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

Takiguchi, T.

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PART I Legacies of Corinne and Sappho

CHAPTER 1

Germaine de Staël's Corinne as a Model of the Woman Poet

A Series of Poems Written by Women

Letitia Landon died a mysterious death shortly after writing a lyric called “Night at Sea”. Her death has never been fully explained, and we only know that her later life had been stormy.¹ An engagement to a literary critic, rumors of alleged love affairs that spread in the London literary coterie, the cancellation of the engagement, a hasty marriage to the governor of Cape Coast, and a journey to West Africa to accompany him – this series of events suggests that there were frictions between society and Landon as a female celebrity. She was vulnerable to scandals partly because of her unmarried status, without a “respectable” guardian (such as a father or a husband). “Night at Sea” is presented as a monologue by the poet’s persona on her way to Africa, leaving behind her career and social life in London to start her married life in a foreign land. Landon sent the poem to the editor of *The New Monthly Magazine* from Africa after arriving there in October 1838. The poem was published in *NMM* 55 (January 1839), shortly after her death was announced in English newspapers on 1

¹ She was allegedly holding an empty bottle of prussic acid when found dead by her servant. It was concluded by a doctor in an inquest that her death was caused by improper use of the medicine she was in the habit of taking to appease the symptoms of spasmodic affections. The body was not subjected to autopsy. For the various accounts of Landon’s death given by different biographers, see Glennis Stephenson, *Letitia Landon: The Woman behind L. E. L.* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995), especially 175-98.

January 1839.² It must have seemed to contemporary readers that the monologue expressed the poet's personal experience at the end of her life.

Landon in "Night at Sea" refers to Felicia Hemans' "A Parting Song", responding to the sorrow its speaker experiences when separating from her "friends". As Angela Leighton has pointed out, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61) and Christina Rossetti each responded to Landon's song with pieces of their own: "L. E. L.'s Last Question" and "L. E. L."³ These poems all address the theme of the chasm the poet feels between herself and the audience (society). Leighton explains that Barrett Browning, in "L. E. L.'s Last Question", shows an ambivalent attitude towards Landon. Barrett Browning apparently felt that Landon's songs of love were too sweet and infantile. At the same time, however, Barrett Browning felt close to these songs, because she herself tended to write in a similar strain: she had struggled for a long time to replace such "melodramatic" poems with "true" poems. In Leighton's words, Landon left "a dread warning to the women poets who come after", yet she also was "a figure whose mistakes may become the measure of the possibilities of their own art" (Leighton, 74-75). It is not Barrett Browning but Rossetti, Leighton argues, who revived Landon's legacies most powerfully. Examining Rossetti's "L. E. L.", Leighton observes that, while Rossetti shares with her precursor the sense of discrepancy between "public face and private mask", she avoids falling into the pitfall of "self-pity" that is so apparent in Landon's poem (76).

Leighton has many good points to make. I would argue, however, that the theme of love in Landon's poem is not a weakness, and therefore her work need not be interpreted as a "dread warning" to women poets after her. Rather, I would emphasize Landon's strength in developing the apparently feminine theme of love to serve as a vehicle for women to question patriarchal assumptions in society. Landon's heroine, by calling attention to her loneliness, leads her readers to question the coldness of a society that forgets a woman poet it once admired, treating her as a fashionable commodity to be

² Letitia Elizabeth Landon, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, eds. Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997), 283.

³ Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 71-77.

consumed. I suggest that Rossetti therefore learned, not from Landon's "mistakes", but rather from Landon's use of love as a metaphor, to pursue her own questioning of gender issues. From this perspective, I examine anew the series of poems written by the four women poets.

Hemans' "A Parting Song" (1828) consists of four stanzas, each one starting with a two-line refrain:

*When will ye think of me, my friends?
When will ye think of me? –*
When the last red light, the farewell of day,
From the rock and the river is passing away,
When the air with a deep'ning hush is fraught,
And the heart grows burden'd with tender thought –
Then let it be!⁴

(emphasis added; stanza 1, lines 1-7)

The refrain appears to be no more than the speaker addressing a simple plea to her "friends" to remember her when she is far away from them. However, the epigraph to the poem indicates that the poet has set out to convey more than that: "Oh! mes Amis, rappelez-vous quelquefois mes vers; mon âme y est empreinte" (Oh! my Friends, remember my verses sometimes, for my soul is stamped on them). When we read the poem in the context of the epigraph, this seemingly personal poem starts to bear social significance. The epigraph is taken from the last song of *Corinne*, the heroine of Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807).⁵ It subtly induces the reader to suspect that the poem is trying to portray the "antagonism between female desire and nihilizing patriarchal law" that repeatedly appears in Staël's story of *Corinne* and brings forth the heroine's sorrow and eventually her

⁴ "A Parting Song", the closing poem of *Records of Woman* (1828). Felicia Hemans, *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2000), 425.

⁵ The English translation of the motto here is from *Corinne, or Italy*, trans. and ed. Sylvia Raphael (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), 402. Soon after performing her last song, *Corinne* dies, heartbroken in love. Hemans was haunted by this song (see also note 26 below). Landon refers to the same lines in her essay entitled "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans' Writings", published in *New Monthly Magazine* 44 (May – August 1835). I will consider the meanings of *Corinne* and her songs in more detail later in this chapter.

death.⁶

Half English and half Italian, Corinne, a widely acclaimed improvisatrice in Italy, falls in love with an English gentleman, Lord Oswald Nelvil.⁷ He is deeply attracted to Corinne, a woman brimming with pride and confidence, a type he would rarely expect to meet in his home country. However, he eventually leaves her because he cannot overcome the gendered norms he inherited from his father: a woman should stay at home, and she should not exhibit her talent in public in search of fame. Corinne herself is not completely free from the psychological effects of the patriarchal norms she was expected to embrace while she lived in her father's country (England). In her confusion, she fails to meet Oswald in England, where she has followed him hoping to win him back. Corinne returns to Italy alone, and Oswald marries a docile English woman, Lucile, Corinne's half-sister. Heartbroken, Corinne pines away and dies. The novel's tragic ending cannot be ascribed solely to the unfaithfulness of the English gentleman, who often comes under criticism from the narrator; it is also the result of a woman of talent struggling with patriarchal assumptions.⁸

⁶ "Introduction", in *The Novel's Seductions: Staël's Corinne in Critical Inquiry*, ed. Karyna Szmurlo (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 19. Szmurlo in the Introduction notes that the myth of Corinne as a woman artist with unlimited desire and competence was revolutionary in the nineteenth century.

⁷ In eighteenth and nineteenth century Italy, the art of improvisation flourished and a number of artists called improvisatrice (if female) or improvisatore (if male) performed at theatres and private salons. In response to requests from the audience, they improvised and recited poetry on the spot. Their reputation was known to British people, by way of reviews in journals and reports of English travelers on their Grand Tour (Lord Byron, Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley were among them). Corilla Olimpica (1740-1800) was a legendary improvisatrice, who apparently inspired Staël to create the character of Corinne. See *British Romanticism and Italian Literature: Translating, Reviewing, Rewriting*, eds. Laura Bandiera and Diervo Saglia (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005), 165-92. Joan DeJean points out that Staël attended some performances by legendary improvisatrices during her travels in Italy, and introduced the terms improvisatrice and improvisation to the French language. See Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho: 1546-1937* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), 178-79.

⁸ For the story of Corinne and its influence upon female writers in Europe, see Clarissa Campbell Orr, "The Corinne Complex: Gender, Genius and National Character", in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995), 89-106, Linda M. Lewis, *Germaine de Staël, George Sand, and the Victorian Woman Artist* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press,

By referring to this story of Corinne, “A Parting Song” indirectly lets us know that it addresses gender issues. In the poem, we can see the speaker’s anxiety that her friends may easily forget her, just as easily as Oswald forsakes Corinne. Those addressed by the speaker then face an emotional request for loyalty – a request in the form of a plea to remain loyal to their friend, even if she may have transgressed conventional gendered expectations. In a word, their gender ideology is put to the test.

The meaning of the request, however, is camouflaged by the gentle lyricism pervading the poem. Firstly, the speaker of the poem does not directly demand to be remembered, but gently asks her friends “when” they will remember her. In doing so, she evokes in their mind pleasant memories of nature, leading them to nostalgic associations of nature and man, and of the present and the past:

When will ye think of me, kind friends?
 When will ye think of me? –
 When the rose of the rich midsummer time
 Is fill’d with the hues of its glorious prime;
 When ye gather its bloom, as in bright hours fled,
 From the walks where my footsteps no more may tread;
 Then let it be!

(stanza 2, lines 8-14)

Secondly, the answers the speaker gives to her own question are full of serene images such as a lingering sunset, a fresh rose, and an old melody, as if to ease her own misgivings. Lastly, the phrase “let it be” placed at the end of each stanza is ambiguous, and has the effect of canceling the speaker’s wish to be remembered. The phrase indicates the speaker’s request for her friends to always let her memory be with them. At the same time, however, the phrase suggests the speaker’s ultimate indifference to the matter of remembrance: she leaves her

2003), and Szmurlo. Ellen Moers first pointed out the importance of *Corinne* in *Literary Women* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1976), 173-210. She notes that “poetesses of the 1820s, in England and America, were identified by their large public with *Corinne*” (177), and considers Landon as “one of *Corinne*’s disciples” (181). For *Corinne*’s influence upon Hemans and Landon, see also Richard Cronin, “Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and ‘Lady’s Rule’”, in *Romantic Women Poets: Genre and Gender*, eds. Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Cecilia Pietropoli (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), 224.

friends to decide whether to remember her or not. Let us look at the last stanza:

Thus let my memory be with you, friends!
 Thus ever think of me!
 Kindly and gently, but as of one
 For whom 'tis well to be fled and gone;
 As of a bird from a chain unbound,
 As of a wanderer whose home is found; –
 So let it be.

(stanza 4, lines 22-28)

In contrast to the speaker's clear wish to be remembered in the lines 22-23, the lines that follow intimate that the speaker takes back her wish. For she refers to the transience of living things, indicating her attitude of renunciation; the images of an unchained bird and a wanderer remind us of solitary exiles, destined to be forgotten. It is also significant that the phrase "let it be" in the last stanza has no exclamation mark attached to it as is the case in the other stanzas: the phrase now appears to represent the fading voice of the speaker sinking into oblivion. It is as if she were making her last wish to disappear from her friends' memories.

Compared to this aesthetic modesty in Hemans' "A Parting Song", Landon's "Night at Sea" (1839) shows more clearly the speaker's wish for remembrance. The poem consists of twelve stanzas, and the refrain at the end of each stanza, as Leighton notes, is an adaptation of the refrain to "A Parting Song" (Leighton, 72):

The lovely purple of the noon's bestowing
 Has vanished from the waters, where it flung
 A royal colour, such as gems are throwing
 Tyrian or regal garniture among.
 'Tis night, and overhead the sky is gleaming,
 Thro' the slight vapour trembles each dim star;
 I turn away – my heart is sadly dreaming
 Of scenes they do not light, of scenes afar.
My friends, my absent friends!
*Do you think of me, as I think of you?*⁹

⁹ "Night at Sea" in Landon (1997), 205-08.

(emphasis added; stanza 1, lines 1-10)

Landon's refrain demands more commitment from her "friends" than does Hemans' gentle question of "when". Longing for her affection to be returned ("as I think of you") and complaining of her loneliness ("my heart is sadly dreaming ..."), the speaker asks her friends point-blank if they care or not. In this way, the significance of the chasm between a woman and society in the story of Corinne is made even clearer in Landon's lyric. Landon's refrain can be read as a serious question put to society from a woman's point of view: I have devoted myself to you, but what about you? Are you willing to love me in return, or are you going to forget and forsake me?

Let us see in more detail how this significance manifests itself in the text.

Bearing upon its wing the hues of morning,
Up springs the flying fish, like life's false joy,
Which of the sunshine asks that frail adorning
Whose very light is fated to destroy.
Ah, so doth genius on its rainbow pinion,
Spring from the depths of an unkindly world;
So spring sweet fancies from the heart's dominion, –
Too soon in death the scorched up wing is furled.
My friends, my absent friends!
Whate'er I see is linked with thoughts of you.

(stanza 6, lines 51-60)

The sight of a flying fish leaping up out of the sea leads the speaker to ponder the transience of nature and the fate of "genius" perishing in "an unkindly world". But how can this observation, in line 60, be "linked" with "thoughts of you"? The speaker is led to think of her friends because the fate of genius in her imagination is implicitly linked to the fate of her creative power. Throughout the poem, the poet-speaker draws on her poetic artistry, associating the color of a lingering sunset with "gems" (stanza 1), "stars" with "strangers" (stanza 3), and "the moon" with "a young queen pale with splendour" (stanza 8). This indicates that the sad story of genius she describes foreshadows the unfortunate future of her poetic endeavors. It follows, then, that the speaker fears that her "friends" may do to her what the "unkindly world" does to "genius": her literary efforts may

reap ill treatment such as people of genius often receive from the world. In a word, what she implicitly does in this stanza is to ask her “friends” if they mean to ruin her in the same way the “unkindly world” so often destroys poetic genius.¹⁰

As mentioned earlier, when Landon wrote this poem, she was on her way to West Africa to start her married life with the governor of Cape Coast, George Mclean. Formerly, she had been engaged to John Forster, a literary critic and editor of the *Examiner*. However, rumors spread about Landon’s affairs with other men. When Forster questioned her on the matter, Landon offered to cancel their engagement in a gesture of self-sacrifice.¹¹ After this scandal, Landon’s literary standing as well as her social reputation suffered. It seems likely that Landon’s hasty marriage to George Mclean was prompted by the necessity to clear her name and to escape from the “unkind” London literary circles. Landon sent “Night at Sea” from Africa, and it was published in *The New Monthly Magazine*, shortly after her death was announced in English newspapers. This was the end of the career Landon had built up over many years.¹²

With Landon’s persona as the speaker, the poem invites us to read into it what we assume to be the real Landon’s thoughts – thoughts about the relation between genius and society, and more specifically, what it means for a woman to have public success. These thoughts are not optimistic ones, tinged as they are by rising anxiety: no matter how highly a woman is praised for her talent, society may at any moment retaliate against her. It can give her everything she wishes for in life, only to take it all away – respect, wealth, love and friendship.

In Landon’s and Hemans’ poems the female speaker longs to be loved, and her personal plea for love represents a cry of a more public kind: a plea addressed to society from a woman troubled by a sense of

¹⁰ These lines remind us of the myth of Icarus, which has often been associated with artists.

¹¹ For Landon’s biography, see Laman Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains of L. E. L.*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), and Glennis Stephenson. Landon wrote to Forster, “The more I think, the more I feel I ought not – I cannot – allow you to unite yourself with one accused of – I cannot write it”. However, there is an indication in Landon’s letter to Bulwer-Lytton that she felt “harassed and humiliated” by Forster and therefore was willing to reconsider the engagement. See Stephenson, 47-48.

¹² Landon was active not only as a poet, but also as a literary critic and an editor of annuals, or fashionable gift-books of poetry and illustrations that were popular especially in the 1830s.

alienation. In Barrett Browning's "L. E. L.'s Last Question" (1839), on the other hand, the poet does not value this rhetoric of love. The speaker in her poem takes Landon's request for remembrance as merely a childish wish:

It seemed not too much to ask – *as I of you* –
 We all do ask the same – no eyelids cover
 Within the meekest eyes that question over –
 And little in this world the loving do,
 But sit (among the rocks?) and listen for
 The echo of their own love evermore –
 Do you think of me as I think of you?¹³

(emphasis in the original; stanza 2, lines 8-14)

The speaker dissociates Landon's urgent plea from its social context, and relegates it to the general human longing for mutual love ("we all do ask the same"). She considers Landon's anxiety to be unproductive ("little in this world the loving do"), suggesting that we humans ought to have more self-respect. In so doing, she belittles the power of Landon's rhetoric of love.

Paradoxically, however, the speaker also praises Landon as "true heart to love". She regrets that Landon did not demand the praise she deserved from the reading public:

Forgetting that sweet lute beside her hand,
 She asked not "Do you praise me, O my land,"
 But, "Think ye of me, friends, as I of you?"

True heart to love, that pour'd many a year
 Love's oracles for England, smooth and well, –
 Would God, thou hadst an inward oracle
 In that lone moment, to confirm thee dear!

(stanzas 4-5, lines 26-32)

This inconsistency shows that Barrett Browning's evaluation of Landon wavers. Barrett Browning complains that Landon sings solely from the perspective of a woman in love, probably because she wishes

¹³ "L. E. L.'s Last Question" in 'Appendix B: Poems Written for and about "L. E. L."', in Landon (1997), 365-67.

to elevate the status of the woman poet by associating herself with more “universal” Romantic poetics: she believes that female poets are capable of dealing with as wide a variety of topics as male poets are.¹⁴ In this respect Landon’s theme of love appears to her to be too limited and narrow. At the same time, however, Barrett Browning instinctively realizes that love is a field where a woman poet can find a voice of her own, as Landon shows in her works.

Barrett Browning and Landon have different strategies for making women’s voices heard. Barrett Browning’s case for women may initially appear stronger, openly claiming that women, as well as men, deserve recognition in the public arena. Still, Landon’s questioning of society is also empowering, and may even be considered more drastic, for it implicitly asks for a change in social values. It is made from a woman’s point of view, and can therefore be a stinging criticism of a male-oriented society that brings suffering to women.

Rossetti’s “L. E. L.” (1863) is a response to Barrett Browning’s “L. E. L.’s Last Question”, as indicated by its epigraph: “‘Whose heart is breaking for a little love.’ E. B. Browning”. Although the epigraph is not an exact quotation from Barrett Browning’s poem, there is an expression that comes close: “the craver of a little love”. Rossetti pays special attention to Barrett Browning’s phrase “a little love” and has her speaker – named L. E. L. – repeatedly sing, “My heart is breaking for a little love”:

Downstairs I laugh, I sport and jest with all:
 But in my solitary room above
 I turn my face in silence to the wall;
My heart is breaking for a little love.
 Tho’ winter frosts are done,
 And birds pair every one,
 And leaves peep out, for springtide is begun.¹⁵

¹⁴ Concerning this point, see another poem of Barrett Browning’s referring to Landon: “Stanzas Addressed to Miss Landon, and Suggested by Her ‘Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans’”, in Landon (1997), 363-64. Here Barrett Browning’s speaker states that Landon should have sung not of the past but of the future, and more of sublime subjects such as relations between nature and humans. This indicates Barrett Browning’s belief that female poets should tackle the same themes as male poets.

¹⁵ “L. E. L.” in ‘Appendix B: Poems Written for and about “L. E. L.”’, in Landon (1997), 381-82. The poem was first published in *The Victoria Magazine* I (May 1863).

(emphasis added; stanza 1)

Rossetti does not directly allude to Barrett Browning's criticism of Landon, but implicitly she objects to it and defends Landon's strategy for addressing women's issues.

One key to Rossetti's defense of Landon is "compassion". The poem is designed to elicit the reader's compassion for the first-person speaker, "L. E. L.", referring to Letitia Landon. The first three stanzas bring into relief the sorrow of the heroine, who feels "no spring" and finds "no nest" in her society while "all love, are loved" except her. The last two stanzas portray the heroine as imagining in her mind the voices of saints and angels who watch over her from above:

Perhaps some saints in glory guess the truth,
Perhaps some angels read it as they move,
And cry one to another full of ruth,
"Her heart is breaking for a little love."
Though other things have birth,
And leap and sing for mirth,
When springtime wakes and clothes and feeds the earth.

Yet saith a saint: "Take patience for thy scathe;"
Yet saith an angel: "Wait, for thou shalt prove
True best is last, true life is born of death,
O thou, heart-broken for a little love.
Then love shall fill thy girth,
And love make fat thy dearth,
When new spring builds new heaven and clean new earth."

(stanzas 5-6)

Taking up nearly the whole of the last stanza, these voices show how earnestly L. E. L. longs for a comforting vision, and the reader is invited to respond to the heroine's sorrow with compassion. In this sense, Rossetti's portrayal of Landon stands in contrast to Barrett Browning's message that a talented woman poet is entitled to public praise and therefore does not need to plead for compassion.

Further, we can look more closely at Rossetti's phrase "a little love". Rossetti borrows the phrase from Barrett Browning, who by qualifying the word "love" with the adjective "little" implies that Landon's theme of love is insignificant. Rossetti's use of Barrett

Browning's phrase does not, however, indicate her agreement with Barrett Browning. On the contrary, Rossetti's speaker hopes that L. E. L.'s longing for "a little love" will pave the way for other-dimensional, religious love. Accordingly, as the phrase "a little love" is reiterated, it begins to sound ironical: it increasingly raises doubts about its surface meaning, intimating that what the speaker calls "a little love" is actually not trivial, but something more significant.¹⁶ In this way Rossetti defends Landon, suggesting the importance of love as a theme for women poets.¹⁷

Rossetti's understanding of Landon's theme shows her fitness for becoming a successor to Landon (and Hemans), who sings of love as a way to express women's difficulties in society.

Corinne's Three Songs: Intertextuality between Staël, Hemans and Landon

Of the four poets discussed above, the two who were most directly influenced by Germaine de Staël's novel *Corinne, or Italy* were Hemans and Landon.¹⁸

¹⁶ This rhetorical device in the poem is reminiscent of Antony's funeral speech for Caesar in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Act III, Scene II. Antony turns the audience against Brutus by ironic repetitions of the phrase "Brutus is an honorable man". Both the speaker of "L. E. L." and Shakespeare's Antony use the rhetorical device of a repeated phrase to signify something contrary to its surface meaning.

¹⁷ The concept of love, affection or sympathy is open to potentially radical interpretations. Whereas some may think it appropriate that individual love is extended only to the rich and powerful, to one's fellow countrymen and the family circle, others may believe that love can be extended beyond these boundaries to the poor and weak, and to people outside one's own circles. In the latter case, such impartial love has the potentially radical power to overturn established social systems. For a discussion of the radical concept of affection and sympathy in the 1970s, see C. B. Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1970s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 20-58. See also note 17 in Chapter 3 of the present study.

¹⁸ Barrett Browning is considered to have portrayed her heroine in *Aurora Leigh* (1856) under the influence of the figure of Corinne in Staël's novel. While Barrett Browning's heroine Aurora is determined to stand as a woman poet like Corinne, her difference from Staël's heroine is clear when she turns down a marriage proposal from her cousin Romney to avoid having to relinquish her literary ambitions. This contrasts with Corinne, who starts to weaken when she realizes that her love will not be

We now turn to the story of Corinne, to see exactly what aspects of the heroine appealed to Hemans and Landon. I will focus on the three songs Corinne sings in the novel, especially the first and the second ones, which Hemans and Landon allude to in their poems. These songs, performed in important scenes, summarize the afflictions and vicissitudes of the heroine's life.

The first of the three songs is performed at the Capitol, where Corinne is crowned, just as the great Petrarch was in an earlier time (Staël 1998, 21-35). Corinne is applauded by the crowd, as a poetess of great genius and the very image of their beautiful Italy. Following the custom for poets crowned at the Capitol, she recites some verses. The theme of the verses is, at the request of all those around her, "The glory and happiness of Italy" (28). Corinne takes up her lyre, her chosen instrument, which "closely [resembles] a harp but ... [has] a more antique shape and simpler sound" (28), and starts to improvise a song.¹⁹ A British gentleman, Lord Oswald Nelvil, from his place in the audience, sees Corinne for the first time on this occasion, and falls in love with her. Hemans was inspired by this scene to write "Corinne at the Capitol" (1827).²⁰ In this poem Hemans, implicitly referring to the heroine's disappointment in love, describes a gifted woman's sorrow when domestic happiness eludes her:

Radiant daughter of the sun!
 Now thy living wreath is won.
 Crown'd of Rome! – Oh! art thou not
 Happy in that glorious lot? –

Happier, happier far than thou,
 With the laurel on thy brow,
 She that makes the humblest hearth

reciprocated. Aurora can psychologically separate her love and her vocation, but Corinne cannot sing if she loses her love. If we trace a genealogy of women poets who write about women (poets) who live and die for love, we can see a stronger influence by Staël's *Corinne* in the poetry of Hemans, Landon and Rossetti than in that of Barrett Browning.

¹⁹ Corinne is portrayed as an improvisatrice, a female artist who improvises poetry in response to requests from the audience. For the art of improvisation and its popularity in Italy, see note 4 above.

²⁰ Hemans (2000), 460-62.

Lovely but to one on earth!

(lines 41-48)

Contrasting the successful woman artist with humble wives, the poem abruptly declares the triumph of the latter over the former in terms of “happiness”. But why is Corinne unhappy? Is it her fault that she has gained fame? Is it impossible for a talented woman to enjoy both fame and domestic happiness? If so, why? The poem ends without answering any of these questions that may come to the reader’s mind. The speaker only shows her compassion for Corinne by asking a concerned question (“art thou not happy in that glorious lot?”).²¹ This sympathetic gesture suggests that the poem does not intend to accuse Corinne of being the cause of her own unhappiness. What, then, is to receive the blame?

Landon in her elegy “Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans” (1835) shows her appreciation for Hemans’ art of “universal love”, and implicitly likens Hemans to Corinne.²² She thereby answers the reader’s question Hemans leaves unanswered in her song for Corinne:

Ah! dearly purchased is the gift,
 The gift of song like thine;
 A fated doom is hers who stands
 The priestess of the shrine.
 The crowd – they only see the crown,
 They only hear the hymn; –
 They mark not that the cheek is pale,
 And that the eye is dim.

(lines 49-56)

It [the heart] never meets the love it paints,

²¹ Hemans’ sympathy with Corinne is recorded in her letter to a friend: “[*Corinne*], in particular, towards its close, has a power over me which is quite indescribable; some passages seem to give me back my own thoughts and feelings, my whole inner being with a mirror, more true than ever friend could hold up.” Hemans inscribed her own copy of *Corinne* with the words “C’est moi”. See Henry F. Chorley, *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1836), 124-25.

²² Landon (1997), 169-72. Landon in the poem alludes to Hemans’ “Bring Flowers” (1825). See “Bring Flowers” in Hemans (2000), 326. Also, the motto at the top of the poem quotes lines from Hemans’ “The Nightingale’s Death Song” (1830). See “The Nightingale’s Death Song”, in *Works of Mrs. Hemans, with a Memoir by Her Sister*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1839), vol. VI, 128-30.

The love for which it pines;

(65-66)

Didst thou not tremble at thy fame,
 And loathe its bitter prize,
 While what to others triumph seemed,
 To thee was sacrifice?

(73-76)

The poem would appear to be dedicated to Corinne, if it were not for the title. Landon regards Hemans' "gift" as "dearly purchased" (49), purchased, that is, at the cost of the love Hemans' heart "pines for". Hemans' gift brings her "fame", but requires the "sacrifice" of the love she longs for (73-76). This portrayal reminds us of the heroine in "Corinne at the Capitol" who gained fame at the expense of domestic happiness. In addition, Landon calls the readers of Hemans' poems "the crowd", who sees only her glory ("the crown") and does not notice her sorrow (53-54). This is an allusion to Corinne's audience at the Capitol: an audience that asks for, listens to, and applauds her artistic performances, without understanding her inner suffering. This parallel between Landon's portrayal of Hemans and the heroine in *Corinne, or Italy* indicates Landon's recognition that Hemans is Corinne's double: both Hemans and Corinne are torn between fame and domestic happiness, and experience a sense of alienation from their audiences.

In her implicit comparison of Corinne and Hemans, Landon repeatedly refers to the "crowd" (audience) listening to the poet's performances. In doing so, she shows her understanding that the audience is essential for Corinne's art, and suggests that it is also important for understanding the works of Hemans. As mentioned above, the heroine's three songs in *Corinne, or Italy* are all performed before an audience. Corinne's first song is performed at the Capitol before a huge crowd. Her second song is sung at the Cape of Misena, before local people and some of her friends. On this occasion she has a premonition that her love, Oswald, may forsake her in the near future. Corinne's last song – her swan song – is performed before an audience invited to the Florence Academy when, heartbroken, she is fatally ill. As the story proceeds, the tone of the songs changes from glorious to sorrowful, and the audience, listening to the poet's

performances, responds in a variety of ways: with exaltation, sympathy, pity, sorrow, and at times disappointment.

Corinne needs the presence of an audience, since she is an improvisatrice: an artist who improvises songs, in response to requests from her audience. Her vocation is to understand the thoughts of people nearby or far away, create and perform on behalf of them, and emotionally move them. As Prince Castel-Forte, a man of high reputation in Rome, says in honoring Corinne on her coronation at the Capitol, she is endowed with “eloquence”, or “a powerful force that ... [moves] her audience”. Her words proceed from “enthusiasm”, an infinite source of emotions and ideas, creating the “bond that unites her friends”. Possessing these qualities, he continues, her talent for improvisation bears “no resemblance to anything normally given that name in Italy” (Staël 1998, 25-27).²³

Corinne’s power of eloquence, however, is a double-edged sword. As Prince Castel-Forte admits in his speech, it is “the more bound to move her listeners the more they themselves [are] intelligent and sensitive” (25). In other words, her power has its limitations: its effectiveness depends largely upon the listeners’ capacity for compassion. There is a possibility that the improvisatrice’s eloquence may not have much impact upon her listeners, or that it may encounter lack of understanding.

In *Corinne, or Italy* the heroine’s songs do keep having impact upon her listeners until the end. Still, they increasingly bear sorrowful tones, and come to reveal the chasm between the improvisatrice and

²³ In *De la Littérature Considérée dans ses Rapports avec les Institutions Sociales* (1800), Staël writes that eloquence has impact on the audience and creates a social bond, by appealing to their reason and their passions. See Suzanne Guerlac, “Writing the Nation”, in *French Forum*, vol. 30, 3 (2005): 43-56. Staël’s emphasis on the improvisatrice’s eloquence is probably not unrelated to the time when the heroine is supposed to have lived in the novel: the story starts in the winter of 1794-95, when France saw Robespierre executed and the Reign of Terror was brought to an end. It is not difficult to see that, during the years of the Revolution, when conventional values were called into question, eloquence or persuasive appeal to an audience was a desirable attribute for public speakers. Haruko Kajitani points out that Staël gives her heroine the power of eloquence, intending that Corinne exemplifies her ideal of speeches accompanied by a sense of justice, sincere thoughts and emotions, which she feels were lost during the Reign of Terror. Haruko Kajitani, “Madame de Staël’s *Corinne, or Italy*”, in *French Literature – Men and Women* (Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 1991), 84-86.

her audience. Corinne, with her extensive study of foreign literatures, knows “how to combine the imagination, the descriptions, the brilliant life of the South [i.e. Italy] with the observations of the human heart which seems to be the province of countries where the outside world arouses less interest” (25): observations of the human heart, which we infer she learned by way of her studies as well as through her half-English origins. What is initially her strength as an artist, her double nationality (English and Italian), however, gradually destroys her from within, and in the end she dies, having failed to deal with the different value systems of England and Italy. Corinne’s suffering is not fully understood by her listeners, and by extension, the societies they represent: England and Italy, both of which she holds dear to her heart.²⁴

The sorrowful tone in Hemans’ “Corinne at the Capitol” shows the poet’s compassion with Corinne’s suffering, but it also reflects her perception that women’s eloquence may be suppressed at any moment by indifference or lack of understanding on the part of their listeners. Landon, by implicitly likening Hemans to Corinne in her elegy, suggests that Hemans, in spite of her talent as a poet and the fame she achieved, was often disappointed, saddened, or silenced by the response of her audiences, and of her society.

Landon herself wrote a poem entitled “Corinne at the Cape of Misena” (1832), alluding to Corinne’s second song.²⁵ She

²⁴ The way Corinne’s songs become sorrowful can be viewed as paralleling the way the women’s movement gradually weakened in the early years of the French Revolution. At the beginning of the Revolution, Olympe de Gouges, the female activist known as the author of the *Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Citizens* (1791), insisted that women were entitled to make public speeches like men. Underscoring her claim, some women made public speeches, fighting for the same rights to equality and liberty claimed by men. Demanding suffrage for women, the right to own property, and amendments to the marriage laws, women’s groups (such as “the Revolutionary Republic Women” headed by Claire Lacombe and Pauline Leon, and Etta d’Palme’s “Friends of Truth Club”) were founded. Before long, however, the revolutionary government and newspapers started to criticize such groups, and finally, in 1794, women’s social activities were prohibited. The movement for women’s rights was eventually suppressed. For the life of Olympe de Gouges and the French Revolution, see Olivier Blanc, *Une Femme De Libertés: Olympe de Gouges* (Paris: Syros Editeurs, 1989), translated into Japanese by Miyoko Tsujimura (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten Publishers, 1995). Also, see Kajitani.

²⁵ The poem was published in an annual entitled *The Amulet for 1832*. The figure of Corinne at the Cape of Misena was popular at the time, and illustrations of the scene

accompanies the poem with her translation of a fragment of the song. The part of the song Landon chooses for translation is a passage where Corinne sings of the chasm between the poet and the “world”:

“Thus, shrinking from the desert spread around,
Doth Genius wander through the world, and finds
No likeness to himself – no echo given
By Nature: and the common crowd but hold
As madness that desire of the rapt soul
Which finds not in this world enough of air,
Of high enthusiasm, or of hope!
For Destiny compels exalted minds;
The poet whose imagination draws
Its power from loving and from suffering,
They are banished of another sphere:
For the Almighty goodness might not frame
All for a few – th’ elect or the proscribed.²⁶

(“Corinne at the Cape of Misena”, lines 61-73)

In lamenting the poet’s loneliness, Corinne has in mind her sense of alienation from society. Landon explains in her note to the poem that this brief passage was chosen as “having less reference to the story than other parts equally beautiful”. Landon’s intention is to focus on Corinne’s sorrow, and apparently she does not need to introduce her readers to the storyline; she can assume that they are familiar with Staël’s original novel.²⁷

were seen in wall clocks, calendars, vases and so on. Landon wrote the poem partly inspired by one of those illustrations, made by François Gérard. See “Corinne at the Cape of Misena”, in Landon (1997), 143-46. All my quotations of the poem are from this edition, where one can find Gérard’s illustration on page 142. Another of Landon’s poems which sing of Staël’s heroine is entitled “Corinna”, published in *The Fate of Adelaide* (1821).

²⁶ Landon’s translation of Corinne’s songs, including this passage, was published in the English edition of the novel, *Corinne; or, Italy*, trans. Isabel Hill, with metrical versions of the odes by L. E. Landon (New York: Hurst & Co., Publishers, [c.1833]).

²⁷ Following the publication of *Corinne* in French in 1807, two English translations of the novel appeared in the same year: *Corinna, or Italy*, 3 vols, trans. anon. (London: Samuel Tipper, 1807) and *Corinna, or Italy*, trans. D. Lawler (London: Colburn, 1807). See “Corinne in Distress: translation as cultural misappropriation in the 1800s”, in *Corvey Women Writers (1796-1834) on the Web*. I accessed this page on May 5, 2009.

(URL: <http://www2.shu.ac.uk/corvey/CW3journal/issue%20two/wright.html>)

In the original story, Corinne's second song is primarily intended to praise the glorious history of Naples. However, influenced by her personal sorrow, the song soon turns melancholy, and dwells mournfully on ancient Romans who died a tragic death:

Oh, memory, noble power, thou reignest in these places! Strange destiny! From century to century man laments what he has lost. It is as if times gone by are all, in their turn, depositories of a happiness which is no more (Stäel 1998, 235)

Corinne sings on top of a little hill, lit up by the sun's last rays. As the audience applauds, tears flow from her eyes.²⁸

The improvisatrice's sorrow, however, does not receive as much compassionate response from the audience as she could wish. The Neapolitan members of the audience, although pleased with the beauty of Corinne's song, "would have preferred her verses to be inspired by a less sad tendency" (238). In contrast, the English people in the audience are filled with admiration, but they feel a cruel gratification in seeing the beautiful woman beset by secret sorrow: "this daughter of the sun ... was like those flowers which are still fresh and brilliant, but which a black spot, caused by a fatal prick, threatens with an early end" (238). Both Neapolitan and English members of the audience regard Corinne as a delightful object to watch, and do not fully sympathize with her sorrow.

This song may give the impression that there is not enough of the "eloquence" for which the improvisatrice is originally praised: she sinks into sorrow and fails to powerfully influence the audience. However, there is an indication that her song still has hidden power – the power to reveal the forces that inflict suffering upon women of talent. As readers of the novel, we can come to this interpretation since we know more about what is behind her sorrow than her audience does.

We know that Corinne is sad because she might have to part with her lover, Oswald. Why, then, does she have to part with him? Vincent Whitman, discussing Corinne's three songs, points out that the

²⁸ In this scene, in her glory and sorrow, Corinne embodies the light and shadow of Italy: the glorious past of Italy and the lost glory of Italy, both of which she has been singing of. In this double sense Corinne personifies Italy.

ultimate cause for Oswald to forsake Corinne is a letter written by his father.²⁹ Oswald, after returning to his country from his stay in Italy, happens to read a letter his late father wrote to Corinne's father while he was alive. In the letter the father writes that he cannot approve of his son's marriage to Corinne. He thinks that Corinne, being a talented Italian artist, would not be able to adapt to a life in England:

She needs the independent life which is subject only to the imagination. Our country life, our domestic habits, are bound to be contrary to all her tastes. A man born in our fortunate native land must, above all, be English. He must fulfill his duties as a citizen, since he has the good fortune to be one, and in a country where political institutions give men honourable opportunities for action and public appearances, women must stay in the shade. (Staël 1998, 318)

Whitman considers this letter as betraying "a mechanism devised to bar [Corinne] from the social structure Nelvil Sr. is convinced her 'unusual talents' would destabilize", and argues that it is "in effect a legal document pleading the case for that exclusion" (Whitman, 67). Corinne has never read this letter herself. But while talking with Oswald on her trip to Naples, she has come to realize his loyalty to his father (Staël 1998, 202-24). Moreover, having experienced living in England, Corinne understands the English patriarchal values that Nelvil Sr. embraced: "women must stay in the shade", that is, women must stay in the domestic sphere, never to show their talents in public.

Corinne cries at the Cape of Misena, then, because she senses that she must pay dearly for violating the patriarchal rules. She already knows that she cannot be accepted by English society, but she now has a premonition that she will be further punished, by being abandoned by her lover.

Later in the novel, this premonition comes true. Upon his return to his home country, Oswald falls in love with Corinne's half-sister, the blond Englishwoman Lucile. Following him to England, Corinne learns of his betrayal, and returns to Rome without meeting him. Heartbroken, she weakens day by day. Finally she composes her last song, to bid a final farewell to her friends and to the people of Italy.

²⁹ Vincent Whitman, "'Remember My Verse Sometimes': Corinne's Three Songs", in Szmurł, 55-68, 66-68.

The song is sung by an anonymous girl instead of the dying poet, who is now too weak to perform herself. Whitman argues that this absence of the poet signals the cruelty of the forces that destroy her: it attests to how deep the heroine's wounds inflicted by patriarchal society are. In this way, Whitman concludes, Corinne's song serves as "an indictment – beyond overt accusation – of the violent forces that transform a poetry of presence into the sign of absence" (Whitman, 68).

I agree with Whitman that Oswald's father's letter is the ultimate cause of Corinne's fatal sorrow. One may want to qualify this argument by insisting that the heroine in part invites her own decline. For if such patriarchal pressure was unbearable for Corinne, she could simply have given up Oswald once for all. She could have chosen another man, perhaps an Italian, who would accept her as she is, including her talent and fame.³⁰ Or else, if Corinne really wanted to be with Oswald, she could have persuaded him to reject his father's will and spend his life with her in Italy. Since she does not take any of these steps, then after all she can only wait for her decline. However, I suggest that this inability to take action not be ascribed solely to Corinne's personal fault. For it is more of a social matter: it is related more to the emotional quandary of dealing with a hostile society that one nevertheless feels attached to.

Corinne actually tries to control her feelings about Oswald when she realizes that problems exist in their relationship. However, all her efforts to give him up turn out to be ineffective (Staël 1998, 269). What charm does Oswald have to thus captivate Corinne? Since their first meeting, Corinne has been attracted to Oswald's character, which she can hardly find among Italians:

[Corinne] was used to the lively flattering compliments of the Italians, but Oswald's dignified manner, his apparent coldness, and his sensitivity ... exercised a much greater power over her imagination. ... He aroused in Corinne *a feeling of respect that she had not experienced for a long time*. No intelligence, however distinguished, could surprise her, but *nobility and dignity* of character affected her profoundly. With these

³⁰ She could have married another man, for instance Prince Castel-Forte, who understands Corinne and her talent as a loyal friend of hers. He is in love with Corinne, and is greatly saddened when he hears a rumor that she has married Oswald. See Staël (1998), 267.

qualities Lord Nelvil combined elevated language and an elegance in the smallest actions of life which contrasted with the carelessness and informality of most of the great Roman nobleman. ... Although Oswald's tastes were in some respects quite different from Corinne's they understood each other marvelously. Lord Nelvil was extremely skillful in guessing Corinne's reactions, and at the slightest change in his expression she detected what was going on in him. Used as she was to the passionate outbursts of Italians, this shy, yet proud devotion, this feeling constantly proved but never expressed, spread an altogether new interest over her life. (emphases added; Staël 1998, 49)

The feeling of respect that "she had not experienced for a long time" is probably a feeling Corinne came to know while in England, where she must have met a number of people with "nobility and dignity". In a word, Corinne is attracted to the Englishness in Oswald, which she values and feels close to, somewhere deep in her heart.

Corinne cannot stop loving Oswald, then, not in small part due to her strong attachment to his country. He seems to her to embody some of the best traits of English people. By the same token, she cannot get herself to persuade Oswald to disobey his father's will, because she feels it should be respected for following the social construction of the land.

The sorrowful tone in Corinne's songs, therefore, is to be taken as a message that conveys women's conflict with society: it tells of how much pain a woman has to suffer when excluded by a society she feels attached to. She is torn between her society and her individual self, and cannot reject the society which has nurtured her character, nor can she stop being herself, a talented woman. It is not difficult to see that this double bind is not solely reserved for Corinne; many other women can experience the same situation, if they have a desire to pursue their career in a society that prohibits them from doing so. Corinne's sorrow is personal, but it is also universal in this sense.

Corinne herself is conscious of this hidden message in her songs, which the readers of the novel are led to perceive through her second song. In her third and last song Corinne repeatedly describes her sorrow as "strong pain" and "hostile power", suggesting that her songs have the potential to turn into a counterforce against what gives suffering to her. She insists that her genius, or the power of her songs, resides in conveying suffering:

Unhappy woman! My genius, if it still survives, makes its presence felt only by *the strength of my pain*. It is in the shape of a *hostile power* that it can still be recognized. (emphases added; Staël 1998, 401)

... of all the faculties of the heart I receive from nature, that of suffering is the only one I have fully put into practice. (402)

Landon perceives, and esteems, this message in Corinne's songs, as apparently so does Hemans.³¹ Landon's speaker in "Corinne at the Cape of Misena" sees lasting value in Corinne's words that convey her pain. In Staël's and Landon's time, the art of improvisation was often thought to have only temporary effects on the audience, even if it incites in them an excitement of watching the process of creating.³² Landon's speaker also mentions the ephemeral nature of improvisation, and admits that the song, or its music, will eventually "perish" (lines 21-24). However, she insists that the "words" in Corinne's song will never die. The "song", like the "wind / That wafts the seeds which afterwards spring up / In a perpetual growth, and then subsides", serves to convey "words", while the "words" themselves have the "immortality of pain" (22-29). Landon's speaker, then, reveres Corinne as a poet endowed with a special gift:

There is a power
Given to some minds to fashion and create,
Until the being present on the page
Is actual as our life's vitality!
Such was Corinne – and such the mind that gave
Its own existence to its work. Corinne
Is but another name for her who wrote,
Who felt, and poured her spirit on her lay.

(lines 33-40)

As Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) illustrates, in the Romantic period the poet is compared to something close to a prophet who raises himself from the status of an ordinary man to that

³¹ Hemans highlighted the second passage in the above quotations in her own copy of *Corinne*. The copy Hemans had is a French edition, although I use an English translation here. See Chorley, 125.

³² See Bandiera and Saglia, 183, 190-91.

of an inspired being, who perceives, and teaches people, what is behind the visible world. Landon's speaker also considers Corinne as representing poets with such inspiration and power of creation. More important, however, is that this power is assumed to be of a feminine nature – “Corinne is but another name for *her* who wrote” – and that the message the poet sends is primarily her “pain”.

Landon's speaker then explains what the poet's pain is: the poet suffers from a deep chasm between herself and her society:

What are feelings but her own? The hope
Which in the bleak world finds no resting-place,
And, like the dove, returns unsatisfied,
But bringing no green leaf, it seeks its ark
With wearied wing, and plumes whose gloss is gone.
Here, too, is traced that love which hath too much
Of heaven in its fine nature for the earth –

(41-46)

Those high aspirings which but rise to find
What weight is on their wings; and that keen sense
Of the wide difference between ourselves
And those who are our fellows; ...

(51-54)

The speaker describes the poet's society as “the bleak world”, which offers her “no resting place” and no satisfaction. Although she raises herself high above to send, as a prophet, divine messages to her audiences and society, she keeps being disappointed by their cold responses. This statement may echo the poet's sense of alienation from the (vulgar) world portrayed in many a Romantic poem. Our exploration of Corinne's songs in Staël's novel, however, leads us to see a more gender-specific meaning in it: Landon's speaker is describing the situation in which women deviating from social norms are rejected by their society and become alienated.

In “Corinne at the Cape of Misena”, Landon sets aside the surface storyline of Staël's original novel, a woman's unrequited love. In doing so, she highlights what is signified by it, and shows the possibility for poets to use women's affliction of love as a metaphor. The poem is Landon's celebration of Corinne as a model for women poets, and her implicit declaration that she will follow the heroine's

footsteps to ever sing of women's love and pain.

The title of *Corinne, or Italy* (*Corinne, ou l'Italie*) is like a riddle, leading us to consider its meaning. The word "or" can be interpreted as indicating a choice, as in the phrase "either ... or". It is also possible to consider the conjunction as introducing a synonym or explanation of the preceding word: Corinne, that is, Italy. Since the heroine is praised in the novel as an artist who sings of, and represents, the beauty of Italy, the latter interpretation seems more likely. However, as discussed above, Corinne is closely attached to England as well as to Italy. Why does the title indicate only the heroine's bond with the southern land? Further, when *Corinne* was published it was not uncommon to entitle a novel with the heroine's first name, or full name. As Marie-Claire Vallois points out, there is in the title a "substitution of toponym for patronym": instead of adding Corinne's last name, Staël compensates for it with the place name, Italy.³³ What does this signify?

In *Corinne*, the heroine's English lover is referred to either by his first or last name, interchangeably: Oswald, or Lord Nelvil. This continuously reminds the reader of his tie with his father in England. The heroine's real name and birth, in contrast, remain secret until the middle of the novel, when she tells Oswald the story of her childhood. She reveals that she once lived with her English father in his homeland. However, after his death she returned to Italy, her mother's homeland (the mother was already dead before Corinne moved to England). While Oswald feels guilty about once having fallen in love with a Frenchwoman, disobeying his father's will, Corinne feels guilty about having left England, to live a life transgressing the patriarchal rules of her father's country. Oswald in the end returns to England to live a life in accordance with his father's will, thereby assuaging his sense of guilt. In contrast, Corinne cannot choose but to remain in Italy, because she knows too well that she could not adapt to life in England.

It is no wonder, then, that Corinne's last name – her father's name – is absent from the title of the novel. The presence of Italy instead of the last name suggests that Corinne belongs to her mother's

³³ Marie-Claire Vallois, "Voice as Fossil; Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy*: An Archaeology of Feminine Discourse", in Szmurlo, 127-38, 132.

hometown. And the absence of the last name, or father's name, implies her rupture with both her father and his land. The image of the father does not feature so prominently in the works of the three women poets, Hemans, Landon and Christina Rossetti, as if in accordance with the absence of the paternal name in the title of *Corinne*. It is, instead, turned into often implicit, invisible, and unnamed forces that reside in a patriarchal society.³⁴

I have discussed the way the figure of Corinne influenced Hemans, Landon and, by extension, Christina Rossetti, from the viewpoint of the theme of love as a metaphor to convey women's struggle with social conventions. I want to suggest further that the figure of Corinne influenced the form of their poetry as well: the dramatic monologue. Corinne is an improvisatrice who responds to the expectations of her audience, sings on behalf of them, and moves them by her performance. The form of the dramatic monologue Hemans and Landon adopt is in some ways similar to the way Corinne creates her songs. Like Corinne, the speakers of their dramatic monologues need to have an audience responding in various ways as the speakers express their thoughts and feelings. The speakers need an audience because their statement is social as well as personal, and is intended, whether consciously or not, to move the audience to question assumptions they take for granted. Hemans' and Landon's speakers adopt a variety of rhetorical devices, not unlike those used in public speaking, to influence their listeners. Their dramatic monologues have an implicitly reformist agenda to question and recast dominant ideologies, in an age when ideas about women are changing.

³⁴ Rossetti's father Gabriel was an Italian who immigrated to England as a political exile and married Frances, the child of an Italian father and an English mother. He used to live in Naples, where he was an improvisatore (like Corinne). After moving to England, where the vocation was not thought respectable, he became a teacher of Italian. Having a poet as her father, it was natural for Christina to start to write poetry, so becoming a poet was not itself much of a transgression, at least in her household. Still, in her middle teens Christina spent much time looking after her father, who was invalid by then, while other members of the family were off to work and school. This is when Christina started to have mental and physical symptoms of breakdown, and it may not be unrelated to her experience with her father who had "the patriarchal status commonly accorded the male head of the household in both Italian and British society". See Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, 24. While Christina often portrays motherly love, the father's image is conspicuously absent from her works. For Rossetti's relation with her father, see Marsh, *Christina Rossetti*, 15-54.

The speaker of the monologue does not always succeed in moving her audience, nor does she always have strong confidence in what she says. At times, she may be trapped in the very ideology that she wants to question. In such cases, the audience may have more power than the speaker, and the audience may start to influence the speaker.³⁵ The word “audience” as used here means the direct audience, the auditor (or auditors) of the monologue, who are part of the same world where the speaker lives, and who listen to the speaker on the spot. The speaker is conscious that her monologue is being listened to by these auditors and expects them to respond to it. However, the dramatic monologue has an additional audience: we, the readers of the monologue, who watch the stage from outside of the world where the speaker and her direct audience live. The speaker does not know that we are listening to (reading) her monologue, but the poet who writes the dramatic monologue does know that her work has us, the readers, as the indirect audience of the monologue, and expects us to respond. It is as if the poet asks us many implicit questions, such as: “What do you think of the speaker’s utterance, and the difficult situation she is in?” As readers of the monologue, we often know more than the speaker’s direct audience do, and hence it may happen that we understand her situation better – just as in the scene of *Corinne*’s second song, where we know more about the heroine’s sorrow than her audience at the Cape of Misena do. We have much more to say about the monologue, since the author of the dramatic monologue gives us clues to the speaker’s situation, so that we can judge, from a broader perspective, what she says in the monologue.

The following chapters examine more closely the poetry of Hemans and Landon, and of Christina Rossetti as their successor, partly with an eye to this strategic use of the dramatic monologue.

³⁵ For the power of the audience in the dramatic monologue, see Dorothy Mermin, *The Audience in the Poem: Five Victorian Poets* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1983), and Chapter 7 of the present study.

