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Recasting Women's Stories
in the Poetry of
Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon,
and Christina Rossetti

Tomoko Takiguchi
Leiden, 10 mei 2011

1. Women's poetry in the early nineteenth century, as seen in popular literary annuals and anthologies, led to the gender construction of women as ruled by instinct and sentiment. Elizabeth Barrett Browning objected to this stereotype, while Letitia Landon capitalized on it, deconstructing the gender construction from within.
2. Letitia Landon's emphasis on violence and death in her romances tells us that she rearranged the motifs of the romance to show different, often shocking, story-endings.
3. Felicia Hemans' treatment of women's conflicts between fame and modesty, self-expression and self-denial shows that she questioned the stereotype of ideal womanhood of her time.

4. Christina Rossetti's sonnet sequence entitled "Monna Innominata" draws on the genre of epistolary love poems. She recasts the story of an unfortunate woman waiting in vain for her lover's return, by subtly mingling earthly and heavenly loves and weaving in Christian ideas.

5. In his famous defense of Tennyson's early poems, Arthur Henry Hallam makes a distinction between "poets of sensation" such as Tennyson and "poets of reflection" like Wordsworth. However, Hallam betrays ambivalence between his desire to view sensuality as heralding a new era of poetry, and his assumption that the "true" poet represents the universal mind and therefore should be "philosophical".

6. One of the characteristics defining Pre-Raphaelitism is its interest in the fusion of visual and poetical imaginations. This is illustrated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paired works, a painting and a poem, produced on the same theme and having the same title: "The Blessed Damozel".

7. Two Victorian women poets, who collaborated under the pseudonym of Michael Field, made most of the contemporary Sappho studies, to creatively fill the gap (corroded lines) in Sappho's works. Inspired by Henry Thornton Wharton's scientific edition of Sappho's fragments, they created their own version of Sapphic poems, which celebrate women poets' art, love and friendship.

8. Ai Tanji in *Dracula and Fin de siècle* (1997) argues that *Dracula* (1897) written by Bram Stoker reflects unconscious xenophobic thinking in the late Victorian period. I agree with him, because he is thereby able to solve several mysteries in the novel.

9. One of the forerunners of Japanese crime novelists is Edogawa Lampo (1894-1965), who named himself after an American writer he respected, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). Heavily influenced by Poe's versatility, Edogawa produced unique works mixing Japanese and Western elements in an unprecedented way. I call this creative Occidentalism, which many Japanese writers and artists have engaged in since then.

10. Johannes Vermeer's paintings, especially "Girl with a Pearl Earring" (1665), enjoy tremendous popularity among art lovers in Japan, in part because of their affinity to Japanese ukiyoe prints. Hishikawa Moronobu (1618-1694), often referred to as the originator of the genre of ukiyoe, is best known for his "Mikaeri-bijin", or "Beauty looking over her shoulder". Portraying an unnamed woman casually looking back, Moronobu captures her in a relaxed and unpretentious moment. Enchantment in a moment's beauty in everyday life is one element Vermeer's works and ukiyoe prints have in common.

11. Japanese pop music (or J-pop, as it is widely called) has been greatly influenced by Western classical music, especially that of French

impressionists. One reason for this is that many noted pop music composers have had a classical music training. They started to incorporate into pop music the impressionists' highly sophisticated chord patterns to create a kind of music that is refined as well as appealing to a wide audience. This tradition is being passed on to a younger generation of composers, contributing much to the development of Japanese pop music.

12. Director Sofia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation* (2003) succeeds in portraying in a convincing way elusive moments when people feel alone in their daily lives, unable to communicate well with each other. Although a sense of loneliness may be universal in our modern society, it is especially sharpened when we are in another country. The key to the film's success is the setting of the story in Japan (Tokyo), a country that is similar to the main characters' country in terms of economic development, but is still foreign to them because it has a different culture, a different language.