

Tucker, Herbert F. "House Arrest: The Domestication of English Poetry in the 1820's."

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The 1820's represent a decade of literary indecisiveness, as scholars feel the time period to be too late to be called "Romanticism" and too early to be called "Victorian." In this article, Tucker suggest that the poetry in this time period catered to the parlor-game, hearth-loving tastes of the people. Themes of domestic appeal run rampant in gift albums and holiday annuals, an "innovation of format." With particular focus on Felicia Hemans, as well as Wordsworth and concluding with Tennyson, Tucker points out the move from exotic, high-soaring Romantic sentiments to a reigned in, homely taste that, while occasionally ambiguous, nonetheless brings emotion and nostalgia into the safe confines of home.

Discussion...we hope? Questions:

1. Tucker states, "If poetry was to maintain a place in the 1820's, it would have to prove itself a superior amusement." How are these poems, like games, amusing? Was this really the reason people bought gift albums and holiday annuals, or was it more to stay with the trends of the day?
2. To what extent do the poems within these annuals, as in our online examples for class, show domestic themes? Does the "domestication of poetry" that Tucker describes speak mainly to the fact that the poems are gathered in albums that have themselves become trendy, domestic items? How much does a poem like

Hemans' "The Child and Flowers," written in 1828, really domesticate poetry, as Tucker argues?

3. Tucker says, "For the annuals were, all told, spectacular symptoms of a condition larger than themselves. They crystallized in a brilliant format the domestically commodified mystique which had come to define poetic success: the power to utter, and thereby become a household word." A fair question: what the heck does this mean, exactly? There is a lot going on in that statement; can we pick it apart?