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Recasting women's stories : in the poetry of Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and Christina Rossetti

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PART II

Landon, Hemans, and Dying Women

CHAPTER 3

The Female Other in Letitia Landon's "A History of the Lyre"

"This proud reward you see, and yet can leave:
Your songs sink on the ear, and there they die,
A flower's sweetness, but a flower's life.
An evening's homage is your only fame;
'Tis vanity, Eulalia."¹

(lines 147-51)

After speaking enthusiastically about the immortality of soul gained by fame, Eulalia, a gifted improvisatrice in Rome, is confronted with this brief but harsh criticism from an English gentleman. Stunned by his remark, she implores him, "speak not of this to me, nor bid me think", and then embarks on an extended monologue dwelling on the theme of the female poet and her fate. This is a scene from "A History of the Lyre" (1828), a poem written by Letitia Landon in the form of a dramatic monologue. The scene illustrates the moment when a split between the two protagonists emerges. After this friction, Eulalia gradually succumbs to her interlocutor's gendered views on artistic talent and fame, and eventually allows herself to die nameless, frozen in a portrait as one of his possessions.

The poem is a dramatic monologue with a two-tiered structure. The monologue is spoken by an English gentleman, the first speaker. There is an auditor who listens to this monologue, but without

¹ "A History of the Lyre", in Landon (1997), 115-27. All the citations of the poem will be from this edition, and are indicated by line numbers.

speaking a word. Within this monologue, the gentleman recalls his stay in Rome, and a conversation he had there with an improvisatrice named Eulalia. He perfectly remembers the words Eulalia said, and reproduces her long monologue in the presence of his silent auditor. Eulalia, then, can be considered the second speaker of the poem, speaking within the gentleman's monologue. This intricate narrative structure serves to bring into relief the gender relationship between the two speakers. It has been pointed out that the genre of the dramatic monologue often reveals gender dynamics between a man as the Self and a woman as the Other.² "A History of the Lyre" is a good example to show this aspect of the genre.

This chapter examines the way "A History of the Lyre" presents the fatal gender dynamics. Before analyzing the poem itself, let us increase our understanding of the dramatic monologue by looking at some views on this genre, with special reference to gender issues.

Sympathy, Irony, and Gender in the Dramatic Monologue

Robert Langbaum in his classical study of the genre, *The Poetry of Experience*, discusses how readers of dramatic monologues construct the meaning of the poems they read.³ He contends that the dramatic monologue produces a tension in the reader's mind: the reader feels sympathy for the speaker of the monologue, but at the same time

² For the relationship between Self and Other in dramatic monologues written by Robert Browning and Tennyson, see Erik Gray, "'Out of me, out of me!': Andrea, Ulysses, and Victorian Revisions of Egotistical Lyric", in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 36, no.4 (Winter 1998): 417-30. Eijun Senaha examines Robert Browning's dramatic monologues from a feminist perspective, and finds woman's voice to be present here as well as man's. See Eijun Senaha, Chapter 4, "Man's Voice and Woman's Voice: Audibility of Porphyria and the Duchess", in *Sex, Drugs, and Madness in Poetry from William Blake to Christina Rossetti: Women's Pain, Women's Pleasure* (Lewiston: Mellen UP, 1996). Dorothy Mermin discusses issues of gender in dramatic monologues written by both men and women in "'The Fruitful Feud of Hers and His': Sameness, Difference, and Gender in Victorian Poetry", in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 149-68.

³ Robert Langbaum, *Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), rpt. of 1957.

forms a moral judgment and disapproves of the speaker's behavior (Langbaum, 75-108). According to him, the reader of Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842) is attracted to the cruel speaker (Duke) and, in sympathy for him, temporarily suspends moral judgment of the man's cruelty to his deceased wife (82-86).

Cynthia Scheinberg, in her study of dramatic monologues written by women, "recasts" this classical theory of the dramatic monologue. Scheinberg points out that Langbaum's formulation of a split between sympathy and moral judgment does not necessarily apply to all readers.⁴ As a woman and a feminist who was educated in the late eighties and early nineties, she cannot sympathize with the misogynist Duke of "My Last Duchess". It is this very lack of sympathy, however, that leads her to regard the poem as a "great" work: the poem is great because it reveals the extent to which a woman can be oppressed by male language (Scheinberg, 178). As she suggests, Langbaum's theory is predicated on the idea of the generalized reader, which has become increasingly problematic with the rise of feminist, post-structuralist, and post-colonialist approaches to literature. Emphasizing that the emotional and moral response can vary depending on the reader, Scheinberg revises Langbaum's theory to suggest that "dramatic monologues by both men and women work to reveal the contingency [not the split] between powers of poetic sympathy and moral judgment". She brings to light a major characteristic of the genre that "readers, auditors, and critics have deep moral and personal commitments which necessarily affect their capacities for identification or sympathy with poetic speakers" (179).

U. C. Knoepfelmacher also discusses the genre of dramatic monologue from the perspective of reader response. He contends that Robert Browning, in his dramatic monologues such as "Porphyria's Lover" (1836, 1842) and "My Last Duchess", "ironizes the act of projection by which a devouring male ego reduces ... Female Other into nothingness".⁵ In these monologues a woman is denied her personality – is, in fact, murdered – and is relegated to a state of

⁴ Cynthia Scheinberg, "Recasting 'Sympathy and Judgement': Amy Levy, Women Poets, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue", in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 35, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 173-192, 176-78.

⁵ U. C. Knoepfelmacher, "Projection and the Female Other: Romanticism, Browning, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue", in *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 139-59, 142-43.

eternal confinement, as a static portrait deprived of her voice. Knoepfelmacher suggests that, although the poet apparently acts as an accomplice in suppressing the woman as Other, he actually “maneuvers the reader into becoming that suppressed Other’s chief ally” (Knoepfelmacher, 143).⁶ As he suggests, once the reader discerns the irony in the poem, it is only a short step to hearing the voice of the silenced woman:

Porphyria and the Duchess have lost more than a freedom of motion. Imprisoned as they are within a male’s rhetoric of justification, they have also become bereft of a voice of their own Unless rescued by the reader, Porphyria and the Duchess remain the perennial captives of masculine speech. (Knoepfelmacher, 143)

Knoepfelmacher does not specifically mention that reader response can be varied, but I suggest that, with all the maneuvering by Browning, readers may not always take his hints and “rescue” the Duchess from her state of captivity. Still, Knoepfelmacher’s discussion encourages feminist readings of dramatic monologues and, like Scheinberg’s argument, makes us aware of the moral commitment we have as readers of works belonging to this genre.

The theories mentioned above highlight the importance of reader response in the dramatic monologue: we are invited to actively sympathize with, and judge, the protagonists. While interpretations may vary from one reader to the next, the dramatic monologue does “maneuver” the reader toward a particular interpretation. The poet gives readers certain clues, to lead them to read dramatic irony into the speaker’s monologue. This indicates that the poet keeps a certain distance from, and objectifies, the speaker. In the dramatic monologue the speaker’s voice is not necessarily an exact reflection of the poet’s thinking.

Dorothy Mermin argues that, in terms of creating a distance between the poet and the speaker, women authors’ dramatic

⁶ It is difficult to state with confidence that Robert Browning *consciously* intended to ironically depict the speakers as cruel oppressors. Eijun Senaha expresses his doubts about Robert Langbaum’s view that Browning shows refined moral intelligence in “Porphyria’s Lover”; he suggests that the young Browning (at the age of twenty-four), although well aware of Victorian gender issues, was simply confused and was not capable of judging these matters. See Senaha, 98-99.

monologues differ from men's. According to Mermin, women poets such as Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning

seem usually to sympathize with their protagonists, and neither frame them with irony as Browning does nor at least partly objectify them like Tennyson by using characters with an independent literary existence ... we are not made aware of the poet signaling to us from behind the speaker's back ... where men's poems have two sharply differentiated figures – in dramatic monologues, the poet and the dramatized speaker – in women's poems the two blur together.⁷

Mermin suggests that women authors' dramatic monologues do not present the speaker ironically, and the poet usually sympathizes with her protagonists. I have some doubts about this, however,⁸ and agree with Glennis Byron, who comments that "this statement [of Mermin's] ... needs more qualification".⁹ Women poets may tend to sympathize more with their speakers than male poets. Still, as Byron suggests, "this does not mean that they do not objectify them or frame them with irony". She continues,

What it *does* mean is that their ultimate target is more the systems which produce the speakers than the speakers themselves. (emphasis in original; Byron, 59)

More importantly, those "systems which produce the speakers" could ultimately turn out to be the "gendered ideological constructs which repress and restrain" (Byron, 60-61).

This suggestion of Byron's applies to Landon's dramatic monologues, especially the one I discuss in this chapter. "A History of the Lyre" is a dramatic monologue in which both speakers are presented ironically, and the reader is, to borrow Byron's words, led to recognize the social "systems which produce the speakers" – and the "gendered ideological constructs that repress and restrain". Since

⁷ Dorothy Mermin, "The Damsel, the Knight, and the Victorian Woman Poet", in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1986): 64-80, 75-76.

⁸ As I will argue in later chapters, while Christina Rossetti may present her protagonists sympathetically, she can also "frame them with irony" and "objectify them". In her dramatic monologues sympathy and irony can exist together.

⁹ Glennis Byron, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Routledge, 2003), 58.

the poem has two speakers, it can present two different perspectives: man's and woman's. The clash between the two ways of thinking then appears in a more tangible way, and we see clearly how a dominant ideological discourse devours a vulnerable ideological strain. Let us examine this through a close reading of "A History of the Lyre".

"A History of the Lyre"

The figure of Eulalia in "A History of the Lyre" originates in Germaine de Staël's novel *Corinne, or Italy*, which was discussed in Chapter 1. The setting of the story in Rome, the heroine's friendship with an English gentleman, and her death at the end – these elements the two stories have in common.¹⁰ There is, however, a major difference in narration between the original novel and "A History of the Lyre": while the novel is told by a third-person narrator, the poem is a monologue by a male speaker (the English gentleman). In this male monologue is embedded another monologue by a female speaker, Eulalia.

The poem starts with the male speaker's recollections, which already show his self-centered attitude toward Eulalia:

'Tis strange how much is mark'd on memory,
In which we may have *interest*, but *no part*;
How circumstances will bring together links
In destinies the most dissimilar.

(emphases added; lines 1-4)

Here the speaker has in mind his encounter with the improvisatrice, who is already dead. We know this because at this moment he is showing Eulalia's portrait to his silent auditor.¹¹ The paradox is that

¹⁰ There are major differences in terms of story settings between the original novel and "A History of the Lyre". First, Staël's *Corinne* is half English and half Italian, while Landon's Eulalia is Italian. Second, *Corinne* falls in love with the gentleman, whereas there is no clear indication that Eulalia is in love with her English friend. "A History of the Lyre" simplifies the original story and, as the preface puts it, concentrates on the wavering "thoughts" and "emotions" of "woman's soul".

¹¹ Mitoko Hirabayashi points out that the "portrait of a dead woman" was a subgenre

the speaker shows great interest in Eulalia, while regarding her as in no way related to him: he has "no part" in Eulalia's life and death. He even proclaims that their "destinies" are "the most dissimilar". His attitude seems contradictory, but it is possible to explain this combination of curiosity and indifference. On the one hand, the gentleman was curious to know what kind of woman Eulalia was: he was attracted to her because in his home country he could rarely encounter a woman like her, enjoying public admiration as an artist. On the other hand, he takes pride in his own country,¹² and has chosen as his bride a person who in the context of England is considered an ideal woman. This, in his case, leads to a chauvinistic mindset: he regards a woman of another country – even if she is talented, or rather, precisely because she is talented – as totally alien to him. We may call this paradoxical attitude "a sense of Otherness".

The gentleman, with this sense of Otherness, takes special pleasure in gazing on Eulalia in her sorrow. For he can thereby gratify his curiosity, and – thanks to his indifference – does not have to feel any pity for her sorrow:

The face, whose rudely-pencill'd sketch you hold,
Recalls to me *a host of pleasant thoughts*, ...

(emphasis added; 5-6)

The gentleman has felt the pleasure of gazing since he first saw Eulalia. On this occasion, he watched Eulalia without letting her notice. He was impressed by the beauty of the lonely poet, who was wandering alone through the ruins of a fallen palace, filled with inspiration. He recollects:

– I never saw more perfect loveliness.
It ask'd, it had no aid from dress: her robe

in poetry of the nineteenth-century. Poems in this genre include: "The Gardener's Daughter" (1842) by Alfred Lord Tennyson, "My Last Duchess" (1842) by Robert Browning, and "The Portrait" (1870) by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. See Mitoko Hirabayashi, *Sleeping Beauty Kept Waiting: Representation of Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Kyoto: Kyoto Shugakusha, 1996), 21.

¹² See the gentleman's words in lines 378-80: "I soon left Italy: it is well worth / A year of wandering, were it but to feel / How much our England does outweigh the world".

Was white, and simply gather'd in such folds
 As suit a *statue*: neck and arms were bare;
 The black hair was unbound, and like a veil
 Hung even to her feet; she held a lute,
 And, as she paced the ancient gallery, waked
 A few chords, and murmur'd low sweet words,
 But scarcely audible, as if she thought
 Rather than spoke: – the night, the solitude,
 Fill'd the young Pythoness with poetry.
 – Her eyes were like the moonlight, clear and soft,
 That shadowy brightness which is born of tears,
 And raised towards the sky, as if they sought
 Companionship with their own heaven; ...

(emphasis added; 68-82)

In describing Eulalia's beauty, the gentleman compares her to a Roman statue. What does this comparison signify?

For the gentleman the statue symbolizes death, decline and decay. This is seen from his description of a ruined palace – the remains of a lost Roman family. Here he finds “a few statues, beautiful but cold”. These statues appear to him as “white shadows, pale and motionless”, and impress him as “fit images of the dead” (40-43). In ancient times, the Roman family enjoyed prosperity. But they died out, and their name and glory are gone to dust forever. Therefore, the remains of the family remind the gentleman of the emptiness of human glory.¹³ By comparing Eulalia to a Roman statue, then, he foresees her decline: Eulalia is destined to die soon and her fame will be forgotten for good, just like that of the extinct Roman family. But the gentleman does not feel any pity for her. He only feels cold gratification in gazing on her in this way.

Eulalia keeps singing, inspired, but her voice is “scarcely audible, as if she thought rather than spoke” (76-77). This beautiful but bleak portrayal of Eulalia as a statue is seen repeatedly throughout the poem, and is finalized by the gentleman's description of the improvisatrice who, leaning against one of the statues, predicts her own death, and fades away in fulfillment of her own prediction.

¹³ The gentleman implicitly refers to the fall of the Roman Empire when he describes the remains of the Roman family, but it may also be possible to see a reference to the end of the Italian Renaissance.

Ultimately, Eulalia is seen to assimilate the gentleman's perception of herself. She takes on the role of a "beautiful but cold" statue, and dies as a pleasant object of the man's gaze.

If we name this bleak portrayal of the poet "the white Eulalia" (she is then dressed in white), there is in the gentleman's narration another representation of the poet which we may call "the red Eulalia". The Eulalia the gentleman sees at a banquet the next day looks very different from the way she looked the previous night. She now engages in lively and witty conversation, surrounded by admirers. Her robe is Indian red, worked with gold around her waist, and her hair is gathered up in grape-like curls (90-104). This rich, ornate appearance can be understood as a proud declaration of her career as an artist worthy of public acclaim. The white Eulalia keeps to herself in solitude, while the red Eulalia talks and sings to people. The gentleman, taking pleasure in gazing on the white Eulalia, feels disappointment seeing the red Eulalia:

– At Count Zarin's palazzo the next night
We were to meet, and expectation wore
Itself with fancies, – all of them were vain.
I could not image aught so wholly changed.

(90-93)

Why does the gentleman feel shocked when seeing the red Eulalia sitting in "the centre of a group", her wit "[flashing] like lightning", and her "sunniest smiles [wandering] upon her face" (99-103)?

The red Eulalia upsets him because she seems to enjoy her popularity and does not hesitate to show her brilliance to people. Jan Marsh, as he examines the mindset necessary for an artist's success in nineteenth-century Britain, points out that "contemporary gender theory and custom made what was strongly urged on men equally positively forbidden to women". For instance, Sir Joshua Reynolds recommended Royal Academy students to cultivate moral qualities such as "a just and manly confidence" in themselves, ambition, and self-respect. These virtues, however, are contrary to those women were counseled to learn: modesty, self-effacement, and altruism. As Marsh puts it, "these qualities [associated with women] will seldom bring the success and fame that depend on professional and public esteem" (Marsh 1995, 33-34). Since the gentleman has chosen a

modest English woman as his bride, it would seem that he shares his society's assumptions about gender. This would explain why he feels betrayed at the sight of the red Eulalia: her behavior defies his gender assumptions about the appropriateness of fame for women.

The presence of the red Eulalia is deeply disturbing to the gentleman, and he can no longer remain comfortably "indifferent" to her. An antipathy toward Eulalia grows in his mind, and finally he finds a chance for revenge. It is when she talks about the immortality an artist attains by fame:

... "Tis this which makes
 The best assurance of *our* promised heaven:
 This triumph intellect has over death –
Our words yet live on others' lips; *our* thoughts
 Actuate others. Can that *man* be dead
 Whose spiritual influence is upon *his* kind?
He lives in glory; ...

(emphases added; 137-43)

The gentleman cannot pass over in silence this proud pronouncement by Eulalia, and he makes a personal attack against her. This attack is in the lines quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

In these lines (147-51), the gentleman condemns Eulalia's songs as transient, by using sinister words such as "sink" and "die", and labels her ambition as "vanity". But more damaging to Eulalia is his manipulation of her discourse. When talking about an artist's fame, Eulalia uses generic personal pronouns such as "our", "man", "his", and "he". In contrast, the gentleman arbitrarily limits Eulalia's discourse to her personal case, by using the second-person pronoun to retort, "An evening's homage is *your* only fame" (emphasis added; 150). His gendered double standard manifests itself in this restrictive rhetoric: he thinks that women should not seek fame, and that, if ever they do, their fame is only transient, whereas men's can be immortal. The gentleman's rhetoric is powerful enough that Eulalia succumbs to it: she embarks on a long monologue, incorporating into it his gendered perspective.

Eulalia's monologue dwells on the poet's struggle for achievement and its failure. By taking up the theme of the poet's struggle, Eulalia seems to follow the three-stage storyline of man's glory, fall and

recovery often seen in the poetry of (male) Romanticism. For instance, Eulalia's account of man's glorious state before his birth (305-09) is close to what is described in "Ode [Intimation of Immortality]" (1807) by William Wordsworth.¹⁴ Wordsworth dwells on man's birth and his former glorious state with God:

Our birth is but a sleep and forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:

(58-65)

Compare this with Eulalia's meditation:

"Methinks *we* must have known some former state
More glorious than *our* present, and the heart
Is haunted with dim memories, shadows left
By past magnificence; and hence *we* pine
With vain aspirings, hopes that fill the eyes
With bitter tears for their own vanity.

(emphases added; 305-10)

Telling the story of the poet's glory and his fall, Eulalia uses the generic (non-gendered) personal pronoun "we", as Wordsworth does in his poem. She uses another generic pronoun, "he", when she imagines more concretely what happens to the poet striving for fame:

I am as one who sought at early dawn
To climb with fiery speed some lofty hill:
His feet are strong in eagerness and youth;
His limb are braced by the fresh morning air,
And all seems possible: – this cannot last. ...

¹⁴ William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983), 271-77. Hereafter, quotations from the poem, and line numbers indicated, are from this edition.

His heart upon *his* lips, *he* seeks the world,
 To find *him* fame and fortune, as if life
 Were like a fairy tale. *His* song has led
 The way before *him*; flatteries fill *his* ear,
His presence courted, ...

... worldiness
 Has crept upon *his* spirit unaware;
 Vanity craves for its accustom'd food;
He has turn'd sceptic to the truth which made
His feelings poetry; ...

(emphases added: 159-63, 281-85, 294-98)

Eulalia's use of generic pronouns makes clear that initially "the poet" represents all poets: it does not matter if "he" is male or female. However, she makes a sudden change of personal pronouns to use a more specific one, "I". This signals that Eulalia now limits her meditation to her own case – or the case of women including herself. And this is where her story starts to differ from Wordsworth's:

There is the summit, which *he* [the poet] may not reach,
 And round him are a thousand obstacles.
 "*I am a woman*: – tell me not of fame.
 The eagle's wing may sweep the stormy path,
 And fling back arrows, where the dove would die.
 Look on those flowers near yon acacia tree –
 The lily of the valley – mark how pure
 The snowy blossoms, – and how soft a breath
 Is almost hidden by the large dark leaves.
 Not only have those delicate flowers a gift
 Of sweetness and of beauty, but the root –
 A healing power dwells there; fragrant and fair,
 But dwelling still in some beloved shade.
 Is not this woman's emblem? – she whose smile
 Should only make the loveliness of home –
 Who seeks support and shelter from man's heart,
 And pays it with affection quiet, deep, –
 And in his sickness – sorrow – with an aid
 He did not deem in aught so fragile dwelt.
 Alas! This has not been my destiny.

(emphasis added; 173-92)

With this limitation ("I am a woman"), Eulalia's discourse turns into a meditation on woman's duty: woman "should only make the loveliness of home" as man's helpmate. She laments her own destiny as a talented poet, comparing it with that of the "ideal" woman.

Like Eulalia, Wordsworth's speaker-poet in "Ode" is haunted by the sense that he has lost his poetic inspiration: "Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" (56-57). However, he later recovers from the loss, turning inner "misgivings" (147) into joy. He raises "the song of thanks and praise" (143), finding "strength in what remains behind" (183). Finally he proclaims his triumph: "Another race hath been, and other palms are won" (202). Wordsworth makes a change of personal pronouns as Landon does, but his "I" is not restrictive: although he speaks in the first person, his speaking "I" still represents all poets. In contrast, Landon's speaker is strongly conscious that she is a woman and therefore cannot represent all poets. In consequence, she cannot recover from her fall, but will continue to decline. This limitation of the discourse to the case of women is exactly what the gentleman did when he attacked Eulalia for her ambition. Eulalia now submits to his criticism and even assimilates his way of thinking. Eulalia may appear to be too susceptible to others' views. But what her response to the gentleman actually shows is the way gendered social systems work: male rhetoric can have a strong influence on even an exceptionally talented woman, because it comes from a dominant ideology.

When meditating on the fate of the poet, Eulalia initially criticizes society, not herself. She portrays the poet as isolated because of a gap between him and society.¹⁵ The poet has "a keener sense" than "common men", and the "lovely shapes" of his imagination are contrasted with "existing things" in society (311-17). Eulalia blames the vulgarity of society for the poet's fall and for his loss of poetic inspiration. However, as her discourse turns into a meditation on her own case, she starts to feel poignant remorse for her past actions and attitudes: now she locates the cause of the poet's fall – *her* fall – not in her society, but in herself:

¹⁵ For the poet's sense of discrepancy between himself and vulgar society in the Romantic era, see Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 176-77.

Had I known even an unhappy love,
It would have flung an interest round life
Mine never knew ...

(326-28)

... I have fed
Perhaps too much upon the lotus fruits

(332-33)

The glorified – the passionate – the brave –
In these I might have found the head and heart
I could have worshipp'd ...

(347-49)

After these remorseful lines, Eulalia bluntly concludes: “The fault has been my own” (353-54). This clear statement cancels out her social criticism, and her potential to reform “cold”, “careless” and “false” society from a woman’s perspective, as hinted at earlier in the monologue:

... My days are past
Among the cold, the careless, and the false.
What part have I in them, or they in me?
Yet I would be beloved; I would be kind;
I would share others’ sorrows, others’ joys;
I would fence in a happiness with friends.

(249-54)

In these lines Eulalia makes the potentially radical claim that she can reform society with her sympathetic power – woman’s extensive moral power.¹⁶ This claim is, however, silenced for good by her ultimate self-criticism.

¹⁶ For the radically moral and political potential of “sensibility” (especially of “sympathy” as one of sensibility’s main aspects), see Chris Jones. Jones focuses on interpretations of sensibility in the 1790s, a politically turbulent period in Britain. He explains that radical interpretations of sensibility value expanding one’s sympathy beyond the narrow bond of familial ties and the circle of high-ranking people, and that accordingly they can potentially lead to subversion of the established social order (Chris Jones, 70-74). For a study that examines Landon’s and Hemans’ poems with respect to the poetics of sensibility, see McGann (1996).

After Eulalia's speech ends with her sorrowful remark that she has grown weary of living, the poem abruptly returns to the gentleman's narration:

I soon left Italy: it is well worth
A year of wandering, were it but to feel
How much our England does outweigh the world.

(378-80)

We are given no information about how the gentleman responded to Eulalia's monologue. His curt sentence "I soon left Italy" indicates that he does not care how much grief his verbal attack brought her. Forgetting the huge pleasure he received from Eulalia and her songs, he summarizes his stay in Italy in words of self-glorification: "How much our England does outweigh the world". In this concluding speech, the gentleman keeps comparing himself and Eulalia. In doing so, he is constantly conscious of his superiority over the woman artist – both as a foreigner and as a woman, she is Other – and cannot hide his satisfaction.

The gentleman begins by recalling how glad he was to return to England:

Nearer I came, I heard familiar sounds –
They are the heart's best music; saw the blaze
Through the wide windows of the dear old hall.
One moment more, my eager footsteps stood
Within my father's home, beside his hearth.

(391-95)

In his home country, he was reunited with his bride Emily, and spent a few happy years. Then he visited Italy again, this time accompanying Emily, so that she could recuperate after an illness. There, just as he had recovered his pride in his homeland by his previous visit, his wife soon recovered her health:

I need not tell thee how the soothing air
Brought tranquil bloom that *fed not upon itself*
To Emily's sweet face; but soon again
We talk'd of winter by our own wood fire,
With cheerful words, that had no tears to hide.

(403-07)

The gentleman is so pleased to tell how he and Emily both benefited from their temporary stays in Italy. On their return home, the couple paid a visit to Eulalia, but the poet now looked very different. She was obviously in decline:

– We pass'd through Rome on our return, and there
Sought out Eulalia. Graceful as her wont
Her welcome to my bride; but oh, so changed!
Her cheek was colourless as snow; she wore
The beauty of a statue, or a spirit
With large and radiant eyes: – her thrilling voice
Had lost its power, ...

(408-14)

The gentleman appears to express pity for Eulalia. However, coming after the complacent description of his own blessedness, his lamentation (“oh, so changed!”) has a hollow ring. It merely reveals his hypocrisy.

In the final lines of the poem the gentleman offers a prayer for the dead Eulalia. But it sounds deeply ironical:

Peace to the weary and the beating heart,
That fed upon itself!

(448-49)

Taken literally, these are words of sympathy for Eulalia. However, the gentleman's cruelty emerges from between the lines. For he is actually drawing a contrast between Emily, who is blessed with the bloom “that fed *not* upon itself” (emphasis added; 404), and Eulalia, whose heart “fed upon itself” (449). This makes clear that the gentleman feels superior to Eulalia: unlike that self-destructive woman, he and his wife are destined to prosper, blessed with the power of recuperation. In gratification, he takes pleasure in mourning Eulalia.

The gentleman once received pleasure from the beautiful Eulalia. However, when perceiving that his patriarchal ideas of women were challenged by her fame and talent, he retaliated by attacking her ambition as “vanity”. Later, filled with patriotic feelings, he conveniently forgets the benefits he enjoyed from Eulalia and her

country, and how ungratefully he treated them. Sure of Eulalia's decline, he cries almost in rapture, "the weary and beating heart, that fed upon itself!" He has now fulfilled his secret desire to destroy the woman who he felt had threatened his patriarchal beliefs. The gentleman's triumphant exclamation confirms that the poem is after all *his* poem, not Eulalia's. He exploits Eulalia, also in the sense of making use of her for *his* poem, and thereby seeking to achieve for himself what he criticizes her for: fame. When reading irony into the gentleman's speech and understanding the cruel way he mourns Eulalia, we start to hear the suffering voice of the dead woman, who was manipulated into accepting the dominant male discourse.

