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Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson A Poet In "The Athens of North America"

MOST ACCOUNTS OF Philadelphia social and literary life in the late eighteenth-century treat Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson as a minor poet who had powerful friends and an unfortunate marriage.[1] As an uncommon woman in an uncommon age she deserves serious attention. Her poetry arose initially out of her own intellectual

[1] The most comprehensive biographical account on Ferguson and the Graemes appears in Theodore Bean's *History of Montgomery County* (Philadelphia, 1884), 360-365, 874-902. The only contemporary account is Benjamin Rush's anonymously written "Account of the Life and Character of Mrs. Elizabeth Ferguson," *Portfolio*, n.s., 1 (June 1809), 520-527. Other biographical material appears in Elizabeth Ellet's *The Women of the American Revolution* (New York, 1848) I, 189-201 and in Simon Gratz's "Some Materials for the Biography of Mrs. Elizabeth Fergusson, nee Graeme," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 39 (1915), 257-321, 385-409; 41 (1917), 385-389 where much of her correspondence is published. Thomas A. Glenn, ed., *Some Colonial Mansions* (Philadelphia, 1898), 367-401, describes Graeme Park and its inhabitants. Reviews of Ferguson's literary activities are published in Katherine Jackson, *Outlines of the Literary History of Colonial Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, PA, 1906), 96-101; in Joshua Logan Fisher, "Some Account of the Early Poets and Poetry of Pennsylvania," *Register of Pennsylvania* by Samuel Hazard, ed., 8 (Sept. 3, 1831), 177; Ellis P. Oberholtzer, *The Literary History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1906), 76-83; Moses Coit Tyler, *The Literary History of the American Revolution, 1763-1783*, (1897: reprint ed., New York, 1963), 1:160-162; Rufus W. Griswold, ed., *The Female Poets of America* (New York, 1874), 24-27; and Evert A. Duyckinck and George L. Duyckinck, ed., *The Cyclopedia of American Literature*, (New York, 1855), I, 233-237.

More recent accounts of her life appear in Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen* (New York, 1942), 111-113; Mary Maples Dunn, "Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson," *Notable American Women*, eds., Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James and Paul S. Boyer (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 1:610-611; and Patti Cowell, *Women Poets in Pre-Revolutionary America, 1650-1775—An Anthology* (Troy, NY, 1981), 101-111.

genius, but was shaped by events in her life and her drive to contribute to the literary culture of eighteenth-century Philadelphia, which she described as "the Athens of North America." This study will briefly discuss her role as a literary figure in eighteenth-century Philadelphia against the backdrop of her family background, her literary friends, and events in her life. Her prolific poetic output, written during her last forty years, covers a wide range of enlightenment themes. Some of these themes appear in a group of her poems, not previously reprinted, written between 1777 and 1782.

Elizabeth Graeme was born in Philadelphia in 1737 to Dr. Thomas Graeme and Ann Diggs Graeme, the step-daughter of Governor William Keith. Keith and his political apprentice, Thomas Graeme, both members of important Highland clans, were Jacobite sympathizers fallen on inopportune times in Scotland. Born in 1689, Keith had spent his youth in St. Germaine, France, in the court of the exiled pretender, James Stuart. His political career in the American colonies lasted only little more than a decade, and he returned to England to die in poverty in 1749. Keith established a literary tradition in Elizabeth's family with his *History of the British Plantations in America;. . .Part I Containing the History of Virginia:*. . .(London, 1738).

Thomas Graeme came to America in 1717 as part of Keith's entourage and became head of the naval office, a member of the Proprietary Council, and a Master of Chancery. He had received his medical training at the University of Leyden and was a founding subscriber to the Philadelphia Hospital. He married Ann Diggs in 1719 in Philadelphia's Christ Church where the Graemes were all to be baptized and buried. Ann Diggs was the daughter of a wealthy councilor in St. Albans, and she was largely responsible for her youngest daughter's remarkable education. Benjamin Rush remembered that Elizabeth's mother "possessed a masculine mind, with all those female charms and accomplishments. . .agreeable to both sexes."[2]

When William Keith's political career as a provincial governor came to an end, his son-in-law purchased the country seat which Keith had built in 1721. The Graeme winter home was in center city Philadelphia but the development of their summer home at Graeme Park, twenty miles north of the city near Horsham, became an increasing concern for Thomas Graeme. Among its five hundred acres of carefully planted

[2] [Rush], "Ferguson," 521.

groves, shrubs, and trees were a picturesque lake and waterfall. Most rare was a three-hundred-acre deer park about which Graeme wrote to Thomas Penn in 1755, "If you consider it as a place of beauty and ornament to a dwelling, I venture to say that no nobleman in England but would be proud to have it on his seat."[3] The mansion house has been preserved as an historic building, its thick stone walls elegantly lined from floor to ceiling by fine paneling and its main fireplace faced with marble. The house became the ideal setting for what Benjamin Rush describes as Elizabeth's "attic" gatherings for literary enrichment as well as her literary inspiration and finally as a last refuge in her life.

Every biographer of Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson has referred to the circle of literary and artistic friends who gathered in her home. Rush's account written anonymously after her death has led subsequent writers to refer to her coterie as colonial America's first literary salon.[4] Rush indicated that the Graeme home was "always consecrated to society and friendship;" that after the death of Elizabeth's mother in 1765 and with Elizabeth as hostess in the Graemes's winter residence in the city, Saturday evenings were appropriated not only for strangers but for her friends; and finally, that the "genius of Miss Graeme, evolved the heat and light that animated" these gatherings.[5]

[3] William J. Buck, "Horsham Township," *History of Montgomery Country* by Theodore W. Bean, ed. (Philadelphia, 1884), 882. Thomas Graeme was also justice of the supreme court and owner of land on a larger scale. He and his brother Patrick, a merchant, purchased three thousand acres of land in the present Northampton County on which Thomas Penn later directed Graeme to lay out the town of Easton.

[4] Besides Rush's descriptive allusions to her "attic" evenings, and perhaps because of them, most accounts of her refer to her Saturday evening soirees: "The mansion was. . .the headquarters of literature and refinement." (Ellet, *Women of the Revolution,* I, 192); "At her father's house she was surrounded by the most refined and literary society of America." (Fisher, "Early Poets of Pennsylvania," (September 18, 1831) VIII, 23): "Miss Graeme entertained lavishly, and with the example of London literary gatherings in mind, she succeeded in assembling about her colonial America's first salon." (Bridenbaugh, *Rebels,* 112-113); "it is quite evident that the literary gatherings to which she was introduced in London made a deep impression upon her. . .for soon after her return we find her presiding over a smaller circle in her own city modelled after the English fashion." Anne H. Wharton, *Salons Colonial and Republican* (Philadelphia, 1900), 19.

[5] [Rush], "Ferguson," 523.

Elizabeth Graeme's closest friends in those days before the Revolution shared her literary tastes and admired her knowledge of the "historians, philosophers, and poets of ancient and modern nations."[6] In 1769 her friend Annis Boudinot Stockton wrote about the society they had shared in earlier days, "How often when I am reading Mr. Pope's Letters, do I envy that day the knot of friends that seem'd to have but one heart by which they were united and their greatest pleasure was giving each other pleasure."[7]

The "knot of friends" included Francis Hopkinson, Jacob Duché, Nathaniel Evans, Thomas Godfrey, Jr., and John Morgan, who were all students at the newly chartered College of Philadelphia; but more significantly for Elizabeth it included Benjamin Franklin's son William. His interest may have been more military, adventurous, and romantic than literary. Following in his doting father's footsteps, William developed tastes broadly typical of an eighteenth-century gentleman for he had studied law at the Temple in London, traveled often with his famous father, and made a favorable impression in Boston society before settling in Philadelphia. He and Elizabeth Graeme became engaged in 1754; it is not hard to imagine how attractive this handsome rising star was to young Betsy. She called him her "Tom Jones" and labeled herself "Sophia." He had even sent her a muff from England just as Tom had given one to Sophia in the Fielding novel.[8] Their engagement was ill-starred, however, and ended in the spring of 1759 when he was in England and jilted her for another.[9]

This emotional rupture in Elizabeth Graeme's life was a catalyst for her literary career. She began writing poetry as a diversion and in 1760 undertook a verse translation of Abbé Francois Fénelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus*, a formidable accomplishment for anyone in colonial

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Lyman H. Butterfield, "Morven: a Colonial Outpost of Sensibility. . . .," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 6(November 1944), 3.

[8] William Franklin to EGF, October 24, 1758, Gratz Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, hereafter HSP.

[9] Though her contacts with Benjamin Franklin may have suffered a chill during the 1760s, she wrote to Benjamin Rush near the end of her life about her letters from Franklin, which were since lost: "I have some of the kindest and fondest letters from Dr. Franklin wrote to me when he wished me to have been a member of his family, which had. . .vanity taken place, and I had had a mind to have shewn them, would have circulated thro' all the anecdote writers in Europe and America under the article Traits of Dr. Franklin's Domestic Character." Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *The Papers of Benajmin Franklin*. (New Haven, 1963) VII, 177n.

America. This lengthy philosophical romance on the proper education of the young was soon followed by her metrical version of the Psalms.[10] Concerned about the decline in her health following this excessive literary therapy, Elizabeth's parents arranged for her to travel abroad under the care of the Reverend Richard Peters, an old family friend. Peters had been assistant rector at Christ Church when Elizabeth was baptized, and upon their return from Europe he was to become rector of St. Peters and Christ Churches in Philadelphia.

Elizabeth Graeme's stay in Europe during 1764 and 1765 was a brilliant social and literary success. Her intellect and charm along with Peters's influence made her a welcome American protegé among members of London society. During the year in England she met novelist Laurence Sterne, visited Thomas and Juliana Penn, formed a friendship with her Quaker physician Dr. John Fothergill, and was received by George III. She wrote to a friend from London, "Lt. John and Lady are often here, Mr. and Mrs. Barron, Mr. Ritchie, Mr. LeMer, Mr. West, Mr. Hunter, all the American gentlemen, Mr. Graeme of Carolina and many more, who as they keep equipage and footmen, can much easier come to me than I go to them."[11] On an extended trip to Scotland and the Graeme seat at Balgowan in Perthshire, her cousin Thomas Graeme presented her with serveral books for her library. She was to recall later that on March 16, 1765, the day after "the Bill passed the House for the American Stamp Act," Dr. Fothergill told her, "Betsy, you were yesterday made a slave of."[12] With perhaps no thought of future enslavements she shared the return voyage with Nathaniel Evans, a young Philadelphia poet and Anglican clergyman whose early death two years later Elizabeth eulogized.

The most notable lacuna in Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson's papers is the journal of her European visit. A "feast to all who read it," according to Benjamin Rush, it showed her to have been "all eye, all ear, and all grasp" as she wrote about "manners and characters in an old and highly civilized country, contrasted with those to which she had been accus-

[10] Bound manuscript volumes of both *Telemachus* and the metrical version of the Psalms are in the collections at HSP. In an introduction written to *Telemachus* in 1769 she notes that "she is sensible the translation has little merit," but that "it is sufficient for her that it amused her in a period that would have been pensive and solitary without a pursuit "

[11] EGF to Richard Peters, January 18, 1765, Society Coll , HSP

[12] Ferguson Commonplace book, 1796, HSP (hereafter cited as CBk, 1796, HSP), 40

tomed in our own, accompanied by many curious facts and anecdotes."[13] One anecdote of her encounter with Laurence Sterne appeared in the *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* in March, 1791:

ANECDOTE OF STERNE AND A PENNSYLVANIA LADY

> When Mrs. F. _____ was in England, she attended the York races where she met with the celebrated Laurence Sterne. He rode up to the side of the coach, and accosted her, 'Well Madam, which horse do you bet upon?' 'Sir,' said she, 'if you can tell me which is the worse horse, I will bet upon that.'—'But why, madam,' said Sterne, 'do you make so strange a choice?'—'Because,' replied the lady, 'you know, *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.*'
>
> Sterne was so pleased with the reply, that he went home and wrote from that text, his much admired sermon, entitled 'Time and Chance.'

Several writers have since named Elizabeth Graeme as the "Pennsylvania Lady" in this account. Whether it originated from Elizabeth's European journal or was offered by her to the press in a later period when her poems were being published, the anecdote shows her European tour to have been an important memory for her Philadelphia readers.

One of her nineteenth-century biographers who knew neighbors at Graeme Park where Elizabeth spent the last decades of her life recalled that they always referred to her as Lady Ferguson because she had met the King.[14] Persons of her class often travelled to England but her literary and informative account of her visit as well as her rising literary reputation set her apart. The death of Elizabeth's mother in 1765 necessitated her return home, and the death of her only surviving sister Jane Young in the next year left her as guardian for her niece and nephew, Anna and John Young, as well as hostess and heir to her father's estate.

Thomas Graeme had retired to Graeme Park to enjoy his country home for the remaining years of his life. Dr. Graeme was a senior member in the fraternity of Philadelphia doctors which included Benjamin Rush, one of Elizabeth's most loyal friends. Perhaps it was during Rush's years in Edinburgh between 1766 and 1769 that he met Elizabeth's future husband Henry Hugh Ferguson. Rush introduced

[13] [Rush], "Ferguson,", 523.

[14] Buck, "Horsham Township," 896. He says she was also given the name because she was the granddaughter of Lady Keith.

her to this young Scotsman at one of her salon gatherings in 1771. Elizabeth Graeme and Henry Ferguson were married secretly four months later.[15] Like Rush, Ferguson was ten years younger than Elizabeth, although Dr. Rush thought that the inequality of their ages was more than offset by their common interest in "books, retirement, and literary society."

Ferguson remains a shadowy figure in spite of our search for the details of his life. Elizabeth's father died in 1772 before learning of their secret marriage in Swede's Church at Wicaco. She inherited Graeme Park and she and Henry settled there to pursue an independent life as farmers. On February 6, 1773, as the new laird of Graeme Park, Henry attended the quarterly meeting of the nearby Hatboro Library Company and was admitted into membership. Elizabeth was a member and a frequent donor of books to the library. But try as they might to sustain this idyllic state, the disintegration of the old order of which they were a part was to overwhelm them. On February 5, 1775, Henry was commissioned a justice of the peace for Philadelphia County, the last appointment to this office under the colonial government. In September, 1775, he returned to England in company with Samuel Stockton, Benjamin Rush's uncle by marriage. Evidently, Henry's stay in England was prolonged by the inexorable progress of the Revolution as well as by his wife's pleas for him to postpone his return. As she reported in a petition to the Supreme Executive Council a year later, in the spring of 1778, "The Commotion of the Public increased so rapidly from that Period of time that I tho' warmly attached to the American Cause wrote to Mr. Ferguson from time to time to protract his stay in Britain."[16] That Henry Ferguson was an opportunist interested mainly in Elizabeth Ferguson's property has been generally assumed; his allegiance to Britain was certain.

Elizabeth's loyalties are not so easy to define. She wrote of herself as an American patriot, but she clearly had residual loyalty to the King she had met. The politics of those to whom she was closest, aside from her husband, added to her dilemma. Her brother-in-law Charles Stedman's family were strong Tories as were many of her old friends, such as Jacob Duché. Her niece Anna Young and her father were "warm

[15] Rush attended their wedding at old Swede's Church. Rush's esteem for EGF led to his naming his fifth child, who died in infancy, after her.

[16] EGF "Memorial" to Supreme Executive Council, June 24, 1778, Gratz Collection, HSP.

Whigs," although Anna's brother John was a loyalist who left the country and later joined Henry Ferguson in Europe.

Upon Henry's return voyage from England in 1777, he accompanied the British troops as they invaded Philadelphia. Claiming it was his only opportunity to return to Elizabeth, he served as Commissary of Prisoners for the British during the next year. Elizabeth's close friend Elias Boudinot was his American counterpart. She and Henry met in the environs of the city and corresponded secretly in this troubled period. In October, 1777, Henry persuaded Elizabeth to be the bearer of a letter from her loyalist friend Jacob Duché to George Washington criticizing the Americans and predicting their defeat. This act for which Washington chastised her in a letter to Congress was compounded later in the next year by her attempts to approach an American official with a bribe on behalf of a member of the unsuccessful British Peace Commission under Lord Carlisle. Her credulity in both actions was undoubtedly motivated by her desperate efforts to somehow bring about peace.

In the spring months of 1778, Henry Hugh Ferguson, along with five hundred others was proscribed for treason and he fled Philadelphia. Graeme Park was seized as loyalist property and it took Elizabeth Ferguson two years added by the influence of old friends and a special act of the Assembly in 1781 to reacquire her inheritance; most of the contents of her house except for a portion which she had been allowed to keep on "loan" had been sold earlier as loyalist goods.[17] In her letter of appeal to John Dickinson, an old family friend, she dwells on the obvious enigma presented by her husband's activities:

> The winter the British passed in the City was to me the most completely Miserable of any I ever endurd, and rather than spend my Days as those were, I should wish for Annihilation. Just to touch upon it, My Husband continually soliciting me to come unto him, after an Absence of two years. My Neighbors thinking that I corresponded with him much oftener than I did, and parties out every week close to where I lived, and dreading lest the people should think he was immediately engaged in any of them, which positively he never was. . .; and Continually Soliciting him the little time I was with him to surrender himself up. He pleading Honor and Conscience. I worried with Accounts of the Distress of the Prisoners under His Care.[18]

[17] *Statutes of Pennsylvania*, 10 (1799-1781), 281-282.

[18] EGF to John Dickinson, September 10, 1779, Gratz Collection, HSP.

Elizabeth's friend Sally Barton, the wife of the Reverend Thomas Barton, a prominent Anglican and Tory from Lancaster, wrote her in November, 1778, that Henry was in New York and that he was "highly esteemed" by others but "greatly distressed on your account."[19] The elusive Henry was back in Elizabethtown Point, New Jersey, by February, 1779, and it was there, while staying with the Stocktons, that Elizabeth saw him for the last time before he departed for Boston and at some point for Britain; she scarcely heard of him again. Near the end of her life, she wrote:

> Every event of my marriage and all that relates to my husband is as recent in my memory as though it had occurred but yesterday. Though strange out of twenty-eight years I lived but two and a half with him, and the period of separation exceeds that of the celebrated Ulysses and Penelope. I know not now whether he is among the dead or the living.[20]

In 1784 when Elizabeth was forty-seven and living in isolation in Graeme Park with Elizabeth Stedman, a distant relative and lifelong companion, a sympathetic Elias Boudinot wrote to her:

> It sometimes appears to me as if the special circumstances of your Fate, would bring about again the former ages of Romance and Fairy Tales. I am astonished how your poor weather-worn constitution is supported so long tossed on the Billows of Affliction and Misfortune.[21]

Elizabeth Ferguson's literary fortunes were fueled by "Romance" and tragic affairs of the heart. Her literary career was launched in the early 1760s as a consolation for her broken engagement to Will Franklin; two decades later, with the virtual loss of her husband, her financial resources, and the dissolution of the active literary society which had sustained her, she used her isolation at Graeme Park to enter the most productive period of her literary career. All of her poems were published in this time though many had undoubtedly been shared with friends in her salon. Her first published poem, "Ode to Spring," appeared in the *Pennsylvania Magazine* for April 2, 1776. Twenty-seven of her poems appeared in Philadelphia journals and newspapers over

[19] Sally Barton to EGF, November 18, 1778, Gratz Collection, HSP.
[20] EGF to _____, February 25, 1800, Cbk, 1800, HSP.
[21] Elias Boudinot to EGF, January 2, 1784, Gratz Coll., HSP.

the subsequent sixteen years.[22] Nearly seventy other poems attributed to her exist in manuscript. Her letters and other writings show that she continued to cultivate the life of the mind and was *au courant* of other literary enterprise. She experienced vicariously and eagerly the events of that larger world which she seldom experienced, as friends wrote her about the celebration of the Dauphin's birthday in Philadelphia, Mr. Blanchard's "aerial voyage," and the French Revolution.[23] Her commonplace books, which contain her poems, letters and the writings of those she admired, were written for her closest friends; they were extensions of the "great conversation" so important to the enlightenment.[24] After a long and painful illness Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson died in the home of a neighbor in 1801 and was buried near her parents in the Christ Church burial ground.

Anne Wharton argues that Elizabeth Ferguson was the most learned woman in America during the last half of the eighteenth century.[25] She used her intellect and her friendships with other aspiring literati in her mission to raise literature to its rightful sphere in colonial Philadelphia. "We are the Athens of North America," she avowed. She also quoted often from Bishop Berkeley's "Verses on the prospect of planting Arts and Learning in America."

> There shall be seen another golden age,
> The rise of Empires and of arts,
> The good and great inspiring epic rage
> The wisest heads, and noblest hearts.[26]

[22] Ten Ferguson poems were published in the *Columbian Magazine* from September 1787, to December 1789; fifteen in the succeeding *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine*, September 1790 to September 1792. In her Cbk, 1796, HSP, 4, she wrote that her "Ode to Spring," dated April 1773, was published in the *American Magazine*, although it cannot be found there.

[23] Benjamin Rush to EGF, July 16, 1782, in Lyman H. Butterfield, ed. *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, (Princeton, 1951), I, 278-282 and another on January 18, 1793, II, 627-628.

[24] Five of her commonplace books have been identified, and four of them were the source of research for this paper. One at Dickinson College Library was written in 1787 for Annis Boudinot Stockton, (hereafter Cbk, 1787, DCA); Mrs. Margaret Strawbridge owns a commonplace book written for the five Willing sisters, (hereafter Cbk, 1789, Strawbridge.) Either Benjamin Rush or Elias Boudinot received Cbk, 1796, HSP. An unknown friend received Cbk, 1800, HSP, which contains her metrical version of the Psalms. Another journal not located was written for Ann Ridgeley, as referred to in Gratz, "Ferguson," XXXIX, 406-407.

[25] Wharton, *Salons*, 13

[26] Cbk, 1796, HSP, 137.

She frequently included prose excerpts in her commonplace books and submissions to public journals designed for the improvement of the "rising generations."

Her mission kept her in the forefront of literary activities in Philadelphia. Although her literary career was launched for therapeutic reasons, she was no Hannah Griffits or Phyllis Wheatley writing purely for self-expression in the Emily Dickinson manner. The first bound manuscript volumes of her poetry, mainly translations and travel accounts, were circulated among friends and greatly admired. When she addressed Francis Hopkinson or William Bradford, two of the editors who published her poems in the *Columbian Magazine* (after 1790 the *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine),* she knew them well. Although Elizabeth's salon was not called that in her day, there seems to be ample evidence that the circle of friends in Elizabeth Ferguson's pre-Revolutionary orbit were in the forefront of literary and artistic endeavor and that as they struggled to establish their own American culture, imitative but separate from Britain's, they benefited from their common associations.

Benjamin Rush's account of the Graeme soirées is descriptive of the ambiance of her literary circle if not the identity of its participants. Her commonplace book, written a quarter of a century after the literati of Philadelphia gathered regularly in her home, contains strong evidence of those friends whose literary gifts she valued. Besides providing important clues about possible members of her earlier salon group, it is a testament to her own literary culture as well as to that of her society. This remarkable book written in 1788 and 1789 for the five daughters of her friends Thomas and Ann McCall Willing became a vehicle for her to celebrate in verse and prose the English literary heritage, the value of gatherings of literati in fostering literary culture, and finally the achievement and promise of American literati. In it her long "Ode to the Litchfield Willow" shows her continuing loyalty to the English world of letters in which Dr. Samuel Johnson was a "sun" reflecting "rays" of those around him.[27] The Litchfield ode is coupled with an equally lengthy "Ode to American Genius" which she wrote as a tribute to "Genius and Friendship."

[27] Cbk, 1789, Strawbridge, 43.

Addressing the daughters of Thomas Willing, Mayor of Philadelphia, Supreme Court Justice, and mercantile partner of Robert Morris, Ferguson in her odes reminds them about Litchfield, the small town located halfway between London and Bath. Litchfield's citizens included not only their grandfather Charles Willing but also Samuel Johnson, literary critic, lexicographer and author; Joseph Addison, essayist and editor of the *Tatler* and the *Spectator;* actor David Garrick; painter William Hogarth; "the circumnavigator" Captain Cook; and poet Anna Seward. Ferguson wrote here of her admiration for the collective strength of "literary lights." "Perhaps within one century a greater number of truly eminent personages were never locally collected together in so small a spot; like rays of Light conveyed in a Focus their heat is stronger and their Light more brilliant than if scattered."[28] She obviously saw Philadelphia as a "spot" where American genius was concentrated; indeed she may have felt that the Light focused by the "rays" in her earlier salon produced the literary "heat" which distinguished Philadelphia.

When Elizabeth Ferguson moves her emphasis from Litchfield, England, to the banks of the Schuylkill in Pennsylvania, she expresses appropriate modesty for American claims to genius as compared to the Litchfield group of Johnson, Addison, Hogarth, Garrick, Cook and Seward:

> Oh may we hope some tender twig
> The willow well can spare
> Some thriving, blooming, verdant Sprig,
> May yet be wafted here.

Pride overcomes modesty in later stanzas:

> A land which claims a Washington
> And Franklin does Adorn
> Calls Rittenhouse a Native son,
> A Land where *West* was born.
>
> The *Willow There* and *Laurel* too
> May to perfection rise
> If we the Metaphor pursue
> Symbolic of the Wise.[29]

[28] *Ibid,* 66.
[29] *Ibid,* 103-105

Subsequent verses describe those she considers the most important American devotees to the muses. With few exceptions, these were the friends of her youth. There seems to be no figure as central as Johnson was for England, but she sees Franklin, Richard Peters and William Smith as important instruments in the process of creating an American "Litchfield" group. Franklin's vision of an Academy for Philadelphia had become, under the leadership of Richard Peters and William Smith, the College of Philadelphia in 1755. Peters succeeded Franklin as President of the Board and along with Smith as its energetic first provost, they charted the College's course along Anglican lines.

Elizabeth Graeme's entre to William Smith and higher education was undoubtedly through Christ Church and Philadelphia's upper class Anglicans. Her intellectual interests would have attracted her to the College her friends attended, but her sex denied her access to its classes. Her vicarious experience with the college community came through such close Anglican friends of her own generation as Jacob Duché, Francis Hopkinson, Nathaniel Evans, and Thomas Coombe—the "Schuylkill poets" Ferguson celebrates in her "Ode to American Genius." Completing the close circle of contemporaries she believed represented American genius were Thomas Godfrey and John Morgan, both members of the College; Benjamin Rush and Richard Stockton, educated at the College of New Jersey; John Dickinson, Benjamin West, and James Bremner, the Scottish musician; and Annis Boudinot Stockton. Her writings and letters suggest that these were all old friends.

Richard Peters, mentioned first in her ode, had been in many ways at the center of her community in influence and affection. Three decades her senior, his priestly career at Christ Church as well as his membership on the Provincial Council with Thomas Graeme, and the fact that he had been Dr. Graeme's patient, cemented a life-long social bond. Elizabeth's American Ode pays tribute to her "mentor" Richard Peters.

> And can a retrospective view
> Of Social Comforts rise?
> And not the Eye of Faith pursue
> My *Mentor* to the skies.
>
> *Mentor* who parent like distill'd
> With fond assiduous Care
> Maxims with pure Religion fill'd
> By Love and Sacred Tear.[30]

[30] *Ibid.*, 148.

Since William Smith was a kind of "Pennsylvania Dr. Johnson presiding over all" and an "Atlantic highway. . .to everything English or Episcopalian," it was natural that the Graemes would draw him into their community.[31] Soon after his arrival in 1753 he sought out the sons of Anglican families who showed literary promise. These young men were contemporaries, friends, and neighbors of the Graemes. Smith's home near the falls of the Schuylkill was a favorite gathering place for Hopkinson, Duché, Morgan, and West, who were among his first students. In the 1750s and 1760s Hopkinson and his fellow bards met often on the banks of the Schuylkill at the "Baptisterion" (in the Oak Grove at the end of Spruce Street) to meditate on justice, religion and the arts.[32] William Smith's wife Rebecca Moore was Elizabeth's childhood friend. The depth of their friendship is recorded in her elegy written in 1793 after Rebecca Moore Smith's death from yellow fever.

> I became acquainted with her when I was 12 and she 14 years old and each of us till married would have forgone any scene that the world calls pleasure to have strolled together either at Graeme Park or at Moore Hall. We both had a little Romantic turn as to the objects of nature. We both had a turn for investigation and dear delightful hours we passed in reading. Fare, farewell Dear Mrs. Smith. Still dearer Becky Moore.[33]

Elizabeth in later life followed with interest and admiration the modest literary efforts of her friends' son William Moore Smith. She was godmother to the Smiths's daughter Williamina.

Smith and Elizabeth Graeme became executors of poet Nathaniel Evans's literary papers after his death in 1767. In the spring of 1766 Evans had spent several weeks at Graeme Park in hopes of recovering his failing health. He wrote an ode about the "sylvan scenes" of Graeme Park during his time there. Evidence of their exchange of poems throughout his brief literary career appears in his *Poems on Several Occasions* published by Smith in 1772. Elizabeth Graeme's introductory poem written for the volume contributes nothing new to the well-worn class of eighteenth-century elegaic poetry.

Francis Hopkinson and Jacob Duché began writing poems as students at the College, served Christ Church as organist and rector respectively, and were life-long friends of Elizabeth Ferguson. Hop-

[31] Bridenbaugh, *Rebels*, 103.
[32] John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia, 1857) I, 430-431.
[33] Cbk, 1796, HSP, 188.

kinson was only a year and a half younger than Elizabeth and their lives reveal strong parallels. Their fathers were important professional men and early members of the American Philosophical Society; they both enjoyed the best educations their families and social class could provide; they benefited from extended visits in England in the 1760s; Hopkinson purchased a harpsichord for Elizabeth during his stay there; as members of Christ Church, they were in the same privileged cast. Elizabeth Ferguson's "Lines to the Memory of Francis Hopkinson" written after his death in 1791 when he was fifty-three gives us fifteen nearly illegible verses of "elegiac woe" about her friend "Orion." The classic constraints of the elegiac form prevented much personal comment, but this tribute sent to Hopkinson's mother must have been a reminder to Elizabeth of the poem Hopkinson had written upon the death of her own mother twenty-five years earlier.

> Aid me ye strains of elegiac Woe
> Ye moving numbers soft and pensive flow
> To mourn our lost our most Accomplished swain,
> Wit, Poet, Orpheus of Columbia's Plain.[34]

Hopkinson's sisters married Jacob Duché and John Morgan, strenthening the social ties already drawn by family, class, and church. Morgan wrote to Elizabeth in England in 1765 with condolences on the death of her mother. "Your friends anxiously look for your return and are full of hopes that you will come greatly benefitted in your Health."[35] He had recently returned from his own Grand Tour of the continent with Samuel Powel, the subject of several Ferguson poems. Both men had been educated at the University of Edinburgh and had enjoyed tours of the Perthshire Highlands from which the Graemes had come.

Elizabeth Ferguson's critical judgment was reliable in placing Thomas Godfrey in a paramount position in her American Ode. Godfrey, the son of a glazier, lived only a few doors from the Graemes. He was the only member of the college group with an artisan background. Godfrey's most lasting literary effort was his *Prince of Parthia*, the first drama by a native American to be produced upon the professional stage. It was published posthumously by William Smith and Nathaniel Evans in 1765. The play was first produced by the American

[34] Cbk, 1787, DCA, 93-115.
[35] John Morgan to EGF, June 20, 1765, Peters Papers, HSP.

Company under David Douglass on April 24, 1767, at Philadelphia's Southwark Theatre.[36] Elizabeth Ferguson never wrote about having attended the theater, but it seems difficult to imagine that she and Godfrey's other friends would not have delighted in the play written in the favorite classical manner and imitative of Shakespeare and Beaumont.

The deaths of Thomas Godfrey in 1763 and Nathaniel Evans in 1767 diminished the circle of Elizabeth Ferguson's literary friends. Thomas Coombe, another of the Schuylkill poets and a 1766 graduate of the College, wrote an elegiac dialogue praising fellow poet Evans which was set to music by Francis Hopkinson. Elizabeth included it in the Willing Commonplace Book with this introduction:

> As the *Lamenter* and the *Lamented* are both College pupils I shall here give it in this work professedly wrote to speak of the youthful genius in *Pennsylvania*. Both Mr. *Evans* and Mr. *Coombe* were gentlemen who did the Seminary of Philadelphia much honour by their irreproachable lives as by their talents in Literature.[37]

Coombe was to be remembered more as a clergyman than as a poet and like Jacob Duché his uncertain views in relation to the Revolution sent him to England to live out the rest of his life. Coombe and Benjamin Rush were second cousins and they had lodged together in London when Rush went there in 1768 upon completion of his medical degree at Edinburgh.

Perennial visitors to the Graeme home were Benjamin Rush, his parents-in-law Annis Boudinot and Richard Stockton, and her brother Elias Boudinot. The Boudinots had lived in center city Philadelphia until the 1750s when Annis's father's silver-smithing took them to New Brunswick, New Jersey. Both Annis and her brother Elias joined one of Princeton's founding families when they married the Stockton siblings, Richard and Hannah. Annis and Richard Stockton's home at Morven became a center for literary friends as did Graeme Park. Annis shared Elizabeth's literary interests and produced poetry but shunned publication. Her poetry, imitative of Pope, leaned heavily on English artifice and taste, although many verses expressed her near idolatry of General Washington. In one of her poems Annis Stockton expressed

[36] Kenneth Silverman, *Cultural History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1976), 103-105.

[37] Cbk, 1789, Strawbridge, 115.

with some awe her admiration for her more experienced and accomplished friend Elizabeth Ferguson.

> Permit a sister muse to soar
> To Heights she never tryd before,
> And then look up to thee;
>
> For sure such female virtue joind
> Conspires to make they lovely mind
> The Seat of harmony.[38]

By 1765 the Graeme home would become the scene of Saturday soirees with Elizabeth as its hostess. The young alumni and students of the College, "the Schuylkill poets," were establishing themselves as literati, and those who were in the city were certainly frequent visitors in her home. A decade earlier, William Smith's *American Magazine*, began publishing his pupils' poems. Francis Hopkinson had already had his portrait painted by Benjamin West who had gone to London in 1763. Hopkinson was starting series of public subscription concerts that same year along with his teacher James Bremner, the Scottish musician who had just recently come from Britain.

In 1764 one of Elizabeth's friends wrote to her in Britain about attending these concerts where Governor John Penn, Hopkinson, John Stadler, and Bremner played Handel and Scarlatti.[39] Thomas Godfrey died in 1763 and Evans's edition of his works was published with a memoir, *Juvenile Poems on Various Subjects, with the Prince of Parthia, a Tragedy*. John Morgan recently returned from Edinburgh with a medical degree; Benjamin Rush was in Philadelphia studying under Dr. John Redman and was soon to go to Edinburgh for his medical degree. Nathaniel Evans wrote his *Pastoral Ecologue* and Hopkinson set to music "My Days have been so wondrous Free," adapted from Thomas Parnell's "Love and Innocence." Thomas Coombe, in his last year at the College, was translating some Latin poems written by one of his teachers. McPherson's popular *Fingal*, published in 1762, inspired newlyweds Annis and Richard Stockton to name their ancestral home, Morven. Jacob Duché married Molly Hopkinson and received his ordination in Britain. By 1765 most of these rising poets had adopted *noms de plume*. Elizabeth Graeme was "Laura"; Annis, "Emilia."

[38] Butterfield, "Morven," 5.
[39] Eliza Stedman to EGF, December 16, 1764, Gratz Coll., HSP.

The associations which Elizabeth and her friends enjoyed in her home before the Revolution were undoubtedly significant in their careers. We can be sure that William Smith, who attended Elizabeth's wedding, used her salon to further his own literary and political ambitions. Surely the harpsichord which Francis Hopkinson brought back for Elizabeth from London in 1767 enhanced her gatherings. Music played by Hopkinson and James Bremner would have been natural extensions of their public subscription concerts which had just become popular. Poetry read by Evans, Coombe, Smith or Graeme would have given them support for further literary creation. The political importance of Peters, Smith, Hopkinson, Boudinot and Dr. Graeme, among others, furthered the success of their literary and artistic ambitions.

The significance of the Graeme salon in Elizabeth's own life is much easier to determine. She and Annis Boudinot Stockton, as well as other women of their class, had received an excellent education. Yet they were not free to attend the newly founded academy or college, to subscribe to the Library Company where Hopkinson was librarian, or to belong to the American Philosophical Society as their fathers or brothers did. The salon or the close community of literary friends was a natural option for literary women of the leisure class in eighteenth-century America. The Willing Commonplace Book written near the end of her life shows how valuable her pre-Revolutionary society had been to her literary development. When she and her friends met together they identified and created a literary culture closely imitative of Britain's; they perpetuated this culture by sharing books, periodicals, and first-hand accounts of literary, artistic, and social life in their mother country. As they began to produce their own literature, the salon or the scientific society became an important means of communication. Elizabeth's "American Ode" shows that her literary models remained essentially the same after a quarter of a century.

By the 1780s she thought of herself as established in the literary world. Calling herself "Fawnia" in her preface to the two odes she writes:

> The number of Notes annexd to the *Odes* were written with a View to young people who read Magazines and such light pieces as this might not be acquainted with Poetical allusions, And references, and some notes also on Modern performances.[40]

[40] Cbk, 1789, Strawbridge, 58.

Her allusions to "Modern performances" and her admiration for the younger Litchfield poet Anna Seward show that her interest in English letters had not diminished after the events of the Revolution. In her accounts of "people of *Genius* and *Science* in Pennsylvania," those who have "honoured her with their Friendship" predominate. She also praised younger "acquaintances" such as painters Thomas Duché and Betsy Pyle, the sculptor Patience Wright, and the only new literary figure she honors, her late niece Anna Young. Ferguson's prejudices were those of her class, but her high calling as an advocate and patron for American literature led her to take note of all rising literary lights. She abhorred the excesses of Thomas Paine, but she read and commented on his work. Although Joel Barlow's affinities for the French Revolution repelled her, she copied one of his patriotic poems for a friend.[41]

Ferguson's writings illustrate an impressive scope of knowledge, and her reading and writing encompassed most enlightment themes. She described her major interests as "a turn for investigation" and a "romantic turn as to the objects of nature." In her elegiac view of nature, her poetic models were, besides Vergil, Thomson's *Seasons*, Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," and the immensely popular *Night Thoughts* by Edward Young. Natural history and medicine were interrelated in the eighteenth century. Her close contacts with medical men in Philadelphia and reading of Buffon, Boerhave, and Linnaeus led her to offer diagnoses in letters to ailing friends. She showed as keen an interest in the mysteries of the universe as in medicine. Such interest continued in her poems celebrating the discovery of a "new star" by Sir William Hershel in 1781 or an eclipse in 1768.[42]

Ferguson was a keen observer of political events. Her ninety-three page long "Dream of the Patriotic Philosophic Farmer" written in 1768 expressed the same moderate revolutionary themes as the "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania. . ." written by John Dickinson in the same period.[43] Both Dickinson and William Penn are central figures in

[41] Cbk, 1796, HSP, pp. 485-488. Her satiric poem, "God Save the Guillotine," to be sung to the tune of "God save the King," was written in reaction to Barlow's "A New Song" sung at a Fourth of July celebration in Harrisburg.

[42] On the Discovery of a new Star by Mt. Hershel," Cbk, 1787, DCA, pp. 64-66; also in CBk, 1789, Strawbridge, 193-196.

"Lines written at Eleven at night in Philadelphia at the time the moon was under an Eclipse. . .," Cbk, 1796, HSP, 358-359.

[43] Cbk, 1796, HSP, 39-133.

her allegory, the latter appearing in "celestial" form on a cloud to answer "Albion's" complaints about unrest in the colonies.

Her description of the allegory's "Contents" indicate Ferguson's moderate reaction to the demands of the colonists for "their Liberty and Property unjustly infringed by the Taxes and Duties" of the "Mother Country." Pictured as unfolding on a scroll read by Penn to the people of Pennsylvania, the "Contents" provide an index of themes dear to Elizabeth Graeme's class:

> God's particular Care of Nations. The Fruitfulness of the Country. Nature to be followed. Extreams Shund, And the Golden Mean recommended. The Beauty of True Simplicity, the rural life pleasing to Heaven. Innocent pleasures acceptable to the Deity. A Digression to the Georgics of Vergil. Religion and Nature closely united. The animal Creation, a lively stimulative to Industry. . .patterns exemplified in the Bee, Spider and Beaver. . . .*Autumn* the plenty of that Season described adorn to remember the poor and Friendless at that Time. Enjoyments of all the Comforts of Life allowable. The Error only in the excess. Winter evening described as spent in a well educated and well regulated country family. A hint not to make use of African Slaves in our Farms, while we are ourselves struggling for Liberty with G. Britain. An address to commerce. The vast advantage it has been to Pennsylvania. . .The distinction between Licentiousness and true Liberty: The Beauty of the one and the Deformity of the other: a prophetic gloom augured by a temporary nature hopd to end in lasting glory to *Pennsylvania* when *Commerce* shall be served on a more extensive plan and broader foundation than ever.[44]

In the letter presenting a copy of "Dream of the Patriotic Philosophic Farmer" to Elias Boudinot in 1793, Ferguson asserts that she has only added three lines to the original 1768 version and that these relate to a threatened war with France. One of her reasons for addressing the poem to him is that he is a "warm asserter of freedom without licentiousness."

In religious matters she was a devout believer, a curious observer, and an informed inquirer. Through birth, belief, and society she was an Anglican. Her "turn for investigation" and her affinity for piety prompted her interest in German pietistic sects. She wrote in detail about her observations of the "Dumplers," her term for the religious community at Ephrata, and the Moravians at Bethlehem.[45] She was

[44] Ibid., 45-47.
[45] Ibid, 365-372.

drawn to the enlightened humanitarianism of the Quakers as she wrote about her concerns for penal reform and for anti-slavery efforts. Perhaps her friendship with Rush and her Anglican friends, the Duchés, led her into the quasi-scientific and millenial realms of Swedenborgianism.

Except for Francis Hopkinson and perhaps Godfrey, Elizabeth Ferguson was as skilled a poet as any of the other poets who were her contemporaries. Most of their work was imitative and derivative of classical models. Whether they were writing in the middle of Philadelphia or on board a ship for England, their poetical settings were Virgilian pastoral groves peopled by goddesses, muses, nymphs, bard, Delias and Strephons—all usually mourning and weeping under laurel branches for love or the loss thereof. In their urgency to copy the "Litchfield" poets and to duplicate their ambiance and literary society, they seldom let their muse run wild or free by the Schuylkill or in the streets of Philadelphia. Ferguson's "Spinning Song" below is among the rare exceptions for capturing the spontaneity and earthiness of the native spirit and culture of the new country. We learn something here of her rustic community, and of her own natural musical gifts in this product of wartime. Some of her excursions into political allegory also reveal an effort to escape from slavish imitation of English models. Her "Continental Bill's Reply to Hard Money" written in 1779 in reply to a piece in the *United States Magazine*, which she mistakenly attributed to Hopkinson, is one of these. This charming, twenty-four page poem on the depreciation of American paper currency because of the war is informed, witty, and humorous. It is replete with classical allusion and moral maxims. Reminiscent of her "Spinning Song," Elizabeth traced the genealogy of the "Continental Bill." First planted by a "Peasant" and "pulled by lads and lasses gay," he was combed and spun by a "lovely Maid," next "was woven in a loom," "then in an under garment made I did sweet Susans beauties shade." After surviving Susan, "soap, the dairy, and the kitchen," "Continental Bill" complained, "a *rag man* took me to the Mill, And here I am a *paper bill.*"[46]

Although in such later poems Elizabeth Ferguson tries to identify with the rustic class around her, she is always "Lady Ferguson" and a member of the provincial gentry into which she was born. Even if this segment of eighteenth-century society was a second rate *arriviste* lot

[46] Cbk, 1787, DCA, 93-115.

struggling to overcome inferiority, as Bailyn and Clive suggest in their comparative study of eighteenth century provincial culture in Scotland and America,[47] Ferguson and her friends were members of the cream of Philadelphia society. No matter what their origins and complexes, they were among America's most promising literati. Although they reinforced each other in the same Anglican mold, political events, living conditions, and the rise of Romanticism brought minor but significant changes to their writings. The impending Revolution undermined the established order and forced them to look toward a new American independence in literary expression.

The following poems by Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson were written between 1777 and 1782.[48] Inspired by the melodramatic events in her life brought about by the British invasion of Philadelphia and her husband's final departure from America, they are clothed in the classical conventions preferred in her time. Nevertheless the poems with her explanatory notes are personal expressions of the conflicts and tensions she experienced as well as evidence of the importance of a literary avocation in her life.

Verses to a Married *Gentleman* who made Laura
Some very good penns, which Suited her hand
To write to Mr. Fn in Britain at that time.[49]

Graeme Park 1777

How can we term a Feather Light!
And trifling as air!
When it conveys such High delight,
As fond Epistles bear?

2

Your Friendly Hand with nicest art,
Above a Common Skill!
Fashions the *Feather* for the Heart,
And finely points the *Quill.*

[47] John Clive and Bernard Bailyn, "England's Cultural Provinces: Scotland and America," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3d ser., XI(1954)200-213.

[48] When manuscript versions of a poem are reproduced here, EGF's original spelling, underlining punctuation and capitalization are retained. When more than one version of the poem exists, a version was chosen which seemed to be the best one or which included the most illuminating notes. In some instances illegible handwriting determined the choice of a certain version.

[49] Cbk, 1787, 32-33. Henry Ferguson and Samuel Stockton, Annis' brother, left England in March 1777. They returned to New York via Jamaica where they stayed a month and where the Stocktons had mercantile connections. They apparently reached New York in time for Henry to accompany the British fleet with General Howe and his brother Admiral Richard as they departed in July on their campaign to invade Philadelphia, even as Elizabeth was writing this letter.

3
The *Painters Pencil* paints alone,
One Object to our view,
But by the Happier Pen is Shown
What kindred Souls pursue.
4
Sweet Sentiment and pure desire;
Which fondest spirits move;
The Vestals Chaste Seraphic Fire
And mild Connubial Love.
5
Oh may this *Instrument* Convey,
To Distant *Henrys* Eyes;
Thoughts such as *Delia's* self would say,[50]
Thus tender, good and wise.
6
Then might I hope to wake each string
Which Glows in *Henrys* Breast
Soon waft Him Home on Loves soft Wing
To be like Delia Blest.

To Mr. Powel of Philadelphia.[51]
Graeme park July 13, 1777

Mr. Ferguson I thought then was in Britain as I had not heard from Him a year But He was then on the point of joining the British at New York.

COUNTRY MOUSE[52]

Verses to a gentleman in Philadelphia written in the Month of November 1777 when the British was in possession of the City. The

[50] EGF's most frequent pen name was "Laura" but it was frequently "Delia" in poems involving her husband Henry.

[51] Samuel Powel (1739-1793) was Elizabeth's life-long friend judging from her many allusions to him in her writings. He was a 1759 graduate of the College of Philadelphia and by 1777 he had been one of its trustees and mayor of Philadelphia. He was keenly interested in scientific agriculture and must have shared such interests with Elizabeth as they discussed the care of their country seats at Powelton and Graeme Park.

[52] Cbk, 1796, HSP, 292. It also appears in Cbk, 1787, DCA, 33, without verses 6 and 10 shown here. The 1787 version bears the following poignant end note addressed to Annis Stockton for whom the book was written;

> You Madam well know all the pains I suffered that Winter. Mr. Ferguson was never here after he returned from England not a single moment. I begd and Entreated Him never to come out as it might create suspicions: And I would go to town as often as I could; But not without a pass. And in the course of the Winter and Spring and Summer I believe put it all together spent about a fortnight with him. He never has been in a House of his own since the 10 of September 1775 when he left this and went with your brother Mr. Stockton to England.

gentleman to who these lines were adressd asked the writer to leave the country and partake of the winter pleasures of the City and the entertainment given by the military gentlemen.

The writer lived on her own estate twenty miles from Ph a.

When in the dawn of artless youth
I read old *Esop's* tales;
I there remarked this well-drawn Truth;
For Rustiks of the vales.

2

A City mouse in pompous phrase
Describes the happy state;
Of such as pass their joyous Days
Within the Pallace Gate.

3

A rural Mouse stared and admird,
To hear of things so fine,
With ardent wish she fond aspird
In polished Life to shine.

4

She tripd it off with *Lady Mouse;*
Disdaining former Fare
And enters soon a spacious house,
Delighted with all There.

5

Gay rooms adornd, with taste superb
Quite dazzled her weak mind,
She smiles contemptuous on the herd
She lately left behind.

6

On sugar cakes she feasts awhile
And every dainty thing,
The hours they fly while pleasures smile
Nor think these hours have wing.

7

But ah the scene is soon reverst;
Her mind is filled with dread!
She longs to Bite a Barly Crust
Beneath her Humble shed.

8

No friendly hand, no little track;
Points out her late left shed;
No light gleams forth to lead her Back
Where peace and safety tread.

9

The moral holds if right applyd
At least it suits my case;
Warned by her Fate I will abide
Within this lowly place.

10

Then bid adieu to *courts* and *camps*
And all that striving throng
For few would shed its chilling Damps
And blast the festive song.

Nov. 7, 1777 Laura.

LINES written on a blank-leaf of Dr. Young's *Night Thoughts;* and, with the book, presented to a gentleman by his wife, the night before he undertook a long voyage; January, 1779.[53]

If e'er thy L***a to thy soul was near;
If e'er her sorrows claim'd one manly tear;
If e'er amidst her numerous errors you
One latent virtue fondly could pursue;
If e'er she pleased, if e'er her form appear'd
But one lost moment to thine eye endeared!
If e'er congenial transports warmed thy mind,
And fondly whisper'd that our souls were joined,
Peruse this book, with candour scan the *page,*
And shun the vices of a fallen age!

[53] *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* (February 1791), 115. Also in Cbk, 1796, HSP, 255ff. with the head-note, "From Mrs. Fn to Mr. Fn the night before he crossed the Atlantic she remaining in Pennsylvania, January 16, 1779."

Henry Ferguson had left Philadelphia with Howe's troops probably in June 1778. We know that he was in New York for the rest of that year and that he was in Elizabethtown, New Jersey early in 1779 where, while staying with the Stocktons, she saw him for the last time. The book she presented to him contained one of the most important blank verse poems of the century. Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-45) was a particular favorite of Elizabeth's. In a note added to her long poem, "A Farewell to the Muses written by a Young Woman soon after marriage," Ferguson commended "The Death Bed Scene in Dr. Young's Second Night" as "the noblest poem I ever read. " (Cbk, 1796, HSP, 340) Young's "graveyard poetry" embodied a kind of romantic subjectivity with the melancholy knowledge in his readers of his own tragic loss of his wife.

In 1779 Elizabeth Ferguson had endured ample sorrow for a lifetime but by the 1790s when the poem was published and copied into her commonplace book, death had already taken from her eight brothers and sisters, her parents and a niece and nephew whom she reared as her own. By 1796 Henry Ferguson was to all intents dead to her.

Here truths important—*heaven* and *hell* are shown;
Life, death, eternity, are all made known;
In warmest colours to the mind of man,
The fleeting pleasure of this bounded span
Finely contrasted with that deathless day
Which joins our spirits, when we drop this clay!
So sang the *preacher,* so the poets feign,
As *swans* sing sweetest in their dying strain!
Sounds *mild, melliflous, ardent, clear, devine*
Breathe forth and radiate each seraphic line!
Whilst here I read, *earth* from my footstep flies,
On angels' wings I'm wafted to the skies;
The heavenly host to fancy seem displayed,
And purest transports all my mind pervade:
All sublunary objects sink to view,
Fortune, ambition, nay, my Henry—you!
If right we measure our last *weal* or woe,
We yet shall meet where neither joy nor pain
In ebbs or flows shall short admission gain!
One calm, perpetual, equal, happy round,
In these unfading mansions shall be found,
No *spring* to flatter—*summer* to mature,
No fruits *autumnal* plenty to ensure,
No snow—rolled fields to meliorate th' earth,
For *renovation* of *perennial* birth.
Death life succeeds in this imperfect state:
No so when entered heaven's triumphant gate;
Then fixed duration shall enhance each joy,
And repetition there shall never cloy;
E'en *hope, bright hope,* although life's *cordial drop,*
Is no ingredient in the heavenly cup;
Though the grand softener of our sorrows here
She'll far be banished when we enter there,
Nor smiling cheat us with her partner *Fear,*
Although contrasted they are near allied,
And small partitions do their bounds divide,
Here *hope* and *fear* are ever in one train,
Linked to each other in life's motley *chain,*
Suspense their parent flings them *shade* and light,
Himself the offspring of bright *day* and *night;*
The parent's features stamped upon the child;

One moment fearful, of all joy beguiled,
The next all sanguine and disdaining fears,
Till the pale *twin* before his view appears,
Surrounded by his doubts, his glooms, and fears.
But full *fruition* shall such guests dismiss,
Guests too uncertain for abodes of bliss
No parting there, or else no more be known,
All ties dissolved before Emanuel's throne,
That found celestial lesser springs shall drown,
Each stream concentered in that stream profound.

Introduction to Laura's efusions of friendship written in Retirement at Graeme Park, 1788 & 1789.[54]

Let not the Criticks rigid Eye
Poor Lauras Odes and Sonnets spy!
Good Nature must the *Opticks* be,
Through which her Verses they must see.
Beauties (if there) will first be viewed
And Errors not too close pursued.
Retirement and the pensive Hour
Her inmates in the Rural Bower
She sought the *Muses* in the grove
In place of ill-*Requited Love*
Perhaps she sought them too in vain
Condemned to meet with cool disdain
Where most she favor wishd to find;
Hard Tale to *Laura* still assigned.
Though there Bright Torches were not brought,
To Light the serious moral Thought
Tho Wreaths of *Laurel* are not found;
To foliage gay her Temples round,
Tho *Sewards,* nor *Mores,* nor *Carters* verse;[55]

[54] Cbk, 1789, Strawbridge, 3-6. In Cbk, 1796. HSP, pp. 255 ff, the poem appeared as "Il Penseroso or the Deserted Wife—by Laura. Part of a Poem writ in four parts in the year 1780." This later version written down in 1790 has numerous textual changes and a few additions of lines.

[55] These three poets were cited as Ferguson favorites in her "Farewell to the Muses written by a Young Woman soon after Marriage." (Cbk, 1796, HSP, 41), as well as in other pieces by her Anna Seward (1742-1809) was one of the Litchfield poets cited in the Litchfield Willow Ode by EGF. Though her poetry was shallow and affected, six volumes of her letters were published just after her death. Hannah More (1745-1833) was a member of Mrs. Montagu's blue-stocking group, and was immensely popular in her day for her views on education and practical piety. Both she and Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806) were close to Dr. Samuel Johnson and therefore important to EGF. Carter translated many works, particularly those of Epictetus, she wrote for the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Rambler*.

You do not in her Lines Rehearse,
Yet Still the jingle of the Rhyme,
Beguild the lingering loitering Time.
When War breathd terrors all around,
She trod her own enchanted ground,
*Like *Merlins* Circle all within
Precluded of the Horrid Din
When Peace her Olive did extend
To her it ne'er returned a Friend;
No tender Husband Soothd her Cares,
Nor her Domestic Troubles Shares;
No lisping Children prattled near,
To charm a partial mothers ear.
One Female Friend alone was left
That *Ewe Lamb* from the Slaughter kept
Then pensive *Laura* dont repine,
If one fair Jewell yet be thine
My *Stella* partner of my hours[56]
Who no Misanthropy devours.
A similie here *Gray afords*
Which to My *Stella* plain accords.
Full many a Gem of brilliant ray,
The Oceans depths alone survey,
Full many a sweet and fragrant *Flower,*
Blows only for the air and Shower:
And let me add the tawdry glare,
Alone attracts the Vulgar stare
While to the Virtuoso's Eye,
Reveald the finer Beauties lie,
Which streak the *Shell* or grace the *Maid,*
Are to his nicer ken Displayd;
For Similies of mental Sweets,
Are Shown in Flowers and Shell Retreats,
Love, Light and *Harmony* are found,
Painted in Natures Scenes around,
As Correspondent to the Mind
Of Coarser Cast, or more refind.
But here I close my humble Song,

[56] "Stella" was Eliza Stedman, a cousin of Elizabeth's brother-in-law Charles Stedman; she lived with her at Graeme Park after the departure of Henry Ferguson.

I meant no Harm, I wishd no wrong,
I Sought to pull a Slender Bough
Low in the Vale nor mount the Brow,
Then dont a vernal twig refuse,
But Smile and Cheer a modest Muse.

Laura G Park October 1 1789.

*Merlin a famous British Enchanter.
*Gray in His poem in a Country Churchyard.

A Song written during the Time of the War 1782 written to be sung at a Spinning Frolic, where it is the Custom in the Country for a number of young Women to Collect together to spin a Web of Linnen and Have a little Hop in the Evening.[57]

A SONG

Since Fate hath assigned us these rural abodes
Far distant from Honour, and Fortunes High Roads

[57] This most popular of her poems, at least with her, is taken here from Cbk, 1787, DCA, 29. It was copied into two other commonplace books and published in *Columbian Magazine* 3(December 1789), 746.

In Cbk, 1789, Strawbridge, 190, the poem is called "The American Spinning Wheel" and her introductory note is essentially the same as in the 1787 version except that for the "Hop" in the evening, the spinners were "joined by the Lads of the Neighborhood."

The headnote to "A New Song" in Cbk, 1796, HSP, 149 is nearly the same with "The Horsham Spinsters, Montgomery County" preceding the title. An additional line has been inserted after the last line of the poem, "And sweet little prattles re-echo their sound." Her endnote written on the eve of leaving Graeme Park to live with a neighboring friend, Seneca Lukens, reads "The writer of this is not only *Spinner* in Theory for she has with her own Hands spun many hundred yards at *Dear Gr. Park* which she leaves tomorrow, December 25 '93."

Tradition says that while the Continental Army camped at Whitemarsh about six miles from Graeme Park in the winter of 1777, badly in need of clothing, Elizabeth sent them several times "linen and other materials of her own raising and manufacture" for the troops. (Buck, "Horsham Township," 894) General Washington was also said to have stayed at Graeme Park during the period. Buck (340) includes this poem as "The Pennsylvania Spinners' Song" in his section of "Sports and Pastimes in Montgomery County," where "it was the custom of the owner of the flax to distribute a hank or a dozen of cuts apiece among the young women of the neighborhood which they would spin and reel at their homes, and on an appointed day return to his house. Here they would be provided with refreshments and a supper, when in the evening the young men would join them."

Benjamin Rush in his *Portfolio* sketch on Ferguson mentions her fondness for spinning flax and thread into linen. Several prose pieces as well as poetry and prose in Cbk, 1796, HSP, show her interest in needlework and spinning. Her *nom-de-plume* of "Arachne" for this poem's publication in the *Columbian Magazine* expresses this interest.

Let us Cheerfully pass thro' Lifes innocent Dale,
Nor look up to the Mountain since fixd in the Vale
When Storms rage the fiercest, and mighty trees fall
The lone Shrub is sheltered that Clings to the wall
Let our *Wheels*, and our *Reels* go Merrily round,
While *Health, Peace* and *Virtues* among us are found

2

Tho' the great call us little and do us dispise
Yet sure it is Wise to make little suffice.
In this we will teach them altho they are great
It is always true Wisdom to bend to our Fate
For the *King* or *Congress* should carry the Day
We *Farmers* and *Spinners* must learn to Obey.
Let our Wheels and our Reels go Merrily round
While Health Peace and Virtue among us are found.

3

Our *flax* hath its beauties: an elegant green
When it Shoots from the Earth Enamels the scene
When moistened and broken in filaments fine
Our Maidens they draw the flexible Line:
Then let the *Wheels* and *Reels* go Merrily Round
While *Health, Peace* and *Virtue* among us are found.

4

Some fine as a Cobweb while some is more coarse
To wear but in Common by Substance and force
Since all have assembled to *Card* and to *Spin*
Come Girls quick be nimble and shortly begin
To help Neighbor *Friendly* and when we have done
The Boys they shall join us at set of the Sun
Perhaps our brisk partners may lead us thro Life
And the Dance of the Night End in Husband and Wife
Let the Wheel and the Reel go Merrily Round
While *Health, Peace* and *Virtue* among us are found.

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