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"Why did she love her mother's so?": L.E.L. Forging Corinne*

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Abstract

The early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a renewed interest in the folklore of the mermaid. This period of intensified nation-building and pursuit of individual spirit gradually shifted the political concerns of the medieval romance, such as in the French legend of Mélusine, to the struggle of Romantic author, such as in *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) by Germaine de Staël. Corinne, an improvisatrice of hybrid origin becomes a model for women writers in the nineteenth century. Their responses can be summed up in the polarized paradigm of the poetess represented by Felicia Dorothea Hemans, "the pious mother," and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, the pretty verse maker.

Landon's self-definition as a poetess against the model of Corinne develops in three phases in which she adjusts her alignment with her foremothers and finally finds a way out of the impasse bequeathed by them, namely the overwhelming emphasis on the body. First, in "The Improvisatrice," Landon exploits Corinne's performative art to exude the visual confines demanded by the popular periodicals and gift annuals. Second, in "The Fairy of the Fountains," she adapts the matrilineal legend of Mélusine by crafting the word rather than the body of the Fairy into the crux of transgression. Third, in "Corinne at the Cape of Misena," Landon uses her translation of Corinne's last song to reinstate her virtuosity. This paper seeks to delineate the ways in which Landon forges her own authority as a new Corinne by capitalizing on the "mingled dower" of Mélusine.

Keywords: Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Madame de Staël, the poetess, the mermaid

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Introduction

The early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a renewed interest in folklore as a vital part of national culture. Among folklore motifs, the legend of the mermaid proffered a focus for cultural imagination shared across regions. The period of intensified nation-building and pursuit of individual spirit gradually shifted the political concerns of the medieval romance, such as in the French legend of Mélusine, to the struggle of Romantic author, such as in *The Little Mermaid* (1837) by Hans Christian Andersen and in *Corinne, or Italy* (1807)[1] by Germaine de Staël. Corinne, an improvisatrice of Italian-English hybrid nationality, becomes a model especially for women writers in the nineteenth century. Their responses can be summed up in the polarized paradigm of the poetess represented by Felicia Dorothea Hemans (1793-1835), "the pious mother," and Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-38), the pretty versifier. The mermaid legend about the curse from the mother that inspired de Staël's novel enables Landon to negotiate the legacy of her literary foremothers.

Landon's life and career typify a self-made poetess with no class privilege. The term "poetess" is not necessarily derogatory. As Anne K. Mellor makes the distinction between the poetess and the female poet, the former shows subtle subversiveness in their works whereas the latter directly engages with political issues ("The Female Poet" 261-62).[2] Landon's subtle dealings with political issues render her a typical poetess. Her father's military business declined after the Napoleonic war, and her mother's dominant influence forced her to run away and set herself up as a professional writer.[3] Her talent was spotted early on by William Jerdan, the editor of the popular periodical *The Literary Gazette*, who published many of her early poems starting in 1820. She also contributed to the gift annuals, such as *Forget Me Not*, *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book*, and *Heath's Book of Beauty*, which are ornate volumes of verse aimed at the Christmas market. But her early fame was plagued with slanders about alleged affairs with Jerdan and others, which even caused her first fiancé, a reviewer for *The Examiner*, to break off their

1 Hereafter, this novel is referred to by its shortened form, *Corinne*.

2 For a full discussion of the history of this term, especially in the nineteenth century, see Mandell, Introduction.

3 The estranged relationship between Landon and her mother is suggested by Elizabeth B. Browning, who after reading Samuel Laman Blanchard's *Life and Literary Remains of L.E.L.* (1841), noticed the absence of "daughterly affection" between Landon and her mother (qtd. in Leighton 48).

engagement in 1834. Eventually she accepted a marriage proposal from Captain George MacLean, the Governor of Gold Coast (nowadays Ghana), and went to Africa with him soon after their wedding. However, she was found dead less than two months after landing in Africa. The cause of death was said to be an overdose of prussic acid.[4] A contemporary critic compared Landon's death with that of Mary Wollstonecraft (Leighton 45). The comparison underscores the stigma attached to women who dared to strike their own path at a time when Wollstonecraft's works remained censored after her husband William Godwin published the *Memoirs of the Author of* A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1798). The comparison between Wollstonecraft and Landon is at once apt and stretched. Landon's tragic life seems a cautionary tale for those who pursued their talents, on a par with Wollstonecraft's, whose death at child birth was considered a just retribution for her transgression. However, Landon never expressed political opinions similar to those embraced by Wollstonecraft. Their tragic fate, which seemed so aligned in the view of conservative critics, is what Landon sought to break free of.

The comparison with Wollstonecraft indicates a wider historical perspective that is needed in our understanding of the heritage bequeathed by the literary foremothers that Landon adopts and challenges.[5] The increasing visibility of women writers since the second half of the eighteenth century incurred the envy of male writers and censure from critics. In the wake of the French Revolution, they were seen divided along political lines. Rev. Richard Polwhele in his polemical poem, *The Unsex'd Female* (1798), categorizes literary women into two camps: the "unsex'd" ones including those who answered the clarion call of Wollstonecraft and the proper women writers who followed the lead of the evangelical Hannah More. The prefix, "unsex'd," in the title echoes the epigraph taken from Thomas Mathias's *The Pursuits of Literature* (1798): "Our unsex'd female writers now instruct, or confuse, us and themselves, in the labyrinth of politics, or turn us wild with Gallic frenzy." Polwhele uses this prefix to denounce radical-minded women writers who, like Lady Macbeth from whom the prefix derives, disown their natural share of power that ought to lie in the domestic sphere by intervening in the public domain. He also specifies one of their pursuits of knowledge, that is, botany, as disguised enthusiasm

4 Tricia Lootens points out that the complicated situation in which Landon found herself in Africa might have contributed to her death: the West African colony in the transition from slave trade to abolition, MacLean's lack of sympathy toward his young wife, and the jealousy of his native mistress ("Receiving" 244). For a more detailed treatment, please see Stephenson, *Laetitia Landon*.

5 For a detailed discussion of the relationship between women writers of the nineteenth century, with extension to E. B. Browning, see Ryan.

for sexual matters.[6] Therefore, the word "unsex'd" connotes at once wanting to become masculine by shedding their femininity and overcharged with sexuality due to their pursuit of knowledge previously forbidden to them. Such a denunciation of these "unnatural" women writers represents the hallmark of the conservative camp in the debate of the French Revolution in the 1790s.[7]

Two decades later, women writers had gained more access to the literary arena. However, they still found themselves typecast into two extremes of the poetess represented by Hemans and Landon. Both Hemans and Landon aspired to become the new embodiments of Corinne. Hemans established herself as the pillar of social conscience, upholding the values of the hearth amidst imperial expansion, as in "England's Dead" (1822) and "The Homes of England" (1828), and exhorting Christian femininity, as in *The Records of Women* (1828). Throughout the nineteenth century, Hemans enjoyed accolades from both sides of the Atlantic. Her fame presented a threat even to Byron. In a letter to his friend, Byron dismisses her as "Mrs. Hewoman" and a "feminine He-man" (*Letters* 7: 158). Byron's sexual slur is on a par with Polwhele's bias. They were more than ready to denounce women writers as unnatural monsters. Hemans's literary reception accords with the typical curve of successful poetess in the nineteenth century, for despite the hard-won accolades, her poetry became largely unread after the First World War (Mandell, Introduction). The apparent conservative advocacy in her works subjected them to modern neglect till her quiet challenges to patriarchy were re-discovered by critics such as Nanora Sweet, Julia Melnyk, Tricia Lootens ("Hemans and Home"), and Marlon Ross.

On the other end of the poetess spectrum, Landon acknowledges the legacy of Hemans as in the "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans" (1835) and "On the Character of Mrs. Hemans's Writings" (1835). Nevertheless, she steers away from the domestic ideology of Hemans in order to carve out a niche for herself by advancing on the Della Cruscan convention of sensuous poetry[8] and by capitalizing on the thriving trade of popular periodicals and gift annuals. Her poetry and person were seen closely allied behind the cryptic initials L.E.L. to form an icon of femininity. Thus her apparent complicity with the consumerist culture deflated her critical fortune in the modern view. Only recently have Adriana Craciun, Richard Cronin and others started to "retrieve" the subversive strains in Landon's oeuvre.

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6 For the political controversy concerning botany in the late eighteenth century, see Bewell.

7 For a detail analysis of each of the writers and artists discussed in Polwhele's poem, see Stafford 1-34. For a thorough explication of the rise of women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, please see Ross; Mellor, *Romanticism and Feminism*.

8 For an excellent recent study on the Della Cruscan poetry, see Labbe 39-66.

Advancing on Jerome McGann's recuperation of the emotion in *The Poetic of Sensibility* (1996), Isobel Armstrong sees Landon's work offering an "access point" for our exploration into the hermeneutics of the feminine discourse (*Victorian Poetry* 339). Isobel Armstrong further pleads for an epistemology and aesthetics of women poets under the rubric of "the gush of the feminine" ("Gush" 15), which resounds with the exclamation of Landon's "Erinna" in *The Golden Violet* (1826): "And song came gushing, like the natural tears" (*Selected Writings* 93).[9] Conversely, Mellor judges that Landon commodifies herself as a "purchasable icon of beauty" (*Romanticism and Gender* 112). Mellor identifies the "hegemonic ideal of feminine beauty" as an "image of the ideal woman as specular, as the object rather than the owner of the gaze" (111). However, Jacqueline Labbe maintains that Landon works not "within," as Mellor argues (120), but "with" such essentialist constructions. The deliberate triteness of Landon, as in the "Six Songs of Love, Constancy, Romance, Inconstancy, Truth, and Marriage" (1821), in fact offers a trenchant critique on love (Labbe 136). I agree more with Labbe that Mellor's entrapped poetess represents only a persona to demonstrate her poetic "fitness" (159). In other words, Landon is fully aware of its artifice and expediency. The debate between Mellor and Labbe seems to hinge on their different assessments of the self-reference in Landon's work. The core of their contention lies in Landon's preface to *The Venetian Bracelet* volume (1829) in which she defines the moral and aesthetic purpose of her writing:

> A highly-cultivated state of society must ever have for concomitant evils, that selfishness, the result of indolent indulgence; and that heartlessness attendant on refinement, which too often hardens while it polishes. Aware that to elevate I must first soften, and that if I wished to purify I must first touch, I have ever endeavored to bring forward grief, disappointment, the fallen leaf, the faded flower, the broken heart, and the early grave. Surely we must be less worldly, less interested, from this sympathy with the sorrow in which our unselfish feelings alone can take part. (*Selected Writings* 102-03)

In Mellor's opinion, Landon's appeal to Lord Shaftesbury's philosophy of "disinterested" sympathy could not save her from the charge of having "exhausted" the Burkean notion of the beautiful (*Romanticism and Gender* 114), that is, having

9 Quotations of Landon's poems, unless noted otherwise, are drawn from *Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Selected Writings*, ed. Jerome McGann and Daniel Reiss (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 1997). References to this edition are noted as *Selected Writings* followed by line numbers. Some poems not included in entirety in McGann and Reiss's edition are drawn from *The Poetical Works of Letitia Elizabeth Landon. "L.E.L." 1837*, rpt. ed. F. J. Sypher (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1990). References to this edition are noted as *Poetical Works* followed by page numbers.

capitalized on the advantage and then fallen prey to the bondage of women writers. However, Labbe sees this passage as exemplifying Landon's awareness of her staged "entrapment." This paper adopts Labbe's strategy in order to investigate Landon's involuted dealings with the commodification of works by women poets.

Moreover, Angela Leighton tries to unravel the paradox represented by Landon by arguing that she lives the story of Corinne and leaves to later generations a "shabbier example of the woman poet as suicidal victim of men's treachery" (57, my emphasis). Leighton leads us to see the way in which Landon embodies the emergent modern celebrity. Landon emulated the ideal of an independent woman artist yet was not blessed with spatial-temporal distance and class privilege, such as those enjoyed by Madame de Staël, to shield her from public scrutiny. Therefore, the rhetoric of sensibility that has been attributed to Landon's success becomes a two-edged sword. On the one hand, the model offers her a means of recovering a lost "self" and of returning "to the body" as an active subject. On the other hand, sensibility, as a mode of "display," expresses and perpetuates the inner self-alienation of female subjectivity. Leighton thus compares Landon's project with that of Hélène Cixous. They both seek to "reclaim woman's poetic selfhood as a physical identity translated as a kind of writing" (58). But Landon's language of sensation gradually becomes a "ventriloquizing end in itself"—"unattended to the contingent realities of women's life, but technically self-justifying and self-prolonging" (64). Landon reaches toward a breakthrough when writing the autobiographical poem, "The Story of the Lyre" (1828), in which self-doubt disrupts self-pity and thus promises a new vista (Leighton 64). But this new prospect dissipates at her untimely death.

More recently, historical studies help us see Landon in a different light as Craciun situates Landon's poetry in the context of the 1820s and 1830s, especially the cholera scare in London. With focus on the material history of London in the 1830s, Craciun contends that Landon's "corporeal poetics" works to demystify the "disembodied poetics" of Romanticism (241). In this way, Craciun portrays Landon as proudly celebrating sensibility and the feminine body. However, this paper argues that Landon endeavors to move beyond the constraints resulted from overemphasis on the female body. An alternative to the impasse is offered by the Mélusine legend, which, as Luce Irigaray points out, is a story "about the relationship to the mother, and mother nature, and how she fits into society" (473). It thus provides a lens through which Landon adjusts her alignment with the tradition of women writers.

The figure of the mermaid also points out the way toward solving a problem in literary history—how to bridge the gap between Romanticism and Victorian literature. The women poets in the 1820s and 30s, as Stuart Curran suggests, provide

the conceptual and stylistic transition from high Romanticism to conservative Victorian values (188). The shift can be understood in the rhetoric of biology in the sense that the women writers of the intervening period provide a "missing link" between the two paradigms. The connection dwells on the image of the mermaid. Gillian Beer leads us to see why the mermaid becomes an important trope of the cultural imagination in the nineteenth century: "[t]he Mermaid (Siren canora) is one of the connecting links of which too many are missing, between Man and the Marine Ascidiae" (133).[10] For women writers, the legend of the mermaid offers an opportunity to imagine a bridge between the dichotomy of human / beast, domesticity / fantasy, and rationality / imagination. As the Renaissance occultist Paracelsus in "A Book on Nymphs, Sylphs, Pygmies, and Salamanders, and on the Other Spirits" imagines a world inhabited by those fantastic creatures in parallel with the human world (213-56), the woman poet envisions herself inhabiting a position on the side of the mainstream society, yet harboring all its ambivalences.

The legend of Mélusine thus enables Landon to stage a combat with her literary foremothers. Landon's challenge to their legacy, mainly through intricate framing and allusion, unfolds in three phases. First, in "The Improvisatrice," Landon practices her voice with de Staël's heroine Corinne. But she makes Corinne's performative art exude the visual confines demanded by the popular periodicals and gift annuals in which most of her own works appeared. For Landon, the voice of the improvisatrice remains unattainable beyond the frame of the tableau. Second, in "The Fairy of the Fountains," the story about Mélusine entombing the father to revenge the mother but ending up in her double exile, Landon makes the word, rather than the grotesque body of the Fairy, the crux of transgression. Third, in "Corinne at the Cape of Misena," a poem evoking a popular vignette of Corinne's improvisation, Landon alludes to her own translation in order to restage Corrine's performance in verse, a virtuosity overlooked in de Staël's novel. Landon's maneuver here skews the model of "bearing the word" which is, as Margaret Homans explains, one of the four ways to establish female legacy (29). Instead of deferring to authority, as Homans suggests, Landon quotes from her own translation to give voice to Corinne. This paper does not intend to reinstate a proto-feminist stance for Landon, a stance unfit for her subtle maneuver under patriarchal demands and within commercial mechanism. Various critics, such as Isobel Armstrong, Leighton and Craciun, have tried to evaluate Landon's poetry through versions of the French feminists' theory of *écriture feminine*. But I would argue that this mode of writing that stems from the feminine bodily experience is only a ploy adopted by Landon, rather than her ultimate goal. This paper delineates the way in which

10 For one of the most recent studies on the issue related to the mermaid, see Yan, "Freak."

Landon forges her own authority as a new Corinne while skirting the censure of grotesque so often heaped upon women writers by diverting emphasis from her hybrid body to her word. The idea of "forging" is drawn from two sources. First, it is gleaned from literary history as in the *Forging Connections: Women's Poetry from the Renaissance to Romanticism*, a collection of essay edited by Mellor et al, to indicate Landon's attempt at bridging the gap between high Romantic ideals and Victorian conservative values. Second, it draws on Beer's use of the word which refers to "connecting" and "counterfeiting" in the biological discourse of the "missing link" (117). The ambiguity pointed out by Beer in the biological discourse helps us to see Landon's double maneuver of Mélusine, in terms of theme, style and structure. Landon grafts the figure of Mélusine unto the voice of Corinne in a travesty of some contemporary mermaid hoax which was made up of a fishtail grafted onto a monkey torso. In other words, Landon's Mélusine is and is not a mermaid because the focus of her poetry is not on her body but on her word which allows her to break free of her foremothers' legacy-cum-curse.

1. The Figure of the Mermaid

Compilation of folk tales gathered momentum in the nineteenth century as societies were facing tremendous structural changes in the economic, political and cultural fronts. A bifurcated emphasis related to the folktale collection emerged: to salvage the grassroots of national culture and to consolidate the emerging bourgeois ethics. On the one hand, scholars started to collect folklore from the fringes of the society to preserve the core of their cultural identity. They also sought to retrieve an ur-myth which would represent the essence of the world mythology and to configure a system that would provide a common ground for all mythologies. On the other hand, codification of folklore went hand in hand with ideological structuring of the society. According to Jack Zipes, as the decentralized societies of the Middle Ages gave way to more centralized nation-states and principalities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, lax notions of courtesy were replaced by more stringent notions of civility. All these transformations were reinforced by the rise of the bourgeoisie (19). Charles Perrault and his contemporary folktale writers aimed to build the foundation of their nation-state by educating children in new codes of conduct. This civilizing task, guided by the "utilitarian moralism" of the bourgeoisie, was continued in a different form by the Brothers Grimm at a time when the prolonged Napoleonic wars threatened to "submerge" the Germanic culture (Lokke 140). In other words, fairy tales were highly treasured, especially at the time of crisis, for they were thought to contain the key to the authentic national culture on a broad

base.

Situated in the social context of folktale compilation, the legends of the mermaid take on new significance. Tales of the mermaid, including creatures of half-woman, half-beast (be it bird, fish, snake, etc.), have pervaded civilizations since time immemorial. The hybridity of such creatures gives shape to our desire to connect with other life forms. Over the last millennium, Christian orthodoxy has tried to contain the inordinate enthusiasm of reaching out to other creatures. One of their strategies was to uphold Christ's Incarnation as the ultimate hybrid between the divine and the human and Eucharist as the only means for us to regain unity with God.[11] The church condemned other forms of coupling with a view to promoting the idea of a coherent and self-contained identity. However, the fascination for hybrid creatures remains resilient. It is condensed in the figure of the mermaid for her legends often involve bonding between humans and such creatures through marriage, the most intimate mode of union between two entities. The interest in the mermaid invites exploration in various perspectives. Nancy Easterlin argues from an anthropological viewpoint that the shape-change of such creatures from bird-bodied sirens to the fish-women mermaids indicates the gradual dominance of maritime trade (258). Boria Sax explains the ambivalence provoked by such figures as stemming from the fear for the elemental feminine, for instance, the anxiety provoked by the water nymph Naiad in the legend of the Golden Fleece (44). In a similar vein of thought, Marina Warner explains that this figure embodies voice, fate and Eros (406). She represents the male fantasy of feminine submission and male fear of her lure. Her hybrid body materializes man's desire and her evaporation spells out his solution to the anxiety of engulfment. These anthropological and psychological investigations help us examine the following renditions of the mermaid—the French romance, Andersen's tale, and de Staël's novel. Together they show a shift of focus from the public to the individual and to the newly emerged female agency.

1.1 The Case of Mélusine

The French medieval legend, Mélusine, embodies the struggle between patriarchal and matriarchal cultural forces. The legend lends legitimacy to the Lusigna regime, with her name signifying "Mère Lusigne" (the mother of Lusigne) (Krell n.p.). The myth condenses the process in which patriarchy subsumes

11 Around the twelfth century, the Eucharist was regarded as a kind of transformation in which the metamorphosis occurs at the level of substance rather than appearance. See Bynum 17.

matriarchal forces while still trumpeting the maternal figure as a safeguard of its reign.

Born of a fairy mother and a mortal father, Mélusine remains a regal figure whose predicament does not compromise her prowess. As in the earliest account by Jean d'Arras's *Roman de Mélusine* (1393), she encounters Raymondyn who wanders in a wood after accidentally killing his uncle on a boar hunt. She marries him under the condition that he must not visit her at her lying-in. If he broke his promise, she will have to leave him. She helps him restore his sovereignty and build a fortress, in addition to giving birth to several children, most of whom have strange birthmarks or develop extra limbs and superhuman powers. Nevertheless, Raymondyn is instigated by one of his jealous cousins to peep on Mélusine while she is nursing her daughters. He is shocked to discover Mélusine's lower serpent part which is a curse from her mother for killing her father. She immediately notices his perfidy but keeps quiet about it. Then one of their sons kills his sibling and Raymondyn bitterly blames Mélusine's monstrous origin as the cause of fratricide. Enraged, Mélusine assumes the shape of a flying serpent and departs from the kingdom. Raymondyn feels bereaved and eventually dies.

Two elements in the French romance stand out as hallmarks of this character. Firstly, her assertive character is tolerated by patriarchy perhaps because of her mixed origins and the tragedy is blamed on Raymondyn's perfidy. As Kevin Brownless elucidates, Raymondyn's first transgression—peering at her on a Saturday night—questions her integrity as a wife, and his second—denouncing her as the curse of his bloodline—questions her role as a mother (27). It's the second that results in her furious reproach of his betrayal. Throughout the myth, she is presented as a dominant character, dictating her terms and never ashamed of her desires. Before her departure, she has a speech on the windowsill lamenting the betrayal and the loss of privilege and pleasures:

> Ha, thou swete Countre / in the haue I had so grete solas & recreacion, . . . / alas! I was wonnt to be called lady / . . . / & now not able to be alowed a symple seruaunt / but assygned to horryble peynes & tourments vnto the day of fynal judgement. And al they that myght come to my presence had grete Joye to behold me / and fro this tyme foorth they shal dysdayne me & be ferefull of myn abhomynable figure / and the lustes & playsirs that I was wonnt to haue shal be reuertid in tribulacions & grieuous penitences. (*Mélusine* xlvi.319-20, punctuations original)

The scenario at the windowsill, a luminal position between the floor and the sky, when she is morphing into a flying serpent, captures her hybridity in both physical and emotional terms. In the end, her transgression of boundary is "neutralized," as

Brownlee suggests, in a Christian framework. As she claims in her final address, "Adieu, myn herte, & al my joye; Farewel, my loue, & al myn wele / and yet as long as thou lyuest, I shal feed myn eyen with the syght of the / but pyte I haue on the of this, that thou mayst neuer see me but in horryble figure" (xliv.318-19). Although Mélusine as a desiring subject is firmly established at the very moment of her disappearance, her final words to Raymondyn seal the king safely from her influence. As Brownlee insists, "while she will continue to gaze upon him with the eyes of female desire, he will be protected by virtue of not being able to reciprocate, due to her impending metamorphosis" (32-33). The patriarchal integrity is thus restored.

The second salient feature of the romance is the contrary evaluations of her maternal and stately functions. After departure, she often comes back to nurse her infants and to oversee the transition of power. Mélusine's maternal acts turn out to be more problematic than her metamorphosis. In Jean d'Arras's text, she hires wet nurses, whereas in Coudrette's account (1400-01) she breastfeeds her children. Other versions of the legend also feature illustrations of Mélusine as a siren in the act of breastfeeding. Siren's milk is highly transgressive as it upsets the discreteness of species (Léglu 74, 81). These siren-related references suggest contamination of the bloodline at its source. Her hybrid status is thus used first to lend authority to the Lusignan lineage, and then to defame it in order to legitimize the appropriation of the fortress by Jean de Berry in 1374, who happened to be the patron of Jean d'Arras (Brownlee 18, 81). The later political appropriation may be seen foreshadowed by Raymondyn's denunciation of her as the curse on his offspring.

The dubious effects of her maternity, either as a blessing or abomination, stem from her hybrid body. As Dyan Elliott points out, the psychoanalytical "splitting" mechanisms in the medieval perceptions of women's bodies are often materialized as a "good" top half and a "bad" lower half (qtd. in Léglu 79-80). This notion helps to elucidate Mélusine's hybridity. It also foregrounds her mixed origins—half fairy and half human—but also the depth of her alienation. Her mother's curse dooms her to live precariously between the two states. Her husband's perfidy again forces her to wander eternally between the two. Her shape-change, as Brownlee leads us to see, forms a pattern: she shifts from "two natures in one body," to a hybrid body, and finally to two alternating ones (19; 38). This figure of beauty and power needs to be tamed. As Easterlin points out, the mermaid legend can be seen as a syncretic myth embodying pagan dualism that becomes subjugated under Christianity in the trajectory of sin, redemption and immortality (258). Her body is thus the basis of both her potency and her fate.

1.2 Andersen's Little Mermaid

The public dimension of the French romance is charged with new energy of individual quest for identity in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In the German Romantic literature, the mermaid legend curiously becomes a major drawing force as she features in Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte, Baron Fouqué's *Undine* (1811); E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Golden Pot, or a Modern Fairy Tale* (1814); and Goethe's "The New Mélusine," which appeared in *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Travel, or the Renunciations* (1821). Fouqué's tale is based on the Nordic legend of the Saal River Nymph, whose power over the elements fascinates the knight Huldebrand. She seeks a union with him in order to gain a soul. But he betrays her for fear of her power and marries her half-sister Bertalda instead. According to God's judgment, Huldebrand is killed and Undine surges from underneath the earth as a "little silver spring" on the spot where he is buried (136). The tale, sharing the same pattern of love and betrayal with the French romance, was a hit across Europe and spawned various stage performances. In Fouqué's emphasis on the ethic of self-sacrifice, Kari Lokke notices an "unconscious protofeminism" for his sympathy with the woman who transgresses the bounds of "constructed femininity" in the "naturalness of her passion" (152). Furthermore, the views of Fouqué on folklore are developed by Heinrich Heine, who, in his essays *Elementargeister* (1835-36) and *Die Götter im Exil* (1853), values folklore as a vehicle for preserving the Germanic myth and classical paganism that have been demonized by Christianity. For Heine, the longing for the naïve is allied with the desire for a culturally repressed feminine (Lokke 151). Heine's belief aptly explains the German romantic fascination for the mermaid legend.

Inspired by Fouqué's tale and sharing Heine's cultural anxiety, Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* typifies how this legend can paradoxically express the longing to preserve the pristine purity in solitude and the desire of the alienated genius to assimilate with the mainstream. Andersen emerged as Denmark's first proletarian writer in a general mood of withdrawal resulted from the massively reduced Danish reign in the early nineteenth century (Easterlin 264). Placed in this somber backdrop, *The Little Mermaid* encapsulates both his endeavor for recognition and yearning for transcendence. From the outset, the world of the mermaid is set in parallel with that of the human world, as the old grandmother explains to the Little Mermaid: "Just as we dive up out of the sea to look at the lands where people live, so they dive up to lovely unknown places that we shall never come to see" (Andersen 90). The mermaid decides to pursue her desire for the Prince and the immortal soul by trading her voice with the sea witch for human legs. She is then caught in a painful dilemma. Her beauty is cherished by the Prince while her every step incurs excruciating pain.

But her muteness deprives her of a chance to become the real subject of his love. The Prince's unwitting betrayal in marrying the princess of a neighboring country puts her on the brink of collapse. But her mercy in not killing him saves her from ultimate evaporation. She is permitted to join the daughters of the air in their hope of redemption: "When we have striven to do what good we can for three hundred years, we gain our immortal soul and are given a share in the eternal happiness of mankind" (106). Moreover, this limbo-like status can be shortened if they see "a good child that makes its parents happy and deserves their love, so God shortens our period of trial. The child does not know when we are flying through the room, and then when we smile upon it in happiness, a year is taken from our three hundred" (106).

Andersen's tale follows the trajectory of Fouqué's *Undine* in that both heroines strive for an immortal soul. The tale has been regarded as a miniature of his autobiography, *The Fairy Tale of My Life*, which shows his life as a process of "self-denial cultivated as individualism" (Zipes 77). Andersen eliminates the demonic side of the mermaid contained in Fouqué's story for the Little Mermaid is an "unwitting" femme fatale, dangerous to none but herself. Andersen also subsumes the mermaid's struggle within his blueprint for a mobile society built on merit and virtue. The Little Mermaid, with her voice exchanged for a proper body and being stranded between the land and the sea, provides us a model to probe into the similar plight of the poetess. The in-between status of the mermaid also inspires de Staël to launch her project of the independent woman artist with *Corinne*.

1.3 De Staël's Corinne

The works of Germaine de Staël, both in the form of political discourse and fiction, have proved to be ever more influential to the Romantic period across nations. She was born to Jacques Necker, the Swiss banker who was appointed the finance minister of Louis XVI, and the Swiss salonnière, Suzanne C. Necker. She was banished by Napoleon from Paris in 1802 for criticizing his imperial policy. While exiled in Weimar, she was inspired by an opera based on the Nordic legend of Die Saalnixe, which was performed in 1803, to compose her masterpiece, *Corinne* (1807) (Isbell vii). The novel chronicles the tragic life of Corinne, born of an Italian mother and an English father, who relinquishes her father's name in order to return to Italy to pursue her artistic talents. The story begins with Corinne encountering her Scottish suitor, Oswald, Lord Nelvil, upon receiving her laurel at the Capitol of Rome for her consummate improvisation. The novel departs from the legend of the water nymph and becomes a travelogue-cum-romance in which the dark-haired Corinne falls in love with and is later betrayed by Oswald, who upon returning to

England gets married to her half-sister, the blonde Lucile. Oswald then takes Lucile with their daughter Juliet to visit Corinne in Florence. In the end, Corinne takes delight in coaching the dark-haired Juliet before her own imminent death.

The inspiration of a hybrid creature for *Corinne* shows its imprint on the contrarian build-up of Corinne's character, half-English and half-Italian, the former Protestant and phlegmatic, the latter Catholic and jovial. The conflict is thus more psychological than political. De Staël, a salonnière and writer in exile, well understands the sacrifices women have to undergo if they decide to pursue their talents.[12] They are likely to be envied by their male counterpart and shunned by women who are contented within the domestic confines. Their sense of double alienation is thus likened to that felt by the water nymph hovering above the human realm.

More importantly, the name Corinne evokes Corinna, a Boeotian poet of ancient Greece, who reputedly won five victories over Pindar for the lyric prize (Wolfson 460 n). De Staël further models her heroine on another famous ancient poetess, Sappho, whose tragic death immortalizes her as the ultimate woman artist. *Corinne* thus provides a consummate example of woman artist. Ellen Moers judiciously points out the seminal influence of *Corinne* on the English women writers in the nineteenth century, including Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, George Eliot, Elizabeth Browning, etc. (173-210). Writing at a time when the works of women writers were yet to be restored for fair assessment, Moers does not include Landon in her analysis. To remedy this lack, this paper delineates the ways in which Landon trains herself on the model of Corinne.

2. Landon Forging Corinne

Landon's adaptation of Mélusine assumes the word / body dyad that is paramount in Andersen's tale and develops Corinne's national hybridity in de Staël's novel into the conflict between the ambition for self-fulfillment and the longing for domestic bliss. To mold her heroine, Landon grafts the figure of Mélusine onto the voice of Corinne in a parody of the mermaid hoax of that time which featured a fishtail grafted onto a monkey torso. The idea of "grafting" is associated with the biological analogy of forging as connecting and counterfeiting. According to the OED, "grafting" means to "insert or fix in or upon something, with the result of producing a vital or indissoluble union" or to "transplant (a piece of skin, tissue, etc.)

12 For a literary biography of de Staël, see Hogsett; for a collection of new studies of de Staël, see Gutwirth, et al.

into a different part of the body, or from one animal to another."[13] Landon's forging her ideal by grafting Mélusine onto Corinne can be understood in two ways: to achieve self-definition against literary foremothers and to critique commodification of poetry by passing as a mermaid, that is, a commodity. First, Landon turns Mélusine's "mingled dower" of human passion and fairy power ("Fairy of the Fountain," *Selected Writings* 141-42) into a double banishment, which indicates a keen awareness of her predicament—being ridiculed by male critics and contemned by fellow female poets. Second, the popular outlets of Landon's work pronounce her complicity with, but allow her critique to emerge from within, the commodity culture. In the end, Landon exploits the metamorphosis of Mélusine to upset the visual priority demanded by such publications and to foreground the poetess's "word" as the preserve of the woman poet. Landon shifts the voyeurism at the scene of metamorphosis to Mélusine's father's eavesdropping on her mother's "word / Mortal ears hath never heard" (127-28). Landon's stress on the "word" coheres with the shift of emphasis in Andersen's tale from the body to the voice / word. Andersen changes the focus from the fertility of woman, which is the primary secret in Jean d'Arras's romance, to the lost voice of the mermaid in order to showcase the poet who has lost his true voice in the disciplinary mechanism (Lokke 153-54). The body / word dyad is further complicated in Landon's poetry. Landon grafts the irreducible body of Mélusine onto the unattainable voice of Corinne to mold her brand of woman poet who seeks for approbation while not yielding to appropriation.

The case of Landon, enticingly promoted under the acronym L.E.L. attached at the end of her poems, crystallizes the attraction and anxiety associated with such a popular poetess. Being a professional writer, Landon strives to maintain the balance between mystery and publicity in order to sustain the reader's interest and to fulfill her responsibility as a cultural critic. Streaks of resistance are inserted underneath the sleek commodification of her talent and person. As McGann and Reiss judge, Landon fashions herself as the "emblem of the conflicted Victorian sentimentalist," at once "critical of and enslaved by the worldliness and hypocrisies of her age" (11). This self-aware conflict is best exemplified in Landon's letter to a friend: "I have been both bodily and intellectually industrious. I have written poetry 'by the pound'; I have eaten fruit enough to stock a stall in Covent-garden" (qtd. in Craciun 243). This ironic self-assessment suggests Landon's engagement with two sets of framework: physical and intellectual, without forfeiting either. Landon's irresolution between the two has been recognized as being inherited from the incongruity that characterized Byron's poetry. Frederic Rowton in *The Female Poets of Great Britain* (1848) acknowledges Landon as the "Byron of our poetesses." Moreover, Landon's

13 Please see http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/80481?rskey=NYG5qX&result=6#eid.

Byronic heroines demonstrate a keener awareness of the patriarchal restrictions, the desire to flout them and the consequences of such daring.

The most explicitly Byronic heroine in Landon's work is the one based on de Staël's Corinne. Landon's poetry is replete with adaptations of themes from *Corinne*, especially "The Improvisatrice" (1824), "Erinna" (1826), "The History of the Lyre" (1828), and "Corinne at the Cape of Misena" (1832). Leighton leads us to see that Landon was celebrated and lamented in her time as a "real-life, and therefore more tawdry, Corinne" (45). Landon's most subtle Corinne impersonation appears in the verse translation of Corinne's four improvisations in the English translation of de Staël's novel, edited by Isabel Hill in 1833. De Staël's prose "transcription" of the improvisations deprives Corinne of both the chance to show her command of Italian and the chance to compose verse. Instead, Landon gives voice to this iconic figure.

Landon's struggle at self-definition develops in the following three phases: first she reconfigures the Corinne image by enshrining the voice beyond the tableau in "The Improvisatrice"; then she grafts Mélusine onto the Corinne figure while establishing the word rather than the body in "The Fairy of the Fountains" as the foundation of the poetess's calling; finally in "Corinne at the Cape of Misena," Landon secures an advantage for the word by allowing Corinne to speak in verse in order to redress de Staël's oversight. With these three poems, she embarks on her subtitle critique of the commodification of poetry.

2.1 "The Improvisatrice": the Voice beyond the Tableau

"The Improvisatrice," the title poem of Landon's first major volume of poetry, *The Improvisatrice; and Other Poems* (1824), launches her career on the stage established by de Staël's Corinne. This poem best demonstrates Landon's endeavor to exploit the visual emphasis imposed on women poets in order to enact improvisation as both eulogy and elegy. The voice of the improvisatrice, while presenting one tableau after another, remains unattainable. Improvisation, a type of performance popular in parts of Italy became an important pan-European cultural phenomenon in the final decades of the eighteenth century, according to Angela Esterhammer. It was highly acclaimed outside Italy as a mode of composition that puts the performer on the brink of inspiration and collapse as we witness in German, French and English travel accounts of this period. For example, Mary Shelley records in her journal her witness of an improviser's performance (Esterhammer 1). Improvisation, as an "ex-tempore" manner of composition, is incommensurate with the normal span of time allotted to thought and writing, at once unforeseeable and "un-re-visable." Esterhammer points out that improvisation as a performative, public, and normally secular phenomenon is opposed to inspiration as a private and cognitive aspect of the act of composition which is sometime linked with spiritual

activity (4). De Staël's *Corinne* has rendered the highly volatile image of the improvisatrice an embodiment of Romantic poetry (102). She further gives it a vivid imprint, not only in inserting quite a few vignettes in the narrative, but more importantly in posing as her heroine in portraits and social functions.[14] Both the visualizing tendency and self-display are inherited by Landon. However, the legacy of the body (self-staging) and the voice (the mode of composition) came with a high price because of Landon's lack in class privilege. Hostile criticism was heaped on her from two fronts. First, Landon's ready collaboration with the visual incurred bitter disapproval from male critics. For instance, William Makepeace Thackeray denounced writers like her for ingratiating themselves in providing "poetic illusion" to paintings in the gift book volumes and in "using a little sham sentiment" to promote "a little sham art" (qtd. in Lawford 112). Thackeray's vituperation reveals his apprehension about the easy allure of Landon's art. Second, the effusive outpouring of sentiment, so much lauded in Romantic male poets, becomes suspicious if found in women's poetry. In the introduction to *The British Female Poets* (1848), George Bethune refers to Landon as "shorthand" for slip-shod verse: "As the line came first to the brain, so it was written; as it was written, so it was printed" (qtd. in Esterhammer 97). In a paradoxical move to defuse one criticism by courting another, Landon makes the speaker of "The Improvisatrice" both a poet and painter and shifts the focus from spontaneity to spectacle. Visual devices are thus used to condense on-site inspiration to time-arrested sight. Nevertheless, visual emphasis is not allowed to upstage poetry.

The advertisement for the volume, *The Improvisatrice* explicitly appeals to the imagined South that has been made vital to the English reader's imagination by *Corinne*: "*The Improvisatrice* is an attempt to illustrate that species of inspiration common in Italy, where the mind is warmed from earliest childhood by all that is beautiful in Nature and glorious in Art" (*Selected Writings* 51). This poem demonstrates an ornate intersection between poetry, music, and painting and also showcases the Oriental allure of Landon's writing. It begins with a first-person account of the speaker's upbringing in Florence: "I am a daughter of that land, / Where the poet's lip and the painter's hand / Are most divine" (*Poetical Works* 1). Then she proceeds to describe her paintings of Petrarch and Sappho. In describing the latter, she bursts into singing and the printed song is accompanied by an illustration of the death of Sappho on the adjacent page. Then the improvisatrice sings "A Moorish Romance" about Leila betrayed by Abdalla. Finishing the story, the improvisatrice sees a man among the audience resembling her painting of Petrarch, with pale cheeks and "dark eyes kept fixed on mine" (*Poetical Works* 10).

14 For a detailed discussion of de Staël's portraits as Corinne, see Sheriff 223-61.

She is thus inspired to sing "The Charmed Cup," a tragic love story between Ida and Julian. After this song, she encounters her aforementioned ardent admirer, Lorenzo, in a gallery. She then dresses as an Indian girl to attend a feast in Count Leon's hall and sings "The Hindoo Girl's Song" and "The Indian Bride." When the song ends, she cannot locate Lorenzo; she then sings a song related to her sadness. It is followed by a song about an ancient Greek legend, Leades and Cydippe. Incidentally, she discovers that Lorenzo is with another girl. Broken hearted and in failing health, she then paints a portrait of Sappho as a farewell gift to him. Lorenzo comes in at this point to explain his previous betrothal to a pale heiress, Ianthe, but later finds himself in love with the improvisatrice. Ianthe dies shortly after marriage but it is too late for the improvisatrice to recover, and she dies. Finally a first-person narrator wanders into the splendid hall of Lorenzo and marvels at the portrait of Sappho. Besides the portrait, a funeral urn is placed with the inscription: "Lorenzo to his minstrel love" (*Poetical Works* 33). The romance proper of the poem is so intertwined with the improvisatrice's performance that the identity of the improvisatrice and the heroines in her songs and paintings are blurred. The first-person speaker who ends the poem is not the speaker who begins it. This inconclusive structure provides neither a definite frame nor a neat correspondence between the speaker and the subjects of her account. This structure underscores, as Cynthia Lawford suggests, the fact that the woman in the spotlight represents "an ideal born of yearnings ever yet to be expressed, an ideal that could not be fully comprehended, predicted, or ascertained" (110). Furthermore, the titles of the inset songs read like a list of Landon's own poetic titles. In other words, this poem enacts her poetical program in a nutshell, announcing her subject, scope, and keynote. But the structure of "The Improvisatrice" that carries the series of tableaux makes them into a string of metonyms that can only approximate but never capture nor contain the voice of the improvisatrice. This poem apparently testifies to the "effusiveness" of Landon's poetry which caters to the popular readership but in reality refuses easy appropriation.

2.2 "The Fairy of the Fountains": the Word over the Body

"The Fairy of the Fountains" (1834) further testifies to Landon's attempt to implode the voyeuristic selling strategy with a view to promoting her word rather than her body. This poem, contemporaneous with Andersen's tale (1837),[15] explores

15 There is no evidence suggesting Andersen's awareness of Landon's work or vice versa. Andersen's tale is translated into English by Lady Duff Gordon in *Bentley's Miscellany* (1846) and by Caroline Peachey in *Danish Legends and Tales* (1846) (Bennett 186). No

a facet of the cultural imagination different from that emphasized in the German Romanticism. Fouqué's tale registers a shift in the imagination for the mermaid from a supernatural figure to a domestic housewife, a shift that reflects the male anxiety about the rise of woman (Craciun 210). The domesticating tendency is explored by Andersen and resisted by de Staël but both can only envision a tragic outcome of such defiance. De Staël's stance is shared by Landon who then tries out a different route by resorting to the French source. "The Fairy of the Fountains" appeared in the gift annual, *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book for 1835*, after her trip to Paris. Having acknowledged her source as William Thoms's *Lays and Legends of Various Nations* (1834) in the note, Landon eliminates the two sisters of Mélusine and her children, the deformities of the latter being signs of their supernatural prower (Léglu 78). Craciun argues that, by omitting the monstrous children, Landon "reinscribes" the desire for a proper bourgeois body, *homo clausus* (245). Also eliminated are Raymond's envious cousin, and the "intradiegetic presence" of a courtly audience (Brownlee 30). The focus is thus sharpened onto the relationship between Mélusine and her mother Pressine, Mélusine and Raymond. Such a concentration works to update the medieval romance in the Romantic context in which the nuclear family becomes increasingly dominant in individual life and society. The characters are brought closer to the modern angst about the nature of love, coherent identity and female agency.

At the outset of this poem, we are intrigued by the ambiguous grammatical case: "Why did she love her mother's so? / It hath wrought her wondrous wo" (*Selected Writings* 1-2). The possessive case, "her mother's," refers to her mother's belongings which may include her mother's power and fate.[16] This question announces a thematic, stylistic and structural doubleness that dominates the poem. Thematically, mother's and daughter's life mirror each other as Mélusine repeats her mother's fate of falling in love with a mortal and of being betrayed subsequently. Mélusine's hybrid body is the result of a curse from her mother as a punishment for entombing her father in a cave. It is also in a cave that she has to undergo periodic metamorphosis. The cave encapsulates the dynamism of liminality that governs the legend. This dynamism runs through the windowsill from which Mélusine takes her farewell and the fountain which serves as a threshold between the human and the supernatural.

Landon's resistance to ready co-option shows in her skepticism about her vision

doubt that they were both influenced by the cultural fascination with the mermaid.

16 This puzzling possessive case is used in the first edition of the poem, and adopted in McGann and Reiss's edition. For an interpretation of this punctuation, see Craciun 210, n 29.

and her own craft that is crystallized in the following scene which is projected from the daughter but overseen by the mother:

> Once that ladye, dark and tall,
> Stood upon the castle wall;
> And she marked her daughter's eyes
> Fix'd upon the glad sunrise,
> With a sad yet eager look,
> Such as fixes on a book
> Which describes some happy lot,
> Lit with joys that we have not.
> And the thought of what has been,
> And the thought of what might be,
> Makes us crave the fancied scene,
> And despise reality.
> 'Twas a drear and desert plain
> Lay around their own domain;
> But, far off, a world more fair
> Outlined on the sunny air;
> Hung amid the purple clouds,
> With which early morning shrouds
> All her blushes, brief and bright,
> Waking up from sleep and night. (97-116, my emphasis)

The vista thus triggers the mother's account of her own life and exhortation of spiritual redemption from their "mingled dower." As McGann and Reiss note, the transitive voice, "outlined," designates the imaginary scenery as "self-generating" (29). In other words, Mélusine and Pressine exist like passive recipients of the external prospect. The double frame of the vista further foregrounds the perspective on two levels: that the viewer is at once the daughter and the mother and that we are alerted to the presence of the omniscient narrator peering over their mirroring desire and fate. The mechanism of the double frame testifies to McGann and Reiss's observation that the women in Landon's work are shrewd observers of the spectacular society and of their own spectacular body as "cold spectators of a colder spectacle masked in the warm colors of dissimulating love" (24). While presenting Mélusine's sexual awakening, this imagined world is transmitted to us as if it is screened (both projected and censored) through Pressine who recognizes the same longings that have led to her own tragedy. The doubleness invites a psychological

reading of the ambivalence felt between mother and daughter. As Nancy Chodorow explains while varying her ideas from the more pessimistic view of Helene Deutsch, the daughter's attempts at individuation often involve "oscillations in emotions and ambivalence. A girl alternates between total rejection of a mother who represents infantile dependence and attachment to her, between identification with anyone other than her mother and feeling herself her mother's double and extension. Her mother often mirrors her preoccupations" (138). This insight leads us to see the vista as presenting the desire and fear of both mother and daughter, which dramatizes their symbiotic attachment to each other and the daughter's struggle to break free of her mother's predicament.

This double frame is comparable to the maneuver in de Staël's novel. As the dying Corinne commissions a young woman to perform her last improvisation to the returned Lord Nelvil, Pressine curates for the reader what Mélusine envisages. The sense of stage-management is exposed in both cases to alert the reader to its artifice. Moreover, the "blushes" on the cheeks of Mélusine when she imagines the outside world shall be repeated as she sees the approach of Raymond from the crystal globe when she is exiled to her own enchanted chamber. In these two passages, Landon makes the representations of desire, even prior to the advent of the object of their desire, trigger the bodily response.

Stylistically, the doubleness multiplies into repletion of similar emblems, such as rings (13,124, 564); the "stately stranger" (referring to Mélusine's father) (23), "her stately mother" (89), "that stately lady" (her mother) (119), Mélusine being "tall and stately" (208); Mélusine's father's "glittering mail" (26), Mélusine's "glittering scales" (553) and so on. Repetition does cast an overall sense of doom. Most important among the repeated images are the statues, especially when it refers to the female body. The similar references of the mother and the daughter to statue indicate their shared traits and fates: "With the marble of her [Pressine's] brow, / Colder than its custom now" (255-56); on Mélusine's "marble brow are wrought / Traces of impassioned thought" (373-74); Mélusine in her exile, "sits the fairy lady there, / Like a statue, pale and fair" (369-70). Moreover, the statue-like quality, a common feature in Victorian women's writing, has in fact been criticized for being the trope of female entrapment which reduces women either to predators like Medusa or to victims of domestic ideology.[17] Likewise, Leighton remarks that the poetess runs the risk of becoming her own effigy, that is, a "visually bounded" object, dead to her own subjectivity and ready for male appropriation (61). However, these emblematic statues in Landon's poem are not monolithic figures of subservience.

17 For discussion of the prominence of statues and sculptures in the 1820s and 30s as an index to the visual emphasis of literature, see Simonsen.

They can be examined in two aspects. First, as a heightened awareness of artifice, they serve as index to Landon's ploy of the body as spectacle. They invite an analogy with the statue of the Prince that Andersen's mermaid treasures as the epitome of human finesse. In both works, the statue symbolizes the ambivalent desire of the heroine. As Easterlin explains, in Andersen's tale, "just as the statue is ideal to her so she is to us: akin to romantic conceptions of the child and the noble savage, she links the human back to the presumed purity and innocence of nature and inexperience, even as these qualities render her powerless" (268-69). The statue of the Prince is an ironic reminder of the mermaid's real objective, that is, to "possess, like him, an immortal soul" (Easterlin 269). Andersen thus creates a Pygmalion myth in reverse by having the little mermaid wishing to find a flesh-and-blood prototype of the statue while striving to become the Galatea to her Prince. In the end, feminine ideals of innocence and sacrifice threaten to petrify her to a state worse than that of a statue, stranded between the mermaid and the woman, between the sea and the land. Nonetheless, different from the mute mermaid of Andersen's tale, Landon's Mélusine is ready to own up to her desire. Like Galatea coming to life, Mélusine could not hold back her blushes as she sees through her "crystal globe" the approach of Raymond, though being described as "pale and fair," like a statue. Mélusine's initial fusion with the statue only marks her departure from her mother's statue-like abstention. It quietly pronounces her desire to emerge from the bower-like prison.

The presence of statues in the poem also suggest an allusion to one of the putative inspirations for de Staël's *Corinne*, Lady Emma Hamilton, the second wife of the English ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples, Lord William Hamilton.[18] Lady Hamilton was famous for her performance of "attitudes" at Lord Hamilton's social functions and in the court of Naples, which even became part of the itinerary of the Grand Tourists. Though Landon's knowledge of Lady Hamilton cannot be established, she would have learned about her cultural influence via de Staël's novel. "Attitudes" refer to, as Marcia Pointon explains, the classical poses she was tutored by Hamilton to adopt in the form of *tableau vivant* that made an impact around Europe so huge that she served as the model of many well-known artists, such as George Romney and Joshua Reynolds (221 n 13). With the case of Lady Hamilton, Pointon contends a "performative" theory about women's active participation in and management of their artistic representations. Pointon's recuperative approach is shared by Richard Cronin who comments on the women writers' strategy to mold a new agency through ostensible passivity: "feminine vulnerability is extended from a

18 For more information on the connection between Corinne and Lady Hamilton, see Touchette.

social posture until it becomes a poetic style, can drive towards a vision in which victimhood becomes apotheosis, in which abandonment frees a woman from the flesh, transforming her into a marble monument that commands the male gaze, but remains itself as coolly impervious to the existence of its male worshippers" (236). In Landon's poetry, Cronin identifies a dynamic that fuses the seeing subject with the seen object in blurring the distinction between the poet and poetry. He judges this fusion not as relinquishing her subjectivity but as creating a different kind of agency (231). I further argue that in Landon's poetry this new agency is at once asserted and scrutinized in its obsessive self-reflexivity.

Structurally, the two-tiered format of the poem indicates the repetitive predicament shared by mother and daughter. The first part of the poem is governed by Pressine in her somber tower, with her rule truncated by Mélusine's revenge on her father; the second is dominated by Mélusine in her enchanted chamber which is intruded by Raymond. Mélusine is thus trapped by the circular fate dictated by her "mingled dower" from which Pressine hopes for a messianic breakthrough, as her mother directs her to "[k]eep thou then a timid eye / On the hopes that fill yon sky; / Bend thou with a suppliant knee, / And thy soul yet saved may be; -- / Saved by Him who died to save / Man from death beyond the grave" (147-52). Pressine's hope of salvation sustains her own living death. Unconvinced, Mélusine remains tormented by an illusion of the outside world:

> Still illusion's purple light
> Was upon the morning tide,
> And there rose before her sight
> The loveliness of life untried. (165-68)

The beautiful quatrain sums up the classic scenario of women embowered in their illusion as illustrated by Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott."[19] However, Mélusine takes on a Satanic tone: "Must such lights themselves consume? / Must she be her own dark tomb?" (171-72). She then sets off to assert her "right" (179), and to "avenge the wrongs / Of my mother exiled here" (183-84). But her revenge incurs her mother's ire which condemns her to a double banishment: "Banished from her mother's arms / Banished by her mother's charms" (134-35). Landon thus spells out the psychological make-up of the double banishment of Andersen's mermaid who exchanges her voice for human legs and then turns out to be unfit both for her sea origins and the Prince's court. Landon explores the similar in-between situation in another poem, "Calypso Watching the Ocean," published in *The New Monthly*

19 For the Lady of Shalott as a Romanticized vision of the medieval legend, see Labbie 88. For the cultural implications of such embowered women, see Isobel Armstrong, "Tennyson's."

Magazine and Literary Journal (1836). Calypso is a goddess, having tasted sexual pleasure with Odysseus, is tormented for not being able to become fully human in order to end her sorrow after he departs. His betrayal renders her exile more complete for she is trapped in eternity with human grief: "Eyes that know not tears nor sleep, / Would she not be glad to weep, . . / Would she could forget to grieve, / Or that she could die and leave / The lone and lovely island / Mid the far off southern seas" (*Poetical Works*, 379-80). As Isobel Armstrong points out, through the stranded fate of the classical goddess, Landon puts forward the only category shared by both human and divine as that of being a woman ("Gush" 26): "[s]he [Calypso] is but the type of all, / Mortal or celestial, / Who allow the heart, / In its passion and its power, / On some dark and fated hour, / To assert its part" (*Poetical Works* 380). Nevertheless, the "mingled dower," the in-between state to which Pressine enlightens her daughter about their hybrid nature strikes a similarity to Byron's description of humanity in *Manfred*, "Half-dust, half-deity, alike unfit / To sink or soar (1.2.40-1). Mélusine thus comes to represent the human, not merely the female, predicament.

The in-between state is further emphasized by the liminal landscape which begins the second part of "The Fairy of the Fountains." Here by the riverside, the leaves of willows are half green, half snow, "Summer never seems to be / Present all with that sad tree" (294-96). Raymond, a youthful warrior, is enthralled by Mélusine, the queen of the fairy train who comes to dance around the fountains. He arrives at her palace after travelling for one year and one day since their first encounter. Her "enchanted room" (362), unlike the somber tower of her mother, is lit with precious stones and scented with perfumes. She finally agrees to accept his devotion on one condition that for seven years she will keep every seventh day to herself whereas for the rest of the days each of her deeds is shown to him and to the public. But Raymond's "dark inquiring thought" (458) gradually overpowers him. He becomes torn between two speculations for Mélusine's secrecy: woe or guilt. He follows Mélusine stealthily to her palace which is changed to its dark double, a "night-black cave" (503) midst the "spectral darkness" (511). On a couch of green moss besides the fountain, he sees Mélusine transforming back to her serpent self.

Pain is in her languid eye,

. . . . . .

See the fevered cheek is red,

And the fiery color rushes

To her brow in hectic blushes.

. . . . . .

Downwards from that slender waist,

By a golden zone embraced,
Do the many folds escape,
Of the subtle serpent's shape. —
Bright with many-colored dyes
All the glittering scales arise,
With a red and purple glow
Coloring the waves below! (533-55)

The metamorphosis reverses Mélusine back to her former glory. This is the result of Pressine's curse: "Six days yield not to our powers, / But the seventh day is ours" (271-72). In Pressine's opinion, the gravest penalty is that Mélusine can only be true to herself every seventh day. This perspective, sided with the serpent self of both mother and daughter, suggests a reference to Keats's "Lamia":

Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear,
Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,
Flash'd phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling tear.
The colors all inflam'd throughout her train,
She writh'd about, convuls'd with scarlet pain:
A deep volcanian yellow took the place
Of all her milder-mooned body's grace;
And, as the lava ravishes the mèad,
Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede;
Made gloom of all her freckling, streaks and bars,
Eclips'd her crescents, and lick'd up her stars:
So that, in moments few, she was undrest
Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,
And rubious-argent: of all these bereft,
Nothing but pain and ugliness were left.
(Keats, "Lamia" 1.150-64)

Although Mélusine undergoes a metamorphosis in reverse to that of Lamia, the multiplying beauty of the serpent and the pang of transformation are similar. The excessive sensuality of the serpent's body signals the principle of monstrosity, or the "self-propagating formative power" (Gigante, "The Monster" 434), that exceeds representation.[20] Both Keats and Landon are in sympathy with, or more fascinated

20 The principle of monstrosity derives from the debate on vitalism in the early nineteenth century, which exceeds the scope of this paper. For more information, see Gigante, *Life*.

by, the serpent part of such a creature and therefore the metamorphosis into a human form is treated in both as sorry degeneration.

The passage in Landon running so close to that in Keats almost warrants the slight of "derivedness." This question of allusion or plagiarism needs to be examined in the ways in which women became writers in the nineteenth century. As Laura Mandell explains, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries women writers mainly wrote about their reading and therefore their poetry was not primarily of an "aesthetic of monumentalizing originality," but of "productive consumption" ("Hemans"). But I would argue Landon's deployment of allusion signals more of a shrewd assertion of her individual voice. Here rather than simply gleaning from Keats, Landon straightens his tortuous imagery and clarifies his ornate musicality. What results is a crisp version of Keats as if to cater to a more popular readership. But still her irregular length of sentences undercutting Keats's rimed couplets enacts pulsating throes of Mélusine's metamorphosis.

What distinguishes Landon even more from Keats is that she sets the excess of metamorphosis against the macabre of the cave as "[m]id the spectral darkness," Raymond follows a sudden light which "Shows but brightens not the gloom / Of the corpse and the tomb" (511, 517). Mélusine is thus made to bear the otherness of the grave, reminding us of her father's entombment. Craciun situates this reference to death in the context of the London outbreak of Asiatic cholera in 1831-32 (220-23). This historical background allows us to better gauge Landon's effort to revitalize the legend about the fairy of the fountains whose traditional associations with life and beauty are rendered in sharp contrast with the actual death on the streets of London. In the 1830s, the health campaign to cleanse London sewage system was rhetorically allied with the calls to regulate prostitutes, who were often presented as being punished by drowning in the Thames.[21] Amidst the mounting health scare, Landon daringly celebrates the exuberance of metamorphosis, which mystifies the enactment of desire and the throes of giving birth. Mixed with the guilt of transgression and patricide, the associations between woman and water, birth and death lead us to realize Landon's quiet dissent from the patriarchal discipline.

Landon discerns the deep power of Mélusine in her three-phase shape-change from the statue-like stasis to a hybrid body in need of periodic metamorphosis, and to a discrete lady in eternal wandering and a wailing voice coming back to mourn the passing of her offspring. Her power peaks at the time of metamorphosis due to the enclosed shape of her body.[22] As Gabrielle M. Spiegel points out, in the

21 The discussion on pollution management and moral patrol exceeds the scope of this paper. For more information, see Douglas.

22 This paper adopts the distinction made by Caroline Walker Bynum: "hybrid" expresses a

medieval romance, the serpent lower part of Mélusine indicates her "phallic tail" (107), which Raymondyn both craves to see and shys away from. The enclosed shape symbolizes woman's complete command over her body, offering a way for Landon to defy the commodifying gaze. More intriguingly, Glennis Stephenson suggests that the scene of metamorphosis in Landon's poem encapsulates mistrust in "idyllic consummation" and a sense of self-sufficiency which prefers "expiring alone in an orgasmic death" to union with the other sex ("The Victorian Improvisatrice" 13). I would argue that the so-called solitary orgasm needs to be seen flanked by two discrete states: the one before the curse and the other after the betrayal. The former offers insights into the longing for the purity before the awakening of sexuality, whereas the latter registers an elegiac mood for the loss of the fully inhabited hybrid body available only at the moment of metamorphosis. Having exhausted the possibilities of Mélusine's shape-change, Landon comes to shift the focus from the grotesque body to the wailing voice. This voice is a diminished form of her mother's word which her father eavesdrops and triggers the degeneration. In this way, Landon taunts the market expectation for a woman poet to exhibit her body by shielding it with her word.

2.3 "Corinne at the Cape of Misena": Critique of Poetry as a Commodity

"Corinne at the Cape of Misena," published in *the Amulet* (1832), best exemplifies Landon's endeavor to assert herself in the lineage of women poets. Landon maneuvers the visual mechanism paramount in the popular literary publications in order to wrest an advantage for the word. Far more empowered than the heroine in Hemans's tribute to de Staël, Landon's Corinne speaks with Landon's translated verse to outperform de Staël's Corinne.

Landon's work often appeared in two publishing ventures: the popular periodicals and gift annuals. On the one hand, the mish-mash nature of the popular periodicals, containing writings of news, politics, gossips, reminiscences, as well as literary pieces, offers us a glimpse of the tough terrain a woman poet of the time has to struggle for survival. On the other hand, the gift annuals offer Landon a sequestered realm for which her poems are valued for their beauty. These different arenas force her to mold her poetry in a way that is designed to retain interest in the crowded pages of popular periodicals and to seem to cohere with the ornate

world of essence, or substances, encountered through paradox whereas "metamorphosis" expresses a world of flux and transformation, encountered through narrative; hybrid forces incompatible categories to coexist and serve as commentary on each other whereas metamorphosis breaks down categories (29-31).

packaging of the gift annuals. Nevertheless, Landon manages to insert her critique of the amassing tendency of the former and the spectaclization of the poetess in the latter.

Landon's negotiation with the popular periodicals is best exemplified in her adaptation of the mermaid figure. Literary magazines often catered to the broad interests of a metropolitan readership. The mixture of writings can be ludicrous sometimes. For instance, in the *Literary Gazette*, the account of the mermaid exhibit and a woodcut image of a grotesque mermaid appeared on the same page as Landon's "The Castilian Nuptials" (28 Sept. 1822, 616) (fig. 1); the account of mermaid exhibit and sightings appeared on the page adjacent to Hemans's "England's Dead" and Landon's "Songs of Absence" (19 Oct. 1822, 663-64).[23] There are two ways to understand the assortment of writings. On the one hand, Landon's "The Castilian Nuptials," later published in *The Vow of the Peacock and Other Poems* (1835), is set in Spain about Hermione's revenge on her perfidious lover Fernand on his wedding night. This poem typifies the selling formula of such publications: beauty, passion, and exotic setting. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of Landon's "Songs of Absence," a short poem of lover's lament, with Hemans's famous patriotic poem, "England's Dead," indicates the common ground shared by women poets and their various strategies to generate and maintain their own followings. In this periodical, poems were set under the heading of "Original poetry." But the easy juxtaposition of poetry, news reports and even advertisements gives us a glance at what a garish marketplace in which the poets have to compete for attention. Such periodicals, a microcosm of London the metropolis, present the aspiration, fantasy and anxiety of the expanding empire.[24] London has become a Mecca since the end of the seventeenth century for all kinds of curiosities and freak shows. The mermaids in exhibit, often "manufactured" with monkey's torsos and fish tails, toured the circus and sideshow tents (Easterlin 259). The most notorious example of such "grafting" was the exhibit of "Feejee Mermaid" (1842) which attracted a large crowd composed of both academics and laypeople (Ritvo 278). The mermaid became one of the star attractions in the shows of London, often presented as a paradox to quasi-evolutionary theory and a target of political lampoon, as appearing in the cartoons of the *Punch* at least in 1850, 1865 and 1871 (Yan, "Between" 230, 237). The dubious status of the mermaid in exhibition thus

23 These two pages are available at <http://books.google.com.>.Thanks to Adam Komisaruk, West Virginia University, who directed me to this link.

24 For a thorough study on the periodicals of the nineteenth century, with respect to the ways in which the British empire is visually constructed and disseminated, see Nancy Armstrong.

represents the mixed arena of the popular periodicals and the ambivalence surrounding the popularity of the poetess. Situated in this heterogeneous context, Landon's ploy of Mélusine reflects her shrewd awareness of popular fads and presents her defiance against classification and appropriation.

On the other end of the literary market, the gift annuals, Landon demonstrates her intricate negotiation with the visual demands of this high-end market and with her predecessors. The trade of gift books peaked in the 1820s and 1830s. Their common format consisted in having extravagant binding, pocket-sized steel engravings (rather than etchings) and enlisting titled women or famous writers as editors of poetry which was commissioned mainly to embellish the reproduced pictures of famous paintings, both classical and contemporary.[25] As Sofia Hofkosh notes, from the first English annual, *The Forget Me Not, 1823*, to nine gift-book volumes two years later, expanding to sixty three by 1832, these "elegant bijouteries" indicate a significant shift in the development of the literary market (87). The gift books descended from the pocket-book album and thrived on a combination of almanac and scrapbook popular in the early 1820s (89). Advertised as "tokens of remembrance, friendship, or affection," the gift books also functioned as signs of education, taste and "a bourgeois semblance of aristocratic (self) possession" (86). Leighton reminds us that the particular "picturesque" emphasis of the annuals, which were often named after their engravers—Heath, Fisher, Findens, etc.—required mainly narrative and descriptive writings. Despite its popular appeals, the formula was no easy patchwork. Instead, its success dictated the "tone of pretty sentiment" in the writing and the "prompt professionalism" in the editing (49-51). Having served as the editor of *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap Book* (1831) and *Heath's Book of Beauty for 1833*, Landon creates the yardstick with which to measure her own professional success.

The best example of Landon's success in the gift annual format is the poem "Corinne at the Cape of Misena." It crystallizes Landon's endeavor to forge her authority in a dialogue with de Staël and Hemans, and in the interaction between the media of painting, music and poetry. The poem begins with an acknowledgement to the engraving of the painting by François Gérard (1819),[26] which features de Staël in the pose of Corinne: "How much of mind is in this little scroll, / Whereon the

25 This sector of literary production was downplayed because of their commercial appeals but eventually attracted critical attention starting in the 1990s. See Harris, Hoagwood and Ledbetter, and Linley.

26 A detail of this painting is available at <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fran%C3%A7ois_G%C3%A9rard_-_Corinne_at_Cape_Miseno_(detail)_-_WGA08602.jpg>.

artist's skill has bodied forth / The shapes which genius dreamed!" (*Selected Writings* 1-3). References to the picture serve mainly as a spring board for Landon to launch her re-staging of Corinne. Karen Fang argues that by this "value-added" quality Landon fulfills the "ekphrastic obligation" of contributions to the gift books, that is, to provide verbal "embellishment" of the visual images (109). I would contend rather than merely as a sign of her commercial complicity that the poem indicates Landon's active engagement with the gift books aesthetics and with the Corinne legacy. Landon directs our attention to what lies beyond the image and the music of Corinne. The rivalry between image, music and word is thus resolved in the victory of the word, albeit a costly one:

> Ay, perished long the music of those chords,
>
> . . .
>
> Not so the words! –for, even as the wind,
> That wafts the seeds which afterwards spring up
> In a perpetual growth, and then subsides,
> The song was only minister to words
> Which have the immortality of pain. (23-29)

The speaker of the poem summarizes the career of Corinne which is checked by her pursuit of love: "Where love pines for a home and finds a grave" (48). At the end of her life, "[t]he heart is sacrificed upon the shrine / Of mental power—at least its happiness" (57-58). Landon then quotes her own translation of parts of Corinne's last improvisation in de Staël's novel which is set at the Cape of Misena overlooking the Bay of Naples. Thus Corinne is permitted to speak for herself in verse but mediated through Landon. The passage she has chosen is about Tasso, a Genius whose "desire of the rapt soul" was misjudged by the common crowd as "madness" (65-66):

> [The exalted minds] are the banished of another sphere:
> For the Almighty goodness might not frame
> All for a few—th' elect or the proscribed.
> . . .
> Genius can penetrate the mysteries
> Of feeling all unknown to other hearts:—
> A power hath entered in his inmost soul,
> Whose presence he may not contain. (*Selected Writing* 71-73; 85-88)

In mourning Tasso's tragic life, Corinne vents a final lament of her life under-appreciated even by the one she loves dearly. Landon selects the most

dramatic passage in de Staël's more expansive historical overview as the representative episode of her novel. Accompanied by Gérard's picture, this poem illustrates the way in which Landon borrows the pose of de Staël as Corinne to ventriloquize Corinne's profound sense of alienation. She has thus elevated the deferential allusion to de Staël to a quotation from her own translation in order to assert her authority.

This poem of Landon fundamentally revises Hemans's poem "Corinne at the Capitol" (1830) which laments Corinne's fate of pursuing a life of creativity. Hemans's poem ends in a cautionary tale to all women aspiring for a lot beyond that of "d'une femme aimée et d'une mère heureuse" (this is part of the epigraph taken from de Staël's own writing) (Wolfson 462):

> Radiant daughter of the sun!
> Now thy living wreath is won.
> Crown'd of Rome!—Oh! art thou not
> Happy in that glorious lot?—
> Happier, happier far than thou,
> With the laurel on thy brow,
> She that makes the humblest hearth
> Lovely but to one on earth! (41-48)[27]

As Leighton judges, Hemans subjects creativity within the restrictive control of her regular meter and rhyme whereas Landon's irregular poetry "mimes" the improvised nature of her subject (58). Landon thus enacts the close alliance between body and word. In de Staël's novel, the song of Corinne seems to issue from a physical spasm: "she was oppressed by so violent a tremor, that her voice trembled" (Hill 2.3.25). Yet Leighton warns us of the danger and advantage offered by the equivalence between body and word. On the one hand, the woman has become her own work of art, which can be easily turned into a property for the man. On the other, the "hystericised" body of the woman poet serves as an insider comment on the unsocialized extremism of this feminine aesthetic (59, 61). Landon well exploits the risk and thrill of such a stance. Her maneuver of framing and allusion suggests a comment on, rather than a celebration of, patriarchal appropriation of the female body and word.

Nevertheless, her work and body are seen so intimately allied that her poems become public performance of her person. An anecdote in 1831 sums up the excitement felt by young men about her poetry. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, a writer of

27 Quotation from Hemans's poem is drawn from Susan J. Wolfson, ed. *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000).

historical novels, such as *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), and an admirer of Landon, wrote of his undergraduate years at Cambridge, about the rush

> every Saturday afternoon for the *Literary Gazette* and in impatient anxiety to hasten at once to the corner of the sheet which contained the three magical letters of "L.E.L." And all of us praised the verse, and all of us guessed at the author. We soon learned it was a female, and our admiration was doubled, and our conjectures tripled. Was she young? Was she pretty? (qtd. in Stephenson, "The Victorian Improvisatrice," 2)

This rhapsodic reminiscence suggests how closely the poetry of the woman poet is equated with her person. However, apart from attracting admiration, women writers more often incur diatribes that see them prostituting their person and talent. For example, Thackeray commented in the late 1830s that the contributors to gift books were "prostituting themselves to public inclination,—or perhaps one should say proprietary inclination, though the two are synonymous" (qtd. in Lawford 103). Thackeray is damning the popular publication together with its largely female contributors. He is nevertheless right in pointing out the root of this phenomenal rise of the woman poet as the bourgeois emulation and acquisition. In his view, gift annuals create a platform for those who are willing to prostitute their talents. His lampoon is charged more with envy than with indignation. With such jealous critics around, successful women writers had to gingerly ply their trade. While Hemans shrewdly managed her affairs from her country retreat with publishers mainly based in London and Edinburgh, Landon learned to deal with hers right in London. As Harriet K. Linkin maintains, Landon's persona is in fact a "calculated case of self-projection," for behind the melancholy poetess there is an astute businesswoman "with a pressing need to make a living, and keen awareness of the literary market" (173). Landon's calculated defiance is illustrated in her grafting Mélusine unto Corinne while displacing the body onto the word to disrupt the objectification of woman.

Conclusion

The mysterious figure of the mermaid, so easily exploited by the misogynist strains of patriarchy, often proves poignantly controversial to women writers. The outsider status of the mermaid guarantees their empathy while its associations with sensuality and the grotesque keep them forever wary. Landon's rendition of this figure is subtly challenging. It registers her strife with her literary foremothers in order to forge her own authority. By grafting the French figure of Mélusine onto the voice of Corinne, Landon opens up new channels of inquiry into the painfully

intertwined relationship between the word and the body. Through framing and allusion, Landon has achieved an "emblematic" status, as judged by McGann and Reiss, which has inspired homage from later female writers and become a rite de passage if not a female devotion (16). Landon's double maneuver of Mélusine, at once exhibiting her body and promoting her word, maintains a critique of the literary marketplace from within. The mermaid, this under-studied figure in Landon's work, contains the key to the mystery of her relentless focus on love and her unabashed catering to the visual demands of popular venues of literature.

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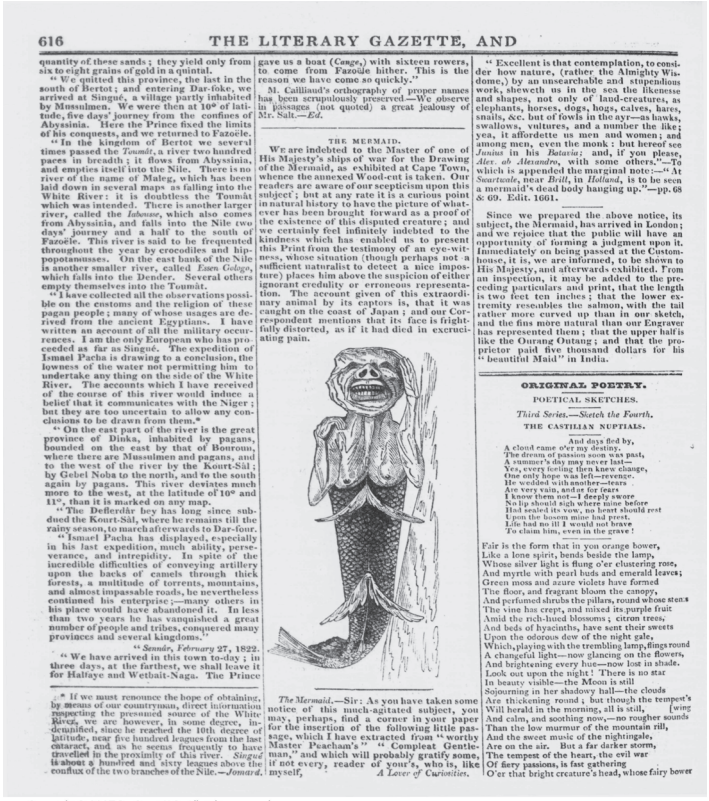
Fig. 1: *Literary Gazette* (28 Sep. 1822), 616. 9 Feb. 2009. <http://books.google.com>.



616 THE LITERARY GAZETTE, AND

quantity of these sands; they yield only from six to eight grains of gold in a quintal.

"We quitted this province, the last in the south of Bertot; and entering Dar-foke, we arrived at Singué, a village partly inhabited by Mussulmen. We were then at 10° of latitude, five days' journey from the confines of Abyssinia. Here the Prince fixed the limits of his conquests, and we returned to Fazoéle.

"In the kingdom of Bertot we several times passed the *Toumât*, a river two hundred paces in breadth; it flows from Abyssinia, and empties itself into the Nile. There is no river of the name of Maleg, which has been laid down in several maps as falling into the White River; it is doubtless the Toumât which was intended. There is another larger river, called the *Iabousr*, which also comes from Abyssinia, and falls into the Nile two days' journey and a half to the south of Fazoéle. This river is said to be frequented throughout the year by crocodiles and hippopotamusses. On the east bank of the Nile is another smaller river, called *Essen Bridge*, which falls into the Dender. Several others empty themselves into the Toumât.

"I have collected all the observations possible on the customs and the religion of these pagan people; many of whose usages are derived from the ancient Egyptians. I have written an account of all the military occurrences. I am the only European who has proceeded as far as Singué. The expedition of Ismael Pacha is drawing to a conclusion, the lowness of the water not permitting him to undertake any thing on the side of the White River. The accounts which I have received of the course of this river would induce a belief that it communicates with the Niger; but they are too uncertain to allow any conclusions to be drawn from them."

"On the east part of the river is the great province of Dinka, inhabited by pagans, bounded on the east by that of Boerouu, where there are Mussulmen and pagans, and to the west of the river by the Kourt-Sâl; by Gebel Noba to the north, and to the south again by pagans. This river deviates much more to the west, at the latitude of 10° and 11°, than it is marked on any map.

"The Defterdâr bey has long since subdued the Kourt-Sâl, where he remains till the rainy season, to march afterwards to Dar-four.

"Ismael Pacha has displayed, especially in his last expedition, much ability, perseverance, and intrepidity. In spite of the incredible difficulties of conveying artillery upon the backs of camels through thick forests, a multitude of torrents, mountains, and almost impassable roads, he nevertheless continued his enterprise;—many others in his place would have abandoned it. In less than two years he has vanquished a great number of people and tribes, conquered many provinces and several kingdoms."

"*Sennâr, February* 27, 1822.

"We have arrived in this town to-day; in three days, at the farthest, we shall leave it for Halfaye and Wetbait-Naga. The Prince gave us a boat (*Cange,*) with sixteen rowers, to come from Fazoéle hither. This is the reason we have come so quickly."

M. Caillaud's orthography of proper names has been scrupulously preserved.—We observe in passages (not quoted) a great jealousy of Mr. Salt.—*Ed.*

THE MERMAID.

We are indebted to the Master of one of His Majesty's ships of war for the Drawing of the Mermaid, as exhibited at Cape Town, whence the annexed Wood-cut is taken. Our readers are aware of our scepticism upon this subject; but at any rate it is a curious point in natural history to have the picture of whatever has been brought forward as a proof of the existence of this disputed creature; and we certainly feel infinitely indebted to the kindness which has enabled us to present this Print from the testimony of an eye-witness, whose situation (though perhaps not a sufficient naturalist to detect a nice imposture) places him above the suspicion of either ignorant credulity or erroneous representation. The account given of this extraordinary animal by its captors is, that it was caught on the coast of Japan; and our Correspondent mentions that its face is frightfully distorted, as if it had died in excruciating pain.

The Mermaid.—Sir: As you have taken some notice of this much-agitated subject, you may, perhaps, find a corner in your paper for the insertion of the following little passage, which I have extracted from "worthy Master Pearcham's." "Compleat Gentleman," and which will probably gratify some, if not every, reader of your's, who is, like myself,

A Lover of Curiosities.

"Excellent is that contemplation, to consider how nature, (rather the Almighty Wisdome,) by an unsearchable and stupendious work, sheweth us in the sea the likenesse and shapes, not only of land-creatures, as elephants, horses, dogs, hogs, calves, hares, snails, &c. but of fowls in the ayr—as hawks, swallows, vultures, and a number the like; yea, it affordette us men and women; and among men, even the monk: but hereof see *Jonius* in his *Batavia:* and, if you please, *Alex. ab Alexandro*, with some others."—To which is appended the marginal note:—"At *Swartwale*, near *Brill*, in *Holland*, is to be seen a mermaid's dead body hanging up."—pp. 68 & 69. Edit. 1601.

Since we prepared the above notice, its subject, the Mermaid, has arrived in London; and we rejoice that the public will have an opportunity of forming a judgment upon it. Immediately on being passed at the Custom-house, it is, we are informed, to be shown to His Majesty, and afterwards exhibited. From an inspection, it may be added to the preceding particulars and print, that the length is two feet ten inches; that the lower extremity resembles the salmon, with the tail rather more curved up than in our sketch, and the fins more natural than our Engraver has represented them; that the upper half is like the Ourang Outang; and that the proprietor paid five thousand dollars for his "beautiful Maid" in India.

ORIGINAL POETRY.

POETICAL SKETCHES.

Third Series.—Sketch the Fourth.

THE CASTILIAN NUPTIALS.

And days fled by,
A cloud came o'er my destiny.
The dream of passion soon was past,
A summer's day may never last—
Yes, every feeling then knew change,
One only hope was left—revenge.
He wedded with another—tears
Are very vain, and or fears
I know them not—I deeply swore
No lip should sigh where mine before
Had sealed its vow, no heart should rest
Upon the bosom mine had prest.
Life had no ill I would not brave
To claim him, even in the grave!

Fair is the form that in yon orange bower,
Like a lone spirit, bends beside the lamp,
Whose silver light is flung o'er clustering rose,
And myrtle with pearl buds and emerald leaves;
Green moss and azure violets have formed
The floor, and fragrant bloom the canopy,
And perfumed shrubs the pillars, round whose stems
The vine has crept, and mixed its purple fruit
Amid the rich-hued blossoms; citron trees,
And beds of hyacinths, have sent their sweets
Upon the odorous dew of the night gale,
Which, playing with the trembling lamp, flings round
A changeful light—now glancing on the flowers,
And brightening every hue—now lost in shade.
Look out upon the night! There is no star
In beauty visible—the Moon is still
Sojourning in her shadowy hall—the clouds
Are thickening round; but though the tempest's wing
Will herald in the morning, all is still,
And calm, and soothing now,—no rougher sounds
Than the low murmur of the mountain rill,
And the sweet music of the nightingale,
Are on the air. But a far darker storm,
The tempest of the heart, the evil war
Of fiery passions, is fast gathering
O'er that bright creature's head, whose fairy bower

「她為何如此珍愛母親／的所有?」：蘭登鑄煉蔻琳

吳 雅 鳳*

摘 要

在十九世紀上半葉歐洲社會對於童話、民間故事的蒐集益加熱烈，民間傳說甚至被視為國族文化的基礎，特別是有關美人魚的傳說逐漸成為跨文化的神話典型之一。此類傳說由政治寓言的縮影，如法國中古傳奇《梅律欣》，轉型為浪漫個人主體追求的代言，如安徒生的《小美人魚》與斯黛夫人的《蔻琳，義大利》。英國女詩人蘭登將梅律欣半人半魚的混雜身體嫁接在蔻琳的聲音上，企求在文學商品化的時代脈動中，鑄煉自身文學的威信，能與當代女詩人的另一典範，有著「虔敬母親」之稱的賀曼絲並駕齊驅。蘭登的自我定義分為三個階段：第一、在〈即興女詩人〉一詩中，蘭登將女詩人蔻琳的即興表演發揮地淋漓盡致，更利用詩人聲音稍縱即逝的特性，她得以擊破流行文學雜誌與年鑑以視覺為賣點的策略。第二、在〈噴泉仙女〉一詩中，蘭登將市場對女性詩人兜售身體的要求，透過梅律欣身體的三重展演，轉化為對她們文字的珍視。第三、〈蔻琳在米賽納角〉一詩則具體而微地體現蘭登如何巧用視覺機制突顯文字的優勢，為斯黛夫人筆下失去義大利詩歌本真的蔻琳賦予聲音。本論文探討蘭登如何與斯黛夫人與賀曼絲這兩位「文學母親」的詩學遺產較勁，以梅律欣的「混合嫁妝」譬喻自己在十九世紀文學商業化潮流下的掙扎。

關鍵詞：蘭登　斯黛夫人　女詩人　美人魚

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