

Susan Evance

(fl. 1808–1818)

Susan Evance's contemporary reviewers seem to have known as little about her as we do. James Clarke edited *Poems by Miss S. E., Selected from her Earliest Productions, to Those of the Present Year*, which included poems, many of them sonnets, composed between 1803 and 1808, published in London by Longmans in 1808. The critic for the *Anti-Jacobin Review* complained that "we are not told what is her age, her studies, or her education, or any thing respecting her."¹ Her poems suggest that she had a brother in the navy as well as sisters. Commentators assumed that she was young, and the unimpressed critic for the *Eclectic Review* supposed that she was a disciple of Robert Merry and the Della Crusicans.² Still, most notices for the book were favorable. The *British Critic* called her poems "remarkable for their elegance and sensibility," thought they showed "some of the best qualities of poetical excellence," and worried that real misfortune might have inspired their melancholy.³ The more skeptical *Monthly Review* observed, "When fictitious wretchedness gives way to more rational considerations, she pleases by her power of imagery, her justness of reflection, and her elegance of thought."⁴ And her unaffected style won praise from the *Poetical Register*.⁵

Elizabeth Hill included work by Evance in her anthology *A Sequel to the Poetical Monitor* (London, 1815) along with selections from Charlotte Smith, Amelia Opie, Elizabeth Moody, Hannah More, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and others. In 1818 Evance published *A Poem Occasioned by the Cessation of Public Mourning for . . . the Princess Charlotte; together with Sonnets and Other Productions*, printed by Suttaby, Evance, and Fox, a firm with which she may have

1. 33 (July 1809): 296.

2. 5 (April 1809): 381–82.

3. 33 (May 1809): 516–17.

4. 60 (October 1809): 216.

5. 7 (1808): 564. The *Critical Review*, 3rd ser., 16 (1809): 329–31, thought her sonnets resembled and were "equal to those of [William Lisle] Bowles," a much-admired sonneteer.

Sonnet Written in a Ruinous Abbey

As 'mid these mouldering walls I pensive stray,
 With moss and ivy rudely overgrown,
 I love to watch the last pale glimpse of day,
 And hear the rising winds of evening moan.

How loud the gust comes sweeping o'er the vale!
 Now faintly murmurs midst those distant trees;
 The owl begins her melancholy wail,
 Filling with shrieks the pauses of the breeze.

Fancy, thy wildest dreams engage my mind—
 I gaze on forms which not to earth belong;
 I see them riding on the passing wind,
 And hear their sadly-sweet, expressive song.
 Wrap'd in the dear tho' visionary sound,
 In spells of rapture all my soul is bound!
 (wr. 1803; pub. 1808)

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Sonnet to a Violet

Spring's sweet attendant! modest simple flower,
 Whose soft retiring charms the woods adorn,
 How often have I wander'd at that hour,
 When first appear the rosy tints of morn,
 To the wild brook—there, upon mossy ground,
 Thy velvet form all beautiful to view;
 To catch thy breath that steals delicious round,
 And mark thy pensive smile thro' tears of dew:
 But then I sigh that other Vi'lets bloom,
 Unseen, in wilds where foot-step never trod,
 Find unadmir'd, unnotic'd, there a tomb,
 And mingle silent with the grassy sod;
 Ah, so the scatter'd flowers of genius rise;
 These bloom to charm—that, hid—neglected dies.
 (wr. 1803; pub. 1808)

10

Sonnet to the Clouds

O ye who ride upon the wand'ring gale,
 And silently, yet swiftly pass away—
 I love to view you, when the glimmering ray
 Of early morning tints your forms so pale,
 Or when meek twilight gleams above the steep,
 As in fantastic changeful shapes ye fly
 Far in the west, — when smiles the summer sky,
 Or when rough wintry winds with fury sweep
 Along the hill your darkly-frowning forms,
 10 All desolate and gloomy as my heart.
 Ah! could I but from this sad earth depart
 And wander careless as the roving storms
 Amidst your shadowy scenes — borne by the wind,
 Far I would fly, and leave my woes behind!
 (wr. 1804; pub. 1808)

Written during a Storm of Wind

Cease your desolating sound,
 O ye furious winds! forbear—
 Every gust that swells around
 Chills my shuddering heart with fear.

 Ah! the thoughtless time is past
 When I mark'd the rapid flight
 Of each wildly rushing blast,
 With romantic gay delight.

 10 When in sportive frolic dance,
 With the gale I skimm'd the plain,
 Or would breathlessly advance,
 Laughing at its fury vain.

Often too, in graver mood,
I have heard the tempest roll,
While a joy sublimely rude
Has possess'd and charm'd my soul.

But I cannot listen now
To the wild, the dreadful sound;
Sad I see the forest bow,
Mournful mark its groans around.

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Fanciful I seem to hear
Ocean roaring in the storm:
And behold the bark appear,
Which contains a Brother's form.

Hope had pictur'd scenes of joy
When he reach'd his native shore—
Should the tempest these destroy!
—Winds, in pity blow no more.
(wr. 1807; pub. 1808)