

**CLOSE ENCOUNTERS: ANNA SEWARD, 1742–1809, A
WOMAN IN PROVINCIAL CULTURAL LIFE**

by

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ABSTRACT

Anna Seward (1747–1809) is best known today as a poet, but one whose reputation did not survive her death. Most studies of Seward since the nineteenth century have been critical or dismissive, but in recent years her published work has attracted more attention. Academics, particularly feminist scholars, have focused on her environmental observations, and the ways in which her writings draw attention to the gendered nature of eighteenth-century society. This study adopts a different approach by exploring Anna Seward's private and public life within the provincial culture in which she emerged and remained until her death. Seward's identity was shaped by her early life in the Derbyshire Peak District and the cathedral city of Lichfield. Her relationships with male mentors and friends of both sexes provided learning experiences and opportunities to develop her literary skills and personal confidence. Her wealthy clergyman father educated her at home and developed her literary interests. She was also heavily influenced by Dr Erasmus Darwin who encouraged her literary abilities and developed her confidence. Influenced by other provincial literary figures, such as Thomas Whalley, William Hayley, Robert Southey, Helen Maria Williams, Hannah More and the Ladies of Llangollen, she embarked on a publishing career, became a commentator on public affairs and acted as a critic. Her extensive letters bear witness to a wide range of interests and a large network of correspondents. Unlike other cultural figures, Seward did not move to London to participate in the competitive life of the capital. She disliked large towns and did not become part of the Bluestocking circle of metropolitan intellectuals; instead, people came to her or solicited her opinions from a distance. Seward was self-willed, independent and prepared to criticise the famous, such as Samuel Johnson and

Darwin, her former mentor. Her life in Lichfield, moreover, secured the disapproval of the local ecclesiastical establishment, because of her close public relationship with a married man, John Saville. Towards the end of her life she worked to secure her reputation as a poet and commentator, through the agency of Walter Scott, but after her death, his savage editing of her letters and works did much to destroy her reputation. Though Seward was a literary figure orbiting within an environment which excluded London, her life was important. It revealed how middle-class women could develop a national cultural reputation outside of the capital and provided a commentary on the vigorous nature of provincial life in the English Midlands.

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations appear in the thesis:

AS	Anna Seward
CUL	Cambridge University Library
DRO	Derbyshire Record Office
FM	Fleming Museum, Vermont
HU	Harvard University
LoC	Library of Congress, Washington
LCL	Lichfield Cathedral Library
LRO	Lichfield Record Office
MM	Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
NA	National Archives, Kew
NPG	National Portrait Gallery, London
PRC	Prerogative Court of Canterbury
SJBM	Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum, Lichfield
UBL	University of Birmingham Library
UCL	University College Library, London
WSL	William Salt Library, Stafford
YL	Yale University

ANNA SEWARD (1742–1809): CHRONOLGY

- 1742:** Born St. Laurence's Rectory, Eyam, Derbyshire, 12 December (Father: Reverend Thomas Seward. Mother: Elizabeth Hunter. Married: Newton-In-the-Thistle, Warwickshire, 1740).
- 1744:** Sarah Seward born 17 March (Five other children born to the Swards, between 1747–1753 of which three died early in life and two were stillborn).
- 1749:** Reverend Thomas Seward appointed Residentiary Canon, Lichfield Cathedral. Family move to 15 Saddler (Market) Street, Lichfield.
- 1754:** Seward family move into the Bishop's Palace.
- 1755:** John Saville, Vicar Choral, commences harpsichord lessons with Anna Seward.
- 1756:** Dr. Erasmus Darwin comes to set up practice in Lichfield. Honora Sneyd comes to live with the Swards. Darwin praises Anna's poetry. Parents forbid her to write.
- 1757:** Darwin marries Anna Seward's friend, Mary Howard.
- 1759:** Anna Seward writes poem, *Portrait of Miss Levett*
- 1761:** Samuel Johnson visits his mother and Lucy Porter. Anna Seward begins to write verse epistle, *Louisa*
- 1762:** Portrait painted by Tilly Kettle. Meets Captain Hugh Temple (October). Begins the 'juvenile' letters. Reads Rousseau's *Julie* (May).
- 1763:** Sarah is engaged to Johnson's stepson, Joseph Porter (June). Lucy Porter inherits fortune from her brother, Capt. Jervis Porter of £10,000. Builds Redcourt in Lichfield.
- 1764:** Saville is mentioned for the first time in the 'juvenile' letters.
April: Joseph Porter arrives from Italy.
June: Sarah becomes ill with 'putrid fever', 2 June and dies 9 June from possibly Miliary Tuberculosis.
July: Seward and her father go to Eyam. She starts a relationship with Major Wright of Eyam Hall.
Aug: Returns to Lichfield. Major Wright visits. He proposes marriage but is dismissed by Canon Seward.
Sept: Seward goes to London. Meets Captain Temple again. Becomes engaged.
After her return, her father breaks the engagement. She is wooed and then jilted by Cornet Vyse. Seward writes and publishes, *The Visions, an Elegy*.

- 1765:** Seward writes and publishes, *Elegy, Addressed to Cornet Vyse*.
- 1766:** Richard Lovell Edgeworth visits Lichfield. Lucy Porter lives at Redcourt.
- 1767:** Samuel Johnson's mother is very ill. Lucy Porter asks him to visit but he fails to do so. Lucy Porter informs him of his mother's death on the 23 January. Johnson does not attend her funeral.
August: Seward is away from home for three months.
- 1768:** Capt. Temple renews his courtship. Seward writes that she is not interested. She fractures her right knee-cap in a fall down steps. Darwin treats her.
- 1769:** Seward meets John André in Buxton. He travels back to Lichfield, meets Honora Sneyd. André conducts a 'triangular' romance with Honora Sneyd through letters addressed to Anna Seward. André proposes marriage to Honora.
- 1770:** Edgeworth, Day and his two orphan girls come to live at Stowe House. André dismissed by Mr. Sneyd. Mary Darwin dies. Seward and Saville painted by John Smart. Seward begins her cycle of *Sonnets*.
- 1771:** Edgeworth in love with Honora Sneyd. Day proposes marriage to her and is rejected. Honora returns to her family home. Johnson visits Lichfield. Seward no longer received by Mrs. Saville. Darwin starts his *Zoonomia*.
- 1772:** The Seward and Saville scandal erupts. Mrs. Saville complains to the Bishop. Johnson again in Lichfield. Darwin's first illegitimate daughter born. Seward now accompanies Saville to his concerts.
- 1773:** Edgeworth's wife dies. He marries Honora Sneyd. Saville separates from his wife, moves to another house. Day leaves for Paris.
- 1774:** Johnson brings Boswell to Lichfield. Boswell tries to start an affair with Seward. Darwin's second illegitimate daughter born.
- 1776:** Boswell visits Seward. His advances are rebuffed. Darwin purchases land for his 'botanic' garden. Seward treated by Darwin for 'serious stomach pains'. Seward contributes *A Rural Coronation* to Mundy's *Needwood Forest*. 500 copies printed, She also contributes *Charity* to Lady Miller's *Poetical Amusements* at Bathheaston, Somerset, where it wins first prize in competition.
- 1778:** Day marries Esther Milnes of Wakefield, Yorkshire. Edgeworth visits Lichfield. Honora ill. Seward's first meeting with Lady Miller. Seward's poem, *Invocation of the Comic Muse* wins the Myrtle Wreath at Lady Miller's *Poetical Amusements*.
- 1780:** Mrs. Seward dies. Father has his first stroke. Honora Sneyd dies in Ireland. André executed in America as a spy, at Tappan, New York. Seward starts on

her letter books. Darwin and Seward exchange the 'Cat' letters. Edgeworth marries Elizabeth Sneyd.

May: Seward publishes *Ode to the Sun* and *Invocation of the Comic Muse* and starts contributions to the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

June: Seward publishes *Elegy on Captain Cook*. Reviewed in the *Monthly Review*.

- 1781:** Darwin marries Elizabeth Pole. Goes to live in Derby. Hayley and Whalley visit Seward. Lady Miller dies. Seward writes her epitaph. Seward criticises General George Washington in her poem, *Monody on the Unfortunate Major André*.
- 1782:** Seward visits Hayley in Sussex. First portrait, in white dress, by George Romney is privately painted for Hayley. Darwin visits her in Lichfield. Seward has treatment for 'torpid indisposition.' Poem, *To the Memory of Lady Miller* and poem, *Ode to Poetic Fancy* written on the publication of William Hayley's *The Triumphs of Temper*.
- 1784:** Death of Samuel Johnson. Seward publishes anonymously a 'character' of him in *The General Evening Post*. Begins a correspondence with Dr. Thomas Whalley. *Louisa, a Poetical Novel in Four Episodes*, published. Reviewed by Boswell, *European Magazine*, August; published in the *Monthly Review*, November 1784.
- 1785:** Boswell visits. Requests information and anecdotes on Johnson. Seward goes to Manchester with Saville. He sings with Gertrude Mara. Seward starts *Paraphrases and Imitations of Horace*. Writes 26 *Odes*. Published monthly in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.
May: Seward gives assistance to the uneducated William Newton, 'the Derbyshire Minstrel'. Her *Memoir* and *Poem* addressed to him and published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.
- 1786:** Lucy Porter dies. *Benvolio* controversy letters first appear in the *Gentleman's Magazine* on 10 January. Second portrait of Seward painted by Romney. She suffers severe rheumatism. To Buxton and Hoylake 'for the waters.'
- 1787:** Seward meets Hester Thrale Piozzi. Visited by Lord Heathfield, the former General Eliott, Hero of Gibraltar. She presents him with a quarto bound copy of her *Ode on General Eliott's Return from Gibraltar* which he carries throughout his visit to Lichfield.
- 1788:** Seward's letters on the merits of Dryden and Pope published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.
- 1789:** Thomas Day dies following riding accident. First French prisoners of war in Lichfield. In October, Seward writes an analysis on Day's character for the *General Evening Post*.
- 1790:** Canon Seward dies. Seward now has an income of £400 per annum. Erects

an impressive family monument in the cathedral. In July, has 'dropsy and shortness of breath.' Darwin recommends sea bathing. Reads Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Helen Williams' *Letters*.

- 1791:** Much visiting with friends. Attends concerts. Dropsy improves.
- 1792:** Seward's beloved pet dog, Sappho dies. Saville now ill.
- 1795:** Injures left breast in a fall against wainscotting. Sees Sarah Siddons perform in Birmingham and receives note from her during the interval. Visits the Roberts in Dinbren, North Wales. Meets the 'Ladies of Llangollen', Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby. Begins correspondence and friendship with them.
- 1796:** Revisits Wales with Saville and his daughter. Writes and publishes *Llangollen Vale with other Poems: Eyam, Time Past, Hoyle Lake, Wrexham, and Six Sonnets*. Reviewed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in May.
- 1797:** Burst blood vessel in nose, severe haemorrhage. Visits Hoylake and Llangollen Vale.
Aug: Poem: *Lines written after reading Southey's Joan of Arc* published in the *European Magazine*.
- 1798:** Seward receives a valuable ring from the Ladies of Llangollen.
- 1799:** In January, Seward goes to Hoylake. Receives poems from Walter Scott. Sends a letter of recognition to him. Publishes her *Centenary of Original Sonnets* which are reviewed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* and the *Critical Revue* in December.
- 1801:** After an illness, Saville stays in the Bishop's Palace for 4 weeks. Seward buys No.8, The Close for Saville and his daughter. Visits friends with them.
- 1802:** April: Erasmus Darwin dies. His son, Robert, asks Seward for anecdotes. An imitation of Scott's poetry, by Seward, published in Volume 3 of Scott's *Minstrelsy*.
- 1803:** John Saville dies after heart attack. Seward is bereft and erects vault outside the cathedral. She settles his debts, pays for the funeral and £100 for a memorial tablet inside the cathedral. Does not leave the Palace for months.
- 1804:** Seward's *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin: Chiefly During His Residence at Lichfield; With Anecdotes of His Friends and Criticisms On His Writings* is published in March. Darwin family upset by the contents. Veiled threats to Seward. Bishop's Palace re-roofed, Seward forced to move out. Stays with friends for four months, until work completed. Later in the year has seizures and is unable to write. Employs Elizabeth Fern as companion.
- 1805:** Poor health continues. Receives copy of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* from

Walter Scott.

- 1807:** Archibald Constable visits Seward to discuss publication of her *Letters*. Scott and Southey visit. Seward starts to write her epic poem, *Telemachus*. This work remains unfinished and is never published.
- 1808:** Seward writes her twenty-page Will. Visits Buxton and Warwickshire friends. Southey visits her again.
- 1809:** 23 March, Anna Seward suffers a massive stroke.
25 March, Anna Seward dies at the Bishop's Place, Lichfield. Buried in the Cathedral Choir with her parents.
- 1810:** *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward with Extracts from her Literary Correspondence*, ed. Walter Scott is published.
- 1811:** *Letters of Anna Seward Written Between the Years 1784 and 1807* edited and published by Archibald Constable, Edinburgh

INTRODUCTION

Several writers, including Margaret Ashmun, Edward Verrell Lucas and Hesketh Pearson have looked at Anna Seward, the eighteenth-century poet and critic through her enormous epistolary output, which ran to twelve letter books, written and rewritten, together with her many poems, with a view to posthumous publication. Indeed, Archibald Constable, the publisher and Walter Scott carried out her wishes concerning their publication, but only after savagely reducing the contents of the twelve letter books down to six and the poetic works down to three volumes.¹ The epistolary method alone is not sufficient for understanding the woman, I intend to present a more rounded portrait of Seward, by using a range of sources to look at her upbringing; her relationships with the men and women she knew and who impinged on her life and how, by the force of her personality and her learning, she was able to establish a niche for herself, as a poet and literary critic in a male-dominated society. Seward was a woman who refused to move to London, opting instead to stay in Lichfield, thereby allowing the world to come to her.

Using existing biographies, her own letters and works, together with references from the people she knew and in whose lives she was involved, through subsequent chapters, I aim to show the significance of the life and scholarship of Anna Seward, the daughter of a clergyman. Born in Eyam, Derbyshire in 1742, she came to Lichfield, Staffordshire, at the age of seven when her well-connected father was appointed a Canon-Residentiary at the cathedral there. She lived in the Close, at the Bishop's Palace for 55 years, having become the centre of Lichfield's eighteenth-century literary life, achieving recognition as the 'Queen Muse of Britain'.²

Seward detested the intimate life of the Close and she scandalised the clergy families there and others in the town when she began to live in a companionate relationship with her music teacher, John Saville, her beloved ‘Giovanni’, a Vicar Choral at the cathedral, who was married with two daughters. This relationship is discussed in Chapter 4.³

Samuel Johnson was her maternal kinsman, but they disliked each other intensely. His friend, James Boswell, whom she called ‘that Scottish coxcomb’ tried twice to have an affair with her but she, knowing his reputation, rebuffed him.⁴ She also met and knew most of the luminaries who, at that time, were the members of the Lunar Society. She was close friends with Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Thomas Day, Erasmus Darwin was her physician and poetic mentor and they all visited the Bishop’s Palace. Lady Anna Miller at Batheaston, Somerset, was instrumental in bringing Seward’s poetry to a wider audience through her ‘Poetical Amusements’, allowing her to meet and befriend the reverends William Hayley and Thomas Whalley and the Ladies of Llangollen, Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby. Some became close friends, others bitter enemies; but they all helped form her outlook on life and coloured her work.

This study explores the personal history of this eighteenth-century provincial daughter of the manse, to show how, despite her genteel, but quite restricted life within the confines of an ecclesiastical background, first in the Peak District of Eyam, Derbyshire and then among the prebendal clique of Lichfield cathedral, she succeeded as a poet and critic. Seward believed that she had the right to choose the mode of her life, and, by staying in Lichfield, surrounded by a large, interconnected circle of friends, correspondents and acquaintances all supporting her endeavours, she would

demonstrate that there was natural, national talent outside the city of London. By such decisions, Seward became, in her lifetime, a figure of considerable renown.

The primary sources for Anna Seward are her baptismal records, those of her sister and her vast correspondence. She was born at the rectory of St. Lawrence's Church, Eyam, Derbyshire, on the 12th December 1742, and was followed by her sister Sarah, born on the 17th March 1744.⁵ Her own letters are those referred to as the 'juvenile' letters, written between 1763 and 1767 to 'Emma', an imaginary friend, in which Seward develops her epistolary skill, after which there is a gap of several years, probably due to the fact that Seward kept no copies of her correspondence during that time.⁶ The record resumed between October 1784, when she must have realised that she now had a place in the literary world, and December 1807, when she made copies of her letters following the publication of her work. Like Elizabeth Montagu, Anna Seward rearranged and notated her correspondence, taking care to ensure that her life and work should be properly memorialised after her death. At her request, Walter Scott did this, but not as well as Seward had hoped. He removed all or parts of letters which he thought critical of himself and others, reducing the twelve letter books to six, along with many of her poetic works.⁷ Archibald Constable, who published the *Letters* in 1811, states in his 'Advertisement':

the reader...cannot fail to be struck with the many intellectual and moral excellencies they display. He will perceive...an independent and vigorous mind. Her Critical remarks will always be ingenious and instructive; in Politics her opinions are free and spirited. The ardour of Miss Seward's affections is no less conspicuous in these Letters than the force of her understanding.⁸

Constable suggests here that he believes Seward to be an intelligent, independent, principled woman, full of energy; that her critical remarks are original and enlightening; and that she is able to sympathise with the feelings of others.

Seward has been subjected to varied treatment by her biographers and critics. Scott, in his Biographical Preface to her *Poetical Works* (1811) states, 'Miss Seward was 'one of those gifted minds which snatches eagerly at the intellectual banquet' and that she 'imbibed a strong and enthusiastic partiality for mountain scenery and for the pleasures of the landscape, a source of enjoyment during her life.' He also mentions that, having been thwarted in her first romance, she deserves our praise for 'the great firmness and steadiness of mind' and 'the dictates of prudence and duty' in her submission to parental authority.⁹ Her poetic powers lay dormant, he believed, until her acquaintance with Lady Miller at 'her fanciful and romantic institution at Batheaston, Somerset' and declares that Seward's *Elegy on Captain Cook* (1780) shows a high impression of the original powers of the author:

She gave, with her whole soul, her applause to contemporary times, ready with her advice, her encouragement, her purse, if necessary, to assist those whom timidity... prevented from asserting their right to public notice.¹⁰

Scott also praises her *Collection of Original Sonnets* (1799), which 'contain some beautiful examples of that species of composition' and was pleased that 'occasionally she would forget the "tiara and glittering zone" in the natural zone of real passion', but is less praiseworthy of her *Translations of Horace* (1810) concluding they are 'paraphrases rather than translations.'¹¹ He was greatly impressed by her 'still youthful appearance, conversation and command of language, which rendered her society delightful', her 'warmest heart for her friends' but regrets that her 'tone of

mind rendered her jealous of critical authority...over her own production' and her 'more laboured and ornate style of composition.' With all her faults, Scott, it appears, liked Anna Seward and felt her to have keen judgement and insight, 'demanding beauty, elegance and the splendour of language... unwilling to allow that sublimity or truth of conception could atone for poverty, rudeness or even simplicity of expression'. He continues by acknowledging her critical ability, but he leaves it to readers to form their own opinions and to draw their own conclusions from the content, energy and worth of the poems presented.¹² This is Scott, for his own purposes, presenting Seward to the reader, after his censorship and selection and indication to the publisher for the removal of anything from her Letters that he thought anecdotal, political or not considered suitable and also by the same written instructions to the publisher at the top of Seward's Poems. By so doing, he lessened Seward's incisiveness, humour, and wit.¹³ After Scott, little or nothing was written until the early part of the last century when there was a revival of interest in Anna Seward. Five biographies were produced in the early to middle part of the twentieth century by Edward V. Lucas (1907) Stapleton Martin (1909), Margaret Ashmun (1931) and Hesketh Pearson (1936). All of these rely on Seward's letters for their narrative. Each biography has its own particular bias and provides only a limited evaluation of her life and career. Lucas' *A Swan and Her Friends*, is a book for the general reader, written from a male-centred point of view. In this patronising book, Lucas finds it 'amusing' to seek Anna Seward and discovers her in Lichfield. Only in his opening paragraph and in the second chapter does he mention Eyam, her birthplace, going no further. Lucas is subtly disparaging and sarcastic in parts, speaking of Seward's 'pontifical confidence, floridity and sentimentalism' and how, when she came to compete with men:

everyone was astonished and apparently pleased. It is difficult today to understand how Miss Seward's artificial conventions can have warmed anyone to such cordiality. It is, of course, largely the fault of herself and her imitators that there have been so many women writers since. They showed how easy it was.¹⁴

Lucas clearly disapproves of Seward's temerity in entering this masculine world of literature. He shows his prejudice against her, although he goes some way to redeeming himself by rather resentfully saying that she was 'one of the masters of fine writing. Her pen never ceased to be a brush', and that for that gift alone she is worth attention, but then he decries her by stating that she lacked 'three things that might have corrected it all: poverty, London life and marriage'.¹⁵ Lucas, throughout is derisive and contradictory in his assessment of Seward, whom he declares is jealous and snobbish, but whose heart and honour were right; a warm and faithful friend, generous with both money and praise, yet a conceited woman, and a sin against man and nature.

A more sympathetic study is provided by Stapleton Martin in *Anna Seward and Classic Lichfield*. He writes of her life, friends, acquaintances, suitors, her loves and hates, habits, achievements, joys and sorrows, and produces a short, readable and well-researched narrative.¹⁶ In his Preface, he tells us that 'it is the aim of this book to resuscitate interest in the poetess, and in the literary circle over which she reigned supreme'. Martin has obviously read both her letters and poems but admits that her works are 'now rarely read' and speaks of the great magnetic power she must have possessed, plus the certain family wealth, which added to her attractive presence. He also describes her, though, as 'a faithful and generous friend; her fault

would have been her conceit'. Martin, a distant relation of Seward, reminds and shows us throughout that she held a high rank in the annals of British literature and in the circle over which she remained supreme; that her correspondence will always be of value, even though he feels that 'her poetry is not likely ever to be much read; still a study of her... must always be instructive'.¹⁷ This small book holds some regard for Seward with a wealth of detail showing careful, though unreferenced, research.

Margaret Ashmun's *The Singing Swan* is a study of Seward's personality which says little about the context in which she operated. Ashmun calls our attention to the fact that no extended study of Seward's life had, up to that time, been attempted and states that 'the chief source of information regarding Seward must inevitably be the six volumes of her letters, published in 1811, two years after her death', but insists that 'we can find our dates and facts elsewhere and can put our own interpretations on the somewhat highly coloured statements of the Letters.'¹⁸ In her Author's Notes, she states that Seward was 'an active-minded woman who made many contacts' and 'although her work has suffered almost complete effacement, her personality survives by reason of the strong force within itself.' She refers to Lucas's *A Swan and Her Friends*, as 'an impressionistic review of Miss Seward and her coterie which makes no pretensions to following a time sequence or marking the consecutive events in the career of the provincial *précieuse*.'¹⁹ In just one sentence in the text, Ashmun removes the Seward family from Derbyshire to Lichfield, then shows us the quite considerable research she has done into Seward's life in that city, from the age of seven, bringing in others members of the Lichfield group: Thomas Day, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Samuel Johnson and Erasmus Darwin, using Seward as the focus for a study that contains them all, reminding us that Seward's 'vigorous individuality...brought her the friendship of eminent people and preserved her from oblivion, even to the present

day'.²⁰ This is a more detailed discussion of Seward, again for the general reader, where Ashmun reiterates her literary ability, her kindness with her time, energy and money, her possible potential as an actress, her sensitiveness to criticism and feels that, with all her talents, Seward was never really happy. She objects to the sneers and ridicule heaped on Seward, stating that she was worthy of respect for her vigour and the place she made for herself. There are informative appendices and an index and Ashmun shows some regard for her subject in this workmanlike, yet occasionally fanciful study. Frederick A. Pottle, in his preface to *The Singing Swan*, reminds us how 'hard it is to realise how famous these people were [Miss Seward receiving] more acclaim than any other female author except Mrs. Macaulay or Fanny Burney'.²¹ Pottle would seem to have held the patronising belief that women should never be writers, until he read Miss Ashmun's book, which helped some way in allowing him to see that Seward was a remarkably talented woman, deserving of a place in literature.

Hesketh Pearson, in his preface to *The Swan of Lichfield: Being a Selection from the Correspondence of Anna Seward*, provides us with another attempt at individual evaluation and portrays her as an eccentric intellectual without influence, by stating that

Anna Seward ... belonged to no school of style and she founded none, she was, and remains her own unique, unbelievable self...she was a bluestocking, a highbrow, the centre of an intellectual coterie and she has suffered the invariable fate of such... their only hope of survival is to be restored as 'period pieces'.²²

He does try to restore himself somewhat in his concluding paragraph by stating that

‘she was...an honest and good woman [whose] heart was in the right place.’²³ His narrative is based on the *Letters*, from her ‘juvenile’ pen in October 1762, to the last letter she wrote on the 13th March 1809, twelve days before her death. His *précis* of her life, used as an introduction to the book, gives us a better insight into Seward’s world, but again, there are neither footnotes nor index. Pearson has obviously immersed himself well enough in Seward’s *Letters* to produce from them a connected narrative of her life, but his prejudice remains evident in the Preface.

Addleshaw’s *The Swan of Lichfield: Anna Seward and her Circle*, opens with an account of how the youthful Anna Seward was inspired to begin writing early, but abstained from publication until she was of an age to please herself. He quotes from her letters throughout, observing that she ‘adopts an artificial, elaborate style, which compels derision rather than respect’. He is surprised that her works won such fame, yet he believes her to be ‘a good critic – those [accounts] of Pope, Milton and Gray are first class’ but is not sure whether he likes her or not.²⁴ His remarks are contradictory, but he does acknowledge that Seward still deserves remembrance.²⁵

As well as the key biographies of Anna Seward, several authors have studied important aspects of her life and work since the 1940s. Together, they provide insights into the breadth of her activities and address some of the limitations of early biographical studies. Focusing upon her letters, James L. Clifford in his article ‘The Authenticity of Anna Seward’s Published Correspondence’ (1941) questions the authenticity of the six volumes of Seward’s correspondence, referring to them as ‘pretentious epistles’ being used as ‘genuine contemporary evidence concerning the social and literary life of the late eighteenth century’. He contends that, as the re-written letters ‘are late revisions, copies of the originals, as such, cannot be trusted as evidence in controversial matters’.²⁶ We are reminded that, in his three-

volume edition of Seward's *Poetical Works*, Scott published in his Preface a selection from her 'juvenile' letters (Oct. 1762–Jan. 1768) as a means of 'easing his conscience over his refusal to be responsible for the rest [and] disliking the style of the later letters, suspected their authenticity and printed these few which he felt certain were genuine'.²⁷ Whatever Scott's reasons for his selection, it was Constable who published the six volumes of Seward's later letters. In 1863, Hill Wickham wrote of finding that the manuscripts of Seward's letters were 'often varying from the printed copy' but offered no further evidence. After providing comparative evidence from one of Seward's letters to Mrs. Piozzi, original and published versions, and one to Edward Jerningham, Clifford looks at the changes in dates throughout Seward's letters up to 1800, asking 'what could Seward's motive have been?'²⁸ Deciding then, that until all the originals can be compared with the published material 'the 1811 edition of her *Letters* cannot be completely trusted for facts or contemporary opinions and not even for a strict chronology of the period'. Clifford shows the differing composition of some of the original and published letters, which one finds are often more concise versions, possibly edited from concerns of space without losing the essence of a given letter. It is also possible that Seward failed to put the actual date of the letter, retaining only the month and the year. One feels that Clifford is being pedantic in his assessment of the contents of the letters which are still considered to be authentic.²⁹

Seward's interest in music is explored by Robert Manson Myers in *Anna Seward, An Eighteenth-Century Handelian* (1947). Myers argues that Handel's 'soul-exalting music' became the 'second favourite science of (her) life'.³⁰ By joining many of her contemporaries in a mutual linking of Milton and Handel as the two great masters of the sublime, Seward considered the latter, even though a German, to be representative of the peak of 'English' music.³¹ Myers considers Seward's outrage at

Cowper's 'fiery censures upon the great Handel Commemoration in Westminster Abbey in 1784', which she expressed in a blank verse 'Remonstrance to William Cowper Esq' in 1788, but which, because 'of the reported depression in his spirits', she refused to send to him or to publish during his lifetime.³² Although Myers was not an admirer of Seward's literary works, he maintains and believes she was an astute critic of Handel's music and of public singers.³³

The Lichfield context, considered by Mary Alden Hopkins in *Dr Johnson's Lichfield* (1956), has anecdotes much in evidence. Samuel Johnson and Seward's mother, Elizabeth, were related by marriage, so their lives intertwined.³⁴ The book, while mainly concentrating on Johnson, is an excellent source for Seward's life in Lichfield as it supplies useful information on the Cathedral Close and the city. Chapters on 'The Seward and Saville Scandal' (chap. VIII) and 'Wife Trouble Among The Clergy' (chap. IX) are especially interesting, revealing the hypocritical attitude of the clergy within this prebendal domain.

Seward's relationship with her father is explored by Frank Swinnerton in *A Galaxy of Fathers* (1966). Chapter six shows us the concern the Reverend Thomas Seward has for his daughter, Anna, calling her 'a typically genteel person' who 'modelled her prose style on Johnson'. By praising her father continuously, Anna Seward 'converted a dull man, her father, into a character resembling Jane Austen's Mr. Woodhouse and for this fact should be given credit'.³⁵ Swinnerton sees her 'as an administering angel to an eighteenth century father... content to witness his daughter's enslavement to his whims'.³⁶ Resurrecting Seward, he tells us that 'she was easy game', and remarks on the 'sniggering ridicule, which has been her lot for a century and a half'. He is generally well disposed to Seward, but sees her as somewhat pathetic, obliged to be obedient to her father, for whom she had a love-hate

relationship. He considers that this obedience, in many ways, provoked the disparaging attitude of some critics 'to a literary lady of limited experience' which diminishes the significance of Seward's achievements.³⁷

Seward's literary context is examined by Roger Lonsdale in his *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (1990). He tells us that the Restoration had brought a new, confident competence to women's verse, even though the restraints imposed on them made such versifying difficult. A lot depended on status, education, determination or publication by subscription. In 1978, anyone admitting to an interest in eighteenth-century women poets, would soon be asked in a sceptical way: 'were there any?'³⁸ However, in 1798, Ralph Griffiths, for almost fifty years editor of the *Monthly Review*, celebrated the fact that in 'the Age of Ingenious and Learned Ladies... in the elegant Branches of Literature... it is no longer a question of whether a woman is or is not inferior to a man in natural ability, or less capable of excelling in mental accomplishments.'³⁹ Women's verses were published in the *Gentleman's Magazine* alongside those of men, there was no discrimination on the part of the literary editor, and, by this time, Anna Seward had named seven other distinguished women poets: Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Hannah More, Anna Williams, Hester Lynch Piozzi, Elizabeth Carter, Hannah Cowley and Charlotte Smith, whose work could be found continually in the London periodicals.⁴⁰ Seward continued to support up-and-coming male poets: William Newton, the 'Derbyshire Minstrel', Francis Mundy, author of 'Needwood Forest' and the reverend Peter Cunningham(e), her father's curate at Eyam.⁴¹ It is obvious that Lonsdale believes that Seward was full of her own importance; she could be severe in her judgement of male readers and writers; and that she was a pedant, always ready to criticise others. He hopes, perhaps, to redeem

Seward from such personal failings by stating that ‘in spite of her fondness for tortuous syntax, her poetic voice can have intensity and individuality.’⁴²

Seward’s significance as a sonneteer is considered by Paula R. Feldman and Daniel Robinson, who argue that Seward, alongside other women poets, was responsible for the sonnet revival of the 1780s and 1790s: they established a tradition of female lyrical expression that would last well into the nineteenth century. For Seward, sonnet writing was a serious business, to be undertaken using the rules of practice of fourteen iambic pentameter lines.⁴³ She was among the first serious woman sonneteers and had no problem aligning herself with the tradition of Milton, for whom she had great admiration and praise, commending his work for its ‘hardness, manly firmness, strength and majesty’.⁴⁴ Her *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects* containing 100 works, allowed Seward to appropriate ‘an entirely male tradition and ... claim herself as a great poet within this tradition...and in many ways a subversive one’.⁴⁵ Here, we now see what was, to Seward, a sacred skill – to take the prevailing mood away from its male dominance, without sacrificing its glorious tradition. Her sonnets, far more original and varied than they have ever been credited, deal with a variety of subjects in a variety of styles: friendships, nature, literature and the common experiences of life. They reveal a confident, conspicuous, but still rather self-conscious literary voice, claiming validity as a female poet, willing to compete with her male counterparts.

A further examination of Seward’s poetical significance is provided by Andrew Ashfield in *Romantic Women Poets, 1770–1838: An Anthology* (1995). He states that it was in the eighteenth century that ‘the idea of a canon of English poetry emerged...a type of highly subjective and emotionally involved reading...bound together and creating a cluster of complications for our understanding of women’s

poetry, the actual site of moral activity [where] the reading of imaginative literature became a “waking dream” where author, reader and text fused’.⁴⁶ Women’s poetry, in such a canon, became problematic. This set of complications created difficult positions for women. Acts of imagination were considered as species of adultery, so literature and its figures were closed to women, resulting in a change of direction for Romantic women poets. Seward was one of those who rehabilitated the sonnet, allowing it to be the supreme vehicle for the expression of the isolated dramatic form, in situations of loneliness before the landscape. This sense of loneliness, though, did not bring about sustained friendships; the female poets remained a dispersed group, subject to hostile criticism. Ashfield reminds us that Seward, in literary matters, was less than charitable to other women poets. She also used water – rain, streams, rivers, the seashore and the persistent iconography and ambiguity of the sea; the tumult above, the peace below; to highlight the central concern for many eighteenth-century female writers, which we can now interpret as concern, during the French Revolution, about possible invasion in the 1790s. Seward demonstrated the connection of all these concerns as being fully central to this period of Romanticism.⁴⁷

Seward’s importance as a cultural figure is explored by John Brewer in *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1997), where he describes Seward as ‘an amateur versifier and critic who lived her entire life in the Bishop’s Palace, Lichfield... scribbling in her writing room’. But he also acknowledges her powerful influence on the critical and poetic views of her day.⁴⁸ ‘A correspondent’, he says, ‘in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, even challenged its readers to “produce me any female writer who equals that lady.”’⁴⁹ Brewer suggests that, by staying in Lichfield, Seward gives us a sense of place. Her personality, an efficient postal system, a large and supportive networks of friends and other writers and a press that gave access to all her

correspondents, male and female, all helped in her endeavours. Her love of Macpherson's *Ossian* gave her 'a poignant thrill of pensive transport', kindling her taste for sentiment, sublime landscape and medievalism'.⁵¹ Seward wanted to show, by using these such literary components, how certain regional locations could be understood by the metropolis. Obsessive about poetry, she was never deferential and always outspoken. Brewer believes that Seward became popular because she spoke for many gentlewomen who shared her view of poetasting, and reiterates that after her death, her works, like many others, were forgotten. The world of poetry was reconstructed in such a way that the sentimental works and beliefs of women such as she, were considered insipid and consigned to oblivion.⁵² Brewer looks at Seward only from a literary point of view, mainly through her poems and letters. Her family life only emerges when Brewer says that in her letters she repeatedly portrayed herself in domestic surroundings in Lichfield. Moving to London would have meant her living and behaving according to 'the rules of metropolitan society'.⁵² He sees Seward as patriotic, imaginative and sympathetic; a person of passionate enthusiasms, who was not deflected by the barbs of criticism and sarcasm; who had a taste for sentiment and was acutely conscious of how Britain's literary heritage should be viewed; that anyone could write poetry and that poetic sensibility and conscience should accompany one another.

Seward's relationship with Erasmus Darwin is considered by Desmond King-Hele in *A Life of Unequalled Achievement* (1999). He feels that Seward and Darwin were too close for comfort, but, as far as her poetic ability was concerned, King-Hele regards her as a 'complete literary person', almost cut off from real life, writing endlessly from limited experience. Darwin, he thinks, became her poetic preceptor and she was 'indebted to him for it. He had always very great poetic talents.'⁵³ King-

Hele believes Seward was a capable critic, considers her to be the first Romantic Poet, being known as the 'Swan of Lichfield', the 'Queen Muse of Britain' and the finest poet of her day.⁵⁴

Recent writings have interpreted Seward as a feminist figure. Jennifer Kelly's *Bluestocking Feminism* (1999) shows us, through some of Seward's poems, sonnets, extracts from her literary correspondence and from the *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin*, her struggle for a place in literary life, not by challenging men in their belief in their exclusive right to be in the forefront of public life, but by her works. She sees Seward as 'a bluestocking feminist...engaged in the Midlands Enlightenment politics of writing and philosophy, an astute literary critic as well as a poet, a woman of reason, carving out a vital role for herself in the cultural revolution'.⁵⁵ Sustained by friendships and correspondence, women like Seward participated in their drawing rooms, literary gatherings and by reading and writing. Seward was also fortunate in that she benefited from contact with the Lunar Group, and their occasional intellectual gatherings in her family home. Here, progressive ideas on education, experiments and politics were discussed. Seward was not an active participant in such discussions, but she may well have listened and absorbed some of their ideas.⁵⁶ Later, Seward carved out a place for herself through her correspondence, her social circle, her poetry and literary criticism, becoming over time a figure of national standing.⁵⁷

Donna Coffey, in her article, 'Protecting the Botanical Garden: Seward, Darwin and Coalbrookdale' (2002) offers an analysis of Seward and Darwin's differing perspectives on the changes taking place at Coalbrookdale, a mining town in Shropshire, which became a cradle of industrialisation in 1787. Seward wrote to the

poet, Hayley about the ways in which the natural beauty of the Dale was being destroyed by industry, while Darwin wrote to Thomas Beddoes in Oxford, referring to a 'fountain of petroleum' discovered in the Dale and his hopes that this natural resource could be used for industry.⁵⁸ Both aspects would later be incorporated into literary works. Both Seward and Darwin, though, as outsiders, were not directly concerned with the place itself; they lived in comfort in Lichfield. Though not a scientist, Seward was familiar enough with Darwin's writings to analyse them and she was 'able to see something he didn't see – how what Darwin was developing would contribute to the degradation of the natural world which she loved'.⁵⁹ Seward was also able to see a parallel between the ways in which men had dominated nature, and the ways in which men had dominated women. Most eighteenth-century women were barred from most scientific and economic pursuits, which so fascinated Darwin and his colleagues. He advocated and took an active part in the industrialisation process whereas Seward was an outsider, an observer of a world in which Darwin was such an enthusiastic participant. Ruth Watts reminds us that women in England, at this time, did not participate in 'scientific' matters, and were only 'scientifically' knowledgeable in domestic and childbearing spheres, though Caroline Herschel was, in the late eighteenth-century, assisting her Royal Astronomer brother, William. On the Continent the position of women was different: Emilie du Chatelet was assisting Voltaire with mathematics and natural philosophy and Marie Lavoisier was assisting her husband with his experiments in 'dephlogisticated' air.⁶⁰ Coffey, by using extracts from Darwin's epic botanic poems, to which Seward contributed many lines, and her sonnets, reveals the polarised, ambivalent outlook of these figures. She notes that Seward loved wild nature and anything done to spoil it she abhorred. Seward was unable to understand why this 'noise and destruction' was happening in such a

beautiful place. Darwin saw these changes to the land as exciting and revealing and had not the slightest concern for its impact. Seward, visiting Saville's large garden of plants, would have studied some botany, a fashionable subject at that time, hence Seward's use of the flower/woman analogy in her poems, 'a powerful tool with which to indict the oppression of women and nature, by men'.⁶¹ Seward was the first poet to use the word 'pollute' in her verse as a reference to industrialisation, private ownership, trade and colonisation.⁶²

Norma Clarke's *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (2004) considers Anna Seward from the aspect of her Lichfield life 'growing up in Lichfield, where she spent her life in the Bishop's Palace'⁶³ She investigates the slow decline of eighteenth-century patrician culture which allowed women of letters – poets, novelists and critics – to 'rise' and become public figures, only to fall and fade away into obscurity for a long period of time. She also shows us Seward's nature – a superior woman whose life was dedicated to a serious purpose – literary fame. A woman who saw herself as presiding over a provincial circle, a woman of determination and renown, a fighter who, through her 'exceptional ability' and her sense of 'entitlement', would bring distinction to her locality, and, using Prior's words, 'by pencil, compass, sword or pen/ Should in life's visit leave their name', securing a place for herself in the annals of literature.⁶⁵ Clarke's article, 'Anna Seward, Swan, Duckling or Goose' (2005), reminds us that Seward thought her nickname, 'The Swan of Lichfield', quite appropriate, placing her 'in the tradition of Pope, the 'Sweet Swan of Twickenham' and of Shakespeare, 'the Swan of Avon', feeling that it acknowledged 'her lifelong identification with Lichfield, her prominent place within it and her eminence in a literary and cultural world beyond' [having] 'no difficulty in seeing herself as a swan, full of elegant distinction and a serene conviction of her own

grandeur.⁶⁶ Seward could also see herself as an ugly duckling, a woman who, for all her charm and obvious gifts, lacked something, there is also the possibility that Seward was a goose, in the sense of a fool or a dolt, a woman who had inflated ideas of her own talents and worth, whose ‘pronouncements were lofty and absolute...who took herself very seriously’ – a woman, who, because of her stature was considered ugly and who had ideas above her station, yet an able literary academic, whose textual criticism was precise.⁶⁶ Clarke shows us that Seward’s cause was herself and her posthumous standing. Her letters were not falsified documents, full of everyday trivia, they were a writer’s manuscripts, full of cultural history, political and literary criticism, rewritten for publication as ‘an heroic and high-minded endeavour’.⁶⁷ Clarke also reiterates Seward’s estimation of Johnson. Though Seward was not prepared to put him on ‘a noble pedestal’, she admired ‘the truth and daylight of his reasoning’ but deplored his ‘lack of generosity to other writers’.⁶⁸ She also considered that Boswell made her look ‘a goose’ by belittling her in the series of *Benvolio* letters in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* and was responsible for Seward’s eventual downfall.⁶⁹ It was the eighteenth century which formed Seward and the nineteenth which reacted against her. Any judgement of Seward should take this into account, and Clarke’s analysis has influenced the argument in this thesis.

Sylvia Bowerbank, in *Speaking for Nature: Women and Ecologies of Early Modern England* (2004) states that ‘to promote sound environmental practices was of primary concern to Anna Seward’. Though often classed as a poet of nothing more than sensibility, ‘she was a keen defender of local environments and intervened, on occasion, in environmental politics.’⁷⁰ In her sonnet, ‘To Colebrooke Dale’, Seward criticises the modern industries that were beginning to ravage the beauties of nature. Her longer poem, *Colebrook Dale*, speaks of the ‘blackening of England, caused by

ironworks on the site'.⁷¹ Throughout Seward's poems, we see the same defence of natural beauty against the dictates of greed. *The Lake or Modern Improvement in Landscape*, ridicules the construction of a large lake, 'obliterating the pleasing diversity: ancient trees, bushes, lanes and blossoms of the original landscape'. Seward believes that nothing, neither Genius of the Place, Naiads nor Dryads can stop this greedy, rapacious invasion of Nature.⁷² Bowerbank shows us that Seward gives us that sense of 'place'. With her father's 'pluralities' in mind, Seward was pleased with those who achieved good land-stewardship, for much of his income came from tithes and she knew that good taste and honest labour would sustain a welcome home for Hygeia, the goddess of health. Her failing health, in later life, made her determined, even desperate, to find places where she could, quite literally, breathe and survive. Seward knew the value of fresh air. She was also, it might be argued, an early environmentalist, working continuously to make sure that her city was clean, to ensure good conditions for its citizens.⁷³

In 'Not Strictly Proper for a Female Pen: Eighteenth-Century Poetry and the Sexuality of Botany' (2005), Sam George discusses matters which Seward suggested were not suitable in a publication for women, even though some of her work is incorporated into it. Darwin thought Seward's botanical verse should 'form the exordium of a great work', a plan that she thought 'not strictly suitable for the female pen,' as women were not at liberty to talk about such issues in public. It can be argued, though, that Darwin's epic poem, *The Loves of Plants* changed the course of women's botany in England.⁷⁴

Judith Jennings: *A Trio of Talented Women – Abolition, Gender and Political Science, 1780–91* (2005), contains new information about three influential women, Mary Morris Knowles, Anna Seward and Jenny (Harry) Thresher. It focuses on their

connections, ideologies and abolitionist activities, their support for each other and their subsequent opposition to slave-holding and trading, so it was inevitable that these three women would combine their efforts when the slavery debate began. Josiah Wedgwood sent abolitionist tracts to Seward which she agreed to read. By doing so, she became a supporter of the abolition of slavery. Unfortunately, even though we feel that Jennings admires them, we get very little insight into the characters of the trio.⁷⁵

Teresa Barnard's 'Anna Seward and the Battle for Authorship' (2004), discusses Seward's courage, showing how carefully she had to 'negotiate the gender codes of conduct in overcoming the restrictions surrounding female education' in order to challenge the conventions of the publishing industry when publishing her *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin*. Seward's work was not a biography in its truest sense of the word, but a focus on Darwin's literary work rather than his scientific achievements, which she had gleaned over the twenty four years that Darwin had resided in Lichfield, but which, on publication, pleased neither his family nor publisher.⁷⁶ They reveal the human face of a poet and lover, rather than the scientific qualities of Erasmus Darwin. Seward wrote as a fellow poet and friend, and this was never meant to be a falsely flattering tribute. It may have been controversial, but it memorialised the cultural circles of Lichfield, and has stood the test of time. The *Memoirs* are still being consulted by scholars. She reminds us that 'women's public role was beginning to be reconfigured, with increasing latitude', but only 'to a certain extent in the areas of print culture' and 'to reading rooms'.⁷⁷ Lack of education meant that many women were confined to the domestic sphere. Women's role in literary production is a constant in Seward's writing as she believed in 'the value of literature' above what she classed as 'ornamental' subjects. Barnard points out the frustrations

which came out of Seward's confidence in her own literary abilities, particularly when Boswell discarded the Johnsonian anecdotes she had sent him and the severe criticism of her by the Darwin family. These events, together with the lack of support from her immediate circle, can clearly be seen in her correspondence. Barnard also allows us to see Seward's struggle to be heard in what was a male-dominated world and it is quite evident that all her literary efforts were to that end. Even though she was writing at an early age, Seward's first publication only took place in 1780.⁷⁸ She continued to voice her opinions, resisting all established traditions and, by doing so, overcoming many obstacles and prejudices, Seward was, at last, able to add her works to a growing female literary tradition.

In her critical biography *Anna Seward: A Constructed Life* (2007), Barnard uses edited, censored and forgotten private letters and documents, 'to bring coherence to her writing and to representations of her life'. She reminds us that Lucas saw Seward as 'the last and greatest of unhumorous women', but that he had not 'read the jokes, anecdotes and entertaining stories' that were edited from the letters, which Barnard uses as her cornerstone.⁷⁹ She shows that Seward's letters *were* meant to be an accurate account of her own life, and she intended her poems and letters to be published as a series, with an instalment every two years, but that this was not to happen. It was Walter Scott who, by his unscrupulous editing, sometimes at the instigation of Charles Simpson, Seward's lawyer, and by his removal of anything he considered anecdotal, political or that did not portray him in a good light, changed their whole nature.⁸⁰ By taking those edited parts of the letters Seward wrote to her close friends, Mary Powys and Dorothy Sykes, Barnard shows us the wider picture of challenging periods in Seward's life: her love for Saville, her battle with her parents, the church and her crisis of faith and the attentions of James Boswell and his 'secret'

letters to her which still remain unpublished. By concentrating on just this epistolary method of reconstruction, Barnard fails to ‘construct’ a full life of this accomplished woman, but Seward’s ability as a writer, her struggle for publication and much of its subsequent influence is considered.⁸¹

All the studies considered here look at Anna Seward through her poetical works and letters, and are mostly concerned with her literary standing. Lucas, Pearson, Clifford and Pottle look at her from a male perspective. According to them, Seward was intruding into *their* world, a move they abhorred. This was no place for a woman, yet, almost as an afterthought, they felt they had to pay her the compliment of possessing a modicum of ability. Martin, Swinnerton, Brewer and King-Hele demonstrate their admiration for a woman working from her limited standpoint, against many odds and from a provincial city, yet proving her literary ability. Ashmun and Hopkins look at Seward mainly through her literary output. Clarke, Coffey, George and Kelly do the same, but from a modern feminist viewpoint. Barnard bases her analysis on the drastically edited letters. Any further writers with whom Seward had any contact, were just that, individual writers, hoping to find some way of getting their work known, mainly through publication by sympathetic magazine editors. These works represent a growth of interest in Seward’s life and significance and suggest more about the influences upon her personality and opinions, the cultural milieu in which she operated and the depth and breadth of her interests than the limited biographical studies of the past. They provide insights into many neglected areas, for she was not just a poet and literary critic, Seward had a deep interest in music, nature and the environment, she was a woman in eighteenth-century society with a particular gendered view of the world.

My study attempts to examine the social and cultural influences upon Seward, giving a much fuller picture of her life and importance. It neither approaches Seward from a particular gendered perspective, nor engages in literary criticism. Seward was an influential provincial cultural figure as a critic and arbiter of taste, and though most commentators have concentrated on her literary significance, this study explores Seward by tracing her education, largely at the hands of her father and Erasmus Darwin, her friendships, her 'affairs of the heart' and her ability to enter and develop a network of contacts and interests which sustained her during her emergence from local obscurity to provincial and national importance as an influential, provincial cultural figure, as a critic and arbiter of taste. It offers an insight into eighteenth-century provincial culture through the life of an independent, educated woman.

This thesis will explore Anna Seward's significance as a provincial cultural figure in the following ways:

Chapter 1 establishes Lichfield as an important hub at the centre of the Midlands, both as an early ecclesiastical centre attracting scholars, thinkers, artists and writers and as a garrison town, and how transport, travel and local government helped it to develop into an attractive, enlightened city, able to nurture its own luminaries: Samuel Johnson, David Garrick, Joseph Addison, Erasmus Darwin and Anna Seward, together with those, as her fame grew, whom she attracted and who came to visit her.

Chapter 2 will look at Anna Seward's family and early life, her somewhat unstructured education given mainly by her father, using both his own and the cathedral library; her care and nurture of her 'adopted' sister, Honora Sneyd; her meetings with Erasmus Darwin and John Saville and her suitors – all of which helped shape her as an independent woman.

Chapter 3 will examine the relationship between Anna Seward and John Saville, Vicar Choral at Lichfield Cathedral, married with children, from their first meeting and how in spite of parental and clerical opposition over several years, through a love of Handel's music and of literature, they realised a commitment and devotion to each other which lasted for almost forty years until his death.

The close relationship between Anna Seward and Erasmus Darwin is explored in Chapter 4. The rapport, the poetic collaboration and reciprocation throughout his time in Lichfield; his attempt to inveigle Seward into an affair through the 'Cat' letters and how her carefully considered reply signified her move towards independence, and the Darwin family vilification of Seward following the publication of her *Memoirs* of Erasmus Darwin.

Chapter 5 will indicate how, following the death of her mother, her entry into Lady Miller's Batheaston Circle changed Seward's literary life, bringing her to the notice of a wider readership; her further important and lasting friendships with Hayley, Whalley, Southey and the Ladies of Llangollen; her poetic and literary acclaim and how her decision to remain in Lichfield secured her reputation as a poet.

Chapter 6, will discuss how, after her father's death and in the face of her own failing health, Seward effectively dealt with and used the new, widened, literary world in which she travelled, with its host of new acquaintances, including Walter Scott. It will also consider her extensive correspondence and published works; her meticulous chronicling of her ailments; the careful crafting of her Will, intended to overcome the *couverture* rule and how her wishes for her unpublished works were overruled by her executors. The Conclusion will summarise her life and how her strength of character, her self-belief, her critical ability, the lasting friendships she made, her achievements, confirmed her as a significant literary and cultural figure.

Notes to Introduction

1. LRO. D262/1/35. Copy of the Last Will and Testament of Anna Seward. 1808–9. Also Scott, Walter, *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward with extracts from her Literary Correspondence* (Edinburgh, 1810), 3 vols, vol.1, pp. xxxiii – vii.
2. Willam Hayley (1745-1820), poet and biographer of Milton, Romney and Cowper, gave Seward this title during his visit to Lichfield in 1781. See Johnson, J.L.D. (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley, Esq.* (London), 2 vols, Vol. 1, pp. 241–252. See also Ashmun, Margaret, *The Singing Swan: An Account of Anna Seward and her Acquaintance With Dr. Johnson, Boswell and Others of Their Time* (New York, 1968), pp. 95–108.
3. John Saville (1735–1803), chorister, born Ely, Cambridgeshire. Married Mary Leaf, a minor, in Ely Cathedral on the 19th April 1755. Appointed Vicar Choral, Lichfield Cathedral, May 1755 and lived in the Vicar’s Close. He Had two daughters, Mary, baptised Lichfield Cathedral, 8th December 1755 and Elizabeth, born and baptised Lichfield, 1757 (confirmed by Parish Records).
4. Chapman, R.W. (ed.), *Boswell’s Notebook* (London, 1925). Boswell had tried, unsuccessfully, to have affairs with Anna Seward in 1785 and 1788.
5. Clifford, John G., Curator, Eyam Museum, Derbyshire. Birthdates of the Seward sisters confirmed in Parish Records, St. Lawrence’s Church, Eyam, Derbyshire. Known in the family as ‘ Nancy’, Seward called herself ‘Anna’ in later life.
6. Seward, Anna, *Literary Correspondence in Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, 1810), 2 vols, vol. 1, pp. xiii – ccvi.
7. Constable, Archibald (ed.), *Letters of Anna Seward, written between 1784 and 1807* (Edinburgh, 1811), Vol. 1, pp.v –vi. also Facsimile copy of Letter: Seward to Constable 17th July 1807 inserted into vol i p.1.
8. *ibid.* *Advertisement*, vol. 1, pp. vii –viii.
9. Scott, Walter (ed.), *Extracts from Miss Seward’s Literary Correspondence in The Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, 1810), 3 vols, Vol. 1, pp. xliii – ccvi.
10. Scott, Walter (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh,1810). Vol. 1, pp. xi, xiii.
11. *ibid.* pp. xix–xx.
12. *ibid.* pp. xxiv – xxvii.
13. NLS. MSS 879–80, Vol. I: *Writings of Anna Seward, copied in her Autograph and bequeathed to Walter Scott* (This collection consists of the unpublished remainder of sheets not removed by Walter Scott and are described in a letter, 17 July, 1807) in Seward, Anna, *Poetical Works*, vol. 1, p. xxxiii; vol. 2, *Telemachus*; Thomas Seward, *Poems; Observations upon Prof. Spence’s Essay on Pope’s Oddyssey and Four Sermons*; Lists of Contents and *The Last Lay of the Lichfield Minstrel, 1804*. Catalogue of *Walter Scott Correspondence*: MSS: 853–54, 865–69, 870, 879–80, 910, 1750– 53. See also Seward, Anna, *Juvenile Letters in Poetical Works, 1762–80* (Edinburgh, 1810), vol. 1.

14. Lucas, Edward Verrall, *A Swan and Her Friends* (London, 1907), pp. 2–3.
15. *ibid.* pp. 8–9 and p. 321.
16. Martin, Stapleton, *Anna Seward and Classic Lichfield* (Worcester, 1909).
17. *ibid.* p.42.
18. Ashmun (1968), pp .xiii –xiv.
19. *ibid.* p. xiii.
20. *ibid.* p. 282.
21. *ibid.* pp. viii–ix.
22. Pearson, Hesketh, (ed.), *The Swan of Lichfield: Being a Selection from the Correspondence of Anna Seward* (London, 1936), p. 9.
23. *ibid.* p. 11.
24. Addleshaw, S, ‘The Swan of Lichfield: Anna Seward and her Circle’ in *The Church Quarterly Review*, April 1937), vol. cxxiv, p. 8.
25. *ibid.* p.29.
26. Clifford, James L., ‘The Authenticity of Anna Seward’s Published Correspondence’ in *Modern Philology*, Nov. 1941), vol. 39, Number 2, p. 113.
27. *ibid.* p. 114. See also Lockhart, J.G., *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh and London), vol. 3, p. 298. All Scott did, was to read through the manuscript copies and remove numerous references to himself.
28. Wickham, H, (ed.), *Journals and Correspondence of Thomas Sedgewick Whalley D.D.* (London,1863), p. 16. Anna Seward, with a view to publication, rewrote many of her *Letters* using a more literary style.
29. Clifford, James L., *Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs Thrale)* 2nd Edition, (Oxford, 1987) in *Piozziana*, vol. 4,p. 73. Hester Piozzi wrote: ‘Her keeping Copies too of her own Letters! How astonishing! Copies of one’s own Letters! She might well complain for want of *Time* when she wrote every Trifle so – Twice over!’
30. Myers, Robert Manson, *Anna Seward: An Eighteenth Century Handelian* (Williamsburg, Virginia;1947), p. 6
31. *ibid.* p. 9.
32. *ibid.* pp. 18–19.
33. *ibid.* pp. 23–24.
34. Hopkins, Mary Alden, *Dr. Johnson’s Lichfield* (London,1956).
35. Swinnerton, Frank, *A Galaxy of Fathers* (London, 1966), p. 37
36. *ibid.* p. 47.
37. *ibid.* p. 37.
38. Lonsdale, Roger (ed.), *Eighteenth Century Women Poets* (Oxford, 1990), p. xxi.
39. Griffiths, Ralph (ed.) *Monthly Review*. (London), p. vii.
40. Lonsdale (1990), p. xxxv. Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743–1825); Hannah More (1745–1833); Anna Williams (1706 –1783); Hester Lynch Piozzi (1741–1821); Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806); Hannah Cowley (1743–1809); Charlotte Smith (1749 –1806) See *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1789) vol. 1, p. 292.
41. William Newton was a carpenter. See Anna Seward to The Right Hon. Lady Eleanor Butler, 9th December 1795 in *Letters*, vol. 4, pp.1 234–5; Mundy, Francis, author of *Needwood Forest*. See *On Miss Seward’s Sonnets, with Particular Attention to her Twenty-first and Twenty-second* in *Letter to F.N.C. Mundy Esq. 20th April 1799* in *Letters*, vol. 5, pp. 217–221.
42. Lonsdale (1990), p.xxxvii.

43. Feldman, Paula R. & Robinson, Daniel (eds), *A Century of Sonnets* (Oxford, 1999), p.10. See also Boulton, Majorie, *The Anatomy of Poetry* (London, 1965), pp.140, 148.
44. Throughout her six volumes of *Letters*, Anna Seward continued to praise John Milton's poetry as the most vivid and sublime, expressing strong feelings and sentiment. To her, he was the greatest epic poet in English history. Mary Robinson had published 'Sappho and Phaeon', a collection of Sonnets in 1796; see Paula Byrne, Perdita, the Life of Mary Robinson (London, 2004), p. 344.
45. Robinson, Daniel, *Reviving the Sonnet: Women Romantic Poets and the Sonnet Claim*.(European Romantic Review, 1995), vol. 6, pp. 98–127 and p. 103. See also Seward, Anna, *Original Sonnets on Various Subject And Odes paraphrased from Horace* in *Critical Review*, 1799, pp. 33–38.
46. Ashfield, Andrew (ed.), *Romantic Women Poets*. (Manchester,1995), pp. xi–xvi.
47. Ashfield (1995), pp. xi–xvi.
48. Brewer, John, *The Pleasures of the Imagination, English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London,1997), p. 573.
49. *ibid.* p. 574.
50. *ibid.* p. 583.
51. *ibid.* p. 612.
52. *ibid.* p. 612.
53. King-Hele, Desmond, *Erasmus Darwin, A Life of Unequalled Achievement* (London,1991), p. 36.
54. *ibid.* p. 238. Though she praised his poetic ability, Seward always disliked Darwin's sarcasm. The titles, 'Swan of Lichfield', 'Queen Muse of Britain' came from the poet, William Hayley, during a visit to Lichfield in 1781.
55. Kelly, Jennifer, (ed.), *Bluestocking Feminism* (London, 1999), Vol. 4, p. xi.
56. Canon Seward had an 'open door' policy and visitors of note would present their card at the Bishop's Palace. There is no doubt that the Lunar group would visit, eat, discuss matters pertaining to their interests in Seward's presence – most likely as the Darwin household was not conducive to such meetings – there were young children and Polly was ailing. Coffey, Donna, 'Protecting the Botanical Garden: Seward, Darwin and Coalbrookdale' *Women's Studies*, 31, p.147 also Darwin,Erasmus: '*The Temple of Nature*.(London, J. Johnson,1803) p.118.
57. Clarke, Norma, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London, 2004), p.1 4.
58. Coffey, Donna, 'Protecting the Botanical Garden: Seward, Darwin and Coalbrookdale' in *Women's Studies*, 31, pp. 141–161.
59. Seward, *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1810), vol. 2, p. 314 and King-Hele, Desmond, (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Erasmus Darwin* (Cambridge, 2007), nos. 88–20, pp. 326–7.
60. Watts, Ruth, *Women in Science, A Social and Cultural History* (London, Routledge, 2007), pp. 72–3.
61. Coffey, Donna 'Protecting the Botanic Garden: Seward, Darwin and Coalbrookdale (London, 2002), p. 142. Seward, *Poetical Works* (1810), vol. 2, pp. 314 – 319.
62. Coffey, *ibid.*

63. Clarke, Norma, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London, 2004), p. 24. Seward was twelve years old when the family moved into the Bishop's Palace, Lichfield.
64. *ibid.* p.24.
65. Clarke, Norma, 'Anna Seward: Swan, Duckling or Goose?' in Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan, *British Women's Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century: Authorship, Politics and History* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 34–5, 42.
66. In later life, Seward became very fat, a contributing factor to her poor general condition. See Ashmun (1968), p. 165.
67. Clarke, (2004), p. 51.
68. Clarke (2004), p. 20.
69. Ashmun (1968), pp. 139–143.
70. Bowerbank, Sylvia, *Defending Local Places*, in *Speaking for Nature, Women and Ecologies of Early Modern England* (Baltimore and London, 2004), p. 161.
71. Seward, 'Colebrooke Dale', in *Poetical Works* (1810), vol. 2, pp. 314–9. Also see 'To Colebrooke Dale', vol. 3, p.184.
72. Seward, 'The Lake, or, Modern Improvement in Landscape', in *Poetical Works* (1810), vol. 3, pp. 34–38.
73. Bowerbank (2004), pp. 178–179.
74. George, Sam, Not Strictly Proper for the Female Pen: Eighteenth Century Poetry and the Sexuality of Botany in *BCLA Comparative Critical Studies*, 2005, 2. 2, pp. 191–210. See Erasmus Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants*, (London, 1789).
75. Jennings, Judith, 'A Trio of Talented Women: Abolition, Gender and Political Participation 1780–91' in *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 26, No.1, April 2005, pp. 55–70.
76. Barnard, Teresa, *Anna Seward and the Battle for Authorship* in *Corvey CW3 Journal*, Sheffield Hallam University, 2006, p. 9. See also: Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin, Chiefly During His residence at Lichfield, with Anecdotes of His Friends and Criticism of His Writings*, (London, 1804) and Ashmun (1931), pp.235–38.
77. Barnard, (2006), p. 2
78. Anna Seward was the winner of the Myrtle Wreath at Lady Miller's Batheaston *Amusements* in 1780, with her poem *Elegy on Captain Cook* which was subsequently published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.
79. Barnard, Teresa, *Anna Seward: A Constructed Life, A Critical Biography* (Farnham and Burlington, 2007), p.2.
80. As Seward's executor, Scott did not comply with her instructions regarding publication of her works, reducing the thirteen Letter books to six and reducing her Poetic Works down to three volumes. See Anna Seward Will, LRO. D262 / 1 / 35, Appendix II.
81. Barnard does not include some of important aspects of Seward's life – her relationship with Erasmus Darwin, the extent of Seward's success at Lady Miller's Batheaston Amusements nor her long relationship with the Ladies of Llangollen, Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby.

CHAPTER 1

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LICHFIELD AND PROVINCIAL SOCIETY

Samuel Johnson referred to Lichfield as ‘a city of philosophers... We work with our heads and make the boobies of Birmingham work for us with their hands’ which was, to some degree true, for Lichfield had neither navigable river, fertile land, nor was it of any strategic importance.¹ It sat almost in the heart of England, at the hub of an important Midlands crossroads, which came from all four points of the compass. An important ecclesiastical centre and market town from medieval times, it grew and prospered, becoming an important post town and one of the principal leisure-based provincial towns of pre-industrial England, while still remaining at the margins of the surrounding industrial growth.² It can be argued that Lichfield did benefit from that industrialisation, but, situated twelve miles from Birmingham with the nearest coal mines at Rugeley, seven miles distant, it developed more as a transit centre, with a constantly moving population of travellers, resulting in a growing service industry of inns, hotels and carriage trade.³ Everitt refers to such towns as inland ‘warehouses’: exchanges or meeting places of factors and traders, which, in turn, attracted professionals such as doctors, lawyers and the gentry.⁴ Peter Borsay and Peter M. Jones show how such towns developed, in this period, as cultural centres. Jones notes how many managed to ‘shine in some particular speciality of their own, through leisure facilities, public amenities and architecture’, and ‘where

Dissent has no purchase whatsoever.⁵ Leonard Schwarz shows that even though its manufacturing was in decline and its population remained relatively small, Lichfield was able to remain an active economic centre through growth in agriculture, finishing trades and its continuing ability to attract visitors and the gentry.⁶ The purpose of this chapter, however, is to show the physical development, significance and importance of Lichfield as an eighteenth-century cultural centre, during the period when Anna Seward was a resident in the city.

By the sixteenth century, with its eminence as an ecclesiastical centre based on its cathedral and clergy, the city had overtaken Stafford as the main town of the county.⁷ Lichfield was divided into two very distinctive sections of society: the ecclesiastical Close, around the cathedral, and the town, separate, and housing the other inhabitants, the workers, shopkeepers and traders who created the wealth. The Civil War in 1650, had seen Lichfield besieged. The cathedral and town sustained much damage from cannon fire and wanton destruction. After the Civil War, though it still had a tiny population of around 3,000, the city had comparative wealth. Lichfield was a leisure town, with facilities designed to cater for the upper and middle classes. It was these which helped it to become, by the eighteenth century, with a growing population of about 3,700, a centre of culture, attracting the aristocracy and the gentry.⁸ It also had a good water supply (its mineral content making the town a spa centre for several years), which flowed through conduits to the wide, well-maintained roads and streets.⁹ As a cathedral town, to demonstrate its growing urban sophistication from just manufacturing to services and professions, it established, from the 1740s, a musical society, with public subscription concerts, in both the Vicar's Hall and the Cathedral itself. From 1746, there were Race Weeks, in March and September, with dinners and balls and a Society of Gardeners by 1769.¹⁰

Theatrical companies visited and performed in the Guildhall, and later, in the newly built playhouse in Bore Street, designed by James Miller.¹¹ It was considered a regional and local shopping centre; with printers, booksellers, silversmiths, a dentist, perfumier, toy maker, apothecaries, doctors and attorneys, though not according to Anna Seward who complained: 'Lichfield furnishes nothing but clumsy necessities... it is the worst market imaginable'.¹²

At the end of the eighteenth century, being an armed forces rallying town, and in particular, a recruiting centre for the Staffordshire regiments, Lichfield would also raise its own militia, The Lichfield Volunteer Force, a sort of Home Guard, to protect the town and its citizens. A subscription list raised enough to cover the costs of buying equipment and uniforms.¹³ With all this activity, it can be seen that in Lichfield, cultured people with surplus wealth, found an arena for personal display and entertainment. Following the Restoration, in May 1768, the Close saw the rebuilding, in brick with stone facings, in the north-east corner, the Bishop's Palace. With over thirty rooms, outbuildings and gardens, set in half an acre, at a cost of £3,808 17s. 6d, it took almost eighteen months to complete; the architect was Edward Pierce who had worked with Sir Christopher Wren in London.¹⁴ The Bishop, not caring for the house, moved to Eccleshall Castle, and the Palace was subsequently let to less exalted tenants, such as Canon Seward and his family, who took up occupation in 1754. Anna Seward continued a tenancy at the Palace following her father's death in 1790, and, apart from a four month absence in 1804, when she had to vacate the Palace while re-roofing was carried out, she remained there until her death in 1809. In the north-west corner of the Close, in two courtyards, the Vicar's Choral Hall and houses were built. Life here was rather collegiate and good behaviour was expected from the residents: no gambling in the Hall, no women, nor hunting dogs

allowed in the rooms.¹⁵ By 1740, a man was employed to clean the walks in the Close.¹⁶ A line of lime trees was planted along the Dean's Walk, pavements were repaired, there was a fashion for whitewashing the outside walls of the houses and the Close became the centre for polite society.¹⁷ Houses in Lichfield were now built in the neo-classical style; their elegance showing the burgeoning wealth of those who came to live there. Passing through the town in 1697, Celia Fiennes, the travel writer, thought the town had 'houses which are good,' and that 'its streets are very neat and handsome', but 'the city stood low and waterish...a great standing water just by the town which does often flow the grounds after rains'. Fiennes also mentions one of the medieval traditions which survived all the changes – the Bower Procession :

They have in this town a Custom at Whitsuntide ye Monday and Tuesday call'd ye Green Bower feast, by which they hold their Charter... then assemble at ye Market place and so go on in a solemn procession through the great streets to a hill beyond ye town where there is a large Bower made of greens in which they have their feast.¹⁸

It was a visible, theatrical symbol of the borough's status, with music, entertainers, costumes and props, the parade, with its ritual and ceremony being later described by Anna Seward in 1795 as 'our grotesque Whitsun Monday anniversary' including 'the noisy and gaudy morris dancing revel' and 'emblematic figures and garlands carried on poles... the vulgar jubilee of the town and its environs'.¹⁹

Daniel Defoe, visiting the city in 1720, declared it to be 'a fine, neat, well-built and indifferent large city. The Minster Pool parts Lichfield into two distinct parts... the Town and the Close', and described the town as more considerable

than the county town of Stafford. He observed that ‘it is a place of good conversation and good company, above all the towns in this county or the next, I mean Warwickshire or Derbyshire.’²⁰ There were structures in place for each parish to organise its own Poor Relief. In 1725, a house and manufactory, no longer used, on the south side of Sandford Street, in St. Mary’s Parish, was turned into a workhouse for the city. A master was appointed and the Conduit Lands Trust bought two stocking frames for use by the inmates. Rent was five shillings per annum. St. Chad’s and St. Michael’s parishes shared a workhouse in the 1740s, also producing linen and cotton for sale, but this organisation was later discontinued and all parishes were combined into one single poor law union.²¹ Two Almshouses, Dr. Milley’s Hospital, which housed fifteen poor women and St. John’s Hospital, run by Franciscan Friars, caring for old men, were charitable institutions.²² Lichfield was already a post town and had been so from 1576.²³ Howard Clayton notes that coaches from both The Swan and The George went from London to Chester and London to Liverpool, in each direction, daily. By the mid-eighteenth century, Lichfield stood as the hub of a Turnpike system of roads: the London to Chester Road, the Lichfield to Burton Road; the Lichfield to Birmingham Road and the Lichfield to Walsall Road (as far as Shenstone) also the Lichfield to Walsall Road (as far as Muckley Corner, Watling Street). All these roads were under the Lichfield Turnpike Trust. Toll gates were set up across the roads, money was collected, and the revenue used for maintenance. With postal, passenger and carrier services, coaches now ran from The Swan and George inns, the latter having stabling for about fifty-four horses, later to be joined by The Talbot, a former private house for gentlemen on horseback. These coaches went to London, Chester and Liverpool daily, and to Birmingham and Sheffield, on six days a week.²⁴ It was also known as a city of heavy drinkers. By 1732, there were 80

ale-houses, so together with the inns, they contributed greatly to the cultural life of the city, with their malt beer, dinners, meetings, conversation, gambling and entertainment.²⁵

The cultural life of the city, in Anna Seward's time, was already distinguished by two great physicians. Early in the eighteenth century, Sir John Floyer, who had been the King's physician, set up in practice. He firmly believed in the curative power of mineral spring water and took out a lease on a well at nearby Abnalls. Floyer built a cold bath near its source in 1701, which, for a time, made Lichfield a significant spa town.²⁶ Dr. Erasmus Darwin, who set up practice in 1756, and who would become Lichfield's greatest physician, bought the land on which this bath stood in 1776. Here, he created the botanic garden, 200-yards long, with streams and pools.²⁷ He also founded a Botanical Society in the town, consisting of just three members, himself, Brooke Boothby and William Jackson.²⁸

Lichfield was also the birthplace of David Garrick and Samuel Johnson, both of whom moved to London to embark upon their careers.²⁹ The town attracted into its midst other notable artisans: painters, such as Tilly Kettle, John Glover and Joseph Wright of Derby; musicians, such as the celebrated violinist, Wilhelm Cramer, who played for Anna Seward and her dinner party guests on four consecutive evenings.³⁰ Professional theatre companies had played in Lichfield from the late 1760s, using a rather makeshift stage and scenery at the Guildhall. George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* with William Siddons in the leading role, was staged in 1770. Realising that Lichfield needed a proper theatre, a group of its residents, including Seward, started to raise money. Through lobbying and subscriptions, they were instrumental in obtaining one designed by James Miller, a London architect, and built on the site of the White Hart Inn in Bore Street. The new theatre opened in 1790, with leading actors such as

Sarah Siddons, Edmund Kean and Charles Dibdin treading the boards.³² Marie Tussaud also gave an exhibition of her waxworks in the theatre, all helping to affirm Lichfield's credentials as a cultured place.³³

Much of the city's rise to prominence was due to its educational facilities instituted in 1577, at the Grammar School, situated in St. John's Hospital, St. John's Street. The seventeenth century saw such pupils as Elias Ashmole and Gregory King and its two great headmasters, Robert Shaw (1680–1704) and the Reverend Dr. John Hunter (1704–41), Anna Seward's grandfather. One of his pupils, Samuel Johnson, said of him: 'he used to beat us unmercifully; and he did not distinguish between ignorance and negligence'.³⁴ It was likely that this rigorous discipline of beating knowledge into pupils, was the reason that the school became so popular, accommodating 100 boarders in addition to day scholars. Johnson's father, Michael, sold books in Breadmarket Street, and by 1760, the Circulating Library, run by Miss Henrietta Shaw, increased the availability of novels. There were also newspapers, such as *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, which brought both national and local news. A Permanent Library in the Close held more scholarly books. Lichfield people now had money to spend. In 1780, though, Seward was to complain that 'a visitor would find the food at her table, plain'.³⁵ Seward was now receiving many renowned visitors: William Hayley and Robert Southey, poets; Walter Scott, poet and novelist; Humphrey Repton, landscape artist; James Boswell, Dr. Johnson's diarist and John Howard, the prison reformer. She also knew Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Thomas Day who came to live in Lichfield.³⁶

Clubs and societies were founded to cater for the rapidly increasing interest in music. The Cecilian Club, promoting public concerts and set up in the Vicar's Hall, came into being in 1739, but finished some years later due to drunkenness. The

Cecilian Society met in the Vicar's Hall and, from 1745, gave a very popular yearly concert on St. Cecilia's Day, 22nd November, accompanied by a dinner at the King's Head, Bird Street.³⁷ Other concerts were held at the Guildhall but returned to the newly-decorated Vicars Hall after 1746. In 1767, members could buy a subscription ticket, at a cost of five shillings, for five concerts in February and March. Non-subscribers paid two shillings per concert. There were often disagreements in the Cecilian Society between performing and non-performing members as meetings turned more to food and drink, but these were settled in 1790. Performers made decisions on musical matters, the scores and instruments, the choice of music to be played and restrictions placed on the number of flutes, horns and oboes. Admittance was by ticket only. Non-performers were allowed a maximum number of just sixty, and they could not invite outsiders.³⁸ The club later transferred from the King's Head to the Swan.³⁹

About the middle of the eighteenth century, Richard Greene, came from Shrewsbury to set himself up as a Surgeon-Apothecary in Market Street, bringing with him his collection of natural and historical artefacts, known locally as 'oddities'. Listed in Greene's 1777 catalogue, this collection included 'Animals (preserved) viz., birds, etc; shells, corals, etc., stones, fossils, etc., woods, seeds and fruits; Roman and other coins; dresses and ornaments of the natives of Otaheite; remains of Antiquity, urns, etc., a Roman breviary, a musical altar clock, etc'. Anna Seward donated a 'feathered necklace worn by the females of the Sandwich Islands' and her father gave an 'American Indian pipe' to the collection. This 'museum' became Lichfield's principal attraction, to which visitors and local inhabitants flocked. After Dr. Greene's death, the museum passed into the hands of his son-in-law, Dr Wright, who exhibited the contents in a house, No.19 in the Close, but following Wright's death, the contents

were sold. Greene also contributed articles on Lichfield history and antiquities to the *Gentleman's Magazine*.⁴⁰

Lichfield was relatively sedate when James Boswell visited in 1776. He noted that 'very little business seemed to be going forward... on the whole the busy hand of industry seemed to be quite slackened'.⁴¹ In 1758, James Brindley was invited to survey a potential route from the Minster Pool to the River Trent in Donnington in order to reduce the cost of goods from the Midlands to the Trent and Humber. Brindley estimated the cost of this twenty-three-mile project, including locks, at £16,490. Darwin and the other Turnpike Trust members were enthusiastic, but it came to nothing. Lichfield would remain land-locked, but the city's wealthy inhabitants did invest £56,000 in the Trent & Mersey canal, hoping, perhaps, that in time the promise, in 1767, of a branch line to Lichfield would materialise. That never happened and the nearest canal remained twenty miles from the city. The Wyrley and Essington Canal, built at a cost of about £90,000, with its route lying just south of the city centre, was opened in 1797, bringing cheap coal to the six wharves and some additional industry. A limeworks and boneworks arrived, together with an increase in population, yet Lichfield's importance as a city did not grow.⁴²

Cultural services were also limited. There was a bookseller, Michael Johnson; there were several hairdressers 'running about Lichfield' as the city grew 'more fine and fashionable every day', together with confectioners, milliners, musical instrument makers, tea dealers and watch makers.⁴³ 1779 saw about eighty French officers, now prisoners of war, on parole and living in Lichfield. Seward referred to their 'graceful manners and enlightened minds' and noted that one prisoner gave French lessons while another taught the Darwin and Wedgwood children in Darwin's house in Beacon Street.⁴⁴ Some prisoners bought houses and married local women. Although

the city was still growing and prospering, Anna Seward thought it plain and uninventive. As a rallying point for armed forces, Lichfield remembered its debt to those men who had ridden or marched to or from the town, under orders and colours, throughout the years. 1803 saw the establishment of the Loyal Association of Truly Independent Volunteers, a 100-man strong Corps of Yeomanry (a sort of eighteenth-century Home Guard). A subscription list, 'for the purpose of Cloathing (sic) and Arming', to help buy equipment and uniforms, brought a positive response from the city. Seward personally contributed thirty-two guineas towards the total amount of £2193.11s, 6d.⁴⁵ She also invested £2390 in the Lichfield Turnpike Trust, becoming a Mortgagee. She bought shares in canals and paid, towards the end of her life, £200 to the town's Improvement Commissioners, which brought her an income of £24 per year.⁴⁶

From its earliest beginnings on marshy ground, in the Iron-Age Celtic period of history, Lichfield, was at the hub of strategic crossroads, in the centre of the Midlands. By its ability to anticipate and capitalize on change throughout the centuries, it came a long way from the dark woods, raiders and invasions and was able to grow steadily, changing its shape and appearance, absorbing new immigrants, who brought their abilities and varied skills to the town. Even though it was never to be fully industrialised, Lichfield became, through its cathedral and clergy, a prominent ecclesiastical centre, a magnet for scholars, thinkers, writers, artists and musicians. Alongside them, though not always in harmony, stood the armed forces, as Lichfield became the principal recruiting centre for the Staffordshire Militia, with many of the soldiers being billeted in the town and then housed in barracks. Its basic medieval street grid below the Minster Pool, remained in place as did the street names, and there are those which still end in 'field': Townfield and Gaiadays, which remind us

that Lichfield was once an arable and rural area. Transport and travel brought the gentry and services to the town, for it was an attractive and accessible place in which to live, with good local government, good housing for the élite and a good water supply. It had education for the gentry, and it would become renowned for its service sector even though it always remained outside the industrialisation that affected nearby towns and districts. Being centrally situated between the estuaries of the rivers Mersey, Severn, Humber and Thames and also with its closeness to the Trent, there is no doubt that it would have benefited greatly from a canal system. Lichfield was different from some of the nearby towns. Compared with Stafford, it was metropolitan, and compared with Birmingham, it was conservative, calm and meditative. Producing its own luminaries, Johnson, Garrick, Addison, Darwin and Seward, Lichfield, for its size, was quite remarkable, considering itself to be a rival to Bath as a literary and artistic centre.⁴⁷ The ale-houses, clubs, societies, race-meetings, theatricals, music and libraries provided such a varied range of activities and the high quality of functions it offered, made Lichfield a vibrant meeting place. There was contact with other towns and cities; it offered access to people who liked to think, debate, reason and understand, to enjoy music, encouraging the development of an enlightened and informed city. Though a provincial habitation, Lichfield was a sufficiently lively cultural centre to provide a setting in which Anna Seward could develop and flourish.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Boswell, James, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (London, 1986), p. 203.
2. Greenslade, W. M., *Victoria County Histories, Stafford*, Vol. 14, p. 29.
3. Upton, C., *A History of Lichfield* (Chichester, 2001), pp. 91–93.
4. Everitt, A., ‘Country, County and Town: Patterns of Regional Evolution in England’ in Borsay, Peter, *The Eighteenth Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1688–1820* (London, 1990), pp. 83–115.
5. Borsay (1990). See also: Jones, Peter M., *Industrial Enlightenment: Science, Technology and Culture in Birmingham and the West Midlands 1760 – 1820* (Manchester, 2008), pp. 32–33 and 161–175.
6. Schwarz, Leonard in J. Stobart & N. Raven, (eds) *Towns, Regions and Industries: Urban and Industrial Change in the Midlands c.1700 –1840* (Manchester, 2005), Ch. 11.
7. Adey, K. R., ‘Seventeenth-century Stafford: a county town in decline’ in *Midland History*, vol. 2, No. 3, 1974, pp. 152–6.
8. Upton (2001), p. 51.
9. *ibid.* pp. 23–25. See also P. Laithwaite, *Conduit Lands Trust*, pp.77–8 and LJRO: D77/16.1, D.126 / acct bk.
10. Upton (2001), pp. 113 and 115.
11. Clayton, Howard, *Coaching City* (Lichfield, 1970), pp. 45–6.
12. Wickham, Hill, (ed.), *Journals & Correspondence of Thomas Sedgewick Whalley* (London, 1863), vol. 2, pp. 25, 297.
13. Clayton, (1970), Appendix ‘B’, pp. 94–95. See also Upton, (2001), pp. 144–5.
14. Tringham, Nigel A., ‘Bishop’s Palace, Lichfield Cathedral Close. Its Construction 1686–7’ in *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archeological and Historical Society*, 27, pp. 57–63.
15. Harwood, Thomas, (ed.), *Antiquities of Lichfield* (Gloucester, 1806), pp. 291–2; see also Stebbing Shaw, *Antiquities of Staffordshire* (1798, 1801) reprinted (Wakefield, 1976), vol. 1, p. 308.
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18. Morris, C., (ed.), *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes, c.1682–1712* (London, 1984), p. 112.
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22. Clayton, Howard, *Coaching City* (Lichfield, 1970), pp. 9.66. Also Upton, Chris, *A History of Lichfield* (Chichester, Phillimore, 2001), p. 23.
23. Upton (2001), p. 91. See also PRO, State papers 12 / 96 p. 192.
24. Clayton (1970), p. 4
25. Upton (2001), p. 94.

26. VCH, *Staffordshire*, Vol. 14: Lichfield, p. 23; See also, Upton (2001), p. 76; King-Hele, Desmond, *Erasmus Darwin: A Life of Unequalled Achievement* (London, 1999), pp. 134–5; Floyer, John, *An Essay to Prove Cold Bathing both Safe and Useful* (London, 1702).
27. Seward, Anna, *Verses Written in Dr. Darwin's Botanic Garden 1778* in *Poetic Works* (Edinburgh, 1810), 3 vols, vol. 2, pp. 1–4.
28. Ashmun, Margaret, *The Singing Swan* (New York, 1968), p. 179; also Clayton (1970), p. 37.
29. David Garrick (1717–79), born Hertford; educated Lichfield, actor, manager, *impresario* in London theatre; Samuel Johnson (1709–84), born Lichfield, poet, essayist, lexicographer and critic; Tilly Kettle (1735–86), born London, English painter, portraits of Anna and Sarah Seward, 1762; John Glover (1767–1849), watercolourist and drawing master, Lichfield, 1799, later emigrated to Tasmania; Joseph Wright (1734–97), Derby portrait and landscape painter and admired by the Lunar group. Refused R.A. election, 1784; Wilhelm Cramer (1745–99), London violinist. See: Anna Seward: *Letters* (Edinburgh, 1811), 6 vols, vol. 4, pp. 288–9.
30. Matthew Boulton (1728–1809), manufacturer, Dr. William Small (1734–1775), physician and mathematician, Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744–1817), wealthy dilettante inventor.
32. Sarah Siddons (1755–1831), Edmund Kean (1787–1833) and Charles Dibdin (1745–1814) all performed at the Bore Street Theatre in 1789 and 1790. See also Upton (2001), p. 115.
33. Clayton (1970), p. 50
34. Upton (2001), pp. 77–78. See also Boswell, James, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (London, 1986), pp. 40–41.
35. *ibid.* p.97. See also Wickham, Hill (ed.), *Journals and Correspondence of Thomas Sedgewick Whalley*, 2 vols, vol. 2, p. 279
36. William Hayley (1745–1820), poet and writer, biographer of Milton, Romney and Cowper and a Seward correspondent; Thomas Whalley (1746–1828), poet, Seward's friend and correspondent, high-minded, literary man; Humphrey Repton (1752–1818), born Norfolk, landscape designer, successor to Lancelot 'Capability' Brown; James Boswell (1740–1795), Scottish lawyer, man of letters and biographer of Samuel Johnson; Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744–1817), Irish inventor and educationalist, friend of Thomas Day (1748–89), barrister, writer and disciple of Rousseau. They both lived at Stowe House. John Howard (1726–1790), born London, English prison reformer.
37. VCH *Staffordshire* (Oxford, 1990), vol. 4. See also Aris's *Birmingham Gazette*, 14th December 1751 and 13th January 1766.
38. Upton (2001), p. 93. See also Aris's *Birmingham Gazette*, 26th August 1754, 13th January 1766. See also Anna Seward, *Letters* (Edinburgh, 1811), 6 vols, vol. 1, pp. 37–8,
39. Elrington (ed.) (1990), p. 164. See also *Printed Account and Agreement of New Rules*, 17th May 1790. (Copy held in LRO. D. 127).
40. Greene, Richard (1716–1793), apothecary-surgeon. Opened his museum in 1740. See *Transactions, South Staffordshire Archeological and Historical Society*, xviii, p.79; also Stebbing Shaw, *Antiquities of Staffordshire* (1798) p. 331.
41. Boswell, James, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, (London, 1979), p. 203.

42. Upton (2001), pp. 134–7, 141–2. (James Brindley’s Prospectuses for the canal, are now held in a) The William Salt Library, Stafford and b) The Stringer Collection, The Bodleian Library, Oxford).
43. *ibid.* p. 97.
44. Seward, Anna, *Letters of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, 1811), vol. 4, p. 362 and Vol. 5, pp. 18–19.
45. Clayton (1970), Appendix B, pp. 94–5; Upton (2001), pp. 144 –145; see also: VCH, *Staffordshire*, 1950, pp. 1, 188; PRO, State Papers, *Issues of the Exchequer* (Rec. Com.) 359, pp. 12 / 96, and 192.
46. LRO D.262 / 1 / 35. Lichfield Record Office, Anna Seward, Last Will and Testament. 1808–9.
47. Boswell, *Johnson*, pp. 284, 346.

CHAPTER 2

ANNA SEWARD: EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION, 1742–1756

The aim of this chapter is to show the family life, education and close relationship between Anna Seward and her father, the Reverend Thomas Seward. It will consider how Seward undertook the education of his daughter, albeit in a fairly unsystematic fashion, drawing upon his own considerable scholarship and the material resources of both his own library at Eyam Rectory and the library at the Bishop's Palace, Lichfield. The chapter will also suggest that Seward imbued in his daughter a life-long love of the wilderness and of nature by taking her to the wilds of the White Peak district, the area in which they first lived. All this, though, was much against her mother's wishes, as she did not want a bookish daughter whose academic and literary interests might deter a prospective marriage partner. Mrs. Seward's protestations fell on deaf ears, resulting in a rather difficult relationship with her strong-minded, eldest daughter. The chapter also considers how the physician, Erasmus Darwin became her mentor, encouraged her writing, and gave her sufficient confidence to publish her work.

Earlier biographers of Seward either fleetingly mention her birth and early life in Eyam or ignore them altogether. Lucas, notes her birth there in 1742, and that her father 'removed to Lichfield about 1750', Margaret Ashmun records Seward's birth in December 1742, and that she moved to Lichfield and the Bishop's Palace, aged thirteen. Addleshaw states that Seward 'lived all her life in the Bishop's Palace, in the cathedral Close'.¹ Hesketh Pearson gives the correct details of her birth in Eyam, the

move to Lichfield ‘when she was seven’ and ‘five years later they moved into the Bishop’s Palace in the Cathedral Close’; and Teresa Barnard gives Seward’s birth date and mentions her ‘growing up, first in Eyam and then in Lichfield’.² My account will provide more detail of Seward’s early years in Eyam, and her childhood in Lichfield, and how these events and experiences influenced her adult life and outlook.

Seward was not a native of Lichfield. She was born in the Rectory of St. Lawrence’s Church in the Plague village of Eyam, in the high hills of the White Peak district of Derbyshire on the 1st December 1742, where her father had recently been made minister. On the 28th December, she was christened Anne and would change this to Anna later; but within the family she was always known as Nancy.³ Her father, born in 1708, was the youngest of seven sons of John and Mary Seward of Badsey, near Evesham in Worcestershire. The Seward family had come the twenty miles north to Badsey, from Tardebigge near Bromsgrove, when John was appointed steward to Viscount Windsor, whose estates in South Wales comprised Cardiff Castle and all the Pembroke manors in Glamorgan. The Viscount was the eldest son of the Earl of Plymouth, whose seat was Hewell Grange in Tardebigge. As befitting their new status, Seward House, Badsey, was converted from a farmhouse to a gentleman’s residence with a classical frontage.⁴

Thomas was admitted as a foundation scholar of Westminster School in February 1719. He was elected by the school to scholarships at Christ Church, Oxford and Trinity College, Cambridge in 1727, but, being rejected by both institutions, he became a pensioner at St. John’s College, Cambridge, graduating as Bachelor of Arts in 1731. Having been ordained at Rochester in 1732, he received his Master’s degree in 1734. A year later, Lord Windsor presented Thomas with the rectory of Llanmaes, Glamorganshire, a quiet, rural area of South Wales, but such an exile for a young man

used to polite society was more than he could endure. Leaving a curate in charge of the parish, Thomas sought and was appointed tutor to Lord Charles Fitzroy, second son of the Duke of Grafton. Having ingratiated himself with the family, he was asked to accompany the young aristocrat on a Grand Tour. In Genoa, in the Spring of 1739, his young charge died of a fever. The Duke, grateful for the care that his son's tutor had shown, promised him some preferment.⁵ After a short, uneventful career as a naval chaplain, during which he never set foot on a ship, on the 28th April 1740, Thomas Seward was presented, by Lord and Lady Burlington, with the rectory of Eyam, Derbyshire, and an income of £200 a year.⁶

Now thirty-two, Thomas decided on marriage, asking for the hand of the twenty-eight-year-old daughter of the Reverend Dr. John Hunter, Headmaster of the Free Grammar School, Lichfield, Staffordshire. There were two other suitors for Elizabeth, both clergymen: Dr. Green and Dr. Newton, (subsequently Bishops of Lincoln and Bristol respectively), but Thomas was successful and the couple were married by special licence, costing £100, on the 27th October 1741 at Newton in the Thistle (Newton Regis), where Elizabeth had spent a lot of her time with her uncle. The amount of the dowry brought to the marriage is not known.⁷

The lives of middle-class women, at this time, divided into four stages: maid, wife, mother, and often widow. Anatomy too determined destiny - men were supposedly designed to be dominant, excelling in reason, business and action. The received opinion was that women should be dependent on men, as daughters and as wives and chastity and reputation were considered crucial. Conduct books recommending such virtues were regularly published, exhorting modesty and grace if women wished to be thought of with esteem. One author bluntly observes: 'there is no middle Way to be followed; the Management of a Young Lady's Person is not to

be overlooked, but the Erudition of her mind is much more to be regarded'.⁸ The distinguished English jurist, William Blackstone, provided an overview of the legal status of married women: 'by marriage the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended... she cannot let, set, sell, give away, or alienate any thing without her husband's consent'. So, a woman was stripped of her independence and separate identity and by this definition, was not a citizen. This was the doctrine of *couverture*—married women were *femmes covert*, hidden women. According to the rules of *couverture*, a woman, on marriage, was subsumed into her husband and became a 'non-person'. Any money or property that she owned was forfeited and now belonged to her husband.⁹ Rousseau claimed that woman was born to obey. As one of the 'weaker sex', she was more dependent on men than they were on her. Once married, a woman had four cardinal functions: to support and to obey her husband; to run his household and to bear him as many children as possible. She should not seek any public recognition, 'even if she possesses genuine talents...her dignity depends on remaining unknown, her glory lies in her husband's esteem'.¹⁰ She could expect to give birth to ten or twelve children before she reached forty, possibly then dying as a result of her continuous pregnant state, breast feeding and the certain disablement resulting from these births.¹¹ Though they were known about and could be bought, prophylactics were used to prevent the contraction of disease from prostitutes, rather than as a birth control for married women. They were advised 'not to use this practise lest it pervert the true meaning of marriage'.¹² A wife's duty did not stop there. She was also expected to run the household, providing food, drink and comforts, commanding servants, supervising household accounts, and arranging entertainment. She was also expected to be ladylike and graceful. Suitable accomplishment included the arts of dressing, polite conversation, singing or playing a musical instrument, the

ability to draw and to cultivate tasteful decoration and furnishings, with sewing, embroidery and lacemaking.¹³ Anna Seward's mother, Elizabeth, produced seven children over ten years, five of whom died either at birth, within days or a few months, yet little is known of her, except that she was an enthusiastic card-player.¹⁴ These events in her life could well have added to her demise, and there is only one letter to her daughter, Anna, and only one aspect of her life, her date of death, recorded by her daughter. No one saw fit to chronicle her life, within her own marriage, her home, or place within the cathedral clergy.¹⁵

The Rector was thought to be pompous, always ready to talk about himself and his health, often visiting Buxton to take the waters. Johnson was to say of him later: 'Sir, his ambition is to be a fine talker, so he goes to Buxton and such places, where he may find companions to listen to him. And, Sir, he is a valetudinarian, one of those who are always mending themselves'.¹⁶

A second daughter, Sarah, was born to the Swards on the 25th April 1744, to be followed by a son on the 8th April 1745. This child was not destined to live. He was privately baptised, John, on the 24th April, dying two days later and was buried on the 28th April in St. Peter's Church, Derby. Further children followed: Jane was born on 30th June 1748, was baptised on the 25th July and died 14th February 1749. Mrs. Seward, gave birth again, to Elizabeth on the 18th June, 1749, another child who would quickly depart this life. Privately baptised on the 22nd June, she died two days later.¹⁷ The seven-year-old Anna was already learning about the frequency and perils of childbirth, the deep sadness of loss and the depressive effect it had particularly on her mother, and the disruption it caused within the household. Too young and unsure of what she could do to help her mother, she clung to her sister, Sarah, and naturally gravitated to her father, who, recognising the lively intelligence that his older

daughter possessed. Having had four of his own poems published anonymously in 1748, he started to read to her from Milton and Shakespeare.¹⁸ With her retentive memory, the young Seward was soon able to recite Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, not perhaps with complete understanding, but with suitable cadence and rhythm.¹⁹ It was also, from walks with her father over the surrounding hills, in all weathers, that she came to love wild nature. The bleak, stony, heather-covered high ground, with its limestone outcrops and the wide vistas in view, would remain with her, an image she would often seek throughout her life.²⁰

The living at St. Lawrence's church, at that time, was reasonable. Eyam Edge, the glebe land on which it stood, was a ridge rich in good quality lead ore. It was a recognised practice that any man could search for veins of ore wherever he chose, except in church, house or garden, and, regardless of any damage he might do to the ground or to crops, only paying for the basis of such destruction should he find sufficient ore, paying a 'dish' to the lessee. If lead *was* found, the official Barmaster had to be informed and, provided the vein was worked properly, the finder was awarded a measure of ground, a *meer*, and nothing could be done to stop it.²¹ According to the Terrier, there were at least three very deep mines on glebe land at that time: Ladywash – one of the deepest with best quality lead and a good ore yield. The agreed amount paid to the minister was one penny for every dish of about sixty-five pounds weight of lead extracted, plus 2¼d. for the 'hillock stuff' or part-usable waste, which weighed about 100 pounds. Such was the value of the ore that, at the time of greatest prosperity, it brought the Reverend Seward's stipend up to £1000 per year. There could have been, and probably were, other smaller mines on the glebe land, who would also pay tithes to the Rector. Tithe from the mines was paid to the church on the traditionally-held belief that lead was 'alive', in the sense that it 'grew'

again in old workings. Men only worked below ground, woman up above, washing the ore.²² The glebe lands covered 26¼ acres on which there were many houses, farmsteads and pasture. The Parsonage House itself was quite a substantial dwelling of six bays, with a ¼ acre each of garden and fold, a great barn, a cow house, a stable and a cottage in ½ an acre of land. In August, every year, the churchwardens had to draw up a perfect list, a Terrier, of all the holdings belonging to the Rectory of Eyam, in which were listed all those who lived on that land and the tithes due to the rector, not only from the dwellings, but also from the hay gathered in and the animals kept. He also received extra money in dues at Easter from his parishioners and Surplice fees from duties in the church. Once agreed by the Rector, this list would go to the Bishop. This continued throughout the Reverend Seward's life and later, due to his infirmity, would be dealt with by both his curate, Peter Cunningham(e) and his daughter, Anna Seward.²³ Another sign of preferment came on the 2nd April 1747, when Thomas Seward was given the livings of Kingsley, Staffordshire, again from Lord and Lady Burlington, along with the prebends of Canterbury and York, from which he spent a great deal of time and money enlarging the Eyam Rectory into a very elegant, but somewhat overbearing, thirteen-bedroomed Georgian mansion wherein he could entertain his friends.²⁴

The Reverend Seward and his family were comfortable. Thomas Seward's ministry left little mark on the village of Eyam as most of the work was overseen by Cunningham(e).²⁵ In 1749, Thomas Seward was appointed a Canon Residentiary of Lichfield Cathedral, Staffordshire. Mrs. Seward was not happy, on their arrival, to discover that they would not be housed in the Close around the cathedral, as befitting her husband's station, but in a dwelling house, 15 Saddler Street, where there was much less space for them and their servants.²⁶

Thomas Seward, having had four of his poems published anonymously, was now a minor poet and would achieve further success by editing the ten volume *Works of Beaumont and Fletcher* (1750).²⁷ By this time, Anna Seward, herself, had rendered several psalms into verse. These so pleased her father, he asked her to produce some verses on the first fine day of a stormy Spring and in just a few hours she had produced twenty-five lines, for example:

Fairest quarter of the year
Dost thou then at last appear
Clad in this thy golden dress
Bright presage of Happiness?

Her efforts earned her half a crown!²⁸

Two further Seward children were born in Saddler Street. Elizabeth Seward, now thirty-eight, gave birth to a son on the 29th April 1751 and a daughter on the 20th October 1753. Both were stillborn. No christening or burial details have been uncovered.²⁹ The loss of these children no doubt caused great sadness within the family. Seward, now eleven, would assume some of the household tasks, helping her mother, who, having had seven children in ten years, needed help to recover. Caring for her father and sister, there would have been little time for writing. But she would have had the chance to read a copy of her father's verse epistle, *The Female Right to Literature, in a Letter to a Young Lady, from Florence*, which he had written during his travels on the Continent many years before, but which was not published until 1748.³⁰

In 1754, the Reverend Gilbert Walmesley vacated the Bishop's Palace, which stood in the north-east corner of the Close, retiring and moving elsewhere. Nigel Tringham has investigated the history of the residence. The title 'Palace' was very

apt: it had been built over two years from 1686 at a cost of £3,808 17s.10d. and it had a frontage of eighty-eight feet, a depth of fifty-five feet, up to thirty rooms and about half an acre of garden. The architect was Edward Pierce, who had worked with Sir Christopher Wren on various church reconstructions following the Great Fire of London, but, after the building was completed, the Bishop, not caring for it, moved to his other residence in Eccleshall, and the building was let to less exalted tenants such as the Swards and it was here, that Sward lived for the next fifty-five years. Now in their new home, and much to the delight of Mrs. Sward, there was a stream of visitors – the Vyses, Addenbrookes, Smallbrookes, Woodhouses and the Garrick ladies, all residents of the Close; and there was an open door policy at the Palace; anyone of note could and did present their card to Canon Sward on arrival in Lichfield.³¹ Anna, had the opportunity to discover the beauties of the great, ruddy cathedral and its large library, to which she now had access. She was enamoured of the building seeing

One free and perfect whole it meets the sight
Adorn'd, yet simple, through majestic light;
While, as around that waving basis drawn,
Shines the green surface of the level lawn.³²

She and Sarah were given their own apartments, three rooms: drawing room, bedroom and closet, which they named ‘the blue region’, where they slept together, read, wrote and played, often being left to their own devices, while below, their parents held card, tea and dinner parties, with concerts and conversation.³³ The Canon’s good fortune continued with further preferment. He obtained the prebend of Bubbenhall and was also collated to the prebend of Pipa Parva on the 30th April 1755. He was installed prebend of Lyme and Halstock in the church of Salisbury on the 5th

June in the same year. Canon Seward was granted and held all these livings together with those of Salisbury and Canterbury until his death in 1790.³⁴ Their position in Lichfield society firmly established, the Seward daughters were now prepared for marriage. As the elder daughter, Anna Seward would be an heiress of a considerable fortune, destined to take her place in society. To that end, her informal education continued, with her father. His words:

Proceed, ATHENIA, let thy growing mind
Take ev'ry knowledge in of ev'ry kind;
Still on perfection fix thy steady eye
Be ever rising

could have been especially written for her. He encouraged her to read Pope, Dryden Young and Prior, such periodicals as *The Rambler*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, *The Spectator* and to compose verse. Anna listened carefully, determined to prove herself worthy of her father, 'and with assiduous toil, Reap the rich fruits of learning's fertile soil'.³⁴ Her mother, greatly concerned about this bookish daughter, having no taste herself for such pursuits, but with future marriage in mind, saw it would be necessary for the sisters to be launched into society. It was decided that the older sister would learn to play a musical instrument, the harpsichord, and the Canon was fortunate to find a suitable teacher close at hand. John Saville, aged twenty, from Ely, Cambridgeshire, together with his new wife, Mary, had just arrived in Lichfield.³⁵

It was also about this time in 1755, that a child of five arrived on the Seward's doorstep. Major Edward Sneyd of Bishton, near Lichfield, a commissioned, serving officer in the Royal Horse Guards, had recently lost his wife and needing foster places for his six daughters, he asked the Canon and his wife if they would agree to take the youngest, Honora, raising her as one of their own until he could return. Without

question, the child was taken in and, on seeing her, Anna was immediately entranced, taking it upon herself to care for and educate her. She continued to do so until Honora's marriage to Richard Lovell Edgeworth in 1773.³⁷

In the late 1750s, three sisters occupied the 'blue region' on the first floor of the Palace. Anna and Sarah, were allowed into society, visiting relatives and family friends, attending tea parties, soirées, dances and visits to Eyam, remaining there while their father went to Buxton 'for his health'.³⁸ Anna was also allowed to join in intellectual gatherings held by her parents, partly to show off her talents as a conversationalist and musician and, of course, her availability as a suitable marriage partner. All the time, her surreptitious writing continued, stored away in her bureau and locked trunk. Both sisters would have their portraits painted by Tilly Kettle.³⁹

Lichfield would welcome another new arrival in November 1756 when Erasmus Darwin, physician, came from Nottingham with a letter of introduction to Canon Seward from John Michell, a scientific friend from Cambridge. Darwin hoped he would be able to set up in practice in the city, and, at first lodged 'at Mr. Bernard's in the Close'. He was greatly pleased when the Swards agreed that he should be their family physician as this, in turn, brought other patients, a lucrative practice and, shortly afterwards, another educational opportunity for Anna Seward.⁴⁰ Showing him some of her verses, Darwin recognised her literary potential and he continued to call at the Palace, suggesting, correcting, encouraging and praising. Seward's work started to show a degree of maturity that caused Darwin to wonder if she was actually writing the poems herself, so, on one occasion when her father was absent in Derbyshire, he set her a test. Writing the first stanzas of a poem, he asked Seward to complete it. He was so surprised at the maturity of the finished piece, he could not praise her enough.⁴¹ On the Canon's return, Darwin showed him his daughter's poem, saying

that it was far superior to anything that the Canon could produce, which angered the cleric to such a degree, that, not wishing to be eclipsed by his daughter, he refused to look at the work and sent for her. Seward was told to put away all ideas she held about writing or literary pretensions, to attend her mother and learn domestic arts. Seward did as she was told, reluctantly learning from her mother knitting, knotting, embroidery, and gauze lacemaking which became a lifelong skill. Seward became so proficient with her needles that her work was sold at Lichfield charity bazaars.⁴² She also produced, and was noted for her own imitation lace, by embroidering on fine cotton gauze.⁴³ She might have held a grudge against her father, but she never stopped praising him and his work. And she was always grateful to Darwin, (as revealed in Chapter 4), for his early encouragement and affection. That affection suffered somewhat when, on the 30th December 1757, Darwin married Seward's seventeen-year-old friend, Mary Howard, daughter of John Howard, a lawyer, who lived in the Close, and went to live, some months later, in a large house in Beacon Street. Nevertheless, Seward continued to visit them, her friendship with Mary becoming closer over time. Mary valued her company while Darwin was away visiting his far-flung patients, and also as a helpmate for five children born in quick succession. The friendship continued until Mary's death in 1770.⁴⁴ It was a debt that Seward felt she owed to Darwin for his mentorship until his departure for Derby following his second marriage, to Elizabeth Pole in 1781.⁴⁵

Seward herself, was not without suitors. John Adey of Norfolk admired her and Cornet Vyse of the Close, courted her, but, as her father declared there was no dowry, she was not considered suitable as a wife.⁴⁶ In Lichfield, she met and fell in love with a Captain Temple, whom she agreed to marry, but who was found to be

somewhat impoverished and was dismissed by her father when the matter became known.⁴⁷ In Eyam, Major John Wright, heir to Eyam Hall and a small fortune, also wished to marry her and even paid her parents a visit on the matter, but her father declined the offer.⁴⁸ As an unmarried woman, and considered to be her father's property, she was his to dispose of at will. An aspiring father arranged his daughter's marriage, with first considerations being security, family, title and land. Marriage was all to do with family policy, lineage, honour and fortune. Samuel Johnson considered this:

a crime...which parents frequently commit, that, in their estimation, riches and happiness are equivalent terms... with no other wish than that of adding acre to acre, filling one bag after another.⁴⁹

Seward's eighteen-year-old, delicate sister, Sarah, was betrothed to Samuel Johnson's forty-year-old stepson, Joseph Porter, a merchant in Leghorn, Italy but she subsequently died 'from a putrid fever' on what was to be her wedding day.⁵⁰ The knowledge that Mr. Porter could and did, quite readily, transfer his affections and offer of marriage to the older sister, possibly allowed Seward to learn another lesson, that, as a woman, she was a commodity, to be bought and sold in a marriage contract, if the price was right.

Through every aspect of her early life, Seward had learned well – from the suggestions laid down in her father's verse-letter poem, the availability of knowledge contained in the books in his own and the cathedral library, through her care and nurturing of Honora Sneyd, through the musical encouragement of John Saville, through her mother's household instruction and the continued support of her friend, Mary Howard Darwin. Seward may also have learned lessons of a different

kind: how to hide disappointment with cheerfulness and not to show one's feelings, and the expectations of prudence, self-denial and submission. Some women, however, were now moving out of the domestic confines blurring the separation between public and private. They were creating their own social identity whilst keeping within established boundaries. They were even asking questions about their position in polite society, for they still remained on the fringes. It was still considered to be a male preserve. Literature, at this time, was still very much a masculine genre, used to instruct its readers how to make progress in the world. A world in which eighteenth-century women did not move.⁵¹

Women, such as Anna Seward, were starting to emerge from the shadow of father or husband. They were finding their voice, hoping to contribute on equal terms, but women's ability to reason remained a central issue. Only at the end of the century was the idea of the rights of women to have both education and a certain degree of autonomy publicised by writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft. As a genteel daughter, Seward received some degree of education from her clergyman father, but it was through her extensive reading after being given access to his large library in the Bishop's Palace, to the cathedral library, to newspapers and magazines, together with new and important friendships and correspondence she established, that she came to know and find her real place in society – deciding not to marry the suitors chosen by her parents, but to be her own mistress, selecting, not only a male, and married companion, but living openly with him for over thirty years. Remembering again the words in her father's poem and realising her own proven abilities, she would also choose how she would live her life, showing that by becoming a writer, mainly of letters, later generations would discover her extensive network of correspondents, her many friendships, her ideas on art and music, her literary criticisms and her politics,

her epic poems of great deeds and victories and her sonnets, essays and sermons. She would also submit her work and see it in such publications as the *Gentleman's Magazine* and Swinney's *Birmingham and Stafford Chronicle*.⁵² Her very successful verse poem, *Louisa*, published in 1784, would run to five editions, Seward arranging all her own terms and copyrights with editors and publishers.⁵³ Later, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), a powerful plea for fundamental change in society's perception of the function, place and potential of women, struck a chord with Seward, who quickly obtained a copy of the book, and, having avidly read it, wrote, to a friend:

have you read that wonderful book, *The Rights of Woman*? It has, by turns, pleased and displeased, startled and half-convinced me that its author is oftener right than wrong...and on that momentous theme, this work affords much better rules than can be found in the sophist Rousseau or in the plausible Gregory.⁵⁴

In her book, Wollstonecraft argued against the traditional upbringing of young women, forcing them into narrow functions within society and denying them a proper education, equality with men or allowing them the ability to have their own independence and to decide their own destiny.⁵⁵ Anna Seward would certainly approve and embrace such ideas.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Lucas, Edward V., *A Swan and Her Friends* (London, 1907); MacCunn, Florence, *Sir Walter Scott's Friends* (Edinburgh, 1909); Ashmun, Margaret, *The Singing Swan* (New York, 1968); Addleshaw, S., *Church Quarterly Review*, April–June.1937. No.CCXLVII;
2. Pearson, Hesketh, *The Swan of Lichfield* (London, 1936), p. 14; Barnard, Teresa, *Anna Seward, A Constructed Life* (Farnham, 2009), p. vii.
3. LRO D 262/1/5: Seward, Thomas, Letter to his daughter, Nancy, 12th November 1771.
4. Braby, Rev. Peter, 'Letters of a Badsey Family 1735–36' in *Vale of Evesham Historical Society Research Papers*, 1971, pp. 66–73. See also 'Seward House, Badsey, Nr. Tardebigge, Worcestershire: <http://www.badsey.net/past/braby3.htm>
5. ODNB: Entry: Seward, Thomas, 1705–1790, Oxford University Press, 2004, Online Edition; See also Braby, (1971).
6. LRO, B/ A/ 3/260 / 8. Copy of the Presentation Document to the Parish of Eyam, Derbyshire.
7. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1782, Letter signed W.S. re: Letter from Thomas Seward to Mr. Green concerning Miss Hunter also LRO. B / A / 3 / 260 / 8, Copy of Presentation Document to the Parish of Eyam, Derbyshire, and LRO, B / C / 6,7 / 1741, Copy of marriage Licence, Declaration and Entry, Parish Records, Staffordshire.
8. Essex, J., *The Young Ladies Conduct* (London, 1772) also Wilkes, Wettenhall, A *Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (Dublin, 1740).
9. Blackstone, William, *The Laws respecting Women as they regard their Natural Rights* (1777).
10. Rousseau, Jean Jacques, *Emile, ou Traité de l'Education. Oevres Completes* (Paris, 1966), vol. 4, p. 768.
11. Shorter, Edward, *A History of Women's Bodies* (London, 1982), Chap. 1.
12. 'Cundums' or condoms, made from fish skin or pig's intestines were sold in London but were expensive and were usually only used as a defence against infection from prostitutes. See Daniel Defoe, *Conjugal Lewdness or Matrimonial Whoredom*, (London, 1727).
13. Anna Seward was an accomplished needlewoman. She made all her own clothes and was noted for her embroidery on fine gauze, producing an imitation lace. See Simonton, Deborah (ed.), *The Routledge History of Women in Europe since 1700* (London,) p. 141; Vickery, Amanda, *The Gentleman's Daughter* (New Haven: 1998) , Chaps. 2, 3; Steinbach, Susie, *Women in England, 1760–1914* (London, 2004), pp. 1–3, Chap. 2, pp. 43–54.
14. Seward mentions her parents and card-playing in *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1810), Vol. 1, p. lxxxiv.
15. On Elizabeth Seward's death from Dropsy see Ashmun (1968), p. 83.
16. Lucas (1907), p. 19.
17. Eyam, Derbyshire, Entries: St. Lawrence Church Records, Details courtesy of John Clifford, curator, Eyam Museum.

18. Reade, Alleyn Lyall , *Johnsonian Gleanings*, Parts 1, 3 and 4.
19. Scott, Walter, 'Biographical Preface', *Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, 1810) pp. iv, v. See also *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXIX, April 1809, p. 378.
20. Wood, William, *The History and Antiquities of Eyam*, 1842, 1845, 1860. The six volumes of Seward's *Letters* (Edinburgh, 1811) make frequent reference to the beauty of Eyam.
21. Miners could search for ore quite freely, paying the customary dues of 'lot and cope'. See BM Add. MSS. 6685, 166.
22. DRO. D.A J. 80 (1960). Hopkinson, G. G., *Lead Mining in the Eyam District in the 18th. Century*
23. DRO. D2360 / 1/ 64/15, *A Perfect Terrier of the House, Garden etc. belonging to the Rectory of Eyam* 1741. Anna Seward returned every year throughout her life to collect the tithes and dues and to visit friends.
24. Parish Records, Eyam, Derbyshire. Details courtesy of John Clifford, curator, Eyam Museum.
25. The Reverend Peter Cunningham remained as curate at St. Lawrence's Church, Eyam from 1740 until Canon Seward's death in 1790.
26. Details obtained from the late Mrs. Jane Hampartumian, Diocesan Archivist, Lichfield Record Office.
27. Seward, Thomas (co-editor), *The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher* (London, 1750), 10 vols.
28. See *European Magazine*, April 1782; also Nichols, John, *Illustrations of the Literary History of the 18th Century* vol. 6, pp. 3, 7, 8.
29. Mithra Tonking, Diocesan Archivist, Lichfield Diocesan Record Office states and confirms that as these two children were stillborn, there are no entries of either birth or burial in the Records.
30. Seward, Thomas, *The Female Right to Literature, in a letter to a Young Lady, from Florence Written about 1730* (1748).
31. Tringham, Nigel J., The Bishop's Palace, Lichfield Cathedral Close: its Construction 1686–70 in *Transactions, South Staffordshire Archeological and Historical Society*, 1985–86, vol. 27.
32. Edgeworth, Richard Lovell, *Memoirs* (London, 1820), Vol. 1, p. 106.
33. Seward, Anna, *Lichfield, An Elegy, May 1781* in *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, 1811), vol. 1, p. 89.
34. Scott, Walter (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward; Literary Correspondence* (Edinburgh, 1811) vol 1, p.lxxxiv.
35. Seward, Thomas, *The Female Right to Literature*, lines, 1, 2, 142–144. From the style of her 'juvenile' letters, it would appear that Seward possibly espoused the style of Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674–1737), *Letters Moral and Entertaining* (Birmingham, 1808). Seward used *Evander* and *Amelia*- in her *Love Epistles* she unites Pope's *Eloisa* and Prior's *Emma* into her poetic novel, *Louisa*, and discovers that Rowe quotes from Dryden, Milton, Pope and Shakespeare.
36. Cambridge County Records Office: Entry: Saville Family, *Sworn Affidavit of Intent to Marry and Agreement of the Bride's Father to the Marriage*. 19th April 1755. Mary Leaf, a minor, already pregnant, needed her father's permission to marry.

37. Mithra Tonking, Diocesan Archivist, Lichfield states that Honora Sneyd and Richard Lovell Edgeworth were married by the Rev. Thomas Seward in the Lady Chapel, Lichfield Cathedral, July 17th 1773. Seward, Anna, *Letters* (Edinburgh, 1811), 6 vols, Vol. 3, p. 261; *Poetical Works*, (Edinburgh, 1810), 3 vols. *Literary Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. clxxxvii, iii.
38. Ashmun (1968), pp. 14–16. N.P.G.
39. Tilly Kettle, Portrait of Anna Seward, 1762 (NPG 2017). The whereabouts of the portrait of Sarah Seward, painted at the same time, is unknown.
40. King-Hele, Desmond, *Erasmus Darwin, A Life of Unequalled Achievement*. (London, 1999), p. 27 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Library) DAR 227.5:12 (Robert's Notebook).
41. Ashmun (1968), pp. 11–13.
42. *ibid.* p.14.
43. Kelly, Jennifer, (ed.), *Bluestocking Feminism* (London, 1999). Seward made many of her own clothes, trimmed with her own handmade 'catgut' lace. The purses and letter cases she made were sold at the Charity Repository, Lichfield.
44. King-Hele (1999), pp. 170–174. Darwin, Mary (Howard) (1740–70) bore five children in nine years and died of cirrhosis of the Liver, 30th June 1770.
45. Derby Record Office, Matlock, Parish Register, Erasmus Darwin married Elizabeth Pole on the 6th March 1781.
46. It was an accepted fact that a woman had to bring either money or property to the marriage as their 'portion', which would then be taken and used by their husband in whatever way he wished. See footnote above.
47. Anna Seward, *Poetical Works, Literary Correspondence* (1810), vol. 1, pp. cxxxvii–viii. Also *Johnsonian Gleanings*, part 4, p. 146 re John Adey.
48. Major Wright, aged forty, would later inherit Eyam Hall and an income of £1000 per year.
49. Johnson, Samuel, *Marriage 2* in *The Rambler*. No. 39, 31, July 1750 (London). See Lynn Abrams, *At Home in the Family* in Simonton, pp. 22–29; also Vickery Amanda, *The Gentleman's Daughter* (New Haven, 1998), Chap. 2.
50. Sarah Seward (1744–1762) probably suffered from Acute Miliary Tuberculosis (Galloping Consumption), where the whole body becomes studded with tubercles. The sufferer quickly dies from putrid fever and exhaustion. See Anna Seward, *Poetical Works* (1810), Biographical Preface, vol. 1, p. ix re. Joseph Porter.
51. Curtin, Michael, 'A Question of Manners: Status & Gender in Etiquette and Courtesy' in *Journal of Modern History*, 57, 1985, pp. 395–423.
52. Birmingham Archives & Heritage, Miles Swinney, *Birmingham & Stafford Chronicle*, 5th January, 15th April, 9th 23rd August 1792.
53. Seward, Anna, *Louisa: A Poetical Novel in Four Epistles* (London, 1784) 4 editions in this country, 1 edition in America.
54. Seward, Anna, Letter to Thomas Whalley, 26th February 1792, in *Letters of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, 1811), Vol. 3, p. 117.
55. Wollstonecroft, Mary, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London, 2004), p. 60. See also Anna Seward, *Louisa* (1784).

CHAPTER 3

INDEPENDENCE AND DEFIANCE: THE SEWARD AND SAVILLE RELATIONSHIP, 1754–1803

The purpose of this chapter is to show how Anna Seward and John Saville, Vicar Choral at Lichfield cathedral first met, and how, over several years, through music, particularly that of Handel, and literature, they came to realise their commitment to each other in spite of his unavailability; Saville was already married. The position of the cathedral clergy and some citizens to their relationship, with their monetary bribery, their boycott of the Seward family and their insistence that Saville should leave the city, had no effect. It was the first public example of Seward's defiance, taking a stand against parental and clerical authority. Seward's conduct was indicative of a new capacity for a limited number of middle-class women to resist conventional expectations while still retaining social respectability.

Biographers have only touched on this most important relationship in Seward's life. Lucas states:

As to her depth of feeling for him, no one... can be in any doubt, but the matter does not concern us here, nor have I any knowledge on which to base a faithful story. Strong-minded spinsters who fall in love late can be very foolish...Mr.Saville's character has nothing to do with us: women will love any kind of man and see merit wherever they wish.¹

Margaret Ashmun suggests that ‘Seward did not yield easily to the call of unsanctioned and unprofitable love [but] finding her struggles unavailing, she resigned herself to the demands of her affections and ...her absolute and entire devotion to Saville’.² Pearson states that Seward ‘had known him [Saville] from her twelfth year. He was one of the vicars choral at the cathedral and it was he who taught her to love music, especially the music of Handel [and] he became her sole interest in life after the death of her father’.³ Clarke gives a concise, but well-informed picture, showing the difficulties with the Seward and Saville liaison and even though ‘Lichfield didn’t like the relationship... it was required to put up with it’ and it enabled Seward ‘to cling to her ‘soul’s chosen friend’.⁴ This chapter is the first attempt to analyse, in detail, how the relationship between Seward and Saville commenced, how it developed in spite of great opposition within the confines of family and Lichfield, remaining constant until Saville’s death. It will also consider the importance of Saville in Seward’s personal development.

Saville, son of Robert, described as a painter, and his wife Elizabeth, came from Haddenham, near Ely, Cambridgeshire. Born on the 3rd March 1735, John was apprenticed to his father at an early age.⁵ He became a chorister at Ely Cathedral Cathedral on the 14th June 1744, and remained at the cathedral school until he was sixteen. In 1754, he was chosen to be a Probationary Lay Clerk, a ‘singing man’, on half-pay, whilst still working for his father.⁶ He married in Ely Cathedral on the 19th April 1755 with her father’s consent – for at nineteen she was a minor – the already pregnant Mary Leaf, a servant girl in the household of one of the senior clergymen in the cathedral close at Ely.⁷ Saville arrived in Lichfield, installed as a Vicar Choral at the Cathedral in May 1755, and housed in one of the small dwellings in the Vicar’s

Close, within the cathedral precincts.⁸ Their first daughter, Mary, was born about six months later.⁹

Saville became an important figure in the Close and in the world of music. In Lichfield and beyond, he was much in demand as both a professional singer and an organiser of concert programmes throughout the country. Later, he would be contracted to the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, and would become one of King George III's favourite singers¹⁰ Saville was a rather shy, hard-working and humble man, fulfilling his church duties and teaching music. Not always obliged to dress in clerical black, from the evidence of the miniature painted by Smart in 1770, Saville is depicted in this portrait as a finely dressed, handsome man in a bright blue coat and a neat wig.¹¹ Seward already knew of Handel, but under Saville's tutelage on the harpsichord, she developed a passion for the German composer whose music was by now much adored and revered by the English. To her, Handel's music was 'the *ne plus ultra* of excellence.'¹² In a letter to Mrs Hayley in 1795, she wrote, 'the choruses of Handel are dearer than any other species of music. The exhilaration and rapture with which they inspire me are extreme'.¹³ Seward was in her late twenties and Saville was in his mid-thirties, and it is clear that their relationship was very close. Saville was still married and had another daughter, Elizabeth.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Saville became a member of Seward's 'blue sitting-room group'.¹⁵ Seward would sometimes visit his wife at the family home in the Vicar's Close, but in August 1771 Mary Saville's indignation boiled over. Seward was told she was no longer welcome. Saville's wife complained to the Reverend Seward about this 'untoward relationship' between his daughter and her husband, but it seems that he did nothing about it. Mrs. Seward's pleas to her husband also fell on deaf ears. An easy-going man, never inclined to exert himself, the Reverend Seward had no influence over his daughter,

but he was estranged from Saville, with ‘the altered eye of hard unkindness ‘ and Seward, when approached by her mother on the matter, described Mrs. Saville as ‘shrewish, vulgar and in many ways an unamiable wife’.¹⁶ Mrs. Saville took her grievance to the Dean, Dr. John Addenbrooke, as it was his duty ‘to correct any irregularities of the members of the church’. He also failed to deal with the matter. He went as far as to offer Saville a sum of money for life, if he would agree to leave the area, an offer which Saville declined. The Dean was embarrassed as Canon Seward was a member of the Cathedral Chapter, which the Dean would have to consult in affairs of discipline. There is no account whatsoever of any action being taken over the affair.¹⁷

The new Dean, Dr. Baptist Proby, was no more successful, though his ladies showed their displeasure by refusing to call on the Seward family. Seward herself nicknamed Dean Proby, ‘Dr. Bumble-Bee’, scorning ‘his epicurism, his spleen and his gullibility’. Prebendary Falconer and his wife became Seward’s enemies. As the news spread, the Seward family were shunned for many months by others in the Close and in the town. Seward’s ‘improper’ attachment was ‘another count against her’, according the Bishop Percy of Dromore, in Ireland.¹⁸ Seward, when questioned by her parents, declared that the relationship was ‘innocent’, and that ‘no prospect ... could induce me to renounce the blessing of a tried and faithful friend’.¹⁹ She was not a wife in the eyes of God, and she was certainly not innocent of having involved them all in a most distressing situation. Perhaps Seward and Saville were also not innocent in another sense. In the eighteenth century, the practice of ‘bundling’: sexual play between a couple, was allowed where the couple were free to be together, to indulge in foreplay without penetration, often with another female present.²⁰ Anna Seward’s statement that they were not lovers in the full sense of the word, could have been a

veiled allusion to this practice. A full sexual relationship between them and to avoid pregnancy, would have required *cundums* (condoms), fashioned from sheep's intestines or fish skin, tied on with ribbon. These were available, but perhaps such items could not be purchased in Lichfield, although Mr. Richard Greene, the surgeon apothecary, had a shop in Market Street where such contraceptives might have been bought. The enterprising Mrs. Constantia Phillips had established a manufactory for such items at The Green Canister, Half Moon Alley, off The Strand in London, in 1748. Her 'very fine engines' were 'made of sheep gut'. Less expensive 'engines' – *capote anglaises*, were made of treated linen, but were 'often riddled with pores and easily torn'.²¹ But neither Seward nor Saville could have afforded such measures: they were expensive, would have to have come from the capital, and the whole of Lichfield would surely get to know. Had there been a pregnancy, an abortifacient, Savin, made from the juniper bush, a small, evergreen, shrubby tree, with short, narrow, prickly leaves and blackish-blue berries, could have been bought and used, but again could only have been purchased from an apothecary, such as Mr. Greene, a family friend.²² Seward was not Saville's wife, but they were to remain close companions until his death. To a friend, Seward wrote: 'he cannot be my husband but no law of earth or heaven forbids that he should be my friend or bars us the liberty of conversing together while that conversation is innocent. The world has no right to suppose it otherwise'.²³

In 1773, Saville left his wife and two daughters, moving into another house not far from his family. He never spoke to his wife again, but continued to provide for her and the children, and she continued to do his laundry.²⁴ This arrangement was not so unusual as might be thought. Divorce, at this time was only possible in England by a special sitting of Parliament, and usually only when a noble or rich man wished to

be free. There was no legal separation for women, no matter what their position, nor the distress within the marriage. Marital difficulties occurred, even in clerical circles. Some holding ecclesiastical appointments in the Lichfield diocese at this time had marital troubles. The Reverend William Vyse, Chancellor of the Lichfield Diocese, Archdeacon of Salop and a Canon Residentiary of the Cathedral, made, while his wife was still alive, an 'engagement to marry' (conditional on his wife's death) Miss Sophia Streatfield, 'a young lady with a lovely neck, a knowledge of Greek and the ability to weep easily and beautifully'. It was an engagement lasting many years, but when his wife died, Vyse jilted Sophia and married someone else.²⁵ Samuel Jackson Pratt, took Holy Orders, obtained a curacy in Lincolnshire and eloped to Scotland with an eighteen-year-old friend of Seward. Having frittered away his wife's £1500 fortune, Pratt asked Samuel Johnson and Mrs. Siddons to help pay his way to Ireland in the company of a married actress, with whom he acted in touring companies.²⁶ In view of these unlawful liaisons, one can consider that the Church's attitude to the Seward and Saville affair to be hypocritical. There was nothing clandestine about their relationship. She was now calling him '*Il Penseroso*'.²⁷ As a couple, they travelled wherever Saville was to perform – to Stratford upon Avon, to Birmingham, to Sheffield, even to Covent Garden. He came to depend on her and she became his agent, organising concerts, helping to choose his music, musicians and venues. He taught her carefully, allowing her to see and hear the subtle shades and distinctions between musicians and singers.²⁸

The feast-day of St. Cecilia, patron saint of music, was, from 1742, always observed in Lichfield with an annual concert in the Vicar's Hall, at 11.00 am. A full band, with singers and soloist musicians on harpsichord and violin, very often organised by Saville, would perform solemn works by Handel and Haydn for a

crowded audience. In October 1767, Saville appeared, with Capell Bond, the Coventry organist as conductor, at three days of oratorios in Birmingham, in front of large audiences who appreciated the prestige they brought to the town. Also in that year, David Garrick organised a Shakespeare Jubilee pageant at Stratford-on-Avon. A report on the event in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* states that 'the Concerts under the direction of Mr. Saville, gave General Satisfaction to the Catches, Glees Roundelays, etc. which were performed [and] were very properly introduced'.²⁹ In November, in Lichfield, Garrick staged 'a genteel Entertainment for a select Number of Lichfield Neighbours'. The choristers came from the cathedral and 'the whole conducted with the greatest regularity, and afforded the highest Satisfaction to everyone present'.³⁰ Saville's popularity continued, with Seward now helping to arrange his concert performances and often choosing the music, even though she confessed to being 'so shallow a student of music' that she was never really proficient in its execution. Her letters contain frequent references to private *musicales* in her own salon and public concerts all over the country, declaring that 'those in Lichfield are the only public amusements I can partake with pleasure'. She 'devoted her evenings to the sublime music of Handel... the *ne plus ultra* of excellence', and was surprised and delighted one Sunday to hear the 'Grand Chorus' from '*Messiah*' sung in the cathedral: 'Our glorious organ pealed along the aisles and the choir put forth all their energies in the execution and her minstrels sung with their heart and soul – everybody wept with pleasure'.³¹

Seward now considered Handel to be a supreme artist (to match Milton) and was always ready to defend the composer. Her strong musical tastes brought about a keen interest in public singers who were judged on their skill in interpreting his work. She believed Samuel Harrison had 'great correctness, delicacy and pathos, but no

energy, without which Handel can have no justice from his performer'.³² Elizabeth Billington had a voice 'of great sweetness, compass, power and execution, who played finely on the harpsichord'.³³ Seward's praise for the great soprano, Gertrude Elizabeth Mara, the most celebrated singer in England, was somewhat reserved: 'this new-risen star in the harmonic world...seems to have turned the brains of the whole kingdom', but declared that Mara was not faultless, revealing 'some harsh notes in the lower part of her voice, when she throws it out *fortissimo*...she has a sweet smile but her temper is capricious, haughty and avaricious'.³⁴ Saville, who often shared a stage with Mara, was, to Seward, 'sublime' and her admiration for him and his music never wavered.

He unites poetic taste and the vivid emotions of a feeling heart and of a high and kindling spirit, to a rich, extensive and powerful voice and the most perfect knowledge of his science...he of all Brethren of the lyre, sings with impulses congenial to those with which Milton wrote and Handel composed, though he never aims to dazzle or astonish his audience.³⁵

Following the huge Handel Commemoration in 1784, grand musical festivals continued to be held in Westminster Abbey over the next seven years, alongside which, with the growing taste for such performances, provincial music meetings became more active. In the 1780s Seward made excursions to Birmingham, Sheffield, Manchester and London. In 1785, Seward found herself

amidst the bustle of those feminine preparations, which necessarily precede the design of attending an harmonic Festival at Manchester, where the abbey drums are to

thunder, Mara to exhibit vocal miracles, and what is more to genuine music lovers, our friend, Saville, is to open *Messiah*, to take all principal tenor and *contra-tenor* songs and the noble band to be under his conduct.³⁶

She was also to hear the renowned violinist, Johann Baptist Cramer, who would later play for her privately at the Bishop's Palace; and, in 1785, even 'the King expressed some *chagrin* to several of his musical nobility, that Mr. Saville was not in the orchestra at the first commemoration'. Both Seward and Saville were at Westminster Abbey in 1786 where 3000 people, including the King and Queen, heard 750 singers and musicians perform Handel's *Messiah*. The King expressed himself 'more than ever highly pleased with his [Saville's] performance'.³⁷ In October 1788, the now forty-six-year-old Seward recorded that, at a Birmingham concert: 'perilous crowds and Calcutta heat in the morning and evening performance, three days together: eight hours of music out of twenty-four. It was hazarding martyrdom to the second favourite science of my life'. She also lamented the 'prevalence of bad taste' which was not uncommon among eighteenth-century superficial audiences, considering it 'fickle'.³⁸

John Saville was also a gardener, and had, in addition to the small garden at his house in the Close, which Honora Sneyd called 'Damon's Bower', a fine plot near Stowe House, where, using gifts of plants, exchanges and careful purchases, for he had little money, combined with considerable horticultural skill, grown hundreds of specimens.³⁹ Spending so much time 'that his friends lose many hours, every week, of his company', he exchanged his prodigious knowledge with Darwin, Sir Brooke Boothby of Ashbourne, Derbyshire, translator of Linnaeus, and a Mr. William Jackson, a proctor of the Lichfield Cathedral Jurisdiction, who formed the triumvirate

of the Lichfield Botanical Society when Saville declined an invitation to join: 'his fame as a botanic florist flies far... his little garden is become one of the lions of Lichfield which strangers go to see'.⁴⁰ Saville was also a contributor to William Withering's *Botanical Arrangement of British Plants* (1787).⁴¹

Saville's wife, having obtained a separation, remained in Lichfield. His surviving daughter, Elizabeth, married, in the cathedral in 1787, according to Seward, a 'bankrupt' named Smith, and, having been trained by her father, often joined him on the concert platform.⁴² Seward's father, now enfeebled in both body and mind drew up a Will, which gave his daughter the authority to manage his affairs, including an extensive portfolio of shares, stocks, property, bonds and money.⁴³ Having negotiated all her own publishing contracts, controlled all her own finances and copyrights, she was now charged to administrate a considerable estate. The death of the Reverend Seward in 1790 allowed Seward the freedom for which she had yearned, but there was soon another concern as Saville's health became increasingly precarious. Darwin had treated him some years earlier for a nervous' stomach condition with electrotherapy applied to his liver, but the complaint had returned and was accompanied by other difficulties.⁴⁴ Against advice, he continued his busy cathedral schedule, until, on 1st December 1801, he suffered a paralytic seizure, losing movement in his limbs. Seward was convinced his death was imminent, but, with his daughter's ministrations, he made a slow recovery. Seward purchased a larger house, no. 8 the Close, where Saville, could be comfortably accommodated.⁴⁵ Three months later, Seward herself was ill. Suffering from arthritis, an irregular heartbeat and breathing difficulties, she travelled to Hoylake, Lancashire for the sea-bathing, but after five weeks and twenty-two sea immersions, there was no miraculous recovery.

She comforted herself on the way home with a three-day festival of Handel and Haydn oratorios in Birmingham.⁴⁶

By August 1803, Saville had recovered enough to resume performing, this time at the cathedral, where he had been a Vicar Choral for forty-eight years. Hurrying to dress for the performance on 2nd August, he collapsed and was found dead at his home at eight that evening, but Seward had already left the Palace, with friends, to take her seat in the cathedral. She had last spoken to him at 4 pm. Her grief, on hearing the news, was terrible. Seward roused herself enough to arrange and pay for his funeral, but she was not allowed to attend the service as the clergy deemed it 'unseemly'. She had asked the Dean and Chapter to allow Saville to be buried within the Cathedral. This they also refused, but all the clergy attended the burial in the vault for which she paid, to be erected on the greensward in front of the Cathedral. Seward settled all Saville's affairs; she paid his debts and persuaded the Dean and Chapter to give permission for her to erect a monument to his memory in the transit aisle of the Cathedral. She allowed his wife and daughter to occupy no. 8, The Close. For three months, Seward never left the Palace. She mourned Saville as a wife would mourn a beloved husband, and her letters reveal the devastating effect his death had on her.⁴⁷ Slowly returning to her writing, her grief can be seen in her poem, *To Remembrance*: 'Saville, the gates of harmony / Eternally were closed to me / when thou didst pass the Mortal goal.'⁴⁸ Like her relationship with her father, Seward's relationship with Saville was important in helping to shape her life. By his understanding of music and his teaching, Saville helped Seward develop her knowledge of and enthusiasm for the music of Handel, Haydn and other composers. Following her own death, her legacy to Walter Scott was due to be paid. In sending the intimation of this, on the 30th March 1811, Charles Simpson, her executor, took the opportunity to thank Scott for her

epitaph, and to inform him that about a year earlier she had told him, voluntarily, about her unbounded affection for Saville.⁴⁹ Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, Scottish antiquary and friend of Walter Scott and known to Seward, writing to a correspondent from Hoddam Castle, in October 1811, appears to contradict this

All the prudes cry Foh! At her, because she liked one Mr. Saville, a singing man of Lichfield, but these are venial flaws – tho'one is a little angry with her when one supposes she was actually the death of the poor man. I think she slew him – I think Saville died from over exertion, attempting to mend the hole of a blue-stocking!⁵⁰

and, in a letter from Walter Scott to Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, November 1811, it says in a postscript:

I have filled up my sheet with no word of Miss Seward. As for the scandal between her and Vicar Saville, she herself told a female friend, who told me, there was not a word of truth in it – and I believe her, for she added, candidly, she did not know what might have happened if Saville had not been more afraid of the devil than she was!⁵¹

We are not in a position to say whether the relationship between Seward and Saville was a sexual one, but clearly it was extremely close. Seward's management of the relationship showed that she had a mind of her own and despite the concerns in Lichfield about the propriety of the relationship, Seward was sufficiently strong willed to ignore the conventions of clerical society. Marriage between Seward and Saville was clearly out of the question, but it does seem, in any case, that she made a

decision not to marry anyone. Marriage would have compromised her independence and curtailed her writing. Companionship with Saville allowed her to live a life that suited her for many years. There was, though, another close relationship of a different kind. As we will see in the next chapter it was her association with Erasmus Darwin which shaped her development as a self-confident and assertive writer.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. Lucas, Edward Verrell, *A Swan and Her Friends* (London, 1907), p. 174.
2. Ashmun, Margaret, *The Singing Swan* (New Haven, 1931), pp. 184–5.
3. Pearson, Hesketh, *The Swan of Lichfield*. (London, 1936), p. 18.
4. Clarke, Norma, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London, 2004), pp. 43–44.
5. Cambridge County Record Office, Haddenham Parish Register, Cambridge (Ely Diocese), Birth date confirmed.
6. CUL, Order Book, Dean and the Chapter of Ely (EDC 2/ 2A/ 3). All records confirmed by the Keeper of Ely Diocesan Records and Archives.
7. CUL, The marriage took place in Ely Cathedral, 19th May 1755, confirmed by Diocesan Records, the Dean and the Chapter Archives.
8. LCL, Chapter Acts, John Saville installed as Vicar Choral, Lichfield Cathedral, 2nd, May 1755.
9. LCL, Baptism of Mary Saville: Recorded 8th December 1755. Confirmed by Parish records.
10. Saville, a former choral scholar and musician at Ely, gave harpsichord lessons to Seward. Much in demand on the concert platform all over the country. See Myers, Robert Manson, *Anna Seward, An Eighteenth Century Handelian* (Williamsburg, 1947), pp. 7, 20–24.
11. Hopkins, Mary Alden, *Dr. Johnson's Lichfield* (London, 1963). Miniature of Saville by Smart inserted at p. 113.
12. Anna Seward to Mrs. Martin, 5th June 1786, Anna Seward, *Letters* (Edinburgh, 1811), 6 vols, vol. 1, p. 152.
13. Anna Seward to Mrs. Hayley, 19th June, 1795 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 4, p. 69.
14. LRO. Elizabeth Saville, born and baptised in Lichfield in 1757 (confirmed by Lichfield parish records).
15. Seward gave this name to the three upstairs rooms at the Bishop's Palace, which she occupied with Honora Sneyd, and it was here she entertained her friends, particularly John Saville.
16. Wickham, Hill, (ed.), *Journals and Correspondence of Thomas Sedgewick Whalley, D.D.* (London, 1863), 2 vols, vol. 1, p. 344.
17. The Bishop and Dean Baptist Proby, who held office at Lichfield at this time, also took no notice of the trouble. See Mary Alden Hopkins, *Dr. Johnson's Lichfield* (London, 1956), p. 114.
18. Nichol, John, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1812–15), eight vols, Vol. 8, pp. 427–432. See also Anna Seward to William Hayley, 11th October 1780 in Seward, *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 181.
19. Wickham (ed.), (1863), vol. 1, p. 344.
20. Steinbach, Susie, *Women in England, 1760–1914* (London, 2004), p. 125.
21. Cruikshank, Dan, *The Secret History of Georgian Britain* (London, 2009), pp. 209–10.
22. Savin, a small, evergreen, shrub with short, narrow, prickly leaves and blue or black berries. Not much grown in England. See Shorter, Edward: *A History of Women's Bodies* (London, 1983), pp. 186–7.
23. SJBM. Accession Nos: 2001.72.1, May 1773; 2001.72.2, undated; 2001.72.3,

- 27th July 1773), Anna Seward, *Letters to Mrs Sykes*, 1773.
24. Saville moved into No.7 in the Vicar's Close while his wife remained in the marital home, No.6. See Hopkins (1956), p. 114.
 25. Hayward, A. (ed.), *Autobiography, Letters and Literary Remains of Mrs. Piozzi (Thrale)*, (London, 1861), 2 vols, vol. 1, pp.111, 118.
 26. Wright, J. D. (ed.), *Some Unpublished Letters to and from Dr. Johnson* (Manchester, 1938), pp. 17–24.
 27. A lover of Milton, Seward saw Saville as the melancholic embodiment of his poem of the same title.
 28. They attended the Handel Festivals: London, October 1785; Manchester, 1786, 1790; Sheffield, 2 visits. See Ashmun (1968) p. 148; also Seward, *Letters to Mrs. Martin*, Vol. 4, p. 69; vol. 5, p.152. The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, state that their 18th century records are so slight that they cannot confirm Saville's contract, but as he was well known musically, he would possibly be contracted to the Theatre Royal.
 29. Hopkins, pp. 53–54; see also Report, *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 6th November 1796, (Birmingham Archives and Heritage, Birmingham Central Library).
 30. Anna Seward to Dr. Warner, 3rd June 1788 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 2, p. 133.
 31. Anna Seward to Thomas Swift, 5th June, 1788 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 1, p.133; see also Anna Seward to Mrs Roberts, 3rd November 1790 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 3, p. 40.
 32. Anna Seward to Dr. Warner, 3rd June 1788 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 2, p. 135.
 33. Anna Seward to Mrs. Martin, 5th June 1788 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 1, p. 153.
 34. Anna Seward to Mrs. Cotton, 27th October 1785 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 1, p. 89. See also Wickham, Hill (ed.), *The Journals & Correspondence of Thomas Sedgewick Whalley* (London, 1863), vol. 1, p. 449.
 35. Anna Seward to Miss Helen Williams, 25th August 1785 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 1, p. 76.
 36. Anna Seward to Thomas Park. Esq., 27th September 1802 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, pp. 41–49.
 37. Anna Seward to Dr. Whalley, 13th August 1786 in Wickham (ed.), (1863), 2 vols, Vol. 1, pp. 489–491. In 1796, Johann Cramer played for Seward before going to perform in Birmingham.
 38. Anna Seward to Thomas Park, Esq., September 27th1802 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, pp. 46–49.
 39. Hopkins, (1956), pp. 188–9.
 40. Saville knew that if he joined this triumvirate he would be expected to translate and keep all the records, so took the decision not to become a member. See Ashmun (1968), p. 179.
 41. Withering, William, *Botanical Arrangement of British Plants, including the Uses of Each Species in Medicine, Diet, Rural Economy and the Arts* (London, 1787). See also, Sheldon, Peter, *The Life and Times of William Withering, His Work, His Legacy* (Studley, 2004).
 42. Elizabeth Saville was born in Lichfield in 1757. She married a spendthrift, then bankrupt, husband and had two children, Honora and Saville, before leaving him. Trained by her father. See: Anna Seward, *Poem to Mrs. Smith, Daughter of Mr Saville, on her Singing in Public, January 1789*, in *Poetical Works*, vol. 2, pp. 350–351.

43. NA. Will of Thomas Seward. Catalogue Reference: prob / 11 / 1191. Image Reference: 354.
44. Erasmus Darwin was a great believer in the therapeutic use of electricity in medicine and often used it to 'galvanise' organs into action.
45. Ashmun (1968), p. 232. John Saville was moved into the new house, No.8, The Close, Lichfield in February 1802.
46. *ibid.* p. 233.
47. Hesketh Pearson, *The Swan of Lichfield* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1936), *Letter: Anna Seward to Dr. Whalley, 16th August 1803.* pp. 254–258; Anna Seward to Rev. R. Fellowes 31st August 1803 in *Letters*, vol. 6. pp.101–3; Anna Seward to Mrs. Childers, Sen. 23rd September 1803, in *Letters*, vol.6. pp.106–114.
48. Seward, Anna, *To Remembrance*, in *Poetical Works* (1810), 3 vols, vol. 3, pp. 398–402. See also LRO, Copy of John Saville's Will. Dated 4th February 1804.
49. Partington, Wilfred (ed.), *Sir Walter's Post Bag* (London), 4th Letter Book, extract from Letter, Charles Simpson to Walter Scott, Birmingham, March 30th 1811, pp. 66–67.
50. Excerpt from a letter from Charles K. Sharpe to the Honourable Thomas Stapleton, 9th October 1811 in Allardyce, Edward, *Letters to and from Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe. Esq.* (Edinburgh:1888), 2 vols, vol. 2,
51. Postscript to a letter from Walter Scott to Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, 7th November 1811, Allardyce, (1888), vol. 2.

CHAPTER 4

DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE:

ANNA SEWARD AND ERASMUS DARWIN, 1756 –1802

The relationship between Erasmus Darwin and Anna Seward was crucial to her development as a cultural figure. From their very first meeting in 1756 at the Bishop's Palace, Lichfield, Erasmus Darwin had a profound effect upon her life. Over twenty-five years, through his perusing, collaborating and correcting her poetry, Seward would grow in confidence, submitting and publishing her work continually, to become known as the 'Queen Muse of Britain', an independent, intelligent literary figure. However, their relationship became more distant as Seward developed as a writer and increasingly exercised her independence. Darwin was, apart from her father, almost certainly the first man to show any interest in her. He became her lodestar, her guiding light and her poetic mentor, encouraging and praising her, receiving her gratitude in return, at least until the relationship soured as a result of an argument over three poems in 1776. To the first and best, he had appended his own name; to the second, his son's name and to the third and worst, Seward's name. In a letter to a correspondent, Mrs Jackson, she stated 'he laught (sic) it off in a manner peculiar to himself and with which he carries all his points of despotism'.¹ Their relationship, which was close at one time became cooler and in her *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin* she published a critical commentary on the man and his works.

The first external comment on the relationship between Seward and Darwin was provided by his grandson, Charles, in his biography of his grandfather, published in 1879. Charles Darwin rebutted Seward for criticising his grandfather in letters and

her *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin*, and accused her of showing ‘much malice towards him’.² Desmond King-Hele, Darwin’s biographer, is also somewhat dismissive of Seward’s relationship with Darwin when he states that Seward ‘was a poet not a scholar, a woman of feeling rather than of accuracy’ but does agree that in Darwin she saw a ‘famous neighbour, whom she admired yet at times detested’.³ King-Hele, however, also considers her 100-page analysis and critique of Darwin’s *The Botanic Garden*, Seward’s way of asserting her own literary ability, as the most thorough that has yet appeared.⁴ Barnard has also recently commented on the relationship, suggesting that the Seward, Powys and Sykes letters ‘open up a very misunderstood relationship with her friend, Erasmus Darwin’ and that they chart the eventual separation in Seward’s mind between his personal characteristics and his literary influence.⁵ However, Seward’s *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin...with Anecdotes of His Friends and Criticisms of His Writing* (1804) have an analogous purpose, as the work skilfully demonstrates that Darwin and the eccentric Thomas Day, used and abused the women in their lives and *that* abuse extended to herself.⁶

Their relationship commenced in 1756, when Darwin came to Lichfield to set up in practice in the Close, when Seward was thirteen. Even at this age, Seward was, according to Walter Scott, considered to be a ‘‘tawny’ beauty-auburn hair and hazel eyes, with a sparkling personality’.⁷ Lucas quotes from the *British Lady’s Magazine* which refers to a visit to the Rev. Thomas Seward’s residence:

A gentleman of some genius and erudition... took to calling when he knew that Mr. Seward was from home and interrogating her. After discoursing some time...he wrote the first stanza and requested her to complete it.

When he called the next morning, the gentleman saw the completion, he was too much astonished at the brilliancy of the style [and] did not from that moment entertain the least doubt of the young lady's literary abilities.⁸

The 'gentleman of some erudition' was Darwin. Newly qualified as a physician, aged twenty-five, he had come from Elston, near Newark, Derbyshire to present his card to the Reverend Seward and to establish a medical practice in Lichfield. Seward described him precisely:

somewhat above the middle size, his limbs too heavy for exact proportion. The traces of severe smallpox; features and countenance, when they were not animated by social pleasure, were rather saturnine than sprightly, a stoop in the shoulders...florid health and earnest good humour, a sunny smile on entering a room, on first accosting his friends, rendered, his youth, that exterior agreeable, to which beauty and symmetry had not been propitious.⁹

Darwin's interest in the young Seward's poetic ability ensured an excited reciprocation and a rapport between the two from the very first meeting which continued even after Darwin married her friend, the seventeen-year-old, Mary Howard in 1757, a marriage which would produce a family of five, of which only three sons survived.¹⁰ From then until the day he left the city in 1781 with his second wife, Elizabeth Pole, for a new home and practice in Derby, Seward and Darwin enjoyed a close friendship. Seward described his first wife, Mary, as

blooming and lovely...with a mind of native strength;
an awakened taste for the works of imagination; ingenious
sweetness...animated by and sustained by fortitude...
making her a capable as well as a fascinating companion,
even to a man of talents illustrious

and the speed at which the marriage took place, on 30th December 1757, at St, Mary's Church, Lichfield, suggests that Darwin's beloved 'Polly' (his nickname for Mary), was already pregnant.¹¹ Sexual intercourse between couples who had declared their intention of marrying was permissible, once the marriage settlement and the dowries from both families had been settled.¹² The length of a pregnancy is forty weeks from the date of the last menstruation, and, as Mary gave birth to her first son on the 3rd September 1758, after a full term, she must have been about eight weeks pregnant at the time of the marriage.¹³

Seward, even after his marriage, was often in Darwin's company, among the other members of the Lunar Group at musical evenings, dinner or tea parties in her own home, the Bishop's Palace, or at Darwin's large house on Beacon Street. She also helped Mary with her growing family. She would keep Mary company when Erasmus, now a well-known, respected physician, was away, sometimes for over a week, visiting by coach, his far-flung patients.¹⁴ Seward would often show him what she had written, seeking his advice, so much so, their work became almost identical in composition. Darwin helped to get them published, under her own name, by sending them to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1784.¹⁵ She claimed later he drew on parts of them and failed to acknowledge the debt properly when his poem *The Botanic Garden* poem was published.¹⁶ There may be a belated reference to Darwin's obligation in

Interlude three of his poem *The Loves of the Plants* (1789), where Darwin notes that 'there may be others which, if I could recollect them, should be here acknowledged.'¹⁷

In Darwin's defence, however, it was his habit to be collaborative, for, in a letter from Richard Lovell Edgeworth to Walter Scott, the writer states: 'Miss Seward's *Ode to Captain Cook* (1780) stands deservedly high in the public opinion. Now, to my certain knowledge, most of the passages which have been selected in the various reviews of that work, were written by Dr. Darwin'.¹⁸ Seward had submitted this poem to the *Poetical Amusements* held at the home of Lady Miller of Batheaston, Somerset, where, in competition with other poems, it won the Myrtle Wreath, paving the way for later literary submissions to periodicals and publishers.¹⁹ Pearson states that Seward's 'growing affection for him [Darwin] was the subject of some amusement among their friends' and that she 'would doubtless have married him had he given her the chance...[but]...he regarded her with a chaste eye and reserved his less spiritual intimacies for a mistress'.²⁰ Another author writing in the 1930s, Ashmun, mentions Darwin's 'interest in the attractive and brilliant daughter of Canon Seward' and, after viewing the result of the poetic task he set, being 'convinced that Nancy's talent was her own', encouraged the young girl to go on writing, while he advised and corrected.²¹ All appear to have accepted this relationship without commenting on it any further. A different stage in the relationship between Darwin and Seward began when he became a widower on the 30th June 1770. His wife, Mary, died from gallstones and possible cirrhosis of the liver. Lacking full knowledge of the disease, Darwin was unable to treat it effectively; he had no recourse, but to administer opium (of which he was a great advocate) for the pain, even though he knew it was addictive. In addition to this, Polly treated herself with alcohol, stating that 'pain taught me the value of ease and I enjoyed it with a glow of spirit...He has

prolonged my days and has blessed them'.²² Seward commented on this passing in the *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin*: 'thus died a superior woman in the bloom of life, sincerely regretted by all who knew how to value her excellence and *passionately* regretted by the selected few, whom she honoured with her personal and confidential friendship'.²³ Seward's friendship to Mary Darwin is clear. In an eight-page, moving *Consolation* document, which Darwin sent to his late wife's friend, Miss Newton, relating to the happenings leading up to his beloved Mary's death, he concludes by looking forward to the end of mourning: 'a few months will soften these ideas and smooth the remembrance of her down to Pleasure, and turn my tears to Rapture.'²⁴

Darwin, now thirty-eight and with three young sons to raise, needed someone to care for them, to run his large house, and to supervise his servants. Fortunately, his younger, unmarried sister, Susannah, was willing to come from Elston to act as his housekeeper. Within a month, also from Elston, Darwin was able to find a young woman to care for his four-year-old son, in the shape of seventeen-year-old Mary Parker. His home life now, once again, was settled and running smoothly. It was not long before Mary Parker bore him two daughters, Susan and Mary, whom Darwin brought up and educated, but never legitimised.²⁵ What Anna Seward thought of this relationship, we do not know, but she probably felt that if Darwin's behaviour could be tolerated within the confines of the Close, then her friendship with him was acceptable and would be allowed to continue. Darwin was already looking for another wife. He became greatly enamoured, even though she was still married, of Elizabeth Pole, the wife of the elderly Colonel Sacheverel Pole of Radburn Hall, Derbyshire.²⁶

Over five years, until the death of Colonel Pole in 1781, Darwin composed and sent her love poems:

The love-struck swain, when summer's heat invades,

Or winter's blasts perplex the billowing sky.
With folded arms shall walk beneath our shades,
And think on bright Eliza – think and sigh!²⁷

Seward followed the progress of this affair with much interest, speaking plainly of Elizabeth Pole, as having

Much vivacity and sportive humour, with very engaging frankness of temper and manners. She took Dr. Darwin, never handsome or handsomely graceful, with impeded utterance, with hard features on a rough surface, older much in appearance than in reality, lame and clumsy! – and this, when half the wealthy youth of Derbyshire were said to have disputed the prize with him!²⁸

During the period following Colonel Pole's death and while Darwin was wooing his widow in verse, he may also have tried to persuade Seward to have an affair with him. He took time to write and deliver by hand to her, a skittishly written letter and poem, dated 7th September 1780, purporting to come from his cat, Snow Grimalkin, to her cat, Po Felina. It contained enough innuendo to interest the recipient, although whether they were appreciated is another matter. Seward knew Darwin well and, in a well-considered reply, cleverly turned him down (See the correspondence in Appendix I).²⁹

Meanwhile, Elizabeth Pole was won over by Darwin's love poems and agreed to marry him. Darwin was elated enough to write:

On, on, gay dance and jocund song
And lead the lazy hours along!
Thou beamy star of morning shine!

Tomorrow makes Eliza mine! ³⁰

The marriage took place at Radburn Church, Derbyshire on the 6th March 1781, but Elizabeth flatly refused to live in Lichfield, saying she disliked the place.³¹ Possibly also, because of Seward's presence and knowing of her closeness to Darwin, so the couple went to live at Radburn Hall, Derbyshire, taking his two daughters with them, where they could join Elizabeth's daughters, Elizabeth Anne and Millicent, who were of a similar age. Seward never saw him again. Darwin died, aged seventy, following a lung infection on the 18th April 1802 at Breadsall Priory, near Derby, to where the family had recently moved.³² The man who had been her friend and mentor for twenty-three years had now gone. Seward felt the need to record her relationship with Erasmus Darwin, a commentary on his poetry and various other anecdotes of Lichfield life in her *Memoirs* (1804). She notes in the preface to this work that another biography by Mr Bilsborrow, a Derby physician friend of Darwin was planned,³³ but she wanted to provide a record on her own terms:

To the best of my power I have presumed to be the recorder of vanished Genius, beneath the ever-present consciousness that biography and criticism have their sacred duties, alike to the deceased, and to the public; precluding, on the one hand, unjust depreciation, and the other, over-valuing partiality.³⁴

The publisher, having offered 'a handsome price' for the manuscript, expressed his concern that it might cause some offence to some of Darwin's friends and insisted on changes to which Seward reluctantly agreed: 'I have attempted the softened colouring'.³⁵ In a letter to Scott, Seward states that she had made no attempt at a biography, 'only to analyse his poetic claims and to present singular instances of

philosophical love in the eventful history of one of his distinguished friends (Thomas Day) and only these must expect from my feminine Darwiniana'.³⁶ The *Edinburgh Review* quickly attacked the book calling it 'planless and incoherent'. and that 'it leaves no very distinct impression on the mind, and *that* impression, such as it is, has not in our own case at least, been extremely favourable'.³⁷ Seward commented on the review in a letter to the publisher:

ignorance and envy ate the only possible parents of such criticisms as disgrace the publication which assumes the name of your city... to blight the early sale of an eminent work by unjust criticism is to rob the bard of his remuneration, while the arrested progress of his fame must inflict severer mortification.³⁸

Following the publication of the *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin*, the Darwin family accused Seward of gross negligence and malice towards him. Charles Darwin in his *Life of Erasmus Darwin*, characterised Seward as malicious, when, following Darwin's death, she described him as 'that large mass of genius and sarcasm... a mixed character, illustrious by talent...always hospitable, sometimes friendly, but never amiable...with a cold, satiric atmosphere about him, repulsing the confidence and sympathy of friendship'.³⁹ He also stated that it appeared to him that his grandfather had rejected Seward's love for him, which he believed to have existed even before Darwin's first marriage. He states that his father, Robert Waring Darwin, had documentary evidence (subsequently destroyed) to that effect: 'were I to have published my father's papers...some circumstances must unavoidably appeared which would have been as unpleasant for you to read as for me to publish'.⁴⁰ Such a threatening statement as this, did not resolve the matter. No hint of what was

contained in this documentary evidence was given, so, for all intents and purposes, it could have been a ploy, the grandson, not greatly enamoured of Seward, trying to defend his grandfather's reputation. There was though, a rapport between Seward and Erasmus Darwin. As the first man apart from her father to have taken notice of her, she may have been infatuated with this larger than life figure. As his relationships with other women showed, Darwin had a strong sexual appetite, but it does seem from the evidence of the correspondence that Seward rejected a possible sexual relationship with Darwin.

One small section of Seward's *Memoirs of the Life of Dr, Darwin* is particularly illuminating about their relationship:

In September 1780, a playful correspondence, a letter and poem, passed between Dr. Darwin and Miss Seward, in the name of their respective cats. The subject was as ludicrous as it was singular, but the mock-heroic result pleased very generally...Some literary friends...remembering the *bagatelles* with pleasure, persuaded her to insert them. Dr. Darwin appears in a new light of comic wit and sportive ingenuity.⁴¹

Addressed to 'Miss Pussey', the tone of the letter is already set, and it is easy to see who he means when he says 'I saw you in your stately palace, washing your beautiful round face and elegant brinded ears, with your velvet paws, and whisking about, with graceful sinuosity, your meandering tail.'⁴² Obtusely, he reminds Seward of what she is missing: 'New milk have I, flowing in abundance...for your food and amusement' may be his way of telling her that he wishes to have sexual relations with her as soon as possible! Darwin also refers to a 'Norway Rat', equating this black rodent which

brought pestilence from Northern Europe in the 1700s, with the black garments of the Lichfield clergy, for as Seward's relationship with Seward and Darwin's deistic beliefs showed, neither conformed readily to Anglican beliefs. Darwin had also been condemned by Canon Seward for his renunciation of his Maker by later stating, in a poem, that all life was descended, not from God but from a common denominator, 'a single living filament.' Replying to this, also poetically, the Canon hits a sensitive spot – 'Great Wizard he!/ By magic spells'/ Can all things raise from cockle shells,' Darwin retreated and was never friendly with the clergyman again.⁴³

In the chorus of his poem to Seward, Darwin declares 'Rough and hardy, bold and free/ is the cat that's made for me!' so indicating the sort of relationship he envisages with Seward. His reference to 'He whose nervous paw can take / My lady's lap-dog by the neck' could here be referring to either John Saville, Anna Seward's dear friend, whom he would be pleased to replace in her favour; her little dog, Sappho; or he may be referring obliquely to Sappho of Lesbos, the Greek poet, known as the tenth Muse, whose poetry was considered unsurpassed for depth of feeling, passion and grace. The last four lines: 'If the treacherous swain should prove / rebellious to my tender love, / My scorn the vengeful paw shall dart, / Shall tear his fur and pierce his heart' appear to throw out a challenge to Seward that if she finds him unfaithful, she is at liberty to attack him in print. In his closing sentence, Darwin states that he has 'the profoundest respect' for her, which the wording in his poem clearly shows that he does not have, and, referring to himself as 'your true admirer', another untruth, he again hopes that, having hopefully aroused Seward's interest, she will enter into a relationship with him.⁴⁴

In her first paragraph, Seward provides a very carefully considered reply to this letter:

I am but too sensible to the charms of Mr. Snow; but
while I admire the spotless whiteness of his ermine, and
the tyger strength of his commanding form... Our hereditary
violence is perhaps commendable when we exert it against
the foes of our protectors, but deserves blame when it annoys
their friends.⁴⁵

She continues by agreeing that his education is far superior to hers, but, unlike him she has curbed her sexual desires, so much so, that none are intimidated by her and she poses no threat.⁴⁶ She concludes 'Alas, My heart died within me at so preposterous a union!'⁴⁷

In similar vein, Seward proceeds with a poem, laying before Darwin how adverse is his request. She sees him as a predatory male, whereas she would want someone more amenable, and, considering that as a medical man, he offers succour and help for those who are afflicted, he should consider the feelings of others more carefully, without resorting to sarcasm. She also reminds him that, 'The stigma fix, where'er they range,/ That cats can ne'er their nature change./ Should I content with thee to wed,/ These sanguine crimes upon thy head.'⁴⁸ Seward also draws his attention to the matter of offspring from the union and that the Close and Lichfield and beyond would know the identity of the father. 'Could I, alas! Our kittens bring / Where sweet her plummy favourite sing,/ Would not the watchful nymphs espy / Their father's fierceness in their eye?' thereby insisting that the couple would have to leave the city which they both know and love, in order not to offend the inhabitants with their behaviour: 'As on starv'd mice we swearing dine / And grumble that our lives are nine'. As a result of all this deliberating, Seward tells Darwin that she has spent 'the whole morning devoted to this, my correspondence to thee...to

which the delicacy of my sentiments obliges me to send so inauspicious a reply.’⁴⁹ As previously indicated, Darwin had set, read and corrected her work; and they exchanged ideas and collaborated on verse production, so much so that their work became almost identical. That their styles merged is undoubtedly true and many of the words and phrases used were essentially ‘Darwinesque’ – sharp, vigorous and pointed.⁵⁰ They were close friends for twenty-five years and knew each other well. If Seward loved Darwin, it was probably more for his poetic and scientific ability than for anything else. Seward certainly did not like his sarcasm. That he manipulated her in a skilful way helped make her the fine poet she would become.

On the whole, the writing and publication of the *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin*, did not bring Seward much glory or happiness for it was considered by Darwin’s family to show gross negligence and they questioned why Miss Seward ‘felt so much malice towards a man with whom she had lived on such intimate terms over so many years? The explanation appears to be that Dr Darwin rejected her love.’⁵¹ By bringing the ‘Cat’ letters into the public sphere, inserting them into the middle of the *Memoirs*, thereby showing a somewhat different aspect of Darwin, one can wonder if Seward was consciously seeking to damage his reputation. More probably, it was Seward being somewhat mischievous, for Darwin knew the strength of her long friendship with the still-married Saville. In a robust letter to Darwin, dated 14th March 1772, following a social gathering on Saturday 16th March 1772, Seward accuses him of ‘saying that Mr. Baskerville had sold his wife and...that Saville would be glad to do the same’ and he then proceeded to declare that ‘he [Saville] deserved to be *horse-whipt*...’ She continued

Expressing the high opinion I have always entertain’d of
Dr. Darwin and the friendship which I perhaps vainly

flattered myself he had for me [and] astonishment when reflect on the conversation of Saturday night, little did I expect to hear from the mouth of Dr. Darwin, things which I thought no friend of mine nor his would have said.⁵²

Her letter goes on to say that by trying to make her parents believe that Saville had acted wrongly, 'the domestic peace of our family was destroyed'. She also states in no uncertain terms that she 'was a free agent, and will be so, of an age to think and act for myself'; that she was sorry that Darwin blamed Saville for all the utterances of his 'vulgar wife', but was in no doubt that 'the censures cast upon him are meant for *me* ... What I have done to deserve such treatment...I am sure I know not'.⁵³ Yet, in spite of that sharp rebuke, Darwin was still perhaps hoping that she might succumb to his suggestions and even consider marrying him, for Seward, by this time, was thirty-seven and now perhaps past the stage of attracting suitors.

The Darwin family, after the death of Erasmus, believed that Seward had wished to become his second wife. They also believed that her disappointment in this matter produced a desire for revenge, which she ran as a thread through the *Memoirs*. Seward, though, was not likely to be good marriage material given the expectations that men had of their wives in the late eighteenth century. She liked her independence and the celebrity she had found for herself through her published work, the life she had decided upon, together with the ability to do what *she* wanted to do, without having recourse to others, especially men. So, having carefully considered a possible married life with, but in the shadow of, Erasmus Darwin, she declined his offer, for her own place in the sun.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Anna Seward to Mrs. Jackson, 3rd August 1792 in *Letters of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, 1811), 6 vols, vol. 3, p. 154.
2. King-Hele, Desmond (ed.), *Charles Darwin's Life of Erasmus Darwin* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 75. The first edition was published in 1879.
3. King-Hele, Desmond, *Erasmus Darwin: A Life of Unequalled Achievement* (London, 1999), p. 41.
4. King-Hele (1999), p. 238.
5. SJBM, Lichfield, MS 18 and MS 35, Anna Seward to Mary Powys and Dorothy Sykes. See also Teresa Barnard, *Anna Seward: A Constructed Life* (Surrey, 2007), p. 16.
6. Seward, Anna, *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin: Chiefly During His Residence at Lichfield* (London, 1804), pp. 1–2.
7. Scott, Walter (ed.), Anna Seward, *Poetical Works*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1811), vol. 1, pp. xxii–xxiii
8. Lucas, Edward V., *A Swan and Her Friends* (London, 1907), p. 24.
9. Seward, Anna, *Memoirs* (1804), pp. 1–3.
10. LRO, D / C / 6,7. Erasmus Darwin/Mary Howard: Marriage Entry, 30th December 1747, St Mary's Church, Lichfield.
11. King-Hele (1999), pp. 29–32.
12. Peakman, Julie, *Lascivious Bodies, a Sexual History of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2004), p. 32.
13. King-Hele, *Darwin* (1999) suggests that 'a slightly short pregnancy seems more likely than a pre-marital one.' See p. 31.
14. Ashmun, Margaret, *The Singing Swan*, (New Haven, 1931) pp. 31–32.
15. King-Hele (1999), pp. 149–150; see also Erasmus Darwin, *Commonplace Book* (Manuscript in Erasmus Darwin House, Lichfield).
16. Darwin, Erasmus, *Loves of the Plants* (Lichfield, 1789), Interlude three.
17. Wilson, Philip K., Dolan, Elizabeth A., Dick, Malcolm M., *Anna Seward's Life of Erasmus Darwin* (Studley, 2010), p. 111
18. Edgeworth, Richard Lovell, Letter to Walter Scott, 3rd February 1812 in *Memoirs of Richard. L. Edgeworth* 2nd edition (London, 1821), vol.2, p. 268.
19. Seward's *Ode to Captain Cook* was submitted to Lady Miller's Poetical Amusements in 1780 and won the Myrtle Wreath. See: Hasselgrave, Ruth A., *Lady Miller and the Batheaston Literary Circle* (New Haven, 1927).
20. Pearson, Hesketh, *The Swan of Lichfield* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1936) pp. 17–18.
21. Ashmun, Margaret, *The Singing Swan* (New York, 1968), p. 13.
22. Ashmun (1968), p. 47.
23. Seward, Anna, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin Chiefly During his Residence at Lichfield*. (London, 1804), p. 14.
24. King-Hele, Desmond, *Erasmus Darwin: A Life of Unequalled Achievement* (London, 1999), p. 92.
25. King-Hele (1999), p. 96 and p. 106.
26. Elizabeth (Collier) Pole (1747–1832), illegitimate daughter of Charles, second Earl of Portmore, became Darwin's second wife on 6th March 1781 at Radburn

- Church, Derbyshire. See King-Hele (1999), pp. 126–128 and pp. 170–173.
27. CUL, Pearson Papers. 577, Darwin, Erasmus, *Love Poems* manuscript, p. 12.
 28. Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (London, 1804), pp. 148–9.
 29. *ibid.* pp. 134–145.
 30. CUL, Pearson Papers, 557, Darwin, *Love Poems* manuscript, p. 87.
 31. DRO, Matlock, Derbyshire. Marriage entry, Parish Register, Radburn Church.
 32. King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin*,
 33. Wilson, Dolan and Dick (eds), *Seward's Life of Erasmus Darwin*, p. 263.
 34. *ibid.*, p. 54.
 35. Anna Seward to Dr. Lister, 20th June 1803 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, pp. 82–3.
 36. Anna Seward to Walter Scott, 9th July 1803 in *Letters* (1811), vol 6, p. 94.
 37. *Edinburgh Review*, April 1804, Article XVIII, p. 430.
 38. Constable, Thomas, *Archibald Constable and His Literary Correspondents: A Memorial by His Son*, Vol. 2, p. 25.
 39. Anna Seward to the Rev. T. S. Whalley, 12th May 1802 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 4, p. 21.
 40. King-Hele, Desmond (ed.), *Charles Darwin's The Life of Erasmus Darwin* (Cambridge: 2003), pp. 75–76.
 41. Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (1804), p. 133–145.
 42. 'Brinded' (brindled) means tawny – Anna Seward's colouring exactly. 'Tail' is a reference to the female hips and buttocks.
 43. King-Hele (1999), p. 89 .See also: Shaw, Stebbing, *Staffordshire* (Stafford, William Salt Library), pp. 54, 87 and *Gentleman's Magazine* (1784) pp. 54, 87.
 44. See Appendix 1.
 45. See Appendix 1
 46. See Appendix 1.
 47. See Appendix 1.
 48. See Appendix 1.
 49. See Appendix 1. 'A woman hath nine lives like a cat', Haywood, *Proverbs II*, iv. G2v (1546),; see also Grose, Francis, *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, (Chichester, 2004): Cat's Foot, p. 59 : 'Cats, according to vulgar naturalists, have nine lives, that is, one less than a woman.' Other entries refer to a cat's apparent ability to escape death, either through agility or sheer good luck. Seward was not about to take such a chance.
 50. Harris, Stuart, *Erasmus Darwin's Enlightenment Epic* (Chichester, 2002). See also Appendix 1
 51. King-Hele, Desmond (ed.), *Charles Darwin's Life of Erasmus Darwin* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 75–76.
 52. CUL DA227.3, Anna Seward to Erasmus Darwin, 16 March 1772.
 53. *ibid.*

CHAPTER 5

DISCOVERING ANNA SEWARD: BATHEASTON AND BEYOND, 1780–1795

Following her mother's death in 1780, and even though her father was now ailing, Seward began to make a name for herself following an invitation from Lady Anna Miller to join in her convivial 'Poetic Amusements' at Batheaston in Somerset. Here, Seward made important friendships, particularly with poets, William Hayley and Thomas Whalley, which would remain for the rest of her life, and it was here that her reputation as a poet, by winning the Myrtle Wreath on several occasions, was first recognised. This chapter will show how from these 'Amusements' her circle widened and her poetic ability grew, until she became recognised as a substantial literary figure.

Other biographers and writers have given slight praise, but are often dismissive or disapproving of these Somerset gatherings where anyone could be invited to submit their verses in competition to win the Myrtle Wreath. Lucas is disparaging, describing the assemblies and the volumes of 'Poetical Amusements at a Villa in Bath' as 'deplorably silly'. Martin states that Lady Miller kept a vase 'wherein fools were wont to put bad verses'. Hesselgrave's fuller account of the Batheaston Circle, exposes 'the literary pretensions, the doggerel versifying with Lady Miller as the *Sappho*, "a hunter of literary lions"'. Ashmun briefly mentions the 'Poetical Amusements' at Batheaston, and its hostess, Lady Miller, to whom Seward was 'indebted'. Addleshaw somewhat grudgingly acknowledges that 'in spite of the poetry, there is a certain charm about Lady Miller's *Fêtes à la Watteau*'. However, the circle was important, culturally. Gavin Turner reminds us that it was Christopher

Anstey who states that ‘the Batheaston circle allowed some to improve the mind and attempt the composition of literary works’ and puts their assemblies and proceedings into context. John Brewer highlights the artistic and communal appeal of the set to Seward, stating that ‘Batheaston was a community to Seward’s taste – high-minded, agreeable, genteel and provincial’.¹

This chapter shows how Batheaston was crucial to Seward’s literary and cultural emergence. Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Pelz examined in *Brilliant Women* (2008) the ‘Bluestockings’, the high-minded ladies who met in late eighteenth-century London. For over twenty years, wealthy women, such as Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, had been hosting evening assemblies, inviting guests from many backgrounds and differing walks of life, where topical discussions, ranging through novels and poetry to painting and plays, using good, polite, constructive conversation, were discussed by an eclectic mix of both sexes. The *salon* included Angelica Kauffmann, artist; Hannah More, Elizabeth Carter and Charlotte Lennox, writers; Catherine Macaulay, historian; Anna Barbauld, poet and writer. These ladies became known as the ‘Bluestockings’, a reference to Benjamin Stillingfleet, one of the male attendees, who always wore blue woollen stockings instead of the white silk favoured by the other gentlemen. The term would become synonymous with women who had literary ambitions. Those who participated became, over time, engaged in a wide range of activities that promoted women’s role as writers, thinkers, artists and commentators.² Anna Seward was not a formal member of the Bluestocking group, her literary abilities and cultural significance developed in the provinces, but she shared a number of their interests. She was eventually able to set up her own *coterie* and *salon* within the confines of the Bishop’s Palace, where she met other influential people, entertained and published poetry, criticisms and letters. By her persistence in entering what was, at that time,

considered to be a male domain, she gained, within the confines of her city, Lichfield, the legitimacy she sought.

In 1780, Seward was delighted to receive an invitation to submit her *Elegy on the Death of Captain Cook* (1780) and her *Monody on the Death of Major André* (1781), two poems which, on publication, received acknowledgement and much acclaim from other poets, William Hayley and Edward Jerningham, and was also praised by Samuel Johnson, who remarked, 'Madam, there is not anything equal to your description of the sea around the North Pole, in your ode on the death of Captain Cook'.³ The invitation came from Lady Anna Riggs-Miller, to her convivial 'Poetical Amusements' at Batheaston, in Somerset. Set up in 1775, these gatherings were used as a *divertissement* for those who came to Bath to take the waters. Held under the patronage of Sir John and Lady Riggs-Miller at their Villa, aspiring poets wrote verses on given subjects, which were then placed in an antique Roman urn. The winners on a given day would receive a wreath of Myrtle.⁴ Seward had already won a wreath with her submitted poem, 'An Invocation to the Comic Muse', and, though she was not always able to be present at the Riggs-Miller's home, she would continue to contribute pieces of verse.⁵ She was to be in receipt of this award a further three times, bringing her to recognition and introducing her to a wider circle of influential friends. They included Christopher Anstey, poet and satirist, who wrote *An Election Ball* (1776), a clever, amusing but scurrilous account of the social life of Bath, at that time; Catherine Macaulay, an historian, ambitious political theorist and educationalist, who had her own *salon* and Edward Jerningham, much criticised Anglican clergyman, poet and dramatist. Other writers: Richard Graves, rector of Claverton, near Bath, novelist, who, together with William Hayley, known as 'The Bard of Eartham', Thomas Whalley, poet and traveller and Robert Southey, poet and man of letters,

declared that Seward ‘had a very likeable warmth and sincerity’.⁶ The famed Ladies of Llangollen, Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, whom she admired and later befriended also became correspondents.⁷ The influence of all these friends would help set Seward on the road to literary fame. Her popular novel, *Louisa* (1784), would prove a turning point in her life, gaining her a national reputation. Her friendship with the patroness, Lady Riggs-Miller, was deeply important, so much so, that when Lady Miller died suddenly in the summer of 1781, Seward wrote the memorial poem to her friend – her way of showing her fondness for her friend and declaring that women could achieve things of note, regardless of the restrictions placed on them.⁸

At Bath, in 1765, Anna Miller, née Riggs, a twenty-four year old from a Shropshire family, heiress to a considerable fortune, married the almost penniless Captain John Miller from Ballicasey, County Clare, in Ireland. Establishing themselves with the bride’s mother at their ‘commodious’ villa, and having financially extended themselves somewhat in this venture, they journeyed to Paris, where a son was born, going on to Italy, before returning to their home at Batheaston in 1772. They now began to entertain extensively. Mrs Miller, seeking to promote literature, provided an opportunity for fashionable people of standing to combine both socialising and literary activities at gatherings at their villa. The combination of the two, she thought, would gain them an entrée into fashionable society.⁹ Horace Walpole, visiting the city and the Millers in 1776, was complimentary:

I dined, one day with an agreeable family two miles from Bath, a Captain Miller, his wife and her mother, Mrs. Riggs. They have a small, new-built house with a bow window... their garden is pretty but watered with small rivulets among the bushes. ‘Tis a very diminutive principality with large

pretensions.¹⁰

John Riggs-Miller, having been created a baronet of Ireland on the 24th August 1778, adopted his wife's surname as a prefix to his own in 1780. Its prestige gave his wife the courtesy title of 'Lady' Miller, making her socially more confident, though Mrs. Thrale, who, with Fanny Burney, had met them several years before thought her

a round, plump, coarse-looking dame of about forty, and while her aim is to appear an elegant woman of fashion, all her success is to seem an ordinary woman in common life, with fine clothes on. Her manners are bustling and very inelegant and her air is mock-important. So much for the lady of Batheaston; who, however, seems extremely good-natured and who is, I am sure, extremely civil.¹¹

Such derogatory statements from such an eminent socialite ensured that the Riggs-Millers would never be admitted to the inner circle of the Bluestockings, though they did enjoy a great degree of popularity for over six years. The Miller's morning assemblies, organised so as not to intrude on the complex social programme of Bath, were held regularly during the Season, fortnightly, on a Thursday. The ever enterprising Lady Miller, already had the idea of a series of poetical events, intellectual contests, where the winners were to be rewarded with honorary crowns of Myrtle, so her guests were invited to bring with them a composition in verse on some prearranged topic.¹²

The *leveé* or morning assembly had been popular since about 1745. In the Miller's choicest furnished rooms at Batheaston, breakfasts of biscuits, cream, butter and toast, with coffee, chocolate and tea, were served on long tables, covered with fine linen. Conversation and compositions were the order of the day, to be read aloud

and commented upon, while impromptu verses were often composed, guests vying with one another to produce epigrams. Lady Miller was out to impress the *ton*, the people of fashion.¹³ Guests were requested to bring with them six-line poems on a given subject, a chosen theme, or as *bouts-rimé*, rhyming endings supplied by their hostess. Those who were of literary merit accepted invitations and the institution flourished. Poetic pieces were placed in a ribbon-bedecked Etruscan Vase, which had been excavated in 1769, at Tusculum, near Frascati, fifteen miles south of Rome, where Cicero had lived. With such overtones of ancient times, now purchased by the Millers, it had been borne triumphantly back to England and placed in their bow window. It was of carved stone, with twisted snake handles and human figures round the sides. Acanthus adorned half its surface and a chain of trefoil circled its neck.¹⁴ A chosen person, would retrieve and read aloud each one, from which, some gentlemen from the assembly would then choose the best three, on whom Myrtle Wreaths would be bestowed. Some contributors showed no poetic talent; they placed poems in the vase because it was fashionable. Those who *could* write, did so mainly as a pastime – verses written hastily without revision, something that Anna Seward never did. Although not always able to be present, she sent her poems to Batheaston, to be placed in the vase, and she was delighted to be awarded four wreaths for her work.¹⁵ Seward took the proceedings seriously:

I was reduced to six hours for the entire composition of the *Ode to Fancy* and when I sat down to the task at ten o'clock in the morning, had not conceived a single idea on the subject and was obliged to send it at four in the afternoon – not one night's rest to sober my imagination for the perception of

absurdities. When the blotted transcript met my sight next morning, a fine number of them stared me in the face.¹⁶

Subjects chosen by Lady Miller ranged from topical items: ‘Winter Amusements’, ‘The Month of May’, to more abstract issues, such as ‘Charity’, ‘Dreams’, or ‘Imagination’. The literary coterie did attract ridicule. Walpole considered it presumptuous of the Millers to have any literary pretensions.

That both may contribute to the improvement of their own country, they have introduced *bouts-rimés* as a new discovery. They hold a Parnassus fair every Thursday, give out rhymes and themes and all the flux of quality at Bath contend for the prizes... In short, since folly, which never ripens to madness but in this hot climate, ran distracted, there was never anything so entertaining or so dull.¹⁷

Fanny Burney described the gatherings as a ‘vain folly’, and an article which appeared in the *St. James Chronicle*, signed ‘Julius Caesar’, was preceded by a satirical account of one of the assemblies, ‘At a Lady’s House, near this city, proud Knights, silly Squires and bald-pated Seers, beat their brains once a week and weave, with Penelope’s Maids, their Taffety Trappings.’¹⁸

From 1775–81, four volumes of *Poetical Amusements*, containing a selection of offerings from the Vase, were published by Lady Miller, all profits going to a Bath charity of which Sir John Riggs-Miller was chairman. The poet, Christopher Anstey, was one of those who defended the Batheaston coterie and others were also complimentary. Elizabeth Hayley, wife of the poet and biographer, William Hayley, in a 1781 letter to her husband said: ‘I have spent a very agreeable morning at Bath Easton, and must (not very much against my inclination) spend such another this day

e'ennight, (sic) for I am not so *great* or so *fashionable*, or *am literally so ridiculous*, as not to ridicule the entertainment'.¹⁹ Seward, understandably, also took a charitable view of the gatherings and the publication of its collections seeing it as serving the purposes of benevolence and charity. Her '*Elegy on Captain Cook*', already published was bringing her fame and notice. Walter Scott, in his preface to her *Poetical Works* wrote that

her poetical powers appear to have lain dormant or have been sparingly exercised until her acquaintance with Lady Miller, whose fanciful and romantic institution at Batheaston was then the subject of public attention... The applause of this selected circle gave Miss Seward courage to commit, and the public received with great favour, her elegiac commemoration of Cook.²⁰

Seward's friendship with Thomas Whalley (1746–1828) started, in earnest, at this time and they used pet names for each other, expressions of sentimentality. To her, he was *Edwy*, a character in his long poem *Edwy and Edilda*, and, in letters to him, she always signed herself 'Julia'.²¹ Flattery was the order of the day, most of it directed at Batheaston's hostess.

The acclaim that accompanied the winning of the Myrtle wreaths gave Seward a new interest in life, fixing in her mind, so it seems, the will to write together with a new sense of freedom. Seward was given free rein to her facility for writing verse. It brought her new friendships, particularly that of her hostess, and of Anstey, who wrote that 'so much wit, humour, fun, poetry, so much originality, never met together before.' His work was much in evidence at Batheaston and his epistolary verses in *An Election Ball* (1776), were based 'on a subject given out at Mrs. Miller's *Coterie*.'²²

Fanny Burney referred to Whalley as ‘one of the best supporters of Lady Miller’s Vase...he is immensely tall, thin and handsome, but affected, delicate and sentimentally pathetic.’ His best known poem, *Edwy and Edilda* (1779), a sentimental tale in five parts, led to his acquaintance with Anna Seward and their thirty-year long, enthusiastic correspondence.²³

It was Lady Miller’s sudden death in 1781, which brought to an end this much enjoyed *divertissement* together with a deep sadness for those who had supported the endeavour with their presence. Seward was asked by Sir John to compose an epitaph for the marble monument to be placed in Bath Abbey. Along with this, she composed a poem of forty-seven stanzas, *To the Memory of Lady Miller* (1782), in which she bemoaned the irreparable loss they had all sustained. ‘She bade the fires of classic lore pervade / With charity’s kind warmth, and her regard / Misfortune’s barren shade.’ To do justice to her friend, Seward, in this poem, drew on the happy times at Batheaston and the friendly hostess who had crowned her with the Myrtle wreath, expressing the indebtedness she felt. The *European Magazine* reviewed the poem at length:

It gives us very sincere pleasure, which we partake in common with our readers, to find the virtues of the late Lady Miller perpetuated by so excellent a poet as Miss Seward...one of the most shining ornaments of the British Muse.²⁴

The novelist, Richard Graves, stated that the Batheaston coterie had more merit than for which it was given credit. ‘It has also called forth some rising geniuses and some writers of the first rank ...who reside in or have occasionally visited Bath.’²⁵ Anstey’s particular ‘sporting humour’ contribution was remembered by Seward:

Anstey himself would join the sportive band,
Anstey, enlivener of the serious earth!
At the light waving of whose magic wand,
New fountains rose, and flow with endless mirth,
Pouring on Fancy's soul a glow as warm
As Bath's rich springs.²⁶

Batheaston was the spur that Anna Seward needed. Here, she achieved the confidence to deal with publishers, to negotiate her own contracts and to have her work published and subsequently reviewed.

It was William Hayley (1745–1820), known as The Bard of Eartham, having heard of all the happenings in letters from his wife, who persuaded Seward, in a letter in a letter in October 1781 to abandon her resolve to 'sigh in secret' over Lady Miller's demise, and they would meet two months later, in December of that year.²⁷ Hayley was born on the 9th November 1745, at the family seat, Eartham House, near Chichester, Sussex, the second son of Thomas Hayley (1715–1748) and his second wife, Mary (1718–1774). Having contracted a serious illness in 1750, while at boarding school in Kingston, Hayley always walked with a limp and suffered from chronic eye disease. Privately tutored at first, he attended Eton College between 1757–1763, going then up to Trinity Hall, Cambridge.²⁸ He left without a degree, bought further tuition in languages and art, and determined on a literary career after publishing his *Ode on the Birth of the Prince of Wales*.²⁹ His efforts to become a playwright, however, were not successful. In 1793, Seward would describe his tragedy, *Lord Russell*, as 'lacking spirit and variety' in style, so Hayley concentrated on poetry, odes, sonnets and epitaphs.³⁰ His odes, written to celebrate or cheer, were

sent to individuals, whether he knew them or not, and he loved being close to talented people, encouraging and offering suggestions to help their careers, inviting many to his home. He also wrote 140 epitaphs and became known as the Bard of Sussex, whose poem, *The Triumphs of Temper* (1781), would run into twelve editions, and who, in 1790, would turn down the Poet Laureateship. Sending Seward a few verses in praise of her *Elegy on Captain Cook*, he became ‘engaged in a long, familiar correspondence and friendship with that celebrated lady’.³¹ Seward had then followed the *Elegy* with a *Monody on the Death of Major André* (1781), in which she reproached George Washington for not doing enough to save this officer. The General was so concerned by this attack, he sent an *aide de camp* to visit her, carrying papers to prove he had tried to save André. Seward’s admiration for Washington was restored and afterwards she always spoke highly of him. André’s family, though, accused her of exaggeration and invention in the writing of the *Monody*, which upset her.³² Her verse poem, *Louisa, a Poetic Novel*, was well received and ran to five editions in Britain and one in America.³³ From the start, between Seward and Hayley there existed a mutual admiration; and in December 1781, he visited her in Lichfield and stayed for two weeks. Seward wrote an *Epistle* to him on his departure. Some months later, in August 1782, Seward commented ‘how charming is your poetical Gallantry! My pride, my heart, exults in such distinctions, conferred by the transcendent English Bard of the present era!’ She then visited him at his home in Eartham, Sussex, whereupon Hayley wrote an *Impromptu* on her arrival. 1782 saw a biography of Seward, with some extracts from her poetic work and the valuable influence of her patroness, Lady Miller, appear in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*.³⁴ That summer she braved the rigours of the road and visited the Hayleys in Sussex, staying for ‘several weeks’. It was perhaps fortunate that George Romney, the painter, was

also a guest. He painted a small portrait of her specially for Hayley, and would later paint a larger portrait as a gift to her father. Romney 'greatly admired her poetical talents, for the sprightly charms of her social character and for the graces of a majestic person'.³⁵ It was then, in that year, that she was acclaimed by Hayley as the 'Swan of Lichfield, Queen Muse of Britain'. Writing to a correspondent, George Harding, Attorney General to the Queen and a critic of Seward, in 1782, who would later refer to her, disparagingly, as 'the roan mare', Seward says, 'Hayley is indeed a true poet... our four years correspondence has been enriched with a galaxy of little poetic gems, of the first water.'³⁶ From the evidence of the surviving letters, the Hayley correspondence continued for another four years until 1786. The letters became less frequent, shorter, and less affectionate, resulting in a loss of admiration on Seward's part, and she became quite critical of her former friend.

By 1783, however, Seward was sufficiently well known to be approached by other important figures. In summer that year, Seward was asked by the affluent and witty Sir Brooke Boothby to take part in a pageant 'to surprise and amuse the Great Wizard Painter, Henry Fuseli', to be performed, at 'immense expense of Machinery' in woodland, in London, belonging to Colonel Richard St. George, Boothby's friend. Playing 'a Fairy Form' in the pageant, Seward descended from 'an azure cloud' as 'the Genius of the Elegiac verse', singing 'Now shall these vocal Groves be dumb/
Their tuneful Echo(e)s mute remain,/ Till my favourite Votary come/
Bath'd in tears for Hero(e)s slain.'³⁷

In 1785, as his correspondence shows, James Boswell, in the process of writing his *Life of Samuel Johnson*, wrote to Seward asking her for information and anecdotes concerning his subject, who had died the previous year. Seward did what he asked, requesting that he would use what she had provided, 'unmutilated'. Boswell,

given to protecting Johnson's memory, rejected her material and 'committed it to the flames'. A month or so later, he called on her in Lichfield hoping to add to his knowledge of Johnson, but 'he was not so candid and ingenuous and affected to distinguish, in the despot's favour, between envy and literary jealousy', so the disaffection between them may have begun at this time.³⁸ In 1786, Seward was visiting the Granvilles at Wellesbourne, near to Charlecote in Warwickshire. They were relatives of the celebrated Mrs. Delany, witty Lady of Letters, friend of Handel, the Duchess of Portland and Sir Joseph Banks, botanist, who was, in part, the inspiration for her one thousand famous flower collages, her 'paper mosaics'. Mary Delany had the ability to use scissors so incisively and with such precise control, finely working, dyeing the papers herself, structuring layer upon layer, until her collages became almost lifelike. She also constructed birds in the same manner, she cut silhouettes and was a truly fine embroideress.³⁹ These were new acquaintances for Seward, who entertained and observed the proprieties with their friends and it was while here, her *Benvolio* dispute with Boswell started.⁴⁰ His account of his *Tour of the Hebrides* (1786) was published that year. Seward determined to correct what she saw as the extravagant praise being lavished on Johnson, in letters and reviews, all seeing him as a demigod, with no human faults, that the first of her series of letters, under the pen-name, *Benvolio* appeared:

Personally to have known the wonderful being is to obtain those who never conversed with him ... to see him as he was; to perceive the genius and absurdity, wisdom and folly, penetration and prejudice, devotion and superstition, truth and sophistry...blended in the large composition of that man. Over the malignance he

records, Mr. Boswell strives to spread a veil; but that veil is not impenetrable.⁴¹

Another long *Bemvolio* letter appeared two months later, in which Seward describes, in contrast to Boswell and Mrs. Piozzi, who write of his 'honesty and charity, his injurious sarcasm, his irritable temper, his delight in wounding the feelings of others, his ingratitude and his indulgence in the most insolent rudeness.' Even though Seward thought Johnson a fine writer, she knew him to be all of these things – his overbearing ways, his preference for London over Lichfield, which ran contrary to her determined provincialism, and her objections to the way he had 'trampled' over her favourite authors, Milton, Dryden, Pope and Thomson.⁴² She attacked Boswell again at the end of 1791, crossing swords when he omitted to use the anecdotes with which she had supplied him for his *Life of Samuel Johnson*, and she publicly acknowledged that the *Bemvolio* letters were hers.⁴³

Through all this, her correspondence with Thomas Sedgewick Whalley, another important and influential friend, continued. Born in 1746, he was four years younger than Seward. His father was Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University and his mother was the daughter of the Chancellor of Wells Cathedral, so it was just a matter of course that Whalley would take Orders, becoming Rector of Hagworthingham, Cambridgeshire, on the condition that he never resided there as his health was not robust. Whalley fully complied and, using the fortunes of his three wives, travelled in countries abroad, resided at the Crescent, Bath, or at his house, Langford Court, built on terraces in the Mendip Hills, which Seward called 'Eden' and which she would visit at regular intervals.⁴⁴ They shared the same degree of gentle, high-minded 'sentimentalism', exchanged gifts, and over three years, Seward

poured out her heart to him in letters which were in sharp contrast to those she copied for publication.⁴⁵

The death of her father in March 1790, from a series of strokes and increasing senility over ten years, brought both sadness and relief to Seward, for now, although somewhat ailing herself, with rheumatism, excessive nose bleeds, ‘fierce’ coughs and breathing problems, she was a free agent. She inherited her father’s wealth from Canal and Navy Shares and Turnpike Trusts, which she had administered for some years.⁴⁶ Seward, now forty-seven, was, at last able to go wherever and do whatever she fancied – to Buxton, Harrogate or Hoylake for seabathing and to take the waters, to concerts of Handel’s music, to the theatre to see and hear Mrs. Siddons, to be installed as an *ovate*, a natural philosopher in the third degree, in the Order of Welsh Bards at a *gorsedd* on Primrose Hill in London, in 1793, organised by David Samwell, naval surgeon from HMS *Discovery*. He had visited her, with Otahitian gifts following the publication of her *Monody on Captain Cook*, and would remain her correspondent for eighteen years.⁴⁷ This was, for Seward, another important dimension of literary recognition. She also went to visit in August 1795 her new friends, Lady Eleanor Butler and Miss Sarah Ponsonby, known as The Ladies of Llangollen. She had been introduced to them by their friend, the local minister, the Reverend Mr. Roberts, who lived in Dinbren, not far from their home. The couple had fled together, from Ireland, in 1778, to live in their gothic cottage, Plas Newydd, rather than be forced into marriage. Since then, wearing their masculine costume, they had spent their time in gardening, reading and welcoming the literary élite. Visiting their home, Seward was struck by the large Aeolian harp fixed in one of the windows, which, ‘when the weather permits them to be opened, it breathes its soft tones to the gale, swelling and softening as that rises and falls’. So, it is not surprising to learn that

Seward had just such a harp subsequently installed in a window, facing east, in her palace apartments. The happy, lively friendship with these two reclusive ladies was one of the great delights of Seward's life. It brought about a ten-year correspondence and an exchange of ideas and plants:

suffer me to present my thanks for the bounteous present
of fruit trees. They will be the pride of my garden ...
pledges of a highly-prized friendship.⁴⁸

Seward lost no time in putting what she learned of the Ladies and their home, into verse, in her long poem, *Llangollen Vale*,

Screen'd from the storms of Winter, cold and pale,
Screen'd from the fervours of the sultry hours,
Circling the lawny crescent, soon they rose,
To letter'd ease devote, and Friendship's blest repose,

which she sent to them as soon as it was completed. She wrote: 'I rejoice that my poem on *Llangollen Vale* meets a reception of such partial warmth from the bright spirits it celebrates, and whose praise I desire for it more than fame.'⁴⁹ Published in 1796, the poem was not well received in all quarters. The *British Critic* called it 'pompous nonsense'.⁵⁰ Stephen Brown in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, wrote: 'What a dickens! Cannot these fine lady-writers be satisfied with moderate praise? Must it be heaped up and flowing over? Cannot the admirers of the *Lichfield Swan* be content without *she carries all before her*?'⁵¹ Seward, could not bear the slightest hint of disapproval. She believed all that Hayley had often indicated in his letters, that she was, indeed, the first, best, and wisest poet.

During the winter of 1795, Seward, now fifty-three, was again assailed by ill-health, suffering from whitlows, a very painful infection of the nail base, causing

abscesses, which made her finger and toe nails fall off, one by one, 'imprisoning me in my chair or on my couch during a fortnight ... so much for bodily egotism.'⁵²

Letters, books, manuscripts, pictures and gifts continued to be exchanged from Plas Newydd to Lichfield and back. 'I have to thank you, dearest ladies, for the very beautiful but too costly present. This ring and seal in one, this Apollo's head and lyre, makes an admirable impression. It is a fine gem, and rich and elegant is the circlet for the finger.'⁵³ In September 1802, Seward, made what would be her last visit to the celebrated pair. A year later, following the death of Saville, their letters grew infrequent and finally ceased.

For more than twenty years, Seward had written sonnets of which she was very proud. With 100 works in total, meticulously, she took great care to see that they were technically correct. Having been urged to publish the compilation by friends, and, in particular, by the Ladies of Llangollen, a flattered, Seward wrote that these works formed:

a sort of compendium of my sentiments, opinions and impressions...I certainly mean they should one day appear. I know their poetic worth, and dare trust their fame to posterity... Few people, at this period respect the Muses; and this consciousness makes me feel unwilling to expose myself ...to the spleen of my personal enemies venting itself in anonymous criticism.⁵⁴

The sonnets were printed and published in 1799, Seward confessing that her favourite was 'Sonnet XL': 'December Morning: 19th December 1782' which she wrote in her upstairs apartments at the Bishop's Palace, looking across the greensward in the Close

at the whitewashed prebendary houses all around.⁵⁵ The author of *Needwood Forest*, Francis Mundy, the hunting squire of Markeaton Hall, wrote her a ‘truly Miltonic sonnet’ by which she was ‘flattered’, as did another admirer, Christopher Smyth, of Lincoln’s Inn, London. ‘The packet before me...is rich in testimonies of kindness and of genius.’⁵⁶ Her fame was now widespread. Her works were published, she received important visitors and she had a large number of correspondents with whom she discussed domestic, literary and political events.

The invitation to join the Batheaston Circle was undoubtedly the turning point in Seward’s life, bringing her to the notice of a wider field of readership, friendship and acclaim. Her two monodies on the deaths of Captain Cook and Major André, and also her poetic novel, *Louisa*, were certainly first submitted there. Both she and her work was warmly received in the *salon*. She believed that Lady Miller had had a great influence on her life and, following Lady Miller’s early death, Seward’s memorial to her friend was to show that women’s achievements were also worth noting, regardless of the limitations imposed on females at that time. In spite of deteriorating health, Seward, always a strong willed woman, began to make a name for herself, sending her verses to the London journals, where her work was often critically acclaimed. Now a well-known figure, her recognition allowed for the establishing of a circle of correspondents and friendships. Those established with Hayley, Whalley and later, Southey, the Ladies of Llangollen, and other talented and learned people, in the main, remained with her for the rest of her life. It was within that circle that her reputation as a poet was first recognised, spurring on her belief in herself and her work.

Remaining in provincial Lichfield, Seward was later to become a controversial critic, the first biographer of Erasmus Darwin, and a prolific poet, writing 100 varied sonnets, dealing with a variety of subjects and styles and a verse

poem, *Louisa*, which ran to five editions.⁵⁷ These publications gave her both authority and legitimacy. She showed, through fortuitous contacts, being in the right place at the right time, cultivating influential friends and, through her persistence, what a late eighteenth-century provincial, talented woman was able to achieve.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. Lucas, Edward Verrell, *A Swan and Her Friends* (London, 1907), p. 42; Stapleton, Martin, *Anna Seward and Her Circle* (Worcester, 1909), p. 15; Hesselgrave, Ruth Aveline, *Lady Miller and the Batheaston Circle* (New Haven, 1931), pp. 171–3; Addleshaw, S., ‘Anna Seward and Classic Lichfield’ in *Church Quarterly Review*. No. CCXLVII, April–June, 1937), p. 9; Turner, Gavin and Anstey, Christopher, *An Election Ball: Introduction & Notes* (1787), Fifth edition, (Bristol, 1997); Brewer, John, *Pleasures of the Imagination* (London, 1997), p. 603.
2. Eger, E. and Pelz, L., *Brilliant Women: 18th-Century Bluestockings* (London, 2008), pp. 29–31.
3. Seward, Anna, *Elegy on Captain Cook* (London, 1780). See also Lucas (1907), p. 165.
4. Hesselgrave, Ruth Aveline, *Lady Miller & the Batheaston Literary Circle* (London, 1907).
5. Seward, Anna, *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1810), 3 vols, vol. 2, pp. 222–224.
6. Edward Jerningham (1727–1812), clergyman poet and essayist. See *Elegy, written in the Ruins of an Abbey* (1765); Richard Graves (1718–1804), Clergyman and novelist. Reputed to have based his character the ‘Canon’ in *Columnella or The Distressed Anchoress* (1779) on the Reverend Thomas Seward, William Hayley (1745–1820), poet, essayist, biographer. See *Triumphs of Temper* (1781); the Rev. Thomas Sedgewick Whalley, (1746–1828), poet and traveller. also Hill, Wickham (ed.), *Journals & Correspondence* (1863); Robert Southey: (1774–1843), poet, biographer of *Nelson* (1813), *Wesley* (1820) and *Bunyan* (1830). See also *Correspondence with Caroline Bowles*, p. 319.
7. Lady Eleanor Butler (1745–1829) and Sarah Ponsonby (1755–1831), from Ireland, lived together in seclusion at Plas Newydd, Vale of Llangollen, North Wales. See Mavor, Elizabeth, *Life with the Ladies of Llangollen* (London, 1984).
8. Seward, Anna, *To the Memory of Lady Miller* in *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1810), 2 vols, vol. 2, pp. 150–164.
9. Hesselgrave, Ruth Aveline, *Lady Miller and the Batheaston Circle* (New Haven, 1927), p. 1.
10. Toynbee, Mrs. Paget (ed.), *Letters of Horace Walpole* (Oxford, 1903–5), Letter to George Montagu. 27th October 1766. See also Hesselgrave (1927), p. 2–3.
11. Hester Thrale and Fanny Burney visited Bath in 1780. Met Lady Miller at the home of Thomas Whalley in The Crescent. See Hesselgrave (1927), p. 10.
12. Miller, Anna Riggs, *Poetical Amusements at a Villa near Bath* (Published for The Pauper Charity, 1775–81), 4 vols, Preface to vol. 1.
13. Hesselgrave (1927), p. 18.
14. The Batheaston Vase, *Magazine of Art*, April 1895, pp. 234–235.
15. Seward received Myrtle Wreaths for her poems *Charity; Monody on the Death of David Garrick; Ode on the Pythagorean System and Invocation of the Comic Muse*. Seward’s four winning poems can be found in Scott, Walter (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, Ballantyne, 1810), 3 vols, vol. ii., pp. 219–294.

16. Whalley, Thomas Sedgewick, *Memoirs*, 2 vols, vol. 1, p. 234–235.
17. Walpole, Horace, *Correspondence with H. Conway and Lady Ailesbury*, Letter, 15th January 1775. Lord Ailesbury, the Lord Chamberlain, was a friend of Christopher Anstey.
18. Burney, Frances, (Madame D'Arbly), 'Julius Caesar' in *St. James Chronicle*, 19th–22nd March 1774.
19. Johnson, John, *Memoirs of William Hayley, Esq.* (Gregg International Publications 1971) 2 vols, vol. 1, pp. 334–335.
20. Scott, Walter, Preface to *Anna Seward, Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1811) 3 vols, vol. 1, p. xi. See Anna Seward, *Elegy on Captain Cook* (London, 1780), Reviewed in *Monthly Review*, 62, 1780, pp. 458–461; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1780, p. 432 and *Critical Review* 50, 1780, pp. 69–70.
21. Hasselgrave (1927), p. 67.
22. Anstey, Christopher, *An Election Ball* (Bristol, 1997), p. 19. See also Anstey, John, *The Poetical Works of the Late Christopher Anstey Esq. with some account of the Life and Writings of the Author* (London, 1808).
23. Hasselgrave (1927), p. 67.
24. Seward, Anna, *Poem to the Memory of Lady Miller* (London, 1782), also in *Poetical Works*, (Edinburgh, Ballantyne, 1810), 3 vols, pp. 150–164, reviewed in *Monthly Review*, 67, 1782, pp. 46–9; *Gentleman's Magazine*, 52, 1782, pp. 127–8 and *European and London Review*, 1, 1782, pp. 286–90.
25. Graves, Richard, Preface to *Euphrosyne* (1780), vol. 2, pp. xiv–xv.
26. Scott, Walter, (ed.) *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, 1810), Vol. 2, p. 158.
27. Elizabeth Hayley to William Hayley, 18th February 1781 in *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley* (London, 1823), 2 vols, vol. 1, pp. 228–9, also quoted in Anstey, Christopher, *An Election Ball* (Bristol, 1997), pp. 36–7.
28. Hayley, *Memoirs*
29. William Hayley contracted a severe fever and encephalitis in 1748. Collapsed vertebrae meant he always walked with a limp. See *Memoirs of William Hayley* (London, 1823) 2 vols, vol. 1, pp. 17–21. Hayley, William, 'Ode on the Birth of the Prince of Wales' first appeared in *Cambridge Verses* Reprinted in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, January 1763.
30. Anna Seward in *Letters* (Edinburgh, 1811), 6 vols, vol. 3, p. 212.
31. Johnson, Reverend John (ed.), *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of William Hayley, Esq.* (London, 1823), 2 vols, vol. 1, p. 241.
32. General George Washington sent an *aide de camp* to Anna Seward with papers to show that he had tried to save André. See LoC, John André, Court Martial: Manuscript Letters, 1781. 48 pages. After publication of the *Monody on the Death of Major André* (Lichfield), the André family accused and charged Seward with exaggeration and invention.
33. Ashmun, Margaret, *The Singing Swan* (New York, Greenwood Press, 1931), pp. 125–130; Scott, Walter (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (Edinburgh, Ballantyne, 1810), 3 vols, vol. ii, pp. 219–294. James Boswell wrote a favourable review of *Louisa* in the *European Magazine*, August, 1784, p. 106.
34. Anna Seward to William Hayley, 15th March 1785 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 1, p. 29. See also Seward, *Poetical Works* (1810), vol. 2, p. 143; Ashmun (1968), pp. 95–102 and Lucas (1907), pp. 180–181.
35. The smaller George Romney portrait, painted in 1786 at Earham, for William

- Hayley, was lost. Found later, it was sold at an art sale in London and now hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York under the title of 'Portrait of a Woman' by John Hoppner. The larger portrait, painted for Seward's father, first hung in the Bishop's Palace, Lichfield. The present whereabouts of this portrait are unknown, but what appears to be a copy, hangs in the Fleming Museum, Burlington, Vermont. USA.
36. Anna Seward to George Hardinge, 4th October 1786 in *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 189.
 37. Boothby, Brooke, Baronet, dilettante, poet, political essayist; Henry Fuseli, 1784–1825, Swiss-born, Gothic painter and art critic, Best known for *The Nightmare* (1781) and *The Apotheosis of Penelope Boothby* (1792). MSS of this pageant are now held at BL, Department of Manuscripts, London. Add MS61842. See also Zonnefeld, Jacques, *Brooke Boothby, Rousseau's Roving Baronet Friend* (Holland, 2007), pp. 160–175.
 38. Anna Seward to James Boswell in *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 38. See also Ashmun, (1968), pp. 132–133. See *Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1794 and *Nichols Illustrations*, Vol. 7, p. 357.
 39. Anna Seward to John Saville, 7th December 1792 in *Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 195–198. See also Hayden, Ruth, *Mrs. Delany: Her Life and Flowers* (London, 1980).
 40. See *Gentleman's Magazine*, LVI, February 1786, p. 125.
 41. See *Gentleman's Magazine*, LVI, April 1786, p. 302.
 42. Boswell, James, *Correspondence* (New Haven), vol. 2, Letters Anna Seward to James Boswell pp. 190–192, 278–9, 281.
 43. Boswell, James, *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) (London, 1986); see also Ashmun, (1968), pp. 139–143 and Anna Seward to Miss Weston, 7th July 1791 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 3, pp. 85–7.
 44. Lucas (1907), pp. 192–4 and Hopkins, Mary Alden, *Dr. Johnson's Lichfield* (London, 1961), pp. 128–130.
 45. Lucas (1907), pp. 205–211.
 46. Seward's father referred to her as 'a business woman.' See NA, Catalogue Ref: Prob. / 11/ 1191. Will of Thomas Seward, 11th May 1782.
 47. Samwell, David, (1752–1798), Welsh Naval Surgeon, who served with Captain Cook, and Poet. See *Transactions Cymmrodorion Society*, 1926–27, p. 119.
 48. Anna Seward to Lady Eleanor Butler, 9th December 1795, in *Letters*, vol. 4, p.131. A description of the Ladies of Llangollen is contained in Anna Seward to Rev. Henry White of Lichfield, 7th September 1795 in Anna Seward, *Letters* (1811), 6 vols, vol. 4, pp. 98–104.
 49. Anna Seward, *Llangollen Vale and Other Poems* (Birmingham, G. Sael, 1796). See also Ashmun, Singing Swan, p. 213.
 50. See *The British Critic*, April 1796 (London).
 51. The poem 'Llangollen Vale' was criticised in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1796. In a footnote, the editor remarked 'We must dismiss the controversy here.'
 52. Anna Seward to Miss Wingfield, 22nd February 1796 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 4, p.164.
 53. Anna Seward to Miss Ponsonby, 24th January 1799 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 5, p. 193. There is no mention of this ring, nor to whom it was bequeathed, in Anna Seward's Will.

54. Anna Seward to Lady Eleanor Butler, 9th December 1795 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 4, pp. 133–4.
55. Seward, Anna, *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects, with Odes paraphrased from Horace* (Printed for G. Sael, London, 1799)
56. Anna Seward to F. N. C. Mundy, 30th April 1799 in *Letters*, vol. 5, p. 217. See also Letter to Charles Smyth Esq. of Lincoln's Inn, 29th November 1799 in *Letters*, vol. 5, p. 266.
57. Seward, Anna, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin, Chiefly during His Residence in Lichfield* (London, 1804) See also Seward, Anna, *Louisa: A Poetical Novel in Four Epistles* (1784) in Seward's *Poetical Works* (1810), vol. 2, pp. 219–75.

CHAPTER 6

DECLINE AND DEATH, 1796 – 1809

Although increasingly assailed by severe bodily ailments which caused her pain and distress, coupled with her concern for the failing health of John Saville, both of which could have proved daunting, Anna Seward always tried to rise above the miseries she was suffering and her mind remained set on proving her value as a poet.

In this chapter, I will explore how Seward used her new, widened world, with its host of influential acquaintances – some fleeting, some who became close friends – William Hayley, Thomas Whalley and Robert Southey, poets and the Ladies of Llangollen, Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, whom she particularly admired for their constancy, exhilarating friendship and domestic application. Seward continued to travel widely, but only within the British Isles. Within her own home, she entertained, wrote and published more poetry, criticism and letters, showing erudition, industry and productivity. Many of these works had a strain of grim humour as Seward chronicled her declining health and her various treatments. Throughout, she resisted all suggestions that she move to London. She felt her domestic and social life suited her well. By staying within her home city, Lichfield, with occasional visits elsewhere, metropolitan society came to her.

Most commentators on Seward either ignore or mention only briefly this period of her life. Lucas and Martin both note her death; Ashmun records in passing her ‘physical and mental suffering’ following the death of John Saville in 1803; Pearson ventures that she may not have been sorry to die herself. Addleshaw informs us that ‘she was a martyr to acute rheumatism’ and ‘more or less an invalid’; Clark

does not discuss her disabilities and death; Barnard (2007) records that Seward was beset by health problems; Only Bowerbank considers her illness and death in some detail.¹

By 1796, Seward had breathing problems and feebleness following a mild winter. In spite of ill-health, she found enough vigour to attend the Lichfield Balls, subscribing to them all, 'because I like the manner in which they are now conducted'.² Perhaps the exertion of so much dancing was too much for her poor frame for her breathing problems increased and the pain from the old injury to her right knee grew worse, necessitating rest, but she still maintained her correspondence and her spirits were lifted by the praise she received in reviews in *The Monthly Mirror*, *The Analytical Review* and *The European Magazine* following the publication of her poem, *Llangollen Vale*.³ She visited Buxton, Derbyshire in August 1796 'for her health', enjoying the 'changed and perhaps purer air which was instantly salutary to me'.⁴ Here, Seward was the centre of attention being 'honoured with the notice of people of rank' such as William Wilberforce and the 'polite, obliging and agreeable Lady Harewood' who observed Seward's 'resemblance to Mrs. Fitzherbert'.⁵ Even though she stayed for a month, Seward felt no benefit from the Buxton waters nor the social life, so she left for Harrogate in the hope of getting some relief from the waters there, hiding herself away from all company 'in a seclusion never in my whole life experienced' in 'a house that had seen better days', taking her meals in the Granby Hotel. She had the water, 'that superlatively nauseous fluid, impregnated with salts and sulphur, that makes it taste like putrid eggs', brought to her room, for drinking. Slowly, the regime began to make her feel better, but her presence in the town was discovered and the resulting social round led to a relapse and a hasty departure for Lichfield.⁶

The social round began again in Lichfield in November 1796, with ‘six private balls’ being given and to which a determined, invigorated Seward ‘was persuaded to attend’.⁷ The following month saw Saville’s friend, the violinist, Thomas Cramer, ‘the Orpheus of the English orchestra’, accepting an invitation to visit Lichfield: ‘Four evenings were devoted to music... twenty to supper each night. Mr Cramer played overtures, solos, quartetts... and set us all laughing at the humorous ingenuity of his violin, then he set the young ones to dancing, playing... for more than an hour’.⁸

The highly commendatory review of her sonnets in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* would have done much to lift Seward’s spirits as she struggled, once again, to cope with her bodily problems.⁹ In February 1797, she wrote to Mrs. Gell in London, that ‘fulness (sic) of rheumatic pain and weakness in my limbs... have been my enfeebling oppressors during the Winter.’¹⁰ To Lady Butler she wrote ‘I am crippled with rheumatism at present, in consequence of a violent cold... thus am disabled from walking... and fear losing all power of pedestrian exercise’ but was ‘pleased that Saville was ‘less oppressed with his nervous disability.’¹¹ But by April, her health had not improved and in May, she told a Yorkshire friend that ‘obstructed respiration is a terrible disorder when it is in excess. Walking has now become more difficult, yet I force myself to that exercise... in this old mansion, whose apartments open into each other, without steps.’¹² Without doubt, Seward’s spirits were at a low ebb. She started to decline invitations, even from Mrs. Powys of Berwick, to visit friends. ‘Maladies...rob me of many pleasures’, she wrote, ‘the Buxton and Harrogate waters induce me to think of trying them again this summer’, though she mused on ‘how time, as life advances, seems to accelerate his pace.’¹³

If Seward was not able to travel far, she still had numerous visitors, not always to her liking and she wished her ‘distant friends...would be less ready to give notes or

letters [to those] individuals who apply for them.’¹⁴ One month later, in July 1797, Seward suffered a ‘convulsive fit’ and ‘a violent, dangerous and repeated haemorrhage’ from her nose, ‘accompanied by a fever’ which left her ‘very weak and languid.’¹⁵ Her concerned physician, Dr. Jones, suggested she go to Hoyle Lake with Saville, his daughter and a maid, considering that the sea air would be beneficial. Seward was always a fervent searcher for ‘the smiles of Hygeia, Goddess of Health’. To her, fresh air was paramount and walks on the cliffs and by the sea, or even immersed within it, soon made her well enough to revisit the Ladies of Llangollen, which meant she was away from Lichfield for a month. ‘My health has certainly received benefit from my excursion’, she told Thomas Whalley, in a letter at the end of the year. She had had ‘nineteen oceanic immersions’ and enjoyed ‘the exquisitely pure air of the shore and Downs.’¹⁶

1797 had seen the arrival ‘with the wisest quietness – with the most uncomplaining patience’ of the first French prisoners in Lichfield, as a result of the war between Britain and Revolutionary France. Seward demonstrates compassion: ‘the Simpson family and I strove to cheer by kindness and hospitality, the bitter hours of their exile.’ But their stay in Lichfield was short. Within days, the men were taken to ‘an unwholesome jail in Liverpool, destitute of all the comfort of existence’.¹⁷ Seward’s own existence was again threatened towards the end of the year, by further nasal haemorrhage and acute sciatica, which she treated with ‘an embrocation made from the pretended essence of mustard, three time a day’. Her surgeon, Mr. Panting, was ‘convinced that the lotion is merely oil of turpentine mixed with saffron...yet I think it has been of use to me, and therefore, what it is, matters little’.¹⁸ In December, Seward was delighted to receive a letter from the naval surgeon, David Samwell, just returned from a ‘tour of his native principality’. She praised his poetic ability, and was

looking forward to 'hearing Mr. Randall of Wrexham, a pedal harpist' who was to be her guest when he came to Lichfield 'for a benefit concert', the following week, and, always concerned for her country, she hoped the New Year would 'rescue the nation from its self-incurred perils.'¹⁹

At the start of 1798, 'in white muslin, decked with orange ribbons', Seward attended the Staffordshire Fox-hunt Ball, held in the city.²⁰ Just one month later, Seward contemplated a visit to one of the spas, as she had found that 'the active mineral waters above all drugs,' were more suitable to her. She complained of becoming 'a sad valetudinarian' and that any late dinners result in 'injured digestion' and, 'if I cannot walk my two allotted miles a day, in or out of doors. I become extremely indisposed.'²¹ Her correspondence to other friends contained her thoughts on the continuing war with France and her great anger at the clergy for not having done more to bring about peace: 'you clergymen, who might have exhorted pacific measures, have been deeply to blame in your contrary conduct...I shall not be able to change your opinion, nor can you alter mine.'²²

In April 1798, she shows her concern in writing to Miss Ponsonby that her epic poem *Telemachus* based on Fenelon's work, sadly, had 'taken a snail's walk' since her last letter to her, but sent an 'inclosed extract' produced in 'two mornings of leisure', though she wonders if she 'will ever finish an epic poem'. Seward thought this poem would be her finest work, 'poetically, equal to anything I have written' giving her 'the best right to pre-eminence on Delphic ground.'²³ It was still unfinished at her death. Scott, her literary executor, even though he maintained he had complied with Seward's wishes, ignored it:

Miss Seward was in practice trained and attached to that school of the picturesque and florid description, of lofty

metaphor and bold personification...of compound epithets
rendered as remote as possible from the tone of ordinary
language...too remote from common life, to retain its
popularity.²⁴

Rather than being a masculine heroic epic, the poem shows Seward's commitment to the tenets of sensibility, thereby creating a response within the human heart and mind. Scott's failed to honour Seward's wishes because he felt that her previously published poetic work offered no kind of basis on which to assess this piece, so he excluded it and it was never published. Two months later 'oppressive rheumatism, gradually stealing the strength of all my frame' obliged Seward to think of trying Buxton, but 'state exactions' prevented her 'income from allowing [her] to take two journeys this year', so she remained at home.²⁵ It could be asked why her physician was not treating her with *lignum vitae*, *guaiacum officinale*, 'the wood of life' from the Caribbean, being used, at that time, for the treatment of this painful disease? For some time, Darwin had prescribed and Seward had taken 'Velno's Vegetable Syrup', a former 'quack' medicine, once owned by Isaac Swainson, a woollen draper and bringing him an income of £5000 a year. In 1772, it had become 'patent' following the successful application to the High Court by John Burrows M.D. for its manufacture and sale. Velno's Vegetable Syrup was a nostrum comprising sublimate mercury, gum arabic, honey and syrup. Burrows described it as follows:

a soluble plant medicine [which] can circulate through the
body, pushing the disease out of channels mercury cannot
reach, invigorating the entire physique. An Acknowledged
Specific in all Venereal, Scorbutic and Scrofulous cases...
it can be taken in complete secrecy...does not deprive the

patient of general society and offers quick and permanent relief.

Patients were required to take two doses daily, so, at eight shillings and sixpence per dose, this was not an inexpensive medicine.²⁶ In the eighteenth century, there were also, for physicians, four staple recognised but dangerous, remedies: mercury, used in the 'blue pill', calomel, was a very powerful purgative; antimony, as tartar emetic, produced vomiting, and was also used to ease a cough, to cause perspiration and a bowel action; opium, from poppies, also known as morphine, to ease severe pain and to produce sleep and cinchona or Peruvian bark, which contains quinine, used in small doses as a remedy for feverish colds. Medical men, from the most renowned physician to the humble folk-healer, were, at this time, all competing for custom, recognition and reward. The 'healing arts' were only occasionally able to overcome the major diseases that were due to poverty, poor diet and squalid living conditions, so herbal remedies were resorted to quite often. These prescribed medicines and the self-help remedies fed off each other, the latter method being described as 'quacking oneself.'²⁷ The thought remains and one wonders why, when Seward always maintained herself as a 'celibate cypher' and often complained of her 'stale maidenhood' was she being prescribed Velno's Vegetable Syrup, a medicine for the treatment of venereal disease? Perhaps it was a case of, if at first (or even last), you don't succeed, improvise.

August 1798, in spite of what Seward had declared about the state of her income, saw her back at Buxton, among an 'immense crowd', seeking relief from the springs, hoping that if she lived 'and the fiend of the joints remits his persecution, next year to see and converse with my friends.'²⁸ Sadly, the waters failed to help her condition, but she found pleasure and 'pure air' in the home of Mr. Sneyd of Belmont,

Lancashire, before returning to Lichfield. A surprise gift arrived from the Llangollen ladies in January 1799 of a 'very beautiful but too costly a present – a ring and seal combined, with Apollo's head and lyre – a fine gem, and rich and elegant is the circlet for the finger'. The gift raised her spirits, but her mood was to be cast down on hearing of the sudden death of her naval surgeon friend, David Samwell in London.²⁹ Her *Sonnets* had now 'gone to press and Glover, our Lichfield Claude...has made a sweet drawing for the engraver'.³⁰ Seward's health deteriorated, resulting in a chest infection, leaving her depressed. She left home in June 'to take the waters at Bath' in a further attempt to induce a recovery, then to travel to Hoyle Lake in August for a sojourn of six weeks, before returning to the Bishop's Palace.

Thomas Whalley sent what he hoped would improve her condition and she wrote in March 1799 that she had 'received the 'tractors' safely. 'I have worn them constantly in my pockets', she wrote, 'and have rubbed the affected parts with them until they felt sore, but there is no abatement of the pain. I think they operate by a sort of occult charm in which I have little faith.'³¹ The 'tractors', costing five guineas each, had been invented in 1795 by an American, Elisha Perkins, who claimed that, by drawing his wonder gadget across the affected part, the body would be galvanised, so pain and disease would be cured by the magic of electricity. His 'metallic' cure put £10,000 in his pocket, but did nothing to improve Seward's health, which took another downturn during the 'Siberian' winter of 1799. She complained of 'dizziness' with 'torpid' pain and 'thrillings, like a sleeping foot returning to sensation' and that she has had 'the cupping glass, lancet, volatile drops, blisters and medicines, to no avail.'³²

Throughout the following year, Seward remained in Lichfield attending to her

correspondence and her letters. These are full of literary criticism and political comment. In April 1801, she wrote to her friend in Yorkshire that she has ‘a sad account to give of my situation...I apprehend a total loss of all ability to travel.’ She had had another ‘violent’ fall, down steps into the street, after paying an evening visit, injuring her left knee so that she could now walk only with assistance.³³ This injury, coupled with the old injury to her right knee and Seward’s other medical problems, resulted in a state of melancholy. The thought of ‘a lifelong imbecility sickens my heart’, she recorded, it ‘withers the energy of my mind [and] often darkens my spirit’. Proposed improvements to the Close, however, caused her to rouse herself and to write a strong letter to the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral regarding their proposal to ‘take away every other tree’ along the Dean’s Walk; ‘It will be like drawing every other tooth in front of a well-furnished mouth.’ She made an impassioned plea for just the short and weaker lime trees to be removed and even organised a subscription to gravel the Walk. She also complained about other recent changes in the Close – the removal of the conduit and its replacement with a ‘miserable’ pump and the ‘damage done to the foundations of some of the houses by the widening of the approach’, but to no avail.³⁴ Her mood was somewhat lifted by the announcement that at last the war was over, but was advised by Saville to ‘restrain her joy’ until the peace terms were known.³⁵

In April 1802, Seward received ‘a literary present’: *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, a collection of historical and romantic ballads by Walter Scott, the young Scottish poet, with whom she had recently started a correspondence. Flattered by the gift, she could have just thanked him, but instead, Seward read the volume carefully praised his literary skill, and candidly criticised the contents of ‘the highly curious books’.³⁶ On 18th April, she heard of the death, in Derby, of Darwin, and wrote to

Thomas Whalley that 'his extinction is universally lamented' and that Darwin's son, Dr. Robert Waring Darwin of Shrewsbury now applied to her 'for assistance in furnishing materials for a short life of the great man.' Seward expressed a wish that 'the application had not been made, since my respect for the existing Dr. Darwin will not let me say it nay: since the demands on my pen are already too heavy for my health.' In the same letter, Seward also complained that her health was 'not so good during the rigid, gloomy winter and has not improved. Rheumatism combined with... weakness, dizziness, tremulous sensation of the heart and difficulty with breathing when I walk.'³⁷ Seward was now constantly dizzy, had to be bled, and had to take an emetic and 'calomel: 'an awful warning!...I cannot cross the room without an assisting arm and have nervous tremblings all over me!'³⁸ By September 1802, she was still in poor condition. 'The renovation of a frame, enfeebled by accident and impaired by time, was the chief, if not the only motive which counteracted my love of home and dread of journeying.' Yet Seward did just that – going back to Hoyle Lake. Her knee, however, was not strengthened 'in spite of twenty-one immersions'; and she was obliged to return through Ivetsy in Shropshire, 'to travel the heavy, hilly stage between, in dusk, thickening into darkness, amid the palpable smoke and lurid fires of the Kettleley-engines, whose pointed flames...served only to make the darkness visible...a commercial Pandemonium.' Two days later, she attended the Handel Festival in Birmingham, 'in Calcutta heat and immense crowds', but 'paid the price for it' with 'a severe cold and inflamed lungs'. On top of this, she was faced with 'the perpetual claims of social engagements and answering letters from literary strangers.' One was Dewhurst Bilsberrow, an admirer of Darwin, who had asked her for help with a proposed biography, were halting the progress of her own 'little Darwiniana.'³⁹ Declining, Seward states that her own volume 'ought long since to have been

finished...I have spoken of him as he was. My anecdotes, as yet, only cover sixty quarto pages and perhaps eighty will involve all I have to say on the subject.⁴⁰

Well into 1803, she shrank from venturing into society and the few letters that she wrote to friends are full of Saville memorabilia: 'I remain still a voluntary prisoner within my own gates...repose is all I wish for', but she acknowledged 'that she should visit some of her neighbours who have been so kind.'⁴¹ Full of melancholy and physical suffering, not able to travel far, Seward realised she was failing. She looked for a companion and found one in the middle-aged spinster Elizabeth Fern, whom she had known for many years.⁴² Even though she remained in her home, Seward was still aware of city affairs. In August 1803, when subscriptions 'for the clothing and arming of a Volunteer Corps within and for the protection of the City of Lichfield' were called for, Seward saw it as her duty to give thirty two pounds, two shillings to this cause.⁴³

She completed the manuscript of her *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin* and sent it to Joseph Johnson, the London printer. The *Memoirs*, as she pointed out on the title page, were 'not a biography' but were chiefly concerned with Darwin's time at Lichfield, for that was the only part of his life on which she could comment authoritatively. As she had already informed the Reverend Dewhurst Billborrow:

It will not, from its shortness, be worthy to be called a life, and still less, from my utter ignorance of the habits and incidents which marked the course of that period in which he lived at Derby...Characteristic traits of his friends, are introduced and also criticism of his writings. I have spoken of him as he was.⁴⁴

Even though these comments demonstrate Seward's honesty with regard to what she had written, the Darwin family were not pleased and made veiled threats, necessitating a retraction from Seward, published in *The Edinburgh Review*.⁴⁵

In November, she told Whalley that she 'had been extremely ill for two weeks...I have spasms of the brain which take away the use of my limbs and my frame is weaker', but she is glad 'that he is enjoying the benefits of Velno's Syrup', that her letters are now written by her companion, Miss Fern, and 'callers are becoming an irritation and a strain.'⁴⁶

Towards the end of 1804, as she noted in a letter to Charles Simpson, Seward was informed by the church authorities that the Bishop had now implemented a plan for the demolition and rebuilding of the outhouses, together with new roof tiles, at the Palace. No internal work would be carried out, but, as the cost would be in the region of £1000, there would be 'a considerable increase in rent'. Seward, in spite of her condition, had to arrange the removal of all her furniture and belongings, and she spent five months staying with friends and relatives. From Winterbourne, she wrote to thank her friend, the barrister Charles Simpson, for 'the welcome news of the Palace, concerning its approach to a habitable state' and also thanked him for the offer of 'on my returning to Lichfield, I would repeat my visit to your pleasant and hospitable mansion and make it my head-quarters until the ecclesiastical roof may once more shelter me.'⁴⁷ In March 1805, in a letter to Walter Scott, she wrote that she still suffered 'a dizziness of the head, which has increased in force, amounting to sudden paroxysms, in which all surrounding objects seem to fall into chaos.' She also thanked him for the copy of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, recently received. Examining each stanza carefully, she commented on the beauty of each one.⁴⁸ She also wrote to Dr. Caleb Hillier Parry at Bath concerning her condition. He was an esteemed physician

who had recognised and described the heart condition, Angina Pectoris. He had obviously sent her a régime about which she was not happy. In her letter she carefully elicited all aspects of her condition from the broken knee cap to the latest seizure. She also stated that 'I have, and still do use, a flesh brush about my body on waking', that 'Dr. Hussey in Birmingham has advised me not to increase my usual exercise and bodily exertion', and that she 'will eat a small portion of flesh meat each day'. She insists, however, that she 'must have a little butter...as I would hate to eat my food totally dry'. She agreed to having leeches applied weekly and that she would 'take the blue pill, Calomel' that he suggests.⁴⁹

For about two years, Seward had been arranging and preparing her early poems for possible publication. Her cousin, the reverend Henry White had already approached the publisher, Archibald Constable in Edinburgh about this matter. A short visit from Walter Scott in May 1807, 'like a sunbeam into my dwelling', enlivened her. 'The muses drive a thriving trade for Scott...in the present period. Such visits are the most high-prized honours my writings have procured for me.'⁵⁰ When he finally met her at her home, Scott enjoyed her company so much that he stayed for two days. He would afterwards assisted Constable in the negotiations for the exclusive copyright of her works, and she would choose him to be the editor of those works. In July, she complained to Dr. Hussey that, for the last month, she was in 'pain of body and feverish irritation, violent itching, which [has] banished nightly rest.'⁵¹ A month later she still complained that at night 'the fiery darts begin to shoot with increased and scarcely supportable fury. I dread to press my pillow'.⁵² All such scorbutic conditions were thought to manifest themselves in varying ways: skin disorders, dropsy, fevers, dizziness, breathing difficulties, agues or consumption. Seward's condition could have been psoriasis or scurvy, through lack of vitamin C,

but this could easily have been treated with the freely-growing scurvy grass, a folk remedy.⁵³ Suffering from rheumatism and depression were often associated with the cause, and Seward's physician took six ounces of blood at each visit in a possible vain attempt to ease her condition. This might sound rather a drastic procedure, but it was far better than the use of an antimony cup, a dangerous and poisonous mixture of antimony (tartar emetic) and James's Powders, dissolved in wine and used for the treatment of fevers.

October 1807 brought her the first letter from Bristol-born Robert Southey, living in the Lake District, but he came to visit her in 1808. Her first impression was not favourable. She criticised his Tory politics yet saw some literary promise, having studied his verse. She praised his work, particularly his *Madoc*, in her letters and Southey asked Seward to suggest alterations to this epic poem. She cautioned him about making changes for changes sake: 'Madoc appears to me a work too beautiful and great to stand the smallest need of any alteration.'⁵⁴ Southey may have thought that by paying homage to this Bluestocking lady, whose opinions were noticed, his image would be greatly enhanced; and he provided her with details of his works and career. Seward appears to have acted as a professional confidante before Southey became a well-known writer. Their correspondence continued until her death.

Early in 1809, Seward compiled her detailed Will, her legacy for the future, which would run to twenty pages (see Appendix 2). It demonstrates her ability as an astute business woman with a large portfolio of stocks, shares, property, and money. She would attempt in her will to remember everyone who had meant something to her, particularly her female beneficiaries, granting legacies in their own right, and overturning the *couverture* of marriage.⁵⁵ She wrote to Mr. Constable, the publisher in Edinburgh: 'I have left you the exclusive copy-right of Twelve Volumes, quarto, half

bound...of letters...that, after I had written them, appeared to me to be worth the attention of the public...It commences, viz., from the year 1784 to the present day'. In the same letter she also hoped that Scott would 'have the goodness to settle the terms'.⁵⁶ In monetary terms, Seward left £9000, some inherited from her father, some from her own investments and some from her own publications, Seward always negotiated her own contracts with publishers and editors (see Appendix 2). Seward's last published letter was to Walter Scott, in which she relates her delight that 'her young cousin, Miss Seward, was advantageously married to Major Burrowes of the 38th Regiment of Foot [and] heir to a large estate'.⁵⁷ On 23 March 1809, having taken to her bed, Seward fell into a 'universal stupor', a massive stroke. Never regaining consciousness, she died at six o'clock in the evening. Two days later, *The Gentleman's Magazine* recorded:

March 25. In the Episcopal Palace, in the Close of
the Cathedral Church of Lichfield, the justly celebrated
Miss Seward; 'Wept, Prais'd and Honour'd by the
Friends she lov'd'.⁵⁸

Seward was buried in the Choir of Lichfield Cathedral with her parents. The last three lines of her epitaph, written by Walter Scott, read:

Honour'd, belov'd and mourn'd, here SEWARD lies
Her worth, her warmth of heart, our sorrows say
Go seek her genius in her living lay.⁵⁹

Seward's literary legacy was decimated by Scott, who went through all the bequeathed letters, removing from them 'all personal anecdote' relating to himself and others.⁶⁰ He removed the prose and poems of her late father, together with 'the

imitation of Telemachus' but categorically in the Preface to her *Poetical Works* he stated that the poetry has been published 'precisely according to Miss Seward's directions'. Consequently, Seward's twelve letter books were reduced, and only six volumes of her vast correspondence saw publication in 1811. He did the same to her *Poetical Works* and only three volumes saw publication by Ballantyne in 1810.⁶¹

Notes to Chapter 6

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14. Anna Seward to Mrs. Stokes, 15th June 1797 in *Letters* (1811), Vol. 5, p. 358.
15. Anna Seward to Thomas Parke Esq., 11th July 1797 in *Letters* (1811), Vol. 4, p. 367.
16. Anna Seward to Reverend. Thomas Whalley, 10th October 1797 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 4, p. 392.
17. Anna Seward to Colonel Dowdeswell of Shrewsbury, 30th November 1797 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 5, pp. 18–19.
18. Anna Seward to Thomas Parke Esq., 21st December 1797 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 5, pp. 28–29.
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40. Anna Seward to the Rev. Dewhurst Bilsbury (Billsborrow) 9th October 1802 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, pp. 52–56
41. Anna Seward to Mrs. Childers snr., 3rd September 1803 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, pp. 106–109.
42. Anna Seward to Mrs Childers snr., 23rd September 1803 in *Letters* (1811), vol 6, p. 285.
42. Anna Seward to Miss Fern, 7th February 1806 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, p. 245; also Anna Seward to Charles Simpson, 19th September 1804 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, pp. 191– 3.
43. Clayton, Howard, *Coaching City* (Lichfield, 1970), see Appendix ‘B’, *Subscriptions*, pp. 94–95.

44. Anna Seward to the Rev. Dewhurst Bilsbury (Billborrow) in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, pp. 52–56.
45. Seward, Anna, *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin*, see *Edinburgh Review*, ‘Miss Seward’s ‘Memoirs of Dr. Darwin’, April 1804, footnote, pp. 236–7.
46. Anna Seward to Rev. Hill Wickham in *Journals & Correspondence of Thomas S. Whalley* (London, 1863), 2 vols, vol. 2, pp. 257–9.
47. Anna Seward to Charles Simpson, 19th September 1804 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, pp. 192-3, 197- 8.
48. Anna Seward to Walter Scott, 7th March 1805 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, pp. 207–8.
49. HU, MS Hyde 82 (5), Anna Seward to Dr. Caleb Hillier Parry, Bath, 13th March 1805
50. Anna Seward to Henry Carey, 10th May 1807 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6. pp. 337–340.
51. Anna Seward to Dr. Hussey, Portsmouth, 28th July 1807 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, p. 341.
52. Anna Seward to Mrs. Blore, Edensor, Derbyshire, 8th August 1807 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, p. 357
53. Scurvy Grass or Spoonwort. A sharp-tasting, powerful perennial made into a solution from the leaves, mixed with orange juice and used for the treatment of scorbutic rheumatism. See Thompson, C. J. S., *The Quacks of Old London* (New York, 1993), pp. 173–4; also Porter, Roy, *Quacks, Fakers and Charlatans in Medicine* (Gloucestershire, Stroud, 2000), pp. 26–27, 195–201.
54. Robert Southey (1774–1843), Bristol-born Poet Laureate and reviewer. Anna Seward to Robert Southey, 15th August 1809, in *Letters* (1811), Vol. 6, p. 358–362.
55. LRO. D262 /1/35, Anna Seward, Will, 8th March 1809, 20 pages; see Bequests in this Will, Appendix 2.
56. Seward, Anna, *Letters* (811), ‘Advertisement’, Vol. 1, pp. v–vi.
57. Anna Seward to Walter Scott, 5th November 1807 in *Letters* (1811), vol. 6, pp. 387–390.
58. Anna Seward, *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1810), 3 vols, Biographical Preface by Walter Scott, Vol. 1, p. xxxii; see also *Gentleman’s Magazine*, Obituary, March 1809 and ‘Biographical Sketch of the Late Miss Seward’, April 1809.
59. Walter Scott’s *Epitaph to Miss Seward* on Memorial Tablet, Lichfield Cathedral.
60. Scott, Walter (ed.), *Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (1810), 3 vols, Biographical Preface, pp. xxxviii – xxxix. NLS 879–880. *Juvenile Letters*, 1762–88. These writings of Anna Seward, bequeathed to Walter Scott clearly show, in his handwriting, the sections he wished removed before publication.
61. Scott, Walter (ed.), *Poetical Works of Anna Seward* (1810), 3 vols., vol. 1, p. xxxii. See also Constable, Archibald, *The Letters of Anna Seward, written between the Years 1784 and 1807* (Edinburgh, Constable, 1811), 6 vols.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

It was undoubtedly the death of Seward's mother in 1780, with whom she always had a difficult relationship, which gave her an early sense of freedom. To some degree, this was taken away by her father's subsequent series of strokes over the ensuing ten years and his lapse into senility, yet it was his early teaching and her espousal of his poem, 'The Female Right to Literature' (1748), which convinced Seward that she was, and would always consider herself, endowed with literary gifts. She developed great strength of character, confidence in her own ability to think and act for herself and enough fighting spirit to make her name and to take her place in the literary world. This, then, was the bond forged between father and daughter. That she was strong, was shown in her belief that she was equal to any man, and in the decision she took never to defer to one. Seward was confident enough to know in her own mind that, even though a woman, and a provincial one, she had something worth saying. By using her sharp wit, reasoning and incisive literary ability, excellent judgement and combative spirit, Seward became one of the most successful women writers of her time. Her poems on Captain Cook and Major André were published, as was her verse poem, *Louisa*. She also wrote literary criticism, sonnets and sermons. Her extensive circle of friends and correspondents, to whom she was greatly attached, recognised her worth and valued her friendship and she believed that, by preserving her letters, many of which were carefully chosen and rewritten, becoming almost essays, future generations would have an insight into her world. As John Brewer

indicates, this is ‘in fact, revealing, for it represents the idealised version of a literary community she wishes posterity to imagine...at the centre of which Seward is to be found’.¹

Anna Seward was a bluestocking who never joined a bluestocking group and very few of her letters were addressed to literary figures in London. They were written for an interconnected circle of friends, clerics, writers and poets, offering her opinions and criticisms but always portraying herself as the dutiful daughter and busy gentlewoman caught up in daily life; a woman primarily concerned with caring for her aged parent, having sacrificed all ambition to properly feminine employments. Such employments were not really necessary in Seward’s case, as her household was run by five servants, giving her ample time to devote to her correspondence and literary and business activities.

Although she had numerous friends, no friendship was greater than that between her and Saville, in spite of Boswell’s slur on her conduct, Norma Clarke reminds us that ‘men like him (Boswell) could conduct their sexual lives in whatever way they pleased...women...were fair game for gutter journalism.’² As indicated in Chapter 3, Seward claimed that her relationship with Saville was an innocent one. The well-beneficed Reverend Thomas Whalley, another friend, became Seward’s main male correspondent, and she unburdened her heart to him over twenty years.

Her elegiac poems confirmed Seward’s reputation as a significant poet and her friendship with Hayley, the most fashionable of living poets at that time and, in particular, the sort of poet she aspired to be, set the seal on her reputation. He became one of her most enthusiastic supporters, joining Erasmus Darwin who was not only a friend but her poetic mentor and collaborator until he plagiarised some of her verses, using them, she believed, in his own in his great work, *The Botanic*

Garden (1789) without acknowledgement. Seward used the chance here to retaliate and show her literary ability, when she was asked by Darwin's son, Robert, for anecdotes following his father's death. Her *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin* (1804) demonstrates her worth: first and foremost as a fine writer drawing out, anecdotally, the emotional, personal and complex characteristics of Darwin, his experiments and the juxtapositions of life and death, sexuality and fertility, often shown in his poetry. She also skilfully dissected the idiosyncratic thinking and behaviour of his eccentric Rousseauvian friend, Thomas Day. He was also concerned with experimentation, using the two orphan girls, Sabrina and Lucretia, in a quest to find a suitable wife. By following this with a careful and detailed study of Darwin's poem, *The Botanic Garden* (which incorporated her opening lines), Seward provides a fine-grained analysis of this work, but she knew that there would be criticism of the book as a whole. The *Edinburgh Review* remarked that 'after having followed her with patience through her eccentric and capricious evolutions, we are unable to say...that it has afforded us any tolerable compensation ...of a distinct and intelligible narrative.'³ Even some of the Wedgwood family voiced their anger, stating that Seward 'had inflicted indelible damage on Dr. Darwin's reputation.'⁴ Lucas wrote that the 'book could not be worse, and it is dull too. Everything great... is omitted... [and] turned into silliness.'⁵ Peter Rowland argues the 'world at large was partly stunned, and partly fascinated by Anna Seward's lurid Book of Revelations.'⁶

Throughout Seward's life her health was always a concern. Respiratory and heart problems, lameness, rheumatism and psoriasis were constant, and for which she sought relief wherever she thought it could be obtained. Having lived and breathed in the pure air of the Peak District in her early life, Seward was very sensitive to the quality of her environment, seeking and travelling to places such as Hoyle Lake,

North Wales, Bath and Buxton, where the air was unpolluted and beneficial, allowing her to breathe. Always willing to try out new and various ideas for treatments, she kept herself informed with letters to medical and scientific men. She was greatly concerned about the damage to the countryside by industrialisation, bringing it into her writing, thereby allowing others to be aware of the growing problems.⁷

Seward was a pioneer, a woman somewhat out of her time, living and working in a provincial city. Her quest was literary fame, the chance to demonstrate natural talent. Seward determined to do that and, as Clarke has suggested, she ‘took upon herself an heroic and high-minded endeavour...[that]...what she produced might best be seen as an epic, a finished epic.’⁸ This was her poem, *Telemachus* (1798) which tells of the young man’s search for his father, Odysseus. Seward believed that this would be her finest work. Sadly, this epic poem was still not finished at her death.⁹ Scott, to whom she bequeathed her works, thought otherwise. Perhaps he considered the £100 she left to him in her Will (Appendix 2), paltry recompense for what he was asked to do. He completely ignored it, along with much of her other writing and letters, and it was never published.¹⁰

Seward’s Will again shows us her ability, not only as a business woman, but as a fine writer. Her staff, friends and relatives are her main concern and she left very specific instructions as to the disposal of her possessions. Her portraits, paintings, stocks, shares and money, bequeathed to her female friends and relatives, ensuring that the laws of *couverture* were bypassed and that those to whom she designated, would receive her bequests. Her twelve letterbooks, written and rewritten over twenty years, showed her keen judgement and insight. They contained *her* story and were left to Archibald Constable on the understanding that he would publish two volumes annually. These letters, though appearing formal, are written with confidence by a

woman aware of the circumstances of her provincial community and the wider world; an independent woman who tried to strike a balance between the domestic and literary worlds. Scott removed all the parts of her *oeuvre* he considered 'anecdotal'. By doing so, he significantly changed and reduced the volumes to six, which were then published in 1811.¹¹

Had the instructions in her Will been carried out as she decreed, Seward's place in literary history might have been more secure. Her letters were her literary manuscripts, often revised and rewritten. They were not only a personal declaration, but a lasting reminder of her life and what she had achieved. Seward considered that poetry was a 'science' which she carefully studied throughout her life, using the works of the classical poets, William Shakespeare, John Milton, John Dryden and Alexander Pope, together with those of the 'peasant' poets, John Newton, Robert Burns, Anne Yearsley and Thomas Chatterton. She used nature in its varied forms, mythology, history and her strong patriotism, in her verse. She also arranged for all her poetry to be published (possibly in eight volumes), but again, Scott reduced Seward's work to three volumes with a selection of her 'juvenile' letters serving as an introduction.¹²

Anna Seward showed that one did not have to be a professional journalist or an historian, or to live in London, to be able to write well. Seeking literary fame, she trusted her own judgement, both as a critic and through careful assessment of both her own and the work of others. Seward cultivated within herself reason, self-discipline and independence. Hers was a distinctive voice, yet following her death, sentimental verse and sensibility came under political attack, giving rise to a belief that genius was a privilege of only a few, gifted people and not for all. Modern poets, particularly women, were discarded in favour of ancient authors. Sentimental expression was no

longer fashionable, and Seward's work was largely forgotten. Not only her letters, but many of her poetical works, such as *Louisa: A Poetical Novel in Four Epistles* (1784), *Ode on General Elliott's Return from Gibraltar* (1787), *Llangollen Vale with Other Poems* (1796), and *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects* (1799) were often only to be found in library collections.¹³ Now, with a resurgence of interest in Anna Seward, she is receiving greater attention as a writer and poet, yet there are parts of her life about which we know nothing at all: her relationship with her mother and with James Boswell and John Saville, touched upon but not fully explained. These could warrant further research but, for now, through this resurgence, Anna Seward has achieved her place as a significant figure, who demonstrates through her writings the possibilities of a middle-class provincial literary life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century.

Notes to Chapter 7

1. Brewer, John, *The Pleasures of the Imagination, English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), p. 604.
2. Clarke, Norma, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London, 2004), p. 47.
3. *Edinburgh Review*, 'Miss Seward's Memoirs of Dr. Darwin' (1804), p. 231.
4. Wedgwood, Barbara and Hensleigh, *The Wedgwood Circle, 1730–1897: Four Generations of a Family and their Friends* (London, 1980), p. 136.
5. Lucas, Edward Verrell, *A Swan and Her Friends* (London, 1907), p. 105.
6. Rowland, Peter, *The Life and Times of Thomas Day 1748–1789* (Lewiston, 1996), p. 350.
7. Seward, Anna, 'Colebrookdale' in *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1810) 3 vols, vol. 2, pp. 315 – 9.
8. Clarke, Norma, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London, 2004), pp. 15.
9. *ibid.*, p.50.
10. Seward, Anna, *Poetical Works* (Edinburgh, 1810), 3 vols, Biographical Preface, vol. 1, pp. xxxix –xxxv.
11. NLS. Millgate Union MSS, 850 et seq. Walter Scott Correspondence Catalogue.
12. Seward, Anna, *Poetical Works*,(Edinburgh, 1810) 3 vols, Vol. 1, pp. xliii–ccvi.
13. Seward, Anna, *Louisa: A Poetical Novel, in Four Epistles* (London, 1784); *Ode on General Elliott's Return from Gibraltar* (London, 1787), *Llangollen Vale with other poems*, Jonathan Wordsworth (ed.), (London, 1796, Reprint 1994), *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects and Odes Paraphrased from Horace*, (London, 1799).

APPENDIX I.
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ANNA SEWARD AND
ERASMUS DARWIN, SEPTEMBER 1780: THE ‘CAT’ LETTERS
AND POEMS

This appendix provides a supplement to the discussion of the relationship between Anna Seward and Erasmus Darwin in Chapter 4. It reproduces and provides comments in notes upon their correspondence which took place in September 1780. The correspondence takes the form of both letters and poems from one cat to another where Darwin as ‘Persian Snow’ addresses Seward as ‘Miss Po Felina’, who responds in the same vein. There are two versions of this correspondence. One is provided in Seward’s *Memoirs of Dr Darwin*, published in 1804 (Section A) and the second is contained in the Pearson Papers held in Cambridge University Library (Section B).

Section A

In her *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin*, Seward introduces what she calls ‘a playful correspondence’ that passed between her and Erasmus Darwin in September 1780, saying that

Some literary friends of the writer, remembering the
bagatelles with pleasure, persuaded her to insert them
[and] in this whimsically gay effusion, Dr Darwin appears
in a new light of comic wit and sportive ingenuity.¹

This letter below contains several *double entendres* which, while they may have aroused Seward’s interest, she, knowing his nature, turned him down quite tactfully in her reply.

Dr. Darwin’s Letter:

From the Persian Snow, at Dr. Darwin’s, to Miss Po Felina, at the
Palace, Lichfield:

Lichfield Vicarage, Sept. 7th. 1780.

Dear Miss Pussey,

As I sat, the other day, basking myself in the Dean's Walk,² I saw you, in your stately palace, washing your beautiful round face, and elegantly brinded ears, with your velvet paws, and whisking about, with graceful sinuosity, your meandering tail. That treacherous hedgehog, Cupid, concealed himself behind your tabby beauties, and darting one of his too well aimed quills, pierced, O cruel imp! my fluttering heart.³

Ever since that fatal hour have I watched, day and night, in my balcony, hoping that the stillness of the starlight evenings might induce you to take the air on the leads of the palace.⁴ Many serenades have I sung under you windows; and, when you failed to appear, with the sound of my voice made the vicarage re-echo through all its winding lanes and dirty alleys. All heard me but my cruel Fair-one; she, wrapped in fur, sat purring with contented insensibility, or slept with untroubled dreams.⁵

Though I cannot boast those delicate varieties of melody with which you sometimes ravish the ear of night; and stay the listening stars; though you sleep hourly on the lap of the favourite of the muses, and are patted by those fingers which hold the pen of science; and every day, with her permission, dip your white whiskers in delicious cream, yet am I not destitute of all advantages of birth, education and beauty. Derived from Persian kings, my snowy fur yet retains the whiteness and splendour of their ermine.⁶ This morning, as I sat on the Doctor's tea-table, and saw my reflected features in the slop-basin, my long white whiskers, ivory teeth, and topaz eyes, I felt an agreeable presentiment of my suit; and certainly the slop-basin did not flatter me, which shews the azure flowers upon its borders less beautiful than they are.⁷ You know not, dear Miss Pussey Po, the value of the address you neglect. New

milk have I, in flowing abundance, and mice pent up in twenty garrets, for your food and amusement.⁸ Permit me, this afternoon, to lay at your divine feet the head of an enormous Norway Rat, which has even now stained my paws with its gore.⁹ If you will do me the honour to sing the following song, which I have taken the liberty to write, expressing sentiments I wish you to entertain, I will bring a band of catgut and catcall, to accompany you in chorus.

Air: – spirituosì.

Cats I scorn, who, sleek and fat,
Shiver at a Norway rat;
Rough and hardy, bold and free,
Be the cat that's made for me!¹⁰
He, whose nervous paw can take
My lady's lapdog by the neck;
With furious hiss attack the hen,
And snatch the chicken from the pen.¹¹
If the treacherous swain should prove
Rebellious to my tender love,
My scorn the vengeful paw shall dart,
Shall tear his fur, and pierce his heart.¹²

Chorus:

Qu-ow wow, quall, wawl, moon.

Deign, most adorable charmer, to purr your assent to this my request, and believe me to be with the profoundest respect, your true admirer.¹³

Snow.

Miss Seward's answer:

Palace, Lichfield. Sept. 8th. 1780.

I am but too sensible of the charms of Mr. Snow; but while I admire the spotless whiteness of his ermine, and the tyger-strength of his commanding form, I sigh in secret, that he, who sucked the milk of benevolence and philosophy, should yet retain the extreme of the fierceness, too justly imputed to the Grimalkin race. Our hereditary violence is perhaps commendable when we exert it against the foes of our protectors, but deserves much blame when it annoys their friends.¹⁴ The happiness of a refined education was mine; yet, dear Mr. Snow, my advantages in that respect were not equal to what yours might have been: but, while you give unbounded indulgence to your carnivorous desires, I have so far subdued mine, that the lark pours his morn'g song, the canary bird warbles wild and loud, and the robin pipes his farewell song to the setting sun, unmolested in my presence; nay, the plump and tempting dove has reposed securely on my soft back, and bent her glossy neck in graceful curves as she walked round me.¹⁵

But let me hasten to tell thee how my sensibilities in thy favour were, last month, unfortunately repressed. Once, in the noon of one of the most beautiful nights, I was invited abroad by the serenity of the amorous hour, secretly stimulated by the hope of meeting my admired Persian. With silent steps I paced around the dimly – gleaming leads of the palace. I had acquired a taste for scenic beauty and poetic imagery, by listening to ingenious observations upon their nature from the lips of thy own lord, as I lay purring at the feet of my mistress. I admired the lovely scene, and breathed my sighs for thee to the listening moon. She threw the long shadows of the Majestic cathedral upon the silvered lawn. I beheld the pearly meadows of Stow valley, and the lake in its bosom, which, reflecting the lunar rays, seemed a sheet of diamonds.¹⁶ The trees of the Dean's Walk, which the hand of Dulness (sic) had been

restrained from torturing into trim and detestable regularity, met each other in a thousand various and beautiful forms. Their liberated boughs danced on the midnight gale, and the edges of their leaves were whitened by the moonbeams. I descended to the lawn, that I might throw the beauties of the valley into perspective through the graceful arches, formed by the meeting branches.¹⁷ Suddenly my ear was startled, not by the voice of my lover, but by the loud and dissonant noise of the war-song, which six black grimalkins were raising in honour of the numerous victories obtained by the Persian, Snow; compared with which, they acknowledged those of English cats had little brilliance, eclipsed, like the unimportant victories of the Howes, by the puissant Clinton and Arbuthnot, and the still more puissant Cornwallis.¹⁸

It sung that thou didst owe thy matchless might to thy lineal descent from the invincible Alexander, as he derived his more than mortal valour from his mother Olympia's illicit commerce with Jupiter. They sung that, amid the renowned siege of Persepolis, while Roxana and Statira were contending for the honour of his attentions, the conqueror of the world deigned to bestow on them a large, white female cat, thy grandmother, warlike Mr. Snow, in the ten thousandth and ninety-ninth ascent. Thus far their triumphant din was music to my ear; and even when it sung that lakes of milk ran curdling into whey, within the ebon concave of their pancheons, with terror at thy approach; that mice squealed from all the neighbouring garrets; and that whole armies of Norway-rats, crying out amain, "the devil take the hindmost", ran violently into the Minster-pool, at the first gleam of thy white mail through the shrubs of Mr. Howard's garden.¹⁹

But O! when they sung, or rather yelled, of larks warbling on sunbeams, fascinated suddenly by the glare of thine eyes, and falling into thy remorseless talons; of robins, warbling soft and solitary upon the leafless branch, till the pale cheek of

winter dimpled into joy; of hundreds of those bright breasted songsters, torn from their barren sprays by thy pitiless fangs! – Alas! My heart died within me at the idea of so preposterous a union!

Marry you, Mr. Snow, I'm afraid I cannot; since, though the laws of our community might not oppose our connection, yet those of principle, of delicacy, of duty to my mistress, do very powerfully oppose it.²⁰ As to presiding at your concert, if you extremely wish it, I may perhaps grant your request; but then you must allow me to sing a song of my own composition' applicable to our present situation, and set to music by my sister Sophy at Mr. Brown's the organist's, thus,

Air: - affettuoso.

He, whom Pussy Po detains
A captive in her silken chains,
Must curb the furious thirst of prey,
Nor rend the warbler from his spray!
Nor let his wild, ungenerous rage
An unprotected foe engage.²¹
O, should cat of Darwin prove
Foe to pity, foe to love! .
Cat, that listens day by day,
To mercy's mild and honied lay,
Too surely would the dire disgrace
More deeply brand our future race,
The stigma fix, where'er they range,
That cats can ne'er their nature change.²²
Should I content with thee to wed,

These sanguine crimes upon thy head,²³
And ere the wish'd reform I see,
Adieu to lapping Seward's tea!
Adieu to purring gentle praise
Charm'd as she quotes her thy master's lays!
Could I, alas! Our kittens bring
Where sweet her plummy favorites sing,
Would not the watchful nymph espy
Their father's fierceness in their eye.
And drive us far and wide away,²⁴
In cold and lonely barn to stray?
Where the dark owl, with hideous scream,
Shall mock our yells for forfeit cream,
As on starv'd mice we swearing dine
And grumble that our lives are nine.²⁵

Chorus: – largo.

Waal, woee, trone, moan, oll, moule.

The still too much admired Mr. Snow will have the goodness to pardon the freedom of these expostulations and excuse their imperfections. The morning, O Snow! had been devoted to this my correspondence with thee, but I was interrupted in that employment by two females of our species, who fed my ill-starred passion by praising thy wit and endowments, exemplified by thy elegant letter, to which the delicacy of my sentiments obliges me to send so inauspicious a reply.²⁶

I am, dear Mr. Snow,

Your ever obliged.

Section B

A further typescript copy of the Darwin letter, dated Lichfield 1780, by Violetta, one of Erasmus Darwin's granddaughters, is contained in a small book, compiled by Sir Francis Sacheverel Darwin (1786–1859), the second son of Darwin's marriage to Elizabeth Pole. The book contains 91 pages.²⁷ The cover reads:

The following small collection of Poems consists chiefly of the early productions of the celebrated author of Zoonomia, Botanic Garden, etc. Several of them may have appeared in print before, but in general they are compiled from manuscript fragments and from letters written by Dr. Darwin to some of his dearest friends.

F.S.DARWIN.

The dedication reads:

TO MY BROTHER
ROBERT WARING DARWIN. ESQ.
by whose example and encouragement
my mind was directed to the study
of Poetry
in my very early years,
this volume of poems is dedicated
as a testimony of gratitude
by Erasmus Darwin.

Although the body of the poem contains the same sentiments as those already quoted in the text, there are some subtle differences:

To Miss Seward's Cat, Po.

Lichfield, 1780.

Dear Miss Pussy,

As I sat the other day carelessly basking myself in the sun in my parlour window, and saw you in the opposite window washing your beautiful round face and elegant brinded ears with your velvet paw; and whisking about with graceful sinuosity your meandering tail; the treacherous Porcupine, Cupid, concealing himself behind your tabby beauties, shot one of his too well-aim'd quills, and pierced, oh cruel fate! my fluttering heart.

Ever since that cruel hour have I watched you all night from my balcony, hoping that the stillness of the star-light evening might induce you to take the air in the cupola of your house,--- but have watched in vain!

Many a serenade have I sung under your window, and with the sound of my shrill voice made the whole neighbourhood re-echo, through all its winding lanes and dirty alleys, --- all heard me, but my cruel fair one --- She, wrapt in soft furr, sat purring with contented insensibility, or slept with untroubled dreams!

Tho' I can not boast the shining tortoise shell, that cloaths my fair brinded charmer --- tho' I can not boast those delicate varieties of melody, with which you sometimes ravish the ear of night, and stay the listening stars! --- tho' you sleep hourly lulled on the lap of your fair mistress and dip with her permission your white whiskers in delicious cream!--- Nor am I, sweet charmer, utterly destitute of the advantages of birth and beauty,--- derived from Persian kings my white furr still retains the splendor, and softness of their ermine. This morning as I sat upon my master's tea-table, and saw my reflected features in the slop-bason, my long white

whiskers, ivory teeth and topaz eyes,--- and sure the slop-bason can not flatter me,
which shows the azure flowers painted on its border less beautiful than they are
painted!

You know not, dear Miss Pussy, the value of the heart you slight; --- new
milk have I in flowing streams to regale you, and mice pent up in a hundred garrets
for your food, or your amusement, Oh, permit me this very afternoon to lay at your
divine feet the head of an enormous rat, who has even now stained my paws with his
gore. And if you will honour me so much as to sing the following song in the evening
I will bring a band of cat-gut, and cat-call, to accompany your mellifluous voice in the
chorus.

Air.

Cats! I scorn, who sleek and fat,
Shudder at a Norway rat;
Smooths with nice care his silky fur,
Or fawns with soft seductive purr.

Chorus

Rough and hardy, bold and free,
Be the cat that's made for me.

Air.

* He whose nervous paw can take
My Lady's lap dog by the neck, *

..... *F. S. Darwin has: "He whose nervous paws can tear
The barking lap-dog's shaggy ear"*

With furious hiss assault the hen,

And snatch a chicken from the pen.

Chorus: Rough and hardy etc.

Air: If the treacherous swain should prove
Rebellious to my tender love,
My scorn the vengeful paw shall dart,
Shall tear his fur + and pierce his heart.

Chorus Soon another good as he,
Shall be found a cat for me.

Quow, mow, how, now, quall, wall, pall, quash, smash, pash, etc.

Deign most adorable beauty to purr your assent to this request, and believe me with
most profound respect your true admirer:

SNOW GRIMALKIN.

+..... *Francis S .Darwin has: “eyes” for “fur”.*

It is quite clear, from the contents, that Seward had this letter to hand, that she embellished it to suit her own purpose, in order to include it in the *Memoirs of Dr. Darwin*, allowing readers to believe that what *she* had written was the *original* letter from Darwin's hand, which is quite clearly not the case, but it appears that this was the only way she could retaliate against Darwin, to give herself satisfaction and to retain her integrity. It is also clear that Sir Francis Sacheverel Darwin had studied the original poem in its somewhat distressed state and had interpreted those words, which may have already been rather indistinct, in quite a different way from those of his daughter. The poem also shows Darwin's phonetic spelling - furr, pur, cloaths,

splendor, bason – however, there were no fixed rules for spelling in the late eighteenth century.

Notes to Appendix 1

1. Seward, Anna, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr Darwin: Chiefly During His Residence at Lichfield, with Anecdotes of His Friends and Criticisms of His Writings* (London, 1804), p. 133.
2. This was the lime tree walk in the Close at Lichfield fronting the prebendary houses from the Bishop's Palace to the Vicars' Hall.
3. He has been smitten by her beauty.
4. The 'leads' are the metal gutterings edging the Palace roof.
5. Darwin suggests he has sung her praises around the dirt-strewn Close, fouled by pigs and sheep grazing on the greensward fronting the cathedral, but his admiration had fallen on deaf ears.
6. He knows she is the 'Queen Muse of Britain' and that she is patted by the hands of the nobility but he wishes her to know that he is as 'noble' as they are.
7. He believes he is attractive to women.
8. The reference to milk is probably an indication that he is anxious to have sexual intercourse with her.
9. Here, Darwin equates the 'Norway rat', the black rodent, which brought pestilence from Europe in the 1700s, with the black garments of the clergy and the admonishment that Seward's father, Thomas put into sarcastic verse, condemning him for rejecting his Maker. (WSL Stafford.) MS2015/1.
10. Darwin here indicates the sort of relationship he envisages.
11. Darwin could here be referring to John Saville, whom he would be pleased to replace in Seward's favour or Seward's dog, Sappho, whom she adored.
12. Here Darwin is suggesting that if Seward finds him unfaithful, she is at liberty to attack him in print.
13. Darwin here asserts that he greatly admires Seward and hopes she will enter into this relationship with him.
14. Seward confirms that she finds him very attractive and could easily succumb to his request, but her attentions are engaged elsewhere, with Saville, and she finds his suggestions offensive.
15. Seward agrees that his education is far superior to hers, but, unlike his, she has so curbed her sexual desires that none are intimidated by her and she poses no threat.
16. It appears that Seward had anticipated an assignation with Darwin, but further consideration has convinced her that 'her taste for beauty and poetic imagery' was more important.
17. Seward's obsession with the beauty of Lichfield's Lime Tree walk manifests itself here.
18. The voices were those of the senior cathedral clergymen in heated debate about Darwin's rejection of his Maker, yet realising there was nothing they could do about it. It was a rather hollow victory, like that of the mighty Admiral Richard Howe, hero of the Seven Years war, who, succeeded by Sir Henry

Clinton, commander of English forces in America, was also unsuccessful when trying to help Charles Cornwallis at Georgetown.

19. Seward believes that the clergy backed down, rather than confront Darwin on his beliefs. Charles Howard (1707–71), was Darwin's father in law. He was a proctor in the Ecclesiastical Court at Lichfield and lived at No. 19 in the Close, where all the gardens, on that side of the Close, at that time, ran down to the Minster Pool. See *A Plan of the City and Close of Lichfield, from Actual Survey by John Snape, 1781*, reproduced: rear endpaper, in C. Upton, *A History of Lichfield* (Chichester, 2001).
20. Even though a legitimate marriage with Darwin, now a widower, would have been acceptable, Seward, aware of the teachings of the church, knew that he had two illegitimate daughters by Mary Parker, his son's nanny, Susan, born 16 May 1772 and Mary, born 20 May 1774 and could, therefore, not consider any form of liaison with him. See Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin: A Life of Unequalled Achievement* (London, 1999), p. 106.
21. Seward here considers Darwin to be a predatory male.
22. She sees him as a man, addicted to sex who cannot change his nature
23. To Seward, Darwin's crimes may be his two illegitimate daughters, Susan and Mary Parker.
24. Even though Seward is full of praise for him, any liaison with Darwin and possible further illegitimate children, would necessitate their removal from the Close and Lichfield, something she does not want.
25. See Heywood: *Proverbs* II. iv. G2v. 1546. 'A woman hath nine lives like a cat' and Grose, Francis, *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, 1788: Cat's Foot*: 'Cats, according to vulgar naturalists, have nine lives, that is, one less than a woman.' These all refer to a cat's apparent ability to escape death, either through agility or sheer good luck. Seward was not about to take such a chance.
26. Seward, although holding deep feelings for Darwin, having thought the matter through, had decided that his request was indelicate and so is obliged to send this unfavourable reply.
27. CUL, (Pearson Papers, Special Collections, No. XXV), Erasmus Darwin, *Letter to a Cat*, pp. 80–81.

APPENDIX II.
ANNA SEWARD: LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

This large, very detailed document¹ consists of twenty pages, formally written by Anna Seward, gives us a summation of her life's work and achievement. After careful consideration she composes what she hopes will be a testament to her reputation and her literary legacy. In the disposition of her huge portfolio of stocks, shares, bonds, properties and monies she exercises her incisive control, to benefit her married, female friends, by rescinding *couverture*, allowing them to benefit in their own right, rather than the bequests being taken by their husbands.

Specific details and bequests taken from the Will:

- 1) A frugal and private funeral. Seward requests that she be buried with John Saville, in the vault she built for him, but, if her wish is denied, then with her parents in the family vault, in the Choir, Lichfield Cathedral.
- 2) Monument to Canon Thomas Seward and his family, to the value of £500, to be found a proper place within the cathedral.
- 3) All her servants to receive proper mourning and £10 each in money.
- 4) To Walter Scott: All her writings in verse (92 half-bound quarto volumes) which have passed the press, plus her unpublished works, juvenile letters-1762-68, 4 sermons and a critical dissertation are all to be found in 'the blue Hair Trunk, tied together with silk braid.'
- 5) To Mary Wright, her maid: 'all her apparel and best laces, except those on gowns, handkerchiefs, or which lie, unmade up, in my Drawers.'
- 6) To Mrs. Elizabeth Smith: 'such contents of the Bureau, which I have always kept locked up, as she may choose to accept.'
- 7) To the Ladies of Llangollen: 'Each a ring, value 5 guineas, or any other acceptable memorial... to the said amount they may choose.'
- 9) Miss Cornwallis, daughter of the present Bishop:)
Mrs. Mary Powys, Clifton. Bristol:)
Mr. Wm. Feary, Lichfield:) Mourning Rings,

- Mr. Thos. Lister, Armitage:) value 5 guineas.
 Dr. Wm. Hussey:)
- 10) Mr.& Mrs. Hussey, Wyrley:)
 Mr. Thos White:)
 Mrs Susan Burrowes:)
 Mr. Hinkley, Lichfield:) Mourning Rings,
 Mrs. Martin, Winterbourne:) value 2 guineas.
 Mrs. Chas. Simpson:)
 Mrs. Ironmonger, Lichfield:)
- 11) Mrs. Thos. White: ‘My curious Fan of ancient date, but excellent workmanship, with a French mount of Red Leather, together with my best Diamond Ring and the miniature picture of myself by Miers.’
- 12) Mrs. Susan Burrowes, cousin: ‘The miniature portrait of my father by Richmond.’
- 13) Mr. Thos. White, cousin: ‘The portrait of my father by Joseph Wright of Derby and all the beautiful drawings in my possession, by the Rev. William Bree of Coleshill. Warks. I return the valuable Italian portrait (now in my Green Room) to him, as it is his property.’
- 14) Mr. Chas. Simpson, executor: ‘The portrait of me done by Romney,’
- 15) Miss Susan Burrowes: ‘The portrait of my father’s mother, her property, to be returned to her.’
- 16) Mr. Thos White, executor: ‘If Mr. Simpson be deceased, to receive my portrait by Romney. I also leave him the mezzotint print of the dying St. Stephen by West and the French engraving ‘Instruction Paternelle’, both presented to me by my dear friend, Mr. Saville,’
- 17) Mrs. Elizabeth Smith: ‘The miniature of her father, John Saville, drawn in 1770 by the celebrated artist, Smart, and, after her demise, then to her daughter, Mrs. Honora Jager and her heirs, exhorting them to guard it from sun and damp, as I have done, so that posterity will know what was his form.’
- 18) Mr. Edward Sneyd: ‘The mezzotint engraving from a picture by Romney, inscribed ‘such was Honora Sneyd’, and on his demise, to his daughter, Miss Emma Sneyd, entreating her to value and preserve it.’
- 19) Mrs. Mary Powys: ‘The miniature of Honora Sneyd by her gallant and unfortunate lover, Major André, drawn in Brixton, 1769.’
- 20) Mr. A. Constable, publisher: ‘... 12 volumes of letters. I wish Mr. Constable to publish 2 volumes of said letters annually.’
- 21) Mrs, Mary Saville: ‘I give and devise the house, situated in the Close, now

occupied by Mrs. Saville and Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, for their use during their lives and then to Saville Smith, son of said Elizabeth, for the term of his natural life. In Trust to Charles Simpson and Thomas White.'

- 22) Mrs. Honora Jager: 'I give the house in the West Approach to the cathedral now occupied by Mr. Robert Jager, then to my Executors. Chas Simpson and Thos. White, in Trust. Mrs. Jager to receive Rents and Profits.'
- 23) 'To my Executors, Thomas White and Charles Simpson, I leave all my shares (6) in the Staffs. and Worcs. Navigation, (Wolverhampton Canal); (10) shares in the Trent and Mersey Navigation, (Grand Trunk Canal); and all money, £2390, in the Lichfield Turnpike Trust; all securities and the rest and residue of my Real and Personal Estate, (until their deaths), for two years after my decease, it being my intention to raise thereout a fund sufficient to pay my Pecuniary Legacies and Annuities, so that the Legatees and Divisees shall, at all periods mentioned, be entitled to receive the Proceeds, Dividends and Interest thereof.'

Trent and Mersey:

Honora Jager)
Anne Martin) 1 share each.
Saville Smith)
Grace Roberts)

Susan Burrowes)
Mrs. J. Martin) 2 shares each.
George Dove)

- 24) 'My Executors are also to sell and dispose of my whole stock of Household Furniture, Plate, Books, Pictures, Drawings and other Effects, (except for what has been bequeathed), by Public Auction and to apply the produce together with whatever sums of money may be in my possession or in the bank, to the payment of any small debts I may have, the Pecuniary Legacies and expense of my Funeral and my Will. It is my custom to discharge all my debts in this city within twelve months, so it is improbable that any debts would be more than trifling amounts.'
- 25) 'I leave the rest of my Real and Personal Estate residue in Trust: the Rents, Dividends. Interest and proceeds for and during the term of two years after my death, that they may discharge the Annuities, Legacies, Bequests and Purposes, as follows:

Mrs. Mary Saville) Annuities of (Full amount of £100
Mrs. Elizabeth Smith) £50 each (paid to survivor.

Miss Elizabeth Fern, companion: £50

Mary Atkins, housekeeper: £30 (if in my employ at time of my death.)

Mary Wright, maid: £20 and my worn apparel.

All to be paid half-yearly from the day of my death until they die.

Anna Seward, daughter of Lt. Col. Seward:)

Anna Seward Stokes, god-daughter:)
 Mrs, Anna Srokesm Chesterfield:) £100 each. To be paid
 Stephen Simpson, Lichfield:) in 2 years.
 Robert Seward, Cherry St, Birmingham:)
 Rev. H.F.Carey,Kingsbury:)

- 26) Thomas Burrowes: £500 (part of £900 due on Bond from the Proprietors of the Trent and Mersey Navigation.)
- 27) Lichfield Turnpike Trust – £2390. Mrs. Simmons – £200
 Mr. Thos.Hinkley – £500
 Thos.White (godson) – £50
 Thos. White,executor – £145
 Miss Roberts – £100
- Children of Mrs. Grace Roberts – £597/10/-
 - Children of Mr. Hall – £597/10/-
 - These last two bequests revoked in Codicil 2 of the Will.
- 28) 5% Navy Annuities – £1000. Family Monument – £500.
 Thos. White and Chas. Simpson – £200 each.
 Walter Scott – £100.
- 29) 4% Annuities – £1400. (£1300 in my name, £100 in my father’s name).
 Edward Sneyd – £500
 Thomas Lister – £ 500
 Dividends to be paid to Lovell Edgeworth, son of Honora Edgeworth.
- 30) £900 + Bond on security for £110 in the Chesterfield Canal – to Capt. Holland Hastings, 82nd. Regiment of Foot.
- 31) £150 (part of the £900 lent to the Proprietors of the Trent and Mersey Navigation Trust):
 to Mr. William Roberts.
 £150 to Miss Roberts, his daughter.
 £100 to Robert Seward.
- 32) £35 Long Annuities (held in mine and my father’s names):
 £20 to Thomas White
 £15 to William Roberts.
- 33) One Share in the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal to Charles Simpson.
- 34) Remaining monies to be invested in Stock or other Property Securities.
- 35) Proceeds of One Share in the Staffordshire Canal to pass equally to Saville Smith and Honora Jager and thence to the survivor after death, then to Thos. White. Dividends and proceeds to Honora Jager for her natural life.
- 36) * Grandchildren of Grace Roberts:

£340 – Sheffield and Sparrowspit Turnpike Trusts.
£320 – Security on the Chesterfield Turnpike Trust
plus Interest on 6 Shares in Staffs and Worcs. Canal.
* (This bequest revoked in Codicil 2 in the Will.)

Anna Seward. 15th. day of February 1808.

Codicil 1. All expenses of Stamps, Transfers and Assignments and all the Legacy Taxes shall be paid and discharged by the Legatees and Divisees, instead of being paid as directed by my Will.
I also direct my Executors to sell the house and premises bequeathed to Honora Jager, wife of Robert Jager, and to place the purchase money in Government or Security on the same Trusts. Purchaser shall not be bound to see the application of the said purchase money.

Mary Wright, maid: an additional Annuity of Two Pounds.
Mary Atkins, cook: an additional Annuity of Three Pounds.
Elizabeth Fern, companion: an additional Annuity of Ten pounds.
John Fish, servant: An Annuity for life of Twenty Pounds, if
still in my employ.
Miss Honora Burrowes, God daughter: £100 with Interest, if
she attain the age of twenty-one.
Mrs. Mary Powys, Bristol: £100 to be paid six months after my death.

Dated: 8th. day of March 1809.

Codicil 2. In order to increase the residuary fund to cover Payments and Legacies, I revoke the Payments of £597/10/-, Securities in the Lichfield Turnpike Trust, to the child or children of Mrs Grace Roberts and Mrs. Hall and give the said sums to my Executor, Thomas White, to enable him to discharge the said Annuities and Legacies given in my Will.

Whereas Mrs. Smith's income has now much increased and her children, Honora Jager and Saville Smith have legacies in my Will, I order and direct that Mrs. Smith, should she survive Mrs. Saville, she shall only be entitled to receive £50 per annum, instead of the £100 per annum for life.

Anna Seward.

Dated: 8th. day of March 1809.

From Probate: 3rd. February 1810.

Notes to Appendix 2

1. LRO D262/1/35. Copy of the Will and codicils of Anna Seward, with extracts of bequests 1808–1809.

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D262/1/6, Letter from Thomas Day, (Lyons, France) to Anna Seward, 10th December 1771.

D262/1/8, Letter from the Reverend Peter Cunninghame, Curate, Eyam, to Thomas Seward.

D262/1/27, Poem by Anna Seward on the avoidance of marriage due to a lack of sensible men.

D262/2/5, Letter from Anna Seward to Charles Simpson re selling of shares in the Grand Trunk Canal.

D262/1/32, Verse epitaph? by Anna Seward with silhouette.

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Portrait, to waist, of Anna Seward by Tilly Kettle 1762. Oil on canvas. (29 x 24½ “) White dress, red satin, fur-trimmed, stole, with black velvet and pearl choker. Seated at table, hands on volume of Milton. (NPG 2017).

Fleming Museum, Burlington, Vermont (FM)

Portrait (three quarter length) of Anna Seward by George Romney. This would appear to be a copy of the original – some changes to background and items on table. Original bequeathed to T.L. Burrowes in Seward's Will (Whereabouts now unknown).

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Portrait of Anna Seward by George Romney. 1782 (30 x 25 inches). In white dress, Face turned aside, to the left, hair puffed and bound with ribbon. Privately painted for William Hayley and hung in his library at Eartham, Sussex. Exhibited in 1868 as a portrait by John Opie R.A. Lost until 1903, when it was then catalogued as a portrait of Mrs. Siddons. Now, attributed to John Hoppner and entitled: 'Portrait of a Woman', it hangs in the Witt Gallery.

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