On 16 December Sabonadiere wrote to William Pitt, offering to go to Paris to call on the French government to adopt “moderate measures”. It is evident that Barbauld took an interest in this initiative because in January she wrote to Charles Aikin about it.

Daer, Muir and Palmer also had international radical links. Daer was a friend of Condorcet. In 1791, he returned from Paris to London with Paine and Etienne Dumont, Mirabeau’s secretary. In May 1792 Paine seconded Daer’s nomination to membership of the Society for Constitutional Information. Daer promoted international co-operation between the reform movements and suggested holding a convention of English and Scottish radicals in England. Muir also had contacts with the French revolutionary government and was a friend of the Girondist leader, La Fayette. At the Edinburgh Convention in December 1792, Muir was keen to unite the Scottish movement with the more militant reformers in the United Irishmen. Palmer supported Muir’s proposal. Palmer had long-standing links with the United Irishmen’s leader, Hamilton Rowan; when Muir was in Ireland in 1793, Hamilton Rowan gave him letters and pamphlets for Palmer about the situation in Ireland.

As McFarland’s work emphasises, the radical Dissenting network was based on bonds of education, faith and friendship. There existed “an ideological community” between Scots and Presbyterians in the north of Ireland, and I contend that these links also encompassed radical English Dissenters including Barbauld and John Aikin. The main starting point for this network was Edinburgh

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160 Ibid. 328–9.
161 Barbauld to Charles Rochemont Aikin, 4 January 1793. She wrote: “Mr Sabonadiere, who has been a second time to Paris, does no longer say Tout va bien when he speaks of their proceedings. He went on a peacemaking errand and has been in conference with Mr Pitt on the subject, who is said to wish peace much, but whether sufficient concessions will be made on either side seems to be yet uncertain” (emphasis original). Qtd. in Rodgers 211.
166 Bewley 44–5.
167 Ibid.
169 Ibid. 1.
University, where Dissenters from throughout Britain received a progressive education. The United Irishmen’s leader, William Drennan, the son of a Belfast Protestant Dissenting Minister, learned his debating skills at the Edinburgh University Speculative Society, which encouraged public speaking and liberal thought.170 Muir and Daer were also members of the society at the same time as the Irish radical Thomas Emmett.171 A key figure in the circle was the Professor of Moral Philosophy, Dugald Stewart, who maintained a long-standing friendship with Daer and Drennan.172 Barbauld was linked to Edinburgh alumni through John Aikin, who studied medicine at the university in the 1760s, and as McCarthy shows, she also knew Stewart, spending an evening at his house during her trip to Scotland in 1794.173 It seems that, through Stewart, Drennan heard about Barbauld’s work and became an admirer.174 In 1792 and 1793 his sister Martha McTier encouraged Drennan to read Barbauld’s Remarks and Sins of Government.175

The Dissenting educational links extended beyond Scotland; Hamilton Rowan had been at Cambridge University with Palmer. In 1769 Rowan became a student at Warrington Academy, where he was a contemporary of Benjamin Vaughan’s and an admirer of Barbauld’s.176 As Chapter 3 shows, this was a very political time at the academy; Barbauld and the Vaughan family were involved in the campaign for Corsican independence.177

Shared educational experiences meant these British radicals had similar political and religious values. MacFarland emphasises the importance of Hutcheson’s ideas on this group. An Ulsterman who had been ordained a Presbyterian minister, Hutcheson linked Enlightenment thought to the tradition of

170 Drennan was a member in 1778. Ibid. 21.
171 Daer was admitted February 1783 and was non-resident March 1787. Thomas Emmett was admitted November 1782 and was non-resident April 1785. History of the Speculative Society of Edinburgh (Edinburgh, 1845)
172 McFarland 19.
174 When Barbauld wrote a witty epigram about David Garrick in 1777, William Drennan heard about it from Stewart and then passed it to his sister. Ibid. 227.
175 Ibid. 340–1.
176 Aged eighteen, Rowan was eight years her junior, but he is reported to have said that she was his first love. Ibid. 131–2.
177 Ibid. 99–100.
Presbyterian libertarianism. Like Barbauld, the majority of the Scottish Friends of the People and the United Irish leaders in the early 1790s were deeply religious, and although they sympathised with some of Paine’s political ideas they rejected his religious scepticism. I contend that it was their faith which gave them the strength to suffer persecution. At their trials, Muir and Palmer emphasised that they had discounted the personal danger of demanding reform because of the higher moral claims of truth and integrity. They saw themselves as Christian martyrs. As Stephen Bygrave’s research shows, this was similar to Priestley’s reaction to the Birmingham riots. He displayed more sorrow than anger and preached shortly afterwards “On the Duty of Forgiveness of Injuries”. Bygrave explains that in Priestley’s two Appeals to the Public, On the Subject of the Riots in Birmingham (1791), he did not “risk a blasphemous comparison to the apostles (although he does compare himself to the Protestant Martyrs under Mary)”. Drawing on Alan Tapper’s examination of Priestley’s Irenaean idea of “character formation” and moral progress through the discipline of suffering, I suggest that these ideas can also be found in Barbauld’s work. In Sins, Barbauld wrote: “Rather than fulfil such duties [as would go against a person’s conscience], a man of integrity will prepare himself to suffer, and a Christian knows where such sufferings will be rewarded” (emphasis original). In 1794 Barbauld wrote her political hymn “Ye are the salt of the earth” which can be read as referring to Palmer and Muir in terms of martyrdom:

Your’s is the large expansive thought,  
The high heroic deed;  
Exile and chains to you are dear;  
To you ‘tis sweet to bleed. (29–32)

The description of “exile and chains” recalled the harsh treatment of Muir and Palmer during their transportation when they were kept “in IRONS among the

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179 Ibid. 70–1.  
180 For Palmer’s comments see The new annual register, or general repository of history, politics, and literature, for the year 1793. To which is prefixed, the history of knowledge, learning, and taste, in Great Britian, during the reign of King James the First, part the first (London, 1794) 39; For Muir see Mackenzie 111.  
182 Tapper 274.  
184 Barbauld, “Hymn: ‘Ye are the salt of the earth’” 137.
A 1793 letter from John Aikin demonstrates how shocked the Barbauld/Aikin circles were by this treatment:

The confinement of Muir and Palmer in the hulks is an example of tyranny scarcely, I think, legal, certainly not decent. It has produced here much emotion, though perhaps only in the breasts of those who before were enemies to the present system. Several persons of respectable situation and character have been to visit them.

Reinforcing the affiliation between Barbauld and Muir, in 1795 Barbauld selected a verse from James Thomson to accompany a portrait of Muir. He commented in a letter to Theophilus Lindsey: “gratefully I recognise the truth of the lines put by Mrs Barbauld beneath my Bust. To that Lady and to Mr Barbauld, present my most affectionate remembrance.”

As the government had intended, the treatment of Muir and Palmer intimidated Dissenting radicals. Schofield claims that the sentence passed on Palmer most frightened Priestley’s friends, making them encourage him to leave England, in case he should suffer a similar fate. Barbauld’s circle shared these fears. In a 1793 letter John Aikin wrote:

I keep company, it is true, with persons of well known sentiments, who happen also to be some of my best friends, and I am not afraid in private companies of speaking without disguise. But these things I shall do at all hazards. (emphasis original)

Friends and acquaintances were prosecuted and imprisoned. Richard Philips, who worked with Aikin on the *Monthly Magazine* from 1796, had previously been sentenced to eighteen months’ imprisonment for distributing cheap editions of Paine’s *Rights of Man*. In 1793, William Frend was tried and expelled from his

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185 Mackenzie 27.
187 The portrait of Muir was published 15 July 1795. McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 633 n. 105. Barbauld chose the following verse:

Should fate command me to the farthest verge
Of this green earth, to distant barbarous climes,
'Tis nought to me; I cannot go
Where universal love not smiles around,
From seeming evil still educing good,
And better thence again, and better still
In infinite progression… (Qtd. in Bewley 107)
188 Muir, letter to Theophilus Lindsey, 14 July 1796. McCarthy 633 n.105. Qtd. in Bewley 151.
fellowship at Cambridge University for his support for reform, indifference to Louis XVI’s death, and opposition to the war. Later in the decade Barbauld’s publisher Joseph Johnson and her old sparring partner Gilbert Wakefield were punished for a pamphlet by Wakefield. Although Clive Emsley emphasises that the numbers of prosecutions were not vast, they were threatening.

SINS OF GOVERNMENT, SINS OF THE NATION

In Sins Barbauld examined how a virtuous person should respond to the increasingly challenging political situation. Written in 1793, the year after Civic Sermons, it is like a companion piece to this work, expanding earlier ideas for a more sophisticated audience and reacting to the latest events; the execution of Louis XVI in January had led to Britain going to war with France the following month. Barbauld’s pamphlet was written in response to the government appointing a day for obligatory “Public fast and Humiliation” in all places of worship, during which the congregation would pray for divine aid for Britain’s victory in the war. Barbauld was infuriated by this misuse of religion and used the occasion as an opportunity to attack the government and the church for supporting what she considered to be an unjust war.

In this pamphlet Barbauld set out her democratic ideas and support of the right of resistance. As in Civic Sermons, Barbauld inverted the government’s intentions to her own democratic ends. Twisting the meaning of the proclamation, she argued that by calling the people together during a public emergency Pitt’s ministry was giving ordinary people a role in government. She contended that every citizen had a responsibility, of varying degrees, for the action of the state and that power “ultimately rests” with the people. As Civic Sermons demonstrates, Barbauld’s democracy included the sober, industrious working class who respected property. She only excluded the dissolute and idle “who prey upon the honest industry of others; who are ignorant, not merely from want of information, but from

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191 Roe 104.
192 Cookson 101.
193 Clive Emsley has counted some two hundred prosecutions for treason, seditious words or seditious libel and most of these were the result of local prosecutions organised either by individual magistrates or by loyalist groups. Clive Emsley, “Revolution, War and the Nation State: The British and French Experiences 1789–1801”, Philp, French Revolution 114.
194 McCarthy and Kraft 297–8.
a debased and besotted understanding – to you I do not speak, you must be governed like brutes”. However, she made it clear that this type of social parasite was as common in the upper classes when she added: “A King with such dispositions, cannot govern; he may prowl about for a time, and tear in pieces and destroy; but he cannot govern”. Her criterion for inclusion was based on virtue rather than class or property qualifications. J. G. A. Pocock’s research shows that this idea was similar to Catharine Macaulay’s, whose “notion of politics was exclusively centered on the moral personality”. He explains that Macaulay wanted all to practise active civic virtue in order to become morally free and politically self-determining agents.

Barbauld’s ideas were similar to Richard Price’s in his Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty (1776). As F. Rosen argues, although Price was influenced by Locke, he replaced Locke’s doctrine of consent with an emphasis on “the continuous participation of the people in government and the more democratic belief that all men should have the right to participate”. Linking individual and civil liberty, Price envisaged wide-scale change; he argued that most people lacked self-government and could be considered political slaves. Price claimed that in a free state every man should be his own legislator and all taxes should be free gifts for public services, although he claimed self-government was compatible with a “hereditary council” and a “supreme executive magistrate”. His ideas were extremely radical; according to Rosen, most controversial was the “his almost Rousseauian belief in self-government and participation”. Although Barbauld’s ideas echoed some of Price’s views, she did not explain in the same detail exactly what she meant.

Other intellectuals were also developing ideas about parliamentary reform. As Rosen’s research sets out, from 1788 to 1795, Jeremy Bentham wrote a series of essays on French and British political reform. In one of the essays entitled “British Parliamentary Reform”, he provided a “complex and subtle analysis of the

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196 Barbauld, Civic Sermons 7.
197 Ibid.
199 Rosen 27.
200 Ibid.
mischievous consequences of the electoral system”. Bentham emphasised the unsuitableness of elections and representatives, and the system’s tendency to increase the power of the rich at the expense of the poor. He proposed annual elections, a large number of equal electoral districts, secret ballots, and that all citizens, male or female, who were of sound mind and able to read should have the right to vote. Everyone was eligible for office and deputies could be removed from office by petition and a new election. Although, like Barbauld he was arguing for more democratic government, his ideas were more detailed and fully developed. In 1793 events in France made Bentham withdraw his suggestions for reform of Parliament and change of the Constitution. However, his democratic ideas were to reappear in his mature theories of the 1820s.

Although Barbauld did not provide detailed blueprints for reform, her democratic stance was more populist than that of some of her fellow middle-class radicals. She argued that the voice of the majority was right, even when it opposed intellectual arguments. In contrast, as McCann shows, when Godwin was confronted with what he considered was the dangerous populism of radical corresponding and debating societies he demonstrated a fear of populist mobilisation. Keen explains that Godwin’s “public opinion” was “wholly distinct” from mass meetings or movements in which he believed the private identity of each participant was obscured. Barbauld’s faith and experience of Christian worship meant that she did not share Godwin’s fear of mass enthusiasm, provided intellectuals took their role to lead the unenlightened. According to McCann, Godwin believed that populist enthusiasm might overpower individual reason; he feared that intellectual individuality could be swallowed up in the mindless uniformity of the mob. He argued that charismatic authority figures could manipulate passive audiences who, unlike enlightened listeners, would not distinguish between thought and action.

201 Ibid. 51.
202 Ibid. 51–2.
203 Ibid. 57.
204 McCann 61.
205 Keen 60.
206 McCann 61.
similarly phrased comments in her pamphlet to Gilbert Wakefield. In his *Enquiry* Godwin wrote:

> While the sympathy of opinion catches from man to man, especially among persons whose passions have been little used to the curb of judgment, actions may be determined on which the solitary reflection of all would have rejected. There is nothing more barbarous, blood-thirsty and unfeeling than the triumph of the mob.\(^{207}\)

In contrast Barbauld wrote of the “happy contagion” of religious feeling in her *Remarks on Mr Gilbert Wakefield*.\(^{208}\) She added:

> None of our feelings are of a more communicable nature than our religious ones. If devotion really exists in the heart of each individual, it is morally impossible it should exist there apart and single. So many tapers burning so near each other, in the very nature of things must catch, and spread into one common flame.\(^{209}\)

Throughout the pamphlet Barbauld used flame imagery to describe social worship. Laura Mandell comments that all the metaphors Barbauld used suggested “evangelism or worse: enthusiasm, fanaticism”. Setting this imagery in the wider context of Barbauld’s other works, according to Mandell, Barbauld considered that each person’s “bit of flame or godhead is not a little metaphysical light to be sought amidst the melancholic gloom or private introspection”.\(^{210}\) Instead, reflecting her sociability, for Barbauld each separate flame added to a larger fire when all individuals come together.

By using the imagery of the fire of enthusiasm and the metaphor of contagion, she was drawing on a common trope of the time, but unlike many of her contemporaries, who employed it in a pejorative sense to imply the pathological danger of enthusiasm, she used it to emphasise the positive power and excitement of mass emotional experience. This was typical of Barbauld’s clever use of language for her political/religious ends; she often parodied her opponents’ ideas by using the same terms but inverting them to mean the opposite of their usual usage.

\(^{208}\) Barbauld, *Remarks* 42.  
\(^{209}\) Ibid. 8.  
As I argue in Chapter 1, in her pamphlet to Gilbert Wakefield her political and religious ideas were interwoven, and thus her praise of public worship had political implications. It suggests that she was supportive of the new radical societies. However, she was aware that the power of popular feeling had to be channelled in the right direction to prevent it becoming like the mob action which destroyed Priestley’s home. In her works at this time, Barbauld argued that the more educated members of society should guide but not dictate to ordinary people what they should think. In a passage from Sins, Barbauld argued against intellectual elitism:

Reformers, conceiving of themselves, as of a more enlightened class than the bulk of mankind, are likewise apt to forget the deference due to them (...) They too contemn a swinish multitude [a phrase from Burke], and aim at an aristocracy of talents. (emphasis original) 211

By using Burke’s phrase, she was arguing that in their intellectual elitism radicals were unwittingly like the conservatives. She argued that the public were not always wrong, even if reformers’ ideas were rational, because their concepts were “often crude and premature” and “too refined for real life”. 212 McCarthy speculates whether she was thinking of Godwin when she wrote this section, as he had lately published his Enquiry. 213 Demonstrating her own democratic attitude, she championed the right of the majority to choose rather than be forced to accept the way they were governed. She wrote: “the voice of the people ought to prevail; men of more liberal minds should warn them indeed what they are about; but having done that they should acquiesce”. 214

Her work explored the role of an intellectual in an era of political conflict. She suggested that the time for intellectual debate was over; instead, immediate action was called for. In “Lines to Samuel Rogers in Wales on the Eve of Bastille Day 1791”, she wrote:

Hanging woods and fairy streams,
Inspirers of poetic dreams,
Must not now the soul enthral,
While dungeons burst and despots fall. (4–7) 215

211 Barbauld, “Sins of Government” 304.
212 Ibid.
213 McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 335.
215 Qtd. in Janowitz, “Amiable and Radical Sociability” 74.
She told Rogers he should be “at the ‘Crown and Anchor’ as you and every good patriot ought to be on the 14th of July.” His place was at a meeting of radicals, not indulging in solitary “poetic dreams”; his literary skills should be used for a practical political purpose. For Barbauld, as an intellectual, thought was important but sociable action was even more essential. As an intellectual activist, her form of action was translating complex ideas into modern political polemics which would influence a mass audience.

In *Sins* Barbauld claimed that because governors are employed by the nation, if they abuse their power the people have the right of resistance. At certain times citizens have not just a *right* but a *duty* to oppose a bad government. She wrote that “there are, indeed, cases of such atrocity” that concurrence with the existing order “would be criminal.” By championing this right Barbauld drew on seventeenth-century ideas. In her *A Legacy for Young Ladies* she expressed her admiration for seventeenth-century liberal heroes, including Milton, Hampden, Sidney and Locke, as “great and good characters.” As Blair Worden sets out, the debate about when subjects have a right to resist the government became increasingly important under Charles I. Republicans like John Milton were unequivocal about the citizen’s right to overthrow a bad monarch; he portrayed the regicide as an assertion of that right. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649) he argued that power should rest in the people. Later in the century the idea that subjects could resist a bad government was given added strength by contemporary intellectual arguments and events. Caroline Robbins examines how these ideas were developed later in the century. In his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690), John Locke supported opposition to Charles II and argued that authority rested in the people; thus they had the ultimate power to remove or change the legislature if the trust placed in them was being abused. In his *Discourses* (1698) Algernon Sidney stated the argument that Barbauld promoted a century later, when he argued that it is the people’s duty, not merely their right, to

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216 Ibid.
218 Barbauld et al., *A Legacy* 51.
resist a tyrannical government. Only a lazy or corrupt people would ever give up their fundamental right to be governed well. 220 Sidney believed the happiness of mankind was indivisible from its constitutional arrangements and that free governments promoted virtue. 221 Events also helped to support the right of resistance; the 1688 Revolution replaced the idea of monarchs ruling by divine right with the concept of the subjects’ right to choose their rulers. In the late eighteenth century, Price and Priestley promoted similar ideas to Locke and Sidney. 222

Drawing on J. G. A. Pocock’s analysis of Catharine Macaulay’s political stance, I suggest that Barbauld shared many of her views. Both women saw the right of resistance as a duty in certain circumstances, but wanted to prevent this necessity by establishing good government. Macaulay and Barbauld considered themselves to be patriots; as Pocock argues, this term had a subversive meaning at this time, as it was used to describe a person who loved his country more than its ruling family or institutions and thus might rebel against a monarch in the name of the nation or the people. 223 Championing a civic humanist view, in which the political community is based on maintaining public virtue, they believed every individual had a duty to keep the government good by carefully monitoring it. Barbauld explained that even if people were born under a “good government” they would not die under one “if they conceive of it as an indolent and passive happiness”; instead, they had to take an active role and oppose abuses of the system, even if that involved personal sacrifice and suffering. 224

Hutcheson influenced Barbauld’s ideas of when the right to resist should be used. He argued that common “utility” should be the main purpose of the laws in a state. 225 If the limited hereditary monarch violated the fundamental laws, or broke the bounds set on his power, he became a tyrant and forfeited his right to rule. 226

221 Worden 139.
223 Pocock 246.
225 Hutcheson wrote: “The power of making and executing laws is the most important internal power. Every law should be intended for some real utility to the state; and as far as human power can go, laws should enjoin whatever is of consequence to the general prosperity.” Francis Hutcheson, A short introduction to moral philosophy in three books; containing the elements of ethicks and the law of nature, vol. 2 (Glasgow, 1764) 342.
226 Ibid. 320.
As McFarland stresses, he believed that educated men had the “moral sense” to determine whether or not revolutionary action was required. As in *Civic Sermons*, in *Sins* Barbauld encouraged her readers to think for themselves and apply their “moral sense”. She did not say explicitly when a person should take action against their rulers, but rather argued that it was up to each person to use his or her conscience to decide. Implicitly her list of reasons suggested action was required now, because in *Sins* and her other political pamphlets she had already accused the government of the abuses listed. In *Sins* Barbauld used a series of questions to examine how British society fell short of the criteria she set for good government; she particularly focused on the justice system, slavery, taxation and war with France, as areas where Britain should examine its collective conscience. She wrote: “Every good man owes it to his country and to his own character, to lift his voice against a ruinous war, an unequal tax, or an edict of persecution; and to oppose them, temperately, but firmly, by all means in his power”. She believed each individual must oppose these misuses of power; otherwise the consequences would be detrimental to the liberty of present and future generations.

As Butler emphasises, the issue of when rebellion was justified and what form it should take was “a profoundly awkward topic for the radical: it is more or less equally fatal to recommend armed resistance, and to state that it should never be resorted to”. The Whig leader Charles James Fox supported the right in theory but was nervous about it in practice. He commented that it “is a principle which we should wish kings never to forget, and their subjects seldom to remember”. Even the London Corresponding Society was wary. In 1793 members asserted the right to resistance, but after “The Gagging Acts” or “Two Bills” were passed fear of prosecution made them equivocal. In 1795 they stated: “We pretend not to say at what degree of depravity on the part of Government actual insurrection becomes the duty of the people”. William Godwin in his second edition of *Political Justice* (1796) half-justified revolution because of the people’s suffering but then moved towards recommending passivity.

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227 McFarland 15–16.
230 Qtd. in Worden 134.
231 Barrell 189, 598.
232 Qtd. in Barrell 598.
and a “gradualist approach”.\textsuperscript{233} \textit{Sins} suggests that Barbauld had a similar, equivocal attitude; her rhetoric highlighted the failures of the government, but she promoted temperate resistance not violent revolution. She wrote: “It is their [reformers’] business to sow the seed, and let it lie patiently in the bosom of the ground, perhaps for ages – to prepare, not to bring about revolutions.”\textsuperscript{234} However, in the febrile atmosphere of the time, even to sow the seeds could be treated as a criminal offence.\textsuperscript{235}

\textit{Sins of Government} was very controversial. McCarthy suggests that it only escaped prosecution because it was written by a woman.\textsuperscript{236} \textit{The British Critic} complained that by holding the public responsible for the actions of the nation Barbauld was promoting a doctrine which was “perfectly French (…) Here we have organ and national will, and all the jargon of French Republicanism”.\textsuperscript{237} Even two decades later, her democratic attitude was seen as pure Jacobinism by her admirer Henry Crabb Robinson.\textsuperscript{238}

CONCLUSION
Barbauld’s \textit{Sins} was her last major political pamphlet. Government repressive policies made writing such radical ideas even more dangerous. The political baton passed from middle-class intellectuals to more working-class, secular movements such as the London Corresponding Society and popular orators like Thelwall. By 1795 the pamphlet wars, in which Barbauld was one of the few women to play a significant part, had come to an end. By the mid-1790s the Dissenting intellectual network was dwindling; key figures in this circle such as Priestley, Price, Hollis and Robinson had either died or emigrated.\textsuperscript{239} Barbauld and her fellow Dissenters had not been rewarded with political victory; in black and white terms their ideas had failed. However, at times during the early 1790s the government thought they

\begin{footnotes}
\item[233] Butler, \textit{Burke, Paine, Godwin} 151.
\item[234] McCarthy and Kraft 304. In this quotation she was echoing Price who in \textit{A Discourse on the Love of our Country} wrote that Milton, Locke, Sidney and Hoadly, and Montesquieu, Fenelon and Turgot, “sowed a seed which has since taken root, and is now growing up to a glorious harvest.” Price 14.
\item[235] In his \textit{Appeal} Burke picked up on Price’s metaphor and used it negatively to suggest the damage radical ideas could do: “In such a state of things, the principles, now only sown, will shoot out and vegetate in full luxuriance” (132).
\item[237] Qtd. in McCarthy and Kraft 298.
\item[238] Robinson, \textit{On Books and their Writers} 1: 64.
\item[239] White, \textit{Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent} 87.
\end{footnotes}
might succeed and acted with all their power to prevent it. Barbauld’s “mighty rage” in her “soft bosom” made an important contribution to the radical writing of the era. Her progressive ideas combined elements of French revolutionary thought with seventeenth-century British radical ideas. Similarly her literary style combined seventeenth-century enthusiasm with eighteenth-century sensibility, in an eloquent combination of emotion and reason. This political and literary synthesis had the potential to threaten the government. Her work demonstrated that a woman could be a full and active player in the politics of the time. As one of the few women to write in the traditionally male genre of the political pamphlet, she used her well-honed literary skills to combine righteous indignation with simplicity and sensibility. Working sociably as part of a radical, international, Dissenting network, she made an important contribution to “the heroic age of the expansion of radical thinking”. Like her co-religionists, she had the courage of her convictions and was willing to face prosecution or persecution for her beliefs. Barbauld’s lines to her fellow radicals in “Hymn: ‘Ye are the salt of the earth’” applied equally to her:

You lift on high the warning voice,
When public ills prevail;
Your’s is the writing on the wall,
That turns the tyrant pale. (33–6)\textsuperscript{241}

\textsuperscript{240} Butler, \textit{Burke, Paine, Godwin} 10.

Chapter 5
“How like two scions on one stem we grew”: Barbauld’s and John Aikin’s “collaborative consciousness”

“How like two scions on one stem we grew” (27), Barbauld wrote to her brother John Aikin, in her 1768 poem.1 Echoing her natural imagery, two decades later her brother described them as “sole streamlets from one hounour’d source,/In fond affection as in blood allied”.2 These lines capture the closeness of Barbauld and Aikin’s relationship and how they were linked by nature and nurture. Educated by their father at Warrington Academy, they shared the same values. In his poem Aikin tells his sister his “one dear wish (…) one darling object unpossess’d” was for them to “meet again,— to part no more!”3 His longing to be reunited was for emotional reasons but also because of their importance to each other as collaborative partners. Their political and imaginative affinity is emphasised as he anticipates the inspiring effects of Barbauld’s European tour on “the heart that beats to liberty and love!”4

Recent scholarship by Daniel E. White, Scott Krawczyk and Michele Levy explores in detail Barbauld and Aikin’s “collaborative consciousness”.5 Krawczyk defines “collaborative consciousness” as writers’ “collective will” to bring about reform, and to raise awareness of social and/or political problems. The term also sustains more private and intimate connections, in which “the shared intimacies of creative labour foster the development of a singular consciousness within the ‘different persons’ thinking about and acting upon the joint enterprise.”6 Levy and White also emphasise the political and personal impetus behind the siblings’

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1 Barbauld, “To Dr Aikin on his Complaining that she Neglected him, October 20th 1768” 56.
2 “To Mrs Barbauld in Geneva.” Qtd. in Aikin, Memoir of John Aikin, M.D. 107.
3 Ibid.
4 He writes: “On thee from far the mental vision bend./O’er land, o’er sea, freed Fancy speeds her flight.” He then imagines the scenes she is seeing and adds: “Such, my Laetitia, on thy ravish’d eyes/Bursts the bright scene, the vivid landscapes rise;/While from my sight the air-drawn pictures fade./And Fancy’s glass bedimm’d denies its aid.” Ibid. 104–5.
5 White, “The ‘Joineriana’” 511–33; Krawczyk, Romantic Literary Families; Michele Levy, Family Authorship.
6 Krawczyk, Romantic Literary Families xiv.
literary partnership. As Levy explains, in Barbauld and Aikin’s model of authorship the family is “utterly inseparable from the political sphere, and private individuals are inevitably enmeshed in political and religious controversies”. White describes how they asserted “an integral connection between the intimate sphere of the family, the austere virtues of religious nonconformity and the progressive market ethos of middle-class eighteenth-century life”.

Critics have examined sociable groups and modes of collaboration in this era to challenge Romanticism’s identification with the solitary poet. Although other important examples of family authorship are included, for instance the Wordsworths and Godwin/Shelley circle, according to Levy, Barbauld and Aikin “stand out as the period’s exemplary family authors”. A major contribution to this scholarship is Religious Dissent and the Aikin–Barbauld Circle, 1740–1860; this collection of essays is “a form of group biography” which examines the “powerful familial ethos” displayed across the generations of the Aikin family.

Reflecting the importance of sociability to Barbauld, this thesis discusses individuals who were important in the evolution of her ideas. This chapter examines the unique role John Aikin played in her intellectual development. As their poetic description of their relationship suggests, brother and sister grew at the same rate in the same direction, like intellectual Siamese twins. In their joint works it is often difficult to separate one sibling’s ideas from the other’s. In many of their individual works the influence of the other’s ideas is also evident. Krawczyk divides their collaborative career into three stages: firstly the Warrington period (1758–74) when they lived together; then the reformist education stage (1774–1802) in which they produced activist and educational writing; thirdly, the years 1802–20 during which, through their literary criticism, they helped to establish the English canon and shape literary taste.

This chapter will focus on the second educational, reformist period, particularly their collaborative work in the 1790s. It will examine the evidence for and the nature of their collaboration. I suggest their purpose was
highly political, as is demonstrated not only in their pamphlets, where it is to be expected, but also in their children’s writing where politicisation was more controversial.

Their most famous collaboration of this period was *Evenings at Home; or, the juvenile budget opened* (1792–6). As government policies made overt expressions of radicalism dangerous, Barbauld and Aikin turned their literary abilities to passing on their progressive values to the next generation. I suggest that Joseph Priestley’s pamphlet *The proper objects of education in the present state of the world* (1791) was a call to arms to Barbauld and Aikin. First delivered as a speech in April 1791, in it he set out ideas about shaping the virtuous citizen which were put into practice in *Evenings*.

Although *Evenings* had a topical impetus, it should also be seen as a continuation of Barbauld’s long-term project to enlighten all sectors of society. *Civic Sermons* was to educate the masses about society; *Lessons for Children* (1778–9) and *Evenings* served the same purpose for young people. Although written for an older age group, *Evenings* has many similarities to Barbauld’s innovative reading primer, *Lessons for Children*. Drawing on William McCarthy’s, Mitzi Myers’ and Sarah Robbins’ research, I will briefly examine the continuities between the two works. Both treat children as active participants in the learning process. They aim to teach young people to think for themselves and to shape compassionate future citizens by encouraging children to identify with others. The use of language in *Evenings* also reflects its precursor; it uses a conversational style and emphasises linguistic precision.

Myers argues that until recently Barbauld’s “remarkable” and “original” contribution to children’s literature has been “systematically misread”. She claims that this was due to her male contemporaries, who “recognised her importance and feared her power”. The first generation of Romantics, Lamb, Wordsworth and Coleridge, portrayed her children’s literature as didactic and lacking in imagination. The argument about education between the Romantics and Rationalist educators

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13 Myers, “Of Mice and Mothers” 262.
has been explored in depth by critics. Drawing on Alan Richardson’s detailed study of literature, education and Romanticism, I will briefly outline the differences between the Romantics’ and the Rationalists’ views of education. While accepting the importance of Barbauld’s role as an educational innovator, I do not intend to examine her work from a pedagogical perspective in detail; instead my emphasis will be on her political ideas and how they were expressed and furthered through her educational projects. My focus will be on *Evenings* rather than *Lessons*. *Evenings* is the most overtly political of her children’s writing, reflecting its older readership and the politicised decade in which it was written.

Recent critics have demonstrated that *Evenings* provided a very radical education, and Michele Levy has written a definitive overview of the radicalism of the stories. She demonstrates that Barbauld’s and Aikin’s aim was to prevent the transmission of martial and imperial values to young children, especially boys, by showing the true costs of militarism and expansionism. Drawing on the affective bonds between parents and children, the human suffering involved in these enterprises was emphasised. Questioning the concept of heroism,* Evenings  championed a compassionate, domestic model epitomised by the prison reformer John Howard.

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16 McCarthy examines *Lessons* in detail in “Mother of All Discourses: Anna Barbauld’s Lessons for Children.” *Culturing the Child, 1690–1914: Essays in Memory of Mitzi Myers*, ed. Donelle Ruwe (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005) 85–111. He demonstrates how the four volumes of *Lessons* (1778–9) were innovative; they are graduated to keep pace with the child’s development. They used large type and wide margins to make them reader-friendly and were sized to fit a child’s hand. They introduced an informal dialogue between parent and child. Each lesson is a dialogue, a narrative, or a description suited to the child’s level of experience. It teaches language using whole language pedagogy rather than phonics (88–92). Sarah Robbins in “Lessons for Children and Teaching Mothers” writes: “By arguing for these shifts in the content and format of children’s first reading texts, Barbauld replaces passive absorbers of adult-oriented subject matter with empowered learners interpreting text that has direct meaning in their own lives” (137).


20 Ibid. 41.
The anti-war sentiments have been examined in detail by Penny Mahon, who claims that “the roots of peace education” can be found in these stories. She contends that “Things by their Right Names”, “The Cost of a War” and “The Price of a Victory” were the first anti-war stories written specifically for children. Darren Howard analyses the multiple genres about animals in Evenings. He shows how they are used to engage in discourses about colonialism and political power, the ethics of science, gender and racial difference, and the relationship between humans and the natural world. They encourage young readers to recognise “the validity of heterogeneous perspectives and value-systems”. They also invite the sympathetic identification with the animal as an alienated subject. Assessing in detail the opposition to slavery in Evenings, Krawczyk describes the dialogue between “Master and Slave” as one of the most important pieces of abolitionist literature written in England. The dialogue argues that a slave has a right and a moral obligation to himself as a human being, to try to escape and claim his natural right to freedom.

As I examine Barbauld’s attitudes to war, colonialism, slavery and animals in detail in other chapters, in this chapter I intend to concentrate on analysing Barbauld’s attitudes to hierarchies and socio-economic problems. I will draw on Krawczyk’s model, which involves reading Barbauld’s and Aikin’s political pamphlets together, because “the writing of one sibling requires its complement in order to complete the picture”. To illustrate how their “collaborative consciousness” worked in practice, and to gain a deeper understanding of Barbauld’s attitude to inequality, I will read Barbauld’s Remarks on Mr Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship (1792), her poem “To the Poor” (1795), her “The Rich and the Poor: A Dialogue” in A Legacy for Young Ladies and her essay “Thoughts on the Inequality of

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22 Ibid. 167–8.
24 Ibid. 643.
25 Krawczyk, Romantic Literary Families 23.
26 Ibid. 48.
27 Ibid. 11.
Conditions”, alongside relevant stories from Evenings and John Aikin’s letter on “Inequality of Conditions”, and his 1788 article for the Gentleman’s Magazine. Critics are divided on where Barbauld’s views on these issues place her on the political spectrum; McCarthy considers her essay on “Inequality” “reads like sentences from The Communist Manifesto”, while Taylor claims her work was less egalitarian than that of her radical contemporaries and offered “a bland defence of cultural hierarchy”. It is important to the overall assessment of Barbauld’s progressive ideas in this thesis to establish which reading of her work is the more accurate.

Read individually, her writings on the subject can appear ambiguous, but read together a more coherent, nuanced picture emerges. To discover how progressive Barbauld’s views were, I will set them in the context of the attitudes to the poor of her contemporaries Joseph Priestley, William Godwin and Thomas Paine. Unlike them, she did not produce a comprehensive blueprint to deal with poverty. However, I suggest that, with her brother, she developed a distinctive attitude which combined elements of progressive liberalism with civic humanism and a genuine “fellow-feeling” for the poor. She demonstrated an early awareness of the formation of a working class in her differentiation of the “industrious” poor from paupers, and portrayed skilled workers as natural allies of the middle classes., E. P. Thompson argues that if this alliance had been accepted by her contemporaries Pitt might have been forced to introduce more reforms in the 1790s. However, even after detailed analysis, ambiguities about Barbauld’s and Aikin’s ideological beliefs remain. There are tensions and inconsistencies in their work which are similar to those of other writers at this time. Shifts in views reflected the fast-changing political and socio-economic situation they were responding to. The political terms and ideas which were to be fully developed in the nineteenth

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29 McCarthy writes: “It [‘Thoughts on Inequality’] is also a striking document of the liberal British ideas on ‘political economy’ that would eventually be gathered into the thought of Karl Marx.” McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment) 382; Taylor, Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination 184.
and twentieth centuries were only beginning to appear in embryonic form at this time.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BARBAULD AND AIKIN
Although Anne Janowitz portrays the relationship between Barbauld and Aikin as "rivalrous", once Barbauld had come to terms with the limitations placed on her ambitions because of her gender it seems more supportive than competitive.\(^{31}\) As Krawczyk establishes, from their youth at Warrington Academy they encouraged each other to write. They developed a "dialogic consciousness" which involved offering constructive criticism or even contributing to the other’s writing.\(^{32}\) Anna contributed six songs to John’s *Essays on Song Writing* (1772). He encouraged her to publish, and then collected and edited her *Poems* (1773).\(^{33}\) They both contributed to their *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* (1773). Daniel E. White has examined this collection in detail. He claims that although the essays were written from a nonconformist, anti-establishmentarian, middle-class perspective, the siblings attempted to identify opposed communities and establish balance between extremes.\(^{34}\) Krawczyk emphasises that receiving credit for their contribution was never their concern. The individual essays were unsigned, demonstrating the non-competitive "egalitarian ethos" of their collaboration.\(^{35}\) He argues that the working partnership developed during the Warrington period shaped their "strategy of responsive collaboration" in the 1790s.\(^{36}\) Levy shows that their modus vivendi was typical of the manuscript culture in which different members of a circle interacted, reading, annotating and amending each other’s work in a way that was “far less author-centered” than the developing print culture.\(^{37}\) As Susan Rosenbaum’s argues, Barbauld and Aikin promoted an alternative, domestic, familial attitude to literature as opposed to the dominant, commercial forms of exchange. Although Barbauld participated in commercial authorship, she preferred to portray her work


\(^{32}\) Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families* 10, 13, 15.


\(^{34}\) White, “The ‘Joineriana’” 521–2.


\(^{36}\) Ibid. 53.

as personal gifts rather than commodities for sale. Reflecting “private” publicness, she sometimes wrote anonymously, relying on her work being recognised by Dissenting groups while remaining anonymous to the larger reading public.  

For a time the siblings’ paths diverged. From 1774 Barbauld was running her school at Palgrave with Rochemont. After studying medicine at Edinburgh University, Aikin practised as a doctor in Leicestershire, Warrington and Yarmouth. When apart, they supported each other’s individual careers primarily through letters. However, working together remained an aspiration. In a 1775 letter Barbauld wrote to her brother: “I think we must some day sew all our fragments together, and make a Joineriana of them. Let me see: – I have, half a ballad; the first scene of a play; a plot of another, all but the catastrophe, half a dozen loose similes, and an eccentric flight or two among the fairies”. Levy claims that the homely image of stitching their work together suggests its domestic origins and the idea that it should be functional rather than theoretical. It also implies that they joined together fragments by both individuals to produce a single work. Barbauld’s comment also has a political import. As Felicity James’ research shows, “Joineriana” refers to Samuel Paterson’s Joineriana, or the Book of Scraps.

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38 Susan Rosenbaum, “‘A Thing Unknown, without a Name’: Anna Laetitia Barbauld and the Illegible Signature”, Studies in Romanticism 40:3 (2001): 369–99. After Pope’s lawsuit against Curll in 1741, the Statute of Anne was used to provide an early form of copyright protection. This case signalled the writer’s property in his/her name. The claim to a recognisable identity became vital to the value of the literary work as a commodity in the marketplace (386). Rosenbaum argues that Barbauld “develops a lyric aesthetic based on the miniature object so as to textually and materially define a circulation distinct from the dominant, commercially controlled circuits of exchange. The miniaturist poem offers itself to a small, local audience through the conceit of the gift rather than the commodity (...) Barbauld inscribes her miniaturist poetry as the privileged unit of a representational and political economy opposed to capitalist expansion in its imperialist variety, and to its poetic counterpart, the expansive romantic self” (372).

39 Krawczyk, Romantic Literary Families 56.

40 Recent research has examined Aikin’s work outside his collaborations with Barbauld, assessing his role as a literary physician, geographer, biographer and editor of the Monthly Magazine and The Athenaeum. See Kathryn Ready, “‘And Make Thine Own Apollo Doubly Thine’: John Aikin as Literary Physician and the Intersection of Medicine, Morality and Politics”, James and Inkster, 70–93; Stephen Daniels and Paul Elliott, “Outline Maps of Knowledge: John Aikin’s Geographical Imagination”, James and Inkster 94–125. See also Janowitz, “Memoirs of a Dutiful Niece” 80–98. Janowitz argues that in her memoir of her father Lucy Aikin portrayed him as undervalued and a “martyr to the talents of his sister” (81). She adds that John Aikin “edited the Monthly Magazine and took an important step in founding the journalism of the liberal intelligentsia by not offering much in the way of religious controversies” (82).


42 Levy, Family Authorship 22.
Paterson was a Dissenter whose book was published by Johnson. His miscellany included some radical essays. In the “Freethinker” Paterson wrote: “I am of opinion that it becomes every sensible man to be a FREETHINKER – nay more, that it is his duty, as a rational being”. James suggests that “Joineriana”, therefore, conveys “a complex of ideas, as Barbauld alludes to someone who is deeply involved in Dissenting circles (...) What at first seems to be a private domestic enterprise carries a larger public charge”. Paterson’s miscellany also discussed literary property. I suggest that Barbauld refers to his Joineriana as a joke with her brother because the concept of individual literary property could not be applied to their work.

It seems that Paterson’s book sowed the seeds in Barbauld’s mind for the radical purpose of Evenings. In his “Sonnet to Mrs Barbauld March, 1790” Aikin tells her to “Seize, seize the lyre! Resume the lofty strain/’Tis time, ’tis time! Hark how the nations round/With jocund notes of liberty resound.” In the politicised environment of the 1790s the time was right to resume their joint literary project for political purposes. They began by writing individual political pamphlets on the same topics. In 1790 Aikin wrote An Address to the Dissidents of England on their late Defeat, while Barbauld produced An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts; in 1793 Barbauld’s Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation appeared at the same time as Aikin’s Food for National Penitence; or, a discourse intended for the approaching Fast Day. Krawczyk stresses that they worked as a team in their reformist activism; on each occasion the two parallel pamphlets were designed to be read together but addressed different audiences and aspects of the debate. By doing this they produced “a combined and coherent

43 James suggests that Barbauld and Aikin must have known this book as it was published by Joseph Johnson in 1772, the same year that he brought out John Aikin’s Essay on Song Writing. Paterson had links to Unitarianism. He was a friend of Johnson’s and it was Paterson’s book auction house on Essex Street that Johnson leased in 1774 in order to help establish the chapel which, under Theophilus Lindsey, would become the first avowedly Unitarian place of worship. James, “An Introduction”, James and Inkster 14–15.
45 James, “An Introduction” 15.
46 Paterson’s conclusion to the “Freethinker” encapsulated its purpose: “He [the freethinker] considers himself, in a great measure, born for the service of society – and if he may promulgate any good, without the hazard of bringing on a great inconveniency, he is ready, at all times, to exert his faculties – fearless, and even without a fee. His most earnest endeavour and only drift, is to instruct his fellows – not to distract them” (83–4).
rhetorical effect” which reinforced the same message. It reflected their reformist ethos which was “characterised by co-operation and communal action”.\textsuperscript{48} Levy suggests that working together made them more courageous and risk-taking.\textsuperscript{49} Aikin’s inflammatory political pamphlets led to his medical practice being boycotted.\textsuperscript{50} In 1792 he left Yarmouth for London.\textsuperscript{51} Living close to each other, Barbauld and Aikin began to write \textit{Evenings at Home}. In his \textit{Address to the Dissidents} Aikin called on Dissenters to capitalise on their position as a freethinking, intellectual elite to influence the next generation.\textsuperscript{52} This long-term political strategy was carried out in \textit{Evenings}.

**EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS**

Dissenters had always seen the political potential of education.\textsuperscript{53} However, in the 1790s, when Dissenting values were under threat, shaping the next generation became a priority. In his speech on \textit{The proper objects of education}, Priestley explained that reformers had “nothing to expect from power, or general favour, but must look for every species of abuse and persecution (…) But youth should be so trained up, as, without fear, to look for every species of ill usage in a good cause” (emphases original).\textsuperscript{54} They needed to be inspired with a love of truth and public spiritedness. They should study the nature of government to discover what makes nations secure and happy.\textsuperscript{55} He called for the extinction of wars and the abolition of “useless distinctions, which were the offspring of a barbarous age, (producing an absurd haughtiness in some, and a base servility in others)”.\textsuperscript{56} He claimed that through science, arts, manufactures and commerce “the real welfare of nations is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48} Krawczyk, \textit{Romantic Literary Families} 1–2, 9–10.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Levy writes they “might have felt emboldened to say things together as a family that they would not have had the courage to say on their own.” \textit{Family Authorship} 26.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Lucy Aikin, \textit{Memoir} 132.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Krawczyk claims that John felt “the chill of public disapprobation after the appearance of his \textit{The Spirit of the Constitution and that of the Church of England} (…) By levelling charges of ‘Jacobitism’ against the Anglican Church and asserting that it ‘[Posed] the greatest denominational threat to the state’ and was, furthermore ‘hostile to the rights of their fellow citizens,’ Aikin put himself in a tenuous position vis a vis the Yarmouth community.” \textit{Romantic Literary Families} 8.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Aikin, \textit{An Address to the Dissidents of England on their late defeat} (London, 1790) 26–8.
\item \textsuperscript{53} The Lunar Society in the 1780s spent as much time discussing the education of youth as the more “adult” issues of slavery and parliamentary reform. Robbins, “\textit{Lessons for Children}” 139.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Priestley, \textit{The proper objects of education in the present state of the world} (London, 1791)19–20.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid. 13–14, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid. 30.
\end{itemize}
promoted”. Barbauld and Aikin put the ideas in his *Address* into practice in *Evenings*. For Priestley, like the siblings, knowledge was power. He wrote: “It is *knowledge* that finally governs mankind, and *power*, though ever so refractory, must at length yield to it” (emphases original).

Although Lucy Aikin distinguished between the stories written by Barbauld and Aikin in *Evenings at Home* in her 1825 edition of her aunt’s work (apparently Barbauld wrote only fourteen of the ninety-nine), Levy questions the reliability of her attributions and suggests that the work as a whole should be read as a joint project. She argues that rather than accepting “a model of autonomous authorship”, they took “joint responsibility for a work that throughout displays a unified style and a shared set of ethical and political beliefs”. Comparing the fourteen attributed to Barbauld to the other stories, supports Levy’s argument. Criticism of hereditary monarchy in “Alfred, a drama” and “Canute’s Reproof” and the anti-war argument in “Things by their Right Names” are repeated and developed in the rest of *Evenings*. “Things by their Right Names” and “A Lesson in the Art of Distinguishing” are two of the most important dialogues on the precise use of language. However, it would be wrong to conclude that Barbauld was more concerned than her brother about the power of linguistics because, as Lucy Aikin’s *Memoir* demonstrates, this was one of his preoccupations. In *Civic Sermons* Barbauld argued that in an era when radicals faced prosecution on the interpretation of political terms it was particularly important that everyone had an accurate understanding of them. John Aikin agreed, writing to his son: “The accurate use of terms is in all cases important; but (...) peculiarly so, in these times of violent and bitter party contention”.

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57 Ibid. 31. For a discussion of the influence of manufacturers on Dissenters’ pedagogy see Robbins, “Lessons for Children” 139.
58 Priestley, *The proper objects of education* 23.
59 Barbauld, *Works* 1: xxxvi. Lucy Aikin lists Barbauld’s contributions as: “The Young Mouse; The Wasp and Bee; Alfred, a drama; Animals and Countries; Canute’s Reproof; The Masque of Nature; Things by their Right Names; The Goose and Horse; On Manufactures; The Flying-fish; A Lesson in the Art of Distinguishing; The Phoenix and Dove; The Manufacture of Paper; The Four Sisters and in a new edition Live Dolls.” Levy, *Family Authorship* 25.
60 Ibid.
61 Lucy Aikin writes: “His principal object, however (...) was, to preserve his style from the fault which most of all offended him in every kind of writing, – *obscenity*” (emphasis original). *Memoir of John Aikin M.D.* 200.
62 For a full discussion of *Civic Sermons* see Chapter 4.
As Levy demonstrates, analysis of the texts complicates Lucy’s attributions; some of the pieces attributed to Barbauld contain subject matter and characters that are nearly identical to Aikin’s. Some of the pieces assigned to Aikin, for example “On Man”, resemble “On Monastic Institutions” in *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* which was said to have been written by Barbauld. According to Levy these similarities suggest that Barbauld and Aikin followed the practice of continuing each other’s stories as Barbauld had proposed in her Joineriana letter. Levy speculates that, in the conservative political climate of 1825, a desire to portray her aunt as a model of feminine respectability motivated Lucy to deny Barbauld’s authorship of the more controversial pieces. However, brother and sister did not intend the stories to be individually attributed. Through the final lifetime edition they declined from signing their contributions. Levy suggests that this had an ideological reason; it was “a form of provocation” reflecting their view that individual authorship did not matter. Unlike the Romantic self-representation of the solitary genius, they favoured sociable collaboration. The suggestion is that the stories are not about an individual expressing a unique view but could reflect the ideas of many people whose views developed through conversation and debate. Inspired by the ideas of Locke, Hartley and Smith, authorship was based not on special powers but on human sympathy and a commitment to the public good.

Their emphasis on a familial model of education also had a philosophical basis. Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* influenced Barbauld and Aikin to see the family as the institution that could change society because it was where children’s knowledge, habits and morals were formed. In her essay “On Prejudice”, which was published in 1800 in *The Monthly Magazine*, Barbauld’s

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64 Levy, *Family Authorship* 26
65 Ibid. 25.
66 Ibid. 10–11.
67 Ibid. 25.
68 Levy claims that the theoretical underpinnings of these ideas came from Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Hartley’s *Observations on Man* (1749) and Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiment* (1759). She writes: “With this model we see greater continuity with Enlightenment thinking generally, as the author comes to be defined not by his capacity for inner vision, but by his ability to identify with the feelings of others (for Hartley and Smith, an innate human trait that ought to be cultivated) and his dedication to the improvement of humankind (for Locke, an achievable educational aim).” Ibid. 11.
69 Ibid. 21 and 26–7.
argument that the domestic environment is the best place for children to learn is couched in Hartleyan associationist terms. She wrote:

Instead of sending him to that cold and hesitating belief which is founded on the painful and uncertain consequences of late investigation, let his conviction of all the truths you deem important be mixed up with every warm affection of his nature, and identified with his most cherished recollections.\textsuperscript{70}

James argues that as a devotee of Hutcheson’s ideas, in her \textit{Hymns in Prose} and \textit{Civic Sermons} Barbauld had drawn on the idea of the child starting to understand society in terms of the family but then extending the concept of affiliation outwards to the wider community, first to nations made up of “families of men”, then to the world.\textsuperscript{71} This theory is reflected in the format of \textit{Evenings}. The individual stories and dialogues are set within a frame narrative. The Fairborne family and their friends write a fable, story or dialogue which is placed in a “budget”. The children then pick out stories to be read each evening in front of the family and their guests. The stories were written for two audiences, parents as well as children.\textsuperscript{72}

Although Locke’s ideas influenced Barbauld, Levy argues convincingly that she departs from Locke’s political theory at the point where he describes men alone coming together to form the social compact. Unlike Locke’s argument that the family and political society had different ends, Barbauld claimed that the reasons we associate in larger groups is identical to the reasons we associate in smaller societies: in order to protect life, liberty and property but also because of the ties of love and affection.\textsuperscript{73} For Barbauld, the public and private were continuous. She rejected the exclusion of women from civil society and “separate spheres ideology”. She did not accept the separation of family and state; instead the domestic unit was the “site for intense scrutiny of the state”.\textsuperscript{74}

Mitzi Myers, Emma Major, William McCarthy and Sarah Robbins have emphasised Barbauld’s role as part of the “mothers of the nation model”. She believed that shaping the next generation of men could bring lasting social change.

\textsuperscript{71} James, “An Introduction” 16.
\textsuperscript{72} Richardson, \textit{Literature, Education, and Romanticism} 134–5.
\textsuperscript{73} Levy, \textit{Family Authorship} 28.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid. 14–17, 21.
and was a middle-class woman’s indirect route to cultural power.\textsuperscript{75} As McCarthy demonstrates, Barbauld’s model of motherhood was not restricted or confined by her domestic setting.\textsuperscript{76} Teaching was “an act of citizenship” at a time when women were excluded from official acts of citizenship.\textsuperscript{77}

Although Lessons portrays early education as the role of the mother, Levy argues that Barbauld considered education was a family project rather than an exclusively female one. Unlike feminists such as Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft, she did not believe the family and the polity were vehicles of female subjugation.\textsuperscript{78} The domestic space in Evenings is neither feminine nor masculine; it includes men, women and children all participating in debates ranging from household economy to political reform. Its sociable model of the family is “cross-gendered and inter-generational” and based on equality not hierarchy.\textsuperscript{79} White claims that this domestic literary collaboration reflected the sphere of intervention open to Dissenters which, while they were excluded from some aspects of civic life because of their legal status, allowed them to occupy “the intermediate space between the private realm and the state”. The alliance of middle-class, Dissenting values with sensibility and “the plenitude of the intimate sphere” domesticated progressive values and authorised Barbauld to communicate them to the nation.\textsuperscript{80}

To understand the educational importance of Evenings involves setting it in the context of the Dissenting Academy tradition and Barbauld’s other writing on education: her reading primer, Lessons for Children, her Hymns in Prose for Children (1781), and her essays “What Is Education?” (1798) and “On Prejudice” (1800). As Chapter 1 establishes, Dissenting Academies encouraged students to consider both sides of the argument in matters of controversy and then make their

\textsuperscript{75} Myers, “Of Mice and Mothers” 269–72; Emma Major, “Nature, Nation, and Denomination: Barbauld’s Taste for the Public”, \textit{ELH} 74:4 (2007) 920; Robbins, “Women’s Studies’ Debates” and “Lessons for Children”. Robbins writes: “As an educated mother conscientiously preparing her child for middle-class adulthood, she would soon provide an influential model advocated and adopted by many of her country’s would-be cultural arbiters. Further, via ongoing sales of the juvenile texts first inspired by her own parenting, Barbauld’s literary pedagogy would also play a notable part in the construction of the American post-Revolutionary ideal of Republican motherhood molding a well-educated male electorate through home literacy training.” “Women’s Studies’ Debates” 71–2.
\textsuperscript{76} McCarthy, “Mother of all Discourses” 103–4.
\textsuperscript{77} McCarthy, “How Dissent Made Anna Letitia Barbauld, and What she Made of Dissent”, James and Inkster 61–2.
\textsuperscript{78} Levy, \textit{Family Authorship} 30.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. 17.
\textsuperscript{80} White, “The ‘Joineriana’” 513.
own judgements. Barbauld replicated the Dissenting Academy tradition for boys aged three to eighteen at Palgrave School. Drawing on her experience of teaching and bringing up her adopted son Charles, Barbauld wrote her innovative and influential *Lessons for Children*, published in four volumes. The first was for children aged two and three, the second and third were for children of three, and the fourth was for children aged between three and four. Myers claims *Lessons* founded a female tradition in pedagogy. Barbauld introduced domestic realism and a “quotidian mimetism of mother–child instructional interaction” into children’s literature. She challenged the established emphasis on rote memorising and classical learning with a democratised vernacular instruction. McCarthy suggests that its “chit-chat” probably arose from actual incidents and transactions in her life with Charles, which makes them “in some ways intimate, and at the same time public, even in some ways a manifesto”. Because she was an experienced teacher her innovations were also practical: her book fitted a child’s hand and was printed in large, clear type with wide margins.

Barbauld suggested that parents should encourage children from toddlers onwards to form rational judgements about the nature of good government. McCarthy examines how, in *Lessons*, she introduced a child to elements of society’s symbols-systems and conceptual structures, inculcating an ethics, and encouraging a certain kind of sensibility. In both *Lessons* and *Hymns in Prose*, children were taught the interdependence of human society and the basics of political economy. Encouraging Christian egalitarianism and internationalism, in *Hymns* she wrote: “All are God’s family; he knoweth every one of them (…) he heareth them all; he taketh care of all; none are so great, that he cannot punish them; none so mean that he will not protect them”. As Myers emphasises, Barbauld’s *Lessons* “seldom draw the easy moral” expected from children’s

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82 Myers, “Of Mice and Mothers” 260–1.
83 McCarthy, “Mother of all Discourses” 92–3.
84 Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families* 42.
86 McCarthy, “Mother of all Discourses” 93.
87 Ibid. 98.
literature. Her “implicit critiques leave the reader to get the anti-heroic point”. The political and ethical education begun in *Lessons* and *Hymns* was continued at a more sophisticated level in *Evenings*. Aimed at children between the ages of eight and twelve, *Evenings* widens out from lessons between mother and child to include the whole family. However, the ethos of self-discovery remained constant. Children were encouraged to use inquiry based, evidence-led research, and to observe and investigate. The “familiar discourse” in *Lessons* was developed in *Evenings* to include discussion and debate. Aikin and Barbauld believed that through conversation children became active learners who would discover their own moral knowledge. They ignored class, gender and age boundaries, showing an egalitarian belief that everyone should be involved in discussions of the most important issues of the day.

Barbauld is seen as one of the leading rationalist educators, whose literature for children was based on reason and individual judgement. More, Wollstonecraft and Trimmer were inspired by her work. Richard and Maria Edgeworths’ manual for parents *Practical Education* (1798), which epitomised rationalist theories, was also influenced by Barbauld’s *Lessons*. As Stephen Bygrave shows, the Edgeworths, like Barbauld, believed education should be “moral education”. However, they were “attentive to minute instances of impropriety” and “prissily” rewrote Barbauld’s *Lessons* because they considered that they created false associations; the phrase “I want my dinner” was changed because it fostered a false idea of property. As Barbauld’s preface to her *Hymns in Prose for Children* demonstrates, she was more relaxed about such details, for instance explaining that if the child’s religious ideas were mixed with “many improprieties” his “correcter reason” would refine them later.

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89 Myers cites Barbauld’s recurrent portrayal of the death of animals and in particular the story of the vicious boy who starved a robin getting eaten by bears in return. Myers, “Of Mice and Mothers” 274–5.
90 Levy, *Family Authorship* 37.
91 Ibid. 44.
93 Myers, “Of Mice and Mothers” 261. For a full discussion of *Practical Education* see Richardson 52–4.
95 Barbauld, “Hymns in Prose for Children” 238.
Like most rationalists, Barbauld’s ideas were influenced by Locke and Hartley and to a certain extent Rousseau. Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) claimed that a child was born a “tabula rasa” and was formed by experience. He portrayed children as morally neutral and malleable, so they were equally open to corruption or improvement. Education was crucial for reforming society.\(^96\) He believed it should begin early and include all aspects of a child’s upbringing, instilling civic values.\(^97\) His theory of moral sensibility taught that the basis of morality was recognising the subjectivity of others.\(^98\) These ideas are evident in Barbauld’s dialogues about animals and the poor in *Lessons* which teach children to treat them kindly.\(^99\) They are developed further in *Evenings* as the reader is encouraged to identify with animals and people from other cultures and classes. Howard claims that techniques of defamiliarisation make readers reconsider the world around them by seeing it through other people’s eyes. The aim is to make children critical observers of their own society. It suggests that there is no single reality accessible to individuals; instead there are multiple perspectives.\(^100\)

Also influential on Barbauld’s educational ideas was the associational psychology of Hartley’s *Observations on Man*. Hartley argued that all complex or intellectual ideas developed from simple ones based on sense data. Repeated sensations could stimulate new ideas and modify innate character, and thus it had the potential to reform society.\(^101\) In *Lessons* Charles was introduced to a range of sensory experiences through exploring nature. This education was continued in *Hymns in Prose*, which demonstrate God’s benevolence through sensuous descriptions of nature. Learning through the senses was developed further in a more diverse environment in *Evenings*.

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\(^96\) Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* 10, 12.
\(^98\) Howard 649.
\(^99\) See Chapter 3.
\(^100\) For instance in “The Young Mouse” the perspective is the mouse’s view of a mousetrap, while in the “Traveller’s Wonders” the domestic customs of the British are viewed through the eyes of a foreigner. Aikin and Barbauld, “The Young Mouse”, *Evenings at Home* 1: 18–20; “Travellers’ Wonders”, ibid. 22–31. For a full discussion of the use of defamiliarisation in the stories see Howard 654–5.
\(^101\) Ian Inkster, “Under the Eye of the Public”: Arthur Aikin (1773–1854), the Dissenting Mind and the Character of English Industrialization*, James and Inkster 139.
It seems that Barbauld’s attitude to Rousseau’s ideas on education was more ambivalent. Although she accepted his basic premise that we are educated by experience, using this theory in Lessons by linking Charles’ linguistic experience to everyday activities, she questioned the practicality of some of Rousseau’s ideas. In her essay “What Is Education?” which was published in The Monthly Magazine in 1798, she argued that his idea in Emile of devoting several men to the education of one child is unnecessary. Nor should a child be artificially isolated from society. She claimed that more important than the direct influence of a parent or a tutor is “the education of circumstances” which children absorb from their parents’ example and the environment to which they are exposed. Her view was practical, not theoretical, developed from teaching children.

The view of language in Lessons and Evenings also suggests Barbauld’s ambiguous attitude to Rousseau’s theories. She accepted the importance of using few and plain words when teaching children, but she did not agree that children’s direct experience of the object world should be unmediated as far as possible by words. Unlike Rousseau, who considered the age of twelve early enough for literacy, Barbauld, like Edgeworth, More, Wollstonecraft and Trimmer, valued early reading and writing. Lessons assumes that the child starts reading between two and three years old. Barbauld and Aikin believed that children needed to develop an accurate understanding of language and simple ideas and therefore they paired words with distinct ideas. As McCarthy shows, this began in Lessons, with Barbauld introducing children to the simpler concepts that compose more complex ideas. Incremental development of vocabulary was continued in Evenings in “Things by their Right Names”, “The Art of Distinguishing”, “The

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102 McCarthy, “Mother of all Discourses” 91.
104 Ibid. 323. Barbauld wrote: “Do you ask then, what will educate your son? Your example will educate him; your conversation with your friends; the business he sees you transact; the likings and dislikings you express; these will educate him – the society you live in will educate him” (323).
105 Levy writes: “Unlike other educational theorists like Rousseau and Genlis who had proposed an education ‘completely uninfluenced by society’s existing body of knowledge and belief,’ she knew that such a plan was impossible.” Family Authorship 35. McCarthy writes: “Barbauld never proposed a theory of pedagogy; on the contrary, her 1798 essay ‘On Education’ argues the futility of pedagogy theory.” “Performance, Pedagogy, and Politics” 268.
106 Richardson, Literature, Education, and Romanticism 56.
Kidnappers” and “The Two Robbers”, which encouraged children to think about the true meaning of words.\textsuperscript{110} As Father explains to Charles in the conclusion to “A Lesson in the Art of Distinguishing”, he has spent so long making him distinguish between a “definition” and a “description” because “nothing is more useful than to learn to form ideas with precision, and to express them with accuracy: I have not given you a definition to teach you what a horse is, but to teach you to think” (emphasis original).\textsuperscript{111} 

In her essay “On Prejudice” Barbauld rejected Rousseau’s idea that a child should receive no prejudice: “It is, in truth, the most absurd of all suppositions that a human being can be educated, or even nourished and brought up, without imbibing numberless prejudices from everything which passes around him”.\textsuperscript{112} It would be “cruel and unjust” of a parent to deprive a child of the benefit of their experience; this attitude can be seen in her approach to religious instruction.\textsuperscript{113} Barbauld’s pedagogy was based on the principle that a child should be presented only with ideas that he or she was ready to understand.\textsuperscript{114} Thus Lessons were free from religious doctrine.\textsuperscript{115} However, when children graduated from Lessons at the age of four, Barbauld believed it was important that they were introduced to simple religious ideas.\textsuperscript{116} She wrote that the purpose of Hymns was “to impress devotional feelings as early as possible on the infant mind; fully convinced as the author is, that they cannot be impressed too soon, and that a child, to feel the full force of the idea of God, ought never to remember the time when he had no such idea”.\textsuperscript{117} Drawing on Hartley’s theories, she stated that the ideas should be impressed “by connecting religion with a variety of sensible objects; with all that he sees, all he hears, all that affects his young mind with wonder or delight; and thus by deep,

\textsuperscript{111} Aikin and Barbauld, Evenings at Home 2: 136.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. 338.
\textsuperscript{114} McCarthy and Kraft 234.
\textsuperscript{115} McCarthy writes: “The morality of Lessons is not enforced by any reference to God or religious sanction. That would be much too abstract (…) Unlike earlier primers, which often lead the child straight from word-lists to catechisms (…) it is entirely secular, with no suggestion of any power transcending the empirically known natural world (…) The do’s and don’ts of human ethics are enforced, then, by human means.” McCarthy, “Mother of all Discourses” 97.
\textsuperscript{116} McCarthy and Kraft 234.
\textsuperscript{117} Barbauld, Preface, “Hymns in Prose for Children” 238.
strong, and permanent associations, to lay the best foundation for practical
devoion in future life”. Barbauld’s emphasis was on practical rather than
metaphysical ideas. Hymns demonstrates a Rational Dissenting perspective.
Promoting Hutchesonian beliefs, it described a benevolent God who was like a
loving parent so there is little mention of sin and punishment. Using metaphors
from the natural world, she taught children the comforting doctrine that God would
protect them and that there is an afterlife. Complex doctrinal ideas were not
important at this stage.\(^{119}\)

Having laid the foundations of a simple Christian faith, Evenings encouraged
older children to be freethinkers and develop their beliefs through rational
examination. In Evenings children were exposed to some unorthodox beliefs; for
instance, “The Transmigrations of Indur” introduced them to the idea of
reincarnation.\(^{120}\) This story was attributed to Aikin by his daughter; Barbauld was
ambivalent about metaphysical ideas and considered their discussion only
appropriate for the most intellectually questioning students.\(^{121}\) She wrote in her
essay “On Prejudice”:

Metaphysical questions of space and time, necessity and free-will, and a
thousand others, may safely be left for that age which delights in such
discussions. They have no connection with conduct, and none have any
business with them at all but those who are able by such studies to exercise
and sharpen their mental powers.\(^{122}\)

Conservatives like Mrs Trimmer considered Barbauld’s and Aikin’s approach was
deeply subversive. She had admired Hymns but criticised it for doctrinal errors.\(^{123}\)
McCarthy claims that she imitated Barbauld’s “familiar conversation” in Lessons
but disliked it when a dialogue between parent and child was used to discuss
political ideas in Evenings.\(^{124}\) In her periodical The Guardian of Education she
warned parents to beware of exposing their children to radical ideologies under the
guise of harmless stories. She criticised radical children’s writers for following
Rousseau’s advice to defer religious instruction and allow children to choose a

\(^{118}\) Ibid.
\(^{119}\) Ibid.
\(^{120}\) Aikin and Barbauld, “The Transmigrations of Indur”, Evenings at Home 2: 1–34.
\(^{121}\) For a full discussion of this ambivalence see Chapter 1.
\(^{122}\) Barbauld, “On Prejudice” 344.
\(^{123}\) For details of Trimmer’s criticisms see McCarthy and Kraft’s notes to the text of “Hymns in Prose
for Children” 237–60.
\(^{124}\) McCarthy, “Mother of all Discourses” 89.
religion for themselves.\textsuperscript{125} She claimed their books were “expressly designed to sow the seeds of infidelity, and of every bad principle, in the minds of the rising generation”.\textsuperscript{126} Aware of the revolutionary potential, she wrote:

> It is more consistent with the public interests at large to educate children to be contented with the laws and long established customs of their ancestors, than to raise desires in their minds which, if generally inculcated, would probably lead to a revolution in government.\textsuperscript{127}

As previous critics have established, the first generation of Romantics attacked Barbauld from a different perspective. Charles Lamb, Wordsworth and Coleridge accused the “cursed Barbauld crew” of impairing the imagination and independent thinking of children by their didactic approach to education.\textsuperscript{128} Lamb described Barbauld’s books as full of “knowledge insignificant and vapid”. He argued that science was replacing poetry in the lives of children.\textsuperscript{129} Richardson argues that although no single conception of the child characterises the canonical Romantics, one dominant theme was the unprecedented significance of childhood.\textsuperscript{130} Emphasising the importance of the imagination and arguing that it should not be limited by artificial restraints, they promoted the importance of fairy-tales in inspiring the imagination.\textsuperscript{131} The Romantics also opposed the increasing politicisation of childhood. However Richardson claims that there was a political element in their championing of fairy-tales as it relied on a Burkean conception of “oral literature”.\textsuperscript{132} Fairy-tales represented “a harmless, pacifying alternative to radical intellectualism (…) fairyland found unexpected allies in writers who found in fantasy a happy escape from more direct assaults on conventional morality and conservative politics”.\textsuperscript{133}

> It is evident that the dichotomisation of children’s literature into Romanticism versus Rationalism, imaginative or didactic writing, political or poetical, was not as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{125} Howard 642.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Sarah Trimmer, \textit{The Guardian of Education} I: 64. Qtd. in Howard 644.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Trimmer I: 265. Qtd. in Howard 645.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Letter from Charles Lamb to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 23 October 1802. Qtd. in Myers, “Of Mice and Mothers” 266.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Richardson, \textit{Literature, Education, and Romanticism} 9.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Ibid. 31.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid. 123.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Ibid. 121.
\end{itemize}
black and white as the Romantics and their later supporters portray it. Richardson and McCarthy demonstrate there was not a clear binary between Rationalists and Romantics. 

Both groups agreed on the primacy of the object world in early education. Both were more concerned to instil “intellectual preparedness” than acquiring factual knowledge. Myers argues that science was not the binary opposite of poetry, as Lamb claimed, but “its ally”. Barbauld believed the arts and science were both necessary for a well-balanced society. In Lessons, natural and social science were taught in a lucid, simple language which encouraged Charles to feel and think poetically. In Evenings Barbauld and Aikin demonstrated a “holistic approach” to knowledge, which blurred disciplinary boundaries between science, literature, morality and politics.

Richardson emphasises the disciplinary aspect of rationalist educational theories, in which he describes the parent as in a double role, as “friend and spymaster”, supervising the child. He claims that moral tales, like the ones in Lessons and Evenings, are based on the assumption that the child reader is not to make moral evaluations on its own; a controlling adult figure guides the choices. The ethical code is clearly established by the author, and although “the child protagonist may at times be called upon to make an ‘independent’ judgement, it is always made clear to the child reader which choice is the correct one” (emphasis original). Recent critics have challenged this view. McCarthy is critical of Richardson’s portrayal of “sinister forces making for an oppressive social

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134 McCarthy, “Mother of all Discourses” 87; Richardson, Literature, Education, and Romanticism 118.

135 Richardson, Literature, Education, and Romanticism 59.

136 Myers, “Of Mice and Mothers” 271.

137 McCarthy demonstrates how metaphors are used in Mother’s examination of animals. A snail’s shell is its “house” (1: 20), a lamb’s wool is its “petticoat” (2: 51), grass is described as a “carpet out of doors” (3: 15–18). By making objects and animals speak she introduces Charles into “the fictive, allegorical, animistic discourse often associated with poetry, and into tropes and symbols that are the staples of poetry”. “Mother of all Discourses” 101–2.

138 Ready, “And make thine own Apollo” 70. In his letters to his son Arthur, Aikin explained: “Almost all the branches of knowledge have a mutual connection and dependence.” John Aikin, Letters 1792–1793 2. For a discussion of Barbauld’s attitude to natural science see Bellanca 50–2.

139 Richardson, Literature, Education, and Romanticism 49. He argues that the new educational theories were both disciplinary and progressive. He claims that Locke’s reformist agenda involved “a program of discipline, surveillance, and the insinuation of a self-regulating moral conscience. Coercion gives place to an affectionate relation between parent and child, precisely because the latter is seen as a more effective and durable form of discipline. Similarly, while the development of the child’s powers of reasoning and judgement are stressed this process must be supervised and adjusted with great care, so that discipline can become properly internalised” (44, 48).

140 Ibid. 142–3.
hegemony". Brad Sullivan claims he does not examine the ideas of individual educators closely enough, nor does he focus on a specifically Dissenting education. Dissenters did not want to stifle individuality. Priestley opposed a national education system because of its potential to be used by the government for indoctrination and its tendency to create uniformity. In his address on the proper objects of education he stated that if the minds of youth “be cramped by systems and thereby habituated to servitude, and disinclined to think for themselves in their early years, they will be prepared to oppose, instead of favouring any great and noble efforts”. As Lucy Aikin explained, her father John Aikin did not “desire even from his own children a blind and prejudiced adherence to his opinions; but, on the contrary, never ceased to impress upon them (...) that their reason was given them for the discovery of truth, and that there were no subjects on which it was not allowable, and even laudable, to exercise it independently.”

BARBAULD’S AND AIKIN’S COLLABORATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS IN PRACTICE: ON INEQUALITY OF CONDITIONS

Critics have convincingly demonstrated Barbauld’s and Aikin’s radical attitude to war, slavery and imperialism in Evenings. My focus will be on their socio-economic views and attitudes to hierarchies. Sullivan suggests the aim in Evenings is to overthrow hierarchies. Similarly, Howard claims that Barbauld’s animal stories destabilise hierarchies by presenting alternative forms of social organisation. In contrast, Carol Shiner Wilson portrays Barbauld as upholding class distinctions. This divergence in critics’ opinions is understandable if Evenings is read in isolation; some stories seem to suggest that the poor should be content with their

141 McCarthy, “Mother of all Discourses” 87.
142 Sullivan writes: “Since Richardson does not aim in his text to examine Dissenting education closely, the reader is left with a potentially Gradgrindian view of educational views and practices.” Brad Sullivan, “Cultivating a ‘Dissenting Frame of Mind’: Radical Education, the Rhetoric of Inquiry, and Anna Barbauld’s Poetry”, Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net 45 (2007) Feb. 48 paragraphs.
143 Richardson, Literature, Education, and Romanticism 87.
144 Priestley, The proper objects of education 9.
145 Lucy Aikin, Memoir 201–2.
146 Sullivan links Barbauld’s questioning of hierarchies to her Dissenting “frame of mind” which was “marked by a refusal to accept traditional authority as fixed and final.”
147 Howard 662.
station in life, while others imply rebellion is acceptable. These inconsistencies reflect Barbauld’s attempt to respond to the rapid changes in society. The tensions in her work suggest the difficulties of applying her benevolent philosophy to real life situations. However, although some of the ambiguities remain, by setting the stories in *Evenings* in a wider context we can gain a more coherent understanding of Barbauld’s attitude to inequality. I intend to draw on Krawczyk’s idea of “collaborative consciousness” and his model of reading Barbauld’s and Aikin’s ideas together to provide a more complete picture. Barbauld’s most important individual contribution to the socio-economic debate was her essay “Thoughts on the Inequality of Conditions”; Krawczyk reads this in conjunction with John Aikin’s letter to his son “On Inequality”. He concludes that the two works reinforce each other’s ideas but Barbauld “pushes her brother’s arguments in radical directions that given his audience he simply could not pursue”. Building on Krawczyk’s analysis, I will examine Barbauld’s and Aikin’s other works on poverty (Barbauld’s poem “To the Poor”, her *Remarks on Mr Gilbert Wakefield’s Enquiry* and “The Rich and the Poor: A Dialogue”, and John Aikin’s 1788 article on poverty in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*) to provide a deeper understanding of Barbauld’s essay on inequality and the stories on hierarchy in *Evenings*. I will set the ideas in historical context and compare them to the attitudes of Burke, Smith, Paine, Godwin and Priestley.

In the 1790s, inequality between rich and poor became a controversial political issue which was given considerable attention by Parliament, social reformers and philanthropists. Modern historians dispute the extent of the problem. Ian Christie argues that the proportion of people in poverty was shrinking in relation to the total population, and that large numbers of people were rising to ranks where they had a modest degree of comfort and prosperity. However, Roger Wells provides a less sanguine assessment. In 1794–6 and 1799–1801

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149 See “The Little Philosopher” which approvingly describes a poor, eight-year-old boy content with his position in life. Aikin and Barbauld, *Evenings at Home* (1793) 3: 144–50. “Humble Life; or, the Cottagers” also portrays the contented life of a poor weaver. *Evenings at Home* (1796) 5: 123–35. These stories are in contrast to the “Master and Slave” which supports rebellion. *Evenings at Home* (1796) 6: 81–8.


152 Ibid. 181.
there were famines in which people starved to death. In these years there was a major ideological conflict between moral and laissez faire economics, local and central government. While Parliament and the government insisted on free-market principles, the judges, supported by many magistrates and parish officers, insisted that the common law could be used to alleviate poverty and implement the “moral economy”.

Representing the two extremes of the political debate, Thomas Paine promoted radical ideas of state intervention, while Edmund Burke represented the laissez faire argument. In *Rights of Man* Part II, instead of unfettered competition Paine promoted ordinary people working together in a spirit of co-operation and of state intervention on behalf of the weak, the sick, the old and the young. He proposed the redistribution of the national income from taxation in favour of the poor and anticipated the welfare state. In contrast, Burke’s *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*, (written in 1795 but published in 1800) opposed state intervention and systematic charity in “philosophic” terms, claiming that the interests of employer and employee were not at variance. The system was based on employment of wage-labour by capital so as to yield a profit to the capitalist, whose interests are served by healthy workers. Burke argued that “of all things, an indiscreet tampering with the trade of provisions is the most dangerous (…) To provide for us in our necessities is not in the power of Government (…) It is in the power of Government to prevent much evil; it can do very little positive good in this, or perhaps in any thing else”.

At this time class consciousness was developing. E. P. Thompson argues that “the outstanding fact” of the period between 1790 and 1830 was the formation of the working class. There was the growing consciousness of an identity of interests between the diverse groups of working people. There was also the development of corresponding forms of political and industrial organisation.

154 Ibid. 221–5.
156 Ibid. 60
158 Thompson 212–13.
Written in or after 1800 (although it was not published until 1807 in John Aikin’s magazine *The Athenaeum*), Barbauld’s essay “Thoughts on Inequality” was part of the topical political and moral debate. Barbauld considered that poverty was one of the main indictments against British society. She wrote: “There is nothing which a humane and considerate mind contemplates with more pain, than the great inequality with which the advantages and enjoyments of life are dealt out to different classes of men”. Barbauld’s use of the words “humane and considerate” emphasises that her approach was based in genuine sensibility. Similarly, Lucy Aikin described her father as having a “remarkable degree of fellow-feeling with the poor, a desire to raise them in their own estimation and that of others to what he regarded as their due level” (emphasis original). It is this “fellow-feeling” which distinguishes Barbauld’s and Aikin’s approach from many of their middle-class contemporaries. Drawing on Butler’s analysis of John Thelwall’s work, I suggest that their expression of heartfelt sympathy for the poor was similar to Thelwall’s oratory, in which he encouraged his middle-class hearers to show humanity. It also resembled Adam Smith’s attitude; Caroline Robbins argues that “what deeply stirred Smith’s sympathy was the condition of the lower ranks of society”.

Barbauld differed from many of her middle-class contemporaries in her awareness that “the poor” should not be treated as one undifferentiated, threatening mass. As the political activist Francis Place complained, the middle and upper class failed to recognise the great disparity in status, skills and conditions among the “lower orders”. Middle-class fears took two main forms: the poor might organise collectively and assert their power. Secondly, if the numbers of paupers needing assistance increased it would place a heavy financial burden on society. Barbauld examined these concerns in her essay. She did not

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159 It was published in *The Athenaeum* 2 (July 1807) under ALB’s initials. McCarthy and Kraft 346.
164 Francis Place wrote: “If the character and conduct of the working-people are to be taken from reviews, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, reports of the two Houses of Parliament and the Factory Commissioners, we shall find them all jumbled together as the ‘lower orders’, the most skilled and the most prudent workman, with the most ignorant and imprudent labourers and paupers, though the difference is great indeed, and indeed in many cases will scarce admit of comparison.” Qtd. in Thompson 212.
accept Thomas Malthus’ argument in *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) that the numbers of the poor were increasing and might overwhelm society.\(^{165}\) She also challenged Patrick Colquhoun’s work on poverty, which overestimated the extent of the criminal poor.\(^{166}\) Mimicking Colquhoun’s argument, Barbauld wrote: “We always use the phrase of a numerous poor, a burdensome poor, a country overstocked with poor, whenever from any accidental overflow, they happen to exist in greater numbers than we can conveniently use” (emphases original).\(^{167}\) Barbauld’s emphasis on the word “use” implied the poor were exploited by the rich.

Reflecting her emphasis on the precision of language, Barbauld realised that “the poor” was a term which needed to be subdivided before it could be used in any meaningful sense in the socio-economic debate. Although Barbauld did not refer to the “working class”, as this was not a term in common use at the time, her writing demonstrates an early awareness of its existence. In her essay “The Rich and the Poor” she distinguished between the poor and “paupers”, or what later generations would describe as the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. Mrs Beechwood tells her daughter Harriet: “To whatever degree of indigence you apply the term, you must take care not to confound a poor man with a pauper” (emphases original).\(^{168}\) She claims that there is “a real and essential difference” between a poor man who works for his living and “the idle, the profligate, and the dissolute, who are maintained upon charity”.\(^{169}\) She argues that to be a pauper is often the “consequence of vice; and where it is not, it justly degrades a man from his rank in society”.\(^{170}\) Demonstrating her respect for the “industrious” poor, Barbauld claimed that there was little difference in values between the middle classes and skilled workers. In *Civic Sermons* Barbauld described these values as

\(^{165}\) McCarthy and Kraft n.2 348. For a further discussion of Barbauld’s attitude to Malthus see Chapter 6.

\(^{166}\) Colquhoun estimated that the criminal classes made up 115,000 out of a metropolitan population of less than one million. His estimate of the same class for the whole country totalled 1,320,716. For a full discussion of Colquhoun’s work see Thompson 59–60. Thompson writes that Colquhoun’s figures were “impressionistic estimates. They reveal as much about the mentality of the propertied classes (who assumed – not without reason – that any person out of steady employment and without property must maintain himself by illicit means) as they do about the actual criminal behaviour of the unpropertied” (60).

\(^{167}\) Barbauld, “On Inequality” 348.


\(^{169}\) Ibid.

\(^{170}\) Ibid.
respecting property rights, caring for their families and relishing the conveniences and delicacies of life.\footnote{Barbauld, \textit{Civic Sermons} 8.}

Like the majority of her contemporaries, radicals as well as conservatives, Barbauld was unsympathetic to the “undeserving” poor. In \textit{Civic Sermons} she wrote: “All that Government \textit{can} do for you is to soften and alleviate the miseries you bring upon yourselves, by your thoughtlessness and your vices” (emphasis original).\footnote{Ibid.} She contrasted them with respectable citizens, whatever their rank in life, “who are sober, industrious, and thoughtful”.\footnote{Ibid.} Her distinction between the “thoughtful” and “thoughtless” is similar to Priestley’s comment in his \textit{Account of a Society, for Encouraging the Industrious Poor} (1787). He wrote: “At present the thoughtless are maintained by the exertions of the thoughtful”.\footnote{Joseph Priestley, \textit{An Account of a Society, for Encouraging the Industrious Poor. With a table for their use. To which are prefixed, some considerations on the state of the poor in general} (Birmingham, 1787) 6.}

She contrasted them with respectable citizens, whatever their rank in life, “who are sober, industrious, and thoughtful”.\footnote{Ibid.} Her distinction between the “thoughtful” and “thoughtless” is similar to Priestley’s comment in his \textit{Account of a Society, for Encouraging the Industrious Poor} (1787). He wrote: “At present the thoughtless are maintained by the exertions of the thoughtful”.\footnote{Ibid.} Like Priestley, Barbauld was critical of the poor who were destitute through their own moral failings. However, Barbauld and Aikin distinguished this group from those who relied on charity due to accident, ill-health or old age. As Mr Everard tells his son in the \textit{Evenings} story, “Humble Life; or the Cottagers”, hard-working men like the weaver “may, from untoward accidents, be rendered objects of our compassion, but they never can of our contempt”.\footnote{Aikin and Barbauld, \textit{“Humble Life; or, the Cottagers”}, \textit{Evenings at Home} 5: 133–4.}

Throughout their works Barbauld and Aikin used the imagery of bees to represent the hard-working poor and wasps and other pests as metaphors for the “undeserving”.\footnote{Drawing on Daniel B. Watkins’ research, I suggest that this imagery comes from Virgil’s \textit{Georgics}, book 4, which is about the management of bees. Virgil describes the bees in social terms as dedicated to building workable social relations that guarantee the well-being of the whole colony. Virgil suggested that bees offered an example of how humans could work together. As Daniel P. Watkins demonstrates, Barbauld had read this work as her epigraph to her poem “On the Backwardness of the Spring” is taken from it. Watkins 83–4.} In her essay “On Inequality” Barbauld described the “small tribes” of animals “who have no pasture but the field of other’s labours”.\footnote{Barbauld, “On Inequality” 353.} She wrote:

\begin{quote}
We are in a constant state of warfare with them (...) They are for ever nibbling at our property (...) hovering about and sipping in our cup, some with insidious stealth, others with bolder warfare; some make us sensible of their sting.\footnote{Ibid.}
\end{quote}
This was similar to the imagery of the troublesome wasp in the *Evenings* story “The Wasp and the Bee”. This dialogue questioned why bees and wasps were treated differently although they were similar. The bee claims it is because the wasp is not useful to humans and is troublesome. However, as Howard points out, the message of “The Wasp and the Bee” implies that we should not judge people or animals purely on the criterion of utility. As the wasp cannot do anything to make himself more useful it cannot be seen as a moral failing; Howard argues that this implies that “the inability of some people to make themselves economically useful (...) ought not to be seen as moral failing” (emphasis original).\(^{179}\) He adds that it suggests that Barbauld rejected the utilitarian idea that the poor always had to be “useful”. It also challenged conservative attitudes, exemplified in Mrs Trimmer’s *Fabulous Histories*, that treating “inferiors” kindly is not only a Christian duty but a way of maximising their utility and productivity.\(^{180}\) My reading of Barbauld’s *Remarks* supports Howard’s argument. Barbauld wrote: “He [the poor man] hears those of his class spoken of collectively, as of machines which are kept in repair indeed, but of which the sole use is to raise the happiness of the higher orders”.\(^{181}\) In *Evenings* Barbauld and Aikin promoted the concept that each individual has an inherent value as they are made by God. Reflecting this idea, in her essay “On Inequality” Barbauld argued that although pests/paupers are a nuisance we should not destroy them because “it is the intent of Nature that all her children should live”.\(^{182}\) Society is interdependent and everyone has a right to exist.

The argument for the interdependence of different classes sounds like Burke’s theory that in society the interests of the rich and the poor are the same. However, Barbauld and Aikin believed that this interdependent relationship was being broken down by industrialisation and the government’s policies which favoured the rich at the expense of the poor; these made men destitute through no moral fault of their own. Between 1760 and 1820 wholesale enclosure led to the loss of common rights, leaving the labourer landless. In the new industrial towns

\(^{179}\) Howard 657.

\(^{180}\) Ibid. 653.


\(^{182}\) Barbauld, “On Inequality” 353.
large-scale enterprise and the factory system led to exploitation of the workers.\textsuperscript{183}

In her \textit{Remarks} Barbauld appeared to be critical of enclosure. She wrote:

\begin{quote}
How many a man exists who possesses not the smallest property in this earth of which you call him lord; who, from the narrowing spirit of property, is circumscribed and hemmed in by the possessions of his opulent neighbours, till there is scarcely an unoccupied spot of verdure on which he can set his foot (…) without a trespass.\textsuperscript{184}
\end{quote}

In this new economic climate, working hard was not always enough. As Mrs Meanwell pointed out to her daughter in the \textit{Evenings} story “A Dialogue on Different Stations in Life", even though Plowman the labourer works exceptionally hard his family often have insufficient food. She explained that there are “a great many” poor people who are “very deserving”.\textsuperscript{185} In a 1788 letter to a friend Aikin wrote:

\begin{quote}
Their [the poor’s] state is, indeed, so bad in many respects, that, considering they form the great bulk of the community, it ought, I think, to diminish our boasts of a perfect form of constitution, and incite us to some extensive and effectual reform.\textsuperscript{186}
\end{quote}

Government intervention came in the form of the Poor Laws. Rate-payers of all parishes or urban areas were responsible for maintaining the poor. The aged and infirm were given doles to purchase food and pay rent or the provision of board and accommodation in a workhouse. For the able bodied, the Poor Law stated that work was to be found for them if possible, and if not parish work would be required in return for maintenance.\textsuperscript{187} From 1795 the Speenhamland system became common in most counties in England, giving poor relief to supplement low wages with the amount calculated according to the price of bread.\textsuperscript{188}

Like many Dissenters, Barbauld and Aikin were critical of the Poor Laws.\textsuperscript{189} However, their criticism differed from some of their co-religionists, most notably Priestley. In his 1787 pamphlet \textit{An Account of a Society, for Encouraging the Industrious Poor}, Priestley examined “the present state of the Poor” (emphasis

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{183} Thompson 217.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Barbauld, \textit{Remarks} 44.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Akin and Barbauld, “A Dialogue on Different Stations in Life”, \textit{Evenings at Home} 1: 51.
\item \textsuperscript{186} Lucy Aikin, \textit{Memoir} 128.
\item \textsuperscript{187} Christie 183–6.
\item \textsuperscript{188} Butler, \textit{Burke, Paine, Godwin} 60.
\item \textsuperscript{189} Many middle-class liberals wanted to see the Poor Laws abolished. Kramnick 63.
\end{itemize}
While he criticised the benefits available as too generous, Barbauld and Aikin argued that they were insufficient. As a doctor in Norfolk, where the workhouse system was widely adopted, Aikin visited a “house of industry” and was appalled by its prison-like atmosphere and the penal attitude of the authorities towards the unemployed and destitute. In reaction he wrote an article for the Gentleman’s Magazine in January 1788. I suggest that this article was addressed not only to the government but also to Priestley’s An Account of a Society, for encouraging the industrious poor which was written the previous year.

Breaking down hierarchical distinctions, Aikin wrote: “With respect to the Poor Man’s RIGHTS, I presume they are naturally the same with the rich man’s” (emphasizes original). The idea of natural equality and rights was radical, but equally progressive was his argument for the economic support of the poor. He argued that a “willingness to labour” (emphasis original) was all that could be asked in return for the poor being provided with financial security. They should be given not just necessities but comforts because they had already contributed to society through their work. Comparing the working poor to the productive bee he wrote that he should “be fed with a portion of that honey which he collects for his masters. If this be denied him, will not he be apt to call for a fresh division of the common property, and say, ‘Give me the portion of good things which falleth unto me?’” This idea was similar to Adam Smith’s argument in The Wealth of Nations, that it is only fair that the workers whose work feeds, clothes and houses others should have a large enough share of the produce of their own labour to make them tolerably well fed, clothed and housed.

Suggesting that the rich are no better than the poor, Aikin added that if a poor man was unable to work through age or sickness, or if no work could be found for him, he had the right to demand financial support from “those who, without labouring any more than he, are supplied with abundance out of the general stock”

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190 Priestley, An Account 1.
191 Rodgers 105–6.
192 Qtd. in Lucy Aikin, Memoir 123.
193 Qtd. in ibid. 124.
194 Aikin wrote: “It is not enough, then, to provide for the poor, by keeping their souls and bodies together in the cheapest manner possible; they are to be maintained in the possession of their comforts” (emphasis original). Qtd. in ibid. 125.
195 Qtd. in ibid. 124.
Aikin’s ideas were similar to Paine’s in *Rights of Man* Part II. Paine suggested that the poor rates should be abolished and in their place a remission of taxes to the poor of double the amount of the present poor rates would be made out of the surplus taxes. He emphasised that this support was not charity, but a right, because the recipients had paid taxes. He provided a detailed, costed programme to better the condition of the poor, including child benefit and old age pensions. Aikin’s article pre-dates *Rights of Man*, and although it did not develop its argument in detail, for instance if the “general stock” is public or private money, a local or national fund, it demonstrated that Aikin was on the radical wing of the debate.

Aikin also engaged with Priestley’s ideas in his *Account*. Priestley claimed that the present system of provision for the poor was too generous and a disincentive to work. He argued that many abused the system and if “the provision for our poor [was] twice as much as it now is, we should soon find twice the number of poor we now have (…) Men will always live without labour, or upon the labour of others, if they can”. Instead of the Poor Laws, Priestley suggested that the “industrious poor” should pay into a fund every week; if they became disabled by sickness or accidents they would draw on this fund. Encouraging the poor to provide for themselves would make them industrious and independent and “in time render almost all foreign assistance unnecessary”. “The Rookery” in *Evenings* suggests that Aikin admired this scheme. Returning to the image of the bee to represent the hard-working poor, he described how bees “lay up a store of provision, which is the property of the whole community, and is not used except at certain seasons, and under certain regulations”. A beehive is praised as “a true image of a commonwealth, where no member acts for himself alone, but for the whole body”. The principle upon which they associate is “to obtain some benefit for the whole body, not to give particular advantage to the few” (emphasis original).

In his *Account* Priestley recommended a coercive approach, suggesting there should be a law which made his scheme “not a matter of choice, but of

200 Ibid. 11.
201 Aikin and Barbauld, *Evenings at Home* 1: 83.
"necessity" (emphases original).\textsuperscript{202} It seems unlikely that Aikin would have supported this aspect of the project. Arguing from a liberal perspective, he supported the freedom of the individual to act as he pleased. He wrote:

The poor man is comforted under his poverty by thinking himself free (...) He pleases himself in imagining that he possesses it; and that he may go out or come in, work or play, at his own option. He likes to be the judge of his own wants, and to provide for them after his own manner. (emphasis original)\textsuperscript{203}

I suggest that Aikin was more understanding of the poor man’s culture than Priestley and saw his motivations as the same as other sections of society. Priestley argued for “the suppression of supernumerary alehouses” (emphasis original) because he claimed workmen spent any extra money there “where they contract the worst habits, and often encourage every kind of vice and licentiousness”.\textsuperscript{204} In contrast, Aikin distinguished between the inveterate drunkard and the working man who enjoyed a social drink. He wrote: “The bare mention of these [the social and convivial enjoyments], in a poor man, strikes many with the idea of great criminality, and the appellations of drunken and idle are liberally bestowed with great indignation”.\textsuperscript{205} Aikin recognised that it was “natural” for a man to seek relaxation in an alehouse after a hard day’s labour.\textsuperscript{206} He called for the poor to be judged by the same criteria as their wealthy counterparts:

The holiday festivities, the rustic games, and athletic exercises, are as welcome to the labourer, as the Opera-house and Almack’s to the lord; and who will say, that the pleasures of the former are not as well earned as those of the latter? Without these sweeteners, what would be the bitter cup of a poor man’s life.\textsuperscript{207}

Aikin’s argument was unusual; Thompson claims it was the “natural tendency of authority to regard taverns, fairs, any large congregations of people, as a nuisance – sources of idleness, brawls, sedition or contagion”.\textsuperscript{208} This attitude could be found in the utilitarian attitudes of the new manufacturing class, who needed to create a disciplined workforce, the Methodists who portrayed such entertainments

\textsuperscript{202} Priestley, \textit{An Account} 13.
\textsuperscript{203} Qtd. in Lucy Aikin, \textit{Memoir} 126.
\textsuperscript{204} Priestley, \textit{An Account} 5, 16.
\textsuperscript{205} Qtd. in Lucy Aikin, \textit{Memoir} 127.
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{208} Thomspson 62.
as sinful, and the first leaders of working-class movements, like Francis Place, who emphasised the importance of self-discipline. Aikin’s more understanding attitude was more like Adam Smith’s examination of the needs and rewards of the working poor. After considering their leisure and the disadvantages of a limited education, he attributed drunkenness or disorderly behaviour, not to viciousness, but to ignorance which left no other recourse open to young working men. Caroline Robbins writes: “His most striking passages were devoted to sympathetic consideration of the workers.”

Like her brother, Barbauld argued in her essay “Thoughts on the Inequality of Conditions” that there should not be one rule for the rich and another for the poor. Explaining what she meant by the “enjoyments of life” which all should be entitled to, she wrote that they included:

A plentiful table, lightsome and well-furnished apartments, apparel of delicate manufacture, power to command the attendance of others, and freedom from any obligation to coarse or disgusting employments; to labour that exhausts life, or privations that render it of little value. To these may be added a share of deference, respect, a facility of access to objects of taste and curiosity, with all those other circumstances through which the rich feel their superiority over the poor.

This comment implied that workers were exploited by bad working conditions. Her suggestion that the rich deliberately maintained inequality because it allowed them to feel superior is a theme developed throughout her essay; she challenged this assumption of superiority.

As in Sins of Government and Civic Sermons, in “Thoughts on the Inequality of Conditions” Barbauld inverted conservative arguments for democratic purposes. Burke argued in his Thoughts and Details on Scarcity that the rich are “the pensioners of the poor” and they are under an absolute, hereditary dependence on those who labour. Barbauld also portrayed the rich as dependent, but she took it further to challenge class hierarchies by suggesting that the skilled workers were superior because their power was based on skill. Suggesting that natural equality existed between a so-called “master” and his servants, she wrote:

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209 Ibid. 62–3.
212 Qtd. in Butler, Burke, Paine, Godwin 62.
If he talks with his gardener about fruit walls, or with his housekeeper about setting out an entertainment, he will find they are the people of consequence (…) So well is this understood that workmen of all kinds are the acknowledged masters of those who employ them (…) Some kinds of authority maybe usurped, but the authority which arises from technical skill never can.214

Suggesting that workers could be the “masters” had a revolutionary import. Equally subversive was the implication that aristocratic authority was “usurped”. The respect deserved by the skilled working class was also instilled in the young middle class in the Evenings story “Humble Life; or, the Cottagers”. Mr Everard takes his son Charles to visit a weaver and his family because: “I doubt you hardly think them human creatures”.215 However, he shows his son that the weaver and his children are in some ways his superior: “Here are several arts, you see, in this house, which both you and I should be much puzzled to set about”.216 In her Remarks Barbauld argued that the rich and the poor were spiritually equal and that, if measured by the Christian criteria that really mattered, the poor were not inferior. She wrote:

Here [in 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 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.217

The only genuine superiority Barbauld granted the rich was good taste. In “The Rich and the Poor” she wrote:

The higher ranks have so many advantages for cultivating taste, so much money to lay out in decoration, and are so early taught the graces of air and manner to set off those decorations, that it would be absurd to deny their superiority in this particular.218

214 Ibid. 349–50. Barbauld’s ideas echo John Aikin’s comments in his 1788 article for the Gentleman’s Magazine. He wrote: “Set the prince and the basket-maker together upon a desolate island, and it is certain the birth of the former will not be so good a plea for superiority as the skill of the latter.” Qtd. in Lucy Aikin, Memoir 123.
215 Aikin and Barbauld, “Humble Life; or, the Cottagers” 126.
216 Ibid. 128.
217 Barbauld, Remarks 46.
218 Barbauld, Works 2: 250.
In her essay “Thoughts on Inequality”, Barbauld mocked wealthy “philosophers” who argued that material comforts were nothing to do with happiness, which resided exclusively in the mind. Using sarcasm she wrote:

> We are therefore bound to believe that these gentlemen, though they appear to enjoy a good table, or an elegant carriage as well as their neighbours, in fact regard them with perfect indifference; for which reason I beg to be considered as only addressing those who share in the common feelings of mankind, and who are therefore apt, at times, to repine that in the common blessings of it there should exist so striking a disproportion.  

This comment challenges Wilson’s argument that Barbauld holds to “class boundaries”. Quoting from Barbauld’s “Against Inconsistency in our Expectations” Wilson claims that Barbauld’s Stoicism makes her articulate “her belief that God ordained a system of ‘laws as determined, fixed and invariable, as any of Newton’s Principia.’ We must live moderately, with equanimity and even resignation, for to ‘vex ourselves with fruitless wishes, or give way to groundless discontent’ leads to misery”. Although I accept Wilson’s reading of “Against Inconsistency”, I suggest that Barbauld was always aware of the limitations of the philosophy. As I show in Chapter 2, as early as her 1769 poem “Corsica” there were tensions between her Rational Dissenting attitudes to political activism and Stoical philosophy. Similar tensions can also be found in her later work. Although the stories in *Evenings* suggest that a Stoical acceptance of your station in life was the best way to find contentment, as the “Master and Slave” dialogue suggests, if suffering became degrading resistance, rather than passive acceptance was appropriate.

Barbauld’s “Thoughts on Inequality” suggested that Stoical philosophy was being misused by the wealthy to support a laissez faire approach which absolved them from having to decrease poverty. She argued from a practical rather than a philosophical perspective that the material conditions of the poor mattered and the level of inequality had become so great that a Stoical response was inadequate. She promoted a similar argument in her 1795 poem “To the Poor”. Employing sensibility, she imagined how the poor felt: “Who seest the rich, to heaven and fate resign’d,/Bear *thy* afflictions with a patient mind” (5–6; emphasis original). The emphasis Barbauld placed on “*thy*” highlighted the hypocrisy of this attitude; her

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221 Barbauld, “To the Poor”, McCarthy and Kraft 139–40.
use of this intimate term suggests that Barbauld considered the poor rather than
the rich were her friends. The poem was written in response to the famine of 1794–
5. Barbauld told a friend that it was “inspired by indignation on hearing sermons in
which the poor are addressed in a manner which evidently shows the design of
making religion an engine of government”. 222

I suggest that Wilson misreads this poem when she states that Barbauld
urged the poor to bear their wrongs in return for a divine reward. 223 Instead I
consider Barbauld was mimicking the words of conservative religious ministers in
the rhyming couplet “Bear, bear thy wrongs, fulfil thy destined hour,/Bend thy meek
neck beneath the foot of power” (11–12). 224 She was challenging, not condoning,
their sentiments. Angry that they used spiritual “threats” to keep the poor in order,
she wrote:

But when thou feel’st the great deliverer nigh,
And thy freed spirit mounting seeks the sky,
Let no vain fears thy parting hour molest,
No whispered terrors shake thy quiet breast,
Think not their threats can work thy future woe. (13–17)

Barbauld argued that the poor would be “freed” in the next life but that was not
conditional on their passive acceptance of hardship. Reflecting her Dissenting faith,
she rejected the Calvinist vision of a God of “terrors” for the image of a “deliverer”.
She distinguished between the man-made attitudes of organised religion which
were used for the political purposes of the state and her genuine, benevolent,
Christian faith.

Nor deem the Lord above, like Lords below.
Safe in the bosom of that love repose
By whom the sun gives light, the ocean flows,
Prepare to meet a father undismayed,
Nor fear the God whom priests and kings have made. (18–22)

222 Lucy Aikin’s note to the poem cites this quotation from a letter from Barbauld to a friend.
Barbauld, Works 1: 193; McCarthy suggests that Barbauld was reacting to a sermon preached by
the Reverend Samuel Glasse, chaplain-in-ordinary to the King, in July 1795. In A Word of Comfort
to the Poor, in Their Present Necessity, Glasse called on the poor to rely on Providence and not act
unlawfully or blame the government for creating their misery. Instead, they should believe that God
had made some rich and some poor. It was their duty to submit to the laws in the confidence that
223 Wilson, “Lost Needles, Tangled Threads” 179.
224 Barbauld, “To the Poor” 139.
As a Dissenter, and thus an outsider, Barbauld identified with the poor: “Whose bursting heart disdains unjust controll, /Who feel'st oppression's iron in thy soul” (7–8). However, she recognised that the position of the poor was worse because they faced material hardship: “the load of faint and feeble years” (9) and the lack of necessities. Reflecting the religious context of her argument, Barbauld used a quotation from Isaiah to demonstrate that a person’s material and spiritual well-being were intertwined.225 Linking them metaphorically, she wrote: “Whose bread is anguish and whose water tears” (10). In this poem Barbauld was not suggesting that the poor should revolt, but she expressed an understanding of their anger and why they might consider rebelling.

My reading of Barbauld’s poem “To the Poor” is reinforced by her comments in her Remarks. She wrote:

So high and haughty is the spirit of aristocracy, and such the increasing pride of the privileged classes, that it is to be feared, if men did not attend at the same place here [public worship], it would hardly be believed they were meant to go to the same place hereafter.226

In this passage she was accusing the upper classes of the sin of pride. The implication is that the true sinners were the rich who kept the poor in such dreadful circumstances. This argument was developed further in “Thoughts on Inequality”; McCarthy and Kraft set her argument in this essay in the context of Adam Smith’s and Karl Marx’s ideas; her description of individual labour as the source of wealth, and wealth as the power to command labour, came from Smith’s economic doctrine in The Wealth of Nations.227 They propose that Barbauld developed her argument to prefigure Marx’s ideas. Her description of the accumulation of wealth in ever fewer hands was similar to his doctrine. She considered that “the mischief” begins when “power embanks and confines the riches which otherwise would disperse and flow back in various channels to the community at large”.228 McCarthy and Kraft compare her description of the “unnatural separation between the enjoyment of a thing and the power of producing it” to Marx’s concept of “alienated labour”.229 Her idea that inequality was due to government policy is compared to

225 Isaiah 30:20, McCarthy and Kraft n.1 139.
226 Barbauld, Remarks 44.
227 McCarthy and Kraft n.1 347.
229 Ibid.
“Marx’s critique of bourgeois law and culture as devices for perpetuating bourgeois hegemony over the working class”. She wrote:

All the fences of law are provided, all the watchfulness of suspicion is awakened, all the salutary prejudices are cherished which may serve to keep down those who are already undermost, and to secure to those who have once acquired them the enjoyments and advantages of life.

Although there are similarities between Barbauld’s and Marx’s ideas, for instance her awareness of an early form of class consciousness and the exploitation of the working class, her ideas were not communist. At this time very few radicals proposed any form of communism. Coleridge in his pantisocratic phase opposed private property. Thomas Spence promoted a form of agrarian socialism. His message was addressed to the landless poor and differed from that of other radicals because he did not conciliate middle-class opinion by concealing the threat his ideas represented to existing property owners. Rather than the abolition of private property, Barbauld and Aikin emphasised the importance of an “idea of property” to all classes. The surest way to avoid revolution was to include the poor in a property-owning democracy. In her essay on inequality, Barbauld argued that if the ruling classes improved the economic and political conditions of the poor they would not pose a threat. In her essay on inequality, she wrote: “Let every man know what it is to have property, and you will soon awaken in him a sense of honesty. Make him a citizen, and he will love the constitution to which he belongs, and obey the laws he had helped to make.”

Her idea that through existing institutions oppression is systematised was similar to Godwin’s in his An Enquiry concerning Political Justice, and its influence on general virtues and happiness (1793). He considered aristocratic society was upheld by a deliberate fraud, or imposition of the governors on the governed. As legislators, the rich passed laws which disadvantaged the poor by placing a greater proportionate burden on them. Barbauld’s assessment also reflected Adam

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233 In his article on the poor in the Gentleman’s Magazine, Aikin wrote: “The poor man, poor as he is, loves to cherish some idea of property; – to say, my house, my garden, my furniture (…) And are not these respectable prejudices?” (emphases original). Qtd. in Lucy Aikin, Memoir 126.
235 Butler, Burke, Paine, Godwin 149–50.
Smith’s idea that government was too involved in the race of life because it reserved office, power and authority for the privileged and slanted the competition to favour the aristocracy, who lacked talent and virtue.\(^{236}\)

Rather than looking forward to a future egalitarian movement, Barbauld looked back to a past one. Contradicting Taylor’s claim that “‘levelling’ notions were as unwelcome to her as to any anti-jacobin propagandist”, in “Thoughts on Inequality” Barbauld wrote: “I have often considered with pleasure those levelling principles which are constantly at work, and prevent the accumulating principle”.\(^{237}\) Aikin used the same language in his letter on inequality:

> Every good government contains in it a *levelling principle*; for what is the purpose of equal laws, equal rights, equal opportunities of profiting by natural and acquired talents, but to annul artificial distinctions, and cause the race of life to be run fairly. (emphasis original)\(^{238}\)

Reflecting the way Barbauld and Aikin intermixed seventeenth-century political ideas with the latest eighteenth-century concepts, the use of the term “levelling” recalled the radical Civil War Levellers led by John Lillburne while the idea of “the race of life” echoed Adam Smith. The term “Leveller” became a smear used to describe intentions to destroy the nobility, abolish property and to make everyone equal.\(^{239}\) Blair Worden claims that using this language was unusual among late eighteenth-century radicals; they avoided the term or used it pejoratively. John Wilkes condemned “levelling principles” and John Thelwall equated “levelling” with “plunder”.\(^{240}\) Even Paine denied it was applicable to his radical ideas.\(^{241}\)

Reformers were wary of the term because loyalist groups used it against them, describing themselves as the “Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers”.\(^{242}\) By advocating “levelling”, Barbauld and Aikin were being deliberately provocative and signalling the radicalism of their ideas.

\(^{236}\) Kramnick 58.

\(^{237}\) Taylor 184; Barbauld, “On Inequality” 348.

\(^{238}\) Aikin, “On Inequality” 212.

\(^{239}\) Although Lillburne denied these unwarranted allegations, this connotation remained. Worden, 319–20.

\(^{240}\) Ibid. 329

\(^{241}\) Paine wrote: “We have heard the *Rights of Man* called a *levelling* system; but the only system to which the word *levelling* is truly applicable is the hereditary monarchical system. It is a system of *mental levelling*” (emphasis original). Paine 2: 21.

\(^{242}\) McCarthy and Kraft n.1 348.
However, as Aikin’s quotation demonstrates, the levelling they called for was limited despite the inflammatory rhetoric. Barbauld and Aikin were not revolutionaries; they wanted reform to prevent revolution. Barbauld accepted that some inequality was inevitable. Developing her brother’s argument in his letter on inequality, that as soon as man formed a society inequalities appeared, she claimed in “Thoughts on Inequality” that the “honourable origin of this disproportion is industry” (emphasis original), by which one man becomes wealthier than his weaker or more indolent neighbour through hard work and superior talent.\(^{243}\)

Barbauld admired people because of their “personal consequence” (emphasis original) which was the result of “personal capacity and experience”, not rank.\(^{244}\)

This was reflected in the portrayal of heroes in *Evenings* which defined a moral and virtuous man by his civic and economic activities. The engineer James Brindley who built the Duke of Bridgewater’s Canal was praised because through “the force of his own genius” he introduced improvements which promoted the comfort of future generations.\(^{245}\)

Her praise of the hard-working middle class in contrast to the indolent upper classes in “Thoughts on Inequality” echoed the stories in *Evenings* in which feckless aristocrats came to a bad end while industrious youths flourished.\(^{246}\)

Influenced by the Protestant work ethic, these stories emphasised that capitalism, if used in the right way, could promote the virtue and happiness of the individual and the community.

In her essay “What Is Education”, Barbauld wrote: “I would not be understood to inveigh against wealth, or against the enjoyments of it; they are real enjoyments”.\(^{247}\)

Her view can be traced back to Hutcheson’s ideas; he believed that there were real benefits from increased consumption. As Caroline Robbins argues, he distinguished between “the evils that might come from wealth and the

\(^{242}\) Barbauld, “On Inequality” 347.

\(^{244}\) Ibid. 349.

\(^{245}\) Aikin and Barbauld, “Great Men”, *Evenings at Home* 6: 11.

\(^{246}\) See Aikin and Barbauld, “Good Company”, *Evenings at Home* (1799) 4: 62. Mr Manly’s son, Henry, keeps good company with men who improve the morals and understanding and show politeness. They work hard as watchmakers, mechanics and scientists. He uses his skills in mechanics and chemistry in manufacturing and becomes prosperous, independent and respected. In contrast, Mr Lofty’s son, Frederick, seeks advancement by mixing with fashionable young men who indulge in “frolic and dissipation” (65). He squanders his money and ends up “despised and detested” (66).

good that might be enjoyed as a result of industry. Sober, plentiful consumption was not the same as luxury.\textsuperscript{248}

Although Barbauld did not oppose people making money, she believed there should not be too large a gap between the rich and the poor because it destroyed “the balance of society.”\textsuperscript{249} In “Thoughts on Inequality” she wrote that “power enables the indolent and the useless not only to retain, but to add to their possessions, by taking from the industrious the natural reward of their labour, and applying it to their own use” (emphasis original).\textsuperscript{250} These reservations about the damaging effects of too great accumulation of wealth were similar to Hutcheson’s. However, Barbauld did not go as far as her mentor; he suggested the radical idea of an agrarian law which would prevent any immediate increase of wealth in the hands of the few.\textsuperscript{251} Catharine Macaulay also supported these laws for a moderate limitation of wealth. However, Robbins argues that these proposals did not stem from a drastic desire to redistribute wealth; like Barbauld, their purpose was to maintain the balance of the state.\textsuperscript{252}

Criticism of the indolent aristocracy was the norm amongst radicals from Paine to Godwin. Radical Dissenters James Burgh, Richard Price and Priestley argued that the idle, profligate and unproductive were corrupt and that a system becomes corrupt if untalented parasites hold public office.\textsuperscript{253} Barbauld’s critique was also topical; Wells argues that soaring living costs and escalating local and national taxation hit the middle classes harder than the upper classes. Taxes on consumption penalised the poor.\textsuperscript{254} The potential for violence unless these injustices were ended was emphasised in Aikin’s letter on inequality: “If instead of counteracting by civil regulations the strong tendency to inequality, it be favoured

\textsuperscript{248} Robbins, \textit{The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealth} 191.
\textsuperscript{249} Barbauld, “On Inequality” 348.
\textsuperscript{250} Ibid. 347.
\textsuperscript{251} Robbins, \textit{The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealth} 191.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid. 15.
\textsuperscript{253} Kramnick 194.
\textsuperscript{254} Wells 194. In May 1795 John Aikin wrote to a friend criticising the effects of the government’s economic policy on the middle and lower classes: “I see irresistible power, under the direction, as I think, of little wisdom or honesty, involving us in difficulties and loading us with burthens which in the end must be sensibly felt, and that not by politicians and theorists alone. In short, I seriously fear that it will become a country in which a man of moderate resources, and with a family to provide for, cannot live, and then what will signify debating about our constitution? (…) If taxes and dearness of living more than keep pace with it, what can we do, especially those of us who are out of trade, but sink, sink?” (emphases original). Qtd. in Lucy Aikin, \textit{Memoir} 185.
A similar analysis of the danger of great inequality was examined in more detail by Godwin in *Political Justice*. He wrote:

A perpetual struggle with the evils of poverty, if frequently ineffectual, must necessarily render many of the sufferers desperate (…) The superiority of the rich, being thus unmercifully exercised, must inevitably expose them to reprisals; and the poor man will be induced to regard the state of society as a state of war, an unjust combination, not for protecting every man in his rights and securing to him the means of existence, but for engrossing all its advantages to a few favoured individuals, and reserving for the portion of the rest want, dependence and misery.

In “Thoughts on Inequality” Barbauld argued that unless inequality was decreased the poor might take the law into their own hands by forming a “secret combination” against the rich as a natural corrective to the accumulation of wealth and power. This comment implied a political as well as an economic threat, reminding conservatives of the secret radical organisations like the United Irishmen and Scotsmen whose membership was predominantly working class. Her idea that the poor needed to combine to counter-balance the superior economic power of the rich was similar to Godwin’s in *Political Justice*. He wrote: “Monopolies and patents are lavishly dispersed to such as are able to purchase them; while the most vigilant policy is employed to prevent combinations of the poor to fix the price of labour.”

As Wells establishes, during the 1790s workers resorted to trade unionism in reaction to technological change and sustained inflation. In London skilled tradesmen engaged in a constant struggle to win wage increases. Farm workers and country craftsmen also engaged in collective bargaining. Although this collective action was “painfully unsuccessful”, the middle and upper classes felt threatened. In 1799 and 1800 the government introduced legislation banning combinations. Thompson claims that the Combination Acts served the purpose for the aristocracy and manufacturers by repressing Jacobin conspiracies and

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256 Godwin 1: 35.
257 Barbauld, “On Inequality” 351. For a full discussion of Barbauld’s ideas of the form this “secret combination” could take see Krawczyk, *Romantic Literary Families* 46.
258 Godwin 1: 40.
259 Wells 193.
260 McCarthy and Kraft 346.
defeating workers’ “conspiracies” to increase wages.\textsuperscript{261} Responding defiantly in her essay, Barbauld wrote: “Laws are continually made against combinations, but the secret combination of the low against the high can never be prevented, because it is founded on the interest of the many, and the moral sense of all.”\textsuperscript{262} Her argument played on middle-class fears by emphasising the numerical power of the masses. Her approach was democratic and based on ideas of a moral economy.

To prevent revolution Barbauld and Aikin favoured some form of redistribution of wealth. However, they did not clearly set out proposals for the mechanisms involved, nor did they explain in detail the state’s role in the process. In her \textit{Memoir} of her father Lucy Aikin wrote that he thought “it was the duty of a Government calling itself free and enlightened, to take measures for lessening [inequality].”\textsuperscript{263} However, in his letter on inequality Aikin’s attitude seemed laissez faire; the government’s role was merely to “secure them [the poor] from oppression, and prevent their interests from being sacrificed to the avarice and ambition of the higher.”\textsuperscript{264} Barbauld’s and Aikin’s preference seems to have been for voluntary action by individuals which would encourage a moral change in both the rich and the poor. Drawing on civic humanist ideas of developing each person’s capacity for virtue, Aikin wrote “every man, however contracted his sphere of action, is able to advance the public good”.\textsuperscript{265}

Barbauld supported practical philanthropy, writing: “The best levelling principle is that philanthropy which is continually at work to smooth and soften the too great inequalities of life”.\textsuperscript{266} In \textit{Lessons} and \textit{Evenings} Barbauld and Aikin encouraged children to share; this translated in their adult essays to encouraging adults to redistribute some of their wealth to the poor. In \textit{Lessons}, when Charles is told about a destitute boy, Mama encourages him to take practical action rather than cry. He should give a starving boy a half-penny to buy a roll.\textsuperscript{267} The same moral is repeated in \textit{Evenings}. In the story “A Dialogue on Different Stations in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{261} Thompson 216–17.
\item \textsuperscript{262} Barbauld, “On Inequality” 352.
\item \textsuperscript{263} Lucy Aikin, \textit{Memoir} 122.
\item \textsuperscript{264} Aikin, “On Inequality” 217.
\item \textsuperscript{265} Ibid. 219.
\item \textsuperscript{266} Barbauld, “On Inequality” 355.
\item \textsuperscript{267} Barbauld, \textit{Lessons for children of three years old} 69–70.
\end{itemize}
Life*, when Sally says that she hopes nobody starves in England, Mrs Meanwell replies:

I hope not, for we have laws by which every person is entitled to relief from the parish, if he is unable to gain a subsistence; and were there no laws about it, I am sure it would be our duty to part with every superfluity, rather than let a fellow-creature perish for want of necessaries.268

For Barbauld and Aikin philanthropy involved educating the wealthy about the lives of the poor and establishing personal contact between the classes, not just financial gifts.269 In “Thoughts on Inequality” Barbauld wrote: “I am apt to suspect that the greatest good done by the numerous societies for the reformation of manners is, by bringing the poor in contact with the rich (...) The rich cannot seek the poor without beneficial effects for both parties”.270 Her argument was the same in Remarks. She argued that contact would encourage “a sense of duty and moral obligation”.271

In the late eighteenth century, organisations like the Sunday School Movement, Bishop Barrington’s Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor, and William Wilberforce and Dr John Bowdler’s Society for the Suppression of Vice and Encouragement of Religion were set up.272 With their emphasis on moral reform, these philanthropic and reformist movements were supported by middle class women, like Hannah More and Sarah Trimmer.273 However, unlike their more conservative counterparts, Barbauld and Aikin implied that the rich as much as the poor needed this contact to make them virtuous. In his letter on inequality Aikin emphasised the positive result of bringing “the spoilt child” in contact with “the abandoned outcast”.274 This idea was apparent in Evenings. In “A Dialogue on Different Stations of Life”, once the thoughtless princess is made aware of the true nature of the suffering of the poor, she immediately sacrifices her finery for poor

268 Aikin and Barbauld, “A Dialogue on Different Stations in Life”, *Evenings at Home* 1: 54.
269 See Barbauld’s “West End Fair”, written in 1807, which mocks genteel people who Barbauld considered were just playing at charity. She contrasts their actions with the genuine philanthropists, Joseph Lancaster, the educator who established schools for the poor, John Howard, the prison reformer, and Henry Thornton, who founded the Foreign Bible Society and supported Hannah More’s Sunday Schools. McCarthy and Kraft 152–3.
271 Barbauld, Remarks 39.
272 Thompson 60–1.
273 Wilson, “Lost Needles, Tangled Threads” 178.
In “Humble Life; or the Cottagers”, Mr Everard tells his son he will get the hard-working weaver a piece of wasteland so that he can grow potatoes. He explains: “When giving a little from the superfluities of persons in our situation would add so much to the happiness of persons in theirs, I am of opinion that it is unpardonable not to do it”.

Barbauld and Aikin believed that it was natural for humans to help others, because “we are so constituted that we cannot be happy ourselves without making others happy, the best end of living is to produce as much general happiness as lies in our power”.

Wilson criticises Barbauld’s idealised portrayal of the potential for relationships between rich and poor. She claims that female philanthropists’ “manner of condescension (…) must have grated on the nerves of the poor. Not all shone ‘with joy and gratitude’ (…) Rather this is how middle-class philanthropists needed to think the poor felt”. This criticism seems unfair to Barbauld and Aikin. Their attitude to the poor was realistic rather than sentimental. As a doctor, Aikin worked among the poor. In his letter he emphasised that it was important to observe and find solutions based on empiricism, not theoretical fictions. In her “Thoughts on Inequality” Barbauld demonstrated realism rather than idealism when she described the more subversive forms of redistribution. She cited approvingly, the overcharging of the rich by the working class for their services and the pilfering of small items. She claimed that preventing the lower orders “preying upon the property of the higher, would be a curse and not a blessing”. Giving an example, she vindicated the stevedores who unloaded West Indian ships’ cargoes and pilfered small goods. McCarthy and Kraft claim that Barbauld was responding to Colquhoun’s A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis (1796), which examined the crimes against public and private property. Colquhoun complained that theft by stevedores deeply affected the interest of the West Indian ship owners and

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276 Aikin and Barbauld, “Humble Life; or, the Cottagers”, Evenings at Home 5: 134.
278 Wilson, “Lost Needles, Tangled Threads” 178.
279 Aikin described the poor in detail. He wrote: “The sallow dingy countenances, uncombed locks, and, beggarly apparel of these people, disgust your senses, and their manners equally shock your moral feelings. You shrink back, and are almost ready to renounce the relationship of a common nature with such beings. The idea of their present and future existence makes you shudder.” “On Inequality” 214–15.
281 McCarthy and Kraft 345.
merchants. By using this example Barbauld was challenging Colquhoun’s criminalisation of the poor, inequality at home and the West Indian slave trade abroad.\textsuperscript{282} Being deliberately provocative Barbauld wrote:

\begin{quote}
I rather wish to consider them [the stevedores] as usefully employed in lessening the enormous inequality between the miserable beings who engage in them, and the great commercial speculators, in their way equally rapacious, against whom their frauds are exercised.\textsuperscript{283}
\end{quote}

Drawing on Thompson’s study, I suggest that Barbauld’s approach reflected “popular attitudes towards crime” which distinguished between the legal code and the unwritten popular code. Some crimes against authority were actively condoned by whole communities, for example poaching, coining and evasion of the window taxes and tithes.\textsuperscript{284} By siding with the popular code Barbauld was once again on the side of the poor rather than the middle or upper classes. She drew on the idea of natural justice to support her position. In “Thoughts on Inequality” Barbauld did not condone law-breaking, but she blamed the rich for allowing the situation to develop which made the poor have to choose between stealing and starving. The argument in the essay was similar to the \textit{Evenings} story “Mouse, Lapdog, and Monkey, a Fable”, in which the three animals were dependent on the benevolence of wealthy humans for survival.\textsuperscript{285} The uncharitable rich were portrayed as morally corrupt because they showed no sensitivity to genuine poverty, rewarding instead the servility of the lapdog and the buffoonery of the monkey. Sympathy was with the mouse, who complains: “Alas! How ignorant was I, to imagine that poverty and distress were sufficient recommendations to the charity of the opulent”.\textsuperscript{286}

In “Thoughts on Inequality”, Barbauld claimed that the poor should not be judged as harshly as the rich for minor crimes because their moral sense had been dulled by their degrading circumstances. Their behaviour was due to “the privations we impose”. Instead of improving their condition the ruling classes had chosen to pursue commerce and war. She argued that in their desire to maintain the distinction of ranks they “require that large classes shall be sacrificed”.\textsuperscript{287} She

\textsuperscript{282} McCarthy and Kraft n.1 353.
\textsuperscript{283} Barbauld, “On Inequality” 352–3.
\textsuperscript{284} Thompson 64.
\textsuperscript{285} Aikin and Barbauld, “Mouse, Lap-Dog, and Monkey. A Fable”, \textit{Evenings at Home} 1: 98–100.
\textsuperscript{286} Ibid. 100.
\textsuperscript{287} Barbauld, “On Inequality” 355.
suggested that “it is in their own power [the rich] to get rid of many of these
grievances whenever they please”. If they improved the economic and political
conditions of the poor they would no longer pose a threat. Her argument was
similar to Paine’s in *Rights of Man*. He complained that the poor were executed for
minor crimes but the rich had created their “wretchedness”. He wrote:

> Bred up without morals, and cast upon the world without a prospect, they
> are the exposed sacrifice of vice and legal barbarity. The millions that are
> superfluously wasted upon governments, are more than sufficient to reform
> those evils, and to benefit the condition of every man in a nation.

**CONCLUSION**

An examination of Barbauld’s and Aikin’s attitudes to inequality suggests that they
were more radical than some critics have portrayed them. Their ideas showed
similarities to those of Paine and Godwin. They were more sympathetic to the poor
than Priestley. Unlike many of their middle-class contemporaries, they rejected the
view that the poor were an innately criminal class who needed to be treated
punitively. Instead they distinguished between the different groups who made up
the “lower order” and demonstrated an early awareness of a distinct working class.
They suggested that this group were natural allies of the middle class because
they shared similar values. Thompson argues that if this alliance had occurred it
might have changed the course of British history. He writes: “The ‘natural’ alliance
between an impatient radically-minded industrial bourgeoisie and a formative
proletariat was broken as soon as it was formed (...) After the September
massacres all but a small minority of the manufacturers had been frightened from
the cause of reform.” He claims that if middle-class men like Wedgwood,
Wilkinson and Boulton had acted together with working class leaders like Hardy,
Place and Binns then Pitt would have been forced to grant many reforms. Instead
landowners and manufacturers were united in a common panic and the popular
societies were left too weak and inexperienced to achieve reform without middle-
class support.

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288 Ibid.
289 Paine 2: 91.
290 Thompson 195.
291 Ibid.
Thompson’s thesis supports my argument that Barbauld’s and Aikin’s attitudes to socio-economic problems and hierarchies were more radical and important than previously thought. However, it is easy to understand how the misreadings of their position developed. Their analysis of these issues was not set out as clearly as Paine’s, Godwin’s or Priestley’s. As this chapter demonstrates, to gain a detailed view of their attitude involves piecing together their ideas expressed in many different works written over a long period of time. Even after close examination ideological ambiguities remain. At times Barbauld’s and Aikin’s ideas seem laissez faire; at others they imply some degree of state intervention. Their views were not always consistent, but like other reformers, they were responding to the developing situation and working out responses to complex problems. Barbauld applied the methods she taught her pupils: to observe and then draw conclusions. As her attitude to education demonstrates, she believed not in telling people what to think but in encouraging them to consider different possibilities. She did not believe in imposing authoritarian solutions. As Howard suggests, the ambivalence of Barbauld’s and Aikin’s political message in *Evenings* reflected their pragmatic belief that no one ideology has all the answers.\(^{292}\) I suggest that it would be anachronistic to try to define Barbauld’s views as conservative or Marxist/socialist. Instead, her ideas were a subtle synthesis of her spiritual as well as her political beliefs; she combined liberal and civic humanist values with Rational Dissenting faith in the perfectibility of man. Her fundamental belief in the spiritual equality of all men and women inspired her “fellow-feeling” for the poor. Her approach to socio-economic issues treated the material, moral and spiritual needs of each individual as inextricably intertwined.

\(^{292}\) Howard writes: “The difficulty of ascertaining the political leanings of *Evenings at Home* springs out of its refusal of single answers – its refusal of both Burkean and Jacobin concepts of difference, both an inherent hierarchy and a hierarchy of utility – and its location of value in plurality and difference (...) *Evenings at Home* as a whole thus encourages, even demands, a form of critical reading in which multiple perspectives and meanings can coexist” (665; emphasis original).
Chapter 6

A party pamphlet in verse: Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*

In the most damning review of Barbauld’s poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, in the *Quarterly Review*, the Tory politician John Wilson Croker claimed that Barbauld had produced a party pamphlet in verse.¹ He asked what had “induced her (...) to sally forth, hand in hand with her renowned compatriot [William Roscoe] in the magnanimous resolution of saving a sinking state, by the instrumentality of a pamphlet in prose and a pamphlet in verse”.² I suggest that Croker’s description of Barbauld’s poem as a party political pamphlet is largely accurate. In this chapter I will argue that she was using her poem to promote a topical political campaign and also a wider political ideology. The “pamphlet in prose” referred to the collected anti-war pamphlets of the banker, historian and Dissenting philanthropist William Roscoe (1753–1831).³ Croker was right to identify Roscoe as her close ally; Barbauld and Roscoe had a collaborative relationship, and examining his writing provides a new insight into the nuanced meaning of *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*.

Written by December 1811 and published in January or February 1812, Barbauld’s anti-war poem is one of her most controversial works. The contemporary, critical response to it ranged from “cautious to patronizingly negative to outrageously abusive”.⁴ Recent critics have emphasized the importance of the poem, and this chapter will draw on the latest research to demonstrate that *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* challenged British self-perception at a crucial time. In her ground-breaking re-reading of *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, Emma Clery argues that the poem was written with a specific political purpose: to get the government’s Orders in Council, which were stifling European and American trade, lifted and then bring about a negotiated peace with France.

¹ John Wilson Croker entreated her “with great earnestness, that she will not for the sake of this ungrateful generation, put herself to the trouble of writing any more party pamphlets in verse”. Rev. of *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven. A Poem*, by Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Quarterly Review* 7 June 1812: 313.
² Ibid. 309.
³ William Roscoe, *Occasional Tracts relative to the War between Great Britain and France, written and published at different periods, from the year 1793, including brief observations on the Address on His Majesty, proposed by Earl Grey, in the House of Lords, June 13, 1810* (London, 1810).
⁴ McCarthy and Kraft 160.
Clery argues that Croker was Barbauld’s implied reader, and he reacted savagely in his review because, as Secretary of the Admiralty, he was responsible for defending the government’s economic policy. Croker wanted to portray Barbauld as an isolated Cassandra but in reality she was part of a pressure group which was campaigning against the government’s policy. Clery argues that Barbauld played an important part in bringing about the recall of the orders in June 1812. Although Croker's review was in the June issue of the Quarterly it appeared in July, which suggests that he was retaliating for the defeat Barbauld and her “compatriots” had inflicted on government policy.⁵

Building on Clery’s work, this chapter will examine in detail Barbauld’s relationship with Roscoe. It will add to the overall picture of Barbauld’s networks and sociable working practices that has been developed throughout my thesis. I argue that by writing *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* Barbauld was repeating the collaborative model used during the anti-slavery campaign when she wrote her *Epistle to William Wilberforce*. The idea that the *Epistle* and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* are linked and distinctive within Barbauld’s work is supported by Michele Levy’s analysis of the modes of circulation of her poetry. Levy demonstrates that Barbauld’s use of print distribution was limited; less than one third of her 160 known poems were printed, and the majority were circulated in manuscript form. Between 1791 and 1812 her only separately printed poems, written directly for print, were her *Epistle* and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. Levy argues that Barbauld deliberately rejected print publication, but in response to these vital national issues she felt it was necessary to publish her poems.⁶

This chapter also adds to our understanding of the nature of Barbauld’s progressive ideas; as is shown in the rest of the thesis, for her the political and the spiritual were intertwined. Reflecting this view, she believed that poetry which appealed to the emotional as well as the rational side of men and women had an important role to play in shaping society. I suggest that, following the pattern of her earlier poetry “The Mouse’s Petition” and *Epistle to William Wilberforce, Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* addressed a topical issue while also examining wider concerns about the state of British society. As well as the specific purpose of

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⁵ Clery.
⁶ Levy, “Barbauld and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*”. 

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opposing the Orders in Council, in this poem Barbauld challenged the political and literary spirit of the age at a time of ideological conflict. Linda Colley’s *Britons* depicts the revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars as developing a Britain confident in its national identity against the French “other”. She argues that the concept of the “armed nation” led to the broader idea of a political nation based on a patriotism which over- rode ethnicity, religion, class and party. J. E. Cookson in *The British Armed Nation* disputes the degree of unity, emphasising “the strength and continuity of public opposition to the war” discernible in a “radical patriotism” which associated war with non-democratic government. I argue that Barbauld was one of the leading intellectuals to dissent from this nation-building project. Her aim was to challenge British complacency. She wrote:

> When one sees the continual change, the astonishing revolutions which have changed and do change the political face of the globe, what nation has a right to say “My mountain stands strong, I shall *never* be moved”? (emphasis original)

This chapter will explore Barbauld’s critique of British attitudes to patriotism, imperialism, commercialism and nationalism. Drawing on the scholarship of critics Maggie Favretti, Josephine McDonagh, Karen Hadley and Isobel Armstrong, it will examine Barbauld’s engagement with the leading male philosophical discourse: firstly Adam Smith’s free market ideas and secondly Thomas Malthus’ attitudes to over-population. In her poem Barbauld attacked the values on which this nationalistic view of Britain was being developed, and offered an alternative Dissenting version. Like William Keach, I consider that although *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* “marks a decisive break with the meliorist historical perspective” it was still “rooted in the progressive Dissenting ideology that motivates all her work”. In

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this chapter I will draw attention to the continuities between this poem and earlier writing.

Building on Simon Bainbridge’s study of the use of poetry during the Napoleonic Wars, I will argue that, at a time when poetry was used for propaganda purposes, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* refused to conform to the model of patriotic literature produced by Walter Scott and Felicia Hemans. Until recently critics did not fully recognise the radicalism of Barbauld’s poem, perhaps because it was written in a “conservative” eighteenth-century form instead of the innovative style of the Romantics. However, as William Levine demonstrates, Barbauld subtly altered eighteenth-century models to make a radical, topical point. Influenced by the socially aware poetry of Oliver Goldsmith, particularly his poem *The Deserted Village*, she challenged his georgic model, which compared the cultivation of a rural estate with an ideal commonwealth, to suggest that this was futile during the Napoleonic Wars. By writing her poem in the highly stylised Augustan mode of heroic couplets with many classical allusions, she adopted the moral authority of Alexander Pope. However, Marlon Ross claims that although she echoed Pope’s *Windsor Forest*, Barbauld challenged the earlier poet’s “Augustan complacency” by portraying England as falling into ruin as a result of empire rather than flourishing because of it. Penny Bradshaw supports Levine’s argument by showing that Barbauld reworked James Thomson’s poem *Liberty* (1733–4), in which liberty, accompanied by arts and science, flourishes and declines and is portrayed as moving from Italy and Greece to Britain. Barbauld claimed that it had moved again, to America. Levine concludes that by using progress poems, civic humanist georgics and Juvenalian satire in a “disconcerting and at time contradictory manner” Barbauld’s “ultimate message is that none of the inherited ideologies are adequate to control or redeem the self-destructive plight of the nation”.

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14 Ibid. 179.
15 Ibid. 177.
16 Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire* 224.
18 Levine 179–80.
The response to her work was also adversely affected by her clash with the first generation of Romantics. Drawing on Marilyn Butler’s and Nicholas Roe’s studies of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, I suggest that Barbauld was going in the opposite direction from these poets both politically and aesthetically.¹⁹ As Eighteen Hundred and Eleven illustrates, her interest was in changing political policies, not revolutionising poetry. While her political ideas in the 1790s were very similar to Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s, as the war continued they reacted to events in different ways. While Barbauld remained a radical, the Lakers became more conservative. Their ideas on literature also diverged; as Levine comments, by looking back to the eighteenth century for stylistic inspiration, Barbauld was publicly rejecting the Romantic model of poetry.²⁰

Modern critics have recognised Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’s poetic importance. Ross describes it as one of Barbauld’s “most riveting” poems.²¹ Praising it as a “brilliant poem”, Favretti claims that it demonstrates Barbauld’s “extraordinary ability to use powerful yet accessible allusions to present and argue complex ideas”.²² Other critics have analysed the specific literary techniques used. Karen Hadley traces the evolution of allegorised “Freedom” in the poem’s narrative. She suggests that this trope reflects the contemporary justification of masculine desire, in the form of Enlightenment rhetoric.²³ Exploring the relation of the aesthetic to the political in Barbauld’s work, Laura Mandell focuses on her use of personification in Eighteen Hundred and Eleven “to evoke the uncertainty of agency” and make people think for themselves about what actually constitutes any abstract term.²⁴ Although I agree with these critics’ assessments of Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’s aesthetic importance, this chapter will focus on Barbauld’s distinctive political vision and her use of poetry to communicate that view.

¹⁹ Butler, Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries; Roe.
²⁰ Levine claims that Barbauld used Eighteen Hundred and Eleven to position her view of progress more centrally in the public sphere than the first generation of Romantics or the eighteenth-century Sensibility poets, Collins and Cowper. She was relocating the progress poem “in the centre of commercial, political, and civic life, rather than allowing it to remain in the isolated, remote retreats of her male contemporaries and immediate predecessors” (177).
²¹ Ross, Contours of Masculine Desire 224.
²² Favretti 99.
²³ Hadley 87–96.
Much recent criticism of *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* has examined the reasons why it was so widely attacked. Hostile reviewers accused Barbauld of behaving inappropriately for an elderly lady in both her style and her content. Devoney Looser has explored in detail attitudes to Barbauld’s age. Ross explains that by writing an occasional poem which was a satire, Barbauld was entering poetic territory which was traditionally male. Josephine McDonagh shows that, despite the increasing specialisation and professionalisation of political economy, Barbauld engaged in this debate in her poem. However, as Evan Gottlieb argues, despite the rhetoric of female domestication, it was acceptable for a woman to write political verse, as long as she did so from a conservative standpoint. He compares the different receptions of Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* and Felicia Hemans’ *England and Spain: or, Patriotism and Valour* (1808). In contrast to the near universal hostility to Barbauld’s poem, Hemans’ verse received critical approval. Gottlieb’s research supports Behrendt’s argument that Barbauld was attacked primarily not because she was a woman writing about politics but because she was a radical woman. Although it is evident that her gender was a useful way of expressing hostility against her, I suggest that it was her radical views which made the government and its supporters wish to silence Barbauld.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

To understand *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* involves setting it in its historical and political context. According to Butler, the war created “a rare bitterness” in politics, dividing the country into two polarised camps. While Britain fought Napoleon on the battlefield, Barbauld was at the heart of an ideological struggle at home. As John W. Derry claims, Regency England was “uncomfortably poised between the old way of life and the new”. It was “a society in transition, when honest doubt dispelled many creeds (...) Men were afraid and anxious, perplexed by new sciences and old faiths, and fearful of social and political revolution, and of the

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25 Looser 118–39.
26 Ross, “Configurations” 95.
27 McDonagh, “Barbauld’s Domestic Economy” 77.
29 Stephen C. Behrendt, “The Gap that Is not a Gap”, Linkin and Behrendt 34.
30 Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* 44.
31 Derry 39.
dangers of democracy”. Barbauld’s poem encapsulates this spirit of uncertainty and alienation.

Recent scholars have examined in detail how the revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars differed from previous conflicts. Alan Forest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall’s collection of essays shows how these wars were fought on an unprecedented scale. They were portrayed by combatants on both sides as patriotic and national wars. In Britain political and cultural nation-building was required to rally national sentiment to support the war effort. As Bainbridge’s study demonstrates, poetry had an important role to play in this project. Its power lay in its potential to shape readers’ view of the conflict through “fancy”, “imagination” and “feeling”. Jeffrey Cox emphasises that at this time poetry was political; there was a general assumption that there was a link between poetic vision and political debate. According to Cox, reviews were more about political affiliations than about the quality of the poetry. He explains: “Put simply, one’s reception was dependent upon one’s view of the government”. James. J. Sack examines the close relationship between the right-wing press and the government during the Perceval administration. He shows that a sympathetic press was subsidised through secret service money, and indirectly by placing advertisements or official government proclamations in friendly newspapers. The Tory journals Blackwood’s and the Quarterly do not seem to have received government aid. However, their relationship to the government was close because the journals’ publishers paid members of the government for writing articles. It is then no surprise that the most damning review of Barbauld’s poem was by the Tory politician Wilson Croker in the Quarterly. For two decades Croker dominated the right-wing press. As a leading contributor to the Quarterly he used his position to

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32 Ibid. 4.
34 Bainbridge 1–2.
36 Sack 20–3.
try to destroy radical writers from Barbauld to John Keats.\(^{37}\) As Secretary to the Admiralty, Croker was in effect “the government’s press manager”.\(^{38}\)

Although Croker criticised Barbauld for writing a political pamphlet in verse, that was exactly what he himself had done two years before; his best-selling *The Battles of Talavera* (1809) was used to promote a patriotic view of the Peninsular War.\(^{39}\) As Richard Cronin establishes, accusations that poets were being too political were made by both sides, demonstrating that the debate was not really about “rival aesthetic principles but rival parties”.\(^{40}\) Cronin writes: “During the war years it seemed impossible to reflect on events in Europe without being accused of subordinating the exalted duty of the artist to the paltry interest of party.”\(^{41}\) The implication was that poetry should address the timeless and universal, otherwise it would be degraded into a form of political journalism. Barbauld’s poem was particularly threatening because it communicated timeless values but at the same time contained a topical message. McCarthy argues that the viciousness of Croker’s review indicates that Barbauld was “still counted among the nation’s foremost writers and moral authorities” and she had “seriously irritated the government”.\(^{42}\)

Since the war with France had started in 1793, Barbauld and Roscoe had publicly opposed it. Originally the war represented an ideological struggle between supporters of the old order and the new represented by the French Revolution.\(^{43}\) Philip Harling defines the divisions in the debate. Radicals argued that the French Jacobins were the enlightened friends of liberty who had been provoked into violence by the supporters of tyranny at home and abroad. They claimed that Pitt’s government had gone to war not just to restore the monarchy in France but to use

\(^{37}\) Ibid. 14–15.
\(^{38}\) Ibid. 21.
\(^{39}\) Bainbridge 4.
\(^{40}\) Barbauld was not the only poet to be attacked by the *Quarterly Review* on this ground. In March 1812 their review of the radical Whig Lord George Grenville’s poem *Portugal* about the Peninsula War argued that its defeatism was a lamentable example of how poetry might be misused by placing it at the service of party. Richard Cronin, *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: In Search of the Pure Commonwealth* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 140.
\(^{41}\) Ibid. 139.
\(^{42}\) McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 477.
\(^{43}\) Derry 5.
the wartime emergency as an excuse for undermining civil liberties in Britain. However, the majority of people supported the war.\textsuperscript{44}

For most of the 1790s Britain did badly in the war. The lowest point came in 1797 when Britain’s only remaining ally concluded peace with France. At home Britain was threatened by naval mutinies, unrest in Ireland and a financial crisis. In response the government introduced income tax and indefinitely suspended cash payments from the Bank of England.\textsuperscript{45} For liberals, this action suggested that Britain was increasingly becoming a militaristic state.\textsuperscript{46}

In March 1802 the government negotiated the Peace of Amiens. However, it was evident that Napoleon’s plan was still domination of Europe. In May 1803 England recommenced the war and fear of a French invasion spread through the country.\textsuperscript{47} Historians agree that the period between 1803 and 1805 marked the height of patriotic rallying behind the war as the government linked national and personal survival.\textsuperscript{48} Colley has emphasised the sense of British unity at this time, demonstrated by mass mobilisation. She considers it reflected the intensity of nationalistic feelings which cohered around the monarchy, pride in triumph in war, and ideas of British freedom.\textsuperscript{49} However, other historians dispute the depth of this patriotism. Cookson suggests the extent to which armies were united by nationalistic ideals has been over-emphasised. He claims, instead, that their attitude was “opportunistic, interested and conditional” and loyalty was more to their regiment and comrades than to larger causes such as “King and Country”.\textsuperscript{50} Mark Philp argues that, rather than a genuine new-found nationalism, there was a great degree of unanimity in the representation of Britain. He claims a national political agenda emerged. The government had learnt lessons from the 1790s that there was “an important battle to be won in terms of the hearts and minds” of the

\textsuperscript{45} Cookson, The Friends of Peace 157.
\textsuperscript{46} During the war the armed forces grew to three times their size during the American war. Government at a local level grew to collect income tax and supervise volunteers and national defence. Cookson, The British Armed Nation 1–5.
\textsuperscript{47} Derry 22–4.
\textsuperscript{48} Cookson, The British Armed Nation 213.
\textsuperscript{49} Colley.
\textsuperscript{50} Cookson, The British Armed Nation 9.
extra-parliamentary community; to reach these people they used a powerful print culture.  

During these years the Friends of Peace suspended their opposition to the war, as it could now be portrayed as a war in self-defence. Reflecting the changed attitude to the conflict, Barbauld’s nephews joined the volunteer regiments with John Aikin’s approval. However, Barbauld was still sceptical about the justness of the war. In Spring 1803 she wrote: “For my part, I cannot yet persuade myself of the reality of the danger, and am apt to think it will end in enormous expence and consequent financial difficulties; there, indeed, we seem to be on the edge of ruin”.  

However, for the majority of Britons, until Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar in 1805, the threat that Napoleon would invade Britain seemed very real. Later that year Napoleon defeated the allies at Austerlitz, knocking Austria out of the war. By 1807 Napoleon’s power was at its peak; Britain’s chief ally, Russia, capitulated. Britain suffered a series of set-backs which were blamed by critics on government incompetence. In 1808 the Covenant of Cintra squandered Britain’s first major victory in the Peninsula War, and then a year later the British expedition to the Scheldt ended in disaster.  

Harling identifies a “bellicose moment” in popular politics between 1805 and 1810, when radicals criticised elite corruption which jeopardised the war effort, but they were in a minority. Those who criticised the government risked being labelled as French sympathisers and dangerous subversives. Roscoe observed that his small circle in Liverpool had got smaller. However, Cookson points out that “the isolation and ineffectiveness of the Friends of Peace can be easily exaggerated”. He argues that from 1808 to 1812 they ran their most successful campaign against the government’s Orders in Council. The Orders were introduced by the British government in November 1807 in response to Napoleon’s continental system of blockade. Their aim was to prevent neutral trade with Europe except

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52 McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 459.
54 Derry 27.
55 Harling 32.
57 Cookson, The Friends of Peace 185.
through Britain. However, the government’s policy antagonised neutrals, particularly America, and decreased European demand, seriously affecting the industries of the North and the Midlands which relied on transatlantic business. Liverpool was particularly hard hit as it handled about 60 per cent of the American trade. There was a severe recession in the export industries in 1807–8 and 1811–12. The campaign against the Orders was led by the anti-war liberals and provincial businessmen who were worst affected.58

POLITICS
Barbauld was involved in the Friends of Peace, one of the most important pressure groups of the time. Cookson’s *The Friends Of Peace: Anti-War Liberalism in England 1793–1815* provides a definitive study of this movement. Drawn largely from Dissenters, it was based on a close-knit network of reformers who had campaigned together against the American war and slavery, to repeal the Corporation and Test Acts, and for moderate parliamentary reform. These campaigns increased their ideological agreements and political commitment by building personal connections and networks which greatly facilitated common action.59

*Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* reads like a verse manifesto for the Friends of Peace, because their distinctive liberal views were expressed throughout the poem. Although an anti-war movement, the Friends offered a wider critique of society; they were anti-aristocratic, resenting the incompetence of the old ruling class at a time of national crisis.60 They argued the inutility of war, claiming that the government used the war to consolidate and extend their power instead of ruling for the “general good”. There was a tacit link between peace and political reform because they argued that effective representation was required to limit the bellicosity of the government.61

Examining Barbauld’s relationship with Roscoe places her more precisely on the political spectrum. Barbauld and Roscoe had much in common. Both were Dissenters. William Enfield had been Roscoe’s minister in Liverpool from 1763,

59 Ibid. 2.
60 Ibid. 25.
61 Ibid. 6–7.
and when Enfield became rector of Warrington Academy in 1770 Roscoe also
developed links to the academy. His famous poem *Mount Pleasant* was published
at Warrington. It is likely that he met Barbauld at this time as he developed a
lifelong friendship with her brother John Aikin.62

Roscoe shared many of Barbauld’s political preoccupations. He was a
leading member of the anti-slavery movement and the Friends of Peace. Between
1788 and 1792 he acted as a propagandist and provided information for the
London Committee of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.63 His support
for the French Revolution led to his circle being labelled the “Liverpool Jacobins” 64
Opposing the war against France from 1793, he earned himself a reputation at
Westminster as an important anti-war pamphleteer.65 Elected an independent MP
for Liverpool in 1806, he lost his seat the next year. Under Roscoe’s leadership,
from 1808 to 1812 Liverpool led the way in the campaign against the Orders in
Council.

As well as their political affinity, Barbauld and Roscoe shared the same
classical literary taste.66 In 1824 Roscoe published the works of Alexander Pope;
his favourite authors were Shenstone, Goldsmith, Addison and Steele.67 Like
Barbauld, Roscoe used his writing for humanitarian purposes. *Mount Pleasant*
(1777) offered a critique of commerce, luxury and the slave trade. His *The Wrongs
of Africa* (1787) was one of the most important poems of the anti-slavery
campaign. He used his best-selling *Life of Lorenzo de’ Medici* (1796) to emphasise
the importance of peace for the development of trade and a non-tyrannical,
representative government for the flourishing of the arts.68 In *Eighteen Hundred*

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62 Their respect was mutual; in a letter to Dr James Currie in 1794, John Aikin wrote: “There are few
of my old acquaintances to whom I look with more affection than the knot of select men at
Liverpool.” Qtd. in Arline Wilson, *William Roscoe: Commerce and Culture* (Liverpool: Liverpool
63 Ibid. 128–9.
64 Ibid. 136.
65 During this time he corresponded regularly with Lord Lansdowne, Lord Holland and the Duke of
Gloucester. Ibid. 140.
66 In a letter to Lucy Aikin after her father’s death Roscoe acknowledged John Aikin’s influence on
his intellectual development. He explained that Aikin had first directed him “to the perusal of the
modern writers of Latin poetry.” Qtd. in Wilson, *William Roscoe* 39.
Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 (http://0-
and Eleven, Barbauld clearly signalled her links to Roscoe by echoing his work in her poem. I suggest that his anti-war pamphlets galvanised her into action. In the preface Roscoe described it as the duty of citizens to oppose the war:

Every real friend to his country ought (...) to relieve her from her state of degradation, and to restore her to rectitude, to honour, and prosperity. In the performance of this severe but indispensable task, he will frequently have to assume a tone of harshness and reproof, and when imminent destruction seems to await her, will warn her even by threats and denunciations from the dangerous precipice.⁶⁹

His prophetic account of anti-war writing’s likely negative reception suggests that Barbauld was aware of the risks involved.⁷⁰ Seeing Barbauld’s work as part of a concerted political campaign to change attitudes, and thus policy, alters our reading of the poem. Marlon Ross argues that in the poem “doom is presented as a foregone conclusion”.⁷¹ I agree with Jonathan Sachs that Barbauld’s poem, rather than a description of inevitable decline, was intended to be a warning, in the hope that change would produce an alternative future.⁷² After publication Barbauld wrote: “I am sure I do not wish to be a true prophet”, a comment which suggests that she was writing the poem to shock people into changing their attitudes.⁷³ Sachs argues that by using a precise historical year as the title, Barbauld encourages us to consider decline as part of a dateable historical process.⁷⁴ I suggest that 1811 was a key date for Barbauld because at this moment lifting the Orders in Council had become a matter of urgency. With a more belligerent party leading the American congress, the British government’s economic policy had brought Britain to the brink of war with America. Barbauld began writing her poem at the end of 1811 at the same time as the Liverpool liberals, led by Roscoe,

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⁶⁹ Roscoe, Occasional Tracts vi.
⁷⁰ Roscoe wrote: “How liable this conduct is to be mistaken, or misrepresented, as the effect of a perverse and unfriendly disposition, it is easy to perceive; nor are the present times without instances of men of the highest endowments, and best intentions, having fallen a sacrifice to such unfounded imputations (...) To weigh their [a people’s] conduct, and estimate their character in an impartial scale, to point out their faults, and banish those delusions in which they delight, is always an invidious, and frequently a dangerous task.” Ibid. vi–vii.
⁷¹ Ross, The Contours of Masculine Desire 224.
⁷³ Anna Letitia Barbauld, letter to Judy Beecroft, 19 March 1812. McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 481.
⁷⁴ Sachs 308.
renewed their agitation against the Orders. The idea that Roscoe and Barbauld were working collaboratively is supported by Roscoe’s letter to her about the poem in March 1812:

If any thing could rouse the people from their lethargy it must be remonstrances like this, addressed to their feelings and their fears, for as to all appeals to their reason and judgment, they are entirely disregarded.

His pamphlet had appealed to “reason and judgement” and failed; the second strand of their joint project was to appeal to “feelings” and “fears”. Like the anti-slavery campaign, the campaign against the Orders in Council was fought on many levels; while Roscoe provided the intellectual argument in his prose pamphlets, Barbauld used sensibility in her poem to appeal to the emotions. While Henry Brougham fought in Parliament, ordinary people were involved through petitioning.

Drawing on Clery’s research, I claim that it was because Barbauld was actively attempting to intervene in topical events that her work received such a hostile reception. Chandler supports this argument, but also stresses the historical importance of her intervention. According to him, the literary representation of the state of the nation became a way of making history in two senses: “as the construction of a narrative of events in literary form and as the intervention in the course of events by the very act of publishing such a construction” (emphases original).

Viewing Barbauld’s poem as a carefully considered political intervention, rather than a misjudgement, fits the pattern of her use of literature for political purposes throughout her life. She argued that intellectuals had a moral duty to be involved in the topical political debate rather than just examine abstract ideas.

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75 Early in December the American Chamber in Liverpool published resolutions that blamed the policy for the extreme distress caused by the trade depression. They called on the mayor to convene a meeting and raise a petition. Cookson, *The Friends of Peace* 223–4.
79 See Chapter 3.
ANTI-WAR

Barbauld’s anti-war attitudes opposed the dominant patriotic values of the era. In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, instead of focusing on the glory of war, she portrayed the relentless misery it created:

Still the loud death drum, thundering from afar,
O’er the vexed nations pours the storm of war:
To the stern call still Britain bends her ear,
Feeds the fierce strife, the alternate hope and fear;
Bravely, though vainly, dares to strive with Fate,
And seeks by turns to prop each sinking state. (1–6)\(^80\)

The repetition of the word “still” emphasises the endless conflict. The alliteration of “death drum” echoes the steady rhythm of death which dominated society. Barbauld’s poem is reminiscent of John Scott’s famous anti-war poem “The Drum”.\(^81\) Scott’s verse began: “I Hate that drum’s discordant sound”. It is then structured by the different responses to the recruiting drum. It continues:

To me it talks of ravaged plains,
And burning towns and ruin’d swains,
And mangled limbs, and dying groans,
And widow’s fears, and orphans’ moans,
And all that Misery’s hand bestows,
To fill a catalogue of woes. (emphasis original)\(^82\)

Barbauld took his “catalogue of woes” and expanded them in her poem. As Bainbridge establishes, these anti-war tropes were used frequently during the 1790s.\(^83\) The image of the drum immediately signalled Barbauld’s alignment with the earlier tradition of anti-war writing.

The word “vainly”, which is repeated throughout the poem, implied that British heroism was futile against Fate. Her lines reflected the Friends of Peace argument that Britain could make little impression on Napoleon’s dominance of the continent by warfare.\(^84\) Like Roscoe’s 1810 pamphlet, Barbauld’s poem suggests that it was essential that Britain made peace with Napoleon. This was not because they were among the small minority of British Jacobins who regarded Napoleon as

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\(^80\) Barbauld, “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, a Poem”, McCarthy and Kraft 161.
\(^82\) Ibid. Qtd. in Bainbridge 15.
\(^83\) So widely read was “The Drum” that it was parodied in a patriotic poem published in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1804, in which the poet began: “I love the drum’s inspiring sound.” Qtd. in Bainbridge 16.
\(^84\) Cookson, *The Friends of Peace* 176.
the personification of liberal hopes.\textsuperscript{85} Instead they called for peace for practical and pragmatic reasons, believing that if Britain continued a perpetual war it would undermine the economy. If Britain made peace at this point it could still be a strong power which could co-exist with France without accepting Napoleonic values.\textsuperscript{86} Britain’s maritime empire would be secure, while France would remain the dominant continental power.

Barbauld’s negative attitude to Napoleon was explicit from the outset of the poem. After the recommencement of war in 1803 the conflict was envisaged in more personal terms as a struggle against Napoleon; the majority of Britons saw him as the embodiment of deceit and tyranny.\textsuperscript{87} Barbauld’s lines suggest that she shared this perception:

\begin{quote}
Colossal Power with overwhelming force  
Bears down each fort of Freedom in its course;  
Prostrate she lies beneath the Despot’s sway,  
While the hushed nations curse him – and obey. (7–10)
\end{quote}

“Colossal Power” reflects the widespread image of Napoleon as a giant. He was demonised in British political propaganda, caricatures, popular songs and broadsides as a bogeyman.\textsuperscript{88} Portraying him as a despot crushing other nations into submission, Barbauld emphasised that they obeyed because of his “overwhelming force”. Her lines reflected British anger that Napoleon’s imperialism divided Europe as though “people could simply be merged like mathematical units”.\textsuperscript{89} Liberals had been particularly outraged by France’s violation of Swiss sovereignty in 1798.\textsuperscript{90} The phrase “fort of Freedom” recalls Barbauld’s description of Corsica in her 1769 poem of that name; then, Barbauld optimistically believed that Corsica’s opposition to France signalled the start of the movement for liberty throughout Europe. By 1811, her vision had come full circle, as she pessimistically argued that freedom might be permanently crushed in Europe.

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\\textsuperscript{85} Derry 24.  
\textsuperscript{86} In 1810 Roscoe wrote: “We are strong for peace, but weak for war. Competent to defend ourselves from every attack that can be made against us; but incompetent to change the destiny of Europe, or to drag its present ruler from his imperial height.” Roscoe, \textit{Occasional Tracts} 309.  
\textsuperscript{87} Derry 24.  
\textsuperscript{88} Philp, “Introduction” 8.  
\textsuperscript{89} Weiss, \textit{Conservatism in Europe} 42.  
\textsuperscript{90} Cookson, \textit{The Friends of Peace} 172–3.
\end{flushright}
Croker criticised Barbauld’s poem for not referring to specific events in 1811. However, I agree with Gottlieb that Barbauld did this deliberately to create a timeless quality suggesting the “eternal costs of war” rather than individual disasters. Her poem was in the tradition of Goldsmith’s socially aware poetry. In *The Deserted Village* (1770) he portrayed an old soldier, who had been physically destroyed by war and reduced to begging. His description of this broken man evoked anger and pity. In the 1790s anti-war poets were preoccupied with the effects of war on communities. Barbauld’s poem was typical of this poetry which used the rhetoric of sentiment for oppositional purposes. *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* concentrated on the suffering of innocent civilians. Recent scholarship stresses that in the Napoleonic Wars the boundaries between civilians and soldiers became more blurred. Civilians died during bombardments, from starvation in besieged cities, and from epidemics spread by soldiers. Armies often plundered the lands they marched through. Barbauld’s poem reflected this reality:

The tramp of marching hosts disturbs the plough
The sword, not sickle, reaps the harvest now
And where the Soldier gleans the scant supply,
The helpless Peasant but retires to die;
No laws his hut from licensed outrage shield,
And war’s least horror is the ensanguined field. (17–22)

Civilians’ impotence was emphasised in the description of “the helpless peasant”. Her poem suggested that the atrocities committed against non-combatants could be worse than those experienced in battle. The word “ensanguined” was one of the most hackneyed tropes to describe the battlefield. I suggest that Barbauld used it to imply that battles had been described so often that there was nothing new to say. Instead, she exposed the less explored suffering of foreign civilians. Reflecting her Rational Dissenting beliefs, she believed that people of all nationalities were equal before God and each individual life had an innate value. Barbauld’s

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91 Rev. of “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” 309.
92 Gottlieb 337.
95 Forrest, Hagemann and Rendall, “Introduction” 5–6.
96 Bainbridge 23.
description of “licensed outrage” resembled Roscoe’s idea that during wartime the rules of civilised society were replaced with survival of the fittest. He wrote:

It has been reserved for the present day to discover that a nation is bound by no laws, human or divine, but that if it has the power, it has also the right to rob, murder, massacre, and despoil all that are unable to resist its violence, and may excuse its enormities under the pretext of cruel necessity. (emphasis original)\(^\text{97}\)

In Barbauld’s and Roscoe’s eyes, Britain was as guilty of this amorality as other countries.

Like many poets of the era, Barbauld explored the experience of women during wartime. She wrote:

\[
\text{Oft o’er the daily page some soft-one bends} \\
\text{To learn the fate of husband, brothers, friends,} \\
\text{Or the spread map with anxious eye explores,} \\
\text{Its dotted boundaries and pencilled shores,} \\
\text{Asks where the spot that wrecked her bliss is found,} \\
\text{And learns its name but to detest the sound. (33–8; emphasis original)}
\]

The words “soft-one” to describe the woman at home contrasts with the hard experience of war. The obscurity of the battlefields implied that this was not a war in self-defence for the survival of Britain. Women were having their “bliss” sacrificed for a meaningless cause. Barbauld’s use of sensibility was typical of much anti-war poetry. Bainbridge examines how writers such as Elizabeth Moody and Charlotte Smith focused on the suffering of widows and orphans.\(^\text{98}\) Critics have detected similarities between Smith’s and Barbauld’s work. Anne K. Mellor sets Smith’s *The Emigrants* (1793) and Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* in the tradition of “the female poet”. She defines this tradition as “explicitly political; it self-consciously and insistently occupies the public sphere”. It originated in the writing of seventeenth-century female preachers and prophets. According to Mellor, the female poet wrote poetry that was didactic. It either responded to specific political events or argued more broadly for wide-ranging social and political reform, or attempted to initiate a social revolution. The female poet’s social analysis was founded on a specific political and religious ideology which entitled her to take up

\(^{97}\) Roscoe, *Occasional Tracts* 187.  
\(^{98}\) Bainbridge 38.
“the stance of moral judge”. My research, as set out throughout this thesis, supports Mellor’s portrayal of Barbauld as part of the “female poet tradition”. Her definition of the origins of this type of writing, and the way it was developed, is reinforced by my analysis of Barbauld’s work.

As Mellor’s analysis of *The Emigrants* shows, Smith claimed that there was little difference between the oppressions of the ancien régime, the new French Republic or the British monarchy; all were patriarchal and unjust systems. Like Barbauld, she attacked the devastations of war and militarism, claiming that nature’s plenitude had been stained with blood. Penny Bradshaw also argues that there are similarities between Smith’s and Barbauld’s work. In her comparison of Smith’s “Beachy Head” (1806) and Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, Bradshaw claims that both women expressed millenarian anxiety. They adopted “the genre of visionary writing in subversive ways”, using the narrative of past events to predict a future “which appears not as utopian but dystopian”. I agree with Bradshaw’s reading of *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* as millenarian; it is similar to Barbauld’s apocalyptic tone in her pamphlet *An Address to the Opposers*, suggesting that the year 1811 marks another important turning point for Britain. However, my analysis focuses more on the topical relevance of the poem than on Barbauld’s utopian or dystopian visions.

As well as the similarities between Smith’s and Barbauld’s writing there were important differences. Bainbridge’s study of Smith’s work demonstrates that she constructed a specifically feminine poetic persona as the mother figure. I suggest that Barbauld’s perspective in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* was androgynous; her focus on individual feminine suffering was similar to that of male, as well as other female, anti-war writers. As Bainbridge shows, Joseph Fawcett’s poems “The Despairing Mother” and “The Mourning Maid” in his *War Elegies* (1801) were typical of this type of verse. Fawcett argued that the clinical reports

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100 Ibid. 86–7.
101 Bradshaw.
102 Bainbridge 55–6.
about the war in newspapers concealed the pathetic stories behind the statistics. His poetry attempted to rectify this situation.  

Recent scholars are divided about the effectiveness of literary representations in making the civilian population aware of the consequences of war. Mary Favret argues that poems, newspaper reports, pamphlets and songs created a “paper shield” which cushioned the British public from the destructive impact of war. Bainbridge counters this idea by arguing that, rather than insulating the public from the genuine experience, poets saw the imagination as the means of making readers feel as though they were eye-witnesses to the conflict. I suggest Barbauld provided a model of war poetry in between Favret’s and Bainbridge’s categories. Although she did not portray the battlefield in realistic detail, nor did she shield her readers from the profound negative effects of war. It is likely that she avoided graphic descriptions for the same reasons that she avoided them in the anti-slavery campaign: she disapproved of misusing sensibility to create what Karen Haltunnen describes as “a pornography of pain”. As in her earlier anti-slavery writing, she described the emotional experiences of suffering rather than physical details. She then called on her readers to consider the wider implications of what this individual suffering meant for society as a whole. Immediately after her passage on the bereft woman, Barbauld wrote:

And think’st thou, Britain, still to sit at ease,  
An island Queen amidst thy subject seas,  
Whilst the vext billows, in their distant roar,  
But soothe thy slumbers, and but kiss thy shore?  
To sport in wars, while danger keeps aloof,  
Thy grassy turf unbruised by hostile hoof?  
So sing thy flatterers; but Britain, know,  
Thou who hast shared the guilt must share the woe. (39–46)

Her phrase “To sport in wars, while danger keeps aloof” suggested that courtiers and ministers treated war as a profitable game. However, they were not the only guilty ones. Ross comments: “The reader is fully burdened with the poem’s vision” as Barbauld claimed each person shared in the nation’s guilt both about the war

103 Ibid. 28.  
105 Bainbridge 17.  
106 Haltunnen 303–34. For a discussion of Barbauld’s use of sensibility see Chapter 3.
and about their economic behaviour. In 1793 Barbauld had proposed the same argument in *Sins of Government*. She claimed that individuals must use their conscience to decide when to oppose government policies. This argument was common amongst the Friends of Peace, who saw war as part of divine government. In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* the pun on the word “guilt”, which could alternatively be read as “gilt”, suggests that those who profited from the war and imperialism would eventually share in the suffering. Barbauld argued in apocalyptic terms that the hour of reckoning was drawing near:

Nor distant is the hour; low murmurs spread,
And whispered fears, creating what they dread;
Ruin, as with an earthquake shock, is here,
There the heart-witherings of unuttered fear,
And that sad death, whence most affection bleeds,
Which sickness, only of the soul, precedes. (47–52)

An underlying sense of unease is expressed in “low murmurs” and “whispers”. The spiritual malaise which has physical effects is emphasised by the phrases “heart-witherings”, a “sad death” and “sickness, only of the soul”. The image of spiritual and physical illness recalls her descriptions of the effects of the slave trade on Britons in her *Epistle to William Wilberforce*.

**COMMERCE AND CAPITALISM**

Barbauld emphasised the negative economic effects of the war. Coming from a Dissenting background she had close links with middle-class commercial interests. As a Liverpool lawyer, banker and businessman, Roscoe was even more closely connected. It is evident that in her poem Barbauld was not arguing against commerce per se; like the other Friends of Peace she distinguished between its different forms. She was supportive of manufacturing but critical of colonial trade. While the Orders in Council harmed the manufacturers in the Midlands and the North, the policy was supported by the West Indian and East Indian interest which

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109 Barbauld’s emphasis on the importance of political morality was similar to Roscoe’s. In 1808 he wrote that his aim in writing anti-war pamphlets was “to remind them [the people] that the faults of the government are the faults of the people; the honour of the nation their honour, and the disgrace of the nation their disgrace; and to induce them to feel, that the conscience of a nation is in the bosom of every honest man.” Roscoe, *Occasional Tracts* 129.
110 See Chapter 3.
benefited from trade restrictions. Unlike manufacturing, which was a wealth-creating activity, the colonial trade only made profits from exchange.\(^{111}\) Like Roscoe, Barbauld critiqued the damage done to the economy by the government’s wartime policy. Beyond the topical arguments, she pressed for a fairer form of capitalism which did not allow great inequalities between rich and poor.\(^{112}\) I suggest that Barbauld reinforced her friend’s ideas in his poem *Mount Pleasant* by also using the historical perspective of the ruin of empires to invoke the need for ethical trade in her poem.\(^{113}\)

In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* Barbauld looked to the past for a positive commercial model. She described London as:

> The mighty city, which by every road,  
> In floods of people poured itself abroad;  
> Ungirt by walls, irregularly great,  
> No jealous drawbridge, and no closing gate;  
> Whose merchants (such the state which commerce brings)  
> Sent forth their mandates to dependant kings;  
> Streets, where the turban’d Moslem, bearded Jew,  
> And woolly Afric, met the brown Hindu;  
> Where through each vein spontaneous plenty flowed,  
> Where Wealth enjoyed, and Charity bestowed. (159–68)

This image of a thriving multicultural commercial centre was similar to Roscoe’s line in *Mount Pleasant* that “An open welcome met the stranger crew”.\(^{114}\) It also reflected Voltaire’s description of the Royal Exchange in London in *Letters concerning the English Nation* (1733). He portrayed a place where Jew, Muslim and Christian transacted business together as though they were of the same religion.\(^{115}\) Barbauld’s passage resembled the Friends of Peace’s argument that free trade promoted international relations and world peace.\(^{116}\) Her final line emphasised that this society balanced accumulating wealth with sharing prosperity through charity. Contrasting the past with the present she wrote:

> No more on crowded mart or busy street  
> Friends, meeting friends, with cheerful hurry greet;

\(^{111}\) Cookson, *The Friends of Peace* 218.  
\(^{112}\) For a full discussion of her views on inequality see Chapter 5.  
\(^{113}\) Whale 98.  
\(^{114}\) William Roscoe, *Mount Pleasant: a descriptive Poem. To which is added, an Ode* (Warrington, 1777) 15.  
\(^{115}\) McCarthy and Kraft n.4 167  
Sad, on the ground thy princely merchants bend
Their altered looks, and evil days portend,
And fold their arms, and watch with anxious breast
The tempest blackening in the distant West. (55–60)

The “tempest blackening in the distant West” refers to the prospect of war with America because of the Orders in Council. Her phrase “evil days portend” suggests that she agreed with Brougham’s assessment that an American war was “one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, evil which can visit this country”. She portrayed government policy as responsible for the decline of trade. The reference to the “sad” change in the “princely merchants” recalled the increase in the number of bankruptcies in 1810 and the suicides linked to financial ruin. She believed that the “cheerful”, sociability of the past commercial environment was coming to an end because of the war. Her ideas were similar to Roscoe’s. In 1793 he wrote:

The materials that compose our prosperity, though undoubtedly of a very precarious and inflammable nature, had long existed, and might with due care have been preserved to an indefinite period, but no sooner did we kindle the torch of war, than its first spark dissipated them in air.  

Barbauld’s poem echoed Roscoe’s description of the insubstantiality of the financial system. She wrote: “Thy baseless wealth dissolves in air away./Like mists that melt before the morning ray” (53–4). Her use of the simile “mists” suggests that the nation’s wealth could evaporate. As recent scholarship demonstrates, her poem reflected the financial situation. The government’s reliance on credit to pay for the war created mounting debt. In 1810 the government ignored the advice of the Bullion Committee that a return to the gold standard was necessary. By January 1811 a Select Committee of the House of Commons reported that the British government had issued paper currency in excess of its gold reserves and

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117 Qtd. in Cookson, *The Friends of Peace* 229.
118 McCarthy and Kraft n.1 163.
119 Roscoe, *Occasional Tracts* 27–8. Roscoe’s analysis was supported by Alexander Baring’s findings in his *Inquiry into the Causes and Consequences of the Orders in Council* (1808). He argued that the prosperity of Britain depended on the interaction of the British economy with many other economies on the terms of free trade not monopoly. If commerce had been left to its natural course it would have sustained growth and created a mutuality of interest. Cookson, *The Friends of Peace* 66–7.
120 The annual cost of the war increased from £20 million in 1794 to £56 million in 1811. McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 455–6.
that the currency therefore lacked credibility.\textsuperscript{122}\ The Friends of Peace believed the “commercial spirit” was undermined by this dependence on credit rather than capital, and the preference for the short-term returns of speculation instead of the long-term returns of industry.\textsuperscript{123}

Suspicion of paper currency was common but it came in various forms. Cox examines the political writer William Cobbett’s opposition; it is clear that his argument differed from the Friends of Peace.\textsuperscript{124}\ As a banker, Roscoe believed paper currency and credit were necessary in a modern financial system, but he argued that during wartime the confidence needed for credit to function properly breaks down.\textsuperscript{125}\ The industrialists in the Midlands and the North, where the supply and cost of credit was most crucial and the dependence on export markets greatest, were particularly affected. The war was undermining their development.\textsuperscript{126}\ Barbauld reflected this situation, writing:

\begin{quote}
Thy Midas dream is o’er;  
The golden tide of Commerce leaves thy shore.  
Leaves thee to prove the alternate ills that haunt  
Enfeebling Luxury and ghastly want. (61–4)
\end{quote}

The era when everything British merchants touched turned to gold, like King Midas of the Greek myth, was at an end. “The golden tide of Commerce” suggests Barbauld was referring to the export market which was stymied by the Orders in Council. Using the myth of Midas reflected her ambivalent attitude to commerce; the king destroyed the things that really mattered by worshipping gold. Her description of “enfeebling Luxury” reminds readers of the luxury products that came from the British empire; it suggests that while the manufacturers suffered, the colonial trade continued to thrive. “Enfeebling” is reminiscent of Barbauld’s description of the detrimental moral effects of imperialism on the British character in \textit{An Epistle to William Wilberforce}\.\textsuperscript{127}\ Luxury juxtaposed with “ghastly want”

\begin{footnotes}
\item[122] McCarthy and Kraft n.2 163.
\item[123] Cookson, \textit{The Friends of Peace} 42.
\item[124] Cox 201.
\item[125] In 1793, Roscoe wrote that at the outbreak of war “the whole fabric vanishes like the work of enchantment. The enormous but unsubstantial capital, by which the productions of the world were so expeditiously transferred from region to region, sinks in a moment to a few hard guineas.” Roscoe, \textit{Occasional Tracts} 33.
\item[126] Cookson, \textit{The Friends of Peace} 25.
\item[127] Her linking of imperialism with illness was similar to Roscoe’s lines in \textit{Mount Pleasant}. He wrote: Hence a few surplus stores we claim,
\end{footnotes}
implied that Britain had not shared the benefits of commerce fairly. Barbauld’s attack on luxury was typical of the liberals’ attacks on aristocratic indulgence; drawing on Puritan precedents, they portrayed the ruling classes as morally degenerate, corrupt and incompetent.\textsuperscript{128}

In her poem Barbauld engaged with contemporary views on political economy. Isobel Armstrong demonstrates that in her poetry Barbauld questioned a number of traditionally male philosophical discourses and then subtly inverted them to reconstruct them from a female perspective.\textsuperscript{129} In \textit{Eighteen Hundred and Eleven}; she explored the economic ideas of Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus. Mandell argues that Smith’s argument in \textit{The Wealth of Nations} (1776) that commerce was stimulated by the right kind of public expenditure but undermined by state prodigality was in tune with Barbauld’s ideas.\textsuperscript{130} According to Smith, war was an unproductive use of labour, and capital as expenditure on the armed forces was “dead consumption”. He also opposed increasing the national debt as it represented inactive capital. He argued that taxation to support the debt would eventually reduce accumulation and this would limit the productiveness of labour.\textsuperscript{131}

However, Favretti argues that Barbauld did not agree with Smith’s idea that wealth production was man’s “socially approved goal”.\textsuperscript{132} Her use of the Midas myth suggests that Britain worshipped wealth instead of the true values which could bring happiness. Her idea was similar to Roscoe’s in \textit{Mount Pleasant} which criticised the excessive thirst for gain which was not productive of virtue or happiness.\textsuperscript{133} Favretti claims that Barbauld challenged Smith’s view from the civic

\begin{quote}
That tempt our avarice, but increase our shame;  
The sickly palate touch with more delight,  
Or swell the senseless riot of the night.–
-- Blest were the days ere Foreign Climes were known,  
Our wants contracted, and our wealth our own,  
When Health could crown, and Innocence endear,  
The temperate meal, that cost no eye a tear. (15)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{128} Cookson, \textit{The Friends of Peace} 26.  
\textsuperscript{129} Armstrong 16.  
\textsuperscript{130} Mandell, ““Those Limbs Disjointed” 38.  
\textsuperscript{131} Cookson, \textit{The Friends of Peace} 55.  
\textsuperscript{132} Favretti 103. For a discussion of his ideas see Sutherland, “Adam Smith’s Master Narrative” 97.  
\textsuperscript{133} Roscoe wrote:  
Ah! Why, ye sons of Wealth, with ceaseless toil,  
Add gold to gold, and swell the shining pile?  
Your general course to happiness ye bend,
humanist tradition by arguing that substituting the profit motive for classical virtue was destructive of society. She believed that man’s lust for power needed to be balanced by his civic virtue, which involved placing the public good above private interests. Unregulated commerce threatened these values because it was based on private initiative and open to corruption. The ideal republican citizen demonstrated independence and a “virtuous” devotion to the public good. In Barbauld’s poem Roscoe embodied these values with his “patriot breast” and “Roman virtue” (147–8).

Armstrong shows that Barbauld also engaged with the controversial theories of the political economist Thomas Malthus. In his Essay on the Principle of Population (1798), Malthus argued that the power of population to grow was greater than the potential of the earth to produce subsistence. He described nature squandering production in overpopulation which resulted in shortage. However, population was constantly reduced to a sustainable level by famine, wars, disease and natural disasters. McDonagh argues that Barbauld’s attitude to Malthus in Eighteen Hundred and Eleven was ambiguous. Parts of her poem present “something close to a Malthusian vision in which excessive productivity brings only death”. Barbauld wrote:

| Fruitful in vain, the matron counts with pride |
| The blooming youths that grace her honoured side; |
| No son returns to press her widow’d hand, |
| Her fallen blossoms strew a foreign strand. |

“Fruitful in vain”, which is repeated in the poem, suggests that the products of female fertility are wasted. As well as the bereaved mothers, Barbauld described the young girls who would remain virgins because of the war. Drawing on Bainbridge’s research, I suggest that in these descriptions Barbauld was subtly criticising the patriotic war poetry which used the image of “the Spartan matron who sends her son to war and the romantic heroine who buckles on her lover’s

| Why then to gain the means neglect the end? |
| To purchase peace requires a scanty store, – |
| – O spurn the grovelling wish that pants for more. |
| William Roscoe, Mount Pleasant 10. |

134 Favretti 103.
136 Armstrong 19.
137 McDonagh, “Barbauld’s Domestic Economy” 75.
Instead of glorifying these actions she emphasised the waste. She did not accept that this sacrifice was necessary on political or economic grounds. Unlike Malthus, Barbauld did not believe disasters were necessary to keep population under control. In her “Dialogue in the Shades” she ironically described Malthus as the “great philosopher [who] has lately discovered the world is in imminent danger of being over-peopled, and that if twenty or forty thousand men could not be persuaded every now and then to stand and be shot at, we should be forced to eat one another”.

Armstrong argues that Barbauld parodied Malthus’ ideas, suggesting that they legitimised the atrocities of war.

It seems that Barbauld agreed with Price’s earlier analysis that the British population was declining and that this was potentially harmful to the vitality of the economy. Population growth was seen by many liberals as essential to economic expansion as it would lead to increasing consumption and abundant labour. In her poem Barbauld argued death and destruction were unnecessarily invoked by man, not nature. She wrote:

Bounteous in vain, with frantic man at strife,
Gladd Nature pours the means – the joys of life;
In vain with orange blossoms scents the gale,
The hills with olive clothes, with corn the vale;
Man calls to Famine, nor invokes in vain,
Disease and Rapine follow in her train. (11–16)

McDonagh argues that the feminine, natural world is portrayed as fruitful, able to provide “the joys of life”, but this productivity is “in vain” because of the intrusion of the “masculine aggressor”. “Man at strife” brings “famine”, “disease” and war which destroys the female creative force.

IMPERIALISM AND PROGRESS

In her poem Barbauld traced the development of civilisation. Personifying a mysterious “Spirit” (215) which brings civilisation and progress, Barbauld challenged Enlightenment ideas by describing this force ambivalently as not necessarily benevolent: “Secret his progress is, unknown his birth;/Moody and

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138 Bainbridge 31.
140 Armstrong 20–1.
141 Cookson, The Friends of Peace 56.
142 McDonagh, “Barbauld’s Domestic Economy” 75.
viewless as the changing wind” (216–17). The idea that the spirit is unknowable and unpredictable, abiding by no universal laws, undermined progressive ideas in the infinite potential of knowledge. At first it is described in positive terms as a civilising force which stimulates man “to better life” (220). Creative potential is released, as a feminised “Obedient Nature” (223) follows the spirit, and “the steaming marsh is changed to fruitful meads” (224). The word “fruitful” creates a productive image of the agricultural stage. Then comes the female figure “Commerce” (228) encouraging man to conquer nature. The man-made wonders of the ancient world are then created by the Babylonians and the Egyptians; this era is described positively as the “flowers of Genius and of Art” (236) flourish. Religion and culture develop as “Saints, Heroes, Sages” “adorn” the land (237). But at this zenith of civilisation the “Genius” “forsakes the favoured shore,/And hates, capricious, what he loved before” (241–2). At this point empires decline and despots seize power.

Drawing on Edward Gibbon’s ideas about the rise and fall of civilisations in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and the Comte de Volney’s *The Ruins: or, Meditations on the Revolutions of Empire* (1791), Barbauld traced the decline of previous empires. She then turned to the British empire arguing that it too was destined to fall. Implying imperial expansion had gone too far, she expressed ambivalence to foreign trade and scientific advances. The replacement of the warrior “matrons” of Boudicca’s era by the “light forms” floating “beneath transparent muslins” (291) with their “tutored voices” (292) and “artful note” (292) creates an image of artificial femininity. It is similar to her linking of corrupted femininity to commercialism and imperialism in her *Epistle to William Wilberforce.* In *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* imperialists take the products of other civilisations from their natural environment to place them in artificial ones. Acacias and cedars are grafted into Britain’s natural woodland and exotic plants are confined within greenhouses’ “crystal walls” (295). Barbauld expressed admiration for advances in science and art contriving to “mould a climate and

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143 McCarthy and Kraft 160.
144 See Chapter 3.
create the soil” (300) describing it as “useful toil” (299).\textsuperscript{145} She also used the positive term “exults” (305) to describe London’s pride in the manipulation of the natural cycle to provide “summer ices” (306) and winter roses. However, Barbauld expressed uneasiness about man’s hubristic idea that he could conquer nature. Gendering nature as female, she described an exploitative imperialism which showed no respect to “yielding Nature” (303), treating her like a conquered subject who was asked not for “gifts, but tribute at her hands” (304). Her ambiguous attitude to science in \textit{Eighteen Hundred and Eleven} is reminiscent of her debates with Priestley in the 1770s.\textsuperscript{146}

Having described imperial imports, Barbauld turned to British exports. Drawing on the idea that free trade could promote universal peace and happiness, she argued that British commerce also spread British laws and Christianity. However, Barbauld suggested that Britain’s hegemony was coming to an end:

\begin{quote}
But fairest flowers expand but to decay;
The worm is in thy core, thy glories pass away;
Arts, arms, and wealth destroy the fruits they bring;
Commerce, like beauty, knows no second spring. (313–16)
\end{quote}

The natural imagery emphasised that despite man’s belief in his power to control nature the natural cycle, involved in the decline and fall of empires, will eventually triumph.

Chandler claims that Barbauld’s description of different periods of improvement reflected Scottish Enlightenment ideas. In John Millar’s \textit{The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks in Society} (1771), he portrayed the state passing through a sequence of stages: barbaric, pastoral, agricultural. Instead of emphasising universal progress, Scottish Enlightenment thinkers argued that there could be uneven development; one state could be barbaric while another was civilised.\textsuperscript{147} The Friends of Peace were influenced by these ideas but they added the new category of the “military society” as epitomised by Napoleonic France. The alternative was an ethical “commercial society” based on a relatively fair distribution of wealth and power, which opposed war, disorder and lawlessness.

\textsuperscript{145} This passage can be read as referring to Roscoe’s experiments in scientific agriculture at Chat Moss and Trafford Moss to reclaim marsh land for agricultural cultivation. For a full discussion of Roscoe’s agricultural experiment see Wilson, \textit{William Roscoe} 156–7.

\textsuperscript{146} See Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{147} Chandler 127–31.
and which was internationalist rather than nationalist in its outlook. They believed that pacific, commercial civilisation could lead to progress throughout the world. This was the type of nation Barbauld believed in, but her poem suggests that Britain was increasingly developing a more militaristic model of nationhood.

A mirror image of Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* was Felicia Hemans’ *England and Spain: or, Patriotism and Valour* (1808). As Gottlieb shows, Barbauld’s poem can “fruitfully be read as a counterstatement” to Hemans’ youthful patriotism. The two poems were similar in their panoramic perspective but opposite in their assessment of that view. Championing militaristic values, Hemans’ poetry portrayed the war as a battle for freedom. Unlike Barbauld’s pessimistic view of Britain’s future, Hemans praised Britain’s imperial ambitions.

Disillusioned with British society, Barbauld argued that in the future progressive commercial society would be found in America. She portrayed the “Genius” of progress moving to South America. He calls out: “‘Tis now the hour!”

\begin{quote}
Spreads his broad hand, and bids the nations rise.
La Plata hears amidst her torrents’ roar,
Potosi hears it, as she digs the ore:
Ardent, the Genius fans the noble strife,
And pours through feeble souls a higher life,
Shouts to the mingled tribes from sea to sea,
And swears – Thy world, Columbus, shall be free! (328–34)
\end{quote}

These lines refer to the South American nations’ fight for freedom. Venezuela declared independence from Spain in 1811; the mention of La Plata in Argentina and Potosi in Bolivia suggests Barbauld thought other nations would follow. In contrast to wars of imperialism, she saw this as “the noble strife” and part of a “higher life” because liberty was a prerequisite for progress. These final lines are reminiscent of “Corsica”, as they link imagery of sublime landscapes to the noble fight for freedom from tyranny.

“Thy world, Columbus, shall be free!” can be read as referring to economic as well as political freedom. Rebecca Cole Heinowitz has examined in detail the

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149 Gottlieb 336.
150 Ibid. 337.
151 McCarthy and Kraft n.3 173.
links between Barbauld’s poem and South American political developments. The creole patriot Juan Pablo Viscardo y Guzman in his *Lettre aux Espagnols Américains* (translated in 1808 as *The Letter to the Spanish Americans*) argued that Spanish America was the ideal place to test the humanising power of free trade.\(^{152}\) I consider that his description of the internationalism and fraternity of free trade was similar to Barbauld’s positive portrayal of the successful era of multicultural British commerce. It suggests that Barbauld believed that South America would be the model for ethical free trade. For her, progress was inextricably linked to both economic and political freedom. She implied that it would no longer continue in Britain because the government had undermined free trade and civil liberties. Prophesying the future, Barbauld wrote:

Night, Gothic night, again may shade the plains  
Where Power is seated, and where Science reigns;  
England, the seat of arts, be only known  
By the grey ruin and the mouldering stone;  
That Time may tear the garland from her brow,  
And Europe sit in dust, as Asia now. (121–6)

The repetition of the word “night” suggested that darkness might triumph over the light of Enlightenment ideas. However, her use of the conditional “may” instead of “will” implied that it was not inevitable. She made a final plea for Britons to protect liberal values:

Yet, O my Country, name beloved, revered,  
By every tie that binds the soul endeared,  
Whose image to my infant senses came  
Mixt with Religion’s light and Freedom’s holy flame!  
If prayers may not avert, if ’tis thy fate  
To rank amongst the names that once were great,  
Not like the dim cold Crescent shalt thou fade,  
Thy debt to Science and the Muse unpaid. (67–74)

This very personal passage demonstrated her love of country which was based on Britain’s religious tolerance and freedom. As Watson points out, for radicals,\(^{152}\) Guzman wrote: “What an agreeable spectacle will the fertile shores of America present, covered with men from all nations exchanging the productions of their country against ours! How many from among them, flying oppression and misery, will come to enrich us by their industry and their knowledge, and to repair our exhausted population! Thus would America reconcile the extremities of the earth; and her inhabitants, united by a common interest, would form one GREAT FAMILY OF BROTHERS” (123–4). Qtd. in Rebecca Cole Heinowitz, “‘Thy World, Columbus, Shall Be Free’: British Romantic Deviance and Spanish American Revolution”, *European Romantic Review* 17:2 (2006):153.
patriotism was owed to the welfare of mankind rather than nation, church and king. Mandell has examined Barbauld’s use of the conditional mode in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. By repeating “if” Barbauld again implied that Britain’s decline could be averted as she suggested that each individual had a role to play in the nation’s destiny. Mandell claims that the conditional mode “makes the answer to the question ‘whose hands are doing what to whom?’ – and perhaps, ‘what is my hand in this?’ – just that more pressing”. Praying for a last-minute reprieve, Barbauld indicated that a spiritual change was needed in the nation.

Progress might leave Britain but it would survive in America. Barbauld wrote: “If westward streams the light that leaves thy shores,/Still from thy lamp the streaming radiance pours” (79–80). The imagery of light represented Enlightenment values which had not been extinguished like the “dim cold” (73) unenlightened values of the Ottoman empire. Nicholas Birns reads the poem as emphasising that Britain’s literary, legal and scientific legacy would continue in the English-speaking world.

Keach claims that Barbauld’s description of the transatlantic emigration of progress was steeped in Dissenting culture. From the seventeenth century Dissenters portrayed a corrupt monarchical and ecclesiastical establishment in Britain in contrast to a new land of religious and political freedom abroad. Drawing on Caroline Robbins’ analysis of the Dissenting teacher and writer James Burgh’s work, I suggest that Barbauld’s poem was particularly influenced by his ideas. Robbins describes Burgh’s *Political Disquisitions* (1774) as “perhaps the most important political treatise which appeared in England in the first half of the reign of George III”. Like Roscoe, Burgh attributed the troubles of the era to the corrupt and unrepresentative character of Parliament. He argued that all able-bodied men not in receipt of alms should vote. His portrayal of the “fearful and

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horrid prospects ahead” for Britain if steps were not taken to remedy the constitution was similar to *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*.  

He wrote:

>Pursuing those gloomy ideas I see – how shall I write it? – I see my wretched country in the same condition as *France* is now (...) I see the once rich and populous cities of *England* in the same condition with those of *Spain*; whole streets lying in rubbish and the grass peeping up between the stones in those which continue still inhabited. I see the harbours empty, the warehouses shut up and the shopkeepers playing at draughts for want of customers. (emphases original)

Prophesying future threats to British liberties, he forecast the end of habeas corpus, the Bill of Rights and trial by jury in the near future. Like Barbauld’s later poem, his work was written on the brink of the earlier war between Britain and America. He praised the courage and nobility of the American colonists and criticised British treatment of them.

After the disillusionment with events in France many radicals emigrated to America. Like Barbauld, Roscoe had close transatlantic links. He exchanged ideas with leading Americans, including the future President, Thomas Jefferson. These ties of history, religion, politics, trade and friendship explain why war with America was such a dreadful prospect for Barbauld and her fellow liberals that the campaign against the Orders in Council became the main focus of their political action.

In the wider context, Barbauld’s poem is a reassessment of what constitutes power. Although she recognised that in the modern world the strongest military power conquered countries, Barbauld believed that the pre-eminence that mattered was cultural and spiritual. Her sentiments in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* were the same as in “Corsica”; what really counted was “the realms of mind” (136). Her attitude was shared by Roscoe. In 1810, he wrote:

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158 Ibid. 365–8.
160 Ibid. 368.
161 Barbauld’s idea of British cultural ideas being exported to America proved prophetic. Roscoe’s model of cultural enterprise was widely admired by Americans. In 1820, the former President of America, Thomas Jefferson, wrote to Roscoe claiming that his ideas on higher education had inspired him in forming the University of Virginia. Whale 102–3.
162 In “Corsica” Barbauld wrote:
There yet remains a freedom, nobler far
Than kings or senates can destroy or give;
Beyond the proud oppressor’s cruel grasp
It is only by industry, by integrity, by knowledge, by the encouragement of enlarged and virtuous sentiments, by the cultivation of the human mind in every department of science and of art, that we ought to contend for superiority over others. It is by such contests only that the human race can be effectually improved, and it is these alone that counteract the calamities which the brutal struggles of physical strength have hitherto inflicted upon mankind.\textsuperscript{163}

Roscoe considered the arts were an integral part of the commercial spirit, capable of producing a wealthy and virtuous civilised society. Barbauld reflected this vision in her lines: “Art plies his tools, and Commerce spreads her sail,/And wealth is wafted in each shifting gale” (273–4). John Whale claims that having written the biography of Lorenzo de’ Medici in 1796, which portrayed the Florentine as a self-made merchant prince and patron of the arts, Roscoe saw himself as a modern day Lorenzo, integrating aesthetics and economics in Liverpool.\textsuperscript{164}

Barbauld’s and Roscoe’s ideas were based on the French philosopher Diderot’s theories that art should contribute to public morality. Experiencing art could have an ennobling effect on all members of society, not just the elite.\textsuperscript{165}

During the 1770s there was a debate about who should patronise the arts. In 1777 Wilkes argued in the Commons for more generous funds for the British Museum and for the establishment of a national gallery of paintings. In 1768 the Royal Academy opened, with Sir Joshua Reynolds as its first president.\textsuperscript{166} Barbauld alluded to these cultural developments approvingly in her poem:

\begin{quote}
Oft shall the strangers turn their eager feet
The rich remains of antient art to greet,
The pictured walls with critic eye explore,
And Reynolds be what Raphael was before. (205–8)
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{164} Working with Dissenting intellectuals and merchants, he turned Liverpool into a city of culture which he believed could be a model for the rest of the world. His wide range of projects, combining commerce, education and the fine arts, brought together a community which was politically divided. As an abolitionist Unitarian, Roscoe was often in conflict with the dominant commercial and political forces in his home town which were based around the slave trade. However, his institutionalisation of the arts in the city involved different factions working together for the common good. He was involved in the Liverpool Society for Promoting Painting and Design, the Athenaeum Club, the Literary and Philosophical Society, the Liverpool Library, the Botanic Garden and the Liverpool Royal Institution. For a full discussion of Roscoe’s work see Whale 91–2.

\textsuperscript{165} Wilson, \textit{William Roscoe} 122.

\textsuperscript{166} Butler, \textit{Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries} 40.
In her poem Barbauld suggested that even if Britain was in decline, its cultural heritage would still inspire other nations. In the future, American tourists would visit significant sites reflecting British liberal values. During the war, monuments to war heroes were erected in St Paul’s to create a new pantheon. Its purpose was to embody national concepts of patriotism. In her poem Barbauld alluded to this describing how the American pilgrim visiting:

The hallowed mansions of the silent dead,
Shall enter the long isle and vaulted dome
Where Genius and where Valour find a home. (178–80)

However, Barbauld challenged this militaristic nation-building project by drawing attention to the statues in the cathedral of the literary figure Samuel Johnson and the philanthropist John Howard, not the military ones. She then created her own pantheon of heroes reflecting her Dissenting heritage. Although she included the military leaders Horatio Nelson and Sir John Moore, the majority of her icons reflected pacific pursuits. For their contribution to literature and philosophy she included John Locke, John Milton, William Cowper, James Thomson, William Shakespeare, and her friend the dramatist Joanna Baillie. Demonstrating her pride in Britain’s contribution to science and humanitarianism, Sir Isaac Newton and the anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Clarkson were lauded. Her choice of heroes was similar to her brother John Aikin’s selection in his *General Biography*. His choice of manufacturers, inventors and engineers implied that they were more deserving of a place in history than military heroes.

By creating her alternative pantheon, Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* subtly criticised contemporary poets who glorified war and warriors. From Nelson’s victory at the Battle of the Nile in 1798, many volumes of poetry were produced to celebrate British heroes. Barbauld highlighted the divide between pro- and anti-war writers in *Sins of Government*, arguing that instead of glorifying heroes the focus should be on the futile suffering of war.

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167 Parliament voted for thirty-two monuments at a cost of £120,000. This was widely covered by newspapers and magazines and seen as a propaganda opportunity. Holger Hoock, “‘The Cheap Defence of Nations’: Monuments and Propaganda”, Philp, *Resisting Napoleon* 159–71.
169 Bainbridge 50.
170 Barbauld wrote: “We must fix our eyes, not on the hero returning with conquest, nor yet on the gallant officer dying in the bed of honour, the subject of picture and of song, but on the private soldier, forced into service, exhausted by camp-sickness and fatigue; pale, emaciated, crawling to
used in the same way as public monuments and ceremonial to create an image of military glamour.\textsuperscript{171} This type of poetry, which glorified dying for one’s country, celebrated Britain’s national characteristics, culture, history and political system. Recalling triumphs of the past, it sanctioned a divinely ordained global role.\textsuperscript{172} Walter Scott’s tales of chivalry in the sixteenth-century Scottish borders made him the most popular and influential of these patriotic poets.\textsuperscript{173} From the publication of his first metrical romance \textit{The Lay of the Last Minstrel} in 1805, he shaped the public imagination by translating the realities of modern warfare into a chivalric world of heroic individuals.\textsuperscript{174} In a review of Scott’s \textit{The Lay of the Last Minstrel}, in the \textit{Annual Review}, Barbauld analysed this type of war poetry. Contrasting the differences in imaginative appeal between Scott’s “picturesque” portrayal of warfare and the “scientific” reality of modern warfare, she was aware that individual action set in the past was more aesthetically attractive.\textsuperscript{175} Her poem offered an alternative vision of war and a radical patriotism.

**HOW RADICAL WAS EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND ELEVEN?**

Barbauld’s poem was extremely radical but her purpose was to bring about reform not revolution: in the short term by ending the Orders in Council and in the longer term by creating a more liberal society. However, the vicious attacks on her poem suggest that the government perceived her poem as threatening. As Behrendt comments her “politically oppositional poem represented just the sort of ‘sedition’ against which the \textit{Quarterly} and other like-minded Tory organs railed”.\textsuperscript{176}

One of the most controversial lines in Barbauld’s poem was: “Man calls to Famine, nor invokes in vain” (15). Her argument that poverty was exacerbated by government policies and not natural phenomena was typical of 1790s anti-war poetry. In 1797, the \textit{Anti-Jacobin} described the anti-war Jacobin poet who

\begin{itemize}
  \item an hospital with the prospect of life (…) blasted, useless and suffering. We must think of the uncounted tears of her who weeps alone, because the only being who shared her sentiments is taken from her.” “Sins of Government”, McCarthy and Kraft 313.
  \item Cookson, \textit{The British Armed Nation} 183.
  \item Bainbridge 99–100.
  \item Ibid. 17, 119–21.
  \item Catriona Kennedy, “From the Ballroom to the Battlefield: British Women and Waterloo”, Forrest, Hagemann and Rendall 146.
  \item Bainbridge 121–2.
  \item Behrendt, “The Gap” 37.
\end{itemize}
celebrated Gallic victories, while describing the devastating consequences of war on the British poor. Barbauld’s lines echoed Roscoe’s claim in 1808 that the war was caused “not by any irremediable necessity, but is the result of the passions of the wicked”. Opponents of the war argued that it consolidated oligarchical society by augmenting the wealth and power of a small group of office-holders, financiers and contractors. In her poem Barbauld promoted the view that the rich used their power to increase their wealth at the expense of the poor; this was similar to her argument in her earlier essay “Thoughts on the Inequality of Conditions”. She wrote:

    O’er want and woe thy gorgeous robe is spread,
    And angel charities in vain oppose:
    With grandeur’s growth the mass of misery grows. (318–20)

The alliteration of “want and woe” in contrast to “grandeur’s growth” emphasised the separation between rich and poor. The “gorgeous robe” suggested that the wealthy enjoyed luxury while the poor lacked the basic necessities. Hadley reads Barbauld’s poem as opposing Smith’s idea that as the wealth of society increased the conditions for the poor would also improve. Barbauld argued that the “mass of misery grows” (320) in an unregulated market economy.

The idea that there was a self-serving war faction was particularly threatening to the ruling classes. To retaliate Croker wrote: “We had indeed heard that some mad and mischievous partisans had ventured to charge the scarcity which unhappily exists upon the political measures of government:— but what does Mrs Barbauld mean?” Croker’s comparison of Barbauld to “mad and mischievous partisans” suggests that the government considered her comment to be subversive.

The timing of publication helps to explain why Eighteen Hundred and Eleven seemed so inflammatory. The poem appeared during one of the worst bread

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177 Bainbridge 3.
178 Roscoe, Occasional Tracts 208.
179 Favretti 103.
180 For a full discussion of Barbauld’s attitude to inequality see Chapter 5.
181 On this issue, Barbauld agreed with Malthus, who challenged Smith’s claim by drawing attention to the crowded conditions produced by the growth of manufacturing. He claimed that this state was unfavourable to health and virtue and the increased demand for jobs drove down wages. Hadley 93–4.
183 Croker, Review of “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” 310.
crises, which lasted from 1811 to 1813. The Friends of Peace claimed that war was the main cause of scarcity but the government blamed it purely on harvest failure. Liberals argued that increased taxation on farmers increased the price of bread and large producers used their monopoly to manipulate the market.\(^{184}\) Bread riots and organised machine breaking by Luddites in Nottingham made the government fear there could be an insurrection. The assassination of the Prime Minister Spencer Perceval in May 1812 also heightened fears. Although the murder was committed by a lone lunatic, some alarmists considered it was part of a greater conspiracy to overthrow the government.\(^{185}\) As Henry Crabb Robinson’s account shows, Wordsworth and Coleridge connected the murder with political fanaticism, inflamed by the radical MP Sir Francis Burdett’s speeches.\(^{186}\) Wordsworth expressed his fears that war would arise between the poor and the rich, aggravated by industrialisation.\(^{187}\) McCarthy speculates that in such “a fevered climate, *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* might have been thought implicated in some occult way” in Perceval’s murder.\(^{188}\)

Recent historians have argued that there was an immense gap between the threat of revolution imagined by the ruling classes and the reality of events. In *The Armed Nation*, Cookson argues that the governing classes’ overreaction was rooted in their memories of the French Revolution, which made them view any popular opposition as subversive.\(^{189}\) This mentality is evident in Crabb Robinson’s criticism of “the unqualified Jacobinism of her [Barbauld’s] politics”.\(^{190}\) In fact, Barbauld was no Jacobin; she was aware that the debate had moved on from eighteenth-century issues. I suggest that, like many liberals, Barbauld realised that

\(^{184}\) Cookson, *The Friends of Peace* 69. The poor faced starvation due to the rising price of grain brought about by wartime blockades and a succession of bad harvests; bread riots were common. During the war the price of wheat increased from 43 shillings in 1792 to 126 shillings in 1812. Derry 48.\(^{185}\) Bew 304.\(^{186}\) A party at the Aikins’ house 13 May 1812 demonstrates how the assassination further polarised politics. Wordsworth suggested that Perceval’s assassin had probably heard Burdett’s speech and “operating on his mind in its diseased and inflamed state, [it] might be the determining motive to his act” (emphasis original). Roscoe’s son immediately contradicted Wordsworth, stating that Burdett’s speech was constitutional, and asked what people who were starving should do. Wordsworth replied: “Not murder people, unless they mean to eat their hearts.” Barbauld agreed with Roscoe. Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of H. C. Robinson*, ed. Thomas Sadler, vol. 1 (London, 1872) 246–7.\(^{187}\) Ibid. 250.\(^{188}\) McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment* 478.\(^{189}\) Cookson, *The British Armed Nation* 15.\(^{190}\) Robinson, *On Books and their Writers* 64.
the problem was new forms of despotism and an oligarchical government, not monarchy and the ancien régime.

Barbauld’s poem “On the King’s Illness”, written in the same year as *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, illustrates this realisation. It is an elegy for George III and the Georgian era. George is portrayed as a good king, preferable to the continental despotism of the ancien régime and the new Napoleonic form of despotism. However, the poem reflected Barbauld’s republican theories. She emphasised the egalitarianism of heaven, writing there “the peasant and the king repose together” (4). She emphasised that George was no greater than other men: there was no idea of divine right; his right to rule was based on him behaving humanely and keeping within his constitutional powers. Although at times during his reign she, like other Dissenters, had questioned whether he was going to behave like the continental monarchs, she acknowledged that he was not like them. While they were condemned to reside in hell, George would find a “peaceful sleep” (5) because his humanity influenced his behaviour as a ruler. The idea that public and private morality should be the same was a constant in Barbauld’s work, present in *Sins of Government* and in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*.

Barbauld’s poem implied that the King had made political mistakes but they were ones “of erring judgment and not will perverse” (26). This can be read as referring to the early part of his reign. Whigs and Dissenters had been concerned that, under the influence of the earl of Bute, George seemed to be undermining the 1688 settlement. However, after this early error Barbauld conceded that he demonstrated no “will” to subvert the constitution. In her reflection on the Georgian era she acknowledged that it had been an enlightened period, writing: “Thy name has chronicled a long bright page/Of England’s story” (30–1). However, as in *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, she suggested that this achievement was under

192 George won admiration from observers like Barbauld who were “not used/To gaze on kings with admiration fond” (14–15) because he was charitable, devout and unostentatious in his lifestyle. She portrayed him as a unifying force who in his illness received “A Nation’s pity and a Nation’s love”(23). The repetition of “Nation” reflects that in the King’s Jubilee in 1809 there was widespread recognition that George III had become a national icon in the long struggle against Napoleonic despotism. Sack 134.
193 For a full discussion of Barbauld’s attitudes to monarchy see Chapter 4.
194 Sack 122–3.
threat in “this eventful world” (33). Using the lifespan of a baby born in 1811, she speculated that by the time the baby was an old man the world would be a worse place. The representative of a future generation had hair “whitened with grief” (35). He would look back with nostalgia and muse “Our fathers’ days were happy” (36).

Barbauld’s ideas in this poem reflected Roscoe’s in his 1811 pamphlet on parliamentary reform. He also praised the constitution of Britain as “upon the whole, the most perfect system which the world has hitherto seen”. But like Barbauld he considered it was vulnerable. He claimed that only a corrupt Parliament would allow the policies which had continued the war and undermined the economy. The solution was a complete reform of Parliament which would allow all householders to vote. He wrote: “The time either now is, or will soon arrive, when every person must ask himself the important question, what opinions he means decisively to adopt, and what course of conduct to pursue”. His belief that each individual must use his or her conscience and decide what political action to take against a corrupt government recalls Barbauld’s ideas in *Sins of Government*. In 1811 Crabb Robinson cited this pamphlet as evidence that she was a democrat. He wrote: “On looking over her otherwise admirable *Sins* I was surprised that I had not before noticed what was then become offensive, the unqualified assertion that the numerical majority of every country ought to be the legislators!”

However, as Sack argues, supporting parliamentary reform was not in itself revolutionary. Roscoe’s and Barbauld’s ideas were controversial because they criticised the government and called for wholesale democratic reform at a sensitive time. In a review of Roscoe’s pamphlet *A Letter to Henry Brougham, Esq. MP., on the subject of reform in the representation of the people in Parliament*, which appeared in the same edition of the *Quarterly* as Croker’s attack on Barbauld, the reviewer criticised Roscoe for suggesting that corrupt ministers were responsible

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196 Ibid. 29–31.
198 Sack shows that from the mid-eighteenth century it was backed by the High Church Sector of the Tory party and the City, radical wing. In the 1790s the Pittites supported eventual electoral reform. However, reform was not a major issue until 1809 when the scandal over the Duke of York’s corruption led to Whig calls for electoral reform. At this time voices on the right, including Wordsworth, also supported reform. Before 1819 it was difficult to find any Tory newspaper or journal which explicitly denounced it. Sack 150–1.
for wasting the “blood and treasure of the nation”.¹⁹⁹ The reviewer asked what hope there was for national reputation:

> If such capital misrepresentations are so coolly to be circulated (…) not merely by those vile panders to revolution (…) but by the authors of undoubted patriotism and respectability; if such men are thus to write curses and infamy on the most radiant page of a people's glory.²⁰⁰

Looser argues that among a number of factors that contributed to *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven’s* negative reception was Barbauld’s age. Some reviewers portrayed her as old fashioned; others questioned the soundness of her mind.²⁰¹ I suggest that the comment in the review of Roscoe’s pamphlet was influenced by his age. It seems that Barbauld and Roscoe were particularly threatening because they were “respectable”, mature patriots; this gave their ideas authority with a wide audience. Although they attacked the existing order, their arguments were reasonable not revolutionary. Their age gave them a disinterested perspective. As they could not be labelled as hot-headed young revolutionaries, another way had to be found to stop them, hence the attacks on their age which aimed to belittle their authority.

**CONCLUSION**

Barbauld’s poem was attacked because it was radical, threatening and prophetic. Lucy Aikin claimed that the bad reviews deterred Barbauld from further publication.²⁰² However Looser argues that this is a myth. Barbauld continued to publish and to contemplate publication after 1812.²⁰³ I suggest that Barbauld knew from discussions with Roscoe that she would be attacked for writing this poem, so the hostility of her enemies did not come as a surprise. What shocked and demoralised her was the lack of support from many of her friends and former allies. Keach has examined in detail the negative response of Barbauld’s friends and

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²⁰⁰ Ibid. 280.
²⁰¹ Looser 132–8.
²⁰² Aikin wrote: “This was the last of Mrs Barbauld’s separate publications. Who indeed, that knew and loved her, could have wished her to expose again that honoured head to the scorns of the unmanly, the malignant, and the base?” Barbauld, Works 1: lii.
²⁰³ Looser 137.
foes. McCarthy claims that it was the lack of support from the Edgeworths that particularly hurt her. Like her co-religionists throughout the centuries, at great personal sacrifice to herself, Barbauld had stood up for her beliefs at a time of national crisis. Her literary martyrdom made a difference. Although Barbauld’s poem was badly received by contemporary critics, it was part of a successful campaign which swayed public opinion to such an extent that the Orders in Council were lifted in June 1812. It was too late to prevent a war with America, but it was a triumph for liberalism. Cookson claims that after the patriotic reaction of the 1790s threatened to crush liberal opposition it emerged “stronger than ever in the following decade. No government could afford to take it lightly after the liberal-led campaign against the Orders in Council succeeded in 1812”.

Barbauld and her colleagues in the Friends of Peace had promoted what it meant to be liberal at a time when those values were under threat. Their beliefs in ethical capitalism, free trade and internationalism were to be at the centre of the political debate throughout the nineteenth century. Her poem was a brave attempt to encourage each individual to consider what really made Britain great and to fight for the survival of those values in the modern world.

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204 Keach, “A Regency Prophecy” 570–2.
205 William McCarthy, personal communication 14 September 2012.
Conclusion

In *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation* Barbauld wrote: “It is their [reformers’] business to sow the seed, and let it lie patiently in the bosom of the ground, perhaps for ages – to prepare, not to bring about revolutions”.¹ As my thesis demonstrates, this is what Barbauld did in her political writing. She provided in embryonic form the ideas which would grow to fruition in the more fertile political ground of the nineteenth century. This imagery is particularly apt as a seed is not fully developed: similarly, some of Barbauld’s ideas, for instance on socio-economic issues and representative government, are not fully worked out; they are taken to the next stage by thinkers in the next generations.

My research reveals Barbauld as a reformer, not a revolutionary. However, she was among the most radical of the reformers; the similarity of her ideas to those of her fellow Dissenters Priestley and Price is to be expected, but the echoes in her writing of Thomas Paine’s work is more surprising. If her ideas had been implemented they would have transformed society, ending aristocratic privileges in church and state and involving ordinary people in politics. Conservatives at this time were well aware of the danger of these ideas, hence their focus on persecuting Dissenters. They were particularly afraid of the middle class allying with the masses to overthrow the existing order. As is demonstrated in my examination of the treatment of Muir and Palmer, when the middle classes offered leadership to the working class they received the harshest penalties. Barbauld’s positive attitude to the evolving working class, seeing the similarities between their values and those of the middle class, was particularly threatening to the established order.

My thesis demonstrates that her issues were the ones that dominated her own society and she was an important protagonist in the politics of her time. However, Barbauld’s case raises the larger question about the significance of work that is prominent but on the losing side. In the short-term she failed to achieve her political aims. She was a leading member of progressive movements which saw their hope of reform dashed by reactionary forces. As the contemporary response to her poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* showed, Barbauld’s challenge to the

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dominant political and literary ideas of the era was running against the tide. But that does not mean that her radicalism did not make a major contribution to British society. It is worth remembering that Paine, Godwin and Wollstonecraft did not see their ideas implemented in their life-time either. Within a decade of Barbauld’s death, in 1825, many of the reforms she fought for were implemented: the Corporation and Test Acts were repealed in 1828, Parliament was reformed in 1832 and slavery in the British colonies was abolished in 1833. Her belief that the best way to change society was through educating the next generation of citizens was borne out; one of her Palgrave pupils, Thomas Denman, became Lord Chief Justice of England and drafted the bill for the Reform Act of 1832.  

As well as measuring political success in terms of policy changes, it is equally important to assess Barbauld’s contribution to the development of political ideas. I argue that her work was involved in the transmission of early liberal ideas from one generation to another, thus helping to lay the groundwork for reform. Caroline Robbins claims that the French Revolution marked the end of the Commonwealthmen. The radicalism that began to manifest itself in the early nineteenth century, although connected with earlier movements, was strongly defined by utilitarianism, continental theories and the changes brought by industrialisation. The great theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries “entirely failed to foresee anything remotely resembling modern economic development and the changes in class structure that accompanied it”. However, I have shown that Barbauld did foresee some of these changes and she was one of the writers who transmitted and updated the Commonwealth ideas on liberty for the new era. She fought for the survival of these values at a time when they were under threat. Cookson writes: “If during the [Napoleonic] war and afterwards liberal intervention in national issues did little to determine government action of the moment, the writers and pressmen contributed profoundly to the beliefs and values that would influence political decision and conflict in the long-term”. 

As J. W. Burrow's research emphasises, there were important connections between nineteenth-century liberal thinking and the “richly heterogeneous varieties

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2 McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 184.  
of eighteen-century Whiggism”. Barbauld was one of the writers who maintained those links. Rather than fitting into one tradition of progressive thought, as outlined by neo-Lockean or Marxist historians like Kramnick or others who focus on the civic humanist tradition, my research has shown that she combined a range of ideas from the seventeenth-century Commonwealthmen, Whig civic humanists, the Scottish Enlightenment and early utilitarianism to create her form of middle-class, liberal values. F. Rosen emphasises “the complexity of the transformation which took place in the early nineteenth century, involving Whig and radical ideas in relation to the emergence of liberalism as an ideology”. I propose that through the composite nature of her ideas Barbauld contributed to this transformation.

Recent critics argue that one of the most important philosophical influences on nineteenth-century liberalism was utilitarianism or Benthamism. They challenge the thesis of earlier critics, led by Elie Halevy, that Bentham was never a liberal; impatient with philanthropic reforms he passed from monarchic authoritarianism to democratic authoritarianism. Rosen argues that “liberty and utility do not in any sense stand in opposition to each other”. He contends that Bentham’s emphasis on security in his account of civil and political liberty, which acknowledged the logical difference between liberty as acting as one pleases, and civil and political liberty as security, requiring restraints on one’s action so that others are free to act, gives liberty a central place in Bentham’s utilitarianism.

Rosen asserts that Bentham’s idea of constitutional liberty was completed only with the evolution of his mature theory in the 1820s. Burrow describes Benthamism as an offshoot of associationist psychological doctrines. Suspicion of custom and received opinions as prejudice led to the view that English institutions and established culture were “delusive fictions, whose function was to protect and disguise the sinister vested interests which controlled society for their own ends”. Bentham claimed that monarchs were often ignorant and unfit to rule. Arguing for a representative democracy, he believed that the interests of the members of the

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5 Burrow 4.
6 Rosen 5.
8 Rosen 4.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid. 5.
11 Burrow 37.
community would be more likely to embody the universal interest than those of a monarch, aristocracy or other ruling elites. Mere intellectual aptitude was not sufficient to identify one’s interest with the universal interest; moral aptitude was also necessary, and, on balance, numerous individuals had a greater tendency to act correctly than any set of rulers. Therefore he advocated near universal suffrage based on literacy, claiming that the participation would improve people’s intellectual and moral character.12

My thesis suggests that there are similarities between the ideas advocated in Barbauld’s 1790s political pamphlets and Bentham’s later theories. Barbauld’s critique of hereditary monarchy, her claim that the few governed in their own interest instead of for the many, and her support for the democratic rights of the majority, reflect an embryonic form of utilitarianism which circulated in the Priestley circle.13 However, Barbauld’s ideas were not developed in detail like Bentham’s. Unlike him, she did not set out in full how representative government should be organised. Nor should she be described as a utilitarian. Benthamism’s attempt to reduce the entire range of human behaviour, individual as well as social, to the single principle of happiness through a calculus of pleasure and pain, was too formulaic for Barbauld.14 Her political ideas were based on a more human-scale approach. As she wrote in Sins, reformers “want people to be happy their way; whereas every one must be happy his own way”.15 This emphasis on individualism is similar to the critique of utilitarianism by the leading liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill. After receiving a utilitarian education from his father, Mill had an intellectual and emotional crisis which made him challenge the basic tenet of utilitarianism. Gertrude Himmelfarb writes: “It was only after he discovered that the greatest-happiness principle was not a sufficient raison d’être for himself that he began to suspect that happiness, as the Benthamite understood it, was not a sufficient raison for human beings in general” (emphases original).16 Mill became aware that the almost exclusive importance Benthamites placed on ordering outward circumstances was not enough; “there was much that did not come within

12 Rosen 69–70.
13 Goodwin 103.
15 Barbauld, "Sins of Government" 305.
16 Himmelfarb 4–5.
the purview of the reformer or legislator, that no one set of ‘model institutions’ would do for all people”.17

Burrow explains that Mill reacted against “the aridity of an excessive rationalism” represented by his education by adopting a philosophy which valued diversity of experience and the emotions in self-development.18 Himmelfarb writes: “Instead of being totally preoccupied with the ‘external culture’ – the self-conscious, analytic, purely rational mode of thought and behaviour – Mill decided that attention should be directed to the ‘internal culture of the individual,’ the cultivation of feeling, the development of the poetic and artistic sensibilities”.19 Mill’s reaction is similar to Barbauld’s response to the excesses of Rational Dissent as demonstrated in her essay “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste” which emphasised the aesthetic and emotional needs of human psychology.

There is continuity between some of Barbauld’s and Mill’s political ideas, but there are also fundamental differences which reflect the different eras in which they were writing. Burrow admits that to suggest that much of Mill’s writing is consonant with eighteenth-century Whig ideas runs counter to Mill’s own sense of himself and his intellectual heritage.20 However, despite Mill’s “inherited hostility” to Whiggism, Burrow argues that elements of the civic humanist tradition can be found in his work.21 In Mill’s Representative Government and On Liberty his “reflections on political virtue and its conditions, on the enervation of public spirit, stasis, and the decline of states” is similar to those eighteenth-century ideas.22 As my thesis has shown, these civic humanist values were also at the heart of Barbauld’s work; they influenced her attitude to wealth creation, imperialism, and the role of the virtuous citizen. Maurice Cowling shows that Mill had qualms about the consequences of industrialisation, realising that although it produced energetic entrepreneurs it also created acquisitive ones whose sole object was the accumulation of wealth. For the creation of a morally and intellectually healthy society, men needed to fulfil their social responsibilities.23

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17 Ibid. 7.
18 Burrow 93, 101.
19 Himmelfarb 7.
20 Burrow 102
21 Ibid. 15
22 Ibid. 16.
Reflecting the different eras in which they were writing, Barbauld’s and Mill’s work demonstrate different attitudes to public opinion and democracy. Barbauld suggested that the power of public opinion could be beneficial as a sanction against government abuses. In *Sins of Government* she emphasised that “the voice of the people ought to prevail” even if the will of the majority went against enlightened reform.\(^\text{24}\) Writing at a time when parliamentary representation had been increased, Mill saw dangers to individuality in democracy.\(^\text{25}\) He believed that the Benthamite idea of the “popular will” as the ruling power had triumphed. In practice this meant the rule of the majority.\(^\text{26}\) He argued that in this new stage the mass electorate could not be relied on to show the rationality to prefer long-term to short-term influence.\(^\text{27}\) He was fearful about the “tyranny of commonplace opinion” of the majority over the individual.\(^\text{28}\)

Both Mill and Barbauld emphasised the importance of education in tempering the power of the majority. They agreed that it is the duty of enlightened reformers to try and educate mass opinion, and to be a “persuader” rather than impose their beliefs by force.\(^\text{29}\) Mill’s emphasis in *On Liberty* of nurturing independence of mind and spirit through exposure to a variety of experiences and diverse modes of life is similar to Barbauld’s educational ethos.\(^\text{30}\) Like her, he encouraged the individual to submit all actions to self-conscious ethical judgement. Rather than accepting received opinions, critical questioning was essential to the establishment of a healthy society.\(^\text{31}\) Himmelfarb highlights Mill’s development of what is now called “the adversary theory of truth”, in which the collision of adverse opinions allows truth to emerge in its full vitality. A truth, if unchallenged, became a dead dogma; opposition elicited its full meaning.\(^\text{32}\) These ideas had echoes of the Dissenting Academy approach favoured by Barbauld, which can be traced back, through Warrington Academy, to Jennings’ and Doddridge’s teaching methods. His approach to language was also similar to Barbauld’s. As Himmelfarb explains, *On

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\(^{24}\) Barbauld, “Sins of Government” 305.  
\(^{25}\) Burrow 103.  
\(^{26}\) Himmelfarb 19.  
\(^{27}\) Burrow 105.  
\(^{28}\) Ibid. 75.  
\(^{29}\) Ibid. 72.  
\(^{30}\) Ibid. 81.  
\(^{31}\) Cowling 30–1.  
\(^{32}\) Himmelfarb 25, 30–1.
Liberty is written in simple language “as befits so simple a principle. The words are commonplace and matter-of-fact, not those of a professional philosopher (...) but of a plain-spoken, reasonable man addressing other plain and reasonable men. There is nothing abstruse or difficult here”.33

By comparing Barbauld’s ideas to Bentham’s and Mill’s, I am not arguing there was a direct influence and that they read Barbauld’s work, but as Burrow writes, “the transmission of a political culture may be a subtler and more continuous matter than conscious awareness of it”.34 I suggest that Mill, Bentham and Barbauld were influenced by similar political ideas and drew some similar conclusions. They were different links in a chain in the development of liberal thought.

My thesis recognises the limits as well as the importance of Barbauld’s political contribution. Unlike the major theorists, she did not produce a visionary intellectual blueprint for future societies. McCarthy claims that this is one of the reasons her importance to the radical politics and literature of the 1790s has been underestimated.35 Compared to the programmes of thinkers such as Paine, Priestley and Bentham, her political ideas lacked detail. As my research reveals, arguments about religious and political issues, including the nature of the soul, the citizen’s right of resistance, and the role of government in lessening inequality, are not always fully developed or clear enough for us to know exactly what her view was. On socio-economic issues in particular, her ideas can appear ambivalent and contradictory.

Although the theorists’ detailed blueprints are more intellectually coherent, Marilyn Butler’s analysis suggests that Barbauld’s pragmatic approach was more typical of the thinking of the era. Butler writes that the innovative and utopian proposals of a “like-minded” pre-selected circle of leading radicals such as Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Paine have been preserved for posterity perhaps because of their extremism, while the debate “was often more humdrum or more practical”.36 Barbauld did not claim to be a political or economic theorist. Although she was an intellectual, she was suspicious of abstract theorising in politics and religion. She

33 Ibid. 14.
34 Burrow 15.
35 McCarthy, Voice of the Enlightenment 309.
36 Butler, Burke, Paine, Godwin 5.
had an idealistic vision of what society should be like but she believed that to reach this end required a pragmatic, small-scale approach. As Daniel E. White’s research emphasises she domesticated complex political and religious ideas. He writes that she attempted “to temper the bourgeois sphere of civil society with the human values of the family.”  

She did not claim to know all the answers. Instead, she observed the rapidly changing society and then provided people with a range of ideas aimed at encouraging people to think about the questions which dominated the religious and political debate and come to their own conclusions.

As Daniel P. Watkins’ work on Barbauld’s visionary poetics convincingly argues, Barbauld was trying to do something different from traditional political writers. Watkins writes:

Her visionary impulse is to change the core and course of human experience; it is not intended simply to change political systems (…) For her, politics matter, but politics alone ultimately cannot liberate the human situation from the hardships that afflict it (…) Unless the foundations and goals of human experience are fully understood and embraced, political struggle (…) will be doomed to duplicate the forms of corruption that it seeks to eliminate.

Barbauld never promoted the concept of the solitary genius working in isolation; throughout her work she preferred a sociable working model. My thesis has emphasised that her importance is as a member of the reforming networks of the late eighteenth century. It has shown that she was linked to some of the individuals and groups who were perceived as most threatening by the government. My particular contribution has been to extend the scholarship on her connections with the Scottish radicals in the 1790s. I have also examined in detail her collaborative work with other reformers in the anti-slavery and peace movements. My research suggests that her writing was used for propaganda purposes in these early forms of pressure groups. There have been some aspects that I have not had time to examine. An area of further research would be to investigate Barbauld’s links to the Norwich Radicals. She described her “Norwich friends”, particularly her former Palgrave pupil William Taylor, as “dangerous” in her January 1793 letter to Charles Aikin. More research into the actions of the Norwich circle at this time would add

38 Watkins 42–3.
39 Barbauld to Charles Rochemont Aikin, 4 January 1793. Rodgers 211.
another strand to our understanding of the complex and intertwined networks of Rational Dissent and radicalism and Barbauld’s position at the centre of this web.

My thesis has demonstrated that as well as being involved in the political movements of her era, Barbauld’s political writing had an important literary effect. Paul Keen’s *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* has examined in detail the group of reformist authors who were aware of the progressive power of literature. My research places Barbauld at the heart of this movement. The purpose of Barbauld’s writing was to provide a diverse range of people with the necessary information to enable them to become active, virtuous citizens involved in creating a better society. She used a variety of genres including political pamphlets, poetry and children’s literature to communicate her ideas to a wide audience; her work was sometimes simple, at others sophisticated. Her methods of doing this contributed to the political discourse of the period. In an era when literary and ideological concerns came together, she was one of the writers who experimented with the boundaries between literature and politics. Aware of early theories about psychology, she appealed to her readers’ aesthetic and emotional taste as well as their reason. Throughout her writing she used different rhetorical techniques. My thesis has shown that although she was aware of the potential pitfalls of enthusiasm and the discourse of sensibility, she carefully regulated their use to reach the emotions of her audience.

But how effective were these different genres in communicating Barbauld’s message? In this thesis I have argued that her public poems contributed to humanitarian campaigns and also addressed the wider issue of the state of British society. As I have shown, poems like “The Mouse’s Petition”, *Epistle to William Wilberforce* and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* can be read on many levels; some meanings were obvious, others were carefully concealed. A contradiction in Barbauld’s work is that although she wanted to reach a wide audience, in her poetry some of her political messages are so camouflaged it is difficult to expose them. Her poetry contains classical and literary allusions that would be meaningful to only the most literate members of society. As Daniel P. Watkins’ decoding of the messages of her 1773 *Poems* and Emma Clery’s convincing new reading of

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40 Keen.
Eighteen Hundred and Eleven demonstrate, it requires detailed research and extensive background knowledge for modern readers fully to understand Barbauld’s poems. This suggests that the allusiveness of some of her work was elitist and ran counter to a democratic literary ethos.

To a certain degree this is true but it is not the complete picture. Barbauld’s writing, taken as a whole, was inclusive not exclusive. This did not mean that each work was easily accessible to every reader; instead it meant that within her complete works there was writing for all sections of society. She wanted her ideas to reach the least educated but also the most learned; to speak to both sexes and different age groups. Her poetry appealed to a readership who might not read political pamphlets. Her use of personification brought political issues to life. It made people think about politics in new ways; as Lucy Newlyn explains: “she shifted the centre of attention away from political events towards the thoughts and feelings they provoked”.41

We also have to beware of being anachronistic. Although her poems seem esoteric to modern readers, Newlyn argues that “we should not underestimate the extent to which her readers were capable of seeing through these codes”.42 Her poems should be seen in the tradition of the poets of sensibility, Gray, Collins and Cowper. She was extending and enriching a language which was already “coded”.43 Newlyn argues convincingly that making the poem into a type of riddle created an interactive relationship between author and reader. The solving of the riddles involved the “conjunction of pleasure and anticlimax, whereas unsolved riddles have the capacity to go on intriguing”.44 Applying the association of ideas, if readers enjoyed the process of decoding a poem they might react positively to the political ideas it contained.

In contrast to her political poems, her 1790s pamphlets were overtly political and they communicate in a simple, straightforward way. She used biblical references and everyday imagery which would be immediately recognisable. However, even within her series of political pamphlets, she varied the level of sophistication of her argument and vocabulary according to the audience; for

41 Newlyn, Reading, Writing, and Romanticism 142–3.
42 Ibid. 144.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid. 152.
instance Civic Sermons has many similarities to Sins of Government, but it is expressed in simpler terms to reach ordinary people. The idea of graduating levels of language to suit her readership can also be seen in Barbauld’s approach to children’s literature; her Lessons for Children, Hymns in Prose for Children and Evenings at Home were aimed at different ages and levels of understanding. Even the youngest children were introduced to simple ethical values; they then progressed to more complex concepts. As in her poetry, Barbauld realised that her children’s books had to entertain as well as educate, so animals were often used to personify political ideas. Children, like adults, were treated as active participants rather than passive recipients in the political debate.

My thesis has argued that although Barbauld was not overtly feminist, her political poetry and pamphlets contributed to a form of feminism in action by “challenging preconceptions about gender and genres”. By writing occasional verse and political pamphlets Barbauld entered traditionally male territory. As Eleanor Ty, Gary Kelly and Paul Keen have demonstrated, women, especially religious Dissenters, played an important role in the 1790s political debate. They moved from acceptable subjects such as social sympathy, humanitarianism and devotional religion into participation in the Revolution debate. Kelly describes Mary Wollstonecraft’s “venture into the ‘masculine’ domain of politics” as displaying “a style and method of argument that is both feeling and ‘philosophical’, both ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’”. Although these critical works do not focus on Barbauld’s contribution, my thesis demonstrates that she also combined “masculine” and “feminine” qualities in her political pamphlets. Her reasoned arguments showed that women’s capacity for rational thought was equal to that of her male contemporaries. By doing this she helped to change the perception of women’s roles in politics.

Building on the work of recent scholars, I suggest that Barbauld’s political writing also contributed to the development of Romanticism. Barbauld did not fit the old ideas of this movement which emphasised the egotistical sublime. However, the new research, which revises these ideas to see Romanticism in terms of

45 Ibid. 144.
46 Kelly, Women, Writing, and Revolution; Ty; Keen.
47 Kelly, Women, Writing, and Revolution 22.
48 Ibid. 17.
collaborative consciousness, puts Barbauld back in the picture. As John Gardner establishes, the second generation, which included Shelley, Byron and Keats, believed poetry had a social function: they were “not writing in isolation, possessed of an individual creativity that enclosed them from the public world”; instead of focusing on the self they were reacting to a sequence of key political events.\(^{49}\) Jeffrey Cox explains that the “Cockney School” shared a common ideological position based on resisting established power through an integrated vision which was political, social and cultural.\(^{50}\) They believed that power could be subverted not only by direct confrontation but also by cultural warfare which undermined the intellectual, emotional and ideological grounds of its appeal.\(^{51}\)

Recent research by Stephen Behrendt suggests that Barbauld and the female poets of the early nineteenth century bridged the “illusory gap” between the first and second generation of Romantic poets. He argues that “they exerted a real – if historically unacknowledged – shaping influence upon the work we typically associate with the second-generation male writers”.\(^{52}\) The ideas of profound alienation and the establishment of a “contestatory stance” associated with Regency poetry are foreshadowed by the anti-war poetry from the 1790s onward. This poetry emphasised that the community was being placed in jeopardy by the inhumanity of war. Blame was placed on the reactionary political and economic establishment. These poets used the rhetoric of sentiment for oppositional purposes.\(^{53}\) Behrendt cites *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* as a prime example of this politically oppositional poetry. He concludes that the preoccupations of the anti-war women poets were carried on to the next logical stage by the second generation of Romantics in works like Byron’s *Manfred, Cain* and *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*.\(^{54}\)

James Chandler has examined in detail the special relevance of *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* to the work of Percy Shelley.\(^{55}\) He draws parallels between Barbauld’s poem and Shelley’s effort to write politics in verse in *England in 1819*,

\(^{50}\) Cox 31.
\(^{51}\) Ibid. 61.
\(^{53}\) Ibid. 30.
\(^{54}\) Ibid. 33.
\(^{55}\) Chandler 120.
which is a poetic meditation on “the state of England”.56 He claims that Shelley’s starting point for his dedicatory epistle to “Tom Brown” in *Peter Bell the Third* is Barbauld’s poem. He notes the similarities in the descriptions of Regency England’s state of decay from the point of view of a transatlantic observer.57

To suggest that Barbauld influenced the later Romantic poets is not to claim that she should be seen as a Romantic poet. As McCarthy states: “there remains the danger of reassimilating her to a literary culture that she herself distrusted and which certainly did not treat her kindly”.58 There were important differences between Barbauld’s ideas and the second generation. As Butler’s work demonstrates, they drew on paganism and a cult of sexuality to challenge politically reactionary Christianity.59 In poetic terms, although Byron’s and Shelley’s work was influenced by eighteenth-century styles, using traditional genres such as elegies, odes and verse epistles, their writing was more poetically revolutionary than Barbauld’s poetry.60 David Duff has examined in detail these poets’ transformation of generic conventions. In *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812–18), Byron modernised the genre of romance for political purposes as well as demonstrating the “internalisation of quest romance”.61 However, Duff argues that in Shelley’s “revolutionary romances”, the genre “received its fullest political development, and underwent its most remarkable formal transformations”.62 In *Queen Mab* (1813), Shelley’s “audacity (…) lies not just in its radical ideas and inflammatory tone but also in its form”.63 It is a “remarkable synthesis” of eighteenth-century allegory, Miltonic epic, metrical romance, dream vision and revolutionary polemic. In *Laon and Cythna* (1817), Shelley reworked the fashionable chivalric ethos. Like *Queen Mab*, it sought to reawaken the political idealism of the 1790s and to advance liberal politics, but it replaced the “naked

56 Ibid. 121.
57 Ibid. 110.
59 Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* 121.
60 Ibid. 124.
62 Ibid. 1–4.
63 Ibid. 4.
didacticism of the earlier poem with an affective poetics derived from Spenser and Wordsworth”.  

Despite these caveats, Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* was an important link which connects the second-generation Romantics to a long tradition of oppositional political poetry. Her writing on history demonstrated an awareness of the importance of the literary legacies left to posterity by historical figures. In an essay “On the Classics” she described their importance in the transmission of ideas. These books were the “perpetual censors on men and manners”; they rekindled “the flame of virtue and liberty” when it was in danger of being extinguished. She wrote: “They may sleep for a while and be neglected; but whenever the desire of information springs up in the human breast, there they are with their mild wisdom ready to instruct and please us”. Although written about the great Greek and Roman authors, this description aptly captures the value of her own writing; her political poetry and prose should be read as classics of liberal literature. No longer neglected, her “mild wisdom” still keeps the flame of liberty alive nearly two centuries after her death.

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64 Ibid. 5.
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