The Making of Letitia Landon: Reception, Media, Art

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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia
in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

University of Virginia
May, 2019

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Acknowledgments

> *Though a Preface be the first page seen in a volume, it is always the last page written. By that time, the golden age of hope has darkened into the iron age of fear. The ideas that seemed at first so delightful, are grown common, by passing through the familiarizing process of writing, printing, and correcting. A proof-sheet is a terrible reality; and you look upon your work with much the same feeling as people look upon the prospect to which they are accustomed—they are much more alive to its faults than its beauties.*

So wrote Letitia Landon in 1831, and as usual, she was on to something. (I type this late in the afternoon of a warm April day: it is the last page I will write before submitting this dissertation to the University of Virginia's scholarly repository.) I came to this project late in my graduate career, and am indeed acutely alive to its faults—but for the best of what follows I am indebted to many wonderful people. I owe first and greatest thanks to Jerome McGann, Andrew Stauffer, and James Seitz for their unremitting intellectual and moral support. They are all exemplary, generous teachers, who have helped me see not just this project but also the whole profession more clearly. Thank you for believing in my work.

To my colleagues and friends, thank you, thank you, for seeing me through. Thank you for the conversations over coffee and wine, the fin de siècle parties, film nights, writing groups, and Friendsgivings. Kirsten, Matt, Gretchen, Brandon, Annie, Anne, Kelly, Eliza, Becca, Ethan, Dana, Phoebe, Khristian, Amy, Brooke, Ann, Michelle, Hannah, Gerard: I'm honored to know each of you.

I am greatly indebted to the independent researcher Peter Bolton, who described himself to me as "merely an enthusiast with an enquiring mind." His excellent, painstakingly proofed transcriptions of Landon's poems into Wikisource made the writing of this dissertation substantially less difficult, and allowed for discoveries I certainly could not have made in their absence. My thanks also to the librarians and staff of the University of Virginia library, who are

unfailingly helpful, kind, and expert. I am especially grateful to the Interlibrary Services team, who cheerfully fulfilled my incessant requests for the same books over and over.

And finally, to my parents and my sister, who have encouraged and supported me unconditionally for so many years: thank you. I couldn't have done it without you.

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A Note on the Text

I have erred on the side of excess when it comes to quotation. Most of the poems I discuss are difficult to access in any form, especially those printed in literary annuals. I reproduce long segments of Landon's poems partly to aid the readers of this dissertation, but also because the texts deserve our attention, preservation, and care.

A history of how and where works of imagination have been produced, would be more extraordinary than even the works themselves.

Letitia Elizabeth Landon, *Ethel Churchill: Or, the Two Brides*

Prologue | Whose Ending?

Letitia Elizabeth Landon's sudden death in October 1838 at a former slavery outpost on the Gold Coast of Africa caused a sensation. Speculation about the event continued for months after news reached England, where tributes to Landon in prose and verse proliferated in literary magazines and periodicals. In January of 1840, William Maginn commented at length on Landon's death in an essay for *Fraser's Magazine*, condemning the authorities for failing to respond in the immediate aftermath of the incident:

> It is, to say the least, strange, that, although a year has now elapsed since the tidings of her death arrived in England, not a word beyond the first vague and unsatisfactory communication of her sudden fate has reached us. It is somewhat remarkable, that […] nothing can be learned of the death of L.E.L. beyond the confused report of a hasty inquest, destitute of many characteristics indispensably required to stamp a value upon such inquiries held in this country.[1]

The mystery would never be solved. Landon had been buried the day after the inquest, and Maginn suggests that by the time of his writing her "mortal remnants" must have already "passed into clay," which he imagines "blend[ing] undistinguishably with the tropic-baked and fermenting mould of Cape Coast Castle" (25). Landon's poetic remains, however, were still intact, and Maginn's examination of that body of work led him to the conclusion that whatever the cause of death, Landon "had herself predicted" her fate (25). He presents, by way of evidence, an excerpt from one of her poems, his careful selection calculated to underscore the striking coincidence between poetic narrative and true life:

[1] Maginn, "Preface to Our Second Decade," *Fraser's Magazine* 21 (January 1840): 24.

Where my father's bones are lying,

There my bones will never lie;

* * *

Mine shall be a lonelier ending,

Mine shall be a wilder grave,

Where the shout and shriek are blending,

Where the tempest meets the wave;

Or perhaps a fate more lonely,

In some drear and distant ward,

Where my weary eyes meet only

Hiréd nurse and sullen guard.

The special use Maginn makes of Landon's poetry as prophetic writing was not unusual by early 1840. He incorporates into the *Fraser's* essay an extract from William Howitt's introduction to *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1840 in which Howitt quotes Landon—"another Cassandra"—to similar divinatory effect.[2] In 1841, Laman Blanchard reproduced the *Fraser's* excerpt ("Where my father's bones are lying"), along with Maginn's interpretation of it, in the first volume of his *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.* Magazine and periodical editors in turn

[2] Howitt, "L.E.L.," *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* [for 1840] (London, 1839), 6. Howitt declares that "her poems […] were […] but the heralds and delineations of melancholy misfortune and death. Let any one turn to any or all of her poetical volumes, and say whether this be not so, with few, and in most of them, no exceptions. The very words of her first heroine might have literally been uttered as her own:—

'Sad were my shades, methinks they had
Almost a tone of prophecy;
I ever had, from earliest youth,
A feeling what my fate would be.'

The Improvisatrice, p. 3."

excerpted and recirculated Blanchard's text in the years following. This mid-nineteenth-century explication of Landon's literary remains provided one kind of closure to the open-ended questions surrounding her death: the printed body of work could answer for the irrecoverable body of clay.

But when we examine carefully the texts handed down to us by these early exegetes, they produce more questions than answers. Let us reconsider the extract Maginn prints in his *Fraser's Magazine* essay. It appears to be derived from Landon's sixty-eight line poem "Kalendria. A Port in Cilicia," originally printed in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1838 as a poetic illustration to the engraving titled *Kalendria, Coast of Cilicia* (figure 1).

Figure 1. *Kalendria, Coast of Cilicia* in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1838 (1837), courtesy HathiTrust

But the *Scrap Book* poem differs substantially from the excerpt printed by Maginn. Compare below the *Scrap Book* text (left) with the *Fraser's* version (right):

Where my father's bones are lying,	Where my father's bones are lying,

There mine own will never lie;	There my bones will never lie;
[…]	* * *
Mine will be a wilder ending,	Mine shall be a lonelier ending,
Mine will be a wilder grave,	Mine shall be a wilder grave,
Where the shriek and shout are blending,	Where the shout and shriek are blending,
Or the tempest sweeps the wave.	Where the tempest meets the wave;
Mine may be a fate more lonely,	Or perhaps a fate more lonely,
In some sick and foreign ward,	In some drear and distant ward,
Where my weary eyes meet only	Where my weary eyes meet only
Hired nurse or sullen guard.	Hiréd nurse and sullen guard.

(25-26, 29-36)

Given the differences between these two versions, it is possible that Maginn copied his extract from a source other than Landon's "Kalendria." However, if there is such an intermediary text, my searching has not found it.[3] Maginn might have been printing the poem from faulty memory, or he might have revised the poem himself, perhaps to make it point more clearly to the poet's doom.

No matter the cause for the variants, they strengthen the claims Maginn makes about Landon in the *Fraser's* essay. The reference to "my bones" in the second line of the *Fraser's* text (vs. Landon's pronoun phrase "mine own") reinforces Maginn's macabre prose description of Landon's bodily disintegration, while the doubling of "lonelier" (lines 3 and 7) and substitution of "drear and distant" for "sick and foreign" (line 8) echo Landon's own impressions of the African outpost. "The solitude here is very Robinson Crusoeish," she had written to her

[3] Google Books and full-text databases such as *British Library Newspapers* and *British Periodicals* do not return any results that predate the *Fraser's* text.

publisher, three days before she died.[4] In another letter to a friend, dated October 15—the day of her death—she reported the following:

> The solitude, except an occasional dinner, is absolute; from seven in the morning till seven when we dine, I never see Mr. Maclean, and rarely any one else […] On three sides we are surrounded by the sea. I like the perpetual dash on the rocks: one wave comes up after another, and is for ever dashed in pieces, like human hopes, that can only swell to be disappointed. We advance; up springs the shining froth of love or hope, 'a moment white, and gone for ever.'[5]

Landon's last packet of letters had been widely reprinted beginning in January of 1839, where they served to further public speculation about what had really happened at the "drear and distant" Cape Coast Castle. The *Fraser's* version of the poem replicates the tone of those last missives, and capitalizes upon the popularly held belief that Landon must have found her new situation unbearably isolating.

No matter the source or motive behind Maginn's excerpt, however, the full publication history of this text thoroughly undermines his reading of it as prophecy. In fact, the poem did not originate with Landon at all. The divinatory "Kalendria" is actually a clever rewriting of someone else's work—most likely John Wilson's. Landon could have first seen the poem in the "Noctes Ambrosianae. No. LXV," published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in May of 1834. Or she might have read it in a miscellany like *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and*

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[4] Landon to Robert Fisher, October 12, 1838, in *Letters by Letitia Elizabeth Landon*, ed. Francis J. Sypher (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 2001), 196.
[5] Landon to Marie Fagan, October 15, 1838, in *Letters*, 198. This letter was also reprinted as prefatory material in *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L.* (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1839). "A moment white, and gone for ever" alludes to Robert Burns's "Tam O'Shanter": "But pleasures are like poppies spread,/ You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed;/ Or like the snow falls in the river,/ A moment white—then melts forever."

Instruction, which printed two "songs" from the May "Noctes" in its June 14th issue of the same year. In any case, it did not come to her in a vision.

Though Landon's poem is clearly a copy of the *Blackwood's* original, she made several changes to it for the *Scrap Book*. Perhaps most noticeably, she revised the second half of the fifth stanza and moved it closer to the poem's conclusion, where it intensifies the sentimental "farewell" of the final stanza. Periodically she introduced terms that reference the accompanying *Scrap Book* illustration, as when she replaced "Kindred, friends, good-by for ever!" with "Thou, fair isle! adieu for ever!" The extract we have been examining contains a few of these interesting revisions:

from "Noctes Ambrosianae No. LXV":		*from "Kalendria. A Port in Cilicia":*
Where my father's bones are lying,		Where my father's bones are lying,
There mine own will never lie;		There mine own will never lie;
Where the pale wild-flowers are sighing		Where the myrtle groves are sighing,
Sweet beneath a summery sky.		Soft beneath our summer sky.
Mine will be less hallow'd ending	5	Mine will be a wilder ending,
Mine will be a wilder grave;		Mine will be a wilder grave,
When the shriek and shout are blending,		Where the shriek and shout are blending,
Or the tempest sweeps the wave.		Or the tempest sweeps the wave.
Or, perhaps, a fate more lonely,		Mine may be a fate more lonely,
In some sick and foreign ward,	10	In some sick and foreign ward,

When my weary eyes meet only
Hired nurse or sullen guard.[6]

Where my weary eyes meet only
Hired nurse or sullen guard.

Landon's substitution of "myrtle groves" at line 3 for the original's "pale wild-flowers," for example, helps shift the poem from an English to a Mediterranean register. Notably, variants appear in every version of this passage at the fifth line. The "lonelier ending" of the *Fraser's* text is transposed from the "wilder" substitution Landon makes for Wilson's "less hallow'd"—but then Landon never was religious. However the shift from "will" to "shall" in the *Fraser's* text (also at line 5) not only elevates the formal register of the excerpt, but also replaces a modal verb derived etymologically from desire with one inflected by necessity or obligation.

If most of Landon's revisions to the "Noctes" poem make it a more fitting accompaniment to the image—and perhaps a better sentimental poem—the original "Noctes" opening lines do seem ready-made to illustrate a ship in harbor, like the one depicted on the plate titled *Kalendria, Coast of Cilicia*:

Do you see our vessel riding
At her anchor in yon bay,
Like a sleeping sea-bird biding
For the morrow's onward way? (1-4)

The deictic "yon" at line two invites an imaginative reader to picture a location outside the immediate text: an imagined bay. But in a literary annual, deixis directs the reader's attention to a specific printed image—often presented on the facing page of the book. Though Landon revises these lines in order to reference the engraving's "*island* bay," she preserves the deictic link by moving "yon" to the first line of her poem: "Do you see yon vessel riding/ Anchored in

[6] [John Wilson?], "Noctes Ambrosianae LXV," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (May 1834): 865 (lines 1-4).

our island bay." Her adjustments transform the poem into a composition written for and about the subject she had been required to illustrate. The poem is prophetic after all, but in bibliographical rather than biographical terms. Landon reveals its hidden "meaning" when she applies it to an image that it has somehow always already depicted.

Yet it is Maginn's version of Landon's text that survives in modern scholarship—at least in part because it was reprinted so extensively, and comes already-interpreted. In *Victorian Sappho*, Yopie Prins suggests that Landon's poetic career represents "a recursive reiteration" of performed sentimentality.[7] Like other Victorian women poetesses, Prins argues, Landon found Sappho a convenient figure through which to reflect upon the impossibility of writing with "authentic" subjectivity while writing "*as* a woman" (179, original emphasis). By the light of this narrative, the most ironic assessment of Landon's poetry comes from William Howitt, who observes that "one singular peculiarity of the poetry of L.E.L." is that it "is entirely her own."[8] But Landon's words, according to Prins, "are not her own, after all, but a Sapphic utterance without origin" (200). Prins supports this claim by reprinting the following four lines of Maginn's extract in her book:

> Mine shall be a lonelier ending,
>
> Mine shall be a wilder grave,
>
> Where the shout and shriek are blending,
>
> Where the tempest meets the wave.[9]

[7] Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 191.
[8] Howitt, "L.E.L.," 6. Quoted in Prins, *Victorian Sappho*, 200.
[9] Prins never acknowledges or otherwise references Landon's poem "Kalendria. A Port in Cilicia." She does not indicate a source for her excerpt other than Maginn's *Fraser's Magazine* article.

For Prins, "the ending that would seem to be 'mine'—belonging to L.E.L. as 'literally… her own'—does not properly belong to anyone; it is a Sapphic scenario that makes her fate not only predictable but infinitely repeatable" (200).

However, as we have seen, the "ending that would seem to be 'mine'" does "properly belong" to John Wilson, who obviously does not seek to write "*as* a woman." We might even say that the "ending" that is "mine" marks *the most* defining moment of individual expression in this recycled excerpt. Each iteration's "ending" ("less hallow'd"; "wilder"; "lonelier") "belongs" quite literally to each new author's (re)vision. And finally, we should observe that Landon's version of the poem retains the explicitly masculine voicing of the original. As in the "Noctes" poem, the speaker of Landon's monologue addresses his "dearest maiden" and references his "boyhood home." The poem only becomes Sapphic—a dramatic monologue voiced by a despairing woman—when Maginn repurposes it to that effect. Ultimately the use Prins makes of this fragment reproduces the same kind of reading she critiques, and if Howitt, Maginn, and Blanchard read Landon only according to their own desires, so too does Prins. This dissertation ultimately argues that Landon's verse *aspires* to be recycled in just this way—according to the individual desires of her readers. But we must also recognize that such sentimental rhetoric has been carefully *designed* to work upon us in this way.

As her bibliographer Francis Sypher indicates, "Landon (unlike Sir Walter Scott, Alfred Tennyson, John Wilson, […] and many other writers of her period) had no pious family member or friend who took responsibility for assembling a collected edition of her work at a time when the materials for it would have been readily available."[10] Though Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess published the excellent *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings* in 1997, Landon's

[10] Sypher, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: a Bibliography* (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2005), viii.

(immense) complete oeuvre has yet to be collected into a comprehensive scholarly edition. And when faced with an unedited text, like the "Kalendria" fragment, rarely do scholars return to the original materials Landon published, perhaps because such research can be quite time-consuming—or, perhaps, because such precise attention to textual history is not now considered necessary or important. The gradual disappearance of mandatory bibliographical study from graduate curricula only exacerbates the problem. Because scholarship is collaborative, early and influential readings of Landon's poetry—even when these readings rely on inadequate textual sources—are continuously repeated in the critical conversation. Each new citation compounds the textual and interpretive problem.

In her 2012 essay "Thoughts on *Romanticism and Gender*," Anne Mellor observes that doctoral programs in recent years have tended to "[encourage] graduate students and younger scholars to undertake broader, interdisciplinary studies rather than the single-author studies with which the literary scholars of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s began their careers."[11] One unfortunate consequence of this development, for Mellor, is that young scholars are encouraged (and in fact required) to privilege generalization over specificity. But Mellor suggests that a second, equally damaging effect of this trend has been to deprive the academy as a whole of

> substantive, single-author, literary critical studies of the entire careers of almost all the leading female writers of the Romantic period (except the Big Three of Wollstonecraft, Austen, and Shelley), studies that combine sophisticated, densely informed interpretations of all their works within their biographical and historical contexts. (346)

Because, as Mellor notes, the rise of feminist scholarship—and the recovery of much women's writing—coincides roughly with the "end" of the single-author study, it is hardly surprising that

[11] Mellor, "Thoughts on *Romanticism and Gender*," *European Romantic Review* 23, no. 3 (June 2012): 347.

we suffer from such a "paucity of first-rate scholarship on the works of the women writers of the Romantic era" (346). And we lack not only well-researched single-author studies, but also the foundational texts that have always enabled the writing of such studies, including "complete editions of [women's] letters and journals" and, significantly, "modern editions, densely annotated and with adequate critical apparatuses, of their major works, in paperback, and aimed at a student audience" (346). The absence of editions, especially, conveys the impression that women's writing need not be documented as carefully, or studied as closely, as men's. Devoney Looser has defended the continuing study of women's literary history by pointing out that even if "the arrival of gender studies" has helped us "see gender everywhere in literary texts," women writers, unlike their male counterparts, are still "not yet everywhere *in our accounts of the past*" (original emphasis).[12]

Isobel Armstrong points to a related set of problems in another state-of-the-field essay. She begins by remarking upon the large number of nineteenth-century women's poetry anthologies compiled in the 1990s, a phenomenon that suggests "women's poetry was highly visible" in that decade.[13] The subtitle of Armstrong's essay sums up her assessment of the availability of women's poetic texts fifteen years later: "Where Have the Women Poets Gone?" The nine anthologies she names in her survey were almost all out of print by 2011. One reason for this, Armstrong suggests, is that "blockbuster antholog[ies] for undergraduates" now compete for the same share of the market. Unsurprisingly the breadth and depth of women's poetry

[12] Looser, "Why I'm Still Writing Women's Literary History," *Minnesota Review* 71/72 (Winter 2009), 223.
[13] Armstrong, "The Long Nineteenth Century: Where Have the Women Poets Gone?" Victorian Poetry Network (blog), January 14, 2011, http://web.uvic.ca/~vicpoet/2011/01/the-long-nineteenth-century-where-have-the-women-poets-gone/.

selections suffer in comprehensive collections. "Effectively the women [in these anthologies] are add ons," Armstrong concludes. These editorial decisions have far-reaching implications:

> As well as narrowing the range of women poets, creating a minority group, these anthologies have also drastically narrowed down the *oeuvre* of each poet, foreclosing on the range of their work, and establishing a premature canon. In some cases it seems as if the selectors have looked for a consensus among the path-breaking anthologies of women poets published earlier, and thus we have selections from what was *already* a selection.

Armstrong also suggests, echoing Looser, that one reason for these unsatisfactory choices might be the academy's "deep unfamiliarity with" and "uncertainty about the place of women's poetry," particularly compared with the much more familiar narrative and outline of poetry written by men.

This is the same historical problem to which Mellor's essay also speaks: the nineteenth-century canon consists largely of men's poetry that has been carefully collected, edited, and studied on its own terms. Armstrong cites Landon as an exemplary case: her "status is still debated" at least in part because nobody can seem to agree on what she wrote:

> There is no established central core of work and consequently no strong reading of it. Except perhaps for "Sappho's Song," "The Factory," and "Revenge," shared by one or two anthologies in each case but not by all, there is almost no overlap between the selections of Landon in Norton, Broadview, Feldman, Wu, Leighton and Reynolds, Higgotnet, and Armstrong and Bristow. Leighton and Reynolds prefer short fragments. Armstrong and Bristow go for the later work […], whereas the other anthologies make

different selections from the early published collections, and none at all form the late "Subjects for Pictures," which has affinities with Felicia Hemans's *Records of Woman*.[14] Anthology selections matter because, as Mellor's essay makes clear, so many women writers remain unedited. Anthologies often provide the only access to these writers' works, and editorial selections play a critical role in canon reshaping and syllabus building. If "most female poets have returned to the niche," Armstrong's solution to the problem is to encourage the study of women writers not as a group apart, but rather alongside their male counterparts. But we should begin, as Mellor suggests, with a more complete elaboration of the works women writers produced, in the form of editions, biographies, and single author studies.

This dissertation works to that end.

[14] I would qualify or perhaps query Armstrong's claim about the lack of a "strong reading" of Landon. As I observe in the introduction to this dissertation, the strongest (that is, most typical) reading of her work is resolutely biographical, though some, including Jonas Cope, Katherine Montwieler, Adriana Craciun, and Jerome McGann have written persuasively about her work on its own terms. Armstrong's citations in this paragraph correspond to the following anthologies: *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 8th edn., vol. 2, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006); *The Broadview Anthology of Poetry and Poetic Theory*, ed. Thomas J. Collins & Vivienne J. Rundle (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview Press, 1999); *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era*. *An Anthology*, ed. Paula R. Feldman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); *Romantic Women Poets. An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); *Victorian Women Poets. An Anthology*, eds. Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); *Romantic Women Poets 1770-1838*, ed. Margaret Higgonet (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1996); *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets*, eds. Isobel Armstrong and Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

Reports of the recovery of Letitia Landon's poetry have been greatly exaggerated—not because of a lack of scholarly work on the subject, but because that work has with few exceptions relied on an inadequate comprehension of the ways her poetry was composed and published. Jerome McGann's critically important early writing on Landon in *The Poetics of Sensibility* (1996) and *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings* (1997) situates the work in its original historical and print contexts, and also models thoughtful engagement with the special difficulties of Landon's sentimental style. However, as noted recently by Katherine Montwieler, the most ubiquitous trend in Landon scholarship has consistently been to approach the work through various biographically inflected critical lenses, figuring the poet "as siren, as virgin, as literary prodigy, as desperate hack writer"; as "a paragon of femininity […] a savvy capitalist […] a feminist rhetor."[15] Montwieler pointedly suggests that "Landon's work may be more complex than any individual portrait of her might be" (97), but attempting to read that work on its own terms is, practically speaking, quite difficult: not only is hers an extremely large and various oeuvre, but hundreds of her poems first appeared in the now rapidly-disintegrating literary annuals. Many of these books currently sit in the stacks of our circulating collections, subject to what Robert Frost might call "the slow smokeless burning of decay."

In one sense we might still claim as Germaine Greer did in 1982 that Landon is "the kind of woman writer about whom a little is known and nothing understood."[16] Her poetry is most

[15] Montwieler, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838): Whose Poetess?" in *Biographical Misrepresentations of British Women Writers: A Hall of Mirrors and the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Brenda Ayres (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 97.
[16] Greer, "The Tulsa Center for the Study of Women's Literature: What We Are Doing and Why We Are Doing It," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 15.

innovative in its bibliographic and grammatical aspects, but when Landon came back into critical favor under the auspices of feminist scholarship in the early 1980s, the work was selected, anthologized, and reprinted in ways that obscure these special characteristics.[17] There followed a long history of criticism that assessed Landon's work by the half-light of incomplete or misleading stories of textual transmission.[18] These problems continue, and have obscured the collective view of a fascinating and innovative poet. This dissertation argues that far from being merely another sentimental poetess, Landon was in fact a brilliant media theorist and

[17] For Jonas Cope, Landon "is now marginally anthologized but often misunderstood. A tiny fraction of her corpus serves to encapsulate her role as an artist wherever she appears in edited collections"; "'A Series of Small Inconstancies': Letitia Landon and the Sewn-Together Subject," *Studies in Romanticism* 52, no. 3 (2013): 365. Harriet Linkin and Kate Singer likewise observe that "only a few of her poems appear in the three major British literature anthologies published by Norton, Longman, and Broadview," and that the rest "lie beyond our reach in annuals or other ephemera," while Roxanne Eberle draws special attention to the publication context problem: "her poetic output appears scanty and fragmented in even the best of anthologies, with cursory attention paid to where her poems first appeared and what an original volume of Landon's poetry looked like"; Linkin and Singer, "Introduction," *Pedagogy* 18, no. 2 (April 2018):187; Eberle, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon's 'Minstrel Annals' and the Romantic Literature Classroom," *Pedagogy* 18, no. 2 (April 2018): 213. While anthologies occasionally reprint Landon's annual poems, most fail to indicate publication history, and corresponding engravings are almost never reproduced.

[18] McGann, however, has observed repeatedly that the publication contexts of Landon's poems, and in particular the literary annuals, must inform any reading of her "art of disillusion." See especially McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 143-149, 164-173; *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 1997), 11-31; and "Innovation and Experiment" in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. Kate Flint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 298-301. Glenn Dibert-Himes has similarly argued for the importance of publication history in critical assessment of her work, in part by demonstrating how the collected volumes issued immediately following her death "misrepresent both the forms and contexts of [Landon's] poetry" and continue to inform the selection of her poems that we read today; "The Comprehensive Index and Bibliography to the Collected Words of Letitia Elizabeth Landon" (PhD dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1997), 14. See also Terrence Hoagwood and Kathryn Ledbetter, "Life of Letitia Elizabeth Landon," Romantic Circles, October 1998, accessed October 1, 2018, https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/lel/lelbio.htm; Hoagwood and Ledbetter, *"Colour'd Shadows": Contexts in Publishing, Printing, and Reading Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 47-73.

practitioner: she leveraged an experimental role in early nineteenth-century print media to explore the limits of representational art in an era of mass production.

As a recent example of the problem in criticism, take the series of essays on Landon in *Pedagogy* (2018), which argue collectively for "the important position" Landon's work "needs to occupy in our teaching of Romanticism."[19] Editors Harriet Linkin and Kate Singer claim that Landon's "innovative poetics […] manifest a major revision" of Romanticism; that teaching Landon might help students "learn how to define and redefine the period"; and that new approaches to teaching Landon will help us all "become more acute and subtle readers" of "the contributions British women writers make to nineteenth century poetics and print culture."[20] However, many essays in this cluster reveal that scholars are still struggling to come to terms with Landon's "innovative poetics." The essays suggest in various ways that we continue to read Landon's poetry by *not* reading it—by disregarding its publication history, by misunderstanding its grammatical irregularities, by distorting it according to the myths of Landon's "development" as a poet, or by handling the poems only at a distance.

To grasp fully Landon's "innovative poetics" requires a commitment of time and attention most scholars cannot afford to spend on a single author. "When it comes to Landon's oeuvre," Noah Comet has written, "we do not know what we do not know."[21] But until Landon's publication histories and her experiments with media and language are better understood, the critical conversation about her work will remain on various wrong tracks. Virtually all of her

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[19] Linkin and Singer, "Introduction," *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition and Culture* 18, no. 2 (April 2018): 185.
[20] Linkin and Singer, "Introduction," 189.
[21] Comet, "Landon in the Canon: An Intertextual Approach," *Pedagogy* 18, no. 2 (April 2018): 192. Comet suggests that current anthologies reprint "no more than 5 percent" of Landon's total work, while "the rest remains almost entirely untouched, for […] tracking down her un-reprinted texts is time-consuming work" (191-2).

work is devoted to exploiting media and language to reveal the paradoxes and ironies of representation. She is the print-culture obverse of Emily Dickinson, best thought of alongside figures like Gertrude Stein and Andy Warhol rather than Felicia Hemans or Elizabeth Barrett Browning. In not seeing this, we have missed an opportunity for a wholesale reframing of the transition from Romantic to Victorian poetry, according to paths laid down by this strange genius who often signed her work "L.E.L."

I.

The greater part of Landon's poetry was composed not for her well-known volumes like *The Improvisatrice, and Other Poems* (1824), but for magazines and literary annuals, those emerging popular organs of early nineteenth-century print.[22] This fact is key to understanding the imaginative projects she carried out over the course of her career: most of her work comes embedded in forms of media that regularly juxtaposed visual and verbal arts. Many of Landon's earliest poems for the *Literary Gazette* expressly address the art reviews, exhibition notices, and advertisements featured in the magazine's "Fine Arts" column.[23] When literary annuals began to flood the nineteenth-century print market in the mid-1820s, Landon had already become a practicing theorist of the effects print media had on the sister arts. One magnificent early example from the *Literary Gazette* is the poem "Different Thoughts; Suggested by a Picture by

[22] Landon published prolifically in the *Literary Gazette* and the *New Monthly Magazine*, writing over 300 poems for the former and fifty for the latter, depending on how the poems are counted. To the annuals she contributed over 460 poems, with some certainly remaining unidentified. See Francis Sypher, ed. *Poems from Annuals by Letitia Elizabeth Landon* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2006), 369 n. [to page 305].

[23] For commentary on these poems, see Daniel Riess, "Laetitia Landon and the Dawn of English Post-Romanticism," *Studies in English Literature* 36 (1996): 807-814; Michele Martinez, "Creating an Audience for a British School: L. E. L.'s Poetical Catalogue of Pictures in the *Literary Gazette*," *Victorian Poetry* 52, no. 1 (Spring 2014) 41-63.

G. S. Newton, No. 16, in the British Gallery, and representing a Girl looking at her Lover's Miniature," in which three successive dramatic monologues perform the "different thoughts" of the poem's title, each monologue apparently voiced by a different iteration of the same Girl. Though the poem thereby offers three possible interpretations of the painting—in which the painted subject *also* muses on a painting—the question posed in the epigraph hangs over all without resolution: "Which is the truest reading of thy look?"[24] Landon returned to Newton's *A Girl at Her Devotions* several times before her death, perhaps in pursuit of that impossible thing, a picture's "truest reading."

While sentimental pictures like *A Girl at Her Devotions* were standard literary annual fare, the annuals also proffered images of the expanding British Empire. In recent years, the concurrent rise of periodical and empire studies combined with the digitization of the nineteenth-century archive has drawn critical attention to the annuals, and especially to the ways annual contributors "illustrated" the pictured and commodified imperial subject.[25] Landon wrote dozens of poems to accompany scenes of empire for the annual *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*, which have received a significant amount of scholarly treatment in the past decade. However, the

[24] Landon, "Different Thoughts; Suggested by a Picture by G. S. Newton, No. 16, in the British Gallery, and representing a Girl looking at her Lover's Miniature," *Literary Gazette* 322 (March 22, 1823): 189.

[25] Essays that investigate Landon's periodical poetry as it relates specifically to the British Empire include Margaret Linley, "A Centre that Would not Hold: Annuals and Cultural Democracy," in *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identity*, ed. Laurel Brake, Bill Bell and David Finkelstein (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 54-74; Máire Ní Fhlathúin, "India and Women's Poetry of the 1830's: Femininity and the Picturesque in the Poetry of Emma Roberts and Letitia Elizabeth Landon," *Women's Writing: the Elizabethan to Victorian Period* 12, no. 2 (2005): 187-204; Vanessa Warne, "'What foreign scenes can be': The Ruin of India in Letitia Landon's *Scrapbook Poems*," *Victorian Review* 32, no. 2 (2006): 40-63; Karen Fang, "'But another name for her who wrote': *Corinne* and the Making of Landon's Giftbook Style" in *Romantic Writing and the Empire of Signs: Periodical Culture and Post-Napoleonic Authorship* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 104-141; Manuela Mourão, "Remembrance of Things Past: Literary Annuals' Self-Historicization," *Victorian Poetry* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 107-123.

arguments advanced about Landon's *Scrap Book* poems often reveal unfamiliarity with the way annuals in general (and this annual in particular) were constructed.[26]

Landon edited the first eight volumes of the *Scrap Book* and composed nearly all of the letterpress in each volume herself. Appearing yearly in quarto, the *Scrap Book* was the first large-format annual on the market, and its title accurately represents its contents: the *Scrap Book* collected together and recycled Fisher's existing prints—including dozens of landscapes depicting India—for sale in the annuals market. While it is inarguable that Landon participated in the *Scrap Book*'s marketing of the British Empire, her involvement was both under-motivated and overdetermined, and any claim about her choices of subject and execution must be reconciled with the facts surrounding the composition and production of these texts.

Unfortunately most of Landon's annual poems are read as transparent messages—conveying perceived complicity in or resistance to the imperial project, for example—when they are read at all. Karen Fang has recently decided that "most of [Landon's] verse for the annuals, as much of the contemporary and modern disregard for Landon would seem to imply, is utterly conventional."[27] Two poems from the *Scrap Book* for 1833, "Macao" and "The Chinese Pagoda," escape Fang's condemnation, but only because "both use the specifically geographical contents of the landscape annual to portray the conditions of giftbook collaboration in oppressively imperial terms" (135). Katherine Harris agrees that "Macao" "register[s] [Landon's] regret in producing a poem with a forced subject," and suggests that in it Landon "exposes herself to public view and voices discontent with and rebellion against the practice of

[26] While scholars have addressed the production and distribution of specific literary annuals in essays and book chapters, the only book length study of the genre is Katherine Harris, *Forget Me Not: The Rise of the British Literary Annual, 1823-1835* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2015).
[27] Fang, *Romantic Writing and the Empire of Signs*, 139.

privileging the engraving over authorial creativity."[28] But these are misguidedly earnest readings of some very clever poems, which take as their subjects neither British Empire nor the constraints of annual writing, but rather the mysteries of art criticism. Both poems dramatically enact their own compositions: each reads as an instruction manual, a How to Write a *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* Poem. The iambic tetrameter lines of "The Chinese Pagoda" are quite literally manufactured out of "joint-stock" phrases lifted from other poets' "newspaper" contributions and self-consciously enclosed in quotation marks on this new page:

> "The parting look," "the bitter token,"
> "The last despair," "the first distress,"
> "The anguish of a heart that's broken—"
> Do not these crowd the daily press? (5-8)

The whole conceit of the poem is that the speaker has had to resort to such recycled paraphernalia, "a sort of joint-stock kept on hand," because she is otherwise unable to write a poem that illustrates the engraving called *The Chinese Pagoda*:

> If in this world there is an object,
> For pity which may stand alone,
> It is a poet with no subject,
> Or with a picture worse than none. (41-44)

The only thing more pitiable than "a poet with no subject" is a poet with a *bad* subject. But this poem and its companion piece "Macao" demonstrate quite clearly that Landon's imagination thrives on recycled, restrictive, or "bad" subjects. The two poems together constitute a kind of manifesto on the creative possibility inherent in this new world of manufactured art: "Macao"

[28] Harris, *Forget Me Not*, 186-7.

even makes a play on the domestic identification between the steel plate representations of Chinese landscapes, reproduced by the thousands, and the transfer-printed ceramic "willow-pattern plates" mass-manufactured in industrial centers around the country. If Landon's muse had nothing more for "inspiration" than "A Chinese Town, and an English Factory," this was more than enough material to furnish a pair of ingenious commentaries on the current state of British poetry.

All of Landon's work was predicated on a culture of recycling. By the 1830s, Fisher, Son & Co possessed a substantial stock of engravings representing scenes in India: many of them were based on sketches taken by amateur artists in the British military.[29] Between 1830 and 1833 Fisher published engravings after sketches by Captain Robert James Elliot, together with prose descriptions, in part issues; these were eventually collected into the volume *Views in the East; comprising India, Canton, and the Shores of the Red Sea* (1833).[30] The Indian landscapes for which Landon writes in the first few volumes of *Fisher's Scrap Book* come from this collection of more than sixty plates, which Fisher was recycling in the format of an annual "scrap book"—in part to advertise *Views in the East*. If the typical literary annual offered their readers art at one remove—engravings after paintings—the secondhand art in *Fisher's Scrap Book* had already been printed at least once, together with descriptive prose. It was Landon's task to rework these recycled pieces, preselected for her each year by Fisher, into poems—or rather, into representational fields involving both image and verse.

[29] See James M'Kenzie-Hall, "Illustrated Travel: Steel Engravings and their Use in Early Nineteenth-Century Topographical Books, with Special Reference to Henry Fisher & Co." vol. 1 (PhD diss., Southampton Solent University, 2011), 92-106.
[30] The plates appeared again a few years later when Fisher published Emma Roberts's *Views in India, China and on the shores of the Red Sea* (London, 1835).

One such engraving, titled *The Celebrated Hindoo Temples and Palace at Madura*, appeared in the *Scrap Book* for 1836. Jean Fernandez argues that Landon's incorporation of the Tamil poetess Avyia into the poem that accompanied this engraving represents "one of L.E.L.'s most sophisticated formulations of feminism in the context of Imperial aesthetics," especially because the poem is composed in the 1830s during "the most crucial moments of the Orientalist-Anglicist debate" surrounding education in India:

> When LEL chose to write of a South Indian poetess, she was […] entering into the highly contested territory of Indian-ness. […] By focusing on a South Indian landscape (the temple city of Madurai), Tamil literature, and the Tamil poetess Avvaiyar, LEL bypasses the Sanskritic, Brahminical Orientalism of [William] Jones, and its patristic traditions. Instead, while writing of the engraving of the Madura temple, she chooses to develop the ekphrastic moment in her poem through the elaboration of an allusion to a Dravidian poet, whose lowly caste and gender are foregrounded in her text.[31]

For Fernandez, Landon subversively advances a feminist, anti-imperial agenda through the use of the female figure in this and other *Scrap Book* poems, while Vanessa Warne makes related claims about Landon's apparent "fascination" with Indian subjects.[32] But Landon's "interest in India" in these instances derives from her publishers, who were reprinting the "Indian views" for

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[31] Fernandez, "Graven Images: The Woman Writer, the Indian Poetess, and Imperial Aesthetics in L.E.L.'s 'Hindoo Temples and Palaces [sic] at Madura," *Victorian Poetry* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 36, 37, 39-40.

[32] Warne, "'What foreign scenes can be': The Ruin of India in Letitia Landon's *Scrapbook Poems*," 52. Warne finds that a series of Landon's poems on Indian scenes in the *Scrap Book* for 1834 imply "Landon's continuing fascination with India's decline," though the "decline" of India is expressly portrayed by the engravings themselves. The very titles of these engravings (e.g. "Ruins, Old Delhi"; "Ruins, South Side of Old Delhi") make the theme of "ruin" explicit, while Landon's note to "Bejapore" (which she adapts from Robert Elliot's *Views in the East*) clarifies that Landon's reading of this engraving depended upon Elliot's description of the scene as "A […] remarkable example of the vanity of all human grandeur," a "desolate place" of "architectural remains"; *Views in the East,* n.p.

a new purchasing market, hoping to increase overall sales. Landon did not *elect* to "[focus] on a South Indian Landscape."

Given the constraints of writing for a predetermined visual subject, it might well seem remarkable that Landon incorporates a Tamil poetess into "Hindoo Temples" when the engraving depicts no such figure. While we simply cannot know whether Landon harbored subversive, anti-imperialist, proto-feminist sentiments, we can in fact verify that the poetess Avyia is mentioned in the source Landon consulted while researching her topic. The first footnote to Landon's "Hindoo Temples" explains that the phrase "a woman's triumph" refers to

> the celebrated Avyia. She was a Pariah of the lowest class, but obtained such literary distinction, that her works are to this day the class-books of the scholars of the highest rank and caste in all the Hindoo schools of the peninsula of India.[33]

Landon quotes the second half of this note verbatim from Lieutenant George Francis White's prose description of the very same plate in his *Views in India, chiefly among the Himalaya Mountains, taken during tours in the direction of Mussooree, Simla, the sources of the Jumna and Ganges, etc. in 1829-31-32*, a volume also under preparation with Fisher in 1835-6.[34] Avyia's surprising appearance in "Hindoo Temples" likely has more to do with early nineteenth-century print culture than with politics.

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[33] Landon, "Hindoo Temples and Palace at Madura," in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* [for 1836] (London and Paris, 1835), 50.

[34] Landon occasionally credited sources in her notes. Notes in the 1834 *Scrap Book* repeatedly reference "Elliot" for Robert Elliot's prose descriptions in *Views in the East*, from which most of the 1834 plates had been drawn, but some notes, though clearly lifted from Elliot, are unattributed. She also cites sources quoted by Elliot (e.g. Bishop Heber, Sir John Malcom) as though they are her own, and in some cases consults Elliot's sources for further information. Landon also paraphrases notes from the second edition of Emma Roberts's *Oriental Scenes, Sketches, and Tales* (London, 1832), which Roberts had dedicated to Landon.

Landon's penchant for recycling useful materials formed the foundation of her *Scrap Book* method. In her editor's introduction to the first volume, Landon explains her approach to writing for this unique annual:

> It is not an easy thing to write illustrations to prints selected rather for their pictorial excellence than their poetic capabilities; and mere description is certainly not the most popular species of composition. I have endeavoured to give as much variety as possible, by the adoption of any legend, train of reflection, &c. which the subject could possibly suggest.[35]

As McGann has observed, Landon's execution of this plan often produces an "odd and disturbing disjunction between the events elaborated in the poem and the scene rendered in the picture," a kind of "work whose 'opposite and discordant qualities' are effectively unbalanced and unreconciled. The final work is therefore extremely disorienting, even a touch surreal."[36] Landon's notes, written in what Máire Ní Fhlathúin styles "guidebook prose," regularly intensify such disorientation. Frequently reprinted directly from secondary sources, the notes provide dramatically "incongruous commentary" on poems already dissociated from the engravings they are meant to represent.[37] In "Hindoo Temples," Landon attempts to "give […] variety" to yet another picture of Indian architecture by introducing the "legend" of Avyia into her poem. Fisher's engraving appears in triplicate, refracted through Landon's poetic interpretation of White's prose description of a copy of a landscape.

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[35] Landon, "Introduction," in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* [for 1832] (London, 1831), [3].
[36] McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 167.
[37] Ní Fhlathúin, 199. Ní Fhlathúin offer an illustrative example from the *Scrap Book* for 1836: "The meditation on the woman's nervous dread and fear of loss as she awaits news of her seafaring lover ('Fishing Boats in the Monsoon') is preceded by the observation that the 'western coasts of India abound with a great variety of fish, of excellent quality'" (199).

These disorienting effects that Landon's poems pursue—the qualities that set her writing apart from that of other literary annual contributors—go unnoticed when the work is read primarily for the politics of its ostensible subject matter, or more broadly, its "message." Such readings tend to develop at the expense of close attention to composition and publication history, thus obscuring the actual imaginative dynamics of her work. But partly because Landon wrote so many poems "about" India, this kind of argument has been popularized to the degree that critics in recent years are able to reference Landon's "critique of empire" as an established fact.[38]

In a related development, Landon's annual poems now regularly feature in conversations about global literature, often with a similar disregard for their composition and publication histories. Jacqueline Labbe, for example, teaches Landon's narrative poem "The Zenana" in a thematically-organized course on Pan-Romanticisms. For Labbe, Landon "splices her customary romance tale with an exploration of form and function through characters' use of Eastern-sounding genres in speech and performance."[39] The familiar "reproductive plot" of Landon's typical romance narrative is at once recognizable (locally via plot) and estranged (globally via form) in "The Zenana," and the effect, for Labbe, is a "glocal Landon," whose narrative poems "unit[e] human actors via their common feeling across borders that would otherwise define them

[38] Devin Garofalo cites Fernandez's conclusions in the essay just discussed ("Graven Images") as one example of how "recent scholarship has begun to recoup the ways in which Landon's literary productions are engaged in the political," asserting that Fernandez shows how Landon "identifies with the Indian woman of 'Hindoo Temples and Palace at Madura,'" and "employ[s] a vocal duplicity 'to contemplate the Imperial character of patriarchal aesthetics'"; "Touching Worlds: Letitia Elizabeth Landon's Embodied Poetics," *Women's Writing* 22, no. 2 (2015): 258. Linda Peterson, writing about Landon's magazine poems of the 1820s, notes that the poet "would eventually write sharp critical commentary in her novels, reviews, and oriental verse," becoming "a critic of empire" in her late career; "Nineteenth-Century Women Poets and Periodical Spaces: Letitia Landon and Felicia Hemans," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 49, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 399.

[39] Labbe, "Teaching 'Glocal Landon' within British Romanticism," *Pedagogy* 18, no. 2 (April 2018): 205.

against each other" (203). But especially if Labbe's course situates its selection of texts "within the evolving tradition of the Eastern tale," it seems critical to note that Landon's most remarkable innovation on this tradition was to compose her "Eastern tale" by piecing it together backwards from secondhand visual materials: the 1099-line poem weaves its plot out of and around eighteen of the thirty-six engravings she was required to illustrate in the *Scrap Book* for 1834.[40] It appears, however, that "The Zenana" is treated in this course as a purely linguistic production, even though one of the course's aims is "to allow students to range widely through the […] visual art of Europe (including Britain)" from 1750-1850 (203).

Perhaps Labbe overlooks the engravings that originated this poem because her source for "The Zenana" is *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L*, for which she gives no publication date in her works cited.[41] The volume was compiled by Landon's friend Emma Roberts and published by Fisher in 1839, the year after Landon died. In collaboration with Fisher, Roberts chose the "minor poems" from Landon's portfolio of *Scrap Book* work. Cleverly selected, organized, and marketed, this book replicates formally and thematically the long narrative romances—always printed with accompanying "minor" or "other" poems—for which Landon had become famous. It looked, read, and felt like any other Landon volume, which is precisely how Labbe interprets it. Situating "The Zenana" within the course's narrative of "evolving tradition," Labbe asserts that "more so than [William] Jones, Landon voices her Eastern tale subtly" by deploying

[40] A letter to Anna Maria Hall about the year's *Scrap Book* conveys Landon's sense of accomplishment in managing this feat: "The volume just completed contains one long poem founded on Indian history; a connected story called the 'Zenana,' and longer than the 'Venetian Bracelet.' How my ingenuity has been taxed to introduce the different places! and, pray, forgive this little tender effusion of vanity, I do pique myself on contriving to get from Dowlutabad to Shusher, and Penawa, and the Triad Figure in the Caves of Elephante, and from thence to Ibrahim Padshah's tomb, etc. etc."; Landon to Anna Maria Hall, *Letters*, 91.

[41] Elsewhere in the essay Labbe notes the poem's initial publication in 1834, but she does not mention *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*.

"'songs' of different meters, rhyme schemes, and timbres" to shift between exotic and familiar registers (204, 205). If formal variety subdues the "Eastern elements" (206) in a purely textual rendering of "The Zenana," the poem as it first appears in the *Scrap Book* repeatedly references, through extra-poetic devices, its "Eastern" sources. Marginal notes scattered throughout the poem point to corresponding interleaved engravings, while footnotes lifted from Landon's illustrated travel book sources describe those images in a manner totally irrelevant to the poem's romance plot. As composed for and printed in *Fisher's Scrap Book*, the "Eastern elements" of the poem are anything but "subtle": the persistent interruption of the text via marginal note, asterisk, and full-page landscape image makes a coherent reading of the narrative nearly impossible.

I do not want to suggest that Landon's literary annual poems cannot be productively examined in a thematic way, but the circumstances surrounding their composition and production do affect the claims we can make. Especially because she wrote to order, the truly remarkable innovations Landon executes in the annuals are most strikingly revealed when we attend not to the meanings of the poems, but to their formal and bibliographical codes. "The Zenana" is an astonishing work of literary artistry not *because* of its subjects, but *in spite* of them: Landon makes experimental use of the literary annual form, forcing a stack of disparate and geographically-scattered images to illustrate her poem rather than the other way around. That the poem conceived by this transposition could be repackaged and sold quite traditionally, as one of Landon's metrical romances, speaks to her self-conscious artistry, her creative embrace of aleatory subjects to create a deeply theoretical work of pop art.

II.

"The Zenana" is perhaps the most extensive example of Landon's facility for reworking used materials, an exercise she developed explicitly through her writing for the annuals, and one that became a key characteristic of her entire poetic program. Landon's creative practice also involved the habitual recycling of her own published poems: she made them new by excerpting, revising, and printing them under other names, often in alternative forms of media. But nearly all of her imaginative work in this mode remains undetected and unexplored in Landon studies, because recognizing these repurposed texts demands careful, broad, and deep reading of an overwhelmingly large corpus of materials.[42]

Nevertheless, the sheer number of texts Landon did repurpose makes it almost inevitable that critics have written innocently about poems that come trailing invisible clouds of glory. Noah Comet provides a compelling reading of one such poem, "Age and Youth," in an essay proposing to demonstrate how well Landon fits into a course constructed around the traditional Romantic canon.[43] Here is the poem, which served as epigraph to the first chapter of Landon's 1837 novel, *Ethel Churchill*:

"I tell thee," said the old man, "what is life.

A gulf of troubled waters—where the soul,

[42] Because Landon almost always substantively revises these texts before printing them in new iterations, digital full-text search methods are only minimally helpful. Francis Sypher and Peter Bolton both refer to Landon's repurposing of texts as epigraphs for *Ethel Churchill* (1837), but neither articulate the degree to which Landon incessantly repurposed texts throughout her career by revising, recombining, and retitling them for publication in new forms.

[43] Landon never gave this poem a title. When Laman Blanchard reprinted the epigraphs to *Ethel Churchill* under the heading "Fragments" in his *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.* (1841), he wrote titles for each poem himself. Therefore, like the titles given to Emily Dickinson's poems in the early twentieth century, Blanchard's titles represent interpretive editorial interventions. His titles are nevertheless still widely used, both in the criticism and in the anthologies where these poems are reprinted.

Like a vexed bark, is tossed upon the waves,
Of pain and pleasure, by the wavering breath
Of passions. They are winds that drive it on,
But only to destruction and despair.
Methinks that we have known some former state
More glorious than our present; and the heart
Is haunted by dim memories—shadows left
By past felicity. Hence do we pine
For vain aspirings—hopes that fill the eyes
With bitter tears for their own vanity.
Are we then fallen from some lovely star,
Whose consciousness is as an unknown curse?"

For Comet, this poem shows Landon in dialogue with Byron and Wordsworth; both *Childe Harold* and the "Intimations Ode" inform his students' readings of "Age and Youth." He also asks students to consider the poem's dramatic monologue form in order to help them query why later nineteenth-century anthologists choose to extract and reprint only the poem's first six lines—what Comet calls its "Byronic preamble to [a] Wordsworthian failure to launch."[44] Anthologies regularly dispensed not only with the final eight lines of the fourteen-line poem but also with its dramatic quotation marks, turning the quoted excerpt into "Landon's own utterance" (194). These anthologists "miss the poem's insistence on dialectic, internal dialogue, and ontological tension," which Comet sees as its most important themes (194).

[44] Comet, "Landon in the Canon," 194.

However, as is often the case, in "Age and Youth" Landon excerpts her own work. As Comet convincingly argues, Landon's "blank verse sonnet" presents "an antagonism toward sonnetly resolution, suspending the form's native dialectical structure" (195). The difficulty of locating the volta underscores this irresolution, "for the poem pivots affectively at the sestet but perhaps more definitively at what would be the concluding couplet" (195). In point of fact, Landon pieced this epigraph together at the very same "pivots" Comet identifies: the first six lines of the poem were originally part of her "dramatic sketch" "The Ancestress" (in *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829)), while the final eight come from "A History of the Lyre," in separate six- and two-line excerpts (also in *The Venetian Bracelet*). She joined these pieces at the sestet and as the concluding couplet of the new construction, "Age and Youth." Therefore while the poem certainly foregrounds "dialectic, internal dialogue, and ontological tension," such cross-currents originate in Landon's reuse of disparate pieces of separate poems. None of the foregoing negates Comet's central claim that Landon might easily fit into a course on Romantic poetry. Attending to these publication details might, however, help frame her in a more compelling manner. Critics have repeatedly asserted that "the Byron of our poetesses" deals chiefly in a kind of second-hand Romanticism, unimaginatively recycling tropes popularized by her Romantic predecessors. But the inventive, often extraordinary use she makes of her own texts deserves at least as much attention.[45]

[45] Frederic Rowton named Landon the "Byron of our poetesses" in his mid-century anthology *The Female Poets of Great Britain* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848), 424. In a discussion of Landon and Felicia Hemans, Richard Cronin observes that "formally, neither poet was particularly innovative. Both wrote within the tradition of Scott and Byron"; *Romantic Victorians: English Literature, 1824-1840* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 2002), 10. An opposing view is articulated by Cope in "'A Series of Small Inconstancies'," 364.

Comet is not the first to neglect Landon's publication history. In fact, one favorite longstanding critical narrative currently circulating in Landon scholarship depends upon a much more serious gap in knowledge. The oft-repeated claim that Landon's poetry develops in significant ways chronologically, and that her later poems indicate the emergence of a more "mature" poetic voice, often relies for evidence upon "late" poems that in fact turn out to be *early* ones, tweaked or modified for reuse. Angela Leighton is among the first to sketch out this narrative of poetic maturation in *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*:

> L.E.L's [later] work, particularly the verse epigraphs of her satirical society novel *Ethel Churchill* (1837), seem to express a darker realism and skepticism than is found in her earlier poetry […] in the end [she] repudiated the high style of exotic melancholia which was the key to her easy, short-lived success, and […] eventually faced her own artistic failings with an honesty which is unsoftened by religious or romantic sentiment."[46]

One definitive example of this "honesty," Leighton suggests, is Landon's "late" poem "Gifts Misused"—an *Ethel Churchill* epigraph—which "starkly sums up the progress of [Landon's] own too 'golden' career, while pointing, in its rougher, more awkward, more truly 'natural' idiom**,** to the possibility, although too late, of better verse to come" (71). Leighton quotes the poem in full to close out this section of her chapter's argument:

> Oh, what a waste of feeling and of thought
> Have been the imprints on my roll of life!
> What worthless hours! to what use have I turned
> The golden gifts which are my hope and pride!

[46] Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 57.

My power of song, unto how base a use

Has it been put! with its pure ore I made

An idol, living only on the breath

Of idol worshippers. Alas! that ever

Praise should have been what praise has been to me –

The opiate of the mind!

The poem may read as a retrospective on Landon's life, but its first appearance in print heralded the beginning rather than the end of that story. "Gifts Misused" descends directly from a poem of forty-four lines published in the *Literary Gazette*'s "Original Poetry" column on December 17, 1825, predating *Ethel Churchill* by twelve years—the majority of Landon "too 'golden' career." As with most of her repurposed texts Landon revised the poem substantially; nevertheless the relationship between "Poetic Fragments.—Fifth Series ("I have a gush")" and the 1837 epigraph is unmistakable:

What a worst waste of feeling and of life

Have been the imprints on my roll of time—

Too long, too much! To what use have I turned

The golden gifts, in which I pride myself?

They are profaned;—with their pure ore I've made

An idol, whose sway is but in the breath

Of passing worshippers. Alas! that ever

Praise should have been what it has been to me!

The opiate of my heart […] (9-17)

The same excerpt went through at least one further stage of revision as it made its way from the pages of the 1825 *Literary Gazette* to the epigraph for *Ethel Churchill*: Landon also inserted it, with some alterations, into the body of her dramatic monologue "Erinna," first published in *The Golden Violet* (1826).[47]

"Gifts Misused" appears again in Leighton's selection of Landon's poetry for the 1995 *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*. The headnote to the entry on Landon concludes with the following observations:

> The late *Fragments* […] which served as epigraphs to [Landon's] society novel *Ethel Churchill* reveal a sharp-edged realism and disillusionment, which suggest a genuine development from the mellifluous, effortless-sounding flow of the early work. These fragments tell of lessons of experience learned too late, of darker, moral secrets in the soul, of social hypocrisy and emotional distrust and, most movingly of all, of poetic "Gifts Misused."[48]

In the final sentence of her headnote, Leighton suggests that Landon "herself paid the high price of [her] success, in tragic corroboration of the drama of many of her own poems." The arrangement of the selected texts in the anthology mirrors this biographical reading, especially the choice of the final text, "Song":

> Farewell!—and never think of me
>
> In lighted hall or lady's bower!

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[47] Of the many striking revisions she makes to this favorite passage, perhaps the most remarkable is the exchange of "my heart" in "Poetic Fragments" and "Erinna" for "the mind" in the epigraph: while "my heart" appears mid-phrase and mid-poem in 1825 and 1826, "the mind" concludes the 1837 epigraph, two feet short of a full pentameter line.

[48] Leighton, "L.E.L. (Letitia Elizabeth Landon) (1802-1838)" in *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology* eds. Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 41.

Farewell!—and never think of me

In spring sunshine or summer hour!—

But when you see a lonely grave,

Just where a broken heart might be,

With not one mourner by its sod,

Then—and then only—THINK OF ME![49]

This poem is given as Landon's last word in the anthology, her tragic death echoing in this final Song's final request. But ironically the "fragment" "Song" is not a "late" lyric: it was first published in 1824, as one of the "other poems" in *The Improvisatrice, and Other Poems*, the volume that first made Landon famous. Leighton's biographical reading of "Song"—her desire that it explain the narrative of Landon's life—might explain its chronological misplacement in this anthology.

Leighton's work has been immensely influential, and for good reason. However, the narrative she constructs outlining Landon's supposed poetic maturation has circulated widely in the scholarship as a given fact based on seriously flawed evidence. One might trace the impact of this narrative in various directions. Daniel Riess, for example, both refines and elaborates upon Leighton's claim by pointing specifically to literary annuals as the source of Landon's apparent regret. "In her later years," he writes, "Landon's belief that she had prostituted her poetic talents for money and fame by publishing in the annuals afforded her considerable remorse and anxiety, and much of her mature work expresses these feelings of guilt."[50] Like Leighton, Riess reads the

[49] Landon, "Song," in *The Improvisatrice and Other Poems* (London, 1824) 296; in Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, 60.

[50] Riess, "Laetitia Landon and the Dawn of English Post-Romanticism," 820. Brandy Ryan replicates Riess's reading in her "'Echo and Reply': The Elegies of Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and Elizabeth Barrett," *Victorian Poetry* 46, no. 3 (2008), see p. 258.

poetry biographically, insisting that in particular "the autobiographical implications" of the 1826 dramatic monologue "Erinna" are "unmistakable" (823). The poetess Erinna is a thinly veiled Landon, "a young woman poet who describes how she has misused her talent for fame and fortune, and bewails the way she has desecrated her poetic ability" (823).

The "misuse of talent" trope Riess pinpoints in "Erinna," however, began circulating in Landon's poetry well before she ever contributed to an annual.[51] When "Poetic Sketches: Sketch the Third" appeared in the *Literary Gazette* on January 26, 1822, the very first British literary annual, Rudolph Ackermann's *Forget Me Not*, had not even been printed.[52] And yet "Sketch the Third" explicitly addresses poetic "gifts misused"—at a time when Landon was still a relatively unknown poet:

> There are given
> Rich gifts unto the bard; but, not content
> With silent rapture, he must sun his wealth,
> Show his hid treasures to the world, and then
> The canker will consume them, and the fame
> He fondly sought be bitterness of heart. (39-44)

Perhaps the misused gifts thesis insisted upon by Leighton, Riess, and others exudes such powerful appeal because if true, it would help illuminate the personal life of a relatively private

[51] The headnote to "Erinna" frames this poem as the culmination, rather than the rejection, of a longstanding poetic preoccupation: "*A poem of the present kind had long floated on my imagination*; and this gave it a local habitation and a name […] feelings are what I wish to narrate, not incidents: my aim has been to draw the portrait and trace the changes of a highly poetical mind, too sensitive perhaps of the chill and bitterness belonging even to success" (my emphasis); Landon, "Introductory Notice," in *The Golden Violet: with its Tales of Romance and Chivalry, and Other Poems* (Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green: London, 1826) 242.
[52] Ackermann published the 1823 *Forget Me Not* in November 1822.

poet.[53] Read biographically, the poetry is redeemed from its overly performative sentimental investments because through it Landon earnestly expresses her true emotions and also somehow—magically—predicts her own tragic demise. Landon may have been a master of the masked dramatic monologue form, but as usual reading her poems for their semantic "meanings," no matter how tempting, blinds us to their truly innovative effects.

These short forays into the textual histories of Landon's so-called late poems are meant to underscore the damage that existing narratives have done to Landon's reception. Some fundamental work must be undertaken to explode those narratives before her poems can be justly assessed. Given the early date of "Sketch the Third"—and for that matter, the relatively early date of "Erinna"—we cannot responsibly distill from those poems Landon's attitude toward the annuals.[54] But attempting to read *any* of Landon's poems biographically is especially risky because of the way she uses them, as recyclable objects capable of taking on various meanings depending on their publication contexts. Valuing the poems according to a biographical

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[53] According to Sypher's assessment, certain subjects that might help us understand Landon on a more personal level are lacking in the extant correspondence: "there are relatively few letters in which Landon discusses serious personal concerns in a really confidential way […] there are virtually no comments on public events; and virtually no philosophical discussions […] and there are no love letters"; *Letters*, ix.

[54] When "Erinna" was completed in late 1826 (*The Golden Violet* was postdated 1827), Landon had contributed only thirty-five poems in total to the annuals, compared with the hundreds more she would write before her death twelve years later. She also appealed repeatedly to friends in the publishing industry to consider her proposals for new annual and illustrated gift book projects. One moving piece of evidence suggesting Landon did not look back with regret on her annual contributions may be found in a letter of 1838, addressed to Robert Fisher from Cape Coast Castle: "The solitude here is very Robinson Crusoeish, and I find my habit of writing a great resource. I shall be so glad if we can make an arrangement for doing even half the *Drawing-room Scrap Book*. […] I really shall not know what to do with all my accumulated poetry. I have so long accustomed myself to give the poems a collected form in the *scrap-book*, in which my best poems have appeared, that I shall quite grudge scattering them through periodicals. […] Send me any papers that may contain any notice of this year's volume, when you have done with them; however old, they will be treats to me"; *Letters*, 196. It would be difficult to reconcile her lifelong enthusiastic engagement with annuals and gift books to the disgust Riess believes she already felt for the genre in 1826.

"maturation" narrative introduces an infinity loop of misinterpretation into the already fraught scene surrounding the reception of her works: the mistaken belief that Landon's best poems are her "late" poems (which are often revisions of *early* poems) distorts the picture, and effectively discourages serious interest in her work for the annuals and the *Literary Gazette*.[55] As we have seen, in order to recognize what makes Landon an innovative poet, we must be able to perceive that she repeatedly makes her works—including her early works—anew, often by reworking, recycling, and recontextualizing. Hers was a muse of reuse: she made a career-long project of turning to creative ends the very mass-market publications that scholars have been accustomed to scorn, or simply to mine for information.[56] Landon was a practicing theorist of the nineteenth-century's newest media, but that truth is at present caviare to the general.

III.

Even if we clarify the composition and publication history of Landon's poetry, the stylistic effects that her poems cultivate present another kind of obstacle to scholarly engagement. A number of Landon's earliest reviewers found her poetry to be absurdly repetitive and grammatically incorrect, and many contemporary scholars seem to agree.[57] As McGann has suggested, however, the strangeness of Landon's grammatical style rewards careful attention: often the seemingly careless construction of a line will offer multiple competing interpretive

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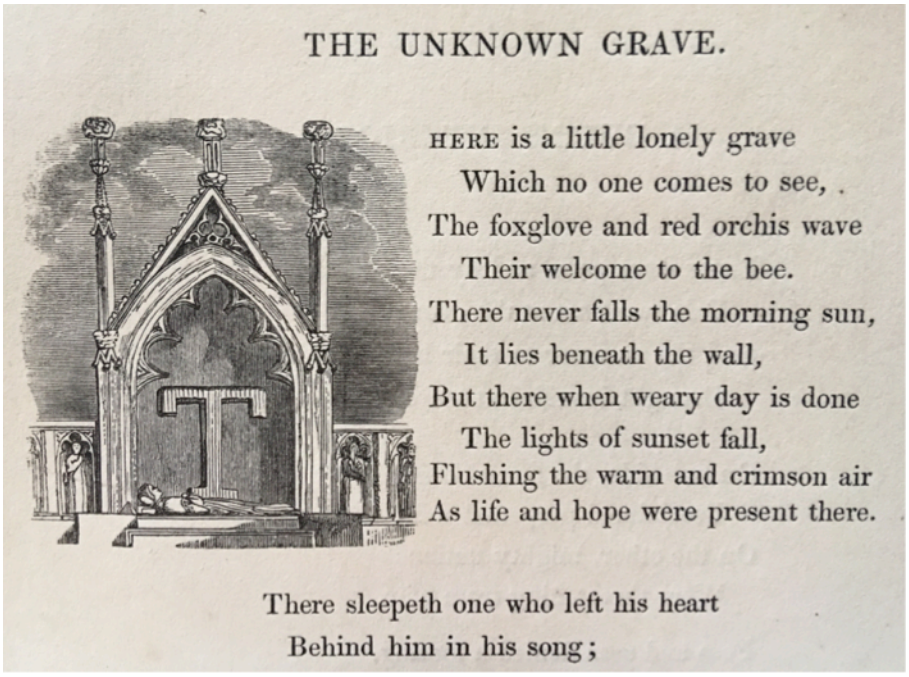
[55] Cynthia Lawford's study of the early poetry, however, resulted in the discovery of Landon's children by William Jerdan. See Lawford, "'Thou shalt bid thy fair hands rove': L. E. L.'s Wooing of Sex, Pain, Death and the Editor," *Romanticism on the Net* 29-30 (February 2003) accessed October 1, 2018 <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/007718ar>.

[56] Regarding the poetry of sensibility and sentiment generally, McGann observes: "We tend not to 'read' this poetry, we have tended not to do so for almost one hundred years […] because we think we already know it. So we pre-read it instead, if we turn to it at all, or we mine it for information. But the writing as such remains largely unencountered"; *Poetics of Sensibility*, 4.

[57] For an exemplary review, see John Arthur Roebuck's unsigned article "The Poetry of L.E.L." in *The Westminster Review* 7 (January 1827): 50-67, especially pp. 58-61.

possibilities—even while none of the possibilities feel satisfactorily "correct."[58] But such irresolution is a feature of Landon's work rather than a flaw. The poetry turns grammar to interrogative effect in order to explore the (in)capacity of textual and visual representation to convey semantic "meaning." If we ignore the strange torsion Landon applies to grammar, we do so at our peril.

Consider for example the first line of "The Unknown Grave" in the *Scrap Book* for 1837, which begins with an ornamental capital "T" (figure 2). In the center of the engraving a pointed arch encloses both the letter "T" and a recumbent effigy with folded hands. Small statues occupy the niches of blind arcades extending outwards. The first lines of the poem, however, describe a "little lonely grave/ Which no one comes to see": a rural spot visited only by bees and flowers, and unmarked by human artistry. In combination with this disjunction, the visual distance between the "T," falling at about the stanza's seventh line, and the rest of the word, "here," at the top of the stanza, suggests—however accidentally—two alternative readings of this textual scene. "HERE is a little lonely


THE UNKNOWN GRAVE.

HERE is a little lonely grave
Which no one comes to see,
The foxglove and red orchis wave
Their welcome to the bee.
There never falls the morning sun,
It lies beneath the wall,
But there when weary day is done
The lights of sunset fall,
Flushing the warm and crimson air
As life and hope were present there.

There sleepeth one who left his heart
Behind him in his song;

Figure 2. "The Unknown Grave" from *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1837 (1836)

[58] See McGann, "Innovation and Experiment," 298-9.

grave" locates the grave on this page, in this book, rather than in an imaginary location. The fact that the "T" arrives in an image depicting an altogether different kind of lonely grave (whose is it? we cannot know) magnifies the identification between an artificial "here" and a supposedly natural "there." Meanwhile Landon employs the word "there" four times in this first stanza (five if we count the homonym "their"), a pattern that stresses the strange uses to which expletive constructions like "there is," "here is," or "where is" can be put. *Where is* the little lonely grave? The page delivers a third reading that sums up the whole problem—the building in the historiated capital is also a "W."[59] In "The Unknown Grave," we see that Landon's exploitation of the random expressive qualities of print extends to the semantic texture of the poems themselves.[60] Her grammar is full of strange choices like the one described above—a bit like Emily Dickinson's alternative wordings.

However, perhaps because Landon's style has been so persistently criticized and dismissed, critics have begun to feel comfortable disregarding it altogether. Comet emends two lines of "The Thessalian Fountain" for the transcription printed in the second half of his essay cited above: square brackets indicate that he has changed "have" to "ha[s]," and "Seem" to "Seem[s]," in lines 31 and 33 of the poem, respectively, though he never explains or mentions the emendations. In the context of the poem, these changes to subject-verb agreement indicate that Comet considers Landon's subject in these lines to be singular rather than plural—"a spirit"

[59] With my thanks to Jerome McGann for spotting the "W."

[60] The ornamental capitals were introduced as a regular feature of the *Drawing Room Scrap Book* beginning in the volume for 1833. Landon sent a review copy of the 1833 *Scrap Book* to Thomas Gaspey at the *Sunday Times* in late 1832, and in an accompanying letter asked him to consider "the great improvement[s]" made for that year, including "the innitial [sic] *letters*, a complete novelty I believe in Annuals"; *Letters*, 78. See also her letter to Thomas Crofton Croker about the same volume: "Is not the binding pretty, and have not the initial letters an excellent aspect"; Landon to Thomas Crofton Croker, n.d., bound MSS volume, box 8 folder 23, Symington Collection, Rutgers University Special Collections and Archives.

rather than "the woods and flowers." This "correction" allows Comet to pursue more straightforwardly his claim that Landon's poem works in dialogue with Wordsworth's "Nutting." He posits that the "Grecian memory" belonging to the "spirit in the woods and flowers" allows Landon's poem to both reject Wordsworth's "spirit" in "Nutting," but also to embrace, nostalgically, the "memory" of such faith.[61]

The poem's original syntax and grammar throw up some interesting obstacles to this reading. I indicate Comet's emendations as bracketed marginal notes in the relevant lines, quoted below:

but there still

[…]

Lingers a spirit in the woods and flowers

Which have a Grecian memory,—some tale [has]

Of olden love or grief linked with their bloom,

Seem beautiful beyond all other ones. [Seems] (27, 30-33)

As printed in its original form, the passage resolves itself into a series of claims, beginning with the assertion that a spirit lingers "in the woods and flowers." The woods and flowers (perhaps only the flowers) "have a Grecian memory." This "Grecian memory" is then redefined, via the dash, as "some tale/ […] linked with [the flowers'] bloom." Though the final clause of the sentence certainly introduces a difficult syntactical problem, its local ambiguity need not be read backwards into the previous lines, which otherwise make a straightforward argument. As Comet acknowledges, Landon published this poem twice—it first appeared in 1824 as a "Fragment" in the *Literary Gazette*, then again eleven years later in *The Vow of the Peacock* as "The Thessalian

[61] Comet, 197-8.

Fountain." She made one substantive revision to the poem, which suggests that she re-read it carefully at least once. Not only does Comet's reading divide the poem in half, splitting "Grecian memory" from "some tale of love or grief," it also requires that we ignore both printings of the poem: it is choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.[62]

If Comet's emendations suggest that we still do not care to read Landon's syntax, approaches like Kate Singer's for the same *Pedagogy* cluster take this logic to an extreme. Using word frequency software, Singer processes Landon's poetry to extract its "particular redundancies" for further analysis.[63] For Singer, this distant reading intervention is called for especially because "our own techniques of reading [have not] enabled us to see her repetition a poetic tactic all its own [sic]."[64] That is, Singer's analysis of Landon's poetry discards grammar and syntax as irrelevant and distracting data, currently getting in the way of our ability to appreciate "more accurately the nature and complexity of Landon's large-scale poetic output—and its readability" (226). But the "complexity" and "readability" of Landon's poetry cannot be assessed in any meaningful way through word frequency analysis, because that complexity absolutely depends upon Landon's trademark style, which, as we have observed in "The Thessalian Fountain" and "The Unknown Grave," enacts its own argument about the very "readability" of poetry itself. Landon's grammatical and syntactical moves regularly delay, obscure, or confuse the subjects of her poems' clauses, leaving the reader at a loss for how to know what, exactly, the subject of the poem *is* at any given moment. That confusion is usually

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[62] One of Landon's most important critical essays supports the sense conveyed by the poem's original wording: "Her mythology was the earthly immortality of Greece. Greece is indelibly linked with the idea of civilization; *but all those fine and graceful beliefs which made its springs holy places, and haunted the fragrant life of every flower and leaf*, were the creations of earliest time" (emphasis mine); Landon, "On the Ancient and Modern Influence of Poetry," *New Monthly Magazine* 35 (November 1832): 466.
[63] Singer, "Retouching Scalar Landon," *Pedagogy* 18, no. 2 (April 2018): 226.
[64] Singer, 226.

the point and the argument of a poetry that is often neither here nor there, and makes its home in that productive ambiguity. Even setting these facts aside, it seems that using word frequency software to process a corpus about which "we do not know what we do not know" necessarily introduces additional uncertainty into an already tenuous textual situation—and to what end?[65]

Both Comet and Singer declare up front their intentions to read around or in opposition to the given texts of Landon's poems, but Harriet Linkin's essay for the *Pedagogy* cluster takes a more typical—and perhaps more troubling, because less obvious—approach. Linkin teaches Landon "as the pivotal canonizer of women poets," positioning her at the center of a chain that also connects Mary Tighe, Felicia Hemans, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Christina Rossetti.[66] According to Linkin, Landon's poem "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans" "self-consciously cites Hemans evoking Tighe" thereby initiating "the performative pattern that Barrett Browning and Rossetti expand" (236). Although the connections Linkin draws between "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans" and Hemans's other poems are clear, the claim that "lines 13-16 [of Landon's poem] echo Hemans's words for Tighe in 'The Grave of a Poetess'" is tenuous at best (238). The only "echo" apparent in the juxtaposed lines is the single word "odours": Landon's poem describes how Hemans's "pure" "sweet […] life" has filled the earth with lovely "odours"—a metaphor for Hemans's poetry (in which "common scenes grew fair")—whereas in

[65] Singer cites Comet's observation in her own essay on page 226. She also states that one of her word frequency clouds represents "the top word frequencies for Landon's eleven volumes of poetry," which are listed in a footnote (p. 233 n. 7). Included in the list are "*Traits and Trials of Early Life* (1836)" and "*Life and Literary Remains* (1841)." However, Laman Blanchard's *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.* could not be considered even *mostly* poetry. Blanchard's prose "life," illustrated by judicious excerpts from Landon's letters, makes up the first volume, and one third of the second volume reprints the prose essays Landon wrote for her unfinished series on Walter Scott's heroines. Similarly confusing is the inclusion of *Traits and Trials of Early Life*, in which only sixteen of the book's 312 pages feature poems.

[66] Harriet Linkin, "Landon the Equivocal Canonizer: Constructing an Elegiac Chain of Women Poets in the Classroom," *Pedagogy* 18, no. 2 (April 2018): 243.

the lines by Hemans a speaker stands quite literally "beside [Tighe's] lowly grave" around which "spring odours" breathe, near which a river passes. And yet Linkin writes that "[students] hear how Landon's lines 13-16 echo the first four lines of Hemans's tribute (cited above)" (239). I suspect those students are responding to teacherly expectation rather than performing careful close readings of the poems before them. And here we get to the heart of the problem: as long as we continue to make of Landon's poetry what we want—as long as we see it according to myths that have obscured her (e.g., her obsession with India, her development into a tragic figure of regret, her grammatical carelessness, her second-hand Romanticism, her runner-up status to Hemans and Elizabeth Barrett Browning), we won't ever truly recover her work in its fascinating and innovative complexity.

Toward the end of her chapter surveying Landon scholarship for the recent volume *Biographical Misrepresentations of British Women Writers*, Montwieler concludes that at present, "we see Landon through a glass darkly"; that "perhaps we see our own critical preoccupations more clearly than we see the ostensible subject herself."[67] That is, we read Landon primarily through the lenses of our own interests, finding in her works what we wish to find.[68] I would supplement Montwieler's judgment by suggesting that Landon's seemingly infinite malleability may be attributed, at least in part, to our disregard for the bibliographical, textual, and grammatical state of her works. The editors of the headnote preceding Landon's poems in the 2018 *Broadview Anthology of British Literature: Age of Romanticism* assert that

[67] Montwieler, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838): Whose Poetess?," 106.
[68] This selective reading, Eberle suggests, is also enabled by anthologies, in which "the poetry that is selected […] tends to be less representative because editors choose coherence over variation. Representing Landon as an 'improvisatrice' and 'poetess,' for example, leads to the inclusion of poems that support that critical position, but poems are also chosen to resonate with more canonical works (e.g., Landon's 'The Proud Ladye' read in relation to Keats's 'La Belle Dame sans Merci')"; Eberle, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon's 'Minstrel Annals'," 212.

Landon "was able to compose her poems quickly and she rarely revised or edited"; they suggest that the speed with which she composed produces a "distinctive style in which punctuation and grammar vary widely," while "eloquent plainness of diction and lyrical intensity convey a sense of emotion pouring unbidden and unobstructed onto the page."[69] These commonly repeated claims, more fiction than fact, originate in similar statements Laman Blanchard first made in the *Life and Literary Remains of L. E. L.* more than 175 years ago. The distinguishing feature of Landon's writing, Blanchard claims, is the speed with which she composed: "Her thoughts always flowed faster than she could put them upon paper," and "the injury that resulted from the rule of rapidity—breathless and reckless rapidity—is shown throughout the various poems that compose the overwrought richness, the beautiful excess, the melodious confusion of the 'Improvvisatrice' [sic]".[70]

That Landon did in fact regularly revise her poems should be clear from the above discussion: she developed a career and an artistic program through revising and reworking materials both given and made. The allegation about her "speed" (and implied carelessness) has for too long provided cover for those who find her grammatical or syntactical constructions difficult, uncomfortable, or inconvenient.[71] Whether Landon wrote quickly or not should be

[69] "Letitia Elizabeth Landon" in *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature Volume 4: The Age of Romanticism* eds. Joseph Black et al. (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2018), 1012.
[70] Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.* vol. 1 (London, 1841), 42.
[71] The editor of the Broadview entry makes an intervention of this same kind when they enclose the first sixty lines of "Love's Last Lesson" in quotation marks, identifying the opening of the poem as a staged dramatic monologue. Such identification undermines the program of the poem, however, which like so many of Landon's other poems wrong-foots the reader by leading her on with convincing artistic representation. The reader is not supposed to realize that the original speaker of the poem is an object under surveillance by a second speaker, who suddenly appears midway through. The "lesson" of "Love's Last Lesson" is at least in part that poetry cannot be relied upon to tell "the truth." "Are words, then, only false?" the second speaker asks, as the poem draws to a close: the question goes unanswered.

immaterial to the interpretation of her poems, which deserve our best attention, paid in good faith. Until we make an effort to read Landon on her own terms, and in her original contexts, she will continue to be unrecoverable amidst her own ongoing recovery. Her unique strengths will remain hidden under the cover of critical preconceptions that have for too long gone unexamined.

IV.

This dissertation offers notes toward a critical edition of Landon's works, in an effort to respond both to the critical situation outlined above and to the concerns raised by Anne Mellor and Isobel Armstrong regarding the textual instability of nineteenth-century women's poetry. Landon's is an especially complicated body of material, but subjecting it to careful textual study has revealed a wealth of previously obscured information about her poetic practice, which she developed in response to the changing literary landscape of the nineteenth century. Landon deployed her texts strategically in various forms of media newly circulating in the 1820s and 30s, including literary annuals and magazines. The arguments that her poems make always depend upon how and where they appear, because Landon designed them to test the expressive potential latent in new and rapidly evolving print media. The dissertation argues that Landon's involvement in the publication and circulation of her works is as significant to her poetic project as the texts themselves.

As I indicated briefly at the beginning of this introduction, the dissertation also addresses a bibliographical emergency. Francis Sypher estimates that Landon wrote over four hundred and fifty poems—nearly half of her total output—for literary annuals and gift books alone. These volumes have not fared well critically, which in turn makes them an endangered species in our libraries. Not usually considered interesting or valuable enough to preserve in special collections,

the few copies that do remain in libraries are gradually falling apart. Frequently individual copies of annuals lack one or more of their original engraved prints. Just as nineteenth-century readers cut the pictures out for personal use, so do twenty-first-century entrepreneurs, who buy these books cheaply in order to sell the extracted prints at a premium on sites like eBay and Etsy. The bibliographical record is disappearing, and soon constructing anything like a complete edition of Landon's work may be essentially impossible. Landon saw literary annuals as a transformative, experimental genre, and the innovative use she makes of annual materials must inform our understanding of her work if we are ever to justly assess her poetics.

Each chapter of the dissertation is concerned equally with the poems Landon wrote and the media in which those poems were printed—and, often, reprinted. Because of the nature of the materials under investigation, certain arguments and works appear in more than one section, but each chapter is designed to stand on its own. Especially because Landon often creatively reused her own (quite early) poems, a chronological treatment of her oeuvre seems an unrewarding approach, at least at this point in our critical assessments.

The first chapter attempts to clarify what happened to Landon's poetry in the years following her death, and during the nineteenth-century consolidation of her works, in order to explain why so many critics using these texts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have only seen Landon, in Montwieler's terms, "through a glass darkly." Her work was repackaged in various innovative ways after she died, particularly in two important volumes: *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L.* (1839) and *The Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.* (1841). But scholars today still rely uncritically on these volumes as though they are transparent windows onto Landon's practice and reliable editions of the work, rather than creative reworkings of it. Chapter one explains why the misuse or misinterpretation of these documents by early editors and

modern critics continues to skew our perception of what Landon wrote, and the kind of poet she actually was.

In both chapters two and three, I make a case for Landon as a theorist of late-Romantic print culture. Her poems are best understood not as projections of her own subjectivity (she is not her "improvisatrice") but rather as collaged works that capitalize upon the conventions of sentimental poetry to ensure successful circulation and recirculation in a volatile and rapidly-expanding print market. I argue that Landon is not merely subject to the industrialized market, but that she is a willing, creative, and experimental manipulator of its affordances.

Chapter two addresses Landon's work for the literary annuals, where we see her media imagination most clearly at work. Focusing in particular on *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*, the chapter explores her formal and generic interventions at the level of both text and book. For Landon, the interpretation of a work of art (whether visual or poetical) depends upon its framing contexts. The third chapter presents a series of case studies drawn from Landon's work in annuals and magazines: taken together, these readings reveal that Landon's early investment in the expressive potential of reprinting informs not only the unique experiments she performed in the annuals but also her more canonical writing (i.e., her verse collections). Like chapter two, chapter three argues for an approach to Landon based in the composition, production, and reception history of her writings.

The final two chapters also insist that reading more widely in Landon's oeuvre than we have typically done is critical to understanding even her most well-known poems. The Letitia Landon we think we know is a fiction, in part the product of our own selective reprinting (in editions, anthologies, and critical essays). I am now, more than ever, intensely aware that my grasp of Landon's work is limited: there is only so much time, and there are ever so many

poems. In what follows I nevertheless hope to make the case that further study of this remarkable poet might transform our understanding of late-Romantic period poetry.

Chapter One | Representations, 1839-2019

Letitia Landon did not write a book called *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L.* (1839). Nor did she write the sequence of short poems called "Fragments" that appear in journalist Laman Blanchard's *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.* (1841). Yet these posthumous volumes are two of the most frequently cited texts in modern Landon scholarship, whether critics refer to the books themselves or quote from their distributed contents as absorbed by later nineteenth-century collections of Landon's work. However, these volumes cannot be relied upon as sources for Landon's texts because they are not in fact proper editions of the poetry. That is, they do not attempt to represent Landon's works as she wrote them. Instead, the editors of both *The Zenana* and *The Life and Literary Remains*—Emma Roberts and Blanchard, respectively—creatively repackaged Landon's poetry, collecting into unprecedented series many poems that were otherwise difficult for nineteenth-century readers to access. In so doing, they created wholly new imaginative works, of which Landon herself never conceived, and in the production of which she never participated. Nevertheless, when William B. Scott compiled his important 1873 collection, he drew substantially from both *The Zenana* and *The Life and Literary Remains*, silently incorporating these posthumous works into a single volume that remains to this day the most complete, readily accessible collection of Landon's work. In 1990, Francis Sypher republished the 1873 *Poetical Works* in facsimile, securing its continued circulation and popularity as the go-to source for Landon's texts. The collective influence of these volumes has led more than one modern critic astray, and distorted the ongoing conversation about Landon's work and poetic legacy.

The goal of this chapter is to clarify the transmission history of Landon's texts towards two related ends: first, to counteract a persistent cycle of misuse and misquotation in scholarly work on Landon, and second, to explicate what Landon's contemporaries made of her work in their remakings of it. In one respect, *The Zenana* and *The Life and Literary Remains* helped shape Landon's reception history, and are valuable contemporary interpretations of the poetry. Editorial interventions at work in both books, including the selection, arrangement, and retitling of individual poems, bring forward special characteristic features of Landon's style and practice that are often difficult to observe. On the other hand, this chapter posits *The Zenana* and *The Life and Literary Remains* as distorting influences in the transmission of Landon's texts**,** insofar as they have been misunderstood by later critics. Carried forward by Scott's collection in 1873, these books have had a significant and often detrimental effect upon Landon scholarship. The situation is especially intractable because influential feminist scholars, who contributed substantially to Landon's critical recovery in the 1980s and 90s, have depended upon these nineteenth-century books as though they are reliable editions. But *The Zenana* and *The Life and Literary Remains* are idiosyncratic objects that remake Landon's texts—and extraordinarily, do so according to a plan she might have encouraged herself, given her interest in creating new works out of old. In that regard, Roberts and Blanchard are excellent readers of Landon's poetic program. Their insights, enacted bibliographically in these posthumous volumes, deserve our close attention. But it would be a serious mistake to continue relying upon their work as transparent windows onto the poetry Landon actually created.

I.

When Landon died in 1838, she had been editor of the literary annual *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for nearly a decade. Though editors of annuals typically solicited contributions from other writers to fill out the pages of their books, Landon composed nearly all of the text for each volume of the *Scrap Book* herself, amounting to approximately 250 poems altogether. The *Scrap Book* also differed from other annuals in the ratio of image to text on offer each year: every volume included approximately thirty-five plates, and Landon was commissioned to write one poetic "illustration" for each image. This arrangement produced an unusual annual that was typically half picture and half text, whereas the majority of contents in the early exemplary annuals (e.g. *The Keepsake*, *The Forget Me Not*, etc.) consisted of letterpress: many more poems and tales than illustrations. The *Scrap Book*, furthermore, was the first of the annuals to appear in quarto, and was specifically designed to capitalize on the public's growing taste for prints. Fisher used the annual as a way to advertise, pictorially, their other illustrated works, which meant that the prints in each year's volume were made from plates that Fisher already owned. This strategy saved Fisher the exorbitant fees required to commission new engravings every year; consequently, the firm could afford to print exponentially more images than other publishers. Smaller in format than the *Scrap Book*, volumes like *The Keepsake* were also much longer—often numbering upwards of three hundred pages per octavo (or duodecimo) volume. The Scrap Book's luxuriously large pages and smaller bulk, by comparison, implied the privileging of visual over textual art.

It was from the *Scrap Book* portfolio of work that Landon's friend, Emma Roberts, chose the title poem as well as the "minor poems" that make up *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L.* This book was published a mere four months after Landon died, most likely in order to

take advantage of the increased public interest in her work. However, Roberts's introduction claims that Landon herself had "for some time previous to her departure from England, contemplated a republication of her favourite poems, selected from this cherished child of her fancy" – that is, the *Scrap Book*.[72] And the epigraph, itself selected from Landon's *Scrap Book* poetry, suggests that the book might—even should—be read metaleptically, as a missive from beyond the grave:

> "ALAS! HOPE IS NOT PROPHECY,—WE DREAM,
>
> BUT RARELY DOES THE GLAD FULFILMENT COME:
>
> WE LEAVE OUR LAND—AND WE RETURN NO MORE!"
>
> L.E.L.

As we have already seen, writers, journalists, friends, and critics regularly turned to Landon's poetry when they wished to explain her death. Though the poetry does lend itself to such reuse, the art of printing a good Landon prophecy also required careful selection. The epigraph for *The Zenana* is drawn from "Shuhur, Jeypore," which appeared in the *Scrap Book* for 1834, the same volume that featured Landon's long narrative poem "The Zenana." "Shuhur, Jeypore" illustrated a print of the same title that depicts two figures reclining by a lake, a looming fortress in the background (figure 3).

[72] Roberts, "Memoir of L.E.L.," in *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L.* (London and Paris: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1829), 26.

Figure 3. *Shuhur,—Jeypore* from *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1834 (1833)

However the poem addresses not a fortress, but "a lonely grave, far from all kindred ties." The deictic reference to "yonder grave, where the dark branches droop" at line 12 suggests—even insists—that the picture does illustrate a grave, but the only clear connection between poem and image are some few "dark branches," belonging to a group of trees clustered at the far right edge of the lake. Landon, however, offers an explanation for her poem in a footnote:

> Shuhur is a small town, in a wild part of Jeypore. The recent death of a young acquaintance in its neighborhood, led to the above lines. Every traveller[73] alludes to the melancholy appearance of European burying-grounds; without mourners or memorial, and almost without the common decencies of sepulture.

[73] Landon read widely in travel literature expressly to research her work for the *Scrap Book*. In this note she is likely remembering Emma Roberts's "Indian Graves" in the second edition of *Oriental Scenes, Sketches, and* Tales (London, 1832). Roberts dedicated the book to Landon.

"The above lines" illustrate not the *Shuhur,—Jeypore* of the plate, but a real place filled with British bodies. As is often the case, Landon uses the plate as a prompt to meditations that lead well beyond what it actually depicts. *Shuhur, Jeypore*, in Landon's idiosyncratic reading, is "about" personal loss ("the recent death of a young acquaintance in the neighborhood"). In the same way that Landon's poem repurposes the print, Roberts's selected epigraph reframes Landon's poem: the poet herself becomes the "young acquaintance," who will "return no more."

The title page of the 1839 *Zenana* is not the only carefully designed preliminary material in this book that reads as a missive from Landon herself. The engraved frontispiece portrait, from an original by Daniel Maclise, features a striking facsimile signature and date at bottom: "L. E. L. | Cape Coast Castle October 12" (figures 4 and 5). The book is thus "signed" in Landon's hand, three days before her death. When the editors of *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* assert that "[Landon's] final piece of writing was the poem, 'Zenana,'" one suspects that the carefully executed framing devices at work in this book may have invited such a mistake.[74]

Figure 4. Frontispiece to *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L.* (1839) Courtesy Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections, University of Virginia Library

[74] "L.E.L. (Letitia Elizabeth Landon) (1802-1838)," in *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* eds. Isobel Armstrong, Joseph Bristow and Cath Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 241. "The Zenana" was first published nearly six years earlier in late 1833 for the 1834 *Scrap Book*.

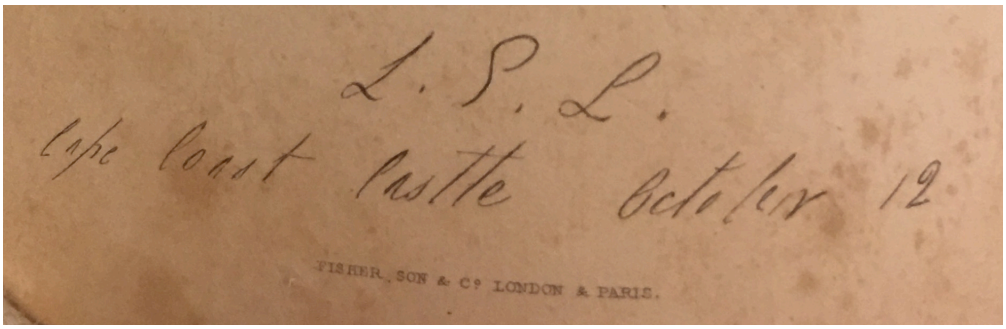

Figure 5. *The Zenana* frontispiece detail

By far the most brilliant move Roberts made in the construction of this book was to arrange it so that the contents replicate formally and thematically the long narrative romance volumes—always printed with accompanying "minor" or "other" poems—for which Landon had become famous. The title signals this continuity, as in other collections foregrounding the primary romance followed by a collection of shorter verses: *The Fate of Adelaide, a Swiss Romantic Tale and Other Poems* (1821); *The Improvisatrice, and Other Poems* (1824); *The Golden Violet with its Tales of Romance and Chivalry, and Other Poems* (1826); *The Venetian Bracelet, The Lost Pleiad, A History of the Lyre and Other Poems* (1829). And although she had first composed it for a literary annual, Landon's long narrative poem "The Zenana" functions formally and generically in a manner identical to her other romance medley poems. Like "The Improvisatrice," "The Zenana" follows the emotional inner life of a young female singer. Her intermittent performances—she sings both brief meditative lyrics and short narrative ballads—all receive individual titles in the poem's original printing, as do the interpolated songs in "The Improvisatrice." As we shall see in chapter two, in the context of the *Scrap Book* "The Zenana" is a tour-de-force poem, in which Landon works conventional literary annual materials into an original narrative. But removed from its unusual illustrated setting and resituated in a book of poems, "The Zenana" also, quite extraordinarily, reads like a typical Landon romance narrative. At two-thirds the length of "The Improvisatrice," its substantial 1099 lines in combination with

the medley form more than justify its assignment as title poem. Roberts selected a set of fifty-two "minor poems" from the rest of Landon's *Scrap Book* materials, silently arranging them in chronological order following the opening "Zenana." The only indication that this book was not arranged or written by the same "L.E.L." who constructed *The Improvisatrice* is the fact that the table of contents does not subdivide the "minor poems" into more elaborate categories. Most Landon volumes featured a section of "Miscellaneous poems" as well as one or two subtitles that suggested poetry inspired by art, such as "Classical Sketches" and "Poetical Sketches of Modern Pictures."

The triumph of Roberts's imitation project is perhaps best indicated by the manner in which modern critics reference *The Zenana*. Kate Singer, for example, names *The Zenana* as one of "Landon's seven 'romance' volumes." Using word frequency analysis, visualized by word clouds and "force graphs," Singer proposes to help us "read [Landon's] texts at a greater distance" in order to see large-scale patterns in her use of repetitive language and plot.[75] But though the other six "romance" volumes Singer incorporates into her analysis are in fact books that Landon assembled, *The Zenana* is an editorial construction successfully masquerading as the real thing. A more serious problem for Singer's analysis is that *The Zenana* obviously could not have been written or published by Landon in 1839, the year to which Singer assigns it in her graph, where it also represents the end-point of a career-long trajectory. *The Zenana* in fact is a scrap-book of *Scrap Book* pieces, condensing eight years of poetic work into one volume. Its title poem was first printed well before *The Vow of the Peacock, and Other Poems* (1835), which precedes *The Zenana* in Singer's graph.

[75] Singer, "Landon: In Sound and Noise," *Multi Media Romanticisms* Romantic Circles https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/multi-media/praxis.2016.multi-media.singer.html (Nov 2016) accessed 14 Jan 2019. Singer also refers to *The Zenana* as one of "Landon's eleven volumes of poetry" in her essay "Retouching Scalar Landon," *Pedagogy* 18.2 (April 2018) 229.

If at surface level *The Zenana* successfully imitates Landon's other books of poems, a serious reading of its contents reveals both the intense strangeness of the materials, and the obscured editorial work that made much of those materials readable in the first place. The table of contents presents a disjointed collection of subjects, ranging from portraits ("Sir Thomas Lawrence"; "Walter Scott"; "The Earl of Sandwich") to localized descriptions ("Fountain's Abbey"; "A Ruined Castle on the Rhine"; "The Sea Shore") to British imperial subjects ("The African Prince"; "A Suttee"; "The Ganges"). A poem titled "On Reading a Description of the Delectable Mountains in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*" shares space with love lyrics, short romantic ballads, and the Arthurian "Legend of Tintagel Castle." While the contents list makes for bizarre reading, it also foregrounds the unusual composition history of these poems. Landon's publishers chose the subjects for the *Scrap Book*, and the prints they sent Landon for her poetic elaboration were almost always drawn from an extant Fisher's publication (or from one in production concurrently with that year's *Scrap Book*). Topographical books were Fisher's specialty—several works on various English, Irish, and Indian landscapes, scenic views, and ruins appeared throughout the 1830s—but they also published other illustrated volumes calculated to be popular with the public.[76] This is why plates from Fisher's *Illustrations of the Pilgrim's Progress* (1836), for example, were also redistributed in the *Scrap Book*. Roberts found two of Landon's poems for these prints compelling, and included both "The Shepherd

[76] For example: the *National Portrait Gallery of illustrious and eminent personages of the nineteenth century* (1830-34); *Killarney legends; arranged as a guide to the lakes* (1831); *Landscape-historical illustrations of Scotland, and the Waverley novels* (1836); *Historic illustrations of the Bible. Principally after the old masters* (1840-1843).

Boy" and "On Reading a Description of the Delectable Mountains in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress" in *The Zenana*.

The titles of these two poems throw into relief some important facts concerning both Landon's poetical practice and Roberts's editorial method. Although the title of the print in the *Scrap Book* for which Landon composed "The Shepherd Boy" clearly indicates its source ("The Shepherd Boy in the Valley of Humiliation"), and the print depicts Christiana and the pilgrimaging company's encounter with said shepherd, neither title nor content of "The Shepherd Boy" poem as printed in *The Zenana* indicate any overt connection to Bunyan's story. Furthermore, while the argument of the shepherd boy's song in *Pilgrim's Progress* is explicitly to instruct the pilgrims in the virtue of humility, Landon's poem makes the shepherd boy's song *itself* the subject of speculation: "What song art thou singing?" the first stanza queries. The second stanza proposes that perhaps the shepherd boy doesn't sing at all, but rather complains:

> Or art thou complaining
>
> Of thy lowly lot,
>
> And thine own disdaining
>
> Dost ask what thou hast not?
>
> Of the future dreaming,
>
> Weary of the past,
>
> For the present scheming,
>
> All but what thou hast. (9-16)

Though the poem finally arrives at the authorized conclusion—that the shepherd boy is "humble in [his] joy"—the questioning attitude it takes towards its pictured subject destabilizes the pious

message of Bunyan's original text. The pictorial rendering of Bunyan's Christian allegory falls victim to Landon's agnostic revisionings.

For these reasons "The Shepherd Boy" necessarily produces far more dramatic tension in the illustrated *Scrap Book* than it does in *The Zenana*, for in the former its clear referent, the Bunyan engraving, superimposes an alternative (preexisting) interpretation onto the picture. In *The Zenana*, the poem could be (and is) "about" any generic shepherd boy, and readers need not think otherwise. This result is both odd and hardly surprising, given Landon's methods. She did not enjoy writing "mere description," and often ignored the "subjects" of Fisher's plates entirely, as we have already observed in her treatment of *Shuhur, Jeypore*. Jerome McGann has observed that Landon's typical procedure in the *Scrap Book*, her "adoption of any legend, train of reflection, &c." which might furnish "as much variety as possible" to the overwhelmingly similar visual contents,[77] often produces an "odd and disturbing disjunction between the events elaborated in the poem and the scene rendered in the picture."[78] This effect disappears, to a certain degree, when Roberts removes the poems from the *Scrap Book*, where they are juxtaposed with the images they purport to illustrate, into *The Zenana*, where they exist as free-floating lyrics or ballads.

But the "disturbing disjunction" between poem and picture McGann detects in the *Scrap Book* is also magnified by the editorial manipulation Roberts exerted upon many of these "minor poems" in *The Zenana*. In order to incorporate so many poems written expressly for pictures into standard collected volume format, Roberts changed the titles of nearly half of the fifty-three *Scrap Book* poems she selected, a fact that underscores how frequently Landon's titles provide the only clear link between poem and engraving. Fisher, in the *Scrap Book*, was reusing plates

[77] Landon, "Introduction," *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* [for 1832] (London, 1831), [3].
[78] McGann, *Poetics of Sensibility*, 167.

onto which descriptive titles had already been engraved, and Landon's poems shared the same title as the pictures they accompanied (excepting shortened versions of the same, as in "The Shepherd Boy"). However in *The Zenana*, Landon's "Sassoor, in the Deccan" becomes "Thoughts on Christmas Day in India"; "Caldron Snout—Westmorland" becomes "Long Years Have Past." Because the real substance of any given *Scrap Book* poem was derived from "the adoption of any legend, train of reflection, &c.," the original titles would have mystified readers who lacked the literary annual context.

Perhaps most telling of all is the alteration Roberts makes to Landon's "Hindoo Temples and Palace at Madura": it becomes "On an Engraving of Hindoo Temples." Foregrounding the second-order encounter that gave rise to Landon's poem, Roberts's new title transmits the combination of alienation and intimacy fueling a poem about an exotic illustration: India on one's writing desk. But if adding "On an Engraving" usefully restores the interpretive frame to this poem, Roberts also devised titles that fictionalized the composition history of Landon's work. "On Reading a Description of the Delectable Mountains in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress" was, in the *Scrap Book* for 1837, simply titled "The Delectable Mountains." Whether or not Landon's brief dramatic monologue can be said to interpret the plate (also titled "The Delectable Mountains") with any degree of fidelity, the suggestion that it was composed after "*reading a description* of the Delectable Mountains *in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*" is an editorial fabrication. Roberts's ingenuity impresses, however: the title "On Reading a Description…" economically combines (false) contextualizing information with an imaginary narrative about the poet. Roberts exploits the dramatic situation of the poem's first-person speaker, and turns this short piece of annual verse into something more like Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," or "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again." *The Zenana and Minor Poems of*

L.E.L. is likewise a tissue of picturesque lies. Though it clearly demonstrates a thorough understanding of Landon's procedures, *The Zenana* is fully a work of Roberts's own sympathetic imagination.

II.

The first volume of Laman Blanchard's *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.* (1841) recounts Landon's biography in carefully redacted terms. Like Emma Roberts, Blanchard was concerned about protecting the poet's reputation following the perceived scandal of her death, which had reignited public interest in the rumored scandals of her life. The second volume gathers together an eccentric collection of Landon's work. Two items in the volume had never before been published: her play *Castruccio Castrucani* and the majority of her essays on Walter Scott's female characters ("The Female Picture Gallery"). The remainder of the volume comprises short poems Blanchard selected for republication. Alongside the previously unpublished works, these poems were chosen to represent Landon as an original genius, whose intellectual accomplishments far exceeded the reputation she had earned for being, as the young Elizabeth Barrett put it, "like a bird of a few notes."[79]

The poems in *Life and Literary Remains* are grouped under four subheadings: "Subjects for Pictures," "Miscellaneous Poems," "Fragments," and "Fugitive Poems of an Earlier Date."

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[79] Elizabeth Barrett to Lady Margaret Cocks, November 1835, in *The Brownings' Correspondence* vol. 3, eds. Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson (Winfield, KS: Wedgestone Press, 1985),159. Discussing Landon with Mary Russell Mitford in September 1836, Barrett expanded upon her previous evaluation, writing that although Landon possessed a "very brilliant imagination & [a] nature *turned towards music*, […] the striking of one note does not make a melody" (original emphasis). *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford: 1836-1854* vol. 1, eds. Meredith B. Raymond and Mary Rose Sullivan (Winfield, KS: Wedgestone Press, 1983), 18.

"Subjects for Pictures" was Landon's title for a series of poems in the *New Monthly Magazine*. They had appeared in sets of three or four at a time, with Roman numerals indicating the series' progress, between 1836 and 1838. The "Miscellaneous Poems" are also gathered from the *New Monthly Magazine* (between 1835 and 1837), as are "Fugitive Poems of an Earlier Date." As in *The Zenana*, Blanchard's book collection provided a more lasting repository for these poems originally printed in ephemeral publications, and as the terms "miscellaneous" and "fugitive" suggest, he was fairly transparent about the sourcing of his materials. In volume 1 he explains his selection rationale: "the 'New Monthly Magazine,' […] of all periodicals, obtained by far the most finished of her poetical efforts; *the subjects being her own, and not her publisher's*" (1:147, my emphasis).

While he briefly admires Landon's ingenuity in the *Scrap Book* poems, Blanchard finds the *New Monthly* poems superior explicitly because they are not *derivative*—not subject to "her publisher's" dictation. Blanchard's goal in the *Life and Literary Remains* is to emphasize Landon's powers of originality, a plan he advances on one front by comparing her to the painters whose work she so admired. "Evidence for her sympathy with [visual artists]," he writes, "is given with matchless force and beauty in the 'Subjects for Pictures'" (1:290). The title of this series seems to suggest that the poems were written "for" existing pictures, as some critics have in fact asserted. According to Elizabeth Dolan "the women characters in these poems written for annuals are paired with plates, visual representations of the speakers and their contexts."[80] Dolan

[80] Dolan, *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008) 219. The issue is confused in another way by Christopher Nagle, who writes of "the picture-poems that have come to stand as [Landon's] signature mode" that "these works usually appear under the heading 'Poetical Catalogue of Pictures'"; "Landon, Letitia Elizabeth" in *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature Litearture* vol. 2, eds. Frederick Burwick, Nancy Moore Goslee, and Diane Long Hoeveler, (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 766. However the "Poetical Catalogue of Pictures" refers to one unique set of poems only.

is right of course to point out the "specific references to visuality" in these poems, but as her source is Blanchard's *Life and Literary Remains* it is impossible to know how she came to conclude that these poems were "written for annuals" (219)—they were not. As noted, Blanchard was careful to foreground Landon's powers of pure invention rather than her capacity to second-handedly "illustrate." In fact, the poems in this experimental group *are* the original "subjects." They are presented as textual artworks suitable for visual elaboration: "*Subjects* for Pictures." If critics considered annual poetry derivative, Blanchard meant this series to demonstrate that Landon was no mere imitative artist but instead a master of her trade, capable of inverting the "illustrations" process by producing primary textual materials worthy themselves of painterly translation.

Blanchard similarly champions Landon's powers of originality in a discussion of the 104-poem series titled "Fragments," which he had gathered together from the epigraphs heading each chapter of Landon's most successful novel, *Ethel Churchill, or the Two Brides* (1837). He explains his newly-constructed series in terms that emphasize Landon's superfluously productive and creative capacities:

> "Ethel Churchill" […] contains a little volume of verses, beautifully scattered through the work as mottos to the chapters; a liberality denoting, perhaps, that L.E.L.'s activity of thought and keenness of feeling could create, where other minds reposed on a quotation;

Confusion regarding these matters may stem from the fact that Landon published many distinct series of poems that either appeared to, or actually did, illustrate works of visual art. None of them, however, are interchangeable. Series titles include, in the *Literary Gazette*: "Sketches from Designs by Mr. Dagley" (1822), "Poetic Sketches" (a five-part series, 1822-1824), "Medallion Wafers" (1823), "Poetical Catalogue of Pictures" (1823); in *The Troubadour*: "Poetical Sketches of Modern Pictures" (1825); in *The Venetian Bracelet*: "Poetical Portraits" (1829). Along with the "Subjects for Pictures" in the *New Monthly Magazine*, these series span the length of her literary career, during which time she also wrote hundreds of poems to accompany visual images in the annuals.

> and could produce a sweet song, while another novelist was turning over her own poetical pages for an appropriate extract. It has been deemed right to collect some of these mottos in the present work." (1:160)

Blanchard then prints a preview selection from the "Fragments," remarking somewhat paradoxically, "Coleridge might have written it" (1:161). Nevertheless it's clear that to Blanchard the novel epigraph series demonstrates above all inventiveness, as Landon "could create" and "produce a sweet song" where another novelist might perhaps repurpose their own or someone else's poetic materials.

Ethel Churchill also signals for Blanchard a marked improvement in Landon's maturation as an artist: she had for so long seemed capable merely of "writing Troubadours and Golden Violets all her days—apostrophizing loves, memories, hopes, and fears, for ever, in scattered songs and uncompleted stanzas" (1:276). But in *Ethel Churchill* Landon's

> thoughts found a deeper channel, and flowed still more freely; her observation took a wider range, and scanned the features of life as they presented themselves to her earnest gaze—not has she had imaged them in the pages of chivalry and romance. (1:276-277)

In Blanchard's view, *Ethel Churchill* was the highest achievement of Landon's career, in which she not only "led Prose captive, as she had led Poetry," but into which she had also inserted "a little volume of verses […] not [to] be lightly regarded by the reader" (1:277, 160). The poems from this volume, like the poems drawn from the *New Monthly Magazine*, represent her "most finished" works, and indicate Landon's exchange of "Romance" for "Reality" (1:277).

In addition to Blanchard's rhetorical framing of the "Fragments" as mature artistic triumph (a narrative still current in Landon scholarship), this series of poems undergo some further serious editorial manipulation when adapted for the *Life and Literary Remains*. In the

first place, and in a manner similar to the selections Roberts made for *The Zenana*, these verses were never conceived as a series to be read consecutively. As first printed they performed epigraphic functions for a novel about, among other things, the trials of poetic vocation. A second noteworthy fact about the *Ethel Churchill* epigraphs is that there are 116 total, one for each chapter of the novel. Blanchard only reprints 104 of them, and never acknowledges the missing twelve. But the most brilliant (and alarming) change Blanchard makes to the epigraphs when he prints them in *Life and Literary Remains* is to give each a thematically appropriate title. Every epigraph becomes a self-contained poem, with the titles often conveying what Blanchard found to be the central lesson or message ("Life's Mask"; "What is Success?"). Other titles offer ironic commentary inadvertently, such as "The Marriage Vow," which begins: "The altar, 'tis of death! for there are laid/ The sacrifice of all youth's sweetest hopes" (II., 277). In some cases Blanchard seems to have selected a single relevant word, turning the poems into definitions or elaborations ("Hope"; "Secrets"; "Memory") while other titles suggest mini-narratives ("The First Doubt"; "Pleasure Becomes Pain"; "Faith Ill Requited").

Certain titles function ambiguously in relation to the corresponding poem. Blanchard's economically worded title "Weakness Ends With Love" itself might be read in two contradictory ways: either weakness ends when love begins, or weakness ends when love does. In the poem, the speaker claims that her "weakness is o'er" because "It died with the sentence—I love thee no more!" (2:265). Though it seems clear that the title must therefore reference a concurrent end to "weakness" and "love," a close reading of the poem produces more questions than answers. For example, who first voiced that fateful sentence, "I love thee no more," which is the apparent cause of this rupture? Does the speaker repeat her own declaration? Or does she recall her lover's disavowal? Is "I love thee no more" not "the sentence" at all (no quotation marks enclose it, as

we might expect) but rather the result of some unrepeatable expression? Who is repaid by the curse of this poem?

I say not, regret me; you will not regret;
You will try to forget me, you cannot forget;
We shall hear of each other, ah, misery to hear
Those names from another which once were so dear!

But deep words shall sting thee that breathe of the past,
And many things bring thee thoughts fated to last;
The fond hopes that centered in thee are all dead,
The iron has entered the soul where they fed.

Of the chain that once bound me, the memory is mine,
But my words are around thee, their power is on thine;
No hope, no repentance, my weakness is o'er,
It died with the sentence—I love thee no more!

Blanchard's title smooths over these fascinating irregularities by framing the poem in moralizing terms: weakness for a lover should end when affections are withdrawn. But in spite of (because of?) the final declarative statement, the "lesson" of "Weakness Ends With Love" is most thoroughly conveyed by the litany of devastating future-tense experiences the speaker and addressee will both suffer. The poem curses them both.

Of course the titles also aim to make these epigraphs intelligible as a poetic sequence. Epigraphs, meanwhile, are always read as forecasts of, or commentary upon, what will come

next in a narrative, and therefore function somewhat like titles themselves. Blanchard's "Weakness Ends With Love" originally begins chapter eighteen of *Ethel Churchill*, which climaxes in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's humiliation of Alexander Pope. The catalyst for this incident is the discovery of "some verses, lying on the seat" in Pope's newly constructed grotto, where a sightseeing party is gathered, having spent the afternoon touring Pope's grounds.[81] These are not just any "verses," however; Landon copies them from Pope's poem "To Mr. Gay, Who Had Congratulated Pope on Finishing His House and Gardens":

> Ah, friend, 'tis true—this truth you lovers know,
> In vain my structures rise, my gardens grow;
> In vain fair Thames reflects the double scene
> Of hanging woodlands, and of sloping green:
> Joy lives not here; to happier seats it flies,
> And only lives where Wortley casts her eyes. (1:193)

Pope does not object when one of the gentlemen proposes reading the lines aloud. He has been led to believe, Landon suggests, that Lady Mary will return his affection. Instead, Lady Mary expresses her disgust at the verses and sweeps out of the grotto, cruelly dropping a just-audible insult to her nearest companion as she goes. Pope, deeply embarrassed, turns to anger. According to Landon's fan fiction, this marks the beginning of an infamously antagonistic relationship. In the context of this chapter, the epigraph's speaker and addressee might quite easily be read as figures for Pope and Lady Mary. That connection is obviously lost in translation to the "Fragments," but such is Blanchard's intention.

[81] Landon, *Ethel Churchill: Or, the Two Brides* (London, 1837) 1:192.

While Blanchard's titles enact various local rhetorical and thematic effects upon the poems in his constructed series, the very naming of untitled poems in the first place also affects readerly assumptions about what the poems are. Modified by Blanchard's titles, Landon's epigraphs become unique objects, separable by name from other printed materials. Untitled epigraphs, however, suggest at least the possibility of having originated elsewhere. And in fact, over a third of the *Ethel Churchill* epigraphs are extracts taken from Landon's earlier works, rather than the "original" compositions Blanchard and later critics have assumed them to be. For example, the epigraph discussed above comes from the final three stanzas of Landon's poem "The Lily of the Valley," first published in *Fisher's Scrap Book* for 1836. Compare the first version of the last stanza from "The Lily of the Valley":

> Like others in seeming, we'll walk through life's part,
> Cold, careless, and dreaming,—with death in the heart.
> No hope—no repentance; the spring of life o'er;
> All died with that sentence—I love thee no more! (45-48)

Though Landon makes substantive changes throughout, major revisions to this concluding stanza show her efforts to shift "The Lily of the Valley" into a poem that emphasizes bitter division between two parties, rather than mutual destruction. The first-person plural pronoun "we" that governs the first two lines in the "The Lily of the Valley" stanza becomes "me," "mine," "my," "thee," and "thine" in *Ethel Churchill*.

The fact that so many of the "Fragments" are old news undermines Blanchard's attempt to republish only the most "original" of Landon's poems, but these recyclings also challenge his argument about Landon's late-blooming sophistication. Let us recall his dismissal of the "scattered songs and uncompleted stanzas" from the "Troubadours and Golden Violets" of

Landon's earlier career (1:276). In fact, for *Ethel Churchill*, Landon drew twenty-nine of forty-two total repurposed epigraphs from her work published *before* 1830, including both *The Troubadour* (1825) (six epigraphs) and *The Golden Violet* (1826) (ten epigraphs). For Blanchard, the "Fragments" are meant to demonstrate not merely Landon's technical accomplishment (the "most finished of her poetical efforts") but more importantly her new appreciation for "Reality" over "Romance." But the composition history here suggests Landon's early poetry cannot be dismissed as merely "the grotesque fancies of a dream" (Blanchard, 1:277). Blanchard is in general a fair critic of Landon's faults. If her early "pages of chivalry and romance" survive undetected in their new epigraphic shape, that is a sign of a consistently-present formal experimental achievement.

Much more remains to be said of the work Landon does with the epigraphs, and the *Ethel Churchill* situation is only one example among many in her career-long experimentation with textual remaking. In the following chapters, I will address the innovative reuse to which Landon puts her own and others' work. Though I suspect Angela Leighton speaks for many when she declares that "L.E.L. was not an original poet,"[82] the following chapters aim to show that some of Landon's most experimental and creative poems are the very same works that we, like Leighton and Blanchard, have been accustomed to call derivative, precisely because thy *are* "unoriginal."

III.

As Francis Sypher carefully documents in *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: a Bibliography*, the 1873 *Poetical Works* includes "the contents of three independently published collections: (1)

[82] Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 57.

contents of the two-volume *Poetical Works* of 1850; (2) poems published by Blanchard in volume 2 of *Life and Literary Remains*, 1841; and (3) poems published by Fisher in *The Zenana and Minor Poems*, 1839."[83] Sypher republished this 1873 collection as a facsimile edition in 1990, and it remains one of the best-known collections of Landon's work to this date. However, as we have just seen, the 1873 *Poetical Works* incorporates two complex and eccentric collections, significantly shaped by Landon's editors, that require (and repay) careful independent assessment.

Although in a sense the 1850 *Poetical Works* interferes less aggressively with Landon's texts than do either Roberts or Blanchard, this collection too is an editorial interpretation of the work. In fact, the 1850 *Poetical Works* completely reorganizes the established Landon canon as it existed at mid-century in Britain.[84] In 1827, Landon's collected volumes of poetry—*The Improvisatrice* (1824), *The Troubadour* (1825), and *The Golden Violet* (1826)—were printed by Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans in three separate volumes, one per each original book. *The Venetian Bracelet* was added as the fourth volume in 1829, and this four-volume edition was also reissued in 1844.[85] Until mid-century, then, the collected works looked much like the original publications, with the addition of a shared title page. Things changed in 1850. The "Advertisement" to the 1850 *Poetical Works* explains the rationale for a new collection:

> The expression of a general desire, that the Poetical Works of L.E.L. should be rendered accessible to a still wider circle of readers than they have even hitherto enjoyed, has

[83] Sypher, *Bibliography*, 98.
[84] The history of Landon's reception in American collections is quite different, and documented by Sypher in his bibliography (pp. 100-118). I do not go into that history here because the 1873 *Poetical Works* has so clearly been the collection of choice in modern Landon scholarship, with which this dissertation primarily engages.
[85] Landon's *Vow of the Peacock* (1835) was never incorporated into this scheme, perhaps because it was among Landon's least successful collections. See Francis Sypher, ed. *Poems from The Literary Gazette* (Ann Arbor: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2003) x.

> induced the Publishers to print them in a form and at a price better fitted for popular circulation. The present edition contains all the matter comprised in the 4-volume edition; but a new arrangement has been adopted, by which all the poems homogeneous in character are placed together, thus giving greater uniformity and, it is hoped, value to the work.[86]

The editors brought Landon's texts into "uniformity" by separating the long narratives from the shorter, "miscellaneous," and "other" poems. The first volume of the 1850 *Poetical Works* prints the first three of the long title romances ("The Improvisatrice," "The Troubadour," "The Golden Violet") in addition to the narrative poem "The Lost Pleiad." The second volume prints the fourth long narrative poem "The Venetian Bracelet," and compresses together all other short poems that had previously been distributed throughout Landon's four collections.

One effect of this reorganization, as Glenn Dibert-Himes has observed, is the total loss of publication chronology.[87] Though the longer poems appear in order, the rest of volume two consists of titled subsections cut from the original collections and pasted into the 1850 *Poetical Works* in no particular order. Nor does the volume indicate from which collection any of these poems originate.[88] The collection privileges the generic category over the bibliographical unit, or

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[86] "Advertisement" in *The Poetical Works of Letitia Elizabeth Landon* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1850) vii.

[87] Dibert-Himes, "The Comprehensive Index and Bibliography to the Collected Words of Letitia Elizabeth Landon" (PhD dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1997), 19.

[88] The short poems in volume two appear as follows: "Erinna" (1826), "The History of the Lyre" (1829), and "The Ancestress" (1829) follow "The Venetian Bracelet" (1829). Next are printed series of poems organized by Landon's own subheadings: "Poetical Portraits" (from *The Venetian Bracelet* 1829), "Poetical Sketches of Modern Pictures," and "Sketches from History" (both *The Troubadour* 1825). The next subheading, "Tales and Miscellaneous Poems," is drawn from *The Improvisatrice* (1824) table of contents, and all poems from that volume so listed are included here. But this group also incorporates "Miscellaneous Poems" from *The Golden Violet* (1826) and *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829). The final two series are "Ballads" and "Fragments," both taken from *The Improvisatrice* (1824).

in Longman's terms, it divides Landon's works into groupings "homogeneous in character," irrespective of chronology. Modern critics who use these later editions (both 1850 and 1873) must therefore tread carefully in order to avoid mistaken consclusions. Similar things might be said about many nineteenth-century collected editions, which is why modern scholarly editions and bibliographies are so crucial to the field.

Nineteenth-century editions of poetry are typically products of compiling and assemblage, rather than strict editorial work. When William B. Scott assembled his new single-volume collection of Landon's works in 1873, he simply stitched together the *Poetical Works* of 1850, the poems from the second volume of *The Life and Literary Remains*, and the poems from *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L.*, in that order. The resulting table of contents does not distinguish between subheadings Landon created herself (e.g. "Tales and Miscellaneous Poems" and "Fragments," both from *The Improvisatrice*), and those her editors invented (e.g. "Minor Poems" by Roberts; "Miscellaneous Poems" and "Fragments" by Blanchard). Consequently certain subheadings appear more than once in the table of contents, with no way to distinguish, for example, the "Fragments" of Landon's own creation from the "Fragments" of Blanchard's making. In another strange accident of combination, "The Zenana" appears to fall under Blanchard's category "Fugitive Poems of an Earlier Date," though the "Minor Poems" from *The Zenana* retain their 1839 subtitle on the next page. In short, the table of contents in this collection confuses far more than it illuminates. Like the books it absorbs, *The Poetical Works* of 1873 presents a body of work that is deeply estranged, formally and contextually, from the materials Landon actually created.

IV.

In spite of this textual situation, critics have written a great deal about Landon's poetry as transmitted by Roberts, Blanchard, Longman, and Scott: a frequently treacherous foundation for literary analysis. Occasionally the complex textual history surveyed above produces only minor errors and critical misprisions, but such errors nevertheless become part of the scholarly record. Concerning a poem Landon first composed for the 1836 *Scrap Book*, Jean Fernandez observes, "'Hindoo Temples' is listed under the somewhat dismissive category of "Minor Poems" in F. J. Sypher's 1990 edition of L.E.L.'s poems, where it may be found under its present title "On an Engraving of Hindoo Temples.'"[89] Fernandez's entire article is devoted to explicating this single poem of Landon's, beginning with its publication history.[90] But her mild dismay regarding the "dismissive category of 'Minor Poems' in F. J. Sypher's 1990 edition" (Sypher's edition is a facsimile reprint of the 1873 *Poetical Works*) in addition to her apparent confusion about the "present title" of the poem (in fact Roberts's title from *The Zenana*) indicates that even when a single Landon poem is the primary object of study, the textual situation outlined above makes navigating the works extremely difficult.

Fernandez's confusion is symptomatic of the current widespread critical misunderstanding of Landon's texts. The problem has been ongoing since the early 1990s when feminist recovery work on Landon began in earnest. Both Angela Leighton in *Victorian Women Poets* (1992) and Isobel Armstrong in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* (1993)

[89] Fernandez, "Graven Images: The Woman Writer, the Indian Poetess, and Imperial Aesthetics in L.E.L.'s s 'Hindoo Temples and Palaces [sic] at Madura," *Victorian Poetry* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 35.

[90] Fernandez observes that it "first appeared under the title of "Hindoo Temples and Palace at Madura" in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrapbook*, 1836 later [sic] republished in *The Zenana and Minor Poems with a Memoir* by Emma Roberts (1839) and the *Poetical Works* of 1873" (35). She does not indicate that the *Poetical Works* is in fact the text reproduced in "F. J. Sypher's 1990 edition of L.E.L.'s poems."

make productive use of Landon's *Ethel Churchill* epigraphs, but refer to them by Blanchard's titles—presumably because Leighton's source is Scott's 1873 *Poetical Works*, and Armstrong's source is the *Life and Literary Remains* itself. Leighton (with Margaret Reynolds) and Armstrong (with Joseph Bristow) also incorporate Landon's "Fragments" into their important anthologies of women's poetry. Popularized by Armstrong and Leighton, the "Fragments" continue to be printed under Blanchard's titles. Jessica and Jonathan Wordsworth include "The Poet's Lot" in *The New Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry* (2001). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar reprint "The Marriage Vow" in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, 3rd edition (2007), though unaccountably, they give its title as "The Marriage Pact." Noah Comet discusses and reprints "Age and Youth" in his 2018 essay "Landon in the Canon: An Intertextual Approach."[91]

But beyond simply perpetuating the myth that Landon published these poems under these titles (which in fact she never wrote), both Leighton and Armstrong also rely on the "Fragments" to support interpretive arguments about Landon's personal and political views. Ironically, Armstrong begins the single chapter on women's poetry in her magisterial *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* with one of Blanchard's "Fragments." The poem—originally, as we know, an epigraph—uncannily reappears *as* epigraph for Armstrong's chapter. Blanchard's title "The Marriage Vow," however, is supplied in a footnote. According to Armstrong, "The Marriage Vow" is a poem "of protest […] in which an overt sexual politics addresses the institutions and customs which burden women."[92] The poem apparently makes clear that "for Landon marriage is a terminal moment which requires the language of sacrifice and victim"

[91] Comet, "Landon in the Canon," 192-195.
[92] Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 319.

(319). While one might read the editorially constructed poem "The Marriage Vow" in this way, it seems important to remember that the epigraph was originally meant to rhyme with the events unfolding in another fictional narrative, inside the world of *Ethel Churchill*. "The Marriage Vow" is not one of Landon's recycled epigraphs—she composed it specifically for a novel in which marriage both is and is not a sacrifice. The chapter it heads describes a narrow escape: the title character is about to be unhappily married to a man she does not love, but a sudden turn of events prevents the wedding from going forward. The novel ends happily for Ethel Churchill, in fact, who (joyfully) marries the man she has loved from her youth. Perhaps Landon felt that marriage was a sacrifice, or perhaps she did not—I suspect that the appeal of "The Marriage Vow" for many critics has to do with Landon's own sudden decision to marry, and the tragic consequences that followed. But no matter Landon's personal feelings, the history of the poem we now call "The Marriage Vow" must come into our critical conversations about its "ideas," perhaps especially because a man wrote its title.

Leighton, as we have already seen, uses the "Fragments" primarily to support the claim that Landon's poetry develops in significant ways chronologically, and that her later poems indicate the emergence of a more "mature" poetic voice. Like Blanchard, she advances a narrative of progress that depends upon Landon's embrace of reality over romance. Leighton finds in the "Fragments," that is, evidence that Landon exchanged "the high style of exotic melancholia which was key to her easy, short-lived success" for "a darker realism and skepticism than is found in her earlier poetry."[93] As previously noted, Leighton's biographical reading of Landon's poetry likely played an important part in her decision to print "Song" ("Farewell!—and never think of me") as the last of Landon's poems in *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*.

[93] Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets*, 57.

Although "Song," first published in 1824, is in fact a very early poem, it appears as the concluding example in Leighton's selection of ten "late" and mature "Fragments." We might observe here, however, that Leighton's source text, the 1873 *Poetical Works*, likely facilitated that error. Because "Song" first appeared in *The Improvisatrice* volume under a subsection titled "Fragments," it also falls under a subsection titled "Fragments" in the 1873 *Poetical Works*. But as we have seen, the 1873 collection contains *two* "Fragments" subsections—one is Blanchard's (the "late" "Fragments"), the other is Landon's—identical verso running titles in each section give no indication which "Fragments" series one is perusing.

Even if the 1873 collection's table of contents explains the mistake, the fact remains that Leighton is able to reconcile a quite early poem to her idea of what a purportedly world-weary poet produced. Like Blanchard, Leighton reads the poetry into and out of a predetermined story: Landon might have begun her career courting "easy, short-lived success" by contributing to literary annuals and writing sentimental trash, but eventually she left this embarrassing kind of work behind her: "L.E.L. is to be credited […] with having developed from a garrulous girl prodigy, gifted with a trick of versifying which suited the tastes of the day, into a poet who, looking back over her career, could write quite sternly about her poetic failings," who could distinguish "the truth of real experience" from "visions of romance" (71, 74). "Song," however, touches upon nearly all of Landon's favorite (and *early*) themes:

> Farewell!—and never think of me
> In lighted hall or lady's bower!
> Farewell!—and never think of me
> In spring sunshine or summer hour!—
> But when you see a lonely grave,

Just where a broken heart might be,

With not one mourner by its sod,

Then—and then only—THINK OF ME![94]

The "lighted hall," the "lady's bower," and the "lonely grave"—we might call these hallmarks of Landon's most well-known romances, while the rendering of the final "think of me" in melodramatic small capitals suggests a certain "high style of exotic melancholia." Leighton's reading (or lack thereof) demonstrates why interpreting Landon's work biographically is a hazardous approach. The actual poetry disappears from view when we look for only what we wish to see.

The work of Leighton and Armstrong continues to be influential in Landon studies—both critics made important attempts to put Landon back on our maps of Victorian poetry. However, many claims they (and other critics) have advanced misrepresent the poetry as Landon composed and published it. In this chapter I have suggested that at least part of the problem derives from the current state of Landon's texts, and the general critical disregard for how those texts descend to us. But in addition to the textual problems presented by *The Zenana*, *The Life and Literary Remains* and the 1873 *Poetical Works*, we must also acknowledge, as Sypher and Dibert-Himes have already documented, that Landon's full corpus extends far beyond the relatively small selection of materials reprinted in these books. "It is essential to recognize," Dibert-Himes observes,

> that these collections are unrepresentative of the corpus of Landon's poetic publication. […] In searching beyond these posthumous collections, I have collected and indexed over eleven hundred individual works published by Landon during her lifetime. (20) [95]

[94] Landon, "Song," in *The Improvisatrice and Other Poems* (London, 1824) 296; in Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, 60.

As Dibert-Himes's index demonstrates, the majority of Landon's poetry—over eight hundred poems—remains largely out of view, in part because of the conveniently packaged and accessible 1873 *Poetical Works*. Sypher, in the introduction to his edition of Landon's poetry for *The Literary Gazette*, likewise finds that the history of Landon's textual transmission conveys only a narrow sense of her achievement:

> the overwhelming majority of the poems that shaped Landon's reputation in the minds of readers […] were never brought together for reprinting by Landon or by 19th-century editors of her works. Rather, from 1824 on, her fame became increasingly associated with books of poetry that were published independently of her periodical writings. […] Almost throughout Landon's career she continued to publish poetic pieces in annuals (contributors were well paid), and in magazines, especially *The New Monthly Magazine*, and *The Literary Gazette*. Landon was understating the case when she wrote in 1837, 'A thousand songs of mine are on the air.' Most of these poems were not collected by her for reprinting in book form, but they contributed to her reputation among her contemporaries.[96]

Because the periodical and literary annual poems Sypher mentions are more difficult to access, these works are infrequently taken up for pedagogical or literary critical engagement.[97] Since the 1990s, Sypher has attempted to correct this situation by meticulously constructing scholarly

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[95] The index to Landon's poems compiled by Dibert-Himes was printed in his dissertation, as well as in *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings* ed. Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 1997) 387-509.

[96] Sypher, *Poems from The Literary Gazette*, ix-x.

[97] In the past few years a number of scholars have pointed to the same problem in terms that often suggest helplessness regarding how much of Landon's work remains uncollected. See Cope, "'A Series of Small Inconstancies,'"365. See also Comet, "Landon in the Canon," 191-192; Roxanne Eberle, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon's 'Minstrel Annals'," 211-213; Harriet Kramer Linkin and Kate Singer, "Introduction," 187.

editions of the magazine and literary annual poetry through Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints. Unhappily those editions are not only scarce, but also apparently no longer in print, and out of reach for most would-be scholars of Landon's poetry.

Though Landon's poems now regularly feature in teaching and period anthologies, the typical handful of titles afforded each writer in an anthology simply cannot replace a complete edition. Anthologies only provide a representative sample of the work, and such sampling has been particularly unsatisfying in Landon's case. Editors seem simply to choose the poems they like best, often selected from Landon's poems that have been circulated before. Roxanne Eberle suggests that anthology selections of Landon tend to be "less representative because editors choose coherence over variation."[98] That is, Landon's diverse and voluminous corpus is typically mined for examples that support specific narratives: a few "Romantic" poems on nature; a "Victorian" poem about child labor; or a series of poems that support reading her as "poetess" or "improvisatrice." Furthermore, many anthologies fail to identify source texts (or, as frequently, misidentify them).

These procedures distort Landon's work into silently misleading patterns. The literary annual poems—and especially the poems composed for the *Scrap Book*—further complicate the situation, because annual "subjects" originated with a publisher rather than with Landon. And because the *Scrap Book* poem titles correspond to the illustrated plates, which often depict the British Empire via landscape, Landon's anthologized *Scrap Book* poems seem to suggest an interest in imperial projects (not to mention in Nature) that Landon in reality pursued on commission. To take one example, Armstrong and Bristow, in *Nineteenth Century Women Poets*, only print twelve short poems by Landon. One third of these are among the most-frequently

[98] Eberle, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon's 'Minstrel Annals'," 212.

anthologized ("Revenge," "The Princess Victoria," "The Factory," "The Marriage Vow"), which only serve to make "The Pirate's Song off the Tiger Island" and "Hurdwar, a Place of Hindoo Pilgrimage," seem the more unusual and exotic. The anthology provides no information on individual text provenance, so a reader is left to assume that Landon's own interests inspired these poems on a Chinese port and an Indian site of pilgrimage. Similarly, in the *Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory,* four of the seven poems selected to represent Landon are drawn from the *Scrap Book* ("Carthage," "Infanticide in Madagascar," "Rydal Water and Grasmere Lake, the Residence of Wordsworth," "Felicia Hemans"). However, though the headnote enumerates all of Landon's single volume collections, it fails to mention her literary annual writing altogether. The four poems selected from the *Scrap-Book* and reprinted in this anthology thus appear in a kind of disguise, as though they were composed and circulated in a manner similar to Landon's long narrative poem "The Improvisatrice," a selection of which appears alongside them.

Other anthologies foreground more directly thematic connections between Landon's poetry and relevant period texts. In *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology*, Duncan Wu includes four poems "from" *The Works of L. E. Landon* (Philadelphia, 1838)[99] which are, in fact, *Scrap Book* poems.[100] Two of these are titled after Lake District landscapes, and Wu appends an

[99] Published by E. L. Carey and A. Hart, this comprehensive 3-volume collection is printed in double columns of 8-point type. The third volume (part-title *The Poetical Works of L. E. Landon*) includes not only Landon's five "romance" volumes but also 145 poems from *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*, under the heading "Miscellaneous Poems." The titles of these poems are drawn directly from the annual: thus, where American collections print "Sassoor, in the Deccan," British collections print the same poem as "Thoughts on Christmas Day in India" (via Roberts's *The Zenana*). For more on American collections of Landon's poetry, see Sypher's *Bibliography*, 100-118.

[100] Wu correctly identifies the *Scrap Book* as the source for Landon's poem "Felicia Hemans," however, thereby confusing further the history of the four texts he sources from the American collection.

explanatory note to one of them ("Airey Force"): "Aira Force, an impressive Lake District waterfall, on the western shore of Ullswater, halfway between the head and foot of the lake. Landon probably did not know Wordsworth's famous *Airey-Force Valley*, composed September 1835, published 1842" (607). In the context of a Romantic poetry anthology, such a note makes good sense, but the unusual composition history of Landon's "Airey Force"—a forced topic—would enrich substantially any comparison between the poets' approaches to "the same" subject.

Figure 6. *Airey Force, Cumberland*, from *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1834 (1833)

Landon's poem could easily describe any waterfall landscape—it is entirely generic. The opening stanza is representative: "Aye, underneath yon shadowy side,/ I could be fain to fix my home;/ Where dashes down the torrent's pride,/ In sparkling wave, and silver foam" (1-4). The connection to Wordsworth is therefore noteworthy, if ultimately ironic. In the first place, Landon's "Airey Force" was printed in late 1833, before Wordsworth began composing his poem. But it is also critical to clarify that Landon did not write in a Wordsworthian spirit. Landon's "Airey Force" does not endeavor to represent the first-hand experience of communion with a natural space. Rather, it evaluates an artist's rendering of a subject selected by her publisher (figure 6). "Yon shadowy side" points to the waterfall illustrated "yon"—on the verso of the facing page, separated from the poem by intervening tissue paper. Comparing the two Airey Forces might

well generate a productive conversation about how natural scenes are represented in poetry of the 1830s—both Landon and Wordsworth employ the deictic "yon," for example—but we must make composition history central to such conversations.

Landon's annual poetry is subjected to an explicitly thematic analysis in Jessica and Jonathan Wordsworth's *New Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*, which groups together poems from various Romantic period authors into categories like "Ennobling Interchange: Man and Nature," and "On Poets and Poetry." Landon's *Scrap Book* poem "Scale Force, Cumberland" naturally appears in the section on "Man and Nature," alongside the likes of "Frost at Midnight," "Tintern Abbey," and "Mont Blanc." But the poem never actually names its alleged subject (another waterfall), and with each stanza that subject becomes more obscure. The poem finally concludes with a suitable moral lesson, supposedly derived from communion with nature:

> To love and to admire
> Seems natural to the heart;
> Life's small and selfish interests
> From such a scene depart. (25-28)

The reference to "such a scene" in the last line draws our attention, again, to the engraved picture the poem is supposed to illustrate, rather than to a specific natural location. Or at least, such is the effect of that reference in the *Drawing Room Scrap Book*.

In an important way "Scale Force, Cumberland" reveals quite well Landon's poetic attitude towards "Man and Nature." She greatly preferred city life to visits in the country. But without certain contextualizing information, it would be easy to write her off as a second- or third-rate Wordsworth (her waterfall, pointedly, "haunt[s] those who gaze"—though merely "*like a dream of strength and beauty*," whereas Wordsworth's "sounding cataract" in "Tintern Abbey"

haunts him "*like a passion"*). Landon's characteristic approach to writing for landscape engravings survives in a letter to Fisher of 1835, where she notes, "the verses to Derwent—will equally suit Eskdale."[101] Because the two prints shared a few features in common—some hills and a lake—they were interchangeable as far as Landon and Fisher were concerned. This is because in fact Landon's "nature" poems in the *Scrap Book* are really poems about a second order form of art works. All of the waterfalls Landon illustrates do seem alike, because all are made from identical materials: steel plate, ink, and paper. She might have just as easily written, "the verses to Scale Force—will equally suit Aiery Force," and never mind "Wordsworth's famous 'Airey-Force Valley.'"

Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess published *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings* in 1997. This volume should have marked a major turning point in Landon criticism, particularly because the edition attends so carefully to Landon's publication contexts as well as to her reception history. The *Selected Writings* reproduces, for example, several of Landon's annual poems paired with their respective prints in an effort to clarify that essential facet of her literary career. An illuminating introductory essay, parts of which reflect McGann's important work in *The Poetics of Sensibility* (1996), suggests fruitful avenues for further bibliographically-grounded investigation. But the example laid down by these editors, especially regarding the significance of composition and publication contexts to Landon's work, has not generally been followed by later anthologists. Both the Penguin and Broadview editions mentioned above were first compiled (and have since been reprinted) years after the publication of *Selected Writings*, and nevertheless fail to document Landon's work in the annuals to any satisfactory degree.

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[101] Landon to Robert Fisher, in *Letters*, 134-5. An engraving titled *Eskdale, looking towards Scawfell* appeared in the *Scrap Book* for 1836, while *Derwent Water, Cumberland* was printed in the volume for 1837.

If we have not taken direction from McGann and Riess's *Selected Writings*, perhaps that is because we still value quantity over quality. The 1990 Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints facsimile of the 1873 *Poetical Works* provides access to *more* poems than do McGann and Riess. But relying on nineteenth-century collections of the works prevents us from observing the most interesting and innovative characteristics of Landon's poetics, which depend upon publication context. As Dibert-Himes sees clearly, Landon was "an artist who carefully crafted and contextualized her material" (21). Having compiled an index to over eleven hundred of Landon's poems "in the forms and places in which they were published in her lifetime," he concludes that "the overwhelming bulk of Landon's poetry was written for specific publications" and that she "carefully crafted the individual works with deference to the publishing environment in which the work was to appear" (21). Though Dibert-Himes also asserts that Landon avoided "recycl[ing] material among various publications," the advent of Google Books and other full text search engines has turned up evidence that suggests otherwise. However, these findings only strengthen the point about Landon's attention to her publishing environments. Landon clearly considered the print context for each of her works essential to that work's "meaning." Perpetually interested in the effects that print media had upon all kinds of expressive art, she pursued experiments in recontextualizing, recycling, and remaking her own and others' artistic materials throughout her career.

Landon's investment in media and form make the strongest case for why we cannot continue to use the texts that Roberts and Blanchard constructed as though Landon composed them herself. Letitia Landon did not write a book called *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L.*—nor did she write Blanchard's "Fragments." But she did continuously experiment, in her poetry, with the expressive capacities of print media. An as-yet underappreciated media theorist

working at a time when industrialization was transforming the print landscape, Landon took special advantage of one form in particular that must have seemed to materialize for her own personal pleasure at precisely the right time. Uniquely suited to showcasing her deep interest in the relationship between visual and poetic art, the literary annuals provided Landon a profoundly exciting form with which to play, and an arena for just her type of aesthetic and philosophical exertion. Letitia Landon *did* write a poem called "The Zenana"—it is one of her consummate achievements in literary annual experimentation. The incredible accomplishment of her work in that genre is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Two | Pictured Lines

Letitia Landon wrote nearly five hundred poems for literary annuals between 1824 and 1839. She composed "poetical illustrations" for hundreds of engraved prints in dozens of different publications, and wrote the full contents of several complete annual and gift book volumes.[102] She also edited *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for eight years, and unlike most other editors wrote nearly every poem for each volume herself. By 1834, she had begun to plan her own gift book and annual projects. On her only trip abroad (before her last, to Cape Coast Castle), Landon eagerly read the "French new works" with an eye to translating them into English—and into illustrated gift book form.[103] Publishers generally deferred to Landon's judgment on questions of book design because of her expertise in the genre and her familiarity with the market. And she translated that deep knowledge into a poetry that embraces and turns to creative use the apparent limitations of annual composition. Though Landon's interest in the relationship between poetry and painting predates the annuals, the mass-produced steel plate engravings that circulated in these books provided her with a new and compelling subject: the production and reproduction of art. Her theory of poetry matured within and alongside the annual genre. It follows that any attempt to understand the poet must take seriously her creative and representational engagements with and within the annuals.

In this chapter I want to advance two claims about Landon's literary annual work: first, as I have already suggested, the annuals are the venue in which she practiced her most innovative

[102] *The Easter Gift, a Religious Offering* (1832), *The Book of Beauty; or, Regal Gallery* (1833), *The Pictorial Album; or, Cabinet of Paintings for the Year 1837* (1836), *Flowers of Loveliness* (1838), and four volumes of *Schloss's English Bijou Almanack* (1836-1839).
[103] Landon sent this letter, dated July 1834, to William Jerdan. In *Letters*, 113.

poetics. Our current estimation of her poetic accomplishment—insofar as it relies heavily on early collected volumes like *The Improvisatrice* (1824)—is lamentably superficial. Second, I intend to show why Landon's supervision of the extremely successful *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* (from 1831-1838) should be considered a significant imaginative achievement in its own right. In some ways Landon's work for the *Scrap Book* is very like Charles Dickens's in *The Pickwick Papers*, which appeared in monthly installments during this same period (from March 1836 to November 1837). Though Dickens was first called on to supply connecting letterpress for a series of planned sketches, he almost immediately made the project his own.

Landon on the other hand worked with materials not of her choosing, which makes her accomplishment within those constraints all the more extraordinary. Both Dickens and Landon exploit the nature of the print media in which their work appears: serial publication, "forced" composition, and the periodical press all become subjects for creative investigation in *Pickwick* and *Fisher's Scrap Book*. But whereas Dickens's innovation in *Pickwick Papers* has been widely recognized, we have yet to see that the eight volumes of Landon's *Scrap Book* constitute a grand experiment in the literary annual genre, and beyond that, in modern media generally. In the *Scrap Book* she develops a poetics of collage (as opposed to organic growth) that addressed the rapidly expanding print market of the early nineteenth century.

That we have not yet recognized this is hardly surprising, given the poor academic reputation of literary annuals. Typically they are dismissed as debased commercial products, vitiated by sentimentality and cliché. What Laila Ferreira observes of scholarship on *The Keepsake*—published in London from 1827 to 1856—is true for literary annual criticism on the whole:

> *Keepsake* criticism has struggled to incorporate the possibility that the commercial aspects of the annual were integral to the kinds of artistic value that writers were able to produce through its pages. The Romantic ideology continues to stand, within such criticism, as a testament to the natural, stable value of the Romantic imagination over the artificial, contingent value of the marketplace.[104]

Like Ferreira, I am interested in "the kinds of writing and reading practices the annual had the potential to produce" (11). Recently several critics have proposed sociohistorical approaches that might help us reevaluate the traditionally disregarded texts and media forms—like the literary annuals—that developed out of what Meredith McGill has called a "culture of reprinting."[105] As in antebellum America (the focus of McGill's book), late-Romantic mass-market print culture operated under a system of reprinting that thrived on the generic, recycled materials of which annuals like Landon's *Fisher's Scrap Book* were composed.[106] Both McGill and Eliza Richards suggest that in this kind of literary scene especially, the anticipated reception of poetic materials affects poetic composition.[107] And Andrew Stauffer's work on nineteenth-century reading practices confirms that sentimental verse (the kind of poetry most often published in the annuals)

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[104] Ferreira, "Romantic Value and the Literary Marketplace: Wordsworth, Scott, Shelley and Landon in The *Keepsake*, 1829." (PhD dissertation, University of British Columbia Vancouver, 2010) 11.

[105] McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). For McGill's specific definition of the term see p. 4.

[106] Literary annuals, McGill observes, "suggest the significant challenge offered by an aesthetic based on imitation to ordinary modes of historicist analysis. In order to read a literary text drawn from a gift book in the context of its initial publication, one cannot simply return the text to its context; one would have to read it in the context of the radical decontextualization that marked the gift book medium as a whole" (39). I attempt to answer this challenge in the pages that follow.

[107] See Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), also Richards, "Poe's Lyrical Media: The Raven's Returns" in *Poe and the Remapping of Antebellum Print Culture* ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Jerome McGann (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 200-224.

did indeed elicit the private responses its rhetoric invites.[108] In this chapter and the next, I will argue that Landon's poetry—materially and thematically embedded in forms of media we are no longer accustomed to appreciate—ought to be read via the approaches outlined by McGill, Richards, and Stauffer. As we will see, Landon's work in the annuals *models* the kind of reading it also solicits. Her reinterpretations of the annuals' secondhand artworks often resemble subjective readings themselves. This kind of writing is best understood in terms of its engagement with the conventions of reprint culture.

I.

Because Landon's contributions to the annuals far exceed those of any other poet, there is no shortage of critical commentary on her writing in the genre. However, claims about her annual work, and especially about her attitude towards that work, are often based in assumption, bias, or cursory reading rather than in a considered evaluation of the poetry in the contexts of its production and reception. For Lee Erickson, Landon exemplifies the kind of author willing to take on the uninteresting "taskwork" of "writing poems as commentary upon pictures."[109] With her he contrasts the "'unacknowledged legislators' writing avant-garde work" elsewhere (e.g. Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning) who, as Erickson sees it, refused to subjugate their more noble talents to a marketplace shaped by the annual's formal requirements (36). Jonas Cope asserts that illustrating annual plates "under deadlines" was "a process that frustrated [Landon]"—apparently this claim is so obvious that it does not require corroborating

[108] See Stauffer, "An Image in Lava: Annotation, Sentiment, and the Traces of Nineteenth-Century Reading" *PMLA* 134 no. 1 (2019): 81-98.
[109] Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing, 1800-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 31.

evidence.[110] For Herbert Tucker, the annuals merely "offered her a living," though he notes that financial inducements coupled with the annuals' "domestically commodified mystique" also attracted "other—and better—poets."[111] And while Landon did rely heavily on her annual writing for income, we need not assume as Catherine Boyle and Zachary Leader do that the "contingencies of commerce and labour" are the sole motivating factors for her work.[112] As I am arguing, the annuals provided her with a field for radical poetic experiments in representation.

Boyle and Leader develop their reading from a series of Landon's *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* contributions, including the preface to the first volume (for 1832) as well as a selection of poems and engravings—they reprint these items below a contextualizing essay. Published in 1998, when Landon's *Scrap Book* work was not yet available via digital repositories, the transcriptions in *Romantic Period Writings 1798-1832: An Anthology* provided access to a representative selection of Landon's annual poetry, otherwise only available in scarce original copies.[113] Scholars continue to rely upon this reprinted selection of *Scrap Book* materials to claim that Landon found writing for the annual market an oppressive and dissatisfying task. Following Boyle and Leader, Katherine Harris believes that the 1832 *Scrap Book* preface

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[110] Cope, "'A Series of Small Inconstancies,'" 380.
[111] Tucker, "House Arrest: The Domestication of English Poetry in the 1820s," *New Literary History* 25 no. 3 (Summer 1994): 526.
[112] Boyle and Leader, "Literary Institutions" in *Romantic Period Writings 1798-1832* ed. Zachary Leader and Ian Haywood (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 187.
[113] Unfortunately the *Romantic Period Writings* transcriptions introduce several substantive errors into two of Landon's poems. In the reprinted "Macao," from *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1833, line 10 of the poem should read "**But** here again invention falters"; the editors print "**And** here again invention falters." This substitution subtly but significantly disrupts the logic of the poem's argument, enacted by the xaxa rhyme scheme. The first line of "The Chinese Pagoda" from the same volume of the *Scrap Book* drops the article "a": "Whene'er person is a poet" should read "Whene'er **a** person is a poet." At line 6 in the same poem, "**he** first distress" should read "**the** first distress." *Romantic Period Writings*, 208, 210. These errors are reproduced by Katherine Harris in *Forget Me No*t, 185-187. Harris introduces further errors by dropping a full line from one of the poems.

transparently indicates Landon's "resent[ment]" at the "practice of forced versifying" the annuals allegedly required.[114] Lindsey Eckert, who cites Harris on Landon's *Scrap Book* work, similarly reads the 1832 preface as a "lament" in which "Landon points to the practical realities that mediate poetic ideas into commercial products. Her own writing, she claims, has become tiringly familiar to her."[115] For Sophie Thomas, Landon's 1832 preface also constitutes a "lament" about the unique difficulty of annual composition.[116] Almost none of this is true.

Two points should be clarified here: in the first place, neither the difficulties of compositional tasks nor "the contingencies of commerce" disqualify Landon's annual work as poetic art. In fact, as this chapter goes on to suggest, Landon regularly used the limitations of annual writing as both prompt and subject for her poems. The William Morris apothegm, that "you can't have art without resistance in the materials," might index her entire oeuvre in its relation to the media format in which much of it appeared. Secondly, to read Landon's preface as a personal expression of distaste for annual writing (absolving us of any obligation to take her poems seriously) amounts to a kind of inattentive special pleading.[117] Here is the beginning of the preface in question:

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[114] Harris, *Forget Me Not*, 185.
[115] Eckert, "Reading Lyric's Form: The Written Hand in Albums and Literary Annuals," *English Literary History* 85 no. 4 (Winter 2018): 973.
[116] Thomas, "Word and Image" in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism* ed. David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 638-639.
[117] This idea is popular in Landon scholarship. Several critics believe that Landon's own poetry indicates she resented and later regretted publishing in annuals, but these readings all fail to account for her enthusiastic engagement with the genre until the very month she died. See the introduction to this dissertation, as well as Riess, "Laetitia Landon and the Dawn of English Post-Romanticism," 820; Brandy Ryan, "'Echo and Reply': The Elegies of Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and Elizabeth Barrett," *Victorian Poetry* 46, no. 3 (2008), 258; Terrence Allan Hogwood and Kathryn Ledbetter, *"Colour'd Shadows": Contexts in Publishing, Printing, and Reading Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 87-88.

> Though a Preface be the first page seen in a volume, it is always the last page written. By that time, the golden age of hope has darkened into the iron age of fear. The ideas that seemed at first so delightful, are grown common, by passing through the familiarizing process of writing, printing, and correcting. A proof-sheet is a terrible reality; and you look upon your work with much the same feeling as people look upon the prospect to which they are accustomed—they are much more alive to its faults than its beauties.[118]

Both Eckert and Harris cite the third sentence ("The ideas that…") as evidence for Landon's dissatisfaction with annual composition specifically. But these observations apply equally well to the print mediation of any literary work: writing takes on a new "reality" in "proof sheet" form. (Both Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Alfred Tennyson found the process elucidating; Tennyson was of the opinion that "poetry looks better, more convincing, in print."[119]) Landon's preface is less a "lament" of the Shelleyan variety (in which "composition" signals a waning of "inspiration") and more an appeal to her readers' sympathies. Authors often presupposed the "faults" of new works, as Landon had herself done in the preface to *The Venetian Bracelet* (1829).[120] And Landon's formulation in this *Scrap Book* preface is far more optimistic and open-ended than her critics have allowed: if the poet has grown "accustomed" to the "prospect" of this mediated work and can only see its flaws, the same prospect nevertheless offers "its beauties" to the unaccustomed

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[118] Landon, "Introduction," *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* [for 1832] (London, 1831), [3].
[119] Hallam Lord Tennyson, A*lfred Lord Tennyson: a Memoir by his Son*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1897), 1:190.
[120] "Diffidence of their own abilities, and fear, which heightens the anxiety for public favour, are the pleas usually urged by the youthful writer: may I, while venturing for the first time to speak of myself, be permitted to say they far more truly belong to one who has had experience of both praise and censure. The feelings which attended the publication of the "Improvisatrice" are very different from those that accompany the present volume. I believe I *then* felt little beyond hope, vague as the timidity which subdued it, and that excitement which every author must know: *now* mine is a "farther looking hope;" and the timidity which apprehended the verdict of others, is now deepened by distrust of my own powers" *The Venetian Bracelet, The Lost Pleiad, A History of the Lyre and Other Poems* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1829): iii-iv.

eyes of new readers. As I suggest in chapter three, the entirety of Landon's corpus explores how the interpretation of a work of art depends upon its framing contexts and the perspectives they enable (and foreclose).

Though Landon's annual poetry found its fair share of sympathetic readers—she helped ensure the runaway success of *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*, for example—many nineteenth-century writers (like many modern critics) thought of the annuals as nothing more than "vapid books."[121] The most famous and prolific contemporary critic of the annuals is without question William Thackeray, whose quotable, damning reviews have become objects of literary study in their own right.[122] As Vanessa Warne observes, William Thackeray "played an important role in the development of art journalism and in the democratization of so-called high art" during the first part of the nineteenth century.[123] When he turned his attention from "high" art to the middle-class literary annuals, he "brought together two of the most important sources of art for the middle classes, the written word and the engraving" (163). He used these essays to caution the public *against* reading the annuals, which he found morally and artistically bankrupt.

It is not surprising, then, that when Thackeray comments upon Landon's annual work, he does not *read* the poetry so much as he *pre*reads it: like many modern critics, he sees only its participation in a flawed system. Like Thackeray, most of us believe that we already know exactly what literary annual poetry is: something too embarrassing to merit sympathetic or

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[121] Alfred Tennyson, *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1:144.

[122] See Vanessa Warne, "Thackeray Among the Annuals: Morality, Cultural Authority and the Literary Annual Genre," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 39, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 158-178; Donald Hawes, "Thackeray and the Annuals," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 7 no. 1 (1976): 3-31. An important related essay is Helene Roberts, " 'The Sentiment of Reality': Thackeray's Art Criticism," *Studies in the Novel* 13 1/ 2 (Spring-Summer 1981): 21-39.

[123] Warne, "Thackeray Among the Annuals," 163.

rigorous attention. Like Thackeray, we have repeatedly failed to imagine that the limiting conditions of annual composition might provide a provocative an artistic challenge (and enabling framework) to a poet particularly interested in the representation and reproduction of art. Our collective failure of imagination has prevented us from seeing in Landon's annual work a poetry that theorizes how the industrialized print market was affecting representational art and imaginative writing.

Thackeray's aversion to Landon's poetry is informed by his profound familiarity with nineteenth-century publication practices, including how individual annuals were put together. As Warne suggests, "Thackeray's comments are a timely engagement with the nature of art in an age of mechanical reproduction" (164). His commentary therefore offers a useful (if antagonistic) starting-point for our recovery of Landon's annual work, because what and how she wrote depended so fundamentally on the media in which she published. The next section of this chapter reads one of Landon's last *Scrap Book* poems alongside (but primarily *against*) Thackeray's annual criticism. My aim is to tell a cautionary tale: if modern scholarship continues to emulate Thackeray's approach to annual art, Landon's imaginative work in the genre will remain to us essentially imperceptible.

II.

By 1838—the year Landon died—literary annuals had become a universally recognized feature of English popular culture. They were also a fixture of the Christmas book market. Magazines, periodicals, and newspapers printed reviews in advance of the season, which offered readers a few poetic excerpts, commentary on plates, and notes about remarkable features (e.g. gilt edges, satin covers, quality typography). But William Thackeray begins a November 1838 review essay

for the *London Times* by suggesting that literary annuals were a national embarrassment. "A foreigner," Thackeray writes,

> if he is anxious to know what is the state of art in England, will naturally enough turn to the print-books which appear annually at this season, and contain hundreds of specimens of the works of our artists, and, of course, of the taste of the public. The foreigner will have a pretty account to give of us to his countrymen when he has duly examined the annuals, read all the poems and stories which they contain, and studied all the delicately engraved prints which ornament them.[124]

As the rest of the essay makes clear, Thackeray believed that "the state of art in England" had in fact reached a point of crisis, and that literary annuals were both symptom and cause.

The popular art disseminated by the annuals offended Thackeray primarily because it did not derive from the study of nature.[125] "There seems to be a general conspiracy between printers, publishers, and the people," he complains, "to banish nature altogether from pictures, and to substitute and to admire a favourite monster of their own. It is called Beauty, and came in along with steel engravings some six years ago." In Thackeray's view, annual art grew more self-referential and more derivative with every passing season, and as a consequence "the public has acquired such a taste for art as is far worse than regular barbarism." But the greatest con practiced upon the public, according to Thackeray, was the recycling of old plates in new volumes. "So complete is the forgetfulness of the public," he laments, that "the prints of ancient annuals, numbered with the dead […] appear yearly afterwards, resuscitated, in works with a different binding and title, and have, with many, all the air of novelty." Reappearing

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[124] Thackeray, "The Annuals," *The London Times* (November 2, 1838): 5.
[125] For more on the importance of artistic "truth to nature" for Thackeray, see Roberts, "Thackeray's Art Criticism," 26-29.

deceitfully—immorally, even—under changed names, these plates pretend at "originality" that, he argues, never characterized them in the first place.

The publishers of *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* come under repeated attack in Thackeray's reviews because they produced an annual constructed entirely from recycled visual materials. Elsewhere Thackeray calls the *Scrap Book* a "sea-pie,[126] made up of scraps that have been served at many tables before."[127] In the essay for the *Times*, he identifies a set of plates first printed in *Heath's Drawing Room Portfolio* for 1836, with poems by Marguerite Gardner, Countess of Blessington, published by Charles Tilt. The same plates had apparently been "transferred" to Robert Fisher, and reappear in the *Scrap Book* for 1839, with poems by Letitia Landon. Observing that it is "curious to read the different interpretations which each lady gives to the plates before her," Thackeray first reprints Lady Blessington's 1836 poem for the plate titled *The Bride of Abydos*. As its title suggests, the plate is supposed to illustrate a scene from Byron's 1813 "Turkish Tale." Lady Blessington's sonnet, however, refuses to perform an interpretation of an interpretation, deferring in the sestet to Byron's original (and originating) genius:

> Ah! who dare touch what Byron hath portrayed
>
> With the rare hues of genius' magic spell?
>
> Repeat the tale of that fond gentle maid,
>
> And her brave lover, sung by him so well.
>
> The theme is sacred from a feebler lay

[126] Thackeray provides the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s only example of this term "in extended use"—a composition of miscellaneous items: "a dish of meat and vegetables, etc. boiled together, with a crust of paste" (sea-pie, *n*.2).
[127] Thackeray, "A Grumble About the Christmas Books" *Fraser's Magazine* 35 (January 1847): 123.

Which he hath sung—alas! too early called away.

"One would have thought," Thackeray remarks, "that her Ladyship in the above sonnet had quite settled the point"—a reprise of Byron's "tale" should not be attempted. "Miss Landon, on the contrary," he continues, "has shown that a couple of pages of very smooth incomprehensible verses may be indited concerning [Zuleika and Selim]."

For Thackeray, Landon's poem is the textual equivalent of the derivative print it illustrates—irredeemably unoriginal and unnatural. He reprints for "the reader['s]" evaluation three stanzas from Landon's poem for the same plate, observing by way of introduction that "Selim addresses Zuleika in the following strain:—"

I dare not look upon that face,
  My bark is in the bay;
Too much already its soft grace
  Has won from me delay.
A few short hours and I must gaze
  On those sad eyes no more,
A dream will seem the pleasant days
  Pass'd on that lonely shore.

I love thee not, my heart has cast
  Its inmost life away;
The many memories of the past
  Leave little for delay.
Thou art to me a thing apart

From passion, hope, or fear;

Yet, 'tis a pleasure to my heart

To know thou art so dear.

* * * * *

Thy pensive influence only brought

The dreams of early years;

What childhood felt—what childhood thought,

Its tenderness, its tears!

Farewell! the wind sets from the shore,

The white foam lights the sea;

If Heaven one blessing have in store,

That blessing light on thee!

Readers familiar with *The Bride of Abydos* might agree that the above stanzas are "incomprehensible" in relation to Byron's tale.[128] "I love thee not," the speaker—apparently Selim—declares. For his would-be lover Zuleika he can feel only "what childhood felt—what childhood thought"; his address to her ends with a farewell, a chaste blessing. The *Scrap Book* plate meanwhile illustrates not a parting scene but a passage near the end of *The Bride of Abydos* Canto 1: Zuleika, kneeling, offers a rose to Selim, who is turned away from her at a window (figure 7).[129] This moment in Byron's poem marks the opposite of a farewell—in the next verse paragraph Zuleika pledges herself to Selim forever. "Time shall not see/ The hour that tears my

[128] In at least one place the poem is made more difficult to "comprehend" thanks to an apparent transcription error. Thackeray's line 12 should read: "little for **to-day.**"

[129] Compare *The Bride of Abydos* Canto 1, lines 279-286: "She saw in curious order set/ The fairest flowers of Eastern land—/ 'He loved them once—may touch them yet,/ If offered by Zuleika's hand.'/ The childish thought was hardly breathed/ Before the Rose was pluck'd and wreathed—/ The next fond moment saw her seat/ Her fairy form at Selim's feet—"

soul from thee," she vows, to which Selim replies, "Now thou art mine, forever mine" (321-22; 347). Thackeray nevertheless clearly reads Landon's poem as though it attempts to address Byron's poem; that is, as though it appeals to the original "meaning" of the image, which is supposed to represent Byron's characters.

Figure 7. *The Farewell* in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1839 (1838)

But Thackeray fails to mention—or perhaps fails to notice—that the title of the plate in the *Scrap Book* is not *The Bride of Abydos* (as it is in *Heath's Drawing Room Portfolio*), but rather *The Farewell*. "The Farewell" is also, naturally, the title of Landon's poem. Its final stanza echoes both titles in the speaker's parting "blessing." "The Farewell" moreover never names Zuleika or Selim, but shifts the image instead into an entirely new imaginative register (see appendix for the full text of "The Farewell"). In Landon's poem, the anonymous man at the window abandons his childhood love for "[b]attle and revel, feast and fight"; for "other names that are as sweet" and "perhaps […] more dear" (45; 49-50). "The Farewell" does not come near imitating or even obliquely adapting Byron's story. Landon's is a completely idiosyncratic appropriation of the plate, a move underscored and signaled exactly because the connection to "Byron" is being undone. Though not derivative of Byron in Thackeray's sense ("Selim addresses Zuleika"), Landon does perform with "The Farewell" a transposition that Byron might have admired, by turning the plate into an opportunity to reflect, in a melancholy key, upon her

own career. This sense of the poem only emerges, however, for readers familiar with the bibliographical history in which the poem participates.

"The Farewell" is the first poem in the *Scrap Book* for 1839: it appears on page 5, following the frontispiece, title vignette, title page, and preface. Landon used the 1839 *Scrap Book* preface not as she had in previous years, to explicate or to plead for readerly indulgence regarding her "poetical illustrations." This preface serves instead as her own "farewell" to the *Scrap Book*. She explains to her readers that an imminent departure from England means she must reluctantly give up editing the annual, which "for the past few years has been the cherished record of my poetical impressions, and my only poetical work."[130] Thanking her publishers for their "constant liberality and kindness," she notes that although she hopes "to write for England when far away from its shores […] that hope is indeed an uncertainty." It is a sad message, not least because Landon frames the *Scrap Book* writing as essential to her identity as a poet. The yearly publication of the *Scrap Book* had effectively replaced her "romance" volumes of the 1820s. As in those collections, Landon had a great deal of control over the arrangement of contents in any given *Scrap Book*—but even if she had not, the opening poem of the 1839 volume inescapably recalls the prose farewell of its preface. In effect, Landon's "bark" *was* "in the bay" as she composed the contents of this last *Scrap Book*: she sailed for Africa in early July 1838, and her preparations for the trip had begun well before she illustrated this final set of plates.[131]

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[130] Landon, "Preface," *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* [for 1839] (London and Paris, 1838), [3].

[131] When Landon and George Maclean first decided to marry, the plan might have been for her to remain in England while he returned to Cape Coast. However, by late 1837 Landon had made up her mind to accompany him. She wrote to Edward Bulwer, "I cannot endure that Mr Maclean should leave England without me—my very existence goes with him." See Francis Sypher,

"The Farewell" also rhymes with a series of poetic prefaces Landon had begun writing for the *Scrap Book*—an innovation that annoyed her publishers, as the longer poetic prefaces often ran to multiple pages. In 1834 Landon introduced her usual prose preface with a short poetic epigraph, but in 1835 and 1837 she wrote full prefatory poems, both titled "Introduction." In these "Introduction[s]" the implied speaker is Landon *in propria persona*—the poems are meditations on literary annual composition, where "every pictured scene" rendered in the pages that follow challenges the poet's imaginative power.[132] The "Introduction" for 1835 begins:

> And has my heart enough of song
>
> To give these pictured lines
>
> The poetry that must belong
>
> To what such art designs? (1-4)

That "such art" has various "designs" upon a poet—and that "pictured lines" might stand for both engraved and poetical art—are the particular subjects of both introductory poems, as well as preoccupying questions for Landon generally. In the 1838 volume, an introductory poem likewise reflects on Landon's *Scrap Book* writing, though its deliberations come framed as a dedicatory poem "To the Queen." The poem surveys the variety of plates in the year's publication, its "pictured shores" representations of the "vast […] empire" entrusted "to thy youthful and thy woman's hand" (19-20).

If we read "The Farewell" alongside these metacommentaries on literary annual composition, it is possible to see that the addressee of the monologue might well be Landon's

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Letitia Elizabeth Landon: a Biography (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2004) 279.

[132] Landon, "Introduction," *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* [for 1837] (London, Paris, and America, 1836), 3 (l. 57).

own “art,” rather than, or in addition to, the pictured girl in the engraving. The notable repetition of “thou art” in the second stanza activates this possibility:

> Thou art to me a thing apart
>
> From passion, hope, or fear;
>
> Yet ’tis a pleasure to my heart
>
> To know thou art so dear. (13-16)

“*Thou art*[,] so dear,” indeed. These lines sum up Landon’s typical poetic approach to reproduced, engraved art—it is “a thing apart”—apart, we might say, from “powerful feelings” or “emotion recollected in tranquility.” Writing annual poetry requires a different kind of imagination altogether: one that privileges manipulation and variety of perspective over and above the drama of the lyric subject. Consider for example the following lines from the poem “Glengariffe,” in the *Scrap Book* for 1833:

> Oh lovely Picture, thou art one to haunt
>
> The mind in feverish moods of discontent,
>
> When noise and multitudes afflict the heart
>
> With bitter sense of personal nothingness.
>
> […]
>
> Thou lovely bay,
>
> I dream of beauty which I have not seen,
>
> And yet I know: thanks to the art divine
>
> Which haunts the eye with summer; fills the mind
>
> With natural love, and sweet and gentle thoughts,
>
> Morning, and flowers; green grass, and aged trees—

All that can soothe, and calm, and purify,

E'en 'mid a busy wilderness of streets. (1-4, 22-29)

The poem addresses itself to a "lovely Picture," what Landon elsewhere calls "thou art of the Present."[133] The engraved plate provides access not to nature directly, but to a "dream" of its beauty—it is knowable, though "not seen," and certainly not experienced firsthand. "Glengariffe" self-consciously engages its nominal subject from the estranged (and estranging) perspective of a city-dweller, one who lives "'mid a busy wilderness of streets," among "noise and multitudes." As glossed by "The Farewell," engraved reproductions of natural landscapes—in which *Fisher's Scrap Book* specialized—might be both "a thing apart" and yet "a pleasure[…]/ To know."

Around the same time that she composed "The Farewell," Landon was also writing a final set of poems for the miniature annual *Schloss's English Bijou Almanack*. The last poem in the volume for 1839 is titled, aptly, "Farewell." As with *Fisher's Scrap Book*, Landon had been responsible for all the poetical illustrations in the *English Bijou Almanack* for several years.[134] This final poem, however, does not correspond to an engraving. It stands alone at the end of the book: a goodbye from Landon to her readers. But "Farewell" resonates in other ways with the concurrently published *Scrap Book* poem:

My little fairy chronicle,

The prettiest of my tasks, farewell!

Ere other eyes shall meet this line,

Far other records will be mine;

[133] The line is from Landon's untitled poem in the *Keepsake* for 1829 that accompanied a print portrait of Georgiana, Duchess of Bedford. See also Jerome McGann's discussion of this poem, in *Poetics of Sensibility*, 168-170.

[134] Her work for this annual began with the volume for 1836.

How many miles of trackless sea.

Will roll between my land and me!

I said thine elfin almanac

Should call all pleasant hours back;

Amid those pleasant hours, will none

Think kindly on what I have done?

Then, fairy page, I leave with thee

Some memory of my songs and me.

This little poem essentially glosses the longer *Scrap Book* "Farewell": its speaker takes leave of her work and her readers, describes an impending voyage across the "trackless sea," speculates about the future, and reflects on the "pleasant hours" of the past. Both poems conclude with a kind of benediction—and with rhymes that recall the poems' arguments: "sea," "me," "thee." These annual farewells thereby anticipate the two (now relatively well-known) poems Landon wrote during her passage to the Gold Coast. "The Polar Star" and "Night at Sea" also attempt to bridge the distance between "me" and "thee" even as they describe a voyage outward. As Sypher notes, the appearance in print of "The Polar Star" and "Night at Sea" "coincided approximately with the arrival in England […] of the news of [Landon's] death at Cape Coast Castle."[135] The sea parts "me" from "thee" still—in spite of urgent petitioning that the body be returned to "[her] land," Landon's remains are still interred beneath the fort's old parade grounds.

In the copy of the 1839 *Scrap Book* held by the University of Virginia library, a reader has underlined in pencil the first line of "The Farewell": "I dare not look upon that face." While

[135] Francis J. Sypher, ed. *Poems from the New Monthly Magazine by Letitia Elizabeth Landon* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2007), 157-158 (note to page 115).

there is no way to know for certain when this mark was made, both Stauffer and Jerome McGann have demonstrated that nineteenth-century readers often responded to sentimental poetry by annotating it, inscribing printed texts with private histories. Sentimental poetry cultivates this kind of appropriative response especially because, as McGann indicates, "it inclines to efface itself before the reader"—its commonplaces (e.g. "I dare not look upon that face") call out for personal interpretation.[136] Landon knew her poems evoked this kind of reaction, that they could call forth or supplement readers' lived experience. Poems that explicitly model and theorize appropriative reading appear throughout her oeuvre. Consider the following stanzas, from *Finden's Gallery of the Graces* for 1834, which were written to accompany an engraving of that enduringly popular subject, a woman holding a book (figure 8):

Figure 8. *Emily* in *Finden's Gallery of the Graces* for 1834 (1833) Courtesy Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections, University of Virginia Library

> Ah! there is colour on her cheek,
> And languor in her eye;
> It is some deeper, dearer thought,
> That now is flitting by!
>
> A history of old romance
> That painted page has shown;

[136] McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility*, 139.

How can she read of others' love

And not recal her own? (13-20)

According to Landon's poem, the engraving depicts the act of sentimental, identificatory reading. The woman's gaze is directed outside the frame of the print rather than down at her book; the "history of old romance" lies closed in her lap. She has stopped reading "of others' love" because the text has conjured "her own" ("quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante," as Dante's Francesca says). But poetry might also provide solace by mediating overwhelming emotion, as in this passage from "Lines of Life":

Will the young maiden, when her tears

Alone in moonlight shine—

Tears for the absent and the loved—

Murmur some song of mine? (97-100)

This stanza imagines that readers might find in poetry what Stauffer calls "a language for their own baffled hearts […] a source of expression when one's own words fail."[137] In "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings," Landon praises Hemans precisely because her poems of love and loss offer themselves up for personal appropriation. Because "there is a well of melancholy poetry in every human bosom"—because suffering is a universal condition—"poetry will always have its own appointed hour. Its haunted words will be to us even as our own."[138]

Whether a work of art appealed to the emotions was also of central concern to early nineteenth-century art reviewers. "What the reviewer wanted from a painting," Helene Roberts

[137] Stauffer, "An Image in Lava," 90.
[138] Landon, "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings," *New Monthly Magazine* 44 (1835): 426.

observes, "was some kind of experience. He wished to have his imagination stimulated, his senses aroused, and, above all, his sentiments engaged."[139] Thackeray, like many of his contemporaries, thought that a painting's ability to evoke emotional response was critically important to its success:

> If I might be allowed to give a hint to amateurs concerning pictures and their merit, I would say look to have your *heart* touched by them. The best paintings address themselves to the best feelings of it; and a great many clever pictures do not touch it at all. Skill and handling are great parts of a painter's trade, but heart is the first.[140]

Unlike Landon, however, Thackeray felt that such heart-touching effects were indelibly rooted in the work's original meaning. According to Roberts, Thackeray believed that the artist, through his "choice of proper subject matter" and "clearly demarcated details and facial expressions" was meant to "lead the viewer to follow the charted train of associations and arrive at the desired sentimental response."[141] It is clear from his reviews of the *Scrap Book* that Thackeray bestowed a kind of Benjaminian "aura" upon engravings as well as paintings, and that the thousands of identical copies made from a single engraved plate were all to be considered equally authentic.[142]

Thackeray's disgust with the *Scrap Book* derives at least in part from what he perceived to be Fisher's mercenary operating principles and consequent abuse of engraved art. By design the *Scrap Book* was an advertisement, meant to advantageously display a selection of plates circulating in the firm's other more expensive illustrated publications. Landon acknowledges as much in the annual's first introduction: "the voluminous and expensive works from which [the

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[139] Roberts, "Art Reviewing in the Early Nineteenth-Century Art Periodicals," *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* 6, no. 1 (March 1973): 13.
[140] Thackeray, "A Pictorial Rhapsody," *Fraser's Magazine* 21 (June 1840) 725.
[141] Roberts, "Thackeray's Art Criticism" 32.
[142] That critics use the terms "plate," "engraving," and "picture" interchangeably—and that Thackeray did so too—is worth noting here.

plates] are selected, were 'fountains sealed' to the many."[143] Landon's poems, in Thackeray's view, participate in Fisher's dishonest repurposing of original works of art. They are deceptions—"fresh illustrations of the old plates." The resulting annual, he declares, amounts to little other than lies and "humbug":

> The unwary public, who purchase Mr. Fisher's publications, will be astonished, if they knew but the secret, with the number of repetitions, and the ingenuity with which one plate is made to figure, now in the *Scrap-Book*, now in the *Views of Syria*, and now in the *Christian Keepsake*. Heaven knows how many more periodicals are issued from the same establishment, and how many different titles are given to each individual print![144]

Landon, however, did not ask of mechanically reproduced art *what* it meant, but *how* it meant. Engravings after all are copies of copies—the aim of the painter might be to depict a ship or a temple, but the aim of the engraver of a painting is to depict the painting. The "meaning" of prints, for Landon, is therefore much less interesting than the various uses to which such art might be put in new forms of print media.

In *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*, the prints "after" which Landon wrote were not only illustrations of illustrations, but they had also already appeared in other publications, sometimes under other titles, and always explicated by other texts. As Thackeray makes clear in one of his many complaints, the "Messrs. Fisher change, not the plates, but just the names underneath, and make Medora into Haidee, or Desdemona, or what you will."[145] Such transformations were a feature of industrial print: steel-plate engravings held up so well over time that they could be used, then sold, retitled, and recirculated "as" something else entirely.

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[143] Landon, "Introduction," *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* [for 1832] (London, 1831) [3].
[144] Thackeray, "A Word on the Annuals," *Fraser's Magazine*, 16 (December 1837): 762.
[145] Thackeray, "Our Annual Execution" *Fraser's Magazine* 19 (January 1839): 63.

Landon, who reworked these print materials on a daily basis, developed her poetics of recycling out of the very phenomenon Thackeray denounces. Taking her cue from the new title supplied by Fisher, Landon's poem "The Farewell" reads the engraving superficially and generically: a man looks out a window, turned away from the supplicant woman at his feet. What is the meaning of this print other than "the farewell"? What is the meaning of a sentimental poem other than "what you will"? In taking the art of representation as its subject, "The Farewell" performs a fitting farewell to Landon's *Scrap Book* writing.

III.

Landon had begun editing the *Scrap Book* in 1831, which proved to be the mid-point of her annual-writing career.[146] Incidentally the inaugural *Scrap Book* was the first annual volume for which Landon composed all the contents: she would go on to author single-handedly eight more annual books,[147] in addition to seven more *Scrap Books*.[148] That the *Scrap Book* project marks an important point of transition for Landon's annual work is further indicated by the preface to its first volume, in which she explains her procedure:

> For the Volume now offered to the public, I must plead for indulgence. It is not an easy thing to write illustrations to prints, selected rather for their pictorial excellence, than their poetic capabilities; and mere description is certainly not the most popular species of

[146] She had published her first annual poems eight years earlier in the *Forget Me Not* for 1824. Both "Ellen. A Fragment," and "Lines on the Mausoleum of the Princess Charlotte, at Claremont" accompanied prints.
[147] These were *The Easter Gift, a Religious Offering* for 1832, *The Book of Beauty; or, Regal Gallery* for 1833, *The Pictorial Album; or, Cabinet of Paintings for the Year 1837*,[147] *Flowers of Loveliness* for 1838, and four volumes of *Schloss's English Bijou Almanack* (for 1836-1839). Landon did not illustrate every one of the eleven prints in *The Pictorial Album*, though she did write all six of its poems. Five prose pieces are attributed to publisher and writer James Ollier.
[148] Landon did solicit occasional contributions from literary friends such as Thomas Crofton Croker in certain *Scrap Book* volumes, but the overwhelming majority of contents are her own.

composition. I have endeavoured to give as much variety as possible, by the adoption of any legend, train of reflection, &c., which the subject could possibly suggest. ([3])

This preface makes clear that the *Scrap Book* poems do not, as a rule, attempt ekphrasis ("mere description").[149] Instead "the subject" of each picture serves as a prompt for imaginative writing that may or may not reference the details of any given print. Very often the visual referent fades from view as the poem progresses. A number of scholars nevertheless persist in evaluating Landon's *Scrap Book* poems according to descriptive criteria.[150] For some critics, the poems that "[do] anything but illustrate the engraving" (in the ekphrastic sense) indicate an apparent failure of imagination, or enthusiasm, or both.[151]

However, as William Thackeray rightly suggests, it is precisely the non-descriptive, generic nature of annual writing that makes it so remarkable (though whether such writing is embraced or derided depends on the reader). Thackeray's oft-cited parody is instructive because it is so convincingly managed:

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[149] If we take ekphrasis to mean, as James Heffernan has proposed, "the verbal representation of visual representation," then Landon does write more or less ekphrastic poems, though the best examples are not found in her annual work. See e.g. her series "Poetical Sketches of Modern Pictures" in *The Troubadour* (1825) or the series "Poetical Catalogue of Pictures" published in the *Literary Gazette* between March and August 1823. See Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993).

[150] Throughout the introduction to their facsimile edition of *Fisher's Scrap Book* for 1836, Terrence Hoagwood and Gina Opdycke repeatedly refer to Landon's work as "ekphrastic"; *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book 1836, with Poetical Illustrations: a Facsimile Reproduction* (Ann Arbor: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 2004). Jill Rappoport, on the other hand, suggests that Landon's annual poetry is "both ekphrastic and anything *but* ekphrastic"; Rappoport, "Buyer Beware: The Gift Poetics of Letitia Elizabeth Landon" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 58 no. 4 (March 2004), 459.

[151] Harris, *Forget Me Not*, 186. Harris claims such poems indicate Landon's "exasperation" with annual composition as well as her "rebellion against the practice of privileging the engraving over authorial creativity" (186-187). For Karen Fang, Landon's anti-descriptive poems figure "the industrial conditions under which poetry is produced" as a "crisis of imagination"; *Romantic Writing and the Empire of Signs*, 138.

> Miss Landon, Miss Mitford, or my Lady Blessington, writes a song […] about a water-lily, chilly, stilly, shivering beside a streamlet, plighted, blighted, love-benighted, falsehood sharper than a gimlet, lost affection, recollection, cut connexion, tears in torrents, true-love token, spoken, broken, sighing, dying, girl of Florence, and so on. The poetry is quite worthy of the picture, and a little sham sentiment is employed to illustrate a little sham art.[152]

The parody enacts an equation between "sham sentiment" and "sham art": not only is annual poetry insincere by Thackeray's standards, it is also "made in imitation of something else" ("sham" *OED* def. B3)—literally manufactured out of clichéd words and phrases.[153] In this sense, Thackeray's own comic imitation, a rhymed list of recycled clichés, scarcely differs from the "real" thing. But Landon had written an analogous critique of annual poetry five years before Thackeray's appeared, and unlike Thackeray, she published her work in the same medium it addressed. In a pair of poems composed for the 1833 *Scrap Book,* Landon similarly acknowledges that annual poetry is manufactured out of recycled textual materials. But while Thackeray raises the point merely to ridicule, Landon's poems suggest that acts of reproduction are in fact poetry's proper subject in an age of industrial print.

Both "Macao" and "The Chinese Pagoda" initially declare themselves to be imaginative failures: the speaker indicates that she can find no suggestive "hints" in the plates these poems are supposed to address. But both poems then dramatically enact their own compositions, and turn the process of annual writing itself into the subject of poetic elaboration. "Macao," the first of these experiments, proceeds by catalogue, listing a series of hypothetical engraved subjects

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[152] Thackeray, "A Word on the Annuals," 758.
[153] The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that though the term "sham" "now always impl[ies] reprobation" it was "in the earlier part of the 19th cent[ury] often used in tradesmen's price-lists, etc. as equivalent to 'imitation.'"

that “might have” invited the sort of poetical translation that the plate titled *Macao.—China* apparently cannot:

> Had it but been a town in Greece;
> I might have raved about its altars,
> And talked of liberty and mass,
> Of tyrants and Romaic dances,
> Of Athens with a German king,
> And fifty thousand other chances:
> Or had it only been in Spain;
> A few night-stars the midnight gemming,
> And a guitar, I might have scribbled
> The rest from Contarini Flemming:
> Or Italy, the land of song;
> Of myrtle, pictures, and of passion—
> Ah! that was for mine earlier lute,
> I write now in another fashion:
> Or France, which, like an invalid,
> Goes patching up a constitution;
> Those three most glorious days in June,
> Might have lain under contribution:
> Or had it only been Madeira;
> I might have made a charming fiction,

Of some young maiden crossed in love,

And dying of the contradiction. (11-32)

The short textual illustrations for each of these imaginary engravings derive from contemporary news items and popular literature: Otto I, the first king of independent Greece ("Athens with a German king"), had begun his reign in May 1832, just weeks, perhaps, before Landon wrote her poem. Benjamin Disraeli's *Contarini Fleming: A Psychological Romance* was published that same month—Landon most likely "scribbled" the anonymous two-page review of the novel that appeared in the *Literary Gazette* on May 12. The passage on "France" identifies the June Rebellion (or Paris Uprising) of 1832 as a proper subject for poetic elaboration—notably, the very event that inspired Victor Hugo's 1862 *Les Misérables*. And the Italian subject, dismissed by the poem as "for mine earlier lute," alludes to Landon's "earlier" blockbuster poem *The Improvisatrice* (1824), a reworking of Germaine de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie* (1807). Therefore the "charming fiction" proposed for "Madeira" recycles obliquely a text the poem has already discussed, because "some young maiden crossed in love,/ And dying of the contradiction" is also the story of *The Improvisatrice* (and of *Corinne*): the formulaic plot applies equally well to any number of sentimental poems. Finally, "Macao" clearly pitches itself in a Byronic register—the final rhyme ("charming fiction"/ "contradiction") might have come straight from *Don Juan*.[154]

In turning these current texts and events into lines of verse, "Macao" performs the argument that annual poetry sources its materials from newspapers, magazines, and books—that modern poetry absolutely depends upon the circulation (and recirculation) of printed texts facilitated by the industrialized print market. Moreover, in "Macao" Landon implies that a poetry composed of recycled texts describes the "sham art" of secondhand engravings far more

[154] My thanks to Andrew Stauffer for this observation. In fact, Byron rhymes all four instances of "contradiction" in *Don Juan* with the word "fiction."

precisely than does ekphrastic translation, which addresses not the immediate subject (the problem of translated representational art) but an idealized, abstracted fiction ("a port in China"). The *Macao* engraving had been manufactured in the first place as a kind of visual news item, meant to help bring the British Empire home to the reading public. On August 6, 1831, the *Literary Gazette* reviewed Part XI of Robert Elliot's *Views in the East*, including the engraving *Macao*, which, the *Gazette* writer observes, is a picture "rendered peculiarly interesting at the present moment by the absurd conduct of the Portuguese government with respect to that colony."[155] News of "the present moment" renders Macao (or *Macao*) "peculiarly interesting" in both the *Literary Gazette* and in the *Scrap Book*.

What "Macao" enacts, its sister poem "The Chinese Pagoda" describes: the best way to write an annual poem is first to read a newspaper. "The Chinese Pagoda" begins by addressing the current state of British poetry—or, "the daily press":

> Whene'er a person is a poet,
> No matter what the pang may be;
> Does not at once the public know it?
> Witness each newspaper we see.
>
> "The parting look," "the bitter token,"
> "The last despair," "the first distress;"
> "The anguish of a heart that's broken—"
> Do not these crowd the daily press? (1-8)

[155] "Fine Arts: New Publications," *The Literary Gazette* 759 (August 6, 1831): 507.

According to the poem, the phrases set off with quotation marks are "a sort of joint-stock kept on hand": the collective property of the poetry-manufacturing industry. Like Thackeray, Landon deploys a volley of poetic cliché, demonstrating a satiric awareness that equals his own.

The speaker then complains that her fellow poets' pieced-together, *illusory* anguish elicits more "public pity" than does her writer's block (a "more real" problem), but after all that is how clichéd, sentimental poems featuring "parting look[s]" and "bitter token[s]" function. "Public pity" is precisely the desired outcome of such writing. The speaker's difficulty seems to be that her picture inhibits appropriative reading—*The Chinese Pagoda* is worse than "no subject" because it apparently forecloses interpretive possibilities:

> If in this world there is an object,
> For pity which may stand alone,
> It is a poet with no subject,
> Or with a picture worse than none. (41-44)

We should be careful, however, to avoid conflating poet with poetic subject, as some critics tend to do in this case. The poem of course accomplishes the very task it claims is "impossible": it does provide a reading of the plate (as insufficiently sentimental). "The Chinese Pagoda" also demonstrates how annual poetry might capitalize upon the expressive potential of its framing media. Astonishingly, the "picture worse than none" (*Chinese Pagoda.—Between Canton & Whampoa*, printed on the facing page) is not the first engraving this poem addresses. In a move that helps define the poem's subject as, specifically, the 1833 *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*, "The Chinese Pagoda" points at line 21 back to the engraving that "Macao" earlier refused to illustrate:

> Now, I who thought the first* vexatious,

Despaired, and knew not what to do,

Abused the stars, called fate ungracious—

Here is a second Chinese view! (21-24)

A footnote keyed to the word "first" reads, simply, "Macao." These poems embody their own newspaper clichés: they are "'The last despair'" and "'the first distress'." The "meaning" of "The Chinese Pagoda" depends upon its bibliographical relationship to "the first" "Chinese view," as well as to that engraving's corresponding verse illustration.

In subsequent stanzas "The Chinese Pagoda" works the entire publication history of *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* into poetic material. It addresses not only the "Messrs. Fisher" but also a "Captain Elliot," who has, regrettably, "forsake[n] the Indian fanes of yore" (37-38). Captain Robert Elliot was as central to the production of the *Scrap Book* in the early 1830s as were Fisher & Son: prints from his travel sketches, first published in parts by Fisher beginning in 1830, supplied a significant number of the engravings that made up the first few volumes of the *Scrap Book*. Elliot's sketches were eventually collected together into *Views in the East; comprising India, Canton, and the Shores of the Red Sea* (1833)—though, as Landon's poem insinuates, the greater part of those "views" depicted India. So many of the *Scrap Book*'s plates featured Indian scenes, in fact, that annual reviewers (among them even Thackeray) praised Landon for writing so inventively, *ad infinitum*, on almost identical subjects. The 1833 *Scrap Book* contained nine Indian plates, amounting to a quarter of the book's pictorial content. It seems likely, then, that the line about Elliot's "forsaken" Indian scenes is meant as a wink to the reader, especially because the poem is on the whole so tongue-in cheek.

"The Chinese Pagoda" is full of ironies, not least the claim governing the ninth stanza (and perhaps the whole poem), which insists: "It is impossible that ever/ *This place* can furnish

hints to me" (35-36, my emphasis). In Landon's *Scrap Book*, deixis always points in more than the usual number of directions. While "this place" seems to refer directly to the *Chinese Pagoda* print, we have seen that the underlying subject of the poem is the literary annual itself. The *Scrap Book* publication venue—equally "this place"—clearly "furnish[es]" sufficient "hints" for a pair of witty, self-reflective poems, both of which amount to a backhanded defense of the annuals, and a satiric revelation of the possibilities of the format.

Landon was particularly interested in the annuals' foregrounding of issues of representation: their reprinted engravings *of* pictures *of* nature motivated her reflexive poetics. Deixis features abundantly in Landon's *Scrap Book* work, but it is nowhere more striking than in poems that address natural landscapes. Consider the beginning of the poem called "Linmouth":

> Oh lone and lovely solitude,
>
> Washed by the sounding sea!
>
> Nature was in a poet's mood,
>
> When she created thee. (1-4)

While the first two lines seem to address the poem's visual referent (the real place depicted by the engraving *Linmouth, North Devon*), the second half of the stanza suggests that landscape is a crafted work, produced by the artist Nature. To be "in a poet's mood" in the Landonian sense is to think and work in recycled terms, and accordingly the first half of this poem rehearses a very predictable meditation on the pleasures of the country, featuring "golden shade," "trembling" aspen, and "elfin pillow[s]" formed of "moss and fragile flowers." The fifth stanza begins to suggest, however, that these surfaces are deceptive:

> Here one might dream the hours away,
>
> As if the world had not

Or grief, or care, or disarray,

To darken human lot. (17-20)

An escape to the countryside's "here" begins to seem ethically problematic, and the "poet's mood," in fact, changes the course of "Linmouth" entirely in the sixth stanza. "Yet 'tis not here that I would dwell,/ Tho' fair the place may be," the speaker declares, turning our attention to "a busier scene," a "crowded place," the inverse of the "lone and lovely solitude" where we began (21-24; 27). While the first half of the poem catalogues Nature's creations, the second half indexes lived experience in a metropolis: "industry, intellect, and skill," "sorrow, suffering, and thrall" (33; 39) The city encourages "deeper feeling" and "higher thought" (47) than the country because the faces, cries, and prayers of the urban populace invite empathetic reply.

As Jonas Cope has observed, "it is clear that 'Linmouth' is something of a response to [Wordsworth's] "The Tables Turned," which stands as a sort of predecessor-poem."[156] For Cope, a stanza-long "credo" in "Linmouth" answers the "moral sentiment" of "The Tables Turned" via formal and syntactical parallelism:

from "The Tables Turned":	*from "Linmouth":*
One impulse from a vernal wood	There's more for thought in one brief hour
May teach you more of man;	In yonder busy street,
Of moral evil and of good,	Than all that ever leaf or flower
Than all the sages can.	Taught in their green retreat.

As Cope also acknowledges, Landon extends her response to Wordsworth in a lengthy footnote, which declares the "melodramatic morality which talks of rural felicity, and unsophisticated pleasures" to be "copy-book cant" (40). The note then proposes the city of London as an

[156] Cope, "'A Series of Small Inconstancies,'" 379.

undervalued though equally sublime alternative to a countryside "divested of romantic grandeur":[157]

> I do own I have a most affectionate attachment for London—the deep voice of her multitudes "haunts me like a passion." I delight in observing the infinite variety of her crowded streets, the rich merchandise of the shops, the vast buildings, whether raised for pomp, commerce, or charity, down to the barrel-organ, whose music is only common because it is beautiful. The country is no more left as it was originally created, than Belgrave Square remains its pristine swamp. The forest has been felled, the marsh drained, the enclosures planted, and the field ploughed. All these […] are the works of man's hands; and so is the town—the one is not more artificial than the other.

Landon's efficient response to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" works via substitution: her preferred sublime subject, "the deep voice of [London's] multitudes," simply replaces Wordsworth's "sounding cataract" in the Wye Valley, which "haunted [him] like a passion." (In print, surely, "the one is not more artificial than the other.")

For Cope, the poem and note together convey an "anti-Wordsworthianism" absent from two other 1833 *Scrap Book* poems, whose speakers "more or less profess an allegiance to Wordsworthian doctrine" (380). Cope's aim is to show how Landon's "inconsistencies" identify her as "someone who has come to grips with the fact that ideologies move in and through the individual […] and surface in the expression—which *is* the individual." Her poems, that is, "debunk the romantic ideology *as* ideology far ahead of their time" (380). Cope argues that the way forward in Landon studies is to situate her writings first and foremost "within a philosophical context" so that we might query "how they address certain pressing

[157] Cope, 380.

epistemological anxieties of her age" (368). This proposal is meant as a corrective to the current conversation, in which Cope finds that (along with other nineteenth-century women writers) Landon is "too extensively linked to print culture" (368).

But as I have suggested, Landon's entire poetic program develops out of the very print culture Cope finds distracting. And certainly the fact that this response to "The Tables Turned" appears in a literary annual—one that advertised other large-format picture books featuring reproduced natural landscapes—should figure into our analysis of the poem's critique of Wordsworthian Romanticism. After all, Wordsworth's poem "The Tables Turned" also comments upon print culture, in part by executing a (literally) arresting moment of deixis in the final stanza: "Enough of science and of art/ Close up these barren leaves" (29-30). What are we to make of this imperative? Are "these barren leaves" the leaves of *Wordsworth's* book? Should we take the instruction literally? In any case, the word "these" wrests us from the fiction of Wordsworth's poem into the present moment of reading a printed object. This kind of acknowledgement, that brings forward the fictionality of poetic utterance, is a hallmark of Landon's style. If "The Tables Turned" admits to its constructedness only in closing, "Linmouth" investigates what happens when that admission is made the subject of an entire poem. Let us revisit her strange stanza quoted above:

> There's more for thought in one brief hour
>
> In yonder busy street,
>
> Than all that ever leaf or flower
>
> Taught in their green retreat. (29-32)

This passage presents an interesting ontological problem—but only if we recall the publication context of the poem (*pace* Cope, its engagement with "print culture"). If the deictic "here" of the

fifth stanza refers both to an engraving and to a place called Linmouth (i.e. "'tis not *here* that I would dwell"), then where is the above stanza's "yonder"? The word suggests a place within sight, if at a distance—but the engraving offers no corresponding "busy" scene. An alternative narrative emerges, in which the speaker of the poem admits that in *fact* she is sitting at a writing desk somewhere in London, looking out her window, perhaps, while she composes some lines to accompany this mass-produced engraving of a village scene. "Here" and "there," in Landon's poems, almost always introduce this kind of vertiginous layering of perspectival possibilities.

Another poem in the 1833 *Scrap Book* achieves similarly startling effects. Its corresponding engraved plate features a view of the *Waterfall and Stone Quarry, near Boscastle*. But unlike in "Linmouth," the poem for this print moves from pictured landscape to imagined cityscape within the space of only four lines:

> Oh gloomy quarry! Thou dost hide in thee
> The tower and shrine.
> The city vast and grand and wonderful,
> And strong, is thine. (1-4)

Immediately the poem refuses its ostensible subject, turning instead to "the city vast and grand and wonderful." A series of dramatically dislocating lines follow, as the speaker commands the reader to "look at the mighty buildings of our land" instead of the picture in the book:

> One fronts me now, a temple beautiful,
> Touched by the light
> Which has so much of heaven—the light of eve,
> Golden and bright.
> In dull relief against the cloudy sky

These turrets rise:

Our fine old Abbey, where the dust of kings,

Tranquilly lies. (9-16)

The turrets of Westminster Abbey "front" the speaker "now"—in the imagined moment of the speaker's address to the quarry image? In the moment of writing? In the moment of our reading? The poem underscores the difference between the naïve and the knowing—those who fall for the illusions of art, and those who hold it at a proper distance. But of course the poem also relates a fiction: that the Abbey "fronts" the speaker "now" is impossible outside the world of lyric. In this way, "Boscastle Waterfall and Quarry" is like Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," which also purports to be a poem composed and voiced on the site, in the moment, "here, under this dark sycamore." Perpetually interested in how contextualizing print mediums shape the poetic objects they frame, Landon imports Wordsworth's mode of lyric immediacy into a genre that necessarily transforms it altogether.

The footnote to "Boscastle Waterfall and Quarry" is keyed to the poem's fourth verse paragraph, quoted above ("In dull relief… Tranquilly lies"), but the note does not at first clarify any of the references made in that passage: "We talk of the beauties of nature," it begins, "I must own I am more pleased with those of art." An impressionistic collage-catalogue follows, detailing the "spectacle" offered by "a great street in a great city": "Picadilly […] the houses, with all their daily life […] the shops, where every article is a triumph of ingenuity […] the sweep of the Green Park […] the beautiful garden of Lord Coventry […] Westminster Abbey, rising in dim and dusky grandeur," and "the many carriages" of London all come under observation. An especially evocative sentence concludes this urban hymn:

> The gradual closing in of night, whose empire is here disputed by the lamps linked in one long line of light,—each holding its imprisoned flame, and, last, the triumphal arch at Hyde Park, while the open space behind is shrouded in unbroken darkness. (22)

The note proves the poem's claim that "what/ We can create" out of "rude, shapeless, lone" materials can "[win] the eye […]/ To other thought" (29-30; 26; 17-18). *Waterfall & Stone Quarry, Near Boscastle*, the engraving on the facing page, is the "rude" material from which the city of London emerges. Formally, the footnote reads like nothing so much as a prelude to the meditation on London's Highgate Hill, printed seventeen pages later, in the footnote to "Linmouth":

> Let any one ride down Highgate Hill on a summer's day, see the immense mass of buildings spread like a dark panorama, hear the ceaseless and peculiar sound, which has been likened to the hollow roar of the ocean, but has an utterly differing tone; watch the dense cloud that hangs over all—one perpetual storm, which yet bursts not—and then say, if ever was witnessed hill or valley that so powerfully impressed the imagination with that sublime and awful feeling which is the epic of poetry. (40)

Both notes figure the city of London as the ideal Romantic poetic subject: its vastness and quotidian chaos evoke "that sublime and awful feeling which is the epic of poetry."

In both rhetorical and practical terms, these two prose passages represent an unusual departure from Landon's typical *Scrap Book* notes: she copied most of them verbatim from other Fisher & Son publications, because those works offered ready-made context for the *Scrap Book*'s recycled engravings. But the notes to "Linmouth" and "Boscastle Waterfall and Quarry" do not apply to the prints. They function instead as imaginative prose commentaries on Landon's *poems*, which advance the sublimity of the artificial, and privilege invention over sincerity.

("Surely," reads the "Linmouth" note, "genius, intellectual goodness and greatness, are far nobler emanations of the Divine Spirit than mere honesty.") In these poems, it is the urban rather than the natural space that most strikingly reflects back "the mind of man," from his grand architectural achievements "down to the barrel-organ, whose music is only common because it is beautiful." Together with the two "Chinese" poems, these paired "London" poems in the *Scrap Book* for 1833 transform the annual from a mere delivery vehicle for secondhand art into a venue for theorizing the work of the modern poet. The *Scrap Book* demonstrates that the age's commonplaces—the unsung and the over-circulated, the "barrel-organ," the newspaper cliché, the recycled image, the overlooked metropolis—might (and ought to) serve as artistic materials.

The remarkable 1833 volume was only Landon's second *Scrap Book* production. In the six volumes that followed, she continued to experiment with the constraints and affordances unique to the annual form. In the preface to the 1836 volume, she announced the addition of "fugitive pieces" to the *Scrap Book*'s contents—"fugitive" in the sense that these poems did not illustrate any of the plates in the book. Ostensibly Landon offered them as replacements for the poetic illustrations that should have accompanied Fisher's portrait prints, which were the only variety of engraving she absolutely refused to entertain. "What the genius of Dryden could not redeem," she writes, "I may be excused from even attempting."[158] Much to her publishers' chagrin, however, Landon's "miscellaneous" writings were so voluminous that they far exceeded her page allowance, and threatened to compromise the annual's aesthetic integrity.[159] In a previously unpublished letter dated August 14, 1835, a dismayed Robert Fisher chastises Landon

[158] Landon, "Preface" to *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* [for 1832] (London, 1831), [3].
[159] In the previous year's *Scrap Book*, Landon published the 585-line narrative poem "The Fairy of the Fountains" which should be considered the first of these "fugitive" poems. Running to seven and a half pages, it is the only *Scrap Book* poem printed in double columns.

for her overly long compositions, which, he reminds her, do not conform to the terms they had originally negotiated:

> The double columns are entirely against our taste & inclination—but as we have only a certain space for the 36 Plates & the greater portion of the poems are written to occupy 2 pages & in some instances 3—what can we do—we would much prefer 36 poems to occupy as at first arranged 36 pages. […] I really hardly expected to be charged with wishing to encroach on what might be considered our due—especially after having begged at the commencement that the poems might be shortish & the whole not to exceed about 48 to 50 pages. […] I think the 2 [columns] looks any thing but ornamental […] I trust you will not suppose I am finding fault—I only wish to exculpate myself & Partners from the implied desire to procure by a kind of stratagem more matter than we ought to expect or are entitled to. [160]

Fisher concludes the letter by noting that he will "immediately go over the poems in the double columns & strike out to bring them into single." As Fisher's complaint makes clear, Landon's poems were supposed to serve both descriptive and decorative functions in the *Scrap Book*: they were meant to "look […] ornamental," ideally framed by wide margins and ample white space.

Later in her career Landon did begin writing "ornamental" texts, in Fisher's typographical sense. For most of the poems in the *Subjects for Pictures* series (1836-1838), as well as some late *Scrap Book* poems, Landon employed unusual stanzaic verse forms. The elaborate indentation of these texts, necessitated by their complicated rhyme schemes and refrains, shape the poems into what we might call "pictured lines," to borrow one of Landon's

[160] Robert Fisher to Letitia Landon, bound MSS volume, box 8 folder 23, Symington Collection, Rutgers University Special Collections and Archives.

own expressions. But in the "fugitive" poems Landon is more interested in how descriptive poetry could function in a space where the "ornament" was always primarily pictorial.

One interesting example is a four-part series in the 1836 *Scrap Book* titled "Scenes in London." Where "Linmouth" and "Boscastle Waterfall and Quarry" arrive at descriptions of London via a reframing of their pictorial referents, the "Scenes in London," unencumbered by engravings, declaim what we might call "London views" in their subtitles: "Piccadilly," "The Savoyard in Grosvenor Square," "The City Church-Yard," "Oxford Street." Like the coupled poems of 1833, these city "scenes" are dispersed throughout the volume, lending it an unusual coherence (with emphasis on Landon's urban preoccupations). Paradoxically, though not written for pictures, they feature some of the most descriptive poetry in the book. The opening lines of "Scenes in London:—The City Church-Yard" are representative:

> I pray thee lay me not to rest
>
> Among these mouldering bones;
>
> Too heavily the earth is prest
>
> By all these crowded stones. (1-4)

Because they operate within the horizon of expectations set by the *Scrap Book*'s literary annual frame, poems like this one are haunted by the phantom engravings they do not illustrate.

One question Landon repeatedly attempts to work out in these volumes concerns how the annual as medium affects the representational capacity of poetic text. Her *Scrap Book* poems refuse to remain within a singular frame of representation or self-contained lyric perspective: instead they toggle between fields—poem to footnote, poem to (real or imagined) engraving, poem to poem across a volume. In the final section of this chapter, I take up the most extensive of the experiments Landon executed with these mass-manufactured materials.

IV.

When Emma Roberts mined the *Scrap Book* for her posthumous collection *The Zenana and Minor Poems of L.E.L.* (1839), she included several poems that underscore Landon's unusual engagement with the *Scrap Book*. Roberts found room for both "The Fairy of the Fountains" and the "Scenes in London" series—neither had served as "illustrations" for the annual's popular engraved plates.[161] But by far the most extraordinary poem Roberts extracted from old volumes of the *Scrap Book* was Landon's masterpiece of annual poetry innovation, a long narrative poem titled "The Zenana."

The genesis of "The Zenana" begins with Landon's preparation of the *Scrap Book* volume for 1834. Of the thirty-six engravings Fisher sent for illustration that year, seventeen depicted the infamous "Indian views" drawn by Robert Elliot: most of these were engravings of monuments and ruins. In the preface to the volume Landon provides readers with an origin story for the unusual formal experiment she conducts in the annual's first thirty-three pages:

> Of all soils, a literary one is the soonest exhausted, and a change of subjects is as much needed as a change of crops. The magnificent ruins in the Indian Views suggested at first so much of melancholy reflection on the instability of human glories, that the poems which sought to illustrate "the fallen temple and the lonely tomb," naturally took a sad and thoughtful cast. But as my knowledge of Oriental history increased, I found it full of rich material for narrative; abounding with incidents of interest and of wild adventure. I

[161] Notably, Roberts reformatted "Scenes in London" for her collection: "Oxford Street" moves up into the second position in the series, and the poems appear together, printed as a numbered sequence, in the middle of the volume.

> therefore determined on accompanying the Plates of Eastern scenery this year with a connected Tale.

However, in a letter to her friend Anna Maria Hall about the same work, Landon frames her accomplishment rather differently:

> The volume just completed contains one long poem founded on Indian history; a connected story called the "Zenana," and longer than the "Venetian Bracelet." How my ingenuity has been taxed to introduce the different places! and, pray, forgive this little tender effusion of vanity, I do pique myself on contriving to get from Dowlutabad to Shusher, and Penawa, and the Triad Figure in the Caves of Elephante, and from thence to Ibrahim Padshah's tomb, etc. etc.[162]

Landon understates both her labor and her skill in these explications. The *Scrap-Book* preface addresses primarily the *subject* of the poem, selling its "incidents of interest and of wild adventure" to the reading public. The extensive research Landon often performed while writing these annual poems evaporates into the passive voice: it is something that happens *to* her. "As my knowledge of Oriental history *increased*," she writes, "I *found* it full of rich material for narrative." On the other hand, the private letter takes up the matter of the poem's construction and shape, but undercuts the practical difficulty of making all these things hang together. Her "tender effusion of vanity" is well earned: mapping the locations for each of the seventeen images "connected" by "The Zenana" clearly reveals the extent of reading and drafting she must have worked through in the process of its writing.

But the result pleased her, as she also indicates in her letter: "It is four years since I have written a long poem [*The Venetian Bracelet* (1829)]. I cannot describe to you the enjoyment of

[162] Landon to Anna Maria Hall, *Letters*, 91.

going back again to 'my first-love and my last.' I can only say that writing poetry is like writing one's native language, and writing prose, writing in a strange tongue."[163] Given the intractability of the materials, Landon's enthusiasm for her old poetic form must have been considerable. She bends the annual to her will, fitting its contents to a specific narrative shape, rather than vice versa. While the images exist prior to the text, the text also relegates them to a secondary position: Landon treats them simply as pieces to be slotted into the puzzle of her narrative. The 1834 *Scrap Book*, in this regard, is Landon's *Pickwick*—though her visual materials hardly lent themselves to narrative elaboration of any kind.

Although as a rule the titles of Landon's poems for the *Scrap Book* are identical to the titles of the engravings they embellish, in this case Landon's title "The Zenana" is the rubric under which are subsumed all the "different places" depicted in the plates. The title of this long poem advertises none of Fisher's given materials, but rather a feminine space: the word "zenana" applies both to the rooms reserved for women's use in Muslim and Hindu households as well as to "the occupants of this area considered collectively; the female part of a household."[164] While the poem describes a fictional community formed by a group of women brought together by song, we might remember too that the literary annuals, collectively, provided space for women poets in the early decades of the nineteenth century to form writing communities of their own.

So far, "The Zenana" may seem an unusual poem, especially in terms of its bibliographical features. In other respects, however, "The Zenana" conforms to our current expectations about what a long narrative poem by "L.E.L." might be and do. While "The

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[163] The "prose" to which Landon refers here is likely her novel writing: she published her first novel, *Romance and Reality*, in 1831. *Francesca Carrara* must have been well underway at this point in late 1833—it was published the following year.

[164] "zenana, n. and adj.". OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proxy01.its.virginia.edu/view/Entry/232776 (accessed March 20, 2019).

Zenana" has received scant critical consideration, rare discussions of the poem always situate it in relation to "The Improvisatrice" or Landon's other long romance narratives.[165] And after all, both "The Zenana" and "The Improvisatrice" feature a female protagonist who improvises songs and stories in verse for various audiences. Both protagonists die from broken hearts after their lovers abandon them. Many critics seem to concur with Anne Mellor, who has concluded that "once Landon accepted her culture's hegemonic definition of the female, she could only repeat the same story over and over."[166]

But "The Zenana" does not simply embrace a formulaic narrative; it also imports that familiar pattern into the resistant space of the literary annual. The "same story over and over" is a template, the controlled variable that Landon exposes to various contextualizing frames. "The Zenana," then, is what happens to "The Improvisatrice" under new multimedia circumstances—new generic conditions. *Because* of its formulaic nature, when we read "The Zenana" *as annual poem* we can explode a variety of critical commonplaces regarding the whole of Landon's narrative poetry, including the persistent association of Landon with her literary characters, as well as the related claim that Landon's writing was consistently dashed off—one might say *improvised*—and embarrassingly artless. "The Zenana" categorically resists these interpretations when we attend to its bibliographical codes: the material and formal features of the physical object.

The poem opens with the following verse paragraph:

> What is there that the world hath not
>
> Gathered in yon enchanted spot?

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[165] See e.g. Singer, "Landon: In Sound and Noise"; Serena Baisei, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Metrical Romance: The Adventures of a 'Literary Genius'* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2009), 128-135.

[166] Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 114.

Where pale, and with a languid eye,

The fair Sultana listlessly

Leans on her silken couch and dreams

Of mountain airs, and mountain streams.

Sweet though the music float around,

It wants the old familiar sound

And fragrant though the flowers are breathing,

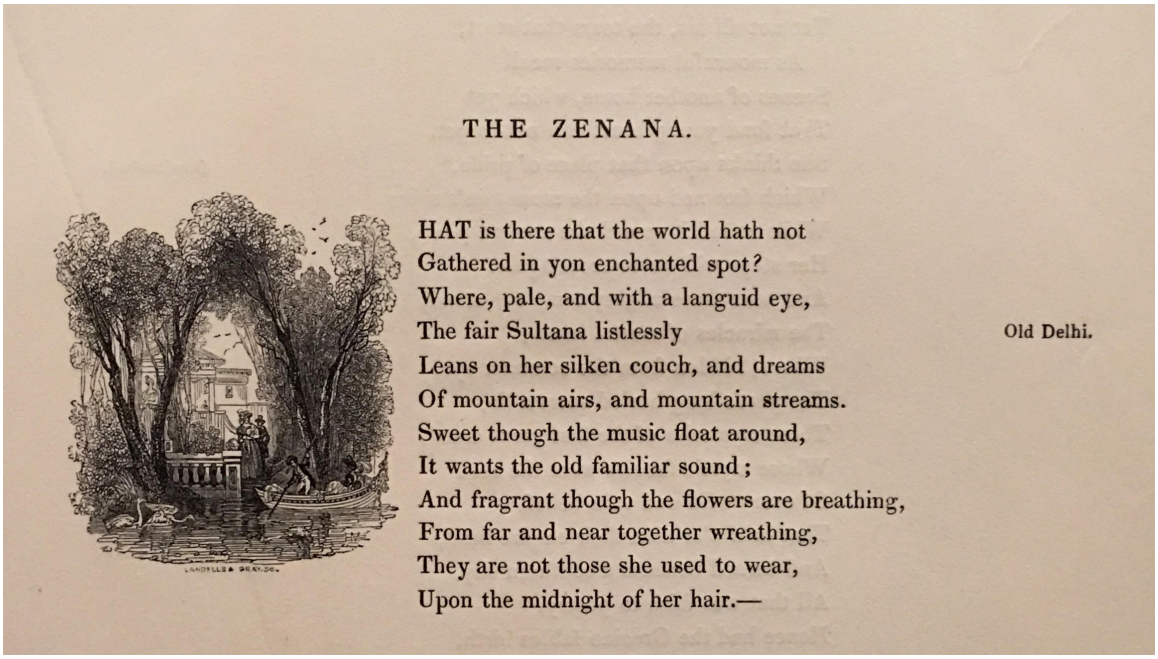
From far and near together wreathing,

They are not those she used to wear,

Upon the midnight of her hair.— (1-13)

In one sense these lines present a typical scene: a beautiful woman is unhappy, and a lover is likely the culprit. The music, the flowers, the midnight hair, and the anaphora are all standard Landon fare. However, the question mark following the first couplet seems misplaced, as the "Where" of the next line suggests a continuation of the opening query. That is, "What is there that the world hath not gathered in yon enchanted spot *where* [over there the Sulatana listlessly leans]." The question mark, followed by the word "Where," invites both readings: "yon enchanted spot" is both undetermined (it is "yon"), and also the Sultana's resting place.

This uncertainty about the precise location of "yon enchanted spot" is strangely magnified because the question appears in the pages of a literary annual, and the poem is supposed to illustrate an engraving. But the first letter of the poem is itself an image, a decorated initial capital W (figure 9).



THE ZENANA.

HAT 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
Of mountain airs, and mountain streams.
Sweet though the music float around,
It wants the old familiar sound;
And fragrant though the flowers are breathing,
From far and near together wreathing,
They are not those she used to wear,
Upon the midnight of her hair.—

Old Delhi.

Figure 9. Detail of "The Zenana" in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1834 (1833)

The word "yon" in the second line of the poem also points at this illustrated space. The image depicts a European-style villa, framed by the "W" of the tree branches. In the foreground a couple in a gondola and a pair of swans share the waterway, while a few other well-dressed figures stand in the middle distance. The scene in the W is certainly not Eastern. Though it may be one kind of "enchanted spot," the engraved W disables willing suspension of disbelief by intruding its inappropriately foreign swans and gondolas into the space of the poem's fiction.

The poem's paratexts complicate matters as well. In the right margin next to the fourth line, the words "Old Delhi" appear in reduced type. Such notes repeat throughout "The Zenana": they are keyed to the engravings that Landon has distributed into the shape of this poem. The marginal note "Old Delhi" here again interrupts the narrative by pointing to something outside it, this time to the facing page illustration. To read that *image* properly requires a 90-degree turn of the book, or the head, which distances the reader from the poem proper (figure 10).

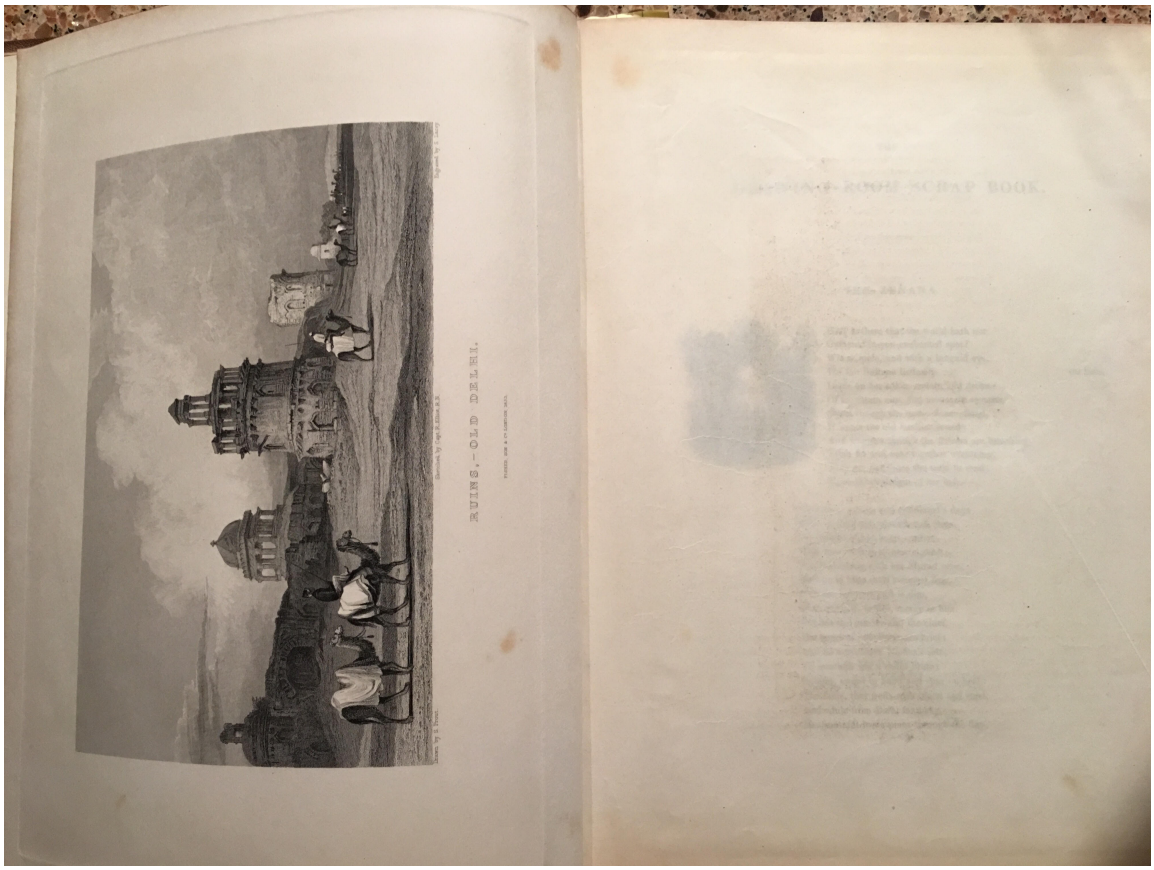


Figure 10. ***Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*** **for 1834 (1833), p. 6 opening**

Below the engraving, a title reads *Ruins, Old Delhi.* Because this illustrated space also presents itself as "yon enchanted spot," the poem introduces the uncomfortable suggestion that the spot where the Sultana lies is in "*Ruins.*" Where, exactly, does this poem begin? In what world does the Sultana exist? Surely not within the enchanted world of poetry, accompanied by these fallen, reprinted representations and insistent textual gesturings outward. She lives in the world of artificial construction, as do all of Landon's female protagonists. In this poem, the engravings-as-marginalia constantly intrude into the narrative to remind the reader of this state of affairs.

"The Zenana" cultivates many other procedures of disenchantment by elaborating (and refusing) reciprocities with the engraved images it purports to illustrate. As previously noted, the ill-fated female protagonist of this poem performs a number of songs for admiring listeners. And just as in "The Improvisatrice," these songs come in two varieties: one, the brief poetic narrative,

and the other a kind of sentimental dramatic monologue, in which the speaker adopts a first-person perspective and complains of general varieties of forsakenness or sadness. As we have already observed, sentimental poems, through their formulaic procedures, invite "individual acts of (re)appropriation by a wide and diverse audience."[167] They were a favorite mode of Landon's. Remarkably, of the five songs nested within "The Zenana," three of them are sentimental lyrics of the most generic type. None of these poems (all titled "Song") illustrate any of the engravings in an explicit or even an implicit way, nor do they serve to advance the story's plot—a noteworthy fact, given the challenge of working such a long poem into the constrained annual format (page limits included). The poems rather offer themselves as extractable, repurposable objects, and insist on their identification with other sentimental poems Landon's readers have seen before. Simultaneously, however, the lyrics appear here newly strange because of their striking inutility within the context of a poem that refuses to let its constructedness slip from view.

The manifesto-like nature of "The Zenana" depends upon its situation in the literary annual form. Explicitly a product of mass-market demand, "The Zenana" professes itself to be the farthest thing from a Wordsworthian lyric of powerful feeling recollected in tranquility. Instead, the poem insists upon its artificiality by drawing attention to the use it makes of otherwise discordant materials. Landon lays bare many of her typical poetic procedures from the outset of "The Zenana," a poem that, I suggest, might serve as a key for demystifying her thematically similar works—as well as a guide to keeping our distance from reading those works as improvised effusions of sentiment. If Tricia Lootens justly warns against "our vulnerability to

[167] McGann, *Poetics of Sensibility*, 136.

a continuing tendency to read Landon's career in terms of her own plots,"[168] I would suggest that reading more of her estranging, brilliant literary annual poetry in its original printed forms might supply one remedy.

[168] Lootens, "Receiving the Legend, Rethinking the Writer: Letitia Landon and the Poetess Tradition," in *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception*, ed. Harriet Kramer Linkin and Stephen C. Behrendt (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 251.

Chapter Three | Muse of Reuse

At the conclusion of her first chapter on Edgar Allan Poe in *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, Meredith McGill observes that Poe "defines authorship not as origination but as manipulation."[169] The same might be said of his contemporary Letitia Landon, who set the terms of her poetics within a similarly flourishing "culture of reprinting" across the Atlantic. Creative repurposing became Landon's signature move within the burgeoning media landscape of her age.

Landon developed her poetic program in response to the emergent mass-media forms in which she published (and republished) her work. For too long we have thought of her primarily according to a myth she helped construct, as "the author of *The Improvisatrice*" and its successors: *The Troubadour, The Golden Violet*, *The Venetian Bracelet*—that is, as the author of collections of poems. As Karen Fang observes in a chapter on Landon's "giftbook style," "past approaches to Landon's oeuvre have often suggested general similarities throughout all of her verse, particularly emphasizing a propensity for self-representation and self reference."[170] While Landon's poetry does embrace "general similarities" at both stylistic and thematic levels, the assumption that her work is always self-referential persists precisely because we read so narrowly across her body of work. To define Landon principally as the author of collected volumes is to seriously misunderstand her approach to poetry more broadly, and consequently to misunderstand even those poems for which Landon is now best known, including "The Improvisatrice," "Erinna," "A History of the Lyre," and especially all of the so-called "late" "Fragments" popularized by Laman Blanchard.

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[169] McGill, *American Litearture and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 186. For the "culture of reprinting," see pp. 1-8.
[170] Fang, *Romantic Writing and the Empire of Signs*, 107.

This chapter attempts to re-orient our perspective on Landon through a series of case studies of her poems, drawn from the publication venues where most of her work appeared: literary annuals and magazines. Because her corpus is so extensive, the limited survey I provide here in no way pretends to be comprehensive. Nevertheless these readings, which all foreground Landon's poetics of reuse, collectively argue that we should see Landon not merely as *subject to* the industrialized print market, but as a willing, creative, and experimental manipulator of its affordances. The model advanced here should also enable us to revisit Landon's more "canonical" works with an eye to the culture of reprinting in which they too circulated. As we have already seen, certain favorites of modern criticism, like "Erinna" or Blanchard's "Fragments," actually originate in Landon's magazine writing, and thus bear much more complex textual histories and chains of signification than have been recognized in Landon scholarship.

A striking conclusion emerges from the patterns visible in the following series of readings: Landon's poems were *designed* to be recirculated. The same generic features that solicit individual, subjective reader responses in sentimental poems also facilitate reprintings of "the same" poem in various guises, under any number of titles or recombined forms. Having begun to experiment with creatively recycling her own poems years before the innovation of steel plate engravings revolutionized the market for English art prints, Landon must have found oddly familiar the market's repurposing of those long-lasting plates. While many have suggested that Landon's "medley" poems like "The Improvisatrice" are "prophetic" of her later work in the literary annuals, the following case studies suggest a more demonstrable connection between Landon's early investment in the expressive potential of reprinting and the unique experiments

she eventually performed in the annuals. Landon's designed-for-reproduction poetics resists the idea that any image (or text) need have a fixed, finite identity.

A comment before we turn to Landon's poems: the introduction to this dissertation frames the project as "notes toward" a scholarly edition. Because Landon's poems take as their subjects the very print culture in which they circulate, because they rely on various forms of new media to make and remake themselves, and because so many of her texts form complex networked constellations (in which lines from one poem will reappear in three or four others), it is difficult to imagine that her oeuvre could be well represented by the kind of edition we have traditionally constructed.[171] My hope is that the examples I offer here and in the rest of this project begin to suggest how innovative a truly representative edition of Landon would have to be. The realization of such an edition might revolutionize our understanding not only of the poet, and of the late-Romantic period, but also of our praxis of scholarly editing.

I.

In 1824, Winthrop Mackworth Praed published "A Preface," a short poem that parodied Letitia Elizabeth Landon's newly-famous style. Praed could have counted on the reading public's familiarity with his topic especially because Landon's recently published blockbuster volume *The Improvisatrice* had been so aggressively puffed in the press. The speaker of "A Preface" begins by invoking Landon's aid: he requests to borrow her "light lute" to help him tell "a tale of love"—Landon's trademark genre. But as the poem proceeds, the speaker discovers

[171] In claiming this I merely echo Daniel Riess, who observed in 1996 that "a full appreciation of Landon's significance to literary history would require a massive act of historical reconstruction"; Riess, "Laetitia Landon and the Dawn of English Post-Romanticism," 808.

that the lute in question is at best a problematic instrument. While "A Preface" capitalizes throughout on Landon's easily mimicked style, one moment deserves our special attention:

> Within thy passion-haunted pages
> Throng forward girls—and distant ages,
> The lifeless learns at once to live,
> The dumb grows strangely talkative,
> Resemblances begin to strike
> In things exceedingly unlike,
> All nouns, like statesmen, suit all places,
> And verbs, turned lawyers, hunt for cases. (27-34)

Landon's poetry, Praed suggests, fails to preserve either logical or grammatical decorum. "Girls" and "distant ages" ("things exceedingly unlike") "throng forward" together in a single line of verse; nouns and verbs follow no syntactical rules. "A Preface" ultimately reverses its initial petition, marking clearly the difference between the kind of poetics the speaker values and those practiced by "L.E.L.":

> I never feel poetic mania,
> I gnaw no laurel with Urania,
> I court no critic's tender mercies,
> I count the feet in all my verses… (79-82)

Praed's critique derives special force from its execution in poetic form. It is cutting, and it scans. The off-rhyme of that final couplet only accentuates the poem's argument: Praed's teasing "versies" are "mercies" compared with Landon's. "A Preface" also pokes fun at Landon's laurel-gnawing persona. A conflation of author and poetic subject, the unnamed *improvisatrice* of the

poem reads to this day as a figure for Landon herself, thanks in part to clever marketing by the poet's mentor William Jerdan. Landon has ever since been blamed or praised for her "improvisational" style, depending on the taste of the critic.[172]

Though in the past twenty years Landon has been recovered as an early example of the Victorian "poetess," scholars have with few exceptions done little to address the "aesthetic 'value'" of her work.[173] Feminist critics have had much to say about whether and how Landon's work reveals her to be either complicit in or subversive of the norms imposed by early nineteenth-century society on "the poetess," and on what kinds of things a poetess might write. Many still think along with Virginia Blain that Landon is interesting primarily as a "cultural phenomenon" rather than as a "'serious' poet."[174] But as the very existence of Praed's parody indicates, Landon was one of the best-known poets of the period. How can we reconcile this popular reception with her apparently poor skill as poet? Or should we? One question this final chapter addresses is whether the many criticisms leveled against Landon's style might not clarify for us some of the essential elements of her poetic methodology. If we attend carefully to the "badness" of Landon's poems, as did many of her contemporaries, her central preoccupations with how representational art and poetry might work in the age of industrial print begin to emerge.

A host of nineteenth-century critics wrote energetically about Landon's apparent lack of poetic talent. Many of them begrudgingly attributed her popularity to felicitous choice of subject

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[172] For a smart rebuttal to this popular line of interpretation, see Katherine Montwieler, "Laughing at Love: L.E.L. and the Embellishment of Eros," *Romanticism on the Net* 29-30 (February-May 2003) accessed March 30, 2019, https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/007717ar.
[173] The quotation marks around "value" belong to Virginia Blain, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Eliza Mary Hamilton, and the Genealogy of the Victorian Poetess," *Victorian Poetry* 33 no. 1 (Spring 1995): 37.
[174] Blain, "Genealogy of the Victorian Poetess," 46.

matter. Writing for the *Westminster Review* in 1827, John Arthur Roebuck declared: "L.E.L. has acquired a degree of fame by writing on love, which she by no means deserves, and which her readers would not have awarded had she chosen a less seductive theme."[175] Readers "erroneously attribute to the mode in which the subject is discussed, the pleasure which arises solely from the inherent interest of the subject itself" (51). For Roebuck, Landon's readers admire her poems simply because love is a seductive topic. Roebuck was well aware that the majority of these readers were women, perhaps, he implies, too unsophisticated to know any better. Blain puts Roebuck's claim in modern terms when she suggests that "much of what Landon produced was the nineteenth-century equivalent of Harlequin Romance, never intended to be lasting."[176] The reviewer of Landon's poem "The Golden Violet" in the *Inspector* for 1827 also found Landon's work ephemeral: "she writes too fast and too much to write for posterity […] nobody remembers a line of [her poems] next week."[177] Unmemorable yet easily recognizable—subject not only to parody but also to earnest imitation—Landon cultivated a verse style that could (and would) bear repetition.[178]

That Landon wrote "too fast and too much" is a commonplace of nineteenth-century criticism, though it is true that she could write quickly and that she published prolifically. One of her many female poet-speakers announces, in an 1837 poem, that "a thousand songs of mine are on the air," while Francis Sypher estimates that Landon had probably published well *over* a

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[175] [John Arthur Roebuck], "Poetry of L.E.L." *Westminster Review* 7 (January 1827): 51.
[176] Blain, "Genealogy of the Victorian Poetess," 36.
[177] "Review: *The Golden Violet, with its Tales of Romance and Chivalry: and other Poems. By L.E.L., Author of* '*The Improvisatrice*,' '*The Troubadour*,' *&c.*," *The Inspector, Literary Magazine and Review* 2 (London, 1827): 244.
[178] For more on Landon imitators, including Benjamin Disraeli's claim that she was "foundress of the initial school, the pet-lamb of Magazinery, and the peculiar poetess of sentimental ladies'-maids," see Nicholas Mason, *Literary Advertising and the Shaping of British Romanticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013), 99.

thousand individual poems at the time that line was written.[179] But uncritically relying on nineteenth-century opinions regarding her *too*-prolific pen inhibits an objective assessment of her style. Three years after Landon's death, journalist Laman Blanchard published his *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.* (1841), in which he set forward certain assertions about her compositional methods that have been recycled ever since. The distinguishing feature of her writing, he claimed, was the speed with which she composed: "Her thoughts always flowed faster than she could put them upon paper," and "the injury that resulted from the rule of rapidity—breathless and reckless rapidity—is shown throughout the various poems that compose the overwrought richness, the beautiful excess, the melodious confusion of the 'Improvisatrice.'"[180] This "confusion" resulted from Landon's failure to revise and edit: "if only the superfluities, amounting to at least one-third of the poem, had been cut away, all that is obscure would have been clear—all that is languid, strong—all that is incongruous, harmonized" (42).

Blanchard's subjective assessment has become objective truth for modern critics.[181] For instance Duncan Wu indicates that "it would be difficult, today, to claim Letitia as a neglected genius […] even her admirers tend to agree that she worked too rapidly for there to have been much polish to her work."[182] Wu proposes an alternative rubric for appreciating Landon's poetry, also drawn from Blanchard's criticism, when he declares that "it is easiest to value her verse for precisely the qualities Blanchard singled out—its 'breathless rapidity,' richness, and, indeed, confusion" (596). Wu is right to suggest that "confusion" is key to understanding Landon's

[179] See Sypher, *Poems from the Literary Gazette*, x.
[180] Blanchard, *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.*, 1:42.
[181] Karen Fang for example declares casually that Landon's poetry was "written quickly and with little revision"; *Romantic Writing and the Empire of Signs*, 140.
[182] Wu, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838)" in *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology* (Oxford; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 596.

verse: the "obscure" and "incongruous" qualities of "The Improvisatrice" are *features* of her poetics, rather than flaws, and can be observed throughout her corpus. If we have never seen fit to "claim Letitia as a neglected genius," perhaps that is because her poems appeal to a different kind of muse, one whose presiding spirit is not "polish" but rather a carefully studied polyvalence. We might think of each poem as a garden of forking paths, where ambiguous grammatical events produce several outcomes (or interpretive avenues) simultaneously. Though it may look like "confusion" to some, this effect is actually the ground of Landon's innovative poetics.

Because many nineteenth-century reviewers so thoroughly dissect Landon's poems—taking the poetry seriously in ways we typically do not—they also offer usefully detailed descriptions of the grammatical and stylistic "confusion" that animates Landon's writing. John Roebuck's essay for the *Westminster Review*, for example offers a seventeen-page-long inventory of the stylistic infelicities marring *The Troubadour* (1825) and *The Golden Violet* (1826). Seconding Blanchard's concerns about obscurity and incongruity, and adding the charge of poor prosody, Roebuck writes:

> The conventional language of poetry […] retains in some degree the power of calling up poetical ideas, even when it is thrown together without form, order, or meaning. A dictionary of such words, if printed in lines of ten syllables, might be mistaken for poetry by many who fancy themselves ardent admirers of poetic genius; […] Trusting to these poetical associations, and being pleased herself with the words, L.E.L. has crowded epithets and similes into her verses without regard either to poetical numbers or to reason. In many of her lines, consequently, it would be difficult to find sense, and still more difficult to find correct prosody. (56)

Roebuck's metaphors here suggest a logical underpinning to Landon's work in spite of his attempt to utterly dismantle it. The hypothetical dictionary of "conventional" poetical language, even if "printed in lines of ten syllables," would, we suppose, still retain a coherent (i.e. alphabetical) organization, even while the pattern superimposed upon its contents might enable a reading of the dictionary as "poetry." The key to writing good nonsense, of course, is to follow a precise set of rules. In order to show that Landon's poetry is nonsense of the most *in*decipherable kind, Roebuck dissects a selection of lines from Landon's long narrative poem "The Troubadour." I replicate here the emphasis and footnotes as printed in the *Westminster Review*:

> One silent gaze, as if each band
> Could slaughter both with eye and hand.
> Then peals the war-cry! then the dash
> Amid the waters! and the crash
> Of spears—the falchion's iron ring,
> The arrow hissing from the string,
> Tell they have met. *Thus from the height*
> *The torrent rushes in his might.*
> *With the lightning's speed, the thunder's peal,*
> *Flashes the lance, and strikes the steel.*
> "Many a steed to earth is borne,
> Many a banner trampled and torn,"*
> †*Or ever its brand* could strike a blow,
> Many a gallant arm lies low:
> Many a scarf and many a crest,

Float with the leaves on the river's breast.

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*Almost verbatim from the two bad lines in the speech of Marmion to king James.
†"Or ever" is not English, at least not grammatical English.

Roebuck delivers an elaborately detailed assessment of this passage, beginning with those snide footnotes about the twelfth and thirteenth lines. "This is," he declares, "merely a confused enumeration of a few unconnected particulars" (57). Roebuck complains that the metaphor of the rushing torrent, though it begins with the word "thus," is "neither referred nor referrible to any preceding part of the description" (58). The torrent is, rather, "a pacific torrent; [...] Meeting with no opponent, it is not an illustration of a combatant" (57). The couplet describing the "lightning's speed" and the "thunder's peal" is, for Roebuck, "almost without meaning. Does the lance flash with the thunder's peal, or with lightning's speed; and if flashing with lightning's speed, what object is attained by describing the *rapidity* of its gleamings?" (original emphasis, 58). The passage per Roebuck's reading *is* a meaningless composite of epithets and similes thrown together.[183] Landon cannot be bothered with ensuring that her metaphors are in fact metaphors, or with the actual scansion of her "bad lines."

What we might take away from Roebuck's assessment is that Landon trades exclusively in the raw materials of poetry, its unrefined basic elements. The vocabulary is recognizably—conventionally—poetic, but words are not thoughtfully selected; lines consist of a number of syllables rather than metrically sound feet; poetic devices do not actually perform the functions they are meant to perform, but instead work more like placeholders signifying "this is poetry" without making meaningful contribution to the whole. The result troubles those who read carefully, like Roebuck. But when reading for plot (i.e. a "tale of love"), incongruities fade to

[183] This type of review was not unusual: see for example Robert Mudie's discussion of Landon's infelicitous similes in *Babylon the Great* vol. 1 (London: 1825), 60-64.

background noise. One review of "The Improvisatrice" declares that "the wild and romantic being whom [Landon] describes as the Improvisatrice, seems to be the very counterpart of her sentimental self. Her poetical breathing appears to proceed from a soul, whose very essence is love."[184] For this reviewer, "seductive theme" outweighs "melodious confusion."

Much critical writing on Landon today tends to ignore her style altogether, preferring like the anonymous reviewer above to prioritize theme and plot. Part of this tendency may derive from the narrative established by Germaine Greer over thirty years ago, for whom Landon's poetry consists of "slipshop improvisation with [...] haphazard assonances and liquid syntax;" the "clauses simply run into each other to make a seamless whole with no irritable adversities of coordination."[185] The verse is "garbled, the rhythms approximate, the texture of the whole blurred and uneven."[186] Without explaining precisley how, Greer claims that such writing enabled the development of "that essentially female form, the verse novel."[187] That is, Landon's style serves an important end, but it is not interesting of itself. Both Greer and Glennis Stephenson, writing at the beginning of Landon's critical recovery, turn the problematic elements of her style to subversive ends: its irregularities serve to further the development of nineteenth-century women's writing—particularly the sort performed under the auspices of the nineteenth-

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[184] "The Improvisatrice, and other poems. By L. E. L.," *The Literary Magnet* 2 (1824): 106.
[185] Greer, "What We Are Doing and Why We Are Doing It," 22. Glennis Stephenson objects to Greer's use of the term "improvisation," remarking that "Landon's stylistic choices were obviously made with the intent of *suggesting* improvisation, and as her readers were quick to identify Landon with her Improvisatrice, speaking the heart, so they readily associated her style with the improvisation of which she wrote" (original emphasis); Stephenson, *Letitia Landon: The Woman Behind L.E.L.* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 121.
[186] Greer, *Slip-Shod Sybils: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet* (London: Viking, 1995), 265.
[187] Greer, "What We Are Doing and Why We Are Doing It," 23.

century poetess. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, which apparently rescues women's poetry from its sentimental excesses, would not have been possible without Landon's bad style.

The feminist "recovery" of Landon focused on her longer poems featuring female protagonists who resemble "the very counterpart of her sentimental self." But these texts constitute a very small selection of her oeuvre. Most of her writing was not published in the book collections where these long poems appear, but in magazines, and in those books Sara Lodge fondly terms "the disappointing suburban cul de sac at the end of Romanticism's wild high road": the literary annuals.[188] If critics often date the beginning of Landon's career to the publication of *The Improvisatrice*, we might also recall that she published her first annual poems in the same year—and that by 1824, she had been writing prolifically about British art in the "Original Poetry" column of the *Literary Gazette* for years. It is my contention that her unusual grammatical and syntactical moves are features of a poetics she crafted in response to the remediation of both visual and textual art in early nineteenth-century mass-market print.

Take for example Landon's poem "The Zenana," composed for the literary annual *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*. We have already seen that the first lines of this poem present an ambiguous situation—and that its ambiguity derives in part from the multiple works of engraved art that surround the text:

> 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

[188] Lodge, "Romantic Reliquaries: Memory and Irony in The Literary Annuals," *Romanticism* 10 no. 1 (2004), 23.

Of mountain airs, and mountain streams… (1-6)

Attempting to locate "yon enchanted spot" in any of the images this poem might address (an engraved letter "W," the print titled *Ruins, Old Delhi*) proves futile: representational art in this book is decidedly *un*enchanted. But grammatical ambiguity also amplifies the interpretive difficulty of these first lines. Landon often opens her poems with dummy subjects like "It is," "There is," or, most obscurely, "What is"—these beginnings effectively delay the reader's ability to apprehend the actual subject of a sentence indefinitely. We might crudely paraphrase the first two lines of "The Zenana" as: "that spot is paradise." But if we pay close attention to the grammar, what is happening? "What is there that the world hath not/ Gathered in yon enchanted spot?" (?!) The disorienting effect is achieved partly by the delay of the subject, and partly by the enjambment of the couplet (fortified by the rhymed "not" and "spot"). "What is there that the world hath not?" is made a nonsense question by the succeeding line. *What* is being "gathered"? "What is there that the world hath [*that is*] not/ Gathered in yon enchanted spot?" seems the most logical reading. The poem poses a rhetorical question: the Sultana has all she might desire. Nevertheless, the possibility that the poem actually asks "what is there that *does not exist* in the world?" remains—an absent, indescribable subject insisted upon by the construction of the opening couplet. "What *is* there…?"

Landon's poetry often suggests multiple interpretive possibilities simultaneously: this is because she works with the most conventional of poetic materials and experiments with their generic potentialities. It is no coincidence that she developed her poetics just as the print market exploded with mass-produced visual art. Literary annuals provide only one example of how new technology had begun situating vast quantities of images and texts side by side in print. Landon, who wrote more content for the annuals than any other nineteenth-century poet, witnessed

firsthand how the same image, printed from the same matrix, could be made new through the paratext, if you will, of poetry.

If we now call Landon's poeticisms clichés, we would do well to remember that the word originated in the early nineteenth century as a term for the stereotype, electrotype, or other plates used to print an image. Landon's poetry suggests that what is possible for images might also be possible for text: one just might be able to give new meaning to phrases so overused that they have solidified into objects, good only for signifying "poetry" in the abstract. The battle scene Roebuck dissects does not fail, after all, to convey the general *idea* of a battle scene. We know what's going on in terms of "plot," despite grammatical and syntactical difficulties. In this way Landon's poems resemble composite images or mosaics, in which up close everything appears particularized and irreconcilable, "thrown together without form, order, or meaning." It is a defamiliarizing move. However, from a distance, the subject never fails to emerge. The subject for Landon, though, is never a battle, or a garden, or love, but the recycling of art itself. As Terrence Hoagwood and Kathryn Ledbetter have noted, "her works are not about the experiences and feelings of […] narrated characters; they are about the narration of those feelings and experiences. L.E.L. writes poems about tales of love, but she does not write tales of love."[189]

II.

Within the frame narrative of Letitia Landon's poem "The Zenana" are embedded several brief sentimental songs, all sung by the poetess-figure Zilara. She performs them for her disconsolate patroness Nadira, whose lover Murad has gone to "wield/ His scimitar in battle

[189] Terrence Hoagwood and Kathryn Ledbetter, "Life of Letitia Elizabeth Landon," in *L. E. L.'s "Verses" and The Keepsake for 1829* eds. Terence Hoagwood, Kathryn Ledbetter, and Martin M. Jacobson. Romantic Circles: Electronic Editions, October 1998, accessed March 30, 2019, http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/lel/keepsake.htm.

field." The intensely private response that Zilara's singing draws from Nadira recalls nineteenth-century readers' similarly affective reactions to sentimental poetry. Andrew Stauffer has recently demonstrated that evidence of personal, appropriative reading practices survive in annotated nineteenth-century books—and at least one nineteenth-century reader, as Jerome McGann has noted, annotated a copy of this very poem.[190] Like her real counterparts, the fictional Nadira invests a nonspecific lyric of lament with her own particular sorrow:

Zilara's song

Beguiled the fair Sultana's hours,

[…]

'Twas as till then she had not known

How much hear heart had for its own,

And Murad's image seemed more dear,

These higher chords of feeling strung;

And love shone brighter for the shade

That others' sorrows round it flung.

Zilara's singing affords immediate consolation—its commonplace plaintiveness invites Nadira to reflect privately on her own heartache, to modulate it with "others' sorrows."

Sentimental poetry advances the plot of the frame narrative by drawing Nadira out of an initial impenetrable despair. But remarkably, the performance of Zilara's first sentimental song is figured as the printed repetition of a text already overheard. Zilara's "melody" precedes the

[190] See Stauffer, "An Image in Lava," 81-98; and see also Stauffer's crowd-sourced web project *Book Traces* http://www.booktraces.org/. For McGann's annotated "Zenana," see *The Poetics of Sensibility*, 137-138.

appearance of Zilara herself—she drifts into "The Zenana" mid-song, rousing a despondent Nadira who until then could "not raise her brow":

> Yet stay—some spell hath caught her now:
> That melody has touched her heart.
> Oh, triumph of Zilara's art;
> She listens to the mournful strain
> And bids her sing that song again.

Beneath these lines the word "Song" appears in small capitals (a perpetually useful generic title), followed by the text of Zilara's (repeat) performance. To "sing that song again" fairly defines Zilara's role in the world of this poem, where she serves to entertain Nadira and to embody Landon's poetics of reuse. That Zilara's methods are also Landon's becomes clear following the conclusion of another song, "The Raki," which leaves Zilara's listeners spellbound in "deep silence,"

> When lo, another plaintive sound,
> Came from the river's side, and there
> They saw a girl with loosened hair
> Seat her beneath a peepul tree
> Where swung her gurrah mournfully,
> Filled with the cool and limpid wave,
> An offering o'er some dear one's grave.
> At once Zilara caught the tone,
> And made it, as she sung, her own.

Again, in the subtitled "Song" that follows, the printed text repeats an already-overheard lyric. Zilara appropriates the girl's "plaintive" song and redeploys it, making it new through "her own" singing. Correspondingly "The Zenana"—a poem in and *of* a literary annual—reworks others' texts into Landon's "own" frame. Its narrative recontextualizes recycled landscape prints, footnotes copied verbatim from other writers, and mini narrative poems (voiced by Zilara) that rework some of Landon's previous *Scrap Book* writings.

Most extraordinarily, Zilara seems to have "caught the tone" of this "Song" from none other than Letitia Landon herself. The "Song" beginning "Oh weep not o'er the quiet grave" derives from a *Literary Gazette* poem titled "The Churchyard" that Landon had published four and half years earlier.[191] As we might expect, "The Churchyard" begins in a cemetery. Though the speaker initially laments a friend lost "too soon," the poem dramatizes her shifting perspective on death: "'tis best to die/ Ere all of life save breath is fled," she eventually reasons. Instead of weeping for the dead, we should mourn those "who loathe to live, yet fear to die." The same phrase concludes Zilara's "Song," which draws twenty of its twenty-four lines from the second half of "The Churchyard," recombining the original quatrains into novel eight-line stanzas. Four new lines introduce Zilara's remixed "Churchyard" to the world of "The Zenana." They offer solace to the "girl with loosened hair"—they offer solace likewise to any mourning reader:

> Oh weep not o'er the quiet grave,
>
> Although the spirit lost be near;
>
> Weep not, for well those phantoms know

[191] "The Churchyard" first appeared in the *Literary Gazette* no. 624 (Jan 1829): 11-12. It was reprinted in eight-line stanzas as one of the "Fugitive Pieces" in *The Vow of the Peacock, and Other Poems* (1835).

How vain the grief above their bier.

By narrativizing the conditions under which Zilara's "Song" is produced, Landon models the act of sentimental response her poems characteristically encourage. The poem also self-consciously acknowledges its reworking of given materials and simultaneously insists that creative adaptation constitutes artistic practice. Zilara makes the overheard lament "as she [sings], her own"—and Landon crafts a new poem out of an old. Ultimately "The Zenana" enacts Landon's poetics of reuse: it insists that to read and write sentimentally is also to remake, to "sing that song again" with a difference.

III.

The poem titled "Different Thoughts; Suggested by a Picture by G. S. Newton, No. 16, in the British Gallery, and representing a Girl looking at her Lover's Miniature" declares its allegiances in an epigraph that might serve as key to the whole of Landon's oeuvre: "Which is the truest reading of thy look?" This provocative question (to which we will return) is succeeded by the "different thoughts" that the Girl in Gilbert Stuart Newton's *Girl at Her Devotions* might be directing towards the miniature she holds. Three dramatic monologues composed in three different verse forms present three different possibilities. In the first, the girl wishes for the return of her faithful but absent "Olave"; in the second, she excoriates a "cold, false hearted" lover; in the third, she laments a "forbidden" love and consigns the miniature "to the red flames" as "a sacrifice/ On which I swear forgetfulness!" Thin hairlines separate one "thought" from another in the original printing. Running to 129 lines, the text required two thirds of the page in the *Literary Gazette* where it appeared on March 22, 1823, in the column for "Original Poetry." One of a series titled *Poetical Catalogue of Pictures* ("to be continued occasionally"), "Different

Thoughts" brings into focus some of the questions that animated Landon's earliest writing and informed her career-long experimentation in mass-mediated poetics.

In a recent essay, Michelle Martinez rightly points out that Landon's important work in the *Literary Gazette* is not well enough known. Situating the *Poetical Catalogue of Pictures* within the context of the *Literary Gazette*, which also featured a "Fine Arts" column (adjacent to "Original Poetry"), Martinez shows that Landon's poems participate in "public art discourse" as they "versify different aspects of art writing in this period, particularly the exhibition catalogue entry and the generalist art review."[192] It is likely that Landon wrote copy for the "Fine Arts" column herself after Jerdan engaged her as a regular contributor to the magazine in the early 1820s. If so, she had composed the very reviews of exhibitions and gallery openings that shared page space with the magazine's "Original Poetry" column. In any case, we know Landon regularly perused the "Fine Arts" column because her "Original Poetry" contributions occasionally refer to arts items described in *Literary Gazette* back issues. "The hint for this series of Poems," begins the prefatory note to Landon's *Medallion Wafers* series, "has been taken from the account of the Medallion Wafers in the Literary Gazette."[193] Earlier that month, the "Fine Arts" column had reviewed these "exceedingly beautiful" sealing wafers, and suggested that they were "as fit for love-letters as any thing that could be imagined."[194] In her prefatory note, Landon clarifies that she has imaginatively repurposed these wafers by "devot[ing]" them to verse, "*on the supposition* that they have been employed as seals to lovers' correspondence" (my emphasis). The twelve-poem *Medallion Wafers* series appeared between 25 January and 1 March, 1823.

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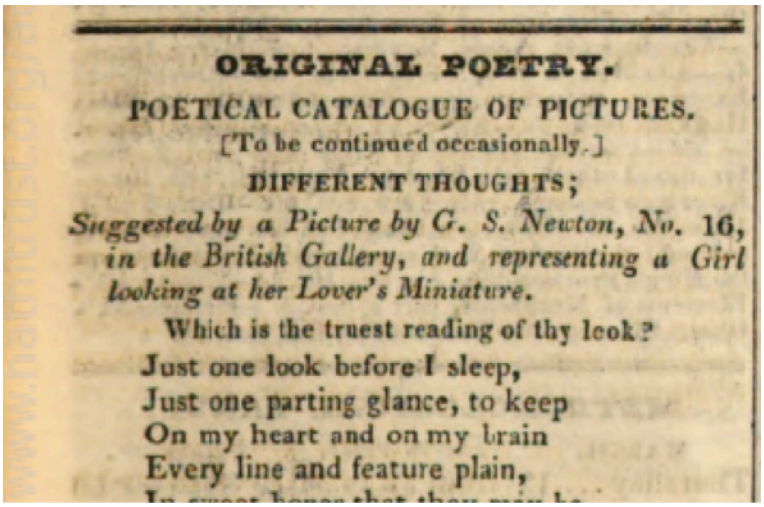
[192] Martinez, "Creating an Audience for a British School: L.E.L.'s *Poetical Catalogue of Pictures in The Literary Gazette*," *Victorian Poetry* 52 no. 1 (Spring 2014): 42.
[193] Landon, "Medallion Wafers," *Literary Gazette* 314 (25 Jan 1823): 60.
[194] "Medallion Wafers," *Literary Gazette* 311 (4 Jan 1823): 12.

One week later, the "Original Poetry" column featured the first installment of the *Poetical Catalogue of Pictures*.

Elizabeth Prettejohn writes that "[generalist art] criticism of the early Victorian period 'educated' its readers to respond emotionally to the picture's narrative and moral implications, not to evaluate its visual or formal qualities."[195] Whether Landon's "versified… generalist art reviews" could be said to deal in *moral* truths seems doubtful, but her poems do engage emotionally with the pictures they address. Martinez reads Landon's "Different Thoughts" as a progression, in which "each [of the three monologues] builds up to the female speaker's vehement rejection of the romantic sentiment implied by Newton's painting" (52). For Martinez, one self-identical "female speaker" voices all three monologues, and "the burning of the miniature […] suggests the female speaker's triumph over the tormenting male portrait" (54). To interpret the poem in this way, however, requires a complete dismissal of the epigraph, which might be the most important line in the whole poem (figure 11).



ORIGINAL POETRY.

POETICAL CATALOGUE OF PICTURES.

[To be continued occasionally.]

DIFFERENT THOUGHTS;

Suggested by a Picture by G. S. Newton, No. 16, in the British Gallery, and representing a Girl looking at her Lover's Miniature.

Which is the truest reading of thy look?
Just one look before I sleep,
Just one parting glance, to keep
On my heart and on my brain
Every line and feature plain,

Figure 11. Detail from "Different Thoughts" in *The Literary Gazette* 322 (March 1823): 189.

"Which is the truest reading of thy look?" This querying epigraph invites queries in turn. If we suppose that the girl in Newton's painting voices the monologues, then who poses this prefatory question? And to whom (or what) is the question addressed? To Newton's painting? In

[195] Prettejohn, "Aesthetic Value and the Professionalization of Victorian Art Criticism 1837–78," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2 no. 1 (1997): 83.

that case "thy look" might refer to the painting's appearance, or its "message." But the repetition of "look" in the poem's first line ("Just one look before I sleep") suggests a different possibility: that "thy look" means the girl's act of looking, her gaze directed at the painting within the painting. So perhaps the girl poses the question after all, addressing it to the miniature. Which of her "readings" of his painted aspect is "truest"? Nearly every word in the epigraph points in several contradictory directions: "which," "truest," and "reading" all need explication. "Readings" of the epigraph itself multiply exponentially the longer we examine it.

Literary annual poems written "after" pictures would eventually be condemned as secondary and unoriginal productions. But "Different Thoughts" argues that framing an image with interpretive text is a generative rather than a derivative move. The "truest reading" of a painting (or a text, for that matter) is the iteration of its many possible and ultimately subjective "meanings." As Martinez observes, Newton's picture "enjoyed a commercial afterlife in England and America" following its exhibition at the British Institution in 1823 (52). Its appeal may be witnessed by the many print reproductions and textual commentaries it accrued throughout the 1830s and 40s.[196] Though we cannot know how many readers responded privately to the sentimental rhetoric of "Different Thoughts," the poem received at least one remarkable reply in print. In October 1826, more than three years after "Different Thoughts" appeared in the *Literary Gazette*, a poem titled "Answer of 'A Girl at Her Devotions,' to L.E.L.'s Three Poems, With the Motto, 'Which is the truest reading of thy look?'" was printed in *The Literary Magnet*. Its opening couplet sums up its "Answer": "Lady, that sweet eye of thine/ Has not truly read in mine." Rebutting the theories advanced in each of Landon's monologues, the "Answer" offers a fourth alternative. The girl's devotions belong to a man far above her station, whom she

[196] See Martinez, "Creating an Audience for a British School," 52-55.

worships nonetheless: "He I love is like a star—/ I may trace his path from far,/[…] But I cannot reach his height" (9-10, 12). It is worth noting that Landon's "Motto," while incorporated into the title of the anonymous respondent's poem, is in fact printed on its own line in reduced type, where it replicates the placement of Landon's epigraph in the original *Literary Gazette* publication. The recycled "Motto" frames this latest "reading" as one among many, and suggests that the "Answer" to the question posed by Landon's provocative epigraph is indeed "different thoughts."

IV.

Some time in 1836, Landon agreed to compose a number of verses for the *Pictorial Album; Or, Cabinet of Paintings for 1837*. This volume featured colored prints manufactured via the Baxter process, which combined relief and intaglio methods: a key plate established the outline and shading of the picture to which relief blocks added any number of oil colors.[197] The *Pictorial Album* was expressly designed to showcase printmaker George Baxter's newly patented technique. Its eleven prints were made after popular contemporary paintings by, among others, Eliza Sharpe, Louisa Seyffarth, Fanny Corbaux, Samuel Prout, Henry William Pickersgill, and Richard and William Westall. The title page vignette depicts a man bending over a woman in a field (figure 12).

[197] For more on George Baxter's printmaking, see C. T. Courtney Lewis, *The Picture Printer of the Nineteenth Century: George Baxter, 1804-1867* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1911) 43-65.

Figure 12. Title page vignette from *The Pictorial Album; Or, Cabinet of Paintings* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1837). Courtesy Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections, University of Virginia Library

He holds an armful of wheat while she appears to be binding a sheaf. Landon's poetic illustration for this image, the first poem in the volume, is titled "Burns and His Highland Mary." Though the poem opens by acknowledging the harvest setting ("The reapers are upon the plain") it soon turns to the secret lives of the pair in the print, the "two […] knelt a little way apart." Reflective rather than descriptive, the poem moves through a series of Landon's typical themes—it details the beauty of first love, the poet's responsibility to society, and finally the difficulties and disappointments that inevitably accompany a famous poetic life. The final stanza suggests that "chronicle[s]" of poets' lives all tell the same story:

> And he who gave the scene its spell,
> What was in after life his doom?

The poet's usual chronicle,

The weary life—the welcome tomb. (69-72)

"The weary life" of the poet was one of Landon's favorite topics: she subjected it to dozens of variations, illustrating poets both male and female, ancient and modern, historical and imaginary. All of her poets *feel* too deeply to ever be happy. They are instead weary, pained, misunderstood—and therefore capable of writing good poetry.

In her 1835 essay "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings," Landon insists that the most affecting poetry always originates in strong feeling:

> I believe that no poet ever made his readers feel unless he had himself felt. The many touching poems which most memories keep as favorites originated in some strong personal sensation. I do not mean to say that the fact is set down, but if any feeling is marked in the writing, that feeling has been keenly and painfully experienced.[198]

We see in "Burns and his Highland Mary," however, that the poet's gift for turning such feeling into successful art is also a curse:

> It is a glorious thing to be
> A poet—loved, and yet alone;
> To dream of immortality;
> To wake, and find it is your own.
>
> To know that to the sorrowing heart
> Your words are language and relief;
> Of hope, of joy, or triumph part—

[198] Landon, "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings," *New Monthly Magazine* 44 (1835): 426.

The breath of love—the wail of grief.

Oh! mockery,—the poet's name
Is dearly bought, by wretched years:
He finds the golden haze of fame
An April sunshine, made of tears. (61-72)

To be a poet is to be "loved, and yet alone"—it is "to know that to the sorrowing heart/ Your words are language and relief" but also to receive no fellow feeling in return from an anonymous public.

Landon may have found the story of Robert Burns and Mary Campbell compelling because the relationship was supposed to have had a profound emotional impact on the young Burns: the editor of the first edition of Burns's posthumous works (published 1800) had suggested that "the impression left on the mind of Burns [by the affair] seems to have been deep and lasting."[199] However, Landon's poem elaborating this "source of strong personal sensation" in Burns's life is less an ekphrastic illustration of the print in the *Pictorial Album* than it is a variation upon another of her own poems, published six years earlier in the *Literary Souvenir* for 1831. "Burns and His Highland Mary" re-posits and expands upon themes already at play in the earlier "*Robert* Burns and His Highland Mary" (my emphasis). But the most remarkable fact about this constellation of works is that the print in the *Pictorial Album* does not depict Burns and Mary at all—that is, not until Landon writes her poem. In fact, Baxter's print reproduces a detail from *Reapers*, a painting by Richard Westall, which had been displayed as item number 335 in the Royal Academy exhibition of 1798. Westall's painting was reproduced in full by

[199] James Currie, ed., *The Works of Robert Burns*, 2nd edn vol. 1 (Liverpool, 1800), 128.

various printmakers working in the early nineteenth century, including Daniel Wright Kellogg & Co. (who incidentally chose to retitle it *The Harvesters*, presumably to accommodate their American consumers) (figure 13).

Figure 13. *The Harvesters*. Lithograph. n.d. Printed and published by D.W. Kellogg & Co., after Richard Westall. Courtesy Smith College Museum of Art

As we can see, George Baxter excerpts the two figures in the foreground of Westall's painting for his title page vignette print. Removed from the company of their fellow reapers, the couple's private interaction is rendered somehow both more and less intimate (figure 14).

Figure 14. Details from *The Harvesters* (L) and *The Pictorial Album* title page vignette (R)

However, the subject of Baxter's picture in the *Pictorial Album* is finally determined not by the craftsmanship or original intention of either visual artist, but rather by the framing media of the illustrated book—and by the *poet's* decision. Currently catalogued in research libraries and museums by the title of its corresponding poem, Baxter's print after Westall has in fact become a picture of "Burns and His Highland Mary."[200]

The example of Burns and Mary is noteworthy because it suggests that during this period visual artists as well as poets practiced the art of selective excerpting. Contemporary print culture was certainly hospitable to Landon's repurposing of visual materials. By way of illustration, consider two separate letters Landon sent to Frederic Shoberl, editor of the *Forget Me Not*, concerning the prints she had been tasked with illustrating for the season's annual. In both letters, she requests that the titles of prints assigned to her be altered to suit a desired (invented) subject. "Dear Sir," she writes, in 1835, "If the same to you—I infinitely prefer the title of the

[200] See, for example, catalogue entries from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/432017), the Victoria and Albert Museum (http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O744270/burns-and-his-highland-mary-print-baxter-george/), the Victoria University Library and Archive (https://digitalcollections.vicu.utoronto.ca/RS/pages/view.php?ref=8507&k=).

Confession. I think I could far better manage Father and Daughter than Man & Wife. Jealousy is disagreeable to manage."[201] Shoberl received a similar proposal again in 1836: "I would call the print 'The dream of the Sleeping Beauty.' *This changes it completely*—and I think a very fanciful and graceful poem may be founded on the charming old fairy tale—you shall have it almost at once" (my emphasis).[202] Landon's poems "The Confession" and "The Sleeping Beauty"—together with the prints those titles reframe—appeared in *The Forget Me Not* for 1836 and 1837, respectively. She knew full well that the interpretation of artworks both visual and verbal depended substantially upon their printed contexts and paratexts.

Figure 15. *Robert Burns and His Highland Mary* in *The Literary Souvenir* for 1831 (1832) Courtesy HathiTrust

In the *Pictorial Album*, Landon makes the most of a convenient opportunity: Baxter's image is a sentimental excerpt of a larger print, and encourages any number of readings. We might compare it to the extracts printed in anthologies like *The Beauties of the British Poets* or *Lyrical Gems*, in which short pieces from longer poetical works often appear under new lyrical names. But as I suggested above, Landon may have had other motives for turning Baxter's print into a depiction

[201] Landon to Frederic Shoberl, *Letters*, 136.
[202] Landon to Shoberl, *Letters*, 142.

of Burns and Mary. Her previously published poem on the same subject accompanies a *verifiable* Burns and Mary, engraved by J. T. Mitchell after a painting by Robert Edmonstone (figure 15). Both poems turn the "Burns and Mary" relationship into an occasion for reflecting on first loves, the poet's social function, and the special difficulties of poetic vocation. But Landon does not simply *reprint* her first poem on Burns and Mary in the *Pictorial Album*—we cannot accuse her of laziness or even of economy, though she was always working under the pressure of numerous deadlines. Instead of simply copying her old poem into a new book, she reworks the matter entirely. Consider the final stanzas of each:

in *The Literary Souvenir* for 1831	in *The Pictorial Album* for 1837
A spirit from that hour was shed,	And he who gave the scene its spell,
His spell of song to be;	What was in after life his doom?
And if in other hearts he read,	The poet's usual chronicle,
His own heart was the key!	The weary life—the welcome tomb.

The stanzas both address Burns's spell-casting powers and Mary's apparent influence upon them. Both poems also point forward from the pictured moment, but while one looks to the "spell of song to be," the other envisions "the welcome tomb."

Landon regularly reworked her own texts, a feature of her practice that she learned by cutting her poetic teeth on media that perpetually upcycled old materials. "Mrs. Hemans," printed in *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1838, and also only apparently composed to accompany a literary annual engraving, in fact expands upon and modifies Landon's 1835 "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans" from the *New Monthly Magazine*. "Juliet After the Masquerade" is the title Landon gave to two different poems written "on" the subject of Henry Thompson's painting by the same name. The first poem, in heroic couplets, appeared in *The*

Troubadour in 1825, but two years later Landon was commissioned by the editor of the *Literary Souvenir* to write a poem for an engraving after the same painting. Rather than simply reprinting the 1825 poem, she completely overhauled it, rendering her subject anew into numbered quatrains of vaguely iambic trimeter. Landon was also interested in the obverse of this practice, changing the *title* of a text without altering much else. A poem titled "Lines on Seeing a Portrait of Keats" can also be printed under the name "Antinous" because, as Landon saw clearly, the "meaning" of any work of art depends upon its contextualizing frame(s).

V.

Midway through Landon's 1824 poem "The Improvisatrice," the eponymous protagonist unexpectedly meets Lorenzo—the distant object of her affection—in an alcove full of statues:

I turned me from the crowd, and reached
A spot which seemed unsought by all—
An alcove filled with shrubs and flowers,
But lighted by the distant hall,
With one or two fair statues placed,
Like deities of the sweet shrine.
That human art should ever frame
Such shapes so utterly divine!
A deep sigh breathed,—I knew the tone;
My cheek blushed warm, my heart beat high;—
One moment more I too was known,
—I shrank before Lorenzo's eye.

He leant beside a pedestal.
The glorious brow, of Parian stone,
Of the Antinous, by his side,
Was not more noble than his own!
They were alike: he had the same
Thick-clustering curls the Roman wore—
The fixed and melancholy eye—
The smile which passed like lightning o'er
The curved lip. We did not speak …

Many critics have observed that in this moment the improvisatrice, so often the recipient of others' gazes, turns her gaze back on her male observer: she objectifies Lorenzo by comparing him to a work of art. But the awkwardness of Landon's style in the above passage suggests that this exchange signifies more than just a "competition of the gaze."[203] The conflation of the fictional (living) Lorenzo with the fictional (artificial) Antinous underscores a question central to Landon's poetic practice: what happens to representational art when it is remediated in print?

Landon's characteristic move, to delay the subject of a sentence (or a description), contributes substantially to the confusion of this passage. We read at line 925 that there are "one or two fair statues placed" in the alcove. But which is it? Failing to distinguish ten from a dozen statues might be reasonable, but it is surely strange to confuse one and two. As the poem will eventually suggest, the second statue *is* Lorenzo, but Landon delays his arrival for dramatic

[203] Harriet Linkin finds that in this "competition [of the gaze] neither party wins," and the improvisatrice ultimately suffers a loss of identity: "all that is left to the silenced improvisatrice" at the end of her career "is her image, which she self-reflexively paints on a canvas she hopes will attract [Lorenzo's] gaze." Linkin, "Romantic Aesthetics in Mary Tighe and Letitia Landon: How Women Poets Recuperate the Gaze," *European Romantic Review* 7 no. 2 (1997): 175-176.

effect. The result of this delay is the bizarre phrase, "a deep sigh breathed." The poem here obscures the human subject, deferring his printed appearance for the space of three lines while the improvisatrice's body reacts to her would-be lover's presence—a presence only she can sense.

When Lorenzo is finally named in print, the improvisatrice offers a straightforward description: "He leant beside a pedestal." But the next line, which begins a new sentence, once again throws up some ambiguity: because Lorenzo, leaning, is the object of the poem's attention at line 933, "the glorious brow, of Parian stone" seems to be Lorenzo's brow. "The Antinous, by his side," however, identifies a new subject. Of course this confusion is the whole point of the comparison. The independent clause "they were alike" followed by a colon seems to indicate that a catalogue of similarities between Lorenzo and "the Antinous" will follow: both have "the same thick-clustering curls," the same "fixed and melancholy eye," the same "smile which passed like lightning o'er/ the curved lip." The list becomes stranger as it goes on. How does a smile pass like lightning over a *statue's* lip? Does the observation apply only to Lorenzo? Are both statue and Lorenzo smiling? Or does the comparison begin and end with the single item "thick clustering curls"? We might note here that stylized curls feature characteristically in statuary depictions of the first-century Antinous, lover of the Roman emperor Hadrian.[204] Aptly the phrase "clustering curls" is a favorite cliché of Landon's. Near the poem's conclusion, a painting of the improvisatrice features "curls/ Clustered beneath a laurel braid." The phrase can describe

[204] According to Caroline Vout, sculptures of Antinous are (and have long been) identified according to a "lock-scheme," whereby "any ancient sculpture which boasts […] key locks on the temple and forehead and longer hair at the back, or a limited variation on these […] qualifies to be classified as Antinous"; Vout, "Antinous, Archaeology, and History," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 95 (2005): 85. Vout observes elsewhere that "more portrait-sculptures of Antinous survive than of any other figure from classical antiquity"; Vout, *Power and Eroticism in Imperial Rome* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53.

both an artistic representation of the improvisatrice and the art-objects of her gaze because all of these figures are equally fictitious, constructed from the common idioms of poetic language.

Landon's treatment of art in this poem troubles the scene of artistic representation and comparison (and thereby draws attention to itself as an aesthetic object). How many statues are in the room, and why can't that number be determined? Is Lorenzo's hair ultra-stylized after the manner of Greek statuary tradition, or is Antinous a statue with supernaturally human-like expression? The poem enacts at the syntactic and semantic levels the difficulty of determining whether "Lorenzo" is separate from "Antinous": the pronoun "he" functions equally well for the poetic depiction of a man, and for the poetic depiction of a statuary representation of a man. The whole situation is elaborated further in two other poems, titled "Lines on Seeing a Portrait of Keats," and—inevitably perhaps—"Antinous."

In late December 2016, the NASSR listserv engaged in a debate about Landon's poem "Lines On Seeing a Portrait of Keats." The conversation began with a question: which portrait of Keats could Landon have been thinking about—which portrait could she have *seen*—when she composed her poem in 1822?[205] Members of the list suggested a few possibilities, basing their conjectures on the poem's description of the portrait. The original question was: "Are [Keats's curls] too blonde as Severn depicts them" for the 1819 Severn miniature to be the right portrait? In response, Grant Scott suggested that 1822 was probably too early in Keats's reception history for Landon to have seen any of the then extant portraits. Instead, he proposed, we might understand Landon's poem to be what John Hollander has called "notional ekphrasis," the

[205] The discussion begins with Carmen Mathes to NASSR-L (electronic mailing list), December 19, 2016, LEL: 'Lines on Seeing a Portrait of Keats' ... which portrait?, http://listserv.wvu.edu/archives/nassr-l.html. For the composition history of "Lines on Seeing a Portrait of Keats," see Sypher, *Critical Writings by Letitia Landon* (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1996) 182-4.

"verbal representation of a purely fictional work of art."[206] Scott further pointed out that even basic attention to the poem's language reveals multiple discrepancies between any portrait Landon could have seen and the manner in which she describes it: "Keats's curls in Severn's miniature are a beautiful auburn, not 'dark,' and there are no real curls in Hilton's later copy. In neither does the hair 'hang'o'er' the forehead. Neither portrait reveals a smile or 'thoughts dark and terrible,' etc., etc." While he admits it is possible someone might have described a portrait of Keats to Landon, Scott notes that "the key evidence lies in the poem itself, which offers a highly generalized and romanticized description of Keats."[207]

This NASSR thread was initiated in pursuit not of Landon's writing but of Keats, and his reception history. I do not mean to suggest that Landon's reception of Keats is not valuable. Of course it is—particularly because Landon read Keats sympathetically, and because the Keats poem appears in *The Examiner* on September 12, 1824, just a few months after the immensely successful publication of Landon's *The Improvisatrice and Other Poems*, which helped launch her very successful, very public career. (The Keats poem was signed: "By the author of *L'Improvisatrice*.") But before we can make any observations about what Landon's poem means for *Keats*, we need to come to terms with her poetic methodology. We might begin by reading "the poem[s] [themselves]," per Grant Scott's shrewd advice.

The remediation of representational art in late Romantic print culture is Landon's greatest subject. As we have seen, Landon disavows any intention to write genuinely ekphrastic poems for the *Scrap Book* prints she illustrated. But even when Landon writes poems "on" pictures she

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[206] See Hollander, *The Gazer's Spirit: Poems Speaking to Silent Works of Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4.
[207] Susan Wolfson to NASSR-L (electronic mailing list), (forward of Grant Scott to Susan Wolfson and Carmen Mathes) Re: LEL and Keats's Legacy, http://listserv.wvu.edu/archives/nassr-l.html.

chooses herself, as in the *Poetical Catalogue of Pictures* in the *Literary Gazette*, or the *Poetical Sketches of Modern Pictures* in *The Troubadour*, she very rarely adheres to what she calls "mere description." One of her favorite moves is to draw attention to the fact that such poems are works of poetic artifice "about" other works of artifice—as McGann has suggested, the work "self-consciously exploits its own factitiousness."[208]

Given this tendency in Landon's art poems, it becomes almost irrelevant for our reading of the poem "Lines on Seeing a Portrait of Keats," to ask *of it* some evidence about which portrait it is supposed to depict. Landon may have seen (or heard described) a portrait of Keats, or she may not have, but either way her poem probably cannot tell us anything about what that portrait looked like. That is, had this poem been written much later, when Landon could easily have seen the Severn portrait, for example, it would be no more surprising to find her writing on Keats's "dark curls" or "smile" or "thoughts dark and terrible" than it is to read those lines in this early composition.

The poem "Antinous" lends clarity to the situation. It was first published in *The Literary Gazette* in May of 1824, so it appeared in print before either "Lines on Seeing a Portrait of Keats" or *The Improvisatrice* volume, although Landon was probably sending the latter to press at around the same time. "Antinous," however, is obviously a reworking of the poem on Keats. A relatively few number of revisions differentiate the two, most of these coming towards the poems' conclusions (see appendix for the full texts of these poems). "Antinous" effectively travesties the idea that any representational work of art "means" only one thing—even when we all agree on what that thing is.[209] In the first fifteen lines, five words distinguish the description

[208] McGann, *Poetics of Sensibility*, 169.
[209] James Heffernan has recently noted that "semiotic theory has not yet […] solved what might be called the enigma of recognition […] Recognition, in short, has yet to be banished from the

of "Antinous" from the description of "Keats," and arguably only one of those words changes what we might call the "meanings" of the poems. Antinous has "thick" curls rather than "dark" curls, which makes revisionary sense if Antinous is a statue whereas Keats is a painting. But this single instance of difference is overwhelmed by the unrelenting sameness of the lines generally. For Landon, this poem applies just as well to an artistic depiction of Keats as to an artistic depiction of Antinous. The poems address a painting and a statue, not the people they represent. Insomuch as both subjects are works of art, they are in important ways identical.

But the poems also offer biographical details about the persons represented in these works of art. This layer of specificity only serves to underscore the unsettling similarity between the two poems otherwise. We might find that "the doom/ That hangs on thy young life" at line 5 works almost as well, biographically speaking, for Antinous as for Keats: Antinous died young, by murder, accident, or possibly as a sacrifice. But consider the following, from "Antinous":

> Ardent hopes were thine,
>
> And dreams of victories and high renown,
>
> Ere health departed; and on thy wan lip
>
> And hope-forsaken cheek a spirit burns,
>
> Which will not wholly pass till in the grave. (15-19)

---

experience of art, has yet to be subsumed by any theory that would simply equate the viewing of a picture with the decoding of signs. What [W. J. T.] Mitchell wrote over twenty years ago remains true today: in an age of 'all-pervasive image-making, we still do not know exactly what pictures are, *what their relation to language is*, how they operate on observers and on the world, and what is to be done with or about them'"; Heffernan, "Reading Pictures," *PMLA* 134 no. 1 (2019): 23-24. Heffernan cites W. J. T. Mitchell from *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 13.

At this point the original painting-poem begins to show fairly aggressively through the overwriting of its marble façade.[210] In the first place, biographical accounts of Antinous's life emphasize his robust health. More pressingly, what does a "wan lip" look like on a marble statue? The spirit that "burns" on the "hope-forsaken" cheek also relies on painterly vocabulary. The poem is notably *not* titled "*Lines on a Bust of* Antinous"; however, its conclusion forecloses any other possibility. The speaker views Antinous in the company of a host of other statues, "kings, heroes, gods,/ Bright queens and nymphs in radiant loveliness." Among all these, the viewer's eye "turns" to Antinous, who possesses a special affective power: "We look on those [kings, queens, nymphs] with wonder and delight—/ We look on thee, and weep!" "I weep for Adonais—he is dead!"—so begins a much more famous elegy on Keats.

We might consider Landon's practice here to be "anti-ekphrastic," because it does not pretend to describe a real or imagined work of art. The poem employs a useful set of tropes, clichés, and commonplaces rather than detailed, vivid description. If we return to the selection from "The Improvisatrice" with which we began, we see Landon frames the Lorenzo/Antinous scene in the same formulaic terms that describe Keats/Antinous: all four figures possess the glorious brow; the clustering curls; the melancholy expression. In one respect Landon's self-quotations strip the poetry of its representational capacity, and "Keats," "Antinous," and "Lorenzo" all become names for "art in the age of industrial print." All three are copied from a single matrix. But this networked collection of poems is equally an experiment in sentimental

[210] I pause here only to note that Landon's "faked" Antinous is in good company. According to Vout, "several of our most famous images of Antinous, including those admired by Winckelmann, came to light in the eighteenth century. There is a possibility that some were new Antinouses to meet collectors' needs. By 'new' I do not just mean those that were made in the artist's studio and sold as antique but also ancient marbles amended to enhance their market value. Often this process involved *re-creating their identity*" (my emphasis); Vout, *Power and Eroticism in Imperial Rome*, 89.

logic. “Thine influence is upon the heart,” the (same?) speaker declares to both the portrait of Keats and its marble analogue. The Keats poem frames its visual subject in Keatsian terms (as “a thing of beauty” and “a joy forever”): the portrait makes us “think […] Of a bright harp, whose chords for aye are mute,/ But whose rich breathings are remembered still;/ Whose tone can never be forgotten” (30, 33-35). The copy of the copy, on the other hand, is what makes us “weep.” Correspondent to the genius Keats only in terms of his early death, the sculpted Antinous offers a more affecting because more generic figure for sentimental reading. His is the “youth and beauty” belonging to every son and brother lost too soon.

Ironically, Keats and Landon have arrived at reversed critical situations now, nearly 200 years after Landon wrote “Lines on Seeing a Portrait of Keats.” Keats’s canonical reputation is firmly secured, whereas Landon, once so celebrated, remains peripheral. There was a time when Keats was just as marginalized as Landon remains today: his present happy position “among the English Poets” owes much to those who took his poetry seriously after his death. We might do the same for “L.E.L.”

"The Farewell"
***Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* for 1839 (1838)**

I DARE not look upon that face,
My bark is in the bay,
Too much already its soft grace
Has won from me delay.
A few short hours, and I must gaze
On those sad eyes no more,
A dream will seem the pleasant days
Past on this lonely shore.

I love thee not—my heart has cast
Its inward life away;
The many memories of the past
Leave little for to-day.
Thou art to me a thing apart
From passion, hope, or fear;
Yet 'tis a pleasure to my heart
To know thou art so dear.

It shows me I have something left
Of what youth used to be;
The spirit is not quite bereft
That dreams of one like thee.
I know there is another hour,
When I have left this isle,
When there will be but little power
In thy forgotten smile.

When other eyes may fling their gleams
Above my purple wine;
But little shall I heed the dreams
I once could read in thine.
Yet not the less soft—gentle—kind—
Thy presence has renewed
What long I thought was left behind,
Youth's glad but softened mood.

Thy heart it is untouched and pure—
I wish it not for mine;
Too feverish and insecure
Would be such world-worn shrine.
For thou dost need such quiet home

As might befit the dove,
Where green leaves droop, and soft winds come,
Where peace attends on love.

I doubt if I shall gaze again
Upon that tranquil brow;
I turn to yonder glittering main,
Impatient for my prow.
Battle and revel, feast and fight,
Spread o'er life's troubled sea:
Then where will be the calm delight
That here entranceth me?

When other names that are as sweet,
Perhaps have been more dear,
Shall make gay midnight moments fleet
Unlike the midnights here.
When they shall ask for pledge or song,
I shall not name thy name;
For other thoughts to them belong
Than at thy charming came.

Thy pensive influence only brought
The dreams of early years,
What childhood felt—what childhood thought—
Its tenderness—its tears!
Farewell! the wind sets from the shore,
The white foam lights the sea.
If Heaven one blessing have in store,
That blessing light on thee!

“Lines on Seeing a Portrait of Keats, by the Author of L’Improvisatrice”
***The Examiner*, 12 September 1824**

The dark curls cluster round thy graceful head,
And hang o'er thy pale forehead, where the mind
Her visible temple hath; upon thy lip
Is throned a rich and melancholy smile,
So sad, it seems prophetic of the doom
That hangs o'er thy young life, and thine eye wears
An inward look where outward things but pass
Unnoticed: thou dost hold communion with
Thoughts dark and terrible; a blight hangs o'er
The spring flowers of thy youth; the seeds of death
Are sown within thy bosom, and there is
Upon thee consciousness of fate. The light
That lingers on thy face is as a star,
The last remaining one, a shadowy beam
Of those which have been. Ardent hopes were thine,
Dreams of the laurel and of high renown,
Ere health departed; and on thy wan lip
And hope-forsaken cheek a spirit burns,
Which will not wholly pass till in the grave.
I looked upon thee, youthful minstrel! thou
Wert like the lovely presence of a dream;
Such shapes as come when, o'er the sleeper's brain,
The memory floats of some wild, saddening tale;
And he has slept, his inmost spirit filled
With sorrow's beautiful imaginings,
Or as th' Endymion of thine own sweet song.
I look'd upon thy open brow, and felt
Almost an interest like to life in thee;
Thine influence is upon the heart; thou can'st
Awaken such sweet sympathies, we think
Of youth, of genius, gathered like the rose
In the first blushing of its purple morn;
Of a bright harp, whose chords for aye are mute,
But whose rich breathings are remembered still;
Whose tone can never be forgotten.

“Antinous” (signed “L.E.L.”)
***The Literary Gazette* 382, 15 May 1824**

The thick curls cluster round thy graceful head,
And over thy pale forehead, where the mind
Her visible temple hath; upon thy lip
Is throned a rich yet melancholy smile—
So sad, it seems prophetic of the doom
That hangs on thy young life; and thine eye wears
An inward look, where outward things but pass
Unnoticed—thou dost hold communion with
Thoughts dark and terrible. A blight hangs o’er
The spring flowers of thy morn, the seeds of death
Are sown within thy bosom, and there is
Upon thee consciousness of fate. The light
That lingers on thy face is as a star—
The last remaining one—a shadowy beam
Of those which have been. Ardent hopes were thine,
And dreams of victories and high renown,
Ere health departed; and on thy wan lip
And hope-forsaken cheek a spirit burns,
Which will not wholly pass till in the grave.
I looked upon thee, young Antinous! thou
Wert like the lovely presence of a dream,
Such shapes as come, when o’er the sleeper’s brain
The memory floats of some wild maddening tale,
And he has slept, his inmost spirit filled
With sorrow’s beautiful imaginings.
How often have I gazed on thee, and felt
An interest almost like to life in thee!
Thine influence is upon the heart! around
Are many glorious forms—kings, heroes, gods,
Bright queens and nymphs radiant in loveliness—
Yet the eye turns to thee; for thou hast power
To awaken such sweet sympathies. We think
Of youth and beauty, gathered like the rose
On the first blushing of its purple morn;
We look on those with wonder and delight—
We look on thee, and weep!

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