GENDER, CELEBRITY, AND PERFORMANCE IN THE POETRY OF HEMANS AND LANDON

UNCERTAIN SANCTUARY: NEGOTIATING GENDER, CELEBRITY, AND PERFORMANCE IN THE POETRY OF FELICIA HEMANS AND LETITIA LANDON

BY CLAIRE WILCOX, B.A. HONS.

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AUTHOR: Claire Wilcox, B.A. (McMaster University)

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Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that late-Romantic women writers Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon were embedded in, and intent on discussing the intersection of gender, celebrity, and performance in their poetry. In Chapter One, I examine Hemans’s and Landon’s public personae to trace how they navigated the commercial society. Each poet crafted a persona which, as was the trend in this period, was often conflated with the characters depicted in their writings. This worked to their pecuniary advantage but had ambivalent social consequences as well. In Chapter Two, I establish how both Hemans and Landon reconfigured Germaine de Staël’s novel *Corinne* (1807) in their poetry to suit their poetic styles. This retelling of the Improvisatrice profession made room for feminine, public genius in print. It also rendered the character of Corinne more English and drew out the North-South binaries and tensions of the political moment. Through this kind of feminist cross-cultural reading, I conceptualize another way of reading late-Romantic sentimental poetry, and the “poetess” personae that often accompany it, ambivalently engaged in both Continental and colonial politics.

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# Introduction

I depart,

Unknown, tho’ Fame goes with me; I must leave

The earth unknown. Yet it may be that death

Shall give my name a power to win such tears

As would have made life precious.

—Felicia Hemans, “Properzia Rossi”

What, to a Romantic woman writer, is fame? For Felicia Hemans (1793-1835), this is the perennial question. It appears repeatedly in her work, each time in slightly differing contexts—here in a mother, there in a daughter, more often than not ending in a grave. Her *Records of Woman* (1828) itself is a mausoleum, a densely populated gravesite for characters who openly faced death with declarations like the one above, made by the heartbroken, fading artist Properzia Rossi. These are no *femmes fatales.* These are combatants in a woman’s warfare, embracing death not in the aftermath of imperial conquest, but in the heat of its battles.[[1]](#footnote-1) And yet, the stage upon which the death is set to occur is so conventional, as is the “Mrs. Hemans” who lived comfortably off the profits of her volumes. One writer in the *Quarterly* pointed out that Hemans’s devotion to her writing, “talent and learning,” “have not produced the ill effects so often attributed to them; her faculties seem to sit meekly on her” (24:130-31) (Wolfson 2006:42). Hemans’s faculties most likely sat meekly on her because she was scarcely out in public, and virtually never in London.

And what of other women writers who were not afforded such virtue? Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838), for example, was consistently accused of conducting an affair with her editor, William Jerdan—accusations which are now supposed to be true (Lawford 2000; 2003). Both Hemans and Landon’s poetry prolifically feature what Elisa Beshero-Bondar (2013) aptly calls “tragic heroines in public lament” (407) and, to varying extents, embody that trope. Their contribution to a nineteenth-century “feminine mystique” is clear in the language of their poems, which constantly invokes female characters’ feminine emotional and physical faculties and invites readers to identify these faculties with the poets themselves. This is a proliferation of the attitude that considers the “private” to be a publicly tradeable commodity (Francis 1998:96). The “rise of women as the nurturers of literary discourse” points to a feminized form of literature that is also enabling or responding to some of the other broad late-Romantic trends like that of serial publications replacing subscriptions, a rising literacy rate, and the emergence of an increasingly unionized, if not unified, middle class (Ross 1989:22). These elements participate in the demystification of the singular, sublime, genius poet and are arguably the most notable movement of the late Romantic period. Scholars largely attribute Hemans’s and Landon’s active participation in this “cult of femininity” to their need to support their families—for Hemans this included five sons, her mother, and her siblings at intervals, and for Landon this was her nuclear family, although she did not live with them for most of adult life (Wolfson 48; McGann and Riess 12).

In both their contemporary critical reception and current Romantic scholarship, Hemans’s and Landon’s reputations are contingent on “femininity” rather than genius, celebrity, or accomplishments. This depiction effectively erases their labour, intellect, and poetic control, making the quality of the poetry relative to the poet’s embodiment of “feminine” faculties. However, even within this trope, each poet’s brand of “femininity” is distinct. “L.E.L.”’s and her characters’ appeal relies upon their sexual availability as “beautiful,” if not fraught, young women, and calls on conventions of theatricality to depict both their talents and their grief. “Mrs. Hemans” denotes tones of home, comfort, and domesticity in a way that also plays on well-established tropes of femininity, but ones which register as much more affective than eroticized, and oriented toward conjugal life, and thus considered to be directed exclusively at a female readership.[[2]](#footnote-2) Hemans continually draws on cases from the historical record for the intrigue of her poems, using archetypal women like Sappho, Ariadne, Joan of Arc, and Properzia Rossi, among less known and even generic figures, invoking a genealogy of legendary female sacrifice through the ages. While the two poets thus appeal to readerships in different ways, they both draw upon and amplify existing tropes of femininity to enhance their appeal.

Landon, who has been called “the female Byron” by multiple scholars (Eisner 2009; Knowles 2007; Riess 1996), plays on the eroticized gaze directed at both her characters and at “L.E.L.” We need look no farther than Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s oft-cited review of Landon from *The New Monthly Magazine* to find her mastery of commodity-fetishism in this regard: upon learning that L.E.L. was a woman, “our admiration was doubled, and our conjecture tripled. Was she young? Was she pretty?” (*NMM* 1831:545). Contrary to Hemans’s, Landon’s poems interpolate both male and female readers, utilizing a blend of melancholy and eroticization that speaks both to female grief and suffering, but also in a way that makes those bodies sexually available. Like Hemans, Landon also evokes female tropes within an already-established network; for example, “The Improvisatrice” is implicitly Germaine de Staël’s Corinne. In Eric Eisner’s (2009) words, “What endorses the lyric feeling for which Landon celebrates Hemans and Byron and Corinne, and implicitly her own poetry, is its ability not only to be quoted but to feel like a quotation. The language of genuine interiority on this model is necessarily one that has already been in public circulation” (126). In other words, Hemans and Landon are recirculating generic characters in recognizable plots. Landon is expressly concerned with the female/feminine cultural producer and “cultural assumptions about the woman artist” (129), about the spectacle of these types of figures who are paradoxically living, and to different extents problematizing, the essentially private experience of “womanhood.”

The feminine cultural icons “Mrs. Hemans” and “L.E.L.” are complicit in the mythologizing of femininity to the extent that they allow Hemans and Landon to dissociate their poetics from their own unorthodox lifestyles, which diverged starkly from conjugal home-making; at the same time, these personae made space for styles of writing and living that unsettle the bounds of gender-appropriate feeling and behaviour. To be called a “female Byron” is to be “stuck in a secondary status” that echoes his sexual availability, and the parallel between the melancholy poetry and the poet’s tragic life and early death. Further, for Landon to remain unmarried throughout her career is to remain a fantasy object for the male readership (Eisner 2009:119-120). Landon plays on a simultaneous “arousal and deferral of sexuality” (101) apparent in her poetics and applied to her publicly. Conversely, “Mrs. Hemans” conspicuously adopted a married title even though the public was well aware of the dissolution of her marriage because she could wear it like a cross—she could publicly face this failure, or be understood to face it, with dignity and longsuffering. Hemans used her permanent status of sexual *unavailability* to “secure positioning as adored and protected daughter and adoring and self-sacrificing mother” (Francis 1989:100).

At stake here is a triangulated tension among the categories of death/memorialization, nurturing/domesticity, and performativity. What these poets are doing with modes and forms of Romantic femininity is much more complex than simple binaries between the stasis of the memorial and the activity of performance, or nature versus artifice, or death versus life. However, these three categories inform one another in that the femininity analyzed here requires attending to all three and how they operate together. For Eisner (2009), this “woman and fame” discourse of being ultimately conflicted as a woman writer (and thus failing/dying) can be read as quite generative: it can be “a critique of the structural conditions of authorship generally, and the particular challenges faced by women writers in nineteenth-century Britain” (134). Positing *Records* as “records” associates her work with authority and the documentation of historical accounts. The records are also, however, an exaltation of women’s lives via prosopography. Further, “Woman” (as opposed to “women”) is an objectifiable and timeless signifier— in appealing to it, Hemans overlaps with less ‘domestic’ contemporaries like Mary Wollstonecraft. The term asserts typifiable biological and cognitive differences between the genders. In the same way, the title of “Improvisatrice” taps into a legacy of the “performing poetess,” which itself is different from a “female poet” or “woman writer.” I consider the term “Improvisatrice” to denote a gendered position that does not necessarily consolidate power—the Improvisatrice is a figure who can simultaneously be object and subject because they compose and work from/with their immediate transcorporeal situation. These “expressions of practiced rhetorical ability” (Ianetta 2008:102) are what separates Improvisatrice from bardic and other performances. Paola Giuli (2011) is helpful in distinguishing learned improvisation versus street performing: “Theorised in turn as a classical poet and a pre-Romantic creative genius for a good part of the eighteenth century, the learned improviser was seen by many as the epitome of the gifted artist and the *cantor* of Italian civilisation” (214). The hybridization of performance and art redoubles the value of each; this stands in stark and somewhat ironic contrast to the categorization of Romantic women’s poetry as “mere desultory effusions,” as Hemans herself called her poems in a letter to Rose Lawrence (Wolfson 2000:521). For Leighton (1992), the improvisatrice is “a creature of contradiction” (59): passionate subject and object of song, endless echoes of famous woman talking about woman and fame. The Improvisatrice herself is the art as much as she is the artist, and her audience is her muse. The improvisation is a triangulation of power in which everyone occupies liminal space, and yet each is subject to movement throughout the performance as well, depending on the shifts in social energy.

Key Terms, Key Figures

Tricia Lootens’s (1994) glossing of the word “femininity” is particularly helpful when considering Romantic-Victorian women writers: “a condition that is not biological but culturally constructed and historically contingent. In dominant nineteenth-century British and American writings on the subject, womanhood is only truly embodied by married or marriageable ‘Anglo-Saxon’ gentlewomen and not even by all of them” (250). By these terms, “femininity” is contingent on whiteness, dignity (which implicates material conditions and therefore class), and a public signal of sexual availability.

Femininity is closely tied to the type of politics that makes Hemans’ and Landon’s personae intelligible to their readers. Politics “does not refer to local issues of government, but to the larger issues that seized the imagination during this period. These are the French Revolution during the radical 1790s, and the consequences of the revolution that focused the relation between the state and the family during the reactionary years of the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath” (Fay 1998:61). Politics, inasmuch as I refer to them here, signify as an abstraction of the War’s social effects on the British empire which, through the Regency period and at least until the Reform Act of 1832, materializes as social conservatism.

And, of course, how could we conceptualize a “poetess” without grounding the explicitly gendered term in heteronormativity? Per Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s ground-breaking essay “Sex in Public,” heteronormativity refers to

the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment. It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than of a sense of rightness produced in contradictory manifestations—often unconscious, immanent to practice or to institutions. Contexts that have little visible relation to sex practice, such as life narrative and generational identity, can be heteronormative in this sense, while in other contexts forms of sex between men and women might not be heteronormative. Heteronormativity is thus a concept distinct from heterosexuality. One of the most conspicuous differences is that it has no parallel, unlike heterosexuality, which organizes homosexuality as its opposite. Because homosexuality can never have the invisible, tacit, society-founding rightness that heterosexuality has, it would not be possible to speak of “homonormativity” in the same sense. (548, footnote 2)

To apply this definition to the Romantic period, we might adjust the notion of “coherence” to think specifically about conjugality: “Mrs. Hemans” promotes her perpetual grief and sexual unavailability, whereas “L.E.L.” suggests that Landon is always-already available and publicizing her availability. Romantic-era heteronormativity, embodied by the literary critic and reviewer, is a policing not only of a woman writer’s published content through its formal reception, but also of her own public identity due to the widespread assumption that a female poet’s work is highly autobiographical. Hemans and Landon are, in one sense, “contradictory manifestations” in that Hemans’s almost-widowhood is the opposite of Landon’s maidenhood. However, to a large extent both are safe, occupiable positions in British literary and public culture.

Performativity, then, is a garment of heteronormativity, most often associated with the veil. For Judith Butler, the chief gender critic of the last two decades, performativity refers to the way that

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the “integrity” of the subject. In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* 173)

In the years after the battle of Waterloo, Hemans restores, celebrates, and diffuses the feminine image in a way which allows readers to reconcile with the immediacy of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, among other British colonial goings-on (Wolfson 2006:43). Hemans deploys gendered “acts, gestures, or enactments” in two particular ways: she stays out of urban areas, and she signs her poems “Mrs. Hemans.” Her public absences ensure that much public knowledge about her derives from her own writing and criticism about it rather than from Hemans’s mannerisms or day-to-day lifestyle.

Though they may be contemporary terms, femininity, heteronormativity, and performativity figure prominently in the politics of key early-Romantic figures Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Germaine de Staël, and Mary Wollstonecraft. All three writers published fiction and non-fiction about gender conformity across continental Europe, and both de Staël and Wollstonecraft were denounced for their watershed publications set in Napoleonic France. Rousseau’s demarcation of gender resonated well into the years Hemans and Landon were publishing. Behrendt (2017) makes the observation that the popular term “the proper lady” is an “agenda for female behaviour” (13) and “the gendered boundaries” of “culturally defined expectations” (14). This stems directly from Rousseauian (and later Burkean) notions of gender. This is really helpful because it doesn’t use the word “home” or “domestic sphere,” an overt choice which I strive to adopt here. For Behrendt (2017), women writers’ resistance to essentialization is “tied to changing cultural attitudes about gender in an age that was gravitating towards more egalitarian thinking, both in the politics of the nation-state and in the politics of the nuclear family that so often provided the metaphorical trope for nation-state” (13). What I am tracing here is a social politics of gender in women’s writings which concedes to certain obligations of “femininity” outlined above like whiteness, dignity and a public signal of sexual availability, but which subverts each of those categories by relocating to Italy, taking the stage in acts of public artistry, and repeatedly failing attempts at courtship.

Rousseau’s writings are also helpful in characterizing the dynamic between European nations well into the Romantic period. Saglia (2017) cites Rousseau’s posthumous publication “Essay on the Origin of Languages” (1781) as a major characterization of the divide between northern and southern European societies (105), a divide which many writers adopt and formulate into a North-South dialectic. For Sweet (1994), this dialectic is a way

to direct British consciousness away from imperial modes and insular destinies toward a model of history that defeats the imperial project. Although, like Byron, she [Hemans] couches her political commentary in classical and Italianate terms, she adopts in particular a Mediterranean aesthetics of the beautiful whose instability and productivity work against the subliminity of monument and empire, whether these are associated with Paris, Rome, Athens, or London. (171)

This “Mediterranean aesthetics of the beautiful” is grounded within a gendered understanding of nation as well as poet, and poems depicting female artists emphatically so. And for every Rousseauian notion, there is an equal and opposite de Staëlian one; in particular, I am referring to the gender politics she brings forth in her novels *Delphine* and *Corinne, or Italy.* As Paola Giuli summarizes, “In a truly deconstructive fashion Staël subverted the negative connotation of a feminine and feminised Italy. If Italy is feminised, feminine need not be synonymous with weak, unsubstantial, superficial, the novel teaches us. It can be strong, deep, and glorious” (2011:231). This is a non-essential femininity thriving in a non-essential Italy—for Corinne, it is not a reproductive futurity, but one grounded in public feeling turned national sentiment garnered through improvisation.

Elizabeth Fay (1998) asserts that posthumously, Mary Wollstonecraft’s life “came to be interpreted after her early death as a version of the inappropriately public life of Marie Antoinette,” (57) a fate worse than death. This is the legacy of scandal and gender-monstrosity of being politically motivated and ambitious in terms of influence. In fact, in *Dublin University Magazine* William Archer Butler mused that Felicia Hemans “has, indeed, approved herself a worthy interpreter of the inestimable feelings of the female breast, and woman in the pages (whether we regard the *subjects* of some, or the exquisitely feminine *spirit* which pervades all) is more truly vindicated than if her “rights” were proclaimed by a thousand Mary Wollstonecrafts” (1834; Wolfson 2006, 42). Butler calibrates the national project of “femininity” by placing Wollstonecraft on one end of the scale, and Hemans on the other.

Wollstonecraft and Hemans use associations between motherhood and the nation, but in different ways: Hemans uses a metaphorical representation (nation-as-mother) and Wollstonecraft a logical one (uneducated women=bad families=failing nation) (Fay 1998:68-9). Elizabeth Fay posits Hemans’s poetics as one in which the nation is maternal—a quaint, passive, old mother—but the maternal nation in *Records of Woman* works more to identify women as middle-class subjects. Wollstonecraft’s stance is radical “as that which benefits the mother” (91) via education whereas Hemans envisions a domestically-centered state. Nonetheless, both writers focus (as many women writers from the period did) on transforming the public understanding of maternity so that it is “politically necessary” (92) to the continuation and betterment of the nation. Wollstonecraft and Hemans align in their assertion that “civil freedoms are meshed with family bonds, that domestic affections cannot stabilize a nation where they are weakened by patriarchal abuse infiltrating the family unit” (75). But the two writers depart from one another in methodology: Wollstonecraft critiques the institution of marriage, whereas Hemans depicts how it fails within the conditions discussed above. Further, Wollstonecraft was subject to mass and overt critique, whereas Hemans remained the apple of the public’s eye well into the Victorian era.

We might consider de Staël’s (and equally Hemans’s and Landon’s) Corinnes as emblems of a prototypical glamour, almost of the likes of Laura Mulvey’s 1920s female Hollywood stars. These publications provide an avenue for a (more) liberated female sexuality without revealing it to be as such—a quest for love, often unrequited, in which women’s (physical) mobility comes into play, but in a way that diffuses and contains her potential for social disruption. It is through performance that Hemans, Landon, and their Corinnes negotiate death and memorialization as the prize and consequence of calling domesticity into question.

Chapter I

The “Woman” Question: Mythic Alliances Between Women, Womanhood, and Literary Character

In a letter to Mary Russell Mitford in 1828, Felicia Hemans wrote, “I am sure that you will agree with me, that fame can only afford *reflected* delight to a woman” (Wolfson 2000, 498). Hemans reiterates this feeling to another friend in 1830: “a walk in the hayfield—the children playing round me—my dear mother coming to call me in from the dew—… How these things have passed away from me, and how much more was I formed for their quiet happiness, than for the weary part of the *femme célèbre,* which I am now acting!” (2000, 502). It seems that for Hemans, to be a woman in the public sphere was compromising in one way: the perks of fame are refracted by gender and the *femme célèbre* itself is a trope that involves the trade-off of personal failure for professional success. To be sure, much of Hemans’s revenue and cultural currency depended on this type of assertion, and the melancholy tone of much of her poetry works to excuse the fact that she was one of the most popular poets (male or female) of the nineteenth century. Hemans is not the only late-Romantic writer balancing commercial success with the aura of “quiet happiness”: Letitia Landon embodied a type of *femme célèbre* which excused her public life on the grounds that it directly fed her productivity. Essentially, Landon adopted the Improvisatrice persona to justify her incredibly prolific, “unpolished” publications as effusions special *because* they passed through no filter. In fact, Landon’s strategic publishing in periodicals catalyzes her career—her affinity for this “improvised” type of work gestures to the popular strategy of reproducing recognizable narratives which hold cultural currency. Both Hemans and Landon used the social position of *femme célèbre* as a launching point for their content,but in ways which suited their respective rural and urban lifestyles.

This chapter examines Felicia Hemans’s and Letitia Landon’s public personae as faultless “Women” and traces how they navigated, even thrived, in the commercial society that laid the groundwork for Victorianism. As Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess (1997) point out, Hemans and Landon emerged as writers in distinct ways, though they do have much in common, most prominently a stance which is “at once critical of and enslaved by the worldliness and hypocrisies of [the] age” (11). McGann and Riess echo this feeling periodically in their introduction to Landon’s selected writings, insisting that, specifically for Hemans and Landon, “Each in her way pursued and accommodated the social order they knew well to distrust” (20). For Norma Clarke (1990), women writers challenged this male authority in three ways: “they used the home to write in, they occupied the printed page with words which might attain to the power of definition, and they competed with male writers in the market-place, earning money and potentially acquiring economic independence” (21). It is interesting that women writing in the home makes it an inherently political space when male writers have been writing in similar contexts without much critical commentary. If the periodical market is a sort of arena for competition, the revenue Hemans and Landon generate from their publications speaks to their networking as well as their writing skills.

Biographies

Hemans’s biography is one teeming with departing men. Although it would be convenient to read it as source material for the affect found in many of her poems, I include it here primarily to understand some of the moving parts of her life. Felicia Dorothea Browne was born September 25, 1793 in Liverpool to George Browne, an Irish merchant, and Felicity Wagner of Lancashire. Facing financial troubles, George immigrated to Canada when Felicia was thirteen and died there six years later. Under Felicity’s care, the family lived in Bronwylfa, St. Asaph, Flintshire in rural Wales. Hemans published her first collection *Poems* (1808) at age fourteen.[[3]](#footnote-3) The young Hemans learned Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Latin, and German, eventually publishing translations in all six languages, and on texts ranging from Goethe to Camoens (Sweet 1994:172). Browne married Captain Alfred Hemans in 1812 and they had five sons; however, by the time Hemans was pregnant with the fifth, the couple had separated and in 1818 Alfred departed for Italy. Clarke, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, prophetically writes that “Marriage, the heterosexual drama which defined woman always and entirely in relation to man, and writing, which for women in the nineteenth century was potentially a means of expressing a self on the same terms available to men, existed uneasily together” (8). It is well that Captain Hemans self-exiled to Italy—one third of *Records* have Greek or Italian protagonists. Although Hemans herself never visited these locations, Italy especially was a site of both her personal ties and cosmopolitan ideals. This excited her readership with the cause of Italian and Greek nationhood, a galvanization which would endure into the Victorian years (Schor 2008:244).

By the time Captain Hemans left her, Hemans had already moved back into her mother’s household in Bronwylfa and was securing publishing deals via letter correspondence, a strategy which would prove successful throughout her literary career. The entire family moved to Rhyllon in 1825, approximately one mile from Bronwylfa, where Hemans continued to operate until the death of her mother in 1827, her brother’s move to Ireland and her sister’s marriage in 1828 (49). Hemans was devastated by the fracturing of her family; from this time onward, she experienced chest pains, heart palpitations, and inflammation. She moved to Dublin in 1831 to be close to her brother as her health declined severely and died there on May 16, 1835.

However troubling the failure of Hemans’s marriage, friends and critics alike agree that Hemans’s reincorporation into her mother’s home had a positive effect on her literary career. In *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans, with Illustrations of her Literary Character from Private Correspondence* (1836), Chorley explains thather return to her childhood home was an impetus for her career, that effectively “placing her in a household, as a member and not as its head, excused her from many of those small cares of domestic life, which might have either fretted away her day-dreams, and, by interruption, have made of less avail the search for knowledge to which she bent herself with such eagerness; or, more probably still, might have imparted to her poetry more of masculine health and stamen, at the expense of some of its romance and music” (36). Following Chorley’s logic, it is the exemption from managing the domestic space that makes Hemans so disposed to write about it. Benjamin Kim (2013) goes even further, citing Captain Hemans’s departure as integral to how Hemans’s persona and poetics converge: that “she was not supposed to get beyond the wound of separation and enjoy her fame. This was the socially acceptable attitude to take by a woman who was supposed to value family over all” (148). Claire Knowles (2012) corroborates this strategy of permanent “wounding” by which both Hemans and Joanna Baillie[[4]](#footnote-4) keep a healthy distance from public scrutiny (1110-1). Interestingly, Kim, Kelly, and others assert that the readership of “Mrs. Hemans” was well aware of the desertion of her husband, but this fact does not seem to diminish her authority in chronicling the conventional home. Her poeticization of the domestic sphere is melancholy in tone; this is the tone in which Hemans establishes authority. Thus, it stands that Hemans’s social recovery from her husband’s departure was paradoxically achieved through the promulgation of a longsuffering, heartbroken figure which registers as her melancholy aesthetic. In other words, Hemans *gains* authority over the home space by thematizing her *loss* of its benefits.

Like Hemans, Landon also published her first poems as a teenager by virtue of family connection: the family was neighbours with William Jerdan, editor of *The Literary Gazette* from 1817 until after Landon’s death. Landon was born on August 14, 1802 in Chelsea to a family of landed gentry who had long since lost their fortune (McGann and Riess 11). What distinguishes the young Landon from the young Hemans is how Landon “was ushered into a volatile cultural arena, the highly public and journalistic scene centered in London” (22). Encouraged by the reception of her poems in the *Gazette*, Landon published her first collection of poems, *The Improvisatrice[[5]](#footnote-5)* (1824), which went through six editions in its first year (12). The collection, like others to come, depicts alienated, lovesick and suffering protagonists, chronicling the joys and the pitfalls inherent to the combination of femininity and fame. Like Hemans, Landon borrows from cross-cultural narratives, often choosing to depict ostensibly Italian women, but who exhibit recognizably English feminine characteristics. As discussed in more detail below, both writers borrow heavily from Lord Byron at the beginning of their careers. When Landon’s father died in 1824, she supported her mother and brother through her publications and by undertaking more responsibility at the *Gazette*. Landon quarrelled with her mother and, after living briefly with her grandmother before the latter’s death in 1826, rented an apartment at a boarding school.

Rumours slandering Landon’s chastity began to circulate anonymously in the press accusing Landon of liaisons with Jerdan, among other men (13). Whether or not they were true, the rumours permanently damaged her reputation and catalyzed her mythologization as an intensely public “fallen woman.” For Knowles, Landon distinguishes herself from other women writers of the period from her first publication in 1821 by “openly court[ing] fame” (1111) in the intensely public London literary sphere. Court fame she did, in her public and literary life as well as through the incorporation of advertising and commercial material in her poetry. In 1829 and 1830, Landon began to contribute to gift books and annuals, most notably *Fishers Drawing Room Scrapbook,* which she edited from 1832 to 1839. Landon also published three “Silver Fork” novels in the 1830s, a trendy genre that depicted the lives of the then-fading aristocracy. Landon became engaged to literary critic John Forster in 1834 but broke off the engagement when he accused her of sexual immorality (14). In 1836 Landon met George Maclean, the then-governor of Cape Coast Castle, the most prominent settlement on Africa’s Gold Coast, present-day Ghana. The engagement was suspended in early 1837 as each considered rumours stacked against the other. The two eventually reconciled and were married in June 1838, after which they quickly departed for Cape Coast. Landon was found dying in her bedroom on October 15, two months after her arrival, holding an empty bottle of diluted hydrocyanic (or prussic) acid, a toxic compound which McGann and Riess maintain was consistent with her treatment of “periodic spasmodic attacks” (15). What unsettled her readership, and what remains unsettled, is how to interpret Landon’s cause of death: a physician ruled it a case of accidental overdose and there was no post-mortem (15). Landon’s contemporary biographers Emma Roberts (1839) and Laman Blanchard (1841) worked to dissuade the public from assuming foul play or suicide, but antagonistic proof published by William Howlitt (1843) and others fuelled the debate. Thus, Landon’s mythologization, which aligns strongly with the trope of a “fallen woman,” is wildly popular for three reasons: it takes root in the midst of her success, it is driven by her status as a lower-class, single woman living alone and self-representing (publicly and financially) in London, and it climaxes through her death abroad.

Public Femininity

Apparent in the lives of both poets is their preoccupation, aesthetically and literally, with their ongoing reception as they continued to publish and support their families. However, it is helpful for understanding Hemans’s and Landon’s strategies for reception to gloss the gendered implications of a life of writing for the British public. In this context, Stephen Behrendt and Harriet Kramer Linkin (1999) nuance notions of gendered literary success:

*Reception* itself is a vexed term, involving as it does an often diverse array of literary markets, readerships, and cultural conditions that affect the way literary works are read and interpreted. Closely related is *reputation,* which has historically indicated the more protracted, less momentary form that reception assumes within the continuum of history. Like their male counterparts, the women poets appreciated that the latter depended on the volatile former. Unlike them, however, the literary production of the women poets was carried on in a less stable and generally less hospitable environment, especially when they opted for subjects and forms traditionally associated with the male poetic tradition. (2)

Scholars of romanticism are retroactively engaging with both “reception” and “reputation” in blurry, united terms like “fame” or “celebrity” (Brock 2002; Knowles 2007). However, as Behrendt and Linkin make clear, to do so without attending to the contemporaneousness of “reception” and the dynamism of “reputation” forecloses possibilities for unity among women writers. Hemans and Landon in particular promulgate their literary importance as self-proclaimed “cultural mediators” (Saglia 2010:283), by which I mean they positioned themselves as essential to the literary landscape by virtue of their commitment to reproduce and retell narratives with massive cultural currency. For Lootens (1996), who reads based on Wittig’s feminist tradition, the woman writer must embody a “true femininity” that pushes her own personality to the background, and simply become a vessel for that femininity: “In the case of women poets, such annihilation often works through a process of metaphoric absolution whereby a woman poet who is in the process of being proclaimed quintessentially feminine is both freed from the onus of deliberate artistic creation and rendered a virtually transparent medium for *the* generic genius of Woman” (69). Both Hemans and Landon, among other women writers, operate within this constraint.

Gary Kelly (2002) argues that Hemans’s poetics of the domestic sphere operates within a “private sphere [that] was constructed as an idealized and necessary domain of feminized nurture for middle-class men and their refuge from the conflicted and unreformed public sphere” (56). In this way, the masculinized “public” and feminized “private” spheres, in their Romantic articulation, are not simply a limitation of female existence but rather a distinction of that gendered lifestyle from working-class indecency, on the one hand, and upper-class extravagance on the other. Thus, the category of “feminine” thrives in liberal, bourgeois conceptions of modernization, a process initiated after the Napoleonic Wars which continues, albeit in different forms, for a century. This modernization is most recognizable in resistance to the Corn Law of 1815 and the drive for parliamentary representation which would continue into the 1830s. Susan Wolfson notes that “by the early 1820s, the press on ‘Mrs. Hemans’ was broadcasting two related themes: she is to be admired for what she *is*—the epitome of British ‘feminine’ excellence and womanly propriety—and praised for what she is *not*—an ‘unfeminine’ woman of intellectual force and political opinion” (2000, 525). Jason R. Rudy (2006) echoes this this tendency to praise Hemans “specifically *not* for overflowing with powerful feeling” (544). This critical imposition is so strong that even when Hemans registers ambivalence about domesticity or associates it with negative feelings, these reservations are either ignored or attributed to effusive femininity in a way that leaves no possibility for reading them as deliberately destabilizing or subversive. For Rudy, Hemans seized on a trend in the early 1820s that (briefly) turned away from Byron’s passionate style and toward what they claimed “capitalizes” on poetical, and especially metrical, “restraint” (546). He posits that Hemans’s metrical excellence “relieve[s] public exhaustion with Romantic overflow” (546) which, though perhaps true of her form, it certainly not the case with her content. Hemans’s work features how war and empire crush characters who exhibit the exact delicacy of feeling for which she is praised.

Ironically, many critics agree that both Hemans and Landon owed much of their success, at least during the years which establish their fame, to their emulation of Byronic verse (Knowles 2012; Riess 1996; Rudy 2006). Knowles rightly points out that *The Improvisatrice*’s setting in Italy and “brooding heroes” (1111) owe much to Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812). This gendered distinction of poetic merit is best expressed by several reviews from the era (like Francis Jeffrey’s review of *Records,* forthcoming below), and the result is the erasure of labour or profit and the celebration of that which upholds orthodoxy, an ironic assertion that for Hemans as for other women writers, “To enjoy the rewards of fame might suggest that she had set out expressly to achieve it” (Clarke 50). Self-censorship, then, must be adopted as a common practice: if Hemans’s work does not entirely challenge the gender paradigms of her historical moment, it does “register the price of compliance,” chronicling the moments in which those paradigms collapse upon themselves (Kelley and Feldman 8).

With all these considerations of gender and authorship, I am compelled to ask similar questions about Romantic masculinity. What is it to write “like a man” at the end of the regency period, in the era of Keats, Shelley, and the especially fluid Lord Byron? We might ask the reviewers of *Modern Greece* (1817), published anonymously by Hemans and called “the production of an academical, and certainly not a female, pen” by the *British Review* because “the mind of women is not usually favourable to that deep-toned emotion which constitutes the very essence of the higher kinds of poetry,” and therefore it must be what the *Eclectic Review* calls “the production of a man [*sic*] of genuine talent and feeling” (*British Review 15* January 1820; *Eclectic Review* n.s. 10, December 1818, p.299, all from Behrendt p.6). Hemans plays with gendered affect in the early 1820s, experimenting with theatre briefly with the negative reception of *The Vespers of Palermo* (1823) and conducting some translation work, eventually settling on the topics bridged in her very first publication: the consequences of war and conflict on the British family unit.

In a social reality where paternalistic cultural authority defines not only the types of women’s writing acceptable in the public sphere, but the types of female personae as well, what options are there for women writers? Where the early works of writers like Maria Jane Jewsbury and Letitia Elizabeth Landon were signed with the gender-ambiguous initials “M.J.J.” and “L.E.L.,” Hemans opted for the hyper-orthodox signature “Mrs. Hemans,” by which she signified as *woman* and *wife* before, and above, *author*. Performing “Mrs.” shrouded publications in a veil of feminine virtue, and any sign of correlation between her persona and her content was an affirmation of this veil. More interestingly, though, is that performing “Mrs.” enabled Hemans to centre the female experience as told by the female voice, one which relayed more suffering than joy in the domestic space, thus unsettling and even fracturing the platform from which the poet spoke. Her dedication to depicting the complications and failures of domestic life is an intrinsic, “almost allegorical use of the family’s relations to the home to exemplify the economic and political interests of the nation” (Fay 1998, 103). This is most clearly expressed by conjugal and familial failure in imperial and otherwise war-prone climates. Hemans utilizes domestic space in such a way that “it becomes coextensive with the globe” (Cronin 2007:3). In other words, the home’s ability to survive conflict is a litmus test for the nation.

Francis Jeffrey’s oft-cited review of “Mrs. Hemans”’s *Records of Woman*,along with a reprint of her epic poem *The Forest Sanctuary* (1825) published in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1829 is a very telling characterization of how Hemans’s work is being discussed throughout the period: more than anything, as “a fine exemplification of Female Poetry” (34). Editor of the *Review* since he co-founded it in 1802, Francis tends toward a confrontational style, to which this review might be an exception:

Women, we fear, cannot do every thing; nor even every thing they attempt. But what they can do, they do, for the most part, excellently—and much more frequently with an absolute and perfect success, than the aspirants of our rougher and more ambitious sex. They cannot, we think, represent naturally the fierce and sullen passions of men—nor their coarser voices—nor even scenes of actual business or contention—and the mixed motives, and strong and faulty characters, by which affairs of moment are usually conducted on the great theatre of the world. (32)

What does it mean to “represent naturally”? Francis steadfastly denies that women writers could depict male characters “naturally,” or the “coarser voices” or “scenes of actual business or contention,” but *Records* is teeming with female characters who fit into those criteria exactly.[[6]](#footnote-6) As Marlon Ross and other modern scholars point out, Jeffrey’s is a review whose opening digression is actually the intended subject (237). They attempt to articulate the subordination of women writers generally and of the poet in question specifically, a move that is “as much a form of psychic defense as a form of appraisal” (237). In an important early text on re-gendering Romanticism, Marlon Ross (1989) goes so far as to say that “By simultaneously popularizing and legitimizing the idea that poetry is the realm of private experience, is the realm of personal affection, the romantics, early and late, unintentionally authorize women to view themselves as legitimate poeticizers of their own experience” (304). *Records* is a series of poems which, as seen in the next chapter, depict female protagonists taking up positions of power as they represent the tumults and failures of family and marriage, children and futurity, imperialism and the nation, art and fame; in short, Hemans’s speakers are clearly “the poeticizers of their own experience.” The seeming contradictions of her public and private personas can be read as strategies when placed in historical context: given the struggle to re-establish British identity in the wake of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, British masculinity’s virile powers presumed the supportive love of a “good woman.” “Mrs. Hemans,” the feminine cultural icon, combatted the austerity of this coercive social order by working with and within it to make space for women’s voices and female fame. Francis is not the only critic to dampen praise by redirecting it through gender, but his authoritative critical voice echoes the Rousseauian binaries from the Introduction (Tucker 2013). This treatise on what is “natural” for women continues throughout the review: “Their proper and natural business is the practical regulation of private life, in all its bearings, affections, and concerns” (32).

George Gilfillan, writing for *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1847, adopts a similar stance when praising Hemans for what he identifies as the inherent limitations of her verse, which derive from her limitations as a woman writer: “Mrs. Hemans’s poems are strictly effusions. And not a little of their charm springs from their unstudied and extempore character” (Wolfson 2000, 594, orig. 1847). Gilfillan reduces the poet’s ability and craft to the heightened affective labour of women, known widely as ‘the domestic affections’—another trope in the reception of women’s writing in the era. In *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans* (1836),Henry Fothergill Chorley endorses the entire collection *Records of Woman* by calling them“not things of meditation, but imagined and uttered in the same breath” (103). In *Dublin University Magazine* William Archer Butler mused that Felicia Hemans “has, indeed, approved herself a worthy interpreter of the inestimable feelings of the female breast, and woman in the pages (whether we regard the *subjects* of some, or the exquisitely feminine *spirit* which pervades all) is more truly vindicated than if her rights were proclaimed by a thousand Mary Wollstonecrafts” (1834; Wolfson 2006, 42). Butler calibrates the national project of “femininity” by placing the vilified, masculinized Mary Wollstonecraft on one end of the scale, and the venerated, “exquisitely feminine” Hemans on the other.

For Hemans, the consequences of the double-edged sword of femininity were the inherent limitations for which she was praised: just as women writers are applauded for their supposedly innate limitations, they are commended for not attempting to defy the preconceived bounds of those deficiencies. As Norma Clarke (1990) theorizes that for women writers of the early nineteenth century, “To challenge male authority was to perpetrate forms of deviance,” (21) so Hemans accepts that, whether or not her poetical motives challenge this authority, they must achieve this without appearing to do so. Where Wordsworth, for example, could adopt the language of “effusion” (in the poem memorializing Hemans, “Extempore Effusion upon the Death of James Hogg,” for one) as an “incidental, merely occasional” stance, women writers were proscribed extemporaneity as a rule (Wolfson 2006, 22). For the male critics of women’s writings, tendencies toward effusion and passion translate quickly (and comfortably) to the capricious and irrational, what Wolfson characterizes as “a reflexive negative that in effect, if not in theory, subverts the praise” (2006, 44). In public review, Hemans comfortably oscillates between perfectly and imperfectly feminine, dual qualities which ensure her position as a feminine cultural icon well into the Victorian era.

Where Mrs. Hemans is openly praised as a sort of guide to and mistress of feminine virtue, L.E.L., once Jerdan outed her as a female writer in 1823, adopts an aura of eroticism. This is in part because of the descriptive, corporeal feminine suffering depicted in many of her poems, and partly due to the commodity-fetishization the poet openly endorses in verse. The oft-cited review of Landon’s *Romance and Reality* (1831) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton not only attests to Landon’s celebrity, but as Riess (1996) suggests, also gestures toward her mastery of commodity-fetishism and her prominence as a writer for the *Gazette*:

We well remember when [Landon] first appeared before the public in the pages of the Literary Gazette. We were young and out of college ... At that time poetry was not yet out of fashion, at least with us of the cloister, and there was always in the reading-room of the Union a rush every Saturday for the Literary Gazette; and an impatient anxiety to hasten at once to the corner of the sheet which contained the three magical letters L.E.L. (*New Monthly Magazine* 32, 546)

The nervous explanation that “poetry was not yet out of fashion” points to Bulwer-Lytton’s need to distinguish “then,” a time when poetry still held cultural capital, from “now,” where that capital has implicitly disappeared. The rhetoric denoting this shift continues: “We…now staid critics and sober gentlemen” (545-6) review in 1831 the writer they ogled in 1823. What is often left unquoted, however, are the beginning sentences of that same review:

We review this work for two reasons: first, because it is exceedingly clever; secondly, because being exceedingly clever, it is written by a lady. One among the designs in the ambition entertained by the present conductors of this Magazine, is to support that wise and enlarged social policy which would give to one sex the same mental cultivation as the other. (*New Monthly Magazine* 32, 545)

Whereas the *Gazette* remains painstakingly nonpartisan, *New Monthly*, in this case, reveals Bulwer-Lytton’s radical influence on the publication in the months after he is appointed editor. It is of little surprise that the same edition of the magazine contained a veneration of the Reform Bill of 1832, which by December 1831 had passed in the House of Commons but not in the House of Lords (Maehl 1967, 5). The Reform Bill is regarded by most as the watershed for modern British democracy without resulting to violent revolutionary means (Maehl 1967:2).

Interestingly, Landon reviews Hemans in both signed and unsigned publications. Motivations for this might include fostering a feeling of solidarity among women writers (or the appearance of one to the readership), or simply referencing a successful writer as a strategy of bolstering one’s own success. Paula Feldman (1997) points out the inadequacy of gauging a woman writer’s success on reviews or letters alone, which often do not reveal the poet’s economic situation or market conditions (148). However, I include Landon’s review of Hemans here to show how Landon might have intimated, yet left unnamed, Hemans’s strategic femininity. In an unsigned review in *The Athenaeum* 172, “Literary Sketches No. 1: Felicia Hemans,” 12 Feb 1831, Landon writes:

Her matronly delicacy of thought, her chastened style of expression, her hallowed ideas of happiness as connected with home, and home-enjoyments;— to condense all in one emphatic word, her *womanliness* is to her intellectual qualities as the morning mist to the landscape, or the evening dew to the flower— that which enhances loveliness without diminishing lustre. (1831, 104-5, from Wolfson 2000, 562)

Matronly, chastened, hallowed: this is the woman writer’s trinity. Landon gives a glowing review of Hemans for the “womanly” faculties that define her as a writer. However, following the construction of Landon’s simile, Hemans’s “womanliness” is an addition to or condition of something that is previously existing—her womanliness is the “mist” and “dew,” and something left unmentioned is the “landscape” and “flower.” Landon could be referring to Hemans’s womanliness as an enhancement to her genius or a filter through which her genius must pass: in Landon’s words, she must “chasten” her “expression.” If the previously cited male critics celebrate Hemans for her femininity, Landon, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, suggests here that Hemans represents the myth of heterosexual bliss. Registering the “price of compliance” (Kelley and Feldman 1995:8) as populist poets is not without its downside: Hemans and Landon both reflect on the compromises they made in their poetry later in their lives. However, as Behrendt (2009) and others have shown, both writers privately expressed regret about the “intellectual and artistic compromises” they made “to satisfy the demands imposed by public market factors” (293). One revelatory instance is in a letter to Rose Lawrence from Hemans in February 1835, just three months before her death:

It has ever been one of my regrets that the constant necessity of providing sums of money to meet the exigencies of the boys’ education, has obliged me to waste my mind in what I consider mere desultory effusions … My wish ever to concentrate all my mental energy in the production of some more noble and complete work; something of pure and holy excellence (if there be not too much presumption in the thought), which might *permanently* take its place as the work of an English poetess. (Wolfson 2000:521)

What might these “more noble and complete” works look like? Perhaps more of *Modern Greece* (1817), which was published anonymously, or of her *Dartmoor* (1821) which, also submitted anonymously to the Royal Society of Literature, won a 50-guinea prize. Perhaps it would be a play, not unlike *The Vespers of Palermo* (1823), which closed after opening night. It is difficult to know whether Hemans imagined social capital or economic success, or even present or posthumous recognition for these works. For Hemans as for other writers who might be associated with the emerging middle class, the drive to produce fluid, reception-oriented content, content that factored in the readership of a particular sociopolitical moment, trumped all else.

To succeed in a patriarchal public sphere, the labour and talent of female writers must “sit meekly” behind the domestic faculties they propagate and allow for their embodiment of those faculties to be mythologized (*Quarterly*). However, this mythologizing effect works to the benefit of both Hemans and Landon; conforming to Romantic gender norms in their personae as well as their poetry gave them presence in popular culture and created space to unsettle the bounds of gender-appropriate feeling and behaviour from within. However, the implications of these myths give both authors a spectral quality which, I would argue, emerges while their popularity is still growing rather than upon their deaths. According to Virginia Blain (2001), it is Landon’s premature death in present-day Ghana that sparks a wave of sales that rival those of Hemans well into the 1850s (167). McGann and Riess echo this feeling with respect to Landon, whose suspicious death simply “consummated the myth that had been gathering about her life for more than fifteen years” (11). Such is the material that leads the poet’s biography.

Canons

Comparing the plight of women in Hemans’s “Corinne at the Capitol” and Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne, or Italy* (1807), Sweet (1994) summarizes succinctly that “The experience of woman in history is one of displacement into marriage or exile outside of it. Hemans’s work is full of instances of women for whom marriage at best is removal into uncertain sanctuary and at worst is exposure to rapine” (174). In this way Hemans certainly aligns with de Staël’s rhetorical strategy, though the former owes much of her success to more than the emulation of strategy: Hemans, Landon, and others all take part in the repackaging of *Corinne*’s titular character, modifying her to fit each one’s own aesthetic. If we consider what Sweet (2007) calls de Staël’s “siren-sibyl Corinne” (162) an emblem of musical lament which offers more than simply love and loss, Landon’s fascination with Sapphic subjecthood (that is, poetic speakers who suffer and/or grieve with or beside the lyre and other instruments) enters the conversation as well. For Maureen McCue (2014), *Corinne* is a “guide,” a “sympathetic and knowledgeable travel companion,” and with regards to bridging topics of art, poetry, and beauty, “an important template” (43) for the series of improvisatrices to come. But what is it about Germaine de Staël that inspired a litany of publications in her and her characters’ images?



Figure 1:

Madame de Staël as Corinne at Cape Miseno

Elizabeth Vigée-LeBrun, 1809

Vigée-LeBrun’s portrait of de Staël (Figure 1), a radical depiction of the author as her character Corinne, may begin to offer some answers. She is positioned within a pretty rugged Italian landscape, right hand poised to pluck the strings of a lyre, eyes looking toward the top left corner of the frame. Her curly hair corkscrews around her face, which holds unconventionally large features for a woman’s portrait. Although this painting may have been a realistic depiction of de Staël, it would have been interpreted as a crude masculinization of both author and character while simultaneously supporting their conflation (Eger and Peltz 2008:84-89). Painted just two years after *Corinne*’s publication, Vigée-LeBrun’s portrait is a biting critique of woman’s over-indulgence in publicity. But it is this same assertion that draws women writers like Hemans and Landon to emulate this commitment to publicity, albeit in more conservative ways.

For the purposes of this thesis, Germaine de Staël’s rhetorical strategy can be informed by her decidedly transnational identity. Again, it is difficult to avoid a degree of conflation between author and publication, and I believe that biography does add context to an interpretation of a given author’s public persona. Anne Louise Germaine de Staël-Holstein was born in Paris in 1766, the only child of diplomat Jacques Necker and *salonnière* Suzanne Churchod. De Staël grew up involved in social and political discussions of the *salon,* and Churchod raised her to be Protestant like her own father, who was a pastor. De Staël married Eric-Magnus, Baron Staël von Holstein in 1786, although she had multiple affairs with prominent public figures, most notably the French author Benjamin Constant. Like Hemans, de Staël had five children, though her reputation grew for hosting a galvanizing, high-profile salon and not for the protection of her children. She openly criticized Napoleon Bonaparte after the French invasion of Switzerland in 1798, and he exiled her from Paris for the remainder of her life. This exile is widely credited as the impetus for her travels, which resulted in the publication of *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) and *De l’Allemagne* (1810). She suffered a stroke in 1817 which left her bedridden and subsequently died on 14 July 1817 in Paris (Gutwirth 2004).

For Diego Saglia (2010) the years following the close of the Napoleonic wars witnessed a boost in cross-cultural interest which, though often appropriative and imperial in nature, created space for a particular kind of Continental-oriented writing. The British nation felt independent and secure, and therefore certainly less anxious about cultural contamination and intercultural exchanges in general. “By promoting international connections and locating their literary practice in a cross-cultural terrain,” argues Saglia, “women qualify and strengthen their position in the national culture” (270). Following this logic, it is precisely Hemans’s and Landon’s interest in reviving Greek, Italian, Spanish, and even French historical characters and tales that solidifies their identities in British literary culture. As mentioned previously, one remarkable instance of cross-cultural reproduction is in the reproductions of Staël’s *Corinne* (1807), which depicts the fraught, yet trendy relationship between a half-Italian, half-British Corinne and a Scottish Oswald, Lord Nelvil. Landon's speaker in *The Improvisatrice*’s (1824) titular poem is implicitly Corinne, but with more of the trademark eroticism/suffering combination that Landon is famous for. Hemans’s “Corinne at the Capitol” from *Records of Woman* (1828) actually includes an alternate (and much less controversial) ending for Corinne’s story. While a complete study of these reproductions takes place in chapter two, I will outline below the reasoning behind Landon’s and Hemans’s poems which reframe *Corinne* to ultimately argue why de Staël makes more sense as a contextual figure for reading Hemans and Landon than someone like William Wordsworth*.* What are the advantages of reproducing a narrative which is culturally recognizable, albeit controversial? Do Landon and Hemans amend de Staël’s Corinne, and do these reproductions change their British readerships’ opinions of de Staël?

Hemans and Landon both caught the periodical wave that began to dominate the market during the regency period (1811-1820). Hemans had a longstanding professional relationship with William Blackwood of *Blackwood’s Magazine* as well aspublishing with *The Edinburgh Review*, and Landon published prolifically with *The Literary Gazette* and *New Monthly Magazine,* and both edited and published in annuals like *Fishers Drawing Room Scrapbook.* They are among dozens of women writers who negotiated remuneration for their work, either by personally arranging contracts with editors or having male representatives act on their behalf. The Romantic era is especially interesting in this regard since, regardless of reputation or poetical style, both modes seem to be acceptable, though exploitative in surprising ways. Jacqueline Labbe (2015) details the nature of the author-publisher relationship: “the publisher is simultaneously middle-man and initial purchaser. For the female writer, her economic viability depends on this relationship” (159). What results is predominantly very polite letter-writing between the writer or her representative and the editor of a journal, the pace of which depends on how near the writer lives to an urban centre and how much negotiation there is to be done. Where Jane Austen’s father and brother acted as her middle-men between Austen and her publisher, they consistently undervalued her work and asked for too little from the publisher (Labbe 162). Jacqueline Labbe posits that Austen approaches writer-publisher relations as a “lady” who “expects respect and delivers not just a product but also politeness” (163). This could very well be another facet of Austen’s self-effacement, because as Susan Wolfson (2014) notes, none of the novels published during Austen’s lifetime had her name on the title page (64). Her name would appear in a “Biographical Notice” accompanying the text. Conversely, Labbe’s account of Mary Wollstonecraft’s relationship with her publisher Joseph Johnson tends toward the friendly and “manifestly unbusinesslike,” (161) although Wollstonecraft expresses in her letters to Johnson and others that she believes her work is being valued fairly. Felicia Hemans’s model dwells somewhere between these two poles: she certainly adopts a ladylike reserve in letters to her publishers, but she also demands fair prices for her work and strives to create marketable, demand-driven content (163). The most telling example of this is when Hemans asks her publisher William Blackwood to give her a raise from 1 guinea to 2 guineas per page, to which he replies that he will grant to her what he would not think of for a “most gifted friend,” on the condition that Hemans publishes forthcoming work through Blackwood alone (see Wolfson p.485 for letter, Labbe 163). Hemans asks for an increase in rate based on her increased market value following *Blackwoods’* commendation of *Modern Greece* in 1826 and publication of the now-classic “The Homes of England” in 1827, and in consequence of the raise another publisher recently granted her. Further, as Labbe details, “her letters do not indicate a discomfort with selling (and therefore losing control over) her intellectual property. She seems to understand it *as* property and willingly trades it” (163-4). Her personal dissociation from her work allows Hemans to sell strategically over the course of the 1820s and early 1830s, effectively conceptualizing the author as commodity, and as one separate from her intellectual property.

Where Norma Clarke (1990) attributes successful women’s writing to the presence of a “significant male” who stands between the writer and her public like an interpreter or security measure, I argue that patriarchal *endorsement* of the writer’s persona is much more integral to her success, even if male critics revere and delimit her in the same rhetorical move (22). The foremost endorsement of Hemans’s “Womanly” faculties is from Henry Fothergill Chorley, Hemans’s publisher and biographer, though critics widely praised Hemans and her poetry for qualities of “virtue,” “delicacy,” and “beauty” rather than “intellect,” “reason,” or “politics.” The cultivation of a “womanly” persona is a tightrope between feminine virtue (a modesty or reluctance to enter the public sphere) and feminine weakness (either a lack and an excess of the former). In fact, according to Stephen C. Behrendt (2015), in 1820 not only did Hemans and Byron share the same publisher—Hemans’s sales rivaled those of Lord Byron. Similarly, Behrendt contends that in the late 1820s and early 30s Landon consistently outsold Byron (3). What sold for Hemans, though, was the “removed domestic vantage” that “became the mythic core of her writing—the feature of her work that her readers, both in and out of London, most wanted to experience” (McGann and Riess 1997:22). It is what distinguishes Hemans from Landon and others: her robustly rural, geographically and socially reserved “vantage.” This is especially interesting with regard to how Hemans characterizes British imperialism in her work, which will be discussed extensively in the following chapter.

Landon developed a similar, if not more fraught relationship with William Jerdan, editor of *The Literary Gazette,* who lived near the Landon family in Brompton. As McGann and Riess (1997) recount, Landon made her name by publishing series of “poetical sketches” for the *Gazette*: “that is, poems on the subject of paintings and mass-produced engravings of contemporary artists” (12). Riess (1996) argues that Landon’s association with the *Gazette* is unique because the publication was distinctly nonpartisan, unlike many of its competitors (809). Further, the *Gazette* published weekly and sold for eight pence an issue—the perfect formula for selling widely—and Riess recounts that in 1823 the *Gazette* was selling four thousand copies per week (810). Landon used the magazine’s momentum to jumpstart a prolific career in serialized publications, one that marks the steady decline of the patronage sales system in favour of a more widespread, accessible commercial product (810). A changing readership meant that the *Gazette,* among others, had to adjust their advertisements and marketing strategies to stay relevant. One example of Landon’s innovative contribution to the magazine are her “Medallion Wafers” poems, a series which appears several 1823 issues of the *Gazette.* The poems muse on the figures depicted on a medallion that appears in the magazine’s advertisements. This is part prototypical product placement, part found poem, reaching upward of four thousand readers.

With regards to canonicity later in the century, a woman poet’s lasting reception (what Behrendt and Linkin might call *reputation*) depends prominently on her reputation *as a woman*: “repeatedly throughout the century, reverent critics instruct readers that women writers’ verses are glorious not so much in themselves as in their association with those sacred heroines who wrote them” (67). In terms of the legacy and canonization of a woman poet, Tricia Lootens (1996) asserts that the canonical poet-heroine “most often represents not so much irreducibly individual Romantic genius as the ‘essential characteristics of woman as a genius.’ In so doing, she speaks not for the universe but for ‘the sex’” (45). Perhaps this is why women writers are relegated to minor appearances in twentieth and twenty-first century anthologies—as representatives of a brand which stands in for womanhood itself. To this end, Chorley’s and Hemans’s sister Harriet Hughes’ biographies of Hemans following her death focused intensely on her “essentially feminine” qualities (1836 and 1839, respectively).

For McGann and Riess (1997), it is Hemans and Landon specifically who “preside over the poetry scene” (20) in the wake of the deaths of Keats, Byron, and Shelley. Hemans and Landon’s evolutions into Victorian staples might be conceived alongside that of Wordsworth, who labours to establish himself as “Victorian patriarch and sage” (Behrendt 2009:200). For Behrendt, all three poets “labored to refashion the materials and modes of British poetry, revising and renewing them to accommodate the new realities of the modern world” (200). It is Hemans, though, that Clarke (1990) resoundingly calls “the undisputed representative poet of Victorian imperial and domestic ideology” (45). However diverse and transnational Hemans’s works are, they were celebrated during the Victorian era for cohering around British-ness.

Two female figures punctuate the spectrum of identities available to late-Romantic poetesses: Sappho and Corinne. Thwarted by rumour which derives from the combination of her urban life, the erotic tone of her oeuvre, and her mysterious death abroad, Landon’s passion and violence place her permanently in the camp of Sappho. The eponymous speaker in *The Improvisatrice,* who describes her portrait of Sappho at the point of death, improvises a song (“Sappho’s Song”) that muses on the figure’s final words. Contrastingly, and perhaps paradoxically, the same passion and violence that permeate Hemans’s work of the 1820s, redirected through the “wronged woman” trope that hangs over her poetic persona and intensified by her rapid decline and death, exemplifies the perennially toned-down, silenced Corinne. However, Hemans is equally preoccupied with Sapphic figures, which recur in 1834 as “The Last Song of Sappho,” to be discussed alongside Landon’s “Sappho’s Song” in the next chapter. Very quickly, the ways in which Sappho and Corinne transform across their many iterations make one seem increasingly like the other. In any case, these two belong to a literary tradition that is perhaps the farthest from the Romantic and later Victorian one of Wordsworth or Tennyson. Wordsworth is far from obsolete—he is one of few Romantic literary celebrities who knew Hemans personally, and she was certainly writing with the Wordsworthian pastoral in mind. However, to make a place for Hemans and Landon in a canonical tradition defined by Wordsworth would cloud the ways in which they participated in alternative literary and social traditions. Focusing on de Staël and Corinne allows us to see how Hemans and Landon worked in, and worked to depict, literary networks that prioritized artist-interlocutor collaboration in the forms of the improvisatrice and of market-based publication choices poets made in the 1820s to turn a profit. These literary networks are founded upon unconventional kinship networks, whether that be Landon’s illegitimate children or Hemans’s enduring attachment to her mother. The same is true of their Corinnes: foregrounding this figure forces us to re-evaluate how we appraise gendered sentiment and sentimentalist poetry more generally.

Chapter II

Sentimentalism in Public

The character depicted is entirely Italian,—a young female with all the loveliness, vivid feeling, and genius of her own impassioned land. She is supposed to relate her own history; with which are intermixed the tales and episodes which various circumstances call forth.

—Advertisement for *The Improvisatrice*

Hemans’s *Records of Woman* is singular in its ability to, as Benjamin Kim (2013) puts it, “dramatize the givenness of attachment” (124)—that is, to depict love in such a way that calls the foundations of that love, its very sacredness, into question. The *Records* are predicated on conjugal, maternal, and patriotic love that manifests as marital failure, infanticide, and suicide. Similarly, Landon’s “The Improvisatrice” continually dramatizes conjugal failure in both its main narrative and its inset poems. Art and artistic activity is a cornerstone in Landon’s poetry, which overlaps with these types of female suffering substantially as it is filtered through a female protagonist lens. However, where the two poets tend to arrive at the same fatalistic ends for their female characters, they differ fundamentally in their route to this outcome. Hemans’s protagonists react to unrequited love and colonial desire in material ways that underscore the arbitrariness and even absurdity of that love’s and desire’s conventions. Contrastingly, Landon demonstrates the structural impracticalities of idyllic conjugal lifestyles rather than those of love or fame. Read together, these two poets offer a revisionist history of how successful women’s lives were perceived during the late-Romantic period.

This chapter will begin by tracing the recurrence and repurposing of the popular narrative of the doomed female artist, an archetype most recognizable in Sapphic reproductions including Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne, or Italy* (1807). It will then consider two poems from *Records* and Landon’s inset poems “Sappho’s Song,” and “The Indian Bride” from “The Improvisatrice.” To be clear, although this thesis integrates several ways in which Hemans and Landon are conflated with their characters and essentialized into a mythic version of themselves, like Helen Luu (2014), I seek in this chapter to disprove any simple relationship between poet and persona. Chapter one sought to identify the readership’s predilection for conflating the woman poet with her characters (which is often encouraged by the poet as a selling technique) and then demonstrate how this conflation is critiqued by Romantic theorists to varying degrees. To this end, I argue that the conflation of poet with persona can be used to critique that relationship without re-enacting it. In this chapter, I will further the wager that famous women writing about famous women is integral to the model of posterity in sentimental discourse in that this is, for the Hemans and Landon poems discussed below, how feminized sentimentalism represents itself and its own modes of reproduction.

De Staël Syndrome: Repeating and Refashioning *Corinne, or Italy* in Romantic Women’s Poetry

Look on the personation of our own fair Italy. She is what we might be, if freed from the ignorance, envy, discord, and sloth, to which fate has reduced us.

—Prince Castel Forte, Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne*

The publication of Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) and its multiple translations into English[[7]](#footnote-7) stimulated a surge in cross-cultural interest which created space for previously objectionable Continental writing; this is especially true during the post-Napoleonic years. For Martin (2011), de Staël’s rare position as “an intercultural icon of female authorial fame” (2) writing “the first female artist novel” (3) has reverberations that span further than the European nations who hosted her during exile. The publication of *Corinne* gives rise to a litany of female artist novels and poems written and published throughout Europe in the decades to come (6). As Claire Brock (2002) traces, these reiterations of Corinne are also reiterations of how public opinion of a woman artist is one of her principal concerns, since her economic success is generally contingent on her reportedly “womanly” qualities (198). This section will trace how Corinne is rendered fully and legibly *English*—that is to say, if British women writers’ “position” is strategically strengthened by their “literary practice in a cross-cultural terrain,” this is implicitly connected to notions of neoclassical Italy and the freedom it offers to an *improvisatrice*. Felicia Hemans’s “Corinne at the Capitol” (1830) and Letitia Elizabeth Landon’s *The Improvisatrice* (1824) not only perpetuate the myth of Corinne, but of the cross-cultural woman writer herself. Tricia Lootens (1999) proposes the examination of “sexual politics through the lens of national identity” to make connections among women writers that refuse to be predicated on shared femininity above all else. Considering a writer’s geopolitical and then gendered identity rather than vice versa allows for a more holistic construction of cultural identity (245). Indeed, though much of the criticism detailed above centers femininity and redirects all judgments through it, to consider Romantic women writers primarily through gender would foreclose conversations about race, nationalism, and empire, to say the least. Reading Hemans and Landon as *English* and representing English-ness in verse,instead of predominantly feminine and representing femininity, provides another lens for the examination of their cross-cultural poems: their renderings of *Corinne* can be read as attempts to reconceptualize the titular character as British, domesticated, and perhaps not so “fallen” as the original.

In postwar Britain, Napoleon’s defeat confirmed national independence and security, and certainly lowered levels of anxiety about cross-cultural contamination from the French specifically and in intercultural exchanges in general. The early nineteenth century, particularly post-Waterloo, is witness to “a remarkable increase in the interest in foreign cultures which counters the widespread resistance to Continental literatures during the war years. Indeed, this renewed attention corrects and reverses the rampant cultural Europhobia of the 1790s” (268). The British nation is feeling independent and cultural contamination/intercultural exchanges are not particularly appealing. What follows, for women writers who emulate some of Germaine de Staël’s practices, is to be intercultural without the incriminating elements of that legacy. Diego Saglia (2010) argues that these conditions are especially influential for those writers: “By promoting international connections and locating their literary practice in a cross-cultural terrain, women qualify and strengthen their position in the national culture” (270). This is in (usually covert) opposition to accepted notions of femininity, operating publicly as somewhere in between total submission to the male partner and the flaunting of cosmopolitan liberation. Depicting a compromise between the two is especially lucrative for de Staël, Hemans, and Landon, but in very different ways: where de Staël presents a thoroughly virtuous character to critique notions of success in public spaces, Hemans and Landon recast Corinne’s triumph to incorporate the retrospective failure she feels later in the novel. This latter position resonates strongly with British Romantic notions of the European South: for Paola Giuli (2011), the late-eighteenth century marks a period of Northern European judgment of Southern nations and Italy in particular. The Italian inability to unify as a result of subjection to foreign rule produces the Northern belief that Italian national character is weak in gendered ways: “Because of its perceived lack of philosophical originality and of martial prowess, Italian culture’s assumed focus on improvisation, poetry and art, was stigmatised as sensual, disengaged and effeminate” (229). This judgment contributes to the wider stereotype that Italy continued to be an unenlightened nation wherein art was simply an outlet for unoriginal expression (30). If Italy is valued for its warm climate and general beauty, but not respected for its martial weakness historically and during the First and Second Coalitions (respectively 1792-97 and 1798-1802), it quickly becomes, under the British gaze, a feminized nation. For Sweet, the novel is a showdown between the *romantic* (“northern, English, austere, monumental, imperial, and masculine”) and the *classical* (“southern, Italian, refulgent, fragmented, post-imperial, and feminine”) (173). Italy is also tainted, for Britons, by Catholicism and its inability to unite as a nation, for the Congress of Vienna was years after *Corinne*’s publication. Saglia (2017) echoes Giuli in conceptualizing this British aesthetic of the South as useful for liberal Romantic writers like Byron, Shelley, and for Hemans to “imagine restoration as a new departure rather than a return, albeit under new circumstances, to earlier conditions or a reinforcement of precedent (115). This discourse promoting liberalism without evoking revolution is crucial during the Regency period and the years that follow, much in the same way that female authors writing cross-culturally did so without activating patriarchal anxieties about women’s rights.

This context is particularly useful for examinations of *Corinne,* where the eponymous character is an Improvisatrice (a famous female poet, improvisor, dancer, musician, and artist) so celebrated by the Italian public that she is crowned poet laureate at the Capitol in Rome. The novel follows the half-Italian, half-English Corinne’s relationship with Lord Oswald Nelvil, a British tourist who is caught between his intrigue with her and his duty to his dead father. Originally marketed as a tour guide, the novel encompasses contemporary European politics and the characterization of public artistry with regards to gender norms. For Maureen McCue (2014), *Corinne* is a “guide,” a “sympathetic and knowledgeable travel companion,” and with regards to bridging topics of art, poetry, and beauty, “an important template” (43) for the series of improvisatrices to come. Here, notions of the famous woman and the idealized woman are inextricable, not because Corinne is depicted as expressing the qualities of both, but because the interplay between these two qualities is repeatedly taken up by the male characters who surround her. For both Oswald, the English newcomer, and Prince Castel Forte, the seasoned admirer, Corinne’s charm derives from her ability to shift seamlessly from idealized feminine modesty to seasoned and talented artistic confidence. However, Oswald’s preference for the former behaviour, which he interprets as “womanly” in the Northern European sense, marks his patriarchal urge to tame the Improvisatrice, a compromise which Corinne finds impossible to fulfill and which leads to her death. As Brock points out, this heavy reliance on public opinion likened to the evaluative gaze of the male suitors Oswald and Castel Forte didactically argues for the public’s responsibility to not deal so severely with the individual genius (200). Thus, the novel problematizes an Improvisatrice’s “delight in the physical thrill their abilities create in themselves and in their adoring audiences,” (201) but also the ways in which the patriarchy attempts to control a woman’s artistic energy.

De Staël’s novel engenders innumerable texts written by women about the intersection of femininity and fame in the decades that follow its publication. Both de Staël’s and Corinne’s transnational identities resonate with women writers seeking to solidify their reputations by publishing cross-cultural texts. One remarkable instance of cross-cultural reproduction is that of *Corinne* in the works of second-generation Romantic women writers. The eponymous poem in Letitia Elizabeth Landon’s *The Improvisatrice, and Other Poems* (1824) is implicitly about Corinne, and Felicia Hemans’s poem “Corinne at the Capitol” from *Songs of the Affections, with Other Poems* (1830) concludes with an alternate, more conservative ending to de Staël’s novel.

Although *Corinne* was censored and its author exiled for most of Napoleon’s reign, vilified as something between a bluestocking and a revolutionary, the negative commentary did not stop the barrage of Corinne-like stories which appeared in print for decades to come. Hemans and Landon are among this group of writers who reformulate aspects of the original narrative to render it ever-more marketable to the late-Romantic British readership. Landon’s Corinne is “fallen,” but that feeling of failure is self-inflicted from the very opening lines of the dramatic monologue, characterized as revelling in the Italian artistic tradition to the point of idolatry. Similarly, for Hemans, to face the public and control her publicity is not what condemns Corinne—it is to enjoy doing so. However, this judgment is imposed on Corinne by an anonymous speaker who aligns with Oswald’s conservative British stance on women’s duties.

Landon’s Corinne, conceptualized as a Sapphic, musical storyteller, adds elements of eroticism and self-reflection as a poet and a culturally recognizable figure. Here, the tradition of the female improviser is presented as a 1600-line dramatic monologue containing multiple inset lyric poems, most famously “Sappho’s Song.” Since these lines are spoken in the first person singular, we receive an account of the Improvisatrice’s fraught relationship with her work beginning at a young age; fatalistic overtones work dialectically as she self-identifies from the poem’s opening line as “daughter of that land” (1) and thus progeny of both its artistic genius

and the invasive European powers that thwart it. On recalling one of her first paintings to hang professionally, she expresses:

Sad were my shades; methinks they had

Almost a tone of prophecy—

I ever had, from my earliest youth,

A feeling what my fate would be. (37-40)

Speaking retrospectively, the Improvisatrice positions herself in a state of personal failure as a woman and a woman artist, and national failure to foster the culture it stereotypically celebrates so robustly. However, contrary to this, she consistently discloses the gratification she receives from performance, especially in terms of her audience’s energy. This tone of both personal and national self-indulgence is most notable during her descriptions of Italian art, including her own. In an anecdote about her beginnings as an artist, her “pulse throbs to recall” (33) when her first painting was displayed publicly. She later remarks that Florence’s “every change of earth and sky,/ Breathed the deep soul of poesy” (183-4). Upon first seeing her lover Lorenzo, who appeared during an improvisation, her “pulses throbbed, my heart beat high,/ A flush of dizzy ecstasy/ Crimsoned my cheek” (466-8). She dashes to the gallery that next morning, where “There, in my rapture, … As the vision past me, pour/ My song of passion, joy and pride” (697-700). The joy she derives from her artistic success, her nation’s beauty, and her lover are commensurate—the pleasure of each one is contingent on the continuation of the others. As a daughter of Italy, the Improvisatrice’s celebrations of Italy’s actual and historical sublimity as well as her own are inseparable. This is why adaptations like Landon’s hold a precarious cultural currency—although those “controversial” elements of de Staël’s work (like the overt critique of patriarchy) have been re-worked or omitted entirely, the success of the adaptation depends on its recognizability as an iteration of that which has been censored. Unlike Hemans, Landon virtually omits any judgment against the woman artist’s lifestyle; rather, the Improvisatrice condemns the pressures to conform to a domestic lifestyle that would compromise her art and her fame.

As the Improvisatrice revels in past joy and laments her current predicament, she recalls multiple scenes in which poets are crowned at the Capitol. Where Landon exhibits some artistic freedom over her depiction of Corinne’s personal faculties, her representation of Petrarch noticing Laura at the Capitol parallels that of Corinne and Oswald:

Divinest Petrarch! he whose lyre

Like morning light, half dew, half fire,

To Laura and to love was vowed—

He looked on one, who with the crowd

Mingled, but mixed not; on whose cheek

There was a blush, as if she knew

Whose look was fixed on her’s. Her eye,

Of a spring-sky’s delicious blue,

Had not the language of that bloom,

But mingling tears, and light, and gloom,

Was raised abstractedly to Heaven:—

No sign was to her lover given. (56-67)

Laura does not interact with Petrarch as he improvises—the opportunity for interchange is missed; there is a distance between the two which cannot be covered. Landon depicts the affective exchange as entirely one-sided, catalyzed and then neglected by Laura; directly following this passage, the speaker transitions to how she painted Laura in this unreachable state and then laments on the “sole idolatry” (94) of unrequited love. Although scholarship has pointed to the possibilities for feminist ambiguity in depictions of women in prayer,[[8]](#footnote-8) this instance (perhaps ironically) indicates how quickly a female character moves from the category of personhood to that of love object. De Staël contrasts this scene by recasting it as an encounter between Corinne and Oswald. Putting Corinne in Petrarch’s position, then having her read Oswald’s own gaze, is a direct reversal of that objectification:

Corinne was interrupted for some moments by impetuous applause. Oswald alone joined not in the noisy transport around him. He had bowed his head on his hand, when Corinne said——

“E’en for the sorrows of the stricken heart  
Is comfort here:”

he had not raised it since. Corinne observed him […] She was struck by the mourning which he wore, and his melancholy countenance. His gaze, *then fixed upon herself*, seemed gently to reproach her: she entered into his thoughts, and felt a wish to sympathize with him, by speaking of happiness with less reliance, and consecrating some few verses to Death in the midst of a festival. With this intention, she again took up her lyre; a few prolonged and touching tones silenced the assemblage, while thus she continued:—— (Book II, Ch III, my emphasis)

Corinne, who spies Oswald amid the crowd at the capitol, is perhaps more moved mid-improvisation by Oswald’s melancholy than he is by her performance. Indeed, Landon’s poem is in dramatic contrast with de Staël’s lines, in which the connection between improvisor and spectator is responsive and generative, making Oswald an interlocutor more than an audience member. This effect is doubled when taking the affect present in these scenes into account: de Staël’s Corinne adjusts her verse to suit the melancholy her interlocutor is transmitting (albeit through his gaze of “gentle reproach”) whereas Landon’s Petrarch is not able to do so—at least, in as much time as the speaker dwells on the scene. Interestingly, both Laura and Oswald avert their gazes from their respective improvisors during these moments, but Oswald’s turn to face Corinne is the manifestation of their affect, whereas Laura’s continued disregard symbolizes the disconnection (and even the foreclosure) of her and Petrarch’s love.

As mentioned previously, the Improvisatrice’s monologue is a retrospective consideration of her failure in love with inset poems that work as case studies for the female artist’s conundrum: fulfillment through love or through art. One of the most popular sections of “The Improvisatrice,” the inset poem “Sappho’s Song” (141-160), reads as the iconic poet’s dying words; for Yopie Prins (1999), the combination of the Improvisatrice’s portrait of Sappho and the transcription of her final utterance makes Sappho “into a speaking picture, albeit a persona that can only speak because it is already dead” (193). As the tone of this poem makes clear, this version of Sappho (and by extension Corinne) is the long eighteenth-century’s heterosexual and humble iteration. It is Sappho’s failure that makes these retrospective lines possible; her necromancy thus takes on a didactic role on the temptation of fame: “It is thy work, thou faithless one!/ But, no!—I will not name thy name!/ Sun-god! lute, wreath are vowed to thee!” (Landon 155-7). Icarus-like, Sappho attributes her downfall to the double-vice of ambition and pleasure derived from fulfilling that ambition, characterized as worshipping that “evil star above” (149), the sun, who could also represent her spiteful lover Phaon. The ambiguity of leaving the character unnamed allows for the poem to be interpreted as deriving from Sappho, or the Improvisatrice, or from Landon herself. This is L.E.L.’s charm: improvisation allows no distance between poet, poem, and performance; for Cronin (2007), poet and poem are “equally and indistinguishably the object of the audience’s regard” (13). The improvisatrice trope encourages its audience to make that conflation. As Prins argues, even as the poem calls for Sappho’s death, its structure prolongs her life and her music through repetition, anaphora, and conjunctions (194). The metaphor of burning, situated specifically in her upper-body, illuminates her irreconcilable position—“If song be past, and hope undone,/ And pulse, and head, and heart are flame,” (153-4)—and then continues throughout the greater poem. Like her body, the chords of Sappho’s lute are “burning” (2), calling for a way to consolidate the damage and silence the music. Sappho resolves to jump into the sea to end her life, thus extinguishing the flames that engulf her mind, heart, and artistic practice.

I resist the convenient imposition that Landon’s verse is highly autobiographical, at least in terms of affect, and so the widespread inference that reading Landon’s poetry is in fact gazing at Landon herself, making her “an object of desire, fascination, or pity” (Eisner 2009:120). Eric Eisner’s critique unsettles this reading because of how Landon depicts the Improvisatrice’s male suitors as objects for the romanticized gaze: “In these dynamics, the male poet is himself the spectacle, and Landon appears as a consumer and as a producer of culture” (121). In this way, Landon “mobilizes resources of Byronic fandom—an eroticized gaze at Byron and an ambivalent identification with Byron—in order to examine and reconfigure the gendered relations of spectator and spectacle in which she works both as a cultural producer and as a reader of culture” (117-8). The result, then, is an ambivalent, yet recognizably Byronic reproduction that promotes “L.E.L.”’s sexual availability (and thus makes her an object of fantasy), and yet relegates her to secondary status. In “The Improvisatrice” specifically, Lorenzo takes on Byronic qualities in a way that unsettles the tendency to read Landon’s poem as highly autobiographical: Lorenzo is repeatedly the object of the Improvisatrice’s gaze, relegated to an (often feminized) art object. As Eisner argues, this move strategically puts male bodies on display as they depict the limits of female agency (123). Importantly, the Improvisatrice and the nameless bride in the inset poem “The Indian Bride” reverse the dynamic of this male gaze within their respective storylines.

“The Indian Bride” is “The Improvisatrice”’s fifth inset poem, appearing after “Sappho’s Song,” “A Moorish Romance,” “The Charmed Cup,” and “The Hindoo Girl’s Song.” In fact, only four lines from the frame poem appear between “The Hindoo Girl’s Song” and “The Indian Bride,” and both poems are performed consecutively at the same masked ball while the Improvisatrice is very much infatuated with her watching lover. She has attended dressed as the “Hindoo girl” (747), thus creating and shaping her character even as she embodies it. “The Hindoo Girl’s Song” is the brief, playful, and frivolous twin of “The Indian Bride,” and I read these poems as meaningful (critically and to the Improvisatrice’s audience) because they appear as a set. The first poem is spoken in the first person by an unnamed “Hindoo Girl,” who tells her audience that love is fickle and “must not sleep in security,/ Or most calm and cold will his waking be” (782-3). The 22-line poem ends with this call for exciting, capricious relationships. Conversely, the second recounts in third-person non-omniscience how Zaide, betrothed to the dead Azim, burns to death on his funeral pyre in an act of passion and loyalty called a suttee. We can read Zaide as the older version of the girl from the first poem, one who is more invested in love and the social convention of marriage. In any case, Zaide has fallen deeply in love against the warnings echoed just one page earlier.

In the same way that the Improvisatrice performs “The Indian Bride” in relation to “The Hindoo Girl’s Song,” there is a mirroring between the former and the narrative unfolding in the frame poem. In particular, Zaide’s lover’s return from battle is a refashioning of the type of tableau scene between Lorenzo and the Improvisatrice discussed above. The non-omniscient speaker’s ordering of facts adds to the drama of the scene in a way which disorients the reader:

This looks not a bridal,—the singers are mute,

Still is the mandore, and breathless the lute;

Yet there the bride sits. Her dark hair is bound,

And the robe of her marriage floats white on the ground.

Oh! where is the lover, the bridegroom,—oh! where?

Look under yon black pall—the bridegroom is there!

Yet the guests are all bidden, the feast is the same,

And the bride plights her troth amid smoke and ‘mid flame! (852-859)

The speaker takes up the gaze of a wedding attendee, which defamiliarizes the reader before revealing to them that this wedding is in fact a funeral. The first five lines of this passage demonstrate the search for visual cues that signal a wedding, The bridegroom’s location under “yon black pall,” the one cue necessary to destroy the social stability established in those lines. Yet, drawing an overt comparison between wedding and funeral, and continuing to call Zaide’s lover the “bridegroom,” indicates Landon’s intention to interpret wedding as funeral in a more general sense. This gaze reversal occurs not in one character or speaker, but at the level of social interpretation. The characters in this scene reverse, or better yet invert, one ritual of mutual dedication into another, and yet *the feast is the same*—the attendees perform in the same ways they would had the wedding actually taken place. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the expression “to plight one’s troth” is “to engage to marry (a person),” so for Zaide to “[plight] one’s troth amid smoke and ‘mid flame” is for her to literally approach marriage as a burning pyre.

It is interesting to note that this marriage pyre can take place only because the poem’s universe does not allow for Azim’s disembodiment. In other words, Azim’s death does not void Zaide’s obligation to him outlined by their betrothal. His spirit and reputation are still very much connected to and contingent on his material body. The betrothal contract cannot be fulfilled, but the material commitment of one person to another is still physically enacted by burning with her bridegroom. Crucially, the scene’s narration leaves the source for this pressure to proceed quite ambiguous. Similarly, the guests “are all bidden” (857) and the priests “are assembled” (861) in the passive voice. Nevertheless, Zaide accompanies Azim to the grave in an act of commitment and solidarity. The poem closes with one last, lingering reversal, one which questions the type of love being celebrated that day:

Ay, is this not love?—

That one pure, wild feeling all others above

Vowed to the living, and kept to the tomb!— (864-866)

This observation of “love” is no declaration—it is a question. Marriage vows have not yet been taken, so the familiar maxim “till death do us part” need not apply here; death is no longer a circumstance for parting. The speaker seems to be looking at Zaide here, but just a half dozen lines later a new option for this love-relationship emerges:

One look was given—the last she might spare!

To the mother, who stood in her weeping there. (874-875)

“The mother” is unnamed—she may not even be Zaide’s mother, for all we know—but the fact remains that this mother is the only character singled out during this process and certainly the only object of Zaide’s gaze. She is relegated to two lines, but she and her tears receive Zaide’s final attention before the bride’s death. In this “last” moment, Zaide’s love for the mother rivals the compulsion for which she jumps into the flames. Zaide’s gaze upon the mother offers another interpretation for that love “Vowed to the living, and kept to the tomb,” one which makes the marriage-funeral seem like an invalidation of the loving mother-daughter relationship. With this scene, the male gaze is doubly reversed: the gazer is a woman, and she in turn is looking at another woman with a gaze which recognizes her grief in a way that does not make it accessible to the speaker, the audience, or the reader. This is a complete interruption of the play-by-play narration the speaker has been reporting since stating “This looks not a bridal” because suddenly, after all these melodramatic wedding-funeral cues, we are looking at something we cannot understand and have hardly been given enough information to be able to interpret. The two may be connecting—or they may not—but their communication in those two lines is impenetrable for their audience in a way that resists that public’s gaze.

Despite instances of this important reversal, the price of the male gaze and male acceptance seems to be the calcification of the female artist into work of art, of her permanent disembodiment. And yet, the poem’s ending seems to suggest that the protagonist rests in an unattainable pinnacle of herself, which effectively denies any attempt made by Lorenzo at restitution. The scale comes to rest in the Improvisatrice’s favour, as she becomes the ultimate version of herself: permanent, yet physically and emotionally unavailable. This position is radical in that it offers a notion of futurity outside of motherhood and of conjugal love, and yet it places the Improvisatrice, daughter of the Italian nation (in which Italy is the soul of female genius), on a pedestal which simultaneously evokes the nation’s epic past and which functions as an icon of Italy’s future. As McDayter points out, becoming a painting at the end of the poem is actually preceded by Lorenzo’s statuary associations during their brief courtship: “He leant beside a pedestal./ The glorious brow, of Parian stone,/ Of the Antinous, by his side,/ Was not more noble than his own!/ They were alike: he had the same/ Thick clustering curls the Roman wore—” (II. 933-8). This is truly a reversal of the male gaze. In fact, Lorenzo’s relegation to the statuesque occurs after the Improvisatrice’s death as well: as he mourns her, the poem’s speaker details how “His brow, as sculpture beautiful,/ Was wan as Grief’s corroded page” (II. 539-40). Lorenzo becomes ornamental, a mere token at her vigil, even as he is the one grieving her. Occupying this position, the Improvisatrice is not Rousseau’s or Burke’s “proper lady,” nor is she de Staël’s controversial, censored heroine, nor is she Hemans’s disgraced woman. She is untouchable in her civic virtue, permanently offering a method for transforming cultural attitudes through engaging with the romance of the woman of genius. Her position is a recuperation of the feminine in a way that is uncompromisingly brilliant and devoutly public.

Where Landon is concerned with reversing the male gaze in ways which undermine the social conventions it upholds and represents, Hemans remains concerned with universal female suffering, but also positions her Corinne as shameful, and ashamed, ambitious woman. Originally published in *Literary Souvenir* (1827) with the title “Corinna at the Capitol,” the poem appears with its final title among the “Miscellaneous Poems” section of *Songs of the Affections* (1830)*,* the collection immediately following the tremendous commercial success of *Records of Woman* (1828). According to Susan Wolfson, (2000) the change in title reflects a change in allusion from the 5th century B.C.E. Greek poet Corinna to instead copy the title of book 2 of Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne, or Italy* (1807). Complicating this title change further is the still-recent legacy of Corilla Olimpica, the late-eighteenth-century Italian poet laureate whose allegorizing facilitates a positive representation of the Italian literary tradition (Giuli 213). Cast with this recognizable (if not slightly ambiguous) title, the poem mimics “the definitive story of female ‘genius’—at once an inspiration and a cautionary fable about the cost in domestic happiness of fame and creative fulfillment” (460). And like de Staël, then, Hemans’s title names a female character who is recognizable without a patronym. A quick turn to Hemans’s oeuvre reveals that naming female characters in poem titles is not uncommon; however, the other titles featuring women’s names *sans* patronym are generally naming genericcharacter types, like “Madeline, a Domestic Tale” (1828). Subtly, “Corinne at the Capitol” cites a female character who needs no contextualization. Why, then, does the poem begin with an epigraph from de Staël’s *De l’influence des Passions sur le Bonheur des Individus et des Nations* (1796)? It reads, in de Staël’s original French, “Women must realize that there is in this career very little of the conditions that are equal in worth to the most obscure life of a beloved wife and a happy mother” (Wolfson 2000:462). Perhaps Hemans posits her poem as an homage to de Staël—more than anything, the strategic quotation aligns Hemans with de Staël and primes readers for the speaker’s reproof of Corinne’s career as an improvisatrice. The work itself takes the form of lyric poem with a didactic ending. Though certainly not an audience-oriented perspective of the crowning, the speaker adopts the position of onlooker to the scene at the Capitol whose relationship to Corinne is enmeshed in Italian nationalism. Like Landon, Hemans’s poem begins with Corinne as the “daughter” of Italy; in fact, “Daughter” is the very first word. Interestingly, Corinne is addressed in the second person singular “thou/thy,” implying an intimacy between her and the speaker which is strengthened by the imperial celebration that “Joyously thy car hath roll’d/ Where the conquerors pass’d of old” (3-4). Similarly, the speaker positions Corinne as the celebrated inheritor of the ancient Roman empire:

Now thou tread’st th’ ascending road,   
Freedom's foot so proudly trode;   
While, from tombs of heroes borne,   
From the dust of empire shorn,   
Flowers upon thy graceful head (9-13)

Corinne’s journey to the Capitol is reiterative of the walk of Petrarch and other poet laureates—her head is adorned with flowers that grow from the ashes of Roman “heroes.” Not only is this prosperous history her crown—its decline, death, and afterlife are repurposed to make it so, making both Corinne and her crown reincarnations of the high and low points of Italian history.

Where declarations of Italian pride and prosperity mark the poem’s opening lines, the main dialectic which follows is that of sound, music, and affect depicted as outpouring. Beginning with seemingly blameless, effusive motion, Corinne’s lyre, “Touched as by a breeze’s wing/ Murmurs tremblingly at first,/ Ere the tide of rapture burst,” (30-32) emits a sound as natural as the warm Italian wind. These “low and lovely” (27) sounds render the speaker’s captivation during these lines apparent—Corinne’s extempore art is working. However, the line “Ere the tide of rapture burst” foreshadows the speaker’s judgment to come in the final stanza. Corinne’s humouring of both her music and her improvisation, her increased output, demands characterization by forces stronger than a breeze: it is a full-fledged torrent from her head, expressed through metaphors of fire and water:

All the spirit of thy sky   
Now hath lit thy large dark eye,   
And thy cheek a flush hath caught   
From the joy of kindled thought;   
And the burning words of song   
From thy lip flow fast and strong,   
With a rushing stream's delight   
In the freedom of its might. (32-40)

Description of feminine features is extraordinarily common in Hemans’s poetry as a technique for characterizing the protagonist’s personal investment in the stakes of the scene. Corinne’s improvisational power derives not from an audience, but from an ambiguous, seemingly impious or altogether secularized “spirit of the sky,” the “fires” (2) of “Italian heaven” (1) named in the first stanza. This is the “sun-god” (157) worship from “Sappho’s Song,” the consequence of taking pride in one’s own sound and music. However, the play between the thrilling “dark eye” (comparable to Sappho’s “dark,/ Large, floating eyes,” Landon 123-4) and the extended metaphor of fire prove that the ignition, or leakage of Corinne’s poetic energy is her fatal misstep. That the bodily response of her cheek’s “flush” results from the “kindled thought” of composition conveys Corinne’s passionate engagement with her nation’s history, but also the pleasure she derives from presenting herself as engaged. Thus, the jump from “kindled thought” to “burning words” is one of condemnation: Corinne’s words flow from her mouth “With a rushing stream’s delight/ In the freedom of its might” (39-40). To “delight” in the “freedom” of this expression, the fluidity of her improvisation and the transmission of her artistic energy, is outside the bounds of the performance and therefore judged by the speaker to be indecent female behaviour. In this context, it’s interesting how the phrase “freedom of its might” is *not*, but gives us the materials to think of, “the might of its freedom.” The phrase doesn’t grant strength to “freedom” as a principle, but rather posits “might” as something that asserts itself freely—a force erupting from within the female subject, taking its freedom with and through her, rather than something she exercises.

Hemans shifts the speaker’s alignment from celebrating Corinne to passing subtle judgments over the course of the poem, consistent with the “English” judgments within a North-South dialectic. Like the opening line, the loaded title of “daughter” appears in the first line of the final stanza. Where Corinne figures as “Daughter of th’Italian heaven!” (1) at the poem’s opening, her investment in her performance at the Capitol has rendered her “Radiant daughter of the sun!” (41) by its closing. These “daughter” bookends seem to point to the approbation Hemans extends to the woman writer who is thoroughly entrenched and invested in her nation’s history, but if this is the case, in the final stanza Corinne has shirked this national pride in favour of self-centered glory. The origin of this ruling lies not in a woman’s fervent will to dedicate herself to her country, but through the ways in which this energy put forth eclipses its original motive, and therefore its justification for being.

Like de Staël’s fiction, Hemans’s poetry often ends with female protagonists resorting to suicide in the face of irreconcilable circumstances. This is an especially political act when the character is a “famous” woman and the suicide also marks the termination of their art, poetry, or song. This violence can also be read as a way of controlling the contours of one’s own body or body of work, as an authoritative decision of where and how it ends. Hemans, reading de Staël’s novel, famously wrote in margin “C’est moi” (Kelly 2002). Hemans’s “Corinne at the Capitol” is just one poem among several where the poet shares kindred feelings of suffering with a female historical figure.[[9]](#footnote-9) For Jacqueline Labbe (2000), Hemans “[uses] the disruption of romance to signify another form of desire: for female autonomy and freedom from the trappings of the ideology of romance” (123). Therefore, the ridiculously frequent deaths in *Records* serve to “free Hemans’s women from the constraints of conventional romance” (123) rather than display their concession to them. Hemans’s “Properzia Rossi,” which appears as the fourth poem in *Records,* evokes the same radical notion of female futurity as an embodiment of the nation and of national productivity, again while resisting the pressures of conjugal family-making. Hemans notes in the epigraph that Rossi “possessed also of talents for poetry and music”; paired with the frequent use of exclamation marks, this assertion of Rossi’s talents beyond visual art positions her as an Improvisatrice. Here, this iteration of Corinne is the speaker in a dramatic monologue musing upon her painting of Ariadne and imploring her absent lover to return her love. In this way, both the poem and the painting function as Rossi’s eulogy to herself, one which envisions her posterity as both one of enduring fame and one which unleashes her melancholy on her lover. Rossi pleads for the “bright fulfillment” (2) of “One dream of passion and beauty more!” (1) and not for reconciliation with her lover. Interestingly, Rossi switches from first person narration to referring to herself in the third person for a handful of lines the first stanza. Rather than universalizing Rossi as the downcast, doomed woman, this move universalizes her lover’s mourning experience and generalizes it into community or national mourning of a celebrated artist. Rossi pleads for a token or work of art that

may speak to thee when I am gone,  
Shaking thine inmost bosom with a tone  
Of lost affection;–something that may prove  
What she hath been (21-25)

What Rossi pleads for here is the mirror image of Lorenzo’s lament over the Improvisatrice’s portrait in the closing lines of Landon’s poem. Rossi continues to use this narrative degree of separation from herself to envision posthumous love; she reports that her unrequited lover, while she is alive, is “Stealing the brightness from her life away” (29). Even while her spirit fades, Rossi [orders] it to “wake” (32) and continue to live.

Ironically, Rossi adopts the discourse of conjugal love to describe her incompetence as a candidate: she refers to her art as “my fruitless dower/ That could not win me love” (38-9). She prepares a glorified version of herself in her painting of Ariadne like a bride might be prepared for her wedding day: the “Forsaken Ariadne” “shalt wear/ my form, my lineaments” (50-51), but as Ariadne, Rossi’s “wo/ shall yet look beautiful to meet his sight,/ When I am pass’d away” (54-6). As with the Improvisatrice, it is as though the only way Rossi may succeed and endure conjugal love is as a static, unattainable version of herself. More subversively, however, is the way in which Rossi bequeaths her melancholy, the product of her unrequited love, to her unrequited lover. Instead of imploring the lover (who remains unnamed) to love her while she is still living, Rossi desires to give her painting a voice with “tones to bear/ My life’s deep feeling” (66-7). The voice’s function is to make her lover cry “*one* gush of tears” for her, as though his grief would finally allow her to rest peacefully. As Luu (2014) explains, Hemans’s Sapphic, effusive dramatic monologues, “Properzia Rossi” included, are “purely conventional, an emptying out of subjectivity rather than expression of it” (49). If this is the case, then Rossi’s plea to leave traces of herself to plague her lover prove she is already envisioning an immobilized, muted, lifeless version of herself—in fact, she is painting it to leave behind for him. Rossi’s is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Rossi’s notion of futurity, even posthumous futurity, is firmly embedded in her art rather than any version of reconciliation or maternity. As Pulham (2016) reiterates from Simonsen (2005), Rossi’s description of how she paints Ariadne puns on the word “line” with ambiguousness: it could be Rossi painting, Rossi speaking/narrating, or Hemans writing (7). In fact, there is one further option: as is indicated in the epigraph, the poem is inspired by a Ducis painting of Rossi painting Ariadne; this is a painting of an artist painting an icon. It also suggests two major conflations: firstly, of these arts into one generalized, (almost) life-sustaining artistic output. Secondly, that Rossi’s Sapphic death pose mirrors the ekphrasis exhibited in her description of her bas-relief of Ariadne. This is, after all, a poem about and from the perspective of a artist sculpting, inspired by another artist’s painting of that artist sculpting—in short, “Properzia Rossi” depicts meta-creative activity that is idealized at each level of creation. I am suggesting here that Rossi, as speaker, positions herself as a work of art to be described ekphrastically. This is female artist as work of art in radical terms because Rossi herself is doing the positioning *and* the describing. On her deathbed, she recognizes what she “might have kindled, with the fire of heaven,/ Things not of such as die!” (78-9). Rossi’s partner is heavenly[[10]](#footnote-10) rather than earthly, and she grieves for her future masterpieces, not future children. Similarly, Rossi figures her name (and the fame it implies) as a sound which will resonate over the earth after she is gone to “one day haply in thy heart revive/ Sad thoughts” (139-40) of her. Rossi’s peace is contingent on her lover’s distress.

I consider Hemans’s *Records* as a “clear-eyed exposer” (Behrendt 2009:179) of women’s personal and systemic struggles in a way that neither endorses nor mirrors the conventional romance. For Behrendt, this dissociation from the romance *par excellence* is most evident by Hemans’s placement of conventional narratives within historically recognizable or overtly glossed contexts that renders the plot outcomes uncannily familiar (179). Following this line of thought, Hemans’s resistance to placing sentimental and romantic plot within a quaint, universal setting (which is only true for approximately half of the *Records*) is what makes the *Records* so universally pleasurable. While it is accurate to say that there is a certain play between Romantic disidentification and convention, Hemans’s *Records* is an ambivalent smattering of famous and generic stories, both contemporary and ancient, that follow and deviate from their tropes such that the result isn’t anti-romance so much as anti-heroine. *Records* especially isn’t taking up affairs of the moment, and in fact gets at current living conditions by doing just the opposite, in terms of the historical and geographical settings of her poems and their characters’ notions of posterity. As with the inset poems from Landon’s *Improvisatrice,* this anti-heroinism is often embodied through orientalism, geographic foreignness, and yet a prescription to British domestic values, a combination which ultimately dramatizes the stakes of domestic ideology through an Otherness.[[11]](#footnote-11) This Otherness is just “Other” enough to shroud the critique of domestic ideology within a sentimentalist spectacle, a strategy which refracts that potential critique through an effeminized, inferior nation or society. In other words, British domesticity is displaced onto orientalised scenes so that it can be critiqued without the criticism extending to the British nation.

Hemans’s reputation as the foremost British poetess of her lifetime is particularly interesting, considering she spent over three decades of her short life in Wales and died in Ireland. Ironically, Hemans acquires much of her cultural authority through her transcultural writing—her translations, her epigraphs (biographical, historical, and poetic), and the international characters and settings of her works. In fact, Hemans crafts much of her poems in *Records* so that they don’t fully signify without paratexts. This is true of both the “historical” introductory notes to poems like “Arabella Stuart” and “The Memorial Pillar” and the poetic epigraphs like that of Sardanapalus in “The Bride of the Greek Isle,” or a combination of both, as in “Gertrude, or Fidelity Till Death.” For Diego Saglia (2010), transnational women’s writing and Hemans’s writing strategies in particular bolsters efforts for British women writers to be recognized professionally:

As cultural mediators, women writers have to respect the demands of the literary market and its ideological mandates, and thus import figures, texts, and issues that may be adapted to indigenous cultural expressions. Yet these imports, which effectively enable female writers to accumulate cultural capital and authoritativeness, insinuate literary discourse and thus potentially modify its national qualities… appropriation and adaptation are more than a mere nod to the exotic or a mechanical exploitation of unfamiliar literary and cultural sources in pursuit of novelty. Instead, these practices bring about an expansion of the boundaries of English-language literature by enmeshing it in cultural and linguistic difference. (283-4)

Quoting, misquoting, and translating the work of internationally renowned writers not only boosts women writers’ visibility—it professionalizes their craft in ways that conflate national cultures, gender identities, and the possibilities normally regulated by gender, ethnicity, and class. Sweet (1994) remarks that the social instability of refusing marriage has deep resonances within Hemans’s North-South dialectic: “If Italy’s crumbling ruins and lush vegetation signal its feminine character, more insidiously they signal its power to feminize, to seduce sublimity and monumentality to its historical end as Corinne included Oswald in hers. In *Corinne*—and in Hemans’s poetry—feminization is the condition to which we all come, male and female, conqueror and conquered” (174). Feminization can be both threat and curse, colony and metropole, the rise and the fall an empire.

Variations of the word ‘records’ actually appear eight times in *Records*, in both the poems and their epigraphs. The very first one is in the epigraph for “Arabella Stuart,” in which the poet appends the historical note that “The following poem, meant as some *record* of her fate, and the imagined fluctuations of her thoughts and feelings, is supposed to commence during the time of her first imprisonment, whilst her mind was yet buoyed up by the consciousness of Seymour’s affection, and the cherished hope of eventual deliverance” (7-8, my emphasis). Hemans posits the *Records* as both traces and prophecies, where the former substantiates women’s lived experiences and the latter prefigures tragedy in a feedback loop that is temporally complex and palimpsestic in nature. Most of the *Records* depict figures who live historically and geographically removed from Hemans’s lifetime, but who live with and succumb to timeless, generalized experiences of war and heartbreak and who conduct themselves in recognizably British ways. *Records* features formulaic plots which depend on their protagonist’s demise such that it is no longer the point of the story; the point is to document the ways in which women are cajoled into the endless feedback loops of tragic poet, mother, daughter, and wife, who prescribe to the vows of domesticity, to the extent that the principles undergirding those vows seem arbitrary.

Further, the *Records* ascribe to the vows and desires of domestic futurity in such strong and queer ways that those then explode. Here I am referring to queerness in the sense that these Corinne-like characters are strongly attached to the figure of the mother, but do not become mothers themselves—that they can be emblems of national futurity without having to marry or reproduce in conventional ways. For example, in “The American Forest Girl,” a young girl (ambiguously defined only as “American” in the title, but it is intimated throughout the poem that she is Indigenous) emerges from the woods and convinces a group of Indigenous people to spare a young British soldier from being burned at the stake. Clearly the poem is deeply symbolic: this girl, representative of the pacifist desires of the British “home front,” single-handedly (and monosyllabically) convinces the group not to kill with the simple utterance of “He shall not die” (66); this mercy is contingent on a pity that both spares British losses and imagines a willing, “thrill’d” (67) forest and population for the colonial project. The opening stanza establishes the “fair-hair’d youth of England” (6) as a national icon who “stood/ Like a king’s son” (6-7) whose cheeks are deprived of the “crimson of the island blood” (8). The third-person narrator, who professes they are not omniscient, muses on the man’s homesickness considerably with regards to his sisters and mother: that “he might *see* the band/ Of his young sisters wand’ring hand in hand” (19-20). This is the perfect condition for a sisterly intervention; the girl appears as “a fawn-like child” (53) who “had mourn’d a playmate brother dead” (58) and thus advocates to spare the life of a strange young man because she understands he is someone’s brother. The girl “gently laid/ His bright head on her bosom” (62-63)—yes, the child has a “bosom” now—as a comforting gesture that distorts her into a surrogate maternal figure rather than a sisterly one. This scene is the Romantic-era colonizer’s dream come true: individuals among the colonized disrupt resistance to the colonization process, and in doing so take on noble, but not threatening, qualities. This scene is also notable because the girl successfully disrupts the scene of anti-colonial violence with a pacifism that does not result in her own marriage. Whose daughter is she, and where do her imperial allegiances lie? The answer is that the girl is ambivalent on all counts—she seems to side with kinship and pacifism more than take a stance on empire, although her declaration to spare the young man is inherently political. The entire poem is a scene in which the colonial project has failed, until the girl resists the sacrifice of the settler. Although she certainly takes on qualities of sexually available maidenhood, the poem’s closing lines have no intimation of what occurs beyond freeing the young British man—this scene, these characters, and this colonial project have no future.

In the *Feminist Introduction to Romanticism,* Elizabeth Fay (1998) posits that “Motherhood as a metaphor for nationalism seems to meld the private role of woman as mother with her positive public role of mothering the nation, but in a way that is reassuring rather than transgressive” (Fay 1998:91). If the mother-as-nation allegory is perceived to be reasonable in this way, the daughter-as-nation resists the dominant interpretation of womanhood as motherhood without foreclosing sexual or artistic potential. Womanhood outside the parameters of motherhood, when allegorized as a nation like Italy, opens radical (and yet publicly admissible) possibilities for national futurity in ways which can both endorse and subvert nationalist and colonial projects.

The poems discussed above are only an entry point into discussions of re-working *Corinne,* not to mention the innumerable nineteenth-century publications referencing Sappho, a revival which Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne* catalyzed. As I have begun to gesture here, Landon and Hemans are part of an intergenerational, cross-cultural network of women writers whose echoes of one another mutually bolster their reputations. For Saglia, these poems “effect an ‘othering’ of English literature by steeping it in foreign lore and cross-breeding it with different linguistic, generic, and thematic conditions” (282). These transnational discourses embedded within the poetry effectively dismantle notions of “national literary heritage.” Wolfson (2000) calls this a “melancholy Sapphic sorority,” (465) but perhaps this places too much weight on homage and citational practice than on the ground-breaking feminine and feminist literary success itself. Though much about Hemans, Landon, and other Romantic women writers remains to be explored, it is clear that they adapt the legacies of predecessors like de Staël to transform notions of femininity in their lives as well as their poems.

Conclusion: Survival (and Other Futures)

What a pretty botchery Mrs Hemans, clever and brilliant as indeed she is, has made of it, when she takes upon herself to depict the awful fall of the last of the Caesars, in the breach of the last wall of Byzantium! Or who does not pity the delusion of Miss Porter, when she fancies that she is giving us the grim features of Sir William Wallace, with a white handkerchief to his face, and a bottle of aromatic vinegar under his nose? Again, what more odiously blue-stocking and blundering, than Madame de Staël’s Germany.

—*Blackwood’s Edinburgh Review* of *The Improvisatrice*

…we would engage to manufacture a poet out of any young person, particularly a female, by supplying her with a dictionary of love phrases, similes, &c., with as little exertion of intellect, as is employed in manufacturing a stocking in the loom.

—*Westminster Review* of *The Improvisatrice*

In Hemans’s tragic lyrical poems (so, virtually all her *Records*) she conceptualizes a loss by which her poetry will be sought out as consolation and maybe even compensation. This is sentimental poetry’s lucrative edge: the commodification of a generic loss that anticipates personal, future loss, and anticipates it specifically as a site of profit. Crucially, the female sacrifices she depicts are the consequence of named male individuals or groups of men, and are contextualized within the greater conflicts of war and empire; she depicts this particular form of violence which omits detailed carnage, but emphasizes the lack of redress and the foreclosure of women’s lives in the wake of emotional devastation. This dying woman trope renders female characters, and by extension the poet so often conflated with them, into monuments for a posterity that cannot occur.

It is as if this deathly aspect of Hemans’s poetry sacrifices its own posterity, and these consequences are only amplified in the context of famous women writing about famous women in the sentimentalist tradition. Like her poetry, for Hemans herself, perhaps monumentalization as a “poetess,” a poet of “femininity,” and an “ideal” woman, is what forecloses the posterity of her career beyond the Victorian era. “Monumentalization” here also connotes the way in which Hemans’s oeuvre was, before the 1990s, widely considered to be static, to have taken on a stoical position which ultimately renders it obsolete. As Bennett (1999) puts it, the literal deaths most of her characters suffer leave little “possibility for a redemptive textual afterlife” (82). Notions of posterity (both its anticipation and its reality) lie just beneath the surface of these discussions of gendered celebrity. Bennett’s thought-provoking work on posterity and gender for Romantic poets reconceptualizes the trope that fame is the consolation for death, citing Hemans’s poems “Properzia Rossi” and “Last Song of Sappho” to demonstrate how posterity, for these characters, is a “desire for oblivion”—the “desire to survive as identity-less, effaced, invisible, forgotten, obliterated, anonymous” (80). That these characters are artistic and literary women negotiating fame is integral to the model of posterity in sentimental discourse. This rejection of futurity and promotion of the female artist’s ephemerality in the poetry (which is hailed by critics as “feminine” sentimental poetry in the first place), paired with the widespread impression that the sentimental woman writer’s poetry is part-autobiographic, forecloses the poet’s own posterity. When Hemans, reading Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) famously writes in the margin “C’est moi” and then goes on to pen “Corinne at the Capitol,” (1830) which includes an epigraph from another de Staël work on womanhood and fame, it becomes clear that Hemans is, to a large extent, working this cliché to her advantage (Kelly 2002:431-2). Hemans and Landon, along with Maria Jane Jewsbury and other writers in the 1820s especially, are wildly successful in articulating, through reproductions of generic narratives, a resistance to posthumous fame as a “redemptive supplement” to life (Bennett 75). For Jacqueline Labbe, (2000) Hemans “recognizes the essential emptiness of the romance, dramatizing its inadequacies by allowing, then destroying, the emotionally charged love-relationship” (98). Her poetics continually depict how structuring lives around patriarchal configurations of home, family, and nation runs those lives off the track. What Hemans is doing, then, is depicting women who don’t exactly succumb to tyranny, but who also don’t usually survive it.

The latest *Cambridge Companion to Victorian Women’s Writing* considers Hemans an exemplary “early” Victorian poet who is quickly eclipsed (both temporally and spatially within the chapter) by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rosetti. Incidentally, second-generation Romantic women poets like Hemans and Landon are often considered to be the cornerstone of early Victorianism. Scolars refer to those years that are “Neither truly ‘Romantic’ nor quite ‘Victorian,’” (Riess 1996: 808) a sort of “post-Romantic” interlude (809). The result of this overlap in paradigms is that scholars oscillate between pedagogically accepted (and loosely chronological) banners in an attempt to unite the poets’ contemporary reception as well as how that reception echoes and warps during the decades that follow. Emma Francis (1998) further explicates this “oscillation” scholars adopt when characterizing the work of these two writers in particular: where the deaths of Keats, Shelley, and Byron in 1821, 1822, and 1824 respectively leave a divisive mark in the “Big Six” chronology, Hemans and Landon live until 1835 and 1838, and “thus write right across the chronological divide” (96). This is not to say that Hemans and Landon, who both died prematurely, are the only successful authors during that time—Walter Scott is proof of that. Further, their commercial strategies diverge in interesting ways during those years. Landon’s legacy is especially important in the realm of reviewing and editing magazines, giftbooks, and annuals, which becomes central to her poetic production.

It is important to remember that because so many women writers published anonymously or under pseudonymns, we can never accurately quantify just how much women were writing in the Romantic and Victorian eras, nor just how economically successful they became. “Mrs. Hemans” and “L.E.L.” are two cases in which the persona eclipses the poet, to both the benefit and detriment of the person. Linda H. Peterson’s (2016) study of Landon’s contributions to *The Literary Gazette* and Hemans’s to *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* traces Landon’s first publications in 1820, which failed to enter into critical conversation (398-399). Published under the “Correspondents” column rather than that of “Original Poems,” Landon experimented with genre and subject matter, and signed her poems with a simple, anonymous “L.” This is consistent with Hemans’s anonymously published *Modern Greece* (1817) and prize-winning poem “Dartmoor” (1821?). The former was well-received and critics widely believed the poet to be male, a conclusion which widely stems from the poem’s epic genre and style. The latter poem won Hemans a 50-guinea prize from the Royal Society of Literature. The implication is that emerging women writers must protect their identities if they want to risk first publications or “masculine” genre writing, that women writers must build a brand and hardly deviate from it. As I mentioned in chapter 1, Hemans and Landon build their “poetess” brands throughout the 1820s in periodical spaces, a strategy which both boosts visibility and offers more stable pecuniary benefits than exclusively publishing volumes of poetry.

According to Riess (1996), a major component to Landon’s success in the periodicals of the 1820s and ‘30s is her poems’ “appeal to the desire of bourgeois consumers for purchasable art objects” (809). Her “Medallion Wafers” poems do just this; the poems accompany advertisements for medallion wafers, which are essentially inexpensive reproductions of popular art. The poems act as an endorsement for the wafers and entirely derivative of their subject matter while also functioning as commodifiable artistic pieces themselves. Riess posits Landon as a prototypical Charles Dickens in the way that she encourages an overt, if not aesthetic association between her work and the advertisements that accompany the publication: this is British commodity-fetishism at its (Romantic) finest (812). Landon’s and Dickens’s methodological similarities are yet another case for Landon’s enduring position on the doorstep of Victorianism.

Similar to Landon’s “Medallion Wafers” poems, Hemans adopts strategies in periodical spaces: Peterson (2016) traces one of Hemans’s contributions to *Blackwoods* in particular: the publication of “The Stately Homes of England” in April 1827 immediately follows an article titled “The Surplus Population of the United Kingdom,” perhaps promoting these joyous British homes in a way that can be emulated in the colonies. Further, the publication of “Song of Emigration” in July of that same year offers a dialogue between husband and wife on the affective consequences of emigration (403-5).

Another strategy of Hemans’s in increasing readership is through her inclusion of epigraphs with her poems, whether published in a periodical or a collection. These epigraphs feature other women writers as well as recognizable “Greats” in translation, from Tasso and Pindemonte to Byron and Joanna Baillie.[[12]](#footnote-12) Margot K. Louis (1998) traces Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s inheritance from Landon and Hemans, which manifests as a fraught relationship with feminized sensibility, but also on the nature of female creativity: “Barrett both resists and subsumes the sentimental vision of the poet within her own sacramental vision of art” (1-2). Barrett Browning works with and from Hemans and Landon’s personalities and characters to construct Aurora Leigh as a surviving female character:

if improvisations inspired by pure feeling are technically inadequate to the creation of great poetry, Barrett Browning also insists that a poetry of pure feeling is an inadequate end in itself… At the emotional climax of each poem, these [Hemans’s and Landon’s] heroines appear as disembodied abstractions (159).

In this way, we can see what Finnerty (2016) terms “celebrity sisterliness” among women writers in which Barrett Browning gleans from Hemans and Landon what they in turn gleaned from de Staël and even Byron.

With Landon as with Hemans, it would be naïve to assume that each writer’s career privileged opportunism and thus ended in personal regret. As does Jonas Cope (2018), I believe Landon resists canonization in a way that Hemans doesn’t. However, her multi-platform writing (especially in literary annuals) aligns her with writers like Maria Jane Jewsbury, and together they offer an attractive restructuring of how we understand the late-Romantic market for poetry. These women also offer a radical alternative to notions of prolific women’s writing; in fact, it is impossible to know just how much Landon and Jewsbury published due to the nature of annual writing and editing. I mean this not as a dismissal of critical responsibility, but as a call to consider Landon’s oeuvre more holistically as Romanticists expand and dissolve the canon. Marlon Ross (1989) reduces twentieth-century conceptions of Romanticism in a swift gesture to “two inescapable factors”: that “our appraisals of poetry are synonymous with the history that has made those appraisals possible,” and that “romantic assumptions cannot be divorced from gender assumptions” (235). It is important to acknowledge the lens through which I approach Hemans’s and Landon’s legacies as poets, the bias of disdain for those public and private “spheres” I denounced in the introduction. This lens is most accurately described by Harriet Kramer Linkin, and is a pitfall for works like this one: “Reevaluation based on the domestic alone—even as it opens up to include political commitment to the community—conditions the admittance of women poets into what remains a divided state” (Linkin 1997:161). This is an admitted limitation of this project: my work here engages expressly with Landon’s poetry, ignoring her fiction and much of her engagement with annuals.

Although Hemans did not ever publish prose, she promised forthcoming work to her publisher William Blackwood on multiple occasions.[[13]](#footnote-13) Future projects might engage more with Landon’s roles as curator and novelist and the pressures Hemans felt to diversifying her writing. Along with Craciun (2003), I recommend that a re-evaluation of Landon’s oeuvre begin with her novels rather than her poetry or serial publications. In the same vein, much of Hemans’s critical reception focuses on poetry written in the last decade of her life. Much can be gained from a study of her earlier works, which are more overtly geopolitical in nature. There are many reasons why Landon would adopt the Sapphic death pose as her signature move, and just as many for why Hemans would choose to brand herself as a poet of femininity. It is a matter of diversification according to market changes, and the 1820s were not especially fortuitous years to be publishing volumes. Where Landon shifts into roles of curation as well as creation, Hemans associates herself with one distinct poetic voice: the one of the bereaved woman. Like Hemans, Landon avoids any essentializing views in her writing: the melodramatic piling of bodies makes clear that “just constancy in love, but constancy itself is theoretically and practically impossible” (Cope 2018:146). Reading the two poets together, we can begin to distinguish between the different versatilities (and by extension, the constancies) Romantic women writers exhibited in their publications. These two stances resonated as long as serial publications sold, and as long as women felt loss.

Perhaps this is why Virginia Woolf begins a short story titled “The Works of Mrs. Hemans,” as indicated by the traces in her Monk’s House papers (Lootens 2016:117). The journal entry depicts a self-proclaimed literary critic who begins to fantasize that a particularly mousy fellow library-goer is, in fact, Felicia Hemans. There are hints that he begins to become enamoured by her, but intrigue beyond this point is impossible to ascertain. It is equally impossible to know how Woolf’s story might have influenced 20th-century opinions of Hemans had it been completed and published.

Perhaps this is why Elizabeth Bishop writes her “Casabianca” (1965), or why *The Guardian* ran a piece in 2011 about Hemans’s “Casabianca” with the byline “Remembered mostly through parodies, does this portrayal of maritime tragedy still warrant serious attention in its own right?” (Rumens). The article appraises the poem if only for inspiring Bishop’s parodic rewrite, a dredging up of history that is only tangentially helpful. It does also, albeit briefly, trace the original historical context back to severe French losses at the Battle of the Nile (August 1-2 1798), most notably the ship *L’Orient,* upon which our young hero perished (Gallagher and Schweikart 2013).

Comparing Woolf’s story fragment to the *Sound and Sense* anthology as late as 1997, Lootens (2016) characterizes the twentieth century’s cautioning against the reader’s investment in sentimental verse as a pitfall in the journey to self-improvement: for the aptly-named character “Mr. Hume” to the several iterations of the anthology, “Self- detachment from sentimental texts, taught thus, is no mere practice of critical reading: it is also a discipline of character development” (120). It is not simply that a poem’s generic-ness decides its worth—it decides the reader’s worth as well. This is part of what Lootens calls the “pedagogical histories of training to unread sentimental poetry,” (121) deeply invested in the separation of spaces (into “spheres”) and the qualifying of those spaces within the social hierarchy. As a final “perhaps,” perhaps this centuries-old training of how to read sentimental poetry is why reconfigurations of Hemans’s sentimentalist work must be held at arm’s length through techniques like Woolf’s non-omniscience, Bishop’s parody, or *The Guardian*’s pithiness, in order to stay relevant.

The deaths of Hemans’s and Landon’s protagonists do not signal their failures as poets, nor their victimization as women. This “poetics of refusal” yields the particularly strange posterity of these writers—how they seem simultaneously perhaps too much “of their time” to be fully relevant to the future, including our present. Yet they are not fully enough “of their time”; they are always performing, leaning toward death, thinking away or ahead of the moment to be memorialized in the conventional ways of the literary canon. They alert the audience to an ongoing poetics of refusal to concede wholly to one kind of gendered embodiment, a refusal which echoes in poem after poem, writer after writer.

Images

Vigée-LeBrun, Elizabeth. *Madame de Staël as Corinne at Cape Miseno.* 1809, oil on canvas, 140 x 118cm, Musée d’Art et d’Histoire de la Ville de Genève, Gift of Madame Necker-de-Saussure, 1841.

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1. This is not the universally accepted interpretation of Hemans’s work: for Gary Kelly (2002), *Records* is pessimistic about the feminization of history, and rather “emphasizes the heroism and sacrifice of women in the face of history as meaningless death” (45). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There is certainly room to debate this claim, since many of Hemans’s poems (including those published in *Records of Woman*) were first published in the conservative *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine,* which published almost exclusively male authors. Hemans was, at one point, the highest earner per page of written work to contribute to the magazine, earning two guineas per page. For more, see Jacqueline M. Labbe, “The economics of female authorship.” *The Cambridge Companion to Women’s Writing in the Romantic Period,* ed. Devoney Looser, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A brief list of Hemans’s publications is available as an Appendix to this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Joanna Baillie remained unmarried and resided in Hampstead with her sister Agnes for their entire adult lives (Slagle 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As for Hemans, a brief list of Landon’s publications is available as an Appendix to this chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. One example of a protagonist in the midst of political turmoil is “The Switzer’s Wife,” in which the unnamed protagonist compels her husband, a Swiss diplomat, to organize a resistance against the oncoming Austrian attack. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The version of the novel referenced here is the 1833 edition translated by Isabel Hill with “Metrical Versions of the Odes by L. E. Landon,” since the implication of Landon’s verse seems most fitting. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For an innovative argument centering women in stances of prayer as depicted in Romantic women’s poetry, see Christopher Stokes’s “Prayer, Discipline and Secrecy in Felicia Hemans’s Late Poetry.” *Women’s Writing,* 2014, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 91-109. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For more examples, see also “Joan of Arc, in Rheims” from *Records of Woman* (1828) and “Woman and Fame” from *Amulet, or Christian and Literary Remembrancer* (1829). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Importantly, this “heavenly” partner is not godly and is more a divine inspiration and drive for her craft than a faith-based reworking of immaculate conception. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For example, the speaker in Hemans’s “The Bride of the Greek Isle” repeatedly praises the decidedly “Greek” flora, from the vines in the doorway to Eudora’s father’s house to the lemon and lime trees, jasmine, and cypress tree that shade the house. These plants take over the first stanza of part II. Similarly, in the opening stanza of Landon’s “The Indian Bride,” [she] is surrounded by first roses, and then orientalising flowers like jasmine and lotus. She stands beneath a mango tree to wait for her lover, at which point she throws spices and repeats an ambiguous incantation on the bank of the Ganges. Both are scenes which anticipate a conjugal union. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. On Romantic women’s networks of communication and citation: see *Women’s Literary Networks and Romanticism* (2017), edited by Andrew Winkle and Angela Rehbein. This book is especially helpful in thinking through how these networks complicate the distinctions we try to make between periods, and even generations, of Romantics. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Throughout their publishing relationship, Blackwood emphasizes the positive selling relationship with publishing in magazines and publishing in volumes, the former garnering interest and anticipation for the latter: “I am very desirous that you should try when you are in the humor for it, something of greater length for the Magazine, either in verse or prose. The very popularity of any article in the Magazine could give it a better chance of being popular when separately published” (Footnote dated 18 Dec. 1828, Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland MS 30,311 f. 149). Blackwood had been urging her to write prose almost from the start of their association. He told her the previous year, “I would be very happy if you found it agreeable to write pieces of greater length whether in prose or verse. Of course I cannot hold out the same rate of remuneration for longer pieces, that I am to allow you for these short occasional contributions .... I could at once say on receiving any thing of this kind what I could allow for it; or you could name your own price and then should it not answer either of our purposes, I could take care to return the MS most carefully” (Blackwood Archives, MS 30310, ff. 282). Likely, Hemans assured the publisher of future prose work to appease and maintain positive the relationship which, as pointed out earlier, was increasingly tending toward buying copyrights outright rather than profit-splitting. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)