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**DEPRESSION AND GENDER: THE EXPRESSION AND  
EXPERIENCE OF MELANCHOLY IN THE EIGHTEENTH  
CENTURY**

PAULINE MARY HARRISON

PhD

2011

**DEPRESSION AND GENDER: THE EXPRESSION AND  
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CENTURY**

PAULINE MARY HARRISON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the  
University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the life and work of six eighteenth-century writers, two male and four female. It explores their experience of depression through their letters and other autobiographical material, and examines the ways in which they represent melancholy in their poetry and prose. The subject of Chapter Two is Thomas Gray, whose real life persona as the lonely intellectual is also identifiable in his poetry. The Scottish poet Robert Fergusson is studied in Chapter Three. Fergusson's lively and vigorous mind was shattered in the months leading up to his death, during which time some of his writing became darkly nihilistic. Chapter Four looks at Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, a lifelong depressive who often wrote about her feelings of despair in her poetry. Chapter Five explores Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. She was a courageous and controversial figure, but despite her resilience, on occasion in her letters she reveals her vulnerability and susceptibility to low spirits, a mood which is sometimes expressed in her creative writing. Sarah Scott, whose life and work have not yet been considered in relation to the subject of melancholy, is examined in Chapter Six. Her novel includes several low-spirited and depressed female characters who are continually seeking asylum from a hostile world. Chapter Seven analyses Charlotte Smith, a mother of twelve children whose unhappy marriage ended in separation. Smith wrote extensively about her depression in her letters, prefaces, poetry and novels.

This study shows that the women in particular use their writing on melancholy and depression to express their discontent with the confined way in which they are often expected to live out their lives.

## **Dedication**

To the memory of my dad Patrick Forster  
and  
my sister Marie Pryer

## **Acknowledgments**

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Finally, thank you to my husband Bob Harrison for all his encouragement and support.

### **Author's declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name:

Signature

Date:

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## **Abbreviations**

*GC* = Gray's correspondence: P. Toynbee and L. Whibley.

*MC* = Montagu's correspondence: R. Halsband.

*SC* = Smith's correspondence: J. Stanton.

This thesis uses the life and work of six authors to explore issues of depression and gender in the eighteenth century. It includes a study of both men and women, but the chief interest lies in female depression and so greater attention is paid to women. In particular, it examines the extent to which the social condition of women at this time contributed to their depressive feelings. Two male and four female writers are analysed. The chapters on the men serve as contextual material through which the similarities and differences between male and female expression and experience are observed. By exploring men alongside women it avoids the temptation to make over-exaggerated claims about the nature of female depression and the disadvantages that women face. In many studies on depression in this period, women are often overlooked or just briefly mentioned. Attention is frequently focused on eminent male figures such as Samuel Johnson and William Cowper who suffered debilitating bouts of depression. Their prominence in literary history tends to heighten the importance of their depressive experience and dominates our view of what eighteenth-century depression was like. This thesis attempts to redress the balance by giving special consideration to women's experiences and the ways in which they chose to express depression in their writing. It is original in the sense that it draws together a group of writers that have not been discussed together in one study and because in each case the focus is on the subject of depression. Some studies have been carried out on individual cases that address various aspects of the writer's expression and experience of depression, but these are contextualized within the chapters themselves. Other broader studies on dejected mental states in this period that include women, such as Allan Ingram's *Cultural Constructions of Madness in Eighteenth-Century Writing: Representing the Insane* (2005), focus on madness rather than depression.

In this work the term ‘depression’ denotes a wide spectrum of depressed states which range from mild feelings of sadness through to severe forms of depressive illness. The word ‘expression’ refers to all kinds of creative writing in which the author writes about sadness and depression, whether it is a representation of melancholy in poetry or a characterization of a depressed person within a novel. The depressive ‘experience’ of the writer is explored through the analysis of autobiographical writing, such as letters and prose prefaces: no useful diaries were available. Memoirs and biographies written by close friends or family members are also explored. In addition, accounts of the author’s life written by other and often later biographers are referred to for information relating to the writer’s experience of depression. The way in which the writers themselves observe and describe depression in the people around them is considered in some instances. Often, as in the case of autobiographical poems, ‘experience’ and ‘expression’ merge.

#### **a) Melancholy in the early modern period**

Several theories have emerged from recent scholarship on the nature of melancholy (or depression as we refer to it today) in this period. Angus Gowland argues that while the subject has long been under discussion our understanding of its “religious, social and political meanings remains limited” (2006, 78). He comments that there is a general consensus that melancholy in England “had become an especially prevalent disease” (79). However, he suggests that this “notion” stands in need of “correction or at least refinement” (79). Gowland extends his research beyond English sources and shows that melancholy was indeed a “European phenomenon” (80). He also refers to *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) in which Robert Burton cites German, French and Italian “authorities” in his “diagnosis of ‘epidemic’”, to claim that the “whole Continent was afflicted” (80). Gowland contends that the “key” to understanding the “high incidence” of the disease, is in

the “increased domain in which the concept of melancholy could be applied” (84). He finds that there was a growing interest in melancholy as a subject and that this is evident in texts written by the educated elite, the ‘middling sort’ and the lower social ranks. The disease was also “beginning to attract attention that was technically extra-medical in nature” and that this can be identified in writings concerned with “demonology, spectrology or psychology” (93). In addition, because melancholy is a disease of the “emotions” (97), it became useful as a concept in discourses on the soul and in moral-philosophical texts. In discussions on gender, Gowland proposes that because women were deemed especially susceptible to “strong passions”, that this would account for the fact that they were “marginally more likely to be diagnosed with the disease than men” (99). He goes on to refer to eighteenth-century medical texts on melancholy, which began to focus on the “physiological basis” of the disease in light of scientific research on the body and the new doctrines of “nerves, fibres and spirit” (111).

Jeremy Schmidt looks at the place of the “soul” in ideas of melancholy in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Drawing upon medical, religious and pastoral texts, as well as autobiographical writing, he argues that in this period melancholy was a condition that required both a “physician of the body” and a “physician of the soul” (2007, 2). He uses the example of Hamlet to illustrate his point that melancholy in the age of Shakespeare was seen in terms of its “conspicuous shows of emotion” (3). This is different to the eighteenth century when individuals “displayed their condition by complaining of their bodily ailments” (3). In considering gender, Schmidt comments that late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century “evangelical therapies” viewed women’s “melancholy spiritual suffering” as the potential for a “heightened spiritual sensitivity and saintliness” (7). He goes on to state that Restoration pastoral writers linked melancholy to “female weakness and sinfulness” (7), while in the eighteenth century, female hysteria was seen to be

“subversive and disorderly” (7). Schmidt looks closely at religious melancholy and the way in which sufferers experienced guilt and despair, and felt damned in the eyes of God. He refers to several consolatory texts, such as the one written by Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, *Discourse of Pastoral Care* (1692), in which the Bishop urges ministers to sympathize with the afflicted. Schmidt is pointing out that sufferers of melancholy were not always treated with the brutality that some studies of this period might suggest. He comments that there is a general shift from religious melancholy in the seventeenth century to “hypochondria and hysteria” in the eighteenth century, and that medical discourse on the subject became in part “an artefact of the practice of medicine in the context of a culture of polite sociability” (159). Nevertheless, Schmidt finds religious threads in George Cheyne’s *The English Malady* (1733) and concludes that even in the early eighteenth century “the care of the body could be regarded as a feature of the care of the soul” (186).

Harvie Ferguson traces the human pursuit of happiness in the history of religion, from the time of the ancient Greeks to present day. He shows that this quest is often a disappointment and contrary to its intention, inevitably leads to despair. He argues that the general spiritual movement of Christianity was greatly influenced by the work of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430). He comments that his *Confessions* (thirteen books written between 397 and 398) are “rightly regarded as a literary and psychological masterpiece” and are considered to be the “first genuine spiritual autobiography” (1992, 57). Augustine, through the traumas of his own experience, came to believe that salvation, and by implication happiness, was gained only as a “continuous struggle against both the world of the senses *and* the secular soul” (57). Ferguson’s arguments develop on from Augustine and move through the ‘feudal period’ to ‘capitalist society’, a time when religion “appears everywhere to be in retreat” (135). In specific references to the eighteenth century he explores ideas of the ‘self’, which he describes as the “coherent

bundle of intentions activated within the rational individual in pursuit of his or her own private interests” (147). He explores the influential work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) who wrote *Confessions* (1770) and *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* (1782). Ferguson describes his work as the “first genuinely modern autobiographical project” (149). Rousseau attacked bourgeois society and noticed a “discrepancy between conventional morality and the actual conduct of everyday life” (148). He refers to this disparity as the “deceitful veil of politeness” (148). In his own search for “genuine Happiness” (152) Rousseau retreated to the island of Saint-Pierre in a bid to cast off the expectations and presumptions that society imposed upon its individuals. He sought an absence of desire and passion in solitude and believed that an “authentic selfhood” could not be found in society, only in nature. However, as Ferguson observes, Rousseau conceded that humans are ultimately caught up in an “infinite web of selfishness” (153) that denies them true happiness on earth.

## **b) What is depression?**

### *i. Melancholy/melancholia in the eighteenth century*

A shift in medical thinking occurred at the end of the seventeenth century. The humoral theory of the body, which had dominated for centuries and which explained melancholy as the result of noxious fumes rising to the brain from an accumulation of black bile in the spleen, was gradually being replaced. Stanley Jackson explores the nature of these changes in his history of depression from Hippocratic times to the present day. The main concern of his study is to examine “pathological states” (1986, 2) but in order to chart “some sort of reasonable boundaries for melancholia and depression” (2), he also gives some attention to “sadness, sorrow ... and other troubled, dejected states” (2). He observes that while sadness and melancholy are normal human emotions, it is when they are experienced with “greater degrees of severity or longer durations” (2) that they come to be

known as mental illness. He looks at terminological issues, pointing out that “*depression* is a relative latecomer to the terminology for dejected states” (5). While it was used occasionally in the seventeenth century it was during the eighteenth century that “*depression* really began to find a place in discussions of melancholia” (5). Jackson is referring to pathological depression when he uses the term ‘melancholia’. He points out that the word ‘melancholy’ in this period was both a “synonym for melancholia and a popular term used with a breadth and diffuseness not unlike our use of the term *depression* today” (5).

Jackson also explains that at the start of the eighteenth century “mechanical philosophy” (116) was at the forefront of scientific investigation. Mechanical theory in relation to the body was understood as the “physical phenomena” of the “motion and interaction of the various particles of matter” (116). This concept was applied to the “explanation of melancholia” (116). He cites amongst others Archibald Pitcairn (1652-1713), who defined melancholia in “familiar terms as a delirium (disordered thought) without a fever and accompanied by fear and sadness” (117). Pitcairn then introduced his “mechanical views” suggesting that melancholia was caused by a “thicker than usual condition of the blood” (117) which accumulated in the brain and slowed down circulation. This disorder in the “hydrodynamics of the blood” then affected the “flow of the animal spirits in the nerves to bring about the disordered thought or delirium associated with the disease” (117). These ideas remained popular until the mid-eighteenth century, a time when mechanical theory was being challenged. Jackson then refers to Richard Mead (1673-1754), who argued that melancholia was more likely to be caused by an alteration in the “nerve fluid” (123) itself, or the “animal spirits” (124) as it was more commonly known, brought about by “an excessive intention of the mind” or by “thoughts long fixed on any one subject” (124). Jackson observes that despite the many developments in explanations of melancholia, by

the end of the eighteenth century the “clinical syndrome” was left “essentially unchanged” (132) and “therapeutic practices” (131), such as bloodletting and purging, remained much the same.

*ii. Writing on melancholy by eighteenth-century physicians*

In the sixteenth century Timothy Bright published *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586) and in the seventeenth century Robert Burton’s classic study *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) was published. Several other influential physicians, such as Thomas Sydenham (1624-1689), wrote on the subject of melancholy shortly after Burton, but it was during the eighteenth century that this writing truly proliferated, and some of the most popular works are mentioned here, while others are mentioned throughout the thesis. Physician Nicholas Robinson in *A new system of the spleen, vapours, and hypochondriack melancholy: wherein all the decays of the nerves, and lownesses of the spirits, are mechanically account for* (1729), based his medical hypothesis on the concept of mechanics. As the title of the book implies, the terminology surrounding ‘melancholy’ had expanded, although the vocabulary remained influenced by humoral theory. Robinson’s writings show that the various forms of dejected states were now being recognised as separate conditions.

In his treatise Robinson describes the body as a “Harmony of several fibres that constitute the members of an organized machine” (15). He explains that melancholy is caused when “the Fibres of the Muscles, and other Vessels, are so relax’d, that they cannot assist the Mind in voluntary Motion” and vital fluids “form a thick, viscid, melancholy Blood, unfit for the Motions and Secretions of the Animal OEconomy” (259). Robinson explores



gender issues and examines the spleen in men and the vapours and hysteric fits in women<sup>1</sup>.

He explains that

the symptoms that affect Women in the Beginning of the Vapours, are so nearly related to those that disorder the Imagination of Men under a Fit of the Spleen, that I should not have treated them in separate Chapters, were it not that the Vapours are incident to convulsive Motions of the whole nervous System (211).

He admits that the two complaints are similar in many ways, but observes that the “Fits” (197) which accompany these afflictions, are different in nature in men and women. In his use of language, Robinson links male melancholy to the “Imagination” and female melancholy to the “nervous System”. This gender distinction, which disassociates women from ingenuity and insight and describes them in relation to the body rather than the mind, is a view that pervades throughout the period.

In 1733 George Cheyne published *The English Malady: or a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds*. Cheyne does not differentiate the melancholy experiences of men and women and addresses his advice to both genders. In his Preface he explains the reasons why melancholy is considered to be an “English Malady”, for instance the “The Moisture of our Air, and Variableness of our Weather” as well as the “unhealthy Towns” (1991, ii). He also mentions the “Richness and Heaviness of our Food, the Wealth and Abundance of the Inhabitants” and most significantly, the “Inactivity and sedentary Occupations of the better Sort” (ii). According to Cheyne, melancholy is a greater problem amongst the idle rich. Like Robinson he is influenced by mechanical theory and describes the human body as a “Machin of an infinite Number and Variety of different Channels and Pipes, filled with Various and different Liquors and Fluids” (4). He argues that nervous distempers occur when a weakness in the “Force and Elasticity in the solids in general, and the *Nerves* in particular” prevent proper circulation of the fluids to “remove Obstructions ... and make

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<sup>1</sup> In the eighteenth century the terms ‘vapours’ and ‘spleen’ are not always applied in this gender specific way, especially in non-medical writing, and are often used with reference to either sex.

the secretions” (14). He proposes a systematic approach to curing melancholy which begins by using medicines to thin the blood, clear blockages and strengthen the system. When this process is complete he advises a moderate diet, although in the case of severe nervous illnesses, a strict regimen of vegetables and milk is recommended. Finally, he advocates exercise which he states is approved by “all *Physicians*, and the Experience of all those who have suffer’d under *Nervous Distempers*” (172). He believes that in warmer climates where melancholy is less prevalent the sun stimulates “the Blood and Juices sufficiently”. However, in “our *cold* Climates” (173) exercise is necessary for good circulation. Cheyne bases his understanding of melancholy in *The English Malady* upon his own experience and includes an account of ‘The Author’s Case’.

William Buchan, who wrote *Domestic Medicine: or, a treatise on the prevention and cure of diseases by regimen and simple medicines*, 3rd edn. (1774), was a popular medical writer of the second half of the century<sup>2</sup>. Buchan offers advice on a wide range of ailments including “nervous disorders”. He admits that “of all diseases incident to mankind, those of the nervous kind are the most complicated and difficult to cure” (456). He explores melancholy, low spirits, hysterical affections and hypochondria affections, amongst others. He explains that in general melancholy

is that state of alienation or weakness of mind which renders people incapable of enjoying the pleasures, or performing the duties of life. It is a degree of insanity, and often terminates in madness (463).

Buchan draws attention to the fact that melancholy was considered to be a progressive condition. He comments that in the cure of this disease “particular attention must be paid

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<sup>2</sup> R.A. Houston comments that Buchan’s book, “first published in 1769, was a best-seller, running to 21 editions between then and 1813”. He goes on to state that “it was claimed that every cottage in Scotland had *Domestic Medicine* and the Bible” (2000, 23, n.57). Christopher Lawrence comments that “before the twentieth century, no single health guide enjoyed as much popularity as *Domestic Medicine*. Between 1769 and the last edition, which appeared in Philadelphia in 1871, there were at least 142 separate English-language editions. It was particularly popular in the United States, an American reprint first appearing in 1772” (2010, 1). Lawrence further notes that “there were also French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, Russian and Swedish translations (1).

to the mind” and suggests that sufferers be “soothed and diverted with [a] variety of amusements, as entertaining stories, pastimes, music etc.” (466). He writes about low spirits and observes that those who have “weak nerves” (485) are susceptible. He also states that “it is greatly increased by solitude and indulging gloomy ideas” (485). He argues that hysteric affections are suffered by women “of a delicate habit ... and whose nervous system is extremely sensible” (486). However, hypochondria is experienced by men of a “melancholy temperament, whose minds are capable of great attention” (491). In his overall method of cure Buchan believes that “regimen alone”, that is, “diet, air, exercise, and amusements” (463), is the most suitable remedy and unlike Robinson advises that “all strong and violent purgatives are ... to be avoided” (461). He concludes his analysis by declaring that “all persons afflicted with nervous disorders” have a “great delicacy and sensibility of the whole nervous system” (493). He further states that “the most general cause of nervous disorders is *indolence*” (495) and that only those who live a life of “ease” and “affluence” experience these distempers. The “active and laborious”, argues Buchan, “are seldom troubled with them” (495). His view, that melancholy and associated conditions were an affliction of the elite, is widely held during the period.

In summary, medical writing provides a context for the discussion of literary figures and their experience and expression of melancholy. These texts reveal the complexity of language surrounding depression and the way in which it is often regarded as a gendered condition. Male melancholy is usually discussed in relation to the intellect and is thought to be caused by profound thinking, creative endeavour or a studious lifestyle. Robinson and Buchan concentrate on the weakness of the female nervous system and conclude that women of a delicate habit are as prone to melancholy as men: Buchan in particular draws attention to the connection between melancholy and sensibility. Robinson and Cheyne further explore physical causes and argue that melancholy stems from a problem in the

tubes and canals of the body and in the circulation of the fluids, thus implicitly making the link between mind and body. Their use of medicine as a cure is rejected by Buchan who simply recommends a suitable regimen. Buchan, in anticipation of nineteenth-century psychiatry, also focuses on the mind and advises that the sufferer should be diverted from gloomy reflections by engaging in enjoyable activities. It is generally agreed that idleness, a lifestyle of the rich and applicable to both genders, is one of the most common causes of nervous diseases.

### *iii. Melancholy and sensibility*

The association between the nervous system, refinement and sensibility is discussed in medical texts by physicians such as Buchan. The concept of 'sensibility' is also represented in creative writing between the 1730s and the 1790s. George Rousseau argues that the prominence of sensibility in literature stemmed from scientific investigation into the brain and nerves, which began in the seventeenth century with the work of Thomas Willis (1621-1675). He points out that Willis made an "imaginative leap" (1973, 149) when he suggested that the 'soul' was in the brain and that this led to the "intense interest after the Restoration ... in nerve research" (145). He comments that it was from here that the "diverse cults of sensibility" (145) emerged. One such cult was that of "melancholy, hypochondria as a national institution, the 'English Malady' as Cheyne called it" (151). John Mullan explores the concept of sensibility in both literature and in medical writing and observes that while in the novels of the period it can "declare itself reclusive, and retreat into the, sometimes histrionic, postures of melancholy", comparably, medical texts also represent "the construction of a body attuned to the influences of sensibility" (1988, 201). Mullan observes that in novels sensibility is "constituted, in various ways, out of an opposition to a 'world' of masculine desire, commercial endeavour, and material ambition" and that similarly this type of opposition "defines discussions of hypochondria and

melancholy” (213) in medical texts. He comments that “outside of the ‘world’ of specifically commercial and practical activity are hypochondria, melancholy, nervous disorder – but also sensibility, imagination, delicacy” (214).

Mullan’s argument draws attention to the fact that the concept of sensibility had a philosophical dimension, and that it was not just based upon the developments in nerve theory in medicine. M.H. Abrams argues that the literature of sensibility, or sentimental literature, was “fostered by the moral philosophy that had developed as a reaction against seventeenth-century Stoicism (which emphasised reason and the unemotional will as the sole motives to virtue)” (1985, 190). He mentions in particular that it was written in response to the claims of Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651) that “a human being is innately selfish and that the mainsprings of human behaviour are self-interest and the drive for power and status” (190). Abrams goes on to explain that “sensibility” was the “hair-trigger responsiveness to another person’s distresses and joys” (190) as well as an “intense emotional responsiveness to beauty and sublimity, whether in nature or art” (190), an indication of a “person’s gentility” or “upper-class status” (190). Janet Todd also argues that “sentimental theory” emerged from the “alliance in interests of eighteenth-century literature and moral philosophy” (1986, 3) and that while the idea “entered all literary genres – the novel, essay, poetry and drama”, the “cult of sensibility was largely defined by fiction from the 1740s to the 1770s” (4). However, Todd suggests that the link between sensibility and melancholy is most prominent in the work of the male poets of the period who “formed a tradition and became predictable types of vulnerable sensibility such as Gray and Cowper, but also “Milton, Otway, Collins and Chatterton” (53). She observes that “such poets were supremely men of feeling, feeling more intense than that possessed by ordinary men and inevitably isolating since it was the emotional stance not its skilful verbal expression that was stressed” (53). In his analysis of sensibility in poetry, David

Fairer explains that the eighteenth century was an age of “restless enquiry” into ideas of the “self”, and that “such thinking represented the radical potential of ‘sensibility’, a concept that bridged self-consciousness and sense perception, and which could accommodate doubts perhaps more easily than certainties” (2003, 216). Fairer also refers to Cowper, a poet of sensibility and a “victim of philosophic melancholy” (221). He observes that in his poem *Epistle to Robert Lloyd* (1745) Cowper is “incoherent” and “shows us a mind in process” (221). Fairer suggests that the poem has “become part of his mental mechanism as a man of sensibility” (222). All of these studies show the prevalence of sensibility as a concept which is represented in the creative writing of the period. They also show that people of sensibility were thought to be refined, intelligent and prone to melancholy, a state of mind that signified their sensitivity and also their vulnerability in an increasingly hostile world.

#### *iv. Depression and artistic genius*

In the eighteenth century the notion that there was a link between male melancholy and intellectual genius was still current. It is an ancient concept and is discussed by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) in *Problemata XXX*. These writings are explored by Jackson who suggests that Theophrastus, or another follower of Aristotle, may have been the author rather than Aristotle himself. In this work it is stated that persons who have an excess of black bile in their bodies are of a melancholy temperament, and are thought to be “disposed to being gifted persons as a result” (32). While this disposition makes them more susceptible to “various melancholy diseases” (32) it also makes them more capable of “outstanding accomplishment” (32). In these writings the quality of the black bile humor is described as a “mixture of heat and cold” (32) with the potential to “become very hot or very cold” (32). The coldness precipitates a state of “groundless despondency” whereas the heat, “if it approaches the region of the intellect”, causes “frenzy” and moments of inspiration. This

condition, in which the sufferer experiences both depressions and manias, is today referred to as manic depression. Kay Redfield Jamison in *Touched with Fire* examines the association between manic-depressive illness and the artistic temperament. She too refers to *Problemata XXX* and comments that the “link between madness and genius is one of the oldest and most persistent of cultural notions” (1994, 50). She explains that “during the Renaissance there was a renewed interest in the relationship between genius, melancholia, and madness” (51). However, she also argues that the concept changed in character in the eighteenth century when “balance and rational thought, rather than “inspiration” and emotional extremes, were seen as primary components of genius” (52). She further contends that this identification of “moderation” with “genius” was “completely reversed” (52) by the Romantics, who “once again emphasized not only the melancholic side, but also the more spontaneous, inspired, and swept-by-the-muses qualities of genius” (52).

Jamison suggests that manic depression is a cyclic disease and that its “rhythms and cycles” are “strikingly similar to those of the natural world, as well as to the death-and-regeneration and dark-and-light cycles so often captured in poetry, music, and painting” (6). She comments that it is during periods of mania that the depressed artist produces exceptionally imaginative work, which can then be “significantly shaped or partially edited while its creator is depressed and put into final order when he or she is normal” (6). She mentions several famous depressives, such as Lord Byron, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath, who have all exhibited a special kind of genius in their work. In the eighteenth century only male artists would have been named in such a list. Jamison believes that the problem for manic-depressive artists today, with the availability of “mood-stabilizing medications” (241), is that they fear this treatment will transform them into “normal, well-adjusted, dampened, and bloodless souls – unable, or unmotivated, to write, paint, or compose (241).

v. *Depression today*

Depression is an experience unique to each individual and even today is a difficult condition to define. The *Concise Medical Dictionary* describes it as a “mental state characterized by excessive sadness” in which the sufferer is “governed by pessimistic or despairing beliefs” (1998, 176). Allan V. Horwitz and Jerome C. Wakefield argue that there are two states of sadness in human experience, the first and the most common is “normal sadness” or “sadness with cause” (2007, 6), which is associated with “loss or other painful circumstances that seem to be the obvious causes of distress” (6). The second condition, more “traditionally known as *melancholia*, or depression “without cause”” (6), is rare and is distinguished by the lack of “appropriate reason” (6) for the patient’s symptoms. Horwitz and Wakefield suggest that normal sadness is “context specific” (27), meaning that it is of “roughly proportionate intensity to the provoking loss” (28) and usually ends when the “loss situation ends” (28). However, they note that many people suffer long-term personal and social problems, therefore, ordinary sadness is “not necessarily of shorter duration than dysfunctional depression” (29). Sadness “without cause” is referred to as depressive disorder, that is, when no obvious loss event or other major life disruptions can be identified as a reason for the depression, or in other words, when there is no “appropriate *context* for symptoms” (14). They argue that the current “symptom-based criteria” (103) for diagnosing depression, as set out in *DSM-IV* and used worldwide, does not take into account the “context” of the patient’s suffering. Hence sadness “with” and “without” cause, which have been distinguished as such since ancient times, are now diagnosed as one and the same condition. Many of the “symptoms” of “intense normal sadness” and “depressive disorder” (103) are similar, therefore, people who are experiencing normal sadness are often diagnosed and treated with a depressive



disorder. Horwitz and Wakefield believe that this accounts for the increase in recent years in the number of people being treated for depression.

*vi. The language of depression*

Jackson has already shown that the terminology surrounding ‘depression’ is complicated. Jennifer Radden also explores this problem in detail and like Jackson looks at ‘pathological depression’. She disputes Jackson’s view that there is a “remarkable consistency” (2003, 39) among descriptions of the condition past and present, and argues that a “superficial continuity” (37) exists which links today’s “clinical depression” with “melancholia” of past eras. She points out, as did Jackson, that the terms ‘melancholy’ and ‘melancholia’ were used interchangeably before the nineteenth century. In her comparison of melancholia with clinical depression she finds some similarities. For instance, she notices that the symptoms of “fear and sadness” that were “central, almost defining features of melancholic subjectivity” (38) in the past, are common signs in depressive and anxiety disorders today. That fear and sadness were experienced without any obvious cause, is relevant today and was also a “hallmark of melancholy until the eighteenth century” (38). Radden goes on to comment that psychological signs present in depressive illness today, such as “self-consciousness” and “oversensitivity” (39), are also mentioned in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). Lastly, the moods of “exaltation” and “grandiosity” (39) that are mentioned in Greek writing are symptoms of manic-depressive illness today.

In her assessment of dissimilarities, Radden first of all observes that melancholia of the past “encompassed much more than modern conceptions of depression” (39). Whereas today we consider “schizophrenia”, “obsessive compulsive disorder” and “persecutory paranoia” (40) as separate mental illnesses, in the past they were incorporated within descriptions of melancholia. Radden also mentions that until the eighteenth century

melancholia “carried glamorous associations of intellectual brilliance” (40) which are “absent from today’s concept of depression” (40). She further comments that because melancholia was linked to the intellect in this way, it had “masculine associations” (40). Radden asserts that today depression is more commonly identified as a woman’s disease. She also suggests that following Freud’s influential essay, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917), “states of loss” became associated with depressive illness as well as traits of “self-critical and self-hating attitudes” (40). Neither, argues Radden, is “attached with any consistency to melancholic states of pre-nineteenth century eras” (40). Finally, she admits that there is no conclusive answer to the question, is melancholia the same thing as depression? However, she is inclined to believe that the “differences are more persuasive than the similarities” (48) and hence argues that the terms apply to different sets of dejected mental states which overlap to some degree.

### **c) Women and depression**

#### *i. In the eighteenth century*

Eighteenth-century medical writing on melancholy has shown that there were gendered aspects to the condition. George Rousseau, in his paper ‘Depression’s forgotten genealogy: notes towards a history of depression’, points out that depression in the eighteenth century is as yet under-explored and declares that his aim is to “document merely *one aspect* of the pre-1800 record: gender” (2000, 78). However, he looks for the “representation” of depression in literature, rather than seeking an understanding of the condition from “narrow medical models” (81). Concentrating on prose fiction he claims that “among the types of pre-1800 literature few portrayed depressives as realistically as the emerging novel” (81). He asserts that mad men had always been depicted as noble and strong, such as Hamlet and King Lear, whereas women had generally been characterised as “weak, soft, ignoble, passive” (82) depressives. He observes that this continues to be the

case in the eighteenth century. Further, he boldly comments that eighteenth-century prose fiction demonstrates that “to be a woman *is to be* depressive; to be depressive *is to be* female” (84). Nevertheless, he notices a shift in the portrayal of both male and female dejected mental states from mid-eighteenth century onwards, when the “developing cultural sensibility ... turned the genders topsy-turvy” (106). Women, argues Rousseau, are gradually being represented as mad rather than depressed, and in addition are depicted with qualities resembling male madness. Men on the other hand, are now being portrayed as sensitive and depressed, such as the character of Harley in McKenzie’s *Man of Feeling* (1771). Rousseau concludes his study by stating that representations in literature are more “expressive” (105) than discussions in medical texts, and he is convinced that prose fiction offers a useful insight into the history of the gendered aspects of eighteenth-century depression.

## *ii. Today*

The relationship between gender and depression is still a current issue. An article by Ali Ahmad, ‘Women’s mental health deteriorates as one in five experience common disorders’ (*Guardian*, 2009), refers to a recent NHS report which found a “significant increase in the number of women suffering from depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts”. These conditions are known as “common mental disorders (CMDs)”. More recently a survey by Platform 51 (formerly the Young Women’s Christian Association) of more than 2,000 girls and women in England and Wales, found that “sixty-three percent of girls and women have been affected by mental health problems of some kind” (2010, 3). In this report, ‘Women like me: Supporting wellbeing in girls and women’, it states that “evidence suggests that girls and women are almost twice as likely as boys and men to suffer from depression, anxiety, self-harm, eating disorders and low self-esteem” (5). Trigger factors are cited as “physical or emotional abuse, debt and relationship breakdown” (8). It is reported that

women found the “cumulative effect of these events made it harder to cope with each new challenge” (8). Often, women who appear to be functioning normally are using coping mechanisms that are self-destructive and hidden, such as self-harming. The consequences may have an impact upon their physical and mental health “which is sometimes not fully felt until many years later” (9). Platform 51 believes that women with mental health problems often isolate themselves from friends and family and never give voice to their suffering. As an organisation it offers “women-only” services and a “structured social space” (14) for women which allows them to speak out about their problems. The report proposes that “just as the physical health of women and men is differentiated their mental health must also be looked at from a gendered perspective” (16).

Susan Nolen-Hoeksema explores the biological, psychological and sociological reasons why depression today is “so much more common in women than in men” (1990, 1). Biologists argue that the “hormonal changes during the menstrual cycle can affect some women’s moods negatively” and that women sometimes “experience increased levels of depression during the postpartum period and during menopause, periods when levels of certain hormones change dramatically” (18). Psychologists have attributed women’s depression to their personalities. A number of studies have shown that

females tend to have a lower sense of their own competence, to interpret events more negatively, to evaluate themselves more harshly, to set lower goals for themselves, and to rely more on external feedback in making judgements about themselves than do males (19).

These “negative thinking styles” (19), as Nolen-Hoeksema describes them, are associated with problems in “motivation, achievement, and self-esteem, as well as with a tendency toward depression” (19). She explains that many feminist writers offer a “sociological explanation for women’s nervous problems” (18). While more women today have full-time jobs and are “entering formerly male-dominated professions such as medicine and

law” (18), the ones who also have families often find that they are doing two full-time jobs. This is referred to as the “*role overload*” (79) theory. It is also thought that housework and the housewife role are still undervalued, and that women experience more victimization and domestic violence than men. In addition, women become accustomed to having no control over their lives and this “expectation of no control leads to sadness, reduced motivation, and an inability to see opportunities for controlling situations when they do arise” (79). This is known as the “*learned helplessness*” (79) theory.

While Nolen-Hoeksema is not convinced that either biological or psychological factors account for the high rate of depression in women, she agrees that “several aspects of women’s social roles may predispose them to depression” (104). However, she claims that the high incidence of depression in women might be better accounted for by observing the way in which women “respond” to their depressive feelings. She finds that many women adopt a “*ruminative style*” (160) in their response to depression, whereas men more often use a “*distracting style*” (160). Research has shown that ruminating on the causes and symptoms of depression amplifies the mood and extends the period of suffering. Distracting techniques, such as engaging in activities, “dampens the symptoms” (169) and thus reduces the impact of depression. Nolen-Hoeksema remarks that “being active and controlling one’s moods are part of the masculine stereotype; being inactive and emotional are part of the feminine stereotype” (171). Nevertheless, she goes on to argue that a distracting response can also have negative effects, for instance when a person turns to alcohol. Therefore, while men’s tendency is to “distract themselves from their depressed moods, when taken to extremes, may contribute to their greater vulnerability to other disorders, such as alcoholism” (177).

Dana Crowley Jack also explores the nature of female depression, and states that while she is aware of the “possible biological influences on depression in women” (1991, 2) she is focusing on “psychosocial factors” (2). She claims that in marriage and motherhood women often experience a “loss of self” (30) and that this leads to depression. Loss of self involves a “loss of *voice*” (32) in the marital relationship. A woman may fear that the expression of “negative feelings” (32) would destabilize the marriage, and so when she is depressed she remains silent. Crowley Jack believes that “voice is an indication of self” and that “speaking one’s feelings and thoughts is part of creating, maintaining, and recreating one’s authentic self” (32). When a woman loses the ability to speak, a gap exists between the outward “good self” and the inner authentic self. The “inauthenticity” and “self-betrayal” of the outer voice can lead to “anguish and despair” (32). Women also “refrain from speech” (33) because they “fear they may be wrong” (33) when they do speak out. They find it difficult to stand up to a “masculinist culture” which has “consistently justified and elevated males while it has correspondently discounted and demeaned females” (33). In addition, women often “lose themselves” as they try to fit into an image of womanhood that is provided for them by someone else, “the husband, parental teachings, the culture” (32). The self then becomes a “construction” and consequently intimate relationships are “contrived” (32). Crowley Jack goes on to observe a resemblance between feminine behaviour and the experience of depression. She argues that femininity is stated in the “language of constraint: self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-effacement, self-restraint”, while depression similarly “connotes a diminution in the experience of an active self and its possibilities” (87).

A study on women and depression by the American Psychological Association and chaired by Ellen McGrath, also reports on the idea that “feminine personality traits are milder manifestations of depressive disorders” (1993, 20). They believe that women’s pessimistic

and negative cognitive styles predispose them to depression, and like Nolen-Hoeksema, argue that women focus too much on “depressed feelings instead of action and mastery strategies” (xii). They further contend that women are at a higher risk from depression than men “due to a number of social, economic, biological, and emotional factors” (xii). For these reasons, they recommend that female depression should be studied from a “*biopsychosocial* perspective” (xii). They claim that mothers in particular are vulnerable to depression, and “the more children in the house, the more depression is reported” (xii). They also describe “poverty” as the “pathway to depression” (xii) and point out that in the United States seventy-five percent of the population who are in poverty are women and children. McGrath *et al.* also link violence against women with their depression and suggest that “depressive symptoms may be long-standing effects of posttraumatic stress syndrome” (xii).

Janet M. Stoppard, writing from a feminist social constructionist point of view, argues that many positivist scientific studies on the gendered aspects of depression “leave out important aspects of women’s lived experience” (2000, 17). She believes that depression in women should be explored in the context of women’s lives, and that the women themselves should describe their depressive experience rather than it being explained by health professionals. She suggests that while claims

are commonly made that depression in women arises in the context of their roles as wives and mothers, it is also the case that remarkably little is known about women’s experiences as wives and mothers from the perspective of the women themselves (138).

In her “feminist approach” to research “women’s accounts of their experiences become the focus of inquiry” rather than reports “reconstructed in the language of experts” (37). In a particular look at motherhood, Stoppard explains that key themes emerge from the “depressive experience of women who are mothers” which include “ambivalence,

disappointment and loss” (154). She asserts that the problems women face in being mothers, “lie not with motherhood” nor with “the meaning motherhood holds for women” but with the “*intensive* form of mothering which has come to dominate cultural constructions of the good mother” (160).

Depression today is studied in a wide range of professional settings and academic disciplines. It is explored from a biological, psychological and sociological point of view, or from various combinations of all three. The focus on women’s depression in particular, has arisen out of the fact that in the western world it is understood that twice as many women than men suffer from depression. This statistic agrees with Rousseau’s view that depression in the eighteenth century is also a woman’s disease. The studies on current-day female depression reveal that poverty, abuse and relationship breakdown all lead to long-term depression. With regard to marriage and motherhood, many women feel dissatisfied with their roles but are unable to speak out from fear of disrupting family life and because they feel oppressed by a masculine culture which dismisses their opinions. In addition, the image of womanhood which is imposed upon them is often difficult to achieve, and this leads to feelings of inadequacy and despair. The fact that feminine behaviour itself resembles the depressive state is perhaps the most worrying observation. It is also argued that women dwell more upon their unhappiness than men, an attitude which both prolongs and deepens their depressive condition. Today’s theories of women’s depression are more sophisticated than those presented in eighteenth-century medical texts and help to illuminate aspects of women’s depression in the earlier period.

#### **d) Memoirs of depression**

In order to explore depression in the past, all forms of writing are analysed to gain an understanding of the sufferers’ experiences. These writings, which include letters,



autobiographies, biographies and literature, are accepted to some degree as memoirs of depression. This approach is taken by Stanley Jackson, who not only explores the history of depression as a medical concept but also examines the condition from the perspective of the sufferers themselves. He mentions William Cowper (1731-1800) who described his melancholia in “forty-five years’ worth of letters” (137) and in his posthumously published autobiography, *Memoirs of the Early Life of William Cowper, Esq* (1816). Cowper suffered repeated bouts of “disruptive illness” and “severe anxiety” and “ruminated at length about the possibility of suicide” (137). He found comfort in his writing, which Jackson describes as a kind of “occupational therapy” (138). Jackson also looks at the case of Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) who “suffered through two lengthy periods of serious dejection” (142). While information about the nature of Johnson’s condition is found in the writings of his friends Arthur Murphy and James Boswell, Jackson argues that a “further perspective on Johnson’s troubled mind and his depth of understanding of mental life” (144) can be gained from his novel *Rasselas*. He points out that neither Cowper nor Johnson described their condition in medical terms or with reference to medical texts.

Jennifer Radden looks at the differences between memoirs of depression written in the past and those written today. She claims that because “beliefs and assumptions” (2009, 169) change over time this has an effect upon the narrative “framing” (170) of the memoirs. She explores the writings of George Trosse, an eighteenth-century nonconformist minister, who believed that during his depressive experience he was possessed by an “*unearthly external agency*” (171), at which time a “voice” commanded him to cut off his hair. Radden explains that while “unbidden thoughts and alien commands are typical of psychosis, now as much as then” (171), today the ‘voices’ are thought to stem from a problem within the sufferer’s own mind and not from an “*external agency*”. A further aspect of Trosse’s depression is that he believed through “his own iniquities”, that he

“invited” (172) this external agency in. Radden argues that this adds a moralistic and religious “reframing” (172) to his experience, that would not be so applicable today. She comments that while the features of Trosse’s account are typical of early modern memoirs of depression, narrative framings have changed since then. For instance, she refers to the mid-twentieth century “symptom-alienating framing” (172) that she identifies in John Custance’s record of his manic-depressive illness, *Wisdom, Madness and Folly* (1952). She notices that he describes his symptoms as something “alienated from the self” (172), in other words, something separate from the self and that these symptoms are the “illness” (172) that must be treated. This is in contrast to more recent memoirs, such as Kay Redfield Jamison’s *An Unquiet Mind* (1996), which adopt a “symptom-integrating framing” (175), that is, the writers insist that their moods, or symptoms, are not only “integral to who they are” but that there is a “great personal meaning and value in them” (175).

In their memoirs of depression authors of today write at length about their experiences. Radden has drawn attention to the differences between narrative framings of the past and the present. Nevertheless, recent accounts offer an insight into what it feels like to be depressed, and therefore assist in the understanding of the often fragmentary record of mental suffering in the past. Jamison, a Professor of Psychiatry, writes about her life with manic depression in her memoir *An Unquiet Mind*. She states that as a young girl both her parents “strongly encouraged [her] interests in writing poetry and school plays, as well as in science and medicine” (1996, 19). She comments that “neither of them tried to limit my dreams” (19). Despite her success at school, when aged seventeen she began to experience periods of intense enthusiasms, followed by bouts of deep depressions. She writes that in her manias her mind was “fabulously focussed” and that she read intensely, “staying up all night, night after night” (36). In her depressions, she lacked energy and viewed life as

“meaningless” (38): she was preoccupied with death and often “dragged [her] exhausted mind and body around a local cemetery, ruminating about how long each of its inhabitants had lived before the final moment” (38). In a rather clichéd manner, she sat on graves “writing long, dreary, morbid poems” (38). She hid her despair from friends suffering in silence and states that “with such loss of one’s self, with such proximity to death, and such distance from shelter” (40) she aged rapidly. Her condition was eventually controlled by Lithium but the effects of the drug meant that she was never able to have children.

Stephanie Merritt, who writes about her manic depression in *The Devil Within*, is a literary editor, well-educated and academically successful. However, like Jamison, at the age of seventeen she began to suffer from manic depression. She believes that her illness was a reaction to persistent bullying that she experienced at school. Although she left school with “the highest exam results” her self-esteem was “shredded” and she had “no coherent sense of self” (2009, 39). She writes that her manic episodes were characterized by “a kind of frenzy that manifested itself in a need for urgent flight” (65) and that in her depressions she felt a “crushing worthlessness” (81). She describes depression as “the loneliest place on earth; no one can reach you there, when you most need to be reached” (261). Merritt often represents her illness as a metaphor, for instance, she explains that in managing her condition she lives “like someone who has built a house on a notorious faultline: every day that passes without incident, I feel as if I have got away with something” (258). Also, following her pregnancy she began to feel suicidal and describes her pills as “the toys of my despair” (194). In terms of treatment she finally settles on nutritional therapy which involves a “regime of supplements” (255). Jamison and Merritt are not women confined by a masculinist culture or social conditioning but by their own manic-depressive illness. Thus, Merritt admits that she has turned down advantageous jobs “with great reluctance”

(257) because she knows she is not yet strong enough to cope with too much stress. This is not the action of a victim of oppression.

In *The Noonday Demon: An Anatomy of Depression*, Andrew Solomon describes his own experiences with major depression in the context of a more extensive review of the depressive experience. Solomon, who had supportive parents and a relatively happy childhood and currently has a successful career as a writer, can find no real cause for his depressive episodes. He argues that “if you feel bad without reason most of the time, you’re depressed” and that if you “feel bad most of the time with reason, you’re also depressed” (20). However, if depression “is disabling to you, then it’s major” (2002, 20). He defines mild depression as a “gradual and sometimes permanent thing that undermines people the way rust weakens iron” (16). He suggests that feelings of depression can *only* be described in “metaphor and allegory” (16) and writes that his own depression had grown upon him like a vine that smothers the oak tree. He explains that at its worst he felt “asphyxiated” (18) by depression, which had a “life of its own” (18), and points out that the “rebuilding of the self in and after depression requires love, insight, work, and ... time” (19). He comments that the cumulative effect of the symptoms of major depression, which “gather over the years, usually over a lifetime” (48), can lead to breakdowns and that breakdowns are a crossover into madness. Depression, argues Solomon, affects sufferers in different ways and that while some people who experience severe episodes are able to “achieve real success in life”, others might be “utterly destroyed by the mildest forms of the illness” (23).

Jamison, Merritt and Solomon all use the poetry and literature of others to assist them in the expression of their own depressive feelings. For instance, Solomon refers to the writing of Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) and Jamison cites the poetry of Edna St. Vincent

Millay (1892-1950). They also readily use the memoirs of others, for example, Merritt mentions the work of both Jamison and Solomon. This interplay between the different writers and their experiences is not gender-specific: men refer to women's writing and vice versa. Radden has pointed out that beliefs and assumptions change over time. However, memoirs and literature on depression become part of a shared community of personal writings by both men and women that span across the centuries and always remain relevant. In identifying with the suffering of others, writers in turn validate their own experiences. The memoirs also interestingly show that sufferers tend not to describe their experiences in medical terms, and thus are valuable in that they offer different and more personal perspectives on the condition than those found in medical texts. Finally, these memoirs in particular reveal that the presence of depression leads to the loss of a coherent self, in other words, the self becomes fragmented and must be restored and rebuilt once the depression has subsided.

#### **e) Women in eighteenth-century society**

##### *i. Separate spheres*

To understand the social condition of women in this period and the ways in which their position in society may have negatively impacted upon their mental health it is useful to explore the different roles and responsibilities of men and women at this time. Research shows that social constructions of masculinity and femininity were influenced by, what Frank O'Gorman describes as, "the Christian doctrine of the natural inferiority of women" (1997, 8). O'Gorman also observes that both genders accepted male rule on the basis that "female inferiority arose naturally, out of the obvious fact that men and women possessed different qualities" (9). It was understood that men were not only "physically superior" to women, but were "rational, decisive and consistent" (9) and were therefore better equipped to cope with the hurly-burly of public life. Women on the other hand had "less positive

qualities” and were “emotional” and their behaviour was “inconsistent” (9). For these reasons it was thought that women were better suited to the responsibilities associated with home and family life. However, O’Gorman contends that the household was governed by men and was in this sense “patriarchal” (9).

The sexual behaviour of women was considered to be of paramount importance because it was related to the patriarchal system of bloodlines and property. Fenela A. Childs explores eighteenth-century courtesy literature and concludes that “courtesy writers were overwhelmingly concerned with the preservation of female chastity”. She further states that this theme “dominates every major courtesy work for women” (1984, 270). With regard to men, male promiscuity was not believed to be such a threat to social stability and the class system. R.W. Connell, in his study of the history of masculinity, mentions that amongst the male gentry in this period, “licence in sexual relationships, especially with women of the lower classes, was a prerogative of rank” (2002, 249). This grossly biased moral standard was a constraint upon the emotional freedom of women, particularly those of the middle and upper classes of society.

Historians generally agree that men and women lived in ‘separate spheres’ in the eighteenth century. Roy Porter states that “public life was a men-only club” and that there were “no female parliamentarians, explorers, lawyers, magistrates or factory entrepreneurs, and almost no women voters” (1991, 22). Public opinion, explains Porter, “tight-laced women into constrictive roles: wives, mothers, housekeepers, subordinate workers, domestic servants, maiden aunts” (22). He further comments that “a woman hoping to be accepted as an intellectual had to run the gauntlet” (22). O’Gorman points out that women were less well-educated than men and were considered to be of “inferior intellectual ability” (9). He also observes that in relation to the law, women had “fewer legal rights

than men” (10) and once married, they had “no legal rights over their children” and “few legal rights over their own persons” (10). In addition, married women had “no rights in common law over their own property” or indeed over “matrimonial property acquired after marriage” (10).

Despite much evidence to support the notion of ‘separate spheres’, this ideology has recently been challenged by revisionist historians such as Lawrence E. Klein, who argues that eighteenth-century women did have “public dimensions to their lives” (1995, 102). Klein believes that we must question what “public” and “private” meant at this time, and suggests that these terms did not necessarily “correspond to the distinction between home and not-home” (105). He comments that “privacy was ascribed to forms of life that we would consider public” and that both men and women at home “were not necessarily spending more time in private” (105). Women, argues Klein, “were found in all sorts of places that, to speak loosely, were public” (103). Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, while accepting that men and women were “subject to a vast array of social rules and obligations, many of which were gendered”, state that the “public sphere was neither solely male, nor openly accessible to females” (1997, 25). They suggest that “to some extent, the historian’s choice of sources determines his or her understanding of gender” (25). Examples of women who did experience a sense of personal control at this time are identified by Porter, who refers to Sarah Churchill and the Duchess of Devonshire, two women who “exercised immense behind-the-scenes power, because of rank, breeding, force of personality and sexual charms” (24). Nevertheless, the eighteenth century remains a period when women were severely confined by social, legal and moral conventions. Their position in society and within the family meant that they had limited control over their own lives. Their legal status reflected their social inferiority. In comparison to men,

they were thought to be ‘naturally’ less intelligent and less emotionally stable, and therefore not generally suited to the demanding roles of public life.

*ii. Women’s voices*

Whilst accepting that women were constrained in these ways, it is necessary to consider the extent to which women’s voices can be heard in this period. With regard to sources, Porter argues that it was men “who left most records behind” and that this suggests just how “muted women had to be” (22). He explains that compared with men “we know little about what women felt, thought, and did” (35) even though “slightly over half the nation was female” (35). However, Katherine M. Rogers points out that “for the first time in England many women were “expressing themselves privately in letters and diaries, publicly in novels, tracts, and educational works” (1982, 2). Nevertheless, she also argues that for writing women “there was the nagging suspicion that cultivating their minds was selfish and unfeminine” (29). Many women believed that the act of writing itself was beyond the limitations of female decorum. Felicity A. Nussbaum notices a sense of confusion in the writing of eighteenth-century “women autobiographers” (1989, 127). She observes that they “frequently call attention to the oddity of their activity, the strangeness they find in speaking about identity and experience to potential readers, if only themselves” (127). Nussbaum believes that “these uneasinesses testify to the special status that gender gives to their writing and to their situation” (128).

In terms of their public persona, Rogers argues that female authors had to prove that “publishing one’s work could be consistent with the utmost virtue and femininity” (27). In their novels, as Rogers explains, “practically all the women writers show perpetual anxiety to remain above suspicion. Their heroines never have a libidinous or self-assertive thought; a sexual lapse in a female leads to lingering, remorseful death” (26). Alice



Browne comments that “men as well as women read women centred novels, or popular factual works about women” but that the “implied reader in these works is usually female” (1987, 23). Many texts by women were morally didactic in nature and others, as Browne observes, had a “serious feminist intent” (4). However, she further suggests that this work was often “misunderstood as exercises in paradox, or dismissed as perverse attempts to take absurd ideas seriously” (4). Despite the risks to their reputation women wrote prolifically and as Browne points out, by the end of the century “many women writers were highly respected and highly moral, some of them earning a lot of money from their work” (28).

#### **f) ‘Gender’ as a tool of analysis**

The history of the use and the meaning of the term ‘gender’ have recently been debated. For instance, Barker and Chalus suggest that “gender history is an offshoot of women’s history” but comment that “both are relatively new fields of study” (3). They believe that the development of “gender history as distinct from women’s history” is postmodernism’s “most significant contribution to scholarship” (5). Toni Bowers adopts a slightly different viewpoint and contextualizes gender studies as “the youngest of three sisters – Women’s Studies, Feminist Criticism, and Gender Studies” (2007, 935) and she observes that the three terms are “not synonymous”, nor are they “mutually exclusive” (937). Bowers argues that more recently gender studies have become concerned with the “broader issues of *gender difference*” (936).

Joan Scott draws attention to the often limited and narrow approaches taken by some feminist historians in the study of gender. For example, she argues that for Marxist feminists “the concept of gender has long been treated as the by-product of changing economic structures” and that it has no “independent analytic status of its own” (1986,

1061). She also refers to feminists who have adopted Lacan's theory of language through which "gender identity is constructed" (1063). Scott believes that while language may always appear "coherent and fixed" (1063) it is, in fact, "highly unstable" and requires the "suppression of ambiguities ... in order to assure (and create the illusion of) coherence and common understanding" (1063). Rather than attaching gender to existing theoretical models, Scott explains that "systems of social or sexual relations" (1066) would be better understood by applying gender as an analytical category with its own carefully constructed definition.

Scott proposes such a definition based upon two "interrelated" but "analytically distinct" (1067) parts. The first part is that gender is recognisable in "social relationships" (1067), for instance, through culturally available symbols such as those of "woman" in Western Christian tradition, and in the ways in which these symbols become fixed in their meaning to give an "appearance of timeless permanence in binary gender representation" (1068). Gender can also be observed in a "broader view" of systems other than "kinship" (1068) such as the labour market and education, and finally in "subjective identity", because as Scott argues, "real men and women do not always or literally fulfil the terms of their society's prescriptions or of our analytic categories" (1068). She suggests that so far "biographies" have yielded the best results and cites among others Mary A. Hill's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Making of a Radical Feminist, 1860-1896* (1980). In the second part of her definition, Scott proposes that gender is a "primary way of signifying relationships of power" (1067), for instance, as in political history, and may be used to understand the ways in which "politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics" (1070). Scott believes that changes in "social relationships" affect "relationships of power" and that the direction of change can be either way. Her complex theory for the study of "gender" is written with feminist historians in mind.

Social historian Robert B. Shoemaker in a later study refers to Scott's work which he describes as her "influential manifesto for gender history" (1998, 4). Like Scott, he explores the ways in which gender has been applied in the study of history and believes that the term's most powerful use has been as "an *alternative* to sex as a way of characterising the differences between men and women in history" (1). He comments that the word "sex" suggests biological differences which are "by implication unchanging" whereas the term "gender" allows dissimilarities between the sexes to be identified which are "socially, culturally, and politically constructed, and are therefore subject to change" (1). While acknowledging that women's history has not always excluded men, he contends that feminist historians usually accept that "male dominance and oppression were a constant in history" (2). This indeed may characterize the 'feminist' position. He argues that the concept of masculinity, which changes over time, should be explored in conjunction with ideas of femininity. While taking into account recent "theoretical advances" (5) in gender analysis, such as the importance of language to the "construction of gender roles" (5), Shoemaker states that his approach is to "describe the ways in which male and female patterns of behaviour differed (or not) in important areas of private and public life over the period 1650-1850" (5). Clearly, the arguments in these studies show that the term gender and its use in historical research is understood and applied in different ways, and care needs to be taken when using this language.

#### **g) This study**

While this study is primarily interested in women's history, and to some extent adopts the approach of feminist historians in that it explores the social condition of women, it is also concerned with what Toni Bowers describes as the "broader issues of *gender difference*". In this sense, it is influenced by Robert Shoemaker's model for the study of gender and

looks for the ways in which female and male patterns of behaviour differ (or not) in both private and public life. It is aware of Joan Scott's argument relating to the importance of power structures in the study of gender, and how both "social" and "power" formations are interrelated. It is also guided by her observation that information on the social history of women (and men) is most fruitfully obtained through a study of their lives, that is, through biography. However, in this thesis the focus is on depression and therefore the study of the authors' lives might be more accurately described as 'biographies of depression'. Equally important to this thesis is the study of poetry and prose, which are analysed as forms of expression that either stem from the depressed mind or show an understanding of dejected mental states. This thesis can also be seen as being within the tradition of cultural studies. Abrams explains that in cultural studies there is a tendency to subvert the "hierarchical distinctions between "high literature" and the traditionally "lower" forms" (254) that appeal to a wider audience, and to "transfer to the centre of cultural study such hitherto "marginal" or "excluded" subjects", for example, the "literary ... and intellectual productions of women" (254). Here, in this respect, one major male literary figure and one male minor writer are included together with four women writers.

The eighteenth century is a formative period in the history of depression. As has been noted above, scientific theories about the body were constantly being revised and this influenced the way in which melancholy and melancholia were defined and discussed in medical writing. The causes of depression were generally, though not exclusively, thought to be closely linked to the workings of the body rather than with the mind as in the nineteenth century. While it has been established that depressed writers do not always discuss their experiences in medical terms, in this period they are clearly influenced by medical theory and language. The writers in this study lived at various times across the century and are presented chronologically so that any changes in the way in which they

describe their depression can be observed. This thesis takes the form of a series of case studies and the writers have been chosen because of the diversity of their life histories and their writing. Within the framework of 'depression and gender' the cases stand independently, and the similarities and differences between them are largely explored in the main conclusion. One of the purposes for choosing such a varied selection of writers is to reveal whether or not the depressive experience and its expression have similar features, regardless of the circumstances of the author or the times in which they lived.

The study is set out in two parts. The first part considers two cases of male depression, Thomas Gray (1716-1771) and Robert Fergusson (1750-1774). As was stated earlier, in studies on eighteenth-century depression attention is often focused on eminent male figures, but this thesis is different in that minor authors are considered. However, an exception is made with Thomas Gray who is a canonical male writer whose depression has frequently been discussed. There are several features of his work and his life that justify his inclusion in this study. First of all, his poem 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' was highly influential throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. Many poets have mimicked his style in their expression of the melancholy mood. Also, his 'Sonnet on the Death of Richard West' had a profound effect upon writers after this time and led to a revival of the sonnet form. Neither Johnson's nor Cowper's work had such a deep and lasting impact on the literature of melancholy in this period. In his life he was the typical intellectual melancholic and describes his moods in great detail in his letters. He was shy and socially awkward and this also contributes to his depression. Robert Fergusson is a minor Scottish poet who died in Edinburgh's Bedlam at the age of twenty-four. His depressive period was brief and difficult to explain, but sources reveal that it may have been related to the effects of alcohol or to his religious beliefs. There is some evidence in his poetry that there was a melancholy aspect to his character which deepened in the

months leading up to his death. While Gray and Fergusson did not experience the same social restrictions as the female subjects, this freedom brought with it other problems and difficulties and this makes it useful to include them in this study. The chapters on the men serve as contextual material through which the similarities and differences between male and female expression and experience may be observed, nevertheless, the men are studied with the same rigorous attention as the women. The purpose for this is to reach a view of the writer's depression that is specific to the framework of this study, and which is not determined by the various and often contradictory opinions of other critics.

Part two of the thesis looks at female depression through the writers Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea (1661-1720), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), Sarah Scott (1721-1795) and Charlotte Smith (1749-1806). Anne Finch and her husband were political exiles from the royal court and this situation is often cited as the cause of her lifelong depression. However, she lived a life of relative ease and often her bouts of despair appear to have no real cause. Only fragments of information about her life exist although many of her poems are autobiographical accounts of her mental suffering. Lady Montagu was not a depressive character nor does she ruminate upon her problems, yet clearly at times she was depressed, and while this is evident in some of her poems it is revealed more often in her letters. Sarah Scott was a novelist who shows in her work an awareness of women's depression, which she associates with the subservient position of women in society. Her concept of female community as the answer to women's problems is simultaneously forward-thinking and regressive. Charlotte Smith was a mother to twelve children, had an unhappy marriage that ended in separation and wrote repeatedly in her letters about the difficulties of her lot. In her poetry she expresses the melancholy mood, and in her fiction portrays depressed women, some of whom are autobiographical figures. All of these women writers offer different perspectives on what female depression was like in the eighteenth century. The

availability of material on both the women and the men is limited to middle and upper class writers and this imparts a class bias to the study.

The language surrounding depression was complex in the eighteenth century and remains so today. Jackson has drawn a distinction between two conditions, 'depression' and 'pathological depression'. The latter is often described as 'depressive illness' or 'clinical depression' and renders the sufferer incapable of carrying out the normal duties of life. Horwitz and Wakefield describe it as a 'depressive disorder' or 'depression without cause'. Solomon refers to pathological depression as 'major depression' and describes it as disabling. Radden argues that 'fear and sadness' are defining symptoms of depressive illness in the past and in the present. The milder condition of depression is described by Horwitz and Wakefield as 'normal sadness', that is, sadness or depression that is experienced in response to an identifiable cause. For instance, a person who suffers the devastating loss of a loved one suffers from 'normal sadness'. However, if the sadness continues for more than a few weeks and debilitates the sufferer, then this would be described as pathological depression or depression without cause. This condition is traditionally known as melancholia, but confusingly in the eighteenth century the terms melancholia and melancholy were often used interchangeably. Solomon argues that normal sadness is still depression and may be moderate or extreme, and might occur briefly or last for a long time. He also points out that different people cope with different kinds of depression in various ways.

In this thesis the terms 'depression' and 'melancholy' are used with reference to 'sadness with cause', and the terms 'major depression' or 'melancholia' are used to describe 'sadness without cause'. Eighteenth-century terms are discussed as they arise. Other terminology used, such as 'dejected mental states', refers in general to states of mind

associated with sadness, loss, fear, despondency, low spirits and despair. This kind of phraseology combines language related to both the past and the present. 'Dejected' was a word used frequently in the eighteenth century to describe a melancholy state of mind, whereas the word 'mental' is a modern term used with reference to psychological states as in the terms 'mental health' or 'mental well-being'. It is clear that the study of depression in the eighteenth century must be approached with care in relation to terminology and also with sensitivity for the suffering that the writers describe.



## PART ONE

### Male depression

Thomas Gray is the quintessential eighteenth-century melancholy poet. He wrote about his low spirits in his letters and composed poems that reflected his thoughtful and pensive character. He was a learned man and considered to be one of the greatest scholars of his age, but he was not a highly productive poet and as Alastair Macdonald points out, he “composed only a limited amount, and published not all of that” (1974, 172). Macdonald describes Gray as the “reclusive savant” who gave in his poetry “periodical flashes of manifest worth” and then withdrew into “the darkness of a guarded privacy” (173). Gray’s work is influenced by the ideas and expressions of other writers which was a common literary practice in the period. However, Roger Lonsdale argues that “in the case of Gray, one seems at times to be confronting a kind of literary kleptomania, such is his dependence on the phrasing and thoughts of other poets” (1969, xvii). Various editions of his poems were published in his lifetime, for instance *Designs by Mr. R. Bentley, for six poems by Mr. T. Gray* appeared in 1753 and in 1757 *Odes by Mr. Gray* was produced. A later edition, *Poems by Mr. Gray* was published in 1768 with a new edition printed in 1771, the year of his death.

The poem which appeared most frequently in print was his renowned ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ (1751). At the time of its publication it was an instant success and received much critical attention then and in the decades that followed. Dr John Gregory, with whom Gray was acquainted, remarked that the ‘Elegy’ “owed its popularity entirely to the subject, and that the public would have received it as well if it had been in prose”<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> In Lonsdale (113) taken from the *Life of James Beattie* (1806, i.83) by Sir William Forbes. Dr Gregory was Professor of Medicine at Edinburgh University. In his study, *A comparative view of the state of man. With those of the animal World*, he asks, “Whence is it that the English with great natural Genius and Acuteness,

Gregory's comments highlight the taste for melancholy writing at this time. Samuel Johnson admitted in his biography of Gray that he contemplated his poetry "with less pleasure than his life" (1781, 476) although conceding that

in the character of his *Elegy* I rejoice to concur with the common reader ... the *Churchyard* abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo (485).

As Johnson's comment suggests, the mood, imagery and sentiments all contributed to the poem's appeal. Through the 'Elegy' Gray, the solitary and private man, was thrust into the public eye. Amy L. Reed, in her survey of melancholy writing in this period, argues that the 'Elegy' "came before its public not as a presentation of novel thought but as the perfectly adequate expression of a widespread popular feeling, the "melancholy" of the first half of the eighteenth century" (1924, 1). Eleanor Sickels, in her review of melancholy poetry from Gray to Keats comments on the 'Elegy's' subsequent fame and notes that "no poem in the English language has been more quoted, parodied, imitated, translated, and generally talked about than "An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"" (1932, 92).

Biographers and critics have used Gray's correspondence to comment upon the nature of his lifelong melancholy. Ian Jack has contended that it was caused by the tediousness of his life, and claims that Gray was always "bored, or in flight from boredom, or pretending to be bored, from the first of his letters to his last" (1974, 32). He comments that Gray's adult life was "singularly deficient in sources of stimulation" (33). Jean H. Hagstrum seeks a deeper understanding of Gray's melancholy and describes it as a "fixed condition" that "inhibited his activity and poisoned his quiet" (1974, 7). He also explains it as part of his "sensibility", stating that "melancholy is too private and too isolated a condition to

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and still greater Goodness of heart, blessed with riches and liberty, are rather a melancholy and unhappy people?" (1765, 64).

adequately describe Gray of the humanist tradition” (8). In his analysis Hagstrum argues that the term “sensibility” is “broad enough” to incorporate other aspects of Gray’s character such as his “intellectual and artistic interests” (7). Robert Lance Snyder looks beyond Gray’s personality and considers society in general as a cause of Gray’s depression. He believes that Gray was out of step with the “dominant values of his time” (1979, 126) and that he immersed himself in studies of the past as a “strategy of abstracting himself from a painfully alien culture” (136). However, the “very necessity for such manoeuvring only further depressed him” (136). According to Snyder then, Gray was unhappy both in and out of society. A.L. Lytton Sells argues rather unsympathetically, that “all his talk of melancholy ... was probably exaggerated” (1980, 18), and suggests that if he had led a busier life he “would have had less time to dwell on his neurosis” (18). His most recent biographer R.L. Mack refers to studies that have associated his “melancholy” to repressed homosexual desires. He disputes this view and argues that his “chronic depression ... was itself surely an incidental symptom of his response to the perception of his own sexual impulse” (2000, 34). Mack explains Gray’s melancholy as simply an aspect of his “temperament” (388).

These views on Gray’s melancholy are all useful. The uneventful nature of his life, his sensitivity, alienation, sexuality and temperament no doubt all added to his depression. However, this chapter is concerned with those letters which reveal the difficulties that Gray had in relating to other people, and the way in which his social anxieties, introverted personality and secluded lifestyle contributed to his depression. In this sense there is a social dimension to his condition. It looks back to the comments of his friend Norton Nicholls, who wrote in his reminiscences of Gray, that in general society or assemblies he “had neither inclination to mix much in conversation ... nor I think much facility, even if he had been willing” (*GC*, App.Z, 3, 1299). He observes that this “arose perhaps partly from

natural reserve, & what is called *shyness*, & partly from having lived retired in the University during so great a part of his life where he had lost as he told me himself ‘the versatility of his mind’” (1299). This chapter also explores the epistolary relationship between Gray and Richard West, a friend and fellow poet, through which they share their melancholy feelings. It is in these letters that the story of Gray’s depression begins to emerge.

Gray and West first met at Eton College which they both left in 1734: Gray went on to Cambridge and West went to Oxford. They corresponded on many topics and West in particular wrote of his poor health and low spirits. Gray acknowledged West’s complaints and attempted to advise and comfort his friend. As part of his counsel, and by way of showing his understanding of the melancholy state of mind, Gray often talked about his own depression. For instance, he explains to West:

If the default of your spirits and nerves be nothing but the effect of the hyp, I have no more to say. We all must submit to that wayward Queen; I too in no small degree own her sway, - I feel her influence while I speak her power (*GC*, Dec. 1736, 1, 56).

Gray describes his melancholy as the male condition of hypochondria, which was sometimes referred to as ‘the disease of the learned’. Physician Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733) commented that men who “continually fatigue their heads with intense thought and study, whilst they neglect to give the rest of their bodies the exercise they require, go the ready way to get it”<sup>4</sup> (1711, 95). Gray would probably have placed himself and West in this category. Writing at the age of twenty, Gray is quite dismissive of the “hyp” suggesting that it is a common disorder and not of serious concern. Nevertheless, he also admits that he suffers from it “in no small degree”, an indication of things to come.

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<sup>4</sup> In a letter thought to be addressed to George Cheyne, philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) seeks advice for a “Distemper” which he describes as a “Weakness rather than a Lowness of Spirits” (in Greig, Mar/April 1734, 1, 17). Symptoms include a “Watryness in the mouth” (14) and a “Palpitation of the Heart” (15). It occurred after periods of intense study and one physician warned him “against the Vapors”, while another told him that he “had fairly got the Disease of the Learned” (14).

He continues his letter by stating: “But if it be a real distemper, pray take more care of your health”. This comment reveals again that at this point in his life Gray believes the “hyp” to be a relatively minor condition, and that a physical problem rather than those troubles of the “spirits and nerves” constitutes “real” illness.

Over the next two years West continued to complain of ill-health and melancholy, but assured Gray that he found consolation in his letters. For instance, he wrote to him: “I find no physic comparable to your letters” (*GC*, Dec. 1737, 1, 70), and “I thank you again and again for your two last most agreeable letters ... I made them my classics in the Country, they were my Horace and Tibullus” (*GC*, 17 Sep. 1738, 1, 91). Gray too spoke easily to West about his own melancholy feelings. For example, in one letter he explains to him that he was disappointed when he did not arrive for a visit as promised, and writes:

low spirits are my true and faithful companions; they get up with me, go to bed with me, make journeys and returns as I do; nay, and pay visits, and will even affect to be jocose, and force a feeble laugh with me; but most commonly we sit alone together, and are the prettiest insipid company in the world” (*GC*, 22 Aug. 1737, 1, 66).

Although the tone of the letter is reasonably light-hearted, it reveals Gray to be a rather lonely, introverted and mildly depressed young man. Whereas the “hyp” was a condition that affected all men especially scholars and one which was experienced occasionally, Gray portrays his “low spirits” as particular to him and as a continuous and settled state.

Upon leaving university, Gray travelled through Europe with another Etonian friend, Horace Walpole, although he regularly corresponded with West during that time. Towards the end of the tour he quarrelled with Walpole and their friendship was not re-established until some years later. Returning home his friendship with West intensified but was carried on mainly through letters. In the spring of 1742 West was extremely ill with consumption and resided in the country. Gray wrote to him from London and several of

the conversations between the friends are lively debates about literature. However, West's health was also discussed and he informs Gray: "I have been tormented within this week with a most violent cough" (*GC*, 4 Apr. 1742, 1, 190). In addition, the subject of Gray's mental health is referred to and it becomes of some concern to West. In a letter in which Gray mentions his translation of Propertius, the Latin elegiac poet, which he had previously sent to West, he writes:

You see, by what I sent you, that I converse, as usual, with none but the dead: They are my old friends, and almost make me long to be with them. You will not wonder therefore, that I, who live only in times past, am able to tell you no news of the present (*GC*, 8 May 1742, 1, 201).

Gray has retreated into his studies, shows little interest in the world around him and hints at a death wish. Snyder comments that his "antiquarian interests" may represent the "nascent historical self-consciousness of his era" (136) but on a "personal level" they may have enabled him to "submerge anxieties about the present and lose himself amid the richness of the past" (136). At this point in time Gray was probably extremely worried about the state of West's health. His mood of withdrawal troubles West who anxiously replies: "But why are you thus melancholy? I am so sorry for it, that you see I cannot forbear writing again the very first opportunity" (*GC*, 11 May 1742, 1, 203).

In response, Gray writes in detail about the true nature of his deepening melancholy, which he now describes as two separate states. The first is a "white Melancholy" or "Leucocholy" which he defines as a "good easy sort of state", a kind of "Ennui, which makes one form certain little wishes that signify nothing". The second is "black indeed" which is "frightful" and "excludes and shuts its eyes to the most possible hopes, and every thing that is pleasurable" (*GC*, 27 May 1742, 1, 209). Solomon comments that the "cardinal symptom of major depression" is that "you cannot gain pleasure from anything" (19). It seems as though Gray's mild depression or "white Melancholy" as he calls it,

occasionally developed into major depressive episodes. Hagstrum argues that “viewing Gray’s life in perspective whole, we must conclude that he did not suffer from two illnesses”, that is, “chronic and white” and “black and occasional”, but from “only one, of which the white was the temporary remission of the black” (7). However, despite his gloomy reflections, it is difficult to imagine Gray at this early stage in his career as a man who exists without any hope or joy in his life. He did not receive a reply from West to this particular letter, because West died only a few days after it was written. His confession, then, must only have served as a personal catharsis and a private memoir of his melancholy, rather than as a shared confidence between friends. The evidence in these letters shows that at the age of twenty-six Gray suffered from a depressive condition that blighted his life, one which was exacerbated by his intellectual pursuits and his studious mode of living.

The loss of West was a painful burden for Gray and one that remained with him for the rest of his life. Nicholls, who became Gray’s friend in later years, comments: “Whenever I mentioned Mr West he looked serious, & seemed to feel the affliction of a recent loss” (*GC*, App.Z, 3, 1300). In the weeks after his death on 1 June 1742 Gray expressed his grief in his poetry. Robert F. Gleckner argues that his “sudden burst into a career ... as Miltonic poet” was “as sustainer and continuer ... of West’s career” (1997, 69). In October that year Gray became a fellow of Cambridge University and remained there for the rest of his life. Apart from visits to his mother in Stoke Poges and to various other friends, as well as excursions in England and Scotland, he mostly lived privately and quietly at Cambridge. He did spend two years in London researching in the British Museum, but Nicholls remarks that even here “he certainly lived very little in society” and he “dined generally alone” (1300). Gray declined the offer of Poet Laureateship in 1757 and in all his time at Cambridge never delivered one lecture, despite becoming Regius Professor of Modern



History in 1768. Throughout his career, therefore, Gray was rarely exposed to the demands of public life.

His preference for a reclusive lifestyle may have stemmed in part from the difficulties he experienced in social situations. Walpole said of Gray's social skills:

he is the worst company in the world – from a melancholy turn, from living reclusively, and from a little too much dignity, he never converses easily – all his words are measured, and chosen, and formed into sentences; his writings are admirable; he himself is not agreeable” (in Lewis, 3 Sep. 1748, 9, 76).

Gray admitted in a letter to West, written while on the European tour with Walpole, that he had a “want of love for general society, indeed an inability to it” (*GC*, 21 Apr. 1741, 1, 181). His dislike for socializing and his ineptitude in company did not improve. For instance, he wrote to his friend Joseph Wharton some years later from Stoke about the challenges he faced during visits to his neighbour Lady Cobham, where she entertained other guests. He explains: “I grow so old, that, I own, People in high spirits & gayety overpower me, & entirely take away mine. I can yet be diverted with their sallies, but if they appear to take notice of my dullness, it sinks me to nothing” (*GC*, 31 Aug. 1758, 2, 584). His incapability to interact makes the situation impossible for him to manage and his only way of coping is to position himself as an observer. However, when his privacy is intruded upon and he becomes the focus of attention, the emotional consequences for him are disastrous and he “sinks ... to nothing”. Radden has pointed out that “self-consciousness” and “oversensitivity” (2003, 39) are symptoms of depressive illness, and Gray seems to be displaying signs of both here. He is embarrassed by his “dullness” which is a mixture of his serious disposition, social anxiety and depression.

Gray's room at Cambridge was his refuge from the world. In the summer of 1760 he wrote to his friend John Clerke discussing a recent holiday. He mentions that he is now at home,

and writes: “I am come to my resting place, and find it very necessary, after living for a month in a house with three women that laughed from morning to night, and would allow nothing to the sulkiness of my disposition” (GC, 12 Aug. 1760, 2, 692). He also writes of the same holiday to Wharton, and complains that “a pack of Women ... wore my spirits, tho’ not their own” and that he had spent the rest of the summer season “at Cambridge in a duller, & more congenial, situation” (GC, 21 Oct. 1760, 2, 703). Gray constantly withdrew to Cambridge where his life was one of tedious tranquillity. In 1756 he wrote to another friend, the poet William Mason: “you know I am at Stoke, hearing, seeing, doing, absolutely nothing. Not such a nothing as you do at Tunbridge, chequer’d & diversified with a succession of fleeting colours; but heavy, lifeless, without form, & void”. His description of the static and colourless seclusion of his experience at Stoke reflects the very life that he cultivates at Cambridge. It is not surprising that he also told Mason: “I have had no more pores & muscular inflations, & am only troubled with this depression of mind” (GC, Jul. 1756, 2, 466). His life of retreat and solitude at Cambridge perpetuated his depression, a mood which followed him on his visits to Stoke. It is as Solomon comments, in depression there is a “terrible cycle: the symptoms of depression cause depression. Loneliness is depressing, but depression also causes loneliness” (60).

As Gray’s life progressed he became less able to cope with the demands of his scholarly pursuits and enjoyed the more mundane tasks of compiling lists and writing catalogues about historical buildings and landscapes. He explains to Wharton: “my spirits are very near the *freezing point*, & for some hours of the day this exercise by its warmth & gentle motion serves to raise them a few degrees higher” (GC, 21 Feb. 1758, 2, 565). It appears as though the inertia that has characterized his everyday life for so long, is now affecting his mental powers. His low-key and steady existence was profoundly disrupted in December 1769 when he met and befriended Charles Victor de Bonstetten, a young Swiss

gentleman who resided in Cambridge for three months. When he returned home Gray was devastated and wrote to him: "I am grown old in the compass of less than three weeks ... I did not conceive till now (I own) what it was to lose you, nor felt the solitude and insipidity of my own condition, before I possessed the happiness of your friendship" (*GC*, 12 Apr. 1770, 3, 1117). A secluded and dreary life is no longer attractive to him after Bonstetten has gone. It is possible that in his conversations with him, Gray experienced echoes of his relationship with West, and on his departure felt again acutely the loss of his friend. Whatever the nature of the attachment the two men never saw each other again. Gray was planning to visit him in 1771 but wrote to Wharton:

My summer was intended to have been pass'd in Switzerland: but I have dropp'd the thought of it, & believe my expeditions will terminate in Old-park<sup>5</sup>: for travel I must, or cease to exist. till this year I hardly knew what (mechanical) low-spirits were: but now I even tremble at an east-wind (*GC*, 24 May 1771, 3, 1189).

Gray's "mechanical low spirits" are different from his "white" and "black" melancholy, and are related to his physical condition. He suffered continually from gout, chills and headaches from this point onwards until his death from "something like the gout in the stomach" (*GC*, App.W, 3, 1271) on 30 July 1771, aged fifty-four.

In the eighteenth century Gray's melancholy would have been seen as an integral part of his disposition or temperament. It was his brooding and introspective personality and his love of elegiac poetry which no doubt prompted his friend Walpole to suggest that he was of a "melancholy turn". His melancholy would also have been thought to stem from his imagination and his intellectual pursuits and while there is evidence to suggest that physicians agreed with this popular view of the time, they also warned of the perils of a studious way of life. Buchan, for instance, cautions that even a few months of intense study can induce "a train of nervous complaints" (58) for which there is no cure. Ideas

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<sup>5</sup> The home of Joseph Wharton in Durham.

about temperament are still current, for example, Gray's most recent biographer Mack comments that he was "always of a melancholy temperament" (388). Jackson explores this concept and explains that it comes from Galen's "theory of temperaments" of which there were "nine possible types", one of which was "melancholic" (43). He points out that Galen used the term "temperament" in the "sense of bodily dispositions, characteristic individual physical tendencies", but that it later "came to refer to characteristic psychological dispositions" (43). Radden observes that notions of the association between "intellectual brilliance" (2003, 40) and melancholy are no longer prevalent, therefore, in a modern view Gray's 'genius' would not be linked to his depression.

Gray himself would probably have accepted that his disposition, his intense application to study and his creativity all contributed to his melancholy, but that it was not something which required treatment and was indeed an intrinsic part of his identity. He initially refers to his melancholy as the "hyp" and does not consider it to be of serious concern: he implies that all scholars "must submit to that wayward Queen". Nevertheless, physicians wrote about hypochondria in extremely severe terms. Buchan warns that it is the "most afflicting of all the diseases which attack the studious" and describes it as a "complication of maladies" (61) rather than a single disease. Robinson points out the dangers and argues that "so easie, indeed, is the Transition from the highest Degree of the Hyp. into the lowest of a fix'd, settled, melancholy Madness, that it's impossible to mark out the Boundaries" (227). Gray's attitude then appears to differ from the opinions of the physicians. For him the "hyp" was bound up with his persona, and was an accepted if not essential feature of his life as the studious intellectual.

However, Gray's melancholy was complicated and was not just related to his temperament and intellect. His persistent "low spirits" were also caused by loneliness and his lack of

close companionship. While he did have several friends, he preferred to live a solitary life but this choice was partly influenced by his inability to socialize successfully in company. While social anxiety is not in itself depression, the isolation that results in a withdrawal from society, does indeed cause loneliness and depression. In his later years Gray admitted to Nicholls that in living a life of retirement at Cambridge he lost the “versatility of his mind”. In retreating from society rather than confronting his difficulty, he never overcame his shyness. He explained in his letter to West that his “white” melancholy or his “Ennui” was a “good easy sort of state”, and in a sense he had no choice but to accept it as such, because mild depression was the price he paid for living a life of perpetual solitude.

There are identifiable causes for Gray’s persistent but moderate melancholy. However, it is his “black” melancholy, first hinted at in his tentative longing for being with “none but the dead”, that seems to come from nowhere and must be described as a sadness without cause. In this condition he felt dreadful, hopeless and utterly miserable, and contrary to Hagstrum’s assertion that this was his usual state, it must be acknowledged that only Gray himself knew how long these episodes lasted. Solomon comments that depression “starts out insipid, fogs the days into a dull colour, weakens ordinary actions until their clear shapes are obscured by the effort they require, leaves you tired and bored and self-obsessed” (17). This could be a description of Gray’s life. Solomon also argues that “emotional rust” accumulates and can lead to “collapse” which marks “major depression” (17). This would suggest that Gray’s persistent low spirits periodically wore him down resulting in phases of major depression which were his darkest moments, his “black” melancholy.

The sadness and melancholy in Gray’s poetry has been discussed by several critics. For instance, F. Doherty contends that two voices can be heard in his poetry, the first is

“outward-directed and largely impersonal” and the second is “self-directed and partly personal, prosaic and poetic” (1963, 222). He proposes that Gray “was more truly himself in those poems which are most loved and best known” such as the ‘Sonnet on the Death of Richard West’ “because it is here that we hear the distinctive voice of Gray, depressed and shaded, expressing its gentle and gentlemanly sadness in a tone unique and recognisable” (227). Donald C. Mell explores form as meaning in the ‘Sonnet’ as well as the allusions to ‘Paradise Lost’ in the poem. He states that Gray’s “tight, rigidly metrical and regularly rhymed sonnet reduces the sweep of Milton’s blank verse while permitting the speaker to express a complex attitude toward death” (1968, 143). Judith K. Moore looks at the importance of context in her analysis of the ‘Sonnet’ and suggests that the “rupture” in the communication between West and Gray is what the poem “records and responds to” (1974, 111). Raymond Bentman argues that the ‘Sonnet’ can be read as an indication of Gray’s repressed sexuality. He believes that it is a poem “about the death of a loved one and about the impossibility of expressing that love openly” (1992, 217). B. Eugene McCarthy argues that ‘Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College’ should be read in conjunction with ‘Ode to Adversity’ because “the two poems function as chapters on the theme of realizing a solution to life’s miseries” (1997, 74).

Clarence Tracy examines the influence of Milton’s ‘Lycidas’ and ‘Il Penseroso’ in Gray’s ‘Elegy’ and suggests that for Milton, as for Gray, “melancholy was not an affliction but a creative power – the means to truth and poetic inspiration” (1974, 46). Thomas R. Carper compares the ‘Eton MS.’ version of the ‘Elegy’ with the final and published one. He comments that both are “intensely personal” (1977, 451) but argues that the earlier one is “more consistently melancholy” and that its ending is “unremittingly dark” because the poet “remains entirely alone” (458). He contends that in the published version “there is an escape from solitary existence in a pastoral setting” (458). Andrew Dillon argues that the

'Elegy' exhibits Gray's "personal sense of a buried life" (1992, 132) and that it is "as much about depression as it is about other species of entombments" (133). Vincent Newey examines "recurrent tropes" in Gray's work as a "kind of autobiography" (1993, 15) and believes that the "motifs of circling, confinement and 'low spirits'" that are evident in the 'Elegy' are his "customary autograph" (19). Suvir Kaul asserts that the opening of the poem evokes a "sense of loss and isolation" and that the "empty landscape is at once the stuff of poetry as well as symptomatic of the larger isolations of poetic practice" (2006, 280).

All of these studies uncover something of the melancholy in Gray's poetry. They reveal that his philosophical outlook is often bleak and that he alludes to the work of other poets, particularly Milton, as a means of emphasizing and describing the various facets of the melancholy in his own poetry. They also highlight the personal nature of some of Gray's poems in which he expresses his feelings of loss, isolation and depression, not just in those written in the wake of West's death but also in the 'Elegy'. Similarly, this study examines loneliness and depression in his poetry but while critics generally focus their attention on individual poems, here four poems are explored together in order to establish a fuller understanding of these themes within his work. 'Sonnet on the Death of Richard West', 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College' and 'Ode to Adversity', all written in August 1742, two months after the death of West, are included. His later poem 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' which was published in 1751, although its exact date of composition is unknown, is also discussed. Gray presents himself in all of these poems as might be expected, as a man and poet who views the world from a solitary position.

In the days after Gray learned of West's death he added some lines to 'De Principiis Cogitandi', a Latin poem he had been in the process of writing for two years. Here Gray

reveals openly the true depth of his grief, lamenting that he has lost the “inspiration” for his poetry and that he feels deserted by West who has hidden himself in the “eternal shadow of Death!” (trans. Mack, 308). He moans that “sunny days” are now “spent in mourning ... in weeping because you are not there, and in vain complaints” (308). He addresses these lines to West’s “blessed spirit” and writes:

look back on these tears ... which, stricken with love, I pour out in memory to you;  
this is all I can do, while my only wish is to mourn at your tomb and address these  
empty words to your silent ashes (308).

Yet even in death West did inspire Gray and two months later he incorporated these moving and heartfelt sentiments in his poem ‘Sonnet on the Death of Richard West’. Stuart Curran describes it as the “great sonnet of the English Enlightenment” and “the motive force underlying the entire Romantic revival of the sonnet” (1986, 30). He also comments that it is written in the “encoded tradition of Renaissance love sonnets” and argues that because it was published “four years after the death of its author” it can be read as the “suppressed record of Gray’s unfulfilled secret life” (30). The ‘Sonnet’ is no doubt an expression of love for West and as Roger Lonsdale points out, Gray “may well have had in mind one of the best known of Petrarch’s sonnets on the death of Laura”<sup>6</sup> (1969, 66). However, whether it is an encoded message of homosexual love or not is a matter of opinion because there is no actual evidence to support the view that Gray and West were lovers. In this poem Gray expresses his deep sense of loneliness and pain at the loss of his friend and contrasts his own deadened emotions with the beauty and activity of the world around him.

In the opening octave Gray reveals his sense of alienation from the sights and sounds of sunrise. He explains:

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<sup>6</sup> Lonsdale is referring to “no. 310 in modern editions of the *Canzoniere*” (66).



In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,  
And reddening Phoebus lifts his golden fire:  
The birds in vain their amorous descant join,  
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire:  
These ears, alas! for other notes repine,  
A different object do these eyes require. (l.1-6)

Gray sets the scene in a summer morning, a time of awakening and renewal, and the optimism of this moment contrasts with the bleak occasion of West's death and Gray's terrible feelings of loss. The warmth of the "reddening" sun with its "golden fire" symbolises rejuvenation and therefore shines "in vain" for the grief-stricken poet. For him the dawning of a new day is simply a reminder that he must live through it without West. Mack points out that "not only is the natural world indifferent to the grief experienced by Gray ... but the writer, too, is conversely and equally unmoved by the spectacle of life in nature" (316). Gray goes on to reveal that he now exists in his own private world of grief. He writes:

My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;  
And in my breast the imperfect joys expire. (l.7-8)

The powerful force of nature is important in the grand scheme of the universe, but only Gray can feel and understand the significance of West's death. His greatest desire is to see his friend and to communicate with him but his longings will remain unsatisfied and hence the joys of the world are "imperfect". His profound feelings of loneliness are not unusual after such a loss and his painful emotions would be described by Horwitz and Wakefield as "normal sadness" (30). They comment that intense grief is usually in proportion to "the importance and centrality to one's life of the lost individual, and it persists for some time and then gradually subsides as one adapts to the changed circumstances" (31). In this poem Gray is still traumatized by the death of his friend.

In the sestet that follows Gray describes the effects of the sunrise on the birds and on other men:

Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,  
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men:  
The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;  
To warm their little loves the birds complain. (l.9-12)

The poet is the lonely spectator who lives outside the world of “happier men” and his pain is emphasised when contrasted with the pleasure, warmth and love experienced by the “busy race”. Moore observes that Gray “is not writing about his isolation *in* isolation; instead, the fact that the world of communication, of social relationships, is all around him yet beyond his grasp is the pathetic irony that defines his situation and shapes the poem” (112). Nevertheless, Gray at least sees the beauty of the world in which he lives and this denotes that his vision is not in complete darkness and this might be construed as an optimistic sign. He concludes the sonnet:

I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,  
And weep the more because I weep in vain. (l.13-14)

Lonsdale argues that the repetition of the opening phrase, “in vain”, at the end of the poem suggests the “fruitless circling of his sorrow” (67). Moore asserts that “to be heard is to have one’s voice and words validated; thus to address the dead is fruitless and leads to the closed circle of isolation where the only response to the poet’s weeping is his own reiteration of the sound”(111). These are pertinent observations, however, the word “fruitless” might also be understood in an artistic sense and symbolise the fact that this commemorative poem will never be read by the very person whose literary opinion Gray most valued. It could be argued that the poem itself and not just his grief, is pointless, although as Mell suggests, even as the poem “expresses the ineffectuality of mourning” it turns out to be “a consolation in spite of itself” and that past joys “survive only in the poem that laments their loss” (143).

Gray opens 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College' with an epigraph in Greek which translates as: 'I am a man, and that in itself is a sufficient reason for being unhappy' (trans. Mack, 324). The subject matter of the poem then, that all men are "Condemned alike to groan" (l.92), is revealed here before the poem itself begins. The epigraph also sheds light on the poem's title: the poet is obviously unhappy and Eton College, at a distance in both time and space, must be symbolic of past happiness. McCarthy comments that in this poem Gray is "not a poet musing under the trees but a jaded adult" (77). His choice of the ode form in which to express his own misery and the sorrowful state of man in general, heightens the importance of 'unhappiness' in the poem itself as well as its significance in human experience. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland comment that "from its origins in classical antiquity, the ode was a solemn, heroic, and elevated form. It elevated the person, the object, the occasion" (2000, 240). In Gray's ode the person is himself, the object is Eton College and the occasion is the loss of happiness experienced by the poet beyond its protective boundaries. Lonsdale argues that in the 'Ode' Gray was "combining the topographical poem with the subjective ode to produce a new form" (56).

In the opening stanza Gray's description of Eton is how it appears to him from the view of "Windsor's heights" (l.6). The scene is expansive yet Gray writes of "Henry's holy shade" (l.4). He also describes the river as such:

Of grove, of lawn, of mead survey,  
Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among  
Wanders the hoary Thames along  
His silver-winding way. (l.7-10)

The repetition of the word "shade", thought by McCarthy to suggest a "kind of excess or uncertainty" (78), instead indicates that the poet's immediate response to the sight of the college, even in his mind's eye, is that it is a place of shelter. The use of the word "holy"

is a reference to the piety of Henry VI who founded the college, but when coupled with “shade” intimates that Eton is a kind of sanctuary. In the stanza that follows Gray once again alludes to the idea of Eton as a place of refuge. He begins:

Ah, happy hills, ah, pleasing shade,  
Ah, fields beloved in vain,  
Where once my careless childhood strayed,  
A stranger yet to pain! (l.11-14)

The “pleasing shade” is a reference to the woodland surrounding the college, which not only reminds him of past pleasures but also represents a feeling of security. However, his train of thought has become negative as he reflects upon the “careless childhood” that failed to prepare him for the “pain” of adult life. In this sense it was a time spent “in vain”, a period without purpose. Nevertheless, as the stanza develops Gray feels the need to recall those days of innocence and writes:

I feel the gales, that from ye blow,  
A momentary bliss bestow,  
As waving fresh their gladsome wing,  
My weary soul they seem to soothe,  
And, redolent of joy and youth,  
To breathe a second spring. (l.15-20)

Gray’s recollection of the past through the sight of the college in its glorious surroundings is now deepened by the “feel” of the “gales”, and the “bliss” of this sensation soothes his “weary soul”. He now feels able to “breathe a second spring”, that is, to become once more the child whose mind was unburdened and carefree. He goes on to depict the Eton community as one of lively activity and suggests that the minds of the boys are like his own in this reflective moment, “thoughtless” and “easy” (l.48). They chase the “paths of pleasure” (l.24) on the “margent green” (l.23) of the Thames, and theirs is a “buxom health of rosy hue” (l.45).

The mood of the poem so far has been one of gentle nostalgia and it reflects the low spirits of the poet. Judith Broome describes nostalgia as a “peculiar mix of sadness and pleasure” (2007, 13). She argues that writers represent it as a “desire for the familiar, or home, in the face of uncertainty and alienation” (21). Gray displays such a desire in this poem: Eton was his home for nine years during his childhood and it was here that he formed those friendships for which he now mourns. The mood of the ‘Ode’ becomes much darker in stanza six when Gray pessimistically refers to the Eton boys as “victims” who are unaware of the “ills to come” (l.53). He suggests that they should be told of the “ministers of human fate” (l.56) who are waiting to “ambush” (l.58) them once they leave school and become men. They should know of the numerous “Passions” (l.61), or “vultures of the Mind” (l.62), such as “Anger”, “Fear” (l.63), “Shame” (l.64) and “Jealousy” (l.66) that will destroy their peace and ruin their lives. They should also be aware of the “painful family of Death” (l.83), which is illness that “racks the joints” and “fires the veins” (l.85), or “Poverty” (l.88) or “slow-consuming Age” (l.90). He goes on to concede that the innocence of the boys should be preserved for at least the brief period of their childhood, and writes:

Yet ah! why should they know their fate?  
Since sorrow never comes too late,  
And happiness too swiftly flies.  
Thought would destroy their paradise.  
No more; where ignorance is bliss,  
'Tis folly to be wise. (l.95-100)

The poet’s cynical view, that “sorrow” will soon replace “happiness” in the adult world, stems from his own recent painful experiences: his quarrel with Walpole and the death of West. Solomon remarks that the worst pain of depression is “the memory of the good times with people who are no longer alive, or who are no longer the people they were” (98). In this poem “ignorance” is a “paradise” which is soon destroyed in adulthood by

one or more of the many “Passions”. Those which seem most pertinent to Gray and which best describe the various features of his depression are,

faded Care,  
Grim-visaged comfortless Despair,  
And Sorrow’s piercing dart. (l.68-70)

Eton College was for Gray a place of companionship and safety in which he was not called upon to confront the pain of loneliness and loss. It is not likely that his school days were the ideal that he portrays in the ‘Ode’ but as Mack points out, “time and recent experiences ... had taught Gray that life at the school had been a comparative paradise” (325).

In ‘Ode to Adversity’ Gray accepts that his recent sorrows, which have caused him to feel so much despair, must now be embraced as part of his personal journey to manhood. Lonsdale argues that the ‘Ode’ is a “mature and positive confrontation of the evils of adult life that are described with such unrelieved gloom in the ‘Eton Ode’” (69). Gray once again opens the poem with a Greek epigraph which translates as: ‘Zeus, who leads mortals to understanding, has decreed that wisdom can come only through suffering’ (trans. Mack, 321). That Gray has been miserable is evident in the previous two poems but now he is attempting, through a celebration of the goddess ‘Adversity’, to learn from his recent dreadful experiences. McCarthy argues that the ‘Ode’ “is an important poetic and probably personal advancement on how to live without despair, how to respond positively to others” (83). The poem is not concerned with how Gray’s loneliness and depression make him feel, but about how his suffering can lead him to a deeper understanding of both himself and his fellow man.

Gray begins the poem by stating that all men, even the “bad” and the “best”, feel ‘Adversity’s’ unyielding power at some point in their lives. He writes:

Daughter of Jove, relentless power,  
Thou tamer of the human breast,  
Whose iron scourge and torturing hour,  
The bad affright, afflict the best! (l.1-4)

‘Adversity’ not only serves to pacify the human spirit but teaches us to be righteous. ‘Virtue’ is the “darling child” (l.10) of that “Stern rugged nurse” (l.13) ‘Adversity’ who taught her to know “What sorrow was” (l.15) and hence through her own suffering she “learned to melt at others’ woe” (l.16). McCarthy observes that Gray realised that “adversity taught us more than the existence of pain: it was given by God to bring forth “Virtue” ... so that suffering would instruct one toward goodness” (81). Gray goes on to argue that there are those who refuse to accept the lessons of ‘Adversity’ such as “Self-pleasing Folly’s idle brood” (l.18) who quickly run for refuge to “vain Prosperity” (l.23). Those who constantly seek the society of the affluent are persuasive in their promises of friendship but, according to Gray, they are false and swiftly abandon friends who experience hardship.

The followers of ‘Adversity’ are “Wisdom” (l.25), “Melancholy” (l.27), “Charity” (l.30), “Justice” (l.31) and “Pity” (l.32). These are dignified and benevolent attributes and can be gained through the experience of pain and sorrow. Gray concludes his poem with the hope that the “dread Goddess” (l.34) will come to him “gently” (l.33) and not with “thundering voice and threatening mien” (l.38), or

With screaming Horror’s funeral cry,  
Despair and fell Disease and ghastly Poverty. (l.39-40)

To experience ‘Adversity’ in this way would be oppressive and destructive rather than instructive. He seeks a “form benign” (l.41) that will allow him to grow both intellectually and emotionally. Mack comments that Gray hopes that the ‘Adversity’ he will encounter

will be “abstract or theoretical in contemplation – rather than the result of cruel and wounding experience” (323). Gray writes of this desire in the final stanza:

Thy milder influence impart,  
Thy philosophic Train be there  
To soften, not to wound my heart,  
The gen'rous spark extinct revive,  
Teach me to love and to forgive,  
Exact my own defects to scan,  
What others are, to feel, and know myself a Man. (l.42-48)

Gray hopes to acquire a greater sense of love and forgiveness through his suffering. He is searching for a deeper understanding of himself and more importantly of others, and believes that it is in reaching this point that he can truly make the transition into manhood. In this poem he begins to confront the reality of a life without the solace of West's friendship. He seeks a way forward from within himself, as McCarthy points out: “the poet has ceased looking outward only to reject nature and remain static, and has turned inward to examine his own far from perfect self. The stasis of ignorance has given way to the growth of learning” (82). In this ‘Ode’ Gray understands that the loneliness and depression he has experienced since West's death, and indeed beforehand, must be endured with fortitude. He also realises that in learning to accept the trials of life he can become a more compassionate and less introverted person and can therefore grow in stature as a man, and perhaps also as a poet.

On its first publication in 1751 Gray's ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ was an instant success. Tracy comments that despite its “often Latinate ... diction” and its complex “word order” it immediately “hit the fancy of the poetry-reading public” (38). Although the poem is not often thought to stem directly from the grief that Gray suffered in the summer of 1742 as did the other three poems above, his friend William Mason believed that it “was begun, if not concluded, at this time” (1775, 157). Lonsdale on the other hand



comments that “it must appear more likely that it came after rather than preceded such contemplations as Young’s *Night Thoughts* (1742-54), Blair’s *The Grave* (1743) and James Hervey’s *Meditations among the Tombs* (1746)” (109). The ‘Elegy’ may indeed have been inspired by the death of West or influenced by the vogue for graveyard poetry, nevertheless, it can also be read as a personal statement in which Gray reflects upon his position in society as the lonely and depressed poet. Lonsdale argues that what Gray “dramatises is the poet as outsider, with an uneasy consciousness of a sensibility and imagination at once unique and burdensome” (115). His choice of poetic form in which to express the larger concerns of life, death and loss as well as his own personal conflicts is apt. Strand and Boland comment that “in the traditional elegy” (167) the grief expressed is more often a “cultural one” (168). However, they also argue that “in all societies, death constitutes a cultural event ... as well as an individual loss” and that the “best elegies will always be sites of struggle between custom and decorum on the one hand, and private feeling on the other” (168). In the ‘Elegy’ Gray ruminates upon the ways in which both rich and poor men are viewed in death and then finally turns his attention to how he as a poet might be discussed after his own demise.

In the opening stanzas Gray sets the scene for his philosophical musings. In the evening in a churchyard is the perfect time and place. He begins:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o’er the lea,  
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,  
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds. (l.1-8)

In his use of language, for example “knell”, “parting” and “solemn stillness”, Gray creates an appropriate atmosphere in which to reflect upon the lives of the men in the graves before him. However, the real focus of attention is the poet himself who is left alone in the “darkness”. As Mack observes, Gray “now forms the centre of all he sees” (403). In choosing a country churchyard as his location for contemplation he aligns himself more closely with the ideals of the rural rustics, than with the ambitions of men of power.

He celebrates the rustic way of life throughout the poem and associates their experience with Christian images. He introduces this concept by describing their graves as “narrow cell(s)” (l.15), a monastic allusion, and as “lowly bed(s)” (l.20), a suggestion of Christ’s humble birth. They are also remembered by “frail memorial(s)” (l.78) engraved with wisdom from the “holy text” (l.83), while great men are commemorated more elaborately but less religiously, on a “storied urn” or “animated bust” (l.41). Gray speaks positively about their “useful toil” (l.29) and “homely joys” (l.30) but admits that in the course of their lives, due to their lack of education and poverty, some of these men may have “repressed” (l.51) their desires. While the hidden “gem” (l.53) or unseen “flower” (l.55), as he refers to them, may have been thwarted in their ambitions, he also suggests that they have escaped the mental dilemmas that harass the minds of greater men. Men of ambition struggle to hide “conscious truth” (l.69) and blush with “ingenuous shame” (l.70). He writes of the rustics:

Their lot forbade: nor circumscribed alone  
Their glowing virtues, but their crimes confined;  
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,  
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind. (l.65-68)

In other words, as a kind of compensation for their frustrated aspirations, they have been saved from the trauma of carrying out terrible deeds. All men await “alike the inevitable

hour” (l.35) but the countrymen, unlike men of power, are able to live out their lives in a decent and unpretentious manner and with a clear conscience.

The comparison between the lives of the rural labourers and worldly men serves to shed light on the ways in which the poet is both similar and different from these two groups. Gray is more attracted to the experience of the rustics because he believes their lives to be less emotionally turbulent. For instance, he writes:

Far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife  
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;  
Along the cool sequestered vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way. (l.73-76)

The passions and ambitions of the rustics as Gray describes them, are like his own, subdued and under control and he too aspires to a “noiseless” way of life. He acknowledges that the men are likely to have had unfulfilled hopes and dreams, however, he does not take into account the fact that their disappointments may have caused them to feel anxious or depressed. It is the minds of the educated men who are involved in the affairs of the world that are tormented. The poet, who prefers the rural setting, feels more a part of the rustics’ way of life but he is different from them because he is troubled in mind. Kaul argues that “the figuration of poetic practice” in the poem “seeks to locate the poet within the simple village society that he describes, but from which he is – crucially – set apart” (282). To represent the experience of the poet Gray imagines his own death, although his depiction of the often animated poet is not altogether a self-portrait. The “kindred spirit” (l.96) who by “lonely contemplation (l.95) is led to read the ‘Epitaph’ is a closer portrayal of himself. Dillon suggests that this whole conception is unusual but that it “allows Gray to break through the natural terror of dying in order to forge a relationship between a fear of death and an acceptance of that death” (132).

Gray represents the life of the poet as one of deep contemplation, for instance, he “pore(s) upon the brook that babbles by” (l.104). Tracy believes that Gray “was meaning to allude ... to his own studious way of life and to justify in some measure his choice of academic seclusion, far from the madding crowds of London, as a means of achieving wisdom and inspiration” (46). The poet’s life then is not a one of physical toil or of combat in the world of wealth and power. However, it is a one of emotional fluctuation as he goes on to portray:

‘Now drooping, woeful wan, like one forlorn,  
‘Or crazed with care, or crossed in hopeless love. (l.107-108)

The poet is always coping with some kind of mental dilemma. The ‘Epitaph’ that concludes the poem reads:

Here rests his head upon the lap of earth  
A youth to fortune and to fame unknown.  
Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,  
And Melancholy marked him for her own.

Large was his bounty and his soul sincere,  
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:  
He gave to Misery all he had, a tear,  
He gained from Heaven (’twas all he wished) a friend.

No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,  
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)  
The bosom of his Father and his God. (l.117-128)

The life of the poet is similar to that of the rustics in the sense that it is a Christian one and one of obscurity and financial hardship. Carper argues that the poet “finds a place in the world of Forefathers, sons, and their sons” (161) in the churchyard. However, like the men of the world he is educated by “Fair Science” and this makes him different from the countrymen. The poet also differs from both groups in the sense that he is “marked” with “Melancholy”. His melancholy stems from his sensibility which is represented by “a tear” for the miseries of mankind and this quality also sets him apart from other men. His

sensibility and melancholy as well as his imaginative and creative impulses are all marks of distinction but are also a cause of his loneliness. Poets do not exist within groups as do other men, although they do understand each others' pain and in this way form a community of 'kindred spirits'. In the 'Elegy' Gray suggests that it is his intellect and sensitive spirit together that make him so vulnerable to loneliness and depression and that all poets suffer equally, in which case, he may also be remembering his friend, Richard West.

Three of the four poems discussed here were written as a direct response to the death of West and therefore a clear cause for Gray's sorrow can be identified. Jackson explores the relationship between bereavement and depression and notes that "grief reactions (or mourning) are quite different from clinical depressions (or melancholia)" although they "share symptoms such as sadness and depression" (324). In the 'Sonnet' Gray explains that he finds no consolation in the business of the world and feels that life goes on "in vain" without West. Nevertheless, he may have found some comfort in expressing his grief through his writing and in paying tribute to his friend and fellow poet in verse. Moore suggests that this is not a public poem but a "highly and deliberately private work" in which "its author is not a man speaking to men, but Thomas Gray speaking – for the last time – to Richard West" (113). In the 'Eton' ode Gray's suffering encourages him to look back nostalgically on his schooldays when he, West and Walpole were all friends together. His reflections become grim when he considers what horrors await the schoolboys in the adult world. In the 'Adversity' ode he is more optimistic and begins to argue that suffering is instructive and can teach human beings to become wiser and more sympathetic individuals. Solomon writes of a similar idea in his discussion on depression and quotes Ovid, who wrote: "welcome this pain ... for you will learn from it" (38). The 'Elegy' is different from these three poems in the sense that it does not necessarily stem from his

grief, and his contemplations are written in response to a more general melancholy mood. Nolen-Hoeksema comments that an example of a ruminative response to depression is “isolating oneself to think about how one is feeling” and focussing on “one’s symptoms of depression (sadness, apathy, fatigue) and not on an external event” (161). This is like Gray’s reaction in the ‘Elegy’ in which he removes himself from all human contact in order to ponder over gloomy ideas about life and death.

In these poems there is a general sense that Gray desires to withdraw from the busy world both physically and mentally to seek out places of retreat, and this is a sign of his melancholy state of mind. In the ‘Sonnet’ he implies that he is looking out from a lonely and shaded position, onto a bright and burgeoning scene of growth and activity. Newey observes that in the ‘Sonnet’ Gray realises “the nature, the very quality, of disablement, impotence, and loss” (33). This sense of paralysis is somewhat released in the ‘Eton’ ode where Gray begins to “feel” again and he remembers his old school with fondness. However, he also views it as a kind of asylum, a safe haven where the evils of the world are shut out and the innocence of the boys is protected. In this way Gray is searching for respite from his troubled mind in a different time and place. In the ‘Elegy’ he is looking for peace and quiet in the remoteness of the churchyard away from the “ploughman” who is heading “homeward”, and at a time of day when he is not likely to be disturbed by passersby. The evening also allows him to ruminate in “darkness”. It is only in the ‘Adversity’ ode that Gray makes an attempt to emerge from the shadows and seek out a connection with his fellow man.

Nevertheless, in the ‘Sonnet’, the ‘Eton’ ode and the ‘Elegy’ Gray’s portrayal of himself is that of a lonely and depressed poet. His representations of community in all of these poems are ones from which he feels excluded. In the ‘Sonnet’ he mentions the “busy race”

and the “happier men”, however, he is neither busy nor happy. Moore argues that in this poem “communication and relatedness are the law of life, from which only the speaker has been cruelly excepted – literally singled out” (111). In the ‘Eton’ ode he is no longer a member of the “sprightly race” of boys at the college, and while in the ‘Elegy’ he clearly feels more affinity with the rustics than with the worldly men, ultimately he does not belong to either group. Kaul observes that in the ‘Elegy’ the poet is isolated from the village community and pastoral life and “lives, though he does not work, within its diurnal rhythms, and dwindles to a lonely death” (287). In these three poems Gray sees the world outside of his own existence but does not feel connected to it and his sense of isolation is a cause of both his melancholy and his loneliness.

In his life Gray was the reclusive scholar whose rigorous application to study was a cause of his depression. In eighteenth-century terms it was thought to be related to his ‘genius’ and to the lonely and sedentary nature of his lifestyle. This learned, reclusive and melancholy man became in his poetry, the perceptive, lonely and troubled poet. In social terms, Gray represents the poet as an outsider because he is intellectually and imaginatively superior to his fellow man. While his unique mind gains him a higher status among men it also means that he is excluded from that connection with others which other men enjoy, and this leaves him bereft and isolated. Similarly, in his life Gray’s studiousness and introverted personality meant that he was segregated from the busy community of men around him and his low spirits became his “true and faithful companions”. In his letters he describes his depression as the “hyp” or “white” and “black” melancholy and the grief that he experienced after the loss of West was an additional burden to his already troubled mind. His feelings of loss at the death of his friend were expressed within his poetry rather than in his letters, and in this case his experience became his expression. The poem that seems to reflect more generally the

nature of his everyday life is the 'Elegy'. For instance, whereas the "ploughman" makes his way "homeward" to a "blazing hearth", which represents the warmth of family life, Gray's room at Cambridge was like the graveyard, dull and lifeless. Also, in the 'Elegy' the poet is excluded from the seasonal fluctuations of pastoral life experienced by the rustics, as well as from the turbulence of the "madding crowd's ignoble strife" (l.73). In a similar way, Gray was excluded from the hurly burly of the academic year at Cambridge because he was never called upon to deliver any lectures. The unchanging nature of the poet's life then, reflects the uniformity of Gray's existence at Cambridge. For both the poet and for Gray all activity is internalized and their introspection leaves them lonely and depressed. However, in the 'Elegy' Gray shows through his poetic persona that he is capable of looking beyond his own suffering and that his sensitive spirit allows him to both see and feel the "Misery" of all humankind. Through the 'Epitaph' in his graveyard poem he has achieved what he set out to do in the 'Adversity' ode, that is, "What others are, to feel, and know myself a Man". His sadness, in its various shades and as expressed in his poetry, has taught him to be a more compassionate and understanding human being, one who accepts that his pain, loneliness and depression are not just part of his own life but that all men are destined to suffer in one way or another.



Robert Fergusson: “But now these airy dreams are past” – the darkness and despair of a youthful Scottish poet

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Robert Fergusson (1750-1774) was a young poet whose depression quickly descended into madness and he died in the Edinburgh Bedlam at the age of twenty-four. His poems often express a nostalgic melancholy for the loss of a Scottish past but some, especially those written during the final months of his life, reveal a distinctly personal despair. He began writing poetry as a student at university and one of his poems, ‘Elegy, on the Death of Mr David Gregory, Late Professor of Mathematics at the University of St Andrews’, was later published. He was first introduced to the literary scene of Edinburgh when his three pastorals, ‘Morning’, ‘Noon’ and ‘Night’ were printed in *The Weekly Magazine* on 7 February 1771. These are fashionable pieces and not considered to be of any significant value. Alan T. McKenzie describes them as “vaguish imitations of William Shenstone” (1991, 138), and James Robertson comments that they are “quite forgettable” (2007, 12). Five more of his English poems were published that year but on 2 January 1772 his first of several highly successful poems in the Scottish vernacular, ‘The Daft-Days’, appeared. McKenzie observes that with the publication of this poem “a new note was sounded and a new voice heard in Scottish poetry” (141). ‘The Daft-Days’ is a celebration of Edinburgh life in the festive season and it marked the beginning of Fergusson’s poetic fame. His poems, both English and Scots, continued to appear in *The Weekly Magazine* until December 1773. Also in 1773 *Poems by Robert Fergusson* was produced and *Auld Reikie, a poem* and *A Poem to the Memory of John Cunningham* were published as individual volumes. Some ‘Posthumous Pieces’ were included in *Poems on Various Subjects by Robert Fergusson, in two parts* in 1779. Over the course of his short literary career, Fergusson wrote approximately sixty poems in English and thirty-five in Scots and while

his later English poems are of interest in relation to his melancholy, it is generally his Scottish poems that attract most critical attention today.

There are few sources available with which to piece together the story of Fergusson's depression and madness. Speculation as to the cause of his mental decline began soon after his death and early biographers, such as John Pinkerton, blamed the poet's dissipated lifestyle. He writes:

Poor Fergusson, being a humorous companion, and a good singer, used frequently to spend the evening over a bowl of punch. This imprudent practice, being long and constantly used, at length inflamed his brain so much that he was obliged to be sent to Bedlam (1786, cxi).

Others, like Alexander Campbell, contend that the roots of his madness lay in a guilty conscience and he writes of a meeting between Fergusson and a "pious divine" during which they discussed issues of "morality and judgement" (1798, 296). He explains that this conversation "seemed to sink deep in the mind of our poet" (296) who returned to his mother's house "in all the agonies of religious horror" (296). David Irving links Fergusson's religious melancholia to his "vicious habits" (1799, 19) and remarks that he "sunk into a state of religious despondency; but previous to that event his body was emaciated by disease, and his mind was totally unhinged" (21). In this comment Irving is suggesting that Fergusson was suffering from a venereal disease. The information in these accounts is occasionally dubious in its authority because the biographers were not personally acquainted with Fergusson and they often relied upon verbal statements recorded by friends and family several years after the poet's death.

Nevertheless, twentieth-century commentators have used this material to come to their own view on the poet's mental demise. Sydney Goodsir Smith, for instance, explains that as a child Fergusson had been "delicate" and "as a youth and man had never been robust", and

in the months leading up to his death “weakness of a mental character began to appear, taking the form of fits of unreasonable depression” (1952, 25). Chalmers Davidson asserts that accounts of the final weeks of Fergusson’s life show “that he was profoundly depressed and obsessed with feelings of guilt and unworthiness”, symptoms of a “manic-depressive state which is frequently precipitated by the effects of a severe physical illness on a susceptible temperament” (1952, 200). Matthew P. McDiarmid refers to Fergusson’s physical condition and suggests that if he had contracted syphilis for instance, then this illness “acting on a constitution and temperament like Fergusson’s, would naturally produce the nervous and depressed condition of mind which the letters reveal” (1954, 69). Allan W. Beveridge has lately come to the view that Fergusson’s mental illness occurred in two distinct phases. The first is that “it seems quite probable that Fergusson suffered from some form of venereal disease” (1990. 321); the second phase was likely to have been caused by a blow to the head after a fall down a flight of stairs, an injury which possibly led to a “subdural haematoma” (327). This would account for his subsequent violent behaviour and early and unexpected death in Bedlam.

William E. Gillis, in his insightful critical biography of the poet, claims that “all the meagre information available leads us to the conclusion that Fergusson’s disease was manic depression, aggravated and characterized by strong feelings of religious guilt” (1955, 258). He argues that it could not have been religious melancholia in itself because it is an “illness of middle or old age, not of youth” (251). With regard to his physical health Gillis points out that even if Fergusson did have syphilis it would have taken years to kill him, therefore, “syphilis as the cause of his madness and death is a medical impossibility” (252). James Connor, like Davidson and Gillis, proposes that Fergusson developed “a melancholia and a behaviour pattern suggestive of a manic-depressive

psychosis” (1998, 62). Taken together these studies show that opinions are varied with regard to the nature of Fergusson’s mental health problems.

A recent biographer, David Daiches, explores Fergusson’s “fits of depression” (1982, 105) in the autumn of 1773 and, unlike Gillis, suggests that he was suffering from religious melancholia. He comments that the poet was

now very troubled by religious questions, moving, apparently, from scepticism about the doctrines of the Fall and vicarious atonement and their consistency with the wisdom and beneficence of God to self-torturing fears about his own entitlement to salvation and the future of his eternal soul (106).

However, Rhona Brown has lately and persuasively argued that the “particular belief that Fergusson’s final and fatal illness was religious melancholia is one which responds unfavourably to scrutiny” (2004, 111). She contends that Fergusson distances himself from the “harsh Calvinist Presbyterianism of his day” and associates himself with a more moderate form of religion, “one based on reason, order and harmony: the Deism inherited from its Episcopal, Jacobite background” (125). Brown refrains from reaching a view on Fergusson’s mental state and concentrates more fully on his standing as a poet. In a later study she compares his reputation with that of Thomas Chatterton in the sense that both poets “are notorious for their early deaths” (2006, 5). She argues that “biographical constructions” of the two poets gain “disproportionate attention” and “rather than celebrating the genuinely innovative and scholarly contributions of Fergusson and Chatterton, post-Romantic critics luxuriate in their Romantic myth” (5). Brown’s views are compelling, especially in relation to Fergusson’s religious affiliations in adult life. However, because of the dearth of direct information relating to his condition all explanations must remain possible.

While R.A. Houston observes that almost everyone who has written about Fergusson since his death has offered a “strong opinion on the reasons for his descent into madness” (1999, 138), he also points out that in contrast “few contemporaries tried to label Fergusson’s condition” (138). He goes on to comment that “interpretations of Fergusson’s condition are ... best treated as indicative of a set of social and cultural assumptions about mental incapacity, rather than as a scientific fact which we can classify retrospectively” (140). This study does not attempt to diagnose Fergusson’s mental illness but does suggest insights into his depressive state of mind. It explores his life from a different perspective than previous studies and looks particularly at the way in which his poverty and vulnerable social position contributed to his depression. It refers to accounts of his life written by his friend Thomas Sommers and to the more recent biography by Gillis, as reliable sources. Sommers comments on the difficulties that Fergusson faced after leaving university, a time in which “he became peevish from his unsettled and dependent situation” (1803, 21). This chapter also examines a fragment of a letter written by Fergusson, as well as a rarely analysed verse letter, in which he sheds light on his experience of depression.

Fergusson’s father, William, was a well-educated man from Tarland in Aberdeenshire who inherited his father’s business as a litser or dyer of cloth. Unfortunately this failed and he moved to Edinburgh where he worked as a clerk for the remainder of his life. His wife, Elizabeth Forbes, had also been born into a prosperous family, but in the city the couple lived in relative poverty. Here Robert, one of four children, was born in a small apartment in an alley called Cap and Feather Close. Gillis comments that “from this confined place, from a strictly religious household, from sometimes tight financial circumstances, and from a body limited in its physical energies, the soul of a poet could hardly have been expected to emerge” (vi). Fergusson was often too ill to attend school, yet his education flourished and he was awarded bursaries to attend Dundee Grammar School and St

Andrews University. At St Andrews he initially studied for the ministry in the Church of Scotland but eventually abandoned this idea.

Just before he left university in 1768 his father died and so he returned home to a family whose circumstances had further declined. Gillis observes that “fortunately, Robert was able to complete his education; but it soon became his responsibility to provide for his mother who was to survive her husband by twenty years” (vii). Problems regarding Fergusson’s mental health surfaced almost immediately. He went to live with a wealthy uncle, John Forbes, in Aberdeenshire in the hope of gaining employment through his uncle’s connections. The plan did not succeed and after six months a dispute arose between the two men concerning Fergusson’s shabby appearance in front of important dinner guests, and his uncle asked him to leave. He returned to Edinburgh on foot and Sommers remarks that “he had become, by travelling and his uncle’s miserly behaviour, so debilitated in his body, and depressed in mind, that he was confined to his bed for several days” (14). Gillis suggests that because Fergusson was “young and oversensitive” the incident “grew to unnecessary proportions in his mind, leaving him with convictions that he had been used unjustly” (64). He also mentions that the “bitter outcome meant an unending rent in the relations between the two families” (64). Thus, Fergusson was now entirely without support and was forced to accept employment as a copyist in the city. Nevertheless, despite his difficult circumstances he was independent and the future was bright. Daiches comments that while his work was mechanical and ill-paid “it provided him with sufficient to enable him to develop his contacts with musical and theatrical circles as well as his talents as a poet. He wrote poetry, he sang songs, and he made friends”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> His friends included several famous figures of the day such as the actors West Digges and William Woods. In 1770 he wrote three Scotch airs for an opera which were performed by Giusti Ferdinando Tenduci, who also became his friend. Sommers comments on Fergusson’s own singing voice and states that it was “strong, clear, and melodius” (45).

(31). He was a gregarious man and his company was sought after. Sommers remembers his outgoing, affable and generous character:

for social life, he possessed an amazing variety of qualifications. With the best good nature; with much modesty, and the greatest goodness of heart, he was always sprightly, - always entertaining (1).

In October 1772 Fergusson was admitted to the Cape Club, one of the many social societies in Edinburgh at the time. Alexander Runciman, one of the most celebrated of eighteenth-century Scottish painters, was a member and he painted Fergusson's portrait.

For four years Fergusson balanced his responsibilities with his sociability and creative drive but in the autumn of 1773 he became depressed and his life quickly deteriorated. His Scottish poetry was being praised by the general public and in literary circles, and Sommers recalls that he was "courted by the literati of every description" (4). However, he also comments that while he was surrounded by "flattering admirers, who frequently enjoyed over a bottle his witty conversation, by way of spending an evening" they "never thought of serving him farther!" (5). In addition, as McDiarmid points out, the "eminent literati were not praising him too much" (33). It is possible then, that Fergusson became disheartened by his lack of success amongst the anglophile literary establishment and that this contributed to his low spirits. Sommers comments that only on one occasion was patronage sought on his behalf. This was by Houston Stewart Nicholson, a friend of James Boswell<sup>8</sup>, who recommended Fergusson to David Garrick, but he "never responded"<sup>9</sup> (43).

Fergusson needed both financial patronage and an influential critical appraisal of his work

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<sup>8</sup> McKenzie notes that several presentation copies of Fergusson's *Poems* (1773) survive, including one inscribed, "To James Boswell, Esq., the Friend of Liberty and Patron of Science; the following Efforts of a Scottish youth are respectfully presented to his most obedient and very humble servt. R. Fergusson".

McKenzie comments that "Boswell does not seem to have recorded his reaction to this tribute" (1991, 143).  
<sup>9</sup> Paul Henderson Scott discusses patronage in Scotland after the Union and comments that control was "in the hands of the London establishment and of a small aristocratic circle in Scotland who collaborated with them" (2002, 11). A.M. Kinghorn also points out that "the gulf between Fergusson and the Edinburgh *bon ton* towards modern literary Scots had widened since Ramsay's day, and the greater prosperity of 'North Britain' in the second half of the century was accompanied by a leaning towards genteel culture as represented in London society" (1992, 16).

but he received neither. Robert Burns later criticized the Edinburgh gentry on four separate occasions in his poetry, for their failure to recognise Fergusson's financial needs. He wrote:

Fergusson, the writer-chiel  
A deathless name.

...  
My curse upon your whunstane hearts,  
Ye Enbrugh gentry!<sup>10</sup>

[Scotia] mourns, sweet tune-ful youth, thy hapless fate;  
Tho' all the powers of song thy fancy fired,  
Yet Luxury and Wealth lay by in State,  
And, thankless, starv'd what they so much admired.<sup>11</sup>

Curse on ungrateful man, that can be pleased,  
And yet can starve the author of the pleasure!<sup>12</sup>

O why should truest Worth and Genius pine  
Beneath the iron grasp of Want and Woe,  
While titled knaves and idiot-greatness shine  
In all the splendour Fortune can bestow?<sup>13</sup>

Burns clearly blamed the gentry for Fergusson's early death.

In a letter Fergusson wrote in October 1773 to an unknown recipient, of which only a fragment remains, he begins to exhibit signs of depression. He writes:

The town is dull at present; I am thoroughly idle, and that fancy which has so often afforded me pleasure almost denies to operate but on the gloomiest subjects.  
"Your afflicted humble servant" (in Inverarity, 1801, 764)

He is "afflicted" with melancholy and in this frame of mind his poetic "fancy" becomes gloomy. Houston points out that "literary scholars" have tended to focus on examples of Fergusson's work that might display "signs of incipient madness" (1999, 143), however, he suggests that a "gloomy poem does not necessarily mean a gloomy poet" (143). While

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<sup>10</sup> 'To William Simpson'.

<sup>11</sup> 'Inscription on the tomb of Fergusson the Poet'.

<sup>12</sup> 'Lines under a portrait of Fergusson'.

<sup>13</sup> 'Lines on Fergusson, the Poet'.



this must be true, in this letter Fergusson does imply that in his depressive mood he is only capable of writing gloomy poetry, or, as his verse letter<sup>14</sup> of the following month reveals, poems that are concerned with his depressive condition. In this letter, which was not published until more than one hundred years after his death, the poet offers a valuable insight into his depression. The fact that he chose to express his feelings in a poem within a letter, shows his engagement with the eighteenth-century verse epistle form. David Fairer argues that in this form “it is the human voice that we hear in all its moods, and as readers we become part of the ‘converse’, alert to the nuances of speech and aware of other relationships that are being expressed and tested in our company” (2003, 77). Fergusson’s poem is written in heroic couplets of tetrameter, a form which Bill Overton asserts is one of the most common “for verse epistles in the eighteenth century”<sup>15</sup> (2007, 28). He addresses his letter to ‘Dear Collector’, a familiar name for his close friend Charles Lorimer, and then begins his poem:

When teased with vapors, urged with spleen,  
 And clouds of gloomy thoughts convene;  
 When youthful blood, once child of fun,  
 Weeps o’er the mirthful glass that’s run,  
 With Nature fading from his sight,  
 He views the day by candle light:

What then can cheer the forlorn breast  
 Of him whose mind’s unknown to rest,  
 If friendship can’t extort a smile  
 And dissipate his grief the while?

In these passages Fergusson presents himself as a lonely and troubled man sitting in the dark, gloomy and weeping, looking out onto a world to which he no longer belongs. His depression makes him reflective and the “mirthful glass” represents an awareness of time

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<sup>14</sup> Fergusson (1887).

<sup>15</sup> Overton draws a distinction between the verse epistle and the verse letter: “Poems bearing the most explicit markers of real correspondence would come at one end of the spectrum, those that bear the least explicit markers, or in extreme cases, none at all, would come at the other. ‘Verse letter’ reflects the greater closeness of the former to genuine written messages, while ‘verse epistle’ helps reflect the derivation of essay-epistle and heroic epistle directly from Horace and Ovid” (2007, 6). He also points out that an “important contrast is that the great majority of verse letters are not part of a narrative but are independent poems” (23).

running out. It is also symbolic of an era gone by, and thoughts of what used to be “fun” now invoke a melancholy response. He realises that there is no going back to the irresponsible pleasures of his past life and he is burdened with a new recognition of accountability. He views the day by “candle light” and the beauties of “Nature” are losing their appeal. In poetic terms, this is a particularly negative reflection for someone who often writes in the pastoral genre. Also, for a man with a strong religious conscience it signifies an exclusion from God’s creation and this is a further depressing thought for Fergusson. The “candle light” illuminates only “gloomy thoughts” and this indicates a restriction in his poetic vision. In stating that his “mind’s unknown to rest” he also suggests a sense of mental exhaustion and in so doing links his depression to his poetic imagination.

In his life, the dilemma that he now must face is, where does happiness lie for him if it is not in the company of his friends in the taverns? He is at the final and painful stage of transition from youth to adulthood and is confronted with a future life of cares and obligations. He goes on to write of the “airy dreams” and the “golden aera” which are now past. He admits that his current problems stem from his “DISSIPATION”, and that alcohol is an enemy which he must conquer. He concludes his poem by informing Lorimer that he is not yet fit to join him in a social capacity. He writes:

My compliments to all the folks  
With whom I’ve drunk and cracked my jokes:  
Tell them, O tell, too sadly true,  
That lips in wine I scarce embrue.  
Nor dare I join the list with Bacchus,  
Afraid new horrors should attack us,  
Till health again with winning face  
My brain shall clear, my nerves shall brace;  
Then will I with indulgent vein  
Be blyth and crack my jokes again.

Fergusson's tone has become jocular echoing the banter of the tavern. When his "brain" and "nerves" are healthy again he will become once more the cheerful person that his friends know and love. When he mentions "new horrors", he is associating his alcohol consumption with his depression. In this poem Fergusson reveals a genuine emotional dilemma concerning the direction of his life, a darkening of his creative imagination and a link between alcohol and his morbid mental state. It shows that as a man of language and poetry he has been able to express at greater length his personal feelings through the poetic form. However, his jocund tone also indicates that he is attempting to conceal the true nature and depth of his depression from his friends. Strand and Boland comment that in the "Augustan Age when order was the dream, and decorum a necessity, the couplet seemed a micro-model of the age's intentions: closed-in, certain, attractive to the reason, and finally, reassuring to the limits of that elegant world" (122). Perhaps Fergusson felt that in confining his dark and chaotic thoughts within this poetic form, he could maintain some control over them. He completes the letter by signing it "Yours, in the horrors", and his repetition of the word "horrors" in both the poem and the letter, is a worrying sign of his gradually deepening despair.

By December 1773 Fergusson had become so debilitated by his depression that he was forced to resign from his post as a copyist. Although he had been until now diligently holding down a job, regularly composing poetry of a standard that brought him recognition, and enjoying a hectic social life, his life now began to unravel. His progression into manhood had been problematic and his lack of support and encouragement by influential figures at this difficult time was unsettling. Gillis comments that Fergusson was "well aware of his achievement and of his potential achievement in Scots, but he knew the eternal limitations of a Scotsman who stays at home linguistically as well as physically" (180). He admitted that alcohol was detrimental to his mental

health, although as Houston observes, this explanation “was, of course, easier to take on board and to present to friends than one which might include mental illness” (2000, 242). If his disappointments with regard to his literary fame or his raucous lifestyle were at the root of his depression then this would suggest that there were specific social causes for his decline into severe mental illness. However, it may also have been the case that Fergusson had an underlying depressive condition, such as manic depression, which until the autumn of 1773 he had managed to conceal from his family and friends. His depression then, would be described as depression ‘without cause’ and his excessive drinking would be viewed as a response to his mental suffering, rather than as a cause of his illness. However, as Merritt points out, “alcohol and depression have a close and complex relationship and often it can be difficult to distinguish between the cause and effect” (99). Nolen-Hoeksema comments that “men are much more likely than women to engage in some inherently maladaptive activities, perhaps in an effort to distract themselves from negative moods” (171). Fergusson was known to have had at least one depressive episode four years earlier after his return from his uncle’s house in Aberdeenshire, therefore, there is some evidence to suggest that he did have a susceptibility to low moods. Solomon observes that “most severe depressions have precursor smaller depressions that have passed largely unnoticed or simply unexplained” (44), and this may have been the case for Fergusson. In July 1774 Sommers recalls that Fergusson had “the misfortune to fall from a stair-case, by which he received a violent contusion on the head” (29). This exacerbated his declining mental condition, his behaviour became violent and he was taken to Bedlam where he died on 17 October. The exact cause of his death is unknown.

In terms of Fergusson’s work, most critical attention is paid to his Scottish poems, some of which offer a unique and lively view of Edinburgh life at this time. The poems written during his depressive phase are considered to be of less interest because it is clear that

within them, the poet has lost his verve, his usual vitality. McDiarmid, for instance, comments on his elegiac poem ‘To the Memory of John Cunningham’ and remarks that “in style and spirit it has little in common with our ordinary conception of Fergusson’s work; indeed, for the modern reader its whole interest must lie in the remarkable coincidence between its morbid theme and later events” (66). He goes on to observe that “unfortunately the elegy was not a mere moment of assured solemnity in the continued course of the writer’s high spirits. There was to be no return to the happier efforts of Fergusson’s genius” (67). Robert Crawford argues that Fergusson’s oeuvre is characterized by abrupt oscillations in mood and comments that the “pendulum-swings within [his] work, and even within individual poems ... may help to explain why he features in Kay Redfield Jamison’s study of manic depression and the artistic temperament” (2003, 11). He suggests that the balance between “despair and joviality” which is present in many of his poems, tilts decisively in 1773 toward “despair” (14). This chapter is concerned with the way in which Fergusson represents that despair. It includes a discussion on ‘Ode to the Gowdspink’<sup>16</sup>, a sad and reflective poem in which he explores ideas of beauty, freedom and confinement. It also considers three poems, ‘To the Memory of John Cunningham’<sup>17</sup>, ‘Rob. Fergusson’s Last Will’<sup>18</sup> and ‘Codicil to Rob. Fergusson’s Last Will’<sup>19</sup> in which he portrays both Cunningham and himself as impoverished poets. In these poems he implicitly criticises a society which fails to nurture poetic talent. This study also examines two posthumously published poems, ‘The Author’s Life’ and ‘Job, Chapter III, Paraphrased’, which offer contrasting examples of how Fergusson chose to express his pessimism in this final period of his life and which may indeed validate the view that he was suffering from manic depression.

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<sup>16</sup> Published in *The Weekly Magazine* on 12 August 1773.

<sup>17</sup> Published as an individual volume in Edinburgh by Alexander Kincaid in October 1773.

<sup>18</sup> Published in *The Weekly Magazine* on 25 November 1773.

<sup>19</sup> Published in *The Weekly Magazine* on 23 December 1773.

‘Ode to the Gowdspink’ was published immediately before the onset of Fergusson’s depression and in this poem it is evident that he is beginning to feel anxious about the potential loss of his poetic voice. He represents his fears through the metaphor of the caged bird, who in its misery has lost its ability to sing. There are several examples of poems addressed to birds and animals in this period and Fergusson is writing within this tradition. However, Allan H. MacLaine argues that the “quality of sincerity” in his poem distinguishes it from the hundreds of “didactic nature poems of the era and saves it from being merely a conventional exercise” (1965, 114). When compared to a similar type of poem, such as the one written by William Cowper, ‘On a Goldfinch starved to death in his cage’, differences in poetic purpose can be observed. The voice in Cowper’s poem is that of the bird itself, and it scornfully thanks its captor “for all [its] woes” (l.13). Cowper is clearly making a statement about animal cruelty. Fergusson similarly writes of the distress inflicted on the caged goldfinch but the voice in his poem is that of the poet himself, and this, rather than the voice of the goldfinch, is ultimately the main concern of the poem. In addition, whereas the form of Cowper’s poem is a simple structure of three stanzas of equal length, Fergusson’s is written in the more complex form of an irregular ode which allows him to express his somewhat contentious ideas on the nature of “Liberty” (l.49) and “confinement” (l.65) in both the animal and human world. Maddison comments that the ode “offered the eighteenth century a classical escape from its mechanical universe and the metronome tick of the heroic couplet, from stoicism and rationalism, to the imagined emotional abandon and freedom of expression of a more primitive age” (1960, 1). In this poem Fergusson freely expresses his views on what it means to be a poet in an increasingly commercial, and thus hostile, society.

He begins by praising the beauty of the bird which has no equal in nature. In the sunrise in springtime

The gowdspink comes in new attire,  
The brawest 'mang the whistling choir (l.3-4).

The goldfinch is the “sey-piece” of nature’s skill and its beauty even outshines the “cherries upo’ Hebe’s lip” (l.18) and the “crimson rose” (l.20). The description of the bird in its natural environment is simply observed, however, complications arise when ‘man’ is introduced into the poem. Fergusson writes:

’Mang man, wae’s heart! we aften find  
The brawest drest want peace of mind,  
While he that gangs wi ragged coat  
Is weel contentit wi his lot (l.21-24).

The attractiveness of the wealthy man, whose “attire” has been purchased, is different from the natural beauty of the goldfinch and his lack of contentment is likely to be due to the fact that his money was earned in dubious ways. Unfortunately for the bird, its “gowden glister” (l.31) also becomes a burden when the “envious treachery of man” (l.30) is involved. He traps the goldfinch with “glewy birdlime” (l.25) and keeps it in a “fettering cage” (l.38) where the bird’s

free-born bosom beats in vain  
For darling liberty again (l.39-40).

The “cage” is symbolic of the entrapment of wealth, and the bird becomes as miserable as the rich man who wants “peace of mind”. It would gladly change his “cleething gay” (l.27) for the lark’s “sober grey” (l.28) whose dull coat is reminiscent of the poor but happy man’s “ragged coat”. The goldfinch looks out from its cage through a window to “warblers free” (l.42) who “carrol saft, and sweetly sing” (l.43). In its confinement the caged bird is unable to sing “Sae lightsome sweet, sae blythly gay” (l.72). Instead it sits silent in “some dark chamber’s dowy nook” (l.66), and as Murray Pittock observes, captivity is “shortly to become just as real for the poet as for the bird” (2008, 131).

Fergusson's view in this poem is that songbirds should be allowed to remain in their natural environment where they are unrestrained and can warble endlessly, as he explains:

Ah, Liberty! thou bonny dame,  
How wildly wanton is thy stream,  
Round whilk the birdies a' rejoice,  
An' hail you wi a grateful voice.  
The gowdspink chatters joyous here,  
And courts wi gleesome sangs his peer:  
The mavis frae the new-bloom'd thorn  
Begins his lauds at ear'est morn.

"Liberty" is represented by the "wildly wanton" stream where birds such as the goldfinch and the thrush (mavis) gather to sing and hail the arrival of the morning. The true beauty of the goldfinch then, is not in its outer coat but in its singing voice, which can only be heard while it lives freely amongst other songbirds. In his ignorance, man gains a superficial pleasure by gazing at the goldfinch's startling coat and fails to recognise the more meaningful beauty of its song.

Fergusson concludes the poem by turning his attention to his own distress and writes:

I'll never envy your giral's grist (wealth);  
For whan fair freedom smiles nae mair,  
Care I for life? Shame fa the hair;  
A field o'ergrown wi rankest stubble,  
The essence of a paltry bubble (l.76-80).

He is adamant that he would rather die than give up his freedom but freedom to him also means poverty and therefore amounts to no freedom at all. MacLaine suggests that Fergusson's "sympathetic and genuinely moving picture of the caged bird reminds one ... of the impoverished poet himself: his mind filled with an incalculable potential of compelling poetic ideas ... yet hampered, confined, and driven to distraction by the sheer necessity of earning his daily bread" (116). For poor poets like Fergusson who are not supported by patronage, there is no "wildly wanton" stream for them to gather around, no



environment in which they can sing freely in their natural poetic voices. In the human world food and drink are commodities that come at a price, and while Fergusson seems to be implying in this poem that he will never degrade his true art for the sake of patronage, he does not fully address the problem of his financial hardship: it presents him with a dilemma to which there is no resolution in the 'Ode'. His pessimistic reflection, that life will have no meaning for him when "fair freedom smiles nae mair" is an early sign of his troubled mental state and as Pittock comments, "chillingly prophetic of Fergusson's imminent fate" (131).

Fergusson writes of another impoverished poet in 'To the Memory of John Cunningham' who died of a nervous disorder on 18 September 1773. The poem was published shortly after Cunningham's death and is written in the form of a pastoral elegy. Abrams comments that this type of poem is "an important subspecies of the elegy ... which represents both the mourner and the one he mourns – who is usually also a poet – as shepherds" (50). Cunningham was a popular pastoral poet and Fergusson remembers his "gentle Affection" (l.35). He also recalls his difficult personal circumstances and suggests that while "TITLES and WEALTH were his due" (l.61) the goddess "Fortune" (l.62) paid him little attention. Cunningham needed money to bring "kindly Relief to the Mind" (l.68) but unfortunately spent his final days in the "Cells of the wretched" (l.70). McDiarmid comments that he died "in the madhouse at Newcastle" (66). Fergusson accuses the rich of their neglect of such a well-regarded poet in the same way that Burns attacked Edinburgh's gentry some years later for their indifference to Fergusson's predicament. Fergusson argues that the rich

Near Sorrow they never can come,  
'Till MISFORTUNE has mark'd them her own (l.79-80).

In other words, the selfish gentry are only interested in their own troubles. The lives of both Cunningham and Fergusson show that the economic struggles faced by artists who exist on the fringes of elite literary circles can often lead to disastrous mental health problems. However, while it is tempting to suggest a parallel between the lives of the two poets, linking their mental health difficulties to their financial hardships, as indeed the poets themselves do, caution needs to be exercised. Solomon points out that there is “a vast difference between simply having a difficult life and having a mood disorder” (336). He goes on to observe that while it is “common to assume that depression is the natural result” of a life of poverty “the reality is frequently just the other way around” and that in a state of “disabling depression” sufferers often feel “overwhelmed” (336) by the thought of helping themselves. It is probably more appropriate to assume that Fergusson and Cunningham were suffering from some form of underlying mental illness which may have been different for both men but which were certainly exacerbated by their financial anxieties.

Fergusson attempts to make a joke of his meagre belongings in ‘Rob. Fergusson’s Last Will’, and despite Susan Manning’s assertion that in this and in some of his other poems, he affirms a “comic vitality against the self-consuming melancholy of productions like Robert Blair’s lugubrious ‘The Grave’” (2003, 108), there is without doubt a thread of pessimism running through this poem. McDiarmid comments that the “poetic inventory – usually in testamentary form – is ... a literary joke of some antiquity” (314). He suggests that Fergusson may have been influenced by such poems as William Dunbar’s ‘Testament to Mr. Andro Kennedy’, David Lindsay’s ‘The Mare of Collingtoun’ and Allan Ramsay’s ‘Epistle to Mr. James Arbuckle of Belfast, A.M.’. However, he also mentions that “a comparison with any of these examples makes one remark the underlying seriousness of Fergusson” (315). He also points out that Fergusson “probably got the immediate hint for

his 'Last Will' from verses which appeared in the previous number of the [*Weekly Magazine*], described as 'An Inventory of Dr Swift's Goods, upon lending his House to the Bishop of M. Not printed in his works'" (314). This is likely to be the case because as Manning remarks, "Fergusson exercised and expanded his poetic versatility as occasion arose and subjects presented themselves" and "debates and correspondence of current interest in the *Weekly Magazine* become opportunities for experiments in genre and diction" (102).

When compared to Swift's poem the depression in Fergusson's 'Last Will' becomes more apparent. Swift opens his poem:

An oaken, broken, elbow-chair;  
A cawdle-cup, without an ear;  
A batter'd, shatter'd ash bedstead;  
A box of deal, without a lid;  
A pair of tongs, but out of joint;  
A back-sword poker, without point;  
A pot that's crack'd across, around,  
With an old knotted garter bound (l.1-8).

In the comedy of these lines there is no hint of angst about the terrible misfortunes of poverty and the pure humour persists until the end of the poem. On the other hand, Fergusson's poem contains within its beginning a sombre prophecy:

While sober folks, in humble prose,  
Estate, and goods, and gear dispose,  
A poet surely may disperse  
His moveables in doggrel verse;  
And fearing death my blood will fast chill,  
I hereby constitute my last will (l.1-6).

The words "death", "blood" and "chill" would find no place in Swift's comic production. Fergusson is known to have been depressed when this poem was composed and therefore it is impossible to accept his allusion to his own imminent death as simply a form of comedy, especially in light of the fact that eleven months later his gloomy prediction was realised.

James Robertson observes that “although comic, this poem is tinged with a solemnity which reflects the illness and depression into which the poet was already sinking” (2007, 193). Fergusson continues his poem in a jocular manner but the serious undercurrent is still present as he points out that he is an impoverished poet. He writes:

Thanks to the gods, who made me poor!  
No lukewarm friends molest my door,  
Who always shew a busy care  
For being legatee or heir:  
Of this stamp none will ever follow  
The youth that’s favour’d by Apollo (l.13-18).

A young poverty-stricken poet is never going to attract a “lukewarm” friend who hopes to become the heir to his property. The word “molest” has negative connotations and reflects the poet’s moroseness that is evident in the opening lines of the poem. Manning argues that there is “no exploitation of pathos to provoke sympathy for the physical frailty of the poet, his poverty, the hardness of his lot” (108), yet Fergusson once again seems preoccupied by his financial difficulties. His persistent references in his poetry to the hardships faced by poets who have no means of support but their own labour, shows that for him, if not for Swift, poverty was no laughing matter.

A positive aspect of the poem is the genuine regard that Fergusson feels towards his friends. He appreciates the fact that they never thought it was a disgrace to be “a *poet’s friend*” (l.20), and he leaves them his “trifles” (l.21) with his “kindest breath” (l.22). However, his sentiments indicate an emotional withdrawal and a sense that he is now looking back nostalgically on times spent with friends. To Jamie Rae he leaves his “snuff-box” (l.29) in the hope that it will revive him after a “drowsy meal” (l.30), and

wake remembrance of a friend  
Who lov’d him to his latter end (l.31-32).

Here, Fergusson is not only nostalgic but indeed seems to be writing from the grave. To Oliphant he leaves “scrolls poetic” (l.40) and to Hamilton he gives the task of sorting out his debts which are “mostly *desperatim*” (l.54). He hopes that Woods will pick up his muse

And boldly catch the glowing fire  
That dwells in raptures on his lyre (l.60-61).

Finally, he requests that Hutcheson attend to his dirge, being a man “fit to guide the ceremonies” (l.66).

In ‘Codicil to Rob. Fergusson’s Last Will’ he adopts a similar approach. Robertson describes this poem as a “weary extension of the same joke, and further evidence of his decline” (193). Fergusson bequeaths two “FLASKS” (l.25) to his friend Tulloch who was kind enough to fill them with port, however, they are now “as full of air” (l.25). The empty flasks symbolise the role that alcohol has played in the poet’s mental demise. He hopes that Greenlaw, his “learned friend” (l.68), will write his “*Epitaph*” (l.66) and in his gift to Walter Ruddiman, the editor of *The Weekly Magazine*, he seems to be preparing the ground for the publication of his work after his death. He leaves him “a picture” (l.31) that may be suitable “for prints and frontispieces” (l.35). Taken together these two poems serve as a thoughtful and courageous attempt by a severely depressed poet to make public in *The Weekly Magazine*, the warmth and tenderness that he felt towards those who had supported him in his life, and thus Fergusson shows himself to be a man of sensitivity and loyalty. Nevertheless, while they are poems of friendship they are also concerned with leave-taking. Fergusson is closing down this chapter of his life and leaves us with some hint of his fears for the future.

‘The Author’s Life’ is a brief poem of ten lines and its title suggests that Fergusson was continuing to dwell on how he would be remembered after his death. In publications of the period it was common practice to include a short biography of a deceased author as an introductory piece to their works. For example, *Poems on various subjects, by R. Fergusson. With a life of the author* was published in St Andrews in 1800. What of course is different about Fergusson’s poem is the content, which bears no resemblance to a usual biography. Perhaps he anticipated that accounts of his life would be tedious and partially invented, and took the opportunity to represent the true nature of his creative spirit in his own way. As a poet, he places himself in a pastoral setting and writes rapturously of his stimulating surroundings:

My life is like the flowing stream  
That glides where summer’s beauties teem,  
Meets all the riches of the gale  
That on its watry bosom sail,  
And wanders ’midst Elysian groves  
Thro’ all the haunts that fancy loves (l.1-6).

Fergusson portrays the essence of his being as his “fancy”, or his poetic imagination. He is in a reverie and in his mind’s eye he is like the “flowing stream” winding his way through “Elysian groves” drawing inspiration for his poetry from “summer’s beauties”. The ecstasy of the moment may suggest that Fergusson is in a manic phase of his illness. Likewise, Jamison wrote in her biography that when she was in a mania “the world was filled with pleasure and promise” (1996, 36). The mood is punctured slightly in the concluding lines as Fergusson anticipates his death. He writes:

May I, when drooping days decline,  
And ’gainst those genial streams combine,  
The winter’s sad decay forsake,  
And center in my parent lake (l.7-10).

When Fergusson ceases to be creative in his “drooping days” he hopes to “forsake” an unproductive life, epitomised here by the winter season, and die in peace. The brevity of

the poem reflects the transience of human existence, and while it is a celebration of the poet's life it is also an acceptance of the inevitability of his death. In this poem Fergusson forgets his cares and troubles and concentrates solely on what is truly important to him, his artistic talents.

From the airy dreams of the "Elysian groves" Fergusson plunges into the nightmarish darkness of 'Job, Chapter III, Paraphrased'. It is a poetic form that perhaps belongs more appropriately to the earlier part of the century, as Reed explains, much of the melancholy poetry written between 1700 and 1750 is written "in language now of the classics, now of the Bible, and now of both at once" (47). She observes that the penitential psalms 'Ecclesiastes' and 'Job' were popular subjects of "religious non-classical poems" (46) and that in these poems two themes were familiar, the "complaint of life" and "death" (47). An early example of the third chapter of 'Job' paraphrased was written by John Norris and published in 1706. Norris was a Church of England clergyman and his poem of ten six-line self-contained stanzas, resembles the form of a hymn. Abrams comments that hymns often "consisted of the texts of paraphrases of Old Testament psalms" and many were "composed to be read rather than sung" (85). In his choice of poetic form Fergusson was more likely to have been influenced by the paraphrase written by Samuel Boyse (1708-1749), the son of an Irish dissenting minister. Boyse's poem, 'The III. Chapter of the Book of JOB', is in heroic couplets of iambic pentameter, as is Fergusson's. It was published in 1731 in Edinburgh by Walter and Thomas Ruddiman, the father and uncle of Fergusson's friend and publisher, Walter Ruddiman, therefore, Fergusson is likely to have known this work. While Brown argues that Fergusson's poetry is "notable for an absence of religious reference" and that "curiously, each of Fergusson's biographers attempt to thrust unwarranted religious affiliations on the poet" (2004, 112), in this poem, written during a period of severe mental torment, he does turn to the Bible for inspiration. It must not be

assumed, however, that every poet who composed a paraphrase on 'Job' chapter three was severely depressed. Nevertheless, as Manning observes, "it would be perverse in this case to side-step the association between choice of subject and the poet's immediate personal circumstances and state of mind" (108).

The development of Fergusson's poem corresponds almost identically with Boyse's and it is useful to make some comparisons to show in what ways Fergusson's is different. In the first thirty-eight lines of each poem Job curses the day that he was born, questions why he was ever born at all and considers death to be the blessed condition in which all men are equal and contented. Fergusson starts by writing of the "loathed, hateful, and lamented night" (l.3) of Job's birth:

Let blackest darkness and death's awful shade  
Stain it, and make the trembling earth afraid (l.7-8).

Boyse similarly writes:

Let Darkness stain it o'er, no friendly Ray  
Pierce thro' the Gloom of that affrighted Day! (l.7-8)

Then Fergusson, in the voice of Job, asks:

Why did supporting knees prevent my death,  
Or suckling breasts sustain my infant breath? (l.23-24)

Job asks the same type of questions in Boyse's poem:

Why dy'd I not? Why did preventive Care  
My destin'd Life for future Sorrows spare? (l.23-24)

Through Fergusson, Job goes on to describe the happiness he would have already found in what he considers to be the blissful state of death. Fergusson writes:

For now my soul with quiet had been blest,  
With kings and counsellors of earth at rest (l.25-26).



In the same manner Boyse writes:

Then had I found that Ease I seek in vain,  
Nor known this Load of unexampled Pain! (l.25-26)

If Fergusson did identify with Job's experiences then it must be assumed that when he wrote this poem, life was becoming a burden to him. To regret the fact that he survived at birth suggests that he was having suicidal thoughts. He may have felt that despite all of his achievements, living with mental illness amounted to no life at all. In lines thirty-nine to forty-eight of both poems, Job questions the reasons why those who are suffering are forced to continue living, when they would much rather be dead. First of all Fergusson writes:

Why then is grateful light bestow'd on man,  
Whose life is darkness, all his days a span? (l.47-48)

Comparably Boyse writes:

Why sparest thou, O LORD! a Life like mine?  
While with incessant Pray'rs for Death I pine (l.39-40).

It may have been the case that Fergusson chose to write such a paraphrase because it allowed him, through the voice of Job, to both conceal and yet express his suicidal feelings. As a Christian his thoughts of death would have been interpreted as a sign of ingratitude towards God who had bestowed on him the gift of life. In identifying his own troubled experiences with that of a biblical character it may have helped to relieve his sense of guilt.

It is perhaps not too much of a coincidence that two poems on the same subject correspond in such a uniform way. However, what is significant is the way in which Fergusson's poem differs from Boyse's. Firstly, unlike Boyse's poem which includes two stanza breaks, his poem is written continuously without pause and the effect is that the agitated

mood and tension within the poem gathers momentum. Secondly, Fergusson adds a further six lines to his poem which crucially, are more obviously written from his own perspective. In these concluding lines he looks forward, peering into some kind of terrible world which is even worse than the one he has just described, something which neither Boyce nor Norris do in their paraphrases. He writes:

For ere the morn return'd my sighing came,  
My mourning pour'd out as the mountain stream;  
Wild visag'd fear, with sorrow-mingled eye,  
And wan destruction piteous stared me nigh;  
For though nor rest nor safety blest my soul,  
New trouble came, new darkness, new controul (l.49-54).

In these lines the “wild-visag'd fear”, the “sorrow-mingled eye” and “wan destruction” describe the madman that Fergusson believes he has become. After a disrupted, restless and fearful night the new day only promises further torment. Crawford comments that the poem's conclusion “possesses a horrific vitality, a terrible sense of endlessness even at the end of the poem; that final word ‘controul’ brings with it to the modern ear a menace all the more powerful for sounding both authoritative and undefined” (14). Indeed, Fergusson seems to be aware that each passing day his mental troubles are growing rather than receding and the pressure, like the pace in the poem, is relentlessly building up to the inevitable point of hysteria. As in his verse letter, the heroic couplet enables him to present Job's and his own mental chaos in an ordered form. Manning also points out that the poem itself is “an exercise in taut aesthetic control” (109). Nevertheless, the poet in this poem is disturbed and pessimistic, a mood which is in stark contrast to the quiet resignation identifiable in ‘The Author's Life’. ‘Job’ has been inspired by mental terror and not by “Elysian groves”. However, both poems are introspective and as Crawford observes, “sociability is crucial to Fergusson's muse” (13). Both poems then, are symbolic of the decline of his true poetic self.

This group of poems written during Fergusson's depressive phase is extremely varied in genre. It might have been that he was suffering from manic depression and that the diversity of poetic forms reflect the highs and lows of his condition. Equally, Fergusson was an experimental poet and the range of styles may simply be an indication of this aspect of his work. Despite the eclectic combination certain themes clearly emerge. In 'Ode to the Gowdspink' he represents the controlling powers of the wealthy who hinder the lives of struggling poets. He suggests that the rich are suffocating the creative potential of vulnerable artists in the same way that they are confining the goldfinch and stifling its song. In polite society ideas on what constitutes beauty are distorted and because of this those who suffer include impoverished poets and goldfinches. In 'To the Memory of John Cunningham' Fergusson discusses the life of a popular but poor poet and implies that he was starved and driven mad for the sake of a few pounds. In this poem he is also suggesting that if poetic genius is not allowed to express itself then it drives the poet insane. In 'Last Will' and 'Codicil' he continues on the theme of the poet's hardship, this time his own, but attempts to lighten the mood through humour. The significance of these poetic inventories is not in the few worthless possessions that he owns but in his friendships. They are touching in the sense that they are farewell poems but also depressing because the poet is not moving on to bright new pastures, simply retreating into his own private world of hell.

In the final two poems in this group Fergusson is now alone and there is no mention of his poverty or his friends. In 'The Author's Life' he implies that life without the freedom to express his "fancy" would not be worth living. His acceptance of the inevitability of his death suggests that his depression is now settling upon him. In 'Job' he fears for his sanity and while the production of the poem itself means that he still has the capability to compose, there is an even greater sense that his despondency is intruding upon his creative

mental space. Solomon comments that in major depression “you are less than yourself and in the clutches of something alien” (19). There is also a terrible sense of foreboding in ‘Job’ which sadly bears itself out in the tragic circumstances of his death. However, despite the obvious presence of Fergusson’s despair in this poem he appears to write in a complete state of awareness of the horror of his declining mental state and what this must mean for his future.

In his life Fergusson occupied a male world and socialized in the clubs and taverns of Edinburgh. This freedom presented him with difficulties and he admits in his verse letter that alcohol contributed greatly to his depression. A further burden to him and another major cause of his anxiety was his financial hardships. Also, that he ultimately chose to express the worst of his feelings in a religious paraphrase reveals the importance of religion in his life and may indicate that some religious doubt did indeed colour his depression. It might also be suggested that his sensitive spirit, evident in both his life and work, added to his melancholy feelings. Sommers recalls of Fergusson’s character that “his spirit was truly independent; and his feelings most acute and tender” (40). His exuberance and verve for life which Goodsir Smith describes as his “effervescent temperament” (17) meant that he was keenly interested in the world around him and his poetic talent allowed him to express in verse his observations. While he was often inspired by his surroundings in the city to write humorously about its many facets, for a perceptive poet Edinburgh was both inspiring and disconcerting. His responsive insight forced him to confront the insecurities of his own future. Thus, his sensitivity reveals to him the contradictions between his poetic ambitions and the reality of his impoverished situation. This realization must have been an acute disappointment for a man of his age and intellectual vigour. In this sense Fergusson’s gift becomes burdensome as he anticipates a life in which his full potential as a poet will be denied. Despite the presence of these

possible causes of Fergusson's melancholy, it is likely that they simply exacerbated an underlying mental health problem. Gillis, in his assessment of Fergusson's mental state, rather melodramatically declares that "the seeds of madness had been with him all his life" (ix). However, there may be some truth in this suggestion and if Fergusson was suffering from something like manic depression as some biographers have suggested, then it would have been a problem for him whatever his circumstances.

## PART TWO

### Female depression

“I feel thy Force, whilst I against thee rail”: Anne Finch’s struggle with the spleen

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Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea (1661-1720) is one of the most celebrated female poets of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. She suffered from bouts of depression for most of her adult life and often expressed her despair within her poetry. Both she and her husband, Heneage Finch (1657-1726), who were members of the royal courts of Charles II and James II, were loyal Jacobites and their lives were severely disrupted when James was deposed in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Her poems of this period convey the deep sense of loss that she felt as a result of this political change and in later poems she continued to reflect upon this event with a tone of sadness and regret. Her poetic career began at the age of twenty-three, and throughout their lives Heneage supported his wife in her literary endeavours. Barbara McGovern comments that he often “functioned as her editor and amanuensis” (1992, 68). Her work first appeared in print in 1691 with the publication of her song, ‘Tis strange this Heart’, in the songbook *Vinculum Societatis*. Further songs and poems were included in other publications and in 1701 her poem ‘The Spleen’ was first published in Charles Gildon’s *A New Collection of Poems for Several Occasions*. The poem appeared again in 1709 in a single volume entitled *The Spleen, A Pindarique Ode. By a Lady, together with ‘A Prospect of Death: A Pindarique Essay’*. In 1713 *Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions, Written by a Lady* was published. All of Finch’s writing had up until this point, appeared anonymously, as did this volume, but a subsequent edition of *Miscellany Poems* printed that same year included her title, ‘the Right Hon<sup>ble</sup> ANNE, Countess of WINCHILSEA’, and her identity as an author, which was commonly known amongst her friends and family, was now made public.

Her poetic talents were already also known to her literary friends such as the poet and playwright Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718). McGovern states that he “had been familiar with her poetry since the 1690s” (100). His poem, ‘An epistle to Flavia, on the sight of two Pindaric Odes on the Spleen and Vanity’ (1714), is addressed to Finch. She was also an acquaintance of Swift and Pope and Swift’s poem ‘Apollo Outwitted’ from his *Miscellanies in prose and verse* (1711) is addressed to ‘Mrs. Finch’. Her poem ‘To Mr. Pope’ is included in his *Works* (1717) which was a compliment to Finch. John Buxton suggests that “Pope’s praise of her helped to maintain the reputation of her poetry during the half century after her death” (1967, 179). She composed more than two hundred poems and stylistically wrote in various forms and genres on subjects such as love, friendship and religion. Many of her poems are fables and Buxton comments that “she was the first English follower of [Jean] La Fontaine, preceding Gay, whose *Fables* were not published until some years after her death” (175). She was most admired for ‘The Spleen’ and as McGovern notes, it “would become her best-known poem during her lifetime and her most frequently anthologized poem throughout the eighteenth century” (93). However, Wordsworth, in a letter to Rev. Alexander Dyce<sup>20</sup> of 1830, commented that while the “most celebrated” of her poems was ‘The Spleen’ it was “far from the best”. He remarked that “‘The Petition for an Absolute Retreat’, and the ‘Nocturnal Reverie’, are of much superior merit”<sup>21</sup>.

Information about Finch’s life is scarce and even less exists with which to gain an understanding of her experience of depression. Nevertheless, some biographers and critics have made an attempt to describe the nature of her lifelong melancholy and use her poetry, which is often of a personal nature, to supplement the lack of biographical detail. Katharine M. Rogers explains that in her poem, ‘The Petition for an Absolute Retreat’,

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<sup>20</sup> Dyce published *Specimens of British Poetesses* in 1825.

<sup>21</sup> Published in Reynolds (1903, lxxvi-lxxviii).



Finch writes of the “Dark Oblivion” (l.163) into which she was plunged “by the exile of King James and Queen Mary” (1979, x) and that her traumas were eventually alleviated by Heneage’s nephew who invited the couple to live with him at Eastwell Park. She observes that despite her subsequent contentment Finch “continued to suffer periodically from depression” and that her ode ‘The Spleen’ “reveals painful experience of depression and the impossibility of reasoning it away” (xi). Carol Barash suggests that Finch gives voice to her political allegiances through poems such as ‘Elegy on the Death of King James’ (1701) but that in later years, with the publication of *Miscellany Poems* (1713), she shows that she has split “her identification as a woman writer from her political identification” (1991, 343). She goes on to argue that “the ideal of the heroic woman” that Finch presents in her earlier poems is now “translated into patterns of negativity which link [her] work to later women writers such as Emily Dickenson, Christina Rossetti, and ... Virginia Woolf” (346). Thus, she becomes politically alienated and represents a “female voice cut off from history and from others” (344). Finch’s most recent biographer, McGovern, also uses her poetry to comment upon her depressive state. She suggests that in the tumultuous period following the revolution Finch was able to “break out of the prison of despondency and liberate herself through her words” (1992, 63). She mentions poems that Finch wrote during this period which include ‘On Affliction’ and ‘Ardelia to Melancholy’. These studies highlight the impact of the dreadful political situation on Finch’s life and show that she used her writing to express her negative emotions. They also reveal that while she suffered a terrible shock in 1688 her melancholy persisted well beyond this time.

McGovern comments that “for most of her life Finch was afflicted with melancholy, a term then interchangeable with the spleen” and that her poetry “contains numerous references to this malady” (160). However, to suggest that ‘melancholy’ and ‘spleen’ are one condition in the case of Finch, may not be appropriate. An earlier editor of her work, Myra

Reynolds, observes that Finch suffered from two separate complaints. She refers to her “depression of spirit engendered by the public and private disasters incident on the revolution” and remarks that she was also “an unfortunate victim of the spleen, a fashionable eighteenth-century distemper” (1903, xliii). Like Reynolds, this study considers Finch’s depression from two perspectives. Firstly, it explores her feelings of despair following the Revolution, when a specific cause for her unhappiness is obvious. Secondly, it examines her experience of depression beyond this point, when she appears to live a life of relative ease and no particular cause for her despondent moods can be identified.

Finch was born into an aristocratic family but had an unsettled childhood. Her father, William Kingsmill of Sydmonton in Hampshire married Anne Haselwood of Maidwell, Northamptonshire. The couple had three children, William, Bridget and Anne. When Finch was five months old her father died and a year later her mother married Thomas Ogle. They had one daughter, Dorothy, with whom Finch had a close and affectionate relationship. When she was aged three her mother also died and she lived for seven years in London with her paternal grandmother and then from the age of eleven onwards, with her maternal uncle, William Haselwood, at Maidwell. In 1682, the year of her uncle’s death, Finch was appointed one of six maids of honour to Mary of Modena, who was then Duchess of York in the court of Charles II. McGovern observes that at court Finch “developed a devotion to the future queen of England” (20). Here she also met and fell in love with Heneage Finch, a Gentleman of the Bedchamber of James, Duke of York and they married on 15 May 1684. After her marriage she resigned her position as maid of honour but continued to participate in court life. On 6 February 1685, after the death of his brother Charles, James became King: this was now a period of great hope and opportunity for Finch and her husband. Heneage developed his career and Buxton comments that he

became “Lieutenant-Colonel in the Coldstream Guards ... Deputy Lieutenant for the county of Kent, and sat for two years in Parliament as a member for Hythe” (158).

However, in 1688 James was forced to abdicate in favour of his son-in-law William of Orange. Finch and Heneage maintained their allegiance to James and the exiled Stuart Jacobite court and became what is known as ‘Nonjurors’ for their refusal to swear the oath of loyalty to the new king, William III. Hence, the abdication marked the end of their public life and their income. Heneage was arrested in 1690 on charges of Jacobitism, and in later life Finch recalls in ‘The Preface’ to her play *Aristomenes*, which was composed at this time, her fears for his safety and her own feelings of loneliness. She explains that she was often living in “an absolute solitude” and under “such dejection of mind”, and that her writing helped to give “some interruption to those melancholy thoughts, which possesst me, not only for my own, but much more for the misfortune of those to whom I owe all imaginable duty”<sup>22</sup>. Finch was not only concerned for her husband’s welfare but was also anxious for the safety of the deposed monarchs. In her poem ‘Upon the Death of James the Second’ she remembers the reasons why both she and her husband remained loyal to the cause. She praises James’s undaunted courage on the “Stage of War” (l.36) as a young man and regrets that his heroic personal qualities will not be celebrated in England by “Dirges” (l.8) and “weeping Elegy’s” (l.9). The death of James meant that the wrongs against him could never be rectified and that his “Followers” (l.21) like Finch, must live with the terrible knowledge that they were unable to assist him in his rightful restoration. She hopes that from now on “Rightfull Kings” (l.159) may die “where they had Reign’d” (l.162). She insinuates that James was misunderstood and treated unfairly and believes that Britain should learn from its misdeeds. Finally, she focuses on her own state of mind

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<sup>22</sup> Published in Reynolds (1903, 12).

and her position as a poet. She concludes with a request addressed to “Brittan” (l.168), her homeland and writes:

May all who Shield Thee due Applauses have  
Whilst for my self like solitary men  
Devoted only to the Pen  
I but a safe Retreat amidst Thee Crave  
Below th’ambitious World and just above my Grave (l.173-177).

These closing lines offer an insight into Finch’s melancholy at this time. She states that she desires a “safe Retreat” away from the “ambitious World”, a world which is chaotic and causes disruption to the natural order of kingship. Ambitious men have disturbed Britain’s political stability and as a result, several worthy people have been displaced. Barash comments that in this poem Finch “uses James’s death to situate herself, publicly, as author and political subject” (338). Indeed, in aligning herself with “solitary men” who are dedicated to writing, she confidently raises her status as an authoress. Through her poem she also reveals that her exile from court life, her sense of regret for the loss of James’s cause and the devastating effects of the Revolution on the lives of those around her, ensured that from this point onwards she would feel a permanent sadness in her life.

When Heneage was finally discharged from prison seven months after his arrest the couple lived at Eastwell permanently. Here Finch pursued her literary interests and the beauty of the place inspired her creativity. In ‘The Preface’ she confesses that she may have given up her poetic ambitions but admits that “when I came to Eastwell, and cou’d fix my eyes only upon objects naturally inspiring soft and Poeticall immaginations ... I cou’d no longer keep within the limitts I had prescrib’d myself”<sup>23</sup>. In addition, both Heneage and his nephew encouraged Finch in her writing. Heneage became interested in antiquarian studies and was a member of the Society of Antiquaries. As well as their studious

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<sup>23</sup> Published in Reynolds (1903, 8).

occupations the couple often visited friends and family, therefore, in the closing years of the seventeenth century they lived a reasonably happy and settled existence. However, they did experience periods of isolation and in a letter written by Heneage to a friend, dated 8 February 1697, he complains:

This is a lonely Winter to us, having no neighbours within reach of a visite (this hard weather) now the best of them my good Ld: Thanet, and his Family, are out of the country. And indeed, this wou'd be an uncomfortable Place did not my Ld. Winchilsea's good humour, and good Principles, make any place agreeable.<sup>24</sup>

Heneage describes the quiet nature of their lives now that they are separated from the main thrust of political activity and social interaction of court life. While Heneage's intellectual pursuits must have been rewarding and diverting it is likely that he lacked a sense of purpose and that this was the source of his discomfort. In the early years of the new century the couple began to spend periods of time in London where Finch became more involved in the literary world. However, despite the distractions of the city she often suffered from 'the spleen'. Her acquaintance Lady Marrow describes in a letter to her daughter dated August 1708, a visit she had recently made to Finch at her London home. She writes:

Friday last I went to town ... From the Vice Chamberlain I went to see Mrs. Finch, she ill of the spleen. Lady Worsley has painted a pretty fire-screen and presented her with. And notwithstanding her ill-natured distemper, she was very diverting – Mrs. Finch I mean.<sup>25</sup>

This letter is evidence that several years after the revolution Finch continued to suffer from melancholy, only now she describes it as 'the spleen' rather than 'dejection of mind'.

Physician Nicholas Robinson defines the spleen in women:

These Sinkings of the Spirits, or Sadnesses, that oblige some vapourish Women to burst into sudden Fits of Crying, without any evident Cause, arise from great Depression of the Mind, that dampen the Passions, retard the Motions of the Nerves, and make us low-spirited (277).

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<sup>24</sup> Published in McGovern (1992, 74).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* (117).

Robinson suggests that the spleen, which is often referred to as the vapours, especially in women, is a mental disorder that originates in a “Depression of Mind” for which there is no “evident Cause”. This sinking of the spirits then has a negative effect upon the body. In her poem ‘Fragment at Tunbridge Wells’ Finch also discusses the spleen and like Robinson, describes it as a condition which is related to the body. She explains that its symptoms include “Sweats, Swoonings, and convulsive Motions” (l.9) and argues that “Words, and Notions” (l.10) are of no use “for the *Spleen*” (l.4). Only the waters of Tunbridge “Must brighten Life, and cure the Vapours” (l.18). In this poem she is not describing the kind of melancholy that is experienced in reaction to a traumatic external event, but, again like Robinson, rather suggests that it is a complaint for which there appears to be no apparent cause.

Throughout her life Finch clearly remained devoted to the Jacobite cause and in particular to the memory of Mary of Modena. In her poem ‘On the Death of the Queen’ (1718) written two years before her own death, Finch celebrates the “modest airs” (l.58), “inward beauty” (l.61) and “Superior sense” (l.63) of Mary. She writes:

The solemn grave with reverence takes her down  
And lasting wreaths succeed th’ unstable crown (l.134-135).

Finch still feels a sense of desolation at the losses sustained by James and Mary and her lifelong sorrow in response to their deposition becomes her sacrifice to the “unstable crown”. Now Mary’s death draws to a close the story of the “Court of many woes” (l.44). That she is still preoccupied by events that happened so long ago is understandable because it is a period that also represents a series of personal losses for both Heneage and herself. He lost his promising career and therefore together they lost their security and

independence. A life in the political wilderness meant that these disappointments were never resolved.

While it appears that Finch never quite recovered from the despondency that she experienced at this time, there also seems to be an aspect of her depression, or indeed a different kind of depression that Finch suffers from and which is unrelated to the revolution and its consequences and is therefore more difficult to explain. Her new life with Heneage offered many consolations, for instance, the retirement and solitude of their environment enabled her to develop her own identity as a poet. This may have been denied her had Heneage's career been the focus of their attention. As a writer she was able to give voice to her political opinions and the act of writing itself, as she admits in 'The Preface', often served as a remedy for her melancholy. In addition, she was fortunate in that she had a loving relationship with her husband. She expresses her affection for him in her poem 'A Letter to Daphnis' (1685) which she addresses to,

the crown and blessing of my life  
The much loved husband of a happy wife (l.1-2).

Although they were never wealthy, on the death of Heneage's nephew in 1712, Heneage became the fourth Earl of Winchilsea and Finch became a Countess and so relatively speaking they lived a reasonably comfortable life. Nevertheless, she did suffer from serious bouts of depression which may have partly stemmed from other causes. The couple essentially lived a twilight existence and it is possible that her quiet life in the shade of Eastwell was too lonely and cloistered. In her poem 'Fragment' she describes "Retirement" as, "which the World *Moroseness* calls" (l.22). Perhaps despite her successful marriage and the intellectual satisfaction of writing, she lacked purpose and direction in other areas of her life. For example, she had no children and she may have felt unfulfilled in this regard. Also, as Rogers suggests, "her difficulties and ambivalence as a

woman poet may have contributed to her recurrent depression. Certainly it affected her most painfully by undermining her confidence as a poet” (xv). In ‘The Preface’ Finch does indeed repeatedly apologise for being so presumptuous as to publish her work and explains that it is her “sincere opinion that when a Woman meddles with things of this nature,

So strong, th’opposing faction still appears  
The hopes to thrive, can ne’re outweigh the fears”<sup>26</sup>.

As a woman writer she mentions her “uneasy reflections”<sup>27</sup> and “mistaken vanity”<sup>28</sup>, a hesitancy which must have been demoralizing and must surely have contributed to her depression. However, it is equally likely that she suffered from a chronic depressive illness which she describes as the spleen, and that episodes of despair would occur without any apparent cause. Her isolation, frustrations and disappointments may simply have aggravated her condition.

Previous critical studies of Finch’s work have mainly focussed on her Pindaric ode ‘The Spleen’ (1701). Some consider the poem in relation to the medical views of the time, for instance, John F. Sena comments that the poem’s reference to “*Proteus*” (1.2) echoes the “sentiments of contemporary physicians who frequently compared the disease to Proteus, the shape-changing god of the sea, because its manifestations were always changing” (1971, 110). Rogers argues that because Finch “based her description on first-hand experience [she] produced a more accurate clinical picture than did her physician contemporaries” (1989, 17). McGovern observes that in ‘The Spleen’ the “scholarship on medical dimensions of Restoration and eighteenth-century melancholy is plentiful and comprehensive” (1992, 161), and that the “intense personal appeal” of the poem is “tempered by a stark realism and a rigorous analytical approach” (167). Desiree Hellegers

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<sup>26</sup> Published in Reynolds (1903, 9)

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* (7).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* (7).



offers a feminist reading of the poem and suggests that at this time the “medical establishment ... shapes the definition of nervous disorders” in such a way that confines women to the “domestic sphere” (1993, 201), and that in ‘The Spleen’ Finch shows a “sophisticated awareness” (200) of this ideology. Heather Meek analyses the poem as a form that combines “‘female’ emotion, irrationality, and displays of hysteria, and ‘male’ reason, science, and objectivity” (2007, 120). She also points out that Finch adopts a “distinctly male poetic form: the Pindaric ode” which was “hardy, difficult, rough, and inconstant” (120) and which enabled her to fetter her hysteria “in verse” (121).

Jane Spencer explores the broader implications of the poem and comments that Finch “embeds a confessional passage about her own experience of the disorder in a wide-ranging philosophical enquiry into its nature” (2003, 64). Paula R. Backscheider describes ‘The Spleen’ as a “superb example of the union of the personal, topical, and the universal” and comments that while critics argue that the poem has “lost favour”, the “honesty of its voice and its poetic virtuosity will never die” (2005, 73). Charles H. Hinnant extends the analysis of Finch’s melancholy in her poetry and examines ‘On Affliction’, ‘An Invocation to Sleep’ and ‘Ardelia to Melancholy’ as well as ‘The Spleen’. He links her personal sadness to the political situation and argues that “while it is true that she does not refer explicitly to political issues in these poems, it is difficult not to link her obsessive preoccupation with melancholy, loss, mourning, care, and the spleen with the abdication of James II and the subsequent arrest of her husband” (1994, 198).

In general, these studies concentrate on ‘The Spleen’, and explore the poem from the point of view that it represents an analysis by Finch of the mysteries of her depressive condition. However, Hinnant suggests that Finch writes “as if depression itself was being embraced as a substitute for a lost existence” (198) and implies that the cause of her melancholy is

rooted in the troubles associated with the Glorious Revolution. This study examines a selection of Finch's poems which seem to represent both perspectives. It includes 'On Affliction' and 'All is Vanity' which were written in the months following the revolution and which appear to reflect the anxiety and despair that she experienced at this time. Similarly, it looks at 'An Invocation to Sleep', also written at this time, however, in this poem Finch begins to hint at a depressive illness. In addition, this chapter examines another contemporary poem 'Ardelia to Melancholy'. In this Finch seems to be describing a different kind of melancholy, one that has no discernable cause and which she experiences alongside her more explainable and understandable distress. Finally, it explores 'The Spleen' which was written later than the previous poem, but in which Finch once again attempts to define a kind of depression 'without cause'. She does this now in greater detail and in a more exasperated tone of voice, as well as discussing the condition within its wider social and medical context. This study also considers the ways in which Finch, particularly in the last three poems, associates her gender to her depressive feelings.

'On Affliction', which Hinnant describes as one of Finch's "finest hymns" (210), is a brief poem of three stanzas containing five lines each. It probably takes its title and subject matter from George Herbert's group of five poems, all entitled 'Affliction'. Reuben A. Brower suggests that it is her only complete poem which "we might confidently include in a collection of Metaphysical verse" and argues that it is "reminiscent of George Herbert, though there is no evidence, aside from the title, of any direct indebtedness" (1945, 65). While Finch's poem differs from Herbert's in the sense that his poem is a much longer study on the subject, developing its theme through five separate poems, there are similarities. For instance, both poems are religious and seek to represent suffering as a state of being that brings us closer to God. Also, Finch begins her poem on the same topic with which Herbert concludes his fourth poem. He writes:

Then shall those powers, which work for grief,  
Enter thy pay,  
And day by day  
Labour thy praise, and my relief;  
With care and courage building me,  
Till I reach heav'n, and much more, thee (IV, l.25-30).

Herbert suggests that through his “grief” he has become a more courageous human being and that his religious resolve has been strengthened. His suffering will eventually lead him to heaven and more importantly to God. Comparably, Finch reveals in her opening lines that she bears her pain with fortitude and believes that this response to her suffering will bring her closer to God. She begins her poem:

Wellcome, what e're my tender flesh may say,  
Welcome affliction, to my reason, still;  
Though hard, and rugged on that rock I lay  
A sure foundation, which if rais'd with skill,  
Shall compass Babel's aim, and reach th' Almighty's hill (l.1-5).

Finch immediately associates body and mind and her “tender flesh” and “reason” are both adversely affected by her current troubles. Nevertheless, she embraces the burdens of sorrow because she believes that affliction is the “sure foundation” upon which a strong and sturdy character is built. She hopes that her “aim” will surpass that of the people of Babel whose tower to heaven was destroyed by God because their reason for constructing it was insincere. Finch is convinced that if she reacts to her suffering “with skill” she will secure for herself a place in paradise. Hinnant observes that in this poem “there is an insistence that in the midst of a world dominated by pain and grief the self must hold fast to a belief in a counterworld” (213). The purpose of both Herbert and Finch is to show that for the individual, suffering in life secures for them a place in heaven after death.

Finch goes on to develop her own ideas on the theme of ‘affliction’ and explains that those who withstand considerable agony throughout their lives on earth are guaranteed high status in heaven. She writes:

Wellcome the rod, that does adoption shew,  
The cup, whose wholsome dregs are giv’n me here;  
There is a day behind, if God be true,  
When all these Clouds shall passe, & heav’n be clear,  
When those whom most they shade, shall shine most glorious there (l.6-10).

Finch reveals an acceptance of the miseries of her own life, which are symbolised by the “rod” and the “dregs”, because she feels that in so doing she will be morally nourished. The “Clouds”, which represent the disruption and chaos of the revolution, will eventually pass and heaven will be open to her view. Those who are at this time living in darkness, such as herself and other followers of James, will be rewarded in the next life. Finally, Finch explores the nature of sainthood and suggests that saints offer an example of strength and goodness to which we can all aspire. She concludes:

Affliction is the line, which every Saint  
Is measur’d by, his stature taken right;  
So much itt shrinks, as they repine or faint,  
But if their faith and Courage stand upright,  
By that is made the Crown, and the full robe of light (l.11-15).

She proposes that the true measure of devotion to God is the manner in which a person endures pain. A saint bears affliction with “faith” and “Courage” but other people may “repine” or “faint” under the weight of their distress. A saint therefore has earned their halo and “robe of light”, that is, their divine grace because they have shown an unusual degree of toleration in the face of adversity. Finch measures her own strength of character to that of the saint and she is optimistic that her suffering will lead her to greater glory in heaven. Her references to the “Crown” and the “robe” are not just concerned with religion but are political allusions. She implies that James too, by standing “upright” will gain a distinguished seat in heaven, a position that has been denied him on earth. In ‘On

Affliction' Finch situates herself confidently in the male dominated realms of religion and politics. She also attempts to derive something beneficial, at least in the Christian sense, from what she perceives to be the dreadful political situation and from the melancholy that she has experienced as a result of the events of the Glorious Revolution.

In 'All is Vanity' Finch employs the Pindaric ode verse form with which to express her complex ideas concerning the futile nature of human existence. She was probably inspired by Abraham Cowley's Pindaric odes which were first published in 1656. Maddison observes that Cowley was responsible for the "tremendous popularity of the ode in England from the second half of the seventeenth century through to the middle of the nineteenth" (361). She comments that its irregular verse gave flexibility to display "wide-ranging learning" and at the same time allowed "orderliness in both rhyme and thought that showed that the poet ... was participating in the triumph of reason" (372). Finch shows such skill in this poem, in which she variously argues why mankind is "in Vain" (l.24). Reed points out that the "Vanity of Life" (47) theme, influenced by classical literature, was common in melancholy verse of this period. However, the poem also reflects Finch's disillusionment with her life at this moment in time. She opens the poem:

How vain is *Life!* which rightly we compare  
To flying *Posts*, that haste away;  
To *Plants*, that fade with the declining Day;  
To *Clouds*, that sail amidst the yielding Air;  
Till by Extention into that they flow,  
Or, scatt'ring on the World below,  
Are lost and gone, ere we can say they were;  
To *Autumn-Leaves*, which every Wind can chase;  
To rising *Bubbles*, on the Waters Face (l.1-9).

She represents "*Life*" as something that departs swiftly like "flying *Posts*" or disperses immediately like the "rising *Bubbles*". She devalues the gift of life and suggests that all our aims and ambitions are a waste of time. This conflicts with the message in the

previous poem in which she believes that a place in heaven will be earned if earthly sorrows are endured with patience. As she continues the mood begins to darken. She concentrates on the misery and anguish that men suffer throughout their lives. She argues:

As weak is *Man*, whilst Tenant to the Earth;  
As frail and as uncertain all his Ways,  
From the first moment of his weeping Birth,  
Down to the last and best of his few restless Days;  
When to the Land of Darkness he retires  
From disappointed Hopes, and frustrated Desires;  
Reaping no other Fruit of all his Pain  
Bestow'd whilst in the vale of Tears below,  
But this unhappy Truth, at last to know,  
*That Vanity's our Lot, and all Mankind is Vain* (l.15-24).

Finch claims in this poem that suffering is the usual state of being. Man, who is feeble and whose life is insecure, is born and dies in despair. There is no remedy for his sorrow and all that he can gain from his life is a realisation that "*all Mankind is Vain*". Death, which Finch describes as a withdrawal into the "Land of Darkness", is man's only refuge from torment.

In the verses that follow Finch looks at the different ways in which men and women live out their lives and her purpose is to demonstrate the vanity of life's journey. She begins with the "*studious Boy*" (l.29) who, in his search for "Truths and Mysteries Divine" (l.34), becomes ill with a fever that has seized his "o'er-labour'd Brain" (l.57). His delirium will send him to "Death's concealing Shade" (l.58) and so all he needs to know is,

*That first from Dust we came, and must to Dust return* (l.63).

She goes on to discuss the actions of a "*bolder Youth*" (l.64) who seeks renown in the field of war, but his "hasty Death" (l.100) reveals that honour is a "false Idol" (l.108). She also explores the worthlessness of "*Beauty*" (l.109), that "fantastic Tyrant of an Hour" (l.112), which sways the "coldest Hearts" and the "wisest Heads" (l.111). She refers to Cleopatra with her "conqu'ring Face" (l.156) who was ultimately embraced by "deforming *Death*"

(l.164). Then, the “*Wit*” (l.165) of the poet comes under scrutiny and Finch concludes that in the “Darkness of the abject Grave” (l.197) a writer is unable to respond to praise of his work, even though his reputation may last “near Two Thousand Years” (l.187). Finally, Finch explains that the man who has lived a life of “*Luxury*” (l.201) goes to his grave despised and his “pamper’d Carcase” (l.253) then becomes a feast for the worms. She is preoccupied with death and suggests that all human action and struggle is useless because it inevitably leads to the grave.

As Finch ends the poem she highlights once again that all human ambition terminates in death, although she eventually concedes that man, through religious faith, is able to appreciate his purpose on earth. Therefore, she ends the poem less pessimistically than when she started. She argues that while “humane Art and Industry” (l.290) has built the Seven Wonders of the World, God, the “Architect of Heaven” (l.292) is the most powerful Creator. Also that man during his time on earth should keep heaven in his view as the sole concern worth working towards. She writes:

Remember then, to fix thy Aim on High,  
Project, and build on t’other side the Sky,  
For, after all thy vain Expence below,  
Thou canst no Fame, no lasting Pleasure know;  
No Good, that shall not thy Embraces fly,  
Or thou from that be in a Moment caught,  
Thy Spirit to new Claims, new Int’rests brought,  
Whilst unconcern’d thy secret Ashes lye,  
Or stray about the Globe, *O Man ordain’d to Dye!* (l.293-301)

Death is the only certainty and man should not waste his time on fruitless earthly occupations. Finch has now turned away from the political disappointments of the here and now to contemplate the rewards of faith in the afterlife. She understands that life is a preparation for the consolation of being with God in death. Her negative view of earthly life results in the consistently bleak outlook with which she colours the representation of

human experience. In this poem she fails to consider human beings in relation to any kind of joy, such as the pleasures associated with family life and friendship, and depicts men and women as isolated individuals. In view of the political and personal turmoil that she experienced at this time her gloom may have been justified. In 'All is Vanity' Finch insists upon the sobering realisation that man is "*ordain'd to Dye!*" and that apart from the happy prospect of death and being with God, life on earth has no meaning.

In 'An Invocation to Sleep' Finch calls upon 'Sleep' to give her some respite from her responsibilities. Brower argues that in this poem "she can play with her sadness" and that her mood "still presents a refreshing contrast with the deadly solemnity of eighteenth-century nocturnal meditations" (65). However, the feminine language and delicate tone of the poem belies a darkly pessimistic mood. Its ultimate message is again that death is the supreme sanctuary. Reed observes that "Sleep" and "Death" (47) were common themes in meditative verse of the late seventeenth century, and Finch is writing within this vogue. Nevertheless, the poem is more than a poetic pose and rather reflects her struggle to maintain her equilibrium in the face of adversity. She begins the poem with two enquiries:

How shall I wooe thee gentle rest,  
To a sad Mind, with cares oppress'd?  
By what soft means, shall I invite  
Thy Pow'rs into my Soul to night? (l.1-4)

She adopts the tone of a lover and relies upon her modest charms as a means of encouraging "gentle rest" to take possession of her "Soul". Her "sad Mind" which is burdened with "cares" reveals that her melancholy is caused by her anxieties and troubles. She goes on to explain that she will lie in "darkness" (l.6) for the arrival of "Gentle sleep" (l.5) and that she will wait in a "Silence" (l.9) as deep as the "Turkish State" (l.10). Then she explains:

Whilst, still as Death, I will be found,



My arms, by one another bound;  
And my dull lids, so clos'd shall be  
As if already seal'd by thee (l.11-14).

Finch draws an analogy between sleep and death and in depicting herself as a lifeless form suggests a preference for death. Sickels points out that the image of “folded arms” was common in personifications of ‘Melancholy’ and cites the example of Joseph Warton’s poem, ‘Ode to Fancy’ in which he writes:

Haste, Fancy, from the scenes of folly,  
To meet the Matron Melancholy,  
Goddess of the tearful eye,  
That loves to fold her arms, and sigh.

Sickels suggests that the idea might be derived from John Fletcher’s ‘Song’, in which he writes:

Welcome, folded arms, and fixed eyes,  
A sigh that piercing mortifies,  
A look that’s fasten’d to the ground,  
A tongue chained up, without a sound!

In her poem Finch fuses together well-known images of ‘Melancholy’ with her depiction of ‘Sleep’. Her “arms by one another bound” are like Fletcher’s “folded arms”, and her “Silence” is like Fletcher’s “tongue chained up, without a sound”. Hinnant observes that the “image of a recumbent women preparing for sleep by enfolding her arms in a dark and silent room conveys a sense of torpor that is clearly different from full consciousness” (204), and he argues that she is representing a “kind of spiritual death” (205). Indeed, in this imagery Finch seems to be alluding to an inherently depressive condition that has exhausted all of her enthusiasm for life. She continues to direct her speech to ‘Sleep’:

Thus, I’ll dispose the outward part,  
Wou’d I cou’d quiet too my Heart.  
But, in its overburthen’d stead  
Behold I offer thee, my head;  
My head, I better can command,  
And that, I bow beneath thy hand (l.15-20).

It is clear from her sentiments that Finch does not expect to invoke 'Sleep' and that ultimately it does not have the power to soothe her anxious feelings. She can mimic its pose and control her thoughts but what she is unable to do is calm her "overburthen'd" heart.

She now digresses and compares herself with Adam, the "first great Father" (l.22) who gave no more to 'Sleep' than she herself is offering. He lay on a "flow'ry bank" (l.23) to invoke sleep so that God could create Eve. This theme is taken from Genesis 2:21 which states: "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept". As Hinnant points out, the comparison is "puzzling" (205). He notices that 'Sleep' in this poem is "at once an experience that gives new life ... and an experience that is akin to death" (204). Finch is perhaps suggesting that she seeks some kind of rejuvenation from sleep, a new life in fact, and one that does not include depression. However, she may also be alluding to her frustrations as a woman. For instance, she goes on to say that when Adam woke up he was immediately drawn to "Eve's fair bosome" (l.30) and was pleased to "admit his rightfull claim" (l.31). The language is political but she implies a sense of being personally controlled. According to the bible women are to be dominated and 'claimed' by men. This reference to the subservient position of women might reveal an underlying disappointment and an irritation with womanhood that conflicts with the feminine persona that she presents in this poem. As Hinnant suggests, "one might argue that the dejection at the heart of the speaker's quest for sleep is not directed at a specific object at all but at an archaic and lost domain – the secret and unattainable horizon of all her aspirations and desires" (205).

In her final address to 'Sleep' she writes:

For, if thou wilt not hear my Pray'rs,  
Till I have vanquish'd all my cares,  
Thou'lt stay, 'till kinder Death supplies thy place,  
The surer Friend, tho' with the harsher face (l.35-38).

She once again refers to her “cares” and finds a solution only in death, where rest is guaranteed. The fact that she considers death to be the only satisfactory resolution to her problems is a sign of her depression, a state of mind which only allows her to view the world negatively. In this poem she presents herself as someone who is suffering from a depressive illness and who is also overwhelmed by cares which are beyond her control. In this sense it differs from the previous two poems in which she only describes a melancholy ‘with’ cause. However, it anticipates ‘Ardelia to Melancholy’ and ‘The Spleen’ in which she concentrates on representing and describing her causeless despair.

While in ‘Ardelia to Melancholy’<sup>29</sup> Finch uses the language of warfare and political oppression, the depression that she represents does not stem from the revolution but is a portrayal of her depressive illness, her sadness ‘without’ cause. She describes her melancholy as a settled and confirmed state which may suggest that she was troubled with depression before the revolution began. McGovern comments that “even in her early twenties she was travelling to Tunbridge Wells to take the waters for her health” (160). The poem is not an ‘invocation’ to melancholy as are many similar poems of the period, nor is it a celebration of its qualities as in Milton’s ‘Il Penseroso’ where he writes:

hail! Thou Goddess sage and holy,  
Hail, divinest Melancholy! (l.11-12)

It is more reminiscent of ‘Melancholy’ (1677), a poem by Nahum Tate, poet laureate in the 1690s, who describes the mood as a “Malignant Humour” which is “Poyson” (l.1) to his

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<sup>29</sup> Ardelia is Finch’s pen name.

blood. Similarly, Finch represents melancholy as a malevolent entity that destroys her health and happiness.

In the opening lines she describes the various ways in which she has attempted to cope with her authoritative and overbearing enemy, and expresses her dismay because all of her endeavours have failed. She writes:

At last, my old inveterate foe,  
No opposition shalt thou know.  
Since I by struggling, can obtain  
Nothing, but encrease of pain,  
I will att last, no more do soe,  
Tho' I confesse, I have apply'd  
Sweet mirth, and musick, and have try'd  
A thousand other arts beside,  
To drive thee from my darken'd breast,  
Thou, who hast banish'd all my rest (l.1-10).

She actively searches for a suitable remedy but nothing that she has tried so far has removed this unwelcome visitor from her “darken'd breast”. Melancholy overpowers Finch and confines her to a life in the shade. It also prevents her from taking refuge in the restorative powers of “rest”. She points out that all her efforts to rid herself of this opponent simply increase her pain, and she complains:

But, though sometimes, a short reprieve they gave,  
Unable they, and far too weak, to save;  
All arts to quell, did but augment thy force,  
As rivers check'd, break with a wilder course (l.11-14).

The periods of respite merely lead her into a false sense of security. When she has experienced a “short reprieve” from her gloom her suffering returns with deeper intensity and increases its strength like a river that has been obstructed and diverted from its course, only to flow with renewed vigour in an alternative direction.

She goes on to explain that she has also sought to alleviate her depression in the comfort and security of friendship. She thought that ‘Melancholy’ would certainly be intimidated when faced with such powerful allies. She writes confidently:

And to myself, I boasting said,  
Now I a conqu’rer sure shall be,  
The end of all my conflicts, see,  
And noble triumph, wait on me;  
My dusky, sullen foe, will sure  
N’er this united charge endure (l.19-24).

But despite her certainty this attempt to defeat her adversary was also unsuccessful. She comments that the “reed” (l.25) of friendship on which she relied for support broke and “pierc’d my hand” (l.26). This image of physical violence implies that her depression has a brutal quality. However, she emerges from her despair and applies herself to other distractions which are temporarily fruitful as she relates:

Still, some new object, or new int’reast came  
And loos’d the bonds, and quite disolv’d the claim.

‘Melancholy’ is her master and she is the slave. When her slackened “bonds” become tightened again she then turns to the “Muse” in an effort to free herself, and writes:

I invok’d a Muse,  
And Poetry wou’d often use,  
To guard me from thy Tyrant pow’r;  
And to oppose thee ev’ry hour  
New troops of fancy’s, did I chuse (l.29-33).

However, Finch and her “Muse” together are no match for ‘Melancholy’. As Hinnant observes, Finch opposes her enemy with a “fractured multiplicity that never moves beyond the confines of a set of particulars” (202). He argues that in using a series of “divided and dispersed” interests to combat “an unchanging entity” (202) she can never hope to overcome her depression. Indeed, Finch’s varied and erratic responses to her condition, which to some extent mirror the capricious nature of ‘Melancholy’, are merely diversions

and do not serve as a concerted effort to combat the illness: they may represent manic spurts of energy. Only the production of the poem itself represents any kind of fruitful effort to understand and perhaps alleviate the symptoms of her depression. She concludes:

Alas! in vain, for all agree  
To yield me Captive up to thee,  
And heav'n, alone, can sett me free.  
Thou, through my life, wilt with me goe,  
And make the passage, sad, and slow.  
All, that cou'd ere thy ill got rule, invade,  
Their useless arms, before thy feet have laid;  
The Fort is thine, now ruin'd, all within,  
Whilst by decays without, thy Conquest too, is seen (l.34-42).

She is 'Melancholy's' prisoner and only in death will she be liberated. She feels completely overwhelmed by the heavy burden of depression and her internal misery is now visible in her outward appearance. Melancholy has become an intrinsic part of her identity both physically and mentally. Finch's use of language throughout the poem is undoubtedly influenced by the political situation. For instance, "foe", "noble triumph", "Tyrant", "invade", "arms", "Fort" and "Conquest" are all associated with male aggression and is the language of struggle. It seems as if she conveniently adopts this style of expression as a way of linking her depression to what she believes to be the oppressive nature of patriarchal rule, even though the depression she is describing seems to have no apparent cause.

In 'The Spleen, A Pindarik Poem' she analyses depression 'without' cause in a wider context. As Spencer observes, "there is a much more ambitious attempt to understand the implications of this disorder" (64). In 1701 when the poem was published it was a subject very much in vogue. The change to 'spleen' from 'melancholy' as in the title of the previous poem, reflects her engagement with the scientific and medical discourse of the time. Reed comments that "towards the end of the century there is some tendency to

reserve “melancholy” for use in the more general sense of “sadness”, and to employ the word “spleen” as a technical term” for melancholia, although as she points out, the “words were still used interchangeably” (25). In her use of the Pindaric ode form Finch was also writing within a trend. Margaret Ann Doody states that the form was “used for current events” and that it is “almost the most journalistic of poetic forms in its turning to the topical, but it seeks to give large archetypal meaning to the history it discusses” (1985, 255). Finch is writing on a fashionable topic of which she also has personal experience and this increases the authenticity of her debate. She was possibly inspired to write on a medical subject by Cowley’s Pindaric ode, ‘To Dr Scarborough’, in which he celebrates the “wondrous *Art*” (l.19) of the physician whose “*Medicine*” was a “*Counter-poyson to the Age*” (l.196). Whereas Cowley praises Scarborough’s “*Magick Virtues*” (l.65) which keep “*Disease, and Death in aw*” (l.66), Finch writes of a condition that baffles the “studious Pains” (l.141) of even the greatest physicians. Her choice of poetic form was also one that suited her subject matter. The “perplexing Form” (l.5) of ‘the spleen’, which continually changes its “Shape” (l.4), is like the shifting and varying form of the Pindaric ode. Doody remarks that in the ode the stanzas are “large and irregular sections or paragraphs of poetry, that may or may not be matched in rhyme scheme or metre by any other such section” (250). David Fairer also suggests that the form became “associated with poetic ‘genius’, a brilliance that broke the rules, and indeed a certain impatience, recklessness, even indiscipline were regarded as appropriate” (2003, 125). Nevertheless, while the fluid nature of the Pindaric ode form was particularly suitable for Finch’s purpose, it is important to point out that ‘The Spleen’ was also an exercise in poetic control. As Backscheider observes, “although the Pindaric ode in general and Finch’s in particular have been called “loose” or even “wandering”, that is inaccurate” (78). She states that ‘The Spleen’ displays a “searching intellectual argument, that is ... both economical and tight” (78).

Finch begins her poem with a query: “What art thou, SPLEEN, which ev’ry thing dost ape? (1.1). She knows that there is no definitive answer to this question but in the remainder of the poem describes the various signs and symptoms of the spleen and the different ways in which it manifests itself in each person. She writes:

Thou *Proteus* to abus’d Mankind,  
Who never yet thy real Cause cou’d find,  
Or fix thee to remain in one continued Shape  
Still varying thy perplexing Form  
Now a Dead Sea thou’lt represent,  
A Calm of stupid Discontent,  
Then, dashing on the Rocks wilt rage into a Storm.  
Trembling sometimes thou dost appear,  
Dissolved into a Panick Fear (1.2-10).

The cause of the disease is a mystery and it can reveal itself in moods of uneasy calm, anger or terror. She suggests that because of the complexities of the disease, diagnosis and cure are virtually impossible. Physician Richard Blackmore comments that the spleen is “attended with a long Train of Complaints, and a sad Variety of Sufferings” (1725, 17) and that patients are inconstant in their “Temper and Passions” (26). William Stukeley, also a physician<sup>30</sup>, remarks that the “symptoms of this malady are so infinitely various, that [the victim] suffer[s] in every limb and member and viscus, even in the whole body to such a degree, that it appears like witchcraft” (1723, 65). Finch goes one step further and observes that

In ev’ry One thou dost possess,  
New are thy Motions, and thy Dress (1.44-45).

This corresponds with Solomon’s view today that “no two people have the same depression” (173). He states that “like snowflakes, depressions are always unique, each based on the same essential principles but each boasting an irreproducibly complex shape”

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<sup>30</sup> Two years after her death, Stukeley included Finch’s poem in his publication, *Of the Spleen, its Description and History ... 1722* (1723). In his preface he comments that “the admirable poem on the spleen (which I obtain’d leave to insert) I judg’d necessary, to help out my own description of the disease”.



(173). Finch goes on to argue that the spleen may whisper false “Griefs” or “Sorrows” (1.48) into the ear of a “list’ning Friend” who sits in a “Grove” (1.46), and their pain is expressed in a “Sigh” or a “Tear” (1.49). Alternatively, amongst a “light, and vulgar Croud” (1.50) it presents itself in its “Slaves” (1.51) as “Laughters unprovok’d” (1.52). McGovern suggests that these are the “manic-depressive stages that plague a splenetic” (170). Finch also refers to the dreadful visions that sufferers are afflicted with in the “Midnight Hour” (1.14), and writes:

On Sleep intruding dost thy Shadows spread,  
Thy gloomy Terrours round the silent Bed,  
And croud with boading Dreams the Melancholy Head (1.11-13).

In the silence of the night fears grow out of all proportion. She explains that Brutus, who had “all Rome’s Fortunes rolling in his Breast” (1.22), one night had a “monstrous Vision” (1.20) and was “vanquish’d by the Spleen” (1.25). Here she is making the point that even the greatest and strongest of men succumb to the unassailable power of the spleen. She explains that “ev’ry Art” (1.128) and “all Remedies” (1.129) have been tried in an effort to cure the disease but nothing has been successful. Mild infusions of “*Indian Leaf*” (1.130) have been used and the “*Eastern Berry*” (1.131), as well as “nobler Liquors” (1.132). Music has been tried “in vain” (1.133) because if it is too soothing the sufferer becomes “sad” (1.136) and if it is “too light” it drives them “gayly Mad” (1.137). Sena observes that “by recommending music, liquor, and drugs as splenetic curatives, [Finch] is reflecting, not merely personal remedies, but the collective medical wisdom of her age” (1.114).

Finch implies in this poem that physicians are wasting their time searching for a physical cause of the spleen. She argues that it has been an intrinsic part of the human condition since the fall of man, and writes:

Falsly, the Mortal Part we blame  
Of our deprest, and pond’rous Frame,

Which, till the First degrading Sin  
Let Thee, its dull Attendant, in,  
Still with the Other did comply,  
Nor clogg'd the Active Soul, dispos'd to fly,  
And range the Mansions of it's native Sky (l.26-32).

Hinnant states that here Finch “is less concerned with the humoral pathology of the Renaissance or with the emerging mechanical and chemical hypotheses of the late seventeenth century than with an explanation that is moral and religious” (219). Indeed, she believes that the spleen is not caused by our “Mortal Part” because when it was free from the “First degrading Sin” it worked happily in conjunction with the “Active Soul” and “the Other”, which can be interpreted as the uncorrupted and innocent mind. In other words, before the fall, body, mind and soul worked perfectly together. At the point of the original sin in came its “dull Attendant”, the spleen. McGovern argues that “the poet here identifies the malady with Original Sin, claiming that it is not the body that should be blamed for the disease but the soul” (169). However, this explanation requires further interpretation. While it is true that the purity of the soul is tainted by the first sin linking it to pain and guilt, Finch is also suggesting that from the tree of knowledge came uncertainty and that this ‘doubt’ is what the spleen preys upon. She continues to explain that before the fall, man, in the “fertile Garden in the fragrant East” (l.35) could not be overcome by “united Odours” (l.36), but since then the “Jonquille o’ercomes the feeble Brain” (l.40) and causes “Pain” (l.41). A world with depression in it cannot be enjoyed in the same way as before and the beauties of nature have lost their appeal. While it is possible for some “offensive scent” to “appease” (l.42) the power of the spleen, man has essentially exchanged pure “Pleasure” for a “short, and nauseous Ease” (43). Rogers comments that Finch’s “emphasis on the sense of smell probably derives from the standard use of pungent smelling salts to allay hysteric fits” (23). According to Finch, the spleen has disrupted the

equilibrium of body, mind and soul and there is little that the powers of nature can do to assist in regaining that perfect balance.

She also demonstrates that because of the indeterminate nature of the condition it is easy for people to feign the illness. For instance, the “sullen” (l.91) husband uses it as an excuse to be ill-humoured with his wife, and the drunkard “Pretends” (l.96) to suffer as a reason to drown his “Cares” (l.96) in a “purple Show’r” (l.98). The “Coquette” (l.99) adopts the spleen as one of her many poses in a bid to make herself more interesting to the “Fop” (l.108). She is at once “Light, Impertinent, and Vain” (l.102) and then “Assumes a soft, a melancholy Air” (l.103). Finch argues that these are the “fantastic Harms” (l.112) and “Tricks” (l.113) of the spleen that engage the “weaker Sort” (l.114). More seriously, it causes religious doubt and the gifts of “bounteous Heav’n” (l.122) are perverted by the “niggard Voice” (l.122) of the spleen. She explains that the teachings of the bible, which exist to enlighten the experience of man on earth, are mistakenly interpreted by “Vot’ries” (l.125) who are under the influence of the disease. They then flee to “Deserts” or live in “Cells reclus’d” (l.124) and convince themselves that they are living in isolation for the sake of religion, when in truth they are suffering from the spleen. As Backscheider observes, “the spleen’s transformative power over the delightful and good ... threatens more than happiness and productivity in life; it becomes a devastating barrier to faith, the essential requirement of salvation” (76).

While Finch indicates on several occasions in this poem that men and women are equally prone to the spleen, she raises other issues which reveal that gender distinctions are drawn between the male and female experience. For instance, she points out that in women it is referred to as “Vapours” (l.53) which rise from “o’erheated Passions” (l.54), suggesting that the spleen in women is thought to stem from the female reproductive organs. The

clouds which rise to the “attractive Brain” (1.55) then descend “thro’ the o’er-cast, and show’ring Eyes” (1.57). The tears work to soften the husband’s heart and the wife wins the “disputed Point” (1.59), and so “Lordly *Man*” (1.61) who was “born to Imperial Sway” (1.61) slavishly obeys a “*Woman*, arm’d with *Spleen*” (1.63). The spleen gives women the power to subvert the natural authority of men. In a further point, Finch disassociates her own condition from the usual “Vapours” of women by embedding her own history of the spleen within a stanza that is devoted to the association between the intellect and depression. She observes that “The *Fool*” (1.64) often claims to have the spleen in order to make himself appear less dull, because, as she writes of the spleen,

sometimes, thou dost presume  
Into the ablest Heads to come (1.68-69).

The disease forces “Men of Thoughts refin’d” (1.70) away from people of “unequal Sence” (1.71) and into solitude where they are susceptible to the spleen. She too, in the loneliness of her intellectual activity is plagued by it. She writes:

O’er me alas! thou dost too much prevail:  
I feel thy Force, whilst I against thee rail;  
I feel my Verse decay, and my cramp’t Numbers fail.  
Thro’ thy black Jaundice I all Objects see,  
As Dark, and Terrible as Thee,  
My Lines decry’d, and my Employment thought  
An useless Folly, or presumptuous Fault (1.74-80).

In the act of writing she is tormented by doubts, firstly because she is convinced that her writing is not good enough and secondly that for a woman to be writing at all is a “presumptuous Fault”. Hellegers comments that the “black Jaundice” through which Finch views the world is equated with the harsh valuations imposed upon her work by a society which has no place for a woman poet” (209). However, Finch goes on to defend her actions by stating that she loves writing poetry and reveals a genuine dedication to her art:

Whilst in the *Muses* Paths I stray,  
Whilst in their Groves, and by their secret Springs

My Hand delights to trace unusual Things,  
And deviates from the known, and common way (l.81-84).

She prefers this activity to working with “Silks” (85) and painting on “Glass” (87) which are typical feminine activities of the time. Hinnant argues that here Finch reveals a “sense of purpose that is somehow untouched by the dark and demonic uncertainties of the spleen” (223). Nevertheless, in her poetic ambitions she is straying into the sphere of men. This is a departure from the accepted domestic and non-intellectual routes open to women and it presents her with a dilemma which she is able to ignore in her more contented moments, but which takes on a greater significance when she is depressed. Her guilt concerning her creative aspirations becomes part of her depression and adds a gendered aspect to her suffering. Finch suffers more than “Men of Thoughts refin’d” because like them she finds the activity of writing lonely and depressing, only for her she has the added burden of being a female poet.

As Finch concludes her poem she makes a further gender comment, and writes:

Tho’ the Physicians greatest Gains,  
Altho’ his growing Wealth he sees  
Daily increas’d by Ladies Fees,  
Yet dost thou baffle all his studious Pains (l.138-141).

Her point, that it is mainly “Ladies” who consult the physicians, corresponds with the dominant view set out in medical texts, that wealthy women are more susceptible to the spleen. Medically speaking they are not considered to be as physically robust as men and women who work, and hence their nerves are weaker. For instance, William Stukeley comments: “that women have it more frequently than men, is accountable from the specific delicacy and softness of their composure, their more tender frame, and the less elastic *compages* of their solids” (73). In addition, he links their vulnerability to nervous complaints to “the womb”. He argues that “symptoms of menstrual suppression and spleen

are alike” and that “not unjustly did the ancients charge the spleen and womb with this malady” (73). He also suggests that refined women are more susceptible because they “generally use less exercise than the men in all civil countries” (73). Sena observes that “the very attributes of femininity – delicacy, refinement, frailty – increased a woman’s vulnerability to the ‘English Malady’” (1971, 109). In making her point, that doctors grow rich at the expense of women, Finch implies that the field of medicine is conveniently finding reasons why the spleen is a female malady. She highlights that male physicians have no more idea about the cause of the spleen than anyone else and cites the example of Richard Lower (1631-1691), a physician and physiologist who studied the nervous system:

Not skilful Lower thy Source cou’d find,  
Or thro’ the well-dissected Body trace  
The secret, the mysterious ways,  
By which thou dost surprise, and prey upon the Mind (l.142-145).

She goes on to say that Lower himself became a “Slave” (l.149) to the spleen and eventually committed suicide. Meek argues that “the male science that attempts to “catch” and contain hysteria fails. Finch, on the other hand, finishes her poem. In embracing the complex elusive qualities of hysteria, and submitting to its power, Finch’s distinctly feminine mode prevails over conventional medical discourse in its diagnoses of hysteria” (122). Certainly, Finch represents depression as the supreme conqueror and although she writes about it as a condition that she is greatly troubled by, she chooses a poetic form which is normally used to celebrate its subject. She does this in order to demonstrate that she is in complete awe of the spleen because it is something that defies human understanding. All that she can suggest in this poem is that it is an inherent part of the human condition.

In ‘On Affliction’ and ‘All is Vanity’ Finch’s voice is confident and clear in its message, that in times of trouble and distress religion is the anchor that provides stability. In these

poems the cause for her despair lies in the disruption of the Glorious Revolution. In this case she is able to turn to her religious faith for comfort. There is no wavering or uncertainty in her tone, and no apology for being a woman poet as she speaks out in a politically hostile world. The hesitation in her voice begins to creep in when she discusses her depression 'without' cause. In 'An Invocation to Sleep' the suicidal tone indicates a turning away from her religious beliefs. She insinuates that in this kind of depression she finds it hard to gain consolation from religion. However, she does mention Adam and the Garden of Eden showing that her devotion to God is never far from her mind. This reference also reveals some kind of contentious view of gender relations as she points out the "rightfull claim" of Adam over Eve. In this poem her "cares become confused with her causeless despair and her purpose for writing the poem is less clear. In 'Ardelia to Melancholy' the enemy is not those who forced James to abdicate but 'Melancholy' itself. It is an opponent that harasses her at random and she has no idea of when it is going to strike or in what manner. She does try to cure the condition by using various methods but to no avail, and consequently depression undermines her dignity and makes her journey through life "sad, and slow". Through her use of language it is evident that Finch considers her opponent to be a male aggressor which again intimates that she is not entirely comfortable with the way in which women are considered to be subservient to men. In 'The Spleen' she explores the relationship between depression and gender and suggests that while in many respects it is considered to be a female malady, women are being taken advantage of by the male medical profession. In this poem she mentions that her "Verse" decays when she is writing under the influence of the spleen, yet ironically the poem itself was, and perhaps still is, her most successful. Depression in fact inspires her creativity rather than subdues it. In the first two poems in this group religion is the rock that keeps Finch steadfast, but in the last two poems it is the poems themselves that provide her with something positive to hold on to during her bouts of depression. It is likely that in the

process of writing these poems Finch was able to gain a better understanding of her condition and recognise its implications in her life. 'The Spleen' in particular is a self-assured statement and stands as an important contribution to the literature of depression. Rather than fettering or constraining 'the spleen' in verse, it serves as an enduring account of her attempt to demystify depression and bring the subject of mental illness into the public arena. The fact that she is a woman poet writing so skilfully on a topic that affects both men and women brings a sense of equality to her writing, and secures her a place in the canon of eighteenth-century poetry.

That Finch felt moved to write about her depression at all, reveals its significance in her life experience. There is an obvious cause for her sorrow following the revolution which completely changed the direction of her life. However, she had already resigned her post as Maid of Honour and the change probably had more impact on Heneage, whose career was effectively over at a young age. Also, their new lifestyle enabled Finch to apply herself to her writing so this might be construed as a positive change. Nevertheless, she was subject to fits of depression and the numerous references to her despair in her writing suggests that her dark moods blighted her life. Her religious beliefs, which she represents throughout the poems, often allowed her to anticipate the consolations in death and heaven but did not always give her the strength to cope with her depression. In taking her life and work together it might be possible to infer that Finch suffered from manic depression. Lady Marrow pointed out that even when Finch was suffering from the spleen she was "very diverting". If she was animated and talkative then she could have been in the manic phase of the illness, although this kind of behaviour was considered to be a symptom of the spleen as Blackmore explains: "Sometimes [splenetics] are gay, cheerful, and in good Humour" (26). Nevertheless, in 'Ardelia to Melancholy' the "mirth" and "music" and "thousand other arts" that she tries in an effort to cure her melancholy, may suggest a



manic response to her depressive phases. Also, the “Calm” and the “rage” that she talks about in ‘The Spleen’ may be indicative of intense mood swings. It may also explain why she is able to produce such astute and carefully constructed poems whilst suffering from a depressive illness. As Jamison points out, “poetic or artistic genius, when infused with these fitful and inconstant moods, can become a powerful crucible for imagination and experience” (2). In ‘The Spleen’ Finch attempts to defend the position of intellectual women and links her depression to her creativity. This may indeed imply that it was not just her role as a female poet that undermined her confidence, but that the rigours of the creative act itself contributed to her confusing, variable and challenging depressive moods.

“Single we have all the spleen”: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the female malady

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The topic of melancholy, vapours and the spleen appears frequently in the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762). Her understanding was that depression was more common in women than in men, and that it was generally caused by an idle lifestyle. She thought that the way to avoid being plagued by the condition was to keep busy and she spent her own life in perpetual activity. Much of her time was occupied in literary endeavours and as well as her letters she wrote essays, plays, poetry and prose. Some of her poems are melancholy and were written in response to a doomed love affair, although she also wrote ‘A Receipt to Cure the Vapours’, a brief poem about women and the spleen. Her work first appeared in print in 1714 in the form of a fictional letter in Addison’s *Spectator* under the pseudonym of ‘Lady President’. Isobel Grundy comments that this is the “only contribution to *The Spectator* to be written by a woman” (2010, 2). In 1716 *Court Poems* was published which included three of her eclogues, but without her permission and her name. The poems appeared again in 1747 under the direction of Horace Walpole with three more eclogues and a new title, *Six town eclogues: With some other poems*, and bearing on the front cover, ‘By the Rt. Hon. L.M.W.M. While Carol Barash observes that she “scorned publication through booksellers and circulated her early poems primarily in manuscript” (1990, 149) several of them did appear in print throughout her life, either individually or in general collections. She wrote essays on various subjects and nine issues of her periodical *The Nonsense of Common Sense* appeared between 1737 and 1738. Grundy mentions that in this journal Montagu “addressed some topics seldom met with in women’s writing, such as industrial wages, interest rates, and censorship” (5). In 1763 the year after her death *Letters of the Right Honourable Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Written, during her travels in Europe, Asia and Africa, to persons of distinction, men of*

*letters, etc. ... Which contain, ... accounts of the policy and manners of the Turks.*, was published. The preface was written by her friend the writer Mary Astell and is dated 1724. It is these letters, now known as the Turkish Embassy letters, for which she is mainly appreciated as a writer today. Her other literary friends included William Congreve, John Gay, Alexander Pope and John, Lord Hervey and she was also patron to her cousin, Henry Fielding. She quarrelled with Pope in 1722 for reasons unknown and their enmity was played out in their poetry. Apart from her writing she was also noted for her involvement in introducing smallpox inoculation to England in the 1720s, a procedure she had witnessed during her time in Turkey. She was still being praised for her contribution to this practice in *The Universal family physician, and surgeon* published later in the century, which refers to her as “the ingenious and celebrated Lady Mary Wortley Montagu” (1796, 50).

Her experience of melancholy and the way in which she discusses melancholy in general in her letters, has not been widely explored. Robert Halsband in his biography of Montagu does refer to “her depression” (1957, 31) in the early years of her marriage. He suggests that there was a “disparity” (34) of temperaments between Montagu and her husband and that this was the cause of her melancholy. He comments that “despite a hard, unemotional exterior, her personality did have a capacity for tender feelings” whereas Wortley “seemed dour and humourless, without any genuine tenderness to match hers” (34). He argues that her love for the young Italian, Francesco Algarotti some years later, was “an outlet for her bitterly repressed emotions” (158). Grundy, in a more recent biography, pays less attention to the melancholy that Montagu experienced as a young bride and comments that on the whole at this time she was “all energy and almost all good humour” (1999, 67). She looks closely at her letters written in the 1720s in which Montagu responds to her sister Lady Mar’s depression. During this period Lady Mar, who was living in exile in Paris with her

husband, suffered from severe mental health problems. Grundy observes that Montagu “appears at her most flippant and brittle” (223) in these letters even though her sister was “sliding gradually towards clinical depression” (224). She suggests that her “jokiness may look like a serious error of judgment, an attempt at jolly along which must surely have been counter-productive” and that “her motives are impossible to read” (224). Grundy argues that she “saw her sister’s depression as something to deny” (248). However, this chapter suggests that Montagu’s early letters help to explain why she responded to Lady Mar’s depression in the way that she did. Her view, that idleness and solitude were the cause of her own melancholy, inspired her to advise her sister that “Air, Exercise and Company are the best med’cines” (*MC*, 23 June 1727, II, 77) for depression. She largely maintained these opinions throughout her life and her letters written in her old age, which are also explored in this study, display a similar attitude. Additionally, this chapter examines Montagu’s infatuation with Algarotti, a situation that caused her intense mental suffering and in which she was unable to adopt the same counsel that she had offered to her sister some years previously. As Grundy remarks, “love kept Lady Mary mostly solitary and musing” (363).

Montagu was the daughter of Lady Mary Fielding and Lord Evelyn Pierrepont. Grundy comments that she “sprang from two families lavishly endowed with rank, wealth, and power, as well as with ability and achievement” (1). She had two younger sisters, Frances (Lady Mar) and Evelyn, and a brother William who was the youngest of the siblings. She was a pretty and gifted child and at the age of eight her beauty and talents were toasted by the eminent members of the fashionable Kit-Cat Club of which her father was a member. In 1692 when she was aged thirteen her mother died. In 1712 at the age of twenty-three her father negotiated a marriage contract between herself and Edward Wortley Montagu. This was unsuccessful because of Edward’s refusal to entail his assets to any possible

future male heir. However, the couple were in love and so they eloped and married on 23 August that year without a contract. For the first two and half years of their marriage she lived a lonely life in various country residences while Edward, a Whig politician, was frequently away from home on business.

She quickly began to complain of the tedium and solitude of her life, a circumstance which she believed made her susceptible to melancholy. She wrote to Wortley on the subject:

I continue indifferently well, and endeavor as much as I can to preserve my selfe from Spleen and Melancholy, not for my own sake ... but in the condition I am, I believe it may be of very ill consequence; yet passing whole days alone, as I do, I do not allways find it possible.

Montagu is pregnant with their first child and she is concerned that her melancholy will have a detrimental effect upon her physical health, but in “passing whole days alone” she feels that it is not a state of mind which is easy to avoid. She goes on to assert that the “idle Mind will sometimes fall into Contemplations that serve for nothing but to ruine the Health, destroy good Humour, hasten old Age and wrinkles, and bring on an Habitual Melancholy” (*MC*, c.6 Dec. 1712, I, 172). While she is fully aware of the consequences of brooding on the negative aspects of life, in the next letter it is evident that she continues to do so. She refers to her husband as a “Man of busynesse” but describes her own existence as repetitive and banal: “I write and read till I can’t see, and then I walk; sleep succeeds” (*MC*, 8 Dec. 1712, I, 173). A few days later she writes again to Wortley: “I am alone without any Amusements to take up my thoughts, I am in Circumstances in which melancholy is apt to prevail” (*MC*, c.13 Dec. 1712, I, 176). Two years later the loneliness and monotony of her life are still apparent and she also complains of Wortley’s lack of interest in her. She moans:

you write seldom and with so much indifference as shows you hardly think of me at all ... You should consider solitude and spleen (the consequence of Solitude) is apt to give the most melancholy Ideas, and there needs at least tender Letters and kind

expressions to hinder uneasynesses allmost inseparable from absence (*MC*, c.24 Nov. 1714, I, 236).

It is obvious in this letter that her husband's inattentiveness adds to her feelings of dejection. In all of these letters Montagu shows a clear understanding of her bouts of despondency. She knows that without sufficient distractions and activities to occupy her mind, especially living in solitude, this makes her ponderous and melancholy. She also observes the link between mind and body and suggests that a persistently negative frame of mind can lead to a "Habitual Melancholy" and "ruine the Health". In 1715 her circumstances changed dramatically when she moved to London to be with Wortley who had recently been appointed junior Commissioner of the Treasury. Here she was an instant success in court society and amongst the literary elite. Her life was full of interest and there is no talk of melancholy in her correspondence. However, she later draws upon her experience and her knowledge of depression to advise her sister on how to guard against it.

Lady Mar's husband John Erskine, Earl of Mar, led the 1715 Jacobite uprising and was compelled to flee to France with his family after it failed. Montagu wrote to her sister constantly during this time and in the letters from 1722 onwards it is noticeable that Lady Mar is seriously depressed. Initially she stops writing to Montagu who complains: "I have had no Answer (Dear Sister) to a long letter that I writ to you a month ago" (*MC*, Apr. 1722, II, 15), and again the following month, "I am surpriz'd at your Silence, which has been very long, and I'm sure is very tedious to me. I have writ 3 times" (*MC*, July 1722, II, 19). By the end of the year she is exasperated and writes: "I have writ you at least five and forty Letters, dear sister, without receiving any answer" (*MC*, 25 Dec. 1722, II, 20). In 1724 a letter does arrive from Lady Mar and this sheds light on her predicament. She explains:

You think me a strange creature I'm sure for being so long without writing to you. All I can say is Lazyness, Stupidity and ill humour have taken such hold upon me that I write to nobody nor have Spirrits to go any where. Perhaps a letter from you may contribute to my Cure (*MC*, n.8, II, 41).

This is a cue for Montagu who proceeds over the next three years to write several letters advising her on how to cure the vapours. Nevertheless, her immediate response is to comment that her sister's excuses for failing to write do not seem "very reasonable" and that "what ever keeps one at home naturally enclines one to write" (*MC*, c.12 Nov. 1724, II, 41). At this time Lady Mar and her family were in serious financial difficulties, a worrying situation which must have greatly contributed to her depressed state of mind. Montagu's seemingly unsympathetic attitude was probably an attempt to disguise her fears for her sister's future. As Grundy observes, Lady Mar "had been liable to depression since her teens" (224). Later, Montagu seems genuinely perturbed by the fact that her sister intends to move from Paris to a country residence and writes: "I can't help being very sorry for your sake to hear that you persist in your Design of retiring" (*MC*, c.10 June 1725, II, 52). Her own experience had taught her that living a solitary and idle life in the country leads to melancholy and that this lifestyle would certainly exacerbate her sister's condition. She attempts to show Lady Mar through the model of her own behaviour how to avoid becoming depressed. For instance, in her next letter she explains that she is now living out of London and writes: "[I] could fall into solitary amusements with a good deal of Taste, but I resist it as a Temptation of Satan, and rather turn my Endeavours to make the World as agreeable to me as I can" (*MC*, July 1725, II, 53). In another letter she is obviously responding to a gloomy epistle from her sister and chides her: "Depend upon it, tis only the Spleen that gives you those Ideas". She also declares that she is "very sorry" for her "ill Health" but hopes that it is now "entirely past". Of herself she explains that she "never was better" and that this is because she rides and mingles in "societies quite to my Taste" (*MC*, Nov. 1726, II, 71). Despite her efforts, this 'lead by example' approach failed

to have any impact on Lady Mar and by 1727 her condition had deteriorated. Montagu becomes horrified by the “monstrous and shocking” tone of her sister’s letters. She scolds her: “I attribute all this to your living so long at Chatton”, and she suggests that a week in Paris would “set things in a better light”. She also advises her on a cure for lowness of spirits which is “not drinking nasty Water but galloping all day, and a moderate Glass of Champaign at Night in good Company”. She believes that “this regimen closely follow’d is one of the most wholsom that can be prescrib’d, and may save one a world of filthy doses and more filthy Doctors’ fees at the Year’s end” (*MC*, May 1727, II, 76). Montagu clearly believes that physicians and their potions are an expense that Lady Mar can do without, particularly for something like the spleen which is easily cured through a change in lifestyle. In addition, interference by doctors simply makes the condition worse. She argues that “Physic and Retirement” are good for nothing but “to break Hearts and spoil Constitutions” (*MC*, 23 June 1727, II, 77). She offers her own advice which is “conducive to Health of Body and Mind”:

As soon as you wake in the morning, lift up your Eyes and consider seriously what will best divert you that Day. Your imagination being then refresh’d by sleep will certainly put in your mind some party of pleasure, which if you execute with prudence will disperse those melancholy vapours which are the foundation of all Distempers (*MC*, July 1727, II, 81).

She undoubtedly thought that women like Lady Mar could cure their own depression and that a change in attitude of mind and in daily habits would suffice. Indeed, it was their responsibility to “divert” themselves and that this was the key to overcoming the spleen. Unfortunately, Lady Mar’s depression was more settled and serious than that which Montagu had experienced in the early years of her marriage and was not so easily cured, and when her sister returned to England in 1728 she was declared insane. Halsband comments that “on 12 July 1728 a lunacy inquisition of three commissioners and a jury of seventeen men found Lady Mar of unsound mind, a lunatic for about four months” (134).



Montagu cared for her sister until Lady Mar's daughter reached the age of twenty-one in 1736, at which point she applied for custody of her mother and won. Although Montagu had experienced only brief and not very critical episodes of melancholy in her early twenties, she had certainly seen its worst effects in her sister over an eight-year period. Nevertheless, she was now freed from the responsibility of her welfare. Her life took a dramatic new turn in March that same year when she met and immediately fell desperately in love with the young Italian, Francesco Algarotti, who had just arrived in England. She was forty-six and he was twenty-four. Halsband states that "his rapid conquest was due to his attractiveness as well as to her susceptibility at that time" (154). When he returned to the Continent six months later she was devastated. Grundy comments that his decision to leave England was one that "plunged Lady Mary into emotional turmoil and despair" (356). In a letter written to him shortly after his departure she expresses her feelings openly: "I am torn by a thousand conflicting feelings ... All that is certain is that I shall love you all my life" (*MC*, Sept. 1736, II, 501). In another she writes: "I am a thousand times more to be pitied than the sad Dido, and I have a thousand more reasons to kill myself" (*MC*, 10 Sept. 1736, II, 501). Over the course of the next three years she continued to write to him although he was not always so quick to respond. She complains: "I am losing patience ... I dare not go into detail about my feelings ... crushed as I am by your silence" (*MC*, 9 Aug. 1738, II, 505). In 1738 she began another correspondence with a Lady Pomfret, whom she had met in London but who had recently moved to Italy with her family. In these letters, as well as those to Algarotti, it seems apparent that she has become disillusioned with her life in London. She repeatedly moans to Lady Pomfret of the "mists and fogs" of England and explains that she is "very much infected with the epidemical dullness" of the place. In fact, she appears to be suffering from what George Cheyne would describe as the 'English Malady', a melancholy partly caused by England's variable and damp weather. She comments that "'tis necessary to have a very uncommon

constitution not to be tainted with the distempers of our climate” (*MC*, 26 July 1738, II, 119). A few months later she suggests that she might join Lady Pomfret in her retirement in Italy but that she has been “so much accustomed to wish in vain, that I dare not flatter myself with so pleasing an idea”. Her tone is despondent and again she reminds her friend that “we are wrapt up in fogs, and consequential stupidity” (*MC*, Oct. 1738, II, 123). Clearly, since her meeting with Algarotti she has lost all interest in her life in England and in 1739 she made the decision to go and live on the Continent. She wrote to Algarotti: “I am leaving to seek you” (*MC*, 16 July 1739, II, 507). However, as Grundy observes, there may have been other reasons why she decided to leave, for instance, her sense of remoteness from her husband and family and the fact that her “closest friends were recently dead” (391). She also argues that it may have been for health reasons and comments that recent letters to Lady Pomfret suggest that “she could have been medically depressed, and this might well alarm her in view of her sister’s history” (391). Certainly, the Montagu in these letters is not the same person who once advised her sister to go horse riding, drink champagne and socialize as an antidote to melancholy, nor does she describe her own gloominess in terms of the female vapours, a condition that she believed was easily cured.

It does seem as though her love for Algarotti was at the heart of her despair, but her anguish was likely to have been temporarily alleviated by the excitement and anticipation of her journey to Italy to meet with him. However, any hopes of renewing her close friendship with Algarotti were soon to evaporate. She had written to him the day before she departed saying that she expected to find “the Elysian Fields, and Happiness beyond imagining” (*MC*, 24 July 1739, II, 508). Five months later she was forced to confront the reality that she would probably never see him again. In another letter to Algarotti written in Venice she confides: “I have received here many more civilities and even honours than

I deserve; and I should lead a peaceful life if it were not troubled by the remembrance of an ingrate who has forgotten me in an Exile which he caused” (*MC*, 24 Dec. 1739, II, 508). Regardless of her disappointments concerning Algarotti she did settle abroad and lived a reasonably contented life. She was less pessimistic than in those final years in England. Nevertheless, there are episodes during her exile which might suggest a continuing susceptibility to depression, signs that she never quite recovered from the loss of hope of a more satisfying and passionate relationship with Algarotti. For instance, between 1746 and 1756 she lived in Brescia, a remote town in northern Italy where Count Ugolino Palazzi swindled her out of thousands of pounds. Her experiences are recorded in her ‘Italian Memoir’ written as a means of calling Palazzi to account, although she never prosecuted. Grundy comments on this document and observes that her letters of this period show her life “as a fulfilling, tranquil sphere of existence” (1993, 322), but that the ‘Memoir’ “presents a shadow, a downside, an unadmitted subtext” (322). Montagu’s vulnerability concerning Palazzi does seem out of character and her passive behaviour in relation to this affair may indicate that she was still suffering from a persistent but milder form of depression.

However, if this was the case it was a private feeling and one that she did not disclose to her daughter, Lady Bute. In this correspondence melancholy is once again discussed in terms of the spleen and vapours. Montagu was concerned about the education of her granddaughters and wrote to Lady Bute: “If your Daughters are inclin’d to Love reading, do not check their Inclination by hindering them of the diverting part of it”, although she insists that they must not “expect or desire any Applause from it” because it is only men who read for “Reputation”. Women, argues Montagu, should content themselves that it makes “their lives easier”. She explains that “Ignorance” is as great a vice as “Idleness” and that “People that do not read or work for a Livelihood have many hours they know not

how to employ, especially Women, who commonly fall into Vapours or something worse” (*MC*, Jan. 1750, II, 449). Therefore, while society does not depend upon women to use their intellect, Montagu suggests that they should still improve their minds because ignorance is immoral and idleness leads to depression, or, as in the case of her sister, “something worse”. Even as an older woman Montagu remains convinced that ‘idleness’ is one of the main causes of depression but whereas once she recommended exercise, champagne and company as the best remedies, now she advises women to read and study. She comments in another letter to her daughter that her granddaughters have “no reason to expect to pass their time otherwise than their Aunts do at present” and that she knows “by Experience” that it is in the “power of Study not only to make solitude tolerable, but agreeable” (*MC*, 6 Mar. 1753, III, 25).

During the latter years of her life abroad Montagu befriended Sir James Steuart, a Jacobite and political exile, and his wife Lady Frances. In her correspondence to them the subject of the spleen and vapours arises frequently, usually in relation to Lady Frances who is susceptible to depression. On one occasion Montagu wrote to Sir James that she was “extremely sorry for dear Lady Fanny’s disorder” and that she has “seen so much of hysterical complaints, tho’ Heaven be praised I never felt them”. She is keen to impress upon Sir James that she does not suffer from female frailties such as the vapours. However, she further comments that she knows it is “an obstinate and very uneasy distemper, tho’ never fatal unless when Quacks undertake to cure it”. Here she maintains her position that doctors merely aggravate the condition. She advises Sir James to “read Dr. Sydenham” who she believes writes with “a candour” she never found “in any other author”. Apparently Sydenham proves that the “wise honourable spleen” in men is much the “same disorder and arises from the same cause” as vapours in women. She teases Sir James:

but you vile usurpers do not only engross learning, power, and authority to yourselves, but will be our superiors even in constitution of mind, and fancy you are incapable of the woman's weakness of fear and tenderness (*MC*, 5 Sept. 1758, III, 170).

While she distinguishes the 'spleen' in men from the 'vapours' in women, in previous letters she had used both terms to apply to women. So while the word 'spleen' was used to describe depression in both men and women, it had different meanings when applied to each gender. As Montagu points out, in men it was a "wise honourable" condition but in women it was characterized by "fear and tenderness". In this instance Montagu praises Sydenham but in another letter she appears to be more influenced by the writings of physicians such as Nicholas Robinson. She begins by commenting on a "fashion sprung up entirely new in this part of the world: I mean suicide". She mentions that a "rich Parish-priest" and a "young Celestine monk" had "disposed of themselves" and observes that it is "not in Britain alone that the Spleen spreads his dominion". She looks on "all excursions of this kind to be owing to that distemper" and argues for the "necessity of seeking employment for the mind and exercise for the body", otherwise the "spirits and blood stagnate without motion". Her observation that the spleen is a weakness of both mind and body is also discussed by Robinson who explains that if the "Fibres of the Muscles, and other Vessels, are so relaxed, that they cannot assist the Mind in voluntary Motion" or the "natural Motion of the Fluids" then this forms a "thick, viscid, melancholy Blood" (259). He points out that "great Fears, Grievs, Sorrows, or Disappointments" also "retard the Motion of the Blood, and Secretion of the Fluids" (89). Montagu continues her discourse on melancholy by stating that Sir James's studies are not only useful to him in the sense that they keep his mind active, but that they are also "beneficial to mankind". On the other hand, she must content herself that her studies are "good for nothing" except that they "contribute to [her] health and serve at least to lull asleep those corroding reflections that embitter life, and wear out the frail machine in which we inhabit" (*MC*, 4 May 1759,

III, 208). Once again, she endorses study as a means of preserving the mental well-being of women.

Yet the previous month she had told her daughter that, “I own I have too much Indulg’d my Sedentary Humour and have been a Rake in Reading”, by which she means that she has read to an excess. She once thought that it was an “Innocent” pleasure but now finds that she was “mistaken”. In actual fact her solitary habit has permanently lowered her mood and her “spirits in Company are false Fire”. She explains that she has a “Damp within” but then immediately apologises for growing “Spleenatic” (*MC*, 11 April 1759, III, 205). In this letter Montagu describes a low-spiritedness that has come upon her with age, a mood that is expressed now and then in her correspondence of this period. Even so, as Grundy argues, in her letters to the Steuart’s she spoke of her “solitude and melancholy ... with wit and stylistic flourish” (1999, 580). Indeed, she writes to Sir James that she is “extremely glad to hear Lady Fanny has overcome her disorder” but that she is now concerned about her own mental health. She explains that “Solitude begets whimsies; at my time of life one usually falls into those that are melancholy” (*MC*, 19 July 1759, III, 215). She also writes to her daughter that “all weaknesses appear (as they increase) with Age” and that she is now “grown Timorous and enclin’d to low spirits” (*MC*, 15 April 1760, III, 239). She finally admits to Sir James that “a long series of disappointments have perhaps worn out my natural spirits and given a melancholy cast to my way of thinking” (*MC*, 12 April 1761, III, 268). Nevertheless, even in old age Montagu’s mood is not always despondent and on her way back to England in 1761 she advises Lady Fanny, who has obviously relapsed, that “a melancholy state of mind should never be indulged, since it often remains even when the cause of it is removed” (*MC*, 26 Dec. 1761, III, 284). She was probably thinking of her sister when she made this remark. In January 1762 she

arrived back in England but on 21 August that year she died of breast cancer aged seventy-three.

Although Montagu did not suffer from unexplainable and causeless bouts of depression it was a subject and condition that for one reason or another played an important part in her life. She was well aware that women of her class had a marginal role to play in society and that they often had long and empty days to fill. Their sense of loneliness and lack of a purposeful existence made them susceptible to depression. She did not feel that physicians had any role to play in curing women and that the remedy lay in their own hands. In her younger days she thought that idleness and solitude were the main cause of the spleen and suggested that as a cure, women should go horse riding and socialise. However, as an older woman, she felt that a life of solitude was not too distressing as long as women could spend their days in reading and in study. Overall, she thought that the cause of the female malady at any age in life was 'idleness', and her answer to this problem was that women should always "divert" themselves. One of her diversions was to write long and sprightly letters to a number of correspondents. In the letter she received from Lady Mar she must have noticed the warning signs: her sister wrote to no-one and went nowhere. She also warned her daughter, who was going through a particularly difficult time, "Do not give way to melancholy; seek amusements. Be willing to be diverted, and insensibly you will become so. Weak people only place a merit in affliction" (*MC*, April 1751, II, 480). Montagu was a woman who did not intend to give in to depression or to be seen as a victim of the spleen. She made a conscious effort to guard against it perceiving it to be, in light of her sister's condition, a constant threat. In this period melancholy was thought to be, in medical terms, a progressive condition, for instance George Motherby, in his definition of melancholia states that "melancholy ... is the lesser degrees, or beginning of madness" (1775, 5). While she did occasionally suffer from low spirits and even at times deep

despair, her feelings were always in response to a particularly upsetting situation, what Horwitz and Wakefield would describe as “normal sadness, or nondisordered responses to loss” (27). Possibly her greatest weakness was her passion for Algarotti, a love that drove her away from family and friends in England and into an often precarious and lonely existence in Italy. While Grundy comments that “Lady Mary knew that she had entered into a wilful self-deception” (360), Algarotti’s rejection was probably one of the most significant disappointments of her life. Her sense of regret seemed to linger on although not in an obvious way, but is shown through her susceptibility to being swindled by Palazzi and perhaps also in her low spirits in old age.

Grundy praises Montagu’s poetry and argues that she had the “gift of successfully embodying her idiosyncratic opinions and attitudes in a verse style heavily influenced by her contemporaries, especially Dryden and the Pope of the 1717 *Works*” (1977, 172). She also comments that “its range is remarkable: Ovidian and Horatian epistles, mock-eclogue, mock-epic, songs and ballads, description, meditation, and translation” (172). Still, despite this applause from Grundy her poems, as yet, have received little critical attention. This study examines a small selection of her poetry, those in which she expresses a melancholy mood and reflects the sense of despair that she suffered over Algarotti. In these love poems she reveals herself to be a woman of sensitivity and vulnerability. However, first of all ‘A Receipt to Cure the Vapours’ (1730) is examined. In this poem she exposes the more pragmatic side of her character and looks for practical solutions to the problem of women and the spleen. It is addressed to one woman in particular, Lady Anne Irwin, who had been a widow for four years. The poet asks Lady Irwin, or “Delia” (l.1), why she is prepared to “languish Life away” (l.2) while there are still “sighing Crowds” (l.3) who admire her beauty; she insists that it is “too soon for Hartshorn Tea” (l.4). Here, Montagu appears to be drawing upon her knowledge of Sydenham’s work: he included “Spirit of



Hartshorn" (1710, 9) is his list of remedies for hysterical complaints. She goes on to point out that all of Lady Irwin's "dismal looks and fretting" (l.5) will not bring her husband back to life and that it is time to review her face in "the Glass" (l.10). She then draws attention to the fact that all women are susceptible to "the Spleen" (l.16) and that even she knows "what Vapours mean" (l.14). Grundy observes that "it would be foolish to seek in *any* of her occasional poems for serious long-term opinions" (295). Nevertheless, in this instance, Montagu did consistently hold the view that women were more prone to the spleen than men. Even so, the remedy that she offers Lady Irwin in this poem is less convincing. She advises her to choose "among the pretty Fellows" (l.19) one who is young and witty, and then listen to his chatter both morning and night. She is sure that this "Dose will do" (l.24). Montagu's lively poem appears to be making light of her friend's predicament and perhaps presents her as someone who finds it difficult to truly empathise with other people's suffering. In spite of this, her message is meant to be instructive because she firmly believed that women should not be gloomy and dwell upon their sorrows as this would inevitably lead them into depression. Her persistent call to them is that they should take action and do something constructive with their lives.

Her disapproval of Lady Irwin's conduct, that is, her moping around and her self-pitying attitude, is a criticism that she found more difficult to apply to her own behaviour when she fell in love with Algarotti six years later. She suffered all the torments of love in his absence and as Grundy comments, "one thing is constant" in her poems of this period, that "love is an affliction; it is the classical, divinely inflicted madness, a punishment for which she is singled out" (365). Her pain is expressed in a poem which took its inspiration from William Congreve's 'To a Candle, Elegy'. His is a beautifully constructed and compact poem and conversely its message of unspoken love is clearly expressed. On the other hand, Montagu's untitled poem lacks clarity of purpose and its less than organised

structure seems to reflect her disordered frame of mind. Her poem is known by its opening line, 'Ye soft Ideas leave this tortur'd Breast' (written 1736 or 1739), a line which sums up the conflict and struggle that she is experiencing at this moment in time. She is a victim of her "Passions" (l.5) and "Rebel wishes" (l.6) and pleads with "Reason" (l.3) to exert its "right Divine" (l.4) over her mind. She writes of her "mix'd emotions" (l.10) and of the "Joy and pain" (l.9) that confuse her "Brain" (l.10). In so doing, she thus presents herself as a love-melancholic. Robert Burton wrote that "the Symptomes of the minde in Lovers, are almost infinite, and so diverse, that no Art can comprehend them, though they bee merry sometimes, and rapt beyond themselves for joy, yet most part, Love is a plague, a torture, an hell, a bitter sweet passion at last" (1994, 148). Montagu admits that in the art of "poetry it self" (l.11) she is not able to express the true extent of her emotions and that it is only her lover who can "raise" them and she can "feel" (l.12) them. Grundy observes that when she writes, "And thou fond Heart, go beat thy selfe to rest" (l.2), she "just hints at a death wish" (365). However, there are other instances in this poem when she appears to seek self-destruction. For example, she asks "calm Oblivion" (l.7) to "Quiet" her "throbbing Pulse" (l.8) and to "Blot out" the confusion in her "Brain" (l.10). Despite this request she becomes even more distraught when she imagines that her lover is close by. She writes:

He comes! – 'twas nothing but the rustling Wind,  
 He has forgot, is faithless, is unkind –  
 While expectation rends my labouring mind (l.13-15).

The anticipation of his arrival has increased her agitation and she is torn apart by the stress of the situation. However, when she realises that he does not intend to come, her mood begins to settle and she debates the pros and cons of the relationship. She wonders whether all of the "pleasures that he brings" (l.16) can pay her for the "long sighing of this

tedious day” (l.17). At this point of understanding she then relies upon the opening lines of Congreve’s poem to conclude her own, and writes:

Thou watchfull Taper by whose silent Light  
I lonely pass the melancholy night,  
Thou faithfull Wittness of my secret pain  
To whom alone I venture to complain (l.18-21).

Her state of disarray, for instance her “tears” (l.8), “throbbing Pulse” and “mix’d emotions”, have been brought under control and subdued by the calmer and more accepting voice that Congreve expresses in his verse. He knows that his is a “secret Pain” (l.3) which can only be communicated to the “watchful” (l.1) and “faithful” (l.3) taper, and he reluctantly but compliantly withdraws to the “Shades obscure and Solitude” (l.16).

In ‘Hymn to the Moon, Written in July in an Arbor’ (written before 1740) Montagu adopts the self-control that Congreve exhibits in his poem, and her brief but well-organised verse of three four-line stanzas expresses a “tender Griefe” (l.6). This time she does not present herself as a tortured individual who is in a state of emotional flux. Her feelings are perfectly restrained and now she confides her troubles in the “silver Deity of Secret Night” (l.1) rather than the candle. She wanders “solitary” by the “pale beams” (l.5) of the moon and similarly to Congreve, seeks out the “Woodland Shade” (l.2) and “Silent Grove” (l.7). Grundy observes that in this poem Montagu “makes something delicate and dream-like from the confused turmoil of reality” (1999, 364). Yet, while she describes the moon as her “Friend”, “Goddess” and “Guide” (l.8) she is ultimately dissatisfied by its “Coldness” (l.12) and thus ends the poem on a note of disappointment and pessimism. She implies that in paying reverence to a cosmic entity like the moon it has made little difference to her afflicted mind. The seemingly indifferent moon may inspire her poetically, and indeed she describes it as the “Muses Aid” (l.4), however, she suggests that in reality human beings who are suffering require the warmth and understanding of a human response.

Her loneliness is expressed even more starkly in her poem ‘1736 Addressed to –’. It is likely that Algarotti was the intended recipient but because she loved him in secret his name could not be disclosed. Grundy observes that the poem is headed “with the momentous year date, ‘1736’” (364), the year in which Montagu both discovered and then lost Algarotti. She presents herself in this poem as someone who is jaded with life, which is in stark contrast to the determined character that she largely reveals herself to be in her letters. She begins by stating that it is with “toilsome steps” she passes through “Life’s dull Road” (l.1), and that there is no “Pack Horse halfe so weary of his Load” (l.2). She then ponders over what will happen to her spirit when her “dirty Journey” (l.3) is done. Halsband and Grundy point out that in this passage she alludes to the work of Dryden and Pope. She asks:

Say; then does the unbody’d Spirit fly,  
To happier climes and to a better Sky;  
Or sinking, mixes with its kindred clay,  
And sleeps a whole Eternity away? (l.5-8)

Dryden suggests in his poem, ‘Of the Pythagorean Philosophy’, that in death the “unbodied Spirit flies” (l.240) here and there and “lodges, where it lights, in Man or Beast” (l.242). In other words, the spirit lives on in some new “Tenement” (l.245). Pope, in ‘Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady’ (1717), proposes that “purer spirits” (l.25) flow upwards to a “pitying sky” (l.24) and separate from their “kindred dregs below” (l.26). The influence of Dryden and Pope are recognisable in Montagu’s verse and thus reveal her engagement with the literary and philosophical discourses on the afterlife in this period.

She goes on to wonder if her “Form” will be “once again renew’d” (l.9) after death and whether she will be expected to act once more on life’s “detested Stage” (l.11). She has read the philosophy of “Tully” (l.13) and the “moderns” (l.14) but is not convinced by their

views on what happens to the human spirit in the next world. This leads her to consider suicide as the most suitable option, because it would reveal to her in “one short moment” (l.17) what she has sought “in vain” (l.18) from “all Philosophy” (l.18). This desperate measure would also “terminate all pain” (l.19). She then continues to build the case for self-destruction and writes:

Why then not hasten that decisive Hour (l.20)  
...  
Why should I drag along this Life I hate (l.22)  
...  
When every Joy is lost, and every Hope dismiss?  
In chains and darkness wherefore should I stay  
And mourn in Prison while I keep the Key? (l.25-27)

Her defeatist sentiments are completely out of character and must have been written in response to a particularly bleak mood, probably after Algarotti’s departure when all “Hope” and “Joy” were gone. As Grundy comments, “in her storms of emotions she wrote to the moment” (364). However, the afterlife is clearly a subject that she had explored in her reading and in this sense the poem is a more considered piece of work, and not simply written in reaction to a temporary fit of despair.

In 1740 she sent a copy to her friend Lady Pomfret and told her that no-one else had seen it. Lady Pomfret then sent it on to her friend, Lady Hartford, but advised her, “pray do not let us make it public, lest it should induce some desperate person to break locks” (in Bingley, 1805, 175). Lady Hartford replied that Montagu’s mind “must have been in a very melancholy disposition when she composed [it]. I hope it was only a gloomy hour, which soon blew over to make way for more cheerful prospects to succeed” (170). Lady Pomfret thought that Montagu spoke “so feelingly that all who read must know that it comes from the heart!” (175). Their horrified response to the depressing nature of the poem is similar to that of Montagu’s when she described her sister’s letters as “monstrous

and shocking”. Montagu reveals in the suicidal tone of her verse that she was capable, if only temporarily, of sinking to the same depths of despair that Lady Mar had experienced during her time in Paris.

In ‘A Receipt to Cure the Vapours’ Montagu represents her view that women are more subject to the vapours than men, in which case they must always be thinking of ways to counteract them. Her advice is clear and down-to-earth although the remedy of a ‘pretty fellow’ is not a one that she usually recommends to her correspondents in her letters. Nevertheless, in this poem she suggests that aristocratic women like herself and Lady Irwin, who are destined to live a life that is mostly conducted in the domestic sphere, must always be on their guard against the vapours. In contrast, in her love poems she reveals another side to her personality, one that is completely ruled by romantic notions and which leads her into a troubling state of despair. Her despondency is not so easily remedied in the usual practical ways. In fact, where Algarotti is concerned, she acts against her principle maxim in relation to depression, which is that idleness is the main cause, and instead indulges her melancholy mood. In ‘Ye soft Ideas leave this tortur’d Breast’ she represents her extreme emotions and her inability to behave in a rational way. Her mood is more composed in ‘Hymn to the Moon’ but in ‘1736 Addressed to – ’ her despair has spiralled out of control. Through her relationship with Algarotti, a one that clearly had no future, she sought some kind of purpose for her life. She may have been glad to feel “mix’d emotions” rather than no emotions at all, but the love which gave her a greater sense of being alive also made her feel suicidal.

Over the course of her life Montagu suffered from occasional periods of low spirits and depression which were usually the result of a specific cause, and were probably quite normal in terms of human experience in general. Horwitz and Wakefield point out that

there are “three essential components” of normal sadness. It is “context specific; it is of roughly proportionate intensity to the provoking loss; and it tends to end about when the loss situation ends” (27). This perhaps typically summarises Montagu’s experience. The bouts of depression that she did suffer from were rarely debilitating, although one exception might have been when Algarotti left England. Following his departure her motivation was seriously affected and in the three years before she left for the Continent she spoke negatively in some of her letters, suggesting that she had lost all interest in life and in her immediate social environment. She decided that a change of scene would remedy the situation and also, by moving to Italy, she would be closer to Algarotti. While her romantic aspirations failed to materialize, Grundy believes that she continued to love Algarotti for the rest of her life and that “her heart would retain his indelible impression till she died” (379). Romantically, Montagu was never destined to be satisfied. In the early years of her marriage Edward paid her little attention and this made her peevish and unhappy. During this period she was also lonely and bored, and this made her realise that the way in which aristocratic women were expected to live out their lives, made them susceptible to depression. From this point onwards, she developed strong and positive opinions on the ways in which women could avoid the spleen and vapours. It was a subject that she felt able to discuss with many of her correspondents but usually it was only ever debated on a basic level. She repeatedly advised women to keep active and busy and that this would keep melancholy at bay. After many years of trying various diversions she concluded that ‘study’ was the greatest antidote. Through her own incessant reading and writing, Montagu’s mind was constantly occupied, and poetry served as an outlet for her secret and painful passion for Algarotti. Although she witnessed depression at its worst in her sister she never described the nature of her sister’s illness to anyone in her correspondence, and consequently very little is known about Lady Mar’s condition. Montagu must have understood that her sister’s mental illness was something much more

than the spleen, however, it is likely that she believed that it originated in the loneliness and tediousness of her life. She must also have been anxious that madness was a hereditary condition and that both she and her daughter Lady Bute, must be cautious. Interestingly, Montagu never suggested that depression in women was caused by their physicality, as do many of the physicians of this period. For instance, William Buchan argued that hysteric affections were suffered by women of a “delicate habit” and an “extremely sensible” (486) nervous system. She was certain that ‘idleness’ was the main cause of depression and that women of her class, who had little to do and no specific role to play in society, were the most susceptible, and that they must consciously devise ways of engaging their minds and usefully passing their time.



Sarah Scott (1721-1795), younger sister to queen of the Bluestockings, Elizabeth Montagu, was an eighteenth-century writer, social crusader and proto-feminist. Little is known about the personal details of her life and Sir Egerton Brydges, who included a memoir of Scott in his *Censura Literatia* (1805), laments the fact that when she died “not one of her contemporaries who knew her literary habits came forward to preserve the slightest memorial of her”<sup>31</sup>. Her surviving letters are held in the Huntington Library and only a small selection has been quoted by scholars so far. However, they are currently being edited by Nichole Pohl. The main source of information is Walter M. Crittendon’s biography, *The Life and Writings of Mrs. Sarah Scott, Novelist* (1932). What is known about Scott is that she suffered from lifelong headaches and periods of depression, and that she lived for much of her life in or near the spa town of Bath. It is also established that she was involved in benevolent activities and in caring for the vulnerable members of her community. Betty Rizzo describes her as a “political activist” who lived in hope of “changing the cruellest aspects of the society in which she lived” (1994, 319). In some of her writing, Scott gives voice to her proposals for reform, and the money that she earned from her publications contributed to the cost of her charitable work. She published three history books and six novels, one of which was a French translation, but her novel *Millenium Hall*<sup>32</sup> (1762) was the most successful of her works. It was reprinted in 1764, 1767 and 1778. The *Monthly Review* stated that “we have perused it with pleasure; and heartily recommend it, as a very entertaining as well as truly moral and sensible

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<sup>31</sup> Published in Crittenden (1932, 9).

<sup>32</sup> Its full title reads: *A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent: Together with the Characters of the Inhabitants, And such Historical Anecdotes and Reflections, as May excite in the Reader proper Sentiments of Humanity, and lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue. By A Gentleman on his Travels.*

performance” (Nov. 1762). Today it is mainly studied as a utopian fiction but this chapter explores its portrayal of female melancholy.

Scott was one of twelve children born to Elizabeth Drake (c.1693-1746) of Kent and Matthew Robinson (1694-1778) of Yorkshire. Nine of the children survived infancy and most of them went on to enjoy successful careers. Their maternal grandmother’s second husband, Dr Conyers Middleton (1683-1750), a notable Cambridge scholar, assisted in their education. Rizzo comments that “it was a family of clever, loyal, close-knit siblings, most of whom remained intimately connected throughout their lives” (1996, ix). As well as Scott, other family members suffered from depression, for instance, her sister Elizabeth Montagu wrote of their father that “physicians cannot prescribe him any cordial strong enough to keep up his spirits” (in Climençon, I, 12). She also states that “if the dire hype does haunt a solitary chimney corner, sure it will visit my Pappa, now it is sure to find him at home and alone” (67). In 1749 their twenty-year-old brother John, a fellow of Trinity College Cambridge, became ill with a “nervous disorder” from which “he never recovered” (in Climençon, II, 7). Little is known about his mental illness only that he spent the remainder of his life in custodial care.

Scott married George Lewis Scott, a well-regarded mathematician and musicologist, on 15 June 1751 at the age of thirty. After only nine months of marriage and for reasons unknown, the couple separated and Scott was removed from the marital home in London by her father and her brothers. The involvement of the male members of the family suggests that her husband was physically aggressive. This is also implied in some of Elizabeth Montagu’s letters, where the situation is discussed by herself and other correspondents. For example, a Mrs Delany writes to her sister: “what a foolish match Mrs. Scott has made for herself. Mrs. Montagu wrote ... that she and the rest of her friends

had rescued her out of the hands of a very bad man: but for reasons of interest, they should conceal his misbehaviour as much as possible” (in Climenson, II, 5). Elizabeth also wrote to her husband concerning Scott’s fragile mental state: “her spirits are so bad and she is so ill she cannot be alone”. She continues by commenting upon Scott’s future prospects:

her situation is miserable, allied to the faults and the infamy of a bad man, subject to his aspersions, and liable to the censures of his friends ... as in all disagreements in wedlock, blame falls ever on the innocent where there is no harmony (in Climenson, II, 6).

Although the failure of her marriage must have been a great disappointment to Scott, both personally and in terms of her reputation, she quickly recovered and went on to build a new life for herself with her companion, Lady Barbara Montagu, daughter of the Earl of Halifax, whom she had befriended in Bath in 1748 and who had lived with Scott and her husband in London.

The two women moved to Bath where they continued to share a home, although they always lived in relative poverty. However Scott, who had already published a novel, cultivated her mind and collected books for her library. Both she and Lady Barbara belonged to a circle of learned women who “shared an important idea of community, based on writings by Mary Astell and Sarah Fielding among others” (Rizzo, xvii). They started their charity work in Bath in around 1752 by employing women servants with disabilities and by befriending and assisting people in distress. In 1755 they set up another home in Batheaston, a village two miles from Bath, where they “began their unique scheme of charitable service” (Crittenden, 28). They helped to educate some of the poor children in the district in subjects such as writing, arithmetic and religion, and also taught them practical skills. After a visit to Batheaston, Elizabeth Montagu wrote to Dr Gilbert West:

My sister seems very happy; it has pleased God to lead her to truth, by the road of affliction; but what draws the sting of death and triumphs over the grave, cannot fail

to heal the wounds of disappointment ... their convent, for by its regularity it resembles one, is really a cheerful place (in Climenson, II, 78).

In this letter Elizabeth refers to her sister's despondency following the breakdown of her marriage, as well as to her subsequent recovery. Scott and Lady Barbara now lived a harmonious existence and this contentment, coupled with the satisfaction of working for the benefit of others, alleviated her melancholy. Summers were spent in Batheaston but the couple resided in Bath during the winter months because of Lady Barbara's ill-health. They pursued their unconventional way of life for ten years until Lady Barbara's death in 1765. In her charity work Scott had witnessed first hand the problems of the poor and understood their needs, and her experience at Batheaston became the inspiration for *Millenium Hall*.

After 1765 and now on her own, Scott moved from place to place. Rizzo comments that "most of her moves can be attributed to one of two relentless conditions, ill health and poverty" (1996, xviii). In 1767 she attempted with some friends to set up a charitable community in Hitcham House, Berkshire, but this failed almost immediately for a number of reasons, one of which was Scott's poor health. She suffered from lifelong headaches for which she repeatedly sought remedies. Rizzo states that in August 1768 she "was in Chelsea at the establishment of Dr Dominiceti, who offered a regimen of medicated baths and fumigations for almost every ailment" (1996, xxviii). Crittenden suggests that after Lady Barbara's death Scott was "more or less helpless" and that "drifting about, in a vain effort to be relieved of the headaches, was her chief occupation" (35). Almost twenty years after her visit to the Chelsea clinic and now in her sixties, Scott was still seeking a cure for her headaches, but this time at a clinic in Norwich. The treatments offered her relief and so she settled in nearby Catton in 1787 where she remained until her death. Her

letters written in the final years of her life are melancholy in tone, for instance on 22 January 1788 she wrote to Elizabeth:

I am not sorry that I still retain fire enough to take a strong interest in what passes; it keeps the embers of age & sickness alive, & gives an enlivening glow to the Scene, which otherwise might look rather dreary (in Kelly, xviii).

In old age she maintains an interest in public life and affairs but her own existence, as represented in this letter, appears lonely and depressing. On 18 February 1795, ten months before her death, she writes again to Elizabeth:

I have read the Mysteries of Udolpho, which no doubt is well written, but I think it is the last series of horrors I shall peruse, for I find them too much for my weak nerves; I shall endeavour to keep my imagination in sunshine. I am not equal to any thing affecting; a cool suspense from pleasure & from pain<sup>33</sup>, is all my feeble frame will bear (in Kelly, xx).

Her reaction to Radcliffe's novel seems exaggerated but she now requires emotional equilibrium. However, Kelly suggests that she was "increasingly ill, and apparently emotionally exhausted" (xx) by the revolutionary horrors in France. The violence of these events must have contrasted sharply with her quiet and considered approach to social progress.

It is difficult to piece together a clear picture of Scott's melancholy because of the fragmentary nature of the record. It seems clear that she did suffer from periods of depression and that it was associated with episodes of poor health and emotional crises. It is not possible to determine whether her ill-health, such as her headaches, were caused by or were the cause of her low spirits. Her visits to clinics became a constant feature of her life and her preference for Bath and Catton as dwelling places, where remedies for her health concerns were easily available, suggests a morbid preoccupation with cures. In her

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<sup>33</sup> Scott's sentiments are reminiscent of William Battie's in his *Treatise of Madness* (1758). He suggests in his 'Regimen and Cure of Madness' that the patient's employment should be about "such things as are rather indifferent, and which approach the nearest to an intermediate state (if such there be) between pleasure and anxiety" (69).

later years she seems to have developed a mild but settled melancholy. She does not appear to have suffered from major depression and indeed seemed always to find the energy for good causes and social experiments. The main interest in Scott with regard to this study lies in her sympathy and understanding for the suffering of others which is evident in both her life and work.

Her reformist novel, *Millenium Hall*, which is based upon her experience at Batheaston, is a story in which six ladies decide to opt out of mainstream society and build a new world of their own design and construction. Gary Kelly describes it as the “fullest literary expression of the first wave of ‘bluestocking’ feminism” (1999, 11). He comments that this movement developed from the “convergence of class and gender issues and interests within a particular coalition of the progressive gentry and the professional middle class” (11). *Millenium Hall* is a charitable organization which is based upon deeply moral and religious principles. One of the ladies explains that it is a society of “mutual confidence, reciprocal services, and correspondent affections” (Kelly, 1999, 111). The women of the Hall manage to maintain the property by contributing their personal finances to a general fund. They develop an economic structure that is of benefit to themselves and to the poorer members of their community. Jane Spencer describes *Millenium Hall* as a “novel of ideas” (1986, xi) and a “utopian vision of female community” (xii). That Scott felt moved to write about an alternative way of living for women, suggests that she was dissatisfied with the way in which they were treated in contemporary society, and in this sense the Hall can be viewed as a refuge. Nicole Pohl argues that in this novel “existing ‘male’ architecture is taken over by a female utopian community and reconstructed as a new spatial form where women are liberated from the ‘inferiorizing definitions of men’” (1996, 51). Linda Dunne remarks that the “ladies of Millenium Hall have taken themselves and their money out of the dominant male-controlled economic system that ...

destroys and exploits both women and nature” (1994, 58). Other scholars draw attention to the negative aspects of Scott’s utopian vision. For instance, Vincent Carretta suggests that the “happiness of Millenium Hall depends upon control and containment” (1992, 313) and Dorice Elliot observes that while the Hall is indeed an “asylum”, it also “represents a withdrawal from the world” which the ladies can “never again enter without taking on the position of victimized object” (1995, 549). In the novel, reading and education are seen as a major source of happiness for the ladies. Christine Rees comments that in utopian fictions of the period, women writers do not “waste their time focusing their utopian dreams on unthinkable futuristic forms of emancipation” but on “better education, seen as the key to inner freedom, and also capable of being institutionalised in utopian structures” (1996, 205). Through the ‘histories’ of five of the ladies, told by the sixth lady Mrs. Maynard, to two male travellers, George Ellison and Mr. Lamont, Scott describes the society from which the ladies have chosen to retire. Ellison wants to know “by what steps women thus qualified both by nature and fortune to have the world almost at command, were brought thus to seclude themselves from it” (76). This chapter, through a study of the women’s past experiences, explores the reasons why they, and other women associated with their lives, were discontented and depressed. It then looks at aspects of their new mode of living in the Hall that appear to make them happier and more fulfilled.

Mrs. Maynard begins by narrating the stories of Miss Louisa Mancel and Mrs. Morgan, who she says “from their childhood have been so connected, that I could not, if I would, disunite them in my relation” (76). Both of these women are bereft at an early age of a guiding mother figure, for instance, Louisa’s aunt dies when she is ten and Mrs. Morgan loses her mother at the age of fourteen. When the two girls find themselves sharing the same room at boarding school they form a lifelong attachment. They are both quite depressed when they first meet and their melancholy becomes an understanding between

them, it endears them to one another. As Mrs. Maynard explains, Mrs. Morgan's separation from her father had "greatly affected her spirits" (87) and Louisa's "dejected air prejudiced [Mrs. Morgan] much in her favour" (87). Their 'sensibility' of temperament, which makes them susceptible to melancholy, is something that both girls have in common. For example, following the death of her aunt, Louisa exhibited "so strong a proof of extreme sensibility, at an age when few children perceive half the dreadful consequences of such a misfortune" (80). As such, her sorrow "could not fail of exciting a tender sensibility in the heart of [Mrs. Morgan's] disposition" (83). The girls also shared an interest in education and learning and "received a considerable increase of happiness" (91) in reading. Louisa's benefactor provided the girls with an Italian tutor, Mr d'Avora, a man of the "most tender disposition" (95), and he became their lifelong friend. Mrs. Morgan was six years older than Louisa and she acted as a mother figure and Mr d'Avora became a kind of substitute father to both girls. Through this grouping of like-minded people, Scott begins to develop the idea of a supportive family network which is reproduced on a larger scale in Millenium Hall.

When the girls leave school they face several dilemmas and difficult situations. Louisa's guardian Mr Hintman, who had taken care of her since the death of her aunt, attempts to seduce her. Fortunately he dies before the evil deed is carried out. Having little money with which to support herself she finds a position as companion to a Lady Lambton. She then falls in love with Lambton's grandson Edward and he loves her too. However, Lady Lambton prevents them from marrying because Louisa is of "obscure birth" (142). Edward is so distraught that he joins the army and gets killed. Louisa's grief is "deep, but silent and submissive" (154). She finds a temporary "asylum" (142) with Mr d'Avora and then she finds employment with a Mrs Thornby, whom she soon discovers to be her real



mother. After six years of living together, her mother dies and she inherits forty thousand pounds.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Morgan has been forced by her stepmother into a marriage with an older man whom she does not love. She thought that “to enter into wedlock without any prospect of social happiness” was “one of the greatest misfortunes in life” (124). She considered a life as “fugitive and wanderer” (127) but had no means of support. She states that “happiness is beyond my view” (128). She feels suicidal and comments that “the grave, I confess, appears to me far more eligible than this marriage, for I might there hope to be at peace” (128). However, she remains stoical and was “fully determined to acquit herself properly in her new sphere” (132). Mr Morgan’s home is “large and old” with ancient “furniture” and the situation is “dreary” (132). The surrounding countryside is “disagreeable” and “nature nowhere appears graced with fewer charms” (132). In fact, the whole place is “destitute of every thing that could afford any satisfaction to Mrs. Morgan” (132). In addition, Mr Morgan’s bitter and miserable unmarried sister, Susanna, lives there too and, because she is envious of Mrs. Morgan’s youth and beauty, constantly finds reasons to criticize her. The “only consolation” (135) in Mrs. Morgan’s life are the letters she receives from Louisa. When Mr Morgan becomes ill she takes care of him but this undermines her own health. He eventually dies and she inherits his wealth, and she then spends time at Tunbridge Wells with Louisa, where she becomes “much recovered by the waters” (159). In a sense, Mrs. Morgan is recovering from the role that she was expected to play as the devoted and subservient wife. During his illness Mr Morgan would “take neither medicine nor nourishment except from her hands” (157). He wanted to know that she was “present in the night, as in the day” and she could “never quite undress herself the whole time of his sickness” (158). At Tunbridge, the two friends conceive the idea of Millenium Hall because they were “desirous of fixing in a way of life where all their

satisfactions might be rational, and as conducive to eternal, as to temporal happiness” (159). The spa town, with its reviving waters, becomes symbolic of the gateway to a new life, one that is more conducive to the women’s physical and mental well-being.

The life of Lady Mary Jones is the third story to be related to Ellison and Lamont. Lady Mary is orphaned at the age of ten and then lives with an aunt, Lady Sheerness, who treats her like a daughter. However, Lady Sheerness is a terrible role model for her niece, she spends her life hosting parties and playing cards, and when she becomes ill with an “incurable disorder” (187) she spends no time reflecting on what may face her in the next life. Lady Mary comments after her death that she “departed to a world of which she had never thought, and for which she was totally unprepared” (188). The next relative that she lives with is Lady Brumptom who presents her with no better an example. She also wastes her life on frivolous activities, however, on her deathbed she shows some repentance. She was “sensible that she had never been in the path of happiness” and that “sickness, by lowering her spirits, had taken away the false glare which dazzled her eyes, and restored her to her sight” (194). Here Scott implies that low mood can be beneficial in the sense that it encourages a more mature and reflective state of mind. Lady Mary experiences traumas of her own which include being enticed to elope by a married man. Thanks to the deity “Chance” (178), the coach in which she is travelling to meet him overturns and she is saved from ruining her reputation and her life. Eventually, she becomes “tired of the multitude in which she had so long lived” (194) and finds retirement at Millenium Hall.

The fourth lady, Mrs Harriot Selvyn, is brought up to be well-educated by a man that she thought was her father. When she is seventeen both she and her father move from the country to London where she befriends Lady Emilia Reynolds. Lady Emilia is a “grave and sensible” woman who has an “air of dejection” in her countenance. After the death of

her father, Harriot becomes a companion to Lady Emilia and the two women then move to the country. Here they spend most of their time reading, and their “regular way of life, and the benefits of air and exercise, seemed to abate the dejection so visible in Lady Emilia” (205). After several years of living in “rational enjoyment” (210) Lady Emilia becomes terminally ill and on her deathbed reveals to Harriot the reason for her lifelong melancholy, that she is Harriot’s natural mother and that she was born illegitimately. She hands her daughter a piece of paper which contains the traumatic details surrounding her birth. She had loved Harriot’s father Lord Peyton deeply, but they made the mistake of having sex before they married and she became pregnant. She explains that after this event she felt ashamed and penitent and vowed never to marry. She has since lived with a “constant sense of guilt” that “fixed a degree of melancholy on [her] mind, which no time has been able to conquer” (216). Through the example of Lady Emilia, Scott exposes the deep and lasting depression that is experienced by some women who transgress the sexual boundaries imposed upon them. Harriot is shocked by her mother’s revelation but appreciates that she has subsequently lived a “well-spent life” (218). Lady Emilia is grateful for her daughter’s forgiveness and feels that after discharging “the burden” (218) from her mind she can now die in peace. After her mother’s death Harriot inherits twelve thousand pounds which she joins to the “common stock” (218) of Millenium Hall.

The final ‘history’ is that of Harriot Trentham, who is brought up by her grandmother from the age of eight. Harriot has a very generous disposition and always thinks of others above herself, a perfect candidate for the Hall. She falls in love with her cousin Alworth, but he marries someone else. However, he later realises that Harriot is the woman he truly loves. They both become very depressed but Harriot knows that they can never be together and she moves to London in an effort to “dispel her melancholy” (240). She was initially in “very low spirits” (240) but soon found that she enjoyed the attention of many “single

men” (240). She neglected her books and became extremely vain, but then contracted smallpox which “entirely destroyed her beauty” (241). This made her realise that the “flutter and dissipation” of city life had deprived her of the “quiet happiness” that she had once enjoyed, and so she returned to her “love for reading” (241). In the example of Harriot Trentham, Scott implies that the antidote to low spirits is in sober reflection rather than in the gaiety of fashionable society. As the narrator observes, Harriot found “retirement better calculated for overcoming an hopeless passion than noise and flutter” (241). She too joined the women at Millenium Hall.

In this novel Scott portrays the life choices that are open to middle and upper class women, and these are discussed within three main themes, employment, inheritance and marriage. Employment opportunities are few, for instance, Louisa Mancel is paid for her needlework and attempts to earn money by selling her paintings. She also works as a lady’s companion. None of these alternatives provide her with a great deal of independence. When other women in the story inherit quite substantial sums of money through the deaths of their husbands, such as Lady Sheerness and Lady Brumpton, they do not spend it wisely but squander it on pointless and unfulfilling occupations; they have no sense of purpose in their lives. Marriage is the most obvious choice for women but this option is fraught with difficulties. As Rees comments, in utopian fictions marriage “tends to be regarded as the problem, not the answer. In a depressing equation, man’s domestic utopia turns out to be equal to women’s dystopia” (205). In *Millenium Hall* women might not, for various reasons, be able to marry the person of their choice, and may be forced into an arranged marriage in which they have no potential for happiness. In which case, marriage is like a prison sentence. Those who deviate from the strict sexual code imposed upon them by a patriarchal society, seriously hamper their chances on the marriage market and leave themselves susceptible to a lifetime of guilt and despair. In this novel, women in the

outside world have little control over their own destiny and their lives are subject to the vagaries of fate and chance. However, in all situations their behaviour must remain impeccable. They have no room for manoeuvre in terms of their conduct and any mistakes they make will haunt them forever. In addition, in the absence of sensible and protective guiding figures they are also vulnerable to abuse. In these case histories Scott argues that opportunities for women to be happy are extremely limited and that unhappiness and depression are an intrinsic part of the female condition in the world outside Millenium Hall.

Nevertheless, also included within these narratives are ways of living and activities that might improve the condition of women. For instance, Scott promotes reading as a great antidote to melancholy, and the ladies also find comfort in friendship, letter-writing and in the quiet retirement of country living. Scott builds upon these ideas in the construction of her new society. For instance, when Ellison is first led into the “large hall” he believes himself to be in the “Attick school” (58) and describes the scene as “so uncommon a society” (59). Women and young girls are employed in several ways: reading, painting, engraving, carving, embroidery and studying French. The ladies believe that the “idle mind, like fallow ground, is the soil for every weed to grow in” (118) and thus they require everyone in their community to keep busy. Still, time for reflection is also thought to be important, and to facilitate this, the ladies have built a temple “dedicated to solitude” in which there is a “picture of Contemplation, another of Silence” (69). In her ideal world Scott rejects the “noise” and “flutter” (12) of large assemblies and encourages a more subdued and low mood so that women can meditate upon serious subjects. She does not suggest that this kind of ruminative exercise will lead to melancholy, but that it allows people time to think and work out the best ways to behave, which in turn leads to a greater sense of happiness.

The physical environment of the Hall is also conducive to the happiness of its residents. In the ‘history’ of Mrs. Morgan, the landscape is described as “dreary” and “disagreeable” (132) which reflects her inner despondency. At the Hall the gardens are excessively beautiful and Ellison refers to the place as an “earthly paradise” (58), a “female Arcadia” (223). The flowers are of the “highest fragrance” (57) and in the morning dew the aroma is increased “to as great an excess of sweetness as the senses could support” (223). At Millenium Hall the idyllic rural setting, cultivated by the ladies, reflects the inner happiness of its inhabitants. Another benefit of the Hall is its sense of community. In the outside world women are often lonely and isolated but in the Hall they belong to the “sisterhood” (121). Their greatest source of happiness comes from their charitable work and included in their “family” (72) are the poor, elderly and disabled. One ‘enclosure’ in particular offers “asylum” (72) to people, who because of their physical disabilities and malformations, had been exhibited for money by “monster-mongers”<sup>34</sup> (73). The ladies create a private space for them in which to recover from the humiliation of their ordeal in the outside world. Their physical health was soon restored with “air and exercise” but it took longer to cure the “malady of the mind” (74). This point illustrates that the only depression in the Hall is that which was caused by experiences on the outside. The care and attention that the ladies pay to members of society who have been degraded and oppressed shows that they find a real satisfaction in alleviating the misery of others.

In *Millenium Hall* Scott proposes a system for a new and better world which is organised and run by women. Pohl argues that her ideas challenge “historical gender constructs” (56). In the novel Scott presents the ills of the society ‘outside’ through the past lives of

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<sup>34</sup> Linda Dunne points out that the word “monster” was used to describe human dwarfs and giants during the eighteenth century” (1994, 217). Scott’s views against the undignified exposure of vulnerable people are in sympathy with the ideas of William Battie, who wrote that the public exhibition of lunatics, a practice that went on throughout the period, “ought strictly to be forbidden” (1758, 69).

her characters. The misery that they suffer becomes part of her justification for the formation of her new community. The ladies of the Hall are genteel women of sensibility whose “notions ... are too refined for persons who live in the world” (101). They empathise with each other and significantly, with the suffering of the poor, the elderly and the disabled. In the Hall the ‘unhappy’ are treated with consideration by the ladies who promote a shared understanding and sympathetic response to their problems. Spencer comments that “today’s reader is struck by how enlightened is Scott’s view of a caring community” (xiii). Scott implies that low spirits and depression can be alleviated through activity and writes in favour of work and in leading a useful life. In her ideals of charity she is convinced that in doing good for others, people invariably feel happier in themselves. This is a point of view that undoubtedly stems from her own experience. She was happy in her life at Batheaston with Lady Barbara where they offered assistance and relief to the poor.

Scott also spent much of her life in the spa town of Bath where people congregated to take the waters as a treatment for numerous health complaints, including melancholy. It may have been the case that her knowledge and observations of those who were low-spirited and depressed, informed the portrayal of her unhappy characters in her writing. The fictional refuge of Millenium Hall resembles Bath in the sense that it is a place where the infirm are given an opportunity for rest and recovery. Scott’s utopia is also similar to St Luke’s asylum, which was founded by William Battie in 1751. Roy Porter comments that “for one thing [St Luke’s] called itself not a madhouse or hospital but an ‘asylum’, with its overtones of sanctuary. For another it banned casual sightseeing from the outset (1990, 130). Scott repeatedly refers to the Hall as an ‘asylum’, for example, it is defined as an “assured asylum against every evil” (58). Also, a separate mansion near Millenium Hall which was bought by the ladies for ‘dependent women’, “the most unhappy part of the

creation” (115), is described as an “asylum” (116). Further, and in relation to Porter’s other point, through the example of the so-called “monsters” Scott argues against the exposure of human beings as objects of public gaze. The way in which Scott manages the inhabitants of her community bears similarities to Battie’s therapy for the insane. Allan Ingram observes of St Luke’s:

The patient was to be removed entirely from the context wherein he or she had become mad, including family, friends and external pressures. Only in such a state of asylum could treatment have a chance of success. Moreover, Battie dismissed a wide range of conventional treatments ... asserting that management, by which he meant a temperate and ordered mode of living within the regimen of the asylum, would do more than medicine (1998, 112).

Likewise, the ladies of the Hall remove themselves and other people from ‘outside’ society and welcome them into their ‘asylum’, where they insist upon a regulated and sober way of life. Ellison observes that in the evenings, the “most social part of the day” (63), the dignified behaviour of the women “plainly evinced how much greater strength the mind can exert itself in a regular and rational way of life” (64). Additionally, in his *Treatise of Madness*, Battie recommends that “the patient’s body and place of residence is carefully to be kept clean” (69). This mirrors Scott’s insistence on cleanliness and neatness in the Hall. For example, one of the elderly women tells Ellison and Lamont that the ladies desire them to be “cleanly ... for that we cannot be healthy if we are not clean and neat” (67). Battie’s progressive and humane approach in his treatment of the insane corresponds with Scott’s compassionate attitude towards those who are maltreated in society. The asylum that she provides for the ‘unhappy’ in the Hall is analogous to the sanctuary offered to the ‘mad’ at St Luke’s. It is likely that Scott knew of or read<sup>35</sup> about the treatment of the insane because she was interested in all matters concerning health, but more pertinently, her mentally ill brother had been institutionalised since 1749. It must be more than

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<sup>35</sup> Crittenden comments on Scott’s reading habits and quotes from a selection of her letters although none of his examples mention medical literature. However, he does point out that “the books listed in Mrs. Scott’s letters are, for the most part, serious works. It would seem that she cared very little of the lighter types of romances and novels” (64).



coincidental that she likens her refuge for the emotionally exhausted, women in particular, to the asylum of St Luke's. She creates a protective atmosphere in which the residents of her community can recover, and through various forms of activity she offers them therapy. It seems that she not only constructed a new way of living for women in her reformist novel, but also created an asylum that was partly based upon a medical model<sup>36</sup>.

In the novel the characters Louisa Mancel and Mrs. Morgan, the founders of the Hall, resemble Scott and Lady Barbara, only the fictional women have the finances with which to set up their ideal community. Scott is comfortable with the idea of an asylum for women because it is similar to the way in which she lived her own life at Batheaston. However, in her fiction she creates a private world in which refuge is offered as a permanent solution to women's problems. There is no plan in *Millenium Hall* for reintegration into the world from which its inhabitants have fled. Their sense of separateness from mainstream society means that they are still excluded in some way but only now in a different form. This state of isolation would probably also lead to unhappiness and depression, but Scott fails to confront this issue in her novel. In addition, while the Hall offers peace and tranquillity, its members must suppress their individuality and accept a life of emotional, sexual and physical constraint. As Dunne argues, "in this world emotions are as tightly controlled and regulated as nature and social interactions. So is sexuality" (71). It is likely that the repression of their basic human needs and desires would also lead to depression, but again this point is not addressed by Scott. Thus, while

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<sup>36</sup> Andrew Scull points out that the "model institution" being developed at the beginning of the nineteenth century was influenced by the set up of the York Retreat (1796) and the writings of its founder Samuel Tuke. These new retreats or 'asylums' contrasted with the "traditional madhouse ... where the deranged were hidden and hope and humanity abandoned" (1993, 147). There was an "emphasis on intimacy, on patients and staff alike being members of an extended 'family'" (148). They were built with a "pleasing view of the surrounding countryside" (149) and the patients were employed in "useful work" (150). Scull comments that "a strong utopian strand runs through the early Victorian images of the asylum" (151). His observations show that new asylums for the mad bear similarities to the female community depicted earlier in *Millenium Hall*.

her novel is both socially and politically forward-thinking, she is less progressive in her suggestion that it is only in the confinement of an asylum that women can feel empowered and hence experience fulfilment and happiness. As Carretta observes, like the “monsters”, the ladies “gain happiness through confinement” (314). Elliot points out that “asylums for female victims were safe, but they were also prisons” (548). Nevertheless, despite the obvious limitations for the potential for happiness in the Hall, it still offers women the opportunity to gain some control over their own lives. According to Scott, their regular way of life, rational approach to solving problems and greater sense of purpose, means that they never become unhappy or get depressed. The ladies also believe that through their charitable behaviour and exemplary conduct that they are preparing themselves well for the next life, and this also gives them a feeling of contentment. In her novel, Scott does not discuss depression ‘without cause’, she simply implies that unhappiness, particularly in women, is caused by a dysfunctional society. Low spirits and depression are experienced by women and other oppressed social groups in a patriarchal society that denies them autonomy and treats them as subservient and second-class citizens.

Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) was a popular poet and novelist of the late eighteenth century. She had a difficult private life and constructs a literary identity through her personal sorrows. She writes about low spirits and depression in her letters and in the prose prefaces to her work, and some depressed characters in her novels are autobiographical figures. Moreover, much of her poetry is an expression of the melancholy mood. Her first publication, *Elegiac Sonnets, and other Essays*, appeared in 1784. This volume consisted of sixteen sonnets and three essays. It sold well and was published again in 1786 with an additional twenty sonnets but with the essays omitted. Further editions, which Smith continually expanded with more sonnets and other poems, appeared until her death in 1806. She wrote ninety-two sonnets in total but several of these, more than twenty, originally appeared in her novels and are spoken through the voices of characters. She produced ten novels between 1788 and 1798, as well as a poem in two books entitled *The Emigrants* which appeared in 1793. In addition, she wrote *Beachy Head, Fables, and Other Poems* which was published posthumously in 1807. Ten other works written by Smith were published between 1786 and 1806 and these ranged from French translations to natural history books, and her book entitled *A Natural History of Birds, intended chiefly for young persons*, was also published posthumously in 1807. Smith's many publications are a testament to her success as a writer.

Her work was praised by well-known contemporary reviewers, for instance, Mary Wollstonecraft commended her realistic approach in her prose writing and stated in the *Analytical Review* that she "writes like a gentlewoman: if she introduces ladies of quality, they are transcribed from life, and not the sickly offspring of a distempered imagination

(Dec. 1789). Smith pointed out to her publisher Thomas Cadell, whilst negotiating the sale of her novel *Ethelinde*, that her writing was “just now so much in fashion” (SC, 22 Aug. 1790, 27). She mentions that the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan had complimented her “very highly” on her novels *Celestina* and *Emmeline*. Such favourable criticism from an eminent writer increased her bargaining power. The poet William Hayley commented on Smith’s creative ability and stated that “in strength of understanding, & in delicacy of taste, she appeared to me to have no superior among the most eminent of our literary ladies”. He also comments that his friend and fellow poet William Cowper, “frequently declared, that he did not believe any man existing could write so rapidly & so well”<sup>37</sup>. While her work was in demand during her lifetime, its popularity diminished after her death and Stuart Curran remarks that by the mid-nineteenth century Smith was “largely forgotten by literary history” (1993, xix). Nevertheless, her poetry was remembered by Wordsworth who noted that she wrote “with true feeling for rural nature, at a time when nature was not much regarded by English poets” (in Hunt, 1970, 101). Walter Scott commented that “her invention ... her knowledge of the human bosom, her power of natural description, her wit, and her satire” (1928, 328) were evident in her prose narratives. These later reviews show that Smith’s work was at least appreciated by notable writers of the next generation.

Smith’s sister, Catherine Ann Dorset, also a writer, composed a memoir of her which was published in Walter Scott’s *The Lives of the Novelists* (1825). In this account she recalls the trials and tribulations of her sister’s life and describes the years of “mental anxiety and exertion” (323) that eventually ruined her health and led to her death “in her 58<sup>th</sup> year” (324). Lorraine Fletcher mentions that Smith suffered from “acute depression” (1998, 35) when at the age of seventeen she saw “her first child’s coffin leave the house” (34). She

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<sup>37</sup> Letter, 7 February 1807.

observes that Smith attempts to “convey the sense of a baby’s loss” (34) more than thirty years later in her novel *The Young Philosopher* through the character of Laura Glenmorris, who is also seventeen and must bury her dead baby. Judith Stanton comments that Smith’s letters tell of a story of “loss, loneliness, and isolation” (2003, xiv) and how she “ruined her health working to support her children” (xxx). Throughout her life Smith was extremely vocal about her suffering and her problems. Sarah Zimmerman comments that “in all of her writings” she presents herself as a “woman wronged” (1991, 59) and that the “prefaces that open most of her works became, in effect, a serialized autobiographical narrative” (60). Diane E. Boyd argues that by presenting herself as an oppressed woman and a “mother-writer” her prefaces “evolve into a site where she and her readers can take their culture to task for negative, confining categorisations of women” (2001, 155). As noted above, Smith also represents the hardships of her life in her novels. Mary A. Schofield describes Smith’s fictions as “quasi-autobiographical tales”, and furthermore asserts that they are “autobiographical to a much greater extent” (1990, 147) than those written by the other female novelists included in her study<sup>38</sup>. Richard C. Taylor points out that the “image of the author as impoverished, self-sacrificing mother, conveyed autobiographically in her letters and prefaces and fictively in characters such as Mrs Stafford in *Emmeline*, is one of the most pervasive and distinctive features of her work” (1994, 313). In this chapter the nature of Smith’s depression is explored through a study of her letters, prefaces and her portrayal of Mrs Stafford. It considers to what extent her mental suffering is related to her role as a mother or to other features of her life that conspire to make her unhappy.

Smith’s life before marriage and motherhood had been a very happy one. She was born into a wealthy country family in Sussex and after the death of her mother at the age of

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<sup>38</sup> Other writers discussed in Schofield’s study include Eliza Haywood (1693-1756), Sarah Fielding (1710-1768), Charlotte Lennox (1730-1804) and Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821).

three, she was raised by her father, Nicholas Turner, and her maternal aunt, Lucy Towers. Dorset recalls that “her father’s unbounded indulgence, and that of an aunt who almost idolised her, were ill calculated to prepare her mind to contend with the calamities of her future life” (305). Doted on at home, Smith was also popular at school and was an exceptional student. Dorset quotes a former schoolfellow who comments that Smith was “superior to other young persons of her age” and that she “excelled most of us in writing and drawing”. This schoolfellow also mentions that Smith was far above the other children “in intellect, and the general improvement of the mind” and that she was “continually composing verses” (304). Dorset remembers that Smith was considered “by far the best actress” at school and that her “theatrical talents were much applauded both at school and at home” (304). She also points out that this kind of “display” did not induce “boldness or undue confidence” in Smith, and that she was “rather of a retiring than of an assuming disposition” (304). These sketches of Smith as a child show her creative and artistic potential.

However, by the age of fifteen the idyllic years of her childhood were over. She married Benjamin Smith on 23 February 1765. He was the second son of Richard Smith, a wealthy merchant, and Benjamin was a partner in his father’s business. The couple moved from Sussex to London where their new residence was dark and stifling. As Dorset explains: “it was in one of the narrowest and most dirty lanes in the city” and was a “large dull habitation”. She comments that it was “impossible to enter it without experiencing a chilling sensation and depression of spirits, which induced a longing desire to escape from its gloom” (308). Apart from the dreary and confining physical environment in which Smith now lived, the new family that she lived with were very different from her own. Dorset remarks that their father had been an “elegant poet and a scholar ... a man of infinite wit and imagination” (305), but that Smith’s new relatives were business people who had

“no taste for literature” (307). She spent her own time in the “cultivation of her mind” (310) but this made her conscious of “her own superiority” and the “ignorance” (311) of those around her. Dorset observes that this “mental improvement was not favourable to her happiness” and that she began to experience an “indefinable restlessness and impatience” (311). Smith explains her predicament in a letter to an unnamed recipient:

No disadvantage could equal those I sustained; the more my mind expanded, the more I became sensible of personal slavery; the more I improved and cultivated my understanding, the farther I was removed from those with whom I was condemned to pass my life; and the more clearly I saw by these newly-acquired lights the horror of the abyss into which I had unconsciously plunged (*SC*, ca.1768-70, 2).

This early and pessimistic letter reveals how important Smith’s intellectual endeavours were to her sense of happiness, and that she felt mentally imprisoned by marriage, Benjamin and his family. Also, by this time she had given birth to three sons, although her first-born had already died: grief and post-natal depression were perhaps part of her low feelings. She was reasonably close to her father-in-law who admired her intelligence but he died in 1776. Dorset comments that “from his death may be dated the long course of calamities which marked [Smith’s] life” (313). Benjamin proved to be an unfaithful and brutish husband and, without his father’s guidance, feckless in matters of commerce. By 1784 he was in debtor’s jail.

Smith lived in King’s Bench prison with her husband for a few months and left her children with her brother at Bignor Park in Sussex. In a letter she recalls her emotions when Benjamin was released and they returned home. She writes: “how deliciously soothing to my wearied spirits was the soft pure air of the summer’s morning, breathing over the dewy grass, as ... we passed over the heaths of Surrey (*SC*, ca.July 1784, 5). She then remembers her childhood and states: “my native hills at length burst upon my view. I beheld once more the fields where I had passed my happiest days” (5). A momentary

reflection on past joys allowed her some temporary relief from her mental suffering. However, her reunion with her children provoked a more complicated response. She explains:

Amidst the perfumed turf with which one of those fields was strewn, [I] perceived with delight the beloved group from whom I had been so long divided, and for whose fate my affections were ever anxious. The transports of this meeting were too much for my exhausted spirits (6).

On seeing her children she was reminded of her responsibilities towards them, and she must have realised, that with only an irresponsible father to support them, their future was bleak. Still, she concludes the letter optimistically and comments that “after all my sufferings, I began to hope I might taste content, or experience at least a respite from calamity (6). Smith was extremely fatigued but it is evident that she was not at this stage overwhelmed by her problems and that she expected to be happy in the future should her troubles subside. Fletcher observes that this letter suggests the “natural buoyancy of her temperament” (67). Indeed, Smith was in a positive frame of mind despite the trauma that she had just experienced. It was at this time that she decided to try and earn her own money through her writing. She published *Elegiac Sonnets*, which was endorsed by the poet William Hayley, and it sold reasonably well. A second edition was published that same year.

In 1787, after twenty-two years of marriage and twelve children, Smith separated from her husband. In her letters after this period she writes continuously of her low spirits and depression as she struggles single-handedly to maintain her family. Three of her sons had already died but Fletcher points out that the remaining nine children chose “to go with Charlotte” even though the law “would have given Benjamin custody” (87). She began to write novels in order to support them and the year after her separation from Benjamin, she published *Emmeline* (1788) a gothic romance. In this fiction she also took the opportunity



to publicly expose her husband's bad behaviour through the character of Mr Stafford. Mrs Stafford, who is a depressed wife and mother, is a self-portrait, and her melancholy stems from her marriage at fifteen to a man who treated her "with great harshness" (161). Mr Stafford, like Benjamin, seeks in "every casual occurrence or childish amusement, relief against the tedium of life" (160). He pursues "vices" that are "fatal to the repose of his wife" and schemes that are "destructive to the fortune of his family" (160). Mrs Stafford, like Smith, is "naturally extremely cheerful" but the actions of her husband give her an "air of despondence, and melancholy cast of mind" (161). This low mood affects the way in which she views her children, for instance, when they were "playing round her, she would gaze mournfully on them 'till the tears streamed down her cheeks" (42). They were not yet old enough to be her "companions" and she often felt "more pain than pleasure in being with them" (44). She trembled for their "future destiny" (44). Mrs Stafford, and probably Smith, spent many hours alone which were "heavy and melancholy" (44). Through the character of Mrs Stafford, Smith made public her own experience of motherhood, a role, that when married to a profligate husband, was depressing, lonely and often unrewarding. By exposing her emotions and private affairs in this way, Smith transgressed the boundaries of female decorum. In this novel she is no longer the silent and submissive wife that she had been during her marriage. Author Anna Seward was critical and wrote of *Emmeline* that "whatever may be Mr Smith's faults" Smith was "as wrong as indelicate, to hold up the man, whose name she bears, the father of her children, to public contempt in a novel" (1811, 215). However, Smith also includes a poem entitled 'To My Children' as an appendix to her fiction, which shows her to be a depressed but devoted mother. She describes her "languid despondency" (1.3) and the "plaintive lyre" (1.7) with which she expresses her "maternal love" (1.9). She writes of the "evils" she was "born to bear" (1.12) and that she has suffered "long calamities" (1.26) for the sake of her children who deserve

a “mother’s love” (1.28). To a degree, Smith retrieves her reputation by presenting herself as the dedicated mother who has sacrificed her own happiness for the sake of her children.

Throughout the remainder of her life Smith had persistent financial worries and Benjamin, who remained permanently in debt himself, exercised his continuing legal right over her earnings. She was in constant battle with him to retain her own income. A further concern for her was that her father-in-law had left behind him a very complicated will, what Dorset describes as a “tangled skein, which neither patience nor skill could unravel” (313). It was not finally resolved until more than thirty years after his death. Smith spent her entire life, without success, fighting for her children’s right to their grandfather’s money. The distress that she suffered as a consequence often impeded the progress of her writing. For instance, she explains to Joseph Warton, who had commented on her novel *Celestina*, that she wrote it “indeed under much oppression of Spirit from the long and frequently hopeless difficulties in which my children’s affairs continue to be involved” (SC, 31 Aug. 1791, 36). She apologises to him for its faults and complains that the “worn out pen falls from the tired hand, and the real calamities of life press too heavily to allow of the power of evading them by fictitious detail (36). In a letter to Joseph Cooper Walker she explains that she has been “ill & perplexed with the cruelty of [her] Children’s tyrannical Aristocratic relations” who have not allowed her a “shilling” for them. She writes that “these torments, which often affect my spirits & drive me almost to despair, have prevented my going on with the Novel so rapidly as I hoped to have done (SC, 16 Dec. 1792, 53). Therefore, Smith’s ability to solve her financial problems through her creative writing, was often hampered by low spirits and exhaustion caused by her frustrated attempts to secure her children’s inheritance.

In the preface to the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1792) she defends the persistently “plaintive tone” (Curran, 5) of her poetry. She apologises for the “apparent despondence” that still permeates her poems and admits that “when it is observed for a long series of years” it “may look like affectation” (6). She was eager to point out that the melancholy mood within her poetry was not contrived but was inspired by her own experience of despair. She suggests that her depression is caused by the unreasonable behaviour of the trustees of her father-in-law’s will, who have not as yet, obtained for her children the “provision their grandfather designed for them” (5). With regard to her poetry, she insists that she has no reason at this time to “*change [her] tone*” (5) and thus confirms that her melancholy, which is the result of her difficult domestic situation, has an influence upon the nature and quality of her creative expression. In the preface to her novel *The Banished Man* (1794) her tone is less genteel and she refers to the trustees as the “weazles, wolves, and vultures” (108) who have used her children’s money for their own gain. She also comments that as a consequence of their greed, she has “suffered ten years of poverty and deprivation” (108). She states that she is “quite worn out by [her] sufferings” (107) and further adds that she has been “compelled” to have “recourse to [her] pen for a subsistence” (108). She explains that this novel was composed “at a time when long anxiety has ruined my health, and long oppression broken my spirits” (107). She denigrates the art of novel writing and describes novels as “trifling” (107) compositions. However, she also admits that her prose writing is often inspired by her own experiences and thus once again confirms a link between her life and work.

For therapy for her low spirits Smith often made visits to the spa town of Bath. Spa treatments were a panacea for all ailments at this time and many physicians, including Cheyne advised “drinking *Bath Waters*” (1991, 207) as part of the remedy for lowness of spirits. Smith wrote to Walker stating: “I have found the waters of very great service to

me in removing that excessive lowness and depression which render'd me unfit for everything, & is perhaps the most distressing of all evils to a person situated as I am – who must live to write & write to live (*SC*, 30 April 1794, 112). Smith's anxiety and depression affected her bodily health and the visits to Bath acted as a remedy not just for her mind but also for her crippling rheumatism. In an earlier letter to George Robinson she complained that her low spirits were having a detrimental effect upon her body. She wrote: "I am harrass'd to death for debts not my own & my Spirits are so much injured by such applications that I suffer extremely in my health (*SC*, 4 July 1792, 46). In another letter to Walker she regrets that "illness and dejection" have prevented her from writing earlier. She explains that she has been a "martyr to the Rheumatism" and was now "entirely crippled". She believes that her condition was "brought on by anxiety" and states that her "Physicians" had advised her to go to Bath for "a Month or six weeks" (*SC*, 25 March 1794, 103). Smith responded to this advice and wrote to James Upton Tripp from Bath in May that same year, reporting on her condition: "I am so ill & in such pain in my hands that I can hardly write". She explains that her financial difficulties are still causing her concern and that "indeed all my attempts to get restor'd to any degree of health are vain while my mind is torn to pieces (*SC*, 1 May 1794, 114). Smith understood that the agitations of her mind had a detrimental effect upon her physical health, a view which corresponded with that of physicians of the period. For instance, William Corp wrote that "the close connection which subsists between the Mind and Body, renders the welfare of either, of considerable importance to each (1791, 1).

In 1795 Smith's favourite child, Anna Augusta, died of consumption at the age of twenty. The incessant financial troubles and the mental and physical health problems that Smith had experienced so far, now undermined her ability to overcome this devastating loss. Smith's concerns for Augusta's health began the previous year when she feared that her

pregnant daughter would not survive childbirth. She wrote in a letter to the Reverend Charles Dunster that “the weight on my spirits is too heavy”. She informs him that Augusta is ill “with symptoms that make me suppose the event I so much dread, and yet wish for, is at hand” (SC, 16 July 1794, 133). In a letter to her publisher Thomas Cadell, she explains that she is terrified because Augusta is in “so dangerous a way”. She tells him that Augusta’s death would “complete the bitterness of [her] destiny” and that while she has so many other children “this dear Child is the most precious” (SC, 22 July 1794, 137). Although Augusta recovered from the trauma of childbirth, her baby only lived for three days. However, Augusta remained seriously ill and in the Spring of the following year Smith wrote to her brother, the Reverend Nicholas Turner, to inform him that Augusta, her “darling child”, was now dying before her eyes. She laments the fact that she is without a “single shilling in the World to buy for her the necessaries she has occasion for” and that “such complicated misery” (SC, 5 April 1795, 193) overwhelms her. Smith feared for Augusta’s life but she was also in the humiliating position of having to beg assistance from her brother to obtain money for her daughter’s medical care. Unfortunately, Augusta died on 23 April.

In the preface to *Marchmont* (1796) Smith states that while she wrote her novel for the “pecuniary advantages” she laboured under the “heaviest oppression” (3). She continues her verbal assault on the trustees and blames them entirely for Augusta’s death, describing her loss as the “one dreadful evil” that has “nearly overwhelmed” (3) her. She explains that this “last and bitterest calamity I shall ever impute to the conduct of our inhuman oppressors” (3). She explains that Augusta was the “greatest blessing” of her life and that she alone “had the power to soothe [her] wearied spirit and sweeten [her] hours of toil” (3). The following year in the preface to Volume II of *Elegiac Sonnets* (1697) she writes of her “extreme depression of spirit” (Curran, 1993, 7). She complains that as a consequence of

their poverty, both she and her children have suffered severe disappointments and losses, in particular, the loss of Augusta the “darling of all her family” (7). She attacks the trustees with the purpose of exposing their “false and frivolous pretences” (8) and describes them as her “aggressors” and “oppressors”<sup>39</sup> (9). She states that they have made her “miserable as an *individual*” (8) and that they have “crushed the poor abilities of the *author*” (9). The trustees have defeated Smith: they can no longer “restore the dead” or recall to her the time that she has spent “in anxiety, in sorrow, in anguish” (9). She once again connects her own depressed emotions to the melancholy mood within her poems by stating that she is “unhappily exempt from the suspicion of *feigning* sorrow for an opportunity of shewing the pathos with which it can be described” (11). Smith is writing in response to “certain critics” (11) who have ridiculed the depressing tone of her work.

In those letters written after the loss of Augusta in which Smith discusses her own mental state, she describes her melancholy as an established and permanent condition. Buchan warned his readers that grief, when indulged, “often changes into a fixed melancholy, which preys upon the spirits, and wastes the constitution” (1774, 125). Physician Alexander Crichton drew a distinction between male and female responses to loss, stating that the “painful affection from grief is almost peculiar to females, for, on their delicate frame, mental causes of every kind operate, in general, much more powerfully than on men (1798, 190). The settled nature of Smith’s despondency is evident in a letter written to Hayley from Exmouth two months after Augusta’s death. She explains that “the situation of this place is charming to anyone who cares about beauty, but to me all places are now alike” (SC, 12 June 1795, 199). She further writes: “what is to become of me or where I am to drag on the few months or years [of] my unhappy existence, I know not & to say the truth I do not much care (199). She now believed that her life was of little consequence

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<sup>39</sup> Curran comments that because of its “angry and defensive tone”, this preface was “suppressed upon publication of the second edition of this volume in 1800” (1993, 6).

and that the responsibilities which had preoccupied her for so long, were at this present moment, of no importance. Nevertheless, her obligations to her other children continued to pursue her and writing to Hayley two years later she states that she is not yet “at the very bottom of personal suffering”. She imagines that she will “die in prison”. She refers to her “extreme misery” and “shatter’d” health and believes that it is “despair” rather than “fortitude” that carries her on. She feels as though her life’s work has been rewarded with “the loss of all that is accounted good & with that of the one good which would have reconciled [her] to the deprivation of every other” (SC, 16 April 1797, 262).

Despite the fact that Smith had experienced a life of both physical and intellectual fecundity, her inability to focus on her achievements and her preoccupation with her losses, of which Augusta was at the core, perpetuated her low mental state. In a letter to her friend Sarah Rose in 1805, the year before her own death, she mentions Augusta: “ten years have dragg’d along, & the image is as new as ever in my memory, & my wound bleeds as painfully as ever” (SC, 30 July 1805, 700). Her recurring sense of loss and her fixation on this event contributed to her depression. She explains to Rose that she continually sees in certain places “the ghost of departed happiness, & the image of One who, alone of all my children, never gave me pain but when she suffered illness” (700). Smith felt as though she had been deprived of the one positive force in her life, of the one person who gave her life a sense of purpose. In another letter to Rose the following month she writes in a defeated tone, “what is life worth to me? The flowers are fallen never to reappear; the thorns remain; I try to fancy a sprig or two among them, but it will not do. They are like Autumnal flowers, scentless and pale (SC, Aug. 1805, 701).

Smith’s final years saw no abatement of her financial troubles and her physical and mental exhaustion prevented any possibility of recovery from the depression that continued to

plague her life. As her physical health deteriorated she began to suffer from anxiety attacks which she described as “that palpitation of the heart” and which her doctor believed originated in an “over wearied mind & corrosive uneasiness” (SC, 5 Jan. 1803, 506). Her inability to achieve a more positive attitude, together with her crushing sense of hopelessness, are evident in a letter to Walker in which she explains that “a gloom which I have vainly endeavoured to conquer has hung over me. A long series of calamities the most bitter seem to have corroded my heart, which is no longer alive to any sentiment of pleasure” (SC, 23 June 1799, 327). Smith was aged fifty when she wrote this letter, a time in women’s lives when they are going through the menopause and are susceptible to several ailments, including depression. However, she repeatedly suggests that the cause of her depression lay in her social circumstances. She was married at a young age at her father’s convenience, to an immature and unreliable husband and this made her life extremely difficult. After their separation, she had no legal rights with which to demand money from him and indeed, little power with which to prevent him from taking money from her. Her long-running and aggressive battle with the trustees of her father-in-law’s will added to her misery. Boyd comments that Smith’s letters and prefaces “systematically portray her family’s ever-impending destitution at the hands of an overtly-litigious society dedicated to keeping women tucked neatly within the private sphere” (145). Taken together, these factors show that despite her obvious creative talents and her ability to work tirelessly in conditions of extreme adversity, she was never destined to achieve happiness. In fact, to summarise, it may be inferred that Smith was finally overwhelmed, defeated by patriarchy. Stanton comments that “she had no lasting champion. No husband or brother stepped up to her defense” (xxx), and that “in a world where women’s rights were negligible, she had long discovered that her insistent, complaining, abrasive letters yielded results” (xxxi).



Through the character of Mrs Stafford Smith suggests that she had a naturally cheerful temperament and that her melancholy was caused by her difficult situation. This is a view she maintains in her prefaces, for instance, in the preface to the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* she asks: “can the *effect* cease, while the *cause* remains?” (Curran, 5). In her letters she also writes about her emotional and financial problems. However, while specific causes for her depression can be identified, this does not mean that her condition was not serious or debilitating. Horwitz and Wakefield explain that “not all reactive depressions are normal” and that “external events can so deeply affect individuals that they trigger internal dysfunctions” (18). They point out that “although physiological causes do often produce disorders, psychological or social factors can also lead to dysfunctions” (19). Hayley stated in his letter that both he and Cowper observed some “mental infirmities” in Smith.<sup>40</sup> It may have been the case that the constant and severe pressures which Smith encountered during most of her adult life, led to a more permanent and settled depressive condition from which she was ultimately unable to recover. This seems particularly evident in the years after Augusta’s death. Smith’s struggle, in all areas of her life, had been for the benefit of her children. The fact that she had to witness her daughter’s demise, for what she believed to be was the sake of a few “necessaries”, must have been completely demoralizing.

Nevertheless, her experience as the beleaguered mother gave her the motivation and the necessity to write. However, her elegiac sonnets and other elegiac poems are not necessarily influenced directly by her children or by her role as a mother, although some were written in response to Augusta’s death. It is more the sadness that she experienced as a result of her problematical life that inspired her to write as the melancholy poet, expressing, in the language of sensibility, a continual sense of loss and regret. In the

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<sup>40</sup> Letter, 7 February 1807.

preface to the sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* she admits: “I wrote mournfully because I was unhappy” (Curran, x). Her poems are widely accepted as a genuine reflection of her inner feelings, for instance, Adela Pinch observes that Smith’s sonnets are “melancholy meditations of a speaker who typically mourns the loss of past happiness, or the disjunction between the repose and renewal of nature and her gloomy internal state” (1996, 58). Deborah Kennedy remarks that the title of her publication, *Elegiac Sonnets*, “signals the mood of these poems rather than their occasion, for Smith was not mourning either a deceased person or an absent lover” but mourned the loss of “her own self” (1995, 43). Judith Hawley comments that “overall her sonnets are pervaded by a sense of lament, of absence, ‘the pain/Of knowing “such things were” – and are no more’ (sonnet XC, ‘To Oblivion’)” (1999, 187). Elizabeth A. Dolan points out that Smith’s sonnets “led the way in shifting the focus of British contemplative melancholy poetry from a preoccupation with the general transitory nature of life to an interest in the speaker’s own state of mind” (2003, 244).

This acknowledgment of Smith’s poems as authentic expressions of her own sorrows is not universally accepted. For example, Jacqueline M. Labbe suggests that Smith presents her sorrows as a “marketing strategy” (2003, 6) and that the selling of her sorrows was “as much a ploy as a realistic depiction of her *actual* needs” (19). She argues that the “femininity” in Smith’s poems is “adopted, rather than ‘natural’, staged rather than authentic” (95). Kathryn Pratt observes that in the sonnets Smith “presents her poetic performances as illusory and fleeting” and that she “associates these qualities with the theatricality of sentimental spectatorship as practiced by male literary authorities” (2001, 563). Paula R. Backscheider argues that discussions on the autobiographical nature of Smith’s sonnets are “founded in misunderstandings” and that “rather than primarily autobiographical poems, Smith was writing a sonnet sequence” (2005, 325). She explains

that in this sense they are “art and ... often artifice and performance” (326). In this chapter Smith’s sonnets and other poems are explored as both authentic expressions of her melancholy and as poetic performances. They are examined as a space where Smith was able to present herself as a distressed woman and, at the same time, create a forum in which she was able to construct a new and separate identity, that of a poet. Smith used her ‘female condition’, that is, the suffering that she experienced at the hands of a patriarchal society, as a means of entering into the literary arena of poetry, in particular, the tradition of ‘melancholy’ poetry, a genre which had been established by classical male poets and that had been continued since, and more recently, by poets such as Shakespeare, Milton, Gray, Otway and Collins. Curran notes that by the time *Elegiac Sonnets* had “attained its final state in 1800, there were in all thirty-six poems in the collection distinguished as not being her personal expressions” (1993, xxvi). This is because they had already appeared in her novels or were written after Petrarch or based upon Goethe’s *Werther*. The sonnets chosen for analysis in this study are her autobiographically based sonnets, those in which she clearly refers to her own predicament as a suffering woman. Some show the way in which she links her poetry to what Curran describes as “a long tradition of singers” (xxvi), in other words, how she creates and maintains her persona as the poet of melancholy by using the work of other male writers to assist her in the expression of her own personal sorrow, and by referring to male poets within the poems themselves. In addition, her poems ‘April’ and ‘Beachy Head’ are explored for their interesting autobiographical references and, finally, her last poem, ‘To my lyre’, which is significant as a poetic epitaph and in which unusually signs of optimism can be observed, is also discussed.

Stuart Curran argues that from the 1780s and continuing on for the next four decades, “sonnets of sensibility flooded forth like tears” (1986, 30). He comments that the sonnet’s “rebirth” coincided with the “rise of a definable women’s literary movement and with the

beginnings of Romanticism” (30). He also states that the “palm in both cases should go to Charlotte Turner Smith” (30). He explains that Smith’s poems established the “mode of the new sonnet in pensive contemplation, mostly sorrowful, at times lachrymose” (30). Later, in the introduction to his edition of her poetry, he remarks that “it is undoubtedly the case that Smith’s reiterated sorrows” are “somewhat numbing”, although he defends her poems by stating that her “contemplation of a threatened and unfulfilled life is less dependent on formula than are the dozens of poetic sequences spawned by Petrarch in the clubbish atmosphere of Europe’s masculine renaissance” (xxvi). The repetitive strain of inconsolable melancholy in Smith’s ninety-two elegiac sonnets may indeed seem quite wearing. However, it does reflect the persistent nature of her troubles in her life. Peter M. Sacks explains that “often, elegies are presented as being repetitions in themselves” and that “many seem to “begin again” or to commence with a “yet once more”” (1985, 23). He also suggests that “repetition is ... one of the psychological responses to trauma” (23). Therefore, Smith’s choice of the sonnet form, which she believed to be “no improper vehicle for a single Sentiment” (Curran, 3), and her successive production using the form to create a sequence or chain of poems, accommodated both her desire to reflect her continuing melancholy, and her aim to be a successful, and original, poet.

In several of Smith’s sonnets she refers to the general sense of despair that she suffers because of her difficult life, and in others she suggests that her suffering is heightened yet further because she is a person of sensibility and a sensitive poet. In Sonnet I she represents herself as the poet of melancholy and also alludes to her situation as a harassed wife and mother. In discussing these two personas within a single composition she establishes a connection between her life and art and insists that she is both a serious poet as well as a suffering woman. In this sonnet she explores her relationship with the muse

and explains that she has been a poet since childhood. She also refers to the domestic trials of her adult life and the powerlessness of her current situation. She opens the poem:

The partial Muse, has from my earliest hours  
Smil'd on the rugged path I'm doom'd to tread  
And still with sportive hand has snatch'd wild flowers,  
To weave fantastic garlands for my head (l.1-4).

While Smith in adulthood is still favoured with the gift of a poetic imagination, she implies that the once friendly muse has now become "sportive" and her unease at this change is noticeable when she states:

But far, far happier is the lot of those  
Who never learn'd her dear delusive art;  
Which, while it decks the head with many a rose,  
Reserves the thorn - to fester in the heart<sup>41</sup> (l.5-8).

The muse, who once adorned her mind with lovely images like the rose, now inflicts her heart with impressions of sorrow. She regrets her artistic skill because she believes that poets are more susceptible to mental suffering, and likens the poet's pain to a festering thorn. Kennedy argues that this is a particularly feminine image and believes that it "represents the passive suffering or typical inner-directed female response to pain, which is in contrast to the typical outer-directed male response to pain through acts of verbal or physical aggression" (51). However, the festering thorn also symbolises Smith's bitterness towards a muse who intensifies, rather than alleviates her suffering, which is further represented in the following lines:

For still she bids soft Pity's melting eye  
Stream o'er the ills she knows not to remove,  
Points every pang, and deepens every sigh  
Of mourning friendship, or unhappy love (l.9-12).

The demands of the muse are such that the poet must observe and feel sorrow to a much greater extent than those who have never learned her art. Smith concludes the poem:

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<sup>41</sup> Curran comments that "the nightingale, in legend, having been deserted in love, pressed her heart against a thorn and lamented her fate in song" (1993, 5). This image corresponds with Smith's purpose of expressing her own sorrow through her poem.

Ah! then, how dear the Muse's favours cost,  
*If those paint sorrow best – who feel it most!*<sup>42</sup> (1.13-14)

Thus, the sensitive poet, who has also experienced personal suffering like Smith, is able to portray melancholy most convincingly. Intense pain is the price paid by the poet for the gift of poetic expression. Backscheider remarks that “just as the rose garland and the thorn are inseparable, so are the honor, responsibility, and pain of being a poet” (328). In this poem Smith uses feminine imagery, such as the “garlands” of “wild flowers”, to construct her identity as a melancholy poet and reflect upon her own experience as a distressed mother who is oppressed by circumstances beyond her control. These factors make her poetic persona distinctly female and hence different from the male poets of melancholy whom she both admires and emulates.

In Sonnet VI ‘To Hope’ she maintains her persona as the poet of melancholy and again refers to her own personal sorrows. She begins:

O Hope! Thou soother sweet of human woes!  
How shall I lure thee to my haunts forlorn?  
For me wilt thou renew the wither'd rose,  
And clear my painful path of pointed thorn? (1.1-4)

She personifies “Hope” and believes it to be an antidote to her despair. She also depicts herself as the typical sufferer of melancholy who has a preference for “haunts forlorn”. However, this is also an allusion to her unhappy domestic sphere. The “wither'd rose” represents her fading aspirations and her “painful path of pointed thorn” is symbolic of the

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<sup>42</sup> This line was inspired by Pope, who wrote in *Eloisa to Abelard*:

The well-sung woes shall soothe my pensive ghost  
He best can paint them who shall feel them most (1.365-366).

Smith's poem is also reminiscent of Anne Finch's poem ‘To the Nightingale’ in which she writes:

Poets, as wild as thee, were born,  
Pleasing best when unconfin'd  
When to Please is least design'd  
Soothing but their Cares to rest;  
Cares do still their Thoughts molest,  
And still th' unhappy Poet's Breast,  
Like thine, when best he sings, is plac'd against a Thorn (1.7-13).

drudgery and hardship that she experiences in her daily life. She begs “Hope” to come to her and alleviate her “woes”:

Ah, come, sweet nymph! in smiles and softness drest,  
Like the young Hours that lead the tender Year,  
Enchantress! come, and charm my cares to rest (l.5-7).

She looks back to recapture those feelings of childhood when she basked in the “smiles and softness” of “Hope”. Now she is disappointed because capricious “Hope” refuses to listen to her complaints, and she states:

Alas! the flatterer flies, and will not hear!  
A prey to fear, anxiety, and pain,  
Must I a sad existence still deplore?  
Lo! – the flowers fade, but all the thorns remain,  
“For me the vernal garland blooms no more”<sup>43</sup> (l.8-12).

“Hope” has failed to act as a remedy for her sorrow and “Misery” becomes a more certain friend, as she explains:

Come then, “pale Misery’s love!”<sup>44</sup> be thou my cure,  
And I will bless thee, who, tho’ slow, art sure (l.13-14).

In this sonnet Smith invokes again the image of the rose and the thorn to represent her “sad existence”. Like the dying rose her hopes have perished, but misery like the thorns, is more robust. Kennedy comments that “by using the image of the rose as a symbol of her suffering, Smith implies that the truth about her experience, if not woman’s in general, can be found in the thorns – harshness, and pain – not in the flowers associated with femininity (51). Smith mentions her “cares” and describes her state of mind as dominated by “fear, anxiety, and pain”. While these aspects of the poem give some insight into her melancholy, other features serve to undermine the seriousness of her portrayal. For instance, the description of “Hope” as the “sweet nymph” and the “Enchantress” are fanciful, and are not so easily related to her life experience. Also, in associating her own

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<sup>43</sup> Pope’s “Imitation of the first Ode of the fourth Book of Horace” (l.32).

<sup>44</sup> Shakespeare’s *King John* (III.iv.l.35).

experience of depression with “pale Misery”, a traditionally literary portrait of the melancholy sufferer, Smith tends to lessen the significance of her real suffering. Still, she adapts the convention to suit her purpose which allows her to retain both her persona as the poet of melancholy and her identity as the distressed female.

In Sonnet XLVII ‘To Fancy’, Smith describes the way in which her ‘fancy’ or her muse, had begun to inspire her in her youth, a time when it showed her “the beauteous rather than the true!” (l.4). However, now “those glowing tints are dead” (l.5) because life has since taught her that a poetic imagination is more of a fiction than a reality. She has learned through her subsequent trials and tribulations that life is depressing, as she explains:

And now ’tis thine in darkest hues to dress  
The spot where pale Experience hangs her head  
O’er the sad grave of murder’d Happiness! (l.6-8)

Smith is now the melancholy poet whose writing is informed by the reality of her situation and not by the “false medium” (l.9) of “fancy”. Now her muse is “Queen of Shadows!” (l.1) and she no longer seeks “perfection with a poet’s eye” (l.13) or feels anguish with a “poet’s heart!” (l.14). This fanciful idea has been annihilated by “pale Experience”. In Sonnet XXXI ‘Written in Farm Wood, South Downs, in May 1784’ she contrasts her own unhappy existence with the contented life of the rural labourer. In this poem she suggests that her ‘sensibility’ is the cause of her suffering. She observes the shepherd in the beauty of “his upland bowers / Strewn with wild thyme” (l.4-5) and writes:

- Ah! blest the hind – whom no sad thought bereaves  
Of the gay season’s pleasures! – All his hours  
To wholesome labour given, or thoughtless mirth;  
No pangs of sorrow past, or coming dread,  
Bend his unconscious spirit down to earth,  
Or chase calm slumbers from his careless head! (l.7-12)



Smith views the scene with regret because, in her low spirits, she is unable to appreciate the wonders of nature. Her burdened mind with its “sorrow past” and “coming dread” stoops her body and intrudes upon her repose. The shepherd on the other hand, leads a worthy but simple life which allows him to enjoy the “gay season’s pleasures”. Again, in Sonnet LIV ‘The sleeping woodman. Written in April 1790’, Smith envies the woodman’s peaceful state of mind. She seeks the woodland in a bid to avoid “human converse” because her soul is “depress’d” (l.3) and here she notices the sleeping labourer. She writes:

Lo! – where the Woodman, with his toil oppress’d,  
His careless head on bark and moss reclined,  
Lull’d by the song of birds, the murmuring wind,  
Has sunk to calm tho’ momentary rest (l.5-8).

The woodman is secure in the soothing arms of nature and is able to recover his physical strength through rest, but Smith waits for the last sleep of death as the antidote to her mental toil:

Ah! would ‘twere mine in Spring’s green lap to find  
Such transient respite from the ills I bear!  
Would I could taste, like this unthinking hind,  
A sweet forgetfulness of human care<sup>45</sup>,  
Till the last sleep these weary eyes shall close,  
And Death receive me to his long repose (l.9-14).

She idealizes death as the ultimate remedy for her melancholy. In these poems Smith’s romantic view of the rustic’s “thoughtless”, “careless” and “unthinking” life, by implication draws attention to her own sensibility and cultivated intellect. Unlike Smith, the rustics are not subjected to the traumas of “pale Experience” and she implies that because they lead a simpler life and are less well-educated, they are less sensitive and unlikely to suffer from melancholy. She believes that her status as a poet and as a woman

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<sup>45</sup> Pope, “Divine Oblivion of low-thoughted care”, in *Eloisa to Abelard* (l.298).

of high birth, entitles her to the claim of sensibility, which she then associates with her bouts of depression.

In some of her sonnets Smith imagines herself to be in surroundings that are lonely and desolate. For instance, in Sonnet XII, 'Written on the sea shore. – October, 1784' she is alone and the setting is rugged and violent. She opens the poem:

On some rude fragment of the rocky shore,  
Where on the fractured cliff the billows break,  
Musing, my solitary seat I take  
And listen to the deep and solemn roar (l.1-4).

In this hostile environment Smith has placed herself precariously on the edge of a dangerous cliff in order to muse upon her sorrows. Her preferred site of meditation in this poem is in stark contrast to the peaceful woodland settings that she seeks out in other poems. Still, this noisy "rocky shore" agrees with her mood, as she demonstrates:

O'er the dark waves the winds tempestuous howl;  
The screaming sea-bird quits the troubled sea:  
But the wild gloomy scene has charms for me,  
And suits the mournful temper of my soul (l.5-8).

Her tumultuous state of mind is reflected in this "wild gloomy scene" of nature and unlike the "sea-bird", she delights in its chaos. She then compares her own life to that of a stranded sailor, the victim of a shipwreck:

Already shipwreck'd by the storms of Fate,  
Like the poor mariner, methinks, I stand,  
Cast on a rock; who sees the distant land  
From whence no succour comes – or comes too late.  
Faint and more faint are heard his feeble cries,  
'Till in the rising tide the exhausted sufferer dies (l.9-14).

The "storms of Fate" represent her disastrous marriage and her subsequent difficulties. Seated amongst the tempestuous and threatening elements, Smith reflects upon her feelings of abandonment and desperation and now believes that she will soon die. This

poem, in its depiction of Smith's overwhelming sense of isolation and inner turmoil, offers a further insight into her melancholy feelings and shows that her mood is not simply "mournful" but that she also feels angry, resentful and afraid. She believes that only the assistance of human beings can relieve her distress and hence alleviate her melancholy, but she is not convinced that anyone is listening to her "feeble cries". Nevertheless, her mood is in unison with the stormy scene on the craggy shoreline and in this regard at least, Smith feels a sense of belonging.

One environment that she repeatedly returns to is the River Arun, one of her childhood haunts. She also believes it to be haunted by the ghosts of poets such as Thomas Otway and William Collins, who had lived in the vicinity and who had also experienced problems in their lives. Otway died in extreme poverty and Collins suffered from mental illness. In Sonnet XXVI 'To the River Arun' she explains that it is the "mournful Muse" (l.3) who adorns the course of the Arun, and that the "infant Otway" (l.5) lingered there. The river encouraged him to dream of "early woes" (l.6) and its "low murmurs sooth'd his pensive ear" (l.7). While Otway is the focus of the poem, Smith writes of "kindred spirits" (l.13) like herself, who sympathise with his "sorrows, and lament his fate!" (l.14). In Sonnet XXX, again entitled 'To the River Arun', Smith explains how its "banks" (l.5) are haunted by "Sorrow's drooping form and faded cheek" (l.7), and that it was this atmosphere that inspired "Otway's plaintive strain" (l.9). Its "lorn echoes" also heard the "deeper tone" (l.10) of "Collins's powerful shell!" (l.11). In her third poem on the Arun, Sonnet XXXII 'To Melancholy. Written on the banks of the Arun, October 1785', Smith begins to associate her own experience more closely with the river. Pinch argues that "the speaker of this poem is much more palpably present in the scene than in most of Smith's nature sonnets" (65). She opens the poem:

When latest Autumn spreads her evening veil,

And the grey mists from these dim waves arise,  
I love to listen to the hollow sighs,  
Thro' the half-leafless wood that breathes the gale (l.1-4).

She creates a scene, a gloomy season, the close of day and a lonely river, which is suitable for the invocation of the melancholy mood. She responds to the “hollow sighs” with satisfaction and goes on to conjure up ghostly visions who lament their sorrows:

For at such hours the shadowy phantom pale,  
Oft seems to fleet before the poet's eyes;  
Strange sounds are heard, and mournful melodies,  
As of night-wanderers, who their woes bewail! (l.5-8)

She is unafraid of the darkness and the remote location and feels an affinity with these unearthly “night-wanderers”. She mentions Otway once again:

Here, by his native stream, at such an hour,  
Pity's own Otway I methinks could meet,  
And hear his deep sighs swell the sadden'd wind! (l.9-11)

In her imagination she associates herself with Otway, a writer with whom she can identify both intellectually and emotionally. In the “sadden'd wind” she feels at ease and her own melancholy is, at this moment, a pleasing experience rather than a destructive force. She concludes:

O Melancholy! – such thy magic power,  
That to the soul these dreams are often sweet,  
And sooth the pensive visionary mind! (l.12-14)

In this sonnet, Smith's retreat from the real world allows her to reinforce her poetic identity. She refers to her own mind as “visionary” and thus portrays herself as romantic and idealistic, as opposed to domestic and realistic. Pratt suggests that in this poem Smith upstages Otway with her own “superior theatrical powers” (571). She argues that at the end of the sonnet, Smith plays “the starring role of melancholic object for the spectator” and therefore assumes the position of “literary genius” (572). The river Arun for Smith is

a type of theatre, a place in which she can broaden her imagination and invent a world that bears no resemblance to her own real existence. On the banks of the Arun she feels at home, the atmosphere suits her mood and the ghosts with whom she mingles would understand her melancholy. Her dark mood becomes “sweet” in this sonnet, and while this idea is derived from a popular tradition<sup>46</sup>, Sickels argues that its philosophical basis “is in a belief that it is the part of wisdom and of virtue to seek a solitude filled with melancholy musings, and that in such invocation to melancholy lies the truest happiness of the sensitive spirit” (40). In embracing the melancholy mood on the banks of the river Arun, Smith feels a sense of belonging and visualizes a place for herself in the afterlife, in the company of those with whom she can identify.

Now that Smith has secured her place amongst the melancholy poets of the past who were also men of significant creative talent, in her final poem set on the banks of the Arun, Sonnet XLV ‘On leaving a part of Sussex’, she reiterates once again that she too belongs to that environment and claims the scene as her own. She explains that on its “varied shore” (l.1) her “early vows were paid to Nature’s shrine” (l.2), a time of “thoughtless joy” and “infant hope” (l.3). However, since that time the “lorn stream” (l.4) has listened to “Too many sorrows!” (l.5). Despite the fact that the poem is about her own sadness she still remembers Collins, the “Enthusiast of the Lyre” (l.11), who wandered in the vicinity of the Arun and called forth “Pity’s tenderest tear” (l.13) or woke “wild Phrenzy – from her hideous cell!” (l.13). Smith sympathises with Collins’s mental suffering and in so doing again suggests that he is her kindred spirit. Although she aligns her sorrows in all of these poems to those of Otway and Collins, her melancholy stems from her responsibilities towards her children and the demands that the mothering role places upon her. Therefore,

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<sup>46</sup> This concept was revived by Milton in *Il Penseroso*:  
 “Hail divinest Melancholy” (l.12)  
 “These pleasures Melancholy give  
 And I with thee will choose to live” (l.175-176).

the causes of her sorrow differ significantly from those of Otway and Collins. Nevertheless, in associating herself with these poets, Smith is stating quite emphatically that she is as much a poet as she is a mother. It is not the cause of the poet's despair that is important, but the way in which the poet responds to their suffering. Poets like Smith, Otway and Collins are sensitive spirits who feel the sorrows of the world more keenly than those who never learned "her dear delusive art".

Smith expanded her sonnet sequence over a period of sixteen years. During this time she experienced several hardships but the worst of blows seems to have been the loss of Augusta in 1795. Immediately after her death Smith began to record her feelings of grief in her poetry, and thus ensured that the extent of her love for her daughter would not be forgotten. In these poems Smith uses her artistic skill to express her motherly love, and indeed her practice in writing melancholy poetry seems to have been in preparation for this moment, the most dreadful of tragedies. In Sonnet LXVIII 'Written at Exmouth, midsummer, 1795' she writes of the violence of her pain when she describes her "burning breast" (l.1), "ever-streaming eyes" (l.2) and "bursting heart" (l.3). This outburst of human grief is tempered by images of the natural world. Smith refers to the "pale stars" (l.7) and "Soft rosy tints" (l.8) that announce midsummer's day. However, as for Gray, the sun of "radiant June" (l.10) shines "in vain" (l.9) for Smith. In Sonnet LXXII 'To the morning star. Written near the sea', she explains that

never more shall thy heraldic fire  
Speak of approaching morn with joy to me!  
Quench'd in the gloom of death that heavenly ray  
Once lent to light me on my thorny way! (l.11-14)

Smith is alluding to the comfort that Augusta's presence gave to her, a guiding light in an otherwise troubled world, but since her death each day is now in darkness. In Sonnet LXXIV 'The winter night' Smith looks forward to the "long and undisturb'd repose"

(l.10) of death where she can “feel that loss no more” (l.14). In Sonnet LXXVIII ‘Snowdrops’ she describes how she used to escape from all her “cares” (l.6) and explore with “pensive, silent step” (l.7) the leafless woods, to admire the “green and pencil’d blossoms” (l.9). This comfort is now denied her because the budding flowers only serve to remind her of her loss and her daughter’s lost potential. She compares the snowdrops unfavourably to Augusta:

Ah! ye soft, transient children of the ground,  
More fair was she on whose untimely grave  
Flow my unceasing tears! Their varied round  
The Seasons go; while I through all repine:  
For fixt regret, and hopeless grief are mine (l.10-14).

Smith feels depressed not just in spring but at all times of the year. In this poem her “unceasing tears” once more confirm her melancholy to be a “fixt” and “hopeless” condition. In Sonnet XC ‘To Oblivion’ she turns her eyes reluctantly “from the day” (l.2) and explains that “Since robb’d of all that gave [her] soul delight” (l.7) she asks only for “exemption from the pain” (l.8). One of her most poignant recollections of her daughter is expressed in Sonnet XCI ‘Reflections on some drawings of a plant’. She opens the poem:

I can in groups these mimic flowers compose,  
These bells and golden eyes, embathed in dew;  
Catch the soft blush that warms the early Rose,  
Or the pale Iris cloud with veins of blue;  
Copy the scallop’d leaves, and downy stems,  
And bid the pencil’s varied shades arrest  
Spring’s humid buds, and Summer’s musky gems (l.1-7).

In her botanical drawings Smith is able to capture the fullness and detail of the plants. She can represent the image, the smells, the textures, and even the moisture of the flowers and the stems. She can “mimic” the “golden eyes”, “soft blush” and “veins of blue” of the flowers, but no longer can she observe these features in her daughter’s lovely face. She goes on to explain that she has no picture of Augusta:

But, save the portrait on my bleeding breast,  
I have no semblance of that form adored,  
That form, expressive of a soul divine,  
So early blighted; and while life is mine,  
With fond regret, and ceaseless grief deplored –  
That grief, my angel! with too faithful art  
Enshrines thy image in thy Mother's heart (l.8-14).

Smith's own life force is represented in the image of the "bleeding breast". Here, she does record Augusta's face and while she breathes life, Augusta will not be forgotten. Smith is the melancholy mother whose "ceaseless grief" not only represents her melancholia, but her unending devotion to that "form adored". However, her public display of grief concludes appropriately with a most personal and private image of the indelible bond between mother and daughter. She preserves the sacred image of Augusta on her "Mother's heart", the heart and indeed the body that gave Augusta life but which now commemorates her death. In 'April', a poem of fourteen stanzas of four lines each, Smith explains that since Augusta's loss "Springtide's pleasant hours" (l.33) now revive within her a "sharper pain" (l.34). Augusta had died in April 1795 and since then each returning spring reminds her of "scenes of agony and mourning" (l.35). She looks back on this emotionally dark and distressing time:

Thus shone the Sun, his vernal rays displaying,  
Thus did the woods in early verdure wave,  
While dire Disease on all I loved was preying,  
And flowers seem'd rising but to strew her grave! (l.37-40)

In 1795 the natural world blossomed as ever in spring, only this time it was in preparation for the traumatic event of Augusta's death. In the years to follow, springtime seems "devoid of joy" to Smith "alone" (l.42). She goes on to describe how she "drag[s] on life" (l.46) and that never "one pleasurable hour" her "soul" (l.48) shall know. These sentiments reveal the persistent and permanent nature of Smith's melancholy since her daughter's death. Dolan observes that the grief in these poems is



“insistently unmitigated; there is no moral lesson to be derived from, no peace to be made with, the loss of her favourite child” (246).

In much of her poetry Smith alludes to what Hawley describes as “her own lost promise” (188). She frequently looks back to a time before her life was blighted by her early marriage to Benjamin Smith. For instance, in Sonnet II ‘Written at the close of spring’ she describes the temporary nature of springtime’s flowers and how they will grow once again the following year. The lot of “poor Humanity” (l.9) is not so optimistic and the “fond visions” of the “early day” (l.10) are not renewed. They are replaced by the “tyrant Passion, and corrosive Care” (l.11). While “Another May” will bring new “buds” and “flowers” (l.13), happiness has “no second Spring” (l.14). She refers to her happy childhood in Sonnet V ‘To the South Downs’, a time when the echoes of the hills were woken by her “artless song” (l.4). However, while the “turf” and “flowers remain” (l.5), the “peace” (l.6) that she felt in her childhood cannot be restored, nor can the sight of the beautiful hillsides “soothe her sense of pain” (l.7). In her final poem in her sonnet sequence, Sonnet XCII ‘Written at Bignor Park in Sussex, in August, 1799’, she writes of the visions of her youth which were “bright and warm” (l.7) but which are now “obscured for ever!” (l.9). While the “radiant star” (l.11) lights up the “lovely scene” (l.12) before her, her own fate is devoid of light, and absent of “hope” or “joy” (l.13), and the “rosy hours” (l.14) of her childhood are gone forever.

In ‘Beachy Head’, her posthumously published poem and what Curran refers to as her “masterpiece” (xxvii), Smith explores in yet more detail, the contrast between her happy childhood and her miserable adult existence. Labbe remarks that this poem “signifies the final resting place of a peripatetic speaker, whose wanderings have figured disenfranchisement on many levels: Smith’s poetic self is always outdoors, always

unhoused, always seeking shelter” (143). In ‘Beachy Head’, scenes of nature again symbolise her youthful joy and descriptions of the “dark and stifling” (l.293) streets of London represent the melancholy that she suffers in her adult life. She explains that she was “An early worshipper at Nature’s shrine” (l.346) and imagines that she can still breathe the “pure keen air” (l.369) around her Sussex home. She asks, “Ah! who *is* happy?”, and then proceeds to state: “I once was happy, when while yet a child” (l.282), and that at this time she had learned to love the “upland solitudes” (l.283) of the Sussex hillsides. Happiness for Smith is a concept that belongs in the past. She goes on to contemplate both the loss of her youth and her premature removal from the “southern hills” (l.292). She writes:

And, when elastic as the mountain air,  
To my light spirit, care was yet unknown  
And evil unforeseen; - Early it came,  
And childhood scarcely passed, I was condemned,  
A guiltless exile, silently to sigh,  
While Memory, with faithful pencil, drew  
The contrast; and regretting, I compar’d  
With the polluted smoky atmosphere  
And dark and stifling streets, the southern hills (l.284-292).

Smith’s nostalgic reminiscences of her childhood are inextricably bound up with her memories of the landscape. Her powerful sense of belonging to the natural world explains her feelings of despair and displacement when living in the “polluted smoky atmosphere” (l.291) of London. In this poem she refers to the early and difficult years of her married life, and recalls how “Memory” enabled her to escape back into the childhood days of freedom, space and nature, that she had so recently lost. Even in her final years, happiness was something that Smith could only experience through memory, through the nostalgic reflection as expressed in her poetry.

The melancholy mood that pervades much of her poetry is not reflected to the same extent in her final poem, 'To my lyre', written in the months leading up to her death. In this poem, she acknowledges that her creative talents have, at least, been a source of comfort to her throughout her troubled life. This poetic epitaph, in which she displays affection for her "faithful" (l.1) muse, is to some degree optimistic. She recalls that when she was removed at an early age from her "native fields" (l.7) and from all that she "valued" and "loved" (l.8), the "gentle accents" (l.25) of the lyre were drowned out by the "Bow-bells' detested sound" (l.26). So, Smith sought for her "darling treasure" (l.27) the "green fields, pure air, and leisure" (l.30) of the Hampshire countryside. The muse since then has "soothed each adverse hour" (l.35) for Smith, and she praises the continuing loyalty of the muse in her final years:

In cheerless solitude, bereft  
Of youth and health, thou still art left,  
When hope and fortune have deceived me;  
Thou, far unlike the summer friend,  
Did still my falt'ring steps attend,  
And with thy plaintive voice relieved me (l.37-42).

Smith represents herself as a friendless elderly lady without "health", "hope", or "fortune" (l.38-39). She depicts the muse as a kind of carer who supports her "falt'ring steps" (l.41). The sad and mournful voice of the muse has been both a comfort and an inspiration to her. Kennedy suggests that "Smith's lyre soothed her because through the "plaintive voice" of her poetry she was able to confront and express her discontent" (50).

Smith concludes her poem by looking forward to death and posterity, and is confident that "gentle minds" (l.46) will benefit from her poetry:

And as the time ere long must come  
When I lie silent in the tomb,  
Thou wilt preserve these mournful pages;

For gentle minds will love my verse,  
And Pity shall my strains rehearse,  
And tell my name to distant ages (l.43-48).

Throughout her life the pensive muse has offered Smith great consolation and now she believes that her “mournful pages” will help to alleviate the pain of other sufferers of melancholy in years to come. In this poem, Smith’s contentious and complex relationship with her muse is now resolved. She finally admits that her artistic ability has been one of the most consistent, supportive and enduring features of her otherwise difficult and turbulent life.

In her poems Smith portrays herself as both a sensitive poet and a distressed woman thereby implying that her suffering is more acute than that of male melancholy poets, because she is doubly vulnerable. Throughout her poetry she combines conventional representations of melancholy with references to her own despair and so develops an acceptable poetic form in which to express her own distinctive female sorrow. Her melancholy is often portrayed in botanical metaphors, particularly in the image of the rose and the thorn. The faded rose symbolises her loss of hope for a better life and the thorns represent her anxieties. She uses the metaphor of the “rugged path” to represent her lonely and difficult progress through life. In Smith’s society, women who married feckless men and were then burdened with the responsibility of caring for numerous children, had no prospect of happiness. They were financially and legally disempowered as well as socially excluded. Smith’s depiction of herself as the thoughtful melancholic who seeks out various deserted places in which to contemplate, is perhaps not just a literary invention, but may represent her alienation from a society which disregards the role of women and devalues motherhood.

She moderates the representation of her own suffering by including references and quotes from the work of renowned male poets of the past. Her voice then becomes rational rather than hysterical and this makes her poetry more culturally acceptable. Readers will recognise and share her regard for male poetic genius. Dolan comments that in effect Smith projects her own “potentially unacceptable thoughts and feelings through the bodies of their texts” (247). She also suggests that Smith demonstrates to her readers “that in these moments of intense emotion the poet’s rational mind is fully engaged” (248). In addition, Smith often identifies her experience of distress with that of male melancholy, for example, she believes Otway and Collins to be her kindred spirits in sorrow. In associating herself with male expression and experience in this way, Smith acknowledges male authority in the poetic form. However, she makes her own contribution by introducing references to her own suffering and thus indirectly comments upon the emotional complexities associated with the mothering role. She identifies her own cultural legacy by stating in her final poem, that people in ages to come will be comforted by the strains of “Pity” within her own female melancholy verse. A receptive modern reader would still agree with this claim.

Smith insists in her prefaces that her poetry is inspired by her own suffering, and this suggests that she adopts the persona of the melancholy poet because it corresponds with her experience. The subjective voice of many of her poems encourages the reader to understand the melancholy mood as originating from a genuine source. She often represents her melancholy as a condition for which there is no remedy except in death. She feels no joy in her present life and has no vision of future happiness. For her “the vernal garland blooms no more” (Sonnet VI, l.12). As Hawley observes, “Smith’s elegies resolutely refuse consolation” (187). Smith portrays her sensibility as part of the cause of her depression and in her state of melancholia longs for a more emotionally

and intellectually simpler life. The loss of Augusta is the final defeat for Smith. She sees reminders of her daughter everywhere, even in her botanical drawings, so there is no escape from her grief and this compounds her depression. Smith's only response to her condition is to express her painful emotions through her poetry. She considers the passing of her childhood as a further cause of her sorrow and so in the early years of her marriage, looks back on her happy youth as a source of comfort.

Smith complains about the female lot in her poetry but usually in relation to her own experience as a mother. Her poems express a personal despair and collectively serve as a general grievance against the men who control her finances and thus deprive her of the means with which to bring up her children. She also uses her poetry as a way of expressing particularly painful events in her life, such as the death of her daughter, and her grief becomes a further burden to her overwhelming sorrows. She highlights the extent of the responsibilities of motherhood and the fact that women can suffer from lifelong depression. Both instances of which are pertinent to her own life. In the early days of her marriage she suggests that in cultivating her mind she simply made herself unhappy because she had no outlet for her learning. She was surrounded by people who were not artistic or creative. However, although she does suggest in Sonnet I and in Sonnet XLVII 'To Fancy' that her poetic talent has been a burden as well as a joy, she does finally admit in 'To my lyre', to finding an escape from her depression and her other problems through her writing. An important aspect of her poetry, which is not associated to her role as a wife and mother, is that of her creative identity, and she asserts in her poems that like famous male poets she too is gifted in poetic imagination. This separate identity, that is, her creative self, enables her to both express her melancholy feelings in her work and to earn a living at the same time. In her life, Smith uses her writing to maximum effect, fighting back and speaking out in her letters,

prefaces, poetry and novels about the dilemmas that women face, and using her own experience as an example. The problem is that in addition to suffering from depression Smith becomes exhausted by her incessant need to write, a situation that eventually wears her down and also ruins her health.

The experiences of this group of writers show, that as can be expected depression and associated conditions such as anxiety, loneliness and grief, stem from several different causes and can manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Often, bouts of depression can occur for no apparent reason and this disorder is considered to be the most worrying, and is usually the sign of a depressive illness. It is different from the normal human response of sadness to particularly upsetting situations. It is likely that Thomas Gray suffered from this kind of depression at various times in his life. Still, even when he was not suffering from what would be described as clinical depression, he did seem to live his life in a permanently low emotional state, preferring to exclude all forms of activity that might raise his spirits to a higher and unacceptable level to him. He certainly had reasons to be depressed, for instance, all of his siblings had died in infancy and during his childhood his father was abusive towards his mother. In addition, the loss of his friend West was a constant source of sorrow in his life. Some critics have also suggested that his repressed sexuality was the cause of his lifelong melancholy. Yet depression, or low spirits, was a state of mind that Gray seemed to nurture, and this is evident in the way in which he lived his life. He was lonely and studious and did not spend time cultivating and improving upon his poor social skills. It might even be implied that, to some extent, Gray's melancholy was an affectation, a manner that he assumed which suited his intellectual lifestyle at Cambridge. However, it is also possible that he adopted this withdrawn and aloof persona to mask his chronic shyness and social ineptitude. Fergusson, in a sense, had the opposite problem to Gray. He was socially competent, gregarious and his company was sought after. Nevertheless, his depression was even more intense and dangerous than Gray's. The exact cause of his rapid descent into madness is unknown, although it is



possible to infer that he suffered from manic depression, an illness that was aggravated by his hectic social life and alcohol consumption. While Gray was always financially secure Fergusson's economic situation was precarious and he had to work for a living which left him little time to pursue his creative impulses, a factor which may also have contributed to his depression. Equally, his lifestyle and circumstances may have had little to do with his mental illness, which was probably inherent and had a physiological basis. It is not possible to take a clear view.

Finch's sadness at the loss of the Stuart cause stayed with her throughout her life. When James II was deposed both she and Heneage lost their livelihood and were forced into early retirement from public life. She then concentrated on her writing but as a female author she experienced feelings of guilt and self-doubt which probably contributed to her depressive feelings. However, she suffered from bouts of depression that seem unrelated to all of these factors and which rather indicate the presence of a chronic illness. The fact that she wrote so extensively suggests that her complaint was not always debilitating. It might be possible to conclude that she was also suffering from manic depression, a condition which is thought to enhance the creative drive. Montagu's experience of depression was different from that of Finch. She did not suffer from causeless bouts of despair, however, her sister's mental illness meant that it was a serious subject to her and one that was always in the background of her life. She clearly did become depressed in the months before she left England for the Continent and implied in her letters that the cause of her low spirits was the drabness of English society, and the dullness of England's weather, but it was also due to the disappointment that she suffered in losing Algarotti and in his cool response to her passionate letters. Her low spirits lingered on periodically after that time and became more prevalent in her later life. Scott also had depressed family members, for example, her brother was mentally ill for most of his adult life. She herself

suffered from depression following the breakdown of her marriage and, like Montagu, there is evidence of low spirits in later life. Nevertheless, and again as for Montagu, she does not seem to have experienced bouts of causeless despair. For Smith, like for Montagu and Scott, there were clear causes for her depression. She had few opportunities to recover her spirits and lived most of her adult life under a dark cloud, fighting for her children's inheritance. As a schoolgirl she was intelligent and artistic and looked forward to an intellectually rewarding life. To a large extent she succeeded in this regard, but her early marriage and subsequent pregnancies impeded the development of her creative potential, a situation which probably contributed to her low feelings. Moreover, having given birth twelve times Smith must have been physically exhausted, and to add to that, her particular role as a mother and sole provider meant that she was always worrying about the security of her children. All of these factors meant that she had little time or energy to be light-hearted and cheerful. It is possible, as with any woman who gives birth, that she suffered from post-natal depression, and in later life, depression associated with the menopause. These biological factors, as well as the deaths of some of her children and her difficult circumstances, may give sufficient cause to understand why she was continually depressed.

Three writers in this study, Gray, Fergusson and Finch, are likely to have suffered from some kind of depressive illness, or, what would be described as depression 'without cause'. This is not to say that they did not also experience episodes of depression that were normal responses to distressing situations, as well as the low spirits and ennui that is generally associated with boredom and fatigue. Fergusson's mental illness was much more destructive than that experienced by Gray or Finch and his mental decline culminated in his death. Gray and Finch appear to have suffered from similar kinds of dark moods, feelings that blighted their lives and were extremely disturbing. Still, when compared to Fergusson, their conditions were at least manageable. Much of their depression seems to

have been caused by their lonely and studious way of life. The three other writers, Montagu, Scott and Smith, experienced bouts of depression that were in response to certain situations, or, what is commonly known as depression 'with cause'. However, it must be pointed out that Smith differed from Montagu and Scott because she appears to have eventually succumbed to a depressive illness due to the persistent nature of her anxieties and troubles. In the case of Scott, it might be possible to shed more light on her depression when her letters become freely available.

Depression in all its various forms and associated moods is a universal condition experienced by both men and women alike. However, through these case studies certain conclusions can be drawn concerning the link between depression and gender. Gray was educated at Eton and Cambridge and amongst all of the writers in this study had the greatest number of advantages and opportunities open to him with regard to both life and career choices. He chose to become a fellow at Cambridge because it suited his quiet and introverted temperament but this lonely mode of living contributed to his low spirits. Therefore, his depression was partly related to his lifestyle. It was probably also associated to his social phobias and may have been linked to his sexuality. Like Gray, Fergusson was well-educated but his family, who had once been quite wealthy, were now living in reduced circumstances and as a result his life and career choices were limited by his poverty. His poetic talent in the Scots vernacular and his interest in the revival of a Scottish past restricted his potential for fame and fortune amongst the anglophile literary establishment. All of these factors, as well as his excessive alcohol intake, were likely to have been contributory factors in his mental demise. With regard to both of these male figures, it is difficult to identify a correlation between their gender and their depressive experiences. Fergusson may have felt some concern when his father died, that as a man he would be expected to provide for his mother. The pressure of this responsibility may have

contributed to his depression, knowing that he had aspirations to be a poet, which was rarely a lucrative career. In this case, it may be possible to observe a connection between his gender and his depressive feelings.

In the context of the women's lives it is easier to link their depression to their gender. Finch lived a quiet and retired life similar to that of Gray, but it was a way of living that was less of a personal choice and was rather a situation that was imposed upon her. She was forced, as a result of the political upheaval, to withdraw from public life because her husband's career had come to an end. One of the ways in which she coped with this change was to engross herself in her writing. However, her feelings of guilt at being a female author became part of her depression. Her lack of control over the way in which she lived her own life, as well as the necessity that she felt in always having to apologise for her desire to write, must have contributed to her recurrent episodes of despondency. Montagu appeared to live a life of her own choosing but her infatuation with Algarotti may have been an indication that she was unfulfilled in other areas of her life. Had she been able to devote herself to a career she may not have been so easily enthralled by him. The depression that she suffered as a result of this failed affair may have afflicted her anyway because in the years before she left for the Continent she was lonely, bored and low-spirited. Scott was depressed after the breakdown of her marriage which is understandable when we consider that to be married was one of the few options in life open to her. Remarkably, she constructed a new way of living that was based upon her charity work, although this only lasted until Lady Barbara's death after which time her life was less purposeful. A major cause of Smith's depression was due to the fact that the legal system allowed her husband to take her earnings and did not make him take responsibility for his own children. She was also devastated by the fact that the trustees of her father-in-law's will would not release the money that he intended for her children. Smith was let down by

a patriarchal system which failed to support and protect her, and this made her deeply unhappy and distressed. In view of the fact that these women's lives were confined and restricted in these ways and that the limitations imposed upon them by a patriarchal society contributed to their depressive feelings, it is possible to associate their low moods with their gender, and conclude that they were often depressed because they were women.

The ways in which these writers experience depression is expressed and represented in their creative writing in a variety of ways. Through his poetry Gray reassesses his life after the traumatic event of his friend's death. He expresses his immediate numbness and grief in his 'Sonnet on the Death of Richard West', and in 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College' he shows how the boys at Eton exist in a world that is free from mental pain, as he had once done. However, soon like him they would also be thrust into a world of agony and torment. He suggests that adult life is full of sorrow, but in 'Ode to Adversity' he attempts to manage that pain and use it as a means of strengthening his character. In this poem he begins to emerge as a more mature and considerate human being. His friend's early death encourages him in the years ahead to reflect upon his own mortality, and in 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' he imagines his own death. It is a poem in which he represents the tender and sensitive spirit of the poet who is perplexed and traumatized by the pain and suffering that is present in the world. As that poet, it is Gray's responsibility to observe and record what he both sees and feels. In 'Ode to the Gowdspark' Fergusson suggests that the poet's voice is vulnerable, and that if it is constrained in any way, for example by poverty, it is unable to express itself. In which case the poet is like the caged bird, which in its confinement is unhappy, and consequently has lost its singing voice. He implies through 'To the Memory of John Cunningham', 'Last Will' and 'Codicil' that the financial struggles and hardships that poor poets like himself must endure, mean that it is difficult for them to survive and that they are

susceptible to mental illness. Through his poems Fergusson also shows himself to be a man of friendship and loyalty, but when his mental health declines, as represented in 'The Author's Life' and 'Job', he believes himself to be alone in his suffering.

The women are equally diverse in their expressions and representations. Finch reveals a clear and confident voice in her first two poems, 'On Affliction' and 'All is Vanity', in which she portrays the pain and disillusionment that she felt after the revolution. Her voice becomes more tentative and uncertain in 'An Invocation to Sleep' and she begins to write about a depressive complaint that leaves her confused and perplexed, a state of mind that she explores and describes more fully in 'Ardelia to Melancholy'. In her most famous poem 'The Spleen', she carefully analyses depression as a condition. Nevertheless, her enquiry does not present her with a resolution to the problem, because as she demonstrates, there is no cure for this complex and overwhelming malady. Finch feels as though she has no control over her own moods and that as a result, she feels weak and defenceless. Montagu in her poems reveals two sides to her character. In 'A Receipt to Cure the Vapours' she is certain that she knows the remedy for her friend's melancholy: Lady Irwin is mourning the loss of her husband and Montagu advises her that she simply needs a new lover. However, in her own love poems, 'Ye soft Ideas leave this tortur'd Breast' and 'Hymn to the Moon', she shows that she is just as susceptible to melancholy when it comes to affairs of the heart. In '1736 Addressed to – ' her confused emotions have taken a morbid turn and spiralled downwards, and in this poem she exposes a deeply pessimistic despair. Scott, in her novel *Millenium Hall*, offers a solution to the miseries experienced by refined, middle and upper-class women in a patriarchal society. In her refuge, or asylum, women are never depressed and are always happy, contented and fulfilled. In Smith's sonnets I, VI, XXXI, XLVII and LIV she expresses the sorrow that she feels because of her sad and difficult journey through life. Like Gray, she presents herself as the

sensitive poet, but her vision is less expansive and she focuses on the pain and suffering that only she is destined to bear. She portrays herself as a woman of refinement and sensibility who is greatly offended by the harshness of her lot. In Sonnet XII she finds refuge on the rocky shore, however, she discovers a true sanctuary in sonnets XXVI, XXX, XXXII and XLV along the banks of the River Arun in Sussex near her childhood home. She feels a sense of belonging in the company of the ghosts of dead melancholy poets. In sonnets LXVIII, LXXII, LXXIV, LXXVII and XC, and in her poem 'April', she describes the nature of her grief after the death of her daughter, an event which symbolises her own final defeat at the hands of patriarchy. She regrets the loss of her youth in sonnets II and XCII and in her poem 'Beachy Head', and explains that she was once capable of being happy. She finally acknowledges in 'To my lyre', written at the end of her life, that despite her troubles and her contention with her muse, she had always derived pleasure from her poetic gift.

This group of writers display a diverse range of expressions and representations of melancholy. Within this Finch stands out for her attempt to define depression 'without cause' and Smith is prominent for her repeated assertions that her depression has identifiable causes. In addition, there are clear gendered aspects to this collection of poetry and prose and it is the writing of the women that is noticeable for its references, or allusions to, the link between depression and gender. Finch uses the masculine language of conflict and aggression to portray her melancholy and spleen as her enemy. Montagu suggests that on the one hand women should take action to cure the vapours, however, on the other hand she shows that passively waiting for her indifferent lover becomes a difficult strain within the lonely and tedious nature of her life. Scott's solution to women's unhappiness is to retreat from a world that has men in it. Finally, through her poetry Smith shows just how miserable women can become, when their lives are controlled by men.

Neither Gray nor Fergusson suggest in their poetry that their melancholy feelings have anything to do with the fact that they are men.

Authors today such as Jamison, Merritt and Solomon, write lengthy biographies about their depressive experiences. In comparison, the writers in this study refer only briefly to their depression in their writing. Perhaps one exception is Smith who uses her letters, prefaces, poetry and novels to mention in one way or another, her troubled life and her melancholy. Nevertheless, in the work of all six certain pieces of writing can be taken to stand as memoirs of their depression. For instance, in his letter of 27 May 1742 Gray explains that he suffers from a “white” melancholy, a state which is not too distressing. However, he then mentions his “black” melancholy, an utterly joyless mood in which he feels an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. In ‘Job’ Fergusson represents the terrible nightmare of the deterioration of his mental health, and in ‘The Spleen’ Finch suggests in the opening lines that she has been prey to the unpredictable and destructive moods of depression. In ‘1736 Addressed to –’ Montagu exhibits a nihilistic state of mind as she contemplates self-destruction. The memoir is harder to find in Scott’s work but the idea in her novel for a female refuge, appears to be partly modelled on the new and more humane asylums for the mentally ill, and as such in *Millenium Hall* she presents the reader with a similar solution for female depression which is based upon direct experience. In Sonnet I Smith encapsulates what she is trying to express in many of her other sonnets, that her happiness has been destroyed and that her poetic gift simply illuminates that dreadful fact. Despite the variations in form, these accounts taken together with memoirs of today, show a continuity in the personal expression of the depressive experience, an experience which is shared by both men and women.



The language used to describe depression and associated conditions in this period is complex. The writers in this study employ some of the language that is used by physicians of the time. 'Melancholy' for instance, was one of the most commonly used words by the doctors and these writers alike. Gray also mentions 'the hyp' in one of his letters and Montagu talks about 'the spleen' and 'the vapours' in her correspondence, terms that she also uses in her poetry, as does Finch. This is the same terminology which is used to describe various forms of depression in medical texts. In the writings of Scott and Smith, neither the spleen nor the vapours are used at all. It is evident that these terms are gradually being phased out in the closing decades of the century, reflecting the fact that the humoral theory of the body, from which they derive, is by this time falling out of favour. Nevertheless, Fergusson in 1773 does mention the vapours and spleen in his verse letter which may be an indication that in Scotland at this time, this terminology was still in use. Gray and Montagu also refer to their 'low spirits' in their correspondence, but Smith shortens this phrase to 'lowness' in one of her letters. Another word for depression that was in general use throughout the century, as these writings show, was 'dejection', for instance, it is mentioned by Finch in her prose preface, by Smith in her letters and by Scott in her novel. The word 'depression' is first used by Gray when he describes his 'depression of mind'. The only other writer here to use this word is Smith, who mentions her 'depression' and her 'depression of spirit', indicating that the term was becoming more commonly used by the close of the eighteenth century. What can also be deduced from the writings in this study is that the language of depression is generally transferable between all forms of writing and that in non-medical writing at least, it was not gender specific.

During this period physicians were fully involved in the treatment of depressive disorders. However, the evidence of the cases studied here shows a marked gender difference in the engagement with the practice of the physicians and with their writings on depression.

Thus, there is no evidence to suggest that despite Gray's persistent complaints of low spirits and melancholy, that he ever sought advice from physicians or was interested in contemporary medical writing on depression. Fergusson on the other hand, had no choice but to submit to medical attention because he was so desperately mentally ill. There are signs that all of the women in this study were either keen to seek medical advice for their low spirits and depression, or were at least influenced by the writing of physicians on this topic. For example, Finch reveals in her poem 'The Spleen', her knowledge of Dr Lower, a physician who had been investigating the cause of depression and then succumbed to the disease himself. She concludes her poem with an account of his demise. Montagu advised her friend Sir James Steuart, whose wife was suffering from depression, to read Dr Sydenham, a seventeenth-century physician who she preferred above all others: she was often derogatory about physicians in general. While little information is available on Scott's life, what is known is that she visited Dr Dominiceti at his clinic in Chelsea in search of a cure for her headaches. She was permanently in poor health and eventually moved to a house in Norwich, near a clinic that she found to be helpful. Smith was continually seeking advice from physicians about her poor physical health and her anxiety, low spirits and depression. The life and work of these six writers show that the women were clearly more willing to engage with either the physicians themselves or with medical texts.

In their accounts of their depressive experiences Jamison and Merritt point out that their parents had encouraged them to do well in their education and that this enabled them to fulfil their career aspirations. Therefore, their depression was not caused because they were socially constrained or because their lives were limited in any way. However, studies by Platform 51 and McGrath *et al.* show that some women today are still becoming depressed because they are socially confined and because they feel disempowered. These

women live in poverty, suffer abuse and feel that they have no control over their own lives. Also, Stoppard suggests that today, society's high expectations imposed upon mothers and the way in which they are expected to raise their children, causes women to feel depressed. Crowley Jack understands that many women in their roles as wives and mothers lose their sense of self and experience a loss of voice. This is not the case for the women mentioned here who voice their opinions through all forms of writing and often using their depressive experiences as a vehicle for their expression of discontentment. Nolen-Hoeksema observes that there is evidence to suggest that women today are more likely than men to show a ruminative response style for depression, yet in the authors examined here, Gray clearly adopts this approach more so than the women, therefore, this theory cannot be universally applied. The question that remains is, to what extent did the social condition of the women in this study contribute to their depressive feelings? It may be suggested that Finch, as an aristocratic woman who did not work for a living and who had no children, lacked a sense of purpose and that this contributed to her depression. Her writing career filled a void to some degree, although this role was not without its anxieties. Montagu's repeated assertions that women of her class must keep busy in order to avoid becoming depressed, suggests that the way in which they were expected to conduct their lives was lonely and depressing. In her novel, Scott portrays women who are neglected and abused, and others whose lives are simply futile. Smith's life shows that not all middle and upper-class women were idle, however, for her the stresses and poverty associated with the mothering role also made her depressed. McGrath *et al.* point out that today motherhood and poverty often go hand in hand and that this is the route to depression for many women.

In *Millenium Hall* Scott presents eighteenth-century women with a solution to their problems. She suggests that they set up a new society, one that is more conducive to their needs. Smith would have been an ideal candidate for the Hall: the women would have

helped her to look after her children and she would have been able to continue with her writing in a more relaxed and stress-free environment. Still, the novel is a quiet and subdued call for change, the Hall is hidden away in the depths of the countryside and the men only stumble across it by accident. Also, the women hardly dare to complain and their voices are genteel and rational, they are not the mad women that Rousseau argues are present in the novels of sensibility at this time. Nevertheless, the very existence of the Hall with its coterie of women is a clear statement that something is wrong with society. The idea that women have to withdraw from it in order to be happy is ultimately pessimistic and is a remedy that would not be acceptable today. The fact that the women in the novel conceive the idea for a female community in the spa town of Tunbridge is significant. In their lives Finch, Scott and Smith visited spa towns in order to recover their health and spirits. It could be argued that they were often seeking therapy for the depression that was caused by the boredom, frustration and anxieties associated with their lives as women, in other words, by their social condition.

Today, middle and upper-class women are not as socially constrained as were the women in this study and, therefore, as the examples of Jamison and Merritt have shown, their gender and social condition would not be considered as contributory factors in their experience of depression. However, women today who come from the lower social classes are still becoming depressed because of the limited opportunities open to them. Today, more women than men are thought to suffer from depression and, perhaps unfairly, this has led to a greater enquiry into the causes of women's depression. The reverse seems to be the case for research into eighteenth-century depression, which tends to focus on men's experiences, and more specifically on the depression suffered by eminent male figures. However, this study has broadened the exploration in this field by looking at one male and four female minor writers. In so doing it has shown the complexities of depression as a

condition and the different ways in which mental health problems can affect people's lives. It also reveals that not all writers in this period were suffering from the 'disease of the learned', as perhaps Gray was at times, but that they were suffering nevertheless and were often attempting to be creative in extremely difficult circumstances and under severe mental strain.

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