

NINETEENTH-CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

Issue 18.1 (Spring 2022)

“One deep heart wrung!”: Felicia Hemans’s Affective Poetics in “The Indian City” and “Woman on the Field of Battle”

By [Joey S. Kim](#), University of Toledo

<1>Felicia Hemans’s poetry has largely been examined in terms of its self-questioning military critique and the effects of war on women (Cottingham 290). Comparatively little work has been done to interrogate the intersectional identities of Hemans’s female protagonists. As Tricia Lootens argues, Felicia Hemans’s reputation as exemplary “Poetess” did not reach an apex until the second-wave feminism of 1975 and the publication of Cora Kaplan’s *Salt and Bitter and Good: Three Centuries of English and American Women Poets*. Kaplan calls Hemans’s poetic feelings that of “the most genteel English wife” (93). As a white British woman, Hemans orients herself in what Lootens calls “the poet’s imagined transnational, multiracial, interfaith community of female suffering” (66). In two of Hemans’s most popular poetry collections, *Records of Woman* (1828) and *Songs of the Affections* (1830), Hemans describes her range of protagonists in varying private and public roles of individual heroism, rebellion, and resistance. In this essay, I turn to representative poems from each collection, “The Indian City” and “Woman on the Field of Battle,” arguing that Hemans builds feminist affinity between these protagonists through their overlapping subjectivity of affective power. I illustrate how Hemans’s affective poetics links individual and universal notions of womanhood through her ultimate valorization of “affection’s might” (“Woman on the Field of Battle”).

<2>By “affective,” I am placing Hemans’s work in the context of theories of moral sentiment by Anthony Ashley Cooper (Third Earl of Shaftesbury), hereafter Shaftesbury. Like Nancy Yousef’s work on Romantic philosophies of sympathy and

intimacy, I show how Hemans's poems can "illuminate tensions between perceptual uncertainty and affective confidence" (Yousef, "Wordsworth, Sentimentalism, and the Defiance of Sympathy" 205).⁽¹⁾ These tensions constitute the mobility of subjectivity that is a common attribute in Hemans's poems. By subjectivity, I refer to the quality of existing in the human mind and the feelings, thoughts, and identities that cohere in this imagined space.⁽²⁾ In linking "affection" to a range of ethnically and racially diverse heroines across both collections, Hemans moves between particular and general expressions of feminist affinities. These expressions forge Hemans's poetic representation of womanhood as an unfixed intersectional self of multiple identities and roles, including mother, martyr, patriot, and "Other."

<3>"The Indian City" is an Orientalist poem about motherhood, warfare, and the intersecting identity and gender roles of the protagonist, Maimuna.⁽³⁾ "Woman on the Field of Battle" is a symbolic poem that ponders an anonymous dead woman as an ideal model of battlefield prowess. To trace Hemans's bridging of individual and collective female identities across a politics of difference—how Hemans's womanhood is an oriented subjectivity of self-reflexive uncertainty—I begin with the particularity of Maimuna's Orientalist representation and then move to the nationless, unidentified "woman" in "Woman on the Field of Battle."⁽⁴⁾ After this comparative analysis, I place Hemans within the context of Shaftesbury's theories of affection to historically ground Hemans's use of "affection." Through this hitherto unmade connection between Hemans and eighteenth-century theories of emotion, I show how Hemans's poetics illuminate the affective intimacies of feminine poetic subjectivity. In doing so, I conclude that Hemans distances her poetry from clear national and racial borders and invokes affection as a binding force of transnational women's solidarity.

Hemans's "Woman" as Oriented Subjectivity

<4>Both *Records of Woman* and *Songs of the Affections* were published at a time of unwitting loss and autonomy in Hemans's life. Hemans, separated from her husband, was grieving the unexpected death of her mother in 1827 and eventually moved to Dublin in 1831 to be near her brother. *Records of Woman* was published at the height of her career and *Songs of the Affections*, published two years later, cemented her literary celebrity and poetic repertoire of "domestic affections." In these two collections, the trope of affection exists predominantly outside the domestic space and is unmoored from home, hearth, and the private sphere. Like her contemporaries Robert Southey, Lord Byron, and Percy Bysshe Shelley, Hemans's Orientalism in poems like "The Indian City," "The Wife of Asdrubal" (1819), "Moorish Bridal Song" (1825) and "Indian Woman's Death Song" (1828) veers between the dualisms

of East/West, past/present, commonplace/exotic. Rather than a scholarly Orientalism or one based on travel to the “East,” Hemans orients the subject in an aesthetics of representation that is bound by the self-created imaginary of the text. Thus, Hemans’ poems qualify Orientalism’s range of genres and purposes. For Hemans, the Orientalist imagination is a directional force of perception and creation with its coordinates inside the poet’s feeling mind. In addition to being a tool of exotic fantasy, world-making, and pleasure, Hemans’s poems also function as an ethical compass, reckoning the shared suffering of women across nations and borders.

<5>As a British woman without much travel experience, Hemans orients herself in transnational communities through themes of shared suffering, gender biases, maternity, martyrdom, and sisterhood. These themes presage the concerns of postcolonial feminist theorists, including Sara Ahmed, Chandra Mohanty, and Gayatri Spivak.(5) Sara Ahmed writes of the futurity of orientalism that results from its orientation of “towardness,” how “direct[ing] one’s gaze and attention toward the other, as an object of desire, is not indifferent, neutral, or casual: we can redescribe ‘towardness’ as energetic. In being directed toward others, one acts, or is committed to specific actions, which point toward the future” (120). This future orientation is what Benedict Anderson would call homogeneous, empty time, that which deconstructs the “imaginary distinctions between the West and Orient, but would also shape how bodies cohere, by facing the same direction” (Ahmed 120). Ahmed’s phenomenology of Orientalism produces a subjectivity that is interpellated by repeatedly being perceived by those “around” it—in this case, those who are not part of the “Orient,” such as Felicia Hemans. Ahmed’s tracking of the orientation of Orientalism is a qualification of Gayatri Spivak’s concept of the subaltern—any person who is somehow marginalized outside of the hegemonic institutions of a culture, specifically with the only route of recognition or representation being assimilation to the hegemony of Westernization. For Spivak, the subaltern cannot speak because of her non-subject status. Thus, it is the duty of both the “female intellectual” and more broadly, the postcolonial theorist, to reconstruct history from the viewpoint of the marginalized, as Hemans attempts in “The Indian City.” Hemans counterbalances her Orientalism in this poem with the common ground of feminist affection as the foundational trope of her poetic subjectivity.(6)

<6>Both *Records* and *Songs* offer critiques and idealisms of gendered concepts like sacrifice, motherhood, and affection. One of Hemans’s first published works, *England and Spain; or, Valour and Patriotism* (1808), is a nationalist call to action arguing for England to help Spain resist Napoleon’s invasion of their peninsula. Fascinated from a young age by stories of the Peninsular War, Hemans’s

upbringing in a military family propelled her to write both *Tales and Historic Scenes* (1819) and *Records of Woman*. While keeping with the themes of patriotism and transnational alliance, *Records of Woman* also functions as a network, albeit culturally homogeneous, of imagined poetic solidarity. Chandra Mohanty defines solidarity as “mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together” (7). Hemans’s imagined poetic solidarity in *Records* features nineteen poems with women protagonists from history and contemporary life, including Joan of Arc, Lady Arabella Stuart, Italian sculptress Properzia Rossi, an unnamed Native American woman, and Indian war leader, Maimuna.

<7>While this sisterhood is imaginary, it is progressive and diverse in its Romantic-era context. Compared to the other poems in *Records*, the Orientalist and affective intersection of “The Indian City” is a uniquely transgressive and successful feminist imaginary in that Maimuna leads her Muslim side to victory. Hemans usually writes in standard poetic meter, mainly iambs and ballad form. However, like Byron’s *Eastern Tales* and Sir Walter Scott’s long poems, “The Indian City” is written in atypically loose and irregular tetrameter, a type of formal transgression for Hemans that reflects Maimuna’s transgressive martyrdom. Through Maimuna’s complicated representation and the uncharacteristic tetrameter, Hemans yokes together form/content experimentation to pose a new type of intersectionality for individual and collective feminist solidarity.

<8>The poem is divided into three parts and written in third-person narration with rhythmic couplets; it describes the ruin of an unnamed Indian city as the result of grieving mother, Maimuna’s, incitement of religious war between Muslims and Hindus. Maimuna, who is Muslim, wants to avenge her innocent son’s death, and becomes a beacon of proud rebellion for the Muslim forces. While carrying her dead son through the Indian city, she vows not to weep until “‘yon city, in ruins rent, / Be piled for its victim's monument” (135-36). Once war is underway, however, and Maimuna’s story is spread throughout the city and beyond, Maimuna does not enjoy the fruits of revenge but rather, feels “[v]ain, bitter glory!—the gift of grief” and “[s]ickening she [turns] from her sad renown, / As a king in death might reject his crown” (179, 185-86). Ultimately, her Muslim side is victorious and destroys the city, but Maimuna, now a “martyr” for her cause, dies with a “broken heart” and wishes to be buried with her dead son (213, 214). The poem ends with a solemn description of the now seemingly abandoned city and a declaration that “This [the

city's ruin] was the work of one deep heart wrung!" (228). The narrative resolution is one of trauma, grief, and revenge, ultimately ending in Maimuna's sacrifice.

An Orientalist Displacement

<9>The question of the Orientalized female subject in Hemans's poetry has been raised by scholars such as Susan Wolfson and Amy L. Gates and is interrogated most comprehensively by Sharifah A. Osman. Osman "underscore[s] the [global] sorority of female suffering" in Hemans's Byronic heroines (par. 1), arguing for the shared discourse of "mothers and sisters" when referring to Hemans's female characters: "If woman's empire is her home, then Hemans's critique of the domestic ideal through the tragic lives of her Byronic *mothers and sisters* demonstrates the physical and emotional toll that a nation with imperialistic ambitions like Britain exacts on its devoted citizens" (par. 41, emphasis my own). This pairing, however, does not hold in "The Indian City"; the patriotism of Maimuna is one that, in addition to a sorority of domestic affections, is borne out of individualized precarity and necessity. While maternity is a prominent theme in Hemans's works, it cannot be read as synonymous with femininity in these middle works of Hemans.

<10>Both Wolfson and Osman articulate the Orientalist representation of Maimuna, yet they overlook the physical setting and its own Orientalist description in their readings of the poem. While Wolfson juxtaposes Hemans and Percy Bysshe Shelley in terms of their themes of revolutionary violence, she focalizes the question of displacement through historical events and genres, not the Orientalist setting, asserting that these displacements "dramatize tyranny in figures of... female revenge, often in spectacular transgression of 'feminine' character" (115). Maimuna is one of these figures, but while transgressing traditional ideals of femininity, she is surrounded by a lush and exotic landscape that affords the British or Anglophone reader a safe distance or remove from the catastrophic trauma of the poem's narrative.(7)

<11>The first part of the poem is where we see this Orientalist setting most clearly. Hemans begins with the focus on the unnamed Indian city suffused with verdant greenery and sunlight:

ROYAL in splendour went down the day
On the plain where an Indian city lay,
With its crown of domes o'er the forest high,
Red as if fused in the burning sky (1-4)

This suffusion of light is dotted with the “plantain [that] glitter'd with leaves of gold, / As a tree midst the genii-gardens old...And the stems of the cocoas were shafts of fire” (9-12). The Orientalist setting is not only supernatural (“genii-gardens”) but also “royal” where the “gleam” of a “white pagoda” shines (13). Devoid of ethnographic accuracy and through this “scene of beauty” wanders “a noble Moslem boy,” the son of Maimuna (27-28). The boy relishes his view of “the stately city...Like a pageant of clouds in its red repose,” wandering “in breathless joy” until eventually, he trespasses on Hindu “holy ground” (29-30, 36). This act of religious defiance ushers the reader into the second part of the poem, which deals with the aftermath of the boy’s trespassing, for which he is mortally punished. He returns to his mother with “a gash on his bosom” (72), dying in her arms from mortal “wounds from the children of Brahma born” (80).(8) Maimuna witnesses her son’s last breaths: “One moment—the soul from the [son’s] face had pass'd! / Are there no words for that common wo?” (96-97). Instead of reacting outwardly, Maimuna is paralyzed: “bow'd down mutely o'er her dead” (109). Once she sees “no reply” in her son’s “half-shut eye” and knows he is surely dead (118, 117), she shrieks in agony and, enraged, rises up and seek revenge for her son’s death:

And what deep change, what work of power,
Was wrought on her secret soul that hour?
How rose the lonely one?—She rose
Like a prophetess from dark repose!
And proudly flung from her face the veil,
And shook the hair from her forehead pale (121-26)

In a moment directly linked to prophecy, Maimuna defiantly throws off her Muslim veil, emblem of female piety and submission, and vows to avenge her son’s death by destroying the eponymous “Indian City” (143). She becomes a figure of gender transgression and prophecy only *after* the tragic death of her son, and her assumption of this prophetic role transforms her into Hemans’s Byronic heroine. Hemans was inspired by Byron’s work, and she includes lines from *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* in the epigraph to this poem: “*What deep wounds ever clos'd without a scar? / The heart's bleed longest, and but heal to wear / That which disfigures it. - Childe Harold*” (368). More than corporeal suffering, emotional wounds are the most enduring for Hemans’s women speakers. This emphasis on the suffering of the human heart reinforces Hemans’s standard usage of affection as a psychological more than a physical force.(9)

<12>The heroines in *Records* are influenced by Byron, yet they are broader in global representation. For example, they are Greek, Italian, Native American, Indian

Muslim, Hindu, and African, among others. The focalization of large, historical moments through specific female subjectivities, like that of Maimuna, is what enables Hemans to simultaneously address questions of religious nationalism and militancy while building a network of diverse and sympathetic engagement with proto-postcolonial questions of race and gender. Myra Cottingham argues for the “subtle coding” of Hemans’s protest of “masculine warfare” in poems like “The Indian City” (283). Cottingham sees Hemans’s challenge to her readers as a sacrifice of Hemans’s “own potential role as a more militantly philosophical writer in favour of a more psychologically realistic expression of futility” (283). This futility paradoxically affords Hemans the opportunity to capitalize on certain identity categories and positions of power (male, warrior, leader, prophet) and illustrate her emboldened and unfixed subjectivity of womanhood.

<13>As an exoticized imaginary displaced from a historical setting, “The Indian City” disorients the Eurocentric slant of her collection and invokes Maimuna’s otherness as a force of transformation. In the third and final section of the poem, Maimuna fully transforms into the hero capable of leading a religious war. This section begins with the sound of “the gathering of Moslem war” (146), and the previously shining city has lost its luster. The plantain plant from the idyllic first section no longer glitters “with leaves of gold” but rather, offers “shade, / As the light of the lances along it play’d” (149-50). Maimuna’s story

. . . from realm to realm had pass'd,
And her tale had rung like a trumpet's blast;
There had been words from her pale lips pour'd,
Each one a spell to unsheath the sword. (161-64)

She is on the frontlines of this war as a “queenly foe, / [with] Banner, and javelin, and bended bow” (171-72). Rather than illustrating Maimuna’s physical prowess in this battle, however, Hemans notes her “deeper power [which] on her forehead sate” (173): the mental power of vision and prophecy:

Her eye's wild flash through the tented line
Was hail'd as a spirit and a sign,
And the faintest tone from her lip was caught,
As a Sybil's breath of prophetic thought. (175-78)

Again, we see Maimuna described in terms of her prophetic power. Her tale of woe has mobilized an army, torn the unnamed city asunder, and her interiority remains a mystery.

<14>Once the war is over, Maimuna does not rejoice in or relish her side's victory and spoils. She feels no relief or redemption, only "[v]ain, bitter glory," which sickens her to turn "from her sad renown, / As a king in death might reject his crown" (179, 185-86). Her "wounded" heart has become "weary" and she is close to death herself: "*Shewith*'d faster, from day to day" (157, 198, 188). While the idyllic Indian city has been "rent" and the Muslim side crowned victorious, Maimuna does not feel glory or peace. She lies supine and defeated on a "couch," her voice "an echo of feelings that long seem'd flown" (200). She "murmur[s] a low sweet cradle song, . . . A song of the time when her boy's young cheek / Had glow'd on her breast in its slumber meek" (201-204). Maimuna has transformed back into a gentle maternal figure. She has relinquished her role of warrior.⁽¹⁰⁾ While it seems Maimuna has lost the will to live, one day, a "gust o'er her soul again" suddenly provokes her to start up and declare, "'Give him [my son] proud burial at my side!'" (208). According to her wishes, she is then laid to rest with her dead son where "the [Hindu] temples are fallen" (210), a last act of reprisal and trespass against those who murdered her beloved son. The poem ends, as it began, with a panoramic view of the now ruined city:

Palace and tower on that plain were left,
Like fallen trees by the lightning cleft;
The wild vine mantled the stately square,
The Rajah's throne was the serpent's lair,
And the jungle grass o'er the altar sprung—
This was the work of one deep heart wrung! (223-28)

The once picturesque Orientalist setting is gone, all because of one mother's "deep heart wrung!" (228). Significantly, the poem begins and ends by invoking the "heart," first with Byron's epigraph, "*What deep wounds ever clos'd without a scar? / The heart's bleed longest*" (368).⁽¹¹⁾ More than battlefield mastery, it is Maimuna's ultimately "wounded" and "weary" heart that structures and frames, but does not limit or contain, her multiple gender and identity roles. This heart motif can be found throughout Hemans's oeuvre, as Hemans focalizes her poetic subjectivity in affective over physical energy, as "Woman on the Field of Battle" further illustrates.

Transgressive Martyrdom as Gender Performativity

<15>Maimuna's heroism is reinforced by her martyrdom, yet this martyrdom is fraught with contradiction, as it speaks to a woman-centered fatalism that is transgressive in terms of its implications with suicide. Thus, Maimuna's martyrdom

is also an act of gender transgression and performativity, an exercise in strategic essentialism.(12) While many scholars have argued that Hemans reiterates nineteenth-century gender norms in her works, protagonists like Maimuna rebut this argument by inhabiting overlapping roles like mother, pious Muslim, prophet, war leader, storyteller, invalid, sentimentalist, and non-Christian martyr. The multiplicity we see in Maimuna's identity formation is what Judith Butler would call a narrative of becoming.(13) In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler writes of narrative becoming in terms of performative gender: "If gender is performative, then it follows that the reality of gender is itself produced as an effect of the performance" (218). Through Maimuna's own gender performativity, we see a mechanism of how Maimuna's characterization is reproduced and altered in the course of that reproduction.

<15>Because of Maimuna's transformative leaps of character, she becomes a convincing symbol of resistance and feminist agency. In order to process the grief of losing her son and forge her own "livable existence" (Butler 206), Maimuna must transgress traditional gender roles in order to survive her circumstances. This transgression eventually enables her to establish her voice and place in history.(14) Maimuna's narrative of becoming illustrates Butler's paradox that "we must be undone in order to do ourselves: we must be part of a larger social fabric of existence in order to create who we are" (100-101). This is to say, Maimuna's role switching

between doting mother, prophet, Byronic heroine, and religious martyr does not cause her undoing or death but rather, weaves her more inextricably into the public consciousness and cements her identity as a legitimate subject with the rights and opportunity to participate as "outsider within" Hemans's affective poetics (Hill Collins 14).

<16>Maimuna's gender performativity ultimately coalesces to depict Hemans's career-spanning critique of British patriarchal nationalism—a nationalism that often contradicts itself in its common yoking of a woman's identity to mother. "The Indian City" departs from Hemans's more well-known poems like "Homes of England" but a curious point of affective solidarity lingers between these disparate works: both poems endorse womanhood as an identity category not solely linked to maternal identification. While in "Homes of England" the "woman's voice flows forth in song, / Or childish tale is told" (13-14), and the woman is a singer and not a war hero, the poem omits the word "mother," in effect disavowing the gender essentialism of motherhood. Within Hemans's critique of British nationalism and her poetic representations of womanhood, feminist identity formation occurs at the intersection of her various subjectivities: woman, mother, patriot, "Other," etc. In "The Indian City" Hemans's nationalist critique is made more palatable by

Hemans's displacement of heroine (Maimuna) and setting to the East, at a safe distance from British soil. Maimuna's "transformative passion" may seem like a madness (Wolfson 104), but it is also a source of newfound agency activated by love.(15) Maimuna's love for her son is the through line of the poem's narrative and her transformations in character. Interestingly enough, one identity that is consistent, however, is that of the Oriental "Other." This consistency is, in effect, the grating persistence of universalized Orientalism that is in tension with performative identity and complicates Hemans's own feminist proclivities.

"Woman" as Epistemological Problem

<17>Not always allowing women the space to be equal subjects, gendered acts of nationalist identification like motherhood trigger in Hemans's writings a futility of feminine experience that seems like an insurmountable impasse. This impasse enters a symbolic order in Hemans's later poem, "Woman on the Field of Battle," where Hemans's unnamed "woman" becomes a larger epistemological problem. It is also interesting that the only titular use of "Woman" in *Records* is an "Indian Woman" while the "Woman" in *Songs* is ethnically and religiously ambiguous. By eliding clear markers of identity categories such as nationality, race and ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, and class, the poem exists as a fixed paradigm of womanhood not only of its larger collection, *Songs of the Affections*, but also of the affective imaginary representing the uncertain ontology of Hemans's "woman" across her works.

<18>While *Songs of the Affections* is not as woman-centered as *Records of Woman*, it harbors a similar critique of the limiting subject positions of heteronormativity through its depictions of the affective and physical suffering in various characters of diverse ethnic and gendered subjectivities.(16) Joanna Baillie, on reading the collection, described it as "melancholy tenderness" and Wolfson notes that the subsection title of this collection is changed from "Miscellaneous Pieces" to "Miscellaneous Poems" (444). This shift mirrors Wordsworth's own move, in 1820, to offer his volume of *Miscellaneous Poems*, reflecting how Hemans feels established enough in her career to present this section as on the level of her male peers and more important than miscellany. More than being pieces of poetic deficiency, which readers would associate with fancy over the "esemplastic" imagination, Hemans embraces the vital power of her poem/"songs." In the epigraph to the leading poem of the collection, "A Spirit's Return," Hemans writes that these songs "tell" "a lonely spirit's dreams" of "melancholy love" and "passionate memory" (444). The poem begins with the speaker addressing the welcome return of a spirit and "dear friend," for whom the speaker's "long-shut heart . . . shall be

unsealed” (2). This opening invokes affection as the collection’s steering trope of spiritual agency.

<19>This trope finds its most archetypal representation in “Woman on the Field of Battle.”(17) The poem is made up of fifteen quatrains alternating between dimeter and trimeter lines, and the third-person narration is from the point of view of a speaker who is not omniscient. Its epigraph reads, “*Where hath not a woman stood, / Strong in affection's might? a reed, upborne / By an o'er mastering current!*”(18) The “affection” here possesses a “might” that withstands an “o’er mastering current,” and it is something inhering in the woman herself, who stands “strong” amidst “the fierce battle-storm” (3). The lingering question of the speaker’s exact vantage point is never fully answered. The poem begins,

GENTLE and lovely form,
What didst thou here,
When the fierce battle-storm
Bore down the spear? (1-4)

The stark contrast between the woman’s “gentle and lovely form” and the “fierce battle-storm” is further reinforced by the rhyme. The next stanza commands, “Tell, that amidst the best, / Thy work was done! (7-8). The dead woman in this poem, like Maimuna, is immediately positioned amidst a battle scene, amongst “the best” warriors, and her “work” is equated with these (presumably male) compatriots. The poem’s movement from interrogative to imperative statement asserts the agency of this voiceless, nameless figure.

<20>In the next stanza, the speaker continues to meditate on this unnamed woman,

Yet strangely, sadly fair,
O'er the wild scene,
Gleams, through its golden hair,
That brow serene. (9-12)

From the proud prospect of this woman’s “best” work, the poem’s speaker shifts abruptly with the interruptive, “Yet.” This banner-strewn landscape signals not only the purely triumphant bravada of a war hero but also the “sadly fair” and “serene” countenance of a woman whose story is unknown to the speaker. Soon, we learn that this woman is now a “Slumberer!” whose “early bier / Friends should have crown'd, / Many a flower and tear / Shedding around” (17-20). The speaker laments that the dead woman’s friends have not “crown’d” her “bier” or shed a “tear” of grief for her (18, 17, 19), and the subsequent stanzas continue in this elegiac mode of honoring

and commemorating the fallen woman. The speaker argues that the woman should have been mourned by her “[s]isters” who “above the grave / Of thy repose, / Should have bid violets wave / With the white rose” (25, 26-28). The delicate imagery contrasts with the woman’s battlefield prowess. Like Maimuna, this woman has died without fanfare and lies seemingly forgotten in the ruins of this “wild scene” (10).

<21>After this elegiac mode, the speaker turns again to interrogation and meaning-making:

Why?—ask the true heart why
Woman hath been
Ever, where brave men die
Unshrinking seen? (37-40)

The beginning question asks “why” women have died without the same recognition as men, but it ends with an unclear dangling modifier, “[u]nshrinking seen” (40). Is it the “brave men” or the aforementioned “woman” who are/is “unshrinking seen” in battle? Regardless of the subject (who is “seen”), the “true heart” pleads for a response, to no avail (37). The speaker then ponders possible reasons for joining a war or engaging in battle. Hemans writes of “Some [who came], for that stirring sound, / A warrior's name” (43-44). Other reasons for joining the battle include “for the stormy play / And joy of strife;” and/or “to fling away / A weary life;—” (45-46, 47-48). These are not the reasons of the elegized “woman,” however. Rather, they are the worldly and commonplace reasons of “[p]roud reapers” (42). This woman, in contrast, is described as “pale sleeper...With the slight frame / and the rich locks, whose glow / Death cannot tame” (49-52). The woman, while generalized in that she lacks a name or specific history, is also left ambiguously exceptional and untamed. She has unknown reasons for going to battle and being found dead by the speaker. In the final two quatrains, the speaker eventually shares this woman’s true motive—love:

Only one thought, one power,
Thee could have led,
So, through the tempest’s hour,
To lift thy head!
Only the true, the strong,
The love, whose trust
Woman’s deep soul too long
Pours on the dust! (53-60)

This woman, like Maimuna, has been led by “love,” the “one thought, one power” that propels her to “lift [her] head” and persevere. This woman’s “deep soul too long / Pours on the dust!” (59-60). The poem ends with another ambiguous grammatical construct, “pours on the dust!,” that is not clearly the action of the personified “trust” or the woman’s “deep soul.” The poem remains a conundrum in many ways, making it an emblem of the unresolved tensions within Hemans’s increasingly multivalent subjectivity of womanhood.

<22>As a whole, this poem only explicitly uses the word “affection” once, and it is in the epigraph. This paratextual appearance of “affection” reflects the word’s function as commentary for the entire volume, what Gerard Genette would call the poem’s “threshold” of interpretation (2).(19) Of the sixty-one poems in *Songs*, eleven include the word “affection.” These usages predominantly anthropomorphize the word into an agential character, twice giving it strength or “might.” The word’s association with “might” turns it into an active force exceeding internal feeling. After the epigraph’s use of “affection,” the lingering question of to who or what this affection is aimed remains.

<23>The “affection” in this poem is aligned with the woman’s work, reinforcing its gendered exceptionalism. The fact that the “affection” is borne by the upright, steady “woman” also can imply that feminine affection is not only exceptional but also superior to other types of affections. The woman has the affection that is recognized by the “true heart” (37), so truth is of the utmost importance in motivating her love (“Only one thought, one power...Only the true, the strong, / The love”). Not limited to sentimental yearning, Hemans’s affection is a force of ethical action that becomes a vehicle of shared representation for her women characters.

Shaftesbury’s “Affection” as Intertext

<24>Hemans’s usage of affection can be contextualized within eighteenth-century philosophical debates between rationalist and sentimentalist assumptions of feeling. These debates are fundamental to Shaftesbury’s theory of affection in *An Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit*.(20) Shaftesbury’s concept of “affection” is both idealistic *and* relational, thus coterminous with Hemans’s usage. In harmony with the longer tradition of eighteenth-century sensibility that many argue Shaftesbury inaugurated, Hemans deploys a language of emotions to express the value of affective energy in building imagined solidarity between different subjectivities and communities.

<25>While Shaftesbury is discredited by many critics as being predominantly a “sentimentalist,” a link persists in his philosophy between emotion and reason.(21) This link anchors Hemans’s poetics within a discourse of moral philosophy. All of Hemans’s subject positions face epistemological obstacles of misrecognition or unknown suffering, so finding what Michael T. Williamson calls Hemans’s “affectionate intellect” is a vital recuperation of the role of women in steering poetic tradition toward epistemologies of feminist engagement (25). Shaftesbury uses the word “affection” throughout *An Inquiry*, particularly in describing how affections can be motives to virtuous or moral actions. He describes the difference between a good and bad creature (including humans):

A good creature is one who is through his natural temperament or the *slant of his affections* carried primarily and immediately, and not secondarily and accidentally, to good and against bad. A bad creature is one who lacks the *right affections* of the force needed to carry him directly towards good and against bad; or who is carried by other affections directly towards bad and against good. When all the affections or passions are suited to the public good, i.e. the good of the species, then the natural temperament is entirely good. (7, emphasis my own)

According to Shaftesbury, a good creature’s affections are in the service of the greater or “public good.” Goodness is not a matter of whether the affections are natural or not, as the affections can be corrected (to be made “right affections”), but rather, the ability of affections to orient a creature towards right or wrong action (right or wrong being based on what benefits the greater good, not the individual). Thus, Shaftesbury’s affection needs an object to work toward or orient itself. This is seen in how many times the word “towards” is used as preposition for “affection” in *Inquiry*. Examples include “affection towards self-preservation” (1.2), “affection towards self-good” (1.2), “affections towards moral good” (2.4), and “affections towards the whole” (3.2). This repetitive pairing emphasizes that affection cannot exist alone and must be steered, that Shaftesbury’s affection needs an object and a moral compass. For Hemans, women steer this ethical action, yet they too, need an object or purpose, lest they go unheard in the world of public recognition. The required towardness of both usages of affection feeds the larger question of orientation in individual subjectivity: to whom or what should we aim our perceptions, thoughts, and desires? This question undergirds all of Hemans’s poetic representations, as their subjectivities often maintain an impasse of ambiguous and uncertain relation to another subject, object, idea, or frame of reference.

<26>Shaftesbury also writes of affection's applicability, not its inherent good or badness (2.3). This relativist view of affection presages current affect studies and its focus on "forces or forces of encounter...a supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations" (Gregg and Seigworth 2). The towardness of Shaftesbury's "affection" also lacks the moral determinism of right and wrongness. It is not the affection itself that is inherently corrupt, but the way it is used or applied.⁽²²⁾ As an ethical tool, it is a means to modulate the movement between feeling/knowing and emotion/reason. This movement is seen in the representational uncertainty of the "woman" in Hemans's latter poem, with the poem valorizing the woman's immortalized "work" yet ending without clear narrative resolution (8). The unnamed woman, in effect, crystallizes Hemans's mode of emotional proximity and elegiac sympathy. "The "woman" has sacrificed herself and her "stately head" (13), and even "[d]eath cannot tame" her "glow" (52, 51). The subjectivity of this woman persists beyond the grave because of her "affection's might" and her "true heart" (37). Hemans's representation of the "woman" in "Woman on the Field of Battle" illustrates the duality of affection as a type of feeling and knowing. The poem turns "woman" into a symbol of the impossibility of fully witnessing someone else and the radical uncertainty of a woman's subjectivity. This uncertainty is not a lack of knowing or feeling, however, but an oriented self who is open to the multiplicity of womanhood.

Conclusion

<27>Through her poetics, Hemans argues for the agential uncertainty yet possibility in a woman's subjectivity. Hemans's poetic subject routinely acts on behalf of someone or some purpose beyond herself, whether that be for redemption or for military battle. She maneuvers the circuitous routes between multiple subject positions. In "The Indian City," Maimuna's Orientalist representation transgresses and transcends the privacy of "domestic affections," asserting the affective "might" of a woman. Maimuna also represents a complicated doubling of subject position—first, as woman, and second, as "Other." This otherness forges Hemans's Orientalism as a type of racial logic distinct from the white Poetess figure Hemans herself occupies. Hemans's "Woman on the Field of Battle" idealizes a feminine subjectivity that is, like Maimuna, fearless warrior, but it is delinked from national borders and individual identities other than womanhood, turning the trope of affection into a binding force beyond self, race, or place.

<28>Through this analysis of Hemans's affective poetics and the historical usage of affection in Shaftesbury's *Inquiry*, I want to end by proposing affective intimacy as a prevailing theme in Hemans's poetics—a force of affinity between different

subjectivities of womanhood. These intimacies break down fixed identity markers that reinforce heteronormative and nationalist norms, proposing feminist affinities in literature that did not exist in the material world of the time.

Notes

(1) In terms of affect, I build on the work of Lauren Berlant in connecting early nation-building to discourses of sentimentality. See *Cruel Optimism*. Duke UP, 2011. (△)

(2) I build on work of Andrea K. Henderson and Anne K. Mellor in their discussions of women's writing and subjectivity. (△)

(3) Of the three victorious heroines in *Records of Woman*, Maimuna is the only woman of color. The other two are Joan of Arc and the Queen of Prussia. (△)

(4) See also Susan Wolfson's analysis of Hemans's "stages of the 'feminine'" (*Borderlines* 39). (△)

(5) Whereas Spivak's work is based in formalist questions of epistemic thought through representation in language, Mohanty's work is rooted in questions of building solidarity across "Third World" and Western feminisms. Mohanty is concerned with decentering the Western center (Europe and the United States) of feminist thought in order to find common ground amidst a politics of difference. This tension between solidarity and universalism is something that Mohanty finds generative of common issues of misunderstanding. (△)

(6) It is also worth noting that of the major British Romantic authors we study today, Hemans is relatively unique in how many translations she offers in her works, with poems and paratexts translated from French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and German. Cf. David Simpson's "The limits of cosmopolitanism and the case for translation" *European Romantic Review* 16.2. (2005): 141-52. (△)

(7) For more on the Orientalist setting of "The Indian City," see Pramod K. Nayar's "The Imperial Picturesque in Felicia Hemans' 'The Indian City.'" *Journal of Literary Studies*. 31.1 (2015): 34-50. (△)

(8) Whether this defiance is intentional or not is left unclear. (△)

(9) Julie Melnyk notes that out of the nineteen poems in *Records*, Hemans uses Byron in six of the poems' epigraphs (146), so Byron's influence is clear. Osman also

recounts Byron's influence on Hemans's heroines in *Records*, arguing that Hemans was spurred by "Byron's propagandistic appropriation of the orientalized Greek heroine as a symbol of revolutionary freedom, and even composed several poems on philhellenic themes, namely 'Modern Greece' (1817), 'The Suliote Mother' and 'Greek Funeral Chant' (from *The Forest Sanctuary*, published in 1825), 'The Bride of the Greek Isle' (from the 1828 *Records of Woman*), and 'The Sisters of Scio' (from the 1830 *Songs of the Affections*)" (para. 3).(^)

(10) Susan Wolfson astutely observes that "the imagination of [Hemans's] women with violent political agency had to take routes into a supernatural idiom...and return routes to domestic spheres and affections" ("Something must be done" 119). These routes and returns are traceable in Maimuna's story. By poem's end, Maimuna is a far cry from the Byronic hero of the battle scenes.(^)

(11) The heart imagery recalls the ending of Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" as well, when the woman's "hope endeared, / Fast rooted at her heart, and here, my friend, / In sickness she remained, and here she died, / Last human tenant of these ruined walls" (525-28).(^)

(12) Helen Luu writes about the deconstruction of "femininity" in *Records of Woman*.(^)

(13) By "performativity" I am engaging Judith Butler's term as discussed in *Gender Trouble, Bodies that Matter*, and *Undoing Gender*. She first coins it in *Gender Trouble* (1990), when she writes about the process of performing gender: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (25). The phrase "narrative of becoming" refers to Butler's description of the body in *Undoing Gender*: "As a consequence of being *in the mode of becoming*, and in always living with the constitutive possibility of *becoming otherwise*, the body is that which can occupy the norm in myriad ways, exceed the norm, rework the norm, and expose realities to which we thought we were confined as open to transformation" (217, emphasis my own).(^)

(14) Wolfson asserts that Hemans's portrayal of the "death of the rebellious female" is characterized by hesitation "before violent revolution as a fatal course" and yet, it is still "caught up, in a shadowy context: the historical persistence of gender symbolism in the dark havoc of injustice and oppression" (119). Butler would consider this "gender symbolism" a type of restrictive and even compulsory norm that limits and even damages the opportunities for a "livable existence" (206).(^)

(15) Benjamin Kim writes that “Hemans’s poems about martial sacrifice dramatize the givenness of attachment: love for the nation or the group is given expression in an individual’s reaction to a crisis that tests the limits of that love. Love is expressed in violence” (124).(^)

(16) Wordsworth has a similarly titled “Poems Founded on the Affections” in his collected works of 1815.(^)

(17) It has a supplementary poem, “To the Memory of Lord Charles Murray Who died in the Cause, and lamented by the People of Greece” which honors aristocrat Murray, who died in the Greek War for Independence.(^)

(18) Cf. Matthew 11:7, “reed shaken with the wind” (*Selected Poems* 457).(^)

(19) Genette writes of the four primary functions of an epigraph (a type of paratext), concluding that the epigraph “in itself is a signal (intended as a *sign*) of culture, a password of intellectuality” (160).(^)

(20) In *Romantic Intimacy*, Nancy Yousef traces the shift in eighteenth-century philosophy, particularly from “the egoistic premises of Hobbesian psychology” towards the “philosophers of moral sentiment such as Anthony Ashley Cooper (Third Earl of Shaftesbury), Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith” (5). This shift illuminates how epistemological and ethical perspectives overlap and even cohere in particular “feelings” like sympathy and intimacy.(^)

(21) Amy M. Schmitter similarly argues that “[i]t would be something of a misnomer to call Shaftesbury a ‘sentimentalist’ (as opposed to a ‘rationalist’), but that is not because he fails to appreciate the importance of the emotions to moral philosophy” (para. 1).(^)

Works Cited

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Collins, Patricia Hill. “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of

Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems*, vol. 33, no. 6, 1986, pp. S14–S32. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/800672.

Cottingham, Myra. "Felicia Hemans's Dead and Dying Bodies." *Women's Writing* 8.2 (2001):

275-294. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 11 Oct. 2014.

Gates, Amy L. "Fixing Memory: The Effigial Forms of Felicia Hemans And Jeremy

Bentham." *Women's Writing* 21.1 (2014): 58-73. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 11 Oct. 2014.

Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Edited by Richard A. Macksey.

Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cambridge UP, 2001.

Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth, editors. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Haefner, Joel. "(De)Forming the Romantic Canon: The Case of Women Writers." *College*

Literature, vol. 20, no. 2, 1993, pp. 44-57, *Periodicals Archive Online; Periodicals Index Online*. 11 June 2016.

Hemans, Felicia. *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*. Edited by

Susan J. Wolfson. Princeton University Press, 2000.

Henderson, Andrea K. *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774-1830*. Cambridge

UP, 1996.

Kaplan, Cora. *Salt and Bitter and Good: Three Centuries of English and American Women Poets*

Paddington Press, 1975.

Kim, Benjamin. *Wordsworth, Hemans, and Politics, 1800-1830: Romantic Crises*. Lewisburg,

PA: Bucknell UP, 2013.

Lootens, Tricia. *The Political Poetess: Victorian Femininity, Race, and the Legacy of Separate Spheres*. Princeton UP, 2017.

Luu, Helen. "Fantasies Of 'Woman': Hemans's Deconstruction Of 'Femininity' in *Records*

Of Woman." *Women's Writing* 21.1 (2014): 41-57. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 11 Oct. 2014.

Mellor, Anne K. *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830*.

Indiana UP, 2000.

Melnyk, Julie. "William Wordsworth and Felicia Hemans." *Fellow Romantics: Male and Female*

British Writers, 1790-1835. Ed. Beth Lau. Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009. 139-58.

Nayar, Pramod K. "The Imperial Picturesque in Felicia Hemans' 'The Indian City.'" *Journal of*

Literary Studies. 31.1 (2015): 34-50.

Osman, Sharifah A. "'Mightier than death, untamable by fate': Felicia Hemans's Byronic Heroines and the Sorority of the Domestic Affections." *Romanticism on the Net*. 43 (2006) Web. 11 Oct. 2014.

Reno, Seth. "Felicia Hemans and the Affections." *CEA Critic*, vol. 77 no. 1, 2015, pp. 4-24.

Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/cea.2015.0010

Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of. "An Inquiry concerning virtue or

merit." 1711. *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, edited by Lawrence E. Klein, Cambridge UP, 1999.

Schmitter, Amy M. "Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, on the Emotions." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, 2010.

Williamson, Michael T. "Impure Affections: Felicia Hemans's Elegiac Poetry and Contaminated

Grief." Ed. Nanora Sweet. *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century*. Ed. Julie Melnyk. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001. 19-35.

Wolfson, Susan J. *Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism*. Stanford UP,

2006.

---. "'Something must be done': Shelley, Hemans, and the Flash of Revolutionary Female

Violence." *Fellow Romantics: Male and Female British Writers, 1790-1835*. Ed. Beth Lau. Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009. 99-122.

Wordsworth, William. *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*. Edited by Ernest De

Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, vol. 5, Clarendon Press, 1949.

Yousef, Nancy. *Romantic Intimacy*. Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2013.