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HEMANS AND THE GIFT-BOOK AESTHETIC

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A woman who is unhappy—and truly unhappy—cries and doesn't move you at all: it's worse, it's that any slight feature that disfigures her makes you laugh: it's that an accent which is ordinary for her sounds dissonantly in your ear and wounds you; it's that a movement which is habitual to her shows you that her sadness is ignoble and sullen; it's that excessive passions are almost all subject to those grimaces that the artist without taste copies servilely, but the great artist avoids.—Denis Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le Comédien* (1830)¹

A FEW MONTHS AGO, a truly cantankerous old-school scholar announced on the email discussion list for the North American Society for Romantic Studies (NASSR-L) that no one had successfully proven to him that any of the short lyrics written by a woman poet during the Romantic Era were 'any good'. So much work has been done analysing what for this man was completely unproblematic, the notion of aesthetic value, and yet in a way, this cantankerous old-school Romanticist has a point: an analysis of the ideologies that inform the dominant Romantic aesthetic needs to be brought to bear on delineating the achievement of individual poems, those that conform to it as well as those that propose alternative aesthetic values. In this paper, I will ask, what counted as 'good poetry' for women writing in the literary annuals? A careful analysis of poems by Felicia Hemans which first appeared in *The Literary Souvenir* and *The Forget Me Not* shows how her aesthetic program contrasts with that of canonical male authors. I will look in particular at two of Hemans's poems: 'The Child and Dove' (1826) and 'The Sculptured Children' (1829).²

At first glance, everyone seems to agree that the primary suppliers of the literary annuals were merely popular poetasters, and, in contrast to the canonical authors who resisted contributing to the annual gift books, their names and poems have deservedly died away, out of sight.³ In fact, the contrast between gift books and single-author poetry collections of the 1820s through the 1850s perfectly exemplifies the distinction that Pierre Bourdieu makes between the field of restricted production and the mass market. Bourdieu credits the Romantic period with fabricating the distinction, which he sees as in fact a ruse for denying that 'cultural capital' has any economic implications at all:

[T]hose 'inventions' of Romanticism—the representation of culture as a kind of superior reality, irreducible to the vulgar demands of economics, and the ideology of free, disinterested 'creation' founded on the spontaneity of innate inspiration—appear to be just so many reactions to the pressures of an anonymous market. [...] [T]he appearance of an anonymous 'bourgeois' public [...] coincides with the rejection of bourgeois aesthetics and with the methodical attempt to distinguish the artist and the intellectual from other commoners by positing the unique products of 'creative genius' against interchangeable products, utterly and completely reducible to their commodity value.⁴

Gift books certainly were viewed as commodities, and were hawked as such by their promoters and detractors alike. Producers in the field of restricted production—what we would call the avant-garde—purport to have no financial gain in view, nor do they court popularity among the masses, seeking rather the famous 'fit audience [...] though few'.⁵ So, as Kathryn Ledbetter has shown,

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1. In Diderot's *Oeuvres Esthétiques*, ed. Paul Vernière (Paris: Garnier, 1965), p. 317: '[U]ne femme malheureuse, et vraiment malheureuse, pleure et ne vous touche point: il y a pis, c'est qu'un trait léger qui la défigure vous fait rire; c'est qu'un accent qui lui est propre dissonne à votre oreille et vous blesse; c'est qu'un mouvement qui lui est habituel vous montre sa douleur ignoble et maussade; c'est que les passions outrées sont presque toutes sujettes à des grimaces que l'artiste sans goût copie servilement, mais que le grand artiste évite'.
 2. The first was originally published in *The Literary Souvenir*, ed. Alaric A. Watts (London: Hurst, Robinson, and Co., 1826). The second in *The Forget Me Not; a Christmas, New Year's, and Birthday Present* (London: Ackermann, 1829). Subsequent references to these pieces will be given in the text. A copy of 'The Sculptured Children' is provided at the end of this paper.
 3. See Kathryn Ledbetter, 'Lucrative Requests: British Authors and Gift Book Editors', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 88.2 (June 1994), 208–09 and 211–12.
 4. 'The Market of Symbolic Goods', *Poetics* 14 (1985), 17.
 5. Wordsworth's 'Prospectus to *The Recluse*', quoting Milton's *Paradise Lost* (VII, 31). Reprinted in M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 466.

Thomas Moore claimed that his name as an author would be ruined by publication in the gift books.⁶ And Wordsworth held out for a long time against the lucrative offers to publish in *The Keepsake*, saying that ‘[a]ll my natural feelings are against appearing before the Public in *this way*’.⁷ What he means by ‘*this way*’ was characterised by Caroline Bowles as being “perpetually placarded in the annuals”⁸ and by Charles Lamb as ‘immodest candidateship’.⁹ Gift-book authors are somewhere between campaigning politicians and advertised goods. And the table of contents for *The Literary Souvenir*, for instance, seems to bear this impression out: it lists author’s names, frequently following the name with the title of that author’s recent ‘hit’ publication, as if to say, ‘only the hottest-selling popular writers appear here’. Furthermore, the fact that the editors of gift books paid huge sums for pictures, stories, and poems seems to suggest that the contributors resemble our grocery-store-check-out-lane romance writers, Harlequin or otherwise, who are making huge sums of money and are supporting, through the gains that publishers accrue from them, other kinds of publishing enterprises that involve financial loss, academic publishing among them.

However, this apparent fit into Bourdieu’s scheme threatens to obscure some crucially important features of the gift book and of gift-book writing that have been noticed by Ledbetter, Paula Feldman, and Cynthia Lawford. From my perusal of them, I can say that gift books are not Hallmark cards, nor are they Harlequin romances: they aren’t lowbrow. Moreover, they did not establish popularity *solely* among the bourgeoisie for their contributors. Ledbetter demonstrates Tennyson’s ambivalence, his simultaneous disgust with the annuals and his desire to use them to make a name for himself among literati.¹⁰ Moore, let’s just notice, never did make it to canonical status, if we are to judge (as John Guillory suggests we should) by the table of contents of a Norton anthology, so staying out of gift books was not the way to make or keep his name ‘high’. Feldman shows that Hemans made a name for herself partly in the gift books before being taken up by William Blackwood as a regular contributor to *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine (Maga)*, and thereby becoming an author of poetry volumes enjoying major runs. Her earlier collections of poems singly authored by her, published by John Murray, had not secured her a place among literati. After beginning to contribute to the *Monthly Magazine* in 1823 and the annuals in 1825, however, gift-book contributions ultimately totalling ninety-four poems in thirteen British annuals (more if American collections are counted), Hemans was taken up by Blackwood as a regular contributor to *Maga* for pay beyond what was given to Thomas Hood, Walter Scott, and Hartley Coleridge.¹¹ And so while publicly condemning the pernicious effects of ‘the Annuals’ in 1829, John Wilson was secretly writing to Blackwood that he should consider paying Hemans an exorbitant amount for her poems in 1827 because of her effects on a captive public, primarily through gift books.¹² It seems clear that gift books offered a way up into the avant-garde as much as they contained popular poets to be distinguished from the producers of high Romantic poetry and establishment literary criticism.

Moreover, there is a question as to how the commodification of poetry by the annuals influenced the high aesthetic realm which seems—but, as Bourdieu suggests, only *seems*—uninterested in monetary gain. Reviewers complained of Hemans’s single-author collections of

6. Ledbetter, p. 211.

7. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Alan G. Hill, 3 vols. (2nd edn. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), III, 593. Quoted in Ledbetter, p. 208; Wordsworth eventually succumbs to the temptation, but he doesn’t become a regular contributor.

8. Letter in the Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, dated 15 July 1833. Quoted in Paula Feldman, ‘The Poet and the Profits: Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace’, in *Women’s Poetry, Late Romantic to Early Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830–1900*, ed. Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (London: Macmillan, and New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999), p. 81.

9. *Letters of Charles Lamb*, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt, 2 vols. (London: George Bell, 1886), II, 292. Quoted in Cynthia Lawford, ‘Bijoux Beyond Possession: The Prima Donna’s of L.E.L.’s Album Poems’, in *Women’s Poetry*, p. 110.

10. Ledbetter, p. 213.

11. Feldman, pp. 81–87.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

poetry that the poems in them had been previously printed in annuals,¹³ and it is for reasons such as this, perhaps, that Wordsworth believed purchasers of annuals would not purchase single-author collections of poetry.¹⁴ John Wilson claimed that readers of the annuals would nevermore be interested in literary history—Milton, Pope, or Gray¹⁵—but Ledbetter sees the huge market in gift books, despite their high price, as indicating that middle-class readers had ‘the highest motives in placing literature among their most worthy investments’.¹⁶ Did the annuals in effect serve to depress the market for poetry, leading to the ‘crash’ of 1826, or did they rather sustain poets and interest in poetry in the face of that crash, as Ledbetter maintains?¹⁷ If the effects of gift books on establishing literary repute were ambiguous, their effects on production by ‘high’ Romantic writers were more so. Blackwood used inflated prices for single poems to be published in *Maga* as a way of stimulating Hemans to produce enough poetry for a single-author collection, and relied on her production for gift-books to extend the pages of her collections which he published.¹⁸ And similarly, Wordsworth’s ultimate submission to the financial necessity of publishing in annuals seems to have stimulated his lagging poetic production in the late 1820s.¹⁹



The ambiguous status of gift-book authors, and the ambiguous influence of gift-book economics on high poetic production, suggest that discourse about the literary annuals was engaged in bringing into existence the very distinction Bourdieu locates as originating during the Romantic period, the distinction between aesthetic, disinterested production and popular, mass-market verse for the philistines. Of course, gift books were not alone in forging the distinction between popular and canonical literature,²⁰ but their short-lived status—roughly 1825–60—suggests that they performed the ideological work of distinguishing canonical from ephemeral poetry and then died when that distinction was finally well established. When Thackeray says, then, in the late 1830s, that gift-book contributors ‘prostitut[e] themselves to public inclination,—or perhaps one should say *proprietary inclination*, though the two are synonymous’,²¹ he is not, I would like to suggest, reminding people of an already-established equivalence, as he clearly thinks he is, but is rather himself creating and establishing the distinction by insisting that popularity and money go together, and, throughout the article, insisting that both go with poor aesthetic quality. For, only twenty years earlier, Hemans was writing to John Murray asking him to ‘[suggest to her] any subject, or style of writing, likely to be more popular’ than her current subject and style: her sense of what it means to be popular may include financial success, but certainly not aesthetic devaluation. Hemans like many of her contemporaries associated popularity and financial power with Byron’s poetry.²² Even more

13. Ibid., p. 81.

14. *Letters*, III, 680. Quoted in Ledbetter, p. 209.

15. John Wilson, ‘Monologue, or Soliloquy on the Annuals’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 26 (Dec 1829), 949–51. Quoted in Zachary Leader and Ian Haywood (eds.), *Romantic Period Writings 1798–1832: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 199.

16. Ledbetter, p. 215.

17. Ibid., p. 209.

18. Feldman, pp. 91 and 86.

19. Ledbetter, p. 208.

20. See Ina Ferris, Introduction to *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History, and the Waverley Novels* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), and Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

21. [William Makepeace Thackeray], ‘A Word on the Annuals’, *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country* 16 (1837), 757–63. Quoted in Lawford, p. 103.

22. Letters to John Murray, dated 26 Feb 1817 and Nov 1817. Quoted in Feldman, pp. 75 and 77.

interesting is Leigh Hunt's confusing introduction to *The Keepsake for 1828*, confusing insofar as he symbolically equates the gift book with 'a part of an individual's self' such as 'a lock of hair' but also with commodities: gems and rubies.²³ As Lawford points out, the latter are 'self-promoting possessions', that is, commodities for conspicuous consumption, books to lay on the coffee table to prove that you were rising in class, a potential for class mobility being the distinguishing feature of the bourgeois individual. Unlike the purchasable, self-promoting gems and jewels to which gift books were so often compared, however, a self-part or lock of hair is inalienable—not for sale! Hunt's confusing image suggests the gift book's confusing aesthetico-economic status.

In reviewing the contents of the annuals, the question arises: insofar as these collections were engaged in producing, as a counter to the high Romantic aesthetic that culminates in high modernist aestheticism, a *bourgeois* aesthetic, what was that aesthetic?²⁴ First off, the bourgeois aesthetic is what Diderot in the epigraph to this essay calls 'without taste', and the NASSR discussion list's old-school, cantankerous scholar would certainly agree. In the passage quoted above, Diderot rejects the realism that he had previously embraced as a writer of 'comédie larmoyante'—crying theatre, or bourgeois melodrama, as we would call it. Diderot associates the subject of bourgeois tragedy with the crying woman, and sees both bourgeois art and crying women as in bad taste. Despite containing many literary works by men—at least half—and being edited by men as well as women,²⁵ gift books get associated with women, as does bourgeois melodrama, primarily through the female subjects of their pictures, poems, and stories, but also through the expectation, visible in some poems, of a female readership.

However, just as novel prefaces are frequently addressed to women but not indicative of actual readership, wouldn't it be wrong to buy into Diderot's sexist manoeuvre and associate a bourgeois aesthetic with women poets? Isn't Diderot using sexism as a way of distinguishing between high and bourgeois art? Surely many Romantic women poets resist the bourgeois. For instance, Cynthia Lawford shows that L.E.L.'s poems undermine the commodification of poetry that the material form of the gift book encourages. Nonetheless, I would argue that gift-book poetry, and a portion of the poems in annuals written by women, develop a bourgeois aesthetic that explicitly counters the dominant aesthetic of canonical Romantic poetry in very specifiable ways, and that Romantic women writers frequently wrote poems that for them and many others counted as 'good' because of achieving some of the aims of this distinctively bourgeois aesthetic. It is necessary, however, in considering this argument to suspend for the moment any knee-jerk judgment of bourgeois art as bad art: that is another way to avoid the sexism of Diderot and the NASSR correspondent. And certainly as a counter to high-Romantic elitist canonising, we can expect this bourgeois aesthetic to display some valuable egalitarian impulses. While I wouldn't want to essentialise bourgeois art as distinctively 'feminine', as do Diderot and the NASSR list correspondent, it is likely that the bourgeois aesthetic provided a welcoming venue for women writers.

In what specific ways does the bourgeois aesthetic in gift books counter canonical literature? The poems, stories, and pictures in literary annuals are often about viewing, listening to, and reading works of art. A table of contents of the epigraphs and subjects of the poems and stories in them reveal the illustrious names of those who, if living, scorned to contribute to annuals, such as Wordsworth, Byron, Moore, Coleridge, and Shakespeare.²⁶ Writers of gift-book poetry engage in what might be called productive consumption, and the medium may be so heavily associated with

23. *Keepsake for 1828* (London: Hurst, 1827), pp. 15 and 17. Quoted in Lawford, 'Bijoux Beyond Possession', p. 104.

24. Jerome McGann [*The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983)] sees high Romantic poetry as universalising, and Georg Lukács [*Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper and Row, 1964)] perceives such a universalising of bourgeois class concerns as the hallmark of modernism, and perhaps modernity as well.

25. Ledbetter, p. 213.

26. Except for Shakespeare, they disdained gift books, but ultimately did contribute at least a small amount of poetry to the annuals, as Ledbetter shows.

women writers and readers partly because of the difference between men's and women's different relations to literary tradition. Male poets were presumed to be educated enough to have the luxury of having a bad-boy relation to school: they could be uninterested in it, like Wordsworth, or expelled from it, like Shelley. Their focus as writers lay in demonstrating that they were part of a tradition of a literary history that, as original writers, they needed to carry on by revising. Romantic poets, Stuart Curran argues, had a sense of themselves as participating in and remaking literary history in a way that previous writers did not quite, but they also had a sense of the need to be 'original', a sense developing out of discussions such as Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759).²⁷ And all Harold Bloom's arguments about poetic misprision and the anxiety of influence are about the double bind in the command to be original while participating in a tradition: writing as a canonical author requires simultaneously incurring and obscuring one's debts to previous authors.²⁸

For women writers, as Claudia Thomas's work suggests, the distance was less great than it was for men between being a professional writer and publicly reading literary works—reading through writing: eighteenth-century women writers were not so much concerned with originality as they were with proving that they had gained enough education despite exclusion from educational institutions as to be able to participate in literary discourse.²⁹ We can take as emblematic a comparison of two poems by Hemans and L.E.L. to two canonical works. L.E.L.'s poem on hearing Madame Giulia Grisi is comparable and probably indebted to Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1819), but, as Lawford points, 'the crucial difference [is that L.E.L.'s] thrilling song was heard in the artificial environment of an opera house where the ticket was paid for and the singer was paid'.³⁰ Hemans's 'The Child and Dove' is comparable to Wordsworth's 'Intimations Ode', but Hemans's recollections of early childhood were evoked not by lambs bounding through the fields but rather by seeing a statue in the gallery at Woburn Abbey. Both of the gift-book poems by these women writers position the speakers of their poems as tourists or paying spectators; both are explicitly about consuming works of art.³¹

It is important to specify more precisely the difference between the way in which male canonical poets and Romantic women poets enter the field of art, including the tradition of British literature in which they write, and I will do so by contrasting a male canonical with a sentimental woman poet, Thomas Gray with Charlotte Smith. Both were called 'plagiarists' because of the way they incorporated previous poetry, but there is a subtle yet crucial difference between the way each one incorporated the words of earlier canonical authors into their own works.

Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', which has been called a quintessentially canonical poem,³² makes use of so many 'allusions' to other poems that, as Gray's editor, Roger Lonsdale had to conduct 'delicate negotiations with [his] printers' to prevent having a page of his edition of the 'Elegy' contain so many footnotes that only one line of poetic text could

27. Stuart Curran. 'Romantic Poetry: Why and Wherefore?', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 216–35.

28. See Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence; A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) and *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

29. See Claudia Thomas, *Alexander Pope and his Eighteenth-Century Women Readers* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994).

30. Lawford, p. 112.

31. At moments Hemans became anxious over writing too much about viewing artistic work. She writes to John Murray in 1817: 'Had I been more fully aware of the very limited taste for the Arts which you inform me is displayed by the Public, I should certainly have applied myself to some other subject [than the Elgin marbles, in *Modern Greece*]; but from having seen so many works advertised on Sculpture, Painting, &c. I was naturally led to imagine the contrary'. Quoted in Feldman, p. 75.

32. See John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

appear above them.³³ However, Gray's 'echoing' of poetic tradition is distinctively unlike Smith's 'practice of quotation',³⁴ even though she too quotes so extensively as to make her poems 'echo chambers' of English poetry as a whole.³⁵ Smith's most famous and most difficult to fathom instance of quoting occurs in the first of her *Elegiac Sonnets*, her poetic manifesto, when she writes: 'Ah! then, how dear the Muse's favours cost / If those paint sorrow best—who feel it most!' The last line quotes Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, 'He best can paint them who shall feel them the most'.³⁶ Gray also 'quotes' a line from Pope, from his 'Rape of the Lock', in the 'Elegy'. Gray's famous lines, 'Full many a flower is born to blush unseen / And waste its sweetness on the desert air', allude to Belinda's wish, after her lock has been stolen, that she had hidden herself away in a remote spot, 'There [to] keep my Charms conceal'd from mortal Eye, / Like Roses that in Desarts bloom and die'. Pope is not quoted verbatim by Gray as he is by Smith. Gray uses the image from Pope's lines, as Suvir Kaul points out, that joins blushing (Roses) to 'the idea of flowers blooming and dying unseen'.³⁷ But unless one knows the literary tradition very well, one might not catch Gray's use of Pope at all: the only identical word is 'desert', and the grammatical form of it differs in each case. Gray is *not* 'consuming' Pope, *not* reusing his words as if they were anybody's to use, as is Smith. But Gray is also tuning a verse to ideas and partly to sounds that make his poem familiar to an educated memory and ear, thus creating an 'original' poem that sounds like it should be part of the tradition of the British canon, as is 'The Rape of the Lock'.

Gray's poem is a monument to Pope in that it doesn't touch his words—Pope's words are *his alone*, the 'Elegy' says in its practice of not really quoting—and also a monument to Gray who offers an 'original' composition of Pope's images in new words. Gray's 'Elegy' performs beautifully in accordance with the exigencies of the double bind insofar as it is both traditional and original, as do all the instances of misprision or misquoting in works by male canonical authors adumbrated by Harold Bloom, and the result in all cases is the establishment of a literary tradition strewn with monuments, poems the words of which appear inviolate because uttered by some great man.

I would like to suggest that women wrote under a different exigency: Smith had to prove that she had read Pope. Adela Pinch points out that '[m]ost readers did not object to Smith's heavy use of quotation and allusion [...] [H]er sonnets announce a relationship to poetic language and literary tradition that seemed appropriate'.³⁸ It is important to notice that at least ten editions of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* appeared between 1784 and 1806, in the midst of the decades of controversy over Gray's 'originality', 1781–1806,³⁹ when critics began to notice that some of Gray's 'allusions' came too close to their originals. In fact, in the year 1806, the *European Magazine* attacked Gray for his 'borrowed plumage'⁴⁰ and praised Smith, in her obituary, for her originality.⁴¹ It is clear, therefore, that they are being held to a different standard, that gender determined what counted as a proper relationship to literary tradition. It is fine for women poets to use lines of male canonical authors almost verbatim in their poems. Women can quote high art because their own ephemeral work does *not* have to employ original language; they can repeat rather than monumentalise as inviolate the language of their literary predecessors. Fundamentally positioned as the bourgeois consumers of

33. 'Gray and "Allusion": The Poet as Debtor', in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century IV: Papers Presented at the Fourth David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar Canberra 1976*, ed. R. F. Brissenden and J. C. Eade (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979), p. 31.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

35. Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 60.

36. Quoted in Pinch, pp. 62–63.

37. Suvir Kaul, *Thomas Gray & Literary Authority: A Study in Ideology and Poetics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 124–25.

38. Pinch, p. 61. Pinch points out that Anna Seward did attack Smith for 'plagiarism', but insists that this attack was unusual.

39. Lonsdale, p. 46.

40. *European Magazine* 50 (1806), 292–95. Quoted in Lonsdale, p. 46.

41. *European Magazine* 50 (1806), 339–40. Summarised in Pinch, p. 202 n. 21.

what avant-garde artists drop down to them, women consume high poetry as readers who write about their reading: theirs is not an aesthetic of monumentalising originality, but rather an aesthetic of productive consumption.

That Hemans was '[o]ne of the most indefatigable epigraphers' of the Romantic period suggests that she is operating within this aesthetic of productive consumption.⁴² What I would now like to show is how two of Hemans's gift-book poems operate within that aesthetic—but not only that, how they deliberately oppose the monumentalising enterprise.

Often in the annuals, the speakers of poems are positioned as having traveled to see commemorating and funereal sculptures, and, in the body of the poem, the speakers reflect on the meaning of these monuments. Paradoxically, while much gift-book poetry is about monuments, it does not monumentalise as does the canonical poetry that is *not* about monuments. Gray's 'Elegy' enshrines Pope, but it describes 'mouldering heaps' in the 'turf' over which 'no trophies' or tombstones have been raised. Hemans's poem reflecting on the lost innocence of childhood, 'The Child and Dove', is, as the title and plate attest, 'suggested by Chantrey's statue of Lady Louisa Jane Russell' (p. 245). Wordsworth's poem on the same subject, the Intimations Ode, is about no sculpted object. Yet the two differently commemorate both innocence and art.

Wordsworth's 'Ode' sees childhood innocence—'the hour / Of splendour in the grass'—as lost, but also sees some part of it that 'remains behind' in a 'primal sympathy' with nature 'Which having been must ever be'; and, of course, in 'the philosophic mind'.⁴³ Innocence is called up for Hemans by the statue of a child, of 'the hours / When the love of our souls was on leaves and flowers; / When a world was our own in some dim, sweet grove, / And treasure untold in one captive Dove!' ('Child and Dove', 245) But in contrast to Wordsworth, nothing of this feeling remains behind: 'Is it not Spring that indeed breathes free / And fresh o'er each thought, as we gaze on thee? / No!' (pp. 245–46) While that feeling is gone, the memory of it is retained, 'shrine[d]' in human 'hearts' (p. 246) The statue itself, like Hemans's poem, evokes a memory which is enshrined in a living person, but it doesn't itself monumentalise the feeling: the speaker of 'The Child and Dove' 'turn[s]' quickly away from the statue, leaving it forever, taking 'One vision away of the cloudless morn!' This statue has been consumed; it is a used and abandoned object, not a monument. That Wordsworth considers his poem to be enshrining the feeling in a monument is suggested by the insistence that innocence is still present, that it is still 'the fountain light of all our day', 'a master light of all our seeing' evoking 'truths that wake / To perish never', never utterly abolish[ed] or destroy[ed]' ('Ode', ll. 154–55, 158–59, and 163). But more than that, the poem itself becomes a monument in one of its echoes. Wordsworth writes that the child 'Did tremble like a guilty / Thing surprized' before the instinct of immortality ('Ode', l. 150), partly quoting Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The ghost of Hamlet's father began to speak to Horatio but then suddenly 'started, like a guilty thing / Upon a fearful summons' and disappeared (l.i.148–49). 'Trembl[ing]' with 'surprise' is a paraphrase of 'started': Shakespeare is almost quoted here, and yet not quite; his words are indicated but not used; Wordsworth monumentalises Shakespeare in his poem just as Gray monumentalised Pope. In contrast to the immortal things passed down through allusion from Shakespeare to Wordsworth, the statue about which Hemans writes is, as she says in an anaphora, 'a thing' that performs various tasks, stimulating dreams and memories ('Child and Dove', p. 245), but not of equal value to the 'something' that lies in human hearts of living people which is what truly 'shrine[s] / A memory of beauty' (p. 246). For Wordsworth, in other words, it is possible to have the feeling still, and have it in a poem; for Hemans, it is only possible to have the memory of a feeling which can be evoked by a statue or a poem as it is consumed. Art performs good services for

42. See David Latané, 'Epigraphs', Online posting: NASSR-L (17 May 2000). Date Accessed: 22 Aug 2000.

43. 'Ode ("There Was a Time")', in *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 297–302: ll. 180–81, 183–85, and 189. Subsequent references will be to this edition of the poem and will be given in the text.

living people, awaking memories, but it isn't itself those living, breathing memories and it doesn't compensate for the loss of the child's capacity to apprehend beauty.

Hemans's 'The Sculptured Children' is a poem about Sir Francis Chantrey's *Sleeping Children* (1817), a statue in Lichfield Cathedral commemorating the death of two young sisters in 1812. It begins with an epigraph from Shakespeare's *Richard III* (IV.iii.9–11) about other children who have died tragically, these at Richard's hands. The poem implicitly speaks throughout to a mother who has lost a child and views this statue, explicitly addressing mothers about mid-way through. Hemans believes that the form of the funereal monument will stimulate memory, as did the 'Fair form' of Chantrey's statue of Lady Louisa Jane: it causes the mother's memory of her lost child to 'too piercingly return' and causes 'her soul [to] too deeply yearn' for that child. Hemans invokes the monument to help this mother, seeming to request that art offer some permanent consolation for loss. But Hemans moves from addressing the form of the monument to addressing those 'gentlest forms' it pictures, the deceased children. When she says in the final stanza 'By all the pure, meek mind / In your pale beauty shrined', it's not exactly clear whether the statue of the children has the 'pale beauty' or whether the children have it. That is, it's not quite clear who 'your' refers to, children or monument, because, by the end of the stanza, Hemans is indeed addressing 'the fairest, holiest Dead', the dead children themselves, not their monument. She asks the children, not the monument, to comfort this mother 'By childhood's love—too bright a bloom to die'. The love of childhood is indistinctly the mother's love of her children or the children's love of their own lives (including their mother). The poem may be suggesting that the two are inextricably intertwined, that the children's love of life is sustained by the mother's unappeasable love for her dead children. The power of immortalising these children, and with them, of 'pure, meek mind', comes from 'childhood's love' and not from the statue: it comes from a mother's living being. What we witness in this poem about a bereaved mother reading Shakespeare and seeing Chantrey's monument is a woman taking the power to generate her own sense of immortality away from the experience of consuming art. That power isn't in the text and the monument, in the things, but in the living people who use them.

The goal of these two poems, I believe, contrasts starkly with the goal set up for art by the dominant aesthetic of the canonical male tradition, an aesthetic engaged in monumentalising originality, that creates melancholy feelings of loss over great (male) poets. The goal of a gift-book aesthetic, of what I've been calling 'productive consumption', as Hemans formulates it in these two poems, is to envision and BE art that is expendable, art that stimulates feeling about losses of living realities, and returns the consumer to those realities, offering detachment from the work of art itself. Insofar as we haven't canonised the writers of gift books, they have beautifully fulfilled their aesthetic goals.

THE SCULPTURED CHILDREN.
 On Chantrey's Monument at Lichfield.
 By MRS. HEMANS.⁴⁴

Thus lay
 The gentle babes, thus girdling one another
 Within their alabaster innocent arms.
 SHAKESPEARE.

Fair images of sleep!
 Hallow'd, and soft, and deep!
 On whose calm lids the dreamy quiet lies,
 Like moonlight on shut bells
 Of flowers in mossy dells,
 Fill'd with the hush of night and summer skies;

How many hearts have felt
 Your silent beauty melt
 Their strength to gushing tenderness away!
 How many sudden tears,
 From depths of buried years
 All freshly bursting, have confess'd your sway!

How many eyes will shed
 Still, o'er your marble bed,
 Such drops, from Memory's troubled fountains wrung!
 While Hope hath blights to bear,
 While Love breathes mortal air,
 While roses perish ere to glory sprung.

Yet, from a voiceless home,
 If some sad mother come
 To bend and linger o'er your lovely rest;
 As o'er the cheek's warm glow,
 And the soft breathings low
 Of babes, that grew and faded on her breast;

If then the dovelike tone
 Of those faint murmurs gone,
 O'er her sick sense too piercingly return;
 If for the soft bright hair,
 And brow and bosom fair,
 And life, now dust, her soul too deeply yearn;

O gentlest forms! entwin'd
 Like tendrils, which the wind
 May wave, so clasp'd, but never can unlink;
 Send from your calm profound
 A still small voice, a sound
 Of hope, forbidding that lone heart to sink.

⁴⁴ Originally published in the *Forget Me Not for 1829*, ed. Frederic Shoberl (London: Ackerman, 1829), pp. 11–12.

By all the pure, meek mind
In your pale beauty shrined,
By childhood's love—too bright a bloom to die!
O'er her worn spirit shed,
O fairest, holiest Dead!
The Faith, Trust, Light, of Immortality!

SIR FRANCIS CHANTREY, 'SLEEPING CHILDREN' (1817)⁴⁵



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