Victorian Literature and Culture (1999), 521–530. Printed in the United States of America.
Copyright © 1999 Cambridge University Press. 1060-1503/99 $9.50

LYRICAL STUDIES

By Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins

THE VICTORIAN POETESS has become as important a figure in the late twentieth century as she was in the late nineteenth — perhaps because she seems now, as then, to have lapsed into the obscurity of literary history. In recent years feminist critics have been interested in reclaiming a tradition of nineteenth-century popular poetesses whose verse circulated broadly on both sides of the Atlantic. A spate of new anthologies, annotated editions, and critical collections (as well as texts now available on-line) has reintroduced supposedly lost women poets into the canon of Victorian poetry. Indeed, this recovery is often predicated on a rhetoric of loss, as if only by losing women poets we can rediscover and read them anew. Thus in recent advertisements for such anthologies, we read that *Victorian Women Poets* (edited by Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds in 1995) "aims to recover the lost map of Victorian women's poetry," and *British Women Poets of the 19th Century* (edited by Margaret Higonnet in 1996) "restores the voices and reputations of these 'lost' artists"; likewise, the compendious *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets* (edited by Isobel Armstrong and Joseph Bristow with Cath Sharrock in 1996) "rediscovers rich and diverse female traditions." On the other side of the Atlantic, *American Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century* (edited by Cheryl Walker in 1992) reverses "the almost total neglect accorded nineteenth-century popular women poets," and *Nineteenth-Century American Women Poets* (edited by Paula Bennett in 1997) also rediscovers "previously neglected" women poets, while *She Wields a Pen: American Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century* (edited by Janet Gray in 1997) "restores some of the plenitude of women's poetry."

Recover, restore, rediscover: the impulse to anthologize women poets is nothing new, insofar as current (re)collections repeat their (re)discovery in numerous nineteenth-century anthologies. For example the year 1848 — exactly one and a half centuries ago, at the time of our writing — saw the publication of *British Female Poets* by George Bethune, *The Female Poets of Great Britain* by Fredric Rowton, *The Female Poets of America* by Rufus Griswold, and *The American Female Poets* by Caroline May. While the editorial principles of nineteenth-century editors may differ from their twentieth-century successors, they constructed the Poetess as a category that is now being revived. Indeed, as Tricia Lootens has argued so eloquently in *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender and Victorian Literary Canonization* (1996), much of the nineteenth century is devoted to canonizing poetesses who are, as they were, ironically forgotten in the very process of being remembered. If the Poetess is a continually rediscovered figure, what are we hoping to uncover by exhuming dead

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178 Published online by Cambridge University Press

poetesses from a dusty century? When we look into the crypt of literary history, are we recovering in our culture what is lost in theirs, or recovering in their culture what is lost in ours? And what theory of culture — or tradition, or history — are we assuming?

One answer to these questions is already implicit in the disappearing act performed by nineteenth-century poetesses. As a Victorianist and an Americanist, we have been interested in the Poetess as a vehicle for trans-Atlantic exchange not only in the previous century, but also in our own. While there has been a lively debate among scholars in nineteenth-century American studies about the politics of sentiment, and a developed discourse on poetics and aesthetics among Victorianists, we would like to bring these conversations into contact with one another. The Poetess serves as our relay point, located at the intersection of politics and poetics that we understand to be the domain of cultural studies, and we will offer the example of two poetesses — one British, one American — in order to think about the claims of women's "sentimental" lyric. While the recovery of women poets is understood and justified (or justifiably understood) as a revision of the canon that shapes current literary studies, this critical model assumes that nineteenth-century poetesses can be reclaimed and made available for identification. The task of the feminist critic is then seen to be revisionary, altering literary history so that women writers can be represented in the academic curriculum, either by integrating them into the existing canon or by creating a female counter-canon: a tradition of their own. Such a recovery project takes up the reformist energies of nineteenth-century women's literature as part of the political agenda of twentieth-century feminist literary criticism.

But to reduce the history of canon formation to a politics of representation is to beg the question of the construction of cultural categories, according to an argument more fully developed by John Guillory in *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (1993). We agree with his critique of identity politics in the canon debates, but it is worth asking why Guillory chooses to exemplify "the emergence of this topos into institutional prominence" (n.343) with reference to "the feminist research program" in particular (n.348). Insofar as the topos of non-representation in the canon has become a rhetorical commonplace within feminist criticism, this point seemingly sidelined to the footnotes also proves central to Guillory's argument. His account of literary canon formation revolves around the example of Thomas Gray, whose "Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard" becomes canonical by reinhabiting an emptied common with rhetorical commonplaces. The popular reception of this poem is evident in pedagogical anthologies such as *The Speaker* (1774), where Thomas Gray is presented alongside "Our Poetess," Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Here, according to Guillory, Gray's poem can be read "in its proper place, the place it occupies in the field of institutional/linguistic forces" (102), while a poem by "'one Mrs. Barbauld,' a writer no one would regard today as canonical" (103) is placed in a "pendant position" (104) to reflect on Gray's reception. Indeed, the canonization of the elegy depends on "one Mrs. Barbauld," a name we seem to have disinherited in the very process of inheriting Mr. Thomas Gray, the proper name in its proper place. Thus Guillory demonstrates how "Our Poetess" is consigned to anonymity: her proper place in culture is a perpetual displacement, the very means of cultural transmission.

In leaping from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, however, from the vernacular canon of Gray and Wordsworth to the canonical claims of New Criticism and Deconstruction, Guillory's book leaves the nineteenth century open for discussion: a century when the negotiation between classical and vernacular literacy is further played out between

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178 Published online by Cambridge University Press

England and America, and when the woman of letters emerges alongside the man of letters to play the role of mediator in this negotiation. Guillory's account of feminist identity politics in the American academy is, in part, a symptom of this historical gap. By making feminist criticism stand in for, or representative of, the problem of (non)representation, he too has inherited another version of the displacement prefigured in the Poetess, who circulates from the late eighteenth century onward as an increasingly empty figure: not a lyric subject to be reclaimed as an identity but a medium for cultural exchange, a common name upon which much depends — including the problem of defining lyric as a genre.

As a type, the Poetess exemplifies the theory of her own apparent historical obscurity, and it is a theory that has gone virtually unrecognized. We would like to call that theory "lyrical," rather than calling it a theory of "the lyric," in order to mark a distinction between lyric as a transhistorical genre and the uses to which that genre may be put. One reason for the perpetual disappearance and reappearance of the Poetess is that she is not the content of her own generic representation: not a speaker, not an "I," not a consciousness, not a subjectivity, not a voice, not a persona, not a self. The history of her generic obscurity has not yet been written because of a tendency to read "the lyric" as a genre defined in terms of subjective expression. Susan Stewart has suggested in her "Preface to a Lyric History" that "it is almost unbearable to imagine lyric outside of [the] terms of subjectivity" (212). But is it? Was it? Perhaps a properly historical approach to the lyric would entail imagining the terms of subjectivity as themselves quite lyrically generic, particularly by the latter part of the nineteenth century. Various poetesses seem to have imagined them so: through the figure of the Poetess, they perform lyrical reflections on the conventions of subjectivity attributed to persons and poems, and thus imagine the unbearable possibility of lyric outside the terms, or boundaries, of subjectivity. The question we would pose through these poetesses is whether the pathos attributed to their poetry may be traced to their outside position on subjectivity, rather than (as has been the case for the last one hundred and fifty years) to their utter absorption in their own particularly abstract selves.

Consider Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Victorian Poetess who inspired Robert Browning to make his now famous personal appeal to her poetic persona: "I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett. . . . and I love you too" (Barrett and Browning 1). Their 1846 marriage made her into an even more public persona and perhaps Tennyson's rival for Poet Laureate in 1850, although the nomination of a Poetess for the title could only be made improperly, in jest. Her verse novel *Aurora Leigh* (published in London in 1856, with a simultaneous American edition advertised and enthusiastically received as "Mrs. Browning's New Poem") is a lyrical study of mid-nineteenth-century literary culture: it narrates the paradigmatic career of a poetess, in order to meditate on the production of that generically gendered figure. In this way the poem predicts its own reception as well, according to a convention of biographical reading that dictates the absorption of Aurora into Elizabeth Barrett Browning. By reading generically, nineteenth-century readers discovered EBB to be writing "autobiographically," making herself the subject of her own poem. Thus its opening lines introduce the tautology of an "I, writing thus" (I. 9).

Twentieth-century feminist critics have subscribed to a subjectivist reading, not least in their recovery of EBB as an exemplary precursor for women writers. Beginning with

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Women's Press reprint of *Aurora Leigh* in 1978, introduced by Cora Kaplan, her poem has been reread and taught in the academy for its delineation of a female poetic subject and a feminized poetic tradition. The publication of critical studies in the late eighties (including books by Helen Cooper, Dorothy Mermin, and Angela Leighton) served to confirm and consolidate this feminist orthodoxy, an assumption that "I, writing thus" can be read as a woman. But the gendering of the subject is complicated in *Aurora Leigh* by its overt juxtaposition of literary genres, making "I" the symptom of conflicting conventions rather than the expression of a coherent self. *Aurora Leigh* is both a reflection *of* and a reflection *on* such generic conventions. Thus, in her influential introduction to the 1978 edition, Kaplan discovers it to be "an elaborate collage of typical themes or motifs of the novels and long poems of the 1840's and 1850's" (14), and in a more recent critical edition of the poem, comprehensively annotated in 1992, Margaret Reynolds also notes that "a sense of doubleness, inside and outside, is carried over into the story of the woman poet" (11).

Indeed, as Isobel Armstrong further argues in "Msrepresentation," one of the most typical themes in *Aurora Leigh* is the *too* personal story of the woman poet. "You generalise / Oh, nothing, — not even grief!" is the criticism of Aurora made by her cousin Romney, as he espouses the nineteenth-century view that women's "quick-breathed hearts" are "so sympathetic to the personal pang" that they can only read and write by sentimental identification:

> The human race
> To you means, such a child, or such a man,
> You saw one morning waiting in the cold,
> Beside that gate, perhaps. You gather up
> A few such cases, and when strong sometimes
> Will write of factories and of slaves, as if
> Your father were a negro, and your son
> A spinner in the mills. All's yours and you,
> All, coloured with your blood, or otherwise
> Just nothing to you. Why, I call you hard
> to general suffering. (II. 189–99)

The charge against poetesses like Aurora is their tendency to particularize "general suffering" by projecting it into particular persons ("such a child, or such a man") and then turning "A few such cases" into poetic personifications, with which they themselves are personally identified: "All's yours and you." It is a shrewd commentary on the gendering of sentimental lyric as a "feminine" genre (of which Romney proves to be a reader more naive than its seemingly unsophisticated female practitioners), and on the equally shrewd manipulation of its generic conventions by EBB in her own earlier poems, such as "The Cry of the Children" (1843) and "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1848). The general circulation of these poems assumes, in fact, the recognition of their personifications *as* generic.

The extravagant (or runaway) pathos of "The Runaway Slave," for example, derives from the difficulty of locating a lyric subject. This controversial poem begins on a margin ("I stand on the mark beside the shore") that proves to be a place for multiple cross-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178 Published online by Cambridge University Press

identifications: an exchange between "I" of the cursed slave and the "you" of the slave-owners who are cursed by her in turn, an exchange between the "I" of the poem and the reader hailed as "you," an exchange between "I" identified as a black mark on the shore and the written mark on the page identified with the "I" of a writer who left it there. All these exchanges are forms of crossing that ask us to identify with an "I" that is not really identifiable: X marks the spot where "I stand." The slave is less a persona than a personification produced by the interplay of generic identifications that are recognizable to any nineteenth-century reader, making it difficult to read the poem as if EBB "herself" were pretending to be the slave. Rather, the rhetorical performance of suffering in the poem turns the slave (who tries to prove her pain by "this mark on my wrist") into an embodiment of the "general suffering" that Romney finds lacking in women's verse; only by means of this personified abstraction can "The Runaway Slave" run its course. Transposing the slave narrative into sentimental lyric, EBB performs a crossing between genres that is also a form of cross-cultural exchange: commissioned by the Boston Anti-Slavery Bazaar in 1845, "The Runaway Slave" was first published in America in *The Liberty Bell* of 1848, and then reprinted by the British publisher of *Poems* in 1850. Thus EBB made a mark as Poetess, freely traveling back and forth across the Atlantic.

Reflecting further on the Poetess as a figure produced by and for trans-Atlantic exchange, EBB published "A Curse for a Nation" a decade later, in 1860. The prologue seems, at first, to reject the calling of a British woman poet to speak out against American slavery: "To curse, choose men. For I, a woman, have only known / How the heart melts and the tears run down" (11. 38–40). But it is precisely by means of identifying "I" as "a woman," the embodiment of sentimental exchange, that the Victorian Poetess is entitled to address a nation where slavery has become the focal point for the discourses of sentiment. She is therefore instructed to "weep and write" by a voice not properly speaking her own, but projected simultaneously outward and inward as the curse she must bear:

> "Therefore," the voice said, "shalt thou write
> My curse tonight.
> Some women weep and curse, I say
> (And no one marvels,) night and day.
>
> And thou shalt take their part tonight
> Weep and write.
> A curse from the depths of womanhood
> Is very salt, and bitter, and good." (11. 41–48)

Set off in quotation marks, this invocation defines the vocation of the Poetess and sets the scene for the rhetorical enactment of her curse: a series of stanzas ending in the refrain, "This is the Curse. Write." As it is written again and again, the curse is no longer presented as a quotation but performed through repetition: to write the curse is to enter into a historical moment that can only be realized as an empty form, a "curse from the depths of womanhood" that is fulfilled by marking the historical absence of the woman as much as her presence. The reflexivity of the curse does not place the poetess at a critical distance from the writing, however, as if she were ironically reflecting on the part she must play;

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178 Published online by Cambridge University Press

rather "A Curse for a Nation" makes the figure of the Poetess inseparable from the performative utterance by means of which she is removed. This performance is lyrical not because it allows the Poetess to come to "her" voice, but because it enacts through the iterability of its form the historical process by which we come to read what is written. The writing of the curse collapses what the poem is and what it will be: an epistle sent across the ocean, both into and out of history.

By foregrounding the construction of cultural categories (the struggling poetess, the suffering slave, the woman in pain) the poems of EBB and many of her female contemporaries bring into visibility the gross outlines of figures taken as subjects. While the commodification of women in the nineteenth century may have formed them as potential producers of culture, according to an argument usually made about the rise of the novel, their access to the means of literary production — the distribution of cultural capital, in Guillory's terms — leads to a confusion of the poetic subject and the identities circulated, or commodified, by the genre of women's sentimental lyric. The question begged by this confusion is whether the product of culture may also be its producer — or better, what it would mean to produce "culture" at all. Whose culture? What culture? Guillory is right that the "feminist research program" has recovered its own institutional capital in the names of unread women's texts. And we have certainly begun with a privileged example of literary access, a poetess whose name conveys a stake if not a place in the canon. But what if her (and not only her) texts already proclaimed their status *as* cultural currency? Does such self-coinage, in the guise of coinage of the self, make them counterfeit? And are we doomed to simply reproduce for our own purposes the identifications stamped in the service of an economy of reproduction? If it was the curse of the nineteenth-century poetess to write in that service, it need not be the twentieth-century feminist critic's curse to read in it.

Our second, American example of the Victorian poetess, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, has yet to be re- or dis-covered by contemporary critics, perhaps because her work offers up as allegory the stock figures of the genre she celebrated to popular acclaim. If EBB's work pressed lyrical utterance into and against the fabric of history, the poems of Oakes Smith seem to lift the type of the poetess so free of social gravity that it spins in midair. In fact, Oakes Smith's work so idealized the lyrical type that its very abstraction may have consigned it to history. Oakes Smith herself certainly had access to the field of literary production: her poems were printed and reprinted, anthologized, reviewed by Poe and many others. Like Margaret Fuller, she wrote for the *New York Daily Tribune.* Her feminist manifesto, *Woman and Her Needs* (1851), written in response to Fuller, was published in the *Tribune* after she had delivered sections of it on a successful lecture circuit. Like "Mrs. Browning," Oakes Smith was widely cited as "Mrs. Smith," wife of Seba Smith, a prominent popular writer and newspaperman (whose bankruptcy was the alleged occasion for Oakes Smith's literary career). Like both less obscure women writers, Oakes Smith worked immediately and belatedly in the lyric strains of British High Romanticism. And her work seems to have made that other, most important entrance into the literary field as an influence on the most exalted and most popular nineteenth-century American poetry and prose: young Eva, heroine of her popular early poem, "The Sinless Child" (1842), may be seen as a template for both Longfellow's Evangeline in 1847 and Stowe's Little Eva in 1851. Hence we might speculate that Oakes Smith's apparently ahistorical lyrics are so much *of* history that they have not transcended it. Have they

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178 Published online by Cambridge University Press

disappeared from the literary field because they are not formally interesting examples of lyric form — or because they are merely formal performances?

Consider "The Sinless Child," the long narrative (not, formally, lyric) poem by which Oakes Smith was popularly known in the middle of the nineteenth century. Like *Aurora Leigh,* "The Sinless Child" is a lyrical study of nineteenth-century literary culture, but it would be more accurate to say that the poem lyrically narrates nineteenth-century lyric. If *Aurora Leigh* personifies the Poetess, then "The Sinless Child" personifies poetry. The person of poetry (as in Oakes Smith's other poems) is certainly feminized, but it is and is not a woman. Young Eva trails clouds of glory as she comes,

> A fair-haired girl, of wondrous truth,
> And blameless from a child,
> Gentle she was, and full of love,
> With voice exceeding sweet,
> And eyes of dove-like tenderness,
> Where joy and sadness meet. (11. 3–8)

The shift from past to present tense here may be the price of a bad rhyme, or it may mark Eva's entitlement to lyric immortality — especially since the telos of the poem is her death. After hundreds of lines depicting the girlchild as perfect sympathetic interpreter of nature's various language, of her widowed mother's grief, of the misery of the poor and disabled, she dies on the eve of "the crowning grace of womanhood," her marriage. Before Eva can become Eve, "her sinless lips" are stilled; "the pure virgin of the soul" becomes at the end of the poem what she always already was, "the vestibule of Heaven," the embodiment of an ideal that has no body in which to descend into history.

We might call that ideal "woman" or "lyric" if the inscription that prefaces the poem did not so explicitly place Eva as the passage between those terms, as the "vestibule" of generically abstract literary identities:

> Sweet Eva! Shall I send thee forth, to other hearts to speak?
> With all thy timidness and love companionship to seek?
> Send thee with all thy abstract ways, thy more than earthly tone—
> An exile, dearest, send thee forth, thou, who art all mine own! (11. 1–4)
> . . .
> Thou fond Ideal! vital made, the trusting, earnest, true;
> Who fostered sacred, undefiled, my heart's pure, youthful dew;
> Thou woman-soul, all tender, meek, thou wilt not leave me now
> To bear alone the weary thoughts that stamp an aching brow!
> Yet go! I may not say farewell, for thou wilt not forsake,
> Thou'lt linger, Eva, wilt thou not, all hallowed thoughts to wake?
> Then go; and speak to kindred hearts in purity and truth;
> And win the spirit back again, to Love, and Peace and Youth. (11. 17–24)

In this conventional invocation of her own literary creation as a literary creation, Oakes Smith manages to own Eva's feminized lyric identity and to disown it at the same time. Like EBB's dramatic pause over the performance of her "woman's curse," Oakes Smith's poem stages a hesitation at its threshold — but this is not a hesitation over the scene of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178 Published online by Cambridge University Press

writing but over the fate of printing. Can a literary creation survive its own public circulation? Can a woman? The lines seem to answer yes, but only in the form of a rhetorical question. The autobiographical pathos of this invocation serves to excuse the writer's feminine modesty, casting the poet as the sentimental mother who must release her cherished babe for the greater good. So doing, it turns that mother into a figure for the successful poet, the "woman" half of the "woman-soul" whose historical pain is here so stagily detached from the poetic character that bears its trace. The point of enacting this detachment at the beginning of the poem is to make Eva innocent of the identity — woman, lyric soul — the poem will have her bear but not be. In "The Sinless Child," it is the subjectivity attached to lyric that is unbearable.

This is, of course, a paradigmatic Romantic lyric predicament — as Oakes Smith demonstrates in an ode appropriately titled "The Poet." The ode was collected in Griswold's *The Female Poets of America* and it downright caricatures the idea to which the anthology was devoted. The poem is prefaced by two epigraphs: "Non Vox Sed Votum" and "*It is the belief of the vulgar that when a nightingale sings, she leans her breast upon a thorn.*" What is not a voice but a vow is the melody unheard in the nightingale's song; like Eva, the nightingale may be pathetically detached from its own subjective reference — as if the conventional romantic bird had an "own" to begin with. The entire ode proceeds in a series of invocations to the bird/poet to sing her pain, but she never does. Instead, the poem makes a series of promises, or vows, about what will happen if she were to do so:

> Sing, sing — Poet sing!
> It doth ease thee of thy sorrow —
> "Darkling" singing till the morrow;
> Never weary of thy trust,
> Hoping, loving as thou must, (11.9–13)
> . . .
> Sing, sing — Poet, sing!
> Thou art made a human voice;
> Wherefore shouldst thou not rejoice
> That the tears of thy mute brother
> Bearing pangs he may not smother
> Through thee are flowing —
> For his dim, unuttered grief
> Through thy song hath found relief?
> Sing, sing — Poet, sing!
> Join the music of the stars,
> Wheeling on their sounding cars;
> Each responsive in its place
> To the choral hymn of space —
> Lift, oh lift thy wing —
> And the thorn beneath thy breast
> Though it pierce, may give thee rest. (11.17–32)

As a litany of invocations pitched forward to the moment when the nightingale's song would take over the poet's description of it, the ode promises more than it can deliver — unless we read it as a lyrical study of such promises, of the "vulgar belief" that subtends

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the production and reception of women's lyrics. The allusion to Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" in the quotation marks around "Darkling" marks the invisibility as well as the inaudibility of the bird's song itself, as if what Keats heard were some moaning woman poet acting as the vehicle for everyone's "unuttered grief" but her own. This is not to say that Oakes Smith's poem treats Keats or women ironically; rather, it lyricizes its own lyric subjects. It formalizes a form that can contain but not express feeling; it empties the vulgarly abstract figure of poetic suffering of anything but historical reference.

To make such an abstract claim about pain is obviously to lighten the burden that history has shouldered in recent cultural theory, and to place that critical weight somewhere else. Cultural studies has so far avoided the study of lyric because lyrics have been misunderstood as the personal subjective utterances of historical subjects. On this view, the oppression of women led to the suppression of women's poetry, and our current task is to recover that poetry — and those women. But according to our brief readings, Victorian British and American poetesses (the very figures accused of being most personal and most subjective, and thus most historically obscure) were apt to skirt the subjects that such a recovery project would invoke. We have been arguing that the lyric's tendency to get off the subject — to go around it in such a way as to trace its cultural pattern — is at least as important an aspect of the genre to recover as are (or would be) the subjects themselves. For in the poems we have read here, the presentation of those subjects as already gone reveals their ideal emptiness as well as the lyric's historical function as vehicle for transporting, and potentially displacing, representative identities. And though "potentially displacing" may sound like a hopefully subversive critical agenda, these lyrics end up demonstrating their entrance into social process as at best a performative effect: neither cursing nor singing can change the course of history.

Hence we do not mean to suggest that by reading these women's lyrics for their cultural pattern rather than for their subjective expression that history can in any simple way be read out of the poems themselves. That strategy would only work if lyric poems were actually the ideal forms they claim to be. We also do not suggest that the lyric can be read directly into narrative, material history, since the genre's way of decomposing as it illumines moments of the past may be its greatest critical use. While contemporary critics debate about whether to read nineteenth-century women's poetry for aesthetic value or historical interest — a question that tends to reveal any given reader's "formalist" or "cultural studies" bent — it seems to us that such oppositions dissolve at the touch of the poems themselves. Is it possible to articulate the relation between lyric and history differently, not so that history includes lyric (as context), or so that lyric is influenced by history (as condition), or so that history is influenced by lyric (as hermeneutic)? Suppose we imagine culture not as the object (or fetish) of cultural studies, or as the sum of the narrative ideology of history, or as the subject of interpretation. Suppose the general, generic definition of certain cultural figures — lyric, woman, nation — were evoked in such particular abstraction that both historicizing and hermeneutic views of culture gave way to what we call a "lyrical" perspective. To read lyrically would then be a way of both doing and undoing cultural studies — especially since the terms abstracted by the poetesses are the terms in which Anglo-American Victorian culture still curses and sings itself.

Rutgers University and University of Michigan

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178 Published online by Cambridge University Press

WORKS CITED

Armstrong, Isobel. "Msrepresentation: Codes of Affect and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry." In *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830–1900.* Ed. Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain. London: Macmillan, 1998. 3–32.

———, and Joseph Bristow and Cath Sharrock. *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets.* Oxford: Clarendon P, 1996.

Barrett, Elizabeth and Robert Browning. *The Courtship Correspondence 1845–1846.* Ed. Daniel Karlin. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989.

Bennett, Paula. *Nineteenth-Century American Women Poets.* Malden: Blackwell, 1998.

Bethune, George. *British Female Poets.* Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1848.

Gray, Janet. *She Wields a Pen: American Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century.* Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1997.

Griswold, Rufus. *The Female Poets of America.* Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1848.

Guillory, John. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.

Higonnet, Margaret. *British Women Poets of the 19th Century. New York: Meridian, 1996.*

Kaplan, Cora. "Introduction." *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems.* London: The Women's Press, 1978. 5–36.

Leighton, Angela and Margaret Reynolds. *Victorian Women Poets.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Lootens, Tricia. *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender and Victorian Literary Canonization.* Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1996.

May, Caroline. *The American Female Poets.* Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1848.

Oakes Smith, Elizabeth. *The Poetical Writings of Elizabeth Oakes Smith.* New York: J. S. Redfield, Clinton Hall, 1846.

Reynolds, Margaret. "Critical Introduction." *Aurora Leigh* . Athens: Ohio UP, 1992. 1–77.

Rowton, Fredric. *The Female Poets of Great Britain.* Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1848.

Stewart, Susan. "Preface to a Lyric History." In *The Uses of Literary History.* Ed. Marshall Brown. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. 199–218.

Walker, Cheryl. *American Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century.* New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150399272178 Published online by Cambridge University Press