

Felicia Hemans

(25 September 1793 - 16 May 1835)

Nicholas R. Jones

Oberlin College

- BOOKS: *Poems*, by Felicia Dorothea Browne (Liverpool: Printed by G. F. Harris for T. Cadell & W. Davies, London, 1808); republished with *England and Spain as Early Blossoms* (London: T. Allman, 1840);
- England and Spain; or, Valour and Patriotism*, by Felicia Dorothea Browne (London: Printed by J. M'Creery for T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1808); republished with *Poems as Early Blossoms* (1840);
- The Domestic Affections, and Other Poems* (London: Printed by J. M'Creery for T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1812);
- The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy: A Poem* (Oxford: Printed by W. Baxter for R. Pearson and J. Ebers, London, 1816; revised edition, Oxford: Printed by W. Baxter for J. Murray, London, 1816);
- Modern Greece. A Poem* (London: John Murray, 1817);
- Translations from Camoens, and other Poets, with Original Poetry* (Oxford: Printed by S. & J. Collingwood for J. Murray, London, 1818);
- Tales, and Historic Scenes in Verse* (London: John Murray, 1819);
- Wallace's Invocation to Bruce. A Poem* (Edinburgh: Printed for William Blackwood and T. Cadell & W. Davies, London, 1819);
- The Sceptic: A Poem* (London: John Murray, 1820);
- Stanzas to the Memory of the Late King* (London: John Murray, 1820);
- Dartmoor, A Poem: Which Obtained the Prize of Fifty Guineas proposed by The Royal Society of Literature* (London: Printed by J. Brettell by order of the Royal Society of Literature, 1821);
- A Selection of Welsh Melodies*, words by Hemans with music arranged by John Parry (London: Published by J. Power, 1821);
- The Siege of Valencia; A Dramatic Poem. The Last Constantine: with Other Poems* (London: John Murray, 1823);
- The Vespers of Palermo; A tragedy, in five acts* (London: John Murray, 1823);
- The Forest Sanctuary; and Other Poems* (London: John Murray, 1825; enlarged edition, Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1829);
- Poems by Mrs. Hemans*, 2 volumes, edited by Andrews Norton (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little & Wilkins, 1826, 1827);
- Hymns on the Works of Nature. For the Use of Children* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little & Wilkins, 1827; London: J. Mardon, 1833); republished as *Hymns for Childhood* (Dublin: W. Curry, 1834);
- Records of Woman: with Other Poems* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood / London: T. Cadell, 1828; Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little & Wilkins, 1828);
- A Set of Original Songs*, lyrics by Hemans, with music composed by J. Z. Herrmann and H. F. Chorley (London: Power, 1830);
- A Collection of Peninsular Melodies*, 2 volumes, lyrics by Hemans and others, edited and music arranged by G. L. Hodges (London: Goulding D'Almaine, 1830);
- Songs of the Affections, with Other Poems* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood / London: T. Cadell, 1830; Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1831);
- Scenes and Hymns of Life, with other religious poems* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood / London: T. Cadell, 1834); republished as *Hymns and Scenes of Life; and other poems* (Philadelphia: T. T. Ash, 1835);
- National Lyrics, and Songs for Music* (Dublin: W. Curry, Jun. / London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1834; Philadelphia, 1835);
- Poetical Remains of the late Mrs. Hemans*, edited by D. M. Moir (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons / London: T. Cadell, 1836).
- Collections:** *The Poetical Works* (Philadelphia: Grigg & Elliot, 1836);
- The Works of Mrs. Hemans*, 7 volumes, edited by Harriet Browne Hughes (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood / London: T. Cadell, 1839); republished, with "An Essay on Her Genius,"



Felicia Hemans (engraving by Edward Smith, based on a miniature by Edward Robertson)

by Lydia Sigourney (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1840);

Poems by Felicia Hemans, with an Essay on Her Genius, by H. T. Tuckerman, edited by Rufus W. Griswold (Philadelphia: Sorin & Ball, 1845);

The Poetical Works of Mrs. Felicia Hemans, edited by William Michael Rossetti (London: E. Moxon & Son, 1873);

The Poetical Works of Felicia Dorothea Hemans (London: Oxford University Press, 1914).

PLAY PRODUCTION: *The Vespers of Palermo*, London, Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, 12 December 1823.

When Felicia Hemans's *Dartmoor* won the Royal Society of Literature's poetry prize for 1821, her eldest son exclaimed, "Now I am sure mamma is a better poet than Lord Byron!" Many in the next decades were to take the comparison seriously. From her rise to fame in the early 1820s until after her death in the mid 1830s, "Mrs. Hemans" (as she was universally known) maintained an unrivaled position in critical and popular opinion as the premier woman poet of

the day. Throughout the nineteenth century, multivolume editions of her works came repeatedly from British and American presses. Today she is remembered only as the author of "The boy stood on the burning deck," a lyric much abused in recitation and parody. She continues virtually to be ignored in literary criticism and history, yet her work deserves attention as one of the major landmarks in the admittedly sparse landscape of post-Byronic Romantic poetry. Her vast and varied output, which was widely published and for which she was decently paid, marks her short life as possibly the first significant professional female career in English poetry.

Hemans not only achieved substantial successes in the Romantic mode but also redirected Romantic poetry, tainted by its association with the notorious George Gordon, Lord Byron, toward the domestic world of the pious, primarily female reading public of Britain. Hemans herself admired Byron, treasuring a lock of his hair in her favorite brooch; yet when she read in Thomas Moore's memoir of Byron's "iniquities," she removed the relic and never wore it again. She was not "a better poet than Lord Byron"; her diffuse-



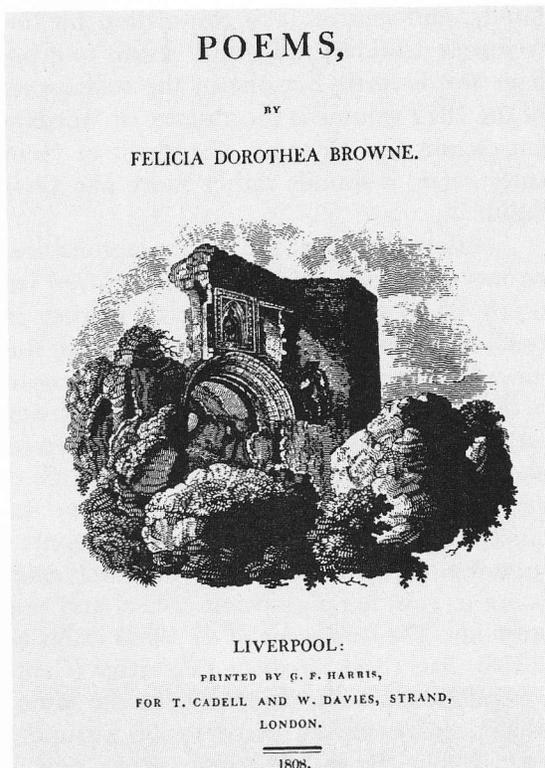
Felicity Wagner Browne, the poet's mother (engraving by E. Scriven, based on a miniature)

ness, repetitiveness, and thinness make her work seem flimsy or tiresome; yet many contemporaries felt that she was morally, if not aesthetically, better than Byron. Ardently chivalric and patriotic, her heroic and historical poems domesticate the disturbing themes of their Byronic equivalents. Her religious work displays a sacramental Nature without Wordsworthian pantheism and a spiritual yearning without heterodoxy. Her poems about love concentrate on the steady longing of women for the values of home, hearth, family, country, and God. Writing almost exclusively without irony, in a style that is accessible, predictable, and yet passionate, Hemans redirected Romantic poetic narrative and Romantic lyric toward clarity and congruity with the language and opinions of its principal readership, foreshadowing the moral and emotional tones of the Victorian poem.

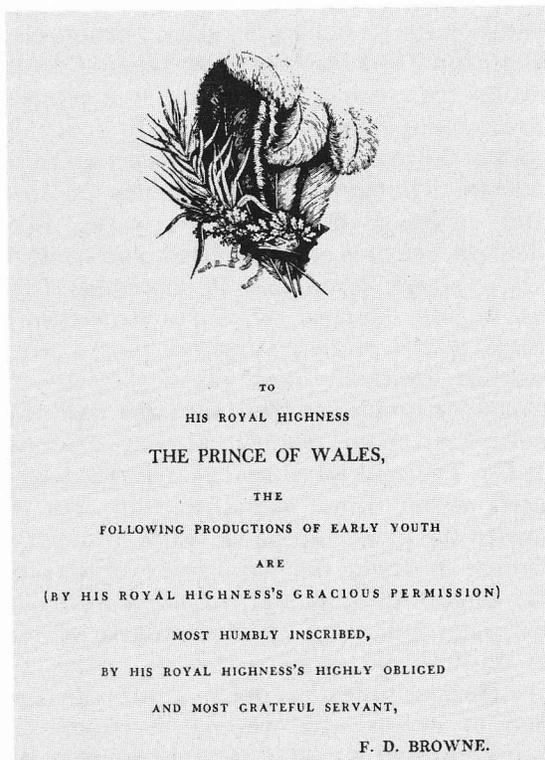
The fifth of seven children (one of whom died in infancy), Felicia Dorothea Browne was born into the disruption of the French wars. Her father, George Browne, had emigrated from Ireland to Liverpool in the 1780s. He married Felic-

ity Wagner, the daughter of a well-established merchant, and joined his father-in-law in a wine-importing partnership. But in the year of Felicia's birth, during a general crash, the family business was bankrupted. Her father recovered from this loss, but at the turn of the century lost his business for good. The family moved to a rented house near Abergele, on the seacoast of north Wales; in this rural setting they could live in cheaper gentility. Felicia and her younger sister, Harriet (later her biographer and the composer of many popular musical settings for her poems), were educated by their energetic and intelligent mother. Felicia was a precocious child, noted for her speed in reading and memorizing poetry. Her parents took her to London for two winter visits when she was eleven and twelve, but she was never to revisit the capital. Probably in 1811 her father tried his fortunes in Quebec, but with little success; his virtual absence from accounts of the poet's life is notable.

Encouraged by her mother, Felicia began her writing early—some occasional poems are said to have been written when she was eight, in



Title page, dedication, and advertisement for Hemans's first book, published by subscription when she was fifteen



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following pieces are the genuine productions of a young lady, written between the age of eight and thirteen years. By this information it is not intended to arrogate to them that favour to which they may perhaps have no intrinsic claim; but if it should appear that they possess a degree of merit sufficient to obtain the approbation of the reader, the circumstances under which they have been produced may give them that additional interest to which they are most truly intitled. They owe their publication to the kind and condescending favour of the RIGHT HONOURABLE VISCOUNTESS KIRKWALL, to the regard and partialities of friendship, and to the hope that they may in some degree be rendered subservient to the earnest wish of the young authoress for intellectual improvement.

1808, the poet being barely in her teens, these early works were published through the assistance of a local patron. The volume was printed as a quarto (an expensive format usually reserved for more dignified publications), sold by subscription to an impressive list of some eight-hundred well-placed individuals, and dedicated, by permission, to the Prince Regent. The poems are light in texture and meter, sparkling with picturesque scenes described in conventional poetic diction, and properly darkened with doses of melancholy. They are shallow—critics advised her to read more widely before publishing her work again—but technically quite skillful.

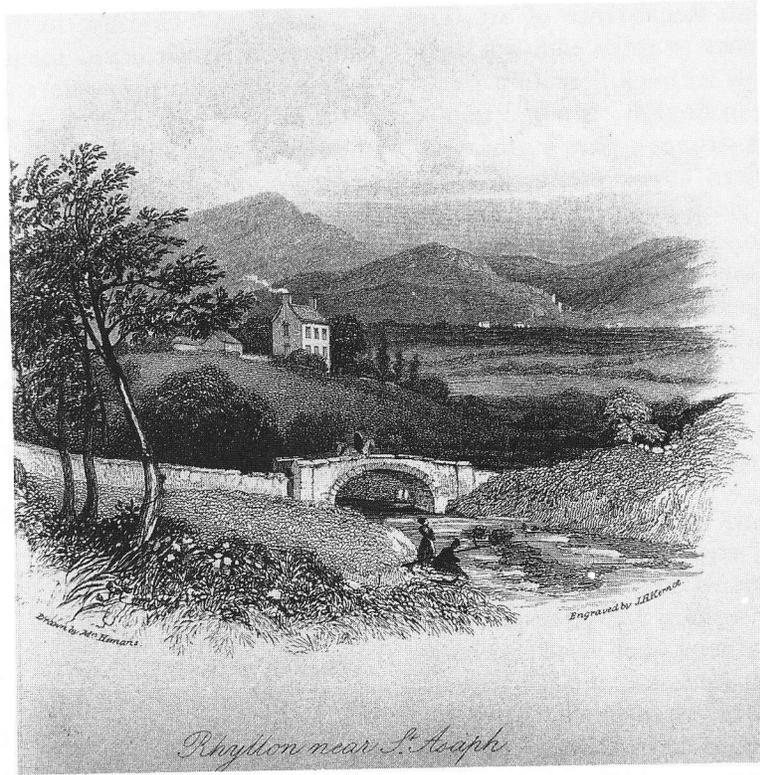
In the same year—a remarkable occurrence given her youth—Felicia Browne published a second quarto volume, comprising a single poem, *England and Spain*. Pursuing patriotic interests (her older brothers were officers in the Peninsular campaign), this first extended effort clearly exhibits the poet's emotions. In enthusiastic and polished heroic couplets, the poet apostrophizes Liberty and Chivalry, exhorting them to drive out Napoleon, the "Despot of France! destroyer of mankind!" Though clearly an apprentice work, the poem nonetheless marks a significant direction in Hemans's later work—the ability to compose with speed and spirit on themes of immediate national concern.

One of the many military men subscribing to Felicia Browne's elegant first quarto was Alfred Hemans, an Irish gentleman and officer in the army. Captain Hemans, about whom little is known, must have been at least fifteen years older than the young poet with whom he fell in love. The family disapproved of the match, and it was put off for three years. When the couple finally married in summer 1812, Captain Hemans was a broken veteran of the racking campaigns at Corunna in Spain and at Walcheren in the Low Countries. He left the regular army for a desk job in the Northamptonshire Militia in Daventry, where the couple took up residence and where their first son was born. In the year of her marriage the poet published her third volume, *The Domestic Affections*. The volume is of significance mainly for its evidence of continued growth in versification and metrical variety, and for its sustained power: three long patriotic poems on the Napoleonic Wars show far more energy, invention, and control than *England and Spain*. The volume closes with the title poem, in which "the child of rude alarms"—a soldier—returns after a harrowing campaign to find the solace of home,

family, and nature. The consolation he finds in "nature's deathless ties" today seems to echo William Wordsworth, but one of the striking aspects of the 1812 volume is the absence of Wordsworthian diction and rhythms; like much of Hemans's early verse, it sounds rather more like Charlotte Smith.

After only a year the Northamptonshire Militia was disbanded, and the couple moved back to north Wales to live with Felicia's mother in the small cathedral town of St. Asaph, where she had moved three years earlier. The poet was to live in the peaceful valley of the Clywd for the next fifteen years. Its mild climate, pastoral landscape, and provincial society were to shape much of the gentle romanticism of her major poetry. In this quiet outpost of Britain, as the Napoleonic Wars subsided, Hemans composed the first extended poem to gain her significant critical and popular attention. *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* (1816), like *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Canto III was published in the same year by the same publisher), concerns the recovery of Europe from war. Unlike Byron, Hemans wrote only from what she had read: she never traveled outside Great Britain, but she was an ardent reader of news, history, and travel literature (she was fluent in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and German). *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* evokes the creative spirit of the free republics of Renaissance Italy and passionately urges the return of the masterpieces of Italian art stolen by Napoleon. Though romantic themes of freedom and sublimity dominate, the verse, like the thought, remains neat, balanced, and controlled.

Though Byron, in a 30 September 1816 letter to John Murray, called *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* "a good poem—very," he scorned Hemans's next poem: "Modern Greece Good for nothing—written by some one who has never been there" (letter to Murray, 4 September 1817). The criticism is apt, in that the descriptive parts suffer from overabstraction, but Byron missed the point: the poem is not so much about Greece as about the importance of Greece for the English imagination. Bolstered with substantial notes indicating a serious course of reading in classical and modern history, *Modern Greece*, like Hemans's previous poem, argues the conjunction of genius with national freedom: Greece being enslaved, it cannot recreate or even appreciate its past. Hemans calls for Greek liberation, to be accomplished by the sublime effects of Greek art upon the souls of already free Englishmen



Engravings based on Hemans's drawings of the house in Wales that she took in 1825 (top) and nearby landmarks

through a new English Renaissance of art. The poem never quite comes to grips with the difficulty of imagining how a Greek liberation movement might originate in English contemplation of the Elgin Marbles. Its strongest part is a passionate picture of a modern Greek patriot in exile, wandering about the globe in search of freedom. Hemans is at her best developing themes of home and homesickness, evoking the restlessness of the wanderer even amid the sublime scenery of the American wilderness:

There is a heart-sick weariness of mood,
That like slow poison wastes the vital glow,
And shrines itself in mental solitude[.]

By 1818 Hemans's poems were being received with critical enthusiasm and moving quickly to second editions. The writing provided some of the income to support a large household—her mother and sister (her father was apparently dead by this time), her husband, and a family of five young sons. Hemans was meanwhile continuing her education, particularly in modern languages: her 1818 volume of shorter poems featured translations of sonnets from Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian Renaissance poets, along with a few English lyrics primarily notable for their foreshadowing of Hemans's later success in the lyric form and her interest in Scottish themes. By 1820 reviewers could note Hemans's established fame and look forward to future greatness. In that year an essay by William Gifford in the influential *Quarterly Review* (October 1820) noted the "rapid improvement" in her recent poems: like most commentators, he praised them for elegant versification, powerful feeling, beauty, and above all moral uprightness: "all her poems are elegant and pure in thought and language; her later poems are of higher promise, they are vigorous, picturesque, and pathetic."

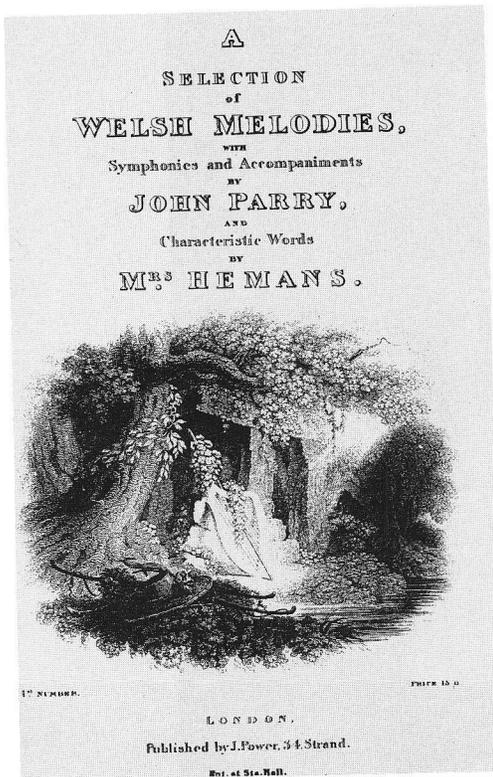
Tales, and Historic Scenes and *Wallace's Invocation to Bruce* (both published in 1819) show Hemans extending her repertoire from didacticism to historic narrative. The poem on the two heroes, the winner of a Scottish competition, initiated a reputation in Edinburgh that ensured her a warm welcome when she visited there ten years later. *Wallace's Invocation to Bruce* and several of the *Tales, and Historic Scenes* have a swifter and more vigorous movement than earlier work, created largely by dropping one foot from the often-padded five-foot line. The most successful narratives are the shorter "scenes," vignettes from

classical and chivalric history. They evoke moments of heroic crisis, focusing always on public figures, particularly rulers and their families, in the struggles familiar to romantic fiction. Always noble, rarely individualized, viewed with steady passion, the figures are less vivid than the situations behind them: bloody national struggles, vast historical shifts (reminiscent of the Napoleonic Wars just passed) press upon the men and women with inescapable and almost unbearable force, to which they respond with heroic dignity. "The Abencerrage," an extended narrative in three cantos—a tale of love, treachery, suffering, and death in the chivalric history of the fall of Granada—is given pride of place in *Tales, and Historic Scenes*, and deserves note as Hemans's most ambitious work to date.

In his 1820 essay Gifford noted that though he knew little of the poet's life, he had heard of some personal sorrow. If so, he commented, her concern with suffering and endurance becomes more poignant. Gifford had heard what soon became common knowledge—that just before the birth of their fifth son, Captain Hemans had left his wife. He went to Italy, ostensibly for his health, and she stayed in England to further her literary career and to manage the education of her sons. No reliable account exists of what must have been a major alienation. Captain Hemans lived in Rome probably until well after the death of his wife; whether he provided financial support, advice, or communication of any kind is uncertain. Clearly, after 1818 Hemans felt herself to be without marital support, and came to rely more and more on her brothers, her sister, and her mother for advice and household management.

Two smaller publications of 1820 furthered Hemans's name as a poet of thoughtful patriotism and piety. *The Sceptic* combines arguments for faith with a vivid picture of the agonizing death of an imagined disbeliever, noted by contemporaries to resemble the "godless poets" Shelley and Byron. *Stanzas to the Memory of the Late King* is a sympathetic meditation on the bitterness of the life of George III. The king is presented as a "blasted oak," a great figure mysteriously struck by madness, yet enduring as a symbol of the survival of the "ancient landmarks" of the British nation.

The first seven years of the 1820s were the happiest and most productive years of Hemans's life. Surrounded by a caring family in the countryside she loved, secure in her growing fame, she



Title page and song from the second (1822) edition of a book inspired by Hemans's interest in the ancient Welsh bards

10
THE HALL OF CYNDDYLAN.

Andante

The Hall of my Chief-tain is gloomy to night, I
weep for the Grave has extinguish'd its light; The beam of its
lamp from the summit is o'er, The blaze of its
Hearth shall give welcome no more.

600

THE HALL OF CYNDDYLAN. 11

Air.—*The Door-Chapper.*

I.

The Hall of Cynddylan is gloomy to-night*,
I weep, for the grave has extinguish'd its light;
The beam of its lamp from the summit is o'er,
The blaze of its hearth shall give welcome no more!

II.

The Hall of Cynddylan is voiceless and still,
The sound of its harpings hath died on the hill!
Be silent for ever, thou desolate scene,
Nor let e'en an echo recall what hath been!

III.

The Hall of Cynddylan is lonely and bare,
No banquet, no guest, not a footstep is there!
Oh! where are the warriors who circled its board?
—The grass will soon wave where the mead-cup was pour'd!

IV.

The Hall of Cynddylan is loveless to-night,
Since He is departed whose smile made it bright!
I mourn, but the sigh of my soul shall be brief,
The pathway is short to the grave of my chief!

* The Hall of Cynddylan is gloomy this night,
Without fire, without bed—
I must weep awhile, and then be silent.

The Hall of Cynddylan is gloomy this night,
Without fire, without being lighted—
Be thou comforted with spreading silence!

The Hall of Cynddylan is without love this night,
Else he that owned it is no more—
Ah, Death! it will be but a short time he will leave me!

The Hall of Cynddylan is not long this night
On the top of the rock of Helyddyn,
Without its lord, without company, without the circling flames!
See O'Connell's "Horse, Steeples of Llanwrthwl, &c."



Felicia Hemans in 1827 (engraving by Edward Scriven, based on a painting by W. E. West). This work inspired Hemans to write, in "To My Own Portrait," "What Spell within thee hath been shrined, / To image back my own deep mind."

continued to write fluently and to read widely. Welsh history occupied her on occasion: she wrote lyrics for meetings of the Cymmrodorion, the London-based ethnic revival, and for *A Selection of Welsh Melodies* (1821). She entered and won a competition sponsored by the Royal Society of Literature for a poem on Dartmoor. She began to compose extensive numbers of lyrics and to send them to periodicals such as the *New Monthly Magazine* and *Blackwood's*. She wrote and published two plays (a third remained in manuscript through her life) and extended historical narratives. By constant literary effort she became widely known as the prominent woman poet of the day. But in 1827, marked by the death of her mother, the marriage of her sister, and the first signs of Hemans's heart disease, her secure world broke apart, and she entered a new phase of life.

During the mid 1820s, however, she completed several important works. Of her two published verse tragedies *The Vespers of Palermo* (1823) was written first, probably by spring 1821. A long

correspondence with Reginald Heber, a well-known hymn writer and her first literary acquaintance, and with his friend H. H. Milman, another clergyman and poet of some note, led to revisions and negotiations with Charles Kemble, manager of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, where the play was produced on 12 December 1823. In part because of a strange mixture of acting styles among the major roles, and in part because of the basically undramatic nature of the writing, the play failed on stage and was withdrawn after one night. In its published form (anonymous, but its authorship a well-known secret), the tragedy was politely received but felt to be not quite worthy of Hemans. Like many of her works, the play revolves on a historical incident of nationalistic liberation, the massacre known as the Sicilian Vespers. The action turns on conventional conflicts of love and revenge, but the play is notable for its treatment of the terrorism latent in the struggle for freedom (the massacre that frees the Sicilians appalls and destroys

the heroic characters), for its powerful and agonized hero (Procida, the Charles Kemble role), and for its two strong women heroines.

Another verse tragedy, *The Siege of Valencia* (1823), was not intended for the stage. The play, like so much of Hemans's work, focuses on the grief of broken families: Gonzalez, the governor, stoically withstands temptations to give up his besieged city for the lives of his two sons, held hostage by the Moors. His distraught wife, Elmira, betrays her husband and the city to save the boys, but at a crucial moment she repents. Their melancholy daughter, Ximena—a child of nature now tragically isolated from her Wordsworthian sources of hope—pines in loneliness, rousing herself only at the end of the play to summon the soldiers of Valencia to repel the Moors. As the city is saved, Ximena dies of grief while Gonzalez is killed in battle: only Elmira, the central figure of the play, survives as a broken and almost despairing mother and wife. In plot, the play is implausible and contrived. But in the scenes in which it explores suffering—particularly for women—the play anticipates Hemans's greatest achievement in *Records of Woman* (1828) five years later. Hemans explores the ennobling power of suffering and endurance; increasingly Wordsworthian, she sees natural ruin compensated by spiritual growth—Elmira refers at the end to her “still and chastened soul.” Yet there is a countercurrent of desolation in her women, trapped by their powerlessness. Ultimately, though Hemans never fully articulates the depth of the devastation, one can see her shadowing a despair alien to Wordsworth.

The last of the works published before her mother's death was *The Forest Sanctuary* (1825). Always an avid reader of history and travel literature, and blessed with a phenomenal memory of what she read, Hemans here assembled an exotic and moving historical narrative purely from literary sources. A Spanish gentleman of the sixteenth century, having watched his best friends burned at the stake for heresy, converts to Protestantism. After a grueling prison term, he takes his wife and child into exile in the Americas. Though his wife goes with him, she remains Catholic; she considers him a heretic, and silently dies of grief on the voyage from Spain. He settles in the American wilderness to raise his son in freedom. Like *The Siege of Valencia* this poem is ambivalent: on the surface, with its orthodox Protestant martyrology, it supports a view of growth through suffering; but deeper in the poem's re-

flections lies a loneliness unmitigated by abstractions such as religious and national freedom. The depth of the poem comes largely from Hemans's daring avoidance of a didactic narrative stance. Instead she takes on the voice of the survivor himself, the converted Spaniard: though he finds in his son and his faith some compensation for his losses, they hardly dampen the sorrow with which he narrates the deaths that have wounded his spirit. *The Forest Sanctuary* was said to have been Hemans's favorite composition, though for modern readers it suffers—like much Romantic poetry—for its overextended descriptive passages.

The finest, most widely acclaimed volume Hemans was to publish was *Records of Woman* (1828). In this collection of monologues and narratives, Hemans developed her view of the tragic potential of woman's position. Hemans's women—political, artistic, and domestic—have power to create, love, act; yet like most Romantic figures, they act as individuals, in isolation. The need to act, and the constraints of individualistic action, defeat what Hemans sees as woman's domestic, communal role. So the sculptor blessed with skill and fame tragically lacks love, and her success embitters her. The “Bride of the Greek Isles,” whose husband is killed on their wedding night, finds fulfillment only in heroic revenge and death as she burns the ship on which she is held by her husband's murderers. Behind the passionate scenes of piracy, torture, and battle that characterize these poems, the domestic ideal for women is only the faintest of possibilities: the burning soul and the constraining world make such bliss a dream, a rare luxury. In its absence, the heroines of these poems are as fragmented as a Cain or a Manfred, finding only in death the peace they vainly look for in life.

Toward the end of her career, restlessness and ill health compelled Hemans to shorten her poems. The major works in *Records of Woman* are less than five hundred lines, and many are considerably shorter and more compact. Increasingly, too, she filled out her volumes with lyrics. Published first in magazines before being collected in volumes, they made for Hemans a steady income and a steady readership. With the lyrics in particular, she achieved her substantial American reputation—in part through the interest of Harvard professor Andrews Norton, who edited the first American editions of Hemans's selected works and secured for her the proceeds from their sales. The lyrics, which were to become the most important part of Hemans's canon for the

later nineteenth century, are marked by their accessibility and grace. "The Homes of England," one of the best known, is typical in its measured yet passionate contemplation of a simple theme—domesticity—presented through a series of simple images marked by a key phrase beginning each stanza: stately homes, merry homes, blessed homes, cottage homes. The parallel structure of the first four stanzas leads easily to a final stanza of heightened prayer for the continuation of English domestic freedom:

And green for ever be the groves,
And bright the flowery sod,
Where first the child's glad spirit loves
Its country and its God!

The lyrics are straightforward, their organization readily apparent; their values are orthodox—home, family, country, religion; to our eyes, accustomed to the close readings of John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley's far more intricate lyrics, they seem bland and indistinguishable. In their time, however, appearing not as a group but singly in magazines or in small collections, they marked an important, continuing domestication of Romanticism: many of the major Romantic themes and voices are here, but softer, neater, chaster, more pious. Hemans's shorter poems appeared in vast numbers of musical settings for amateur voices and became a staple of school recitations: these were Romantic poems that one might safely speak or sing in a drawing room.

Yet it would be a mistake to see them as devoid of tension or interest. Without breaking with an Anglican view of God, they nonetheless explore the difficulties of individual belief in the face of recurring suffering and grief; without ever totally denying natural beauty and natural law, the poems question whether that world can ever be read accurately or rationally, whether natural symbols are finally trustworthy. These gentle and melancholy poems hide a sharpness that was never to be fully realized by their author, but appears later, perhaps, in the women for whom Hemans's lyrics had significantly made a foundation—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson.

The best known of Hemans's shorter poems, "Casabianca" ("The boy stood on the burning deck"), carries such a sharpness beneath its orthodoxy. In a battle of the Napoleonic Wars, a boy of thirteen is commanded by his father, the admiral, to remain at his post; unknown to the boy,

the father is unconscious on the deck below and cannot rescind his order. The boy stays at his post until the flames reach the powder magazine and the ship explodes. This simple parable of duty obeyed has such a shocking end (with fragments of the ship strewn on the waves, with all nobility and grace—including "that young faithful heart" of the boy—exploded in "a burst of thunder-sound") that it criticizes the authority it seems to praise. If for youth we read woman—a frequent link in Hemans—the poem becomes a bitter reflection on the fate of nineteenth-century British wives and daughters, serving silent, remote patriarchs in unquestioning obedience. Although Hemans rarely wrote of her personal life, "Casabianca" and other lyrics may reflect her own experience, for she knew at first hand the ineffective and yet stifling authority of a bankrupt father and an alienated husband.

Hemans's personal struggle intensified early in 1827. After the departure of Captain Hemans, Hemans and her five sons had been living in matriarchal domesticity with her unmarried sister and their mother. But with her mother's death, and the imminent marriage of her sister to a clergyman in England, Hemans had to consider the necessity of life on her own. She sent the two oldest boys to their father in Rome, and moved to Wavertree, a suburb of Liverpool, where she thought she would find good schools for her sons and better literary connections for herself. It was an unhappy move: Hemans was increasingly subject to heart palpitations, and her sickness, unhappiness, and intellectual interests made her a querulous oddity in the provincial society of Liverpool. Turning elsewhere for companionship, she formed a wider literary network, beginning correspondences and friendships with literary women—Maria Jane Jewsbury, Mary Howitt, Joanna Baillie. Through them, she eventually developed acquaintances with more prominent figures, in particular Sir Walter Scott and William Wordsworth. The happiest moments of the Liverpool years were spent in summer trips to Scotland (1829), where Scott showed her and her sons his famed hospitality, and to the Lakes (1830), where she stayed a fortnight at Rydal Mount with a polite and considerate Wordsworth and his privately scornful family: Dorothy and Mary Wordsworth, and Sara Hutchinson, considered Hemans a barely tolerable bluestocking.

In 1830 Hemans published *Songs of the Affections*, most of which had appeared previously in magazines. For the next four years she was to put

F. Hemans

Angel Visits.

No more of talk, when God or Angel Guest
 With Man, as with his Friend, familiar used
 To sit indulgent, and with him partake
 Rural repast. ————— Milton

Are ye for ever to your Skies departed?
 Oh! will ye visit this dim World no more?
 Ye whose bright wings a Column splend'ring darted
 thro' Eden's fresh and flowering Shades of yore?
 — How are the fountains dried on that sweet spot!
 And ye — our faded Earth beholds you not!

Yet, by your shining eyes not all forsaken,
 Man wandered from his Paradise away;
 Ye, from forgetfulness his heart to waken,
 Came down, high Guests! in many a later day,
 And with the Patriarchs under Vine or Oak,
 Midst hoortide calm or hush of Evening spoke.

Felicia Hemans (Holograph of:)

First page from the manuscript for the poem in which Hemans concludes that, while angels no longer walk the earth, "One, One is near—a spirit holier still!" (HM 1829; by permission of the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery)



Felicia Hemans

together no new volumes, though she continued to publish lyrics in the *New Monthly Magazine* and elsewhere. In 1831 she sought a new home in Dublin, where her brother had just begun a career in police work, but her health failed drastically, and she lived much of the rest of her life an invalid. She disliked Ireland, and increasingly reflected in her last poems her memories of happier years in north Wales. Her closest friends were the Graves family, especially the young university student Robert Perceval Graves, later to become a friend of Wordsworth (at Hemans's introduction). Through the Graves family, she became a friend of the young astronomer William Rowan Hamilton, also an important figure in the later life of Wordsworth. The young Graves—tutor to Hemans's son—became Hemans's closest spiritual and literary adviser, urging her toward a more pietistic poetry matching his earnest Anglicanism. She began to write more ecclesiastically based poems, a movement culminating in her final book, *Scenes and Hymns of Life* (1834), an explicitly religious collection. This volume, in its preface and dedication of “fervent gratitude” to Wordsworth, calls for the expansion of religious poetry beyond prayer and meditation and recognizes “those active influences upon human life, so often called into victorious energy by trial and

conflict.” The “scenes” take place in wildernesses, prisons, and deathbeds, dramatizing crises reminiscent of Byronic poetry and drama, but the religious spirit of the late Wordsworth is also here in full force, consoling, spiritualizing “the agony / In that most hidden chamber of the heart, / Where darkly sits remorse,” pervading with love even “The haunted caves of self-accusing thought.” The poems are not markedly impressive—an uncertain presentation of the crisis makes the consolation seem sentimental—but indicate an important direction for Hemans, had she lived to write more poems, and for the poetry of the mid century as it struggled to reconcile Romanticism with the new evangelism.

Two less important volumes also appeared in 1834: *Hymns for Childhood* reprinted under Hemans's supervision earlier American and British editions of children's poems, and *National Lyrics, and Songs for Music* collected some of the many poems for music Hemans supplied to her sister and other composers in the 1820s and 1830s. By 1834 Hemans was unable to travel or to write for long; she suffered devastating attacks of fever over the winter, spending most of her diminished energy to find positions for her three younger sons. She died in the spring of 1835 after a long decline and was buried in St. Anne's

Church, Dublin; her last miscellaneous pieces were collected and published by the Scottish critic D. M. Moir ("Delta") in *Poetical Remains of the late Mrs. Hemans* (1836). That same year, Henry Chorley, a young musician and journalist who had known Hemans well in Liverpool, published his reminiscences of Hemans and some of her letters. His work was widely condemned for its eccentric trivializing of Hemans's character—her family preferred to keep her quirks private—and was superseded in 1839 by her sister's biography, included in Blackwood's seven-volume edition of Hemans's *Works*.

Little new work has been done on Hemans since 1839: the frequent nineteenth-century re-printings, with various attached memoirs and essays, including one by the American poet Lydia Sigourney, added little to the first collected *Works*. Hemans was the subject of a slim biography in the *Writers of Wales* series in 1984. Though few readers are likely to demand a definitive modern edition of Hemans's complete works, her best poems and her life deserve more attention for their importance in the histories of Romanticism and of women's poetry. For those interested in the early-nineteenth-century literary profession, the transition from Romantic to early Victorian taste, and the complex issues of feminism and patriarchy in nineteenth-century poetry, the career of Hemans still has much to teach us.

Biographies:

- Henry F. Chorley, *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans*, 2 volumes (London: Saunders & Otley, 1836);
 Harriet Browne Hughes, *Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Hemans*, in *The Works of Mrs. Hemans*, 7 volumes (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood / London: T. Cadell, 1839; Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1840);

Peter W. Trinder, *Mrs. Hemans* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1984).

References:

- Edith Dumeril, *Une Femme Poete au Declin du Romantisme Anglaise: Felicia Hemans* (Toulouse: Bonnet, 1929);
 William Gifford, Essay-review on Hemans, *Quarterly Review*, 24 (October 1820): 130-139;
 T. K. Hervey, "The Life and Writings of Mrs. Hemans," *Dublin Review*, 2 (December 1836): 245-275;
 Francis Jeffrey, Essay-review on Hemans, *Edinburgh Review*, 50 (October 1829): 32-47;
 W. Ledderbogen, *Felicia Dorothea Hemans' Lyrik: Eine Stilkritik* (Heidelberg, 1913);
 Francis Nicholson, "Correspondence between Mrs. Hemans and Matthew Nicholson, an early member of this Society" *Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society*, 54, no. 9 (1910): 1-40;
 W. K. Ruprecht, "Felicia Hemans und die englischen Beziehungen zur deutschen Literatur," *Anglia*, 48 (1924): 1-53;
 I. A. Williams, "Wordsworth, Mrs. Hemans and R. P. Graves," *London Mercury*, 6 (August 1922): 395-401.

Papers:

Major public collections of Hemans's letters and manuscripts include the Liverpool Record Office; the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales; Alexandra College, Dublin; the Houghton Library at Harvard University; the Boston Public Library; the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library; the Huntington Library; and the British Library.

Thomas Hood

(23 May 1799 - 3 May 1845)

Jonathan E. Hill

St. Olaf College

- BOOKS:** *Odes and Addresses to Great People*, by Hood and John Hamilton Reynolds (London: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1825); *Whims and Oddities, in Prose and Verse* (London: Lupton Relfe, 1826; Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Carey, 1828); *National Tales* (2 volumes, London: W. H. Ainsworth, 1827; 1 volume, Philadelphia: T. K. & P. G. Collins, 1839); *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies, Hero and Leander, Lycus the Centaur, and Other Poems* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown & Green, 1827; Philadelphia: E. Littell & J. Grigg, 1827); *Whims and Oddities, in Prose and Verse*, second series (London: C. Tilt, 1827); republished with the first series (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1844); *The Epping Hunt* (London: C. Tilt, 1829); *The Dream of Eugene Aram* (London: C. Tilt, 1831; New York: Peabody, 1832); *Tylney Hall*, 3 volumes (London: A. H. Baily, 1834; Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1834); *Hood's Own* (London: A. H. Baily, 1839; New York: G. P. Putnam, 1852); *Up the Rhine* (London: A. H. Baily, 1840; Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1840); *Whimsicalities, a Periodical Gathering*, 2 volumes (London: H. Colburn, 1844; Philadelphia, 1846).
- Collections:** *Poems*, 2 volumes (London: Moxon, 1846; New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1846); *The Works of Thomas Hood*, 10 volumes, edited, with notes, by Tom Hood and Frances Freeling Broderip (London: Moxon, 1869-1873; New York: Beacham, 1880?); *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hood*, Oxford Edition, edited, with notes, by Walter Jerrold (London & New York: H. Frowde, 1906); *Selected Poems of Thomas Hood*, edited, with an introduction and notes, by John Clubbe (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).
- PLAY PRODUCTIONS:** *Mr. Sims*, London, Surrey Theatre, 25 February 1829; *York and Lancaster*, London, Adelphi Theatre, 10 May 1829.
- OTHER:** *The Gem*, volume 1, edited, with contributions, by Hood (London: Marshall, 1829); *The Comic Annual*, 11 volumes, edited, with contributions, by Hood (London: Hurst, Chance, 1830; London: Tilt, 1831-1834; London: A. H. Baily, 1835-1839; London: H. Colburn, 1842); *The New Monthly Magazine and Humourist*, new series volumes 63-68, edited, with contributions, by Hood (London: H. Colburn, October 1841-December 1843); *Hood's Monthly Magazine and Comic Miscellany*, volumes 1-3, edited, with contributions, by Hood (London, January 1844-January 1845).
- Thomas Hood was the most gifted comic poet of the early Victorian period. He has rarely been matched for his metrical resourcefulness and rhyming ingenuity, and never for his pyrotechnic punning. His humorous verse ranges from the whimsical and bantering to the grotesque and satiric. He was also known for Romantic poetry of a derivative kind, and late in life achieved renown for poems of social protest in which he championed the working oppressed. As an editor he pioneered the humorous family magazine, a compilation of short pieces in prose and verse accompanied by droll illustrations.
- Hood's father, Thomas Hood, was a Scotsman who came from Dundee to London in the 1780s and entered the book trade. He was successful and became a partner in a firm of booksellers and publishers. He married Elizabeth Sands, whose father and brother were engravers of some repute. Six of their children survived in-