

“Blest Contemplation’s Placid Friend”: A Hold, mint
tekintélyes társalkodónő a romantikus női költészetben
és azon túl

“Blest Contemplation's Placid Friend”: The Moon as a
Mighty Confidante in the Works of Romantic Women Poets
and Beyond

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“Blest Contemplation's Placid Friend”: The Moon as a Mighty Confidante in the Works of Romantic Women Poets and Beyond

1. Introduction

It would prove to be an exceedingly difficult endeavour to find an image as pervasive in literary works and as multifaceted as that of the Moon. Departing from the celestial body's classical associations with the goddess Diana or Artemis, and hence with femininity, chastity and, quite paradoxically, fertility, one can trace its trajectory throughout diverse epochs and survey its numerous successive connotations with mysticism, superstition, the passage of time and changes in mental and bodily functions. Moonlight is often the guide and accomplice of lovers dashing furtively to their secret appointments under the cover of the night although many refrain from placing complete trust in her due to her perceived volatility: “O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon, / That monthly changes in her circled orb” (Shakespeare 2004, *Romeo and Juliet*, II.II., lines 109–110). Because of her unreliability, she was called an outright liar by the Romans, the *Luna mendax* (Jensen 2007, 95). Despite her changing nature, the women poets of the Pre-romantic and Romantic period to be discussed in the present study depict the Moon as a sisterly, soothing associate; she is not the witness of a rendezvous but the one with whom a clandestine meeting is arranged.

The primary objective of the study is to scrutinise the thus far largely overlooked *oeuvres* of the late 18th- and early 19th- century female poets to pinpoint the similarities between their portrayals of the Moon. The scope of the essay extends to the works of Anne Seward (1742 – 1809), Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743 – 1825), Charlotte Smith (1749 – 1806), Mary Robinson (1757 – 1800), Helen Maria Williams (1759 – 1827), Mary Tighe (1772 – 1810), and Felicia Hemans (1793 – 1835). The argument to be advanced is that the image of the Moon prevalent in the poetry of these writers is created via a synthesis of contrasting characteristics. The Moon inspires both the faculties of reason and imagination in the course of the persona's nocturnal excursions; in addition, she is conceived to be simultaneously beautiful and sublime in the Burkean sense, a gentle companion who also happens to be the cold and mighty queen of the night. Though evidently entrenched in the neoclassical and earlier conventions of representation, the utilization of the Moon trope in the poems to be examined is not devoid of innovation. What is seen as unique is the Moon's special status as a confidante, while her ultimately unfathomable demeanour is also underscored. A final undertaking of the paper is to

situate the poems in the broader socio-cultural context of the age, inspecting the potential impact of Romantic science on the production of the pieces and how they may be inserted into Anne K. Mellor's suggested alternative canon of Romanticism, Feminine Romanticism.

2. The Night as a Chronotope

As darkness falls, the personae of numerous poems written by women in the late 18th and early 19th century retreat to the tender night, contemplating the trials and tribulations of the day by the comforting light of the Moon. During these solitary saunters highly suitable for self-scrutiny and cogitation, the speakers withdraw from the diurnal spaces and gain access to a "countersite" to the day, a Bakhtinian chronotope (Bronfen 2013, 110). Indeed, in this inseparable time-space (Bakhtin 1981, 84), Charlotte Smith's lyrical I can readily address the Moon since "by thy pale beam / Alone and pensive, I delight to stray" (2012, "Sonnet IV. To the Moon", lines 1-2). Elisabeth Bronfen underlines how the night is simultaneously "another way of reckoning time; a time that cannot be reckoned; a time of reckoning" (2013, xi). The nocturnal space-time is fit to be regarded as "bounded and unbound; a sanctuary, a promise, and a chance" (xiii). Although not the primary focus of the paper, one may even draw on biographical details to demonstrate how such a refuge was gravely needed by the women artists of the era. Misfortunes in their lives were rampant, frequently originating from the societal treatment they received due to their gender. From the multifarious ordeals they were to endure, it is sufficient to select only a few to convey a sense of their vulnerable positions. Charlotte Smith was forced into a disastrous marriage at an extremely young age and was even compelled to tend to her husband during his prison sentence, following the customs of the age (Wu 2012, 83). Mary Robinson suffered from being held in a constant state of ill-repute after the disclosure of her involvement with the Prince of Wales to the public and later in her life, she was probably partially paralysed as a result of a miscarriage (Denlinger 2005, 3).

Undisturbed by these daylight struggles, one may explore the time and terrain of seemingly endless possibilities because the "dazzling sight" of the Sun no longer torments the eye, but the skies "with mild maiden beams / Of temper'd light, invite the cherish'd eye / To wander o'er their sphere" (Barbauld 1773, "A Summer Evening's Meditation", lines 1-6). While the vibrant rays of the "sultry tyrant" would impede contemplation and therefore the composition of poetry, the shielding darkness and the gentle glow of the Moon prove to be the perfect ambience for such endeavours. Smith's "Sonnet XXXIX" is an unfeigned confession of love to the night and thereby to its empress, the moon:

I love thee, mournful, sobersuited night,
When the faint moon, yet ling'ring in her wane,
And veil'd in clouds, with pale uncertain light
Hangs o'er the waters of the restless main. (1795, lines 1–4)

Entering the protective, liminal realm of the night is also a transgressive act owing to the fact that it is ordained to be the time of rest. Nevertheless, the women poets to be discussed cannot help but join Milton's Eve in posing the question, "but wherefore all night long shine these [the Moon and the stars], for whom / This glorious sight, when sleep hath shut all eyes?" (2004, *Paradise Lost*, Book II, lines 657-658).

3. The Metaphysics of Light and Darkness

One can maintain without hesitation that Western systems of thought are structured by the day v. night binary, with a clear preference exhibited for daylight. Jacques Derrida (1978) considers the light vs. darkness opposition "the founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics" (27). The beginning of the Gospel of John immediately comes to mind, potentially perceived as a testimony to the functioning of light as an effective Christian allegory: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (*The Holy Bible*, 8:12). Naturally, "the Enlightenment yearned for the splendor of the sun" (Brown 2010, 41), while darkness is conventionally associated with ignorance and superstition. The fall of dusk often demarcates the limits of the knowable, and it is no coincidence that in Greek mythology, the dominion of the night is ruled by Nyx; she is the female embodiment of the threat of primeval darkness, the antithesis to the masculine presence of the day (Bronfen 2013, 20). The influence exerted by the contrast is detectable even at the level of quotidian existence. It is enough to examine the metaphors we live by, how frequently we shed light on issues, elucidate obscure and opaque definitions, and label something or someone as illuminating or brilliant. As Lakoff and Johnson point out, "understanding is seeing; ideas are light-sources; dis-course is a light-medium" (2003, 48).

Numerous efforts have been made to terminate the hitherto unrivalled reign of light; Martin Heidegger found that it is imperative to "learn to acknowledge the dark as something unavoidable" since "the dark is the secret of life", essential for the unconcealment of truth or *Aletheia* (quoted in Burik 2019, 355). It may also be possible to discover earlier instances of the binary somewhat undermined. Arguably, the works of certain Romantic women poets partially destabilize the light vs. dark hierarchical opposition via the synthesis of ostensibly

contradictory qualities, encapsulated in the mildly glowing Moon of the night sky. In the lonely wanderer of the poems, the moonlight invokes not solely flights of fancy but also ponderings saturated with reason. The Moon is depicted with an eye to scientific detail but also mythologized as the “Queen of the silver bow” (Smith 2012, “Sonnet IV. To the Moon”, line 1). As a peaceful companion with whom tales of woe can be shared after a day full of hardships, she is gentle and may be termed beautiful, utilizing Edmund Burke’s definition; nonetheless, she also appears as cold and distant and possesses sublime powers that both disturb and delight the beholder. The following sections shall aim to introduce how such reconciliations are achieved through the deployment of Moon imagery in the writings of late 18th- and early 19th-century women poets.

4. Reason and Fancy

Serving as a counterpoint to rationality’s association with Apollonian radiance and hence masculinity, Reason is sometimes represented in the literature of the epoch as feminine. Although upholding the light vs. dark binary, Mary Wollstonecraft in her *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1794) employs a female personification of Reason; moreover, she feasibly identifies feminine reason with the Moon: “Reason has, at last, shown her captivating face, beaming with benevolence; and it will be impossible for the dark hand of despotism again to obscure its radiance, or the lurking dagger of subordinate tyrants to reach her bosom” (quoted in Mellor 1993, 68). Returning to Milton, one can demonstrate with no great difficulty that contemplation was most widely assessed to be a masculine occupation since “for contemplation hee and valour formd, / For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace” (Book IV, lines 297-298). In light of this observation, the personified Contemplation of Anna Lætitia Barbauld’s “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” is nothing less than subversive and could perhaps be inserted into a more general trend of the period, a gradual change of Contemplation’s perception:

...’Tis now the hour
When Contemplation, from her sunless haunts,
The cool damp grotto, or the lonely depth
Of unpierc’d woods, where wrapt in solid shade
She mused away the gaudy hours of noon,
And fed on thoughts unripen’d by the sun,

Moves forward; and with radiant finger points

To yon blue concave swell'd by breath divine. (1773, lines 17-24)

It is during the dead of midnight, the “the noon of thought” (line 51) that Contemplation makes her departure from her shadowy shelter, and subsequent to her feast on “thoughts unripen’d by the sun” (line 22), she entreats the speaker to indulge in a study of the sky and the crescent Moon as “wisdom mounts her zenith with the stars” (line 52). The Moon’s propensity to become “Blest Contemplation’s placid friend” is then hardly surprising (Robinson 1791, “Ode to the Moon”, line 2).

Rational reflections on ephemerality are recurrent in these lunar poems, often induced by the sight of the heavenly orb. The speaker of Charlotte Smith’s “Sonnet XLIV. Written in the Church Yard at Middleton in Sussex” is confronted with the sight of the corpses which were washed out by the forceful flood engendered by the Moon. The spectator of this arresting scene is prompted to consider her own impermanence and feels envious of the deceased, being exhausted by the storms of life:

Lo! their bones whiten in the frequent wave;

But vain to them the winds and waters rave;

They hear the warring elements no more:

While I am doom’d—by life’s long storm oppress,

To gaze with envy, on their gloomy rest. (1795, lines 10-14)

In virtue of her seemingly supernatural powers and repeated disappearance and re-appearance in the sky, the Moon becomes the herald of mortality in Mary Robinson’s ruminations as well, with a similar prominence given to the motif of water:

And as I mark, thy faint reclining head,

Sinking on Ocean’s pearly bed;

Let Reason tell my soul, thus all things fade.

.....

Those eyes, that beam with Friendship’s ray,

And glance ineffable delight,

Shall shrink from life’s translucid day,

And close their fainting orbs, in Death’s impervious night.

(1791, “Ode to the Moon” lines 31–33, 55–58)

The parallel drawn between the closing eyes of the moribund and the dimming light of the orb is especially striking. The light of the Moon may also conjure up memories “of the years that for ever are fled” and “of joys that have vanish'd; of hopes that are dead/ Of friendships that were, and are not” (Tighe 2005, lines 21-24). The very same moonbeam illuminates the window of the speaker in Tighe’s poem that falls on the grave of her departed friend (lines 26-28). In the company of the “melancholy orb”, one could also “mourn that hope to me in youth is lost” (Williams 1823, lines 2, 12). Not only does the Moon operate as an effective *memento mori*, but it also serves as a solace where “the wretched may have rest” and “the sufferers of the earth perhaps may go, / Released by death” (Smith 2012, “Sonnet IV. To the Moon”, lines 8–10). According to Montgomery (1999), the Moon was commonly equated with the Elysian fields during antiquity, where those favoured by the gods dwelt after their retirement from terrestrial existence (14). Identically to the attitude of the speaker in “Sonnet XLIV. Written in the Church Yard at Middleton in Sussex”, the persona of “Sonnet IV. To the Moon” expresses her longing for the “benignant sphere” and that “I soon may reach thy world serene, / Poor wearied pilgrim—in this toiling scene!” (lines 10, 13-14).

Nevertheless, differences could be discerned between the treatment of the trope by Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson. While Smith portrays the Moon as a heavenly, eternal sphere, Robinson’s “chaste orb” is subject to earthly decay. Of considerable importance may be that Sappho (2013) also accentuates the contrast between the permanence of the persona’s solitude and the advancing of time, accompanied by the changeful phases of the Moon:

Well, the moon has set
And the Pleiades. It is the middle
Of the night. And the hour passes by,
But I sleep alone.

Daniel Robinson highlights in his seminal work *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame* (2011) that Mary Robinson was commonly referred to as “the English Sappho” because of her attempted revision of the figure of the Sapphic poetess in her sonnet sequence entitled *Sappho and Phaon* (111-112). The connection between the transience of life and the poet’s reputation, and what may remain of it after expiry is one of the central concerns of these sonnets. The Moon bears witness to the self-destruction of Robinson’s Sappho in “Sonnet XLIII” and “XLIV. Conclusive” of the cycle; accordingly, a parallel is drawn between the poetess’ professed passing into oblivion and the fading of the Moon. To point out another example of

intertextuality, one must note that the sonnet form was deemed to be particularly suitable to accommodate meditations on the link between the ephemerality of fame and the image of the waning Moon as Petrarch and Shakespeare were likewise preoccupied with this theme. Shakespeare (2016) affirms in “Sonnet 107: Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul” that there are ways in which even perishable entities could withstand the test of time: “The mortal moon hath her eclipse endur’d” (line 5). The Moon cyclically returns to the night sky, yet dwindle from time to time she must. Charlotte Smith famously sought to immortalize her predecessors, most significantly Shakespeare and Petrarch, through intertextual allusions and she pronounces that “fame and beauty still defy decay / Saved by the historic page the poet’s tender lay!” (1795, “Sonnet XLVI”, lines 13–14). Accordingly, her Moon is seldom seen as evanescent but rather as an undying celestial domain. Upon a Romantic ramble to a ruin bathed in moonlight, the speaker of Felicia Hemans’s poem avers that “Oh! here shall Contemplation love, / Unseen and undisturb’d, to rove” and “Shall weep for Glory’s transient day / And Grandeur’s evanescent ray”, conjuring the memories “Of warriors and of minstrels dead, / Who sought the field, who struck the lyre, / With all Ambition’s kindling fire!” (1875, “The Ruin and its Flowers”, lines 77-78, 81-82, 86-88).

For challenging a concomitant dichotomy between fancy and reason, imaginings and rationality are often blended in the reveries enkindled by the Moon in these poetic pieces. Traditionally, it is fanciful musings that the Moon gives rise to as the “Mother of wildly-working visions” (Coleridge 1997, “Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon”, line 2) and reason resides in light of the Sun. Here, however, “Fancy’s aëry dream” (Robinson 1791, “Ode to the Moon” line 22) pacifies the mind, yet musings about impermanence require reason’s insight. The “moonlight composure” that steals over the mind of the speaker in Mary Tighe’s “To the Moon” is simultaneously “poetical, pensive, and sweet” (2005, lines 19-20). Enraptured by the mysteries of the night sky, Barbauld’s lyrical I is nevertheless “seize’d in thought” while “On fancy’s wild and roving wing I sail, / From the green borders of the peopled earth (1773, lines 71-72). The persona of Mary Robinson’s “Ode to the Moon” is similarly absorbed in a fantastical vision of the nocturnal landscape:

And oft, amidst the shades of night
I court thy undulating light;
When Fairies dance around the verdant ring,
Or frisk beside the bubbling spring,

When the thoughtless SHEPHERD'S song
Echoes thro' the silent air. (1791, lines 7-12)

The mild light of the Moon “can visionary thoughts impart, / And lead the Muse to soothe a suffring heart” (Williams 1823, lines 13-14) so that the poetess may join “the thoughtless SHEPHERD'S song” (Robinson 1791, line 11). Felicia Hemans also finds that the moonlit scene is the ideal location and time to encounter the Muse:

COME, gentle muse! now all is calm,
The dew descends, the air is balm;
Unruffled is the glassy deep,
While moon-beams o'er its bosom sleep

.....

Oh! at this hour, this placid hour,
Soft music, wake thy magic pow'r! (1812 “Moon-Light”, lines 1-4, 9-10)

However, Mary Robinson (2001) points out in the Preface for *Sappho and Phaon* that there exists a corresponding tension between all-consuming, Dionysian devotion and rational, Apollonian aptitude for poetry as the story of Sappho “presented to my imagination such a lively example of the human mind, enlightened by the most exquisite talents, yet yielding to the destructive controul of ungovernable passions” (6). Both the Apollonian apprehension of *techne* and restraint required to apply poetic forms and the Dionysian liberation of poetic imagination, the thoughtless song, are instigated by the sight of the Moon. As Sappho in Robinson’s *Sappho and Phaon* prepares to leap into the foams of the sea from the Leucadian cliffs due to her unrequited love for Phaon, evening steals over the scenery and Sappho’s “glowing, palpitating soul” greets “returning Reason's placid beam” with a sigh of relief as it can “calm rebellious Fancy's fev'rish dream” (2001, “Sonnet XLIII”, lines 9-10, 12). Similarly, in the conclusive “Sonnet XLIV”, “Celestial Sympathy, with humid eye, / Bids the light Sylph capricious Fancy fly” (2001, lines 2–3). Consequently, moonlight possesses the power to alternately bring about the unfettered flight of fancy and the reawakening of reason.

5. The Sublime and the Beautiful

The apparently irreconcilable aesthetic categories of the sublime and the beautiful as defined by Edmund Burke also dwell side by side in these poems. Charlotte Smith’s persona in her “Sonnet XLIV. Written in the Church Yard at Middleton in Sussex” acknowledges the

arresting abilities of the “mute arbitress of tides” (1795, line 1), paying homage to Shakespeare’s “governess of floods” (2011, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, II. I. line 103). Such power is sublime since it is astonishing and unsettling, fitted “to excite the ideas of pain, and danger” (Burke 1990, 36):

Press’d by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides,
While the loud equinox its pow’r combines,
The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
But o’er the shrinking land sublimely rides. (lines 1-4)

Furthermore, the motif of the Moon is customarily linked to obscurity, being sometimes visible and then invisible, near but unreachable (Burke 1990, 58). Burke comments on these protean features and describes how “a light now appearing, and now leaving us, and so off and on, is even more terrible than total darkness” (1990, 77). Nonetheless, the Moon owns “softer virtues” which are ascribed to beautiful objects and are deemed to be feminine by Burke, such as “easiness of temper, compassion, kindness” (1990, 100). Inherent in her role as a willing auditor and confidante are these qualities since during the pensive occasions spent in her company, she “sheds a soft calm upon my troubled breast” (Smith 2012, “Sonnet IV” line 6). Additionally, one cannot help but wonder whether Burke’s description of a beautiful woman could be analogous to the almost voyeuristic gaze with which a scientist may observe the Moon through his telescope, beholding “the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix or whither it is carried” (1990, 105). Albeit the Moon of the Romantic women poets is a “mild maiden”, quite aggressively she “seems to push / Her brother down the sky” (Barbauld 1773, lines 4, 9-10). Conflicting qualities like darkness and light, the Moon’s gloomy shadow and the soothing rays are juxtaposed and equally cherished by Helen Maria Williams:

Come! and o’er earth thy wand’ring lustre shed,
Thy deepest shadow, and thy softest light;
To me congenial is the gloomy grove,
When with faint light the sloping uplands shine;
That gloom, those pensive rays alike I love. (1823, lines 4-7)

In other writing of these women poets, however, the motherly qualities of the Moon are sometimes purposefully highlighted and her unsettling forces are downplayed, as noticeable in Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children* (1779):

You may look at me always, for I am not so bright as to dazzle your eyes, and I never scorch you. I am mild and gentle. (...) When you are asleep, I shine through your curtains with my gentle beams and I say, Sleep on, poor little tired boy, I will not disturb you. (Quoted in McCarthy 2008, 206-207)

6. Science and Myth

Conventional identifications of the Moon with Greek and Roman lunar goddesses abound in the Romantic poetry composed by women. She is persistently apostrophized as the “PALE GODDESS of the witching hour” (Robinson 1791, “Ode to the Moon”, line 1) or the authoritative “queen of the silver bow” (Smith 2012, “Sonnet IV” line 1), and pictured as “DIAN's bright crescent” (Barbauld 1773, line 7). Yet, one would not be misguided to argue that these poems also engage in a dialogue with the scientific discoveries of their age. The end of the 18th century marks what Samuel Taylor Coleridge dubbed as the second scientific revolution, and Richard Holmes (2008) states that in this “age of wonder”, a reciprocity existed between science and the Romantic movements. Moments of scientific exploration were often interpreted as events of Romantic revelations when one could glimpse into the underlying order of things. Closely monitoring the eclipse of the Moon and her capacity to govern the waters may unveil to the spectator the hidden truths of Nature, for example about the rhythm of life and transitoriness. Müller proposes that the interrelatedness of all natural forms (*Wechselwirkung*) was foregrounded in scientific discourse with the advent of Romanticism (1994, 3). Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* must be mentioned in this context, encouraging an inspection of the natural world in its entirety, progressing from the universal to the particular (Jahn 1994, 77). Importantly, scientific knowledge became more widely accessible in the period, and numerous books sought to instruct not only men but women and children on multiple topics within a variety of disciplines, usually in a dialogic form. A curious specimen of such texts is Ann Murry’s *The Sequel to Mentoria; or, the Young Ladies Instructor* (1799):

The light which the Moon in its brightest state reflects from the Sun, is of that mild quality, to concentrate the imagination, whilst more vivid rays would tend to disturb, and extend its range to objects, not so well suited to the purposes of serious consideration, or devout contemplation. The Moon is to the works of Nature, what modesty, or diffidence, is in its effects on the moral world... (38)

Murry implies that the stimulating moonlight delimits the themes which are worthy of serious thought and ascribes endowments to the Moon which are greatly valued in a young lady. The excerpt convincingly demonstrates how most of these publications merely served as instruments for indoctrination into polite society, providing appropriate subjects for conversation (Walters 1997, 123).

7. “*Celestial Sympathy*”

The conceptualization of *Wechselwirkung* may be harmonious with Anne K. Mellor’s delineation of a Feminine Romantic tradition, functioning as a “countersite” to mainstream Romanticism. Mellor’s Feminine Romanticism is chiefly characterized by a “cooperative rather than possessive interaction with a Nature troped as a female friend or sister” (1993, 3). The relative ease with which one could position the lunar poetry of Romantic women authors within this framework deserves some consideration. Under the dark veil of the night, the boundaries between the human and non-human become undetectable; as identities intermingle, sympathy and affinity prevail. In Smith’s “Sonnet III. To a Nightingale” and Robinson’s “Ode to the Nightingale” and “Second Ode to the Nightingale”, the speakers identify with the eponymous bird as they are all “Pale Sorrow’s victims” (Smith 2012, “Sonnet III” line 9). The poems undoubtedly echo the myth of the mutilated Philomel who was transformed into a nightingale; however, most significant is the pieces’ discourse with Petrarch’s “Sonnet 311, Quel rosignol, che sí soave piagne” and John Milton’s “Sonnet to the Nightingale” (Wu 2012, 88n2). It is crucial to note that neither in Petrarch’s nor Milton’s sonnet is Moon imagery dominant, whereas both Robinson and Smith seek to emphasize how the poet and the bird unite in their song about shared misfortunes, addressing the Moon and inspiring empathy in the whole of Nature:

In snowy west, I tell my pains
Beside the brook in icy chains
Bound its weedy banks between,
While sad I watch night’s pensive queen,
Just emblem of my weary woes:
For ah! where’er the virgin goes,
Each flow’ret greets her with a tear
To sympathetic sorrow dear
(Robinson 1791, “Second Ode to the Nightingale”, lines 41–48)

Smith's verse is concerned with the nightingale's envied position, its freedom in the woodlands to confide in the Moon and tell her its "tale of tender woe" (lines 2, 10). Additionally, in Robinson's "Ode to the Moon", the Moon herself becomes a "languid eye" who "sheds its soft tears upon the painted vale" (1791, lines 17–18). Myers (2014) acutely observes that Smith wishes to emulate Petrarch "to elicit from readers an intellectual and emotional reciprocity missing from her immediate circumstances" (241). Correspondingly, all the elements of the nightly landscape in Felicia Hemans's (1841) "To the Moon" implore "Fair Cyllene" to rise, including the branches of the osiers, the shepherd's song echoed by the mountains, and the minstrel. In her *Memoirs*, Mary Robinson (1895) recounts the curious anecdote of how the sight of the Moon impelled her daughter to utter her first words:

It was during one of these night walks that my little daughter first blessed my ears with the articulation of words. (...) It was a clear moonlight evening; the infant was in the arms of her nursery maid; she was dancing her up and down, and was playing with her; her eyes were fixed on the moon, to which she pointed with her small forefinger. On a sudden a cloud passed over it, and the child, with a slow falling of her hand, articulately sighed, "All gone!" (114)

Mellor suggests that Feminine Romanticism also shows a marked preference for gradual instead of radical social change; favouring the soft light of the Moon to the dazzling rays of the Sun and the reference to the unhurried alteration of its phases may be suggestive of such an agenda (1993, 3). Moreover, advocates for this step-by-step progress would strive to extend "the values of domesticity into the public realm", constituting a society based on a system of friendship, congeniality and sisterly cooperation (3). Mellor borrows Carol Gilligan's theory of the ethics of care, asserting that Romantic women writers refuse to construct a threatening Other; by dismissing "oppositional polarity", they attempt to establish a non-hierarchical structure of sympathy and likeness (3). This tendency may be perceptible in their employment of Moon imagery as indicated by the preceding sections. Their distaste for applying such polarity is exemplified by their portrayal of the Moon as a complex entity, encompassing both light and darkness, beauty and sublimity, being seemingly within reach but proving to be unattainable. Informed in their work not solely by mythology but perhaps also by the breakthroughs of contemporary science, these women poets of Romanticism chose to make equal use of traditional representations and innovative perspectives.

8. Beyond the Moon of Feminine Romanticism

Customarily, the Moon is presented as an object of admiration or utilized as a tool for the poets to achieve the desired atmosphere in their verse. An example of the latter, which may be labelled as an instance of pathetic fallacy, could be discovered in Sir Philip Sidney's "Sonnet 31, With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies..." of *Astrophil and Stella*. Renderings of this kind are to be found in several works of the Romantics as well; Keats' "Endymion" ([1818] 1884) recounts the romance of the shepherd Endymion and silver-lipped Cynthia, goddess of the Moon, and Shelley's (1994) Moon is weary and companionless, wandering endlessly ("To the Moon") or is turned into a dying lady who is gradually going insane ("The Waning Moon"). Naturally, the Moon has always held allure to most; Aphra Behn's play *The Emperor of the Moon* (1688) may satirize just this strange fascination via Doctor Baliardo's almost voyeuristic obsession with the Moon, judged to be a superior place and scrutinised constantly through his telescope.

Attempting a comparison with the lunar poems analysed above, one could postulate that their authors are more likely to regard the Moon as sovereign and potent and less inclined to impart simply their own sentiments to the beloved heavenly body. Even though the Moon is usually likened to a personified friendship whose "mild and genuine ray / Through life's long evening shall unclouded last" (Smith 2012, "Sonnet XXVIII. To Friendship" lines 5–6), her distant and cold mien is equally recognised. It is not uncharacteristic of the poets discussed here to paint the "Night's regent" as uncaring, beaming "at the tumult of the troubled earth", and hence being "unvex'd by all their conflicts" (Smith 1795, "Sonnet LIX", lines 6, 8, 14). Even her capability to console is insufficient at times and despondency triumphs:

Nor pearly leaves, nor Cynthia's beams,
Nor smiling Pleasure's shad'wy dreams,
Sweet bird, not e'en thy melting Strains
Can calm the Heart, where tyrant Sorrow reigns.
(Robinson 1791, "Ode to the Nightingale", lines 75–78)

Despite the presumed dispassion of the Moon, the speakers of these poetic pieces decide to open their hearts to her, just like Anne Seward declares that "cold as she is, to her my bursting heart / Shall pour its waste of woe, its unavailing smart" (1810, lines 5-6). Nor is it rare that they question this contradictory attraction to the remote orb, only to restate their intention to treat her as their closest associate while showing respect for her autonomy:

What is it that gives thee, pale Queen of the Night,
That secret intelligent grace?
Or why do I gaze with such tender delight
On thy fair, but insensible face?

What gentle enchantment possesses thy beam
Beyond the warm sunshine day?
Thy bosom is cold as the glittering stream,
Where dances thy tremulous ray.

.....

Then still I must love thee, mild Queen of the Night!
Since feeling and fancy agree,
To make thee a source of unfading delight,
A friend and a solace to me. (Tighe 2005, lines 1-8, 29-32)

Mellor claims that in what she labels as mainstream Romanticism, “the male poet speaks of, for and in the place of a nature originally gendered as female” (1993, 90). Notwithstanding their deliberate exploitation and moulding of the Moon to fit their own purposes, certain poets show awareness of the dangers of this practice. It may be revealing that William Wordsworth (1994) initially insists that he would spare the Moon from bestowing on her yet another name, as others did before him:

What pleasure once encompassed those sweet names
Which yet in thy behalf the Poet claims,
An idolizing dreamer as of yore! —
I slight them all... (lines 7-10)

Yet, a few lines after this declaration, he addresses the Moon as the Sailor’s Friend, and later indulges in speculations about the limited powers of the Moon: “Let me a compensating faith maintain; / That there's a sensitive, a tender, part /Which thou canst touch in every human heart” (lines 43-45). Coleridge proves to be more successful in tackling the issue in his parodistic piece, “A Soliloquy of the Full Moon”. Strategically availing himself of the “masculine envoicement” of Nature outlined by Mellor (1993, 90), he grants an opportunity to the hitherto silenced Moon to speak up and assert her own identity, repeating that “I am I myself I, the jolly full Moon” (1997, line 52). Nonetheless, he is unafraid to mock the “Ventriloquogusty” poets

and their attempts at appropriation (line 12). In spite of his best efforts, Wordsworth unwittingly becomes one of them, a fact that Coleridge ever so subtly implies:

A Night or two after a worse Rogue there came,
The head of the Gang, one Wordsworth by name—
'Ho! What's in the wind?' 'Tis the voice of a Wizzard!
I saw him look at me most terribly blue!
He was hunting for witch-rhymes from great A to Izzard,
And soon as he'd found them made no more ado
But chang'd me at once to a little Canoe. (Lines 26–32)

Yet the work is not devoid of self-reflection as the Moon's encounter with the author of the playful piece is hardly more promising:

From this strange Enchantment uncharm'd by degrees
I began to take courage & hop'd for some Ease,
When one Coleridge, a Raff of the self-same Banditti
Past by—& intending no doubt to be witty,
Because I'd th' ill-fortune his taste to displease,
He turn'd up his nose,
And in pitiful Prose
Made me into the half of a small Cheshire Cheese. (Lines 33-40)

9. Conclusion

The poems surveyed in the paper were selected to illustrate how the employment of lunar imagery by the various women poets of Romanticism exhibits a high degree of commonality. The poets appear to conflate reason and fancy, qualities of sublimity and beauty, and the images of a dominant deity and a caring companion in their representations of a personified Moon. Even though a tranquil mood is generally bestowed upon the persona, every so often the Moon appears as insensible and detached. Not unlike their literary precursors, these women poets foreground the role of the Moon as a reminder of temporality; however, it has been suggested that they partly deviate from the previous and maybe even from the subsequent mainstream, male traditions. By their refusal to structure their works according to polarities and readiness to synthesize clashing characteristics, these authors may belong to Anne K. Mellor's Feminine Romanticism, promoting sympathy instead of domination, an ethics of care instead of an ethics of justice. Worthy of further exploration would be a feasible continuity between the inspected

poems and later lyrical pieces on the Moon by female poets, investigating what made a poetess from centuries later defy conventions in an alike manner and boldly proclaim that “the moon is my mother. She is not sweet like Mary / Her blue garments unloose small bats and owls. / How I would like to believe in tenderness –” (Plath 2015, lines 18-20).

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