

Mary Anne Rawson's *The Bow in the Cloud* and the Networks of Anti-Slavery Literature

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A Definitive Object, a Solidity of Purpose

- ▶ “*The plan appears to me very promising, and I hope, and that its success will further the amiable design of its formation—as a publication . . . which though so attractive to the Eye, and in some of their contributions, so touching to the heart, have always seemed to me as wanting a definitive object, a solidity of purpose. . . .*”

(*Mary Sterndale to Mary Anne Rawson, 28 February 1833?*)

Textual transactions

- ▶ Many of the poems submitted to Rawson were unchanged. Yet some of the submissions show a significant level of editorial engagement and judgment.
- ▶ For example, Rawson received four? submissions from Bernard Barton, two of which began and ended the volume, and two more appeared elsewhere in the volume. This suggests an attention to selection.

- ▶ Another textual transaction came with Thomas Hill's submission of "Grave of Wilberforce," a poem that went through several apologies as well as versions.
- ▶ He submitted three versions to Rawson. The first fair copy submission is rather interesting, because it includes both minor revisions, as well as a note penciled in at the end of the poem:

MS. A. 1. 1 v. 10
No. 100. Printed in Boston to All
readers at a reduced price.
London, 1833. Royal Society and a very large
number of subscribers.

Now closed that breast, now cold in death—
How few those lips once flour'd a breath!
Cold lasting snarls more,
Cold still each snore, cold quell each strife—
Speak ye, who paid him in his life,
And still his ashes live.

To b', his despoils to grace,
The noblist of the British race
At Britain's call appear,
And stand around in mournful state,
While, midst the ashes of the great,
Descends a Patriot's tear. *

The throne, the Church, their white guild;
The Bar, the Senate, and the Field,
Their varied honours blend:
See Howley's neckcloth, Wellerley's night,
Eldon, the fresh'd ancient Right.

Yet has he won a nobler prize!
A saxon's native of the skies,
He lays his laurels down,
Where, robb'd in leav's all-lefted bays,
He boasts a Saviour's yokeship,
And wears a blood-bright crown.

Chelmsford Aug. 20th 1833

Dr.

By dr. Mr. Rawson

I am ashamed of the lateness of my offering; I am perfectly conscious of its want of finish. I have among the productions of those highly gifted individuals whom names you ever mention'd one, and of rare feelings on this subject, one in unconquerable, I do beg that you will be influenced by no motive of delicacy toward me, but consider the humble effort of my power to be next to oblivion. — Our kindred spirits often cross & fly in the dear friend.

- Here is the note zoomed in:

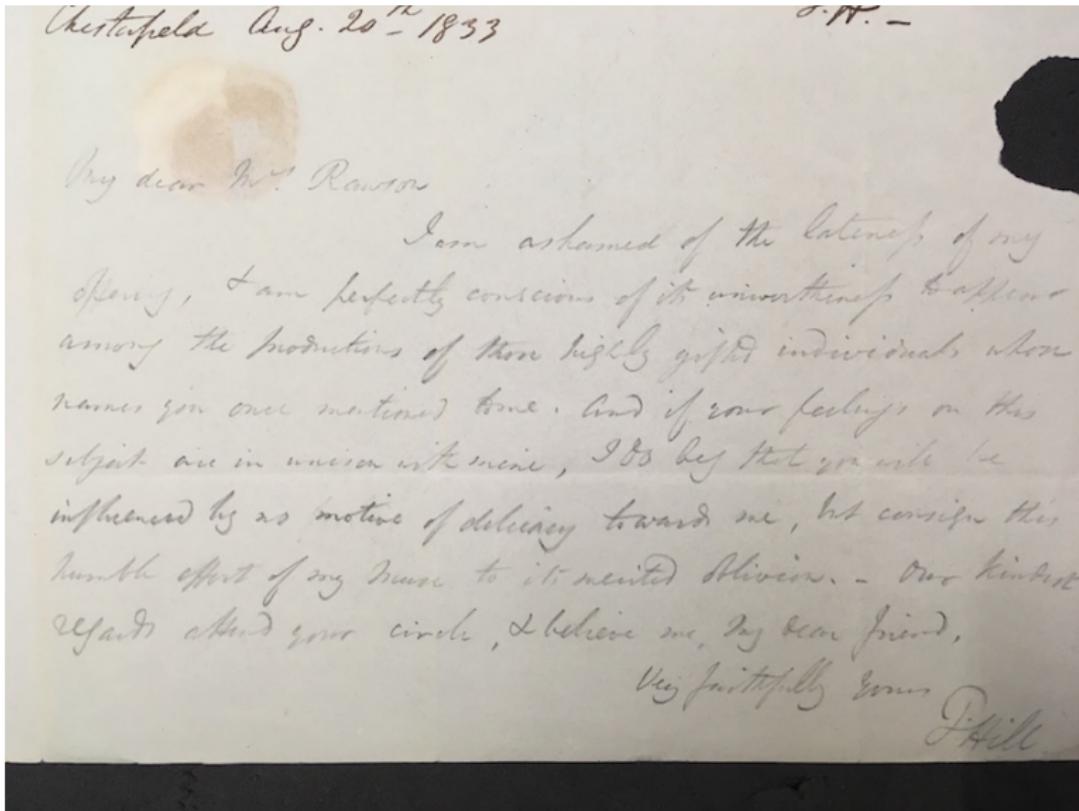


Figure 2: hill-poem-note

- ▶ Another clue left in the manuscripts comes from J. W. H. Pritchard's 26 December 1833 letter to Rawson, suggesting changes to Miss Williams's poem (to which himself provided the title "Voice from the Land of Bondage").

My Dear Madam

The best Doctor advises
that I can think of you will
perceive by comparing the passages
below with Miss W.'s M. S. I
should certainly begin at the
fourth stanza, & read the pieces
thus:

Voice from the land of
Bondage.

x x x x x x

Should arose &c. —

The fifth line I would write
thus, (a real improvement)
And thus it answers? —

(Leaves out "to a certain extent")

- ▶ Pritchard's next letter from 11 April 1834 is crucial.

judge. The sentence might admit of a change of this kind "It would indeed have been delightful if every hand which has taken a prominent part [or been actively employed] in pulling down the prison house, & in striking off the fetters of the bondsmen, could have profited."

Figure 4: suggestion

- ▶ *The sentence might admit of a change of this kind "It would indeed have been delightful if* every *hand which has taken a

Here it is as published:

It would indeed have been delightful if *every* hand which has been actively engaged in pulling down the prison-house, and striking off the fetters of the bondman, could have put a stone into the monument here erected upon its ruins, to tell posterity where it stood, the curses it contained, and how it fell. To

Figure 5: bic-preface-shot

Publication History

- ▶ While in many ways *BIC* was a publication of Northern writers and activists, it was published by Jackson and Walford (St. Paul's Churchyard).
- ▶ The book was sold for 12 shillings, about 50 GBP in today's money; about two days pay for a skilled tradesman, or the cost of a week's supply of butchered meat and tea.
- ▶ The volume is indeed handsome: foolscap octavo gilt pages, tightly bound in a turkey morocco binding with a gilded engraving of the bow. The advertisement called attention to its quality.

Reception

- ▶ The publisher, Jackson and Walford (18 St Paul's Church-yard) was also responsible for the *Eclectic Review*, *The Congregational Year Books*, and other ecclesiastical books.
- ▶ One of the contributors to *The Bow in the Cloud*, Josiah Conder, had since 1813 been the owner and editor of the *Eclectic Review*, which also featured a substantial and laudatory review of *BIC* in its July 1834 issue.
- ▶ The periodical also had a wide American readership (it was reprinted Foster, Bisbee, and Co. in New York).

New Discoveries

- ▶ Rawson chose not to publish every piece she received.
- ▶ Perhaps the most important of the rejected pieces comes from Dinah Ball, whose poem glorifying Toussaint L'Ouverture must have been too controversial for a volume largely framed around Christian piety, not the violent revolution that is clearly celebrated in the opening stanzas.

Two faint Louvertrues.

Cast a reflective glance athwart the flood,
 To that bold Isle where freedom and renown
 Have urged their course through deluges of blood,
 And snatched the tyrant's yoke, and secured his power.
 When Europe's unrelenting hand had swayed,
 With impious rod, Domingo's land of slaves,
 And Negro-servitude had her Deeds repaid
 By meaures that did the wailing waves,
 Benignant Heaven, in mercy to the oppressed,
 Ventured a tear of the pity race,
 Her mighty soul with ample veins suffused,
 And stamped with moral dignity her face.
 Most amply and ever, with calm energy,
 He traced a path to greatness and repose;
 And his vast counsels for a future day,
 And watched the viciss of his Brother's woes.
 Then, as when fierce Tornado's ire of death
 Has threatened every bough, in darkness driven,
 And seeming beauty comes on morning breath,
 The mists of glowing Morn's rays of Heaven,

Figure 6: ball-poem

*Toussaint Louverture. Cast a reflective glance athwart the
flood To that bold Isle where prowess and renown Have
urged their course through deluges of blood, And snapped
the Tyrant's yoke, and scorned his frown. When Europe's
unrelenting hand had swayed, With scorpion rod,
Domingo's land of slaves, And Negro-vengeance had her
deeds repaid By massacres that died the circling waves,
Benignant Heaven, in mercy to the oppressed, Nurtured a
Hero of the [jitty?] race, This mighty soul with ample
views possessed, And stamped with moral dignity his face.*

The poem encompasses seven manuscript pages, and it is truly a great pity that the poem was left out. For the first time, this edition is publishing this entire poem.