

**WRITTEN ON WALKING IN THE WOODS OF GREGYNOG
IN MONTGOMERYSHIRE**

*This poem was written in 1794 by a Mrs Darwall
(formerly Miss Whateley) and published in her collection
POEMS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS*

*We don't know much about this poet except that she was a Vicar's wife
from Walsall who contributed work to the Gentleman's Magazine
between the 1760s and 1790s. She was presumably staying in the
Newtown area when she wrote this poem but we have no information
about her acquaintance with Arthur Blayney.*

Ye sweetly varied scenes, that rise
With pow'r to charm the gloomiest soul,
Ah! had ye bless'd my ravish'd eyes,
Er my mind bent to care's control;
When youthful Fancy's vivid glow
Banish'd the family of woe,
Then, cheerful as the linnet's strain,
My song had echo'd o'er the plain.

And sure these hills, these bow'rs and groves,
Where Peace resides, and Virtue roves,
Roves in their owner's form benign,
May bid misfortune cease to pine;
Give calm suspension to each care,
Cheer the dull features of despair,
Bid fancy reassume her reign,
And pleasure gild each smiling plain.

Hail! ye majestic wilds! sweet Cambria, hail!
Music and magic float in ev'ry gale:
The mellow black-bird chants his ev'ning lay,
And the sweet red-breast warbles from the spray;
The pensive stock-dove pours his soothing tale,
And soft responses sigh thro' ev'ry vale:
Corroding grief here sinks to soft repose,
And healing balm the wounded spirit knows.

See the mountains, tow'ring high,
Lift their summits to the sky,
While many a dew-charg'd, fleecy cloud,
Brooding show'rs, their tops enshroud:
Brown and sterile here they frown,-
There their steepy sides adown
Graze the shepherd's bleating care,-
There the flow'ry pasture fair:

Lower, down their fertile sides
The patient hind his plough-share guides,
Where future harvests waving smile,
And health and plenty crown his toil.

Distant, the tall rock rough and hoar
Nods o'er Sabrina's rapid wave,
Where her shelving sedge-crown'd shore
Invites the blue-ey'd numph to lave;
While the whisp'ring zephyrs breathe
Thro' the woody dell beneath.

Now, the placid orb of night
Sheds o'er the grove her soften'd light,
Gilds the smooth lake with silv'ry beam,
And adds new beauties to the stream,
As murm'ring to the breeze it flows,
And sooths all nature to repose.

O! Care, when with thy train I've toil'd all day,
Give me at eve thro' these lov'd haunts to stray,-
Woo peace and contemplation to my breast,
While ev'ry jarring thought is charm'd to rest.

MARY WHATELEY (later DARWALL) (1738-1825)

She was born in February 1738 at Beoley, Worcestershire, the youngest of the nine children of William Whateley, a substantial farmer who 'occupies his own estate', and his wife Mary. In spite of a limited education she loved literature and during 1759, at the age of 21, contributed a number of poems to the *Gentleman's Magazine* (pp. [282](#), [334](#), [483](#), [538](#)) under the pseudonym of 'Harriet Airey', not all of which she would later reprint. The first two, in June 1759, replied to verses in earlier numbers of the periodical, and her lines 'To Mr. Copywell' excited a response in July (p. [334](#)) from the poet William Woty ('Jeremy Copywell'), who invited her to send her address to Robin's Coffee House, Shire Lane, Temple Bar, so that he could communicate directly with her. Whatever her family might have thought of these transactions, the farmer's daughter in rural Worcestershire no doubt enjoyed arousing such interest in London literary men.

During 1761 there began what appears to have been an organized campaign to further the publication of her poetry by subscription. By then she was acting as housekeeper to her brother, an attorney in Walsall, Staffordshire. In September

Typhonic] tempestuous

1761 William Shenstone the poet received 'a large Collection of Poetry' in MS, 'by a Miss Wheatley of Walsall': 'many of the pieces written in an excellent and truly classical style; simple, sentimental, harmonious, and more correct than I almost ever saw written by a lady'. Lord Dartmouth was said to be acting as patron of the subscription. In December 1761 an account of her appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (pp. 635-6) in a letter by Dr J. Wall of Worcester, which described her as having had the education of 'the meanest of menial servants, barely learning to read and write; and her whole life has been employed in the common drudgery of a mean farm-house'. Her reading, he reported, had been confined to Shakespeare, the *Spectator*, and *Gentleman's Magazine*, and a few novels. Dr Wall in fact revised this first account in the *Magazine* in February 1762 (p. [84](#)), presenting her as a much more respectable figure and less of a 'natural genius', claiming that, in spite of her limited education, she had written some 'very extraordinary poems, 'not unworthy of the best of our poets'. Modest and disinterested, she had been persuaded to agree to the opening of the subscription. A similar account, with samples of her verse, appeared in the *London Magazine* in 1762 (pp. [46](#), [81](#)).

Her *Original Poems on Several Occasions*, published by Dodsley in 1764, were dedicated to Lady Wrottesley at Perton. Among the 600 subscribers were Elizabeth Carter, Erasmus Darwin, Mary Delany, and the Revd Thomas Seward (father of Anna), as well as the Revd Mr Loggin, Vicar of Beoley, and his daughter Elizabeth, who, to judge from the poems addressed to her, was a close friend. The early encouragement of the Revd Mr Welchman of Tanworth is acknowledged in another poem (pp. [90](#) -4), which admits her lack of a 'Learn'd Education', explains that she began writing verse when depressed with 'pale Care, and melancholy Gloom', pays tribute to her parents, and rejoices that she lacks the beauty which might have 'tempted the Seducer's Wiles'. The volume contained prefatory lines by John Langhorne, the poet and reviewer, who, like Shenstone, must have been shown the poems before publication, and who duly praised them in the *Monthly Review*. (She had addressed a poem to him, pp. [114](#) -17.) The collection was reprinted at Dublin in 1764.

Among the subscribers, and addressed in a poem (pp. [100](#) -1), was the Revd John Darwall, Vicar of Walsall, who also wrote verse. She married him on 4 Nov. 1766 and her domestic responsibilities -- he was a widower with five small children and by 1776 she had had six children of her own, one dying in infancy -- no doubt seriously affected her literary ambitions. After her husband's death in 1789, however, she published by subscription a new collection of Poems on Several Occasions (2 vols., Walsall, 1794), the dedication to which is dated from Newtown, **Montgomeryshire**, where she evidently lived for a time. Some lines addressed to her by Dr Luke Booker of Dudley (i. 1-4) remark that 'Erst, unarraign'd, tyrannic man confin'd | In chains of ignorance the female mind', but that 'Lib'ral Thought' has now illumined 'hapless woman's dark Egyptian night'. Some of the verse was contributed by two young friends (ii. 128-58): one was conceivably her daughter Elizabeth, who later published *The Storm, With Other Poems* (1810), which contains a poem addressed to her by her mother. Mary Darwall died at Walsall on 5 December 1825, aged 87.

Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology, ed. Roger Lonsdale; Oxford University Press, 1989