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"THAT STRANGE PERSONAL INTEREST": PERSONALITY, PUBLISHING, AND POETRY IN THE 1820S

by

Theresa A. Adams

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
(English)

at the
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
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A dissertation entitled

"That Strange Personal Interest":
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Theresa A. Adams

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

"Too dreary and abstracted to excite the strongest interest": John Keats and His Readers 17

"The pruning hook has been over me agen": Violence as Protest in John Clare 41

Performing the Poetess: Felicia Hemans's Theatrical Poetics 86

"A compromise between the anonymious and the full announcement": Letitia Elizabeth Landon and the Biographical Bind 124

Conclusion 157

Introduction

"These are odd particulars to give, when I am introducing the Work and not the Man to you,--but if you knew him, you would also feel that strange personal Interest in all that concerns him" *(Keats Circle 1: 31).*[1]

In this letter, John Keats's publisher, John Taylor, attempts to interest Sir James Mackintosh in becoming the poet's patron. The "odd particulars" that he refers to are the details of Keats's personal history. Taylor seems almost surprised at the turn that his appeal takes, but the blurring of "the Work" and "the Man" is a common occurrence in Keats's poetic career, as well as the careers of his contemporaries: John Clare, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon. This personal interest in poets is rooted in the eighteenth-century tradition of sensibility, the legacy of Byron's personal poems, the emergence of new venues for publication that encouraged readers to view poets in personal terms, and a discomfort with the increasing commodification of poetry and the economic basis of the poet/reader relationship. Although both poet and work became increasingly commodified during the 1820s, readers familiar with the tradition of sensibility were trained to respond to authors' emotional displays with their own; they wanted a relationship based on sympathy, not economics. These four poets used their poems to encourage their readers' sympathy, but they also resisted the classed and gendered expectations linked to the personal that limited them to "appropriate" topics and sentiments. They participated in the blurring of poet and work, while often resisting narrowly biographical readings of their poems in both subtle and explicit ways.

Sensibility was linked above all to the emotions. Janet Todd writes that this term, "little used before the mid-eighteenth century," "came to denote the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering" (7). Compassion is another key component of sensibility, because this sympathy acts as a bond between individuals. Todd claims that this kind of literature "teach[es] its consumers to produce a response equivalent to the one presented in its episodes" (4). Stuart Curran calls the "cult of sensibility" "largely a female creation" (195), and as Todd has argued, "The cult of sensibility was a most suitable development for poetical women who could express themselves with perfect propriety in its conventional diction and could exalt their own sensibility without appearing improperly self-conscious" (60). For example, Charlotte Smith's very popular Elegiac Sonnets (1784) were lyric expressions of sorrow that were read as responses to the melancholy events of her life. Expressions of joy or sorrow evoked similar emotions in the reader. In The Plays of the Passions, Joanna Baillie built her dramatic theory around the audience's sympathy. In her "Introductory Discourse," she writes that she wants her plays to show the influence of passion on the mind because "The highest pleasures that we receive from poetry, as well as from the real objects that surround us in the world, are derived from the sympathetic interest we all take in beings like ourselves" (28).

Alan Richardson has linked the literature of sensibility, with its "widespread revaluation of the feminine, of the emotions, and of relationality," to the larger cultural and social changes mapped by the historian Lawrence Stone (14). In The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800, Stone argues that during these three centuries, there was "a change in how the individual regarded himself in relation to society (the growth of individualism) and how he behaved and felt towards other human beings...(the growth of affect)" (150). By individualism, he means in part "a growing introspection and interest in the individual personality" (151). This focus on affect and the "growing introspection and interest in the individual personality" dovetails with the conventional view of canonical male poets during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. For example, M. H. Abrams's influential definition of the "Greater

Romantic Lyric" features a first-person speaker engaged in "meditation" that "achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem" (201). Some examples include William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," and John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." According to Abrams, "Only Byron, among the major poets, did not write in this mode at all" (201). However, with Byron, "interest in the individual personality" takes on a new meaning, becoming a "personal interest" in the poet.

During the second decade of the nineteenth century, reading poetry was "a fad in genteel society," fueled in part by Byron's success (Erickson 23). The sales figures of successful books suggest poetry's incredible popularity. In 1810, Walter Scott's Lady of the Lake sold over 20,000 copies in six months (Erickson 23). In 1814, Lord Byron's Corsair sold 10,000 copies on the first day it was available, reaching a total of 20,000 copies two weeks later (Erickson 23). Scott and Byron also received unprecedented sums for the copyrights to their work. For example, Scott received 2,000 pounds for the copyright to Rokeby in 1812. It is generally thought that Byron's poetic success caused Scott to change genres, from poetry to the novel.

Byron famously compared poetry to a volcanic eruption: "the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earth-quake" (Letters and Journals 3: 179). As Sonia Hofkosh interprets this comparison, "the force of literary production is immediate and personal, originating within the poet, from his 'deepest self.' The poetic text is the expression and preservation of that self's integrity, composed in an impulse so fundamental as to be a matter of biological necessity" ("Writer's Ravishment" 93). The personal nature of Byron's writing and his readers' interest in his life were central to his success, beginning with Childe Harold, the poem that made his reputation. Peter Manning notes that "the manuscripts famously show that

'Childe Harold' was once 'Childe Burun'" (180), and Byron's identification with the speaker intensified as the decade progressed. In the first two cantos, published in 1812, Harold was identifiable with Byron, yet the fictional persona of the speaker was maintained. By the time Canto IV was published in 1818, the line between Harold and Byron was almost entirely effaced. It was not surprising that John Scott would say, "'He has awakened, by literary exertion, a more intense interest in his person than ever before resulted from literature" (qtd. in Manning 185).[2]

Jerome Christensen argues that Byron's popular success was achieved by "coding the residual affective charge that still clung to the paraphernalia of aristocracy" (xvi). The result is a phenomenon that Christensen calls "Byronism," a "literary system" in which Byron and his publisher, John Murray, worked together to create a persona grounded in aristocratic privilege to sell poems "to a reading public avid for glamour" (xvi). This marketing of Byron "was quite studied, from the display of copies magnificently bound for members of the royal family to Murray's steady provision of engravings of Byron in Albanian dress" (Manning 183). Manning notes, "Nothing was more emblematic of Byron's aristocratic stance than his handling of the payments for his poetry"—he gave away the copyright to Cantos I and II of Childe Harold and The Corsair (180). And yet he also embraced commercialism and the market: "Byron both points to the aristocratic world that his heroes inhabit and from where he came, and to the world of commerce that contested it" (Manning 182).

While the personal brought Byron spectacular literary success, it also resulted in his disgrace and self-exile. He became notorious for his affairs and his separation from his wife. Even after his death, the publication of Thomas Moore's Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, With Notices of His Life (1830) further alienated some readers, among them Felicia Hemans, who kept a brooch containing a lock of Byron's hair as a "relic" of the poet (Chorley 2: 16).

This "was one of her favorite ornaments till the Memoirs of the poet appeared," at which point she put it away forever (Chorley 2: 17).

Byron's poems and persona created a demand for the personal, and new venues for poetic publication fed this demand. The growth of these venues was made possible by incredible changes in the process of textual production: "In 1800 the methods used in the printing and allied industries had hardly changed from those of 350 years before. Paper continued to be made by hand and the methods of making punches, striking, metrices, casting types, setting text, and inking and printing from the forms remained much the same as in the fifteenth century" (Twyman 48). However, the early nineteenth century saw three important innovations: stereotyping, the mechanization of paper-making, and the development of steel engraving. In stereotyping, plaster or papier-mâché molds are used to cast type, thereby "cut[ting] the costs of printing associated with typesetting and type forms" (Erickson 27). One result of cheaper and more efficient production was the surge in the number of periodicals published during the years 1815-32. These new periodicals included Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, London Magazine, Colburn's New Monthly Magazine, and Fraser's Magazine (Erickson 28). Periodicals fed the personal interest in poets by publishing not only their poems, but also biographical sketches of poets, engravings of their portraits, and sometimes even gossip. Poets who published frequently in these periodicals could develop a personal relationship with their readers. For example, at the beginning of her career, Landon published a new poem in The Literary Gazette every week. Readers waited impatiently for her weekly installment, signed with her initials, L.E.L., and her anonymity produced a nation-wide mania to learn her identity. This kind of publication reached a wide audience—the affordable Literary Gazette, for example, sold 4,000 copies a week (McGann, Riess 809).

Another innovation was the use of steel engravings, which made it possible to mass-produce engraved books: "As steel plates were tougher than copper ones even very fine lines could withstand the wear of printing, and the commercial life of intaglio plates was lengthened considerably" (Twyman 23-4). One of the phenomenal publishing successes of the 1820s was the literary annual. The annuals featured poems and short stories accompanied by engraved subjects, although it might be more accurate to say that the poems, which were often written to match a specific picture, accompanied the engravings. The number of annuals produced grew from nine in 1825-6 to forty-three in 1830 (Ledbetter, "Lucrative Requests" 215). In 1824, just one of these annuals, The Literary Souvenir sold 6,000 copies in two weeks and in 1825, its sales totaled more than 15,000 (Ledbetter, "Lucrative Requests" 207). Like periodicals, the annuals contributed to the increased focus on the personal. Margaret Linley argues that their success was linked to their ability to make a mass-produced commodity a personal object. The purchase and receipt of the book, often given as a Christmas gift, were actions of "sympathetic identification between individuals" and the marking of passages, inscriptions, and the placing of a lock of hair in the book, reveal the annuals' "self-conscious staging of sympathy and affection" (Linley 57). Thus, the annuals participated in a kind of "Byronism"; they were commodities that hid their commodification. Similarly, they used the trappings of aristocracy to appeal to their middle-class readers. Kathryn Ledbetter's study of one annual, The Keepsake, points out that "The Keepsake imitated hand-crafted books of gentleman's libraries, yet binders, printers, and engravers of The Keepsake worked in modern assembly-line factories" ("White Vellum" 36). Sonia Hofkosh discusses the annuals as icons of aristocratic taste, with their titled editors and engravings of aristocratic women fulfilling the middle-class desire for "aristocratic (self-) possession" ("Disfiguring" 206).

Although periodicals and annuals offered new opportunities for poets, they also created new pressures. In a more segmented marketplace, the poets who succeeded were those who could identify and appeal to a niche audience. The most important new audience was composed of middle-class women. The annuals, which were given as Christmas gifts for women, edited by women, filled with the work of women poets, and illustrated with engravings of beautiful women, were the visible culmination of women's growing power in the literary marketplace. Hemans and Landon successfully appealed to this audience, while Keats and Clare resisted women's power, openly attacking their influence.

As niche audiences and publications grew, the most common form of poetic publication—the single-author book—declined. The peak year of poetic production during the decade was 1820, when 200 original volumes of poetry were published; that number had slipped to 91 in 1826, 77 in 1832 (Erickson 28), and "by 1830 almost all publishers refused to publish poetry" (Erickson 26). Both Wordsworth and Southey attributed the decline in the sales of their books to the annuals (Linley 72). However, another factor was a mid-decade financial crisis, whose effects were felt in the publishing trade, since numerous booksellers and publishers, including Constable and James Ballantyne & Co., "risk[ed] their resources in mines, hops and all manner of ventures" (Mumbie and Norrie 199). The London Magazine, published by Taylor and Hessey (Keats and Clare's publishers), failed in 1825. In 1826, Byron and Hemans's publisher John Murray's daily paper, The Representative, failed, costing the house 26,000 pounds (Mumby and Norrie 199).

The four poets in my study were particularly sensitive to changing conditions in the literary marketplace because they wrote to support themselves and/or their families. All four poets also lacked a university or classical education and therefore were distanced from the kind of cultural authority possessed by a poet like Byron. Their dependence on the audience led them to shape their work and their self-presentation in response to the audience's interest in the personal. The personal may take the form of an interest in the biographical details of the poet's life, an attention to the poet's appearance (through written or visual portraits or the poet's body) and a desire to read the poetic utterance as an "authentic" and sincere expression of emotion. At the same time, the poets express their resistance to these expectations, which can be confining and even exploitative.

For all four poets, the details of their lives are strongly registered in their contemporary reception. For example, the infamously hostile reviews of Keats's Endymion used details of Keats's life—particularly the fact that he was born over a livery stable (his father ran an inn) and his training as an apothecary—to question his suitability as a poet. Clare's reception was influenced by the biographical context in which his work was first presented. For example, in the introduction to Clare's first volume, Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery, his editor and publisher John Taylor claimed, "The following Poems will probably attract some notice by their intrinsic merit; but they are also entitled to attention from the circumstances under which they were written. They are the genuine productions of a young Peasant, a day-labourer in husbandry" (vii). The danger in this approach is that the poet becomes reducible to biography and the "intrinsic merit" of the poems is eclipsed.

The poems were also considered to be expressions of the poet's authentic experiences and emotions. To return to Clare, Taylor again invites this reading. In the introduction to Poems Descriptive, he refers to Clare's work as "a picture of what he has constantly witnessed and felt" (ix), and in his description of a visit to Clare's cottage, published in the London Magazine, Taylor repeatedly describes the correspondence between what he sees around him and Clare's poems. This issue of authenticity is the key to Landon's work as well. Like Byron's Childe Harold, Landon's Improvisatrice was read as a stand-in for the poet. "The Improvisatrice," like many of her other poems, is a melancholy story of heartbreak and loss and readers believed that it expressed Landon's sorrow over her own betrayed love. This authenticity presented specific problems for women poets, since any deviation from the expected gender norms could trouble readers. For example, Landon's claim that her poetry was "all professional" was shocking. When a woman poet wrote of love or emotion, she was expected to relate real sentiment—to express her emotions, rather than to professionally craft a commodity for sale.

The interest in the poet's life and concern about authentic emotion meet in the attention paid to the poet's appearance (in portraits) and body. Engravings of Clare and his cottage served as frontispieces to The Village Minstrel. Landon's portrait was exhibited and appeared in periodicals during her lifetime, inspiring poems such as Mrs. Cornwall Baron Wilson's "Impromptu: On Seeing the Portrait of the Fair Author of the 'Improvisatrice,' in the Exhibition" and Laman Blanchard's "On First Seeing the Portrait of L.E.L." Clare and Hemans's readers followed them to their homes. Some of Clare's readers wanted to be certain that the works were, as Taylor claimed, "the genuine productions of a young Peasant." Hemans's readers, who loved her poems of the domestic affections, flocked to her home as the real-life incarnation of those values.

The poets encouraged readers to view the poet/reader relationship in personal terms. Hemans's poems invited readers to sympathize with her private self, de-emphasizing the economic nature of relationships in the literary marketplace. Keats was a key figure for both understanding the dangers of hostile reading and imagining the dynamics of sympathy and identification that could exist between poet and reader. The personal was used to attack Keats on the basis of class and politics, resulting in the myth that he had died from harsh reviews. Both Clare and Landon write poems that redeem the personal for Keats by using it as the starting point for the development of a sympathetic relationship between poet and reader.

Clare describes "To the Memory of Keats"(1821) as a poem of sensibility. In a letter to John Taylor containing the poem, Clare writes, "I send you my sorrows for poor Keats while his memory is warmly felt—they are just a few beats of the heart—the head has nothing to do with them" (Letters 174).[3] However, the "few beats" of the heart focus less on Clare's emotion than on the emotion of Keats's readers more generally. Clare mentions Keats's rocky reception as "rancours wounds," but suggests that the audience that experiences nature as Keats does will be the true source of his fame:

> Thou shalt survive—ah while a being dwells
> In natures joys with soul to warm as thine
> With eye to view her fascinating spells
> & dream entranced oer each form divine
> Worth wild enthusiast shall be cherish'd here
> & thine with him shall linger & be dear.

The poem turns on the idea of fame as a function of readerly sympathy evoked by shared experience. It is the reader who "dwells / In natures joy with soul to warm as thine" who will "cherish" Keats. Both "cherish" and the last word of the poem, "dear," suggests the emotional nature of this reader/poet relationship.

Landon's poem, "Lines on Seeing a Portrait of Keats, By the Author of *L'Improvisatrice*" appeared in The Examiner in 1824.[4] In a letter written two years earlier, in which the poem was included, she described her "admiration" for Keats and her appreciation for her correspondent's comparison of her to the poet: "Again I must express how grateful I feel by your telling me my style resembled Keats" (183). Another expression of her identification occurs when she notes her particular interest in Endymion: "there is so much interest thrown round a young poet's first production, in the early breathing of his hopes his wild imaginings" (183). Endymion was not Keats's first production, just as The Improvisatrice was not Landon's; however, these were the volumes and characters with which they were most identified, and Landon's comments about Endymion could easily have been taken from a review of The Improvisatrice. Landon's poem reflects this personal interest in Keats. It is addressed to the poet's portrait and begins with a physical description of the "pale forehead" and "The dark curls cluster[ed] round thy graceful head." Landon's poem, like Clare's, turns on the idea of sympathy:

> I looked upon thy open brow, and felt
> Almost an interest like to life in thee;
> Thine influence is upon the heart; thou canst
> Awaken such sweet sympathies.

Like Clare, Landon also uses the language of sensibility, explicitly referencing the "heart" and "sympathies." Her poem, even more than Clare's, seems to record the "beats of the heart." Both poems promote a model of sympathetic reading, one that Clare and Landon hope will apply to them as well as to Keats.

My study suggests the multiple and sometimes contradictory expectations generated by the print culture of the 1820s. While the poets often found it efficacious to encourage the reader's personal interest in the poet, there were also times when they subverted or broke with this interest outright. Poets solicited this kind of attention because it brought them popularity and economic success. However, particularly in the case of the women poets, readers wanted to elide the economic nature of the literary transaction—to see friendship as the basis of the relationship. Hemans resists this, questioning her readers' motives and seeing their attempts at friendship and insistence on sympathy as exploitation and objectification. While Hemans does this in her letters, Landon's resistance also appears in her poems and prefaces. Landon's readers sympathized with her because they conflated her with the melancholy speakers of her poems. But in The Venetian Bracelet (1829), she consciously chooses to separate herself from those speakers. For Clare, the situation is quite different. In his case, the economic is actually the sign of the reader's sympathy and friendship. Contemporary reviews exhorted potential readers to purchase his texts as the means of lifting a gifted man out of poverty.

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Notes

[1] John Taylor to Sir James Mackintosh, December 5, 1818.

[2] "Living Authors, No. IV: Lord Byron," London Magazine, 3 (1821).

[3] John Clare to John Taylor c. April 3-14, 1821. The text of the poem is taken from The Early Poems of John Clare, 1804-1822, vol. 2.

[4] The text of Landon's poem is taken from F. J. Sypher's Critical Writings by Letitia Elizabeth Landon (183-4).

"Too dreary and abstracted to excite the strongest interest": John Keats and His Readers

The one fact that most people know about Keats is that he died young. Readers of Keats have become accustomed to reading his poems through this biographical lens. However, the personal was a contested term for Keats and his contemporaries. They debated the personal nature of his poems with great energy and their reactions to the personal changed several times during the course of his brief career. The best-known use of the personal was by politically motivated reviewers who used it to question Keats's poetic legitimacy by mocking his class status and lack of a university education. In this chapter, I consider the focus on the personal in Keats's reception within the context of a larger aesthetic debate about the role of the personal in poetry. William Hazlitt's "Lectures on the English Poets," presented at the Surrey Institution from January-March 1818, and published soon after that, set the terms of this debate. In his lectures, Hazlitt distinguished between "dramatic" and "modern" poetry. Dramatic poetry is impersonal; the poet inhabits his characters so fully that he disappears. For Hazlitt, Shakespeare was the foremost dramatic poet. In aesthetic terms, dramatic poetry is associated with a concrete style and gives the reader "flesh and blood" characters to sympathize and identify with. Modern poetry is an expression of the poet's egotism, characterized by an emotional self-absorption that alienates the reader. William Wordsworth and Lord Byron were the most notable practitioners of modern poetry. The reviews of Keats's Endymion make frequent use of these categories in evaluating the poem.

Keats admired Hazlitt and moved in some of the same social and intellectual circles. Throughout his brief career, Keats was actively engaged with the personal as an aesthetic problem. Although he was strongly influenced by Hazlitt's ideas and vocabulary, his own formulation of a dramatic poetics modifies Hazlitt's theories. I examine the poems written during the summer following the publication of Endymion (July 1818), "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns," "This mortal body of a thousand days," and "There is a joy in footing slow across a silent plain," as examples of the process by which Keats forms his new poetics. The focus on the personal frequently frames Keats as a victim of forces (class, education, death) beyond his control. Mapping Keats's manipulation of the personal suggests the extent to which he responded to his contemporaries' concerns, fulfilled his own desire for aesthetic growth, and actively shaped his poetic career.

I. Endymion's Reception

Lockhart's infamous review of Endymion in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine attacks Keats with personal details. For example, Lockhart mocks Keats's medical training, ordering him "back to the shop Mr. John, back to 'plasters, pills, and ointment boxes'" (524). His objective is to point out Keats's presumption in assuming a role that he cannot fill because of his inadequate class and education. For Lockhart, the strong identification between Keats and his title character, Endymion, is the result of Keats's background, because "no man, whose mind has ever been imbued with the smallest knowledge or feeling of classical poetry or classical history, could have stooped to profane and vulgarise every association in the manner which has been adopted by this 'son of promise'" (522). As a result, "Mr Keats has thoroughly appropriated the character [of Endymion] if not the name. His Endymion is not a Greek shepherd, loved by a Grecian goddess; he is merely a young Cockney rhymester, dreaming a phantastic dream at the full of the moon" (522). Because Keats lacks the proper, classical education, he cannot separate himself from his own point of view in order to convincingly present Endymion as a character.

Lockhart's review invokes the personal in order to attack a writer whose liberal politics he finds objectionable. However, his identification of Keats with Endymion is echoed in other reviews that are not politically motivated. These reviewers, influenced by William Hazlitt's concerns and vocabulary, focus on the personal as an aesthetic, rather than a political or class, issue. In his lecture "On Shakespeare and Milton," Hazlitt claims that in modern poetry, poets find "nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves" (53). In the final lecture, "On the Living Poets," he uses Byron as an example of this tendency: "There is nothing more repulsive than this sort of ideal absorption of all the interests of others, of the good and ills of life, in the ruling passion and moody abstraction of a single mind" (153). In contrast with modern poets like Byron, Shakespeare "was the least of an egoist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become" ("On Shakespeare and Milton" 47). Rather than presenting the reader with "the moody abstraction of a single mind," Shakespeare's "characters are real beings of flesh and blood" (88). This echoes Hazlitt's suggestion in an earlier piece of criticism that in Shakespeare, "The broad distinctions and governing principles of human nature are presented not in the abstract, but in their immediate and endless appeal to different persons and things" ("Mr. Kean's Macbeth" 204). As he would later summarize: "If a bias to abstraction is evidently, then, the reigning spirit of the age, dramatic poetry must be allowed to be most irreconcilable with this spirit; it is essentially individual and concrete" (qtd. in Bromwich 132).

Hazlitt's criticism of Endymion was that it was too personal and egotistical; in other words, it was modern, not dramatic, poetry. He argues that "[Keats] painted his own thoughts and character; and did not transport himself into the fabulous and heroic ages" ("On Effeminacy of Character" 255). J.H. Reynolds, Keats's friend, who also attended Hazlitt's lectures, uses this terminology to argue a different conclusion—the poem is dramatic. He claims that "Mr. Keats has none of this egotism [of Byron]" and, unlike Wordsworth, who "lost himself by looking at his own image in the waters," Keats "does not...obtrude his person before you"; "You do not see him where you see [nature]" (648). He goes on to explicitly align Keats with dramatic poetry by characterizing a quotation from Endymion as "truly Shakespearean" (649) and describing Keats as "a spirit kindred with [the old dramatists]" (649).

Another of Keats's friends, Richard Woodhouse, also situates his review of Endymion within the debate over the relative merits of modern and dramatic poetry.[1] While Hazlitt objects to the omnipresence of modern poets in their work, Woodhouse claims that "The secret of the success of our modern poets, is their universal presence in their poems—they give to every thing the colouring of their own feeling; and what a man has felt intensely—the impressions of actual existence—he is likely to describe powerfully: what he has felt we can easily sympathize with" (362). Like Hazlitt, Woodhouse criticizes emotional abstraction but he does not equate abstraction with modern poetry. By "their universal presence in their poems," modern poets can communicate their emotions strongly and produce a correspondingly strong emotional reaction in the reader. Keats "goes out of himself into a world of abstractions" (362) and as a result, his poems fail his audience because "to transfer the mind to the situation of another, to feel as he feels, requires an enthusiasm, and an abstraction beyond the power or the habit of most people" (363). Keats suffers from a kind of emotional solipsism. Enclosed in his own world and unaware of his audience, he cannot make his readers feel with him. Woodhouse concludes that Keats needs "to make us feel by *telling us what he felt*: and this is to be done by calculating on the effects on *others'* feelings, and not by abandoning ourselves to our own" (363). This criticism of Keats's emotional abandonment and its effect of abstraction is echoed by Francis Jeffrey, who claims that Keats's emotion is "poured out without measure or restraint, and with no apparent design but to unburden the breast of the author, and give vent to the overflowing vein of his fancy" (204). He concludes that "The scope of Mr. Keats's poetry is rather too dreary and abstracted to excite the strongest interest" (206). The lack of emotional control shows a failure to consider his audience and excite its interest.

Jeffrey's review suggests that this abstraction is reproduced on a formal level. He imagines that "Keats has taken the first word that presented itself to make a rhyme, and then made that word the germ of a new cluster of images...till he had covered his pages with an interminable arabesque of connected and incongruous figures" (204-5). This "interminable arabesque of connected and incongruous figures" implies that the poem produces the stylistic effect of vagueness and confusion. Other reviewers claim that Endymion has no form at all. Peter George Patmore states, "it is not a poem at all. It is...a flush—a fever—a burning light" (381). Hazlitt sees Endymion as unformed and un-classical: "there is nothing tangible in it, nothing marked or palpable—we have none of the hardy spirit or rigid forms of antiquity....All is soft and flesh, without bone or muscle" ("On Effeminacy of Character" 255). In this he agrees with Lockhart, who described Keats's style as "loose" and "nerveless" (522). If the undesirable form is abstract, then it follows that the desirable form is concrete. Hazlitt links desirable poetic form to the concrete forms of Greek statuary, as does Reynolds, although he once again is proving a different point. Reynolds insists on the tangibility of the verse: "in the structure of his verse, and the sinewy quality of his thoughts, Mr. Keats greatly resembles old Chapman, the nervous translator of Homer. His mind has 'thews and limbs like to its ancestors'" (649). The language—"sinews," "limbs"—refers back to the body and ultimately to classical sculpture: Endymion "has all the naked and solitary vigour of old sculpture" (649).

II. Hazlitt and Dramatic Poetry

"I am convinced that there are three things to rejoice at in this Age—The Excursion Your Pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of Taste" (Letters 1: 203).[2]

Keats's letters, written in the early months of 1818, show the influence of his attendance at Hazlitt's lectures. In a letter to Reynolds describing the difference between the moderns and the Elizabethans, Keats echoes Hazlitt's distinction between dramatic and modern poetry:

> We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us—and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject.—How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, 'admire me I am a violet! dote upon me I am a primrose! Modern poets differ from the Elizabethans in this. Each of the moderns like an Elector of Hanover governs his petty state, & knows how many straws are swept daily from the Causeways in all his dominions & has a continual itching that all the Housewives should have their coppers well scoured. (Letters 1: 224)[3]

Modern poetry is guilty both of withdrawing from the reader, "put[ting] its hand in its breeches pocket," and of thrusting itself forward, "crying out, 'admire me.'" It also puts the reader in a defensive position: "It may be said that we ought to read our Contemporaries. that Wordsworth &c should have their due from us. but for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist" (Letters 1. 223). This "bullying" of the reader is meant to suggest modern poetry's distance from dramatic poetry, which in Hazlitt's formulation, depends on the reader's sympathy: "The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves" ("On Shakespeare and Milton" 52).

We can see the influence of this attitude towards the audience in Keats's prefaces to Endymion. The poem was finished by fall 1817, and Keats was revising and preparing it for publication from January-April 1818, at the same time that he was attending Hazlitt's lectures. Jeffrey Cox argues that Keats's preface to Endymion "insists on the audience's defining role for poetry....Keats expresses a commitment to the importance of reception not simply as the justification or disqualification of the work of art but as fundamentally constitutive of it" (350). Keats, prodded by Reynolds and his publisher John Taylor, tried to make his work more marketable by defining a sympathetic relationship between the poet and audience. In the two prefaces that he wrote, Keats struggles to present himself and his poem for public consumption. The draft preface assumes that the reader is not interested in his life or his poems: "In a great nation, the work of an individual is of so little importance; his pleadings and excuses are so uninteresting; his 'way of life' such a nothing, that a preface seems a sort of impertinent bow to strangers who care nothing about it" (506).[4] Keats reinforces the portrait of his audience as "strangers" when he claims that his first book "was read by some dozen of my friends who lik'd it; and some dozen whom I was unacquainted with, who did not" (506). Reynolds and Taylor complained about this preface and so Keats revised it, acknowledging that it contained an "undersong of disrespect to the Public" (Letters 1: 267).[5] The revised preface focuses instead on pleasing the audience.

The revised preface was published with Endymion in April 1818. In it, Keats identifies his former self with the poem in order to distance himself from his poem's inadequacies and foster the audience's sympathy and identification. Rather than a stranger, the reader becomes a sympathetic listener who is encouraged to understand the poem in light of Keats's personal development: "The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted" (64).[6] He shifts from an appeal for the reader's pity in the draft preface (in which he quotes the Renaissance playwright John Marston: "'let it be the Curtsey of my peruser rather to pity my self hindering labours than to malice me'" (507)) to an appeal for sympathy: "This may be speaking too presumptuously, and may deserve a punishment: but no feeling man will be forward to inflict it: he will leave me alone, with the conviction that there is not a fiercer hell than the failure in a great object" (64). Underlying this appeal is the supposition that the reader understands Keats's mind: the "feeling man" will leave him to his own "fiercer hell."

While readying the volume for the press and writing (and re-writing) the preface, Keats was also planning a trip to Scotland. His purpose was to get material for poems and in a more general sense, to gain experience. As he famously wrote: "I know nothing. I have read nothing and I mean to follow Solomon's directions of 'get Wisdom—get understanding'" (Letters 1: 271).[7] While in Scotland, Keats composed a series of three poems inspired by the Scottish poet Robert Burns. These poems illustrate his struggle to translate his theoretical grasp of dramatic and modern poetic modes into action. In "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns," "This mortal body of a thousand days," and "There is a joy in footing slow across a silent plain," all composed in July 1818, Keats moves away from the poet's presence in the poem towards a more detached point of observation. He also moves away from the poems as an unmediated outpouring of the poet's feeling to an attempt to account for the audience's feeling—in Woodhouse's words, to "calculate effects."

Stuart Sperry points out that "Keats admired and identified himself with Burns," especially "his courage and determination to succeed against the obstacles humble birth or a hostile society could place in his way" (139). Although not himself an agricultural laborer, as a poet who did not have access to a university education, Keats sympathized with Burns and saw their careers in similar terms—as struggle. Despite this desire to identify with Burns, Keats's visits to his tomb or his cottage produce feelings of alienation. Keats includes the sonnet "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns" in letter to his brother Tom.[8] The letter registers a sense of disappointment with the tomb, the countryside, and the poem: "This Sonnet I have written in a strange mood, half asleep. I know not how it is, the Clouds, the sky, the Houses, all seem anti Grecian & anti Chralemagnish—I will endeavour to get rid of my prejudices & tell you fairly about the Scotch--" (Letters 1: 309). The sonnet itself registers this state—what he sees is "Cold," "strange," and "dream"-like. The second poem, "This mortal body," included in a letter of July 13, 1818, is written at Burns's cottage and shares the clouded perceptions of its predecessor. Keats is even more displeased with this poem, calling it "so bad" and later (on July 22), "wretched." This self-criticism is not typical of his letters and reveals that he was particularly frustrated by his failures.

The Endymion reviews criticized Keats for his presence in the poem. In the Burns poems he begins to acknowledge that his presence is problematic; it makes it difficult to see and communicate clearly. Interestingly, Keats saw his visit to Burns's cottage as a negation of self rather than an assertion of its presence: "One of the pleasantest means of annulling self is approaching such a shrine as the Cottage of Burns" (Letters 1: 323). However, the self proves to be neither pleasant nor easy to annul. The poem describes Keats's physical response to being in the cottage: his "pulse is warm," "head is light," and "eyes are wandering." His response is one of blindness, confusion, drunkenness, and blurred perception.[9] At the same time, his actions mimic Burns's. He "stamp[s] [his] foot upon thy floor," he "ope[s] thy window-sash" to see the landscape. It is this superimposition that troubles him. Bennett suggests that "By conflating the living poet, 'Keats', 'this mortal body,' with the absent, mortal but immortalised body of Burns, the poem allows for an identification of the living poet with the immortal one" (155). I read the poem less positively, prompted by Keats's sense of the poem's failure.

Keats seems affected less by a vision of Burns's literary immortality than by his mortal pain. In anticipating his visit to the cottage, Keats wrote: "we need not think of his misery—that is all gone—bad luck to it—I shall look upon [my visit] hereafter with unmixed pleasure as I do upon my Stratford on <and> Avon day" (Letters 1: 323). Although he initially feels that "we need not think of his misery," his encounter with Burns's garrulous landlord forces him to reevaluate this statement: "[Burns'] Misery is a dead weight upon the nimbleness of one's quill—I tried to forget it—to drink Toddy without any Care—to write a merry Sonnet—it wont do—he talked with Bitches—he drank with Blackguards, he was miserable—" (Letters 1. 325). Rather than "a merry Sonnet" he writes "This mortal body." This focus on Burns's misery is the key to understanding the poem's failure. Sympathizing with Burns's pain, Keats feels that pain; it disorients him and he is caught in a wave of emotion. Like Endymion, this poem expresses unmediated emotion and is therefore an example of the "egotistical sublime" of modern poetry.

The last of the three Burns poems, "There is a joy in footing slow across a silent plain," responds to "This mortal body."[10] One of the few interpreters of the poem, Andrew Bennett, argues that when we read "This mortal body" retrospectively, we experience sympathy with

Keats, because we read it with the knowledge that his own death came close to 1,000 days after writing the poem. I read this poem as an attempt to reshape the overwhelming and disabling emotion displayed in the sonnets, to get the emotion right, to redo the experience, and above all, to make that experience meaningful for his readers. Rather than placing his own experience at the center of the poem, Keats universalizes that experience and rewrites the self-absorption that characterized his earlier attempts to sympathize and identify with Burns as madness. The obvious differences between the sonnets and "There is a joy" are that Keats is not a character in the poem and the tone is more measured and detached. The poem describes a "Palmer" or pilgrim's visit to the highlands to see "a Bard's low Cradle-place about the silent North." Although the poem is about Keats's visit to Burns's birthplace, it does not make specific references to Keats or Burns. Related to this shift in emphasis from personal to general is a movement from an excessive, uncontrolled emotional response to a more measured, detached viewpoint. In "This mortal body," Keats describes his physically overwhelmed response in Burns's cottage. "There is a joy" describes the dangers of this emotional excess and self-absorption: "At such a time the Soul's a Child, in Childhood is the brain / Forgotten is the worldly heart." This return to childhood is a type of madness and the madman, "half ideot," is a cautionary figure in this poem. The palmer could become mad if he lingers too long: "Scanty the hour and few the steps, because a longer stay / Would bar return, and make a Man forget his mortal way."

These lines from the climax of the poem convey the dangers by opposing two sets of images:

> O horrible! to lose the sight of well remember'd face,
> Of Brother's eyes, Of Sister's Brow, constant to every place;

Filling the Air as on we move with Portraiture intense
More warm than those heroic tints that fill a Painter's sense--
When Shapes of old come striding by and visages of old,
Locks shining black, hair scanty grey and passions manifold.
No, No, that horror cannot be—for at the Cable's length
Man feels the gentle Anchor pull and gladdens in its strength--.

The abstract "Shapes" are opposed to the wholesome materiality of the "well remember'd face." They are "intense" and "warm" as opposed to "scanty grey." The horror of abstraction here is countered by the concrete, which acts as a "gentle Anchor pull" to restore "Man" to sanity. The poem thus exhibits a number of the characteristics associated with dramatic poetry—the poet is not present in the poem, but rather controls his emotion while delighting in the concrete.

Keats expressed his desire to annul the self by sympathizing and identifying with Burns. However, he found that he could not control his emotional response to Burns's misery. Keats tried to repress Burns's sorrow, pain, and failure, but they continued to rise to the surface, sabotaging the poems. In order to convert these negative emotions into art, Keats had to return to an earlier attempt to formulate a dramatic poetics. Keats was revising the finished draft of Endymion while he was attending Hazlitt's lectures. Influenced by Hazlitt's notion of the dramatic, he decided to insert a new passage into the text. He notes of this passage that "It set before me at once the gradations of Happiness even like a kind of Pleasure Thermometer—and this is my first Step towards the chief Attempt in the Drama—the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow" (Letters 1: 218-9).[11] In this formulation of the drama, the emotion of the poet is not the focus. Instead, the drama is about "the playing of different Natures with Joy and

Sorrow." Keats's famous formulation of the poetical character, written three months after the Burns poems, represents a return to this "first Step":

> As to the poetical Character itself, (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is itself a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosop[h]er, delights the camelion Poet....A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea, and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. (Letters 1: 386-7)[12]

The poetical character is open to all varieties of human experience—"it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated."

Keats's conception of poetical character is indebted to Hazlitt on several counts. Hazlitt emphasized the importance of emotion in dramatic representation: "The poet, to do justice to his undertaking, must not only identify himself with each, but must take part with all by turns, 'to relish all as sharply, passioned as they';--must feel scorn, pity, love, hate, anger, remorse, revenge, ambition" (qtd. in Bromwich 133). Keats's "poetical character" also builds on Hazlitt's distinction between dramatic and modern poetry. He distinguishes "the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" from "the camelion poet" who "has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen." Finally, Keats's statement that a poet "is continually in for—and filling some other

Body" recalls Hazlitt's description of Shakespeare's genius: "The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given" ("On Shakespeare and Milton" 50). Yet while Hazlitt's Shakespeare seems to delight in his own power, Keats's chameleon poet identifies fully with each object and delights in its concreteness. For example, Shakespeare's ability to enter into different bodies and the reference to ventriloquism suggest manipulation. We can see this even more clearly in some of Hazlitt's other descriptions: "'All corners of the earth...' are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men" ("On Shakespeare and Milton" 47). Hazlitt's language emphasizes Shakespeare's surveillance and control. The poet has a penetrating gaze; he is god-like and powerful. Whereas Keats suggests that "if a sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel" (Letters 1: 186) and Woodhouse recalls, "He has affirmed that he can conceive of a billiard Ball that it may have a sense of delight from its own roundness, smoothness <& very> volubility. & the rapidity of its motion--" (Letters 1: 389).[13]

III. 1820 and After

Thus far I have been mapping Keats's struggle to achieve a dramatic poetics by controlling his presence in his poems, his emotion, and the reader's emotional response to his work. Many reviews of Endymion criticized Keats's overflowing, solipsistic emotion and the promiscuous blending of Keats and his protagonist. However, the positive reviews of Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and Other Poems (1820) suggest that readers are no longer alienated. These reviews emphasize the reader's emotional response and sympathy with the characters.

Keats was not entirely sure that the dramatic approach to emotion would be successful. Of "Isabella" he commented, "in my dramatic capacity I enter fully into the feeling: but in Propria Persona I should be apt to quiz it myself" (Letters 2: 174).[14] However, it was one of the most remarked upon poems in the volume and the reviewers commented positively on its emotional appeal. According to The New Monthly Magazine, "he tells the tale with a naked and affecting simplicity which goes irresistibly to the heart" (246). Charles Lamb calls Isabella "the finest thing in the volume" (Critical Heritage 157), noting of one scene, "there is nothing more awfully simple in diction, more nakedly grand and involving in sentiment, in Dante, in Chaucer, or in Spenser" (158).[15] "Ode to a Nightingale" is also praised as "distinct, noble, pathetic, and true: the thoughts have all chords of direct communication with naturally-constituted hearts: the echoes of the strain linger about the depths of human bosoms" (Scott 318). This praise implicitly compares Keats to Shakespeare, specifically Hazlitt's description of Shakespeare's genius. Hazlitt suggested that "The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds—so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another" ("On Shakespeare and Milton" 47). Like Shakespeare, who has the "power of communication with all other minds," Keats has the power of "communication with naturally-constituted hearts." The change of "minds" to "hearts" emphasizes the dominant role that emotion plays for readers in Keats's late work. The descriptor—"naturally-constituted"—is intended to put readers, especially politically motivated ones, on the defensive. Who would admit to having an "unnaturally-constituted" heart?

The emotional connection described in these reviews occurs with Keats's work rather than with Keats himself, which suggests that Keats has successfully made his poems more dramatic. According to Hazlitt's definition, "The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves." Keats's contemporaries judge Hyperion according to this standard. Francis Jeffrey cautions, "We cannot advise the completion [of Hyperion], the subject is too far removed from all the sources of human interest, to be successfully treated by any modern author" (213). Percy Bysshe Shelley has the opposite reaction to the poem. His biographer Thomas Medwin claims, "He used to say that 'the scenery and drawing of his Saturn Dethroned, and the fallen Titans, surpassed those of Satan and his rebellious angels in the *Paradise Lost*,--possessing more human interest" (307). In both cases, it is "human interest"—the reader's reaction to the subject—that makes the poem a success or a failure.

As was the case with the Endymion reviews, these reviews link the dramatic nature of the poems to a concrete style:

> These poems are very far superior to any which their author has previously committed to the press. They have nothing showy, or extravagant, or eccentric about them; but are pieces of calm beauty, or of lone and self-supported grandeur. There is a fine freeness of touch about them, like that which is manifest in the old marbles, as though the poet played at will his fancies virginal, and produced his most perfect works without toil. (New Monthly Magazine 245)

This "self-supported grandeur" translates into a concreteness of style—associated, as it was in the Endymion reviews, with the classical, particularly Greek sculpture. In the review just quoted, the reference to "the old marbles" would signal the Elgin marbles in contemporary readers' minds. The Elgin marbles were the Greek Parthenon sculptures brought to England by Lord Elgin. The marbles were a popular topic of aesthetic debate during the period, discussed by Keats's friend, the painter Benjamin Haydon, and Hazlitt; Keats wrote a sonnet "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles." Once again, Hazlitt's "Lectures on the English Poets" provides a critical touchstone: "In their faultless excellence [the marbles] appear sufficient to themselves....their forms are a reproach to common humanity. They seem to have no sympathy with us, and not to want our admiration" ("On Poetry in General" 11).[16] Hazlitt's description of the marbles as "sufficient to themselves" and "a reproach to common humanity" is echoed in the review's description of the "lone and self-supported grandeur" of Keats's poems. This review defines Keats's style as concrete and classical. However, instead of focusing on the "sinews" of the verse, as Reynolds does in his review of Endymion, the reviewer invokes the sculpture as an art object. Keats consciously tried to achieve this stylistic effect of concreteness and classicism. In envisioning the difference between Endymion and "Hyperion," his second attempt at epic, he resolves to treat the latter poem "in a more naked and grecian Manner" (Letters 1: 207).[17] His success is reflected in the reviewers' reference to his poems' "naked and affecting simplicity" and in the observation that his work is "awfully simple in diction...nakedly grand and involving in sentiment."

However, with Keats's sickness and death, this movement reverses itself again and he is conflated with the protagonist of "Ode to a Nightingale." In the review of "Ode to a Nightingale" discussed earlier, the poem produces emotion through "chords of direct communication with all naturally-constituted hearts"—a kind of communication that is predicated on the work's universality. After Keats's death, it is not his universality but the particularity of his situation that produces an emotional response. In his review of Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and other Poems, Leigh Hunt reads "Ode to a Nightingale" as an expression of Keats's emotions during his final illness:

> The poem will be the more striking to the reader, when he understands what we take a friend's liberty in telling him, that the author's powerful mind has for some time past been inhabiting a sickened and shaken body, and that in the mean while it has had to contend with...critical malignity,—that unhappy envy, which would wreak its own tortures upon others, especially upon those that really feel for it already. (345)

Hunt suggests that knowledge of Keats's "sickened and shaken body" enhances the reader's understanding of the poem. Indeed the poem, which begins, "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk," develops multiple images of pain and death.[18]

After Keats's death, the speaker's address to the nightingale is read retrospectively as an expression of Keats's desire to:

> drink, and leave the world unseen,
> And with thee fade away into the forest dim:
> Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
> What thou among the leaves hast never known,
> The weariness, the fever, and the fret
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad last gray hairs,
> Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies.

One obituary comments, "His sad and beautiful last wish is at last accomplished: it was that he might drink 'of the warm south,' and 'leave the world unseen.'—and—(he is addressing the nightingale)—And with thee fade away" (Critical Heritage 242).[19] The reference to the "warm south" reminds the reader that Keats died in Italy. The reviewer also quotes stanza 3 (which begins "Fade far away"), italicizing "Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies" to intensify the biographical echo. Another obituary also reads "Ode to a Nightingale" as an expression of Keats's "wishes": "It appears that Keats had a presentiment he should never return to England, and that he communicated it to more than one person. He is said to have wished to drink 'of the warm South,' and 'leave the world unseen;' and his wish was accordingly fulfilled" (Critical Heritage 244).[20]

After Keats's death, he was also conflated with the protagonist of Endymion in elegies and tribute poems. However, while this conflation previously furnished the grounds for Lockhart's savage attack, these poems make the connection to evoke a sympathetic response in the audience. In "Written in Keats's 'Endymion,'" Thomas Hood muses, "I grew sad to think / Endymion's foot was silent on those mountains." In "Keats," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow writes, "The young Endymion sleeps Endymion's sleep; / The shepherd-boy whose tale was left half told."[21] How is it that Endymion can now sustain this type of reading? Endymion is an epic, based on classical material. Its personal and emotional content, registered so strongly in the contemporary reviews, seemed out of place in an epic. In contrast, "Ode to a Nightingale" was better suited to evoke a sympathetic response. The ode uses the language of sensibility to describe the speaker's mental and bodily unease. Readers knew how to respond to sensibility in an ode but not in an epic. However, after Keats's death, it became possible to read Endymion in personal terms.

George Ford writes of Keats, "In the reputation of no other English poet has the question of personality played such a significant role in its development" (68). The "question of personality" in Keats's reception is a particularly complicated one. The personal, in the form of the poet's emotions, can overwhelm the reader and biographical details can alienate the poet from his audience. However, the personal can also generate sympathy for and interest in the poet. I have considered the personal in the context of a larger debate about modern and dramatic poetry. Francis Jeffrey claimed, "The scope of Mr. Keats's poetry is rather too dreary and abstracted to excite the strongest interest," and it was this aesthetic problem of emotional self-absorption that Keats had to address (206). While Keats shaped and reworked the personal in his poems, crafting a dramatic poetics that would appeal to his readers, the role that the personal played in his reception was ultimately beyond his control. After his death, his poems do "excite the strongest interest," but this is because they are read through a biographical lens. The result, in the words of his first biographer, Richard Monckton Milnes, was that "he was held to owe a certain personal interest, which his poetic reputation hardly justified" (1: xvii).

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Notes

[1] According to G.M. Matthews, "J.H. Reynolds has been suggested as the author of this remarkable little review....Its style and content, however, point rather to Richard Woodhouse" (Critical Heritage 87).

[2] John Keats to B.R. Haydon, January 10, 1818

[3] February 3, 1818.

[4] The text of the draft preface is taken from Complete Poems, ed. John Barnard.

[5] John Keats to J.H. Reynolds, April 9, 1818.

[6] The text of the revised preface is taken from Complete Poems, ed. Jack Stillinger.

[7] John Keats to John Taylor, April 24 1818.

[8] July 2, 1818. The text of "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns" is taken from this letter.

[9] The text of "This mortal body" is taken from Complete Poems, ed. Stillinger.

[10] In a letter of July 22, 1818, Keats refers to "This mortal body" and then comments, "I wrote some lines cousin-german to the circumstance" (Letters 1: 344). The text of this poem is taken from Letters 1: 344-5.

[11] John Keats to John Taylor, January 30, 1818.

[12] John Keats to Richard Woodhouse, October 27, 1818.

[13] John Keats to Benjamin Bailey, November 22, 1817. Richard Woodhouse to John Taylor, c. October 27, 1818.

[14] John Keats to Richard Woodhouse, September 21-22, 1819.

[15] New Times, 19 July 1820.

[16] It is worth noting that Hazlitt does not view these characteristics as positively as the reviewer does.

[17] John Keats to B.R. Haydon, January 23, 1818.

[18] The text of the poem is taken from Complete Poems, ed. Stillinger.

[19] "Barry Cornwall" (Bryan Waller Procter) London Magazine, April 1821.

[20] New Monthly Magazine, 1 May 1821. Jeffrey Robinson argues that quotation plays a central role in tribute poems to Keats: "Quotation often fetishizes the original, metonymically: to quote a phrase of Keats is to possess by reclaiming a part of Keats himself, his body becomes his spirit. To quote is also to write a fragment of biography; the lines of poetry are subdued by the story of the life" (77). A similar impulse is also at work in these obituaries.

[21] The texts of these poems are taken from Jeffrey Robinson's Reception and Poetics in Keats (168, 174).

"The pruning hook has been over me agen":

Violence as Protest in John Clare

The 1820s were years of profound highs and lows for John Clare. His first volume, Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery, was published in 1820, the peak year of poetic production for that decade. Clare's book was an unexpected success, going through four editions in one year. Clare became an instant celebrity and newspapers and journals discussed his "natural genius" and debated his significance to British literary culture and his relationship to other peasant poets such as Robert Bloomfield and Robert Burns. The Village Minstrel, which appeared in 1821, was a lesser success and with the publication of this work there was a sense that Clare's novelty had faded. No new book of poems by Clare appeared until The Shepherd's Calendar in 1827, but by the time his third book was published, the market for the single-author book of poetry had declined and the reading public was no longer fascinated with peasant poets. Neither this volume nor The Rural Muse (1835) came close to matching the popularity of Poems Descriptive.

The personal was a significant part of Clare's initial appeal, as his publisher and editor John Taylor makes clear in his introduction to Poems Descriptive. Taylor presented Clare to his readers within a biographical context, suggesting that "The following Poems will probably attract some notice by their intrinsic merit; but they are also entitled to attention from the circumstances under which they were written. They are the genuine productions of a young Peasant, a day-labourer in husbandry" (vii). Taylor's description of the poems, first as "genuine productions" and later as "a picture of what [Clare] has constantly witnessed and felt," also provides a model for interpreting Clare's work as the authentic expression of the poet's experiences and emotions (ix). Taylor's description of a visit to Clare's home in Helpston, published in the London Magazine, further emphasizes this authenticity since he repeatedly notes the correspondence between Clare's poems and the landscapes and individuals he encounters during his visit. For example, Taylor writes, "I saw Clare's father in the garden: it was a fine day, and his rheumatism allowed him just to move about, but with the aid of two sticks, he could scarcely drag his feet along: he can neither kneel nor stoop. I thought of Clare's lines: 'I'll be thy crutch, my father, lean on me'" (Critical Heritage 162).

Clare suspected that the readers who visited his cottage wanted to text this authenticity. They had "a mere curiosity to expect to know wether I realy was the son of a thresher and a laboring rustic" ("Autobiographical Fragments" 118). In his letters and autobiographical prose, Clare complains that these visitors disrupt his work: "I went to work as usual but was often tormented and sent for home to satisfye the gaze of strangers" ("Autobiographical Fragments" 118). Clare's phrase, "the gaze of strangers," registers the extent to which the personal and the bodily were a significant part of the marketing and consumption of his work. As Elizabeth Helsinger claims, "He, not his poems, was the rural scene they believed they had purchased" (520). The result was that his visitors regarded him as a form of popular entertainment: "they send for me twice & three times a day out of the fields & I am still the strangers poppet show"; "I am sought after very much agen now...but let me wait another year or two & the peep show will be over" (Letters 89, 141).[1] As these references to the "poppet show" and the "peep show" suggest, Clare is a visual spectacle.[2]

In this chapter, I argue that Clare expresses his feelings of vulnerability and exploitation most strongly in his letters and autobiographical prose. These texts convey an almost obsessive attention to metaphorical images of violence perpetrated against his body by patrons, editors, critics, and readers. On one level, these images allow Clare to express his anger. As a laborer-poet, he had limited control over his career, which was shaped by the agendas of editors and patrons, and the whims of readers whose interest in peasant poetry lasted only as long as the genre was in fashion. More importantly, this recurrent and significant pattern of imagery critiques unjust and unequal power structures. By figuring himself as a tree that is pruned, cut, and suffocated, Clare links his personal experience in the literary marketplace to the enclosure of common lands, a manifestly political act. Clare also makes visible the economic imperatives that govern the sale of literary texts when he uses his readers' consumption of his body as a metaphor for textual consumption.

Clare's critique has affinities with the genre of the complaint. According to Lauren Berlant, the complaint "addresse[s] personal, social, or institutional struggles witnessed by a powerful voice that aims to reveal (to the reading audience, and often to the recalcitrant or disappointing object of the invective) an injustice perpetrated against the speaker or something the speaker represents" (242-3). Clare's complaint reveals that relationships in the literary marketplace between the poet and his editors, patrons, critics, and readers replicate the oppression of the powerless by the powerful in British society. Clare does not merely expose these wrongs. In his poems and his prose, he counters the exploitation of the "common people" in both the literary marketplace and society as a whole by identifying them as the true audience for poetry and the productive heart of the nation's social body. Significantly, he does not restrict their role as audience to his own poetry, or that of other peasant poets, but extends it to Byron, an aristocrat and one of the most popular poets of the day.

I. Patrons and Editors

Writing to his editor and publisher John Taylor, Clare expresses his frustration at the attempts by his primary patron, Lord Radstock, to censor and alter several poems in his first volume, including "Helpstone" and "Dawnings of Genius": "D--n that canting way of being forced to please I say—I cant abide it & one day or other I will show my Independance more stron[g]ly then ever" (Letters 69).[3] Radstock, an evangelical, a former Admiral, and the son of an earl, accused the two poems of political radicalism for their critique of the enclosure of common lands as a disfiguration of the landscape and a wanton abuse of the wealthy and powerful's "monied might." Clare's attitude towards enclosure is similar to that of the twentieth-century historian E.P. Thompson, who argues that the effects of enclosure were devastating: "In village after village, enclosure destroyed the scratch-as-scratch-can subsistence economy of the poor," and that the enclosures were motivated "by the desire for fatter rent-rolls and larger profits" (217).[4]

According to Eric Hobsbawn, "Some 5,000 'enclosures' under private and general Enclosure Acts broke up some six million acres of common fields and common lands from 1760 onwards, transform[ing] them into private holdings" (153). These acts also canceled many customary rights, including gleaning after the harvest and pasturing animals on the common. J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingay describe two particularly significant periods of enclosure: the 1760s-70s and 1793-1815 (the years of war with Napoleon's France) (77). Clare lived through the period of enclosure in his own village, Helpston: "The Act of Parliament for the Enclosure of Helpston was passed in 1809, and the final award was published in 1820" (Barrell 106). John Barrell explains that prior to enclosure, Helpston's land was cultivated using an "open field" system rather than being divided into individual farms. As a result, the visual changes brought by enclosure would have been particularly striking, since previously "There were very few permanent fences or hedges," and so "the eye moving over the long sweep of arable land was engaged by very little" (99).

Radstock singled out the following description of enclosure from "Helpstone" as an example of Clare's "radical slang," and all but the first two lines were omitted from the fourth edition of Poems Descriptive at his instigation:

> Now all laid waste by desolations hand
> Whose cursed weapon levels half the land
> Oh who could see my dear green willows fall
> What feeling heart but dropt a tear for all
> Accursed wealth o'er bounding human laws
> Of every evil thou remains the cause
> Victims of want those wretches such as me
> Too truly lay their wretchedness to thee
> Thou art the bar that keeps from being fed
> & thine our loss of labour & of bread
> Thou art the cause that levels every tree
> And woods bow down to clear a way for thee.[5]

"Helpstone" combines an emotional concern for enclosure's destruction of the landscape (the "feeling heart" cries for the "dear green willows") with a strong sense of its impact on its human victims and the political, economic, and social realities that make enclosure possible. "Accursed wealth o'er bounding human laws" is responsible for the "victims of want" who have lost "labour" and "bread." The poem invites us to see enclosure as having two sets of linked effects: on the landscape and on the laborers who inhabit it. As Johanne Clare argues, "Whether Clare wrote of life before enclosure or after, a social order and the labourer's experience within that order were always implicated in the landscapes he described" (41). And, as John Lucas claims, our awareness of this link is heightened through the poem's final line, "with its image of the woods as laborers who helplessly conspire in their own degradation. They too are deferential workers" (156).

It is this deference that Radstock demands when he requires Clare to cut these lines from "Helpstone." His directive appears in a letter to Eliza Louisa Emmerson, another of Clare's patrons, who then communicates it to Clare:

> you must tell him—to expunge certain highly objectionable passages in his 1st Volume—before the 3rd Edition appears—passages, wherein, his then depressed state hurried him not only into error, but into the most flagrant act of injustice; by accusing those of pride, cruelty, vices, and ill-directed passions—who, are the very persons, by whose truly generous and noble exertions he has been raised from misery and despondency….tell Clare if he has still a recollection of what I have done, and am still doing for him, he must give me unquestionable *proofs*, of being that man I would have him to be—he *must expunge*!" (Critical Heritage 61)[6]

When Radstock reminds Clare that "he has been raised from misery and despondency" and insists, "if he still has a recollection of what I have done, and am still doing for him...he *must expunge*," he defines Clare's public role as a grateful man who is aware of his debt to his social superiors. By forcing Clare to exhibit gratitude, he insists on a display of respect that reinforces the class distinctions unsettled by the poems that he wants to "expunge." In establishing Clare as grateful, Radstock constructs the patron-author relationship as a feudal one: Clare is the humble and submissive vassal to his generous and magnanimous lord. The relationship is clearly paternalistic as well: as Tim Chilcott observes, Radstock threatens to "publicly disown Clare" over this incident as if Clare were his disobedient son (92-3).

Clare's struggle with his patron Lord Rastock over the censoring of his enclosure poems led him to apply the figure of enclosure to their relationship. Radstock is wealthy and powerful and forces his will on the vulnerable Clare and his text, just as the enclosers exert their power over the poor and the land. Clare describes himself as a vulnerable natural object, a suffocated tree, in order to make Radstock's power visible. In a letter to Taylor, Clare claims that:

> if E.L.E. & L.R. [Eliza Louisa Emmerson and Lord Radstock] had found me out first & edited my poems what monsters would they have made can it be possible to judge I think praises of self & selfs noble friend & selfs incomparable poems undoubtedly shovd into the bargain woud have left little room for me & mine to grow up in the esteem of the public but shoud end into a dark corner they woud have servd as a foundation for their own buildings & dwindled away like the tree surrounded with Ivy while the names & praises of patron & poetess flourished in every page. (Letters 125)[7]

In this description, the assault on Clare's body and poems takes three different forms. First, he is trapped in a dark corner. More disturbing is the image of Clare as the foundation crushed under the weight of a building that represents Radstock and Emmerson's egotism: they build their fame on his. The final image, in which Clare figures himself as a tree suffocated by ivy, suggests that the patrons are parasites living on and destroying their poet/host. Implicit in this passage is a protest against the body- and mind-control exerted by Radstock and the hypocrisy of his patron's directive to recall "what I have done, and am still doing for him." Radstock claims that it is parasitic of Clare to take the material aids that his patron offers if he will not be guided by him and express gratitude. However, Clare turns this argument around in order to show that

Radstock and Emmerson are the parasitic ivy, using Clare and his poems as tools for their own self-aggrandizement. They are grasping for fame and using Clare to get it.[8]

Clare's letter is a sarcastic revision of his unpublished dedication to the second edition of Poems Descriptive.[9] In this dedication, he thanks his various noble patrons for their support and prays to heaven for "the rich & powerful to help up & be a prop to the weak & needy who directs the wise that are in the broad <road> way of fame to turn an eye to the dark cold corner of Obscurity where merit creeps his lonly way & dwindles in darkness like the lowley blossom coverd & hid in the long ramping grass" (Letters 32). "[T]he dark cold corner of Obscurity" becomes the "dark corner" in which he is confined by Radstock and Emmerson. "Merit" "dwindl[ing] like the lowley blossom coverd & hid in the long ramping grass" becomes Clare himself, "dwindl[ing] away like the tree surrounded with Ivy." Clare's modifications are slight but significant. The initial reference to "the lowley blossom coverd & hid" recalls feminized images of neglected rural beauty, such as Thomas Gray's reflection that "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, / And waste its sweetness on the desert air," or William Wordsworth's comparison of Lucy to "A Violet by a mossy stone / Half-hidden from the eye!"[10] Clare's use of this image in a dedication, which was intended to be a public document, suggests his ability to employ conventional images to serve his own purposes (in this case, self-promotion). By replacing the flower with the wounded tree, Clare invokes a different set of conventional images associated with the enclosure of common lands. Radstock and Emmerson's exploitation of Clare, figured as the destruction of a tree, recalls the "monied might" responsible for the enclosure of common lands, the destruction of trees, and the exploitation of the landscape and the laboring people associated with it.

Clare's publisher John Taylor was the recipient of this letter. Clare knew that Taylor, who often did not agree with Radstock, would be a sympathetic audience. In fact, Taylor did not want to censor the poems, although he agreed to do so after Clare requested it: "My opinion is fixed as to the Needlessness of these Omissions…but let them be expunged and welcome, since so decided….Set is to be made against you if they are not" (Critical Heritage 64). Clare's relationship with Taylor was generally positive, particularly early in his career when his volumes sold well, and he relied on Taylor to edit his poems and to give advice. Clare scholars have strong opinions about Taylor's editing, with the editors of recent editions of Clare's works arguing for a return to Clare's "original" texts.[11] In his letters, Clare associates Taylor's editing with enclosure and conflates his text, figured as a tree, with his body. The implicit references to enclosure recall Clare's anxiety about Radstock's patronage. However, while Radstock's editing is a form of censorship designed, as Clare acutely observes, to improve Radstock's own image, Clare's perception of Taylor's editing is more ambivalent. Taylor's "pruning" seems quite benign when compared to the "cutting" of Clare's poems on Bloomfield, carried out by the editor of Bloomfield's correspondence. This editor inspired Clare to reflect: "Editors are troubled with nice amendings & if Doctors were as fond of amputation as they are of altering & correcting the world would have nothing but cripples" (Journal 71).[12] However, Clare's references to the cutting and pruning of trees reveal an anxiety about Taylor's editing that Clare cannot express directly, especially when Taylor is his audience.

Clare's conflict is evident in this letter to Taylor, in which he veers back and forth between criticism and praise:

> You rogue you, the pruning hook has been over me agen but vain as I am of my abilities I must own your lopping off have bravely amended them the "Rural Evening" & "Cress

> Gatherer" in particular are now as compleat as anything in the Vols. but the "Pastoral" & "death of Dobbin" are left out to save the public 6d expense—but why do I rant & rattle on at this rate—friend I believe you are a caterer of profound wisdom in these matters you know what sort of a dish will suit the publics appetite better than I at all events you'll say "I ought to do." (Letters 204)[13]

Once again, Clare is the vulnerable tree ("the pruning hook has been over me agen"). But while Clare claims that the "lopping off" has improved the poems, there is an anxiety in this passage that cannot be repressed. The tone of the passage, at least initially, is genial, even playful. While Clare wants to maintain his genial tone, he cannot leave the issue of the editing alone; this is revealed by his question: "why do I rant & rattle on?" Clare's very questioning may seem, in turn, to undercut his expressions of anxiety.

This strange dynamic, in which Clare moves back and forth between critique and dismissal of critique, is characteristic of other moments in his letters as well. For example, in the introduction to The Village Minstrel, Taylor quotes Clare's response to "the purposed destruction of two elm trees which overhang his little cottage": "O was this country Egypt, and was I but a caliph, the owner should lose his ears for his arrogant presumption; and the first wretch that buried his axe in their roots should hang on their branches as a terror to the rest" (xx-xxi). Clare's excessive, violent response is followed by a more moderate statement: "A second thought tells me I am a fool: were all people to feel as I do, the world could not be carried on,—a green would not be ploughed—a tree or bush would not be cut for firing or furniture, and every thing they found when boys would remain in that state till they died" (xxi). As Sarah Zimmerman points out, "Taylor includes Clare's desire for revenge in order to defuse its impact, or rather to have Clare deflate it himself, for the poet goes on to voice second thoughts" (166).

Clare seems to reverse himself at the end of the passage, endorsing the status quo by adopting the rhetoric of progress and mocking himself for his passionate response. For some later readers, such as Edwin Paxton Hood, his outburst could also be redefined and contained as an example of "extreme sensibility": "And is there not an extreme sensibility indicated in the following strange extract from one of his letters. How affectingly does the vehemence of the former portion contrast with the wisdom of the latter:--" (Critical Heritage 258).[14] Lucas suspects that "Clare remembered to whom he was writing and tried to control his anguished rage, with the effect of almost splitting himself in half" (160). I would suggest that Clare is not merely concerned with his elm trees when he makes this complaint to Taylor. Clare also invokes the language of enclosure, which plows the common lands and cuts down trees, and calls attention to the enclosers' economic motives when he comments, "[t]he savage who owns them thinks they have done their best, and now he wants to make use of the benefits he can get from selling them" (xx).

Rather than undercutting his criticism then, Clare's question, "why do I rant & rattle on," reveals a real anxiety. Clare is troubled by the economic aspects of literary activity, particularly his awareness of readers as purchasers. When Clare lingers over the fact that "the 'Pastoral' & 'death of Dobbin' are left out to save the public 6d expense," we see his discomfort with the type of editing that cuts poems in order to make the price of the book more attractive to consumers.[15] Clare makes it clear that he sees his readers as consumers when he writes that the public has an "appetite" that is only satisfied by a certain "sort of dish." He associates the necessity of cultivating these consumers with Taylor, since Taylor is the one who knows the right "sort of dish" to satisfy their "appetite"; indeed, it is Taylor's own language that Clare echoes here. Several months earlier, Taylor described his plans to market Clare's next book: "Our plan must be, to publish two Volumes, entitled 'The Ways of a Village, with Songs, Sonnets, & other

Poems.'—and prefixing the head by Scriven, we shall have both Head and Heart, my Boy, to tickle the Fancies of your Friends with. When a 4th Vol is ready we will shew them where you live, like little Children who eat the Fruit out of the Pie before they begin the Crust" (Letters 126).[16] Taylor refers to Clare's readers as "little Children who eat the Fruit out of the Pie before they begin the Crust." In this case, the "dish" that will satisfy the public's appetite" is a personal one: engravings of Clare's portrait (the "head by Scriven") and his cottage ("we will show them where you live").

As the decade wore on, Clare's relationship with Taylor worsened. Taylor was busy with his troubled publication, the London Magazine, and Clare resented his failure to read new work in a timely fashion and his lack of support for a third book. Clare's frustration with Taylor's delay is apparent in his negative comments on "booksellers" in his autobiographical prose: "if a book suits them they write a fine friendly letter to the author if not they neglect to write..." ("Autobiographical Fragments" 148). But Clare was also troubled by the suspicion that his relationship with Taylor, which he believed to be a friendship, was merely a business arrangement, and he "advise[d] young authors not to be upon too close friendships with booksellers that is not to make them bosom friends" because "their friendships are always built on speculations of profit like a farmer shewing his sample" ("Autobiographical Fragments" 148). A friendship based on "speculations of profit" would collapse in times of economic uncertainty: "like all other matters of trade interested friendships too close and hastily made must meet some time or other a drop in the market and leave one side dissapointed" ("Autobiographical Fragments" 148-9). During the 1820s, the single-author book of poetry experienced just such "a drop in the market." Taylor attributed the lackluster sales of Clare's third book, The Shepherd's Calendar (1827), to a declining interest in poetry: "The Season has been a very bad one for new

Books, & I am afraid the Time has passed away in which Poetry will answer" (Letters 394). Although Clare also acknowledges the vagaries of the market, replying to Taylor, "I feel very dissapointed at the bad sale of the new Poems but I cannot help it if the public will not read rhymes" (Letters 394), he still tries to reinforce their friendship by expressing concern for Taylor's business: "I hope for your sake that the Poems may turn the tide & sell better for Novels & such rubbish were in as bad repute once as Poetry now & may be again" (394).[17] Despite his popular success, Clare was a relatively powerless figure in the literary marketplace. In his relationship with Taylor and with readers in general (as we will see in the next section), he tries to replace the commodity-seller and commodity-consumer relationships with friendship, as a way of recreating these relationships on a more equal level.

II. Readers

As we have seen, Taylor describes Clare's audience as children eating pie—an obvious metaphor for the consumption of the poet's work. But since the "pie" refers specifically to engravings of Clare's portrait and his cottage, this metaphor also evokes the consumption of the poet himself. Clare expresses some anxiety about consumption in his letters describing Taylor's editing to suit the public's "appetite." This anxiety is linked to his awareness of the economic basis of literary activity and his own status as a commodity-object. We see similar concerns in Clare's more direct comments on his audience and readers. Clare's relationship with his audience, both professional readers (critics) and readers drawn from different classes and genders, is frequently couched in the language of consumption. This language allows Clare to express the anger and fear that stems in part from the too-close association of the poet and his work. However, Clare's comments also make visible the economic imperatives that drive the production of cultural objects and highlight the particularly destructive impact that the ideology of the marketplace can have on an author of his class.

I first want to look at two poems where Clare shows his awareness of himself as a commodified and consumable object while trying to shape his relationship with his readers: "The Author's Address to His Book" (1819) and "Address to a Copy of Clare's Poems" (1820).[18] In both poems, the book serves as Clare's double, and its experiences with readers in the marketplace mirrors his own. Written early in his career and unpublished during his lifetime, these poems suggest Clare's ambivalence about audience.

In "The Author's Address to His Book" (1819), Clare takes up the problem of the relationship between the poet and his readers by describing his book's quest for an audience. While this device marks a separation between poet and book, the details of the poem tend to re-collapse it—the book has Clare's characteristics, and its journey stands in for his own journey through the marketplace: "Now little book the time is come / That thou must leave thy dad & home / To seek for friends." The bulk of the poem is a description of readerships (and friendships) to avoid. The first rejected audience is the one that most closely resembles the book. Clare counsels:

> for Friendship never go
> Mong (like thy self) the mean & low
> But pass thou by the peasants door
> Who's quite as ign'rant as their poor
> A sensless laugh & silly stare
> With humming here & hahing there--
> 'Why's!—now't b't nonscense now its cem'

Thats all that thou mayst hope from them
For what can thou expect to find
Where Ignorance continues blind—
The ploughboy when behind his heels
The restless hogs tormenting squeals
Near seems supris'd about their bother
They're hogs & he expects no other
Such silly dunces pass 'em by
& ne'er so much as turn thy eye.

Although the peasants are "(like thyself)...mean & low," this similarity itself does not produce the "Friendship" that Clare desires. They are not a good audience for the book because they are "ign'rant," "senseless," and "silly," and in their ignorance see the book as possessing these very qualities: "Why's!—no'wt bu't nonscense now its cem." This line suggests Clare's anxiety about his neighbors' reception of the soon to be published Poems Descriptive. He worries that they will say: Clare's book is finally here, but it's nothing but nonsense.

The second audience that he warns the book away from, religious dissenters, is "quite as bad." This audience will not be sympathetic because they will see the book as worldly and sinful. They "Say every page wants rerevising & every ballad spir'tualizing / Call thee old Nickeys choise observant / & stil thy dad his humble servant." The third audience is the petty bourgeoisie, represented by the grocer, who does not read the book, but instead uses it in his shop:

Thee for his use he'll quickly handle
As rapper for some farthing candle

(His Customers politely pleasing
By Keeping Misses hands from greasing)
Or binding more disgracful stuff
Help goody to her ounce o' snuff.

This audience will pull the book apart for use as wrappers. The book will be torn apart, and its original purpose and value—as poetry—will be lost. Clare's final warning is against the farm and its inhabitants, particularly the "senseless wench[es]" who will use the book for curl papers and kindling:

think thourt for no other use
(So ignorance wi'us plays the deuce)
Then to rap their greazy heads
In curls each night they go to bed
Which every morning when they rise
Fresh kindling for the fire supplies
& pot & kettle holders serving.

These alternate uses for books were common during this period. For example, Byron describes a grocer who used Samuel Richardson's Pamela as waste paper to wrap his bacon and cheese. Byron wonders, "What would [Richardson] have said? What can anybody say, save what Solomon said long before us? After all, it is but passing from one counter to another, from the bookseller's to the other tradesman's—grocer or pastry-cook" (Letters 11).[19]

Sonia Hofkosh's reading of this letter suggests that it expresses Byron's anxieties about the fate of the poet's identity in the literary marketplace:

> Richardson's text undergoes a radical commercialization that violates the author's fame with the violation of the work's integrity. The fate of the book turns the author into the kind of Grub Street hack Byron deplored, whose work is subject to the designs and demands of tradesmen, be they publishers, printers, grocers, or pastry-cooks. [The grocer's] appropriation of the book as so much waste paper alienates the author from the distinct and stable personality—the properties of the self—that he seeks to express and confirm in his writing. (95).

Hofkosh describes a commercialization that re-classes the author as a "Grub Street hack," lowering his social prestige and diluting his authority. Moreover, the disassembly of the book echoes the dissolution of the author's "personality" or "self." While Clare is also outraged by this textual abuse, the episode that he describes actually seems to increase his authority and more firmly establish his self. First, he aligns himself with books of a higher class since these readers mistreat even "thy superiors & betters / Which fashion decks in golden Letters / 'Spite of their fine 'morocco backs / (A dress which thou must ever lack)." So, rather than being brought down to a lower level, Clare elevates himself above these readers because of his greater taste and discernment. Finally, rather than robbing Clare of his identity, this episode solidifies his sense of self. When he concludes in exasperation, "Such is their taste for Poetry!," he defines himself against these barbarians.

Having detailed the abominations of the ignorant, Clare introduces the final and only fitting audience for the book, "the learned." While Clare urged the book to "shun" the other audiences, he now advises the book to approach deferentially:

> Wi' scraping boot & bending bow
> & tho in manners little read

Simple, shanny, lowly bred
Yet never mind push forward book
Worth will excuse thy clownish look
Thy vulgar faults wi' them's but small
Good breeding over looks it all.

Here, the book is clearly described in classed terms: "Simple, shanny, lowly bred"; "clownish"; and "vulgar." Moreover, these are terms that Clare used to describe himself when he was seeking to make an impression on a more powerful correspondent in his letters.[20] The book is clearly in a subordinate position, approaching "Wi' scraping boot & bending bow." In the previous passages that I cited, the focus was on the audience; here, the focus is on the book's response, because while the plowman, grocer, and farmers' daughters were familiar to Clare, this audience was unknown. After setting out "To seek for friends," the book has finally found them.

However, as the description of the book's deference suggests, this friendship is not the same as equality. At the end of the poem, Clare rights this imbalance when he reasserts his own friendship with the book. He urges the book not to forget him once it has earned the notice of learned readers: "Dont let thy pride thy dad forsaking." He calls on the book not to "be asham'd" of the author's "condition," but to become an advocate for Clare by reminding the reader of his poverty: "But tell em how thou left him moping / Thro oblivions darkness grouping / Still in its dark corner ryhmeing," and encouraging the reader's generosity: "--Money would be useful stuff / To the wise a hints enough." He claims that if the book is successful in its mission, "Then we might face every weather / Gogging hand in hand together." Thus, the poem ends with an image of Clare and his book (not Clare and his reader) "hand in hand."

Clare revisits these issues in "Address to a Copy of Clare's Poems" (1820). However, now that his book has been published, Clare is less interested in finding an audience than in what happens now that his text is a purchasable object. As in the earlier poem, the book is described in classed terms that link it to Clare. However, now these classed terms are connected to descriptions of the text's monetary value and its physical appearance:

> & plain & simple as ye seem
> In value scarcly worth a groat
> I know yell meet a friends esteem
> & doubtless get a gilded coat.

The description of the text as "plain" and "simple" links the text to its author, a laborer-poet. These adjectives further describe the physical appearance of the text: published in boards, it would be plain. This plainness and simplicity also has an economic meaning—the "value" of the text is "scarcly...a groat." Yet, Clare suggests that this state is transient. The text will "meet a friends esteem," and being newly valued by the purchaser, be dressed up in "a gilded coat" or leather binding. Friendship is again the model for the relationship between the poet and reader. However, here the value of the text and the personal connection between text and reader are given concrete form in the expensive binding, so that commodification becomes the sign of friendship and value. The circumstances of the poem's composition support this reading. In a letter to his friend Octavius Gilchrist, Clare writes: "I have sent the verses I intended should accompany it [the volume], & to gratify my vanity hope you will paste it on the fly leaf of yours & tho hardly worth the cost I have fust it up to be in hopes of a 'gilded coat'" (29). Gilchrist had requested a volume and a dedication from Clare as a gesture of friendship and planned to paste a copy of the poem into a volume as a present to his sister-in-law. The various personal relationships that are marked by the exchange of this poem suggest the importance of friendship in Clare's theory of textual consumption.

In the earlier poem, Clare declared that it would be impossible for the book to get a "gilded coat" and expressed his fear that the advancement this signified might cause the book to disdain its author. In "Address to a Copy of Clare's Poems," this social climbing seems to fill him with amusement:

> L—d knows I coudnt help but laugh
> To see ye fixt among yer betters
> Upon the learned shelves set off
> & flas[h]t about wi golden letters.

The amusement seems to come from the incongruity of the book's situation—it has gotten above itself "among [its] betters" on "the learned shelves"—and appearance—"flas[h]t about wi golden letters." In this poem, the text is obviously a commodified object. Bound in expensive materials and stamped with golden markings, it is on display. Clare's own experience, after his initial success, gave him first-hand experience of being treated like a status object. For example, when he observes that visitors to his cottage "askd me if I kept a book to insert the names of visitors and on my answering in the negative they would often request to insert them on my paper," he suggests that by signing the book they would mark their participation in the cultural phenomenon that was "John Clare" ("Autobiographical Fragments" 119). Another example is a visitor who "begd my walking stick and after he had got it wanted me to write my name on the crook" ("Autobiographical Fragments" 119). Reading and visiting Clare gives readers a kind of status, one to which Clare objects in his autobiographical prose. While Clare seems to embrace this condition in the poem, there is also an undercurrent of alienation. Clare speculates that when he and the book "meet again," "Thoult turn thy nose up wi' disdain / & thinkt disgrace thy dad to own." In 1819, Clare returns his relationship and identification with his book to center stage at the end of the poem; here, Clare remains a simple man while the text puts on airs. So, although Clare embraces self-commodification for the purpose of cultivating an audience, he also suggests the extent to which his participation in the literary marketplace separates him from himself.

I now want to turn to Clare's theories about the impact of criticism on the creation and shaping of reading audiences. As he did with his patrons and editor, Clare links critics to images of enclosure, associating their elevation of "fashion" with the more general oppression of the powerless by the powerful. John Keats, who had been attacked in the Quarterly Review and Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine by politically motivated reviewers, was a salient figure for Clare's thinking about criticism. Clare also identified with Keats. Not only did they share an editor, who was very close to both men, but they were also close in age. In a letter, Clare recounts the critics' harsh treatment of Keats, and contrasts this with two popular poets: "Campbell & Rogers must be fine very fine   Because they are the critics own childern nursd in the critics garden & prund by the fine polishing knifes of the critics—they must be good no soul dare say otherwise—it would be out of the fashion—" (Letters 80-1).[21] This description of the critics makes use of the familiar image of pruning, and Campbell and Rogers are shaped in much the same way as Clare would later describe himself in relation to Taylor's editing.[22] Other references to enclosure reinforce the similarities between Clare's appraisal of the critics and his earlier critiques of patronage and editing. For Clare, criticism, like Radstock and Emmerson's patronage, is a self-interested exercise: "a critic like a gardener uses his pruning knife very often to keep it in action & find as he calls it a job—an old proverb is among us 'a gardener woud cut his fathers head off were he a tree'   so woud the other if his father was a book—to keep his hand in" (Letters 80-1).[23] Rather than evaluating texts according to objective standards of aesthetic and literary merit, they critique in order "to keep [their] hand[s] in." Clare also sees criticism as an economic tool, since critics "[sell] praise and abuse at market price" ("Autobiographical Fragments"133), and perhaps more insidiously, as an exercise in cultural power.[24]

These images highlight Clare's suggestion that literary fashion is another form of oppression, because fashion is the unquestioned consensus of critics with cultural power: "They must be good no soul dare say otherwise—it would be out of the fashion." Clare's discussion of fashion exposes the ideological underpinnings of his readers' "cultural consumption" of literary texts.[25] When readers appreciate Campbell and Rogers, poets validated by the critics, they gain cultural power. They not only mark themselves as members of a certain class (one that has the awareness and appreciation of what is, in Clare's words, "fine very fine"), but through their appreciation, they legitimize their own class standing.

It is not surprising that musing upon Keats's experience with critics leads Clare to speculate on the ideological nature of criticism, since it was well known that reviews of Keats's work were motivated by disdain for his association with Leigh Hunt and the Cockney School's liberal politics. In a letter to Taylor written after Keats's death, Clare urges their common editor to publish Keats's life and literary remains as a way of addressing the injustice done by the critics:

> I am anxious of getting my book out & not only that let me tell you but am as anxious of seeing you do justice to Keats by bringing him out agen which I hope you will loose no time to do—excuse my conscieted meddling advice—else I think the sooner you publish a vol of his remains with an account of his life &c the better while the ashes of

> genius is warm the public look with a tender anxiety for what it leaves behind—to let this get cold woud in my opinion do him an injury—the ill treatment he has met will now be productive of more advantages—tho the warm heart that once felt it—is cold & careless to praise or to censure now—still he left those hopes behind him—which his friends cherish in remembrance that justice woud be done him—the cold hearted butchers of annonymous Critics to <blast a> cut up everything that escapes their bribery or thinks contrary to them is polotics to rule genius—if it is—honesty & worth may turn swindlers & liberty be thrown to the dogs & worried out of existance—& that she has been long ago. (Letters 188-9)[26]

By the end of this long quotation, Clare has modified the imagery from his previous letter. The "pruning" of Campbell and Rogers becomes "the cold hearted butchers" who "cut up everything." He has also abandoned the more roundabout relationship of criticism and fashion to cultural power for a blunt statement that criticism is "polotics to rule genius." And he conflates the literary world with the social world—the situation created by this cold-hearted criticism is compared to a world in which "liberty be thrown to the dogs & worried out of existence." Thus, Taylor's publication of Keats's biography would satisfy the hopes of Keats's friends that "justice woud be done him," with the term "justice" taking on added meaning within this context. The discussion of Keats's friends and Clare's description of the appeal to the reader's "tender anxiety" suggest his continued interest in the nature of relationships in the literary marketplace. In contrast to the critics, Clare's relationships are driven by sympathy, not money or politics.

Early in his career, Clare critiques the critics, using references to Keats's treatment. At this point, he had not had a similarly negative experience with the critics, who almost unanimously praised Poems Descrptive. Later in his career, however, Clare's popularity diminished. He benefited from fashion, the vogue for peasant poets, but suffered when that fashion disappeared. There was a six-year gap between his second volume (The Village Minstrel, 1821) and his third (The Shepherd's Calendar, 1827). In 1827, Clare responded to the poor sale of his book by exposing the critics who control an empty and worthless fashion. He further inveighs against Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Felicia Hemans, and Hannah Moore, all popular women poets, and the venues in which their work appeared—the monthly and weekly magazines:

> my judgment some years back was as green as a childs in matters of taste & now I think it is ripened & good & if I dont yet know what is Poetry & who are Poets Fashion shall not make me believe she does <with> in spite of her trumpeting clamour about her L.E.L.s. Hemans's Dartford[27] Moorians &c but I don't wish to be hasty among these Dela Crusan gentry & I am sure I shall if I go on for one has no patience with the humbug that teams from the Literary Stews Monthly & Weekly aye & daily & almost hourly for I expect bye & bye we shall have 'Hourly papers' chiming over their praises as well as we have 'Daily ones' now. (Letters 397)[28]

Clare places his own "taste" against the dictates of fashion, with its "trumpeting clamour," and the "chiming" "praises" of the critics in the monthly and weekly magazines. His vehemence is surprising, since three years earlier, he had been "uncommonly pleasd" by Landon's first volume, The Improvisatrice (Letters 313).[29] The difference between 1824 and 1827 was the growing influence of magazines, "monthly" and "weekly," and the powerful position that women poets occupied in the marketplace as a result of those changes. This may have been even more true when his fourth and final volume, The Rural Muse, was published in 1835. As Cyrus Redding later reflected, the poem was published at a time when the marketplace was dominated by "the puling, wordy, pseudo-sentimental effusions of boarding school misses and verse that said much and meant nothing" (Critical Heritage 252).[30] As a result of this dominance of "the namby-pamby in annuals and in all sorts of ephemera, that had overlaid the market to the exclusion of better things," Clare's book was neglected (252). Clare's mockery of periodicals and criticism of the annuals are specifically gendered and classed attacks. They express the extent to which he was threatened by women writers' greater power in the literary marketplace. For Clare, the poets are "Dela Crusan gentry," associated with a false gentility, and sexualized by being linked to the "Literary Stews."[31]

Clare was likewise threatened by upper and middle-class women readers, primarily because of the economic power that they wielded as consumers of literary texts. His sense of vulnerability in the literary marketplace, due to his lack of control, leads him to depict his body as vulnerable while demonizing their bodies as sexually voracious. In "The Authors Address to his Book," Clare described women's consumption of his text primarily in non-literary forms, as a wrapping for snuff or curl papers. Now he is dealing with the threat of a different kind of consumption by a different kind of woman reader.

In some respects, the argument that Margaret Homans makes about Keats's relationship with his women readers is relevant to Clare as well. Homans argues that Keats is motivated by fear of the power of women readers. But while Clare isolates middle- and upper-class women who have power in the literary marketplace, Keats's discomfort with women readers also extends to Fanny Brawne, a woman of his own class. Homans also illustrates that Keats is eager to make a case for a masculine poetic authority: "By invoking an exclusively male readership, by writing only for men, he makes of his poetry a masculine preserve, and in so doing he elects himself a member of the male club" of literature (368). His primary concern is to "dissociate himself from the...female, lower class, and desexualized" (369). As a result, when Keats edits a poem like "The Eve of St. Agnes," he tries to make it more sexually explicit as a way of excluding women and invoking the power of male censorship (362). In contrast, Clare does not exclude women in order to claim poetic authority, and in fact, he believes that middle- and upper-class women should not be offended by the frank discussion of sexuality in his poems. My argument about Clare should also be read with reference to Sonia Hofkosh's extension of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "anxiety of authorship." She argues that the male writer (represented by Byron and Keats) "experiences...anxiety about being read by others and...at crucial moments these others take the literal and figurative form of the woman"; this anxiety has a sexual dimension (110). This dynamic is also present in Clare's writing—powerful women are beyond his control and so he figures them as sexually voracious. The distinction that I would make between these three authors is that while Byron and Keats view the interchange between reader and author as an anxiety-producing form of seduction (Hofskosh 100, Homans 348), Clare views it as a more violent, physical threat, which sometimes takes a sexual form. Since this is the case, it follows that his response to women readers is more visceral and employs stronger language than Byron or Keats's.

In his letters, Clare suggests that these women readers have the power to influence Taylor's editing of Poems Descriptive. He projects Taylor into a group of women and places him at their beck and call: "I often picture him in the midst of a circle of 'blue stockings' offering this and that opinion for emprovement or omision" (Letters 84).[32] These women are depicted as usurping Taylor's role as editor and Taylor himself is emasculated by their advice. Clare's anger was provoked by the omission of "Dollys Mistake" and "My Mary" from the third edition of Poems Descriptive. Radstock objected to Clare's straightforward and sympathetic depiction of sexuality and demanded that the poems be omitted. For Taylor, who tells Clare, "For my own part I am not so fastidious," the omission of the poems is not a moral issue. Instead, he does not want to alienate potential purchasers, particularly upper- and middle-class women (Critical Heritage 60). According to Taylor's partner, J.A. Hessey, Taylor made the changes because "he perceived that objections were continually made to them & that the sale of the volume would eventually be materially injured & therefore he determined on leaving them out" (Critical Heritage 63). In fact, Taylor took a similar stance in the editing of Keats's final volume. He objected to Keats's modifications to "The Eve of St. Agnes" because their sexual explicitness would have made the poem unsuitable for women readers.

Clare protests the editing of his text, claiming, "'Dollys mistake' & 'my Mary' is by the multitude reckoned the two best in the book" (Letters 84). "Dollys Mistake" presents a very sympathetic view of the lower-class Dolly's fall; she is the victim of a seducer who dazzles her with gifts, then breaks his promise to marry her. It is not surprising that these readers would respond positively while middle- and upper-class readers would claim to be shocked by Clare's appeal to the audience's sympathy. Clare's response is to turn middle- and upper-class women readers' horror at Dolly's sexual licentiousness back on them by claiming that they possess an unpleasant, even voracious sexuality:

> damn it I hate it beyond everything those primpt up misses brought up in those seminaries of mysterious wickedness (Boarding Schools) what will please em? why we well know—but while their heart & soul loves to extravagance (what we dare not mention) false delicasy's seriousness muscles up the mouth and condemns it—what in the name of delicasy doth poor Dolly say to incur such malice as to have her artless

> lamentations shut out—they blush to read what they go nightly to balls for & love to practice alas false delicasy—I fear thou art worse than dolly. (Letters 83)[33]

These readers are more offensive than Dolly because their righteous appearance hides corruption. For example, their schools are "seminaries of mysterious wickedness" (suggesting, perhaps, the hidden evil found in the Catholic seminaries of gothic novels). Their bodies also convey their inner corruption, since their false delicacy "muscles up the mouth," and their physical response to reading about Dolly is a blush, which represents a false sense of shock at what they "love to practice." In addition to representing a false or manufactured response, the blush might also signal excitement or titillation at the poem's representation of a classed sexuality. In fact, this type of response is reminiscent of the interest in Clare's sexuality displayed by some of the visitors to his cottage. Clare recounts a conversation with a "dandified gentleman" who "asked me some insulting libertys respecting my first acquaintance with Patty and said he understood that in this country the lower orders made their courtship in barns and pig styes and asked wether I did" ("Autobiographical Fragments" 119).[34]

Clare is aware that different audiences have different literary likes and dislikes. He perceives that upper- and middle-class women were offended by "My Mary" and "Dollys Mistake," while they were "by the multitude reckoned the two best in the book" (Letters 84).[35] Clare's audience for his early poems—his parents—was also made up of both genders: "I scribbld on unceasing for 2 or 3 years, reciting them every night as I wrote them when my father retund home from labour and we was all seated by the fire side their remarks was very useful to me" ("Sketches in the Life of John Clare" 12). But he does not seem to understand, or more likely pretends not to understand for rhetorical effect, why these women are offended by sexual practices that they find exciting. His expressions of surprise that these women readers exhibit hypocritical reactions draws attention to the fact that upper- and middle-class readers mark themselves as upper- and middle-class by being offended. Their cultural power lies in making the judgment of indecency seem uncontested, natural, and obvious. By revealing this hypocrisy, Clare attempts to subvert their power. However, Clare's responses to the pressures of his upper- and middle-class readers are problematic because he embraces the terms by which he is oppressed. When he pathologizes female sexuality, Clare demonizes upper and middle-class women just as working-class sexuality is demonized during this period (as we will see in the next section). Clare responds so strongly because he believes that these readers threaten him on the most fundamental level: they threaten to take away his identity. Clare's aggressive response to women readers is therefore both self-defense and a kind of retribution.

Clare mockingly proposes that in response to women readers' demands, Taylor should "please all and offend all" by publishing a blank book called "Clare in fashion" (Letters 84).[36] In "The Author's Address to his Book" and "Address to a Copy of 'Clare's Poems,'" we saw that the book could serve as a surrogate for Clare's anxieties about audience and reception, and the same is true here. "Clare in fashion" is the title of the book, but it is also a description of Clare as a fashionable man. Both are empty because for Clare to be fashionable he would have to be blank—unmarked by his class and available to be shaped by the reader into whatever form she chose. The idea of fashion, here as elsewhere in Clare, suggests the political nature of literary consumption. In this case, the oppression of fashion registers as absence, with the blank pages representing the erasure of Clare's identity.

III. Imagining a New Audience

So far, I have suggested that Clare articulates a "complaint" about destructive relationships in the literary marketplace and expresses his sense of vulnerability through references to violence against his body. Specifically, he feels threatened by patrons and editors whose relationships with Clare replicate the oppression of the powerless by the powerful; the idea of readers as consumers; and the role that fashion plays in creating "classed" readerships. In response to these threats, Clare creates an idealized audience of agricultural laborers and urban working people in his poems to the peasant poet Robert Bloomfield and his account of Byron's funeral procession. These texts are very different from "The Authors Address to his Book," in which Clare argued that the book would find its friends among the learned, while mocking the "ploughboy" who could not appreciate his poems. The audience of the common people does not consume the author nor is it concerned with fashion or status. In contrast to the bodies of upper and middle-class readers, the bodies of the common people are idealized. Clare emphasizes the productivity of these bodies, which both perform agricultural labor and renew and perpetuate poets' fame. This mixing of tangible and intangible production provides a corrective to contemporary discourses surrounding agricultural laborers and the urban working-class that focused on their uncontrolled reproduction as a drain on the nation's resources.

Clare composed three memorial sonnets to Robert Bloomfield after his death in 1823.[37] Bloomfield was a poet, as well as a farm laborer and shoemaker, who died penniless despite the fact that The Farmer's Boy, published in 1800, sold 26,000 copies in less than three years. Writing about Bloomfield allows Clare to work out some of his own anxieties about his audience and the relationship of fashion to poetic fame. In a letter to Joseph Weston, the editor of Bloomfield's Remains, Clare lays out the major themes of the sequence of poems: "as Fashion (that feeble substitute for <? > Fame) had nothing to do in [Bloomfield's] exaltation its neglect will have nothing to affect his memory it is built on a more solid foundation" (Letters 322). The first sonnet sets up a general opposition between fashion and fame. The second sonnet addresses Bloomfield more directly, and illustrates this opposition using natural images:

> Well, nature owns thee let the crowd pass bye
> The tide of fashion is a stream too strong
> For pastoral brooks that gently flow and sing
> But nature is their source and earth and sky
> Their annual offerings to her current bring
> Thy injured muse and memory need no sigh
> For thine shall murmur on to many a spring
> When their proud stream is summer burnt and dry.

Although the "tide of fashion," associated with "the crowd," is more powerful (the stream is "too strong), nature, associated with the "pastoral brooks that gently flow and sing," is longer lasting. Thus, Bloomfield's work "will murmur" when fashion's poets are "summer burnt and dry."

Clare's initial interest in writing the sonnets was to counter Bloomfield's neglect; he had been forgotten, and therefore had an "injured muse and memory." However, this "memory" in the second sonnet is purely natural—there is no human audience. And so, in the third sonnet, Clare introduces a group of rural laborers—the "musing" shepherd, "singing ploughman," and "hay making lass"—familiar from the pastoral tradition. These figures, along with "The may day wild flowers in the meadow grass" and "The sunshine sparkling in the valley streams," are described as Bloomfield's "green memorials" who "live the summer of [his] rural themes." Such "green memorials" "surpass / The cobweb praise of fashion." By contrasting the solid bodies of the "green memorials" with the "cobweb praise of fashion," which is insubstantial and presumably ephemeral, Clare links the bodies of rural laborers and an idealized landscape to the permanence of Bloomfield's verse. As long as these bodies labor in this landscape, Bloomfield will be memorialized.[38] Although Clare introduces an audience for Bloomfield, his depiction of these figures is problematic. They are the opposite of the ploughboy with his squealing pigs from "The Authors Address to his Book," and so are too romanticized. Also, the shepherd, the ploughman, and the hay-making lass are never shown reading Bloomfield's poems; instead, they *are* his memorials.

It is in this detail that Clare's Bloomfield sonnet differs from another of his memorial poems, "To the Memory of Keats."[39] While Clare describes Keats's poetic immortality in terms of a natural image ("these left buds thy monument shall be") that is similar to the "green memorials" of Bloomfield, he also describes a member of the audience who experiences sympathy with Keats and preserves his fame:

> Thou shalt survive—ah while a being dwells
> In natures joys with soul to warm as thine
> With eye to view her fascinating spells
> & dream entranced oer each form divine
> Worth wild enthusiast shall be cherish'd here
> & thine with him shall linger & be dear.

Keats is presented as a nature poet and thus becomes more like Clare through this process of memorializing. As was the case with the Bloomfield sonnets, in writing about Keats's legacy Clare was also thinking about his own. Bloomfield's fame is insured by the regeneration of nature and the memorials of the rural laborers. The act of individual identification and sympathy between reader and poet that dominates the Keats poem is absent. In part, this is because the

Bloomfield sonnet has a clear political motivation. Clare challenges fashion, his shorthand term for cultural power, by investing the agricultural laborers with the power to determine a poet's fame—a power that they clearly do not possess in the literary marketplace.

This project is more fully articulated in a passage from Clare's autobiographical prose in which he describes the response of the London spectators at Byron's funeral procession in 1826. This passage integrates the audience's individual identification with and sympathy for the poet, which was present in "To the Memory of Keats," with a description of an audience made up of "the common people." In Clare's account, the (dead) body of the poet, which is ostensibly on display in the procession, is of subordinate importance. In describing the carriages, Clare notes that "the gilt ones that lede the procession were empty—the hearse lookd small and rather mean and the coach that followed carried his em[bers] in a urn over which a pawl was thrown thro which one might distinguish the form of the [urn] underneath and the window seemd to be left open for that purpose" ("Autobiographical Fragments" 148). There is a lot of detail in this description and all of it tends to de-emphasize Byron's body. The gilt carriages, which should be the center of attention, are empty, the hearse itself is "small" and "mean," and the urn is covered by a pall. All reference points are either absent or hidden.

Instead, Clare is primarily interested in the bodies of the spectators and their classed reactions to the procession. The common people "did not stand gaping with surprise on the trappings of gaudy show or look on with apathisd indifference like the hir[e]d mutes in the spectacle but they felt it I coud see it in their faces" (148). In contrast, "the windows and doors had those of the higher [orders] about them but they wore smiles on their faces and thought more of the spectacle than the poet" (148). This description reverses the roles usually played by the two groups. The common people do not behave vulgarly, "gaping with surprise on the trappings of gaudy show" and "looking on with apathisd indifference like the hir[e]d mutes in the spectacle." They are the ones who "felt it." Instead, it is the "higher [orders]" who "thought more of the spectacle than the poet." This reference to the poet as a "spectacle" recalls Clare's own complaints, a few years earlier, that upper- and middle-class readers treated him as a spectacle and a form of entertainment. At the time of his death, Byron was known as much for sexual scandal and self-exile as his poetry. Byron's vilified, sexualized body links him with the bodies of the "lower orders," including Clare's.[40]

Unlike the pastoral figures who embody Bloomfield's fame, these onlookers are more individuated, especially the figure of the young girl who "gave a deep sigh and utterd poor Lord Byron" (148). Compared to Clare's strikingly negative, even misogynistic, representations of middle- and upper-class women who hide their voracious sexuality under a mask of innocence, this girl expresses an authentic sentiment and her body has an aura of purity: "I looked up in the young girls face it was dark and beautiful and I coud almost feel in love with her for the sigh she had utterd for the poet" (147). Clare uses her idealized body, like the bodies of the laborers in the third sonnet to Bloomfield, to oppose true fame to fashion. He claims that the young girl's sigh is more powerful than contemporary print culture, since it "was worth all the News paper puffs and Magazine Mournings that ever was paraded after the death of a poet" (147). Her emotional response to Byron then takes on a broader meaning, becoming characteristic of the "common people": "the common people felt his merits and his power and the common people of a country are the best feelings of a prophecy of futurity—they are below—or rather below the prejudices and flatterys the fancys of likes and dislikes of fashion" (147-8).[41] Clare elevates the feelings of these spectators, tying the poet's immortality to their approbation and denigrating "the likes and dislikes of fashion." Clare's claim that the common people will preserve Byron's fame is particularly significant in light of the fact that Byron was not a peasant poet, but one of the best-known and best-read poets of the day. As I have already suggested, Clare's idea of fashion has strong political resonance. Here, his language reflects his desire to assert the power of the common people over entrenched power structures.

The political meaning of Clare's account of these spectators becomes even more obvious when he shifts the focus from their actual bodies to the metaphorical social body, describing the common people as "the veins and arterys that feed and quiken the heart of living fame the breathings of eternity and the soul of time are indicated in that prophecy" (147-8). Clare takes the image of the social body, in which all of the different classes are apportioned a share (with the king as the head) and reworks it; the social body becomes a mechanism for nurturing and remembering genius. This characterization may be read as a form of wish fulfillment. Clare creates this idealized audience to counter his fears of being consumed by his upper- and middle-class readers. This audience does not consume the poet. Instead, it is made up of producers; they are the "veins and arterys" that "*feed*...the heart of living fame" (my emphasis).

This passage also reworks, consciously or otherwise, the period's obsession with the relationship of working-class bodies to the social body, specifically the fear that excessively sexual and parasitic working-class bodies were a threat to the entire nation. The most influential articulation of this threat was Malthus's Essay on the Principles of Population (first published in 1798 and expanded in 1803), which warned that uncontrolled working-class reproduction (and therefore working-class sexual desire) was dangerous to the nation. Malthus contends that because reproduction increases geometrically while the food supply increases arithmetically, the reproduction of the working classes would outrun the food supply. The problem of how to manage this threat to the social body was central to the debate over the reform of the Poor Laws during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Whereas Malthus suggests that starvation and disease are natural checks on population, the Poor Laws provided relief for the poor out of parish funds. However, the means by which this relief was administered could threaten the social body by producing a parasitic, idle working-class.[42] At the center of the controversy over reform was the question of whether economic relief for the poor would lead to "pauperism," that is to say, to the dependence of able-bodied workers on alms. A clear distinction was drawn between the deserving objects of relief and the undeserving, idle poor, and maintained by the observation and regulation of working-class bodies.[43] Clare challenges this fear of working-class reproduction with his creation of an idealized, productive audience. The bodies of the laborers in the Bloomfield poem are associated with agricultural production, and both they and the figures at Byron's funeral procession are associated with poetic production and the perpetuation of authors' fame.

I would argue that Clare's recuperation of these bodies is problematic. When he describes the pastoral figures as "green memorials," suggests that the young girl's sigh is worth more than newspaper puffs, or rewrites the image of the social body, Clare imagines and elevates "the common people" as an audience for his work. This audience does not participate in the oppression of the powerless by the powerful that characterizes all of the other relationships that Clare describes in the literary marketplace—between the poet and his editors, patrons, critics, and upper- and middle-class reading audiences. However, this is because they are themselves powerless. Despite Clare's attempts to suggest that the fame of an author resides in the memory of the people, their power in the literary marketplace, like Clare's own, is minimal. Neither the figures in the Bloomfield sonnet nor the onlookers at Byron's funeral procession are involved with the materiality of texts, textual production, or textual exchange. The onlookers at Byron's funeral procession admire Byron more for his "liberal principals in religion and politics" than for his poems ("Autobiographical Fragments" 148). The shepherd, the ploughman, the hay-making lass, are never shown reading Bloomfield's poems; instead, they *are* his memorials. Thus, Clare's complaint reveals injustice but can only re-imagine, not reshape, the literary marketplace.

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Notes

[1] John Clare to John Taylor, August 31, 1820. John Clare to John Taylor, September 6, 1821.

[2] Spencer T. Hall makes a similar connection in Biographical Sketches of Remarkable People (1873): "the people, of whatever rank, with whom Clare was brought most in contact by such means, instead of delicately befriending him, regarded him too often with a vulgar curiosity not unlike that with which (though with less emolument to the object) they in turn regarded Tom Thumb and the Hippopotamus—whichever happened for the moment to be most in fashion" (Critical Heritage 277). It is not coincidental that Clare associates himself with popular entertainment in order to signal his sense of degradation; the popularity of the London shows reveals that there was a market for exhibiting the sexualized body of an inferior. For example, the Hottentot Venus, Saartjie Baartman, was a South African woman who was "exhibited" in London in 1810: "Scantily clad to reveal the physical characteristic that so fascinated contemporaries—the steatopygia—or protruding buttocks—Baartman enacted a theatrical tableau of slavery, in response to the commands of a stick-wielding 'master'" (Teltscher 93). This woman, clearly marked as other, is a sexual spectacle masquerading as anthropology and a social cause. Kate Teltscher points to "the mixture of prurient interest and humanitarian concern that turned Baartman into a cause celebre" (93). The show produced a debate over whether Baartman was participating in the spectacle of her own free will. The same mixed motives that characterize the response to this type of "entertainment" also characterize the contemporary response to Clare. He is both a social cause and a spectacle.

[3] John Clare to John Taylor, May 16, 1820. Lord Radstock aided Clare with money and by promoting his writing in London literary circles.

[4] Other historians present a more positive picture of enclosure. Chambers and Mingay describe its "four main objectives": producing "more efficient farming by making farms more compact, larger and easier to work"; "convert[ing] land to more profitable uses"; "expanding the area of land under regular cultivation"; and "getting rid of tithes and by bringing order and greater convenience into a parish" (79-80).

[5] Mark Storey notes, "Radstock had written in the margin against this passage, 'This is radical slang'" (Letters 69). The text is taken from The Early Poems of John Clare, 1804-1822, vol. 1.

[6] Eliza Louisa Emmerson to John Clare, May 11, 1820. Emmerson, the wife of a picture-importer, was another of Clare's patrons. She was also a poet. Mark Storey describes her as "Clare's most frequent, tireless, and tiresome correspondent" (Critical Heritage 57).

[7] John Clare to John Taylor, December 21, 1820.

[8] This definition of the upper-class patron as parasitic also redirects the critique of the dangerous and parasitic working-class body found in Thomas Malthus's Essay on the Principles of Population and the debates over Poor Law Reform. I will discuss this topic in more detail at the end of the chapter.

[9] Clare's sarcastic rewriting of his own dedication suggests the subversive role that mimicry plays in his complaint. This letter also contains Clare's wicked mimicry of Emmerson's gushing prose style: "self & selfs noble friend & selfs incomparable poems."

[10] This first quotation is from Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751). The second is from Wordsworth's "Song" ("She dwelt among th'untrodden ways," 1800).

[11] Recent editions of Clare's work, such as The Early Poems of John Clare, by Eric Robinson and David Powell, strip away Taylor's revisions (along with those of subsequent editors). Robinson and Powell's guiding principle, "we have tried as far as possible to present Clare as he wrote," suggests that it is possible to uncover a more authentic text by going back to the Clare's manuscripts (xxii). Zachary Leader takes issue with the attitude that "earliest is best" and asks: "But what is the nature of the evidence that Clare would have preferred manuscript versions of his early poems—unpunctuated, misspelled, ungrammatical, metrically defective, irregularly rhymed, poorly structured, repetitive—to the printed versions" (207). Leader believes that "The argument for unrevised versions rests not only on Romantic notions of poetic autonomy, of the poet as solitary genius...but on a no less Romantic undervaluing of secondary processes" (212). Tim Chilcott, like Leader, makes the case for a sympathetic view of Taylor's editing, which he characterizes as both necessary to Clare's success and respectful of Clare's genius. He specifically disputes the position taken by Robinson and Summerfield in "Taylor's Editing of The Shepherd's Calendar" that Taylor took out too many of Clare's dialect words, cut too much of the volume's length and excised too much sexually and politically controversial material (107-8). Chilcott looks specifically at the many dialect words that Taylor included and argues that the attacks against Taylor are oversimplified (108-9).

[12] This quotation is taken from the April 30 entry in Clare's Journal (1824-5).

[13] John Clare to John Taylor, July 10, 1821. The poems discussed were to have been included in The Village Minstrel.

[14] From Literature of Labour (1851).

[15] At the same time, Clare wanted his books to be popular. When his second effort did not sell as well as Poems Descriptive, he complained to Taylor: "I feel rather hipt at the Village Minstrel's success the Old Volume had gone thro two editions ere this" (Letters 229). John Clare to John Taylor, February 8, 1822.

[16] John Taylor to John Clare, December 29, 1820. At this point, The Village Minstrel was still called by Clare's preferred title, Ways in a Village.

[17] August 20,1827.

[18] The text of "The Authors Address to his Book" is taken from The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822, Volume I. The text of "Address to a Copy of 'Clare's Poems'" is taken from The Early Poems of John Clare 1804-1822, Volume II.

[19] January 4, 1821.

[20] For example, Clare asks William Strong "to accept the simple thanks of a clown" (February 9, 1820; Letters 30). In a letter to Markham E. Sherwill he writes, "With a clowns gratfull way of blunt return I can but thank you" (February 24, 1820; Letters 33).

[21] John Clare to James Augustus Hessey, July 4, 1820. Clare refers to Thomas Campbell and Samuel Rogers. Clare associates himself with Keats in this letter, describing the poet as "a child of nature warm & wild" (Letters 80). Clare's fellow feeling with Keats is also evident in his letter to John Taylor, c.3 April 1821: "the apathy of mellancholly has again laid her cold hand upon my heart pointing with a careless finger to my own fate that awaits me & alowing but a common feeling for the fate of others to go before me—viewing such in a course of natural occurences—but dear Taylor with the affection that one brother feels at the loss of another do I lament the end of poor Keats" (Letters 175).

[22] Clare's statement, "a critic like a gardener uses his pruning knife very often to keep it in action & find as he calls it a job," recalls Taylor's comment: "I must have something to cut out, or 'Othelio's Occupation's gone'" (Letters 38).

[23] John Clare to James Augustus Hessey, July 4, 1820.

[24] He also points out the critics' immediate economic motivation in his 1831 poem "The Hue and Cry: A Tale of the Times": "He saw a reviewer reviewing a work / & the book was most wretchedly bad / ...hed been paid for his praise."

[25] The term is Pierre Bourdieu's. Bourdieu argues that "tastes function as markers of 'class.'" (1-2). Not only does the nature of an individual's taste mark him or her as the member of a specific class, but also "social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make" (6). As a result, cultural consumption "fulfill[s] a social function of legitimating social differences" (7).

[26] Some years later, Clare would explicitly articulate the political nature of fashion. In his commentary on the "reconstruction" of Buckingham House (which was becoming Buckingham Palace) he claims, "taste now has nothing to do with such things where fashion is everything & royal fashions too they must be excellent or it would evidently be considered radicalism to think otherwise" (Letters 495). Here, Clare intensifies his earlier reference; not only does fashion ensure that "no soul dare say otherwise," but those who "think otherwise," or deviate from the status quo, are "radicals." Royal fashion, like critical fashion, clearly pits the powerful against the powerless and defines any dissenter as politically marginal. Clare claims that a surer judge of quality is "taste." While fashion is related primarily to communal norms regulated by those with economic and cultural power, Clare uses the term taste to refer to an innate sense of aesthetic enjoyment, particularly of nature, as in this passage from his essay "Taste": "Taste

finds pleasure where the vulgar cannot even find amusement the man of taste feels excessive rapture in contemplating the rich scenery of an autumn landscape which the rude man passes unnoticed" (Journals 91-2). Clearly, Clare, an agricultural laborer, sees himself as a man of taste and thus opposes himself to "the vulgar" or "the rude" man. In so doing, he also rejects terms such as "rude" or "vulgar" that are associated with his class, without embracing the "fashionable" opinion that would be linked to the middle and upper classes. Instead, he wants to see and enforce an ideal of aesthetic judgment—taste—that is not related to class. This attempt to get beyond class is an exercise of agency in an attempt to gain cultural power and suggests Clare's confidence in his own judgment, since one would not expect a poet like Clare, who seems so powerless, to speak with such assurance on matters of aesthetics.

[27] In his edition of Clare's letters, Mark Storey says that the "Dartford reference...remains elusive" (397). Clare may be referring to Hemans's poem "Dartmoor," which won a prize from the Royal Society of Literature in 1821.

[28] John Clare to George Darley, September 3, 1827.

[29] John Clare to Henry Francis Cary, December 30, 1824.

[30] From English Journal, May 15, 1841, 20, 305-9; May 29, 1841, 22, 340-3.

[31] Although J. L. Cherry points out that "'The Rural Muse,' the last volume which Clare published, was composed almost entirely of poems which had appeared in the annuals, or other periodicals" (103).

[32] John Clare to James Augustus Hessey, c. July 10, 1820.

[33] John Clare to James Augustus Hessey, c. July 10, 1820.

[34] Clare turns the tables when he responds, "I felt very vext and said that it might be the custom of high orders for aught I knew as experience made fools wise in most matters but I assured him he was wrong respecting that custom among the lower orders here" ("Autobiographical Fragments" 119).

[35] John Clare to James Augustus Hessey, c. 10 July 1820.

[36] John Clare to James Augustus Hessey, c. July 10, 1820.

[37] As he wrote to Joseph Weston, the editor of Bloomfield's Remains, "soon after the Poets death I wrote in a mellancholy feeling 3 Sonnets to his memory" (Letters 322); March 7, 1825. According to Storey, the sonnets were printed in The Scientific Receptacle (1825) and were part of the manuscript for The Midsummer Cushion (unpublished in Clare's lifetime). The second sonnet appeared in The Rural Muse (1835) (Letters 322). The text of the poems is taken from Letters (323-4).

[38] Clare's positive view of his embodied audience sharply contrasts with William Wordsworth's famous description in his "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (1815). When Wordsworth talks about readers, he refers to their bodies with disgust: "Away, then, with the senseless iteration of the word, popular, applied to new works in Poetry, as if there were not test of excellence in this first of the fine arts but that all Men should run after its productions, as if urged by an appetite, or constrained by a spell!" (660).

[39] The text of the poem is taken from The Early Poems of John Clare, 1804-1822, vol. 2.

[40] During the asylum years, Clare famously thought that he was Byron and wrote his own versions of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and Don Juan.

[41] In his footnote to this passage, Robinson suggests that Clare probably intended to write "above" instead of the second "below."

[42] Since the time of their codification in the late sixteenth century, the Poor Laws had been a system of parish-administered relief for the poor in the form of alms and almshouses, apprenticeship for children, and work for the able-bodied. A poor rate levied on householders paid for the system. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Poor Laws were altered, notably by the Act of Settlement, which was designed to keep the poor from moving out of their own parish and collecting relief in another area. During the early nineteenth century, the Poor Laws were compromised by the Speenhamland system of distributing relief. This system, wherein a poor family's earnings would be supplemented by the parish rates, was vulnerable to abuses. It was possible that the employers of the working poor might cut wages, since they knew that the parish would make up the difference. More disturbing was the suspicion that laborers who received aid from the parish would be less likely to work.

[43] In The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age, Gertrude Himmelfarb argues that the movement to reform the Poor Laws reflects the influence of middle-class ideology. While the middle class believed that they had a moral responsibility to provide for the deserving poor (the sick, the aged, widows, the incapacitated), they also believed that dependency, profligacy, and idleness would result from the provision of relief to able-bodied workers. The debates resulted in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 (also known as the New Poor Law), which emphasized the principles of uniformity, restricted relief to the workhouse, and less eligibility. Instead of having each parish be individually responsible for the administration of relief, a central bureaucratic structure was created to standardize and oversee this process. The New Poor Law banned "outdoor relief," which was relief provided outside the workhouse. If the poor wanted aid, they would have to give up their freedom and enter the workhouse to get it. Relief administered in the workhouse was based on the principle of less eligibility, which meant that the conditions and amenities provided (the type of clothing, food, etc.) must be at a level below that of the laboring poor. Derek Fraser argues that all three of these principles were compromised in practice (17).

Performing the Poetess: Felicia Hemans's Theatrical Poetics

"Felicia Hemans, whose character is best pourtrayed in her writings" --the inscription on the memorial erected by Hemans's brothers in the Cathedral of St. Asaph.

As the inscription on her memorial suggests, Felicia Hemans's contemporaries believed that the poet's "character is best pourtrayed in her writings." They saw this character as fundamentally domestic and maternal, as Lydia Sigourney ("the American Hemans") does when she describes Hemans's genius, which "mingled with the whole circle of women's joys and duties, and, as a German philosopher said of the genius of Sophocles, 'revealed through the transparency of its works the internal harmony and beauty of the soul'" (xx). Angela Leighton describes such formulations as the "sentimentalist transparency of life and art, which brings the character of the poet comfortingly within reach" (43). Modern critics have undercut this illusion of transparency, claiming that "Felicia Hemans" was "a calculated self-projection," "an invention," and a "congenial position."[1] In this chapter, I argue that the ideal of transparency, in which the poems are a public manifestation of her private self, is constantly slipping into another form of transparency, in which Hemans's body or appearance becomes the public manifestation of her private self. As a result, the audience's act of understanding becomes linked to the act of seeing, hearing, or touching Hemans, whether this involves looking at a written or engraved portrait or visiting her home. The body, which should be private and unseen, becomes a public site of conflicting interpretations

In this chapter, I explore the implications of this situation for Hemans's self-presentation and her relationship with her audience. The focus on Hemans's body in contemporary critical works suggests that her relationship with her audience could be expressed in physical, even erotic terms. The physical connection could suggest the sympathetic bond between poet and audience. However, this sympathy could give way to objectification, in which the reading or consumption of texts becomes the consumption of the author.

In poems such as "Properzia Rossi" and "To My Own Portrait," Hemans insistently directs the reader's attention to the poet's physical appearance, but she signals her alienation from her public face by emphasizing her "hidden" sorrow. In these confessional poems, Hemans creates the appearance of sincerity through a theatrical performance of intimacy directed at her readers that gives them the impression that they truly understand the poet. The illusion that each reader is an intimate friend is threatened when Hemans's letters are published after her death. In these letters, as in the poems, Hemans claims that there is a disjunction between appearance and reality. However, in the letters, she points out this gap in order to criticize the audience, rather than place it in a privileged position. Hemans claims that she must be an actress, performing the role of poetess for the readers who visit her at home. She describes an audience for whom Hemans and her texts are objects to be consumed as markers of class and social status. These letters redefine the relationship between Hemans and her readers as primarily economic, exposing the illusion that there is an emotional and sympathetic bond between the poet and her audience. The intimacy that is predicated on the audience's ability to "read" the poet's body in the form of the portrait or sculpture is disrupted by the audience's real bodies, which intrude into the space of Hemans's home, and also by Hemans's performing body. As a middle-class woman and a poet associated with the "domestic affections," Hemans's body should not be displayed, yet her public housekeeping moves it to center stage. After the publication of the letters in Henry Chorley's Memorials of Mrs. Hemans (1836), Hemans's sister Harriet Hughes takes up the task of publicly interpreting Hemans's body, attempting to reconnect appearance and reality by reasserting the continuity of the public and private Hemans—the poetess and the domestic woman—in her Memoir of Mrs. Hemans (1839). She does this, in part, through her reading of Hemans's portrait. She emphasizes that Hemans's appearance in the portrait can be read as an accurate representation of the reality of the poet's life and contains the portrait's sexual appeal by rewriting it as maternity.

I. Picturing the Poet

> *"...[A] pretty picture is presented to the mind's eye, and would not be unworthy of realization by art, in the anecdote that it was her habit, at the age of six, to read Shakespeare while seated in the branches of an apple-tree." --W.M. Rossetti's "Prefatory Notice" to The Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans (604).*

Rossetti describes an image that is repeatedly mentioned in discussions of Hemans' childhood—young Felicia Hemans, sitting in an apple tree, reading Shakespeare.[2] Writing later in the century, Rossetti's presentation of this image helps us to see the conflicts between the public and private self, appearance and inner reality, body and character, performance and absorption that are always present in contemporary accounts of Hemans's life and career. The frequency with which this anecdote appears suggests that it functions as a kind of biographical shorthand that expresses important truths about Hemans and, when paired with the image of her reading at night in a Dublin garden (where she catches the "ague" that would kill her), it frames her life. The anecdote suggests precocity; privacy, since she is surrounded by the branches of the apple-tree, which serves as a retreat where she can read in peace; and Hemans' transgressive desire for knowledge. For Hemans herself, this is a pre-lapsarian image, her own Garden of Eden. She contrasts it with the pressures of her success, exclaiming, "'O the "pleasures of Fame!" O that I were but the little girl in the top of the elm tree again!'" (qtd. in Chorley 1: 179). (Although she refers to the "elm tree" here, it is clearly the "apple tree" that is intended.)

It represents her desire to return to a time before her "fall" into the public spotlight. Hemans refers to the image in order to affirm the private self—her absorption in literature representing freedom from observation and the gaze.[3] Yet, when Rossetti says that Hemans in the apple-tree is "a pretty picture" that "would not be unworthy of realization by art," he takes an image of Hemans in a private, reflective moment, absorbed in a book, and suggests that it be made public through artistic representation.

For Rossetti, Hemans is not only the creator of art—her poems—but also an aesthetic object; her face and body form a "pretty picture" that can be painted and displayed. Rossetti's focus on Hemans's body as an object of display is just one example of the way in which Hemans's body enters the critical conversation. In this passage from The Three Histories, a novella by Hemans's friend Maria Jane Jewsbury, the character Egeria, a thinly disguised version of Hemans, is also a "pretty picture." She is "'lovely without being beautiful; her movements were features; and if a blind man had been privileged to pass his hand over the silken length of hair, that when unbraided flowed round her like a veil, he would have been justified in expecting softness and a love of softness, beauty and a perception of beauty, to be distinctive traits of her mind'" (qtd. in Clarke 82). Unlike Rossetti's description, which features Hemans as a girl, Jewsbury's scenario presents an erotic moment, in which the "unbraided" and "flow[ing]" hair, which iconographically represents female sexuality, is stroked by the blind man. She suggests that sensuous apprehension of Hemans's body can give the observer access to her mind. When the blind man "pass[es] his hand over the silken length of hair," he learns that "softness and a love of softness, beauty and a perception of beauty [are] distinctive traits of her mind."

I suggest that Jewsbury's description should be read as a model of how Hemans's contemporaries understood the relationship between this poet and her audience. The erotic nature of this relationship creates what another popular poet of the day, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, calls "the intimate relation that subsists between the poet and the public" (66).[4] Landon also figures this relationship in sexual terms:

> The work appears—it lives in the light of popular applause; but truly might the writer exclaim,--
>
> 'It is my youth—it is my bloom—it is my glad free heart
> I cast away for thee—for thee—ill-fated as thou art.' (74)[5]

Here, the work stands in for the sexual attractions of the poet's body: "It is my youth—it is my bloom." Not only does the woman writer give up her "youth" and "bloom" in exchange for fame, but she is also sexually betrayed because she "cast[s] away" her bloom for an "ill-fated" partner.[6]

II. Performing Intimacy: Hemans's Poetic Practice

I want to examine the ways in which Hemans's poetry reworks the conflation of the writer and her text and the resulting eroticisation of the poet/reader relationship. In poems such as "Properzia Rossi" and "To My Own Portrait," Hemans insistently directs the reader's attention to her physical appearance, while emphasizing the failure of that appearance to represent her inner sorrow. Therefore, she undoes the conflation of public and private, appearance and reality, body and character, performance and absorption that characterize contemporary critical response to her work. By creating an audience within each poem that is privileged to see these paired terms as oppositions, she seems to distance her friends from the reading public. However, by enacting this distancing maneuver within the frame of the poem, Hemans draws her readers into the experience of intimacy. In these confessional poems then, Hemans creates the appearance of sincerity through a theatrical "performance of intimacy" designed to produce a sympathetic response.

Hemans wrote relatively few poems in which she was recognizably the speaker writing about her own experience. A poem like "To My Own Portrait," in which Hemans not only speaks in her own person but also addresses her own public image in the form of the portrait, is rare. Her use of this overtly personal material may explain why the poem was not published during her lifetime. "To My Own Portrait" first appeared in Poetical Remains (1836) and was also quoted in full in Chorley's review of that volume in The Athenaeum.[7] The poem is addressed to a portrait of Hemans painted by William Edward West in 1827. Hemans's poem "To My Own Portrait" asserts the portrait's lack of transparency, its failure to capture her emotions and inner life, and by extension, the discrepancy between her public face or persona and her private face or real self. Looking at the portrait, Hemans re-experiences emotions from the past, and marks the discrepancy between her experience and the unmarked, "imaged self":

> —O imaged self! It seems
> That on *thy* brow of peace no change
> Reflects my own swift dreams;
> Almost I marvel not to trace
> Those lights and shadows in *thy* fair face.
> To see *thee* calm, while powers thus deep—
> Affection, Memory, Grief—
> Pass o'er my soul as winds that sweep
> O'er a frail aspen leaf!
> O that the quiet of thine eye

> Might sink there when the storm goes by![8]

The portrait Hemans has a "brow of peace," a "fair face," and is "calm," with a "quiet...eye," while the real Hemans is afflicted by a "storm," has "swift dreams," a soul swept by "Affection, Memory, Grief...as winds that sweep / O'er a frail aspen leaf," and a face marked by "lights and shadows." Her appearance in the portrait is static, associated with images and words that suggest stillness, while her real experience is characterized by movement: her dreams are swift, the lights and shadows suggest the rapid changes in a landscape, and her emotions are like sweeping winds.

Hughes's "Memoir" also describes the mobility of Hemans's face in terms of its "lights and shadows": "The mantling bloom of her cheeks was shaded by a profusion of natural ringlets, of a rich golden brown; and the every-varying expression of her brilliant eyes gave a changeful play to her countenance" (39). In her letters, Hemans talks about her spirits in similar terms. They are "'as variable as the lights and shadows now flitting with the wind over the high grass, and sometimes the tears gush into my eyes when I can scarcely define the cause'" (qtd. in Hughes 127). The poem, the memoir, and the letter all draw on the "mercurial responsiveness" conventionally associated with sensibility (Todd 62). The straightforward description of the portrait suggests that its meaning is easy to read and therefore transparent. However, the real Hemans's heightened state of emotion is expressed through references to the natural world, suggesting that reality must be approached obliquely, through the use of distancing literary techniques, such as simile and metaphor, or even through the literary conventions of sensibility.

Hemans's expressions of alienation, including her references to the portrait as a separate entity and her italicization of thy/thine, are dramatic gestures, designed to reveal the distance between her physical appearance and the reality of her personal experience, and by extension, the distance between her public persona and her private self.[9] Her description of her portrait's appearance as calm, quiet, and undisturbed also recalls the terms in which her contemporaries described her poetry. Jerome McGann has suggested that "Hemans's poetry covets an undisturbed appearance: 'bland'" and "nineteenth century readers of Hemans repeatedly remark on this quality in her work when they praise its 'elegance,' its 'purity,' its 'taste' and 'harmony'" ("Literary History" 218-9). Such terms could also be used to criticize her work, as Elizabeth Barrett-Browning did when she complained: "'[Hemans] is polished all over to one smoothness & one level, & is monotonous in her best qualities'" (Letters 2: 88). Since Hemans's body and poems are described in identical terms, and it is this "undisturbed appearance" or "smoothness" that alienates her from the portrait, "To My Own Portrait" also comments on her contemporaries' misplaced belief that knowledge of the poem produced knowledge of the poet.

Paradoxically, by suggesting that neither her appearance nor her texts is transparent, Hemans establishes her readers as part of a privileged audience. In addressing the portrait in the following lines, she emphasizes that only her friends, as opposed to readers or casual acquaintances, will be able to see the discrepancy between the portrait and reality:

> Yet look thou still serenely on,
> And if sweet friends there be
> That when my song and soul are gone
> Shall seek my form in thee,--
> Tell them of one for whom 'twas best
> To flee away and be at rest!

For these friends, the serenity of the portrait can be correctly interpreted as a mask. By creating an audience of friends *within* the poem, she seems to exclude everyone else, including her readers, from understanding her melancholy. However, I would suggest that by enacting this distancing maneuver, she is actually creating a performance of intimacy. Although she addresses the poem to this select audience, by the act of reading the poem, all readers become part of the audience that knows that the portrait and the persona are false.

I now want to turn to "Properzia Rossi," a poem written earlier than "To My Own Portrait," and published in Records of Woman (1828). Although both poems enact a performance of intimacy, "Properzia Rossi" is more typical of Hemans's work, since it is not spoken in the poet's own voice; it is the internal monologue of the title character, a sculptor.[10] Nevertheless, contemporaries identified Rossi with Hemans. According to Hemans's friend and biographer Rose Lawrence, "She never complained, but what she felt [about her marriage] may, perhaps, be traced from her picture of disappointed tenderness in her own 'Properzia Rossi'— (298). Jane Williams suggests that "'Properzia Rossi' tells but too plainly the recorder's own tale, while relating the unrequited, ill-requited love of a woman of genius, who yearns for the affections of one, and sickens at the world's applause" (602). Finally, Landon counts "Properzia Rossi" as among the poems "in which the sentiment is too true for Mrs. Hemans not to have been her own inspiration" (70).

Recent discussions of "Properzia Rossi" expand on this biographical reading in order to explore Hemans's gender ideology. Susan Wolfson suggests that Hemans's poems about women artists, including "Properzia Rossi," grapple with issues of gender and power that are not neatly resolved, since Hemans "continues to indulge the creative energies she means to discredit, even calling into question the controlling assumptions about the greater satisfactions of domestic bliss" ("Domestic Affections" 160). Angela Leighton has questioned whether the poem presents a positive image of the woman artist, since Rossi "is, in fact, a courtesan in her art, displaying her emotional wares to the imagined eye of her lover." (39-40). Leighton's term "courtesan" links Rossi's emotional display to the display of her body to the male gaze. I suggest that in addition to focusing on the "display" that Rossi directs at her lover, we can examine the display that Hemans directs at her readers. I want to expand on Norma Clarke's argument that the poems in Records of Woman, including "Properzia Rossi," "address the experience of the woman who reaches out to a public" (76). Instead of reading Rossi's indifferent lover as the audience, however, I want to suggest that the poem uses a dynamic similar to the one already examined in "To My Own Portrait" to model the poet/reader relationship. The poem's internal audience (the lover) is distinct from and less important than the external audience (readers).

The central action of the poem is Rossi's creation of a sculpture of Ariadne in her own image.[11] As in "To My Own Portrait," the speaker directly addresses the artwork:

> I fix my thought, heart, soul, to burn, to shine
> I give my own life's history to thy brow,
> Forsaken Ariadne!—thou shalt wear
> My form, my lineaments; but O, more fair,
> Touched into lovelier being but the glow
> Which in me dwells....
> ....From thee my wo
> Shall yet look beautiful to meet his sight,
> When I am passed away.

Rossi wants the object of her unrequited love, a Roman knight, to be able to see her in the sculpture, so the sculpture "wear(s)" her physical appearance--her "form" and "lineaments." It also represents her emotional pain, her "wo," through the act of titling the piece "Ariadne" and because the appearance of the sculpture can "Speak to him of me… / With the soft sadness of thine earnest eye."[12]

As in "To My Own Portrait," the link between the artist's body and her artwork is intended to produce an emotional response in an audience of intimates—in this case, the beloved—after her death: "For thee alone, for thee! / May this last work, this farewell triumph be." The beloved is the only audience member who can read the work's true meaning, since "the world will see / Little of this, my parting work, in thee." The poem's readers are presumably part of "the world" that cannot see the sorrow and pain of her thwarted love in the sculpture; they see only the appearance and not the reality. But of course, they *will* know how to interpret the image, and may even do it more accurately than the privileged audience (since the beloved's response is not included in the poem). The reading audience also correctly interprets the poem by reading Rossi as a mask for the Hemans's own "wo."[13] In this sense, Leighton's characterization of Rossi as "courtesan" is appropriate: Hemans's display, which occurs indirectly through the figure of Rossi, convinces her readers that they can see past that appearance to her inner life.

I want to show how Hemans's distancing maneuver was mirrored in contemporary reading practices by looking at an exemplary reader, Letitia Landon, and her poems, "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans" and "Felicia Hemans." In "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans," Landon, like Hemans in "To My Own Portrait," separates what the public sees from what the poet experiences:

> The crowd—they only see the crown,
> They only hear the hymn;--
> They mark not that the cheek is pale,

And that the eye is dim."[14]

The context in which "Felicia Hemans" was first printed, facing an engraving of the West portrait that Hemans addresses in "To My Own Portrait," suggests the same split between appearance and reality that characterized Hemans's poem. On one side of the page, the reader would have seen the placid, unruffled portrait of Hemans, and on the other side, Landon's description of "the worn cheek and tearful eyelid."[15]

While the crowds "mark not that the cheek is pale," Landon does. She is able to correctly interpret the poet's physical appearance. And despite the lack of a personal connection, since she only knows Hemans by name, she exclaims that Hemans is "An old familiar friend":

How many loved and honoured thee
Who only knew thy name;
Which over the weary working world
Like starry music came!
With what still hours of calm delight
Thy songs and image blend;
I cannot choose but think thou wert
An old familiar friend."[16]

Landon sees the split between the public body of the poet and her private reality. This awareness produces sympathy and a feeling of friendship for a woman she has never met. Therefore, Landon's poems suggest that she reinscribes Hemans's model of the poet/reader relationship into her own reading (and writing) practices. As I will discuss in the next chapter, Landon does this consciously. In perpetuating Hemans's "myth," Landon also shapes her own public persona.

III. "To Play a Careless Part": Hemans Onstage at Home

Thine sparkling wit, The effort wild and vain,
For the charmed crowd to play a careless part;
Which hid the throbbings of a wounded heart.
(Too well to me the swift reverse was known,
The languid pause, when spirits worn expire:
Vainly for me the glittering pile was raised,
I knew the light with which thy fancy blazed,
At once a dazzling and consuming fire.
"Recollections of Mrs. Hemans; Irregular Stanzas,
Written in the Library, Wavertree-Hall" by Mrs. Rose Lawrence.

In addition to Landon's poems, a few descriptions of Hemans's admirers' behavior will show that Hemans succeeded in giving her audience exactly what it desired—the illusion of intimate acquaintance with the poet. For example, on a visit to Scotland, she was "abruptly accosted in the castle garden by an unknown lady, who approached her 'under the assurance of an internal sympathy that she must be Mrs. Hemans'" (Chorley 2: 23). The reader has never met Hemans, yet she recognizes her solely on the basis of "an internal sympathy." Readers trained in the conventions of sensibility would have responded sympathetically to the poet's display of emotion in her work. This sympathy is reflected in her readers' desire to console her for the melancholy tone of her poems: "One lady beset her, with a frame of family miniatures in hand, and, on parting with her, and remonstrating with her on the melancholy tone of her poems, begged leave to introduce a substitute who would act in her absence as a counselor and cheering influence; and, to use her own phrase, might be relied upon as a 'perfect walking-stick of friendship'" (Chorley 1: 109). This reader, appearing "with a frame of family miniatures in hand," responds to Hemans's display of intimacy with one of her own.

I now want to turn to what happens when readers, who are assured of their "internal sympathy with Hemans" and desire to be "walking-stick[s] of friendship," enter Hemans's home. Readers had certain expectations of Hemans in the home based on the illusion that the private and the public woman were continuous—an illusion that, as we have seen, Hemans helps to create through a dramatic gesture in which she uses her representations of her body or physical appearance to reveal her private self. But readers would also have expectations of Hemans's home based on the ideology that identified the home as a private and domestic space. Therefore, it is not surprising that Landon figures Hemans's home as a private space that provides comfort and protection from the horrors of the literary marketplace:

> Mrs. Hemans was spared some of the keenest mortifications of a literary career. She knew nothing of it as a profession which has to make its way through poverty, neglect, and obstacles: she lived apart in a small, affectionate circle of friends. The high road of life, with its crowds and contention—its heat, its noise, and its dust that rests on all—was for her happily at a distance. ("On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings" 73-4)

Landon's use of physical and spatial metaphors situates Hemans's body, both negatively, in terms of what it does not experience: heat, noise dust—and positively, in terms of what it does: a "circle of friends," and later in the essay, "the green nest." The literary marketplace here is figured as a literal marketplace, with its obstacles, crowds, heat, noise, and dust, while Hemans is protected by her location in a private, domestic space.

This idea that Hemans was untouched by the literary marketplace is a fiction. As Paula Feldman has argued, Hemans "came to take not only an active but a highly assertive hand in managing her career," negotiating prices for her contributions to magazines and annuals, and refusing to associate her name with lesser publications (94). The idea that Hemans's production of poetry was an effortless part of her daily tasks and that her home was completely segregated from the pressures of the literary marketplace is also a fiction. In order to find a peaceful place to write, for example, Hemans was "driven to seek refuge in the laundry, from which classical locality, she was wont to say, it could be no wonder if sadly mangled lines were to issue" (Hughes 82).[17] On another occasion she complains, "'I have been pursued by the household troops through every room successively, and begin to think of establishing my metier in the cellar'" (qtd. in Hughes 83).[18]

More pressing than these "humorous complaints" (Hughes 82) is the invasion from outside of the home, by readers who make Hemans, in Clarke's words, "an item on the cultural tourism map" (75). After the death of her mother, the marriage of her sister and her brother's removal to Ireland, Hemans moved her own family to Wavertree near Liverpool. The letters that Hemans writes during this period of her life register her embarrassment and anger at readers who enter her home. Hemans's private home becomes the site of public performance; she feels as if she is on stage at home, sighing, "'how much more was I formed for...quiet happiness, than for the weary part of femme célèbre, which I am now enacting!'" (qtd. in Hughes 189).[19] Hemans's anti-theatrical rhetoric is echoed by her friends and biographers Rose Lawrence and Henry Chorley. In the epigraph quoted above, Lawrence describes "[Her] sparkling wit, The effort wild and vain, / For the charmed crowd to play a careless part." And Chorley recalls:

> I have heard her requested to read aloud, that the visitors 'might carry away an impression of the sweetness of her tones.' I have been present when another eccentric guest, upon her characterizing some favorite poem as happily as was her wont, clapped her hands as at a theatre, and exclaimed, 'O Mrs. Hemans! *do* say that again that I may put it down and remember it!' The subjects suggested to her as themes for her poems were motley enough to help out the contriver of a pantomime. (1: 200)

Not only is Hemans's voice, like an actress's voice, performing the reading; the audience members behave as though they are at a play—clapping at her witty remarks—and their suggestions for her poetry implicitly suggest a desire for a low theatrical entertainment (pantomime).

The theatricalization of a private space was not in itself unusual for the period. In her work on the use of the closet trope, Catherine Burroughs suggests that many women writers saw the home as "inherently theatrical" (12): "the female closet of the Romantic period may be viewed as a small experimental theater in which dramas and gendered identities were conceived and rehearsed, sometimes in preparation for public viewings, at other times for private and semiprivate readings and dramatizations" (11).[20] However, while Burroughs describes women who put on theatrical displays in private spaces that they controlled, Hemans felt that she was not in control of her home and her attempt to exert control by separating public from private—"quiet happiness" from "the weary part of femme célèbre"—is unsuccessful.

A second anecdote from Chorley's Memorials illustrates Hemans's inability to reinforce these boundaries. Chorley refers to a famous story recounted by James Northcote to draw a parallel between Hemans and the "Tragic Muse," Sarah Siddons:

> I remember seeing a beautiful girl from New York, as much excited and awe-struck at the thought of being admitted to [Hemans's] presence, as the Lady Fannys and Lady Bettys whom Northcote saw reverentially peeping through the door of the room where England's tragic muse was sitting—"Her friends at home," said she, "would think so much of her, for having seen Mrs. Hemans." (1: 109)[21]

Chorley suggests that Hemans's audience can be compared to the audience members who spy through the door of an actress who is offstage. This anecdote emphasizes the excitement that comes from seeing the private life of a public woman. The comparison to Siddons is particularly appropriate because, as Judith Pascoe suggests, Siddons "participated in blurring the line between public and private" by making her domestic and maternal qualities a part of her public persona (23-4).

The actress serves as a powerful shadow figure for the poetess because of the challenge that she poses to the separation of public and private spheres. Kristina Straub argues that as "the contradiction between femininity as a public spectacle and emergent definitions of the middle-class woman as domestic and private, veiled from the public eye" becomes apparent in the eighteenth century, "the actresses' inherent challenge to the gendered, opposing spheres of public and private becomes increasingly the object of rhetorical containment and even erasure" (89). The careful quarantining of Hemans's body that we saw in the quotation from Landon suggests the extent to which the poetess' challenge to this ideology is figured as the containment of her body in the home, and by extension, the private sphere. According to Straub, "the actress figures discursively as the site of an excessive sexuality that must be—but never fully is—contained or repressed" (88). The actress' sexuality is always foregrounded since she is, with the exception of the prostitute, the figure most strongly associated with physical display in the public sphere. Similarly, women poets, as Nancy Armstrong suggests, "could always be accused of indulging in a form of aristocratic display"—the display of the body (78). This physical display, performed for money, could produce the illusion of ownership. In Anecdotes of Actors (1844), Anne Mathews claims that "actors are indubitably the legitimate property of the public" and "the vassals of all those who, for the time, possess the purchased right not only to taste of their quality, but to pronounce upon its flavor" (2).[22] The kind of language that Mathews uses, "to taste of their quality…to pronounce upon its flavor," is similar to that applied to the poetess. The Dublin University Magazine series on "Poetesses of Our Day," which takes Felicia Hemans as its first subject, includes a lengthy discussion that highlights the physical and sexual appeal of the poetess to male readers. The writer notes that he has taken on this assignment because "it is impossible to calculate what might be the result if we suffered such a gunpowder topic" to be treated by the magazine's young, male contributors who are "rascals" waiting to dishonor what the writer, who describes himself as "a perfect Duenna," guards (124). His language figures reading the poems as eating the poetess:

> these omnivorous amorists...digest with unimaginable facility, love affairs of the most contradictory material...One of these tender fellows will often breakfast on a tender colloquy with Clara—appease the noon-day cravings of his heart with a billet-doux to Wilhelmina—dine on a disparate promise of eternal constancy to Rose, and pick the wing of an undecided penchant for Seraphine, for Supper!" (125)

The relentless focus on the woman's body and the metaphors of consumption are intended to be humorous, but such comments make it clear that when readers consumed a text they also consumed the authoress. This connection is also one that Clare highlights in his letters and autobiographical prose, which suggests the extent to which he, as a laborer-poet, is feminized in the literary marketplace. In Hemans's case, the language of consumption, which is applied to both the actress and the poetess, highlights the way in which the physical, and by extension the sexual, cannot be repressed.

The language of consumption also suggests the extent to which Hemans's readers, whether they were purchasing the books and literary annuals in which her work appeared or visiting Hemans at home, were participating in a classed activity. Using Pierre Bourdieu's term "cultural consumption" to describe the way in which "tastes function as markers of 'class,'" I want to look at the way in which readers' consumption of Hemans could serve as a mark of middle-class status (1-2). The "incipient commodity culture" that Sonia Hofkosh links to the popularity of literary annuals is clearly operative in the commercial culture of Liverpool in the 1820s and 30s ("Disfiguring" 207). Chorley describes Hemans's Liverpool visitors' disappointment at finding that "strange to tell, [she] had nothing to say of theaters, concerts, &c., &c.—nothing to quote of 'the sweet new poem,'—no sympathy with the card table, and the 'comfortable early party'" (1: 177). By grouping theaters, concerts, new poems, cards, and social gatherings as topics of conversation that mark the speaker's middle-class status, literature becomes one classed commodity among many.[23] When Hemans comments on this aspect of Liverpool society, she does so by linking partygoers in search of low entertainment with her reading audience. She describes the party as a "Circus" at which she "'sat….looking most resolutely away *from* the stage'" (qtd. in Chorley 1: 209), as opposed to the others in attendance, who "'might have been an audience of "gentle readers."'" (qtd. in Chorley 1: 210). Hemans returns to the metaphor of the theater to suggest that her "gentle readers" are in fact philistines who cannot separate art from the social rituals that emphasize the ostentatious display of wealth.

Many of Hemans's poems appeared in the literary annuals, a venue that made those poems classed commodities. Hofkosh argues that annuals encode certain cultural values: "they operate on the logic of a cultural fetish" by functioning "as recognized signs of education, taste, luxury…as signs, in other words, of that excess which delineates the very sphere of the private. Purchasing a piece of that excess, the middle-class reader bought the privileges of ownership, a bourgeois semblance of aristocratic (self-) possession" ("Disfiguring" 206). I suggest that her readers translated the meaning encoded in the annuals and their contents to Hemans. Their invasion of her home is another example of the desire to possess "the very sphere of the private." We have already seen the "beautiful girl" from New York who claims that her friends "would think so much of her, for having seen Mrs. Hemans." Her response suggests that seeing Hemans confers social status. Other admirers sought to acquire more tangible souvenirs of their visit by having Hemans write a verse in their souvenir albums. As one contemporary reports, "[Hemans's] house was besieged by morning callers, who overwhelmed her with compliments, and by album-mongers, anxious to possess something from the pen of the poetess" (Elwood 242). Another adds, "People not only brought their own books, but likewise those of 'my sister and my sister's child,' all anxious to have something written on purpose for themselves" (Chorley 1: 178). Here, the language of possession and personal acquisition suggests the desire for a fetish—a substitute object that stands in for the experience of seeing the poet in the flesh.[24] Middle-class readers who acquired annuals in order to achieve self-possession through ownership wanted to acquire Hemans through objects linked to her physical body: to possess the sight of her, her voice, her intelligent conversation, her autograph, and her verses (written just for them in their souvenir albums).

The violent images that recur in Hemans's descriptions of her admirers' visits reveal her anxiety about becoming a fetishized, commodified object.[25] Describing the appearance of album-verse-seeking fans at Dove Cottage, where she is staying during her visit to Wordsworth and the Lake District, Hemans writes that "'Robinson Crusoe's dismay at seeing the print of the man's foot in the sand could have been nothing, absolutely nothing to mine, when these evil tokens of "young ladies with pink parasols" met my distracted sight'" (qtd. in Chorley 2: 108-9). And on another occasion, she again expresses surprise that she has been "found out": "'The young ladies, as I feared, brought an Album concealed in their shawls, and it was leveled at me like a pocket-pistol before all was over'" (qtd. in Chorley 2: 119). The incongruity that links gorgeously decorated albums with pistols and describes "young ladies with pink parasols" as "evil tokens" (and, through the Robinson Crusoe comparison, as cannibals), suggests that there is real strain, and perhaps even fear, beneath Hemans's wit.[26] Hemans's letters redefine her relationship with her readers as primarily economic, exposing the illusion that there is an emotional and sympathetic bond between the poet and her audience. This relationship between the poet and her public is revealed to be a business transaction. For readers, Hemans and her poets are status objects. For Hemans, these readers are primarily purchasers. At the same time, however, readers used the idealized, even sentimentalized, language of sympathy to mask the economic nature of literary exchange. This account of Hemans's relationship with her readers suggests that we understand sympathy differently when we observe its functioning in the literary marketplace.

The intimacy that is predicated on the audience's ability to "read" the poet's body in the form of the portrait or sculpture is disrupted by the audience's real bodies, which intrude into the space of Hemans's home, and also by Hemans's performing body. As a middle-class woman and a poet associated with the "domestic affections," Hemans's body should not be displayed, yet her public housekeeping moves it to center stage. In "To My Own Portrait" and "Properzia Rossi," Hemans controlled her bodily display. She decided how her body would be represented and used that representation strategically in order to model the poet/reader relationship. However, Hemans's letters reveal a tension between her belief that readers control her bodily display in her home and her determination to conduct this display on her own terms. For example, she describes an admirer who offered her undying friendship. Although this declaration made Hemans blush from embarrassment and anger, she says, "'I...can only hope that my blushes on this occasion were attributed to an excess of sensibility'" (qtd in Chorley 2: 83). Anyone familiar with the conventions of sensibility would attribute her blushes to strong emotion and delicate feeling; Hemans uses her knowledge of this code to hide her real feelings while creating the impression of sincerity. The admirer's desire to offer Hemans undying friendship stems from her belief that reading Hemans's poetry produces knowledge of Hemans, but the failed "reading" of Hemans's body reveals that her body is not a legible text.

IV. Hemans's Letters and the Biographical Controversy

After the publication of Chorley's Memorials, Hemans's contemporaries singled out these letters for particular censure. In a review of the Memorials in Dublin University Magazine, a reviewer denigrates: "the little correspondences of Wavertree; the invitation to tea; the apology for absence; the remark on the last concert or the last novel; and still worse,--because while the others are trifles, these might become positively injurious to her fame;--the caustic observations on her visitors and the lamentations of overpowered lionship" (140). His use of the term "caustic," which was completely foreign to her image of melancholy sweetness, suggests the extent to which the letters separated her from her persona. The Dublin Review also cites these letters' "vain and gossiping details" and refers to them as "a correspondence, which, to name its least objectionable characteristic, is little better than the tattle of a pair of sentimental milliners" (249). Just as Hemans invoked class in her letters to mock her status-obsessed Liverpool readers, this reviewer defines Hemans as working-class. He extends this comparison, suggesting that the text of her letters is suited only for women even lower on the status ladder: "We have no doubt that this will form a text of great authority amongst the milliners' apprentices" (250). The reviewer's reference to the milliner girl is significant. Hofkosh has explained that the milliner girl was a working-class woman associated with "class mobility and a contagious, corruptive sexuality" ("Classifying" 68). The allusion to Hemans as a milliner suggests that her position as a poet earning money associates her with working-class women. Hofkosh also argues that the milliner could be used as an image of social-climbing: "millinery and other women's businesses seem to have offered only a simulacrum of middle-class values and power for most working women. Hence the image of the milliner girl sipping her tea, so conspicuously imitating the middle-class manner to which she aspires" ("Classifying" 77). The reviewer seems to impute these aspirations to Hemans when he dubs her a *sentimental* milliner. Hemans' public persona was decidedly middle-class. The subject matter of her poems, with their patriotic and domestic themes, and her own maternal image contributed to this persona. Readers of the Memorials were disturbed by their recognition that Hemans could present a portrait of herself. In response, this review offers its own construction: a portrait of Hemans as a working girl. Just as Keats and Clare were feminized as a way of signaling a concern that they were trespassing on literary preserves intended for poets of a higher class, Hemans is classed to mark her deviation from a conventional model of femininity.

Both reviewers critique the letters, but ultimately they ignore them and attempt to reinforce the broken connection between Hemans and her works. The Dublin University Magazine says that these letters will merely *mislead* readers as to "the real character of the writer" (140), concluding, "[t]he private life of the Poetess was worthy of her published fame. Perhaps we ought rather to reverse the expression and say—that her exterior life was in harmony with that far profounder and more intimate existence, of which her works are the portrait and the history" (138). The reviewer emphasizes the unbroken link between the "private life" and her "published fame," and the "exterior life" and her works, while The Dublin Review suggests that Hemans is a wronged woman who must be saved from the villainous Chorley who has tainted her reputation: "we are anxious to rescue the fame of Mrs. Hemans from the obloquy cast on it" by Chorley's "unfortunate publication" (249).[27]

The most important contribution to "rescu[ing] the fame of Mrs. Hemans from the obloquy cast on it," was the "Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Hemans" written by her sister, Harriet Hughes, and published in Volume I of The Works of Mrs. Hemans in 1839. Hughes takes up the task of publicly interpreting Hemans's body, attempting to reconnect appearance and reality by reasserting the continuity of the public and private Hemans—the poetess and the domestic woman. She does this, in part, through her reading of Hemans's portrait. Hughes emphasizes that Hemans's appearance in the portrait can be read as an accurate representation of her private life, rewriting the portrait's sexual appeal as maternity. Hughes's unremitting focus on what Angela Leighton calls Hemans's "saintliness of character" was not universally admired (27). For example, Elizabeth Barrett preferred Chorley, because "'the sister's memoir touching as it is in many ways, & in its sisterhood & pure affection, always, is totally void of character, undescriptive of character, scentless, colorless...with the taste of holy water'" (Letters 2: 88). The Literary Gazette elevates the "Memoir" over the implicitly referenced Chorley when it claims that "Hitherto the biographical notices of this distinguished lady have been most desultory and conflicting, some of them, we might say, almost purely imaginary."

Hughes's "Memoir" responds directly to Chorley by focusing on the issue of privacy. She claims that Hemans "would have shrunk... from the idea of being made the subject of a biographical memoir" and recounts "her death-bed injunction, 'Oh! Never let them publish any of my letters!'" (29).[28] However, because Chorley has already made the letters public, and as Hughes suggests, "the result has been one which was, doubtless, little contemplated by the kindly-intentioned editor,--that of creating a very inadequate estimate of her character," she feels justified in writing a biographical memoir and employing the letters to create a more accurate representation of her sister (30). Hughes consistently describes the publication of her sister's letters as a violation of privacy through which "the veil of the sanctuary [was] lifted" and the "sanctity of private correspondence" endangered (30). By using this language, Hughes posits privacy almost as a religious value. The questionable nature of this assertion highlights the polemical nature of Hughes's response. Letters were not a strictly private form of communication. They were passed among friends and family members rather than being restricted to the eyes of sender and recipient. This focus on the private persists throughout the "Memoir" as Hughes tries to achieve her primary objective—the reconnection of Hemans's public persona to her private life.

Hughes's anxiety about inaccurate representations of Hemans, such as Chorley's Memorials, is mirrored in her specific concern about the accuracy of the different portraits of Hemans that became widely available for the first time in the years following her death in 1835.[29] These portraits are important to Hughes because they create an image of the poet that in turn creates her public persona.[30] For example, she addresses the possibility that inaccurate engravings taken from a second West portrait could distort Hemans's persona: "Engravings from it have appeared in [*The Drawing-room Scrap-Book*] and in *The Christian Keepsake*; but they are any thing but satisfactory; and give the idea of sallowness of complexion and sternness of countenance, as different from the original as possible" (146-7). Recognizing the discrepancy between the original and the copies enables Hughes to make a larger point. If something so straightforward as what Hemans actually looked like could be distorted, then readers should be skeptical of portraits—both engraved and written. This cultivation of readerly skepticism works to Hughes's advantage because her relationship with her sister enables her to position herself as an authority on Hemans's life and as a trustworthy judge of Hemans's appearance and character.

Ironically, Hughes claims that the West portrait, which Hemans described as alien in "To My Own Portrait," is closest to the "original." While that poem calls the transparency of the portrait into question, Hughes uses it to make the argument that Hemans's body or appearance is an expression of her character. She praises:

> its perfect freedom from any thing set or constrained in the air; and the sweet, serious expression, so accordant with her maternal character, which recalls her own lines,--
>
> "Mother! with thine earnest eye
> Ever following silently,"
>
> and which made one of her children remark, in glancing from it to the bust, executed some years after by Mr. Angus Fletcher, "The bust is the poetess, but the picture is all mother." (146-7)

This quotation expresses, in compressed form, the strategies that Hughes employs in the "Memoir" to make Hemans readily interpretable to her reading audience. Hughes describes "the perfect freedom from anything set or constrained in the air"—that is to say, from anything unnatural or artificial. Hughes emphasizes this naturalness in order to suggest that Hemans is not acting. Hughes observes that she has a "sweet, serious expression," a statement that distances Hemans from the letters' "caustic" wit. Instead, this expression is "accordant with her maternal character." The reassertion of a domestic, maternal Hemans is further reinforced both by her son's verdict that the portrait is "all mother" and the inclusion of the lines from one of her poems: "Mother with thine earnest eye / Ever following silently." By making this reference to the poetry, Hughes is also able to restore the reader's expectation, unsettled by the letters, that the poet's inner life is expressed in her works.

The self-consciousness of Hughes's reading is signaled by the discrepancy between the description that she gives in the "Memoir" and the reality of the portrait's appearance. Instead of manifesting, as in the verse quoted by Hughes, a mother's "earnest eye / Ever following silently," Hemans looks up, as though seeing the unseen, in a poetic glance. The overall impression is of youth and beauty, and the viewer is struck by the fashionable details of Hemans's dress: the bared shoulders, wide neckline, and large, puffed sleeves with transparent gauze over-sleeves. W. M. Rossetti responds to these aspects of Hemans's appearance in his "Prefatory Notice" to The Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans, using them to counter the assertion, made by Hughes and others, that Hemans's beauty "faded" early. Instead, he finds Hemans to be "eminently pleasing and good looking," with a "contour amply and elegantly rounded" (604). Hughes writes out the portrait's physical attractiveness because she wants to emphasize the private, domestic, and maternal.

Hughes's recounting of her nephew's statement—"The bust is the poetess, but the picture is all mother"—similarly reveals her shaping hand at work as she divides Hemans's persona into public and private roles and links each role to a corresponding image. This rewriting neutralizes the poetess' physical display; her Hemans is not a public spectacle. The bust, which is classical in style, is powerful and confident—a suitable image for representing the poet's public role.[31] The portrait is sweet, pretty, and introspective; it appropriately represents the poet's private life. Hughes's association of the portrait with the private is certainly linked to the fact that she possessed the portrait, which had been presented to her by the artist. The use of the portrait as the frontispiece to Volume I of The Works of Mrs. Hemans, in which the "Memoir" appeared, suggests that work's privileging of the private and furnishes an unspoken contrast with Chorley's

Memorials, which has an engraving of a portrait by Robinson, painted in Dublin in 1831, as its frontispiece.

There are a number of shared strategies that characterize Hemans and Hughes's uses of the West portrait in their respective texts. In "To My Own Portrait," Hemans complicates the notion that the poet's appearance is transparent by emphasizing the distance between her physical appearance and the reality of her personal experience—her public persona and her private self. Because Hughes does not present one unified image of Hemans, her splitting of Hemans's persona also participates in this complication. However, unlike "To My Own Portrait," the "Memoir" presents the possibility that some representations of Hemans's appearance may in fact reveal her character, but the viewer (and the reader) must be wary—appearances can be deceiving. Like "To My Own Portrait," the "Memoir" is designed to appeal to Hemans's readers, although this task is more complex for Hughes because of the changing context of Hemans's reception. By emphasizing that some engravings are better than others; some portraits are more satisfying than others; and that some biographies (such as her own) are more accurate than others; Hughes invites readers to think of themselves as privileged friends of the poet, precisely because they have access to this information. However, readers are never invited to judge for themselves. The task of interpreting the portrait is far too important to be left in their hands.

Conclusion

"'Imagine my dismay on visiting Mr. Fletcher's sculpture-room, on beholding at least six Mrs. Hemans, placed as if to greet me in every direction. There is something absolutely frightful in this multiplication of one's self to infinity'" (qtd. in Chorley 2: 123-4).

The sensation that Hemans feels upon seeing the busts is characteristic of the conflicts that she experiences in her strategic creation of a persona and a poetic career. The busts are terrifying in their multiplicity, reflecting her fear of replication and consumption. And yet, she places herself in the marketplace to be consumed and deploys her physical image in order to create and keep an audience. In fact, the very alienation that Hemans describes in her statements about her bust enables her, in "Properzia Rossi" and "To My Own Portrait," to create a persona and an audience through a performance of intimacy. Yet I would suggest that there is an important difference between Hemans's response to representations of her body in her poems and in her letters. In the poems, these representations are evoked for the consumption of her reading audience. In the letters, it becomes apparent that Hemans loses control over the representation of her body when public housekeeping brings that body to public attention.

Hemans's consciousness of herself as an actress in the letters points both to her desire to critique her readers and her need to exert some form of control over their representations of her body. Hemans critiques her readers by claiming that she is forced to perform a role to meet their expectations. But by suggesting that she can fool her readers into misreading her body (as in the "blushing" episode), she undercuts their ability to interpret her. Her theatricality is further complicated by the fact that her letters, despite their anti-theatrical rhetoric, have a performative quality—her critique is a *tour de force* in which her outrage is acted out using literary strategies such as allusions, metaphors, and vivid language. Hemans's theatrical performance, both in her poems and in her home, was effective. Landon's poems indicate that Hemans's performance of intimacy was reinscribed into contemporary reading practices and the fact that Hemans's readers visit her home shows that they found her performance of intimacy compelling. Moreover, her audience's shocked reaction to the theatricality of the letters suggests that they found the performance so convincing that they did not realize that it *was* a performance. Despite their surprise, I do not think that it is accurate to call Hemans's theatrical strategy subversive, since she uses it to give her readers exactly what they want—the illusion of an intimate relationship with the poet. However, like Clare, Hemans does use theatrical language subversively in the context of her letters to register her anger at the way in which her body is objectified, commodified, and fetishized by her audience. In spite of her critique, I would not call Hemans's theatricality a successful strategy, since it offers her no public outlet to address the issue of how the physical shapes her public persona.

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Notes

[1] See Angela Leighton's Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart, in which she argues that the "myth of Hemans" was "On the one hand, a calculated self-projection on the part of the poet and, on the other, an invention of the age which needed it" (8-9). Anne Mellor's Romanticism and Gender also describes the self-conscious construction of the Hemans myth: "In public, Hemans reconciled the tension between her poetic commitment to the domestic realm and the failure of her marriage by adopting the congenial position of the patiently suffering, neglected wife" (134). Norma Clarke suggests that "Giving the public what it wanted meant—in the 1820s, that period of mass production—giving them herself in the image they desired" (34).

[2] See Chorley (14) and Hughes (34). Maria Jane Jewsbury also refers to this image in a letter to Dora Wordsworth: "[Hemans] taught herself everything—was in childhood a regular romp—at seven years old used to climb into an apple tree to read Shakespeare" (qtd. in Clarke 75).

[3] Hughes also emphasizes Hemans's absorption: "she would become completely absorbed in the imaginative world [Shakespeare] revealed to her" (34).

[4] The quotation appears in her article "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings."

[5] As Susan Wolfson points out in her edition of Hemans's poems, letters, and reception materials, Landon actually misquotes Hemans. The text that Landon quotes comes from "The Chamois Hunter's Love" "where the reading is 'all reckless,' not 'ill fated'" (581).

[6] In her discussion of Hemans's relationship with her audience, Landon foregrounds her own anxieties about her position in the literary marketplace. While Hemans was the decade's domestic paragon, Landon had an affair with William Jerdan that produced three illegitimate children. Hemans herself conflates the movement into the marketplace with a woman's fall when she writes: "'Do you know the song—Where shall we bury our shame? Change the last word into fame, and it will express all my present perplexities'" (qtd. in Hughes 228-9).

[7] The Athenaeum 437 (12 March 1836)

[8] All quotations from Hemans's poems are taken from Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials, ed. Susan J. Wolfson.

[9] I suggest that this alienation is a dramatic gesture in part because in a letter to Mary Russell Mitford, Hemans suggests that the portrait can serve as "a personal introduction": "If you are likely soon to pay one of your flying visits to London, I should very much like you to see my portrait, for which I sat a few months since; I am sure you will understand *why* I wish you to see it; it would be giving me something of a personal introduction to one whom I esteem so highly" (qtd. in Chorley 1: 130).

[10] Hemans's headnote to the poem describes Rossi as "a celebrated female sculptor of Bologna, possessed also of talents for poetry and music" (352).

[11] She depicts herself as Ariadne so that she can cast her lover in the role of Theseus, the betrayer.

[12] This description resembles lines (from Hemans's poetry) used by Hughes uses to describe the West portrait: "the sweet, serious expression, so accordant with her maternal character, which recalls her own lines,--

> 'Mother! with thine earnest eye
> Ever following silently.'" (146-7)

[13] Hemans invites this reading. In a letter she suggests, "I have so often found a kind of relief in throwing the coloring of my own feelings over the destiny of historical characters, that it has almost become a habit of my mind" (41).

[14] Quotations from Landon's poems are taken from Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings, ed. Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess. "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans" first appeared in the New Monthly Magazine 44 (May-Aug. 1835): 286-88, and then in The Ladies' Wreath, an anthology of poems edited by Sarah J. Hale (1837) (McGann, Riess 489).

[15] The poem first appeared in a literary annual, Fisher's Drawing Room Scrapbook, 1838.

[16] In "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings," Landon says, "I can never sufficiently regret that it was not my good fortune to know Mrs. Hemans personally; it was an honour I should have estimated so highly—a happiness that I should have enjoyed so keenly" (73). Elizabeth Barrett's poem "Stanzas Addressed to Miss Landon, and Suggested by Her 'Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans'" suggests that Landon was drawn to Hemans because she saw herself in the other poet. Barrett figures the two women as mirror images: "Thou bay-crown'd living one—who o'er / The bay-crown'd dead art bowing, / And o'er the shadeless, moveless brow / Thy human shadow throwing." Barrett's text is taken from Wolfson's Selected Poems.

[17] On this occasion she was hiding from the masons and carpenters working at Bronwylfa (her house in Wales). Chorley also reports this anecdote: "I have heard Mrs. Hemans say, that the greater part of this poem [The Forest Sanctuary] was written in no more picturesque a retreat than a laundry..." (100). Hemans is forced to seek refuge in an un-ladylike space associated with servants.

[18] In her letters, she sees the problem of finding a place to work as a gendered one. She disputes with Hazlitt who "'describes the studies of the artist as a kind of sanctuary, a "city of refuge" from worldly strife, envy, and littleness, and his communion with nature as sufficient to fill the void, and satisfy all the cravings of heart and soul. I wonder if this indeed can be'" (qtd. in Hughes 234). Hazlitt talks about a sanctuary that has no physical place; it is a metaphor, a "city of refuge." However, metaphors cannot satisfy Hemans; the physical world presses too heavily upon her.

[19] In making this argument, I pick up on a prominent thread in recent Hemans criticism, which sees conflict and ambivalence in her poems about home, and apply it to *her* home. Instead of providing an uncomplicated valorization of domesticity, critics suggest that Hemans's poems

point to the tenuousness and instability of this ideal. Jerome McGann writes, "In her poetry what appears as substance is imagined on the brink of its dissolution" (Poetics 220). "Her work is a vision of the doom of an old order of values which it simultaneously, and paradoxically, celebrates as a solid and ascendant order of things" (Poetics 220). Anne Mellor makes a similar point, arguing, "even as Hemans consistently represents the home as an earthly paradise, she constructs this home as absent" (125-6). Tricia Lootens concludes that Hemans's treatment of home occupies "a fragmented compelling, and complex range of patriotic positions" (5). Anthony John Harding claims that "Read 'against the grain'...Hemans's texts reveal the terrible price of the 'cult of domesticity'" (139). Finally, Susan Wolfson argues for her "exposure of contradictions between the ideals of the feminine and women's social fate" ("Revolving Doors" 224).

[20] In a footnote, Burroughs also points us to Donald Reiman's observation that Hemans used her room as a "closet space" in order to act out verse dramas (178).

[21] Sarah Siddons was the best-known actress of the period, particularly praised for Shakespearean roles such as Lady Macbeth. After the unsuccessful production of Hemans' play The Vespers of Palermo in London, Siddons acted the role of Constance in the well-received Edinburgh production of the play. At a time when women on the stage were only a step above prostitutes, Siddons, who had the primary responsibility to economically support her children, emphasized her domesticity and her maternal feelings. Like Hemans, Siddons was also subject to her admirers' invasion of her private space. Her Reminiscences recounts "the storming of her own home by a Scottish lady who claimed to be too ill to go to the theater" (Burroughs 191).

[22] Interestingly, Matthews thinks that for actresses, this consumption is confined to the public sphere, since "No money can purchase a key to the blue chamber of an actor's privacy" (4).

[23] The "commercial" outlook of Hemans's actual readers might explain why contemporary commentators repeatedly invent a different audience. For example, Lydia Sigourney describes Hemans's American audience in thoroughly non-commercial terms: "The emigrant mother, toiling over steep, rugged mountains, reads thy poems in the rude vehicle which bears all her treasures to a stranger-land. The lisping child responds to her voice, amid those deep solitudes....Thou art with them in their unfloored hut,--teaching them to love the home which God has given" (xxiii).

[24] Hemans was similarly capable of fetishizing the poets that she loved. Enclosing a lock of Byron's hair with a letter, she writes, "'I have reserved quite as much as I shall want, for a brooch in which I mean to wear it...I have no sort of pleasure in keeping a relic all to myself'" (qtd. in Chorley 1: 16). The brooch "was one of her favorite ornaments till the Memoirs of the poet appeared," when, disappointed by the revelations contained in his letters and journals, she never wore the brooch again (Chorley 1: 17). The Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with notices of his life by Thomas Moore was published in 1830.

[25] Armstrong links objectification to public display, claiming that "[i]t is a woman's part in public spectacle that injures her, for as an object of display, she always loses value as a subject" (77).

[26] Another way of reading her anxiety over the footprint in the sand is to see it as her identification with Friday, who becomes Crusoe's servant.

[27] Dublin University Magazine also makes Chorley the villain, describing him as a social climber who published the Memorials in order to gain "admission to the literary coteries" (249).

[28] The conflict over whether Hemans's life story should be written at all could paralyze the biographer. In The Last Autumn at a Favourite Residence, With Other Poems; And Recollections of Mrs. Hemans (1836), Rose Lawrence's anxiety about writing a memoir was so great that she felt unable to write almost anything at all: "The writer feels so bound down by the fear of doing injustice to the memory of her friend by betraying the careless communications of a confiding affection,--of inserting anything in these pages that can give pain to those who were dearest to her while she lived,--that this little memoir...must necessarily be very slight and general" (287).

[29] There were other ways for Hemans's contemporaries to see such portraits or busts prior to this period. For example, they were displayed in the artist's studio. An engraving of the sculpted bust by Angus Fletcher appeared with Landon's article, "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings" in the New Monthly Magazine (1835); an engraving of the portrait by W. E. West appeared with Landon's poem "Felicia Hemans" in Fisher's Drawing Room Scrapbook (1838); Chorley's Memorials includes an engraving of a portrait by Robinson; and Volume I of The Works of Mrs. Hemans, containing Hughes's "Memoir," has an engraving of the West portrait as its frontispiece.

[30] Hemans herself was aware of portraits' persona-shaping power. When William Wordsworth told her of his intention to give a young woman a pair of scales for a bridal present, she "'told him that I looked upon scales as particularly graceful things, and had great thoughts of having my picture taken with a pair in my hand'" (qtd. in Chorley 2: 117). In so doing, she replaces the scales' domestic associations with an allegorical meaning.

[31] An engraving of the bust appears as a frontispiece to The Poetical Works of Felicia Hemans, Boston, 1853. Lawrence describes it as "an excellent bust, executed in marble, of Mrs. Hemans, when she was in Scotland, by Mr. Angus Fletcher, for her venerable friend Sir Robert Liston: it was exhibited in London, Liverpool, &c.—it is very like her, and very pleasing; for her light form, the air of the head, and the regularity of the small features were favourable to this mode of representation; and the one long tress of her hair which fell over her breast was, in this, advantageous" (347).

"A compromise between the anonymious and the full announcement": Letitia Elizabeth Landon and the Biographical Bind

The central issue of Letitia Elizabeth Landon's critical reception has been her emotional experience. Landon's poems were famous for their stories of the tragic deaths of faithful women betrayed or thwarted by love. Her contemporaries believed that to judge the value of her work, one must first determine the authenticity of these melancholy feelings—had Landon experienced these emotions? The biographical impulse of Landon criticism has provided material to both attack and praise her work. One of the only twentieth-century evaluations of Landon, appearing long before the recent surge of interest in her work, is Lionel Stevenson's "Miss Landon, 'The Milk-And-Watery Moon of Our Darkness,' 1824-30." As the title suggests, this is a dismissive account of Landon and her work, based in part on Landon's lack of emotional experience. Stevenson concludes that "When she began to write, she was absolutely without emotional experiences, either joyous or sad; and although anxieties soon afterwards beset her, they were of the threadbare, inelegant sort that had to be disguised out of all recognition before they could figure in her gorgeous poetic wonderland" (359). Recent biographical revelations by Cynthia Lawford have challenged the statement that Landon "was absolutely without emotional experience." Lawford's research has uncovered the fact that the scandalous rumors of sexual liaisons that followed Landon throughout her life were at least partly true. Landon had a long-term relationship with William Jerdan, the married editor of The Literary Gazette, which produced three children. Lawford suggests that traces of this secret relationship are found in Landon's work:

> She was the heroine of 'Rosalie' (1824) who 'was left to brood/O'er wrongs and ruin in her solitude'; or the maiden in 'A Legend of Tintagel Castle' (1832) who led Sir Lancelot 'away to an odorous cave'....She also seems to have used her poems to remind Jerdan of her charms: she who with 'fresh wild pulse' loves 'as youth—woman—genius loves' ('Roland's Tower', 1824). Over and over she bids him farewell, upbraids him and bemoans their plight: 'we feign we do not feel,/Until our feelings are forgotten things,/Their nature warp'd in one base selfishness.' (37)

While new biographical information will aid in the interpretation of Landon's career and work, it may also tempt us to read the poems as biographical documents that transparently reveal the events of her life. It was exactly this kind of confining reading that Landon grappled with throughout her career. Exploring Landon's self-conscious shaping of the personal allows us to think about the relationship of these issues to her work without re-imposing the gendered critical standards of her contemporaries.

In this chapter, I contend that Landon disdained the biographical reading while encouraging readers to see her poems as personally connected to their author. Laman Blanchard's description of Landon's use of her initials (L.E.L.) as a pen name: "the compromise between the anonymious and the full announcement," is also a good description of Landon's complex approach to the use of the personal in her poems (31). She encourages readers to see her poems as an expression of her emotions. Her claim, "the painter reproduces others,--the poet reproduces himself," enables her to satisfy her audience's expectations by avoiding the accusations of professionalism or theatricality leveled at any woman poet who strayed from heartfelt emotion ("On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings" 69). Yet she also chastises critics for paying too much attention to the personal or biographical, claiming that they should "speak, not of the author, but of his works; his pages, not himself are amenable to your remarks" ("Edward Lytton Bulwer" 47). Landon's ambivalence suggests the biographical bind in which she was caught. I look at The Venetian Bracelet (1829) as the key text in her response to this predicament. By examining the preface and three poems in that volume, I show that Landon employs different "voices" in these poems that are both identifiable with and separate from her. Landon cultivates this ambiguity in order to play both sides at once: the poems are both the "full announcement" of her personal emotions and "anonymious"—the rejection of a narrowly personal reading.

L.E.L's literary career began inauspiciously, with the publication of a largely ignored volume, The Fate of Adelaide (1821). However, her popularity came not from a volume of poetry, but from her publication of short poems in The Literary Gazette, a weekly magazine devoted to the arts. These contributions were signed with her initials, "L.E.L." According to Laman Blanchard, the author of Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L. (1841), "The three letters very speedily became a signature of magical interest and curiosity" (30). And because "the many songs and sketches...week after week, without intermission, appeared under the same signature" (30), the "initials became a *name*" (31). The audience's interest was piqued not only by the "partial revelation" of the initials, but also by the presence of her poems "week after week" in the same magazine: "From the summer of 1821, to that of 1824, these contributions were uninterruptedly continued" (Blanchard 31). The audience's interest was so profound that Blanchard could compare Landon's initial experience of literary fame to Byron's: "It was thus that the young initialist 'woke, and found herself famous'" (31).

The conditions of publication contributed to her success. As the New Monthly Magazine suggests, she was something of a novelty: "nobody had successfully initialized, until L.E.L.

arose—nobody had dreamt of spelling fame in three letters that expressed no meaning at all" ("Memoir of Letitia Elizabeth Landon" 78). However, the writer is wrong that L.E.L. was "three letters that expressed no meaning at all." The initials expressed multiple meanings and enabled readers to create their own image of the poet. A few comments by Landon's contemporaries will suggest how common this activity was. Edward Bulwer Lytton's oft-quoted recollections of his undergraduate days describe:

> a rush every Saturday afternoon for the 'Literary Gazette;' and an impatient anxiety to hasten at once to that corner of the sheet which contained the three magical letters 'L.E.L.' And all of us praised the verse, and all of us guessed at the author. We soon learned it was a female, and our admiration was doubled, and our conjectures tripled. Was she young? Was she pretty? And—for there were some embryo fortune-hunters among us—was she rich? (546)

This slyly pragmatic view contrasts with the more romantic vision of "the youthful dreamers" who "were half inclined to imagine that 'L.E.L.' might be, in some unknown tongue, the name of sylph or naiad—that the fair poet's inkstand was a lily, her ink dew, and her pen the wing-feather of a real phoenix" ("Memoir of Letitia Elizabeth Landon" 79).

The publication of The Improvisatrice (1824) ended readers' speculations by revealing Landon's identity. At the same time, the volume's title poem provided readers with another way of imagining the poet. The narrator of the poem, the improvisatrice (a young, Italian woman), was clearly modeled on Madame de Stael's Corinne, but readers immediately associated the speaker with Landon. A review of the volume in the New Monthly Magazine sums up the prevailing opinion: "The language, the doctrine, the thoughts, are all moulded and tinctured with the rich and powerful sentiment which governs the heart of the writer" (365).[1] For some readers, the improvisatrice's description of her poetic process: "I poured my full and burning heart / In song," evoked Landon's Literary Gazette poems. Blanchard recalls the contemporary opinion that "The heroine of it...might be even L.E.L. herself; for what were the multitude of songs she had been pouring out for three years past, but 'improvisings?'" (38-9). The association of poet and speaker led to the conclusion that would dominate her critical reception: "whilst she identified herself in idea with those whose sorrows she sang, lamenting, often in the first person, over disappointments and treacheries she never had then experienced, it may easily be supposed that those readers who were wholly unacquainted with the fair poetess, naturally concluded her to be the pining victim of unrequited affection" (Elwood 320).

Readers expected that Landon would be melancholy and sorrowful like her heroines, yet her personality and social life were at odds with their expectations. Describing her conversation, the Athenaeum notes that it "sparkled always brightly with quick fancy, and a badinage astonishing to those matter-of-fact persons who expected to find, in the manners and discourse of the poetess, traces of the weary heart, the broken lute, and the disconsolate willow-tree, which were so frequently her themes of song" ("Mrs. MacLean" 14). The gap between "the conversation of [the] authoress" and her poems could be the source of criticism as well as surprise because it signaled a kind of professionalism that made many readers uncomfortable.

Of course, Landon was a professional. After her father's death in 1824, she supported her mother, brother, and herself with the income from her writing. Landon lived in London and it was well known that she mixed in literary circles and had numerous literary acquaintances. She was the chief reviewer for The Literary Gazette, edited by William Jerdan, through much of the 1820s. This position made her a powerful figure in the London literary world, with the ability to help or harm other writers' careers. Although the articles that she wrote for The

Literary Gazette were unsigned, her status as a reviewer was common knowledge, and some contemporaries felt that she had destroyed careers at Jerdan's direction. She produced seven books of poetry, four books of fiction, contributed numerous poems to annuals and gift books, and edited several annuals, most notably Fisher's Drawing Room Scrapbook (1832-38). Her incredible productivity, which was part of her appeal to her first readers, could also be read as a sign of her professionalism and ridiculed for the classed associations that it evoked.[2] Noting the frequent comments on Landon's "professionalism as a writer," Virginia Blain has suggested, "it is possible that class may have been just as big a factor as gender in marking out the contours of her reputation" (39).

It was dangerous for Landon to have herself or her work too closely associated with the "professional" because for some readers, it was a synonym for the manipulative, artificial, and theatrical. One frequently quoted anecdote recounts an exchange between Landon and two admirers at a party:

> "You never think of such a thing as love!' exclaimed a young, sentimental man; 'you, who have written so many volumes of poetry upon it?' 'Oh! that's all professional, you know!' exclaimed she, with an air of merry scorn. 'Professional!' exclaimed a grave Quaker, who stood near. 'Why, dost thou make a difference between what is professional and what is real? Dost thou write one thing and think another? Does not that look very much like hypocrisy?' To this the astonished poet made no reply, but by a look of genuine amazement. It was a mode of putting the matter to which she had evidently never been accustomed. (Howitt, Homes and Haunts 132-3)[3]

The sentimental young man is shocked by Landon's admission that she does not share the thoughts and feelings of her heroines and for the "grave Quaker," this even seems to constitute a moral failure.

The gap between "writ[ing] one thing and think[ing] another" meant that her love poetry was a commercial offering, manufactured for an audience eager to consume her melancholy products. Readers were troubled by the idea that Landon would assume a tone and persona to sell her work. A review of The Improvisatrice in the Westminster Review expresses this anxiety, comparing Landon and her poems to manufactured objects. The reviewer observes that English abounds in "poetical terms," a fact that leads some young women to mistake themselves for poets:

> [Landon] has fallen into [this mistake] the more readily and deeply, because nearly all her poetry related to love, a topic, for every thing connected with which there are nearly as many forms of expression and words as there are in Arabic for a lion; and on which 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. (302)

This review suggests an anxiety about Landon's prolific literary output, which must have seemed like mass-production to her contemporaries. When phrases and images merely need to be fitted together in order to produce a poem, the poet herself becomes a "stocking," a mass-produced commodity. Commodities are created to satisfy specific consumers, in Landon's case, the young men and women who want to affect melancholy poses. A review of Landon's The Troubadour (1825) and The Golden Violet (1827) identifies "the class of readers to whom they are addressed; viz. the younger part of the fair sex, and those members of our's who deem it interesting to be sentimentally melancholy" (Roebuck 303).[4] These reviews imply that Landon's poetry is professional, a commodity constructed out of conventional materials for a well-defined audience.[5]

The trajectory of Landon's critical reception across the 1820s is the movement from the unquestioned assumption that her work was an expression of her personal experiences and emotions to the suspicion that her poems were performances and commodities. Landon's career had reached a turning point. Lionel Stevenson suggests that "Her books were selling in their thousands, but unfavorable criticism was increasing. On the one hand, censorious persons branded her poems 'immoral' for their insistence on passionate love; on the other, discriminating readers began to find her themes and settings monotonous" (361). Her response was The Venetian Bracelet (1829), a volume whose preface makes a public statement about the place of the personal and the poet's emotions in her work. In this preface, Landon distances herself from her poems' speakers and places the focus on her readers' emotions, not her own, in order to present her melancholy poems as the solution to a larger cultural problem. Her reimagining of love poetry in the preface makes it clear that her public attitude towards poetry was not "all professional."

Displacing her experience from the poems is a potentially dangerous strategy; as we have seen, readers both wanted and expected to see the poems as expressions of her emotions. However, Landon separates the work from herself: "With regard to the frequent application of my works to myself, considering that I sometimes portrayed love unrequited then betrayed, and again destroyed by death—may I hint the conclusions are not quite logically drawn, as assuredly the same mind cannot have suffered such varied modes of misery" (8). Instead, her depictions of "love unrequited then betrayed, and again destroyed by death" are presented as a poetic solution to a larger cultural problem:

> A highly cultivated state of society must ever have for concomitant evils, that selfishness, the result of indolent indulgence; and that heartlessness attendant on refinement, which too often hardens while it polishes. Aware that to elevate I must first soften, and that if I wish to purify I must first touch, I have ever endeavored to bring forward grief, disappointment, the fallen leaf, the faded flower, the broken heart, and the early grave. Surely we must be less worldly, less interested from this sympathy with the sorrow in which our unselfish feelings alone can take part. (7-8)

Individuals are selfish and heartless because their "highly cultivated" society is indolent and over-refined. The poet's goals are to "elevate" and "purify," but this selfishness stands in the way. So the poet softens the readers by encouraging their sympathy with melancholy subjects. Melancholy love poetry becomes the cure for a diseased culture.

Recent critics have looked at the preface in terms of its gendered rhetoric. Glennis Stephenson claims that Landon's rhetoric echoes commonly held expectations for women poets, noting that in The Female Poets of Great Britain, Frederic Rowton describes "'how constantly [female poets] have sought to impress the feelings of the race'" (11). Stephenson concludes that Landon's preface is part of this tradition of women's poetry: "[women poets] are acutely aware of the importance of forging that link between poetess and audience which will allow them to 'impress the feelings of the race'" (11). Isobel Armstrong argues for Landon's participation in this tradition, although she sees her use of this tradition as subversive:

> If Landon appears to be completely accepting the sentimental terms in which women were seen, she is turning them to moral and social account and arguing that women's

> discourse can soften what would now be called the phallocentric hardness and imaginative deficiencies of an overcivilised culture. It is as if she has taken over the melting softness of Burke's category of the 'beautiful', which he saw as an overrefined and 'feminine' principle in contrdistiction to the strenuous labour of the 'sublime', and reappropriated it as a moral category which can dissolve overcivilised hardness. (328)

I think that it is also possible to see Landon's preface as part of another tradition—or rather a debate—on the role of art in a capitalist society.

This debate is cast in terms of the distinction between ancient and modern (in the arts, in social life) that preoccupied eighteenth-century thinkers. Ancient societies were characterized by war, physical courage and vigor; they privileged the community. Modern societies were characterized by refinement, the growth of the arts and sciences, and commerce; they privileged the individual.[6] Motivating this debate was an anxiety that the replacement of ancient virtues with bourgeois capitalism would produce an over-refined, weak society. The arts were important to this debate because they could be positioned either as part of the problem or the solution. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's First Discourse (1750) contrasts modern and ancient societies and blames the corruption of the moderns on the luxury bred by art: "Before Art had moulded our manners and taught our passions to speak in an affected language, our customs were rustic but natural" (37); "While living conveniences multiply, arts are perfected and luxury spreads, true courage is enervated, military virtues disappear, and this too is the work of the sciences and of all those arts which are exercised in the shade of the study" (54). Art does not depict courageous acts but "all the aberrations of the heart and mind" (58). David Hume takes up the opposite position in Essays Moral, Political, and Literary (1742). He argues that "a cultivated taste for the polite arts" "improves our sensibility for all the tender and agreeable passions" (93) and that

> nothing is so improving to the temper as the study of the beauties, either of poetry, eloquence, music, or painting....The emotions which they excite are soft and tender. They draw off the mind from the hurry of business and interest; cherish reflection; dispose to tranquility; and produce an agreeable melancholy, which, of all dispositions of the mind, is the best suited to love and friendship (93).[7]

Landon's preface engages with many of the same issues. Like Rousseau, she suggests that modern society is corrupt. His "luxury" is similar to her "refinement" and "indolent indulgence." At the same time, her desire to "soften" through "sympathy" with others' "sorrow" is similar to Hume's focus on the power of art to evoke "soft and tender" emotion and the power of "melancholy" to produce "love and friendship."[8] In the preface, then, Landon seizes upon the topic of love as a way to enter this debate and claim an audience beyond the young women and sentimental young men who are usually identified as her readers. She also inventively claims the authority to speak as a cultural critic and maps out an influential role for the poet.

In the preface, Landon emphasizes the distance between the emotions of the poet and the speakers of her poems by pointing out that "the same mind cannot have suffered such varied modes of misery" (8). However, the poems in The Venetian Bracelet complicate this distance. I want to look at three poems in which the narrator or speaker can be identified with Landon: "The Venetian Bracelet," "A Summer Evening's Tale," and "Lines of Life".[9] All three poems feature a first-person narrator or speaker (who is a poet) and address the same social issues as the preface in the same language. While the preface only identifies the social problems of hardness, worldliness, and selfishness, the poems dramatize or illustrate them, giving them specific form. In the poems, these social problems originate in society's demand that individuals mask their authentic emotions.

"The Venetian Bracelet" and "A Summer Evening's Tale" have a similar form. Both are narratives with introductory sections, spoken in the first person by a poet, that clearly frame the rest of the text as a tale. In both poems, the first-person narrator has characteristics that were commonly associated with Landon. For example, in "A Summer Evening's Tale," she is the poet of love: "I'll tell thee, love, a tale,--just such a tale / As you once said my lips could breathe so well; / Speaking as poetry should speak of love." In "The Venetian Bracelet," the narrator exclaims:

> Another tale of thine! fair Italie—
> What makes my lute, my heart, aye turn to thee?
> I do not know thy language,--that is still
> Like the mysterious music of the rill;--
> And neither have I seen thy cloudless sky.

Like this speaker, Landon has told numerous "tale[s]" of Italy without ever visiting the country or learning its language. Among these tales is "The Improvisatrice," her best-known poem, and the character with which she was most associated. The similarity between Landon and the narrator of the poems is heightened by the poems' treatment of the same issues discussed in the preface. The preface describes modern society as emotionally hard and selfish, and we see that reflected in the poems' critique of the hypocrisy of social life. "A Summer Evening's Tale" asks:

> Are we not like that actor of old time,
> Who wore his mask so long, his features took
> Its likeness?—thus we feign we do not feel,
> Until our feelings are forgotten things

Their nature warp'd in one base selfishness.

This hypocrisy is expressed through the figure of the mask, which represents false emotions.[10] Similarly, in "The Venetian Bracelet" the narrator describes:

The many meannesses, the petty cares,
The long avoidance of a thousand snares,
the lip that must be chain'd, the eye so taught
To image all but its own actual thought.

The poems, like the preface, envision poetry as the remedy for restoring real emotion to individuals and health to society through sympathy with sorrow. In the preface, Landon vowed "to purify" through "sympathy" with "grief, disappointment, the fallen leaf, the faded flower, the broken heart and the early grave" and claimed that "all true deep feeling purifies the heart." The goal of purification (linked to the image of water) is present in the poems as well. The narrator of "The Venetian Bracelet" describes a "cold world, / Where feelings sleep like wither'd leaves upfurl'd" and hopes "to wash them with such gentle rain, / Calling their early freshness back again." Once the poems' "gentle rain" washes the reader:

The heart of vanity, the head of pride,
Touch'd by such sorrow, are half purified;
And we rise up less selfish, having known
Part in deep grief, yet that grief not our own.

In "A Summer Evening's Tale," the narrator uses almost identical language, describing the "glorious" "aim" of a poet in a "mercenary" society: "To melt these frozen waters into tears, / By sympathy with sorrows not our own." Landon's association of her "preface voice" with the narrators of these poems aids her larger project of defining inauthentic emotion as a social problem. When she positions herself in the poems, she takes on the voice of cultural authority; she is the one who tells the melancholy stories, rather than the one who experiences them.

The narrators of "The Venetian Bracelet" and "A Summer Evening's Tale" seem to speak in Landon's voice—the voice of cultural authority and sincerity. "Lines of Life" is a different kind of poem. The speaker retains the authority to critique society, but rather than introducing a narrative, she communicates her own experience directly in a monologue. Part of the poem's appeal is its ambiguity, as Landon simultaneously inserts herself into the poem and distances herself from its speaker. The poem has always been a favorite of readers, often appearing in nineteenth-century anthologies of women's poetry. The poem's popularity is due in part to its style; it has short, crisp lines and a directness that some contemporaries felt was lacking in her other poems.

Like "The Venetian Bracelet" and "A Summer Evening's Tale," the poem uses the mask or false face to suggest the emotional falseness that individuals living in a commercial society must exhibit:

> WELL, read my cheek, and watch my eye,—
> Too strictly school'd are they,
> One secret of my soul to show,
> One hidden though betray.
> I teach my lip its sweetest smile,
> My tongue its softest tone;
> I borrow others' likeness, till
> Almost I lose my own.

Both the language and the message link the speaker to Landon. However, in this poem, she uses several distancing strategies that make the link ambiguous. The poem's epigraph supplies a persona for the speaker: "Orphan in my first year's, I early learnt / To make my heart suffice itself, and seek / Support and sympathy in its own depths." The epigraph could be read as Landon's signal that the poem is not in her own voice, since she was not orphaned in her first years. Yet Landon did project the image of herself as "orphan girl" in the final lines of "The Troubadour," addressed to her father who died in 1824:

> My own dead father, time may bring
> Chance, change, upon his rainbow wing,
> But never will thy name depart
> The household god of thy child's heart,
> Until thy orphan girl may share
> The grave where her best feelings are.[11]

Her audience would have been familiar with these lines, since the volume's reviewers praised their filial feeling.[12]

The same ambiguity is created by the title's allusion to the "lines of life" in Shakespeare's Sonnet 16.[13] On one hand, the allusion to Shakespeare suggests a self-conscious engagement with literary tradition that has a distancing effect. However, the allusion also introduces the personal into the poem, since the title, "Lines of Life," implies that the verses are about the life of the speaker. Glennis Stephenson notes: "These opening stanzas appear reminiscent of a riddle, and the reader rightly waits for the expected question, 'What am I?' since this is exactly what the poem seems to be about: What is Landon?" (18).[14] The allusion also allows Landon to expand on one of the preface's main concerns—the social influence of melancholy poems. In "Lines of Life," the speaker expresses a similar "eagerness of hope / To benefit my kind" through poetry. However, the poem not only emphasizes the reader's emotional response, but also describes the emotional connection between the speaker and the reader:

> Will the young maiden, when her tears
> Alone in moonlight shine—
> Tears for the absent and the loved—
> Murmur some song of mine?
> Will the pale youth by his dim lamp,
> Himself a dying flame,
> From many an antique scroll beside,
> Choose that which bears my name?

Both the "young maiden" and the "pale youth" are engaged in solitary acts of poetic consumption. The "young maiden," "Alone," "Murmur[s]" a poem; the dying youth chooses her texts over "many an antique scroll." Landon implies that while a connection between the speaker and those she encounters in everyday life is not possible, emotional connections can occur between poets and readers. Not coincidentally, the audience described (young men and women) mirrors Landon's actual audience.

Stephenson sees the poem as different from the general tenor of Landon's work in its "powerful affirmation of the consolations inherent in fame" and reads the final stanzas as "a quite startling assertion of the poetic self that defiantly flouts the conventionally acceptable altruistic goals" (18). This attitude seems less unusual in the context of the poem's larger message. "Lines of Life" describes the dangers of emotional solipsism. The poet's fame, accomplished through the circulation of her texts, provides a channel that enables emotion to turn outward towards an audience and produce a sympathetic bond with the reader.[15] I suggest that the title's allusion to Shakespeare's Sonnet 16 makes a statement about poetic fame. This is one of a series of sonnets that entreat a young man to marry and have children. Its message is that reproduction, not writing, is the true path to immortality:

> So should the lines of life that life repair
> Which this time's pencil, or my pupil pen,
> Neither in inward worth nor outward fair
> Can make you live yourself in eyes of men.

The "lines of life," one's descendants, make one live "in eyes of man" where "pencil" or "pen" cannot. Landon inverts the meaning of the source. In the sonnet, children oppose decay—in the monologue, it is writing. The text enables sympathy, and therefore is analogous to generation in a sterile world.

Why does Landon use different personae and different voices, in her poems? Do they undercut the kind of emotional sincerity that she is trying to achieve? To answer these questions, I turn to recent criticism that examines the relationship between Landon and these personae. Like the criticism by Landon's contemporaries examined so far, much recent criticism has focused on the personal. In part, this is a response to Landon's reception history, but it is also driven by feminist scholars' desire to determine whether Landon supports or subverts conventional gendered roles and subjects. Anne Mellor's influential discussion of Landon suggests that her poetry replicates the social construction of womanhood and Burke's ideal of beauty. Others contend that Landon critiques these conventions by employing a mask or a persona embedded within them to expose their corruption. Jacqueline Labbe argues that

"Mellor's entrapped poetess simply represents a persona employed by Landon to demonstrate her poetic fitness" (159). Labbe separates the narrator, who is "complicit with society" (160), from the "author's voice," which she locates in "her prefatory space" (161). Landon uses the conventions of romantic love in her poems to expose the damage that they cause. Love becomes a "theatricalised script" and 'emotion is always necessarily feigned" (164-5). Armstrong also argues for the intentional theatricality of Landon's persona: "["The Improvisatrice"] is a mask, a role-playing, a dramatic monologue; it is not to be identified with herself or her own feminine subjectivity" (325). Moreover, "The adoption of the mask appears to involve a displacement of feminine subjectivity, almost a travestying of femininity in order that it can be made an object of investigation" (Armstrong 325). For both Labbe and Armstrong, Landon's personae are evidence of a theatrical approach to poetry that produces a critique of conventional gendered roles and subjects. This theatrical language parallels the language of Landon's contemporaries, yet the connotations of the theatrical are inverted. The dramatic tools of "script" and "mask" reveal what is beneath the surface of conventional love poetry in which betrayed women die of broken hearts. It is only through performance that Landon's "true" attitudes are revealed.[16]

The line of inquiry that I have followed is different from Labbe's assertion that the poetess' voice is separate and distinct from Landon's voice and the prefatory voice. Landon tried to appeal to her audiences with a set of voices that are distinct, but not separate. We can distinguish the speakers of the different poems from each other and from the voice of the preface, yet Landon does not separate them from herself. Readers would have experienced the volume as a set of overlapping voices that produce a multi-sided, yet still personal, whole. The detached voice of cultural criticism in the preface is as much a performance as the monologue "Lines of Life," and yet both are expressions of the same "sincere" cultural argument. Landon's poetic process in The Venetian Bracelet attempts to balance the performative and the personal. Landon is neither trapped in the conventions that Mellor identifies, nor using the speakers of her poems as mere masks to be stripped away in order to get at her real opinions. I suggest that Laman Blanchard's description of Landon's initials (L.E.L.) as "the compromise between the anonymious and the full announcement" serves as a model of this poetic practice (31). Landon cultivates a sense of ambiguity: the poems are both the "full announcement" of her personal pain and "anonymious"—the rejection of "the frequent application of my works to myself" (103).

The response of Landon's contemporaries to The Venetian Bracelet suggests that this strategy for escaping the biographical bind was not entirely successful. Both The New Monthly Magazine and the Athenaeum seized upon the section where she disclaims "the frequent application of my works to myself" (103). The New Monthly Magazine reviewer is disturbed by:

> her acknowledgement that she is perfectly unconscious of having felt the stirrings and woes of love which she describes, or, in other words, that her delineations are purely imaginative. It is a question of some moment to decide, whether he who depicts feelings which to himself are unreal, is capable of giving them truly?....Indeed, it is difficult to conceive how a knowledge of any passion can be painted to the life—to the very truth of nature, without being felt. (514)[17]

Landon's goal in the preface was to separate herself from her subjects and to create the persona of "detached" observer and cultural critic. However, the reviewer seizes on her "acknowledgement" as an admission of guilt. He sees only two poles—authentic emotion ("having felt the stirrings...") and false emotion ("purely imaginary"). The Athenaeum reviewer reads Landon's disclaimer as an expression of her fear of seeming too self-centered. She attempts to evade the "charge" of egotism by seducing the reader: "If...Miss Landon were open to this charge....It would not be enough to say, 'I assure you, dear reader and courteous critic, that, whatever you may think, I was in love with no one but you,'—for though we most potently believe Miss Landon's assertion on this point uttered in our private ear, we are bound, when judging a work of her's, not to hear one word of it" (327). The reviewer marks the preface as a performance ("seduction") but suggests that while it may work for a reader who experiences the performance as "love" or intimacy, a "professional" reader must see through the ploy.

Landon's response to these concerns and her insistence on the authenticity of the poet's emotion are forcefully articulated in the essay "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings." Significantly, this piece, unlike most of her criticism, was signed. Because she was publicly identified with her words, she likely chose them with particular care.[18] Although the piece ostensibly explores Hemans's work, it is apparent, as F.J. Sypher claims, that "in the extended discussion with which Landon begins her article on Mrs. Hemans, she seems by implication to be addressing critics who questioned the sincerity of her own poetry" (19). The applicability of her remarks on Hemans to herself is strengthened by the general nature of Landon's discussion. She refers to "the poet" rather than Hemans or the poetess: "There cannot be a greater error than to suppose that the poet does not feel what he writes" (66). Landon then implicitly challenges some of the objections that were made to her work:

> What an extraordinary, I might say, impossible view, is this to take of an art more connected with emotion than any of its sister sciences. What—the depths of the heart are to be sounded, its mysteries unveiled, and its beatings numbered by those whose own heart is made by this strange doctrine—a mere machine wound up by the clock-work of rhythm! No; poetry is even more a passion than a power, and nothing is so strongly

> impressed on composition as the character of the writer. I should almost define poetry to be the necessity of feeling strongly in the first instance, and the as strong necessity of confiding in the second. (66)

Here, Landon rejects the language of mechanization—"a mere machine wound up by the clock-work of the rhythm"—used by The Westminster Review, which placed her and her poems in the realm of mass production. She also addresses The New Monthly Magazine's argument that "a knowledge of any passion can[not] be painted to the life...without being felt," using the same language. Poetry is "a *passion*," "the necessity of *feeling* strongly" (my emphasis). Moreover, she shrewdly inverts the reviewer's argument: he claims that emotions cannot be given "truly" unless they have been experienced, while Landon argues that poetry itself cannot be written without "feeling strongly." There is no true or untrue poetry—if the text produced is poetry, then it is by definition the product of strong feeling.

This formulation still leaves Landon trapped in the biographical bind that determines her reception. If "the character of the writer" is "impressed on the composition," then readers should be able to find the events of the writing in the author's life. So Landon continues her argument, suggesting that the emotion is true even if she does not "confess" these events in her verse or her life: "I do not mean to say that the fact is set down, but if any feeling is marked in the writing, that feeling has been keenly and painfully experienced" (67).[19] She also revisits the concerns of The Venetian Bracelet, suggesting that "no indication of its [the feeling's] existence would probably be shown in ordinary life" because "the habit has so grown up with us,--so grown with our growth, and strengthened with our strength, that we scarcely know the extraordinary system of dissimulation carried on in our present state of society" (67). The "habit" and "system of dissimulation" refer to the social masking that characterizes social interaction in a culture of false emotion: "To this may be in great measure attributed the difference that exists between an author's writings and his conversation. The one is often sad and thoughtful, while the other is lively and careless. The fact is, that the real character is shown in the first instance, and the assumed in the second" (68). Here, she claims that her writings express her "real character," while her everyday social interactions are the fiction. Landon's comments here refer to her own reception. As we have seen, her contemporaries criticized her for "lively and careless" "conversation" while she wrote "sad and thoughtful" poems.

Landon chose to enter the debate over Hemans's sincerity after the other poet's death in 1835; her own death, in 1838, engendered an even more widespread discussion. During the 1820s and 30s, she was romantically linked to a number of men including Jerdan, the artist Daniel Maclise, and the writer William Maginn. In response to the rumors, Landon broke off her engagement to John Foster. She finally married George MacLean, a colonial administrator, but died under suspicious circumstances soon after her arrival in Africa. As Stephenson succinctly puts it: "On 7 June 1838, Letitia Landon married George MacLean; on 5 July they sailed for Cape Coast; on 16 August they landed, and on 15 October, Landon, at the age of thirty-six, was dead" (175). She was found dead with a vial of prussic (hydrocyanic) acid in her hand. Curiosity about the circumstances of her death was rampant. Some speculated that she had been poisoned by her husband's African lover, that MacLean had killed her, that she had killed herself, or that she had accidentally overdosed on medicine that she regularly took. The inquest ruled that her death was an accident. However, many contemporaries, including her brother, questioned the thoroughness of the investigation. The explanations for Landon's death—either murder or suicide—presented obvious problems for her public image. Even before her death, her respectability had suffered from the rumors of her sexual liaisons with several men, and murder or suicide would not enhance her already tattered reputation. Her death also presented problems for the interpretation of her work because her tragic end could have been the subject of one of her own poems of betrayed love. The distance between her life and her poems collapsed once more.

Because of the circumstances of Landon's death, her biographer's approach differed from that of Hemans's sister. In order to restore the link between the poet and her texts that had been severed by the publication of the "caustic" letters, Harriet Hughes asserted that Hemans was transparent. However, Landon's biographer needed to separate Landon's life from her melancholy poems. The first major biographical treatment of Landon after her death was Laman Blanchard's Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L. (1841). Blanchard faced the difficult task of rehabilitating Landon's public image. His goal was to prove that she did not kill herself; to do so he had to emphasize that she was not the melancholy figure that many contemporaries imagined. The unspoken argument of the text is that Landon did not commit suicide in Africa; the details of her life that Blanchard presents are the evidence.

Blanchard repeatedly establishes the distinction between Landon and her poems. He claims that "No one who had ever caught a glimpse of the animated and joyous creature who thus sang, could have committed the error of identifying her with the love-lorn damsel she painted" (Blanchard 62). Landon is not a "love-lorn damsel"; instead, she is described as an actress: "she less frequently aimed at expressing in her poetry her own actual feelings and opinions, than at assuming a character for the sake of a certain kind of effect" (37). Rather than real emotions, sorrow and regret were her "literary resources" (37).[20] In her poem, Landon is "assuming a character," "producing an effect"—in other words, performing. Blanchard insists that there is a "real," sincere Landon, but her emotions are not found in her poems: "She reversed in her practice the quality attributed to Garrick—she never acted when off the stage; it was then that she became most herself, and most merited the praise of being 'natural, simple, affecting.' She was most beautiful when farthest removed from those artificialities in which she was too fond of exhibiting herself" (231). The impossibility of Blanchard's task is apparent in the language that he uses: "[on] the stage," "exhibiting herself" in "artificalities." This language did not have positive associations when it was applied to women poets during this period. As a result, Blanchard's approach is a gamble. He absolves Landon of melancholy and removes the suspicion of suicide, but at the expense of depicting Landon as an actress whose poems convey false emotion. By expunging the personal from her texts he undoes the delicate balance that she worked so hard to achieve.

In so doing, Blanchard may have alienated the very audience that he hoped to appease. Although she expressed strong sympathy for Landon, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's reading of Blanchard disappointed her because he

> dwell[s] so emphatically upon the contrariety of her own nature to the thing *called* her nature & expressed in her poems. Why *there*, just *there*, was the plague spot—*there*, her poetic mortality. She was the actress & not Juliet. Her genius was not strong enough to assert itself in truth. It *suffered* her to belie herself--& *stood by*, while she put on the mask. Where is the true deep poetry which was not felt deeply & truly by the poet? What is the poet without the use of his own heart? (Letters 232)[21]

Barrett Browning distinguishes between "her own nature" and "the thing *called* her nature" and uses language associated with the theater, such as "actress" and "mask," to make this distinction. Unlike Blanchard, she views Landon's theatricality as her fatal flaw—her "plague spot" or "poetic mortality." It is not a sign of her genius, but rather a subversion of it. Interestingly, Barrett Browning's definition of "true deep poetry" as poetry that is "felt deeply & truly by the poet," is very similar to Landon's own: "poetry [is] the necessity of feeling strongly." Barrett Browning privileges this same emotional authenticity. When she declares, "the passion was pasteboard from the first," she sets up a contrast between authentic, and therefore valuable, jewels and worthless ones made of paste (Letters 252).[22] She makes a similar distinction between false and authentic when she claims that Landon "was the actress & not Juliet." However, this critique is qualified by her strange reference to Juliet, a character in a play, as the opposite of "the actress" and a model of authentic emotion.

Barrett Browning's response makes it clear that the biographical bind tightened in both directions—on poems too closely associated with their author and those too separated from her. In The Venetian Bracelet, Landon tried to achieve equilibrium between these two poles. She created a balance between the performative and the personal by using a set of voices that were distinct, but not completely separate, from her. The responses of her readers, both her contemporaries and ours, suggest how difficult this balance was to achieve, yet how necessary it was to her success.

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Rev. of *The Vow of the Peacock, and Other Poems*, by Letitia Elizabeth Landon. *The New Monthly Magazine* (Part the Third, 1835): 346-53.

Notes

[1] Some similar observations include William Howitt's: "The very words of her first heroine might have literally been uttered as her own" (Homes and Haunts 134) and George Bethune's: "The Improvisatrice" "flows on like improvisation, as it undoubtedly was, her pen being to her as a voice" (275).

[2] This distinction between melancholy poetess and witty, social woman may remind us of some of the problems of Hemans' reception, after her witty letters were published in Henry Chorley's biography. However, Hemans's public persona was decidedly domestic and middle-class. Separated from the literary marketplace, first in Wales, then in Liverpool and Dublin, Hemans was out of its center—London—where Landon lived and worked.

[3] Howitt follows this anecdote with an admission and an explanation: "And in fact, there can be no question that much of her writing was professional. She had to win a golden harvest for the comfort of others as dear to her as herself; and she felt, like all authors who have to cater for the public, that she must provide, not so much what she would of her free-will choice, but what they expected from her" (Homes and Haunts 133).

[4] Contemporaries frequently remarked that the young were the primary audience for Landon's poems. Howitt claims, "it is the young and the ardent who must always be the warmest admirers of the larger poems of LEL" (Fisher's 348). According to a review of The Golden Violet in The Literary Gazette, "to woman and to youth, the poetry of L.E.L. spoke in words of fire; the matron recognised in it the exquisite propriety and tenderness of her own disposition; the young were enraptured with outpourings like their own souls' inward springs, the most fervent and passionate" (785). Blanchard also suggests that youth was her primary audience: "With the young she at once became a favourite. She breathed in rapturous verse their own fervent and wild aspirations" (32).

[5] Unlike her contemporaries, who merely implied it, recent critics have focused on Landon's self-conscious commodification. Anne Mellor describes Landon's "commercial production of her self as an acquirable artifact of beauty" (111) and Daniel Riess claims that "Landon responds to the growing commercialism of the world of art in the late Regency period by producing lyrics which can best be characterized as commodity-poems" (808).

[6] Landon explicitly addresses this debate using the terms "ancient" and "modern" in "On the Ancient and Modern Influence of Poetry": "The influence of poetry has two eras, first as it tends to civilize; secondly as it tends to prevent that very civilization from growing too cold and too selfish" (62).

[7] These quotations are taken from the first essay, "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion." Armstrong points out that Landon was "brought up on Hume" and "was fascinated by the nature of sensation...and with the pulsation of sympathy" (326).

[8] Landon emphasizes the importance of sympathy in much of her subsequent prose as well. In Traits and Trials of Early Life (a collection of stories for children) she wrote, "My object has been rather to interest, than to amuse, to excite the imagination through the softening medium of the feelings. Sympathy is the surest destruction of selfishness" (iii). In "On the Ancient and Modern Influence of Poetry," she claims that love poetry in particular produces "sad and affectionate regrets in whose communion our own nature grows more kindly from its sympathy. We are always the better for entering into other's sorrow or other's joy" (61).

[9] The three poems appeared for the first time in this volume. Quotations from "The Venetian Bracelet" are taken from The Venetian Bracelet, The Lost Pleiad, A History of the Lyre, and other poems. Quotations from "A Summer Evening's Tale" and "Lines of Life" are taken from Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings.

[10] Some earlier poems also use this image, such as "Erinna" from The Golden Violet (1826): "I can judge / Of others but by outward show, and that / Is falser than the actor's studied part. / We dress our words and looks in borrow'd robes: / The mind is as the face—for who goes forth / In public walks without a veil at least?" (121).

[11] The poem appeared in The Troubadour (1825). Landon's characterization of herself as an "orphan girl" was a reflection not only of her feelings for her father, but also of her feelings for her mother. Although she supported her mother (and brother) financially after her father's death, they were not close. Landon lived with her grandmother, and then by herself after her grandmother's death in 1826. Stephenson points out that "Erinna, Eulalie [from "A History of the Lyre"], and the Improvisatrice are, significantly, all orphans....Landon actually did lose her father at an early age, and since she lived with female friends in London, rather than with her mother, she can justifiably establish L.E.L. in the same camp" (115).

[12] For example, The Literary Gazette reviewer claimed, "we never read any thing more affecting than this" (449). The Literary Chronicle reviewer called the lines "an affectionate and a beautiful tribute to the memory of her father" (488).

[13] Riess and McGann point out the allusion to Shakespeare in a footnote in Selected Writings (275).

[14] Stephenson continues, "The lines of life to which Landon refers in her title appropriately convey multiple meanings" (19). These include the lines of poetry, "the life lines on the hand, the lines that she eagerly scans for some indication of her future, to see how long she, as poet, will life, not in actual years, but in the minds of those who will come after, who will bestow upon her the fame for which she yearns" (19).

[15] Landon's essay "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings" reinforces this point. Landon defines fame as the "sympathy of the many" and claims that "Fame...is but the fulfillment of that desire for sympathy which can never be brought home to the individual" (66). Blanchard picked up on this point in his biography, suggesting that her melancholy was tempered by her fame: "as

the melancholy of her song moved numberless hearts towards her, her own was only moved by the same process still farther than ever out of melancholy's reach" (34).

[16] Blain describes another kind of performance. Landon is the puppetmaster, manipulating a puppet—herself—on stage: she "construct[ed] her poetry as a kind of tragic peepshow, and the 'poetess' as puppet/victim" (43). While Labbe and Armstrong suggest that masking and performance allow us to read below the conventional surface of the poems in order to find Landon's real opinions, Blain claims that Landon creates a situation in which the reader is encouraged to see the poetry as a window into the life. For Labbe and Armstrong, reading is an act of unmasking, for Blain—voyeurism.

[17] These concerns appear not to have troubled the magazine for very long. In a review of The Vow of the Peacock, the reviewer notes: "The woman is felt in every line: she makes audible the melody of that warm yet gentle heart in her sex, which all men have possessed or covet to possess. Miss Landon possesses not the elements of the tragic but of the affecting; she only appeals to our sympathies. The natural strain of her mind is melancholy....it is very obvious that her personal feeling gives its colour to the whole. The sickness of hope deferred—the long-lingering pang of early disappointment—the bitterness of the discovered illusion, are too truly expressed not to have been keenly felt. Such a result appeared to us the inevitable consequences of such a career" (348).

[18] Like all of her works, we must assume that they have been crafted to appeal to a particular audience. Glennis Stephenson argues that a comparison of the two essays, "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings" and "On the Ancient and Modern Influence of Poetry," reveals that the style of the first text is gendered feminine, the second masculine. Landon's ability to change her stylistic register suggests "how deliberately and carefully Landon constructed the conventionally female poetic self of L.E.L., the degree to which she manipulated the rules laid down by the critical establishment and conflated the woman and the artist" (15).

[19] In a broader sense, Landon's formulation works to any woman writer's advantage because her personal experience was supposed to be confined to the domestic and the religious. The question of the woman writer's personal experience, is memorably encapsulated by Byron's dismissive comments on Felicia Hemans's poem, "Modern Greece": "Modern Greece—good for nothing; written by some one who has never been there" (5: 262-3). By differentiating between the poet's life and her feelings, Landon may be "liberating" women's poetry from the necessity of experience, particularly the Byronic kind of experience—masculine, involving the free movement among exotic spaces and sexual experience.

[20] In his desire to make this point, Blanchard event contradicts other evidence that he presents. He claims that "In her picture of the Troubadour, LEL describes, what she could not yet have experienced, the insufficiency of a fair fame fairly won to atone for the evils of sacrificed repose, of unambitious dreams dispelled, of privacy invaded, of the cold sneer, the envious tongue, the heart-searing slander" (43). But as she herself states, and he quotes, "I have known little else than privation, disappointment, unkindness, and harassment; from the time I was 15, my life has

been one continual struggle in some shape or another against absolute poverty, and I must say not a tithe of my profits have I ever expended on myself" (51).

[21] Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford; July 2, 1841.

[22] Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford; late July 1841.

Conclusion

In my introduction, I detailed three significant forms that personal interest could take: an attention to the poet's life and appearance, an insistence on the poems as an expression of the poet's emotions, and a conception of the poet/reader relationship as friendship. The Victorian "after-life" of these four poets is marked by the persistence of these forms of the personal.

All four poets had major works of biography published during the nineteenth century. I have already discussed Henry Chorley's Memorials, Harriet Hughes's "Memoir," and Laman Blanchard's Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L., and the role that they played in shaping Hemans and Landon's personae. Keats's biography was even more important because the growth of his poetic reputation in the post-Romantic period was tied to a biographical revaluation of his character. George Ford points out that "The work of no other major English poet had received such neglect as Keats's" and "For nineteen years after his death not a single reprint of his poems appeared in England. Furthermore, it was not until 1848 that his first biography [Richard Monckton Milnes' Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats] was published" (2). Ford attributes this neglect in part to "the 'Keats legend,' that is the story of his death being attributable to the adverse criticism his poetry had received" (68). Milnes addresses this myth head on in his preface to the Life: "[Keats] was all but universally believed to have been killed by a stupid, savage, article in a review, and to the compassion generated by his untoward fate he was held to owe a certain personal interest, which his poetic reputation hardly justified" (xvii). As Susan Wolfson claims, this personal interest in the Keats myth was particularly appealing to women readers and "The myth of a poet who 'burst a blood vessel on reading a savage attack on 'Endymion'...and died in Rome as a consequence' was routinely rehearsed in women's journals, such as The Ladies' Companion...while the image of the lovely genius too refined for long life gained prestige with his female biographers" (324).

However, Milnes sought to move beyond this "hardly justified" "personal interest" to a more complete portrait of the poet. In a rhetorical move common to the other biographies that I have already discussed, Milnes tries to redirect the focus from life to art: "Our business is with [authors'] books, to understand and to enjoy them" (xiv). However, he could not neglect the personal altogether. As Wolfson has argued, in order to rehabilitate Keats's work, it was necessary to get rid of the stigma of effeminacy that was attached to his life. She points out that Milnes "quite consciously framed his Life to give the 'impression' of Keats's 'noble nature' and 'manly heart'...he reports Keats's boyhood pugnacity and 'skill in all manly exercises,' and treats these as prefigurations of the way the mature Keats, 'at the mention of oppression or wrong, or at any calumny against those he loved,' would rise 'into grave manliness at once, [seeming] like a tall man'" (340). Thus, Keats was already beloved by women readers, yet this more manly incarnation made him palatable to men as well.

Clare, who died in 1864, substantially outlived the other three poets. However, he spent the last 27 years of his life in asylums—first the asylum at High Beach, from 1837-41, and afterward the Northborough Asylum (1841-1864). This biographical fact was particularly interesting to his readers, and was the focus of various periodical pieces and books during the 1840s and 50s, notably those by Cyrus Redding, John Plummer, and Spencer T. Hall.[1] These authors describe their visits to the asylum, producing a disturbing echo of the accounts of the visits to Clare's cottage in the first flush of his fame. One similarity of both sets of visits is the visitor's interest in Clare's body. All three comment on Clare's current appearance, contrasting it with the engraving of his portrait that appeared as the frontispiece to The Village Minstrel in

1821. Cyrus Redding notes, "The expression of his countenance was more pleasing but somewhat less intellectual than that in the engraved portrait prefixed to his works in the edition of 'The Village Minstrel,' published in 1821" (Critical Heritage 248). John Plummer writes, "Time had dealt gently with the poet, who—making allowance for his increased years—bore a very striking resemblance to the portrait of him prefixed to The Village Minstrel." Spencer Hall complains, "instead of the spare, sensitive person he appears in the portrait of him from Hilton's painting, forming a frontispiece to The Village Minstrel, I found him rather burly, florid, with light hair and somewhat shaggy eyebrows" (Critical Heritage 280). This contrast between Clare's past and present appearance takes on concrete form in the frontispiece to J. L. Cherry's Life and Remains of John Clare, which shows two engravings of two portraits side-by-side: one of the young Clare, and one of the old, balding Clare.

This interest of the asylum visitors in Clare's appearance, like that of Clare's early readers, seems to center on the question: who is the real or authentic Clare? However, the references to the engraved portrait also suggest a desire not only to see how Clare has changed over time or how his madness has changed him, but also to compare the mass-market Clare, available to the readers of his books, with Clare himself. Clare is once again the subject of his readers' gaze, a fact that Plummer unselfconsciously references when he writes, "we recently visited him by the courteous permission of the medical superintendent [of the Northampton County Lunatic Asylum], who generally refuses the same favour to others, because he deems, and rightly too, that his patients should not be made an 'exhibition' of" (269).

Another feature of these accounts of asylum visits is the speculation on the source of Clare's madness. Both Plummer and Redding blame Clare's disheartening experiences in the literary marketplace for his present condition. Plummer writes, "the poet's popularity waned, and the unsold copies of his works which crowded the publishers' shelves but too truly testified to the neglect and indifference of the fickle public. Poor Clare felt the blow, and became more moody and sad in his demeanour, till at last the springs of his overwrought mind gave way, and he became hopelessly insane" (268-9). Redding uses the connection between madness and the marketplace to argue that the reading public's increased support for Clare will cure him: "To our seeming, his affection was slight; and it is not at all improbable that a relief from mental anxiety might completely restore him. The finer organisation of such a humanity, if more easily put out of order than that of a more obtuse character, is in all probability more likely to re-tune itself, the evil cause being removed" (249). He calls for a subscription "to place him beyond the reach of that care for his subsistence which is the main cause of his present mental hallucination" (249). So Clare is back where he started, as his situation and biographical details are invoked in order to advocate for him. While his initial readers were exhorted to buy his books as a service to a poor laborer, now they must do so to save his mental health.

For Hemans, the complexity of her image and self-fashioning was simplified as the century progressed. We have already seen how her sister's biography smoothed any rough edges, and this process continued in an 1845 article by George Gilfillan. Gilfillan's agenda becomes particularly clear when compared with the important and influential review of Hemans's Records of Woman and The Forest Sanctuary by Francis Jeffrey (1829). Jeffrey's review famously begins with a description of women's poetry:

> Women, we fear, cannot do everything; 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 vices—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)

The review also ends with another assertion about Hemans's relationship to this model of women's poetry. Her work exhibits "a tenderness and loftiness of feeling, and an ethereal purity of sentiment, which could only emanate from the soul of a woman" (47).

While Jeffrey's statements now seem dismissive or condescending, we should not neglect to notice the seriousness with which he treats Hemans in the rest of the review. I am particularly struck by his insistence that Hemans is a self-conscious shaper of her poems. To choose two examples, he notes that "The diction is always beautiful, harmonious, and free—and the themes, though of infinite variety, uniformly treated with a grace, originality, and judgment, which mark the same master hand" (34-5). These "themes" include the legends from other countries that she uses in her work. Jeffrey notes her skill in their presentation: she "has contrived to retain much of what is interesting and peculiar in each of them" and "has thus transfused into her German or Scandinavian legends the imaginative and daring tone of the originals" (35). In both examples, the emphasis on Hemans's "master hand" depicts her as a craftsman, a shaping force. When the issue of spontaneity does come up, Jeffrey links it to two male poets—Shakespeare and Milton—describing "the predominant emotion of their minds overflowing spontaneously on all the objects which present themselves to their fancy" (36).[2] The woman poet's artistry is thus established, and the poet's emotional overflow, which is so conspicuously gendered in other contemporary reviews, is gender-neutral here.

Seventeen years later, George Gilfillan made Hemans the first subject of a three-part series on female authorship.[3] Like Jeffrey, Gilfillan both begins and ends his piece with a discussion of the relationship between women and authorship. He begins by stating, "Female authorship is, if not a great, certainly a singular fact" (591). "But alas! in our age, the exception is likely soon to become the rule" (591). He chose Hemans to begin his series because she was "the most feminine writer of the age" (592). However, while Jeffrey insists on her artistry, Gilfillan stresses her artlessness:

> A bee wreathing round you in the warm summer morn, her singing circle gives you as much new insight into the universe as do the sweetest strains which have ever issued from this 'voice of spring.' We are reluctantly compelled, therefore, to deny her, in its highest sense, the name of poet—a word often abused, often misapplied in mere compliment or courtesy, but which ought ever to retain its stern and original signification. A *maker* she is not. (592-3)

Instead, "Her works are a versified *journal* of a quite ideal and beautiful life" (593). The comparison to the bee suggests that her poems are unmediated outpourings, while the reference to her works as a "versified *journal*," suggests that her poems are merely a personal record. In both cases, he makes use of a rhetorical stress on maker and journal to emphasize the more exalted connotations of the former and the non-professional connotations of the latter.

For Jeffrey, spontaneity had a gender-neutral meaning, but Gilfillan's description of the seamless blending of life and art that elides craftsmanship and poetic work is a hyper-feminine form of spontaneity:

> Mrs. Hemans's poems are strictly effusions. And not a little of their charm springs from their unstudied and extempore character. This, too, is in fine keeping with the sex of the writer. You are saved the ludicrous image of a double-dyed Blue, in papers and morning wrapper, sweating at some stupendous treatise or tragedy from morn to noon, and from

> noon to dewy eve—you see a graceful and gifted woman, passing from the cares of her family, and the enjoyments of society, to inscribe on her tablets some fine thought or feeling, which had throughout the day existed as a still sunshine upon her countenance, or perhaps as a quiet unshed tear in her eye. In this case, the transition is so natural and graceful, from the duties or delights of the day to the employments of the desk, that there is as little pedantry in writing a poem as in writing a letter, and the authoress appears only the lady in flower. (594-5)

Unlike Jeffrey, Gilfillan elides Hemans's craftsmanship and poetic work, which becomes completely subsumed by the personal:

> After all, the nature of this poetess is more interesting than her genius, or than its finest productions. [...] If not, in a transcendent sense, a poet, her life was a poem. Poetry coloured all her existence with a golden light—poetry presided at her needlework—poetry mingled with her domestic and maternal duties—poetry sat down with her to her piano—poetry fluttered her hair and flushed her cheek in her mountain rambles—poetry quivered in her voice, which was a "sweet sad melody." (596)

Contemporary biographical accounts would have completely disproved this portrait. Gilfillan represents an extreme version of the contemporary interest in the authenticity of the poet's emotions. For him, poetry has become inseparable from the poet's very being. It is Hemans's rapturous domesticity that is meant to move the reader; her poetry need not even be written down.

While the complexity of Hemans's persona is simplified, Landon's becomes more multifaceted. In the Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L., Laman Blanchard devoted a substantial number of pages to Landon's final months in Africa, her death, and its after-effects.

The tribute poems and elegies written to Landon are an interesting compliment to the Life; they tend not to focus on the circumstances of her death (no references are made to a suicide, homicide, or accident—except metaphorically), but on the fact that she died, and was buried, in Africa. The separation of the continents figures the separation of poet and reader. "Elegiac Tribute to the Memory of L.E.L.," by Mrs. Cornwall Baron Wilson is a typical example.[4] She focuses on the fact that Landon's death was lonely and that she remains separated from all of her "friends":

> Thy grave is made under a foreign sky,
> And in a stranger soil;--thine ashes rest
> In a far-distant clime;--no kindred eye
> Soften'd thy death pangs,--saw thy heaving breast
> Gasp its last sign, or caught the fond bequest
> Thy murmuring lip had breathed to friends afar;--
> Lone was thy setting, Genius' "Polar Star!"—
> There should have knelt around thee, mourning friends,
> With anxious hearts, in that all-fearful hour....
> And the last murmur of thy parting groan
> Should not have pass'd, unheeded and unknown!

She emphasizes not only Landon's emotional state, but also that of her "friends" who are "mourning" and "anxious." Her description of the scene, with its "death pangs," heaving breast," "gasp[ing]," "murmuring," and "groan[ing]," evokes extreme physical and emotional distress. Likewise, Charles Swain's "A Vision of Tombs. Addressed to the *Forget Me Not*" describes:

Our LANDON, silent on her funeral bier,

Far from our heart, sleeps on a foreign shore;

The voice of her—the song-inspired—is o'er;

Oh, she who wept for others found no tone

To soothe the many parting griefs she bore;

None had a tear for that sweet spirit lone—

All sorrows found a balm save that fair Minstrel's own!"

His description of Landon's grief ("wept" "tear," "sorrow") also references the popular image of Landon as melancholy. In both poems, the poets use the themes and language of sensibility to emphasize the sympathetic link between poet and reader—a link that compensates for the friendship that she was denied at the time of her death.

There is a counter trend in these elegies to Landon that questions the poet/reader connection. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "L.E.L.'s Last Question" (1839) makes reference to one of Landon's last poems, "Do you think of me as I think of you?":

"Do you think of me as I think of you,

My friends, my friends?" She said it from the sea,

The English minstrel in her minstrelsy—

While under brighter skies than erst she knew,

Her heart grew dark, and groped as the blind,

To touch, across the waves, friends left behind—

"Do you think of me as I think of you?"

Barrett Browning's poem also invokes Landon in Africa and emphasizes her isolation. However, while the other poems turn on the speaker's ability to give the reader an illusion of a sympathetic relationship with Landon, Barrett Browning withholds that sympathy, instead choosing to meditate on the influence of death and mortality on friendship:

> Do you think of me as I think of you?—
> O friends, O kindred, O dear brotherhood
> Of the whole world—what are we that we should
> For covenants of long affection sue?—
> Why press so near each other, when the touch
> Is barred by graves? Not much, and yet too much,
> This, "Think upon me as I think of you."

Throughout the poem, Barrett Browning repeats Landon's phrase "Do you think," not as a means of insisting on Landon's remembrance, but to challenge it. Barrett Browning's final use of the phrase occurs in a religious context, as God says, "DO YOU THINK OF ME AS I THINK OF YOU?" Here she rebukes the egotism that she sees in Landon's cry for sympathy. In this sense, Barrett Browning's poem dismisses the idea that reading is an act of sensibility and identification. The transcendent moment is not one of sympathy between poet and reader, but between an individual and God. Rather than outward movement towards an audience, she suggests that one should turn inward towards the soul.

This turn to the religious also characterizes Christina Rossetti's poem "L.E.L." (1863). The poem responds to Barrett Browning, as indicated by the epigraph: "Whose heart was breaking for a little love." As Angela Leighton points out, this is a misquoting of a line from "L.E.L.'s Last Question" (75). This poem does not directly address Landon's death. Instead, like Landon's poem "Lines of Life," there is an epigraph that gives us information about the speaker and the poem itself is a first-person description of a performance of social masking:

> Downstairs I laugh, I sport and jest with all:
> But in my solitary room above
> I turn my face in silence to the wall;
> My heart is breaking for a little love.

Rossetti, like Barrett Browning, is clear that the desire for love and sympathy should be satisfied by spiritual means. The poem ends with the voice of an angel:

> "Wait, for thou shalt prove
> True best is last, true life is born of death,
> O thou, heart-broken for a little love.
> Then love shall fill thy girth,
> And love make fat thy dearth,
> When new spring builds new heaven and clean new earth."

All of the tribute or memorial poems are strongly personal, referencing the characteristics that Landon was popularly known for during her life—her melancholy and isolation. However, while Wilson and Swain understand these qualities as marks of sensibility that evoke an answering sensibility in the audience and a sense of sympathy and friendship with Landon herself, Barrett Browning and Rossetti are critical of Landon and read her desperate desire for sympathy and friendship as a sign of a deeper spiritual crisis.

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Notes

[1] Redding's article appeared in English Journal, May 15, 1841, 20: 305-9; May 29, 1841, 22: 340-3. Plummer's was printed in Once a Week, May 11, 1861, iv: 539-41. Hall's piece was part of his Biographical Sketches of Remarkable People (1873), but was written in 1866.

[2] Susan Wolfson points out an unacknowledged echo of Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads: Jeffrey's seeming echo complicates his famous antipathy to Wordsworth....it may be that he misremembers even as he recalls the Wordsworthian source. Or can he admire this poetic if the agent is not Wordsworth? Or is he deliberately refusing Wordsworth credit, tweaking him with its better success in Hemans, Milton, and Shakespeare?" (555).

[3] Gilfillan's text is taken from Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials, ed. Susan J. Wolfson. His article, "Female Authors. No. I.—Mrs. Hemans" first appeared in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine 14 (June 1847).

[4] The texts of these poems are taken from Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings, ed. Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess.