

Title: 'Self-Fashioning and Poetic Voice: Elizabeth Singer Rowe's Authorial Prerogative'

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Abstract: Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737) spent forty years negotiating and intervening in the gendered frameworks of the cultural poetics of her time. Nevertheless, despite a number of studies that explore Rowe's engagement with emerging literary trends and her posthumous reputation, little has been said about her self-conscious construction of a literary career trajectory. This essay seeks to address this lacuna by revisiting a number of poems, particularly her famous elegy to her husband, which helped to shape her career and reputation. Rowe's early poems reveal the care and deliberation with which she positioned herself. As a contrast to these earlier, explicit expressions, the elegy's implicit and intensely personal struggle with creative expression itself marks a turning point in Rowe's self-construction. In transforming her private griefs into an expressive form that specifically foregrounds poetic agency and ambition, Rowe co-opts a male elegiac tradition that makes her poem extremely influential for later women writers. Recognising the various ways in which Rowe constructed her professional role and claimed poetic authority gives us a better sense of her aesthetic contributions to eighteenth-century verse traditions.

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Throughout her lifetime and for well over a century after, Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737) had a strong literary reputation, particularly for the distinctive nature of her poetic voice. Indeed, from the outset of her career, Rowe was given the pseudonym 'Philomela', and her 'tuneful gift' was lauded by contemporaries.¹ Rowe herself frequently advertised this reputation and regularly referenced her claims to fame or 'everlasting bays'.² This interest in reputation, literary vocation, and legacy was common to many male poets of the era; however, as Paula Backscheider reminds us, women's 'statements of aspiration' have 'often pass[ed] unnoticed'.³ This essay charts the development of Rowe's self-conscious expression of poetic voice and vocation across her poetry. In doing so, it aims to expose the extent to which this significant element of her oeuvre remains unexplored and untheorised.⁴ It also argues implicitly for a much closer reading of the influence of this aspect of Rowe's creativity both on her contemporaries and on the development of a female literary tradition in the years after her death.

Rowe was easily England's most prominent and popular eighteenth-century female poet and prose writer.⁵ She was the author of an impressive array of works in various genres that included pastoral poetry, biblical paraphrase, epic poetry, epistolary prose fiction, and religious devotions. Throughout her career, she embraced a consistent identity as a rural, coterie poet engaging in manuscript circulation. From that position, she also reinvented herself in relation to established literary roles: she fashioned herself (and was fashioned) variously as female laureate for a burgeoning newspaper industry; as Augustan poet sharing space with Pope and Prior; as anonymous publishing sensation with her epistolary fiction of the 1720s and 1730s; and as a virtuous exemplar and devotional poet in her posthumous publications.⁶ Given Rowe's responsive engagement with the diverse expectations and practices of her contemporary context, it is surprising that her particular inscription of a self-

consciously literary identity has received relatively little attention. The idea of poetic voice and vocation were central to Rowe, and her foregrounding of these concerns in her poetry illuminates the significance of her contribution to eighteenth-century aesthetics.

Like John Milton before her, and her contemporary Alexander Pope, Rowe self-consciously worked towards establishing what Backscheider identifies as a marker of the ‘serious, experimental, original artist’ at the time: an individual poetic ‘signature’.⁷ Nowhere is that individual signature more apparent than in Rowe’s concerted invocation of questions about literary voice, inspiration, and vocation in her poetry. Indeed, from the start of her career, Rowe confidently performed the role of poet. Many of her poems dwell on moments of inspiration or composition and refer to her laureate ambitions. She also frequently negotiated between ideas of the ‘public’ and ‘private’ in her writing; Rowe produced pastoral elegies for patrons and friends, and she wrote poems on significant national occasions. The significance of this confident engagement with questions about the role of the poet and her readership is apparent from the extent to which other writers responded specifically with Rowe’s status as poet-creator and poet-persona.

Addressing Rowe’s self-fashioning and its reception foregrounds long-standing problems in the interpretation of her oeuvre. One of Rowe’s most critically overlooked as well as misconstrued works is her elegy on the death of her husband, variously titled ‘On the death of Mr. Thomas Rowe’ or ‘On the death of her Husband’ (written c.1715-17). The poem is often cited as evidence of her pious persona. Anne Mellor, for example, reads it as an example of an eighteenth-century woman writer’s ‘natural’ propensity to produce intuitive and affective literature, and Staves as an ‘affecting, touchingly plain elegy for a good man and a beloved husband’.⁸ The aim of this essay, however, is to detail how, in the context of Rowe’s oeuvre, the elegy constitutes a seminal engagement with and creative extension of her many earlier explorations of ideas of poetic selfhood and agency in relation to

contemporary creativity. The paper begins by examining a series of early poems to explore Rowe's self-conscious, often explicit focus on the idea of a literary vocation. It then identifies in the elegy a turning point in Rowe's construction of her distinctive voice. Rowe self-consciously co-opts a male elegiac tradition to transform her private grief into an expressive form that specifically foregrounds poetic agency and ambition. In doing so, she establishes a model to which writers such as Elizabeth Carter and Anna Barbauld would look for inspiration in their own subsequent workings-through of creative and professional expression.

To recognise the ways in which Rowe constructed her professional role and claimed poetic authority is to gain a better sense of her aesthetic contributions to eighteenth-century literary traditions. It also enables a more attentive reading of the ways in which contemporaries responded to her compositions and literary personae. A revised assessment of agency, vocation, and voice in Rowe's work, therefore, affords new insights into eighteenth-century women authors' self-perception and reception. Rowe spent forty years negotiating and intervening in the gendered frameworks of the cultural poetics of her time. The explicit or implicit tropes and strategies she deployed are everywhere evident in later women writers – whether mirrored or refracted – and should encourage us to rethink 'virtuous' eighteenth-century women poets and their cultural engagements more generally.

Vocation and Voice: Rowe's Early Poems

In the eighteenth century, the notion of poetry as a divinely inspired art was commonplace; however, as Jon Mee has shown, the application and regulation of such inspiration was a fraught subject.⁹ The spectre of religious enthusiasm loomed large over Rowe's career and posthumous reputation; the rapturous expressions and prophetic posturing in her poetry could make her susceptible to accusations of being a 'religious enthusiast', a problematic label because of its association with late seventeenth-century radical religion and dissent.¹⁰ More

enduringly, Rowe's seemingly unmodulated expressions of religious devotion and divine inspiration could lead some to question the degree to which she knowingly saw herself as an authoring self. For example, Isaac Watts, in the preface to a posthumous publication of her prose devotions, worried that her 'Language of holy Passion' strayed too far for rational tastes.¹¹ However, as his allusion to poetic diction suggests (and as Rowe's process of composition reveals), she was always in control of the tone and style of her 'enthusiastic' outpourings.¹² As a closer examination of her poetry reveals, Rowe was constantly foregrounding and working through the very idea of a creative voice in relation to her own engagement with literary tradition. Indeed, Rowe's works exerted considerable influence on contemporary writers precisely because her literary evocation and manipulation of aesthetic experience encouraged others to share in and contribute to this cultural intervention in their own right.

A large part of the aesthetic of Rowe's poetry and later prose focused on evoking a pastoral world that was emblematic of the Edenic delights of a heavenly afterlife, but that was equally embedded in a classical tradition. In literary circles, pastoral was, according to David Fairer, a rite of passage: 'a kind of punch-bag for hundreds of poets-in-training to test their powers on in the hope of embarking on the *rota Virgiliana*'.¹³ Pastoral's 'malleability', he continues, 'offered opportunities for poetic experiment, and the widespread familiarity of its codes allowed for considerable ingenuity and playfulness.'¹⁴ Rowe was just such an experimental and playful writer and the repeated deployment of pastoral settings, tropes, and personae in her earliest collection of poetry points to her ambitious career aspirations and self-conscious positioning in relation to established tropes. Indeed, Rowe even continued on the traditional Virgilian trajectory: after writing pastorals she went on to complete a biblical epic, *The History of Joseph*.¹⁵

Though published anonymously, Rowe's first collection, *Poems on Several Occasions by Philomela* (1696), offered readers a pseudonym that they were already familiar with from the pages of John Dunton's periodical *The Athenian Mercury* (1691-97), where she was known as both Philomela and the Pindarick Lady. Capitalising on the popularity of the pieces that Rowe had already submitted to his twice-weekly magazine over the course of 1695, Dunton speedily published a selection of them. This publication suggests that Rowe's initial self-positioning paid off. Her works were well received by Dunton and his fellow 'Athenians', and, importantly, her authorial persona enabled a dialogic relationship to open up between herself, the Athenians, and the readers of the periodical. Throughout *Poems* (1696), Rowe's blurring of the line between the 'poet-as-creator-of-the-poem' and 'poet-as-imagined-presence-in-the-poem' challenges the reader in pleasurable as well as problematic ways.¹⁶

The interplay of enthusiasm and pastoral codes is particularly manifest in Rowe's first poem of the collection, 'Platonick Love', which also engages with and closely mirrors themes raised in Katherine Philips's poem 'Friendship'.¹⁷ For a young female poet writing at the end of the seventeenth century, a gesture back to the 'Matchless Orinda' constituted a powerful (if conventional) allusion to female linguistic and cultural agency. Rowe's allusive engagement is not one of mere tribute; instead, it serves implicit notice of her attempt to articulate a distinct voice and identity within established tropes and traditions. The poems of both Rowe and Philips feature gender-neutral speakers and neither is addressed to any particular member of their coteries. Nevertheless, both poems are emblematic of a new and authoritative female poetic voice. Both develop the theme of platonic love, drawing a comparison between angelic love and its copy on earth, the 'noble flame' of friendship. Whilst Philips's speaker records that 'this is friendship, that abstracted flame / Which creeping mortals know not how to name' (ll.27-8), Rowe's speaker similarly reflects, 'Why

should I blush to indulge the noble flame, / For which even friendship's a degrading name'

(ll.11-12). Both poems make similar statements on the theme of the neoplatonic separation of ideal love from the debasements of physical love. Philips's speaker avers:

Let the dull brutish World that know not Love,
Continue heretics, and disapprove
That noble flame; but the refinèd know
'Tis all the Heaven we have here below. (ll.1-4)

Rowe opens with:

So Angels Love and all the rest is dross,
Contracted, selfish, sensitive and gross.
Unlike to this, all free and unconfin'd,
Is that bright flame I bear thy brighter mind. (ll.1-4)

Contrasting the platonic love of Heaven/Angels with the 'contracted' notions of a brutish/gross world, both writers thus privilege the nobility of non-physical love. They also Christianize the Platonic notion of loving God through the love of an individual, at times to the point of using the same figurative images. For example, Philips's line 'That [heavenly love] is the Ocean, our affections here / Are but streams borrow'd from the fountaine there' (ll.13-14), is echoed by Rowe, 'Can I th'enticing stream almost adore, / And not respect its lovely fountain more?' (ll.15-16).

Despite these similarities, Rowe's poem suggests both a self-conscious divergence from the themes developed by Philips and a deliberate assertion of her individual poetic persona. Philips's poem, at fifty-six lines, presents a sustained neoplatonic argument, and accomplishes the conceit of privileging friendship's purer flames over Love's 'earthly fires' (l.39) in a graceful narrative arc. It also contains its platonic ambition within the confines of 'the dull brutish world' (l.1), acknowledging the constraints of earthly passions but providing the antidote. Rowe's poem – more compact and focused at just sixteen lines – is constructed in terms representative of epiphanic enthusiasm. When the speaker asks, 'Why should I then the Heav'nly spark controul' (l.9), there is a sense that passion, whether platonic or not, has

transcended the bounds of human nature. It has also implicitly taken on a different thematic role from that delineated by the earlier poet. For Rowe, her passion, that is her affection directed outwards to God, is also her source of inspiration and, therefore, her poetic agency. It is this inspiration, she implies, that gives force to the conceits that inform her poetry. Indeed, in the context of a poem whose subject and form are as much about platonic influence as they are about divine inspiration, Rowe's assertion of an authorial 'I' can also be read in terms of an argument about independent creative authority.

That independence extends to laying claim to a position within a dominant literary tradition. Thus, while Rowe affiliates herself overtly with Philips, she also implicitly identifies in that poet a similar refusal to contextualize her voice in gendered terms. Nonetheless, that claim was not always acknowledged or respected. As Sharon Achinstein has shown, Rowe's rapturous verse is susceptible to the 'double register' that 'haunts all poetry that seeks to represent the relationship between humans and the divine': that is, a 'resemblance between holy ardour and carnal eroticism'.¹⁸ Drawing attention to such doubling, the editor(s) of the *Athenian Mercury* and her *Poems* (1696) appended the poem 'Humane Love' as a companion piece, in which a 'Countrey gentleman' argues in favour of bodily desires:

*SO Angels love, So let them love for me;
As mortal, I must like a mortal be.
My Love's as pure as their's, more unconfi'd;
I love the Body, they but love the Mind. (ll.1-4, italics in original)*

Appropriating phrases directly from Rowe's poem, the poet-speaker of 'Humane Love' suggests that her language is as much about sexual fulfilment as it is about platonic love. For example, he reapplies her use of the phrase 'intense and active' – which she used to characterize her 'holy fire' – and argues that his earthly desire 'more intense and active, sure must be, / Since I both *Soul and Body* give to thee' (ll.7-8). Throughout, the response poem foregrounds the amorous possibilities in Rowe's language and thus the gendered identity of

the poet. Predictably, the gentleman's poem ends with sexual innuendo: 'Shall I not for a charming Mistress dye? / When Heaven commands *increase and multiply*' (ll.15-16, italics in original).

Rowe's poem can certainly be read as suggesting an iconoclastic 'sanctioning of female heterosexual pleasure', and the male writer's playful response highlights such susceptibility.¹⁹ Nevertheless, there is also a strong sense of patriarchal curtailment in the way the male writer responds to Rowe's attempt to assert her poetic agency. The gentleman ultimately seeks to delimit her authority by reminding her of women's purely sexual function relative to men. Indeed, although it has been assumed that Rowe sought to distance herself from this publication because of her sense of the errors in her own expressions, it is equally possible that she wanted to reject the Athenians' responses that undermined her literary voice by implicitly containing its identity as 'female'.

A similar, but more overt claim to a public, poetic authority is contained in Rowe's lament 'Occasioned by the Report of the Queen's Death'.²⁰ In that poem, Rowe projects a poet-persona who is confident of her public status. Although Rowe was an avid supporter of William and Mary, her poem is remarkable for how little it says about the queen. Instead, its primary focus seems to be on presenting an image of the public poet in traditional pastoral terms. The poem opens with news of the queen's death blowing 'among the *Western swains*, / The *saddest news* that ever reacht their Plains' (ll.1-2). The poet-speaker – seemingly one of the 'swains' – is exposed as Apollo himself when he later acknowledges that Queen Mary's death was more devastating than Daphne's repudiation of him ('Less was I toucht with that *pernicious Dart*, / That peirc'd [sic] through mine to reach my *Daphnes Heart*' (ll.5-6)).

Apollo's self-referential narrative continues when he describes how

From off my Head the *Florid wreath* I tore,
That I, to please the fond *Orestes*, wore;
And quite *o're charg'd* with Grief upon the ground,
I sunk my Brows, with mournful *Cypress Crown'd*;

My trembling Hand sustain'd my drooping Head,
And at my feet my *Lire* and *Songs* were laid[.] (ll.7-12)

Apollo's language and actions are hyperbolic and highly performative: he theatrically divests himself of all his poetic signifiers (his laurel wreath, lyre, and songs) and bows down his head in obeisance to the monarch. The message is clear: the queen is dead and poetry has lost its source of inspiration. The paradox, of course, is that the pastoral mode still requires a song. Rowe's uncharacteristic gesture of distancing herself from the melodrama by handing over the 'voice' of disappointed poetry to Apollo actually enables her to foreground her own role as primary poet-creator. Thus, Rowe depicts the poet-speaker Apollo as divesting himself of his poetic responsibilities while she assumes the vacant post in an extraordinary performance of creative authority.

Such practices were not confined to national lament. In another poem in the same collection, 'The Vision. To Theron', Rowe's poet-speaker invokes a more uplifting scene, this time associated with a subject from the works of Pindar: the Olympian charioteer, Theron.²¹ The speaker is lulled to sleep in the first two lines of the poem and recounts that

Methought I in a Mirtle shade was plac'd,
My Tresses curl'd, my Brows with Laurel grac'd
Fresh was the Air, serenely bright the Day,
And all around lookt ravishingly Gay,
Active my Thoughts, my Lyre was in my hand,
And once more *Theron* did my Voice command;
Once more the charming *Hero* did inspire
My daring Muse with an Heroick Fire[.] (ll.3-10)

Making use of pastoral tropes for literary vocation and fame ('with Laurel grac'd'; 'my Lyre was in my hand'; 'My daring Muse'), the poet-speaker raises expectations about the 'Heroick Fire' to follow. What follows is not, however, what we might call an 'Heroick' address. The subject invites a martial theme, but Rowe resists that expectation to explore instead poetic performance, or 'Song'. The speaker describes how

The listning streams enchanted with my Song,
Scarce drove their still preceeding waves along;

Whil'st o're and o're complaisant eccho bears,
 Through every cavern the immortal Airs;
 About my Lips th' impatient Zephirs hung,
 To snatch the tuneful Numbers from my Tongue;
 And the pleas'd Graces crowded round to hear their Darling Sung. (ll.14-20)

The subject and suggestion here are that the narrator's abilities 'enchanted' the waves, becalmed the wind, and 'pleas'd' the Graces. It is possible that this poem was composed for a member of Rowe's coterie and, as such, may be understood in relatively simple terms as a compliment. However, the poet-as-imagined-presence-in-the-poem is strongly in evidence as the 'pleas'd Graces' are 'crowded round' the poet and not Theron at the close of the poem.

Reception and Reputation

Rowe's manipulation of aesthetic and poetic form in order to promote an idea of an authorial persona was recognized by many contemporary writers. As we have already seen, some receptions of that performance challenged her claims in gendered terms. That gendered response was not always negative, however, and particularly not from the majority of Rowe's female contemporaries. In the preface to *Poems* (1696), for example, Elizabeth Johnson praises Rowe in the highest terms. Readers will find, she avers, that

purity of Language, that softness and delicacy in the Love-part, that strength and Majesty of Numbers almost every where, especially on Heroical Subjects, and that clear and unaffected Love to Virtue; that heighth of Piety and warmth of Devotion[...]; which [...readers] will hardly find exceeded in the best Authors on those Different Kinds of Writing, much less equall'd by any single Writer. (sig.A4r-v, italics in original)

Johnson's gendered markers point to the ways in which Rowe's poetry encapsulates acceptable feminine discourses ('purity', 'softness', 'delicacy', 'Love', 'virtue', 'piety', and 'devotion'), at the same time as it co-opts masculine cultural authority ('strength', 'majesty', 'heroical subjects', 'virtue', and 'the best authors'). Carol Barash identifies a similar appropriation of a *femme-forte* model in the work of Katherine Philips and Aphra Behn,

among others.²² For Johnson, Rowe's discursive mastery sets her off as an exemplar of female authorial agency at the same time as Rowe can be likened to 'the best authors'.

Johnson's practical task in the preface was twofold: she was introducing a 'new' poet to an audience outside of the coterie of aristocrats and writers gathered around the Thynnes at Longleat, amongst whom Rowe's work had been hitherto confined in manuscript circulation.²³ Otherwise her works had only appeared under pseudonyms in Dunton's *Athenian Mercury*. The preface also functions, as Jennifer Richards notes, as a proto-feminist defence of Rowe.²⁴ Johnson reminds readers that Rowe is a new champion for her sex and that while

some *Angels* fell, others remain'd in their *Innocence* and *Perfection* [...] And if all our *Poetesses* had done the same, I wonder what our *Enemies* cou'd have found out to have objected against us: However, here they are *silenc'd* [...] (sig.a4)

Johnson potentially acknowledges Rowe's local reputation for piety and virtue. She also, however, seems to be referencing the numerous instances in the collection when Rowe positioned herself as the most effective, that is efficacious, *voice* of female poetry.

Contemporaries and later acolytes often recognized and drew from the same conventional tropes that Rowe invoked to assert her creative talents. In Rowe's posthumous *Miscellaneous Works* (1739) the dissenting minister and sometime poet Henry Grove apostrophized, 'O had I but thy voice, and skill, and lyre', and the young Elizabeth Carter claimed that as a result of Rowe's 'pow'rful strains' 'all creation list'ned to the song.'²⁵ In an extended application of the Philomela analogy, Isaac Watts lamented that 'Philomela's voice' and 'song' negated the need for any poetry from him:

Now be my harp forever dumb,
My Muse attempt no more.[...]
Since a fair angel dwells below,
To turn the notes of heav'n.²⁶

Rowe privately agreed. In a letter to Frances Seymour, the Countess of Hertford, she observed that '[t]here is something free & easie in M^r Watts's Poem but Devotion is his

proper Element'.²⁷ Like Watts himself, Rowe suggests that he should stick to theological works and leave poetry to a real poet such as herself.

One of the most notable invocations of Rowe's persona comes from her nearest contemporary, Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea (1661-1720). Finch's poetry often explores the status and efficacy of poets and poetry, particularly in relation to the role of the female poet in the early eighteenth century. Her poem, 'A Tale of the Miser, and the Poet', written around 1709 and published anonymously in 1713, presents a spirited dialogue between a hopeful, young poet and a cautious, old miser as they discuss gains and losses in the profession of letters. Drawing attention to the straitened finances and limited fame of a roll call of recent poets, the miser of the poem attempts to convince the aspiring poet to turn instead to 'Money! which only can relieve you' (l.84).²⁸ The miser asks,

What have you met with, but Disgraces?
 Your PRIOR cou'd not keep in Places;
 And your VAN-BRUG had found no Quarter,
 But for his dabbling in the Morter.
 ROWE no Advantages cou'd hit on,
 Till Verse he left, to write *North-Briton*.
 PHILIPS, who's by the *Shilling* known,
 Ne'er saw a Shilling of his own.
 Meets PHILOMELA, in the Town
 Her due Proportion of Renown?
 What Pref'rence has ARDELIA seen,
 T'expel, tho' she cou'd write the *Spleen*?
 Of Coach, or Tables, can you brag,
 Or better Cloaths than Poet RAG? (ll.53-66)

As ever, Finch's tone is reserved whilst also being ironic. Although the young poet seems to acquiesce to the views of the more experienced miser: 'Sir, (quoth the *Poet* humbly bowing, / And all that he had said allowing)' (ll.86-7), the list of seemingly unsuccessful poets is clearly facetious. Mathew Prior, Sir John Vanbrugh, Nicholas Rowe, and Ambrose Philips were sufficiently popular that the description was obviously at odds with contemporary reality. Finch also includes two women writers in her list of neglected poets: Philomela

(identified in the notes of the 1713 edition of the poem as ‘Mrs. Singer, Author of several excellent Poems’ (148), and Ardelia, Finch’s own poetic pseudonym.

Given the tongue-in-cheek nature of the list of authors, Finch’s reference to herself here is clearly meant to draw attention to her success with ‘The Spleen’. Likewise, the question, ‘Meets PHILOMELA [...] Her due Proportion of Renown?’ rhetorically celebrates the considerable attention that Rowe was receiving for her poetry at this time. Scholars, however, downplay the moment. Backscheider rightly refers to Rowe’s appearance here as a compliment, a moment of eighteenth-century polite sociability.²⁹ Rowe, Finch, and Prior knew each other through the Thynne family, and it is possible that the poem circulated amongst them. Given Rowe’s own, supported claims for her authority as a creative voice, however, and given her recent appearance in a number of significant miscellanies, it is significant that Finch refers explicitly to Rowe’s ‘Renown’; it is only misers and misanthropes who would deny her that literary prominence.

As Finch’s praise suggests, Rowe’s name and poetry circulated broadly in the early decades of the eighteenth century. In addition to dominating the popular miscellany, *Divine Hymns and Poems* (1704, 1707, 1709, 1719, and 1757); eight of her poems and translations appeared in Jacob Tonson’s fifth and sixth *Poetical Miscellanies* (1704 and 1709, respectively, with subsequent editions); she appeared in another Dunton compilation, *Athenianism* (1710); and several of her pieces turned up in two further collections entitled *Poems and Translations by Several Hands* (1714) and *Poetical Miscellanies Consisting of Original Poems and Translations* (1714).³⁰

Nevertheless, Finch’s very assertion of fame also reminds us of the occasionally vexed response to Rowe’s works in the early decades of the eighteenth century. For instance, though over half of the entries in *Divine Hymns* (1704) were by Rowe, she is only acknowledged as the author of two poems in the list of contents.³¹ Despite this lack of

apparent acknowledgement, Rowe's pseudonym was used to sell the volume; the full title references a list of her poems followed by an attribution to Philomela: *Divine Hymns and Poems on Several Occasions. Viz. A Pastoral on our Saviour's Nativity. The Wish. The Description of Heaven, in Imitation of Mr. Milton, &c. By Philomela, and Several Other Ingenious Persons*. Most of the male authors in the miscellany are identified by name, whereas thirty-two poems by Rowe are characterised simply as 'By a Young Lady' or 'By an unknown Hand'. The preface, a rousing defence of the role of poetry in upholding religion and virtue, also elides any mention of Rowe. Indeed, the unidentified author of the preface notes that they struggled to find enough examples of religious poetry amongst male authors and 'for this Reason we have added several New Copies, which make up about half the Book. 'Tis hop'd these will be no Disgrace to the rest.'³² The discrepancies between the title and the contents list, and the diminishing of Rowe's import in the preface, reveal a fascinating negotiation between a celebration and a silencing of this prominent female poet. They also go some way to explain why Finch so forcefully emphasizes Rowe's claims.

Rowe Redux

The poem that changed Rowe's status, that ineluctably transformed her from pastoral neophyte to iconic literary exemplar for a generation of serious religious poets, was her famous elegy to her husband, Thomas Rowe. Rowe met Thomas (1687-1715) in Bath in 1709, they married in 1710, and he died just five years later in May 1715 at the age of twenty-eight. Written sometime between 1715 and 1717, the elegy first appeared with the title 'Upon the Death of her Husband' in the Bernard Lintot publication, *Poems on Several Occasions: by His Grace the Duke of Buckingham... And Other Eminent Hands* (1717), where Rowe's authorship was acknowledged under her maiden name Singer.³³ In her

posthumous *Miscellaneous Works* (1739) the elegy was re-titled ‘On the death of Mr. Thomas Rowe’.³⁴

The elegy explicitly engages with the classical precedents of the genre, with problems of form and content, and, importantly, with the Miltonic theme of poetic vocation. While it fulfills the standard social function of offering up lamentation, praise, and consolation, it also explores the complexity and paradox of making art out of personal loss.³⁵ It also makes a significant case for the position and creative authority of the female voice within a prominent poetic convention. Contemporaries clearly appreciated the blend of private pathos and creative aspiration expressed in the poem: the privately circulated text quickly made it into print in Lintot’s publication. Two years later, it was included in a miscellany ascribed to Oxford and Eton graduates, alongside two anonymous responses – presumably also by graduates.³⁶ Importantly, Pope included the elegy in the second edition of *Eloisa to Abelard* (1720), and it went on to appear in ten more miscellany collections, including John Wesley’s hugely popular *A Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems from the most Celebrated English Authors* (1744).³⁷ Such was the influence of the work that would-be poets, including the scholar Thomas Birch, sent Rowe their own personal elegies for comment and potential publication.³⁸ Rowe herself wrote a sequel: ‘On the anniversary return of the day on which Mr. Rowe died’ (c.1727-8?).³⁹

Poems like the country gentleman’s answer to ‘Platonick Love’, as well as the responses and imitations of the elegy, are suggestive of the way contemporaries read Rowe’s poetry; that is, as problematic expressions of the typical Augustan dilemma of balancing contraries: in this case, virtue and passion, human and divine love, body and soul. Again, these readings were further complicated by the gendered nature of the discourse. The elegy’s published association with Pope’s *Eloisa to Abelard*, for example, points to the potential slippage of terms and ideas around the discourse of love and passion. More significant,

however, is the work's self-positioning within a rhetorical and aesthetic tradition with which Rowe had been engaging from the start of her career. By the time of the elegy, we can identify a confident projection of a distinctive and self-consciously authorial voice.

The primary purpose of an elegy is ostensibly to lament, praise, and console. Peter Sacks, in his definitive study of *The English Elegy*, overlays this basic triad with a more sensitive account of the metapoetic strategies and Freudian impulses to be found in the form.⁴⁰ For Sacks, the historical elegy functions as 'a working through of experience and as a symbolic action.'⁴¹ Thus poets focus on the 'substantiality of poetic language' as a compensatory mechanism for a strongly felt absence where words function in Wordsworthian terms 'not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion'.⁴² The second part of Sacks's argument relies on an Oedipal and fundamentally male narrative pattern culled from Freud: the poet engages in the process of 'symbolic action' (e.g. castration, detachment, and reattachment) that enables him to do the work of mourning. As Anne Mellor points out, Sacks fails to substantiate this argument in any way with regards to female poets. Mellor instead suggests that, in opposition to the 'instrumental' impulse (identified as the intellectual rather than emotional response to grief), women are 'intuitive' grievers; they 'experience grief as *feelings*, and they express those feelings.'⁴³ Mellor herself accepts this gendered difference: she describes Rowe as one of these intuitive grievers. Rowe's apparent inconsolability and depth of feeling, as well as the biographical fact that she never remarried, leads Mellor to claim that, for Rowe, the grief never ends and the elegy is simply a moment of naming and memorialising that grief.⁴⁴

In many respects Rowe's elegy to her young husband does substantiate Mellor's thesis. Ninety-seven lines long, and composed of irregular stanzas of rhyming couplets (with one triplet in the second stanza), the poem expresses intense personal sorrow for the deceased. It opens on a note of melancholy desire as the poet-speaker both invokes and

questions her dead husband as a prelude to her attempt at poetic composition. She asks, ‘In what soft language shall my thoughts get free, / My dear Alexis, when I talk of thee?’ (ll.1-2).⁴⁵ The reference to freeing her thoughts, summoning ‘soft language’, and invoking ‘My dear Alexis’, establishes the sexual and emotional connection between the poet-speaker and the subject of the poem. It also, however, points to the essential problem, identified by Sacks, of finding a language enduring and flexible enough to embody both the genuine passion for the bereaved, as well as to stand in, with meaningful and substantive enough signs, for the absent loved one.

Rowe acknowledges and participates overtly in these conventions. The poem initially follows her question/invocation to Alexis with another to ‘Ye muses, graces, all ye gentle train’, asking them to ‘assist the pensive strain!’ (ll.3-4). The poet-speaker soon rejects that invocation, however, as insufficient to her attempt ‘to speak the dictates of my heart’ (ll.5-6). This tension between the efficacy of language and the overwhelming fact of grief had also been foregrounded in her earlier reference to thoughts that need to ‘get free’. In these first six lines, therefore, Rowe broaches the essential problem of the constraints of literary convention and language in the face of grief: the stanza ends with the speaker determined that ‘In grief, for him, there can be no excess’ (l.10).

The elegy continues to invoke and participate within conventional tropes: the first stanza establishes the centrality of the poet-speaker, and of her struggle with grief and poetic conventions, and the second stanza moves into the conventional gestures of praise. Alexis is described as one whose ‘soul was form’d to act each glorious part / Of life, unstain’d with vanity, or art’ (ll.11-12) and ‘Practis’d by him, each virtue grew more bright, / And shone with more than its own native light’ (ll.15-16). In this section devoted to celebrating and substantiating Alexis’s virtues, however, the poet-speaker then falters:

Whatever noble warmth could recommend
The just, the active, and the constant friend,

Was all his own – but, oh! A dearer name,
And softer ties my endless sorrow claim[.] (17-20)⁴⁶

Though the accidentals were probably added by Rowe's editors, the dash arrests the verse in an emotive pause before it moves into a moment of affective exclamation, 'but, oh!' What follows is the kind of intuitive overflow identified by Mellor; over the course of fifteen more lines, the poem describes how, 'Lost in despair, distracted, and forlorn, / The lover I, and tender husband mourn' (ll.21-2). The poem suggests, in remarkably similar terms to Pope's *Eloisa*, that the poet-speaker of Rowe's elegy feels compelled to express her tragic passion in a way that deifies her human lover. It also dramatizes the problematic nature of that expectation: the speaker admits that 'My pray'rs themselves were thine' (ll.26), and 'O Thou was all my glory, all my pride! / Thro' life's uncertain paths, my constant guide' (ll.32-3). Such lines constitute a sinning against her God, as the speaker admits to praying to Alexis and setting him above God as her 'guide'.

Rowe's elegy continually draws attention to the self-consciousness with which she applies expression to her subject. For example, the speaker further compounds her sin by questioning God's grace: 'Why has my heart this fond engagement known? / Or why has heav'n dissolv'd the tie so soon?' (ll.36-7). This is followed by a spurious justification for her lack of virtue that simultaneously evokes the speaker's emotions:

But virtue here a vain defence had made,
Where so much worth and eloquence could please.
For he could talk – 'twas ecstasy to hear,
'Twas joy, 'twas harmony to ev'ry ear! (ll. 40-42)

A dash here again signifies an overflow of passion and the poet-speaker launches into a series of expostulations. Rowe presents a poet-speaker who is actively drawing on her powers of memory and imagination in order to substantiate the presence of the absent Alexis. In the very dramatization of that struggle in her verse, though, she also asserts implicitly her mastery of the convention. One moment 'the dear delusion mocks my fond embrace' (l.55),

then ‘scenes of horror swim before my sight’ (l.57), and, finally, ‘a dying lover pale and gasping lies’ (l.59). The speaker struggles to fix the memory as ‘[t]he fatal object is for ever new’ (l.61). Importantly, this section of the poem is one of only four points in which the speaker exists in the present tense. The struggle is thus ever-present and ‘for ever new’, and gives immediacy and pathos to what is, emblematically, a memorial monument.

Rowe’s thematic focus on voice and authority is similarly apparent across lines 64 to 77, where the poet-speaker ventriloquizes the dead Alexis. Earlier on, the poem had established that ‘he could talk – ’twas ecstasy to hear’, and Rowe’s later works reveal her belief in the efficacy of speeches from the dead. It is Rowe, however, who gives voice to Alexis. In her poem, Alexis commends her to ‘the charge of sacred providence’ (l.66). He also instructs her to ‘Think on thy vows, be to my mem’ry just, / My future fame and honour are thy trust’ (ll.70-71). While some critics have read this line as Rowe’s vow never to remarry, another interpretation points to a reaffirmation of Rowe’s literary vocation and her keen, signalled sense of poetic voice and authorship. In the elegy, Rowe works through the problem of her grief and explores the theological problem ‘about whether only God could be the proper object of love or whether other kinds of love for God’s creatures or God’s creation had legitimacy’.⁴⁷ More to the point, she also thinks through and self-consciously engages with her *raison d’être as a poet*.

In her elegy, Rowe is engaging with some of the most prominent traditions, works, and poets of her era. As numerous critics have noted of Pope’s epistle, the emotional aesthetic of *Eloisa to Abelard* is at odds with its formal structure. The balance and neat closure created through rhymed couplets is antithetical to the rawness of the grief. In *Lycidas*, the quintessential lyric elegy for Rowe’s generation, Milton had struggled with a similar tension between the expression of grief and the limitation of language. Rowe, like Pope, finds ways around the formality of her own rhymed couplets through her visions, delusions,

punctuation, and enthusiastic apostrophes. She also, however, reminds us that the elegy can never be a faithful imitation of feelings or theology; it *is* artifice, it *is* a literary creation.

Rowe's elegy is best considered an Augustan *Lycidas*, as a work in which she articulates both her own personal grief and her creative vocation. Like her earlier poetry, it is manifestly a self-conscious performance, a work that calls implicit and continuous attention to the creative voice and poetic powers of its author. It is also much more rooted within dominant literary conventions associated with prominent male poets. Rowe's elegy necessarily engages with the inevitably gendered nature of these conventions, but implicitly provides a creative model for other female writers to challenge traditional ideas of poetic genealogy.

Rowe's focus on the mediating voice and authority of the female poet was also supported in the publication of the elegy by Theophilus Rowe, Thomas's brother and one of the posthumous editors of Rowe's 'Life' and *Miscellaneous Works* (1739). Tasked with finishing the biography of Elizabeth, he also appended an account of his brother that perpetuated the dialogue between both voices already invoked in Rowe's elegy. In his 'joint' life of the couple, Theophilus helpfully draws attention to the exchange of poems between the two, and prints one of Thomas's odes to Rowe.⁴⁸ As Theophilus notes, his brother's ode makes a number of prophetic statements (including a hope that he will die before his wife and that her pen may immortalise him), but it begins with a complimentary apostrophe about Rowe's career and reputation for virtue: 'So long may thy inspiring page, / And great example bless the rising age!'⁴⁹ After expressing his wish that she will live a long and happy life, he then dramatises the moment of his own death and the response he hopes for from Rowe:

Whene'er it [Death] comes, may'st thou be by,
Support my sinking frame, and teach me how to die;
Banish desponding nature's gloom,
Make me to hope a gentle doom,
And fix me all on joys to come!
With swimming eyes I'll gaze upon thy charms,

And clasp thee dying in my fainting arms:
 Then gently leaning on thy breast,
 Sink in soft slumbers to eternal rest.
 The ghastly form shall have a pleasing air,
 And all things smile, while heav'n and thou art there.⁵⁰

In presenting this ode immediately before Rowe's elegy, Theophilus positions that elegy as a direct response; Rowe's poetry now perpetuates Thomas' 'fame' and 'mem'ry' in the time-honoured fashion of Shakespeare's sonnet 55: 'You live in this, and dwell in lover's eyes.'⁵¹ Indeed, Theophilus even foregrounds his appreciation of her affective choices when he applauds the 'exquisite grief and affliction' Rowe showed in her elegy to his brother; the adjective 'exquisite' denotes something 'sought out' and 'carefully selected' according to the *OED*. In other words, he was signalling Rowe's skill as a poet.

Two response poems published two years after the first appearance of Rowe's elegy also implicitly acknowledge the aesthetic ambitions and affective achievements of the poem. The miscellany, *Musapædia* (1719), reprinted Rowe's elegy alongside two anonymous contributions, 'The Answer. By a Gentleman' and 'Occasion'd by seeing the Lady's foregoing Poem.' The former, addressing the poet-speaker of the elegy as 'Plorabella' (or beautiful weeper), implores her to 'cease those Sighs and Tears' and, in terms similar to the 'Countrey Gentleman's' poem, questions how the dead Alexis can continue to 'fulfill Desire'[sic].⁵² Despite its lengthy attempt to satirise Rowe's commitment to the dead, the poem repeatedly acknowledges the skilful and moving account of grief that she creates. In particular, this responder explicitly engages with her as both poet-as-imagined-presence ('Plorabella') and author ('thy mournful Pen'). Early on in the poem the responder asks the poet:

But say ---- what was't that mov'd thy mournful Pen,
 The Cause is dubious, as thy Sorrow plain?
 Ev'n all that *knew* the *charming Youth* confess
 In *Grief for him there can* and *is Excess*[.]⁵³

Drawing attention to the problem also identified in criticism of Milton's elegy and Pope's *Eloisa*, the poet questions the desire to take up a pen when grief is foremost. In a gentle rhetorical swipe he proposes and queries:

Say therefore, *Fair One*, was it to explain,
Thy *Grief*, or *Wit*, that *thou* the *gentle Train*
Of weeping Loves, invok'st t'assist thy pensive Strain.⁵⁴

The poem asks Rowe to acknowledge her art, her 'Wit', as the creative force behind the poem. Indeed, for this writer, the metapoetic aspect of the elegy is key to appreciating the aesthetic achievements of the piece.

The second poem in the collection is unquestioning in its praise. For this poet, Rowe is 'the matchless Author' who

could all the Faculties controul;
Enchant each Word, and to fit Numbers rise,
To speak the Dictates of her Thoughts and Eyes.⁵⁵

In this response, Rowe's poetic skill 'controul[s]' the affective signification in her elegy and the poet simply seeks to praise her in return. Both response poems point to the inspiring and provocative nature of Rowe's self-projection of grief. Most significantly, they acknowledge in admiring terms the skill with which she crafted that image.

Throughout her career, Rowe successfully styled herself as someone with unique access to creative inspiration. Her long-time editor and brother-in-law, Theophilus Rowe, reaffirmed this construct in the posthumous edition of her works when he opened the section entitled 'Poems on Several Occasions' with her piece entitled 'The Vision'. This poem has been read subsequently as a manifestation of Rowe's identity as a religious poet.⁵⁶ While that reading is not inaccurate, it risks overlooking the extent to which Rowe – and later Theophilus – was positioning herself confidently as an author. In this forty-five-line poem, the poet-speaker dreams of an angelic visitor who instructs the poet to follow a higher vocation and devote her 'song' to God.⁵⁷ Divided into four stanzas, it opens with the usual

pastoral scene of secluded and floriferous abundance, where a beautiful bower provides the ideal setting for inspiration as well as composition. As in most of the other cases where Rowe presents such a scene, this setting functions as a signifying trope for a change of mode; that is, it prepares for a shift towards a higher plane of literary or spiritual engagement. Thus,

'Twas here, within this happy place retir'd,
 Harmonious pleasures all my soul inspir'd;
 I take my lyre, and try each tuneful string,
 Now war, now love, and beauty's force would sing:
 To heav'nly subjects now, in serious lays,
 I strive my faint, unskilful voice to raise[.] (ll.11-16)

Rowe's alliterative verse strikes a fine balance between overdetermined soundscape and mellifluous ease. Like many religious modes of expression, it also intensifies the aesthetic experience to evoke a religious state (or attitude). In this particular instance, the poet remains 'unresolv'd and doubtful' (l.17) about her calling and eventually drifts off to sleep and to dreams. The timidity and implied insignificance here are, of course, a performance of humility and patience that is explicitly contrasted in the next stanza.

In that third stanza, Rowe opens with a vision: 'a bright ethereal youth' (l.25) of angelic mien instructs the poet-speaker to 'devote thy songs, / To heav'n' (ll.36-7). In return, the vision promises:

And when death's fatal sleep shall close thine eyes,
 In triumph we'll attend thee to the skies;
 We'll crown thee there with everlasting bays,
 And teach thee all our celebrated lays. (ll.40-3)

This poem immediately follows the group of eleven commendatory poems included at the end of Theophilus's and Henry Grove's biography of Rowe and her husband. This positioning thus reinforces the link between the poet-speaker of 'The Vision' and Rowe. Nonetheless, as Backscheider notes, this editorial framing contributed 'to the construction of a much narrower artist and human being than Rowe actually was' as it has been read as emphasizing a shift of emphasis in Rowe away from the pastoral towards religious verse.⁵⁸

As Backscheider herself acknowledges, the apparent problem of such a shift is not so much with Rowe's choice of genre or her framing in the contexts of her own time, but with later literary trends and prejudices.

Our modern critical indifference towards a century of popular religious verse and ideology does a huge disservice to the work of writers like Rowe because it fails to acknowledge their affective and rhetorical gains and ambitions. In the case of 'The Vision', the editorial decision to equate the heavenly poet with the recently deceased Rowe is only secondary to the repeated evidence found in Rowe's and her colleagues' poems and letters of her figuration as just such a visionary poet and one who sought the 'bays'. In fact, this poem is actually one of Rowe's early performances; it was the first of the seven attributed poems featured in Tonson's 1704 miscellany.⁵⁹ In positive, some might say egotistical, terms, Rowe set out positioning herself/her poet-speaker as the poet laureate of heaven. For a female writer to have the confidence, the social acceptance, and the commercial popularity to do this in the early eighteenth century is quite astonishing. Nevertheless, though she clearly captured and expressed the creative and pious desires of her contemporaries, only a handful of scholars now study her poetry and prose and she still lacks a scholarly edition of her works.

Rowe's appropriation of metapoetic tropes from the pastoral tradition – particularly her concerted attention to questions of voice and vocation – and her feminised reimagining and reinvigoration of religious discourse crucially shapes the female poetic voice in the eighteenth century. As we shall see, Rowe's authorising aesthetic not only helped subsequent female writers trace out their literary trajectories, but also gave them a discursive framework and set of intertexts with which to define themselves.

Poetic Genealogies: A Conclusion

Contemporaries and later female writers clearly admired Rowe's self-assurance, as well as her thematic choices. This is why someone as learned and ambitious as Elizabeth Carter would revisit her apostrophising eulogy to Rowe three times over a span of twenty-five years.⁶⁰ It is also why a host of other Bluestocking figures, alongside Anna Barbauld, admired and celebrated her status as their most important forebear.⁶¹ Rowe gave a voice, a thematic focus, and, therefore, a sense of vocational direction for similarly pious female writers to build upon. Carter's multiple elegies 'On the Death of Mrs Rowe' were, her nephew and editor claimed, an indication of Carter's sustained professionalism with regards to her works.⁶² These tributes also reveal her developing awareness of Rowe's and her own place in a growing tradition of exemplary female writers. While Carter's primary concern in her first version of 1737 is to celebrate Rowe as 'our sex's ornament and pride!', the poem is distinctly impersonal – it simply recounts Rowe's chaste style and religious themes – and the speaker is only identified in the signature as 'Eliza'.⁶³ Two years later and Carter is not only much more explicit about her desire to emulate Rowe, but also appears more knowledgeable about Rowe's works. The poem grows from twenty-eight lines to fifty-two, with significant additions to the description of Rowe's style and content. Carter specifically draws attention to Rowe's pastoral settings, 'passions of the soul', and self-styled audience of 'applauding angels'. More to the point, in the last stanza Carter acknowledges Rowe's poetic aspirations by aligning them with her own:

And oh! forgive (tho' faint the transcript be,
That copies an original like thee)
My highest pride, my best attempt for fame,
That joins my own to *Philomela's* name.⁶⁴

Carter confesses her ambitions here in a way that celebrates Rowe's literary individualism ('an original') as well as the renown of her poetic persona ('*Philomela*'). In 1762, Carter changes the tone by excising the elegiac address of the first two versions, foregrounding instead the embattled history of women's writing, where *Intrigue's* 'guilty Arts unite, / To

blacken the Records of female Wit'. After establishing what the tradition should be – to 'celebrate the first great CAUSE of Things' – Rowe is then invoked as the redeeming angel. Carter ends with the same lines, however, explicitly reiterating Rowe's and her own desire for literary fame.

When Barbauld chose to write herself into the same tradition with her 'Verses on Mrs. Rowe', one of the intertexts in her poem was Rowe's elegy to her husband. Opening with a string of references to Rowe's 'spotless life', she nevertheless balances each biographical note with a similar acknowledgement of her 'Poet's fire':

Blest shade! how pure a breath of praise was thine,
Whose spotless life was faultless as thy line:
In whom each worth and every grace conspire,
The Christian's meekness and the Poet's fire.⁶⁵

For Barbauld, Rowe is not just the virtuous exemplar, but someone whom 'The world applauded [...] with fame' (ll.14-15). As her poem shows, however, that fame was a complicated fusion of the 'facts' of her life and her skillfully wrought persona, because 'The world applauded, and Alexis lov'd. / With love, with health, with fame, and friendship blest' (ll.14-15). Barbauld's text assumes that the specifics of 'Sad Philomela's' life and oeuvre are so well known that the mere mention of Thomas' poetic pseudonym will bring to mind Rowe's elegy *and* the fame that poem engendered. Fixated on Rowe's contemporary renown throughout the poem – she provides a roll call of the noble patrons, authors, and friends who praised Rowe's works – Barbauld concludes by aligning herself with her 'muse' (l.39):

Let me thy palm, tho' not thy laurel share,
And copy thee in charity and prayer.
Tho' for the bard my lines are yet too faint,
Yet in my life let me transcribe the saint. (ll.41-44)

Stuart Curran rightly reads Barbauld's poem as 'a knowing and complex act of intertextuality' that utilises Elizabeth Carter's elegy on Rowe 'as the prism through which to define her own continuity with Elizabeth Rowe'.⁶⁶ He specifically draws attention to Carter's

use of ‘faint the transcript be’ in her encomium to Rowe, and Barbauld’s ‘my lines are yet too faint’. He omits to consider, however, the extent to which Barbauld is, in fact, alluding to many of Rowe’s poems (including the ‘faint, unskilful voice’ inscribed in Rowe’s ‘The Vision’ cited above).⁶⁷ Indeed, the intertexts here reach farther back than Rowe. Curran links Barbauld’s opening line on Rowe, ‘Such were the notes our chaster Sappho sung,’ with George Lyttelton’s opening line on Carter, ‘Such were the notes that struck the wond’ring ear.’ What he does not point out, however, is that Barbauld’s phrase, ‘chaster Sappho’, is actually a construction first applied to Katherine Philips. In referencing such lines, Barbauld not only sought to inscribe herself into a tradition of female writers going back to Philips, but she also sought to renew Rowe’s legacy for a new generation. She does so by making explicit reference to such acknowledged, transformative poetic moments as the publication of Rowe’s elegy.

Rowe’s writing career shows the extent to which she was engaged in a continuing and self-conscious construction of a performing, literary self. Her early poetry reveals a concerted attempt to fashion herself as the quintessential pastoral poet. In her elegy ‘On the death of Mr. Thomas Rowe’, however, she dramatizes an acute awareness of the presentational power of her language and the aesthetic pleasure implicit in performing the subjective self. In doing so, she aligns her authorial vocation implicitly with that of some of the most renowned male poets of her time. As evident from the many poems written to or about her, Rowe’s rhetorical and affective self-fashioning were central both to her contemporaneous reception and to the expanding and intertextually enriched female literary tradition that continued after her death. As this essay has sought to illustrate, it is only when we focus attention on Rowe’s concerted self-construction that we can begin to appreciate and identify the lasting legacy of her literary and aesthetic influence.

¹ Henry Grove, who, with Theophilus Rowe, wrote Rowe's biography, was unable to ascertain who gave Rowe her pseudonym (*The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Mrs Elizabeth Rowe*, 2 vols (London, 1739), I: xvi). The quotation is from Rowe's poem, 'A Hymn of Thanks', *Miscellaneous Works*, 94.

² Elizabeth Rowe, 'The Vision', *Miscellaneous Works*, 3.

³ Paula R. Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore, 2005), 26.

⁴ A growing body of research has extended our critical understanding of Rowe's career. For example, on Rowe's publishing practices see Kathryn King, 'Elizabeth Singer Rowe's Tactical Use of Print and Manuscript', *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550-1800*, eds. George Justice and Nathan Tinker (Cambridge, 2002); on her early politics and publishing see Sarah Prescott, *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690-1740* (Basingstoke, 2003); for a more recent reconsideration of her religious and political aesthetic see Dustin Stewart, 'Elizabeth Rowe, John Milton and Poetic Change', *Women's Writing*, 20:1 (2013), 12-31; and, on her epistolary publication practices and editing see Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn, and Elizabeth Carter* (Basingstoke, 2013). Rowe is a significant figure in the field-defining studies by Backscheider (cited above) and Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge, 2006). Backscheider has also explored Rowe's experimental prose fictions, *Elizabeth Singer Rowe and the Development of the English Novel* (Baltimore, 2013).

⁵ From her first volume of poems in 1696 to the end of the eighteenth century, something by Rowe appeared in print in eighty out of the intervening 104 years, and often in multiple editions. According to the *Digital Miscellanies Index*, 101 of her poems and soliloquies appeared 423 times in fifty-nine separate miscellanies. As points of contrast, Katherine Philips's twenty-three poems appeared in ninety-six instances, and Anne Finch's

fifty-nine poems in 197. See *Digital Miscellanies Index* (pubd online 2013)

<<http://digitalmiscellaniesindex.org/>> accessed 24 June 2016. Backscheider finds that Rowe's series of prose and verse fiction works, known collectively as *Friendship in Death* (1728-1734), outperforms both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Clarissa* in terms of editions printed (*English Novel*, 1-2).

⁶ See King.

⁷ Backscheider, *Women Poets*, 24.

⁸ Anne K. Mellor, "'Anguish no Cessation Knows": Elegy and the British Woman Poet, 1660-1834', in Karen Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* (Oxford, 2010), 442-62, 443 and Staves, 219.

⁹ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford, 2003).

¹⁰ On 'Enthusiasm', see R.A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Oxford, 1950).

¹¹ See Isaac Watts's preface in Rowe's *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (London, 1738), xi.

¹² On Rowe's awareness of and deployment of 'Enthusiasm', see Chapter One in Bigold, *Women of Letters*.

¹³ David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-1789* (London, 2003), 79.

¹⁴ Fairer, 79.

¹⁵ Left in manuscript for decades, *The History of Joseph* first appeared in 1736.

¹⁶ Louis L. Martz and Aubrey Williams (eds), *The Author in his Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism* (New Haven, 1978), x.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Rowe, 'Platonick Love' and 'Humane Love', *Poems on Several Occasions by Philomela* (London, 1696), 1-4. Katherine Philips, 'Friendship,' in Patrick Thomas (ed.), *The Collected Works of Katherine Philips, The Matchless Orinda: Volume 1 – The Poems* (Stump Cross, 1990), 150-1. All subsequent references to these poems are from these editions.

¹⁸ Sharon Achinstein, 'Romance of the Spirit: Female Sexuality and Religious Desire in Early Modern England,' *ELH*, 69 (2002), 413-38, 415.

¹⁹ Achinstein, 426.

²⁰ Queen Mary died in December 1694. Rowe's poem first appeared in 1695 in *The Athenian Mercury*. The text cited here is from *Poems* (1696), 9-10. The publication features pagination errors and the numbering sequence begins again after page 72; this poem is in the second sequence. All subsequent references are to this edition. Italics in the original.

²¹ Rowe, *Poems* (1696), 49-50 (second sequence). All subsequent references are to this edition.

²² Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649-1714: Politics, Community, and Linguistic Authority* (Oxford 1996).

²³ Thomas Thynne, first Viscount Weymouth (1640-1714), was a tolerant patron and host. He was a relative of Anne Finch through marriage, supported both non-jurors such as Thomas Ken (the ousted bishop of Bath and Wells) and dissenters such as Elizabeth Rowe, and hosted numerous political and literary writers at his estate at Longleat. His granddaughter, Frances Thynne (the future Countess of Hertford), continued his legacy of patronage.

²⁴ Jennifer Richards (ed.), *The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works: Vol. 7: Elizabeth Singer [Rowe]* (Aldershot, 2003), xi.

²⁵ *Miscellaneous Works*, Grove, cxvii and Carter, cxi.

²⁶ The poem, dated 1706, is included in the *Miscellaneous Works*, cxviii.

²⁷ Rowe to the Countess of Hertford, Alnwick, The Archives of the Duke of Northumberland, DNP: MS 110, Letter 78, p.192.

²⁸ Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, 'A Tale of the Miser and the Poet', in *Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions* (London, 1713), 145-50, 1.84. All subsequent references are to this edition.

²⁹ Backscheider, *Women Poets*, 116.

³⁰ Rowe is identified as the author of her seven pieces in the fifth part of Tonson's miscellany, but not for the singular piece in the sixth. She is inconsistently attributed in Dunton and the other collections. See the *Digital Miscellanies Index*.

³¹ The 1704 edition contains sixty-two poems, thirty-four of them are Rowe's.

³² *Divine Hymns*, sig. A8v.

³³ Anne Finch and Elizabeth Rowe are both identified in the long list of authors in the title.

³⁴ *Miscellaneous Works* (1739), I: 112-15, appears to have corrected the earlier copies. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to this poem are to the 1739 edition unless otherwise indicated.

³⁵ Lorna Clymer, 'The Funeral Elegy in Early Modern Britain: A Brief History', in Karen Weisman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* (Oxford, 2010), 170-86, 170-3.

³⁶ *Musapaedia* (London, 1719).

³⁷ In the majority of instances Rowe was identified as the author. For miscellany appearances see the *Digital Miscellanies Index*.

³⁸ For copies of Thomas Birch's elegy on his wife, see London, British Library, Add MS 4456, ff.25-38. For a copy of his letter and Rowe's original reply (20 July 1730), see Add MS 4317, f.283-4. Another copy of Rowe's letter can be found in Add MS 4456 at f.40. Birch asked if his piece could be included in *Letters on Various Occasions* (1729), but Rowe replied that he was too late.

³⁹ Rowe's poem, 'On the anniversary return of the day on which Mr. Rowe died', is printed in *Miscellaneous Works*, I: 115-16, directly after the elegy; however, it appears in the Countess of Hertford's letterbook in the context of a letter written sometime after the death of George I in June 1727 (Alnwick, The Archives of the Duke of Northumberland, DNP: MS 110, pp.179-82).

⁴⁰ Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore and London, 1985).

⁴¹ Sacks, 1.

⁴² Sacks, xi, quoting William Wordsworth's note to 'The Thorn' in *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford, 1904; reprint ed., 1973), 737.

⁴³ Mellor, 443. Italics in original.

⁴⁴ Sacks, 448.

⁴⁵ Alexis was Thomas Rowe's poetic pseudonym.

⁴⁶ The dash in line nineteen is a semi-colon in the 1717 edition. In a manuscript transcription by Birch there is no punctuation, although there is a longer-than-normal space (London, British Library, Add MS 4456, f.140).

⁴⁷ Staves, 105.

⁴⁸ *Miscellaneous Works*, xxviii-xxix.

⁴⁹ *Miscellaneous Works*, xxxi, ll.1-2

⁵⁰ *Miscellaneous Works*, xxxi.

⁵¹ William Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 55', *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford, 2002), 491.

⁵² *Musapaedia*, 68 and 69.

⁵³ *Musapaedia*, 70. Italics in original.

⁵⁴ *Musapaedia*, 71.

⁵⁵ *Musapaedia*, 76.

⁵⁶ Backscheider, *Women Poets*, 120.

⁵⁷ *Miscellaneous Works*, 1-3. All subsequent references are to this edition.

⁵⁸ Backscheider, *Women Poets*, 120.

⁵⁹ Theophilus retains Tonson's order.

⁶⁰ Carter's elegy was actually printed four times: twice in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, in 1737 and 1739, in Rowe's *Miscellaneous Works* (1739), and in *Poems on Several Occasions* (1762). The two 1739 versions are similar except for accidentals and corrections. For more on Carter's sustained engagement with Rowe's legacy, see Chapter Two in Bigold, *Women of Letters*.

⁶¹ See Chapter Two in Bigold, *Women of Letters*. Mellor misidentifies Susanna Centlivre as one of Elizabeth Rowe's admirers. The elegy she cites, 'A Pastoral to the Honoured Memory of Mrs. Rowe' is actually about Nicholas Rowe, 444.

⁶² Montagu Pennington, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter with a New Edition of her Poems* (1807), 44.

⁶³ Elizabeth Carter, 'On the Death of Mrs Rowe', *Gentleman's Magazine* (April 1737), 247.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Carter, 'On the Death of Mrs Rowe', *Gentleman's Magazine* (March 1739), 152.

⁶⁵ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 'Verses on Mrs. Rowe', *Poems* (1773), 101-3, ll.3-6. All subsequent references are to this edition.

⁶⁶ Stuart Curran, 'Romantic Women Poets: Inscribing the Self' in Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (eds), *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730-1820* (London, 1999), 145-66, 162.

⁶⁷ Curran, 161-4; on Philips see, Harriete Andreadis, 'The Sapphic-Platonics of Katherine Philips, 1632-1664,' *Signs* 15 (1989), 34-66.