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

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CHAPTER 4

Resisting Victims: Felicia Hemans' Records of Woman

Victims/Accomplices of Imperialism

Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson point out that the motif of victimhood in the literature of sensibility reflects intercultural experiences and a sense of guilt in the age of imperialism.¹ This observation applies to Felicia Hemans' *Records of Woman* (1828), a collection of poems featuring nineteen troubled heroines.² The work appears to be designed to elicit the reader's compassion, by focusing on the fluctuating emotions and actions of female protagonists in distress.³ Setting her stories in several nations and in a variety of time periods,

¹ For discussions of Romantic poets and their works that deal with Britain's colonial experiences, see Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson, eds, *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998). In Chapter 3 Fulford introduces poems featuring "victims" of imperialistic expansion, including Byron's *Eastern Tales*, in which woman suffers in cross-cultural love (35-47). As for representations of women as victims in the literature of sensibility, see Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angelica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (London: Virago, 1989) and Julie Ellison, "Politics of Fancy in the Age of Sensibility", in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, eds. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 228-55.

² All the quotations from *Records of Woman* are taken from Hemans (2000), and indicated by line numbers in the text.

³ For a study which discusses Hemans' poems from the perspective of sensibility, see McGann (1996). As for protagonists' sufferings and feelings of compassion and pity in the literature of sensibility, see, for instance, Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background 1760-1830* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981), 31-32, R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novels of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974), Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), and G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago P, 1992).

Hemans adapts historical and legendary tales popular at the time for her own purposes, and presents her protagonists as sufferers involved variously in the imperial and colonial project. An English woman who loses her husband in battle on the American frontier (“Edith, A Tale of the Woods”); a French bride who sails to the “youthful world” (the Americas) to be married, only to find her bridegroom already dead (“Madeline, A Domestic Tale”); a Grecian bride who falls captive to pirates, as if a symbol of Greece’s struggle to free itself from Ottoman oppression (“The Bride of the Greek Isle”); a Swiss hero of the fourteenth century and his wife who revolt against the tyranny of Austrian rule (“The Switzer’s Wife”); a loyal wife who accompanies her husband when he is executed for allegedly conspiring to assassinate Albert I, Holy Roman Emperor (“Gertrude, or Fidelity till Death”) – these characters illustrate Hemans’ project of depicting victims of empire.⁴ They are all presented as loving and loyal women, and this makes their plight seem all the more pathetic.

The victims Hemans portrays are not only people who are colonized by an empire. Many such victims appear in *Records of Woman*, but there are also victims that belong to the colonizing society itself. They are both victims *and* accomplices of their own empire, and they eventually perish – injured, alienated, or exiled. One question that comes to mind is who or what victimizes these women. In a broad sense, the answer may be imperialism, but that is not all. Patriarchy also manifests itself as a force that imposes restrictions upon women. For Hemans’ women, suffering caused by imperialism occasionally serves as an analogy for the sense of alienation they feel in society. *Records of Woman* was published during the years after the Congress of Vienna, when liberal and nationalist movements were suppressed, and riots broke out throughout Europe. Reactionary governments came to power, and some British Romantic writers opposed this; they strongly supported the cause of nationalism for

⁴ Many poems in the collection carry a strong sense of the age of imperialism: “The Indian City” sets the story in colonized India and features a Muslim mother who has her revenge on Hindoos for murdering her son; the heroine of “Joan of Arc” is the famed female warrior whose icon is said to have represented French opposition against the threat of Britain during the years of the Napoleonic Wars; a captivity narrative, “The American Forest Girl”, depicts an encounter of a white Christian man as a captive with a Native American girl; “The Queen of Prussia’s Tomb” admires the deceased patriotic queen of Germany during the Napoleonic Wars.

small countries. Considering this context in which Hemans portrays resistance to imperialism, we start to appreciate the huge scope of the concept of “victims of empire” to act as a metaphor for other kinds of resistance. Hemans’ heroines, by borrowing this metaphoric power, show women’s rebellion against the patriarchal restrictions of their own society.

This does not mean that Hemans’ heroines *always* explicitly resist imperialism and male-dominated society. There are moments when they appear to accept their assigned role. Similar paradoxes occur in many other representations of empire in the Romantic era. Nigel Leask, in his studies on “Anxieties of Empire” in the works of Byron, Shelley and other British Romantic writers, points out that, whereas their anxiety “registered a sense of the internal dislocation of metropolitan culture (a dislocation which ... offered itself as a site of resistance for the subjugated)”, it could also “lend its support to its hegemonic programme”.⁵ Also, Fulford and Kitson repeatedly point out that the literature of the period was complicit with, as well as resistant to, colonialist discourses, racist theories, and the material progress of British imperialism (Fulford and Kitson, 1-47). Earlier, Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, explored the way the West, from its own authoritarian standpoint, had constructed the Orient as a “silent Other”.⁶ Other researchers, revising Said’s views, argue that the Romantic writers did not unanimously engage in dominating discourses on different cultures, but that there were complicated fluctuations in their attitudes. Keeping this in mind, the present chapter discusses the ways Hemans’ heroines experience imperialism from the viewpoints of victimized women. Further, it examines moments when women’s wavering resistance to imperialism turns into defiance of their own male-oriented society.

Women in *Records of Woman* often show patriotic valor in the face of tyranny. In “The Switzer’s Wife”, for instance, the female protagonist contributes to the resistance movement of Switzerland, a country under Austrian rule in the fourteenth century. When she realizes that her husband is about to be arrested, her “free Alpine spirit” (line 66)

⁵ Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 2-3.

⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

is aroused. She insists that her son, whom she had borne her husband, “must be free” (81), and incites her low-spirited husband to assemble an army and rise up against the authorities. Usually meek and calm as a loving woman at home, she now “stood brightly forth, and steadfastly”, “her clear glance kindling into sudden power” (71-72). This decisive gesture to fight is militantly patriotic, overshadowing the glory of her husband and his comrades who do the actual fighting.⁷

Another heroine appropriating man’s glory appears in “Gertrude: or Fidelity till Death”. Gertrude’s husband is now to be executed in a most cruel manner, bound alive to the wheel. He could be celebrated as the hero of the poem, dying as the martyr of resistance to the Holy Roman Empire. But the poem is not focused on his death. Rather, it foregrounds the wife’s heroic perseverance in attending his agonizing last hours:

Her hands were clasp’d, her dark eyes raised,
The breeze threw back her hair;
Up to the fearful wheel she gaz’d –
All that she lov’d was there.
The night was round her clear and cold.
The holy heaven above,
Its pale stars watching to behold
The might of earthly love.

(1-8)

These lines show Gertrude’s strong affection for her husband as well as her defiance of the authorities who carry out the cruel killing. Her gestures – raised eyes, clasped hands, and hair thrown back by the wind – present her as a female hero who leads the resistance movement with powers of domestic affection.

The attitude of the heroines in “The Switzer’s Wife” and “Gertrude: or Fidelity till Death” illustrates what Tricia Lootens calls “Victorian

⁷ Tricia Lootens maintains that “mid-century readers failed to register any difference between the Swiss woman’s release of her husband to protect a family home and a British woman’s sacrifice in sending her husband off to defend an empire”. See Tricia Lootens, “Hemans and Home: Victorianism, Feminine ‘Internal Enemies’, and the Domestication of National Identity (1994)”, in *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader*, ed. Angela Leighton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 1-23, 11.

domestic patriotism". Lootens defines three kinds of patriotism, and points out that Victorian domestic patriotism is presented well in the voice of Felicia Hemans:

Victorian domestic patriotism ... sought to cast warriors as tender homebodies and children's playing fields as military training grounds. Enlightenment patriotism might tend to invoke liberty, whether defined by reason or constitutional monarchy, and Romantic patriotism might call on the organic unity of the folk nation. But Victorian culture tells soldiers that they fight for home, and it often does so in the voice of Felicia Hemans. (Lootens, "Hemans and Home", 1-2)

Hemans turns (male) warriors into home-oriented men, and boys into little heroes hoping to protect their homes and land. She also turns domestic women into militant heroes, who appropriate men's patriotic glory.

The poems discussed above offer anecdotes about small countries or regions that struggle to become independent. This international perspective is to be viewed, as Nanora Sweet points out, in the context of the contemporary political climate of reactionary Europe, and can be compared to that of other Romantic poets such as Byron and Shelley, who sympathized with the cause of republican independence. The evocation of the literature and culture of ancient Italy and Greece in the two male poets' works reflects their ideal of reestablishing the republican values of these ruined city-states: values that had been obstructed by empires such as Austria, Britain, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia. When Hemans describes the struggles of small nations, her poetry, just as Byron's and Shelley's work often does, may implicitly criticize Britain's foreign policy after the Congress of Vienna – the policy of cooperating with the Holy Alliance in promoting Bourbon restoration and suppressing republican revolt across Europe.⁸

We should note, however, that Hemans' criticism, if it exists, is not explicit. It can sometimes be found in the same text together with elements of justification of British imperialism. For instance, the

⁸ Nanora Sweet, "History, Imperialism, and the Aesthetics of the Beautiful – Hemans and the Post-Napoleonic Moment", in *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism*, eds. Mary A. Favret & Nicola J. Watson (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994), 170-84, 170-72.

Switzer's wife represents the ideal woman of England – an affectionate mother and wife. She incites her compatriots to mutiny; her role as the moral center of the home allows her to influence her husband, children, and as an extension, society as a whole.⁹ The projection of the English ideal onto a woman of a foreign country (Switzerland) may subtly induce the reader to assume that the ideal is a prerequisite to establishing republican freedom and independence. It might even lead to a justification of Britain's imperial expansion, by promoting the idea that British cultural values should be disseminated abroad.

A poem that registers such justification more clearly is "Edith, A Tale of the Woods", a story of a Native American couple and their foster daughter. Edith, a young British woman, sails to the American continent with her husband. Her hope for a life in the new world is shattered when she loses him in battle, and is left stranded on a foreign shore. She is saved from the verge of death and adopted as a daughter by an old Mohegan couple. The new family lives happily in the woods, and parents and daughter become deeply attached to each other. In the course of time, however, something within Edith starts to "warn" her (115). The inner voice urges her to inculcate Christian beliefs into her foster parents, and she eventually succeeds in converting them to Christianity.¹⁰

Behind the story of an affectionate family overcoming racial difference, there lies a subtext of a British woman engaging in a colonial project. What Edith does is not so far removed from what her husband would have done if he had survived the battle. Since she does not carry a gun as her husband did, her project may not initially appear to be an act of aggression. Nevertheless, she colonizes a foreign land to control local people. She does this, not by force, but by gently exerting cultural influence over them. Edith's colonial "purpose" to "leave one trace" (111) of herself in a foreign land is thus realized:

⁹ For the cult of womanhood and the ideas of the ideal English woman, see Catherine Hall, "The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology", in *Fit Work for Women*, ed. Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 15-32.

¹⁰ For the idea that Europeans have a duty to make people of other lands acquainted with Christianity, see Fulford and Kitson, 21.

– yet still she pray'd,
 Ev'n o'er her soldier's lowly grave, for aid
 One purpose to fulfil, to leave one trace
 Brightly recording that her dwelling-place
 Had been among the wilds; for well she knew
 The secret whisper of her bosom true,
 Which warn'd her hence.

(109-15)

Edith's ambition is connected with the ideal of womanhood in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain: a woman should possess moral superiority, and her duty is to impart morals to her family and society. Edith's husband's imperialist project may have been spurred by military and economic drives, while hers is the white woman's civilizing agenda. She "enchains" the brown people of a strange land in a condescending way:¹¹

And now, by many a word
 Link'd unto moments when the heart was stirr'd,
 By the sweet mournfulness of many a hymn,
 Sung when the woods at eve grew hush'd and dim,
 By the persuasion of her fervent eye,
 All eloquent with child-like piety,
 By the still beauty of her life, she strove
 To win for heaven, and heaven-born truth, the love
 Pour'd out on her so freely. – Nor in vain
 Was that soft-breathing influence to enchain
 The soul in gentle bonds: ...

(emphases added; 115-25)

It now seems that everything is satisfying to Edith. The poem, however, mysteriously ends with her death. Why does she have to die?

She has to die because she is trapped in what is called a double consciousness. It has been pointed out that the oppressed in a society

¹¹ Edith's attitude conforms to, or anticipates, the assumption the British rulers had throughout the nineteenth century: "The British saw their rule as essentially 'civilized' and beneficial to the people they governed, despite the fact that in many places it was viewed as tyranny". Frank McDonough, *The British Empire 1815-1914* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994), 2.

are torn between themselves and the oppressor's consciousness they internalize within themselves.¹² Edith is, in a sense, a victim of empire: she was separated from her birth parents and she lost her husband in the course of immigration, all because of Britain's imperialist project. Her new life with the Mohegan foster-parents can be taken, on one level, as a chance for her to be finally "freed" from her society:

... Oh! The joy,
The rich, deep blessedness – tho' earth's joy,
Fear, that still bodes, be there – of pouring forth
The heart's whole power of love, its wealth and worth
Of strong affection, in one healthful flow,
On something all its own! – that kindly glow,
Which to shut inward is consuming pain,
Gives the glad soul its flowering time again,
When, like the sunshine, freed. ...

(97-105)

However, the values of the old oppressor internalized within herself act as a brake on her new life. Toward the end of the poem, Edith is represented by the metaphor of a "broken flower of England", which cannot take root in "alien shades" (138-41).¹³ The metaphor suggests Edith's unwillingness to accommodate the culture of the colonized. This reflects the way the British controlled their Empire: British rulers are said to have "remained aloof from the non-British and non-

¹² Mary Daly explains the notion of "divided consciousness" that members of any oppressed group suffer from, referring to Paulo Freire:

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot live authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized.

The quotation is from Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), 48.

¹³ This recalls Emily in Landon's "A History of the Lyre" discussed in the previous chapter. Both Emily and Edith, as "genuine" English ladies, can recover their health in a foreign land, but cannot take root there.

European people in their Empire”, not adapting to local conditions and social mobility (McDonough, 5). Edith, as a result of internalizing such aloofness as a British colonizer, brings about her own death: unable to live as part of the Mohegan community, she has no other choice but to die as an exile.

Before dying, Edith turns the sadness of parting from life into gladness of departure to “that far clime / Where graves are not, nor blights of changeful time” (157-58), and the poem ends peacefully. But this apparent simplicity is deceptive. “Edith, A Tale of the Woods” is an ambiguous text, encompassing woman’s victimization, woman’s colonizing ambition, and woman’s compliance with the ideology of her society. The dying heroine is both a victim and an accomplice of imperial British society.

While Edith eventually perishes as a meek victim, there are other heroines who express strong anger against their society. The nameless heroine in “Indian Woman’s Death Song” is a victim in a double sense: she lives under the rule of empire, and she has been forsaken by her husband. This leads us to see a parallel between Indians’ resistance to colonial rule and the abandoned woman’s defiance of her cruel husband. The heroine is on a canoe with her little daughter, intending to commit suicide by rushing down over a cataract. Her desperate action signifies more than just succumbing to her husband’s iniquity. On the verge of death she is full of “joy”, and her dark hair is thrown back “triumphantly”:

Proudly, and dauntlessly, and all alone,
 Save that a babe lay sleeping at her breast,
 A woman stood: upon her Indian brow
 Sat a strange gladness, and her dark hair wav’d
 As if triumphantly. She press’d her child,
 In its bright slumber, to her beating heart,
 And lifted her sweet voice, that rose awhile
 Above the sound of waters, high and clear,
 Wafting a wild proud strain, her song of death.

(7-15)

This proud gesture can be viewed as the woman’s resistance against a disloyal man in the form of suicide. In her reasoning, killing herself is a way to proclaim her freedom, triumph, and above all, retaliation

against man.¹⁴

In “The Bride of the Greek Isle”, Eudora, a Greek bride captured by pirates, stands as a symbol of Greece suffering under Ottoman tyranny. The Ottomans actually attacked the island named Sio, the homeland of the heroine in the poem, in 1822. 20,000 residents were massacred and 45,000 enslaved, and Hemans treats the subject on other occasions too.¹⁵ Sio and its bride, on one level, represent a protest against a cruel imperialist power. As Susan J. Wolfson suggests, in addition to such political connotations, the poem also implies woman’s desperate longing for freedom from fetters imposed by man.¹⁶

The first half of the poem describes Eudora’s departure from home on her wedding day, while the second half tells how on the wedding day pirates kill the bridegroom and capture Eudora. Juxtaposing the two stories this way, the poem makes clear what they have in common: the plot of Eudora being torn away from her beloved – first from her parents, and next from her bridegroom. This brings into relief the sad fate of a woman who is perpetually dislocated and has been passed from hand to hand as if she were a commodity. When she is torn from her home, Eudora weeps. But when she is violently deprived of her husband, her anger finally explodes: Eudora in her suicide attempt sets fire to the pirate ship while she is on board, killing herself and thereby gaining her freedom. The juxtaposition of the two stories subtly suggests that Eudora’s fury is directed not only against the pirates who have enslaved her, but also against the proprietary marriage system of her society which treats her as a commodity:

Man may not fetter, nor ocean tame
The might and wrath of the rushing flame!

(189-90)

... and lo! A brand
Blazing up high in her lifted hand!

¹⁴ Man’s unfaithfulness is compared with woman’s fidelity also in “Constanza” and “The Peasant Girl of the Rhone” in *Records of Woman*.

¹⁵ See Susan J. Wolfson’s note 3 to this poem in Hemans (2000), 346.

¹⁶ Susan J. Wolfson, “‘Domestic Affections’ and ‘the Spear of Minerva’: Felicia Hemans and the Dilemma of Gender”, in Wilson and Haefner, 128-66, 148-49.

And her veil flung back, and her free dark hair
 Sway'd by the flames as they rock and flare,
 And her fragile form to its loftiest height
 Dilated, as if by the spirit's might,
 And her eye with an eagle – gladness fraught, –
 Oh! could this work be of woman wrought?
 Yes! 'twas her deed! – by that haughty smile
 It was her's! – She hath kindled her funeral pile!
 Never might shame on that bright head be,
 Her blood was the Greek's, and hath made her free.

(203-14)

The flame raging “like a glittering snake” (191) signifies Eudora's burning anger.¹⁷ Significantly, it is Eudora's mother, not her father, who watches her daughter burn to death in the very fire she sets on the ship. The focus is on the bond between mother and daughter, who as women presumably share pains inflicted by patriarchy.¹⁸

“Arabella Stuart”

Like many other heroines in *Records of Woman*, the eponymous speaker of “Arabella Stuart” longs for release from bondage, resisting royal oppression and challenging men's cruelty. The poem is a dramatic monologue, featuring a historical personage who secretly married an heir to the crown like herself, William Seymour. The marriage was made known to James I, whereupon the alarmed king confined Arabella in the Tower of London. Sickened by her long-deferred hope for rescue, she eventually died alone in delirium. Hemans explains the storyline in the foreword, and has the monologue concentrate on the suffering heroine's fluctuating thoughts

¹⁷ Susan J. Wolfson points out that Hemans hesitates to finalize the implied social allegory of woman liberating herself from man's fetters, and weakens the implication using various methods: “Hemans' hesitation ... keeps such freedom a purchase by death, even restricting its transcendence with a simile that recuperates this heroism as a marriage of the [Indian] suttee” (Wolfson 1994, 149).

¹⁸ Resistance to patriarchy is also implied in “Imelda”, where a strife between fathers leads to the sad ending of a young couple, and in “Madeline, a Domestic Tale”, in which a young bride, torn away from her beloved mother, dies in a foreign land.

and emotions.

The poem starts with Arabella's description of a dream she has just awoken from. It seems to foretell her future and to suggest what she subconsciously fears is her husband's true nature:

'Twas but a dream! I saw the stag leap free,
Under the boughs where early birds were singing;
I stood o'ershadowed by the greenwood tree,
And heard, it seemed, a sudden bugle ringing
Far through a royal forest. Then the fawn
Shot, like a gleam of light, from grassy lawn
To secret covert; and the smooth turf shook,
And lilies quivered by the glade's lone brook,
And young leaves trembled, as, in fleet career,
A Princely band, with horn, and hound, and spear,
Like a rich masque swept forth. I saw the dance
Of their white plumes, that bore a silvery glance
Into the deep wood's heart; and all passed by
Save one – I met the smile of one clear eye,
Flashing out joy to mine. Yes, thou wert there,
Seymour! A soft wind blew the clustering hair
Back from thy gallant brow, ...

(1-17)

In her dream, Arabella watches a “stag leap free”, and a “fawn” hidden “in secret covert”, in a pastoral setting that reminds us of Shakespeare's Forest of Arden. If the forest represents a shelter for temporary escape from the court, the deer playing there symbolize Arabella and Seymour who go against the wishes of the royal family and flee from their commitments. But the fates of the two deer are different. Whereas the “free” stag signifies Seymour, who is eventually released from the Tower, the fawn, destined to be shot by the royal hunters, symbolizes Arabella, who is confined for life.

What remains puzzling in the dream is that the real Seymour appears as a participant of the “Princely band” in pursuit of the fawn. This almost suggests that he is an ally of the royal authority and has come to ruin Arabella, whom he as her husband is supposed to protect. Seymour's ambiguities are exhibited in his attire as well: he wears green (20), and is armed with a spear and helmet as a soldier would be. Green is traditionally associated with Robin Hood, and it

also reminds us of a character in chivalric romances: the Green Knight. The color therefore represents chivalric bravery, but at the same time it can refer to an outlaw and a terrifying judge and tester.¹⁹ The Seymour in green, then, can be a hero who saves Arabella, but he can also be an oppressor who puts her under heavy pressure. Arabella does not notice this sinister suggestion, and is delighted by the encounter with her “gallant” husband. The sinister suggestion in Arabella’s dream comes true in the rest of the poem: Seymour never succeeds in rescuing her, and causes her fatal grief.²⁰

He fails as a hero, while Arabella takes on the role of a hero, in a reversal of the conventional gender roles in chivalrous romances. Arabella shows a number of traits of a hero: loyalty, bravery, and perseverance. In her plight, she shows great strength of character, determined to remain loyal to her beloved Seymour (40). Her attempt to escape is brave, even if it ends in failure. Under confinement, Arabella cannot take any action, and time passes in vain; all she can do is to wait for rescue. Her attitude of waiting may appear to be passive, but it contributes to creating the impression of Arabella as a saintly woman patiently waiting for the day of Christ’s coming. It shows her heroic perseverance:²¹

... I make my heart a shrine,
And by the lamp which quenchless there shall burn,
Sit, a lone watcher for the day’s return.

(58-60)

¹⁹ For the association of Robin Hood, see the entry “green” in Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery* (London: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1974), translated into Japanese (Tokyo: Taishukan Publishing Company, 1984). Robin Hood is an ambiguous legendary figure, but the Green Knight is also mysterious: he is a powerful knight who serves King Arthur, and a terrifying judge and tester of other knights. See Brian Stone, trans. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Penguin Books, 1974), translated into Japanese by Shiro Yamamoto (Tokyo: Hara-shobo, 2003).

²⁰ The man’s inability to rescue her stands in contrast to the act of the Indian forest-girl, who dares to rescue a captive (an English youth) who is about to be burnt at the stake, and makes him “free”, in “The American Forest-Girl” in *Records of Woman*.

²¹ Tricia Lootens points out that the gesture of woman waiting serves to illustrate her strength, and functions as one aspect of the “internal enemy” in society (Lootens, “Hemans and Home”, 7-8).

The fourth and fifth stanzas (61-92) describe how Arabella attempts to escape and fails. One day, she receives a secret message from Seymour. On the evening of the planned escape, she waits and watches for a sign from Seymour's envoy (again in a saintly gesture), and finally ventures bravely into the dark night. After escaping from the Tower, Arabella hurries to the arranged meeting place, but Seymour never shows up. She ends up being recaptured by her foes and taken back to prison. Her hopes are shattered. The sixth to the last stanza (93-259) portrays the heroine back in the Tower, desperately fighting despair. Arabella is now alienated from all the joys of life. Separated from the outside world, she cannot make her cry heard to anybody. Arabella undergoes the cruel torture of a long confinement.

In her sufferings, Arabella starts to raise a voice of resistance. She yearns for "Love and Freedom" (150), as the heroines in "The Switzer's wife" and "Eudora, the Bride of the Greek Isle" do:

Kings! – I had silent visions of deep bliss,
 Leaving their thrones far distant, and for this
 I am cast under their triumphant car,
 An insect to be crush'd. – Oh! Heaven is far, –
 Earth pitiless!

(155-59)

Arabella is aware that she is being punished by the royal family because of her disobedience to them. Her cry, "Heaven is far – Earth pitiless!", is a complaint that the punishment is unfair. Arabella insists that her royal blood brings not bliss but merely "chains": unlike her, the peasant is gifted with love and freedom (151-53). She thereby criticizes monarchy from an insider's point of view, implying that it involves a system of bondage and fuels a mutually destructive competition for power.

Appealing for sympathy with her misery, Arabella then addresses Seymour, and asks: "doth thou forget me?" (160, 167) She has now switched the object of her criticism from the royal family to her husband. When she compares her agony to the "last shriek" from a sinking ship, Seymour, who never comes to rescue her, is associated with a cruel "wave" that destroys the ship and her crew (179-83). Arabella's anger finally flares up against him:

Thou hast forsaken me! I feel, I know,
 There would be rescue if this were not so.
 Thou'rt at the chase, thou'rt at the festive board,
 Thou'rt where the red wine free and high is pour'd,
 Thou'rt where the dancers meet! – a magic glass
 Is set within my soul, and proud shapes pass,
 Flushing it o'er with pomp from bower and hall; –
 I see one shadow, stateliest there of all, –
Thine! – What dost *thou* amidst the bright and fair,
 Whispering light words, and mocking my despair?
 It is not well of thee! – ...

(emphases original; 184-94)

The force of Arabella's anger is weakened, however, at the very moment she utters the phrase "Thou hast forsaken me!" (184). The phrase is reminiscent of Christ's words on the cross when he speaks to his Father in heaven (Mark 15.34). It suggests that Arabella's plight is divine providence, rather than the result of the wrongs done by her foes and her husband. Further, our attention is diverted from Arabella's criticizing spirit to her pathological symptoms when she hallucinates due to extreme despair: she sees a vision of Seymour living in luxury and mocking her sufferings.

After a while, Arabella's mental "storm" is stilled, and she comes to herself. We find her as a devout Christian who turns to "Father in Heaven", regretting that she has adored "a mortal" in his place (208-18). She implores God to bring her peace of mind, begs his forgiveness for her "sin", and is ready to be called to Heaven. This humble attitude also serves to cancel out the anger and resistance she has expressed so far:

Therefore, forgive, my Father! if Thy child,
 Rock'd on its heaving darkness, had grown wild,
 And sinn'd in her despair! ...

(212-14)

... Now let me strive
 With Thy strong arm no more! Forgive, forgive!

(218-19)

Still, Arabella implicitly continues accusing Seymour:

... Now, with fainting frame,
 With soul just lingering on the flight begun,
 To bind for thee its last dim thoughts in one,
I bless thee! Peace be on thy noble head,
 Years of bright fame, when I am with the dead!
 I bid this prayer survive me, and retain
 Its might, again to bless thee, and again!

(emphasis added; 233-39)

Her prayer “I bless thee” shows her selfless love for Seymour: she humbly asks God’s favor upon her husband. It has further implications, though. In calling for the permanence of her blessing (“I bid this prayer survive me”), Arabella suggests the immortality of her influence. This creates the impression that she is a divine agent blessing Seymour. In this case, the prayer “I bless thee” means that she, as his superior, grants mercy to his sinful soul: he is a fallible man, and she is a saint.²² In this way, Arabella reminds us of her husband’s “sin”: he failed to rescue his wife.²³

The underlying accusation persists, even when Arabella wishes the best for Seymour before her death. This creates sharp irony in her monologue:

Thou hast been gather’d into my dark fate
 Too much; too long, for my sake, desolate
 Hath been thine exiled youth; but now take back,
 From dying hands, thy freedom, and re-track
 (After a few kind tears for her whose days
 Went out in dreams of thee) the sunny ways
 Of hope, and find thou happiness! Yet send,

²² The word “bless”, on one hand, assumes God, or a “superior” person entitled to speak on behalf of God, as its agent. On the other hand, there are cases in which a person blesses as one who is not necessarily superior, but devoutly seeking God’s favor. See the entry for the word “bless” in *OED*. Arabella’s use of the word can be seen as carrying both meanings.

²³ It has been pointed out that in the Victorian era women were thought to be spiritually superior and therefore suited to learn religious truths. See Julie Melnyk, ed. *Women’s Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of Their Fathers* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998), xi. Hemans represents her heroine as a pious woman to attach authority to her, drawing on the idea of womanhood in that period.

Ev'n then, in silent hours, a thought, dear friend!
Down to my voiceless chamber; for thy love
Hath been to me all gifts of earth above,
Tho' bought with burning tears!

(240-50)

Arabella recollects her past experience with Seymour, and considers what they have given and received from each other. She received his love, "all gifts of earth", and thereby took his "freedom" from him. Because of this, Seymour has had to take on Arabella's "dark fate" and endure it with her. Arabella draws a contrast between her own fate and Seymour's: she is made happy by giving and receiving love, whereas he is made unhappy by doing so. If she wishes her husband's happiness, she has to give him back what she has taken away from him.

On the surface these words of Arabella's appear to show her unselfish nature: she regards her husband's happiness as more important than her own. However, they paradoxically entail her resentment of him. Arabella's request for Seymour to "take back / from [her] dying hands, [his] freedom" evokes an image of a woman holding tightly something important she does not want to let go, and that of a man who is trying to take back something by force from a feeble, dying woman. These images indicate the depth of the woman's grudge and the extent of the man's cruelty. When Arabella asks Seymour to "send a thought" to her "voiceless chamber" after her death, this request is also charged with irony. For it calls up the illusion that the specter of Arabella, after her death in desolation, will haunt the chamber where she spent her last days. Voiceless, the specter will not say anything, but this will make the fear of the specter even stronger. Further, Arabella's statement that she "bought" his love with "burning tears" implies that what his love has brought her is not happiness but suffering: she paid dearly for obtaining his love. It turns out that the man's love was a bad bargain, causing fatal damage to the woman.

Although the heroine of "Arabella Stuart" may appear to have submitted to royal authority, she is still one of those victims who never stop accusing. In the humble attitude of begging God for help and wishing for the happiness of her beloved, she harbors implicit criticism of royal authority and of the one whom she both loves and

condemns.²⁴

²⁴ In contrast to Letitia Landon, who was beset by scandals, Hemans was generally respected as a “proper” female poet. This may be partly due to Hemans’ careful strategy to camouflage the criticism of society that resides in her poems. As for the reception and canonization of female poets, see Tricia Lootens, *Lost Saints: Science, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1996), Chapter 2. Hemans’ reputation reached its peak during the Victorian age, and her works continued to be read widely at least until the beginning of the twentieth century (Trinder, 2).