ABSTRACT  Jean Adam was a lower-class eighteenth-century woman poet whose work has been unjustly neglected, even during the rediscovery of unprivileged writers in the last fifteen or so years. When her name has been cited, this has most often been as the disputed author of a song that she cannot be proved to have written, while her only collection of poems, in which it does not appear, has been largely ignored. This article presents new biographical information and provides a systematic account of the collection, *Miscellany Poems* (1734), arguing that it is organised on principles partly of theme and partly of verse form. Through detailed analysis of the volume’s construction, including close discussion of key poems, it shows both that Adam was a more self-aware and a more skilful poet than has been recognised, and that there is a basic tension in her work between the constraints imposed by her faith and social position and her invention and aspirations as a writer. It ends by discussing the song often attributed to her and the questions raised by its disputed authorship, but maintains that Adam has to be appraised on the basis of the poems she is known to have written, which are here considered in detail for the first time.

Jean Adam’s *Miscellany Poems* was published by subscription at Glasgow in 1734.[1] The collection suffered near-total neglect till the 1980s, when Roger Lonsdale included one of its poems in *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse* and the same poem with two others in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology.*[2]
Despite Lonsdale’s care not to claim too much for these superb anthologies,[3] in effect they rewrite the period’s poetic canon. Although he was not a lone pioneer,[4] it is chiefly his work that has led the continuing rediscovery, since the mid-1980s, of poets to whom posterity had condescended so far as virtually to forget their existence. Foremost among those recovered are women and lower-class writers – categories that sometimes overlap. Examples are Mary Leapor, subject of a monograph and a forthcoming edition by Richard Greene; Stephen Duck and Mary Collier, whose accounts of their labouring lives are often juxtaposed; Mary Barber; Laetitia Pilkington and Constantia Grierson; and the anonymous writer of a series of love poems first published in the *Barbados Gazette*. Indeed, *Women’s Writing* has itself published in recent years excellent essays on Barber, Mehetabel Wright, and Mary Chandler.[6] It is therefore surprising that this recovery project has so far overlooked Jean Adam, although she is a lower-class woman poet of interest and distinction. For example, she finds no place in two new, wide-ranging publications: Edinburgh University Press’s *Scottish Literature*, and the three-volume *Eighteenth Century English Labouring-Class Poets* – a work which, despite the word “English” in its title, includes several Scottish writers.[7]

The neglect of Jean Adam seems stranger still in light of the fact that, unlike poets who attracted more attention in their day, such as Sarah Fyge Egerton, Martha Fowke, or Mary Whateley, she appears in the *DNB*. But the paradox is only apparent, for the entry declares, “her only passport to fame is the claim so persistently asserted for her of the authorship of the ‘Song of the Mariner’s Wife,’ or ‘There’s nae Luck aboot the House!’ a simple, humorous, and touching lyric, one of the sweetest in any language”. The lyric does not appear in Adam’s *Miscellany Poems*, which is her only known publication, yet the question of its authorship has inspired most of what has been written about her. It appeared in a book in 1769, four years after her death; it was often reprinted, in collections of songs and as a broadside; and its authorship was claimed by John Sim for William Julius Mickle (1735–88), best known as translator of Camões’s *Lusiad*, when he added it to his edition of Mickle’s *Poetical Works* in 1806.[8] Roger Lonsdale rightly remarks that “it is unlikely that the problem of authorship can be
resolved”[9]. Partly for that reason this article concentrates on *Miscellany Poems*, returning to the song at the end.

I also wish, however, to direct attention from a poem that Adam may or may not have written to those that are definitely hers. Some reasons for their neglect are illustrated by Janet Todd’s remark in her *Dictionary of British and American Women Writers*: “Although they interest as the productions of a self-taught working woman, the poems are on the whole pious and dull, given to extended metaphor and sometimes to childish sing-song rhythms.”[10] Poems that are primarily moral and religious do not appeal readily today, especially when, like Adam’s, they also seem to offer little to those looking for proto-feminism; and Todd’s account of their form and style is uninviting. However, no one has studied *Miscellany Poems* in sufficient detail to supply a proper basis for interpretation and judgement. This essay therefore seeks to provide, through close textual description and analysis, a systematic account of the collection that will identify its leading qualities and so facilitate future work. Apart from the question of whether or not she wrote the celebrated song, scholars have so neglected Adam that this is the first such account. As such it considers her verse in detail, poem by poem, after brief discussion of her biography.

What little is known of Adam’s life comes chiefly from the collection’s preface, headed “To the Reader” and signed “Archibald Crauford”. This begins:

> The Author of the following Miscellany Poems is a young Woman, born in the Town of *Craufordsdyke*, in the Parish of *Greenoak* and Shire of *Renfrew*, in the West of Scotland: her Father was a Shipmaster in that Place: her Breeding was as is ordinary for Girls of her Station, and Circumstances; and having several Years ago lost her Father, Providence ordered her Lot for some Years in the Family of a Reverend Minister in the Neighbourhood, where she had Access to peruse such of that Minister’s Books, as her Fancy led her to read. (sig. A1)

The title-page anglicises the author’s name as Mrs. Jane Adams, but the Dedication partly retracts this with the signature Jean Adams (sig. A2’s). While the signature indicates that the author’s first name was Jean, her surname must have been Adam, for, as Andrew Craufurd remarked in 1818, “In many surnames which are substantially the same in both kingdoms, the Scots take the singular, while the English take the plural
form”.[11] This is confirmed by an entry in the Old Parish Register which indicates that Adam was born not in 1710, her accepted birth date, but in 1704. This reads: “Adam / Jean, law[ful]l. daughter to John Adam mariner in Carsdyke & Jean Eddie, was born Ap: 28 and baptised Ap: 30, as witness James Hunter and John Hunter Junior Merchants in Greenock”.[12] Four other children were born to the same parents. In some of the records the mother’s maiden name is given as Edie, and it is under this name that her marriage to John Adam is recorded in 1701. The name Jean Adam is not uncommon, but the only such registration in Greenock during these years is to these parents. During the same period, there is no Scottish record of the birth of any Jean or Jane Adams; the births of four females named Jane Adam are recorded, but none in Greenock. It seems almost certain, then, that the Jean Adam born in 1704 is the poet; and it is likely that, as her brother John was born in 1717, her father died then or soon after. The date of 1710 usually given for her birth is probably an extrapolation from 1734, the date of Miscellany Poems, where the preface calls her “a young Woman”.

Most of the other details that have been passed on about Adam’s life stem from R. H. Cromek’s enquiries when, while assembling his Select Scotish Songs, he tried to resolve the question of who wrote “There’s Nae Luck About the House”.[13] Cromek reports that she kept a little school – a fact confirmed by one of her former pupils; that she also supported herself in part by needlework; and that her poems were collected for publication by “a Mr. Drummond, of Greenock” (I, pp. 191–3). Alexander Rodger adds, “her father dying, probably before she was fully grown up, it fell to her lot to be for some years in the family of a reverend gentleman of the neighbourhood, whose library was thrown open to her” he identifies this clergyman as “one of the Turners of the West Kirk”, and he identifies the writer of the preface as heir to the dedicatee, Thomas Crawfurd, Laird of Cartsburn.[14] Cromek records a tradition that Adam was so impressed by Clarissa that she walked to London “to pay her personal respects to Mr. Richardson”, and that she once fainted after an impassioned reading of Othello to her pupils (I, p. 194); but Rodger expresses doubt about the visit to Richardson (pp. 8–9), and Lonsdale says the story is “unconfirmed by any evidence at Richardson’s end”. [15] If the story about the visit is true, Adam was still keeping her school around 1750, for Clarissa was first published in 1747–48.[16] However, she must have fallen on hard
times afterwards, for Cromek reports that “Some time after the year 1760 she came to the house of Mrs. Fullarton, formerly her pupil, in a state of beggary”. The date of her death was 3 April 1765, recorded in an extract printed by Cromek from the records of the Glasgow Town Hospital (I, p. 195; also Rodger, p. 10).

Adam’s collection has a subscription list of 153 names, mostly local and middle-class. It contains eighty-four poems.[17] These vary in length from two lines (“The Tryal of Eve”) to 230 (“A Dialogue between the Soul and Curiosity”); eleven are over one hundred lines long, but forty-nine have forty or fewer lines. There is considerable variety in verse form. In his preface Archibald Crauford writes, “The Poems are divided into two Parts, the first being all in Meeter, according to the ordinary metrical Numbers, the second Part being blank Verse, in Imitation of the famous Milton, his incomparable and unparalelled Paradise lost and regain’d” (sig. A1v). By “Meeter”, as distinct from blank verse, Crauford seems to have meant poems that rhyme, for fifty-eight such poems precede the group of fifteen inspired by Milton’s account of the Fall. However, one of the fifteen poems in the Miltonic series is not in blank verse;[18] the series is followed by a further eleven poems in different verse forms; and the phrase “ordinary metrical Numbers” does scant justice to the variety of verse forms displayed by the volume. These different forms include iambic pentameter couplets, various kinds of quatrain, the “Song to David” stanza, as it would come to be known after the poem by Christopher Smart that uses it superbly,[19] and a number of irregular poems.

In more detail, the largest number is in iambic pentameter couplets. There are thirty-eight of these, and, except for the section devoted mainly to poems in blank verse, they are distributed fairly evenly throughout. Two other poems are also in couplets, but one (“To the Muse”) is in tetrameters, and the other (“The Song of Moses”) mixes pentameters and tetrameters. Further variants are “To Lucretia” (a couplet followed by four triplets); “The Degenerate Son” (triplets until its final stanza); and “On Hatred” (pentameter couplets after two “Song to David” stanzas). Apart from the fourteen poems in blank verse, the next largest category is that of various forms of quatrain: ten in common metre; one in the same form but with eleven of the first sixteen lines trochaic rather than iambic; and one in iambic pentameter couplets. Six of the poems
use the “Song to David” stanza, three of them regularly but three with variations.
Finally, there are nine poems in irregular forms.[20]

The range of Adam’s verse forms is of interest for several reasons. First, it
suggests a distinctive and unusual stylistic awareness. Andrew Crawfurd, one of the
very few to have commented on Miscellany Poems, remarks that Adam may have been
influenced by the Gospel-sonnets of her contemporary and countryman Ralph
Erskine,[21] but the comparison fails to do justice either to Adam’s skill and versatility
or to her inclusion of secular poems. Second, her placing of secular among religious
poems locates her between two traditions, and points to a possible tension between
them. Such a tension would have been especially troublesome for a woman of her social
position writing under a strict Presbyterian regime, as several of the poems indicate.
Third, Archibald Crauford’s remark about the division of the poems by verse form,
though in several respects misleading, provides a crucial clue to the volume. Study of
the collection as a whole reveals not two but seven distinct groups, organised partly by
verse form and partly by theme. The series inspired by Milton’s account of the Fall, all
but one in blank verse, is the most obvious example; but there are two further groups
where all the poems are in the same basic verse form, iambic pentameter couplets, and
elsewhere poems in different forms are interwoven with evident care. Because these
patterns help to define the key preoccupations of Miscellany Poems, I will analyse each
group in detail.

The main structural principles governing arrangement of the poems are linkage
and juxtaposition. In the couplet that opens “The Gratefull Muse”,[22] her first poem in
the collection, Adam sets out a kind of manifesto: “Whilst Statesmen drain the Schools
for Subjects new, / I will the Plan of privat e Life pursue” (p. 1). This variation on the
stock eighteenth-century theme of public versus private life might in part be explained
by the fact that her sex and social position would scarcely have allowed her to enter the
world she rejects; but she goes on to justify “private Life” on religious principles. Near
the end of the poem she asks:

Can our Invention fix the wandring Heart?
Or sp’ritual Wisdom to the Soul impart?
No; only he, who gave the blind their Sight,
Can fix interiour Eyes on heavenly Light. (p. 4)

This is an orthodox answer, but it poses a problem, unacknowledged here, for a devout poet. One answer to the question of “Invention” is that such a poet may properly seek inspiration in the world around her, and that is what Adam does in the second poem, “On Creation”. Here, the theme on which she says she will show her art is “Implicite Nature” (p. 5), a phrase that occurs several times in Miscellany Poems and that refers to the evidences of God’s power and beneficence to be found in the natural world.[23] Most of the poem surveys that world, though it also finds there “Thorns and Thistles” that it calls “the Offspring of [Man’s] lawless Deeds” (p. 7). However, having run through “the Book of Nature”, Adam realises that in a fundamental respect it is lacking: “I nothing of Redemption see”. This is to assert the traditional belief that, to know God truly, the evidence of nature is not sufficient – a belief challenged by deism, and put in question by James Thomson’s The Seasons (1726–46). Adam refuses such notions. She ends her poem sardonically by observing that, just as with bodily appetites, there are limits to the kind of work her muse can do: “More than enough degenerates into Wind, / Just so with Learning of the humane Kind” (p. 8).

“On Creation” therefore leads into the next poem, “On Redemption”. This begins, “Implicite Nature speaks her LORD / Both powerfull, wise, and good”, yet goes on to ask, “But what can Nature teach to Man / Of free electing Grace” (p. 8). The five poems that follow answer this question. “The Method of Grace” pivots on a metaphor of bankruptcy and deals with the poet’s experience of grace as deliverance from sin, while “The Priviledge of Saints” addresses the same theme. (“Saint” in this sense means “one of the elect under the New Covenant” [OED]). The sixth poem, “Christian Bravery”, is complemented by the seventh, “Christian Policy”, the first arguing that Christian courage is “But common Gratitude” (p. 13) for the bravery Christ showed as Redeemer, the second that Christians need to use their intelligence to tell God from the Devil. Then the poem that ends this series of eight, “Religion Compendiz’d”,[24] sums up its main themes and introduces the remaining seven poems of the first group. These are arranged as a pair, a trio and another pair, as their titles indicate: “The Discord of the Vices” is complemented by “The Harmony of the Graces”; the latter ushers in the trio “On Faith”,

While Adam groups her poems by verse form as well as by theme, she also uses verse form to support theme. This, too, is clear from the opening group of fifteen poems. Both the opening and the closing pair of poems in this group are in pentameter couplets, whereas the poem that introduces the importance of grace and humility is in the unpretentious form of common metre. After reverting to pentameter couplets for “The Method of Grace”, Adam uses common metre again for the three poems that follow, before ending the series composed by the first eight poems with another in pentameter couplets, “Religion Compendiz’d”. The seven other poems of the first group begin with two in common metre, ending with the pair I have mentioned in pentameter couplets. In between is the trio “On Faith”, “On Hope”, and “On Charity”, the first and third of which are also in pentameter couplets, but the second in the “Song to David” stanza. The poems in different forms are clearly interwoven not only with care but meaning.

But more is at issue than formal and thematic patterning. The first group of poems also identifies a danger stated by a line in “Religion Compendiz’d”: “For he that set thee up, may pull thee down” (p. 15). The danger is that of pride, and, because this theme reappears insistently in later poems, I will discuss it before analysing the second group. As a lower-class woman as well as a Scottish Presbyterian, Adam had to beware of not appearing proud. Grace could only come from God, as she points out in the same poem, and the lesson of humility would have been reinforced by her sex and her social rank. To a large extent her poetry complies. The form she used most often, pentameter couplets, was a natural choice because it was the dominant form of the period for serious verse. However, whereas Dryden, Pope and others had already given many brilliant examples of the opportunities it offers for aural, lexical and conceptual equivalence or antithesis, Adam preferred a direct, forthright style. None of her poems in this form contains an alexandrine, and the first eight contain no triplets.[26] She uses relatively little enjambement, and most of her couplets are closed, reserving run-on lines and open couplets for moments of special emphasis. This restrained style is explained by her appeal in the same poem where she warns herself of the danger of pride,
“Religion Compendiz’d”: “Come here weak Muse, dear Infant of my Mind, / The plainest Way will make thee most refin’d” (p. 14).

The phrase “plainest Way” also helps account for Adam’s use of common metre. Not only was it a popular standard, but it was the basis for many hymns and would continue so for many years.[27] She probably chose the “Song to David” stanza for similar reasons: it was another popular form, one that had originated in the Middle Ages. George Saintsbury calls it the “Romance stanza” or the “romance-six”, because it is a six-line stanza used in such metrical romances as *The King of Tars*, part of *Guy of Warwick*, and parodically by Chaucer in *Sir Thopas*. [28] And it remained in common use for, as Marcus Walsh remarks:

In the eighteenth century it provided one of the forms for biblical paraphrase, and was commonly used in hymns, appearing amongst the works of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley, and in the Evangelical collections. It was one of the most popular stanzas of poetry in the periodicals during Smart’s creative life; C. D. Yost finds thirty-three examples in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in the period 1741–50, forty-nine from 1751 to 1760, and twenty-eight from 1761 to 1770.[29]

*Miscellany Poems* was published before poets took up the “Song to David” stanza with such enthusiasm. Adam may have found it in the old metrical romances, or perhaps in Watts’s *Horae Lyricae* (1706),[30] and it probably appealed to her as an interesting but unostentatious variant from common metre.

Adam also had to beware of ostentation in allusion and poetic invention. In the poem that begins her collection, “The Gratefull Muse”, she distinguishes between the “real” good offered by the Bible and the “fabled Good” offered by classical literature. She declares, for example, “On Helicon I scorn to spend a Breath, / Since Zion’s King deliver’d me from Death” (p. 1); and, referring to the Cross, “Plato’s Elysium could not boast a Tree, / That ere could kill the sting of Sin in Me” (p. 2). This claim is nothing if not orthodox, and it would have reassured dogmatic readers, yet in subsequent poems Adam draws on secular literature almost as much as on the Bible. Orthodoxy also restricts imagination, but again in a way she here accepts. When, in lines already quoted, the same poem asks, “Can our Invention fix the wandring Heart?”; and answers that only God “Can fix interiour Eyes on heavenly Light” (p. 4), Adam offers to resolve
without apparent difficulty the kind of dilemma over which so many of George Herbert’s poems agonise. Later poems suggest, however, that “Invention” was more of a temptation than she was prepared to allow here. Instead, it becomes a manifest source of tension.

The second group, consisting of twelve poems, is chiefly defined by theme but also, again, in part by verse form. The first poem, “The Vulgar Estimate”, begins with four “Song to David” stanzas but ends, very unusually, with a six-line stanza of pentameter couplets. It is followed by “The Impartial Law of God in Nature”, which is in pentameter couplets, but then by a trio of poems on psalms, the first two in common metre but the third in the “Song to David” stanza. “Times Pleasures imperfect” reverts to common metre but is followed by four poems in unusual forms. “On Astrea” is in common metre but contains eleven trochaic lines; “The Baptized Aethist” begins with two trimeter lines before shifting into pentameters, and, except for the first line, which is unrhymed, it rhymes in couplets; “On Divine Love” consists of twenty-four “Song to David” stanzas interspersed at irregular intervals by three five-line stanzas and by five stanzas in common metre; and “On Hatred” begins with two “Song to David” stanzas before turning to pentameter couplets. The final two poems in the group, “On Joy” and “On Grief”, clearly link thematically with “On Hatred”, and each follows one of its verse forms regularly – “On Joy” the “Song to David” stanza, and “On Grief” pentameter couplets.

While the initial group of poems in Adam’s collection revolves around the importance of Christian grace both for an understanding of the world and for knowing how to live in it, the second group takes a more personal, questioning course. The tone of the first poem, “The Vulgar Estimate”, is one of resentful protest. Adam’s title refers to the common view that as a woman with little social status she was not entitled to write poetry, especially of an exalted or imaginative kind. She asks her muse to explain this in the opening stanza, argues in the second and third stanzas that she should leave writing poetry to those who can afford it or are otherwise privileged, and decides in the fourth that she is so unsuited to “such uncommon Flights of Wit” that in her “they are a Crime” (p. 24). Still addressing herself, she reaches a bitter conclusion:

In thee’s the Mark, in whom all Arrows meet,
Whose Cup long since has lost the taste of Sweet,
Whom adverse Blasts in Youth hath turn’d to Stone,
Left like a Turtle on the Earth alone,
Much like a single Seed upon the Earth;
The half of that methinks might Check thy Mirth.

Here Adam mortifies her pride not on grounds of religious doctrine but of social position – the images of the lone turtle-dove and the single seed probably refer not only to the fact that she had been orphaned but to her spinsterhood. Yet, paradoxically, unlike in the rest of the poem, she draws on at least two biblical metaphors: the arrow is from Lamentations, the turtle-dove from Psalm 74.[32] In this way she gives her personal protest the sanction of Biblical language.[33]

The second poem in the group, “The Impartial Law of God in Nature”, answers “The Vulgar Estimate”, so vindicating Adam’s right to compose poetry. It begins by responding to those who had questioned this right: “By Way of Insult thou inquires at me, / Who first it was that gave me Wings to fly?” (p. 25), and its reply is based on two fundamental facts: her possession of literary talent, and everyone’s equality before God. The poem’s forthrightness has its own eloquence, as when Adam declares, “The Law of Nature is the same in all, / In such a Case a Talent is a Call” (p. 25), or, “The lowest Class that is below the Sun, / True Faith and Virtue puts Respect upon” (p. 26). It ends by resolving the problem posed by “The Vulgar Estimate”, repeating in a different key the theme of the collection’s opening couplet with the statement, “‘Tis better to adorn a private Lot, / Than be to shining Eminence a Blot”. This assertion comes better from a poet like Adam than from Thomas Gray whose thoughts in the “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” on low-status potential it anticipates, especially as she has already addressed her resentment with her lot.[34]

The three poems on psalms that follow meld with the main themes of the opening poems in the second group the idea of consolation with a humble position. Two are not so much imitations of psalms, but, as the titles imply, meditations upon them. In this way the first, “On the 19th, Psalm”, extrapolates from the imagery of its source and especially from its initial verse, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork”. In a further implicit rebuke to deism, Adam asks,
“Shall Nature’s Works inanimate / Declare the Power of GOD?” (p. 26). She also goes further, however, criticising nominal Christianity and associating it with those who pursue “temporal Reward” (p. 28). “On the 23d, Psalm” stays closer to its original and to the theme of consolation, so that the opening stanza presents the poet as better adorned by the “rural Weeds” given her by God than by “Crowns of shining Gold” (p. 30), and converts the “Vale” in which, in “The Impartial Law of God in Nature”, she saw herself placed “alone” (p. 25) to “a fertile Vale” (p. 30). The second poem on the same psalm, so clearly appropriate to Adam’s situation, expands it, partly by converting the original imagery into Christian terms, so that “green pastures” becomes “Grace’s Field”, and “still waters” become “the glassie Brook” of God’s wisdom where sinners may detect their errors (p. 33).

Two pairs of poems then restate the dialectic between personal consolation and Christian faith that runs through the whole group. “Times Pleasures imperfect” begins by again addressing the poet’s muse, asking why she stays in the world when everything in it is so impermanent. In the opening stanza Adam pointedly transforms the traditional meaning of the Icarus myth by relating it not to herself, as her detractors might have done, but to the “created Things” that offer merely fleeting enjoyments (p. 35); later she sounds an even more personal note, asking:

Hast thou found out a Friend below,
Above the Reach of Change?
The very Law of Nature breaks,
And nearest Kin grow strange. (p. 36)

Nevertheless, the poem expresses faith in Christian redemption, so that the poet’s muse may be content to “Keep fast”, like Ruth, “in Boaze’s Field” – an apt analogue, which the rest of the poem develops, for a mingled sense of forlornness and hope. This Old Testament figure is complemented in the next poem by the classical goddess of justice. “On Astrea” may be read as a dialogue in which the poet speaks the first three and Astrea the second three of its six stanzas.[35] To the poet’s question why Astrea is so sad and austere, the goddess responds with the assurance that her vision is eternal, using the image of the Phoenix to emphasise her integrity and permanence. By shifting from a falling rhythm to a rising one – the mainly trochaic metre of the first four stanzas
becomes exclusively iambic in the last two – the poem ends confidently, even triumphantly. The second pair of poems contrast with each other. In the first, “The Baptized Aethist”, Adam satirises the position of an atheist who conforms outwardly to Christianity by adopting his own voice. Here the initial metrical irregularity seems to suggest the perversity of this stance: not only are the first two lines trimeters, with the first line unrhymed, but the second line rhymes with the third, a pentameter which initiates the three pentameter couplets that compose the rest of the poem. This is a different kind of irregularity from that of the contrasting poem, “On Divine Love”, which begins with four regular “Song to David” stanzas, shifting to a five-line stanza and to common metre at points of thematic and emotional climax. “On Divine Love” answers the atheist by tracing the course of Jesus’ life and its culmination in redemptive self-sacrifice. At the same time, repeating a point Adam asserts elsewhere, it contrasts St John, who by tradition composed the Book of Revelation on the island of Patmos, with pagan classical writers, exclaiming of the latter, “How dull they paint eternal Joys / In their Elysium!” (p. 45). Adam declares, shifting from a five-line stanza to common metre with an initial internal half-rhyme:

Lo here’s a Theme, will raise thy Fame,
If thou wants to aspire;
The more thou pores on divine Love,
The more thou wilt admire. (pp. 45–6)

One of the other methods by which Adam seeks emphasis and intensity in the poem is through repeating the key word “Love” at the head of fourteen of the poem’s “Song to David” stanzas, most of them successively – a form of repetition that anticipates Smart’s in *A Song to David* itself.

Again through a principle of contrast, “On Divine Love” introduces “On Hatred”, the first of the final three poems in the second group. The thrust of this trio, however, is the most didactic so far. In the opening two stanzas of “On Hatred”, which are in the same form as most of the previous poem, Adam argues that hatred of evil or vice is righteous. Switching to pentameter couplets, she then gives examples of sinful anger, beginning with Abel’s murder by Cain and culminating in Satan’s anger at God. “On Joy” reverts to the “Song to David” stanza for its entirety. Hailing joy vividly as “a
Triumph of the Mind” (p. 51), the poem explains that, in a fallen world, joy becomes “depraved” (p. 52). This is the obverse of the fact that, as “On Hatred” has insisted, anger is not necessarily sinful, and the rest of the poem provides examples of what might be called rightful joy, concluding that “it turns to Sin” if a “just Degree” is exceeded (p. 55). Finally, “On Grief” expresses a similar doctrine, beginning with a statement emphasised by a double rhyme and closing hypermetrical light stresses: “Hark! gentle Grief, if thou be well directed, / Thou wilt amongst the wisest be respected” (p. 56). Again the poem provides examples, in this case of misplaced as well as legitimate grief. Although its depiction of familial grief is poignant, the poem also moralises in remarks such as “On such accounts Grief may be tolerate, / Providing that it’s Reign be moderate” (p. 59). If her former pupil’s memory was accurate, the poem may be the “Address to Grief” that Mrs Fullarton said was Adam’s first.[36]

The next two groups in Miscellany Poems are straightforwardly religious and didactic, and so may be discussed more briefly. Two features connect the poems in the third group: all deal with Old Testament figures, and all are in pentameter couplets. The first, “On Abel”, recalls “On Hatred” in the previous group, and presents Abel’s murder almost in typological terms as first rousing “the Church . . . militant” (p. 60). “On Enoch and Noah” tells Noah’s story from Enoch’s prophecy onward, providing examples not only of an almost universally ignored warning, but of hope, salvation, and ultimately, in Noah’s drunkenness, of “Want of pious Care” (p. 63). Adam uses the first triplet in Miscellany Poems to mark the consequence:

Which in his Brain such dire Disorder bred,
That at the Noise his frighted Reason fled,
And left him in Confusion worse than Dead. (p. 63)

The rest of the group consists of three consecutive poems on King David, and five on Joseph. David probably interested Adam not only as a poet but as a man of humble birth, though neither theme is emphasised. “On Jonathan and David” focuses on the famous friendship, and ends with David’s grief at his friend’s death. “David’s Gratitude” is formally a complaint that verges on a dramatic monologue.[37] Given in the prophet’s own voice, it expresses his sense of indebtedness to Jonathan and, again, grief at his death. It is possible that the last two lines of the previous poem belong to
this one, because they are also in David’s voice, and because, unusually, the two poems are not separated by printer’s ornaments.[38] “David’s Clemency”, the last of the trio, is a panegyric on the prophet, “both with Bay and Laurel crown’d” (p. 67), “The greatest Patriot and the greatest Saint” (p. 68).

If David was especially interesting to Adam as a poet, Joseph is important as a seer. Although she draws on his role in Christian tradition as a type of Christ when she refers to “his great Antetype above the Skies” (p. 76), the quality she most emphasises in her five poems about him is his gift of prophetic vision. The first, “On Joseph”, relates part of the story of his father Jacob, up to the point when he flees from Esau; portrays Esau as “Reprobate”, “deserted by the divine Will” (p. 70); and contrasts Jacob’s visions with the revelations given to his son. “On Joseph’s Revelation” then comments further on the same topic, using the fruitless opposition of Joseph’s brothers to emphasise how irresistible is “The firm Decree of Heaven” (p. 71). “On Joseph’s Sufferings” tells the story of Joseph’s fake murder by his brothers, and introduces “Jacob’s Lament”, another complaint verging on a dramatic monologue. The poem ends by pointing a moral, under the sub-heading “Note”, to the effect that it is short-sighted to question God’s Providence. “Joseph goes down to Egypt”, the final poem in the series, is even more directly didactic, containing the direction “Note” twice. It continues Joseph’s story to the point when he forgives his brothers after they come for food in the famine, but alludes only in passing to the episode with Potiphar’s wife. The chief moral lessons Adam seeks to impress are the importance of “leading Characters” setting a proper example (p. 74), the power of God in protecting those “whom true Grace doth animate” (p. 75), and, returning to the initial theme of the five poems, the role of revelation: “Divining led the Way to Joseph’s Liberty, / And recommended him to Majesty” (p. 77). Given her remark, in “Times Pleasures imperfect”, that “nearest Kin grow strange” (p. 36), it is possible that one of the themes that interested her in Joseph’s story was sibling rivalry. More directly relevant to her role as poet, however, is Joseph’s visionary power, as the next group but one of Miscellany Poems will show.

Before this there is a group of eleven poems on moral and religious principles. The first three, “On Fortitude”, “On Temperance”, and “On Prudence”, deal with virtues, though emphasising the cardinal importance of grace. While all these are in
different verse forms – the first in irregular stanzas, the second in pentameter
couplets, and the third in pentameter quatrains rhyming in couplets – pentameter
couplets is the form for each of the trio that follows. “A Dialogue between the Soul and
Curiosity”, at 230 lines the longest poem in the collection, is a kind of catechism in
which Curiosity asks sometimes very naïve questions and the Soul gives orthodox
replies. The fact that the next two poems are “The Preface to the Ten Commandments”
and a further dialogue, “Curiosity and the Soul about the keeping of the Ten
Commandments”,[39] suggests that Adam may have written these, and perhaps other
poems too, for use in her school. If so, the two poems that follow, “On the Lord’s
Prayer”,[40] and “The Degenerate Son”, are further examples, one commenting on each
phrase of the prayer, the other telling the prodigal son’s story. These are in different
verse forms, the former mainly in the “Song to David” stanza, the latter in iambic
pentameter triplets but ending with an irregular stanza of thirteen lines. “The
Degenerate Son” is of further interest because it is in part dramatic. Although no speech
prefixes or quotation marks are given, the voice in stanzas 1–12 and 16–18 is clearly the
father’s, that in stanza 14 the son’s, and that in the remaining four the poet’s.[41] This
may again suggest composition for use in her school. The group ends with a further trio,
two of which, “The Origin and End of Passions” and “On Christian Virtue”, are in
pentameter couplets, and the third, “On Ulysses and Telemachus”,[42] is in iambic
pentameter triplets but with three stanzas, including the last two, in common metre.
Once more, these poems are explicitly didactic. While the first two are quite abstract,
“On Ulysses and Telemachus” is in the part-dramatic mode of “The Degenerate Son”, to
which it forms a kind of classical pendant.

A further stylistic feature that may suggest composition for didactic purposes is
the use of trisyllabic rhyme. This occurs first in “A Dialogue between the Soul and
Curiosity” on the words “Equity”, “Clemency” and “Verity” (p. 83), coinciding with the
poem’s first triplet. Adam repeats the device in five further poems, most strikingly in
“On Religion”, which begins with no fewer than six such rhyme-words, making a
sextuplet. While the effect does little for the ear, it was probably aimed at the memory
and understanding.
The fifth group consists of ten poems, all in pentameter couplets, and strikes a quite different note. It divides into six poems that are in some sense visionary and four that, though they have abstract titles, are more personal. The opening poem in the group, “On Sleep or an Introduction to a Dream”, plainly marks a transition. It introduces not only “A Dream or the Type of the Rising Sun”, but three further poems on visions and another, “To Lucretia”, addressed to a figure seen in one of them. “A Dream” is one of the most interesting poems in the collection. It has three parts. In the first, Adam describes how she leaves her body behind and rises into the realms of the spirit and imagination, where she witnesses the sun passing through the heavens to reveal the beautiful, complex order of the world. There, a symphony of voices from different parts of the Creation praise the sun that gives them energy and life, and celebrate an ecstatic sense of harmony, in which “Pure Pleasure swiftly turn’d the Wheel of Time” (p. 118). The third and final section moves from the natural to the social world, which at first appears equally glorious. Adam draws on the idea of the hortus conclusus, depicting a pleasure garden surrounded by walls of “Duty”, “Honour” and “Intrest”. These are arranged in decreasing order of importance, with “The Hedge of Intrest” (p. 119) last. Adam drily remarks that Interest is worth less than anything else she has seen, but that it is even more effective than Duty and Honour in keeping people in order – and with that, as if awaking from her dream, she abruptly ends the poem. With its sense of earthly harmony, especially in the phrase “Implicite Nature” (p. 117), “A Dream” recalls the second poem in her collection, “On Creation”; yet the tone and imagery of its closing lines anticipate the last poem, “To the Muse”. The shift from a rapturous vision of the whole of nature to an ironic sense of how people behave in society is very striking. It testifies not only to a markedly independent way of seeing the world but to confidence in expressing it.

The final section of “A Dream” ushers in four poems on female conduct. First, “The Happy Pair” presents a vision of familial bliss centred on “that slender Point, a virtuous Wife” (p. 119). This is one of the few poems by Adam to have attracted comment. Andrew Crawfurd printed it to claim that it was alien to “the native simplicity of feeling, and the sensible use of common circumstances” he found in the song “There’s Nae Luck About the House”; but Alexander Rodger, arguing for Adam’s
authorship of the song, put the opposite case that poem and song alike present a warm, detailed view of domestic life. Rodger reads the poem out of context because, though he mentions having seen a copy of *Miscellany Poems*, he depends for detailed reference on the *Visitor* essays.[45] He suggests that it records, under fictitious names – Rosalinda, Orlando, Honoria, Ormida – an actual visit to a family that Adam knew. The names presumably come from the romances that she is said to have enjoyed reading,[46] but, like “A Dream”, it is a vision that the poem records, and one that harmonises with the three poems that follow. As its title suggests, the first of these, “The Pinacle of Diana’s Temple”, is a vision of female chastity that presents an allegorical landscape of the virtuous female mind and juxtaposes good and bad examples. Its main characters are Lucretia, contrasted with Sappho, and Octavia, contrasted with Cleopatra. Near the end, the poet addresses Rosalinda, the main figure of the previous poem, congratulating her because “No guilt or Horrour on [her] Loves attend, / Affection hath its most exalted End” (p. 126). The two poems that follow, “To Lucretia” and “To Cleopatra”, expand on these themes, advising Lucretia from a Christian perspective not to commit suicide, and moving after twenty-two lines of reproach for Cleopatra to a general vision, as if by way of antidote, of moral order and of the divine order on which it is based.

While the four poems that end the fifth group deal in a broad sense with themes arising from the previous six poems, three of them strike a directly personal note.[47] In “On Fame”, for example, Adam declares, “I shall not follow, thou shalt follow me, / I scorn to face about to hunt for thee” (p. 132); and in “On Faith” she asks, “Why didst thou leave me through the Clouds to roam, / Where black Dispair did triumph o’re my Mind, / Whose Rage had made the Eye of Reason blind”, and “Was it to break the strength of Natural Pride, / That thou so long declin’d to be my Guide?” (p. 134). “On a true Lover of Society” is probably addressed to the man who became her guardian after she was orphaned, because she wishes him an exemplary wife and ends, “And may the Guardian of thy Children be / Faithfull to thine, as thou hast been to me” (p. 133). The last poem of the four, “On Faith”, closes with a kind of valediction suitable for ending a series: “Let these Reflections tune my Harp for Praise, / Throughout th’ uncertain
Number of my Days” (p. 136). This further emphasises the transition to the next group of poems, those inspired by Milton’s account of the Fall.

Although Adam adopted blank verse for nearly all of her poems on the Fall, she did not seek to imitate Milton. Her diction and imagery are simpler than his, she makes almost no literary or historical allusions, and her verse is much plainer, using relatively short sentences and little enjambment. The poems imply a less highly cultured readership than Milton’s, and most of them could probably have been used in Adam’s school. In essence, they are improvisations on their original that at times adapt it interestingly. They are arranged as two series of seven poems divided by the eighth, “The first Temptation”, the account of the Fall on which the whole group turns. The first seven poems are spoken by the character Adam, from his creation to his first address to Eve; and he is the main narrator for “The first Temptation”, though the voices of Eve and the Serpent also appear in dialogue. However, the poet’s voice is present in this poem for one inquit, “said Adam” (p. 151), and she relates the next two, “The Tryal of Adam” and “The Tryal of Eve”, as well as the concluding “Reflections on the Fall”. God’s voice speaks in the three poems setting out the sentences on the Serpent, Eve and Adam, but, as its title indicates, Eve’s is the voice of “A Triumph Sung by Eve”.

The sequence is distinctive for several reasons. First, as the above summary indicates, Jean Adam plays a much less prominent role as narrator than Milton. One result of this is that her version is more fully dramatised than his; indeed, several of the poems, like others from earlier in the collection, anticipate the form of dramatic monologue. For the same reason, her version is less often judgemental and even less didactic than its original. Second, and relatedly, although Adam gives her namesake a leading role, she shows none of Milton’s misogyny towards Eve. For example, she not only omits Milton’s description of Eve admiring her own image in the lake (Paradise Lost, IV, ll. 453–76), but, in “Adam’s Reflections upon his own Creation”, she attributes it, with no charge of narcissism, to Adam: “I made a Mirrour of the chrystall Stream, / And in the same without a Wish beheld / The choicest Pearls Nature e’re could boast” (p. 141). Similarly, while Milton has Eve tell Adam she has eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, and blush as she does so, Jean Adam’s Eve shows no
compunction once she has eaten, but just takes the fruit to Adam who asks no questions before eating it too. The crucial difference, however, is that, after giving the first seven poems and most of the eighth to Adam, Jean Adam gives the penultimate poem in the group to Eve. This, “A Triumph Sung by Eve”, transforms conventional representations of Eve as weak and impulsive into a figure of resolve and integrity. It has no precedent in Milton – indeed, it contrasts sharply with Adam’s complaint after the Fall and with Eve’s lamentation (Paradise Lost, X, ll. 720–844; XI, ll. 268–85). Eve begins by rejecting despair, admits her own flaws and errors, and expresses her faith in redemption, before returning to the threat of despair to defy it resolutely: “Angels have no Advocate / Crimes to extenuate; / For evermore farewell” (p. 157). Adam gives the poem further emphasis through its form of an irregular ode, uniquely in this Miltonic sequence.

However, the most unusual poem in the series is the last, “Reflections on the Fall”. It is an allegory charting the voyage of “the costly Ship Humanity” (p. 157) through trials and tribulations brought about by the folly of its captain, Free Will, to the promise of redemption from Christ’s incarnation – a promise that, despite the gospel, remains unheeded by many at the end. The poem suggests that the Fall continues to be re-enacted in the life of everyone, and offers the poet as a case in point when, applying to herself the metaphor of the ship that she uses for humanity, she falters:

But stay, my Muse, I quite forget my Port;  
I did not find a side Wind in my Sail,  
Nor could conceive from whence this slowness sprang,  
But sadly dream’d, that like Humanity,  
Either my Helm was broke, or I was Pilotless. (p. 159)

The moment recalls the one in “The first Temptation” when the character Adam denounces not only “fatal Knowledge” but “impotent Invention” (p. 150). Adam the poet, who has already questioned whether invention can “fix the wandring Heart” (p. 4), quickly returns to the orthodox path, as if seeking to redress a passage in which she has described the wreck of the ship Humanity with striking vividness. She ends her poem with a series of flat one-line affirmations, for example: “If Truth hath Force, here is her Magazine”, and “If Wisdom can enrich, here is her Treasure” (p. 163).
The same conflict between imagination and orthodox belief reappears in several poems in the seventh and final group, and it may be significant that this group shows greater formal irregularity than any other. Its eleven poems contain one in common metre, one in iambic tetrameter couplets, and two in pentameter couplets, but all the others are in various kinds of irregular stanza.[48] The group again consists of two series, and the second features the more irregular forms. First come five poems on the ungodly, but the remaining six are concerned in part with the poet herself and in part with what one of the titles calls “The Nature of Christian Virtue”. Adam begins with expanded imitations of two psalms. “The Ist, Psalm”, in common metre, celebrates the righteous believer and prophesies destruction for “The Prosylites of Chance” (p. 165); while “The 2d, Psalm” switches to an irregular stanza form to caution those who “plot against the LORD” (p. 165) and “spurn” his sentence (p. 166). Three examples of such reprobates then follow. “The Song of Moses” celebrates the drowning of Egyptians in the Red Sea and looks forward to future defeats of Israel’s enemies; and “Jonah on the Loss of his Gourd” is another dramatic-monologue-like complaint in which Jonah, wishing for death, fails to see his own recalcitrance. In between comes a contemporary example: “On the profane Author of the Circassian” denounces Samuel Croxall, who had published The Fair Circassian anonymously in 1720.[49] Though Croxall’s poem went through numerous editions, many found its lubricious adaptation of the Song of Songs offensive, and Adam criticises him roundly for his “horrid Blasphemie” (p. 169). Her poem is of interest partly because it is one of the few that show her awareness of the literary world around her.

The series of poems on the poet herself and the nature of Christian virtue begins with “To the Muse”. This is a kind of self-caution, advising her “rash headless Muse” to “Reflect on Phaeton’s Fall”, exposing the inadequacy of “subtile Reason” (p. 171), and pronouncing her “greatest Joy, / Sweet self Existence[,] but a Toy” (p. 173). Though the examples in OED suggest that “self-existence” usually refers to God, Adam, who uses the same expression in “On Faith” (p. 134) and “Reflections on the Fall” (p. 160), clearly means by it a proud self-sufficiency that fails to acknowledge the impotence of the individual and his or her dependence on God’s grace. Indeed, three of the last five poems address cognate themes. “On Solomon”, presumably the kind of poem Adam
believed Croxall should have written, reproaches its subject for his folly and ingratitude in turning his back on God; “The Nature of Christian Virtue” returns to the poet, scanning her heart for signs of “private Intrest” (p. 181) and insisting that Reason is meant by God merely “As a Rule to Equity” (p. 184); while “The Difference between Virtue and Pride” argues that pride and, again, “Intrest”, are inadequate props for virtue in a fallen world, presenting an allegorical account of their growth and destructive effects. The collection ends with a further poem entitled “To the Muse”, this time plainly intended as an epilogue. It echoes “A Dream or the Type of the Rising Sun” in its image of “the Hedge” (p. 188), declaring that beyond this barrier there is a garden for poetry to explore. Here may be seen “the Bounds of Virtue”, “the plain of Wisdom”, and “the Flowers of harmless Wit” that may be found in “the fair Field of History”. More substantial than these last, Adam suggests, are “the Plants of Piety” (p. 189), so she invites her muse to “transplant” them. But the poem ends abruptly and sardonically with a warning against “whining Cant”. This again recalls “A Dream”, which closes by pointing drily to the way in which people are influenced more by “Intrest” than “Duty” or “Honour” (pp. 118–19). Both poems conclude by bringing vision unexpectedly back down to earth.

Only in one of the poems in the collection, “On the Phenix”, does Adam provide vision without orthodox morality or such an ironical twist, and this is significant because it is about poetic inspiration itself. The poem begins by appealing to the phoenix to “Come Westward” to where the poet lives (p. 174); but, remarkably, has “Arabia’s Sons” respond that it is better off where it is. This response makes up the main body of the poem, and the poet seems to accept it – though insisting, all the same, on associating the phoenix with the imagination by calling it “A Bird begot by Poetry”, and with inspiration by referring to “The fabled Mountain Helicon” and “Pindar’s Well” as places where she has seen it (p. 176). Adam displays unusual humility in her view of the East. The traditional view was that the arts and learning, as well as political power, moved successively westwards.[50] Yet, after envisioning Arabia as a kind of earthly paradise, Adam recognises that the phoenix should stay in its proper place – even though that will allow her access to it only through imagination.
Although “On the Phenix” represents an appeal that fails – a fact that may
reflect Adam’s own experience of struggle and neglect – it celebrates, through its
imagery and its metrical harmony, her ability to imagine and to versify. As the allusion
to Pindar in the last line indicates, it is a Pindaric ode, which in Adam’s period meant an
inspired poem in irregular metre.[51] Its versification is especially skilful. Rhyming in
couplets until the final stanza, it begins with a stanza of six lines, moves to eight lines
for the middle four stanzas, and ends with a stanza of nine lines that opens with a triplet
and closes with a quatrains rhyming ABBA. Even more striking, however, are variations
of metre and line length. At crucial points the metre shifts from iambic to trochaic, the
pace alters as a result both of short lines (there are three trimeters) and long (including a
heptameter), and only twice are there two successive couplets of the same length (both
tetrameter). The third stanza illustrates the effect of shifts in metre and line length. It
begins with a regular iambic pentameter line (“But hark! I hear Arabia’s Sons reply”),
changes to two lines of trochaic tetrameter catalectic (“We enjoy Tranquillity / In a
more enlarg’d Extent”), and then reverts to iambics for a further tetrameter (“Than any
other Continent”) before reinstating trochaic tetrameter catalectics for another two lines
(“We possess a richer Soil, / With less Labour and less Toil”). After this, it returns to
the iambic norm of most of the poem, but ends the stanza emphatically with a trimeter
followed by a pentameter: “Than any Men below, / And live at greater Distance from a
Foe”. Although Adam uses no unusual diction or imagery here, the shifts in pace and
movement created by variations in metre and line length, combined with rhyme, give
her verse unusual life and emphasis.

The formal irregularity of “On the Phenix” is in keeping with that of four of the
other last five poems in the collection. The three poems that follow it, “On Solomon”,
“The Nature of Christian Virtue”, and “The Difference between Virtue and Pride”, are
also irregular odes, and the first of the two poems entitled “To the Muse” is in an
expanded version of the “Song to David” stanza. Adam may have felt, however, that
formal invention risked committing sins of pride and ostentation, for in the second
poem entitled “To the Muse”, which ends her collection, she turns uniquely to the terse
form of iambic tetrameter couplets – especially well suited to the ironic, self-critical
note on which she closes.
“On the Phenix” is one of the most original poems of its period, yet the poems that surround it, both immediately and in Miscellany Poems at large, help explain why it would have been difficult for Adam to write, or at least publish, much verse of this kind. Given the moral and doctrinal constraints to which so many of her poems testify, not to mention those of her sex and social position, it was a great achievement on her part to write and publish poetry at all, let alone to experiment as she did with verse form and with such quasi-dramatic forms as the complaint. It is impossible to know whether or not she continued writing verse during the thirty-one years that she lived after her only volume appeared. She may have been discouraged from writing by poor sales – Cromek reports a tradition that she exported copies to Boston, where they remained unsold (I, p. 193) – or, if she continued writing, she may not have been able to publish. If the song “There’s Nae Luck About the House” is hers, it not only indicates a different kind of subject matter from that of her collection, but it may have been written during this period.

As I have mentioned above, the question of who wrote “There’s Nae Luck About the House” has occupied most of the published commentary on Jean Adam – and also, his translation of The Lusiad excepted, much of the commentary on William Julius Mickle.[52] Rodger’s 1866 pamphlet arguing for Adam’s authorship is the fullest discussion, but the matter remains in dispute.[53] The case for Mickle’s authorship rests largely on two circumstances. First, the editor of his poems, John Sim, discovered two drafts of the poem in the poet’s handwriting among his papers after his death, one prior to publication of the edition of 1806 to which he added it, the other in 1810 following enquiries by Cromek while the latter was compiling his anthology, Select Scotish Songs. Second, there is the testimony of Mickle’s widow Mary, whom Sim consulted in response to Cromek. Cromek cites Sim as reporting that Mary Mickle “perfectly remembers receiving a copy of it from Mr. Mickle, but is not positive that he affirmed it to be his production, though, on being questioned, she thinks he did not absolutely deny it” (I, 190). After finding the second copy of the song, however, Sim again applied to Mary Mickle, who on this occasion informed him, “without being asked, that she now perfectly recollects that Mr. Mickle gave her the song as his own composition, and explained to her the Scottish words and phrases”, repeating most of it to him “with a
very little assistance”. The case against Mickle’s authorship is that the song is unlike any other poem he is known to have written, and, in particular, that its dialect would have been foreign to him. Rodger argues that the version claimed by Sim to be Mickle’s first draft “bears every appearance of having been written very hurriedly”, and “by one who was not at the time familiar with the idiom of the piece” (p. 19); indeed, he goes so far as to accuse Mickle of an “evident total lack of a requisite command of its Scotch phraseology” (p. 21). He suggests that Mickle did not compose the song but took it down “from the mouth of a singer or reciter, and from the indication in it of great hurriedness, from that of a street singer or reciter of it too” (p. 19). Because, unlike this version, the other manuscript was properly punctuated and its spelling had been corrected, it is likely that Mickle produced a fair copy from a draft he had made in haste. If this is so, he must have written it down before he left Scotland in 1763, apparently without returning, for a literary life in London; he did not marry until 1782. In 1784, he contributed the ballad “Cumnor Hall” to Thomas Evans’s *Old Ballads, Historical and Narrative, with some of modern date*; the fact that he did not contribute “There’s Nae Luck” to the same collection, on which he collaborated with Evans, may, argues J. Cuthbert Hadden, “be regarded as at least an indirect evidence that Mickle did not write it”.

The case for Adam’s authorship is based partly on oral testimony, especially from one of her former pupils who had heard her repeat the song and claim it as her work, and partly on two claims by Rodger: that it is in the dialect of Cartsdyke where Adam lived, and that it refers to the Campbells, a family of that town. Like Mickle, Adam is not known to have published any other poems in dialect, but in her case this is explained by the fact that, as Rodger points out, *Miscellany Poems* is clearly “a book which she most strenuously sought to make strictly English” (p. 21). The reason for this, shown too by the anglicised form of Adam’s name on her title page, is that poems in standard English stood a much stronger chance of attracting sales and attention. As I have already indicated, Rodger also argues that the song shows a thematic affinity with Adam’s poem “The Happy Pair”, though he reads the latter out of context.

Those who support Adam’s claim to authorship take Rodger’s view that a woman is more likely than a man to have written a song celebrating a husband’s return,
especially as it provides details of the clothes she will put on and the food she will cook to welcome him.[59] Some also argue that a man is unlikely to have expressed emotion with such directness. The second quatrain of the fourth stanza, which is repeated to end the sixth and last, is the best example:

And will I see his face again?
And will I hear him speak?
I’m downright dizzy wi’ the thocht,
In troth I’m like to greet.[60]

Although assumptions about gender can easily mislead, the stanza added to the poem by James Beattie makes a telling contrast:

The cauld blasts of the winter wind,
That thrilled thro’ my heart,
They’re a’ blawn by; I hae him safe,
Till death we’ll never part;
But what puts parting in my head?
It may be far awa;
The present moment is our ain,
The neist we never saw![61]

This is pitched at a more general level than the song proper, and it is more literary – Cromek notes that the last two lines, much praised by Burns, echo Horace,[62] while the first part of the stanza echoes the Marriage Service. Though the stanza is in dialect, such qualities are more characteristic of a classically educated man than of a working though well-read woman. A larger point about eighteenth-century Scottish ballads is also relevant. Several recent researchers have argued that Scottish women played an important role not only in performing and disseminating ballads and songs, but, especially in the eighteenth century, in composing them. Catherine Kerrigan declares, “Women played such a significant role as tradition bearers and transmitters that it can be claimed that the ballad tradition is one of the most readily identifiable areas of literary performance by women”; and Mary Ellen Brown suggests, “Perhaps ballads spoke particularly to women’s experiences and might even be called a women’s genre”.[63]
Kirsteen McCue points out that “Published songwriters were rarely women who stood low on the social ladder or who were self-taught”. Given that Adam was a woman of this kind, and that her only publication required extensive support from well-wishers better off than herself, it is likely that, if she did write the song, she would not have been able to get it printed. While it is possible that neither Adam nor Mickle was the author, but that the song was at hand for the one to sing or recite and for the other to write it down, the case for her authorship is much stronger than for his. The dispute is also of interest, however, for the various questions it raises: about the relations between evidence originally from oral and from written and printed sources, and between dialect and standard English; about the relative positions of a marginal female writer and an established male professional; and about the extraordinary prestige enjoyed since the later eighteenth century by Scottish ballads and songs as distinct from other types of poem. Whether or not Adam wrote “There’s Nae Luck About the House”, it is a poem of the highest quality. But the main contention of this article is that the poems definitely known to be hers also deserve attention, especially those that show her striking originality of vision and her skill in applying and adapting established verse forms.
References

[1] Miscellany Poems. By Mrs. Jane Adams in Crawfordsdyke (James Duncan). All references are given by page number in parentheses in my text. In quoting I have normalised long to short “s”, and, where opening words are upper-case, I have converted them to lower except in the case of initials. In citing titles I have followed the form in the Index, as that in the body of the volume is not consistent.


[12] Reference number 5643/1. I thank staff at the Scottish Record Office, especially Christine Kinniburgh, for information and for confirming that there is no gap in the Register during this period. Williamson transcribes the entry in Old Greenock (1886, p. 144), as does Archibald Brown in The Early Annals of Greenock (Greenock: Orr, Pollock, 1905), p. 46.


[14] Alexander Rodger, Jean Adam of Cartsdyke: Her Authorship of the Ballad There’s Nae Luck About the House, Vindicated (Greenock: A. Mackenzie, 1866), pp. 6–7. Subsequent references are given in parentheses in my text. The minister must have been either Andrew or David Turner, who served 1704–21 and 1721–86 respectively; see Ninian Hill, The Story of the Old West Kirk of Greenock. 1591–1898 (Greenock: James M’Kelvie & Sons, 1898), pp. 23–7.


[16] Karina Williamson, who generously sent me a copy of the bibliography for her entry on Adam in the New DNB, has suggested to me privately that Pamela (1740)
is more likely to have inspired Adam than Clarissa. George Stronach, who mentions Pamela rather than Clarissa in “Who Wrote There’s Nae Luck Aboot the Hoose?”, Dunedin Magazine, II (1913), pp. 13–16 (p. 14), apparently does so inadvertently.


[18] “A Triumph Sung by Eve”.

[19] A Song to David was first published in 1763; it seems unlikely that Smart would have known Adam’s work.


[21] “Jean Adam”, p. 269. Erskine’s Gospel-sonnets: or, spiritual songs (Edinburgh: John Briggs, 1726) mostly consists of a ponderous religious allegory. In his preface Erskine waives any pretensions to “lofty Poesy” and claims that his verse should be “not unserviceable to those of a meaner Capacity, and to the common Sort of People, for whose Instruction and Edification these Lines are principally designed” (p. iv).

[22] The title given in the Index, “The Gracefull Muse”, seems incorrect, so I have followed the title in the text.

[23] See pp. 8, 117, 131; the adjective is also used on pp. 140, 179.

[24] OED defines “compendize” as “To epitomize, abridge”, and, of the three examples it cites, all from the period 1690–1722, two are from Scottish sources. Adam also uses the word on p. 34, and the noun “Compend” on pp. 39, 93, 94.

[25] “Faith, Hope, and Charity, do live / As girded in one Zone” (p. 17).

[26] Thirteen of the thirty-eight poems in pentameter couplets include triplets; all occur between pp. 61 and 136, i.e. in the middle three groups of the collection; and one poem, “To Cleopatra”, has three quadruplets.

[27] The tradition goes back at least to the sixteenth-century translations of the psalms by Thomas Sternhold and others; see J. R. Watson, The English Hymn: A


[30] There are four poems in the “Song to David” stanza in the second edition of Horae Lyricae (London: J. Humfreys for N. Cliff, 1709), pp. 98–9, 213–215, 224–227, 238–241; and others vary the same form or include stanzas in it or variants.


[32] “He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. / He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins” (Lamentations 3. 12–13); “O deliver not the soul of the turtle-dove unto the multitude of the wicked: forget not the congregation of thy poor for ever” (Psalms 74. 19). The cup that has lost its taste of sweetness reverses the image in Psalm 23. 5, “my cup runneth over”. I am grateful to Elaine Hobby for identifying these allusions.

[33] For a possible context, see Williamson, Old Greenock (1886), p. 266.
[34] Catherine Kerrigan, who reprints the poem in *An Anthology of Scottish Women Poets* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), calls it a protest “against the limitations of a woman’s place in the world” (pp. 159, 5).

[35] There is no formal indication that the poem is a dialogue, but the first three stanzas seem to address Astrea, and Astrea seems to speak the second three.


[38] Ornaments separate most of the poems in the collection. There are six different kinds, but they seem randomly distributed. They are omitted between some of the poems that are thematically or otherwise connected.

[39] On page 93, the text has only “The Preface” as a title, followed by headings for each of the Commandments; the full title is given in the Index. The title “Curiosity and the Soul about the keeping of the Ten Commandments” appears in the Index, but is omitted from the text on page 97.

[40] Again, the title is from the Index; the only title in the text is “Our Father which art in Heaven”, which should have been printed, like the other phrases from the prayer, as a subheading.

[41] The printer seems to have omitted the eighteenth stanza. All that appears of it is the catchword “18. Make”, indicating its number and first word (p. 108).

[42] Pages 114–115 are repeated in the pagination, so that the correct page number for the ending of “On Ulysses and Telemachus” and the beginning of the next poem, “On Sleep or an Introduction to a Dream”, is 117. The title given in the text for “On Ulysses and Telemachus” is “Ulysses and Telemachus; Or Homelitical Virtues”.

[43] In *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (pp. 144–145), Lonsdale omits a line that should, according to the errata slip, occur after line 64, and reads line 54, “Pure Pleasure swiftly turn’d the Wheel of Time”, as “Pure pleasure seemed to turn the wheel of Time”. He follows the errata slip elsewhere.

Jean Adam of Cartsdyke, pp. 19–20. Rodger refers to the Visitor essays on pp. 41–2; and he seems to have taken from them the text of “The Happy Pair”, passages from “Jacob’s Lament” and “Adam’s first Address to Eve” (p. 42; Crawfurd, “Jean Adam”, pp. 271–272), and also titles of other poems (p. 41; Crawfurd, pp. 272–273).

For Adam’s reading of old romances, see Williamson, Old Greenock (1886), p. 265.

The exception is “On Religion” (pp. 133–134).

One of the poems in pentameter couplets, “Jonah on the Loss of his Gourd”, is also irregular in that it contains a couplet in tetrameter.

See DNB, which says that the poem “has added an unpleasing notoriety to [Croxall’s] name”.


On the Pindaric ode, see Lonsdale, Poems of Gray, Collins, and Goldsmith, pp. 158–160. Adam may again have been following Watts, who included a number of irregular Pindaric odes in Horae Lyricae.

Following Sim’s inclusion of the song in Poetical Works of William Julius Mickle, R. H. Cromek discussed the question at length in Select Scotish Songs, I, pp. 67–68, 189–199. Many other discussions have followed.

Lonsdale assigns the song to Mickle in New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse, pp. 551–552, but notes: “Mickle may only have revised and expanded the poem, which has also been attributed to Jean Adams” (p. 850); he repeats this view in Eighteenth-Century Women Poets, p. 141.


[57] Cromek, I, p. 192, supported with further anecdotal information by Rodger, pp. 24–25.

[58] The only unequivocally Scots word is “regrate” (pp. 3, 59).

[59] In addition to Rodger, see Cromek, I, p. 192; [William Motherwell], “Essay on The Poets of Renfrewshire”, in The Harp of Renfrewshire (Paisley: J. Lawrence, Jun., 1819), pp. ix–xlv (pp. xxiv–xxv); Hugh Macdonald, Days at the Coast (Glasgow: Thomas Murray and Son, 1857), p. 84; Sarah Tytler [pseudonym for Jean Keddie], “Jean Adam”, in Sarah Tytler and J. L. Watson, The Songstresses of Scotland, 2 vols (London: Strahan, 1871), I, pp. 21–51 (pp. 44–49); Hadden, “Songs of Scotland before Burns”, p. 214; and Stronach, “Who Wrote There’s Nae Luck Aboot the Hoose?”, p. 16.

[60] Anthology of Scottish Women Poets, p. 160. The source for this version, as for Fullard’s, appears to be Tytler and Watson, Songstresses of Scotland, I, pp. 49–51; but Kerrigan changes the order of the last three stanzas.

[61] Select Scotish Songs, I, p. 190. The stanza is included in Sim’s edition of Mickle’s Poetical Works, with a footnote attributing it to Beattie (p. 122).

