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THE EARLY LIFE AND LONDON WORLDS OF

LETITIA ELIZABETH LANDON,

A POET PERFORMING IN AN AGE OF SENTIMENT AND DISPLAY

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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2001

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Present and Past Representations of L. E. L.

At first glance, it looks like a simple story of renewed interest and renewed success. After a century of neglect, for the last decade or so the work of Letitia Elizabeth Landon has been steadily catching the notice of more and more readers of nineteenth-century poetry. In 1990, when Frank Sypher wanted to publish a facsimile edition of her poetry, he had to resort to William Bell Scott's 1873 edition as the latest, most comprehensive one published, and then add several pages of material never before collected. Since then Landon's works have been included in several anthologies of Romantic and Victorian poetry, and they have been the subject of many conference papers, published articles, and one volume-length study by Glennis Stephenson (1995). Editors Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess have produced a teaching edition of her *Selected Writings* (1997). The well known critics Isobel Armstrong, Stuart Curran, Germaine Greer, Angela Leighton, Anne Mellor, and Marlon Ross agree that she created a distinctive style whose traces can be found throughout Victorian poetry.

None of this renewed interest, however, has led to any expressions of enthusiasm for her early verses intended to glorify woman's love, like these from her bestseller *The Improvisatrice* (1824):

I would have rather been a slave,

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In tears, in bondage, by his side,

Than shared in all, if wanting him,

This world had power to give beside!

. . . . . .

There was one spell upon my brain,

Upon my pencil, on my strain;

But one face to my colours came;

My chord replied but to one name –

LORENZO! -- all seemed vowed to thee,

To passion, and to misery! (66-67)

And Landon wrote hundreds of lines to this effect, so turning one's head away is impossible. Several critics have decided she did not really mean all that she said, or, anyway, she did not feel much that she said her characters felt. Until my recent discovery of her affair with the *Literary Gazette* editor William Jerdan that produced three illegitimate children (Lawford 36-37), nothing in Landon's biography gave grounds for supposing she had given away her heart, much less her body, before or during the time when she wrote so many love poems. Greer sums up what we all used to think in *Slip-shod Sibyls* (1995): "There is no proof that L. E. L. ever had a lover by day or night, let alone several. One would like her rather better if she had, but she seems, however reckless in her superficial manner, to have been deeply reserved about any act of physical committal" (311). Several critics remain uneasy about the literary -- but not the cultural and historical -- value of poems guided by sentiments that, it has been presumed, Landon did not share, poems with a "superficial manner" written

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solely to win reviewers' approval and buyers in a competitive literary marketplace. This idea (with its "romantic" attachment to authentic personal feeling, in Hoagwood and Ledbetter's opinion (2)) gives ammunition to those who would rank Landon far beneath not only Coleridge and Keats but also her female contemporaries. In discussing the holiday annuals of the 1820s, the mention of "the phenomenal celebrity of Laetitia Elizabeth Landon" leads Herbert Tucker to assert, "Other – and better – poets were also drawn to the annuals," and then to discourse at length on Wordsworth and Felicia Hemans (526). Virginia Blain acknowledges that Landon is "once again at the forefront of debates about nineteenth century women's poetry," but she thinks Eliza Hamilton's poems are much better. "I have yet to read a persuasive defense of Landon as a 'serious poet'" (36, 46).

The defenses have come and are continuing to come, and they center around the idea that L. E. L. undermined and sometimes tore apart her pictures of enthralled devotion within the same poems in which they were sketched (Armstrong, "The Gush" 27; Linkin 176-78; Hoagwood and Ledbetter 3-4); that she did so because she was "shrewd enough, and cursed enough" to recognize, despite how alienated she might feel from society and literary culture, that her imagination belonged to that society and culture, with all their artifices; and from that recognition came her awareness of how the women's and poets' imaginings too often blindly led them to their downfall (McGann and Riess 23-30). "What critics rescue, we partly create; and the construction of our generation's 'Letitia Landon' is at a crucial stage," writes Tricia Lootens in her 1999 assessment of where Landon criticism has taken us and where it ought to lead (242). Another defender, she is disturbed about recent criticism in which

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Landon is "condemned to failure as a poet through her drive to enact and market a conventional feminine ideal" (243). Refreshingly uncertain whether Landon meant all that she said in her popular poems, Lootens points toward the novels and short stories that remain largely unread. The novel *Ethel Churchill* (1837) supports a view of "L. E. L., whose indulgence in cosmic weariness and in epigrammatic, often bleak humor sets her apart from the poetess tradition" (255).

But turning our eyes toward the later work does not solve the problems thrown up by the early work. And I think it is a pernicious tendency, inherited from the Victorians, to plot a course of steady improvement, as if Landon's austere strains were without question the best she sang and what she produced early in her career is of literary value primarily as it conveys a disenchantment akin to that manifested in much of her late 1820s and 1830s work, but without the latter's coldness and calm. This line of thought often culminates, as it did in Victorian narratives of Landon's life, in speculations over how great she "might have been" – "It is the motto of all human things," as L. E. L. says (*Selected Writings* 198) – if only she had lived longer. And we find ourselves revisiting her death once again, at Cape Coast Castle in present-day Ghana, with an empty bottle of prussic acid in her hand, four months after marrying George Maclean in 1838. For some, this Landon had too firm a grasp of reality to have killed herself; for others her later work makes the chance more likely. Either way, "We fear once more reducing the poet's career, both personal and poetic, to one grand foreshadowing of suicide" (Lootens 251). Despite how L. E. L. has been derided in the

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earlier part of the twentieth century,[1] I think we should try not to succumb to the fear of foreshadowing suicide, not if the totality of the works and letters appear to do just that. To know what suicide meant for Landon at various stages in her life, her works' array of deaths by broken hearts and suicides should be taken into account and understood in light of Landon's ideas at the start of her career about heroic martyrdom, sacrifice, and purification by love and death for love. Nor should we ever lose sight of how, throughout her long affair with Jerdan, she was risking social death, year after year after year (Lawford 36-37).

My literary biography starts at the beginning of Landon's life and covers what she published up until she began writing *The Improvisatrice* (1824), which ran through six editions in one year and made her a national celebrity. After that she was never long out of the spotlight. *The Troubadour* (1825) went through four editions; *The Golden Violet* (1826) and *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829) sold well enough but did not please so many, as some began to tire of yet more long love poems set in the middle ages or renaissance. Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, Landon was writing poems and anonymous reviews for Jerdan's *Literary Gazette*. From the mid 1820s, her poems, essays, and short stories featured as star attractions in literary and ladies' magazines and in the Christmas gift books. Landon now wrote often about the glare of society's gaze, about how it made feelings shrink and blinded the poet's visionary eye. She turned increasingly to fictional prose, churning out three three-volume novels,

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[1]See D. E. Enfield, *L. E. L. A Mystery of the Thirties* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1928); Lionel Stevenson, "Miss Landon, 'The Milk-and-Watery Moon of Our Darkness,' 1824-1830," *Modern Language Quarterly* 8 (1947): 355-63; Helen Ashton, *Letty Landon* (London: Collins, 1951).

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Romance and Reality (1831), *Francesca Carrara* (1834), and *Ethel Churchill* (1837), and editing, or writing much of another novel, *Duty and Inclination* (1838). Yet she remained loyal to her first love, poetry, penning all the works for the strictly Christian *Easter Gift* (1832) and *Heath's Book of Beauty* (1832), and in 1835 oe another volume-length poem on a chivalric theme, *The Vow of the Peacock.* From 1831 to 1838, she wrote almost all the poems for the annual series, *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book*; and from 1835 to 1838, all the short poems for the *English Bijou Almanac.* She also had published in the 1830s a collection of short stories and poems for children, *Traits and Trials of Early Life* (1836), loaded with autobiographical material. When she died, Landon had just completed her first play, *Castruccio Castrucani*, the first third of another novel, *Lady Anne Granard*, and the several essays on Walter Scott's women characters entitled *Female Portrait Gallery.* She had written over twelve hundred poems.

The work shadowed by the life

Much of the scholarly prose devoted to Landon pivots on the story of her life, almost always stressing how hard she worked to make money and stay popular. For many critics, the biography authenticates those lines voiced by a few of Landon's poets regretting that they have debased their poetic power to court acclaim. As Erinna laments, "Alas! that ever / Praise should have been what it has been to me -- / The

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opiate of my heart" (*Selected Writings* 95). But biographical accounts of Landon's rapid composition are discounted in the widespread assumption that Landon did not seriously think her song came, as Erinna's did, "gushing, like natural tears, / To check whose current does not rest with us" (91). As with Landon's sentiments about love, so with those about poetry: the disillusions are far more likely than the illusions to be considered her own at present, far more likely to be seen as the reservoirs holding her ultimate values and beliefs. And then there seems no point in sympathizing with what she did not; the concern is that giving emotional credence to her poetry's dreams of glory and bliss misreads those poems, as her "naïve" contemporaries did.

Have we tried to set the writer in opposition to much of her work as a means of getting around her challenge to readers to participate sympathetically? And then will it be protested that such participation is not scholarly, not what literary critics ought to be concerned about, not what can be measured or intellectually examined?[2] This reluctance to sympathize and try to identify with Landon's illusions, together with her ideals, is now standing in the way of a full appreciation of her early work in particular. This reluctance makes all the more necessary a study of the life that shows how vital to Landon were her illusionary worlds, inherited as they were from the writers and artists that had preceded her and from a society needing illusions to cope with the tensions created by the rise of the commercial classes and the industrial state. Loathe to identify with what seems unnaturally extreme and clichéd, modern readers need

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[2] Using Barthes's *Pleasure of the Text* to illuminate the work of Anaïs Nin, Frances Wilson writes: "Textual ecstasy is a complicated experience that bears no relation to learned and cultured critical responses. *Jouissance* includes feelings such as shock, emptiness, disturbance, and loss" (44).

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first to understand that in Landon's era sentimental poets expected readers to seek to shut away their everyday moods, cast off their inhibitions, and bring to the poems hearts ready to be touched, or "reawakened," by the poets' superior passion, which was supposed to be directed toward "spiritual" (but not necessarily Christian) truths. The young and impressionable especially were thought to extend their emotional range through the reading experience. Modern readers are wary of this kind of effort and exposure. If we are in any way to approximate the reading experience of Landon's contemporaries -- and to me, we cannot properly recover sentimental poetry if we do not make the effort to approximate it[3] -- we have to trust Landon far more than her contemporaries had to. We need grounds for belief before we will follow Landon's lead down the worn tracks of disappointed romantic love, and a full-scale biography should supply those grounds.

In the biographical sketches of recent anthologies, new readers learn more about the rumors of sexual liaisons than most of Landon's contemporaries ever knew. But where they might have caught a whiff of scandal and liked to think of their poets and their women as concealing some secret passion or other, scholars today are met with the weight of what Landon's friends recorded and conjectured of her life -- in effect, an obstacle of memoirs. As respectable Victorians, Laman Blanchard, Emma

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[3] I do not wish to suggest here that postmodern readings "against the grain," for the undermining of feminine ideals L. E. L. espouses, are not fruitful and important. But these readings, however intellectually engaging, cannot capture the essential verve and intensity of Landon's early work. "Unless the poems become pleasurably invested, they can't be discussed with any sympathy and insight," Anthony Easthope concludes in his psychoanalytic study, *Poetry and Phantasy*. "The more the texts excite desire the better (potentially better) the criticism" (211).

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Roberts, Katherine Thomson, William Howitt, and Samuel Carter Hall told a tale of exuberant, guileless innocence maligned and finally destroyed by jealous tongues. (William Jerdan, in his *Autobiography*'s two long chapters on the child-like genius, made no mention of the scandalous rumors.) Yet Landon rarely wrote about sexual innocence wrongfully denounced.[4] Her publications tended to leave her reputation in doubt rather than defend it. The Victorians wanted the poems replete with mentions of "shame" and "sin" to be seen as fanciful constructs unfairly interpreted by those looking for immorality where none existed, those with "minds which, like negroes, cast a dark shadow on a mirror, however clear and pure in itself," as Landon once described such critics in a letter to Katherine Thomson (Blanchard 1: 55).

Because the Victorian versions of Landon's life conflict with one another and contain admissions that all cannot be explained, current scholars with limited access to Victorian sources wind up reporting different and opposing assertions, and the conflicts are merely renewed. In the opening sentence of their article on Landon's life for the *Romantic Circles* website, Hoagwood and Ledbetter make plain their dissatisfaction with all the conjecture leading nowhere: "The principal biographical sources on L. E. L. do not always agree about the facts of her life, and the word 'mystery' appears so often in them (with words like 'must have' and 'presumably') that readers are well advised to view the story of her life, in any published form, as at

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[4] The Elector's distrust of his wife Sophie's innocence results in her imprisonment and eventually kills them both in Landon's short story, "The Royal Marriage; or, Political Expediency," recently reprinted in Frank Sypher's edition of *Castuccio Castrucani* (2000). The story was, however, anonymously published in *The Keepsake* for 1838, so it mounted no defense of Landon, whose reputation was then at an all time low.

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least partly documentary figment" (1).[5] Probably the mysteries contributed to Landon's neglect in the twentieth century and may even have worked against some of her latest readers becoming admirers. There have been too many holes in the story to resolve anything about her life's relation to her work.

But in the nineteenth century the same mysteries endowed L. E. L. with a mythic status. How great was that myth is demonstrated by the fact that American fans of her poetry were still speculating and inquiring about Landon's private life long after her death. On his trip to England in 1856, Nathaniel Hawthorne visited Francis Bennoch, an old friend of Jerdan, to satisfy his curiosity:

> I asked Bennoch whether he supposed that there was any truth in the scandalous rumors in reference to Jerdan and L. E. L. He replied that he did not think that they were true to the utmost extent, although he conceived that there had been great freedom, and even licentiousness, of intercourse between her and Jerdan – great looseness of behavior – only falling short of the one ultimate result. He said that Jerdan had assured him, on his honor, that L. E. L. had never yielded her virtue to him; and Bennoch thought he would not have denied it, had the case been otherwise. (283)

In *Woman's Record*, first published in 1853, Sarah Joseph Hale refused to interpret Landon's death as anything but an accident. She mentioned the prussic acid and

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[5] Having used "presumably" and "must have" many times in the course of writing the story of Landon's early life, I am in no position to claim to have cleared up all the mysteries – only made a start.

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added by way of explanation, "It was conjectured that she had undesignedly taken an over-dose of the fatal medicine as relief for spasms in the stomach, to which she was subject." The course of Landon's writings, after all, demonstrated moral improvement; in her later works Landon "addresses other feelings besides *love*; her style has more simplicity and strength, and the sentiment becomes elevated and *womanly* – for we hold that . . . the moral feelings, are peculiarly suitable for their development and description to the genius of woman" (emphasis Hale's; 383-84). In *Woman in America*, published in 1843, when memories of L. E. L. were fresher, Mrs. A. J. Graves used Landon as an example of an English female "genius" who lacked "self-reliance" and sufficient faith in Providence. Graves assumed that her readers were familiar with the circumstances of "she who had lived in the brilliant circles of fashion -- the idol, and the 'lion,' of crowded saloons," who then "left the scene of her triumphs . . . and immured herself in a lonely castle on the coast of Africa," dying there "like Sappho on Leucate's rock . . . helpless and hopeless." In a footnote, Graves went so far as to argue for the greater objectivity of her claims, "the distance of space which separates our country from England" enabling her to render an unprejudiced verdict on L. E. L. (240-42).

Graves was contrasting her opinions with "the studied silence of the English press" on contentious details of Landon's life. The gossips had been shamed into silence by the manner of Landon's death; the possibility that they had driven her to her grave making the subject of her life too painful to be discussed in print (and probably in society) by anyone except her staunch defenders. They did not let the gossips forget

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their crimes against an unprotected young woman with the sensitivity of genius. Such is the degree of chastisement in Katherine Thomson's *Recollections* (1854):

> Think not, ye who carelessly, or maliciously, or enviously repeated or invented calumnies . . . think not that your shafts fell powerless. They struck into her heart. Think not that bravado, sometimes uttered, was not followed, in secret, by burning resentment, and bitter tears. Ye, who could convert the carelessness of an occupied and innocent mind into proofs of guilt, be satisfied with this – the arrow sped – the wound it made was a festering and deadly wound, and was never, never healed. (2: 83)

"The calumny was of the kind that most deeply wounds a woman," is as specific as Samuel Carter Hall gets in *Book of Memories* (1871) about the rumors of affairs with Jerdan, William Maginn, Daniel Maclise, and Edward Bulwer Lytton. "A slander more utterly groundless never was propagated. . . . Ay, if ever woman was, Lætitia Landon was 'done to death by slanderous tongues'" (266).

Elizabeth Barrett was not aware of rumors connecting Landon with any man but Jerdan. Nor did she glean any more substantial information along this line from Emma Roberts' memoir (1839) and *The Life and Literary Remains of L. E. L.* (1841) by Laman Blanchard, Landon's chosen biographer. After reading excerpts from Blanchard's book, Barrett wrote Mary Russell Mitford, "The '*calumny*' refers to Mr. Jerdan – does it not? – But I grope in the mournful darkness for the signification of her own allusion to '*the vanity of a man* and the tongue of a vulgar woman'" (emphasis Barrett's; Raymond 1: 232). Blanchard's reference to William Maginn and his wife

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only frustrated Barrett, as did his entire biography. In another letter to Mitford, she wrote, "It is an interesting painful book. . . . Every word which this Mr. Blanchard has devised in order to sunder the identity of poet & woman, is a stroke at her fame" (emphasis Barrett's; 1: 251-52). Through disclaiming the authenticity of Landon's mournful love poems, Blanchard and Roberts in effect overthrew the essence of Barrett's esteem, leaving her only with appreciation for Landon's poetic skills and regret that Landon's "genius was not strong enough to assert itself in truth. It *suffered* her to belie herself -- & *stood by*, while she put on the mask" (emphasis Barrett's; 1: 232; Lawford 37). But Blanchard increased Barrett's curiosity about Landon's life. "Only one letter to her mother, & that of the coldest! There is a mystery somewhere. Indeed everywhere over the book, we are perplexed in the extreme" (1: 252). Six years later, in 1847, Barrett was still gripped by the story and still wanted to share her thoughts with Mitford. After reading William Howitt's *Homes and Haunts of English Poets*, she suspected that Howitt had distressed Landon's "poor family" by making "the probability of her suicide so sure a thing, as the anecdote of her having shown a bottle of prussic acid to her friend [Emma Roberts], under the pressure of former circumstances, must render it" (3: 204). Never mind that Howitt, Roberts, and Blanchard[6] avowed that Landon could not have killed herself. Barrett put no faith in the protestations of friends more interested in whitewashing the reputation than in revealing the truth. The anecdote confirmed suicide for Barrett.

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[6] Long prior to writing Landon's biography, Laman Blanchard had himself tried to commit suicide. In 1845, Blanchard again tried to kill himself and succeeded, leaving behind a wife and children.

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The Rossetti family likewise could not engage with the work without becoming fascinated by the life. In 1848 Dante Rossetti was impatient to read three volumes of Landon's poems at once, and wondered if William was reading them: "The only book I have picked up is L. E. L.'s *Improvisatrice*, for which I gave ninepence. By the bye, have you got her *[Golden] Violet* and *[Venetian] Bracelet* with you? I cannot find them in our library" (Doughty 41). Dante must have discussed Landon with Christina, whose manuscript poem, "L. E. L.," contains recommendations in Dante's hand (Leighton and Reynolds 69, 377). First published in 1863, "L. E. L." begins with the epigraph, "Whose heart was breaking for a little love," misquoted from Barrett's "L. E. L.'s Last Question" (1844), where the line reads, "One thirsty for a little love" (221).[7] Christina Rossetti sympathizes more than Barrett does in her poem. Where Barrett believed in Blanchard's Landon who, not prone to sadness and always delighting in society, was at times too fond of shining there (*The Letters* 232-33, 251-52; Lawford 37), Rossetti is sure that she reads in Landon's poems Landon's own abiding grief:

> 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. (1-4)

Barrett's Landon only realized the value of her friends' affection as she sailed to Africa, yet then she cared too much about being a little loved when she asked, "Do

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[7] Barrett had changed the line from its 1839 version: "The craver of a little love" (69).

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you think of me as I think of you?" (219). This Landon showed insufficient regard for Christian teaching and probably committed unchristian suicide: "Could she not wait to catch their answering breath? / . . . / None smile and none are crowned where lieth she . . ." (221). In Rossetti's poem, it is not clear whether Rossetti alone hopes Landon has joined the angels and the "saints in glory," or whether Landon hopes she will join them (29). But Rossetti certainly hopes Landon was, like her, looking heavenward. Rossetti (and maybe Landon) wonders if the saints "guess the truth" of her heartbreak, the truth that Landon's friends "cannot guess" and "never see" (29, 17, 24). The heartbreak is temporary, though. The angels foretell Landon's victory: "True life is born of death, / . . . / Then love shall fill thy girth, / And love make fat thy dearth . . ." (38-41).

The whole Landon story has hinged on such guesses, in the case of Barrett and Rossetti important enough to make one poet distinguish herself from Landon and another identify with her. From Landon's published beginnings in the early 1820s, when nothing was known of the effusive initialist who boosted sales of the *Literary Gazette*, until now, the number and depth of the questions have only multiplied. No longer are we content to ask how Landon died and with whom she slept, much less with asking, as did the members of the Cambridge student union in the early 1820s, "Was she young? Was she pretty? . . . was she rich?" (E. Bulwer Lytton, Rev. of *Romance* 546). We want to know how the details of her life relate to those in her work; but, more fundamentally, how she related to her work. We must explain how one consciousness could produce so many wildly opposing passages; or, in single passages, make possible wholly contradictory meanings. Rarely has the life story of a

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poet held such potential to shape readings of her work as in the case of Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838). Lootens presents central questions facing anyone interested in Landon's poetry or prose:

> Landon was concealing truth in order to succeed in the market place, she continually insisted: but what truth? Was she the devoted victim of her audience's whims, or the manipulator of their desires? Did her love poetry confess the passion of a real Sappho, albeit in snub-nosed Brompton form, and incompletely disguised as a "professional"? Or was it acutely the work of a hypocrite, and adept at emotional artifice who marketed expressions of a passion she did not feel? Such questions were intrinsic to the "mystery" of L. E. L. At the first extreme, she could be seen as ridiculous or pitiable, but an "honest" woman; at the second, as a competent literary businesswoman, but emotionally disingenuous. (248-49)

So unexpected in light of all that was known about Landon, the truth of Landon's affair with Jerdan and their three children is most probably not the only truth she was concealing, but in itself it represents such a grandiose scheme of secrecy that it defies any value judgment declaring her "ridiculous or pitiable." Besides, value judgments as to whether she loved wrongly or foolishly do not help us evaluate the poems, which we have not even properly understood yet. My thesis establishes that Landon was acting on her love for Jerdan when she entered into the affair, that she expressed her feelings about Jerdan and the affair in her love poems and, more than that, used the poems to further the affair. Landon had to be adept at "emotional artifice" or she

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could never have fooled so many of her good friends and readers as she undoubtedly did. To select one or the other of Lootens's Landons would be to oversimplify the writer and her work. We must not rush to any more judgments but rather gather more facts, perceive the overarching perspective that lay behind her opinions, and firmly situate her thinking in all its radical and conservative aspects within the society and culture in which she moved.

Landons to trust and distrust

The best source material for studying the relation of life to work remains Landon's letters, mostly undated and scattered in libraries throughout North America and the United Kingdom. To date, I have transcribed and chronologically arranged more letters than have ever before been collected. Those letters have helped me uncover many other facts, previously lost or unknown, about Landon's life, bringing me close to unravelling some of the bothersome knots surrounding her history. Wondering whether Landon wrote exactly what she wanted to write, as Stephenson claims she did, Virginia Blain asks, "How can we ever know?" (46). My answer is the letters, many passages of which contain remarks fully supportive of various comments she made in her works. She also often comments in letters about works she was in the process of writing or had just finished. She could be ironic and earnest by turns about the same sentimental poem in the course of a single letter. The letters supply crucial insights into her character, providing a tissue of statements that, taken as a whole, help

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to explain why Landon was motivated to project to the public two opposite personalities: one of exalted yet fatalistic melancholy, the other of exuberant gaiety and wit, each aggressively undermining the other. The letters also reveal another side of Landon she seems to have reserved for business relations and close friends; yet this more pragmatic, down-to-earth side typically gave way within a letter to moods resembling those of the extravagant personae. Those who admired her sentimental verse were sometimes shocked, even dismayed, when introduced to her satiric side at social gatherings. Prefacing his anecdote with the remark that Landon was "one of those celebrities, appearing from time to time, who are a riddle even to their best friends," former U.S. Congressman Robert Dale Owen (1801-77; son of the British social reformer) described for the *Atlantic Monthly* his first meeting with L. E. L., after a long acquaintance with her work:

> Her poetry was usually characterized by deep feeling, sad and romantic; and it had won her for a time a brilliant reputation, albeit it has scarcely outlasted the age in which she wrote. She and Thomas Moore were, in my early youth, my favorite poets, and I had read, I think, almost every line she ever published. Great was my amazement when I met her! Pretty, careless, it seemed, lively, with just a touch of flippancy in her manner, she took pains to disclaim all tender or profound emotion; speaking jestingly of everything that savored of enthusiasm, and declaring that whatever of sentimental appeared in her poetry was but a dressed-up copy of what others had felt and expressed, and had never actually come from her own heart. The real things, she was wont to

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> say, were good dinners, nice suppers, handsome apartments in busy London (far preferable to the dull country!), an equipage, and all the appointments of distinguished society. . . . But though Miss Landon thus sought to make herself out a mere worldly character, I do not think that she really was so. . . . She gave me the impression of a dejected woman, whose heart had been wronged, and who thought to face it out, by deriding the dreams she had failed to realize. (567)

In *Letitia Landon: The Woman Behind L. E. L.* (1995), the first book-length study of Landon's work since Sarah Sheppard's *Characteristics of the Genius and Writings of L. E. L.* (1841), Glennis Stephenson puts next to no faith in the poetry whose expressed feelings Owen believed genuine. Stephenson argues that the L. E. L. of the poems was a "carefully constructed fiction" of feminine sentimentality that Landon adopted to comply with "gendered rules," or conventional norms and expectations for the early nineteenth-century poetess. She "fretted" under these rules and "frequently took the opportunity to subvert the very limitations with which she appeared to comply," but Landon "never had a chance" to be a great poet because she wanted and needed the professional success that came from pleasing reviewers (2-19). Early in the book Stephenson suggests that the prose gives us someone more authentic. "While Landon the woman," as opposed to "Landon the writer," often enjoyed "distancing herself from L. E. L., shocking those who expected to meet a melancholy poetess with her unconventionality, gaiety, and wit, she nevertheless situates this social personality within her work when writing prose" (4). But then Stephenson pours cold water on this idea by commenting of the reviewers of Landon's

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novels: "Rather than assume Landon was creating a new persona in an image she considered more appropriate to the novel, the critics instead proclaimed the emergence of the 'real' woman. They simply could not give up the cherished conflation of woman and text and far preferred to modify the author's personality rather than concede any element of artifice" (40).[8] Some real nugget of individual existed underneath the various facades, Stephenson is convinced. However, beyond the statement (incorrect in my view) made at the beginning and end of her book that Landon was an "astute businesswoman," (4, 195), Stephenson cannot give us a clear sense of the woman behind L. E. L., as she comes close to admitting in her final remarks:

> If anything can be concluded with any certainty about Landon it is that she was a lonely and isolated woman that no one, even her professed 'intimates', ever really knew. . . . She obviously encouraged a wide variety of interpretations of her character: Hall's fairy-like child, Thomson's capable woman, and Cruikshank's happy housewife are not constructed out of a vacuum. Perhaps her assumptions of these various personae is the result of her desire for approval, the desire for love of which L. E. L. so frequently writes. (195)

But to assume even that Landon sought approval and love through adopting these (but not other?) personae "is to forget the gay wit and the astute businesswoman. It is to

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[8] Stephenson inaccurately confines Landon's witty "social personality" to her prose writings, though she does not discuss the novels in any detail because she does not think they affected the public's perception of the L. E. L. persona (3, 40).

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reduce her to L. E. L." (195). This oft-quoted book can do little to help anyone trying to get a handle of the relation of Landon's life to her work, so bent is Stephenson on divorcing the woman from whatever her contemporaries associated with her three initials.

Germaine Greer rejects this version of Landon. "L. E. L. did put herself into her poetry – she had nothing else to put in it. What she was quite right in objecting to was the crassness of the public attempts to interpret her reflections as confessions of some peccadillo or another" (309). Furnishing the other major study of Landon in recent memory with her *Slip-shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet* (1995), Greer spends one hundred pages depicting a poet "lost in her painfully narcissistic fantasies" (264), who was herself "convinced that she was a woman of strong passions." Yet this Landon "was never tempted to return the love of those who loved her," so possessed was she by the "common female syndrome" of "emotional impotence masquerading as emotional superiority" (294). In love with sweet sorrow, Landon finally dispossessed herself of any desire for happiness (274). Greer's entire view of Landon's work as well as life is founded on the surmise that as "most of her heroines died virgins," so too "it is very probable their creator did" (264). Wrong on the second count, Greer is also not completely right on the first, largely because she has not read the 1820-1823 poems in the *Literary Gazette* thoroughly or perhaps closely enough (often one word gives the game away).

One cannot help but wonder -- in what Margaret Doody has called "a long, long chapter on L. E. L." that "urges to become a mini-biography in itself" (14) -- why Greer hardly suggests the gay, vivacious side of Landon, and then with a few quotes

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implying that most of what Landon did or said in the social arena, even her very appearances there, were "a lie. Although she was overworked from the outset she frequented the parties of the literary set and wore herself out being their life and soul" (270, 296). "The Sad Tale of L. E. L." makes no mention of Landon's gleeful scoffing at romantic love, rural bliss, and all bourgeois virtues associated with them. Why should Greer address in detail a side of Landon characterized by "false light-heartedness" (356)? Perhaps Landon's mockery seems to her unremarkable, given her view of Landon's poetics; for Greer sees the poetry as promoting the impious indulgence of the passions in frank rejection of middle-class norms. Not considering here the importance that female displays of overwhelming passion in literature or the arts held for the middle classes, she thus explains the "immediate popularity" of Landon's verses as "little more than a thoughtless response to novelty; it is very doubtful if anyone, not excepting L. E. L. herself, had any a clear idea of the nature of the protest" she was making (against the sexual repression of women) with her "impassioned outpourings" (276). Greer cannot respect the poet or her contemporary readers.

Unfortunately, this chapter introducing many to Landon contains some glaring factual errors, about Landon, her associates, and the period. To cite a single instance, Greer states that Landon began writing for the annuals in 1830 with *Fishers Drawing Room Scrap Book* (312). Actually, poems by L. E. L. had appeared in one or more of the annuals each season since late 1823, making her the prime candidate to illustrate all the engravings for *Fisher's,* a project for which she began writing not in 1830 but 1831. Because Greer does not appreciate the importance of the gift-book industry and

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Landon's prominent place in it, she misconstrues the *Fisher's* undertaking as a kind of "degradation," a "slavery" that bound Landon to writing poems illustrating engravings of oriental landscapes and beautiful women. In fact, Landon's letters show she was thrilled to have the chance to write for the *Scrap Book*, and much of her poetry in that album indicates her respect for her task. Of course, Greer does not discuss this poetry.

For factual mistakes with dismaying interpretive consequences, Greer's chapter is closely followed by Anne Mellor's on Landon in *Romanticism and Gender* (1993). Mellor's thesis aligns her with Stephenson: "Landon constructed both her life and her poetry as an embodiment of Burke's female beauty" -- delicate, affectionate, submissive, mournful, languorous, soft, and weak. If any more adjectives are needed to get the picture, Mellor reports that Landon's autobiographical "The History of a Child," which portrayed her as a "lonely, sensitive, bookish, unloved girl, rejected even by her adored nurse," grossly falsifies Landon's childhood. She cites Laman Blanchard's memoir of Landon to "prove" that Landon's childhood was "a happy one" (113). When compared to accounts of her youth from less rose-tinted sources, however, Landon's tale appears to have exaggerated rather than lied about her past, with details like a cruel nurse thrown in to exacerbate the isolation that taught her to adore musing over sorrowful tales. Mellor has fallen for some of Blanchard's whitewash, then has used it perversely against Landon to demonstrate that the poet turned her writing and "her very self" into a marketable commodity, shaped according to received notions of femininity.

Thus it follows that Maclise is reported as having painted "at least four portraits" of Landon (certainly two, maybe three portraits, plus one caricature) that

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"consistently portrayed Landon as an icon of female beauty" (110). Yet Mellor need only have read further in Blanchard's memoir (1: 290), or read some of the many accounts of her by friends and acquaintances, to learn that Landon was not considered beautiful, rarely even pretty – though, thanks to William Maginn's having met and become besotted with her, *Blackwood's* "Noctes" might report otherwise. Landon's analogy of prettified life to prettified portraits in her letter to Anna Hall suggests that Landon would not have requested such beautification of herself: "Would you not be the last to say that the likeness of life, like any other likeness (of me, for instance!) ought to be flattered to please? 'Betty, give this cheek a little red,' is the common cry of all death-struck Narcissas" (91). At least two of Maclise's engraved portraits portray a well-dressed woman with what contemporary viewers would have deemed modest physical attractions, most residing in her artistically reduced hands and feet. Indeed, Jerdan stated in a letter to T. Crofton Croker that Maclise particularly "misliked" one of these engravings of Landon (Ms., Rutgers Univ.), while bags hang beneath her eyes in the other. Regarding the one prettified drawing Maclise made of Landon, she indicated in a letter to Croker that she had nothing to do with the drawing or its accompanying biographical sketch; she expressed amazed relief at "the merciful treatment I have experienced at the hands of Messrs. the Mohawks of Fraser's Magazine. . . . As to the portrait it is flattered far beyond recognition" (Dec. 1833 Ms., Rutgers Univ.). This is not the response of a woman who, as Mellor puts it, "commodified herself as a purchasable icon of female beauty" (112).

Similar to Greer's erroneous evaluation of the gift books, Mellor reveals her insufficient grasp of the values that governed London society when she suggests that

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Landon had a large number of portraits painted to sell herself as an icon of female beauty. Though she is right to point out that "L. E. L. can be seen as among the first of a long line of media-created 'stars' in the new print culture of the nineteenth century" (121), that stardom did not fit a paradigm of female beauty. Anna Maria Hall states, "It is singular that so few portraits of this accomplished woman should have been painted. For nearly twenty years she occupied a large portion of public attention, and, during the whole of her career, was almost idolized by the young and warm-hearted" (Blanchard 1: 289-90). To be idolized in the 1820s and 1830s -- when "stereotyping, lithography, and the substitution of steel for copper in mezzotint engraving (as late as 1823) had an enormous cumulative effect, quantitative and qualitative, on the currency of images" (Meisel 95); when engraved portraits of literary, military, and theatrical celebrities were avidly sought after, especially by the middle classes -- meant having one's portrait taken every few years or so, almost ritually. More often than not, Landon agreed to sit at the behest of upstart publishers and artists trying to make a living. Landon's agreeing to have at least seven portraits drawn of herself, most of which were not well known, would not have been considered in the least excessive. It appears to have been fewer than were painted of Byron, Napoleon, Wellington, Benjamin Disraeli, Caroline Norton, the Countess of Blessington, and numerous stars of the London stage. In terms of her image's popularity, Landon probably ranked nearer the level of Mary Russell Mitford, whose image her admirers prized despite her physique.

I have dwelt on Mellor's handling of Landon -- repeated so many times that Harriet Linkin in her 1997 article can refer to "Landon's reputation as a beauty" as if it

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were a given fact (171) -- because Mellor's thesis typifies critical approaches to what remains an ineluctable hurdle for those interested in the poet: the problem of explaining why there seem to have been several different Landons, public and private. Angela Leighton may see "a sad figure behind the posturing and flirtatious facade she adopted" (53), where Mellor views a woman with no griefs to hide (121), but both agree with the majority of critics that the artificiality they sense in Landon's poetry primarily resulted from her conforming to conventional notions of femininity. For the last decade and a half, most studies of Landon have been grounded in the notion that by succumbing to prejudices about what women should write, Landon denied herself an authentic voice, a real selfhood (Hickok 143). Dolores Rosenblum thinks Landon wore a "female mask" in her sentimental poems to assure readers "that she was not intruding upon masculine territory," a hegemony of politics, philosophy, business, and military matters (12). Within that territory Leighton also includes the rational interrogation of social and domestic conditions; she finally blames Landon's public facade for having encouraged a series of women poets to make "the discrepancy between what may and may not be seen" (64, 60, 76). The dramatic monologue, a favorite form of Landon and Hemans, provided them with a "disguise, a protection against self-exposure and the exposure of feminine subjectivity," according to Isobel Armstrong (325). Concerned with Landon's influence on Christina Rossetti, Rosenblum believes Landon seductively offered to women poets an "aesthetic of renunciation" that concealed the private woman to vent the full force of "pure desire," unblemished by her own individuality (15-16).[9] L. E. L. is then seen by critics to

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stand at the head of a long line of Victorian women poets who used various feminine masks to shield them against charges of indelicacy as well as masculinity.

There are several problems with this critical approach, none of them having to do fundamentally with inaccuracy. Regarding Landon's poetry, this approach tends to be biased in favor of authenticity, which it trusts to be practical, active, workaday, reasonable. It wants a mentally balanced heroine unwilling to die from a broken heart, or no heroine, period; a realistic setting in a wide awake world, devoid of marble fountains, dew-tipped roses, and dreamy shadows. It would prefer that neither heroine nor setting be unnaturally beautiful. It impugns Landon's ornate artificiality for exuding femininity. To "progressive" critics in the nineteenth century as well as feminists today, the image of the lady languishing amid the roses promoted notions of womanhood that served to isolate real women on pedestals of idealized domesticity, where they lived solely for the sake of their loved ones. Though obviously unreal, Landon's gorgeous scenes then cannot be dismissed as harmless. So attractive is their femininity and female feeling, they threaten to impinge upon reality, almost in spite of themselves. The critics have made Landon bear responsibility for what they view as the harmful historical effects of ideas about women akin to those expressed in her poetry. Landon has, in short, been tried and found guilty of promoting women's oppression, and worse, women's acceptance of that oppression.

Though in part excused by centuries of injustice to women, this prejudice against femininity obviates the enjoyment and deeper comprehension (in that order,

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[9] Greer thinks Landon's "fashionable morbidity" might have encouraged Rossetti's teenage "death wish," which "seems to have been genuine," in contrast to Landon's as

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preferably) of Landon's perfumed imaginings. Sweet surrender is first required, not moral policing of the artificer. Her use of derivative materials allowed her to weave together signs to create patterns of great intricacy, signs that could instantly call forth intense feelings from her contemporaries because they revered the idea of that intensity, and either they had experienced something like it before, or young readers only wanted the chance the poem provided to partake in the intensity they associated with the signs. Readers knew where the "second-order signs" were leading them (McGann and Riess 23); they needed that security to jettison their reserves and emotionally participate in Landon's poems. Landon's artificially evoked intensity could focus itself on the ideals she attached to her signs, namely, ideals of love whose absolutism necessitated that ecstasy be glimpsed and then followed by the equally exquisite sharp pains and dull aches that accompany ecstasy's loss. Nor were these kinds of catharses apolitical, but rather set on the fault lines that separated the middle and upper classes, the reformers and the conservatives. Preserving the status quo while bemoaning it, Landon's poems could be seen to fall on either side of the divides.

Because they were cliché-ridden and blatantly artificial, Landon's second-order signs made it easy for her to deny having sympathy with the sentiments of her work, helping her save face when meeting sophisticates who deemed sentiment beneath them. These were the sort who laughed at the craze for albums though they might give their nieces one, who never went to see popular plays though they would not miss the chance to be seen in a box at the latest opera. Perhaps they liked to wear masks that indicated their higher class and little else. Perhaps they feared not wearing

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expressed in her popular poetry (367).

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them. Regarding Landon's historical moment, critics' concentration on Landon's use of masks and other artifices has been too individualized, tending not to take into account the cosmopolitan world in which she moved, where the conflicting rules at play made almost everyone feel forced to hide something of themselves. In the same glittering London ballroom, members of the upper classes might be concealing the illicitly sexual nature of some of their relationships, those from the upsurgent middle rank might be pretending not to possess any ideals that would threaten their betters, and fashionably beautiful outsiders were letting their clothes and poses talk for them. Society contained as many masks of sentiment as it did of wit and merriment. Some secrets attached to a young man's reputation only made him appear the more interesting, but women were allowed far fewer – which of course turned their feelings themselves into great secrets. There was always something to strip away, something to discover.

Regarding Landon's biographical history, critics have tended to be more concerned with using accounts of her life to bolster their arguments about female masks than with getting the life right. The more information I gather about Landon's life, the more autobiographical her work seems to me. Many of the most personal lines are delivered as frames or asides to stories, in whose characters she realized the ideals of feeling toward which she was willing her heart. Landon plotted her life to follow the most fantastic yet tragic story line imaginable. It is her finest creation. In the end, all of the artifices of the life and work belong to Landon as parts of her multifaceted personality. She never cast off any pose or attitude permanently, but returned to it again and again. Virginia Blain, for one, recognizes that the artificiality

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of Landon's performance of "the 'poetess' as puppet/victim" enhanced her contemporaries' admiration for her poetry: "This was a very successful strategy because it left an implied space beyond the 'L. E. L.' masquerade for the reader to imagine some 'real' agent at work." Nineteenth-century readers could then suppose the Landon they best liked, as is happening once again:

> We can insert, to taste: a charming innocent girl overflowing with spontaneous feeling; a tragic victim of womanhood's betrayal by faithless love; a money-grubbing cynic dedicated only to exploiting the too tender sensibilities of gullible readers; a facile and entertaining verse-maker turning an honest penny to support her old mother; a tough professional woman determined to make her mark in the male-dominated literary world; a true poet who was unfortunately obliged to trade her genius – commodify herself for a living. (43)

Landon was to an extent all of these Landons and more; she presented all of them in her work, each one seeming to step from behind the veil to try to win the trust of those readers yet unconvinced by previous performances, while earning the doubts of the rest.

I am most interested in the Landon we tend not to like, the one whose notion of perfect love called for a woman's enthrallment that would send her to a short-lived sexual nirvana, then abysses of melancholy that led to death. Almost to her dying day, Landon continued to write about the ideal love that could so wondrously enslave and kill. Its fatal magic came into being only when her male poets and women had developed and were attuned to their illusions, or visions, and thus her love beget more

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isolation. She very rarely portrayed love existing between equals, Shelley's brothers and sisters. She had little interest in contemplating the possibility of equal return. However much we may like to look at other Landons, this is the one that seized the public's attention and affected it most throughout the 1820s and 1830s, leaving its mark all over Victorian poetry.

Recent critical attention makes it clear that among nineteenth-century British writers, Landon now stands out in the strength of her demand for thorough investigation. More facts about her life and work need to be excavated, and the whole of her corpus needs to be studied to improve our understanding of her achievements. My investigations have resulted in this two-part dissertation: a literary biography of Landon's early years, from birth up until the 1823 writing of her first major work, *The Improvisatrice*; followed by an analysis of her relation in subsequent years to the London social and cultural scene. In Part One, I examine Landon's fantasy life from childhood on; her family's shifting financial and social circumstances and her relations with her parents; her feelings about becoming a poet and her writing methods; the *Literary Gazette* and its audience that responded so enthusiastically to her poems. Part Two's shorter chapters are concerned with Landon in society, beginning with an attempt to address the problems thrown up by her (sometimes catty) denials of her work's authenticity at the parties and dinners she attended with frequency once *The Improvisatrice* (1824) had made her "a name." I look at her complex allegiance to middle-class gender norms. I examine the significance of her fashion consciousness and of her devoted interest in the London theatrical scene, noting how in her work she employed notions of womanhood then prevailing in the worlds of fashion and

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melodrama. To illuminate the reasons and means by which she was able to publish so much highly erotic verse, Landon's complex involvement with Jerdan at the start of her career is set forth in detail in Part One's Chapters Three and Four. Her affair with Jerdan well illustrates how unhelpful and ultimately false is the opposition of artifice to authenticity, of romance to reality, for the study of L. E. L. and her age.

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Part One: Early Life

(1802-1823)

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Chapter One:

A Smart District, a Smart Girl (1802-1809)

Letitia Landon was born in 1802 into a family with newly acquired wealth and fashionable status, and she was never able to forget it. The status and wealth did not last long, much of the money dissolving with the onset of her teenage years, but the fact that the poet had tasted prosperity in childhood colored her perceptions of her economic and social circumstances for the rest of her life. The adult Landon allowed her mind and thus her work to circle back continually, almost obsessively, to thoughts concerning London society and her feeling of being an outsider therein. Central to an understanding of the celebrated L. E. L., this preoccupation can, I believe, best be explained by Landon's having belonged to a family that, for a few short years, had securely claimed a place within that elect society.

Hans Town

These years were, roughly, from 1797 to 1809, when, as an army agent who successfully pursued profit while Britain pursued Napoleon, John Landon was able to house his growing family in the smart district of upper Chelsea called Hans Town. An

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elegant haven unsullied by London's throngs, Hans Town was designed and built in the late eighteenth century to house the wealthy and professional classes (Stroud 46). It possessed the cachet of being situated a few yards outside what was then an official boundary marker of the metropolis, Hyde Park Corner. Letitia Landon's first years were spent in Hans Town's peaceful, contented atmosphere, amid manicured gardens and rows of dignified Georgian houses. They were also spent hearing the news and gossip of a place called London, to which her parents seemed to be forever straying. Essential to Hans Town's contentment was its proximity to all the great doings of the capital, especially during the Napoleonic wars, when London was western Europe's largest city and "pre-eminent to an extent unknown before or since" (Petrie 83). The inhabitants of Hans Town could feel justifiably satisfied in their familiarity with the grand characters and controversies of the day, situated as they were, well within the bounds of England's most fashionable world.

No study of Landon's life can afford to overlook the ambience of Hans Town. Not only did it shape her first impressions, but Landon returned to this haven in her twenties, boarding throughout her years of greatest writing productivity at number twenty-two Hans Place, in the same square where she had lived as a child, in the same house, in fact, where she had gone to school. She would leave Hans Place only months before she left England altogether. Like her preoccupation with London society, Landon's physical circling back to the site of her childhood home could, in the end, have served only to remind her that she could never return to the prosperity of her earliest years -- when her only cause for sorrow was the frequent absence of her

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parents, and plenty of toys compensated somewhat for that. Perhaps with those carefree years in mind, the financially independent author would sigh, "Youth has sorrows, but maturity has cares, and the care is harder to bear than the sorrow" ("Female Portrait Gallery . . . No. 3" 480).

Landon's childhood circumstances can first be glimpsed by noting the interesting inclusion of John Landon's name in *Boyle's Court and Country Guide, and Town Visiting Directory* for 1806, an elite directory sensitive to "the removals and arrivals that are constantly taking place in the Fashionable World" (v). That world was limited in 1806 to 7500 noble and/or wealthy names when London's population stood at approximately 700,000 (Petrie 83-84). John Landon's inclusion would suggest that the young Letitia grew up surrounded by servants, fine furniture, and the various accoutrements of wealth; further, that her parents were concerned about keeping up their appearances in London society. The servants of the fashionably elect would have used Boyle's guide to locate the addresses of those intended to receive visiting cards, an invaluable source when the country estates were vacated each year at the start of the London season, which always went ahead, war or no war.

The Landons were not immune to this fashionable taste for "removals and arrivals." Though he could not match the rural acquisitions of his boss Alexander Adair -- who, according to Boyle's guide for 1796, needed estates in Kent, Suffolk, and Ealing Middlesex, plus a London address, to contain his wealth (2) -- John Landon felt he was making enough as an army agent to invest in 127 acres of country property in the early 1800s. As William Howitt states, while living in Hans Town the young

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Letitia "had occasionally been taken into the country to a farm in which her father was deeply interested, called Coventry-farm," near the border of Middlesex and Hertfordshire counties (126). John Landon may have also helped his brother buy the leasehold of Trevor Park, a large house and grounds five miles east of Coventry Farm, at what seems to be roughly the same time (Cass 66).[1] During one of the family's visits to Trevor Park, on April 3, 1804, Letitia possibly witnessed the birth of her only brother Whittington (*Account* 14).

Where precisely in Hans Town John Landon and his family lived in each of the years from 1797 to 1809 is not entirely clear, though most biographical accounts have contained no hint that Letitia Landon lived anywhere else but at 25 Hans Place up until her family's departure from Chelsea in 1808 or 1809. She was certainly born on August 14, 1802 in what Katherine Thomson terms the "genteel enclosure of Hans Place, number twenty-five" (*The Queens* 190). However, Boyle's directory for 1806 lists John Landon as living one block away, on the eighty-foot wide thoroughfare of Sloane Street, number 139 (108-09). Records of *Chelsea Land Tax* help to clarify the Landons' movements. The records state that John Landon was paying thirty-five pounds in tax annually from 1798 to 1803 for the property he owned on Hans Place (1798 Ntbk. 146; 1800 Ntbk. 162; 1801 Ntbk. 161; 1802 Ntbk. 139; 1803 Ntbk. 170). But the same records reveal that, from 1804 to 1806, John Landon owned nothing on

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[1]John Landon must have had a financial stake in Trevor Park, where he lived with his family from 1809 to 1815, but the exact nature of that stake remains unclear. He may have been paying for the leaseholds of both Trevor Park and Coventry Farm as early as 1804, and he may have done so without financial assistance from his brother, who possibly lived at one of these properties as a manager. See Chapter Two.

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Hans Place; instead, he was paying forty pounds worth of tax for his property on nearby Sloane Street, suggesting that, as his economic circumstances continued to improve during the war, he decided to move his family to a slightly more expensive accommodation befitting his rising status (1804 Ms. 128; 1805 Ms. 132; 1806 Ms. 132). These were the days of his and his wife's busiest social life. Anna Hall writes of once having run into Letitia Landon coming out of a shop on Sloane Street, which prompted the poet to remember being left behind there:

> That same day she spoke of having lived inSloane Street when a child. Her mother's *ménage* must have been curiously conducted: -- 'On Sundays my brother and myself were often left alone in the house, with one servant, who always went out, locking us in, and we two children used to sit at the open parlour-window, to catch the smell of the one-o'clock dinners that went past from the bake house, well knowing that no dinner awaited us.' (S. C. Hall, *Book of Memories* 275)

John Landon's satisfaction with his house on Sloane Street apparently wore out. In 1807 there is no record of his having paid tax for any property; in 1808 his name is listed again at Hans Place, at a property whose owner was designated merely as "occupier" the year before (*Chelsea Land Tax*, 1807 Ntbk. 149; 1808 Ntbk. 162). The Landon family may have lived there in 1807; regardless, John Landon definitely held the Hans Place property from 1808 until 1812, this time paying thirty-six pounds in land tax (1810 Ntbk. 175; 1811 Ntbk. 179; 1812 Ntbk. 165). Whether thirty-five, thirty-six, or forty pounds, John Landon paid a lot of tax compared to the bulk of

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Chelsea's inhabitants, most of whom paid less than twenty pounds for properties smaller than those that attracted the better heeled residents of Hans Town. Plus Hans Place could pride itself on being one of Hans Town's most exclusive streets; Landon's thirty-six pounds in 1808 would have ranked him among the poorest on the square, where he had neighbors paying forty, 106, and 158 pounds. But compared to the residents of Sloane Street, John Landon's forty pounds signified his living in one of the street's most expensive houses. We may reasonably suppose that he moved his family from the busier thoroughfare back to the square known as "snug Hans Place" to recover its feeling of quiet exclusivity.

This Georgian square where the poet spent much of her life could more accurately be called "an irregular octagonal space" (Walford 99) or "a secluded green oval built about with old-time two-storied brick houses" (B. Martin 31). Henry Holland, the architect of Hans Town and considered "the greatest architect of those days and those parts" (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 192), gave special attention to Hans Place, its unusual shape providing a grand entrance to the avenue of elm (or lime) trees that led to his magnificent villa south of the square (Beaver 345). Letitia would have walked in front of the villa's ornate iron gates each morning when she went to school at the house next door to the Pavilion, as the Doric-columned edifice was called by its then owners, Lord Peter and Lady Charlotte Denys. Both Letitia Landon's home and school backed onto the Pavilion's twenty-one acres of manicured gardens. One imagines that her pale little face, with its dark hair and gray eyes, was often visible from the nursery window as she peered out to admire the Pavilion's gooseberry bushes

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and cherry trees (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 192). From her perch Letitia would also have observed the deer in the gardens, the ice house surrounded by a representation of old priory ruins (some of its stone work taken from Cardinal Wolsey's Esher palace), and the miniature lake with an island in the middle (Faulkner, 2nd ed. 2: 342-44).

On visiting the grounds in 1814, Mary Russell Mitford gives some indication, in her description for her grandmother, of how they might enchant a poet: "They are really incredible. What do you think of a dozen different ruins, half a dozen pillars, ditto urns, ditto hermitages, ditto grottoes, ditto rocks, ditto fortresses, ditto bridges, ditto islands, ditto live bears, foxes, and deer, with statues, wooden, leaden, bronze, and marble past all count? What do you think of all this crammed into a space of about ten acres, and at the back of Hans Place?" (L'Estrange, *The Friendships* 273). We can only guess at how living next to this romantic theme park affected Landon. Maybe Landon began fantasizing escapes to imaginary islands here, Frank Sypher speculates. "The island is a recurrent image in her writing, where it is a symbol of the world of the imagination and of art and song and love, a refuge from the ills and stresses of the 'actual' world" (8-9). But one could as well attribute the innumerable ruins, grottoes, rocks, and statues that decorate Landon's work to her having often peered over the Pavilion gardens from her nursery window during those days when her creative instincts were first being formed.

Henry Holland designed all the houses on Hans Place (which have long since been torn down), including the one on the southwest corner where his son Captain Holland first resided, followed by John Landon's family. Katherine Thomson

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describes number twenty-five as "a charming house of its *genre*, with two pleasant drawing-rooms, and a third, forming a sort of conservatory boudoir, and looking into a strip of garden" filled with rose bushes (*The Queens* 192). Perhaps it was here, in these exquisite yet restrained surroundings, that the poet first observed the delicate pink at the heart of white rose buds, one of her many ways of imaging the idealistic tenderness of youth. And perhaps here she grew to adore roses -- so much so that, despite her awareness in later years of the flower's banality as a poetic instrument, she continually strewed her verses with images like that in "Geraldine," of a lover leaning "o'er the rose when the night-dews are weeping, / And deem[ing] its leaves written with sweet words of thine" (180); or, in "Thomas Moore, Esq.," of Titania awakening "from dreams which the rose, / Flung, coloured and fragrant, around her repose" (14) .

One does not need to read much of Landon's work to realize that her mind's eye was ever filled with flowers. In Chelsea she could hardly have avoided the flowers grown in the market gardens and botanical gardens near her house. Passages such as this one describing an autumn garden are written by one who strolled in all seasons through the huge quantity of Chelsea acreage devoted to raising both exotic and ordinary varieties:

> The snow-drop, crocus and epatica had led the way for the lavish profusion of the violet, the laburnum, the lilac, and the numberless roses that take so many shapes and all of them beautiful. But now the colours of the garden were at their nicest -- the dahlias, those magnificent strangers, spread their oriental magnificence white, scarlet, crimson, orange, like the livery of a

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> court, when a king assembles his nobles in the bravest attire. The geraniums were in full blossom, . . . nor was the rose herself wanting, the delicate species called Chinese. (*Traits and Trials* 41-42)

One of Landon's favorite variety of rose that decorates many a poem, the white moss rose could attribute its existence to the efforts of a Chelsea gardener, Mr. Shailer, who first discovered and cultivated the flower in gardens near Landon's house (Faulkner, 1st ed. 421). Nor, in poems like "Cupid and Swallows Flying from Winter," did Landon have to imagine what it would be like to live amid "scented airs" carrying the perfumes of citrus fruits as well as roses (*The Troubadour* 285). Though her heroines wandered in gardens typically set in Spain or Italy to smell these fragrances and mourned their loss when in northern climes, Landon would have caught a whiff of oranges and lemons on her own doorstep from the nearby Apothecaries Garden, established by Hans Sloane (Faulkner, 1st ed. 22).

In later years, when she could afford only to rent an attic room in a girls' boarding house on Hans Place, Landon was both enchanted and frustrated by the environment of her childhood, while she recognized that many of its attributes could exist for her London readers in ideal worlds alone. Considering herself a proud Londoner, she, for instance, felt ambivalent about Hans Town's peaceful elegance, a deliberate creation of its architect, Holland, who was instrumental in getting Parliament to pass an Act in 1787 to keep the streets of Hans Town "well-lighted and watched," the footpaths well paved. The clean streets and the day-and-night watchmen added value to the houses of Hans Town, enabling them to command high

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rents, thus increasing the elitism of the district (Faulkner, 2nd ed. 2: 341). Hans Place itself could claim that in the first decades of the nineteenth century it had been occupied by Jane Austen, Lord North, Lord Liverpool, Canning, and Percy Shelley at no. 41 (Blunt 147). But what pleased them could bore the longer inhabitant. The adult Landon would joke about how "dull" and "desolate" all the amenities had made life on Hans Place when compared to gritty, bustling London. She moans in a letter to Thomas Croker Croker, "'The fascinations of Hans-place!' vivid must be the imagination that could discover them.

'Never hermit in his cell,

Where repose and silence dwell,

Human shape and human word,

Never seen and never heard --'

had a life of duller calm than the indwellers of our square" (Blanchard 1: 272). The quiet suited her writing, of course, as well as her capacities of invention. She writes in another letter: "The streets are perambulated by such picturesque-looking gentleman in dark blue, that one forgets they are policemen, and fancies them into heroes" (1: 268-69)

That John Landon could afford to house his family in these secure surroundings by 1798, after working just four years as an army agent, indicates how remunerative both Adair's company and the army agency business in general became during the Napoleonic wars. "The respectable and prosperous house of Adair" could be found at the most respectable address of Pall Mall Court, at nos. 4 and 5 (Blanchard

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1: 4); Boyle's guide for 1806 lists Adair as sharing offices with his partners, Alexander Bruce, a Mr. Macdonald, and Landon (91). "It was a lucrative concern," writes William Jerdan, the *Literary Gazette* editor who knew many of London's great figures, "productive, as Mr. Adair himself assured the writer, of many thousands a year, and the splendid style in which that gentleman lived fully sustained the estimate." Adair's wealth not surprisingly increased the aspirations of all three of his partners ("Memoir of L. E. L." viii).

Though he never lived so splendidly as Adair, John Landon had come a long way by the time Letitia was old enough to enjoy the pretty dresses and rocking horses his labor produced. This level of prosperity, attained in her father's middle age, could not have been predicted by his first sustained attempt at establishing himself in a profession. Born in 1756 and soon growing into an adventurer of "active and enterprising disposition," the young John Landon left behind the village of Tedstone Delamere, Herefordshire, where his father had been rector since 1749, to pursue a career in the navy (Blanchard 1: 3). Landon also left behind four brothers and three or four sisters, who, with their mother, had to find a means of supporting themselves once the Rev. John Landon died in 1782 with no fortune. His eldest son John appears to have done little or nothing to provide for them. Moreover, the eldest son's rejection of the cloth may have caused some consternation in the rector's household; Letitia's father obviously could not abide the sober lifestyle that attracted numerous Landons, including two of his brothers. This line of Anglican clergymen started with a famous great uncle John, who, as a rector in Kent, became the first Landon to win

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acknowledgement for literary skill through his uncompromising pronouncements, which Katherine Thomson claims "were directed against his son [or rather, his nephew], the Rector of Tedstone Delamere" (*The Queens* 191). The uncle's pronouncements are epitomized by his *Answer to the Dissenting Gentleman's Third Letter*, where he states: "Schism is a Sin of so heinous a Nature, that it behoves every one, who lies under the least Imputation of it, most strictly and impartially to examine into the Grounds and Reasons of his own Conduct. Such a Scrutiny . . . I would seriously recommend to you and your Brethren" (157-58). Letitia Landon's father would have been well acquainted with this great uncle, who, if he did argue against the beliefs of Letitia's grandfather, must have ended his life on amicable terms with him. For the Kentish rector died and was buried in Tedstone, Delamere, in 1777, where a tablet on the church wall thus commemorates the stern theologian: "His religious principles and literary abilities were evident from what he did and wrote in vindication of the religion he professed to the utter confutation of all dissenters" (Blanchard 1: 2).

Forsaking his opportunities for eminence as a theologian or easy respectability as a clergyman, John Landon intead took voyages to such exotic locations as Jamaica and the southern coast of Africa, which provided him with plenty of material to fill his daughter's head with visions of strange, exciting foreign lands, but did little to advance him in his naval career. He had expected that his friend and relative Admiral George Bowyer would influence his promotion. But Landon does not seem to have progressed beyond the most junior officer rank of midshipman (Hall, S. C. *The Modern Poets* 178), and when Bowyer was forced to retire as a result of his losing a leg "with the

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most distinguished gallantry" in a victorious naval battle with the French in 1794 (Charnock 514), Landon's hopes of promotion dissolved, and he too left the navy. Ironically, having shunned the priesthood that his two brothers joined, John Landon then came to benefit from the success of the older of the two, Whittington, whose scholastic achievements at Oxford eventually gained him the patronage of the Duke of Portland, and thereby the position of Provost of Worcester College in 1795. For John, Whittington's "influential connections" – including the Prince of Wales, for whom he had been a favorite tutor (*Account* 4) -- became a substitute for those of Admiral Bowyer, and through John's and Whittington's "mutual friend," Mr. Churchill, John secured with the worthy Adair a position highly prized in wartime (Blanchard 1: 4).

Army records indicate that Landon had become a partner in the house of Adair and Co. as early as 1800. For example, *A List of the Officers of the Army and Marines* for February 1800 states that the 25th (or the Suffex) infantry regiment, commanded by Colonel Lord George Henry Lennox, relied on "Messrs Macdonald, Bruce and Landon" for outfitting its soldiers with uniforms (173). As a partner in such an estabished agency, Landon profited greatly from the War Office's wasteful policy of making its colonels responsible for buying clothing from merchants with whom the agents negotiated (Emsley 37). Colonels were paid with government funds for uniforming full regiments, regardless of how diminished in size were their actual regiments, and the agents skimmed off part of the profits from those funds (Forbes 155). This profiteering was going on while ill equipped and underpaid British soldiers -- far less smartly attired than the knights whom Letitia Landon would acclaim in her

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works -- were enduring the conditions of war on the continent. Poorly paid as officers, colonels thus received just a little extra money on the side; whereas the agents grew wealthy from the War Office's "vicious and unsound" system of equipping troops during the Napoleonic wars (Fortescue 898-901).

After three years of such employment, John Landon would have had no doubts about his capacity to afford a wife, particularly if that wife came with fourteen thousand pounds, plus a horse and groom (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 191-92). How Catharine Jane Bishop became so endowed remains a mystery. Her ancestors are said to be Welsh, and she may have inherited her wealth from her mother, Letitia Landon's namesake, who "was the natural daughter of an aristocratic family," Jerdan believes, though he admits some confusion over the "mystery" of Letitia Bishop's "parentage." Nor can he identify the source of a "life-in-come" healthy enough for the grandmother "to live genteely" (*Autobiography* 3: 180). In contrast to such vaguely aristocratic origins, John Landon's own noble roots could be traced directly back to a John Landon who was Gentleman Yeoman of the Wine-Cellar for James I and Charles I, and whose son and grandson carried similar courtly titles in their service to Charles II (*Account* 7-8). The Landons held their property in Monnington Straddle and Credenhill, Hereford, remaining wealthy until a Sir William Landon lost the family fortune in the South Sea Bubble and was forced to sell the estates (*The Queens* 191). In Letitia Landon's play *Castruccio Castrucani*, the eponymous hero delivers the speech:

> The name of every noble ancestor's
> A bond upon the soul against disgrace!

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'Tis no vain pride that looketh to their honours,

And taketh thence a high security

That we prove not unworthy of such names. (Blanchard 2: 51-52)

Shortly after writing these lines, when the play was not yet finished, Landon would (mis)quote them in her novel, *Ethel Churchill* (1837), in an aside in which Landon as narrator is clearly speaking for herself:[2]

> I frankly confess that I have a respect for family pride. If it be a prejudice, it is prejudice in its most picturesque shape; but I hold that it is connected with some of the noblest feelings in our nature. Is it nothing to be connected with the history of one's country, and to feel
>
> The name of every noble ancestor
>
> A bond upon your soul against disgrace?
>
> . . . I believe the pride of blood to have a beneficial influence. It is much to feel, that the high and the honourable belong to a name that is pledged to the present by recollections of the past. (1: 96)

Her social reputation then severely damaged by sex scandals, Landon in 1837 was clinging to ancestral bonds. She saw her father's heritage as having served as an impetus for her to succeed as a writer; in what would be her last finished novel, she wanted to point both to her success and her noble heritage, as if they confirmed one

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[2] Scattered throughout all of Landon's novels are asides like this one that are every bit as autobiographical. The three-volume length encouraged her to drop in many confidences that have as yet not been remarked upon.

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another. "We see how time has honoured them [our ancestors], and hope / Ourselves for equal honour," Castruccio Castrucani is not ashamed to state (Blanchard 2: 51).

Content with the certainty of her father's family having once possessed rank, Letitia Landon did not discover, or at least did not talk about, her mother's lineage, however noble it may have been. The whiff of illegitimacy surrounding her grandmother, Letitia Bishop, might account in part for her saying little about Catharine Bishop's origins, but does not explain why nothing is known of Catharine Bishop's father, not even his Christian name, nor when he died. Catharine appears to have lived with her mother in Chelsea until just before her wedding. The marriage certificate states that both she and John Landon were members of Chelsea parish, where, at St. Luke, the Rev. Whittington Landon performed the ceremony for his older brother on 15 June 1797 (*St. Luke, Chelsea: The Register-Book* 118). The bride was twenty-two or twenty-three years old, the groom forty-one (*Account* 14). Catharine would have had the added satisfaction of marrying by licence, instead of the far more common banns, another sign of her husband's prosperity.

Katherine Thomson, Landon's most reliable and informed biographer, notes that John and Catharine Landon still seemed an "apparently happy couple" when Letitia was born five years later -- the implication being, though Thomson never states it, nor is it reported elsewhere, that their marital happiness did not last (*The Queens* 192). From all accounts, the father's and mother's personalities differed greatly. John Landon is described as "an amiable man of an easy and sanguine temper" (1: 198); a man of "simple-heartedness, kindly nature, and quiet worth," who, rather than wanting

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just to make money and hobnob in London society, took much pleasure in experimental farming (Jerdan, "Memoir of L. E. L." ix). We can reasonably presume that it was Catharine Landon, not John, who steered the couple into London social circles and away from their son and daughter. The only one of Landon's biographers to write about her mother from personal acquaintance, Katherine Thomson describes her as "a thin, small woman, with a countenance full of animation," and very expressive eyes, "a person of cultivated mind, warm feelings, great penetration, considerable wit," who surrounded herself with "literary and intellectual society." Catharine Landon was "accustomed also to mingle with a small number of friends of good position" whom, despite financial difficulties in later years, she did not lose: "for her adverse circumstances never lowered her in *any way*" (emphasis K. Thomson's; *The Queens* 197, 202). That is, Catharine never ceased to appear to her contemporaries what she believed herself to be: in the words of Katherine Thomson's husband, "a gentlewoman both by education and in feeling" (A. Thomson).

One of her constant, "intimate" friends was the famous actress Sarah Siddons, whose friendship Catharine probably shared with her mother.[3] "Amongst fashionable

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[3]A few sources solely attribute the poet's contact with Siddons to Siddons' friendship with the grandmother, Letitia Bishop, bypassing altogether Catharine Landon's relationship with Siddons (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 3: 180). But these sources lack the authenticity of Katherine Thomson's account, supplying no personal anecdotes and appearing merely to repeat one another. Siddons would have been nineteen years older than Catharine Landon, but then Catharine's husband was equally senior. One could argue that Siddons would have found it easier to be friends with both women than with just one of them; Catharine and her mother lived within walking distance of one another for many years. Letitia Landon's resentment of how her mother treated her as

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ladies she [Siddons] counted many and constant friends. The doors of Mrs. Montagu's house (centre of intellect and fashion) were always open to her; and we hear of one occasion when all the 'Blues' swarmed round their 'Queen Bee,' and she wore the celebrated dress embroidered with the ruins of Palmyra" (Kennard 140). Just how much new wealth and intellectual charm Catharine Landon possessed is indicated by the fact that she won the friendship of this legendary star of the stage and fashion leader, who in the 1780s and 1790s served as "the glass 'in which our noble youth did dress themselves'" (Boaden 179, 402). Catharine was a good enough friend by 1802 for Siddons to interest her own daughter in Catharine's baby girl. When L. E. L. became famous, Catharine enjoyed telling people that Siddons' daughter Sally (who later died of consumption) "'worked the first cap ever put on my Letitia's head when a baby'" (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 202). Commenting on this infant poet's crown in another work, Thomson gushes, "Could the Muses have done more for her?" (*Recollections* 2: 75). Surely not, as she and Catharine Landon saw it. The cap knitted by the great actress's offspring foreshadowed the celebrity that would one day be knitted into the letters L. E. L. by a public seeking new female icons.

As if confirming an inheritance of greatness, the poet would dedicate her first book to the actress, *The Fate of Adelaide* (1821), in which she claimed that she had been "ever accustomed to look up to Mrs. Siddons" ([iii]). Catharine Landon would have been justified in thinking that, by the gentility of the example she set her daughter and by inviting members of "literary and intellectual society" into her house whose

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a child may have caused her not to credit Catharine Landon with the friendship that

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cultivation rubbed off on Letitia, she had so formed her daughter's character that Letitia was able to slide easily into both the public's eye and polite society when only in her early twenties. Letitia Landon followed her mother's example, at least to the extent that she manifested similar sociability and winning enthusiasm. Though she liked her father more, Letitia was more like her mother. She looked like her, being only slightly larger, and she inherited Catharine's tendency to quick yet graceful movements. Moreover, she possessed her mother's passionate temperament, with all its fiery as well as warm-hearted tendencies (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 197).

Estranged from her mother as an adult, the poet provided friends a few hints that the causes for the separation had deep roots, that her earliest memories of her mother were of missing her. Anna Hall had no trouble believing that Letitia Landon "had endured the wrongs of a neglected childhood" and charging her mother with the crime. Hall visited Landon weekly throughout most of the poet's writing career and was appalled that "her mother I never saw. *Morally* right in all her arrangements, she was *mentally* wrong, and the darling poet of the public had no loving sympathy, no tender care" from Catharine Landon. Her grandmother's care gave the poet her only experience of the "love of motherhood" (emphasis A. Hall's; S. Hall, *Book of Memories* 273). How attentive was Letitia Bishop to her namesake during childhood is unclear; she probably lived close to her grandchildren, but no reports exist of her presence then.

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allowed her to dedicate *The Fate of Adelaide* (1821) to the famous actress.

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The charge of parental neglect against Catharine Landon is supported by the absence of her name in all the reported incidents from Letitia's childhood, particularly during those years when the Landons lived in Chelsea. Ironically, even Letitia's baptism contributes to the allegation. We can assume both parents were present at the baptism, on October 18, 1805 at St. Luke Church (then also called All Saints, but now called Chelsea Old Church), the same thirteenth-century church where they married, and, incidentally, which Sir Thomas More had regularly attended. Letitia was just over three years old. In contrast, her little brother Whittington was baptized when he was only two months old, on June 21, 1804, implying that Letitia's parents regarded their son's christening as a matter of great importance, and then, aware they had neglected his older sister, took a year to get around to having her receive the same religious rite (*St. Luke, Chelsea, County*).

Most of what would be considered motherly duties were taken over by Letitia's nurse, to a degree that seems unusual even for the upper middle classes in that period -- who typically paid their nursery governess less than their cook, and were content with "any one . . . for the first seven years" who took care of the children's clothes and kept them out of trouble (A. Hall, *Pilgrimages* 226). The few memories left to us by Letitia and her brother about these years center around themselves and their nurse, to whom, along with Whittington, Letitia was most fondly attached. In her one semi-autobiographical piece, "The History of a Child" -- which, despite having the authenticity of its morose sentiments questioned, provides insight into the author's memory of her past -- Landon writes:

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> No one loved me but an old nurse -- why she should have been fond of me I know not, for I gave her much trouble; night after night has she wakened with my crying. . . . Her face, with its bold Roman profile, its large black eyes, is still before me as I used to see it bending over my crib, and singing, or rather croning [sic] me to sleep with the old ballad of "Barbara Allen." (*Traits and Trials* 283-84)

Faced with any of childhood's disappointments, Landon would turn to her nurse rather than her mother for solace. Sometime before she turned five, for example, Letitia learned to read from an invalid neighbor who scattered ivory letters on the floor and made her form them into words, usually giving her "rewards" of some sort to take home. She would enter the house triumphantly, putting her rewards on display in the drawing room before she shared them with her brother. But, if the smart scholar came home without a prize, no blood relative was good enough: Letitia rushed for comfort upstairs to her nurse, no doubt shedding a few tears in her matronly bosom (Blanchard 1: 7).

One might read into this little ritual that, addicted to praise for her verbal skills by age five, Landon had already become dependent on approbation, that she needed rewards of some kind to be a happy child, to feel significant and worthy of love. Fortunately for Letitia's sense of well being, the child was clever. "She must have been very quick at that early age," her brother surmises, "for she seldom came empty-handed [of rewards], and I soon began to look for the hour of her return, for which I had such very good reasons" (1: 7). Those ivory letters fascinated Letitia Landon,

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imbuing themselves on her memory as a means of playfully discovering language and being praised for the discovery. In her book of children's stories, *Traits and Trials of Early Life*, she mentions them twice, particulary in the "Indian Island," where Francis takes it on himself to teach his little sister Marion the alphabet and a few small words, spending "hours amusing her with a box of ivory letters" (71, 161, 159).

Landon's nurse surely influenced the formation of her imaginative faculties, reading to her or encouraging her to read ballads and old romances in the Chelsea nursery. Landon "composed from her infancy," Emma Roberts tells us. "Long before her tiny fingers could shape the letters into words, she had composed volumes of poetry" (7). Landon writes Samuel Carter Hall, "I cannot remember the time when composition in some shape or other was not a habit" (*Book of Memories* 269), which likely means that she was composing before her nurse and brother or in solitude. Whatever form they took , Landon's high spirits had to be handled by her nurse. Around age six, when she was attending a girls school at number twenty-two, Hans Place, Letitia often refused to melt into the orderly ranks of children as they filed by the Landons' house. She would see a family servant or her nurse and make a dash for home. Whittington remembers: "On one of these occasions . . . her nurse had purposely thrown herself in the way of the school and brought home her charge." Undisciplined by a nurse not responsible for reprehension, only prevention, Letitia then tried to take charge of one of the expensive toys in the nursery.

> My sister, on her arrival, wanted me to descend from a magnificent rocking-horse on which I chanced to be mounted, and on my refusal

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> to surrender, she threw a tamboureen at me; it struck me on the face and brought me to the ground. The hurt was worse than she imagined it to be at the moment, but it brought out her natural disposition -- for she petted me more than ever, and I had everything my own way a long time after. Indeed it was the luckiest hit for me ever made in the nursery. (Blanchard 1: 8)

Landon's dominance over her brother, exhibited boldly here, continued throughout their lives. During their childhood she supplied Whittington with his greatest pleasures and pains, leaving him dependent on her for providing the next game, the next excitement, the occupation that would keep the pair stimulated for hours. He obviously enjoyed being "petted" by his older sister though knowing that only if Letitia willed it to be so could he have "everything my own way." Brother and sister were, as Blanchard puts it, "inseparable" (1: 4). Landon's biographers make much of her generosity to her brother, beginning with her sharing of those rewards from the neighbor. But one should not be reluctant to speculate over the sense of pride and satisfaction that this energetic little girl must have received from dominating her brother completely, especially in an age that expected more from its boys. Camilla Toulmin Crosland remembers of her youth: "As a rule, men were absolutely lords and masters, and little girls had to submit to the tyranny of brothers – younger brothers even – because they were boys" (17).

Sources disagree about when another girl was born to John and Catharine Landon. She was born in 1806 or 1812, and little is known about her. Neither Letitia

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nor Whittington formed an attachment to the girl named Elizabeth Jane, largely because her constant state of her poor health required that she not play with her rough siblings.[4] Letitia appears to have told at least one friend that the age difference between her sister and herself likewise prohibited their intimacy, but, if there were only four years between them rather than ten, that excuse looks weak (*Account* 14; K. Thomson, *The Queens* 197; Montgomery-Massingberd 512). Letitia and her brother simply took little interest in a frail sibling who could not share their enthusiasms.

Rowden's school

Landon's teachers, like her parents and nurse, did little to curb the child's exuberance. Her parents showed a degree of ambition for their daughter in enrolling her at Frances Arabella Rowden's school in, roughly, 1808. There remains much confusion over whether she attended for a couple of years, starting as the school's youngest pupil at age five, or for a few months, when she was seven (Blanchard 1: 8; Croker 31; W. Howitt 126). The accumulation of anecdotes that connect Landon with the school suggests that she was a pupil there for about two years. The girls school has since become well known to readers of nineteenth-century women's literature for the many talented women writers it produced. The unmarried "Mrs. Rowden," a respected

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[4]The potential evidence for Letitia's sister being named Elizabeth lies in one letter only, written in the 1820s; here she refers to an "Elizabeth" that might be her sister,

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author of four works as well as the school's headmistress, would go to great lengths to nurture any prospective talent she thought she detected among her pupils. It should be no surprise, then, that the brilliant little Letitia was excused for her rambunctious behavior during school walkabouts near her house. In the words of one teacher (presumably Rowden), Landon's "only fault" was that of being unable to "walk steadily from joyousness of spirit" (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 193-94).

Letitia's cleverness and energy so impressed Rowden that, probably near the end of Landon's two years at the school, Rowden presented the future poet with a dress sewn by herself. "It was long regarded as a robe of grace," Blanchard remarks (1: 8). Like the cap knitted by Siddons' daughter, this mantle from the hands of a woman writer was seen by Letitia, her family, and probably Rowden herself as an annunciation of the girl's potential for greatness. But then Rowden longed to be so impressed. Mary Russell Mitford thought the schoolmistress a little too willing to detect intellectual promise in her charges. A former pupil, who as a writer was beginning to fulfill the hopeful predictions, Mitford declares in an 1811 letter to her father, "Fanny Rowden cannot mean to assert that all who have breathed the air of 22, Hans Place, must be female Solomons! If she does, Heaven help her! Don Quixote, when he took the fair nymph of the inn for the daughter of the Governor of the Castle, did not make a greater mistake" (L'Estrange, *The Life* 145).

As an adult, Landon would number among her friends and acquaintances several of the school's former pupils who became writers. She met Caroline Lamb

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but might not be -- underlining how extremely distant her relations were with this

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and Mitford when they had already published several works. And three other former pupils began writing for publication well after they had become intimate with the famous L. E. L.: Anna Maria Hall, Rosina Bulwer Lytton, and Emma Roberts, the latter choosing, like Landon, to board in her old school's building. Seeing these linkages, Thomas Crofton Croker suspects that each sparked the other's desire to become famous and wonders whether, despite her claims to the contrary, Landon would have composed any poetry without having gone to Rowden's school: "The influence of Miss Landon's literary popularity upon the mind of Miss Roberts very probably caused that lady to desire similar celebrity. Indeed, so imitative are the impulses of the human mind, that it may fairly be questioned if Miss Landon would ever have attuned her lyre had she not been in the presence of Miss Mitford's and Miss Rowden's fame, and felt its influence" (35). Indeed, among all its literary protégées, the faculty would have taken most pride in the professional success of Mary Russell Mitford, whose fame as a sketch writer and dramatist compared with L. E. L.'s. Mitford attended the school at Hans Place from 1798 to 1802, beginning at age twelve, and her liking for Rowden as a teacher soon blossomed into a close and lasting friendship (Astin 22-25). Convinced of the girl's genius, Rowden determined to circumvent what Mitford calls her "unwilling application." She set aside time personally to educate Mitford's dramatic and literary tastes and encouraged her to compose plays and poetry. In "the height of a dramatic fever" herself, the older writer made her enthusiasm more tangible for Mitford by often taking her to see stars like

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sister whose mere name cannot as yet be ascertained.

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Kemble at Drury Lane.[5] That Rowden's first book, *A Poetical Introduction to the Study of Botany* (1801), was published during Mitford's time at the school must have likewise prompted Mitford to consider writing for publication. After she began publishing her work, Mitford would return as an honored guest to the school, often having to sit through student recitations of her poems (Croker 37; L'Estrange, *The Friendships* 273).

Mitford was enrolled in the school when it was superintended by Dominique St. Quentin,[6] a French emigré who gives every appearance of having been profoundly committed to the intellectual development of his female pupils -- among whom Letitia Landon could count herself, thanks to St. Quentin's wish to keep teaching long after he had relinquished his headmaster role. His background would seem rather to have disinclined him to make a career of stimulating the minds of English school girls. The son of an Alsatian nobleman, St. Quentin had served as secretary for Louis XVI's ambassador to the Court of St. James. But then he became so impoverished by losses made through unspecified kinds of financial "high play," coupled, in all probability, with losses incurred by the upheavals of the French Revolution, that he grasped at the chance to instruct children at two schools in Reading (Sherwood 123). At one of

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[5]Mitford also likely took part in a few plays produced at the school; for Fanny Kemble reports, "Mrs. Rowden's school in Hans Place had been famous for occasional dramatic representations by the pupils" (1: 109).

[6]*Chelsea Land Tax* records indicate that Francesca Rowden assumed control of the school in 1806. Before then, St. Quentin's name is listed as the one assuming responsibility for paying the forty pounds in tax, implying that the school's building was slightly larger than the Landons' house (1800 Ntbk. 162; 1806 Ntbk. 183).

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those, the Abbey School, St. Quentin may have taught Jane Austen, who attended the widely respected girls school from ages nine to eleven (Austen-Leigh 26). He definitely taught both Frances Rowden and the novelist and children's writer, Mary Sherwood (*née* Butt), at the Abbey School.

This experience not only would have impressed St. Quentin with the level of learning girls could achieve but would have left him with a respect for women's writing, or at least its capacity to attract buyers. For, on losing the rest of his fortune to his passion for gambling, the French nobleman was forced in 1795 to accept the offer of Miss Mary Butt to publish by subscription her first book (*The Traditions: A Legendary Tale*) for his benefit. With the proceeds he set up another girls school in the house on Hans Place. After Rowden served as governess for the Countess of Bessborough, St. Quentin employed her and appears to have fully supported the woman whom he would later marry in her producing for publication *A Poetical Introduction to the Study of Botany*, *The Pleasures of Friendship* (1810), *A Christian Wreath for Pagan Deities* (1820), and *A Biographical Sketch* of modern and classical writers (1821). In sum, St. Quentin's efforts at the Chelsea girls school and its forerunner in Reading helped to set in motion a chain reaction by which one woman was able to spur another to take what was then a bold, brave step and put her name in print, who in turn spurred another, and so on.[7]

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[7]The actress and writer Fanny Kemble should also be added to the list of the school's stars. She attended Rowden's school in Paris in the 1820s. Kemble remembers "our lesson of geography, grammar, history, arithmetic, and mythology (of which latter

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Katherine Thomson matter-of-factly states that Landon acquired from the school a love of poetry and the ability to speak French. St. Quentin's instruction of his native language in an aristocratic accent and idiom provided Landon with her "pure French accent" -- quite an asset, according to Katherine Thomson, who bemoans that Victorian children are forced to take their instruction from lower-class Frenchmen (*The Queens* 194). Landon's prolonged association with the school, its building, and its former pupils leads one to conclude that what she gained from the place requires a little more investigation than Thomson provides. We can glean some idea of what Landon might have learned from works by Rowden and by St. Quentin, who himself wrote a wide range of textbooks. Basically, St. Quentin's educational philosophy enabled children, girls as much as boys, to respect the powers of their own minds. He states frankly, in his introduction to *A Complete System of Geography* (1791), that his "principal object" in the book is "the education of young ladies . . . it is generally more neglected than that of boys" (xvi). And in *The First Rudiments of General Grammar, Applicable to all Languages* (1812) he asserts that, at his school, he has observed "children of five or six years old" (Landon's age upon entering) demonstrate that they understand "the structure and mechanism" of their language, "the use and signification of every word" they employ (xv, viii).

St. Quentin would tell three or four girls grouped around a table that they had come to an age when they were ready to learn grammar, "which teaches you how to express your *Ideas* by *Words*." Words are "the *Signs* of our ideas," and an idea is "*the*

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subject I suspect we had a much more thorough knowledge than is usual with young

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mere representation, or image, in our own mind, of a thing that came to our knowledge through the five senses" (emphasis St. Quentin's; ix-xi). In other words, what goes on in a child's own mind matters, her ideas matter and ought to be expressed. He reminds teachers that they must "find a way to the heart, as well as the understanding," of a student (xiv), that children do not lack the capacity to understand, but rather they need their attention to be fixed: "Care must be taken to prevent their impatience, to awaken their curiosity, and flatter their self love . . . " (*A Complete System of Geography* iv). Mary Sherwood calls St. Quentin "a man of great talent . . . peculiarly calculated to draw out the intellect in his pupils." He would "lower himself to the children's level, since they could not rise to his." She remembers how St. Quentin first "called me into his study to feel the pulse of my intellect." After asking her if she knew any French, history or other school subjects, and receiving a series of blushing negatives, St. Quentin wisely said, "Tell me, Mademoiselle, what you do know?" She "stammered 'Latin – Virgil'" and then burst into tears, at which he "laughed outright, and immediately set me down in his class, and gave me lessons for every day" (125-126).

Probably Landon's extraordinary confidence in her poetic powers was founded in part on her short but promising experience at Rowden's school, where she shined brightly enough to win that "robe of grace." Throughout her life she held onto the faith that she carried around inside her head a world of fantastic images that, once glimpsed by readers, would mesmerize and uplift them. It was a child's fantasy that

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English girls)" (1: 82).

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the adult would never relinquish. Through his knowledge games and a teaching style Sherwood describes as "lively and interesting in the extreme," St. Quentin would have encouraged Landon to value her childish mind and made her thirsty to learn more (126). He would, moreover, likely have been the first noble exile that Landon encountered, his every word and manner reminding pupils like herself that they took lessons from a member of the French aristocracy (173). Perhaps Landon's penchant for romanticizing noble exiles, exhibited in her novel *Francesca Carrara* and in countless poems, was sparked by her association with St. Quentin and the many other emigrés of the French aristocracy who visited twenty-two Hans Place on a regular basis, sporting "their powder and puff, high heels, and fine manners" (L'Estrange, *The Friendships* 21). Even Landon's abiding interest in the theater may have been stirred by the talk of the stage and the green room that St. Quentin and Rowden often engaged in at the school.

Frances Rowden surely must deserve most credit for the fondness for poetry Landon acquired at her female academy. "Quite a character in her way," the poetess is reputed to have been energetic, kind, and wholly dedicated to her mission of educating young women (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 193) -- so much so that she tended to lose track of her glasses, keys, handkerchief, and might have to ask the students to hunt for the book that she held in her hand. Mitford thus pictures her beloved teacher: "Her little elegant figure and her fair mild face, lighted up so brilliantly by her large hazel eyes, correspond exactly with the soft, gentle manners which were so often awakened in a delightful playfulness, or an enthusiasm more charming still, by the impulse of her

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quiet and ardent spirit." We do not have a list of Rowden's favorite works, but Mitford mentions reading Shakespeare's works for hours with her, plus Virgil's, and, when she should have been practicing the harp, some Voltaire (Croker 36-37; Astin 24). Landon, of course, may not have read any of these writers because she attended the school at a much younger age than Mitford did, but she probably heard of them there, and the prompt thus received would have helped motivate her to open their covers not long afterward.

Also, Landon's astonishing capacity in adolescence to memorize epic-length poems has often been noted without any explanation given for her interest in doing so. Rowden was the likely motivator. Passionately believing in the importance of children committing literature to memory, she regularly instructed her pupils to memorize passages from well-known works and appears to have made the task fun and an excuse for acclaiming their talents. Pupils recited on the final day of term when prizes were handed out by the likes of Caroline Lamb and Mary Russell Mitford, similar to the practice at Eton and Harrow -- but not to the goings-on at the average young ladies finishing school. "For several years [Lamb's] graceful form was seen entering the long, low room . . . leading by the hand her little boy." Katherine Thomson records a former pupil's recounting how, at the end of the day, Master Lamb would be placed on a high table to recite passages from Shakespeare, "with wonderful emphasis for such a child. I well remember his giving the 'Seven Ages of Man.'" These details matter to Thomson largely because Letitia Landon witnessed them; in some way they may have inspired her to achieve as a woman writer a level of stardom yet to be contemplated in

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those early days: "How little could Lady Caroline imagine that amid the smiling, eager faces then uplifted toward her, there was one for which many an eye would afterwards turn with an intense eagerness as the three magic letters L. E. L. were uttered" (*The Queens* 193-94).

Admittedly, Rowden's enthusiam for poetry did not outweigh her sense of moral rectitude. Just as Landon claims of many of her heroines, Rowden appeared to her pupils "pure" as well as passionate, guided by emotions whose strength can be only guessed at from unspoken marks on the social surface. Lamb's biographer notes Rowden's "habit of quoting the elevating thoughts and pious verses of distinguished personalities," much to Caroline's distaste (but not, one suspects, to that of the less rebellious Letitia) (Blyth 25). Rowden's two books of poetry, written expressly for young ladies, exhibit ardent feelings housed in upright opinions, feelings that do not dare to outrun the bounds of gentleness or tenderness. In the introduction to *The Pleasures of Friendship*, Rowden goes so far as to specify, "By love is only meant those delicate movements of the soul, that tenderness of esteem, that reverence of virtue, and sacrifice of all selfish enjoyments, which form the essence of this sentiment, when abstracted from the grosser considerations of sense" (viii). Such comments give an insight into the foundation of values from which Landon launched her beliefs about poetry, her work both springing from and reacting against different elements of this orthodoxy. Along with many another poet, the headmistress should receive credit for having nursed Landon in the idea that, to be truly poetical, a female character should appear tender, sweet, gentle, shy. Indeed, Landon may have learned

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her lessons too well. It seems understood in her poetry that heroines should *seek to* appear ever thus, with the most disastrous consequences to their physical well being resulting from the inevitable struggles with their turbulent inner worlds.

Rowden would also have contributed to Landon's notion that flowers offered the poetess her most perfect emblems of womanhood. Rowden decided to write *A Poetical Introduction to the Study of Botany* (1801) to help teach female pupils the properties of a few plants -- what could have been a more obvious topic of interest, as their school was surrounded by some of the most beautiful gardens in England? -- because she found the language of Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden* (1791) "frequently too luxuriant for the female imagination" (though she liked the poem enough to call it "elegant"). Sapped of their Darwinian sexual vigor, Rowden's plants are yet cast in the most "poetical" light. The lily of the valley, for instance, displays "each pure image of her mind." Many of the sentiments Landon would later attach to her roses and violets ostensibly accord with Rowden's, for whom any flower that flourished in the shade could be called a "timid maid" and presumed to hide its blushes (36, 114). Only when speaking of the flowers of the rue does Rowden discover more dramatic emotions, and then only because she refers to the "Genius" of the actress Dorothy Jordan, who weeps for the unhinged Ophelia, "by love distracted and by love betray'd" (58).

Her pupils were likewise expected to conform to the schoolmistress's conservative ideals of womanhood. In case this portrait of Rowden's school is in danger of insinuating that the establishment, situated in the refined placidity of Hans

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Place, shouldering the iron gates of the exquisite Pavilion, should be regarded as some kind of intellectual hotbed for girl geniuses, we must be reminded that, like so many female academies of the era, Rowden's attracted the bulk of its clientele by professing itself a school of elegance, intent on inculcating in its young ladies a wide range of feminine accomplishments: dancing, sewing, singing, drawing, penmanship, a little French and Italian, etc. Designed to provide a measuring stick for evaluating the worth of middle- and upper-class womanhood, the list could incorporate the drier subjects of botany and geography, and, it must not be forgotten, poetic composition. A girls school needed to provide just enough learning, but not too much. After all, a lady's knowledge, talent, or skill was supposed to decorate her person like a piece of fine jewelry, not be obtrusive, certainly not "blue."

In her novel *Miriam Sedley*, Rosina Bulwer Lytton used her own experience at Rowden's school to depict "Miss James's superlatively *genteel establishment*," that "emporium of elegance," whose mantlepiece -- decorated with "little card-board hand screens, portraits of divers bunches of grapes, and bunches of flowers, no doubt the production of 'the young ladies'" -- declared to the visitor the institution's dedication to the fine arts of femininity (213, 221; *A Blighted Life* xiii). Astin refers to Rowden's as "a fashionable school in London," noting that Rowden herself taught "Italian, music, dancing and drawing," and that Mitford took "a prominent part in the Plays and Ballets which marked the end of each term" (22-24). Landon was thinking of Rowden's when, in her short story "Frances Beaumont," she drew Mrs. Cameron's "very select establishment," whose "large and old-fashioned mantel-shelf" contained

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"divers ornaments a little the worse for the wear"; Mrs. Cameron's "systems were always of the newest and most approved order"; her school was famous for its pupils' dancing and harp performances, its prize days functioning as grand exhibitions of every species of feminine accomplishment and concluding with a ball (*Traits and Trials* 187-88). The forerunner of Rowden's school receives Jane Austen's approval in *Emma*, in which Mrs. Goddard's is described as a school where "a reasonable quantity of accomplishments were sold at a reasonable price, and where girls might . . . scramble themselves into a little education, without any danger of coming back prodigies" (Honan 33).

Landon did not attend Rowden's school long enough to receive the feminine polish that its instruction and peer pressure provided, but long enough to know what she missed. As a promising seven year old, Landon was forced to leave when John Landon moved his family to East Barnet in the Hertfordshire countryside, never to enroll his daughter in any kind of school again. Among Landon's scattered references to school life in her published work, she returns most often to the theme of accomplishments, particularly the inferiority or superiority a young woman feels, depending on the amount and quality in her possession. Her short story, "The History of Mabel Dacre's First Lessons," supplies one painful scene after another to illustrate the sorrows of the unaccomplished. First, the empty-handed Mabel is shamed before her female cousins whose sewing, embroidery, and drawing produced gifts for her grandfather. Then she is sent to the Misses Smythe's school, where "the rest of the girls, finding at the age of ten she could do nothing more than read and write,

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immediately set her down for a dunce," and Mabel's "desire for popularity" soon becomes "an absolute passion." After six disastrous months at the school, she receives from the same cousins a "scientific" piece of music, a box of colors "(for drawing Mabel had not the least taste)," "a volume of erudite patters for lace, bead, and other work," and "an elegantly bound French treatise on Botany." Then she is placed in another school, Miss Weston's, where she lapses into a "state of depression," "hopeless with observing so much of accomplishment." But, thanks to Miss Weston's persevering efforts, Mabel finally acquires accomplishments, wins prizes, and turns into a "tall, elegant girl" (*Traits and Trials* 133-44). By way of contrast, the pretty, accomplished Frances Beaumont cannot but be beloved by her schoolmates: "No patriot fresh from an harangue to the people, no General in the first flush of victory, and its consequences, illumination, and public dinners; not even these have a popularity that comes more immediate and home to them than a popular school girl. Her circle is small, but its triumph is complete" (190).

Perhaps Landon was envisioning what she might have experienced. In two 1834 letters Landon pokes fun at what she calls in one "my neglected education," and, in the other, "my want of accomplishments." She recounts her "sadly distressed" cousins' efforts to investigate the extent of her stupidity: "'Can you play?' 'No.' 'Can you sing?' 'No.' 'Can you speak Italian?' 'No.' 'Can you draw?' 'No.' At last they came down to 'Can you write and read?' Here I was able to answer to their great relief, 'Yes, a little'" (Letter to Francis Mahoney; Blanchard 1: 80-81). By sending her to Rowden's and then by hiring tutors in the country, her parents showed they knew

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she ought to be acquiring a sufficient range of accomplishments. Yet the young girl demonstrated little interest and no talent, and she was able to mature without having to worry whether she possessed enough accomplishments to make her attractive. When she emerged into society as a young woman, she could no longer escape the accomplishments' measuring rod, and it affected not only how she came to view herself in relation to other women but also how many men and women viewed her poeticizing. She could not avoid being judged as either excessively ornamental or not ornamental enough. Among her female peers, she never could fit in. She forever felt a gulf stood between herself as a professional writer and the more well-rounded, accomplished women she encountered in the various tiers of London society. By choosing in her twenties to live amid schoolgirls in the house where she had gone to school, Landon was to some extent seeking after the popularity, friendship, and respect of playfellows that she had been denied by leaving school at an early age. Nevertheless, she would have been reminded of her "want of accomplishments" as often when among schoolgirls as when mixing in society. The girls, after all, were trying to acquire the requisite badges of femininity while, in the attic room above the school, Landon scribbled for cash.

As a teenager, Landon likely felt cheated at not attending her only school long enough to gain its full benefits. Katherine Thomson mysteriously comments that though Landon was not long a regular pupil at the Hans Place school, she later would attend classes there "so as to derive advantage from her plans" (*The Queens* 194). One would very much like to know when Landon had formulated "her plans" enough to

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attend classes. Most likely she did so some time between 1816 and 1820, when her family lived nearby in Brompton and before the school was relocated to Paris in the 1820s. Regardless of the questions that persist over when and how long Landon attended Rowden's school, what can be determined is that the school left its imprint on the rest of Landon's days, influencing her choice of career and, more fundamentally, her intellectual development. The proud little girl came away from the school with the notion that she was blessed with something more than a sharp intellect, with a joyous exuberance that delighted her teachers and found echoes in the poetry to which they introduced her. She may already have had the inkling she would, like Rowden, write and publish poems one day. Because of both what she gained there and what she was not there long enough to gain, Rowden's school then possessed a lifelong hold over Landon, drawing her repeatedly back to "that silent square" and to its "house dedicated to education" (1: 194).

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Chapter Two:

Moody Tomboy (1809-1819)

From 1809 to 1815 Letitia Landon lived with her family in Trevor Park, a rambling seventeenth-century house situated a mile south of East Barnet in the Hertfordshire countryside. The house was surrounded by four acres of grounds, a small percentage of which exhibited itself as manicured garden, the rest, not touched by human hands for many a decade, remaining cloaked in untrammelled vegetation to all but the more adventurous. Like Hans Place, Trevor Park contained in its domains enough silence to allow a young girl to build extensive daytime fantasies. Indeed, it better suited daydreaming, its silence deeper and more romantic than any the patrolled Hans Place could capture. Here was stillness unrestrained, away from the rules of watchmen, schoolteachers, and leaders of fashion whose polish alone could declare their presence. Here for six formative years Letitia would explore dark, shady spaces rich in tangled undergrowth, climb unpruned trees bent to a child's liking, and watch wild flowers come and go at their leisure. Having grown bookish to a willful degree, Letitia brought her poems and travel tales outside to these playgrounds, where she had time and space to explore mental as well as physical landscapes. Here she would create worlds so filled with color and adventure that to her they posed a viable

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alternative to what she called "the actual." The budding poet discovered at Trevor Park that any time she liked she could choose to live elsewhere.

Her father's choice to live elsewhere than Han Town may have been made years earlier than his actual move to the country in 1809. Though, while living in Chelsea, he was making lots of money and many fashionable acquaintances, John Landon seems to have discovered -- perhaps through visits to his brother in rural Hertfordshire or through observing farmers in Chelsea market gardens -- that he preferred the simple pleasure of farming. As mentioned previously, in the early 1800s John Landon bought the leasehold of Coventry Farm, 127 acres on the Middlesex-Hertfordshire border, between Highwood Hill and Edgeware, owned by the William Lee family (Cass 66). For the next few years, John and his wife, daughter, and son made repeated trips to Coventry Farm and, five miles east of the farm, Trevor Park. His brother, Thomas Sylvanus Landon, meanwhile superintended Coventry Farm for him while the army agent tried to concentrate on supplying necessities to wartime soldiers from his office in busy Pall Mall Court. But John's mind must have often drifted northwards, and when he thought he had made enough money to be able to devote less time to army agency business, he moved with his family to Trevor Park.

How much wealth he had accumulated cannot be reasonably guessed because John Landon's financial stake in the house named after Baron Thomas Trevor (1658-1730) is shrouded in vagueness. Some sources assume that Letitia's father owned the leasehold for the old mansion, and presumably he could have afforded it in his "season of prosperity" (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 198). Yet Frederick Cass states that John's

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brother "tenanted" Trevor Park while John and his family lived there, the implications being that Thomas rather than John bought the leasehold and that Thomas' family possibly resided in the same house with John's (the house was owned by the widow of Dr. Hugh Smith from the 1790s until 1818, when, as a result of her death, Trevor Park was torn down, much to Letitia Landon's dismay) (48, 69; Roberts 7). However, no writer has discussed the latter possibility, nor does Letitia mention anyone else at the house other than her immediate family, the servants, and one cousin who served as her tutor.

Uncertainty also surrounds John Landon's loss of money from Coventry Farm. Katherine Thomson attributes his hardship there to the "mismanagement of his bailiff" (*The Queens* 198), but when he suffered these losses and their relation to the family's move from Hans Place to Trevor Park cannot be determined as yet. Cass speculates that John Landon moved to Trevor Park because of the "unfortunate results" of his investment in Coventry Farm (66). But other sources leave open the suggestion that those unfortunate results did not occur until after the Landons had been living at Trevor Park for many years and that John Landon's losses were a factor in his family's giving up Trevor Park as well as Coventry Farm in 1815 (Blanchard 1: 8-9; K. Thomson, *The Queens* 198). Seemingly oblivious to the existence of Coventry Farm, Jerdan thinks that John Landon was able to pursue "the cultivation of a fancy farm" solely on the property at Trevor Park. He calls the house and four acres Landon's "toy," insinuating that because Landon still relied on the army agency business to support his family his "agricultural pursuits" never ranked above an interesting hobby

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("Memoir of L. E. L." ix). Landon must have visited London fairly often on business during his first three years at Trevor Park; for, as *Chelsea Land Tax* records reveal, he maintained his Hans Place house up through 1812. However, his removal of his family to Trevor Park and, by 1813, his relinquishment of the Hans Place house imply that John Landon's heart was firmly planted with his family and crops in the Hertfordshire countryside. He most likely held Coventry Farm while living at Trevor Park; for, unless he was too busy tending to his 127 acres, no farming enthusiast would have let most of Trevor Park's four acres remain neglected. Nor was there enough land at Trevor Park to keep him occupied throughout the year, and, besides, the Landons had a gardener.

Sweetly, sorrowfully alone

The profound isolation Letitia Landon experienced at Trevor Park, especially after her brother went away to school in 1812, depended in part on her father's daylong absence from her playgrounds. Letitia's best memories of her father center around his homecomings from work in the fields, and, given that he returned by road in the evening, he surely was coming from Coventry Farm. Twice in her works Letitia Landon refers to waiting at the gate for her father to come home, namely in her short story, "The History of a Child," -- "the basis" of which, she told Samuel Carter Hall,

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was formed by her "childhood . . . passed at Trevor Park" (*Book of Memories* 269).[1] In the short story, she precedes the account of her early evening vigils with a portrait of a girl so wrapped in the solitude of her own imaginings that she spares no thought for either parent, beyond the oblique reflection, "No one loved me but an old nurse" (*Traits and Trials* 283). But on befriending her father's dog Clio, she wonders to where the pointer disappears each evening at six and follows him to "the small gate that opened on the road":

> I soon heard the sound of horses' hoofs, and felt half inclined to run away. I was so glad I did not; for my father took me up in his arms and kissed me with the utmost pleasure, saying -- 'So you have been waiting for me;' and taking the horse's bridle in one hand, and me in the other, we walked across the park together. I now went to meet him every day; happy, happy, hours that I past on that gate. . . . (299-300)

Thanks to Clio, the girl finds out when her father comes home, and, even more surprisingly, that her father took delight in seeing her waiting to greet him. The authenticity of this account is supported by Letitia Landon's tribute to her father at the end of *The Troubadour* (1825), composed shortly after his death:

> I cannot but think of those years

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[1]Blanchard is convinced that Letitia Landon invented the melancholy tone of "The History of a Child" to make her story romantic (1: 23-24). But then Blanchard is seeking to establish throughout his biography that Letitia Landon did not commit suicide; hence, he takes every opportunity to point out how genuinely happy and cheerful his subject was at most times in her life. Whether or not one accepts Blanchard's view, "The History of a Child" remains a valid starting point for

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When happiness and I would wait

On summer evenings by the gate,

And keep o'er the green fields our watch

The first sound of thy step to catch,

Then run for the first kiss, and word, --

An unkind one I never heard. (252)

Her favorite memory of her father was then largely taken up with waiting for his arrival, when in the spring she could observe "the sweet languor of the pale primrose" and "the purple arabia of the breathing violet," while the dog sat at her feet. "Those fair fresh banks rise distinct on my mind's eye. They colour the atmosphere with themselves, their breath rises on the yet perfumed air, and I think with painful pleasure over all that once surrounded them, I think of affections gone down to the grave, and of hopes and beliefs which I can trust no more" (*Traits and Trials* 300-01).

A delicious gloom haunts the poet's memories of Trevor Park, whether happy or sad. The happy times could not be perpetuated, she tells us, and the sadness she experienced there gave her a taste of all that the rest of life had to offer. Letitia Landon would not have refuted Katherine Thomson's assertion that her "only *really* happy days" were at Trevor Park (emphasis K. Thomson's; *The Queens* 196), but, ever uncomfortable with the notion of unclouded bliss, she would have put it differently. The short account of her life she gave Samuel Carter Hall does not single out her childhood at Trevor Park as a happy time. It just states that when her family was

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understanding her life because of the amount of incident and detail it contains. On no

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forced to leave Trevor Park, "the realities of life began with me." Of her time there she states: "I used to invent long stories, which I was only too glad if I could get my mother to hear. These soon took a metrical form; and I used to walk about the grounds, and lie awake half the night, reciting my verses aloud" *(Book of Memories* 269). A touch of melancholy seems to lie behind even this most straightforward of remembrances, as if the child, frustrated at her mother's inattentiveness, felt she could find no one to appreciate her poetic performances, and thus no one to appreciate her. In another children's story, Landon observes, "Nothing discourages a child so much as the impossibility of pleasing" (*Traits and Trials* 61).

Yet this child must have pleased at least some of the time. Her cousin Elizabeth Landon reports that Letitia could keep her parents entertained for an hour or two in the evenings by reciting the fantastic tales she had constructed during her daily rambles in the garden (Blanchard 1: 9). Indeed, Letitia's parents flattered her so much by their attention to her lengthy monologues that, according to Katherine Thomson, they "spoiled her, not so much by overfondness, but that pride in her talents that intoxicates" (*The Queens* 200). Yet Thomson also states that Letitia's mother had little time for her when they lived at Trevor Park because Catharine was busy caring for her invalid daughter Elizabeth, of whom Letitia was probably jealous (197; Blanchard 1: 27). Reflecting on the boyhood of Devereux in a review of Bulwer Lytton's novels (1831), Landon is concerned about what happens to "the warm love of

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reasonable grounds can it be regarded as pure fiction.

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the child thrown back upon itself by unkindness and unjust preference," which prompts her to turn autobiographical:

> We shall only say, fortunate are those who do not sympathize with the affectionate, yet unloved boy, whose heart becomes sullen as sadness always does when utterly unshared. There is terrible injustice in the treatment of children: how arbitrary is the authority exercised over them! . . . Preference, and its consequence, neglect, is the child's most cruel wrong. The bitter feeling of comparing our own lot with another's will come quite soon enough without its being taught in infancy. Early injustice is like the thread of silkplanted with the tulip – it colours all the after leaves. ("Living" 444)

Landon is looking back on her youth and identifying with what Bulwer Lytton traces in Devereux: "the warm emotions concealed – the affectionate temper checked – restraint deepening into reserve, and self-dependence hardening into self-reliance" (444): habits of concealment which Landon notes many times in her works. Her parents listened to the budding poet, but they did not listen nearly enough to suit her, perhaps because Letitia had become so intoxicated with visions of future greatness that she made unreasonable demands for an audience.

Moreover, Letitia exploited an arrangement whereby she and her brother each had "days" when they could decide the play activity -- ostensibly to give Whittington some chance of having his way -- to subject him to long bouts of listening: "On her days," Whittington recalls, "I had to undergo either the account of 'her island,' that is,

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of what she would do as another Robinson Crusoe, or some fairy tale or verses of her own composition; or perhaps the battle scene from the 'Lady of the Lake,' for the whole of that poem I think she knew by heart" (Blanchard 1: 18). Poor Whittington. The battle scene, or Canto V, "The Combat," lasts over six hundred lines. The little brother might have been somewhat compensated by Letitia's recitation of the blood-and-guts fight between Roderick Dhu and Fitz James ("No stinted draught, no scanty tide, / The gushing flood the tartans dyed" (Walter Scott 212)).

When not playing with or listening to Letitia, Whittington would watch her pace up and down a lime-tree walk, as she did sometimes for hours, all too contented with her isolation. On her garden jaunts, she would allow only a long stick, dubbed her "measuring stick," to accompany her. If Whittington or anyone else intruded on her solitude to ask why she was carrying around the stick while talking to herself, she would put them off with the reply, "'Oh, don't speak to me, I have such a delightful thought in my head.'" Letitia could not be bothered to answer such pedestrian queries, immersed, as her cousin claims she was, in her make-believe "world of happiness" (Blanchard 1: 10, 18). At the start of a new book, she would select a tree that complimented the book's tone and read beneath that tree for days until she reached the end; then, on her walks, she would pretend the garden was set within the world of the book and build fantasies from its images.

How well I can recall the time
When first I turned thy page,
The green boughs closed above my head

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A natural hermitage.

And sang a little brook along,

As if it heard and caught thy song.

Recalling when she began *The Lady of the Lake* or *Marmion*, Landon thus refers in "Sir Walter Scott" to reading his poems at Trevor Park.

I peopled all the walks and shades

With images of thine;

The lime-tree was a lady's bower,

The yew-tree was a shrine:

Almost I deemed each sunbeam shone

O'er banner, spear, and morion. (45)

"The History of a Child" gives a picture of her further meanderings in the gardens: "I used to wander in the almost deserted shrubberies, where the flowers grew in all the luxuriance of neglect over the walks, and the shrubs become trees drooped to the very ground, the boughs heaving with bloom and leaves. In the very heart of one of these was a large deep pond, almost black with the depth of shadow." The "solitary pond" starred with water lilies contained "a little island which seemed to float upon the dark water." Among the willow trees that hung over one side of the "mournful mirror," one shot out, its bough forming a bridge over which she would climb to reach the island (*Traits and Trials* 295-96). Here the imputed melancholy signifies the girl's delight in her possession of these hidden riches. It is sadness of the sweetest kind.

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In "Two Doves in a Grove. Mr. Glover's Exhibition" (1823), Landon gives an example of the kind of fairy tales she was reading at Trevor Park, as "I lay / Half buried by long grass and violets, /. . . / . . . with my book pillowed upon the moss, the sun shut out / By the dark yew o'erhead." The two doves in Glover's painting remind her of "one favorite tale"

> . . . of two lovers, true, though tried by all
> Of peril and of sorrow that the heart
> Could bear and yet not break. There was one,
> A gentle Fairy, pitied them, and gave
> A gift of quiet happiness at last:
> And two fair Doves, in the calm greenwood shade,
> Their pleasant life was past. (300)

Landon read this tale of the doves "In the hot noon," when she was "wont to seek a little lonely nook, -- / . . . / My graver task too often laid aside / For this sweet secret idleness," this "passionate happiness." Contemplating sorrowful love near the "pond" and the "willows" was a joy superior to any other she then knew and perhaps would ever know. For all the painting's "luxuriant blossoms" of June and the "paradise of passion" Landon detects in the eyes of its two doves, Glover's work on display in London is made subordinate to Landon's childhood memory of a fairy tale and its rural reading. Returning to London, she closes the poem, "Love, oh love! . . . / . . . gold and care / Are thy death sickness" (300).

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The actual pond at Trevor Park was not that large, but it did contain a small island that fueled Letitia's fantasy of achieving the perfect separation of one of her favorite heroes, Robinson Crusoe (Cass 68; Blanchard 1: 10). Nancy Armstrong notes that Robinson Crusoe presented its young readers with the attractions of "a totally self-enclosed and functional domain where money did not really matter." And a sizeable number of those readers were girls expecting a life of domesticity; Armstrong cites what Maria Edgeworth and her father's *Practical Education* (1801) said of books like Robinson Crusoe: "To girls this species of reading cannot be as dangerous as it is to boys: girls must soon perceive the impossibility of their rambling about the world in quest of adventures" (16). I doubt that the Edgeworths reckoned on female readers like Landon, who, even when she faced this and like impossibilities, did not completely resign herself to them. Calling the opening of *Robinson Crusoe*'s pages "an epoch in my life . . . an epoch in every child's life," Landon continues in "The History of a Child": "After reading that book, I lived as if in a dream, indeed I rarely dreamt of anything else at night, I went to sleep with the cave, its parrots and goats, floating before my closed eyes; I wakened in some rapid flight from the savages landing their canoes. The elms in our own hedges were not more familiar than the prickly shrubs which formed his palisade." Fittingly, the little girl who embodies Landon's childhood self "could not understand . . . Robinson Crusoe's lamentations over his solitude, to me the most unreasonable things in the world. How little did I share his joy when the English vessel came and bore him once more over the sea to his

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native England. It was a long time before I had any wish to read the rest" (*Traits and Trials* 294-95).

Letitia did find a book to rival *Robinson Crusoe*, and this one possessed the additional charm of being a gift from her father (Blanchard 1: 21). Bound in Russian leather and filled with pictures, the four volume edition of *Arabian Nights* that Letitia read would have cost John Landon a princely sum. She loved the pictures and the smell of the leather yet did not hesitate to bring the expensive volumes out amid the plants and insects. "For a time their world made mine," relates the narrator of "The History of a Child." While reading them, the little girl had to abandon her island to seek the brighter environment of a "small old fashioned flower garden," where colorful beds "were confined by small edgings of box into every variety of squares, ovals, and rounds," and with a bee house at one end. But those flowers would have paled beside the brilliant technicolor of her mindscape while reading *Arabian Nights*. Over two decades later, at the age of thirty-four, Letitia Landon could write: "The delight of reading those enchanted plates, I must even to this day rank as the most delicious excitement of my life." What excited her most was not, however, the antic characters and their adventures -- though, for instance, the "brazen giant sitting alone amid the pathless seas" thrilled her imagination. She was most impressed by Destiny's remorseless handling of these characters, i.e., the "fated arrow" that was supposed to sink the giant. Recalling Prince Agib's slaying of his young male friend who lived alone on an island, she remarks, "Fate laughs at human evasion -- the fated morning comes one false step, and even in the very act of tender service, the knife enters the

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heart of the predestined victim" (*Traits and Trials* 302-03).[2] One doubts whether most ten-year-old English girls would have been as taken by the idea that humans could not escape such brutal and impersonal ends.

The Fate of Adelaide (1821) records Landon's first tribute to the *Arabian Nights*. It is long and worth pondering for any student of her verse.

> How oft I've linger'd o'er the page, which told
> Of him, the wand'rer of the sea and all
> The marvels he beheld! and when Gulnare
> Unveil'd the glories of the ocean depth,
> Or when the Persian and his ill-starr'd love,
> United in the grave, found sweet repose!
> And him, the Fortunate, whose gorgeous hall
> Kings could not match – Aladdin, who possest
> The mystic lamp; alas! that days like these,
> Of fairy wonders, now should be no more.
> How have I shudder'd, when the warning voice
> Pass'd o'er the careless city, but in vain!

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[2]We cannot know for certain if Landon thought as much when she read the tales in childhood, but she likely had some kind of similar impression, with this account recording both her memory of reading *Arabian Nights* and her adult reflections on that memory. The adult, anyway, showed no concern for sparing *Traits and Trials*' intended audience of children from her dark reflections; indeed, *New Monthly Magazine* in its 1836 review of *Traits and Trials* praised Landon's stories but considered them too depressing for children to read. "It would be cruel . . . to put into the hands of the very young such melancholy views of human existence" (102).

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When the dread curse came down, and one alone
Liv'd (fearful life!) in the sad solitude.
I've hung on the strange witchery, till I've deem'd
The bright creations visible, and seen
Th' enchanted palaces before me rise:
A few brief moments, and how chang'd the scene!
The song is broken off, the shatter'd lute
Spends its last breath in dying murmurings,
Lost in the clang of arms; the fountain wave
Is red with gore, its crystal beauty gone;
And flowers, trodden on the blood-stain'd earth,
Shed their last odorous sigh upon the dead;
While she, their fairy mistress, captive now,
Is pale and senseless in yon warrior's arm! (46-47)

Landon's capacity to see "bright creations" pales in significance beside her pleasure in imagining their destruction. The "alas" at midway laments that she can no more shudder over the tales. But she has well absorbed their lessons in storytelling: change the scene in an instant; indulge in oriental luxury only to spew blood over the fountains and flowers; seek to induce the shudder; and exploit the arousing power of images of beautiful, vulnerable women. The *Arabian Nights* habituated Landon to the idea that violence and sexuality move the heart to make the most pleasurable fairy visions.

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Landon considered her need for long periods of solitude as a child one more manifestation of her poetic soul, with its ecstasies and aches and its genius for composition. As she saw it, her imaginary powers required privacy for their full exercise, as did her extreme sensitivity. Landon never could brook the mockery of her feelings. Her many portraits of child geniuses share a sadness born of their prescience, their capacity to see into the future and realize that the world will not treat gently its most sensitive. I think she reflects a private side of her childhood self when, in "The Hall of Statues," she apostrophizes a statue of a "Child playing a Lyre," seeing in its expression

> Evidence of deeper thought,
> Higher hopes, and keener fears,
> Than should mark such infant years.
> . . . . . .
> . . . deep and thoughtful eyes,
> Where the soul of genius lies;
> Even now the shade is o'er thee
> Of the path which lies before thee;
> . . . . . .
> . . . the wreath
> Which the poet wins by death. (411-12).

Poets, by their exceptional nature, are cut off from fellow creatures, "fraught / With . . . the melancholy pride of thought / . . . the fine mind, / Which raises but to part

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it from its kind" (*The Golden Violet* 243). In her novel *Romance and Reality* Landon laments over the romantic recluse who cannot compose poetry -- the only means the poet has of connecting with humanity -- but who feels the same "melancholy" that she thinks all poets experience in their solitude. The recluse Algernon[3] possesses, like all poets including herself, "that susceptibility to external impressions -- that fancy which . . . invests all things it looks on with a grace not their own -- that intense feeling which makes so much its own pain and pleasure" (1: 111). For Landon, the isolated child destined to be a poet is inclined to swing to emotional extremes by her very nature. *Erinna*, Landon's poem on the evolving feelings of the female poet, declares the poet's familiarity since childhood with "The dreamy happiness which solitude / Brings to the soul o'erfill'd with its delight," while she has likewise "From earliest childhood [been] all too well aware / Of the uncertain nature of our joys." Her joyous visions, moreover, are conceived in "my lonely hours," born out of the painful awareness of her isolation (*The Golden Violet* 246, 256, 264).

Landon returns again and again in her poems to the scene of the young future poet alone in nature, lost in visions of his or her own making -- exactly how we know she occupied much of her time at Trevor Park. It is not too much to surmise that the feelings she associates with this poet are likely to have been hers. Whether inspired by a sad tale, indulging in self pity over (real or supposed) parental neglect, believing

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[3] In this and some other early passages in the first edition, the character Landon would later call Algernon is called Reginald. In the Preface, Landon apologizes for the character's having two names, and in subsequent editions of the novel the character is always called Algernon.

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herself misunderstood, or possibly witnessing death for the first time, Landon began to sense at Trevor Park the intoxicating pleasure of pain that so marks her works. She fell in love with sorrow, or rather the powerful emotional experience that her sorrows could give her, and, as the source of the greatest sorrow, she fell in love with death. In her autobiographical story, three deaths occur, all of which she may well have experienced at Trevor Park: that of the dog Clio, who had to be shot -- "It was one of those shocking spectacles which remain with you for your life. . . . I could not cry, I stood pale and trembling beside the mangled remains of what I had loved so dearly" (304); the death of the peasant girl Lucy, who had helped decorate the dog's grave with flowers; and the death of Lucy's grandmother from shock (312). Fittingly, the one tree in the speaker's island is a yew: "I would remain hidden in the deep shadows of that gloomy tree, for the whole of my playtime, I was there 'Monarch of all I surveyed / My right there was none to dispute'" (*Traits and Trials* 297).[4]

Other likely sorrows contained in the story include the speaker's memory of overhearing a servant refer to her as "such a plain thing" when she was dressed up for "a juvenile ball," a ball which turned out to be "my earliest experience . . . of the solitude of a crowd" (297). With her distinctively turned-up nose, Letitia Landon was never reputed a beauty, and in many poems she attests that crowded London ballrooms made her feel a stranger to the bubbly and the gay. The story's speaker also remembers suffering at the loss of her nurse, whose departure was kept secret from her

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[4]Landon cites lines 1-2 of Cowper's "Verses, Supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk."

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and who, calling her clever charge "'a great scholar,'" had given her the prized copy of *Robinson Crusoe* (286). We cannot ascertain if Landon received the book and lost her nurse in this way, but the account of the girl secretly stealing out of the house one morning to see the nurse leave, then flinging herself on the dewy grass in despair, only to catch "one of those violent colds to which I have always been subject," is accurate at least to the extent that Landon caught violent colds throughout her life, as her letters testify (291-92). This one at Trevor Park possessed the added torment of producing coughs that were echoed through the house by the "vaulted roof" of her bedroom. Likewise true of herself is the speaker's remark, "I was subject to violent head-aches," by which she seeks to explain why no one paid attention to her pale face and puffy eyes the morning after she learned of her nurse's departure.

Landon's story can also be trusted for its descriptions of the house, a "large, old and somewhat dilapidated place," where the heavy hall door weighed more than she could pull, and where the portraits by the oak staircase made her feel she had intruded on their peace, like that of the "stately lady in black, with a huge white ruff that encircled a face yet paler." The child seems to have imagined that the ghosts of such figures deemed her and her family unworthy interlopers in a house that had long belonged to members of the aristocracy and still contained some of their treasures. The "cold, glassy, immovable eyes, which looked upon, as if they hated, the little trembling thing that was creeping along below" were probably painted by one of the seventeenth-centuries most famous artists (287-92). For when this "ancient, gabled

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structure" was torn down in 1818, the widow of Dr. Hugh Smith requested in her will that her paintings by Vandyke be buried in the family vault (Cass 69).[5]

Haunted by the histories of its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century inhabitants, Trevor Park leant itself to envisioning other worlds besides the present. Its most fabulous inheritance from the seventeenth century was the legend of the flight of Lady Arabella Stuart, cousin of James I, whose forbidden love for the commoner William Seymour induced her to marry him secretly. In his anger, the King imprisoned Seymour and forced her to travel to Durham in June 1611 by way of Thomas Conyers's Church Hill House, the name then given to what became Trevor Park. She feigned illness there, prolonging her stay until she could plan an escape for herself and Seymour. Then, like many a Landon heroine, Arabella dressed herself as a man one night and stole away from Church Hill House on horseback to meet her lover; she intended to flee to France with Seymour. Failing to meet Seymour as planned, she had to set sail without him and was captured in the English Channel, while he made it to France safely on his own. For the next four years Arabella languished in the Tower of London, going mad, again like many a Landon heroine, and dying there in 1615.

If anything, Sypher may be understating the case: "The old house at Trevor Park, grand but decayed, with its romantic but unhappy story, must have made a vivid impression on L. E. L. and she later drew on her memories of the house in writing the

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[5]As an adult, Landon possessed some reverence for the artist's work; she comments on a Vandyke portrait in her novel *Romance and Reality* (1831), noting the character's eyes "and that stately courtesy, which seems to say, 'I owe it to myself to do no wrong'" (477).

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description of old country houses that appear in her novels" (11-12). Musing over the legend of Arabella Stuart in one of her favorite books, Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature*, Landon would have felt the pride of intimacy at having lived in the house from which the doomed lady attempted her escape, of having long ago dusted off the legend and relived its incidents and passions. Probably she chose not to write about "the Lady Arabella" because Felicia Hemans beat her to it in her *Records of Woman* (1828). But throughout her writing life past legend competed against present custom to provide her with subject matter. Adoring ruins of any sort, Landon remained particularly attracted to the idea of an old mansion emptied of its aristocrats -- all of whom perished, or all but one -- whose portraits seem to affirm the legends that surround them. Francesca Carrara, for example, feels the chill of the "gloomy baronial hall of Avonleigh" (*Francesca Carrara* 3: 139), while Emily pauses before the painting of her uncle hanging alongside many covered pictures in an old empty house "for years and years connected with every tradition in the county" (*Romance and Reality* 2: 204). In Landon's verse drama *The Ancestress*, Bertha tells her old nurse, "Thy strange tales / Made me forget" that "In the east turret's old deserted rooms," Jaromir found "a lovely portrait almost hid / By the gray cobwebs and the gather'd dust" of a beautiful, legendary woman with "loose dark hair, / Wild as a sibyl's" (*The Venetian Bracelet* 130-32).

As a girl, Landon very possibly became acquainted with country folk like the blind old woman in "The History of a Child," who talked only of the legends connected with a great house belonging to an extinct noble family. Naturally, all the

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legends "were of a gloomy tendency" (*Traits and Trials* 310). Landon's speaker tells us that the cottage where the old woman lived "stood alone in a little nook between our park and the churchyard; yew trees were on the one side and our cedars on the other" (307). Trevor Park, in fact, lay immediately south of East Barnet Parish Church, built in 1100 by the monks of St. Albans for the local woodmen and swineherds (Joyce 42). The fanciful Letitia, when with her parents she attended this Norman church dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin, must have stared with interest at the mounted arms of the noble families who had once lived at Trevor Park (Walford 330; Cass 174). And, when she wandered by the church and its cemetery on an evening, she would have seen "the last red shadows turned the old Gothic lattices of the church into rubies," as the little girl did in Landon's story, while on her way to visit the old woman's cottage (*Traits and Trials* 309). What more could a dreamy child ask for than to live in a site soaked not just in personal histories but in religious symbolism, where the prayers of those whose bones lay beneath her feet had been offered up with untold amounts of hope and despair? Confirming the poet's attachment to this place, Emma Roberts relates how, when she was "about to pay a visit to some friend in the neighbourhood of East Barnet" in 1836 or 1837, Landon "charged me to make a pilgrimage to the spot which was once Trevor Park, and not fail to think of her as I stood among the gravestones in the village churchyard" (9). Landon's absorption with graves, exhibited in poems like "The Nameless Grave," "The Mountain Grave," and "The Soldier's Home," must have begun in the churchyard next to Trevor Park, where,

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as her characters are prone to do, she likely knelt beside the gravestones and fantasized about the lives commemorated there and the unending sadness of their deaths.

The notion that Landon first developed her morose sensibility at Trevor Park is supported by the fact that, in her autobiographical story, rather than glossing over her life at Trevor Park to make it palatable for her intended audience of children, she paints that period in the blackest of colors. More pessimistic still, the authorial voice tells its young readers that the pain she suffered as a child foreshadowed what was to come. Landon seems to authenticate this pessimism by flagrantly drawing attention to her situation as an isolated professional woman: "To know yourself less beloved than you love, is a dreadful feeling -- alas, how often has the remembrance of that bitter hour come back again by some following hour too sadly like the one that went before -- How often have I since exclaimed, 'I am not beloved as I love'" (*Traits and Trials* 292). She goes so far as to end the tale (and the book) with the reflection that "childhood . . . images forth our after life. Even such has been mine – it has but repeated what it learnt from the first, Sorrow, Beauty, Love, and Death" (312).

However, in the report he gave of their childhood to Laman Blanchard, Whittington Landon refuted the melancholic portrayal of "The History of a Child." Referring to the period before he left for school in 1812, Whittington asserted that his playmate never showed signs of frailty, emotional or otherwise. But Whittington could not possibly have known his sister's mind in her guarded solitudes, especially in the lonely years after he left for school. Moreover, like Blanchard, Whittington sought to refute all assertions about L. E. L. which could be used to support the idea that she

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committed suicide, especially those describing her as morose. Whittington was able to disbelieve that Letitia when a girl would privately indulge her sorrows because, I think, she began early her lifelong practice of not subjecting her sentimental side to the pain of exposure and possible criticism. Besides, Letitia needed to dominate her little brother, and that left no room for effeminate tears. For, according to Whittington, Letitia was hardly what one might call girlish. Rather, she exuded energy and athleticism, spurring her brother on to endless outdoor sports and adventures. "She was a strong, healthy child," Whittington relates, "a joyous, high-spirited romp," who would race him daily, ride donkeys, play with a hoop, or fight imagined enemies with a bow and arrow. When she did stop to read a book beneath a tree, it was often a tale of adventure and daring whose protagonists were invariably male. Ironically, this poet of exquisitely feminine verse could not, as a child, be bothered with feminine toys, such as the shallow "pleasure-books," or "gilt picture books" that were then charming most of her female counterparts (Blanchard 1: 23-24; Roberts 8).

Playing soldiers and poets

Letitia proved her prowess, finding many occasions to demonstrate how much stamina backed the girl's passionately strong will. From her reading of military exploits in *Plutarch's Lives*, she was inspired to play at being a Spartan; and, of course, she got Whittington to follow her lead. "There could be no greater reproach between us than to call each other 'Sybarite,' and this long before I knew why," he

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relates of the sister who would one day sketch many poetical scenes glutted with marble, gems, silks, gold thrones and gold cups filled with wine. That this luxury never satisfied is in keeping with young girl's character. Though Letitia's occasional violence of temper brought down on her the force of her parents' displeasure, no punishment to her person could break her will. "She would endure anything, and give up anything," Blanchard states; she early adopted "habits of fortitude and self-denial." Blanchard is claiming to his Victorian readers that he sees in the tough little tomboy the hallmarks of an angel in the house (1: 13-15). Landon's Spartan code required that she practice what would become some of the Victorian angel's essential virtues. Letitia relished suffering and sacrifice for the opportunities they gave the girl to imagine herself as a heroic figure, male or female, to test her imagined greatness. As an adult and an author, she above all people would recognize that, for displaying the heroism of idealized womanhood, she was largely limited to these passive virtues. They were the part of her hoydenhood she could still practice and preach when no longer able to grab bow and arrow. Whittington's account does not invalidate the portrait of the sad little girl in "The History of a Child." Letitia's taste for self denial, though superficially different from the melancholic yearning for love exhibited in her short story, should be seen rather to agree with that melancholy's need for abuse and its ennobling of the abused figure, ever misunderstood and, as so many Victorian women were, isolated.

With two Spartans for children, Letitia's parents resorted to punishing the innocent half of the pair, leaving the one "in disgrace" to suffer the remorse of having

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a fellow soldier be tortured for his or her sake. According to Whittington, this system of punishment at Trevor Park "effectually secured obedience and attention" (1: 12). It had the merit, at least, of not causing Letitia severe distress when she was locked in a dark room, a martyr for her brother's crimes. She would overcome the trial of her confinement through imaginary escapes to lands of enchantment, where her creative instincts could run riot. The future poet could deny herself anything physical while her imaginary faculties were indulging themselves on some tropical island or in some sunny Italian garden (Roberts 7-9). The nurse, clearly Letitia's ally, would try to ease her confinement by pushing roasted chesnuts, apples, and sweetmeats under the door, but Letitia did not let these treats interfere with her heroic martyrdom. Withstanding their temptations, she handed the treats over to Whittington on her release in one more act of self sacrifice (Blanchard 1: 13).

Letitia was not allowed to obey the one Spartan maxim requiring soldiers to steal, but only because, as her father told her, they were "not in an enemy's country" (1: 15). No doubt she often wished it were otherwise. Though they would probably not have shared such wishes, Landon's female contemporaries partook in the national fervor for military heroes and British victories. Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Landon's friend Anna Maria Hall recalls the spirit of the times in her childhood:

> The world was roused into an interest and enthusiasm, which now we can scarcely appreciate or account for; the sympathies of England were awakened by the terrible revolutions of France, and the desolation of Poland: as a principle, we hated Napoleon, though he had neither act

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> nor part in the doings of the democrats; and the sea-songs of Dibdin, which our youth *now* would call uncouth and ungraceful rhymes, were key-notes to public feeling; the English of that time were thoroughly 'awake,' the British Lion had not slumbered through a thirty years' peace. We were a nation of soldiers and sailors and patriots; not of mingled cotton-spinners and railway speculators and angry protectionists. . . . The taste for *heroic* literature at that time, and the taste for -- we really hardly know what to call it -- literature of the present, made up, as it too generally is, of shreds of patches -- bits of gold and bits of tinsel -- things written in a hurry to be read in a hurry and never thought of afterwards -- suggestive rather than reflective, at the best: and we must plead guilty to a too great proneness to underrate what our fathers probably overrated. (emphasis Hall's; 133)

Anna Hall is trying here to explain the success of Jane Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (1803) and *Scottish Chiefs* (1810),[6] published when "even the exaggeration of enthusiasm was considered good tone and good taste" (133). More than the war itself, its exaggeration of enthusiasm colored the writing and reception of works by that era's youth well into the 1820s and 1830s.[7] In the years 1811 to 1815, when British troops

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[6] Landon in all probability read the former; for she refers to it in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-book for 1835*.

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finally were winning victories in Wellington's Peninsular Campaign and the tide of the war beginning to turn, triumphing over each success seemed to British youths only to bring about another. Reports of the Iberian peninsula's charms were filtered back through the news of the valorous exploits and deaths, enchanting girls like Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans, as Landon's essay "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings" demonstrates. Like Landon, Hemans would prove decades later that she was still enamored by Iberia's reputation for sun and excitement, passion and violence, when she turned again and again to Spain and Portugal for settings for her poems. Recognizing that Hemans shared her enthusiasm, Landon observes that Spain "appears to have peculiarly captivated her imagination. At that period when the fancy is peculiarly alive to impression -- when girlhood is so new, that the eagerness of childhood is still in its delights -- Spain was, of all others, the country on which public attention was fixed; victory after victory carried the British flag from the ocean to the Pyrenees . . ." ("On the Character" 429).[8] Landon could remember her excitement at the news, her eagerness to grab the toy weapons and relive the last British victory with Whittington. Looking back, she had to admit that as a ten year old she had displayed

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[7] How this enthusiasm mixed with its opposite, Byronic melancholia, is well demonstrated by much of Landon's corpus, in which the heroes go gaily to battle while the heroines brood miserably at home, in which valiant death is heralded and trumpeted though so often the hero or heroine sees no reason to live.

[8] In "The Soldier's Home," Landon puts the same phrase in an old veteran's mouth: "I followed where our colours led, / In many a hard-won day, / *From the ocean to the Pyrenees*, / Old England fought her way" (emphasis mine; *Traits and Trials* 148). But the soldier's patriotism is dampened by the loss of his son from a war wound in the campaign. "I shared in all our victories, / But sad they were to me . . ." (149). An

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little or none of the self-restraint that girls were then supposed to exhibit when they reached the era of "girlhood."

The adult Landon looked back on her childhood self at Trevor Park with a mixture of pleasure and shame, understanding that her experience there helped form her into someone quite different from most of the women with whom she socialized in London. Her short stories in *Traits and Trials* contain several hints at this consciousness of what, by the standards of the day, would have been a lax upbringing for an upper middle-class English girl. She had not, for instance, had to encounter the severity of a parent or teacher like Mr. Dalton in "The Twins Sisters," whose "notions of feminine delicacy" resulted in his having "the greatest horror of noise or anything like romping in a girl" (66). Landon, in contrast, might inscribe feminine delicacy onto the bodies of her own pale heroines, but she believed it to be a quality of the heart, and hers, as a poetess, to have been from youth especially delicate. That, in Whittington's words, "It was no easy thing to subdue her will, except through her affections," would only have confirmed to herself how uniquely sensitive she had been when no more than a romp of a girl (Blanchard 1: 12).

Probably because the image of a girl playing soldiers would have unsettled some readers, Landon never depicted a young girl quite so tomboyish, but she unquestionably drew the heroine of "The History of Mabel" with her younger self in mind. Like Letitia had done, Mabel Dacre climbs trees, rides ponies, and asks her female cousin to race her, at which her cousin objects "that such violent exercise was

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ardent patriot herself, Landon was moved deeply by the idea that personal sorrow over

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only fit for boys" (*Traits and Trials* 132). By not going to school, Mabel, like Letitia, was "shy, keenly alive to ridicule, and unaccustomed to girls of her own age," who were being disciplined into proper young ladies when Mabel was governed mainly by her impulses (135). And I have no doubt that Landon was reflecting on her own youthful outbursts when she states of Mabel: "The warm feelings, uncontrolled, had degenerated into passionate ones; the lively temper, uncurled, was grown wayward and violent" (124). For Landon indicates that a streak of hot-headedness ran through her younger self when, in an 1820 letter to her cousin and tutor Elizabeth, the eighteen-year old Letitia declares that she will now reform her behavior: "And now, dear cousin, I do so long to be with you, if it were only to show you how amiable I intend being. I will not be passionate; and, as to Elizabeth, I will be so good-natured -- I will be to her what you have been to me (Blanchard 1: 27). Directed against a sickly sister, the said Elizabeth, who received the attention from their mother that Letitia longed for, Letitia's passionate ways may well have made her sibling feel cruelly rejected, but we can only speculate here.

Seeking to show Landon's generosity in childhood, Blanchard includes the report of her giving treats to poor children at the gate of Trevor Park, treats she accompanied with the assertion, "I would rather be a Spartan than a Sybarite" (1: 15). Yet such acknowledgements of personal virtue most likely had the result that, as with Mabel, "The children of the peasantry shrank from one whom extreme indulgence had, as extreme indulgence always does, rendered selfish and overbearing" (*Traits and*

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the loss of a loved one could outweigh and even subdue one's national feeling.

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Trials 124-25). Read from the autobiographical perspective it invites, "The History of a Child" attributes young Letitia's overbearing manner to her parents' social position, their many servants allowing her to adopt the unfortunate "habit of relying upon others" when "lessons of exertion and self-dependence" were most needed:

> I have often thought since of the difference between the children of the rich, and the children of the poor -- the first kept apart, petted, indulged, and useless, -- the second with every energy in full exercise from the cradle, actively employed, and earning their daily bread, almost from the hour that they begin to eat it. If there is too much of this in the lower classes, if labour be carried into cruelty, there is infinitely too little of it in the higher. (308)

Some worthwhile actions, however, sprung from Letitia's penchant for roughhouse and dominating her inferiors. When the gardener Joseph Chambers decided to ban Letitia and Whittington from the garden (probably for fear of the destruction the combat team would wreak on the flower beds), Letitia masterminded an attack strategy of "taking vengeance on the gardener . . . by shooting at him with arrows with nails stuck in them for piles" (W. Howitt 127). The future apostle of the feminine heart aimed her arrows well enough to hit Chambers; "For my sister, especially, was very expert," Whittington explains (Blanchard 1: 15). Chambers retaliated by tossing these missiles "upon a quickset hedge for punishment." The hedge was probably "one of the old-fashioned square cut ones," William Howitt thinks, "where they would be rather prisoners than sufferers" (127). Perhaps as a

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means of securing her and Whittington's release, or of effecting a rapprochement, Letitia then set about the task of teaching the thirty-year-old Chambers his letters. She first acquainted him with the alphabet; then, giving him a small dictionary, she taught the gardener how to spell, read, and write, her little brother assisting. Chambers carried the dictionary in his hat; he would put aside his spade to peruse a word, then ask Letitia or Whittington for elucidation of its meaning. This rudimentary schooling allowed Chambers eventually to give up his gardening tools. He "obtained a 'milk-walk,' at Brompton, where, being enabled to rely on his own book-keeping, he made some little money," in time saving enough to return to Chipping Barnet as the landlord of The Rising Sun. He used to boast to his customers there that the renowned L. E. L. had taught him his ABC's (Blanchard 1: 16-17; Cussans 63).[9]

Another Trevor Park anecdote similarly combines Letitia Landon's enthusiasm for military combat with her love for the printed word. Once, on asking his father for three shillings, Whittington was told an eighteenpenny piece could be his if he memorized the ballad beginning "Gentle river, gentle river / Lo! thy streams are stained with gore." Whittington confessed he thought the challenge too difficult to attempt, and, he relates, "I was in disgrace accordingly." As John Landon was shaking his head in disgust at his son's laziness and Whittington was mourning his lack of funds, Letitia, as usual, came to the rescue. Without telling anyone her purpose, she sought out the solitude necessary to learn the ballad by heart, and, after a short time,

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recited it to her father. His pleasure at her spirited display did not distract Letitia from her mission. Boldly she asked to be rewarded with three shillings rather than the eighteenpenny-piece, and her father complied, throwing in a few kisses as well. Letitia then tried to teach her brother the sixty lines, one at a time, succeeding in engaging his interest for a little while, as Whittington admits. He concludes this anecdote, "I forget whether I ever said it; but I do *not* forget that she gave me the three shillings" (emphasis W. Landon's; Blanchard 1: 13; K. Thomson, *The Queens* 195-96). Devoid of jealousy and little troubled by his "disgrace," the little brother had already lapsed into the habit of expecting Letitia to win all the glory while he sought only to benefit however he could from her successes.

One tries to imagine the little girl standing at attention before her father in one of the house's huge, dark rooms, spouting those lines on the "gentle river," which paraphrase an old Spanish ballad commemorating the deaths of a few "Christian Warriors" at the hands of the Moors in fifteenth-century Granada. She probably conned over the text of the ballad in a copy of Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), which, along with his many other books, her father could easily have owned. Letitia would have enjoyed, in her recitation of the simple tale, the Moor's javelin "Vainly whizzing thro' the air" and the Christian Saavedra's sending of "a deep and mortal wound" that instantly "sunk the Renegado, / Mute and lifeless on the ground." She would then have recited a series of Christian deaths, as Saavedra,

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[9]The instruction may have run both ways. Landon opens "The Love Charm" with an old man praising his niece for her efforts among the flower beds, "Very well, indeed. I see I shall make a gardener of you in time" (156).

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surrounded by a thousand Moors, soon lies lifeless, followed by the "great Alonzo," who must dismount from his "slaughter'd steed" to face the Paynim bands, the ballad ending as he dies "without a groan" (331-37).

Percy informs his reader that the Spanish called ballads such as this "Romances," noting that they exhibit a "gallantry peculiar to that romantic people." John Landon may even have selected this particular ballad because of his children's fascination with British military action in Spain. Regardless, Letitia read hundreds of similar romances as a child. They sunk into her creative consciousness and shaped her ideals of masculine valor. Such a tale would form many a subplot or backdrop to Landon's poems, the military adventures taking a secondary but essential place to the private trials of the soldier's beloved. Even the exact scene in this ballad of the gentle river's banks lined with fallen soldiers would reappear in her poems more than once. In *The Troubadour*, for example, corpses from the same "desperate strife" between religions lie in a small valley that looks "like a slaughter-pit, of green / Could not one single trace be seen; / The Moslem warrior stretch'd beside / The Christian chief by whom he died; / And by the broken falchion blade / The crooked scymeter was laid" (132-33).

As the above episode illustrates, Letitia's father more than anyone else fed the flames of his daughter's passion for tales of warfare and adventure. Surely she recalled her childhood at Trevor Park when she wrote in "A Tale Founded on Fact" (1823) of how a young son

. . . would sit,

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Through the long winter evenings, by a fire
Less bright than the glad face of the fair Child
Who sat beside his Father, listening
With eager eyes to the strange tales which he,
A sailor in his youth, could tell. (428)

John Landon told his daughter tales of heroes and villains, combat, chivalric pageantry, and the exploration of faraway lands filled with dangers. When telling people what books she most loved as a child, Landon would single out, along with *Arabian Nights*, *The Travels of Sylvester Tramper through the Interior of the South of Africa* (1813), as her other favorite book from her father. John Landon, after all, had sailed to Africa as a midshipman, and his gift of George Walker's *Sylvester Tramper* greatly stimulated his daughter's interest in what she would later call "the least civilized quarter of the globe" ("On the Ancient" 466). But if it in any way helped to influence her decision twenty years later to move to Africa, she would surely rank as one of *Sylvester Tramper*'s most undaunted readers. The book abounds in sickness and death at the hands of insects, wild animals, deceitful "savages," and miserable, rainy weather. The hero vows at the end to live out the rest of his days in England, never again to return to that dark continent "inhabited by the most barbarous and ignorant of human beings" (55). Yet, despite its lack of any paradisal scenes, or, for that matter, any comfortable ones, Landon cared enough for *Sylvester Tramper* to search for a copy as an adult. She could not find one (Blanchard 1: 21). Unlike most of her other favorites, this book did not achieve much popularity and is not listed

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among the favorites of her contemporaries. Its popularity with Landon thus says more about her spirit of adventure than a host of *Robinson Crusoes*.

Blanchard remarks that *Sylvester Tramper*, *Arabian Nights*, and James Cook's *Voyages Round the World* took the place of Letitia's "fairy tales" (1: 21). One assumes the fairy tales contained a little less violence and gruesome detail than their replacements: e.g., in Cook's *Voyages*, the captain's observations that Hottentot children were dabbed with cow dung when born, and, that if twins arrived, the girl twin was eliminated by being placed in a wild animal's hole which was then covered over with stones (146). But then Emma Roberts relates that out of such stuff, "out of graver works, travel especially," Letitia Landon busied herself "making romances . . . filled up with splendid visions" (8). A book's incidents were, in Landon's mind, either raised to dramatic contests between good and evil or dropped as unworthy of her fantastical development. In a poem addressed to her brother, "Captain Cook," Landon only remembers these books providing her and Whittington with a "fairy land," a world "as actual, but more pleasant" than her "darker" adult existence had ever been. She has not forgotten their peril and violence. Pleasant play, for her childhood self, meant power play, meant pretending to be "chiefs and kings," or pretending to live the "golden lot" of the "sailor's [life], mid the storm and strife." She and Whittington could turn the most quiet part of the grounds at Trevor Park into the perilous South Seas: "For weeks he [Cook] was our idol, we sailed with him at sea, / And the pond amid the willows the ocean seemed to be. / . . . / How much we loved his dangers, and how we mourned his fall" (23).

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Many times Letitia must have thought, "If only I were a boy, I might join the navy like my father did and travel to distant countries, I might join the army and ride bravely into battle, I might . . . ." Ernest in *The Fate of Adelaide* (1821) is filled with the same excitement Landon felt "when tales were told of glorious battles and heroic deeds," but, for him, "It came, the wished-for time, and Ernest took / His father's sword, and sought the fields of war" (11). Landon once writes in a letter that, had she lived in the heroic fourteenth century, "I would infinitely preferred being a knight and have set step in stirrup and lance in rest for myself" than be a woman. But "even as a ladye," with her glove born "round the princely list, or through the fiery battle," it would have been preferable to live than in the "degenerate days" of the nineteenth century, when most men display no gallantry nor courtesy toward women (Letter to Mrs. Roberts). It is as the daughter of a midshipman and army agent that Landon in a critique praises Benjamin Disraeli's depiction of "the daughter of a high-born and martial race" thrilling "at the warlike pageantry" of a military review. After stating that "the descendant of Maria Theresa is keenly alive to the 'pomp and circumstance of glorious war,'" Landon enthuses revealingly: "And in truth there is nothing more exciting than a discharge of artillery. The physical effect is wonderful when along the air 'leaps the live thunder;' -- it brings with it an awe mingled with conscious power, while the spirits are completely carried away by the mighty music" (89).

Modern feminist critics who deplore L.E.L.'s doctrine of ideal femininity have largely ignored this militant strand in her thinking, despite its presence in many of her poems, especially those in praise of warriors. Intrinsic to her character, Landon's

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ardor for all things military caused her to identify with the brave shedders of blood, whenever she read or wrote about them. Her very first written poem, presumably composed while living at Trevor Park, acclaimed the military service of her cousin Captain Landon, who had just returned from America (Blanchard 1: 21). This cousin appears to have been the son of her father's brother, Thomas Silvanus; Captain John Landon was a Lieutenant in the Montreal Militia in 1807 and, probably soon after the War of 1812, returned to Hertfordshire, receiving a hero's welcome from all his family (Montgomery-Massingberd 513). I suspect that, like a few of the soldiers in Landon's poems on their return home, this cousin regaled Uncle John and his children with an account of his adventures. Likewise, the books he gave his children suggest that Letitia's father told her and Whittington all about his naval postings in Africa and Jamaica; after all, no storybook hero or historical figure could equal John Landon in his daughter's eyes. Regardless of how distant her father may have seemed at times, or perhaps because a little distance inspired awe -- she called him "The household god of thy child's heart" in *The Troubadour* (254) -- Letitia was inspired by John Landon to be fearless, bold, and eager to plunge into the next adventure. She would not shrink before a challenge any more than she would before a blast of gunfire. Most of all, in encouraging her to admire a succession of adventurous heroes, John Landon spurred his daughter to see herself as a heroic genius, tough and clever enough to handle any adversity.

In "A History of the Lyre" (1829), Eulalie laments that she has not found love because her degenerate age produces so few heroes, and she provides three examples

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of what she admires: the knight whose deeds in combat "were stainless"; the eloquent patriot; and the poet who worships beauty. A similar list of "The glorified -- the passionate -- the brave" could be found in several works from L. E. L.'s hand (*The Venetian Bracelet* 108-109). A student of Hume, her heroes were soldiers, statesmen, or poets. To understand Landon's attitude toward her writing, it is crucial to recognize that she believed she had a calling to compose poetry, and, in answering that call, she was fulfilling her destiny. Possessed from birth with a proud yet generous spirit, she longed to accomplish great deeds in the service of her country. Given that she could not become a general, explorer, or great statesman, she chose, in her view, the one heroic role that remained open to women in Victorian England, that of the poetess. The young Letitia might have fantasized herself slaying the enemy, but the one fantasy she had any hope of realizing in later life required she wield the pen as her sole weapon.

Landon would not have needed much encouragement to believe that the poet could be as important a national hero as the soldier, and she received what she needed from another of the many books that engrossed her while at Trevor Park. In explaining to Samuel Carter Hall that in addition to her "very desultory" childhood reading of "principally history and travels," Landon unsurprisingly notes that she took a special fancy to the *Odyssey* and the works of Walter Scott -- whom she once accords her highest praise in describing him as "Half minstrel and half knight" ("Sir Walter Scott" 45) -- for the action scenes of the warrior heroes. But the one other work Landon mentions here, despite its absence of militant bloodletting, equaled or

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surpassed the rest in feeding her hunger for heroism with a name, a place, and a scene so graphic that it rooted itself in her memory, for the poet to draw on for inspiration: "I especially remember a Life of Petrarch which perhaps first threw round Italy that ideal charm it has always retained in my eyes. The scene of his being crowned at the Capitol was always present to my mind, and gave me the most picturesque notion of the glory of poetry" (*Book of Memories* 269).

This scene, ever-prominent in Landon's consciousness, whose echoes can be detected in several of her best known poems, deserves to be glimpsed. *The Life of Petrarch* (1805), collected by Susanna Dobson from *Mémoires pour la vie de Petrarch* by J. F. P. A. Sade, describes the revival in Rome on Easter morning, 1341, of the Roman custom of crowning the age's greatest poets with a laurel wreath, when Petrarch ceremoniously traced the footsteps of Virgil and Horace, to the ecstatic delight of the populace: "The trumpets sounded; and the people . . . ran in crowds" to witness the ceremony. "The streets were strewed with flowers, and the windows filled with ladies dressed in the most sumptuous manner, who sprinkled as much perfumed water on the poets as would serve for a year in the kingdom of Spain." Petrarch was preceded by twelve men in scarlet habits reciting his verses. After he shouted three times, "Long live the people of Rome! . . . God preserve them in liberty!" Petrarch kneeled before the Count of Anguillara, who took the crown of laurel from his head and placed it on Petrarch's, saying, "This crown is the reward of merit." Petrarch then recited a sonnet on heroes. "The people shewed their joy and approbation by loud and repeated shouts; by clapping their hands; crying out several times, 'Long flourish the

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Capitol! Long live the Poet!'" Petrarch's friends "shed tears of joy," while Petrarch "was himself in a sort of intoxication" (168-70).

Here was poetry being experienced and glorified in the public arena, the poet emerging before his fans with all the excitement of a battle scene when the line of attacking troops first emerges on the crest of a hill. The young Letitia would have envisioned herself as the object of a similar kind of public adulation, one day emerging from her solitude to hear, as the Improvisatrice in Italy does,

> From many a lip . . . sounds of praise,
>
> Like music from sweet voices ringing;
>
> For many a boat had gathered round,
>
> To list the song I had been singing. (*The Improvisatrice* 28).

She wanted to drink from "the maddening cup of praise," which becomes for Erinna "the fountain of my life" and "sunlight to my soul" (*The Golden Violet* 257). However unrealistic, the young Letitia would have imagined herself being crowned like Petrarch -- and like the heroine of De Staël's *Corinne* (1807), which she had probably read by her eighteenth birthday -- with the laurel wreath, the ultimate symbol in L. E. L.'s poetry of universal acclaim.

Part of the laurel's potency for Landon came from its use as an award of merit for the warrior as well as the poet, effectively equating their importance in the eyes of the people. As Petrarch had taught her, the Romans used it to honor those whom they thought best served the Empire. "Petrarch says in his Africa, '. . . if glory belongs to the talents of the mind as well as to military prowess, it is but just to adorn with laurel

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the brows of poets as well as the brows of heroes. This tree, by its perpetual and beautiful verdure, announces immortality both to the one and the other'" (Dobson 158). In more than one poem , Landon would demonstrate the significance that this sharing of the laurel wreath had for her. She thus addresses the laurel tree in "The City of the Dead" (1835):

> Thou that art worn on the conqueror's shield,
> When his country receives him from glory's red field;
> Thou that art wreathed round the lyre of the bard,
> When the song of its sweetness has won its reward.
> Earth's changeless and sacred -- thou proud laurel tree! (*The Vow of the Peacock* 319-20).

As with most of her books, Landon probably opened the pages of *The Life of Petrarch* on impulse, perhaps noticing it on the shelves in her father's "well-stocked library" (Stephenson, *Letitia Landon* 24). Or her cousin Elizabeth may have been largely responsible for prompting the girl's reading of such ambitious works as Rollin's *Ancient History*, Plutarch's *Lives*, John Gay's *Fables*, Aesop's *Fables*, *The Life of Josephus*, Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*, and David Hume's *The History of England* (Blanchard 1: 10). To give an indication of what may have been the influence of just one of these works on Landon (and her contemporaries), I cite a brief notice in the 1822 *Literary Speculum* of Hume's *History*, "too generally known and admired to need any illusion or applause from us." Before Hume, historians "were correct and dull." Battles were recorded "without the smallest appearance of feeling or

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enthusiasm"; heroes were not commended. Historians "shed no tears at the fall of injured excellence. . . . It was reserved for Hume to do justice to the eventful history of this land of heroes, martyrs, poets, and philosophers. . . . He shook the dust from the warrior's shield, fanned into flame the expiring embers of the martyr's funeral pyre, gave a new voice to the clarion of chivalry" (Oldschool 450-51). Landon caught the full strength of Hume's feeling for warriors, martyrs, and poets, for men like Alfred and Richard I. Hume taught her that sympathy was as essential to hero worship as admiration.

Tutored yet not well accomplished

Elizabeth served as Landon's only authority on educational matters while she lived at Trevor Park, and possibly for several years after the family had vacated the country estate. After Miss Rowden, the tutoring of Elizabeth was all Letitia knew of school -- and, it must be admitted, much of what she knew disaffected her toward the very idea of systematized education. Letitia's routine probably adhered to that of the girl in "The History of a Child," her lessons taking place only in the mornings in a room set aside for the purpose, with her afternoons free to roam and read in the garden. For three years, until Whittington was sent away to boys school, she probably received this tutelage alongside her brother. In keeping with the Victorian tradition for hagiography, Elizabeth Landon recalls no struggles to impute knowledge to the brilliant future poet, whose "genius" she claims to have detected early:

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> In very many instances, in endeavoring to teach, I have myself been taught, the extraordinary memory and genius of the learner soon leaving the humble abilities of the teacher far behind. . . . When I asked Letitia any question relating either to history, geography, grammar – to Plutarch's Lives, or to any book we had been reading, I was pretty certain her answers would be perfectly correct; still, not exactly recollecting, and unwilling she should find out just then that I was less learned than herself, I used to question her: -- "You feels sure you are correct?" "Yes, very sure." "Well then, to be perfectly right, bring the book and let us look over it again!" I never knew her to be wrong. (Blanchard 1: 9)

But the poet's many references to what she appears to have experienced in the Trevor Park schoolroom bear little comparison with this scenario. The adult Landon unvaryingly debunked the "absolute belief in the enjoyments of childhood" with mention of her and, she believed, most people's mementoes of early life, those "triangular caps, certain donations on the right or left ear . . . verbs, *graphics*, and, climax of intellectual misery, the multiplication table!" (Blanchard 1: 49). This letter to Katharine Thomson is supported by one to Rosina Wheeler: "I have but small taste for the reminiscences of childhood; standing in the corner with a certain paper pyramid, boxes on the ear, bread and water, stocks and dumbells [sic] grammar with all its antilary [sic] horrors; geography with its with its [sic] twin brother history; two monsters at a birth, and that climax the multiplication table; out upon lamenting the

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childish hours of a, b, c, and 1, 2, 3" (Letter to Rosina Wheeler. Ms. L259ly). In an article on London, the sight of dates for sale in a Covent Garden market bring to Landon's mind "the delicious remembrance of those 'Arabian Nights,'" whose pleasures were "enough to make up for a horde of catechisms of history, mythology, botany, &c., almost for the multiplication-table itself" ("Calendar of London Seasons" 427). The exact sentiments found their way into one of Landon's poems. Faced with an engraving of a young boy tearing up his books in a rage, Landon wrote "The Young Destructive" in sympathy with his destruction: "Oh! days of bread and water -- / How many I recall, / Past -- sent into the corner; / Your face towards the wall." The poet-speaker tells how "I abhorr'd" learning grammar and European geography, and then, in keeping with all the above, states her firm disbelief in the reality of a truly "happy childhood" (24).

Landon is most likely referring to her years spent under Elizabeth's tutelage rather than her time at Rowden's school -- though it is possible she is thinking of both -- because, in the first place, Elizabeth appears far more likely to have adopted a system of rote memorization than the more enlightened Rowden. Secondly, read by Letitia while at Trevor Park, *Arabian Nights* would have competed with Elizabeth's syllabus. Thirdly, Elizabeth's listing of subjects, "history, geography, grammar," agrees enough with the poet's list to imply that these subjects stood out in both of their memories (Elizabeth perhaps preferred not to mention the trial of teaching her pupil the dreaded multiplication table). And, finally, having attended Elizabeth's "school" from age seven onwards, a much longer period than she attended Rowden's (six or

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more years as opposed to two years or less), Letitia would have seen Elizabeth's methods as defining her childhood experience of systematized education.

Letitia Landon clearly liked her older cousin, remaining close to her for years after the family left Trevor Park. She may even have seen those boxes on the ear as well deserved. Strong willed by nature, Letitia must have been difficult at times, unruly, unwilling to learn what she found boring or tedious, especially as she lacked the incentive of competition with her peers. One memoir writer remarks that "she would learn nothing that was not in accordance with her own inclination" ("Preliminary" ix). Days of bread and water did little to drum into her head the rules of grammar, as numerous manuscripts of her poems and letters make manifest, and her own idiosyncratic course of reading seems to have taught her more about geography and history than any system of rote learning. Most likely, best results were obtained when Letitia led and Elizabeth followed, letting her headstrong pupil read whatever she wished. Letitia did, after all, wish to read an awful lot. "She gathered immense stores of information; and the germs of more abstruse and learned studies, which as she grew older engaged her attention, were acquired" at a surprisingly early age (Roberts 8). Building on Blanchard's comment that "Books, and books only" were Landon's delight, Katherine Thomson adds that the precocious girl would not skim books but wade through them slowly, trying to master each according to her own "stern" system (*The Queens* 195).

Elizabeth banned Letitia from one literary genre: "I always made it my particular care never to allow of her reading any novels, knowing it would only

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weaken her mind, and give it a distaste for more serious reading." The ban served little purpose, except to demonstrate that Letitia had no compunction about violating Elizabeth's stricture in secret. Whittington relates that his sister read one hundred to one hundred and fifty volumes from Cooke's Poets and Novelists (Blanchard 1: 10-11). Charles Cooke published cheap editions of novels by, among others, Fielding, Gay, Goldsmith, Samuel Richardson, Smollet, Sterne, all of whose works the adult Landon indicated she knew well. Also published by Cooke, Smollett's translation of *Don Quixote* must have provided her with the text of a work for which she felt a special fondness, identifying, as she did, with the protagonist's yearnings for knighthood. In his youth, Leigh Hunt likewise cherished Cooke's editions as relief medicines to cure the agonies of his academic requirements at Christ's Hospital. Through Cooke, Hunt became acquainted with the work of Spenser, Collins, Gray, Milton, and Pope in volumes costing only sixpence each, bought when he "used to hate and loathe the sight of Homer, Demosthenes, and Cicero" (101-2) Again, the adult Landon knew the same English poets well, probably having been introduced to them in childhood, like Hunt, by the entrepreneurial Mr. Cooke.

Letitia Landon, of course, was not well acquainted with Demosthenes and Cicero, not having received the classical training undergone by most of her male contemporaries. At Merchant Taylors' School, which he attended from July 1812 until 1822, her brother was forced to learn Greek and Latin and little else, besides lessons in religion on Saturdays and a little Hebrew in the sixth form. Whittington could not have avoided informing his curious sister of his dry course of study and the other

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affairs of school life, such as the daily canings administered there (Robinson 194; Hart; Draper 147, 139), and she, in turn, could hardly have resented not being allowed to go to this (or any other) respected male institution of learning. The actor Charles James Matthews, who attended Merchant Taylors' at roughly the same time, and who, like Whittington, was intended for the clergy, complains that because the classical languages comprised the whole of his school lessons, "my native English was left to be picked up as best it might in the cloisters, which formed our playground, and in the streets of the City . . ." (116). If anything, Letitia Landon's awareness of the lopsided nature of the standard classical education convinced her of its relative inutility, and, perhaps, her fortunate escape from it. Long after L. E. L. had won financial independence, she comments in relation to Whittington's limited prospects, "What can be more helpless, than a gentlemanlike young man with a classical education[?]" (Letter to Edward Bulwer Lytton. Ms. D/EK C1/96).

Landon realized that had she, as a woman, been given a classical education, she would have beem tempted to manifest it and thereby made her work and herself less marketable. She would have been branded a bluestocking, in her words, "all books[,] Barbarisms and bores," though, in her letter to Rosina Wheeler, she is quick to except her Latin-speaking friend from the charge (Ms. Princeton University). But what Letitia could have used, as her parents and cousin Elizabeth knew too well, was an accomplishment or two. "Accomplishments were thought all in all, especially music," remembers Camilla Toulmin Crosland, "and a girl's reading was generally so circumscribed that she had small chance of mental development. . . . Yet the very

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parents who grudged their girls the mental development of a book, thought it no waste of time for them to spend two or three hours a day at the piano" (65-66). Landon's French came along well at Trevor Park, but music lessons from the excellent teacher Miss Bissett proved to no avail. "Much of L. E. L.'s childish miseries resulted from the too common absurdity of forcing every young lady to play upon the piano," sympathizes the no doubt equally unmusical Emma Roberts, adding that "she emancipated herself as speedily as possible from . . . [the] drudgery" (20). Absurd or otherwise, the notion that a woman ought to entertain through song was indeed "too common." Other writers, rather than excuse Landon, felt the need to emolliate the truth of her musical ineptitude. Blanchard is keen to stress that Letitia Landon "understood the very soul" of music; Elizabeth Landon that Letitia would write on her slate for hours while someone else played or sang; Thomson that she liked vocal music as an adult, despite her inability to play or sing to a standard requisite for drawing-room exhibition (Blanchard 1: 11; *The Queens* 195). Her music teacher did inspire Landon to compose "Lines Addressed to Miss Bissett" in her first published volume, *The Fate of Adelaide.* Here Bissett is acclaimed "Cecilia of our isle," who so enchants the listeners that they lose "Each feeling . . . in one delicious dream," the kind of dreaming rapture which Landon claimed often to lapse into, only awakening to spout forth her verses (135). Music, at best, could only be the handmaid of poetry for L. E. L.

Nor was that poetry written in the prettiest of feminine hands. Penmanship was another accomplishment that Landon did not accomplish, though it received her

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best efforts under the guidance of another tutor, "a kind old gentleman." As with the piano, she had to spend hours at Trevor Park practicing her handwriting, what to her was a form of "frequent imprisonment." The tutor evaluated her no better than "a dab at pothooks" (Blanchard 1: 11-12). As an adult, Landon never could write a highly legible hand. "Her writing was cramped, as if she had used her left hand only, and was always a matter of difficulty to her" (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 195). Her handwriting fared poorly in comparison with that of other educated English women, women whose hands filled out invitations and the like, that is, women who wrote for show. Not that difficult to read, Landon's manuscripts attest that she wrote much more legibly than most contemporary male writers.

"I was wholly deficient in all showy talents; for music I had no ear, for drawing no eye,[10] and dancing was positively terrible to my timid temper. My sensitiveness made any attempt at display a hopeless endeavour" (*Traits and Trials* 298). This passage from "The History of a Child" rings true enough in some aspects to be revealing in others. It paradoxically draws attention to the shyness at the heart of Landon's personality. But hers was a sensitivity that cherished praise every bit as much as it could not abide ridicule, and if she felt some sort of display was more than likely to win approval, the shyness was overcome, or camouflaged. Discussions of Landon rarely mention her shyness, focused, as they tend to be, on the various

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[10] In his consideration of sketches and sketching, Sha devotes much attention to the importance granted female accomplishments in early nineteenth-century Britain: "When every lady is expected to sketch, it is not so much the ability to do so that becomes remarkable, but its absence that is noteworthy" (79).

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exhibitions of wit and sentiment. Yet many of her poems suggest what she confesses in a letter to a close friend:

> Though all my life I have lived in society, and had to make my own way, I never get accustomed to doing it. I am unconquerably irresolute and shy. The utmost I can do, and that by force of long habit, is to conceal my embarrassment, and to feel it, for that very concealment, all the more. What hesitation and difficulty does it always cost me to enjoy! (Blanchard 1: 114)

With the adult sharing the child's hunger for praise and needing it to make a living, Landon fed that hunger by displaying what talents she possessed. The learning process began at Trevor Park, where the praise her parents gave her for a poem she recited had to atone for her failure to sing prettily; the praise Elizabeth gave her for a lesson perfectly recalled had to compensate for her failure to play an instrument well, paint beautifully, or, perhaps most important, manifest an attractive appearance. Her sensitivity inclining her toward exhibitions where she was confident of her talent, Letitia learned at Trevor Park that, by using her intellectual powers, she could amuse others without the usual accomplishments displayed by her sex.

Landon understood that the pleasure she gave seemed to her audience akin to that given by young women who played the piano or sang well -- light, amateur, amusing, entertaining. The girl poet would have gradually become aware that, however seriously (or not) she might take her own "genius," no one was going to expect her to produce mind-exploding poetry or become one of her country's most

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important writers. A pattern was thereby established that may be seen to have corrupted, or lowered, the poet's expectations of herself by habituating her to the idea that her audience would happily accept from her hand works composed with less than the greatest care. On the other hand, this pattern may also be seen to have accustomed Landon to the production of what might now be called "performance poetry," poetry intended to be recited to an audience or read as if the poet were speaking it "live" from the page, improvising as she went along. Anxious to please, Landon from the beginning allowed her poems to be received as drawing-room displays performed by a highly accomplished young lady.

Composition came easier to Landon than the winning of praise, but at least the praise came from a family that at this time had no reason to expect their daughter's talents would one day provide an essential source of income. The carefree nature of the Trevor Park period would remain for Landon its most valued characteristic. But the series of decisions her father had made to enjoy his money away from the pressures of London commerce eventually helped to destroy that tranquillity. For John Landon's love of farming so distracted him from his business affairs that it led to conflict with his partners at the army agency. Landon's farm "interfered detrimentally with his official affairs," Jerdan informs us. When Adair left the agency (possibly by 1810), "It appeared as if each of his three successors thought they might indulge in. . . expensive style or tastes" similar to those of Adair, and "as some loss of connexions also took place" between John Landon and his partners Bruce and Macdonald, "the consequences were unfortunate" ("Memoir of L. E. L." viii-ix). The conflict between

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the partners probably arose around 1812 or 1813, when, it seems, John Landon sold his house in Chelsea to devote more time to his family and crops than to selling weapons and uniforms. One would expect that his partners demanded his share of the profits be reduced, while at the same time he was forced to spend sizeable amounts on maintaining his house, garden, and farm and conducting his "expensive experiments in amateur model farming" (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 180).

The war's end brought to a final close the Landons' carefree days. Though Letitia and her parents would have rejoiced with their countrymen over the series of British victories during 1814 and 1815 -- and taken special pride in Uncle Whittington's having hosted the Allied Sovereigns on their tour of Oxford University in 1814 (Barker 191) -- the Landons suddenly had to face a future without a war they had grown used to, whose unnatural demands they had grown to rely on, maybe even accepted as part of the natural economic cycle. The final defeat of Napoleon not only marked the end of prosperity for those in the agriculture and army agency businesses but set off a series of financial crises throughout England. Inevitably, business "failure" reached the House of Adair (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 198). By 1815 or 1816, with farming life proving "too costly for his circumstances" (Jerdan, "Memoir of L. E. L." ix), Landon relinquished Trevor Park and, if he had not done so before, Coventry Farm.

The loss of Trevor Park pained his elder daughter deeply, so much so that, as late as the 1830s, when remembering the literary enthusiasms first stirred beneath its trees for her poem, "Sir Walter Scott," she pauses to lament that

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Now, not one single trace is left

Of that sequestered nook;

The very course is turned aside

Of that melodious brook. . . . (45)

L. E. L. is still mourning the loss in her poem, "Captain Cook" (1837). Remembering how she and Whittington used to play make-believe in "that lonely garden," she seems to connect their leaving Trevor Park to "leaving childhood, life's fairy land behind" (23). She does not register the fact that the house had been torn down and the gardens ploughed under to create the Boys Farm Home for orphans (Cass 69). Characteristically, Landon allows for no softening of the pain, no silver lining to the cloud, in the cruel, impersonal world where "they" destroy all that is beautiful:

There is not of that garden a single tree or flower;

They have ploughed its long green grasses, and cut down the lime-tree bower.

Where are the Guelder roses, whose silver used to bring,

With the gold of the laburnums, their tribute to the Spring. (23)

With the vacating of Trevor Park, the entire Landon family seems to have taken on the burden of financial worry. Age thirteen or fourteen at the time of the family's move, Letitia saw herself then (and for many years after) as a child who could never again think and play as a child, thanks to "the embarrassed state of my father's circumstances," as she puts it to Samuel Carter Hall (*Book of Memories* 269). The sense that an absolute change had occurred over her life is echoed in *The Troubadour*, where she states that the years after the family left Trevor Park contain "none like" the

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"pleasant memories" of that place. The next years "came with griefs, and pains, and cares, / All that the heart breaks while it bears" (252-53). The absence of real riches gave the teenage poet justification for finding poetic ones in grieving over all that her family had lost, squeezing out every ounce of pain that she could from the situation -- a tendency of which she would never weary. Though conscious that many were less well off, Landon from then on considered herself most unfortunate. She would often compare her lot with that of the more pampered young ladies she encountered when in her early twenties. From her uncle's house in 1823, she writes a friend declaring that she would rather be one of her cousins than "myself; whatever the future of life, it is much to look back on a happy childhood and youth, past in a house unknown to real sorrow and difficulty; you have at least been happy when you were most capable of happiness" (Letter to Mrs. Roberts).

The Landons moved house several times. In her letter to Samuel Carter Hall, she implies the family moved directly from Trevor Park to Old Brompton, which was in fact the third place the Landons moved to after Trevor Park. She says the family lived in "great seclusion" in Old Brompton (*Book of Memories* 269). One assumes, therefore, that her family lived in even greater seclusion immediately after leaving Trevor Park. The Landons are reported to have moved first to the country village of Fulham, residing in a house either on Lewis Place or Lower Place, for about a year (Blanchard 1: 24; W. Howitt 128). They are supposed to have moved next to Old Brompton, in Kensington. However, Chelsea Land Tax records reveal that, as of June 1818, John Landon lived on Sloane Street and apparently stayed there through part of

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1820, though the listings for 1819 and 1820 are interestingly vague: "Jno Landen or Occr."[11] John Landon paid a respectable thirty-four pounds in rent there.

From this period until he died in 1824, John Landon may well have been living above his means, or at least at the limit of them, as he died leaving many debts. Whittington continued to attend Merchant Taylors' School, whose fees, except for boarders, were low. John Landon may have decided he could not afford the forty pounds needed for his son to board, but we have no evidence of this (Draper 117). Somehow, also, the medical bills had to be paid for Letitia's invalid sister Elizabeth, who died of consumption either around 1820 or 1825-26 (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 197, 206; *Account* 14; Montgomery-Massingberd 512).[12] Yet I have nowhere found mention of precisely how the Landon family supported themselves from 1815 onwards, apart from Letitia's earnings from her poetry, which she did not begin to publish until 1820. She vaguely relates in her letter to Samuel Carter Hall that, throughout the period of 1815 to 1820, the family members involved themselves in "a thousand projects for [our circumstances'] amelioration, -- among others, literature seemed the resource, which it only seems to youth and inexperience. With what

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[11] The occupier could be Letitia Bishop, Letitia Landon's maternal grandmother, who may have lived on Sloane Street during all of Letitia Landon's life. She was living on Sloane Street when Landon moved in with her in, I believe, 1822.

[12]Both the *Account of the Family of Landon of Monnington and Credenhill, County Hereford* and *Burke's Geneological and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry* state that Elizabeth Jane Landon was born in 1806 and died in 1819. However, Letitia's letter to her cousin, cited on page 15, which mentions reforming her behavior toward her sister, was written in 1820 -- so Elizabeth Jane must have lived at least until 1820, perhaps a few years longer.

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wonder in after years we look back on how we used to believe and expect!" (*Book of Memories* 269). Her comments appear to suggest that John Landon discussed some of his financial problems with his wife and children, admitting his need for their help, or any help that might come their way. He may have retained some connection with the army agency business, or dabbled in various trades, but whatever he produced on his own was, according to his daughter, not enough to provide the family with security or contentment.

Landon does not appear to have written much between 1815 and 1819. As she states in the same letter to Hall, "The desire of publication is inseparable from composition" (269), and the Landons made no overtures to magazine editors until well after the family moved to Old Brompton. Conversely, she may have written more than a few poems during these years, but simply lacked the confidence to apply to editors. Amid the thousand moneymaking projects, Letitia then probably spent some of her spare moments writing and, while she went for walks or trundled her hoop about the garden, dreaming of greatness. But most free time was devoted to her idiosyncratic course of reading, when she perhaps tackled some of the books she is reputed to have read at Trevor Park, as well as devouring the latest from Byron, Scott, and Thomas Moore. A strong possibility exists that her cousin Elizabeth continued, in some fashion, to tutor Letitia (and perhaps her little sister) at least until 1820 and may well have encouraged her verse making.[13]

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[13]Cousin Elizabeth seems to have moved with John Landon's family from Trevor Park, living with them ever since on a permanent basis. She would remain with

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Letitia Landon's admission when married of complete ignorance of household chores implies that her family was not so destitute that the teenager needed to cook and clean. Indeed, far from impoverished, the Landons' circumstances in Old Brompton look almost grand. Their house at 45 Brompton Row, near Gloucester Lodge, must have been very large. Sypher calls it "a handsome mansion" (14). The Landons' next door neighbor, William Jerdan, recalls, "My cottage overlooked the mansion and grounds of Mr. Landon . . . at Old Brompton; a narrow lane only dividing our residences" (*Autobiography* 3: 174). Elsewhere he describes the Landons' attached property as "a fair garden and paddock, and though within two miles of the noisy capital, altogether free from its noisy intercourse" ("Memoir of L. E. L." ix).[14] *Kensington Land Tax* records testify that, when John Landon moved his family to their Old Brompton house in late 1818 or early 1819, he began paying sixty pounds in rent for his house, plus fifteen pounds for the attached land. These were relatively high sums for anyone living in Kensington, let alone a man endeavoring to make ends meet. In fact, John Landon paid more for his rent at Old Brompton than he did for the more fashionable house on Hans Place, where the prospering agent's rent was thirty-six pounds at its highest.

Catharine Landon long after her husband died and Letitia and Whittington moved out of their parents' house. In 1820, this cousin wrote the two letters to Jerdan that accompanied the first poems he saw by Letitia Landon. Also, an 1820 letter from Letitia to her "dear cousin" and tutor, written while Letitia was visiting relatives in Gloucestershire, confirms that Elizabeth was then living with John Landon and his family.

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One begins to wonder if Letitia Landon has been stretching the truth a little when she states in that 1837 letter to Hall, "The embarrassed state of my father's circumstances made us live in great seclusion at Old Brompton"; and then claims that her forays into print were prompted by her and her family's desire to improve those circumstances. But the emphasis in that sentence should likely be placed on "embarrassed" and the resultant "seclusion," implying that when John Landon lost much of his wealth -- I have not found his name in any of the London newspapers' bankruptcy lists -- he could do nothing to extricate his family from the social opprobrium associated with such downfalls. John Landon may have taken what money he made by his financial schemes and immediately spent it on his family, allowing them to live comfortably but not fashionably nor with much security, for what was the seventh and last decade of his life. Letitia Landon was probably telling the truth when she said she began writing poems for publication in order to make money she knew the family needed. She suggested in an 1826 letter that she had been burdened with debts not of her own making since she began to write for publication, and her mother certainly lived in great poverty after Landon's father died in 1824. But Landon did not likely know the extent of her father's debts until he died, and in 1820 she may well have sought to publish more to win fame than money, the family's need for the latter providing her with the excuse for advancing into print.

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[14]Jerdan himself paid forty-five pounds in rent for his "cottage," though the editor of the popular *Literary Gazette* soon made enough money to seek grander accommodation in Brompton (*Kensington Land Tax*, 1819-20 Ntbk. 34).

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In Brompton, the Landons could feel they were living in a country village not too dissimilar to East Barnet, while at the same time living close to any old friends they may have retained from their Chelsea years. Even more so than at Hans Place, Letitia Landon was in Brompton again, being "reared amid flowers, and near the imaginative and dramatic personages in whom she ever found great interest" (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 190). With its large grove, heath, and flower gardens, Brompton was in those days "an airy outlet to which the [London] citizen, with his spouse, were wont to resort for an afternoon of rustic enjoyment. It also has the reputation of being a locality favourable to intrigue." Brompton Row, on the north side of the main Fulham Road, then attracted quite a few artists, to whom the rural seclusion and less than perfectly proper atmosphere must have appealed. Though as a teenager Landon may not have met any of these (now forgotten) painters, actors, engravers, and writers, she would have been gradually acclimatized by their proximity to the idea that fame was easily accessible to those whose talents and achievements merited it. The artists and journalists whose names she saw in the London papers were, after all, real people, the same with whom she shared the pleasures of Brompton Row's honeysuckle and roses. To acquire renown herself, she needed just to display her poetry on the well read pages of a London periodical (Croker 37-38). And what better person could she find to exhibit her poems than her next door neighbor, the editor of the *Literary Gazette*?

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Chapter Three:

Anxious to Please the Editor (1820-1821)

As an old man, long bereft of his power to determine authors' fates, William Jerdan liked to tell how he found Letitia Landon. He would relate what she was doing when, across the lane between "my quiet and pretty residence, Rose Cottage," and the Landons' big house (*Autobiography* 2: 193), he first noticed her:

> She appeared to be a girl of some fourteen or fifteen years of age, slightly proportioned, with yet an exuberance of form. In manners she was simplicity itself, and from her previously retired life, and not having associated with children of her own age, strangely combined the infantile with the intellectual. With her book in one hand, reading as well as she could by snatches, she might be seen trundling her hoop, during the hours for exercise, round and round the lawn, and it would have been difficult to suppose that she was doing aught else than combining lesson with play in a curious fashion. But the soul of Poetry was already there; and her first essays in song came with the hoop. ("Memoir of L. E. L." x-xi)

Jerdan would have us trace his discovery of Landon to this moment when he observed and noted the significance of her strange combinations. Pride in having intuitively

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sensed Landon's uniqueness, plus emphasis on her girlishness, help Jerdan overlook the indelicacy of his staring at and, thirty years later, disclosing his private vision of a young lady unaware her "form" was being observed from all angles.

Having replaced her special stick with the hoop, Landon was behaving just as she had done when, in willful isolation, she paced Trevor Park's lime tree walk with lovely thoughts in her head, except that then the "lesson" did not travel outdoors and no "hours for exercise" needed to be established. That she would make play out of exercise and lesson matters to Jerdan. "Play" for the older Landon involved moments when, heedless of convention, she let her fancy assert control over mind and body, her particular soul of Poetry requiring physical as well as verbal expression. Queen of her imaginary realm, Landon saw no monotony in trundling round and round that garden. She ruled supreme when book was put aside and she could make up her own songs to match the rhythm of the hoop. With her needs to feel dominant or heroic, evident in her childhood at Trevor Park, Landon could never be more than superficially simple, despite what Jerdan would have us believe, despite the possibility that some of the first poems Jerdan saw in Landon's hand may well have been a product of these hoop sessions. Landon's unorthodox freedoms may have declared a childlike nature, but not an innocent one. Hers was a willed exuberance – gathering strength of feeling from its opposition to what she by then knew to be a most unromantic world.

Jerdan's 1853 account of the same observation differs in a few ways. Here he presents an overgrown teenager who was trying to train a lumbersome body to move with the agility of her mind:

My first recollection of the future poetess is that of a plump girl,

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> grown enough to be almost mistaken for a woman, bowling a hoop round the oaks, with the hoop-stick in one hand and a book in the other, reading as she ran, and as well as she could manage both exercise and instruction at the same time. The exercise was prescribed and insisted upon: the book was her own irrepressible choice. (*Autobiography* 3: 174)

The passing of five years perhaps made Jerdan feel a little less assured of the survival of Landon's fame, more willing to emphasize her disciplined routine and desire for knowledge to a Victorian public growing soberer and less comfortable with physicality. He wants Landon to appear more mature in every respect, hence the transformation from the slight child of nature to a plump girl who might be taken for a woman. Besides underlining this first sighting's importance for Jerdan, the two passages indicate that Jerdan's memory was fuzzy and likely to be colored by his sense of the immediate tastes of his readers (changes in readers' tastes being one of his favorite subjects). Over the course of his complex relationship with Letitia Landon, questions of whether Jerdan viewed her more as girl or woman, and the degree of sexual attractiveness, or vulnerability, he perceived in one or both, would in a few years give rise first to controversy, then scandal, as London society became "shocked at the intimate relations existing between an unmarried woman and a friend of the opposite sex," twenty years her senior (Jeaffreson 2: 187).

When Jerdan saw her in 1819, the actual Letitia was at least sixteen or seventeen years old and would have been, most likely, an amalgam of his two accounts, not dissimilar from descriptions of her in the early 1820s: a plump, lively

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young woman whose imagination exacerbated her physical energy, hence, her distinctiveness, by propelling her into unorthodox behaviors on a regular basis. In these early days, when the Landons were living in the shameful seclusion of their reduced finances and the poet had yet to publish, no one except Jerdan was noticing one who still liked nothing better than making up narrative poems and had not grown out of her longing to act out, or live out, fantasies of female heroism and sacrifice. Long convinced of her poetic spirit and talent, as previous chapters have shown, Landon was likewise carrying around in her head a vision of herself as crowned poetess, which her family's straightened circumstances, if anything, made more plausible, as she was probably already considering the possibility that her parents might sanction her writing for money. While most of her female contemporaries were confined to the less vigorous exertions of refining their accomplishments, the Landon who could not draw or play music could not but have been little interested in thus preparing to enter society in order to find a husband. The ordinariness of the accomplished did not fit into her scheme; its enforcing codes seemed beneath one gifted with an intelligence, imagination, and extreme sensitivity that her reading of the Romantic poets had taught her to treasure. She would honor her feelings and write from them; she would find a way to publish her poems, trying first to get them into her neighbor's *Literary Gazette*.

But for a year or so she did not try, and the magazine editor who was to consider his development and promotion of Letitia Landon among his greatest achievements – if not *the* greatest – remained ignorant of the poeticizing of his neighbor's interesting daughter. Jerdan was then acquainted with John Landon only

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slightly, which is not surprising. John Landon seems to have been temperamentally disinclined to socialize, and Jerdan, burdened by debts also and a growing family -- by 1819 Jerdan had at least three sons and one daughter by his wife Frances and he would father many more children (Pyle 17, 248-52) -- busied himself with some kind of journalistic business most hours of the day and night. Long after midnight he might have been found at the *Literary Gazette* offices or drinking with prominent authors, publishers, and various other celebrities who might figure on the magazine's pages. "Full of criticisms and politics, Canning's last *mot*, Normanby's first novel; besieged by authors with attentions, fêted by nobles" (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 189), Jerdan had to counterbalance his collecting of famous acquaintances[1] with his wish to peruse the submissions of all authors, new and established. Ambitious poets posted him their verses for the *Gazette*'s "Original Poetry." Most publishers sent him copies of every book as it was printed in hopes that he would write a review.

The siege of writers determined Jerdan's perspective, illustrated by the essay, "Poetry," published on 3 February 1821:

> This is the age of versification: we know not how many volumes of first, of juvenile, of humble, of unknown, of indifferent, and of qualified essays in poetry, load our table. Unfortunately for those essayists who possess talents which, perhaps, only require development[sic], this is also the age in which many distinguished bards flourish. . . . Not to be among the foremost is now to be

[1] Most prominent among Jerdan's collection was George Canning, with whom he had Sunday lunch and who became godfather to one of Jerdan's sons.

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> nothing; there is hardly a medium space between fame and oblivion. (68)

Jerdan's loaded table confirmed his enthusiasm for contemporary poetry, and it was out of that general enthusiasm that his championing of Landon grew, as she was obviously "among the foremost." Recognizing this cause and effect, 1820s reviews of Landon's work by other journalists would openly take issue with Jerdan and his perspective of the age. After all, their desks were not stacked with poems. So much their own fault for not taking the opportunities the times offered them, Jerdan would say. While he was running it, the *Literary Gazette* had become, as well as Britain's best stage for launching new poets, its most popular and, arguably, most influential organ for disseminating information about newly published books. The maelstrom of obligations that engulfed Jerdan would eventually suck in Landon, as, in her wish to assist the editor, she would take on reviewing and reporting duties for various *Gazette* departments, besides contributing regular installments of poetry. Her prose and poetry styles would be formed first under Jerdan's guidance, then in the course of meeting *Gazette* deadlines. In the public's mind, moreover, the success of William Jerdan's *Gazette* would become inextricably linked with her success. The story of L. E. L. should therefore be, as in real life it was, underpinned by that of the rise of the magazine and its editor, as well as an explanation of what he liked in poetry and why he liked it.

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Jerdan's *Literary Gazette*

In 1818 and 1819, the *Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, and Sciences* was fighting to survive as much as to gain popularity, the publisher Henry Colburn having tossed the first literary weekly into London's turbulent periodical marketplace in January 1817. The Saturday publication bobbed up and down there for three years, its circulation rising from 1200 to 2000 issues a week, not making enough money for Jerdan to receive a salary above "porter's wages" until 1820 (Duncan, "William Jerdan" 41; *Autobiography* 2: 195; 3: 63). When he became its editor in July 1817, Jerdan had, moreover, staked his own limited funds -- he also lost money in the failure of Whitehead's bank that same year -- on the *Gazette*'s fate by purchasing a one-third share (Duncan, "William Jerdan" 6). By 1819, with the magazine still unable to turn a decent profit and its editor forced to write for newspapers on the side, he and Colburn were, Jerdan admits, "brought nearly to our wits' end, if we had any" (*Autobiography* 3: 63). The *Gazette* was saved from extinction by an offer from Longman publishing house in 1820 to buy the other one-third share (after John Murray declined to buy it (Pyle 61)). Longman's men subsequently put the accounts in order and established a regular publication schedule, both of which Jerdan was apparently helpless to do on his own (*Autobiography* 3: 77). With Jerdan working more closely with the Longman partners than he ever did with Colburn, the *Gazette* started to make a profit for the first time in 1820. The resultant financial security soon made possible a prosperity that would fuel the magazine for two decades (Pyle 62; Oliphant 1: 498; Hayden 71).

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A shrewd entrepreneur, Henry Colburn began the *Literary Gazette* because no organs existed for promoting his books the very week they were published. No monthly literary magazine, much less the quarterlies, could meet Colburn's need for that immediacy, plus the relentless follow-up that the same ads placed week after week would provide. Once the back pages of the *Gazette* had loaned him plenty of space for his ads (he placed more ads in the press than any publisher of his era), Colburn did not concern himself with most of the matter that filled out the rest of the issue -- though the publisher did expect his books to receive favorable reviews (Sunderland 61-62; Oliphant 1: 498). Jerdan met this expectation most of the time. But he never became Colburn's lap dog, despite the repeated accusations of his being such throughout the years that Landon worked with him on the *Gazette*. Appreciating the power and determination of the publisher Jerdan would at times defy, Sunderland astutely remarks, "The subsequent evolution of the paper [the *Gazette*] is the history of editorial rebellion against proprietorial interference," (62, 68). Most members of the periodical press took no note of this rebellion, disbelieving that jolly Jerdan possessed the moxie to stand up to Colburn and the great deal of tact that would then be required to keep his job.

"Many liked, without respecting him," is the best fellow journalist Samuel Carter Hall could say of Jerdan. "No doubt he was of heedless habits, no doubt he cared little for the cost of self-gratification, and was far too lightly guided all his life long by high and upright principles" (*Retrospect* 1: 165). Excepting Landon, none of his literary associates saw anything in him to love. Memoirs of his acquaintances, if they mention Jerdan at all, do so either when listing guests at a party or when

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explaining a writer's appearance in the *Gazette*. Jerdan's fame as *Gazette* editor, though, was great enough to cause Nathaniel Hawthorne to seek him out on the American writer's visit to London in 1856. After meeting Jerdan, Hawthorne asked Francis Bennoch, whom Jerdan counted a close friend, to tell him more about the editor of the once-almighty *Gazette*:

> Mr Bennoch spoke of him as a very disreputable old fellow, who had spent all his life in dissipation, and has not left it off even now in his old age. I do not see how such a man has attained vogue in society, as he certainly did; for he had no remarkable gifts, more than scores of other literary men, and his manners had, to my taste, no charm. Yet he had contrived to live amongst and upon whatever is exquisite in society, and in festivity, and had seduced (according to Bennoch's statement) innumerable women, and had an infinity of illegitimate children, besides an unconscionable number born in wedlock, of more than one wife. . . . The impression on my mind about Jerdan is, that he is a good for nothing old wretch . . . now drunken and rowdyish on the edge of his grave. (282-83)

In his 1830s sketch of Jerdan for *Fraser's Magazine*, William Maginn, an undeniable alcoholic, remarks that the editor looks his best at 10 p.m., in his familiar "position at the head of a table, firmly seated behind an entrenchment of decanters" (10). Along with the heavy drinking, Bennoch's reported statement about Jerdan's seductions, wives, and children is fundamental to our understanding of the man with whom Landon deeply involved herself. Jerdan married his first wife, Frances, in 1807 or

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1808. In his thesis on Jerdan and the *Gazette*, Gerald Pyle puzzles over why Jerdan mentions Frances only once in four volumes of *Autobiography* and only once in the hundreds of letters Pyle has read; he wonders whether the marriage that produced at least six children was a "misalliance" (250). From the documents he has reviewed, Pyle can attest that Jerdan had a dozen or more other children, at least five of them before 1847. Jerdan would desert Frances between 1847 and 1854 and marry again, it seems, before Frances died (252-53). "Although no one accuses him of it, the available facts strongly imply bigamy" (247).

When he was not reviewing other people's work, Jerdan wore in print the thinnest mask of propriety or none at all. In the first *Gazette* of 1820, he placed the following quatrain with his signature, "W. J.":

> O Attila, so famed in story,
>
> The opposite, oh! let me prove; --
>
> Victorious, *he* lived with glory,
>
> And, all possessing, died in love. (emphasis Jerdan's;
>
> "Imitated" 12)

Jerdan appears as desirous of possessing all in the anonymous travelogue, *Personal Narrative of a Journey Over-land from Bank to Barnes* (1829). Seemingly speaking for Jerdan,[2] Jerdan's middle-aged narrator falls for a lower-class young woman sitting next to him on the Barnes stage. At the journey's end she assures him that "it would

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[2] It was quite common for the authorship of anonymous pieces like this to be widely known in literary circles, with the author happy that other writers were aware of his productions.

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be useless my attempting to see her again, as she walked out with the children at ten minutes to eight on the south side of Finsbury-square every morning" (11-12). What Jerdan thought of his first marriage is too likely revealed by the exchange between the Baron and the old seneschal in his short story, "The Sleepless Woman" (1831), which he chose to reprint in an appendix of his *Autobiography*, published when most likely he had already deserted Frances. Upon the Baron stating that he expects "happiness in this change of my condition," the seneschal replies: "Ay, ay, so we all do before we are married: what we find after, there is no use in saying, for two reasons; first, you would not believe me; secondly, my wife might hear what I'm telling" (46). The Baron is accordingly made miserable by his wife's sleeplessness: "Day and night her large bright eyes eat like fire into my heart" (53). After the Baron commits suicide, the narrator reports that some say, "The real secret of the Sleepless Lady was jealousy. Now, if a jealous wife can't drive a man out of his mind and into a lake, we do not know what can!" (54).

The question of how Jerdan managed to glide through fashionable London society understandably stumped Hawthorne. Jerdan could never have walked in if 1820s London society had not opened its doors to writers and artists to light up its assembly rooms with their brilliance. Journalists, in particular, no longer were certain to fall beneath society's notice. The press, after all, kept rank, wealth, and fashion in the public consciousness. In the 1820s, when Victorian notions of respectability were only beginning to blossom, Jerdan was judged less harshly than in the mid-nineteenth century, when Hall and Hawthorne were writing of a man whose personal fortune and reputation had plummeted. Yet even in the 1820s and 1830s, the overripe Jerdan just

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got by in polite society, being allowed to remain within its precincts --excluding the most elite aristocratic circles and their palaces of amusement, like Almack's -- wholly on the strength of his position at the *Literary Gazette*. Thirty years later and in the depths of poverty, Jerdan could still gloat over his connections and, as his comments on the parties he hosted suggest, his unrestrained appetites: "The Circean cup was gently replenished, and neither Nymph nor Sabrina could I be expected to be. . . . No man ever enjoyed social intercourse and pleasure more intensely than I. . . . As I loved society, society liked me" (*Autobiography* 4: 16).

Jerdan was especially blessed by the fact that the sharpest-tongued pressmen in London and Edinburgh were, like him, Tories. He numbered among his friends a cast more stridently conservative than himself: William Blackwood, John Wilson, John Lockhart, William Gifford, Walter Scott, and William Maginn, several of whom in print gave him valuable tokens of recognition that offset the sneers he sometimes received. Had Jerdan's *Gazette* promoted Whig or radical causes, *Blackwood's*, in particular, would surely have roasted Jerdan with his debauchery. As it was, Jerdan's immoral tendencies were only rarely hinted at in the press, and then by upstart periodicals that did not last. For a decade, moreover, Jerdan's weekly faced no real competition, and when effective competitors finally arose, they did not need to slander his private life, so successful were their attacks on his reviewing policy.

Beyond satisfying older readers that his magazine was safe for their daughters to read, Jerdan's hold on the editorship (until 1850) had, of course, little to do with his (hypocritical) moral pronouncements. It was, rather, Jerdan's love for all things new, which he translated into an eager, tireless determination to become familiar with all

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the celebrated events and personages of London, that made him the perfect man for the top job at the *Gazette*. Jerdan's interest in novelties, particularly literary ones, plus his tendency to equate novelty itself with social progress, imbued the *Gazette*'s prose with a tone of confident optimism. The magazine was devoted to the happenings of London at a time when a genuinely youthful excitement surrounded book publications and art exhibitions, when, for much of the British reading public, weightiness did not matter as nearly as much as verve and élan. With the war having eliminated large sections of the male population, women and young men more influenced the tastes of the British public. That public wanted to experience intensely all the available varieties of escapism provided by the period's most creative minds. One can almost feel Jerdan's pulse quicken as in 1852 he describes the great events of 1817 that, like fireworks, lit up the cultural sky into which the *Gazette* lofted itself:

> It was a stirring time, and in literature as in many other relations, exhibited a very marked difference from the aspects of the present day; the Crystal Palace excitement excepted. Within a few preceding weeks, Moore's 'Lalla Rookh,' Byron's 'Manfred,' Croly's 'Paris in 1815,' Lewis's 'Adelgitha,' Miss Edgeworth's 'Patronage,' and Jane Porter's 'Pastor's Fireside,' were published; Shiel's 'Apostate,' and Maturin's 'Manuel,' to succeed his 'Bertram,' performed; Talfourd began his literary career with a law book; Waterloo Bridge was finished and opened with a grand ceremony; Spurzheim introduced Gall's system of phrenology to London; the first pretensions of mesmerism were advanced . . . lithography was imported and made

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> public . . . my esteemed contemporary, 'Blackwood's Magazine, ' started; in short, it was a busy world, my masters, and I was glad enough to be also up and among the stirring. (*Autobiography* 2: 177-78)

In the magazine's name, Jerdan went where British twenty-somethings wanted to go, wherever in London enterprise in the arts and sciences was putting itself on show: "In my capacity I was omnivorous -- at all in the ring -- and produced hebdomadally, Reviews, Criticisms on the Arts and Drama, Jeux d'esprit in prose and in verse; and in truth, played every part." Jerdan acknowledges that, from the start, he needed "several able coadjutors" (none as helpful as Letitia Landon would become to him) to complete the writing of each issue, but there is no question that his pen filled out the bulk of the sixteen pages (2: 179).[3] He takes satisfaction from the fact that, along with its celebrity sketches and coverage of plays, operas, ballets, and concerts, the *Literary Gazette* instigated in the press the reporting of learned societies' meetings and the regular reviewing of the many exhibitions of painting and sculpture then springing up in the capital. Jerdan loved to celebrate new inventions, too, and none more so than when they related to his magazine. A 26 October 1822 article, "Printing by Steam," tries to impress readers with the *Gazette*'s being the first journal printed by steam, exclaiming that Mr. B. Bensley's machine can print on "both sides!" 800-1000

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[3] Jerdan kept no records of who wrote what in the *Literary Gazette*. In his autobiography, Jerdan mentions his "friends," Dr. George Croly, Richard Dagley, William Carey as helpers before 1820. Poems and perhaps some short pieces were contributed during these early years by George Crabbe, Mary Russell Mitford, the

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sheets at a time. "The process . . . is one of the most remarkable sights that can be witnessed," enthuses Jerdan, adding in a footnote: "The Editor of the *Literary Gazette* accompanied the brothers of the Emperor Alexander in their examination of the original Machine, and explained its movements to them: he may assert that no spectacle in Britain surprised or gratified them more" (671-72).

What particularly caught the public's attention in the *Gazette*'s pre-L. E. L. days was the travel writing from places like China, Japan, and New Zealand. According to Jerdan, the reports of Captain Tuckey's voyage to the Congo and Captain Parry's Arctic expedition attracted more readers than any other *Gazette* pieces. With an unusual concern for immediacy by the journalistic standards of the day, Jerdan boarded Parry's ships as they returned on the Thames and then went without sleep for sixty hours to get the story into print "about which 'all the world' was so interested." The overall success of the *Literary Gazette* depended on this "wide awake principle." An enterprising man in his mid-thirties, desperate for more readers, Jerdan told himself, "Sleeping will not do" (2: 186-87) – not when a growing audience was ready to pay for the latest art and travel news. With his reports of others' travels from completely unknown regions, Jerdan could address a demand for particular knowledge whose urgency could never be repeated. Such news events, while temporarily quickening the magazine's slow increase in circulation, yet gave Jerdan excuse to romanticize his job, to see himself as a teacher of the populace seeking "to encourage all the beneficent arts of peace and civilization; to propagate an

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novelist and journalist Thomas Gaspey, the artist Howard, the architect Wilkins, and a Mr. Neale and Mrs. Rolls (2: 188-90).

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knowledge of science; and to spread over the mass of mankind, a love for those pursuits which refine and ennoble, and bless humanity" (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 3: 78).

The *Gazette*'s eschewing of political wrangles accorded with Jerdan's desires, and, like him,[4] its sentiments were unquestionably Tory. Having worked as a London journalist since 1806, three times becoming editor and twice while owning a share in different Tory periodicals, Jerdan had just left the high-Tory *Sun* newspaper in a huff when he took the reins at the *Literary Gazette.* By 1817 he had, in an age when journalistic disputes reached unparalleled viciousness (including fatal duels), comparatively little stomach for conflict or for sharing editorial authority. "Jerdan was a kindly man, and though able to relish a cutting remark . . . was not well-suited for the rough political humor of the Regency" (Pyle 15). He was seeking a place at a periodical where few would have reason to contend with him, and he believed the literary weekly would provide it. He writes in his *Autobiography*: "The 'Literary Gazette' presented a path into the green pasture for which my soul yearned, after the turmoil or politics, and the more incongenial troubles of personal quarreling" (2: 160). Those more incongenial troubles had included a court battle with the *Sun*'s chief proprietor, John Taylor, whose editorial interference Jerdan had fought against,

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[4] Jerdan defends himself in his *Autobiography*: "Tory as I was, my pen never ceased to exert is dearest efforts to promote the comforts of the people." He declares himself "one of the boldest and earliest, if not the earliest, champion for cheap bread, cheap food, and cheap clothing for the poorer classes, and the downfall of war prices, which enriched only one class, the agricultural, including landlords and tenants!" (2: 22). Dan Riess terms Jerdan's approach "an oblique conservatism," designed "to appeal to a wider range of readers than the quarterlies" (809).

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coupled with the loss of 1400 pounds in expected salary. No doubt Jerdan was, in Peter Thorogood's appraisal of both him and Thomas Hood, "far too sensitive for the rough and tumble of the business world" (164). The emotional and financial suffering he experienced at the *Sun* pained Jerdan far more than his two career brushes with physical violence, but they, too, help to fill out the picture of the semi-feral environment in which journalism was practiced in early nineteenth-century London, when the horse whip was not a wholly uncommon sight in an editor's office. In May, 1812, when reporting on the House of Commons, Jerdan witnessed the murder of the prime minister, Spencer Percival, and won brief fame for being the first to grab hold of the assassin, Bellingham. Jerdan also was challenged to a duel by no less a figure than Lord Byron, who resented Jerdan's attack on his poem to Mrs. Charlemont in 1814, when Jerdan was editor of the *Satirist.* Thanks to Byron's friend, Douglas Kinnaird, Jerdan avoided the duel (Duncan, "Byron" 241), but the incident must have been a factor in the *Gazette*'s many unflattering reviews of and articles about Byron's works.

For Jerdan preferred to praise authors in his magazine that "was, in fact, a realisation, and not a mere symbol of Heaven upon Earth" (*Autobiography* 3: 25). He was looking to literature and the arts to heal his wounds, as well as make him some money, when he joined the *Gazette.* Jerdan's entire approach to the magazine, especially the handling of poetry, was undergirded by this desire to provide for others, as well as for himself, a salve to counter the effects of the belligerence manifested in many periodicals. The *Gazette* basically showcased new works and their authors. Most of the books published in London received treatment on its first ten pages in reviews that were never deep. Jerdan states that the *Gazette* "stood alone" in

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producing "truthful criticism, administered with gentleness, and without asperity to show off the talents of the critic" (3: 53). Unable to dissect works at leisure, Jerdan delivered easy commendations that helped him meet weekly deadlines. Like several other periodicals that reviewed fewer literary works, the *Gazette* provided more summary than analysis, with long excerpts substituting for incisive critiques. Meeting deadlines probably mattered more to the *Gazette*'s sale than the content of the reviews. Regardless, Jerdan demonstrated to literary journalists that being nice and breezy did not prevent growth in circulation.

Readers liked the change from the reviews of the monthlies and quarterlies, and not just because they could get through *Gazette* reviews with less effort. In a letter written in 1820, when the *Gazette* had secured a niche in the periodical market, Bernard Barton told Jerdan he thought the magazine was succeeding specifically because the editor in his reviews declined to show off his talents: "People get tired of seeing so much of the critic, and so little comparatively of the author, and the 'Literary Gazette' is now a rising paper, and its successive numbers are looked for with interest, simply because it is what it professes to be, -- a mirror of the literature of the age" (Barcus 24). Jerdan reached out like a broad church to the many who could not identify with the animosity or condescension of some reviewers toward book authors, their arguments having taken them far away from any semblance of trying to teach the middle classes to discriminate (Klancher 15). Dependent on literary reviews for the first word on new books, readers appreciated the *Gazette*'s many long excerpts as a sign of recognition that, after noting its usual approval of books, these self-respecting members of the middle classes still wished to decide for themselves about actually

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reading the books. But when the *Gazette* did express disappointment in a book, the book did not sell well. For most of the 1820s, the *Gazette*'s word alone would determine how new works were generally rated (S. C. Hall, *Book of Memories* 285; *Retrospect* 164). The magazine's genial enthusiasm, together with its frequent publication, widespread availability, and low cover price of one shilling soon made the *Gazette* the sole "authority" for countryside booksellers and readers looking for guidance amid a bewildering number of new publications.

Early in his editorship, competitors began to charge Jerdan with unduly praising mediocre works of literature, especially works published by his two partners Colburn and Longman. Perhaps the earliest attacks came from Charles Molloy Westmacott, editor of the upstart weekly *Gazette of Fashion* (1822). In "The Tears of Longman's (alias The Literary) Gazette," Westmacott or one of his writers claimed the *Literary Gazette*'s circulation was dropping because the "public" had had "Enough [of your puffery], / Much more will make us sick." The *Gazette of Fashion* predicted the *Literary Gazette* "will ne'er be old / Tho' so proud when it was new!" (55), but Westmacott's *Gazette* did not survive until 1823, while the readership of Jerdan's *Gazette* grew steadily throughout the 1820s. The charge of puffery did not go away, however, and by the early 1830s Jerdan's *Gazette* had lost its leading place among literary weeklies to the magazine most vociferous in the charge, the *Athenæum*. It was then that Maginn, in a sketch of Jerdan for *Fraser's Magazine*, opined that the literary world should cherish the reviews of one who on the whole served authors as a harmless morale booster. Maginn for one surmised that Jerdan had to possess a certain amount of independence to cheer as he did: "His criticism, we are told, is not

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brilliant or deep. . . . With opportunities of being smart and caustic, of inflicting hurt and injury . . . he has taken the other course, that of aiding the efforts of early genius, of encouraging the hopes of neglected talent, of cheering the path of authors anxiously struggling on through the difficulties of their way" (9). A critic of the most stinging asperity whose career the *Gazette* editor had assisted, Maginn discredited his own style in defending Jerdan's.

The *Gazette* editor sacrificed no principles by applauding most writers he reviewed. Rather he stayed true to the one principle that he held strongest throughout his life: that professional writers deserved respect and financial assistance, and they were not receiving enough of either in Britain. "I maintain that literature is neither appreciated, encouraged, nor honoured as it ought to be," Jerdan asserts in his *Autobiography*'s chapter on authorship, "that its professors (if dependent altogether upon it) are liable to worse usage and more misfortune than any other intellectual class in our social scheme" (2: 4-5). As much as he wished to placate publishers like Colburn and Blackwood, Jerdan's encouraging reviews were motivated more by his desire to assist writers. Beginning in 1818, Jerdan recommended authors to publishers throughout most of his career and was paid for his trouble (Duncan, "William Jerdan" 8). Jerdan was one of the first "who consciously assumed the distinct position of the literary middle-man," or literary agent, Harry Ransom has pointed out (68). He likewise worked for decades to provide financial assistance to writers through his active memberships of the Royal Society of Literature and the Royal Literary Fund.

But Jerdan wanted too much for publishers to like him, with the result that in his business dealings money matters often became clouded by sentimental ones.

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Neither "hard-hearted" nor greedy, Jerdan also lacked the necessary financial acumen to make the best deal. Robert Duncan observes that "the desire for good fellowship and friendly relations – almost a vice in its extreme influence on him – rather than money itself, guided Jerdan" ("William Jerdan" 9). In his letters to publishers like Richard Bentley, he would often stress that he regarded theirs as a trusting friendship, hoped the publisher did the same, with "friendship" meaning for the publisher only that, in any instance, Jerdan might settle for less money being paid to a particular writer than the publisher could pay if pressed. The authors for whom Jerdan negotiated could have, in theory, been better helped, but then no one else was known to be as willing to handle authors' business deals with publishers. Jerdan sought for the author exactly what he sought for himself. "In his concern for author's rights, Jerdan was always more insistent upon courteous treatment than high fees" (Ransom 73).

As *Gazette* editor, well versed in the language of literary business, Jerdan was yet also most sensitive to and appreciative of poets' higher yearnings for their work. He had been composing verses since he was twelve years old, and he continued to have his poems and stories, as well as much non-fictional prose, published throughout the 1820s and 1830s in various collections, especially the annuals. To novice writers, Jerdan appeared the perfect person to advise them on survival in the marketplace. Jerdan, however, seems not to have thought he could greatly improve an author's chances of winning financial security. Writers did not make good businessmen, Jerdan believed, and usually did not long keep hold of what money they made. None but professional writers "as a class, are liable to the same irregularities of income and

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unfitness for the business struggle. . . . I have read, and I have written, many obituaries of deceased authors . . . and the conclusion – the epitaph might be stereotyped – has always been, 'He died in poverty, and left his family in distress'" (*Autobiography* 2: 36, 42). Ironically, Jerdan here identifies with the class, considering himself no better at succeeding in the literary business. Though he had moments of seeming affluence that would have impressed ambitious writers, Jerdan from his early twenties was "troubled with debt more often than not for the rest of his life" (Pyle 13). By the time he wrote his memoirs in the 1850s after having to give up the *Gazette*, Jerdan had lost almost all his money in financial crises and bad business deals. An 1852 *Gazette* review of the *Autobiography* reacts: "Literature is in no way responsible for the calamities of William Jerdan. How many of them are traceable to violation of the domestic affections it is not for us to decide" (412).

But no one was paying attention to Jerdan's private life in the late 1810s and early 1820s. All that really mattered then was his attentiveness to British authors, especially poets. The works of George Croly, Barry Cornwall (Bryan Waller Procter), Felicia Hemans, Thomas Moore, Thomas Campbell, Caroline Bowles, Bernard Barton, and James Montgomery best characterized for Jerdan the poetical age in which the *Gazette* found itself (*Autobiography* 2: 235). No unsavory radicals here (though Moore occasionally raised some eyebrows). For Jerdan, their poetry represented Britain's supreme inheritance from the "great literary revolution" that had overturned the pointed phrases of the neoclassical age. Yet the revolution was not over. Still poets must strive to cast off the "artificial habilliments of the day" in favor of "the vigor of naked and heroic nature." In his article of 22 May 1819, the *Gazette* editor

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preaches to poet and reader alike that they must aim even higher: ". . . our progress must be from grandeur to grandeur; a keener sense of passion, a purer simplicity, a more comprehensive vision of nature, a more majestic, solemn, and sacred love of all things lovely, will be wrought upon us on that upward flight, and, like the translated Prophet, the spirit be made sublime in its ascent to receive the palm of immortality" (Duncan, "William Jerdan" 254).[5]

Jerdan does not want to let poets rest content in the continued vogue for poetry with a public still looking for its next Byron or Scott. Despite his pleasure with the poetry of the day, an obligation not to be wholly satisfied seems to weigh on Jerdan as he urges the pursuit of intense, uplifting emotional experiences that would make its participants godlike, worthy of immortality's crown. Inspired (Christian) poets must strive to throw off every conventional restraint on their best feelings, pushing their love of the humble or wonder at the majestic to the furthest extremes, in recognition of their duty to bring their readers to tears again and again. Their religious faith, it was understood, prevented these writers from venturing into the depravities of the Satanic

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[5] Jerdan's list of characteristics conflicts importantly with that Virgil Nemoianu supplies for the Age of Biedermeier, cited by Daniel Riess in "Laetitia Landon and the Dawn of English Post-Romanticism." Formed in reaction to the era of high Romanticism that just preceded it, "the literature of this latter age is characterized by features such as an 'inclination toward morality, a mixture of realism and idealism, peaceful domestic values, idyllic intimacy, lack of passion, coziness, contentedness, innocent drollery, conservatism, resignation'" (809). Herbert Tucker's description of "the new verse of the 1820s . . . as normatively middle-class" provides a complement: "lush yet prim, intimate yet presentable, readily digested in its bite-size genres, tonic in its carefully monitored spectrum of poignancy and uplift" (526). Accurate though Nemoianu's and Tucker's descriptions may be to describe much that came to be written in the British Isles in the 1820s, Jerdan's expectations were for something

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School. But they should not be less ambitious than that or the Lake School. Trends toward pure simplicity and keen passion must be extended -- without going out of bounds, as Byron, and, in other ways, Wordsworth had done -- to where readers as well as poets could feel "wrought upon" by these forces greater than themselves, their spirits actually "made sublime."

It is worth remembering that the *Gazette* could never have pleased so many -- nor have effectively promoted Landon's poems among a wide and trusting readership -- if the magazine had not shown itself to be willing, on rare occasion, to take some old-fashioned stands against publications with what it considered anti-establishment leanings. According to Jerdan's stated policy, the *Gazette* reviewer aimed "to praise heartily . . . to censure mildly . . . to point out defects in a friendly manner; and never to exercise severity, except when the publication gave great offence, by its immoral and dangerous tendencies" (*Autobiography* 3: 11). As writers attracted to radical sentiments, Shelley, Byron, and Keats could never have been sure they would escape a flaying when the *Gazette* decided their work merited a review (of Keats's *Lamia*, the *Gazette* cited three poems but offered no assessment). I believe the *Gazette* castigated no writer as it did Shelley.

In a review of the *Cenci* for 1 April 1820 (one month after Landon's first poems appeared), readers were warned that its subject is "utterly revolting to human nature," the tragedy itself "abominable," seeming "to be the production of a fiend, and calculated for the entertainment of devils in hell" (209). On 9 September 1820, the

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altogether more fiery, intense, restless, expanding the possibilities of emotional experience rather than conforming to a "carefully monitored spectrum."

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Gazette declared that the principles of the author of *Prometheus Unbound* were "ludicrously wicked, and his poetry a mélange of nonsense, cockneyism, poverty, and pedantry" (580). And a diatribe against *Queen Mab*, on 19 May 1821, concluded by attributing those same principles with having "happily deprived him [Shelley] of the superintendance [sic] of his infants, while they plunged an unfortunate wife and mother into ruin, prostitution, guilt, and suicide" (305). But the *Gazette* never denied Shelley's "genius" or, for that matter, Byron's.

It would famously charge Byron with plagiarism in a series of 1821 articles by Alaric A. Watts and mourn the waste of Byron's talents in works such as in *Marino Faliero* and *Don Juan*. "The imagination revolts from the ideas on which the fifth canto chiefly dwells," *Don Juan*'s reviewer (probably Jerdan or Southey) thunders on 11 August 1821, one week after the *Gazette* had congratulated Miss Landon for *The Fate of Adelaide*, "and whether the abominations of Oriental customs, or the hardly less disgusting picture of female passion seeking gratification in the most direct and coarsest way be the theme, it must be avowed, that not only taste and virtue, but every good and manly feeling, would shun its pollution" (497).[6] I suspect that Jerdan

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[6] In dedicating his satires *Cockney Critics* and *The Blow Fly* to Jerdan, Westmacott cites

> the opinion of the Examiner on his (Jerdan's) abuse of Lord Byron: -- "This is certainly the most 'gracious fooling' Master Jerdan has treated the town with, since he abused the finest passages in 'Heaven and Earth,' as the merest '*tol-de-rol buffoonery*' (I quote his own words). The editor of the *Literary Gazette* grudging a shilling for three Cantos of *Don Juan*! What does he imagine the public think of *eightpence* for sixteen pages of little else than a mass of unconnected extracts from about a dozen books? When a true genius appears in the world,

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recruited the trenchant William Maginn to do the dirty work on Keats and Shelley in the 8 December 1821 review of *Adonais*: "an elegy on a foolish young man, who, after writing some volumes of very weak, and in the greater part, of very indecent poetry, died some time since of consumption: the breaking down of an infirm constitution having, in all probability, been accelerated by the discarding [of] his neckcloth, a practice of the cockney poets, who look upon it as essential to genius" (772).

The *Gazette* censured poetry that was seen to stray from the increasingly narrow paths of good taste; the magazine ruled out working-class idiom, Americanisms, as well as characters and images judged ugly, rough, or weird. Like dark flecks found on the surface of fine white china, such crudities marred the poem, damaging its worth. John Clare is chided in the *Gazette*'s 6 October 1821 review of *The Village Minstrel* for his use of words judged "radically low and insignificant" and "too decidedly provincial." The reviewer, presumably Jerdan, was disgusted by phrases like "*thump* the corn out," "Hope *popt* its smile," "bumptious sergeant," and "soodling walk" (emphasis reviewer's; 625). In a 7 October 1820 review of Wordsworth's *Miscellaneous Poems*, the *Gazette* admits to being but a "temperate" admirer of the Lake School. The *Gazette* "never can be persuaded to relish as grand, what is mean; as natural, what is affected; and as exquisitely simple, what is

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(says Swift) you may know him by this sign – that the dunces are in confederacy against him." (emphasis Westmacott's or *Examiner*'s; 4-5)

Westmacott attributes Jerdan's abuse of Byron to the fact that Byron used Murray rather than Longman or Constable as his publisher (12). However, Jerdan praised many works published by Murray over the years.

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ludicrously puerile" (641). Failing to catch the spirit of the age, Wordsworth and Coleridge bastardized its ideals, producing sentiments with which the rising middle classes could not or did not wish to identify, and putting these sentiments in the mouths of lower-class characters too absurd or strange to affect.[7]

Sick of what they saw as the excesses of the Lake and Satanic schools, reviewers like Jerdan were still returning to the eighteenth-century rhetoric of sensibility to advocate the creation of more "refined" poems capable of producing "exquisite," revivifying "sensations" (a late addition to the rhetoric) that could be intense or mild, but ones that they and their readers felt assured could not be experienced by the insensitive lot of mankind -- which they saw as including members from all ranks of society, particularly the upper and lower orders.[8] Among this lot were those highbrow reviewers who declared namby-pamby the sentimental poems intended to trace the most delicate, feminine movements of the heart, "all tenderness, beauty, and light" (Landon, "Requiem" 749). They failed to appreciate the "excitement" with which these poems were perused by readers intent on experiencing all movements of the poet's heart exactly as the poet had experienced them when composing (McCarthy 117, 148). In *Relationships of Sympathy. The Writer and Reader in British Romanticism* (1997), Thomas McCarthy cites the critic Josiah

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[7] In Landon's *Romance and Reality* (1831), Lady Mandeville remarks of Wordworth: "For simplicity he often mistakes both vulgarity and silliness" (2: 118).

[8] In the eighteenth century, the pursuit of refined and exquisite sensations was largely a middle-class effort to "discover" that their hearts were as good as their social betters. Increasingly in the nineteenth century, public concern about the decadence of the

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Conder's assertion in an 1816 *Eclectic Review*: "The only converse to be held with a poet's mind, is that of sympathy. The feelings of the reader must be strung to a pitch in unison with those of the poet himself, or they will not vibrate in reply" (87). Readers were encouraged to speculate that their bodies could feel the "sensations" of the poet's body (34) – and that they were sharing this experience with one another. But to the guardians of high culture, "sensation," or "contagious emotion – including certain kinds of literary affects," represented "a debased experience belonging to mass culture and urban crowds" (Pinch 214).

As if he could not put it better, Jerdan cites what he claims to be George Croly's definition of poetry – when in fact he is misquoting from William Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818):[9]

> Poetry is the music of language, expressing the music of the mind whenever any object takes such a hold on the mind as to make us dwell on it, and brood over it, melting the heart in love, or kindling it to a sentiment of admiration; whenever a movement of imagination or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks

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upper classes encouraged sentimentalists to stress the superiority of their hearts to those of the most privileged members of society.

[9] Instead of "expressing the music of the mind whenever," Hazlitt wrote "answering to the music of the mind, untying as it were 'the secret soul of harmony.' Wherever. . . ." Hazlitt wrote "in tenderness" rather than "in love"; "sentiment of enthusiasm" rather than "sentiment of admiration"; "wherever" rather than "whenever." Instead of "retained and continuous," Hazlitt wrote "sustained and continuous, or gradually varied according to the occasion" (5: 12). Jerdan's erroneous attribution of the quote, together with the many errors he made recording it, indicate how prone he was to misremembering who said what. Here his changes large and small tend to suit better

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> to prolong and repeat the emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, retained and continuous, to the sounds that express it, -- this is poetry.
>
> (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 3: 24)

On the sensibility-sentimentality axis that runs across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hazlitt's definition leans first toward sentimentality, with its emphasis on the mind's direction of the feeling heart, and thus the body. But in the second half of the definition, a physical "passion" can spark the mind which then "seeks" to continue the passion – to prolong the ecstasy, Jerdan might say, as he valued ardor, "sensibility and sensationalism" in poetry above all else (McGann 7; Duncan, "William Jerdan" 300). The mind can take its lead from the heart/body, which in turn must be fed by the mind to feel pleasurably melted or kindled.[10] To feel thus is to be in sympathy. In the same lecture, Hazlitt writes, "Sympathy means contemplating, or 'brooding' and 'dwelling,' and then becoming so 'possessed of' the object and 'saturated with' it that one is 'moulded' to its very essence" (5: 12, qtd. in McCarthy 35).

With literature in general and poetry in particular becoming increasingly feminized and marginalized (Blain 31-32; Curran 182; Ross), 1820s sentimental poets

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his purposes and established opinions. Jerdan, for instance, had long regarded Croly as a good friend and political ally. He could not have seen the liberal Hazlitt as either.

[10] Several of Landon's poems contain statements of her belief that the heart kick-started the mind. Isobel Armstrong places Landon's opinion in the wider context of early nineteenth century women's poetry, much influenced by the writings of David Hume: "Insofar as Hume insisted that ideas are weaker than sense and, so to speak, galvanized by it, his thought is useful to women because it made the beautiful a positive category. Landon's statement in "Petrarch's Dream," "We must feel to think," is Humean in its assertion of dependence of thought on feeling" (28).

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were supposed to write with loving, caring hearts and to exercise rigorous judgment to exclude the unsavory. Hence, the combination of elements Jerdan finds in the first manuscripts Landon sent to him: they contained "the unmistakeable proofs that the writer possessed the great essential elements of taste, feeling, warmth, imagination, without which the attempt to write poetry is but a sham" (*Autobiography* 3: 176). Intolerant of radical politics and frank sexuality intruding themselves into its poetry, the 1820s submitted sentiment "to rational law, and the unwritten and unwritable law of refinement and propriety of judgment," writes the Victorian son and namesake of the poet and critic Alaric Watts of his father's heyday, in contrast to the high Romantic period that preceded it (2). The elder Watts was an upstanding husband proud of being wed to a reputed Quakeress. That he shared the adulterous Jerdan's tastes in poetry – both were appalled by *Don Juan* yet adored passionate, misery-fed love poems like L. E. L.'s *Improvisatrice* -- indicates how concerned both men were with precisely what was printed and what left hidden, or "unsaid," for the sympathetic reader to divine (McCarthy 31). Like the rest of Landon's readers, they could let themselves be thrilled by one of her orgasmic passages because she did not force them to admit its sexuality. Readers might, according to their inclinations, imagine what lay behind the words of a sad love poem, but in pre-Victorian days they were supposed to keep these potentially illicit imaginings to themselves.

The reaction of Landon's contemporaries against the radical, crude, and common in poetry paralleled, I think, the British middle classes' rejection of republicanism, egalitarianism, and other continental "excesses," in favor of striving after ever higher levels of refinement and exquisiteness, as (they liked to think them)

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exhibited in the "best" London society. For many middle-class readers in the nineteenth century, the pursuit of social refinement demanded the pursuit of emotional refinement. Significantly, both pursuits shared "the commodity-fetishism resulting from England's transformation into an industrial capitalist nation [which] underwrote Landon's success" (Riess 812). Poetry, as Hazlitt defined it, arose when one became so pleasurably taken by an object/commodity that one cast it in the roseate haze of admiration or love in order to continue the pleasure and imaginatively possess the object, while obscuring any commercial connections that might exist. Poetry should display only what Thomas Campbell, in his early 1820s "Lectures on Poetry" for *New Monthly Magazine*, called "perfect nature" (3), or "a heightened or select image of life," in contrast to its "flat likeness," which "the bulk of writers" supply (15). Freed of mundane cares and activities and a far cry from Wordsworth's "low and rustic life" (245), what Cyrus Redding calls the "poetry of life" consisted of feelings like those called forth by the idealized poems. Readers were then making a kind of poetry when they experienced "our agreeable sensations, our tendernesses, our magical associations of thought, our spirit-stirring emotions, and our noblest enthusiasms. . . . It [the poetry of life] has little connexion with business, or trade, or traffic, with eating or drinking, or with any of the common occupations" (161). The supreme "object" of the poem, above any material item, was the emotional effect it had on the reader. When the sensations were over, the reader still owned the memory of them, the satisfied pleasure in having been sensitive enough to have experienced them.

The commodification of the feelings paraded in poetry walked hand in hand with the commodification of poetry, with its becoming by the 1820s "marked with the

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sign of a bourgeois Cain" (McGann and Riess 19).[11] Ever since the heyday of the cult of sensibility, various poets had been charged with letting themselves slip into artificially extravagant feeling (none more than the Della Cruscans), but now the greater opportunities for lucre left every daring or wholly conventional poet open to the charge of artificiality, from Byron on down the ladder of fame. Recall Jerdan's finding Wordsworth "affected," he who most sought to guide younger poets away from the highly artificial. Yet the reading public wanted to think that its sentimental poetry was somehow innocent of political and commercial pressures. Note the younger Watts's concern for genuine feeling: "The truth is that, coarse and vulgar as the age was, in many respects, there was within it a very tender and guileless spirit of sentiment rectified by taste, which enabled it to enjoy, and to purify itself by enjoying, whatever was genuinely tender and pathetic, if expressed with power and without exaggeration. This youthfulness of spirit in that age is highly deserving attention" (149-50).[12] Poets could hardly avoid exploiting the age's need to find its purification in poetry. The tensions introduced by expanding commerce made it impossible for 1820s sentimental poetry to be exactly what it appeared to be: sweetly simple, its

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[11] "The salient feature of the period, as well as the chief reason for literary historians' reluctance to tarry there now," Tucker characterizes thus: "namely, a constellation of developments that include the commodification of poetry, the routinization of its manufacture, and the professionalization of its makers" (524).

[12] Wordsworth provides a useful contrast, as he talks much of purification in the Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). He would purify "moral feelings," correct the feelings by aligning them with correct morality (255); whereas this 1820s purification was intended to revive the soft, feminine emotions, namely, love, that seemed to have no place in the lives of those bent on advancing in society, whose consequential insecurity increased their need of tender expressions.

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sentiments pure, devoid of any form of sin, coming straight from the best part of the poet's heart.

> If right I read the poet's mind,
>
> 'Tis delicate as wild,
>
> Lovely, unreal, sensitive,
>
> And simple as a child. . . . (Landon, "The Lyrist" 182)

The simplicity itself was combative, intended to seem to keep the world's mean selfishness outside the precincts of the page, the world where poets were almost never paid enough and their simplicity had no place. No wonder the sentiments tended to droop. Hazlitt's definition noticeably left out the (sometimes bitter) melancholy that trailed the other feelings this poetry could call forth. In the early 1820s, melancholy poetry still carried much of its *Childe Harold* cachet; its decrying of the cruel world was very much of the world, very fashionable.[13]

When poets mourned beautiful victims, they along with their readers were also mourning their own vulnerability, their unstable, insecure positions within the status

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[13] In *England and the English*, Edward Bulwer Lytton attributes Byron's success with *Childe Harold* to the poem's representation of feelings widespread among all classes, what he calls "this very satiety –this very discontent – this profound and melancholy temperament, the result of certain social systems . . . ." Social systems were showing their cracks as they bore the contrary pressures of the established class structure, including all its obstacles and barriers to social advance, and burgeoning capitalism. He posits that the class structure and "the ostentation of commerce" sowed the seeds of discontent, planting in the English character "that fretfulness and pride, that uneasy and dissatisfied temper, which are engendered by a variety of small social distinctions, and the eternal *vying*, and consequent mortification, which those distinctions produce. . . . In the indolent luxuries of court, what more natural than satiety among the great, and a proud discontent among their emulators?" Byron's first two cantos came along and "expressed what every one felt" (emphasis Bulwer Lytton's; 2: 70-71).

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quo – but they would never have acknowledged as much. An essential part of the pleasure of mourning came from the sense that they were being purified from the capitalist and social competitions by selflessly bathing in the emotions of the clear, some would have said shallow, waters of this sentimental poetry. Even the naysayers would not have dreamed of challenging Landon's earnest assertion, made in the preface to *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829), that sympathy for the victims involved "our unselfish feelings alone." I quote the passage here because I do think that Landon was trying to "soften" and to "touch" from the beginning of her literary career, as she claims, and that her aims, arising as they did from contemporary influences, are best understood in the context of the opinions about poetry shared by Jerdan and many others:

> A highly-cultivated state of society must ever have for concomitant evils, that selfishness, the result of indolent indulgence; and that heartlessness attendant on refinement, which too often hardens while it polishes. Aware that to elevate I must first soften, and that if I wished to purify I must first touch, I have ever endeavoured to bring forward grief, disappointment, the fallen leaf, the faded flower, the broken heart, and the early grave. Surely we must be less worldly, less interested, from this sympathy with the sorrow in which our unselfish feelings alone can take part. (v-vi)

"Surely we must be. . . ." Landon switches to first-person plural as she throws up the prayer that her poems have made her and her readers "less worldly." The same middle-class readers who were or would soon be competing to advance as their

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grandparents never dreamed, could feel, in the momentary tear they shed over the broken heart, that they had gained blessed confirmation of their tenderness and guilelessness. They could feel, after all, while their betters made a display in high society of being superior to all things sentimental, and the utilitarians had no time for wallowing in melancholy poetry. Those who loved poetry best were, in Jerdan's words, "the young, the sensitive, the imaginative, the natural, the refined, the tasteful, the innocent, and the good" (*Autobiography* 2: 256). The list of qualities was sincerely meant to define a stereotype applicable to a large number: pure souls seeking to display poetic signs of their virtue.

In 1820, the year Landon's first few poems appeared, Jerdan was pleased with much that he was reading but far from overwhelmed. The *Gazette* praises Cornwall for *Marcian Colonna*'s "simplicity of manner" and "fine feeling for the pathetic," though it finds "that there is sometimes a little apparent affectation in these elegies," e.g., too much use of "to do," "Twas said," and parentheses (371). Croly's *Angel of the World* "sweeps along with the pomp and majesty of a magnificent river," yet "regards, perhaps too little, the sweet attractive graces of the rill or cascade" (449). Manifesting opposite strengths and weaknesses, Hemans is commended for *The Sceptic*'s "sweetness of versification," "purity of thought," and "piety of sentiment," though the work lacks "any of the higher and more striking attributes of poetry" (51). The *Gazette* does not hint that the *Poems* of the Quaker Barton are a little too restrained and unambitious. So great was the novelty of a Quaker poeticizing that it demanded only straightforward promotion. Barton presents "fancy in a sober brown garb, tenderness in a broad beaver, and nature in a staid demeanor" (261). Typical of

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its concern for the betterment of individuals, the *Gazette* recommends *Poems* for tending "to the enlargement of the human faculties, to the moral amelioration, and to the everlasting happiness of the reader" (262): large claims for anyone's verse made by an editor who, believing even more could be done, was seeking vigorous angels and expected to find them.

Jerdan could be excused for thinking he need not have looked further than the pile of manuscripts sent in for the *Gazette*'s Original Poetry section. Symptomatic of poetry's relatively wide audience was the popularity of this section, located in the middle of most issues, but often turned to first, as Bulwer Lytton's recount of the *Gazette*'s reception by Cambridge undergraduates attests (Rev. of *Romance* 546-47). "The opening of our columns to poetical contributions, though hardly credible to the unpoetical spirit, or rather want of spirit, now [1852] pervading the land, had a considerable influence on the Gazette" (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 2: 238). This poetical spirit of these columns usually flew very low, melancholy's fashionable currency perfectly matching the editor's tastes. Having himself recently retreated to the green pastures of the *Gazette*, Jerdan placed exceptional value (in both senses) on poems that might soothe the aching soul yearning to escape from ruthlessly competitive environments. Thus, from cover to cover, the *Gazette* took those readers willing to empathize their way through it on an emotional roller coaster, as the magazine seemed to favor mournful, retiring poems in its reviews and poetry section, while its events pages gloried in an enterprising culture.[14] Short, witty poems were often sprinkled

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through Original Poetry, breaking up a series of gloomy ones, but it was the latter that people talked and wrote about.

Original Poetry served as a kind of workshop for poets, from which several gained the confidence to launch books that, in its reviewing section, the *Gazette* then acclaimed. Besides those mentioned above, regular contributions came from prominent writers like Mary Russell Mitford, Alaric Watts, George Crabbe, James Sheridan Knowles, and Ismael Fitzadam (pseudonym for John Maclun) (*Autobiography* 2: 235- 38). Often these contributions received poetic responses mailed to the *Gazette*, quite a few of which the editor published. Most weeks, grouped beneath the poems by regular contributors, the *Gazette* printed reasonably good verses from unknown writers, under the subheading, "[By Correspondents]."[15] Both paid poets and probably unpaid correspondents adopted concealing signatures. Sometimes a correspondent's pseudonym or set of initials would show up repeatedly in later issues, but more often the poet manqué would disappear, only to be replaced by another mystery writer.

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[14] Comparable contrasts in tone can be found in neighboring columns of the dailies. A perusal of *The Sun* from 1825 and 1826, Jerdan's former paper, reveals that the daily account of the fashionable arrivals in and departures from London usually was accompanied on the same page by accounts of a suicide or murder, the former almost as common as the latter, and both often the result of disappointed love, madness, and poverty. Always these tragic pieces pertained to isolated individuals.

[15] Occasionally the only poems Jerdan had to print were by correspondents. The *Gazette* dropped the subheading, "[By Correspondents]" in 1821, when Landon joined the small group of poets regularly contributing to Original Poetry. She became the principal contributor in 1822, her poems often taking up the entire section.

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Landon's first published poems

In the 21 October 1820 issue, a "Sonnet" by one Anna Matilda is produced as evidence that the sad strains of Ismael Fitzadam had pierced the heart of the unknown female reader-turned-writer, who, Cassandra-like, addresses him, "Bard, foredoom'd to weep! / . . . proscribed and desolate man! / . . . thou are left to die!" She invites comparison both between herself and "some charm'd ocean-nymph, from pearly cave" who alone hears the "native sea-notes," just as Anna Matilda uniquely responds to Fitzadam's harp; and, by her pseudonym, between herself and the deceased Hannah Cowley, the Anna Matilda of Della Cruscan poems. This writer wants readers to pause to consider her, maybe guess about her identity, before they pass on to the next poem (685). Beneath the sonnet appear two poems signed simply "L.," by Letitia Landon. The one titled "Vaucluse," with its Della Cruscan concern for the great love poet, commemorates the "shelter where his [Petrarch's] soul might wander free."[16] It is followed by an untitled set of lines comparing the speaker's wandering heart to the bee visiting flowers. The tone and signature at first seem to suggest a humbler approach than that of Anna Matilda, "L." using the two verses as pleas to be allowed to follow his or her fancy.

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[16] Landon was likely inspired by a short notice in the *Gazette* of January 1, 1820, "Petrarch's Monument": "The monument erected ot the memory of Petrarch at the fountain of Vaucluse, consists of a column about thirty feet high. . . . Standing as it does, in the deepest extremity of a narrow valley, overhung by a mountain seven hundred feet high, it is regarded by nearly all who have visited the celebrated fountain,

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Yet Landon boldly identifies with Petrarch. His were "tender thoughts and minstrel dreams, / All that the bard can feel in solitude." Like Anna Matilda, Landon in "Vaucluse" is preoccupied with the yearnings of a male poet set apart from his fellow men, but to her there is nothing strange about Petrarch, whose works and life story had been giving rise to cherished fantasies since her childhood. She then assumes here she has some knowledge of "All that the bard can feel" because she has long been assuming as much. She will not lament or sympathize because either would detract from the ultimate sweetness of the poet's sorrows, the point of them. The "melancholy charm" of Vaucluse recalls the time "When love awoke the lyre from its long sleep, / Unbound the golden wings of poetry. . . ." Petrarch's impossible love and misery made possible the rebirth of intimate poetry that gave a glimpse of what the poet-lover dreamed and could never in person say. A victorious soldier of sorts, Petrarch deserved the "sacred shade" of the laurel tree, "the hero's trophy and the bard's reward." "Vaucluse" was Landon's first published poem on the subject of poetry; it is vintage Landon, in that it begins by describing a natural setting in which each detail is weighted with feeling – "Tall rocks begirt the lovely valley round, / Like barriers guarding its sweet loneliness" (685) -- and that its praise of another poet amounts to praise of her solitary imaginings. Landon is here already focused on achieving immortal fame, for which she needs a heart as great as Petrarch's, a heart stretched and deepened by tragic love.

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as a mean and almost ridiculous monument." Landon makes no mention of the monument, understandably (11).

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That Original Poetry represented the fifth time in 1820 that poems in the *Literary Gazette* had been published under "L.," but only the fourth time that Letitia Landon has used the signature, the other three being for "Rome," published on March 11th; "The Michaelmas Daisy," on March 18th; and "Fragment," on August 26th. If any curious readers had bothered to collate the first four 1820 poems signed "L.," they would have known that the one calling a West Indian dandy an "Ass," printed above the section for "Correspondents,"[17] was not by the same hand that had reproached modern Rome for its shameful state, had cherished a last flower of the year, and had sketched the decline into death of a "melancholy, broken-hearted girl" (556). But then those three did not necessarily lend themselves toward speculation that the same person had penned them. They differed as much in meter, tone, and length as in subject matter, though all struck mournful notes. ("Vaucluse" is the first poem to sound a little like one of its predecessors, for "Fragment" also opens with a long, blank-verse description of a natural environment.) When she first began appearing in print, Landon did not expect her poems to stir up any interest in their author, nor did she try to draw attention to herself through the use of a peculiar pseudonym or, in the

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[17] The satire does not sound in the least like the sort Landon manifested when, on those rare occasions, she decided to produce a witty poem. Jerdan, however, seems to have mistakenly thought Landon wrote "A West Indian Anecdote, versified." For in his *Autobiography* he states that in August 1820 *Gazette* printed "a passing jeu d'esprit" by Landon as well as her "Fragment" (3: 178). The only other poem by "L." in August is "A West Indian Anecdote, versified," but it is highly doubtful that Landon wrote it. For the poem does not appear where all of the early poems by Landon appeared, beneath the "Correspondents" rubric, and the poem ridicules dandies in a direct, superior manner that Landon never adopted toward these pretty gentlemen.

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text of a poem, an interesting first-person singular. She was instead experimenting with styles and themes to find where her strengths lay.

At this stage, however, Landon could find nothing without Jerdan's approval; only what greatly pleased him did she pick up again to experiment with further. All her hopes for poetical fame, together with those of her family for another source of income, depended on his opinion of her, and, if he liked her work and wanted to help her, she could not wish for more. This dependence was established at the onset of their professional relations. We do not know who in the Landon family first thought of approaching Jerdan to query about getting Letitia's work published in the *Literary Gazette*. She may well have come up with the idea herself. Hall states merely, "Her father's altered circumstances induced her to direct her mind to publication," with her neighbor presenting the obvious starting point (*The Modern Poets* 178). But a young lady in her teens could not, with propriety, initiate any kind of relationship with a married man.

In late 1819 or early 1820, Jerdan was approached by Landon's mother, Catharine. Letitia would never credit her mother for taking the initiative here or with her first book, recounting to others only that, since her childhood, her mother paid discouragingly little heed to her poeticizing. The need for another source of income probably drove Catharine to contact the editor, rather than the feeling that her daughter possessed talent deserving of public recognition. Jerdan writes that, one day out of the blue, Mrs. Landon (whom he seems to have already met) intimated that Letitia "was addicted to poetical composition" and asked if he would evaluate a few of her poems (*Autobiography* 3: 175). "Addicted" may or may not have been Catharine's exact

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word but, by using it, Jerdan lends support to the idea that Mrs. Landon thought her daughter wrote an excessive amount of verses. Perhaps Catharine had over the years tried to dissuade her; yet if there was money to be made by publishing Letitia's verses, Catharine would put aside reservations about her daughter exhibiting her private feelings in print. But she would also try to watch over Letitia's entrance into the profession, helping to attach her so strongly to the neighbor, whose relations with her daughter she could oversee, that Letitia would not dream of relying on anyone else to be her principal guide.

Why the parent more supportive of Letitia's composition is never mentioned at this crucial step in her career remains unknown. John Landon's mind was possibly too taken up with more remunerative opportunities for him to be able to concentrate on getting his daughter published. Yet that possibility does not completely explain, throughout these last four years of his life, John Landon's total lack of involvement in and apparently passive attitude toward the affairs surrounding the publication of his daughter's work. Whether or not more was troubling John Landon than financial difficulties, he clearly did not exercise his patriarchal privilege – abdicating what would have been seen as normal parental responsibility -- to decide, or, at least, to help decide, issues concerning the writing career of the daughter whose creative drive he had, in small but significant ways, done much to foster.

We have no anecdotes from Landon's late teens and early twenties to give a picture of what her life must have been like with her family.[18] But one of her novels

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gives several clues, I think, to how she viewed her parents, and we can thank the fact that this writer so poor at plot creation could not resist using details from her life in her work. Landon composed only the first volume of *Lady Anne Granard; or, Keeping up Appearances*, which was published in three volumes four years after her death. The first volume begins with a widow in financial straits, who remains overly concerned about social life and social codes while trying to marry off her five daughters. One daughter, Isabella, misses "the dear old shrubberies of Granard Park," as Landon did Trevor Park. Isabella's sister Georgiana counters, "And yet, Mamma always talks of having been buried alive there." But their mother thinks only of the wealthiest class shining in London society, Isabella replies. "It is only a very small portion of the world who exist at all" for her, the portion to which Catharine Landon used to aspire to belong (3).

The Granards' deceased father is described as "a broken-spirited man, ruined by extravagance he had not resolution to check, and harassed by embarrassments he had not courage to face. He was a kind-hearted, well-meaning man, and with a different wife would have been a different person" (12-13). It is not unreasonable to speculate that John Landon's financial troubles did not arise solely from the end of the war, his wife contributing to them in no small part. Probably he was renting the large Brompton house for sixty pounds and attached land for fifteen pounds because Catharine wanted to keep up appearances. Jerdan's characterization of John Landon

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[18] Besides servants, I believe that only the two Elizabeths, Letitia's sister and cousin, lived with John and Catharine at this time. Letitia's brother Whittington attended and boarded at Merchant Taylors' School until 1822, so Letitia probably saw him only on holidays.

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as "a man of his simple-heartedness, kindly nature, and quiet worth . . . attached to agricultural pursuits" bears repeating ("Memoir of L. E. L." ix). Mr. Granard was "shy, sensitive, and indolent," "his habits . . . even unsocial"; like John Landon, Mr. Granard "went to London, though he would have preferred living in the country" (12-13).

The picture here agrees enough with what little information is available about both of Letitia's parents, detailed in Chapters One and Two, to seem to fill out the sketch we have of Catherine's and John's personalities. Mr. Granard's indolence, as well as his valetudinarianism (doctors could find no disease), perhaps indicates why no mention exists of how John Landon earned money from roughly 1815, when he was fifty-nine, until 1824, when he died, age sixty-eight. The Landons may have given parties in their large house in the early 1820s. We are told Catherine Landon maintained her society friends all her life, so she must therefore have kept some kind of social life going during the Brompton years. Mr. Granard knew his death would leave his family impoverished, and John Landon's death did. Mr. Granard's oldest daughter Mary, analogous to Letitia Landon, "had become," before his death "the constant companion of her father's solitary walks"; like Letitia, the eldest Miss Granard did not know the whole man, seeing him only "as the kind father with whom she had read and walked, and from whom she had never heard an unkind word" (14). One has no trouble imagining Letitia taking long walks with her father amid those Brompton roses, discussing faraway lands portrayed in their favorite books, perhaps lands where he had sailed as a young man. She could have spoken often to him about

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her hopes for a poetical career, with him attending but lacking the will to do anything to help her.

Catharine having cleared the way with the *Gazette* editor, a sample of Letitia's poems arrived at Jerdan's house with a cover letter written by her cousin and former tutor, Elizabeth Landon, dated 13 February 1820. Miss Elizabeth Landon "ventures to intrude the enclosed lines . . . by a young friend, for whom Miss L. feels the most anxious solicitude. If Mr. Jerdan will, therefore, give his candid opinion whether he considers any taste or genius is expressed, or on the contrary, if he should only call it a waste of time from which no benefit can arise. Miss L. feels the liberty she is taking," in requesting that such a busy, important man as the editor of the *Literary Gazette* attend to an even younger woman's scribblings. We do not know which poems accompanied Elizabeth's letter.[19] "Fragments of romance, snatches of song, 'fancies and good nights,' pieces composed with about as much art as a young bird might exhibit in its first chirping -- were submitted with mingled hope and fear for the critic's judgment" (Blanchard 1: 25). According to Blanchard, they were a child's throwaway poems. Yet when a child, Landon regarded her productions as exercises essential for her development into a poet. The "hope and fear" would indicate that she viewed these as determinants of her professional future. She did not, apparently, revise the poems before submitting them to the editor; Landon never did much revising, as far as I know. She would have presumed her snatches, fragments, and

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[19] As Jerdan's comments on the poems indicate, "Rome" may well have been included in the letter, but probably not "The Michaelmas Daisy," the two poems printed in March issues of the *Gazette*.

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fancies the truest testament of her powers for their having been written with the ease of impulse.

On reading the poems, the *Gazette* editor remembers that he "was exceedingly struck by these juvenile productions – crude and inaccurate . . . in style, but containing ideas so original and extraordinary, that I found it impossible to believe they emanated from the apparent romp, and singular contradictions of the hoop and volume" (*Autobiography* 3: 175). After reading "some of my MSS.," Jerdan "spoke highly of their promise, though at first he doubted who was the author," Landon recalls in a brief sketch of her life for S. C. Hall. "He would not believe that they were written by the child whom he saw playing with his own children" (*Book of Memories* 269). Blanchard understands the editor's sense that if he "could not pronounce every set of verses to be a poem, he could well discern that nobody but a poet had written them" (1: 26). "The manuscripts were corrected, and some other short compositions submitted to me, from all of which I was the more and more forcibly struck with the innate genius they displayed" (*Autobiography* 3: 176). With the arrival of these verses from his neighbor, a true poet – Jerdan's belief that true poets were born, not made, lay behind his championing of poetic genius as a national treasure -- seemed to be presenting herself to him in the shape of a mere "girl," her lines filled with stylish inadequacies demanding his professional attention. Perhaps the situation was too romantic even for Jerdan to believe it true. For the next year or two, what followed between Letitia Landon and William Jerdan would be shadowed by his doubt, unbeknownst to Landon, as to whether he was critiquing and publishing the work of "the apparent romp." She appeared too much a lively tomboy, vigorous and immature

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rather than disciplined and ladylike, not settled enough to need the outlet of poetry or to formulate "ideas so original and extraordinary."

Jerdan suspected Elizabeth actually wrote the poems he read on 13 February 1820, but his letter of reply (which we do not have) must have supplied Letitia with a balance of compliments and criticisms to merit Elizabeth's thanking him in a letter the next day for his "very friendly and candid opinion" – which, of course, was not wholly candid. She assures Jerdan, "It will prove a source of much gratification to the youthful writer that a man of Mr. Jerdan's acknowledged talent should allow them the smallest merit; at the same time it will prove a strong inducement for further improvement, endeavouring to avoid those errors in each branch his kindness has pointed out" (*Autobiography* 3: 176). The obeisant Elizabeth concludes by "again apologising for the very great liberty taken" in writing to Jerdan, which she must have done at her cousin's request. Letitia no doubt feared that, by introducing her own poems, she would seem presumptuous, even conceited. Edicts against any signs of female forwardness were common enough in a society cherishing feminine modesty, and women poets, especially bluestockings, were still enduring criticism in certain circles for making exhibitions of themselves. Just as Letitia was using Elizabeth, so, Jerdan had reason to believe, Elizabeth might be hiding behind Letitia because she did not want to be identified as the poems' author.

Landon's first poem in the *Gazette*, "Rome," was published despite Jerdan's opinion that it contained several "crudities," one of his significant terms of opprobrium, best understood by the examples Jerdan gives from "Rome": "ripe," as in "ripe glory"; "purple," as in "purple rulers, kings"; "stern falchion edge flamed" by the

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prospect of many deaths; and "reddens," as in "the death-light that reddens the tomb" (*Autobiography* 3: 176). Tumbling out from a fancy with a pronounced taste for reds and purples, what Jerdan calls crudities are those nonsensical or risible phrases that distract from what is supposed to be a shaming reproach of the ancient city for betraying its greatness with its present degeneracy, with none of Byron's sympathy in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. For much of her twenty-four lines, Landon rivals Coriolanus's mother in her appreciation for "the red star of conquest" that lit "the joy of thy triumph" as an empire:

> Could the graves yield their dead, and thy warriors arise,
> And see thy blades rusted, thy war banners furl'd,
> Would they know the proud eagle that soared thro' the skies,
> Whose glance lightened over a terror struck world? (173)

Remember, this exulting over an brutal empire and its terrifying soldiers is coming from a seventeen-year old English woman who would soon become famous for her love poetry, a young woman living in seclusion with her family who had never traveled to a foreign country. As we have seen from her childhood games, tales of warfare fired Landon's imagination; she could identify as much with the soldier on the march as she could with the woman left behind.

Jerdan defends "Rome" on the grounds that its sentiment showed "an evidence of thought which broods upon its subject" (*Autobiography* 3: 177). It is a defense that harks back to Jerdan's imperfect memory of Hazlitt's definition of poetry as "the music of language, expressing the music of the mind whenever any object takes such a hold on the mind as to make us dwell on it, and brood over it, melting the heart in

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love, or kindling it to a sentiment of admiration." Landon's "Rome" was printed in the *Gazette* because Jerdan thought it bore musical evidence of a mind that had been somewhat kindled, but to what purpose? To admire a lost empire for the terror it spread or to feel indignant with an ancient city for its loss of military prowess? The poet cannot decide what to feel; nor, in Jerdan's book, were her feelings altogether inspiring. Plus, the poem's crudities jarred contemplation of Rome's brutal might, forcing one to make sense of a word or phrase and puzzle over the poet's meaning. Each discordant note greatly lessened the emotional "effect" which Landon aimed to produce.

Landon's obliviousness to the flaws of "Rome" disturbed the editor who wanted to believe one of his neighbors possessed the soul of Poetry. We know "Rome" disturbed Jerdan because he says Landon's next poem, "The Michaelmas Daisy," which probably arrived at his house just after "Rome" had gone to press, "set my mind at rest" with its "touching simplicity" (*Autobiography* 3: 177):

Last smile of the departing year,
Thy sister sweets are flown;
Thy pensive wreath is far more dear,
From blooming thus alone.

Thy tender blush, thy simple frame,
Unnoticed might have past;
But now thou comest with softer claim,
The loveliest and the last.

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Sweet are the charms in thee we find,

Emblem of hope's gay wing;

'Tis thine to call past bloom to mind,

To promise future spring. (190)[20]

Why the poem's extreme, rarefied simplicity (some would have said triteness) should have been "touching" enough to reassure Jerdan of his neighbor's poetic prowess is a question we must try to answer if we are to have a hope of comprehending the power – a power in weakness, obviously – that this kind of poetry held for 1820s readers. "To give importance to the insignificant is to participate in a strategy of sentimentality itself," Adela Pinch remarks, "which often involves finding pathos and significance in the disproportion between an object and its effects" (76). Everything in "The Michaelmas Daisy" contributes toward heightening and prolonging the reader's appreciation mixed with sympathy for the lonely, little flower; no room here for Blakean turns and revelations. The hope offered by Landon's endnote is not meant to be hopeful, nor can it have been first read that way. For she is throwing a damper over the spring and summer of 1820 by her preferential treatment of a late September flower in a mid-March publication. She asks readers to put aside their expectations of tulips and roses for the sake of considering the fragility of this wild aster that wins

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[20] Frank Sypher thinks that "The Michaelmas Daisy" echoes "'Tis the Last Rose of Summer" from Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*, a work which Landon knew very well. Landon's flower, though, thrives on her isolation, sad though it may be; whereas Moore's must be plucked and its leaves scattered to stop its pining for its dead companions (17).

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admiring love without having to preen or compete. Readers must be very quiet, still, and attentive, lending themselves to being touched by this flower "far more dear" than all the rest, which is supposed to melt us into tenderness as it humbles us into gratitude for its limited role of recalling and forecasting other flowers' glories. "Pensive" is one of Landon's favorite words, usually applied to the beautiful girl who senses that misery awaits as love will be denied her – just as the flower will have to die alone in the face of autumn's chill. But "L." chooses to refrain from broaching that upcoming event, preferring not to let its heroic death detract from the flower's sweet lowliness.

The teenage Landon was very interested in how women with pure hearts admire and win admiration. Rather than being dissuaded by the thorniness of the issues surrounding female display and femininity's reclusive character, she began poeticizing women's predicament with only her second published poem, appropriately indirect in its focus on one of her beloved flowers. She may have begun pondering her own status and decided it better to turn recluse for a while until more deserving of readers' attention. As a "correspondent," Landon was probably unpaid, so she had no financial incentive to insert more poems in the *Gazette* immediately. Jerdan seems to have advised Landon not to try to publish any more poems for the rest of the spring and most of the summer of 1820. He says she used the time to reflect "on friendly criticism and dogmatic rules," without stating what that criticism entailed (3: 178). Jerdan's intensive tutelage began, then, that spring, after Landon had published just two poems in the *Gazette*.

> I found L. E. L. a creature of another sphere, though with every fascination to render her most loveable in our every-day world. . . .

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> From day to day and hour to hour, it was mine to facilitate her studies, to shape her objects, to regulate her taste, to direct her genius, and cultivate the divine organisation of her being. For the divine part was in Her! . . . Every line and every motion of a soul imbued with a quenchless thirst for literary distinction and poetic glory was submitted for my advice; mine was the counsel that pointed the course and the hand that steered the bark, and the breath that filled the sail. . . . (3: 169-72)

As further evidence will demonstrate, Jerdan's picture of close, perhaps daily, contact can be trusted, boast though it clearly is – and though Jerdan, still experiencing financial difficulties, had or was about to move his family to a succession of residences, all of which were in Brompton or Chelsea (Pyle 254). Jerdan omits stating in the *Autobiography* (1852-53) when his uncertainty about the poems' authorship ended, understandably, given the early intimacy he has divulged. But his 1848 "Memoir of L. E. L." rises up to remind us that he has already attributed the end of his uncertainty to Landon's spontaneous writing of "St. George's Hospital, Hyde-Park Corner" when she was away from the editor for only an hour (xi). Jerdan does not say when this composition took place, but "St. George's Hospital" first appeared in print in the *Gazette* of 25 May 1822. She did not likely write it before early 1822. That date is a full two years after he first read Letitia Landon's poems -- two years in which Jerdan could be accused of playing a game with her, praising her, doting on her, introducing her to writers and publishers, while he could not be sure she wrote the poems published under her initial/s in his magazine.

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Jerdan played along for several reasons. The poems emanated from a mind whose possibilities entranced him, and he did not want in any way to dampen their author's willingness to send him more poems. He could not as a gentleman question Letitia Landon's or Elizabeth Landon's veracity, nor could he be certain they were not truthful. If Letitia really was the poet, and thus a "child poet," she would be the marvel of his lifetime, and, as his protégé, this "divine" creature had the potential to become his most enduring triumph, her poetry lasting long after his magazines were no longer read. Landon's "quenchless thirst for literary distinction and poetic glory" would have seemed to Jerdan to be exactly the yearning he had urged poets to possess when in 1819 he called for them to seek to make their spirits "sublime" in their "ascent to receive the palm of immortality" (Duncan, "William Jerdan" 254). Finally, and not unrelated to his sense of her poetic powers, the libidinous editor found Letitia Landon possessed of "every attraction to render her most loveable," and he was enjoying the game. No surprise then that his tutorial abilities appear to have been limited. If he advised her on meter, then Landon, who cared little for "dogmatic rules" of any sort, seems to have laid the advice aside and forgotten it. On the other hand, she likely exercised more taste in her choice of words thanks to Jerdan, while she drew encouragement from his conviction that poets must not let their wings be clipped by the demands of reason or realism (299). Though he could not yet wholly believe in Letitia Landon, per se, Jerdan's certainty that her lines were composed by a nascent poetical genius must have been a factor in her letting her pen follow the wanderings of her imagination down a more idiosyncratic course.

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Five months after the quiet spirit of "The Michaelmas Daisy" looked out from the page, the highly charged "Fragment" was published, in August 1820 (Landon would single it out from her *Gazette* poems for republication in her first volume of poetry (1821)): two poems different in almost every way except for their focus on a lonely female who must die alone. Jerdan calls "Fragment" the "germ of the future L. E. L." (*Autobiography* 3: 178). The manner of this sixty-four line, blank-verse poem would become one of her signature styles, a formula that could be applied, in parts or as a whole, to innumerable beautiful women in innumerable beautiful settings. Dashes are staggered throughout, as if the poet would show by her thoughts left hanging that she fully empathizes with her heroine's disconnected state and the sublimely passionate love that led her there. "L." must break off the saddest strains. Like many works to come, "Fragment" begins by describing a natural scene, in this case a moonlit grove; linked with the grove, the tale of a young woman's love and abandonment is then given the barest of outlines; the woman's changed facial features, presaging her demise, are next mulled over; the poem ends with a description of her corpse. Basically, Landon paints three pictures, the natural scene setting the mood for the next two. Risking (as she often did) looking ridiculous, she asks to be followed into her grove with a heart willing to ache, the better to hear the breeze when it comes "murmuring by, / Fraught with sweet sighs of flowers and the song / Of sorrow, that the nightingale pours forth, / Like the soft dirge of love" (556).

This portrait of the young abandoned woman matters because it is the first of hundreds, and it makes clear Landon's priorities. She throws into her character the essential values of passive, enervated femininity, while giving her no individuating

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traits (long blond hair does not count). Just by not supplying her character with any spoken lines, Landon could have avoided the danger of her improperly verbalizing her passion; but, instead, the woman is made constitutionally unable to speak – as if dumbness were natural for an abandoned woman. Landon thus suggests the prejudice carries some validity, in that the female body cannot handle extreme sexual desire. Landon's silent woman does not fall easily into the long line of abandoned women in poetry going back to Ovid, treated in detail in Lawrence Lipking's *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (1988). Bold, direct, and free of all restraint, these abandoned women represent "a potential threat to a well-ordered society." They still "hope" that their lovers may respond to their wild appeals, while they have "nothing to gain from silence and mystification." In keeping with literary tradition, Landon holds out her abandoned woman for contemporary readers to admire as well as pity (xv-xxii). Yet here, and in many other instances, Landon's abandoned woman is without hope, is left with nothing but a martyrdom made all the more fine and moving by her unthreatening silence. Making no demands or curses, she manifests an ideal form of love by which Landon's female contemporaries were invited to measure their hearts.

> Her sorrow had no voice,
> Save in her faded beauty; for she looked
> A melancholy, broken-hearted girl.
> She was so changed, the soft carnation cloud
> Once mantling o'er her cheek . . .
> Had faded into paleness, broken by
> Bright burning blushes, torches of the tomb.

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There was such sadness, even in her smiles,

And such a look of utter hopelessness

Dwelt in her soft blue eye – a form so frail,

So delicate, scarce like a thing of earth –

'Twas sad to gaze upon a brow so fair,

And see it traced with such a tale of woe –

To think that one so young and beautiful

Was wasting to the grave. (556)

Those "bright burning blushes, torches of the tomb," recall "Rome" with its "death-light that reddens the tomb." Landon is morbidly enchanted with color and sudden drama in the trip to the final resting place -- her fixation with all things deathly lasted her entire adulthood -- just as she is by the perfect absence of the two in the corpse. The burning blushes tell that the young woman wants to sleep solely with death. She is denied to all human lovers now. Equally exquisite, the portrait of the woman in "the cold long rest of death" shimmers with "bright tresses twin'd . . . / Around the polish'd ivory" of the arm. Her whole body is "like to marble," flawless as a classical statue "where the sculptor's skill / Has traced each charm of beauty but the blush" (557). Landon's first male readers would not have been in "awe" of her silent woman (Lipking 180), though, like those of literary tradition, she proves her heart great enough to make a man "more dear than life unto her soul" (Landon, "Fragment" 556). With her porcelain-like delicacy, she is pure victim, absolutely

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powerless, desirable in a way that calls for the utmost care.[21] That man leaves woman, "careless of the passion which / He had awakened into wretchedness," does reflect badly on a common practice of eligible bachelors. But, much more than that, it gives Landon the opportunity to realize one notion of beauty whose power to affect depends on that beauty's evanishment, drawing forth the unlimited pity for the young and lovely and dead that the beautiful living can never know. What actions led to the emotional turmoil of this nameless woman, resulting in the "utter hopelessness" expressed in her "soft blue eye," Landon leaves to be fathomed.

The Fate of Adelaide

Around August 1820, when she turned eighteen and had had no more than three poems accepted for the *Gazette*, Landon decided to write a long narrative poem for publication in a volume. The decision was rash and is difficult to explain – though full of encouragement, Jerdan would not have suggested this great attempt so early in Landon's development as a writer -- apart from her family's financial needs. Plus, an upcoming trip with her grandmother to Clifton, on the Avon river, and then to Castle

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[21] I think most of Landon's female characters were drawn to appeal to both sexes, to please men while they flattered women. That she succeeded is registered in the innuendoes of many a review. A poem like "Ariosto to his Mistress" (1836), where the poet begins to limn the beauties of his mistress for her pleasure, suggests that Landon aspired to match generations of male poets, going back to the troubadours, whose tributes to their beloveds were sewn with the iconic particulars of female physical beauty. The poets taught Landon that the tender feelings of both sexes thus flowered easiest.

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End, Warwickshire, would give her four months away from her family and Jerdan, when she would have stretches of time to concentrate on one writing project. Before she left on the journey to Clifton, Landon began writing the poem and secured Jerdan's "permission" to send him its manuscript, as her letter to him attests (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 3: 181). Landon was trying to hold onto the editor's hand as she embarked on this first flight outside his magazine.

Without Jerdan near to talk to, however, she promptly lost confidence in her first attempt. "The poem I took with me to Clifton, intending to finish it, I quarrelled [sic] with and burnt," Landon would inform her family months later. She soon started over again but could finish just the first of the two cantos that would comprise *The Fate of Adelaide, A Swiss Romantic Tale.*[22] She posted the manuscript home for her mother to deliver to the editor and, unable to resume writing, waited for Jerdan's opinion (Blanchard 1: 37). I dare say that all of the 484 lines that comprise Canto 1 were written principally for Jerdan's eyes, that Landon wanted to please him above all else. Many of the poem's expressions of sentiment were, I think, largely determined by her being away from home and the financial and moral constraints of her immediate family, by being with her grandmother, "an old lady of lady-like manners, pleasing conversation, affectionately fond" of her namesake and favorite

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[22] Though Landon sets her tale amid Switzerland's snowy mountains, there is little else in it that could be seen as essentially Swiss. Perhaps tales of Byron's and the Shelleys' escapades there excited her imagination, but not enough to research the national culture. Probably nothing more than a transient mood of homesickness caused her to write in "Sonnet," from the same volume, "I envy not the traveller's delight" when he gazes on the Swiss mountains or "Italia's loveliness" because such travel would take her far away from her family home (109).

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granddaughter. Jerdan has reason to sugarcoat Letitia Bishop. For the financially-independent grandmother, the supposed "natural daughter of an aristocratic family," did not, as later events would demonstrate, share her daughter Catharine Landon's concern for sexual propriety (*Autobiography* 3: 180).

Both at the beginning and end of Canto 1, Landon/the speaker interjects her plight as a young unknown poet longing for success who must yet use "unskill'd and plaintive . . . notes": "My wreath, if wreath at all my harp may claim, / Will be of simplest field-flowers" (7). If so humble, why so ambitious? The understood question moves the poet-speaker to address her muse, declaring that she wants fame mainly to please her beloved, whose approval matters more than public notice ever could:

> . . . Oh! belov'd
> Inspirer of thy youthful minstrel's dream,
> How dear the meed of fame would be to me!
> For thou must see it, and thy hand would give
> The brightest blossom that could sparkle there.
> Thine was the earliest smile that ever shed
> Its cheering light on my young laurel's growth.
> . . . . . .
> . . . never, never can approval's smile
> Be half so treasur'd, half so priz'd as thine. (7)

In the tale that the beloved has inspired, a dreamy young woman, whose refined heart is attuned to "sorrow's slightest thrill" (16), falls in love with soldier and storyteller Orlando. "Oh, love! how exquisite thy visions are!" exclaims the speaker in a

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passage that two reviewers, one being Jerdan, would quote. "Celestial thy first dawning! . . . / . . . / Waking it [the soul] to a new enchanted world, / Where every thought is gladness" (14). Betrothed to each other, Adelaide and Orlando wander amid dewy flowers before the dawn of his leaving day, pausing for some time in "a shadowy alcove, where oft / Th' unconscious hours had passed unmarked away" (21), where the sexual danger remains blatant, as any contemporary reader could not but have recognized.

From the awful fate of this love, Adelaide, like all Landon heroines, cannot escape. As Orlando leaves Adelaide for battle never to return until it is too late, when she is near death, the speaker yet seems to be thinking more about herself than Adelaide as she rejects melancholy to dance briefly with Hope, on whose gay wing, she says, the young rest all that matters most. She then checks herself and could be referring to Adelaide's story: "False as thou art, O most illusive Hope! / . . . The moments of thy reign . . . / . . . are the purest pleasures life can boast -- / Reality is sadness." But, uncharacteristic of Landon -- schooled by Byron to regard "farewell" as "that fatal word," wherein "howe'er / We promise – hope – believe -- there breathes despair" (*The Corsair* 1.489-90) -- her speaker turns optimistic again to dwell on Hope's "soothing" power during the "gloom of absence." Without "thy sweet promise of meeting joys, / The warm embrace, the look of love, the smile, / . . . / Parting were as the shadow of the grave" (29). No mention is made of Adelaide in the last fifty-one lines. Talk of a reunion of warm embraces and smiles elicits from the poet in Clifton this declaration, ending the canto:

Thus far my song hath reach'd again to thee,

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With whom my strain began: say, will thy smile
Beam on my harp, like sunshine upon flowers,
Depriv'd of which they die? Oh! If one note
Can boast of sweetness, 'tis from thee twas caught.
Enough, enough! Whate'er my fate may be,
That song is transport, that wins praise from thee. (29-30)

Hanging onto her various hopes regarding the beloved and fame, Landon as the speaker likens herself to Adelaide. The speaker is transported by laying her harp at the beloved's feet. She is not interested in giving an accurate assessment of her creative powers but rather in making the beloved acknowledge that, when he praises her, he praises her love for him; that she is woman first, poet second; that she sees no future for herself as a poet without him. The speaker could say more but makes a show of restraining herself, as she seeks to build interest around a professional "fate" whose outcome she yet subordinates to basking in the joys of the beloved's approval.

Letitia Landon is here taking on the role of the troubadour who begs his adored one to grant but one smile more, deprived of which she could only feel her sense of reality's "sadness" confirmed. The praise that she longs for will clearly not be enough to slake her desire for further praise and attention from her beloved. Hers is a request made to look humble by its coming from a heart consumed by thoughts of him. Well schooled in the poetry of Petrarch and the tradition of courtly love, Landon can only regard the lover's self-abasement as ennobling. How far the woman can go, how much she is willing to suffer for her love, Landon's story lays down. Complying with "the social phantasy in the poetry of courtly love," which "takes the form of self-love

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rather than love for another" (Easthope 63), Landon's speaker idealizes her own heart as well as Adelaide's for their capacity to idealize men. To put it simply, Landon reverses the gender roles to advance herself personally and professionally.

Canto 1 of *The Fate of Adelaide* functioned like a (probably initial) love letter between non-fictional people in an evolving relationship. As an 1820 love letter from a well bred, middle-class young lady to a married, middle-aged editor and lover of wine, women, and sentimental poetry, the published text (the manuscript has not been located) represents a shockingly bold act that could have destroyed the poet's career before it really started. In a year when the nation's queen was being tried for adultery, Landon invites Jerdan to view her with adulterous eyes, inviting the ruin of her reputation and hers only. The irresponsibility of this act of composition might be somewhat accounted for by our supposing that, like Petrarch, Landon did not expect her passionate affection to be returned. An abiding tenet of her work is that poets must have great, unrequited loves, for the sake of their poetry, if nothing else. Preceding "Vaucluse" in the *Gazette*, the 1820 "Fragment" likewise demonstrates that Landon's obsession with tales of fatally abandoned women was well established in her mind when her feelings for Jerdan were just in their dawning.

Landon sent Canto 1 to Jerdan "in a fit of despair," she tells her family later, having "thought so much about the poem, that I got quite tired of it." She remembers how nervous she felt about Jerdan's opinion: "I had, indeed, compounded a miserable essence for expectation -- it might have been styled an intrusion, presumption, or, to sum up in a word, it might have been good for nothing" (Blanchard 1: 37). Landon's note to Jerdan accompanying the manuscript places the work's fate in Jerdan's hands

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in another gesture of feminine dependence that would have possessed charms for them both: "I am too well aware of my many defects. . . . Of the poem itself . . . your judgment will be most unmurmuringly and implicitly relied on. It is quite at your option to throw it behind the fire, or allow it a little longer existence" (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 3: 181). Given her fire-raising of the first version – the one time, I believe, that Landon destroyed a long manuscript draft -- her invitation to burn this second manuscript cannot be regarded as frivolous. She knew, though, that Jerdan would never destroy it.

Aware that her humble gestures, combined with the canto's impassioned requests, might elicit unwarranted compliments from the sentimental editor, Landon then adds, "But however delightful your praise may be, is it presumption to say, do not let me receive from your kindness what I would owe to your real sentiments?" She concludes her letter by expressing delight at being "honoured with a place in the 'Gazette'" for "Vaucluse" and the untitled poem beginning, "The bee, when varying flowers are nigh," both published on 21 October 1820. "Pray accept my best thanks for the improvements you made" (3: 181). So long as he approved her work's being printed, she would not have protested if Jerdan had exercised his power to alter half the words of a poem. Landon welcomed any changes Jerdan cared to make, as she would most editorial attentions throughout her career. Yet in her prefaces, Landon continually asks critics to treat her kindly rather than fairly; her letters reveal that she requests honest criticism only prior to publication, when no one else was looking – and probably just when she was sure she was dealing with the sort of critic who could never be severe with a young lady. Landon must have doubted Jerdan would change

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much, at the same time she was asking him to treat her work as he pleased. Jerdan did punctuate her work because he had to -- all of her writing life, Landon tended to leave out more commas and periods than she put in -- but manuscripts of her poems indicate that Jerdan did not often alter Landon's words, preferring to let be even what he thought were errors.

Letitia Landon's mother probably did not read Canto 1 before she passed the manuscript and her daughter's letter on to Jerdan. Ignorant of the passions Letitia was harboring for the editor, Catharine Landon incautiously worked to deepen Jerdan's care for and attraction to her daughter while further encouraging Letitia's dependence on him. In her short letter to Jerdan accompanying the manuscript, dated 4 November 1820, the very proper Catharine defends Letitia's attempting as a novice poet to go beyond the *Gazette*'s pages and write a book of poetry: "I trust you will not think her arrogant, as I believe you are aware of her reasons for wishing to publish" (3: 181-82). You know we need the money, Catharine lacks the indelicacy to say. It would be in keeping with Catharine's character if, in her concerns to protect Letitia's reputation and to stave off arrogance, she had decided years earlier to discourage her daughter's dreams of poetic fame, and only the family's financial straits let her countenance Letitia's rush into print. Catharine's concern for the success of her daughter's poetry would have helped her view Letitia's incapacity to proceed with *Adelaide* without Jerdan's favor as indicative of nothing more than an admirably feminine lack of confidence as well as appropriate reverence for her superior's judgment. She would simply stress to the editor that the young lady is trembling to hear from him. Requesting that Jerdan give her his opinion of the canto by the next week so she can

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enclose it in her letter to Letitia, Catharine rhetorically asks, "Need I say how very anxious she [Letitia] is for your opinion?," not once, but twice – except that four sentences later, Catharine grants Jerdan even more authority: "Need I say how anxious she [Letitia] is to learn her fiat[?]" (3: 182).

Whatever anxiety Landon felt about Canto 1 was consumed by giddiness when she received Jerdan's letter of reply. She writes to her cousin and former tutor, Elizabeth Landon, from her aunt's house in Castle End, Warwickshire:[23] "Dear cousin, Are you pleased with me? Am I not happy? 'An elegance of mind, peculiarly graceful in a female;'-- is not this the praise you would have wished me to obtain?" She credits the editor's flattery with her being unable to stop laughing at a Miss C., who, along with her aunt (or aunt and Miss C. may be the same person), noticed the upsurge of Letitia's mood since receiving it: ". . . she [Miss C.] exclaims, 'Well now, dear heart alive, I am so glad to find you have such good spirits!' I believe my aunt thinks me not a little rhodomontade, but it is very excusable at present. I am so

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[23] This letter and the one to her parents are two of the only four letters by Letitia Landon in existence from this early period of her career. The aunt living in Castle End was probably Jane Landon, who was born in 1754 and died unmarried in 1841 at Ross, which may be Ross-on-Wye. Jane Landon never married; her one surviving sister Barbara married Thomas Cox (*Account* 11). As far as I know, Letitia Landon's mother had no siblings, but perhaps she did. The aunt may have been related to Mrs. Bishop, perhaps being her sister or another daughter. The aunt's surname may have begun with a "C" and been very significant to Landon. For she refers to a "Miss C" in her letter to her cousin, and to her parents she remarks that her current happiness over Jerdan's note "so far surpasses my expectations, convinced as I am that a kind of curse hangs over us all; it seemed too delightful to happen to one of the Cahets [or 'Cabots' or 'Cabets']." Landon's poor handwriting makes the surname indeterminable, which is unfortunate because the name might shed light on her grandmother's and mother's vague origins and what caused Landon romantically to think a curse hung over a branch of her relations (Blanchard 1: 28, 35-37)

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enchanted by Mr. Jerdan's note" (Blanchard 1: 27-28).[24] "So favourable a verdict again revived my spirit of exertion," Landon relates to her family, still feeling the effects of Jerdan's letter when the second canto has been completed. "How happy I am!" (1: 37).

His praising her long narrative poem was, in short, the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to her. Accordingly, before resuming the narrative in Canto 2, the speaker seeks to convey to the beloved how he has pleased her, how she longs to please him further. After she tells the Spirit of the Harp, "I love thee, passionately love!" and "thou enchanting power, my love is thine," she sighs, "But there is a dearer bliss . . .

> -- ah! canst thou,
> From whom it came, paint the deep joy, or tell
> What the young minstrel feels, when first the song
> Has been rewarded by the thrilling praise
> Of one too partial, but whose lightest word
> Can bid the heart beat quick with happiness –
> . . . . . .
> Were mine the fairest laurel Bard e'er gain'd,

---

[24] In her letter to her cousin Elizabeth, Letitia Landon's exclamations of delight over Jerdan's letter provide support for my case that the beloved of *The Fate of Adelaide* is unquestionably Jerdan – and not Elizabeth. Letitia wanted to please Elizabeth, but she wanted to please Jerdan infinitely more. By themselves, Canto I's passages addressed to the beloved could be read as addressed to Elizabeth, and Letitia Landon may have deliberately left them open to that interpretation. But once this letter to Elizabeth, the

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In days when Greece was proud to grace the lyre;
Were mine the fame, before whose glory life
Sinks into nothingness, they could not be
So precious as the slightest wreath of thine.
It is my thought of pride, my cherish'd prize,
To breathe one song not quite unworthy thee. (34-35)

The praise that "has been rewarded," that "came" so recently from the "too partial" beloved has stirred within the speaker's breast a "deep joy" and a "dearer bliss" than the enchantments of her adored poetry. Landon could have found a more straightforward way of confessing her passion for Jerdan. But perhaps she did in the same volume, with "Fragment", which begins, "Love thee! Yes, yes!" Yet here we enter the vast list of her love poems addressed to nameless individuals, usually containing lines that fit her and Jerdan's situation, but often ending with lines that seem to misapply; in the case of "Fragment," ones about having plighted "My vows to thee" (73-74). What makes *The Fate of Adelaide* so significant is that it indicates that Landon, at her most simple and naïve at age eighteen, wanted to express in her poetry her passion for Jerdan to Jerdan and that she expected contemporary readers to be moved by her most private feelings yet not perceive their illicit nature. With ambition on board, Landon sails in Canto 2 from the beloved's lightest word to a quickening heartbeat, from the fairest laurel, fame, and glory to the nothingness of the rest of life to the beloved's slightest wreath. The lines would collapse without the speaker's faith

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one to John and Catharine Landon, and Canto II's passages to the beloved are taken into account, the identity of the beloved can be seen unmistakably to be Jerdan.

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in her sincerity. Yet they are further bolstered by the feelings' seeming confinement to the page, as secrets not to be spoken – only "breathed," a favorite Landon word.

Landon was swimming into an undertow of sexual attraction from which she would make no effort to escape. Indeed, thinking herself insufficiently understood by her family, the sensitive, dreamy young poet could hardly have resisted falling for the prominent editor who, enamored with her charms and tender musings, was in the process of being reduced to an "idolisation of her" (*Autobiography* 3: 169). When Jerdan complimented her on her "elegance of mind, peculiarly graceful in a female," he was telling Landon that her work reflected well on herself and that self appealed to his finest sensibilities. Note Jerdan's understanding that "elegance of mind" could be taken for praise of a male or female, as could "graceful." In a feminized society, the female could, at best, be only "*peculiarly* graceful." Because Landon appealed to his exquisite tastes, Jerdan was sure she would appeal to all poetry lovers. The young woman so long isolated by her family's reduced fortunes as well as her dreamy tendencies should now be confident that, fired by both ambition and what she took for love and monitored by refined taste, her mind would produce sentiments that many would want to possess. Successful or not, however, *Adelaide*'s speaker suspects that her past has endowed her with an ineluctable propensity for wrecking whatever "hall of joy" she builds:

> Alas! each sunny vision I have known,
> Has pass'd away like to an infant's smile
> Bathed the next moment in the bitterest tears.
> And shall I raise my hall of joy again,

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My fairy dwelling, on th' unstable sand?

With tremulous hand, I scarce dare wake the strings;

They too may tell the vanity of hope. (36)

But what of Adelaide and Orlando in Canto 2? In the same letter where she beams over Jerdan's opinion, Landon insincerely flatters her cousin Elizabeth:

> I hope you will like 'Adelaide.' I wished to pourtray [sic] a gentle soft character, and to paint in her character, and to paint in her the most delicate love. I fear her dying of it is a little romantic; yet what was I to do, as her death must terminate it? Pray do you think, as you are the model of my, I hope, charming heroine, you could have contrived to descend to the grave
>
> "Pale martyr to love's wasting flame?" (Blanchard 1: 27)

Adelaide could not have been closely modeled after Elizabeth. Adelaide was too perfect for this earth. So Landon, beginning to model her own affections after her ideals, finds herself asking if Elizabeth could model herself after Adelaide, as she swings from the earnest wish "to paint in her the most delicate love" to an amused sense of the impossibility of it all. But she "must" reach for these impossibilities and crown her sentiment with romance. The delicate Adelaide, deserted by him "who had been / To her the light, the breath of life," must retreat from the "now joyless world" to a convent and, careless of her religious vows, must plunge into her heart's dark, unknown regions: "Her soul held but one feeling, desolate, / The recklessness of cold and fix'd despair" (40-41). Landon would have readers understand that, with Orlando having wed another, Adelaide's heroism lies in her refusal to be compromised or

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compensated for the loss of him. Adelaide will not settle for reality's meager portions. At the climax, Adelaide, "in a wild dream of phrenzy," leaves the convent to go to her brother's grave, where Orlando finds her, like Kaled at the end of Byron's *Lara*, with her form "wasted," her lip "gasping." "Her faded cheek / Wore a strange ghastly hue; her eye was dim -- / Half clos'd and rayless." He kisses her only to discover she has died, presaging his and his wife's soon deaths (62-63).

By the time Landon finished writing *The Fate of Adelaide*, she had also "written all the minor pieces I intend inserting" in the same volume, she tells her cousin (Blanchard 1: 27).[25] These thirty-nine "Miscellaneous Poems" take up eighty-five pages, or over half the work. The bleak reflections that would become such a noted feature of her work are already cropping up, here and there, like the snowdrops in another "Fragment" who "welcome in the spring, and then . . . die": "But it is thus with every loveliness. / Either so frail, its life is but a breath, / Or else some bitterness grows by its side" (92). Counterpoints are provided by poems taken up with single melodramatic moments, tableaux that ask the reader to imagine the sounds of the shrieks, cries, and sobs. The instant of overwhelming emotion comprises the whole of, for instance, "Curtius," in which a soldier "wildly clasp'd" his beloved before throwing himself into an abyss to placate the gods and save the masses gathered round in "gasping breathlessness, as terror chain'd / The life-pulse down" (77-80). Similarly, "Sketch of a Painting of Santa Malvidera, escaped miraculously from

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[25] At least two poems may have been written years earlier: "Lines Addressed to Miss Bisset," Landon's music teacher at Trevor Park; and "Lines Addressed to Colonel H---, On His Return from Waterloo."

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Shipwreck," describes the young female saint on a rock, her arms raised toward heaven in prayer, her "soul / Already mingled with its native skies," tears "trembling" in her eyes. "You might have gaz'd on those half-opened lips, / And deem'd you listen'd to their silvery tones" (81-82). This first of Landon's many poems on paintings is also the first of many times that she will describe one of her works as a "sketch." The sketch, by its publication, suggests that the poet's inspired impressions of a finished painting make the painting speak as it never could have before she saw it and wrote about it.

"Corinna" is Landon's first treatment of the legendary poetess who inspired De Staël's novel and with whom, along with Sappho, Landon would be repeatedly compared. It is worth noting that, early in his journalistic career, Jerdan had helped a friend translate De Staël's *Corinne* (Pyle 16). Conscious of similarities (or the potential for similarities) between Landon and Corinne, Jerdan may have suggested that Landon read the novel or, more likely, he may have reminded her of its powerful depiction of the improvising performance poet who chooses an independent way of life. "Corinna" suggests that *Corinne* persuaded Landon at least to consider an alternative to English codes of sexual morality, as, through the figure of Oswald, the novel invited all its English readers to do.[26] The writer Mary Russell Mitford, for

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[26] One of many articles on De Staël following her death on 14 July 1817, her obituary in the *Times* of 19 July "pits French excessiveness against British common sense" as it frowns upon the inveigling sensuality of De Staël's novels:

> Her moral system must be searched for among the folds of rich and voluptuous sensibility with which she has invested it; and we are not sure that it will always bear the light. Few people, we are persuaded, have risen from her compositions with their taste

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instance, found the novel and its heroine to be most "improper" (L'Estrange, *The Life* 235-36). Moreover, though in the novel the scandal which the English attach to Corinne is unsubstantiated, the life of Germaine de Staël possessed more than enough substance for scandal in nineteenth-century English eyes. And Landon firmly equated Madame de Staël with her novel's heroine. In the poem "Corinne at the Cape of Misena," published in *The Amulet* for 1832, L. E. L. writes: "Corinne / Is but another name for her who wrote, / Who felt, and poured her spirit on her lay. / What are the feelings but her own?" (252). Fourteen years earlier the *Times* had published "titillating details" of De Staël's private life, including "the illegitimate birth of a fifth child in 1812, Louis-Alfonse Rocca, whose existence was only officially made known during the reading of her last will and testament following her burial at the end of July [1817]" (Gardiner 229). "Corinna" shows that three years after those titillating details were known, the teenage Landon was imagining how the figure whom De Staël made popular might have infused her poems with sexuality.

Influenced by a series of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French writers who followed Ovid in depicting Sappho as a spontaneously impassioned poet (DeJean 83, 100), De Staël's *Corinne* placed the female poet in front of a gathered crowd to create the new version of the sapphic archetype that Landon adopted: the female poet

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> purified, or their principles strengthened. The debt which the present generation owes to the alluring author of 'Delphine' and 'Corinne' bears some resemblance in character, though not in amount, to that which was imposed upon the age preceding, by the sentiment and sophistry of ROUSSEAU. Where she counsels the reader to virtue, he does not feel more virtuously disposed; as, where she professed to treat of literature, she adds little to the common stock of knowledge. (Gardiner 227-28)

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whose improvisational performances telegraphed her feelings to those assembled for her performance, so that "she could be shown in the act of swaying the multitude" (Moers, *Literary Women* 185). Landon's Corinna, like her subsequent Sappho and Improvisatrice, but unlike De Staël's Corinne (Riess 816), does not advocate social change to the many gathered to see her performance. Rather she sings only in "such a strain [as] / The soft Erato wakes, when she would sing / Of loveliness, and love by sorrow shaded." In effect, Landon's readers are merged into the crowd, over which Corinna wields her eroticism (no Oswald being present). Landon already "knows," as did Rousseau and as Baudrillard says all virgins do, the seducing power of feminine weakness, the blush that captivates with its timidity, the exquisite pleasures of captivating that cannot avoid the agonies of being captivated (Haslett 283, 286). "She stood alone; but on her every eye / Dwelt in mute ravishment," her long black hair flowing and "bosom's matchless ivory," lightly veiled.

> Her voice (the Syren's is not sweeter . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Was fraught with tender feelings, and called forth
>
> An answering harmony within the heart;
>
> And even when it ceas'd, the list'ner's ear
>
> Thrill'd with its wild and witching melody. (97-98)

Corinna seduces her audiences into sympathetic identification. In this first of Landon's many "urban crowds," all catch the "contagious emotion" and are thrilled to be so transported (Pinch 214). When her song is over, Corinna stays silent as she looks down "In mild unconscious beauty," her cheek "deliciously pale." Only when

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the laurel crown is placed on Corinna's head, emphasizing her erotic attachment to Poetry and fame, does she blush "Such as young Psyche wore, when Love first taught / His own sweet language" (98). That a woman should be portrayed being crowned for her art, as De Staël's Corinne is on the Capitol steps, no doubt imprinted the totality of her success on readers not accustomed to women being lauded for their artistic achievements. With Corinna's blush, Landon seeks to make that success more palatable.

Two minor poems with the same title, "Absence," provide a snapshot of Landon's feelings toward her family at this noteworthy juncture in their less than ideal relations. One bemoaning her "weary hours" apart from loved ones she enclosed in a chatty letter to her family.[27] Written at her aunt's house, this letter is quoted in full by Blanchard to support his thesis that the melancholy of L. E. L.'s poetry did not reflect Landon's authentic, exuberant self. "The contrast between the tone of this letter, and that of the lines enclosed in it, is apparent. It forms the distinction between reality and romance" (1: 37-38). In the poem, Landon laments: "I am quite alone. / . . . all I loved most fondly, all are gone. / . . . cold to me each smile that meets my own."[28]

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[27] I think it safe to assume that Letitia included her brother in the "you all" of the letter and in the familial scene referred to in her two "Absence" poems. The two poems make more sense if Landon was thinking of Whittington as well as the rest of her family. For Landon always loved her brother; whereas she seems to have felt little, if any, affection for her sister and mother most of the time. The two poems and the letter may actually mark the high point of her affections toward them.

[28] These lines from the poem published in Blanchard are, with the exception of differences in punctuation, almost identical to those published in *The Fate of Adelaide* volume. The only verbal change was made to "to me," which reads "is here" in the *Adelaide* volume (75-76).

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Yet she was spending four months with her adored grandmother; she found her aunt "really a delightful person – so good-natured, lets me do just as I please; I don't wonder they all like her so much." And she thus was pleasing herself: "I have such a delightful room to sit in, where I usually spend mornings and evenings," writing, reading Elizabeth Smith's (once popular) *Fragments, in Prose and Verse* (1808) – "I like them so much" -- or playing a "sober rubber at whist." In short, "nothing could be pleasanter than my visit to Castle-end" (Blanchard 1: 27-28, 35-37).

But then, Landon probably took special pleasure in the similarity between her recently published "Fragment" and Smith's opening poem, a vignette of a young isolated women, apparently violated and abandoned, who broods over her "melancholy fate" and then concludes, "Peace for EMMA none remains!" (3, 5). To fill out her *Adelaide* volume, Landon wanted to write poems of undiluted sorrow about missing her family, toward whom her feelings were, at best, mixed. Her absence seems to have brought about the (short-lived) desire to overcome that ambivalence and feel nothing but love. And that wish, together with some remorse and concern that her family members were not missing her as she did them, produced the "Absence" poems. Clearly Landon intended that her family take one of the poems as part of her letter to them, the poem expressing more than she would say in conversational prose. The overall tone of the letter may be light and merry, but it does state, "I do so long to see you all. . . . I have but one cause of complaint -- I so seldom hear from any of you. As for my cousin, if I did not know her too well, I should take it for granted she had forgotten me. . . . The following lines I wrote last night – I send them, as they are addressed to you." All Landon needed was one complaint to write a poem. She

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worries in this poem about being "forgotten," and admits that "sickening thoughts" come to her when she thinks how alone she is, which she defines as being far from the sight of "some long-loved brow." So "tedious" is waiting to see them that she cannot bear to look forward to meeting again (1: 27-28, 35-37). But in the other "Absence," she cannot look beyond the perfect "joy" promised in the moment of reunion: "The world has not a joy for me, / Dear as our meeting thus would be" (112). The poet knows "The deep regret, the bitter tear, / That comes when those lov'd ones are gone" (110). That Landon had any cause for regret is suggested by her asserting in her letter to her cousin that she will reform: "I do so long to be with you, if it were only to show you how amiable I intend being. I will not be passionate; and, as to Elizabeth [her sister], I will be so good-natured -- I will be to her what you have been to me. . . " (Blanchard 1: 27).

In the same poem she writes, "Cold is the heart that e're could breathe / A wish . . . to roam" from "that lov'd spot" named by "that word of magic – home" (111). One imagines Letitia Landon had breathed more than a few of such wishes. To her cousin she writes, "I never knew how delightful it was to be at home until I was away" (Blanchard 1: 27). "Once together again, I care not for anything," she professes to her family. Being away from them for so long had caused her to lose her "passion for traveling" and give up her "intended travels through Africa" (1: 36). This change of heart would imply that she had jumped at the chance to travel with her grandmother for a few months and leave behind her parents and their worries about money, plus her sickly sister who, Letitia perhaps thought, demanded too much attention. More than once Letitia had raised her voice in anger or irritation over her sister; her cousin had

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begged her to be more understanding, but Letitia preferred to leave for a while. Four months of having "to be continually obliged to think of what I must say, for fear of offending some one or other" (1: 28), must have given the teenage poet an indication of how freely (for a middle-class young woman of the period) she was allowed to speak and behave at home.

Though Letitia Landon was obviously feeling some affection toward Catharine at this time, on the whole Letitia "certainly did not love her Mother," as Katherine Thomson comments in a letter to Bulwer Lytton written after the poet's death (Letter to Edward). What tender feelings her mother had for Letitia she does not seem to have made manifest, or at least not in a way that impressed her elder daughter. Upon Letitia arriving home, their joint interest in getting *The Fate of Adelaide* published would have helped to smooth their relations momentarily. Letitia needed someone's assistance, and her mother seems to have wanted her daughter to depend on her rather than turning to Jerdan, as she perhaps began to be concerned about his and Letitia's relationship. Catharine's volunteering and ready ideas allowed mother and daughter to think, for a little while, that they could find a publisher by themselves. Using every means available to her, Catharine sought success for her daughter's most ambitious effort so far in "my life" that Letitia would describe in 1826 as "from the time I was fifteen . . . one continual struggle in some shape or another against absolute poverty" (Blanchard 1: 56). The profits from one book could little help the Landons, but many more chances to profit from the poet's talent might follow. By producing a book that caught reviewers' and the public's attention, an unknown writer could, along with earning a tidy sum, get her name circulated widely in a few months, whereas the

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standard of anonymity in the periodical market made it very hard for the unknown to become known there. Landon would be writing under her full name for the first time with the publication of *The Fate of Adelaide*.

But, once again, she lost confidence in the project, and, through her most reluctant mother, applied to Jerdan. In her letter to the editor written on 27 November 1820,[29] Catharine, "Conscious that your time is much occupied," feels "a great repugnance in intruding my present request; but Letitia's anxiety for your opinion will, I am afraid, make you consider us both very troublesome." She asks Jerdan to put the minor poems in an order suitable for publication and requests his "sanction" for the whole of the work, without which Letitia thinks she has "no hope of success, and has no resolution to go on. . . . A line from you, giving her your opinion, will settle the

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[29] Catharine Landon's letter bears the return address "138, Sloane-Street"; 1820 land tax records for both Chelsea, in which Sloane Street is located, and Kensington, in which the Brompton house was located, list John Landon as a taxpayer. It would then seem possible that John Landon was trying to hold onto two residences in the 1819-1820 period, while in the process of moving everything from Sloane Street to Brompton. Letitia Landon's letter to her parents from Castle End closes with the question, "When do you *think* of moving?" (emphasis Landon's; Blanchard 1: 37), but she gives no indication from where they would be moving, that is, Sloane Street or Brompton. By all accounts, Jerdan and John Landon were neighbors in Brompton since before March 1820, and the Kensington records show that John Landon paid tax from 1820 (meaning he could have lived in Brompton as early as late 1819) to 1825. The house on Sloane Street may have been the same in which John Landon's family lived more than a decade earlier, in between living on Hans Place (the Landons' address in the 1800s was 139 Sloane Street). John Landon may have maintained this house on Sloane Street from the 1800s to the 1820s or changed houses on the same street. His being listed as a ratepayer for Sloane Street from 1818 to 1820 does imply, anyway, that the Landon family was not seeking to live in seclusion at this time, Catharine Landon's interest in social advancement perhaps having reasserted itself. Her mother, Letitia Bishop, also lived on Sloane Street; when Letitia Landon did bother to write a return address from her grandmother's house, she printed it as

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matter, whether she may proceed." Jerdan accordingly doled out his praise and arranged the poems. Yet the attentions of a self-styled "popular editor, intimate with publishers," did not fully dissipate the poet's anxieties. Jerdan may also have felt a twinge of disappointment that the Landons did not request his help at the onset of their efforts to find a publisher. Catharine Landon's letter conveys the impression that close family and friends were handling the matter. She states that Letitia "has upon her list more than sufficient to defray the expenses of publication – I do not mean by subscription." Family and friends, including Letitia Bishop, had agreed to pay a publisher not yet decided upon, but expected to be found in Oxford, where John Landon's brother, Whittington, served as Provost of Worcester College. For Catharine adds: "Mrs. Siddons is shortly going to Oxford, and as we have connections there, and Mrs. S. is taking it up very warmly, we have hope that something may be done for our poetic sketches" (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 3: 182).

No letters on record exist in which Letitia Landon mentions Sarah Siddons. We have only the Dedication of *The Fate of Adelaide* to "To Mrs. Siddons . . . a Lady so long distinguished for brilliant talents," whose approval was to the poet "the greatest encouragement" ([iii]). The idea that the age's outstanding tragic actress, the Incomparable Siddons, then in her late sixties, was taking up "very warmly" the publication of Landon's little book of poems would have re-ignited the poet's hope that she too might affect her audience of readers. But perhaps Siddons stood on too high a pedestal for Landon to dream that she could become, like the actress, one of

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number 49 or 51. But different house numbers, as opposed to street names, meant little at this time.

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those extremely rare women who managed as public figures to possess dignity and to attract respect along with admiring glances. For Landon never tried to be dignified or respected, and she was not, for the most part -- though Catharine would have dearly wished it. Catharine Landon and Letitia Bishop, both, I believe, friends of Siddons, apparently did all they could to involve the actress in *The Fate of Adelaide*'s publication. Perhaps they thought that the attachment of Siddons' name to the enterprise could serve as a kind of protective sign for the poetess, showing how seriously she viewed her calling. In the Dedication, Letitia Landon calls Siddons "a shrine so much venerated," representing "the perfection of all that is beautiful and sublime in poetry" ([iii])." For Landon, the Shakespearean actress enabled her audience to realize poetry, her majestic displays catapulting listeners' hearts into the dreamy stratospheres from which the poet and the poem had first descended. We must remember that when she was being introduced to poetry, the bright daughter of Mrs. John Landon already knew the grand actress. And seeing Siddons and hearing of her exploits was nothing if not a lesson in how the theater could revitalize works of literature.

Siddons' friendship with Catharine Landon and Letitia Bishop cannot fully account for the actress's agreeing to involve herself in the publication of *The Fate of Adelaide*.[30] Further explanation for Siddons' interest in helping an unknown poetess surely must lie in the "substratum of romanticism which underlies her [Siddons']

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[30] Though retired from the theater, Siddons remained much in demand in London circles. Biographies of the actress are taken up with her public engagements and

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character." That romanticism is obvious in "the girlish sentimentality of the letters she wrote to the Galindos," excessive (Mrs. Galindo later attacked Siddons for her intimacy with Mr. Galindo) even "for the Laura Matilda style of the period" (Kennard 212). It is also evident in Siddons' abiding love of poetry, especially the effusive variety. Having served as nurse-maid to the future Della Cruscan poet, George Greatheed, Siddons years later came to the aid of the much-maligned Della Cruscans on London stages, acting in Greatheed's play, *The Regent*, and reciting Robert Merry's verses (Hargreaves-Mawdsley 173, 195). Siddons cared about promoting poetry. She frequently gave Shakespeare readings, and, one year after *The Fate of Adelaide* was published, Siddons would produce *An Abridgement of Paradise Lost* for parents to read to children. Here she states her belief that "a taste for the sublime and beautiful is an approach to virtue" (111). She also wrote poetry and could number among her friends the authors Inchbald, Seward, Sydney Smith, Milman, and Baillie (Kennard 130; Campbell *Life of Mrs. Siddons* 252).

Landon would soon begin to attend the theater regularly and with that attendance would come her view that poetry could not possess more significance than when conveyed through the magnificent person of the actress, full of feeling and lost to herself in the words. The poet was clearly on the way toward that view when she wrote *Adelaide*'s dedication. Siddons planted the seed for Landon's theatrical interests, and the actress's involvement with *Adelaide* would only have furthered them. The stately Siddons, with her preference for ethics over ecstasy, could never

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significant private ones; no mention is made of her friendships with Letitia Landon's mother and grandmother.

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have estimated the strength or the nature of her influence on the young poetess.[31] Nor was Landon's reverence dimmed upon Siddons' finding that she "had undertaken to interest herself more for the volume than she had time or opportunity to perform" (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 3: 180), and consequently withdrawing her offer of assistance, with no publisher in Oxford found. Siddons allowed Landon to dedicate the book to her, marking the end of her involvement in *The Fate of Adelaide* and Landon's career. Landon would never again so patently seek to benefit from the attachment of a name to a book of hers; she did not again dedicate a work to someone she did not know well enough to count a friend.

In her short Preface, the author turns her anxieties to her advantage, appealing "less to the candour, than to the kindness of my judges. Well aware that . . . the path we fondly deemed led to immortality too often terminates in the waters of oblivion – I dare only intreat gentle visitings, for the slight plant thus adventured in open daylight; and look forward to its fate and fear, rather than with hope that it will blossom to maturity." Afraid that she might be rushing into print too early, only to sink under a wave of negative criticism, the poet would have everyone know that she is "so young a Candidate for public favour" ([v]); a sensitive young lady whom critics should handle with kid gloves, or risk destroying her talent. Correctly she assumes that stern reviews would harm her more than whatever negligible loss of respect a fledgling poetess might receive by begging for kindness. Landon then appeals in the Preface to

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[31] Landon may have named the heroine of the long poem after one of Siddons's two nieces, Fanny and Adelaide. She may also have known that Sarah Siddons's brother

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exactly the same instincts and sentiments to which her poem is addressed. Yet, as the poet-speaker's yearnings for immortality emphasize, the poet's fear is great, in part because her ambition is greater.

Somehow the London publisher John Warren was finally settled upon, *The Fate of Adelaide* not reaching the public until August 1821. Jerdan likely involved himself in Warren's selection, either steering Letitia Landon and her mother in the direction of the publisher's Old Bond Street office, or conducting negotiations with Warren himself on behalf of Miss Landon.[32] Warren advertised regularly in the *Gazette*, including in 1821 works by Procter, Croly, and Hazlitt (Sypher 22-23), but he was an unhappy choice. His business failed shortly after *Adelaide*'s publication, draining away the fifty pounds that, Katherine Thomson claims, Landon should have received for profits from *Adelaide*'s sales (*The Queens* 198):[33] "So the first great event of her life began with a disappointment" (*Recollections* 1: 74). The loss of

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was living in Switzerland, where *The Fate of Adelaide* is set. The actress would visit him in Lausane in 1821 (Campbell 250).

[32] The following letter, though not referring specifically to *The Fate of Adelaide*, may well be describing Jerdan's efforts in launching that book, as well as several later ones. "I have not had a friend in the world but himself to manage anything of business, whether literary or pecuniary," Landon writes Katherine Thomson in 1826, in defense of her and Jerdan's relationship. "Your own literary pursuits must have taught you how little, in them, a young woman can do without assistance. Place yourself in my situation. Could you have hunted London for a publisher, endured all the alternate hot and cold water thrown on your exertions; bargained for what sum they might be pleased to give; and, after all, canvassed, examined, nay quarrelled [sic] over accounts the most intricate in the world?" (Blanchard 1: 55)

[33] No records have been found to indicate Landon's business arrangements with Warren or how many copies of *The Fate of Adelaide* were printed and sold. I expect Warren would not have printed more than five hundred copies of the work, if that many.

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money would have galled the Landon family, especially Catharine. Here the formerly wealthy wife of an army agent had swallowed her pride to ask friends and family -- some of whom must have questioned the morality of thus exposing Letitia -- to pay for the publication that would launch her daughter's money-making career, and nothing had come of it. Letitia and Catharine's relationship was bound to have suffered strain.

A few years later, after she had tasted great popularity, Landon would rush downstairs after Katherine Thomson to thrust into her hands a copy of *The Fate of Adelaide*, saying: "'Twas my first poem; perhaps you will be so good as to read it. I believe no one else has" (*Recollections* 1: 74). Having an excuse to feel cheated and saddened, Letitia was temperamentally disinclined to look on the bright side of *The Fate of Adelaide*'s turn in the marketplace. And there was a bright side, despite *Adelaide*'s having "made little impression" (Rev. of *The Life* 448). According to Jerdan and Thomson, the book sold fairly well at its price of 7s. 6 d. (*Autobiography* 3: 180; *The Queens* 198), which was due to its having been fairly well, though not widely, reviewed. Indeed, only one review would have assisted its sale much, the only one coming out the same month as *Adelaide* and giving the little volume what could have been seen, with reason, as unjustifiable notice.

Printed on 4 August 1821 in the *Literary Gazette* and unquestionably by William Jerdan, the review begins with a lie: "This, amid the number of works of the same character, which issue with such fertility from the press, has attracted our notice, not merely by its being the production of a youthful female pen, but by its possessing poetic merits of a very pleasing order." Though a lie of omission, it is a great one. Jerdan's review points diametrically away from the facts of his having advised the

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youthful female on her manuscript draft (in which she declared her adoration of him) and his having prepared the work for publication. More fundamentally, it belies the fact of Jerdan's "notice" having long been "attracted" by the young lady, his now former neighbor's daughter, whose poems the *Gazette* had published in 1820.[34] But, unlike in later reviews of Landon's work, Jerdan never in *The Fate of Adelaide* review mentions this last important fact relating to the *Gazette*'s potential to benefit from the author's promotion.

He does not, however, praise overmuch, held in check by his condescending disquiet over those errors "peculiar to the fair sex": Miss Landon is guilty of "exuberance of fancy, inequality of diction," and too much description of natural scenery. What distinguishes her long poem from "similar performances by young ladies" – that is, what makes the poem more than an exhibition of a female accomplishment -- are those "touches . . . of genius," such as when Miss Landon envies the soldier's life as she sends Orlando to battle; apostrophizes Hope as the greatest source of happiness; and luxuriates in the agonies of Orlando's guilt, madness, and death. Responding to the "fear" expressed in her Preface, the *Gazette* editor seeks to "encourage its [*Adelaide*'s] trembling author to more measured flights.

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[34] Not told that the L. E. L. of the Original Poetry section had written *The Fate of Adelaide*, *Gazette* readers were left to speculate about L. E. L.'s identity until, at the earliest, 1824, when other periodicals began to refer to the author of *Improvisatrice* as Miss Landon. Glennis Stephenson assumes this situation is proof that *The Fate of Adelaide* did not sell well (*Letitia Landon* 51), certainly not enough to make Landon a known public figure. The main reason that *Gazette* readers did not identify L. E. L. as Miss Landon is simply that, though given opportunities to do so in the *Gazette*'s review and printing of A. H. R.'s poem to Miss Landon, the author of *Adelaide*, Jerdan

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She has the feeling and genius of poesy in her mind, and if she cultivates its mechanical requisites, represses words, cherishes deep-thinking, and ponders on selection and polish . . ." (483-84). Letitia Landon and her parents probably did not miss Jerdan's implication that the poet needed much more private tutelage from himself.

The *New Monthly Magazine* and the *Lady's Magazine* reviewed the *Adelaide* volume in November and December, respectively. The "interesting modesty" of Miss Landon's Preface charmed the *New Monthly*. Her poetry reminded the reviewer of Barry Cornwall; only the long title poem shows her to be inferior at constructing a story. Her short poems, though, "afford pleasure" and "excite admiration," he is relieved to say. For the *New Monthly* would not wish to be charged with "that severity of criticism which the authoress deprecates," especially when the publication has been as "unassuming and elegant as the present" (579). How very ladylike Landon seems; her work's idealized femininity could not contrast more with John Clare's *Village Minstrel*, favorably noticed on the same page for its instructive sympathy for the poor. The *Lady's Magazine*, in turn, heralds the "dawn of [Landon's] talent": "When we meet with a fair Notary of the muses, we would gladly encourage her efforts," wanting to applaud every woman writer that takes the brave decision to publish. The critic cheers Adelaide's raptures of young love and agrees with the poetess's declaration at the end of the first canto, "'Woman's fondest sigh is for the brave;' for female weakness requires the aid of manly courage." Miss Landon enthuses too much,

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did not reveal that the author of *Adelaide* was also writing for his magazine. Nor did he use the name Miss Landon in reference to L. E. L. for many years.

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however, over military conflict: "When she thinks that this [manly] courage can only be properly displayed in war, -- when she exults 'o'er the stirring scene / Of thousands rushing onward to the strife;' and exclaims, 'How beautiful, / How glorious, and how glad, they move to death!' we lament the temporary extinction of her feelings of tenderness and humanity, though we know that many readers will readily vindicate and excuse her" (658). (The *Gazette* singles out this passage for praise). That Landon would at times still long to ride with the uniformed thousands into battle could not have been contemplated by the *Lady's Magazine*. Much as she would increasingly adore femininity and all the "feelings of tenderness and humanity" that fell under its rubric, Landon saw no need to limit her imagination to femininity's confines. But then she probably never again enthused over military conflict so bloodthirstily as in a few of *Adelaide*'s passages.

Instead she wrote more of what pleased most. In his "Memoir of L. E. L.," Jerdan remembers that *Adelaide*'s "melancholy tone ensured it the favour of a large class of readers who delight in poetry" (xii). She treated them to a "luxury of woe" reminiscent of the Della Cruscans yet seemingly more sincere and heartfelt, the product of a fresh, youthful mind. So moved was one "A. H. R." that a month after Jerdan's review was published he writes the *Gazette* editor: "Sir, -- Should the following slight tribute of admiration to a work, to which your own pages first attracted my attention, obtain a place in your columns, I shall feel peculiar pleasure, as by that means only can I express to the charming authoress the delight I felt on perusing 'The Fate of Adelaide.'" Printed in the *Gazette* with the letter on 29

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September 1821, the first in a long list of published poems addressed to Landon,[35] A. H. R.'s "Lines written on the last pages of 'The Fate of Adelaide'" bids:

> Farewell, sweet minstrel! Never hath mine ear
>
> Drank in more magic melody; thy power
>
> Wakens those hallowed feelings, pure and dear,
>
> That lie closed in the heart;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And love, oh love! is pictured in thy lay,
>
> True to the very life; that gentle love
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Even in its hopelessness, but prized the more.
>
> Deeply and wild, it has been thine to feel
>
> Love's power on thee; for never may they tell
>
> Of hope and fear, and visions bright, which steal
>
> Upon the thralled senses like a spell,
>
> Who have not known that flame unquenchable. . . . (621)

A. H. R. thanks Landon for releasing within him gentle, pure feelings driven by unfulfilled desire never expecting fulfillment. Attributing their gentleness and purity to that lack of expectation, not absence of sexuality, A. H. R. knows Miss Landon

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[35] Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess's recent Landon edition (1997) valuably prints twenty-two of these poems in Appendix B, "Poems Written for and about 'L. E. L.'" A. H. R.'s poem, however, as well as many others composed between 1821 and 1840, is not included in this appendix.

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knows "Love's power" because she revels in her autoeroticism, endlessly suffering/enjoying states of overwhelming sexual sensations.[36]

"There is a psychoanalytic dictum that it is in the nature of desire to thwart its own fulfillment," remarks Frances Wilson in *Literary Seductions*, "because desire, as opposed to love, has no object and is an autoerotic act: the pleasure of desiring is in the pursuit and not in the goal." (24). In *Poetry and Phantasy*, Easthope uses this dictum to explain the poetry of courtly love, in which desire remains "unsatisfied," indeed is "constituted by its own deferral" (67). But Wilson is concerned here with sexual affairs between writers where the primary, essential seducing occurred with "violent intimacy" between the sheets of a book for readers like Elizabeth Barrett, Mary Godwin, and Caroline Lamb. Literary seductions often result from one "compulsive" writer's need to "channel into writing emotions that would otherwise be expressed in sexual relationships, and for writers like this successful relationships are no more than an extension of writing" (xx). Following Wilson's argument, what A. H. R. and Landon call "love" in *The Fate of Adelaide* (and in dozens and dozens of subsequent poems) is too self-regarding and, hence, insufficiently concentrated on its object, to be anything other than the kind of desire that, when felt by certain persons

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[36] Though writers had long been describing sexual desire in terms of fires, burns, and flames, these fires could be passed over by nice young ladies, or at least not looked into – that seems to have been the hope in the early nineteenth century, anyway. It is even possible that, female ignorance being a source of great charm to the male population, some men presumed Landon did not know to what she was referring with her many conflagrations. Yet my investigation of contemporary texts where what is plainly sexual is typically described in fiery terms has left me with no room for doubting that these terms were used with precise intent in most, perhaps all, literary cases.

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with literary talent, finds its supreme pleasure in writing about itself. Nothing else can compare. Writing allowed Landon to imagine woman's sexual desire thwarted and, as a result, extended in the delights of melancholy. Perhaps the poet who influenced Landon most, Byron, is Wilson's archetypal compulsive writer.

Playful and serious flirtations

In September 1821 the *Gazette* editor explained printing A. H. R.'s letter and poem as "the opportunity of encouraging young genius" (621), without stating -- but also without hiding -- that the Miss Landon whom A. H. R. addresses was the same person who, only the week before, on September 22, ended her eleven-month absence from the *Gazette*'s poetry pages with "Bells" and "Stanzas on the Death of Miss Campbell." These two are the first poems that Landon signed "L. E. L." The change from "L." to "L. E. L." signals that the poet felt ready to be set apart; she felt certain she was good enough to begin establishing a poetic identity by letting readers know her poems were coming from a single source. (Landon could have continued to shelter under the single "L.," easily confused with other writers who chose the same vague signature. Hemans, for instance, published for years under "H." in the *Gazette*, as did Thomas Hood). Landon had used "L. E. L." once before, in *Adelaide*'s Dedication to Sarah Siddons. Neither Jerdan nor Landon should be accused, as they both have been, of masterminding a plan to half reveal, half conceal Landon's identity with the "L. E. L." signature in the *Gazette*. By publishing A. H. R.'s poem to Miss

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Landon one week after the "L. E. L." was first used in the *Gazette*, Jerdan could instead be accused of inviting readers to discover L. E. L.'s identity by buying the book where Landon first used her three initials and her full name. But then, not many were curious about L. E. L. yet.

If Jerdan needed convincing that Landon's poeticized feelings toward him could powerfully move anyone beside himself, A. H. R.'s poem provided the evidence, and he no doubt hoped that A. H. R. would persuade others to identify with Landon's sentiments. Of course, Jerdan was feeding his ego too, while his affections for Landon were only growing stronger, all of which probably inclined him to overlook the risks that Landon and he were just beginning to take. How very much A. H. R.'s poem meant to Jerdan is underlined in his brief 1848 sketch of her life, written in painful awareness of how Emma Roberts' memoir (1839) and Laman Blanchard's biography (1841) had caused readers like Elizabeth Barrett Browning to lose faith in Landon's love poems (Lawford 37).[37] Roberts and Blanchard's portrait of a merry young woman who felt none of the melancholy love she wrote about elicited from Jerdan the following: "Our view . . . must differ materially from aught that has gone

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[37] Emma Roberts, for instance, saw no true love in Landon's poetry because the Landon she knew for many years seemed unwilling and perhaps unable to let herself fall in love.

> While dwelling with apparently earnest tenderness upon the sorrows of love, its disappointments and treacheries, L. E. L. identified herself with the beings of her fancy, lamenting, frequently in the first person, over miseries which she had never felt, and to which she was by no means likely to be subjected, since both then and subsequently, she manifested an almost extraordinary want of susceptibility, upon occasion when attempts were made upon her heart. (10)

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before. . . . We cannot quite assent to the propositions laid down by preceding biographers that the whole proceeded from imagination and not real feeling. On the contrary, we think it impossible that such could have been the case with any mind that ever existed. We are far more inclined to agree with an anonymous writer, A. H. R. . ." ("Memoir of L. E. L." viii, xiv). He then quotes the whole of A. H. R.'s poem to remind Victorian readers that, years ago, when Landon's work was better appreciated, that appreciation came with the certainty that she was writing about her feelings for some mystery man.

In August 1821, shortly after the *Gazette* review gave its blessing to *The Fate of Adelaide*, Letitia Landon met the Irish satirist, William Maginn, who had journeyed to London that month to meet Jerdan (Mackenzie 5: xxiii). Landon was introduced to Maginn at Jerdan's new house at No. 1, Michael's Grove, in Brompton, to which he moved once the *Gazette*'s profits enabled him to clear away many of his debts (Pyle 254). Feeling prosperous, Jerdan was probably hosting a party to introduce Maginn to *Gazette* writers and London literary types, including perhaps John Wilson Croker of the *Quarterly Review*, the publisher John Murray, and *John Bull*'s Theodore Hook, all of whom met Maginn through Jerdan during his 1821 trip to London (Duncan, "William Jerdan 45). A schoolmaster in Cork (the "Athens of Ireland" in those days) with an LL. D. from Dublin University, Maginn was then writing in absentia for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the *Literary Gazette*. The former, with its ultra-Tory politics and daring, its humorous disrespect, suited him perfectly; to serve *Blackwood's* he was willing to exploit his London host with whom he was none too impressed, as his 1821 letter to William Blackwood demonstrates:

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> Jeradin[sic] of the L. Gaz. is an ass – but an honest fellow. We impose on him most horribly; he has published things which he would faint at if he knew their import. I very often give him a lift, chiefly in the way of poems & parodies & such small beer. . . . If you wish, I shall make use of him for you, and that in a way which he wd not have the slightest suspicion. (qtd. in Pyle 90)[38]

The London writers would have known Maginn's name only by rumor of his caustic wit. He almost never signed his pieces, and so various were his styles and charades that no one knew for certain whether or not he wrote a large portion of his published work. Maginn was well on his way toward making a fine art of anonymity, to the extent that editors themselves could not see through his latest pseudonym.[39] Looking back on the career of "the Doctor" who did not blush to write for Whig as well as Tory papers (Hall *Retrospect* 1: 118), Jerdan regards Maginn as a friend who would do him at least no harm:

> Of Maginn, the precocious, the prolific, the humorous, the eccentric, the erratic, the versatile, the learned, the wonderfully endowed . . . Romancist [sic], parodist, politician, satirist, linguist,

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[38] Pyle quotes from William G. Lane's *Richard Harris Barham* (Columbia, 1967) 71; Lane is quoting Ralph Wardle's unpublished thesis, "William Maginn and Blackwood's" (U. of Harvard, 1938) 21.

[39] Maginn first wrote to the *Literary Gazette* under the pseudonym of P. P. Crossman, and only when Jerdan learned through a Cork native the identity of P. P. Crossman did Maginn write to Jerdan under his actual name (Mackenzie "Memoir" xxiii). By the time he traveled to London in 1821, he had already succeeded involving *Blackwood's*

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> poet, critic, scholar . . . He was at all and wrote everywhere. He jested, and he mystified, and he laughed. He played with pebble-stones and nuggets of gold; pelting with one, and hitting hard with the other. . . . A warm-hearted Irishman, though a fearful literary antagonist, his career was devious, zigzag, corruscating, here, there, everywhere flashing with the electric force agreeable to his nature, or working with the regulated toil which graver occasions demanded from his rigorous intellect. In society or with friends he was the most simple and unaffected of men. . . . (*Autobiography* 3: 82)[40]

"When under the excitement of wine or society," Maginn could not hide his stutter, yet when he managed to get the words out, he could, by age twenty-five, speak and write German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and modern Greek, and translate Hebrew, Sanscrit, and Syrian (Mackenzie 5: xiv, xix, xxv). Possessing an astonishing range and depth of knowledge, the brilliant essayist would have, upon meeting Miss Landon at Jerdan's house, talked to her about innumerable topics at length, while she, a reportedly excellent listener, flattered him by seeming to drink it all in, disregarding the stutter which probably manifested itself before her. The bachelor Maginn was

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Magazine in a libel suit over his article on a Professor Leslie, though William Blackwood had yet to learn the name of the article's author (Oliphant 1: 368)

[40] Though Landon met Maginn at Jerdan's house, there is no evidence that they ever formed a threesome socially or in their work for the *Gazette* or elsewhere, despite rumors to the contrary. Thrall makes reference to this notion of a threesome when she attributes Landon's relations with Jerdan and Maginn to "the underestimated bond of quick brains and ready tongues and not as rumor had it from a mercenary desire on her part to gain editorial support in publishing her books" (193). In no position to offer

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twenty-eight and infatuated by Landon – in fact, "somewhat 'smitten.'" By all accounts, he was smitten for life. Maginn's friend, Shelton Mackenzie, remarks that "without possessing beauty," the Miss Landon whom Maginn met "was decidedly attractive, with her expressive and regular features, her *petite* figure, her graceful movements, her gentle voice, her lively wit, her occasional gleams of sentiment, and her fascinating manners" (5: lxxxiii).

The unaccompanied Miss Landon had just turned nineteen. The occasion at Jerdan's likely presented her with her first opportunity to meet other writers in a social setting, *Adelaide* having made her eligible, in Jerdan's opinion anyway, to mix with them as peers. She would have been excited, her dress in need of a smoothing down. She was probably wearing "a fanciful little cap on top of her head . . . that suited her exactly" (K. Thomson, *Recollections* 1: 71). Thomson gives a more precise physical description of Landon between the ages of eighteen to twenty-three:

> a comely girl with a blooming complexion, small, with very beautiful gray eyes, with dark eyelashes: her hair, never very thick, was of a deep brown, and fine as silk: her forehead and eyebrows were perfect; the one white and clear, the other arched and well-defined. She was inclined rather to be fat; too healthy looking; and then her other features were defective; her nose was retroussé. Her mouth, however, without being particularly good, was expressive, and proportioned to her small and delicate face. Her hands and feet were

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any kind of editorial support at this time and for many years to come, Maginn could not have counted power and influence among his many attractions.

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> perfect . . . She had a charming voice; and one could not but wonder that with that, and with so much soul, she did not sing – as a sort of necessity of her nature. (*The Queens* 202-03)

More than anything, the detail of this passage and similar ones by Landon's friends indicates how seriously standards of female beauty were taken at this period. Anna Hall remembers that Landon was "small of person but well formed," though "her neck was short, her shoulders high; you saw those defects at the first glance, just as you did that . . . she was 'underhung,' which ought to have spoiled the expression of her mouth; yet it did not . . . her teeth white, small, and even" (Hall, S. C. *Retrospect* 1: 161; *Book of Memories* 271, 274). Everyone had a notion of "perfect" and, in a society perceptive of the slightest imperfections, there was no escaping their consequences.[41] But Maginn did not pursue physical refinement in the female sex to the nth degree, in contrast to many of the literary gentlemen Landon met (who yet, like Maginn, did not neglect then to tell others that she was not beautiful). Landon well accorded with Maginn's standards for choosing a wife, as dictated in a humorous article "addressed to single gentlemen," "Twenty-One Maxims to Marry By" (1826): "I say a handsome figure . . . is better than a merely pretty face . . . [a figure] finely formed and set. Good eyes are a point never to be overlooked. Fine teeth – full, well-proportioned limbs – don't cast these away for . . . a mouth something too wide; or dimples rather deeper on one side than the other," or, we might add, an upturned nose.

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[41] An argument could be made that the impeccable beauty of Landon's heroines represented a kind of wish fulfillment on her part. She never seems to have obsessed with her looks or depressed by them, but she loved beauty, as her age saw it.

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He also warns young men to avoid women who "talk politics; read Mary Wollstonecraft; or meddle with the mathematics" (Mackenzie 1: 366-69). Landon showed no interest in the fashionable studies of geometry or astronomy, though she might admire the poet Elizabeth Smith's pursuit of them. And if she read Wollstonecraft, she did not share her feminist principles. Nor was Landon prone to preach, or argue, especially about politics. Like Maginn, she wished at the social hour only to please through entertaining. Descriptions of Landon from the early 1820s say, above all, that the poet of melancholy love surprised and delighted interlocutors with her "wit, gaiety, and brightness" (Roberts 6).

Adelaide's author then found herself able to bowl over "the crystallised Paddy, ready to jest and sing, to speechify, to fight, to flatter, to make promises and to break them, with all the unstable charm of being beyond rule, guided by his impulses." Maginn did most things "accidentally" (Oliphant 1: 364). On impulse he made Landon a proposal of marriage shortly after their first meeting. Landon rejected the proposal -- perhaps because it had come too easily to one enchanted by unrequited love, betraying love, and romance under the most difficult circumstances; perhaps because Jerdan was hovering in the background. Only one reason for Landon's refusal is given by Mackenzie (no one else reports this highly significant proposal). Her "friends thought it too early for her to wed, without higher worldly possessions and prospects than her suitor had" (Mackenzie 5: lxxxiii). Landon then gave Maginn the impression that others were making the decision for her. Neither Jerdan nor Letitia Landon's family members would have liked the idea of her marrying Maginn. The family would naturally have preferred a man with higher possessions and prospects

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than a schoolteacher whose periodical writing earned him little. Jerdan may have given the same reason, but the sexual interest that Landon had excited would have been the main cause of his disapproval. Plus, Landon was his protegée; the intelligent, well-educated Maginn would have stopped Jerdan's tutorial sessions forthwith – though whether Maginn then suspected Jerdan's and Landon's growing attachment remains indeterminable.

Whatever friends she had at this time – and I have no proof that Landon had any female friends beyond her cousin – she did not reveal Maginn's proposal to the close friends she would soon acquire. Nor did she tell anyone about it in the 1830s, when her friends were agonizing over the gossip surrounding Maginn and Landon. We should note that Mackenzie did not say that Landon refused Maginn because she lacked romantic interest in her suitor. Despite her affections for Jerdan, William Maginn may very well have stirred up a kind of love in the heart of Letitia Landon that August of 1820, making it all the less likely that, months or even years after rejecting him, the young woman who kept her heart sealed to intimate friends would have disclosed the strength of Maginn's feelings for her. All we can know for sure is that, as a series of letters and reports confirm, an attachment between the two had been formed that would last their lifetimes, with Maginn never losing "his idolatrous devotion to L. E. L." (Thrall 107). Maginn went back to Cork in 1821, still giving Landon at least the occasional thought. In a letter to William Blackwood of 19 November 1821 discussing his London trip, he added the postscript, "There is one fellow who signs L. E. L. that writes pretty verse" (Cooke 190). Maginn thus put in a very kind word for Landon, protecting the secret of her name and gender while letting

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Blackwood know of a promising new talent whom the publisher might wish to use in his Edinburgh magazine. Nothing came of that postscript, though. Maginn would marry a few years later and then with his wife move to London.

Within three months of turning down Maginn's offer of marriage, Landon published a series of songs in the *Gazette* that, in their culmination, reject the whole idea of marrying for romantic love. Published on 10 November 1821, the "Six Songs of Love, Constancy, Romance, Inconstancy, Truth, and Marriage" could be seen to give L. E. L.'s game away before she had hardly begun to play it. The first five poems flow smoothly along on a current idealizing love, so smoothly and musically that, like many of Landon's poems to come, they please yet seem at first to have little interesting to say. The emotions are various enough for the poet to appear to be pretending to feel what she thinks different women in love might feel at different times. However, a kind of unity surfaces for the first five when they are read as if addressed to Jerdan, with Landon imagining an intimacy between them that, to a degree perhaps, did not yet exist. In "Love," she might seek to "soothe" him from the anxieties of his job and his debts. In both "Love" and "Constancy," the speaker responds to the beloved's accusations of having a "light" heart; twenty years older and sentimental, Jerdan might think the teenage poet too enamored with "The revelry of youth" to love with "deep devoted truth." Landon could thus be defending her behavior at parties held in Jerdan's house, protesting that she smiles at other men because she cannot talk too much to him:

'Tis love that gilds the mirthful hour,

That lights the smile for me,

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Those smiles would instant lose their power,

Did they not glance on thee! ("Constancy" 716)

This sentiment, by the way, is most atypical of Landon's corpus; soon her poems will declare every smile of the social hour hollow, a mask to hide misery over love's unfairness and cruelty. But in 1821 Jerdan's obligations might have had the appeal of leaving the poet room for "Romance," for gathering dew-sprinkled roses "pure and white" into a "charmed wreath" to hang above her pillow: "OH! come to my slumber / Sweet dreams of my love" invites all kinds of speculations. Jerdan flirted so inveterately with other women that Landon had reason in "Inconstancy" to fear she was "casting my love away / On bosom false as thine," though my guess is that no vows had been made to be "broken." If Jerdan were not caught up in a whirl of London's attractions, she might have speculated, his heart would be faithful to her; in the last of the five, Landon imagines "A little isle for us alone" – the "Truth" here coming with the speaker's realization that both would hate it:

I thought thus of the flowers, the moon,

This fairy isle for you and me;

And then I thought how very soon

How very tired we should be. (716)

Her fantasies themselves show the limits to this kind of love. How very bored one of the busiest and most socializing of editors should have been with no one but the young poetess for company, while Landon did not wish to leave the social pleasures that she was just beginning to sample, thanks to Jerdan's opening the doors. Beneath these lines is "Matrimonial Creed," which opens:

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He must be rich whom I could love,

His fortune clear must be,

Whether in land or in the funds;

'Tis all the same to me. (716)

She also wants him to be old and to die soon, having made "a settlement" that generously provides for his spouse. "If he should say, -- Will you have me? / I'll very soon say – Yes!" (716). Switching to the third person for the "Matrimonial Creed," L. E. L. takes the excuse she gave for rejecting Maginn as a basis for her speaker's marital goals. But she cannot marry Jerdan and they would not want to run away to an island, so why not marry for money without involving her heart in the process – as a marriage to Maginn would probably have done? Landon could be at once teasing and appealing to Jerdan in this first of many satirical pronouncements on marriage that she would make over the next two decades.

In Jerome McGann's assessment of the series, the "identity" established in the first four and four-fifths songs has been "massively contradicted" by the cynical turn. "Most troubling of all, perhaps, the poetry participates in that field of contradictions, for it makes only the most *superficial* efforts to disguise its superficialities" (emphasis McGann's; 149). The glibness of the songs would then be explained by their superficiality. The song series itself implies that the poet has improvised, or shown what she can do, on the stages of romantic love, all of which one young woman would not likely have experienced.[42] Yet Jerdan's circumstances and contradictory nature go

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a long way toward resolving the contradictions in the speaker's sentiments. I think Landon's superficiality provided her with brilliant disguise -- perhaps disguise for uncertainty about her affections, as well as the affections themselves -- making it possible for her to mean what she writes yet be able to disown the sentiments as throwaway lines. She is not pushing to extremes of feeling here, but by willing herself into expressing such various feelings to write the poems, potentially with Jerdan in mind, she cannot but have regarded the artificiality inherent in the performance. The thin ice on which she skates so smoothly seems to have the potential to crack both ways. It might appear devoid of feeling underneath or full of such precious, secret passion that a young single woman poet would want to refer to it obliquely, just touch on it in vague, general terms and use worn images that seem to tell nothing particular about the poet's own love.

For only the second time in the *Gazette*, Landon signed herself "L. E. L." In the process of writing the six songs, she may have made the discovery that she enjoyed puncturing romantic expectations and leaving her readers guessing over her meaning and her identity. But maybe because she liked to see the faces of those she surprised, or maybe because she took her poetry more seriously than anything else in her life, Landon from now on relegated her cynical turns to her conversation and prose writing, with the exception of a mere handful of poems.[43] Though in the course of

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[42] To protest that she could not have been writing about her own experiences in love in her love poems, Landon will make this same argument in the preface to *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829).

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single prose works she often switched between so-called realistic and romantic perspectives, Landon would never again so brazenly betray romantic ideals as she does at the end of these six songs, not in all of her writing over the next seventeen years. I am proposing that the songs were written by a young woman who had reflected on the shrewd calculation inherent in her refusing of Maginn and had decided to feel no regrets. She would make Jerdan the sole object of her affections and enjoy the games and pains of "love." Or she might marry for money. She could tease Jerdan about marrying, anyway. Landon appreciated the mix of selfishness and sacrifice of affections that was entailed in marrying for rank and money. A few years later, she would advise her close friend Rosina Wheeler to be so selfish. But, like an increasing number of her contemporaries, especially men, in a trend that would continue through the 1830s (Mason 49), Landon really was not the least interested in marriage and would not be for more than a decade. Indeed, romance seemed to end at the very thought of marriage, as it did in the songs.

With no literary reputation to lose, Landon in 1821 felt free to play with personae. She could toy with readers as she toyed with her editor, broadcasting different voices to be cried over or applauded, while presenting L. E. L. as ineffable. "Perhaps the L. E. L. itself, the compromise between the anonymous and the full announcement, the partial revelation, the namelessness of the name, had the effect of stimulating curiosity," writes Blanchard, a contemporary looking back on her rise to popularity in the *Gazette* (1: 31). L. E. L.'s hovering around literature and love, the

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[43] From the *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book for 1832*, "The Princess Victoria" is a rare example of Landon's ability to switch tone dramatically half-way through the

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two topics that appeared to most concern herself, aided the sense of "partial revelation." Her installment of three poems for the 24 November 1821 *Gazette* bears witness to three similar yet distinct voices. Landon begins with a "Requiem" in couplets to a heartbroken young poet at his graveside, his harp hanging on the nearby willow tree: "Thy song in the moment of breathing was past." Too "crush'd and betray'd" by others was the poet to be able to notice the speaker, the only one who now visits his grave, whose "cheek will grow pale as thy funeral stone." Perhaps if he had courted love more than fame, she suggests, he would not have been so vulnerable to the abuse his poems received. This dirge is followed by the exquisite "Stanzas":

> When should lovers breathe their vows?
>
> When should ladies hear them?
>
> When the dew is on the boughs,
>
> When none else are near them;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> When the stars are bright on high,
>
> Like hopes in young Love's dreaming,
>
> And glancing round the light clouds fly,
>
> Like soft fears to shade their beaming. (749)

So easy and fluent, yet with glimpses of defencelessness, L. E. L. is obviously a student of Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*. She is above all flirtatious in songs like this, written throughout the early 1820s. Gaily she courts disapproving gossip; romance depends on the danger of secret, improper meetings. Young ladies "should"

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poem, leaving her romantic vision in the ruins of political satire.

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stay out all the damp English night with their male interests to listen to what they know might be utterly false, because then "lips" and "blushes" are most colored with intensity, then faces and feelings are in harmony with the night's drama and most beautiful. In the third poem, the "Song" beginning "Oh, you cannot prove false to me, my love," the glib tone is forsaken as Landon uncovers the young lady's dependence on those vows. The speaker asks, "Could you act a cruel, a treacherous part, / Could you be the herald of woe," and, though the implied answer is yes, she refuses to believe it. Or, to shame him, is she just pretending she disbelieves "you could blight the young rose / That but blossom'd to bloom on thy shrine" (749)?

Landon was relying wholly on the *Gazette* to launch her career in late 1821, 1822, and most of 1823. The lack of earnings from *The Fate of Adelaide* discouraged her from attempting another book until she could make enough of a name for herself in the *Gazette*'s pages for more prominent publishers to take her on. Landon did try to break into at least one other periodical. Immediately after the *New Monthly Magazine* published its complimentary review of *Adelaide* for the November issue, she enclosed three poems with the following letter to the editor, the famous poet Thomas Campbell:[44]

> Impressed with sentiments of the deepest gratitude for the kind indulgence with which the Fate of Adelaide has been mentioned in the pages of the New Monthly Magazine Miss L. E. Landon trusts she shall not be accused of presumption in venturing to offer her

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> sincere thanks. As the minor poems rather appeared to meet with approval, Miss L with anxiety perhaps excusable in so young a candidate has hoped the Editor of the New Monthly Magazine will give the encouragement, a place in his pages, to the enclosed. Let the fate however be what it will of these slight pieces, nothing can diminish the writer's gratitude. (Letter to the Editor)

In her "anxiety" for what she then calls "slight pieces," Landon contradicts herself. She hopes the editor will sympathize and expects that, like Jerdan, he takes pleasure in encouraging young writers. Yet, regardless of what "fate" befalls her poems, she cannot be made to feel that he has been other than a perfect gentleman toward herself. Thanking editors for complimentary reviews was common practice, but enclosing the three poems for publication -- each one signed "by the Author of the Fate of Adelaide" -- in the thank-you letter may well have appeared presumptuous. Landon did not receive the encouragement she was looking for, and her work would not appear in the *New Monthly* until 1825.[45] Inferior to anything by her in the *Gazette*, the poems were probably written quickly a day or two after she read the review.

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[44] A "figurehead editor," Campbell did not likely handle Landon's submission. His assistant Cyrus Redding did the "real work" at the *New Monthly* (Sunderland 67).

[45] That the *New Monthly* was owned by Colburn, who also owned a third of the *Gazette*, did not then help Landon get published there early in her career, but Colburn's proprietorship of both magazines may yet have been a factor in the *New Monthly*'s noticing *The Fate of Adelaide* and in the many other favorable reviews it gave her in the 1820s and 1830s. It may also have been a factor in the *New Monthly*'s publishing many of Landon's poems, essays, and reviews from the mid 1820s until the end of her career. Colburn could only benefit from Landon's increase in popularity.

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"Stanzas" deserves mention for illustrating Landon's thoughts at a time when she saw she might have a chance of shining in society. "I sought the world and for awhile / I worshiped at the idol's throne / Bright are the spells which there beguile," luring the speaker away from poetry. However, "The sparkles left the bright cup's rim." Perhaps second only to images of flowers in Landon's corpus and used ubiquitously in Jerdan's writing to stand for social gaiety, the image of the wine glass here tells us that Landon had already imbibed her very idea of social life from Jerdan and the heavy drinking in which he indulged. These pleasures were new but not as exciting to Landon as the emotional destruction they could bring. What moves her most here is the despair the poet suffers when the friendship and love bequeathed by this social world fails her. "My heart was seared my brain was fire / Forsaken crushed betrayed bereft" (Letter to the Editor). Landon piles up the past participles, as if no one were sufficient to convey the injuries to heart and mind, to which poetry then applies "balm." Fundamental to Landon's conception of poetry and, I would argue, her calling was this story of the exhausted, disillusioned poet. She wanted to know this state.

In her courting of fame, even at this early stage in her career, Landon was courting various kinds of personal disaster, however gay and bubbly she came across at times. Gripped by the image of the poet ruined either by success or by being deprived of it, she would yet have that success. I am suggesting that Landon believed she would suffer deeply from her strivings and that she wanted to suffer, to be a martyred poetess like Sappho or Corinne, a romantic heroine as grand as the heroes of her childhood fantasies. She was true to her art in the sense that her romanticizing of

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poetic inspiration demanded she take on whatever risks fame might throw at her. She should risk losing her family and good name to experience the consoling power of her art. And she should risk losing the exaltation of her visions to realize their fragile magic.

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Chapter Four:

Passion for Sketches (1822-1823)

1822 marks the threshold of Landon's rise to popularity, and it is very likely the year when Landon and Jerdan embarked on a sexual affair that would produce three illegitimate children. The affair could have begun no later than 1823 because the eldest child, Ella Stuart, was christened in April 1824 (Baptismal Record). At Ella's death in 1910, her eldest child (married to the undertaker and so more inclined than most to be accurate on burial documents) stated that her mother's age was eighty-seven, which would place her birth between 12 July 1822 and 10 July 1823 (Burial Record). Those are some of the facts that overshadow this period of Landon's life and this year in particular. If we look to the poems to tell us more, they provide quantities of provocative material. I think much that Landon published in 1822 encouraged the affair, with several pieces operating as seduction poems, including even her tales of abandoned fallen women, or women who lost everything for love. It is very possible that Jerdan has the beginning of his affair with Landon in mind when he writes: "Throughout the year 1822, L. E. L. was as full of song as the nightingale in May; and excited a very general enthusiasm by the Sapphic warmth, the mournful emotion, and the imaginative invention, the profound thought and the poetic charm with which she invested every strain" ("Memoir of L. E. L." xiii).

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Having had no poems in the *Gazette* since 24 November 1821, Landon began at the start of the next year to place poems in nearly every issue of the magazine.[1] The January 5 issue contains one short "Song" by L. E. L. that opens, "Are other eyes beguiling, Love? / Are other rose-lips smiling, Love?" and then quickly moves onto more sexually provocative ground. The speaker points to the "other white arms wreathing" that distract him whom she addresses; she commands, "Call to mind / The arms, the sighs, you leave behind --"; "Breathe not other sighs, Love" (12). Women poets were not supposed to let female voices hold up their body parts for competitive examination. They were not to conjure up the sexual energies excited by breathing in another's sighs. Why does Landon tread onto this dangerous ground? If the editor was the intended "Love," and if he suspected it and possessed sufficient ego to publish what she secretly addressed to him, then L. E. L.'s eroticism has an object and therefore a reason for the risks it takes. "All thine own, mid gladness, Love" echoes the reassurance in the "Six Songs" that the gaiety the man sees the speaker manifesting across the crowded drawing room -- a common situation for Jerdan and

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[1] The earliest poems in the 1822 *Gazette* were probably written in 1821, but we cannot be sure about order of composition or dates. Published on January 19, 1822, "Sketch Second" of the First Series of Poetic Sketches unusually carries a date, "Nov.," in the bottom left-hand corner, which would seem to indicate that the idea of the Poetic Sketches was conceived in 1821, with Jerdan delaying their publication until the start of the new year.

I am assuming here, because I have no evidence contrariwise, that the increase in Landon's publications was due to an increase in her production of finished poems, rather than to Jerdan's suddenly letting open the floodgates because he thought her poems had improved to the point that, by 1822, all of them were good enough for the *Gazette*. He appears to have regarded Landon's work too highly to have kept it from his readers. Most of what Landon wrote probably made it into print. However, the fact of Landon and Jerdan's sexual affair does leave open the possibility that Jerdan let

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Landon -- is because of her love for him. Before we knew of the affair with Jerdan, scholars could judge a lyric like this completely insincere, a send-up of flirtation that drops a few pat lines about his heart being "the world to me." Landon's speaker could be the sort of "flippant chit" with whom Praed decorated his society verse from 1820 on, admired but incapable of more than pretending to love (60).

Now that we know of the affair, we still can never be sure what feeling was foremost when Landon was composing, or an hour afterward. She teases in *The Golden Violet* (1827):

> WHERE, oh! where's the chain to fling,
>
> One that will bind CUPID'S wing, --
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Like a fairy form a spell
>
> Of all that is changeable,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Be to-day as sad, as pale,
>
> As minstrel with his lovelorn tale;
>
> But to-morrow gay as all
>
> Life had been one festival.
>
> If a woman would secure
>
> All that makes her reign endure,
>
> And, alas! her reign must be

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more of L. E. L.'s poems be published -- perhaps anything she wrote -- because he was swayed by his personal attachment to her.

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Ever most in phantasy,

Never let an envious eye

Gaze upon the heart too nigh;

Never let the veil be thrown

Quite aside, as all were known

Of delight and tenderness,

In the spirit's last recess;

And, one spell all spells above,

Never let her own her love. (151-53)

With every single one of Landon's love poems, we have to keep in mind the possibility that the poem was intended to send some kind of signal to Jerdan. Baudrillard's thesis that seduction belongs to "artifice," to "the order of the feminine" that provides "an alternative to sex and to power" (2, 7), well suits much of L. E. L.'s poetry, weighted with feminine artifice that contains pockets "Of delight and tenderness." What the feminine seductress is feeling remains "insoluble. . . . In the feminine the very distinction between authenticity and artifice is without foundation" – the feminine not as thin veneer, "but the feminine as indistinctness of surface and depth" (10-11). Baudrillard would probably find Landon's "alas" that woman's "reign must be / Ever most in phantasy" just another ruse. Feminists, anyway, "do not understand that seduction represents mastery over the symbolic universe, while power represents only mastery of the real universe. The sovereignty of seduction is incommensurable with the possession of political or sexual power" (8). Defined as

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"not what opposes the masculine, but what seduces the masculine," the feminine possesses

> the privilege of having never acceded to truth or meaning, and of having remained absolute master of the realm of appearances. The capacity immanent to seduction to deny things their truth and turn it into a game; the pure play of appearances, and thereby foil all systems of power and meaning with a mere turn of the hand. The ability to turn appearances on themselves, to play on the body's appearances, rather than with the depths of desire. Now all appearances are reversible. . . . (8)

Baudrillard's emphasis on seduction as transversing power and sex is noteworthy. If and when Landon was bent on seducing, she was not submitting to the power of man or money or fame; she was not dominated by her sexual attraction to Jerdan or wish to benefit financially from his influence. I think Landon's seductive tendencies arose mainly from her need to have a relationship that she thought mattered more to her than fame and money and that let her live out her fantasies of femininity's uniqueness. At this time she understood her desires to be love for Jerdan, seduced as she was by images of women and poets who lost all for love. "And to be seduced is to challenge the other to be seduced in turn," involving oneself in a never-ending game in which there is no limit "to the challenge to love more than one is loved" (22).

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Harum-scarum poems and first fame

By the second week of January 1822, the *Gazette* began to publish the first of what became six series of L. E. L.'s Poetic Sketches, comprising twenty-eight poems in all.[2] Landon would produce them in fits and starts up until the end of 1825, and they would become for *Gazette* readers her trademark. By calling the poems "sketches," she prepared readers to expect the "shared negatives" that Richard Sha in *The Visual and Verbal Sketch in British Romanticism* names as "incompletion, irresolution, and lack of finish, a visualizable thing yet one irreducible to mere vision" (5). And we should remember that Landon could not draw. Like Anne Batten Cristall, Hannah More, Lady Morgan, and the Countess of Blessington, to name a few, Landon used the sketch to confer upon herself "the cachet of propriety" associated with the female accomplishment of sketching (105). Its privacy and amateur status "enabled female authors to display resistance to publicity in the act of making public their propriety" (109).

Yet Landon could not have prepared readers for what they had never seen before from the hand of a woman. No other poet in the *Gazette* or any other periodical had written anything like these wild poems, or that even looked like them. From roughly fifty to ninety lines apiece, the Poetic Sketches ramble down whole columns or more of a *Gazette* page. The lines of verse are forever spilling over, often squeezed

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[2] In McGann and Riess's Introduction, *all* of the Poetic Sketches are mistakenly described as "poems on the subject of paintings and mass-produced engravings of contemporary artists" (12). The first ten of these poems and several subsequent ones

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into bracketed bits at the end of the lines above. Many of the lines are stretched by internal dashes and series of hyphens and ellipses. Sandwiched between the columns of justified prose in larger type and the short, rhyming lines and neat stanzas of the other poets in the Original Poetry section, L. E. L.'s Poetic Sketches look unkempt and untamed. "Luxuriant grace" is what Jerdan claims they possess ("Memoir of L. E. L." xv), analogous to Trevor Park's overgrown playground dense with "weeds and wildflowers," as her admirer Bulwer Lytton would title his 1826 volume of poems.

Prefaced by a mood-setting epigraph -- "A woman's whole life is a history of the affections," begins the one by Washington Irving for "Sketch the First"[3] -- each of the blank-verse poems contains a description of one or two scenes, plus a few lines relaying the story of misfortune, often of a young woman left behind or a bitter poet. The descriptions are elaborate, brimming with particular flowers and trees, gravestones and dew, or the close-up qualities of a female face, each detail possessing sentimental associations and demanding to be visualized in the wondrous whole of the scene before readers proceed to the next line. They were trained to respond to such pictures, after all, by the various "spectacles" on show all over London, everything from the shop windows to rooms of Egyptian artifacts to cages of exotic animals to the

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did not treat contemporary paintings but rather sketched scenes directly from Landon's imagination.

[3] I have not yet been able to trace the work from which the epigraph is taken. A short article in the 6 December 1825 *Sun*, titled "Woman's Love," consists entirely of a long quotation from Irving that includes the passage that Landon cites in her epigraph. The *Sun* is then suggesting that Irving's sentiments are an accurate description of how many women experience love. Both the *Sun* and Landon cite Irving's words: "If shipwrecked, her [woman's] case is hopeless; it is a bankruptcy of the heart" ("Sketch the First" 27).

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whole of the London skyline in a round panorama; by the tableaux popular in the theater and in private theatricals; by the new availability of pictorial art, both in public exhibitions and in books increasingly published with engravings. Hence Landon was able to throw her pronouncements on the universality of human sorrow against her elaborate scenes and readily produce for readers the pleasures of emotional satisfaction.

Readers could feel more worthy for being satisfied, as was not the case when they -- or those that still sought to read the works of the reprobated -- met with Shelley's and Byron's latest productions. Landon's second sketch, for example, immediately follows a four-page account in the *Gazette* of the literary quarrel, "Southey and Byron!" which concludes in an attack on Byron and the "ATHEIST" Shelley as "levellers of order and religion": "It is said, that the highest authority in this kingdom has signified his marked displeasure at the blasphemies of [Byron's] Cain. . . (44). Seemingly held up as the *Gazette*'s refreshing alternative, L. E. L. "Sketch Second" of the First Series of Poëtic Sketches (all six poems in this series are titled by number only) proffers a scene of "bright-cheeked Girl," feeding pigeons, throwing flowers upon the cage of two white doves, then running to greet her father before a rural cottage decked in red roses, silver jessamine, and honeysuckle. Yet her violet-blue eyes have "sad meanings" in them; the scene's excess of happiness is nipped with "A blossom full of promise is Life's Joy, / That never comes to fruit." The unduly harsh "never" demands that readers seeking sentimental pleasure give L. E. L.'s pessimism and, by extension, L. E. L. more credence than they would were they not after that kind of pleasure.

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Landon identifies with the father. "'Tis past, we know not whither, but 'tis gone –" while he "Who fondly cultured it" is "left to weep." Again the speaker sees the now neglected cottage, overgrown by weeds, its rose trees dead, and its one dove wailing by a broken window. "Love, Oh fond Love! betraying, beautiful, / How can we trust the hope of life to thee? / Is it not building on the sands?" The reflection is meant to apply both to father and daughter; the speaker then mourns, "She loved one all unworthy of her love," who "beguil'd" her only to leave her to die as she had left her father (45). These bleak reflections elicited reciprocal aches in the hearts of readers because Landon offered them as resolutions to the unreal pictures. Her dreamscapes called for impassioned responses, beginning with her own over the impossibility of making the ideal last – in truth, the impossibility of realizing the ideal. She predestines that realization as tragic.

L. E. L.'s odd poems excited *Gazette* readers across Britain, giving Landon her first taste of stardom. Readers who began looking for the next Poetic Sketch would soon come to understand that the Sketches need not show up at regular intervals. Landon would write a sketch for one series with little thought for when or if she would write another series, sometimes even another sketch. But L. E. L. could be relied on to produce something often, if not a sketch then a few sweet songs. Riess argues that "the regularity and frequency of her poems in the *Gazette*" was "a potent factor underlying her success" (813). Landon's serial production baited readers in a way, with each poem giving a potent taste of the pleasure of her alternative world while promising that more similar pleasures would come. One supposes that, as would happen with later projects, Landon came up with the idea for several series of these

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Sketches -- probably after Jerdan helped her see that her poetic voice sounded most original (and implacably melancholy) when she used blank verse to paint scenes and faces -- and Jerdan agreed to the idea, privately pleased that, for the time being, she could find no venue but his magazine to showcase her talents. That Landon had carte blanche to write several series of Poetic Sketches emphatically proclaimed the editor's confidence in L. E. L.'s ability to deliver one good poem after another, while their growing intimacy surely compromised his judgment to a degree. But nothing would have convinced Jerdan more of the worth of her poetry than the tremendous rise in the *Gazette*'s circulation. Throughout the winter and spring of 1822, the *Gazette*'s circulation increased at a greater rate than at any other time in the magazine's history, climbing from 3000 issues per week at the end of 1821 to 4600 in May 1822 (Pyle 128).[4] To Jerdan, Landon's energy and imagination in 1822 seemed to know no bounds, and he could only help himself by letting the *Gazette* serve as her conduit.

By the fifth of the six Sketches in the First Series, the unheard of L. E. L. had turned into the poet whose identity *Gazette* readers most wanted to know, whose next poem they looked for when they had never before looked for works by a particular writer in Original Poetry. The fifth sketch was printed on 9 February 1822. After mulling over Elizabeth's death in Evelin's arms, readers found their enthusiasm echoed in "To L. E. L., On his or her Poetic Sketches in the Literary Gazette." A

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[4] Pyle admits that the best estimates we have for the *Gazette*'s circulation come from the *Gazette* itself, printed throughout the 1820s but not published in the 1830s because of the decline in sales. Having examined all the figures the *Gazette* published for its circulation and compared them with other reports, which basically support those

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valuable stamp of approval for the unorthodox initialist, the poem is signed by Bernard Barton, the Quaker whose 1820 *Poems* had been widely praised:

To me there's more of Minstrel stealth
In thy brief overflowings
Of fancy, -- more of Thought's best wealth, --
And Feeling's sweetest glowings; --
Than I can find in many a tome,
O'er which, from page to page, I roam.

Such gentle music may pass by
The cold, or careless hearer; --
To me it's witching melody
Is, from it's softness, dearer.
Its gushing forth, its dying fall,
Surpass the notes of Nourmahal.

I know not who, or what thou art;
Nor do I seek to know thee,
While Thou, performing thus thy part,
Such banquets can bestow me.
Then be, as long as thou shalt list,

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figures, Pyle concludes that the *Gazette*'s accounts are "believable" and the yearly increases "plausible" (128-29).

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My viewless, nameless Melodist. (89)

In effect, Barton's poem acknowledges that *Gazette* readers are witnessing the dawn of an exciting poet, whether or not they are aware of it. He for one perceives the riches that overflow from L. E. L.'s pen, and he would have others regard her kinship of softness and sweetness to Croly, Cornwall, and himself. The "cold and careless" chasing power and money are not attuned to her delicate melodies, audible to those with refined, pure hearts. With his *Napoleon, and Other Poems* (1822) soon to be published and unfavorably reviewed by some, Barton seems to anticipate the abuse that critics would level at the "milk-and-water school," sneering at its preference for the small deeds and the gentle feelings of a circumscribed life over grand schemes and heroic actions (Barcus 22; R. 47-48). Barton is standing up for their quieter poems in treating L. E. L. as a server of pleasurable "banquets" for his heart and mind. "To me" L. E. L.'s poems matter more than those by a host of famous male poets.

Landon's "Sketch Fifth" particularly invites the kinship that Barton announces. Evelin leaves his beloved Elizabeth to seek fame as a soldier because in his heart "there were clouds, / Low worldly clouds, upon affection's star." Because mild and kind Elizabeth "Could but ill brook the many trembling fears / That absent love must know,"[5] she silently declines: "Her fate was like / A star, o'er which the clouds steal one by one, / Scarce seen, scarce noticed, till the sweet light's gone." Elizabeth is then killed by Evelin's glory-seeking and resultant neglect, two crimes

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[5] These lines serve as an epigraph to a "Song" by "B. G." published in the *Gazette* on July 27, 1822. "The bosom" of B. G.'s male speaker "with anguish swells" as he thinks of the tears of the young woman with whom he has parted (473).

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that Landon could have laid at the feet of Jerdan. She will return again and again to the trembling fears of absent love. In "Sketch Fourth," published a week before, Landon's tale is of a not so mild Sea-maid, "deserted" by a "lawless wanderer" (for "love [will] dissolve into forgetfulness"), who screamed her "wild complainings" from a cave as she looked for his boat to return and then died (71). In "Sketch Fifth" Evelin returns too late to save Elizabeth, but not too late for readers to enjoy his observing her blush while embracing her, followed by his crying. "Ah, tears like these are worth / A life of smiles. . . ." Landon allows for just enough pleasure to make the inevitable, on the last half of the last line, seem nevertheless unsettling and cruel. Evelin lovingly gazes "On her sweet face – 'twas fixed and pale in death!" Throughout her portrayal, Elizabeth's inner turmoil is lightly veiled with all the tag words of mildness and with qualifiers, such as, in her first tableau, "her head / Is bent, *as if* in pain" and her "white hand . . . *almost* unconsciously / . . . is wandering" over her harp strings (emphasis mine; 89). Saying it all, death by broken heart yet resolves L. E. L.'s picture of the perfect woman: man's ideal destroyed by man's worldliness and by her feminine sensibility.

Barton is romantically perverse in his wish to remain ignorant of L. E. L.'s identity, even her gender, wanting to preserve the semi-angelic status she has assumed for the Quaker poet – "I know not who, or what thou art." But his talk of "Minstrel stealth," viewlessness, and namelessness could do little but stoke readers' desires to learn about L. E. L. Like Barton, most readers of the Poetic Sketches had not regarded *The Fate of Adelaide*, Jerdan's review of it, A. H. R.'s poem, and Jerdan's note to it. Barton's poem, in effect, makes a great secret out of Landon's initials, and

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Jerdan does not miss the chance to build on the interest created. Having placed an asterisk next to Barton's "his or her" in the subtitle, Jerdan states in a note beneath the poem: "*We have pleasure in saying that the sweet poems under this signature are by a lady, yet in her teens! The admiration with which they have been so generally read, could not delight their fair author more than it has those who in the *Literary Gazette* cherished her infant genius. – *Ed.*" (89). The news was her sex and her age. Jerdan's note would have been read aloud around dozens of hearths and coffee tables. Poetry lovers who did not buy the *Gazette* began to hear about L. E. L., and many would have planned to get a copy of the next week's issue. "The three letters very speedily became a signature of magical interest and curiosity. . . . Not only was the whole tribe of initialists throughout the land eclipsed, but the initials became *a name*. . . . That the poet was a 'Young lady yet in her teens,' as the editor answering inquiries at length announced, was a circumstance that did not, we may be sure, detract from the charm" (emphasis Blanchard's; Blanchard 1: 30-31).

News of L. E. L.'s gender provoked cheers and speculation among Cambridge undergraduates, as Edward Bulwer Lytton remembers:

> There was always, in the Reading Room of the Union, a rush every Saturday afternoon for "The Literary Gazette," and an impatient anxiety to hasten at once to the corner of the sheet which contained the three magical letters of "L. E. L." And all of us praised the verse, and all of us guessed at the author. We soon learned it was a female, and our admiration was doubled, and our conjectures tripled. Was she young? Was she pretty? And – for there were some embryo

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> fortune-hunters among us – was she rich? . . . The other day, in looking over some of our boyish effusions, we found a paper superscribed to "L. E. L.: and beginning "Fair Spirit." (Rev. of *Romance* 546)

In her Poetic Sketches Landon "proved" the female heart to be not just uniquely sensitive, but deeply, energetically passionate. That an overflowing well of emotion should be released from that mysterious arena, whose feelings could only be guessed by most nineteenth-century English gentlemen, was enough to make a young man giddy, whether observing a tragedian actress or an opera soprano extemporizing on stage, or reading a poem so seemingly improvisational that he dare suppose the poetess had transcribed her feelings as soon as they arose in her breast. Unlike the female stage performer, L. E. L. worked from no script composed by a man, so she might appear to give a better idea of what woman's love could be like -- idealized of course and radiating from beautiful bodies that often could not speak for themselves, the stuff of male fantasy. She could hardly have been more seductive.

Yet the Poetic Sketches could have appalled a significant portion of Landon's contemporaries because of these same improvisational qualities – as they have appalled not a few of their readers ever since. That most of their first readers were instead enthralled only begins to be explained by their author's being a woman, whose sketches were supposed to display features such as "a recognition of the ephemerality of women's writing; a simple but compensatory, artless spontaneity and/or naïve effusion of feminine sensibility" (Sha 108). But where proper ladies produced ephemera, Landon seemed to perform under a kind of magical spell over too soon;

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where they showed artlessness, she manifested a number of glaring faults; where they were effusive, she was a gushing torrent. Her poems arrived ringing with the clarion call of "genius." Also note that Bulwer Lytton and his fellows were full of admiration for the Sketches before they knew that their author was a woman. They first responded as they did largely because, along with inheriting the romantic cult of genius, they shared with all of Landon's early readers the uncritical sentimentality and pictorial imagination of the period.

> Struck by the evident youth of the writer, by the force as well as the grace of her careless and hurried notes, by the impassioned tenderness of the many songs and sketches that, week after week, without intermission, appeared under the same signature, the public unhesitatingly recognised these contributions as the fresh and unstudied outpourings of genius. . . . These were read in many quarters with the admiration which glances over defects and dwells on the result -- the general image of beauty presented to the mind.
>
> (Blanchard 1: 30-31)

Given that the success of the First Series of Poetic Sketches gave L. E. L. her first experience of popularity, the fact that none of the six poems from this series has ever been republished -- not in the nineteenth century, nor in any of the anthologies of romantic women poets published in the last twenty years, nor in McGann and Riess's collection of Landon's works (1997) -- says much about L. E. L.'s moment (as well as our own, which, despite its inclusive intentions, cannot divest itself of certain literary standards). These first Sketches are just too delightfully bad to be reprinted. They are

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diffuse in places, abbreviated in others, unbalanced and wayward, and yet, I would argue, those very qualities enhanced their initial appeal. A Victorian critic remembers that Landon's early verses for the *Gazette* came "Week by week . . . eloquent of deep feelings, possessing a melody that Moore never in his sweetest lyrics surpassed. . . . They were covered with faults, want of polish, carelessness, redundancy of metaphor and ornament; but these artistic failings were overlooked, nay admired – for they were the proofs and insignia of youthful and impetuous genius" (Jeaffreson 184). The impetuous Byron, never so careless or redundant, would not have considered stooping to this extreme of impetuosity. Correcting his statement that L. E. L.'s blemishes were overlooked, or, in Blanchard's words, glanced over, Jeaffreson makes the point that Landon caused readers to admire what they had been taught to fault.[6] Landon's defects provided them with evidence that the Poetic Sketches were something new, raw, tumultuous, and brilliant – what De Staël's examples of Corinne improvising fell short of being. Landon wrote the Sketches as if unshackled by any poetic standard that could have inhibited the disclosure of her emotions in their birth. Her work's unfinished nature imparted an excitement and immediacy to this disclosure that seemed to verify its authenticity.

Young enthusiasts, chafing against the behavioral codes of their society, hastened to take off their hats to a woman poet who seemed to write so freely about love. "What is most striking about [the compulsive writer] is the *ease* with which he

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[6] Discussing Anaïs Nin's "bad writing," Frances Wilson similarly speculates that Nin's "weak metaphors, repetition and monotony" are "precisely what is looked for

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works, and it is this curious lack of anxiety that is so enticing in the condition. . . . He writes with Byronic speed and without the blocks and self-doubts that bedevil authors" (emphasis Wilson's; F. Wilson xxvi). The sexually enticing L. E. L. came to embody an idea of refinement ruled by sweet, ardent feelings rather than the restraints of convention. She did not violate poetic standards outlawing vulgar words and images because, it seemed, nothing low and vulgar could arise from her naturally refined imagination. "With the young she [Landon] at once became a favourite. She breathed in rapturous verse their own fervent and wild aspirations -- she unfolded to them the visions of their morning" (Blanchard 1: 31). L. E. L. told readers in their teens and twenties that they alone could feel as she did; and if their love was returned, they alone could know the "season of young passion's happiness," when "The spirit revels in delicious dreams; / The future is so beautiful, for hope [as opposed to money and rank] / Is then all powerful" ("The Mine" 569). Unsurprisingly assenting to her romantic notion of their uniqueness, young readers responded to verse that displayed the deliciousness of such reveling. In *Poetry and Phantasy*, Easthope fundamentally asks, "How could texts providing pathological phantasies ever give shared, public pleasure?" His answer is as fundamental: "Phantasies, like dreams, fulfill wishes, and we do not always wish for what civilised life regards as acceptable" (151). Landon sensed that reflecting "long and deeply" on her subjects, as Wordsworth said all good poets must do (Linkin 174), would take away from the fervor and wildness of her

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and enjoyed: bliss resides in the textual abrasions, Barthes argues in *The Pleasures of the Text*" (44).

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poems, the freedom of thought they conveyed.[7] She sensed that L. E. L.'s greatest appeal lay in her coming across as anything but too civilized.

Particularly in her First Series of Poetic Sketches – five of six of which end with the central character's dying, the other with madness -- Landon appears to have written each few lines in response to the few she had written before, jumping from scene to the character's feelings to the poet's feelings to narrative to tableau of heroine, not developing ideas, just dropping them in as they come to her. She begins the eighty-two lines of "Sketch Fifth" describing palm trees and "citron bloom" in India for eleven lines, only to render India "colourless" in the eyes of English soldier Evelin, who is there dreaming of the oaks, larks, and violets of his homeland; she then praises solitary dreaming and mentions Evelin's memory of the "fairy shape" of Elizabeth and his desire to acquire both her and fame; then, after a series of dashes, Elizabeth is sketched, whose white "cheek does tell the history of the heart," playing sad songs on a harp while she sinks toward the "so lonely but so quiet grave"; more dashes and then, on line 72, L. E. L. diffusely relates, "She is within his arms, and they have met, / Evelin and his Elizabeth," whereupon Elizabeth dies (89). The poet

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[7]Landon also did not revise much. Nowhere have I found evidence of Landon's extensively changing or editing her work. Having examined dozens of Landon's poems in manuscript form, I cannot concur with Glennis Stephenson's remark: "As Landon's manuscripts attest, she was actually no more Improvisatrice than Pythian princess" ("Letitia Landon and the Victorian" 8). On the contrary, many of Landon's manuscripts are completely clean, lacking a single insertion or deletion, but most have a few words changed, say, one word for ten or more lines of poetry. But I have never found extensive changes, never more than even half a line crossed out, and that degree of rewriting is very rare. Landon simply could not better her works by laboring over them. Mackenzie Bell recalls how she tried to rewrite "Juliet at the Masquerade" but

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obviously intends to end with a death when she begins the poem, but beforehand she wants to show how much she is taken with all the various pictures in her head. Each picture comes to her abruptly, then she lingers over it with sentiments so extreme the picture must soon be dropped and another brought in. To expect that readers would follow her stop-and-start pace, empathizing wherever she does, Landon's confidence in her poetic powers had to be colossal.

L. E. L. gave *Gazette* readers poetry in process, poetry as event. In the course of her career, Landon moved gradually away from this harum-scarum kind of work. Though critics have been united in declaring her increasing control and restraint over the years an increasing improvement, I doubt whether she would have ever leaped to fame if she had been so controlled and restrained to begin with. Disturbed by the fact that Landon brought much of the same exciting uncertainty, or lack of direction, to her bestseller *The Improvisatrice* (1824), William Gifford advised Blanchard in a letter to tell "your admirable friend" that with her next volume-length poem she should "plan her subject at first, and not trust to accident for its course and end" (Blanchard 1: 283). The aging, reactionary conservative of *Baviad* (1794) and *Maeviad* (1796) fame, Gifford would not have cared that Landon knew before she wrote *The Improvisatrice* that her improvisational style had a good chance of pleasing the British reading public because she had been delighting *Gazette* readers with her wild long poems since early 1822.[8] Remember that several of her 1821 and 1822 short lyrics

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failed to reach the level of her first effort, proving "how entirely improvisatorial [sic] was her power" (106).

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demonstrated that she could keep to a strict meter and concentrate ideas within a limited space.[9] But she let herself go for the Poetic Sketches, and perhaps was at her most romantically sentimental when composing its First Series. Landon clearly wished to exhibit brief, fervent inspiration in the act of creating, as is shown by her previous poem "Corinna" (1821) – where "the minstrel's fire" sparkled in her eyes as "The song arose" from a voice "fraught with tender feelings" (97-98) – and by "Sketch Third" in the First Series – where the poet of "wild songs," "not content / With silent rapture . . . must sun his wealth, / Show his hid treasures to the world" (59). In her careless, or carefree, disregard of the values that most critics regarded as quintessential to good poetry, Landon produced what no one has wanted to reprint -- as if in accordance with one of her pet truisms, expressed thus in "Sketch Fourth":

> . . . lovely things are fleeting – blushes, sighs,
> The hours of youth, smiles, hopes, and minstrel dreams,
> Springs days and blossoms, music's tones, are all
> Most fugitive. (71)

There is no denying that Landon wrote quickly. As she once remarked, "I like to show how much I can do in little time" (Watts 2: 21). Landon also spoke quickly and even moved quickly. Recalling her friend, Sarah Sheppard speaks of "a graceful

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[8] Harriet Linkin observes of the heroine of *The Improvisatrice* that she "is not incapable of emotion recollected in tranquility so much as she is desired and praised by her audience for her ability to render the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (174). Landon, then, depicted in her most famous poem a praise akin to what she had experienced from her *Gazette* audience.

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quickness in every movement; so accordant with that rapidity of thought which is the especial attribute of genius. . . . Everything seemed accomplished by her without effort. Her thoughts appeared to spring up spontaneously on any proposed subject; so that her literary tasks were completed with a facility and quickness." In her conversation, she spoke with "like rapidity of transition, together with a correspondent quickness of utterance, as if her beautiful thoughts were glad to escape into expression. Her observations, however, brilliant and deep, never seemed laboured, but arose fast and brightly, unrestricted . . ." (76-77). About this time, in early 1822, Jerdan gained "evidence of the rapidity with which she composed" (while finally verifying her authorship) when she produced what became the fourth sketch for the Second Series of Poetic Sketches, "St. George's Hospital, Hyde-Park Corner":

> In driving from town to Brompton immediately before dinner, on passing St. George's Hospital, it was suggested to be a good subject for verse, and Miss Landon was requested to adopt it. Dinner passed, and within an hour the ladies were joined at tea, by which time a most touching poem of seventy four lines was completed on a given theme. The author entered the refuge of the sick and dying, and painted their various conditions and sad fate with most pathetic touches. ("Memoir of L. E. L." xi)

Landon probably did not spend much more time composing the rest of the Poetic Sketches. "St. George's Hospital" would have been read out to the ladies and

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[9] Years after they were composed, several of Landon's early songs would be set to music, which followed on their having been selected for republication in volumes of

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print, not dreaming for a moment, that verses which were poured forth like the waters from a fountain, gushing, as she has beautifully expressed it, of their own sweet will, could ever provoke stern or harsh criticism" (9). In truth, Landon's confinement to the *Gazette* protected her from book reviewers. All for now was applause. To Jerdan and the others present in the carriage on that day in 1822, it seemed that they had tapped Landon's well of feeling and she had left them to spew forth "within an hour" the whole of "St. George's Hospital." Perhaps she welcomed the request to write it. In this improvised poem made part of the series putting her forward as an improvisational poet and then republished in *The Improvisatrice; and Other Poems* (1824), Landon stresses that the poet's well-being requires that he, as a kind of relief, "pour his own impassioned soul upon the lyre" (331).

Landon would later give the impression that the strong passions evident in much of her early poetry demanded release though they arose solely from empathy with the creatures of her imagination. In her 1837 novel *Ethel Churchill*, she recalls when "our former fantasies" came "at a moment's notice" (2: 158):

> Composition, like every thing else, feels the influence of time. At first, all is poetry with the young poet; his heart is full of emotions eagerly struggling for utterance; every thing suggests the exercise of his own sweet art. A leaf, a flower, the star far off in the serene midnight, a look, a word, are enough for a poem. Gradually this profusion exhausts itself, the mind grows less fanciful, and poetry is rather a power than a passion. Feelings have hardened into thoughts, and the sensations of others are no longer almost as if they had been a matter

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of experience. (2: 157)

The struggle for utterance that seemed to dictate the course of the Poetic Sketches made L. E. L. appear at the mercy of her sensational visions and the emotions surrounding them. Propounding the mythic qualities of L. E. L.'s writing better than anyone I have read, the Victorian critic Jeaffreson reminds us that in the early 1820s she transferred her ecstasies to *Gazette* readers because they thought they sensed the immediate dynamism of this struggle, that is, that her verses came "rolling on with a lawless strength that showed plainly they flowed because they could not be withheld":

> Within the unknown poet's breast swelled a power that was not to be trifled with, an irrepressible force that must have its way like electricity; -- how could she pause to count numbers, refer to the rules of syntax for enlightenment on a dubious expression, or debate on the artistic proprieties, when thoughts, feelings, fancies, images followed in quick succession, struggling for utterance and defying reflection. Here was the secret of 'L. E. L.'s' power; poetry was the natural expression of her ardent feelings; she . . . poured her soul into song, because it was the only way nature permitted her to disburthen herself of ungovernable emotions. Song with her was not a mere mental exercise, an art, -- it was a passion, an instinct. It was absurd to say she might have done greater things if she had taken more care. . . . The conditions of her genius denied her the faculty of composing with cold critical deliberation . . . with her, faultlessness would have necessitated the absence of all the elements of her poetic excellence,

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gentlemen at tea as a marvel of Landon's extemporizing powers. That she was almost challenged to write it does not in the least take away from its pathos for Jerdan; its sympathies were to him and the others undeniably genuine. Her speaker "left the crowded street and the fresh day," much as the perambulating Landon would have done, to enter the hospital around the corner from her house, where she sees three of L. E. L.'s favorite characters: a dying soldier, a dying young woman who "had loved, / Trusted, and been betrayed!" and a poet/painter dying bitterly of neglect "Whom I had loved in youth." Was she thinking of Shelley, Keats, or Byron when she described him as "wayward, wild," "Too proud, too visionary for this world"? She leaves him unreconciled, the last line stating that the poet's "brow in death / Wore its pale marble look of cold defiance." Sheppard's observation that Landon spoke "as if her beautiful thoughts were glad to escape" bears comparison here, where the poet without an audience is brought to his death because his "glowing thoughts / Were fires that preyed upon himself"; his feelings were "Thrown back upon themselves," when they would have "carried with them freshness and green beauty" if allowed to flow like "waters unconfined" (331).

A leftover image from the eighteenth-century language of sensibility that Landon made fundamental to her rhetoric of genius, this notion of the mind preying on itself helped her understand her emotional need and long held desire to publish sentiments that, when they did reach print, appeared to flow "like waters unconfined." She appears to have hoped their unconfined nature, or gush, would protect her. Her friend Emma Roberts asserts than in the early 1820s Landon "rushed fearlessly into

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collected poetry.

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and would have been the greatest of all faults. (184)

I think Jeaffreson's exposition of the "secret of 'L. E. L.'s power" well explains why, along with the increase in circulation she was sparking, neither Jerdan nor the *Gazette*'s publishers and other writers suggested to her that she expend more effort on fewer poems. One fundamental question for the biographer is whether Landon in the early 1820s possessed "ungovernable emotions" she could release nowhere except in her poems, the strictures against female passion allowing for the widest definition of "ungovernable." The few letters that exist from this period confirm the disjunction between the agonized poetry and breezy social personality that characterized her adult existence. And that disjunction, often used by critics to undermine the emotional integrity of her poems, can also be seen to confirm that integrity, if one follows the arguments Landon put forward in her literary prose as well as poetry. As mentioned in the introduction, Landon "almost" defined poetry once as

> . . . the necessity of feeling strongly in the first instance, and the as strong necessity of confiding in the second. . . . [T]hose who would shrink from avowing what and how much they feel to even the most trusted friend, yet rely upon and crave for the sympathy of the many. . . . [S]urrounded by the cold and the careless -- shrinking from his immediate circle, who neglect and misunderstand him, [the poet] yet has faith in the far away. ("On the Character" 425)

When her affair with Jerdan is added to the picture we already had of Landon's life – including the accounts of her strong will and passionate temperament in youth; in the 1820s and 1830s, the bouts of "spasms" and the recurrent appeal of suicide; and her

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lifelong secretiveness[10] -- the likelihood becomes stronger that poetry served as the primary outlet for Landon's emotions. One of the poems from *The Fate of Adelaide* volume, "To ___" (perhaps to her cousin Elizabeth), begs that the speaker not be accused of insensitivity toward nature's beauties and then tells how she cherishes the grand, spell-like passions that come only when she is alone:

> Pleasure is unto me a lonely thing:
> Deep sorrow, or rapt joy, I cannot feel,
> But in still solitude: I may not brook
> Another's eye should mark my secret thoughts
> Since the first hour that tears or smiles were mine,
> I never sought communion in my grief,
> And none could share my silent happiness. (95)

What we know of Landon's childhood supports the poem. She first tasted the exquisite physical sensations of extreme feeling then, through indulging her fantasy life in the solitude that was essential to such indulgence. Like Laura in Chistina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," Landon had tasted this fruit and could prefer no other. Nor could she share or even speak about these sensations when not alone, that is, when not writing. Her secretive tendencies were well established when she began the Poetic Sketches and before her affair with Jerdan; indeed they would have eased her into the

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[10] Throughout her adult life, Landon would frustrate friends like Katherine Thomson and the Halls by her secretiveness, by seeming to hold something back from them. No one had her complete confidence, and no one claims to have had it.

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affair, made the idea of it plausible and attractive. As Landon's speaker says in "Lines of Life,"

> I never knew the time my heart
>
> Look'd freely from my brow;
>
> It once was check'd by timidness,
>
> 'Tis taught by caution now. (*The Venetian Bracelet* 265)[11]

Only when writing her poems and fictional prose could Landon open up, share the fruits of her fantasy life. She was at her least secretive and most confessional when she was writing literary works. Remember, she first confessed her passion for Jerdan to Jerdan not face to face, or in a letter, but in a poem to be published, *The Fate of Adelaide.* She had worked herself up to that level of desire in writing the poem. But compared to the Poetic Sketches, *The Fate of Adelaide* is stilted and restrained. Landon came, I think, closer in the Sketches to writing out of "the poetic frenzy that had seized her" than she would at any later time (Blanchard 1: 35).

Unsurprisingly, feminist critics do not warm to the early nineteenth-century vogue for gushing poetesses, all too aware that female thoughtlessness is implied (Leighton 58-60; Stephenson "Letitia Landon" 5). Ellen Moers thinks that women

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[11] In the epigraph to "Lines of Life," the speaker says that she became an "Orphan in my first year's" [sic], and thus, "I early learnt / To make my heart suffice itself, and seek / Support and sympathy in its own depths" (*The Venetian Bracelet* 265). Landon of course did not become an orphan at any time; however, she lost her father when she was twenty-two, when she was still being marketed as an "infant genius," and at a time when a child could be called an orphan if the child had lost only one parent. Like so many of her generation, Landon was attracted to the image of the orphan, and by using it here she provided herself with a light veil in what is clearly an autobiographical poem.

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poets who, following the example of De Staël's Corinne, tried to sing on impulse demeaned themselves by producing "more often raw fantasy than finished art" (*Literary Women* 183). Her view is supported by Joan DeJean, who attributes the ultimate "devaluation of Sappho's poetry" and that of later improvisatory writers to their work's seeming to represent "*merely* authentic desire rather than the more highly prized artificially passionate" (emphasis DeJean's; 24). Thus, to defend Landon, Isobel Armstrong notes the "intellectual precision" with which Landon uses verbs in her later work. She argues, "The language of affect is analytical. . . . The gush of the feminine is a fallacy" (29, 25, 32). Discussing Landon's devotion to the "Sappho-Corinne myth" in her poems of the mid and late 1820s, Linda Peterson cites nineteenth-century praise for as well as current scoffing at Landon's display of the "poetess as improvisatrice, gushing forth her effusions like a natural spring" (121, 118). Peterson weighs the evidence and finds against Landon's persona:

> The myth of the poetess as *improvisatrice* had certain advantages: it linked her to the cult of genius and her work to inspired rather than mechanical or pedantic production. But it also had disadvantages: in its emphasis on the poetess's natural genius and her youthful, sometimes even infantile poetic effusions, it tended to restrict the poetess to a youthful, immature stage of development and to mitigate against more mature, serious writing. (120)

For all their appearance of balance, the defense of Landon's later work and the discomfort with the middle period's improvisational performances are prejudiced toward what Peterson terms "mature, serious writing." Whereas, to grasp the verve

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and power that Landon effervesced to her contemporaries, we should eschew any sort of balance, tipping the scales over to appreciate fully the rebirth of the Delphic priestess in the shape of the early nineteenth-century poetess. The seeming absence of second thoughts in much of Landon's early work does not mean the absence of thought altogether. Nor was thought itself so supremely valued by Landon's first readers. What comment on woman's love that bubbles up amid the images and story could carry for her contemporaries the significance of an oracular truth, to be felt more than just understood.

As part of his recollections of 1822, Jerdan singles out "Sappho" among the Poetic Sketches, identifying it as "the first of the second series . . . a remarkable example of the passionate force in which the ideas are couched . . . a poem, of its order, unsurpassed in any language" ("Memoir of L. E. L." xv). The work that was published on May 4th is, arguably, the most important of the Poetic Sketches as Landon treats the "Sappho-Corinne" for the first time at any length, while she confirms her boldness in weaving her feelings for Jerdan into her love poetry. From the long line of poems about Sappho stretching back to Ovid, Landon makes a crucial deviation. She introduces an older man, Sappho's "first love," and attributes the magnetism of Phaon, her second and fatal love, to his resemblance to this unnamed man, who, as Sappho's former tutor, occupied a role identical to that of Jerdan vis-à-vis Landon in 1822. As Margaret Linley notes, Phaon here "becomes a mere copy of another more originary first love" (23).

Sappho is first seen alone on stage, leaning on her harp before "thousands" who "knelt / And worshipp'd in her presence," shed "burning tears," and paused in

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"breathless agitated eagerness," before shouting her name to the hills. Heightening this crowd's response beyond that of De Staël's *Corinne* or her own "Corinna," L. E. L. glorifies first the assembled masses, then Sappho, for humbly adoring those they deem their superiors. Sappho's display of weakness further strengthens her allure for the crowd; sexual desire for one man gives that "softer blush than conscious pride." She turns "tremulous" and full of "timid tenderness" as her "eye is on a Youth, and other days / And young warm feelings have rushed on her soul / With all their former influence." Having turned from the crowd to look at Phaon, Sappho, already at "other days," has mentally turned aside from the youth, whose features serve to open the floodgates of her memory of a tutor:

> . . . one had called forth
> The music of her soul: he loved her too,
> But not as she did – she was unto him
> As a young bird, whose early flight he trained,
> Whose first wild songs were sweet, for he had taught
> Those songs – but she looked up to him with all
> Youth's deep and passionate idolatry:
> Love was her heart's sole universe – he was
> To her, Hope, Genius, Energy, the God
> Her inmost spirit worshipped – in whose smile
> Was all e'en minstrel pride held precious; praise
> Was prized but as the echo of his own.
> . . . . . .

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Her first love never wholly lost its power,

But, like rich incense shed, although no trace

Was of its visible presence, yet its sweetness

Mingled with every feeling, and it gave

That soft and melancholy tenderness

Which was the magic of her song. . . . That Youth

Who knelt before her was so like the shape

That haunted her spring dreams – the same dark eyes, . .

Whose light had once been as the light of heaven! (282)

The poem's first reader, Jerdan had no doubt that "Sappho" gave him Landon's view of himself. Perhaps as importantly, "Sappho" defined his affection for Landon while accepting it could not match hers. The poem even provided him with a justification for loving her. Upon hearing the news of Landon's death in January 1839, Jerdan would lament in a letter to the Countess of Blessington:

My poor, dear, all but adored L. E. L. -- The creature whose earliest and precocious aspirations it was mine to cherish and improve, whose mind unfolded its marvellous [sic] stores as drawn forth and encouraged by me -- well did she sweetly paint it when she said,

"We love the bird we taught to sing."

and truly and devotedly did I love her for fifteen eventful years. (Letter to Lady Blessington)[12]

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None of Landon's best known volumes of poetry contain the line Jerdan cites, and he may well be imperfectly remembering the five lines from "Sappho" that describe the tutor's feelings: "He loved her too, / . . . she was unto him / As a young bird . . ." etc. Regardless, the line Jerdan cites is a simplified restatement of those five lines (Landon often simplified in the process of recycling). In his *Autobiography*, Jerdan quotes the same line in a crucial passage following a description of how Landon responded to his tutelage:

> The world was only opening and unknown to her, and she might – even holding her child-like gratitude in view – both feel and say, 'For almost every pleasure I can remember I am indebted to one friend. I love poetry; who taught me to love it but he? I love praise; to whom do I owe so much of it as to him? I love paintings; I have rarely seen them but with him. I love theatre, and there I have seldom gone but with him. I love ideas; he has conducted me to their attainment. Thus his image has become associated with my enjoyments and the public admiration already accorded to my efforts, and he must be all I picture of kindness, talents, and excellence. (3: 172)

At least Jerdan admits that she overestimated him, adding that, "Gratitude is prone to such illusions, and especially where combined with the fire and fervour of genius; and if 'We love the bird we taught to sing,' how much more intensely must we cherish the

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[12] I cannot as yet determine whether Lady Blessington knew the truth, as opposed to the rumor, of Landon and Jerdan's affair. Jerdan's 1839 letter is sufficiently vague to have kept her in the dark. On the other hand, his precise numbering, "fifteen eventful

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love of the bird that sings in such a strain" (3: 172). Our knowledge of Landon and Jerdan's affair demands that we no longer take this passage to be an old man's absurd fantasy. "He was / To her, Hope, Genius, Energy, the God / Her inmost spirit worshipped" is, after all, how L. E. L. imagines perfect love.

Jerdan has sounded as overweening in his claim that Landon felt for him "a grateful and devoted attachment . . . all phases of which demonstrate and illume the origin of her productions. Critics and biographers may guess, and speculate, and expatiate for ever; but without this master-key they will make nothing of their reveries" (3: 170). "He went so far," Germaine Greer remarks in distaste, "as to claim that the chief well-spring of L. E. L.'s creativity was her passion for him" (289). Extreme though Jerdan's claims are, Sappho's love for her tutor had no less effect on her poetry. Its "sweetness / Mingled with every feeling, and it gave / that soft and melancholy tenderness / Which was the magic of her song." Both Jerdan and Landon are asserting that a young woman's love for an older man endowed her poetry with the depth of feeling that made it popular, so that "strangers heard her name, and eyes that never / Had looked on SAPPHO, yet had wept with her" (282). Remember that Landon had already written of Jerdan's inspiration in *The Fate of Adelaide*, "If one note / Can boast of sweetness, 'tis from thee twas caught."[13]

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years," could well refer to the length of the affair, beginning in 1822 and ending in 1837, around the time of Landon's engagement to George Maclean.

[13]She will again speak of a love that saturates her poetry in "Conclusion" (1823) -- "Thy name is breathed on every song" (140) – and in "The Legacy of the Lute" (1828), where the now-famous poet asks the "dearest one" to "forget / All that can link my thought with fame; / I'd have thee but recall those songs / Whose only music was

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What role "Sappho" played in Jerdan and Landon's relationship is worthy of a little speculation. It comes out near the time when Landon's relationship with Jerdan will cause her to change her residence, and many of the poems that follow in 1822 and 1823 contain explicitly sexual overtones, the like of which Landon had not published up through the time she wrote "Sappho." More than any previous poem, "Sappho" perhaps operated as Baudrillard's "challenge to love more than one is loved" (22) in that its directness required a response. In the manuscript poem Landon handed the courier boy to deliver to the *Gazette* office, Landon telegraphed to the editor that he did not appreciate the nature of her affection for him because he regarded her as a mere bird he taught. Jerdan was invited to show her how very much he could "intensely . . . cherish" the bird, just as his two citations of "We love the bird we taught to sing" are intended to show others. Conversely, though Jerdan and Landon's sexual affair may have been helped to start by "Sappho" and, to a lesser extent, similar poems, "Sappho" in particular stresses the heroine's entrapment in her yearning and visions. When Sappho sees Phaon, she falls for him "with all the ardour of a heart / Which lives but in itself," not recognizing that he presents a poor chance of her making a human connection. But then, Landon gives Sappho no chance with anyone. "A soul / So gifted and passionate as her's [sic] / Will seek companionship in vain, and find / Its feelings solitary" (282). The high literary value Jerdan placed on Landon's melancholy song surely mitigated whatever challenge he felt to disprove her outlook on the future.

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thy name" (107). There are undoubtedly several more examples of this sentiment to be found in her poems.

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Not one of Landon's contemporaries is known to have remarked on the parallel between Sappho's relationship with her tutor and Landon's with the editor, who, as some in literary society were aware, was instructing her regularly at her parents' house or his own, inviting her to his dinners and parties, taking her around London. Stephenson notes that, from 1824 on, most reviewers likewise ignored the "sexual undertones" in Landon's published volumes. Her breaches of decorum were "simply not in keeping with the character they were busily constructing for L. E. L." (*Letitia Landon* 30-32). Landon would never have inflected her volumes of the mid-1820s with those undertones if she had not been flirting with the outrageous for two or more years in her *Gazette* poetry while growing ever more popular. Piously sentimental readers of the *Gazette* like Bernard Barton and Alaric Watts turned a blind eye because, as Stephenson argues for the later reviewers, they wanted to think L. E. L. angelically chaste. But surely some, as the later comments of Bulwer Lytton and Blackwood's men would suggest, took enough pleasure in Landon's risqué insinuations to accommodate them in their vision of the fair poetess.

Rejecting control and separating

Probably in the spring of 1822, Catharine Landon told her daughter that she was behaving improperly with Jerdan. Deeply in love with the idea of being in love with him, Letitia refused to put up with the censor and moved out of her parents' Brompton house and into her grandmother's lodgings on Sloane Street. Katherine

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Thomson gives "my impression of some of the causes which drove our poor friend from her house" in a letter to Bulwer Lytton written after Letitia Landon's death. After expressing her certainty that what she writes will be "kept sacred," Thomson remembers the poet sixteen years earlier:

> She was very young, at that time, and if not beautiful, had always I believe, great attractions in the eyes of most persons. Her mother saw her flattered by, and on the most intimate terms with a man not reputed to be the most correct of beings. She [Catharine Landon] told me that she remonstrated with her daughter -- an altercation of the bitterest kind ensued. Mrs. Landon to this day looks upon Mr. Jerdan as the source of her separation from her daughter. As a mother, myself, how could I blame her interference? (Letter to Edward)

Letitia Landon was uncompromising. At the age of nineteen or twenty, she walked out of her parents' house not just as a young woman seeking freedom but as an immature one who, in anger and bitterness, wanted nothing more to do with her mother. "Her mother's temper, with a warm heart as she had, clashed with hers," Thomson writes in *The Queens of Society*, published twenty years after her letter to Bulwer Lytton. Here Thomson gives away no cause for the clash beyond Landon's ambition to live independently.

> There is no doubt but that in the separation that afterwards ensued between her and her mother much blame was due to herself. She began to feel her powers, and to reject control. . . . Her early adversity had taught her self-dependence, and she now sometimes wished to

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> tear herself away from constraint -- to live, as certain *esprits forts* did, alone: to be a Corinne, her poetry and her fame giving her a sort of song of brevet among girls of her own age. (200)[14]

Catharine Landon by this time was beset with financial troubles that her husband seemed unable to resolve and had lost her sickly younger daughter or would lose her within a few years.[15] She never stopped caring about Letitia, as Thomson's several letters to Bulwer Lytton attest, and she remained decent and kind in her way. Catharine's niece and Letitia's tutor Elizabeth stayed with Catharine at least until the 1840s, the two living in impoverished circumstances worse than Letitia ever knew. Cutting these bonds unsentimentally, Letitia apparently denied both women a hope of affectionate contact with her, and, though she would later send money to her mother on a regular basis, the poet seems not to have resumed friendly relations with Catharine until just before she left for Africa in 1838.[16] Thomson stresses to Bulwer

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[14] In *The Queens of Society* (1860), Thomson seems to have the confused idea that Landon clashed with and separated from her mother after her father's death, when the poet was being courted by society. Thomson is likewise mistaken in stating that Landon did not leave her grandmother until the elder woman died (206). In truth, Landon left Letitia Bishop to live in a boarding house more than five years before Bishop died.

[15] In his "Memoir of L. E. L.," Jerdan implies that Landon moved out to ease her parents' financial burden: "After her writings had led to a celebrity and offered an independency, the young Letitia, who was most warmly attached to her [grandmother], took up her residence with her in Sloane Street, and there remained till the good old lady died" (ix). Like Thomson, Jerdan tries to cover up the fact that Landon left Letitia Bishop before Bishop's death. Relying solely on the *Gazette* for her income, Landon also may not have achieved financial independence by 1822 or 1823, but her grandmother could have afforded to offer her room and board.

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Lytton that both she and Catharine Landon considered the poet's moral "character" unspotted throughout her life (Letter to Edward), and the whole of Thomson's writings about L. E. L. confirm that she never suspected her of having an affair with Jerdan or anyone else. Letitia Landon convinced her mother and Thomson that she left home because she was offended by the questioning of her innocence and by being told she must restrain her behavior around an older married man. This occasion would only be the first of several times in her adult life when Landon would carry the cross of injured dignity to great effect.

Published on May 18th, "Rosalie" opens: "We met in secret: mystery is to love / Like perfume to the flower; the maiden's blush / Looks loveliest when her cheek is pale with fear" (314). It must not have been far from Letitia Landon's mind that when living with her doting grandmother in nearby Chelsea, she could more easily meet Jerdan in secret as well as in the open. Letitia Bishop knew the causes that brought her granddaughter to her "small apartment in Sloane Street" (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 204), and she may have been taking her granddaughter's side in the dispute by permitting her to live there. The grandmother was in effect replacing her own daughter, Catharine, to serve as Letitia Landon's guardian and give her the vital appearance of respectability. It is worth recalling that Letitia Bishop was supposed to have been an illegitimate daughter of an aristocrat (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 3: 180). Moreover, the 1774 birth record for Catharine Landon née Bishop points toward the

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[16] Landon did not invite her mother to her 1838 wedding but, out of sense of duty, she did visit her before she sailed, and she wrote to her "dear Mother" from Cape Coast Castle, signing herself "affectionate," just before she died that year (Blanchard 1: 208-10).

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probability that she was illegitimate. With her mother's name listed as "Letitia," the birth record gives only the surname "Bishop" for Catharine's father, whereas all the surrounding records give Christian names for the fathers as well (Birth Record for Katherine). As discussed in Chapter One, no information has ever been documented on this man who, through death or otherwise, left Letitia Bishop "genteely" settled for the rest of her days (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 3: 180), and no reason has been given for the absence of information.

That Landon moved in with her grandmother by May 1822 is supported by her having written a letter from "Sloane Street" in that month (Letter to T. Richards). She could have left her parents months later or even as late as 1824, as has been asserted elsewhere, but the accumulation of evidence tips the scale in favor of her moving out in 1822 or perhaps the next year. Importantly, Laman Blanchard, the friend and biographer with best access to the facts, states that Landon had been living with her grandmother for one to two years by the time *Improvisatrice* was published, in July 1824 (1: 43). Aware of contrary reports, another friend, William Howitt, can do no better than admit, "It does not appear very clear whether Miss Landon continued at home . . . from the time the family came to live here [in Brompton] . . . till the death of her father . . ." (128). The confusion here is instructive. For we must not forget how boldly unconventional it was in nineteenth-century England for a young single woman to move out of her parents' house. Though Landon exchanged the protection of her father's house for that of her grandmother, she still did not wholly avoid the look of impropriety. But, reacting against her mother, she was determined to devote as little concern as she could to "appearances."

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However, leaving her adored father must have pained Landon. Several references in her work suggest as much, especially in poems of 1822. Two of her Poetic Sketches about young women left by their lovers cast the die when the woman leaves her parents' home to follow her lover, or rather, leaves "her father's halls" – the mother is not mentioned ("Sketch Fourth" 71). In the second sketch from the First Series, the dying girl returns to "her Father, whom she left, / And knelt, and pray'd forgiveness," her father responding with "kind and pardoning tears" (45). The heroine of her August 1822 short story, "Isadore," does not follow her beloved until her father dies (504-5). In "The Painter's Love" of December 1822, L. E. L.'s miserable female speaker reveals how she left with her lover "Not as a bride who passes o'er / Her father's threshold with his blessing. . . But I – I fled as culprits fly," thinking

> . . . not of my own sweet home,
> Nor of mine aged father's sorrow, --
> Wild love takes no thought for to-morrow.
> I left my home, and I was left. . . . (776)

The year closed with "The Female Convict," in which a chained young woman, languishing near death on board a ship, calls the speaker over because his "northern accents" remind her of her lost home. She tells her dream of returning to her father, who sat by the hearth "With pale thin face, and snow-white hair! / The Bible lay open upon his knee, / But he closed the book to welcome me." The convict's final request is that the speaker give a lock of her hair to "my Father, and tell

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him my prayer, / My dying prayer, was for him" (808).[17] Each in itself proves nothing, but so many references to leaving fathers in the poems of that year lends weight to the argument that the poet anguished over the sorrow she gave John Landon by leaving his house. In his late sixties, he would die in two years' time. To her, the poetic references stood as literary benefits reaped from private sadness: her real remorse sharpening the agonies in her poems and winning extra pity for fallen daughters who recall their fathers as they sink to their graves. Letitia Landon may even have composed some passages about leaving fathers before the row with her mother, when the poet was perhaps looking for an excuse to leave. For poetic reasons, she would not have wished to shake off the guilt for hurting her father, not when she could return to it repeatedly over the years for a few more good lines. Yet Landon's lifelong opinion that "Of all our sensations, love is the one which has most the stamp of Fate" would suggest that she viewed her decision to leave her parents' home as unavoidable (Blanchard 2: 143):

> An attachment is an epoch in existence – it leads to casting off old ties, that, till then, had seemed our dearest; it begins new duties; often, in a woman especially, changes the whole character; and yet, whether in its beginning, its continuance or its end, love is as little within our power as the wind that passes, of which no man knows whither it goeth or whence it comes. (2: 144)

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[17] The poem was based on an incident from *The Life and Adventures of John Nicol, Mariner* (1822), quoted in the *Gazette*'s review on pages 755-57. The actual female convict did not mention her father.

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Once Landon moved in with her grandmother, Jerdan would stop by Sloane Street most days to see the poet for a few minutes, only staying for any length on Sunday afternoons, when he had time to review Landon's manuscripts (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 209). Perhaps it was on these occasions he observed "that her arm and hand were so femininely perfect . . . and that of this fair hand she was wont to make a droll use, for two of its fingers were very apt to find their way into her mouth when she was deep in the act of contemplation and writing. The childish appearance of this custom raised many a laugh at the expense of the rapt minstrel" ("Memoir of L. E. L." xvii). For a busy editor to find any time to cultivate a female "infant genius" was extraordinary in the context of the day's standards of propriety and concern for business profitability. But Jerdan could partly rationalize his visits on business grounds; for the rest of the 1820s, L. E. L.'s pen was known to be essential to the steady increase in the *Gazette*'s circulation (Pyle 143).

By Jerdan's side

In 1822 and 1823 she wrote more poetry for the *Gazette* than she would at any other time in her life and likely was beginning to produce the occasional review of books, art exhibitions, and plays (though, because the reviews were unsigned and no records for the authorship exist, these prose works have not been identified). She would begin writing the reviews casually:

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> By and by, the casual help became permanent, and, for a number of years, I might account L. E. L. rather an effective colleague than an occasional contributor; for she delighted in the work to the extent of craving for the employment, reading everything voraciously, forming opinions, and adding to her stores of knowledge, writing skillfully, and often beautifully upon her favourite subjects, and in short, doing little less for the 'Gazette' than I did myself. . . . The Literary Gazette . . . was in almost every number enriched by her captivating poetry, and judicious, as well as piquant, essays in criticism and original prose. (Jerdan, *Autobiography* 3: 173, 184-85)

If Landon was already writing reviews, then she likely penned the occasional negative one, as she was alleged by the late 1820s to be well practised at "'flinging about fire' as a journalist in sport, according to the approved fashion of her school." Believing himself wounded by her attacks, Henry Chorley hardly contains his anger as he remarks of Landon, "It would not be easy to sum up the iniquities of criticism (the word is not too strong), perpetrated at the instance of publishers, by a young writer and a woman, who was in the grasp of Mr. Jerdan, and who gilt and blackened all writers of the time, as he ordained" (107).

Landon could not escape being tarred by attacks on the editor with whom she so closely associated. Seething with hostility at the short but cutting review his *Points of Misery* (1823) received in the *Gazette*, Charles Westmacott in response dedicated *Cockney Critics, an Original Satire; with The Blow fly, a Portrait in Verse* (1823) to Jerdan. He addresses Jerdan in the dedication: "Sir, you are a *slaughterman* of

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reputation, and can flay poor authors with as much facility, and something less of feeling, than a carcase butcher does a bleating lamb. . . . You . . . are surrounded by satellites as malignant as the demoniac planet in whose orbit you move" (2-4). By satellites, Westmacott is definitely referring to George Croly and Alaric Watts and very possibly to Landon. As Westmacott points out, Jerdan likely scoffed at *Points of Misery* because of the attacks on "*honest* Jerdan and his associates" in Westmacott's *Gazette of Fashion* in the winter and spring of 1822 (emphasis *Gazette of Fashion*'s; 9).[18] Otherwise, there seems to have been no reason for the *Literary Gazette* to come down so hard on a book that could not be charged with immorality: "It is a point of misery beyond any here adduced, to be obliged to read such sad and silly trash as these Points of Misery are . . ." (725).

If Landon was writing *Gazette* reviews in 1822 and 1823, and I suspect she was, then she was not getting paid much for them or for her poems in the *Gazette*. Jerdan's account of Landon's total earnings states that she made no more than twenty pounds a year from her work in periodicals (3: 185). Before 1824, when all she wrote was for the *Gazette*, she must have been paid more than that, but she may well have not made as much as one hundred pounds a year. The publishing firm Longman handled all *Gazette* writers' pay from 1820 to 1841 (Pyle 126). Longman was

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[18]The 23 February 1822 issue of the *Gazette of Fashion* may have mentioned Landon in connection with Jerdan, when, imagining that the *Literary Gazette* was losing some of its public favor, "The Tears of Longman's, (alias The Literary) Gazette" moans that "J---n seeks his source, / And L---n looks quite blue . . ." (55). "Blue-stockings" do not fare well later in the poem, but then the publisher Longman is also referred to at least twice by "L---n." If Landon was referred to here, then this poem would probably mark the first time that she and Jerdan were coupled together in print.

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notorious among "necessitous *litterateurs*" like William Maginn for "the niggardly hand with which payment for their labours [for the *Gazette*] is doled out" (*Gallery* 9-10). Among the Longman papers, very few of the bookkeeping records for the *Gazette* exist. They do record that in 1820 Jerdan was paid twenty-one pounds for editing every three issues of the *Gazette*, and a Miss Ross was paid fifteen pounds for a single contribution (Longman). Unable to find a standard rate of pay per article or poem for the *Gazette*, Pyle throws up examples where one author was paid a guinea a page, another three to four pounds for each sketch in a popular series, and speculates that Jerdan was probably as "open-handed as he could be." Landon, whatever money she made, "is not a representative contributor on the point of the *Gazette*'s rate of pay" (130-32). In other words, she was paid less for doing more, writing her *Gazette* pieces "apparently more for love than money" (Greer 290). To some unascertainable extent, Landon was probably exploited for financial gain by Colburn and the Longman house as well as by the editor, her affections for Jerdan making her an easy prey.

So extreme is Jerdan's idea of Landon's gratitude – "I love paintings; I have rarely seen them but with him. I love theatre, and there I have seldom gone but with him" (*Autobiography* 3: 172) – that, in effect, he has almost cancelled the credit he deserves for introducing her to London cultural life. He provided the essential escort to the galleries and theaters, as well as to formal and informal gatherings of literary society, the rules of etiquette, ironically, providing the pair with the occasional chance to be alone in a hackney coach. She still did not get out often, but when she did, Letita Landon was leaning on Jerdan's arm. He recalls one 1822 outing:

Her perception of the beauties of pictures seemed to be innate

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> and peculiar to herself, and had a strange effect upon her mind; but objects of interest never impressed in the same way as they did the generality of spectators. Her first view of St. Paul's Cathedral, for instance, was an epock in her life; under the dome, her whole being was absorbed in its grandeur and immensity; and it was with no small difficulty that her senses could be recalled to an ordinary state. That day was indeed altogether memorable. From St. Paul's she visited Paternoster Row, and was prevailed on to dine, for the first time in her life, with a party of strangers at Messrs. Longman's hospitable and literary table, and, in the evening, witnessed the private theatrical entertainment given by Mr. Matthews at the Lyceum, -- what a Crowd of new ideas for the teeming brain of the poet! ("Memoir of L. E. L." xvi)

That day was most likely a Saturday, when the publishing house of Thomas Longman held its "'Weekly Literary Meetings' . . . about the pleasantest and most sociable in London. . . . Throughout the day the new publications were displayed in a separate department for the use of literary men" (Curwen 92). As she sat down for one of the famed house dinners, Letitia Landon would have been aware that Wordsworth and Southey had often dined at the same table. The publishers who expressed their pleasure at the success her poetry was bringing the *Gazette*, of which they owned a third, were the same who had handled some of her poet-heroes' most famous works, such as Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy* and *Lay of the Last Minstrel* and Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (for which Longman famously paid three thousand pounds before a line

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was written). In Landon's eyes, Jerdan was escorting her into the realm of the literary greats. She may not have been getting paid much at the *Gazette*, but she would have seen the auspices for financial gain as well as fame in every literary connection Jerdan enabled her to make. By becoming better acquainted with Longman and his writers, Landon was likewise becoming more of a participating member in this literary coterie linked to Colburn's and Blackwood's publishing houses. This linkage created a larger coterie or network that in journalist circles was occasionally suspected of using its affiliated periodicals to abuse other writers strictly because they wrote for competing publishers. Thus Westmacott's *Gazette of Fashion* imagines what it was like to accompany Jerdan "every week" when he "went to dine" with Longman:

> Snugly we fill'd our cheeks,
>
> With Paternoster wine,
>
> Discussing at our ease,
>
> What critiques should ensue. . . . ("The Tears" 55)

Along with Jerdan's escort, the free tickets he received as *Gazette* editor provided Landon access to paintings and plays that resulted in poems on specific works and, more importantly, determined her theatrical-pictorial approach to composing poetry. Having no doubt taken Landon to see *Romeo and Juliet*, Jerdan includes in "The Drama" section of the *Gazette* for 30 November 1822 the following tribute to the actress Fanny Kelly "from a sweet writer," as it "has been handed to us." The poem signed by L. E. L. thanks Kelly for giving a "living picture exquisitely wrought" of the "deep / Intense affection Woman's heart will keep," a picture superior to anything the poet could "hope to see" in life and even "With something more than

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fancy can create, / So full of life, so warm, so passionate." L. E. L. can still "see thee now, / With thy white wreathed arms, thy pensive brow, / Standing so lovely in thy sorrowing." Now, women did not write poetic tributes to actresses. Enchanted men usually penned little effusions right after seeing a performance, and within a day or two the poems showed up in newspaper columns next to the drama reviews. L. E. L.'s poem claims Kelly and her beauty for women's dreams, not men's appetites. So Jerdan is "glad" to print "in opposition" to Landon's poem "an abominable Impromptu" from a "Cockney" saying Kelly "is so sweet that every man / Hopes she'll go on *for July-yet*" (Rev. of *Romeo* 763).

When Jerdan points out in the 1848 "Memoir of L. E. L." that among the Poetic Sketches are some of L. E. L.'s earliest expressions of "her feelings on seeing works of fine art" (xv), he has reason to be contemplating the greater role than escort that he played in the making of these poems: that of intended auditor who inspired a young woman, viewing her first exhibitions, with enough confidence to reveal her interpretations of paintings through poems in the *Gazette*, some of whose readers would likely have been more knowledgeable of the fine arts. Assuring her that he appreciated her "perception of the beauties of pictures," Jerdan prompted Landon to speak as one who could grasp the work of art instinctively, happy in the possession of no special knowledge or training. On one level, Landon's Poetic Sketches and dozens more poems on men's paintings and sculptures exhibit what Sha, referring to women's verbal sketches vis-à-vis men's poems, terms "deference to the more finished works by men" (108). Landon was likewise showing deference to Jerdan in these poems, responding to what he had shown her, entertaining him, saying what she wished she

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had said when they were together at the art exhibition. Yet on another level, Landon was presuming that merely by dashing off her Sketches she could reinvigorate these paintings and classical stories by men. Whatever Jerdan or her readers knew of the tales, she implies that they needed to read her interpretation of them to feel the grandeur of the hearts of their heroes and heroines.

"Mr. Martin's Picture of *Clytie*," published on 1 June 1822, most likely was written after Landon together with Jerdan saw John Martin's *Clytie* at the Royal Academy, where in 1814 Martin sent the painting, along with the quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: "All day all night in trackless wild, alone she pin'd, and taught the listening rocks her moan." In the painting, the small female figure stands isolated in a vast rocky landscape, her tiny face turned toward the sun as she looks for the "Sun-God" who deserted her, foreshadowing when the legendary Clytie would be changed into a heliotrope whose head followed the sun (Johnstone 29). Suitably inspired by the painter's "dream" of "the slighted CLYTIE," L. E. L. would seem as enchanted with ancient Greece, where "every flower had some romantic tale." Yet, this Clytie belongs more to the woman poet than to the classical legend or to the contemporary painter. The face of Martin's Clytie is turned away from the viewer and far too small for any expression to be detectable. But Landon claims Clytie "is pictured with a sad, soft smile" and that her eyes have "that soft look love teaches" (346-47) -- almost nondescript expressions, true enough, the generic quality of "soft" allowing Landon's readers wide interpretation and application, especially to themselves.

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L. E. L. gives her Clytie to the one who has observed the painting with her. This poem is, I believe, the first of many in which Landon plays the storyteller to Jerdan alone. As she would in several later poems, L. E. L. begins her tale, "Now listen, love, / I'll tell thee of her history." "Love" is informed how Clytie played her lute in the Grecian temple at dawn and once saw beside her a young god "who left his native heaven for one / More precious far – the heaven of woman's love. - - / - - They met no more." The encounter changed Clytie's life forever. She "poured her wild complainings to the groves" over "ill-starred love." What next follows is one of L. E. L.'s many passages that encouraged a generation of women to see their constrained lives as both necessary and nobly heroic and to make doctrinal the notion of separate spheres:

> Oh never, never
> Had love a temple like a woman's heart!
> She will serve so devotedly, will give
> Youth, beauty, health, in sacrifice; will be
> So very faithful! – without hope to cheer,
> Or tenderness to soothe, her love yet will
> Continue unto death. (347)

Landon would have Jerdan worship her for the superhuman affection that she, as a poet and a desirable woman, bears him. Passages like this work to stave off the abuse she has laid herself open to. The potential for disrespect and scorn hangs over these lines like a monster against which Landon defends herself with claims of unsurpassable virtue, while ever seeking the sympathy that sentimental readers

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accorded tales of abandoned women. Knowing Jerdan reveres her as a poet, she tries to harness that awe to his concupiscence, wanting him to see that, "without hope" of marriage to him or the "tenderness" of his constant presence, her giving of body and heart is a sacrifice that she, a poet with the greatest of passions, has been fated to make. At the story's end, L. E. L. addresses her secret love again in the imperative mood: "Look, dear, upon that flower" commemorating "unhappy love."[19] It faces the sun in the day, but "when dark clouds have shadowed it, or night / Is on the sky, mark how it folds its leaves, / And droops its head, and weeps sweet tears of dew" (347).

In his 1839 letter to Blessington on Landon's death, Jerdan demonstrates that Landon succeeded in getting him to view her "sacrifice" in terms of her womanhood as well as her "genius." In poems like "Mr. Martin's Picture," Landon laid the groundwork for Jerdan's interpretation of her entire life story. He looks back on the years when she sparkled in elegant society, years that in 1822 were yet to come:

> Could her life be told what a history would be there of a womans [sic] fated wretchedness and of the woes which genius must endure. A life of self-sacrifice from infancy to the grave -- of suffering vainly concealed under mocking brilliancy and affirmed mirth -- of a heart broken by mortifications, of smiles always forced, of the finest of human chords ever crushed and lacerated by the rudest handling, of sensitiveness subjected to perpetual injury – in features such as these are to be

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[19] Landon refers here to the "constant Sun-flower," not the heliotrope, presumably because she was only familiar with a version of the tale in which Clytie was turned into a sunflower.

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> read the sad story of L. E. L. -- Men are exposed to unhappiness, but alas what else is there for their beautiful and gentle companions?
>
> Hard is the fate of womankind; and the serpent whose curse contends with the heels of the one, gnaws the hearts and drains the lifeblood of the other. (Letter to Lady Blessington)

Jerdan arranged in the summer of 1822 for his beautiful and gentle companion to view a set of drawings by his good friend Richard Dagley ("Memoir of L. E. L." xv), perhaps at the British Institution on Suffolk Street, where Dagley was then exhibiting.[20] Around this time Landon must have met Dagley, who, as an illustrator and miniaturist as well as a wide-ranging painter, occasionally wrote the arts column for the *Gazette*.[21] Because he did not have much talent, Dagley never attracted great notice. But Landon liked his works well enough to publish three poems on them that summer in a series called "Sketches from Designs by Mr. Dagley,"[22] and she would publish another in 1825, plus three more to accompany his pictures in an 1826 volume, *Death's Doings*. The second of the 1822 Sketches, "Love touching the Horns of a Snail, which is shrinking from his hand," commands the one person whom the

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[20] Unfortunately, no copies of the drawings that provoked Landon's 1822 poems seem to be now available.

[21] In his autobiography, Jerdan states: "Mr. Dagley was an artist, whose information and taste in all that regarded the Arts, as well as his general talents, poetic fancies, and playful humour, were devoted to my work till the day of his death" (2: 188).

[22] The series title was first printed as "Sketches from Drawing by Mr. Dagley" to accompany Landon's "Sketch the First." But for both the second and the third sketches, the series title read, "Sketches from Designs by Mr. Dagley," which leads

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speaker addresses to look at a thing, similar to the speaker's command to look at a flower in "Mr. Martin's Picture," but here Landon plays the accuser who claims to have been wounded by the addressee's "unkindness and neglect." And here the thing is the picture itself, whose significance the addressee would otherwise have missed. Revealing and unshrinking, the speaker yet complains that her "soul's revealings have been checked," and, like the snail's, "forced to shrink within themselves." But, whereas the snail returns to the peace of its shell, the speaker finds her heart "A desert, where the too impassioned past / Has left deep fiery traces!" Landon leaves open the possibility that the speaker's relationship with the accused is illicit when the speaker declares, "I would have shared the bleakest poverty / With you . . . / . . . given up all the world could give / Of pleasure for you . . . / . . . / . . . I could / Have borne with open shame . . ." (487).

Jerdan and Landon's affair had begun or was just about to begin by 10 August 1822, when Landon produced a few shocking lines in her third poem on Dagley's drawings, "The Cup of Circe." The inebriates "all bent joyfully beneath" the "thrall" of Circe's eyes, including a "white haired man" who hangs on the brim of her wine goblet.

> And by his side a girl, whose blue eyes, bent
> On the seducer, looked too innocent
> For passion's madness; -- but love's soul was there –

---

me to conclude that the editor corrected the title after the publication of the first sketch.

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And for young Love what will not woman dare! (504)[23]

Jerdan's boast bears repeating that at his house "The Circean cup was gently replenished" with frequency (*Autobiography* 4: 16). Here, with wine and sexual lust, Landon mixes the devoted love of a "girl," a teenager, presumably. The old man looks to the wine cup to help him seduce the girl; the girl's looking on the man is meant to signal her purity. The girl, or young woman, is not innocent of sexual experience. She dares to give her body to the man, innocent only of the idea that his sexual desire could exist without love. That innocence alone makes her a victim and makes possible her virtue. The virtue of what she dares is echoed in Landon's recycling of the last of the four lines in *The Vow of the Peacock* (1835), when L. E. L. asks of Amenaïde, "urged by love and love's despair, / What is there woman will not dare?" (63).[24] Amenaïde saves her beloved Leoni's life by taking the blow an assassin intended for Leoni and dying as a result. Only because Landon was writing her 1822 poem on a painting with a catalogue of characters, where the girl would be passed over too quickly to be questioned by most readers, could Landon have dared to present the girl's submission to her seducer as a comparably admirable sacrifice.

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[23] Unable as yet to see a copy of this drawing, I can only expect that Dagley drew such an old man and young girl, though he might not have. But at least we know Letitia Landon spelled out the girl's inclinations – and, more outrageously, justified them.

[24] Similarly, in another 1822 poem, "The Happy Isle," L. E. L. asks, "What is there love dare not do?" after telling of a woman who left a convent and a man who left his country, the two sailing through storms find a land where they can be together (761). Likewise, in 1823 she says of Leander's swimming to Hero: "What is the peril fond hearts will not brave! ("Leander and Hero" 124).

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On the same page in the August 10th *Gazette*, two columns over, L. E. L. tells the story of a nineteen-year old Spanish woman (Landon would turn twenty on August 14th) who falls for the much older Colonel Fitzallan, for whom "the day of romance was over; a man above thirty [Jerdan was forty] cannot enter into the wild visions of an enthusiastic girl" (505). The only signed story Landon wrote for the magazine, "Isadore" appears in the popular column, Sketches of Society, but fails to effervesce any of the column's usual wit. Instead of a lady of fashion talking about "Dressing from twelve to three" and being "Tormented by duns, jewellers, mercers, milliners," to cite a previous sketch by the Countess of Blessington (410), L. E. L.'s is a tale of melodramatic anguish situated at the edge of London society. The story opens at Isadore's English graveside and then recounts how in Spain the wounded Fitzallan could only jest about being Isadore's "true and loyal knight" (504). Hoping to meet Fitzallan again in London, Isadore never gets closer than when, through her coach window, she catches sight of Fitzallan, his "delicate" wife, and his "elegant equipage" in a busy street (505). Isadore dies a rejected outsider, her story making plain for the first time in Landon's work that her tragic thrust is aimed at the shallow heart of London society.

Uncommon love revealed and concealed

It is not fashion but marriage that looked most shallow to Landon, who, believing herself a genius whose superior love and overwhelming passions have

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thrown her into an adulterous affair, could not but have romantically seen herself as an outsider of the society into which she has barely begun to step. She need only have looked to the outsiders De Staël and Byron for recent models who in their fictional work attributed dangerous sexual feelings to characters with innate superiority, and who in their own sex lives took greater risks than the characters they wrote about. What Landon thought of Keats and Shelley at this early period can be gleaned from her letter to T. Richards of 15 May 1822. Returning Richards' copy of *Lamia*, Landon thanks him for the "delight" which the book has given her. "My admiration for Keats is greater than ever." *Endymion*, however, remains "my favourite." No doubt in reference to Shelley as well as other elegists of Keats, Landon declines writing a sonnet in the copy of *Lamia* on the grounds of her comparable unworthiness, though she does enclose a sonnet and some lines to Keats's picture (both lost): "It would be evincing more vanity than I really possess, were I to enroll my slight expression of admiration among the bright tributes he has received from the masterspirits of the age." Finally, she thanks Richards "again" for "your telling me my style ressembles Keats'" (Letter to T. Richards).

We must remember that voicing admiration for Keats and even implying it for Shelley ran counter to the moral mandates of critics who forbade young ladies to read the poets' work. Only a few months before Landon wrote her letter to T. Richards, in its December 1821 review of Shelley's *Adonais*, the *Gazette* had defamed Keats as a "radically presumptuous profligate" who left behind "some volumes of very weak, and, in the greater part, of very indecent poetry." *Adonais* received worse sneers. "For what is the praise of cockneys but disgrace, or what honourable inscription can

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be placed over the dead by the hands of notorious libellers, exiled adulterers, and avowed atheists" (772). Yet as far as Landon was concerned, love was Shelley's deity, and his complete subservience to that god deserved every poet's respect. Years later she wrote, "Of all poets Shelley is the most poetical: 'Love was born with him, in him, so intense, / It was his very being, not a sense'" (Blanchard 1: 151). And she would use lines from several of his works as epigraphs, including *Queen Mab* -- against which the *Gazette* (probably Jerdan) warned in 1821, "A disciple following his tenets, would not hesitate to debauch, or after debauching, to abandon any woman" (307).

How could Landon have accepted Jerdan, knowing that, either with his pen or editorial authority, he had published attacks on poets for sins no greater than he would commit with herself? The answer, I think, lies in the attitude Landon and Jerdan shared that conventional norms were designed to regulate the lives of common people (not themselves, of course) and that, for the health of society, it was occasionally justified to stand up for those norms, especially if one did so at the expense of a political enemy. In this 1838 letter, written when a series of scandals encouraged by her unconventionality had left Landon still unbowed, her compliments to Bulwer Lytton on his novel *Ernest Maltravers* read more like a defence of her long love affair with Jerdan. She would, however, prefer the masses were guided by convention, as they could not understand

> how a really beautiful nature, supported by the unconquerable strength of love will redeem and exalt itself. I do not in the slightest degree undervalue forms, ceremonies, and precedents -- believing that society

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> could not exist without them -- for they are the only rules that the many have the power of comprehending -- and society was made for the many -- but a great writer like yourself, does what is the chief duty of genius, when he reasserts the dignity of our nature -- by shewing [sic] the inherent and unalterable good that is in it. (Letter to Edward Bulwer Lytton. Ms. D/EK C1/89)

In *The Vow of the Peacock* (1835), Landon opines that "the common cannot deem" of such a love as Petrarch possessed for Laura. "Such love hath an ethereal pride! / I'd rather feed on such a dream, / Than win a waking world beside" (19). Published in the *Gazette* of 21 September 1822, L. E. L.'s "The Minstrel of Portugal" concerns exactly the same kind of love. Juan, a Petrarch-like figure who adores a princess, is "pitied" or "marvelled [at], half in mockery," by the common people. "They little knew what pride love ever has / In self-devotedness" (601).

When, in writing his *Autobiography*,[25] Jerdan reaches the chapters on L. E. L., "the most difficult point in these memoirs," he declares: "I cannot write in a language addressed to common minds or submitted to mere worldly rules. I must appeal to the feeling and the imaginative; for such was L. E. L." (3: 168). He hopes "the feeling and the imaginative" who loved L. E. L.'s poems will appreciate that Landon's and Jerdan's feelings for one another, "to be recalled through floods of unavailing tears," transcended "mere worldly rules" (3: 173). Conveying the importance of Landon's

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[25]No other woman receives comparable treatment in Jerdan's *Autobiography*. Besides the two chapters on her, Landon is mentioned repeatedly from beginning to end of the four volumes. The third volume is dedicated to her, the other three to men.

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"attachment" to him in a passage cited above, Jerdan hands these superior readers the "master-key" to L. E. L.'s poetry, without which "Critics and biographers . . . will make nothing of their reveries" (3: 170). Jerdan dangles such provocative phrases that he appears to want uncommon minds to suspect his affair with Landon: "the gifted being whose career intimately blended for nearly twenty years with my own in every intellectual and literary pursuit" (3: 168). His comment apparently about her work on the *Gazette* -- "To me the return of services was great" (3: 173) -- almost begs for wider interpretation.

Landon clearly regarded Byron and de Staël as geniuses whose uncommon love for a few fortunate individuals was fated to transcend, or violate, mere worldly rules. If one is casting about for literary sources of inspiration for her very literary affair with Jerdan, I think it best to start with examining Landon's thoughts about these two writers whose work she was reading well before the affair began. For example, in "The Portrait of Lord Byron, at Newstead Abbey," Landon conjectures that when Byron flung "round a common path, / A glory never common sight / Would find in common hours," he was pursued by boyhood fantasies that never lost their "power" over him, in particular, those stirred by "some wild dream of love" experienced while he was living at Newstead Abbey. I think Landon is referring to Byron's incestuous love for Augusta Leigh, rumors of which circulated in London society and which Landon did not likely escape hearing. Landon's poem is boldly "Inscribed to Lord Byron's Sister, Mrs. George Leigh." She depicts the boy Byron filled with making his "own Eden" while "living on" his love's smile, and, when gazing at the moon, seeing "but one sweet face above." This particular love "never

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quite resigned" the dream it knew impossible of fulfillment. This love was part of the "dangerous thoughts and things" toward which Byron's mind inclined, resulting in poetry of uncommon "loveliness and breath," but leading him to "death" (11-14). "The Portrait of Lord Byron" may have not been intended for publication, or at least not until Landon had left England, as it was published at the end of 1839, more than a year after Landon's death.

By her writing and her life, De Staël similarly taught Landon to consider a literary genius' sexual love as extraordinary, fated to break all sorts of boundaries established for the common lot of mankind. In "Corinne at the Cape of Misena" (1831), Landon commends De Staël for portraying that "love which hath too much / Of heaven in its fine nature for the earth," owned by those who likewise possess "that keen sense / Of the wide difference between ourselves / And those who are our fellows." Landon's translation from De Staël's *Corinne* (1807), "Fragment of Corinne's Song at Naples," then follows:

> . . . the common crown but hold
> As madness that desire of the rapt soul
> . . . . . .
> The poet whose imagination draws
> Its power from loving and from suffering,
> . . . . . .
> What had this terrible Fate to do with them,
> The common and the quiet, who . . .
> . . . do follow timidly

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The beaten track of ordinary life? (253-54)

The above passage is footnoted with another quote from *Corinne*: "Perhaps it is what we shall do to-morrow that will decide our fate; perhaps even yesterday have we said some word that nothing can recal [sic]." L. E. L. adds, "I could never read this short, but true, remark without a feeling of terror" (254). And she had clearly read it several times. De Staël and the fatalist Byron likely provided the origins for Landon's belief that fate determined all great love affairs. "The consequences [of our actions], the fearful consequences, lie not with us. . . . One slight thing has led to another, till the result has been the very reverse of our calculations. Our emotions, how little are they under our own controul!" (Blanchard 2: 143). A regular attendant of Anglican Sunday services, Landon yet used the notion of a "terrible Fate" awaiting women poets to lighten the burden of responsibility for her adulterous affair and the troubles that ensued. She overlooked the paradox inherent in the notion – that love overwhelmed great hearts when, as her poetry and her life demonstrate, great hearts could cause themselves to be overwhelmed, making their own passion with little or no help from their love objects. What she called "the dark creed of the fatalist" further enabled Landon to identify with and speak through her female characters, who, as sentimental creations driven by passions they could not control, demanded whole-hearted sympathy (2: 143).

Landon's poetry ventured into new darkness with "The Castilian Nuptials," published on 28 September 1822. Here she contemplates Hermione, disguised as a boy page, poisoning the man who left her to wed another and then drinking the last of the poison herself. It is the first of a few scattered works in which a woman murders

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her lover (by poison or otherwise), including *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829) and the novel *Ethel Churchill* (1837), and it is one of many in which a woman plans a dramatic suicide. Early in the poem L. E. L. suggests that Hermione has lost her virginity; for "innocence / And peace . . . have fled / A breast . . . / That love has led to guilt." Yet Hermione is not distanced from us, nor does she receive a word of blame -- not when she takes back the poisonous cup from Fernand with a "wild laugh" that "rang like a demon's curse," nor previously, when she "brooded o'er her wrongs, and bitterly / Prayed for revenge!" L. E. L. finishes this line by declaring that Hermione shares "Woman's fate: / . . . / Her trusting heart, filled with weak tenderness, / Is left to bleed and break!" (617). How Jerdan took Fernand's murder we can only guess. He never discusses the violent, destructive side of Landon's imagination, but his boast that Landon's poems revolve around her attachment to him gains ironic support from such poems.

Landon addressed her need to vent the worries and feelings of isolation that arose from her adulterous affair by turning inward to her fantasy world, as she had done since childhood. When, in the course of writing a narrative poem, she reached lines that could also relate to her situation with Jerdan, she pushed her thoughts to irrational extremes that, I think, left her able to be cheerful in company -- in contradistinction merely to appearing cheerful. Landon had just cause to exude gaiety. She was making enough money to get by and her grandmother could provide help; she was involved in an excitingly secret romance, and her initials were becoming more popular with each poem she published in the *Gazette*. Blanchard bases his argument that the melancholy and pessimism of Landon's poetry grew strictly from fictional

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roots on his having known and heard of another Landon: "Five minutes after the composition of some poem full of passionate sorrow, or bitter disappointment and reproach, she would be seen again in the very mood out of which she had been carried . . . a state of mind the most frank, affectionate and enjoying -- self-relying" (1: 35). The few visitors who sought out Letitia Landon when she first moved to her grandmother's house would have been treated to the same gaiety, exuberance, and readiness to give and receive affection that is reported by those who made social calls there in later years. "She had an inborn courtesy of manner that flattered you, whether she wished it or not: a warm, excitable nature," remembers Katherine Thomson, the only certain visitor at this time, besides Jerdan. "I saw her gradually rise into celebrity, out of a very picturesque retirement – her sojourn with an aged grandmother . . . the old-fashioned gentle-woman whose comforts the young poetess consulted with . . . minute care. . . . Every habit, grown into a necessity of old age, every peculiarity, was indulged by L. E. L. with a sweetness of temper . . ." (*Recollections* 1: 71-72).

No wonder this grandmother did not reprimand Landon's behavior with the *Gazette* editor. But I cannot imagine that Landon revealed to Letitia Bishop or anyone else the full strength of her feelings for Jerdan. Before its tale begins, "The Lover's Rock" carries the conviction in the first-person plural that the "one deepest misery" is not unrequited or false love, but

> . . . when two hearts
> Born for each other, yet must beat apart.
> Aye, this is misery, to check, conceal
> That which should be our happiness and glory;

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To love, to be beloved again, and know

A gulf between us: -- aye 'tis misery!

This agony of passion, this wild faith,

Whose constancy is fruitless, yet is kept

Inviolate; -- to feel that all life's hope,

And light, and treasure, clings to one from whom

Our wayward doom divides us. . . .

. . . . . .

. . . to be loved

With feelings deep, eternal as our own,

And yet to know that we must quell those feelings

With phantom shapes of prudence, worldly care --

For two who live but in each other's life,

Whose only star in this dark world is love! (633)

"This agony of passion, this wild faith": no other female British writer was then publishing anything like L. E. L., and she was just beginning to step into these waters. None other wanted to contemplate sexual heat, whereas Landon enlisted it in the service of the womanly virtues of absolute constancy and dependence, as if all these extremes deserve one another. Though she has *The Improvisatrice* (1824) mainly in mind, Greer's comments are worth quoting here:

> L. E. L. was not like the other poetesses. She could not blunt the edge of passion and turn it into bland affection and self-denial. She could not write smooth and even harmonious, elegant verse. . . . She

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> was obsessed, like all those of the generation which clutched at the Byronic hero. She took the psychic process begun by the general love affair with *Childe Harold* and took it one palpitating step further. The speaker was not the Childe himself, but the woman he was making love to, a being every bit as combustible as himself, although obliged by circumstances to wait and sigh and repine in a white heat of devotion. (263-64)

Even when other poetesses treated the fallen, abandoned woman, they would, rather than have her brazenly choose to sacrifice her virginity and reputation for the sake of love, have her be deceived by a sham wedding. Plus, she would not admit to having experienced a moment of sexual pleasure. Witness the eponymous heroine of Caroline Bowles's *Ellen Fitzarthur* (1820), who learns in a letter from her lover that he has left her because her love "was too pure, too saintly cold, / To match with one of mortal mould / So earthly, so unlike her own" (90). If Landon supplies a reason why her heroines are left, it is either that the men longed to go to war or that they found women with more money or better access to power, but never could Landon's heroines be accused of saintly coldness in love.

Jerdan could accuse Hemans of such in her poetry:

> In her [Hemans'] earlier productions, as appears to me, there was too much of a certain coldness and correctness, allied to the marbly classic subjects of her choice, though mixed with occasional bursts of the appalling and pathetic; and that she did not impart that tone of natural warmth and powerful expression to her poetry till after

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> she witnessed the public effect of the first publication of L. E. L. From that date a new light and glow was spread over her canvas; the suggestion of the girlish debutante was enough to kindle and inspire her genius. . . . (*Autobiography* 3: 57)

Jerdan obviously considered Landon the superior poet, the "warmth" of her poetry deriving from her feelings for him. In the *Gazette* of 19 October 1822, featuring poems by "four distinct Female pens," Jerdan has the chutzpah to rank Landon as Hemans' equal. He expects readers to be well acquainted with the "justly-esteemed authors" signing their poems "H." and "L. E. L.," to be distinguished from the two unknown "young ladies" who aspire to "similar approbation" (664). With her first book a commercial failure, L. E. L. is nevertheless placed on a level with a poet whom the public had favored since 1812 when *The Domestic Affections* was published, followed by *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* in 1816, and *Tales and Historic Scenes* in 1819.

The vast difference between Landon's and Hemans' featured poems would have illustrated for Jerdan how Landon's channelling of her sexual love gave to women's poetry the new expression of urgent and intensely private feelings, normally concealed, to which every woman could relate. In contrast, Hemans' "England's Dead" is tearlessly imperialistic as it declares no spot on earth free of the bones of English soldiers. Hemans commands, "Go, Stranger! Track the Deep," hallow the men's bravery by retracing their journeys (664). Next follows L. E. L.'s "Songs on Absence," three neat, metrically regular poems (much safer for comparison than one of her Poetic Sketches) addressed to the speaker's beloved. Projecting intimacy,

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ardor, and vulnerability, Landon's speaker is aware that her "fragile" heart is "Sacred to itself alone." She only asks, "When all is dead around, above -- / Then think upon thy absent love." But her sadness is countered by the bravura she would seem to possess in exposing her feelings, which, we can fairly assume, are directed toward Jerdan. In the second song, after telling her beloved to think of her "Not when pleasure's chain has bound thee" but when autumn winds sound "Like love's lingering farewell sigh," she adds, "(We have known that agony)," the parenthesis accompanying the words like a sidelong glance or a whisper (664). After such, the speaker appears even more bold in the last song when she reduces the tumult of her heart to straightforward declarations.

> I do ask no plighted vow;
> 'Tis enough for me to bow,
> Like a flower before the sun,
> Blest but to be shone upon.
> . . . . . .
> Be thou faithful, life to me
> Will be one dream of ecstasy;
> Be thou false, my heart will make
> No reproach – but love and break! (664)

The simplicity is meant to look nobly constructed, but how constructed *Gazette* readers could never have imagined. The married editor was in no position to plight vows, but he could shine ever so brightly upon L. E. L. in the pages of his magazine, particularly when reviewing the book she would soon begin to write. Faithless to his

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wife when he was most faithful to Landon, Jerdan must bear some relation to the tribe of disloyal male characters that people Landon's works, quasi-embodiments of her fears and suspicions about Jerdan. Lonely women are their prey. Landon did not tend to draw male characters who intrude upon existing relationships and break them up; her heroines never knowingly stoop thus. If she were undisturbed by her treachery toward Frances Jerdan -- and nowhere in her letters or works is there a clear indication that she was -- then Landon may well have deceived herself into thinking she caused no harm.[26] At least when writing, she was caught up in dreams of ecstasy or fears of abandonment, the weakness of her own position making it possible for her to realize and pursue further the extremes she inhabited in her poetry. All she had to keep Jerdan "faithful" was her pen. Ironically, Landon drew strength from assuming the abandoned woman's time-honored position of having "nothing left to lose," of feeling "free to describe her feelings with an honesty and candor that other verse seldom approaches" (Lipking 9).

. . . I have wept

The day away; and when I slept,

My sleeping eyes ceased not their tears;

And jealousies, griefs, hopes, and fears

Even in slumber held their reign,

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[26] Letitia Landon would have known Frances Jerdan from the time the poet first played with the Jerdans' children, when the Jerdans lived next door to John Landon's family. The poet would have often encountered Frances, as Landon seems to have been a regular guest at the Jerdans' home. In her letters Letitia Landon mentions

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And gnawed my heart, and racked my brain! ("The Painter's Love" 776)

With L. E. L.'s importunities running through his head, no wonder the editor, when seeking other verses to set beside hers in Original Poetry, had trouble finding any that could approach her standard. In his editorial note to the poems by four women in the October 19th *Gazette*, Jerdan grumbles over "The difficulty of filling this division of our miscellaneous Sheet with what is worthy of the public" (664). Jerdan's moan would have annoyed Mary Russell Mitford, had she read it, and she may well have. Having already had three books of poetry published, in 1810, 1811, and 1813, Mitford yet could not get her work inserted in the 1822 *Gazette*. Eleanor Anne Porden complains in a letter to Mitford on 5 August 1822, "I expected every week to see your sonnet in the Literary Gazette, and but to show the vanity of all earthly expectations, the editor of the Literary Gazette has been so ungallant to us both as to keep the sonnet still imprisoned into his bureau" (L'Estrange, *The Friendships* 121-22). More galling still, when Mitford tried to concentrate on writing for other periodicals, she found herself being measured against the *Gazette*'s little star. From a Mr. P. Bayley, presumably the editor of the *Literary Museum*, Mitford received the following, written between 21 September and 26 October 1822:

> Mr. Valpy is absolutely *possessed* by a notion that whatever is done in the Literary Gaz must be initiated in the 'Museum.' . . . The poetry published under the signature L. E. L. caught him, and he could not rest for incessantly crying out, 'We must get Miss Mitford

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Frances only once, as intending to go with her husband to a ball to which Landon was also invited.

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> to write us a series of poetry in the manner of L. E . L.' It is vain that I say, 'Let Miss Mitford send us what she pleases, we shall be better than the gazette, our poetry on the whole *is* better than that of the gazette'; nothing but L. E. L. will go down with him. (emphasis Bayley's; 127)

After being told that the magazine's proprietor wanted her to remodel herself after the dreamy songstress, Mitford would have taken small comfort in Bayley's assurance that whatever she wrote would "be better than anything of L. E. L's, and you will see that I shall presently contrive to jerk that out of him [Valpy]" (127-28). Bayley thought Valpy was influenced by Landon's work being published in the most fashionable literary magazine in the land; nevertheless, Mitford knew both Valpy and Jerdan were "caught" by Landon's serial poems as they never had been by her own poetry.[27] More of a capitalist than a sentimentalist, Valpy considered L. E. L.'s serial poems as novelties whose style could be easily imitated. Mitford did not try. She could not have avoided, however, the sense that her literary handlers expected her to compete simply because she too was a woman poet. Thanks in no small part to L. E. L., women poets writing for 1820s periodicals rose in the estimation of their editors, as they began to regard women's poetry as a featured highlight that could boost a periodical's sale.

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[27] Perhaps prompted a little by Jerdan's disinterest in her poems, Mitford would soon find great success with plays, beginning with *Julian* (1823), and with a series of prose sketches, *Our Village* (1824-1832).

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Landon certainly provided her readers with variety of form, if not so much of content. In late 1822, the *Gazette* published a couple of her lengthy "Dramatic Scenes," consisting only of a dialogue between a man and woman. Her first attempt, with its simple epigraph, "The very life of love is confidence," collapses because she tried to end the dialogue as she did so many other love poems. Julian disguises himself to test Agnes's love, and when he tells her that Julian has married someone else and then returns her love tokens, Agnes turns pale and, there on the spot, dies. I suspect that Landon knew the first dialogue had failed because she gave the second a pleasant ending and left the drama to the art discussed. Similar to Landon and Jerdan's many discussions of classical tales and art, the second poem features Alvine and the painter Leonardi conversing over his painting of Ariadne,[28] with the better educated male teaching the legend to the woman, who, more knowledgeable of woman's love, contests Ariadne's sudden falling for the Greek divinity. Alvine then asserts what woman's "love should be," or Landon's religion of love, using the sacred images that run through the whole of her corpus:

> A feeling pure and holy as the flame
>
> The vestal virgin kindles, fresh as flowers
>
> The spring has but just coloured, innocent

---

[28] With no classical education to speak of in youth, Landon most likely gained her knowledge of Greek myths through Jerdan's help, and because so many contemporary paintings dealt with the myths, she probably gained much knowledge in the course of discussing the art works she and Jerdan viewed together. Landon often wrote about subjects just learned, when they were new and exciting to her. In the 1822 poems on Arion, Clytie, Circe, Sappho, and Ariadne, and in many poems to come, she would have taken pleasure in displaying, in a feminine way, a little classical learning.

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As the young dove, and changeless as the faith

The martyr seals in blood. 'Tis beautiful

This picture, but it wakes no sympathy. (698)

The line about the martyr's blood is chilling, in light of Landon's interest in suicide and sacrifice, as if she, the descendant of a long line of Anglican priests, the niece of the current Dean of Exeter, and the sister of a future priest, were seeking to endow woman's love with principles to die for, equal to the belief of Christian martyrs, and thus pure like a vestal virgin's flame, though not necessarily virginal. Behind almost all of Landon's love poems lies this same belief in what she terms in *The Lost Pleiad* (1829) "That pure, that high, that holy creed, / Without which love is vain indeed" (*The Venetian Bracelet* 56). "Love is L. E. L.'s religion, and the only martyr is the woman who loves" (Stephenson, *Letitia Landon* 86). Again and again, the fictional adherents to her religion prove not only their willingness but desire to die for love.

Love purifies, Landon maintained, but as early a work as "The Bayadere" (1823) indicates that this purification remains incomplete until love is proven to mean more than life. Like Goethe, whose "The God and the Bayadere" gave Landon the outline of her tale (*The Improvisatrice* 155), she clearly expected her readers to be aware that dancing bayaderes sought to give themselves sexually to Brahmans and wealthy Hindoos. Mandalla, the Indian god turned Brahman, begins the process of ridding Landon's bayadere of sin by showing her through sexual intercourse what it is

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like to be "beloved in . . . fond purity" ("Part 2" 571),[29] though Landon does not explicitly state that sex has occurred. The last section of the poem opens in a moonlighted bower with the bayadere, full of new "tenderness," lying beside Mandalla in what is clearly post-coital bliss – but one could choose to view it otherwise for delicacy's sake. Fourteen lines are then taken to describe how "sometimes she would leave his side" to dance a shawl dance "round him," after the manner of Lady Hamilton. Landon would have learned from *Hindoostan* (1822) how bayaderes used private dances to seduce their respectable prey.[30] "They give themselves great loose and . . . without any exposure of the body, they are mistresses of such motions, looks and gestures, as are perhaps still more provoking" (Shoberl 3: 55).[31] For his final

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[29] In her discussion of *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829), Greer makes astute observations on Landon's value system: "Purity means for her not freedom from any taint of carnality but from any sordid considerations of convenience or social utility. The sensuous trappings of her settings, the numerous perfumed couches whereupon her lovers fling themselves when their strength fails, insist upon sensuality as an ultimate value" (308).

[30] That Landon had *Hindoostan* in mind when she wrote "The Bayadere" is made clear by the fact that the Indian Cupid Camdeo, or Manmadin, who is portrayed in *Hindoostan* and who inspired her poem "Manmadin," likewise appears in the first part of "The Bayadere" to bring the dream "of love and woman's power, / To Mandalla's sleeping hour" (556).

[31] From De Staël's *Corinne* Landon may have first learned of the Indian female dancers, with whom Corinne's dancing is compared:

> Her gestures displayed that easy union of modesty and voluptuousness, such as must have so awed the Indians when the Bayardères – poets of the dance – depicted the various passions by characteristic attitudes. Corinne was so well acquainted with antique painting and sculpture, that her positions were so many studies for the votaries of art. . . . Corinne as thoroughly infected the spectators with her own sensations as she did while extemporising poetry, playing on her lyre. (89)

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lesson that will ready the bayadere for life with him in heaven, Mandalla brings about the sudden death of his human body to instruct her in love's "faith, its grief, and its darker part." She is "from thy earth stains purified" only when she springs on his "burning pile to die!" ("Part 3" 585).

Landon was reacting against conventional notions of purity in late 1822, when she first read *Hindoostan* (Landon, "Manmadin" 793). In "The Painter's Love" (7 December 1822), the abandoned, dying female speaker thinks of her "happiness" before she knew her lover as, however, "all too pure and passionless!" And "even now" her "pulse throbs" to remember how she exchanged that state for a fallen one full of passion, without a bride's "purest hopes to cheer / The bashfulness of maiden fear." She condemns the painter as she informs him that he has broken a "heart but sullied for thy sake" (776), but the reader should sense that through sullying herself the painter's lover approaches the total purification death will bring.

Attuned to the reading public

One way or another, Landon was using visual arts. She turned a static picture of a young woman holding a letter to a candle – Landon most likely observed one or several pictures of this subject, a common one for contemporary artists -- into a series of feelings and actions in a small gem of a poem, "Lines written under a Picture of a Girl burning a Love-letter" (16 November 1822). The man's letter burnt, as many of Jerdan's to Landon must have been, the young woman fears their love will be

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destroyed by their secretiveness. On the same page of the *Gazette*, L. E. L.'s "Outlines for a Portrait" conceives of a young poet's face and "Shadows . . . that tenderly, / With almost female softness, come / O'er its glance of flame and gloom." His Byronic genius determines that he cannot be at peace with society yet that he commands woman's love. L. E. L. dares the reader-artist, "Such the image in my heart, -- / Painter, try thy glorious art!" (729). In "The Happy Isle," L. E. L. steps beyond the bounds of decorum for female poets with her tableau of bodies intertwined in a small boat. "Her arm round his neck was thrown, / His was round her like a zone," while "she lay / Pillowed on her lover's arm," her lip raised to his lip, his eye answering hers "so tenderly, / So wildly, warmly, passionate . . ." (761). As the couple head to the island to begin a life together, Landon gives no reason to suppose they are married.

Landon recognized that the reading public wanted to see the images about which she wrote; better yet, to possess those images in books and be able to see how she created from them. That prescience, as well as her appreciation for fashionable orientalism, is attested by "Manmadin, the Indian Cupid, floating down the Ganges," published on 14 December 1822. Landon's footnote states that the Indian Cupid "is pictured in Ackermann's pretty work on Hindostan . . . riding a green parrot, his bow of sugar cane, the cord of bees, and his arrows all sorts of flowers; but one alone is headed, and the head covered with honey-comb" (793). In L. E. L.'s poem, Manmadin instead rides high waves on a lotus flower through thunder, lightning, and meteors. Ackermann's *Hindoostan* does not name the flowers and leaves that form the arrows in Manmadin's quiver (1: 67); so L. E. L. does, as emblems of various

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kinds of love; e.g., the lily's bell for the "Breathe of love, that dares not tell / Its sweet feelings; the dark leaves / Of the esignum, which grieves / Droopingly . . ." (794). These arrows give only temporary love, yet the one with the honey-comb head

> . . . has a power
> Lasting till life's latest hour –
> Weary day and sleepless night,
> Lightning gleams of fierce delight,
> Fragrant and yet poisoned sighs,
> Agonies and ecstasies;
> Hopes, like fires amid the gloom,
> Lighting only to consume!
> Happiness one hasty draught,
> And the lip has venom quaffed.
> Doubt, despairing, crime and craft,
> Are upon that honeyed shaft!
> . . . . . .
> A wound, a blight, a curse, a doom
> Bowing young hearts to the tomb! (794)

If read with any ironic distance, the catalogue of nightmarish effects delivered by these smooth and easy lines sounds ridiculously overblown. But most of her *Gazette* readers and probably Rudolph Ackermann were thrilled by L. E. L.'s glances at the frightening extremes of sexual passion, even the "crime and craft" that could include murder. In L. E. L.'s hands, the image of young Manmadin took on the

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strength of her readers' darkest fantasies – the same addressed in the period's melodramas and operas – the cupid becoming far more dangerously attractive and exciting than he appears in *Hindoostan*'s flat image and accompanying text, which goes no further than to say that the honey-comb headed arrow "correctly expresses the pleasures and the pangs . . . of love" (Shoberl 1: 67). A successful, enterprising publisher, Ackermann and his editor Frederic Shoberl could not have hoped for a better advertisement of the recently published, six-volume *Hindoostan*, with its "Upward of 100 Coloured Engravings." Landon's flattering recognition of Ackermann's book may well have been purposeful; for, without asking L. E. L. to contribute a poem, Ackermann and Shoberl had just introduced Christmas gift books to Britain with the publication of the *Forget Me Not for 1823*. With "Manmadin" Landon showed herself eager and able to write poems on engravings published in books. Accordingly, Landon was asked in 1823 to write for the *Forget Me Not for 1824*, the last year Ackermann and Shoberl did not have to face competitors at Christmas time in the midst of what would soon become a craze for the annuals.

In her series "Medallion Wafers," published on 25 January, 8 February, and 1 March 1823, L. E. L. promoted even more strongly a product of the inventors T. and H. Thompson who, unlike Ackermann, held out no possibility of returning the favor. Their product was a set of sealing wafers with classical motifs after the work of the contemporary sculptors Canova and Thorvaldsen. The Thompsons' advertisement for the sealing wafers ran in the back of the same *Gazettes* featuring L. E. L.'s poems. Discussed in Daniel Riess's article, the twelve Medallion Wafers "can best be characterized as commodity-poems," appealing "to the desire of bourgeois consumers

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for purchasable art objects, in particular the art of high Romanticism" (808). Landon was probably following Jerdan's lead. Presumably Jerdan made the decision to notice the sealing wafers in his Fine Arts column and either he or Landon wrote the review of 4 January 1823, which yet begins in hesitant fashion: "We think we are right in classing among the *Fine Arts* one of the prettiest, and not the least useful of inventions of the present period" (11). Riess stresses that Landon "departs from the rhetoric of the *Gazette* review and advertisement" because "Landon's verses contribute to the illusion that the 'aura' of the original work of art somehow persists in these mass-reproduced copies" (812).

In her departure, however, Landon is still following the review, which closes by noting that Thompson's Medallion Wafers are "certainly exceedingly beautiful, and as fit for love-letters as anything that could be imagined" (12). L. E. L. states in the bracketed preface, "The hint for this series of Poems . . . has been taken from the account of the Medallion Wafers in the *Literary Gazette*. These slight things . . . are here devoted to verse, on the supposition that they have been employed as seals to lovers' correspondence" (60). Landon is preoccupied with the sending and receiving of love letters, and from this preoccupation comes the aura she attributes to the sealing wafers, as she obscures the buying and selling of the new product with an infatuated lover's heedlessness to pecuniary matters. She directs the "Introduction" poem to Jerdan. Staring at the wafers, her speaker says, "Here's many a youth with radiant brow / Darkened by raven curls like thine" -- Jerdan's hair was dark and curly -- and then, as she would do for years to come, Landon recycles the line from "Mr. Martin's Picture of Clytie" to move from addressing Jerdan to delivering the tale:

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I'll tell thee now the history

Of these sweet shapes: they are so dear,

Each has been on a scroll from thee;

Thy kiss, thy sigh, are glowing here.

They'll be the spirit of each tone

I fain would wake from chords long gone. (60)

L. E. L. claims in "A Summer Evening's Tale" (1829) that "CANOVA took his inspiration" from his feelings for one woman, and "love / Made him the sculptor of all loveliness" (*The Venetian Bracelet* 260). So, to create these poems, Landon tells Jerdan she has imagined receiving letters from him sealed with the signs of classical tales, with the sealed letters substituting for her flesh as she hopes his kisses and sighs "are glowing here."

Poems about sealing wafers that are copies of sculptures inspired by classical tales: the poems' derivativeness makes L. E. L.'s addresses to a lover seem highly fictional. She writes, as she says, "on the supposition" that the wafers have been used for love letters in order to give the classical designs a peculiar resonance. The derivativeness and stated supposition appear to have given Landon sufficient cover to inscribe her fantasies to Jerdan. The series as a whole neatly demonstrates the different ways in which Landon could introduce her fantasies and sentiments about their relationship into her poems. L. E. L. begins "Hercules and Iole" with a tableau of steamy sexuality centered on Jerdan's adored wine cup:

She held the cup; and he the while

Sat gazing on her playful smile,

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As all the wine he wished to sip

Was one kiss from her rosebud lip.

Half leaning to him, half withdrawn,

Like one above the waters bending,

And blushing like the maiden dawn

Before the bridegroom sun's ascending. . . . (91)

Even when she cools down, Landon remains every bit as brazen. Directly beneath comes "Love Sleeping Beneath a Palm-tree,"[32] which opens, "Ah, this is ours! That gentle Love / Sleeping," with "His bow, unbent, beside him laid." After giving several images of constancy "Even to death," Landon again addresses Jerdan at the end, "And I may say, / May I not, dear! – 'Such love is ours'" (91).

Before she wrote the Medallion Wafers of 1 March 1823, Landon perhaps suffered some moments of "doubt" over Jerdan's devotion to her. Treating universal woman's sorrows, "Head of Ariadne" demands, "Look down within the silent grave" and contemplate "passion's sacrifice"; "Look on her hour of solitude" and its "bitter cares" (140). Landon changes tack for "A Nereid floating on a Shell," in which a male speaker, aware of what is said about the treachery of the nereid's smile, sighs nevertheless: "I know not, and I care still less; / It is enough of happiness / To be deceived." Landon would have Jerdan know he has given her sexual bliss yet she is aware a degree of blindness is needed to perpetuate it; "Love cannot live and doubt"

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[32] The title alone hints that a classical posture is being placed within a sentimental tableau; as does "A Youth, with a Lyre in his hand, kneeling to a Female half turning to him, as in the act of reconciliation" and "An old Man standing by the dead body of

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means here the doubt must be relinquished. That Landon could sympathize, even identify with such a notion indicates both how she treasured her sexual ecstasies and how she could bolster them with absolute ideals to involve herself for many years in an affair with a married womanizer. "I, / Vowed slave" to love and his "false but most delicious thrall" have "but one prayer: Come joy, come ill, / If I am deceiv'd , deceive me still" (140).[33]

"Conclusion" reacts against this stifling of doubt with an uncompromising farewell. The poem is at once the most autobiographical of the series and yet, in its farewell, obviously a pose struck for effect. The speaker tells her "false Love" that she "did not dream, when I have loved / To dwell on Sorrow's saddest tone" – and no one more enjoyed sorrowful tales than Landon – that he would teach her "So much of passion's misery." Passion's thrall no longer concerns her. "My heart is far too warm for thine" repeats the contrast made between the young woman and older man in the short story, "Isadore," a contrast to which Landon will return many times. Here the false love is told to return to "Pleasure's lights and smiles," as Jerdan would ever do.

Thy name is breathed on every song –

. . . . . .

I will be proud for you to hear

---

a Youth," the latter being one of only two of Landon's Medallion Wafers that concern war rather than love.

[33] Contrast Landon's view of illusions in love with that of Wollstonecraft in her novel *Maria* (1798). Here the heroine is full of regret as she recounts how her "fancy had found a basis to erect its model of perfection on; and quickly went to work, with all the happy credulity of youth," to invest the womanizing George Venables "with more

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Of glory brightening on my name;

Oh vain, oh worse than vanity!

Love, love is all a woman's fame. (140)

The speaker is a female poet who has not yet achieved "glory" but feels certain she will. Her ambition shows its face, only to be quickly veiled again; for her false love must not think her contented with professional success alone, especially if he is editor of the *Gazette*, with a financial interest in her popularity. Nothing in L. E. L.'s poetry rankles feminist critics more than her repeated assertion that love is the sole source of woman's happiness and fulfilment. Yet when read as addressed to Jerdan, the speaker's assertion of misery shows Landon refusing to be compensated for his absence by the professional success he has made possible. Throughout Landon's career, Jerdan did all he could do to promote her work, but he inevitably fell far short of answering the emotional needs of the poet, who, locked in the secrecy of her illicit affair, could turn to no one else for comfort -- except, of course, her prospective readers. Thus, Landon here extends love's rule to "woman's fame," with her speaker wishing to be known for her capacity to love, as opposed to being known for her poetical talent, or not being known at all.

At least a few of Landon's early readers, though moved by her poems, presumed that like any proper English young lady, she was inexperienced in the ways of love, or the unhappy ones, anyway. "Long may the sorrows of thy song / Be to thy guileless heart unknown," writes "W. L. R." (who seems a male) in "To L. E. L.,"

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than mortal beauty" (102). On his true character being revealed to her, Maria says, "I should rejoice, conscious that my mind is freed" (105).

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which unsurprisingly made it into the *Gazette* on 15 February 1823. Dated 29 January 1823, just after W. L. R. read the first set of Medallion Wafers, "To L. E. L." claims to be by a lonely, "withered heart" who once knew the "bliss" of her sort of "'witching dream," and longs "to steal / The gleam of joy." However, it is "sweeter far to weep with thee" with "tears . . . like streams of fire" (107). "To L. E. L." was a gift to Landon and Jerdan, offering them confirmation that Landon's love poems did not risk her reputation because they did not demand an autobiographical reading, that indeed the poet's "guileless" manner pointed toward purely imagined agonies. The editor's footnote admits that publishing W. L. R.'s "complimentary" poem "is something like self-praise" by the *Gazette*. "But the many tributes we receive to the genius addressed in these lines will escape censure, when we acknowledge them as due to a young and a female minstrel, and expressive of feelings very generally excited by her beautiful productions" (107). Jerdan did not need to write this footnote; he published tributes to the *Gazette*'s male poets without such notes. But with the *Gazette*'s circulation growing steadily, the editor wanted to inform new readers of L. E. L.'s gender and youth, and perhaps he was also overeager to defend what he knew was his biased promotion of her. Jerdan would continue to use Landon's gender and youth to justify trumpeting her "genius" wherever possible, from reviews to private letters.

When Landon was not writing about love, she wrote about war. And, even more than her lovers, her soldiers could be relied on to die. Echoing the militaristic sentiments expressed in *The Fate of Adelaide* (1821), the long epigraph to "The Cadets" (1 February 1823) confirms that her childhood enthusiasm for "the war thunder's rattle" had become an enthusiasm for the death it promises. A note states

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that for the epigraph, Landon wrote "New words to the Air of 'The Campbells are coming.'" She then hoped that some readers who knew the tune might sing out:

> The death song is singing, hurrah, hurrah!
>
> The death shots are ringing, hurrah, hurrah!
>
> By the musket's red peal,
>
> By the light of our steel,
>
> We will stand by our colours or die, hurrah! (74)

The main poem does not question this sentiment, as the two English soldiers in India die valiantly at the end. Three other poems on soldiers published in 1822 and early 1823, "The Soldier's Funeral," "And old man standing by the dead body of a Youth," and "The Soldier's Grave," throw up another notable concern in Landon's corpus (that should be kept in mind when considering her death): how blessed it is to die and be buried in one's home country, with loved ones gathered round.[34] In two poems the soldiers return home too weak to continue living, just as, during Landon's years in Brompton, she must have observed British soldiers returning from the Napoleonic wars to die shortly afterward. Though L. E. L. points out in "The Soldier's Grave" that soldiers' talk "of victory" and "of cheer" is "vainly spoken" to wives and children, she still seems to conclude that the hero had a uniquely fortunate end to his life because his "death in battle was *won*," and he was able to die "on his own home pillow!" (emphasis mine; 107).

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[34] Likewise, in her short story "Isadore," Landon views the heroine's death and burial in a foreign land as an essential part of her tragedy.

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Landon began to take up medieval themes and settings in 1823. She was responding to the beginnings of the British public's renewal of interest in medieval chivalry well before Tennyson, well before that interest grew to become a prominent revival that would, for later generations, help to characterize the high Victorian era. Based on this renewal, Mark Girouard's *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (1981) mentions L. E. L. as one of the first writers, post-Walter Scott, to treat chivalric themes, crediting her *Troubadour* (1825) with helping to bring about the nation's revival of interest in the days of wandering knights and minstrels (43). A vaguely medieval setting had already formed a backdrop to *The Fate of Adelaide*, but Landon's immediate inspiration for a return to "the days of the bow and the spear" appears to have been the light opera, *Maid Marian; or, The Huntress of Arlingford*, which she saw at Covent Garden in December 1822, no doubt accompanied by Jerdan ("Written after seeing" 12).[35] Landon's and Jerdan's friend James Robinson Planché wrote the libretto, after the idea was suggested to him by Charles Kemble, who conceived of a light opera on reading Thomas Love Peacock's *Maid Marian*, published that year (Priestley 59-60).

Peacock had "no concern with the medieval scene," made "no attempt to paint the manners of the time" (Priestley 171), and neither did Landon when she returned to her grandmother's house to produce "Written after seeing *Maid Marian* performed," published in the *Gazette* on 4 January 1823. Instead, the theme-park version of

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[35] Thackeray also attended a performance of the light opera; for he referred to it in *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*. The clerk Bob Swinney was "always singing 'one of the

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Sherwood Forest represented to her an exciting alternative to "The Happy Isle," a medieval forest where there were no laws or riches to keep lovers apart. There she could envision herself living with Jerdan, her Robin Hood: "My love would look well in the Lincoln green, / . . . / Oh, sweet and wild the hours would be. . . ." The last stanza brings L. E. L. rudely back into 1820s London,

> . . . all of smoke and care,
>
> And gold is the curse that is laid on all there,
>
> And feelings grow cold, and hearts lie dead,
>
> And the fresh leaves of hope are withered! (12)

Landon need not have made this contrast and the sad reflection that the great forces of the modern industrial state sucked everyone into the pursuit of "gold" (12).[36] Her ambivalence toward the pursuit is evident, as she was writing for money she needed yet was probably not paid her fair allowance because she did not demand it. In her second poem to acknowledge a stage performance, Landon's contrasting of the ideal world on stage with the real one signals that she already perceived how the theater of the day could contest the norms and trends of society (Brooks 42), even when the show in question was a light opera that seemed innocuous in exhibiting a "life . . . of love and of liberty" (12). At Covent Garden she would have observed the trendsetters seated in the boxes above her paying little heed. The *Gazette* reviewer of *Maid Marian*, who was likely Jerdan or Landon, notes that the audience was quiet enough to

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Charles Kemble's songs in *Maid Marian*, a play that was all the rage then, taken from a story-book by one Peacock, a clerk in the India House'" (Priestley 60).

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hear "grass grow" as it strained to hear the much-awaited music – with the exception of "the little fashionable buz [sic] of the dress boxes, which always prevails more or less among genteel people (*less* when nothing of interest is going on, and *more* when there is any thing agreeable to be listened to)" (emphasis reviewer's; 779). As her short story "The Head" (1833) demonstrates (106),[37] Landon knew that those in the boxes, however many love affairs they were involved in, had not the least interest in running away with their lovers from the wealth and social success they were enjoying; hence, her last lines about feelings growing cold. Despite her confidence of professional success, Landon was to some degree dissatisfied with her lot in 1823 and could not have denied the lack of "hope" that lay at the heart of her affair with Jerdan.

In 1837, after more than a decade in which scandalous rumors had circled around Landon, Laman Blanchard wrote a biographical sketch in which he complained that, despite how Landon's being "reviled, ridiculed" by society had sobered her poetry, "it is not a little annoying to see Miss Landon persevere in maliciously contrasting the actual with the ideal – in deprecating what is, for the mere sake of glorifying what is not" ("Memoir" 82). It would be more accurate to say that Landon glorified what was not for the sake of deprecating what was, her "*dis*satisfaction with her epoch's satieties and satisfactions" becoming, in McGann and

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[36] Landon echoes this sentiment, pitting "gold and care" against love, in "Two Doves in a Grove. Mr. Glover's Exhibition" (1823).

[37] A passionate French revolutionary and married man from the "middle rank" (101), Julian begs the also married aristocrat Amalie de Boufflers to run away with him. She has no desire to leave Paris or cause "a scandal." Julian exclaims, "Curse on these social laws! which are made for the convenience of the few and the degradation of the many" ("The Head" 106).

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Riess's view, "Landon's greatest subject" (emphasis McGann and Riess's; 30). But what is more important about Blanchard's remark is his sense that Landon's malicious contrasting was an enduring artistic taste, that her disillusion was wilfully adopted (in spite of the pleasures he had so often witnessed her enjoy) and as such was her greatest illusion. Right up until the end of her career, Landon persevered in contrasting the present with ideal visions that she usually set in a pre-industrial past, when ideals of love and honor were shared by many, or so she liked to dream.

Landon soon realized that, with its tales of Christian crusaders and knights vowed to ladies, the Middle Ages could meet her creative needs precisely. In early 1823, shortly after the poem on *Maid Marian*, Landon found in the writing of two ballads a way to glorify the medieval past more suited to her taste because more concerned with the historical scene – its "picturesque" qualities, to be precise, to which Landon added "the sentiment which links it with to-day," as she once explained Scott's treatment of the Middle Ages ("Female Portrait Gallery. No. 2. Constance" 183). The ballads on the whole move with a rhythmic swiftness born of one nursed in Scott's galloping narrative poetry. The same hunter's horn that featured in the poem on *Maid Marian* is listened for in "Song of the Hunter's Bride," as the young woman paints a mental picture of her Ulric with his hawk and hounds, baldric and bow, while she waits for him in what would become a most Victorian pose, wondering, "Why stays he thus? – he would be here / If his love equalled mine" (107). What charmed her most about the Middle Ages, the noble simplicity of its heroics, comes through in "The Crusader," where the Knight of the Cross fights wearing "a scarf of 'broidery rare, / The last love gift of his lady fair," with the motto, "I am vowed to God and my

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love." The lines lengthen and the gusto of the verse fades away upon the Knight of the Cross returning home to find his lady dead, but, after the tears have been spilt, he rides back to war with renewed vigor and the motto, "I fight for a grave" (107).[38]

The motto Landon embroidered into her early poems could be reduced to "I write for love," and she may well have deemed heroic the risks she took in addressing Jerdan. A particularly heroic effort was the composing of "Leander and Hero" (22 February 1823), perhaps not too inferior to Byron's famous swim of the Hellespont. Landon saw that readers responded to her intensity of feeling for Jerdan; she saw that, as she directed him to feel in the love poems, so too she could expect the rest of her readers to step in line. In "Leander and Hero," the feminine L. E. L. was able both to feed her beloved's ego and to show him how he should feel about her by crediting him for her telling of this "tale that many songs have told":

> . . . thou, the idol of my harp, the Soul
>
> Of poetry, to me my hope, my whole
>
> Happiness of existence, there will be
>
> Some gentlest tones that I have caught from thee!

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[38]In L. E. L.'s short story, "The Bride of Lindorf" (1836), the Shelleyan character says of the Middle Ages:

> I wish I had been born in those stirring times – life spent half on horseback, half at the banquet board – when you had but to look round the tournament, fix on the brightest smile, and then win your lady with your sword. Action – action in the sunshine – passion – but little feeling, and less thought: such was meant to be our existence. But we refine – we sadden and we subdue – we call up the hidden and evil spirits of the inner world – we wake from their dark repose those who will madden us. (451)

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Will not each heart-pulse vibrate, as I tell

Of faith even unto death unchangeable! (124)

Landon recharged the clichéd phrases through piling them up, as if she needed them all to reach the verity of her passionate attachment.[39] "Each heart-pulse" was expected to "vibrate": Landon's, Jerdan's, and thousands of *Gazette* readers, seeking to recover the ecstasy of the fabled lovers. Each heart's isolation was essential. After Leander first saw Hero, "he wandered silent to a grove, / To feed upon the full heart's ecstasy," as will the Improvisatrice in Landon's most famous poem, soon to be written, and dozens more of her characters after the first sighting of their beloveds. Hero went to the same grove with her lute, and Leander observed her, her eyes of "dew and light," her cheeks blushed – "And what, save love, do blushes ever speak?" – her lips parted. "She did seem / As consciousness were lost in some sweet dream." When Hero began to sing, "Light, feeling, flashed from her awakened glance" as she "Poured to her lute the burning words of love!" Leander heard his name and at her feet confessed "his passion in each thrilling word, / Only by lovers said, by lovers heard" (124).

In L. E. L.'s version, two Greeks indulging their fantasies happened to meet and a mythic tale was born. She would not divulge the thrilling words the lovers

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[39] Stephenson differently interprets this technique: "The piling up of cliché, one of the most distinctive features of her work, would seem to be an unmistakable way of emphasising artifice. It seems to make what she writes appear highly conventional, and despite the alleged speaking from the heart, the feelings of which she speaks seem just as likely to have been appropriated from other literary texts" (*Letitia Landon* 122). But I think the artifice is a means to an end, not an end in itself, not what the poet wishes to emphasize. Here I think Stephenson does not recognize that, as in the popular plays and operas of the period, conventional signs in poetry could behave as shortcuts to intense emotions, putting the readers on familiar ground so that they felt more secure and willing to sympathize fully.

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spoke. The invitation to guess was for readers who thought themselves lovers, or formerly lovers, or destined to be so – the quality of their dreams entitling them as much as their experience of relationships.[40] L. E. L.'s love is all about dreams, illusions, stories, myths, the sexual highs that come from identifying with their lovers and becoming lost in such contemplation. What might lie beneath the "downcast eye, / Whose depths are love's own azure world – its world of phantasy" was more precious than any fondness that could result from human interaction alone ("The Greek Girl" 87). But L. E. L. had no doubt that she knew what Leander and Hero said to one another, because she too had a reciprocating lover with a poetic heart. Again Landon turned to address only Jerdan to remind him how like Leander and Hero's was their own situation, which in turn was like Cupid and Psyche's:

> And then their love was secret, -- oh it is
> Most exquisite to have a fount of bliss
> Sacred to us alone, no other eye
> Conscious of our enchanted mystery,
> Ourselves the sole possessors of a spell
> Giving us happiness unutterable!
> I would compare this secrecy and shade
> To the fair island, whither Love conveyed

---

[40] Landon thus begins her short story, "First Love; or, Constancy in the Nineteenth Century" (1836): "Now, a love affair . . . is, of all others, a thing apart – an enchanted dream, where 'common griefs and cares come not.' . . . [I]t is a sweet and subtle language, 'that none understand but the speakers;' and yet this fine and delicate spirit is most especially the object of public curiosity" (326).

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His Psyche, where she lived remote from all:

. . . . . .

Love's wings are all too delicate to bear

The open gaze, the common sun and air. (124)

Uncommonly sensitive *Gazette* readers were then made privy to the knowledge that L. E. L. had a secret love who read her lines along with them. They were permitted to overhear L. E. L. if not Leander, and they were all the more enticed to imagine the "unutterable."

One may well ask, if Landon cherished her secret love so much, why did she broadcast it at all, especially as a secret? She could have sent Jerdan love poems aplenty in private letters. But the main purpose of this literary affair was neither to make love nor children but passionate poetry the like of which no English woman had ever composed. The bravado of this single young woman declaring her love to the prominent, married editor was perfectly matched by his swaggering publication of her love poems in his weekly magazine. The strong stands the *Gazette* editor took against immoral poetry would have lulled readers into assuming that he never printed verse unfit for young ladies' consumption. That three more years had to pass before scandal arose must in part be a measure of how great was the sentimental response Landon's poetry received, how she indeed cast a kind of "spell" over readers who willed their enthrallment again and again. What sentimental pleasure they derived from her work would have, if anything, disinclined them to suspect anything immoral or indecent could be suggested by one who placed a sacred value on delicacy and loyalty in love. Also, Landon had hardly begun to thrust herself onto the stage of London society; she

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was not known well enough yet to attract gossip. To become a literary lioness, she had to write a book that sold well, and then she had to accept the invitations and begin giving a face and personality to what had been a set of initials.

Having laid down her poetical foundations in the *Gazette*, Letitia Landon by early 1823 had started or was about to start five weeks' of writing that would produce *The Improvisatrice* (Watts 2: 21). She had tried her hand at short love lyrics, tangled blank-verse narratives, dramatic monologues and dialogues, her poems springing from classical, chivalric, or oriental tales, from contemporary paintings and plays or tragic news stories, and from her relationship with Jerdan. Most of the hundreds of poems that would follow can be traced to one of the styles or themes she had experimented with by early 1823. But she was only just becoming aware of fashionable life and its false gaiety, and then only watching it from afar. Satire was not a tool she then needed to meet the social demands of the day. She had yet to experience the bitterness and weary resignation that would come with the knowledge that her life was a grand charade, founded on her inability as a celebrated, single, middle-class woman to acknowledge her affair with Jerdan and their children. Landon had yet in her poems to find or have reason to seek for middle grounds of feeling.

She is the poet of love's illusions, who makes plain they are illusions and more, rather than less, significant for their unreality. Melodramatic and every bit as artificial, the disillusions of her early poetry remain kinds of illusion that exalt non-marital sexual love beyond even her most hopeful fantasies, however worthless the love objects are proven to be. We must never forget that Landon's love poems for the *Gazette* functioned as a part of Landon and Jerdan's affair; that she held up to him

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images of miserable women left alone who yet kept on loving, while, whatever else he did, Jerdan kept returning to her. The affair moved her to step outside the bounds of poetic convention for women writers and begin exploring in her poems the guilt, fears, jealousies, and consuming sexual desires inherent in love affairs but new to her, and to do so with an urgency that would have impact. In these early poems, the disillusions tend to come suddenly to shatter the victims and send them to their deaths. Their poet was keen to know and display extremes of passion, born of investing illusions with perfect faith that their truths were higher than any reality could offer. Landon cultivated her illusions with the faith that they gave her the capacity to discover for herself the greatest love man or woman could know. Landon's early poetry stresses that fantasies produce the most exquisite feelings. It is the isolated individual rather than the couple that finally determines whether love's thrills and devastations are known.

In her longer poems, she offered *Gazette* readers temporary bliss, if they would only surrender their critical faculties to her uneven rhythms, as she seemed to have surrendered control to her passions like the priestesses she revered. These poems opened a feminized space of solace for readers to dwell in for a little while and really "indulge" themselves, with the poems' final disillusions and death throes functioning as essential parts of that indulgence. *Gazette* readers could delight in the dangerously sexual pleasures of her imagination and yet feel, by sympathetically identifying with Landon's victims in their abandonments and deaths, that they as readers were approaching a superior virtue to that of virginity. In her short lyrics, L. E. L.'s easy mellifluence showed readers she could enjoy just hinting at erotic pleasures and fears.

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She could play the coquette. She could, it appeared, lightly veil or belie the strength of feeling that her longer poems convinced them she possessed. Here she gave young lovers "songs" to match rather than stretch what they wanted to feel. In all of her early poems, Landon honored her heart, the varying moods of her rich fantasy life that appear to have had no outlet besides her poetry and perhaps her private moments with Jerdan (although it is just as likely that her poetry expressed what she could not say to him in person).

When she entered into the affair, Landon needed money, and winning Jerdan's affection may well have appeared to provide financial security, giving her the assurance that he would use his contacts with publishers and the pages of his *Gazette* to promote her work when the opportunities arose. To win and hold Jerdan's affection, as well as continue to have her poems take up *Gazette* columns, she may have surmised that she needed to write for a lower rate than that paid to other *Gazette* writers. Despite her initials' growing recognition at the start of the affair, Landon was for the most part unknown, isolated from her peers, and socially naïve. It is impossible to escape the conclusion that Jerdan took advantage of her in many ways. But Landon made the first brazen overtures of romantic adoration, and she broadcast her fantasies about being a heroic martyr for love's sake. In 1823, when her name's anonymity gave her relative safety, Landon was deeply in love with being in love with Jerdan and intent on confiding as much of the affair as she could in her poetry. This is the year she most likely became pregnant with her first child by Jerdan.

As this biography of Landon's early life has shown, the years of her youth instilled in her a core of belief that she could turn to her fantasies to find happiness

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and, as a poet, direction and purpose, something to say that felt truer than anything born of the compromises required of her in conversation. When she was a child and teenager and longed to be listened to, no one in her family wanted to hear all her lines of verse. But, rather than attributing their impatience to her verse's imperfections, Landon seems to have regarded the products of her imagination as superior to her family and that part of everyone which functioned in the everyday world with little or no regard for sentimental ideals. Her tales of life-dependent love could not but have eventually palled a mother and father who did not bear great affection for one another, whose tastes and pleasures conflicted, who undoubtedly kept secrets from each other, many having to do with their latest expenses, losses, and debts. Landon observed the tensions and constraints between them and probably saw them both display a less than truthful appearance of financial wellbeing to anyone who did not know better. She became used to the idea of living with secrets. And she appears to have decided against marrying for many years, while at the same time being all too vulnerable to falling for the man who first gave her poems the admiration for which she hungered. Faulting her mother's treatment of herself and her father, Landon found it very easy then to rebel against her mother's morality for the sake of a love she thought her mother could not fathom. From her reading and private fantasies, she assumed she knew how great woman's love could be and this special knowledge was hers to communicate in her poems, especially to an older man who, she seems at least to have suspected, had received the affections of several women more experienced than herself. The poems that had been her only feminine accomplishments became for Landon the sign of her sexuality and capacity for passionate love. In person Landon

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denied the veracity of that sign, first to her parents, even as she left their home resenting her mother's concern about her relations with Jerdan, then to those she met through Jerdan's introduction. She had just begun to live with the lies that would only multiply as the years went by. Through the lies, she cloaked her writings on romantic love in intriguing mysteries that she had every reason to perpetuate.

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Part Two: London Worlds

(1820s and 1830s)

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Chapter Five:

Various Performances, Various Publics

"L. E. L. was a social being," her longtime friend Katherine Thomson remarks in *The Queens of Society*. Yet, as Thomson knew, this Landon who seemed to thrive on the pleasure of company did not emerge until the successes of *The Improvisatrice* (1824) and *The Troubadour* (1825), when society came to call on the poet at her grandmother's small apartment on Sloane Street. "The drawing-room of these lodgings was sometimes filled with gay ladies of rank in the morning, and with men of letters and literary ladies in the evening. . . . L. E. L. . . . young as she then was – little more than twenty-three – had the gift, so perfect in France, so rare in England, of receiving well. Nothing could be more lively than these little social meetings, and more unexceptionable" (205). Perhaps Landon, in the midst of an adulterous affair and with her infant daughter secreted somewhere, played the hostess so gracefully because she saw her social self as a very demanding role, a challenge that she was keen to meet. A new audience of spectators far more shrewd than her grandmother came to find out what the woman who wrote those sad love poems was really like, and Landon, with justifiable insecurity, decided she had to leave them convinced that the poetry revealed nothing of the woman. She at once had to disappoint them and

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enchant them by appearing carefree, and though in the process she provided herself as well as her auditors much entertainment, she did not always convince, nor, conversely, did she always overcome the disappointment she caused.

No one interested in Landon can avoid the questions raised about her work and her life by anecdotes of the "merry scorn" with which this "idolized object of the ever moving and thronging social circles of the metropolis" often treated the curious who sought her out, particularly at "mixed" gatherings of the upper and middle classes (W. Howitt 133, 141, 132). "The instant L. E. L. was known, the circle surrounding her was disenchanted. She pleaded guilty to no sentiment; she abjured the idea of writing from her own feelings. She was so lively, so girlish; so fond of dance, or a play, or a gay walk; so full of pleasantry, so ready with her shafts of wit, that one felt half angry with her for being so blithe and so real" (K. Thomson, *The Queens* 204). William Howitt recalls such an occasion when "a young sentimental man" exclaimed to her, "'You never think of such a thing as love! you, who have written so many volumes of poetry upon it?" Landon replied, "Oh! that's all professional, you know!" (133), as if she almost hoped she would leave the young man cruelly shocked and unwilling to pick up another volume of sentimental poetry.

The temptation recently has been to trust this Landon for confirming our doubts about the sincerity of her poetic declarations of fatal love. But the temptation now, after the revelation of her affair and illegitimate children, might be to trust instead Jerdan's version of the social Landon, cited in Chapter Three in his letter to the Countess of Blessington. When, on hearing the news of Landon's death, Jerdan sat

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down in January 1839 to write to Blessington, the images of Landon that sprung to mind were of her glittering in society, as she and everyone else pretended not to know or care for the scandalous rumors about her then in circulation. In his grief, Jerdan remembered her as always in pain, exacerbated by its denial. Landon's whole existence then seemed to him one "of suffering vainly concealed under mocking brilliancy and affirmed mirth -- of a heart broken by mortifications, of smiles always forced, of the finest of human chords ever crushed and lacerated by the rudest handling, of sensitiveness subjected to perpetual injury – in features such as these are to be read the sad story of L. E. L." (Ms. Add. 43688, f.64-65). Samuel Carter Hall's account of Landon agrees that she hid her sorrows in order to "sparkle" in the social glare: ". . . 'gay' the troubles and anxieties of her life would not let her be; 'gay' she was forbidden to be by the necessity of daily toil, ill or in health; more than that, her nature inclined her to despondency -- almost a necessity of the poetic temperament. Her closer friends knew that the sparkle was often unreal" (*Book of Memories* 275). "More than" scandalous rumors, illness, or financial need, Landon's "poetic temperament" made her melancholy in Hall's view, who unlike Jerdan wanted more reason for the sad poems of one who appeared gayer than anyone else at the social hour, so "real" to Thomson, so "unreal" to him.

Because Maria Jane Jewsbury only knew Landon "in the throng," according to Hall, Jewsbury addressed her as "Thou gay and gifted thing!" in the opening line of her poem written around 1830, "To L. E. L. – After Meeting her for the First Time" (275). The poem registers Jewsbury's sincere concern about her new "too careless

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friend," a creature "With bright but hollow glee," who sings "songs of fairy land, / Without the fairy heart" (24-25). In the final quatrain, Jewsbury almost seems to be grabbing Landon by the collar to make her take in the words and remember them:

> Thy life is false and feverish,
>
> It is like a masque to thee:
>
> When the task and glare are over,
>
> And thou grievest – come to me. (25)

Jewsbury distrusts Landon's poetic self and its "task" work, not just her social persona. She distrusts the sprightly, whimsical sentiments with which Landon had begun the building of many a rococo fairyland in her poems, only to fill it with misery and death. Jewsbury gave the manuscript copy of her poem to Landon with, it seems, no expectation that Landon would ever seek to publish it. And Landon held the poem for a long time, waiting five years after Jewsbury died (in 1833) to publish "To L. E. L." in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book for 1839*, the last *Scrap Book* that Landon edited and filled with her poetical illustrations. This *Scrap Book* was not available for purchase until Landon had left England; not until, though no one in England yet knew it, she had already died. Landon wanted Jewsbury's critical yet sympathetic image of her to be a lasting one. That image of an L. E. L. deeply compromised by her struggle to keep afloat in London society mattered more to Landon than her writing a few lines of praise for Jewsbury (as she had done for Hemans and others) to accompany Jewsbury's portrait in the *Scrap Book*.

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In contrast to Jerdan, Hall, and other Victorians who wrote about Landon after her death, Jewsbury did not regard Landon as a unique victim of society. The speaker of Jewsbury's poem acknowledges that she too knows "the lonely hours of night, / When the face puts off its mask"; that, much as she would like to help Landon, she too dwells "amid a way-worn world; / And my vision, like a banner, / But opened to be furled" (24-25). Though "To L. E. L." is more specifically about Landon than the many sketches Landon had drawn of what it was like to dance in the social arena, Landon's decision to publish Jewsbury's poem yet supports the thrust of much of Landon's poetic and prose writings on society. Her decision would seem to indicate that Landon wanted readers to have no uncertainty as to whether her own lines complaining of or lamenting social life were heartfelt. These verses of Landon, if anything, display the impossibility of painting a revealing portrait of oneself or anyone else on the social stage, where everyone is brutally compromised. I cite "Lines of Life" (1829) at length because I think it helps to show why a wholly convincing portrayal of Landon has yet to be published. In its depiction of high society's intolerance of idealism, this poem provides a basis for understanding her perception of how well her London milieu kept its surface free of stains of uniqueness, free of anything that would distract from its "sweetest" smiles and "softest" tones.

Well, read my cheek, and watch my eye, --

Too strictly school'd are they,

One secret of my soul to show,

One hidden thought betray.

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I never knew the time my heart
Look'd freely from my brow;
It once was check'd by timidness,
'Tis taught by caution now.

I live among the cold, the false,
And I must seem like them;
And such I am, for I am false
As those I most condemn.

I teach my lip its sweetest smile,
My tongue its softest tone;
I borrow others' likeness, till
Almost I lose my own.

I pass through flattery's gilded sieve,
Whatever I would say;
In social life, all, like the blind,
Must learn to feel their way.

I check my thoughts like curbed steeds

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That struggle with the rein;
I bid my feelings sleep, like wrecks
In the unfathom'd main.

I hear them speak of love, the deep,
The true, and mock the name;
Mock at all high and early truth,
And I too do the same.

I hear them tell some touching tale,
I swallow down the tear;
I hear them name some generous deed,
And I have learnt to sneer.

I hear the spiritual, the kind,
The pure, but named in mirth;
Till all of good, ay, even hope,
Seems exiled from our earth.

And one fear, withering ridicule,
Is all that I can dread;
A sword hung by a single hair

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For ever o'er the head.

We bow to a most servile faith,
In a most servile fear;
While none among us dares to say
What none will choose to hear.

And if we dream of loftier thoughts,
In weakness they are gone;
And indolence and vanity
Rivet our fetters on.

Surely I was not born for this!
I feel a loftier mood
Of generous impulse, high resolve,
Steal o'er my solitude!

. . . . . .

I have such eagerness of hope
To benefit my kind;
And feel as if immortal power
Were given to my mind.

. . . . . .

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Oh! not myself, -- for what am I? --

The worthless and the weak,

Whose every thought of self should raise

A blush to burn my cheek.

But song has touch'd my lips with fire,

And made my heart a shrine;

For what, although alloy'd, debased,

Is in itself divine.

I am myself but a vile link

Amid life's weary chain;

But I have spoken hallow'd words,

Oh do not say in vain!

My first, my last, my only wish,

Say will my charmed chords

Wake to the morning light of fame,

And breathe again my words? (*The Venetian Bracelet* 265-74)

The "Lines of Life" speaker pleads guilty to behaving just like everyone else. She does not admit to having been enamored of the glittering spectacle, as many of Landon's writings on society suggest that she was at times, but the speaker's shame

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would seem to allow for past captivations. If Landon was shining at a dinner party or in a ballroom hours before she wrote this poem -- and Landon often composed after an evening out – she would rather forget the brilliance of the performance, preferring to let us hear only the voice of a weak self which she dissolves in the mass of society's members. The speaker tars everyone with the debasement of society's false show, the men as much as the women. Expanding "I" to "we" to include all performers in society, the poet-speaker allows no one to escape the charge that "none among us dares to say / What none will choose to hear." Beneath the chatter, many minds feel enslaved. This speaker does not preen with a Romantic poet's sense of superiority and consequent alienation. "We" all just might "dream loftier thoughts"; there could, after all, be many readers of sentimental poetry among the guests. The "loftier mood" of the speaker differs only in that it comes to one given the "immortal power" to turn those thoughts into poetry.

"Lines of Life" brings us no closer to a sense of Landon's individual self when we consider what the speaker does not dare discuss in polite society. She sings of a "truth" uncontaminated by "earth's debasing stain," a truth that resides in the "touching tale" or report of a "generous deed," in "high and early" love, in "the spiritual, the kind / The pure": vague terms that would be expected to include bravery, long suffering, self sacrifice, but could include much else. Landon does seem to focus momentarily on "myself" when she answers her question, "what am I?": "The worthless and the weak, / Whose *every thought* of self should raise / A blush to burn my cheek." She suggests perhaps that her betrayal of these ideals extends beyond her

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silence and worse mockery in social life, to her most intimate relationships, to some of the things this love poet has done in the name of love. But to read with a knowledge of Landon and Jerdan's secret affair and the two or three of his children she had borne when she composed "Lines of Life" is, conversely, to speculate over the breadth of interpretation her adultery gives those ideals of undying love, generosity, and sacrifice.

Published in the same volume, "A Summer Evening's Tale" likewise denounces the speaker and her beloved's hiding of feelings to skate on "the smooth surface of society" (251), yet without shame the speaker asks her beloved (we can assume Jerdan), "Am I not better by my love for you? / At least, I am less selfish" (254). To Jerdan alone Landon proclaims the virtue of the adulterous love that has caused her to give him her body and to risk her reputation, but to everyone else she merely aligns love with a selflessness she links to youth. Seeking to preserve her poetry by means of preserving her social "life," spiritually impoverished though it is, Landon retreats from being the revolutionary female advocate of free love (if only for geniuses) to praise instead in "A Summer Evening's Tale," "that idolatry / With which young Love makes offering of itself" (258); to speak in "Lines of Life" for every "young maiden" standing with "tears / Alone in moonlight" and every "pale youth" with "many an antique scroll" beside his lamp (114). Landon could feel accepted, even vindicated, by espousing vague ideals which she knew her readers, especially the younger ones, would deem their own. The "Lines of Life" speaker's vagueness about these ideals, then, implies a kind of society of readers to which Landon needed to belong, a society comprised largely of members of the middle classes who likely

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shared both an experience of reading romantic tales and some form of resentment at being excluded from high society or of being subjected to aristocrats' ridicule of their earnest ways. Yet by using vague generalities, Landon remained all inclusive. Upper-class readers who resented being insulted or gossiped about at the last party (many of whom invited L. E. L. to their own parties) were encouraged to feel united with a society of unseen readers in their preference for eternal love over the pursuit of social success.

The speaker of "Lines of Life" is then aware of two audiences of differing tastes which nevertheless share many members -- one reveling in glamorous social life and the other cherishing chivalric or sentimental values in fiction -- both of whose tastes are reflected by the speaker: "I borrow others' likeness, till / Almost I lose my own." Though her readers would have tended to think her speaker was speaking for herself, Landon's speaker could have been seen to represent any writer who hobnobbed in sophisticated society yet had written in an exalted vein. Commenting in *Noctes Ambrosianae* on North's assertion that Miss Landon was reputed to be "a brilliant creature" in social life, "none of your lachrymose muses," the Ettrick Shepherd observed that the best writers exhibit for society a personality contrary to that projected in their works: "That's the character o' a' real geniuses, baith males and females. They're ae thing wi' a pen in their haun, at a green desk, wi' only an ink-bottle on't and a sheet o' paper -- and anither thing entirely at a white table a' covered wi' plates and trenchers, soup in the middle, sawmon at the head . . ." (J. Wilson 313-14). Anna Maria Hall likewise considered L. E. L.'s manifestation of contrary

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personalities not the least unusual for a writer intent on frequenting London society: "Like all the earnest workers I have known intimately, she had a double existence -- an inner and outer life" (S. C. Hall, *Book of Memories* 272). Bulwer, however, regarded print, like society, as no place to manifest one's inner life, especially not if one was writing prose for periodicals. He recounts how, when the wife of the periodical writer Laman Blanchard (Landon's biographer and intimate friend) began to suffer fits of paralysis, Blanchard's "long overtasked" nerves started "giving way":

> In mixed society he would strive to rally – sometimes with success – sometimes utterly in vain. He has been obliged to quit the room, to give way to emotions which seemed to rise spontaneously, unexcited by what passed around him, except as it jarred . . . upon the irritable chords within. . . . Still to the public, he wore the mask – which authors wear unto the grave. Still were his writings as full of pleasant amenity, and quiet and ready grace. Still, for the lovers of light literature, the bloom was as fresh as ever upon the fruits of his jaded fancy and grieving heart. ("Memoir of Laman Blanchard" xxv-xxvi)

Several reasons lay behind the doubling and tripling of personae among the writers and artists of London, beginning with the fact that, through the growth of periodical literature and steel engraving, more writers could become celebrities in the 1820s and 1830s than ever before. Celebrated writers and even those with a minor reputation for talent could, in the eyes of upper-class hostesses, well adorn their social evenings. Talent and a little respectability then justified the writers and artists being

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singled out from the middle classes to be invited (commonly without their spouses) into London high society. It should be remembered that, together with the "fashionables" (a.k.a. dandies and "butterflies"), these writers, painters, and actors were being made to feel grand at a time when "the lines of demarcation between the upper and the middle classes [were] so stringently adhered to" that society was largely restricted to the "'Upper Ten Thousand'" (Chancellor 28, 6). Hence, Landon's friend Emma Roberts boasts "of the numerous advances made [toward Landon] by parties moving in the highest circles," of the "many who were desirous to add so great an attraction [as Landon] to their parties." Landon placed only proper value on "distinctions of rank and wealth . . . not caring to number lords and ladies amongst her acquaintance, for the sake of their titles alone," Roberts hastens to add for her predominantly middle-class audience. That "Many of her [Landon's] intimate friends belonged to the most distinguished class of society" is supposed to impress, yet it also should strengthen the impression that Landon moved with ease among her social superiors because of the natural refinement of her character (21-22).

"Not merely in society where she was the idol, but as a solitary companion of the rural walk, or fire-side," Landon displayed her refinement, in Roberts' view, by being "always ready to amuse or be amused" (20). Though many of the star writers and thespians practiced their arts in a highly impassioned vein adored by popular audiences, London's polite society did not want to hear sentimental or melodramatic speeches from them, considering earnestness better suited for those poor enough to have serious cares. Instead, "entertainers" were asked into society to supply what the

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upper classes were often incapable of providing themselves: light amusement sparked by, in the case of the fashionables, creative dress and demeanor; in the case of the artists, clever retorts, puns, observations, and, if urged, maybe a song or poem -- but too sentimental a piece could result in the performer's embarrassment. An 1820 article in the *New Monthly* complained that "persons of genius" represent "the only class branded with vivacity" on the drawing-room stage. Otherwise, society carried a prevailing tone of "apathy, absolute and unvarying apathy," worn as a sign of superiority (M. M.-363). The jaundiced passages of "Lines of Life" might be said to echo that apathy.

When Blain wonders if "class may have been just as big a factor as gender in marking out the contours of her [Landon's] reputation" (39), she is starting to question whether, to date, critical interpretations of Landon's work have been skewed by feminist sympathies. For her "possible," I would substitute "highly probable." But then, by their very existence, Landon's complaints about society point out an absence of similar plaints from her middle-class male (as well as female) contemporaries and their predecessors. Romantic male visionaries had no interest in using their speakers to vilify their "unpoetic" behavior in society. They would never have debased themselves to the level of the "Lines of Life" poet-speaker: the "worthless and the weak," "a vile link" in humanity's "weary chain," who gave voice to a visiting "song" only to alloy or debase it. Why was Landon different from other poets? Was this passionately sentimental woman who used her poetry to keep an affair going with her editor so addicted to the pleasures of self-debasement that she actually enjoyed

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condemning herself along with her social brethren? Or was Landon so in need of experiencing rare moments when she could feel she was being honest before the public that she would shrink at no self-condemnation which would not certainly blacken her name?

As the self-proclaimed "camelion Poet" (sic), Keats surely came much closer to Landon's speaker than those writers who pursued what he termed, in his famous 1818 letter, "the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime." Here Keats's "no self" seems to approach Landon's conception, expressed by the "Lines of Life" speaker as a dissociating of the weak self from the voice that sang exalted verse or mocked the song. On the other hand, Keats, in the same letter, considered it just as "poetical" to become "an[ni]hilated" in social life by "the identity of every one in the room" as to write verse about the moon (87-88). For Landon's speaker, such annihilation betrayed her poetic inspiration. Interestingly, Sarah Sheppard's description of Landon -- "Her society-character did in truth resemble the disputed colour of the chameleon, changing in hues with the changing lights around" (160) -- recalls Keats's of himself, supporting the idea that Landon took a very different view of her social behavior than Keats did of his own. But Keats did not address in his work the mutability of the poet's personality in social life, nor did he have the chance to be celebrated by the upper crust the way Landon was. Byron, of course, did, yet he *was* the upper crust. Also retaining his dignity, Byron's Childe Harold made no claim to becoming a nonentity or weak self in social life. On the contrary, Harold boasted of his capacity to mask a mysterious hurt while acting the bon vivant (1.8).

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For Landon, such masking was really a cowardly mirroring. She comments in her novel *Romance and Reality* (1831) on the absence of "all originality" when the great and good gather: "A mask must be worn. No one has courage to be himself. We look upon others, and our eyes reflect back their images. It is the same with the mind. Even thus in society do we mirror the likeness of others" (2: 171). And later in the novel she notes that "young ladies are like the pieces of looking-glass let into chiffoniers and doorways -- only meant to reflect the actions of others" (2: 234). Though in many of her works this mirroring was identified as society's malaise, Landon, in a letter to a friend written after 1834, attributed the cowardly habit only to herself. "You know my mirror-like propensities," she stated simply, to explain why she had forsaken "republics" and "equality" for "Tory principles" while staying with her conservative clergyman-uncle in rural Yorkshire (Blanchard 1: 81-84). For her liberal London friend, assumedly, that statement was explanation enough, given the friend's knowledge of the chameleon L. E. L.

So where do we find the "real Landon" in this hall of mirrors? I would argue that for Landon each attempt at communication, public or private, written or spoken, functioned as a gambit in an ineluctable identity game that she played over and over again, whether at moments aware of it or not. The confusion and curiosity that still exists about her attests that she played it successfully. But for Landon, her success would have lain in the fact that she remained popular throughout the dramatic changes in the London of the 1820s and 1830s; that is, popular enough to support herself, her mother, her brother, and probably to some degree, her children. Full of contradictory

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tastes and opinions and fairly malleable, Landon recognized much of her game-playing for what it was: a willingness to play only to those tastes that she thought she shared, or could share, with most of a particular audience, or its highest ranking members. Often her arrows of urban wit dismayed more conservative, middle-class members of the audience and must have, in effect, set her apart from them in the eyes of lords and ladies. Perceiving some justification for many different points of view, Landon aimed to charm by flattering the ruling part of that occasion's audience with an italicized reflection of its tastes and opinions, belying in the process whatever other personalities she had last exhibited. Regardless of the venue, "genius" remained on show.

Her middle-class friends' accounts of Landon in society agree on the one point that she was kind and affectionate with small groups of well-read individuals like themselves, but on grand occasions, where rank and wealth reigned, Landon behaved as if she was incapable of caring deeply for anyone. "She was most beautiful when farthest removed from those artificial lights in which she was too fond of exhibiting herself. In her, the constant flush of the affections was, after all, lovelier than the sparkling fancy or the glowing intellect. . . . It has been remarked that it was only when with the frivolous that she assumed frivolity" (Blanchard 1: 280, 289). Jerdan, almost in spite of himself, gives a rare glimpse of how cutting Landon's satire was thought to be:

> In mixed society she was brilliant and witty, and perhaps it would have been safer and better for herself if she had not also been, with a strong sense of the ridiculous, occasionally sarcastic. This turn, in fact,

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> provoked some to become her enemies; whilst those who knew her were perfectly aware that the character of the satirist was only assumed, and that there was not one grain of ill-will or spitefulness in her disposition. It was, however, a fault, and she paid dearly for it. Yet was she generous, forgiving, and affectionate. Everybody near her loved her; while the buzzard world, from some ludicrous sally [by Landon], was being persuaded of her envy and bitterness. ("Memoir of L. E. L." xvii)

Jerdan can defend Landon only by claiming that she pretended to be a satirist, that it was not in her nature to mock others. Yet the "assumed" mockery that played to her social betters won her real "enemies," no doubt middle-class ones whom she might have envied for their seeming less burdened by secrecy and financial cares than herself. Had he pleaded it shortly after Landon had wounded them with one of her attacks and the laughter that followed, Jerdan's defense of Landon would have received nothing but her enemies' scorn. For it was they who helped spread the scandalous rumors about Landon. But William Howitt, who probably experienced her indifference as well as her kindness in society, disbelieved, like Jerdan, in the Landon who challenged his initial enchantment.

> Your first impressions of her were, -- what a little, light, simple, merry-looking girl. If you were not aware of her being a popular poetess, you would have suspected her of being nothing more than an agreeable, brilliant, and joyous young lady. This feeling in her own house, or

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> amongst a few congenial people, was quickly followed by a feeling of the kind-heartedness and goodness about her. You felt that you could not be long with her without loving her. There was a frankness and generosity about her that won extremely upon you. On the other hand, in mixed companies, witty and conversant as she was, you had a feeling she was playing an assumed part. Her manner and conversation were not only the reverse of the tone and sentiment of her poems, but she seemed to say things for the sake of astonishing you with the very contrast. You felt not only no confidence in the truth of what she was asserting, but a strong assurance that it was said merely for the sake of saying what her hearers would least expect her to say. (132)

Roberts is even less impressed with Landon's witticisms in mixed companies, seeing no wit or cleverness in them. "The brilliant displays which LEL so frequently made of her conversational powers" were reserved for "persons of congenial tastes and feelings."

> But in large assemblies, in which expectation had been highly raised, a considerable degree of disappointment has been experienced, either by her remaining silent, or, in consequence of some whim, exhibiting herself in a character perfectly foreign to her own, expressing sentiments, and maintaining opinions which gave those who saw nothing beyond the surface, an idea that she must in reality be a very unintellectual person. (21-22)

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The Landon who chose to remain silent and disappoint everyone was probably a creature of the late 1820s and 1830s, a little bored by society's sameness and fed up with much being expected of her. She then on occasion showed she could resist the pressure to shine. On the other hand, we must not forget the appeal for some of the unintellectual, silent woman. Nor should we overlook the mischievous satisfaction Landon could derive from her power to disappoint, whether it be one sentimental fan or a whole room. Roberts' account, however, is the only one by her friends that mentions Landon's remaining silent, and I suspect she did so very rarely.

Landon took too great a pleasure in mirroring to do otherwise often. Sometimes she would openly adopt several different demeanors in the course of one social evening. The many faces of Landon that Samuel Carter Hall observed convinced him not that she wore masks but that her capacity for fellow feeling was exceptional, even for a woman, and thus erotically "fascinating." "I have rarely known a woman so entirely fascinating as Miss Landon. This arose mainly from her large sympathy; she was playful with the young, sedate with the old, and considerate and reflective with the middle-aged; she could be tender, and she could be severe, prosaic, or practical, and essentially of and with whatever party she chanced to be among" (*Book of Memories* 276). A female friend who relished Landon's "earnest" reading of poetry as if it were "pouring from her soul," likewise saw her adaptability as the essence of thoughtfulness.

> It was often interesting to compare the L. E. L. of the morning with the Miss Landon of the evening. Alike, yet how different. Genius

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> now folded its wings, and walked forth in the garb of social life. Yet still might that genius be recognized in the courteous and nicely fitting compliment, the piquant remark, the brilliant repartee, and sometimes in the full flow of eloquence. Abundantly amusing was it to watch how she almost intuitively read the characters of those before her, and with what tact she adapted her conversation to each and all. In their varying tastes, however opposed to her own, she would be sure to express a graceful interest. (Blanchard 1: 285-86)

The emotive desire to please most and provoke some lay at the heart of Landon's *modus operandi*. And, if she were not in a mood to denounce herself for adjusting too easily to others, she could feel most principled about having delighted all and sundry. In the course of describing an unusually pleasing evening to T. Crofton Croker, she wrote: "It is a moral duty sadly neglected in the decalogue, that of being amusing; instead of 'thou shalt not kill' a command . . . should be substituted, some injunction to entertain and to be entertained" (1832 Ms.).

However, in a letter to Anna Hall, Landon seems to have thought less of this "moral duty" when she defended the tendency in her work to "paint ambition as a vain delusion, love as still vainer, and genius as making its own misery." Her pessimistic visions were, she claimed, no darker than the contents of most people's lives:

> The inherent horror of death is the greatest hold that life has upon us. Let any one look their own past experience steadily in the face, and what a dark and discouraging aspect will it not present? How many

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> enjoyments have passed away for ever! how much warmth and kindliness of feeling! how many generous beliefs! As to love – does it dare to treasure its deepest feelings in the presence of what we call the world? As to friendship -- how many would weigh your dearest interests for one instant against the very lightest of their own? And as to fame, of what avail is it in the grave? -- and during life it will be denied, or dealt forth grudgingly. (Blanchard 1: 91-92)

Landon's letter goes on to suggest her satisfied assurance that her publications, at least, would not lull further "the most contented people . . . the mentally indolent: the money-getting: those whose ideal of happiness is 'being comfortable.'" For she sought rather to disturb their comfort, using her works to proclaim that love, friendship, and deserved fame carried little weight for most people when balanced against their selfish interests. When writing for publication, just as she would "dare to treasure" love's "deepest feelings" before her readers' eyes, so she would never allow herself to flinch before their "inherent horror of death." Closing the letter to Hall with lines that have been repeatedly misinterpreted because taken out of this context, Landon summed up her defense of her work by *contrasting* it with the "steam coach" approach: "To be as indifferent as you can possibly contrive -- to aim *only* at present amusement and passing popularity -- is the best system for a steam coach along the railroad of life. Let who will break the stones, and keep up the fire!" (emphasis mine; 1: 91-92).

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The key word here is "only" because it designates the limited aims of writers who did not care about acquiring the lasting fame that Landon so desired. Yet she desired that fame without forsaking her wish to be amusing and her need to stay somewhat popular. In spite of the popularity she achieved, Landon -- to a certain extent, or, in her darker moods -- believed the gloomy sentiments she expressed in her work. Further, she believed herself to be breaking stones by singing the disappointments of love, fame, and friendship in the 1820s and 1830s, when Romantic poetry no longer gave voice to the predominant concerns and feelings of the majority of British readers as it had done in the days when Scott's *Marmion* and Byron's *Childe Harold* were lapped up by the public. As her friend Katherine Thomson remarks, Landon's "was not an age of poetry. . . . Byron was 'improper;' Scott was 'feeble;' Tennyson, a boy at college" (*The Queens* 198). In an 1831 review of Bulwer's novels, Landon distinguishes her era from the "essentially poetical age" that she sees as having just ended:

> The great writers . . . embodied the excitement, the morbid sensibility, the visionary philosophy, the melancholy ever attendant upon imaginative feeling. . . . The former change was . . . wrought by enthusiasm. . . . The present is being worked by opinion. . . . To-day has nothing in common with Yesterday. People required to be amused in order to be instructed; now, they only permit themselves to be entertained while laying the flattering unction to their souls that it is the vehicle of information. ("Living" 437)

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Landon also notes in the review that Bulwer had written sentimental verses in the early 1820s, when, though the decline in sales had long set in, such poetry still met the tastes of numbers of the British public, such as the Cambridge young men who waited expectantly each week for new poems by L. E. L. Unlike Landon, Bulwer made no money out of his early poems, filled with laments such as one from *Weeds and Wildflowers* that begins:

> Oh would that One would love me now
> As one who lov'd me once so well! –
> Alas, that love is o'er -- and how
> The tomb, the tomb alone can tell! (73)

The fact that Bulwer gained no substantial fame or money from his poetry was cause enough for him to turn to prose. Seeing her popularity by 1830 as inferior to his own, Landon praised Bulwer in the review for having turned his hand to novel writing as soon as he presciently recognized "that the celebrity of one age must be sought in an opposite path by its successor" ("Living" 439).

For in the 1820s and 1830s, most British readers preferred to be entertained by silver-fork novels, travel books, and articles of political or social satire rather than to enthuse and cry their way through books of poetry. Landon eventually felt compelled to act upon this change in public taste, publishing the first of four novels the same year as this review, though she never stopped building into her poems and novels large blocks of "morbid sensibility." Thus, Landon's novels never sold as well as those of Bulwer, Robert Plumer Ward, Catherine Gore, Benjamin Disraeli, and Theodore

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Hook, whose works managed both to satirize and to glamorize each season's "varying succession of dinners, balls, concerts, *déjeuners*, and waterparties," while avoiding the depression of readers' spirits with what Gore demeaned as "the etherialized and the sentimental" (137, 2). Despite their widely varying degrees of intellectual depth, most silver-fork novels could provide sufficient amusement for "the mentally-indolent," "the money-getting" so deplored in Landon's letter to Anna Hall -- those whom, by chance coming across a poem of hers, might be slightly disturbed out of their complacency by one of her many characters whose dejection leads to one of her many death scenes. Or at least our stone-breaker hoped as much. To bring readers to a recognition of the (unrealistic) truth of her sentiments remained, after earning a steady income, a challenge of which Landon never lost sight.

Among the mass of potential British readers, Landon's loyal readership then constituted a minority with somewhat eccentric tastes, as it continued to sigh over sentimental verse despite the predominant bookselling trends. These readers whom William B. Scott called "the lovers of refined feeling and chivalrous sentiment" must have shared at least some of Landon's and/or her characters' discontent in order to sympathize with their endless yearnings (xi). Yet for Landon's work to have retained any kind of popularity, she needed to keep attracting the glances of the more superficial readers, with, for instance, a description of a banquet hall or a young woman's evening attire. Ignoring these readers' interests would have been to her not only unprofitable but the height of arrogance. In the Preface to her novel *Romance and Reality* (1831) L. E. L. denigrated the "egotistical" remarks authors usually make

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in prefaces: "For who really enters into our thoughts, cares for our hopes, allows for our fears, or sympathises with our feelings? . . . Our readers only open our pages for amusement: if they find it, well and good -- if not, our most eloquent pleading will not make them read on."

In that glittering, satirical age, most readers preferred not to spare much time for tales of woe and sorrow. So Landon tempted readers into her caverns of melancholy by supplying them with, as one reviewer noted, "the gayest occurances, the brightest scenes, the most gorgeous parties" at the cavern's entrance, for a moment obscuring the darkness. But, ultimately, the candles were blown out, and those scenes were plunged into the gloom of her morbid sensibility. To refute any idea that Landon lived the sorrowful existence her writings implied, the reviewer (probably William Maginn) added an eye-witness account of her dancing, "the very occupation which we last saw this melancholy and broken-hearted lady engaged, somewhere about half-past three o'clock in the morning, to the tune of 'Cover the Buckle'" (Rev. of *Francesca Carrara* 480-85). Maginn supposed that his observation could persuade the more light-hearted readers to take up Landon's novel, if only to admire her artifice.

None of Landon's "masks" were wholly manufactured out of feelings she did not experience -- though in society and in poems like "Lines of Life," "The Mask of Gaiety," "False Appearances," or "Life's Mask," Landon claimed as much. Indeed, if one reads these poems as representations of Landon, then their absolutist avowals of falsity serve as the defining characteristic of their masquerade. For the modes of behavior Landon adopted contained many grains of authenticity, tending rather to

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heighten some aspects of her personality while veiling others. Her letters moreover affirm that she could enjoy every mood or style she inhabited, showing how she would switch from one extreme to another, from the witty to the sentimental to the world-weary to the business-like, depending on the recipient and the subject. When the recipient was a friend willing to bear all sides of her, Landon might vary her tone radically several times in the course of one letter and let whim alone dictate her views on a given subject.

On no topic was she more mercurial than that of her poetry. In one letter to Croker, the entrepeneurial Landon explained her solution to the problem of illustrating a difficult engraving: "I know not how but the subject never much struck me . . . so I have taken refuge in sentiment, the court card of the poet's hand" (Dec. 1833 Ms., Rutgers Univ.). In another letter to him, written at the same period, she asserted, "Really poetry is to me such a serious business -- it is my religion and I am always in earnest about it" (1833? Ms., Rutgers Univ.). We might also recall the letter to her cousin reporting her progress on *Fate of Adelaide* (1821), in which Landon could not long remain in earnest about her heroine's feelings: "I wished to pourtray [sic] a gentle soft character, and to paint in her character, and to paint in her the most delicate love. I fear her dying of it is a little romantic; yet what was I to do, as her death must terminate it? Pray do you think, as you are the model of my, I hope, charming heroine, you could have contrived to descend to the grave 'Pale martyr to love's wasting flame?'" (Blanchard 1: 27).

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And we should remember that Landon's love for Jerdan inspired the tale of the charming heroine's love and martyrdom. Whenever Landon was writing about romantic love, she could give weight to her performances with lines that seem to relate to her affair with Jerdan. The affair gave her endless reserves. But, most conscious that her own love was built on and of her illusions, Landon could not but see that injecting feelings about her secret affair into her work added, in effect, more layers of artifice -- making it easier to distance herself from it with a laugh. Neither Landon's writing nor her social performances came close to complying with what John Cairncross, discussing misguided criticism of Racine, calls "the curious romantic belief that a work of art must be either a personal declaration of faith or a purely technical construction" (23). To return to her card analogy, Landon stacked her deck to produce court cards of sentiment most of the time. She could throw her feelings entirely into the poetry called for by those cards without entirely losing a sense of the artificiality of her performance.

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Chapter Six:

Landon's London

Frequenting high society while she struggled alone to make ends meet, Landon discerned that adaptability and exhibitionism were necessary for success in the London of the 1820s and 1830s, when class divisions gave rise to conflicts on almost every conceivable issue of the day. The "public mind" to which Landon addressed herself contained a volatile mixture of lingering eighteenth-century sensibility, Romantic idealism, and the loose morality and luxury of the post-Waterloo Regency, combined with upsurgent utilitarianism, Whig and Tory brands of Reform politics, and a growing middle-class piety. The spread of theatres for all classes and of periodicals for all opinions and tastes, many carrying visual images for the first time, roused a desire for stimulation from a perpetual stream of novelties while promoting competition and discord. To gain the attention of the London populace, a wide range of opinions were exploited for their visual and verbal impact, championed today only to be mocked tomorrow. In his exuberant *Life in London* (1821), Pierce Egan described the streets down which Landon walked: "The EXTREMES, in every point of view, are daily to be met with in the metropolis; from the most rigid, persevering, never-tiring industry, down to laziness. . . . The greatest love of and contempt for money are equally

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conspicuous; and in no place are pleasure and business so much united as in London" (22).

With *Don Juan* Byron provided a marvelous example of the adaptability and exhibitionism needed to succeed in this environment, but by packing into one poem so many contrary opinions Byron insured that he would offend all but those most hostile to the established order. Landon could hardly afford to give such offence, and thus her contraries were far less explicit. Her poetry, for example, lacked *Don Juan*'s effrontery of seeking at first to gratify the tastes of the sentimental reader only to satirize those sentiments and, in the process, mortify the reader. Instead, she appealed to the public's growing interest in visual representations through her verbal pictures, luring bourgeois and aristocrat alike with festive displays of luxury and landscapes of unnatural beauty -- only to undermine these attractions by declaring them all vanities. In most cases, she would either castigate them as coldly artificial or judge them too perfect for the cold, false world. Yet her deep attraction to the many forms of material wealth on show in London determined that, despite her protestations, she could never reject high society's cult of display. Her poetry's dark-eyed, snow-skinned women who drank wine from ruby-encrusted goblets were there to be admired, on re-reading, all the same.

Fortunately for her popular appeal, Landon was not too proud to admit that she was influenced by the books that everyone had read, that she was excited about the latest trends in literary journalism, theater, politics, and clothes fashion. Landon was an unabashed creature of her London environment. She relished her position as

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reviewer and poet for the weekly *Literary Gazette*, and she seems to have read with avidity all leading periodicals edited in London and Edinburgh. Whenever away from London's social and material attractions, Landon just wanted to get back. From her uncle's house in Aberford she wrote Croker: "Well here I am, nearly two hundred miles from London, and truly if I wrote as I feel -- this letter would be a perfect seraglio, I could fill it full of misses. I miss everything, and everybody. Well absence at least teaches appreciation, and I have taken to read Rogers's pleasures of Memory -- a view of London in the distance on every page." Disdainfully she repeated her cousin Caroline's opinion "that London is only a great wicked expensive place," and lamented that in Aberford, "Society there is none" (18 Dec. 1834 Ms., Rutgers Univ.). To Anna Hall, the absent towny avowed that she was "as constant as ever to London. I would not take five thousand a year to settle down in the country: I miss the new books, the new faces, the new subjects of conversation . . ." (Blanchard 1: 81).

Landon's fascination with the changing trends of London society stands in sharp distinction to the paradigmatic preference of the major Romantics for contemplating in solitude visions that they presumed timeless. Defending such visions in an 1818 essay, Thomas Peacock laid the groundwork for his attack on the critics of Coleridge's *Christabel* by disparaging the fashionable world for which the critics wrote, where "the books and the dress of the season go out of date together." The very "soul" of this flippant world was the "novelty" Landon could not live without (264). Given that she had perfect confidence in her own "genius" for poetry and often proclaimed it, Landon's open fascination with the fashions represents an important

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turning away from the widespread belief -- encouraged by Wordsworth's residence in the Lake District and Byron's and Shelley's exiles to foreign shores -- that literary geniuses should by their very nature detest the artifices that grew like bacteria in London society. Isaac D'Israeli helped propound this belief to a generation in his work famously annotated by Byron, *The Literary Character*:

> The modes of life of a man of genius, often tinctured by eccentricity and enthusiasm, maintain an eternal conflict with the monotonous and imitative habits of society, as society is carried on in a great metropolis, where men are necessarily alike, in perpetual intercourse, shaping themselves to one another.
>
> The occupations, the amusements, and the ardour of the man of genius, are at discord with the artificial habits of life. (1: 132)

Keats conforms to the stereotype of the literary genius contemptuous of fashions in an 1818 letter, where, after detailing Fanny Brawne's appearance, he admits, "I was forced lately to make use of the term *Minx*" in disapproval of "a penchant she has for acting stylishly," which he describes as "flying out in all directions, calling people such names. . . . I am however tired of such style and shall decline any more of it" (89). Wordsworth likewise states in the 1805 version of the *Prelude* that he grew tired of the "Folly, vice, / Extravagance in gesture, mien, and dress" in every "public Room or private, Park or street" of London, tired of all that "Lies to the ear, and lies to every sense" (7.570-75). London citizens were

> Living amid the same perpetual flow

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Of trivial objects, melted and reduced

To one identity, by differences

That have no law, no meaning, and no end. . . . (7.702-5)

They enslaved themselves to appearances. Wordsworth finally attributes his escape from enslavement to his having used "The Spirit of Nature" and "The Soul of Beauty" to make "Of self-destroying, transitory things / Composure, and ennobling Harmony" (7.736-41).

Yet to a poet bored by nature's composure, the expression of prejudices against London's stylishness and showiness identified the speaker as possessing not poetic genius, nor even superior insight, but rather an all too common mind. In an 1834 essay, "Calendar of London Seasons," Landon asserted that, having never met anyone who planned to live out the remainder of their days in London, she begged to differ with the rest of mankind. Scoffing at people's "rural anticipations," Landon then declared, "I am a cockney, heart and soul"; after all, "the poetical" and "the picturesque . . . are to be found in their perfection in London" (425). Her evidence for London's poetical and picturesque qualities is revealing. Comprised wholly of the material objects Wordsworth pooh-poohed, Landon's testimony centered on the marketplace, where the availability and display of goods entailed a great deal of artifice. For Landon, that artifice transformed the goods into the elemental stuff of which poetry is made:

. . . just look at the shops now . . . what taste in the arrangement of the floating gauzes and the draperied silks! What an eye to colour!

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> A painter might envy the bold and rich contrast between the scarlet cashmere and the emerald-green velvet. But it is in the pastry-cook's that we must look just now for the triumph of art. . . . A little crowd are growing patriotic about yonder window. In the centre is a huge cake iced *couleur de rose*; all the devices are nautical . . . in the centre is a cannon, and against it there is leaning a youth in a blue jacket and black handkerchief -- the beau ideal of our nation's beau ideale -- "a true British sailor." . . . I prefer a fruiterer's in winter to any other time; it most excites the imagination. There are the oranges and Lisbon grapes . . . Spanish chestnuts, which bring to mind . . . the wild tales of muleteers, guitars, and moonlight . . . but, of all, command me to those Eastern treasures -- dates . . . [which bring] delicious remembrance of those "Arabian Nights." . . . (426-27)

For Landon, trivial objects could stir the imagination to create "poetical" scenes, to the extent that the objects derived their sensual appeal from the art involved in their display. An art of arrangement was needed to provoke a sense of wonder at the mystical, magicall qualities of "floating gauzes and draperied silks," themselves artistic coverings. Likewise, daring color combinations using the most luxurious fabrics of the day gave the portrait painter a lesson in conveying "bold and rich" majesty. And more art was required to make oranges available in winter than summer, prompting "tales of muleteers" and moonlight serenades. Landon then could rhapsodize over ubiquitous trivia because, viewing each display with ready reverence,

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she claimed to spy many an *objet d'art*, and as such, elemental to the tales or myths that constituted her idea of the poetical.[1] Eager to appreciate any kind of art on display, Landon viewed such products of the imagination as the creators' attempts to idealize their own vague yearnings through imaging them in the terms of the public marketplace, through identifying their desires with the latest trends and issues. The creators could thereby escape the trap of the egocentric imagination whose yearnings bore little or no relation to what most concerned the public. One might say bakers placed sailors on cakes and poets sang of bravery at sea in their wish to identify themselves with the "noble mission" of the British empire. Far from seeming frivolous, popular tastes spoke to Landon of deeper desires for love, power, or fame, stripped of their baser instincts and begging to be exalted (by her) through association with a cultural inheritance of tales and myths. Leaning against a cannon in a pool of

---

[1] For instance, note how Landon spreads the "evening banquet" in *The Zenana* (1833):

> There the pomegranate's rougher red
> Was cloven, that it might disclose
> A colour stolen from the rose –
> The brown pistachio's glossy shell,
> The citron where faint odours dwell;
> And near the watermelon stands,
> Fresh from the Jumna's shining sands;
> And golden grapes, whose bloom and hue
> Wear morning light and morning dew,
> Or purple with the deepest dye
> That flushes evening's farewell sky.
> And in the slender vases glow –
> Vases that seem like sculptur'd snow –
> The rich sherbets are sparkling bright
> With ruby and with amber light.
> A fragrant mat the ground o'erspread,
> With an old tamarind overhead,
> With drooping bough of darkest green,

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rose/blood-colored icing, the "true British sailor" thus wore for Landon an entirely brave face, without a trace of ignoble lust clouding the blue-jacketed purity of his demeanor.

Landon then wrote from what she had read and seen in a lifetime spent in the dynamic environment of London, an environment in which, despite its ceaseless mutability in pursuit of efficiency and comfort, the historical pasts of Europe and the British colonies were increasingly romanticized to vindicate the present. Much of Landon's success can be attributed to the fact that her tendency to forge links between the material commodities and the mythic past addressed the growing need of the British to see themselves as heroic, able, and willing to lead the world forward on many fronts at once. After all, Waterloo could be celebrated only so long, Wellington receive only so many honors, and George IV feast lavishly only so often, before Londoners in particular wearied of them and sought new victories, new leaders, and new styles. And what was new could best be justified if it was colored by what was legendary. Samuel Carter Hall explained away Landon's not writing about Nature by claiming that the mere fact she lived in London was cause enough for her to devote her attention not to urban affairs but, ironically, to heroic passions:

> Miss Landon has been nearly all her life a resident in London. Her poetry, therefore, dwells more upon human passions, desires, and enjoyments -- the themes and persons that history has rendered sacred -- the glorious chivalries of gone-by ages, and the ruins of nations, --

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Forms for their feast a pleasant screen. (13-14)

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than upon gentler topics, objects, and characters which those who live in the country cherish, venerate, and love. (*The Modern Poets* 178)

Throughout the 1820s and most of the 1830s, popular tastes continued to follow many of the aristocracy's leads, carrying on the Regency's pursuit of exquisiteness in material attractions, then in abundance as never before in the shop windows and drawing rooms of London. Because Landon romanticized these material desires, her exquisiteness offered a peculiar charm -- distinct from the Regency dandy's love of elegant items devoid of heroic connotations (Moers, *The Dandy* 13-21): e.g., Beau Brummell's blue jacket gloried in nothing more than adorning his person. On the other hand, Landon's approach differed widely from that of the anti-dandiacal Carlyle, who in the 1830s and 1840s promoted a strict, even "monastic" notion of heroism, free of the outward trappings that valued men according to their position in society (Sussman 16-72). From a political perspective, Landon's romanticized materialism appealed mainly to that strata of British society which advocated limited reform while maintaining strong allegiances to the monarchy and the class system. Among men, these members of the upper and middle classes included the young M.P.'s, journalists, and artists whom Landon knew well from her evenings out. They included men like Bulwer, Maclise, Disraeli, and Count D'Orsay, who always sought to cut an attractive appearance and who found in chivalry's ideals a means of justifying, even ennobling, a display of fine silk and silver (Girouard 68-103).

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Just as sincere idealism was regularly commingled with hope of financial gain in the promotion of Reform and the Empire, so were they bedfellows in the cultural marketplace, where enthusiasm for romantic adventure sold the arts with tremendous success in the early nineteenth century. In literature, theater, painting, and in a ceaseless variety of commodities, the lore of oriental, chivalric, and gothic legends was being increasingly incorporated with varying amounts of sentiment attached. Exceptionally attuned to fashionable images, Landon found that foreign customs and old tales provided a valid means of her lending to those images the pathos that they, in their superficiality, necessarily lacked. Landon stated in the Preface to *Traits and Trials,* "To connect the external object with the internal emotion is the sweetest privilege of poetry" (iv).[2] By setting her ornaments in periods ranging from the twelfth to the nineteenth centuries and in countries from Persia to Germany to the American forests, usually depending on the source of the plot, Landon sought to entertain her audience's material desires while simultaneously elevating them. At the simplest level, she knew what readers wanted and gave them her version of it.

An "Immolation of a Hindoo Widow" provides a cogent example. In describing an Indian maiden preparing to commit herself to the flames, the poet seeks to excite reader interest by first pointing out the "Chains and bright stones . . . on her

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[2]In one of *Traits and Trials'* short stories, "The Twin Sisters," Landon conveys the burdensome egocentricity of connecting external objects with internal emotions that are unrelated to tales, myths, or customs when she writes that the sisters learned the "bitter lesson how the little world of the human heart gives its own likeness to the vast universe of which it is but an atom" (85). The sisters had discovered that they could not escape their sadness in contemplating the trees and flowers on their father's estate.

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arms and neck," and the "band of gold" around her "slight ankle." Landon evokes not so much a fatally-minded Hindoo as a wealthy young miss reflecting on jewels worn at many a London ball: "What pleasant vanities are linked with them, / Of happy hours, which youth delights to deck / With gold and gem." As the Hindoo maiden surrenders the jewels, or "love-signs," and receives the white veil, her family's eyes fill "with tears unbidden, for the bride — The bride of Death!" (7). Landon's contemporary readers could here have meditated for a moment over every woman's "sacrifice" on the fatal altar of marriage upon surrendering the pleasant vanities of youth, and then focused their sympathies on the Indian woman victimized by the suttee, a custom they would have heard often denounced by zealous members of the middle classes (M. Butler 72). Landon does not take a moral stance on the subject, however. Instead, she suspends a welter of emotions around the suttee and leaves more to admire than to pity in the portrayal of the noble heroine's immolation.

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Chapter Seven:

To Sell What Used to Sell Well

The poets whose works were popular in Landon's youth fostered her predilection for recycling characters and plot details from old stories. In her work and letters, she cites Byron and Scott most often, followed by Wordsworth, Moore, Southey, and Felicia Hemans, all of whom adapted legendary lore for their narrative poems to great acclaim. Their work stands in contradistinction to what Marilyn Butler calls "the modern misconception that the standard Romantic poem is likely to be lyric, and its subject autobiographical" (70). Landon also spares several thoughts for the poetry of Coleridge, Shelley, Burns, Campbell, Hunt, Keats, Cowper, and Rogers, often singling out their long narrative poems for approval. Especially fond of metrical romances, she ranks among her favorites Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), *Marmion* (1808), and *Lady of the Lake* (1810), Southey's *Thalaba* (1801) and *Curse of Kehama* (1810), Byron's Turkish Tales (1813-14), and Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817). In her own long poems, Landon often uses Scott's technique of folding many stories within a main story through periodically halting narrative flow to have characters sing ballads to a lyre. These ballads resemble many of those she published separately, which, along with her lyrics, were preferred by reviewers to her long poems. Yet

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throughout her life Landon cherished drawn-out narrative poetry as "'my first love and last'" and would have written many more epic-length poems if publishers had given her the chance (Blanchard 1: 100).

Her entire corpus was in large part built on the works of her predecessors -- their archetypal characters, settings, and many of their images and plot details. Even Landon's sentimentality, though similar to that of other women poets in its championing of sympathy, seems, on the basis of her comments, to have been directly nurtured by Moore, Byron, and Scott, who themselves had been influenced by poets such as Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson. Though twentieth-century critics have tended to overlook the embarrassingly tearful passages of the better known male poets, all of them left plenty of evidence in their major works of having appreciated eighteenth-century sensibility in general and Della Cruscan poetry in particular (McGann, "'My Brain'" 31). For Landon, the stature of these male writers alone would have acted as a permanent stamp of approval on sentimental verse, justifying that verse's self-conscious attempts to return to the naive pangs of sensibility (*Poetics of Sensibility* 119-26). In Landon's *Romance and Reality*, Lady Mandeville speaks confidently for Landon's generation when she says that Byron "startles us with the depth of our secret thoughts . . . brings to our remembrance all that our own existence has had of poetry or passion – the earnestness of early hope, the bitterness of after-disappointment." Scott, on the other hand, "makes his readers fairly forget their very identity, in the intense interest of the narrative" (2: 118-19).

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Setting aside Madame De Staël's novel *Corinne* for the moment, one could speculate that Landon patterned herself after those male poets she regarded as "masterspirits" largely because Byron's and Scott's works broke all sales records for poetry (Ms. L259r), creating a larger audience of readers than had ever before existed, comprised of all ranks, particularly the middle classes. As an 1817 *Blackwood's* review stated of Scott's poems, "The 'Lay' converted thousands, and 'Marmion' tens of thousands, and the whole *world* read poetry" (emphasis *Blackwood's*; Ross 270). One could speculate further that Landon desperately needed the money, so she catered to the buying power and, hence, the evident tastes of these readers -- despite the fact that there were fewer of them around when she was writing, especially when compared to those who read novels. But there seemed to be far fewer of them around in the 1820s. By 1817, with *Lalla Rookh* and *Don Juan* still to come, the future of poetry already looked bleak, and those works' respective successes did little to halt the decline in sales. Poetry soon returned to what the *Blackwood's* reviewer called "its ancient proverbially unprofitable level" (270). Likewise, though they did become popular in the mid 1820s, Landon's metrical romances never approached the levels of circulation reached by Moore, much less by Scott and Byron.

Indeed, that a profit could be made at all from metrical romances came as a surprise to publishers, highly skeptical of any woman's ability to rework the chivalric and exotic themes of yesterday's star male poets. To prove to publishers that they underestimated the metrical romance's saleability, Landon then had to produce a success more sudden than that of Moore's. Greer (over)dramatizes Landon's plunge

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into fame: "The world that lost its head for Childe Harold lost it again for the Improvisatrice [1824]. . . . No poet had had such a smash hit since Lord Byron 'awoke one morning' in 1812 and found that *Childe Harold* had made him famous" (264, 266). For her part, Landon did not presume to consider herself in Moore's and Byron's league, never having received the same kind of extreme and sustained praise from the public -- a praise she trusted as infallibly above caprice. In her epigraph to the poem "Thomas Moore, Esq.," she writes: "Moore's name is a history in itself. Is there a single reader of poetry, to whom 'Lalla Rookh' and the 'Irish Melodies' are not familiar as household words?" (14). Moore's and Byron's fame demonstrated incontrovertibly their greatness to Landon. In her review of Bulwer's novels, she turns Byron's observation into an article of faith: "Lord Byron makes a very true remark in one of his letters, that the most prolific authors have always been the most popular. . . . We do firmly believe great popularity is never gained without great desert" ("Living" 441-43).[1]

That Landon understood she could promote her work by associating herself with her immediate forbears is insinuated by the several poems she published in homage to Byron and Scott, plus those to Hemans, Wordworth, Burns, and Moore, and a series of essays she wrote on the female characters in Scott's novels. In a letter to

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[1]Such conviction inevitably intensifed the pressure on Landon to win favor and sales each time she appeared in print. "My Drawing Room ScrapBook is just published. I am quite impatient to send it you, " she wrote Mary Anne Lewis in 1833 upon publication of her poem *The Zenana* in *Fisher's*. "I am very anxious about its success -- it is the first long poem that I have published since the Venetian Bracelet -- never tell

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William Jerdan in the mid 1830s, Landon surmised that the subjects of Byron's and Scott's work offered a field of commercial opportunities that ought to be explored. Based on her theory that "those who buy books, and those who buy prints, are two different classes" yet all "people like pretty pictures," Landon proposed a new annual called "The Choice" which would "be more devoted to *belles lettres*" than other annuals: "For example -- there might be portraits of known authors, let that be accompanied by a slight biography -- a subject taken from any popular poet, say Scott or Byron, might be illustrated by a critical essay on that poet" (Letter to William Jerdan. Ms. 63.6.1-0). Furthermore, in 1838, after her first three essays on Scott's female characters had been well received, Landon announced to the publisher Charles Heath that "short tales and poems have had their day," and she proposed that he publish a three-volume work of essays to be named the "Female Portrait Gallery in Modern Literature" (Letter to Charles Heath). Such a work stood a "a fair chance of popularity," she told Bulwer, and Heath seems to have agreed to publish it (Letter to Edward Bulwer. Ms. D/EK C1/99).

Landon trusted that once writers had achieved universal popularity, their names and their subjects would continue to attract customers despite changes in public mood. Her trust was supported by the fact that decades after their works were first published, even decades after they died, dramatists and painters continued to find customers for their various depictions of scenes from the works of, in particular, Byron, Moore, and Scott (Meisel 48, 79, 169). Much of Landon's writing can usefully

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me that an author gets accustomed to appearing before the public, you are more

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be studied as a renewal of the works of her immediate predecessors -- giving special emphasis to her efforts to heighten emotion through making scenes more visible to the mind's eye. Regarding herself as one made doubly sensitive by her gender and poetical nature, Landon hoped with her own work to recreate for readers the intense feelings she experienced while reading the works of her predecessors. With some pride, she describes to Samuel Carter Hall the "sort of pleasure that I derived from reading Scott -- an excitement, a keener sense of existence, a passionate desire of action. Were I to be asked the writer who has exercised the greatest influence in forming my style, I should say -- Walter Scott" (269). To another friend, she explains: "Take the combat between Roderick Dhu and Fitzjames [in *Lady of the Lake*] -- you do not read it, you see it -- you watch the warriors, and hold your breath" (Blanchard 1: 152).

Landon sought to provoke that kind of excitement in her readers by enabling them to smell and touch as well as see what she had envisioned while writing, providing a cornucopia of sensual details to give a sense of tingling immediacy. She aimed to thrill through high-voltage charges of what she considered the "two grand requisites" of poetry: "imagination," which should make a fantastical atmosphere seem present and real; and "passion," or "energy," pulsating through "melancholy" (*Romance and Reality* 2: 118). (By the way, she found Wordsworth lacking on both counts; his "melancholy" was "often tender – but with more of sympathy than energy" (Blanchard 1: 150-51; *Romance and Reality* 2: 118).) Firing series after series of

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nervous every time" (Ms. 64.6.3-3.1575).

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images in hypnotic verse, Landon wanted to overwhelm her audience with pleasures and pains. Greer certainly is aware of the importance of her poetry's visuality:

> Something direct and pictorial in her imagination brings us pell-mell into the Victorian era. Her imaginary tableaux are dense and dramatic, all the space crowded like a Pre-Raphaelite painting with flowers and luxury effects. Her visual imagination forms a continuum with that of the painters . . . Henry Fuseli, Daniel Maclise and . . . Richard Dadd. No other woman of her time had anything like her vigour in imaginings, and few men could equal her headlong kaleidoscopic rush through scene after scene to her almost unfailingly tragic conclusion. (264-65)

How unnecessary it seemed to Landon that, despite the British public's taste for pretty pictures, what she termed the "higher literary ground" lay deserted of visual attractions in the 1820s and 1830s (Letter to Jerdan, Ms. 63.6.1-0). Many writers who thought they inhabited this plateau refused to "sink" to the level of the gift albums and place words at the service of exquisite steel engravings. Even if they succumbed to the money offered by album publishers, these writers would, in their elitism, rarely hide their disdain for the sellers and buyers of gift books. Exquisite verbal pictures likewise fell foul of many members of the British intelligentsia in this period. In *The Spirit of the Age*, Hazlitt complained of the gorgeous descriptions in Moore's poetry:

> He indeed cloys with sweetness; he obscures with splendour. . . . His Muse is never contented with an offering from one sense alone, but

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> brings another rifled charm to match it, and revels in a fairy round of pleasure. The interest is not dramatic, but melodramatic – it is a mixture of painting, poetry, and music, of the natural and preternatural, of obvious sentiment and romantic costume. . . . Mr. Moore has a little mistaken the art of poetry for the *cosmetic art*. He . . . throws a variety of elementary sensations, of vivid impressions together, and calls it a description. (emphasis Hazlitt's; 11: 171)

But for Landon (whose response to Moore was appropriately written to accompany his portrait), "The falling of fountains -- the slight summer rain -- / The voice of the dove were less sweet than [Moore's] strain" ("Thomas Moore" 14). And in Landon's *Romance and Reality*, Lady Mandeville remarks that Moore "fills the atmosphere around with music, 'lapping us in Elysium' (220). Of Southey's work Landon confessed she was transfixed by "the oriental magnificence of his longer poems," their "fantastic ornament" like "fretted gold" (Blanchard 1: 151).

Her immediate male predecessors inspired Landon to paint banquets, gardens, and palaces so elaborately detailed readers could visualize scenes with a clarity that must have nearly approached that of their creator.[2] In these spaces laden with ornament and sentiment Landon's princess is, as Moore's in *Lalla Rookh*, often found

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[2]Concerning Keats's gorgeous descriptions in poems like *Eve of St. Agnes*, Landon's style appears to have been well formed before she read Keats's poetry, nor when she had read some of his poems was she impressed nearly as much as she had been by the works of Moore and Southey.

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reclining. The scene-setting that precedes the introduction of *The Troubadour*'s fair lady is typical of Landon's style:

> And there the castle garden lay
> With tints in beautiful array:
> Its dark green walks, its fountains falling,
> Its tame birds to each other calling;
> The peacock with its orient rings,
> The silver pheasant's gleaming wings;
> And on the breeze rich odours sent
> Sweet messages, as if they meant
> To rouse each sleeping sense to all
> The loveliness of evening's fall.--
> . . . . . .
> Slight columns were around the hall
> With wreathed and fluted pedestal
> Of green Italian marble made,
> In likeness of the palm-trees' shade;
> And o'er the ceiling starry showers
> Mingled with many-colour'd flowers,
> With crimson roses o'er her weeping,
> There lay that royal maiden sleeping –
> DANAE, she whom gold could move –

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How could it move her heart to love? (6-8)

And, catching the scent of those breezes, how could readers of *The Troubadour* not be ready for Landon to tell them her tale? The reviewers might cry: "Her poetry is by far the least original of the day. . . . How little is there that she can claim for her own? . . . Most of her ideas may be seen elsewhere" (Rev. of *The Golden Violet* 243-44). But Landon never claimed to be original, only to have a deep understanding of the qualities in her predecessors' work that had sold their poems. Her reverence for the ideals she saw behind the tinsel and the sentiment walked hand in hand with her faith that popularity declares literary value. If anything, Landon's idealism surpassed her predecessors, convincing her that she had a poetic mission and that she could make her derivative poetry sell well enough, despite the trends.

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Chapter Eight:

Melodramatic L. E. L.

Landon also exempted herself from the better known form of elitism that frowned upon the spectacularity of London theater in the early nineteenth century. Except when an opera or ballet was being performed, or unless stars like Kean or Macready were acting in substantial plays, like those of Shakespeare, most intellectuals and aristocrats stayed away from the theaters. They left "the drama almost entirely to the new class of theatre-goers, drawn from the people" (Child 256). Those literary types who stayed away from the melodramas and pageants would have agreed with the playwright Richard Cumberland that, in their lifetimes at least, the "splendour of the scenes and the ingenuity of the machinist and the rich display of dresses aided by the captivating clamours of music" had "superseded the labours of the poet." The texts of many plays, in fact, could hardly be heard from the back of the enlarged patent theaters, and then only with the aid of hyperbolic delivery and extravagant gestures (Lansdown 13). Such devices may have delighted the philistines, but they failed to impress most of those considered social and cultural leaders, who lost no opportunity to denounce the artificial excesses of the London stage.

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Landon certainly did not inherit her enthusiasm for popular theater from opinions expressed by the authors she revered. Though the Romantic poets evidently attended enough popular theater to incorporate its techniques into their closet dramas, in a literary climate hostile to the spectacular such debts went unacknowledged (Cox 40-50). As one of this theater's greatest debtors, Byron, who served on the Drury Lane sub-committee, so reacted against melodrama's tumult of feelings and events that he excluded love from all but one of his dramas, *Sardanapalus*, and bragged of *Marino Faliero* that it had "nothing *melo*dramatic -- no surprises, no starts, nor trap-doors,[1] nor opportunites 'for tossing their head and kicking their heels' -- and no love -- the grand ingredient of a modern play" (emphasis Byron's; Lansdown 32-55, 229). Wordsworth admitted in the 1805 *Prelude* that when younger he had delighted at "Singers, Rope-dancers, Giants and Dwarfs, / Clowns, Conjurors, Posture-masters, Harlequins" in London theaters, but had come to realize that as long as he was thus transfixed his poetic powers had remained dormant (7. 294-95, 479-80, 499-507). Better to stay away from the theater, Wordsworth seems to suggest, than to fail to cultivate the imagination. Other writers of the period feared that the spectacular stage threatened to reduce the mind's splendid visions to absurdities or mundanities.

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[1] In her anonymous short story, "The Royal Marriage; or, Political Expediency," first published in *The Keepsake for 1838*, Landon found the trap door an efficient way to rid her short story of Count Koningsmarke, who loved and was loved by the virtuous Sophie, wife of the Elector of Hanover. Sophie bid him farewell, then saw "the ground open beneath Koningsmarke's feet. A trap door, purposely left unfastened, had yielded to his weight; he disappeared, and the arches of the gothic gallery reverberated to one last and fearful cry of human agony" (13). Frank Sypher revealed Landon's

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Finding so many examples of this reaction against popular drama, Edward Burns has described it as the "phenomenon" of "Romantic anti-theatricalism . . . in British culture" (52-53).

But it should not be ignored that "the Romantic poets' disdain for the stage" bears much resemblance to that of the fashionable upper classes for the more excitable portions of the theater-going public. Aspiring writers had reason enough to resent the power of the rowdiest audience members to determine the fate of any play, the reputation of any author (Lansdown 38). Drury Lane, Covent Garden, Haymarket, the Olympic, and the Adelphi, all of which Landon frequented regularly, were large, "mixed-class venues" that best appealed to "West End pleasure-seekers": a group which might have included the odd M.P. in the box or major writer in the pit, but for the most part was comprised of "urban middle-class, merchants, apprentices, clerks . . . and the ubiquitous dandies, a diverse and volatile community . . ." (Bratton 40; Gaull 83). Nicoll reminds us that this new class of theater-goer was reputed to be "often licentious and debased," and cites Walter Scott's understanding that "prostitutes and their admirers usually" made up the majority of the audience (8-10). Scott would not write for them (Gaull 83). Nor would Charles Lamb after his *Mr. H.* was sacrificed at Drury Lane to their "relish for blood." Lamb described the outcry against his play as "a sort of frantic yell, like a congregation of mad geese with roaring sometimes like bears, mows and mops like apes, sometimes snakes that hiss'd me into madness." He

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authorship of "The Royal Marriage" in an appendix to his recent edition, *Castruccio Castrucani* (130).

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chose to wait twenty-two years before letting one of his plays be published (201; xiv-vi).

In the late 1830s Landon expended much effort on her one play, the tragedy, *Castruccio Castrucani*, but unfortunately it was never produced. One cannot help but suspect that she envied a little her friends Bulwer, Anna Hall, and James Robinson Planché, and her acquaintance Mary Russell Mitford, all of whom succeeded in having their plays staged and widely praised. Landon would have observed the lewdness and rowdiness of the pit on her many visits to the theater, but there is no record of her complaining about the antics of her countrymen, and she seems not to have minded them in the least. Perhaps her seat in the gallery or the occasional box placed her at a comfortable distance from the pit's commotion. I think Landon, however, was more conscious of the distance that separated her from her social betters, not thinking herself superior to the majority of theater-going public. She wrote the wife of an M.P., Mrs. Wyndham Lewis, who had gone to her country house at the 1833 season's end: "Of course I need not tell you that London is quite empty, which being put into actual English means, that the churches are thronged, and the theatres crowded . . . but everybody meets everybody and says 'Did you ever know town so deserted'? [sic] The truth is a little gentility goes a great way" (Ms. 64.6.3-3.1575.).

Some remarks in the *Oxberry Theatrical Inquisitor* in 1828, on the "noisy, drunken set of auditors, who are impatient throughout the play from an anticipation of the 'glorious pageanty' that a specious program-matical play-bill has prepared them for" (Nicoll 10), highlight the distinctiveness of Landon's enthusiasm for popular

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theater in the 1820s and 1830s. She, in contrast, begins an 1834 article for *New Monthly Magazine* by exulting over:

> . . . the shape of large black and red letters, gigantic in themselves, and gigantic in their promises -- I mean play-bills. I am passionately fond of the theatre; and in spite of the present adoption of Jeremiah's lamentations on the "decline of the drama," there are a great multitude, to use an established phrase, "who will enter into my feelings." I am afraid that this said drama, like every thing else in the present time, must lay aside something of its former kingly pomp. The crown and the sceptre in real life are consigned to the Tower, and I fear in the theatre they must be consigned to the treasury, kept by the sword with which Kean acted Richard III., "glorious memorials of the royal past." . . . There will always be passion, crime, and sorrow enough in the human heart for tragic materials. But I was going to speak of the pantomimes -- those visions of fairy-land -- those legacies left us by the genii of old. Talk of travelling, who needs to travel. . . . I have seen the Falls of Niagara -- I have looked on the Pyramids of Egypt -- I am acquainted with old London bridge. Take your children to the play by all means. . . . ("Calendar" 427-28)[2]

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[2]Landon is probably having a bit of fun here, intending to startle some of the *New Monthly*'s readers whom editor S. C. Hall describes as "chiefly . . . clergymen and steady 'old-notional' country gentlemen" (*Retrospect* 1: 124).

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It is not my purpose here to cite passages from Landon's work showing that she used a wide range of techniques similar to those used in the pantomimes, melodramas, and operas she saw in the West End. In fact, these techniques were intrinsic to most of her corpus. Suffice it to say that, in her wish to overwhelm the heart by overwhelming the senses with artificial stimulants, Landon seems to have identified her writing with the multifarious tasks involved in staging a play -- not just the writing, but the acting, costuming, set design, even playing the music, whose mesmerizing rhythms she wanted her verses to imitate. In his book on the unique dialogue that existed between theater, painting, and literature in the nineteenth century and flourished from the 1820s to the 1860s, Martin Meisel notes that the "shift in dramaturgy from a rhetorical to a situational and pictorial mode" was part of a larger movement in all three arts that sought, paradoxically, "the Realization of the Ideal" (3-13). As with Landon's poetry, so with the grand spectacles on the London stage: the derivativeness of much of their content was intended as part of their creators' mission, which was to provoke the strongest possible emotions from the audience by bringing to life idealized worlds with which the audience was already somewhat familiar. Artists like Landon and the playwright Planché sought to "realize" these idealized spaces for the audience through re-visioning them in a variety of sensational ways. Fantastic scenery, together with the plots' outrageous coincidences, helped elicit excessive responses: "Melodrama tends toward total theatre, its signs projected, sequentially or simultaneously on several planes. . . . Scenery, like all other elements in the genre, had to be expressive" (Brooks 46). Dramatists could not yet be said to

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have realized their ideals when the scenery was painted, the actresses dressed, even the lines delivered on stage. Only when the various "sensations" were felt throughout the dark auditorium could their conceptions be fulfilled (35). The most successful plays left audiences, quite literally, swooning in the aisles (Cox 43).

The inherent populism of this art flew in the face of those Romantics like Byron who did not want their plays staged, or, more broadly, those who deemed the products of their imagination too sublime to be captured by a series of extravagant images and postures. For instead of individual geniuses keeping a hold over their visions by expressing ideals with *relatively* little emphasis on their detailed visuality, many producers of spectacular art forms sought to realize the ideals as communal properties whose emotional impact could be shared by all present, regardless of class, gender, or level of education. Landon's poem to the actor, "John Kemble," strikes universal notes as it applauds the actor's skill "To colour the fine paintings of the mind, / And bid them move and breathe," which the poet then equates with the ability "to sway at will / All feelings in our nature . . . to work the springs of sympathy, the mines of thought, / And all the deep emotions of the heart" (34). The stage brings the ideal to life for all to see and thereby feel. Speaking for herself, Landon admits that she was too young to have seen Kemble perform, "yet still the stage / Is fancy's world of poetry to me." The poet in closing sounds divisive, but not toward those who generally delighted in contemporary theatre:

> I know not how it acts on other minds,
>
> But this I know, my most enchanted world

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Is hidden when the curtain falls, and leaves

Remembrance only of its gorgeous dreams

And beautiful creations. (34)

While members of the intelligentsia judged the stage's demotic productions inferior to their own mental landscapes, the famous L. E. L. rates the stage as at least equal, and possibly superior, to the realms of her imagination.

To both Landon and the dramatists of the period, a realizable "enchanted world" needed its morality painted in absolute black and white. For its historical romances and domestic dramas, the stage called for archetypal characters comparable to Landon's own, characters personifying different moral sentiments, each standing for the "beau-ideal" of different ethical and emotional states: the grieving mother, the faithful wife, the courageous soldier, the inspired artist, and, of course, the loving, suffering virgin whose flowing hair and robes signified her being overcome by sexual passion. Every passion was to have its concomitant "effect" on viewers. For the pleasurable pity she induced, the passive heroine usually could hold center stage against all comers, including male villains and rescuers (Meisel 5-12; Todd 35). The virgin could be princess or milkmaid. On balance, far more of the stock characters in melodramas came from the lower classes than in Landon's poetry, which reached an audience that, on balance, ranked higher on the social scale than that of West End plays. Essential to highlighting the virtues of stock characters was the shadowy presence of evil. The stage met this need often in the shape of villains from the upper classes, like the evicting landlord, selfish dandy, and proud coquette. Landon used

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these villains at times, but not to contrast them with a goodness that seemed inherent to the poor (Brooks 47).

She typically designated evil as an absence of any feeling whatsoever, an infection of hard-heartedness and pride. Her bad men rarely raped or kidnapped, as was so common in the literature of sensibility and later in melodrama. Worse in Landon's book than the deflowering that often preceded it, the crime most committed was neglect, which amounted to abandonment -- crime enough to kill a delicate young woman, and yet ordinary enough to indict a host of London's gay bachelors. Regardless of whether Landon's work was set in present-day England or not, such insensitivity infected her standard group of sophisticates gathered in glittering rooms, leaving hardly anyone, including a bitter female speaker, free of its effects. If, instead of becoming "hardened," Landon's heroine reacted to the inevitable rejection by going mad or dying from a broken heart, that madness or death proved the strength of her love. In most cases, her passion was not to be ironized nor her actions under passion's influence blamed. After all, such a heroine might have been the only character in the poem who could feel, period.

Encouraged by melodrama, Landon created women who burned and throbbed as never before in English literature, partly as a commentary on the general repression of polite London society. Her work attacked the codes of behavior propounded by the aristocracy and copied by the middle classes, codes that kept changing to keep the rising interlopers at bay. Crucially, Landon's appreciation for the theater revolved around the idea that, in contrast to the arenas of social intercourse, the theater

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represented a site where passionate feelings could be expressed by actors and audience members alike. To Mary Anne Lewis, Landon thus explained her response to Anna Hall's *Grace Huntley* at the Adelphi Theatre: "You know that I always take the opportunity crying out my cries, at the play, getting thereby rid of whatever stock of tears I may have on hand, being ashamed to cry at other times -- [you] will not be surprised that I was under the influence of the Pleiades, during one or two very touching scenes" (Ms. 64.6.3-3.1575). The playwright Planché records that Landon once confided to him:

> I would give all the reputation I have gained, or am ever likely to gain, by writing books, for one great triumph on the stage. The praise of critics or friends may be more or less sincere; but the spontaneous thunder of applause of a *mixed multitude* of utter strangers, uninfluenced by any feelings *but those excited at the moment*, is an acknowledgement of gratification surpassing, in my opinion, any other description of approbation. (emphasis mine; 71)

Landon obviously abided by that early nineteenth-century chestnut that spontaneous feeling equaled sincerity which equaled Truth, but the questions remain concerning why she viewed the popular theater as a rare site where audiences and actors could freely display emotion, and what significance that emotional display held for them.

In *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks makes the important point that the identification of "ethical imperatives" with "emotional states" defined the advent of melodrama in France after the Revolution (47). Long the hostage of the educated

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classes, the language of social intercourse could no longer be trusted on stage, as aristocracy and their codes had lost their sacred status (66). French audiences were taught by dramatists like Pixérécourt to look for basic truths in the portrayal of feelings excessively beyond those they experienced on a daily basis, much less expressed.[3] These excesses served as signposts to a deeper "moral occult," where lost "spiritual values" concerning one's identity and relationships lay concealed from view (5-12, 54). Brooks notes that readers today are at once attracted and repulsed by the excesses of early nineteenth-century French and British melodramas, which, in effect, held out to their original audiences the possibility of living in a world where they would be "soliticited to say everything, where manners, the fear of self-betrayal, and accommodations to the Other no longer [would] exert a controlling force" (42). Those like Landon who flocked to the London stages felt no such ambivalence. They were attracted unequivocally to the abundance of passion and to the freedom from authoritarian and social restraints for which this passion cried out. Early nineteenth-century melodramas further held out to their audiences the potential that with such freedom truth could be absolutely distinguished from falsehood, without regard for the issues of rank and wealth which clouded their daily existence.[4]

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[3]These feelings were analogous to those French citizens first experienced when, to cite Charles Nodier, they "had inhaled the scent of powder and blood" of the Revolution (Cox 47).

[4]See Samuel Shepherd's "Pauses of Mutual Agitation" for a provocative comparison between the attempts by characters in melodramas to arrive at "recognised gender or family identity" and the audience's wish "to occupy a proper place in society," which he relates to riots over suffrage and taxation in the Regency (36).

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The mingling of passion and moral absolutism produced within the theater an environment in which highly artificial poses, gestures, and general "stage business that would strike us as utterly hyperbolic were considered the height of the 'natural'" (211). Melodrama whetted a popular appetite for monologues filled with "points," for striking "attitudes," and for series of "effects" and "sensations" -- all of which soon were interspersed throughout every kind of stage production, including Shakespearian drama at Drury Lane. No star performer escaped melodrama's demand for "energy" punctuated by the striking of graphic points (Kelly 193). Melodramatic characteristics were also adopted by those writers and painters who, like Landon, chose to soak up the new theatricalism. For example, her belief that poetry demanded energy must be seen in light of the popular stage -- as should her contemporaries' oft-repeated comment that in her writing and social life Landon had a "passion for effect" (Blanchard 1: 279). The chaotic, unfinished nature of much of Landon's poetry can likewise be traced to the stage's influence as well as to Byron, who is usually assumed to be the source of Landon's theatricalism. Byron once remarked, "Like paintings, poems may be too highly finished. The great art is effect, no matter how produced," thus implying the extent to which he was influenced by the theater's invasion of other arts, despite his chagrin over the demand for spectacle in the theater (P. Martin 57).

Moreover, Landon's relation to her heroines bears as much resemblance to that of stage performers to their characters as it does to Byron's projection of himself in his heroes. The widespread and, it now appears, semiaccurate assumption that Landon spoke for herself in her works surely originated from Byron's autobiographical

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tendencies and not from what people knew of Landon, who unlike Byron could not in person have seemed more different from the characters she drew. Many writers who published immediately after the noble lord met with this assumption from the public. As Landon stated in 1831, "These days . . . every author is identified with his hero" ("Living" 440). Not every author, though, wanted to give themselves over to the reigning passion of their characters, a necessary object of actors and actresses if they wanted to achieve what was considered the best performance -- if possible, losing consciousness of themselves as separate individuals. Praised for her "great energy" a decade and a half after Kean, Fanny Kemble rose suddenly to stardom in 1829 on the back of responses like that of T. Noon Talfourd upon seeing her in *Romeo and Juliet* (Cruse 268-69, 273): ". . . every spectator was electrified by the influence of new-tried genius . . . the illusion that she was Shakespeare's Juliet came so speedily upon us, as to suspend the power of criticism . . . her eyes are full of gifted soul. . . ." Kemble described the progress of her first performance thus: ". . . I began to forget myself; in . . . the balcony scene, I had done so, and for aught I knew, I was Juliet; the passion I was uttering sending hot blushes over my neck and shoulders, while the poetry sounded like music as I spoke it" (Furnas 51). The detail of the spreading hot blushes could be taken from many an L. E. L. poem; and whether or not Landon reddened while writing, she seems to have thrown herself as entirely into her own performances. She wrote Samuel Carter Hall: "Poetry always carries me out of myself. I forget everything in the world but the subject which has interested my imagination. . . . It is always succeeded by extreme depression of spirits, and an overpowering sense of

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bodily fatigue" (*Book of Memories* 269-70). The writing of love poems could certainly carry Landon away from her social self, letting her briefly lose consciousness of all but the more acceptable emotions involved in her secret affair(s) as she tried yet again to portray a female character's devotion. From her early twenties to mid thirties, Landon would then escape to worlds she staged where, like an actress, she identified with very young women absorbed by their new and often illicit love, not like hers shadowed by adultery's treachery and the burden of children.

Landon also viewed her readership much as Fanny Kemble viewed her spectators. In common with melodramatic performers, they both sought a "collective intimacy" with the mixed multitude that sprung from its uncritical pathos (Furnas 64). For Kemble and Landon had been long accustomed to the idea that when the performers used exaggerated behaviors to reveal their characters' essential selves, the audience felt it had received a precious confidence, demonstrating their intimacy with the performer as well as the character (Brooks 47). In a review signed by L. E. L., she wrote: "I should almost define poetry to be the necessity of feeling strongly in the first instance, and the as strong necessity of confiding in the second. It is curious to observe the intimate relation that subsists between the poet and the public." Generalizing on "the poetical temperament," Landon argued that the "irritability" and "proneness to exaggeration" that increased poets' alienation from friends and family were exactly those qualities that caused them to create fantasy worlds where any sense of personal injury or desire could be indulged through the voice of a leading character ("On the Character" 425). Thus, the "true" identity of the character that was revealed

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to the audience embodied a certain aspect of the poet's/performer's emotional life pushed to its extreme, allowed to run free from rational as well as social restraints. Theater and reading audiences acceded to these fantasies without hesitation, flattered that they alone were privy to the wealth of feeling the performer possessed.

More often than not, Landon eschewed the exclamatory speeches of melodrama. Instead she was encouraged by the melodramatic tableau to display passions intensified by the absence of speech. Indeed, in no way does Landon's work more resemble period melodrama than in its use of highly stylized tableaux.[5] At suspenseful moments throughout a play, such tableaux were created through halting all action and speeches and leaving the three or more characters frozen so that the audience could pause to absorb the full emotional impact of a scene. When all tongues on stage were silent and all bodies still, audiences could better reflect upon the feelings at play in the network of character relationships, each character embodying one point of an emotional and moral compass (Brooks 62-4).[6] These moments were supposed to communicate immediately to the audience from the realm of hidden truths. A testimony to their success lies in the fact that eventually all major London playhouses

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[5] The theories behind the theater's use of tableaux were formulated and advocated by Diderot, when inspired by Samuel Richardson's novels of sensibility (Brooks 65-66; Todd 34-35).

[6] Beginning with J. R. Planché's *The Brigand* (1829) these staged moments increasingly imitated well-known paintings (Meisel 111). Such "pictorial realizations" in the 1830s theater bore similarities to Landon's many poems written in the 1820s to "illustrate" paintings on public exhibition. Yet unlike the art of realization, that of illustration allowed Landon as poet to interpret the original paintings to her "independent" satisfaction (36-37).

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were forced to adopt the use of tableaux in acknowledgment of their power to move mixed-class audiences profoundly, the uneducated and educated alike.[7]

Through her lengthy verse paintings, Landon's readers were similarly enabled to visualize scenes for the emotive details contained therein, but she usually focused on single characters rather than groups, allowing for close-ups of the tears and blushes of a figure in isolation. Relatively few of the thousand-plus poems Landon wrote do not contain one or two of those wonderfully still moments -- where the heroine says nothing while readers learn from the description of her blue-veined skin, large dark eyes, and "midnight" hair, as well as from her clothes, gestures, and posture, about the agonized feelings which the other characters often fail to perceive. I think Landon understood her pictorial compositions to be theatrical in a precise sense. When faced with the task of producing a long poem for the future Queen's eighteenth birthday, Landon wrote a letter to Croker making an appeal to the ghost of an actor and playwright, as well as that of a poet laureate: "Mr. Fisher is going to bring out a portrait of the Princess Victoria -- and I am to write the memoir -- and a 'birthday ode.' Shades of Cibber and Pye assist me . . . I propose giving as it were a succession of historical tableaux . . . " (14 April 1837 Ms.). By creating rich tableaux to the measure of hypnotic verse, Landon could convey passions whose power approached

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[7]Interested in the political aspects of tableaux, Shepherd calls them "pauses of mutual agitation," efforts to fix identity which, in the agitation that surrounds their suspense, expressed audience members' discontent with a social structure that limited or prevented individual fulfillment (30, 34). The agitation reminded viewers that the revelations they witnessed were temporary. Every tableau had to collapse, after all, its true visions remaining a distant memory.

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that displayed on the melodramatic stage. In both cases, a character's speechlessness served to enhance that sense of profound pathos by leaving the impression that the depth of feeling could never be entirely fathomed.

It is worth stopping for a moment to reflect that, through the logic of melodrama, the seemingly unanswerable questions that have surrounded Landon's life and work concerning artifice and authenticity can be seen to be misguided. For these questions suppose that a more genuine Landon existed beneath the many performance veils. They posit, in the words of Glennis Stephenson, "Landon herself, the woman behind the melodramatic floor show" (*Letitia Landon* 103). They assume Landon must have spoken in a voice that would strike modern readers as more natural because less mournful, less brilliant, or just less excessive. Throwing as much of herself as she could into every performance, Landon considered a less demonstrative personality not to be worth the attention of anyone who wanted to be entertained, and few did not. As far as authenticity was concerned, Landon adhered to the norms of melodrama and the literature that sprung from it, norms rooted in the revolutionary principle that essential truths relating to identity or relationships could be expressed only through what we would consider artificial means. This artifice of excess underlined the incapacity of social parlance to address the deepest needs and desires of human existence. For Landon, then, her "truest" self lay on the poetic page, or in a few passionately earnest passages of her letters. That voice spoke her strongest feelings, regardless of whether those feelings were related to fictional situations, circumstances in her or others' lives, or a mixture of both.

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When modern readers then feel embarrassed at the hypertrophic passages in melodramas and Landon's poems, they must remember that this exaggeration was intended to counteract the repressiveness of contemporary codes of behavior. Just as one set of artifices served as antidotes to another in Landon's work and her life, so they did in the whole of British culture, with high society's wit ever puncturing bourgeois earnestness, and with the excesses of melodrama and, to a lesser degree, those of popular literature, glorifying the passions of those who for reasons of class or taste felt alienated from the doings of the elite. The excess therefore makes most sense when contrasted with the restrained tenor of high society. And through portraying their mutual opposition time and again, Landon's work makes sense of the excess more clearly and dramatically than any writer of the early nineteenth century. She seems to have been compulsively motivated to portray this opposition because, in her relish to dazzle in the drawing room as well as in print, she continually needed to draw on one or the other set of affectations to express herself in a manner at once extreme yet acceptable. Since her most treasured poetic self had no voice in the social arena, whenever Landon entered it she may have experienced twinges of guilt. She knew that, partly to dampen suspicion of her involvement in any kind of love affair, she would soon betray her poetic ideals by switching sides in the conflict of affectations that divided England's better off.

In her poetry Landon might label the opposing behaviors simply the false and the true. In her prose, she would call them reality and romance, terms of opposition in wide use at the time. By the 1830s, however, Landon was increasingly complicating

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matters by contrasting dreamy passions not just with sarcasm but, in addition, with a restrained sentimentality. This latter mode looked forward to the high Victorian period in its placement of personal feeling within a frame of rational expectations and concern for the welfare of others. It was elucidated best in the third volume of *Romance and Reality*, where it seemed almost to grow out of a weariness with the opposition, in the previous two, of reveries versus wit. Commenting on this last part of the novel, in which the uselessness and the fantasies of one young woman are compared to the industry and the selflessness of another, Mary Shelley proffered a more exact title: "L. E. L.'s 3d vol. is very good indeed. It is Romance & Sentiment; which is that in which she excels -- *Reality* she has too much fancy & fine feeling for . . ." (emphasis Shelley's; Bennett 151). But Landon's adoption of a more sober, often bitter tone does not validate Angela Leighton's conclusion that she belatedly "repudiated the high style of exotic melancholia" (57).[8] In truth, Landon relinquished nothing. Throughout the second half of her career, she would moderate from one form of lyricism to another and then into sarcasm, depending usually on the genre and the audience, yet without ever becoming wholly predictable.

It seems to me that the corpus of Landon's work functioned as a bridge between the literature of sensibility and that of sentimentality. As a figure in literary

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[8]Neither did Landon substitute for that melancholia the "honesty" of a "new, desolating sense of reality" (Leighton 70). When in this mode, Landon's bitterness exceeded any kind of realistic bounds. She would denounce as false all people and things of the busy world, rejecting all social relations whatsoever. Her desolation was too complete to be considered real or honest. Rather it showed the dishonesty of intransigent pessimism.

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history, Landon appears to have walked back and forth across that bridge, not sure whether she wanted to effuse longings and sorrows or whether she wanted to preach bitterly against the selfish search for pleasure and happiness, thereby aligning herself -- usually by implication only -- with the rising emphasis on domestic duty, public service, and charity. Melodrama likewise lay between these two forms of emotion-laden literature, the moral valence of its emotions probably helping to determine the very gradual change in popular culture from a cult of sensibility to a more self-conscious one of sentimentality. Landon's sentimental love never wavered from its chosen object, secreting itself from the unappreciative only to suffer a grand martyrdom for its devotion. Yet, along with the playwrights, Landon remained distanced from the more pious writers by her attention to material stimuli and her emphasis on overwhelming physical desire, both of which originated in the literature of sensibility. To that literature's relatively subdued insignia of tear-filled eyes and blushing cheeks, Landon added the excessive costumes, scenery, and plot devices necessary for producing theatrical effects. It is doubtful that she produced all the effects for which she strove. Her catastrophic events at times must have seemed unwarranted because insufficiently attached to the preceding plot of her narratives. But then as much could be said of many writers of melodramas, and the mixed multitude appreciated their striving after effects and liked to be surprised.

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Chapter Nine:

Dangerous Femininities

As a young woman writing much about younger women, Landon understood that she should treat her heroines' passions as ineluctable fates whose consequences they could not foresee: an ignorance founded on sensibility's faith that its female victims could not think unchaste thoughts (Todd 8). When Landon's women committed sin, they felt powerless to avoid it without violating both their intense loyalty to their beloved and their sense of their own identity. Their passions were too strong and their faculties of restraint too weak for them to do otherwise. Hence they were regarded with sympathy devoid of condemnation. Yet the passions of these women very often included their being erotically obsessed with the pale brows and dark curls of the male beloved, an "idolatry" openly in conflict with their religious faith. As Stephenson points out, "Desire is, quite radically, located within the woman's body at the same time as, quite conventionally, that same body is established as what is to be desired . . ." ("Letitia Landon" 12). Landon's young women, moreover, descended from those heroines of the literature of sensibility famed for displaying their essential selves in their physical features, whether they wanted to or not -- the weakest, most sensitive members of the weaker, more sensitive sex (Todd 79). Feminist critics who have faulted Landon for having portrayed her heroines as

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beautiful, hollow sex objects have simply not shown enough regard for the literary and theatrical traditions that sought to reveal the essence of an identity in physical features.

Along with most of her generation, Landon accepted the notion that the sexes were divided by fundamental differences in disposition, and, consequently, the need for the doctrine of separate spheres. From the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth, that doctrine was being manipulated by middle-class women writers to the advantage of themselves and their class. Along with the doctrine, Landon inherited this manipulation.[1] Principally, Landon exploited the doctrine's endowment of women with the greater emotional life, its advocating that loving relationships were essential to women's happiness, and, hence, infinitely more important than social success or public fame (though happiness in love would remain for L. E.L. an instant soon gone forever). She thus could defend her work's preoccupation with love: "For a woman, whose influence and whose sphere must be in the affections, what subject can be more fitting than one which it is her peculiar province to refine, spiritualise, and exalt?" (*The Venetian Bracelet* vi).

For Landon, widely accepted differences between the sexes established a relatively "safe" framework within which, she believed, there was more room for women writers to maneuver than is usually acknowledged today. Landon capitalized on readers' eagerness to observe the emotional possibilities that her beau ideals of

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[1]Women writers of domestic fiction like Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, and Fanny Burney, all of whom Landon read, helped to redefine identity on the basis of gender rather than social class. In the process, as Nancy Armstrong points out, they helped to acquire for the domestic woman dominance over "all those objects and practices we associate with the private life. To her went authority over the household, leisure time,

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femininity possessed. She explored the archetypes for the wealth of feeling they yielded -- not, as has been suggested, to prescribe standards for how women ought to think and feel (though she used existing standards for how women should appear in public). We must sufficiently appreciate the significance of the fact, obvious though it may seem, that in the charged atmosphere of an early nineteenth-century drama or opera, women who played archetypal characters were expected to exhibit the flaming passions that real women, and thus realistic women characters, would have been forced to stifle, to snuff out. The only time members of the upper and middle classes could, with decency, contemplate the disturbing of the mild feminine surface was when they observed a female performer vent a storm of feelings on stage. Her freedom of expression was of course limited, excluding (at least superficially) matters commercial and political. Yet through embodying a female archetype, an actress or prima donna could cry, shriek, rage, murder, and die to her heart's content, exceeding even the demands of her script if she felt so inclined.

On the whole, poets were not encouraged by the literary establishment to test the boundaries of passionate female expression, and certainly did not do so to the degree that melodramatists and opera composers did in the early nineteenth century. Near those boundaries, as everyone knew, lay the danger of Woman's fall from her pedestal down into a ruinous immorality, and though the theater might be willing to flirt with such dangers while the taint of immorality still clung to many of its female performers, publishers were reluctant to take such risks. But then many successful

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courtship procedures, and kinship relations, and under her jurisdiction the most basic qualities of human identity were supposed to develop" (3).

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women poets did not try to challenge their caution. In the four decades previous to the 1820s, British women writers like Hannah More, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Helen Maria Williams, Amelia Opie, Mary Tighe, Charlotte Smith, and Mary Robinson had proven themselves almost incapable of writing poetry that would offend middle-class morality (though some of their prose writings and private activities cast scandalous shades). These writers were surely aware that in some conservative quarters a woman's exposing her feelings in print still incurred disapproval similar to that levelled at women who exhibited themselves on a public stage. P. G. Patmore recounted a visit to Charles Lamb in 1826: "We spoke of L. E. L., and Lamb said -- 'If she belonged to me, I would lock her up and feed her on bread and water till she left off writing poetry. A female poet, or female author of any kind, ranks below an actress I think'" (84).

With such stern opinions continuing to float about, no wonder most women poets steered clear of the extreme passions displayed by actresses playing female archetypes. In his 1838 anthology, *The Modern Poets and Artists of Great Britain*, editor Samuel Carter Hall respected the shared preference of Tighe, Hemans, and Mary Howitt for a softer style, perceiving it as the product of their sex and upbringing. Hemans' poetry, for instance, he praised as "essentially feminine. A tone of gentle, unforced, and persuasive GOODNESS pervades it: it displays no fiery passion, and resorts to no vehement appeal . . ." (134). On the other hand, a woman who wrote for the tragic stage was not to be so excused. Hall faulted the playwright Joanna Baillie for not portraying the anguished passions normally expected of tragedies -- those "bleeding wounds and mangled fibres of the heart" guaranteed to produce "natural and striking effect" -- in what, with unintended irony, she titled her *Plays on the Passions*

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(1798-1812). Yet Hall added that, given her gender, Baillie's fault was understandable:

> 'Fear and niceness, the handmaids of all women, or, rather, woman its pretty self,' may be said to ruin the tragic Poet. . . . Women, in their writings, are beset with doubts . . . and dare not take a decisive step, any more than in real life. Neither are women taught to give way to, or express, their passions, but to do all they can to suppress and conceal them. A tragic author must speak out; -- a woman is sworn to secresy and silence. . . . Nay, farther, women are generally taught . . . not to witness the outward signs of them [passions], or sympathise with their inward workings in others. They turn from the subject with shrinking sensitiveness, and consider whatever shocks their delicacy as a crime. This reserve and caution is an excellent discipline of manners and virtue, but a bad school for imagination and passion. (268)[2]

Hall could generalize with some authority, having helped his wife Anna become a successful novelist and having worked and socialized with many women writers over

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[2]Marlon Ross cites William Hazlitt's opinion of Baillie in *Lectures on the English Poets*: "She treats her grown men and women as little girls treat their dolls -- makes moral puppets of them, pulls the wires, and they talk virtue and act vice, according to their cue and the title prefixed to each comedy or tragedy, not from any real passions of their own, or love either of virtue or of vice." Ross then further comments, "In adhering to the criteria of pretty and feminine chastity, Baillie opens herself to the charge of being a 'babyhouse' playwright. The femininity which is supposed to protect her authorial project becomes the basis for denying Baillie a place in the canon of great writers" (257-58).

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the years -- including Landon, whom he thought needed to be more cautious and reserved in polite society (*Book of Memories* 266). Furthermore, in opining that the angelic Baillie should have assumed the part "of the destroying demon, that . . . drives passion to frenzy and makes this world a hell from which there is no resource but in the silent grave" (*The Modern Poets* 268), Hall inadvertently indicates how closely Landon's poetic style resembles that of the tragic dramas he prefers. In the same anthology, he matter-of-factly states that Landon "dwells more upon the human passions . . . than upon gentler topics" (178). Even if one knew nothing else about Landon but this statement, innocuous as it may sound by itself, its sharp contrast to Hall's comments on Hemans, Baillie, Tighe, and Howitt leads to the conclusion that Landon's passionate demonstrativeness distinguished her from the bulk of contemporary women writers, though not actresses. Secondly, it leads to the suspicion that such distinctiveness must have held dangers for her. Despite the many complimentary reviews she received, Landon's poetry could not but have come across to some readers as a far cry from feminine gentleness.

None of Landon's speakers more longs for the silent grave than her women poets, doomed to suffer because they have stepped outside their natural place, the private sphere, to disclose their precious feelings to the world, and, as a consequence, become wounded by the sharp edges of its criticism and envy. Theirs is a kind of heroic martyrdom that they cannot help but undergo. The songs gush forth from bodies too weak to stifle the flow. As far as Landon was concerned, it was a notable feat to create a sense of raw, authentic fantasy, which readers would have supposed akin to fantasies of the actual Sappho, Corinne, and Erinna. The pride Landon felt in

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the success of her improvised poetry was justified by that verse style's extreme popularity with men and women writers publishing in a wide range of periodicals.[3] Noted in Chapter Four, feminist critics' dislike of women poets' improvisational poetry arises from their sense that contemporary male critics were slotting women writers into second place when they praised a poetess's work for being, to cite one reviewer of Landon's poetry, "naturally musical [rather] than carefully polished; with great felicity of simile, the result of a quick perception of the chain of association; with an overflowing tenderness, the popularity of her writing has consisted in their being entirely feminine" (Rev. of *The Vow* 348). Landon loved comments like these from reviewers. Unconcerned about being ranked first or fifteenth, she just wanted praise, and to Landon the best praise cloaked her with a feminine mantle. Such reviews insured that her passionate archetypes had not worked against her, seemingly pushing her into realms of impropriety (where Landon had no desire *to be seen* to venture), but rather had enabled her to seem to be authentically disclosing the soul of Woman, as she aimed to do. That Landon created the effect of authentic desire with poetry composed of exquisite artificial images helped to convince readers of her complete femininity.[4] These delicate ornaments appeared to emerge from the quick

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[3] One of the most celebrated writers of such witty effusions was Theodore Hook, who as a result was continually being invited to London parties where he would be asked yet again to play the improvisatore. Indeed, more men seem to have published improvised poems than women in the 1820s and 1830s. And even when not writing for print, every male poet needed to be prepared to write a sweet "effusion" in the album of the lady on whom he was paying a call.

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mind and bursting heart of a woman naturally disinclined toward producing indelicate imaginations.

But Landon's appreciation for the theater as an artistic medium superior to that of print forced her to accept that, even when she drew her female poets performing before gathered crowds, she would never be able to top the effect produced by women on London stages, women whose passionate impulsiveness she considered the theater's strongest symbol of truth. The best actresses and singers were those who left their audiences spellbound with, in this order, the beauty, talent, feeling, and energy they brought to their parts. Landon's poetic tributes to prima donnas Grisi, Malibran, and Pasta for the *English Bijou Almanack* testify to the rapturous thrills she experienced when she "heard" and "saw" them on stage, her poem to Grisi ending fittingly, "Lady art thou what thou dost seem, / Or art thou but a lovely dream --." Until Victoria mounted the throne, probably no woman could be seen in public wielding more power over her audience's emotions than a spellbinding actress or singer.

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[4]Landon's contemporaries had little trouble explaining away the contradiction of this authentic artifice, or natural art, especially regarding the work of female artists. For instance, Agnes Taylor argued in 1836 that the opera soprano Malibran's

> outpouring of mind and feeling . . . showed that her power was not the effect of art, but of natural and excitable passion. The art was the vehicle of its expression -- nothing more; she had studied this art with such intensity, and had rendered herself so complete a mistress of all its intricacies and resources, that they had become identic with herself, forming part of her physical nature, so that she never had to occupy her mind about them. Thus, then, was she able to yield to her feelings. . . . (192)

Applied to Landon, the argument would then conclude that the poet had identified herself so closely with the poetic resources of rhythm and meter and had studied so

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"Miss Fanny Kemble has produced such a sensation," Landon wrote to a friend in 1830, eager to see the new star in performance (Blanchard 1: 269). Having already seen her as Belvidera in *Venice Preserved*, James Stuart Wortley could report to his mother that Kemble gave "a more powerful and commanding performance than her Juliet . . . because the part affords better opportunity for display"; and that the response at the play's end was tremendous: "The whole pit became one moving mass of raising hats. . . . I felt free, and both cheered and raised my hat most lustily. . . . Don't fancy that I am in love. . . . I admire her only as an actress, for I have no opportunity of admiring her otherwise. . . . Think of *Alexander Baring* [the head of a famous London mercantile house] confessing that he cried his eyes out at Belvidera. I saw him *in a state*" (emphasis Wortley's; Cruse 275). In 1836, Agnes Taylor described watching Malibran thus: "No one could account for the siren's power, yet all felt it, and all yielded to it . . . the thrill is raised, that creeping shudder which vibrated through the body and acts upon the heart, filling it with a glow of delight . . ." (192-93).

Camille Paglia, noting in *Sexual Personae* that Hitler "called the masses feminine," remarks that "the ability to entrance and focus the minds of a nation is a form of sexual seduction." She describes the enthrallment or captivation of an audience as a state of "erotic passivity" that amounts to a form of slavery, adding parenthetically that "a thrall is a slave or bondman" (340). In a period when gender spheres and roles were kept doctrinally discrete, the entrancing female performer was,

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carefully the opportunities for exquisite imagery provided by poetic devices that she could surrender to her feelings when writing in the heat of the moment.

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in effect, placed in the ironic position of playing the masculine aggressor to her viewers' feminine passivity -- even if she seemed no dominatrix but, instead, a timid, vulnerable virgin, herself yielding to the strength of her feelings. If the actress enthralled, she dominated and controlled. And to enthrall on the early nineteenth-century stage, she needed to be able to vivify a number of archetypal female characters with archetypically female emotions. Therefore, when Landon in an 1834 article admires Pasta as "actress" for producing a variety of "sensations" in Landon as audience member, she is, in truth, admiring Pasta's masculine power to rule over the audience's feelings through effectively controlling their physical responses:

> She gives the idea of a Grecian statue . . . animated with fire of genius . . . . I feel, from the different sensations I experience, how different are the characters that she embodies. Look at the superb defiance of Fate itself with which she approaches the tomb of Ninus, as the hitherto all-triumphant Semiramide. In Anne Boleyn how exquisite are the transitions from, first, the blank look of idiotcy [sic], so terribly true; then the innocent and engaging expression of childhood, so confident in its own happiness; and at last, the flash of reason which brings frenzy with it. Who that has heard it, but has thrilled at the most touching reproach wrung from the stricken soul of love, the 'io' of her Medea; -- but the working up of the scene is equal to the great effect. There is true knowledge of woman's heart in the timidity with which she approaches the beloved Greek. No one ever deeply loved without thinking themselves unworthy of their idol; and Medea, the

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> royal, the beautiful, and the gifted, is meek and subdued in the presence of Jason. Gradually, the recollection of her sacrifices and her wrongs rouse her to a juster sense of her own claims; she knows the vast wealth of her love, and feels that such a heart might be the world to that recreant lover. ("Calendar" 429)

Recent critics have tended to overlook that Landon rarely praised feminine timidity without coupling it with a sense of pride, of just personal worth or rightful authority; further, that Landon both understood and esteemed the irrationality inherent in her notion of love's idolatry. Landon learned from the female performers on the London stage. As Madame de Staël had given Corinne qualities she gleaned from watching Sarah Siddons on stage and Lady Hamilton's varying "attitudes" in the tableaux of private theatricals (Moers, *Literary Women* 184; Holström 144), so Landon was encouraged to stress the intensity and intricacy of archetypal female passions by women's performances in plays, operas, and private theatricals -- the latter an entertainment for which she confessed, in a letter to the playwright Planché, "having taste enough" (Ms. JP 169). Landon might be said to have limited her exploration of women's psyches to female archetypes already accepted on stage. But since portraying women realistically would have required some form of emotional restraint, Landon's confinement to archetypes allowed her rather to unleash dark passions in the cold light of the printed page, where she could concentrate on women's feelings to a degree that male playwrights did not and where her words could be examined again and again. Landon's confinement then merits praise for having, in the retrospect of

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the history of English poetry, helped her expand the emotional range and depth of female characters' expression.

The feminine credentials of Landon's characters went unquestioned for the first six years her work was published, until 1826, when she heard gossip of the "immoral and improper tendency of my productions." Before then, as Landon wrote of her *Improvisatrice*, "I did not take up a review, a magazine, a newspaper, but if it named my book it was to praise 'the delicacy,' 'the grace,' 'the purity of feminine' it displayed" (Blanchard 1: 54). This gossip remained muted, however, not spreading to the majority of reviews of her work or to most of her reading public, and thus not substantially harming her sales. Many reviews continued to read like the 1835 one that enthused, "The woman is felt in every line [of Landon's poetry]: she makes audible the melody of the warm yet gentle heart in her sex . . ." (Rev. of *The Vow* 348; Stephenson, *Letitia Landon* 30). Landon would have been pleased with the feminine delicacy of the phrase "warm yet gentle," unobjectionable as it then sounded. But this description belies the passionate extremes to which Landon's heroines would go in their exultation or despair -- extremes that, like those of the melodramatic actress, had no place in the conventional life of women, yet remained essential to female archetypes for conveying what possibly lurked behind women's gentle facades. These passionate extremes, in other words, represented the dark underbelly of the feminine, that which might be revealed if the veneer of social restraints and conventions were lifted.

Landon's use of female archetypes is elucidated, I have found, through a study of the feminist theories of Judith Butler and Camille Paglia, focusing on their

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complementary emphases on the complex artificiality of femininity and the powers of feminine performativity. Weak as it looks, soft, sweet femininity yet owns the power of its concentrated desirability -- a desirability which, as Paglia sees it, is never completely divorced from the menacing forces that surround Woman's mysterious allure (*Sex, Art* 108; *Sexual Personae* 16-17). Femininity's attraction depends ultimately on its exciting uncertainty, despite the vulnerability and intense visibility of the feminine image. The threat attached to that uncertainty is thinly veiled by femininity's passivity and elusiveness.

Landon actually heightened the desirability of the feminine by painting "feminine love" as a brutal, agonizing experience in the lives of young women, in which rejection was inevitable and bound to blight the heart forever. For contemporary readers, her beautiful women filled with sexual desires seemed to embody every man's ideals of womanhood. That they loved and were not loved and died intensified their desirability, permanently crowning them with the feminine aura of "that-which-is-sought . . . the ever-elusive, a silver shimmer on the horizon" (32). However, as Landon reminded readers, her heroines died because their love was too great for this world. No man was capable of fully reciprocating: "How often woman's heart must turn / To feed upon its own excess / Of deep yet passionate tenderness!" (*The Troubadour* 36). This was a definition of the feminine which would at the very least have left the male reader, if he accepted it, feeling emotionally inadequate and inferior to women. Likewise, the self-inflicted cruelty of feeding "upon its own excess" -- one of the popular metaphors of the day which Landon pushed to an extreme -- should not be ignored, nor, if directed outward, should its

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cannibalistic potential. Landon's feminine love, "that one pure wild feeling," was cloaked with uncertainty and danger, "reckless of sorrow, sin, or scorn" (*The Improvisatrice* 58, 65). What this love might do if betrayed and then unleashed against its betrayer, no man could determine or control.

Landon plunged so fully into male paradigms of Woman that she wound up promoting (in spite of herself?) much that was not warm and gentle -- the frightening, destructive part of Woman's cultural baggage, often indicated by the Romantics but not extensively explored. Landon called it feminine love when a female character worshipped a man to the point of losing interest in all else, and, once rejected, indulged her melancholy to the point of committing murder and suicide, as in *The Venetian Bracelet*, or just fed on her sorrows until too weak to live. On the other hand, Landon also took pleasure from stressing the power of feminine beauty to snare the male prey and enslave him, as the femme fatale Adeline had done in *The Troubadour*. All one needed was an air of aloofness to go with beauty, plus the capacity to reinvent oneself through a number of feminine guises. After playing the huntress on horseback in the morning, Adeline then appears at night

> The gayest of the meteor dance,
> The jewels in her braided hair,
> Her neck, her arms of ivory bare,
> The silver veil, the broider'd vest, --
> Look'd she not then her loveliest? (79)

Adeline is Paglia's "frigid nymph, masquing in the brilliant luminosity of Apollonian high glamour," as she danced the saraband with the bedazzled Raymond. Her "cool

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unreachability beckons, fascinates, and destroys" (*Sexual Personae* 15), leading a string of suitors to their deaths. Though Landon expressed the necessary sentiments deploring such heartlessness, there is no missing the narrator's triumphant tone at Adeline's capture of Raymond, "When has woman her power not known?" (74). But in *The Improvisatrice*, when poor Ida loses Julian to another gem-decked maiden, Landon laments:

> Alas! that man should ever win
> So sweet a shrine to shame and sin
> As woman's heart! -- and deeper woe
> For her fond weakness, not to know
> That yielding all but breaks the chain
> That never reunites again! (40)

Seeing her complaints to Julian ineffectual, Ida has no choice but to give him a poisonous drink that kills him.

Aside from the exquisiteness of her images, I think that Landon's work became a phenomenon of her age because she imputed to young female characters depths of passion they were not expected (or allowed) by society to possess, passions latent in their most whimsical reveries and integral to their natures as women. In the process, she exalted every mood of Woman's heart. I think that Landon largely got away with these exhibitions for three reasons: 1) She worked within socially accepted archetypes. She seems particularly to have enjoyed using grand, isolated figures of romance who commanded attention -- renowned poetesses, sorceresses, queen-like figures of noble birth, or beauties who played the queen in social circles, all projecting

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a degree of mystery and grandeur -- and then were reduced to the most subservient of slaves when they met the one and only man who would rule their hearts for the rest of their short lives. 2) Landon claimed in print to represent feminine or gentle womanly feelings, demonstrating her perfect accord with the notion of female separateness and giving little indication of the lengths to which feminine feeling might go. 3) She made an instinctive virtue of her female characters' efforts to conceal their passions from others, though not from the readers. Landon would dribble "soft" and "mild" throughout her descriptions of heroines and would profess that they had no wish to look boldly into the eyes of their beloveds, as if the heroines naturally abided by contemporary etiquette manuals. Unlike many young ladies in the 1820s, Landon's heroines did not need to be reminded by instructors like Mrs. Peter Giorgi: "Let an air of softness pervade your looks and actions. Mildness is a characteristic of feminine delicacy: a modest demeanor, that will shrink from the gaze of admiration, will, in itself, possess charms far exceeding those of the most brilliant beauty, who shows her consciousness of obtaining it and deserving it" (17-18).

But Landon could never hold to a modest feminine measure very long, nor would her readers have wanted her to. After all, it was the vanities and desires of Landon's women, intimately revealed by the narrator to the readers, that made these women so appealing -- though the extent to which publishers sensed the dangers of their appeal remains an open question. For example, in the manuscript for "Immolation of a Hindoo Widow," Landon writes that a gold chain was fastened around the widow's "slight ancle [sic] proud of such display" (Ms. VF 10-3). Another hand has drawn a line through "proud of," and the published version reads "meet for

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such display" (7).[5] A typical example of how Landon reveals the vanities and desires of her heroines without seeming to challenge propriety occurs when the improvisatrice confides to the reader, after recognizing that she has transfixed Lorenzo by her singing of "A Moorish Romance," that

> . . . his dark eyes kept fixed on mine,
>
> Which sank beneath their burning gaze.
>
> Mine sank -- but yet I felt the thrill
>
> Of that look burning on me still.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> My hand kept wandering on my lute,
>
> In music, but unconsciously:
>
> My pulses throbbed, my heart beat high,
>
> A flush of dizzy ecstasy
>
> Crimsoned my cheek; I felt warm tears
>
> Dimming my sight, yet was it sweet,
>
> My wild heart's most bewildering beat,
>
> Consciousness, without hopes and fears,
>
> Of a new power within me waking,
>
> Like light before the morn's full breaking. (*The Improvisatrice* 31-32)

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[5] Poking fun at her female elders' disdain of vanity, Landon thus described another heroine preparing her toilette: "Emily lingered and lingered for a longer time at the glass than either Mrs. Radcliffe or Mrs. Hannah More would have approved of, -- one for the sake of romance, the other for that of morality" (*Romance and Reality* 1: 289).

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The improvisatrice hardly strikes a mild note in her ecstatic admission to the reader. How carefully she acknowledges her joy at this new sense of sexual power. She lowers her eyes with appropriate modesty, "but yet" she shamelessly "felt the thrill," that is, the "burning" thrill, of being desired by Lorenzo -- whose physical appearance she has just spent over thirty lines describing, whose gaze had "bowed my heart beneath the chain" (29), him to whom she "would have rather been a slave, / In tears, in bondage" than to live without (66). Harriet Linkin asserts that "Lorenzo wins the competition of the gaze" (175), but I see no competing gazes here, only Landon working to win over her readers by lowering those eyes which yet shed tears in exultation at the improvisatrice's love conquest. To be desired here -- which is to be desired more than anything or anyone else in life -- redresses the balance. In this "orgasmic moment" (175), the overwhelmed improvisatrice yet remains as conscious of her rule of Lorenzo's heart as she is of her heart's enslavement to him.

The inherent superiority of Landon's heroines produces the strength of passion which enslaved them to man. Her heroines' presumptions to "genius" or other forms of greatness could easily be pardoned when classed within the female sphere and accompanied by such servility and dependence. Nor did most male critics wish to impugn the passions that engendered a beautiful woman's abasement before her lover. However, in her possessiveness and dependence upon the beloved for happiness, Landon's quintessential heroine threatens male independence. Her male figure is usually ruined by his discovery of the woman's complete devotion to him, made belatedly upon his return to her as she lies dying, or already dead. In many Landon poems, the male character from then on lingers spellbound near the heroine's grave

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until his own demise, meditating on her profound love and unable to shirk the remorse that his neglect "killed" her. At the end of *The Improvisatrice* when the poetess dies, another poet-speaker emerges to report that Lorenzo has become "wan as Grief's corroded page. / He had no words . . . no smiles, / No hopes." Finding his existence purposeless without her, "In sorrow and in solitude. / . . . day by day, / He mused his weary life away" (103). The speaker turned from Lorenzo's deadened figure to see his picture of the improvisatrice exuding vitality:

> The lips were opening with such life,
>
> You almost heard the silvery words.
>
> She looked a form of light and life, --
>
> All soul, all passion, and all fire;
>
> A priestess of Apollo's, when
>
> The morning beam falls on her lyre;
>
> A Sappho, or ere love had turned
>
> The heart to stone where once it burned. (104-05)

Landon implies that only a woman genius could have lived with such passionate intensity, commanding the respect given a Delphic priestess who surrendered her rational powers to receive spiritual truths. And, with her death, only such a woman could have vampirically drained away the life of the male beloved. Landon's wish to exalt feminine love insured that her heroines triumphed through their deaths, which allowed her to award them quasi-sainthood.

The most triumphant woman in these scenarios appeared to be Landon herself during her several years in London society before scandalous rumors did permanent

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damage to her name. While her poems of worshipping women sold well in the marketplace, "in society where she was the idol" the apparently unattached Landon continued for many years to flirt and yet deny hope to her "numerous" bachelor "admirers," according to her friend Emma Roberts (20, 11).[6] Her coquetry must have seemed cruel to those men expecting her in person to embody the sentimental poetess whom she had helped make a popular myth, the poetess overflowing with song who sang on impulse, not letting her image be marred by a trace of calculated self-advancement. That a woman poet was expected to have an overflowing heart and yet always remain mild and soft provides just one example of the faulty nature of the feminine construct, and if anyone took advantage of such contradictions, Landon did. She could be excused for denying bachelors hope because she needed to protect her delicate heart. She could be excused for her passionate outbursts on the page because, like her heroines, her fantasies and feelings would otherwise "prey upon" her. No one would have disputed the certainty of a writer for the 1822 *New Monthly Magazine* who remarked on women's "superior susceptibility and overflowing affections, which, if not provided with a vent, perpetually corrode and gnaw the heart" (H. 286). By their popular usage, such contradictorily violent metaphors demonstrated how widespread was the fear that the repression society proscribed for its young women might be having horrifying consequences for many of them.

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[6]Landon may have seemed at times a frigid nymph not unlike some of her devious female characters; Roberts notes that Landon "manifested an almost extraordinary want of susceptibility, upon occasions when attempts were made upon her heart" (10).

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In her work, Landon represented her vision of femininity as a *beau ideal* to which women should aspire, but one that could not be fully realized. In the Preface of *The Venetian Bracelet*, Landon's declared intent "to refine, spiritualise, and exalt" love highlighted the artificiality of her enterprise (vi). Even when she tried to suggest that her work had some relevance to "actual life," she could not avoid hinting at the role-play of the London social scene: "Such as I would wish to draw her, woman, actuated by an attachment as intense as it is true, as pure as it is deep, is not only more admirable as a heroine, but also in actual life, than one whose idea of love is that of light amusement, or at worst of vain mortification" (vii). Understanding that behind the noble words lay the dizzy ecstasies and death throes of melodrama, we can see that this passage reflects Landon's habitual contrasting of the melodramatic earnestness with trifling affectations of high society. Her ideals of love had little to do with the domestic life of the middle-class woman, except to offer her a vision that endowed long suffering with a glamor greater than that reserved for society belles. If her readers needed to be told that the woman who died for love was more admirable than the coquettish fortune-huntress, then clearly the attracting power of all young feminine roles counted for much with them and with Landon.

However, in stressing that as "a woman, whose influence and whose sphere must be in the affections," she held it within her "peculiar province" to create this artificial purity (vi), Landon not only reappropriated feminine images for women but outlawed any man's presuming to contradict her understanding of feminine love (Rosenblum 126). How then could validity be given to a male critic's protestations that Landon went too far? And when she preached that women's love was wasted on

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the "faithless" male sex (Roberts 11), bludgeoning men for their selfishness, carelessness, and incapacity to reciprocate, what man could with authority disagree, never being able to penetrate Woman's mystery? As Landon argued in print, "No man ever enters into the feelings of a woman . . . they [women] are too subtle and too delicate for hand whose grasp is on 'life's rougher things.' They require that sorrow should find a voice" (Blanchard 2: 111).

One can now see the inadequacy of the explanation offered by recent critics that Landon consciously adopted a mask of sentimental femininity just to please the men who read periodicals and wrote reviews. The confidence and degree of heedlessness that accompanied her passionate excesses came from those of her feelings and ideas that she identified with her audience's inclinations. The notion of a "feminine mask" disguises the fact that many of Landon's deep-seated values were tied to her respect for certain feminine ideals, including but by no means limited to mildness and gentleness. As a rule, those who lavished praise on L. E. L. did not let themselves see, or acknowledge, her dangerous excesses, so blinkered were they by her appealing lines on female devotion and the conviction that propelled them.[7]

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[7]Like this 1821 writer, many commentators on gender differences simply wanted to encourage young ladies to become good wives by learning from novels and poetry "the art of loving . . . [and] the still more necessary art of exciting love." All female "accomplishments" should "tend to one single object -- that of love," but a young lady should avoid "too much Art" in her efforts to excite male interest ("Learned" 227). Above all, she should avoid "the ostentatious display of the endowments of the mind" and "personal beauties," recognizing that "talents, learning and science . . . cause the world to talk too much of a woman" (224). The writer worried that fashionable "society was now striving to withdraw the veil" protecting "the fair sex" in its glamorization of "learned ladies" (227).

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Judith Butler's work can be seen to offer an alternative explanation for Landon's embrace of feminine constructs. For Butler, what may seem to be a mask of a gender type (and is clearly not a parody of that type) should instead be re-evaluated as one of innumerable efforts to realize and project an identity for oneself. These efforts begin with a child's first attempt to speak as coherent subject, an "I" which unconsciously "performs" its identity through "the forced reiteration of [gender] norms," and they continue throughout the life of the gendered subject, who reproduces the norms each time it speaks of itself as a gendered subject (2-7, 94). Following Butler's argument, Landon could not have championed ideals of femininity in her letters and published work without those ideals representing part of her sense of herself or, more specifically, herself as a woman whose visions, rather than actions, realized these ideals. For with Landon, one can never afford to forget that her imaginary world was in many ways more authentic to her than her lived experience. When Landon set forth romanticized gender norms in her work, she was asserting her identity as one who had long cherished certain ideals of womanhood, gleaned probably from her childhood reading and mixed up with her earliest romantic fantasies.

The greater need for coherence on the page than in the whole of Landon's existence somewhat limited the range of the manifestation of Landon's personality in her work, focusing it around the image of the sorrowful poetess for the public more than for Landon. This poetess could be considered Paglia's sexual persona artificially concentrated, or enhanced, for public consumption. Judith Butler's work implies that the sexual persona made public is just one late stage in the infinite series of personality

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projections which make up the life of the individual in any culture that categorizes by gender. Stated in its awkward complexity, the coherent image Landon's readers knew and the one her social acquaintances knew were subsets of the multi-faceted identity known by her closest friends. After Landon's death, those friends rushed into print to state that a common sense of womanliness united the whole. And Landon had believed as much. Without believing it, she could never have so successfully presented herself in public. No one would now debate that Landon's female speakers were produced in conformity with gender norms and that they helped to reify those norms. The confusion with Landon has arisen from critics' not understanding that *all* her moods were intended to comply with one or more notions of feminine behavior then current. Landon never sought to step beyond the bounds of womanliness,[8] just to push those bounds without losing her readers' sympathies. Her many moods should not detract from the fact that Landon regarded her mournful poetry as her most deeply felt expression, and her mournful poetry on the affections as her most womanly expression.

Judith Butler makes a point of establishing a difference between an "artifice" and a gender "construction." In contrast to the relatively free choices involved in adopting an artifice, one's gender is constructed within "the domain of constraints without which a certain living and desiring being cannot make its way." One's sexuality is a composite of accepted gender norms and personal invention. Sexuality

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[8]Whenever she mocked or jested at someone's expense, Landon used her femininity instead as a defence against charges that she may have hurt someone's feelings, stating that she never intended to harm.

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itself is neither entirely fixed nor free (94). I find it impossible to think that Landon made an entirely "willful appropriation" (7), an entirely free decision (94), to write of love as Woman's all-consuming emotion, nor state any other feminine ideal -- not when the notion of love's being "all the world to a woman" was, along with many other feminine ideals, well ingrained in her and the culture's psyche.

With good reason, though, one might object that Landon did not have to embrace certain feminine ideals in print so wholeheartedly. Though the 1820s and 1830s were a reactionary period in the history of women's rights, other women writers either abided by a different set of gender norms, like "hearth and home," or did not take the same norms to such Landonesque extremes. Yet this reasonable objection is ordinarily based on what I consider fallacious theses: that the conformity of women poets in this period to the prohibition against writing about "money, sex, and power . . . the affairs of the world" should be seen as "one of the most disabling inheritances" (Leighton 3); consequently that Landon's excessiveness made a show of her disability; that she went so far as to court an "easy popularity" by advocating an "aesthetic of renunciation" of the "masculine territory," which resulted in "her poetic failure" (66; Rosenblum 12; Blain 36). As we have seen, money, sex, and power were intrinsic elements in Landon's creations; nor did she avoid political issues. Indeed, she got away with discussing much more than has been recognized because her many expressions of conformity to gender norms diverted some from what they did not wish to see -- and what she did not wish to think unwomanly. Recent critics naturally dislike gender maxims, and their distaste has influenced their opinion that Landon

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retreated from her potential to write worthwhile poetry by complying with these maxims and immersing herself in feminine forms.[9]

I am encouraged by Judith Butler to think that Landon did not gain her potency in spite of the feminine norms and forms but because of them. Butler states that the "constraint" one must undergo to emerge as a gendered subject "calls to be rethought as the very condition of performativity." Instead of setting a limit to performativity, "constraint is . . . that which impels and sustains performativity" throughout life. One addresses the demand to assume "a sexed position . . . marked out within the symbolic domain" through a "phantasmatic identification" that involves "fantasizing the possibility of approximating that symbolic site" (94-97). Social constraints then impel a lifelong process of heterosexual fantasizing that varies with each period's gender norms, along with each individual. Further, social constraints impel fantasies that can culminate in the "performing" of art. It is not too difficult to see how Landon's phantasmatic identification with feminine ideals as the rightful inheritance of women (as well as masculine ideals for her male characters) fueled her elaborate fantasies and thus her poetry. Her fairylands required gendered ideals to justify their poetic existence as meaningful and inspirational.

Butler would not be surprised at the disjunction between the feminine ideals Landon professed and the extremes to which she pushed her characters, as well as between her ideals and actual behavior: "Identification . . . is never achieved;

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[9]On the other hand, Glennis Stephenson is able to rate Landon's poetry more highly by assigning its strength to what she considers to be its subversion of gender norms ("Letitia" 3).

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identification is a phantasmic staging of the event" (105). L. E. L.'s poems can be read as a series of phantasmic stagings in which Landon identified with feminine ideals just long enough to assure her readers and herself of her womanliness, and then, in a fit of confident daring, overran them. Impossible as it is for us to estimate the actual effect she had on women's lives, that effect resulted from the power she aggrandized for her work by professing feminine ideals, not from exceeding them (though her excesses made her work sell). For productive power would have lain solely in performances that, to an ascertainable degree, conformed to conventions. Butler argues: "No 'act' apart from a regularized and sanctioned practice can wield the power to produce that which it declares. Indeed, a performative act apart from a reiterated and, hence, sanctioned set of conventions can appear only as a vain effort to produce effects that it cannot possibly produce" (107).

Landon had everything to gain from marketing herself as a womanly woman poet. Though in the 1820s and 1830s the most conservative still disapproved of women publishing their work, by and large women poets were not only judged as properly conforming to gender norms but their poetry possessed an added appeal because they belonged to the most sensitive sex. For theirs was a period when, with "thousands" of women having published their work since the 1780s, creative writing in general and poetry writing in particular seemed a womanly occupation (Curran 179). Cognisant that women writers' hegemony had spread far beyond the provinces of the domestic novel, Virginia Blain dubs this phenomenon of "the Romantic-

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Victorian transition period . . . the femininization of literature in general" (31-32).[10] And Stuart Curran specifies of that genre most closely associated with the Romantics: "By the 1820s, at the point that the term poetess attains common cultural currency, poetry . . . could be claimed to have become a woman's genre" (182). Moreover, by

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[10]Sussman also speaks of "the increasing feminization of literature" to explain Carlyle's belief that he had a mission to return literature to "its proper form as the script for the achievement of true manhood" (35). In periodical articles, the phrase "poets and women" was common, young male poets being regularly categorized with the entire female sex as the most sensitive members of the population. Commentators of the day often reasoned that women poets should, by virtue of their gender, be able to produce the most sensitive, delicate poetry; further, that novels and poems by women might better explore the psyche than those by their male counterparts or, anyway, the female psyche. In spite of themselves, the male Romantic poets probably should receive some credit for inspiring many women to write and publish their poetry:

> By simultaneously popularizing and legitimating the idea that poetry is the realm of private experience, is the realm of personal affection, the romantics, early and late, unintentionally authorize women to view themselves as legitimate poetizers of their own experience. After all, if women's sphere is the realm of private experience . . . who better can express and inspire a discourse about that realm than women themselves. (Ross 304)

The notion that women's sphere was the realm of private experience had, however, taken root in Britain well before the male Romantics arrived, due in part to novels by women. Nancy Armstrong reminds us that women novelists were staking their sex's claim to the realm of the psyche and its affections before and during the period when the male Romantics were writing. That claim is indicated by the fact that, " . . . where poetry was concerned, the female ceased to represent the writers' muse and, with the Romantics, became instead a function of the imagination that provided figurative language with a psychological source of meaning" (14). The Romantics then could be said to have intruded on what was increasingly seen as women's terrain, an intrusion most flagrant when they presumed to write about women's feelings.

Those male poets who followed their feminine path had to be reprimanded and redirected for a new era. Curran points out, "When Tennyson's friend Trench criticized his early style -- 'Tennyson, we cannot live in art' -- he was, in essence, demanding that his friend forsake the female space of enclosure, fantasy, and long past ages for a contemporary and necessarily masculine outdoors" (182). As the genders moved farther apart in British culture, Tennyson realized he had to change:

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publishing the work of women poets, the literary establishment was able to adjust more easily to poetry's decreasing cultural importance -- as Ross puts it, to poetry's "becoming marginalized to play an immaterial role within an industrializing, production oriented culture" (255).

I would even submit that, unwittingly or otherwise, the male Romantics courted the prospect of poetry's feminization and marginalization by promulgating the image of the feminized male poet, an image well in vogue when Landon began publishing her verse. As far back as the late eighteenth century, the Romantics had been expressing an admiration for femininity that went far beyond their preoccupations with the so-called feminine realm of the psyche. As has been noted by many critics, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and particularly Byron adopted a variety of feminine attitudes and external attributes. Arguing that each poet saw in androgyny a means of resolving the sex war, Paglia cites a few examples which serve nicely to suggest how similar was their effeminacy to Landon's femininity. The long-haired poet of *Kubla Khan* "is calling attention to something feminine in him. He makes himself a sex object passive to the probing eye," possessed with "stunning epicene glamour" (329). Byron took "Romanticism's feminization of the male persona" to the extreme of "effeminacy. . . . Sardanapalus sweeps on stage crowned with flowers and 'effeminately dressed' . . . in a liquid realm of woman, music, and perfume" (349-51). And Shelley's *Adonais* portrays "Keats as a half-feminine Adonis, treacherously slain" (366).

"Tennyson's late fashioning of himself as sage stands in sharp contrast to the aura of the feminine that marked his early poetic career" (Sussman 42).

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Like Chatterton before them, all five poets assumed at times the role of "passive sufferer," abused by "virile males" who were neither industrialists nor politicians, but rather acerbic reviewers: "Shelley's unscrupulous critics are Wordworth's sneering 'selfish men'" (366). Yet these virile males who relished deflating preening male poets were members of the same press whose more woman-friendly elements -- magazines devoted to fashion, literature, the arts, and, if not pitched to an entirely female readership, politics and the sciences as well -- were responsible for magnifying the poets (to widely different degrees) in the public's eyes, and, later, hallowing their reputations after they died in exile. Keats, Shelley, and Byron were, in Paglia's terms, "made into sex-heroes of European high society" by the paper-printing machines of "publicity and fashion" (347). Their images of beautiful boys attracted much of the publicity, good and bad, as the print media wrested the images from their originators' control. In contradistinction to what Ross calls their "metaphors of self-possessing power," the Romantics no less than L. E. L. eventually became, in the eyes of the print media, quasi-toy dolls whose ideas and images could be taken apart and recycled by writers supplying material for the new magazines, magazines that made "explicit the connection between fashion and *belles lettres*, between poetry and the new reading public, between poetic success and lady readers" (51).

Landon learned from the Romantics how to attract readers through feminizing the misunderstood artist and pitying the isolation brought about by the artist's sensitivity. Though she was largely ignored by the sober quarterlies, younger periodicals like the *Literary Gazette* and *La Belle Assemblée* boasted their carrying of

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L. E. L.'s laments over the male and female victims of the cruel world.[11] Her male poets invariably had the Byronic features of curly black hair, slender necks, and wide, pale brows, which became paler as they slumped toward a consumptive death. Indeed, Landon produced characters of both sexes who proved to be more fragile and passionately exposed than any concocted by the Romantics. She not only out-femininized them with her desirable creatures but, in addition, she never had to worry about being attacked for effeminacy. To some of those concerned about the confusion over sex roles fomented by dandies and effeminate poets, Landon's pronouncements on Woman's heart seemed to proffer such a refreshing clarity that they were willing to turn a blind eye to the rest.

Set adrift like most poets in an ocean of periodical print, Landon then used her femininity to guide her toward the magazines for fashion and lighter literature, and away from the rough waters of the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviews. She could not avoid being mentioned by aggressively masculine magazines like *Blackwood's* and *Fraser's*, whose writers were actually called "sharks" and "hawks," with the most bloodthirsty working on scandal sheets such as the *Age* and *John Bull*. Yet Landon's gender, backed by her pronouncements on Woman, insured that her work did not incur the displeasure of the more macho reviewers of leading periodicals. Though some of her saccharine passages attracted jokes and parody from sharks, the humor was in

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[11]Though avoided by some women poets, magazines which discussed fashion were hospitable to women seeking to publish, and their editors readily treated with respect a poet with a list of publications like Landon's. As Katherine Shevelow states, since the eighteenth century women's magazines had used "the construction of femininity in

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most cases good-natured, with the few exceptions coming in the form of personal slurs from the scandal sheets, the meanest coming from the most short-lived. But they amounted to little when compared to the advantages Landon possessed as a woman writer espousing an eccentric femininity at a time when much of the public adored feminine images, and, paradoxically, a growing portion was worried about the gender uncertainty this feminization implied.

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print" to establish "a form of feminine authority that defined a place for women in print culture" (15).

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Chapter Ten:

Feminine Fashions

Despite her poet-speakers' laments over neglect and abuse, Landon experienced nothing in print remotely like the number and kind of hostile attacks levelled against those male writers who continued to dabble with effeminate postures long after Byron's demise. Two of the most noteworthy examples happen to be her friends Bulwer Lytton and Disraeli. As setters as well as followers of fashion trends, these two men well embody the symbiosis between fashion and *belles lettres* that existed in the 1820s and faded out very gradually in the mid 1830s with the demise of Regency culture. Byron must bear part of the responsibility for the symbiosis itself, his poetry and personal style doing much to make effeminacy fashionable wherever single young gentlemen gathered in London. In an 1821 article "On Affectation in Portraiture," C. B. deplores the current habitudes of the middle- and upper-class English male:

> A man will not write an apology to his tailor, unless you allow him to sit in the attitude of the latest portrait of Lord Byron, or sing a manly English song without mincing it Tuscanly . . . or comb his hair, unless it be with the Milton division running up the middle . . . or eat a bunch of currants without contrasting them for an hour with the

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> whiteness of his fingers, and the redness of his ruby ring. . . .In good truth, the wholesome manliness of England is gone or going. . . . Imbecility of body, effeminacy of manners, affectations, and great-girlishness, are perceivable in all its [the age's] limbs and notions. It is [a] starch-collared, man-stayed, French-dancing, Italian squalling, sight-seeing, splendour-loving, over-excited, and sated age. . . . Female beauty we have in as great perfection as ever; but manly, intellectual, and expressive faces, in the male sex, are rare. (606-08)

Byron's influence alone is insufficient to explain why many men in the 1820s and 1830s cultivated an extravagant style of gold chains, jewelled rings, frilly shirts, corsetted waists, rouged cheeks, and perfumed curls -- a style blatantly at odds with the great change in European fashions in the late eighteenth century, when the male sex appeared to be casting off its ornaments for good. Perhaps the explanation for men's new effeminacy lies in clothes fashion becoming increasingly considered, throughout the early nineteenth century, as a topic worthy of study only for the female sex. Despite high society's fascination with men's clothes, despite its never failing to note the cut of the masculine jacket and the fit of the masculine boots, as long as it was regarded as a truism that, to quote Bulwer Lytton's *Pelham*, "Age, which tames all other passions, never tames the passion of dress in a woman's mind" (416), and as long as women's publications treated physical ornamentation and beautification in a comprehensive manner that no gentleman's magazine approached, the period's willingness to extend gender divisions to every aspect of life guaranteed that

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ornamentation and beautification would fall more and more squarely within women's bailiwick. The proliferation of feminine images that resulted from this consignment inevitably caught the eyes of privileged young men like Bulwer Lytton and Disraeli, more anxious to cut a desirably fashionable figure at the soirée than run a factory. Elegant femininity's disinterest in the growth of business and the rise of the merchant classes may have provided these young gents a means of manifesting their similar disinclinations.

The attracting power that Landon's brand of femininity held cannot be fully grasped without our understanding this vogue of male effeminacy that emerged in the London society of the 1820s and 1830s -- only to die a quick death at the hands of Carlyle, Thackeray, and William Maginn of *Fraser's Magazine.* Fearing for the loss of English manhood to decadent culture, yet remaining proud of the "female beauty" produced by that culture's sensuality and luxury, C. B. demonstrates in his above asseveration the relative freedom Landon was given compared to male writers who, like her, wished to convey the pleasures, attractions, affectations, and ultimate shallowness of the London society in which they were swimming. Landon could put a gilded mirror and velvet cushions in a woman's boudoir without anyone protesting, but just let Bulwer Lytton put the same in his hero's dressing room and *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34) would accuse him and his "Dandiacal Sect" of living only to dress, a blasphemous sin, a kind of "Self-worship or Demon-worship" (207-16).

Together with clothes, jewellery, and pleasurable practices like dancing and singing, all luxury items were slotted into the realm of the feminine by male middle-class reactionaries like C. B. and Carlyle. Still more, affectation itself was deemed to

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belong properly to the weaker sex. These views in a sense recycled those of their fathers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, whose entire generation had, in relegating their formerly aristocratic ornaments to women's wear, taken on instead a relatively classless and distinctly masculine apparel. The "artificial, bewigged and Rococo man" was replaced by "the noble and antique man," wearing "the simple clothes of English country life": a broad-shouldered jacket and clinging pantaloons perfected by London's fashionable tailors to display the male body to advantage. For most of the first two decades of the nineteenth century, no fashionable gentleman would have permitted such effeminate fripperies as multicolored silks and jewelry to efface his person (Hollander, *Sex and Suits* 87). "In England, elaborate and gaudy garments in general became associated not only with Popery but with specifically feminine sexuality, with France and Italy in their character as centers of passion, sensuality and superstition as well as of decayed feudalism and diabolic Catholicism" (81).[1] While Paris led the way in ladies' dress, men looked to London, where the gentleman's attire, in contrast, partook of no idealism nor mysticism. The male body traced by its pantaloons boldly put itself forward, evincing a "new raw sexuality . . . the erotic character of the new masculine mode" (100).

However, the whiff of the feminine never absented itself from the dandy, a figure who flourished roughly between 1800 and the 1830s, when, instead of wealth and birth, "ephemera such as style and pose [were] called upon to justify the

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[1]Hollander's list reads like one of Landon's favorite settings and topics, indicating why she used the fantastical nature of women's clothing to stir feelings for the unreal world of her poems.

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stratification of society," and the crown and aristocracy were "more widely despised (and hence more nastily exclusive) than ever before" (Moers, *The Dandy* 12-13; Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* 122-25). Though the first wave of dandies dressed themselves simply, they achieved that simplicity through exercising refined tastes comprised of "shadings of sensitivity, delicacy, exclusivism and effeminacy." Like the most fragile of feminine ladies, the dandy could not tolerate whatever was coarse or whoever was insensitive to his needs (Moers, *The Dandy* 20). Setting himself apart from the rest of his sex, the complete dandy refined away the raw sexuality of his clothes through confidence that his superior tastes and appearance obviated his entertaining any passions whatsoever. The world beyond himself was beneath him (18; 36). He endeared himself to aristocrats through his apathy toward bourgeois concerns, and they liked having his impressive presence decorate the corners of their salons. Concerning women, the dandy was far more interested in being observed than observing (65).[2] Beau Brummell was reputed to be "cold, freezingly cold," entirely "*indifferent* to the female sex," while he did care about producing elegant dinners and adding new snuff-boxes to his collection (emphasis Moers's; 37, 21).

In the post-Brummell 1820s and 1830s, the dandy greatly exacerbated his effeminate tendencies, embracing an "effete, luxurious sensualism" and acquiring nicknames like "butterfly," "exquisite," and "coxcomb." Hence, Bulwer Lytton used the term "effeminate . . . over and over again to characterize Pelham's dandyism" in the first edition (1828), though in soberer Victorian days he would delete it (80-81).

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The signs of effeminacy were there for all to see. As Count D'Orsay and friends paraded through London society their gorgeous curls, rainbow-colored waistcoats, and assorted jewels set off by black coats and loose trousers, their viewers could remember when Brummell ruled the fashionable world wearing short hair, a blue coat, buff waistcoat, buckskins, and a white linen shirt (34). A more particularized example of Disraeli reveals the extent to which the frilly foppery could go, as he turned up at a party hosted by Caroline Norton in "brightly embroidered or scarlet waistcoat, black velvet dress-coat lined with white satin, long gold chains, numerous rings worn over white kid gloves, lace ruffles at the wrist, ivory cane, black hair in corkscrew curls dangling down each side of his deadly pale face. . . . The Sheridans, with their theatrical background, could take such a dramatic apparition better than most" (Adburgham 195).

Filled with literary and political ambitions, Disraeli and Bulwer Lytton donned extravagant dress to insure that they attracted notice amid the glitterati assembled for an evening out (192; Moers, *The Dandy* 89). The butterfly dandies were not content to follow the more approved means of male advancement through demonstrating a responsible, industrious character too serious to waste time on the frivolities that preoccupied women. "They [dandies] really were the last gasp of the male peacock before the ensuing triumph of middle-class sobriety in dress which is still, to a large extent, with us today" (Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* 122-23). In holding out against identically sober dress, the dandies showed their disdain for the middle-class male's

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[2]The dandy loved retreating to the all-male environment of his Pall Mall club, and there to position himself in the front window for the admiration of passers-by.

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new dutiful reserve toward exhibiting himself as a sexual being (McDowell 37). Effeminate dandies refused to leave solely to women the eye-catching attire then being relegated to women's sphere. They aimed to siphon off for themselves some of the "single primitive force" that surrounded ideal Woman, "a creature who may appear in many guises but who always has the same nature" (Hollander, *Sex and Suits* 98). Like the Romantics, these dandies turned to feminine forms to present a persona who, rather than seeking respect, asked to be desired.

In all his early nineteenth-century variations, the dandy posed a number of threats to any single young woman in search of a prosperous husband. His vanity reputedly encouraged him to exploit her sexually and then neglect her, to view sentimental involvement with the female sex as beneath him, and, finally, to settle for a series of prostitutes and mistresses, or do without women altogether. Whatever his inclinations, the dandy was likely to compete with the belles for admiring glances. And to Landon, who based her work on notions of women's superior beauty, sensitivity, delicacy, and passionate loyalty, the dandy was usurping some of Woman's attracting power without deserving it. Though his "feminine" qualities were inevitably those she most admired, she did not forgive any perceptible vanity in him, while the vain but vulnerable woman could always be excused. Landon tended to fault dandies either for, like Brummell, their refusing to contemplate the existence of refined passions, or, like Disraeli, their dress signaling that they might harbor such passions while their physical expressions suggested they would subordinate any feelings for others to their love of themselves. (However, Landon delighted in Bulwer Lytton's clothes yet seems to have been oblivious to his vanity.) Describing them as

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"looking at once irresistible and unattainable," Hollander generalizes, "Dandies themselves . . . were never in love. But they were very much, and very hopelessly loved by women" (*Seeing* 228).

Two of Landon's novels, *Romance and Reality* (1831) and *Ethel Churchill* (1837), contain critiques of dandyism, the latter amounting to a violent attack on haughty, beautifully dressed men. The insufferable Lord Marchmont earns the following description: "His lips were thin, and when they did smile, it was stiff, and made up like the embroidery on his coat. His dress was splendid; his hands glittered with rings, his snuff-box was covered with diamonds, and his ruffles were of the finest Mechlin lace" (*Ethel Churchill* 2: 169). Of Sir George Kingston, "the handsomest and the most fashionable man in London," we learn from a woman preparing, literally, to prostitute herself to him: "He has one object in existence -- to be talked about; for this he devotes himself to the reigning beauty; . . . and for this he will take me to be the prettiest piece of furniture . . ." (3: 113-14). The lesson was not that men should refrain from the splendid dress Landon loved but rather that, until proven innocent, the dandified man should be suspected of adopting feminine ornaments, styles, and attitudes without having the passionate imagination these externals were supposed to signify in Woman -- particularly Woman as she was represented by L. E. L.[3] In his self-absorption, the dandy of the 1820s and 1830s threatened to divorce all apparel from passion itself, leaving ornament merely a sign of the wearer's grand ego.

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[3]Bulwer's Pelham justifies his love of jewelry by making it one of his infamous maxims to wear rings and chains only for the sake of women. "We dignify foppery when we invest it with sentiment," he adds (176).

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At the very beginning of the nineteenth century, women in France and England also jettisoned extraneous ornament. Inspired by classical ideals of simplicity and democracy, women wore only white muslin dresses to veil their natural selves. The woman's loosely draped body tantalized through its ever-so-slight sense of mystery, heightening her erotic appeal. Yet the high waist that raised and protruded the breasts likewise suggested a certain girlishness, echoed by the puff-sleeves and innocent whiteness of the costume. In the earliest portrait we have of L. E. L. (in her late teens or early twenties, after she had begun to publish her work), she wore just such a low-cut number, baring half of her breasts and most of her arms. Emerging as a public figure with Fashion's blessing, Landon over the next two decades never fully divested herself of the sexual looseness and naïvety of that original image, together with its longings for romance. Landon's reputation was affected, and her work was, to an incalculable degree, inspired by the period's fashions as expressions of femininity. Women's clothing of the 1820s and 1830s well illustrates what Barthes has explained as Fashion's longstanding juxtaposition of "the excessively serious and the excessively frivolous, which . . . merely reproduces, on the level of clothing, the mythic situation of Women in Western civilization, at once sublime and childlike" (242).

The popular white muslin dresses did not remain unornamented for long. As if confirming Barthes, Hollander observes that in the early decades of the nineteenth century, women's dress became more and more complexly decorated as "women seemed more and more to become the conductors of feeling and the repositories of either frivolous or forbidden fantasy" (*Sex and Suits* 81). Gradually, layers of gauzy

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materials were added to the muslin -- in her letters Landon was fond of noting the satin, silk, tulle, and blonde lace that layered her friends' gowns of the previous evening -- the skirt broadened, and, to tease the male eye with a show of "real" proportions, the waist again lowered and corseted. In compliance with their designated role, women at first were supposed to convey their love of the frivolous or forbidden with richly-colored cashmere shawls and exotic turbans. In the hair's ringlets or braids were increasingly entwined pearls, jewels, feathers, and flowers. And Landon's heroines followed suit. More than any other feature, these and like ornaments allied her work to the latest fashions. As far as her person was concerned, she opted for less costly decoration while endeavoring to remain fashionable. One of Landon's most reproduced portraits, by Maclise, shows her hair fixed in a giant bow, or "coque," its two loops standing high atop her head. There Landon's fluffy, frilly dress also helps to underline her willingness to adopt even the more absurd changes in fashion as "froth and bulk . . . reasserted themselves" in the 1820s and 1830s (96).

. Landon's portraits verify that she wore multiple bracelets and dresses trimmed with ribbons and beads, that she billowed out her (as we now know, sometimes pregnant) person with big collars, leg-o'-mutton sleeves, sloped shoulders, broader skirts of rich and pastel colors, and plumed hats and flower-bedecked bonnets -- suiting every caprice, or each mutation of the heart (Holland 68). In portraits made in the early eighteenth century, extravagances like these would have been seen as a revelation of personal fantasy much like the dress worn at masquerades (Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress* 183). But by the 1770s and increasingly up through the 1830s, styles with exotic or historical resonances, commonly called "'fancy' or 'romantic' dress,"

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were incorporated into mainstream fashion (Ribeiro, *Dress Worn* ii, 107, 241). Consequently, Landon could put a little, a lot, or none of her fantasy life into her dress without the viewer knowing if she gave a glimpse of a private passion or was adopting some fashion on a whim and then "feeling" her way in the clothes (Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress* 31, 190-222).

Moreover, though oriental and renaissance styles were being adapted for fashionable wear, society's love of fanciful dress was not thereby quenched, as masquerades continued to punctuate the London season, much to Landon's enjoyment. Emma Roberts remembered "assisting at her toilette for a *bal costumé*, when we dressed her as Perdita, in the style of an Arcadian shepherdess, with a white chip hat and white roses" (24-25). By standards of the day, Landon tended to dress herself and her characters strikingly yet simply, with just enough ornaments, making it difficult now to determine whether they would have seemed more fashionable or fanciful to viewers.[4] Regardless, Landon seems to have used her interest in a range of styles to

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[4]By 1833 Landon was well aware of the dangers of wearing too fanciful dress. Yet in this letter to Anna Hall reporting the previous evening's outfits, Landon, despite protestations to the contrary, reveals her love of the fanciful. She could do so here because once an item of fanciful dress became fashionable, it had been, in effect, socially sanctioned:

> Lady ----- had on the most picturesque head-dress, an Italian silk net, twisted round the hair, of green ribbon. I am no great admirer of the fanciful in costume generally, but this was very simple and pretty. But, while on the subject of dress, I must tell you of a *new style of shawl* I saw on Mrs. ----. It is formed of broad stripes of different coloured velvets; first, a rich dahlia, then orange, then such a green! a golden brown, and the loveliest of blues it is very large, and lined with ambersilk. I never saw anything so magnificent and oriental. (emphasis mine; Blanchard 1: 100-01)

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give her an advantage over the many poets not inclined to give lengthy descriptions of a character's glamorous appearance -- not inclined, perhaps, to cater to the interests of the vainest readers. If the styles Landon chose for her characters did not reflect those in vogue at the precise time of publication, she could still count on the approval of readers charmed by foreign or period costumes which they might wish to wear at the next masquerade on their social calendar.

No wonder editors of ladies' magazines easily found room for L. E. L.'s poems. And no wonder reviewers for ladies' magazines cited her passages commending feminine accoutrements. Epitomizing this practice, *La Belle Assemblée*'s review of *A History of the Lyre* of November 1829 quoted a male speaker's two sightings of "the Pythoness" Eulalie (also called Eulalia in parts), first wearing only a white robe, "simply gather'd in such folds / As suit a statue: neck and arms were bare; The black hair was unbound, and like a veil / Hung even to her feet" as she paced alone through a gallery with her lute. The holy priestess absorbed in her devotions recalls both the classical style just passed, whose bare parts enticed without the aid of ornament (but whose short hair dodged that eroticism), and the theatrical pose of long, unbound hair, then too sexually provocative to be seen in public except on stage. Mesmerized by this vision of female purity, the male speaker was even more taken back by Eulalie's transformation the next evening at "Count Zarin's palazzo," where her wit and beauty elevated her above everyone present:

Such oriental magnificence could, even by the day's standards, have been considered fanciful, but in this case it shows how the exotic had been incorporated into fashionable wear.

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I could not image aught so changed.

Her robe was Indian red, and worked with gold,

And gold the queen-like girdle round her waist;

Her hair was gather'd up in grape-like curls;

And emerald wreath, shaped into vine leaves, made

Its graceful coronal. (Rev. of *The Venetian* 222)

Still dressing Eulalie in relatively simple clothes for the period, Landon focused on what concerned fashionable women most: the vivid, exotic color so trendy then, its luxurious embroidery, and the girdle accenting the lowered waistline, "queen-like" in its assertion of slender Eulalie's commanding presence. Regarding the hair ornament, it may seem fitting enough that the priestess of song should wear around "grape-like curls" a coronal of emerald vine leaves, symbolizing wealth, status, and a poetic prowess akin to wine's intoxicating capacities. Next to so much signification, the question of the crown's fashionableness may look unimportant to us. But October's issue of *La Belle Assembée* announced that for the evening, "The hair is elegantly arranged in the last new style of clustered curls and bows, but slightly elevated, and crowned with a wreath of full-blown, red roses, of the Provence kind" ("Fashions for October 1829" 166). Women readers were being told by the magazine to crown themselves queens of the evening merely for fashion's sake, provided they could obtain the roses (which incidentally were one of Landon's favorite hair ornaments). In contrast, Landon's women, though often fashionable in one way or another, were justified in wearing their ornaments by her identification of their hearts and minds with their dress: roses, for country lasses longing for love; bright stones,

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for queens to express their majesty and indomitable will; pearls, to set off the black hair of a sultana yearning for her lost purity, etc., etc. Fashion's mutability supplied Landon the means of displaying the many facets of Woman, particularly a mysterious woman like Eulalie -- whereas the rhetoric of the fashion pages avoided questions of suitability and emotional expression, as if no need for justification existed.

Unlike Landon's crowning of the beautiful, talented pythoness, "Fashions for October" offered no meaning for its crown. Instead it hurried on to more mandates on evening dress, the next one stating that "broad bracelets," made of coral beads and fastened by a turquoise stone set in gold, "are to be worn over the gloves" (166). Again, as with most fashion rhetoric, the dress articles were named but "connotation" of any kind was avoided, despite clothing's immense potential for meaning, so that the urge to buy the clothes was not diluted. Barthes argues, "Fashion does not honor the poetic project which affords it its object," because Fashion must convince readers to buy and wear the clothing. Once readers have imaginatively responded to clothes, sensing all the emotional charges that clothes can be made to convey, readers have no need to buy since, in effect, they "own" the meanings of the clothes, or what they signify (235-37, 17). In the early nineteenth century, when women were supposed to carry the entire weight of the forbidden and the frivolous, the poetic project of women's clothes begged to be exploited -- and Landon for one did not miss this opportunity.[5]

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[5]Through publishing Landon's work, fashion magazines indirectly implied the emotional depth that might find expression in their garments, the poetic significance carried by the garments -- without slackening the pressure on consumers to buy clothing and accessories in accordance with the magazines' monthly updates. That

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As if summarizing Landon's many uses for fashionable and fancy dress, Barthes states that an article of dress can "constitute an excellent poetic object; first, because it mobilizes with great variety all the qualities of matter: substance, form, color, tactility, movement, rigidity, luminosity; next, because touching the body and functioning simultaneously as its substitute and its mask, it is certainly the object of a very important investment" (235-36). Based on her experience of London society, Landon showed women's apparel functioning as both substitute and mask. In *Romance and Reality*, while Emily is studying her appearance in the mirror, Landon's speaker remarks: "We can perfectly understand a young lady's drapery being influenced by her feelings, and that Hope may cast her *couleur de rose* over the mirror -- that study of the fair conqueror" (1: 289). But Emily's illusions evaporate with the advice of Lady Mandeville, who knows from experience that most ladies in high society use Fashion to mask their ambitions, their well of sentiments having dried up long ago:

> My sweetest Emily . . . never be picturesque or poetical at your toilette; -- in matters of grave import, never allow vain and foolish fancies to interfere; -- never sit at your looking-glass as if you were sitting for a picture; -- indulge in no vagrant creations of your own. What Pope said of fate is still truer of fashion -- "Whatever is, is right." (2: 212)

Landon in her work often eschewed the highly fashionable for the lightly fanciful also helped to keep separate her approach from that of the fashion updates.

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Emily replies, "But suppose any prevailing fashion is to me peculiarly unbecoming?" She is answered, "It will be less unbecoming than singularity. A peculiar style, especially if that style suit you, will make a whole room your enemies: independence is an affront to your acquaintance" (2: 212-13).

Setting out to capture hearts and impress society, young women needed to adapt their dress to reveal or pretend the feeling that was the fashion. Some form of pretence in their dress and demeanor would have struck most ladies as necessary in the 1820s and 1830s, as one sentimental style after another came in vogue and suddenly demanded obedience. What was true of Landon's writings then was also true of fashion: no clear distinction could be drawn between affectation and genuine expression (König 50). In contrast to the majority of men (excepting butterfly dandies), women who socialized followed the extravagant styles, *en masse* trying on each expression of Woman's fantasy life as Fashion dictated, until the styles were tamed in the 1840s.[6] A woman's romantic flair might be perceived as fashionable one month and outmoded the next, and not exhibiting sufficient respect for new trends could invite merciless ridicule. As complex codes of interpreting appearances kept

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[6]Born just seven years before Landon, Fanny Kemble as a child experimented with the dress of her pasteboard dolls to satisfy herself that dress trimmings could in fact be seen to suggest the state of the wearer's feelings:

> Of the curious effect of dress in producing the sentiment of a countenance, no better illusion can be had than a series of caps, curls, wreaths, ribbons, etc., painted so as to be adaptable to one face; the totally different *character* imparted by a helmet, or a garland of roses, to the same set of features, is a 'caution' to irregular beauties who console themselves with the fascinating variety of their *expression*. (emphasis Kemble's; 1: 14)

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changing, presumably some young ladies stood in ignorance of the character they were seen to display.

Landon was stung by such ridicule more than once during the first two-thirds of her career, so she was somewhat forced to pay attention to fashion trends. Comments by her and her friends imply that this ostracism came from her preference for the "picturesque or poetical" over the fashionable in dress. But to women friends, she excused her less fashionable appearances with the plaint that she never could afford the necessary clothes and accessories, never could afford even "to have two new dresses at a time." Clearly the gossip pained Landon, though her knowledge of what she referred to as "remarks on my dress" was limited (Blanchard 1: 56). She never knew that at one evening party Disraeli avoided her because, as he wrote his sister, she "looked the very personification of Brompton -- pink satin dress and white satin shoes, red cheeks, snub nose, and her hair a la Sappho" (Wiebe 247). How mortified Landon would have been to learn that Disraeli's sneer has been repeated many times by twentieth-century critics! But they have spared her some shame in failing to recognize that the sneer basically related to her not showing sufficient regard for fashion trends.[7] To Disraeli, L. E. L's Greek style, passé by the 1830s, looked like inappropriate fancy dress worn so she would be identified with Sappho. "Bromptonian" signified that she lived in an area filled with artists, as many dramatists and stage players as poets. For his (and many others') approval, Landon

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[7]Most recently, Blain claims that Disraeli's "well-known dismissal of Landon" was based on his demeaning attitude toward her writing professionally as a middle-class woman. If she had been an aristocrat not writing for money, like Lady Blessington, Landon would have been "protected" from such sneers (Blain 39, 50).

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needed only to change her clothes to the prevailing style. Disraeli reported to his sister two months after the above encounter that at the last evening party Landon had "quite changed; she had thrown off Greco-Bromptonian costume and was perfectly *a la francaise*, and really looked pretty" (257).

The exquisite dandy Disraeli then scoffed at a woman writer's adopting eccentric dress to attract notice in polite society. He, of course, saw his own dress as the height of fashion, while deeming Landon's better suited for masquerade. Yet, as ambitious writers, their motives for dressing "peculiarly" were not dissimilar. In a remark from a Landon novel that could be taken to excuse herself as well as Bulwer Lytton and Disraeli -- both of whom were ridiculed for their dress at times in the 1820s and 1830s -- a female character says of a dandy: "The other men do not like him; they called him a coxcomb. Peculiarity in dress is never popular with your own sex; if possible you will be called vulgar: if that is out of the question, there is the resource of calling you affected" (*Ethel Churchill* 3: 84). But whereas Disraeli was criticized for devoting a womanish amount of attention to his dress, Landon could be mocked for not devoting enough to Fashion, so taken was she by the romantic effect clothing could produce. Landon had to learn to consider the consequences of her wearing the fanciful dress she placed on her characters. She had to face the fact that, as a single female celebrity from the thrusting middle classes, her entire person was on show in society and her clothes would invite comment, one way or the other. If she were not to invite the scorn of her social betters, she had no choice in dress, as in so many other things, but to "borrow others' likeness, till / Almost I lose my own" (*The Venetian Bracelet* 266).

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Over the course of her career, Landon realized that to gain and hold the approbation of society, she needed to prove herself an exception to the (prejudicial) rule that women writers dressed themselves abysmally. So occupied were these women with matters historical, political, and scientific, they were rumored to show up for soirées in some form of undress, wearing, for instance, only a dressing gown, or an outlandish outfit, untucked and untidy. Though Landon never considered herself a "blue," she needed to prove that she did not belong to this notorious set of women, reputed mainly not for their books (mostly history and travel) but for flaunting their unkempt selves and half-baked learning at evening parties. In his first epistle cited above, Disraeli listed Landon as one of "a large sprinkling of blues" present at Bulwer Lytton's party, her "red cheeks" and theatrical costume suggesting the tawdriness often associated with actresses and whores (Wiebe 246-47). In this period some women writers still found themselves vulnerable to the charge of tawdriness, a handy slur for a male writer envious of a woman's success. Describing a visit to Landon in the early 1820s, Rosina Bulwer Lytton attributes the poet's attire to her profession: "I was surprised, and somewhat scandalised when I first saw her: for, though only 2 p.m. she had her neck and arms bare, a very short but elaborately flounced white muslin dress, and a flower in her hair -- but I thought, of course, that authoresses, like 'charming women,' might dress themselves just as they pleased" (Devey 41).

Rosina then assumed that women authors, having ignored polite society's rules by writing for money, could not be suffered to follow society's codes of dress and behavior. Why should they bother with the fashions when they would never be fully included among London's most fashionable sets? Not that concerned with rules of

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dress and propriety early in her career, Landon would have seen the flounced muslin, bared limbs, and hair flower as poetic, expecting her contemporaries to be pleased with the dishabille that centuries of English poets had found charming in women. In the following description of Landon at about the same time, Anna Hall overlooks the forbidden -- the moral laxity suggested by Landon's unkempt state (Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* 127) -- to concentrate on the frivolous in her friend: "When I first knew her, and for some time after, she was childishly untidy and negligent in her dress. Her 'frocks' were tossed on, as if buttons and strings were encumbrances; one sleeve off the shoulder, the other on, and her soft, silky hair brushed 'anyhow.' But Emma Roberts, whose dress was always in 'good taste,' determined on her reformation, and gradually the young poet, as she expressed it, 'did not know herself'" (Hall, S. C. *Book of Memories* 273-74).

The testimony to the success of this reformation is left to Anna's husband, who states that, at the zenith of Landon's fame, "in society, at all events, she paid to dress the attention that literary women too frequently neglect" (274). But Landon seems always to have paid attention to dress, always to have chosen her clothes deliberately. For Hall's "dress," read "good taste in dress" or "Fashion" -- that *sine qua non* that set her apart from the tribe of women scribblers as one who appreciated the standards of feminine conformity, with her clothes glamorous yet decorous enough for the best circles in London society. Like the doctrine of separate spheres, Fashion too made Landon appear safe, her eccentric tendencies contained by widespread trends. Frequenting polite society taught her to listen to and obey what Barthes calls "the absolute, dogmatic, vengeful present tense in which Fashion speaks" (273). Though

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she obviously enjoyed knowing every detail of a pretty style, she remained bemused at this god's authority. In a letter to some rural friends for whom her information had no relevance, Landon announces with mock respect the fashion outlook for spring 1833: "There is every appearance that drawn silk bonnets will be worn . . . that sandals are not worn with coloured stocking, but very, very narrow with white. . . . Almost all the long gloves are trimmed either with swansdown, fringe, or . . . blond net. The short gloves to be quite the thing should have a pointed velvet cuff, either their own colour, or some pretty contrast" (Letter to Miss Halford[?]).

As Rosina Bulwer Lytton notes, though "in later years her dress was tamed to the conventional standard . . . her manners were never entirely broken in" (Devey 41). Landon's enthusiasm for what she deemed the poetic aspect of any style, for its playful and illicit sides, inclined her toward all sorts of impropriety. In 1824, the Quaker Mary Howitt wrote her sister that in response to a gift of a book of poems from Bernard Barton, Landon "sent him, in high glee, a full account of a ball she had just attended, particularising all the dresses, forgetting she was writing to a sober Quaker." Howitt further reported that Landon was known to be "a most thoughtless girl in company, doing strangely extravagant things; for instance, making a wreath of flowers, then rushing with it into a grave and numerous company, and placing it on her patron's [Jerdan's] head." Considering that when this occurred Landon already had one child by Jerdan secreted away somewhere, we can see the danger of the games she was willing to play. We get a hint of how Landon survived them from Howitt's beg for allowance: "However, she [Landon] is but a girl of twenty [actually twenty-two], a genius, and therefore she must be excused" (104). Having posed as a child genius,

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Landon was most romantically excused for her extravagances by Anna Hall and Mary Howitt, both published writers keen to promote female writing talent. Indeed, Landon's presumed genius enabled her to set a fashionable pose or two for young women, notably writers -- though not without some frowning on the antics of the vivacious poetesses who began sprouting up in Britain and the continent. In a letter whose 1836 date indicates that Landon did not become much subdued with the passing years, Thomas Hood pointed out the similarity in behavior between that of the German poet Bettina Brentano von Arnim, "quite notorious in Berlin," and that of Landon: "After the manner of L. E. L. she ['Bettine'] affects to be the girl so young and innocent, that she lays her head on gentlemen's bosoms or sits on their laps . . ." (Marchand 45).

No doubt it added to Landon's popularity that the frivolous was ever shadowed by the forbidden in her life and work. As realizations of mythic Woman, her works typically developed upon some fashions (for the upper and middle classes) and popular trends (for middle and lower classes), but their own trendiness seems to have been as much a matter of accident as of design. One could spend years researching the extent to which Landon's female bodies were formed from or helped form fashionable postures, clothes, opinions, etc. Her consumptive female characters, for instance, clearly followed a fashion for male consumption set largely by the Romantic poets, whose impact prompted fashion critic René König to assert, "The human body, in posture and gait, in movement and expression, is completely formed by fashion. Even health and sickness are subject to it. . . . In about 1830 every artist and snob was posing as a consumptive" (48).

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But most poses could be assumed with far less threat to one's well-being. In a delightful passage from *Romance and Reality* (1831), Landon satirizes society's regard for poses that were subject to the whim of Fashion like all other visual commodities. We are told that Lady Lauriston's "first daughter had come out during the reign of useful employments; Lady Susan plainted straw, and constructed silk shoes" until her utilitarianism snared for a husband the wealthy Mr. Amundeville. "A day of dash and daring came next; and Anastasia rode the most spirited hunter, drove her curricle, told amusing stories, drew caricatures, and laughed even louder than she talked." She married Lord Shafton. "Sentiment succeeded; and Laura leant over the harp, and sat by moonlight in a window-seat, sighed when her flowers faded, and talked of Byron and Italy. Sir Eustace St. Clair made her an offer while her dark blue eyes were filled with tears at some exquisite lines he had written in her album." Lady Adelaide, Lady Lauriston's youngest daughter and a representative of the voguish ladies of the early 1830s, assumed a style "like that of a French tragedy, classical, cold, and correct, -- indifference, languor, and quietude now united to form a *beau idéal* of elegance" (1: 107-8).

Launching herself with *Romance and Reality* into the glutted market of silver-fork novels, Landon could feel confident that her descriptions of this milieu had the validity necessary for effective satire. She may have been poking fun at some of her wealthier readers in Anastasia's taste for adventure, or in Lady Adelaide's affectation of lanquor, for her corpus provides more than a few examples of both imitable types. But there can be no question that, with Laura's seduction of St. Clair as she cried into her album, the album poet *par excellence* was satirizing those readers who too grandly

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displayed adoration for the "sweet L. E. L." A friend of Landon characterizes the type when she describes how one evening a "butterfly of fashion," on hearing that the famous poetess was at the party, "begged for an introduction," then, when seated with Landon, "was heard to express her satisfaction in having met with such a kindred heart, as she was sure Miss Landon's must prove!" (Blanchard 1: 286).

Yet, as we have seen, this fashionable young woman had reason enough to assume from Landon's works that she and Landon bore some kind of "kindred heart." When Landon had, in a conversation with Margaret Howitt, dismissed the annuals as "butterflies of literature," Howitt thought the phrase inappropriate coming from the lips of "L. E L., herself a butterfly" (117). The Quaker Howitt was clearly not impressed by Landon's ability to appeal to flippant beauties enthusiastic for album literature. A *Westminster* reviewer in 1827 seriously worried about "the admiration universally bestowed on them [Landon's poems] by the class of readers to whom they are addressed; viz. the younger part of the fair sex, and those members of our's [sic] who deem it interesting to be sentimentally melancholy" ("The Poetry of L. E. L." 50). On behalf of his supposedly progressive journal, he expressed "deep concern" for these women but only "pity" for such contemptible men. His telling phrase, "deem it interesting," suggests that the men were affected, merely following a fashion. Of the young women, the reviewer seems less sure, probably assuming that women were by nature inclined to be sentimentally melancholy and thus they should be directed away from the inclination.

Such remarks confirm that Landon succeeded in attracting the favor of the audience to which she pitched much of her poetry, specified in her Introduction to

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Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book (1831) as "chiefly . . . a young and gentler class of readers" (3). In addition to its being comprised of readers from the upper and middle classes (a fact the reviewer would consider too obvious to note), Landon's audience for poetry appears to have been largely comprised of young women who admired the trappings of high society -- though the majority would have been excluded from it -- and who liked to indulge in escapist fantasies, imagining themselves in the mirror of L. E. L's pages as princesses and poetesses with the most stunning clothes, ardent feelings, and delicate health possible. As Barthes maintained, imaginative identification could go a long way toward satisfying longings for the accoutrements of rank, wealth, and beauty (235-37). That the majority of her readers were young women has been supported by recent critics pointing out the large number of women readers in the Romantic period. Unsurprisingly, poetry by women was read mainly by women readers (Curran 182, 192; Mellor 7). To Landon, these "young ladies" -- or "non-entities in creation" as she once ironically referred to them (*Romance and Reality* 1: 12) -- could be relied on not to tire of the topic of love, especially those who lived isolated existences. Indeed, Landon romanticized their isolation, basing much of her work on the ideal that the love of a lonely young woman fed "on fancy, rather than hope. . . . Her attachment is the heathenism of the heart: she has herself created the glory and beauty with which the idol of her altar stands invested" (2: 284). "She" was the more beautiful one, possessed with as much inner as outer loveliness. Thus, at a time when the industrial revolution fired the ambitions of middle-class men and while dandies strutted from one club to another, Landon's feminine poetry encouraged young women left at home to feel not only that they

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endowed their male idols with the prowess and beauty they were reputed to possess but also that such creative adoration in the face of neglect proved Woman's own glory, a glory not unlike the heroines of fairy tales.[8]

Illustrating a different kind of emotional creativity, passages like that above on the tactics of the Lauriston sisters imply that Landon deemed young women who had "lived in society" -- hence, likely to be from the upper classes, and, according to Landon, driven by "vanity" rather than bourgeois "sentiment" (*Romance and Reality* 3: 196) -- not above trying to acquire the costumes and demeanors of her heroines. To attract admiration, and perhaps husbands, women born into rank and/or wealth appear to have imitated the feelings and concerns of the unsophisticated classes if and when those feelings and concerns carried fashionable currency in society. Indeed, each of the styles adopted by the Lauriston sisters -- utilitarian, adventurous, sentimental, and even languorous -- seems to have been ultimately derived from literature that permeated that vast, new readership known as "the British public" well before it became fashionable with high society: political pamphlets, romantic novels, poetry, and plays appear to have served as fodder for the style makers. Needing to appeal to sophisticated women with the same poetry that charmed their bourgeois counterparts, Landon then capitalized on this exploitation of popular literature by society's trend-setters, ever in need of new material to fashion new forms of artifice. Through its forced wedding of middle-class sentimentality and upper-class luxury, Landon's

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[8]In the 1820s and 1830s, with many men having died in the Napoleonic wars, single women greatly outnumbered bachelors. Besides, "there was a common perception . . .

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poetry redeemed artificiality from itself for the sake of most of her female readers. She vindicated their yearning for unreal beauty as a quest for that which could best display the purest hearts.

Taking her lead from album publishers, Landon recognized that trivial as the single young woman might appear amid society's grand personages, her status as a valued sex object motivated her becoming a valuable consumer, with a taste for poetic images that idealized fashionable poses. So if we remember Landon's portrayal in her 1831 novel of Lady Adelaide's assumed style upon entering society -- "indifference, languor, and quietude now united to form a *beau ideal* of elegance" -- then it is no surprise that Landon opens *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book for 1834* with "The Zenana," which begins:

> What is there that the world hath not
> Gathered in yon enchanted spot?
> Where, pale, and with a languid eye,
> The fair Sultana listlessly
> Leans on her silken couch, and dreams. . . . (3)

Even here, where the pose projects a lack of interest in the surroundings, Landon supplies a sentimental rationale for that dearth. For the fair Sultana does not exude listlessness from a sense of superiority and "*ennui*" -- that "monster god of the 'twenties generation" that impressed itself on the London social scene (Moers, *The*

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that middle-class men were deliberately refraining from marriage" (Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* 221).

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Dandy 40) -- but because her lover has gone to war, and, in his absence, her virtuous sensibility prohibits her caring for anything else.

Landon could find justification for social languor, though. In the short lyric, "Fantasies Inscribed to T. Crofton Croker," the speaker complains of high society, "I'm weary, I'm weary, -- this cold world of ours," but then announces:

> Farewell to the festal, the hall of the dance,
> Where each step is a study, a falsehood each glance;
> Where the vain are displaying, the vapid are yawning;
> Where the beauty of night, the glory of dawning,
> Are wasted, as Fashion, that tyrant, at will
> Makes war on sweet Nature, and exiles her still.
> (*The Venetian Bracelet* 229)

The vapid do not seek to escape as they are unable to consider existing outside London society. The speaker manages to throw off weariness temporarily by imagining taking off garments she calls "clay fetters" and going to "dwell afar, with fairies and flowers," where "I but wear / A shadowy seeming, a likeness of air" (229-30). In Landon's hands, listlessness can signal the dawning of rebellion, or simply that yearning for a fairyland where Fashion could not reduce those who frequent London society to victims of their desire to impress an evening's guests or to mix with those who impress. The speaker in the end admits that she cannot really escape as no fairyland exists that can rival the sparkle of the London social scene. "For, alas! I'm but dreaming, and dreams are but vain" (231).

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From her letters we learn that Landon at times felt bored with the round of parties that made up the social season, though she loved to receive a "load of invitations." Nor did she tire of society's displays of fashionable clothes. In an 1833 letter to friends living far from London, she reported that at Rosina Bulwer Lytton's soirée "Mrs. Windham Lewis had a blue velvet dress, her hair in loose ringlets, a magnificent bandeau of diamonds"; that "Lady Stepney had a blonde dress over vapeure sattin [sic], and a cherry coloured velvet hat with white feathers"; and that "Mr Bulwer looked desperately well -- he had on a black coat, a blue velvet waistcoat, checks of shaded blue alternately dark and light, a light curious looking gold chain, black trousers, showing the shape of the knee . . . the shoe rather enamelled than blacked." Yet, clothes aside, she thought her evening was forgettable. "And now I have told you every thing about the party; it really is 'truly astonishing' how like one soirée is to another and how little is to be said about any" (Letter to Miss Halford [?]). Years spent as a celebrity invited into society to entertain it had left Landon with the opinion that, as she once expressed to T. Crofton Croker after an evening out, "All rich people deserve to be as dull as thank God they are . . ." (1832 Ms.).

Landon's love-hate relationship with Fashion -- particularly its "subversion" against the very establishment that supported it (Barthes 273, König 45) -- can be explained in part by her ambiguous feelings toward the aristocracy, whose conservative instincts could never be wholly reconciled to Fashion's abhorrence of the dull. Her review of Bulwer Lytton's novels exemplifies her reverence for nobility's past and disdain for its present vapidity. In a long note to the essay, Landon traced Bulwer Lytton's aristocratic heritage on his father's side back to properties obtained at

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the time of the Norman Conquest, and, on his mother's side, back to the reign of Henry VII, when Knebworth "passed into the hands of the first De Lytton, of Lytton, in Derbyshire, Treasurer to the King, and Governor of Boulogne Castle" (438). Yet all this respect for blue blood lines was overshadowed by a passage Landon included in the main body of the review, where she pointed out the "fact not to be disputed, that the aristocracy have not 'progressed' in proportion to the other classes" ("Living" 438). With her status as a middle-class, self-educated woman veiled by anonymity, Landon could afford to be smug as she discussed how the elite had reacted to the spread of education to the lower classes:

> It would seem that education, in ceasing to be a distinction, had lost half its attraction. The evaded study and dissipation of a public school is succeeded by the equally evaded study and dissipation of a college; and too many of our youthful aristocracy begin life with self-sufficiency for knowledge, prejudices for opinions, and with pleasure a habit rather than an enjoyment. The great error of their condition is, that their road through life is too royal a one. . . . (438)

These, of course, were men who possessed every advantage that Landon lacked, and who could, like Bulwer Lytton did that same year, climb into Parliament through the aid of their connections and the respect accorded them as male aristocrats. Though Landon applauded Bulwer Lytton's industriousness as unusual for his class, her frequent association with the aristocracy did not let her forget that industriousness could bring only limited success to members of the wrong classes and, worse, the wrong sex. Bitterly aware of aspersions made against her dress when she could not

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afford to keep up with Fashion, Landon's admiration for expensive draperies exacerbated her resentment of those with wealth, inherited or made. As with her outfitting of characters, the luxurious scenes in her work could be read as Landon's attempt to outshine the glittering rooms in some of her friends' grand houses. She once wrote Jerdan expressing hope that he enjoyed his stay at a country estate but admitted that, "as far as my own taste is concerned, I hate seeing other people's fine places, why should they be so much better off than I am[?]" (Ms. in Moore).

Surely the wealthy ladies at whose estates Landon enjoyed staying never knew she "hated" their possessions. Unlike marriageable daughters from the upper classes or the leading butterflies striving for effects, Landon seems never to have exhibited in society the tears or languor of her poetry, the boredom or class resentment of her letters, because she did not dare to. For although displays of melancholy were fashionable among younger members of society in the 1820s and early 1830s, such displays represented a protest against society's generally frivolous tenor -- albeit a protest subdued enough to be tolerated within society's precincts. Yet from one already on the fringe by virtue of her being a middle-class female writer, the assumption of such "a subtle form of asocial behaviour" as a fashionable pose might have resulted in her hosts' deciding to forget they knew her (König 125). In his commentary on society, *England and the English* (1833), Bulwer Lytton noted that a "listless and vague melancholy which partakes both of the Philosophic and the Poetic . . . is chiefly confined to the young," resulting from their "weariness" with "a dull and insipid circle" (1: 173-74). Though he thought the manifestation of this discontent was widespread, Bulwer Lytton considered it too deeply rooted to belong to

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"FASHION," which he defined earlier in the text as "the shadow of the national character itself." But he acknowledged the trend-setters' inherent dissatisfaction with high society in his statement that English Fashion's "coin has opposite effigies -- on the one side you see the respect for wealth -- on the other side the disdain"(1: 134-35).

Propelled by its unceasing need to change, Fashion refused to subordinate itself to all the conservative norms of London society, scorning, as a consequence, the wealth and rank that supported it while trying to cling to its principles and retain a sense of superiority. Despite the exclusivism the fashionables affected, they indirectly subjected the class system itself to questioning at a time when class differences were most visibly pronounced and the cry for reform growing ever louder. Fashion's rebellious instincts could sense the attraction of other forms of dissatisfaction.[9] Selfishly, it appropriated whatever forms caught its fancy to provide ways of standing out, but not too far out. Thus, fashion trends served as a kind of perpetual protest against the very establishment by which those trends were co-opted and perpetuated. The establishment kept the fashionables somewhat placated by flattery, but their boundless determination to be admired made it impossible for their admirers to forget that resentment might simmer beneath many a dandy's smile. For Fashion either felt it did not receive its due amount of admiration or it became bored with mere admiration. One year before the Reform Bill was passed, Landon put in the mouth of Lord

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[9]The attraction was not mutual, however, as most reform movements opposed public expressions of sensuality and detested the public's fascination with the fashionable world (Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* 106; Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexual Attitudes 3*).

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Mandeville the following reflection: "Discontent is the shadow of display, and display is the characteristic of our age" (*Romance and Reality* 2: 276).

With disdain and discontent at its heart, Fashion inevitably found many of its leaders among upstarts who sought to follow in Beau Brummell's non-aristocratic footsteps to positions of influence in high society. The superficial, showy character of the period in general attests to the impatience of the *nouveau riche* as well as the middle classes to gain acceptance and respect. Bulwer Lytton remarks in *England and the English*, "We allow the opulent to possess power, but we deny them fashion. . . . [O]stentation becomes the order of the day" (1: 135-36). Ostentation naturally begat more ostentation in a competitive environment where the "order of the day" was dictated not by the concerns of industrial moguls or members of the Prime Minister's cabinet, but by the fashions that leading members of the upper classes had to copy from their inferiors in age, wealth, or rank -- ironically, to look as if they deserved their privileges (Moers, *The Dandy* 12-13). A liberal M. P. at the dawn of the Age of Reform, Bulwer Lytton viewed much of the period's ostentation as attempts at self-advancement whose success lay ultimately in the hands of public opinion, though real "power" still did not.[10]

The bohemian writers and artists who strutted into fashionable society in the 1820s and 1830s represented another potential source of consternation for members of the establishment. A *New Monthly* article entitled "Revolution in Fashion" (1821)

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[10]Bulwer, however, evidently perceived fashionableness as a means to power for those less well-off members of the upper classes, having himself been assisted in his election to Parliament by the renown of his trend-setting novels, dress, and parties.

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evinced anxiety about the role that artists were beginning to play in London society, deploring "the alarming invasion of the dominions of fashion by the low-born and the countervailing effects." To point out how far present society had sunk, the author then mused on the better days when Alexander Pope was writing: "No wit, poet, painter, actor, musician, or critic, fancied his Presence capable of conferring honour upon the highest circles. . . . [T]he poet, if he penetrated beyond the anti-room, was permitted to do so only to present a laudatory dedication, which, if graciously received, was repaid with a moderate bank note, and he retired from the magnificent mansion of the peer in all the lowliness of mind to his lofty habitation in Grub-street" (M. M. 362). Landon felt certain her Presence conferred honor on dull rich people. They in turn regarded her as both a literary star and social interloper, and as such she remained set apart, a genius to be wondered at. She was toasted by a society ravenous to be entertained by new celebrities, particularly female ones, and, for a time, this celebration thrilled her all the more in the contrast it offered to her struggle against poverty. The thrill was eventually tarnished by her realization that as celebrity and interloper, she would always be held at a distance while being expected to perform.

Fashion's need for the new drove Landon to stardom. A single young woman with no rank or fortune who invaded "the domininions of fashion" in print as well as in person, Landon was able to make an impression inconceivable in its strength for someone like herself in previous generations in Britain. Display became a way of life for Landon, though she was too proud to admit it -- except indirectly in print. In her novel *Ethel Churchill* (1837), when the poet Walter tries to write one morning though "last night's excess had left him weary and feverish," the narrator remarks, "Of all the

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shapes that temptation can assume, surely that of social success is the most fascinating. . . . The [writer's] vanity is at once encouraged and gratified . . ." (2: 152). Landon expected her audience to read such remarks as autobiographical. Her position as a literary socialite gave these asides authority, and the fact that other socialites would read them gave her no room to make false or irrelevant observations about "social success." True enough, Landon's poetry was filled with pronouncements on the hollowness of fame, and her friends lined up after her death to testify that she was never swayed by, much less addicted to, the attention she received from the great and the good. But in their Victorian way, these friends protested far too much. Their statements have remained unchallenged because Landon's letters and novels have remained largely unread. Regarding her own temptations, Landon at least knew her poetic efforts to manifest the hollowness of fashionable society could not convince her to turn away from it for good. As Lady Orkney sighed in a letter to Henrietta in *Ethel Churchill*, "'I thought I had turned my mind in a philosophical way of having done with the world; but I find I have deceived myself.'" To this, the heroine Henrietta could only respond, "'Poor Lady Orkney! it is what we all do'" (2: 45).

Landon knew that her prestige came to her upon British readers' appointing her their flavor of the month. Yet she refused to surrender what at first was a serendipitous fashionableness, partly because she could not afford to but also because she liked the taste of social success and wanted more. After the publishing triumph of *The Improvisatrice* (1824), Landon's life and her work in an unusually high number of genres can be seen as a series of great and small attempts to hold onto and finally to cling to her status as a fashionable celebrity. Embracing the latest trends while trying

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to attract readers across class lines, she was continually adapting and exceeding requirements. But in an age of excess her enthusiastic displays never failed to interest many. Her work was always relatively successful in the marketplace. The public's fascination with high society, particularly the changing fashions on display there, enabled Landon to maintain a wide appeal for the nearly two decades in which she published.

For, on the whole, Fashion did not so much promote the lifestyle of the upper classes as it allowed for individuals to promote themselves by displaying themselves without seeming inordinately self-centered -- a promotion gained often despite their gender and class. As long as she embraced one fashion or another, Landon was given the relative freedom to promote herself as a talented, inspired poetess. Though she might make a modern critic blanch with her "endless, self-appraising celebration of the wondrous fact that she is a poet" (Leighton 59), such boldness should not be dismissed or, worse, denigrated, especially when it is coming from a woman in her position in the 1820s and 1830s. London's environment of perpetual change and stimulation also made it relatively easy for her to switch from one attitude to another, questioning the premises of the previous attitude in the process, without endangering her public favor to any significant degree. After all, London required its inhabitants to be receptive to influences from all quarters, and because of the periodical press's growth, what was argued about in London had a better chance than ever before of being chattered over throughout the country, as well as in France, Germany, and America. Through immersing herself in the life of London, Landon reached many thousands.

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All of her writing career Landon believed that, because of their capacity to stir the dreams of a generation, popular and fashionable images were fraught with significance. A writer like herself need only claim to be communicating that significance and her pronouncements would be accepted by readers who liked thinking their tastes meaningful. To them, Landon wanted to seem to be ploughing through the image's surface to dredge up latent ideals that she had made it her mission to proclaim. As we have seen, she would then cobble together images from fashionable society, techniques from the popular stage, and feminine ideals from romantic literature, confident that her use of materials already accepted in the public domain allowed her occasionally to run riot in print. Landon's trust of the popular and the fashionable, oddly enough, imbued her with her distinct literary voices. That trust gave a verve to her performances, be they melancholy or gleeful. For readers today, that trust can therefore be seen to hold her together as a literary figure -- as an idealistic young woman fully engaged in the zeitgeist, rather than a sad, fragmented woman, alienated from her deepest feelings. With her social gaiety and secret love affair and children, Landon was yet hardly more fragmented than her period, divided as it was between admiring the rich and beautiful and sorrowing over the distresses of the orphaned and abandoned. In her enthusiasm for the latest trends, she displayed her trust of public opinion's ability to determine Britain's future. But, then, so did the leaders of high society when they opened their doors to the fashionable artists from Grub Street.

Notwithstanding Fashion's emphasis on society instead of the family, on pleasure, luxury, and novelty instead of duty, charity, and modesty, the influence of

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Fashion in the 1820s and most of the 1830s foreshadowed the cultural dominance of the middle classes throughout the Victorian period -- when "the brilliancy of Carlton House was effaced by the drab monotony of Buckingham Palace" (Chancellor 7). Society's admiration for the fashionables, grudging though it may have been, smoothed the transition from an aristocracy-centered culture to a bourgeois one, of which Landon had just a glimpse before sailing for Africa. But the world she knew well was one where the most privileged let their stage be used for brilliant exhibitions of ennui, and then observed the show with a mixture of amusement, irritation, and fear, perhaps at the thought that some of those weary young men would one day be entering Parliament. (What better example of the type than Benjamin Disraeli?) Leading members of society did not (dare) let go unnoticed simmers of disenchantment, which could have boiled over into more drastic societal changes than actually took place in nineteenth-century Britain.

Yet one great change that did occur was the downfall of Fashion from its Olympus. Chancellor points out that "the development of dress down to the end of George IVth's rule and the marked elegance of manners in a certain restricted area of Society only made the survival of less urbane customs, among other classes of citizens, more marked and noticeable" (10). That is to say, glamorous Fashion set itself up as ruler of the public's attention only to be overthrown by that public, along with all that had to do with high society, once a young Queen mounted the throne, married a sober German, and began producing heirs. Maybe it is just as well that Landon perished before the familial domesticity she had denied herself and been

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denied was given the greatest importance in the nation's eyes. I cannot imagine her tasting the same kind of success once excessive social pleasures went out of style.

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