



D.R.P.M.'s verse on **Muriel Wheldale**, from Cambridge Biochemical Department's *Brighter Biochemistry* magazine, 1923.

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A closed book?

'Ode to a Lady Researcher on Anthocyanins (with Apologies to Sir Walter Scott)', *Brighter Biochemistry*, 1923.

This reworking of 'The Rover's Adieu' retains the rustic tone of Scott's original and applies it to the thoroughly manufactured environment of the modern laboratory. While Scott looks forward to the rose budding in winter snow, however, the subject of this incarnation (Wheldale, of course) instead grinds 'petals bright/ in dish of porcelain'.

Brighter Biochemistry was an in-house magazine, comprised of gently mocking caricatures, pastiches and flights of fancy. The references to weary searches and broken beakers offer a comically prosaic counterpoint to Wheldale's own poem on her antirrhinums (snapdragons: see [Radiant like gems – Wheldale's flowers](#)). Wheldale's verse showcases an unalloyed wonder and delight in her work; in contrast 'Ode to a Lady' might have some bearing on the more mundane day-to-day trials that every researcher experiences.

The balance between disappointment and elation that Wheldale experienced in her research is harder to fathom. Much of what we know of Wheldale comes from the recollections of co-workers like **Rose Scott-Moncrieff** and institutional records. Wheldale herself left behind little written material on herself, though she penned much on the subjects of her scientific studies.¹ 'Ode to a Lady Researcher' accurately captures this sense of a dedicated worker viewed from a distance, at the same time as she herself was absorbed in the details of her flowers.

¹ Georgina Ferry, 'Pioneers of Plant Genetics to Flower on Stage: Blooming Snapdragons', *Nature* (8 July 2010), p. 188.