

# Argumentative essay on the woman question: finding a writing niche in a male worl...

[Health & Medicine](#), [Beauty](#)



## **Exchange among Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, and Mary Wollstonecraft**

GE: The role of the writer in our time is much different than it will be in the future, I think. As the wheels of industry churn faster and faster, they will produce more and more distractions from the realities of society, and those in power will keep the public from noticing the stratagems that they use to hold onto that power, because of the sheer number of distractions available.

EB: Don't you think that what we put together has a spiritual component to it? After all, while writing does allow the expression of the noble and the beautiful, if it does not also express the true, then it is useless. Ultimately, what we do should point the reader to God, and to redemption.

MW: The spiritual is well and good, if that is what you need in order to have confidence in yourself, and in your life. However, for many others, the question of God and religion is simply one of superstition. If we as women were not oppressed through a lack of education, we would not need to cast our lots in with something as changeable and as illusory as faith in someone whom we cannot see, let alone talk to.

GE: As industry gains more and more of a footing in our lives, faith will become even more illusory and will be replaced by shades of fanaticism – that is the tool that believers use when there is some sort of existential dread that falls upon them. What is important for writers to reveal is the truth behind the event – the hidden object that creates the shadow.

EB: I don't understand this focus on the problems of this world. After all, the afterlife to come will last far longer than the struggles we face today.

Christianity is “ essentially poetry – poetry glorified.” If we are writing our

poetry correctly, then the reader can look at 90 percent of the poems out there and receive a picture of what Christ is like. The beauty of the language reflects the beauty and perfection of Christ. As a result, writing that ignores the beauty and perfection of Christ will be extremely hard-pressed to be beautiful itself.

GE: Why does writing have to acknowledge a problematic deity to be beautiful? There are many different stories that have been recognized by the literary community – and the rest of the world at large – as dreadful, but they are heavily religious in emphasis. I would think that any story that involves the fear of fire and brimstone, with an eye toward emphasizing the negative aspects of the afterlife. Instead, focusing on the ways that we can help each other in society, both in terms of neighbor-to-neighbor as well as in terms of one person contributing to the greater good will provide more meaningful outcomes in literature.

MW: One way to ensure that these outcomes become useful is to instill a small set of ideas in the story that the reader will access during the reading. As a result, when the reader is conducting a discussion of those ideas, the examples from the work in question ought to come to mind swiftly. If we really examine what we are doing with our children today, in terms of education, it becomes clear that this is our area of greatest need. It is only through instilling the right sets of values in the family that we can avoid the cycle of dishonesty – with each other and with ourselves. It is important to express new truths of this century as well, but seeing the events that I have allows one to look through all of the hubbub to the end, What we need is social progress, so that all of our readers feel a sense of growth.

EB: When we were talking earlier, Poe told me that he missed me as a writer. It was nice that he dedicated his 1845 anthology to me; however, I have not overcome all of my reservations about him. It is interesting to me, though, to see how vehemently people will argue against religion if they are placed in a relatively small area. Poe did not see much of the value of the community, but it is the community that hammers in those social skills and other elements of the personality that one needs to do well in life. If you add this to the lessons of the gospel, then it is obvious that poetry has many important elements for the reader.

GE: But I don't understand why religion has to have so much to do with everything. It is one thing to agitate for change and to write about those situations which one would like to change. In one form or another, that is how writing has been from the beginning. It has also been shown that religious matters have also dominated writing. Why, though, do we still treat the religious impulse as though it is a Faberge egg? It can handle scrutiny, as it has for centuries. Why, though, do we treat it this way still, even though the question cannot be answered?

EB: The key here is that the literature is to provide for the edification for those who want or need it. For many children, because the materials of a new museum are beyond what they can acquire, their first response about the museums is likely one of disdain, or perhaps even scorn. It is important for teachers to bring in sensitivity to their training of students, because a lack of tact can make a huge difference for interpersonal relationships. Because the job of writing is to uplift the reader, that should be our primary goal.

GE: I suppose. I know that, for me, I want to advance the cause of the rural person – it is so easy to get lost in the shuffle now. Each of us has different political agendas, though – which is a real sign that all of us are starting to think – which is a good thing.

## Poem Comparison/Contrast

The poetry of Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Joanna Baillie, and Felicia Hemans represents three different views of the world and of our place in it. However, their styles also have a number of important similarities, making it possible to classify them together during this time period, even despite the differences. Linguistically, there are also several crucial differences among them, leading to the possibility of overlooking the differences – which have more to do with particular aesthetics right now than anything else.

Barbauld's "Washing-Day" (1797) is a witty evocation of the events that take place inside the mind of an experienced housewife as she works her way through what may well be an ordinary day – but certainly sounds difficult. Even though the powerful Muses who informed such names as Homer and Shakespeare have "lost / The buskin'd step, and clear high-sounding praise" (1-2) and now only "loosely prattl[e] on / Of farm or orchard, pleasant curds and cream, / Or drowning flies" (3-5), they do have a function of inspiration nonetheless, even though instead of singing the song of the wanderer, as the Muse honoring Odysseus would, it is now just the "dreaded Washing-Day" (8) that is the topic of song. However, Barbauld is not a happy woman, at least not in terms of the choices that are left to them in life. She refers to women as "[y]e who beneath the yoke of wedlock bend"

(9). While this simply represents the status of women who have already married and accepted the destiny of home and family, this poem is Barbauld's ironic attempt at taking the life and work of the housewife and displaying it in the manner of a hero, for the purposes of showing the vast differences.

Baillie's "The Outlaw's Song" is a much more optimistic presentation of the subject than Barbauld's resentment of the days before washing machines. The song of the outlaw, though, involves the idea of using each day to its fullest, which echoes the call to the women in Barbauld's work. While the image of the "winking tapers faintly peep[ing] / High from my lady's bower" (11-12) indicates that even the outlaw treasures his lady, the other idea present is that being an outlaw is wondrous and exciting, rather than a cause for correction. Barbauld's speaker seems to have been bludgeoned down by the realities of her existence. Here, Baillie still shows the Romantic aspect of being an outlaw for the reader's consideration. This optimism makes Baillie's activism for dissidence more a source of diversion, and even inspiration, than a source of scolding, which appears to have happened in Barbauld's poem. The end result here is a glorious look at the life of an outlaw.

Felicia Hemans' poetry also expresses a warmer world than that of Barbauld; in "The Domestic Affections," the speaker is giving an ode to nature, here in the form of the snowy ringlets and the "tints of roseate lustre" (9). Here, the object of love is winter itself – specifically, the joy that snow can bring to a winter day. Indeed, it can "disarm life's winter of its frown" (4). While Barbauld seems to have her joy robbed from her, the other two poets here still write with a sense of joy and purpose. Baillie and Hemans both describe

scenes that have promise and hope (even though Baillie's protagonist should be headed to jail). Hemans has not lost her joy in the portrayal of nature in her poem. Ultimately, the reader walks away with the different outcomes of writing for women in that time period; writing in the shadow of men in a time period when almost no one got published at all gave women scant opportunities; it was those women who could write the most powerfully that earned some of the earliest freedoms in terms of the mores of life.