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“Hope with eager sparkling eyes”: la giovinezza, il progresso e l’affermazione di sé nella scrittura poetica di Anna Barbauld

Abstract – This paper analyses a group of poems by Anna Barbauld (1743-1825) with the purpose of highlighting the representation of her self-affirmation as a young woman full of hope for the future in the context of the patriarchal system of values of the Dissenting Academy at Warrington. The following poems have been chosen: “The Invitation”, “To Dr. Aikin on His Complaining that she neglected him”, “To Wisdom”, “The Groans of the Tankard”, “Inscription for an Ice-House”, “An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr Priestley’s Study”, “Washing Day”. The first four poems portray the life at Warrington, where the ambitions and the passions of the young were often constrained by their older tutors: here Barbauld uses a highly ironic language to demonstrate that, in spite of the hierarchies imposed by the Academy, the young (a category to which she herself belonged) always found a way to affirm their own intelligence and their own crucial role in the development of natural and human sciences. “Inscription for an Ice-House”, “An Inventory” and “Washing Day”, although written in a later phase of her life, evoke Barbauld’s youth and childhood and aspire, through a more elevated language, to demonstrate that she has fulfilled her self-acknowledgment as a poet, whose writing is finally able to revert traditional hierarchies and is destined to resist the passage of time.

**Keywords:** Barbauld, self-acknowledgment, scientific progress, poetry, eighteenth century