The Progressive Ideas of Anna Letitia Barbauld

Submitted by Rachel Hetty Trethewey to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English
in January 2013

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: ..............................................................................................................
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.
Contents

Introduction 4

1. “A devotion generous, liberal, and humane”: Anna Letitia Barbauld’s religious beliefs 25

2. Breaking through her “bounded sphere”: Barbauld’s tradition of feminism 76

3. “The well taught philosophic mind/To all compassion gives”: Barbauld’s attitudes towards humanitarian concerns 126

4. “And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty rage?”: Barbauld’s revolutionary decade 171

5. “How like two scions on one stem we grew”: Barbauld’s and John Aikin’s “collaborative consciousness” 218

6. A party pamphlet in verse: Barbauld’s *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* 267

Conclusion 309

Bibliography 323