

Hannah Morrison
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The history of Hannah Morison, one of the many "disappeared" women writers hitherto lost in the field of cultural amnesia, can only be conjectured from her sole volume of verse, *Poems on Various Subjects*, published in Newry, County Down, in 1817. In her preface, Morison claims to have been "nurtured in the bosom of retirement," and a brief reference to the rustic setting of her childhood school, near a "clacking mill," may indicate some familial connection with the local linen industry, though representations of indigenous weaving skills and domestic labour, except when defamiliarized through displacement into an exotic setting (see "A Tale"), are otherwise elided from Morison's writing. Whether this is symptomatic of genteel fastidiousness or indicative of a social position so liminal and precarious that to disclose her familiarity with labouring-class life would subject it to jeopardy cannot be determined. But the inclusion of translations "from the French" and allusions to Francis Bacon's *Atlantis* in the volume suggest that Morison had been educated far beyond the "hedge school" scraps commonly doled to the Irish Catholic underclass. Historically marked events, beginning with the death of Robert Burns in 1796, indicate that Morison's collection of sixty seven poems was written over at least twenty years. This prolonged gestation period and the absence of a subscription list make it unlikely that Morison wrote out of financial necessity. Poetic self-figurings as a witness of poverty and a giver of charity, plus her apparent familiarity with members of the professional classes in the Portadown Hunting Club and friendship with Joseph Nicholson, a prominent linen manufacturer from Bessbrook, a country village three miles north of Newry, also add to the sense of Morison's rural milieu and middle-class, Protestant affiliations.

The "dominance of affect" that tends to characterize women's writing of the late Romantic and Victorian period is palpable throughout the major part of Morison's writing and an abiding religious sensibility informs a number of her poems, yet she is by no means a poet of uninterrupted pietistic devotion nor a constant purveyor of sweetness and light. Poetry's duty, as Morison envisages it, is to guide us "to heaven with such a gentle sway, / The mind consents, though half unwilling to obey" ("To Poetry"). But in this "half unwillingness," Morison signals some of tensions that trouble the notion of passive self-abnegation in her writing. As the "various" in her title suggests and as I shall argue here, there is sufficient tonal and thematic diversity in Morison's poems to prevent either her being locked into the "passivity of melancholia" or becoming submerged in the "gush" of sentiment frequently associated with female poets in the Romantic period (*Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment*, p.9).

Morison's poem, "Memory," traces a "melancholy line" that binds memories of rural pleasures and childhood friends, now "slumbering with the dead," into a "chain of social fondness for our native plain." The poem's resolution is in part keyed to Wordsworth's syncretism of the "still sad music of humanity" and the beauty of the living earth, but concludes with an invocation to "sensibility" that shifts her from the "masculinist" mode of sober philosophising to the sphere of affective relations:

O Sensibility! thy charms impart,
And shed thy gentle influence o'er my heart!
Teach me with thy unerring hand to move,

And practise deeds of never-ceasing love.
(from "Memory," *Poems*, pp. 40-47)

The "transcendence and disembodiment of individualist romanticism" (*Lyric and Labour*, p. 91) is here eclipsed by a communitarian impulse that clearly relates to David Hume's concept of "sympathy" (*A Treatise on Human Nature*, 1739). However, Morison's insistence that the mind's impressions and heart's affections should be put to use also aligns her with the stratagems through which Romantic women writers extended the "domestic sphere into the local, regional and national" (*Romanticism and Gender*, pp. 3-4).

The struggle to achieve aesthetic autonomy and freedom of movement between such ideological positionings is challenging at best, but for a writer twice marginalized by gender and nation, it is daunting. Female literary ambition is ever subject to attack and Morison's Preface constructs a deflective shield of feminine modesty and "meekness" (the "brightest ray of heaven"). Her initial voice is gentle, deferential and conciliatory; despite protestations of "simple" naturalism she treads the fine lawns of elocution (Seamus Heaney's phrase), speaking in the language of governance: Anglophone, monoglot. Morison's consciousness of linguistic colonization and perhaps some resistance to it may be evidenced in her later "apology" for using the vernacular word "luggy" (an ass): "this word may appear against the rules of grammar, but as it is the name by which such animals are commonly known, I choose to adopt it" ("A Fable," pp. 174-6). This is atypical, however, and Morison's volume is headed by an epigraph from Cowper, a writer with strong appeal to the "conservative, traditionally Christian strain in the gentry and the prosperous middle class" (*Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, pp. 35-6).

Cowper invokes Nature and God to "guide [the] artless hand" of the poet who wishes only to "give useful light, though [he] should miss renown" ("Retirement"). Self-deprecation in an author's preface is almost de rigueur for both sexes, but as Behrendt points out, a gendered bias remains: in men such self-deprecation is assumed to be false-modesty; in women, plain truth (*Romantic Women Writers*, p. 76). We cannot know whether Morison's professions of humble inadequacy are strategically designed to disarm criticism, or if they indicate an internalization of cultural misogyny to that degree of saturation described by the nineteenth-century Scottish poet, Janet Hamilton, when women are "ready to acquiesce in [their] own inferiority" (Hamilton, *Poems*, p. 392).

Morison's words are nevertheless singularly expressive of the dominant cultural metaphysic of female self-effacement:

It may appear a daring attempt in a female, nursed in the bosom of retirement, to solicit public notice at a period like the present when learning has attained the highest climax of perfection. But the author of the following poems, perfectly conscious of her own deficiencies, does not obtrude herself on the literary world, as an eager competitor for fame. If what she has written, shall be found by her readers, either useful or pleasing--if it shall accord with benevolent feelings and affections of the human heart, and be deemed an auxiliary to virtue itself, her object shall have been then effectually attained. She will be highly gratified, if a few congenial minds shall candidly admit, that they have perused, in an hour not appropriated to more important duties, the simple and artless effusions of her muse. (*Poems*, p. iii)

Morison's opening address manifests an express subordination of aesthetic value to moral improvement, and thus anticipates the increasingly didactic imperative of later nineteenth-century literature. Her confessions of deficiency and intimation of awareness that she may be trespassing on discursive territories (learning and literature) not hers by right, implicitly positions the reader in the dominant masculine sphere of "important duties." This sense of conflicted subjectivity and inherent inequality of worth is extended in the second part of the Preface when she compares herself with the "furze, or primrose," growing in "native wildness" against the "luxurious tints of the rose"; a "step-sister" growing in an "adjoining mead" to her elegant, cultivated neighbour. The "ignoble comparison" of women with flowers, is particularly deplored by Mary Wollstonecraft, who feared that such "epithets of weakness" could only serve to enfeeble women's intellectual growth by glamorizing softness and delicacy" (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, chapter IV, note 5). Nevertheless, the political dimension of Morison's organicist rhetoric relates to the concept of nation, as much as it does to gender formation. Sydney Owenson (aka Lady Morgan), author of *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), and a fervent Irish nationalist, deploys the garden metaphor to symbolize the unequal relationship between Ireland, England and France. Owenson eulogizes the fine flowers of liberty proudly grown by the French peasantry, but laments the condition of the "scentless", "unprofitable" shamrock, symbol of an abject nation... which creeps to be trodden upon" (*Romantic Women Writers*, p. 185). Seamus Deane notes that it is characteristic of colonial and imperial nations to "universalize themselves" and regard the peoples and nations that they attempt to subjugate as "necessarily provincial," and therefore inferior at best, sub-human at worst (*Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, p. 9). Elizabeth Scot's poem, "Scotia's Address to Her Sister Anglia" (1801), speaks of the crippling self-doubt that introjected codes of cultural inequality produce in the colonized subject. Scot's anxiety, expressive of a *national* concern, is that her "uncouth" Scottish phrasing might "disgust" the more refined aesthetic sensibilities (the "nicer ears") of her English sisters ("Irish Women Poets of the Romantic Period: A different sort of Other", p. 154). Morison's suggestion that her reader might find a "charming variety, in leaving the luxuriant flower garden, to view the "uncultivated weeds of the waste," implies a similar sense of suppliant inferiority, with Ireland figured as the "wild", uncultivated "step-sister" (here both Cinderella and "ugly" poor relation) to England's cultured rose.

The conflicted relationship latent in Morison's comparison of the elegant flower and the nativist weed is given an overtly political dimension in "A Tribute to Erin", when the provincial subaltern speaks:

"A Tribute to Erin"

Oh Erin, my country! I sigh to deplore,
That the wreath of thy standard blooms lovely no more;
The rose may expand in a sun-favoured isle,
And the thistle can flourish in Penury's soil--
But the shamrock in regions congenial appears--
The dew of her life's Sensibility's tears

...

Rise genius of Erin! That scorpion destroy,
That mingles despair with the smilings of joy!
Drive hence with those reptiles, who erst, at command,

Were scattered, to prove us a favourite land--
Fell discord, that shines with the trappings of zeal,
To nurture Revenge, not in love to our weal.

May the sons of Saint Patrick their ardor maintain,
And the shamrock spontaneously spread o'er the plain--
May his daughters, the love of our country prolong,
By teaching the infant to lisp out the song--
May our efforts still tend Independence to save,
And the wreck of her rights be an Irishman's grave;
That soil be his shroud, to embosom when dead,
Ere blasted the shamrock to fade o'er his head.
(*Poems*, pp. 207-8)

Morison's powerful vocative to a Gaelicized "Erin" grieves for a riven culture, oppressed from without and inwardly fomenting with dissent. By the 1790s, anti-Catholic Orangemen had established Lodges in rural Ulster and "institutionalized the siege mentality of truculent defiance by annexing the motto of the House of Orange "Je Maintiendrai" as their slogan" (*Irish Literature: A Social History*, p. 66). Even in retirement, at a distance from the urban political hub, Morison could not avoid the internecine violence and bloody factionalism that infected the body politic and caused Sir Walter Scott to declare: "I never saw a richer country, or, to speak my mind, a finer people; the worst of them is the bitter and envenomed dislike which they have to each other. Their factions have been so long envenomed, and they have such narrow ground to do their battle in, that they are like people fighting with daggers in a hogshead" (Letter to Joanna Baillie, October 12, 1825).

Morison condemns "Bigotry's foul rust" for blighting the social cohesion and mutual tolerance crucial to the cause of Irish freedom. "Loud" sectarians of all persuasions are vilified in her poem "Religion," a work of satirical invective notable for its ecumenical inclusiveness. None "scape whipping" in her scathing critique of the animus between the Catholic "hosts"---numerically, if not politically dominant, and the "law-protected" Protestant ascendancy:

"Religion"

...

Here pious Peter knuckles to the host,
And thinks, alas! All unbelievers lost:
And here law-protected Martin builds his hope,
And holds the state as his religious prop

...

I hate thee, Peter, pious Martin says,
Because our worship lies two different ways.
Is this the form that meek religion shews?
Is this the spring whence human comfort flows?
Is this consistent with th' eternal plan,
While we adore the Maker, hate the man!

In 1798, the rebellion of the United Irishmen, a radical brotherhood committed to bring "Real Independence to Ireland" and to uphold Thomas Paine's doctrine of "The Rights of Man," had been overthrown (*Irish Literature: A Social History*, p. 90). In 1800 Ireland was united with England in an act of predation described by Lord Byron as "the union of the shark with his prey; the spoiler swallows up his victim, and thus they become one and indivisible" (*Religion, Toleration, and British Writing*, pp. 208-9). After Emmet's failed rebellion in 1803, Thomas Russell, the "quintessential United Irishman" and religious millenarian, had been subjected to a traitor's death at Downpatrick jail in Morison's home county. Fired by the romantic charisma of martyrs like Russell, the hope of a union of power and affection among "Irishmen of all religious persuasions" kept its grip on the hearts of many. The re-politicized eschatology of millenarianism was adopted by the United Irishmen because it "provided a series of tropes flexible enough to convey their enlightened political liberalism" while simultaneously inciting revolt: "Belfast *philosophes* as well as rural protestants of all stripes found millennial tropes vital in either advancing or repudiating the logic of revolution" (*Protestant Millennialism*, p. 9). Morison shares Russell's patriotism and in her poem, "The Millennium," envisions a world of "perfect unison", purged of sin and enmity: 'subdued those passions, brood of vice and strife, / No brother thirsting for a brother's life.' The muted tone and absence of topographical and historical particularity in Morison's poem distances it from the dangers of overt sedition and from the visionary flamboyance of Francis "Millenium" Dobbs, MP, well known to Russell, and mentioned fleetingly in the sociable context of Morison's poem "On the Portadown Hunting Club." Dobbs's "lunatic" apocalyptic fantasies directly associated Armagh, Ireland's Protestant ecclesiastical capital, with Armageddon, and viewed the union with England as an "attempt to annihilate God's chosen nation," for Ireland's independence was "written in the immutable records of Heaven" (*Evangelical Protestantism*, p. 29).

Morison differs from Dobbs in tone and style, for her more pragmatic, though passionate, aspirations to establish the kingdom of Christ in Ireland are routed through human agency. She deploys the millennial imagery of the expulsion of the serpent, Satan, yet her envisaged "enemy" is the combined product of historiography, superstition and atavism: the "fell Discord" incited by religious fanatics, who "nurture revenge" whilst disguising their belligerence beneath "the trappings of zeal." Morison declares that Sects are "weak in universal love" and the only question that should be asked of a "brother" is whether he is "just" ("Religion", p. 36). Her political endorsement of the struggle for Irish independence is implicitly and symbolically linked with cause of the United Irishmen and the values of egalitarianism and religious toleration they espouse. She exhorts the "sons of St Patrick" to maintain their "ardor" in passionate pursuit of Independence and to ensure true brotherhood by eradicating the poisonous snakes and scorpions of internal dissent. Only thus can the shamrock, no longer Owenson's downtrodden emblem of a subjugated land, "spread spontaneously o'er the plain."

Morison's symbolic evocation of an independent Ireland as a living, organic and familial community is extended here when Ireland's daughters are charged with nurturing an imaginary concept of nationhood itself: "May his daughters the love of their country prolong by / Teaching the infant to lisp out the song" ("A Tribute to Erin"). Joanna Baillie attests to the potential for transforming and re-educating a nation's sense of itself through song, when she paraphrases Andrew Fletcher: "Let he who will make the laws of a nation if I have the writing of its ballads" (quoted in *Women's Poetry: Late Romantic to Late Victorian*, p. 12). But the empowering possibility that the women of Ireland might become the "unacknowledged legislators" of their nation or accomplish the task later appropriated by

James Joyce, of "forming the uncreated conscience" of the Irish race is complicated here by Morison's foregrounding of the dyadic relationship between mother and infant. In Kristeva terms the rhythms of song and pre-linguistic babble (L. *infans* unable to speak) relate to a pre-oedipal state of union with the mother. Morison's privileging of matrilineal orality may thus indicate woman's absorption into the nursery "babble" of the pre-oedipal and consequent relegation to the borders of the symbolic order (Julia Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language"). The daughters of the patriarchal nation are implicitly positioned even more securely in the circumscribed orbit of what Habermas describes as the "intimate sphere of the conjugal family" (*Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. 51).

Morison's validation of woman's maternal influence through her "songs of love" appears to endorse Letitia Landon's insistence that a woman's "sphere must be in the affections, [for] what subject can be more fitting than one which it is her peculiar province to refine, spiritualise, and exalt" (*Poetical Works of Letitia Elizabeth Landon*, IV: v-vii). Owenson claims a natural affinity between women and patriotism because of its inseparable connection "with all those ties of tenderness which the heart is calculated to cherish...the fondness of the child, the mistress, the wife and the mother." Her strategically disingenuous conclusion, that "Politics can never be a woman's science; but patriotism must naturally be a woman's sentiment," enables Owenson to sidestep the inherent dangers for a woman writer who has "ventured into a masculine province" by insisting that her work "is not political; rather it is patriotic" (*Romantic Women Writers*, p. 201, p. 184, p. 200). But as Owenson and Morison could not fail to recognize, the link between Irish politics and religion is indissoluble and to engage with one is inevitably to connect with both. Morison's appeal to patriotic feeling in "A Tribute to Erin" may slip past the censorial eye as an effusion of "womanly" affect, but it is nevertheless placed in the context and in the service of political struggle.

Morison more clearly conforms to conservative codes of cultural value in her invocation of "sacrifice of self" as the natural act of a "pure mind illumed with Virtue's noblest glow" ("The Mental Tour"); she is "blest by seeing others blest" ("Lines on seeing May Flowers scattered before a Cottage Door"), and her "chiefest pride" is to "lead the mind where Virtue guides the way" ("The Mental Tour"). She also performs the rites of mourning culturally sanctioned as duties intrinsic to the role of the female poet; she elegizes lost friends and public strangers, mourns her own corporeal dissolution in "Lines on the Decay of Youth," writes on the death of a "beloved Infant," and in "The Skull" even descends, Hamlet-like, into the grave.

Peter Sacks describes the elegiac genre as one in which a process of substitution takes place: "at the core of each procedure is the renunciatory experience of loss...and in each case a successful resolution is not merely deprivatory, but offers a form of compensatory reward...often involv[ing] ...consoling identifications with symbolic, even immortal, figures of power" (*Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment*, pp.185-6). But the human weight of grief involved in the renunciation of the loved object is powerfully realized in Morison's "Poem on the Death of a Beloved Infant" when a mother is tormented the memory of her "sweet babe":
Oh! smile destructive to a mother's peace, / That even in death seemed ling"ring on her face."
The elegist's "consolation" here is a bleak, masochistic submission to purification through suffering: "From dull repinings let my soul be awed, / And wisely kiss the hand, that holds correction's rod." Virtue lies in submission to God's will and is best revealed when we are afflicted, "bruised" by sorrow.

Morison personifies Poetry as an "enchanted maid," a "kind companion," figured in the essentialist tropes of feminine affect: "Pity's tear" and "purest love." The roses that properly

adorn her are 'stripp'd of satire's thorn," and she is thus securely feminized. Yet if this is symbolic of Morison's ideal poetic agenda, it is not always true of what she actually writes, and it is in her treatment of romantic love, that most essential subject of the affective mode, that she is sometimes least conformist.

Satire's barb is keenly honed in her poem "Love," exploding the sentimental pieties of romance and subverting the "heterosexist mythologizing of marriage" (*Muses of Resistance*, p. 89). Morison's moralistic rectitude is replaced by cynical pragmatism when she engages with the material base and power asymmetries inherent in the marriage contract:

LOVE

Like liquid ether, Love, when unconfined,
Evaporates, nor leaves a trace behind;
Your thoughts, your wishes, wisely keep from sight,
For candour puts the airy god to flight.
'Tis by deception Venus blinds his eyes,
And ever holds her empire by disguise.
This makes the wedding knot so needful prove,
For man would change, when he had changed his love.
Ye virgins marry, wisely act each part,
(Law holds the husband, though bereft of heart,)
And bless the stars that gave you such a spouse,
Who cannot break the chain of broken vows;
With links full stretched, from you he's wondrous snug,
And as the show-man holds unruly pug,
Returns, reluctant, biting on his chain,
Resolved to share the same delights again.

Morison offers a sardonic critique of masculine sexual desire as indiscriminate animal appetite; men are "unruly," faithless dogs, whose lusts may of necessity be slaked elsewhere but must remain leashed by the formal letter of the marriage law. Women, on the other hand, are vulnerable to the cultural sanctions that reduce them to non-persons if they do *not* marry, and the Act of Coverture, a form of marital legislation--equivalent to Byron's analogy of the shark's union with its prey--that reduces them to non-persons if they *do*.

Outraged by Rousseau's declaration that a woman's proper education should consist in learning to please men, Mary Wollstonecraft demanded to know why women's minds "should be tainted by coquetish [sic] arts to gratify the sensualist," and whether "affectation" was indeed necessary to "gain the affections of a virtuous man" (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, chapter II). The surprisingly cynical import of Morison's poem seems to be that there are no virtuous men and that even when the male is "bereft of heart," worldly-wise virgins must relinquish agency and subjectivity through concealment of their "thoughts" and "wishes," and devote themselves to the arts of duplicity and dissembling. In Irigaray's terms, the wife becomes a "more or less complacent facilitator for the working out of man's fantasies [in] a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own and that leaves her in her well-known state of dependency...if only he will 'take' her as the object of his pleasure she will not say what she wants" (*New French Feminisms*, p. 100).

The corrosive satirizing of marriage in "Love" has a melancholic correlative in Morison's poem, "The Ring. Supposed to be written by an unhappy English Wife." Employing a dramatic mask to disguise her subjectivity, the poet effects a double displacement via the authorial instability implied by "supposed" and the geographical/ethnic distancing of the "English" speaker. The poem tracks the "sad reverse" of a woman's belief in eternal love, symbolized by the uroboric circle of the wedding ring:

Enclosed in thee, I hoped to find
Whatever could have power to bind--
Domestic happiness complete.

The wife's existence descends into a "hideous" round of "unsocial days and sorrowing nights," neglected by a husband who is attracted by "every other smile," yet treats her with "contempt," as if "possession killed delight." Ludic humour briefly lifts the poem's mood when the "trembling," would-be errant husband is compared to an ass who "Wishes, but dares not crop the grass," but what is markedly different here is the wife's proto-Ibsenite rejection of a loveless marriage:

The ring can have no power to bind,
For love's the magnet of the mind:
The magnet gone, no ring can hold
The heart that's to affection cold,
Vain gift return! the pledge remove--
Thy tie is o'er, when wanting love.

In this act of self-assertion the protagonist refuses to dissemble or to negate her own desires for the sake of maintaining a hollow pretence, whatever the social consequence of losing its protection might mean.

In "The Mental Tour," a quasi-philosophical allegory, Morison prescribes an ideal of "perfect felicity in love," predicated on absolute compatibility of thought, of "congenial hearts" and "intermingled souls." Ironically, such a union seems unsustainable within the bounds of the familiar domestic sphere, yet appears to thrive on "otherness" and distance in Morison's romance of the Canadian wilderness, "A Tale." The lovers, Onega, an "Indian" brave and Marana, a captive white woman, inhabit an imaginary discursive space, a natural "wild zone" where cultural boundaries are permeable. Exemplifying the idea that romantic poetry is poetry of the Fall, this "paradise on earth" is suffused by a Rousseauesque nostalgia, associated by Anthony Smith with Irish nationalism and the desire for the "simplicity and sturdiness of agricultural life, which embodies in pristine form the essence and inner virtue of the community, uncontaminated by urban luxury and corruption" (*Romantic Women Writers*, pp. 177-8).

Morison's brave new world is nevertheless one in which old conservative values are naturalized and thus freshly validated. Belief in the "omnipresence" of God is a simple lesson of "nature, undisguised by art" and "innate virtue...forms religion in an Indian's breast." European men are "Dissipation's sons," perfidious seducers of women who have been taught to "hide the feelings of the heart," and thus to betray their true nature: "not so the Indian, uncorrupt and bold." A magisterial paternal presence is acknowledged in the person of Ononthio, father of Onega and the voice of moral authority in the narrative. Essentialist gender assignments are integral to the life of the tribe; the "hardy youth" is "taught to fling

the javelin," "ply the oar," and triumph in the "blood-stained field" of battle. Political power and action is vested in the male, affect and delicate physical beauty, in the female.

Morison's heroine, Marana, a "morning flowret," with skin white as "flakes of drifted snow," and a complexion in which the "rose and the lily are wedded," passively embodies the enfeebling epithets, despised by Wollstonecraft. Nor is she singled out from the women of the tribe, to whose "female tenderness" such tasks are given that will not strain "the delicately moulded work of Heaven." The women grow herbs for healing and for dyes; they spin thread from "fibrous cord" (referencing the flax production in Morison's locale) and weave many-coloured "wampam" belts: "ingeniously designed / To mark the soft effusions of the mind." This female form of art is symbolically represented in mythic figures like "Ariadne, Penelope, and Philomela"; women often under threat but employing their art both to conceal and "silently to speak of themselves" (*Madwoman*, p. 642). The art explicitly defined as "women's work" is one in which only the mind's gentler, "softer" thoughts are given representation, yet darker forms of male violence, torture, bereavement, slavery and death are ineradicably knotted into the poem's narrative. "Savage" sensuality may be outlawed, but savage retribution is not. Even in this seemingly utopian meeting of hearts, an unfaithful wife is an enemy to her husband's "virtuous happiness": like Desdemona, she must die:

But thou enchantress, lovely as thou art,
I'll tear thy worthless image from my heart;

...

Beyond yon hills I'll send thy guilty shade,
To join its howlings with the tortured dead

("A Tale")

Once her chastity is proven, Marana is rewarded with connubial bliss, a Burnsian idyll, seated by the "hearth" in "Onega's well-conducted cot." Yet the happiness implied in the resolution of the heterosexual romance plot is undermined by the poem's exposure of the volatile nature of male affection and the potential for cruelty that attends its diminution.

Morison fetishizes the *idea* of a perfect union, yet offers few examples of an intact marital bond untouched by anxiety, disappointment, or the woman's fear of passion's mutability. A widow, gone mad after her husband's death by drowning, is consoled by "sweet visions," yet these "delicious dreams, Reality denies." Innocent maids are deceived by "foul seducers" and "seduction" is the "portal to a world of pain" ("A Tale", p. 192). Morison's most persuasive expression of mutuality in love is not found in the exotic zone of romance but in a poem that runs "aslant to the usually assumed heterosexual position" (*Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment*, p. 138):

"To Miss Carroll,
with a Wreath of Flowers"

Louisa, I with care select
A wreath that Friendship twines with me;
It is not common, cold respect,
But feeling binds my soul to thee--

A something language can't express,
Though robed in Fancy's lavish dress.

There is a charm that tongue can't tell--
A hidden spring that moves the heart,
As if detained by magic spell,
Or drawn by some magnetic art--
That nameless power thou hast for me,
Which links my very soul to thee.

But canst thou give that power a name--
A social name to make it dear;
These sparklings of beatic flame,
Thus lent to gild a mortal sphere?
'Tis Sympathy, with fire divine--
She lights the torch on Friendship's shrine.

Accept the flowers--with these receive
The genuine glowings of the mind;
And read the lessons that they give,
Friendship and love with roses bind:
The heart spurns all but love's control,
Whose silken bonds enchain the soul.

The ambiguities of this poem are literally disorienting. Because we cannot determine whether the poet's subjectivity is displaced behind the mask of a male persona, or indeed of a further female persona, our entry into the poem is profoundly destabilized. The poem's elevation of "sympathy"--Morison's frequent signifier of female affect--could indicate that this intense bond exists between women and is therefore an erotically charged relationship that cannot be named, that has no "social name to make it dear" because the symbolic order forbids the articulation of that which threatens its dominant hetero-patriarchal foundation. Conversely, Morison may adopt a dramatic mask as a means of translating "same-sex desire into the hegemonic discourse of heterosexuality" (*Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment*, p. 146). In Morison's poem addressed "To a young lady on the approach of spring," for example, the gender of the "I" is similarly unassigned, yet the Marvellian urgency of the lines indicate, if not a male speaker, then at least a female speaker with manifest erotic intent: "Why, Mary, should we lose our time, / But cull the roses as they blow?". To pursue this form of binary determinism, however, is to ignore the liberating potentialities in the hermeneutic text or "lesson" of the roses, symbolic here of erotic love *and* of friendship, of *eros* and *agape*. Morison's intimations of the inexpressible *something*, the "hidden spring," the "nameless power" that has sufficient force to bond the souls of the lover and the beloved, to elide difference; these combine to challenge the barriers of the known and the limitations of *fixed* epistemological and gender positions. We need not read this as a gynocentric expression of the Romantic concept of negative capability, though Willa Cather's words on the imaginative resonance of what is implied but not spoken seem apposite here:

Whatever is felt upon the page without being sufficiently named there--that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura...that gives high quality...to poetry itself. (quoted in *Are Girls Necessary?*, p. 81)

In the teasing valences and play of meaning in this enigmatic love lyric and the manner in which she problematizes and ruptures the boundaries of generic and gender conventions, we see that there is more to Morison's writing than the unsophisticated artlessness and homely virtue advertised in her Preface. Donna Landry has traced a line of connection in the work of Katherine Philips and Mary Leapor based on their "criticism of the institution of marriage and cultivation of erotically charged female friendships" (*Muses of Resistance*, p. 86). Morison's obliquity of expression in "To Miss Carroll" may involve Emily Dickinson's mode of telling it "slant," for the gagging mask of cultural prohibition cannot be thrown off without terrible risk. My intention here is not to impose an essentialized Sapphic impulse on Morison's work but rather to acknowledge the ways in which her writing exhibits both transgressive and conformist tendencies, and thus resists homogeneous categorization. As Virginia Woolf points out, the "transaction between the writer and the spirit of the age is necessarily one of infinite delicacy" (*Orlando*, p. 188). The contrastive voices of passion and conservatism that emerge from Morison's engagements with politics and with piety, the reactionary forms that people her "impassioned land" of romance, together with a satirical blade that splits open the "sweet sphere" of domesticity; all attest to the compromises, and the successes of Morison's "various" transactions with the age and her art.

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