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From: owner-RomanticGender@listproc.sjsu.edu on behalf of Jennifer Cairns [jcairns57@yahoo.com]
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To: RG
Subject: Annotated Bib/Questions

Mellor, Anne K. "Were Women Writers 'Romantics'?" *Modern Language Quarterly* 62:4 (Dec 2001): 393-405.

In this article, Mellor examines the history of British women's writing and questions whether or not the literary periodization of "Romantic" is valid for it. Beginning with the female religious preachers and publishers, she notes that during this period, female writers established female authority in the public arena, brought about a social shift by inaugurating Victorianism, and initiated modernity by embracing racial and cultural differences. Furthermore, she asserts that women writers drew from the tradition of their female predecessors rather than setting themselves in opposition to it and concludes by arguing that there was no sharp change in women's writing before, after or between 1789 and 1832 to demarcate a "Romantic period" and therefore, it does not exist.

Discussion Questions:

In British Literature 1780-1830, Mellor and Matlak note, "Barbauld believed that the primary goal of literature was to educate the young in rational thought and correct moral principles" (166).

Are there any didactic elements in "Washing-Day"? If so, what is the moral of the poem?

In "Were Women Writers 'Romantics'," Mellor writes that "[l]ate-eighteenth-century women writers profoundly identified with their female precursors" rather than rebelling against them" (399).

Does "Washing-Day" set Barbauld up against or in alignment with her female predecessors? Is she employing traditional (masculine) Romanticism or "feminine" Romanticism?

By honoring the female work community in the domestic sphere, does Barbauld justify the tradition of washing day or challenge it?

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