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**"A Singular Person": Portraits of Subjectivity
in the Poetry and Prose of Matilda Betham**

by Elaine Bailey

Department of English

Supervisor: Professor April London

**Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research of the University of Ottawa in partial
fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy**

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Abstract

'A Singular Person': Portraits of Subjectivity in the Poetry and Prose of Matilda Betham represents the first book-length study of Matilda Betham's literary output. A poet, biographer, and portrait artist, Betham is best remembered for her friendships with S. T. Coleridge, the Lambs, and Robert Southey. Referring to manuscript and printed material, this thesis uses feminist and New Historical critical methods to examine Betham's contribution to British Romanticism. It offers a biography of Betham and a historically contextualised analysis of her own construction of women's role in civic affairs. Betham's political affiliations, as well as the generic range of her poetic and scholarly representations of history, suggest her engagement with contemporary discussions surrounding subjectivity and self-representation. Her *Biographical Dictionary* participates in a construction of female identity that redefines the feminine while acknowledging the influence of preceding historians. The location and recovery of her autobiographical writings inform this examination of Betham's biographical research. The thesis argues that Betham's political views surrounding broad social representation also emerge in her exploration of the relationship between the lyrical voice and enfranchised selfhood. Betham combines her scholarly and poetic depictions of the individual enacting social change in *The Lay of Marie*, a historically informed metrical romance that compares to compositions by poets, both male and female, who similarly consider the demands of subjective interpretation of publicly available modes of historical discourse.



Matilda Betham

Self-portrait, 1823¹

¹ From *A House of Letters* (London: Jarrold, 1905), facing page 282.

**Dedicated to my parents,
Rev. Angela Bailey and Dr. Keith Bailey**

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A thesis, no matter how interesting to its author, can be a tremendous burden to carry alone. I have been fortunate in knowing so many supportive people who encouraged me in my work: my colleagues and friends in the Department of English, especially Rosemary Daniels, nudged me toward the finish line; my husband, Joey Bray, drove me down the B roads near Stonham Aspal and puzzled over some manuscripts with me; and my family always asked me how Matilda Betham was doing. But the person most deserving of praise is my supervisor, Professor April London, whose helpful editorial comments and critical input proved invaluable, and whose patience and sense of humour helped me see this thesis to its completion.

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Preface

Over the past decade, studies in Romantic literature have expanded to include women poets and novelists formerly excluded from the traditional canon. My thesis, *"A Singular Person": Portraits of Subjectivity in the Poetry and Prose of Matilda Betham*, investigates the works of one such participant in this enlarged literary field, Matilda Betham (1776-1852). Her intimacy with S. T. Coleridge, Robert Southey, and the Lambs brought her the limited attention that such contact with celebrity usually affords, but her own generic innovation and involvement in the economics of print culture remain all but closed to modern commentators. Donald H. Reiman and Stuart Curran were among the first to urge serious investigation of Betham's work; as yet, however, her literary output has received only the most glancing of analyses, even though contemporary reviewers acknowledged, however grudgingly, her skill as a biographer and poet. Betham's work balances scholarly, publicly available records with imaginative reconstructions of international events by including a range of historical perspectives and poetic voices. I demonstrate that the most consistent feature shared by her scholarly and creative publications is the incorporation of debate or dialogue, a characteristic that corresponds to her political belief that the accommodation of diverging opinions is necessary for social improvement. This thesis contextualises Betham's literary output within a body of contemporary historical and poetic material. These comparisons reveal the extent to which she pursued generic innovation as a means of arguing for human equity.

The relative obscurity of Matilda Betham necessitates an initial focus on biographical information. The first chapter, "The Life and Work of Matilda Betham," draws on manuscript letters and rare printed materials to provide information unavailable in existing secondary sources. In quoting from manuscripts, I abide as much as possible by the original spelling and

punctuation she and her correspondents used. An independent woman, Betham chose to live alone in London, where she made a modest income as a portraitist and poet. There, she became acquainted with several eminent artists who corresponded with her during the early years of her career and who encouraged her to continue publishing verse. After 1816, Betham's financial condition worsened, her health deteriorated, and she temporarily abandoned her career in 1822; by that time, however, she had published four books of verse and the encyclopaedic *A Biographical Dictionary of the Celebrated Women of Every Age and Country*.

Betham's own research interests, most especially her work in women's biographies, make her an ideal candidate for a feminist historical study. The daughter of a published antiquarian, Betham was well equipped to participate in the Bluestocking project of advancing women's intellectual development. In Chapter Two, I discuss Betham's *Dictionary*, a work that, in relying heavily on the objectivity of historical resources and factual accuracy for its authority, associates her with a significant eighteenth-century literary tradition, one that was embraced by many authors who shared Betham's interest in women's biography. Because these female biographies apparently restore to view the importance of forgotten women, we might be tempted to characterise Betham's *Dictionary* principally as an innovative challenge to male historians, a work that anticipates feminist research of the 1970s and 1980s in its recovery of marginalised women authors. Certainly her niece Matilda Betham-Edwards, whose own collection of female biographies praises women who pursue professional interests, admired the *Dictionary* for its uniqueness. But the niece assumed that innovation was her aunt's goal. The *Dictionary*, I will argue, appeals to the certitude of precedence as much as to independent inquiry.

Rather than seeking to undermine received historical truth, Betham draws on the eighteenth-century's version of an academic canon to reiterate an established belief that women

have their own cultural heritage. Her dictionary's reliance on previous anthologies and renowned scholars confirms the fact that her work is authorised by its proximity to mainstream history written by men. Betham's reluctance to overthrow established judgements on women's literary place is evidenced in her Preface's apology for instances where she "hazard[s] original criticism or observation". Such prefatory apologies were commonplace among women writers, but Betham's disclaimer appears genuine: the entries in the volume rely heavily on traditional sources, such as the Bible and classical histories, and speculative remarks are infrequent. Betham's choice of an entirely conventional authorial voice aligns her practice with that of contemporary dictionaries of women, including George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752) and Mary Hays's *Female Biography* (1803). However, Betham's *Dictionary* equally evidences an impulse to modify received opinion and to accommodate politically radical writers who had not previously earned a place in such anthologies. Her receptiveness to such authors anticipates the radicalism she expresses in her political treatise, *Challenge to Women* (1821), a previously unknown petition that recommends women's involvement in parliamentary debate. In comparing Betham's *Dictionary* to generically similar works by her immediate predecessors, we can expose the extent to which Betham questioned restrictive notions of womanly conduct. Betham is an especially interesting biographer because she also wrote two autobiographies, hitherto unrecovered, which reflect the dualism found within the *Dictionary*. Together, the self-writings suggest that subjective representation is both a product of external referents -- specifically, documented evidence that originates outside of the individual -- and of internal, privately understood experiences that evade social discourse.

The politics of inclusiveness that informs the *Dictionary* also emerges in her shorter verse. In the third chapter, "'Wrapt in Self: Collections of Subjectivity in Betham's Lyrical

Poems," I consider how Betham uses lyrical personae to insist on the necessity for civic engagement. While the *Dictionary* reproduces biographical facts garnered from research and documentary evidence, her poetry advances imaginative representations of various individuals. In their emphasis on private experiences, Betham's lyrics do not generally rely on historically vetted and publicly shared information; nevertheless, they demonstrate the importance of entering public debate, usually by placing the meditative, lyrical voice within a responsive community of auditors. Her first published volume, *Elegies and Other Small Poems* (1797), reveals her interest in medieval history while rendering scholarly information palatable to readers by dwelling on her subjects' emotional involvement in public events. The emphasis on affective lyric is not, I argue, symptomatic of feminine subjectivity, but rather of a political view that sees the poet as advocate for the disenfranchised. Betham uses empathy to urge social progression toward a more equitable distribution of power. By examining contemporary critical reaction to her work and modern commentary on the relation between lyric and enfranchised selfhood, I argue that Betham acts as spokesperson for the underprivileged. She sees herself not as a poet speaking exclusively for women, but rather as a representative voice for people of both sexes and varying economic backgrounds. Her use of the lyrical mode and the dramatic monologue in *Elegies* (1797), *Poems* (1808), and *Vignettes: In Verse* (1818) enables her to articulate the position formulated in *Challenge to Women*, specifically its call for the populace to speak against the tyranny of self-interested politics. Autocracy and dispossession emerge as central preoccupations in all three volumes of poetry, and repeatedly she suggests that societal integration demands the relinquishment of monologue unmediated by a respondent. In shifting her focus from recorded histories (available in the canon of her dictionary) to the oral moment of self-expression in poetic mode, Betham can more fully explore the heterogeneous range of voice

and the poet's function as spokesperson for the underprivileged rather than for the socially influential subjects of her prose biographies.

The social benefits of dialogue propel the narrative of *The Lay of Marie* (1816). This long poem epitomises Betham's attempt to reconcile the emotive and intellectual in terms that renovate historical perception. My final chapter, "*The Lay of Marie* and the Metrical Romance Revival," examines this volume's accommodation of interior biography and external corroboration by focusing on the dialectic between the invented biography of Marie de France and the historical notes appended to the poem. *Marie* often reflects this tension by drawing on scholarly sources and by situating its invented persona -- the titular heroine whose family is destroyed by French-English antagonism -- within a historically authentic conflict. By appending historical notes to her poem, Betham emphasises the dual process by which a writer understands the past as both external political event and internal empathetic experience. In this trans-generic poem, Betham self-consciously integrates the imaginary with the factual, creating a narrative that foregrounds the semantic process of history's construction. Marie's lay turns history into an oral event: in poetically confessing her personal grief over the English defeat, she thwarts the French audience's expectations of a celebratory song. Betham suggests that the poetic voice is not a refuge from but rather a shaper of history. Betham focuses on scholarly and poetic representations of the past as a means of investigating women's civic role.

Throughout her literary career, Betham appears to have found inspiration in the dual, and sometimes conflicting, claims of scholarly convention and poetic innovation. It is this feature of dualism that speaks to Betham's endorsement of debate and range of opinion, an accommodation of perspectives that is manifested in her appreciation for both scholarship and fiction.

Fascinated by cultural scholarship and women's literary heritage, Betham looked to past

conventions to authorise her own work. Her fictive and factual portraitures of women's personal experiences link her to a community of literati with similar interests. The *Dictionary* represents an initial attempt to articulate the relevance of women's vocational choices. Her transition from antiquarian to historical poet illustrates her further need for a less restrictive mode -- one that, in weaving genres and histories of public and private events, enables her engagement in contemporary politics. Although Betham's poetry certainly shows a consistent respect for women's experiences, which sometimes includes their traditional, domestic roles as wives and mothers, she also believed herself to be, like Marie de France, a visionary poet who could enact social change. Betham's life as an artist and political radical is thus reflected in her literary output. In choosing this unconventional path, Betham incurred a familial breach, financial ruin, and incarceration. But it was also that initial step toward independence that enabled Betham to interject her critical and poetic voice into a wider literary community.

Chapter One:

The Life and Work of Matilda Betham

"I tell You for the 1000th time that You are full of Genius, several paths to fame are open before you, and if You don't contrive to march there thro' one of them, you deserve to have your *mental feet* cut off."¹ So wrote Charlotte, Lady Bedingfeld to twenty-two year old Matilda Betham (pronounced Beetham), exhorting her young friend to triumph in at least one of the artistic pursuits at which she was so talented.² The metaphor of the intrepid pedestrian is one Lady Bedingfeld embellished in a later letter, though in sympathetic terms that acknowledge more fully the obstacles Betham faced when she moved outside the "box-edged Gravel Walk" of the conventional lady's journey:

I am preserved from the disagreeable ones [feelings] by being destined to travel thro' Life in a beaten road, which requires no judgment to follow, whereas you have to make Your way across the fields and thickets, no Wonder You sometimes meet with brambles, and rough paths that impede Your progress, but in return, You catch a view of delightful Glens, and Grottoes, which the quiet traveller on the King's highway little dreams of.
(*Letters* 85)³

As the conceit suggests, the independent route Betham took involved both struggles and rewards unknown to the orthodox traveller; she was a wanderer whose diverse gifts allowed her to range over several genres and befriend many prominent artists. During her career, Betham confronted financial hardship and betrayal, but she also attained a considerable reputation during her lifetime as a literary lady, winning the admiration and affection of, among others, the Lambs, the Southseys, and the Coleridges. Yet it was Lady Bedingfeld who remained her closest confidante. With the encouragement of this friend, herself an aspiring artist, Betham entered the public

domain as a professional miniaturist and writer. The intimacy between Betham and Charlotte Jerningham, who became Lady Bedingfeld when she married Sir Richard Bedingfeld of Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk, led to a correspondence that, together with Matilda Betham-Edwards's three biographies of her aunt, remains the most reliable published source of biographical information about this poet, painter, and scholar.⁴ Betham's unpublished autobiography, missing for over a century and believed to exist only in torn fragments held at the Dove Cottage and Wordsworth Museum, and at the Forster Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, is in fact extant and nearly complete, excepting a few appended notes.⁵ From these reminiscences and other scattered letters in manuscript, a picture emerges of an exceptionally determined woman artist, who left the security of her father's home to make her own living in London. Other short biographies have appeared in literary dictionaries and anthologies of Romantic women poets. But as Betham's letters and unpublished compositions have remained largely ignored or unrecovered, existing studies offer at best a sketchy outline of her literary output, personality, and circle of friends.

Born on 16 November 1776, she was the first of Mary Betham (formerly Damant) and Rev. William Betham's fifteen children, one of whom died in infancy.⁶ As a writer, she is best known for her four books of poetry – *Elegies and Other Small Poems* (1797), *Poems* (1808), *The Lay of Marie* (1816), and *Vignettes: In Verse* (1818) – and for her ambitious *A Biographical Dictionary of the Celebrated Women of Every Age and Country* (1804). The short political treatise, *Challenge to Women* (1821), has been entirely overlooked by her previous biographers and critics, possibly because, as I suggest below, the Betham family accidentally lost or

purposely destroyed manuscripts dated between 1818-1830. Although the Bethams christened their first child Mary Matilda, family and friends always called her Matilda (or "Matty" and "Tillin"), which may account for their naming a later daughter Mary also. This redundancy causes some confusion in critical sources and needs clarification. For instance, C. N. Smith's Introduction to the novel *The Lord of the Harvest*, by Matilda Betham's niece and goddaughter Matilda Betham-Edwards, misleadingly identifies the novelist's literary aunt as "*Mary* Betham, a writer and miniature painter who was on friendly terms with Coleridge and the Lambs," although both her correspondence and signature suggest that she never used that name.⁷ In their indices to the Lambs' collected letters, Edwin Marris and E. V. Lucas list *Matilda* Betham as among Lamb's correspondents but omit *Mary*, despite their inclusion of Charles Lamb's letter to this second Mary Betham. Similarly, David Sutton mistakenly assumes that Mary and Matilda are one and the same person.⁸ Evidently puzzled by the two Mary Bethams, Donald H. Reiman in his Introduction to the Garland reprint series of Betham's poetry concludes that this second Mary probably was a niece or sister-in-law of Matilda.⁹ However, this hypothesis is undermined by Charles Lamb's letter of thanks, directed to a *Miss* Mary Betham residing in King Street, London, for her sister Anne's legacy of thirty pounds, which was left to Mary Lamb in 1833 rather than to the impecunious Matilda. Moreover, Betham herself distinctly refers to her sister Mary in a letter.¹⁰ To avoid further confusion, I will hereafter refer to the author exclusively by the name under which she published and signed documents.

Matilda Betham's diaries indicate that her youth was spent absorbed in books. As a child and young woman, she enjoyed a sheltered life, usually living in the family's rural home in

Stonham Aspal, near Ipswich, but sometimes staying with her father's elder brother Edward in London. Matilda's father, the Reverend William Betham, came of an ancient and socially respected family, the earliest known ancestor having been traced back to the reign of Henry II. Reputedly a well-rounded man of many interests, he was athletic, scholarly, and artistic, adept at portraiture, as was his eldest child. William Betham first became a schoolmaster and then a tutor to the Duke of Ancaster's son before entering the Church in 1771. On July 25, 1774, he married Mary Damant of Eye, and shortly thereafter settled in Stonham Aspal, Suffolk. Rev. Betham promoted the educational advancement of his community by patronising the local school, where he taught, with private funds. He supplemented his modest livelihood as curate of Stradbrook and Master of the Free School at Stonham Aspal by farming some of his land and by publishing genealogical surveys of British history, which were advertised at the end of his daughter's first volume, *Elegies and Other Small Poems*. His interest in antiquarian scholarship doubtless encouraged Matilda and her brother William (whose career I discuss briefly below) in their own literary endeavours. Matilda's parents enjoyed a long life together, her mother dying at the age of eighty-five and her father, surviving her by only six weeks, at the age of ninety-one.¹¹

Rev. Betham's hopes for early advancement in the Church were repeatedly disappointed, and he turned eighty-four before he secured the position of Rector of Stoke Lacy, Herefordshire. However, Matilda benefited from her father's lineage and connection to his elder brother Edward (who changed his patronymic to "Beetham" as a condition of inheriting a small estate), an unconventional man whose independent disposition was rather like Matilda's own. He incurred parental disapproval by joining an acting troupe and marrying a Roman Catholic. Edward

Beetham's financial standing became secure once he inherited and sold the estate of Little Strickland, which allowed him to invest money in patenting mechanical inventions. Matilda stayed in London with her uncle in Chancery Lane near Fleet Street in 1794, a visit that probably stimulated her aspiration to become a professional writer, since, as Ernest Betham observes, "their neighbourhood was the centre for booksellers, publishers, and engravers, and the residence of the literary, artistic, and legal world" (*Letters* 67). Here, at 3 Red Lion Passage, Fleet St., the Betham family registered its press in 1800.¹² It was also while visiting her uncle's house in London that Matilda became friendly with the celebrated painter John Opie (1761-1807), who became a royal portraitist in the court of King George III, and whose affection for his beautiful young pupil Jane Beetham (Matilda's cousin) gave Opie's first wife considerable anxiety. Rev. Betham voiced strong opposition to Opie's persistent admiration and advised the Beethams to discourage his visits, but for her own part, Matilda enjoyed socialising with him and his friends, and gratefully acknowledged his willingness to help her exhibit some art (*Letters* 41). Eventually, both Jane and Matilda displayed their paintings at the Royal Academy.¹³ The potential of making some money as a miniaturist excited Betham, who perceived the necessity of becoming self-sufficient.

A clergyman and a second son, Rev. Betham always struggled financially, and he had a large family to support. In her autobiography, Betham recalls that as the family increased, they were obliged to sell plate for extra money. However, seven of the eight sons grew up to serve in the East India Company, although only four of them remained lifelong employees. Matilda also prepared for an independent life by undertaking much of her own education, principally, it

would seem, because her parents disapproved of her scholarly bent.¹⁴ Betham states that even as a child she dreamed of becoming a writer, but that her literary ambitions "received a check at ten years of age, from a speech of my father's" (*Crow-quill Flights* 7). She was raised "accidentally, ... in a miscellaneous sort of a way," which meant that she was frequently left to look after herself (*Crow-quill Flights* 14). Her father, though he had taught her to recite poetry in infancy, encouraged her to pursue domestic work as her vocation: "I was sent to school for a year to learn sewing, &c." she remembered, "in order to prevent my too strict application to books" (14). Her formal schooling ended in childhood, and Betham admits that she remained ignorant of many branches of knowledge and the life skills of self-preservation. Many entries in her early diaries briefly state, "Went into the fields to read," from which we might infer that Betham studied alone and perhaps covertly (*Letters* 286). However, Betham remained deeply attached to her parents and siblings, remembering her family as "healthy[,] affectionate, and happy ... -- and I, the eldest, had a parent's pride in them--".¹⁵ Rev. Betham himself enjoyed reading and discussion, although in another recollection, Matilda hints that the sons received superior pedagogical guidance:

In our quiet and unorganized household sometimes the arts were all in all-- sometimes learning unlocked her abstruse stores and people talked, albeit without pedantry, as if in the house of a philosopher. Sometimes plays were read and listened to with enthusiasm, or poems, followed in succession by the criticism of admiration We had loads of books in my father's library, and new ones, with reviews, etc., from the book-club every month. We were heard if we carried our lessons to my father's study, at least the boys were, but if they did not an occasional sarcasm or prophecy of what would become of them was all the punishment. (*Letters* 29)

The informal, bookish environment in which she was raised may have encouraged the independent thought, self-reliance, and analytical inquiry that characterise even her youthful literary attempts: at fourteen she read Tom Paine and critiqued his opinions, although in a few years she would re-evaluate her political stance.¹⁶ Without having access to a systematic education, she relied partly on her father's irregular instruction and library resources, but mostly on her own "passionate love of history and anecdote".¹⁷ However, she had to devote much of her time at home to household activities, since the large family rarely employed more than two servants (*Letters* 29).

Indoctrinated by her family's criticism of overly intellectual women, Betham as a girl was fearful of being perceived as a Bluestocking, although in maturity she acknowledged her mistake: "foolishly enough I felt it a disgrace to be thought learned, when somebody told a bishop, sitting next to me at dinner one day, that he must talk Greek to that young lady."¹⁸ Her autobiography acknowledges that as early as 1794 she began to "rally and argue about the equality of the sexes"; however, she also implies that she was naive about the impracticability of changing society's attitude: "That what was abstract truth would be impossible to establish against the settled privileges and supposed interests of the other party I never considered I knew little of what might in reality be said upon the subject" (*Crow-quill Flights* 5). Despite this assertion, Betham's interest in sexual equality was no passing fancy. In 1821, she complained that women's "dependent system of ... education" often rendered them incapable of exercising sound judgement.¹⁹ She revered women intellectuals, attending Hannah More's court of admirers and finding in Germaine de Staël a brilliant interlocutor who flattered her with the

remark, "It is very singular, but you appear to understand *me* and I *you* better than anybody I ever met with; yet at times I cannot make you out; I see nothing of your mind" (*Letters* 178).

Matilda Betham-Edwards observed that her aunt's engagement books also prove that she socialised "constantly" with the Barbaulds at Stoke Newington, although no letters passing between the two women appear to have survived.²⁰

Betham's attendance at various soirées in London introduced her to the exciting, intellectual life of the country's leading artists. In her opinion, an author whose work she read ceased to be a stranger, and she was at home to any writer who paid a call on her.²¹ At the Lambs' house she met William Hazlitt, among others, as is made clear by a glancing reference she makes to his eloquence on metaphysical subjects, although Hazlitt himself does not mention her at all.²² Betham's determination to support herself through painting and writing met with a mixed response from her acquaintances. Hazlitt's grandson was to remember Betham as one of several untalented women authors who "conspired, during many years, to vex the soul of Lamb by their perpetual calls upon him to act the part of a literary censor...".²³ In a reminiscence, Betham admits that as a young woman she shocked some of her contemporaries by searching for a profession:

Many people have thought me naturally a singular and perhaps imprudent person because I rhymed and ventured into the world as an artist; but I belonged to a large family, and dreaded dependence. My mother's handsome fortune [of £4000] was lessened by the expense of a Chancery suit of eleven years' standing. My father's hopes of preferment were one by one disappointed by death and translation of bishops, and once by having delayed a request because he would not call about it on a Sunday. The destination of his children, therefore, became modified by existing circumstances. In my visits to London I had

learned French. The desire of knowing Italian had been kindled by reading Hoole's *Metastasio*, and I took advantage of an invitation to Cambridge to have a half-year's instruction from Agostino Isola, a delightful old man, who had been the preceptor of Gray the poet, Pitt, and others.²⁴

Self-reliance was Betham's goal, and to that end she tried various means of making money, chiefly by painting ("nothing as employment for me would be equal to portrait for profit," she wrote to her brother William) and by writing, which was one occupation for which women living in the early nineteenth century had sufficient qualifications.²⁵ Lady Bedingfeld attempted to find Betham some work as a translator also, but without success. However, Betham taught herself painting so successfully that she earned several commissions and exhibited in Somerset House, although in her autobiography she described miniature portrait painting as "drudgery". In addition, she gave public readings of Shakespeare, and it may have been this theatrical element in her character that endeared her to the scenery painter of Drury Lane Theatre.²⁶

In 1799 she began writing a novel, probably encouraged by Lady Bedingfeld's view that it would earn her some quick money: "pray go on with your Novel. nothing [sic] goes down the public throat like that sort of writing-- any stuff will do, and small profits do to build upon" (*Letters* 62).²⁷ Poetry, however, became Betham's preferred genre, and apparently she discontinued work on the novel. Her other numerous accomplishments were largely self-taught: she learned to read French well enough to understand scholarly sources, although she lacked the opportunity to acquire conversational fluency.²⁸ For a while she lived alone in Cambridge, renting from a bookseller an upstairs bedroom and adjoining studio for painting, and socialising with her new, scholastically minded friends. As a young woman, she was especially close to her

brother William Betham (1779-1853), who shared her fascination with antiquarianism: he published thoroughly researched volumes on Britain's ethnic origins and collected valuable, ancient manuscripts that were finally sold in 1845. In 1820, he was appointed Ulster King at Arms, in which capacity, he organised genealogical documents held in Dublin Castle.²⁹ Matilda likewise studied antiquarian texts assiduously, a hobby she later put to publishable ends in her *Biographical Dictionary* and *The Lay of Marie*. Despite the self-motivated persistence with which she applied herself to diverse branches of knowledge, she accused herself of indolence. More probably, she was simply disorganised and a little absentminded, once losing her place in the stagecoach while travelling back to Stonham, usually dressing eccentrically, and often postponing her correspondence.³⁰

The independence that chiefly characterises Matilda Betham's personality did not compel her to reject artistic advice; she often petitioned friends for the use of books she needed to consult, and several seasoned writers advised her on her work. In fact, it is principally owing to her friendships, not her own publications, that Betham is remembered today. It was she, for instance, who recollected for Lamb's first biographer, Sir Thomas Talfourd, some of Elia's famous puns and quips. Even Matilda Betham-Edwards emphasises Betham's acquaintance with the literary "gods," rather than her aunt's own writing. However, we should be cautious about embracing Donald Reiman's opinion in his Introduction to the Garland series of Betham's poetry, that overly zealous male friends were a detrimental influence on her creative abilities.³¹ For the most part, Betham's subject matter appears to have been self-determined: she published her first book, *Elegies*, several years before she was friendly with Charles Lamb and Robert Southey, and

letters from Lady Bedingfeld prove that she began to compile her *Biographical Dictionary* (1804) as early as 1798, with minimal assistance from friends.³² As for her major poem, *The Lay of Marie* (1816), not only did Southey and Lamb learn from her that Marie de France would be the topic of her poem, but they also offered meagre assistance in its composition. Her final published book *Vignettes: In Verse* (1818), occasionally overlooked in surveys of Betham's works, appears to have been a project she undertook without any advice from men.³³

Nevertheless, her friendships with the Lambs, Coleridges, and Southey secured Betham a minor place in the annals of literary history and consequently deserve comment. Charles Lamb, who became acquainted with her through George Dyer in 1809 and remained her friend into old age, praised her poetry and tried to find commissions for her miniatures, although neither he nor his sister Mary appears to have sat for her. Mary Lamb urged her to solicit Charles's help with the editing of her poems, promising that he would "spy out errors in a manuscript which has passed through many judicious hands," and he did edit part of *The Lay of Marie* in 1816 (*Letters* 127). Both Mary and Charles Lamb became close friends with Betham and her youngest sister, Barbara, the mother of Victorian novelist Matilda Betham-Edwards. In 1811, Matilda received tickets from Lamb to attend Coleridge's lectures on poetry in London (*Letters* 137).

Coleridge's admiration for her poetry predated their personal acquaintance. In 1802, Lady Rouse Boughton recited some of Betham's poetry to Coleridge at Greta Hall. Impressed, he wrote the flattering verses "To Matilda Betham, from a Stranger," in which he compares Betham to Sappho and prophesies her literary ascendance as Britain's foremost poetess. Betham was

delighted when he sent the verses to her, and tells us he singled out "On a Cloud" (called "Rhapsody" in *Elegies*) as an especially praiseworthy poem (*Crow-quill Flights* 10). Another of her projects, greeted with less enthusiasm by Coleridge, was the miniature of his face. In 1808, she formally requested permission to paint him, but he self-deprecatingly warned, "my face is a miserable subject for a painter (for in honest truth I am what the world calls and with more truth than usual, an *ugly* fellow). Yet the mere pleasure of being in your company for two or three hours will be my compensation" (*Letters* 107). Perhaps to his own relief, illness gave him an excuse to defer the event, though eventually Betham prevailed and successfully captured the "contemplative look of [his] large, grey eyes".³⁴

Coleridge's initial reluctance to sit for her should be attributed to his diffidence rather than to doubt of her ability, since he subsequently asked her to draw a design for a seal; moreover, he admired Betham's sketches of Edith Southey and her daughter. Coleridge was touched by Betham's reciprocated admiration, and told her in 1808 that her correspondence reminded him of his youthful friendships: "... I was more than pleased, I was much affected by the letter [from Betham]. It breathed a spirit so unlike that of the letters one is in the habit of receiving from people of the world; in short, it reminded me of my earliest letters from my dear friends at Grasmere."³⁵ Betham also sketched a picture of Coleridge's daughter, although he felt disappointed with that particular work.

A letter from Sara Coleridge dated 1808 reveals that the Wordsworths were also acquainted with her by this time. She records their regrets that Betham had not accompanied Sara on a visit to their new home: "The inmates of Allan Bank are very sorry that they had not

the pleasure of seeing you & were at first a little inclined to reflect on me for mismanagement in the business ... it seems you were fully expected to pass some days there ... they hoped they should see you, & they would show you the country around Grasmere..." (*Letters* 116). Robert Southey later wrote to Betham a brief account of the coolness between Coleridge and Wordsworth. However, no letters seem to have passed between Betham and Wordsworth himself, and I have found no evidence that Betham ever stayed with them, although she was a frequent visitor with the Southneys, who lived near the Wordsworths, in Keswick.

Betham's portrait of Robert Southey was exhibited at the Royal Academy, and he, too, appreciated her artistic talents: "Miss Betham has made me a delightful picture of Edith," he wrote to his brother Tom, "which is the admiration of every body who has seen it. She has also succeeded very happily on Herbert Your eldest niece is to sit next. With me she has failed from over anxiety to do it well. So my face is rubbed out from a finished picture, in hopes of being better put in again."³⁶ He and his wife often urged her to stay with them at Keswick, knowing that their children had become as attached to her as they had themselves. Upon reading *Poems*, Southey offered his congratulations and encouraged her to write a longer, more ambitious work, and Betham responded with *The Lay of Marie* (*Letters* 104). Struck by Betham's intellectual friendships with the country's finest poets, the scenery painter for Drury Lane Theatre, Mr. Greenwood, wrote a playful verse on her appetite for literature:

So in books she delights! on a new work she dotes!
 If by Byron the better, with classical notes;
 Preferr'd to fish, venison, or olio!
 She will dine on a sonnet, drink tea on a song,
 Sup with Southey or Coleridge, as walking along,
 And a banquet to her is a folio! (*Crow-quill Flights* 2)

However, these friendships were not an unmixed blessing. Mary Lamb was ill so often that Charles had to renege on his promise to proof-read *The Lay of Marie* in its entirety before it went to the press, a retraction he apologised for in a letter.³⁷ He also blamed himself for failing to catch the misprint of the word "trill" for "kill," which necessitated an erratum note at the end of *The Lay of Marie*. As for Coleridge, his poor health made him an unreliable visitor (though the evidence suggests he was genuinely fond of her): as his and Sara Coleridge's letters to Betham reveal, he occasionally failed to call upon her at the expected hour. Their friendship petered out sometime after 1811. Devastated by his son Herbert's death in 1816, Robert Southey became distracted from his intention to help promote *The Lay of Marie*. Instead, it was Betham who lent him emotional support, sending him the elegy on Herbert that was later published in *Vignettes*. "Believe me," Southey wrote to her, "I thank you sincerely for them, nor could you have gratified me more. They bear your stamp -- the stamp of the lawful mint of the Muses" (*Letters* 169). Robert Southey's respectful affection for Matilda lies behind another of the Bethams' famous literary acquaintance, this one of disastrous consequences, with poet Walter Savage Landor.

Aware that Matilda's brother Charles Betham intended to turn farmer, Southey suggested he seek out Landor's estate in Llanthony, which Southey's friend Landor was prepared to lease. "Let him [Charles] use my name as an introduction," Southey wrote to Matilda, never guessing that this proposal would embroil Betham in a complicated legal wrangle over tenancy rights (*Letters* 264). Captain Betham began his residence in January 1812, sometime after which his brother Frederick (also a sailor with an interest in farming) joined him. According to Charles

Betham's account, the trouble between owner and tenant began when Landor insisted on payment exceeding the original agreement. Then Charles Betham sought his own compensation when Landor cut down some of the Llanthony trees for lumber without grubbing out the stumps, leaving the work for his tenants. Other squabbles followed, with both the Bethams and Landor seeking legal redress. Relations became increasingly hostile, particularly after Landor apparently wounded Frederick's dignity by calling him a common sailor. Landor's resentment motivated him to pen a sneering caricature of the Betham family as an ungainly, ignorant brood:

Boethamus, bold in plunder, bold in wife,
 He, and his sea-spawn brothers; and of gait
 Countenance and demeanour brotherlike,
 A dismal sister, hired at funerals
 To howl in verse the praises of the dead;
 Following the father's footsteps all alike,
 ("The Last of Ulysses," III. 258-263)³⁸

The allusion to the mournful elegaist refers to Matilda, to whom Landor irrationally apportioned blame, along with the rest of her family. To my knowledge, the only other poet who may have alluded to Betham so scornfully is Byron, who apparently did not know her personally and whose satirical poem *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) lambastes (among many others) Wordsworth, Southey, and a "snivelling" Matilda of Grub-street.³⁹ Betham did not reciprocate his disapproval. On the contrary, her poem "On Hearing of Lord Byron's Death" (presumably composed circa 1824, but published sometime after August, 1834) expresses profound admiration for Byron's poetic genius and political ideals.

Apart from these famous literary friends and enemies, Betham also had influential women patrons to whom she dedicated three of her published books of poems. Frances, Lady

Jerningham (Lady Bedingfeld's mother), Charlotte, Lady Bedingfeld, and Catherine, Lady Rouse Boughton were all wealthy and intelligent women who enjoyed moving in artistic circles and who had great faith in Betham's gifts.⁴⁰ As the sister-in-law of the poet and dramatist Edward Jerningham, Lady Jerningham enjoyed mingling with various poets and owed to Betham her introduction to Coleridge, though afterwards she implied to Betham that she found his conversation too recondite for her taste (*Letters* 129). Lady Rouse Boughton, née Hall, was a wealthy heiress to her father's estate in Shropshire. Her marriage to the baronet and elected politician Sir Charles Rouse Boughton allowed her to choose her friends selectively. At her residence, Corney House in Chiswick, Lady Rouse Boughton welcomed artists and intellectuals. As she admits in a letter to Matilda, she even expanded a couple of rooms to house her many guests more comfortably (*Letters* 59). Her husband Sir Charles advised Betham on the financial side of writing, suggesting that she postpone her publication of a second book of poems until after the appearance of *A Biographical Dictionary* and that she retain the copyright for her work (*Letters* 78-9). In the manner of a patroness, Lady Rouse Boughton ushered her into the houses of the artistic élite, taking her on a formative holiday to Wales in the summer of 1799 and introducing her to the Ladies of Llangollen, Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby. These women had become famous for transgressing social and geographical boundaries, eloping from Ireland and living together at their house Plas Newydd, in northern Wales. There they reputedly dressed in men's clothes and collected literary figures around them, as well as exciting considerable interest from local tourists: "Their mode of life being very singular," an early biographer records delicately, "and their costumes still more so, they soon became noticed by the

many travellers who passed through North Wales."⁴¹ The Ladies were noted for their admiration of musicians, painters, and other artists and for reading as much material by women authors as possible. Anna Seward paid them a poetic tribute when she published *Llangollen Vale* in 1796. They had "high praise" for Matilda Betham, and she in turn admired the "enlighten'd shrine" where they lived (see *Letters* 69, and *Poems* 16). Though the Ladies were not, strictly speaking, single, it seems likely that Betham found in them a model of the independent life that an unmarried woman could enjoy. Shortly after this visit, she too escaped the confines of her father's house (albeit in a less dramatic fashion), lived alone in London, held court at literary salons similar to those at Plas Newydd, and remained single for the rest of her life.

If Betham ever fell in love, she did not reveal it to her closest friend. Lady Bedingsfeld invited her to confide her feelings. "I was thinking the other day," she wrote, "that You are the only one of my friends that is not in Love." Puzzled by Betham's reticence on the subject, she asked, "are you afraid of getting into a Scrape? or that Your Letters should be seen?" (*Letters* 89; 60). Some critics have implied, without irony, that Betham probably searched for a husband but was too tall or too unlucky to succeed.⁴² Certainly the Bethams were exceptionally tall -- Matilda's brother Captain John Betham jovially describes himself as "six feet two above my toes" (*Letters* 153) -- and Charles and Mary Lamb teased the Bethams about their unusual stature. He playfully called them "The measureless Bethams," and wrote a fictional account of the Bethams for the *New Times* newspaper, in which he described Captain Beacham's family:

Pleasant, excellent young women they were, and for their sakes I did, and could endure much. But they were too tall. I am superstitious in that respect, and think that to a just friendship, something like proportion in stature as well as mind is desirable.

Now I am five feet and a trifle more. Each of these young women rose to six, and one exceeded by two inches. The brothers are proportionably taller. I have sometimes taken the altitude of this friendship; and on a modest computation I may be said to have known at one time a whole furlong of Beachams.⁴³

However, the hyperbolic sketch would be better understood as an illustration of Lamb's humour, rather than of the family's freakish appearance or of his distaste for their acquaintance. Matilda Betham appears not to have been offended by it, and Lamb's correspondence indicates that he was genuinely fond of the whole family, especially Matilda. "Believe me that you can have no friends who respect and love you more than ourselves," he assured her.⁴⁴ She returned the sentiment, saying she felt the "most affectionate regard" for the Lambs (*Crow-quill Flights* 15).

Other contemporary descriptions of Matilda indicate that she was both charismatic and pretty. Lady Bedingfeld's daughter recalled Betham's "youthful, comely days" and "the great pleasure it used to give my sisters and myself to be permitted, by her habitual good-nature to plait her long luxuriant hair, according to our juvenile taste, it being then of a pretty light colour" (*Letters* 245). With her blond hair and penetrating blue eyes, she resembled her own bardic heroine, Marie de France (identified as "Mary" in her *Dictionary*). George Dyer's evident admiration of Betham's wit and prettiness amused Lamb, who in a letter teased his friend with bawdy good humour,

Miss B.'s merit, "in every point of view," I am not disposed to question, although *I have not been indulged with any view of that lady, back, side, or front -- fie! Dyer, to praise a female in such common market phrases, -- you, who are held so courtly and so attentive.*⁴⁵

Whatever George Dyer's feelings for Betham, their friendship never progressed toward courtship, though she sent him a copy of *The Lay of Marie* and demonstrated a sincere affection for him by reading to him at his bedside before his death, on March 2, 1841. Even in old age, Betham's magnetic personality attracted "a little court" of youthful admirers, one of whom said that he "would rather talk to Matilda Betham than to the most beautiful young woman in the world."⁴⁶ It seems likely, then, that the single life was hers by active choice and not simply by default.

If the Ladies of Langollen offered a pattern to follow, the example of Lady Bedingfeld, whose own artistic aspirations were cut short by marriage, was an equally persuasive deterrent. Of all Betham's friendships, that with Lady Bedingfeld appears to have been the most intense and long-lived. Despite the disparity in social rank and religious upbringing -- Charlotte was the child of the Roman Catholic baronet Sir William Jerningham before she married Sir Richard -- the two women shared a similar aesthetic taste that drew them closer together.⁴⁷ Betham frequently sought Lady Bedingfeld's opinion on art, as she herself was an accomplished painter. Upon seeing Charlotte Jerningham's work when she was a child, Sir Joshua Reynolds, founder and president of the Royal Society of Art, reputedly declared, "It is a pity she could not be brought up an artist" (*Crow-quill Flights* 13).⁴⁸ In 1797, Lady Bedingfeld exhibited some pictures in London and was commissioned by her friend Lady Eleanor Butler to produce illustrations for her copy of Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. She discovered, however, that household duties encroached on her time to such an extent that she was obliged to abandon her work for prolonged periods. In a telling confession, Lady Bedingfeld hinted that she envied Betham's lifestyle, and that if she had been "single and independent of control," as was her

friend, she could have "enter[ed] the lists of fame in the painting way."⁴⁹ Instead, as she acknowledged to Matilda, she had "to give up [her] mind" to her children's care. Lady Bedingfeld recognised that this "giving up" of intellectual energy involved a sacrifice of personal identity. "I am like the witches," she joked, "midnight is my festive hour. the [sic] day is given up to teaching, which keeps the Imagination asleep, but when my little ones are all safe in bed, I then look round me and feel I have a Soul" (*Letters* 101). The possession and exploration of oneself proved to be a luxury that Lady Bedingfeld rarely enjoyed. Even in widowhood, Lady Bedingfeld, now attending on the Queen Dowager, complained that she had little time for her own work.

In her autobiography, Betham admits that she became a professional painter because "I was not fitted to seek my fortune, as you may call it, in a more private line" (*Crow-quill Flights* 14). After the marriage of Matilda's sister Anne in 1805, Charlotte agreed that her friend's independent disposition would not adapt well to domestic responsibilities: "I doubt if ever You could be happy as a married Woman. do [sic] not therefore be persuaded to give Your hand from *any motive* but a clear Conviction that it is for Your *own* happiness. You have a Mind that will never allow You to feel the Want of a Child..." (*Letters* 89-90). The recommendation that Matilda exercise a judicious amount of caution is one she heeded. In a postscript to a letter dated 1840, Charlotte fondly writes, "You took me for better & for worse years & years ago" (*Letters* 234). The single (and singular) life of a woman artist in London, though fraught with financial troubles, would prove the one Betham preferred when she was free to choose, for

although she was obliged to leave London in the 1820s, she returned in the early 1830s and reclaimed her former self-sufficiency.

Of the intervening years, when she again lived at Stonham Aspal, we have little information. Her grandnephew Ernest Betham states that a "general breakdown of health" at around 1820 accounts for the hiatus in her literary output and correspondence, but he comments only vaguely about the nature of her illness. Although Betham worried that she had a respiratory ailment, her physical health was generally strong.⁵⁰ However, she is widely believed to have suffered from bouts of insanity, a probability Allan Ingram takes as certain when he casually mentions her, quite misleadingly, along with Swift and William Collins as an eighteenth-century poet who was known to be mad.⁵¹ In a letter dated 1811, Lady Bedingfeld, with more affection than concern, describes her as "half mad" and proceeds to imply that an uneven temperament, though incompatible with the responsibilities of motherhood, is requisite to an artist like Betham (*Letters* 136). On the other hand, Southey wrote to his wife in 1820 that he met "poor Miss Betham by accident," who, although "perfectly sane in her conversation and manner, ... has written me the maddest letters I ever saw."⁵² Sometime after Betham published *Vignettes*, Southey and Betham ceased to correspond regularly, possibly because Betham was deemed insane but probably also because of their political differences, which were becoming increasingly apparent. A glancing remark in one of Southey's letters dated 1816 reveals that Betham had expressed disapproval of his conservative opinions on religious dissenters (*Letters* 169). While Southey argued that resistance to the Establishment was contemptible, Betham expressed increasing hostility to all systems of power -- she despised George IV, suspected the

Church of committing evil acts, and believed the country's laws were based on barbaric feudalism. Southey's dismissal of Betham's letters may have been owing as much to their subversive comments as to their irrational content.

Hitherto, the most frequently cited piece of evidence for serious mental degeneration has come from Henry Crabb Robinson's diary entry of June 17, 1819, which indicates that Betham had previously been confined for mental illness: "I went then to Lamb's and found the Burneys there and also Hazlitt. Besides an odd assemblage, Lloyd the poet and Miss Betham; both have been under restraint."⁵³ (Betham retained contact with Crabb Robinson for years, as is clear from a letter she sent him in 1844.)⁵⁴ Donald Reiman speculates that the disappointing reception of her last two books of poetry, *The Lay of Marie* (1816) and *Vignettes in Verse* (1818), may have contributed to a mental breakdown, although the Advertisement in *Vignettes* alludes to the fact that she had been committed to an asylum prior to its publication.⁵⁵ In the Advertisement, Betham mildly complains that her seclusion left her "bereft of the common means of study," but her sufferings were more acute than this prefatory note admits.

An extant letter in manuscript from Matilda Betham to John Cam Hobhouse, the Whig Member of Parliament for Westminster, proves that her incarceration haunted her for years and that her experience prompted her to begin a report on the systemic abuses in the nation's madhouses. Although her study appears to have been lost, the letter hints at the content:

I would point out to you this grand and universal *system* as more than *tending* to create distraction. I could reveal what those who have not been patients cannot and shew even the public ones [madhouses] are not for the relief of the wretched but for the convenience of their friends— That people are put in *without personal examination* at the fiat of a physician. That on admission

they are not interrogated. That this most noble of disorders exci
[probably "excites": covered by seal] no attention and is merely
treated as bad temper ... That people are put in who are not in the
least degree in peace, That self-murder is common from
impatience of the confinement That some are told they must
seek to those who put them in for release

I could shew you sir much (in a more connected way if I could
pay undivided attention to my subject, but I am forced to be my
own servant-- [illegible word] working woman &tc-- and to earn
besides what is requisite for subsistence--)...⁵⁶

Betham implies that she herself had been unjustly incarcerated, and it may have been this sense of betrayal that led her to suspect all institutions of abusing their power. Fearful that her family would send her back to the madhouse, Betham kept her address in London a secret.

George Dyer, though perplexed by Betham's furtiveness, remained her friend during these difficult years. He solicited the help of the Royal Literary Fund, a charity established in 1790 by David Williams, a radical theologian who wished to alleviate the financial distress of struggling authors.⁵⁷ Dyer wrote,

...from her appearance, when I have seen her; and other
circumstances well known to me, I must conclude, that she is in
great distress, and that her case is urgent. I do not know where she
resides, as from apprehension, that the intention is to confine her
again she lives concealed, ... I traced her to a Lady's in Sloane
Street No. 146, but she did not know where Miss B. lived, and
added, that, if she did, she would not tell, for that she [Betham]
was no more mad, than she [the landlady] was. Be this as it may, I
am certain, that she is in great distress, and, I am afraid in absolute
want.⁵⁸

The committee agreed that the case was urgent and sent Betham five pounds in July, 1821. In December of that year, Betham again applied to the Fund, hoping that they would give her enough money for a return trip to Stonham, although she still feared that her family would

prevent her from leaving home. "I wish too to have a possibility of returning back to town, as *living* there entirely I should think equivalent to a confinement," she informed the committee on December 1, 1821. Whatever her mental state may have been, Betham's fear of incarceration was not groundless. According to Sir William Betham, the family succeeded in confining her again in 1822, and he, clearly embarrassed by his sister's behaviour, peremptorily returned the money Matilda had received from the committee. "Miss Betham's state of mind has long required restraint," he wrote, "... her conduct of late has removed all scruples and opposition and she is now in a place where she is treated with every kindness."⁵⁹ Matilda Betham disagreed with his diagnosis, and believed instead that her family wanted to muzzle her: "on account of my political and religious opinions, many of my family wish to keep me out of the way; as well as from their pride being hurt by my poverty, and disregard of many things which they think essential to gentility."⁶⁰ There may have been some truth in her assertions. Sir William, knighted in 1812 and a staunch king's man, would have particularly resented the radical stand she took against the monarch in *Challenge to Women*. This short political pamphlet, which I discuss in Chapters Two and Three, is both a statement in support of Queen Caroline and a call for women's involvement in parliamentary politics. In the Postscript, she boldly insinuates that the coronation's ceremonial tradition of using the ancient spoon to anoint the king with oil merely proved him to be a "spoonie" and a "spoiled child". Even George Dyer, though sympathetic himself to Whiggish politics, thought this note went too far.⁶¹ It seems quite possible that the Betham family, alarmed by her subversive views, conspired to silence her during her lifetime and belittled her accomplishments after her death. Whether Betham required

incarceration prior to 1818 or whether she was a politically outspoken or eccentric woman who embarrassed her family may never be determined. Her autobiography merely states that the emotional stress of publishing *The Lay of Marie*, which proved to be a commercial failure, threw her into a "nervous fever" (*Crow-quill Flights* 18). Letters in manuscript provide further information as to Betham's state of mind after her release from the madhouse.

Betham's letter to Hobhouse opens with the chilling insinuation that her previous efforts at communication were waylaid: "I have addressed a letter or two to you, but circumstances have occurred to make me doubt whether those letters have ever reached you." She concludes with the plea, "will you listen to a powerless and unfortunate woman?" This letter hints at her suspicion of governmental conspiracies and subtle poisonings of its political enemies, and it may have been remarks like these that persuaded some of her friends that she was mad. She makes similar, vaguely worded comments in a letter to the Royal Literary Fund dated July 26, 1821, in which she insists on her prophetic insight into calamitous future events. Her clairvoyance is implied in the unique copy of her poem "On Hearing of Lord Byron's Death," which states that she has long feared for Byron's life, and worries that other young poets will share Byron and Shelley's fate:

O! is it that the sons of verse,
 Incorrupt, unsubdued,
 Are hunted early to the hearse,
 Orestes-like, pursued?
 Is it that plots and snares assail
 The daring and enlighten'd--
 That prudence is of no avail,
 Service and friendship frightened!

O! what is fallen on thee, we dread

Again for Hunt and Moore!
 And think of Shelley's watery bed,
 And stifled Polydore!⁶²

In the 1820s, Betham began to see herself as a like-minded radical who was persecuted by a political foe. Twenty years later, she repeated this fear in an autobiographical poem that she sent to Lord Brougham, a prominent politician with radical sympathies, warning ominously that "Strange miseries/ Await the learned-- Those who bravely shew/ The various tracks of guilt; and do expose/ Malevolence and craft...". She then adds that as a young woman she foresaw the annihilation of her own family:

O! years ago, when young myself, and new
 To all of dread and knowledge of the crimes
 Unveiling to my inexperienced view--
 My frighten'd, fever'd mind with horror shrank,
 As it decipher'd a repeated threat;
 Or rather warning, that my family,
 Like the Barmacides, should all be swept
 Clean from the earth-- as many others are,
 By various spells--⁶³

This conviction that she and her family were being victimised seems to have remained with her throughout her life. A unique copy of the hitherto unrecovered collection of autobiographical poems *Sonnets and Verses, To Relations and Their Connexions* (which possibly were first intended to form part of *Crow-quill Flights*) offers a clue as to the initial cause of Betham's anxiety.⁶⁴ According to one poem, her brother Robert's sudden death in 1820 occurred when he "drank poisoned water" after returning from a shipwreck. Internal evidence from the poem suggests that Betham suspected the ship's commander of seeking vengeance for a court martial brought against him, during which Robert Betham testified to his superior's "villainous

oppression". Betham's footnote states, "My brother has another son in India, for whom I tremble, expecting him to meet his death by poison, or some pretended accident" (7). The Betham family's financial misfortunes and the premature death of several of her siblings exacerbated this fear.⁶⁵ Betham herself consistently refused to take any kind of medication during severe illnesses, saying, "The wise must die as well as the foolish, and I won't be poisoned."⁶⁶ Betham-Edwards treats her aunt's distrust of physic as an amusing anecdote; neither she nor Ernest Betham alludes to Betham's conspiracy theory, nor to the circumstances under which their seafaring relatives died.

Despite Ernest Betham's assertion of his great-aunt's inactivity after her breakdown, the hitherto unrecovered and privately printed *Crow-quill Flights* demonstrates that Betham continued to write poetry after her return to Stonham. She also published in halfpenny sheets a *Dramatic Sketch* in verse, a surviving part of which recounts the tale of two men in danger of being poisoned by witchcraft.⁶⁷ In the late 1830s Betham was writing a play entitled *Hermodon*, but it appears not to have been published and the manuscript for it has not been found.⁶⁸ To my knowledge, none of Betham's biographers or critics mentions the *Dramatic Sketch*, *Crow-quill Flights*, *Sonnets and Verses*, or *Challenge to Women* -- perhaps because all traces of them were nearly lost.⁶⁹

Quite apart from the disappearance of some of her literary output, Betham faced in her insolvency another obstacle to achieving lasting fame, an impecuniousness which began in her youth and apparently persisted until her death. In a letter to Southey, Lamb explains that in publishing *The Lay of Marie* she had contracted debts that "led to little accidents unbecoming a

woman and a poetess to suffer." Anxious for Betham, the Lambs solicited Wordsworth's help in procuring Thomas de Quincey's commission of her work and convinced poet Randal Norris to sit for his portrait, at a cost of five pounds.⁷⁰ Betham explains that a series of misfortunes prevented *Marie* from achieving the success it deserved: "A considerable number of the books, when in boards, were found to be mildewed. Fourteen pounds were spent in newspapers, when from the mistake or bad writing of the person who sent all the advertisements, my surname was misspelt [sic], and the name of the heroine changed to *Mario*" (*Crow-quill Flights* 19). This stroke of bad fortune marked the early demise of her literary career. Desperate for money, Betham first turned to the Royal Literary Fund in 1817. The committee's archives have preserved some of Betham's most piteous letters, which provide details of her troubled financial condition in the early 1820s. For a while, she lived in a room without furniture or a bed, sometimes sleeping only on shavings or, in better times, on an old mattress. She kept herself warm by covering herself with spare clothes. Occasionally, she went without food and shelter for the night. As she explained to the committee, her penury threw her into a spiral of ever-worsening poverty: "I paint as often as I can get employment, and often for nothing, in order to get other employment, because I am acknowledged to take good likenesses, and were I enabled to keep a proper appearance might have plenty to do."⁷¹ However, her shabby dress and inhospitable living conditions prevented her from pulling herself out of her difficulties. She considered republishing one of her major works (probably her *Dictionary*, though she does not name it) years after its initial publication, planning to include more foreign sources she had read in the intervening years, but this project apparently did not succeed.⁷²

Betham had every intention of being heard by posterity, however, and sometime in the early 1840s she began the private printing of her autobiographical *Crow-quill Flights* and unpublished verse. In it, she transcribes Coleridge's poem and several reviews of her poetry, which encouraged her to believe she was "gifted with some talent." "I have thought it right to say thus much," she concludes in the apologia, "because the fame we have once obtained, ... should be kept up by continuing to appear before the public eye, which has not been my fate" (*Crow-quill Flights* 18). In 1841, she complained to Lord Brougham that some of her friends, though they had initially agreed to help defray the costs of printing *Crow-quill Flights*, had subsequently failed to send the money: "I must depend on my own resources, which, unfortunately (living on an annuity, with which I only manage to avoid debt) are small...."⁷³ A section of *Crow-quill Flights* in the archives of the Royal Literary Fund indicates that she applied there for additional funding. But Betham was not to succeed in this final attempt to reclaim her status as one of Britain's significant poets. A letter sent on Sir William's behalf to the RLF requests that the committee disclose whatever sum they may have awarded her, in order that he might summarily repay them. Presumably, Sir William wished to put a complete stop to his sister's work, and her *Crow-quill Flights* disappeared from view.

Most unfortunately, many of Betham's manuscripts were consumed by accidental fires at Stonham, and others were scattered or destroyed after her death. Even Matilda Betham-Edwards, who in 1878 first published a collection of letters addressed to her aunt and godmother, remained unaware of *Crow-quill Flights*. Of Betham's final years very little else is recorded, although it is clear that she remained intimate with the Lambs and George Dyer in old

age. The Victorian Egyptologist Amelia B. Edwards, who was related to Betham by marriage, remembered her tales of Mme. de Staël, Southey, and the "great" French revolution. Edwards depicts her as an eccentric and disorganised intellectual, who spent her declining years in London frequenting the British Museum, visiting old friends, and reliving her former literary success:

She generally carried a big basket and a Brobdignag umbrella. From the depths of this basket (which besides the writing materials she had been using at the Museum, contained her cap and all kinds of miscellaneous marketings,) she would sometimes bring out ... and read aloud, with not ungraceful emphasis, a poem of her own. She had a large, round, jovial face, bright blue eyes, a mobile mouth, and somewhat short grey hair, which strayed from under her cap all round her neck "in silvery slips," like a man's.

In fact, she was not unlike the portraits of Coleridge. Her eccentricities of dress were proverbial. My father once met her in a frequented London thoroughfare, serenely walking in crimson velvet slippers, and followed by a train of little ragamuffins, to whose "chaff" she was good-humouredly indifferent.⁷⁴

Betham's equanimity at the disapproval of those around her is entirely in keeping with her tolerance of other people's opinions. Those who teased her (Lamb, for example) and those who discouraged her ambitions (such as her family) did not become her enemies: "I lov'd all human kind;" she wrote, "(all but the base/ The selfish and the cruel)".⁷⁵ As I argue in subsequent chapters, this self-portrait is borne out by many of her published works, which imply that compassion and the accommodation of diverse perspectives is essential for the betterment of society. Matilda Betham died at 52 Burton Street, London, on September 30, 1852, at the age of 76, and was buried in Highgate Cemetery.⁷⁶

After her death, Betham was remembered more as a salonist than a poet, principally because her niece and godchild Matilda Betham-Edwards glossed over her struggles and poetic accomplishments, focussing instead on her friendships with the luminaries Lamb, Southey, and Coleridge. In many respects and perhaps unintentionally, Betham-Edwards retrospectively projected her own personality and ambitions onto her eponymous aunt.⁷⁷ Ironically, much of Matilda Betham's life and work remains mysterious -- undocumented and forgotten -- even though her *Biographical Dictionary* asserts the importance of recovering and accurately citing sources that catalogue the accomplishments of women artists. When Donald Reiman reprinted Betham's four published books of poems in 1978, he concluded his Introduction with a challenge to future scholars: "To bring her more clearly into view may illuminate a corner of the Romantic Context not only as it was, but also as it might have been" (x). The following chapters attempt to do justice to the range of Betham's accomplishments by bringing her work under closer scrutiny, while bearing in mind her friendships, political sympathies, and the social impediments to fame, all of which shaped her literary output. As more of Betham's work comes to light and as increasing numbers of scholars address both her published and manuscript material, we will acquire a clearer sense of her contribution to the artistic culture of nineteenth-century Britain.

Notes to Chapter One

- 1 Ernest Betham, ed., *A House of Letters* (London: Jarrold, 1905), 57; hereafter referred to in the body as *Letters*. The collection also includes selections from Betham's diaries. I will abide by the grammar and spelling usage found in this edition.
- 2 In a letter dated 1809, Lamb indicates that his friend George Dyer suggested "to me to have my face done by a Miss Beetham, a miniature painter." See Edwin Marrs, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, 3 vols. (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1978), II. 275. As this letter predates his acquaintance with Matilda, Lamb presumably misspelled her patronym based on aural conjecture. Another piece of convincing evidence emerges in Matilda's uncle Edward Betham's decision to change the spelling of his surname to "Beetham" sometime after 1765; and finally, as Ernest Betham explains, the ancient family lived in a "Beetham Castle," the seat of Matilda's ancestors (*Letters* 18 & 67).
- 3 For her part, Lady Bedingfeld envied Matilda's itinerant life: "Don't you know I had rather walk in some tangled Forest than in a box-edged Gravel Walk [?]" (*Letters* 52).
- 4 Information on the Jerningham and Bedingfeld families can be found in Rev. William Betham's *The Baronetage of England*, 5 vols. (Ipswich: Burrell & Bransby, 1801); in it, he identifies Miss Charlotte Jerningham as one of the daughters of Sir William and the Honourable Frances Dillon. Rev. Betham records that she married Sir Richard Bedingfeld on June 16, 1795, a man whom (she told Betham) she liked "tolerably well" (*Letters* 37).
 Matilda Betham-Edwards published three accounts of her aunt: the first was published in *Fraser's Magazine* 18 (July 1878), 73-89; the second in *Six Life Studies of Famous Women* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, [1880] rpt. 1972); the last and rarely cited biography appears in *Friendly Faces of Three Nationalities* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, [1911] rpt. 1969). Many of Betham's letters and diaries are apparently no longer extant. As Matilda Betham-Edwards admitted, she threw out many of her aunt's letters and recollections of famous writers, written microscopically on odd bits of paper, before she realized their value (*Six Life Studies* 299). Many of Betham's manuscript poems were destroyed in three separate fires at Stonham.
- 5 Four fragments of Betham's autobiography are located at the Dove Cottage and Wordsworth Museum, WLMS A 2. Pages 9-12 of it are catalogued under the title "[Fragment from an unidentified publication]," Forster Collection F P. 1, National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum. Pages 1-8 were preserved in the Royal Literary Fund's archives, now on microfilm at the British Library. Jonathan Wordsworth believes the fragmentary "*Autobiographical Sketch*" was first printed by James Dykes Campbell in 1890; see *The Bright Work Grows* (Poole; Washington: Woodstock Books, 1997), 202. In fact, as I explain in Chapter Two, the autobiography constituted Betham's Preface to the privately printed collection of poems *Crow-quill Flights* (n.p., n.d.). I believe that the only extant copy is in the binder *Crow-quill*

Flights and other writings, Reference 920 BET, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich. I will hereafter cite *Crow-quill Flights* in the body of my text.

- 6 An incomplete entry in the International Genealogical Index for Suffolk indicates that a Mary Matilda Betham was born at Stradbrook, but no baptismal record of her exists from there or Stonham Aspal, where she was raised. In a letter to Rev. Mitford, however, Betham reveals the date of her birth and explains that she was born while her parents were visiting Yorkshire: Betham, *Notes*, Good Friday, 1840, William R. Perkins Library, Duke University. I wish to thank Mrs. Alison West for undertaking this research into baptismal records. The parish register of Stradbrook does record the Bethams' second child, William Simon Betham, as born on 23 May, 1779.
- 7 My emphasis; it should read "Matilda Betham," the name under which she always published; her sister Mary was not a professionally active writer. See C. N. Smith's Introduction to Matilda Betham-Edwards's *The Lord of the Harvest* (Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk: Bookmasters, 1983), vii.
- 8 David Sutton mistakes the recipient of Lamb's letter, Mary Betham, for Matilda Betham. *Location Register of English Literary Manuscripts and Letters* (London: British Library, 1995), 58.
- 9 See Donald H. Reiman's Introduction to Betham's *Poems* (New York & London: Garland, 1978), ix.
- 10 See Betham-Edwards, *Six Life Studies*, 293-6. She reprints the letter from Lamb in its entirety and includes the information that the letter is addressed to "Miss Mary Betham, 27, King Street, Cheapside; or to the care of Sir Wm. Betham, Dublin" (296). See also Matilda Betham's *Notes*.
- 11 Ernest Betham tells us that Mary Betham died several months before her husband (*Letters* 28), but Matilda Betham wrote that her father survived her mother by only six weeks: "Letter from Matilda Betham to Lord Brougham," 2 May 1841, Brougham 15, 781, London University Library. Rev. Betham's financial standing improved when he was appointed Rector of Stoke Lacy, Herefordshire, in his eighty-fourth year (*Crow-quill Flights* 18).
- 12 This information about the Betham press can be found in William B. Todd's *A Directory of Printers and Others in Allied Trades London and Vicinity 1800-1840* (London: Printing Historical Society, 1972), 17. Matilda Betham's *Biographical Dictionary* was printed by the Betham and Warde press, at that time located at Furnival's-Inn Court, Holborn.
- 13 See Chris Petteys, *Dictionary of Women Artists, an international dictionary of women artists born before 1900* (Boston, Mass: GK Hall & Co., 1982). Matilda Betham exhibited at the Royal Academy and the British Institute, London, 1804-1816 (Petteys 65); Jane Beetham

exhibited with the Royal Academy, London, 1794-1814 (Petteys 55). An entry in Betham's diary dated 1794 indicates that Rev. Betham told the Beethams of Mrs. Opie's disapproval of her husband's frequent visits. He abandoned his suit, divorced his first wife, and married the poet Amelia Alderson. For more information, consult Ada Earland, *John Opie and His Circle* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1911), 99-114, and Lucy Poate Stebbins, *London Ladies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952).

- 14 Betham, *Notes*.
- 15 Matilda Betham, "Letter to Lord Brougham".
- 16 Betham-Edwards, *Six Life Studies*, 234.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 234.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 236.
- 19 Matilda Betham, *Challenge to Women, being an intended address from ladies of different parts of the kingdom, collectively to Caroline, queen of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Moses, 1821), 2.
- 20 Betham-Edwards, *Friendly Faces*, 27.
- 21 Betham regretted that she had not been at home to a writer, stating that "if you know his [an author's] works he cannot be considered as a stranger--". "Letter from Matilda Betham," [no date], Add. MS 78686, item 29, British Library.
- 22 Betham supplied Talfourd with some recollections of Lamb's witty sayings, remembering one occasion: "About this time I saw Mr. Hazlitt for the first time at their house, and was talking on metaphysical subjects with him. Mr Lamb came up, but my companion was very eloquent, and I begged him not to interrupt us." Quoted in Percy Fitzgerald, ed., *The Life, Letters, and Writings of Charles Lamb*, 6 vols. (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), I. 256 n.1.
- 23 William Carew Hazlitt, *The Lambs. Their Lives, Their Friends, and Their Correspondence* (New York: AMS Press, [1897] rpt. 1973), 143-4.
- 24 Quoted in Matilda Betham-Edwards, *Friendly Faces*, 24. Betham-Edwards presumably cites a draft of Betham's printed autobiography, which provides a similarly worded but longer explanation of her father's professional misfortune (see *Crow-quill Flights* 7, 14 & 16). Mary Betham's inheritance of her first husband's property was reduced to £300. Further details surrounding this chancery suit and the depletion of a legacy left to Matilda Betham by her maternal uncle are explained in Betham's *Notes*. Betham grew very fond of the Isola family,

and must have seen them often at the Lambs' home. In 1823, Charles and Mary Lamb adopted Agostina Isola's granddaughter Emma: see E. V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* (London: Methuen, 1914), 430.

- 25 Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer. Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 156. Betham's comment about an income in portraiture is made in a letter to her brother William; at the time she was twenty-four (*Letters* 63).
 Anne Gilchrist is moderately positive about her paintings; "many of her portraits possess much sweetness of expression and delicacy of finish; but from total want of any training in art they are weakly drawn, and she was unable to achieve an enduring success." On the other hand, Gilchrist condemns her poetry as "poor," excepting *The Lay of Marie*, which "achieved a considerable success." Sir Leslie Stephen & Sir Sidney Lee, eds., *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1885-6] rpt. 1972), 423.
- 26 In a letter to Sara Coleridge dated 1816, Lamb indicates that Betham's painting of *Virgin and Child* cost three guineas. See Claude Prance, *A Companion to Charles Lamb* (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1983), 25. Betham-Edwards tells us that her aunt gave Shakespearean readings, in *Friendly Faces*, 27. See also *Crow-quill Flights*, 2.
- 27 Ernest Betham transcribes Lady Bedingfeld's idiosyncratic use of the lower-case after a period. See endnote 1.
- 28 Betham-Edwards, *Six Life Studies*, 235-6. Matilda Betham's spoken French was not proficient, as one letter from Lady Bedingfeld indicates (*Letters* 37); however, she understood it sufficiently well to use French sources for her *Biographical Dictionary* (1804).
- 29 William Betham (1779-1853) was the eldest son and a committed antiquarian, publishing several books that trace the origins of Britain's inhabitants. Having been knighted in 1812, he was appointed to the position of Ulster king of arms in 1820, which required him to arrange the documents stored in Dublin Castle. He inscribed his first major book *The Gael and Cymbri* (Dublin: William Curry, 1834) to the king, thanking him for his patronage. This work and his next significant publication, *Etruscan Literature and Antiquities Investigated*, 2 vols. (Dublin: Philip Dixon Hardy & Sons, 1842), evidence methodical research in ancient history, and demonstrate his wide-ranging knowledge of classical arts, language, mythology, freemasonry, weaponry and coins. For further information on his life and work, consult *The Dictionary of National Biography*, II. 424-5.
- 30 In a diary entry, Betham states that in conversations with a Mr. G-- , her friend studying at Cambridge, Betham acknowledged her laziness (*Letters* 42). Lady Bedingfeld laughingly said, "You are just the sort of person my dear Matilda to lose Your place in a Stage coach" (*Letters* 101). She also complained that her friend told her "Continually of Letters written and flung away" (*Letters* 46). Amelia Blandford Edwards recalled that "Matilda Betham's eccentricities of dress were proverbial" (*Six Life Studies* 297).

- 31 See Donald Reiman's Introduction to Betham's *Poems*, vii-viii.
- 32 On Dec. 2nd of that year, Charlotte Bedingfeld wrote, "I am glad You are going on with Your *Worthies* and am sorry my scanty Lore can afford no help" (*Letters* 51).
- 33 For example, Claude Prance, 25; and Joanne Shattock, *Oxford Guide to British Women Writers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 41-42.
- 34 Morton D. Paley, *Portraits of Coleridge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 48. A surviving letter from Betham to Coleridge indicates that he had been too ill to comply with her initial request to sit for her: "Letter From Matilda Betham to S. T. Coleridge," WLMS A 1, Dove Cottage and Wordsworth Museum, Grasmere. A reproduction of Betham's portrait of Coleridge is also available in Kathleen Coburn, ed., *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 4 vols. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), III. i [frontispiece]; Sara Coleridge's portrait appears in Molly Lefebure's *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1974), following p. 368; Betham's portrait of Coleridge's daughter Sara is reproduced in Lefebure's *The Bondage of Love* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1986), facing p. 181. See also Kathleen Coburn, "Reflections in a Coleridge Mirror: Some Images in His Poems," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, eds. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 418.
- 35 Betham-Edwards, *Six Life Studies*, 250.
- 36 Kenneth Curry, ed., *New Letters of Robert Southey*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), I. 514.
- 37 "I received your present with mixed feelings of gratitude & shame....[I] regret that I should have shrunk from the task of contributing to its exactness" (*Letters* 166).
- 38 For an account of the quarrel, see R. H. Super, *Walter Savage Landor. A Biography* (New York: New York University Press, 1954), 103-126.
- 39 See Byron. *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome McGann, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), I. 253; I. 258; I. 413 n.758. This "Matilda" is usually believed to refer to the gothic novelist Rosa Matilda (Charlotte Dacre's pseudonym), who certainly was one of the poem's victims. But I am inclined to suspect that the slandered "Rosa" and "Matilda" are two distinct individuals. Byron's explanatory note on "Rosa," which indicates that Charlotte Dacre is the censured novelist, follows a period; he then goes on to condemn a "Matilda," who again is mentioned later in the poem. Although I have no conclusive evidence that Byron has Betham in mind, I find it unlikely that he would refer to the same woman author as both Rosa and Matilda.

40 It was through Betham that Sir William and Lady (Francis) Jerningham met Coleridge; see Edwin Marrs, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, III. 72 n.2. For more information on the Jerningham family's acquaintance, especially of the dramatist and poet Edward Jerningham, consult Lewis Bettany, ed., *Edward Jerningham and His Friends* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1919); and Egerton Castle, ed., *The Jerningham Letters*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bently, 1896).

In 1791, the Boughton's baronetage, first established in Charles I's rein, was reinstated through the female line. Sir Charles William Rouse Boughton married Miss Catherine Hall, the only daughter of William Pearce Hall, Esq., and therefore the heiress of Downton Hall. Her marriage to Sir Charles was a social success, for he was a public figure who had represented the borough of Evesham, Worcs. in 1780 and 1783 before being elected in 1796 to represent Bramber, Sussex. Lady Rouse Boughton relished her busy lifestyle, and Matilda Betham became a great favourite with her and her daughters Louisa and Caroline. The poet dedicated her *Poems* (1808) to her, and she panegyricized these friends in verse. For more information on the Rouse Boughtons, consult William Betham's *The Baronetage of England*, IV. 213-225 (listed under Boughton-Rouse).

41 J. Prichard. *A Short Memoir of the Ladies of Llangollen* (Langollen: Hugh Jones, 1890), 2. See also G. H. Bell, ed., *The Hamwood Papers of The Ladies of Llangollen and Caroline Hamilton* (London: Macmillan, 1930). Mary Gordon declares that Lady Eleanor had already decided to escape Ireland's borders, even before her acquaintance with Miss Ponsonby added a further incentive. *Chase of the Wild Goose. The Story of Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby* (London: Hogarth Press, 1936), 23.

42 See, for example, Roger Lonsdale, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 499. More recently, Elisa Beshero-Bondar speculated that Betham never married because she was too tall and had associated with people outside her own social sphere. "The AEolian Harp of an Exiled Woman: Matilda Betham's *The Lay of Marie*," *NASSR '99*, Halifax (15 Aug. 1999). Beshero-Bondar's paper is currently available online at <http://www.personal.psu.edu/users/e/e/eeb4/betham.htm>.

43 Charles Lamb, "Many Friends," in *The Portable Charles Lamb*, intro. John Mason Brown (New York: Viking Press, 1949, 287-291), 290. Ernest Betham asserts that the Betham men rose to an average height of 5'11" (*Letters* 154). In the postscript of a letter addressed to Matilda's sister Barbara Betham, Mary Lamb writes, "You say you are not so tall as Louisa -- you must be-- you cannot so degenerate from the rest of your family" (quoted in *Six Life Studies* 267).

44 Marrs, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, III. 218.

45 *Ibid.*, II. 284.

46 Betham-Edwards, *Six Life Studies*, 299-300.

- 47 Lady Bedingfeld's devotion to her younger friend inspired her to name a daughter "Matilda Mary," born the same year Betham published her first book. Charlotte gave Betham a lock of her black hair clasped in a ring as a token of their affection. In return, Matilda sent her a miniature self-portrait that her friend greatly admired, despite its lack of justice to the original: "I am surprised with Your talent," Lady Bedingfeld wrote, "and feel really envious of Your Universality. You have not however caught one Expression of Your Countenance, that is a particular look of Benevolence. pray mind this another time, I think you will obviate it by making the corner of the Eye less Sharp" (*Letters* 45).
- 48 cf. *Letters*, 44: Ernest Betham varies the anecdote slightly.
- 49 Quoted in Betham-Edwards, *Six Life Studies*, 238.
- 50 Charlotte Bedingfeld dismissed her anxiety by praising her good health (*Letters* 81). Betham later acknowledged that she was blessed with "excellent natural health and spirits". See "Letter from Matilda Betham," 1 Dec. 1821, in the *The Archives of the Royal Literary Fund: 1790-1918* (London: World Microfilms, 1984), reel #10, file #361. This microfilm edition of the original manuscripts will hereafter be abbreviated to *ARLF*. I am indebted to the Royal Literary Fund for permitting me to cite passages from Matilda Betham's file.
- 51 Allan Ingram, *The Madhouse of Language. Writing and Reading Madness in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 157.
- 52 Kenneth Curry, ed., *New Letters of Robert Southey*, II. 215.
- 53 Edith J. Morley, ed., *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers* (London: J.M. Dent, 1938), I. 232.
- 54 "Letter from Matilda Betham to Henry Crabb Robinson," 10 Oct. 1844, Crabb Robinson MSS 1844, 91a, Dr. Williams's Library, London.
- 55 Reiman, ix. He supports his hypothesis by pointing out that both later volumes received only one review each, whereas *Elegies and Other Small Poems* (1797) and *Poems* (1808) received six and nine respectively. See William Ward, *Literary Reviews in British Periodicals 1798-1820. A Bibliography*, vol. 1 (New York: Garland, 1972), 154-155.
- 56 "Letter from Matilda Betham to John Cam Hobhouse," 16 April 1820, Add. MS 36458, f. 241, British Library.
- 57 Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer*, 23
- 58 "George Dyer to the Committee," July 1821, *ARLF*.

- 59 "Sir William Betham to Hunter," 14 Dec. 1822, *ARLF*. The publisher of her last two books, Rowland Hunter would remain a sincere admirer of Betham's poetry, especially of "that beautiful poem 'The Lay of Marie.'" 28 Nov. 1843, *ARLF*.
- 60 "Betham to Henry Leave," 1 Dec. 1821, *ARLF*.
- 61 In a letter dated July 26, 1821, Betham admitted, "Mr Dyer ... concludes from the postscript ... that I am 'in a state more deserving pity than blame'". Since the postscript to *Challenge to Women* is dated July 3, 1821, I conclude that this must be the work to which she alludes. See "Betham to [?]," *ARLF*.
- 62 "On Hearing of Lord Byron's Death" (London: W. Lewis, [n. d.]). The sole printed copy I have found is located at the Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch. The poem appears on page 5, item 19, in the binder *Crow-quill Flights and other writings*, Reference 920 BET.
- 63 "Letter from Matilda Betham to Lord Brougham".
- 64 Several loose sheets of printed poems held in the Ipswich Record Office appear to be part of the unpublished *Crow-quill Flights*, although the page numbering is irregular. *Sonnets and Verses* make up part of the binder *Crow-quill Flights and other writings* in the Ipswich Record Office.
- 65 Betham admitted to Crabb Robinson that the sudden death of three brothers within one year, all of whom had lived in Russia for an extended time, made her suspicious of some unfathomable plot against her family. See the "Letter from Matilda Betham to Henry Crabb Robinson," Dr. Williams's Library. By 1844, all of her brothers except Sir William had died.
- 66 Betham-Edwards, *Friendly Faces*, 38.
- 67 A copy of the first instalment of the *Dramatic Sketch* was included in a letter to the artist Mrs. Turner (née Mary Palgrave). "Letter from Matilda Betham to Mrs. [Dawson] Turner," 11 May 1836, La. II. 423/61-62, University of Edinburgh Library.
- 68 E. V. Lucas, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, III. 404.
- 69 As far as I know, the only extant copy of *Challenge to Women* is held in the Pforzheimer collection at the New York Public Library. The sole surviving copies of Betham's *Crow-quill Flights* and *Sonnets and Verses* are held at the Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch.
- 70 For Lamb's letter to Southey, see Edwin Marris, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, III. 236; see also III. 235; 238. A copy of Betham's portrait of Norris appears in E. V. Lucas's *At the Shrine of St. Charles* (London: Methuen, 1934), facing page 14.

- 71 Consult *ARLF*. See also Nigel Cross's accompanying introduction and guide, p. 38; and Edward Copeland's *Women Writing About Money* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.
- 72 "Letter from M[atilda] Betham to P. Colburn," [no date], MS Montagu d. 6 fols. 136-137, Bodleian Library. I infer that the dictionary is the book mentioned because she describes herself intending to improve on the first edition by "reading every thing ... which bore upon the subject -- particularly the foreign works --". It is almost impossible to date the letter based on its contents, but she does say that the book was published "a long while ago".
- 73 "Letter from Matilda Betham to Lord Brougham," University of London Library.
- 74 Quoted in Betham-Edwards, *Six Life Studies*, 297. Apart from being related by marriage to Betham, Amelia Blandford Edwards founded the Egyptian Exploration Fund and earned an honorary doctorate from Columbia University. For more information, consult Betham-Edwards, *Mid-Victorian Memories*, intro Sarah Grand (London: John Murray, 1919), 115.
- 75 "Letter from Matilda Betham to Lord Brougham," University of London Library.
- 76 Betham's obituary notice described her as "the authoress of a poem, entitled "Marie," and several other literary works, of note." *Gentleman's Magazine* (Nov. 1852), 549.
- 77 The biography in *Six Lives* ends with the observation that her friendships with these famous individuals were her "title of honour". Katharine Anthony relies on this biography to conclude that Betham turned her back on literary ambitions and imitated Lamb's success as an entertaining salonist. Katharine Anthony, *The Lambs. A Study of Pre-Victorian England* (London: Hammond & Co., 1948), 241. In fact, Sarah Grand's biography of Betham-Edwards indicates that the novelist particularly enjoyed the social aspect of literary life.

Matilda Betham-Edwards (1836-1919) published a formidable range of works, including over ninety published books of various genres -- travel diaries, poetry, literary biographies, editions of collected poems, studies of French culture, autobiographical reminiscences, and most prolifically, novels. Among her best known works of fiction are *The Lord of the Harvest* (see endnote 7), *Kitty* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), and *Felicia* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1877). Betham-Edwards mirrored her own depiction of Matilda Betham by immersing herself in the literary coterie of the day, becoming friends with George Eliot, Coventry Patmore, and Henry James. She self-consciously followed her aunt's example by penning women's biographies, seeing in this genre the potential for women's emancipation: the idea that women's stories need to be told becomes a refrain in her *Six Life Studies* and *Mid-Victorian Memories*. Toward the end of her life, she became increasingly bitter toward women for their indifference toward their female predecessors, and in frustration decided

that women were too petty to hold public office. For most of her life, however, she admired women who, like her aunt, had advocated social, artistic and educational reform.

Chapter Two:

Betham's "Celebrated Women" and the Precedence of History

Of all Matilda Betham's literary works, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Celebrated Women of Every Age and Country* (1804) has excited the most critical attention. Betham's research still proves interesting to feminist scholars for its commentary on early women writers. The evaluation of its participation in a prominent genre of the latter half of the eighteenth century, collected biographies on famous or noteworthy women, offers the necessary historical basis for judging a significant aspect of Betham's achievement.¹ Any discussion of Betham's work must be contextualised in these generic and historical terms, since comparisons between her own dictionary and those of her immediate predecessors reveal the extent to which Betham both revised and reiterated existing narratives of women's role in civic affairs.

Betham acknowledged two strains of inquiry -- empirical biography and independent analysis -- that allowed her to assure the reading public of her reliability as a historian by repeating the judgement of her predecessors *and* to assert her own views by writing about some of her contemporaries. In addressing this dual agenda, my study shows that although Betham certainly relied principally on authoritative sources, the instances when she *does* offer her own criticism suggest a receptiveness to various interpretations of what constitutes a "celebrated" woman. Betham's two autobiographical statements in the Preface to *Crow-quill Flights* (composed circa 1841) and *Letters of an Enthusiast* (n. d.) similarly consider the demands of biographical accuracy. While the Preface conceives autobiography as a genre inspired by public opinion, *Letters* turns inward to an imaginative and self-referential language that covertly illustrates Betham's anxiety about national politics. In part, the memoirs' complementary displacement of a single depiction of selfhood by alternate recollections mirrors the *Dictionary's*

impulse to find identity in plural and often conflicting biographical exempla. But their two expressions of epistemological authority, one public and the other private, also reflect the *Dictionary's* scholarly method.

i. Betham's *A Biographical Dictionary*

The dualism in Betham's research, a product of her reliance on personal judgement and adherence to precedent, has elicited two contradictory responses over the course of the twentieth century. Victorian novelist Matilda Betham-Edwards, believing the work to be the first of its kind, praised its "pioneering" quality, and several critics of the early twentieth century admired its apparent uniqueness.² Recent commentators have instead emphasized its antecedents in earlier encyclopaedia projects. In part, these contradictory assessments of Betham's project rehearse a larger shift in feminist thinking over the course of the twentieth century, from the celebration of early feminist writers as revolutionaries who defied patriarchal authority, evident in such landmark anthologies as Gilbert and Gubar's *Shakespeare's Sisters*, to a more cautious, historically informed evaluation of the Bluestocking circle and the cultural complexities surrounding the political affiliations of its first participants and later supporters.³ I too will define the dictionary in relation to an existing body of prose biographies that Betham drew upon for her own publication but will do so in order to explore the significance of certain changes Betham makes to received opinion.⁴

Betham's research both collaborated with and subverted mainstream notions of history and definitions of womanhood, apparently adhering to a conservative position on historiography even as it included a surprisingly eclectic range of secondary sources. Although Judy Simons has claimed that "the committed female artist ... was clearly an inappropriate subject for serious

literary treatment" during the eighteenth century, other scholars document the period's interest in literary biographies about women.⁵ As Margaret Ezell's *Writing Women's Literary History* reveals, women poets were anthologized with biographical commentary from early in the century. Ruth Perry's edition of George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (originally published in 1752) shows that the eighteenth-century's preoccupation with the heroes found in biography extended to women subjects.⁶ As Ballard states in his preface,

The present age is so far from being defective in this respect [the illustration of great characters] that it has produced a greater number of excellent biographers than any preceding times; and yet, I know not how it has happened that very many ingenious women of this nation, who were really possessed of a great share of learning and have, no doubt, in their time been famous for it, are not only unknown to the public in general, but have been passed by in silence by our greatest biographers.⁷

In its celebration of women's achievements, principally literary ones, Ballard's project provided an early feminist argument that continued with such publications as Colman and Thornton's *Poems by Eminent Ladies* (1755), the anonymously published *Biographium Faemineum: The Female Worthies* (1766), Thomas Gibbons's *Memoirs of Eminently Pious Women of Great Britain* (1777), Mary Pilkington's *Historical Beauties for Young Ladies* (1800), and Mary Hays's *Female Biography: or Memoirs of illustrious and celebrated Women, of all Ages and Countries* (1803).

Betham was well aware that she was following the example of these biographers, even though she hoped to be the first to write an international dictionary of women in English and had, she tells us, submitted proposals for a four-volume project in 1801. (She consequently found the publication of Mary Hays's *Female Biography* especially galling. Jeanne Wood has accused Betham of writing a "querulous" and "indignant" Preface, in which she alludes

disparagingly to *Female Biography*, but Hays's successful completion must have exacerbated Betham's financial worries.⁸) With respect to its subject matter, then, Betham's dictionary was far from innovative. It frequently cites the aforementioned sources, often verbatim, and in many respects endorses the position held by the author of the *Female Worthies*, "that nature has been no less indulgent to the female sex than to the male, with respect to those noble faculties of the mind...".⁹ In asserting mental equality between the sexes, *Female Worthies* and Ballard's *Memoirs* argue for an increased appreciation of women who made full use of their artistic and rational capacities.

While these biographies acknowledged the presence of women, however, their willingness actively to advance or champion women's social identity has been questioned by Ezell and McDowell. Both caution that this genre, while apparently accommodating female-centred biographies, also endeavours to erase certain women from public consciousness through a process of exclusion. Despite the biographers' avowed intention to celebrate the lives of women, biographical noteworthiness is internally defined by the dictionary's notion of the feminine. The inevitable result is that those left "out," beyond the pale of articulation, demonstrate through their absence the defining qualities that make a woman mentionable. As McDowell writes, "It was precisely through the establishment of a 'female literary tradition' in the first place...that oppressive new norms for female literary activity were constructed..." (221-2). She adds that Ballard's omission of commercial playwrights and Quaker women limited approval to literary ladies who were British, Anglican, and chaste. Ezell agrees, explaining that Ballard argued "for the improved education of women -- but only that they may fulfil certain social roles....His ideal woman in this volume -- modest, middle-class, well-read, pious, and charitable -- does not challenge her society in any direct way except to urge further educational

activities. Women who do not fit this pattern are permitted to slip into oblivion" (88). Betham's dictionary receives a mention as among those that unquestioningly repeat the judgement of their predecessors, and in the process solidify the received wisdom of what constituted "female worthiness" (Ezell 80).

This judgement has been corroborated through reference to Betham's social circle. Until now, biographical research on Betham herself has focused on her admiration of conservative men: Robert Southey and S. T. Coleridge in their post-pantisocratic years and her father and brother. Not surprisingly, then, the tentative conclusion has been that Betham endorsed their politics and that her *Dictionary* sententiously prescribed oppressive norms of feminine behaviour.¹⁰ There is good reason to believe that Betham was didactic in her purposes as a biographer, since her *Dictionary's* tone adopts the impersonal, objective, seemingly omniscient voice of a lexicographer. She is scrupulous about citing secondary sources, suggesting her deferral to authority and abdication of personal judgement. Betham *can* be seen negatively as one who repeats her predecessors and therefore confirms a constrained version of female worthiness. But she can also, and with justification, be treated positively as a historian committed to scholarly, even antiquarian, research.

At the most modest computation, Betham personally consulted sixty-six published sources (excluding manuscript materials and primary texts by women authors), and her tertiary references to related works runs into the hundreds. It is her acknowledged intention to speak with "authenticity, and impartiality ... conceiving those principles to be of more consequence in a work of this kind, than ornamental writing" (vi), and therefore, she self-consciously repeats the judgement of those who came before her. If repetition is the process by which canon is formed, as George Steiner has claimed, then, almost inevitably, Betham's dictionary is part of that

process.¹¹ In adhering to the words of previous scholars and going back to the "original source," or the text closest to the time at which a historical event occurred, Betham affirmed a principle of scholarly accuracy that was widely held by eighteenth-century biographers and which presumably she learned from her father's genealogical research. In fact, Betham informs us that she left school because the instructor made erroneous historical claims:

I told such tales of mistakes in explanations of history, (my father being then engaged in collecting for and drawing up his royal genealogies, made me more than commonly *au fait* in such matters,) that it was thought my teachers were incapable of instructing me, and I was not permitted to return.
(*Crow-quill Flights* 14-15)

Betham lamented her lack of training in many other branches of knowledge, but she did feel equipped to make a contribution to historical research.

Both the Rev. William and Matilda Betham received a positive notice for their respective publications in the *Monthly Review*, presumably because they followed the advice offered to historians in that very periodical.¹² The *Monthly Review* of June 1757 insists that reliable scholars depend on the "first witnesses" of a historical event:

The *later* Historian's only way, therefore, to prevent the ill effects of that decrease of evidence which the lapse of years necessarily brings with it, must be, by punctually referring to the spring-head from whence the stream of his narration flows; which at once will cut off all appearance of partiality, or misrepresentation. As in law, the rectitude of a person's character is not alone sufficient to establish the truth of a fact, so in history, not merely the Writer's testimony, be our opinion of his veracity ever so great, but collateral evidence is also required, to determine every thing of a questionable nature¹³

Biographies were expected to offer an objective guide for their readers; reliance on precedent, not revision of factual interpretation, was deemed to be the hallmark of the scrupulous historian. It is presumably for this reason that Betham's Preface asks for the public's indulgence in passages

"where I have hazarded original criticism, or observation" (vi). Her apology implies her acceptance of the conditions under which a biographical dictionary would receive commendation for scholarly merit. Not surprisingly, Betham's adherence to canonical precepts of history earned her the approval, however lukewarm, of contemporary reviewers. The *Monthly Review* gives the dictionary "a due degree of approbation," praising especially the "diffidence" of the preface and Betham's deferral to other scholars: "as the authorities from which they [the entries] are taken are usually quoted ... the reader will be enabled to consult at his leisure more ample sources of information."¹⁴ Similarly, the *British Critic* praised its historical reliability: "The whole is written with great impartiality, and great attention appears to have been paid to the authenticity of the information which is communicated."¹⁵ The notice goes on to praise Betham's near expurgation of facts derived from oral communication rather than written documentation, though one exception is mentioned. (The reviewer probably has in mind Betham's inclusion of a certain Bowanny, a Hindustani woman whose biography almost certainly would have been unknown to any other historian. It seems that Betham made room for her because she was fascinated by the suttee, especially the ritual's transmutation of self-immolation into an aesthetic act of heroism and feminine virtue [150-154].)

The review for the *British Critic*, in commenting on the supremacy of the publicly available written word over orally derived information, participates in one of the period's most densely layered discussions: the relation between authorial reliability, the transmission of folkloric and bardic heritage into historical documentation, and the fear of the displacement, or even replacement, of public discourse with the private interpolation of poetic voice (a politicized literary debate that, as we will see in Chapter Four, is especially pertinent to Betham's *The Lay of Marie*).¹⁶ The reviewer approves of Betham's dictionary largely because she relies

almost exclusively on canonical, historical texts. At the time Betham began amassing material for her dictionary, she, too, appears to have seen "history" quite unproblematically as a written, and therefore verifiable, epistemology handed down from the records of ancient time, with the Bible as the authority on sacred history, the Greek and Roman authors as the first witnesses of events in classical times, and the famous historians of Europe as the best source for modern life studies. In fact, she follows closely the advice Henry Kett gave university students in his *Elements of General Knowledge* (1802), which, though it recommends a wide array of reading material, particularly lauds the virtues of reading "genuine history".¹⁷ "To draw the line of proper distinction between authentic and fabulous history," he writes, "is the first object of the discerning reader," and the best way to determine "true" legitimacy is to determine whether or not the information is recorded (113-114). According to Kett, the preference for "true history" over romances and novels is the quality that distinguishes the man from the youth. While this text is specifically geared to young men, in his novel *Emily. A Moral Tale* (1809) Kett recommends the reading of history to women, and includes a list of historical texts -- among them, William Robertson's *History of the Emperor Charles V*, Dr. John Watkins's *Scripture Biography*, Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, and even specific entries in Hays's *Female Biography* -- as well as conduct manuals such as James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* and John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*. It would seem that for Kett a wide range of works offered didactic instruction to women readers. As Jacqueline Pearson explains, history books were often recommended even by "conservative educationalists as training in compliance to a male-dominated culture and its discursive practices."¹⁸

The reviewers' approval of Betham's deference toward authoritative sources has encouraged numbers of recent critics to argue that the *Dictionary* pursued a politically

conservative agenda. Biographical conventions also lead some to regard the genre as "fundamentally reactionary, conservative, perpetually accommodating new models of man, new theories of the inner self, into a personality-oriented cultural mainstream, thus always helping to defuse their subversive potential."¹⁹ Biographical anthologisation, in its implicit or sometimes explicit use of precedent to establish norms of human behaviour, and its generic impulse to find commonality between subjects, is similarly charged with having a homogenizing influence on constructions of selfhood. To some extent, Betham's dictionary does exhibit this tendency. Her occasional condemnation of women for sexual impropriety or religious unorthodoxy establishes clear guidelines for the *Dictionary's* readers through castigatory reflections on women's lives. Of dramatist and poet Aphra Behn, for instance, Betham comments, "Had not Mrs. Behn been so strongly tinctured with the prevalent dissipation and loose morality of the age, her talents would have ranked her higher in the list of female writers" (111). Such a conclusion implies that an author's character rather than her work plays the more crucial role in determining literary merit. In her entry on Elizabeth Barton, Betham roundly censures the Holy Maid of Kent for deceiving the people, and for conspiring with the clergy in "propping the sinking foundation of the Romish church" (94). These entries support Ezell and McDowell's argument for the self-fulfilling limitations of biography. The contemporary notion of "authentic history," combined with the dictionary's generic restrictions, means that Betham often champions women already approved in previous works for their chasteness and piety.

But this conclusion still raises the question of whether Betham found ways within the confines of generic convention that allowed her to vex stabilized notions of the "celebrated woman". Comparisons with the models adopted by Betham's contemporaries provide some sense of her innovations. Like Betham, noted radical Mary Hays yielded to the claims of

"authentic history" in her dictionary. Nevertheless, she managed to include a few subversive examples of womanhood, some of whom, though condemned for inappropriate conduct, earn tacit commendation by their inclusion in her dictionary. The form of Hays's *Female Biography* is also significant. She chooses the relatively neutral system of an alphabetized dictionary, unlike Mary Pilkington or the anonymous author of *Characterism, or the Modern Age display'd* (1750), both of whom didactically arranged their work according to character types.

In comparing Hays's biographical collection with those of her immediate predecessors, Jeanne Wood explores radical aspects of *Female Biography*. As Wood argues, Hays's methodology allows women of differing social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds to appear side by side.²⁰ Like Pilkington, Hays intended her work for young people, but the *Female Biography* (like Betham's *Dictionary*) differs markedly from Pilkington's *Biography for Girls* (1799). Pilkington's volume includes six stories of girls, under such sententious titles as "Louisa Harrington; or, the Victim of Pride".²¹ Each girl has a prevailing character trait that determines her lot in life. Young Louisa, first promised to the only son of an earl, is deservedly abandoned in favour of her sweet-tempered rival Miss Lumley. Louisa dies of consumption at the age of twenty-one, "unregretted by all except her parents" (32). Each of the six biographies ends with a quotation from the epitaph engraved on the girl's tombstone, a narrative strategy that validates recorded, public testimonials to a person's life. Incapable of being revised, their histories are, literally, written in stone. Another of Pilkington's works, the *Historical Beauties for Young Ladies* (1800), though it derives its information from scholarly sources, serves the same purpose as *Biography for Girls* of chastening its female readers. Her address "To Superiors of Female Seminaries," to whom she submits her work, upholds biography as the best means of improving students' hearts and minds. The text itself begins with a prefatory story of Lady Stanley, who

wisely decides to school her three daughters in biography, determining (as Henry Kett did) that "[a] thorough knowledge of history is certainly one of the most essential parts of a girl's education," (xvi). The book divides thematically into fourteen character types, with each section containing illustrative examples from history.²² Resembling the eighteenth-century conduct book in style and didacticism, both of Pilkington's biographical publications contrast sharply with Hays's more inclusive dictionary.

There is reasonable justification for pursuing Jeanne Wood's line of inquiry with Betham as well, partly because she too decided on an alphabetical organization, but more importantly because she agitated for universal suffrage and openly defied prejudice against women who behaved with sexual impropriety. She admits in her autobiography that she had advocated women's equality in her teens, well before the publication of *A Biographical Dictionary (Crow-quill Flights 5)*. Betham's manuscript letter to the Whig MP John Cam Hobhouse insists that, having always been the "friend of general liberty," she now urges the immediate extension of the vote to all British subjects. The radicalism of Betham's political views has never before been acknowledged, but her long-forgotten petition of support for Queen Caroline, *Challenge To Women* (1821), proves conclusively that she wanted women to enter the national political scene, that she held to a Wollstonecraftian notion of educational reform and that she approved of women's activity in the public sphere:

Women, for fear of being wrong, for fear of doing anything unbecoming, often neglect what is right, and what their hearts and their judgements equally sanctify. In hesitating whether they do that or this, they often lose the opportunity; and it is a fault resulting from the bad, because dependent system of their education, The healthy exercise of action is in all cases necessary; for the mind, like the body, which does not go alone, soon becomes rickety, feeble, and deformed, though it may acquire that sickly delicacy which some account as beauty.

Despising this coquettish and subordinate claim to admiration, from those to whom we surrender our faculties, and who soon forget to pay us for the sacrifice, we feel as human beings, equally susceptible of joy and sorrow, of benefit and injury; equally accountable for our actions, and called upon as strongly as the other sex, to bear our part on any thing which concerns the happiness of our fellow creatures; being related, in the same matter as themselves, to the present and the future.

... feeling utter disdain of all the stale raillery which affects to think it ridiculous in *us* to claim any participation of that power which regulates the welfare of the *whole* of mankind, of which it is not pretended yet that we do not form a part[,] I have next to ask in this public manner for their signatures and countenance to an open profession of independent judgement and action!²³

Betham's defence of Queen Caroline, who had been tried for adultery in the House of Lords in 1820, indicates that she was prepared to risk her own reputation for the sake of her convictions. (Perhaps not coincidentally, she was institutionalized for insanity a year later.) We can also be reasonably sure that Betham advocated tolerance toward Britain's religious minorities, despite the *Dictionary's* occasional condemnation of the Roman Catholic church. Her closest woman friend at the time of the *Dictionary's* composition, Lady Bedingsfeld, was a devout Roman Catholic. In addition, a unique copy of one of her later poems "August, 1834," expresses derision for prejudice against the nation's Jewish population.²⁴ The extent to which she reaffirmed restrictive notions of womanhood handed down by Ballard and other biographical lexicographers must be weighed against such evidence of her personal tolerance of people belonging to various creeds and social backgrounds. Betham's *Dictionary* certainly made substantial use of *The Female Worthies*, undoubtedly a pro-English, anti-Catholic resource, and on many occasions she cited it verbatim. However, Betham tones down the anti-Catholic strain in *The Female Worthies*, even in passages that appear to copy it wholesale. In the entry on Elizabeth Barton, for example, *The Female Worthies* describes Archbishop Warham as "a violent

persecuting papist"; Betham echoes entire paragraphs of the earlier text, but significantly, she changes this description to "a zealous catholic". In the entry on Anne Boleyn, the author of *The Female Worthies* blames Roman Catholic writers for unchristian callousness in "railing against this unhappy woman," while paradoxically agreeing that the Queen "was a woman gay even to immodesty, ... and of an irregular and licentious behaviour" (61; 62). Although Betham cites *The Female Worthies* as the key authority in her own entry on Anne Boleyn, she omits the anti-Catholic sentiment altogether; she also contradicts the verdict on Boleyn's character, deciding instead that "[h]istory affords no reason to call her innocence into question" (138). It seems, then, that Betham did not completely adhere to the sententious, religiously intolerant attitude found in much of the earlier work. She was even prepared to jeopardize the accuracy of her citation if the language her predecessor used was inflammatory, intolerant, or unjust.

When Betham chooses not to specify her intended audience or avoids directing her reader's attention to specific biographies, her work in fact shows less didacticism than that of her famously liberal rival, Mary Hays. In Hays's Preface, which claims that the dictionary was written "for women, and not for scholars," Hays states, "I have endeavoured, in general, to serve the cause of truth and of virtue ..." (vii; vi). It was partly Hays's identification of her motivations and readership that elicited the *Monthly Review's* prickly retort that she might indicate *which* subjects are worthy of women's emulation.²⁵ The reviewer may also have seen an inconsistency in Hays's assertion that, "[u]nconnected with any party, and disdaining every species of bigotry," she offers an unbiased catalogue. He was clearly irritated by the length of Catherine II and Madame Roland's biographies (with some justification: at 428 and 208 pages respectively, they occupy a disproportionate one fifth of the dictionary's six volumes). Their overwhelming textual presence suggests a partisan interest in their biographies.

Betham does not attempt this sort of guidance: she specifies neither her intended audience nor her pedagogical agenda, and the length of her entries is more evenly distributed among her subjects. In doing so, she forestalls the *Monthly's* criticism of Hays's project, even though she wrote tolerant biographies on these same two women. Betham's entries on the two took up a more proportional three percent of her book's space. The absence of an index and Table of Contents also can be seen as evidence of Betham's wish to be less directive than Hays. Without introductory indices, the *Dictionary* must be read in its entirety before information on its contents can be determined. While Hays's readers can see which women earn the commendation of admission into *Female Biography* without having to read through the volume, Betham's *Dictionary* requires thorough examination and in the process encourages a more comprehensive understanding of women's diverse achievements.

A summary of the *Dictionary's* contents may prove useful in refining arguments about Betham's participation in the formation of a woman's literary canon and the construction of feminine identity. In total, Betham includes 691 biographies of women who lived in times as remote as Ancient Greece and died as recently as 1801 and who hailed from countries as far-flung as Japan and as close to home as England.²⁶ Hays's work has less than half that number (although the average length of each biography is a weightier nine pages); *The Female Worthies* less than a third of Betham's number of entries; and Ballard, only sixty-four biographies in total. So although Betham cannot in fact fulfil her title's ambitious promise to include "every age and country," the work's formidable range suggests a genuine desire to be as inclusive as possible. Moreover, she intended in later years to broaden the scope of her collection. In a manuscript letter to a potential publisher, who was apparently considering reprinting the *Dictionary* many years after its first publication, Betham indicates that she kept an interleaved copy of her book

for additional remarks, hoping to include more foreign sources than were found in the first edition.²⁷ This acknowledgement evidences her belief that the consultation of a *variety* of sources, with potentially diverse agenda and political allegiances, attests to a researcher's thoroughness. It also indicates that Betham was an open-minded scholar, prepared to refine or revise her initial conclusions.

The average length of each entry is just over a page or approximately 350 words, although some biographies provide little more than a name and date, while others extend over several pages. The two longest entries are on Bianca Capello and Catherine the Great, at nineteen and thirteen and a half pages respectively. These biographies may thus be worth bearing in mind when we confront claims about Betham's insistence that women exhibit subdued behaviour. While these rulers are certainly not commended for virtuous conduct, neither are they categorically blamed for callousness or sexual impropriety. Betham observes of the Grand Duchess of Tuscany that, though she was cruel, licentious, and fraudulent, her "good sense ... claims all our admiration" (194). As for Catherine II of Russia, Betham concludes her account of the Empress's rise to power, liaison with Count Orloff, and political intrigues with decisive words of praise and only the mildest censure:

To describe her numberless institutions for the benefit of her subjects, her wise regulations, or the internal commotions which she overcame, would exceed the limits of this work. To trace her list of favourites, or lovers, would be a useless task. As an author, Catherine has some claims

It has been doubted, whether she was privy to the murder of her husband, or ever acquainted with the circumstances. Be it as it will, her mind always kept its balance. The most extravagant projects did not bewilder her imaginations; nor the greatest difficulties disarrange her ideas. (224-225)

Betham's detached tone is characteristic of the dictionary as a whole. She generally avoids using personal pronouns when rendering a judgement, although the occasional employment of the first-person plural implies her solidarity with a community of scholars. Discerning Betham's own opinions on the defining characteristics of "celebrated women" thus requires an overview of the entire volume. From such a survey, we may determine whether Betham used the genre to destabilize the gender ideals of her source material.

The women in Betham's dictionary were included for a wide variety of reasons. Any classification of these biographies into groups, therefore, would inevitably oversimplify the women's diversity of professions, vocations, personalities, and achievements. However, for the purposes of determining Betham's criteria for inclusion, I will offer a broad statistical breakdown of the kinds of women she writes about. The largest single type of "celebrated women" are famous for shaping political "history" in the governmental and geographical sense, influencing the civic affairs of the state during their lifetimes. Such women are those who either ruled or waged war, or who had familial or sexual relations with politically active men. Queens, princesses, warriors, and courtesans or wives of famous men thus make up nearly 41 percent of the *Dictionary's* biographies. The next largest group of women are authors, forming about 36 percent of the total number of entries. Another 21 percent of the biographies describe the lives of women who were principally active in a vocation other than writing, such as visual artists, actresses, clerics, lecturers, mathematicians, and inventors. A mere 2 percent of the women were saints or martyrs, which suggests that piety was less of a qualification for entry into Betham's work than political or professional achievement. Nor does her dictionary seem intentionally to privilege British women over those from other nations. The vast majority (over 80 percent) originate from nations other than those of the British Isles, although admittedly no

other single nation has as many entries as does Britain. The number of British subjects may result less from a chauvinistic bias than from practical obstacles to extensive documentation from other countries, since Betham worked independently, never travelled abroad, and relied on scholarly resources available at public and private libraries in England. She was also widely read in the writings of eighteenth-century British women, which allowed her to discuss the work of some of her recent literary predecessors and contemporaries.

In praising women who had recently died, Betham countered one of the few biographers of women active during the 1790s, the radical Charles Pigott, whose satirical collection of biographies in *The Female Jockey Club* (1794) mocks England's literary women. Pigott depicts Mary Robinson as a luxurious tyrant whose "efforts in acting, like those in her writing, were faint and languid ...".²⁸ Pigott also censures the over-privileged "Blue Stocking Jockies" who, he implies, immodestly chose their name as an invitation for him to fantasize about their legs. Betham's dictionary answers Pigott's satire by praising seventeenth- and eighteenth-century polemicists on women's education, including Mary Astell, Mary, Lady Chudleigh, Sarah Fielding, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and Catherine Talbot. She also describes Sarah Scott as the author of "several popular novels" in her entry on her sister, Elizabeth Montagu, whom she praised for her intelligence and charity toward chimney sweepers. The entry on Astell is particularly instructive because it makes no reference to secondary sources, so we can infer that Betham makes use of her own judgement when she remarks that Astell's preface in her second edition of *Reflections on Marriage* (1705) "perhaps is the strongest defence that ever appeared in print, of the rights and abilities of her own sex" (78). In the preface, Astell had scorned the idea that women were naturally the inferior sex, citing Queen Anne's reign as proof positive of at

least one woman's superiority over all men, and claiming that scriptural precedent and the predominance of women's subjection did not justify its perpetuation.

Although willing to approve of the Bluestockings and their royalist forebears, Betham is significantly more cautious when it comes to praising early feminists with republican sympathies. Moira Ferguson believes that the *Dictionary* values women who exhibited "propriety and subdued sensibilities," and that, excepting Catherine Macaulay and Mary Robinson, Betham intentionally omitted radical women writers such as Mary Scott.²⁹ In fact, the *Dictionary* shows signs of the political radicalism that Betham was later to express forcefully in *Challenge to Women*. Betham's inclusion of both Robinson and Macaulay would seem to *prove* her radical sympathies, rather than the reverse. As the author of historical writings that reflected, in Betham's words, "her enthusiastic attachment to liberty," Macaulay exhibited a commitment to republicanism that would prove risky during the tumultuous 1790s, when the British government aggressively clamped down on revolutionary publications and public meetings. Betham concludes her entry on Macaulay-Graham by remarking that she was "a woman of great feeling and indisputable abilities, though the democratic spirit of her writings has made them fall into disrepute" (450). One might conclude with Ferguson that Betham, in stating this opinion as if it were objective fact, endorses the loyalist opinion of Macaulay's excessive democracy. However, the combination of the passive voice and present perfect tense ("has made them fall") meliorates a potentially hostile criticism, offering in its stead an equivocal, self-consciously contemporary assessment. We cannot be sure whether Betham agrees with the prevailing view, or whether she anticipates a reappraisal of Macaulay's work. Moreover, in citing nine titles of Macaulay's political and historical writings, Betham invites our further perusal of primary sources. Similarly, Betham's biography on Robinson (which does not cite any secondary

material) is strikingly favourable. Although she mentions Robinson's separation from her husband and her association with the Prince of Wales, Betham avoids moralizing on her life, saying only that "much of this [her reduced circumstance in later life] was occasioned by her inconsiderate involving herself for the convenience of others" (655). The blame for Robinson's impecuniousness rests equally with those who imposed on her goodwill. For the most part, Betham focuses on Robinson's remarkable poetic gifts, singling out specific works in her *Lyrical Tales* (1800) as verse that "would do honour to the pen of almost any English poet of the present century" (654-5).³⁰

Ferguson's assertion that, excepting Robinson and Macaulay, contemporary radicals have no presence in the dictionary is also not entirely accurate. As J. M. S. Tompkins first observed in 1938, Betham's inclusion of Wollstonecraft (listed as "Mary Godwin") was a risk that even Mary Hays did not take, possibly because she omitted almost all women "nearer to our own times" (iii).³¹ (Hays did, however, offer unequivocal praise of Macaulay's republican writings [V. 287-307]). Betham's admission of Wollstonecraft is striking, most especially since she provides an accurate account of her literary output and romantic liaison with Gilbert Imlay. This is by no means Betham's longest entry on a British woman author -- she dedicates thirteen pages to the "conscious vir[t]ue" of Elizabeth Rowe's life and writing (685). Nevertheless, Betham's entry on Wollstonecraft is three times the length of the average biography. The entry's opening description of Mary Godwin as a "singular" woman may not have been intended censoriously, since it was a word Betham knew was associated with herself in her youth: "Many people considered me a singular ... person," she remembered in later years (*Crow-quill Flights* 7). Betham's entry does, however, inform us of Wollstonecraft's "obstinate" reluctance to marry after becoming William Godwin's lover (340). Despite this careful disapproval of Wollstonecraft's

sexual adventures, Betham was quite prepared to include her and other political radicals in her dictionary. She cites Anna Barbauld, with whom she became friends, in her entry on Hester Chapone (née Mulso). The presence of Macaulay, Robinson, Wollstonecraft, and Barbauld suggests that Betham confidently anticipates their lasting influence on literary history; she even endeavours to *ensure* it.

Her early receptiveness to democratic ideals is most evident in the kind of books she decided to cite. Jacqueline Pearson's helpful study on reading material in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries examines which books were considered dangerous for women to read, and why. Although opinions differed widely, even among those who shared the same political views, many conservative readers in the early nineteenth century feared the corrupting influence of works published in revolutionary France. Betham draws on French writers known to be either sympathetic to revolutionaries or prepared to hear their opinions. The entry on Madame Roland (née Jeanne-Marie Phlipon) makes use of her *Memoirs* and personal reminiscences in *Anecdotes of the Founders of the Republic*, a work sold by the radical publisher J. Johnson that celebrates the "progress of the revolution". At six pages in length, Madame Roland's biography is a comparatively detailed account of her career in literature and political agitation. Betham describes her as a precocious child whose "romantic" feelings drew her toward the ideal world of a republic as it appeared to her in antiquity and her own imagination. But her husband, though himself a critic of the French monarchy, fell into Robespierre's disfavour, and Madame Roland was herself executed under the new regime. French scholarly sources of various political stripes are in evidence throughout the dictionary, including material by Stéphanie de Genlis, whose love affair with the Comte de Chartres made her a dubious role model for conservatives, although as the tutor to his children she allied herself with the French monarchy.³²

Betham also quotes material that deals specifically with the execution of the Royal Family. Her information on Marie Antoinette appears to have been drawn from the Queen's intimate friend Princess de Lamballe, whose *Memoirs* were published in 1801.³³ Despite Betham's use of this source, her entry on Marie Antoinette, while compassionating her sorrows, also indicates that the revolt was largely the Queen's own fault: "The circumstances which led to their [the people's] conceiving so bitter a hate towards her, the limits of this work do not allow us to state progressively. Heedless extravagance and dissipation seem to have been the source: faults certainly both foolish and unfeeling! but the sufferings she underwent, ... more than expiated them" (474-5). While Betham does not go so far as to defend revolutionary activity, neither is she particularly censorious toward those who begin it. Betham, in other words, represents both aristocrats and republicans in her survey of the world's most influential women.

In a similar vein of pluralism, Betham balances those entries that censure women for sexual impropriety with biographies that acknowledge the influence of mistresses and courtesans on world events. The assertion that Betham valued "propriety" in her biographical subjects can only be upheld if we focus primarily on entries that use the anonymously published *Female Worthies* as the principal authority. In that dictionary, a woman's sexual demeanour is a key theme in determining biography, and women who made their living immodestly were intentionally excised from its pages:

As to the famous, or rather infamous courtezans of antiquity, such as *Lais*, *Thais*, *Lamia*, *Messalina*, and many others of the same lewd function, they are all absolutely excluded from this collection; as a recital of their vicious and immoral lives, without the appearance of one virtue to speak for them, would rather serve to corrupt the minds than afford any useful instruction for the conduct or behaviour of the modest part of the fair sex (x).

The author believes that inclusion itself conveys a degree of approbation, harmful to impressionable readers. Many of Betham's subjects, such as Aphra Behn, were adapted from *The Female Worthies*, and in those instances she repeats most of her predecessor's remarks. But the principle of selection in *The Female Worthies* did not meet the demands of Betham's more inclusive work. The "lewd" women Lais, Lamia, Messalina, and several other courtesans all find a place in her *Dictionary*. For information on the courtesans, Betham relied on sources that were less didactic about sexual virtue than *The Female Worthies*.

Chief among these was the work of Antoine-Léonard Thomas. Thomas offered a much less judgmental appraisal when he examined virtue as an evolving concept that reveals more about cultural ideals than a single individual's biography. To that end, his *Essai sur le caractère, les mœurs, et l'esprit des Femmes Dans les Différens Siècles* (1772) offers an overview of women's role from Ancient Greece to the modern age, with the declared intention of examining "ce qu'on été les femmes dans les différens siècles, et comment l'esprit de leur temps ou de leur nation a influé sur leur caractère".³⁴ By referring to Antoine-Léonard Thomas's work, Betham could provide information on the famous mistresses of antiquity, such as Phryne. Following his argument closely, she explains that the "highly accomplished" courtesans attracted a coterie of gifted poets, enabling them to acquire a degree of "taste, precision, and elegance" unavailable to women who lived in respectable isolation from society (624). Betham's decision to praise the courtesans directly challenged the previous notion of "Female Worthies" in *Biographium Faemineum*. She also revised some of the comments her predecessor made in his entry on Cleopatra (who, we are told, was included with great reluctance), in which he condemns the Queen for "prostituting herself" in order to win Caesar's favour but admits that she possessed strength of character and intelligence. Although Betham uses the *Female Worthies* as her

principal resource for her entry on Cleopatra, she omits the inference that her subject was a prostitute, instead describing her as "selfish and extravagant ... but accompanied with unrivalled address and penetration into characters" (252)

Women closer historically to Betham than these classical figures are subjected to more stringent criticism, although here, too, attention to the context of the times modifies moral censure. Betham largely adheres to the judgement of *Female Worthies* when she describes Aphra Behn's lifestyle and writing as "very reprehensible, though the latter abounded in wit and the language of the passions" (110). Mary Hays agrees, saying that her works are "reprehensible for their licentiousness" and that "[h]er comedies and novels, with the exception of Oroonoka [sic], do not serve the cause of virtue" (I. 288-9). Their comments lead Heidi Hutner to believe that they dismissed Behn's work as "corrupt and deplorable -- unfit to be read".³⁵ Interestingly, however, both Hays and Betham make allowances for Behn by placing her within the context of her times. Hays pleads, "something must be allowed for the manners of the times, the example of the first writers, and the contagion of the court" (I. 289), and Betham similarly concludes with the observation that Behn had been "strongly tinctured with the prevalent dissipation and loose morality of the age..." (110-11). Betham certainly echoes the prevailing view that Behn lived an unacceptably licentious life, and that such conduct demotes her from the literary standing she could otherwise have achieved. But she also maintains that Behn turned to a life of pleasure out of frustration with the English court, which, having hired her as a foreign agent, refused to take her intelligence of a Dutch attack seriously. Betham's appreciation for Behn's gifts emerges even more clearly in her entry on Elizabeth "Corinna" Thomas, a long-suffering poet whose filial duty superseded her desire to marry a wealthy lover. Despite Thomas's irreproachable conduct, Betham concludes that her talents were "second-rate: she had not so much wit as Mrs. Behn, or

Mrs Manley [the author of *The New Atlantis*], nor so happy a power of intellectual painting ..." (749). Such an acknowledgement undermines the position that Behn's viciousness reduced her literary standing, for if Thomas is second-rate because her output suffers by comparison to Aphra Behn, Behn herself, by inference, must be considered *first-rate*.

By referring to Antoine-Léonard Thomas and by placing women within period contexts, Betham draws on an early conceptualization of a historically informed notion of selfhood, which Nussbaum sees as the belief that "[w]oman's subjectivity is not a given that precedes entrance into the social formation or can be defined outside of it".³⁶ While the post-modern terminology of decentred individuation was not available to Betham, and although she almost certainly believed in the Christian doctrine of sin and the immortal soul, she nevertheless grasped that commendable behaviour was largely a culturally relative concept, open to reinvestigation and subject to societal ideology. The biographical sketch of Bowanny, for instance, enables Betham to offer insight into a non-European standard of virtuous behaviour, so, although she personally disliked the custom of suttee, she could illustrate how the Hindu people's admiration of Bowanny's fortitude qualified her for admission into the *Dictionary*.

The *Dictionary's* inclusion of women from various national backgrounds and eras, and of differing social classes and professional activities, implies its rejection of a homogenizing vision of womanhood, even while the title's use of the words "celebrated women" asserts a commonality in their noteworthiness. Though we know little of Betham's political views during the early years of her career, the *Dictionary's* impressive array of women argues the need for a diversity of historical narratives. While adhering largely to "authentic" information in sources that preceded her own dictionary, Betham participates in the shaping of history when she "hazard[s] personal opinion" in order to modify received opinion, and when she includes such

contemporary women as Macaulay, Wollstonecraft, and Robinson. Their presence envisions a future when they would achieve international renown as Britain's "celebrated women".

ii. *Crow-quill Flights and Letters of an Enthusiast*

Given the dictionary's accommodation of precedent and personal opinion, how did Betham face the difficulty of writing *herself* into literary history? Was she prepared to use autobiography to resist conventional gender roles? The dualism apparent in the dictionary also emerges in Betham's self-writing. By offering two autobiographical representations, Betham provides both an annotated account of her youth and a more intimate revelation of her longing for social change.

A brief description of these materials will clarify my comparison between the two modes of life-writing. *Letters of an Enthusiast*, a seemingly fictional autobiography of four pages by "Semiramide Venville," is bound together with *Crow-quill Flights* in the Ipswich branch of the Suffolk Record Office, although inspection of the original papers reveals that they were printed separately. The copy of *Letters* appears to be unique; fragments of *Crow-quill Flights*, however, are preserved at the Dove Cottage and Wordsworth Museum and at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Critics usually refer to these pieces, which include the transcription of Coleridge's poem "To Matilda Betham, from a Stranger," as part of Betham's lost *Autobiographical Sketch*. The fragments are, in fact, part of a nineteen-page Preface to *Crow-quill Flights* (n.p., n.d.), which had been printed by private subscription in the early 1840s and distributed to select acquaintances, including Robert Southey.³⁷ Betham wrote *Crow-quill Flights* while in her sixties, hoping to satisfy the curiosity of those who "have felt interested in my fate, during a life of some vicissitudes" (1).

This autobiography is a conflicted piece of prose, serving at once as a self-congratulatory account of her accomplishments and an apology for her literary career. With its self-justifying intention, *Crow-quill Flights* largely succeeds in obscuring the transgressiveness of her life and work, rendering her autobiography more palatable to a readership that, though once friendly towards Betham, became uncomfortable with her contentious opinions and eccentric behaviour. In printing *Crow-quill Flights*, Betham knew she was following in the footsteps of autobiographers Laetitia Pilkington and Mary Robinson, whose memoirs find a place in Betham's dictionary. Though Betham is sympathetic to both, their example would have taught her that self-writing risked being construed as a confessional defence of an indiscreet life: Pilkington, like Robinson, faced public hostility for her friendships with socially prominent men.³⁸

Betham acknowledged that life-writing involves the elision of some information. Shortly before printing *Crow-quill Flights*, she sent a biography of her father to the editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, in which she admits that “delicacy” and “consideration” have required her to disguise certain facts about her family and herself. She concludes the sketch with an observation about the limitations of the genre:

I sometimes think ... we are a great part in a novel-- even at the [?] time, and that a hundred years hence, could I li[ve] [s]o long, the rest might be told -- This is true perhaps of all Biographies-- as the most ingenious person in the world -- and one who would the mostly gladly do it, would find it impossible to tell all he could of himself to one person, though the dearest relation or friend³⁹

Betham suggests that biographical transparency is impracticable, both because the genre itself cannot fully account for a person's life, but also because complete self-revelation demands an intimacy unavailable in human relationships. As with many autobiographical accounts,

Betham's *Crow-quill Flights* intentionally conceals as much as it reveals, and she makes no mention of the radicalism of her politics nor of the temporary breach with her family.

Crow-quill Flights chiefly serves as an apology for her youthful decision to leave the security of her father's home for an independent life in London. In anticipation of the reader's objection to that initial step, she chooses as an epigraph to her Preface Charles Lamb's commendation, "Did I not love your verses, have I ever failed to see that you had the most feminine soul of all our poet- or prose-esses?" Betham's self-portraiture of her conventional femininity becomes a refrain throughout *Crow-quill Flights*. She depicts herself as devoted to home and her religious faith and as compelled by financial circumstance alone to seek her fortune in London. Her autobiography acknowledges that as early as 1794 she began to "rally and argue about the equality of the sexes". But she also implies that she changed her mind about the need for women's empowerment: "That what was abstract truth would be impossible to establish against the settled privileges and supposed interests of the other party I never considered ... My pleas, I have no doubt, were ill-sustained, and I knew little of what might in reality be said upon the subject. Afterwards I grew tired of it..." (*Crow-quill Flights* 5). This assertion seems disingenuous, particularly since Betham proceeds to quote in full an untitled, youthful composition (recently anthologised in Duncan Wu's *Romanticism*) which she thought exemplified her Bluestocking ardour. She gave a copy of it to her friend, Catherine, Lady Rouse Boughton, with whom she vacationed in 1799-1800, but she begged at the time, "shew them [the verses] to no one" (*Crow-quill Flights* 6) The autobiography does not elaborate on Betham's interest in women's equality with men; in fact, she does not even mention the publication of *A Biographical Dictionary*, a startling omission, given its ambitious scope and moderately favourable reception.

In an attempt to justify her first step toward a literary career, Betham provides many testimonials of her skill, claiming that Coleridge's poem and other flattering reviews in the *Monthly Review*, the *Critical Review*, and the *British Critic* (which she appended to the Preface) persuaded her to continue writing. The citation of corroborating evidence supplies an apparently "objective" voice that might otherwise be missing from this first-person account. It would seem that Betham follows the *Monthly Review's* injunction for impartiality and accuracy even in autobiographical history. The emphasis on the authority of public rather than personal opinion recurs throughout the Preface, especially in her insistence that the reading public's approval, rather than private inclination, induced her to persevere in an occupation that, in most cases, would be inexcusable in a woman:

I hope these little anecdotes will prove an excuse for going on with what I found so delightful! and what made my studies as a miniature-painter (when I came to town I gave up oils,) far less irksome (10).

I think my readers will readily admit, that a young woman, who ventured into the world with fear and trembling, and only from the conviction that it was her duty, might be induced by such circumstances as these to fancy herself gifted with some talent for that sister art, she had, even from her childhood, secret aspirations after (12).

I have thought it right to say thus much, because the fame we have once obtained, according to Dr. Johnson's axiom, should be kept up by continuing to appear before the public eye, which has not been my fate (18).

By repeatedly emphasising her feelings of obligation and her search for the "right" decision, Betham portrays herself as a talented but orthodox woman who owes this reminiscence to a sense of civic duty rather than to self-serving desires. One of the most improbable claims she makes is that she left home with great reluctance and from disinterested motives:

Yet I cannot say that I was *driven* from home. Friends in London wished to have me near them; and I began to think it *right* to leave it at any rate. It cost me two years of secret conflict; during which my nightly pillow was bedewed with many tears, before I could determine (16)

But the overwhelming evidence from other biographical sources, particularly her published and manuscript letters, suggests that she preferred an independent, professional life over the protected world of Stonham. As she confessed to the Royal Literary Fund in 1821, "*living there I should think equivalent to a confinement*".

The research Betham undertook for *A Biographical Dictionary*, which includes short entries on over seventy British authors, must have given her keen insight into the sort of women who usually earned a place in the annals of literary history, especially in such volumes as Ballard's *Memoirs*. Thus she must have known that by leaving uncontroversial testimony to her character and work, she stood a better chance of one day being recorded as another "female worthy". This explanation could account for the marked difference between *Crow-quill Flights*, in which, as we have seen, she locates self-identity through outward, externally verifiable referents, and her *Letters of an Enthusiast*, in which she suggests that radical ideas can only be articulated through a highly internalised, private language unavailable to the wider public. In the life-writing of the autobiographical Preface to *Crow-quill Flights*, Lamb's praise, Coleridge's poem, several anecdotes of her friends' encouragement, and the appended reviews of her poetry function collectively as self-defining testimonials. In *Letters of an Enthusiast*, however, she finds another method of self-writing, one that counters the publicly informed identity provided in the official portrait of *Crow-quill Flights*.

The first and only extant instalment of *Letters of an Enthusiast*, which appears to have been printed at around the same time as *Crow-quill Flights*, offers a fictional autobiography of

Semiramide Venville of Italy.⁴⁰ The text is a thinly-veiled account of Betham's own political awakening to the ways in which identity is manipulated and controlled by forces external to the self. Because the fictional *Letters* bears a close relationship with actual manuscript letters Betham composed, we can read Semiramide's revelations of governmental conspiracy as an expression of Betham's anxieties. This short work of four pages, printed in halfpenny numbers, recounts Semiramide's experience of integration into Protestant England, her father's birthplace. Semiramide discovers in England that she must find a means of linguistic representation that evades public consciousness if she is to gain insight into the workings of British society. Her only inheritance from her deceased mother is the "heathen appellation" of Semiramide, abandoned after emigration to England when a clergyman rechristens her with a familiar, British name. Over time, Semiramide comes to realize that "there was in England some sort of moral controul which warred with either acquired or natural excellence. That mediocrity alone mollified, if it did not expel, the secret foe" (*Letters of an Enthusiast* 10). Semiramide tells us that the subtlety of intellectual oppression in Britain disabled progression toward liberty, principally because most people "are always accustomed to behold life in its masked state" (10). These words are highly reminiscent of Betham's earlier political writings. In a 1820 letter to J. C. Hobhouse, for instance, Betham had outlined her theory that a national conspiracy forbade the disclosure of political and religious cruelty, and that metaphorical language alone enabled the revelation of such abuse. She added that very few individuals possessed the insight to see the corruption that lay around them: "To believe this evil exists in the world to think it *possible* requires experience and depth of understanding. It is not done by people who dare not believe any thing out of the common way or [?] account for any thing but on the commonest principles." Betham made a similar claim in a letter to the Royal Literary Society, dated July 26, 1821, in

which she implies that she employs "unusual language" as a means of uncovering the "nefarious traffic and management going on secretly in the world".

Toward the end of *Letters of an Enthusiast*, Betham returns to her preoccupation with mental control by exploring the writer's life through an allegorical journey to the underworld, in which Orpheus represents the visionary poet, and Eurydice, subversive poetic revelation:

I began by degrees to "break the mental prison," in which every person during their youth is more or less involved; and I saw that it was necessary to veil our feelings and to seem ignorant of much, nay of every thing that really revolts the well-intentioned and the innocent mind. I knew that the Eurydice of Orpheus was, perhaps, his destiny, his liberty, his voice, or his pen -- that like, as it is said, if any one was released from the inquisition they are forbidden to relate what they have seen or experienced there -- he was not to look on things which would injure his oppressors. (10)

The safe passage of the visionary depends on her acceptance of the tyrant's prohibition of free expression, but it is this condition that ensures the perpetuation of mental oppression. The trap of the intellectual prison described here bears a close resemblance to passages in Betham's letter to Hobhouse and her tract, *Challenge to Women*. In her letter she hypothesized that people are "made to perform actions to which their feelings are decidedly averse and to take all the guilt upon themselves-- or if they [the victims] wish to disclose what has worked upon them[,] they [the perpetrators] shall make what they say take the character of madness, ... in short they shall make the innocent look guilty, the guilty innocent." In *Challenge to Women*, Betham repeats these warnings by claiming that spies "sow hatred" amongst the nation's people, and that all governments ensnare their citizens with lies and hypocrisy (5).

The government's control of language and the need to use alternative modes of expression to reveal the truth also emerge as the theme of this short, veiled autobiography. Semiramide explains that she increasingly relies on a private language, which she and her

intimate friends use only on rare occasions when they can “abstract [themselves] from society” (10). Betham’s secretive, almost unintelligible style reflects her longing for a new, privately understood language that evades public awareness: “I knew that to walk invisibly was to use chemical inks -- slang or inverted phraseology of all grades and descriptions -- but this must be the subject of future letters” (10). The “future letters,” presumably a reference to the second instalment of Semiramide's confession, seem not to have made an appearance in Betham's lifetime. Insane or not, Betham was correct in observing that unusual or controversial modes of expression met with censorship and hostile scrutiny: most of Betham's later writings were suppressed or destroyed by her family.

The story of Semiramide's forced relinquishment of Italy and indoctrination into the false *logos* of her father's homeland acts as Betham's political confession. Very little of Betham's life was recorded after 1816, but what we can verify demonstrates that Betham admired the radical young poets and advocated political change. During the late 1810s and early 20s, while Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and Moore were poetically active in Italy, Betham suspected that external forces forbade the investigation of alternate modes of expression, whether in language, thought, or politics. Those who *did* endeavour to search for another truth, she claimed, were accused of guilt or madness. Like Semiramide, Betham suspected that “moral controul” prohibited the investigation and discussion of governmental abuses, and her institutionalization, she believed, was the direct result of her freethinking political and religious opinions. Betham's autobiography thus exists in two forms, in the “official” version she distributed to her acquaintances and in the imaginative rendering of self-writing in *Letters of an Enthusiast*. Only together can they speak accurately about Betham's ambitions, literary accomplishments, and personal beliefs.

Adherence to precedent and interjection of personal opinion have an equal place in Betham's *Dictionary*. This work represents many women of differing backgrounds and political allegiances, offering a heterodox interpretation of womanhood that recognizes the need for continual expansion of the *Dictionary's* parameters. As both historian and innovator, Betham finds herself pulled in two directions, with the result that she both rehearses the publicly authorized opinion of her predecessors and ventures her own. She occasionally challenges the norms of female worthiness by revising her authorities' remarks, and by writing entries on women without an established biographical character. The ambivalence of the *Dictionary* is equally pronounced in her self-writing. Betham could not foresee whether she herself would find a biographer, so she offers in *Crow-quill Flights* externally verifiable information about her past, especially the public's approval of her poetry. As she knew very well, such an account, authoritative as it appears, paints an incomplete portrait. Betham presents *Letters of an Enthusiast* as an ongoing alternative autobiography, echoing in it her hypothesis that institutional control dominates the language, the very *identity*, of its subjects. The stylistic ambiguity of this autobiography serves as Betham's answer to the confining lexicon of public discourse: the intelligibility of *Letters* depends on a coded, self-referential language that circumvents the state's penetration. Betham's vision of a new, future social order calls for an inwardly conceived semantics shared only by those sympathetic to her suspicion of lexicographic precedents.

Notes to Chapter Two

- 1 I have found two editions of the *Dictionary*, both published in 1804, one which is 774 pages; the other, published by the same house in the same year, is identical in all respects except the spacing between the lines, lengthening it to 852 pages. All references are to the shorter edition. Key studies in the genre of women's biography in the eighteenth century are: Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Paula McDowell, "Consuming Women: The Life of the 'Literary Lady' As Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century England," *Genre* 26 (1993), 219-252; Ruth Perry, "George Ballard's Biographies of Learned Ladies," in *Biography in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. J. D. Browning (New York: Garland Publishing, 1980) 85-111.
- 2 My chapter offers the first substantial commentary on the *Dictionary*, although Betham's earliest critics singled it out as her most praiseworthy literary endeavour. Helen Black, an early biographer of nineteenth-century women authors, mentions this scholarly work rather than her poetry in *Notable Women Authors of the Day* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, [1893] rpt. 1972), 123. See also Betham-Edwards, *Six Life Studies*, vii-viii. In the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Anne Gilchrist observes that it is "agreeably and often judiciously written"; see *DNB*, eds. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, II. 423; see also Gillian Fenwick, *Women and The Dictionary of National Biography* (Aldershot, Hants: Scolar Press, 1994), 36. In 1948, Katharine Anthony reiterated this opinion by commending the boldness of her dictionary: "As if to express more fully [than women novelists] the contemporary importance of her sex, Mary Matilda Betham published a compendious *Biographical Dictionary* It still survives as an evidence of the author's phenomenal industry and of the strong public interest in women's achievements." See *The Lambs. A Study of Pre-Victorian Achievements* (London: Hammond, Hammond & Co., 1948), 160.
- 3 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., *Shakespeare's Sisters: feminist essays on women poets* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979); Moira Ferguson, *First Feminists: British Women Writers, 1578-1799* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1990).
- 4 Poetic equivalents to these dictionaries existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as John Duncombe's *The Femiuiad* (1754), Mary Scott's *The Female Advocate* (1774), and Elizabeth Benger's *The Female Geniud* (1791). Anthony Harding describes Felicia Hemans's *Records of Woman* (1828) as a possible "verse rival" to Betham's dictionary: "Felicia Hemans and the Effacement of Woman," in *Romantic Women Writers*, eds. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995), 139. The same case could be made even more obviously for Lucy Aikin's *Epistles on Women* (London: J. Johnson, 1810), an extended narrative poem that begins with an Introduction that asserts the necessity and desirability of the separate spheres, but proceeds to offer examples from history that prove women's participation in world events. Evocative, imagistic, and chronologically driven by the continuum of narrative, Aikin's *Epistles* differs

from Betham's dispassionate catalogue, which renders each entry as distinct and unrelated to any overarching theme or chronological pattern.

- 5 Judy Simons, *Diaries and Journals of Literary Women from Fanny Burney to Virginia Woolf* (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan, 1990), 191-2.
- 6 Donald A. Stauffer talks about the formation of a "new hero" in biography, in which "[c]aste, position, and birth [were] no longer necessary...". *The Art of Biography in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1970), 136.
- 7 George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain Who Have Been Celebrated for Their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Sciences*, ed. Ruth Perry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), 53. Collections of women's biographies had long been in existence, though not specifically of British women. See Paula McDowell's Appendix in "Consuming Women," 246-248; and the Bibliography in Margaret Ezell's *Writing Women's Literary History*, 181-186. See also Chantel Lavoie's dissertation for the University of Toronto, "Poems by Eminent Ladies": A Study of an Eighteenth-Century Anthology (Ann Arbor, Mich: Dissertation Abstracts International, 2000).
- 8 Jeanne Wood, "'Alphabetically Arranged': Mary Hays's *Female Biography* and the Biographical Dictionary," *Genre* 31 (Summer 1998), 117-142. See especially p. 124 n. 9 and p. 130 n. 14. Charles Lamb knew Betham resented Hays, and sent her this short rhyme in 1811,
 "G-d forbid I should
 pass my days
 with Miss H--s"
 Edwin Marrs, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, III. 76.
- 9 Anon., *Biographium Faemineum: The Female Worthies: Or, Memoirs of the Most Illustrious Ladies of All Ages and Nations, Who have been Eminently distinguished for their Magnanimity, Learning, Genius, Virtue, Piety, and other excellent Endowments, conspicuous in all the various Stations and Relations of Life, public and private*, 2 vols. (London: S. Crowder, and J. Payne; J. Wilkie, and W. Nicoll; and J. Wren, 1766), vi-vii. Benito Jeronimo Feijoo's *El Teatro Critico* (translated from the Spanish in 1774 as *An Essay on the Learning, Genius, and Abilities, of the Fair-Sex*), another resource Betham consulted, made the same case. She usually cites the original Spanish title, but in other parts of the dictionary, she refers to her authority as a "Father Feejoo," presumably a misprint or an anglicized rendering of the monk's name. See Feijoo's *An Essay on the Learning, Genius, and Abilities of the Fair-Sex: proving them not inferior to men, from a variety of examples, extracted from ancient and modern history. Tr. from the Spanish of El teatro critico* (London: D. Steel, 1774).
- 10 See Morton Paley, "Coleridge's 'To Matilda Betham, from a Stranger'," *The Wordsworth Circle* 27. 3 (Summer 1996), 169-172; Moira Ferguson, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*.

Nation, Class, and Gender (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 33; 126 n. 29.

- 11 "Critic/Reader," *Real Voices: On Reading*, ed. Philip Davis (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 26. See also Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18.
- 12 (Sept. 1805), 105-6.
- 13 From the *Monthly Review* 16 (1757), 530; quoted in Mark Longaker's *English Biography in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, [1931] rpt. 1971), 189.
- 14 *Monthly Review* (July 1805), 318-319.
- 15 *British Critic* 24 (July 1804), 212.
- 16 For some insights into eighteenth-century authorization of oral tale-telling through the editorial process, see Susan Stewart's "Scandals of the Ballad," *Representations* 32 (Fall 1990), 134-156. See Chapter 4 of this thesis for a discussion of Betham's interchange between oral and written representations of history.
- 17 The first edition's full title reads, *Elements of general knowledge: introductory to useful books in the principal branches of literature and science. Designed chiefly for the junior students in the universities, and the higher classes in schools* (Oxford: University Press, 1802); my page references come from the American edition (Baltimore: P. Byrne, 1812).
- 18 Henry Kett, *Emily: A Moral Tale*, 2 vols. (London: Rivington, 1809), II. 34-42; Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 50.
- 19 Jurgen Schlaeger, "Biography: Cult as Culture," in *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. John Batchelor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 63.
- 20 See Mary Hays, *Female Biography*, 6 vols. (London: R. Phillips, 1803). Compare this work with *Characterism, or the Modern Age display'd: being an Attempt to expose the pretended Virtues of both Sexes; with a Poetical Essay on each Character. In Two Parts. First, Of the Ladies, Second, of the Gentlemen* (London: E. Owen, 1750), and with Pilkington's biographical works, cited below.
- 21 *Biography for Girls: or, Moral and Instructive Examples for Young Ladies* (London: Vernor & Hood, 1799). The other biographies in the collection are: "Emily Manley; or, Gratitude Displayed"; "Sally Bowman; or, Filial Fondness"; "Emma Hamilton; or, Human Vicissitudes"; "Lucy Lutridge; or, Vanity Punished"; and "Frances Hindos; or, the Amiable Orphan". It is instructive to compare this volume with her complementary *Biography for Boys* (London: Vernor & Hood, 1800), which includes seven biographies, none of which has

a virtue or vice attached to the character's name. Only one boy falls into disgrace, for the capital offence of murder.

- 22 The full title continues, *Intended to Lead the Female Mind to the Love and Practice of Moral Goodness. Designed Principally for the Use of Ladies' Schools* (Dublin: W. Porter, 1800). The work is also known by the title *Mirror for the Female Sex* (1798) The exempla Pilkington includes fall under these categories: Religion; Filial Duties; Fraternal and Sisterly Love; On the Advantages of a Good Education; Fortitude; Beauty; Humility Contrasted with Pride; Pride; Humanity Contrasted with Cruelty; On the Proper Employment of Time; Politeness of Address and Polish of Manners; Friendship; Ingratitude; and Truth. Pilkington regards beauty as a doubtful endowment, citing five examples that show women sacrificed to misery for their excessive charms. Virtue is defined quite self-consciously as pertaining to sexual modesty. "Reputation is a female's choicest possession, and it is necessary to guard it with unremitting care" (144). She cautions readers against excessive freedom with men and singles out the story of Lucretia (who commits suicide after being raped) as the best illustration of virtue's importance.
- 23 *Challenge to Women* (London: Moses, 1821), 1-2; 7. I am indebted to Helen Stauder for transcribing the original copy.
- 24 "August, 1834" (London: W. Lewis, n.d.); held in the Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch, Reference 920 BET, in the binder *Crow-quill Flights and other writings*. People who exhibited religious tolerance earned Betham's especial admiration: she concludes the biographical sketch of her father by recalling, "He never considered the politics or religion of another any bar to friendliness; ... Thus once, when a gentleman said to him of a person they were talking about, "he is a dissenter!" the immediate answer was, "Thats [sic] of no consequence. I don't care a farthing about that!" Betham, *Notes*.
- 25 (Jan. 1804), 92-93.
- 26 To make this calculation, I counted the number of biographies rather than of names: in some entries Betham describes the lives of several individuals who shared the same heading. See for example the entries on "Arete," "Plautillas," "Renieri," and "Theano".
- 27 "Letter from M[atilda] Betham to P. Colburn," 18[--?], Bodleian Library.
- 28 Charles Pigott, *The Female Jockey Club; or, A sketch of the manners of the age* (New York: Greenleaf, Fellow, & Wayland, 1794), 126. The common theme of this text is that some women, like kings and ambitious Prime Ministers, enjoy tyrannical control, whether through their money and social position, or (in the case of Mary Robinson) through their sexual power over men. The "Blue Stocking Circle" comes under attack for seeking to control the public domain of print by asserting their authority as arbiters of literary taste. Montagu is especially mocked for her false charity to the "sweeps". Betham's *Dictionary* includes the recently deceased Frances Brooke, Charlotte Brooke, Catherine Macaulay, Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Ryves, Mary Robinson, and Mary Wollstonecraft.

- 29 Moira Ferguson, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets. Nation, Class, and Gender*, 126 n. 29.
- 30 Betham mildly criticizes Robinson's novels when she decides that they "betray signs of haste ... and her judgement seems to have preferred feelings to justice in her morality; yet there are many noble sentiments to be found there..." (655). On the whole, however, Betham's review of Robinson's career is decidedly positive.
- 31 J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Polite Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 186. Eleanor Ty points out that Hays published two obituary notices for Wollstonecraft, which appeared in the *Annual Necrology for 1797-8* and the *Monthly Magazine*. See Ty's *Empowering the Feminine* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 17.
- 32 Pearson, 71-77.
- 33 Elisabeth Guénard, *Mémoires Historiques de Marie-Thérèse-Louise de Carignan, princesse de Lamballe; une des principales victimes immolées dans les horribles journées des 2 et 3 septembre 1792* (Paris: Lerouge, 1801). I am not positive that Betham found her information in this publication; she only briefly cites as her source, "M. de Lamballe," as her authority.
- 34 Antoine-Léonard Thomas, *Essai sur...des Femmes*, ed. Colette Michael (Paris-Geneve: Champion-Slatkine, rpt.1987), 4. (Originally published in Paris: Moutard, 1772). Betham used the original French copy, but Thomas's work was also available for a wider English audience: William Russell, *Essay on the Character, Manners, and Genius of Women in different ages. Enlarged from the French of M. Thomas*, 2 vols. (London: G. Robinson, 1773); see Harriet Guest, "Eighteenth-century femininity: 'a supposed sexual character'" in *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800*, ed. Vivien Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 55, 67 n. 21.
- 35 *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 2; see also Jeanne Wood, 134-136.
- 36 Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 134.
- 37 It was among Southey's papers that James Dykes Campbell first discovered the fragment of Betham's autobiography: see *The Athenaeum* 3255 (1890), 34. The Preface to *Crow-quill Flights* can be dated approximately from a letter Betham sent to Lord Brougham in 1841, in which she explains that the printing process had been temporarily interrupted. The catalogue of the National Art Library still lists the sketch as "[Fragment from an unidentified publication]".
- 38 Laetitia Pilkington, *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*, ed. A C. Elias, 2 vols. (Athens:

University of Georgia Press, 1997); Mary Robinson, A. T. Thomson, & Philip Wharton, *Mrs. Mary Robinson* (London: Grolier Society, 1800).

39 Betham, *Notes*.

40 Betham's *Letters of an Enthusiast* (London: W. Lewis, n.d.) has been bound together with *Crow-quill Flights*: Reference 920 BET, Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich.

Chapter Three:

"Wrapt in Self": Collections of Subjectivity in Betham's Lyrical Poetry

Matilda Betham's work qualifies the critical position that the development of the meditative, personal voice in poetic form corresponded with the political shift toward an individuated, liberal notion of selfhood. Her professions as miniature artist and detailed chronicler of nearly seven hundred women's biographies certainly attest to the continuity of her efforts to express subjectivity in a plurality of artistic genres. But in examining an author such as Matilda Betham, issues relating to gender are key. Betham's volumes of shorter poems *Elegies and Other Small Poems* (1797), *Poems* (1808), and *Vignettes: In Verse* (1818) include songs, odes, elegies, ballads, sonnets, and dramatic monologues that invite us to consider more fully how modern subjectivity's correlation with lyric operates, and in particular, how her *non-suffrage* might be reflected in the kind of individualism developed in her poems.¹ The argument that we can interpret Betham's view of subjectivity through her shorter poems would be circular if we simply accepted the lyric's relationship to the individual (or solitary) voice, a connection popularised by John Stuart Mill in his essays on poetry and embraced by many critics in the first half of the twentieth century.² Betham herself, however, provided another vantage. In pondering the connection between poetry and self-expression, she composed lyrics that emphasise the necessity of dialogue. Betham's poetry and prefatory comments on her verse, together with her advocacy of a strong parliamentary opposition, acknowledge the limitations of an individualism that did not recognise the pre-eminent importance of debate. She explored the relationship between speech and broad social representation through diverse lyrical personae that

allow her to represent several individual perspectives that are not necessarily synonymous with her own.

Betham is less interested in the Wordsworthian model of *one* self speaking *to* others (or, as his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* famously states, "a man speaking to men") than in a communitarian version of lyricism, in which a selection of voices collectively speak *on behalf of* the disenfranchised or the dispossessed.³ Certainly her letters to the Royal Literary Fund and John Cam Hobhouse indicate that she regarded herself as a poor and powerless woman, and therefore as a member of the disenfranchised class, despite her family's lineage and social position. Whether or not Betham's self-proclaimed role as spokesperson for the underprivileged in fact entailed an appropriation rather than a representation of voice (an argument sometimes made about the male Romantics) is a question worthy of future discussion.⁴ For the purposes of an initial overview of Betham's lyrical output, however, the primary aim must be to determine the nature of her poetic achievement rather than to analyse the political assumptions that lay behind her work. Each of Betham's volumes of shorter verse investigates the *social* role of a poet by emphasising the audience's participation in lyrical narration, allowing both dissonance and compassion to enable a redistribution of power between speaker and auditor. I begin by examining the work of some literary critics contemporary to Betham. An awareness of their conservative reactions to her and to lyricism generally provides insight into how Betham's literary output necessarily countered a masculine and enfranchised notion of selfhood. The discussion then turns to an investigation of Betham's sympathy for radical political reform, articulated most forcefully in *Challenge to Women*, a political statement that substantiates my

argument that a fruitful analysis of her poetry would pay especial attention to poetic voices questioning autocracy in its many forms.

Critical reactions to lyric poetry contemporary to Betham often favoured the idea of the patrilineal descent of verse, thereby attempting to disenfranchise women from the poetical (and political) voice.⁵ Before the *Lyrical Ballads* achieved celebrity as the manifesto of English Romanticism, "lyrical" derived its meaning from a classical tradition of mellifluous poetry at its best. In 1785, John Pinkerton thus argued that Britain had its own lyrical poets comparable to the classical Greek poets Pindar and Sappho (respectively sublime and beautiful lyricists) in Collins and Gray.⁶ But the increasing interest in ancient songs evinced by late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholars encouraged a movement to reclaim genuinely British poetry, rather than their classical antecedents -- lyrics that could speak to and for the popular voice.

The recuperation of a tradition of British lyrics, therefore, came to represent a patriotic impulse to find a national identity through poetry. In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), eighteenth-century critic Hugh Blair explained that lyric poetry has its origins in the songs of the nation's ancient bards, and that, consequently, the ode's retention of musicality made it the modern poetic form most like the original lyric. The choice of theme and tone, however, could vary, and depended entirely on the author:

I know no distinction of subject that belongs to it [the ode], except that other Poems are often employed in the recital of actions, whereas sentiments, of one kind or other, form, almost always, the subject of the Ode They [music and song] tend to transport, in a higher degree, both the person who sings, and the persons who hear. They justify, therefore, a bolder and more passionate strain, than can be supported in simple recitation Hence the enthusiasm that belongs to it [the ode], and the liberties it is allowed to take, beyond any other species of Poetry.

... the Ode may either aspire to the former character
of the sublime and noble, or it may descend to the latter of the
pleasant and the gay⁷

Blair's claim that the ode deals with sentiments rather than events anticipates John Stuart Mill's comments in the next century about great poetry's ascendance over narrative verse. Mill's views, including his diminishment of the ballad as the "lowest and most elementary kind of poetry," appealing to primitive societies and children, came to dominate early twentieth-century criticism on the lyric, resulting in the temporary obviation of eighteenth-century critical commentary.⁸ Unlike Mill, however, Blair respected the heterogeneity of poetry and the ballad's national legacy, stating that in ancient times the ballad had been the song by which people learned about history and cultural values. The importance of the ancient songs' emotional appeal and instructional significance for the general public led Blair and other editors and literary historians of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries -- for instance, Thomas Percy, George Ellis, Thomas Hurd, and Joseph Ritson -- to regard the ballad as the original song of the bards. The popularity of their scholarship both contributed to the reclamation of national poetry and reflected an increased interest in the common voice. As I discuss more fully in Chapter Four, the notes appended to *The Lay of Marie* demonstrate Betham's familiarity with eighteenth-century scholarship on medieval narrative poetry, including the editorial work of Ellis, Ritson, and many others. A few words here, however, will clarify how the relationship between politics and national poetry shaped the production and reception of literature, including Betham's own poetry.

James Macpherson's *Ossian* (1760) and Bishop Thomas Percy's edition of ancient metrical romances and ballads, the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), sparked interest

in ancient British history and poetry. When Hugh Blair responded to the "Ossianic debate" by defending the authenticity of an oral tradition passed down by the British people, he was also championing a national poetic heritage that was both popular and heroic.⁹ The trend towards republishing original English poetry elicited a response from Joseph Ritson, a noted radical who offered his own edition of *Ancient Songs* (1790), which focused on what he defined as truly British verse: English rather than Norman minstrelsy. George Ellis, in turn, explicitly connected the development of national sentiment with verse when he observed, "it is not easy to conceive a nation which does not possess the rudiments of poetry. Verse, therefore, is anterior to prose, because our passions are anterior to reason and judgment."¹⁰ The belief that the shaping of national identity was intimately related to emotionally charged verse caused some critical anxiety. The socially subversive element of historical poetry, in its potential to reconstruct the past from a poet's own perspective, alarmed the *Monthly Review's* critic, who objected to Betham's narrative poetry on the grounds that "writers of fictitious history, whether in prose or in verse, are often too indulgent to vice...".¹¹ The potentially radical aspect of balladry, with its adoption of the common voice and affective aesthetic, lay behind conservative reactions about who should claim proprietorship of the lyric. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1797, for instance, defined the ballad as,

a kind of song, adapted to the capacity of the lower class of people; who, being mightily taken with this species of poetry, are thereby not a little influenced in the conduct of their lives. Hence we find, that seditious and designing men never fail to spread ballads among the people, with a view to gain them over to their side.¹²

Poetry is assumed to influence directly the thoughts and behaviour of the public, encouraging potentially subversive constructions of society. In its claim that a ballad is sung, the encyclopaedia declares it to be a kind of lyric, but one that caters to "the people," a term that in its synonymity with "lower class" devalues the form even while acknowledging its nearly universal popularity. Other contemporary evidence, not least of which is the titular descriptor *Lyrical Ballads*, suggests that the ballad was considered lyrical, despite Mill's later commentary about the lowness of the genre. George Dyer's writings on the lyric, which we will investigate shortly, similarly indicate that the ballad was a kind of lyric. Mill's belief that ballads are "low" is reinforced by a later generation of critics who find the Romantics able to transcend narrative and create a "greater lyric" or a "truer ballad," poems so far superior to others that they formed a genre removed from the ballad favoured by the mass of humanity.¹³ Modern commentators, then, recapitulate the manoeuvre of the late eighteenth-century conservative critics, by using hierarchical terms of aesthetic value that remove lyric from the general public. Betham resists this segregation of genre by placing the lyrical voice in the context of respondents, a poetic device that emphasises the political dimension of her work.

The relationship between the lyric, balladry, and civil society is particularly relevant to Betham, because, like Wordsworth and Coleridge in their *Lyrical Ballads*, she frequently imitated the narrative devices and the iambic tetrameter rhythm of ancient English ballads, eventually taking as her model the narrative lyrics of the medieval troubadours.¹⁴ In her teens, Betham began composing ballads set in ancient Britain, especially during times of social unrest and military conquest. By the time she published her first volume, *Elegies and Other Small Poems* (1797), the ballad fit the principal criterion of the lyric, a mellifluous poem that would

have been sung. The narrative elements and ballad stanza (sometimes in the *abcb* quatrain, at others in common measure) so frequently employed by Betham therefore matched with the defining qualities of lyricism and drew upon the work begun by antiquarian scholars. The balladic form allowed Betham to include an audience in the moment of poetic revelation, creating a dialogic rather than monologic lyric. As I show in my analysis of her poetry, Betham's narrative devices in her own ballads allow her to voice the position of the many rather than the exclusionary one. In terms of the debate about the relationship between lyrical subjectivity and political shifts, the ballad played an important role. Whatever its formal characteristics, lyrical poetry was regarded not only as a powerful means of self-expression, but also of creating national sentiment; in fact, it is precisely this connection between balladry and its emotional appeal to the general populace that troubled some late eighteenth-century writers.

The close association between balladry and the general populace is borne out to a certain extent by the increase in broadsides during the early nineteenth century. These short, inexpensive balladic tales particularly appealed to women and helped solidify the association of women with plebeian taste. As Martha Vicinus in her influential *The Industrial Muse* observes, "Another side of the increased interest [in poetry] in the common man was the development of a feminine point of view in many ballads. By the eighteenth century women had become the main repositories of traditional songs, and the major purchasers of romantic broadsides".¹⁵ The intersecting audience of women and the lower class may well have encouraged the later bifurcation of lyric into the high (male and professional) lyric and its low (female and working-class) counterpart, with the result that balladry's narrative features eventually became synonymous with its lack of sophistication.

At the time Betham began composing her narrative poems, the denigration of women's involvement in lyrical composition was tied to a broader charge of the impropriety of their participation in the literary marketplace. Citing late eighteenth-century essayists to substantiate her argument, Sonia Hofkosh describes how women authors and readers were often categorised as sexually and socially transgressive. The resentment of literary women encouraged polemicists to conflate the anxiety over women exceeding their proper intellectual boundaries with the fear of their renunciation of the domestic sphere. Conservatives reacted to this transgression by abusing the circulating library for catering to both women and the lower middle classes.¹⁶ Fear of an educated proletariat, both male and female, was also exacerbated by the success of some women novelists and poets. This worry is evidenced in the voices of Thomas Mathias and Thomas Gisborne, who explicitly acknowledge literature's role in creating modern subjectivity. Disturbed by the impact literacy was having on the construction of femininity, Mathias condemned books that "turn [girls' heads] wild with impossible adventures, and are now and then tainted with *democracy*" (my emphasis).¹⁷ The fear that reading could inspire social independence in women underpins the connection repeatedly made in the conduct literature of the period. Thomas Gisborne's *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, published in the same year as Betham's *Elegies*, typically worries that reading would encourage women to neglect their households and marriages for fiction.¹⁸ It is therefore not surprising that Betham's father, to all appearances a conservative man himself, pressured his daughter to sew rather than study. But Betham, who "dreaded dependence," moved away from home and applied her self-taught antiquarian scholarship to poetic compositions.

We might expect, then, that the lyric, so long recognised as the medium for powerful self-expression, would particularly alarm conservative critics, since "the singular lyrical voice came, in the romantic period, to be both centralised in the hierarchy of poetic genres, and taken as the voice of the political subject, the citizen, and hence, the human".¹⁹ Reviews of Betham's poetry suggest that the contemporary recognition of the link between lyricism and politics generated especial hostility when it was made in women's writing. Polemical commentary on the unfeminine aspect of writing lyrics acknowledges this relationship between poetic composition and political change, and speaks to anxieties about women's agency in the formation of both national identity and their own subjectivity. In fact, it is precisely for this reason that conservative critic J. G. Lockhart, best known for his indictment of Keats's *Poems* and *Endymion*, felt threatened by the "mania" of aspiring poets outside of the male gentry:

The just celebrity of Robert Burns and Miss Baillie has had the melancholy effect of turning the heads of we know not how many farm-servants and unmarried ladies; our very footmen compose tragedies, and there is scarcely a superannuated governess in the island that does not leave a roll of lyrics behind her in her band-box.²⁰

These images of crazed young women, servants, and slovenly governesses foretell the chaotic demise of two estimable genres. The success of Lockhart's sardonic humour depends on our recognition and acceptance of the ironic distance between the authors and their generic choices: that a footman would attempt to write a *tragedy* or a governess to compose *lyrics* bears witness to an ambition inconsistent with social place. The specificity of the latter image is particularly telling, for the bandbox, operating here as a symbol of the new proprietorship of a growing mercantile populace, suggests that the lyric has become a commodity appropriated by both the

wrong sex and class. As a genre, the lyric has become the property of a new kind of subject, the unmarried, salaried woman, whose literal misplacement of lyrics reflects the figurative confusion of the high, gentleman's genre with a commodifiable feminine possession. According to Lockhart, then, both the lady and the manservant, in appropriating these genres, have transgressed their proper spheres. Lockhart's opinion of lyrical proprietorship, if not his evaluation of Keats, proved influential: Felix Schelling echoed his complaint in *The English Lyric* (1913) when he asserted that in the late eighteenth century the high lyrical genre temporarily fell into the improper ownership of women and labourers.²¹

Recognition of this hostile reaction should help us interpret reviews of Betham's shorter verse, some of which also suggest that aspiring female poets should beware of sexual and social transgression. Although most reviews of Betham's first book were encouraging, many subtly caution against treating a woman poet as a serious writer. The *Monthly Review*, for instance, extracts from Betham's diffident preface to her first volume *Elegies and other Small Poems* in order to praise her "modesty"; significantly, the *New London Review* and the *Monthly Mirror* also approve of the "modest" preface to her *Elegies*.²² On the other hand, the *British Critic* expresses discomfort at Betham's entrance into the public arena of print, and wishes that Betham "had been satisfied with circulating a few copies among her private friends; to whom, from local circumstances, as well as from the sensibility of the writer's mind, they would undoubtedly have been very acceptable."²³

The most extreme example of the conservative reactions to women's poetical aspirations appears in a review of Betham's *Elegies* in *The Lady's Monthly Museum*. The notice begins with some telling invectives against the prolixity of female and working-class writers, auguring social

disintegration from the phenomenon and delineating the proper boundaries to which Betham should confine herself:

Every young girl, in our times, who has accustomed herself to the perusal of our minor rhymesters, for a few months at a boarding-school, and has got but a smattering of syntax, by rote, now sets up for a *poetess*! This we conceive to be a very gross abuse of those amiable and captivating talents by which nature adorns and distinguishes the sex. And every hour they spend in this pitiful refinement, ought to be considered both as a dereliction of their station in society, and a deduction from the sum total of the utility and happiness they are capacitated to yield. Vanity has a mighty influence in deceiving them from the only sphere in which they can move with propriety and gracefulness And our press, forthwith, teems with the indigested fooleries and bombast of all the little misses in our boarding schools, our milliners [sic] apprentices, and even our milk-maids.

English literature is thus disgraced; and many a pretty woman, who might have made a good mother, and a dutiful wife, abandoned to this deplorable mania, fling away the flower of their days, their beauties, and all their powers of usefulness, in such pursuits as only expose them to pity and ridicule, and, for the most part, doom them to spend the latest periods in life in penitence and regret Few of these writers contribute to the population of the country, or augment in felicity of the conjugal state. Their pursuit of letters puts them out of the way of forming proper connections, and but too frequently exposes them to temptation. And though these observations do not literally apply to the author of the verses before us, we cannot wholly exempt her.²⁴

The Lady's Monthly Museum, the magazine in which this review appears, has been identified as among those that "set out to define their readers" by determining appropriate womanly behaviour.²⁵ Like Lockhart in the nineteenth century and Felix Schelling in the twentieth, Betham's reviewer conflates sexual and class transgression, and anticipates from this "mania" (a term Lockhart also used to acknowledge writing's popular appeal while devaluing the phenomenon as irrational) the disintegration of social order.²⁶ The evaluation of Betham's own

poetry occupies little space, although the conclusion offers a grudging acknowledgement that, while some of Betham's poems "are pretty enough," the reviewer hopes "to see her married to a worthy man, and the joyful mother of an amiable family, than a votary of the Muses".²⁷

We can infer from the vituperation of the review that Betham's poetry is deeply threatening, perhaps because it cannot be dismissed on aesthetic grounds alone. Instead, the review shifts its critique to the socio-political consequence of women's and workers' moving outside their station: England's depopulation. The application of the utilitarian economic terms "deduction," "sum total," and "utility" rhetorically offers an objective, rational endorsement of the heterosexual marriage market, which the reviewer implicitly recognises is at odds with the interests of girls "smitten" with a metaphorical sexual rival, "the infatuation of scribbling".²⁸ Ironically, while the reviewer depicts women writers as susceptible to licentious passion, their attraction to literature also entails national infertility. As this notice demonstrates, Betham represents something beyond one individual woman poet; her poetic voice is politically dangerous precisely because it stands for a subversive "infatuation" shared by many, a socially devastating female desire for entrance into and renegotiation of the literary public. In short, Betham's involvement in the public domain of print culture represents women's desire to construct their own identities, to claim proprietorship of self, and in the process, to shape the British national identity.

Anne Janowitz's *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* studies the connection between the speaking political subject and the lyric voice. Although she does not consider women's contribution to subject-forming lyricism, Janowitz's investigation of how an egotistical construction of personal identity circumscribes the lyrical genre offers valuable insight into the

multi-voiced lyric's participation in forming the modern self. Janowitz's search for "another version of subjectivity," one that forwards a communitarian vision of selfhood, leads her to Wordsworth's contemporary, George Dyer (1755-1841). Despite his close friendships with Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt, Dyer has remained an obscure figure, remembered as the unkempt antiquarian whose eccentricities endeared him to his more celebrated friends. For the purposes of my argument, Dyer is central for two reasons: his critical work on the lyric and his devoted friendship with Matilda Betham, to whom he once sent a complimentary copy of his poetry.²⁹ Donald Reiman guesses that their intimacy probably began when she moved to Cambridge in 1796, where she studied Italian under Wordsworth's tutor, Agostino Isola.³⁰ Their friendship lasted until Dyer's final illness, during which Betham read to him by his bedside, remaining there until he died.³¹ Like Betham, Dyer was a keen antiquarian, biographer, and poet, and Lamb recommended that she submit the appendices of *The Lay of Marie* to him for an appraisal. Whether or not she followed this advice I cannot determine, although she did send him a copy of *Marie*.³² Lamb himself wrote patronisingly of Dyer's indiscriminating tastes, remarking that to Dyer "[a]ll Poems are *good* Poems ... *all* men are *fine* Geniuses".³³ In this eclectic and non-judgemental enthusiasm, Dyer exactly corroborated Matilda Betham's attitude; her niece recalled that "to the last [Betham] loved books so much that she could not bear to hear even a bad one abused...".³⁴ Rather than proving Dyer and Betham's lack of discernment, their receptiveness to all kinds of literature may reflect their wish that print culture accommodate as many perspectives as possible, a liberality related to their own creative impulse to incorporate heterogeneous voices into their poetry.

As Janowitz convincingly argues, Dyer's approval of increased political representation and his championing of the underprivileged, evident in his polemical works *The Complaints of the Poor People of England* (1793) and *Account of New South Wales and the State of the Convicts* (1794), framed his poetic theories. Moreover, a footnote in Dyer's *The Poet's Fate* (1797) suggests that he fathomed with critical prescience the relationship between politics and the aesthetics of those poets later dubbed the Lake School Romantics. Dyer identified with and admired the early poetry of Wordsworth, Charles Lloyd, Lamb, Southey and Coleridge (the last three of whom were all friends of Betham): he particularly praised Southey and Coleridge for their "ardent love of liberty".³⁵ Dyer apparently recognised a commonality between himself and this group of writers, for, as his series of essays on poetry repeatedly asserts, "ease, freedom, and unrestrainedness" best characterise lyric poetry. Dyer overtly politicises aesthetic theory by arguing that popular songs featuring a rustic dialect were one form of lyric, as was the more elevated ode.

His position that lyricists can use several forms and need not abide by stringent rules as to structure and metre testifies to his acceptance of poets from various social backgrounds. In his "Prefatory Essay on Lyric Poetry," Dyer offers a heterogeneous vision of lyrical poetry, exemplified in his own eclectic set of verses in *Poems* (1802). While he believes that the lyric is a noble form, he also clarifies that its value relies on an accommodating, liberal definition inclusive of many authors and audiences. Rather than stripping the genre of narrative and folklore qualities, he argues that "[t]he tender balad [sic], the sprightly song, and even the humorous tale, possess the character of lyric poetry, no less than compositions of high pretension, as to subject, and of more magnificent appearance, as to structure."³⁶ Without

dismissing the exalted work of odic lyrics, Dyer argues that the tuneful favourites of the lower classes contribute to the genre. Even the quality of "sublimity," which he regards as central to lyric, belongs to "the mass of human nature" and not only to the powerful.³⁷ As to metre, he believes several schema, not excepting blank verse, fulfil the lyrical criterion of mellifluous verse. His definition acknowledges the contribution of forms popularised by people of differing classes and sexes and stipulates that, above all, both political and aesthetic freedom are needed for poets to write. It is this feature of range and difference that, for Dyer, makes lyric a liberating and accessible mode. Here I should also mention that Dyer's idea of the common voice accommodated women: his appreciation for women's literary contribution is evidenced in his praise of Elizabeth Rowe, and his admiration of Mary Wollstonecraft's position on women's education further testifies to his respect for radical female writers.³⁸

As Janowitz points out, Dyer's conception of the lyrical speaker, as one whose fluid identity is comparable to Keats's notion of negative capability, relates to his advocacy of a representative government.³⁹ In a representative political system, which demands that the members of parliament *speak* on others' behalf, ideally by laying aside self-centred motivations, the parliamentary voice reflects a kind of political subjectivity that is pluralistic rather than egotistical. For her part, Betham adopts a variety of voices -- whether of the labouring poor or the sedentary lady -- to explore the full range of dispossession that grief and, sometimes, even wealth can entail. In his "Essay on Representative Poetry," Dyer devotes considerable space to reflections on the lyrical voice that expresses a persona which *may* or *may not* be synonymous with the poet's self. He determines that "the poet [who] lays aside his own individuality, and takes up that of another" is more free than the egotistical poet⁴⁰:

... if the poet is but speaking in his own person, he is confined by his own individuality: his own system of sensations and passions, his own assemblage of associations, sentiments, and manners, mark out his *proper boundaries*: But, when a poet represents another person, he of necessity resigns his own individuality; and over and above all the creative energies, which he, by his very character, possesses, he is introduced, by the assumption of a foreign character, into a new system of sensations and passions, into new relations, new associations, and new capacities. He ceases to be himself;(II. 5-6; my emphasis.)

In arguing that the poet "ceases to be himself" and becomes someone else, Dyer implies that the lyrical voice becomes a poet's alternate consciousness, existing at the moment of articulation.⁴¹ Like the parliamentary voice, that of the poet speaks for the concerns, desires, and experiences of a wider public by assuming various identities other than his or her own. As the review of Betham's *Elegies* in *The Lady's Monthly Museum* indicates, the "proper boundaries" of an individual can indeed be confining, particularly for women; Dyer recognised that these demarcations serve a politically conservative agenda. His solution of liberation through poetry, allowing the poet to speak *for* others, is one that Betham's verse endorsed. Dyer concludes that the sort of poetry he calls "Representative and Dramatic" is more free than any other because the representative poet can project himself "into any age or country" (27).

Betham's comprehensive biography of women from "*Every Age and Country*" suggestively echoes these words, as did Mary Hays's dictionary. Dyer befriended Hays also and gave her a copy of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*.⁴² In Betham's poetry, as in her dictionary, the variety of individual histories or emotions allows her to articulate many personal experiences. As we have seen, political conservatism has been imputed to Betham, based principally on her antiquarian bent and on her familial relationships; however, evidence to the contrary, hitherto

unmentioned by modern commentators, confirms that Betham leaned toward the country's radical politicians, such as John Cam Hobhouse and Lord Brougham, both of them outspoken critics of the suppression of free speech.⁴³ In 1820, Betham wrote to Hobhouse that she had always shared his love for "general liberty and unrestricted declaration of opinion"; that she sought "the welfare of mankind in that of every seperate [sic] individual"; and that "general suffrage should take place as a means of throwing down all that offends human nature by cruelty, hypocrisy and tyranny".⁴⁴ She then offers to lay before him evidence of widespread corruption in the nation, concluding that "our laws and religion rest on the foundation of feudal laws established by conquerors of a nature too gross to be talked of in books except by allegory--the *comme il faut* which makes [?] the wife the weaker vessel...". Outspoken in her political views, Betham believed herself entitled to question precedents upon which Britain was founded.

Nowhere is Betham's rejection of monologism, or the curtailment of diverse individual expression, more evident than in *Challenge to Women*, a petition whose recovery helps us locate Betham's position on women's civic rights and on the need for broader parliamentary representation. As I have already mentioned in Chapter Two, her *Challenge to Women, being an intended address on behalf of women to Caroline, queen of Great Britain and Ireland* (1821) evidences Betham's self-acclaimed role as a mouthpiece for public concerns. Printed shortly after the Queen's acquittal in the House of Lords, where she was tried on charges of adultery, the Address exhibits Whiggish sentiment in its defence of the Queen's conduct.⁴⁵ She characterises the Queen as "the head of the popular party" who, in defying the tyrannical ruling power, operates as an unofficial opposition. In the Postscript, Betham adds that the Queen's coronation has been called for by "the continuous *myriad voice of a nation*" (my emphasis); her implication

is that the innumerable speaking as one are builders of *a* (another and new) national identity.

The people share a representative in Betham, who speaks collectively "on behalf of women".⁴⁶

The role of the writer Betham assumes in *Challenge to Women* enables the vocalisation, and therefore ownership, of women's collective opinion on proper female behaviour. At the conclusion of the Address, she urges all readers, but especially women, to join her in affixing their own signatures to her letter to the Queen:

... I hope those who think with me will, by letters inclosed to me,
... convey their signatures for our address to that lady, who while
she has defended her own rights, has taken the most effectual step
to advance those of her sex, and of all the oppressed, the obscure,
(those whose wrongs are not known, or from habit are passed by
as of little consequence) and the injured in either.

[signed] Matilda Betham⁴⁷

In urging all women to become active in their support of Caroline, Betham recommends self-directed empowerment, which requires the "healthy exercise of action" in all matters related to individual rights. For Betham, such action necessarily involves representation through self-expression: the signature on a petition operates as the linguistic manifestation of many selves working collectively to advocate political change. Even more radically, Betham argues that the Queen's persecution is but one instance of institutional corruption and that *all* systems of power, in exerting authority over the general populace, are inherently prone to abuse the unrepresented citizen:

To uphold any one against whom power erects itself is always a noble action, and I am afraid we may as surely say, always a just one. Fairness and caution should always attend the trials of those who may be deemed most certainly guilty, for what dereliction [sic] from duty can be more infamous than the contributing to place an innocent person in the situation of a culprit? To be the instrument of giving pain to such, to be accessory to their

banishment from society, to forward the prejudice which may decide upon their death, is worse than, because unaccompanied by the temptations to, adultery, robbery and murder.⁴⁸

The individual's right to judicial representation, however guilty he or she may seem, must be upheld by her countrymen in order to defeat tyranny. Further, women are particularly skilled at analysing corruption because men themselves are too closely associated with the corrupting source of power: "Women, *better* than men, can develop the abuses of existing institutions, because, in many cases, men are bound by oaths to do every thing they can do to uphold them, and to benefit the societies to which, before they know them, they belong; as well as to keep their laws and practices a secret" (4; Betham's emphasis). Betham's belief that women have in their political disenfranchisement a compensatory possession – the ability to discern corruption—seems to have informed much of her poetry, in that she undertakes the role of spokesperson for the general populace. Betham saw herself as capable of critiquing the powerful *because* of her sex.

Betham knew from personal experience of the close association between gender and institutional power. Her own brother and soul mate, William, knighted during George IV's regency, had just been appointed Ulster King of Arms, in which capacity he arranged genealogical documents held in Dublin Castle. While he apparently supported the Prince Regent and the conservative government under Sir Robert Peel, Matilda allied herself with the populist movement fostered by London's radical publishers, whose literature characterised the Queen as a gothic-romantic heroine persecuted by the state.⁴⁹ The trial in the House of Lords aroused public indignation against parliament, and popular opinion saw Queen Caroline as a symbol of all oppressed members of society. Consequently, Betham's petition draws on a widely held belief

that the Queen's ordeal is one proof of grave injustices in British society. In her poetry, Betham frequently adopts the voices of disadvantaged or oppressed individuals, who, in articulating their grievances, alleviate their suffering. Although Betham's sex disqualified her from defending victims of injustice in a court of law, Betham believed she could serve as advocate for the disempowered in her verse. Betham's poetics accord with her politics in that her verse often speaks on behalf of others, whose sufferings she narrates in order to stir the auditor's compassion. Like Dyer, Betham appears to believe that the poet can relinquish the egocentric voice for another identity. Her call for an oppositional voice capable of contesting that of institutional power suggests that she recognized debate and the expression of personal experience as the corrective to autocracy.

The relevance of Dyer's insight into the poet's supersession of proper boundaries extends beyond a re-examination of the lyric as it was once conceived -- atemporal, private, confessional, and, consequently, devoid of a fictive audience. The plurality of voices possible in Dyer's broad definition of lyric, which includes monologic soliloquy or dialogic balladry, means that subjective voices can emerge in dramatic conflict, meditation, or narrative progression. Apart from admitting chronology, the dialogic lyric allows for the incorporation within the lyric itself of an auditor who overhears and responds to the soliloquising voice, whether in disagreement or accord. Isobel Armstrong believes the dramatic monologue has its roots in women writers using masks, or lyrical personae, self-protectively to disguise their own identities; that is, she inverts Dyer's position by claiming that the personae speak for the disguised poet rather than the other way round.⁵⁰ It seems equally likely, however, that the adoption of the dramatic lyric does not imply an obfuscation of the poetic self but an exploration of multiple subjectivities. In arguing

that Betham makes use of personae and dialogic verse, then, I am not claiming that she represents a female branch of subjectivity or lyricism needful of the protective mask. Any impulse to associate women with dialogism would emerge from essentialising ideas about women's innate impulse to incorporate difference into the ego.⁵¹

It is not the *female* voice of lyric that I am investigating but rather *other* forms; the conflation of difference (or otherness) with the feminine would reassert literary paradigms based on gender. Both male and female poets wrote narrative verse; conversely, we cannot ignore women poets' enrichment of confessional, private lyrics. Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* (1789), for instance, has long been recognised as instrumental in the revival of sonneteering, since her elegiac voice preceded the isolated, melancholy sensibility found in many canonised Romantic poems.⁵² Similarly, Mary Robinson's depiction of Sappho in her *Sappho and Phaëon* explores the theme of glorious failure shared by several of the male poets.⁵³ In the *Dictionary's* entry on Robinson, which instances one of the occasions when she "hazarded original opinion," Betham offers her personal commendation of Robinson's "splendid poetical imagination," admiring "[t]he ease with which she poured forth her unpremeditated verse".⁵⁴ (In admiring both Robinson, once mistress to the Prince of Wales, and Caroline of Brunswick, who later became his wife, Betham, as we have seen, shows a consistent refusal to adopt a censorious attitude toward women who were condemned for sexual licentiousness.) Betham herself experimented with elegiac lyrics that explore the internalised responses of the ego in a moment of spontaneous feeling. In positing a female subjectivity different from men's, we would risk dismissing women lyricists who *do* experiment with the meditative lyric as feeble copyists of the masculine tradition.

My analysis of Betham's three volumes of shorter poems argues that she speaks for the disempowered by ranging over class and sex to create an alliance of voices, joined in their need to be heard. Inevitably, the breadth of Betham's representations of voice has been circumscribed in recent anthologised publications of women's Romantic poetry, which understandably reprint poems that focus on experiences particular to women. One such poem by Betham republished in Roger Lonsdale's *Anthology of Women's Poetry in the Eighteenth Century* should be addressed immediately but outside my discussion of her published books, as it apparently undermines my assertion that Betham championed women's entrance into the public sphere.

Written circa 1794, "[The Power of Woman]" (the title designated by Roger Lonsdale) defers to the conservative position that women, while not outwardly dominant, are so powerful in the private sphere that they need no formal recognition of their societal contribution. It is important to bear in mind that Betham wrote the poem at the inexperienced age of eighteen, when she first began to consider the problem of sexual inequality. Her invocation of the codes of chivalry, though appearing conservative to modern-day sensibilities, was a playful attempt to undermine misogynist claims about women's inherent inferiority to men.⁵⁵ The poem argues that since men wage war, pursue wealth, and recount their adventures in order to impress their mistresses, women actually have more power than men. In fact, the poem decides, it is men who are subservient to women:

Let them [men] in bondage, fancy themselves free;
And while fast fetter'd, vaunt their liberty!

Then with what potent, what resistless art,
Those hidden bonds are twin'd about the heart,
So that the captive wanders unconfin'd,
And has no sovereign but o'er his mind!

The prize is mutual, either power or fame;
We have the substance, *they* may keep the name!
 (*Letters* 56)

Betham wrote this poem in her journal while she stayed with Lady Rouse Boughton. It elicited this curious response from her friend's husband, Sir Charles Rouse Boughton, who, having secretly read the verse, waited until Betham left the room to insert this commendation:

True! ours is idle, empty boast;
 For ladies always rule the roast.
 Our claims are high, but power ideal;
 Yours irresistible, and real.

Betham's amicable relationship with Sir Charles may excuse, in part, his freedom; nevertheless, Sir Charles's versified postscript (which is not mentioned in Lonsdale's *Anthology*) undermines the poem's assertion that men are controlled by women. Although agreeing with her that women dominate "really," Sir Charles's insertion of his approving "True!" implies that her claims to empowerment, even in the most private sphere of a journal, must be corroborated by an external, masculine voice. Betham may not have resented his intrusion, although she mentions that Sir Charles had stolen into the room where she left her journal and that the poem initially had not been intended for public viewing. However, by the time Betham wrote *Challenge to Women*, she changed her mind about women's not needing to claim empowerment for themselves and about the illusory nature of men's domination. Her published poems generally imply the desirability of fame and of the connections between public speech and liberty. The theme of imprisonment, alluded to in this early poem's images of women's captivating charms, is one Betham returned to in her final volume, *Vignettes: In Verse*, but by that time with less naïveté about social injustices and the economic incentives that induce men to wage war. In *Vignettes*

she assigns images of captivity to personae enduring the torments of poverty, abuse, or banishment.

i. *Elegies and Other Small Poems* (1797)

The lyric's relationship to subjective expression, while arguably worth examining in all poets, is especially relevant to Betham, portrait-painter of herself and other poets, and author of several poetic and prose biographies. The narrative element in Betham's work enables her to explore the social role of poetry by becoming a balladeer of British tales – some ancient, others contemporary. In this respect, she draws on antiquarian scholarship that points out the bard's cultural centrality as spokesperson for the people. Betham's three books of collected short verse feature both historical poems and those with evanescent speakers, first-person narrators whose universalised identity dissolve the barriers between poet, speaker, and reader. As we shall see, those poems that feature speakers wrapped up in self-absorption ultimately dismantle the autocracy of ego; liberation occurs not when the self absorbs others, but rather when the self becomes at one with another, or at least listens to another voice. Betham recognises the occasional necessity of solitude for revelation, but she complicates poetic transparency by incorporating an audience into the lyrical moment. For her, the lyrical speaker is not a consciousness unmediated by dialogue, and is incapable of existing in absolute independence from others.

Although Betham includes brief prefatory remarks in her three volumes of miscellaneous verses, none of them extensively theorises about poetic composition. The first published volume, *Elegies and Other Small Poems* (1797), a small octavo which sold for 3s.6d., reveals a

youthful, rather inexperienced poet, still determining how to voice a range of poetic narratives about selfhood. In her dedicatory letter to the family friend Lady Jerningham (who comes in for her own share of criticism in *The Lady's Monthly Museum* for encouraging Betham's artistic aspirations) Betham rather diffidently calls the poems "miscellanies," implying the haphazardness of her efforts. As I mentioned above, several reviews of the volume praise her "modest" preface, presumably because she does not claim ownership of either lofty poetic inspiration or creative independence. "... I hope I shall not be censured as an intentional plagiarist;" she nervously observes in her address to the reader, "... I sometimes fear lest an imperfect recollection of another's idea should have appeared to me as a dawning thought of my own. Wherever I could recollect a similar passage, although unnoticed at the time I wrote, it has been either altered or acknowledged" (ix-x). Betham's anxiety about intellectual property exhibits the diffidence the reviewers praised, but the disclaimer also implies her reluctance to appear intellectually dependent on poetic antecedents. In fact, there is a duality in Betham's preface in its assertion of humility and originality.

Betham modestly denies any attempt to scale artistic heights and explore a new literary world:

I commit these trifles to the press with the anxiety necessarily resulting from a desire that they may not be deemed altogether worthless I have not vainly attempted to ascend to the steeps of Parnassus. If, wandering at its foot, I have mistaken perishable shrubs for never-dying flowers, the errors of a youthful mind, first viewing the fascinating regions of fancy, will not be rigidly condemned(x)

The miscellaneousness of her work acknowledges her limitations as a poet, but it also tells us something useful about Betham's artistic method. Her autobiography suggestively informs us

that she was raised "in a miscellaneous sort of a way" which allowed her "to hear songs, not only in the parlour, but the kitchen and wash-house, and by the side of the milk-maid at the cow," (*Crow-quill Flights* 14). The emphasis on the peripatetic act of collection, of remaining at the base of Parnassus to pluck several immortal flora, suggests the eclecticism of the poet who *wanders* rather than *ascends*. In both her *Dictionary* and *The Lay of Marie*, Betham describes the itinerancy of the ancient minstrel, indicating that Marie's trans-national background is instrumental in her emotional and artistic development. (The most reflective review of Betham's poetry subtly acknowledged the significance of Marie's journeyings by comparing her lay to Richard Savage's "The Wanderer").⁵⁶

The diversity of poems in *Elegies* offers an indication of the direction Betham will take in subsequent publications. With the same caution as the volume's address, the title offers little indication as to Betham's preferred modes, whether elegiac or, as she rather innocuously calls them, "small" poems. *Elegies* includes thirty one pieces -- twenty-seven of them original poems and four of them translations from Italian verse, an inclusion that served as an effective advertisement of her skill as a translator. In fact, only one poem in the volume, "In Memory of Mr. Agostino Isola" (her Italian teacher) mourns the death of a personal friend; the others are dramatic monologues or dialogues (in either iambic tetrameter or pentameter), blank verse odes, and ditties. Most of the poems, however, are elegiac in their lamentation of real or fictional lost lovers, family members, or self-esteem. The theme of dispossession and the reclamation of personal *belonging*, in both emotional and proprietorial terms, dominates the volume, suggesting that at this nascent stage of her career, Betham began to reflect on the relationship

between self-empowerment and property, a conjunction which eventually led her to protest against Britain's systemic perpetuation of human vassalage.

Of the original compositions, the three longest are "Arthur and Albina," (written 1794) "The Outlaw," (1794) and "Cen'lin Prince of Mercia," (1795) which collectively occupy one third of the volume and anticipate the much more sophisticated *The Lay of Marie* (1816) in their integration of historical detail and fiction. In these verse tales set in ancient Britain, Betham includes brief footnotes that provide factual and, admittedly, sometimes fatuous information for her readers. (For instance, in "Arthur and Albina" Betham notes that the metaphor of "iron-breasted foes" alludes to Romans in armour.) Betham had not yet developed a self-assured method of conveying scene, mood and character without resorting to distracting marginalia or preambles to the narratives. The brief description of setting that precedes "Arthur and Albina" reads: "A British Maid awaits the arrival of her lover from the battle, on a hill, where, at its commencement, she had retired to make vows to heaven for his success. -- Evening." Further theatrical elements emerge in the poem's dialogue and narrative plot. A young woman eulogises her lost lover, who dies fighting against a Roman invasion of the British homeland. A bard, whom Betham depicts as a religious guide of the ancient Britons, reconciles her to the loss of Arthur by reassuring her of his eternal bliss. Similarly, "The Outlaw," a narrative in the ballad's *abab* tetrameter, describes a Saxon's disenfranchisement from his land and the loss of his intended bride Adelaide, now destined for a Norman, a crisis speedily resolved when the outlaw Alwin discovers his own sister will marry the Norman, leaving him free to marry his beloved Adelaide and reclaim his title. With Normans and Saxons intermarrying and jointly ruling Northumbria, Alwin foresees an end to his own disenfranchisement and predicts an end to the

peasants' oppression. The third narrative poem, "Cen'lin, Prince of Mercia," recounts in dialogue King Cenulph's disinheritance of his seemingly disloyal son, until Cen'lin confesses that he has been consorting with the enemies in order to woo and wed the Eastern-Saxon princess. The disenfranchised protagonist relies on his auditor's compassion to reassert his identity as his father's heir.

All three poems achieve resolution through a dialogic exchange between the dispossessed primary speakers and their empowered auditors, who themselves assume the narrator's role when they respond to a lament. Ultimately, the character who is dispossessed finds solace in the response of a companion who enters into the feelings of the first speaker and rectifies the calamity. The artificiality of these three narrative poems (unfortunately highlighted by the short notes, improbable plots and hurried conclusions) qualifies the success of their emotional appeal. Preoccupation with an assessment of their literary merit, however, might distract us from determining Betham's thoughts on how poetry *ought to* produce a sense of community by exciting sympathy. In these three narratives, the sharing of emotions leads to a greater appreciation for belonging. The theme of dispossession is one that Betham returns to with greater effect in later publications, most successfully in the narrative poem *The Lay of Marie*, in which the Anglo-Norman heroine reclaims her birthright through a poetic confession to her conquering foe. In this first volume, Betham is more compelling in soliloquies that ponder the relationship between mental and spatial isolation. The intimacy between reader (or auditor) and the speaking voice depends on Betham's concept of privacy, and on her sense that the retreat from society ultimately leads to human interaction and an emotional release from self-absorption.

The dismantling of the myth of lyrical autotelism has enabled recent critics to register the presence of the dialogic in a seemingly monologic voice. Through a Derridean assessment of meaning, Tilottama Rajan asserts the importance of difference even in texts that apparently erase all traces of dialogue; in fact, she suggests that "the writers [of Romantic texts] themselves became self-consciously aware of the impossibility of such autotelism".⁵⁷ The recovery of dialogism in seemingly soliloquised verse (when the poet apparently speaks to himself) suggests that the erasure of conversational personae in meditative lyrics is deceptive; this claim takes us another step toward reconsidering how overtly dialogic poems -- for instance, conversation poems and dramatic monologues with a fictionally constructed audience -- manage themes relating to the speaker's interaction with an auditor. Like her friend George Dyer, Matilda Betham herself had come to recognise the limitations of an autotelic perspective, and used poems with narrating personae and responsive auditors to explore the contribution of dialogue to a sense of self. Over the course of her poetic career, Betham grappled with the dual claims of the individual and communal voice, and with the paradox that solitary reflection and personal revelation inevitably lead to civic debate.

Betham considered solitude to be both a mental and physical condition, and to be intimately related to the individual's discovery of community. Her admiration of Johan G. Zimmermann's *Solitude. Or, The Influence of Occasional Retirement Upon the Mind and the Heart* (1784-6) -- a philosophical essay in German whose first volume went through several English editions during the 1790s -- informed many of her elegiac poems. Most obviously, her blank verse ode "Written in Zimmermann's Solitude" is an early explication of the relationship between individual privacy and lyrical composition. Her reading of Zimmermann differed

fundamentally from the one provided in *The Lady's Monthly Museum*, the same periodical that berated women poets for transgressing the boundaries of the private sphere. The *LMM's* reading of *Solitude* is useful in that it highlights through contrast Betham's own interpretation of the book and her position on British women's societal role. As we might expect, the periodical's review dwells on the importance of women's appreciation for the domestic life (although this is not really Zimmermann's emphasis) and on how reading *Solitude* is peculiarly suitable for "the sedentary and domestic situation of the British fair"⁵⁸:

The querulous tone of feminine sensibility, the relative and sequestered occupations of our women, the tenderness of their attentions, their delicate habits, their feeble frames, and the fastidious fretfulness which is the constant associate of that ill health to which, for the most part, they are so very liable, give them a deep and permanent interest in every source of consolation which this performance lays before them. (*LMM* 314)

In short, the reviewer hopes that Zimmermann's praise of solitude might persuade women out of dissatisfaction and reconcile them to the confinement of the private sphere.

Zimmermann himself envisions the solitary lifestyle as one that eventually should lead to more active involvement in civic virtues. For instance, he claims that retirement from public life paradoxically encourages public duty, especially a proper appreciation for business:

Solitude teaches with the happiest effect the important value of TIME, of which the indolent, having no conception, can form no estimate. A man who is ardently bent on employment, who is anxious to live not entirely in vain, never observes the rapid movement of a stop watch, the true image of transitory life, and most striking emblem of the flight of time, without alarm and apprehension.⁵⁹

Rather than reconciling one to a sedentary life, solitude urges busyness. When appreciated in solitude, the natural world, whether of sublime or beautiful aspect, inspires the social virtues of

"benevolence, gratitude and content" (106), qualities that have relevance only in the public interaction of companionship.

Betham's ode "Written in Zimmermann's Solitude" praises her addressee's conception of solitude's "social smile" as a spur to the enjoyment of friendship, industry, and vocational renown:

Zimmermann!
 Thou draw'st not Solitude as others do,
 With folded arms, with pensive, nun-like air,
 And tearful eye, averted from mankind.
 No! warm, benign, and cheerful, she appears
 The friend of Health, of Piety, and Peace;
 The kind Samaritan that heals our woes,
 The nurse of Science, and, of future fame
 The gentle harbinger:
 (*Elegies* 112)

Betham's personification genders Solitude as female, but not as a cloistered, unoccupied, and melancholy nun; Zimmermann's Solitude is *not* inactive and does *not* shelter women from the public gaze. Solitude promises fame, not privacy, as a reward derived from civic engagement. For Zimmermann as for Betham, the salutary effect of solitude on the industrious mind is to encourage an expressive and busy life. Zimmermann's work repeatedly asserts the connection between isolation and revelation: "Solitude encourages the disclosure of those sentiments and feelings which the manners of the world compel us to conceal. The mind there unburdens itself with ease and freedom. The pen indeed is not always taken up because we are alone, but if we are inclined to write we ought to be alone" (51). Thus, although germinated in isolation, composition represents the liberty of one's mind freely entering into the public domain of literature. Betham recognised the importance of community and dialogue in both Zimmermann's

concept of the solitary self and of textual composition. The title, "Written in Zimmermann's Solitude," suggests at once that the poem was composed under the conditions of Zimmermann's idea of solitude and that it responds to it.

Although Zimmermann does not address women's involvement in literary production, he maintains that they are particularly susceptible to the beauties of an isolated landscape: "Women feel the pure and tranquil pleasures of rural life with a higher sensibility than men. They enjoy more exquisitely the beauties of a *lonely walk*, the freshness of a shady forest, and admire with higher ecstasy the charms of nature" (178; my emphasis). Betham's poem "The Lonely Walk," dated October 13, 1794 and dedicated to W. S. B. (her brother William), recalls Zimmermann's words in its consideration of how isolation in a natural setting transforms solipsism into companionship. Whether Betham had read Zimmermann as early as 1794 is difficult to say, but certainly "The Lonely Walk," in asserting the necessity of solitary reflection for social interaction, evidences a similar philosophy:

When the grey evening spreads a calm around,
Tell me, has thy bewilder'd fancy sought,
Retir'd in some sequestered spot of ground,
Rest, from the labour of eternal thought?

When, wrapt in self, the soul enjoys repose,
The wearied brain resigns its fervent heat,
In dream-like musing every care we lose,
And wind our way with slowly-moving feet.

Oft, to indulge the thought-exploded sigh,
When, slowly wandering at the close of day,
Light emanations from th'abstracted eye,
With transient beauty in the sun-beams play,

Thy sister seeks the solitary shade,
Her mind inhaling the aerial gloom,

Sees, not observing, the fair landscape fade,
And sullen mist usurping day-light's room.

Not her's the feelings which regret inspires,
When sorrows keen have made the spirits low;
Adversity has damp'd the youthful fires,
And all the tears that fall are tears of woe.

Ah, no! possessing every social bliss,
I cannot, will not at my fate repine;
Or ask for happiness excelling this,
When such a world of treasures now are mine!

And, when the melancholy grove I seek,
Scarce can my palpitating heart controul,
While silent tears are trembling on my cheek,
The flood of pleasure swelling in my soul.

But soon my too-elated thoughts are calm,
The tumults of the mental chaos cease;
A soft oblivion the rais'd senses charm,
And lull to a reflecting, soothing peace.

Hail, sweet entrancements of the languid mind!
Whose calm reposes restless worldlings scorn;
But from whose aid recruited strength we find,
And waken, lively as the bird of morn.

And thou, lov'd boy, in whose congenial breast,
I doubt not but those sentiments reside;
For we, our thoughts, our actions have confest,
As much in hearts as persons are allied;

Hail thou, my brother, may thy steps be led
By heav'nly wisdom through this world of care,
And gain the realms for which our Saviour bled!
Nor pain, nor lassitude await us there.

The opening stanza introduces the theme of the self finding community in solitude through its solicitation of a shared emotional response to nature's soothing influence. The lyrical voice's request for confirmation from the reader (or perhaps *auditor*, since the imperative

"Tell me" suggests conversation) expresses desire for companionship, while the interrogative rhetorically ensures an exchange, even if only in the speaker's imagination. Although William has no voice in the poem, his presence is conjured up by the speaker's shift in self-identification from the first-person pronoun to the objectifying second (she calls herself "thy sister" rather than "I"), a surprising shift in light of the solipsism of the speaker's admission that she enters the grove "wrapt in self". The singular soul is replaced by a shared solitude, suggestively worded by the "we" and "our" rather than by the formerly employed singular pronouns. The smooth transition of grammatical person from *I* to *we* corresponds to the poem's emotional development from the self-confinement of personal unhappiness to liberation through mutual confession. The first two stanzas summarise the entire poem's emotional development from loneliness to companionship. The shift from self-absorption to congeniality is rehearsed again from stanzas three to ten, in which Betham confesses, both in an objective third person and subjective first, how she indulges in a healing grief. The mental repose that follows the outburst is swiftly followed by a reclamation of companionship that makes her *feel* as well as *know* that she possesses "social bliss". Once more she indicates that her "congenial" brother reciprocally expresses the same feelings: "For we, our thoughts, our actions have confest, / As much in hearts as persons are allied". The alliance of persons of course implies Matilda and William's emotional and physical similarity. But the word "persons" also refers to their shared grammatical person, the verbal "we" who, according to the speaker, have mutually articulated their sentiments.

The narrative progression of Betham's lyric is an emotional one that corresponds to the pedestrian's lonely walk toward a solitary place of release into fraternity, a spiritual voyage with

the overtly Christian parallel of resurrection into heavenly community. The poem is structured around a cathartic turn in the eighth stanza, when the climax of her “too-elated” sensibilities yields to a “soft oblivion,” a type of death that paradoxically strengthens and spiritually awakens not only herself, but others too: the collective “we” is embodied in the single bird of dawn. The metaphor of resurrection suggested in the image of the rising bird is reiterated in the conclusion when Betham projects her poem into eternity, as the progression of the lonely walk ends in the spiritual gathering of selves and “our” saviour. While the brother’s particular identity and his own lonely walk (“thy steps”) is acknowledged in Betham’s employment of the second person singular, the final two lines anticipate his shift in identity toward pluralism (“await us”), or a collective experience of personal liberty.

The limitations of the singular person are addressed in various ways in several of Betham’s early poems. One of them, the blank verse ode “Rhapsody,” won Coleridge’s particular admiration. As Betham recalled later in her autobiography,

One of our most celebrated poets, who had, I was told, picked out and praised the little piece ‘On a Cloud,’ another had quoted (saying it would have been faultless if I had not used the word *Phoebus* in it, which he thought inadmissible in modern poetry), sent me some verses inscribed “To Matilda Betham, from a Stranger”; and dated “Keswick, Sept. 9, 1802, S. T. C.” I should have guessed whence they came, but dared not flatter myself so highly as satisfactorily to believe it, before I obtained the avowal of the lady [Lady Rouse Boughton] who had transmitted them.
(*Crow-quill Flights* 10)

As Coleridge’s poem “To Matilda Betham” indicates, he heard the poem quoted by Lady Rouse Boughton, with whom Betham stayed in Wales and to whom she later dedicated her second book

of poetry. Betham's "Rhapsody [On a Cloud]," dated February 1, 1797, combines the metaphors of vapour and kingly autocracy to suggest the tyranny of an inflated ego.⁶⁰

Lo! here a cloud comes sailing, richly clad
 In royal purple, which the parting beams
 Of bounteous Phoebus edge with tints of gold
 And lucid crimson. One might fancy it
 A noble bird, that laves its graceful form,
 And bathes its rosy bosom in the light.
 Look! how it swells and rears its snowy crest
 With haughty grandeur; while the blue expanse,
 In smiling patience lets the boaster pass,
 And swell his train with all the lazy vapours
 That hover in the air: an easy prey
 To the gigantic phantom, whose curl'd wing,
 Sweeps in these worthless triflers of the sky,
 And wraps them in his bosom. Go, vain shadow!
 Sick with the burthen of thy fancied greatness,
 A breath of zephyr wafts thee into nothing,
 Scatters thy spreading plumes, uncrowns thy front,
 And drives thee downward to thy mother earth,
 To mix with vapour and dissolve in dew.
 (79)

This first stanza is Shakespearean in its blank verse and descriptive imagery. Like Cleopatra's barge wafting toward shore, the cloud "sailing" on the "blue expanse" is decked in "royal" colours of purple, crimson and gold, with pretty attendants of smaller clouds increasing the dominant cloud's glory (*Antony and Cleopatra* II. ii. 194-232).⁶¹

The self-indulgent, monarchical luxuriance of the picture takes a sinister turn at the description of the cloud's absorption of smaller vapours, the imperialist conquest of which enlarges its swollen bulk until a westerly breeze (like Shelley's west wind) heralds political change. Metaphorically, the cloud's transmutation represents the political transition from an autocratic to a democratic society. The zephyr "uncrowns" and executes the monarch, whose

mortal fall echoes another royal personage, this one professing self-annihilation: "downward to thy mother earth/ To mix with vapour and dissolve in dew" recalls Hamlet's longing for physical decomposition and a return to the elements (*Hamlet* I. ii. 129-30). The cloud's overly vaporous flesh eventually necessitates the disintegration of itself into a dispersed and shared identity. As we discover in the next stanza, the cloud also stands for the self in the act of creation, and for the dangers of becoming too wrapped up in overly subjective, fantastic visions that have no rational basis.

Such are the dreams of hope, which to the eye
Of youthful inexperience, seem to touch
The pure, unclouded sky of certainty.
Buoy'd up by the fond eloquence of thought,
And nurtur'd by the smile of vanity,
Each hour the air-born vision gathers bulk,
And Fancy decks it with a thousand hues,
Varied and wild, till it abounds in charms
Which sink the soul to sadness when the breath
Of gentle Reason breaks the beauteous bubble,
And leaves us nought but vain regret behind.

Coleridge's objection to the archaic word "Phoebus" does not take into account how neatly the allusion links the first stanza with the second. Phoebus has a tripartite function in classical mythology that plays out in the poem's own integrating images of illumination, fancy and reason. As the god of light, Phoebus illuminates the physical cloud and what it represents, the youth's poetic vision; and as the god of the arts and music, Phoebus inspires the poet; but finally, in the second stanza, Reason prevails and destroys an exalted fancy.

By the beginning of the second stanza, the metaphorical significance of the cloud is grounded in the human terms of youthful dreams just as it has, figuratively, turned "downward to ... mother earth". Full of itself literally and metaphorically ("Sick with the burthen of thy fancied

greatness"), the cloud's own nature is one that inevitably must empty itself of imperial identity and distribute its power. Similarly, the vain youth fancies a vision too aggrandised for sustainable existence, and reason decimates it. The second stanza acts as an interpretative commentary on the conceit of the megalomaniac cloud, again with Shakespearean language that recollects Prospero's relinquishment of supremacy over his magical world.⁶²

Its date suggests that the poem is written in response to contemporary discussions of loyalist fears surrounding the French Revolution, and of the politicisation of the word "imagination" in the mid-1790s. As John Barrell explains, conservative legal opinion maintained that "to imagine the king's death" was a treasonable offence. Both radicals and reactionaries claimed for themselves the discourse of reason and accused the other of a dangerously imaginative sensibility, susceptible to emotive rather than rational persuasion. In "imagining" the overthrow of a tyrant, Betham's poem engages in regicidal fantasy, but does so in order to suggest that the imagination produces a vision that, however powerful it appears, is but an insubstantial phantasm. Rather than emphasising the dangers of imagination, then, Betham renders the death of the monarch as poetic bathos: the gentlest breath of reason instantaneously disperses its swollen bulk.⁶³

The metaphorical connection between exalted dreams, the despot, and the bloated cloud exists not merely in their shared susceptibility to destruction, but in the centrality of the autocratic ego. Cloud-watching is an overly subjective pastime, which encourages the youth to see shapes that exist only in one mind. The "eye" of youth acquisitively claims the ethereal world of imagination as a certainty, soars on the wings of metaphorical rhetoric (the "fond eloquence of thought"), and endows the cloud with fantastic and improbable qualities. Just as

the monarchical cloud is destroyed by wind, so too is fancied greatness destroyed by another force, rationality, which counters a seemingly self-sufficient power. The tone of the second stanza is more equivocal than that of the first, however, since Reason's breeze announces the end not merely of an inflated ego, but, more pathetically, of the rhapsodical ecstasy that enabled the poem's expression in the first place. The impersonal (and non-subjective) narrative voice draws the conclusion: aerial visions of an overly ambitious, youthful poet are defeated by terrestrial fact.

Coleridge's "To Matilda Betham, from a Stranger" indicates that he shared this interpretation of the cloud as a metaphor for a poet's exalted fancy. He opens his poem by first praising and then cautioning her against surrendering to the "air-born vision" of poetic inspiration. His appreciation of Betham's lyricism is acknowledged in the opening lines, "Matilda! I have heard a sweet tune played/ On a sweet instrument – thy Poesie –" and in his subsequent comparison of her with the most celebrated female lyricist, Sappho: "Great as th'impassioned Lesbian, in sweet song," (375, line 27). The poem then offers some advice about how she may "fulfil [his] auspices" of becoming a great British poetess. His suggestions recall the sky and earth dichotomy of Betham's rhapsody by imagistically conveying the importance of grounding lofty goals in a more humble, earthly reality:

Poetic feelings, like the stretching boughs
Of mighty oaks, pay homage to the gales,
Toss in the strong winds, drive before the gust,
Themselves one giddy storm of fluttering leaves;
Yet, all the while self-limited, remain
Equally near the fixed and solid trunk
Of Truth and Nature in the howling storm,
As in the calm that stills the aspen grove.
Be bold, meek Woman! but be wisely bold!

Fly, ostrich-like, firm land beneath thy feet,
 Yet hurried onward by thy wings of fancy
 Swift as the whirlwind, singing in their quills.
 (375-6, lines 34-45).

The oxymoronic recommendations that Betham be meekly bold, that she fly on land, that she run swiftly as an ostrich while remaining immutable as an oak suggest the paradoxical identity of a woman poet. Like the oak in the storm, Betham must be "*self-limited*" and bound to earth even while responding to the wind's inspiration. Coleridge's establishment of proper boundaries in the image of the fixed tree invites comparison with the view expressed in *The Lady's Monthly Museum*, that women must confine themselves to a circumscribed place. For although Coleridge, unlike *LMM*, claims that women poets are theoretically possible, he also recommends that they compromise their boldness with a meekness suited to womanhood. The fixedness of subjectivity advised here attempts to resolve the dichotomy of soaring vision and earthly reality in Betham's "Rhapsody". But self-limitation is not the solution Betham turns to in her later volumes. Rather, in order to fulfil Coleridge's injunction to become a poet for the nation, Betham exceeds the proper boundaries of subjectivity by adopting the eyes and ears of others, representing the views of varied speakers and their compassionate auditors, in order to show how poetry can establish communal identity.

The last poem in *Elegies* augurs the trend of her later lyrics in its discussion of how one can represent the many. This poem, entitled simply "Written April, the 18th, 1796," combines Zimmermann's ideas of solitude with her own thoughts on poetic communalism. Coleridge's "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," composed in the same year Betham's lyric was published, shares her exploration of the imagination's ability to exceed the physical limitations of selfhood.

Betham's first- person speaker mentally recreates the company of several friends who enjoy the intimacy of a rural bower, an environment favoured by the personification of Social Love, who "Bids [the heart] each narrow thought resign,/ And fills it with a warmth benign" (126).

Affection for others overcomes a circumscribed, "narrow" identity, an expansion of selfhood Betham represents by describing the various activities and feelings of several people resting in the bower. The ultimate stanza indicates that, in an imaginative recreation of absent friends, a single individual is enlarged by the internalised presence of others in oneself:

Yet would my hovering fancy trace,
The features of each happy face;
And sympathy informs my mind,
That they the same emotions find;
That in each scene of harmless glee,
Memory recalls the absent three:
And all, though distance strives to part,
Will hold communion in the heart.
(128)

The three friends to whom the speaker alludes suggests the Christian trinity, a motif reinforced in the final line's reference to communion. Here as in "The Lonely Walk," the self's expansion into selves is rendered in mystical language. However, unlike Coleridge's lyric, which emphasises his particular act of mental release from confinement, Betham's "communion" relies on the simultaneity of the narrator's and her friends' mutual sympathy, with each member equally engaged in recollecting the others. The sameness of their emotions is reiterated in her declaration that, in isolation, *all* of the friends collectively enable community by individually participating in the sort of imaginative activity exemplified in the poem itself. Betham implies that each person's memory can host a plurality of identities, thereby exceeding the boundaries of the self-interested "narrow thoughts" mentioned near the beginning of the poem. In her second

volume, Betham develops this idea by questioning the limitations of egocentric revelations, and does so by integrating the audience into the moment of poetic expression.

ii. *Poems* (1808)

Poems, another small octavo miscellany of thirty-one poems of varied metrical rhythm and rhyme schemes, features mostly speakers who lament personal hardships and suffer from feelings of isolation or banishment. A letter from Sir Charles Rouse Boughton indicates that Betham considered publishing a second book of poetry as early as 1803 but decided instead to follow his advice and wait for her *Dictionary* to make an impression on the public.⁶⁴ She dedicated this volume with "respect and gratitude for long continued friendship" to his wife, the same Lady Rouse Boughton who introduced Coleridge to Betham's early poetry. Reviews of this volume were generally brief but favourable, particularly those in the *Critical Review* and the *Annual Review*. The former states that "the work ... shews the clearest marks of being written by a person of elegant genius, and of a warm and generous heart," and that, moreover, one poem "has not only a fine vein of poetry throughout, but some parts that are sublime."⁶⁵ This poem is probably the blank verse narrative "The Old Shepherd's Recollections," which the reviewer singles out for especial praise in his concluding remarks. Similarly, *The Annual Review* admires "The Old Shepherd's Recollections," although this reviewer decides that the length of the soliloquy would benefit from an auditor, a suggestion, as I explain below, that ignores the importance of the speaker's auditory role. The reviewer ends with this commendation: "On the whole, we are convinced, that nothing but a culpable degree of indifference in the public, or indolence in Miss Betham, can prevent her from rising to a very flattering rank among the poets

of the day."⁶⁶ As she tells us in *Crow-quill Flights*, this review was one that gave her especial pleasure, although she cites several other positive tributes also.⁶⁷

The Advertisement tells us that "timidity and reluctance" dissuaded her from including a preface. Consequently, any further inferences as to Betham's theoretical development of the notion of shared solitude, evidenced in *Elegies*, must be drawn from the poems themselves. The chief characteristic that distinguishes the second volume from the first is its inclusion of narrating personae from the labouring class -- fishermen, sailors, and shepherds -- whose confessional lyrics represent an expanded social perspective not found in her earlier book. (In fact, the only poem in *Elegies* that depicts the labouring poor is "Written on Whitsun-Monday," dated 1795, whose narrator emphasises the pastoral charm of "poverty's delighted smile," rather than the hardship or social injustices of agrarian life.) Matilda Betham's modest income from her first book of poetry, which went through one edition only, and the prospect of little more from *Poems*, which sold for 4 s. and likewise was not reprinted, must have given her new insight into the trials of an impecunious, if independent, life. Though poor, the labourers speak in a direct but dignified manner.

Betham explores the plurality of *voice*, particularly how the apparently isolated speaker engages a responsive community of auditors. It is often difficult to distinguish conclusively the authorial "I" of Betham herself from the "I" of other lyrical selves found in her poetry, for although Betham's poems sometimes collapse the distance between herself and the speaker, she also allows invented personae to speak in a confessional mode. By using various "voices" (a critical term that Betham literalises to suggest the event of speech), the poems address a wide range of personal experiences. Regardless of the particularities of the speaker's psyche and

circumstance, the voices typically share one trait: they express anxieties about isolation from society. One of the central paradoxes of these poems is that, while speaking of psychological imprisonment and isolation from others, these voices achieve release and companionship through vocal representation. The second book's emphasis on poetry as a *spoken* rather than exclusively written act corresponds to its representation of common people recounting their own sorrows. The confessional voice, though belonging to fictional personae narrating their life stories, adheres to the precept of emotional revelation later formalised by John Stuart Mill.⁶⁸ However, in this volume, the immediacy of the "overheard" lyric is enacted literally in poems that attend to the process of lyricism's emotional release, frequently alluding to or incorporating an auditor. In some instances, this inclusion is as simple as her use of quotation marks to emphasise our implied attendance and the poem's orality, a technique not employed in the first volume except in poems that clearly are set in the past; at others, she frames the central poetic narrative with a foil, the reaction of an eavesdropper, who witnesses and responds to the primary speaker.⁶⁹ The importance of the oral moment in poetic composition is suggested also in poems depicting bardic orators and in poems generically classified as songs. It seems likely that Betham's practise of giving public Shakespearean readings, when an audience might empathise with the speaking voice, creating a moment of shared emotional identity, informed her notion of lyrical performance.⁷⁰ By exploring the relationship between orality and audience, *Poems* anticipates *The Lay of Marie* and its exploration of ancient British minstrelsy, and of poetry that speaks on behalf of people rather than only oneself. Tellingly, one of the most positive reviews of *Poems* (the one that had particularly pleased Betham) recognised and admired the lack of egotism in Betham's poetry.⁷¹

The lyric poet's heritage as minstrel of the people is one that Betham wanted to claim for herself. Three of her six "Songs" were set to music, truly becoming oral poems that exhibited the musical quality of the ancient poems that Hugh Blair described in his *Lectures*.⁷² The six "Songs" are in mnemonic trimeter or tetrameter, rhymed in couplets and alternate rhymes. These short poems offer only the most rudimentary philosophical reflection and narrative elements, although the voice in the wistful ditty "Song -- Distance from the Place of Our Nativity" also unravels a socially inflicted conflict between a young woman's loyalty to her marriage and to premarital relationships. In the last stanza, the speaker Lucy questions the self-contradiction of indulging in nostalgia for childhood while acknowledging her present nuptial commitment. She concludes that absence from childhood acquaintances offers an enduring yet pleasurable sorrow that heightens her appreciation of present companionship (*Poems* 67). The song's exploration of private grief contains a compelling ambiguity in its shift in person. The title's pronoun "our" is inconsistent with the song itself, which uses the first person singular throughout. The plural pronoun in the title suggests that Lucy's song, however particular it seems, represents a collective human experience. Thus, the title universalises Lucy's isolation, rendering her feelings common to us all. Similarly, the other "Songs" describe absence from home and affection for distant lovers or friends, and all have equally particularised personae, both male and female, speaking in the first person. The generic qualities of song necessarily make it the "representative and dramatic" kind of lyric (to borrow Dyer's words), in which the singer lays aside his or her identity to speak on another's behalf, literally giving voice to the poetic persona at the moment of the song's articulation.

Betham frames some of her poems with quotation marks, a technique that allows the first-person narrators to vocalise their own griefs while subtly integrating an audience into the poem. "The Old Fisherman" and "The Mother" (the mother of a young sailor) are overheard, oral tales that express the sorrow occasioned by loneliness while anticipating the solace of a pitying companion. After surviving a series of misfortunes that bereaved him of wife and children, the Fisherman recounts his calamitous life without emotion. "I have forgotten to feel," the Fisherman soliloquises, but he reveals in the final stanza that he expects God to deliver him from this insensible half-life. His final words, "Though I finish my journey alone," are ironic because the closing quotation marks remind us of the poem's orality, and consequently, of our presence as eavesdropping but compassionate auditors, whose feelings supplement the fisherman's own (*Poems* 10). The voice in "The Mother," by contrast, evinces a surfeit of emotion, equally threatening to the speaker's well-being. She anticipates death at the moment of her reunion with her son: "This failing heart! but joy to me, / If heaven in pity is thy guard" (*Poems* 104). In both, Betham demonstrates that the successful formation of community requires an audience to respond to and pity the supplicating voice. In *Poems*, as in *Elegies*, the importance of compassion for social integration emerges as the volume's dominant theme, but in this volume Betham places especial emphasis on the immediacy of a voice and its responsive witness.

Some poems represent a fictive auditor whose reactions to a soliloquised confession explore the social impact of poetic revelation. Both "The Daughter" and "Fragment" (or, "A Pilgrim weary, toil-subdued") portray two perspectives by framing an intimate disclosure with an eavesdropper's response. "The Daughter" opens with the dramatically ironic remark that her

lonely retreat protects her “mournful lute” from the ears of an uninvited companion. Believing herself free to unburden her woes, the daughter admits that guilt over her elopement is killing her, but she hesitates to reveal these regrets and the seriousness of her illness to her husband. The final stanza infuses the lyric with dramatic tension, when we discover that Henry, “In aching silence list’ning to her song,” has been a companion to her grief. A similar device is used in “Fragment,” in which the primary narrator, a pilgrim wandering in a hostile landscape, accidentally overhears a woman’s lament to her infant. The frame reveals the narrator’s emotional development from insensibility to compassion. At the opening of the poem, the narrator meets a harsh and wealthy man whose insolence (the pilgrim tells us) would have raised his ire were he capable of an emotional response. He journeys on until he reaches the chieftain’s fortress, where he pauses to listen to the confessional outburst of the landowner’s wife, whose sorrowful face excites the pilgrim’s wonder. She is physically enclosed in a towered fortress and emotionally trapped in a loveless marriage to an abusive spouse, but the young mother finds comfort in her intended auditor, the infant in her arms who can fulfil her injunction, “Be tender pity then thy law!” (35). The song draws the pilgrim nearer to the fortress, but her fragmentary song abruptly ends. Although the poem is incomplete, the frame narrative suggests that, by exciting his compassion, the lady’s song delivers the pilgrim from emotional indifference and transforms isolation into community.

The importance of the dramatic moment of lyrical revelation is apparent even in those poems that represent a single voice. Betham’s lyrics in *Poems* tend to use narrating personae rather than the voice of the poet herself, but in one of the few sonnets Betham published, “Urge Me No More,” the voice could easily be interpreted as her own, particularly since she is

generally believed to have suffered from an emotional breakdown. Implicitly, the sonnet indicates that a preceding argument has created a breach between the oppressive (now silent) persona and the speaker's protesting voice. The sonnet appeals directly to the audience for a healing, sympathetic response to a dissenting speaker. In this poem as in so many others in the volume, the narrator barely has the strength to express suffering and needs the social interaction of an understanding auditor to reintegrate mind and heart.

Urge me no more! nor think, because I seem
Tame and unsorrowing in the world's rude strife,
That anguish and resentment have not life
Within the heart that ye so quiet deem:
In this forc'd stillness only, I sustain
My thought and feeling, wearied out with pain!
Floating as 'twere upon some wild abyss,
Whence, silent Patience, bending o'er the brink,
Would rescue them with strong and steady hand,
And join again, by that connecting link,
Which now is broken:—O, respect her care!
Respect her in this fearful self-command!
No moment teems with greater woe than this,
Should she but pause, or falter in despair!
(48)

The explosive opening command, while asserting the need for understanding from an auditor (or reader), also establishes a conflict between Betham and the implied interlocutor, whose repeated insistence that Betham throw off her reticence finally goads her into speech. The central irony of the poem lies in the speaker's exclamatory call for silence, which she can only ensure by publicly declaring her emotions. Unlike most sonnets, this one is not a silent, internal monologue but rather a protest against an irksome companion. The antagonism announced in the first quatrain is reproduced in another breach in the poem, the disconnection between thought and feeling. The prolonged caesura after "broken," rendered visually meaningful by the extended

dash, creates a typographical fracture that highlights her emotional disintegration. But because the caesura also provides the long pause of silence that the speaker needs, the sonnet in fact illustrates the efficacy of vocal protestation. Though the sonnet was written years before she involved herself in parliamentary politics, we can see evidence here of her recognition that personal opinions, though they may be dissonant, need to be articulated to an audience.⁷³ It seems that her own leanings toward radical and more inclusive politics covertly found early expression in all those poems that recommend an accommodating, sympathetic community of speakers and listeners.

The insistence on oral expression for the healthy development of social identity also emerges in poems that celebrate the pre-eminence of the bard. The ode "To the River Which separates itself from the Dee, at Bedkellert" and the blank verse narrative "The Old Shepherd's Recollections" centralise the heroic role of the oral poet. In these poems, bards inspire emulation of their oratorical powers and incite rebellion against an oppressor. The ode's location draws on the legend immortalised in Thomas Gray's *The Bard*, in which the heroic poet delivers his last sublime oratory from a mountain above the Conway. Betham had composed it while on holiday with the Rouse Boughtons in Wales, during the summer of 1799. Instead of hailing the "tranquil stream," Betham celebrates the mighty river, whose current rushing against the rocks she compares to a hero's intrepid resistance to injustice:

The yellow Conway as it raves,
 Demands my tributary song!
 When, rushing forth, resistless waves
 O'er rocky fragments foam along!

Like him, whose vigorous mind reviews
 The troubles which around him roll;

The ceaseless warfare still pursues,
 And keeps a firm, undaunted soul.
 (61)

The amalgamate identity of Betham and the bard, conveyed through the water metaphor, is also suggested in the ambiguous modifier "Like him": in the absence of a clear grammatical subject, both the warring waves and Betham's song would appear to resemble an unidentified male.

Although the *He* remains nameless throughout, the poem evokes Gray's defiant hero both in its location and its allusion to his fortitude and in its resistance to malicious foes (stanza 6).

Betham implies her inheritance of the ancient bard's legacy by offering her poetic contribution, an oral tributary that joins the Conway in its noisy protest against the cruel adversaries – who in Gray's *The Bard* are the armies of Edward II, but in Betham's ode remain abstract, represented metaphorically by the injurious rocks. Betham's personified poet-hero, though depicted as rebellious and firm of purpose, is not obdurately solitary, removed from human relations or social obligations. In stanza 5 she tells us that "genial feelings" flow through him, rendering him a sympathetic individual who, like the Conway itself, may eventually fulfil his destiny and reflect a more peaceful world: "And should the savage country round,/ A more engaging aspect show,/ O Conway! it will then be found,/ How sweet and clear thy waters flow!" (62). In this way, the Conway represents the oppositional force of society that will continue its resistance until the country itself changes its character. At the end of the poem, Betham offers an utopian vision of the future poet "mus[ing] on a distant age" while sitting by the peaceful river. The subject of the ode is multiple, at once the bardic hero of yore and the turbulent Conway itself, a plurality which inspires the latter-day poet to contribute her own vocal response.

The bard's defining qualities as national hero and a gatherer of individuals, one whose *recollections* bind past and present society together in the spoken moment of poetry, emerges as the central theme in "The Old Shepherd's Recollections," the longest and most complex narrative in *Poems*. The ability of poetic language to transform one individual's thoughts into a collective experience is alluded to at the opening of the poem, where the narrator, an unnamed shepherd, remarks that his memory "[a]rranges and collects" its treasures so that he can "talk with those long silent in the grave" (69). The shepherd's autobiography takes second place to that of his hero, the blind poet Osborne, whose story dominates the retrospection. The plot involves Osborne's oratorical influence over his followers in their shared solitude, and his doomed love for Lora, obliged by her pertinacious father to marry a wealthy but brutal man belonging to her own social class. In despair, Osborne banishes himself, but in old age is found and reintegrated into Lora's family.

The *Annual Review's* criticism of the absence of an auditor in "The Old Shepherd's Recollections" oversimplifies the narrative interplay of speaking and listening personae: enclosed in quotation marks, the poem unfolds as a spoken narrative, with us, the reading public, functioning as the shepherd's auditors. In focusing on another's biography, and repeating the words of his former comrades, the shepherd permits other voices to speak through him. Although the shepherd now occupies the narrator's place, he imagines himself in his former role as Osborne's listening disciple:

Kind, gentle Osborne! Half a century
Has silver'd o'er the crisp and yellow locks
Of thy young auditor, but memory still
Grasps the torn record of my weary life,
And finds full many a page to tell of thee! (72)

Osborne's biography, not the shepherd's own story, is the focus of the narrative. The traditional role of the lyrical poet as bard, who remembers and articulates a society's collective memory, is expressed in Betham's narrative strategy. The shepherd's allusion to textual poetry (the "torn record") is metaphorical, for this poetic recollection embodies the cycle of oral rather than written tradition, in which auditor becomes author. The shepherd's re-collection of the fragmentary past adopts, reproduces and brings together the voices of Osborne and Lora, giving them another life in song. The shepherd tells us that Osborne was a poor man living in a rough cottage, but his messianic presence drew a crowd of local admirers, the shepherd among them. The bard's cultural centrality is explained through the recollection, which emphasises Osborne's leadership as historian and spiritual guide:

He had a look so tranquil and so mild,
That something holy stole upon the sense
When he appear'd; his language had such power
In converse, that the hearer, as entranc'd
Sate lingering on to listen; while in song,
Or skill upon the many-stringed harp
Was never heard his equal! Then he knew
All our old ballads, all our father's tales,
All the adventurous deeds of early times,
(74)

The balladeer performs a cultural function as a man of the people who recollects and repeats their stories. Osborne's most devoted auditor, Lora, now also deceased, formerly assumed the bard's role under the auspices of her tutor:

He lov'd in her the fondness of his art,
And taught her many wild and simple airs,
Suiting the plaintive tenor of her voice,
Which he would mimic with sweet minstrelsy.

When she was absent, and with strange delight,
 Repeat her parting words, her kind adieu,
 Or sweetly-spoken promise of return.
 (76)

Through this oral exchange, in which Lora imitates Osborne who, in turn, mimics Lora, the bard himself becomes auditor. The recollection of Lora's voice in her absence creates companionship through a kind of oral mirror, in which lyrical representation endlessly integrates and repeats back to itself the voice of another. The dialogic element of bardic oration allows a pluralism of voice, with successive narrators speaking on behalf of others. Throughout the poem, the recollection of speaking voices has a unifying strength that, in overcoming the obstacles of time, grief, physical separation, and social difference, defeats the injustice inflicted by the two tyrannical and self-interested characters in the poem -- Lora's father and husband. Years after their separation, Lora, recognising the sound of Osborne's music, finds him in a village crowd, while Osborne "Retains a true remembrance of that [Lora's] voice" and agrees to return home with her and reintegrate into society (87). The shepherd informs us that the episode of their reunification became a "fav'rite legend ...oft repeated" by the local people (86). This detail reaffirms Betham's position that the transmission of colloquial knowledge offers the general populace a sense of communal identity that is centralised in their bardic hero and, later, in the old shepherd.

The narrative lyric featuring a variety of speakers allows Betham to focus on the social and interactive roles of a poet. As an older woman, Betham admitted that she was regarded as a "singular" woman because she "ventured into the world as an artist" to earn her living. But her singularity did not isolate her from society; rather, as a public reader of Shakespearean verse,

Betham would necessarily have experienced firsthand the performative element of the poetic voice engaging with a listening audience.

iii. *Vignettes: In Verse* (1818)

Shortly after *The Lay of Marie's* publication, Betham's emotional and physical health deteriorated, and her financial condition worsened. Alarmed about his friend, Lamb wrote to Southey on October 26, 1818 that he welcomed Sir William Betham's imminent return from Ireland, which would deliver Matilda from her insolvency. Anxious pity rather than admiration characterises his description of her latest publication: "Have you seen poor Miss Betham's 'Vignettes'? Some of them, the second particularly, 'To Lucy,' are sweet and good as herself, while she was herself. She is in some measure abroad again."⁷⁴ (By Betham's being "abroad," Lamb probably means that she is both professionally and physically in the public again after being held under restraint.) Lamb's innocent remark that the sweet and good poems are *like* herself when "she was herself" unwittingly pinpointed why Betham's mental crisis disturbed Lamb. He can no longer be sure of her identity, and must consequently redefine her by excluding certain qualities from her personality. Interestingly, he also says that only *some* of her poems are as "sweet and good" as their author, inviting speculation as to which ones he thought were *not* representative of her character. Lamb's dogged feminization of Betham's youthful ambitions persisted into later life, when he gallantly assured her that her poems would "be a sweet heir-loom [sic] to leave in the family Did I not love your verses, have I ever failed to see that you had the most feminine soul of all our poet- or prose-esses?"⁷⁵

The sorrows induced by loneliness and confinement emerge in the volume's theme of social alienation. But, despite Lamb's cautious optimism, *Vignettes* excited little critical attention, receiving, like *The Lay of Marie* two years before, only one review. The *New British Lady's Magazine* briefly praises her previous publications, then, rather gratuitously, identifies her male relatives, the senior and junior William Bethams. Like Lamb, who admired the "sweetness" of her poems, the reviewer approves of the *Vignettes* for its "chastened fancy and delicate sentiment," but effectively flattens and feminizes the range of poems by citing two placid tributes to womanly friendship (one to Lady Jerningham and the other to her mother), and by briefly praising the "pathos" in the elegy to Edward Betham.⁷⁶

This last volume is the most sombre of her publications, principally featuring speakers who chafe at the bonds that imprison them. The volume's own Advertisement encourages us to look for the troubled and prophetic tone in her text. Betham dispenses with the timidity that characterises her earlier prefatory remarks, claiming instead that the group of poems in this collection, many of which had been written a few years previously, unintentionally anticipated personal experiences:

As far as the seventy-fourth page, these Poems have been printed about two years; during which many things happened likely to prevent their ever appearing. The time, however, is now come, and I have today found the remainder,

On reading the whole over, they struck me with much surprise, as they appear in a singular manner prophetic. I wrote them with a general, and somewhat undefined view; and they now take the aspect of speaking on what has since happened to myself -- a long seclusion, during which I was bereft of the common means of study, having given rise to one [a study] that has turned out far more important than I at first imagined, and which I have continued since, to the exclusion of every other pursuit.

(2)

The Advertisement was written at her parents' home in Stonham, where she convalesced after her mental breakdown. Most of *Vignettes* was written before her incarceration, and Betham clearly wants us to attribute her poetic inspiration to insight into human suffering. We are therefore encouraged to read the poems not as sentimental, "chastened" autobiography, but as visionary pieces that presciently revealed intimate truths about her own emotional and physical entrapment. Betham's experience in the madhouse inspired her to begin a wide-ranging study of institutional abuses, an investigation to which she alludes in the Advertisement. But although she mentions this research again in her letter to J. C. Hobhouse, no trace of it remains. As the letter explains, "... I have the accumulation of a study founded on certainty upon my memory and my hands. I have the undigested materials to lay open a system of fraud and obscurity, transcending what is generally known ...". Based on her own experience and the historical records she consulted, Betham decided that "*vassalage* [is] the bond of society". Her cynical conclusion about the persistence of social injustice emerges most clearly in the blank verse elegy to her brother Edward, arguably the most anguished and philosophical of her poems.

The vignettes frequently employ a confessional voice that can be easily identified as Betham's own, but just as often, they speak of the sorrows and confinements of a number of individuals, real or imagined. The Advertisement offers compelling evidence that Betham retrospectively grasped the implications of poetic representation, that in speaking on behalf of others, the lyric ultimately may speak for oneself, since individuals contain within themselves a dialogism that requires diverse voices for full expression. The word "vignette" principally denotes a portrait that blurs into its background, rendering the human subject as the visual focus.

Betham's qualifying phrase, "In Verse," acknowledges her adaptation of a visual medium to its linguistic equivalent, an interchange she explored professionally as both miniaturist and biographer. Some of her poems explicitly play with the dual function of the pencil as the artist's and writer's tool. For instance, the poem addressed "To the Hon. Lady J--" was first presented with a picture of one of Lady Jerningham's granddaughters, and her elegy to Herbert Southey complements the water-colour on ivory miniature she painted for his parents. In fact, one reviewer of *Poems* observed that Betham's poetical sketches were drawn as well as her portraits.⁷⁷ Donald Winslow defines the vignette in both media:

In photography or portraiture a vignette is a picture showing only the head and upper part of the body, shading off gradually rather than having a definite border. In biography it has a meaning similar to that of **silhouette, sketch, or profile** —a brief portraiture presenting only outstanding features of the subject but suggesting the background into which they merge.⁷⁸

Betham's versified vignettes resemble those of portraiture, in that the "definite border" between her individual poetic subjects is blurred, with many of them sharing similar emotional experiences to each other and to Betham herself. Unique to this volume, the numbering system that begins with the first poem continues throughout the eighty pages, equalising each of its twenty-six poems as one in a collective unit.

The self's need for emotional release is the book's theme, as the introductory verse promises. The poem is disarmingly rendered in common metre, although the lyric really serves as self-referential commentary on the intentions of *Vignettes* in its entirety. Betham simply titles (and numbers) the poem "I".

If writing Journals were my task,
From cottagers to kings--

A little book I'd only ask,
And fill it full of wings!

Each pair should represent a day:
On some the sun should rise,
While others bent their mournful way
Through cold and cloudy skies.
(3)

The opening stanzas suggest that verse can perform the same function as the quotidian genre of journalism, with each poem representing a day in the life of various subjects from differing social backgrounds. The poem proceeds to state that some wings will look weary, some strong, some agitated, while others are the "happiest" in soaring in the ether until "The rapid and abrupt descent,/ [of] The stain'd and ruffled plume," an allusion to the failure of the poet's pen that recalls the Icarian fall recounted in "Rhapsody" (*Elegies* 5). In vignette 1, the image of flight (which re-emerges in several poems) expresses Betham's view that the representation of human subjects creates a liberating journal "full of wings". The importance of variety in the vignettes is summarised in the concluding stanza, "Alternately to rise and fall,/ Or float along the day -- / And this is Fortune -- This is all/ I would vouchsafe to say!" Betham's "I" tells us that she offers an inclusive volume of poetry that represents the range of human experience from high to low, an image she relates to the classical topos of Fortune's wheel.

Retrospectively, Betham saw in these poems patterns of confinement and bereavement. Her claim that the poems reflect her own "long seclusion" is borne out by the recurring theme of captivity, which is conveyed through images of chains, binds, webs, and winding tendrils, and by the diametrically opposed images of flight, birds, wings, and air. Vignettes III, X, XI, XIII, and XVI can be grouped together in their development of avian imagery to describe escape from an

adversary, whether human or inanimate. For instance, in vignette "III: The Artisan," the refrain "Which poverty has bound in chains" encloses the four stanzas, suggesting that the artist's voice is inescapably trapped in a cycle of impecunious isolation -- a condition Betham was all too familiar with. We learn, however, that the "sinking heart its freedom gains" through an imaginary relationship with a quiet hour:

How oft are all but thee [the hour] forgot!
 While in this half-despairing breast,
 Love builds a little, quiet nest,
 To hover o'er with joyous wing,
 Nay, sometimes soar aloft and sing!
 'Tis this alone the heart sustains,
 Which poverty has bound in chains!
 (10)

The fleeting hour of reflection is both figured as a bird and personified as a precious friend with whom the artisan can create a loving partnership that transcends the oppressiveness of financial hardship. Vignette *XVI* again compares an hour to a companionable bird, but this time as one whom the speaker imprisons in the deluded hope that "With the aid of my captive, / ... I can be free" (33). The tactic fails, however, and the speaker remains trapped in isolation. The futility of capturing time is one way that Betham addresses the ineffectiveness of many forms of domination. Tyrants themselves are subject to their own oppressiveness, since they only encourage defiance from their victims.

Vignette *IX* exemplifies this argument by celebrating the voice of dissonance over the "soft tone" of Art. Betham uses militaristic imagery to suggest the rebelliousness of feelings that resist the oppressive force of conventional thoughts and language:

I am unskill'd in speech: my tongue is slow
 The graceful courtesies of life to pay;

To deck kind meanings up in trim array,
 Keeping the mind's soft tone: words such as flow
 From Complaisance, when she alone inspires!
 And Caution, with a care that never tires,
 Marshals each tribe of thoughts in such a way
 That all are ready for their needful task,
 The moment the occasion comes to ask,
 All prompt to hear, to answer and obey;
 When mine, undisciplin'd, their cause betray,
 By coward falterings, or rebellious zeal!--
 And Art, though subtle, though sublime thy sway,
 I doubt if thou canst rule us, when we feel!
 (22)

Her opening to the sonnet, "I am unskilled in speech," makes an ironic statement about the predominant conception of eloquence: "speech" is defined merely as pleasing sycophancy, not genuine zeal. Orderly thoughts are subservient to the bullying command of Art, which has its field marshals in Complaisance and Caution, but undisciplined and rebellious feelings cannot be "ruled," and therefore represent an independence from the language of "graceful courtesies" and "trim array," phrases suggestive of the rhetoric of courtly politics or regimental commands.

Betham's distrust of certain kinds of language became entrenched over time. After her first incarceration, she grew increasingly suspicious of words, thinking that they were appropriated and manipulated by the wealthy and powerful, and that they were bound up with self-interested policies. This belief is alluded to in her letter to Hobhouse, but only vaguely and almost symbolically, when she writes of state "poisonings" that are as "subtle as conversation," and of words that "carry to some ... commands or extensive information". She is presumably referring to the conspiratorial language of government spies, who, as she asserts in *Challenge to Women*, spread hypocrisy and lies throughout the state. In a letter to the Royal Literary Fund, she claims that "the concurring testimony of all the [world's] languages" proves that "nefarious

traffic and management” have persisted throughout recorded history.⁷⁹ Her suspicions are so vaguely worded that it is difficult to determine her precise meaning, but it would seem that she suspected language itself of being immersed in a system of crime. She is more lucid when she mentions the injustices perpetrated in the madhouses and Britain's legal system, but she knows that her conspiracy theories have been met with great scepticism. Whether the product of insanity or not, Betham's fear that British institutions were carrying out acts of unspeakable cruelty is the main preoccupation in her "Elegy to Edward Betham". It too is largely concerned with the abuse of language and of human life and, ironically, with the ways in which words participate in the degradation of speech.

Betham's elegy laments both her brother's death and civilisation's obdurate privileging of mercantile over spiritual value. Edward's service in the East India Company's vessel, the *Jane, Duchess of Gordon*, cost him his life when it foundered off the Cape of Good Hope.⁸⁰ At the time of the poem's composition, the East India Company had enjoyed over two hundred years of profitable trade relations and was expected to accrue even more wealth.⁸¹ The elegy's persistent juxtaposition of commercial with internal value relies on imagery of commerce and craftsmanship, expressed most obviously in the description of her brother's character, which uses images of Britain's imported goods to convey the pricelessness of virtue:

Those gems of virtue, which concentrate still
 In narrow limits, stores of moral wealth
 Beyond all estimate— whose value known,
 The dealer sells his other merchandise;
 His ivory and curious workmanship,
 The silkworm's product and the cloth of gold,
 To purchase that imperishable store,
 More highly prized than all! --Possessing all
 The properties, most precious of the rest,

In a superior measure and degree,
 Without alloy, sparkling with inward light!
 (72, lines 16-26)

As we discover later in the poem, Betham uses the proverbial image with ironic intent, in order to critique the proliferation of monetary terms at the expense of another system of linguistic signage, one not yet discovered. As the poem proceeds to demonstrate, Betham must measure human *value* against metaphors of wealth because words themselves have been corrupted by commercial interests.

The enumeration of outer and inner properties introduces the terminology of exploration and international trade, and the commercial metaphors persist in Betham's philosophical reflection on the lessons ecology can teach us about external and internal language. The extended, rather complex comparison that follows builds on the parallel between the two kinds of "value" Betham discusses in relation to her brother; she goes on to suggest that language itself can operate in two ways, both falsely and externally (in the speech of current use) or truly and internally (the speech that no-one yet knows):

As of this world, this visible wide world,
 This earth, with all its forests, all its plants,
 All its deep mines, its rivers, and its seas,
 Yea! all that breathes, and moves, and clings to life
 By any subtler impulse, which eludes
 Our blunted observation: -- as of this,
 All that appears and all that is, so much
 Remains, in scorn of science, unexplor'd;
 So, in the not less wond'rous moral world,
 The innermost recesses of the mind,
 We see as little; save, Phoenician like,
 By petty trade and parley on its coasts,
 Talk by interpreters, impatient guess,
 Or careless resting in incertitude,
 At meaning in a tongue almost unknown;

Or so corrupted by this intercourse,
 That all its native harmony is lost,
 Its irresistible persuasions o'er!
 The clearness and the sweetness of its tones,
 Its loftiness, simplicity and truth.

All that we hear is coarse and limited,
 And yet we sail along and search no more,
 And look no farther, though the ear is pall'd
 With the vile din of tame monotony,
 The taste perverted, judgment led astray,
 By soul-annihilating idleness,
 By universal, strengthless poverty,
 Which leans upon its neighbour for support,
 And lifts the eye for sanction, or assent,
 To weakness still more helpless than its own!
 (76-7)

Like a commercial voyager staying on the coast, who cannot see deeply into the land he explores, the empirical eye of science cannot see into the workings of nature; equally, the deep workings of the psyche remain hidden and evade linguistic representation. Since language itself is incapable of translating the moral truths of life, we instead exchange words like property, using imperfect signs that misrepresent the "true," inner world. Toward the end of the passage, Betham contextualises her complaint about the futility of words in a social commentary on imperial trade relations that asserts the intimate relationship between the abuse of language and of human beings. Oral interaction perverts the "native" tongue by its "petty trade and parley," and the genuine musical quality of "loftiness, simplicity, and truth" that preceded imperial contact degenerates into a monotonous drone. As the etymology of the word shows, monotony is the reduction of many sounds to one. It is significant that Betham laments the loss of "tones" (conspicuously in the plural) speaking in "harmony"; here she explicitly associates the

heterogeneity of voice with poetic orality. The social consequences of the failure of communication are moral bankruptcy, widespread poverty, and subservience to weakness.

At the conclusion of the elegy, Betham compares her reflections to an internal journey that differs from the voyages undertaken by her brother in the East India Company's ships. She travels through "seas of anguish" to search for the truth of life, which has given her visionary insight into society's systemic perpetuation of injustice, a discovery that, as she informed Hobhouse, finally persuaded her that "*vassalage* [is] the bond of society":

Oh! my dear brother, little did I think
 These lines would be prophetic, yet to me
 They seem so; for I since have felt deep woe,
 And passed through seas of anguish to attain
 A view of mysteries wonderful and sad--
 Since they are rivetted, through every clime,
 With shame, and guilt, and wretchedness on all
 That bear what is only the *curse* of life,
 Whilst they remain, which have confronted time,
 Wearing the semblance, sporting with the names
 Of truth and valour, liberty and God,
 Successfully, through each recorded age,
 But yet *may* fall, and will, I trust and hope!
 (79-80)

If she were to defer to historical precedent, Betham would have to acknowledge the inevitability of corruption: "each recorded age" shows evidence that social tyranny and the misuse of moral terms not only survived, but flourished. Yet at the last line she offers a glimmer of optimism for a new social order. Betham's elegy tries to reclaim truth and liberty, giving hope that poetic language can defy recorded history and renew communication by questioning the misappropriation of words.

In expressing so much doubt about the realisation of an equitable and compassionate community, *Vignettes* is significantly more pessimistic than *Poems* or *Elegies*. However, like *The Lay of Marie*, all three volumes deal with the social role of lyric poetry -- how it offers release from self-interested concerns, how it establishes a bond between the present and the past, and how it alerts us to the sufferings of fellow human beings. Betham does not directly engage generic terms in any of her prefaces, nor does the word "lyric" appear in any of the titles, but her employment of titular descriptors such as "song," "elegy," "rhapsody," and "fragment" are all suggestive of the meditative, hymnal, and spontaneous qualities privileged by John Stuart Mill and his critical progeny. She also includes narrative poems without sacrificing the lyrical moment of confession or spontaneity. In fact, her work, through narrative devices, foregrounds the *social process* of lyric -- how poetic music can be achieved and how it makes an impact on an audience -- rather than the lyric moment's retreat from communal interaction. The model of the egotistical sublime and its subject-object dissolution enacted by an individual's imagination finds a responding paradigm in Dyer's theory of the subject-subject collusion of the poet speaking for many.

Betham's *Dictionary*, her polemical *Challenge to Women*, and her friendship with Dyer all point to the likelihood that she agreed that the "proper boundaries" of a woman poet empowered her to voice the experiences of many, both male and female. In doing so, she found a way to exceed the limitations imposed by social convention and egocentric preoccupations. Betham's narrative and soliloquised poems deal with a common theme: how privacy is appreciable only once shared, and how intimacy, through poetic expression, can be transformed into something experienced collectively. Betham's verse asserts more than the proprietorship of

her own subjectivity; in appropriating and representing many voices, she insists on her societal function as a spokesperson for the nation both as it is, and as it ought to be.

Notes to Chapter Three

- 1 Although the dedicatory letter in *Elegies* is dated November, 1797, William Ward dates the publication at 1798. *Literary Reviews in British Periodicals 1798-1820. A Bibliography*, vol. 1 (New York: Garland, 1972), 154. Morton Paley points out that all of the reviews of the work appear either in late 1798 or 1799. See "Coleridge's 'To Matilda Betham, from a Stranger,'" *Wordsworth Circle* 27 (1996), 172 n. 1. However, the publisher of *Elegies* records the date as 1797. See "Letter from Longman & Co. to Betham," 28 Nov. 1843, *ARLF*.
- 2 The association between the lyric and the Romantic movement is often traced back to Mill, who prioritized poems that emphasized emotion and internal reflection over action and external events. See John Stuart Mill, *Essays on Poetry*, ed. F. Parvin Sharpless (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1976). Mill's opinions provided the basis for later criticism on the lyric, since solitude, intimacy, atemporality, and, most consistently, musicality became the features most often attributed to lyric. In his influential 1913 edition of *Lyric Poetry*, Ernest Rhys corroborates Mill's position by suggesting that lyrics should "rise above" mere narrative and represent individual thoughts and feelings (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent, [1913], rpt. 1933). The key modern player in the critical designation of lyric was M. H. Abrams, whose description of the "greater lyric" catalogues the principal features of meditative nature poems: the speaker's description and reaction to landscape, his epiphanic realization of the landscape's change, and the poem's meditative odic mood. See M. H. Abrams, "Structure and Style In the Greater Romantic Lyric," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, eds. Frederick W. Hilles & Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 527-560.
- 3 The distinction between speaking *to* and speaking *for* others underpins Anne Janowitz's examination of George Dyer's politics in *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 4 See, for example, Alan Richardson's "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine," *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne Mellor, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 13-25. Richardson argues that the cult of sensibility was appropriated by the male poets; see also Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire. Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 5 Despite Wordsworth's position that his poetry appeals to a broad range of people, his identity as "a man speaking to men" has curtailed generic debate, with the result that Romantic studies traditionally have defined the poet as male. Christine Battersby's *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) investigates the correlation between the shifting definitions of "masculine," "feminine" and "genius" in order to demonstrate that, despite their permeations over time, women in the Romantic period are consistently defined against both terms: "Romanticism relies on a logic of exclusion. For the Romantics the figure of the genius was used to distinguish between the

work of Art (appreciated by an elite group of critics) and works produced for popular consumption by the masses. In the nineteenth century the masses and popular culture were given a female gender..." (6).

It is only fair to add that the association between masculinity and lyric persisted well into the twentieth century. Anne Williams selects a biblical patriarch, Job, as the original father of Romantic identity in *Prophetic Strain: the Greater Lyric in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 58. Likewise Barbara Hardy explicitly genders lyric when she praises poetry that, while exposing private feelings, demonstrates "action," both in term of active verbs and, occasionally, scenes of physical movement, qualities she implies are inherently masculine. In Donne's elegies she sees "phallic beauty" (23), and Arthur Hugh Clough's pastoral *The Bothie* exhibits "nakedness, energy, beauty and masculinity" when "the hexameters rush and throb" (43). See *The Advantage of Lyric* (Bloomington; London: Indiana University Press, 1977).

- 6 John Pinkerton, *Letters of Literature* (New York: Garland Pub., [1785] rpt. 1970), 34, 131. See especially his letter "On the spirit of lyric poetry". Pinkerton's identification of Sappho as the beautiful lyricist genders aesthetics according to Burke's terms, although he designates the modern practitioners as male.
- 7 Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric And Belles Lettres*, 3 vols. (New York: Garland Pub., [1785] 2nd ed. rpt. 1970), III. 138-9.
- 8 J. S. Mill, "What is Poetry?" *Essays on Poetry*, ed. F. Parvin Sharpless (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), 7.
- 9 Blair's essay "A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal" (1763) insists that "The Druids were their [the British people's] philosophers and priests; the Bards, their poets and recorders of heroic actions..." in *Ossian's Fingal, 1792*, intro. Jonathan Wordsworth (Poole; New York: Woodstock Books, 1996), 375.
- 10 George Ellis, *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, to which is Prefixed An Historical Introduction, On the rise and progress of Romantic composition in France and England* (London: Bohn, [1805] rpt. 1968), 10.
- 11 *Monthly Review* 26 (May 1798), 92-93.
- 12 Quoted in Charles Ryskamp's "Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* in Their Time," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, eds. Frederick W. Hilles & Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 358. Ryskamp suggests that the definition of the ballad as a "song" implies its lyricism.
- 13 Abrams uses the term "greater lyric" to describe the meditative poetry of the Romantics, and Charles Ryskamp calls Wordsworth's verse the "truer ballad". A former pupil of Abrams,

Anne Williams seizes on the evolutionary theory of the "rise" of lyric to argue its emergence from the spiritual legacy of Protestantism.

- 14 Unlike her more famous contemporaries, however, Betham rarely comments on the narration of the invented personae. In particular, the remarks Wordsworth offers in "Anecdote For Fathers," "We Are Seven," and "Expostulation and Reply," as well as the extensive notes he added to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, redirect our attention to the emotional experience of the poet. Betham instead focuses on the emotions of the speaker and on fictional auditors, a technique that removes her own voice from much of her poetry.
- 15 Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse. A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 9.
- 16 See Chapter One of Sonia Hofkosh's *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jacqueline Pearson's *Women's Reading in Britain*; and Thomas Kelly's *Early Public Libraries* (London: Library Association, 1966).
- 17 Thomas Mathias, *The Pursuits of Literature* (London: T. Becket, 1797); quoted in Hofkosh, 19.
- 18 Thomas Gisborne, *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: Cadell & Davies, 1797); quoted in Hofkosh, 19.
- 19 Janowitz, 12
- 20 Lockhart first published his review under the name Cornelius Webb in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* III (August 1818), 519-524; reprinted in *The Romantics Reviewed -- Shelley & Keats*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, (New York & London: Garland Pub., 1972), part C. Vol. 1., 90-95. See p. 90 for my citation.
- 21 Felix Schelling observed, "With Blake, Chatterton, and Burns in mind, and likewise with the respectable unlyrical people noticed above, [among others, Joanna Baillie and Hannah More] it might almost be said that the lyric by 1795 had fallen into the hands of women and children, ploughmen and mad folk. But the day was at hand, and the lyric was shortly to come to its own." *The English Lyric* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, [1913] rpt. 1967), 148. In the wake of the 1882 Married Women's Property Act, Schelling's theory of the Romantic lyric exhumes the legal corpus of property rights that formerly ensured gentlemen's ownership of land and money, and hence, the political voice. Those not entitled to it were (happily, in Schelling's view) about to be lyrically disenfranchised also. Clifford Siskin cites this passage to show how writing poetry came to be regarded as a profession suitable for gentlemen only. By extrapolation, the literary inferiority of women and labourers should disallow their appropriation of a valuable possession that should come to its

owner: See *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

- 22 *Monthly Mirror* 5 (Apr. 1798), 226; *New London Review* 1 (Mar. 1799), 298-99.
- 23 *British Critic* 12 (Aug. 1798), 182.
- 24 *Lady's Monthly Museum* 2 (Mar. 1799), 239-40.
- 25 For a discussion of the *LMM*, see Margaret Beetham's *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and desire in the woman's magazine, 1800-1914* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 17-35. She explains that, though the magazine forwarded various paradigms of female identity, it nevertheless sought to define the "lady" as distinct from the labouring female, who was depicted as "a potentially sexual being, which the lady was not, despite being 'a wife'" (27). Years later, Betham remembered this journal with disgust (*Crow-quill Flights* 10).
- 26 The reviewer's fear is reminiscent also of the *Encyclopaedia's* hostility to the "seditious" ballad, which was "mightily taken up" by "the people".
- 27 *LMM*, 240.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 240.
- 29 E. V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb* (London: Methuen, 1968), 351.
- 30 See his "Introduction" to Betham's *Poems*, v.
- 31 E. V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb*, 202.
- 32 Marris, ed., *Letters*, III. 196; III. 213.
- 33 *Ibid.*, I. 240.
- 34 M. Betham-Edwards, *Six Life Studies*, 303.
- 35 George Dyer, *The Poet's Fate*, intro. Donald H. Reiman (New York: Garland Pub., [1797] rpt. 1979), 26-28 n.32.
- 36 George Dyer, "Prefatory Essay on Lyric Poetry," *Poems* vol. 1, ed. Donald H. Reiman (New York: Garland Pub., [1802] rpt. 1978), xxxii.
- 37 *Ibid.*, xli-xlii

- 38 Ibid., lxxxi & lxxxiv-lxxxvi.
- 39 Janowitz, 54-5. However, Keats's images of the poet are often self-contradictory. He describes the poet as both empty of identity (and therefore, arguably, selfless) and as autocratic, a Jove who sits passive but supremely powerful. With the publication of "The Eve of St. Agnes," he hoped to reach the Parnassian heights of genius -- "gradus ad Parnassum altissimum"-- an ascension that Betham explicitly rejected. See Keats's *Letters in Selected Poems and Letters*, ed. Douglas Bush, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 266; 294.
- 40 Dyer, "Essay on Representative Poetry," *Poems* vol. II, ed. Donald H. Reiman (New York: Garland Pub., [1802] rpt. 1978), 24.
- 41 Compare Dyer's view with William Rogers's discussion of how *voice* means consciousness, in *The Three Genres and the Interpretation of Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). He argues that poems with the "anomalous voice" (in which the speaker cannot be regarded as the author) allows "the author to encounter himself on the pre-discursive level, and to symbolize himself, his presence, in the moment of becoming a "voice"; the anomalous voice accomplishes this by providing an "other" with whom the author stands in a fictive relation like empathy" (85).
- 42 A sketch of Dyer's character and friendships with Lamb and Hays appears in Winifred Courtney's *Young Charles Lamb 1775-1802* (London; Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), 203-214.
- 43 Morton Paley regards Betham as politically conservative; see Chapter Two, endnote 10. John Cam Hobhouse (1750-1832) and Henry Brougham (1778-1868) were radical politicians who openly criticized the authorities responsible for the Peterloo Massacre. Lord Brougham was also instrumental in passing the 1832 Reform Bill.
- 44 Betham, "Letter to J. C. Hobhouse," 16 April 1820, British Library.
- 45 Whig ladies showed support for Queen Caroline by visiting her once she was acquitted. See Neville Blackburne's *Ladies' Chain* (London: The Falcon Press, 1952), 168. For an account of the trial, see also Joanna Richardson, *The Disastrous Marriage. A Study of George IV and Caroline of Brunswick* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960); Thea Holme, *Caroline A Biography of Caroline of Brunswick* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979); and Anna Clark, "Queen Caroline and the Sexual Politics of Popular Culture in London, 1820," *Representations* 31 (1990), 47-68.
- Betham's close friend Charles Lamb sided with the Queen also, as is evident from his letter to William Ayrton, when he wrote, "Vivat Regina Moriatur ***" E. V. Lucas, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, II. 305.
- 46 Matilda Betham-Edwards's biographer and friend Sarah Grand states that she signed the first

petition to Parliament for the enfranchisement of women. *Mid-Victorian Memories* (London: John Murray, 1919), xxxiii.

- 47 *Challenge to Women* (London: Moses, 1821), 8.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 2-3.
- 49 Sir William sent Sir Robert Peel a complimentary copy of his book *Irish Antiquarian Researches*: "Letter to Sir R. Peel," 20 July 1826, Correspondence...of...Sir Robert Peel, Add. 40388 f. 96, British Library. For information on the populist movement during the Queen Caroline affair, see Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 162-177; Tim Fulford, "Cobbett, Coleridge and the Queen Caroline Affair," *Studies in Romanticism* 37 (1998), 523-543.
- 50 See Isobel Armstrong, "'A Music of Thine Own' Women's poetry-- an expressive tradition?" in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), 318-377.
- 51 As Anne Mellor argues, "Romantic women writers represent a subjectivity constructed in relation to other subjectivities, hence a self that is fluid, absorptive, responsive, with permeable ego boundaries...". See "A Criticism of Their Own: Romantic Women Literary Critics," in *Questioning Romanticism*, ed. John Beer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 31. Mellor reiterates this position in *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 87.
- 52 See *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Stuart Curran (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). In his introduction to Smith's poetry, Curran explains that she was instrumental in reviving the sonnet in Romantic writing (xxvi). As early as 1913, however, Felix Schelling claimed that Smith revived the sonnet sequence (*The English Lyric* 144).
- 53 Jerome McGann, "The Failures of Romanticism," in *Romanticism, History and the Possibilities of Genre*, eds. Tilottama Rajan and Julia M. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 270-87.
- 54 *A Biographical Dictionary*, 655. Charlotte Smith, still alive in 1804, is of course absent from Betham's *Dictionary*.
- 55 Hitherto, the poem has been dated circa 1798, but Betham states that she first composed it in 1794. She provides a complete copy of the poem and an explanation of the circumstances surrounding its composition in her autobiography (*Crow-quill Flights* 5-7).
- 56 *The Augustan Review* 2 (April 1816), 422; cf. Samuel Johnson, *Life of Richard Savage* (Menston, England: [2nd ed. 1748], rpt. Scholar Press, 1971). My thanks go to Professor Frans de Bruyn for helping me to identify the allusion.

- 57 Tilottama Rajan, "Romanticism and the Death of Lyric Consciousness," in *Lyric Poetry. Beyond New Criticism*, eds. Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 198. The privileging of soliloquised poems and debasement of poems with personae takes its cue from Mill's (and later, Abrams's) insistence on the confessional, unselfconscious poetic voice. See Herbert Tucker's essay "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric," in *Lyric Poetry*. He objects that Abrams's "'greater lyric' was not more-lyrical than lyric, but rather more-than-lyrical" (236). In other words, he believes one can accommodate the dramatic monologue into lyric, regardless of the genre's reliance on location and time, since these two elements contribute to the poetic construction of selfhood.
- 58 *Lady's Monthly Museum* 2 (Oct. 1799), 313.
- 59 J. G. Zimmerman, *Solitude. Or, The Influence of Occasional Retirement Upon the Mind and the Heart* (London: Vernor & Hood, 1798), 30. (Sometimes spelled "Zimmermann"). All future citations of this work will appear in the body.
- 60 The title "Rhapsody" found in *Elegies* appears to be a sub-generic label. Internal evidence from the poem (the use of the word Phoebus and its metaphor of the cloud), coupled with the aerial imagery Coleridge uses in his own poem "To Matilda Betham," suggest that this is the ode on a cloud that Coleridge heard and to which he poetically responded.
- 61 Betham uses this description again in her entry on Cleopatra in the *Biographical Dictionary*, 248.
- 62 Morton Paley points out the allusion to Prospero's speech, but does not explain how Betham uses it to develop her theme of the abnegation of power ("Coleridge's 'To Matilda Betham, from a stranger,'" 170).
- 63 John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death. Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 64 E. Betham, ed. *Letters*, 78.
- 65 *Critical Review* s3, v14 (July 1808), 274 & 276.
- 66 *Annual Review* 7 (1808), 501-2.
- 67 (*Crow-quill Flights* 12 & 18).
- 68 Mill's famous pronouncement, "eloquence is *heard*, poetry is *overheard*" ("What is Poetry?" 12) articulates the view that the poet should appear unaware of his readers, but it also makes

a conflicted claim about an audience's role. For while the dictum insists on a poet's independence from the reception of his revelations, it also paradoxically demands an eavesdropping audience for this intimacy between speaker and listener to exist. Betham's poetry stresses the importance of "audience" to show that its impact has social consequences.

- 69 *Elegies* does use quotation marks in narrative poems recounted as a past event, such as in "Arthur and Albina," but never in the kind of confessional verse found in *Poems*. In the first volume, quotations signal distance between the characters and the objective narrator, whereas their use in *Poems* suggests the immediacy of the speaker's presence.
- 70 In arguing that Betham's incorporation of audience relates to her radical political position, I question William Rowland's view that this technique of creating a surrogate reader is evidence of the Romantic poet's suspicion of the masses and the valorization of his own private experiences. While this may hold true for Wordsworth and Coleridge, it cannot easily be argued for radicals such as Betham or Dyer. See Rowland's *Literature and the Marketplace* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); and Lucy Newlyn's *Romanticism and the Anxiety of Reception*.
- 71 *Annual Review* 7 (1808), 499. See also *Crow-quill Flights* 12.
- 72 Betham tells us that a Mr. Voight, Mr. Walsh, and Mr. A. Pettit of Norwich set three of her songs to music (*Poems* 39, 41, 45).
- 73 In 1816, Betham felt compelled to express regret at Southey's reactionary stance on religious dissenters, but Southey wrote to Betham that he would not retract his remarks: "That stanza in my lay which made you sorry, will make others angry; ...They [the Dissenters] have no common principle but that of hatred to the Establishment, and a union formed upon that principle is abominable" (E. Betham, ed., *Letters*, 169). As I have indicated in this chapter, Betham argued the reverse, stating that powerful institutions were inherently corrupt.
- 74 E. V. Lucas, ed., *Letters*, III. 238; III. 234.
- 75 E. Betham, ed., *Letters*, 233-4.
- 76 *British Lady's Magazine* s.3, v.2 (Mar. 1819), 127-8.
- 77 "This lady, if the Miss B. whose works we observed in the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, displays the same pictures of fascinating delicacy with her pencil as in her poetical effusions; and deservedly attracted the attention of the amateurs of miniature painting. *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* 34 (Oct. 1809), 204.
- 78 Donald J. Winslow, *Life Writing. A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography, And Related Forms* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1980), 42.

- 79 In a letter to an unknown recipient, dated 26 July 1821, *ARLF*.
- 80 Weighing 820 tonnes, the *Duchess of Gordon* survived two voyages and served from 1804-07. See Jean Sutton, *Lords of the East. The East India Company and its Ships* (Conway: Maritime Press, 1981), 167.
- 81 For a useful and succinct account of the Company's two hundred and fifty year history, see Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London & New York: Longman, 1993). Between 1801-1810, the decade in which Edward Betham served on the *Duchess of Gordon*, the average yearly sales at the Company, excluding tea, was £ 4,679,242. For financial tables detailing sales, see C. J. Hamilton, *The Trade Relations between England & India, 1600-1896* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, [1919] rpt. 1975), 255-260.

Chapter Four:

The Lay of Marie and the Metrical Romance Revival

In its amalgamation of her scholarly and poetic endeavours, *The Lay of Marie* (1816) represents Matilda Betham's most ambitious undertaking, with the first half of the volume inventing the life history of Marie de France, and the second compiling scholarly information and translations of the medieval poet's lays. Her close friend Charles Lamb believed that *Marie* met with less attention than it deserved because it was so unusual, and lamented that its publication had reduced her income; "she has contracted debts for printing her beautiful poem of "Marie" which like all things of original excellence does not sell at all."¹ Certainly it reached a limited audience, going through only one edition during Betham's lifetime and receiving merely one review, despite the volume's attempt to appeal to both antiquarians and readers of poetry. When Betham informed Robert Southey of her plan to write a narrative poem about the minstrel, he recommended she append some research to improve its scholarly appeal:

I think I know Whom you mean, a Marie somewhat, whose name and history I will look for. It would be very desirable that you should see her lays; If they are not very numerous, you will insure an antiquarian value in your book by inserting them.
(*Letters* 147)

Although Southey himself evidently knew little about the troubadour, Betham, understandably swayed by the advice of a Poet Laureate whose own verse romances found wide appreciation, attached eight short explanatory Notes and two Appendices.

According to Donald Reiman, editor of the Garland Reprint Series of Betham's poetry, Southey's suggestion did not enhance her poem: "Southey *may* have been correct in suggesting that she publish an antiquarian treatise and a bad English synopsis of Marie's Norman-French

lays," he accedes doubtfully, but proceeds to lament the well-intentioned meddling of Betham's patronizing male friends.² Reiman appears to suspect Betham of deferring to the Poet Laureate's advice by cobbling together a few scholarly notes subsequent to her original plan. The more recent Woodstock edition follows Reiman's lead by omitting the two Appendices altogether.³ However, Betham had begun background research on Marie before 1804, the publication date of her *Biographical Dictionary*, which includes an entry on "Mary, An Anglo-Norman Poetess, of the thirteenth century". Moreover, the Notes and Appendices demonstrate that the research shaped the poem's composition. These endnotes are, in fact, key to contextualizing Betham's participation in a mode explored by several women poets of the early nineteenth century: the historically informed narrative poem.

Before discussing the poetic section of *The Lay of Marie*, I will establish that Betham's research drew upon popular antiquarian texts, sources that had been influential in fostering renewed interest in medieval scholarship in the latter half of the eighteenth century. An overview of the antiquarian movement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries will show how the metrical romance emerged from this trend, and how the genre encouraged patriotic fervour for oral, bardic history. I shall then turn my attention to a few women poets who shared Betham's interest in this genre, and demonstrate that the form enabled them to assume a bardic voice to advance scholarly and creative historical representations of the chivalric period, a trend that suggests women writers' participation in the recuperation of Britain's artistic and political heritage. The chapter will conclude by focusing specifically on the poetic biography in *The Lay of Marie* and its relation to contemporary discussions of women's authority to assume the bard's role of articulating a nation's literary history. *Marie* represents

Betham's examination of a medieval woman poet through a genre that permitted scholarly and poetic expressions of the past.

i. The Medieval Revival

The reception of Betham's work may help us determine the degree of importance we should attribute to the background research appended to the volume. Interestingly, Betham's personal correspondents, while admiring the poem itself for its originality, do not allude to her scholarly endnotes. The poet Allan Cunningham found Betham's plot a page-turner: "to linger in perusing your Poem was impossible; when I began to read, I read on, & I perused it twice without laying it down" (*Letters* 148-9). Charles Lamb, who edited *Marie* for appropriate diction and perfect rhyme but declined assisting her with the appendices, praised its sentimental elegance (he called the lay "very delicately pretty as to sentiment").⁴ Their silence with respect to the second half of the volume might lead us to conclude that the appendices were indeed secondary to the metrical romance itself.

However, the only contemporary review of *Marie*, which appeared in *The Augustan Review* in April 1816, is as careful in its evaluation of the appendices as of the poem, and concludes by encouraging future scholarship on the life and works of the medieval troubadours.⁵ The *Review* also indicates that the appendices work in conjunction with the poetry, and recommends that Betham's readers not neglect her antiquarian research:

The Lay of Marie occupies but half the volume to which it gives its name; the remainder of the pages being filled by an appendix, into which we would have our readers look attentively, before they enter upon the perusal of the poem. This will be found highly

expedient towards a clear understanding of who Marie was, and when and why and where she sang.⁶

Evidently, the reviewer took Betham's Notes as seriously as the lay itself, partly because, as we discover later in the notice, of his esteem for the works of the medieval troubadours, and he expounds the virtues of medieval romances; "...tales, novels, and novelettes of the present day present no adventures half so interesting as the legends of the troubadours" (*Augustan Review* 429). Betham, however, escapes censure by herself becoming a "courteous and confiding bard" who invites readers to investigate Marie's life and works for themselves: "The notes to the poem will interest such readers as have the laudable desire to comprehend as well as understand the subject which engages them" (428). The reviewer's epistemological distinction between "comprehend" and "understand" implies a structural duality in the volume as a whole: while the notes appeal to reason by supplying factual information about the troubadour, the poem provides "understanding," or an empathetic knowledge of its subject, Marie de France. The recommendation that we read the scholarship before the poem, even though the lay precedes the notes, evidences the reviewer's position that Betham's "comprehension" contributed to her "understanding" of the subject. In devoting this space to the notes, extracts, and translations of Marie's lays, *The Augustan Review* usefully directs our attention to the medieval scholarship behind the poem, and implies that, since the publication emerges as much from antiquarian scholarship as Betham's imagination, *Marie* strikes a compromise between objective and subjective representations of history.

In order to place this poem within the context of other contemporary works exploring similar negotiations between a writer's personal imagination and a society's perception of

historical fact, we need to understand the trends to which Betham responds, in particular, the developing fascination with Celtic and medieval scholarship. Betham's indebtedness to prominent authors who instigated the antiquarian movement indicates that the revival of medieval poetry in the latter part of the eighteenth century played a significant role in shaping her project. Betham expanded the research on Marie found in *A Biographical Dictionary*, in which she states that "all the Northern nations had a sort of oral, itinerant poets, who were admired and revered..." (468). Betham draws upon the received wisdom about the cultural prominence of wandering bards, while arguing that records prove the existence of at least one female precedent. In the Notes and Appendices to *The Lay of Marie*, Betham acknowledges further research on the poet by referring to scholarly texts that investigated early English literary history. In the eight Notes to her poem, she annotates or quotes directly from Joseph Walker's *Historical Memoirs of Irish Bards* (1786), George Ellis's *Specimens of early English Metrical Romances*, Walter Scott's Notes to *Sir Tristrem* (1804), Thomas Brydson's *A Summary Review of Heraldry* (1789), and G. L. Way's *Fabliaux* (1796, 1800). The first Appendix extracts from Monsieur Abbé de La Rue's "Dissertation on the Life and Writings of Marie," and the second Appendix provides translations of Marie's lays by Ellis, Way, and Scott, all of them key players in the revitalization of studies in early and medieval English culture, a trend variously referred to as the "Celtic Revival," the "Medieval Revival," or the "Chivalric Revival" in critical texts.

The consensus is that this movement began in earnest during the second half of the eighteenth century. Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) coupled with James Macpherson's *The Poems of Ossian* (1760-5) are the works most often credited with furthering popular interest in the nation's literary heritage and with reviving enthusiasm for the

Gothic period. The rising popularity of medieval romance also depended on its broad appeal and range of application. As Gillian Beer's landmark book about the medieval genre explains, the romance's two modes are characterized as aristocratic and epic, and popular and balladic; thus the romance could potentially satisfy popular taste even as it focused on aristocratic characters and chivalric events. In addition, the romance combines the exotic with the familiar by invoking the "past or the socially remote" while rendering courtly subject matter into accessible language.⁷ By the early nineteenth century, the influence of the chivalric revival manifested itself in writers of all political stripes, a phenomenon that accounts for diverging critical perspectives that emphasize the genre's appropriation by either conservatives or radicals. For instance, Marlon Ross argues that Scott's metrical romance fulfils a conservative agenda by enforcing a homogenizing "authoritative voice of history" through its fictional representation of the audience's reaction to the minstrel's lay.⁸ On the other hand, David Duff argues that Percy Shelley uses romance to imagine a Utopian republic.⁹ The popularity of romance with authors of such different persuasions unfixes any absolute correlation between the genre and politics. As David H. Richter explains,

For the progressives, the Middle Ages are a time of the hegemony of the folk, whose voice sings to us in the ballads and the border minstrelsy For the reactionaries, the Middle Ages are a time when the old order is unquestioned and unquestionable: where monarchs are absolute and despots need not even profess enlightenment.¹⁰

The flexibility of antiquarianism's applications eventually rendered it palatable to many nineteenth-century authors and audiences, although "the romance" as a genre had not always found such favour; indeed, even at the end of the eighteenth century, "romance" had been

frequently satirized as a lowbrow and even politically dangerous genre.¹¹ By the time Betham composed her lay, however, anxieties about romance as a subversive genre had been largely put to rest, and the medieval revival was lauded for its reclamation of ancient British literature.

The legitimacy of ancient English scholarship, it should be stressed, was contested into the nineteenth century, partly because eighteenth-century historians generally disparaged nascent British culture in its "Dark Ages" as unlettered, and partly because several prominent writers questioned the reliability of early British historiography. Both contestations stimulated a debate that spawned several tracts about medieval research. The second objection culminated in the "Ossianic debate," which involved James Macpherson's claim to have translated the Gaelic poems of the Scottish bard into English. Put reductively, the question was whether Macpherson translated or simply invented original Gaelic poems, but at the heart of the debate lay more complex issues of authoritative historical scholarship, of whether an act of individual imagination complements or confounds authentic research. Key participants in this debate included such luminaries as Samuel Johnson, Hugh Blair, and William Wordsworth, authors whose literary status demonstrates the seriousness with which the argument was treated.¹² As I will discuss later, Betham's poem and notes in part served to review this argument by allowing factual and fictional representations of history to speak dialectically to this issue through a dual representation of the past.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century, the patronizing attitude toward medievalism was evident even in essayists who advocated scholarship about ancient England, such as James Beattie and John Pinkerton. Pinkerton's Letter XXXVI ("How far a poet who draws his subject from antiquity ought to be an antiquary") speaks of "night" succeeding the classical age,

darkening the skills of medieval authors so completely that a modern writer is probably more reliable than the "monkish historian" of the past. Pinkerton therefore concludes that the artist has license to invent medieval narratives: "Much scope is therefore left to the poet; and, if he errs not against the *costume* of greater notoriety, he is as likely to be right as any historian, or romance-writer of the times...".¹³ This benediction on the imaginings of historical writers, by favouring the side of the Ossianic debate that accepts a fictional rendition of the past, trusts in the ingenuity of authors of romance, if not in the reliability of medieval historians. Addressing the subject of medieval narratives, James Beattie explains his suspicion of the monks' reliability by supposing that the want of classical reading in what he calls the "dark ages" accounts for the proliferation of extravagantly improbable tales.

Previous to Macpherson's *Ossian*, interest in early English, Scottish, and Irish writing was negligible. Romances and ballads appeared in chapbooks for children during the seventeenth century but were rarely read in the original, and scholars in the first half of the eighteenth century appeared to be at best indifferent to medieval romances.¹⁴ "Throughout the seventeenth century and first half of the eighteenth," observes Edward Snyder, "there were no English poems of importance translated from Irish, Gaelic, or Welsh, and only a very few in which the mythology of the Druids played a serious part."¹⁵ Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* and Macpherson's *Ossian* sparked interest in both an oral tradition of early British poetry and in national history generally. That the interest in national heritage was historical as well as literary is evidenced in the number of publications that focused on Britain's past. William Cooke's *An Enquiry into the Patriarchal and Druidical Religions, Temples, etc.* (1754), Robert Henry's *History of Great Britain* (1771), Sharon Turner's *The History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1799-1805),

John Collinson's *The History and Antiquities of the County of Somerset* (1791), Edward Davies' *Celtic Researches* (1804) -- not to mention the many antiquarian societies established after 1760 -- all point to a trend advocated by John Pinkerton in 1788 in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, wherein he argues that the revival of British heritage would "be regarded as a service both to patriotism and to literature."¹⁶

The patriotic motive of literary excavation emerges in editions of ancient British poetry, whose most influential proponents in the eighteenth century included Thomas Percy, Thomas Warton, George Ellis, Joseph Ritson, Richard Hurd, and Joseph Walker. Included in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* are essays on metrical romances and minstrels, and a collection of English poems, songs and ballads from the 14th to the 17th centuries. The compilation represents a blend of antiquarian research and his own creative editing, for, having heeded William Shenstone's advice to improve the original ballads, Percy altered a few of the manuscript poems and included some of his own imitation pieces. Percy's essay "On The Ancient Metrical Romances, Etc." in *Reliques* depicts the Saxon as a Noble Savage, who honours the "fair sex" and the bardic poet as a source of knowledge and inspiration.¹⁷ Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry* idealizes the Saxon language and speaks regretfully of its adulteration by Norman French, which he describes as "a confused jargon of Teutonic, Gaulish, and vitiated Latin."¹⁸ He consequently focuses on English (not Norman) metrical romances, alluding only briefly to the "French Poetess" Marie in his *History of English Literature*.¹⁹ Equally preoccupied with British poetry, Richard Hurd (1720-1808) investigates in *Letters of Chivalry and Romance* (1762) the importance of medieval writing as an inspiration for English poets, and argues that Spenser owed much of his success to earlier romances. The radical

vegetarian Joseph Ritson aims for historical accuracy in his edition of *Ancient Songs, from the time of King Henry the Third, to the revolution* (1790), which promises in the Advertisement "evident and indisputable authority." Like Warton, he chooses to focus on English rather than Norman songs, and also includes samples of musical scores with lyrics. He pursued English antiquarian scholarship in *Robin Hood: A Collection Of all the Ancient Poems, ...[with] Historical Anecdotes* (1795), in which he prefaces the ancient songs and ballads about the English hero with such biographical information as can be verified by external sources. Ritson set himself against the revered Percy by privileging accurate editing and historical precision over (what Ritson considered to be) Percy's idealized, overly imaginative rendition of the past. These scholars' methodological persuasions accord with their positions respecting "history"-- Percy privileges oral tradition while Ritson favours written documentation. Yet, whatever their differences, they all participated in a patriotic excavation of national poetry that, in time, investigated the prominence of Britain's first itinerant poets.

The chauvinistic impulse in medieval studies encouraged scholarship on the national origins of the romance genre. In a racially motivated argument James Beattie suggests that the fabulous narratives he gently mocks were imported from Oriental nations.²⁰ In 1814, literary historian John Colin Dunlop published an overview and critique of eighteenth-century antiquarian research with his *History of Prose Fiction*. In it, he summarizes arguments made about medieval romance and traces the growth of English storytelling from the medieval romance to the modern novel, beginning with John Lyly's *Euphues*. The common belief that escapist literature came from the exotic East with the crusaders and blended with the more rational Northern world found wide acceptance with Dunlop's immediate predecessors, although

Warton disputed the received opinion and argued that fabulous tales entered England much earlier.²¹ The idea that romance was imported to Europe from the East possibly accounts for Betham's depiction of her heroine in the poem's Preface as the "union of European and Eastern beauty, in the person of Marie" (vi). Marie's body embodies the textual history of the metrical romance. Physically, she has the stereotypical exotic physique -- "The form.../ And movement, only thought to grace/ The dark and yielding Eastern race;" -- but fair, Anglo-Saxon colouring (11). As both mysterious enchantress who captivates her audience with a "wilder'd song" and as truth-teller who accurately recounts her life history, Marie embodies Oriental fantasy and Northern dependability, and as the entertaining historian Marie also fulfils the role of the bard as it was popularly conceived by eighteenth-century scholars.

By the time Betham turned her attention to Marie as a potential subject, the notion of the bard as sublime poet was so firmly entrenched that Byron, in his satire *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* of 1809, laments the plenitude of metrical rhymesters. "No dearth of bards can be complain'd of now," Byron sneers, and adds, "Thus Lays of Minstrels -- may they be the last! -- /On half-strung harps whine mournful to the blast".²² Byron's *Dunciad* disparages these bards while acknowledging the popularity of extended narrative poems by listing such successful works as Southey's "windy epics" and Scott's "stale romance," *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. The movement that Byron satirized, and to some extent adopted when he composed romances such as *The Giaour*, originated with the medieval scholars of the previous century, who found in the bardic hero the embodiment of an orally transmitted national history.

Thomas Percy's *Reliques* characterized the bard as the honoured leader of early British culture, one who was beloved of royalty and alternately performed the functions of priest,

prophet, and poet. Not surprisingly, Joseph Ritson, highly suspicious of Percy's view of the bard, points out instead that minstrels were treated as vagrants during Elizabethan England, and claims, moreover, that the harp was held in "lowest estimation" and was "rarely used as an English instrument."²³ But Ritson's view proved unpopular, and the next several decades of writers favoured Percy's vision. Artistic and scholarly representations exalted the bard to the rank of "vates" -- priest, legislator, poet, historian and prophet.

The notable antiquarians after Percy who promoted the bardic hero include James Beattie, Joseph Cooper Walker, George Ellis, and Hugh Blair. A professor of moral philosophy and logic at the University of Aberdeen, Beattie published a series of essays in *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (1783), one of which explores the origins of Romance. He claims that troubadours of the twelfth century, many of whom were royal princes, were "the fathers of modern learning".²⁴ A related work that Betham annotates in her Notes to *The Lay* is J. C. Walker's *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* (1786). Walker indicates that different kinds of bards discharged specific functions, but that the Chief Bard held "a rank which imposed on him the several offices of poet, historian and legislator," a definition that anticipates Shelley's vates.²⁵ George Ellis concurred with Percy in *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances*, another work to which Betham refers, that the minstrels won public favour and often received lavish gifts.²⁶ Macpherson's principal defender, Hugh Blair, declared in his "Critical Dissertation," first published in 1792, that the bards functioned as the "poets and recorders of heroic actions".²⁷ In fact, Blair's defence of *Ossian's* authenticity relies heavily on the assumption that the Gaels honoured and preserved the poems of their bards. Blair's *Collected Lectures* authoritatively summarizes the received opinion that bards were held in the highest esteem:

Among the Celtic tribes, in Gaul, Britain, and Ireland, we know, in what admiration their bards were held, and how great [an] influence they possessed over the people. They were both Poets and Musicians, as all the first Poets, in every country, were. They were always near the person of the chief or sovereign; they recorded all his great exploits; they were employed as the ambassadors between contending tribes, and their persons were held sacred.²⁸

Successful as these antiquarians were in promoting the bard, the heroic identity of the minstrel found equally persuasive advocates in poetry, especially in Thomas Gray's *The Bard. A Pindaric Ode* (1757), James Beattie's *The Minstrel* (1773-4), and Sir Walter Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). As I shall demonstrate below, Betham drew on both creative and scholastic traditions to create her own bardic heroine.

The Bard illustrates how poetry can transform a mundane historical account into an exciting narrative: Gray relied on historian Thomas Carte's account of Edward the First's massacre of the Welsh bards for his poem's premise. Gray's protagonist is the last surviving bard, who raves to his foe from a mountain top above the River Conway. His resemblance to Milton's Satan is iterated in the bard's meteoric fall to Earth in the final scene, when Gray's hero chooses victorious death over submission to a despot (cf. *Paradise Lost* I.45). After prophesying the tyrant Edward's wretched death and the ascendance of the House of Tudor, the Bard vows "To triumph, and to die," and plunges from the mountain into the River Conway. Despite initially receiving some negative reviews, the poem soon endeared itself to the public and inspired other bardic poems and pictorial representations of the sublime poet-hero.²⁹

Gray and Macpherson were in large part responsible for the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fascination with the oral poet. As historian Sam Smiles observes, the popularity of

"Gray's bard, Ossian and the bards of the Ancient Britons all demonstrated the necessity and power of poetry in a more heroic age."³⁰ Smiles lists the many examples of pictorial representations of Gray's bard to show how the character achieved an increasingly sublime and heroic status, from Richard Bentley's *The Bard* (1757) to John Martin's depiction under the same title (1817). Derived from Richard Corbould's work, which had been exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1807, Martin's *Bard* interprets Gray's hero as "elevated ... above the common herd of soldiery, to rank as prophet and seer among the eagles."³¹ Betham's ode "To the River which separates itself from the Dee at Bedkellert" identifies the turbulent Conway, the site of Gray's famous poem, as a metonymic representation of a visionary poet, an allusion that suggests her endorsement of Gray's representation. Betham here expresses the lyrical moment through a persona, whose presence as a speaking voice defines poetry as an oral genre; thus, *The Lay of Marie* is an extension of the lyrical poetry discussed above in Chapter Three.

Beattie's influential poem *The Minstrel*, which was popular enough to go through four editions, had anticipated the kind of autobiographical reminiscences found in Betham's lay. *The Minstrel* includes a Preface that explains how the poem traces "the progress of a Poetical Genius" to the status of a minstrel, "a character which, according to the notions of our forefathers, was not only respectable, but sacred."³² Beattie's aspiring Minstrel, Edwin, is the child of a shepherd who grows up in the Northern solitude, worshipping Nature with a "romantic eye" and attending to "Gothic" legends and songs. In his wanderings described in Book II, he meets a hoary, solitary harpist, who summarizes the progress of civilization from its fanciful beginnings to scientific reasoning. Compared to Gray's bard, Beattie's Minstrel of Book II appears unimpassioned and pedantic; the Minstrel's function is to convey a didactic message

about how poetic effusions should be tempered with simplicity. Nevertheless, the central role of Beattie's visionary points to the emergence of the bardic hero, one whose biography comprises the poem's narrative.

Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), as the title suggests, also shares some similarities with Betham's work.³³ Both lays are written predominantly in rhyming iambic tetrameter; both employ a frame narrative through which they depict the audience's reaction to the minstrels, and both exalt a minstrel whose poetry transports them beyond their immediate surroundings. However, private sorrow compels Marie to confess her story, whereas ancient legends inspire Scott's minstrel, a difference that leads Jonathan Wordsworth to distinguish, first, the "inwardness of Betham's writing" from Scott's poem and, second, the beauty of Marie from the "infirm and old" male harper of Scott's imagination.³⁴

Although the upsurge of intellectual and creative discussions about ancient English poetry began long before Sir Walter Scott composed his metrical romance, he became the most financially successful of all antiquarian poets. His collection of Scottish poetry, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1803), had already reached a wide market, selling 45,000 copies in the first three years alone, and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), which similarly focused on the Gaelic oral poetic tradition, sold 125,000 copies within two years.³⁵ No wonder, then, that Scott's success encouraged the indigent Matilda Betham, who had experimented with lyrics set in antiquity as early as 1794, to invent her own bardic lay.

ii. The Medieval Lay and Women Writers

Betham's choice of the medieval bard Marie testifies to her admiration of female literary predecessors, an interest previously evidenced in her *Biographical Dictionary*, but Betham was not alone in her investigation of women's prominence in medieval England. She shared the Bluestockings' agenda to contextualize themselves within a community of authors. As Sylvia Harcstock Myers explains, "the first bluestockings, as they reached out in the direction of literary work, noticed and responded to a variety of women writers who had gone before them."³⁶ Although historiography was vested with masculine authority, a fact that arguably accounts for Scott's rise to authorial eminence, women scholars and poets nevertheless evinced considerable interest in medieval history, the reasons for which critics have yet to explore fully.³⁷ Anne Mellor's contestation that the invocation of "visionary experiences or supernatural events in medieval or exotic settings" is particular to the male Romantic poet obviates women poets' participation in the metrical romance revival.³⁸ In fact, the antiquarian movement introduced an alternative branch of study to classical history that appealed not just to Betham but to many women scholars and poets. Barred from a classical education, some women nevertheless might choose to satisfy antiquarian enthusiasm by learning about the "dark ages" of "Old England". The Gothic period inspired not only women novelists of Ann Radcliffe's talent, but also female poets and Bluestocking essayists, possibly because the chivalric age was popularly believed to have witnessed an improvement in gender equity.

Several male scholars perceived the ancient North as generous toward the female sex, a position that justifies Betham's characterization of Marie's audience as courteous and receptive to a female public speaker. Thomas Percy's declaration that Northern nations were famous for

the "respectful complaisance shewn to the fair sex" found support with Richard Hurd and James Beattie.³⁹ Hurd's argument that Northerners honoured women as friends and counsellors, articulated in his *Letters of Chivalry and Romance*, persuades Beattie to conclude that the feudal system gave rise to romantic love and entailed women's ascension from near slavery in Roman times to superhuman exaltation in chivalric Britain.⁴⁰ The persuasiveness of this view emerges even in twentieth-century scholarship, which has perpetuated the view that medieval romances often focused on women's lives and their interests. Northrop Frye, for example, points out in *Secular Scripture* that medieval romance typically ends with the heroine's marriage, a structure that prioritizes the female protagonist's personal fulfilment. Following Frye's lead, some critics argue that the formula of twentieth century women's romances of the Harlequin variety originated with medieval poetry.⁴¹ However, as early as 1785, Clara Reeve had made the connection between gender and the medieval genre with her publication of *The Progress of Romance*, which acknowledged that women in particular are drawn to the modern romance form, the novel, and are consequently receptive to what Reeve characterizes as the medieval epic: that is, romance.

Reeve's text defends women's taste in literature by investigating the generic prejudice against romance. The male character Hortensio's resistance to Euphrasia's equalizing of epic and romance reflects masculine discomfort with the influence of female readership. Reeve's Preface announces her intention to salvage the romance from disrepute by contradicting those "learned men" who contemptuously regard the genre as "proper furniture only for a lady's library".⁴² She explains that Percy, Hurd, Beattie, and Warton notwithstanding, sensational novels dubbed "romances" degraded the generic term so effectively that all romances subsequently met with

undeserved suspicion and ridicule. Written in the form of a Socratic dialogue, a genre that authorizes Reeve's ability to assess classical works rationally, Reeve's text demonstrates that misogynistic assumptions about women's literature account for persistent hostility toward medieval stories. Over the course of twelve evenings the female character Euphrasia argues the case for romance by clarifying that it is neither "a wild, extravagant fabulous Story" (as her male friend Hortensius contends) nor a tale with "no foundation in truth" (her friend Sophronia's definition) (6). Euphrasia's insistence that the epic form became the parent of romance impresses Hortensius, who initially privileges classical over medieval literature. Arguing a Bluestocking position on women's education and access to reading, Reeve suggests through Euphrasia that a good selection of romance reading can provide instruction and rational entertainment. The fact that Reeve links genre with gender is significant: it indicates that the medieval form had by this time become especially popular with women.

Like Reeve, authors Susannah Dobson and Charlotte Brooke demonstrate women's interest in medievalism, anticipating nineteenth-century women poets' scholarly interest in ancient England. Dobson's *Historical Anecdotes of Heraldry and Chivalry* (1795) and Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (1789) instance women's contribution to the antiquarian movement. Dobson's text complements Thomas Brydson's *A Summary Review of Heraldry*, also published in 1795, in its historical focus on the iconic signification of heraldic devices and chivalric codes of conduct. Charlotte Brooke's *Reliques*, regarded as the first anthology of translations of Irish poetry into English, resembles Percy's blend of editorial and creative efforts in that it compiles heroic poems, odes, elegies and songs, while revealing Brooke's personal interpretation of the ancient texts. "I do not profess to give a literal version of my originals ..." she admits in her

Preface, " -- there are many complex words that could not be translated literally, without great injury to the original..."⁴³ The *Reliques* also included one of her own poems based on ancient oral history, "Maon: An Irish Tale," which demonstrates Ossianic sensibilities in recounting a regional legend while indicating that a woman can become a national bard.⁴⁴ Significantly, Betham praises the *Reliques* in her *Dictionary*, citing it as proof of Brooke's "very respectable poetical talents, heroic and elevated sentiments, ... lively and bold imagination, and ... elegant and cultivated taste" (172). A historian, poet, and aspiring translator herself, Betham would feel particular affinity with a woman of Brooke's comprehensive achievements and would recognize that the metrical romance was a genre deemed to be suited to a female-centred historical narrative.

While novels were commonly dismissed as food for mass female consumption, a view Betham herself confronted when she began to compose one, the metrical romance achieved a more respectable status when Scott and Southey adopted the form.⁴⁵ As Hermann Fischer in his study on the romantic verse narrative observes, the offer of Poet Laureateship to them both in 1813 signals the respectability the narrative poem had achieved as a genre that satisfied the general reader's love of an entertaining story while rendering it in the prestigious form of poetry. Significantly, the fictional audience in Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* consists of a gathering of court women, whose narrative presence indicates Scott's subtle acknowledgement of women's particular appreciation for the metrical romance form. Certainly there were several women poets other than Betham publishing contemporaneously with Scott, such as Joanna Baillie, Mary Mitford, Eliza S. Francis, Mary Holford (later Hodson), and Anne Elfe, who also drew on Anglo-Celtic or medieval scholarship to invent historical metrical narratives.⁴⁶

The number of poetic narratives by female authors prompts Hermann Fischer to allude briefly and contemptuously to "the flood of fashionable Scott copies -- mainly written by women...".⁴⁷ Fischer cites Mitford, Francis and Holford as examples, although Scott's friend Joanna Baillie equally demonstrates his influence when she acknowledges him in her Preface. This assumption that Scott's work encouraged mediocre women copyists has in turn encouraged critical disregard of early female participants in this significant tradition of metrical romance. In his 1905 edition of Scott's *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, for instance, Alfred Noyes explains that he excised some of Scott's original selections because "Sir Walter Scott was of an amiable nature where ladies were concerned; but he carried his amiability too far when ... he included the fatuous outpourings of Miss Anna Seward."⁴⁸ The prejudice against Scott's female admirers has obscured the efforts of women poets working in the narrative tradition of national minstrels, even those who composed lengthy verse narratives, although Scott's journal entries and correspondence with several women authors attest to his sincere admiration for, among others, that "gifted person" Joanna Baillie, who honoured Scott's enthusiasm for ancient British tales when she published her *Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters* (1821).⁴⁹ In her Preface, Baillie observes, "The manner of the rhyme and versification I have in some degree, borrowed from my great contemporary Sir Walter Scott; following in this respect, the example of many of the most popular poets of the present day" (xiii). Similarly, Eliza Francis admits in her Notes to *The Rival Roses* that she was partly inspired by Scott (162), an indebtedness she announces also in her choice of titular hero in *Sir Wilbert de Waverley, or The bridal eve* (1815), which the Preface tells us illustrates the consequences of Sir Wilbert's impetuous involvement in the Crusades.⁵⁰ Holford's celebration of Scottish history in *Wallace* implies Scott's influence also.

As for Betham, her reference to Scott in her endnotes attests to her admiration of his scholarship. Finally, Scott's organization of iambic tetrameter cantos into narrative form is shared by Mitford, Holford, Francis, Baillie, and Betham. But for all their appreciation of Scott, their lays are sufficiently different as to suggest their individual exploration of romance's generic possibilities.

"What is it that the antique lay endears/ So to our hearts, and cheats us of our tears?" asks Margaret Holford in the title poem of her volume *The Past* (1819). Holford's use of "our" in her poem acknowledges a community of readers and writers equally attached to the medieval lay. Original in her depiction of a medieval woman artist and therefore in her assertion of British women's literary heritage, Betham nevertheless had sister antiquarian enthusiasts who chose the extended narrative poem as a suitable form for depicting the Gothic period. A brief review of their efforts demonstrates that women authors in the early nineteenth century began to see themselves as poetic historiographers.

Anne Elfe's publication *The Lays of Caruth, Bard of Dinham* (1808) is actually comprised of lays ostensibly by several ancient poets: nine of Caruth, two of Caradoc, four of David, and six of Elfe herself. Most of these lays are set in the time of Rome's invasion of Britain and are written in mellifluous prose reminiscent of James Macpherson's *Ossian*. Elfe's publication is in keeping with the patriotism of eighteenth-century antiquarian poets, a motive that becomes apparent in the poem's final prose-lay. "To the Memory of Nelson" assimilates the heroic soldier with Britannia's heroes of old, with whom Nelson "dissolves to kindred dust" while bardic "harps of burnished gold welcome to hero to eternal bliss" (48). The poem's textual place as the last poem asserts Elfe's authority to deliver the final word on British history. The poem's celebration of Nelson's victory redresses the defeat the ancient Britons suffered at the

hands of their tyrannical Roman enemies, a rhetorical move that establishes Elfe herself as the ultimate patriotic harpist. In this respect, she draws on the late eighteenth-century fascination with the British poet as oral historian, who relies on lyrical rather than chronological rhetoric to establish British heritage. While Elfe's occasional footnotes clarify some terms in the lays, she does not cite scholarly material, a significant difference between her lays and those of Holford, Francis, Baillie, and Betham.

Mary Russell Mitford similarly omits factual data in her *Narrative Poems on the Female Character* (1813), focusing instead on an imaginative rather than scholarly rendition of ancient Europe. However, in the volume's introductory poem, she classifies the poems "Blanch" and "The Rival Sisters" as "lays". The stories themselves feature sentimental tales about women's "sweetness, gentleness, and forbearance," the first involving a Spanish Princess's banishment from court, persecution from enemies, and eventual reconciliation with her friend Queen Isabel, after which joyous event Blanch dies from the illness and self-sacrifice sustained during her travels.⁵¹ The second details a rivalry between two sisters, the cold-hearted Grace and the virtuous Mary, and sententiously concludes that virtue earns its just reward when Mary marries a charming Earl. These fictional biographies, while lacking historical inflection, nevertheless demonstrate that authors as successful as Mitford also saw the medieval lay form as a suitable means of writing to women about women's lives.

With Holford, Francis and Baillie, we see more obvious comparisons with Betham's *Marie*, as each writer negotiates the demands of fact and fiction to develop sophisticated historical narratives in verse, including scholarly notes to legitimate their stories. In this compromise between the actual and the invented, their work recalls the dilemma that fuelled the

Ossianic debate -- that is, the limits on the poet's articulation of history. The solution apparently demands poets' accountability: the texts delineate the boundaries between instruction and invention by appending the objective guide of historical notes to the bardic narratives.

Holford's long poems *Wallace; or The Fight of Falkirk* (1809) and *Margaret of Anjou* (1816) weave together the strands of British history with her own invention to create works similar to Betham's in their combination of distinct genres.⁵² (Betham, incidentally, may have seen her as a literary rival, since her close friend Lady Bedingfeld reassured Betham that in Bath she had met "Miss Holford the poetes [sic] some times, she is good humoured but has a remarkable Saucy, bold, countenance, very plain" [*Letters* 140-141].) Holford's *Wallace* emerges from the tradition of border poetry that fetishizes the Scots' ability, as she puts it in her Preface, to "strike fire" with a pen or sword. Thus, although an Englishwoman herself, Holford perpetuates the stereotype of the Ossianic bard in this metrical romance (the generic term Holford herself applies to *Wallace* in her Preface) while appropriating a Scottish bard's identity when she describes the work of her "northern harp" (35). In the opening lines she appeals to the "Dark Spirit of the northern lay,/ Hear from thy misty mountain, bleak and cold!" (35), an invocation of the gothic muse whose tone is reiterated in the tempestuous plot of the Scottish rebellion and her characterization of the fierce hero. However, Holford qualifies her fictional rhapsody with factual data. As her Preface to *Wallace* admits, this poem of five cantos, although dependent on speculation, is "a metrical romance, founded, indeed, on history, and frequently availing itself of the Sibyl's graver aid" (vii). At the end of the tale she cites the "graver" material, including Dugdale's *Baronage*, Buchanan's *History of Scotland* (originally published under the Latin title *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*), and Holinshed's *Chronicles*. As she explains

at the end of her notes, this material is included for pedagogical reasons, allowing young people to distinguish between fiction and fact. Thus Holford proclaims herself through these notes a responsible and knowledgeable author who is aware of generic distinctions between romance and history.

Holford again discriminates between the two in *Margaret of Anjou* (1816), the poem Byron's "Versicles" dismisses as unreadable. Holford's work, although a lengthy ten cantos, has an eventful plot filled with battles, political intrigue, attempted murder, love interests, and dramatic characters -- particularly the sublime but ruthless Queen Margaret, whose ambition supersedes maternal tenderness toward her son. Holford embeds the notes within the poem by citing secondary sources at the end of each canto, ensuring that the reader sees the extent of her research before turning to the next poetic instalment. Her list of sources is more extensive than that of *Wallace*, and refers to texts as diverse as John Brand's *Observations on Popular Antiquaries*, Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, William Hutton's *Bosworth Field*, Hall's *Chronicle*, and Samuel Rudder's *The History and Antiquities of Gloucester*.

Eliza S. Francis shared Holford's fascination with the Tudor-Lancaster conflict, making it the theme of her two volume poem *The Rival Roses, or, Wars of York and Lancaster: a metrical tale* (1813), a narrative that outstrips *Margaret of Anjou* for melodramatic content.⁵³ Francis's work features plots within plots, a forced marriage, supernaturalism, and feuding families, a story line designed for broad popular appeal in its Gothic sensationalism. At the end of each volume she appends scholarly notes, which specify that the fictional plot begins in 1460 after the historical battle at Northampton. Nevertheless, the conclusion of her poem and accompanying notes indicate that, as antiquated and sensationally as the tale reads, her motives for writing

conform to the patriotic principles advocated by Pinkerton. In the final lines of her poem, Francis lauds the "art divine" of Printing, which enlightened the dark ages and enabled Luther to free England from popery (II. 115). She then celebrates the English tradition of print begun by Caxton and continued by Dryden, Milton, Newton, Addison and Pitt. Her notes reiterate this theme with further encomia to Luther as an inspiration to British liberty, now threatened by Bonaparte and possibly by Roman Catholic incursions into free Protestant England (II. 160). In providing social commentary on Britain's improvement in civility, Francis's notes imply that the poem serves as an illustration of the nation's cultural development over the centuries.

More celebrated now for her plays and dramatic theory than for her metrical tales, Joanna Baillie also published lays in the same tradition as Francis, Holford and Betham. In *The Metrical Legends of Exalted Characters* (1821), which includes chronicles of Wallace, Columbus, and her ancestor Griseld Baillie, she theorizes that versified chronicles, in providing a reliable memorial with whom readers empathize, avoid the major shortcomings of romance and biography, since the first offers merely a fictitious rendering of the past, while the second aims only for a "simple and distant" explanation of an individual. By incorporating the two genres, Baillie believes that she satisfies the demands of factual biography and invented story. However, rather than claiming this genre as her own, she acknowledges her participation in a poetic type employed by "many of the most popular poets of the present day" (xiii). Her allusion to popular poets implies that the genre she has chosen -- called in the poem itself a lay -- guaranteed some measure of success with the public, which in the case of the legend of Lady Griseld Baillie is intended for women readers. The chronicle of Griseld emphasizes the domestic life of a woman in ancient Scotland, the veracity of whose biography Baillie

substantiates with historical notes at the end of the legend. Griseld's adventures have some gothic as well as historical touches, particularly in the episode when Griseld visits her father hiding in a tomb until the family can safely flee the country, but both the moral contained within the tale and the historical notes infuse the text with instructional value. Griseld protects her family during their exile in Belgium and chooses hardship over wealth and status, until she finally dies a penniless but saintly example to women everywhere, an ending reminiscent of Mitford's *Female Characters* in its sententious message about feminine virtue. Baillie's legend, however, more directly participates in a vein of writing and research shared by Francis, Holford and Betham, all of whom indicate that British antiquity is a subject suited for women's historical and poetic study.

iii. *The Lay of Marie*

Betham's *The Lay of Marie* is therefore not atypical of women's poetry in the early nineteenth century, featuring as it does antiquarian characteristics predominant in several works that focus on life in ancient times, and finding in the metrical romance a form suitable for narrative and pedagogical purposes. Betham drew together the strands of scholarship on the bardic hero and information on Marie de France to create a complex biography that serves at once as oral legend and published history. The poem's relative obscurity necessitates a brief synopsis that will facilitate the discussion of this work and its depiction of a British female bard.

Narrated predominantly from Marie's first-person perspective with an objective narrator framing her lay, this poem of four cantos invents the personal history of the medieval poet Marie, whom Betham describes in her Preface as an Anglo-Norman troubadour of the thirteenth

century.⁵⁴ Betham's poem invents a dramatic biography set in the chivalric court of Henry III, one that complements the metrical tales of love for which Marie became famous. Marie is compelled to sing at the wicked Baron de Brehan's feast after a successful battle against the English, with whom Marie sympathizes. Marie's story begins with her recollection of childhood, when her crusading father returns a widower only to find his parents dead and his lands claimed by his treacherous friend Baron de Brehan (whom we discover in Canto Three to be Marie's uncle). In choosing to fight in distant lands, Marie's father disregarded his parents' wishes; his disobedience is the only misdeed Marie specifies, although she implies that in relinquishing his domestic responsibilities to slaughter foreign enemies, her father committed a sin so grave that it destroyed his life.⁵⁵

Emotionally orphaned by her traumatized father, Marie turns to Nature for comfort and inspiration, which nurtures the child's sublime creativity and tender affections. In time, Marie's poetic talents draw royal gifts and praise from the English King Henry III, at whose court she meets and falls in love with Eustace de Stafford. When Henry III urges Eustace to marry Isabel de Brehan in order to secure the baron's political allegiance, Marie can no longer disguise her noble bloodline. Knowing that Isabel has unlawfully inherited her title and fortune, Marie reveals her true identity to Eustace -- she is Marie de Brehan, the child of the wronged crusader. They marry secretly and Marie flees to France in order to avoid the king's wrath. After two years of separation from her husband, the two countries go to war. De Brehan disloyally battles against England, much to Marie's disgust, but Eustace promises her that if the Norman rebels are vanquished, "Thy father's titles and domain/ Shall flourish in his line again!" (124).

The concluding canto focuses on the miseries war inflicts on families. Although Marie endures "the trials soldiers bear," the dangers of battle compel her to send her baby son to the safety of England; however, a tempest wrecks the boat and it appears that her child has perished at sea. Still recovering from this blow, Marie learns that her husband has also died in battle while despairing of his son's life. Marie's lay ends here and the frame narrative resumes, allowing Betham to turn her attention to the audience's reaction to Marie's autobiographical account. Marie's story captivates all of her listeners, but particularly moves the sensitive child of de Brehan. Ashamed of her usurpation of Marie's rightful inheritance, Isabel rejects her father's guardianship and begs to enter a cloister. De Brehan, though proud and ruthless in his personal ambition, cannot endure Isabel's shame, and suffers the punishment of seeing "a dagger pierce her breast,/ In knowledge of his former guilt!" (138). A sudden revelation transforms the mood from pathos to joy when Marie learns from the assembled company that her son survived the voyage, that a loyal friend rescued Eustace, and that this friend will attend her family until Marie's return to England. The poem ends with Marie reunited with her husband and reconciled to society, the happily-ever-after paradigm associated with the euphoric plot of courtship novels. However, while the poetic narrative itself ends tidily, the volume's admission of scholarly information external to the fictive plot, in exposing the extent of Betham's subjective interpretation of history, invites further speculation about alternative historical reconstructions of Marie's life. This accommodation of documentation is the quality that *The Augustan Review* praises, since Betham allows "comprehension" (informed by objective research) to qualify "understanding" (a subjective reconstruction).

With the character of Marie, Betham found a unique subject, for although the figure of the heroic national bard had already gained popular appeal, it was the male bard who had previously dominated scholastic and poetic publications. There was sufficient documentation about Marie's work, however, for Betham to include substantial endnotes. The translated extracts of Marie's twelve lays, which come from such popular works of the late eighteenth century as George Ellis's *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances*, G. L. Way's *Fabliaux*, and Walter Scott's notes to *Sir Tristrem*, prove that at least one medieval bard, and moreover a highly accomplished one, was female. By paraphrasing or directly quoting the Abbé de La Rue's "Dissertation on the Life and Writings of Marie," Joseph C. Walker's *Historical Memoirs of Irish Bards*, and Thomas Brydson's *A Summary Review of Heraldry*, Betham suggests that her own lay has the authority of scholarship behind it. Betham's notes hazard few original speculations, and therefore speak more to the antiquarians' influence than to Betham's capacity as a scholar; what is significant, however, is the care with which she extrapolates from secondary sources to invent a story that would not violate historical probability. Information gleaned from sundry sources, particularly the essay by La Rue on Marie's life and works, reveals that Betham invents most of Marie's biography while infusing the narrative with factual details.

Betham's depiction of a national female bard who would be invited to sing before a public gathering required a defence, particularly since the popular antiquarian texts I have already discussed rarely mention women, or at best make only passing reference to female minstrels. In his essay "Observations on the ancient English Minstrels" Ritson insists that in England "women never sung to the harp" and declines further discussion of the subject, but other scholars offer a few details about female bards.⁵⁶ For instance, one of Betham's sources, Joseph

Walker's *Memoirs of Ancient Irish Bards*, explains that although Ireland had no female bards, women occasionally were chosen as singers at funerals "to assist in heightening the melancholy" of the situation.⁵⁷ Another text Betham quotes, Ellis's *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances*, prefaces its summary of Marie's lays with a brief biography based on her general prologue, which indicates that she faced "envy and persecution," although Ellis chooses not to expand on this theme.⁵⁸ In Betham's poem, the fictional audience is indifferent to the bard's gender, a reaction Betham defends by pointing out that "female minstrels were not uncommon, as one is mentioned in the Romance of Richard Coeur de Lion, without any remark on the strangeness of the circumstance."⁵⁹ The scholarly aspect of Betham's work emphasizes Marie's prominence as an Anglo-Norman poetess and places her within a medieval canon validated by respected male antiquarians.

Further justification of Betham's depiction of a female assuming such a public role appears in the Abbé de La Rue's "Dissertation on the Life and Writings of Marie, an Anglo-Norman Poetess of the thirteenth century," originally published in the periodical *Archaeologia* in 1800. Betham's extract of this scholarly essay forms her entire first Appendix, signalling the importance she placed on this resource. La Rue's summary of Marie's background and character contributed to Betham's fictional account. La Rue's historically informed speculations about the troubadour -- that she was probably a Norman who learned English while travelling in Great Britain, that she probably was born of a genteel social class, that she lived during Henry III's reign, and that she modestly shrouded her true identity and that of her patrons -- all find a place in Betham's invented biography. Betham's amplification of this source is most apparent in her development of Marie's personality and private tragedy. La Rue determines that

... Mary did not only possess a most refined taste, she had also to boast of a mind of sensibility. The English muse seems to have inspired [sic] her; all her subjects are sad and melancholy; she appears to have designed to melt the hearts of her readers, either by the unfortunate situation of her hero, or by some truly afflicting catastrophe. Thus she always speaks to the soul, calls forth all its feelings, and very frequently throws it into the utmost consternation. (*Marie* 165-6)

The pathos in the poem, which awakens the compassion of her audience, originates with La Rue's suggestion. Notwithstanding Thomas Warton's characterization of Marie as French and the fact that she did compose in the Norman language, Betham presents her as a poet loyal to England. This depiction is only partly borne out by the secondary sources she cites. That Marie journeyed to England and knew some English, the Abbé de La Rue acknowledges in his citation of primary sources, pointing to Marie's inclusion of Anglo-Saxon diction and depiction of legendary exploits of King Arthur's knights for textual proof (157-8). However, there is no indication in the primary or secondary material Betham appends to substantiate her vilification of the Norman chief, nor to emphasize Marie's English chauvinism, a quality particularly apparent when Marie upbraids the Norman rebels for breaking allegiance to King Henry (116-7). Betham's Marie is a national bard of the kind celebrated by Percy, Warton, Beattie, and Blair, a characterization partly owing to the antiquarians' influence, but also, probably, to the political climate in England at the time of *The Lay's* composition, which had dispelled the Napoleonic threat only by 1815, and whose reading audience, therefore, would be more receptive to an English heroine. La Rue and Ellis praise Marie warmly, yet they tantalize with vague suppositions about the poet's life, allowing Betham to invent history while using Marie's extant romances as a guide to her own poem's iambic tetrameter rhythm and melodramatic content.

Like the endnotes in Francis's, Holford's and Baillie's poems, those of Betham's lay serve as a gloss to the invented construct; the insertion of antiquarian scholarship defends women's ability to distinguish between the fabulous and the factual. The misogynist view that women were particularly susceptible to romance's deceptive appeal, and therefore at risk of mental ravishment by beguiling novelists, was sufficiently prevalent as to require a defence.⁶⁰ Fear of dismissal for recounting an overly romantic tale may well be the reason for women poets' acknowledgement of historical sources. The inclusion of notes implies that they recognized, as Godwin puts it, that "[t]he study of history may well be ranked among those pursuits which are most worthy to be chosen by a rational being".⁶¹ By annotating objective historical accounts, those vetted by highly respected male scholars, female poets advocated the Bluestocking emphasis on women's powers of ratiocination while demonstrating romantic, creative abilities. Francis, Holford, Baillie, and Betham make it clear that the subjectivity of imagination has some basis in what the endnotes announce to be "facts". It may well have been the case that these women poets felt the need to assert their recognition of "authority," vested in male, historical scholarship, in order to deflect attention from their own appropriation of the historian's authorial voice, rendered poetically into the traditionally oral form of the metrical romance. As Katie Trumpener demonstrates in *Bardic Nationalism*, the figure of the bard came to represent oral cultural heritage as a history whose legitimacy could rival that of documented sources. The editors and imitators of ancient Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, and Gaelic poems thus confronted a paradoxical "yearning ... to become the bards they translate and edit" even while they transcribed and annotated ancient verses.⁶² As I have argued, this authorial longing was not confined to male poets, although Macpherson, Gray, Beattie, and Scott furnish the most familiar examples of

writers who represent or assume the role of the oral poet in order to advertise their own literary powers. While a few nineteenth-century novels "imbued the image of the harp-playing heroines with a great deal of picturesque and romantic charm, signifying a poetic soul and a reverence for national traditions," the role of the sublime, national oral poet appears to have been overwhelmingly male.⁶³

Betham's Notes and Appendices establish that documented history proves the existence of a woman minstrel. The emphasis prominent scholars placed on the ancient British bard as poet, historian and instructive visionary manifests itself in Betham's depiction of Marie performing these three functions: Marie sings to her harp; she recounts both personal history and the political events leading up to the battle; and she instructs her audience in the virtue of compassion by appealing to their emotions. The title *The Lay of Marie* locates her metrical romance within an ancient, oral tradition studied by Warton, Ritson, Percy, Beattie, Walker, Ellis, and Scott --the latter three of whom Betham cites-- and rendered into contemporary poetic form by many poets, both male and female. Betham's self-conscious use of the medieval term evidences her awareness that her work participates in a genre perfected by her predecessors.

In the first Note to her poem, Betham ponders her use of the word "lay" as a titular classification of the work. She briefly summarizes the generic differences between the *roman*, *fabliau* and *lai*, seeing in the first an author's intention to describe history, in the second to inculcate a moral, and in the third to narrate with musical interludes. She concludes, however, that the Norman writers used these terms so interchangeably that she found it "difficult to lay down any positive rule for discriminating between them" (149). The thrust of the note is that the broad term of "metrical romance" so widely used in Betham's day could include a poem chanted

to the harp, such as the autobiographical tale Marie sings, and could encompass both historical and moral instruction (150). Betham's eagerness to categorize her romance as one comparable to the original medieval *lais* shows that she regards textual precedence as a historical authority, but one that, if acknowledged paratextually (in the Preface, Notes and Appendices), authorizes rather than discredits an invented biographical lyric.

The issue of authoritative voice and narrative reliability is one that Betham foregrounds in *The Lay of Marie*, not merely structurally by appending Notes to a lyrical account, but thematically also, by representing Marie as the bardic hero whose vocation permits her to undermine the autocratic masculine villain of the lay. In its depiction of a bard who recounts how subjective experience contributed to her artistic growth, *Marie* is comparable to Beattie's *The Minstrel*, but this emphasis on the personal life also signifies the interpolation of subjectivity into the broader scope of the social narrative of history. It is in its overt thematic discussion of the female authorial voice that Betham's volume distinguishes itself from the lays of Elfe, Mitford, Holford, Francis, and Baillie. Although these writers themselves *enact* the role of the modern female bard, they do not directly *depict* a woman poet articulating national or personal identity. *Marie* appeals to medieval history in order to forward a notion of the bard that recognizes the woman subject's role in constructing public narrative.

The theme of bardic authority finds expression most obviously in the conflicting narrative function of the two de Brehans, the baron and Marie. As the diplomatist who manipulates language to conceal rather than reveal the truth, de Brehan acts as Marie's principal opponent. From the outset, he is identified as a sort of anti-bard, one whose commitment to divisive national policy is intimately related to his abuse of oral communication:

He [de Brehan] spake of policy and right,
 Of bold exploits in recent fight,--
 Of interest, and the common weal,
 Of distant empire, slow appeal.
 Skill'd to elicit thoughts unknown
 In other minds, and hide his own,
 His brighter eye, in darting round
 Their purposes and wishes found.
 Praises, and smiles, and promise play'd
 Around his speech; which yet convey'd
 No meaning, when, the moment past,
 Memory retold her stores at last.
 (7-8)

His manipulative language is shown to be divisive, breaking down semantic coherence and encouraging self-interested policies that lead to imperial warfare. Significantly, Betham concludes her description by stating that his sycophantic rhetoric locks language into the present moment, such that the auditor's memory cannot recall the significance of his words once time passes. The authority of his word, therefore, depends entirely on the transient present moment of its utterance. By contrast, the bard Marie's language relies on her ability orally to reveal her intimate memories and to promote her auditors' self-awareness. Her "stores" necessarily involve the passage of time; the telling and re-telling of stories allow her to memorize "a thousand lays by heart," narratives that affect the listeners' moral choices:

"And sometimes, as the stream of song
 Bore me with eddying haste along,
 My father's spirit would arise,
 And speak strange meaning from these eyes,
 At which a conscious cheek would quail,
 A stern and lofty bearing fail:

 By many an undiscover'd wile
 I brought the pallid lip to smile,

 Towards his child the father leant,

In fast-subsiding discontent:
 I made that father's claims be felt,
 And saw the rash, the stubborn, melt;
 Nay, once, subdued, a rebel knelt.

"Thus skill'd, from pity's warm excess,
 The aching spirit to caress;"
 (17-19)

Unlike de Brehan's meaningless jargon, Marie's narratives have historical resonance because they allow even the dead -- her father in this example -- to speak to a present audience. Her words free the audience from the tyranny of unending presentness and self-interest. Contending powers, whether filial or political, find reconciliation when the "stern and lofty" are humbled, the father leans toward the child, and the rebel kneels before his leader. Betham collates the themes of semantic and social coherence by showing how Marie's oration heals differences.

Although certainly depicted as a bard of British tales, Marie nevertheless represents the subversive force that undermines imperialist agendas of warfare and national divisions between people. Born in France but married to an Englishman, Marie has sung before both King Henry III and his Norman rivals. Part Western and part Oriental in appearance, Marie embodies both the origins of the metrical romance, as described by James Beattie in his essay "On Fable and Romance" (see pages 171-2 above), and the perfect harmony of two hemispheres in one person. Even her waving hair, so thick it cannot be parted, "Elud[es], by commingling lines,/ Whatever severs or defines" (10). The "commingling lines" of hair are clearly comparable to the narrative flow of Marie's lines of poetry. Marie embodies her reconciliatory power as the bardic poet, whose presence "Made contrast'[s] self serene and sweet" (139). After Marie's song ends, social

harmony prevails with a repentant Baron de Brehan yearning for his daughter's love, the English permitted to remove their dead, and, finally, with Marie reunited with her family.

Marie's lay ultimately proves that a subjective voice, if imbued with bardic power, can alter the course of public history. When Marie first appears, her Norman audience, having recently won their battle against the English, anticipate a song of victory, but Marie defies audience expectation and sets the historical record straight. Initially de Brehan appears triumphant over the English, his brother, and his niece. However, in declaring her individual identity, both by narrating an autobiography and by asserting her patronymic, Marie de Brehan undermines much more than her uncle's power. The bard subverts the course of history at the moment in which it is being made -- immediately after her uncle defeats the English -- and authorizes a subjective voice in which the memory of personal experiences informs an audience's notion of history.

By varying the narrative's voice with omniscient, third-person, and subjective perspectives, Betham allows individual voices to achieve an authority equal to a supposedly "objective" historical account. Although Marie's voice dominates the poem, other speakers also contribute to Betham's biographical reconstruction. Before Marie begins, an objective narrator describes the courtly gathering, emphasizing that those obsessed with pomp and battle never achieve liberty and self-empowerment, whereas those who devote themselves to nobler truths speak in "tones, so subtil and so sweet, /.../Which, self-impell'd, defy controul, -- /They bear the signet of the soul" (4). These opening remarks serve as Betham's premise that speech can entail spiritual self-authorization and represent a subversive power against tyranny. The "signet" of the minstrel's power is her ability to reconcile auditor and speaker, such that she provides "Proof that

in other hearts is known/ The secret language of our own" (5). Communication between the self and others empowers the individual by allowing the single poetic voice to speak on behalf of the many. The didactic tone in the opening three pages leads us to expect that an objective narrator will tell us about Marie's minstrel talents from an omniscient perspective. However, this narrator loses total control over the narrative when Betham elides the authoritative omniscient narrative voice with others of limited knowledge, employing free indirect discourse, as first indicated by an abrupt question: "Where does this idle Minstrel stay?/ Proud are the guests, august the day" (5). The interrogative announces a transition in perspective from one of omniscience to the limited third person. Such shifts in voice allow Betham's supple move from an impersonal, *objective* narrator to the individual, *subjective* perspectives of Marie's audience. Without using quotation marks to indicate narrative shifts, Betham represents the various emotions of the assembly -- those of widows weary of their own griefs, of maidens so shy that they long to lose their self-consciousness in a bard's tale, and of impatient, worldly courtiers who resent the bard's tardiness and wile away the time in contemplation of their recent victory.

The narrative's focus drifts, imitating the desultory musings of the restive audience, which mentally alights on Baron de Brehan. The description of the Chief is rendered from the third person's perspective of his courtiers:

... 'twas said,
The pillage of a kinsman dead,
Whom, for his large domain, he [de Brehan] slew:
'Twas whispered only, -- no one knew.
(6)

The unauthorized nature of this knowledge is highlighted in this whispered rumour, which grammatically buries its subject with the passive voice, and is reflected in the speaker's

anonymity and limited omniscience. The dramatic restatement, "no one knew," emphasizes the unknowability of the speaker and creates mystery, which Marie eventually satisfies with the revelation of her true name. Marie's authorization of the whispered rumours about her uncle's usurpation demonstrates the reliability of her subjective voice and its ability to satisfy an audience's collective need for historical revelations.

Once Marie begins to sing, her first-person perspective assumes the role of the omniscient narrator. Rather than rehearsing a lay of "foreign loves, or foreign crimes," the minstrel instead stays "[n]ear home" by describing herself, specifically her childhood, love affair, and the English-Norman conflict's effect on her. Marie's differentiation between foreign and domestic is reiterated when she describes her father's error in leaving his home for distant wars. This emphasis on "domesticity" appears not to be straightforwardly xenophobic or gendered; rather, Marie's elision of geographical and poetic "foreignness" points out to her audience (who, we must remember, have just won a military victory) that the longing to appropriate stories that rightly belong to others is tantamount to the theft of personal property. She implies that both nations and narratives must abandon fantasies of conquest, a message that plays out in de Brehan's obedience to his daughter's wishes rather than to imperial ambitions, and in the persuasiveness of Marie's confessional reverie. Thus, the lay stays "near home" by being both *Kunstlerroman* and *Bildungsroman*; it is Marie's focus on the subjective that allows her to influence her audience for the good.

Betham's description of Marie's growth as a sublime poet and a caring person dependent on those she loves structures the poem's narrative, in that both her success as an artist and her reliance on relationships inform the autobiography's development. Remembering her childhood,

Marie explains how her vocational talents and private self were simultaneously developed by nature's presence:

"Delicious moments then I knew,
 When the rough winds against me blew:
 When, from the top of mountain steep,
 I glanc'd my eye along the deep;
 Or, proud the keener air to breathe,
 Exulting saw the vale beneath.
 When, launch'd in some lone boat, I sought
 A little kingdom for my thought,"

"There's not a star that shines above
 But pours on her a partial ray;
 Endearments, like maternal love,
 Her love to Nature's self repay."
 (30; 33).

The first passage depicts Marie searching for an intellectual "kingdom," battling natural elements in a sublimely egocentric solitude reminiscent of Thomas Gray's *The Bard*; the second demonstrates a transition in emphasis from autocratic independence to reciprocal dependence, in which the "her" refers to anyone attuned to Nature's blessings, although the pronoun applies particularly to Marie. The shift in pronoun number from first to third denotes Marie's developing view of subjectivity, which recognizes that the "I" is one of many selves and that the objectified "She" also represents a self. The two concepts of selfhood play a major role in the rest of the lay, particularly in relation to the audience's vicarious experience of Marie's life. In other words, Marie's confessional lay, rather than deepening the divide between a speaking internal consciousness (in grammatical terms, the first-person) and its listening external witness (the second- and third-persons), actually produces an evanescence of identity that accommodates egos who are diametrically opposed. Marie fulfils the definition of a great minstrel as defined by

the omniscient narrator in the beginning of the poem (producing “Proof that in other hearts is known/ The secret language of our own”) because she shows that emotional experiences can transcend relational positions of subjectivity and objectivity. The audience members' shared appreciation of and compassion for Marie illustrate their participation in her emotional state.

The most dramatic example of an auditor who becomes at one with the speaker is Isabel. She in fact takes over the narrative in Canto Four by confessing her reaction to her own upbringing, a device that allows Isabel to adopt the bard's rhetorical position as persuasive orator. In articulating her own version of past events, Isabel counters her father's deluded belief in her happiness. The father-daughter scene in the frame narrative neatly parallels the one in Canto I, in that "Isabella [sic] and De Brehan mirror the relation of Marie and her father, the daughter having in each case a redemptive role."⁶⁴ A sudden development in Marie's fortunes converts the mood from pathos to joy, as though de Brehan's private repentance is instantly and magically manifested in outward events when Marie reunites with her family. *Marie* repeatedly collapses the internal and external by allowing Marie's personal reminiscences to inform the feelings of her public. Betham argues that, by awakening compassion in an audience, the narrative poet can transform opposition into reconciliation and subjective experience into collective awareness. The poem's development of this theme speaks to the broader scope of the entire volume, in that the “external” research sources work in tandem with Betham's “internal,” individual interpretation of Marie's life.

Despite the volume's incorporation of scholarly sources, the poem itself is represented as a dramatic monologue. The recital of Marie's lay allows a narrative of the past to exist at the moment of articulation; historiography becomes an oral event authorized by the immediate

presence of its subject, the bardic hero, whose veracity is accepted without question by her spellbound audience. Mitford, Elfe, Holford, Francis, Baillie, and Betham find in the metrical romance a generic outlet for reinventing the past; this form, in negotiating the demands of imagination and intellect, appealed to many women writers eager to interject their creative voices into what they construed as a reductively chronological account of medieval England.

The incorporation of scholarship into a poetic biography allows Betham to appropriate the subjective voice of a female literary precursor while retaining the authority of an informed, objective critic. Betham's complementary use of historical notes and depiction of a bardic hero enable her to allude to a major conflict related to the Ossianic debate.⁶⁵ As the fictive poet who persuasively communicates her autobiography to a listening audience, Marie (ostensibly the author of this autobiography) represents the legitimacy of an oral tradition, with the fictive audience of the frame narrative sympathetically identifying with the speaker. As a scholar of Marie's life, Betham places herself within a scholarly convention engaged in the canonization of Marie's lays and a celebration of her achievements. Betham's text indicates that contentions between the primacy of romance or history -- and by implication, the negotiation of subjective and objective narratives -- might be laid to rest, since both are ultimately compatible given their epistemological richness. The volume engages both our "comprehension" and our "understanding," and, in so doing, demonstrates that heterogeneous perspectives, both of the imaginary individuals in the poem and of the antiquarians in Betham's notes, collectively inform history.

Notes to Chapter Four

- 1 Marris, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, III. 236. Although Charles signed this letter, it was begun by Mary Lamb, who asked her friend Mary Hutchinson to solicit Wordsworth's help in finding Betham employment.
- 2 Reiman, viii.
- 3 See Matilda Betham, *The Lay of Marie*, intro. Jonathan Wordsworth (Poole; New York: Woodstock Books, [1816] rpt. 1996). This edition does, however, include the author's Notes and contains a helpful introduction to the poem.
- 4 Marris, ed., *Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb*, III. 156. Lamb declined assisting Matilda with the appendices; preoccupation with his work at the East India Company and with attending his ailing sister Mary drained much of his energy (*House of Letters* 161-2). He did, however, help edit the poem and offered suggestions: "You will find one line I have ventured to alter in a sheet. You had made hope & yoke rhyme [sic], which is intolerable. Every body can see & carp at a bad rhyme or no rhyme. It strikes as slovenly, like bad spelling (*House of Letters* 162).
- 5 *The Augustan Review*, a monthly established in 1815 and disbanded after twenty issues in 1816, generally responded favourably to the Romantic poets. The editors claimed that they had no particular political allegiance, although they advocated "moderation" in their first edition. See Alvin Sullivan, ed., *British Literary Magazines: The Romantic Age, 1789-1836* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 25-28.
- 6 *The Augustan Review* 2 (Apr. 1816), 422.
- 7 Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Methuen, 1970), 2-4. Beer's work offers a helpful generic guide and indicates how medieval romance informed the Romantics.
- 8 Marlon B. Ross, "Scott's Chivalric Pose: The Function of Metrical Romance in the Romantic Period," *Genre* 18 (1986), 267-97.
- 9 David Duff, *Romance And Revolution. Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Duff indicates that the chivalric movement has been associated with conservatism largely because of Edmund Burke's famous passage pertaining to Marie Antoinette's capture, wherein Burke suggests that only the death of chivalry can account for neglect of her safety. While acknowledging Burke's chivalric rhetoric, Duff argues that radical authors could "show that the ideals it [chivalry] expressed were closer to those of the Revolution itself than to those of the *ancien régime*. The effect of this dispute was to politicize the whole question of chivalry, with the result that the so-called "chivalric

revival" which took place after the turn of the century -- mainly through the influence of Scott, though it had begun earlier -- was strongly coloured by politics" (4-5).

- 10 David H. Richter, *The Progress of Romance* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 70.
- 11 I discuss the anxieties surrounding romance further in my analysis of Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance*. April London demonstrates that during the 1790s, conservatives, perceiving romance to be a threat to the established order of public history, appropriated the romance's novelistic conventions to satirize radical notions of individualism and institutional change: "Novel and History in Anti-Jacobin Satire," *Yearbook of English Studies* 30 (2000), 71-81.
- 12 For helpful background information about James MacPherson, his work and his legacy, see J. S. Smart, *James Macpherson. An Episode in Literature* (London: David Nutt, [1905] rpt. 1973). For a more recent investigation that considers England's cultural appropriation of the Ossianic bard, see Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism. The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Nick Groom, *Celts, Goths, and the Nature of the Literary Source* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
- 13 John Pinkerton, *Letters of Literature* (New York: Garland, [1785] rpt. 1970), 287.
- 14 Hubert McDermott, *Novel and Romance: The Odyssey to Tom Jones* (Totawa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1989), 103. McDermott's argument that the English novel could not have been influenced by medieval romances hinges on early eighteenth-century hostility to the genre.
- 15 Edward D. Snyder, *The Celtic Revival in English Literature* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1965), 4.
- 16 Quoted in Sam Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity. Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1994), 9. Smiles offers a valuable overview of late eighteenth-century antiquarians, their books, and their periodicals.
- 17 Thomas Percy, "On the Ancient Metrical Romances, Etc.," in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 2 vols. (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent Ltd., 1906), II. 168-188.
- 18 Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry, from the Eleventh to the Seventeenth Century* (London: Ward, Lock, [1778 & 1781] rpt. 1870), 10. This work was first printed in London for J. Dodsley, 1774-1781. Betham does not cite Warton in her Appendices, but she occasionally refers to his work in *A Biographical Dictionary*.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 462.

- 20 James Beattie, "On Fable and Romance," in *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (New York: Garland, [1783] rpt. 1971), 508.
- 21 John Colin Dunlop, *History of Prose Fiction*, 2 vols., ed. Henry Wilson (London: George Bell & Sons, [1814] rpt. 1888), I.127.
- 22 Byron, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, in *Byron. The Complete Poetical Works*, I. 233-234.
- 23 Joseph Ritson, *Ancient Songs* (London: J. Johnson, 1790), xli.
- 24 James Beattie, "On Fable and Romance," 552.
- 25 Joseph Cooper Walker, *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* (New York: Garland Pub., [1786] rpt. 1971), 3.
- 26 George Ellis, *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances, to which is Prefixed An Historical Introduction, On the rise and progress of Romantic composition in France and England* (London: Bohn, [1805] rpt. 1968), 12.
- 27 Hugh Blair, "A Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal," in *Ossian's Fingal, 1792*, intro Jonathan Wordsworth (Poole; New York: Woodstock Books, [1792] rpt. 1996), 375.
- 28 Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric And Belles Lettres*, III. 92.
- 29 For a discussion of the reception of Gray's poem, see Charles H. Hinnant, "Changing Perspectives on the Past: The Reception of Thomas Gray's *The Bard*," *Clio* 3 (1974), 315-329. Hinnant indicates that Gray surprised his contemporaries by departing from the widespread view that Edward I was a good king. Contemporary reviews also objected to the obscurity of Gray's historical allusions.
- 30 Sam Smiles, 49.
- 31 William Feaver, *The Art of John Martin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 31.
- 32 James Beattie, *The Minstrel*, in *The Poetical Works of Beattie, Blair, and Falconer*, ed. George Gilfillan (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1973), 1.
- 33 Jonathan Wordsworth compares the poems, noting that the titles and some of the lines (for example, Scott's "Upon the harp he stooped his head" and Betham's "Upon the harp her head is thrown") are similar: Wordsworth, *The Bright Work Grows*, 204.

- 34 *Ibid.*, 204.
- 35 Peter T. Murphy, *Poetry as an Occupation and an Art in Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 138.
- 36 Sylvia Harstock Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle*, 153 .
- 37 See Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority. Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991). Ferris argues that Scott's historical scholarship incorporated "masculine purchase on truth and fact" into the novel (88).
- 38 Anne Mellor, "A Literature of Their Own," in *Questioning Romanticism*, 38.
- 39 Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, II. 169.
- 40 James Beattie, "On Fable and Romance," 544-6.
- 41 Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture. A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 80; and Rosalynn Voaden "The Language of Love: Medieval Erotic Vision and Modern Romance Fiction," in *Romance Revisited*, eds. Lynne Pearce & Jackie Stacey (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995), 78-88. For a study of medieval lyrics by women, see Doris Earnshaw, *The Female Voice in Medieval Romance Lyric* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988).
- 42 Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance through Times, Countries, and Manners* (New York: Garland, [1785] rpt. 1970), xi.
- 43 Charlotte Brooke, *Reliques of Irish Poetry* (Dublin: George Bonham, 1789), v-vi.
- 44 Leith Davis, "Birth of the Nation: Gender and Writing in the Work of Henry and Charlotte Brooke," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 18 (1994), 27-47. Brooke's anthology is regarded as the first of its kind since no copies of Charles Henry Wilson's *Poems Translated from the Irish language into the English* (1782) are extant (see Davis 44 n.3.) For a biographical account of Brooke's life and accomplishments, see Aaron Crossley Hobart Seymour's *A Memoir of Miss Brooke* (Gainsville, Fla: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, [1816] rpt. 1970).
- 45 Lady Bedingfeld wrote to Betham in March, 1799, "pray go on with your Novel. nothing goes down the Public throat like that sort of writing -- any stuff will do, and small profits do to build upon" (*Letters* 62). Lady Bedingfeld draws on a pervasive image of the novel as food for mass consumption. For further consultation, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984), and Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority*, 37-8.

- 46 William Ward's biographical index misspells Elfe's name as "Else". Future researchers are advised to search databases under both names.
- 47 Hermann Fischer, *Romantic Verse Narrative: the History of a Genre*, trans. Sue Bollans (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 111.
- 48 Sir Walter Scott, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, ed. Alfred Noyes (New York: British Book Centre, [1908] rpt. 1975), xii-xiii.
- 49 Sir Walter Scott, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. W. E. K. Anderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 460.
- 50 Eliza S. Francis, *Sir Wilbert de Waverley, or, The Bridal Eve* (London: Samuel Leigh, 1815), viii.
- 51 Mary Russell Mitford, *Narrative Poems on the Female Character* (New York: Eastburn, Kirk & Co. 1813), ix.
- 52 Margaret Holford Hodson, *Margaret of Anjou: A Poem In Ten Cantos* (London: John Murray, 1816); and *Wallace; or, The Fight of Falkirk* (London: Cadell And Davies, 1809).
- 53 Eliza S. Francis, *The Rival Roses, or, Wars of York and Lancaster: a metrical tale*, 2 vols. (London: J.J. Stockdale, 1813).
- 54 Modern scholarship places Marie in the twelfth century, during the rein of Henry II, although her nationality remains ambiguous. Medieval scholar Laurie Finke explains that in the epilogue to her *Fables*, "Marie says she is 'from France' [de France] meaning perhaps that she was born in France, although it is just as likely that she would have perceived the English court as a satellite of the Norman French court and so literally 'of France'..." (Finke 155): *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England* (London; New York: Longman, 1999), 154-165. However, Betham describes her as "an Anglo-Norman Minstrel of the thirteenth century" whose contemporaries were Henry III and William Longsword (*Marie v*). Betham's reasons for insisting on Marie's loyalty to England appear to be based on patriotism as well as La Rue's authority.
- 55 As Jonathan Wordsworth points out, both de Brehan's crime and the error Marie's father commits are ambiguously worded (*The Bright Work Grows* 206). *The Augustan Review* of 1816 also notes that Betham's style is "obscured by the graces of diction" (422), but offers what I believe is the likeliest explanation for the father's overwhelming sense of guilt: remorse for his involvement in the bloody crusades.
- 56 *Ancient Songs*, viii

- 57 Joseph Cooper Walker, *Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards* (New York: Garland, [1786] rpt. 1971), 19.
- 58 George Ellis, *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances* (London: Bohn, [1805] rpt. 1968), 46.
- 59 Matilda Betham, *The Lay of Marie* (New York: Garland, [1816] rpt. 1978), 151. This remark constitutes her "Note III" on her own lay; she relies on Ellis's *Specimens* for the pertinent extract of this romance.
- 60 For a recent discussion of attitudes toward women's addiction to romance, see Sonia Hofkosh, *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author*. In Chapter One Hofkosh cites Thomas Gisborne's *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* and Thomas Mathias's *The Pursuits of Literature* as examples of male anxiety that women would be seduced by novels. For discussion of the perceived dangers of an increase in female authors and readers, see Thomas Kelly, *Early Public Libraries* (London: Library Association, 1966), and Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- 61 William Godwin, "Of History and Romance," in *Caleb Williams*, intro and ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 1988), 359.
- 62 Trumpener, 118.
- 63 Ibid., 18-19.
- 64 Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Bright Work Grows*, 206.
- 65 J. S. Smart, *James MacPherson. An Episode in Literature* (London: David Nutt, Long Acre, 1973), 19.

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