

**ELUCIDATING THE SOCIAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT
OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY THROUGH MRS.
BARBAULD'S "WASHING DAY" POEM**

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Öz: On sekizinci yüzyıl İngiltere'si bir geçiş dönemi olduğu için birbirinden çok farklı görüşleri barındırmaktaydı. Sonuçta, mevcut sosyal yapı bir yazarı kısa zamanda ünlendirebildiği gibi aynı kolaylıkla onu antolojilerin dışına da atabiliyordu. Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743- 1825) onsekizinci yüzyıl İngilteresi orta sınıf kadın yazarlarından birisi olarak dönemin diğer pek çok öncü kadın yazarı gibi önce sevgi ve saygı gördüğü toplumda sonraları küçümsenmiş ve uzun süre unutulmaya terk edilmiştir. Oysaki bu yazarların bitmiş bir edebi dönemi daha iyi anlama ve değerlendirebilme adına geride bıraktıkları metinlerin ayrıntılı incelenmesi ve üniversite müfredatları içinde daha fazla yer bulması gereklidir. Bu gereklilikten yola çıkan çalışma öncelikle kadın metinlerine karşı ilgisizliğin ve edebiyat kanonunda erkek egemenliğinin nedenlerini belgelendirmektedir. Anna Laetitia Barbauld'nun yaşamı ve yazma mücadelesi çalışmanın merkezine konduktan sonra Mrs. Barbauld'ya ait görünürde hayli önemsiz olan bir metin, "Çamaşır Günü" şiiri öne çıkarılarak önemsiz görünen bir metnin de çok değerli olabileceği ispatlanmaya çalışılacaktır. Barbauld bu şiirde en erkek egemen olarak kabul edilen alaysı-destan türünü seçmiş ve onsekizinci yüzyıl sosyal yaşantısında toplumsal alan, evsel alan ikilemini okuyucuların ilgisi ve yorumuna sunmuştur. Bu noktadan hareketle, şair, kadınların sınırlandıkları evsel alan içinde bile, iyi bir eğitimden yoksun bırakılmamaları durumunda, kendilerinde doğuştan mevcut hayal güçleri sayesinde insan sorunları üzerinde kalıcı etkileri olan metinler üretebileceklerini de kanıtlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Onsekizinci Yüzyıl Edebiyatı, Kadın Şairler, Alaysı-Destan, Evsel Alan, Toplumsal Alan.

Introduction

The whole of the eighteenth century was a transition period, as is obvious in the captions given to it: "Augustan Age", "The Enlightenment Period", "Neo-Classical Age", "Age of Reason" and the like. Social instability during the period corresponded with shifting ideologies in writing. On one hand, female writers were expected to be modest and not vainglorious in print, since a woman's primary concern was to be toward her family, its good name and

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honour. When a woman's reputation for modesty was brought into question in any way, both she and her relatives would meet social condemnation. On the other hand, considering only the first decade of the eighteenth century, 130 published texts written by more than 70 women show that the intermittent attempts to silence women were largely ineffective.

Stemming from the period's being so open to shifting opinions, it is my contention that, the teacher's choosing even an insignificant piece of female writing and with an in-depth analysis displaying the very conditions which prepared the handled text can be invaluable for forging the counter discourses of this obsolete era. Keeping this idea in mind, the subject matter of this article will constitute the social and literary conditions which created female authors of the eighteenth century in general and will exemplify them in a case, in which the same social matrix made Anna Laetitia Barbauld ascend the literary hierarchy, but upon her claiming some authority in the current discourses of the time dethroned her from her position.

1.1. The Social and Literary Context of the Eighteenth Century

A survey records 4,000 fictional works published during the period between 1770 and 1829, a considerable number of which were penned by women (Batchelor and Kaplan, 2005, p. 6). Such a large amount of publication openly proves how the women writing commonly included justifications for their unfeminine boldness. One way to challenge the female subordination was to use Queen Anne's, their ruler's, position. Carol Barash in her article "The Native Liberty of the Subject" (1992, p. 55-69) vividly displays how three poets, Mary Chudleigh, Sarah Fyge Egerton and Mary Astell, all contemporaneous of Queen Anne's reign, made use of her presence as a martial leader, her political authority, and her maternal presence as being a "Common mother to all her Subjects." In turn, they demanded the same liberty for themselves in their poetic authority and in their marriages.

That the century was a time of transition with respect to traditions was felt outside the court circles, too. Like everything else, the domestic requisites of women and men were tried, discussed, and criticized. Considering the radical changes the middle class members underwent, it is possible to say that the rising middle class women, similar to their husbands, were supposed to have greater attainments than working class women or aristocrat ladies. One such poet, scholar, translator, essayist and letter writer of the same period was Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806). Carolyn D. Williams (1996, p. 3) discusses Carter's consistency in an article and writes that Dr. Samuel Johnson read Elizabeth Carter's translations of Epictetus (c.55-c.153), which she collected under the title *All the Works of Epictetus* (1758). He admired the way the pagan philosophies of Epictetus were so beautifully reconciled with the dialogues of Body and Mind in the translation of her. Dr Johnson further commented on the blending of the female genius Elizabeth's character and abilities represented in this work and saw this blending in the way ingredients of a pudding are blended together. Dr. Johnson expressed his admiration to this young and beautiful

middle-class woman with the words, “A man is in general better pleased when he has a good dinner upon the table than when his wife talks Greek. My old friend, Mrs. Carter, could make a pudding as well as translate Epictetus”.

Another middle class female author, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, too, like Carter is counted among the learned women of her time. Such women were “well grounded” in languages ancient and modern, were acquainted with current ideas, were passionate about science, and were accustomed to maintaining an extensive correspondence with the learned men and women of their time. However, the unfortunate fact about the women of the eighteenth century is that they stayed in oblivion for a long time. This was partly due to the opinion that the literary canon of the period was already crowded with great male writers, such as Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Richard Steel and Samuel Johnson.

1.2. Some Misleading Assumptions Related to the Period’s Female Writing

Even today teachers of English literature face challenges both at home and abroad when trying to recover women’s lost-in-the-canon texts. The assumption that females needed male patronage to publish their works is today considered a myth since there were enough publishers willing to do the job. Janet Todd points out that “Many women were linked through major male writers, who gathered clusters of female authors” but also “major groupings were women generated, both provincial and metropolitan. They formed around strong female personalities of the period. The Bluestockings was such an organization providing a network for women writers, and the publisher Joseph Johnson formed his own network for talented and diligent ladies” (in Haefner, 1993, p. 47).

Another assumption that female authors imitated male poets is no longer accepted in the light of recent readings. Trendy reading stratagems now prove many of these women were not imitators but rather were either innovators or early participants in poetic innovations. Hence, the assumption that stylistically women’s writing was inferior to men’s is another myth. In the area of ‘style’ if we are looking for topics dealing with psychological insight, transcendental truth, unique imagery, symbols, or mythopoetic structures, then the texts produced by women may not satisfy our expectations. The presence of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats in our syllabus will meet all these expectations. However, when teachers are after broader cultural contexts, or when a new historicist, cultural materialist or feminist approach is foregrounded instead of a liberal humanist approach, then, literature teachers are bound to include female voices in their syllabuses.

The aim of a feministic approach is obvious. Firstly, feminists claim we need to know women’s texts apart from the male tradition so that we can grasp their complexity inasmuch as it is essential to understanding the countervoice of female subjectivity in response to male-dominated identities and gender implications. Secondly, female texts are unduly underrated and largely excluded when forming the literary canon and this injustice should be corrected.

Examining the full-scale collections of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, it is quite easy to trace the injustice against female writers. Claudia L. Johnson (2001, p. 173) lists collections of eighteenth century writers, among which are Chalmer's 21 volume *The Works of the English Poets From Chaucer to Cowper* (1810), John Bell's 34 volume *British Theater* (1797), Elizabeth Ichbald's 25 volume set *The British Theater* (1806-09), James Ferguson's 45 volume set of *The British Essayists* (1802-1819), and Sir Walter Scott's 10 volume *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* (1821-24). In all these collections female writers are largely neglected notwithstanding their great number of publications.

To form a comparison, Sir Walter Scott's and Anna Laetitia Barbauld's collections can be scrutinized. Walter Scott gained a normative status among his contemporaries, having his *Ballantyne's Novelist's Library* published. He reprinted 37 novels by 14 writers in this work. Of the fourteen novelists Scott included, twelve are men and two are women, only Ann Radcliffe and Clara Reeve found a seat for themselves. On the other hand, ten years earlier, Mrs. Barbauld was commissioned to edit a selection of contemporaneous British novels and to preface each with a biographical and critical sketch. The result was her monumental 50-volume set published in 1810 under the title *The British Novelists*, (Fyfe, 2000, p. 166). This unique set was advertised in the *Athenaeum* as an explicit guide for the choosing of novels, preferable to the evaluative void of the library catalogue (Toner, 2011, p. 71). So, Mrs. Barbauld was thrust to the position of a canon maker. Barbauld's governing aim in preparing this collection was, in her words, "to choose the most approved novels attending to the taste of the purchasing public" (Toner, 2011, p. 172). Of the twenty-two novelists Mrs. Barbauld included, fourteen are men and eight are women. Her positive discrimination towards female novelists did not fail to create counter voices. One year after the publication of this mammoth work, her poem "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven" was published receiving unfair criticism with claims that "a woman- much less a dissenting woman- has no business delivering opinions about England's welfare at home and abroad" (Johnson, 2001, p. 173). Seemingly, a new transition in the opinions of the eighteenth century reading public was realised, and the dissenting tradition was exiled from the front to the periphery. In almost a decade, Mrs. Barbauld lost her prestige as an authority and furthermore her poetry, too faced the danger of oblivion. Similar examples are so ample throughout the long eighteenth century that today's upsurge of interest of feminist critics of the period should be considered very natural.

2.1. Anna Laetitia Barbauld as an Eighteenth Century Female Voice

When we trace Mrs. Barbauld's life, we see that she was born Anna Laetitia Aikin in Leicestershire in 1743, as the daughter of John Aikin, a dissenting minister and headmaster of a boys' school. She was educated at home by her father, studying Latin and Greek as well as modern languages. Dissenting academies of the time were frequently attacked for the level of freedom and discussion allowed, and were described as "disloyal" and "anti-monarchical"

(Morris, 2003, p. 49). When her father took up a teaching position at Warrington Academy for Dissenters in 1758, Barbauld lived there for the next fifteen years and had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of prominent liberal intellectuals of her time. Joseph Johnson was one of these in the Aikin family circle and the Warrington community who authorized Barbauld to disseminate her writings to the nation. Hence, *Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose* appeared as a collection of her and her brother's essays (White, 1999, p. 513).

Anna Aikin's marriage to Rochemont Barbauld is considered a mistake by her biographers. Anna Miegion describes it as based simply on mutual affection and esteem, lacking love and passion (Miegion, 2002, p. 25). Although, owing to Mrs. Barbauld's initiative, husband and wife opened a successful academy for boys in Sussex, where she devoted her time to teaching language and science, citing ill health, they had to close it in 1785. Without the responsibility of a school, Mrs. Barbauld's interest in politics increased and began to be reflected in her essays and poems. She also undertook an increasing amount of editorial and critical work in this period. Detoriation in her husband's mental condition led him to an apparent suicide, but the undaunted Mrs. Barbauld, this prolific lady, continued to write until her death, leaving two collections to be published posthumously by Lucy Aikin, her niece, with the addition of a memoir.

What were the circumstances of Barbauld's silencing? The body of work she left behind when she died was complex and varied. Her political works include the much discussed poem "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven," in which she prophesied the decline of the British Empire and expressed it in the lines:

There yet remains a freedom, nobler far
Than kings or senates can destroy or give;
Beyond the proud oppressor's cruel grasp
[...] the freedom of the mind
(Barbauld 1825, lines 197-201)

Suggesting the freedom of the mind, Barbauld was so influential that Roger Lonsdale argues "there was no female precedent [of her] in this respect" (1989, xxxiii). Mrs. Barbauld's popularity is reported to have moved Samuel Johnson to mourn her 1774 marriage to a schoolmaster, "If I had bestowed such an education on a daughter, and had discovered that she thought of marrying such a fellow" wrote Johnson "I would have sent her to the *Congress*" (qtd.in Boswell, 1953, p. 662-63).

Mary Sidney Watson (1999, p. 617-643) traces the rationale for Barbauld's disappearance from the anthologies and thus the canon of literature. She concludes that in Barbauld's case, and in probably many others', the definitions of the "proper woman" as "sentimental, devout, dependent, irrational (as in the eighteenth century women were thought to be incapable of rationality), chaste, and stoically enduring" did not suit her vitality concerning political issues, her images of sexuality and the masculine domain of poetry.

Women's poetry, between 1780 and 1830 was so greatly domineered by men, and was so provoking when women wrote public verse that, it is possible to find the explanation of women's lost lines in Spender's words:

There is no contradiction in patriarchal order while women write for women and therefore remain within the limits of the private sphere; the contradiction arises only when women write for men. So the taboo is on women's *public* writing, a taboo which gains in strength the further the woman writer ascends the literary hierarchy, with its presence being most felt in drama and poetry (Spender, 1980, p. 192).

It is obvious in the above lines that when a woman produces a text in a gendered genre such as the novel or a conduct book and the consumer is another woman, there is no apparent problem. Mrs. Barbauld, however, having tried poetic forms and demanding male readers was too challenging. Furthermore, having ascended the literary hierarchy to its pinnacle in her lifetime, it was natural for her to become the target of Victorian editors.

When her progressive ideology in the society left its proper place from conservative ideology, as is pointed out above, Mrs. Barbauld's texts were pushed aside, until they posthumously appeared with her niece Lucy Aiken's intentionally modified prefaces molding Mrs. Barbauld into a "proper woman" (Watson, 1999, p. 624). This time, her original words and the interpretations made on them created so much discrepancy that her oeuvre endangered by misreading, gradually lost popularity. Penny Bradshaw (2005, p. 23-37) re-reads Barbauld's most anti-feminist poem "The Rights of Woman" and lists the evidence which radically alters the implications of her words through material omitted by her niece Lucy Aikin for fear that they would damage her aunt's reputation. As might be expected, in the forthcoming years, Mrs. Barbauld had the misfortune of being labeled "submissive" to her culture by the feminist Victorians, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, and later by Virginia Woolf.

2.2. Mrs. Barbauld in Her More Acclaimed Poetry

It is necessary to add that some of Mrs. Barbauld's seemingly commonplace themes in her poetry have created unforeseen interest and unjust criticism in her own time while others continue to create similar reactions today. Her poem, "The Mouse's Petition" is an example of the former in the way that it seems quite innocent and trivial concerning its subject matter. A live mouse is trapped ready to be examined by Mrs. Barbauld's close friend Dr. Priestley and the poet hears throughout the eighteenth century, experiments on animals were common and the status of such experimentation was quite controversial. In spite of the commonness of the practice, not much poetry dealt with the subject and Mrs. Barbauld's frequently reprinted poem "The Mouse's Petition" formed a problematic exception in this respect. In Kathryn J. Ready's words, (2004, p. 92-3) the poem aroused much criticism since it spoke of "humanity" and "cruelty" rather than mercy and justice required for a small mouse trapped in an air-pump experiment. The criticism was extended to claim that the mouse's situation was emblematic of the hierarchical relationships in Georgian society,

which the poet was against. Mrs. Barbauld, in turn, contrary to her intentions, was allied with the owner of the experiment, Dr. Priestley's political enemies.

The poems "Bouts Rimes in Praise of Old Maids" (1770) and "Washing Day" fall into the latter category in respect to the ways they poeticize the domestic. In "Bouts Rimes in Praise of Old Maids" Mrs. Barbauld depicts an unmarried twenty-seven year old girl who seems to find something positive in the prospect of her single existence. The personae's choice to stay single should not be considered commonplace, especially at a time when Mrs. Barbauld's contemporary Jane Austen is voicing in her well known novel *Emma* through the character Emma that "a single woman with a narrow income must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid" (1994, p. 67). Mrs. Barbauld radically departs from the conventional expectations of her time and describes the unmarried elderly woman as someone being able to enjoy "pleasure's free career" without carrying the burden of nursing children or straying husband. Her old maid should not worry about the expectations of the society, but please and entertain herself.

3. "The Washing Day" Poem

Mrs. Barbauld's poem "Washing Day", which will constitute the case study of my article, would probably not be the first choice of literature teachers, in the presence of her more popular poems, should one of her works be included in any syllabus. Notwithstanding the negligence of "Washing Day" as a poem and its trivial subject matter, my aim will be to display how such an ordinary choice can be used to display the discursive practices of its time.

This eighty-nine line poem first appeared in *Monthly Magazine* in 1797, emerging during Mrs. Barbauld's living in solitude. Her husband's mental health had declined so severely that they were no longer running the boy school together and she found consolation in publishing verse. Some of her verse in the period had political themes including a poem against the slave trade, while others were more amusing pieces. "Washing Day" falls into the latter category and with its mock-serious tone immediately reminds the reader of the works of her contemporaneous males, especially the master of this tone, Alexander Pope and his *Rape of the Lock*. As it is obvious to the readers, mock-epic employs a lofty manner to describe a trivial subject and so makes it look ridiculous. The poet is expected to present the trivial subject so grand that it should become a parody of the activity.

To serve her aim, Mrs. Barbauld in her opening lines first makes use of the Muses. It has long been tradition for an epic poet to ask a favour from a particular muse for the success of his work. However, these nine Greek goddesses, daughters of Zeus, only preside over activities related to art, such as epic poetry, history, love poetry, lyric poetry, tragedy, songs of praise, dancing, comedy, or astronomy. In this poem Barbauld uses this classical source to establish non-classical standards for poetic merit, based on her gender. Her muse does not preside over an activity of art, instead it is called the "domestic Muse" and presides over the washing day. To heighten the effect, Mrs.

Barbauld depicts her domestic Muse as one tackling the hardships of a working-class woman:

[...]Come then, domestic Muse,
 In slipshod measure loosely prattling on
 Of farm or orchard, pleasant curds and cream,
 Or drowning flies, or shoe lost in the mire
 By little whimpering boy, with rueful face;
 Come Muse, and sing the dreaded Washing-Day (Barbauld 1797, lines 6- 11).

Barbauld's domestic Muse is careless and slovenly. When talking or writing, she has nothing serious in stock as is expressed by the words "loosely prattling on." She can only talk of the farm, the food "curds and cream", the daily chores, and the regular nuisances in her life such as flies. While answering the poet's call she has walked through a muddy road and so has lost one of her shoes "shoe lost in the mire". The boy she brings alongside her is pitiable and whimpering. In such a dilapidated condition, the poet's dominant voice "Come then," "Come, Muse," is heard twice; one as the opening expression of the stanza "Come then" and one in the last line of the stanza as "Come, Muse". Her urge to "sing" naturally creates a real paradox since not the Muses of the Old Greek times but the newly emerging female voice will take the lead to overcome the hardships of a washing day.

The domestic Muse is of no use in such circumstances; on the contrary, similar to an overburdened housewife she is dilapidated and is in no mood to sing. As a remedy, a new working force appears in the form of red-armed washing ladies. Once they reach the house, their dominating mode accompanied by the physically strengthened personae start ruling the domestic sphere at the expense of every other family member's peace and physical comfort to complete the chore:

[...] ere the first gray streak of dawn,
 the red-armed washers come and chase repose.
 Nor pleasant smile, nor quaint device of mirth,
 E'er visited that day: (Barbauld 1797, lines 16- 19).

The washing ladies do not belong to this house, they only come and go. Their professional ability at the job is emphasized with the description of them having red arms and sullen faces. Not the domestic muse but these washing ladies will perform the job. In the following lines of the poem, it is expressed that they eat their breakfast uninterrupted and silently; they do not tolerate either the children or the pets of the house "...the very cat,/ From the wet kitchen scared, and reeking hearth/ Visits the parlour, an unwonted guest" (WD lines 19-21).

Washing ladies become even graver should the skies get lower and it starts raining. The thing to do under the rain, is to snap the washing from the lines in the garden as soon as possible and while doing this these Professional women regard neither the myrtle nor the roses but crush all the budding fragrance from the bushes. They destroy the beauty in the garden with their "impatient hand". They know how difficult it is to eliminate the dirt and gravel stains from the linen, hence they do everything possible to avoid damage to their washing.

Closing themselves to the beauties of the garden, regarding no care for the environment, they are identical to the automated factory workers of our familiar world.

The washing ladies are meticulous and businesslike however they are not easy to compare to the mistress of the house who is the most dreaded figure on that day. She meets the washing ladies as early as dawn, accompanies them while they are eating breakfast, even attends the washing process. In the meantime she is extremely difficult to please. Should it start raining, her reaction becomes explicable only in a hyperbole:

Saints have been calm while stretched upon the rack,
And Guatimozin smiled on burning coals;
But never yet did housewife notable
Greet with a smile a rainy washing day (Barbauld 1797, lines 32- 35).

Guatimozin was the last of the Mexican Emperors and was killed by Cortez, smiling while being burned. In the hyperbole, saints also stay calm while being stretched and tortured on the rack. However, the tribulations of the house distress the mistress more than all these and she begrudges respect and compassion from the housefolk. In these circumstances the sole owner of the house is this housewife and her husband is a mere victim: “-But grant the welkin fair, require not thou / Who call’st thyself perchance the master there” (“WD” lines 36- 37). The husband is doomed to yield to his wife. The word “grant” here implies humility in the supplier. The wife is at a level much superior to him, in the celestial abode of the goddesses. How dare he be able to claim his mastery, being so inferior? Neither does he claim regular services, such as his coat to be dusted or his study to be swept. Even though his stockings need darning, he must remain quiet.

[...] – ask not, indiscreet,
Thy stockings mended, though the yawning rents
Gape wide as Erebus; nor hope to find
Some snug recess impervious: (Barbauld 1797, lines 39- 42).

Erebus is the place of darkness in the underworld on the way to Hades (*Webster*: 384). The rents, or openings on his stockings are as wide as Erebus, which shows the husband has been neglected for long, long before this washing day. He is the helpless sufferer of domestic violence, oppression, hardship, and mistreatment. It is futile to find any cozy or secure place in this home. Thus, he flees from the building to the garden. However, the misfortune follows him here, too:

[...] - shouldst thou try
The ‘customed garden walks, thine eye shall rue
The budding fragrance of thy tender shrubs,
Mrytle or rose, all crushed beneath the weight
Of coarse checked apron,- with impatient hand
Twitched off when showers impend: or crossing lines
Shall mar thy musings, as the wet cold sheet
Flaps in thy face abrupt (Barbauld 1797, lines 42- 49).

The washing women with their checked aprons have invaded the garden and destroyed the precious flowers under the weight of their boots. Since finding solace in the garden is something impossible for the husband, he only witnesses how the beauties created are demolished by the pitiless female force, keeping quiet. The washing lines have completely covered the garden from the east to the west; from the north to the south, in every direction. Should he be absent-minded as he walks, it is inevitable that the wet cold sheet will slap him on the face and disturb his peace.

The husband may be unaware of the erosion in his authority and heedlessly may fail to make an excuse to a visiting friend. Accordingly, the husband along with his friend, two males on such a female dominant surrounding, form an unbearable resentment. The guest waits for courtesy in vain. It is improbable that they be served "roast chicken" or "savoury pie". He should be content with the pudding he finds, and with the husband's mending mirth. The visiting friend's disappointment is reflected in the words " -the unlucky guest / In silence dines, and early slinks away" ("WD" lines 59- 60).

Having depicted the misery of the husband and the visitor, having trivialized men's work and even other kinds of daily chores, Mrs. Barbauld displays how domineering the women folk can be in their domestic sphere. The mistress' cool commands are heard all day "At intervals my mother's voice was heard/ Urging dispatch; briskly the work went on" (WD lines 77- 78). To confine the ladies into the domestic sphere and to expect some civility afterwards will be futile. In this case the sphere the females occupy leaves no authority to males similar to the social sphere of males where females are outcast and are doomed to suffer.

After the vividly depicted image of the mistress and the washing ladies, Mrs. Barbauld abruptly changes the setting of the poem with the words "I well remember, when a child, the awe/ This day struck into me;" ("WD" lines 61- 62). From this line onwards, the witty adult personae of the poem leaves its place to a small Anna, to Barbauld's childhood. The tone of the poem changes, accordingly. There are no longer hyperboles of mock-epic but down-to-earth descriptions of the maids, of her grandmother and of other siblings, all of which belong to her memories.

[...] So I went
 And sheltered me beside the parlour fire:
 There my dear grandmother, eldest of forms,
 Tended the little ones, and watched from harm,
 Anxiously fond, though oft her spectacles
 With elfin cunning hid, and oft the pins
 Drawn from her ravelled stocking, might have soured
 One less indulgent - (Barbauld 1797, lines 69- 76).

The grandmother figure is what is lacking at the house of the later generation. Grandmother is ready there to fill the gap created by the relentlessly meticulous mistress and fully professional washing ladies in the first part of the poem. Grandmother wears her glasses and darns the stockings before the husband, most probably her own son, can make a demand. She cunningly "with elfin

cunning” hides hazardous objects such as her glasses or the sewing needles from the children’s reach. She is the representative of a female who has internalized the expectations of the domestic sphere. She has married, has had children and grandchildren; she leaves the washing to professionals without interfering with it. In this respect she is not similar to the personae the reader hears with the orders in the first part of the poem. Instead, she is content in the small circle, devoting herself to the needlework and to the care of her grandchildren.

The atmosphere created by the grandmother is so secure and cozy that, little Anna finds herself in deep contemplation. For her, too, the ongoing washing process is something not to be mingled with. Furthermore, the floating bubbles of the washing are not ordinary soap bubbles, they remind her of the bubbles blown by her and other children through the hollow tube of pipe. The soap bubbles are then transfigured into the Mongolfier balloon in her mind:

The floating bubbles; little dreaming then
To see, Mongolfier, thy silken ball
Ride buoyant through the clouds- so near approach
The sports of children and the toils of men.
Earth, air, and sky, and ocean, hath its bubbles,
And verse is one of them- this most of all (Barbauld 1797, lines 84- 89).

Two things are significant in these lines. Firstly, a series of analogical and associative changes transform the bubbles of Anna’s childhood to a technological miracle, the Mongolfier balloon. The historical fact about this balloon is that it was the first hot air balloon launched in France in 1783. Mrs. Barbauld is reported to have attended a balloon exhibition at the Pantheon a year later, thirteen years earlier than she penned the “Washing Day” (Kraft, 1995, p. 40). Mechanically, both bubbles and the balloon operate by the harnessing of air into a spherical enclosure. Both travel in upward movements. However, the evanescent bubbles of her childhood turn into the form of an enduring, long lasting, functional silken Mongolfier ball. Such a ball is able to carry someone to their highest dreams, to a better world. It does not fall easy victim to the destructive effects of winds, fire, and rain. In the same vein, the childhood dream of Anna seems to have created her own lines and with this poem her dream has been realized. “Washing Day” with its trivial subject matter is no more significant than the “sports of children” but on the other hand “toils of men” very often yield similar outcome. Having read her ages-long-enduring lines, no reader can now claim that she is bound to be forgotten.

For women of the eighteenth century, writing about trivial matters was a substitute for greater emotions that needed to be repressed and had no outlet. They could not take part in the process of making hot air balloons, nor ocean going sea vessels, nor mechanical inventions in general. They were supposed to stay indoors, watching and admiring the achievements of men. Women in turn wrote less abstract poetry and observed the trivial things in life such as animals, plants, and washing days; thus assuming a kinship with them, which was far removed from man-made laws and concepts. Barrel reminds us that:

In eighteenth-century Britain, women were excluded from what was called the "republic of letters", for the qualification for citizenship in that republic was the ability to reduce the data of experience to abstract categories, and women, it was commonly assumed, could think in terms only of the particular and the concrete (Barrel 1988, p. 161).

However, Mrs. Barbauld's writing on a trivial concrete matter such as a washing day is no less controversial. When we consider the female types of the poem we see that from Anna's childhood to her adulthood the whole family structure has changed. There are no grandmothers, no children but rather the professional washing women and a discontented mistress in her adult world. Families are smaller; females are more dominant in their own premises. The distinction between the working and middle class women is more visible. In fact, Mrs. Barbauld's critics agree that much of her writing resisted the idea of primary gender differentiation. However, Harriet Guest (2000, p. 46-60) has recently argued, Barbauld's sense of authorial authority often seemed to be derived from the "bounded sphere" of feminine domesticity. Barbauld believed that men and women should occupy different social stations, and cultivate the gendered characteristics appropriate to them and only in this way would females gain the authority they needed.

In this poem, we especially notice how much the bounded sphere of females provides them with privileges and authority. There is no doubt that domestic duties defined a woman's world more in the previous centuries as compared to the twenty first century. The home in the past, acted as a romantic imprisonment for many poetesses. On the other hand, for many women domestic life was empowering, as it was a woman centered sphere of influence. In the way females were denied a place in the public sphere, males, as is openly claimed in Barbauld's lines, were denied a place in the domestic. In addition, when female poets of the period were pursuing unique, exquisite epic themes, their focus was on the effect of epochal events such as the Mongolfier balloon, on those who were imprisoned at home, similar to little Anna in this poem.

The dominant ideologies of a certain period operate in many spheres and create a certain thought control on its citizens. Generally, it is impossible to create a change in this dominant ideology, but when a work of art employs something against the mainstream of ideas, it creates a difference in the society. The effect may be minimal but it does not mean that it should not be given emphasis. Hence, having accepted that the eighteenth century ideologies in England reinforced patriarchy, when a Mrs. Barbauld poem pinpoints the voice of a female, claiming change in attitude towards, let's say, some aspect of female treatment, this voice, being the sole witness of injustice, should be expected to create a greater impact. Depicting the male so helpless on a washing day in a female domineered setting, Mrs. Barbauld may mockingly have warned the society of the consequences of dividing the public and domestic spheres between males and females.

Furthermore, Mrs. Barbauld gives this message in a male dominated genre, mock-epic. In Haley Bordo's words (2011), her use of mock-epic is more than

saying or writing but performing something with words. It is a kind of “speech act”. Bordo writes:

Barbauld lifts the verse of her male counterparts and predecessors into a new and as-it-were non-legitimized form, she “repeats” it, occupies it with her own female voice, varies it and transposes it onto a domestic plane. In other words, she *performs* genre (sic.). [...] Her “Washing Day” brims with self-reflexivity and parody that “clap” and “wring/[and] fold” men’s verse back upon itself (Bordo 2011, p. 188).

Conclusion

With a domestic theme, “Washing Day,” too, undertakes the task of reforming the sociohistorical context of her time. Foregrounding the memorable depiction of the mistress, the reader hears the cries of a woman neither for, nor against marriages. She presumably shuns criticizing the patterns of the society in the way a Mary Wolstonecraft character does, but instead displays her indifference to the marriage institution. However, her angry looks and statements, her apparent discontentment in the household form a vigorous protest to her subordination.

On the other hand, neither the grandmother, nor the washing ladies are heard in the poem but they are only presented with visual images. Washing ladies are “all hands employed to wash, to rinse, to wring, / to fold, and starch, and clap, and iron, and plait” (“WD” lines 79-80). In the mistress’ outcry, in little Anna’s plea, today’s reader senses the mindset of 1960’s when the white women’s movement focused merely on their problems and ideas about politics, suffrage, literature and social and economic equality between sexes (Hooks, 121). The mistress and little Anna prefer to ignore the washing ladies’ or the grandmother’s concerns. Their demands are limited to middle class, well educated white women. A new awakening, including the voices of the working class women, poor women, colored women, disabled women, lesbians, old women is to wait until the discourses of the 1990’s when the agenda of the feminist movement got widened and started to involve freedom of all people; male or female, upper or lower class, white or colored.

Although Mrs. Barbauld’s characters may not seem particularly revolutionary to modern readers, during Barbauld’s era, to her female readers, this portrayal of a feminized liberty must have made for an exciting reading. The claim made by little Anna for intellectual freedom is something which targets the forthcoming generation. She does not speak but writes. Her claim in writing suggests she does not want to remain ephemeral like the mistress but demands a more solid place than her mother. Her lines also prove free thoughts cannot be enslaved but finds a release in the form of a poem, to be re-read and re-interpreted by not only its contemporaneous reading public but by future generations as well.

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**ELUCIDATING THE SOCIAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT OF
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY THROUGH MRS. BARBAULD'S
POEM "WASHING DAY"**

Abstract: Eighteenth century, being a transition period in England, was open to various shifting opinions. Hence, the social matrix of the time easily made an autor ascend the literary hierarchy, and then excluded him/her from the antologies. Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825) is one of the middle class female authors of the eighteenth century England who has been left to oblivion for a long time similar to many of her contemporaneous advocates. Stemming from the opinion that these long-forgotten writers can be rather precious to better read and appreciate an obsolete period, the main focus of this article will constitute the discussion on the reasons of such neglect, the reasons of male dominancy to the canon and will foreground a different approach to a seemingly insignificant female text, namely "Washing Day" by Mrs.Barbauld, to justify that even an insignificant text can be invaluable for university syllabuses. Mrs. Barbauld, handling the most male dominant genre of the time, the mock-epic, in this poem subjects the social dichotomy of the eighteenth century life, the social and domestic spheres, to close scrutiny. Henceforth, she proves that women can obtain everlasting influence on human affairs with their texts related to the domestic sphere they are confined to, thanks to their inborn capacities in imaginative powers so long as they are not deprived of a good education.

Keywords: Eighteenth Century Literature, Female Poets, Mock-Epic, Domestic Sphere, Social Sphere.

