

Charlotte Lennox

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Charlotte Ramsay Lennox was an English novelist born in Gibraltar to parents James and Catherine Ramsay. Though her exact date of birth is unknown, she was likely born sometime between 9 March 1729 and 11 March 1730. She kept the details of her early life vague and covert, only giving readers hints through the autobiographical approach to some of her literary work.

Lennox's mother, Catherine, was raised with overprotective parents who did not value or find importance in female education. Because of this, she never had an appreciation for books and would later raise her own child in a similar fashion, attempting to teach a young Charlotte Lennox the importance of the female image and being a suitable wife, over education. In 1741, Lennox's parents sent her back to England as they were worried about her becoming an appropriate wife. Instead, it was here Lennox started her writing career and became incredibly successful.

In nearly all her works, Lennox advocates for women in some way and brings attention to the violence they are at risk of experiencing. She defies her mother's way of thinking, urging that women should value their education and not doubt the abilities of their minds, as education can ultimately be what protects them. Due to her literary talent, Lennox's name was mentioned multiple times in the *Gentleman's Magazine* between 1749 and 1751, either through the features of her own work or through the praise and acknowledgment from other writers. She is best known for her 1752 novel *The Female Quixote*, which has been reprinted and translated numerous times.

The poem below, titled "The Question," comes from Lennox's first publication, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1747). It is a collection of thirty different pastorals, odes, songs, epistles, a satire, and a tale set in verse, written in an array of different meters, styles, and genres. Most of the poems in this collection are addressed to women, confronting the intense and complicated nature of relationships between a man and a woman or between a woman and her female friends. This poem is written in iambic tetrameter couplets and, as the title suggests, questions love and the feelings that come with it when unrequited. The poem also draws on pastoral poetry traditions through the mention of Damon, a common shepherd's name in eighteenth-century pastoral love poetry.

Despite the recognition Lennox gained over her forty-three-year career, she spent the end of her life in extreme poverty, relying on the support of the Literary

Fund and personal connections she established over the years. She died in January 1804 in Dean's Yard, Westminster.

Further Reading

Carlile, Susan. *Charlotte Lennox: An Independent Mind*. U of Toronto P, 2017.

Kermode, Frank. *English Pastoral Poetry From the Beginnings to Marvell*. Books for Library Press, 1969.

The Question¹⁷⁷

SINCE freed from Love's enchanting Pains,
 Your Heart no longer wears my Chains;
 Since the gay Folly¹⁷⁸ charms no more,
 And all the dear Delusion's o'er:
 Yet tell me, *Damon*, do you prove 5
 In Freedom, Joys so pure as Love?
 Alike unfelt its Pains or Sweets,
 Your Heart an equal Measure beats:
 No longer Hope and Fear maintain
 Within your Breast a doubtful Reign: 10
 Unpleas'd, nor caring if you please,
 Lost in a dull inactive Ease.
 Since then for this you could forego
 The Lover's sweetly-pleasing Woe;¹⁷⁹
 Forsake those bright enliv'ning¹⁸⁰ Fires, 15
 Gay Hopes, and elegant Desires;
 The mutual Wish, the equal Flame,¹⁸¹
 The Sorrows, Fears, and Hopes, the same.
 Oh say, what Joys can Freedom boast,
 Like those sweet Torments¹⁸² you have lost? 20



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¹⁷⁷ *Poems on Several Occasions. Written by a Young Lady*. London: printed for, and sold by S. Paterson, 1747, pp. 39–40; *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*

¹⁷⁸ *gay Folly* joyful foolishness, in this case of the love relationship

¹⁷⁹ *Woe* misery

¹⁸⁰ *enliv'ning* cheerful, exhilarating

¹⁸¹ *equal flame* strong and mutual sexual desire

¹⁸² *sweet Torments* the wonderful tortures of being in love