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# The Politics and Economics of the Romantic Poetess

*Rachel A. Wortman*

In 1974, to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the Treaty of Berne (October 9, 1874), which standardized and greatly improved written communication across borders, the United States Postal Service issued a block of eight United Postal Union commemorative stamps (United States Postal Service). All eight stamps incorporated details from artistic masterpieces depicting reading and writing; three of the eight stamps in the block depicted European women in some state of reading or writing. Images like the ones captured and popularized by artists such as Jean-Étienne Liotard, Thomas Gainsborough, and Gerard Terborch (and reproduced and mass distributed by the United States Postal Service) have helped to inform the images many hold of eighteenth and nineteenth century female writers. A lady languishing on a couch with a notebook and fancy quill by her side; a young girl sitting at a small writing desk gazing out a window, eyes blankly staring far off into the distance as she meditates upon the one she loves; even, perhaps, a daughter or young wife giving a recitation of her latest poetical musing on something topical, but not too serious, in the parlor after dinner—these are the stereotypes that most often come to mind when one tries to conjure the image of the eighteenth and nineteenth century female writer, particularly the Romantic poetess. However, for Anna Letitia Barbauld, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, such images, and the term “poetess,” as it is colloquially understood today, do them disservice, for they not only undercut the accomplishments of

these women, but they do little to credit the skill, cunning, and, for Landon and Hemans especially, the business sense of these women.

Anna Letitia Barbauld, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon—these were women of letters. While some women did write because it might be a nice way to spend a rainy afternoon, some did so because they had to, and they did so with great success. Landon and Hemans functioned as writers, reviewers, and editors, and were creating and publishing at a time of a significant shift in writing—the moment when imaginative and creative writing claimed a place within society and the economy as a commercial activity (McGann 143). While many female writers of the Romantic period were widely read and highly respected, such a shift opened all imaginative and creative writing to great scrutiny, particularly works written or edited by women. For women, like Landon and Hemans, who came to depend upon the writing economy for their livelihood, they were forced to balance creative expression with considerations of the social and cultural conditions of their time as well as the opinions of their critics. For others, like Barbauld, economic independence granted them the luxury of expression.

Although women had laid claim to a place in the new writing economy, that place remained severely restricted (McGann 145). Landon and Hemans had to navigate these various restrictions, which limited their expression of subject, style, and person, to make a living. To this end, Hemans and Landon developed specifically gendered strategies for establishing credentials to gain, and then maintain, their legitimacy as poets; whereas Barbauld—though she too desired an audience—had the economic freedom to write whatever and however she wished. However, all three women of letters employed similar strategies of embracing a writerly persona, expressing great beauty in their work, and rooting their poems in history and philosophy not only to establish a readership, but also to criticize the dominant paradigm.

In evaluating the environment in which Landon was writing and publishing, Glennis Stephenson wrote:

[The female] poetic self is, therefore, in part imposed upon her—the product of a variety of social, cultural, and even economic conditions, the product of the demands and responses

of her readers, her critics, and her publishers, and, later, even of the gossip that was circulated and the numerous memoirs that were written about her. (3)

What Stephenson notes was, and perhaps remains, true for all women within the literary economy. While each of the female writers examined here might not be a product of *all* of the conditions that Stephenson explained as surrounding Landon, consideration of the social and cultural conditions was necessary in any author's attempt to gain and maintain a readership. Men's purview in writing was the imagination, the self, politics, war, economics, art, intellectual pursuits, and the sublime, while women's poetry was expected to reflect the rational, the improvisational, the 'feminine,' the domestic, and the beautiful. Strict adherence to these guidelines was imperative to fulfilling society's expectations about how the poetess should write, and, therefore, key to gaining an audience and, for some, a living wage. However, given the social dynamic of the Romantic era, becoming a writer was not something that each of these women could do on her own.

Barbauld was living and writing in a time before the boom of the literary journal and the emergence of annual gift-books, which meant that her entrée into the world of publishing was more challenging than it was for Hemans and Landon, who were writing and publishing forty years or more later. Barbauld wrote and circulated her poetry in manuscript form among those at the Warrington Academy, the dissenting school established by those who opposed state interference in religion where her father was a theological tutor (Ockerbloom). Barbauld's audience was extremely limited because the opportunity to send a few of her poems off to a literary journal for consideration simply did not exist. While the opportunities such journals would later present for writers did not yet exist, Barbauld did, however, find herself in an unusually fortunate position. Supported by her younger brother John Aikin, six of Barbauld's poems were included in his 1771 book *Essays on Song-Writing* (Ockerbloom). Without such an opportunity and her brother's continual encouragement and support, her work would have never reached a broader audience, for on her own, as a female, she could not have entered the public literary sphere.

Since she was not writing to support herself, Barbauld did not need to be as conscious of the social and cultural conditions surrounding women's writing as Landon and Hemans later did in endeavoring to gain a readership. However, Barbauld still had an additional barrier to overcome in gaining an audience for work, for not only was she female, but she also dissented from the Church of England.

In 1770, fellow dissenter, family friend, and bookseller Joseph Johnson established his own bookshop, St. Paul's Churchyard, and in so establishing himself in business, he became "an advocate of publishing inexpensive books in order to create as wide a readership as possible for them" (Johnson). Barbauld benefited from this commitment. In 1773, Johnson published a slim volume of Barbauld's work entitled *Poems*. Having gone through four editions within the year, *Poems* proved to be a great popular and critical success (Feldman 52). It was comments like those from the *Monthly Review*—"We very seldom have an opportunity of bestowing praise with so much justice, and so much pleasure"—which helped to establish the thirty-year-old Barbauld as an emerging woman of letters (qtd. in Feldman 52).

Typically, *Poems* considered a variety of stereotypically feminine and decidedly un-political subjects: spring, flowers, invocations of gods or goddesses, Barbauld's grandmother, and observations of her home; Barbauld even wrote reflectively upon what was expected of a female writer. Like any author endeavoring to win a readership, it would have been important strategically to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. To this end, Barbauld balanced her jejune subject matter with references and allusions to other texts and history. Doing so helped her to establish herself as a learned poet, a student equally of the classics as well as dissent at the Warrington Academy, whose musings could be read by young women and intellectuals alike (Armstrong 1). Furthering this, she began each poem in her first book, save for "On a Lady's Writing" and "Songs" with a quote from some well-revered poet or philosopher—Horace and Virgil figure prominently. This successful layering strategy made her poetry both accessible and interesting to a varied readership.

"On a Lady's Writing," the ninth selection within *Poems*, is a brief six-line meditation on penmanship. This work highlights

the careful layering of topical as well as structural elements within Barbauld's work that so engaged her audience:

Her even lines her steady temper show;  
 Neat as her dress, and polish'd as her brow;  
 Strong as her judgment, easy as her air;  
 Correct though free, and regular though fair:  
 And the same graces o'er her pen preside  
 That form her manners and her footsteps guide.

Barbauld's praise of some unknown female writer is an ideal subject for a female author to meditate upon, for it addresses not only the feminine but also the beautiful. By connecting the subject's properly tempered feminine character with her elegant script, Barbauld plays upon the notion that "the manners give a certain determination to the countenance, which is capable of joining the effect of certain agreeable qualities of the mind to those of the body" (Burke 1–7). This idea seems to be present in the first and last lines of the poem: "Her even lines her steady temper show" and "And that same graces o'er her pen preside/That form her manners and her footsteps guide." However, while Barbauld's poem is suited topically for the corner of poetic world to which the female writer had been relegated, her text is more complex than a simple commentary on feminine grace and manners.

"On a Lady's Writing" refers to a particular subject, for the speaker repeats the pronoun "her" nine times within six lines. Not only is the poem about someone in particular, but it is also about the things which belong to "her:" "her even lines," "her steady temper," "her dress," and so forth. The items Barbauld lists epitomize the Romantic concept of "the feminine" in poetry, for each item and the way she has listed them denotes the rational, the feminine, and the domestic. However, the fourth line contains no pronouns. Perhaps, through their absence, Barbauld is connoting—subtly, yet glibly—that notions of correctness, freedom, and fairness do not belong to the feminine sphere, as these are concepts solely defined and controlled by men.

Though seemingly simply structured in rhyming couplets—A, A, B, B, C, C—the rhyme scheme within "On a Lady's Writing" is actually rather complex. Although it looks as though Barbauld has

written these couplets with masculine end rhyme, the scheme shifts from couplet to couplet: the first couplet ends in eye rhyme, the second contains identity rhyme, and the third ends the poem with perfect rhyme. Although Barbauld uses a rhyme scheme that is referred to as a masculine end rhyme, it is the simplest form of rhyme; due to its simplicity, Barbauld would not have been seen as adopting a masculine style of writing. However, by complicating that which will still read as a simple rhyme, she creates an intellectual tension for her reader.

Barbauld's clever construction, both topically and rhetorically, was a way to appeal to those who might have read this poem as praise of the penmanship of a proper young lady, as a poem that is a commentary on how young women are judged and therefore prescriptive of a young woman's education, as a poem which calls attention to the confines of a woman's life, or as a warning to those who serve as teachers of young women. All of these ideas, and more, exist within these six lines; however, the poem remains ideally feminine given the standards of Barbauld's time. Thus, in recognizing the prevailing societal attitude of a readership towards women's writing, it is a work that can easily enter the marketplace and be consumed by a wide audience. However, as Anne Letitia Barbauld was financially secure in her marriage to Rochemont Barbauld, it was not necessary for her to keep her readers in mind while writing to ensure that she had food on her plate and a roof over her head. Thus, it was this freedom—a financial freedom, freedom from having to consider her audience, freedom from having to remain in the corner of the writing sphere to which she had been relegated—that spelled her undoing.

Although the title of her last published poem was innocuous enough, "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, a Poem"—marking it as neither overly masculine nor overly feminine—it was inspired by the conditions in England resulting from England's involvement in the French Wars. Addressing this subject without framing it in a way that would mark it as acceptably feminine, as Barbauld did, was a risk. For within this work Barbauld is actually reproaching her country's ruler, addressing war, and foretelling Britain's downfall by examining the conditions of the day. Barbauld begins:

Still the loud death drum, thundering from afar,  
 O'er the vexed nations pours the storm of war:  
 To the stern call still Britain bends her ear,  
 Feeds the fierce strife, the alternate hope and fear;  
 Bravely, though vainly, dares to strive with Fate,  
 And seeks by turns to prop each sinking state.  
 Colossal Power with overwhelming force  
 Bears down each fort of Freedom in its course;  
 Prostrate she lies beneath the Despot's sway,  
 While the hushed nations curse him—and obey.

Barbauld's diction within this first stanza appears sloppy and careless—unclear pronoun references, indefinite parts of speech, questionable repetition—but Barbauld is a skilled writer and is employing ambiguity within her diction to try to mask, albeit vainly, her deep contempt for what is being done to her country.

The poet's use of the word “still,” the first word in the poem, suggests multiple readings as it may be interpreted as a verb or an adverb. If it is an adverb, one can argue Barbauld is implying that the “death drum” is continuing on as it has, without end, and that with every beat Britain rises to the call of war. However, if the reader elects to read “still” as an imperative verb, then it is, perhaps, Barbauld demanding that the beat of the “death drum” cease. However, this “death drum” is mimicked in the rhythm that the rhyming couplet structure creates in the piece—calling the reader not to war, but to march with Barbauld through her projected vision of Britain's desolate future. Nevertheless, “still” is repeated in the third line of the poem recreating this same tension due to its mutable part of speech, adverb or adjective. Additionally, “vainly,” is a complicated term as Barbauld uses it in this stanza. For, though it is without question a word of an insult to Britain, Barbauld might be implying that not only are Britain's efforts in vain, but that such efforts are also rooted in vanity.

Barbauld further confuses her reader with her pronoun usage. She begins by ascribing the female gender to Britain, “Britain bends her ear,” in the third line of the poem. Yet, she complicates the reader's understanding in the ninth and tenth lines of the poem: “Prostrate she lies beneath the Despot's sway, / While the hushed nations curse him—and obey.” Might she truly be saying that Britain



has been overpowered by Napoleon and that Britons and others who have been defeated by him are acquiescing to his wishes? Probably not. Although she seems to indicate that France is the evil despotic power, Barbauld actually refers to the people of Britain as “she.” It is typical to refer to a country as “she,” but in using the female pronoun to talk about the people of the country Barbauld highlights their weakness. Understanding that “she” refers to the citizens, the noun “Despot” is then being ascribed to George III, the pronoun “him” as well. Calling one’s king a Despot and implying that the king is violating his people, and doing so with sexually charged language (Barbauld’s use of “prostrate”), is a definitive transgression of the bounds of feminine subject matter in writing, and it is meant to bristle her reader. Even though Barbauld was a known dissenter, and it would have been expected that she took issue with the war, such public knowledge did nothing to insulate her from criticism—rather it intensified it.

In short, Barbauld’s audience did not receive this poem well. In his response, published in *The Quarterly Review*, John Wilson Croker, writing anonymously, attacked Barbauld’s poem, “the poem, for so out of courtesy we shall call it,” exclaiming:

But she must excuse us if we think that she has wandered from the course in which she was respectable and useful, and miserably mistaken both her powers and her duty, in exchanging the birchen for the satiric rod, and abandoning the superintendance of the ‘olivia’ of the nursery, to wage war on the ‘reluctantes dracones,’ statesmen, and warriors, whose misdoings have aroused her indignant muse. (Croker 309)

Barbauld does not recover from this review, from her neglect of the dominant readership, or from her foray into the masculine themes and style in poetry writing. “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” was the last poem that she ever published for a mainstream audience. Her last five poems were published in the radical Unitarian journal, *The Monthly Review* (Armstrong 1).

Where Barbauld had failed, Felicia Hemans’s poem “Casabianca” manages to successfully critique Britain for its involvement in the Napoleonic Wars. She was successful because, by the time “Casabianca” was published, Hemans had learned a great deal

about the literary climate as she had been negotiating the societal and cultural expectations of women's writing for over a decade.

Although Hemans began publishing in 1808, she did not achieve critical or popular success until 1816 with the publication of *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy*, "by a Lady" (Wolfson xxii). And up until 1819, with the publication of *Tales, and Historic Scenes* and "The Meeting of Wallace and Bruce of the Banks of the Carron," for which she won a £50 prize (Wolfson xxiii), Hemans's work (sometimes published under her own name, sometimes not) was very much hit or miss with the public. Although her family did suffer a bit of a financial setback when she was young, Hemans began writing while she was in a fairly financially secure position, which enabled her to spend ten years crafting and experimenting with her writing. However, with the departure of her husband in 1818, Hemans's situation changed—as did her poetry.

With five children to feed and the recognition that she could profit from her writing, it is not surprising that Hemans "chose to write the kind of poetry that would attract the most profitable market" (Stephenson 15). Although she was not as deliberate in crafting her literary persona as Landon later was, the conflation of Hemans as mother with her poetry became a specifically gendered strategy, albeit one that was projected on to her, for establishing a niche in the literary culture and economy as a poet of the domestic.

Being seen as a mother and perceived as a "writer of the domestic" worked to Hemans's advantage, for while she was writing in a feminine style, she did address some more masculine themes in her works. Hemans's 1826 poem "Casabianca" exemplifies the rational spirit of the female poetic style and the domestic while commenting on war, society, and politics. Yet, Hemans was only able to venture into this territory without impunity while she remained conscious of her readership, as in "Casabianca," "the connections with the domestic affections remain: patriotism is linked to the home, heroism to the innocence of the child. Any faint resistance she may display can consequently be quite easily ignored, or at best overlooked by critics" (Stephenson 15). While Barbauld's attack on Britain was thinly veiled at best, a reader could very easily get lost in the beauty of "Casabianca" and the motherly sorrow Hemans's speaker projects

over the death of the young boy and entirely overlook the fact that Hemans is, in fact, castigating Britain for the lives that are foolishly lost in Battle—not only the British lives, but the French ones as well.

Hemans begins with the image of a lone boy standing on a burning ship:

The boy stood on the burning deck,  
Whence all but him had fled;  
The flame that lit the battle's wreck  
Shone round him o'er the dead.

This initial image of a child abandoned and in distress is meant to pull at the heartstrings of the reader, especially of the mothers. However, this is the image of a French child who was a part of Napoleon's attempt to damage British trade by invading Egypt (Feldman 299). As her readership would be familiar with the Battle of the Nile, Hemans begins crafting her criticism against Britain here, for she correctly assumes that the sympathies of the reader will lie with child, thus enabling him or her to overlook the fact that young Casabianca is French. Ultimately, Hemans elevates the child while disparaging Britain for putting a child, any child regardless of nationality, in harm's way.

In the second stanza, the speaker describes young Casabianca as “beautiful and bright,” which stands in contrast to the description of the flame in the first stanza as it simply “lit the battle's wreck.” Here Hemans's diction serves to elevate the child above the flame, above Britain, for “bright” is certainly a more powerful and evocative adjective in describing something's luminosity than the adjective “lit.” However, as the flames grow, Hemans writes, “They wrapt the ship in splendor wild.” While this is certainly more powerful language than was used earlier to describe the flames (read as Britain), “wild” might be countering the “splendor” as it does imply recklessness. However, two lines later Hemans's diction manages to elevate the child even though physically the flames have risen above him: “And streamed above the gallant child.” The description of the subject trapped on a burning ship as “beautiful and bright” and “gallant,” is all the more powerful because “beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty” (Burke 100). Young Casabianca would not even be the subject of a poem if the Orient, the ship under his father's command, had not caught fire. It is Casabianca's distress combined both

with his youth and the potential inherent in the youth that is being destroyed that evokes the tragic beauty of Hemans's poem. It is also the abiding tragic beauty of this poem, the beauty of Casabianca in distress, and the public's view of Hemans as a motherly, domestic figure that insulates her from reproach as she subtly, yet systematically, denigrates her country for its overzealousness in carrying out war.

While the public's projection of the image of the domestic onto Hemans became strategic in the development of her writing career, William Jerdan, the editor of the *Literary Gazette* and Letitia Elizabeth Landon's neighbor, left little to chance as he ushered the twenty-year-old poet into the society of letters by publishing her first poems. Not only did he publish her first poems, but he also helped to craft and package Landon as an author so that she could be "sold" to a large audience. Although her first poem had been signed "L." and her first book of poems was published under her full name, Landon and Jerdan designed a commercial character, not just a poetess or a writer, "L. E. L."

Using only the initials L. E. L. to sign her poems created a sense of mystery, androgyny, gender ambiguity, and curiosity around her work. L. E. L. could have just as easily stood for Leonard Eustace Lukas as it did Letitia Elizabeth Landon. So for a reader confronted with the simple initials, no judgment could be passed solely upon the gender of the author. This strategy was in fact two-fold: not only would a potential reader encounter her work who might otherwise not have done so (perhaps dismissing a poem based upon the gender of the author), but a reader was left captivated by the mystery, wanting to know, "who is this L. E. L.?" The commodification of Landon was furthered when Jerdan revealed, in a footnote to the publication of Bernard Barton's "To L. E. L. On his or her Poetic Sketches in the *Literary Gazette*," that the author of the poems, which Barton so admired was, in fact, a young female (Stephenson 25). Revealing that L. E. L. was female had the effect of heightening interest in her work; some were fascinated that a young lady could produce such works, while others were simply infatuated with the idea of the poetess and felt that they possessed some part of her by having copies of her poems. Landon, through the simple use of her initials,

managed to manipulate the pervading climate of the literary society, for now being female was as much a boon to her career as being a mother was for Hemans.

The air of mystery, controversy, and curiosity surrounding L. E. L. and her poetry never fully dissipated as her style of writing fed the desires of her audience, and this, in turn, shaped how she wrote for them. Landon's poetry danced along that very fine line dividing the masculine and feminine spheres of writing. While this was a line that Hemans also knew very well, "the domestic and maternal love infusing so much of Hemans's work gets replaced in Landon with the subject of erotic love. By that choice of subject Landon gave an immediately provocative edge to her work" (McGann 145). Although writing on the subject of love certainly seems to be the quintessential and stereotypical theme of the poetess, it is Landon's strategic employment of the erotic that both develops for her a certain readership and which requires very careful and conscious crafting to negotiate the dominant social and cultural climate (McGann 146). It is the beauty of Landon's poem "Calypso Watching the Ocean"—the social quality that inspires sentiments of tenderness and affection within individuals (Burke 39)—as well as the failure of love that keeps the poem from being considered inappropriate or unfeminine. As with young Casabianca, one becomes taken with Calypso's beauty and the beauty of the poem, for she is another example that "beauty in distress is much the most affecting beauty" (Burke 100). Although we are told in the first stanza of the poem that Calypso "weepeth on eternally," it is the physical description of her in the subsequent stanzas that details her beauty.

The first two lines of this second stanza metonymically illustrate Calypso's beauty through her hair: "Downwards floateth her bright hair,/Fair—how exquisitely fair!" The diction Landon employs here is much like Hemans's in her description of the boy: the "bright" and "exquisitely fair" hair of Calypso and the "beautiful and bright" and "gallant" young Casabianca. A reader would certainly be familiar with the mythic figure of Calypso as a beautiful nymph, thus Landon's allusion further establish the subject's beauty and serves as a way for Landon to temper the theme of erotic love in this work by rooting it in an already established story—just as Hemans couched her

criticism of Britain in the Battle of the Nile. In the subsequent lines of the stanza, Calypso becomes all the more beautiful because the speaker notes of her hair, “but it is unbound” and “there it droopeth sadly bright,” thus depicting her dishevelment. One would think that being so unkempt would mar Calypso’s physical beauty, but she is read as all the more attractive because her distress is all the more affecting.

Distress is not only manifested physically through Calypso, but also through the structure of the poem itself. The rhyme scheme—A, A, B, C, C, B, D, D, E, F—has an almost rolling, heaving, sobbing quality and rhythm to it, amplified by the repetition of the exact E, F lines, “On the lone and lovely island/In the far-off southern seas,” at the close of each of the poem’s ten stanzas. However, the F line is altered slightly throughout the poem. While this does not change the back and forth, heaving, rhythm of the poem, the varying between “In” and “Mid” in the F line does create another layer of imperfection (Burke 100), and thus another layer of beauty within the work.

Although this is a poem about love, it is about a love that is not realized, about a love that has perished. This, too, is a part of Landon’s strategy to maintain her readership, for it certainly would not have been appropriate for a woman to talk about, let alone write and publish about the fulfillment of one’s desires. All of the charged language Landon uses in this poem is derived from passion, but the words themselves connote loss, sadness, and loneliness:

Like a marble statue placed,  
Looking o’er the watery waste,  
With its white fixed gaze;  
There the Goddess sits, her eye  
Raised to the unpitied sky.

The speaker is able to move about the island, and in doing so she emphasizes Calypso’s stillness. In describing Calypso as a “marble statue,” and noting that “she silently sitteth there,” it is as though this poem is a poignant perversion of the myth of Medusa, for now that Odysseus can no longer look upon her, she has become paralyzed. Given the degree of passion the speaker invokes in conveying Calypso’s pain and loss, it is not hard to imagine the erotic force her

words would carry if this was not a story about loss, but instead the union of Calypso and Odysseus.

Having won her audience over through an extended meditation upon lack, love, passion and loss that resolves into beauty, Landon involves her reader in the last stanza:

She is but the type of all,  
Mortal or celestial,  
    Who allow the heart,  
In its passion and its power,  
On some dark and fated hour,  
To assert its part.  
Fate attends the steps of Love,—  
Both brought misery from above  
    To the lone and lovely island  
    'Mid far-off southern seas.

If Calypso “is but the type of all,” then the reader is meant to see him or herself in Calypso’s place upon the shores of the island. Landon’s use of “mortal” and “celestial” in the subsequent line works to ensure that the reader cannot distance him or herself by isolating the experience of such profound loss and pain to Calypso or other mythical beings. Furthermore, the use of “mortal” and “celestial” subtly implies that such experiences are not isolated to women, for just as women are often connected to the heavens during the Romantic era, the men in this period are associated with the earth. Landon is careful not to say that such a fate as befell Calypso will come to pass for everyone, but only to those “who allow the heart”—those who are willing to chance love do risk loss. Yet by noting that such love and loss only come to those who allow the heart to “To assert its part,” she reminds her readers that the heart and passions do have a legitimate place in one’s life. However, she does remind the reader that “Fate attends the steps of Love.” While love should have a place in one’s life, it does not have to be present; however, fate will play a role no matter what. However, depending on how one wishes to read the lines, Fate will play out and one will end up loving whether one wants to or not, or Fate will play itself out differently, leading to the death of love, as it was for Calypso.

Punctuation complicates the reading of this final stanza, for the dash at the end of the first line of the DD couplet, “Fate attends the steps of Love,—” might indicate a continuation of a thought or a pause between two thoughts. Are we to read “Both brought misery from above” as being connected to or separated from that previous line? If it is connected to the previous line and read as “Fate attends the steps of Love,—Both brought misery from above,” then the reader will not see Fate or Love as positive forces. However, if the lines are separated by the dash, then, perhaps, the second line of the couplet is connected, unbroken by punctuation, to the remaining EF lines. If that is the case then all will be well—“Both brought misery from above/to the lone and lovely island/”Mid the far-off southern seas”—for, perhaps, such pain and sadness have been confined to a desolate far away place.

While many might wish that the misery brought about by Fate and Love could be contained to some island “Mid the far-off southern seas,” sadly that is not the case. However, Landon’s final meditation upon the heart and those who allow it “to assert its part” is apropos, for the gendered strategies female poets had to employ in their writing to negotiate the male dominated literary sphere were their ways of allowing their hearts and minds “to assert [their] part[s].” For Barbauld, Hemans, and Landon, to have a role in the literary economy, one did not need to be more than a poetess, with all of the stereotypes that that term implies. For Landon and Hemans, however, their financial states and social conscious could not allow them settle for the life of the poetess nor for the corner of the literary to which women were relegated. Their gendered and layered strategies enabled them to earn legitimacy as women of letters and support their families; these strategies successfully insulated them as they transgressed the boundaries imposed upon them and as they covertly appropriated spaces and subjects that were decidedly not of the feminine sphere.



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