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Re-reading the Legend: Medievalism as a Discourse of Empowerment in the Work of Women Writers and Artists, circa 1830 -1900.

Clare Broome Saunders

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Ph.D. Thesis

Department of English Studies,

Durham University

2005

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the use by women writers and artists of medievalism in the nineteenth century, and argues that this use is of great and under-explored cultural significance. Although it is influenced by the medievalist work of male writers, female nineteenth-century medievalism differs decisively. Often used to express views which women could not otherwise easily formulate, it is empowering in a fashion that is unnecessary for male medievalism. Examining ways in which women writers challenge what Foucault termed 'dominant discursive practices', this thesis explores interrelations between the discourse of medievalism and prescribed ideas of gender. Chapter 1 considers women writers' use of the traditionally acceptable medium of translation to produce subversive works; it focuses on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's transformation of the sonnet sequence, and Louisa Stuart Costello's medieval linguistic translation. Chapter 2 looks at the use of medievalism to veil criticism of war in the work of Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon. Chapter 3 develops this discussion: again concentrating on works by Barrett Browning and Costello, it demonstrates how the Crimean War marked a turning point for the use of medievalism by women. Chapter 4 explores how Joan of Arc, a uniquely empowered medieval figure, is simultaneously used to provide criticism of contemporary gender boundaries, and as a submissive role model. A corresponding exploration of queenship and the chivalric lady is the focus of Chapter 5: at a time when the reigning monarch embodied the roles of both passive icon and active ruler, medievalism allowed women writers a means of expressing discontent at the received expectations of femininity. Chapters 6 and 7 concentrate on how the Arthurian queen, Guinevere, is used to illustrate women's views of contemporary constructions of womanhood; and how the influential work of Tennyson and Morris inspired women's response, in literary and visual art.

Clare Broome Saunders

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Acknowledgements

This doctoral research was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, for which I am extremely grateful.

My warm thanks go to Fiona Robertson and Michael O'Neill, for their years of inspiring supervision and invaluable advice.

Since my research and writing had to be juggled with the demands of raising two small daughters, this thesis could never have been written without the constant support and encouragement of my husband, John. That it has been completed owes as much to his commitment to my academic project as my own.

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Plate 1 ***Reading the Legend*** **(1852)**
Lilly Martin Spencer

Introduction

In the painting *Reading the Legend* (1852) [Plate 1] a man sits reading aloud at a woman's feet, in the pose of a suitably abject courtly lover, a ruined castle looming in the background.[1] Rather than attending to his words, the woman gazes directly on the castle itself. The landscape before both is the same, but their gaze is in different directions. The painting illustrates many features of the relationship between male and female medievalisms: the woman is producing her own version of the story, inspired directly from the castle, independent of the reading of her male companion; the artist herself, British-born Lilly Martin Spencer (1822-1902), is said to have been 'inspired by Tennyson's poem "Lancelot and Elaine"', influenced by the writing of a male medievalist.[2] In this thesis, I shall argue that, in nineteenth-century literature, an identifiably 'female' medievalism exists alongside the dominant 'male' version, a discourse that crosses the boundaries of Romantic into Victorian literature, and can still be seen in the early twentieth century. I shall demonstrate that medievalism — by which I refer to the revival of the study and use of medieval literature and culture in a post-medieval period, here nineteenth-century Britain — provides women with a sanctioned means of self-expression and an empowering mode of discourse. This is a discourse which empowers, but is also a discourse in which questions about female empowerment can be addressed, most relevant to Victorian Britain being the issue of the role of queens.

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[1] I am grateful to Fiona Robertson for bringing this image to my attention.
[2] Robin Bolton-Smith and William H. Truettner, *Lilly Martin Spencer (1822-1902): The Joys of Sentiment* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973), 164.

John Simons complains that 'medieval' specialists are often expected to cover over one thousand years of literature, from Old English to Malory and beyond.[3] I am going to take advantage of this very tradition of conflating centuries of literature, and use a wide-ranging definition of 'medieval' in this thesis. I shall describe the influence of works from the Anglo-Saxon period up to the end of the fifteenth century.[4] Many women writers who employ medieval motifs and ideas are guilty of this same blending of an immense range of cultural ideas, medievalism often being a general sense of things Arthurian, and of a 'faery' world. Yet, for others the specific choice of medieval setting or motif employed is in itself significant. Felicia Hemans, as we shall see in Chapter 2, sets some of her works in late-thirteenth and late-fifteenth century Spain to comment on a contemporary Spanish war, and when the medieval scholar Louisa Stuart Costello describes her poem as a 'Lay' she does so for a particular purpose. To contexualize these self-conscious choices demands the application of a flexible definition of 'medieval'. Medievalism, the way 'the Middle Ages have been stretched in many directions in order to provide a [*sic*] ideological space in which a society can explore and articulate concerns which are otherwise repressed' (Simons ed., 5), especially nineteenth-century medievalism, has received some critical attention in recent years. Well-established studies by Alice Chandler, Marc Girouard, and Kevin Morris paved the way for more recent works such as Clare

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[3] *From Medieval to Medievalism*, ed. by John Simons (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1992), 3.

[4] Andrew Sanders offers 1510 as the finishing date of the medieval literature section, and the starting of the Renaissance, in *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Ronald Carter and John McRae, *The Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain and Ireland*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) suggests 1485 as the end of the medieval and beginning of the Renaissance period, this year seeing both the end of the Wars of the Roses and Caxton's printing of Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*; Brian Cummings's essay 'Reformed Literature and Literature Reformed' (*The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* ed. by David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 821-851) highlights that 'As an end and a beginning, the Reformation provoked a violent fissure in English Literature and in its history' (851), this volume considering as 'medieval' texts up to 1550.

Simmons's *Reversing the Conquest* (1990), Kathleen Biddick's *The Shock of Medievalism* (1998), and Elizabeth Fay's *Romantic Medievalism* (2002).[5]

Alice Chandler's socio-political study of Victorian Medievalism is still the most thorough treatment of the topic: it traces 'the growth and meaning of the medievalist ideal through a detailed study of the books that proclaimed it' (11). Chandler sees medievalism as a reactionary response to the aftershock of the French Revolution, and problems arising from the Industrial Revolution, and explores 'its use as a social and political ideal and its symbolic value as a metaphor of belief' (10). Tracing the development of medievalism from antiquarian scholarship, to the literature of Scott and the Lake Poets, from the chivalry and feudalism of Digby, to the 'Young Englanders' and the political reform of Disraeli, Chandler explores the popularity of medievalism for the politically conservative as well as William Morris and revolutionary socialists. She concludes that the medieval revival was ultimately a failure, as, she claims, is proved by Henry Adams's *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* (1933). Apart from brief mentions of Catherine Macaulay, Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve and Charlotte Mary Yonge, the literary focus of this extensive book is entirely

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5 Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971); Marc Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981); Kevin L. Morris, *The Image of the Middle Ages in Romantic and Victorian Literature* (London: Croon Helm, 1984); Clare A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press,1990); Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); Elizabeth Fay, *Romantic Medievalism: History and the Romantic Literary Ideal* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002). See also Richard Cronin's useful summary 'Victorian Romance: Medievalism' in *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary*, ed. by Corinne Saunders (Malden MA, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell, 2004), 341-359, in which he notes that 'The women poets of the period seem especially interested in tracing their continuity with their medieval forebears' (350). Throughout this thesis I shall give references in full at the first citation of sources; subsequent references will be given in parentheses within the text.

male. Girouard's work, however, offers a study of 'how the code of mediaeval chivalry, and the knights, castles, armour, heraldry, art and literature that it produced, were revived and adapted in Britain from the late eighteenth century until the 1914-18 war' (Preface, n.p.). The scope of his wide-ranging seminal text is huge, but focuses on the more well-known version of knighthood in the work of Scott, Tennyson, Ruskin and Kingsley, to demonstrate the socio-political influence of this chivalric medievalism. Kevin Morris focuses on 'religious medievalism—that aspect of literary medievalism which refers especially to the medieval Church in a religious or quasi-religious manner' (1). In this study, the only female author explored in any depth is the Anglo-Catholic Charlotte Yonge, whose *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), with its medievalized depiction of Victorian life, was indeed highly influential. Morris explores how the 'nineteenth-century anti-medievalists constructed a pseudo-historical view every bit as partisan, rhetorical and mythical as that of the medievalists; a view frequently designed to glorify the modern age by blackening that which preceded it, and often intended to counter the work of the Catholic sympathizers by showing how wicked Catholicism was when given full rein in its heyday' (68). Clare Simmons considers, more specifically, the contrast between Saxon and Norman versions of the medieval in nineteenth-century literature, exploring 'how a writer treats a historical fact that fails to conform with his or her personal ideal of history' (5), and how in turn the development of the historical novel 'gave a structure to fact' (10). Her chapter on representations of King Alfred in the reign of Queen Victoria is especially useful when considering Victoria's own use of medievalism, for example, on the way in which the self-conscious 'Saxonizing' of the monarchy was used as a means of quashing the initial unpopularity of a German

husband. Of all these critics only Fay gives equal focus to male and female writers, considering the work of writers such as Anna Seward, Mary Robinson, Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Mary Shelley alongside male poets, within her Romantic time-frame. Fay identifies two separate 'medievalisms', a conservative medievalism linked to the knight and court, and one which she terms 'radical' medievalism, associated with the troubadour, which forms the focus of her study.

My thesis, by contrast, is based on the premise that there is a tradition of female-authored medievalism, running alongside the dominant medievalism which informs and influences it. This female medievalism, like a wide range of work by male writers, is used as a means to comment on contemporary society. Female medievalism differs from the male-authored tradition in that it is often an empowering discourse, used to permit expression of otherwise forbidden subjects: since male writers did not have the same gender prohibitions of acceptable areas on which to write, the 'male' tradition did not need to be empowering in this way. I do not argue that female medievalism is a separate entity, as Anne Mellor does of masculine and feminine concepts of Romanticism, when she contends that 'even a cursory introductory survey reveals significant differences between the thematic practices, and ideological positionings of male and female Romantic writers'.[6] I maintain that female medievalism should be assessed as part of the dominant discourse as it thrived throughout the nineteenth century, and to which it made a significant contribution. The tradition that can be identified of women writers using medievalism in this separate, empowering way is an important study which informs the understanding of

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[6] Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 2.

the whole discourse. The medievalist tradition often uses the past as a mirror to show how things were done better in a golden age, the aspect changing with the concerns of the writer. For William Morris, the Middle Ages was a time of community and artisanship before industrialization, views most obviously expressed in *News from Nowhere*. For Roman Catholic writers it was a time of more unified and purer religious expression, such as in the work of convert Kenelm Digby. Women writers can similarly be shown to use the past as a means of highlighting contemporary concerns, but they rarely hold up the Middle Ages as a better time, despite the greater freedom envisioned for women in medieval times. They instead use medieval motifs and settings as a means of illustrating objectionable aspects of their own society, by showing how they reflect similar problems of a former age. Most pervasively women writers explore the way in which the nineteenth century's socialization of feudal-style chivalric gender codes was confining and degrading.

Medievalism also provides women writers with a masquerade, a means of upholding the appearance of conformity, while offering the opportunity to comment imaginatively on contemporary socio-political issues, most obviously those of war and gender. I thus refute the division between conservative and radical medievalism that Fay makes. Particularly, I argue against her notion that Victorian Medievalism 'comes to denote the sentimentalized imagining of the paternalistic medieval that developed in popular culture from the Romantic comprehension of the past' (2), and falls into her category of the conservative association of court, knight and honour. Through the work of women writers we see that the voice of both troubadour and knight can be equally radical in challenging received views, or creating new forms of

understanding. I equally reject Mellor's suggestion that 'we might see Victorian literature as a regression from the more liberated stance of feminine Romanticism, a backlash in which female intelligence, activity and power was once again restricted to the arena of the domestic household' (1993, 212). Taking as a starting point the concept that Foucault developed, that the Victorian age was not one of silence and suppression regarding sex, but one in which sexuality was constantly redefined and regulated, I shall demonstrate how a wide range of women writers expressed views on sexuality.[7] Alongside this, women writers often demonstrate an interest in, and engagement with, contemporary political and social concerns: these included gender expectations in society, war, queenship and constructions of womanhood, and government. I shall articulate how they use the discourse of medievalism as a means of expressing their views without risking widespread censure, so that their work will actually be read widely, and by members of their own class and sex. By looking at the ways in which women writers challenge and dismantle dominant discursive practices, I am making use of Foucault's idea that no discourse can be looked at in isolation: that, 'discourse, or a particular discursive formation, is to be understood as an amalgam of material practices and forms of knowledge linked together in a non-contingent relation'.[8] Foucault defines possible non-discursive factors as 'an institutional field, a set of events, practices, and political decisions, a sequence of economic processes that also involve demographic fluctuations, techniques of public assistance,manpower needs, different levels of unemployment, etc.'[9] He suggests that

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[7] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 10.
[8] Lois McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 108.
[9] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan-Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972), 157.

there are 'rules put into operation through a discursive practice at a given moment that explain why a certain thing is seen (or omitted); why it is envisaged under such an aspect and analyzed at such a level; why such a word is employed with such meaning and in such a sentence'.[10] I shall explore the discourse of medievalism and its interrelations with socially-prescribed ideas of gender spheres, and of women's role.

This thesis presupposes the existence of socially realized separate gender spheres that 'underwrote an entire system of institutional practices and conventions at mid-century, ranging from sexual division of labor to a sexual division of economic and political rights'.[11] The idea of separate gender spheres has been hotly contested in the last decade: Davidoff and Hall's seminal thesis, that gender was essential to the structuring of a new middle-class culture, since it was the very concept of separate gender spheres which made middle-class identity distinctive, has recently been challenged.[12] The historian Amanda Vickery argues:

> At a very general level, eighteenth and early nineteenth-century women were associated with home and children, while men controlled public institutions, but then this rough division could be applied to almost any century or culture — a fact that robs the distinction of analytical purchase.

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[10] Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: Interviews 1966-1984*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 52.

[11] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 8-9. See also Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA.: Blackwell, 1990), and Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1982) for discussions of gender roles and representations of women in the Victorian period.

[12] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, rev. edn (London: Routledge, 2002).

> If, *loosely speaking*, there have always been separate spheres of gender power, and perhaps there still are, then 'separate spheres' cannot be used to explain social and political developments in a particular century, least of all to account for Victorian class formation.[13]

Vickery argues that the manuscripts of women themselves, from all aspects of daily life, demonstrate their engagement with public life. Far from suggesting an oppressive domestic sphere, these manuscripts show how women use their role in the private sphere to their own advantage. I would agree with Vickery that, far from being powerless victims of patriarchal structures, many nineteenth-century women did challenge and rewrite the position in which the dominant ideology had placed them. Women, such as Queen Caroline and Caroline Norton, can be seen to use the idea of a defenceless woman to their own advantage in pleading their own causes. Yet I maintain that a combination of social, cultural and political elements from the late eighteenth century meant that an ideology of separate codes of behaviour became enforced. These factors included post-French Revolution trauma and the desire for secure public life, the accession of a young virgin queen and the related rise of gentlemanly chivalry, the corresponding resurgence of interest in antiquarian research, medieval texts and ideas, factors of industrialization which led to the emergence of the middle-class and the separation of work and home, the Evangelical Revivial which articulated the domestic as the sphere of morality and religious experience. All these aspects, combined, led to what Shoemaker terms 'an accentuation, rather than emergence, of separate spheres', which meant that men and

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[13] Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), 383-414, (413).

women were expected to behave, and significantly to write, in a certain way, engaged with specific gender-inscribed areas of life.[14] Foucault argues that power relations are exerted most forcefully at points of resistance to a dominatory force, that in fact domination and resistance are opposite effects of the same power relations, 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power': indeed, the very existence of power relationships depends upon 'a multiplicity of points of resistance' (1978, 95). Using this idea, I suggest that the very existence of codified ideas of gender demonstrates that, within society, women were struggling against existing social restrictions and demanding a redefinition of these structures.

A dissertation from 1993 by Natalie Joy Woodall is the only other study apart from my own that looks specifically at female medievalism.[15] This dissertation explores a range of previously undiscovered uses of female medievalism, mentioning some particularly interesting instances of working class women writers using medievalism. However, it largely only considers the development of the medieval damsel in the work of women writers, and leaves many questions unanswered. It also takes at face value many traditional views and suggests a simplistic view of a chronological progression of women's writing, reading many works from a surface view only, and ignoring centuries of writing by women who demanded greater equality and

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[14] Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 318. This book provides a thorough exploration of men and women in public and private life in the period.

[15] Natalie Joy Woodall, *The Appropriation of the Medieval Motif by Nineteenth -Century British Women Writers* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1993): part of this was published in the article, '"Women are knights-errant to the last": Nineteenth Century Women Writers Reinvent the Medieval Literary Damsel', in *Reinventing the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Constructions of the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, ed. by William F. Gentrup (Turnhout: BREPOLS, 1998).

acceptance. For example, we are told in Woodall's article that 'In the early years of the century, when marriage is the primary goal and fate of women, the literary damsel must also rely on a strong, protective male' (201). Woodall suggests that Hemans 'felt obliged to glorify the passive, retiring damsel whose life was literally linked to a male's because contemporary women were expected to consider marriage their "career"' (220). Woodall concludes her article in the following way:

> As women writers struggled to overcome prejudices aimed at them on account of their sex, so their damsels became more assertive, even taking on attributes usually associated with knighthood, including his less noble attributes, such as the capacity to deceive or even murder. This frank, realistic portrayal stands in stark contrast to that of Felicia Hemans's nameless, storyless lady who lies contentedly beside her knight, certain that her earthly sacrifices have earned her eternal rewards in heaven. (221)

This view seems to me a simplification of the tradition of female medievalism based on a view that temporal movement equates with automatic social progression: writers later in the century were often influenced by and developed the work of their forebears, but, as I shall argue, women in the late-eighteenth century and before were using medievalism to express potentially controversial ideas. This is as true for male medievalist texts as for those by women: Tennyson and Morris, producing Arthurian texts at exactly the same time, present very different versions of the Middle Ages to suit their own philosophical agenda, both of these demonstrably more subversive than chivalric texts of the First World War. Similarly, while some women produced radical and subversive versions of the medieval, others throughout the nineteenth century and beyond obviously can be shown to demonstrate a conservative, traditional line, as

Anna Jameson and Charlotte Yonge demonstrably do. Yonge uses the medieval, and more precisely a sanitized version of chivalry, for religious purposes, being a keen supporter of the High Anglican Oxford Movement. In Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), Sir Guy Morville's spiritual quest and supremely chivalrous death manifests this work as the philosophical heir to Kenelm Digby's *The Broadstone of Honour*. Yonge's medievalism and chivalry is, from a sociological viewpoint, in agreement with the dominant ideologies of the age: in *The Heir* women take a secondary position as man's inspiration and consolation, the symbol of goodness for whom he fights battles and strives to be better.[16] Yonge, like Digby, attempts to subsume chivalry into the contemporary culture so that it becomes a code of conduct for the Victorian gentleman, a far removal from the medieval incarnation of chivalry. The fact that 'Charlotte Yonge's younger brother in the Rifle Brigade serving in the Crimea, declared that every officer in the regiment possessed a copy of *The Heir*, and that in the crowded hospitals of Scutari it was the book most constantly demanded'reflects how successful Yonge was in this endeavour, in a wartime setting where traditional, sociologically-constructed gender roles are reinforced to offer security in a time of upheaval.[17]

I do not propose to offer here an in-depth study of the development of medievalism in the nineteenth century: this thesis does not allow me the space to do this, and Chandler and Girouard, among others, have done this already. Neither will I consider

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[16] See also Charlotte M. Yonge, *A Book of Golden Deeds of All Times and All Lands* (London: Blackie, 1864) in which she uses chivalry as a moral and spiritual exemplar in tales designed for reading aloud to boys; most of the stories uphold the received positions of active, commanding male and passive, observing female.

[17] Charlotte Yonge, *The Heir of Redclyffe*, ed.by Barbara Dennis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), viii.

the development of medievalism in male literature in any great detail, compelling as this study is, for the same reasons of space. More significantly, however, while this thesis will highlight some of the contrasting purposes between medievalist work by men and women, it is not a detailed comparison of male and female medievalisms. I look in some detail at Tennyson's and Morris's Arthurian work, but only as a means of showing their direct influence on Victorian women writers and artists who respond to and develop their work. That said, it should be noted that, far from writing in isolation, women writers were drawing on the male influences of a common culture. Scott's influence on the whole medievalist movement cannot be doubted, nor can the direct significance Byron's medievally set *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812) had for Hemans's and Landon's use of the medieval to critique war.[18] Yet, what this thesis will demonstrate is that female medievalism is a varied and internally complex discourse, and as such is in itself sufficient subject matter for an extended study.

My focus here is to demonstrate the prevalence of female medievalist writings and explore how medievalism provides women with an empowering discourse of expression. I shall explore the complexities of medievalist texts by women and their relationship with the male version of medievalism in the canon, focusing the following areas of research: how women writers use the traditionally acceptable medium of translation to produce socially subversive works, particularly in the

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[18] Some recent research has addressed the question of the use of medievalism, and Romance, in the work of these writers: essays by Fiona Robertson, 'Romance and the Romantic Novel: Sir Walter Scott' (287-304) and Michael O'Neill, 'Poetry of the Romantic Period: Coleridge and Keats' (305-320), both in Saunders ed., 2004; see Simon Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) for an exploration of how, with *Childe Harold*, 'Byron had made the genre a vehicle for anti-war sentiment, and he specifically ridiculed the failure of the British leaders to live up to the chivalric roles that were being scripted for them' (171).

translation and transformation of poetic forms such as the sonnet sequence; how medievalism allows women writers of the middle and upper-middle classes the means to express views which they are socially prohibited from doing without censure, as when Hemans and Landon use medievalism to criticize war; how, through medievalism, women writers demonstrate the confining nature of socially structured definitions of femininity, and challenge particularly the idea that women should not engage in politics; how women writers consider historical figures who by their very role (as queens) or activity (Joan of Arc) cannot be contained within the socially-constructed gender discourses; and how this exploration of queenship and the chivalric lady, at a time when the reigning monarch was both passive icon and active ruler, allowed women writers a means of expressing discontent at the received social constructions and expectations of femininity.

Chapter 1 explores the idea of translation of medieval language and form, using Translation Theory to inform the discussion. I consider how Elizabeth Barrett Browning translates and transforms the medieval form of the sonnet sequence, building on Mary Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon* (1796). She produces a voice that she judges a suitable vehicle of self-expression, in contrast to the terms of the courtly-love poet, while using the idea of translation as a means of screening her innovative work. Here I am using the term 'courtly-love poet' as a useful term of definition for the traditional values and gender roles found in troubadour poetry and the medieval sonnet sequences of Petrarch and others: since the term *amour courtois* was not rediscovered until 1883 by Gaston Paris it is unlikely to have been recognised by women writing earlier in the century. Since 1883 the term has 'been subjected to a

bewildering variety of uses and definitions, and has even been dismissed as a fiction of nineteenth century scholarship'.[19] There is not space within the confines of this thesis to re-examine in any detail the ongoing decades of debate about the actual realities of 'courtly love'. Indeed the question is still one troubling many scholars.[20] Roger Boase concludes *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*, which provides an exhaustive and invaluable summary of the historical use and interpretations of the term, by hoping that his study has 'fully vindicated the use of the term Courtly Love in order to denote the complex of ideas and sentiments implicit in the troubadour movement' (129).[21] What is important here is that there was an understanding of the traditions of this courtly-love poetry by nineteenth-century women writers, who then subvert these codes to provide their own socio-cultural commentary, as can clearly be seen in Barrett Browning's correspondence, as I explore in this first chapter. While not using the term 'courtly love tradition', she recognised the traditions of the medieval sonnet sequence, especially the gender constructions of the chivalric tradition. She observed how these were being assumed in her own contemporary

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[19] Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), 1: as Boase notes (4, n.1) Paris did not actually invent the term, as some critics suggest, (see for example Pamela Porter, *Courtly Love in Medieval Manuscripts* (London: The British Library, 2003), 5) but popularized a term used first in the twelfth century.

[20] More recently Stephen Jaeger has argued against the term 'courtly love', suggesting that 'It is not always possible to distinguish codes of behavior from fictional scenarios', C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 42. He claims that critics such as C.S. Lewis have been misreading the history of love, that of primary importance was not the heterosexual Courtly Love which developed in Europe of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries but, as Derek Brewer explains it, ' the collapse of the ancient pre-existent structure of love between highly elite males' going back to Circero and his forbears (see Derek Brewer's compelling exploration of Jaeger's ideas, 'Some Notes on "Ennobling Love" and its Successor in Medieval Romance', in *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England*, ed. by Corinne Saunders (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), 117-133, 117).

[21] Boase's chapter showing the application of the term 1800-1900 (18-26) is particularly valuable for this study. Bernard O'Donoghue, *The Courtly Love Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), is another useful reference work.

society, and presents an alternative version of them, demonstrating the equal gender roles which she finds more acceptable for herself and her lover than the humiliating roles of traditional medieval sonnet sequences. Implicit within this is that Barrett Browning's understanding of the love aspect of the chivalric tradition is akin to the (recently widely vilified) definitions provided by Lewis in *The Allegory of Love* (1936): Lewis summarises the characteristics of courtly love as 'Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love'.[22] Writing in *The Spirit and Influence of Chivalry* (1890), John Batty shows that these gender constructs were contemporarily accepted as part of this tradition, and reflects the traditionally held view that this passive, objectified iconicization was a positive role for women .[23] He suggests that,

> In the age of chivalry woman held a high position in the social scale—at least equal to man. For her sake its greatest achievements were performed and the most romantic adventures undertaken; she even became an object of veneration. (5)

> Woman, elevated and placed in her true position through the teaching of Christianity and the agency of chivalry; unshackled and liberated from the thraldom of vice and slavish sensuality, had now the opportunity of exercising her mild and benign sway over the better feelings of man, and to this cause may be attributed a very large share in the civilization of Modern Europe. (52)

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[22] C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 2.

[23] John Batty, *The Spirit and Influence of Chivalry* (London: Elliot Stock, 1890), 5 and 52.

It is the question of chivalry that attracts Susannah Dobson's attention when she translates and adapts De Saint-Pelaie's French *The Literary History of the Troubadours* (1779) and *Memoirs of Ancient Chivalry* (1784). I consider her work as part of an exploration of medieval linguistic translation, how Anna Gurney, influenced by forebears like Elizabeth Elstob, produced her translation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (1819); and how this was followed by the work of scholars such as Louisa Stuart Costello, and her efforts to revive interest in medieval literature in her authoritative studies, *Specimens of the Early Poetry of France* (1835) and *The Rose Garden of Persia* (1845).

Courtly-love tradition and the chivalry in which it is bound up are inescapably linked with specific gender roles. Chapters 2 and 3 continue these ideas with an exploration of war and how it has 'engaged a set of conventional gender stereotypes throughout the history of western thought and writing'.[24] Chapter 2 discusses how women writing in the nineteenth century explore and subvert these gender stereotypes, presenting a critique of them, and the whole issue of warfare, using the screen of medievalism to veil their comments. I look at the work of Felicia Hemans, the long-accepted representative of domestic and imperial ideology, and how she uses medieval settings to present her views of war, particularly the role of women in war, at a safe historical distance. With the financial demands of her family, she needed to safeguard her livelihood and could not afford to incite the political destruction that faced Barbauld; and yet, she clearly wanted to express her views of the wars that had raged in the early

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[24] Corinne Saunders, 'Women and Warfare in Medieval English Writing', in *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare*, ed. by Corinne Saunders, Françoise le Saux, and Neil Thomas (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), 187-212, 187.

part of the century. I focus in depth on 'The Abencerrage', from *Tales and Historic Scenes* (1819), and *The Siege of Valencia* (1823), and consider how Hemans explores the problems implicit in chivalry, by allowing women and non-Christians (Moors) to demonstrate greater chivalry than the male Christian knights to whom the code more specifically belongs. Hemans is challenging the traditional view, expressed at the end of the century by John Batty that, 'Though we may come across, in reading the ancient legends of semi-barbarous peoples, slight traces of honour, truth, and devotion, akin to the spirit of chivalry, yet they are so strangely mingled with deeds of ferocious cruelty, bloodshed, and disregard of human life that we are glad to turn our attention from such scenes of horror and proceed to trace the silent growth of true chivalry as it came in contact with, and was moulded by, the influence of Christianity' (Batty, 1890, 4). My approach to Landon's work is different: I explore the prevalence of the topic of war throughout her vast *oeuvre*, with a particular focus on *The Troubadour* (1825). I shall demonstrate how this widely accepted feminine poet of 'love' tackles both the subject of war, and the position of women in a society which adheres to chivalric gender ideals, by using a medieval screen to express her views without receiving widespread condemnation.

I continue this discussion of women writers using medievalism to express their views on war and gender ideology in Chapter 3, here moving forward chronologically to the work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the 1840s. In contrast to Hemans and Landon, Barrett Browning consistently discusses political issues openly, not having their financial necessity to keep favour with the public. However, in her ballads from *Poems* (1844), Barrett Browning uses images of medieval warfare to illustrate her

critique of the gender demands of the chivalric code. She recognises that this code is as embedded in the ideology of her contemporary society as in the historical setting she uses, as she demonstrates vividly in her own correspondence concerning the Crimean War. I consider how two factors combined during the Crimean War to make it a turning point for the use of medievalism by women writers and artists. Firstly, the greater involvement of women in the public sphere of war, as best embodied by Florence Nightingale and Queen Victoria herself, meant that it became a subject on which women could comment openly by the 1860s. The huge success of Elizabeth Thompson (Lady Butler) in the 1870s, despite the critical realism of her battle pictures, is a testament to this greater freedom. Secondly the rise of nineteenth-century chivalry as a code for the English Gentleman led to an accentuated, widespread use of the language of chivalry by the Press and poets who supported the Crimean War. Such absorption of the motif by war's supporters meant that it became, consequently, less attractive and useful for war's critics. In an intriguing compromise, rather than using medieval images to describe contemporary events, Louisa Stuart Costello medievalizes her own society in *The Lay of the Stork* (1856), which I explore in some depth. Set in the Crimea, *The Lay of the Stork* takes up Barrett Browning's criticism of the exclusion of women from political discussion, and the degrading nature of the impossible chivalric gender codes, which were reflected in contemporary ideas about separate spheres of behaviour.

An exploration of women, chivalry, and the medieval, leads to the uniquely empowered figure of Joan of Arc, who is the focus of Chapter 4. The chapter considers the way in which she was simultaneously both the inspiration of chivalry

and the destroyer of its constructions, and how nineteenth-century women writers explore this, in contrast to the work of their male counterparts. I explore her portrayal in visual images, poetry and historical biography; how she is simultaneously praised and vilified, how she is used to provide criticism of contemporary gender boundaries, while at the same time appearing as a submissive role model in the conduct books for girls that flourished from the 1850s. These conduct books were part of the century's obsession with categorizing female behaviour, and reflected the contemporary preoccupation with ideas of queens and queenly women. Chapter 5 focuses on these ideas of queenship and considers how, like Joan of Arc, historical and contemporary queens are both empowered and disempowered by nineteenth-century gender spheres. Nineteenth-century queenship becomes a medievalized construct, imbued with ideas of the chivalric lady and images of the medieval revival, which are domesticated and sanitized to suit the requirements of the dominant ideology. I look at Victorian versions of Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots, alongside portrayals of Queens Caroline and Adelaide, Victoria's more recent forebears. Elizabeth and Mary Stuart are obviously not medieval queens, but the widespread use of them as comparisons for Victoria, and as symbols of virtuous or transgressive femininity, means that they are central to any discussion of queenship in the nineteenth century. I also consider literary presentations of Victoria herself, most obviously by Barrett Browning, and also explore Victoria's own self-fashioning and manipulation of ideas of chivalry for her own benefit. Inextricable from ideas of queenship are nineteenth-century ideas of 'queenly women', social ideals like the chaste maid and the virtuous wife. I consider how Victoria's authority is threatened by the ideas of widespread, middle-class, domestic queenship developed by Ruskin and others.

Despite the century's obsession with queenship, Guinevere, Arthur's queen and the central woman of Arthurian legend, is suppressed in the Victorian Age: her role as queen is largely ignored and she becomes, instead, a focus for ideas of marriage, adultery, and the fallen woman. The figure of Guinevere is the topic of Chapter 6: I explore how the medieval incarnation of Guinevere was tailored by Tennyson to fit in with the social morality of his *Idylls of the King*. I also consider how the dominant version of the medieval queen shown in 'Guinevere' (1859) directly inspired contrasting literary responses of approval or outrage from women writers. By contrast, I look at the more authentic medievalism shown in William Morris's 'The Defence of Guenevere' and 'King Arthur's Tomb' (1858), and how women writers, inspired by Morris, choose this figure as a means of exploring positive ideas of female authority and queenship. The final chapter of the thesis looks at the interpretations of Guinevere by women illustrators of poetry, how they find space when illustrating the works of Tennyson and Morris, to present a sympathetic and admirable queen and a medieval courtly lover, despite the strict social codes of the late-Victorian/Edwardian age in which they are working. In doing so they are also able to provide insightful contemporary social comment.

The main historical focus of my work is roughly the Victorian period (1830-1900): I demonstrate that women, writing at a time when the reigning monarch is a woman, who is consciously playing with the social complexities of her own position, bring a particular charge and impetus to their exploration of the roles of women in society. When I reach out of this time frame it is to identify the groundwork of important predecessors — Mary Robinson's work on the sonnet sequence in the late 1790s,

Felicia Hemans's medieval war poetry of the 1820s — to show how Victorian women writers were building on a tradition of medievalist writings by their immediate literary forebears. This highlights that the distance which Mellor identifies as a divide between Romanticism and Victorianism, can actually be seen in some ways as a continuum. I focus on many writers whose work has been the focus of recent critical recovery —Letitia Landon, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Augusta Webster; but I also offer an assessment of the work of a writer long unjustly ignored by critics. Louisa Stuart Costello (1799-1870) was a talented translator of medieval and contemporary European languages, a poet, novelist, travel writer, historian, biographer and painter. Her translations of medieval French poetry and reworkings of medieval legends, most notably her presentation of the Lady of Shalott story, offer an insightful critique of her own society from an academic standpoint steeped in the literature and culture of the medieval period. Widely published and distributed throughout her long life, Costello was regarded so highly by her contemporaries that in 1845 her request for a civil list pension was granted. However, in the recent selection of anthologies of nineteenth-century women poets, which have developed out of the surge of recent work in this field, she has merited only one entry and a paragraph of biographical detail.[25] Costello remains largely forgotten, her works largely unpublished since the 1900s.[26] Her fascination with the medieval was to pervade her life and work, as she acknowledged in an unpublished letter to Stacey Grimaldi in 1848:

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[25] See *Nineteenth Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong, Joseph Bristow, with Cath Sharrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 200-205.

[26] *The Rose Garden of Persia* is the only exception to this, editions published by Fredonia Books in 2002, and Kessinger Publishing in 2005.

> Those illustrious names you mention carry me back to days of chivalry and romance, to which I blush to confess, living in *these* days, that I am devoted. [27]

Many of her works take a medieval setting, such as her first poetry anthology *The Maid of Cyprus Isle and Other Poems* (1815). Her historical biographies, among them *Jacques Coeur, The French Argonaut, and his Times* (1847), and *Memoirs of Anne, Duchess of Brittany, Twice Queen of France* (1855), focused on figures from the Middle Ages. Yet it was for her medieval translations that Costello was most famed, her celebrated *Specimens of the Early Poetry of France* (1835) contributing as much to the study of this area as Ellis's *Specimens of the Early English Poets* (1790) on which it is modelled. I will demonstrate the significance of Costello's wide-ranging work throughout this thesis, showing how richly it deserves reassessment. Her life and work, spanning as it does seventy years of the century, demonstrates the permeable nature of the boundaries between Romanticism and Victorianism, as does the work of her near contemporary Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

I make no claims for this thesis being an exhaustive study of all the many nineteenth-century women writers and artists who use the medieval discourse in their work: there are far more than could possibly be mentioned successfully here. Many, like Yonge, used medievalism in support of the traditional, conservative gender ideas of the age. What I have done in this thesis is to identify the strong alternative tradition of women using medievalism for subversive reasons, and to indicate the dominant areas in which women's medievalism was used. I shall show that the idea of medievalism as a

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[27] British Library 34189, F357: Letter from Louisa Stuart Costello to Stacey Grimaldi, 22 July 1848.

discourse which can be used to facilitate a hidden and acceptable means of subversion, transgression, and ultimately empowerment, is common to all these works. My main literary focus is on the poetry of this period, while a broader spectrum of less mainstream modes, such as historical biography and short stories, is also considered. A detailed exploration of medievalism in the novel is a thesis in itself. While some women writers, most notably George Eliot in *Romola*, do use medieval settings and motifs, poetry was a dominant medium for women writers in this area, the vehicle through which many women were most successfully able to express their criticisms of, and fears for, contemporary society behind the safety of a historical screen.

Empowerment meant, for many, reclaiming the freedom to fashion an image and role for themselves through their writing, subverting the strict codes of behaviour demanded by nineteenth-century society. Part of this was a reconfiguring of the ideas of love, sex and marriage, and a demand for greater choice and power for women. Marc Girouard writes that, 'Mediaeval courtly love could vary from the worship of an untouchable mistress by her adoring swain to passionately physical love affairs only differentiated from other affairs by the style of high literary romance with which they were conducted. It was not perhaps surprising that courtly love in nineteenth-century England was similarly varied' (204). Women writers provide their own version of courtly love, transforming and subverting the socially-prescribed model, as I shall explore in the first chapter.

1 Recasting the courtly: translations of medieval language and form in the nineteenth century

> It was not until three years later that they were offered to the general public, in the volumes of 1850. Here first they appeared under the title of 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' — a title suggested by Mr Browning (in preference to his wife's proposal, 'Sonnets translated from the Bosnian') for the sake of its half-allusion to her other poem, 'Catarina to Camoens,' which was one of his chief favourites among her works.[1]

As Frederic Kenyon describes, when providing this account of the origins of the Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, the work first came to light in Pisa in 1847, the poet originally intending them for her husband's eyes only. Eventually Browning persuaded his wife to publish what he called 'the finest sonnets written in any language since Shakespeare's'(Kenyon ed., 317). Kenyon's notes highlight the two forms of translation on which this chapter will focus: firstly linguistic translation, an acceptably female endeavour, exploring how and why women translated medieval texts. Secondly the idea of translation, or transformation, of form: specifically how women transformed the predominantly male form of the sonnet sequence, with its usual focus on courtly love, for their own socio-political purposes.[2] I shall focus on Barrett Browning's sonnet sequence, as within these much-maligned poems the idea of linguistic translation and transformation of form are combined. From the outset, Barrett Browning hid the originality of her sonnet

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[1] *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. by Frederic G. Kenyon, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1897), I: 317.

[2] I explore the gender constructs of courtly love in the Introduction; see 17-18.

sequence behind the screen of a translation from a little known foreign language — the choice of which seems to have been unimportant as long as it was obscure enough to conceal her ruse. The expectation established by the title is instantly subverted, as we are presented instead with forty-four innovative, energetic, original poems. In the wealth of criticism that has sprung up around the *Sonnets*, the question of 'translation' and its implications has been largely ignored. When *Poems* was published in 1850, it was basically a two-volume revision of the 1844 edition to which *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, among other new poems, were added. Upon publication, the volume received plenty of critical attention, but scant reference to the *Sonnets*. *The Athenaeum* review, for example, refers in an aside to 'Several translations — including an entirely new, and a striking one, of the "Prometheus Bound"' as its only mention of the work that was to be acclaimed above all her others by the end of the century.[3] So did the reviewer really accept the poems at face value, as translations from an older Portuguese source?

For Barrett Browning the concept of linguistic translation was nothing new: her first translation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* was written in 1832 and published the following year. As this was the only linguistic translation that she published in her poetry collections, the thematic link between the play's critique of tyrannical authoritarianism, presented at a time of intense political debate surrounding the Great Reform Act of 1832, is significant. It reflects the poet's engagement with contemporary public life, and a commitment to the Whig politics which would be obvious throughout her works. In translating from a classical language, Barrett Browning was following a largely male lead from writers such as Dryden and Pope in

[3] '*Poems*. By Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *The Athenaeum*, 30 November 1850, 1242-1244, (1244).

the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. This male domination of classical translation suggests one reason why reviews of her early translation were so disparaging. While a tradition of translating from classical, and later from other European languages, had always been inherent in English culture, the definition and purpose of 'translation' changed dramatically through the centuries. Underlying the translations of Dryden, Pope and their contemporaries was a sense of the moral duty of the translator to both the original text and the target culture. Later in the eighteenth century, theories were produced that argued for a revaluation of translation, questioning whether it should be defined as a creative or mechanical enterprise: Coleridge (*Biographia Literaria*, 1817) and Shelley (*The Defence of Poesy*, 1820) developed this debate in the early nineteenth century.[4] It is on this demonstrably male theorization that Barrett Browning's writing appears.

Although translation from classical languages was more rare for women writers, most of Barrett Browning's contemporaries, and many of her predecessors, produced a wealth of translations from other European languages. Journals such as *The New Monthly Magazine, The Literary Gazette*, and *The Westminster Review* consistently presented translations from the likes of Hemans, Landon, and other lesser known women writers. Historically there was always a sense that linguistic translation was a female stronghold, because of the notion that translation was not an original undertaking: it was therefore seen as more appropriate for women writers to be working from texts that were written from a viewpoint of male authority, as translating these works did not threaten the male establishment as works that

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[4] For a fuller exploration of this reassessment of the role of translation, see Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies: Revised Edition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 63-66.

expressed personal opinions might. Margaret Hannay has explored issues of authorship by women writers, demonstrating how silence was equated to feminine virtue throughout the Tudor period.[5] This rule they were permitted to break only to demonstrate their religious devotion, part of which included translating the religious works of other, predominantly male, writers, and in exceptional cases, creating their own devotional meditations. Women who 'ignored the limits of female discourse were herded back within their proper boundaries' (5).[6] By contrast, there was an established tradition of secular writing by women of other European countries by 1500, most famously Marie de France (publishing 1160-1215), and Christine de Pizan (1365-c.1429), 'the first professional woman writer of the West to earn her living by her pen'[7]: yet even Christine felt the need to justify her writing on religious grounds, writing 'He has truly placed language in women's mouths so that He might be thereby served' (Hannay, 5). Marie de France, conscious of the traditional view that original literary self-expression is beyond the ability of women, and confident of the accomplishment of her own work, feels the need to establish herself as author of the *Fables* in the epilogue:

> Marie is my name,
>
> I am from France.
>
> It may be that many clerks

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[5] *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. by Margaret Patterson Hannay (Kent , Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985), 1-14.
[6] For example, Lady Mary Wroth published nothing further after she had replied to Lord Denny's harsh attack on her secular sonnet sequence *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*.
[7] *Medieval Women Writers*, ed. by Katharina M. Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xviii.

> will take my labor on themselves —
>
> I do not want any of them to claim it.[8]

Yet, as Hannay points out, while the devotional focus of English women writers of the Renaissance meant that 'the wealth, energy, and learning of a substantial number of noblewomen made possible the rapid production of religious works, which were predominantly Protestant', a further unforeseen result was that 'women occasionally subverted the text, even in translation, in order to insert personal and political statements' (4). Hiding this subversion behind the screen of a translation meant that these women escaped the immediate condemnation of the patriarchal strongholds of the family and society. Barrett Browning employs this (by the early nineteenth-century) well-established use of translation as a screen for overturning expectations behind an acceptable vehicle of self-expression. However, like Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto, Sonnets from the Portuguese* is not a linguistic translation, but is an original work first published behind a mask, which displaces the authorial authority, and thus escapes possible censure. Famously the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764 under the pseudonym of William Marshall, was presented as a translation 'From the Original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto, Canon of the Church of St Nicholas at Otranto'.[9] Only in the Preface to the second edition does the author reveal the truth and asks 'pardon of his readers for having offered his work to them under the borrowed personage of a translator' (9). Walpole excuses his behaviour by explaining that this ruse came from 'diffidence of his own abilities, and the novelty of the attempt' (9). In fact, Walpole is seeking safety behind an assumed mask of a

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[8] See Joan M. Ferrante, 'The French Courtly Poet: Marie de France', in Wilson ed., 1984, 64-89, 64.
[9] Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. by E. J. Clery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.

translator and the authority of a document written in the past, because he realises that he is presenting a new and potentially contentious piece. His subtitle, 'A Gothic Story', highlights that in fact this work initiated a whole new genre. In using translation as 'an "alibi" for independent literary creation' in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Barrett Browning is following this earlier example, protecting herself from the initial public reaction to a work that so subverts the expectations of a Petrarchan sonnet sequence.[10]

The last three decades of the twentieth century have provided a diverse range of theories of translation. In 1983 'Translation Theory' merited a mention for the first time in the *MLA Bibliography*, providing a new authority to these studies. The birth of Translation Studies meant that translated texts could be considered in their social, economic and political position in the culture: at the same time highly divergent hypotheses were also being developed.[11] Perhaps most useful to my discussion is the polysystem theory which suggests that translation can function within literary systems to maintain or challenge a dominant poetics and a governing ideology.[12] The term

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[10] Maria Tymoczko, 'Translation as a Force for Literary Revolution in the Twelfth-Century Shift from Epic to Romance', *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies,* 1 (1986), 7-27, 17.

[11] For example George Steiner's universalist theories come in stark contrast to the cultural materialism of Translation Studies theorists such as Bassnett and Lefevere: these in turn conflict with Deconstructionist commentators like Derrida, Barthes and Foucault. See George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere, *Translation, History and Culture* (Cassell: London, 1990); Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977); Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Blackwells, 1977); Sean Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).

[12] For my discussion on polysystem theory I am indebted to the following resources: Itamar Even-Zohar, 'Polysystem Theory', *Poetics Today*, 11(1990), 9-26; Zohar Sharit, 'Translation of Children's Literature as a Function of its Position in the Literary Polysystem', *Poetics Today*, 2 (1981), 171-179;

'polysystem', first used by Itamar Even-Zohar in the early 1970s, describes the aggregate of literary systems in a given culture: from the 'high brow', such as poetry, to those considered 'low brow' like popular fiction. Looking at translation in this way demands an awareness of the 'processes that shape a culture at a given point in time, considering the economic, political, social and metaphysical needs implicit in the choice of texts for translations and dissemination'.[13] I shall explore how Barrett Browning's choice of the sonnet form allows her the means to create a translation, although not a translation from another European language as the title of the sequence suggests. Barrett Browning's translation transforms the usual language of a sonnet sequence, that of courtly love as in the original medieval sonnets of Petrarch, into a voice which she finds sympathetic. She does this while employing the same Petrarchan form, just as Mary Robinson had used the 'legitimate sonnet' at the end of the previous century to present her version of the Sappho story, and to voice her support for the poetry of sensibility. I would like to consider Barrett Browning's work in this context, and against the background of medieval translation in the nineteenth century.

It is interesting to note that the introduction of the sonnet form to English poetry came as a result of translations. The choice of such poets as Wyatt and Surrey to retain the form of the Petrarchan originals that they chose to translate encouraged this new form to enter the system. However, both Wyatt and Surrey veered from Petrarch's original form by characteristically introducing a final rhyming couplet to their sonnets,

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Edwin Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); Bassnett, 1991; Tymoczko, 1986.

[13] Susan Bassnett, 'Translation, Tradition, Transmission', *New Comparison: A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies,* 8 (1989), 1-2, 1.

whether translations or originals, and thereby creating the so-called 'English sonnet'. This new form often assisted in reinforcing a change of tone or character from Petrarch's originals to satisfy the socio-political demands of their sixteenth-century translators, differences which were often brought starkly to the notice of their contemporary audience by the very fact that many would be acquainted with Petrarch's original.[14] Following their example, and that of Mary Robinson closer to her own day, Barrett Browning also used the sonnet form for her own socio-cultural ends. Barrett Browning was the first woman to write a sonnet sequence in the nineteenth century, following the innovative work of writers such as Charlotte Smith in the late eighteenth century.[15] Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* of 1784, expressive poems of a contemplative and often sorrowful tone, had proved so popular that by 1800 they were in their ninth edition: her major contribution to the revival of the sonnet form won her both admirers, among them Coleridge, and detractors. The latter of these included Mary Robinson, who opens the Preface to her 1796 sonnet sequence *Sappho and Phaon* with an attack on writers who, like Smith, had disregarded the classical Petrarchan sonnet form:[16]

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[14] For a discussion of this see Bassnett, 1991, 104-109.

[15] It should be noted that Barrett Browning was not the only woman to transform the sonnet sequence for her own purposes: in her introductory notes to *Monna Innominata: A Sonnet of Sonnets* (1881), Christina Rossetti says she will write the sequence that 'the Great Poetess of our own day and nation' would have written if her personal happiness had not led her to demand mutual love. It is a traditional sonnet sequence from a woman's point of view rather than a man's (see Armstrong, Bristow, with Sharrock, eds., 1996, 560-561). Augusta Webster used the sonnet sequence as an expression of maternal rather than erotic love in *Mother and Daughter: An Uncompleted Sonnet Sequence* (1895), while George Eliot had expressed filial love in her *Brother and Sister* sonnets (1874). I chose to focus on Barrett Browning's work here as the earliest of these examples in the nineteenth century, and because the idea of masking her groundbreaking work as a translation has particular significance to my thesis.

[16] By contrast, Elizabeth Fay aligns Smith and Robinson together as providing examples of 'Petrarchism', 'the formal imagining of being the beloved' (24) in contrast with the *trobairitz*

> It must strike every admirer of poetical composition, that the modern sonnet, concluding with two lines, winding up the sentiment of the whole confines the poet's fancy, and frequently occasions an abrupt termination of a beautiful and interesting picture.[17]

Conversely Robinson casts her sonnets very obviously as a 'series of legitimate sonnets', as Petrarchan. Unlike Smith's sonnets, *Sappho and Phaon* is a sequence that is developed around a single narrative that takes love as its theme, in which 'Robinson focuses on the problem of medievalism as troubadourism, and decides to take on the problem of courtly love' (Fay, 55). Critics of the poem were keen to bring an autobiographical element to their discussions and linked the betrayed Sappho to Robinson's experience as 'Perdita', the rejected mistress of the Prince Regent and Colonel Tarleton.[18] Far more striking, however, is Robinson's self-conscious concern with poetic form, and with contemporary responses to poetry, especially the poetry of sensibility. In her treatment of the Sappho myth, Robinson is creating a manifesto against critics such as William Gifford, who, in works like *The Baviad* (1791), had attacked the Della Cruscan poetry of sensibility, and on many occasions had directly

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Sapphism, which she defines as 'the projection of a female erotic' (24), as seen in the work of Anna Seward (1747-1809). Seward turns herself into the beloved medieval lady, but addresses her dead foster sister, Honora. She reverses the medieval poet's use of the beloved and replaces it instead with an exploration of a 'poet-to-history' (36) dynamic, musing on her own present and past; see Fay, 2002, 33-63, for a thorough and insightful discussion of the work of Seward alongside the work of Smith and Robinson. While Seward's revolutionary use of the sonnet and subversion of the courtly love motif is of obvious importance as background to Barrett Browning's sonnet sequence, Robinson offers a more useful historical basis on which to focus my exploration of the later work, because of the translation aspect of *Sappho and Phaon.*

[17] The text used, to which page references allude throughout, is *Mary Robinson: Selected Poems*, ed. by Judith Pascoe (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), 144. In a note to the Preface, Robinson does, however, show Smith recognising that her own sonnets are not 'legitimate', quoting Smith's Preface to her *Elegiac Sonnets*: 'The little poems which are here called Sonnets, have, I believe, no very just claim to that title'.

[18] See Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 31.

criticized Robinson herself. While Gifford, among others, was especially contemptuous of this poetry as the embodiment of 'feminized' expressions of excess, Robinson maintains that the poetics of sensibility demonstrate the intellectual progressiveness that is characteristic of genius. She uses the writings of Sappho to demonstrate this, that Sappho's enlightened work, like that of the contemporary women poets whom Robinson is defending, is 'too glowing for the fastidious refinement of modern times' (153).

Sappho and Phaon is a recasting of the myth told in Ovid's epistle number fifteen from *Heroides*, and of Pope's 1712 translation of this work *Sappho to Phaon*, along with Barthelemy's *Voyage du jeune Anarcharsis en Grèce* (1788). McGann offers an insightful analysis of the importance of the changes in the terms of the titles: 'When Ovid's "Sappho *to* Phaon" becomes Robinson's *Sappho and Phaon* the changed middle term signals an important change of attention. Sappho is placed in a larger context of understanding, as Robinson's prose materials emphasize, and this widening includes a closer investigation of Phaon'.[19] In her sonnet sequence, Robinson recasts Sappho: unwilling to censure the classical poet, Sappho's love for Phaon appears a madness in her because he is unworthy of her love. It is prophetic, foretelling a golden future when Phaon could be worthy of her love, and when Sappho's poetic genius is fully recognised. Robinson is openly critical of the portrayal of Sappho in her sources: 'OVID and POPE have celebrated the passion of Sappho for Phaon; but their portraits, however beautifully finished, are replete with shades, tending rather to depreciate than to adorn the Grecian Poetess' (150). She clearly wishes to present

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[19] Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 108.

Sappho as 'the unrivalled poetess of her time' with a mind 'enlightened by the most exquisite talents'. To do this, Robinson employs the most highly polished, and significantly named 'legitimate' sonnet form to celebrate the poetic genius of her subject. In doing so she legitimizes the poetry of sensibility, having established in her preface that she and her female contemporaries are Sappho's cultural and intellectual heirs. Robinson self-consciously transforms the mournful epistles of Ovid and Pope into an accurate and structured sonnet sequence, which highlights the persistence of Sappho's poetical genius.[20]

It is significant that *Sappho and Phaon* is prefaced by Robinson's 'thoughts on poetical subjects': throughout her preface, Robinson brilliantly throws the very phrases and arguments that critics of the poetry of sensibility have used against the 'Della Cruscans' back at them. She suggests that this new type of poetry is the intellectual light for the future, building as it does on the poetic genius of forebears like Sappho: as such is suitable for this most polished and intelligent of poetic forms, the 'legitimate' sonnet. By the time we reach the actual sequence, we are left in no doubt that Robinson's striking choice of form is a focused and conscious one. Her sonnet sequence is a translation in several ways: a translation of Ovid's original work; a recasting of Pope's 1712 'Sappho to Phaon'; and, most significantly, a translation of the 'meaning' of the poetry of sensibility, through the transformation of the very language of critics of the 'Della Cruscans'.

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[20] Barrett Browning similarly focuses on Sappho's enduring artistic influence in 'A Vision of Poets' (1844), framing Sappho 'within the calm repose of her fame, thereby reversing the long tradition of focusing on Sappho's life rather than her art' (Majorie Stone, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Macmillan: Basingstoke and London, 1995), 89). Similarly Felicia Hemans uses a sketch of Sappho as the inspiration for 'The Last Song of Sappho', contextualizing the poet in art, and as an artist. Phaon is not mentioned by name in this poem: Sappho's feelings of abandonment are clear, as is her recognition of her poetic success, 'glory's light hath touched my name,/The laurel-wreath is mine'(The edition of Hemans's work used throughout this thesis, to which page references allude, is *The Poetical Works of Mrs Hemans* (London: Warne, [1887?]), 591).

As Robinson recasts Sappho, so Barrett Browning subverts the set roles of a courtly love sonnet sequence — the iconicized (female) beloved and active (male) lover — primarily through her very act of (female) composition, like the *trobairitz*, 'the medieval female troubadours whose poems have barely survived but whose literary history nearly every woman poet of consequence has guessed at' (Fay, 31).[21] Angela Leighton explores in some depth Barrett Browning's refashioning of these archetypal roles, what Leighton calls the 'struggle to be the subject of love rather than its object'.[22] As Leighton suggests, Barrett Browning had to go much further than merely reversing these roles: the inspiration for her sonnets, Robert Browning, was a lover and poet in his own right and unwilling to be cast as superior, if mute, muse, as their correspondence attests.[23] This role is one that she abhorred herself and one to which she refused to degrade her poet-lover. Barrett Browning openly disdained the Victorian interpretation of chivalry as a code of conduct for an English gentleman, which relegated women to a rarefied passivity. Writing to Mary Russell Mitford in February 1845, she speaks scathingly of her admirer, the Revd. G.B. Hunter:

> Ever since my last book has brought me a little more before the public, I can do or say or wish to do and say, nothing right with him — and on, on, he talks epigrams about the sin and shame of those divine angels, called

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[21] It is worth noting that, unlike the constraints for acceptable areas of expression placed on women in medieval England – and indeed still in Barrett Browning's own day - the women troubadours (of continental Europe) did not seem confined: 'Although we might expect the cultural model of the passive woman to make it difficult for the lady to speak out, in fact very few trobairitz mention such a constraint', *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, ed. and trans. by Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, Laurie Shepard and Sarah White (New York: Garland, 2000), xxv.

[22] Angela Leighton, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, (Brighton: Harvester, 1986), 94.

[23] See *Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett: The Courtship Correspondence 1845-1846*, ed. by Daniel Karlin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

> women, daring to tread in the dust of a multitude, when they ought to be minding their clouds. [...] For a woman to hang down her head like a lily through life, and 'die of a rose in aromatic pain' at her death, — to sit or lounge as in a Book of beauty, and be 'defended' by the strong and mighty thinkers on all sides of her, — this he thinks, is her destiny and glory. It is not the pudding-making and stocking-darning theory — it is more graceful and picturesque. But the *significance* is precisely the same, — and the absurdity a hundred times over, greater. Who makes my pudding, is useful to me, — but who looks languishing in a Book of Beauty, is good for nothing *so far*.[24]

So instead of merely reversing the gender roles, Barrett Browning disturbs them, refashions them, and strives to suggest an equality and interdependence between the lovers. Barrett Browning's belief in the intellectual inequality of men and women is well-documented: she repeatedly emphasised that she believed, 'women .. all of us in a mass .. to have minds of quicker movement, but less power & depth .. & that we are under your [man's] feet, because we can't stand upon our own' (Letter to Robert Browning, 3 July 1845, Karlin ed., 79). Yet *Sonnets from the Portuguese* suggests the possibility, if not necessity, for equality of love and passion, and demands the woman's right to expression: in insisting on this privilege to express desire, Barrett Browning follows the tradition of the *trobairitz*, the medieval female troubadours who voice their 'sensuous expression of desire' (Bruckner, Shepard and White, xxviii). If 'The feat of the women troubadours is to conflate two identities, male and female, in their own singing' (xxx), Barrett Browning, by taking on both traditional male and

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[24] *Elizabeth Barrett to Miss Mitford: The Unpublished Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford*, ed. by Betty Miller (London: John Murray, 1954), 235.

female roles as both lover and beloved, can also be seen to be following this tradition. However, since the songs of the female troubadours reveal 'how unobtainable (like the men's transcendent love) mutual love was considered to be' (Fay, 21), Barrett Browning is demonstrably breaking out of this tradition and forging a new poetic female expression for mutual love and desire.

In Sonnet III we have both an active lover *and* an active beloved: the beloved as a 'chief musician' is 'looking from the lattice-lights' at the speaker, the 'poor, tired, wandering singer'.[25] Sonnet VI suggests an interdependence of two becoming one; both are inextricably stained with love; 'What I do/ And what I dream include thee, as the wine/ Must taste of its own grapes': their love is an exchange of equal gifts, both actively giving (VIII). All sense of the unworthiness of the lover, which Barrett Browning has built up in the received pattern of the courtly form, is nullified in Sonnet X. Through love, both parties become equal, 'an equal light/ Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or weed:/ And love is fire', not the customary, chivalric, unrequited love. The lover has learned how to love through the example of the beloved:

> This love even, all my worth, to the uttermost,
> I should not love withal, unless that thou
> Hadst set me an example, shown me how,
> When first thine earnest eyes with mine were crossed
> And love called love.(XII)

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[25] The text used throughout this thesis, to which all page references allude is *The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: John Murray, 1914): for Sonnets from the Portuguese (1847-1850) see 312-321. Roman numerals refer to sonnet numbers.

Sonnets from the Portuguese is a woman's demand to the right to love and express that love directly, as demonstrated most effectively in the now famous penultimate sonnet of the sequence. Sonnet X similarly explores this, the speaker focusing on her own self-expression:

> And when I say at need
> *I love thee*...mark!...*I love thee* — in thy sight
> I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
> With conscience of the new rays that proceed
> Out of my face toward thine.

The [female] speaker is transfigured by the power of direct speech and the ability to express herself actively. She is self-consciously both subject and object — lover and beloved — because she is cognisant of the construction of both roles, and has rendered them equal in the relationship. This sonnet also provides clear evidence of Barrett Browning's revisionism and translation of the female role in the traditional medieval/Elizabethan [male] sonnet sequence. The 'new rays' proceeding from her face immediately bring to mind such images as 'Stella's rays' striking Reason in Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* (sonnet 10, line 12).[26] Sonnet XIV shows the speaker refusing to be the iconicized beloved, demanding to be loved from genuine affection rather than the typical trappings of physical attraction that generally spark the adoration in courtly love poetry: 'If thou must love me, let it be for nought/ Except for love's sake only'. On the contrary, the speaker is disturbed by the idolization of her expressed by her beloved in a letter (XXIII). She demands her right to an identity as a

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[26] *Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. by Katherine Duncan Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 157.

woman, not an idol, and requires corporeal love — 'Then, love me, Love! look on me—breathe on me!'. The sexual attraction that Barrett Browning so vividly describes in Sonnet XXXIV, 'allow/That no child's foot could run fast as this blood', results in an mutual artistic admiration and sharing of poetic gifts (XLIV). She describes a quiet, genuine emotion,'love me also in silence with thy soul' (XXI), and a gratitude for a self-sacrificing love (XLI). The speaker demands an earthly, human love that can be fulfilled and shared, 'Let us stay/ Rather on earth, Belovèd' (XXII): in Sonnet XLII she celebrates the divine becoming human in an overturning of usual courtly imagery. This establishing, and then overturning, of the typical language of the sonnet sequence is evident throughout: the king and 'vanquished soldier' in XVI seem to be conforming to the expectations of the form, but the king is seen to 'invite' not demand. Similarly, an 'out-of-tune/ worn viol' might spoil the song of a 'good singer', but there is the possibility that together harmony can be created, 'perfect strains may float/'Neath master-hands, from instruments defaced,' (XXXII).

Barrett Browning's contemporaries and biographers, and an alarming number of present day critics, focus on *Sonnets from the Portuguese* only as love poems to Robert Browning. Criticism of Barrett Browning has been, until fairly recently, highly biographical in nature: so the story of the Barrett/Browning romance, how Barrett Browning wrote the *Sonnets* in 1845-46, but did not present them to Browning until 1849 because of a criticism he made about writing about personal love, has become legendary. Marjorie Stone concisely summarises this tradition:

> The romantic story of her elopement and marriage has become so much a part of our culture that we are collaborators in it against our will, just as we

> are complicit in the ideological forces that have nurtured it for over a century now. (1995, 1)

Stone provides a thorough exploration of Barrett Browning's audience in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, demonstrating how, 'For thirty years, critics concerned for their reputations had only felt safe in praising the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*' (215). These sonnets were considered to be a suitable confession of a wife's chaste love for her husband, demonstrating correct domestic affection, 'The poems are praised at this time for the manifestly bad reason that they are true to life' (Leighton, 97). The *Sonnets* were considered 'the genuine utterance of a woman's heart', by Hugh Walker[27]: for Margaret Oliphant they represented the 'highest tide' of her poetic genius.[28] Some critics did not even allow Barrett Browning this much credit: in 'Elizabeth Barrett's influence on Browning's Poetry' (1908), John Cunliffe states, 'Browning's influence upon his wife is written large on the surface of all her later work, the best thing she ever did, the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, being directly due to his inspiration'.[29] He concludes that 'I am inclined to believe that her most enduring contributions to literature are not direct but indirect — through the influence she exerted on her poet-husband. Her best work is to be found not in her writings, but in his' (170). Only when Virginia Woolf turned to *Aurora Leigh* in 1932, without a mention of the *Sonnets*, does any fair assessment of Barrett Browning's wide ranging work appear. Stone considers this anomaly:

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[27] Hugh Walker, *The Literature of the Victorian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 328.
[28] Mrs Margaret Oliphant, *The Victorian Age of English Literature* (1892), as shown in Stone 1995, 208.
[29] John W. Cunliffe, 'Elizabeth Barrett's Influence on Browning's Poetry', *PMLA*, 23 (1908), 169-183, 169.

> What is more difficult to account for, given Barrett Browning's poetic stature in the nineteenth century and her impact on a host of other writers and thinkers, male as well as female, is the virtual elimination of her major works from most standard literary histories within fifty years of her death — with the telling exception of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. Only 'Elizabeth's' status as Robert Browning's wife and the popular appeal of their romantic story saved her from becoming one of the 'disappeared' altogether. (193)

Considering that so much credit for the *Sonnets* is given to Browning and his influence on his wife, it is interesting to note that Barrett Browning's fascination with the poetic construction of a sonnet sequence predates their correspondence, which began in 1845. Translations from Petrarch, and a minor Italian love sonneteer Felice Zappi, appear in one of the 'Berg' notebooks dating from 1840. In a letter to Mary Russell Mitford, 19 October 1842, Barrett Browning discusses her recent exploration of the sonnet form, showing a similar fascination with the Petrarchan sonnet as demonstrated by Robinson. She writes:

> The Sonnet structure is a very fine one, however imperious, and I never *would* believe that our language is unqualified for the very strictest Italian form. I have been exercising myself in it not unfrequently of late. (Miller ed.,136).

However, unlike Robinson, Barrett Browning's focus is not the 'legitimacy' of the sonnet form, but translation: as far as Barrett Browning is concerned, there is no need to employ the 'English' sonnet form when the English language can so effortlessly maintain the Italian form. Barrett Browning's creative use of the form, that she is self-

consciously pushing back the boundaries of language and poetical construct, is by far the most arresting feature of the *Sonnets*. From this view, it is interesting to consider Alethea Hayter's opinion of the *Sonnets*:

> Obviously it was a restraint to her to have to stand still, not to let more than one thought into the summer-bower. Most of her critics feel that the restraint did her all the good in the world, and that her sonnets are her best work precisely because her convulsive genius was strait-jacketed into them. But I sometimes think that the straining muscles and suffused countenance of the prisoner in the strait-jacket are a little apparent in her sonnets.[30]

While my evaluation of the success of the sonnet form as employed by Barrett Browning is starkly at odds with Hayter's, her work does have the benefit of being one of the very few assessments of Barrett Browning's *work*, as opposed to *life*, pre-1970. Hayter reflects the deep embarrassment felt by many feminist critics of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s regarding the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*: rather than consider these poems for their poetic and technical worth, these critics shy away from them, finding the biographical associations of them degrading. It is noticeable, for example, that 'Gilbert and Gubar register the poems' ideological disfavour by omitting any mention of them' (Leighton, 98).[31] More recently Isobel Armstrong at last focused on the technical aspects of the poems, putting aside biographical

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[30] Alethea Hayter, *Mrs Browning: A Poet's Work and its Setting* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), 106.
[31] This discussion is explored further in Dorothy Mermin, 'The Female Poet and the Embarrassed Reader: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*', *English Literary History*, 48 (1981), 351-67, 352. For an excellent general survey of the critical recovery of Barrett Browning's work, see Simon Avery and Rebecca Stott, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2003), 13-19.

references. Armstrong explores how the slippage in Barrett Browning's language reflects the breaking of expected sonnet form, and the burst of confinement, for both lover and beloved, from the expected roles.[32] For Armstrong, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* is 'ambitious because it attempts to discover a language to represent and go beyond the structure of an unwilling master-slave relationship' (356). Barrett Browning is interested in the battle for identity between two people and a quest for new language to describe that identity: 'The sonnets chart the struggle of the feminine subject to take up a new position which is free of dependency. They struggle with their own dissolve as they try to break into new areas of being' (356). Armstrong sees redefinition as the aim of the work, and focuses on Barrett Browning's use of language; 'a language of dissolving categories which attempt to coalesce into new forms'. Armstrong notes that:

> the sliding cadences, the deliberate elisions and metrical freedoms which break away from the established regularities of the sonnet form are clearly intentional. The late caesuras and enjambement declare an attempt to dissolve the customary forms and restrictions. Language goes into a flux, as if enacting the dissolution of categories. (356)

More recently, Margaret Morlier has reassessed Barrett Browning's rhymes in the *Sonnets*, considering how 'the rhyming experiments indicate subversive and elitist poetic strategies that are at ideological cross-purposes'.[33]

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[32] Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London and New York, Routledge, 1993), 356-357.

[33] Margaret M. Morlier, '*Sonnets from the Portuguese* and the Politics of Rhyme', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27 (1999), 97-112, 98. Morlier offers a particularly interesting reading of the famous Sonnet XLIII, suggesting that 'the tone of the poem ironically includes both emotional idealism and subdued social satire' (109).

Barrett Browning is translating the language of the sonnet sequence, the discourse of medieval (male) courtly love, and creating a new language where the objectified woman has an active voice for the first time, a language that is accessible for her socio-cultural agenda. As Stott puts it, 'Barrett has turned the sonnet sequence into something of a duet, as voice counterpoints voice inside and outside, yet the individuality of the two speakers is always maintained: significantly too the sequence begins with the word "I" and ends with the word "mine"'(Avery and Stott, 126). Barrett Browning's translation complies with Steiner's definition that translation is in one sense 'an attempt to justify an alternate statement' (246). Steiner suggests that, 'By far the greater proportion of art and historical record has been left by men. The process of 'sexual translation' or of the breakdown of linguistic exchange is seen, almost invariably, from a male focus' (46). By contrast Barrett Browning is throwing her work, and a poetic form dominated by men, into a female focus, and remoulding it to create a language of equality where both lover and beloved can be equal, possessing equal right of action and expression in the poems.

Reviving the Medieval: Linguistic Translation

When Louisa Stuart Costello published her scholarly *Specimens of the Early Poetry of France* (1835), her immediate models were George Ellis's *Specimens of the Early English Poets* (1790) and *Specimens of Early English Romances in Metre* (1805), and Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Le Grand D'Aussy's *Fabliaux or Tales, Abridged from French Manuscripts of the XIIth and XIIIth Centuries*.[34] Yet, she was actually building on a

[34] Louisa Stuart Costello, *Specimens of the Early Poetry of France; from the time of the Troubadours and Trouveres to the Reign of Henri Quatre* (London: Pickering, 1835); George Ellis, *Specimens of the*

tradition of women creating historio-linguistic translations from the medieval, which had been established at least the century before, most prominently by Elizabeth Elstob. In 1709 Elstob published the *English-Saxon Homily on the Nativity of St Gregory*, with an English translation and preface. She followed this in 1715 with the *Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue, first given in English; with an apology for the Study of Northern Antiquities,* the very first grammar of Anglo-Saxon, produced for a 'young lady' who was eager to learn the language. The Preface to Elstob's work opens with an inscription found 'In a Letter from a Right Reverend Prelate to the Author', which expresses the sense that language is the domain of women:

> Our Earthly Possessions are truly enough called a PATRIMONY, as derived to us by the Industry of our FATHERS; but the Language that we speak is our MOTHER-TONGUE; And who so proper to play the Criticks in this as the FEMALES.[35]

Elstob was an ardent campaigner for the learning of Anglo-Saxon and classical languages, which she herself studied when staying with her Anglo-Saxonist brother in Oxford, and argued that only through understanding the etymology of contemporary words can one really have a true grasp of language. Unfortunately, her scholarly

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Early English Poets (London: Edwards, 1790); M Le. Grand, *Fabliaux or Tales, Abridged from French Manuscripts of the XIIth and XIIIth Centuries*, trans. by G.L. Way and ed. by G Ellis, 3 vols (London: Rodwell, 1815).

[35] Elizabeth Elstob, *The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue, First given in English: with an apology for the study of Northern Antiquties* (London: Bowyer, 1715), frontispiece.

endeavours were cut short when she had to stop the publication of *Saxon Homilys* due to debt: she spent the rest of her life teaching, and as a governess.[36]

A century after Elstob's first publication, Anna Gurney took up the linguistic Anglo-Saxonist mantle, publishing *A Literal Translation of the Saxon Chronicle* in 1819, an exceptionally scholarly work with clear and professionally presented notes and references.[37] Gurney here clearly marks a return to the tradition of pure Anglo-Saxon scholarship: the significance of the 'literal' nature of the translation, that it is as near to the original as possible, is emphasized from the very title. In the frontispiece of *A Literal Translation of the Saxon Chronicle*, Gurney acknowledges the assistance of 'the Rev. Mr Ingram'. This gentleman reciprocates in his Preface to *The Saxon Chronicle with an English Translation, and Notes, Critical and Explanatory* (1823), praising Gurney's work: 'But the honour of having printed the first literal version of the Saxon Annals was reserved for a learned LADY, the Elstob of her age; whose work was finished in the year 1819'.[38] Like Gurney, Ingram focuses on the fidelity of the translation of the original, so much so that he places the original Anglo-Saxon verse alongside his English version, so that those with the ability can check it. Accuracy of translation is again seen to be significant, Ingram noting in his Preface, 'Of the translation it is enough to observe that it is made as literal as possible, with a

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[36] For an account of Elstob's career after the deaths of her brother and her mentor, Dr George Hickes, see Sylvia Harcstack Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendships, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 129-133.
[37] Anna Gurney, *A Literal Translation of the Saxon Chronicle* (Norwich: Arch, 1819).
[38] Rev. J. Ingram, *The Saxon Chronicle with an English Translation, and Notes, Critical and Explanatory* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brow,1823), xvi.

view of rendering the original easy to those who are at present unacquainted with the Saxon language' (xvi).[39]

However, alongside the idea of literal translation from the medieval, from the late eighteenth century a tradition can be seen to emerge in which translators start to adapt their work to suit the tastes of the contemporary audience. Clara Reeve demonstrates this in her translation of Barclay's Latin romance *Argenis*, published in 1762. She gave her translation a new title, *The Phoenix*, thus giving it a separate identity and establishing the separate creativity that had been involved in the translation. Reeve has been said to have initiated the genre of the historical novel with *The Champion of Virtue, a Gothic Story* (1777), a work that saw its title changed for the second edition, to *The Old English Baron*.[40] Reeve herself called *The Old English Baron* the 'literary offspring of *The Castle of Otranto*'. However, in his *Preface to the Life of Clara Reeve*, Scott highlights by contrast Walpole's historical precision and Reeve's lack of accurate detail of the period:

> In what may be called the costume, or keeping, of the chivalrous period in which the scene of both is laid, the language and style of Horace Walpole, together with his intimate acquaintance with the manners of the middle

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[39] It is worth noting that Charlotte Yonge pays tribute to Gurney in her *A Book of Golden Deeds of all Times and all Lands* (1864). Yonge uses Joanna Baillie's poem 'Night Scene by Sea', which is claimed to be 'literally and exactly true' as the prompt for her narrative. 'The Rescuers' focuses on Anna Gurney, expert in translating languages of the 'ancient Teutonic branches', who, we are told, bought a lifeboat and supervised many rescues of sailors and fisherman from her wheelchair. Yonge is here again seen to equate heroic behaviour with Christian benevolence, and here also the subject's interest in the medieval seems a significant link between the valiant and the charitable. Unusually for Yonge, however, the active rescuer is a woman, and, ironically one who, by her scholarship, returns to a literal interpretation of the medieval rather than a sanitized version such as Yonge favoured.

[40] See Fay, 3.

> ages, form an incalculable difference betwixt *The Castle of Otranto* and *The Old English Baron.* [41]

In *The Old English Baron*, 'all parties speak and act much in the fashion of the seventeenth century'. Scott goes on to elaborate how among his contemporaries there was a far greater knowledge of the customs and language, and thus a far more accurate attention to detail than Reeve and her contemporaries. Writers of the early nineteenth century had the benefit of work by the antiquarians who were working throughout the previous century on key texts and translations from the Middle Ages: most notably Hurd, Ritson, Warton, Ellis, and Percy. Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) laid the foundations for the reassessment of the medieval by significant scholars and academics, and defined the place of ancient poetry on the contemporary imagination. Hurd's work 'helped to develop an English aesthetic by placing original genius in the Middle Ages, distinguishing it from the Franco-Scottish Celts'.[42] In doing so, Hurd effectively paved the way for editors like Thomas Percy by validating the type of medieval minstrel ballads that Percy was editing, by suggesting that they were examples of an inherent genius.

Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) was a landmark in medieval scholarship, and made collecting medieval texts fashionable for the first time. *Reliques* also bridged the gap between the antiquarian scholar and general cultured reader. Percy's translations were not always literal or exact, although in the *Preface* he apologises for the occasions where, 'The desire of being accurate has

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[41] Ioan Williams, *Sir Walter Scott: On Novelists and Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 98.
[42] Nick Groom, *The Making of Percy's Reliques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 83.

perhaps seduced him into too minute and trifling an exactness'.[43] Percy's was not merely a scholarly endeavour: he was translating to win an audience and popularise these ancient poems. Percy states quite openly in the Preface to the *Reliques* that he had 'endeavoured to be as faithful as the imperfect state of his materials would permit' (I,5), thus allowing himself room for interpretation if he could make the meaning more accessible for his audience. Joseph Ritson, however, was enraged by this approach: in *Ancient Ballads and Songs* (1790), Ritson derided Percy because he 'preferred his ingenuity to his fidelity'.[44] Scott, however, found some sympathy with Percy's approach:

> He that would please the modern world, yet present the exact impression of a tale of the middle ages, will repeatedly find that he will be obliged, in despite of his utmost exertions, to sacrifice the last to the first object, and eternally expose himself to the just censure of the rigid antiquary, because he must, to interest the readers of the present time, invest his characters with language and sentiments unknown to the period assigned to his story; and thus his utmost efforts only attain a sort of composition between the true and the fictitious. (Williams, 99)

Scott demonstrably followed this method in his own medievalist works, such as *Ivanhoe* (1819), *Quentin Durward* (1823), and *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828): however, he came under a similar attack for his inaccuracies. While *Ivanhoe* used as direct sources Sharon Turner's *History of England from the Norman Conquest* (1799) and George Ellis's *Specimens of Ancient Poetry* (1805), there are major errors in the

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[43] Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 2 vols (London and Toronto: Dent, 1906), I, 5.
[44] As shown by Arthur Johnston, *Enchanted Ground: The Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Athlone Press, 1964), 80.

topology, and chronology of the work, for example the focus of action at Coningsburgh Castle, a structure of far later date than Anglo-Saxon. However, as Clare Simmons has noted, 'most of Scott's major errors of chronology are not random but form a pattern that helped create a new interpretation of the period' (88), one that would win back an audience and interest from Scott's contemporaries. Scott's major source, Sharon Turner, who published all his major Anglo-Saxon researches in 1799-1800, perhaps made the medieval period most accessible to the early nineteenth-century readership, because through his works he changed the perception of the period, as Simmons suggests: 'Above all Turner helped make respectable the study of a people formerly dismissed as barbarous and uncultured' (60). Turner's works were of a direct influence to women writers in nineteenth century, as is obvious if we consider the work of Charlotte Yonge. Since the works of Turner, popularized through Scott, made the medieval 'respectable', the young ladies of Yonge's novels can be shown to be immersed in medieval history.[45]

While not translating medieval languages, Susannah Dobson had, in 1779, produced a translation of a French text that demonstrated her enthusiasm for medieval poetry. *The Literary History of the Troubadours*, translated from the French original of M. de Saint-Pelaie, resurrects 'The works and fame of the Troubadours' which 'had long been buried in oblivion' (v), this being an essential part of the study of the antiquities of nations 'without a knowledge of which, the literary history of Europe, and of France in particular, must have remained incomplete' (vi).[46] Dobson's translation not

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[45] In fact, Mrs Turner is the inspiration for the mother who speaks up for the Anglo-Saxon in Yonge's *Abbeychurch* (1844).

[46] Susannah Dobson, *The Literary History of the Troubadours, collected and abridged from the French of Mr. de Saint-Pelaie* (London: Cadell, 1779), v and vi.

only gave her the opportunity to reproduce for her contemporary audience the poetry which she says forms 'The origin of modern literature' (xxiv), but it also allowed her a means to comment on her present day society, most notably her critique of the Catholic Church. It is worth noting that, while in the 1830s members of the Oxford Movement used medievalism to provide an exemplar of a laudable Catholic Church clergy, Dobson uses the discourse to demonstrate her contempt for the very same establishment. She states categorically that, 'It is likewise of use to characterize the spirit and manners of these ages of chivalry; to point out the abuses of an ignorant and disorderly clergy, and the tyranny of the church of Rome' (ix), showing her scorn for the bloody warfare caused by the 'blind and sanguinary devotion of the Crusades' (xiv), which she calls 'the masterstroke of Papal despotism' (xvii). As historians generally were monastic representatives of the Church she despises, Dobson argues that the work of the troubadour poets provide truer details of medieval life: 'The ancient chroniclers, educated in the gloom and prejudices of a cloister, gave only tiresome narrations; their facts were intermixed with vulgar opinions, and ridiculous legends, and thus they darkened and degraded history. But the poets may be justly styled painters from life' (xv). Her work has a further didactic purpose, to show 'that birth and beauty, learning and wit, are nothing without virtue to guard and direct them' (493).

Dobson continues this sense of translating for a moral purpose in her translation of M. de Saint Palaye's (Dobson's alteration of the same author's name) *Memoirs of Ancient*

Chivalry (1784).[47] Dobson insists, 'Had I not been fully persuaded that the following Work was fruitful of instruction to all, but particularly to the youth of both sexes, I would not have undertaken the translation of it, or have been at the pains of interweaving the notes into the original' (xx). She suggests that 'Women, in particular, ought to hold these ancient writers in high esteem, for the deference they paid to modesty, and the fame they so liberally bestowed on virtue' (xviii). Jacqueline Labbe has provided a compelling exploration of Dobson's views of the place of chivalry in society, how she 'wants to link chivalry and nobility', but ultimately, 'all her best efforts seem only to reveal the questionable, if not distasteful, aspects of the system she champions'.[48] Labbe explores the strategies Dobson uses to negotiate the objectionable aspects of chivalry. Labbe notes that:

> The danger experienced by the translator is hastily displaced onto the integrity of the texts. Dobson uneasily reins in her anxieties about the threats posed by the texts and substitutes them with the conventional appeal to what may be called, in light of her subject, the chivalry of her readers, when she begs their indulgence for the inevitable weaknesses her gender will impart to the translation. In the end, chivalry is a condition of, as well as the basis for, her translation. (29)

Dobson claims the works as harmless escapism, 'Pursued in their *just* measure, such studies are not only innocent, but might prove useful relaxations from the cares of

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[47] Monsieur de St.Palaye, *Memoirs of Ancient Chivalry. To which are added, the anecdotes of the times, from the Romance writers and historians of those ages*, trans. by Susannah Dobson (by the Translator of the Life of Petrarch (London: Dodsley, 1784).

[48] Jacqueline M. Labbe, *The Romantic Paradox: Love, Violence and the Uses of Romance, 1760-1830* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 2000), 28.

life' (xii), and suggests the educational benefits of the works: 'there requires little apology for classing the ancient romance writers with the historians of those times' (xvii). Ultimately, the sentiments of chivalry expressed in the works she is translating provide an important sense of order, which will be carried forward as a guide in the post-French Revolution world's terror of social disorder, in Labbe's words, 'Her percipient plotting of social chaos, to be held back only by the judicious reintroduction of chivalric values, indicates the national direction chivalry will take in the 1790s, and its loaded nature as a governing metaphor' (30). A similar claim for the instructive nature of Romance can be found in Clara Reeve's 'sustained theoretical statement about the genre', *The Progress of Romance* (1785).[49] Reeve pays tribute to Dobson's work when listing her antecedents working in this area 'It is with sincere pleasure I add a name that will not disgrace the list, a writer of my own sex, Mrs *Dobson* the elegant writer of the *History of the Troubadours* and the *Memoirs of Ancient Chivalry*'.[50] It is worth noting that, when published, Reeve's innovative theorizing work was followed by a translation of an Egyptian Romance, ostensibly because it 'furnishes an additional proof that Romances are of universal growth, and not confined to any particular period or countries' (xv), but also because, in providing a translation, Reeve returns her work to the bounds of the acceptably female sphere. Vargo has noted that, within the dialogue of *The Progress of Romance*, Reeve employs rhetorical strategies which 'allow for the female voice to claim a space, which will not disrupt male authority' (238): the translation underlines this non-threatening, but innovative, positioning.

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[49] See Lisa Vargo, 'Women's Gothic Romance: Writers, Readers, and the Pleasures of the Form' in Saunders ed., 2004, 233-250, 237.

[50] Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt*. Reproduced from the Colchester Edition of 1785. (New York: The Facsimile Text Society, 1930), xii.

In Costello's presentation of *Specimens* in 1835, she can demonstrably be seen to use elements of the tradition of translation and antiquarian research that she had inherited from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet, the overtly feminized reviews given by contemporary critics show translation, again, treated as a suitably feminine hobby rather than a valuable scholarly study. Costello's *Specimens* is a collection of works that demonstrate the developments in French language and poetry from the eleventh to the early-seventeenth century. It is a scholarly volume in which Costello's introduction, translations and biographical notes, with the occasional assistance of her brother Dudley Costello, manifest her impressive knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, her subject. All sources are clearly cited, further reading suggested, the writer's views clearly stated, the opinions of other scholars contested, all backed up with evidence; take, for example, the discussion in the Introduction that considers the different suggested reasons for the great change in the culture of the French court around the year 1000. This able and committed scholar's work considers major poets, including Marie de France, Jean de Meun, and Christine de Pise, as well as more minor figures. It is interesting that Costello includes works by poets of both sexes in each of the three parts of her work, considering the work of women alongside their male contemporaries. Costello clearly states her aims in the Preface:

> Every lover of literature must have observed with regret the little attention bestowed by the English reader on the early poetry of France. [...] Still some of their best and earliest poets are but little read even in France, and in England their very names are unheard of. To introduce them to the English public appeared, therefore, a desirable object; and an attempt has consequently been made in the following pages to convey as much as

> possible, the spirit of the original poems, divesting them with the trammels which their antique phraseology has thrown around them. (vii)

Costello's object is to return these texts to the canon, if one uses Even-Zohar's definition that 'by canonized one means those literary norms and works [...]which are accepted as legitimate by the dominant circles within a culture and whose conspicuous products are preserved by the community to become part of its historical heritage' (15).

It is worth focusing here on Costello's treatment of Marie de France's *Lais,* as the French author expresses a similar desire to Costello that these tales should be kept in 'circulation'. In the Prologue to the *Lais*, Marie muses on the improving exercise of classical translation relating how she 'began to think/ about composing some good stories/ and translating from Latin to Romance;/ but that was not to bring me fame:/ too many others have done it'.[51] Fuelled by the aspiration to create an original and unique piece of literature, Marie turns to the *lais*, further inspired by a desire to make a lasting written record of these stories; 'I have heard many told;/ and I don't want to neglect or forget them./ To put them into word and rhyme/ I've often stayed awake' (29). Marie is keen to stress the effort she has deemed it worth investing in these lays, spending time translating their form into one of higher art. Costello selects two of Marie de France's *Lais* to include in her *Specimens*: *Bisclaveret* and *The Lay of the*

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[51] *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. by Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1995), 28. All further references to the *Lais* in this thesis are taken from this edition.

Eglantine (Chevrefoil).[52] Costello clearly does not shirk from subjects which society might deem unsuitable for a woman writer: Marie's *Chevrefoil* is a tale of the adulterous love of Tristan and Yseult, *Bisclavret* the story of how a werewolf is trapped by his adulterous wife and her lover. The whole series of *Lais* present a far more complicated view of courtly love than received tradition, and certainly the gentleman-like chivalry of the nineteenth century, would suggest: Costello's choice of these particular lays demonstrates two extremes of courtly love. In *Bisclavret* 'Marie argues that human beings are defined not only by their inherent potential for good or evil but also by their fellow humans' responses of trust or fear to that potential. Thus love is lauded as a socializing force in the *lai*, and its betrayal condemned as the ultimate antisocial act'(Hanning and Ferrante, 104). Love, therefore, is shown specifically as an entity that must live in a social context. In *Chevrefoil* the focus is still love, but this time the private, secluded, passionate love and joy shared by Tristan and the queen.[53] Marie does not mention the magic love potion, which is traditionally presented as the reason for the binding nature of their love, but replaces this with the idea of their natural mutual interdependency and understanding, illustrated by the image of the honeysuckle and the hazel tree.

Costello is clearly willing to represent these poles of treacherous love, from the beast within all humanity, to the possibility of a natural, joyful, and yet adulterous, love. Therefore, it is interesting that she avoids a direct translation of lines with an overtly sexual content which modern translators include. The fact that Bisclavret's wife

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[52] Costello uses the form 'Bisclaveret' while Hanning and Ferrante prefer to use the Bretan 'Bisclavret' of Marie's original: here I use the appropriate form to the specific text in discussion.
[53] Marie, unlike Costello, does not actually name her, but focuses on her public role, perhaps as a means of heightening the sense of impossibility of a social acceptance of their love.

'never wanted to sleep with him again' (94, line 102) is translated by Costello into the sense that fear and horror at her planned treachery 'drove slumber from her eye' (54), and her offer to the suitor knight 'I offer you my love and my body;/ make me your mistress!' (95, line 115) is toned down to her swearing 'a deadly oath of love' (Costello, 54). While Tristan and the queen 'took great joy in each other' (192, line 94), Costello's lovers seem less physical, 'Oh, boundless joy unspeakable!' (66). Similarly the violence of Marie's original is muted so that while the werewolf tears the nose off his wife's face (98, line 235) in the original, the children of her union with the treacherous suitor consequently born grotesquely 'noseless' (100, line 314), Costello's version simply says her face bears the trace of 'deadly fury' (58) and the children bear 'Deep wounds and scars' (60) on their faces as a mark of their parents' crime. Marie's wise man suggests 'Why not put this woman to torture' (99, line 255), and this is clearly used to find the truth, while in Costello he merely recommends that they 'Question the wounded dame' (58), who confesses 'subdued by pain and fear' (59). These changes suggest that Costello, in her anxiety to keep these early French poems in the public eye, is careful not to produce any piece of linguistic translation that could be accused of being unsuitable or inappropriate for the audience: consequently she chooses to restrain Marie's phrases.

More striking still is Costello's archaizing of the text, often using antique language wherever possible to give a sense of the medieval: thus a werewolf keeps its older name 'Garwal', Costello explaining the derivation and usage of this term (50). The opening of *Chevrefoil* , 'Assez me plest è bien le voil/ Del lai qu'hum nume Chèvre-foil' becomes the archaic 'Awake, my harp, and breathe a lay/ Which poets oft have

loved to tell', rather than the literal more prosaic meaning of 'I should like very much/ to tell you the truth/ about the *lai* men call *Chevrefoil* (Hanning and Ferrante, 190). In using such archaic phrases Costello is, like William Morris in his translations from Old Norse, Greek, Latin and Old French later in the century, emphasising the poetic beauty of the language and giving a taste of the medieval as it would have been perceived by many of her audience, in all its antique charm. She is trying to coax her audience into the atmosphere and context of the poems to draw them in. The popularity of *Specimens of the Early Poetry of France* is attested by its republication in 1877 as one of the 'Chandos Classics' series, in a volume alongside John Oxenford's Book of French Songs.[54] The Editor makes the fact that the works had 'long been popular with the reading Public' overt in his preface (vii). *Specimens of the Early Poetry of France* was widely received to great acclaim. *The Athenaeum* on 16 May 1835 gave it a glowing two-page review, the reviewer opening with his declaration of sympathy with Costello's desire to reintroduce early French poetry:

> we were disposed to welcome any attempt to introduce these almost forgotten poets to the English reader but we can warmly recommend Miss Costello's very elegant little work.[55]

The reviewer goes on to consider the work thoroughly, contesting some of the information Costello had provided, suggesting alternative 'specimens' which he believes would be more useful, questioning the weight given to the different poets —

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[54] *The Book of French Songs: to which is added Miss Costello's Early French Poetry*, ed. by John Oxenford (London: Warne, 1877).
[55] *The Athenaeum*, No. 394 (16 May, 1835): 369-370.

in short giving the work the serious consideration it deserves. Similarly a review in *The New Monthly Magazine* lavishes praise on the work:

> the fair translator has very happily caught the feeling of her winningly wild and romantic originals: that she has added explanatory notes and biographical sketches, together with several graphic embellishments, coloured in the early illuminated fashion; and that the whole collection is so attractive as to occasion us to wish it were more extensive than she has ventured to make it.[56]

This reviewer is equally sympathetic to Costello's aim to rekindle interest in early French poetry, since 'Few subjects could be indicated of greater interest than this to minds of taste and refinement'. He supports the work wholeheartedly: 'We hail, therefore, with cordial satisfaction the presence of Miss Costello's charming little volume'. Both these reviews recognise the significance of Costello's work, both support the objectives of the writer. It is interesting then that both damn with faint praise, inadvertently reducing Costello's achievement with diminutive and overtly feminine adjectives: 'Miss Costello's very elegant little work', 'Miss Costello's charming little volume'. Costello is treated in the same way as Barrett Browning was to be in the critical reception to *Sonnets from the Portuguese*: just as these sonnets are reduced by her contemporaries to mere outpourings of her love for her genius husband, Costello's academic study becomes reduced to something insignificant, diminutive and dainty.

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[56] *New Monthly Magazine*, Volume 44 (1835): 238-239.

As Barbara Godard suggests, 'Translation is one among many ways of rewriting within literary systems pushing them in a certain direction through canonizations'.[57] As reviews of her work demonstrate, Costello used translations of early French poetry to bring this important body of work to the attention of the culture. She was following the example of Elstob, Ellis, Percy and Gurney, who had similarly brought medieval works to their contemporary audience by presenting them in such a way that they would have wide appeal — to the generally educated reader as well as the scholar. This was something she would continue in her compilation of translations of Persian poetry, *The Rose Garden of Persia* (1845), a combination of her own translations and her adaptations of the translations of others, preceding the work of such as Edward Fitzgerald with her desire to make these works known in Europe. Wrapping this scholarly work in a 'showy gift-books of the season' livery, meant that this would have a wider appeal and commercial reward for Costello.[58] Conversely, however, this presentation packaged it more as a feminine delicacy than an academic endeavour, as Hervey's review in *The Athenaeum* recognised:

> These extracts are sufficient to show the reader that Miss Costello has added a very pleasant and graceful variety to the stores of our light literature, -- and that the book is much more worthy of its rich embellishments than what are called the "season books" amid which it appears, usually are.' (*The Athenaeum*, 1845, 1217)

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[57] Barbara Godard, 'Theorizing Feminist Discourse/Translation', in Bassnett and Lefevere eds, 1990, 87-96, 92.
[58] See Thomas Kibble Hervey's review of *The Rose Garden of Persia*, *The Athenaeum*, 20 December 1845, 1214-1217, 1214.

Costello's translations are seen here as 'light literature', but of greater worth than others in this category, although this falls far short of the actual value of these translations. This categorization also fails to demonstrate her desire to introduce this poetry to her society, 'So great has been my delight and enthusiasm on the subject for many years, that I cannot help hoping that others may feel equally interested with myself'.[59] Similarly Robinson used translation for her own different agenda: to suggest an alternative presentation of Sappho to the canon, and to try and influence the way the poetry of sensibility was viewed. Her method combined both linguistic translation and translation of form: the self-conscious choice of the 'legitimate' sonnet justified her endeavour. Barrett Browning, on the other hand, feigned a linguistic translation to signpost the actual translation she is undertaking, the transformation of the language of courtly love, which is usual in the Petrarchan sonnet sequence, with a language she finds acceptable. Barrett Browning is accommodating this new narrative voice comfortably within an existing structure, so a new kind of poetry can become part of the 'historical heritage' of the literary community. Within this she is also challenging the strict gender roles demanded by her own society, which were similar in their limitation of male and female activity as in the chivalric code she so abhorred, as it appeared in the traditional male-authored courtly-love sonnet sequence. In this she was following a tradition of using a medieval form as a screen for a critique of the contemporary, as Hemans and Landon had in their war poetry, which trespassed on the male domain of politics.

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[59] Louisa Stuart Costello, *The Rose Garden of Persia*, (London: T.N Foulis, 1925), 11.

2 'Though females are forbidden to interfere in politics': war, medievalism, and the nineteenth-century woman writer

In this chapter I shall consider how women writers in the nineteenth century often used medieval settings in their work as a means of highlighting their commentary on and condemnation of the wars raging in the century, without receiving the censure that would often arise in a more open criticism. De Pauw opens the Preface to her groundbreaking *Battle Cries and Lullabies* 'Women have always and everywhere been inextricably involved in war'.[1] Traditionally women held one of three places in war: victim, inciter or camp follower. Women were victims of war, raped, tortured or killed as 'spoils' of war, or because they are the ones left behind to suffer anguish and loss of male loved ones. As inciter, women encouraged men to partake in the male-waged wars, the white feathers given by women in the First World War reflecting the distaffs given centuries previously by Eleanor of Aquataine and her women to men reluctant to join the Second Crusade. Camp followers were traditionally laundresses, cooks, nurses, grave diggers and, most obviously, prostitutes. There were exceptions, De Pauw providing compelling evidence of the role of the woman soldier, that 'from the late sixteenth through the eighteenth century, there were hundreds of women soldiers and sailors passing as men, and everybody knew about it' (105). Certainly 'Songs celebrating female warriors began to appear in print at the end of the sixteenth

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[1] Linda Grant De Pauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War From Prehistory to the Present* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), xiii.

century and grew in popularity over the next two centuries' (105).[2] Other rarer exceptions include the occasional war leader, such as the queens Fredegund and Isabel of Castile, and Joan of Arc, who actually represents all these categories, making her 'a particularly appealing model for female heroism, memorable even when all other military women are forgotten' (96).[3] Women were not conventionally war commentators, although Christine de Pizan had written a manual for knights and soldiers in 1410 *Le Livre des faits d'armes et de chevallerie*.[4] Hidden in the guise of a straightforward manual for the fifteenth-century professional knight, Christine actually puts forward her well-documented proto-pacifist stance and 'quietly provides all the possible arguments against involvement in anything but the most clear-cut defensive warfare' (Le Saux, 104), refusing to glorify warfare and battle.[5] Yet, in the nineteenth century, many women writers were prompted to write about the wars that were shaking their society: underlying these works is a strong sense of the carnage of war.

The warfare at the beginning of the nineteenth century was bloodier than had been known before, as Isobel Armstrong succinctly describes:

> The war trauma of the nineteenth century was underwritten not only by the first conscripted national armies of the Napoleonic Wars, by a more lethal new technology, as shrapnel and the rifle replaced the musket, but also by

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[2] For another useful summary see also Fraser Easton, 'Gender's Two Bodies: Women Warriors, Female Husbands and the Plebian Life', *Past and Present*, 180 (2003), 131-174.
[3] I shall focus on presentations of this complex and intriguing French saint in Chapter 4.
[4] A recent exploration of Christine's manual can be found in Françoise le Saux's article 'War and Knighthood in Christine de Pizan's *Livre des faits d'armes et de chevallerie*', in Saunders, le Saux and Thomas eds, 2004, 93-105.
[5] See Le Saux, 93, on peace-theory scholars' conclusion on Christine's political position.

> a consciously theorized philosophy of mass death, whose representative text, Clauswitz's *On War* (posthumously published in 1832), celebrated war as total annihilation in a way unknown to western culture until then. For the first time in history, killing as many of your own side as was necessary to kill more of the adversary's became a systematic policy — it is doubtful whether either the Napoleonic or colonial wars of the nineteenth century could have otherwise succeeded.[6]

Women poets were prolific on the subject of warfare, so much so that, 'one feels women poets were more aware of bloodshed than their male contemporaries' (Armstrong, Bristow, with Sharrock eds, 1996, xxviii). One of the most powerful examples of this is Anna Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* which criticizes the continuing war between Britain and France, prophesying that England, like other major powers of the past and future, would eventually dwindle and be surpassed.[7]

Barbauld's view of war in the poem is far from glorious: war is shown as an irrepressible doom. The cost of war is not just the loss of soldiers; it is the famine and disease that destroy the ordinary population especially the peasants, 'war's least horror is the ensanguined field' (line 22). Similarly, as the third stanza explores, the women waiting behind also suffer, the mother, wife, sister, lover, who has her life 'wrecked' by bad news from the war. The poem shows a stark contempt for British military expansion and empire building. Britain in the first stanza 'bends her ear', the image suggestive of a stooping old woman rather than the graceful, powerful 'Britannia'. This is developed into the image of Britain as an indolent queen

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[6] Isobel Armstrong, 'Msrepresentation: Codes of Affect and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry', in *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 3-32, 10.

[7] Textual references for *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven: A Poem* are taken from, *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwells, 1997), 10-18.

surrounded by sycophants who fails to notice the devastation around her. Most striking is the concept of Britain's involvement in war bringing with it a shameful culpability: Britain must realise that 'Thou who hast shared the guilt must share the woe' (lines 45-46), the idea of righteousness being on Britain's side is totally subverted. The Genius that has made Britain great, repulsed by her aggression over other nations, forsakes Britain: 'Then empires fall to dust, then arts decay,/ And wasted realms enfeebled despots sway.' (lines 243-244). The Genius leaves 'Europe's desolated shores' (line 321) for Columbus's world, America.

Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* provoked unmitigated, vitriolic criticism from those 'who think their country just in all her projects, & inexhaustible in her resources' as her brother John Aikin wrote in a letter to James Montgomery in 1812. Most notable was that by the Tory Politician and critic John Wilson Croker, published anonymously in the *Quarterly Review* (1812). It would appear that the writer's sex was the main reason behind the spleen:

> We had hoped, indeed, that the empire might have been saved without the intervention of a lady-author: we even flattered ourselves that the interests of Europe and of humanity would in some degree have swayed our public councils, without the descent of (dea ex machina) Mrs Anna Laetitia Barbauld in a quarto, upon the theatre where the great European tragedy is now performing. (As shown Wu ed., 8)

Croker was by no means alone: another anonymous reviewer wrote in the *Eclectic Review* (1812) that Barbauld's 'choice of subject in this instance, as well as her manner of treating it, is so unfortunate, that we scarcely ever read a poem of equal

merit with so little pleasure', (as shown Wu ed., 9). This aggressive discussion destroyed Barbauld's confidence, discouraged her from further writing, and led other women writers to shy away from openly presenting political arguments: 'The backlash produced by *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* cut short Barbauld's career as a poet, and it is an important episode in the reception of women's interventions in political debate at this time. Her silencing [...] helps to bring into focus the limits imposed on women's direct, historically informed and unsentimental intervention in the most crucial aspects of national culture '.[8] That the writer's sex was an essential consideration for the harsh criticism is demonstrated by the contrast between the sensation that accompanied the publication of the first two cantos of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. A Romaunt* in 1812, the same year as Barbauld's, and the abject scandal aroused by a work on a similar political theme written by a woman: as McGann and Reiss have noted, 'To her contemporaries, Barbauld's poem seemed grotesque and anomalous from a writer who had come to define the proprieties of the feminine imagination for almost fifty years'.[9]

There clearly was a widespread notion in the early nineteenth century that it was unnatural for women to be writing about political and sociological subjects in such critical ways. As Duncan Wu evocatively suggests, the 'whiff of disrepute' shrouded political writing by women in this period (Wu ed., xix). This furore early in the century, with writers like Barbauld and Mary Wollstonecraft crucified in terms of reputation by critics who clearly had distinct expectations and standards from women

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[8] *Women's Writing, 1778-1838: An Anthology*, ed. by Fiona Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 51.

[9] *Letitia Elizabeth Landon: Selected Writings*, ed. by Jerome McGann and Daniel Riess (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997), 19.

writers, made women aware that they needed a means of presenting their views in a less contentious way, if their poems were to be read and accepted. Often these writers turned to creating works steeped in legend from a medieval past: sometimes the result of antiquarian scholarship, sometimes legends of no known source, but which use a medieval setting and motifs. In this way, these women could make their observations without risking the censure that had destroyed Barbauld, and made it difficult for 'respectable' people to read and support her work. Using the medieval was a way of negotiating with social constraints upon these women, and presenting their opinions through the safety of historical distance. Additionally poetry steeped in medieval legend often breaks down national boundaries and suggests shared experience: suffering in war is international, inter-historical, inter-social.

Amelia Opie had used a medieval screen in *The Warrior's Return* in 1808.[10] Sir Walter returns from the Crusades to the Holy Land after fifteen years away at war to the grotesque discovery that he had unwittingly killed his own son in a battle for disputed honours over a fallen Saracen chief. On the surface this is simply a medieval legend telling a tragic tale of the Crusades, but looking under this thin façade many contemporary references can be found. In 1808, when the poem was written, the wars with France had been raging for fifteen years, the age of Sir Walter's son, and had reached a new degree of intensity and bloodiness at the start of the Peninsular Wars. Sir Walter kills his son through vanity: not happy with the fame and glory he has already won in the Crusades, 'martial pride' steels his heart and he kills the young warrior because of the impudence to challenge his claim. This vanity is reinforced

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[10]Amelia Opie, *The Warrior's Return & Other Poems* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808), 3-17.

with Opie's italics 'He fought like a hero! but *vainly* he fought' (15), the boy fought in vain, while Sir Walter fought in vanity: the underling message here is that political vanity has caused Britain to enter many unnecessary wars. Another focus is the huge division between the domestic life, as represented by Editha, and war: Sir Walter fails to recognize his wife's scarf on the dead boy, just as Alfred had failed to recognize his father, because he had changed armour with a fallen friend. The poem leads us to the conclusion that Editha is the main sufferer because of her enforced position of excluded impotence, being left first by husband, then by her son. Yet, it is Editha who can see the vanity in Sir Walter's actions 'But surely, my Walter, the daring bespoke/ A soul nobly eager for fame:/ So many *your* laurels, that one you could spare,…/O tell me you granted his claim!' (14), and recognizes the fatal consequences of such vanity.

Reviews of the volume were, at best, lukewarm. There was particular displeasure about the title poem that the reviewer of the *Monthly Review* found detached 'from the walk of true nature, and from that style of poetry which is adapted to the habits and feelings of men and women of the present day' (as shown Wu, 349). I would argue that this dissatisfaction was as much about the discussion of war and the anti-war feeling that is only loosely veiled in the title poem and which is openly stated in other poems in the volume. That Opie's concerns about war are for the present is obvious in 'Lines on the Opening of a Spring Campaign', written about the contemporary war in the same volume (121-123). The narrator asks Spring to stay away as it will come 'in vain' amid the fighting and the bloodshed: 'To me thy most attractive wreath/ Seems tinged with human blood alone'. She asks Spring not to waste itself on the war-torn

world 'Let not thou smile propitious prove/ To works of carnage, scenes of strife', and asks for the return of Winter to 'check the war-fiend's murderous chase'. In a despairing conclusion, the narrator notes that her wishes are futile: 'Fond, fruitless prayer! Thy hand divine/ The smiling season on must lead;/ And still at war's ensanguined shrine/ Must bid unnumbered victims bleed'. Opie was to continue the theme of the waste and destruction of war retrospectively in *Lays for the Dead* in 1834.[11] Opie directly emphasizes her opposition to war in the poem 'Dirge' (1-6):

> Alas! to think one Christian soul,
>
> At war's red shrine can worship still,
>
> Nor heed, though seas of carnage roll,
>
> Those awful words "Thou shalt not kill!" (5)

Through the use of a medieval screen, this is the message Opie conveys two decades earlier in *The Warrior's Return*. Her use of historical distance in the earlier work meant that, while critical reception was unenthusiastic, she avoided the immense censure Barbauld suffered just three years later. In doing so she had paved the way for her literary descendents throughout the century. In the years between *The Warrior's Return* and her later volumes, other women would use the medieval to explore similar contempt for warfare, not least among these being Felicia Hemans.

Negotiating a Minefield: Hemans, War and the 'Domestic Affections'

Hemans has long been accepted as the representative of nineteenth-century domestic and imperial ideology, celebrating nation and home, a 'fine exemplification of female

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[11] Amelia Opie, *Lays for the Dead* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1834).

poetry'.[12] This largely accounts for her widespread popularity among her contemporaries, but might also explain her lack of appeal for many twentieth and twenty-first century readers. However, beneath the apparent simplicity of many of her patriotic eulogies, Hemans's work often manifests the same tension apparent in public opinion of the day, between the celebration and romance of patriotism that iconicized heroes such as Nelson and Wellington, and the growing concern about the wars that had dominated the first quarter of the century. In a letter written 23 June 1812, Hemans, then Felicia Browne, questions the sentiments of such anti-war poetry:

> .....We have been reading some new publications lately, which I dare say you have met with; Mrs Barbauld's poem of eighteen hundred and eleven, I think you would admire, for though I do not like the despondence which pervades many parts, in her reflections on the present state of England, yet the poetry is very energetic, and some of the ideas original and striking. I cannot think it is judicious or patriotic, in poems of this kind, to paint every thing in the most sombre colours, and what I admire most, in POETRY, as well as in LIFE, is that buoyant spirit, which rises above the temporary cloud, and always dwells on the brightest prospect and most cheerful expectations. Another of the works we have been reading, is Lord Byron's romance of Childe Harolde; it is so singular a composition that I hardly know how to give my opinion of it, but in many parts, its animated descriptions of countries hitherto little explored, particularly of modern Greece and Albania, render it highly interesting. But this Author seems also, like Mrs Barbauld, inclined to look on the gloomy side only; it

[12] See review of *Records of Woman* by Lord Jeffrey, Edinburgh Review No.99, as shown in the Prefatory Memoir to *The Poetical Works of Mrs Hemans* (London: Warne, [1887?]), xxiii.

> reminds one of Pope's observation that 'All seemed yellow to the jaundiced eye', and is a disposition I hold in the most sovereign aversion.[13]

Yet many of Hemans's own works manifest concerns similar to those raised by Barbauld and Byron, and show a particular interest in the position of women in war, that across cultures and through history women have been the victims of men's power struggles and battles, as she explores in *Records of Woman* (1828). As Susan Wolfson suggests: 'She insists that readers confront the violence of war, its child martyrs, its female victims, its devastation of domestic affections, and the hollowness of its 'glory' and 'fame'.[14] *England and Spain; or Valour and Patriotism* ends on a jarring note: having called to English and Spanish soldiers to fight for freedom against the tyranny of France under the despotic Napoleon, and listed historical and legendary champions and the values of chivalry they should emulate, Hemans resolves 'Bid war and anarchy for ever cease/And kindred seraphs rear the shrine of peace' (29). She pleads an end to the 'demon-wrath' of 'war and carnage' rather than a continuing fight for justice.[15] Contrary to expectations set up in the title, the subject of *The Domestic Affections* (1812) is actually war, most of all the ways in which the 'domestic bliss' of home is destroyed by the horrors of war: 'Can fields of carnage, days of toil destroy/The loved impressions of domestic joy' (31). War here is far from glorious, Hemans writing instead of 'carnage', 'rage of combat', 'the ensanguined plain'. The longest work in this volume is actually *War and Peace* (1808), which

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[13] National Library of Wales MS 10959 C., Letter from Felicia Browne to Matthew Nicholson, Bronwhilfa, 23 June 1812.

[14] *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*, ed. by Susan J. Wolfson (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), xvi.

[15] Simon Bainbridge offers an excellent analysis of Hemans's 'plotting of the Peninsular War through romance in England and Spain': see Simon Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 157-159.

opens with a call to Futurity to raise the orb of peace and stop the carnage of war. A tension is shown in the poem between the universal horror of the war with its 'tears of blood, and earthquakes of dismay' (36), and the righteous glory of Albion and her war 'Martyrs'. This is increased when the poem turns to focus on Patriotism,'Who would not bleed, O peerless isle! for thee?' (37): the listing of war heroes is undermined by the ensuing description of the tragic plight of the women left behind the mourning mother whose 'anguish cannot weep', the bereaved widow with her 'soul-consuming grief', the fatherless daughter who has lost her only guardian. Glory in war is a male privilege, women must wait and suffer. This subverting of initial impressions of patriotism with the cold realities of war is seen throughout Hemans's work. 'England's Dead' (1822) appears initially as a eulogy to the expanse of England's warring and colonial project, but, by the close of the work, it is the cost of this in terms of human lives which is most apparent: 'Wave may not foam, nor wild wind sweep,/ Where rest not England's dead' (413). This is enhanced by the images of perilous weather conditions — hurricanes, 'torrent-floods', mountain storms, cold-blue deserts of ice — which give the impression of a monstrous force, out of control.

Contemporary criticism has recently addressed this tension between glorification and condemnation of war. Anthony Harding writes, in response to 'those feminists who consider the recuperation of previously ignored or marginalized texts to be an important part of the feminist project', that

> Hemans was destined to be read as not a margin but a center, the embodiment of that hearth and home that would send forth Englishmen to subdue the world and to which the lucky ones would return, at least in

> thought, to remind themselves of why they were fighting or contracting malaria and typhoid in foreign parts. And yet, of course, this center was not a center of power, in the normal sense of the word. Political and economic power lay elsewhere and, moreover, needed what Hemans came to symbolize, a focal point around which loyal sentiment could gather.[16]

However, he also acknowledges the discord in her work: 'no alert reader can ignore the ways in which Hemans's poetry can be seen to collaborate with the existing social order, even to justify it, while her subtext reveals quite starkly the terrible price this social order exacts on women' (147). Anne Mellor agrees, writing that 'Hemans situated her self and her poetry wholly within the category of feminine domesticity: her poetry celebrates the enduring values of the domestic affections, the glory and beauty of maternal love, and the lasting commitment of a woman to her chosen mate', and that 'Hemans' poetry locates ultimate human value within the domestic sphere. At the same time it emphasizes just how precarious, how threatened, is that sphere'(Mellor, 1993, 124). Writing to her aunt in Liverpool, 19 December 1808, a 15-year-old Hemans identifies the central irony crucial to women's discussion of war at the turn of the nineteenth century, namely that although women were directly affected by the presence of their brothers, fathers, husbands, and lovers in war, 'females are forbidden to interfere in politics':

> The noble Spaniards! surely, surely they will be crowned with success
>
> [...]You will smile, my dear aunt, but you know not what an enthusiast I

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[16] Anthony John Harding, 'Felicia Hemans and the Effacement of Woman', in Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley eds., *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1995), 139-149, 147-148.

> am in the cause of Castile and liberty: my whole heart and soul are interested for the gallant patriots, and though females are forbidden to interfere in politics, yet as I have a dear, dear brother, at present on the scene of action, I may be allowed to feel some ardour on the occasion. [17]

In fact, all three of Hemans's brothers (as well as a future husband) were in military service: George was a lieutenant colonel in the Peninsular Wars, Claude was Deputy Assistant Commissary General at Kingston, Upper Canada, and Thomas Henry joined the army in 1805 and served first in Copenhagen then in the Peninsula. It is important to consider the possible influence of her brothers' war narratives for the young Hemans. *The Napoleonic War Journal of Thomas Henry Browne* is widely recognised by military historians as an important contribution to our understanding of the Napoleonic Wars.[18] The unusual absence of family references in the Journal, apart from mention of meeting his brother in the Peninsular Wars, can be explained by the extreme military ambition of Thomas Browne: he served continuously from 1805 to 1815 without a single leave of absence, and is keen to portray himself as the ideal officer with all the self-possession and sangfroid that this role demands, a image to which domestic allusion can contribute little. In 1828 Browne enlarged the original journal he had made during his military service, and was well aware that it would be read widely, by a largely patriotic audience. It is interesting to note, therefore, that despite these reasons for making the journal a narrative of [his own] military glory, Browne juxtaposes descriptions of military feats and daring with comments on the

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[17] As shown in Susan J. Wolfson ed., 2000, 475.

[18] Particularly in relation to its exploration of how a professional regimental officer under the Duke of Wellington replaced the eighteenth century amateur. See *The Napoleonic War Journal of Captain Thomas Henry Browne 1807-1816*, ed. by Roger Norman Buckley (London: The Bodley Head, 1987).

universal horror of war, which is not limited to the battlefield. Browne writes of the extreme lack of discipline of the battle-fatigued troops after the siege at Badajos (152), the behaviour of some camp-following wives, who plundered the dead bodies of soldiers on both sides and 'gave the finishing blow' to many officers struggling to live to get their possessions (174), the appalling treatment of the French PoWs by his Spanish allies (178), the sufferings of the starving army and their followers going to Cividad Rodrigo in October 1812, women, children, and drummer boys perishing with cold along the roadside (193-197), and soldiers paralysed from their war wounds left on the ground with maggot-infested heads (243). Most striking is the sense of incredulity at the sheer madness of war:

> That so many of England's Sons should be assembled in so wild a spot, to shed the blood of men, who had never offended them at the call of their King & Country [...] is a fact well worthy of the regard that those who have made human character & passions the subject of their speculation and research. (209)

As Browne's main concern is the presentation of himself as the ideal officer, and depiction of England's glory in the war, these incidents stand out as examples of the true horrors of war. When Browne wrote home to his eagerly receptive sister, did he communicate these wretched wartime scenes and battlefield carnage alongside tales of victory and glory? We know that Hemans's brother, George Browne, did: letters from Mrs Browne to Matthew Nicholson transcribe many details from her son's correspondence which consistently focused on the fatally terrible conditions endured

by the soldiers, a far cry from heroic war death. Here is an example from Mrs Browne's letter of 1 February 1809:

> .... In another part he says 'the road now presented a horrid spectacle, being strewed with the dead bodies of our poor soldiers, who dropped down by hundreds, from fatigue and want of nourishment. In the space of two miles I counted 700 men and four officers dead or dying. When you consider, my dear Mother, that most of the men and officers were without shoes, that they had marched 43 days without halting a day, all force marches; that they were four nights without any covering near Lugos, exposed to the most inclement weather, and that they then commenced a march of near 70 miles, which is the distance between Lugos to Corunna; that we only rested six hours during that march, you will not wonder at the havoc which was made. One half of our men that we lost, died on the road, and the rest, being quite exhausted, fell into the hands of the French'.[19]

Mrs Browne adds, 'He gives other shocking details, which I cannot transcribe'. It is hardly surprising then that Hemans wishes to balance patriotic war glory and heroism with the horror and suffering of war.

Hemans's war poetry has provoked some fascinating and thought-provoking recent studies. Gary Kelly explores the preoccupation with death in the works of Hemans and her female contemporaries, suggesting that mass death in war is 'masculine' — caused by 'masculine' drives for power, fame, domination — and thus 'counter-

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[19] National Library of Wales MS 4516B, Letter from Mrs Browne to Matthew Nicholson, 1 February 1809.

feminine'.[20] He explores the concept of 'death and the maiden', found extensively in the literature of Sensibility, suggesting that this is derived from a well-established tradition of general anxiety about human suffering, which was used more specifically in the late-eighteenth century to 'signify the resistance to middle-class desire (as social or even revolutionary ambition) of a world perceived to be still under the hegemony of social others' (200), and was often eroticized. He identifies a distinct concept of 'death and the matron', which by contrast is decidedly un-erotic and which accommodates this revolutionary desire in a 'domestic' social order: matronly domestic concern for suffering can thus become a means of commenting on the national and imperial events in the public sphere. Kevin Eubanks's essay 'Minerva's Veil' shows how and why Hemans's handling of warlike women changes over the course of her career, looking particularly at her developing use of the theme she constantly returns to, that of the mother killing her child to save it from slavery.[21] At first, in works such as Modern Greece (1817) and 'The Wife of Asdrubal', this is an 'act of desperate defiance' (351). However, when this is retold in 1825 in 'The Suliote Mother'(*The Forest Sanctuary* volume), we are shown a woman of far more femininity and propriety, and a far more poignant death. Crucially, Eubanks explores the importance of contemporary reviews and criticism on this development: 'Whereas most early reviewers of Hemans did not concentrate on her gender, as her popularity grew, critics became more concerned with placing her in the sphere of proper women's writing, by praising her appropriately domestic works and by criticizing or ignoring everything else' (342). Many reviews of *Tales and Historic Scenes* (1819),

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[20] Gary Kelly, 'Death and the Matron: Felicia Hemans, Romantic Death, and the Founding of the Modern Liberal State', in *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Nanora Sweet and Julie Melnyk (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 196-211.

[21] Kevin Eubanks, 'Minerva's Veil: Hemans, Critics, and the Construction of Gender', *European Romantic Review*, 8 (1997), 341-359.

did not consider it typical feminine poetry: the *British Critic* and the *Literary Gazette* criticized the work for being too much like Byron's, specifically too masculine in style.[22] It cannot have helped that the desertion of Hemans by her husband in 1818 became known at the same time. As Eubanks puts it, 'a financially independent woman who lived apart from her husband and wrote poems about child-murdering mothers was not the ideal of femininity' (349). It is notable that reviews correspondingly change from being not gender specific to discussing 'Mrs Hemans', underlining the writer's sex and thus grounding expectations of her work.[23]

Hemans was therefore under immense pressure to conform to these guidelines of acceptable subject and style for women writers. Hemans's correspondence with her publishers demonstrates her strong financial acumen and realization that to make a significant income from her poetry she needed to gauge public taste accurately.[24] It is of great significance that Hemans wrote to support herself and five children, thus could not afford to excite critical controversy and public unpopularity. Hence the discreet tension lurking in her work between patriotic glory and war's carnage and

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[22] It is worth noting that, despite this, the reviews were mainly good and the books sold out, Murray publishing a second edition in November 1823. See Paula R. Feldman, 'The Poet and the Profits: Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 40, (1997), 148-176, 155.

[23] However, Hemans's own control of the gendering of her works for her own purposes must also be considered. Writing to Murray in February 1817 about the publication of *Modern Greece*, Hemans suggests, 'Perhaps it would be more advantageous that it should not be known to proceed from a female pen, but this point I leave entirely to your decision' (See Feldman, 1997, 153). After the publication of *Records of Woman*, Hemans's correspondence with Blackwood shows her insistence on having her full name to prove the identity of the author against impostors – another poet who Hemans says was 'so middling, bad were better' had also adopted the initials F.H. under which Hemans had written until then (171). Hemans is clearly aware of the selling power of her name at this stage in her career.

[24] For example, writing to William Gifford (consultant friend of Murray) in November 1819, she explains that she is enclosing a piece 'which would I should think, be appropriate to the present state of public feeling, if it were brought out promptly — it is entirely free from political allusions, and is merely meant as a picture of the dangers resulting to public and private virtue and happiness, from doctrines of Infidelity — I have called it 'the Sceptic' (See Feldman, 1997, 156).

waste, hiding her views in suitably domestic matronly concern. Hence also, I will argue, Hemans's prolific use of historical and cultural distance in her war poetry as a further screen through which she can covertly comment on action in the male dominated public sphere. Hemans often uses such displacement in her work — to ancient Carthage, Rome, the American West, Medieval Spain — which initially seems to distance and fictionalise events, but despite this detachment, disturbingly familiar issues emerge. Wolfson notes that:

> Encased in a culturally orthodox language of the domestic affections, the emotional and affective center of her poems frequently exposes women's devastating struggles against the structures, both domestic and national, in which these struggles are set. Although the stages are typically not contemporary England (rather, ancient Carthage or medieval Valencia), this is not a distancing and de-realizing displacement. The very fictions effect a strategy for presenting disturbingly familiar scenes, and the foreign stage returns a sign of a universal condition.[25]

As has been observed, this veil did not fool all reviewers, but the response Hemans received was far from the damning derision and censure heaped on Barbauld, with such devastating effects on her literary career.

I shall explore Hemans's use of historical distance by looking at her widespread engagement with medieval history and legend, examining in detail two works in which warfare is displaced to Medieval Spain, which notably fall at either side of the

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[25] Susan Wolfson, 'Felicia Hemans and the Revolving Doors of Reception', in *Romanticism and Women Poets: Opening the Doors of Reception*, ed. by Harriet Kramer Linkin and Stephen C. Behrendt (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 214-241, 221.

critical 'gendering' identified by Eubanks. 'The Abencerrage' opens Hemans's *Tales and Historic Scenes* (1819), and is set in medieval Andalusia at the time of Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon's crusade against the Moors, and the 1492 fall of Granada. *The Siege of Valencia* (1823) charts an imaginary siege of the city of the legendary Cid by Moors, basing the narrative on two actual late thirteenth-century city sieges.[26] Notwithstanding the historical setting for 'The Abencerrage', it would be clearly in the minds of her contemporary readers that Spain was the battleground for the Peninsular wars which had ended only four years earlier, and about which Hemans wrote extensively. Hamet's battle-cry at the start of Canto I '"Revenge and freedom! Let the tyrant die!"'(66) recalls the Spanish patriots' shouts against Napoleon in *England and Spain* (1808). The link between past and recent wars is made explicit at the opening of the second Canto: 'Blest be that soil! where England's heroes share/ The grave of chiefs, for ages slumbering there;/Whose names are glorious in romantic lays,/The wild sweet chronicles of elder days'(71). Contemporary readers would also be aware that in 1819 when *Tales and Historic Scenes* was published, liberal revolts were being formed in southern Europe, most notably in southern Spain, and that Britain itself was facing a post-war crisis of its own. As Nanora Sweet suggests, 'Superficially exotic and chivalric in its materials, Orientalist 'matter of Spain' offered British writers a 'veiled' but potent means of commentating on events at home and abroad'.[27] Hemans cites as her source the early seventeenth-century *Historia de las Guerras Civiles de Granada*, by Ginès Pérez de Hita, which was translated in 1803 by Thomas Rodd. From this collection of ballads

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[26] Hemans provides her reasons for creating an imaginary scene rather than using the 'impressive' events of the historic sieges in her Preface to the dramatic poem (130).
[27] Nanora Sweet, 'Gender and Modernity in *The Abencerrage*: Hemans, Rushdie, and 'the Moor's Last Sigh', in Sweet and Melnyk eds., 181-195, 183.

Hemans takes the names for her protagonists and the background for the action of her work, namely the defection of many Abencerrages to the side of Castile and Christianity because of the cruelty and mass murder inflicted on their tribe by the Moorish King, at the incitement of the Zegri. Hemans, however, omits the reason given in her source for the King's hatred of the Abencerrages, namely that in addition to the suspicion that they might kill the king and seize the throne, 'Hamet too, th'Abencerrage,/ He presumes with love obscene,/ What a world of treason's plotting!/ To defile the beauteous queen'.[28]

By contrast to de Hita, Hemans clearly makes Zayda the unquestioned heroine of the work, while her source offers contrasting 'Zaydas'. These range from the passively obedient in Ballad VI to 'false Zayda' (Ballad XXXII), who gives her hand to a rival after Gazul has killed her husband, despite still loving Gazul (Ballad XXXIII). Hemans's protagonist is morally virtuous, unsullied by these accusations. It is this foregrounding of the female protagonist that sets her work apart from both her Spanish source and another influential text, Byron's *The Bride of Abydos* (1813). Through *her* Zayda, Hemans explores the position of women in war and society, a persistent theme throughout her work. The departure of her father and lover to the war has left Zayda isolated, 'Alone she weeps' (70). When Hamet returns to find Zayda despairing over her dead father she again expresses her solitude, 'Com'st thou to weep with me? — for I am left/Alone on earth, of every tie bereft' (82). Consistently women's lives seem dictated by the action of men, over which they have no control; it

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[28] Ginès Pérez de Hita, *Ancient Ballads from the Civil Wars of Granada and the Twelve Peers of France*, trans. by Thomas Rodd (London: Ostell, 1803), 85.

is away from the fighting in the mountains, 'Where thy sad daughters, lost Granada! wait/ In dread suspense the tidings of their fate' (81).

Yet, unlike Byron's work and her Spanish source, Hemans's heroine is allowed powers of chivalry that outweigh the male protagonist's. In response to Hamet's offer of rescue, Zayda makes an active choice to stay for honour and duty, although only the actions of men are celebrated by history:

> Woman, too, can die!
> And die exulting, though unknown to fame,
> In all the stainless beauty of her name!
> Be mine, unmurmuring, undismayed, to share
> The fate my kindred and my sire must bear. (75)

Crisis and war have forced Zayda to manifest this strong side of her character which before lay hidden, ' Thou has but known me ere the trying hour/ Called into life my spirit's latent power;/ But I have energies that idly slept' (75). Her speech leaves Hamet feminized in a position of 'awe-struck and amazed' silence usually reserved for a woman, and he responds to this demonstration of her 'unconquered mind' by referring to himself in the third person. In the face of her 'sublime' heroism his masculine role as warrior is surpassed. Contrast this scene with the one between Zuleika and Selim in the second canto of *The Bride of Abydos*: here it is Zuleika who is typically struck 'mute and motionless' by her lover's words.[29] Hemans's feminization is completed in Canto III where both king and warrior take on roles

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[29] Byron, George Gordon, *Poetical Works*, ed. by Frederick Page and John Jump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 274.

usually reserved for women. The fleeing coward Abdallah weeps to see the destruction of the land ruled by his forebears, 'Well do a woman's tears befit the eye/ Of him who knew not as a man to die' (79), while Hamet is impotent in the face of the vengeful Zegris and cannot save his beloved: conversely it is Zayda who 'practising steadfastness, turns protector' (Sweet, 2001, 189).

Ultimately, Zayda's tragic death represents her life as victim of warfare, in the crossfire of the fighting in which she has no active role: yet, she is allowed to make the choice to sacrifice herself for Hamet, in a reversal of chivalric roles. While her patriotic duty in life demands that she surrenders Hamet, she is able to become a 'martyr' to her love and save his life: 'Still to thy name that heart hath fondly thrilled,/ But sterner duties called —and were fulfilled./ And I am blest! to every holier tie/ My life was faithful, —and for thee I die!'(84). Torn between duty to family and country and duty to lover, Zayda recognises the political nature of her dilemma, over which she can have no control, but to which she can make an active and honourable response, usually reserved as a privilege of a [male] warrior. She is ultimately able to be loyal to every pull of 'domestic affections', as good daughter and lover, as well as good 'citizen'. Through Zayda, Hemans shows chivalry to be not the sole possession of Christian men, but also of a Moorish woman, thus problematizing the whole notion of chivalry, a criticism as relevant to the nineteenth-century social constructions of chivalry as that of a past age. Far from being a passive icon, Zayda takes on a traditional male chivalric role in a national conflict. As a result of the subversive message underlying this illustration of the limitations of chivalry, and its relative gender constructions, a specifically medieval historical setting, where these gender

relations can clearly be expressed, is important for Hemans. Woodall has written that Hemans 'felt obliged to glorify the passive, retiring damsel whose life was literally linked to a male's because contemporary women were expected to consider marriage their "career"' (Woodall , 1998, 220). Zayda demonstrably serves as proof that this is far from the case, that in fact Hemans was using the medieval both to overturn these ideas, and to hide this subversion.

Hamet, too, is portrayed sympathetically, Hemans showing him as caught in a political trap, although Sweet has suggested that, 'Hemans casts Hamet as traitor rather than convert' (2001, 188). Through Hamet, Hemans problematizes the question of duty and patriotism, whether duty to family, to lover, or to country should take precedence. Hamet is in an impossible position, unable, unlike Zayda, to fulfil all that loyalty demands. His choice of duty to family and tribe, rather than to country, faith and lover, earns him the scorn of those he loves. The dying Osmyn dismisses his one-time comrade and rejects his help, ''Tis not for thee to close the fading eyes/ Of him who faithful to his country dies;/ Not for *thy* hand to raise the drooping head/ Of him who sinks to rest on glory's bed' (73). This encounter causes Hamet much inner conflict, 'Still Hamet struggles with indignant pride;/ While his soul rises, gathering all his force,/ To meet the fearful conflict with Remorse' (73), and he seeks solace in his love. His return to Zayda, however, is met with reproach, 'Not thus we met in other days!— oh no!/ Thou wert not, warrior! then thy country's foe' (74). Zayda goes as far as expressing, 'Hadst thou but died, ere yet dishonour's cloud,/ O'er that young name had gathered as a shroud,/ I then had mourned thee proudly, and my grief/ In its own loftiness had found relief' (74). Here again a role reversal is taking

place between Zayda and Hamet, with Zayda putting honour before love and Hamet foregrounding the more typically feminine domestic values of family and lover. The character of Hamet also allows Hemans the space to question the idea of the enemy. Both the Abencerrage and the Zegri are portrayed sympathetically at the same time, as the division of the poem's 'subjective space' (Sweet, 2001, 188) between Hamet and Zayda reflects. The sympathies of Hemans's contemporary readers would be split between, on one hand, the bereaved Hamet, his abused tribe, and Christian Castile, and on the other, with 'the wise and brave' Zegri, who are not coupled in blame with their weak, tyrannical ruler. If the enemy, although led by a tyrant, is as brave and righteous as your own side, the righteousness of patriotism, and bloodshed in war, becomes more controversial. Hemans uses the safe distance of a medieval setting to negotiate these complexities, while clearly describing the contemporary war.

The Siege of Valencia is still exciting as many contrasting reviews as it did when first published in 1823. Contemporary reviews varied: *La Belle Assemblée* suggests that it is 'in the display of a mother's feelings that Mrs Hemans uniformly and pre-eminently excels' and that Elmina's agony 'could only have been painted by a woman — perhaps only a mother', while the *British Review* suggests that the work contains, 'too much vehemence, too much effort', and that 'The military spirit that breathes and glows in many of her pages, does not add to their real excellence. We do not like Bellona as a muse'.[30] Modern criticism shows similar disparities: for Mellor '*The Siege of Valencia* pits Hemans' ideology of the domestic affections directly against a second set of values which she had embraced as a child and which continued to

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[30] As shown in Eubanks, 351: here Eubanks also offers an interesting explanation of the significance of using Bellona instead of Minerva as representative of martial woman.

inspire her poetry, a masculine code of military glory and individual heroism' (1993,135). Mellor contests W.M. Rossetti's reading of Elmina's sole survival at the end of the play as a punishment, suggesting instead that it commemorates the victory of 'not fame but love' (140). Mellor maintains,

> We can thus read Elmina's survival as an ironic affirmation of Hemans' domestic ideology, the triumph of maternal love over a futile heroism. For the noble name which Gonzalez has fought to preserve unsullied has died with him. Elmina is the true heroine, the noble and self-sacrificing woman who has struggled only to save those she most intensely loves: the play is finally the story of her suffering, her tragedy — the tragedy of a woman whose "feminine" love and virtue has been rejected by a patriarchal state and religion. (140)

Marlon Ross offers an alternative reading, that Elmina ultimately transfers her affection to the state, realizing that her attempts to save her children have been 'misplaced'.[31] He does, however, agree that Elmina is the heroine of the play who, in contrast to her inactive, impotent, and therefore feminized husband, takes action for the pull of motherhood and in doing so drives the action of the play. Maternal love is thus foregrounded, but only at the expense of the authorities whose absolute rule feminine virtue should obey, namely husband, religion and state. Ximena, Ross suggests, attempts to replace Elmina as symbol of Gonzalez's chivalric desire, but is 'allowed to glimpse masculine quest only because she is fatally bound to feminine vulnerability' (284), and will die of a broken heart. Eubanks approaches the *Siege* from a different perspective, suggesting that readings such as these, that identify the

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[31] Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 275.

maternal Elmina as the moral centre and heroine of the work, ignore both her renunciation of her own behaviour at the end of the play, and Ximena's role; Ximena is a crucial figure, especially when she is considered in the light of Hemans's earlier heroic female characters. He identifies the play, along with *The Vespers of Palermo* (1823), as an example of how Hemans's work was dramatically affected by the critical reception given to *Tales and Historic Scenes in Verse* (1819), most clearly because the warrior woman of the play is not a mother, but a daughter, in contrast to earlier works such as *Modern Greece* and 'The Wife of Asdrubal'.

Some of Hemans's contemporaries, however, clearly 'sensed this lingering resistance to socially sanctioned gender roles' (Eubanks, 351), as the criticisms of the 'military spirit' of the play suggest. Wolfson notes of the *Siege* that an 'anguished wife discovers that domestic affections are both inextricable from and radically vulnerable to political emergency' (Wolfson, 1999, 215), and further that what no contemporary 'review was able to quote is Hemans's sharpest attack, her siege on the masculine ideology of warfare, honor and national glory' (234), quoting Act 1 lines 265-280 to illustrate her point. Bainbridge has noted how siege warfare 'disrupts the gendered conventions of war [...] by making the home itself the scene of arms, the siege presents a particular challenge to women, compelling them to cross from the private sphere into the public and from a conventionally feminine role into a conventionally masculine one' (200). He offers a detailed analysis of women's behaviour in wartime, looking specifically at the roles of Ximena and Elmina, suggesting that, 'In Hemans's poetry, the state of siege provides an opportunity for women to reconstruct their identity on an entirely different basis, even to transcend what convention presents as

their nature and its natural sphere of activities—'the heart' and the 'domestic affections'—but such reconfigurings of gendered identities away from the naturally feminine threatens women's very existence' (201).

In my view it is equally important to consider *The Siege of Valencia* (1823) in relation to the 'Queen Caroline affair'. Britain, only two years earlier (1820-21), had been brought to the brink of revolution by the political conflict over Caroline's reginal rights, the uncrowned Queen being the recipient of chivalric feeling as well as a convenient weapon for the Whigs against the Regent and the Tories.[32] The contrasting roles women can play in troubling or unifying a politically driven public are clearly played out in *The Siege of Valencia*. That this exploration of women's engagement with state and conflict is central to the drama is obvious from the very opening scene, Ximena's ballad alluding to the death of her lover. My reading of this differs from Mellor's, who suggests that Ximena's lover is killed in the final battle of the play (Mellor, 1993, 139). It is clear from the outset that Ximena both knows of her lover's death (both the character and the lover, we are told, have plumed helmets), and that she will die of a broken heart. Her mother repeatedly notes the change in her and actually enquires after a possible 'secret woe' (133). Ximena's deathly appearance is commented on throughout the play, as when the war-weary citizens comment that she 'Moves upon earth as some bright thing whose time/ To sojourn there is short' (165). It is interesting to note how the conversation of the citizens reflects the mood of newspaper reports of the death of Princess Charlotte in 1817, 'Then woe for us/ When she is gone! [...] Who like her /Shall give us hope again?' (165), and again suggests

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[32] Kelly also explores this concept, additionally considering Hemans 'The Last Constantine' and Joanna Baillie's *Constantine Paleologus* (Kelly, 204-205). I discuss the implications of the Queen Caroline affair further in Chapter 5.

Hemans's preoccupation with woman's role in the state. Charlotte, as Hemans herself notes in 'On the Death of the Princess Charlotte' (1818), like Ximena, was a symbol of all that is best about a ruling family and, as potential child-bearer, the state's main hope for the future.

Ximena has witnessed firsthand the horrors of war, as articulated in her opening ballad: 'We have sent the streams from our battle-field,/ All darkened to the sea!/ We have given the founts a stain,/'Midst their woods of ancient pine;/ And the ground is wet — but not with rain,/ Deep-dyed — but not with wine' (131). More significantly, she has seen her lover die and has endured the usual female role of impotent observer, 'mine eyes were riveted,/ Till blinded by th'intenseness of their gaze' (174), watching helplessly, hence again the appropriateness of the ballad to her situation; 'Alas! For love, —for woman's breast,/ If woe like this must be!' (131). This is of huge importance as provocation for her actions throughout the drama, rendering all the more understandable her scorn for the lot of watching, waiting womanhood: 'When, hour by hour, the noble and the brave/Are falling round us, and we deem it much/ To give them funeral rites, and call them blest/ If the good sword, in its own stormy hour,/Hath done its work upon them, ere disease/Hath chilled their fiery blood'(133). It thus gives added force to her determination to break from her role of silent observation:

> Youth may not loiter now
>
> In the green walks of spring; and womanhood
>
> Is summoned unto conflicts, heretofore
>
> The lot of warrior-souls. But we will take

> Our toils upon us nobly! Strength is born
>
> In the deep silence of long-suffering hearts;
>
> Not amidst joy. (132-133)

Both Ximena and Elmina take active roles for women in war. Ximena's activity develops from the acceptably feminine role as nurse (138), to that of inciter, rousing the beleaguered and war-weary citizens to a final battle through the legend of The Cid, leading them in 'The Cid's Battle Song'.[33] She appears as a Joan of Arc figure, the citizens murmuring 'Is she not inspired? Doth not Heaven call us by her fervent voice?' (166), but, falls short of actual martial activity. The figure of female inciter is one that Hemans also explores in 'Marguerite of France', queen of St Louis. Having given birth to a son, while besieged by the Turks, Marguerite incites the knights who had been resolved on capitulation, to defend herself, her child, and their religion, shaming them in their cowardice by her courage, and insisting that if need be she will arm herself and take on the role of warrior: 'But tell our homes ye left one heart/ To perish undefiled; A woman, and a queen, to guard/ Her honour and her child!' (554). Here we have a mother, the embodiment of the 'domestic affections', prepared to take action to defend herself and her child, but also for her faith and her city, taking on the role of commander in the absence of the imprisoned Louis. Marguerite appears thus as a combination of Ximena and Elmina, with the qualities of both. Her activity, like Elmina's, is 'excused' because of her status as mother, when in fact we are presented with a queen of 'imperial glance' (554) who can command troops and lead a city as successfully as a man.

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[33] Significantly, Ximena shares the name of El Cid's wife, as noted Wolfson, 1999, 224.

What Elmina argues as the fading of Ximena, Gonzalez celebrates as his daughter's rise in nobility and warrior-like deportment:

> She is as one
>
> Who, at the trumpet's sudden call, hath risen
>
> From the gay banquet, and in scorn cast down
>
> The wine-cup, and the garland, and the lute
>
> Of festal hours, for the good spear and helm,
>
> Beseeming sterner tasks.
>
> [...]
>
> She hath put on
>
> Courage, and faith, and generous constancy,
>
> E'en as a breastplate. (138)

This view is borne out by Ximena's refusal to plead for her brothers' lives, but to accept the more male-heroic stance. It is, however, Elmina who is more subversive in her overturning of a typically feminine role. Long celebrated in criticism as the embodiment of maternal love and the domestic sphere pitted against the public sphere, Elmina takes unconventional steps to this end, cross-dressing in her disguise and entering the enemy camp. She proves that courage is not the remit of 'warrior-men' alone: 'my heart is nerved/ To make its way through things which warrior-men,—/Ay, they that master death by field or flood,/ Would look on, ere they braved! —I have no thought,/ No sense of fear!'(153). That we are to sympathize with her desperate measures in the cause of maternal love is obvious, Elmina's powerful attacks on Gonzalez and Hernandez offering a prevailing critique of the patriarchal

code. Despite the fact that Ximena is unable to support her mother's pleas to Gonzalez to save her sons, as this will both make her lover's death futile, and betray faith and city, she does not reject Elmina, as some critics have suggested.[34] Rather, she demonstrates pity and sympathy, as in her dying speech to her mother. It is Elmina's conversation with Hernandez which most clearly juxtaposes two opposing spheres of duty, with Elmina's plight clearly the one designed to win the reader's compassion. While Elmina will sacrifice all for her sons, Hernandez has killed *his* own son in battle, the son having chosen personal over public duty, and 'leagued himself/ E'en with the infidel, the curse of Spain,/ And, for the dark eye of a Moorish maid,/ Abjured his faith, his God!' (147). It is, however, too easy to say that Gonzalez is also villainized in a celebration of motherhood: to Elmina it is unthinkable that a father should immolate his sons for the honour of the city when its end seems to her inevitable anyway. For her Gonzalez is betraying youth, life and love in the present for the isolated coldness of glory:

> Then in your utter desolation, turn
> To the cold world, the smiling, faithless world,
> Which hath swept past you long, and bid it quench
> Your soul's deep thirst with *fame!* immortal *fame!*
> Fame to the sick of heart! —a gorgeous robe,
> A crown of victory, unto him that dies
> I'th'burning waste, for water! (140)

Elmina also vocalizes discontent that such power over life and death should be the remit of men alone: 'Men! men! Too much is yours/ Of vantage' (136). Yet Gonzalez

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[34] See, for example, Mellor, 1993, 139.

is allowed to balance her accusations with his own position: as the Governor of the city, his public role, which he sees as sacred, is indivisible from his private duty, 'Was the oath, whereby,/ On th'altar of my faith, I bound myself,/ With an unswerving spirit to maintain/ This free and Christian city for my God/ And for my king, a writing traced on sand?' (136). The sacrifice of his sons is not a decision he takes lightly, but one he is obliged to make: 'Thinkst thou *I* feel no pangs?'(137). At the drama's climax Gonzalez is feminized, forced into the role of impotent observer on the city walls, a typically female position against which Ximena has railed throughout the work, while his eldest son is beheaded. Bainbridge notes the comparison between Gonzalez's temporary blindness here caused by the emotional turmoil and the 'blinding tears' of Elmina which he had criticised earlier in the play.[35]

By contrast, a transgressive role of the female warrior is celebrated in the song Ximena loves to hear Theresa sing, one of a Spanish maiden who had fought and died in the Crusades. The song demands that she be allowed the grave and burial of a warrior rather than the blossom and leaf deemed more fitting for a 'maiden's bier':

> Scorn not her tomb — deny not her
> The honours of the brave!
> O'er that forsaken sepulchre,
> Banner and plume might wave.

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[35] Bainbridge, 211. Bainbridge here also notes the link between the father unable to witness Alphonso's heroic death in this work, which undermines the reasons for Alphonso's sacrifice, and the father's failure to witness his son's martyrdom in 'Casabianca', both calling into question 'the patriotic and filial values for which the sacrifice was made' (211).

She bound in steel, in battle tried,

Her fearless heart above,

And stood with brave men, side by side,

In the strength and faith of love! (157)

She had died for the same cause, with equal heroism, as her male comrades, 'And nobly won, where heroes fell/ In arms for the holy shrine,/ A death which saved what she loved so well,/ And a grave in Palestine' (157), and thus should be privileged with the same martial honours. The idea of the song is one to which Hemans returns in 'Woman on the Field of Battle' from *Songs of the Affections* (1830). Here the observer muses on the 'Gentle and lovely form' (397) of the dead woman warrior: we are told that instead of the war trumpet, 'many a flower and a tear' (398) should have heralded her death, and sisters (again the bereaved are women) should have been there to 'bid violets wave/With the white rose' on her grave, in contrast to the demand for martial honours in the song. The incongruity of the dead woman's body with its 'brow serene' and golden 'rich locks, whose glow/ Death cannot tame' (398), on a scene of masculine carnage, is reflected in the clash between the poem's rhythm, with its regimented alternating dimeter and trimeter lines that mimic the battle drumbeat, and the choice of elegant and feminine language to describe the grace of the dead woman's body, the floral tributes, and the poignancy of the woman dying for love.

Despite the seeming inappropriateness of a woman dying in battle, the speaker defends her right to be there, asking 'Why? — ask the true heart why/ Woman hath been/ Ever, where brave men die,/Unshrinking seen?'.The courage of a woman is shown to be equal to a man's, her reason for dying manifestly more worthwhile than

the male causes, which are by contrast empty and shallow: the quest for glory and 'that stirring sound,/A warrior's name' or the thrill of battle, or simply to seek death as a refuge 'to fling away/ A weary life'. The poem closes with the revealing of the dead woman's motivation:

But thou, pale sleeper, thou,
With the slight frame,
And the rich locks, whose glow
Death cannot tame;

Only one thought, one power,
Thee could have led,
So, through the tempest's hour,
To lift thy head!

Only the true, the strong,
The love, whose trust
Woman's deep soul too long
Pours on the dust! (398)

In contrast to the woman in Theresa's song, at face value the woman's motives here are personal: but so, unusually, are the men's. Significantly it is the woman's object of 'love' that is ambiguous: contemporary reviewers assumed this was a suitably feminine death because of a lover, but the emotion could just as easily be for country or faith, Hemans does not make this explicit. Far from this poem being an example of Hemans's reluctance to portray ambitious and powerful women in *Songs of the*

Affections (1830), as some critics have suggested,[36] I would argue that here again we have an illustration of Hemans making her poem seem suitably feminine while subverting this image in the text: it is worthwhile noting Hemans's epigraph where woman is 'strong in affections' might'. Wolfson notes (2000, 457, n.1) how this poem is predated by a 'far more lurid' work of unknown authorship, *The Field of Battle* (*Gentleman's and London Magazine*, May 1794; *Courier*, 11 January 1800) in which a woman discovers her dying beloved among the war dead, as does Clotilde in Hemans's 'The Lady of Provence' (*Songs of the Affections*, 1830). Hemans is doing something different in 'Woman on the Field of Battle', presenting a woman warrior with a morally righteous active role for her own purposes, rather than to ensure the status of her lover, or to protect the honour of his reputation and dead body, as in the story of Clotilde. In Theresa's song, however, the war dead have all sacrificed themselves for the same cause of Christianity, and therefore demand an equal right to military honours: this highlights one of the drama's main concerns, woman's equal ability to demonstrate courage, albeit, in Elmina's case, for an utterly maternal, and thus feminine, cause. Theresa's ballad incites Ximena to martial activity, which is catalytic to the final heroic surge of Valencian defence.

Significantly it is Elmina who is left as the sole survivor of the royal house, to greet the victorious troops from Castile who ensure the Christian victory, and to demand a hero's funeral for her husband. Although 'chastened' (183), her leadership of the Castilians at the drama's close suggest a woman ready and able to command the obedience of a city, suggesting that 'domestic' excellence can be transferred to a

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[36] See Eubanks, 354-355, for example.

public role.[37] Hemans herself wrote of *The Siege of Valencia* as the work that manifests her grown confidence as a writer, that, more clearly than in her previous works, it reflected her own thoughts and feelings. She continues 'I had before written with great timidity, at an early age, and in a situation remote from all literary connexion, and was glad to take shelter under fact and authorities and classical names, from which I have since freed myself' (27 October, 1828, as shown in Feldman, 1997,167). This confidence is perhaps demonstrated in her deft screening of 'unfeminine' comments on the public sphere behind the outward appearance of domestic concern, using the further distancing of medieval history. Ultimately Hemans could literally not afford to cause the same controversy and offence as Barbauld: deserted by her husband, Hemans had to publish relentlessly, to educate her sons and to sustain the family. The huge influence of journals, such as the *Quarterly* and the *Gazette*, must be taken into account here: with their vast circulation, they could intimidate any writer to conform to their ideas, as reviews could mean the success or failure of a work. As an example the *Literary Souvenir* and *Magnet* were both edited by Alaric Watts: since Hemans contributed to both these, and was therefore dependent financially on them, she had 'immediate financial reasons to conform to the image of feminine literature promulgated in their pages' (Eubanks, 353). Hemans's correspondence with her publishers shows her acute awareness of the need to tap into public feeling to increase financial success, hence her expressing of any potentially dangerous ideas about women's role in state and in war through the

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[37] Bainbridge explores how Elmina presents herself as transformed by the influence of Ximena, constructed as 'soul' rather than 'heart' (208). However, my conclusion here is in contrast with Bainbridge's view that the reconfigurings of women's gendered identities in the play 'threaten's women's very existence' (201), that in fact Elmina survives because she 'places herself in one of the scripted roles for women in wartime, located in the scene of conflict but playing a secondary role to her husband and defining herself in terms of his love for her' (208).

safer voice of history: Letitia Elizabeth Landon used a similar medieval screen in her discussion of war, ostensibly for the same financial reasons.

'Why not to WAR attune thy powers': Landon and War

'Why not to WAR attune thy powers, And strew the conqueror's path with flowers?': so writes Mrs Cornwall Baron Wilson in her 'Impromptu: On Seeing the Portrait of the Fair Author of the 'Improvisatrice', in the Exhibition' (*La Belle Assemblée* 2, July 1825).[38] What this writer seems to have failed to notice, like the majority of critics who reviewed Landon's *The Improvisatrice* (1824) on its publication, was that a great deal of the volume actually discusses this very question of war. The reviewer in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* is characteristic in his support of what he sees as Landon's subject for her 'very sweet volume of poetry':

> We have heard it said that in Miss Landon's volume there was too much love, and that it would be desirable if she would write on something else. We beg your pardon — it would not. If she could change her sex, and become a He, then, as the conundrum has it, the affair would be altered.[39]

The reviewer goes on to chastise other women poets who have strayed from this topic and written on political issues:

> What a clever botchery Mrs Hemans, clever and brilliant as indeed she is, has made of it, when she takes upon herself to depict the awful fall of the last of the Caesars, in the breach of the breach of the last wall of

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[38] As shown in McGann and Riess eds, 1997, 357-358.
[39] *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* XVI, July-December 1824: 189-193, 190.

> Byzantium! Or who does not pity the delusion of Miss Porter, when she fancies that she is giving us the grim features of Sir William Wallace, with a white handkerchief to his face and a bottle of aromatic vinegar under his nose? Again, what more odiously blue-stocking and blundering, than Madame de Stael's *Germany*.

When the reviewer of *The Improvisatrice* in *The Westminster Review* (April 1825) tells L.E.L. 'to avoid the subject of love, a topic so full of words and so barren of thought', as she is capable of more than 'pages filled with puny and sickly thoughts clothed in glittering language that draws the eye off from their real character and value', he provoked an outcry.[40] A reviewer of *The Venetian Bracelet* would later implore Landon to ignore 'such a very silly bray'[41], while Francis Mahoney writing later in *Fraser's Magazine* asks 'can there be too much of love in a young lady's writings? [...] Is she to write of politics, or political economy, or pugilism, or punch? Certainly not. We feel a determined dislike of women who wander into these unfeminine paths'.[42] The construction, and self-construction, of L.E.L as poet of love has been well-documented, in recent criticism as in Landon's own day.[43] The fact

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[40] *The Westminster Review* III, January-July 1825: 537-539, 539.
[41] *The Athenaeum* 105, 28 October 1829: 669-70, 669.
[42] As shown by Glennis Stephenson, *Letitia Landon: The Woman Behind L.E.L* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 13.
[43] For examples of such criticism see Stephenson, 1995, especially 54-100; Linda H. Peterson, 'Rewriting *A History of the Lyre*: Letitia Landon, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the (Re)Construction of the Nineteenth-Century Woman Poet', in Armstrong and Blain eds, 1999,115-131; Virginia Blain, 'Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Eliza Mary Hamilton, and the Genealogy of the Victorian Poetess', *Victorian Poetry*, 33 (1995), 31-52; Glennis Stephenson, 'Letitia Landon and The Victorian Improvisatrice: The Construction of L.E.L.', *Victorian Poetry*, 30 (1992), 1-17; Germaine Greer, *Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet* (London: Penguin, 1996), Chapter 10; Mellor, 1993, especially 107-124. William Jerdan contributes to the perpetuating of the L.E.L. Legend in *The Autobiography of William Jerdan with his Literary, Political, and Social Reminiscences and Correspondence During the Last Fifty Years*, 4 vols (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue, & Co., 1853), III, 168-206, as does Sarah Sheppard in her biography of Landon: see *Characteristics of the Genius and Writings of L.E.L. with illustrations from her works and from personal recollection* (London:

that, as Mellor notes, 'Landon supported this construction of her "self" as desirable beauty both visually and verbally' (1993, 110), and that 'Letitia Landon commodified herself as a purchasable icon of female beauty' (112) cannot be denied. Landon herself addressed and supported this issue in the Preface to *The Venetian Bracelet*:

> And now a few words on a subject, where the variety of the opinions offered have left me somewhat in the situation of the prince in the fairy tale, who, when in the vicinity of the magic fountain, found himself so distracted by the multitude of voices that directed his way, as to be quite incapable of deciding which was the right path. I allude to the blame and eulogy which have been equally bestowed on my frequent choice of Love as my source of song. I can only say, that for a woman, whose influence and whose sphere must be in the affections, what subject can be more fitting than one which it is her peculiar province to refine, spiritualise, and exalt?[44]

Writing to commission in annuals such as *Heath's Book of Beauty*, which Landon also edited, and *Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book*, Landon created a literary equivalent of the engraved images that appeared in these volumes, a stereotypical ideal of chaste female beauty, desirable but not desiring. Landon was happy to be consistently portrayed as one of these very icons of beauty by Maclise, in his images of the wasp-waisted, demure 'poetess'. Mellor suggests that, 'Having reified not only her writing but her very self into a purchasable icon of female beauty, Landon was trapped in the

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Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1841), 22. For a succinct account of how Landon's poetry for annuals and albums contributed to her representation as poet of love see Cynthia Lawford, 'Bijoux Beyond Possession: The Prima Donnas of L.E.L.'s Album Poems', in Armstrong and Blain eds, 1999, 102-114.

[44] L.E.L., *The Venetian Bracelet, The Lost Pleiad, A History of the Lyre, and Other Poems* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1829), vi-vii.

social discourse of her day' (1993, 120) and was treated by the public as one of her own virginal heroines. She endured a fall from grace, and a broken engagement, when false rumours of sexual affairs with Daniel Maclise and William Maginn were circulated: her subsequent marriage to George Maclean was said to be a desperate move by Landon to 'regain her reputation and literary marketability' (122), a move quickly followed by her death. However, Mellor does accept that 'Working from *within* an essentialist construction of the female as the beautiful and the loving, Landon's poetry uncovers the emptiness, the self-defeating consequences of such a construction' (120). Acutely aware of her financial dependency on the success of her public image, Landon writes within a finely-tuned persona, but she produces poetry as much about socio-political issues, war in particular, as love. Her reinforcement of her public persona in the Preface to *The Venetian Bracelet* shows the possibility of reading less acceptable topics in her work, and the need to reinstate this role, assuring her supporters of the 'happiness they bestowed' (vii), and her critics that, like a good and virtuous maiden, 'I never laid down a criticism by which I did not benefit, or trust to benefit' (viii). I would agree with Labbe that, 'Ironically enough for a poet criticised in her own time and now as a disciple of love, Landon embeds in her poetry distrust and disillusion, and provokes repeated confrontations with the stereotype of Woman Writing Romance'(158).

In a refreshing reassessment of Landon's work, Tricia Lootens poses the question 'What happens if one sets out to read Letitia Elizabeth Landon as something other than a poet of ideal femininity or a primary source of the poetess tradition?'.[45]

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[45] Tricia Lootens, 'Receiving the Legend, Rethinking the Writer: Letitia Landon and the Poetess Tradition', in Harriet Kramer Linkin and Stephen C. Behrendt eds, *Romanticism and Women Poets:*

Lootens then considers the whole of Landon's *oeuvre*, not just her poetry in isolation as is the usual trend, suggesting that Landon should be approached from other angles than just as feminine love poet: 'Focusing on sexual politics through the lens of national identity (as say, of ethnicity or religion) can help us see past the monolithic mirage of femininity in the abstract' (246). Significantly, considering Landon's prose alongside her poetry can offer possibilities for a reassessment of her work, 'For the severity and satire of L.E.L's novels opened up compelling ways of reading, — and rereading — not only Landon's "character" but also her previous verse. Whether in terms of criticism or of reception, the poet, the person, and the novelist could no more be separated than they could be conflated' (246). Through her novels, had she lived, Landon may have risen to a different place in literary criticism: 'Rather than casting her death as the ironic culmination of a lifetime's commitment to the poetess's role, then, we might consider reading it as the collapse of a more complicated public persona' (254). Landon's contemporaries, notably W.M. Thackeray, recognized 'a powerful, deeply disturbing, strain in Landon's writing: a bleak vision conceived in cosmic, not merely feminine terms' (251), something more recent critics have not acknowledged.

As part of her re-evaluation, Lootens presents a compelling exploration of Landon's 'The Battle Field' from *The Venetian Bracelet* (L.E.L., 1829, 275-277), one of the potentially controversial works Landon tries to deflect in her Preface. Despite the fact that 'L.E.L. is known for proclaiming her unfitness to write verses about war' (252), she presents, in crisp and understated poetic diction, a nightmarish vision of a youth

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Opening the Doors of Reception (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 242-259, 242.

sleeping on the battlefield next to the corpse of his best friend. Lootens notes, 'If this Landon — the writer concerned with mortality, triviality, and terror — takes her place within twentieth-century criticism, we may gain a different sense both of L.E.L's prose and of its place in her career' (253).

The fact that the subject of war is transparent in Landon's work is attested by a review of *The Troubadour* (1825) and *The Golden Violet* (1826) published in *The Westminster Review*, January 1827, in which John Arthur Roebuck levies a vehement attack on what he sees as Landon's typically female glorification of war.[46] Roebuck says he will 'address the authoress as an equal, because we consider her an equal' (304), and offer a critique of her work free of the chivalric kid-glove treatment she is used to receiving. He attacks Landon for only having acquired fame by writing love poetry, which is trite and unskilled, 'Love is the great business of a woman's life; and any one who discourses with but ordinary ability on this all-important topic, finds in a woman a ready, patient, and admiring listener' (305). He also berates her 'exceedingly puerile and uninteresting' subjects, and her use of a hackneyed tale of crossed loves, which means 'the gentleman rushes to war, and consoles himself by slaughtering his fellow creatures', while the lady 'gradually pines away' (306). Roebuck objects to Landon's heroes, all of whom, he suggests, share a mistaken idea of chivalry:

> In short a hero must rush to war, heedless of the misery it creates; glory, the most selfish of all passions except love, being worthy of more consideration than the misery or happiness of millions of his fellow-

[46] As shown in McGann and Riess, eds, 1997, 303-325.

> creatures; he must despise all useful occupations, and consider the business of war the only decent employment for a gentleman. (319)

Roebuck compares the battle scenes in *The Troubadour* unfavourably with Byron's *The Giaour*, and is particularly vitriolic on what he considers the glorification of war typical of a woman, while at least refraining from any suggestion that Landon, as a woman, should not write of war and politics (320-322). Contrary to Roebuck's interpretation, I would argue that Landon's very focus is the cost of war: she shows ideas that glorify war in a critical light, consistently focusing on the misery of those left behind and the suffering of the combatants. Yet, as the reviews clearly show, to be a commercial success Landon had to fulfil a range of expectations for a woman writer: as sole provider for her dependents, Landon, like Hemans, was concerned to present works that would conform to public demand, and thus ensure financial security. For this reason she was keen to reinforce the public myth that had been conjured around her, that of a feminine beauty whose sole creative concern was love. Yet, like Hemans, behind the screen of writing poems of 'the affections', Landon presents politically informed poems about the social situation of the day. War, and the medieval code of chivalry in particular, demands clearly defined gender structures and behaviours: through this medieval screen Landon can present a critique of the gender expectations of her own society, which reflect those of a chivalric society, while maintaining her commercial appeal by writing within these confines.

When speaking of medieval warfare in a nineteenth-century context, the reference to ideas and ideals of chivalry cannot be escaped: as Girouard notes in the Preface to *The Return to Camelot*, 'Once one starts looking for the influence of chivalry in this

period one finds it in almost embarrassingly large quantities'. Jacqueline Labbe has expressed succinctly the complex and ambivalent nature of chivalry: 'that what chivalry can hide is a devotion to and glorification of war and killing. As much as chivalric values are the embodiment of virtue and order, they also represent an attempt to impose order; repression and restriction shadow the purity that is associated with knightly behaviour' (9). Labbe expands this view:

> Chivalry allows for — even encourages — a vicarious displacement, an absorption, of fear; on the other hand, by its own code it exists to repress violent impulses and maintain order. As a code, it relies on and enacts fear and repression even as it dresses up its tactics in the flowery language of the romance. The gallantry that considered female chastity its highest treasure, for instance, also enforced such chastity and regarded sexual women as temptresses-enchantresses. The chivalric code does not transcend, but rather requires, attention to order and social cohesion and homogeneity. (37)

Codes of chivalry are a testament to the horrors of war and the impossibility of gender spheres, their very existence demonstrating the terror they conceal, and the need for social restrictions. An example can be seen in the accelerated popularity of the Middle Ages and chivalry in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century, prompted by a terrified reaction to the French Revolution, a battening down of the hatches against change and reform.[47] As such these codes present a useful screen for articulating that which a women writer should not express, a vehement socio-political criticism. I suggest that this can be seen throughout Landon's work, that in her early poetry, while

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[47] For further discussion of this see Girouard, 22-23.

developing her commercially successful poetic personality 'L.E.L.', and writing about love and the trials of a 'poetess', this focus on social questions, death and war can also be traced.

In her discussion of war, Landon focuses on the suffering and loss that women are forced to endure. Given the quantity of works in *The Improvisatrice; and Other Poems* (1824) that are written on the subject of war, it seems incredible that reviewers of this volume failed to notice them as war poems.[48] Landon writes about the position of women in the Napoleonic Wars, which had ended nine years earlier. The widow in 'The Deserter' (185-192), bereft of her husband killed in battle, dies of a broken heart when her, similarly fighting, son, is shot for desertion. Despite the sympathy shown for the mother there is a sense in which, by taking a traditionally sanctioned role as inciter, and encouraging her son to join the war, she is complicit in his doom when his expectations are not met and he deserts to a rebel cause; 'she bade/ Her child tread in that father's steps, and told/ How brave, how honoured he had been' (187). 'The Grey Cross' (289-290) focuses on a woman who dies of grief when she sees the tomb of her betrothed, a hopeful, young soldier of the Peninsular Wars who had died 'in his first field'. 'The Soldier's Grave' (319-321) relates the story of the wife and child who mourn the soldier who had returned from the war, but never recovered. Landon is focusing here on 'the affections' but also considering the cost of war: the two are inseparable, 'He spoke of victory, —spoke of cheer: —/ These are words that are vainly spoken/ To the childless mother or orphan's ear,/ Or the widow whose heart is broken' (321). Yet Landon does not only focus on the grief of women left behind: it is interesting that in 'The Soldier's Funeral' (237-239), the chief mourner is the 'poor

[48] L.E.L., *The Improvisatrice; and Other Poems* (London: Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1824).

and aged man' who had lost his only son in battle, focusing on a father's loss rather than a mother's. When many would be still mourning deaths in a war that ended nine years earlier, Landon focuses on the grief of those left behind.

Despite this focus on the contemporary, the majority of the works about war do use the screen of a medieval setting to shade their main focus, a critique of war and the gender expectations made more obvious by war, rather than a discussion of love. In 'Roland's Tower: A Legend of the Rhine' (129-142) the narrator tells a historical tale of Isabelle, who first suffers when Roland rides off wearing her colours to save her father's lands from the besieging army but is served a double blow when the triumphant army returns: Roland had slain her father by mistake in the thick of battle. Distraught, Isabelle retreats to a convent, deprived of both her father and her lover by the war, and no longer able to function in the society that causes such suffering.

Labbe offers a valuable exploration of this work, suggesting that the reason for the mistake can be explained in the need for separate gender spheres:

> Isabelle and Roland occupy different worlds: she, the heroine, inhabits the house of her father, domesticated, ensconced, and waiting for love; he, the hero, lives in the outside world, identified with war, soldierly deeds, manly prowess. Drawn by love into Isabelle's realm, Roland is changed; the only explanation for his mistake is that, blinded by love, he is now a bad soldier, an inept knight, a disarmed hero. [...] Roland, once he has crossed into the domestic sphere, is unable to return successfully to the world of war, of action. (171)

While I would agree with Labbe, that in Landon's poetry both man and woman suffer because of love, I argue that it is the very existence of the gender spheres that causes this suffering, the unfeasibility of their expectations, not the impossibility of their conjoining. Isabelle may inhabit the domestic world, but she is unavoidably drawn into the world of war by the inclusion of those she loves. 'Unwitting of his colours' (140), Roland slays Isabelle's father, in his haste to join the crush of battle and win military glory: just as in Opie's 'The Warrior's Return', ties of the domestic life are destroyed by war. The protagonist of 'The Crusader' (304-307) returns from 'the sainted battles of Palestine' to find that the lover whose colours he wears has been killed, along with all his family and his home destroyed: he thus returns desolate, to find death in battle. There is an unspoken sense in the work that in chasing the glory of the 'righteous' crusade, the warrior is left to pay for the destruction of the family, the lover, and the life he left unprotected. Of the poems in this volume, 'The Warrior' (308-312) provides the most obvious presentation of the horrors of war. After a preamble of typical courtliness describing the parting of warrior and lady, the warrior rides off to a hideous field of battle:

> Near to the gashed and the nerveless hand
> Is the pointless spear and the broken brand;
> The archer lies like an arrow spent,
> His shafts all lose and his bow unbent;
> Many a white plume torn and red,
> Bright curls rent from the graceful head,
> Helmet and breast-plate scattered around,
> Lie a fearful show on the well-fought ground;
> While the crow and the raven flock over head

> To feed on the hearts of the helpless dead,
>
> Save when scared by the glaring eye
>
> Of some wretch in his last death agony. (309-310)

The contrast between the opening of the poem and the scene of battle could not be greater: chivalry and courtliness may screen war, but cannot erase its horrors. On the surface the main subject of the poem is the love and suffering of Edith, who watches the warrior ride off to battle wearing her scarf, and waits for him until he returns on his bier. Yet, the comment on horror of war and the glory-less grotesqueness of the battlefield is what resounds through the poem, especially when it is considered that this poem was published less than ten years after the bloody battles of the Napoleonic wars. Landon writes of abandoned and mourning parents and lovers in poems with a near-contemporary setting. For her to have written of the heart-eating carrion on the battlefield to the contemporary audience, without using the screen of historical distance and the genre of the love poem, would have been unthinkable for a 'popular' writer like Landon, and would have had disastrous consequences for her career.

Yet, the marginalization of women who are always left behind, blocked out of the war, waving scarves or grieving at tombs, is the most persistent subject in Landon's war poetry. This position of women as 'mourners, locked in the passivity of melancholia' (Armstrong, 1999, 9) was one as true for women in the early nineteenth century as it was for those left behind in these chivalric tales. In fact at the end of *The Troubadour* (1825), a work essentially about war and chivalry, after the 'happy conclusion', Landon focuses on her deep sense of loss in a eulogy after the death of her father, albeit not through war: but it is this sense of a woman helplessly bound in a

position of grieving isolation that lingers at the close of the work.[49] Societies that focus on warfare as a means of control and power enforcement create an alien of woman and her private sphere, while demanding chivalric-like gender constructs, which on the surface seek to uphold women and home above all else. Isobel Armstrong has written that:

> The myth of regulated civic life has broken down as war allows men to make their own rules. War not only perpetuates intergenerational violence; it destroys cultural knowledge, doing violence to the signifying system which sustains socially made symbols and which orders systems of exchange whose stability guarantees the social order. And far from preserving the domestic, the 'private' sphere becomes [...] a mere token. (1999, 17)

This point can best be illustrated in Landon's works in the character of Eva, the unearthly heroine of *The Troubadour*, who is deserted by both father and lover. On her introduction to the work we are told how, after her mother's death, she was borne away by her father to his brother's house, where he left her 'Then past himself like a dream away'(25) to battle. Eva has no further news of him except the rumour that 'he fell/In fighting with the Infidel' (25). The first legend we hear sung by Raymond, the troubadour of the title, is a ballad reminiscent of many of Landon's war poems from *The Improvisatrice* volume, highlighting this major concern of women suffering because of men going to war: a warrior rides off into battle leaving his lady anxiously waiting, ultimately to find 'Her true knight stretch'd on his bier!' (31). The tone for

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[49] L.E.L., *The Troubadour; Catalogue of Pictures, and Historical Sketches* (London: Hurst, Robinson & Co., 1825), 1-254.

the whole of *The Troubadour* is set: knights will go off to gain glory in battle, and women will stay behind and mourn. To a certain extent, Eva, epitome of self-sacrifice and blind devotion, is the self-imposer of these sufferings. It is she who encourages the restless Raymond to assist the Lady of Clarin, and thus prompts his impetuous departure, she being left alone to watch from the battlement:

> With her white robe and long bright hair,
>
> A golden veil flung in the air,
>
> Like Peace prepared from earth to fly,
>
> Yet pausing, ere she wing'd on high,
>
> In pity for the rage and crime
>
> That forced her to some fairer clime. (42)

Eva, like Peace, is excluded from the masculine world of war and fighting below, left longing for a lover who forgets her almost instantly, becomes infatuated by another, and only returns when the pain of loving the ruthless Adeline becomes too great. Eva is then deserted again as Raymond goes off to fight 'the infidel', just as her father had, in an attempt to free himself from his love of Adeline that is still 'rankling'. This all-consuming and self-sacrificing love demonstrated by Eva, and intrinsic to woman's role in chivalric legend, is clearly questioned by Landon, who highlights particularly the inequality of it:

> There is a feeling in the heart
>
> Of woman which can have no part
>
> In man; a self devotedness,
>
> As victims round their idols press,

> And asking for nothing, but to show
>
> How far their zeal and faith can go. (116)

While such lines have been said to be proof of Landon's praise of such 'self devotedness' by women, Roebuck suggesting that 'L.E.L. takes every opportunity of preaching up this perfect subordination, and of bestowing admiration upon those qualities which fit women for being useful and agreeable slaves' (McGann and Reiss eds, 323), I suggest that they instead reflect the writer's contempt for this blind devotion, an idea developed in the figure of the similarly self-sacrificial Moor, Leila. While Leila frees Raymond from prison, and saves his life by nursing him back to health, Raymond deserts her to return home. She dies for love of him, the valley where she died remaining lifeless 'Save the pale pining lemon trees,/And the dark weeping cypresses'(206), which reflect Leila's death. This scene is dramatically juxtaposed with Raymond's optimistic situation:

> And where was RAYMOND, where was he?
>
> Borne homeward o'er the rapid sea,
>
> While sunny days and favouring gales
>
> Brought welcome speed to the white sails,—
>
> With bended knee, and upraised hand,
>
> He stood upon his native land,
>
> With all that happiness can be
>
> When resting on futurity. (207)

The contrast of the two scenes shows the injustice of the situation: Landon is presenting these images of female devotion as a means of criticizing both them, and

the society that holds them up as virtues. Here as elsewhere Landon is concerned with the inequalities between men and women in chivalric society: yet in his 1827 review of *The Troubadour*, Roebuck levies exactly this attack at her, namely that L.E.L presents Raymond without censure for his wrongs, while attacking similar behaviour in a woman:

> In the Troubadour we find the hero, Raymond, permitted without censure to rove from beauty to beauty, reckless of the fatal effects of his fascinating arts; while Adeline, because she rejects Raymond's love, and is, like himself, somewhat difficult to please, is accused of cruelty and disdain, and visited with all the indignation our authoress is capable of assuming. (McGann and Reiss eds, 323)

I would argue that Landon's objective is actually to highlight the unbalanced treatment of a man and a woman committing the same wrongs in the poem, which reflects the disparity and hypocrisy that surrounded contemporary perceptions of gender roles. Raymond is content to desert women at every stage, but furious when he thinks that Eva has forgotten him (in fact she has left to mourn him, having been wrongly told that he had perished). Leaving Leila to return to Eva, via Adeline's ruined castle, Raymond is vexed at Eva's absence:

> He had deem'd a declining flower,
>
> Pining in solitary bower,
>
> He should find EVA, sad and lone,—
>
> He sought the cage, the bird had flown,
>
> With burnish'd plume, and careless wing,
>
> A follower of the sunny Spring. (222)

Instead of the chivalrous warrior we find a petulant child, who is nonetheless rewarded with his desires at the close of the poem, winning the hand of Eva, and the Golden Violet in the minstrels' tournament. Raymond functions in the poem as a romantic hero, albeit a restless, inexperienced, selfish and headstrong one: but he is also a means for Landon to express contempt for the hypocrisy of a society that nurtures inequalities in expected gender behaviour. While Raymond ends up with a woman he clearly does not deserve and the prize of the Golden Violet, noble Leila pines to death and Eva gets a feckless and faithless lover. Despite the expectations set up by the title, Landon seems little concerned with Raymond's role: his songs are few and far between, and his main action in the narrative swings between his relationships with the various women he encounters and his behaviour on the battlefield. Glennis Stephenson considers this anomaly:

> The title of the central poem in *The Troubadour* might lead the reader to expect that Landon would now produce a male poet to set against her Improvisatrice, but as one hostile reviewer complained, 'we find in it no one of that profession' (Metropolitan Quarterly Magazine 1826: 157). Raymond is a warrior who carelessly throws off a couple of songs when the mood strikes him: he is certainly no professional poet nor even a serious amateur. Landon's lack of interest is clear.
>
> (Stephenson, 1995, 66)[50]

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[50] That said, Fay does explore Landon's presentation of the troubadour, and her development of the figure of the female troubadour, through the character of Raymond (54-63). Fay suggests that 'The dissociation of poet from poetry, of subjectivity from subject, deromanticizes her work and divests it of the troubadourian conditions for loss that so constrained women lyric poets before her' (63), that while 'Seward occupies both subject-lover and object-beloved positions; Landon occupies neither but sings of both, thus treating the troubadour as fictional, while she herself takes his place' (60), and that both Landon and 'her poetry with her are caught in the web of women's historic roles' (63).

Rather than being the study of a troubadour poet, songs in the work, on the contrary, highlight Landon's concerns about war. For example, in Canto II, Raymond hears a song murmured by a 'Young Knight' in which the colours and scarf of the lady 'have been soil'd by dust and rain,/ And they must wear a darker stain'(56), a song remembered by Raymond 'next day/ When bleeding that young warrior lay' (58).

Yet, similarly, Raymond is far from being a successful warrior. His heady desire for success and glory in battle, and naïve imaginings about what war would be like, are repeatedly shown as a reflection of his youth and inexperience, a means by which he hopes to live up to the name of his father, who died in battle:

> And where the glory that will yield
> The flush and glow of his first field,
> To the young chief? Will RAYMOND ever
> Feel as he now is feeling?— Never. (48)

Ideas of a glorious war are shown as part of the folly of Raymond's youth. Far from Roebuck's criticism of the hyperbole he sees used in support of war, I would suggest that Landon does not shirk from the realities of war, showing not an arena where the glorious and good kill an evil foe, but indiscriminate brutality and bloodshed:

> And there was desperate strife next day:
> The little vale below that lay
> Was like a slaughter-pit, of green
> Could not one single trace be seen;
> The Moslem warrior stretch'd beside

> The Christian chief by whom he died;
>
> And by the broken falchion blade
>
> The crooked scymeter was laid. (132-133)

As Isobel Armstrong has noted, ' The carnage in Landon's *The Troubadour* (1825) is none the less bloody for its historical distance' (1999, 11).

Like Roebuck, Labbe has made a comparison highlighting the obvious links between Landon and the influence of her predecessor Byron, *The Giaour* obviously informing *The Troubadour*. Labbe's consideration, however, allows for rather more equality, suggesting, 'Moreover, that neither Landon nor Byron shy away from the explicit and drawn-out depiction of violence allows for an intriguing and suggestive scenario: the drama of the romance and violence plays itself out amid the ruins of chivalry, romanticised gender roles, and literary cohesion' (141). Through the historical distance of the medieval romance — 'Landon challenged her culture to remedy the damage caused by an expedient acceptance of hierarchy and the false chivalry of separate spheres' (161) — Landon finds, through this screen, the means to express what would otherwise have had to remain unsaid if 'L.E.L.' were to maintain her commercial success. What might have happened if Landon had lived longer and pursued her career as a novelist, with the more obvious social criticism and sinister observances her prose writing contains, can only be imagined. It is true that, 'as is necessary for a poet who writes for a living and who must, like Hemans and Robinson before her, please a fickle audience, Landon veils her violent impulses' (159). However, the violence and horror are all too obvious if one looks beneath the surface structure of the icon of love poetry and feminine beauty, just as Hemans's image of

the domestic ideal often can be seen to veil expressions of political comment and social concern. Hemans's vision is far from clear-cut: a tension is obvious in her work between the social celebration of war, specifically England's role in the Napoleonic Wars, as moral, political, and, to some extent, religious, and an assurance that, despite this, war is carnage and horror, a state which brings into relief oppressive gender expectations for both men and women. Through her use of a medieval screen, Hemans can be seen working out the scenes of tension, replaying gender ideologies, and demonstrating the suffering and horror of war, but in such a way that her role as popular domestic icon was not undermined.

It has been written that 'The women in Landon's poems are shrewd observers of their spectacular society — cold spectators of a colder spectacle repeatedly masked in the warm colours of dissimulating love' (McGann and Riess, eds, 24). In the next chapter I shall consider how Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Louisa Stuart Costello, like Landon, use the medieval as a means of observing their society, most significantly the spectacle of the Crimean War, and the significance this war had for women writers using the medieval motif.

3 'It's strictly the woman's part and men understand it so': romance, gender and the spectacle of the Crimean

In this chapter I shall demonstrate that the Crimean War was a catalyst for women's use of medievalism, as it generated an idiom for medieval motifs to be used pervasively in support of war. This affected the usefulness of the discourse to women who wanted to protest both about the sufferings of war, and the gender constrictions that were thrown into relief during times of war. I shall explore how women writers negotiated this mood, focusing on Barrett Browning's innovative use of the ballad form, and how 'she employs the starker power structures of medieval society to foreground the status of women as objects in a male economy of social exchange, and to unmask the subtler preservation of gender inequities in contemporary Victorian ideology'(Stone, 1995, 108-9). I shall consider Costello's *The Lay of the Stork* (1856), in which she medievalizes the present to express her views on the exclusion of women from politics in the Crimean War years. I shall argue that the Crimean War was in fact a turning point in perceptions of women in the public sphere and in time of war, and, consequently, of how they were able to write about it, and present it in visual art, in the case of Elizabeth Thompson (Lady Butler).

Joan Perkin writes that, 'In Anglo-Saxon England women had rights to property, to a share in control of domestic affairs and of children, and even in the last resort to divorce or legal separation, departing with children and half the marital goods [...] It was the full

imposition of feudalism by the Normans, based on military service by male barons and knights, which destroyed the legal rights of women'.[1] Historically, war removed women's rights: throughout history, society can be seen reacting to the upheaval of war by trying to impound women in strict gender confines in an attempt to boost domestic security and foster a sense of safe and moral nationhood. Given the perceived greater rights and freedom of Anglo-Saxon women, it is not surprising that, as Deborah Byrd suggests, the Middle Ages was an appealing background for the work of Victorian women poets because it was envisioned 'as a time in which at least some women had control over their property and destiny and the courage to venture into the "male" arenas of politics and war'.[2] However these poets did not do so without questioning the strict gender confines and expectations of the intrinsic chivalric code: 'they encode rebellious sentiments in seemingly conventional texts; in such works, statements that seem to endorse patriarchal ideology are voiced ironically or ambiguously or are called into question by the poem's imagery or structure' (32). Writing a decade after Landon, Elizabeth Barrett Browning uses a medieval setting for many of the ballads in *Poems* (1844) as her predecessor had done, to facilitate a wider exploration of these positions, displaying frustration at the chivalric social constrictions for women, which was as relevant to the ideology of her own society as to the medieval past she creates. Yet she does so using 'ambiguous wording to hide from the unsympathetic reader the fact that she is protesting against middle-class Victorian definitions of the good wife and good daughter' (33). Dorothy Mermin agrees that Barrett Browning's ballads provided 'a

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[1] Joan Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1.
[2] Deborah Byrd, 'Combating an Alien Tyranny: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Evolution as a Feminist Poet', *Browning Institute Studies*, 15 (1987), 23-41, 33.

covert but thorough-going reassessment, often in total repudiation of the Victorian ideas about womanliness to which they ostensibly appeal', but goes on to suggest that Barrett Browning's use of medieval settings and ballad form were 'part of her search for a world which would give scope for passion and action'[3]: a quest she would later see as misdirected and repudiate in *Aurora Leigh* (Book V).[4] Mermin sets the use of medieval forms and settings by women poets firmly within the ideology of Victorian medievalism as a [male] constructed cultural movement, and thus judges it futile:

> In the terms that would matter most to women who felt imprisoned in women's sphere — the relative freedom or fixity of social roles — nineteenth-century medievalism's dream of order was thoroughly retrogressive. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's ballads investigate the resources of medievalism, which was one of the main imaginative alternatives in the nineteenth century to the constrictions of modern life, and reject it as nostalgic folly. (94)

What this verdict fails to assess, however, is that by using a medieval background for her poetry, Barrett Browning is able to demonstrate the gender confines of contemporary life, the expectations and demands of 'feminine' behaviour, by demonstrating their hypocrisy and injustice in the original chivalric background. She is using medievalism for her own purposes, not aligning herself entirely to the belief system of the movement. Rebecca Stott suggests that the much-quoted poetic manifesto in Book V of *Aurora Leigh* reflects

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[3] Dorothy Mermin, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: The Origins of a New Poetry* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 71 and 94.
[4] See Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 152, lines 189-222.

Barrett Browning's own feelings, as evidenced by her letters, that 'The poet is to speak for her age, explore the drama of the Victorian drawing room, not the squabbles of the medieval courts' (Avery and Stott, 66). I shall demonstrate in this chapter how Barrett Browning explores the Victorian drawing room *through* the medieval courts. Barrett Browning clearly refutes the gender constructions of chivalry, but finds medievalism a useful tool through which to highlight the confining gender expectations of her own day.

The direct inspiration for 'The Romaunt of the Page' was an illustration given to Barrett Browning by Mitford, which portrayed a woman disguised as a page in the foreground, with a knight riding away at the rear. Barrett Browning is, however, also following a long tradition of the 'Female Warrior' story which 'exposes to view and subverts — at least by implication — the structuring according to gender of its world'.[5] This is seen in 'A Not-browne Mayd' and 'Child Waters' in Percy's *Reliques*, the disguise of Constance in Scott's *Marmion*, and Hemans's 'Woman on the Field of Battle', from *Songs of the Affections* (1830). The most clear distinction between Barrett Browning's work and Hemans's is the fact that Hemans's unnamed woman is dead, her tale related by the voice of an observer, in contrast to the eloquence and activity allowed to Barrett Browning's page. Hemans deliberately leaves the reason for the woman's death vague, allowing for the possibility that the woman warrior has entered the war for religious and social reasons, as well as just the love of a man. We are left in no doubt that Barrett Browning's page sacrifices herself out of disillusionment, despair, and because of the social

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[5] Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry 1650-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11.

impossibility of her position as 'False page, but truthful woman' (line 297). Barrett Browning's poem has also clear links with Mary Shelley's crisp and engaging short story 'The False Rhyme' (1829; published in *The Keepsake* for 1830), where Emilie de Lagny willingly takes her husband's place in jail so he can anonymously champion the King's cause, and thus disproves the accusations of treason that caused his lifelong imprisonment.[6] As well as the physical deprivations Emilie is forced to endure, she also suffers her reputation to be destroyed by rumours of her elopement with her page and her jewels. In a reversal of the courtly tradition, she disguises herself as a man and debases herself so that her husband can recover his freedom, status and reputation: this he does, celebrated as 'the most fearless and bravest knight in France', but only at immense cost to his wife and through his own emasculation, wearing Emilie's attire in order to escape. Emilie's victory is more far reaching: it is a testament to the constancy and fidelity of women, and is thus a means by which Queen Margaret of Navarre can claim victory over her royal brother in her wager to overturn his claims of woman's falseness. It also demonstrates the hollowness of the idea of courtly behaviour, the manners of chivalry and courtly love: Emilie's sacrifice comes as a stark contrast to the selfishness of the husband who allows her to save him, allowing him to regain his name and reputation only through the loss of hers. The assertion that brings the narrative to a close, 'and surely there was more loveliness in Emilie's faded cheek — more grace in her emaciated form, type as they were of truest affection — than in the prouder bearing and fresher complexion of the most brilliant beauty in attendance on the courtly festival', actually

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[6] Text used is Romantic Circles/ Electronic Edition/ The Last Man/ "The False Rhyme" by Mary Shelley, http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/mws/lastman/falsrhym.htm

instills a jarring note of discord to the end of the work. 'Surely' comes as a question that needs verification rather than as a statement: Emilie herself has been lost in her noble act, 'faded' and 'emaciated' into the mere symbol of her sacrifice, her reputation and outward appearances of femininity destroyed in the process. Her victory, as well as proving woman's constancy, is in her demonstrating the need for a rewriting of a range of accepted ideas. Fay considers these reshapings:

> Chastity/inconstancy will be rewritten as treason/loyalty. The libel of women, and court rumours that a lady had disgracefully disappeared with her page, will be rewritten as the consummate trustworthiness of women, the disappeared lady being discovered to have taken the place of her politically 'disappeared' and imprisoned husband. That husband can then, facelessly and namelessly, champion the King's cause in war and so rewrite the treasonous charge against him. (190)[7]

Ultimately Emilie's actions demand a rewriting of chivalry itself as an area of female activity, her deeds bringing the truth to the fore and winning the final victory, while her husband is nameless and silent. For this reason the closing sentence of the work, with its return to established chivalric behaviours (Sire de Lagny's physical exploits and Emilie's supposed iconic status) jarrs. In chivalric terms, her actions are abhorrent, and she can no longer fulfil her required role to be of 'prouder bearing' and 'fresher complexion'. She has overturned these codes and demonstrated their sterility.

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[7] Fay offers an interesting exploration of this work, especially her consideration of the importance of the role of Francis I and Queen Margaret: her contextualization of the work alongside that of Percy Shelley and Byron is particularly compelling (186-196).

'The Romaunt of the Page' first appeared as the lead poem in Mary Russell Mitford's 1839 *Findens' Tableaux of the Affections: A Series of Picturesque Illustrations of the Womanly Virtues*: it is a heavily revised version of this that appeared in Barrett Browning's 1844 *Poems*.[8] Both versions relate the narrative of the disguised page, who has fought alongside, and saved, her husband in battle, and who sacrifices herself in despair for the knight, stunned by his double standards: she resigns herself to the love of God who deserves her love and sacrifice more than the hypocritical knight. The focus of both poems is that the chivalric code is destructively confining for women. However, in the 1844 version of the poem, Barrett Browning explores how the male knight is also a victim of this social code, forced into a marriage of obligation with a woman whom he had never seen: Barrett Browning here demonstrates her belief in the constrictions of the chivalric code for men as well as women, as she also does in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1847-1850). It is here that Barrett Browning significantly subverts the gender plots of the tradition in which she is following, notably the Percy ballads and *Marmion*, by putting greater emphasis on the role and motivation of the male protagonist within the chivalric gender confines, so that, 'Whereas Scott depicts the old story of women suffering from male falsehood, Barrett Browning's ballad shows both sexes suffering from an oppressive ideology' (Stone, 1995, 127). As a result, the knight's response to the tale of the page's 'sister' in the 1844 *Poems* is not the 'gay' laugh of the 1839 version, but a 'careless' one, and a response which underlines the constrictions of the code to which he adheres: 'My love, so please you, shall requite/ No woman, whether

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[8] See *Findens' Tableaux of the Affections: A Series of Picturesque Illustrations of the Womanly Virtues 1839*, Frontispiece and 1-5.

dark or bright,/ Unwomaned if she be' (lines 194-196). Instead of a woman being rewarded for passing a male-constructed test, as in the ballad tradition of 'Child Waters' and 'The Not-browne Mayd', Barrett Browning here introduces the important innovation of the knight being tested and found wanting. The knight insists that his wife must fulfil the role of passive icon of courtly love, 'No casque shall hide her woman's tear — /It shall have room to trickle clear/Behind her woman's veil' (lines 220-222), his declaration that if faced with a wife who had disguised herself for battle, 'I would forgive, and evermore/ Would love her as my servitor,/ But little as my wife' (lines 226-229), bringing the page to the brink of despair. In asserting his belief that women should be as the clouds above his head 'So high, so pure, and so apart,/ A woman's honour lies' (lines 232-233), the knight is shown to reinforce the chivalric iconicization of women which Barrett Browning so scorned, echoing as this speech does the image she casts in a letter to Mitford of 'the sin and shame of those divine angels, called women, daring to tread in the dust of a multitude, when they ought to be minding their clouds' (Miller ed., 235). Marriage to a knight in shining armour is not the conclusion of this poem, but is the initial problem: marriage built on chivalrous ideals, a heroic version of masculinity and a passive femininity, is shown to be hollow and sterile.

The page's absorption in the delight she mistakenly anticipates in revealing her true identity means she ignores the nun's chanting, auguring as it does her own death: while 'the knight heard all, and the page heard none' (line 93). In a direct reflection, while the knight is so preoccupied with his description of woman's honour, he fails in his role as soldier, not hearing the approach of his enemy Saracens, unlike the page: 'the page seeth

all and the knight seeth none' (line 241). Although guilty of expecting too much from her loveless marriage, the page proves the better soldier. Her tears are stopped by the cold realization of the knight's belief that 'womanhood is proved the best/ By golden brooch and glossy vest/The mincing ladies wear' (lines 198-201), echoing Barrett Browning's contempt for the ornamental passivity into which women are forced by the chivalric code. The page maintains that his 'sister' best fulfilled female virtue by breaking this very code for the love of her husband, the layering of 'woman' and 'womanly' and use of received descriptions of feminine attributes 'little hand and 'tender tears' re-emphasising this:

> Oh womanly she prayed in tent,
> When none beside did wake!
> Oh, womanly she paled in fight,
> For one beloved's sake!—
> And her little hand, defiled with blood,
> Her tender tears of womanhood
> Most woman-pure did make! (lines 207-213)

Brought to cynical despair by the realization that she has risked herself for such an unworthy husband, 'Have I renounced my womanhood/For wifehood unto *thee*' (lines 276-277, Barrett Browning's italics), the page ultimately achieves the final victory by her sacrifice. Mermin judges the page's demise to be one in keeping with the very gender stereotype against which she has been railing, saying she 'chooses a woman's fate — unrecognised, self-sacrificing death — anyway' (1989, 92). I would argue that the opposite is true, like Simon Avery who interprets 'the closure as an articulation of the

woman's desire to play an active role in the public world and assert her autonomy, even if the result is her seemingly inevitable death' (Avery and Stott, 92). In a reversal of the usual chivalric roles, the woman page dies as champion of the [unknowingly] passive, and therefore socially emasculated, knight, recognizing her triumph over her social confinement, and so dying 'With smile more bright in victory/ Than any sword from sheath' (line 325- 326).

In many ways 'The Romaunt of the Page' directly complements 'The Romance of the Swan's Nest', the page recognizing the sterility of the chivalric ideal to which Little Ellie adheres, until she is forced to face the 'sharp reality' (280) that the epigraph predicts. One of the final works of the 1844 volume, 'The Romance of the Swan's Nest' demonstrates in a contemporary setting the 'sterility of the chivalric ideal of passive womanhood', as had Barrett Browning's earlier, medieval ballads.[9] 'Little Ellie', the diminutive epithet being consistently used to emphasise her naïvety and youth, fantasizes about her ideal lover. She longs to be the passive beloved for a stereotypical knight who will 'lead me as a lover' (281), and to whom she will show her most precious secret, the swan's nest among the reeds. As Glennis Stephenson suggests, 'as long as she yearns after the chivalric ideal of love, she will never have the type of fruitful relationship that is represented by the swan's nest'[10]: the swan's desertion of her nest and the rats' gnawing of the reeds symbolize the falseness of such chivalric gender boundaries, and how they

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[9] Marjorie Stone, 'A Cinderella among the Muses: Barrett Browning and the Ballad Tradition', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 21 (1993), 233-268, 256.
[10] Glennis Stephenson, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Poetry of Love* (Ann Arbor and London: UMI Research Press, 1989), 36.

destroy the possibility for women to achieve fulfilment in love, society, and the home. Many reviewers of the poem mistook Barrett Browning's attack on the destructiveness of chivalric falsehoods: a *Blackwood's* reviewer praised the way the work presents the 'sympathies and enjoyments of a child' with 'graceful playfulness' (as shown Mermin, 1989, 95). Similarly many Victorian readers misconstrued her medieval ballads and romances as light fairy tales for children: Mermin has said that 'Elizabeth Barrett told the old stories in a style and tone that gave no hint of revisionary intention, and she discarded the ballad form without discovering how to use it effectively against itself' (95). I would argue, on the contrary, that in her reworkings of medieval stories, and use of the ballad form, the poet finds a powerful, but indirect, means to present her critique of the expectations of 'womanhood' and 'manhood' in her contemporary society: that some reviewers and readers were not able to see past her [comparatively loose] historical veil, shows the value and importance of the message she presents.

Barrett Browning similarly problematizes the gender roles of the chivalric code in the 'Rhyme of the Duchess May' (*Poems* 1844), a striking reworking of 'Edom O'Gordon' in Percy's *Reliques*. That the 'Rhyme' belongs to a fictional historical past is made overtly obvious by the framework of a first person narrator reading an 'ancient rhyme' (line 21) in a churchyard, the solemn bells tolling throughout as the ballad refrain. Additionally, as Helen Cooper has noted, 'This story within a story functions as a distancing device, reducing Barrett's apparent responsibility for her unorthodox story'.[11]

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[11] Helen Cooper, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Woman and Artist* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 87.

Here again, Barrett Browning veers from her source by providing her heroine with a voice and a right to activity denied the earlier incarnation. While the wife in 'Edom O' Gordon' is, with her children, a sitting target in her castle for Gordon's advances while her husband is away, the Duchess May is the active mistress of her own destiny. It is her choice that she should marry Guy of Linteged, and she does so, escaping from her guardian's plans to fulfil her betrothal to his son for the sake of her dowry, 'It is three months gone to-day since *I gave* mine hand away' (line 169: my italics). In doing so she refutes the position of woman as pawn in the masculine political world: her title and position give her the power of a feudal lord, 'Unto both these lords of Leigh spake she out/ right sovranly, / "My will runneth as my blood"' (lines 58-60). The Duchess demands the right to choose a noble death with her husband, her equal sacrifice as a ruling noble, rejecting the position of woman as war-chattel. She is 'thunderstruck' (line 294) by the suggestion that she should groom herself in order to 'find grace' (line 292) with the conquering enemy and refuses to fit into the stereotype of passive icon, 'Go to, faithful friends, go to! judge no/more what ladies do' (lines 297-298). She insists on the right to choose her fate, her right to show the same commitment as a wife that she had when she made the decision to flee with Sir Guy as his lover. In contrast to the passive sacrifice of the wife and children in 'Edom O'Gordon', one child being speared as she is lowered over the wall, the others burning to death with their mother as they await rescue, May's sacrifice is an active one: 'She upsprang, she rose upright, in his selle/ she sate in sight,/ By her love she overcame' (lines 384-386).

Barrett Browning's focus on the difficulties of the male position in chivalric gender roles is here again a variant from her source. By providing an insight into the thoughts of Sir Guy, she highlights the impossibility of his position as feudal lord with sole responsibilities for unmarried sister, young brother, mother, warriors and people of the castle, as well as his personal ties to his wife and family. His preoccupation with his 'manliness', how the impending doom of the castle equates for him with failure in his role as active male, is sharply symbolized when 'the sword he leant upon, shivered,/ snapped upon the stone' (lines 184-185), the brittleness of the sword reflecting the impossibility and destructive nature of the social construction of 'manhood'. Sir Guy is a victim of the gender structures he propagates. The mistake he makes is to expect his wife, whom he sees as a dependant not an equal, to obey him and slot into the typical dutiful, role when she had shown her independence and determination to follow her own will in marrying him. He judges that at the crucial moment of crisis in the battle there is no place for a woman, 'I stand in need of my noble red-roan steed,/ But no more of my noble wife' (lines 318-320). Failing to understand the nature of the Duchess, Sir Guy seems comforted by the possibility of his wife finding grace with Lord Leigh, and happiness with another, 'But her heart is young in pain, and her hopes will spring again/ By the suntime of her years' (lines 226-228). The Duchess, by her activity, demonstrates what both Leigh and Sir Guy have failed to comprehend, that she refuses the position of passive object at the whim of men. Like the page, she redefines 'womanly' behaviour, refusing to leave her husband as to do so would be 'unwomanly' in her terms, 'Meekly have I done all thy biddings under sun/ [...]/But by all my womanhood, which is proved so, true and good,/ I will never do this one' (lines 321-322, 324-325).

Barrett Browning's exploration of gender roles in the scenes of medieval conflict in these ballads is brought forcefully into the consideration of contemporary Victorian society in her discussion of war and affairs of state. Unlike her predecessors earlier in the century, Barrett Browning had no compunction regarding the discussion of politics by women: but neither did she have the financial constraints and the familial dependents of her predecessors so was not forced to bow to the demands of popular taste in the same way. In his excellent recent work, Simon Avery has demonstrated that Barrett Browning 'consistently moved uncompromisingly into subject areas which were traditionally associated with male poets, particularly in her debates around politics and power structures', that she 'was possibly the only woman poet to continue dealing overtly with the wider political sphere during the transition from the Romantic period to the Victorian period', and that, as a result, 'she was repeatedly constructed as something of an over-reacher, a woman pushing into male terrain in ways which more conservative critics found somewhat unnerving' (Avery and Stott, 6-7). His essays, along with Rebecca Stott's, provide a thoroughgoing reassessment of Barrett Browning's work. Avery gives particular emphasis to the long-neglected political elements of her poetry, how 'the fight for democracy and liberty from tyrannical oppressors, the nature of leadership, and the need for gender equality if society is to function healthily' (54), are topics which the poet engages with consistently throughout her work. Barrett Browning was born into the political upheaval of the Napoleonic Wars, encouraged to take part in political discussions by her father, and was committed from an early age to the Whig cause he supported. *The Battle of Marathon*, her first literary work, printed privately when she was only fourteen years old, is a four-book epic focusing on one of the crucial military

campaigns of ancient Greece, and is significant for her challenging of socially endorsed roles for the sexes in the text through the use of female figures.[12] Her first formally published poems, appearing in 1821, deal with the Greek War of Independence. Her 1833 translation of *Prometheus Bound*, with its focus on the suffering caused by tyranny, was written, significantly, during the intense period of debate surrounding the Great Reform Act of 1832 (Whig legislation which sought to produce a fairer distribution of parliamentary seats and an extension of the franchise), classical myth used to highlight the lack of democracy the young poet saw in her own day, and her support for Whig reform. She 'firmly established herself in the eyes of many of her contemporaries as an astute commentator on political affairs' (Avery and Stott, 88), producing two particularly powerful works of political protest, an attack on child labour 'The Cry of the Children' in 1843, and a disturbing anti-slavery poem 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point', written in 1845 and published three years later.

Inevitably, Barrett Browning's move to Tuscany after her marriage saw a turn of focus to overtly Italian politics, *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) reflecting the changing political face of Italy during its composition (1847-1851). While Barrett Browning offsets potential criticism by a disclaimer in the 'Advertisement' to the first edition of the work, that 'No continuous narrative nor exposition of political philosophy is attempted by her' (322), she provides a confident work of astute political commentary and philosophical argument which considers the achievements and problems of the *Risorgimento*. Reviews of the

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[12] Particularly compelling is the transformation of the maternal role of Delopeia into a political one: see Avery's perceptive analysis of this work (45-54).

work were extremely mixed, the New York *Literary World* calling it 'the most eloquent tribute the Muse has yet offered to the genius of Modern Italy', while the *Guardian* reviewer judges it a complete failure and suggests that the poet 'is really not at home in politics and social philosophy'.[13] *Poems Before Congress* (1860) show Barrett Browning continuing to write with confidence and knowledge about contemporary Italian affairs. While the critical response to these works was even more negative than to her previous Italian work (see Donaldson, 1993, 81-85 for a summary), the significance of the role she forged for herself as commentator of war and politics cannot be ignored.[14] Her letters written to [largely female] friends from Florence during the Crimean War are vibrant with discussion about the war, the state of Europe, the state of England, and the political motives and morals of the key players.[15] That war is 'hideous carnage' (Letter to Miss Mitford, 11 December 1854) Barrett Browning is in no doubt, nor that political corruption in England is the cause of the war, as she discusses in bald terms in a letter to Mrs Martin, dated 13 February 1855 from Casa Guidi, just after, as her editor reminds us, 'the horrors of the Crimean winter were now becoming known' (186):

> It's the system, the system which is all one gangrene; the most corrupt system in Europe, is it not? Here is my comfort. Apart from the dreadful amount of individual suffering which cries out against us to heaven and earth, this adversity may teach us much, this shock which has struck to the heart of England may awaken us much, and this humiliation will be altogether good for

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[13] As quoted in Sandra Donaldson, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: An Annotated Bibliography of the Commentary and Criticism, 1826-1990* (New York: G.K. Hall and Co., 1993), 45.
[14] Once again Avery offers the best recent analysis of these works, and a useful summary of critical reaction to them over the past three decades; see 156-180.
[15] See Kenyon ed., 1897, II, 179-204.

> us. We have stood too long on a pedestal talking of our moral superiority, our political superiority, and all our other superiorities, which I have long been sick of hearing recounted. Here's an inferiority proved. Let us understand it and remedy it, and not talk, talk, any more. (186)

Barrett Browning's deep engagement with contemporary politics is clear; however, at this time her interest was in fact far more immersed in the state of affairs in her Italian home than in the war in the Crimea. Apart from four months in 1855, and five months in 1856, the Brownings were in Italy and France when the Crimean War was raging, away from the press saturation of war news and opinions at home. Similarly it may have been an issue of social class distance, as the Brownings were not personally affected by the war: as Armstrong notes 'It is not surprising that those in and close to the working class should have felt strongly, and written so directly, about the war, for it was *their* war' (1993, 230), not therefore the war of the Brownings. In another letter to Mrs Martin from Florence, 20 April 1855, Barrett Browning offers a sarcastic apology for the 'good spirits' (193) of her family at that time, 'Which is a shame, you will say, considering the state of affairs at Sebastopol. Forgive me. I never, at worst, thought that the great tragedy of the world was going on *there*. It was tragic, but there are more chronic cruelties and deeper despairs — ay, and more exasperating wrongs' (193). This offers an explanation as to why she did not produce any poetic writing about the Crimean War, publishing instead *Aurora Leigh* (1856) about the state of society, the place of women, and artistic endeavour in the war years. The plight of the urban poor and prostitution are what Barrett Browning judges to be the true tragedies of her contemporary society, and these are what

she writes about in her epic poem with power and confidence. She suggests, in a letter to Mrs Martin (February 1857) regarding the response to *Aurora Leigh*, that she feels it her social and moral obligation to address these issues:

> If, therefore, I move certain subjects in this work, it is because my conscience was first moved in me not to ignore them. What has given most offence in the book, more than the story of Marian — far more! — has been the reference to the condition of women in our cities. Which a woman oughtn't to refer to, by any manner of means, says the conventional tradition. Now I have thought deeply otherwise. If a woman ignores these wrongs, then may woman as a sex continue to suffer them; there is no help for any of us — let us be dumb and die. (Kenyon ed., II, 254)

Barrett Browning does, however, show concern for the role of women in the war: she is critically aware of, and concerned for, the socialized perception of the 'correct' role and attitude for women. In a letter to Anna Jameson, dated 24 February 1855, Barrett Browning expresses an ambivalent view of the work of Florence Nightingale. While honouring Nightingale as 'an earnest, noble woman' who has 'fulfilled her woman's duty where many men have failed' she expresses dismay that her work in the Crimea is 'retrograde, a revival of old virtues!':

> Since the siege of Troy and earlier, we have had princesses binding wounds with their hands; it's strictly the woman's part, and men understand it so, as you will perceive by the general adhesion and approbation on this late occasion of masculine dignities. Every man is on his knees before ladies carrying lint,

> calling them 'angelic she's,' whereas if they stir an inch as thinkers or artists from the beaten line (involving more good to general humanity than is involved in lint), the very same men would curse the impudence of the very same women and stop there. I can't see on what ground you think you see here the least gain to the 'woman question', so called. It's rather *the contrary*, to my mind, and, any way, the women of England must give precedence to the *soeurs de charité*, who have magnificently won it in all matters of this kind [...] I do not consider the best use to which we can put a gifted and accomplished woman is to *make her a hospital nurse* [...]
>
> Oh, the Crimea! How dismal, how full of despair and horror! The results will, however, be good if we are induced to come down from the English pedestal in Europe of incessant self-glorification, and learn that our close, stifling, corrupt system gives no air nor scope for healthy and effective organisation anywhere. (Kenyon ed., II, 189-190).

Certainly the contemporary press that supported the Establishment was keen to promote an iconicized version of what became the myth of Florence Nightingale and nursing in the Crimea. There was a remarkable lack of images of Nightingale tending the sick and wounded in the illustrated press, only the now legendary images of 'Lady with the Lamp', such as J.A. Benwell's depiction in *Illustrated London News* (1855). Few images told the truth of the disease scandal at Scutari, and the desperate lack of hygiene, showing instead clean patients cared for by 'ministering angels'. As Rosemary Hartill has suggested, 'the image of the 'Lady with the Lamp' became, in the public imagination, sentimentalised into a dream: a Victorian male fantasy of a gentle, feminine, domestic, presence, moving quietly from bed to bed, stroking a fevered brow, cherishing a wounded

hero, murmuring a comforting word — a merging of mother, beloved, angel, and the Virgin Mary'.[16] The myth of Nightingale as single-handed saviour of the wounded and dying has long been exploded: while she was Superintendent of Nursing in Crimean hospitals, fourteen thousand soldiers died, many of these because she and medical staff neglected elementary sanitary measures. [17] Her letters show her refusal to accept that bad hygiene had killed thousands of patients in her hospital: when she discovered what she accepted as proof of this fact after the war, she suffered a complete mental and physical collapse which marked the beginning of her life-long illness, blaming herself for the mortality rate at Scutari, which reached its peak two months after her arrival at the hospital.[18] Nightingale's arrogance and desire for centralized control over all nursing in the Crimea led to many unnecessary deaths: she pressured Lord Raglan to send more patients to Scutari instead of to the primitive hospitals at the front, run by hard-working nurses such as Mary 'Mother' Secole, who was tending the wounded on the battlefields, when supporting them could have saved lives.[19] Men who might have survived, if they had received immediate attention and not been moved, died: sending the wounded to

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[16] *Florence Nightingale: Letters and Reflections*, ed. by Rosemary Hartill (Evesham: Arthur James, 1996), 38. An interesting link can also be seen between the 'Lady of the Lamp' image and William Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* (1851-3), which appeared at the Royal Academy in 1854. The stance of the 'mystic vision of the risen Christ knocking at the door of the human soul' (Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 116-117) is clearly reflected in the images of Nightingale holding aloft her night-light. The association is obvious: Nightingale is Christ-like, doing Christ's work, iconic and deserving of devotion.

[17] Although an alarmingly large number of contemporary critics and historians seem to ignore facts and reinforce this legend: see for example Winfried Baumgart writing in 1999 'the mortality rates dropped to a degree nobody had thought possible, a suitable tribute to her superhuman effort', *The Crimean War 1853-1856* (London: Arnold, 1999), 143-4.

[18] See Hugh Small, *Florence Nightingale: Avenging Angel* (London: Constable, 1998).

[19] For a short biography of this Creole nurse who, in the face of overwhelming prejudice, nursed victims (especially cholera victims) at the front see Marie Stuart, *Mary Secole* (Bristol: Central and East Bristol Adult Continuing Education, 1993).

disease-ridden Scutari meant sending them to certain death. A staunch advocate of pro-secular nursing, Nightingale was critical of Mary Stanley and her religious nurses, who settled at Koulali hospital after conflict with Nightingale made it impossible for them to work in Scutari. Yet a public depiction of Nightingale's work as an extension of the domestic sphere provided comfort and security to a nation in the face of increasing evidence of administrative chaos and destruction of life: 'In the face of massive and shocking evidence to the contrary, England, like any warring country, needed to persuade itself of the ideality of the Crimean horrors, and just like other high values, military ones could best be reified by recourse to female allegory'.[20] The presence of women nursing at deathbeds brought a sense of ennoblement to ugly death, symbolizing that the soldiers were dying to secure domestic life at home, ultimately for the Queen herself, as representative of the nation.

Nightingale herself vehemently rejected these chivalric images of ideal womanhood, and overturned them by her insistence on taking part in practical work, for which she received censure from surgeons. She recognised the, in reality, demeaning nature of being a public icon: 'the War Office gives me tinsel and plenty of empty praise which I do not want — and does *not* give me the real business — like efficient standing which I do want'.[21] Her writings, notably in *Cassandra* (written 1850-60), reflect her contempt for the iconicization of women. Nightingale demands, 'What else is conventional life? *Passivity*

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[20] Ulrich Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 2001), 117.

[21] Florence Nightingale, *Letters from the Crimea 1854-1856*, ed. by Sue M. Goldie (Manchester: Mandolin, 1997), 213.

when we want to be active. So many hours spent every day in passively doing what conventional life tells us, when we would so gladly be at work', and 'Why have women passion, intellect, moral activity — these three — and a place in society where no one of the three can be exercised?'.[22] When Nightingale famously used a medieval image it was in 'Una and the Lion', published in *Good Words*, 1 June 1868. This was a celebration of woman's activity, a tribute to her student, Agnes Jones, who was a pioneer of workhouse nursing, and Superintendent at Liverpool Workhouse University, and a plea for women to embark on a career in nursing.[23] It is ironic, then, that Nightingale should have been created as an icon for the very social stereotypes which she, like Barrett Browning, held in such contempt. Yet, despite the confines of her public image, and the reality of her mistakes at Scutari, the effect of Nightingale on the role of women in professional public life cannot be underestimated. Iconicizing her within an acceptably female role, she was still allowed power and influence which had far reaching consequences for the nursing profession in particular, and for the role of women in social and political life in general: 'She was a moderniser, a seculariser, literally sweeping away cobwebs of ignorance and irresponsibility from public institutions; a promoter of professional training for women; an apostle of statistical surveys; a tireless worker for government commissions and

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[22] Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra and other Selections from Suggestions for Thought*, ed. by Mary Poovey (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1991), 217 and 205.

[23] As shown in *Florence Nightingale on Public Health Care*, *The Collected Works of Florence Nightingale 6*, ed. by Lynn McDonald (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2004), 290. Jones had sacrificed her comfortable privileged lifestyle for her profession: she died 17 February 1868 at the age of thirty-six, having contracted typhus at an epidemic in the hospital.

legislative enactment'.[24] War became a more suitable subject for women's comment through the activities of Florence Nightingale, and others like her, who turned the tide of women's role in society. It must be remembered that Nightingale was the most celebrated of a whole cohort of women who went and worked on the battlefield, many of whom have their experiences recorded in letters and journals.[25] These women brought respectable female activity into the public sphere, despite embodying in one sense what Barrett Browning calls 'a revival of old virtues', and being celebrated in the press as such. Nightingale's fame ensured that these innovations made during the time of war could be established in peace time society, and a profession of nurses be developed.[26]

The Crimean War, as I will demonstrate, was in fact a turning point for the use of medievalism by women in the nineteenth century, as indeed it was a turning point in the involvement of women in the public sphere. Given the pervasiveness of Victorian medievalism as a discourse, it is not surprising that, to muster support for the war effort, from its very outbreak the establishment and the Press used images of medieval chivalry and legendary heroic deeds to present an image of glorious British armies fighting an oppressor. The Crimean was 'probably the first overseas campaign when fairly large

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[24] Anne Summers, 'Ministering Angels: Victorian Ladies and Nursing Reform', in *Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Society*, ed. by Gordon Marsden (Harlow: Longman, 1990) 121-133, 123.

[25] See, for example, the records of Sarah Anne Terrot in Robert G. Richardson, *Nurse Sarah Anne* (London: John Murray, 1977), and Kate Hobson's letters, as shown in W.F. Hobson, *Catherine Leslie Hobson, Lady Nurse, Crimean War, and Her Life* (London: Parker, 1888)

[26] Piers Compton provides a useful summary of the varied roles of women in the Crimean War in *Colonel's Lady and Camp Follower: The Story of Women in the Crimean War* (London: Robert Hall and Company, 1970).

numbers of those involved were able to read and write'.[27] Coverage of the war saw the innovation of hundreds of letters being published in contemporary newspapers, from fighting men, doctors and family back at home, many of which spoke of the horrors of the war and of the incompetence shown by those directing it. The initial surge of patriotism which followed the first shedding of English blood in September 1854 saw the Press saturated with images of medieval chivalry and heroism: but, by the end of the year, accusations of gross mismanagement emerged to challenge this jingoism. In her insightful study of the literature of the Crimean War, which focuses on newspaper reportage of events in the East, Cynthia Dereli traces the change in mood of the press. She shows how a combination of elements critical of the war — an increase in accusations of military incompetence, William Russell's reportage of the suffering of the sick and wounded, the influx of letters, often giving firsthand accounts of suffering, printed starkly in an 'unmediated and decontexualised' way — were balanced by an all-pervading use of 'patriotic, heroic or jingoistic language. No newspaper was ever free from it'.[28] Inseparable from this was the special role for the poet in time of war: 'Most poets in 1855 were clearly aware of a special responsibility and a power to influence the public by contributing to (with individual poems) or complementing (with collections) the coverage of the war in journals and newspapers'(112). Poets who supported the Government and military hierarchy used images of the medieval crusade to express their patriotism, and to gain support for a war waged for questionable motives: casting the war as a crusade against an over-ambitious aggressor, this war actually subverted the *raison*

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[27] Philip Warner, *The Crimean War: A Reappraisal* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1972; repr. 2001), 2.
[28] Cynthia Dereli, *A War Culture in Action: A Study of the Literature of the Crimean War Period* (Bern: Lang, 2003), 47 and 49.

d'etre of the medieval crusades, as it was fought in support of a Muslim ally against a Christian foe whose expansionism was feared.

Nowhere was the imagery of the crusade more rife than in the vast range of poetry written to commemorate the now infamous example of military mismanagement and ambiguous orders, the Charge of the Light Brigade, at the Battle of Balaklava, 25 October 1854. William Russell, *The Times*'s correspondent in the Crimea, who more than any other source exposed the horrors and farcical elements of the War to the attention of the public, had his own spin on this use of chivalric simile for the Charge: he compared the undertaking to an adventure of Don Quixote.[29] Most obviously, despite his own ambiguous attitude to the war, Tennyson contributed to this chivalric presentation of the military muddle with his eulogistic 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', first printed in the *Examiner*, 9 December 1854.[30] It is worth noting that as many women as men can be seen to glorify the battle with chivalric images. For Caroline Hayward, writing in 1855, it is Lord Cardigan who succeeds to the 'lion-heart' of the crusading Richard I.[31] Lydia Melland describes the Charge as, 'the Pride of Modern Chivalry' ('The 24th Anniversary of October 25th 1854' (1878), 155-156): Helen Macgregor agrees that 'No shade hath past o'er England's star,/ No rust hath dimmed her steel', despite the fact that the Charge

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[29] See Patrick Waddington, *"Theirs But To Do and Die": The Poetry of the Charge of The Light Brigade at Balaklava, 25 October 1854* (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1995), 9.
[30] For a detailed study of the writing of Tennyson's famous work, see Edgar Shannon and Christopher Ricks, '"The Charge of the Light Brigade": The Creation of a Poem', in *Studies in Bibliography: Papers of the Bibliographic Society of the University of Virginia*, 38, 1985, 1-44.
[31] 'The Battle of Balaclava, and the Unparalleled Heroic, but Deeply to Be Lamented Charge of the Light Cavalry, through a Mistaken Order'; see Waddington, 111. Page references in this section refer to this anthology, unless otherwise stated.

was a demonstration that contemporary 'strife prove harder,/ Than e'en in days gone by' ('Balaklava', *Lays of the Crimea* 1855, 68). Excessive patriotism marks Helen Nash's 'Balaklava' (*Alma. Balaklava*, 1855), which maintains that at the Charge, 'Each British hand grasped firm his sword,/ Each British heart was stirred' (36). The poem concludes, 'We thundered out three British cheers,/ Exulting in our deed!/ And there's not one of us would shrink Again to brave the strife,/ For Freedom and fair England's sake/ Each man would give his life!' (37), apparently ignoring both the reasons for the battle and the outcome of the Charge.[32] The chivalry of the Crimean War is class-based, that of the nobility and aristocracy: the Light Brigade, the cream of the British army, was seen by many critics as a symbol of the aristocracy, despite the fact that it had many ordinary soldiers in its number. This identification of the Crimean War with an aristocratic chivalry meant that metaphors of medieval heroism were used by its supporters only, its detractors parodying this very element. *Punch* presented countless satirical cartoons, such as one suggesting that to the old guard British Cavalry officers the war was a variation of fox-hunting over their estates. *Our Guards. They can Play; and by Jove They Can Fight Too* (25 February 1854), juxtaposes a cartoon of an officer leading a lady to dance at a society ball alongside one of the same officer sending his troops into battle: the implication being that these grotesquely antithetical situations were approached with the same attitude, the equation of battle with ballroom symbolically rendering killing and dying more bearable to well-bred gentlemen.

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[32] The work was published anonymously, but Waddington makes a convincing case for the publisher, Helen Nash, to also be the author (35-36).

The poetic response by opponents of this chivalric patriotism was to highlight the gulf between the war conditions for the aristocratic officer class and the starving majority of the ordinary soldiers.[33] A 'Poet of the People' subverted Tennyson's *Maud* (1855) in *Anti-Maud* (1855), a work that 'sees the war as a ruthless attempt to repress social protest by deflecting attention overseas' (Armstrong, 1993, 271). This work suggests that the Crimean War was a further means of oppressing the starving poor, who are used as cannon fodder. War demands 'the poor man's earnings, the poor man's blood!', and sees resources that could be used to help the poor fed instead into military pursuits. *Anti-Maud* highlights the concern that alongside the war, the social problems caused by poverty were engulfing the country. Many critics saw the war as a means by which the Government could divert attention from the pressing Home concerns: 'Bread Riots' in response to the unaffordable price of food occurred simultaneously with British involvement with the Crimea (September/October 1854). It is worth noting that Dickens's *Household Words* published Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* in weekly parts from September 1854, flanked consistently by items emphasising the plight of the poor, in contrast to the rest of the war-obsessed society, keeping this major domestic issue alive. The Crimean War provoked a storm of antagonism and division within the British army and society, and became a focus for social reform: disturbing reports from the war led to a challenge to the traditional aristocratic military control by the middle-class, the newest force in British politics, which had lasting repercussions throughout society. Scandalous death statistics of war brought to light inconceivable military incompetence, and showed that survival in

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[33] Famous examples later in the century include Tom Taylor's 'Charge of the Light Brigade' in *Punch*, 6 November 1875, and Gilbert Arthur à Beckett's 'The Last Charge of the Light Brigade' (*Punch*, 26 April 1890) with its vitriolic anger at the plight of destitute, ordinary soldiers returned from Crimea.

war was, more than anything else, a matter of social status. *The Times*'s William Russell was foremost in bringing the plight of the common soldier to the public attention and caused outrage: 'These are the hard truths, which sooner or later must have come to the ears of the people of England. [...] They should know that the wretched beggar who wanders about the streets of London in the rain leads the life of a prince compared with the British soldiers who are fighting for their country'.[34] Russell's reportage led to a huge fund-raising campaign to provide resources for the army, the establishment of the 'Patriotic Fund' to provide help for the families of common soldiers killed in action, and to Sidney Herbert's approach to Florence Nightingale to take a group of nurses to Scutari to try and improve health provision. For many, social inequalities which war brought to the fore were more shocking than the actual fighting: in her poetry of the war Adelaide Proctor can be seen 'refusing superficial heroism and narrow patriotism' (Armstrong, 1993, 336) and considering instead the question of social inequalities. In 'The Lesson of the War' (1855) Proctor reflects the idea that the Crimean War has brought to forefront the question of social inequality, rich and poor united in the common experience of grief and loss: 'Oh you who rule the nation,/ Take now the toil-worn hand — /Brothers you are in sorrow,/ In duty to your land'.[35]

Images of chivalry had always to some extent been used as a means of official and unofficial propaganda for war, but the vehemence of their use in the Crimean War

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[34] As shown in Matthew Paul Lalumia, *Realism and Politics in Victorian Art of the Crimean War* (Epping: Bowker, 1984), 46.

[35] Adelaide Anne Proctor, *Legends and Lyrics: A Book of Verses*, 2 vols (London: Bell and Sons, 1858), I: 184.

reached a hitherto unknown degree, hiding the true plight of soldier and poor alike: this factor paved the way for the saturation of images of chivalry which marked the beginning of the First World War.[36] Given this fact, it is not surprising that the use of the medieval motif as a screen through which socio-political protest can be voiced is drastically reduced: it is one thing to hide behind a screen in order to make political comment, but quite another to appear to be supporting the very Establishment line which you want to reject, by so doing. On this background where chivalric images are used as a means of containing increasingly active women in a passive domestic role, it is unsurprising that women writers reject it as a means of expressing their views on war and use it instead, as Barrett Browning did, to highlight the suffocating social stereotypes of Victorian ideology. In *The Lay of the Stork* (1856), Louisa Stuart Costello takes up the same argument articulated by Barrett Browning with a work which explores women's exclusion from the discussion and politics that can prevent war: the only activity open to the heroine Lila is as a nurse.[37] Costello was using the term *Lay* advisedly, not just for ornament's sake or as a general term for a romance-style work[38]: a scholar of medieval

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[36] For example, Girouard looks at Scott's use of the medieval in his war poetry of the Peninsula Wars, such as *The Field of Waterloo* which 'triumphantly associates mediaeval and modern chivalry' (32). Bainbridge demonstrates the major role of poetry during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, opening his work by exploring the instantaneous effect on morale when Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* was read to troops in the Iberian Peninsular (1). So, when Hemans and Landon hide their protest behind a medieval screen they appear, on the surface, to be emulating a widely celebrated, patriotic, near-predecessor. See Girouard, 276-293 for an account of the frequency of images of chivalry during the First World War.

[37] Louisa Stuart Costello, *The Lay of the Stork* (London: Cash, 1856).

[38] This is in contrast to how many of her contemporaries use terms for the forms of their work indiscriminately: for example, Barrett Browning uses the terms 'romaunt', 'lay', 'rhyme', 'romance' synonymously in the titles of her works and in her letters to describe works generally fitting in with the ballad form, which Marjorie Stone categorizes as 'narrative poems with clear affinities either with the characteristic features of the ballad form (the ballad stanza, the use of dialogue and the refrain, tragic and/or

poetry, in using this Middle English word (taken from Old French *lai*) to describe the form of her work, Costello immediately distances it in an actual medievalized past. In the body of the poem, the reader is not given an indication that Costello is telling a contemporary story until mention of Scutari almost three quarters of the way through the work (73), when the 'band of pilgrims blest,/ Speeding onward to the East' become identifiable as Nightingale's nurses. Costello thus demonstrates that the discussion of repressive social gender codes has as much relevance for the present day as in the medieval past, by this subversion of the usual telling of an antique tale in the present, by telling a modern story as if it was ancient.

The strange tale of a secluded girl, mysterious legend of a stork, and the denouement's revelation about the identity of the Asian Captain Khalid, actually German Wilhelm, is the very stuff of romance. If the 'necessary ingredients' of a Romantic romance — by which I mean that popularised in the Romantic period, 1780s-1832 — are 'a love relationship central to the plot; a hero, heroine and a villain; journeys, adventures and escapes; the supernatural or magical' and importantly a heroine who too becomes a 'questing subject' (Labbe, 2), Costello's *Lay* is cast as an example of this genre: Khalid/Wilhelm and Lila are the heroic couple with War itself cast as the villain. Contrary to the parameters Labbe establishes as essential to Romance, however, Costello's *Lay* offers a 'happily ever after' ending and a lovers' reunion, with Khalid/Wilhelm further graced by the discovery that he is the long-lost heir to the estate

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topical subject matter, narrative compression and intensity) or with the larger tradition of 'minstrelsy' and Romantic narrative verse' (1995, 102).

neighbouring Lila's. At first glance Costello's final two sections headed 'Reward' and 'Happy' leave the twenty-first century reader with the same chill of dissatisfaction as Landon's *The Troubadour*, as the unworthy hero seems to be the one rewarded for his faults. However, further investigation of Costello's conclusion shows that the reward is actually Lila's not Wilhelm's: he has to learn to obey and accept Lila as a flesh and blood woman not as the chivalric icon of his imaginings. It is also significant that the castle to which Wilhelm is heir, on The Mountain of the Faithful Wives, is one that had been defended by the courage of women, in recognition of which the victorious besiegers allow the women their freedom and to take whatever treasure they prized most, so 'the robust heroines each shouldered her husband, and marched down the mountain triumphantly', as Costello reiterates in a footnote (125, note 42). Wilhelm's birthright is thus one imbued with the significance of the activity and courage of women. Costello is in fact taking the archetypal elements of Romantic romance and overturning them to demand, not 'strong heroes and passive, beautiful heroines' (Labbe, 2), but a hero who recognizes the heroine's own strength and activity. It is here that we pinpoint the reason for Costello's use of a medieval form: her main concern in the work is not actually the discussion of war, or of love, but of the impossible position of women in society, as powerful, yet impotent, icons. It is in war, especially a theatrical war of spectacle like the Crimea, where courtly roles of active knight and passive lady are most clearly demonstrated: by medievalizing her tale of war, Costello shows that the ornamental iconicization of women in Victorian society, like that in medieval courtly romance, is actually humiliating to the passive idols it renders impotent.

Lila, Costello's female protagonist, is cast as the Lady of Shalott, a legend Costello had also explored in 'The Funeral Boat' (1829)[39]. She lives in a 'shelter'd castle' (3) and is the subject of legend: 'the ling'ring boatman tells Dreamy tales, in soften'd tone,/ Of an orphan maid, that dwells/ In those lofty towers — alone' (4). Lila seems magical and separate from the rest of the village, 'For, 'tis said, some mystic power/ Gives her knowledge over all' (5): we are also told 'Lila lives — apart — alone' (6). Lila has chosen to be a hermit so she can think, away from the 'falseness and imperfect show' (10) of society: unlike the Lady of Shalott, her solitary life is self-enforced to aid her search for knowledge. Lila is strangely ageless, young but struck by the 'withering blight' of age (8): she is otherworldly throughout the work, appearing like a 'fairy' (73) to the wounded Khalid at Scutari. At the end of work Lila returns to her castle in 'a bark' (106), in a reversal of the Lady of Shalott's end: Lila is similarly mistress of her own destiny, but is going to, not from, the castle, and is alive and revitalized, rewarded because her 'goal was truth and love' (108).

Costello exposes the trap in which women are placed in contemporary society. Although they may have the '*will*' (11, Costello's italics) to seek knowledge, they must suppress this urge, sacrifice their will and suffer in silence:

> Ah! Should not man's confession be
>
> An infant knows as much as he?

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[39] I shall discuss this work in the Conclusion.

And how shall feeble woman dare

The height from whence the learned fall?

Shall she, who may not even share

His solemn vigils — seek at all?

The *will* to crush, to immolate,

All pangs to bear and to conceal,

Is woman's long accepted fate,—

She shrinks not back in woe or weal:

But, if she hope and strive alone,

No light upon her way, to shine,

—The star that beckoned onward gone —

Will not her strength at last decline?

And all her visions, great and high,

Vanish in chill reality! (11)

Lila's self-enforced physical separation from society reflects the mental and spiritual position it has forced upon her as a woman absorbed in thinking about world issues in a society which bars her from political discussion. She longs for the opportunity to contribute to the forming of a new world, 'A new existence to create,/ To banish falsehood, hatred, strife,/ And give the world another life' (12). Lila, although clearly not in a public role, takes an equally transgressive position by placing herself outside of society: this situation is far from domestic, although she longs for love — family love, romantic love, friendship. Her role and her philanthropic view of society is one which is generally scorned: she is an object of pity to the 'courtly maidens' after their rare visits,

and an object of ridicule to villagers, 'The hermit Lila is their jest' (7). Lila realizes that her objection to society's iconicization of women brings her derision:

> Because I shrink, appall'd to view
> The cruel pomp of selfish state,
> While woe and sordid cares pursue
> Those worthier than the rich and great;
> They deem me an enthusiast lost,
> And smile, with silent scorn, to see
> The follies and the joys they boast,
> Are held as crimes by such as me.
> Yes — crimes — while poverty and woe
> Are pleading, trembling at their gate,
> Their only care is — not to know, —
> They dare to bid the wretched — wait!
> And yet they talk of woman's place
> As all too lowly for her soul,
> And bid her quit her narrow space
> And strive for mast'ry and control.
> They crush the glow-worm at their feet
> While reaching to the stars above,
> And slight, for power undue — unmeet —
> Mercy and tenderness and love! (19-20)

Lila rails against this courtly ornamental positioning of women, recognizing the actual humility of the role: society iconicizes women (those of her aristocratic caste) into a place of passivity from where they are ignored and impotent. Lila insists,

> Vain is it to be lifted high,
>
> If, from the gems that light the sky,
>
> No beam upon the earth is thrown,
>
> And those who gaze, admire alone,
>
> Nor hope nor feel a ray can cheer;
>
> So great the distance from their sphere. (21)

By contrast, Lila offers practical help to the villagers, rebuilding the nearby village on a 'spot of pleasant ground' (7) after it was discovered that the gorge in which it lay was unhealthy and causing disease. To those around her she is queenly, perceived as all-powerful because of her status and wealth, 'And I — the last of all my line,/ Can, at my will, a world command,/ And hold a sceptre in my hand,/ because in gold such spirits dwell/ Can bind all creatures to its spell'(12-13), but she herself recognizes the impotence of her position, for all but the most basic activities.

The story of the young German girl in the Introduction, who writes to find out to where storks migrate, only to find that the messenger bird is shot, identifies Costello's other major concern from the outset, that violence — and war — prevent knowledge. Here violence and war are cast as the male domain in contrast to the female sphere of knowledge and investigation. The choice of the stork is a notably female one, with the

bird's mythical associations with childbirth, and one which Costello's detailed notes show she made deliberately. Costello herself draws on the myth of the stork as self-immolator: unable to save or leave her young in a burning nest she returns to perish with them (117, note 15), again reflecting the role of the mother. The stork is sent as woman's messenger, intended to spread Lila's life-affirming message of 'woman's sympathy' (29), peace and love, and sent to gather knowledge. That the stork is killed by Youssouf symbolizes men's violence destroying woman's message of peace, and the refusal by [male] society to listen to women's ideas for peace. While the tribe denounce Youssouf, because of the superstitions of bad fortune falling on whoever kills a stork, Khalid praises Youssouf's act of violence, 'Well shot — dear Youssouf — thou wilt show/ Such prowess on the Russian foe' (63). Significantly, the stork also has associations with war and violence: Costello describes the birds flying in 'countless ranks' (23), a merciless airborne army who kill any stragglers who cannot keep up with the flight by attacking them with 'their jav'lin-beaks' (37). Storks are also said to be war's heralds: if they leave their nests and build others hurriedly in trees it is a sign of forthcoming battle.[40] In this respect they are as equally related to Khalid's fate as to Lila's. Khalid is a warrior who has only ever conquered in battle (52), but who also fosters 'tender visions' of peace on earth, 'That Truth should like a Phoenix soar/ And war and hatred rule no more' (55). Like Lila, society perceives Khalid to be blest, when he too is actually isolated, orphaned in a foreign land far from the German estate to which he is heir. As a result of the dominance of violence, Khalid reads Lila's message too late, 'This angel music sounds

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[40] See *Funk and Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, ed. by Maria Leach (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 1083.

too late,/ It cannot charm the force of Fate!': his is 'the voice that rouses carnage', so he chooses to ignore the plea for peace, showing his 'tender visions' to be meaningless. Thus comes the war, the horror that rages on after the years of peace following the Napoleonic Wars. Costello does not shrink from the vivid description of the horrors of war with the 'full tides of crimson gore/ And mangled forms, from either host,/ Hurl'd down, and in abysses lost' (66), and 'plains, thick strewn — yet desolate —/ Where mangled forms, like sandheaps, lie' (81). Costello's horror at war, and those who instigate battles, is evident throughout her work, from 'On Reading the Account of the Battle of Waterloo', written in 1815 when the poet was only sixteen years old. Here Costello shows repugnance at the idea of delight in military victories:

> Oh when the glory does their hearts inspire,
>
> Did they reflect what woes some bosoms fire?
>
> Oh did their thoughts fly to the battle plain,
>
> And mark the writhing agony and pain,
>
> And hear the cries, and see the bleeding slain!
>
> Ah! sure no more their hearts with joy would bound,
>
> But shrink in horror from the vict'ry's sound.[41]

War can only mean suffering and death. In her description of the war in the *Lay*, Costello turns her focus to woman's role, woman proving herself constant in the face of danger and willing to leave safety of domestic sphere and do duty and deeds of mercy: 'Let her quit all joy and pleasure,/ All the triumphs beauty gave,/ Home and quiet, power and

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[41] As shown in Armstrong, Bristow, with Sharrock, eds, 204.

leisure,/ And go forth — to help and save'. Fighting in battle is a male domain — women are the observers and the passive sufferers:

> Sisters! there your brothers lie:
> Mothers! there your sons are prone
> Wives! your husbands mangled die,
> Bleeding-fever'd-crush'd-alone! (71)

This anguish is epitomized in Saba's misery when her only son Youssouf is killed in battle (76). When Lila's message is ignored she takes the only activity open to her, that of nursing, joining the 'band of pilgrims blest' (72), the'angel band' (73), of Nightingale's Scutari nurses. There is an overt sense that, if women were allowed in politics, the war would never have happened; as it is, their only role is to clean up the man-made mess afterwards. Lila's message, which Khalid has held at his breast, miraculously saves his life, symbolizing the life-affirming nature of the message, which if listened to could have stopped the death and misery of war: peace, when it comes, brings with it shame at the 'angry past' and war (94).

Lila takes on mythical qualities again at the work's conclusion: only she can heal the reopened wounds of Khalid/Wilhelm, who having been bewitched by the magical temptress Minnè ('Minnè in German signifies love', 126, note 43), forgets Lila. He embarks upon the vain pursuit of the enchantress for a year and a day, behaving with the 'error of wild youth' to such an extent that 'modest maidens turn'd away/Nor cared to meet his hardy gaze' (99). In this Lila takes on a role like that of Galahad who, as the

purest knight, is the only one able to heal the wounds of the Maimed King[42]: she, her true identity hidden, is thus brought to the position of control and activity, telling her patient that it is his role 'to obey her, and to live' (103). Wilhelm, however, fails to recognise his disguised nurse, and announces that she is his love, not the morally and socially lofty Lila, who seems too high and unattainable for him: 'Holy and high let Lila be — / But thou — oh, be thou all to me!' (104). Thus in order to win her hand he has to pass her test, and forsake the iconic Lila, with her castle, wealth and lands, in favour of the 'lowly handmaid', the nurse whose skill and activity had brought him back to health. Wilhelm insists, 'Speak not of station or of state/ those are but toys to minds like thine' (105). Significantly, Wilhelm can only be rewarded when he has accepted Lila's humanity, particularly her 'mind', not just adored her as an empty chivalric icon. Lila demands the right to share her life only with one who can identify his romantic 'dream' (107) in the active flesh and blood woman, irrespective of her social status.

Another hugely significant factor for the demise of women writing about war and politics behind a safe historical shield was the increased involvement of women in these 'public' areas, notably Florence Nightingale, her fellow nurses and, not least, the queen herself. Despite the fact that legislative and executive powers over the army had passed from Crown to Parliament, the queen maintained her symbolism as the reason why the soldiers were fighting. In the bourgeois phenomenon of her monarchy, Victoria was simultaneously able to embody the icon of chivalry, Britannia, the high-born lady for

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[42] See Thomas Malory, *Works*, ed. by Eugene Vinaver, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 604, lines 15-21.

whom it is noble to fight and die, and the mother-figure, the soldiers an extension of her family, imbued with sacred domestic ties and the ideal of hearth and home, in whose defence they die. A substantial amount of the patriotic medieval poetry of the period focused on the role of the monarch, with images of Richard I and Henry V popular, and as such 'served to recall an old tradition, not only of heroic deeds in battle, but also of kingship, order and national unity' (Dereli, 115). This idea was also reinforced by the view of Victoria as the present day representative of these virtues, imbued with the even greater emotive sense of the queen as embodiment of waiting wife and mother. Victoria's letters show her clear political engagement with the war, recording her fears that great changes will take place 'in the whole position of the Eastern Question and the War, without our having the power to direct them or even a complete knowledge of them', her insistence to be consulted about everything causing no little annoyance to Clarendon.[43] Women throughout the country followed Victoria's example of knitting socks and mittens and sending them with notes of sympathy to unknown soldiers, a symbolic as well as practical act as it underlined the conventional demarcation of gender roles in times of war. Keller has succinctly summarized the iconic importance of the Queen:

> As a feminized space the home-front provided an ideal arena of symbolic action for Queen Victoria who was perhaps more deeply than any other female contemporary implicated in the gender-specific division of labor, or rather of feeling fostered by the Crimean War. In her, the individual personally and sincerely concerned with the lot of suffering soldiers and the noble angel acting

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[43] See J.B. Conacher, *Britain and the Crimea, 1855-56: Problems of War and Peace* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1987), 143 and 158.

> out the pain and guilt of the nation in carefully crafted public rituals entered into a strange, inextricable union. (178)

Victoria became the self-styled personification of 'the girl left behind' for the British soldiers, but showed a genuine interest and concern with the troubles of the army: she wrote to Sidney Herbert on 6 December 1854, asking that his wife would 'let me see frequently the accounts she receives from Miss Nightingale..., as I hear *no details of the wounded* though I see so many from officers etc., about the battlefield and naturally the former must interest *me* more than anyone' (Victoria's italics, as shown Keller, 179). Her journal records deep anxiety for the plight of the common soldier, and her albums of photographs of the sick and wounded are labelled with intricate and accurate medical descriptions. Despite this engagement, Victoria refused to believe stinging attacks on government and army hierarchy from *The Times*, but had to accept the effect they were having on society. As Keller notes, 'for a public which still conceived of warfare in the old-fashioned categories of personal heroism, chivalrous etiquette and lofty political ideals the anonymity and inefficiency of the war machinery triggered severe disillusionment which came close to eroding the existing social and political order' (190). When, in the winter of 1855, a dangerous rift in the constitutional class relationships began to open up, largely provoked by the class inequalities and military disasters that the Crimean War had thrown into relief, the queen and her advisors astutely recognized that the best way to heal this was to get public sentiment on board. They therefore orchestrated lavish ceremonies that fostered more loyalty than any constitutional doctrine could.

As Keller's title, *The Ultimate Spectacle: A Visual History of the Crimean War*, suggests, the Crimean War was a spectacular one, in the sense that it was observed at first-hand more widely than any before: it was 'the first historical instance when modern institutions such as picture journalism, lithographic presses and metropolitan show business combined to create a war in their own image' (ix). Covered fully on the spot by the press in both words and pictures, the Crimean War thus can be seen as 'the first war of the modern era' (Lalumia, xx). As well as illustrations from a wide variety of sources, and first-hand written dispatches, the Crimea was the first major armed conflict in history to be photographically recorded, Roger Fenton's collection of around 360 images being a landmark in records of war.[44] A novel, if grotesque, part of this idea of war as spectacle was the role of women as observers of actual battles: the spring and summer of 1855, a period of rising optimism for an anticipated victory, saw Crimean tourism becoming an industry. In a letter of 2 June 1855, Colonel Hodge wrote with incredulous irony, 'There are a great many ladies out here and I fully expect to see some excursion steamers come out from England soon with Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool on board' (as shown by Keller, 11). In a pair of watercolours, the Earl of Cadogan considered the horror of this situation, portraying an actual incident of an officer and his wife going to a popular lookout spot to 'enjoy' the bombardment of Sebastopol from where, the next day, the

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[44] Fenton, however, avoided all controversial subjects like trench conditions and the horror of the hospitals in his work, possibly to preserve his Royal Patronage. He produced largely portraits of those in command, similar to the old-style of battle art which Elizabeth Thompson was to subvert in her work twenty years later. Failing to depict the 95% of ordinary troops his 'photographs showed, if anything, what the Crimean War was not like' (Lalumia, 121), sidestepping fact to provide a comforting vision for those at home. Jennifer Green-Lewis provides an interesting comparison of the rosy view of the Crimean in Fenton's photographs with the gritty realism of Matthew Brady's photographs of the American Civil War; see *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 97-144.

wife sees soldiers carrying her husband's body out of battle: a modern day, true-life equivalent of Landon's 'Roland's Tower'. The Crimea became a kind of Eglinton Tournament for those who had the means, or desire, to travel the three thousand miles and spectate. Military as well as civilian groups, however, cultivated this habit of viewing: the obsessive parading of troops by generals receiving widespread criticism, notably in cartoons in *Punch*.

It is this surge of the spectacular and visual aspects of war that Victoria and her advisors used for their own ends, the queen embarking on highly publicized invalid receptions, hospital visits and medal distributions, as Napoleon I had to assuage the memories of his exceptionally bloody campaigns. While Victoria's ceremonies had comparable political purposes, the result was far more successful, as the person of Victoria, as credible non-military, caring feminine leader, was imbued with all the ideology for which the war was being fought, an extension of hearth and home. Her role thus 'stands out as the single most effective effort undertaken by anyone to impose safe meanings on the volatile Crimean War experience, to reabsorb its disruptive potential into the matrix of domestic culture' (Keller, 191). The queen represented traditional meanings and national unity, which helped to integrate a contradictory social structure in the face of political crisis: in exhibiting this role in public ceremonies, Victoria was drawing on centuries of feudal ritual, which, '*was* the constitution; it regulated the hierarchical relationship of different social groups, and speeches, gestures and imagery were used by the participants to remind each other of their mutual obligations' (Keller, 191). The difference in this bourgeois chivalry instigated by Victoria was that there was a greater sense that all

soldiers, irrespective of social rank, could become Queen's Knights: the award of the Victoria Cross, newly instituted for Crimean heroes, was first conferred in a ceremony 26 June,1857, and, in a sensational departure from tradition, was given to all who deserved it, whether general or private. This came in stark contrast to the established military accolades, like the Order of the Bath, which were reserved only for high staff officers.

Another result of the remarkable 'number of non-combatants who were able to wander around' (Warner, 158) in the Crimean War was the number of wives who left written accounts and journals of their time in the East. The most significant is perhaps the journal of Mrs Henry Duberly, who followed her husband at her own expense, and was the only officer's wife to last the whole campaign. Frances Duberly provides eye-witness accounts in a manner that can often seem naïve and callous to a twenty-first century reader: her consistent worries about procuring a decent cook and servants, written while vividly describing tales of brutal atrocities handed out to Greek families by Turkish soldiers, seem absurd.[45] However, she does provide insightful criticism of her first-hand experience of administrative incompetence. Of the failure of hospital administration she writes, 'Why can we not tend our own sick? Why are we so helpless and so broken down? Oh England! England! Blot out the lion and the unicorn: let the supporters of your arms henceforth be, Imbecility and Death!' (164). She also records significant instances of behaviour by British officers which falls far from any ideal, such as her wry recollection of her shock at the three cavalry officers who ride over and horse-whip a

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[45] See Frances Isabella Duberly, *Journal Kept During the Russian War: from the departure of the army from England in April 1854, to the Fall of Sebastopol* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1855), 239-240.

Tartar who has appealed for protection: 'civilization (perhaps because he has not been introduced) rides over the man who is defenceless and wronged, or rids himself of him with the thong of his hunting whip. Let us sing "Te Deum" for civilisation, Christianity, and the Golden Rule' (245). Frances Duberly presents other grotesque images of war, a wounded English officer of the 90th regiment who had been taken prisoner by the Russians and is left under a heap of dead bodies, driven mad by lack of food and medical attention: she sees him 'yelling and naked. I think the impression made upon me by the foul heap of green and black, glazed and shrivelled flesh, I shall never be able to throw entirely away — once perhaps the life and world of some loving woman's heart' (285). She records post-battle scenes at Little Redan where 'The ground was covered with patches and half-dried pools of blood, caps soaked in blood and brains, broken bayonets, and shot and shell' (286). The queen was highly contemptuous of what she considered Mrs Duberly's unfeminine behaviour, and refused the dedication of the published journal to her: but the fact remains that this journal was actually published in 1855, a woman writing openly, and often critically, about the politics and horrors of war from first-hand experience.

Frances Duberly had, of course, nothing to lose by this endeavour, since she did not write for a living and had private means enough to support herself: but the publication of her journal shows a public who, although only recently coming to terms with Russell's reportage, was open to reading a woman's records of war.[46] John Sweetman provides an

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[46] Frances Duberly went on to publish *Campaigning Experiences in Rajpootana and Central India, during the suppression of the Mutiny, 1857-1858* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1859), providing a 'faithful

interesting comparison of Duberly's work and that of Ellen (Nell) Butler, the wife of a private who sailed to the Crimea to join her husband on 7 April 1854. While the six women who were officially taken per regiment had a potentially dangerous and difficult life, it was a far better one than to be left behind 'likely to endure a squalid existence in penury, reliant on the mercy of unsympathetic poor law commissioners'.[47] In contrast to Frances Duberly, Ellen Butler scribbled her memories in an old exercise book, and returned from the war to poverty and illness, being widowed soon after the war as her husband did not recover from his war wounds. At first refused official financial help, she went on to campaign with others for the instigation of a war widows' pension: her journal remains to offer an account of the war from the little-heard voice of the wife of a lower-ranked, lower-class soldier.

The widespread re-appropriation of the medieval motif by war's supporters and the establishment, as part of the popularization of chivalry as a discourse for the English gentleman, was thus not the only reason for the decrease in women writers using medievalism to protest about war and society: the greater freedom of women to write, without crippling censure, and to be involved in politics as the century progressed also contributed to this. 1854, the year of the outbreak of war, saw publication of Barbara Leigh Smith's *Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws of*

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record' of the mutiny 'As little idea can be gathered from the disconnected letters published in the newspapers' (v). In the Preface she is seen pre-empting any criticism by entreating, 'I trust that I shall be pardoned if occasionally I am tempted to touch upon points which may seem beyond a woman's province' (v). She, however, follows this show of humility by demonstrating her knowledge of, and political engagement with, the army, proposing changes in army administration, particularly a sabbatical year for every seventh year of an officer's service.

[47] John Sweetman, *The Crimean War* (London and Chicago: Osprey, 2001), 80.

England Concerning Women, Leigh Smith moved by cases such as Caroline Norton's to write it, at a time when married women were being awarded greater right to own property in most of the states in USA. In 1866 Leigh Smith proposed the first petition on women's suffrage, signed by 1521 people, to John Stuart Mill, who made his first presentation of the Private Members' Bill on suffrage to the House of Commons 7 June 1866, thus officially beginning the campaign to enfranchise women which would continue throughout the century.[48] Despite being denied the vote, women were using long-held political influence as Pamela Horn has noted: 'if women's *direct* political role was circumscribed by traditional 'separate spheres' arguments and by the restrictions of electoral law, *indirectly* they could exercise considerable influence'.[49] Political hostesses, largely wives of MPs, had considerable influence: Lady Louisa Knightley campaigned on behalf of her ill MP husband, and secured his seat in the 1885 General Election, when many other Tories were losing theirs as a result of the enfranchisement of agricultural labourers under 1884 Reform Act. The 1880s saw the creation of a number of auxiliary political organizations for women, as a result of the 1883 Illegal Practices Act, which limited candidates' electioneering expenditure, so unpaid female canvassers and election organizers became invaluable.[50] Joan Perkin has effectively summarized the significance

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[48] The signatories including Florence Nightingale, cousin of Leigh Smith. Nightingale was to write to John Stuart Mill, 11 August 1867, 'That women should have the suffrage, I think no one can be more deeply convinced than I' (52), but felt it was very far from being achieved, and that other issues were more pressing evils, such as the inability of married women to possess property in their own right.

[49] Pamela Horn, *Ladies of the Manor: Wives and Daughters in Country-house Society 1830-1918* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1991), 169. Some aristocratic women had been openly involved in politics but had received much censure as a result: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire participated in the 1784 Westminster election bringing 'much calumny upon her head in the process' (Davidoff and Hall, 2002, xxiii).

[50] It is worth noting that women had been used throughout the century as canvassers on a less formal basis: in 1837 Anne Lister records her canvassing work in her journal. Dorothy Thompson sees the significance

of these bodies; 'In the new sphere to which they had been summoned women proved themselves of immense value, and by doing so broke down the old belief that politics was exclusively a man's job' (Perkin, 1989, 309).

The first of these organizations, the Conservative Primrose League, was established in 1883, and significantly applied pseudo-medieval terminology to its members, referring to them as Knights and Dames and to its branches as 'habitations'.[51] Thus by the application of medieval terms a progressive organisation was able to appear more proper and suitable for ladies: this would be particularly important for women in landed society who were often entirely dependent on families for sustenance, and so were unwilling to create hostility and join more overtly forward-thinking organisations such as Women's Social and Political Union. As Patricia Hollis has stated, 'Both suffragists and antisuffragists agreed by the late 1880s, as did most MPs, that women were serving in local government with distinction, even if they drew different lessons from it': indeed by the end of Victoria's reign women were increasingly experienced and influential in the political arena.[52] The involvement of women in public life was, however, not just restricted to politics, but extended into the male stronghold of the army: 'in common with many aristocratic and middle-class women in civilian life and especially politics, the wives of leading soldiers often did play a significant role behind the scenes in the late

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of the 1832 Reform Bill, which enfranchised many urban shopkeepers, for the influence of women in politics as securing custom by political support became common (see Dorothy Thompson, 'Women, Work and Politics in Nineteenth-Century England: The Problem of Authority', in Jane Rendall ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 57-81, 76).

[51] Women were only admitted after 1884.

[52] Patricia Hollis 'Women in Council: Separate Spheres, Public Space', in Rendall ed., 1987, 192-213, 194.

Victorian army. In so doing, they were not necessarily confined by any perception of separate private and public spheres. [...] it is also clear that the incorporation of women in the army through marriage neither automatically implied their subordination nor constrained their ambition'.[53]

In the 1880s and 1890s, women's role in public life may still have been seen as controversial and not entirely respectable in some areas, but the depth of women's contribution cannot be denied. The career of second-generation Crimean artist Elizabeth Thompson (Lady Butler) serves to demonstrate the greater freedom of women to express their views on war and the military in the last thirty years of the century. In her much-celebrated art, the focus is the exhausted, wounded, collapsed and despondent ordinary soldiers, not the spectacle of officer class in glittering uniform. Despite all efforts of queen and government, the memory of Crimean trauma continued to haunt society in a second wave of war literature and art in the 1870s. Thompson, despite being a loyalist, was struck by the sickening horror of war, its contradictions, 'that it calls forth the noblest and the basest impulses of human nature'.[54] For Thompson war is horror and waste, as her celebrated depictions of battles and their aftermaths demonstrate: these works are a far cry from ideas of military spectacle and grandeur. She conceived and executed her most famous work, *Calling the Roll after an Engagement, Crimea*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1874, in the immediate wake of the Cardwell Reforms, which formally ended the army prerogatives of the aristocracy to command,

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[53] Ian F. Beckett, 'Women and Patronage in the Late Victorian Army', *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*, 85 (2000), 463-480, 480.
[54] Elizabeth Butler, *Autobiography* (Sevenoaks: Fisher Press, 1922; repr.1993).

and rewarded the ordinary soldier with more humane treatment. Thus Thompson can be seen to be creating a new kind of battle painting for a public who had demanded a new type of army. In a drastic move from the typical formula for battle art, which portrayed the deeds and heroic sacrifice of a single, aristocratic character, usually in a portrait form, *Calling the Roll* instead centres the viewers' attention on the dignity of the ordinary soldiers, despite exhaustion and despair: the colonel is unusually a marginal figure on the far left of the work. Far from depicting a mass of common soldiery, Thompson gives every figure in the ranks individual character: 'It is the soldiers who occupy a fixed place and possess stature and individual expression; we are looking directly into their individually readable faces' (Keller, 247). Her autobiography reflects how Thompson made use of eye-witness accounts of the horror and tragedy of war, and was assisted in her figure painting with the co-operation of the army, who posed in the uniforms of the period for her: this vitality is obvious in the work. The painting enjoyed one of the greatest successes in nineteenth- century Britain, certainly by a woman. It was 'hung on the line' when the Royal Academy exhibited it in 1874: the queen herself viewed it privately, and later procured it for the Royal Collection. Thompson's *Balaclava* (1876) similarly depicts the survivors of the doomed Charge of the Light Brigade, the wounded and dying remnants of the regiment, not the chivalric heroism reflected in many poetic eulogies. George Augustus Sala's review in the *Daily Telegraph* (22 April 1876) was warm in its praise for the work; 'In Balaclava' there is very little to remind the viewer of 'glorious war', [...] but, on the contrary, that which we see of warfare here is wretched, squalid, deplorable [...] We know now, thanks to the painter's genius, what war is — a bloodthirsty brawl, and what war really means — namely slaughter and mutilation,

blood, ruin, agony and death' (as shown Lalumia, 143). The subject of Thompson's *Inkerman* (first exhibited 1877) is again the post-battle suffering of common soldiery, here returning to their positions after battle at Inkerman Ridge, 5 November, 1854.

Some recent commentators have been critical of Thompson's work, Keller writing of the focus on the ranks of soldiery that,

> The potentially subversive effect of Thompson's pointed inversion of the conventional relationships is not consummated, however. The guardsmen have been exposed to an extreme and horrible experience, but this experience has neither destroyed nor moved them to rebellion; rather it has had a *cathartic* effect which reverberates throughout the deeply moved faces. [...] the profoundly ennobling experience of battle sanctifies War, effectively relocating it among the most refined cultural practices — in spite of all indications of its inherent but *surmounted* savageness. (247-248)

He concludes that 'On the bottom line, [...] Elizabeth Butler did not question war, or the "system" and the social divisions behind it' (248). I would argue for an alternative interpretation: Thompson is interested in realism, reflecting what actually happened, hence her engagement with eyewitness accounts and contemporary sources. In her *Autobiography*, she writes of her commission from Victoria to portray *The Defence of Rorke's Drift*, the famous battle of 1879: some of the survivors assembled at Windsor Castle and at their base in Portsmouth, uniformed as they were in the battle, were to pose for the work. Thompson notes, 'Of course, the result was that I reproduced the event as

nearly to the life as possible, but from the soldier's point of view — I may say the private's point of view — not mine, as the principal witnesses were from the ranks. To be as true to facts as possible I purposely withdrew my own view of the thing' (149).

Thompson is showing that her focus is the actual conditions of war, to represent it as nearly as possible, in all its horror and squalor: she is presenting fact and leaving her work open to interpretation. I would disagree strongly with Keller, and find *Calling the Roll* as strong an evocation of the true brutality of war as any of the written accounts, or anti-war poetry. I see no profound ennoblement in the ranks of exhausted men, simply bleakness and despair, the assembled ranks of them recalling images of war prisoners in camps, dehumanised rather than sanctified.

That Thompson was allowed to present realistic scenes of battle, and that she was widely celebrated rather than censured, by conservatives and radicals alike, for doing so successfully, is a testament to how far women's artistic involvement in the public sphere had come since the turn of the century. Women artists were able to represent actual conditions of war, without recourse to distancing historical imagery, because the Crimean War had seen the public involvement of many women in the battle action. Thompson's work forced art critics to reassess long established prejudices about the idea of women artists: 'Obviously a woman who painted war, in a manner acceptable to the Academy, went a long way towards contradicting many established ideas about Woman, femininity,

and women's creativity'.[55] In this she is building on the pioneering work of women such as Nightingale, who demonstrated the ability of, and necessity for, women in the public sphere.

Nevertheless, the use of chivalric images by the establishment as a means of containing the horror and violence of war continued, through the Boer War to the iconography of the Great War. The First World War saw the end of the eulogising of chivalry, although chivalric images were still churned out by those at home, in government, to defend the increasingly terrible and drawn out war. However, by the end of the war, with so many of the youthful proponents of chivalry dead, and the surviving wounded and damaged left to endure memories of the indescribable carnage they had witnessed, poetry of the front line spoke instead of the madness and insanity of a patriotism that drove so many to be slaughtered: 'Chivalry, along with patriotism, playing the game, and similar concepts, became not so much devalued as simply irrelevant. It belonged to another world, which seemed infinitely remote from the real world of mud, boredom, fear, endurance, carnage and mutilation in which they now existed' (Girouard, 290). Yet, while the First World War saw the final extinction of chivalric ideas of warfare, the intriguing and complex figure of Joan of Arc had effectively done this centuries before, Joan being 'the maid

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[55] Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Victorian Women Artists* (London: Women's Press, 1987), 16. This book provides an excellent account of the development of the 'woman artist' in the Victorian period, and the problems of the use of this term of definition.

whose love of chivalry ended the age of chivalry even as it ushered in a new age, the outcome of which is not yet known'.[56]

[56] See Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T. Wood eds., *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc* (New York and London: Garland, 1996), ix.

Plate 2 ***Joan of Arc Kisses the Sword of Liberation*** **(1863)**
Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Plate 3 ***Joan of Arc*** **(1865)**
John Everett Millais

Plate 4 *Joan of Arc* **[n.d. 1880(?)]**
Annie Louise Swynnerton

4 The End of Chivalry?: Joan of Arc and the nineteenth-century woman writer

Three Pre-Raphaelite portraits of Joan of Arc manifest contrasting views of the warrior-maiden's chivalry, and can be seen to capture the three main depictions of Joan that could be seen throughout the nineteenth century. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Joan of Arc Kisses the Sword of Liberation* (1863) [Plate 2] is an androgynous knight: the fair face could be Galahad or Lancelot as easily as Joan; Joan's gender is not important here, the only indicator to her femininity being the beads strung about the neck. Pictured kissing the sword of liberation as an offering before the feet of the crucified Christ, Rossetti's Joan is simultaneously a spiritual warrior, on a divine mission, and the martial saviour of France, the white lily in the foreground being symbolic of Joan's virginity and her nationality. Contrast this with John Everett Millais's portrait painted the following year [Plate 3]: Millais's Joan is armoured and holds a sword, but she is 'unmistakably a Victorian young woman', hair neatly parted and bound, eyes raised in submissive piety, wearing a full red crinoline beneath her breastplate.[1] Presented in an interior setting, Joan here is a domestic warrior, nineteenth-century domestic virtue, concealed only partly by armour. Distinct again is Annie Louise Swynnerton's *Joan of Arc* [n.d.1880?] [Plate 4], where Joan is portrayed in an outside setting, an elemental force of nature. Beneath a rainbow halo and a heavenly sky, this Joan is a spiritual warrior on God's mission, the sword held between praying hands, the face held aloft in serene prayer. While being fully armoured she is also

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[1] M.H. Spielman, *Millais and his Works* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1898), 79.

a sexually attractive woman, golden hair flowing over her shoulders, full red lips slightly parted: she seems at once human and divine.

In a century dominated by the ideas of the correct spheres of behaviour for male and female, the cross-dressing, arms-wielding Joan of Arc held an intriguing force, inspiring ideas of chivalry, while at the same time rocking the concept to its very core and bringing about its demise. As active female she immediately overturns chivalry, a code in which woman serves only as passive icon to active male: but more than this Joan, while caught up herself with a crusading ardour, 'heralded different times, times in which the individual conscience would defy the will of the Church, and in which men would begin to declare that the sovereignty of the state could brook no opposition'.[2] Joan of Arc, the subject of more historical studies than any other person in the Middle Ages, and for whom there is an unequalled amount of historical documentation, has many different guises and has held divergent meanings for different groups through the ages: saint, heretic, zealot, witch, prophetess, adolescent lunatic, androgynous proto-feminist, class equalizer, Marxist Liberator, French Nationalist, icon for campaigners for moral reform and temperance and chastity movements — these are just some of the portrayals she has provoked. Yet, it is as paradoxical icon and exploder of chivalry, that Joan of Arc most clearly served as a subject in the nineteenth century, allowing writers, especially women, a focus through which they could explore women's contemporary roles in the domestic and public sphere. I shall consider the varied presentations of Joan throughout the

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[2] Charles T. Wood, *The Age of Chivalry: Manners and Morals 1000-1450* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), 150.

century, looking particularly at how she was used by both writers in favour of the social order, in which a publicly empowered woman should be punished for her trespass, and by those who were keen to subvert gender expectations, using images of an empowered medieval woman as a means of expressing a desire for empowerment in their contemporary society.

The first work written in praise of Joan of Arc was by a woman, Christine de Pisan, in her *Ditié de Jehanne D'Arc*.[3] The last stanza dates the poem as 'the last day of July' 1429, so this work claims to be written while Joan was still alive, shortly after the coronation of Charles VI, enjoying royal and public favour. However, Anne Lutkus and Julia Walker have claimed that the literal acceptance of this date has blinded scholars to the possibility of the poem being post-dated as active political propaganda.[4] The historical narrative of the poem mentions the lifting of the siege of Orleans in May, the coronation of Charles VII on 17 July, the progress of Joan and Charles towards Paris on 23 July, and their arrival on the outskirts on 29 July, only two days before the poem is dated. Lutkus and Walker argue convincingly that it is impossible that the knowledge that Joan's goal of taking Paris was at odds with Charles's plans should have become public only two days after their arrival there (see LI-LVI). They, therefore, suggest that Christine finished the poem later in 1429, or even anytime before late 1431 (the latest date that has been suggested for Christine's death), thus she wrote it in full knowledge of Joan's trial and

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[3] Christine de Pisan, *Ditié de Jehanne D'Arc*, trans.and ed. by Angus J. Kennedy and Kenneth Varty (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Language and Literature, 1977). Roman numerals refer to stanza numbers.

[4] Anne D. Lutkus and Julia M. Walker, 'PR Pas PC: Christine de Pizan's Pro-Joan Propaganda', in Wheeler and Wood eds, 1996, 145-160.

execution, and intended it as a strongly argued piece of anti-Charles/pro-Joan propaganda. Far from offering anonymous criticism of Charles, the author clearly identifies herself in the final stanza. Joan, not Charles, is seen here as 'the key figure for the fate of France' (Lutkus and Walker, 152), and it is Joan who is in control of the King. Charles is praised as 'magnanimous' for giving pardons, but it is actually 'the Maid, the faithful servant of God, who makes him do this' (LIX). Joan is the prophesised saviour of France, her success foretold by Merlin, the Sibyl and Bede (XXI), and she is shown to surpass all the great women of the Bible (XXVIII). Unlike later writers, Christine sees nothing strange that such military glory and success should be won by 'after all, a *woman* — a simple shepherdess — braver than any man ever was in Rome!', as this is easy to accomplish with God's help (XXV). Joan's contemporary biographer realizes the historical importance of her subject, not only as the saviour of France, but as an inspiration to all women, an example of their equal capacity for glory in a public world dominated by men. Joan's success is not only a glory to her but to all women, 'Oh! What honour for the female sex! It is perfectly obvious that God has special regard for it when all these wretched people who destroyed the whole Kingdom — now recovered and made safe by a woman, something that 5000 men could not have done' (XXIV).

Since Christine's time, women writers have used Joan of Arc as an inspiration and a symbol to explore their own social and political views, most prominently about the role of women in society. Despite this, the most famous literary presentations of Joan, and the most influential for nineteenth-century writers, are by men. That Shakespeare's *Henry VI: Part One* 'locates itself in areas of ideological discomfort', is nowhere more obvious

than in the character of Joan.[5] The incoherence of the portrayal of Joan, who appears in one play as ' blessed saint' (III:3, line 15), 'sweet virgin' (line 16), and a dignified and persuasive orator, while also using callous and grotesque language (IV:7, line 75), is shown to be a witch (V:3), rejects her father (V:5, line 7), and claims pregnancy to save herself from the stake (lines 62-63), has been unsatisfactorily explained away by 'the vicissitudes of collaboration'.[6] An obvious conflict of interests can explain some incongruities, so for the French she is the 'Divinest creature' (I:7, 4), while for the English she is, in Talbot's words, 'Foul fiend of France, and hag of all despite' (III:2, 51). However, as Gabriele Jackson persuasively argues, 'the disjunctive presentation of Joan that shows her first as numinous, then as practically and subversively powerful, and finally as feminized and demonised is determined by Shakespeare's progressive exploitation of the varied ideological potential inherent in the topically relevant figure of the virago' (65). Shakespeare is using Joan to demonstrate contemporary categories of womanhood: virago, virgin, and goddess of justice (all of which were used as images for Elizabeth I), and witch, the play dating (1591-2) from the age which saw a peak in executions for witchcraft. Shakespeare's portrayal shows the ranges of meanings given to Joan of Arc, all of which, to some degree, would be drawn on by women writers in the nineteenth century.

Robert Southey's 1796 *Joan of Arc* was hugely influential to the depictions of Joan that

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[5] Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, 'Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc', *English Literary Renaissance*, 18 (1988), 40-65, (65).

[6] Michael Taylor, the editor of the Oxford Shakespeare *Henry VI Part One* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) argues against this in his Introduction (49-50).

flooded the following century.[7] Removing the superstition from Joan's voices, Southey focuses instead on Joan's peasant beginnings, reflecting the young writer's revolutionary socialism.[8] Here Joan is an unspoiled peasant of the land, a force of nature in which the supernatural can be situated without fear, as when Joan is compared in a simile to 'the simple snow-drop', emerging in early spring; later she is likened in a prophecy to the ewe-lamb torn from the poor man's bosom (90). Her English enemies scorn the idea of a woman warrior, and clearly try and posit Joan within a category they recognize for women, that of war prize: by contrast, Southey's Joan is clearly both inciter and warrior, 'Then the Maid/ Rode thro' the thickest battle: fast they fell,/ Pierced by her forceful spear' (116). The work ends with Joan winning the crown for Charles, invoking him to 'Protect the lowly, feed the hungry ones,/ And be the orphan's father' (136), and redeeming her country: her betrayal and death are omitted. For Southey, Joan's greatness is in her subversive military exploits and courageous righteousness, not in her martyrdom.

By contrast, Friedrich Schiller would establish a tradition of presenting Joan as a tragic heroine of romance, with *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, first performed in Weimar in 1801: however his omission of her trial and burning, in favour of her death on the battlefield are

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[7] It is worth noting that the fifth edition of Southey's work was published in 1817, the same year as his edition of Malory, both works being highly influential to later writers and artists and refuelling interest in the protagonists of the works.

[8] Robert Southey, *Joan of Arc*, 2 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1817). The work started as a joint project with Coleridge, but the latter objected to what he saw as Southey's attempt to make Joan 'Tom Paine in petticoats', and removed his section when the two broke friends a month before its publication. Coleridge published a fragment of his poem in the *Morning Post* and the work eventually appeared as 'The Destiny of Nations, A Vision' in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817).

significant (and almost unthinkable now), as dying in battle rather than on a funeral pyre renders her less of a victim and martyr.[9] Schiller's play was written as a direct response to Voltaire's satire, *La Pucelle d'Orleans*, a rare comic treatment of the legend of Joan of Arc that was begun in 1730 and published 1762. Voltaire's work did not meet with widespread approval, as 'The climate of romantic patriotism that prevailed all over Europe at the end of the eighteenth and through the nineteenth century made Voltaire's *La Pucelle* a lapse in the worst possible taste'.[10] Voltaire does, however, astutely identify the significance of Joan's virginity to her legend: Joan's thoroughly investigated virginity was a central issue to the authentication of her mission, as well as sign of her virtue in the face of her transgressive behaviour. Joan always identified herself as 'Jehanne la Pucelle' (Joan the Maid). However, 'pucelle' denotes a distinctly youthful virgin, suggesting innocence but at the same time 'paradoxically, nubility' (Warner, 1991, 22), as it denotes a passage of time, a changing state. Warner goes on to suggest, 'The word implied no rank, and it was current at every level in society. This made it an inspired choice in Joan's case. It cancelled out her background, without denying it, and this [...] was important to her' (23). Joan's virginity also linked her with the traditional prophecy of the maid who would save the kingdom after it had been brought to desolation by a woman, a prediction being reinstated by various female augurs in Joan's own time, among them Marie d'Avignon. If Isabella of Bavaria, mother of Charles VII who, at the Treaty of Troyes in 1420 had sanctioned all rights to the French throne being transferred to Henry

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[9] Schiller had, of course, presented a celebrated tragic heroine the previous year with *Mary Stuart* (1800).
[10] Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (London: Vintage, 1991), 239.

V, was the woman who destroyed France, Joan could be believed to be the prophesized virgin saviour.

Joan's very womanhood was the crux of her life and death, as is suggested by the importance placed at her execution on showing her naked corpse to the crowd to prove that it held 'all the secrets that could or should belong to a woman': as the Bourgeois of Paris, the anonymous author of the *Parisian Journal*, records in May 1431, in response to theories that Joan was either some kind of non-corporeal fiend, or a disguised man, as her military expertise would imply.[11] Joan's contemporaries were obsessed with her gender, and her presentation of herself as a woman, as is proved by the significance placed at her trial on her dressing in men's clothing. The rehabilitation trials were attempts literally to redress her as a woman, especially by Charles VII in his enthusiasm to clear the name of the woman who had put him on the throne, and thus clear himself of any taint by association.[12] Proof was given of Joan's virginity, testimonies provided by her military colleagues who miraculously felt no carnal desire for her beautiful body, her amenorrhea shown as a sign that she was magically holy.[13] Throughout the nineteenth century, women writers consistently felt the need to justify Joan's wearing of men's clothes, which has to be defended as more than the mere practicality of men's dress for fighting a

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[11] As shown in Steven Weiskopf, 'Readers of the Lost Arc: Secrecy, Specularity, and Speculation in the Trial of Joan of Arc', in Wheeler and Wood eds, 113-132, 113.

[12] See Susan Schibanoff, 'True Lies: Transvestism and Idolatry in the Trial of Joan of Arc', in Wheeler and Wood eds, 31-60.

[13] Although her detractors used her amenorrhea as proof of her virago-like abnormality. See Warner, 1991, 22.

war.[14] Joan is redressed as a 'holy transvestite', a woman who, in the judgement of Thomas Aquinas, has used 'transvestment' for a valid reason, that is in order to hide from enemies or to keep her virginity. This is why the identification of St Margaret as one of Joan's heavenly voices is so crucial to her rehabilitation, Margaret herself fitting into this category[15]. All three of the saints who provided Joan's heavenly voices have special significance. St Michael, as well as being the military Archangel of God, is the guardian and patron in the classic tale of French chivalry, the *Song of Roland*, and would have contemporary significance in this role. St Catherine suffered torture and death for refusing to worship false gods, and for rejecting the advances of Alexandrian Emperor Maxentius to safeguard her virginity: Joan's virginity is similarly significant as it is crucial to the validity of her mission. The issue of divine voices in the Joan legend would actually split opinion in the latter part of the nineteenth century, those who claimed Joan for the Church and those who claimed her for personal expression: was she an instrument of external divine will or self-motivated by internal inspiration? In the stories of these three saints lie the essential elements of Joan's story as it has been interpreted throughout the ages, as encapsulated in the work of women writers of the nineteenth century: chivalry, virginity, femininity, public and private womanhood, devotion to, and sacrifice, for God.

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[14] Unsurprisingly, Joan's transvestism and androgyny is one of the appeals she holds for Vita Sackville-West who used her as the subject of a witty and insightful biography in 1937. See Vita Sackville-West, *Joan of Arc* (London: Hogarth Press, 1937).

[15] Margaret cross-dressed as Brother Pelagius and fled to a convent of nuns to retain her virginity on her wedding night: she was ultimately punished for this transgression when one of nuns became pregnant and Pelagius as the only 'man' in the convent was accused and forced to flee into exile, the truth only being revealed in a letter from Pelagius on his/her death.

The publication of two historical works in the 1840s would prove crucial to the depictions of Joan in the century. Jules Michelet's production of the 'Jeanne d'Arc' volume for his *Histoire de France* in 1841 was of enormous significance as in it he 'reinvented Joan of Arc for the modern era'.[16] Nadia Margolis has explored how Michelet's version of Joan synthesised all her future artistic and political reincarnations: his Joan was a post-Revolutionary saint, but also a very human woman of purity, honesty and good sense. Margolis suggests, 'With Michelet, then, begins Joan's *real* rehabilitation trial — that of 1452-56 having occurred mainly to exonerate the cynical, ungrateful Charles VII' (61). Michelet's work was complemented by that of Jules Quicherat, who achieved the mammoth task of publishing the first valid edition of the records of Joan's trial and rehabilitation with related documents (1841-1849), the work translated into English in 1869. Quicherat's book was to become 'the first cult object, the bible, even, of Joan's reception history or afterlife' (Margolis, 67). These works gave new impetus to historical biographies of Joan, and the use of her as a figure to illustrate contemporary power struggles: distinct differences can be seen in works that come at either side of these highly influential historical publications.

The publication of Quicherat and Michelet's historical documents provoked a diverse and large response. Thomas de Quincey's essay 'Joan of Arc' (1847) is a reaction to his delight on reading Michelet's account, and presents a passionate defence of the heroine.

De Quincey objects to Southey's conclusion that Joan's greatest success was her courage

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[16] Nadia Margolis, 'Rewriting the Right: High Priests, Heroes and Hooligans in the Portrayal of Joan of Arc (1824-1945), in *Joan of Arc, A Saint For All Reasons: Studies in Myth and Politics*, ed. by Dominique Goy-Blanquet (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 59-104, 59.

and military exploits, as he argues that it is in her capture, imprisonment, trial and execution that her real glory is manifest, propounding the idea that while woman cannot possibly be equal to man in the role of 'great creators', she can surpass him by dying grandly.[17] Not surprisingly, in an age dominated by the idea of separate spheres of behaviour, objections to the notion of Joan's military skill were strongly voiced by many writers. This view is perhaps best summarized by Philip Henry Stanhope, Lord Mahon:

> But when we find some French historians, transported by an enthusiasm almost equal to that of Joan herself, represent her as filling the part of a general or statesman — as skilful in leading armies, or directing councils — we must withhold our faith [...] In affairs of state Joan's voice was never heard: in affairs of war all her proposals will be found to resolve themselves into two — either to rush headlong upon the enemy, often where he was strongest, or to offer frequent and public prayers to the Almighty. [18]

Stanhope's focus is Joan's duty and devotion to God and her 'comeliness and beauty' (10): clearly the idea of a military woman is abhorrent to him. Yet Joan was unarguably an intriguing military force. Her very activity inspired soldiers, in contrast to the inertia of noble, older generals which had led to many defeats. One of the many paradoxes surrounding Joan is her position as holy woman, and yet non-noble leader of a 'modern army' of mercenaries. Contemporary commentators, including Pope Pius II, are in agreement regarding Joan's abilities: that she was ignorant and simple except in the art of war. Many modern observers are of the same mind, Kelly DeVries claiming that Joan

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[17] Thomas de Quincey, 'Joan of Arc', *The Essays of Thomas de Quincey* (London: Macmillan, 1909), 27.
[18] Philip Henry Stanhope, Lord Mahon, *Joan of Arc* (London: John Murray, 1853), 86.

turned the tide of the Hundred Years War in little more than a year.[19] More importantly, as Wood suggests, 'her example gave rise to a flood of national sentiment which, within twenty years, would lead to the liberation and unification of France' (150).

One of the earliest biographies of the nineteenth century, Mary Pilkington's *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters* (1811), is highly contemptuous of any mystic element in Joan's story, offering only cynical praise of Joan, a style significantly absent from later biographies in the century.[20] While admitting that 'Prodigies of valour were doubtless, performed by this female', and that even while 'Loaded with chains, and ignominiously treated, she still maintained an undaunted intrepidity of mind, and amidst the insulting scoffs of her persecutors, displayed a heroism that ought to have excited the admiration of mankind', Pilkington offers a sceptical view of Joan's spiritual mission, that 'she fancied that heaven had inspired her with zeal in the cause' (25). At court 'the superstition of the times had acquired such a degree of influence, that the account she gave of her divine inspiration was believed' (26). The image of Joan on a steed with her banner 'impressed the people with the idea that she was fighting by the command of God', suggesting that the author is not so easily duped. Pilkington offers an interesting version of Joan's death: abandoned by Charles VII and the people, Joan acknowledges being 'misled' by illusions and renounces them, but is condemned to death anyway in a 'mock trial' (27). The author claims that Joan died in 'the thirtieth year of her age', a historically incorrect fact. Although this is not surprising given that she does not have the

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[19] Kelly DeVries, *Joan of Arc: A Military Leader* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 186.
[20] Mary Pilkington, *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters, who have distinguished themselves by their talents and virtues in every age and nation* (London: Albion Press, 1811), 25-27.

benefit of authentic historical documents to work from, there is also the sense that Pilkington is not willing to allow her subject a great deal of sympathy in the eyes of her readers: an adult and experienced war veteran, on a deluded mission, does not inspire as much pity as a sacrificed teenage maiden. To this author, writing in the middle of England's wars with France, a female warrior seems something of an aberration. Pilkington does, however, appreciate the political nature of Joan's role and downfall, recognizing the importance Joan holds for Charles VII's monarchy, that she 'shed over him a kind of glory, and gave him in the eyes of the nation new and divine rights'. Pilkington also identifies the role the envy of her fellow army commanders played on her fate, 'it is believed that the French officers, jealous of the honours she had received from her royal master, treacherously deserted her, when surrounded by her foes', here the author betraying contemporary anti-French sentiment as well as scepticism as to Joan's mission.

The anonymous epigraph that heralds Maria Jane Jewsbury's 'Joan of Arc' (*Phantasmagoria*, 1825) similarly focuses on the injustice of Joan's betrayal at the hands of her countrymen: 'after having roused the degraded spirit of the whole nation, and served her King with the ability of a General, and the self-devotedness of a Woman, she endured perfidy in return for her services, and a barbarous death was her only recompence'.[21] Jewsbury explores the complex contradictions of Joan's role, that, as the refrain that closes the opening and closing stanzas of the work identifies, in her 'saint and heroine stood/ Concealed, beneath a peasant's hood'. Yet Jewsbury maintains that Joan

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[21] As shown Armstrong and Bristow, with Sharrock, eds., 216-218.

can embody these contradictions, being a divinely inspired, military leader and a peasant woman at the same time. The speaker reassures Joan in the final stanza that her sacrifice will not be forgotten:

> Maiden, they could not quench thy fame!—
>
> *That* rose, immortal, from the flame;
>
> And ages yet to be,
>
> Shall tell how saint and heroine stood
>
> Concealed, beneath a peasant's hood

Significantly, for Jewsbury Joan's transgression, that for which her contemporaries make her pay, is as much one of class as one of sex: what is amazing to the speaker, and what will be celebrated by future ages, is that a 'peasant's hood' could hide the saint and heroine. Jewsbury here brings forward the idea that Joan's death came mainly through the influence of the existing aristocratic class of generals, jealous of the power and influence of a peasant woman in the role of commander of the army. The second stanza presents Joan as a chivalrous knight, fighting for the honour of her country, the image presented of France 'deflowered', 'Her ancient lilies stained', raped by the alien hosts of the alien monarch. It is significant that here Joan is referred to as the 'maiden': it is a woman who will right the wrong of the feminized France, not a typical knight, but also Joan's virginity is implied as proof of her spiritual worthiness. The divine inspiration for Joan's mission is only vaguely alluded to: there is, on the contrary, a clear sense of Joan being in control of the situation, that she,'Self-dazzled! self-sustained!/Mused on the crown, the sword, the shrine—,/ Then rose a spirit half divine'. It is Joan herself who is sustaining

and inspiring her activity, hence the spirit is 'half-divine'. Jewsbury does not dwell on the mystical elements of Joan's story, but celebrates her as determined girl who will become the glorious military leader, as presented in Stanzas III and IV: by force of will she restores France's 'lilied banners bright!', resigning the glory of the victories to heaven, but winning them assuredly with her own battle skill. The vision of this glory is overturned in the two words that open the fifth stanza:

> 'Tis past, — and she who crowned a king,
>
> And bade a realm be free,
>
> A hated, an accursed thing
>
> To-morrow's dawn will be!

The immediacy of the depiction of Joan's burning in stanza six, the chaos of the scene at the pyre,'I hear their curses round the stake;/ I see the fiery column make,/ The boldest shield his brow', come in juxtaposition with the stoic heroism of Joan herself: 'I see, their victim, and their queen,/ Die as she lived, severe, serene!'. The metre of this line forces a pause over the final two words, calming the vision of the confusion and heat with a focus on the dignified saintly victim, who transcends the earthly squalor of her death and betrayal. The poem ends with Jewsbury celebrating how, by their very act of execution, Joan's betrayers sealed the immortality of her name and story, making a martyr and tragic heroine out of the peasant girl.

Like Jewsbury, Felicia Hemans find a means of exploring Joan's womanhood through her military role, and in doing so explores categories of gender and gender behaviour of

her own society. Felicia Hemans sets her poem 'Joan of Arc in Rheims'(*Records of Woman*, 1828: 354-356) at the moment of Joan's glory, Charles VII's coronation in Rheims, when ' a king/ Received his birthright's crown', focusing on the legend that her father and brothers went to greet her there. The poem was first published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1826, Hemans taking advantage of the phenomena of the literary annuals and periodicals to both reap twice as much money from the poem, and, significantly, to benefit from a 'test-run' by exposing the poem to the public before its official publication in a volume of single-author work.[22] Not surprisingly given the original audience, that Hemans's concern in the poem is woman's role in the 'domestic affections' is made clear from the very epigraph of the poem, Hemans's own composition, 'to me — a woman — bring/ Sweet waters from Affection's spring!'. At the heart of the poem is the idea that Joan belongs to the domestic setting which the arrival of her father and brothers symbolizes, not the military pomp of the coronation. She is separate from 'the chivalry and France' at the coronation with all its glory, 'alone and unapproached' beside the altar, the rhythm of the lines in which she is described leading to a focus on 'Silent and radiant stood'. She is set apart from the other knights spiritually as well as physically, by the divine devotion and focus of her quest, 'the helm was raised,/ And the fair face revealed, that upward gazed,/ Intensely worshipping'. Here again the rhythm is used to great effect to stress the importance of the final two words, Joan's devotion is not empty show, but passionate sincerity.

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[22] See Chad Edgar, 'Felicia Hemans and the Shifting Field of Romanticism', in Sweet and Melnyk eds, 2001, 124-134, 124-125.

The position of the pale, pure Joan, praying before the Virgin's altar leads the speaker to explore the paradox of Joan's situation: the 'slight form' of the maid, 'the shepherd's child', 'the lovely dreamer of the wild' is also the warrior 'leader through the battle storm':

> Never before, and never since that hour,
>
> Hath woman, mantled with victorious power,
>
> Stood forth as *thou* beside the shrine didst stand,
>
> Holy amidst the knighthood of the land,
>
> And, beautiful with joy and with renown,
>
> Lift thy white banner o'er the olden crown,
>
> Ransomed for France by thee!

Joan is unique, in that she is a *woman* of 'victorious power', but she is set apart also from the other knights because she is 'Holy', as the enjambement also stresses here. Like Southey's saint, Hemans's Joan is a force of nature, her banner 'like sunshine streaming'; 'the stormy cheer/ Man gives to glory on her high career!' is borne on the wind. It is significant that more forceful is the 'breeze that o'er her home had blown' which for Joan silences all the shouts of glory as it brings with it her father's voice calling her. Here lies the next paradox of Joan's position, her role as warrior of the public sphere, in contrast to Joan the daughter amidst her family and the bonds of domestic affections. Instantly the glory of chivalry is dissolved in the stronger domestic ties, 'She saw the pomp no more,/ The plumes, the banners: to her cabin door,/ [...] Her spirit turned'. The pull of home is too strong: she removes 'the helm of man battles' to reveal feminine 'bright locks', and

begs to return to her family. In the rhyming couplets which close the poem, Hemans manifests her focus. Despite Joan's goodness, purity, spiritual sincerity, and the martial service she has rendered France, she, a peasant girl, must literally pay the price for straying from her domestic, and class, sphere:

> Too much of fame
>
> Had shed its radiance on thy peasant name;
>
> And bought alone by gifts beyond all price —
>
> The trusting heart's repose, the paradise
>
> Of home, with all its loves — doth fate allow
>
> The crown of glory unto woman's brow.

On the surface, here is Hemans supporting the idea that woman's place is in the domestic sphere, and for all Joan's holiness and military service, she had to pay the price for transgression, 'bought alone by gifts beyond all price'. Notice that the penalty alluded to is not Joan's life in her execution: the priceless gifts Hemans speaks of are the 'domestic affections'. Similarly, Joan is distant and set mutely apart, when in her military role before the altar at the opening of the poem: but when she removes her helm and becomes daughter and sister with 'bright locks' at the approach of her family, 'she moves from spectacle to an audible speaking subject' (Edgar, 127).

Edgar goes on to propose that, 'Like most male chroniclers, the presumably female speaker makes little progress in understanding Joan's motives until the reunion with father and brothers. This reunion, a minor episode in the traditional chronicles, becomes

the most important episode in the speaker's account of Joan's life' (128). Edgar sees this work as an example of Hemans offering her female readers 'the opportunity to explore and celebrate female subjectivity, plain and simple. The whole thrust of 'Joan of Arc, in Rheims' is the search for the true Joan' (128). If this is the case, it presupposes that the reader is not supposed to look beyond the surface conclusion of the work, that Joan pays the price for straying from where she belongs, the family home as protected by the male members of her family. I would argue that here Hemans is actually suggesting another idea, showing her outrage that 'fate', here the controlling forces of the male dominated court and society, insist that a woman, and a peasant woman at that, must pay with 'gifts beyond all price' for her glory, for daring to break from her set role. The whole of the final stanza, indeed the whole of the poem, is driven forward to the verdict in the final line. This is the message of the work that the speaker breaks away from the scene in Rheims to reinforce. Certainly, this is the idea that leaps out of historical biographies of Joan, that after Charles's coronation Joan felt her work was done and pleaded to return home, but, by winning glory for him, she became indispensable. Used as a pawn to win France's security and, increase Charles's power, she was ultimately betrayed when her personal power seemed too great, and, overturning Charles's wishes, she led the battle on to Paris. The court was willing to suspend scepticism of Joan and her mission until she began to act independently, following her divine mission not the path they intended for her. Hemans's work looks at the heroine in both her public and private roles, and how she copes with both, celebrating the real humanity of the character, not just idealizing a legendary figure, and using her to explore ideas about women in a military and public sphere.

Francis Jeffrey's review of *Records of Woman* singles out 'Joan of Arc, in Rheims' as written in 'a loftier and more ambitious vein; but sustained with equal grace, and as touching in its solemn tenderness' as the other poems in the volume.[23] While the review opens with an extended discussion on the separate literary spheres inhabited by male and female writers, essentially holding women subordinate by listing the topics and styles they should not consider, it ends with a sense of disquiet for the reviewer, that in fact this safe ordering of spheres is being disintegrated by the writing of Hemans and other women. As Edgar suggests, 'Though he tries to incorporate Hemans's text into a nostalgic version of an earlier literary field, Jeffrey accomplishes the opposite: his attentions only serve to declare the official migration of a subsidiary public sphere into the mainstream' (133). The disquiet transparent in Jeffrey's verdict on 'Joan of Arc, in Rheims' is further evident when, having listed the male victims of 'the perishable nature of modern literary fame' (47), he turns his attention to Hemans. For all her reputation may be due to 'taste and elegance', the very fact that Jeffrey is suggesting that she might win enduring fame, when so many celebrated male writers have lost theirs, shows that he ultimately is comparing Hemans in the same literary public sphere as her male contemporaries. Despite the surface suggestion that Hemans is upholding the ideology of separate spheres of behaviour, her subversion is only lightly hidden beneath the surface, as Jeffrey's discomfort attests.

As I explored in the previous chapter, Barrett Browning rarely manifested any of Hemans's concern at overtly entering discussion of subjects that were seen as proper to

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[23] Francis Jeffrey, 'Felicia Hemans', *Edinburgh Review*, 50 (1829), 32-47, (41).

the public sphere. At the same time as Quicherat began publishing his historical documents relating to Joan of Arc's trials (1841-1842), the correspondence of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Mary Russell Mitford shows the poet considering Mitford's suggestion of either Napoleon or Joan of Arc as the subject for a new work:

> I have been turning Napoleon round & round — & after all, I turn myself wistfully towards Joan. Perhaps my original sin of mysticism is struggling towards her visions —and then I have an inverted enthusiasm about military glories, such as Napoleon's were for the most part.[24]

Barrett Browning is keen to get hold of a copy of Thomas J. Serle's 1841 play *Joan of Arc*, which Mitford has discussed, although she later records her disappointment at the work because of the lack of vitality in the character of Joan: 'Even Joan is not very interesting — true & beautiful as the aspect she wears. She is seen as in a picture — attitude, countenance — but we don't feel her heart beat — we know nothing of her inward life. Our faith in her is drawn from circumstantial evidence, & not direct knowledge' (8 December, 1841, 184-186). Barrett Browning rejects Mitford's objection that the subject of Joan is already 'being pre-occupied by Schiller and Southey', by claiming that she would treat the subject very differently from how the youthful Southey did, in what she judges to be 'not his best music', and notes that the same objection can be raised to a Napoleon epic, one having been published anonymously in the previous month. Barrett Browning is clearly captivated by the spirituality of Joan, coming back to

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[24] Barrett Browning to Mary Russell Mitford, 18 November 1841, *The Brownings' Correspondence*, 14 vols, ed. by Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson (Winfield: Wedgestone Press, 1987), V, 170-172.

her in the postscript, 'Oh but Joan. My belief is that she was true'; and claiming like Hamlet that, 'There are more things in Heaven & earth than are in other people's philosophy just now'. Significantly Barrett Browning suggests she would not make Joan the heroine of a romance, in this letter also alluding to the ill-health she was enduring at the time, which perhaps provides the reason why her Joan of Arc project was not undertaken:

> So you turn the light of your countenance away from Joan of Arc —& perhaps wisely — considering my infirmities. Nevertheless I do not think with you that an objection to a military-glory-subject reverberates necessarily against Joan. If I wrote of her, it wd. not be of "a great general" but of a great enthusiast — admitting perhaps some actual impulses [...] from the spiritual world — nay, admitting them certainly—& preserving faithfully & tenderly her womanly nature unrusted in the iron which sheathes it. Yet, however capable of love, in the sense of the passion, I wd. not make her actually *in love* — because where the imagination is much pre-occupied, the heart is all the less liable to impressions of that particular character. (25 November, 1841, 172-175)

Writing to Mary Russell Mitford on 2 February 1842, Barrett Browning suggests that she has given up the idea of writing about Joan in favour of Bonaparte: 'I am up to the crown of my head in the Athenaeum & the Greeks just now — but afterwards there may be a long interregnum between the end of my prose & the beginning of Psyche, & I must think out some subject, perhaps with Napoleon in it'. Certainly Barrett Browning did not publish any poem on Joan of Arc: but she did refer to her in two very different works.

In the unpublished 'The Princess Marie', from the 'Sonnet's Notebook' (1842-44), Barrett Browning uses the medieval saint as a means of musing on the contemporary reception of women heroes and artists. 'The Princess Marie' relates the story of a daughter of King Louis Phillipe of France (1773-1850) who abandoned the trappings of royalty to fulfil her ambition as a sculptor, dying in 1839, apparently through ill health caused by obsession with her art.[25] Princess Marie is a precursor to Aurora Leigh, an artist who maintains her right to practise her art and to be judged by it; 'I go among you, [...] men of earth/ to choose my own free place/ & not [...] sovrenty nor birth/ Nor beauty in my face' (35). Marie wastes away and dies while working on a bust of Joan, introducing ideas of sacrifice, the artist's sacrifice for her art, the martyr's sacrifice for her passionately held beliefs: as 'the marble [...] brow of spirit (/) took in/ More life' so Marie 'paled to sight' (41), investing her art with her own strength. The transcription is vague in places, the work unfortunately neither completed nor published, and yet this unfinished work serves as a useful illustration of Barrett Browning's musings on 'Jeanne d'Arc's good/brave name' (42), and the nature of her fame: notes and numerous crossings out and alterations of words show Barrett Browning focusing on ideas of purity, the soul and heroism. As the poet had suggested to Mary Russell Mitford, it is Joan's spirituality and passion which intrigues her, not 'military-glory': 'Instead of [...] heroine dripping (?) force/ [...]/ Beheld a nobler fame/ A mild pure woman made sublime/ By God, a great cause of all time/ I [...] with her own her fame' (42). Barrett Browning is demonstrating the aspects of Joan's legend she finds most appealing, the nature of woman's lasting

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[25] The version of the work I am using is a transcription by Phillip David Sharp, 'Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Wimpole Street Notebook' (unpublished master's thesis, Baylor University, Waco, May 1981).

fame, the transfiguring power of faith: Joan is 'made sublime/By God' not merely as a passive vessel, but by the very power of her own belief. The poet is also using a medieval woman to inform and illustrate her discussion of the behaviour of contemporary women, and how they manage the restrictions and expectations placed upon them; a use of medievalism also seen in her sonnets 'To George Sand'.

These two sonnets to the French writer have received wide critical attention; but the aspect of these poems that is of particular interest here is the allusions to Joan of Arc as an analogy for the contemporary infamous French cross-dresser. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Barrett Browning used cross-dressing as a trope to explore women entering the public sphere, most obviously in 'The Romaunt of the Page': she returns to the subject of cross-dressing, as again indicative of women's transgression, in the sonnets to Sand. Barrett Browning refers to both Sand's transvestism and her use of a pseudonym in the opening of 'To George Sand: A Desire', calling the French writer 'Thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man,/ Self-called George Sand' 'to meditate upon the nature of gender and its effect upon the creative powers when qualities considered 'male' and 'female' are united in a single writer' (Avery and Stott, 127). 'To George Sand: A Recognition' opens similarly with a focus on the combination of qualities usually allotted by gender to men and women:

> True genius, but true woman! dost deny
>
> Thy woman's nature with a manly scorn,

And break away the gauds and armlets worn

By weaker women in captivity?

The captivity in question is the social constrictions and expectations that bound women in society, ornamented with 'gauds and armlets', as proved by the censure heaped on Sand for her refusal to conform. Yet Sand's hair 'all unshorn' betrays her true sex 'Disproving thy man's name'. This idea of cascades of hair revealing a woman's true identity was used by Barrett Browning in 'The Romaunt of the Page', as by many of her predecessors, and was similarly used in many literary and visual depictions of the life of Joan of Arc.[26] This allusion to the saint is heightened through images of burning, reminiscent of Joan's death; 'and while before/ The world thou burnest in a poet-fire,/We see thy woman-heart beat evermore/ Through the large flame'. The idea of the 'woman-heart' beating 'evermore' has particular reference to Joan, alluding to the painstaking posthumous tests to prove that Joan's remains belonged to a woman, and to legends that while the rest of her burned, Joan's heart remained intact (to be worn in a gold casket around the neck of a guilt-ridden Charles VII, as Emma Robinson would suggest in 1849 as I shall later explore). The sonnet closes by continuing the image of the heart achieving greater purity and freedom after death, 'Beat purer, heart, and higher,/ Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore,/ To which alone unsexing, purely aspire'.[27] The word 'unsex' brings the negative implications of Lady Macbeth's invocation to the 'spirits/ That tend on mortal

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[26] See my discussion of the woman warrior in Chapter 3, 124-130.

[27] Margaret Morlier notes that Barrett Browning amended this line for the 1850 edition of the work, eliminating the repetition, but clarifying the positive meaning; 'Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore/ Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire'. See Margaret Morlier, 'The Hero and the Sage: Elizabeth Barrett's Sonnets "To George Sand" in Victorian Context', *Victorian Poetry*, 41 (2003), 319-332, 322.

thoughts' to fill her with 'direst cruelty' (1.5.38-41): it was also a word which 'reappeared at the end of the eighteenth century in anti-Jacobin journalism, to attribute the cruel ambition of Lady Macbeth to women political writers' (Morlier, 2003, 322). Barrett Browning is overturning these negative ideas to offer a positive idea of 'unsex', that is when sex will not matter and thus true freedom will be achieved, currently only possible after death; 'attempting to neutralize the negative cultural power of the term "unsex" for women writers, Barrett gave the word a spiritual meaning'(328).

Margaret Morlier has noted the close links between Barrett Browning's sonnets and one 1836 sketch of Joan's death from *The American Monthly Review*, which manifests threads of many of the legends of Joan: 'To George Sand: A Desire' in particular reflects closely the diction used in this description. The idea that at the scene of Joan's pyre 'they imagined that her spirit — visible to mortal eyes — soared upward, dove-like on white pinions, into viewless heaven' bears a strong resemblance to the image used by Barrett Browning, 'Of thine own nobler nature's strength and science,/ Drawing two pinions, white as wings of swan,/ From thy strong shoulders, to amaze the place/ With holier light'. The 'holier light' reflects the 'saintly light' in the account of Joan's death. This 1836 article also draws on the idea of Joan's 'heart which had defied their bravest, unscathed by fire, and ominous to them of fearful retribution!'. Morlier shows how, in 'A Recognition', Barrett Browning produces 'a revisionary image of Sand in which she burns both grotesquely as a French martyr of the English Press and sublimely as an artist of passionate intensity' (329). Sand's reputation had been particularly attacked by the English press, which described her with images of moral contagion and excess of

sensuality. Barrett Browning subverts these images, and combines them with Biblical characters chosen to challenge representations of masculinity and femininity, and with concepts of heroism. These images correspond with the contemporary discussions of heroism that Carlyle had tapped into with his lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, published in 1840, but demand an alternative female version of them. To this she adds visions of the Christian martyrdom of Joan, and thus she redefines Sand as a positive figure, a poet, hero and spiritual example. Significantly Barrett Browning does this by once again using the sonnet form in unexpected ways, the reader neither receiving the love sonnet, nor the heroic/political sonnet that the form suggests, but an innovative combination of the two. Barrett Browning is presenting a revised version of Sand's persona and using sonnets in an original way to do so.

However, Barrett Browning's use of images of Joan's martyrdom in these poems has implications for the presentation of the martyr herself. The links with Joan provide the presentation of Sand with ideas of virtue, spiritual strength, sanctity, fervour, purity. By the same token the comparison imbues Joan with the qualities of Sand which Barrett Browning admired: strength, power, ground-breaking independence, self-empowerment in her male/female role. Barrett Browning uses images of the medieval saint to empower her version of Sand, and support her views of the confining nature of gender expectations, while at the same time empowering Joan with the contemporary writer's revolutionary freedom. The 'woman-heart' in the sestet of 'A Recognition' is central to the message of both sonnets, Barrett Browning insisting that both women can be political, cross-dressers, passionate, and geniuses while being truly women, despite the

contemporary social codes that state that their behaviour is outside the realms of 'femininity'. Joan thus is rendered a political, heroic, feminine force, a precursor to the adoption of her as a mascot by suffragists later in the century.

Patriot Warrior, Maiden of Romance, or Domestic Goddess?

Southey had seen Joan as a revolutionary nationalist, celebrating this aspect of her in his 1796 work, before his disenchantment with the increased violence of the French Revolution saw his adoption of a more anti-Gallic stance. By contrast, Joan of Arc became associated with the patriotism and nationalism of the public schools, built around ideas of chivalry, which developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. This use of Joan as icon of a particular type of chaste, virtuous chivalry, the Maiden Knight, meant that, along with Sir Galahad, she became a role model to be held up to boys in nineteenth century public schools, where ideas of chivalry — duty to country, king and womankind — flourished.[28] Images of Joan litter the schools, on stained glass windows, portraits, and not surprisingly, on war memorials commemorating the Crimean, Boer and Great Wars. In 1846 *Joan of Arc: A Prize Poem* was recited in Rugby School, suggesting a vision of Joan at Charles VII's coronation.[29] Interestingly, the work ends with a criticism of the bloodshed and war of the 'days of yore' and a demand not to forget the horror of Joan's betrayal and execution: 'Nor look we through the treacherous glass of time/ And weave the wreath of bays to consecrate a crime' (10). A work published in 1883, *Jeanne Darc,*

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[28] For a discussion of Public Schools' chivalry see Girouard, 163-176.

[29] Francis Thirkill Conington, *Joan of Arc: A Prize Poem* (Rugby: Crossley and Billington, 1846).

the Patriot Martyr: and other Narratives of Female Heroism in Peace and War, presents the saint as the 'personification of patriotism, one of the sublimest forms of devotion of which the soul is capable. The love of country is the life of a nation as much as family love is the life of a household' (5).[30] Jeanne is a dedicated and successful warrior, 'Jeanne, however, breathed nothing but war' (33). The phenomenon of her life, far from being supernatural or divine, is actually her martial strife and selfless patriotism, 'For her country Jeanne lived, fought, and died; and though like a meteor, she seemed to vanish, leaving a fiery track behind, posterity has acknowledged that she was one of the noblest women whose names adorn the pages of History' (86). The writer sees no difficulty in presenting this military figure at the same time as offering proof of Joan's femininity, that her tears when she was wounded in the neck by an arrow were 'a proof at once of her weakness and her womanhood' (36), that her transvestism was a sign of her 'true maiden modesty' (71), a safeguard against her male sleeping companions, and, most significantly, when she goes back on her recantation, 'she suddenly became herself again, the woman was once more the heroine' (78). Despite the implicit suggestion here that the woman and the heroine are irreconcilable, this Joan is a very domestic heroine, celebrated for all the feminine attributes that would make her socially exemplary despite her trangression into the public and military sphere.

An astoundingly overt example of the 'feminizing' of Joan can be found in Emma

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[30] *Jeanne Darc, The Patriot Martyr: and other Narratives of Female Heroism in Peace and War* (London: Blackie & Son, 1883), 5. The story of Joan is set alongside other heroic women such as The Countess of Nithsdale, Flora Macdonald and Grace Darling.

Robinson's 1849 three-volume *The Maid of Orleans: A Romantic Chronicle*.[31] The title of the work is significant as 'chronicle' has overtures of medieval history, a sense heightened by the writer's claim that she stumbled across the life of Joan in the form of a 'poetical chronicle' *Gestes de la Pucelle d'Orleans* by the Minstrel, Huéline de Troye. So the claim is not only that it is based on a medieval text, but a female-authored one. In the Preface, Robinson declares that she is writing as a service to history to share the little known facts about the life of Joan that she has discovered: in fact, this story bears very little resemblance to the historical facts made available only five years before. The work shifts between presenting Joan as a swashbuckling hero, and as a typical tragic heroine of romance, ultimately destroyed by love. While she bandies words with enemies on the battle-field, taking up the gauntlet of John Falstolfe when he challenges Charles's coronation in the name of Henry VI (II: 284), and is striking at her trial for her 'heroic candour and eloquence of her replies' (III: 191), this work uniquely adds sex to the equation, suggesting a romance between Charles VII and Joan. This seems, in fact, a direct response to the factual historical accounts of Joan's life and trial, the writer reclaiming her as a heroine of romance — making her jealous, susceptible to love, trivial — in short putting her back in her acceptably female sphere. Like all good romances, this story has a central love story, here Joan and the King himself, but with the twist that the male lover is also the villain of the piece.[32] Despite the suggestions of Charles's affection, he callously makes a wager that he can woo Joan to stay after the Coronation, despite her pleas to be allowed to return home as ' a mere woman — a very weak and

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[31] Emma Robinson, *The Maid of Orleans: A Romantic Chronicle*, 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1849).
[32] I am using here Labbe's definition of a Romantic romance (2).

tearful shepherd-girl' (II: 280). Consequently they share a kiss in a 'frenzied ecstasy of love and pleasure' (II: 306), but Joan proves her virtue by rejecting the offer to become his mistress, declaring that she is a 'vowed maiden' (306) despite her great love for him. Enraged, Charles becomes her enemy, despite her remaining in his military service, thus abandoning her to her death. The romance motif continues, however, the villain repenting his betrayal and spending the rest of his life wearing her heart around his neck, encased in a small gold casket. He is said to have restored her memory out of love, rather than for personal political gain as history suggests. Despite Joan's virtue, the writer is at pains to show her as a woman who loves passionately, entertaining jealous thoughts of Charles and his mistress Agnes Sorel while imprisoned (II: 68), and at her death 'She imagined she was deserted by Heaven, and given up to the dreadful doom that awaited her, for her guilt in loving Charles VII' (II: 298).

The published historical facts also seem to have little influence on the vast number of largely female-authored, didactic histories of Joan, written from the 1840s and throughout the second half of the century, for again these seem to be reclaiming Joan for their propaganda as upholder of the private sphere, despite the historical evidence. These works focus on Joan's femininity, ironically exalting her as a domestic icon at the expense of her military and political achievement. Many use the widely held belief of the alignment of properly 'feminine' behaviour with moral strength, and the demonstration of a true Christian devotion to God. In the 1844 *Joan of Arc: An historical tale, by a young lady*, dedicated to 'my dear sisters, and my young friends', the author uses Joan's story as an example of what can happen if we do not 'exert our fortitude to meet, with Christian

behaviour, "the every-day trials of life"', as Joan did. The moral of the story is a harsh one, the lesson to readers being to remember that the 'cruel men' who captured, tried and executed Joan 'were like yourselves, once guileless and tractable in the hands of tutors and parents'.[33] A lesson can also be learned from the transgressive Joan herself, who 'certainly was pious, but not sufficiently pure in her devotions: her earthly king was the first object of her thoughts' (viii). In order to make Joan a suitable feminine role-model, her martial activity is played down: there is very little actual warfare before she is captured, and, significantly, it is through her donning of armour that Bedford is able ultimately to trap and execute her. A unique imaginary scene of Agnes Sorel dressing Joan in a woman's white gown allows the writer to explore different types of womanhood, a contrast being made between Agnes, only a shallow 'gay butterfly' (77), and the heroic, pure Joan. The scheming Agnes, through jealousy of Joan's power and influence, provokes Joan's downfall by urging her lover, Charles VII, not to pay the ransom (156): while a contrasting virtuously feminine woman, Alice, daughter of Duke of Bedford, is Joan's defender. Joan's fall here is also the fault of romance, a trait used repeatedly in such fiction: Joan is urged to marry Orville Dunois by the King (109), and her betrayal comes partly as a result of one of Dunois's supporters avenging his honour.

Joan of Arc; or, The Story of a Noble Life, 'Written for Girls'(1871) invokes young readers to have faith in God and themselves as Joan did: 'Let us learn the lesson of her life: and that is unflinchingly, courageously, and prayerfully, to do the work which God

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[33] *Joan of Arc: An historical tale, by a young lady* (London: Shepherd and Sutton, 1844), iv and 203.

imposes upon each of us', and 'to set duty before us as the paramount aim of our lives'.[34] Here Joan is shown as being properly feminine with 'womanly feelings' (46), 'like a true woman, she was prone to tears' (44), despite her exposure to warfare: 'Our readers will wonder, doubtless, how a woman so fair, so gentle, and so tender as the Maid could mingle in these scenes of bloodshed' (61). Interestingly, the piety of this book demands the rejection of Joan's visions as being too supernatural, as being too Catholic: 'The young reader will remember that Jeanne's visions were not real; that the voice, and the light, and the figures of the saints were entirely the conception of a powerful fancy, stimulated by fasting and lonely meditation' (11). Similarly Joan's detecting of the disguised Charles VII on first meeting him is explained away as her quick eye detecting 'his naturally royal bearing' (23), and from descriptions she has heard. Despite her paranoid and superstitious faults, she remains heroic: 'Put aside her mental delusions — those visions and voices which created by an intense imagination continually brooding upon one great theme — and she stands before you as one of the brightest women whose names adorn the page of history' (107).

The trait of making Joan a suitably feminine domestic goddess is not reserved for didactic texts for youth, but is also seen in more general historical biographies, again usually the work of women writers. Janet Tuckey writing in 1880 explains that Joan possessed a rare union of qualities — 'The soldier's courage, the patriot's devotion, the purity of a saint, and the constancy of a martyr, were all, in her, blended with and glorified by the very truest womanliness'— and reassures us that 'Her bringing-up fitted her for the tender

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[34] *Joan of Arc; or, The Story of a Noble Life*, 'Written for Girls' (Edinburgh: Nimmo, 1871), 103 and 107.

fulfilling of all womanly duties'.[35] As the century continued, the trait of claiming historical accuracy while presenting Joan as a romance heroine, quite different from the logical clear-headed defendant seen at her trial, continues, reaching its apotheosis in Lady Amabel Kerr's 1895 *Joan of Arc*.[36] This opens noting the richness of the historical sources which have been employed, but goes on to disguise historical accuracy with a Joan who 'never ceased for one moment to be essentially a woman' (69), and whose very femininity was the essence of her success: 'Skilful as she was in strategy, and fearless in battle, it was not because of either skill or valour that she changed the fate of nations, and held the hearts of men in her hands, but because, in spite of her life in camp and battlefield, and in spite of her male attire, she was the most womanly of women who ever breathed' (32). Mary Monica Maxwell-Scott opens her 1905 work by verifying its historical accuracy, listing the numerous historical sources she has used, most notably the reports from the trial and rehabilitation trials.[37] Despite this, the focus of the work is on Joan's femininity: even in the face of battle, 'she kept untouched her gentleness and tenderness of heart through all the tumult of war' (35). The link between numerous examples of an ultra-feminine heroine, at a time when women's involvement in politics and the public sphere was increasing, seems to point to an obvious attempt to reinforce typical gender codes.[38]

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[35] Janet Tuckey, *Joan of Arc "The Maid"*, (London: Marcus Ward, 1880), Preface and 25.
[36] Edition used, Amabel Kerr, *Joan of Arc* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1950).
[37] Mary Monica Maxwell-Scott, *Joan of Arc* (Edinburgh and London: Sands and Co., 1905).
[38] The depictions of Joan of Arc by women writing after the First World War, during which Joan was used as an icon to incite support for the war, can often be seen reverting to gender stereotypes, enhancing the appeal of the saint for their readership by rendering her a non-military icon of the domestic. Happily, some

The Heroine Returns

For many women writers, the publication of the historical evidence of Joan's trial meant an opportunity to focus on Joan's political moves in the public sphere. Harriet Parr's fascinating 1866 biography of Jeanne D'Arc opens by immediately enforcing the academic and authentic nature of the work, that it is drawn from Quicherat's records of Jeanne's trial and rehabilitation. Here Joan is depicted as a knowing and political heroine, who, well aware of the traditional prophecy of the virgin saviour of France, uses it for her own advantage to gain acceptance from the public and the sceptical court.[39] Not superstitious, and consistently scornful of the idea that she can perform miracles, Jeanne consciously uses her 'hallucinations' (1:19) artfully as a means of validating the actions she wants to take (1:26). Parr suggests that Jeanne's wrath at the English and Burgundians was incited when they pillaged her village, Domremy (1:25), thus she uses the voices as a way of ensuring she will be able to be avenged. Later Parr reinforces this, 'Her vocation was not the hollow fantastic dream of a sickly visionary, but an impulse to act — a *possession* which burthened her until she was free to act' (1:64). However, by declaring that she was a subject of divine voices, with no power, will, or knowledge apart from what they teach her, Joan is presenting herself as a passive instrument of God's will and thus as a suitably 'feminine' woman. As Parr emphasizes, 'Jeanne assumed her

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writers did see the shallowness of this depiction, Edith Ramsay and Eileen Younghusband maintaining in 1932 that Joan 'has so far outsoared the affectations of romance that all except the simplest have grown impatient of pictures and statues which make her too dainty, too pretty, too consciously noble' (*St Joan: An Anthology*, (London: RTS,1932), Introduction.

[39] Harriet Parr, *The Life and Death of Jeanne D'Arc, called The Maid*, 2 vols (London: Smith, Elder & Co.,1866).

position as a chief of the war with the same ease as she had assumed her martial equipments. Holding her commission from God, who greater, higher, stronger than she?' (1:85). Jeanne is however shown to reinforce the idea that she is fighting a crusade, a holy war, insisting on religious services for the soldiers, raising her celebrated 'Jhesus Maria' standard, and fighting under a banner depicting Christ crucified.

In stark contrast to her role in many biographies, Jeanne here is 'a practical soldier and no mystic' (1:27), Parr reinforcing her military equality with male comrades on the battlefield: 'In camp, Jeanne was no meek maiden spinning at the wheel. When she laid down the distaff and took up the sword, it was with such stern good heart, as makes me, fighting for their country, strike hard and strike home' (1:94). Jeanne is 'gifted with every virtue of her sex, and exempt from all its weaknesses but tears' (1:76), active on the battlefield where 'The blood of an enemy did not make Jeanne's hair rise nor her flesh creep' (1:117). Ultimately Jeanne's sex is no barrier to her military skill or glory: 'She was a person of such high chivalry, that there was no knight in Christendom whose fame overshadowed hers' (II:3). Jeanne herself is shown to be mindful of the idea of chivalry and her role in it: appreciating that 'Swords identify, authorize, and authenticate medieval warriors in fact and legend' (Wheeler and Wood, xi), she realises that her possession of the legendary Fierbois sword allows her to join the litany of mystical chivalric sword-bearers, which include King Arthur, Roland, and Charlemagne, as Southey's Joan had earlier in the century. As Bonnie Wheeler suggests, the judges at her trial similarly recognised the importance of the sword as a symbol of the delivery of Christian France, and a means of glorifying Joan: for this reason, while they probed her clothes, body and

possessions to find evidence of lies or witchcraft, they only asked one question about the Fierbois sword. Parr's practical, intelligent, and politically astute protagonist is herself well aware of the symbolic importance of the Fierbois sword, but, lacking superstition, she attaches little importance to it personally: when the blade breaks she just takes up another (223). Joan here is a political schemer and an active soldier, but can at the same time be a worthy heroine.

Anna Eliza Bray published *Joan of Arc, and the times of Charles the Seventh, King of France* in 1874.[40] This work is a crossover book, written in the 'New and Popular Works — principally for the Young' series but presented as a valid work of history rather than a children's book. Bray is keen to prove the worth of her work by listing her sources, and giving the full background of the Hundred Years' War and Charles VII's situation in the Introduction. From the opening she presents both sides of opinion about her subject, declaring that satisfaction with Joan not 'universal' (111), although she goes on to show that she herself believes her to be heroic and steadfast and undoubtedly on a divine mission: 'It cannot, we think, be doubted that they were accomplished by the will of Almighty God' (275). Bray is keen to justify Joan's wearing of men's clothes, emphasizing Joan's arguments of the necessity of her transvestism as convenient for a serving soldier, and as a means of protection of her virtue. Bray attacks Charles VII's abandonment of 'the noblest subject of his realm' (275) as 'abhorrent': she offers further evidence in support of her presentation of the weak and evil king by relating the similar

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[40] Anna Eliza Bray, *Joan of Arc, and the times of Charles the Seventh, King of France* (London: Griffin and Farran, 1874).

betrayal of Jacques Coeur, the man who had 'laid at his sovereign's feet the wealth he had gained by the creation of a national commerce' (358), and who thus enabled Charles to form the army which restored his kingdom.

Louisa Stuart Costello interestingly reverses Bray's technique, and instead uses the history of Jeanne d'Arc as another example of the treachery of Charles VII in her history of Jacques Coeur.[41] Charles VII here is cowardly, weak and impotent, so Jeanne is used as a political pawn by those who want to force him into action: 'A miracle was necessary to rouse him into energy, and the mission of Jeanne d'Arc was judiciously arranged by those who saw too plainly that mere arguments would fail of the desired effect' (76). Costello's focus is the wealthy merchant, Jeanne serving as a comparison for her main subject: 'The fate of the unhappy and heroic Jeanne might have been to Jacques Coeur a foreshadowing of his own destiny. Abandoned like her to his enemies, like her his name and fame were tardily re-established in the country they had both so faithfully served!' (161). It is Jacques Coeur who had provided Jeanne with the practical means to win her victories: 'The brilliant, though mournful, episode of the heroine of Orleans, which changed the fortune of the legitimate king and paved the way to his future restoration, would scarcely have accomplished its end, had not the sinews of war been supplied by the magnificent merchant, whose overflowing coffers were placed at the disposal of the king' (160). What is evident in both Bray's and Costello's works is the acceptance of Joan as a historical figure, whose life story can be evidenced with solid facts, not simply a romantic heroine, or legendary subject matter with a useful didactic function. The

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[41] Louisa Stuart Costello, *Jacques Coeur, The French Argonaut, and His Times* (London: Bentley, 1847).

contrast between biographies of Joan published after the publication of documentary evidence of her life and trial, and those that pre-date this, is marked.

Literary works using Joan of Arc as a central figure saturate the second half of the century. One of the most compelling is Augusta Webster's 1866 'Jeanne D'Arc', a dramatic monologue that brings Jeanne's voice alive, as it is her compelling and sympathetic voice that we hear throughout the work.[42] Jeanne, in prison on the night before her execution, is haunted by visions of the past, the work opening with her memories of being wounded at the siege of Compiegne. She sees the vision of saints, who comfort her after a terrifying vision of her death:

> Meseemed my living limbs were to be given
> To scorch and writhe and shrivel in the fire—
> I was to know like torment and like shame
> With those who front our God with blasphemies
> And loathsome magic. (31)

Most striking is Jeanne's humanity, both in her vanity at remembering proudly how she was exulted by the public, and in her subsequent humility in her shame at this 'arrogant delight' when she is 'a mean her-wench from the fields, what more/ But made God's instrument' (34). This is also evident later in the poem when she asks herself whether she might sell her soul to the devil if he would save her life: she instantly begs forgiveness for this human failing, what she calls the 'deadliest sin of all my life' (37).

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[42] Julia Augusta Webster, 'Jeanne D'Arc', *Dramatic Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1866) 29-38.

Joan examines her role and why she is different from other women, showing the tragedy of her isolation, and the immense sacrifice of her personal happiness for the public good:

> Was it for this that I was chosen out,
> From my first infancy — marked out to be
> Strange 'mid my kindred and alone in heart,
> Never to cherish thoughts of happy love
> Such as some women know in happy homes,
> Laying their heads upon a husband's breast,
> Or singing, as the merry wheel whirrs round,
> Sweet cradle songs to lull their babes to sleep?
> Was it for this that I forbore to deck
> My beauty with the pleasant woman arts
> That other maidens use and are not blamed,
> Hid me in steel, and for my chaplet wore
> A dented helmet on my weary brows?
> Ah! I like other women might have lived
> A home-sweet life in happy lowly peace,
> And France had not been free but I content,
> A simple woman only taking thought
> For the kind drudgery of household cares.
> But I obeyed the visions: I arose,
> And France is free—And I ere the next sun
> Droops to the west shall be whitened mass—
> Dead ashes on the place where the wild flames
> Shot up—oh horrible! (35-36)

Here the understatement of her achievement, and the use of simple diction, accentuates the heroism of her act, 'I arose/ And France is free', as does the contrast between her vision of an uncomplicated life, and the horror she knows awaits her in a grotesque death. The poem ends with Jeanne's straightforward acceptance of doom, saying of the taunts of the executioners, 'No matter; now they cannot bait me long' (38). Jeanne thanks God for choosing her to be His messenger and, as her death is inextricably linked in her divine task, thanks Him also for her death. Webster's Jeanne d'Arc is manifest as sympathetic heroine, who has given up simple domestic comforts for a difficult life and a monstrous death. An intelligent and articulate speaker, fully cognisant of her situation, Joan shows sincere devotion to her divine mission, and a heroic acceptance of her fate. Webster's work draws on Quicherat's records of Jeanne's trial, the poet bringing her heroine alive by echoing the straightforward language and showing the simple vitality and courage Jeanne had demonstrated, when giving logical answers to frequently ludicrous questions.

The First World War saw the culmination of a century's use of Joan of Arc as icon of chivalry and military glory, a trend particularly seen in her native country, where she became a symbol of France's 'martyrdom'. This is encapsulated in Theodosia Garrison's poem 'The Soul of Jeanne D'Arc', which pictures a heavenly Joan before God not 'as a martyred saint might come', but as 'a straight young soldier, confident, gallant, strong,/ Who asks a boon of his captain in the sudden hush of the drum'.[43] Joan's role as icon for a vast range of social and political causes continued at the beginning of the twentieth

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[43] As used as Preface to Laura E Richards, *Joan of Arc* (New York and London: Appleton, 1919).
For further such images see Jeanne d'Arc and the First World War site
www.scuttlebuttsmallchow.com/joanofarc.html

century: socialists and nationalists, suffragists and upholders of domestic ideology, all found an ideal in the medieval French woman. In his Preface to *Saint Joan* (1924), written in the wake of her canonization, Bernard Shaw objects fiercely to the portrayals of Joan which had preceded his play: Shaw's heroine brings to life the plain speaking, direct, yet innocent, woman who presents herself in the trial documents.[44] Joan of Arc eluded the categories of definition usually given to famous women in the nineteenth century, being neither queen, nor courtesan, nor beauty, nor matron, nor artist, nor genius: she was anomalous in the culture, as she still is today, as a woman renowned for martial activity. Joan is 'every woman', with the possibility to hold meaning for a diverse range of political and social causes: for the nineteenth-century woman writer, her exploding of gender spheres, and yet flexibility to be contained within them, meant she held endless possibility and inspiration, an empowered woman who could be held as a mascot in contemporary fights for empowerment. She was in the rare position of being a medieval woman who transgressed violently from her allotted sphere, as cross-dressing military leader, but whom historical documentary evidence could prove was lucid and straightforward, and imply was virtuous, honest and ultimately saintly: her canonization in 1920 offered her ultimate spiritual empowerment. Literary and visual images of Joan saturated the nineteenth century: this is far from an exhaustive study, as I have only had space to consider a very small portion of these portrayal here, selecting those which best illustrate the varied genres, social, and political uses to which presentations of the

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[44] Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan* (London: Penguin, 2003). Shakespeare's *Henry VI* 'grossly libels her in its concluding scenes in deference to Jingo patriotism' (7) and ends in 'mere scurrility' (23), 'Schiller's Joan has not a single point of contact with the real Joan, nor indeed any mortal woman that ever walked this earth' (24), while Andrew Lang and Mark Twain 'are equally determined to make Joan a beautiful and most ladylike Victorian' (26).

medieval saint were put. The most pervasive use of Joan in the nineteenth century was the icon of the conduct books for girls, part of the trend of reviewing the careers of influential women and using them as exemplars of behaviour for girls to emulate or avoid, a means of codifying women's behaviour. This is perhaps surprising given Joan's cross-dressing, sword-wielding fame: but her insistence on her virginity, her claim of adherence to a spiritual mission and duty to God, and her grotesque death at the hands of her enemies, made her a symbol of the dutiful, obedient, chaste victim, which became a Victorian ideal. Girouard has said that 'chivalry brought queenly women back into fashion' (199): despite exploding all aspects of chivalry with her role as active, martial woman, in the nineteenth century Joan of Arc was certainly presented as a 'queenly' woman, in the age obsessed by the idea of queenship.

5 Issues of Queenship: chivalry and 'queenly women' in the age of Victoria

In social terms Queen Victoria was the ultimately empowered woman. Queenship was an obsession of nineteenth-century Britain, not unexpectedly since it was dominated by the reign of one woman: but issues of queenship had raged earlier in the century, Victoria's accession in 1837 following Caroline's publicly fought battle to be Queen Consort of George IV, and the tragedy of Princess Charlotte, who did not survive to fulfil her promise as monarch. Indeed Nina Auerbach, identifies that the main duality in Victorian fundamental female identities is victim and queen rather than the traditionally accepted categories of virgin and whore: Joan of Arc embodies the idea of martyr victim, while images of women who were both victim and queen, Mary, Queen of Scots, Marie Antoinette, and Lady Jane Grey, were especially popular throughout the century.[1] In this chapter I shall argue that the nineteenth century's ideas of queenship are informed by the gender constructs of chivalry, as presented in the revival of medievalism and the gender spheres of dominant ideology. The queen is cast as a chivalric lady, while her role as head of the public sphere overturns the iconic passivity at the essence of this idea. Yet this arrangement was reciprocal, Victoria using medievalism, most particularly the emerging cult of the English gentleman, to support and develop her own position, just as Caroline of Brunswick had incited chivalric support earlier in the century in her struggle to be recognised as queen. I shall demonstrate how presentations of queens by nineteenth-century women writers show their negotiations with medievalism's gender constructs, and how this

[1] See Auerbach, 1982, 35-62.

translates into a more widespread idealization of 'queenly' women in domestic ideology, epitomized by Ruskin's 'Of Queens' Gardens'. I shall explore the changing iconography assigned to Victoria, first as Liege Lady to be championed, then as wife and mother of the nation, as well as a biological mother of her large family. The reappraisal of historical queens during the nineteenth century was a significant element in constructions of Victoria's queenship: of particular importance were presentations of the widely criticized Elizabeth I, and the victim and mother, Mary Queen of Scots. While these Early Modern sovereigns are obviously not medieval, their inclusion is necessary here as Victorian versions of these women provide clear examples of how women writers uphold or negotiate chivalric gender expectations.

The concept of queenship, and the reappraisal of the role of queen, infused Victorian literature: the culture was flooded by biographies of historical queens and other noble women. Joan of Arc may strike an anomalous figure here, but the didactic biographies of her life formed part of this largely female-authored tradition, which Alison Booth has usefully termed 'role model anthologies', noting, 'Scarcely a year of Victoria's reign passed without publication in Britain and the US of collective biographies of women, with as many as ten or twelve a year in the 1850s and 1870s'.[2] Early in the century, Mary Pilkington and Mary Hays produced their *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters* (1811) and *Memoirs of Queens* (1821) respectively, with later examples by Anna Jameson (1831) and Louisa Stuart Costello (1844).

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[2] See Alison Booth, 'Illustrious Company: Victoria among other women in Anglo-American role model anthologies', in *Remaking Queen Victoria*, ed. by Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 59-78, 77 n.1.

Agnes Strickland was by far the most productive of these royal biographers, producing a mammoth twelve volume *Lives of the Queens of England, from the Norman Conquest* (1840-48), which she supported with numerous single monarch studies and historical volumes, such as her *Letters of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Documents connected with Her Personal History. Lives of the Queens of England* is dedicated to Victoria, and the Introduction to the first volume presents it as a propaganda piece for the queen. Victoria is unmatched by any of her predecessors, 'No other princess has, however, been enthroned in this land under such auspicious circumstances as our present Sovereign Lady': Victoria's accession was not marred by the bloodshed of Mary I's, the disputes of Elizabeth I's, nor the clerical, moral and constitutional wrangling which greeted Mary II and Anne.[3] Strickland makes the comparison even more overt:

> Not one of those four queens, therefore, was crowned with the unanimous consent of her people. But the rapturous acclamations that drowned the pealing of the bells and the thunders of the artillery, at the recognition of our beloved liege Lady, Queen Victoria, in Westminster Abbey, can never be forgotten by those who then heard the voices of a united nation uplifted in assent. I was present, and felt the massy walls of the Abbey thrill from base to tower with the mighty sound, as the burst of loyal enthusiasm within that august sanctuary was echoed by the thronging multitude without, hailing her queen by universal suffrage.(I:xvi)

In making the favourable comparison between Victoria and the previous four Queen Regnants, Strickland is also significantly using the images of medievalism to depict

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[3] Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England, from the Norman Conquest*, 12 vols (London: Colburn, 1840-1848), I (1840), xv.

the scene: so the queen becomes a chivalric 'liege Lady' who is showered with the unconditional devotion and loyalty of her subjects. Strickland's 1861 illustrated and revised edition *The Queens of England* is especially informative as it works rather more like a Book of Beauty than a work of history.[4] Strickland's shortened biography of each queen is here accompanied by an engraving by a variety of eminent Victorian artists, in which the subject is pictured as a demure image of Victorian womanhood, rather than with any idea of historical accuracy. So, although by different artists, the dark-haired, doe-eyed 'Catherine of Arragon' (facing 195) looks remarkably similar to Anne Boleyn (facing 213), who, ironically given her fate, is shown locked in a loving gaze at a miniature of Henry VIII: in fact all the previously chronicled medieval queens are also of the same mould. Booth's term highlights that as well as being historical works, these volumes generally had a didactic purpose: to show, by the praise or censure of a historical woman's conduct, how a contemporary woman, or more precisely a 'Proper Lady' should behave.[5] So in addition to actual queenship the idea of domestic 'queenship', as promoted by Ruskin and others, can be seen to be developed in these anthologies: the queen should be an exemplar, womanhood at its finest, despite the fact that in holding the highest office in the country, she was leader of the public sphere, subject to no man, and as such, ultimately transgressive.

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[4] Agnes Strickland, *The Queens of England: A Series of Portraits of Distinguished Female Sovereigns* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1861).

[5] See Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

Virgin Queen and Victim: Victoria, Elizabeth I, and Mary, Queen of Scots

As monarch, Victoria was most often compared to Elizabeth I, not least because, like Elizabeth, Victoria was Queen Regnant, not Queen Consort as were her immediate queenly antecedents. However, the lasting image of Victoria's bourgeois maternal queenship is a far cry from the self-image of Elizabeth I. Comparisons between Elizabeth and Victoria were irresistible, as the cover of *Ainsworth's Journal* (1842) demonstrates, showing as it does portraits of the two queens in juxtaposition. As with the Elizabethan cult of Gloriana, Victoria became the recipient of the revised form of chivalry from her very accession to the throne: this cult of Victoria developed as central to the whole cultural movement of Victorian Medievalism, just as 'Gloriana' inspired a surge of Elizabethan medievalist works of art and literature. Taking Elizabeth's manipulation of the cult of the Virgin Queen as inspiration, the young Victoria self-consciously aligned herself with an idealized age of chivalry. While the 'middle-class' chivalry of the Victorian Age was a far cry from anything in the Middle Ages, the central notion of a noble lady being honoured and served above all others, and who favours the ideal knight, served Victoria's propaganda purposes admirably. A clear example of Victoria's awareness of the political effect of this link to chivalry is demonstrated in her meticulous preparations for the 'Bal Costume' she was holding on 6th May 1841: at the last minute, she and Albert changed their original costume plans and attended instead as Edward III and Queen Phillippa. By thus role-playing the monarch and consort in whose reign 'the sun of English chivalry reached its meridian', as James Mill has written in his 1825 *History of Chivalry*, Victoria was giving a strong indication that her reign would be another such golden

age. These roles were particularly flattering for both queen and consort: while Edward was the epitome of chivalry, founder of the Order of the Garter[6], Phillippa represented queenly strength and justice, famously begging her husband for mercy for burghers of Calais, as payment for her safeguarding the kingdom against the Scots in his absence. Indeed attempts to increase the popularity of Albert by presenting him as the epitome of an English chivalric gentleman, and the Queen's knight, continued throughout his life. He was painted in armour on numerous occasions, not least in a miniature for Victoria's birthday in 1844. Even after his death this characterization was continued, as is demonstrated by his armoured cenotaph effigy in the Prince Albert Memorial Chapel, Windsor, commissioned by Victoria in 1864. However, as Elizabeth had done before her, Victoria was only willing to comply with this stereotype as far as it met her own ends. Parliament's hopes that Victoria would fulfil the typical position of passive chivalric ideal were quashed soon in her reign, by her defiance in the 'Bedchamber Crisis' (1839).[7]

As Dobson and Watson have discussed, Elizabeth I's reputation suffered from the nineteenth century's refusal to allow one queen to be both national icon and private woman. As they have identified, creators of nineteenth-century popular biography and history-painting were fascinated 'by the feminine, domestic, anecdotal, and

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[6] As had been celebrated by Benjamin West's Edward III series of canvases painted 1787-1789 for the King's Audience Room at Windsor Castle.

[7] Following the resignation of Lord Melbourne as Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel formed a new Tory government and asked the Queen to dismiss some of her Whig ladies-in-waiting and replace them with Tories. Victoria refused, maintaining that many of her ladies had Tory connections, and that their appointment was personal, and not a matter for the House to dictate. Since the Queen's refusal coincided with Peel's uncertainty of a majority in the House of Commons, Peel withdrew, realising the possible damaging effect of a confrontation with the new queen, and Melbourne was allowed to return to office. As Victoria wrote in a letter to Melbourne, dated 9 May 1839, she rejected Peel's request because she felt that 'this was an attempt to see whether she could be led and managed like a child'. The incident became known as the 'Bedchamber Crisis'.

biographical as the underside of the more officially historical, and interested in its potential for moral exemplary narrative directed at girls and young women'.[8] Within this, Elizabeth is split into the sexual and the national, with the former incarnation receiving the most critical assault. Within nineteenth-century ideology, Gloriana's celebrated chastity came to represent female aggression and selfishness rather than virtue. In an age when the Queen chose to present herself, and be represented, as entirely domestic, wifely, and motherly, the childless spinster Elizabeth became the object of much condemnation. Yet Elizabeth had herself played with discourses of motherhood, shrewdly manipulating Tudor constructions of maternity for her own purposes, as Christine Coch has explored.[9] On 6 February 1559, Sir Thomas Gargrave, Speaker of the House of Commons presented the young Queen with what he emphasised was the most fervent prayer of all English-men, that she might 'by Marriage bring forth Children, Heirs both of their Mother's Vertue and Empire' (423): Elizabeth's response was characteristically sharp, that she would, under certain conditions, be happy to marry, but until that time she was pleased to remain 'a vyrgyne' and 'a good mother of my Contreye' (423). Thus 'Replacing their conventional, biological definition of "mother" with a metaphorical definition, she develops a powerful model of female public rule' (423-4).

Elizabeth was not the first queen to do this: Mary I had asserted that although, childless herself, she did not know how a natural mother loved her children, 'but certeinlie a prince and governor may as naturalie and as earnestly love subjects, as the

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[8] Michael Dobson and Nicola J. Watson, *England's Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 153.

[9] Christine Coch, '"Mother of my Contreye": Elizabeth I and Tudor Constructions of Motherhood, *English Literary Renaissance*, 26 (1996), 423-450.

mother dothe hir child' (as shown Coch, 424). Mary's very public failure to reproduce can be constrasted with Elizabeth's astute development of the cult of the Virgin Queen: Elizabeth recast the words of the Annunciation, which had been used to celebrate announcements of her half-sister's (false) pregnancies, by claiming that her virginity, like the Virgin Mary's, was proof of God's grace and favour. Chaste or maternal, women's bodies, particularly the Queen's, were read obsessively, and controlled, mainly because of the power they held: Elizabeth's reign was marred by rumours of barrenness, deemed by many as punishment for her alleged sin of incest with Thomas Seymour, and equally damaging reports of illegitimate offspring.[10] In an age where woman's role was defined around domesticity and maternity, however, such self-portrayal rang hollow: Elizabeth's virginity and childlessness became symbols of her 'unwomanly' behaviour. An autocrat, Elizabeth's very wielding of her power meant that she was subversive in Victorian eyes, falling into the very trap Ruskin identifies in 'Of Queens'Gardens' (1864) as the failure of many domestic 'queens': 'But alas! you are too often idle and careless queens, grasping at majesty in the least things, while you abdicate it in the greatest'.[11] Certainly Anna Jameson expressed this view in *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns*:

> It has been said that Elizabeth never forgot the woman in the sovereign: it might be said with much more truth that she never forgot the sovereign in the woman, and surely this is no praise. — One more destitute of what is

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[10] For an exploration of Elizabeth's relationship with Seymour see Sheila Cavanagh, 'The Bad Seed: Princess Elizabeth and the Seymour Incident', in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. by Julia M. Walker (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 9-29. Carole Levin explores the vast range of rumours spread about Elizabeth's illegitimate offspring, with particular reference to the beliefs of the ordinary public, in '"We shall never have a merry world while the Queene lyveth": Gender, Monarchy, and the Power of Seditious Words', in Walker ed., 77-95.

[11] John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies and The Political Economy of Art* (London and Glasgow: Collins, [1917]), 149.

> called *heart*, that is, of the capacity for all the gentle, generous, and kindly affections proper to her sex, cannot be imagined in the female form. We hear of her "lion-like port;" but woman-like or Christian-like formed no part of her character.[12]

As has been well-documented, by Leonée Ormond and Andrew Sanders among others, Walter Scott's *Kenilworth* (1821) had a significant influence on subsequent nineteenth-century presentations of Elizabeth.[13] The narrator of *Kenilworth* tells us that the character of Elizabeth 'united the occasional caprice of her sex, with that sense and sound policy, in which neither man nor woman ever excelled her'.[14] Elizabeth's sovereignty and her womanhood are constantly balanced as if in conflict: so we find that 'The dignity of the Queen was gratified, and the woman began soon to feel for the mortification which she had imposed on her favourite' (155), when Leicester demonstrates his shame that he has been publicly upbraided. We are further told that Elizabeth, in her relationship with Leicester, is 'fearful lest she should forget the dignity, or compromise the authority of the Queen, while she indulged the affections of the woman' (211). Elizabeth is characterized as capricious and tyrannical:

> Her subjects had the full benefit of her virtues, which far predominated over her weaknesses; but her courtiers, and those about her person, had often to sustain sudden and embarrassing turns of caprice, and the sallies of a temper which was both jealous and despotic. She was the nursing-mother

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[12] Anna Jameson, *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns*, 2 vols (New York: Harper, 1839), I:242.
[13] See Leonée Ormond, '"The spacious times of the great Elizabeth": The Victorian Vision of the Elizabethans', *Victorian Poetry*, 25 (1987), 29-46.
[14] Walter Scott, *Kenilworth: A Romance*, ed. by J.H. Alexander (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 166.

> of her people, but she was also the true daughter of Henry VIII; and though early sufferings and an excellent education had repressed and modified, they had not altogether destroyed, the hereditary temper of that "hard-ruled king". (210)

This contrasts strongly with the myth of Victoria as a reluctant, humble queen, an image instigated by the monarch herself in her declaration on her accession, 20 June 1837. Yet, since Jameson's castigation of Elizabeth may well have been known to Victoria, it is no wonder that she chooses to play the lowly girl-queen, who is maiden first, sovereign second, to protect her position by ensuring the popularity of her accession. Jameson, sets out to present a reassessment of Elizabeth I's reign, suggesting that although 'Almost from our infancy, we have a general impression that her reign is distinguished as one of the most memorable in history', this erroneous impression fades with maturity:

> As we grow older, and become acquainted with the particular details of history, we begin to perceive with surprise that this splendid array of great names and great achievements has another and far different aspect. On looking nearer, we behold on the throne of England a woman whose avarice and jealousy, whose envious, relentless, and malignant spirit, whose coarse manners and violent temper, render her detestable; whose pedantry and meanness, whose childish vanity and intense selfishness, render her contemptible. (I: 216)

It is clear from the outset that Jameson's view of Elizabeth will not be favourable: she begins by insisting that she will provide a holistic picture as 'To separate the personal from the political history of Elizabeth would not be difficult; but it would give a very

unjust and imperfect idea of her character' (215). However, Jameson then overturns this by presenting her assessment in separate sections each considering an aspect of Elizabeth's reign and comments on each one, which usually amounts to an overturning of any complimentary opinion. Jameson balances every 'public' skill against a personal character trait. Thus Elizabeth's celebrated religious toleration is refuted, that 'she had not the slightest idea of toleration in such matters' (219): her role as Protestant heroine is also attacked, Jameson claiming that she 'gave sufficient proof that in her secret soul she was no more of a real Protestant than her father' (218), only defying the Pope because of a pique to her vanity by Paul IV. Jameson admits that foreign policy under Elizabeth was 'most admirably managed' (221), but her praise is ambivalent:

> in particular, the principle of never making war but in self-defence cannot be too highly praised: and though it has been asserted that she adhered to this principle from avarice or policy rather than from Christian or feminine feeling, yet let her have all the commendation she deserves, for bequeathing to posterity the proof and example, that a sovereign may obtain the highest respect and renown, without aspiring to conquest, and leading armies to invade and rob their neighbours. (221)

Elizabeth's actions are lauded, but only in such a way as to suggest she is neither charitable nor womanly. Similarly balanced is the account of her home administration: 'As for the domestic government of Elizabeth, it was prudent, firm, and vigilant, on the principle of self-preservation and self-interest, rather than of enlightened benevolence' (224).

So for Jameson, the desire for a 'womanly' queen who is willing to subject herself to male direction predates Victoria's embodiment of this role. Passivity is the aspect of Mary Tudor's reign that saves her from condemnation for Jameson, 'This wretched woman was rather the perverted instrument of evil than evil in herself'. We should,

> regard her with the same kind of horror with which we look on some passive engine of torture,—some wooden rack or wheel stained with innocent blood. Mary, though a remorseless bigot, was not in her nature a wicked woman; she had strong affections, she had uprightness of purpose, and a high sense of her own and the nation's honour. (213)

Elizabeth's *activity* is her main crime. With a rather more favourable view, Louisa Stuart Costello introduces her *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen* by explaining why she has chosen the reign of Elizabeth as the starting point for her study:

> I have begun this collection at the reign of Elizabeth, because, with all her great qualities, she stands out, both in her own and in all succeeding ages, as one of the most prominent personages of England and of Europe; and because the existence of powerful talent and superior intellect in her seems to have raised her sex in esteem from the period at which she flourished. It appears to have been thought worth while to bestow some attention on women, after the glory of her *avatar* had given them dignity and importance from henceforth in the scale of society; and the long duty of paying deference to a female grew at length into a habit, which her own merit, once properly acknowledged, did not allow to decline.

> The position thus acquired could not be again lost, and woman no longer occupied a mean station in social state.[15]

Conversely, however, Costello does seem to be celebrating what she considers to be Elizabeth's masculinity, that she displays few 'female' faults:

> It would almost seem that Elizabeth had no feminine weakness but one—her inordinate vanity; but, although apt to be influenced by it in small matters, her overpowering sense got the better even of that besetting sin when great events required her to act. When all her grandeur of intellect, her promptness, wisdom, and resolution, are considered, this blemish on her *manly* qualities ought to be looked upon with indulgence, if it does not altogether redeem her reputation, for it was the only *female* trait she allowed to appear. Tenderness, softness, pity and forgiveness, were unknown to her mind, and, but for her vanity, she would scarcely have been a woman or human. (iii-iv)

Costello's de-feminizing of Elizabeth in this way corresponds to the general desire to unsex the Tudor monarch as a post-menopausal, childless, bitter despot in the early years of Victoria's reign, the very time when the Queen was young and bearing children, as is discussed in detail by Dobson and Watson (159-168).[16] However, after 1861, when Victoria herself was ageing, and increasingly unpopular because of the private seclusion of her widowhood, depictions of Elizabeth tended to avoid any undesirable comparisons with the present queen by rendering her 'acceptably infertile

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[15] Louisa Stuart Costello, *Memoirs of Eminent Englishwomen*, 4 vols (London: Bentley, 1844), 1:i.
[16] For a striking visual example of this, see Augustus Egg's unflattering *Queen Elizabeth discovers she is no longer Young* (1848), which is clearly influenced by Paul Delaroche's grotesque *The Death of Queen Elizabeth* (1827).

and unwomanly' (Dobson and Watson, 169), as a child. Safely enclosed within an entirely domestic sphere, Elizabeth's 'pre-sexual childish body, in fact, becomes safely iconic, and can be returned to its function of representing national progress and triumph' (169). The portrayal of Elizabeth as a child also integrated with the fashion for novels that showed 'The Girlhood of ..' historical figures, popular in the later nineteenth century.[17] By contrast, the 'national' side of Elizabeth's personality split was celebrated at the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in literature for men and boys that hailed Elizabeth and the Elizabethans as the progenitors of nation and empire building. This was part of the prevalent 'muscular Christianity', the chivalry of Kingsley and ultimately of the First World War.

Elizabeth's 'sister-queen' and victim, Mary Queen of Scots, did rather well out of the Victorian delight in a female victim, for all her accepted failings. A legendary beauty, she was also a mother, and had a tragic end with a famously poignant farewell speech: between 1820 and 1897 fifty-six works depicting events in the life of the Scottish Queen were exhibited at the Royal Academy.[18] The women who wrote the popular historical biographies at the time eulogized her: as early as 1811, Mary Pilkington completes the sympathetic execution scene in her self-consciously didactic *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Characters*, 'Thus [...] perished the lovely queen of Scotland, in the forty-fifth year of her age, to the eternal disgrace of her enemies, and the shame of England's queen!' (260). For Jameson, Mary died 'like a martyr; by vile hands indeed, and viler practice; but with friendly hearts near her, and all Europe looking on to admire, to applaud, and to bewail her' (212). For Costello she was a victim of her

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[17] For a discussion of these see Dobson and Watson, 165-175.

[18] See Roy Strong, *And when did you last see your father?: The Victorian Painter and British History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 106.

'envious rival' Elizabeth, because of her superiority in many 'charming acquirements' (1844, vi). Strickland is similarly pro-Mary, and highlights that the treatment of the Scottish queen had serious repercussions for national security, as well as for the moral standing of the English sovereign:'The glory of Elizabeth's reign was dimmed from the hour Mary was detained a prisoner, not only in a moral sense, but, politically and statistically speaking, it was a false step, which placed England in an incipient state of civil war, during the whole life of the queen of Scots'(VI (1843), 308).

Catholic Emancipation early in the century, and explicitly pro-Catholic literature by writers such as Charlotte Yonge, also meant a boost to the Catholic Scottish queen: Mary was also presented as an ideally womanly woman and inspirer of manly chivalry. The cult of the romantic Mary Stuart was incited, like so many aspects of medievalism, by Scott: his *The Abbot* (1820), sequel to *The Monastery; A Romance* (1820), dramatizes the Scottish Queen's imprisonment, escape, and ultimate defeat. We are told in the Preface toYonge's *Unknown to History: A Story of the Captivity of Mary of Scotland* (1882) that the work is based on the report that a daughter was born to Mary and the Earl of Bothwell, as suggested in Burton's *History of Scotland* and Agnes Strickland's *Life of Mary Queen of Scots*. The focus is, therefore, on Mary as a mother as well as a captive queen: a significant part of Mary's tragedy is more that of a woman with a traitor son than a deposed and imprisoned queen. The loyal chivalry of the supporters who believe her 'the sole and lawful Queen of England and Scotland' is reinforced with a focus on Antony Babbington, his chivalric idolization of the Queen from boyhood, his willingness to take part in her political schemes, and

ultimately his sacrifice of his life in her cause.[19]

Yonge clearly does not wish to appear too pro-Catholic, balancing her pro-Mary stance with one similarly favouring Elizabeth: she takes pains to suggest that both Mary and Elizabeth were trapped by the machinations of devious politicians, and the blame for Mary's death is certainly not placed at Elizabeth's door. Elizabeth is portrayed as a divinely anointed sovereign, but with suitably feminine weaknesses: by the time of Cicely's supplication to her the queen's face has 'an intellect and grandeur latent in it', but it was also 'haggard and worn, the eyelids red, either with weeping, or with sleeplessness, and there was an anxious look about the keen light hazel eyes which was sometimes almost pathetic and gave Cicely hope' (535). However, Mary is the tragic heroine of the work, with her frail rheumatic body and her 'witching loveliness' (260): 'noted for her beneficent almsgiving' (59), shown to be an affectionate friend and mistress, and the possessor of 'indomitably buoyant spirits' (366), there is also support for her belief that her execution is tantamount to martyrdom. Significantly, however, Mary's queenship is central to the whole work: stripped of the trappings of royalty, on being sentenced to death, she responds with great dignity, 'Sir, you may do as you please. My royal state comes from God, and is not yours to give or take away. I shall die a Queen, whatever you may do by such law as robbers in a forest might use with a righteous judge' (516). Yonge presents us with a surprisingly complex portrayal of the two queens, in which Elizabeth is a dignified and merciful victim of her own politicians, and Mary is the shrewder schemer, the pitiable mother, the bewitching chivalric icon, and, ultimately, the more regal queen.

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[19] Charlotte Mary Yonge, *Unknown to History: A Story of the Captivity of Mary of Scotland* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902), 218.

Victim-queens were a nineteenth-century obsession. Marie Antoinette had provoked Burke to mourn the death of chivalry, and continued to receive a sympathetic hearing throughout the century, she and Louis XVI said to have 'harrowed the hearts of visitors to the Royal Academy with as relentless a regularity as did those of the Queen of Scots' (Strong, 44). Mary Stuart's niece, Arabella Stuart, joined Lady Jane Grey as another victim of royal status widely commemorated in the Victorian age. The majority of these depictions of victim queens suggest these women to be impotent, frail, and in need of chivalric defence, as Roy Strong has noted: 'Mary Queen of Scots and Lady Jane Grey, both tough, humanist-educated women holding their own in a man's world, are deliberately distorted to approximate to a view of women as inferior beings in a male-dominated society' (154). Strong also comments that 'Perhaps the most revealing of all transmutations was their casting of Mary, Queen of Scots, Lady Jane Grey and Henrietta Maria as examples of perfect Victorian gentlewomen. Nothing could have been further from historic truth, but the artists remained undeterred by the facts staring them in the face' (45).

Powerful Vulnerability: Victoria and her Recent Predecessors

The role of queen that Victoria inherited was imbued with the idea of vulnerable femininity from Caroline of Brunswick, George IV's estranged wife. The plate on her coffin, attached by her supporters, read 'Caroline of Brunswick, the injured Queen of England', her role as victim of the corrupt establishment being central to her whole biography. The English people were overwhelmingly on Caroline's side in her battle with the highly unpopular George IV, her position reinforced by a strong sense of an unprotected female needing chivalrous support against the corrupt force of the

Hanoverian crown. As Mary Hays suggests, 'Burke, had he now lived, would have retracted his assertion, that the age of chivalry had passed away; it revived, in all its impassioned fervour, amidst the soberest and gravest people in the civilized world'.[20] By thus linking the degradation Caroline endured with the fate of the executed Marie Antoinette, Hays also evokes the threat of Revolution, which was stirring in the many starving and deprived Industrial towns, largely due to the strength of hostility to the Crown. It was widely agreed that Caroline had been victimized: attempts to ruin her reputation began in 1806 with the 'Delicate Investigation' into claims that Caroline had borne an illegitimate son: when this failed, recourse was made to a Bill of Pains and Penalties in the House of Lords. When the queen herself attended the first day of the trial (17 August 1820), a sole female in a chamber full of men, the recasting of her as damsel in need of chivalrous knights began:

> Proving her innocence necessitated her presentation as a hapless victim, 'a poor forlorn woman', as she described herself. Her mistreatment by some men made it imperative that other men should rescue her from an ill deserved fate. Caroline was the virtuous heroine, the symbol of dependent womanhood. The 'manly' and 'courageous' must rise up and protect her. It was an insult to the nation's manhood to see the queen so insulted by men. (Davidoff and Hall, 151)

Many popular songs of the time suggest the women of the country appealing to the chivalry of the men to defend Caroline (152): the popularity of the queen's cause was so great that the withdrawal of the prosecuting Bill by the government was greeted

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[20] Mary Hays, 'Caroline, Wife of George IV' from *Memoirs of Queens*, as shown in *Women's Writing 1778-1838: An Anthology*, ed. by Fiona Robertson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 402-406, 404.

with huge celebrations throughout the country, in urban centres and rural villages. Davidoff and Hall have explored the consequences of the 'Queen Caroline Affair' for the monarchy, how a 'domesticated monarchy' was called for, this in turn filtering down into the widespread reinforcement of social gender codes and obligations. Ideas of the monarch being symbolic parent for the nation were strengthened: 'The "people" wanted George to fulfil his domestic obligations, only then could he be a proper father to his country as well. The domestic had been imprinted on the monarchical' (152). George III had become a popular monarch by his death in 1820, his obituaries particularly eulogizing his attachment to domestic ties: by contrast, his son's life of public entertainment and dubious morality seemed an insult to the purity of domestic life.

The domesticating of the monarchy continued with William and Adelaide, who were set up as familial ideals, this despite William's extraordinary twenty years of pre-marital life with the actress Mrs Jordan, with whom he produced ten children. In an article discussing 'The Death of the King' in *The Times* on the day of Victoria's accession, the writer urges the young queen to imitate the widowed Adelaide in her wifely qualities, as a secure domestic life for the sovereign means a secure social life for her subjects:

> We are not inclined to be the flatterers of rising greatness, but we are only performing an act of justice to that dignity whose sun is set, in declaring that the brightest gem in the diadem of our young Queen [...] will be the constant imitation and practice of those domestic virtues which have stamped the name of Adelaide with glory and which form the worth, the

> pride, the ornament, and the security of social life.
>
> (*The Times*, 20 June 1837)

Later, obituaries of Adelaide would eulogise her wifely qualities: a clergyman in Birmingham suggested her care of the dying King provide a perfect exemplar for the 'wives of England'. Davidoff and Hall summarise the significance of this idea:

> This notion of the queen as a model was much played on in the years following the accession of Victoria, the 'Rosebud of England', when the wives and mothers of England could all claim to be queens in their own homes, however modest, and to follow the young queen in her celebration of marriage. Public opinion had decreed that the royal family must indeed be a family; kings and queens must be fathers and mothers in their own home if they were to be fathers and mothers to the people. (154-155).

Thus the idea of domestic queenship does not begin with Victoria, although she was to develop it for her own purposes. Of equal significance to Victoria were the public attitudes to sexuality, especially to concepts of womanhood, evidenced by the Queen Caroline affair. Caroline was famously determined, outspoken and open, characteristics which were a far cry from the persona of dependent passive femininity developed to boost support for her at her trial: 'In the public spectacle of the trial, Caroline came to stand for an ideal of womanhood which had little relation to her [...], but which expressed a view of marriage and domesticity which was becoming increasingly powerful' (Davidoff and Hall, 152). Femininity became inextricably bound up with ideas of vulnerability, virtue, honour and passivity, essentially a chivalric rendering which had obvious implications for the young Victoria.

The fate of Caroline intrigued Victoria: on 11th January 1838 Victoria noted in her Journal that she had discussed Lady Charlotte Bury's *The Murdered Queen! Or, Caroline of Brunswick, a Diary of the Court of George IV* eagerly with Lord Melbourne.[21] Another major issue raised by Caroline's saga was the usefulness of a seemingly defenceless royal female as a political pawn: Whig politicians and the lawyer Henry Brougham used both Caroline and Princess Charlotte in their political battle. For the Whig party the affair was a way of reinforcing the idea of monarchical tyranny. It is unsurprising that the pro-Whig Barrett Browning should have favoured the Queen's case, her party politics combining with the gender issues at stake: she declared in her autobiographical essay 'Glimpses into My Own Life and Literary Character' (1820-1),

> At this period when the base & servile aristocracy of my beloved country overwhelm with insults our magnanimous and unfortunate Queen I cannot restrain my indignation I cannot controul my enthusiasm—The dearest wish of my heart would [be] to serve her … to serve the glorious Queen of my native ilse [*sic*].[22]

In an unpublished dramatic scene in blank verse, written in 1820 at the height of the crisis, she depicts an imaginary emotional farewell between the mother and her pregnant daughter. The young Barrett Browning presents Caroline as 'a powerful proto-feminist figure, a dedicated mother and a strong moral guardian' (Avery and Stott, 36), an inspiration of womanhood, spiritual strength and regal behaviour:

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[21] See Gail Turley Houston, 'Reading and writing Victoria: the conduct book and the legal constitution of female sovereignty', in Homans and Munich eds, 1997, 159-181, (170).
[22] *The Brownings' Correspondence*, ed. by Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson, 14 vols (Winfield, KS: Wedgestone Press, 1984), I, 353.

'Child, Daughter, be a Princess — be yourself.../Is this your fortitude...is this your greatness...Is this th'undaunted spirit which might rival/Elizabeth, the glory of our land—?'[23]. Caroline is the righteous victim of 'th'envenomed shaft of persecution' (157), whose adherence to duty means she will ultimately be victorious and which earns her the praise of her daughter, 'Thou art too dazzling for me,/ Angel of Virtue — glory of thy sex' (158). This is a very early piece of work, an overtly sentimental fictional scene, and yet through it, Barrett Browning offers an interesting view of queenly behaviour: in contrast to the weakness of Charlotte, the more admirable behaviour is the fortitude, adherence to duty and virtue of the woman who is clearly royal first, mother second, as Charlotte suggests by calling her 'Oh my princess — oh my mother' (154). In contrast to the construction of queenly behaviour which would develop from Victoria's accession, the qualities Caroline shows here are not particularly womanly or feminine, but exemplars of good behaviour for any leading person in the public sphere, male or female. In this presentation, Barrett Browning is showing the potential for women in public life, demanding equality for them.

As a young queen, Victoria seemed to fulfil the promise of the tragic Charlotte, whose death, after complications in childbirth on 6 November 1817, left the nation black arm-banded and bereft. *The Times* reported that 'It is but little to say that we never recollect so strong and general an expression and indication of sorrow'. After a series of Georges, who were mad, corrupt or both, Charlotte seemed to be the one ray of hope for the future of the monarchy. She had endured a turbulent relationship with a tyrannical father, and shown a depth of spirit and determination that was lauded by

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[23] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Hitherto Unpublished Poems and Stories*, 2 vols (Boston: The Bibliophile Society, 1914), I, 156.

the Whig press as a rightful fight for freedom from oppression, but criticized by the Regent's Government as unnatural rebellion. Despite the rebellious spirit shown by Princess Charlotte in her life, her death saw her lauded as an example of ideal domesticity and femininity, and prompted overwhelming expressions of mourning. The Duke of Wellington called Charlotte's death 'one of the most serious misfortunes the country has ever met with', while Lady Charlotte Bury reported in her journal on 9th December that, 'A greater public calamity could not have occurred to us; nor could it have happened at a more unfortunate moment'.[24] Against this background, after the reign of her uncle William IV, Victoria emerges as the young maiden-queen, hesitant and humble. The monarch herself originates this image in her declaration on her accession, 20 June 1837, which was widely reported in the press the following day:

> This awful responsibility is imposed upon me so suddenly, and at so early a period of my life, that I should feel myself utterly oppressed by the burden were I not sustained by the hope that Divine Providence, which has called me to this work, will give me strength in the performance of it, and that I shall find in the purity of my intentions, and in my zeal for the public welfare, that support and those resources which usually belong to a more mature age and to longer experience.
>
> I place my firm reliance upon the wisdom of Parliament and upon the loyalty and affection of my people.[25]

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[24] As shown in Alison Plowden, *Caroline and Charlotte: The Regent's Wife and Daughter, 1795-1821* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1989), 209.
[25] As reported in *The Times*, 21 June, 1837.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning uses a quotation from this declaration as an epigraph to 'The Young Queen', first published in *The Athenaeum* in 1837. This provides a sympathetic portrait of a suitably demure and pious girl-queen, who is won by no 'outward pageants':

> A royal maiden treadeth firm where *that* departed trod!
> The deathly scented crown
> Weighs her shining ringlets down;
> But calm she lifts her trusting face, and
> calleth upon God. (137, lines 21-24)

Barrett Browning is here emphasising both the weight of duty and the pressures of the inherited tradition of male monarchs on the young Victoria.Victoria gets her strength from God, and, in a reciprocal relationship, Victoria will be supported by the nation if she develops a motherly and nurturing role in return. The queen's power is here placed in traditionally feminine attributes:

> A nation looks to thee
> For steadfast sympathy:
> Make room within thy bright clear eyes for all its gathered tears.
> And so the grateful isles
> Shall give thee back their smiles,
> And as thy mother joys in thee, in them shalt *thou* rejoice.
> (138, lines 46-51)

Barrett Browning offers a similar representation in 'Victoria's Tears', which first appeared in the same publication. This poem takes as its premise the image proliferated by newspaper reports of Victoria's first public appearance as queen, at the window of St James's Palace. A correspondent writing for *The Times* on Thursday 22 June 1837 reports that:

> The Queen, apparently completely overcome by the novelty of her situation, in conjunction with the combination of eventful occurrences which have within the last few days come to pass, the instant the first shout of gratulation [*sic*] pressed upon her ears burst into tears, which continued, notwithstanding an evident attempt on the part of Her Majesty to restrain her feelings, to flow in torrents down her now pallid cheeks, until Her Majesty retired from the window.

The Morning Chronicle of the same day notes that, 'The effect on Her Majesty was very affecting, as she was observed to weep nearly all the time, and was frequently obliged to use her handkerchief'. In Barrett Browning's work, Victoria is cast as a damsel from a medieval ballad who, 'heard, and wept—/ She wept, to wear a crown!'(138). Yet, as the poem goes on to consider, the weeping and overwhelmed young female monarch is able to command authority through using the usual traits of female weakness and submission: 'The tyrant's sceptre cannot move,/As those pure tears has moved!'. Victoria thus wins acceptance as a monarch by exploiting the very tropes of weak femininity that might have made her seem unfit to rule. An interesting wood engraving from the *Illustrated London News* entitled *The Queen on the Morning of her Accession, June 20, 1837*, highlights this image of the queen as commonplace,

shy maid.[26] Rather than regal appearance that this title conjures, the artist, 'Miss Costell', shows a respectably clad middle-class girl, with bonnet, shawl, black mourning ribbons and demure smile.[27] Victoria's youth and vulnerability also provoke the chivalry of the public, which, as George Eliot recognised, increased her potency: 'Our little humbug of a queen is more endurable than the rest of her race because she calls forth a chivalrous feeling'.[28] This subversion of accepted sexual stereotypes is something Barrett Browning explores throughout her poetry. The most popular of the poems of the 1844 volume, 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship', shows Barrett Browning's interest with the sexual politics embodied by Victoria's complex role. The poem takes the form of a letter written by a poet of humble birth about the trials of his love for the noble Lady Geraldine, whose 'queenliness' is emphasised:

> There's a lady, an earl's daughter,—she is proud and she is noble,
>
> And she treads the crimson carpet and she breathes the perfumed air,
>
> And a kingly blood sends glances up, her princely eye to trouble,
>
> And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her hair.
>
> (205, lines 5-8)

In 'The Powers of Powerlessness: The Courtships of Elizabeth Barrett and Queen Victoria', Margaret Homans explores compellingly the similarities between Barrett Browning's relationship with Browning, as shown in the courtship correspondence,

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[26] As shown in Susan P. Casteras, 'The wise child and her "offspring": some changing faces of Queen Victoria', in Homans and Munich eds, 182-199, 190.

[27] I would argue that the artist here is actually Louisa Stuart Costello, a talented artist as well as a writer, whose interest in the roles and images of women is discussed both in this chapter and throughout this work. There are many other examples of Costello's name having been mistakenly given as 'Costell'. For example *The Athenaeum* 17 April 1847,405-406, offers a review of a work by 'L.S.Costell', when this is in fact for Costello's *Jacques Caeur* [*sic*], *the French Argonaut, and his Times*. Neither the book's title nor the author's name has been presented accurately.

[28] As shown in Dorothy Thompson, *Queen Victoria: Gender and Power* (London: Virago, 1990), xvi.

and Victoria's own situation, as monarch and wife: 'When a genuinely successful mid-nineteenth-century woman acts the part of inferior vis-à-vis an embodiment of manliness, her rhetorical act as well as its unpredictable consequences create a resemblance between her and the most important woman in the land, Queen Victoria'.[29] As at her accession, to maintain her power Victoria had consistently to seem to be giving it away. So, in the so-called Bedchamber Crisis, she can only confirm her authority as queen by maintaining to Peel that her Ladies-in-Waiting are friends, not political appointments: this seems to undermine the political power of the Sovereign, but means she gets her own way. Similarly, she has to propose to her consort, and cannot vow to obey her subject-husband: but, as this position might make her seem 'unnatural' in the eyes of society, Victoria constantly reinforces the idea that she is a dutiful, middle-class wife and mother, and thus keeps her popularity as monarch.

Interestingly, in 'Crowned and Wedded' (1844), Barrett Browning raises Victoria out of her conflicting roles of monarch and wife, and pleads celebration for Victoria as woman, the essence that carries both roles, 'She is a *woman*, and *beloved*!, and 'tis enough but so'(251, line 50). In reality, the queen's womanhood, in the public eyes at least, is relatively insignificant behind her public roles. 'Crowned and Wedded' developed the ideas explored by Barrett Browning's two earlier Victoria poems: 'Through the structuring unity of 'Crowned and Wedded', therefore, Barrett suggests that Victoria's success as a leader on the world's political stage derives from the combination of her able statesmanship and her femininity, a combination which

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[29] Margaret Homans, 'The Powers of Powerlessness: The Courtships of Elizabeth Barrett and Queen Victoria', in *Feminist Measures: Soundings in Poetry and Theory*, ed. by Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 237-259, 243.

prevents her succumbing to the potentially emotionally stultifying effects of authority' (Avery and Stott, 96). These poems serve to reinforce the idea that Barrett Browning had consistently explored, 'that good leadership involves the successful negotiation of public and private personas and a strong commitment to moral responsibility, emotional honesty, and personal and social integrity, qualities which are often gendered in nineteenth-century discourses as feminine' (97). She had outlined this belief in a letter to Mitford, writing, 'There is something hardening, I fear, in power [...] and the coldnesses of state etiquette gather too nearly round the heart, not to chill it, often! But our young Queen wears still a very tender heart! And long may its natural emotions lie warm within it!—' (Kelley and Hudson eds, 1985, III, 261). Avery provides an interesting exploration of the pairing of 'Crowned and Wedded' with 'Crowned and Buried' in *Poems*: Barrett Browning's exploration of her ambivalent views on Napoleon Bonaparte shows how this juxtaposition 'eventually works to emphasise the destructive bases of male-dominated political systems and the potential embedded in more female-dominant systems' (98). Avery has also noted the embarrassment felt about the poems, which is evident in recent feminist recovery work, where they are either neglected or dismissed: I would agree that this undeniable trend completely misses the importance of Barrett Browning's use of Victoria as a means of considering 'women's relations to structures of power and authority in the political sphere' (96).

As Dorothy Thompson suggests, 'It is an odd contradiction that in the period in which the doctrine of separate spheres of activity for men and women was most actively developed and propounded, the highest public office in the land was held by a

woman' (1990, xiv). Dennis Moore has produced an enlightening exploration of Tudor queenship, and the relevance that the lively Tudor debates about the right of a woman to rule had in the nineteenth century.[30] He opens by looking at Pollack and Maitland's classic *History of English Law* (1895), which contains a chapter on 'The Sorts and Conditions of Men'. The sort of men in the eleventh section are actually women, discussed after all possible categories of men, including convicted felons, lepers, lunatics and idiots. As if to explain why he gives women no precedence, Maitland observes that 'no text-writer, no statute, ever makes any general statement as to the position of women' (235). Maitland is writing about medieval law, but his language actually demonstrates that little had actually changed by the end of the nineteenth century: of women he says, 'public functions they have none. In the camp, at the council board, on the bench, in the jury box there is no place for them' (236). As Moore points out, 'it seems surprising that [...] a legal historian who could look back on a series of female monarchs from Mary I to Victoria would fail to mention queenship as the great exception to his general rule' (236), especially when Victoria was approaching her diamond jubilee at the time of writing. As Maitland's comments emphasized, this idea of a private, domestic place for women away from public functions and authority is as relevant for Victoria's own age as for the Tudor queens: both societies faced the anomaly of allowing women 'no regular place of authority in church or state—with one most notable exception' (248). While Victorian married women were legally the property of their husbands, subject to the law of coverture, Victoria was uniquely independent. Although holding a strong sense of public duty,

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[30] Dennis Moore, 'Recorder Fleetwood and the Tudor Queenship Controversy', in Carole Levin and Jeanie Watson eds, *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 235-251.

and a firm belief that she was queen by Divine Right, she was consistently prepared to 're-write the rules of conduct and social precedence when it suited her' (Thompson, 1990, 62), while manipulating her public image. A letter from 1852 shows Victoria consciously controlling the ideological paradox of her position: contrasting Albert's liking for power with her alleged dislike of it she writes '[W]e women are not *made* for governing — and if we are good women we must *dislike* these masculine occupations; but there are times which force one to take *interest* in them…and *I* do, of course, *intensely*' (as shown Homans, 1994, 251). The imperative verbs here are revealing: Victoria shows a consciousness that if she is to be considered a moral and natural woman she is *obliged* to give the impression of disliking her governing role and only engage in it when she must, whereas in fact she finds it '*intensely*' interesting.

Following her marriage in 1841, 'the public image of Queen Victoria was reworked from a young queen to a responsible wife partnered by her consort, the mother of nine children and a royal dynasty': as such Victoria is consistently photographed and painted surrounded by her children.[31] Clearly the significance of queen as mother, both symbolically and biologically, cannot be underestimated, a factor of which Elizabeth I was acutely aware. However, 'The maternal body as representing monarchical authority is particularly problematic for Victorian times, with its publicly articulated conception of separate gendered spheres of authority', as Adrienne Auslander Munich explores.[32] Munich considers the problem of having a female monarch without seeming effeminate as a nation, and coins the term 'emmanlinancy'

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[31] Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London: Routledge, 1993), 129.
[32] Adrienne Auslander Munich, 'Queen Victoria, Empire, and Excess, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 6 (1987), 265-281, (265).

for the 'authoritative quality required of a female monarch, while no good woman would want to own it' (Munich, 1987, 266). Munich also provides an insightful exploration of how Victorian writers negotiate the complexities of female sovereignty, in an age when submission was an indicator of virtuous femininity, by presenting notably excessive fictional queens. In *Through the Looking Glass* (1872), Lewis Carroll presents three queens who are absurd in their excess (the Red Queen, the White Queen and Queen Alice): similarly, Gilbert and Sullivan provide a wealth of overpowering, authoritative women in their Savoy Operas, and, in the year of the Queen's Golden Jubilee, Henry Rider Haggard published *She: A History of Adventure* (1887), which features a fantasy queen of immense power.[33]

However, juxtaposed with this treatment of excessive and exotic queenship, the term 'queen' becomes indelibly loaded with the mundane and widespread 'angel in the house' signification that Ruskin gives it in 'Of Queens' Gardens', in 1864. A 'queen' is the moral superior of any bourgeois domestic sphere:

> I am now going to ask you to consider with me further, what special portion or kind of this royal authority arising out of noble education may rightly be possessed by women; and how far they also are called to a true queenly power. Not in their households merely, but over all within their sphere. (97)

The female monarch is no longer an awe-inspiring icon, but is rendered the exemplar of Victorian motherhood: 'Queen Victoria herself was compared less frequently to a

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[33] For a more detailed exploration of presentations of Victoria's monarchy in Gilbert and Sullivan's Savoy Operas, see Adrienne Munich's essay '"Capture the Heart of a Queen": Gilbert and Sullivan's Rites of Conquest', *The Centennial Review*, 28 (1984), 23-44.

patriarchal commander than to a loving mother'(Poovey, 1988, 171). While Victoria aligned herself with bourgeois submissive virtue to foster popularity, here Ruskin aligns the whole of middle-class womanhood to the monarch. Critics, such as Nina Auerbach and Sharon Aronofsky Weltman have recently countered the blistering attacks of misogyny hurled at Ruskin by Kate Millett and others, by arguing that 'Of Queens' Gardens' can be read as a feminist text as easily as a misogynist one. Auerbach claims that, 'Ruskin's is the perfect specimen of the self-canceling [*sic*] simultaneity that both bows to power and mutilates it, allowing critics of our day to read "Of Queens' Gardens" as an anti-feminist and a feminist document alike, with equal plausibility'(59).Weltman argues that Ruskin 'creates a notion of queenship that offers women under the reign of Queen Victoria a powerful political and mythological model for the broadening of their scope of action, thereby redefining the traditionally domestic arena to include a broad range of philanthropy and social activism', maintaining that Ruskin's queen is far more powerful than Coventry Patmore's 'Angel in the House', with which she is often conflated by hostile critics.[34] The title 'queen' would have had immediate relevance for the women listening to the lecture for the first time in Manchester Town Hall (14 December 1864), and an association with influence and power which 'angel' does not. By her very nature, the 'angel in the house' cannot criticize men or their work, while Ruskin suggests that this is the very power women *must* exert. While I would agree that this queenly authority for influencing and changing public policy can certainly be read in the text, Ruskin does also use it to lay the blame for social wrongs firmly at the feet of womankind. He notes that,

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[34] Sharon Afronsky Weltman, '"Be no more Housewives, but queens": Queen Victoria and Ruskin's domestic ideology', in Homans and Munich eds, 105-122, 105.

> There is not a war in the world, no, nor an injustice, but you women are answerable for it; not in that you have provoked, but in that you have not hindered. Men, by their nature, are prone to fight; they will fight for any cause, or for none. It is for you to choose their cause for them, and to forbid them when there is no cause. (149-150)

That Ruskin holds patriarchal views is far from surprising: that he should refer to a woman's husband as her 'lord' and speak of 'a true wifely subjection' (116) would have only been expected by his first audience. However, his statement that they all have a 'public work and duty' (143), which is an expansion of their personal duties, would have been rather more shocking, as would his demand: 'Will you not covet such power as this, and seek such throne as this, and be no more housewives, but queens?'(145). In providing all Victorian womanhood with the possibility of queenship and social authority, Ruskin makes his queen's garden 'not a domestic enclosure but a large visionary world' (Auerbach, 60). Weltman similarly argues the egalitariansim of Ruskin's view, that 'Ruskin's radicalism is that, because he views the world through a mythic lens, he sees no contradiction in these roles, for Victoria or for any woman' (111).

On the other hand, Ruskin is reducing the power of the reigning monarch by dispersing it through the whole of womankind, offering a wide-ranging, achievable, shared ideal of queenship. It is worth remembering that when the lecture was delivered in 1864, Victoria was still in her decade of mourning for Albert, closeted away from the public in her grief. Ruskin's plea for women to cast off private obsession for public duties has especial resonance, therefore: do not be the queen that

Victoria is, but the one that she should be. Victoria's retreat into the domestic privacy of mourning led to widespread criticism, and demands for her abdication: yet, this kind of wifely devotion was exactly what was expected of a Victorian widow, and in any other woman would have been praised as moral virtue. The impossibility of Victoria's position as head of a public sphere, in which women had neither place nor authority, is clearly demonstrated. However, throughout her reign, the queen had negotiated with the anomaly of her role, and can be seen consistently to use medievalism as a means of securing her own authority and popularity, by invoking the passivity and impotence of a chivalric icon. The young queen maximizes the chivalric feeling which her predecessor Caroline had inspired, presenting herself as a humble servant of God, and Liege lady of the people. Victoria developed medievalism's casting of the ideal knight to win popularity for her German husband, tapping into the cult of the nineteenth-century gentleman-knight, and domesticating the Liege lady into the role of bourgeois mother and wife. She has recourse again to ideas of chivalry to win support for the Crimean War, taking on the symbolic role of Britannia, representative of the liberties and rights of the nation which need chivalric defence, as well as personifying the personal reason to fight, the domestic ideal of the girl left behind. Criticized for her retreat into the privacy of mourning, by the end of her reign Victoria can be seen to embody an incongruous mix of the domestic and the international, the matron-Empress, utterly public, while being virtuously private.

As I have shown, the century which was socially dominated by Victoria was absorbed by ideas of queenship. Yet, these discussions about queens, contemporary and historical, had a wider significance than the surface commentary on women's

authority and role in the public sphere. Ideas about queenship translated into notions of 'queenly women', and were a means by which women writers could support the dominant gender ideology: or, alternatively, a useful way of challenging these expectations and presenting in their work an alternative view of femininity, that could be active, vocal, and still virtuous. The medieval revivial was particularly significant in the whole debate about constructions of female behaviour: the legendary female figures of Arthurian legend, which Tennyson brought so famously to the centre of ninteenth-century culture in his first four *Idylls of the King*, became repositories for types of womanhood, and a useful means for women writers to expose and challenge the sterility of these categories. More than any other character, 'the figure of Guenevere personifies the feminine ideal, and in so doing indicates our changing attitudes to women and to sexual morality', as I shall now explore.[35]

[35] Elisabeth Brewer, 'The Figure of Guenevere in Modern Drama and Fiction', in *Arthurian Women*, ed. by Thelma S. Fenster (NewYork: Routledge, 2000), 307-318, 307.

6 Aspects of Guinevere: the medieval queen in the nineteenth century

Guinevere is a figure who crosses literary cultures, nationalities and history, who has been presented as everything from chaste wife to the archetypal adulterous lover. She is thus a useful figure through which we can observe changing attitudes to the role of women, and more specifically ideas of queens and queenly women during the reign of Victoria. In this chapter I shall investigate how presentations of Guinevere allowed nineteenth-century women writers and artists a useful means of exploring both the role of women and the role of the queen. I shall consider how Tennyson and Morris were influential in producing a version of the Middle Ages which was adapted and developed by women writers and artists, especially illustrators of their work, to manifest their, often radically divergent, views of womanhood and queenship: the work of illustrators will be the specific focus of the next chapter. That I explore the presentations of Guinevere by Tennyson and Morris in some depth, despite the fact that my focus is on *women* writers and artists, is justified by their undoubted influence on later women: it is important to see what it is these writers and artists were upholding or refuting in their work.

Through European literary history Guinevere has been, to name but a few, Ginevra, Gaynour, Guenièvre, Ginover, Gwenyver, Gwenhwyfar, Wehaver, Gwinfreda, with a

range of divergent characteristics that reflect the varied versions of her names.[1] It is worth considering the vast historical tradition of Guinevere in order to understand how the moulding of her presentation to suit the mores of the Victorian age was in line with her many historical refashionings to suit the writers' aim and background.[2] In existing literature Gwenhwyfar appears for the first time as Arthur's queen in the Welsh c.1100 text *Culhwch and Olwen*. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136) she is defined only in terms of her relationship to Arthur, becoming the lover of her treacherous co-regent Mordred, and used as a scapegoat to explain Arthur's downfall. Despite this negative portrayal, later appearances of Guinevere in the thirteenth-century Welsh tradition reflect little of this adulterous context, showing instead 'a conventional queen who has a harmonious relationship with her husband' (Walters, xv). It was Chrétien de Troye's *Chevalier de la Charrete* (1177), which gave the Lancelot and Guinevere love story the form in which it became widespread. Here their love is allowed to be empowering and ennobling despite its adulterous nature, Lancelot becoming Arthur's greatest knight *because of* the inspiration of his love for the King's wife. Similarly in the anonymous, secular Prose *Lancelot* from the Vulgate Cycle (c. 1215-1235), it is the dynamic and benevolent Genièvre rather than Arthur who knights Lancelot, symbolizing the nature of his true allegiance.

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[1] In discussions of specific texts I shall use the forms of names as adopted by the author. Where I am making general points I shall use the most common modern English version of the name, for example, 'Guinevere' and 'Lancelot'. It is worth noting that in the nineteenth century, writers and artists who presented a version of the queen closer to their Malorian source tended to use the more medieval version 'Guenevere', for example William Morris and writers influenced by his work.

[2] I shall provide only a thumbnail account here: for an extremely in depth, yet clear and readable, literary history of the characters of Lancelot and Guinevere, see the editor's introduction, *Lancelot and Guinevere: A Casebook*, ed. by Lori J. Walters (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), xiii-lxv.

This depiction is in stark contrast with the last two works in the Vulgate Cycle, with their focus on spiritual rather than secular chivalry. The *Queste del Saint Graal* suggests that the relationship of Lancelot and Genièvre results from an arrow from the Devil, while a similarly negative adulterous love in *Mort Artu* causes the destruction of the kingdom.

This negative portrayal continues in the late twelfth century with Marie de France's vengeful Guinevere in *Lanval*, and the unnamed queen in both Robert Biket's *Lai du Cor* and the anonymous early thirteenth-century *Mantel mal taille* or *Lai du Cort Mantel*, who fails a test of sexual fidelity to her husband. When Layamon adapts Wace's *Roman de Brut* (1155) into English alliterative verse (c. 1191), the first occurrence of the story of Arthur in the English vernacular, his aim is to glorify Arthur as an English leader: as a result Guinevere appears more culpable than in the source *Brut*. The Early Medieval German tradition was, in its first phase, very positive in its depictions of Guinevere: in contrast to the adulterous queen trope, Ginover is Arthur's noble, gracious, and loving wife, and a maternal role model for the court in *Erec* (1180-85), Hartmann von Aue's recasting of Chrétien's *Erec et Enide*. Similarly in *Parzival* (1200-10), Wolfram von Eschenbach continues this representation of a faithful and ideal royal marriage, 'Guinevere and Arthur now embody German courtliness, and therefore their marriage is ideal'.[3] In the second stage of Medieval German tradition, Ginover's reputation is called into question, although Lanzilot and Ginover do not assume their traditional love relationship in the German tradition until around 1250 with *Prosa-Lancelot,* a translation of the French prose romance.

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[3] Susann Samples, 'Guinevere: A Re-Appraisal', in Walters ed., 2002, 219-228, 224.

The Medieval British Tradition at the end of the fourteenth century, in the Alliterative *Morte Arthure,* saw Gaynor (Guinevere) committing treachery with Modrede (Mordred) despite enjoying a good relationship with her husband. It is Malory's *Morte Darthur* (published 1495), which gives extensive treatment to the love affair of Launcelot and Guenevere and presents it in the story we best know today. Sarah Hill provides a concise summary of the strength and vitality of Malory's queen: 'Malory's Guenevere is a complex and pivotal character whose position in the social and political structure of the Arthurian court exposes, to a greater extent than the primary male characters, the brutality and self-destructiveness that lie beneath the veneer of Christian morality and the chivalric code of the knights'.[4] Guenevere here has a strong courtly role as queen, in addition to her more familiar role as the archetypal courtly lover. Editions of Malory reprinted in 1816 and 1817, the latter, edited by Southey, supplied much of the impetus of the nineteenth-century Arthurian Revival. These two editions were also the main sources for portrayals of Guenevere in Tennyson's groundbreaking *Idylls of the King* and Morris's influential 'The Defence of Guenevere'.

The Nineteenth-Century Adulteress

Guinevere in the Victorian Age was, however, a far cry from the medieval source: Malory's Guinevere could be both lover and queen. Socialization of love in a feudal society, where marriage merely serves as a dynastic and financial function, brings the possibility of courtly love, within which agenda there is a place for the acceptance of

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[4] Sarah J. Hill, 'Recovering Malory's Guenevere', in Walters ed., 2002, 267-277, 267.

adultery. As Marc Bloch states, 'As for marriage, it was often quite frankly a mere combining of interests and, for women, a protective institution'.[5] In the *Morte Darthur*, Malory identifies two distinct definitions of Courtly Love: 'vertuouse love', a chaste love where the lover pledges his troth 'firste unto God, nexte unto the joy of them that he promysed hys feythe unto', and 'trew love'(Malory, 649). Lancelot and Guinevere cannot achieve the ideal purity of 'vertuouse' love, but their 'trew' love embodies the constancy and stability that Malory singles out as the essence of love in its finest form. When Guinevere exiles Lancelot, she speaks of the culpability she feels for her part in the fall of Camelot (720). Not penitent for her adultery in moral terms, she is ashamed of the destruction of the kingdom, of which she is Queen Consort, that has arisen from her affair. The fault of the lovers for Malory is rather that they put their love even before their duty to God, which should have been their focus, Launcelot performing all his feats of arms for the glory of Guinevere, not for God. As Peter Waldron suggests,

> Malory has trapped his hero and heroine. They cannot achieve the 'vertuouse love' which puts God first — that would demand they abandon their ungodly but 'trew' love. The stability of their 'trew love', however, has led the kingdom to instability. If they forsake their love, then by Malory's definition, they will simply have traded one kind of instability for another. Thus, unable to do anything else, they cling to their 'trew love' right up to the end'.[6]

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[5] Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. by L.A. Manyon (London and New York: Routledge, 1961; repr. 1989), 135.

[6] Peter Waldron, '"Vertuouse Love" and Adulterous Lovers: Coming to terms with Malory', in *Sir Thomas Malory: Views and Re-views*, ed. by D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. (New York: AMS Press, 1992), 54-62, 60.

Malory praises the constancy of the lovers, who part to lives of chastity, remaining eternally true to each other, for, as Belsey suggests, 'Constancy in love is an absolute value, while a loveless marriage entails only minimal obligations'.[7] For Malory, therefore, there is no contradiction in celebrating both 'vertuouse love' and adulterous lovers, when their 'trew love' can be contained within the ideology of courtly love, which must, by social necessity, be pre-marital or extra marital.

However, when the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery is transposed to the Victorian age, where the socialization of love and sex can appear only in marriage, an ensuing clash of ideology is inevitable: so while Albert can be celebrated as the Arthurian ideal and compared to 'Flos Regum Arthurus' in Tennyson's epigraph, the adulterous queen is scarcely a suitable image for Victoria. In both the opening dedication and the epilogue to the *Idylls*, Tennyson makes overt comparisons between the Prince Consort and King Arthur, the poet's epitome of 'Ideal manhood closed in real man' as Tennyson emphasised by adding this line to the Epilogue in 1891.[8] This image, however, leaves little space for Albert's recently bereaved widow: while Albert could be likened to Arthur in Tennyson's sanitized *Idylls*, cleansed as the King is of all traces of incest with Morgause, through which downfall in the shape of Mordred is produced, Victoria could scarcely be Guinevere. Tennyson augments the portrayal of his perfect King by placing the whole burden of guilt for the destruction of Camelot on Guinevere: as Poulson suggests, 'Instead of underplaying Guinevere's adultery, he makes it the pivot on which

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[7] Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 113.

[8] The edition of Tennyson, from which all references are taken in this thesis, is *The Poems of Tennyson in Three Volumes*, ed. by Christopher Ricks, 2nd edn (Harlow:Longman, 1987). See III, 259.

Idylls of the King turns, while the king's incest simply disappears. The enormity of Guinevere's behaviour in *Idylls of the King* is such as to make it inconceivable that any parallel could be drawn between her and Queen Victoria'.[9] Tennyson rather turns the image on its head and makes Victoria a role model for Guinevere, as Victoria has appreciated her union with an 'ideal knight' when Guinevere fails to do so: so while Victoria has the comfort of 'Remembering all the beauty of that star/ Which shone so close beside Thee that ye made/ One light together' (Dedication, 263-265, lines 45-47), Guinevere is left to regret 'Ah my God,/ What might I not have made of thy fair world, Had I but loved thy highest creature here?' ('Guinevere', 529-547, lines 649-650). Victoria's behaviour is thus supremely queenly, both as monarch and wife, as she has been able to recognise, and be united with, the ideal husband and the ideal knight: the poet laureate is thus shown boosting the cult of Victoria that had been established from her very accession, when the queen is a middle-aged widow.

The problems of implying any association between Victoria and Guinevere had been recognised earlier by the Fine Art Commissioners who, in July 1848, rejected Dyce's original designs for the Queen's Robing Room frescos, a chronological series of designs from the *Morte Darthur* including scenes of Guinevere's infidelity and ultimate repentance, in favour of a more sober portrayal of the Knights of the Round Table as individual moral qualities, epitomizing chivalric greatness.[10] Even then Guinevere is

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[9] Christine Poulson, *The Quest for the Grail: Arthurian Legend in British Art 1840-1920* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 56.

[10] For a detailed account of Dyce's work on the Queen's Robing Room frescos, see Poulson, 1999, Chapter 1 (on which I have drawn for a great deal of my information here), and Debra N. Mancoff, ' Reluctant

marginalized from the images, her role in *Hospitality: The Admission of Sir Tristram to the Fellowship of the Round Table* being greatly reduced from its Malorian source text, so that she is only highlighted from the crowd by a small coronet and a gesture towards Arthur. Dyce, recognising the need to portray Victoria in an appropriately flattering light, does so in *Mercy: Sir Gawaine Swearing To Be Merciful and Never To Be Against Ladies* by developing Malory's brief account of Gawaine's apologetic oath and presenting an image reminiscent of a Renaissance altarpiece, with a youthful and gracious Guinevere taking the usual place of the Virgin: as Poulson explains, the choice of an early episode allows Dyce to portray a recently married Guinevere, still untainted by her affair with Launcelot, showing herself to be 'just, yet merciful, graceful and demure' (1999, 32), a suitably flattering depiction of a queen for the room to be used by the young sovereign.

Dyce's labours with the Robing Room frescos lead the way for Tennyson's work, as Debra Mancoff observes:

> His strategy of definition, justification, selection, and ultimately revision, not only anticipated that of Tennyson, it demonstrates why the *Idylls* were so influential and successful. Dyce raised questions that would be only answered by Tennyson, and his concerns speak for an audience that would be Tennyson's public, revealing not just the desire for revival of the legend, but the desire for its revision. (1994, 255)

Redactor: William Dyce Reads the Legend', Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley eds., *The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994) 254-273.

That Tennyson himself was acutely aware of the politics of association between Victoria and the medieval queen is evident if we compare two presentations of Queen Guinevere, one written before Victoria's accession, one written in 1859. 'Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere: A Fragment' (1842)[11] (I, 544-545) is a celebration of the Courtly Lovers, reminiscent of the Malory's Maying Scene at the opening of 'The Knight of the Cart' (648-649). Set in a forest in early spring, Guinevere seems part of the natural landscape through which she travels with Launcelot, and is allowed to be simultaneously virtuous Queen, passionate woman and enigmatic icon:

> As she fled fast through sun and shade,
> The happy winds upon her played,
> Blowing the ringlet from the braid:
> She looked so lovely, as she swayed
> The rein with dainty finger-tips,
> A man had given all other bliss,
> And all his worldly worth for this,
> To waste his whole heart in one kiss
> Upon her perfect lips. (lines 37-45)

Launcelot has sacrificed all to be at her side, but the 'waste' is ironic; her lips are 'perfect' and the loss is more than rewarded. When, nineteen years later, Tennyson published his 'Guinevere' from *Idylls of the King*, the idea of Guinevere as force of nature is subsumed into her role as repentant adulteress, who, by the time of her audience

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[11] 'Partly if not wholly written in 1830'; see Ricks, I, 544.

with Arthur at the conclusion of the *Idylls*, has been stripped of all positive characteristics. She is *only* false wife, bad queen, fallen woman:

> She sat/ Stiff-stricken, listening; but when armèd feet
> Through the long gallery from the outer doors
> Rang coming, prone from off her seat she fell,
> And grovelled with her face against the floor:
> There with her milkwhite arms and shadowy hair
> She made her face a darkness from the King:
> And in the darkness heard his armèd feet
> Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice,
> Monotonous and hollow like a Ghost's
> Denouncing judgement, but, though changed, the King's:
>
> 'Liest thou here so low, the child of one
> I honoured, happy, dead before thy shame?
> Well is it that no child was born of thee'.
> ('Guinevere' (1859), lines 408-421)

In contrast to the scene of nature and spring in the earlier poem, the setting for this final scene between Arthur and Guinevere is stone cloisters, essentially a private interior scene between a Victorian wife and husband. In the early poem, Guinevere is allowed all her medieval glory in a celebration of courtly love and exalted lovers: in the *Idylls*, Guinevere, trapped in Victorian domestic ideology, is reduced to a mere vessel manifesting one of the messages of Tennyson's epic, which he later so vehemently

dedicates to the dead consort and his grieving widow. She is no longer 'Queen Guinevere' but merely 'Guinevere', stripped of her sovereignty through her adultery. The younger Tennyson was engulfed in the medieval spirit of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*: by contrast, the *Idylls* had a specific moral and social message which demanded Tennyson's purification of Arthur and negative allegorization of the courtly love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere, particularly an exaggerated insistence on the role Guinevere's sexual trangression played in the destruction of Arthur's kingdom. As Victorian readers were far more likely to have read Tennyson's version of the Arthurian myth than Malory's, for them the name of Guinevere became synonymous *only* with 'adulteress'. As a recent critic has put it: 'Evidently the punishment for ignoring an unwanted husband and social responsibility is an abominable reputation that lingers in the minds of somewhat unthoughtful readers forever'.[12]

The critical trend over the past twenty or so years has been to suggest that Arthur expresses Tennyson's own views about women and sexuality, as Marion Shaw summarizes when she suggests that Arthur, 'seems to speak of a revulsion which is Tennyson's as well as his own'.[13] While Catherine Belsey agrees that Guinevere, 'breaks a contract which is at once divine and human: the Queen's sin is also a crime against a husband and a kingdom' (118), she also appreciates the vitality of Tennyson's queen:

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[12] Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin, *Camelot in the Nineteeth Century: Arthurian Characters in the Poems of Tennyson, Arnold, Morris and Swinburne* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2000), 24

[13] Marion Shaw, *Alfred Lord Tennyson* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), 122. For similar readings see also Elaine Jordan, *Alfred Tennyson* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), 165; Brewer, 1996, 315; and Poulson, 85.

'The text makes Guinevere's shame exceptionally clear; the moral position is never in doubt at any point in *The Idylls of the King*; and yet it is her story, rather than Arthur's, that Guinevere recounts, and her anguish more than his which enlists the imagination of the reader' (118). In a recent article Stephen Ahern has argued compellingly that although 'the women of the *Idylls* embody aspects of morality in a quintessentially Victorian construction of woman as a symbolic repository of social values', Tennyson does not actually endorse this contemporary view of sexuality.[14] Instead, 'The *Idylls* candidly depicts the problems that result from subscribing to a model of feminine nature that pervaded Victorian thinking' (89). In this view he is upholding the findings of critics like Linda Shires, who, in contrast to the majority of recent critics of the *Idylls*, suggests that Tennyson's texts overturn dominant gender ideology: 'Ideological contradictions are obvious in the verse itself', interpreting his work as, 'both reproducing and contesting ideologies in a field of multiple and varied discursive relations'.[15] Ahern's defence of Tennyson's Guinevere goes even further:

> Tennyson presents Guinevere as an agent in her own right, as a strong character who struggles against a society that typecasts her within narrowly defined boundaries. Because her voice controls large sections of text, she has opportunities to present her own perspective on her lot and thereby to create a sympathetic audience for her version of the events leading up to the fall of Camelot. As a result of this narrative freedom, the story of Guinevere's

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[14] Stephen Ahern, 'Listening to Guinevere: Female Agency and the Politics of Chivalry in Tennyson's *Idylls*', *Studies in Philology*, 101 (2004), 88-112, (89).
[15] Linda M. Shires, 'Rereading Tennyson's Gender Politics', in *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power*, ed. by Thais E. Morgan (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 46-65, 49 and 50.

> rebellion against, and eventual capitulation to, her husband's vision of her proper wifely function provides an ambivalent representation of the expectations of patriarchal culture. (91)

Ahern argues that, 'Close analysis of the final scenes at the convent shows the queen's capitulation to be not a genuinely cowed contrition, but the reluctant choice of an ostracized woman who, having above all the shrewd character of a survivor, is presented with no viable alternative for her future' (103).While Tennyson's Guinevere is doubtless a desiring, passionate woman, ultimately, in the age of the queen whose social image is based on the domestic ideal of a perfect marriage, she has to be punished for desiring outside the Christian and legal contract of her marriage. As Marion Shaw suggests, 'The bourgeoisification of the monarchy, which reached its height during Victoria's reign, held as its central tenet the faithful, affectionate marriage of the Queen and Consort in which domestic virtue and familial responsibility set the pattern for Victorian respectability and marriage idealism' (89). When Tennyson's fictional queen breaks this ideal and shows the emptiness of the marriage contract, when a woman changed hands as property between father and husband as Guinevere is compelled to do, she *must* be accused and damned, and ultimately forbidden the role of queen, in this world at least, for daring to follow her choice of lover. Tennyson's adulterous queen has to be condemned in the most extreme terms, called a disease and a pollution, because his text has a social message, to offer an ideal in the face of what he saw as the destruction of religion, the growth of materialism, and the threat to marriage with the contemporary changes to the matrimonial law. Ultimately, for all her vitality and complexity, Tennyson's Guinevere is as easily

sacrificed to his message as Geoffrey of Monmouth's was to his chronicling of the deeds of men centuries earlier.

As such it seems naïve to suggest that Arthur's vehement attack on Guinevere necessarily espouses Tennyson's own views of women, although his sympathies do seem to lie with the lofty forgiving King rather than the accused queen. Tennyson certainly has made Arthur's grief far more personal than in Malory, where the King declares 'And much more I am soryar for my good knyghtes losse than for the losse of my fayre queen; for quenys I might have inow, but in such a felyship off good knyghtes shall never be togydirs in no company' (685). However, Ahern's Tennyson-apologetic reading of the poem does not make sense either: 'far from vindicating his anger and justifying his harsh judgement of his wife, Arthur's haughty castigation confirms Guinevere's preceding account of her unfavourable first impression of the king' (104, note 24). Tennyson has openly declared that Arthur is his Ideal, Albert his nineteenth-century glorious likeness: it seems hardly likely, then, that Arthur's condemnation of Guinevere was intended to be as high-handed, self-righteous, vicious and repugnant as it sounds to late twentieth/early twenty-first century ears.

That Guinevere 'becomes the most balanced and fully human figure in the *Idylls*' (Ahern, 97) cannot be doubted. She does not simply fall to the type of repentant Magdalen or sinful queen or capricious lover. She has whims, is capable of violent jealousy and a fierce temper, but she loves Lancelot with a similar wild passion. Despite the fact that Arthur lays the blame for the fall of Camelot entirely at Guinevere's feet, Tennyson does

allow Guinevere 'beauty, grace and power' (line 142) which charms the nuns to allow her anonymity: before her audience with Arthur she is significantly called 'the stately Queen' (line 144), despite the fact of her adultery. Tennyson also shows the role played by the treacherous Mordred in Camelot's destruction: we are told that Mordred sought 'To make a disruption in the Table Round/ Of Arthur, and to splinter it into feuds/ Serving his traitorous end; and all his aims/ Were sharpened by strong hate for Lancelot' (lines 17-20). Tennyson, of course, removes the question of Mordred's parentage, an added reason for usurpation in Malory that contributes to the Greek tragedy to Arthur's fate, since incest was totally out of the question for his ideal knight, especially with the overt links drawn between the King and Christ, and his likeness to Albert.[16] Yet this change in Mordred's role is significant as reducing blame on him means heaping it on the queen. The lasting image we have of this magnificent queen is that of the grovelling magdalen who, incongruously and disappointingly given her characterization through the work, repents of her affair with Lancelot, producing a dissatisfying conclusion where her remorse seems false and contrived.[17] Tennyson is clearly struggling to suppress Guinevere into the role he has assigned to her, that of penitent adulteress, but ultimately that is the task he has set himself. Despite this, he leaves spaces in his work for the more

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[16] In 1872, Algernon Swinburne accused Tennyson of erasing the tragic force of Malory's text and said that the poet had 'lowered and degraded' the Arthurian legend by his omission of Arthur's incestuous relationship. See Ahern, 108, n. 32 for a succinct discussion of Swinburne's article.

[17] The final seven lines of the *Idyll* tell of Guinevere's rise to Abbess of the convent, 'for her good deeds and her pure life,/ And for the power of ministration in her,/ And likewise for the high rank she had borne' (lines 687-689). Yet these seem oddly tacked on to the end, to evoke a sense mercy and forgiveness for the penitent, and fail to erase this idea of the queen as a prostrate mass: yet Tennyson does return to her some of the authority of her royal position.

positive portrayal of the queen, which are exploited by women illustrating his work in the decades that followed, as I shall explore in the following chapter.

Guinevere, even when repentant, was an immensely problematic figure in an age of rigorous social gender construction: yet, the tradition of Arthurian literature by women 'incorporates a broad spectrum of Arthurian works, some of which are remarkably prescient in their attitudes towards social problems, religion, philosophy, and feminism. The position of Guinevere, who must serve as wife to an uncaring husband/king, is a recurring concern in this literature'.[18] It is worth noting that not all women writers had this concern: the Evangelical Christian writer Dinah Mulock Craik chooses instead to focus her short story 'Avillion: or the Happy Isles' (1853) on the justice of Guinever's punishment in the afterlife for earthly sins .[19] The idea of a severe Arthur confronting a penitent Guinevere in Tennyson's work is anticipated in this work: Lupack and Tepa Lupack suggest that in fact, 'It may be that in his depiction of some of the women of the *Idylls* Tennyson actually used Craik's piece as a source (25), and offer persuasive textual comparisons to support their claim. In her short story Craik is even more severe with Arthur's queen than Tennyson, and strips Guinever of her queenship to focus purely on the moral questions of her adultery: she negates her role to that of bodiless phantom in this didactic tale of the afterlife, which demonstrates the idea of the reward of eternal peace for a Christian life. The dying Wilfred dreams that he embarks upon a journey into

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[18] *Arthurian Literature by Women*, ed. by Alan Lupack and Barbara Tepa Lupack (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1999), x.
[19] Dinah Craik, 'Avillion: or the Happy Isles', in *Avillion and Other Tales*, 3 vols (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1853), I, 1-115.

the underworld where he encounters first characters from Greek myth and then Arthurian figures. Arthur's half-sister, Morgue La Faye, here takes Guinever's role as his queen: sanitized of all suggestions of malevolence or incest, because in doing so Craik also purifies Arthur of the same taboo, Morgue becomes transformed into 'the most beauteous dame in the whole land of faerie' (51) and the Queen of Avillion. The social and iconic status that Guinevere usually embodies as queen is thus displaced upon another female figure, Guinever banished to the 'Lake of Shadows' for her adultery. Craik had previously explored the issue of adultery in *The Ogilvies* (1846), one of a selection of works appearing around 1850 which addressed the subject of what Patricia Ingham calls 'putative (or non-) adultery'.[20] These novels address the subject of illicit female passion with wives who gravely transgress by merely desiring a potential lover, without actually committing the act of adultery. So it is unsurprising that since Katherine Ogilvie is punished for her unconsummated passion for Paul Lynedon by a 'frequent and intense' pain in her side, representing the pangs of insatiate desire but actually identifiable as fatal heart disease, Guinever receives a worse treatment — eternal torment as a bodiless phantom in the 'Lake of Shadows'. Within Craik's Evangelical Christian agenda the only roles left for Guinever to embody are negative, as Merlin shows when he negates her utterly in calling her 'False queen, false wife, false woman'(72). Having repented of her affair with Launcelot she thus denounces her role as 'trew lover', loses both her sensuality and physicality, and is reduced to being an insubstantial 'fleeting soul' (72). Guinever is denied the right to articulation and self-explication permitted to Elaine la

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[20] Patricia Ingham, *Dickens, Women and Language* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 89. Other examples of this include Dickens's *Dombey & Son* (1846-8), *Bleak House* (1852-53) and *Hard Times* (1854), and Geraldine Jewsbury's *Zoe* (1845) and *The Half Sisters* (1848).

Blanche, upon whom her role as constant lover is displaced. Elaine appears still in her funeral barge to tell how she still loves Launcelot, even in Paradise, 'I love still, but suffer no more: God looked on me in mercy, and drew wholly unto Himself that love which in life was divided. I am happy — yet I forget thee not: I could never forget thee, my lord Sir Launcelot! (76)'. Elaine, although a desiring female figure, remains the innocent 'lily maid' and thus receives no punishment, judged as she is tragic victim of the adultery of Launcelot and the queen. Guinever is rendered only a suffering penitent, defended by the Christ-like Galahad against the harsh wrath of Arthur and Merlin, his words echoing directly the words of Christ to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:7), far more than Tennyson's condemnatory Arthur of the *Idylls* six years later. In this scheme, Guinever is reduced to a mere vessel upon which Galahad can demonstrate the Christian virtue of forgiveness.

By contrast, the 'putative (or non-) adultery' of the female protagonist in 'The True Story of Guenever', by American writer Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, receives considerably more positive treatment than that doled out to Craik's characters. Phelps prologues her story with a narrator who responds vehemently to Tennyson's treatment of Guenever, 'I can never bear to leave her there upon the convent floor. I rebel against the story'.[21] The speaker has been greatly moved by the figure of Guenever, the work opening,

> In all the wide, dead, old world of story, there is to me no wraith more piteously pursuant than the wraith of Guenever. No other voice has in it the

[21] Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, 'The True Story of Guenever', *Sealed Orders* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1879; repr.Elibron, 2003), 65-80, 66. The story first appeared in *The Independent*, 15 June 1876.

> ring of sweet harmonies so intricately bejangled; no other face turns to us eyes of such luminous entreaty from slow descents of despair; no other figure, majestic though in ruins, carries through every strained muscle and tense nerve and full artery so magnetic a consciousness of the deeps of its deserved humiliation and the height of its lost privilege. (65)

The speaker retells a story as told to her by her washerwoman, Phelps here appropriating to a working class female voice a story best known in forms told by aristocratic and knightly men. The work claims at the conclusion, 'And this, know all men henceforth by these presents, is the true story of Guenever the Queen' (80), a version highly divergent from Tennyson's. Lupack and Tepa Lupack write of Phelps's ending that it,

> raises Guenever from the convent floor and eradicates her "disgrace, exile, and despair". Yet the price she pays is certainly high: a tepid relationship with a man who holds typically nineteenth century attitudes. By accepting the limitations of such an arrangement, she attains a modicum of peace and respectability but not the Holy Grail of female fulfilment, which Phelps's fiction suggests is an ideal not yet achievable by women in this world. (22)

But is this the case? Tennyson's Guinevere is trapped in a value system that denies her right to love and to choose, with a king who expects perfection and damns her when he does not receive it, while still expressing love. He 'bought' his wife, she loved Lancelot whom she met first: the marriage not the love is at fault. In Phelps's rendering, Guenever is married to Arthur who, far from being a typical nineteenth-century autocratic husband, or the lofty king with impossible expectations, just does not know how to express himself

and does not understand his wife's desires: we have no reason to believe that she did not marry him for love. Arthur here does small domestic services to try to show his sympathy:

> He was sorry for the queen — so sorry that he went and set the supper-table, to save her from the draughts that lurked even in the royal pantry that mad March night. He loved the Queen — so much that he would have been a happy man to sit in the bird-of-paradise rocking-chair and kiss that aching, sweet cheek of hers till supper-time to-morrow, if that would help her. But he supposed, if she had the toothache, she wouldn't want to be touched. He knew he shouldn't. So, not knowing what else to do, he just limped royally about and got the supper, like a dear old dull king as he was. (70-71)

Arthur is a sympathetic figure not flawless majesty: 'To tell the truth, Arthur was often dull of late, what with being out of work so much, and the foot he lamed with a rusty nail' (69). Arthur being a 'master carpenter' suggests an image of Christ, but he is far from perfect and Christlike. It is Christ himself who comes to answer Guenever's prayers in her dream, not a self-righteous Arthur who puts himself in the place of God: but as with the self-righteous king at the end of the *Idylls*, although Christ appears to forgive her sin, for having absconded with Launcelot, she is unable to rise from her knees and remains in the same grovelling position at the end of the dream. In the dream all three male figures are unreliable, Guenever not even able to identify whether the voice she hears is her lover, 'or the deathly wind' (76). It is the washerwoman, and ultimately Phelps, who redeem Guenever by allowing her literally to wake up to the truth of a loving

Arthur before she commits adultery and leaves her home. The major difference between the relationship of the husband and wife in this version and in Tennyson's is that Guenever here does desire her husband and longs for him, 'She wanted, in fact, to *be* taken; to be caught and gathered in her husband's safe, broad breast; to be held against his faithful heart; to be fondled and crooned over and cuddled' (69). Phelps saves her Guenever by giving her a loving and lovable Arthur, who ultimately does understand her better than the prospective lover: the drops he recommends would have helped her, while the laudanum Launcelot provides, and she takes by accident, have damaging effects to her health. Arthur's terrified reaction to her illness demonstrates to Guenever the strength of his affection, 'Arthur spoke in his own grave and repressed manner. But he was very pale. His lips, as the queen crept, sobbing, up to touch them, trembled': the work ends with his caressing her on his 'honest heart'. Phelps places the queen in a marriage within which she can desire, and be desired, while showing that there are obvious misunderstandings on both sides: Guenever does not realise Arthur's true nature and love, just as he fails to comprehend how to respond to her. The active and virile Launcelot has obvious attractions for the misunderstood and bored wife. However, here it is not a case of Guenever simply getting it wrong and causing destruction, as in Tennyson: the blame for the marital problems is on both sides and the relationship is one of equal affection, so resolution is possible. The focus of the work is still, however, Guenever's marriage and not her queenship. Her response to the declaration of 'Launcelot or the deathly wind', in her dream of a flight to adultery, suggests that secure marriage and purity is of foremost importance:

'The Queen can never come to her throne again.'

'I seek no throne!' wailed Guenever. 'I ask for no crown! All I want is to go back and be clean. I'll crawl on my knees to the palace, if I may be clean'. (76)

Although Phelps does raise Guenever from the convent floor, she does so by setting her in a happy marriage, and making her desire only the acceptable goals of security and purity: the queen's medieval self is eradicated.

Like Phelps, Violet Fane also chooses Tennyson as her starting point, here the reading aloud of Tennyson's 'Idylls of the blameless king' by an unresponsive husband who 'did not seem to hear,/ Or, if he heard, he heeded not', is the setting for her 'Lancelot and Guinevere'.[22] By the end of the work it becomes clear that the *Idyll* being read is 'Lancelot and Elaine', with its contrasting portrayals of the love for Lancelot of the lily maid and of the Queen. It is also suggested that in reading this particular *Idyll*, the husband is calculating rather than simply oblivious to his wife's request, as she begs him to read something else. Conscious that the story of Guinevere and her love for Lancelot too closely matches her own experience, the husband traps his wife into an admission of her adulterous love, then 'vanish'd in the twilight dim' as his wife hears the 'coming step of Lancelot'. Yet here the focus is neither censure for adultery, nor the penitence of the wife: Fane has her protagonist considering centrally the role of Guinevere as queen, what she risks by loving Lancelot, and, thus, what this proves about the strength of her love. The listening wife becomes enraged at the idea that the lily maid could offer 'the tend'er

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[22] Violet Fane, *From Dawn to Noon: Poems* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1872), 131-136

love' in comparison to 'The *woman's* love! the queen's! my own!'. In her view it was easier to die for love, like Elaine, than to endure the pain of living with an illicit rather than open love, and the prospective infamy of discovery. Guinevere's love is so strong that she does not consider the potential damage she is doing to her reputation and her status:

> The sneering word, the tarnish'd name,
> The galling mask for him she bore;
> She heeded not her loss of fame,
> And risk'd the queenly crown she wore:
>
> For him she did not scorn to lie
> To one whose very life was truth;
> She put her robes and sceptre by,
> And crown'd him king of all her youth.
>
> That simple maiden could but prove
> The love she bore him by her death;
> Give me to *live* for him I love,
> To yield him heart and soul and breath!

Fane is exploring ideas of love, married love in a society where it is a contract rather than choice, and the all-encompassing power of desire. The husband in the poem is presented as the Victorian domestic stereotype, 'Her lord'. He appears to be as unresponsive to his wife's desires and needs as Arthur is to Guinevere's: just as Tennyson's Guinevere tells

Lancelot 'I am yours,/ Not Arthur's, as ye know, save by the bond' ('Lancelot and Elaine', lines 134-135), it is clear, by the wife's reaction to the approach of her lover at the close of Fane's work, that she feels the same way about him. Her eager expectation of 'some near delight', that she 'starting, listen'd to a sound,/ Push'd back her hair, and dash'd away/ the tears in which her eyes were drown'd', reflects the response of Guenevere to the approach of Lancelot in Morris's 'The Defence of Guenevere', when we are told that the Queen 'would not speak another word, but stood/ Turn'd sideways; listening'.[23]

The poem's title, 'Lancelot and Guinevere' is of some significance, especially since Lancelot does not actually appear until the end of the work: Fane has taken Tennyson's 'Lancelot and Elaine' and changed the title to suggest a focus on the woman who appears to show the greater love, certainly in the view of the work's female protagonist. The reader is left in no doubt that, like Guinevere, this wife's passion and affection is for her lover rather than her husband. However, while the work is clearly based on Tennyson's *Idyll*, there is evidence that Fane has read and sympathised with the queen in Morris's 'Defence', and presents a 'Guinevere' who is similarly open and defiant about her adulterous passion, and who, in the same way, has her prayer for presence of 'Lancelot' answered.

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[23] William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (London: Longmans, 1909), 17. All references to Morris's text are taken from this edition.

Restoring the Medieval Queen: Morris's influence on women writers and artists

While critics argue whether Tennyson supports or refutes the sexual politics of his contemporary society, they are similarly at odds in their interpretations of William Morris's 'The Defence of Guenevere'. A vast amount of criticism has been generated to discuss Morris's 'meaning' in the 'Defence'.[24] It is not my intention to join this long-running debate with a detailed response of my own here: I shall rather consider how Morris influenced contemporary women writers, especially with his return to the 'medieval' focus on Guenevere's queenship, and explore the richness of his work as a source for illustrators throughout the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth centuries.

Published in 1858, the year before Tennyson published his 'Guinevere', Morris presents a vibrant and compelling Guenevere who, in a vocal self-defence, asserts her right to be

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[24] The diverse range of criticism in this area is too wide to discuss in detail here, but for a varied cross-section of views see the following works: Armstrong, 1993, 240-251; Dennis R. Balch, 'Guenevere's Fidelity to Arthur in Morris' "The Defence of Guenevere" and "King Arthur's Tomb", *Victorian Poetry*, 13 (1975), 61-70; Florence Boos, 'Justice and Vindication in William Morris' 'The Defence of Guenevere', *King Arthur Through the Ages*, ed. by Valerie M. Lagorio and Mildred Leake Day, 2 vols (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1990), II, 83-104; Angela Carson, 'Morris' Guenevere: A Further Note', *Philological Quarterly*, 42 (1963), 131-134; Rebecca Cochran, 'William Morris: Arthurian Innovator, '*The Arthurian Revival: Essays on Form, Tradition, and Transformation*, ed. by Debra N. Mancoff (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1992), 75-96; Karen Herbert, 'Dissident Language in The Defence of Guenevere', *Victorian Poetry*, 34 (1996), 313-327; Laurence Perrine, 'Morris's Guenevere: An Interpretation', *Philological Quarterly*, 39 (1960), 234-241; Charlotte H. Oberg, *A Pagan Prophet: William Morris* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978); Lynne Pearce, *Woman Image Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 114-129; David Staines, 'Morris' Treatment of His Medieval Sources in *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*', *Studies in Philology*, 70 (1973), 439-464; Robert L. Stallman, 'The Lovers' Progress: An Investigation of William Morris' "The Defence of Guenevere" and "King Arthur's Tomb", *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 15 (1975), 657-670.

both lover and queen. *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* was the first book of Pre-Raphaelite verse to be published, so the savage attack it received at the hands of Victorian critics can in some way be explained: 'the widespread suspicion from which the Pre-Raphaelite painters were only gradually emerging readily transferred itself to Morris' poetry'.[25] More important, however, is the fact that Morris's 'medieval' medievalism did not appeal to a Victorian audience, who were used to the idealized and sanitized Middle Ages of Kenelm Digby. Morris's setting is more authentically medieval than the nineteenth-century gentlemanly chivalry, his work based very closely on Malory and Froissart, using a similar ethos and code. For a Victorian audience not widely familiar with the medieval Arthurian corpus, Tennyson's modern version of the Arthurian epic, with its Victorian values, was more accessible than Morris's violent and illicitly sexual world, as is reflected in a review of the *Idylls* in *Bentley's Quarterly Review* (October 1859), 'He will bring his subject to us, not require us to go back through all the ages to a world of legend'.[26] As critics such as Linda Hughes and Rebecca Cochran have explored, Tennyson skilfully primed his readers for the publication of his version of the Arthurian myth in the *Idylls*, provoking a 'general expectation of what an Arthurian work should be' (Cochran, 78) by the publication in his 1842 *Poems* of 'The Epic' and 'Morte d'Arthur', establishing the return of Arthur 'like a modern gentleman /Of stateliest

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[25] Peter Faulkner, ed., *William Morris: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 6.

[26] It is worth noting that some of Morris's contemporaries realised the significance of Morris's work, such as Walter Pater, who, in his October 1868 essay for the *Westminster Review* praises Morris's 'profounder mediaevalism' which he explains as 'that stricter, imaginative mediaevalism which recreates the mind of the middle age' (*The Westminster Review*, 34 (1868), 300-312).

port'.[27] To be faced with a more authentic treatment of the Middle Ages and a subversive queen who refuses either to deny her adultery or admit wrong, and focuses on her own sensuality and sexuality in graphic terms, was more than most Victorian critics and readers could bear. Indeed, it would seem that similarly today, a lack of knowledge of a medieval corpus brings confusion over the setting for this poem, as Virginia Hale and Catherine Barnes Stevenson discuss. Morris has not stated the charge or the guilt or innocence of the Queen because he has assumed a working knowledge of Malory by his audience: the crime of which Guenevere stands accused is treason, not adultery as many reviewers have assumed.[28] Similarly, in 'King Arthur's Tomb', as Terence McCarthy explains of the Malorian source text, 'Guenevere does not take to a life of devotion because she finally sees herself as the woman taken in adultery; she is not rejecting an earthly for a heavenly ideal. Rather, her spiritual vocation is a penance for having helped to destroy the earthly ideal'(McCarthy, 1988, 74).

I agree with Herbert's suggestion that 'Her guilt or innocence is not Morris' main concern; instead, he directs attention to how Guenevere uses language — figurative language in particular to extricate herself from her 'one-dimensional' society' (315). Morris shows an awareness of how Guenevere would be judged in his contemporary society as *only* an adulteress: as Herbert suggests, the queen uses silence as her last

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[27] Linda K. Hughes, 'Tennyson's Urban Arthurians: Victorian Audiences and the 'City Built to Music', in Lagorio and Leake Day eds, 1990, II, 39-61, 50; Cochran, 78-79. 'The Epic [Morte d'Arthur]', II, 1-19, lines 294-295.

[28] Virginia S. Hale and Catherine Barnes Stevenson, 'Morris' Medieval Queen: A Paradox Resolved', *Victorian Poetry*, Tennyson Issue, 1992, 171-178, (171-172).

strategy, 'I will not tell you more to-day', because, her audience-society has no word for her behaviour other than 'sin', a category which Guenevere refutes (318). Hale and Stevenson explore how Guenevere is able to 'make a case against the "lie" that she is a traitorous Queen while simultaneously making a case for herself as a "true" woman and lover, in light of two bodies of law appropriate to a medieval woman of courtly stature: the law of kynde and the law of courtly love' (174). For Morris, as for Malory, there is no contradiction in Guenevere's being a good queen and a true lover: her marriage is a social arrangement where she was 'bought/ By Arthur's great name and his little love'(6). This is the vital point to take from Morris's work: Morris maintains Guenevere in her medieval guise, and allows her to focus attention on herself as queen and woman. Unlike Tennyson, he does not reduce her to a symbol of social values.

Throughout her defence, Guenevere keeps re-focusing the attention of her accusers on her role as queen in Arthur's court, whose right it is to demand absolute loyalty from Arthur's knights:

> Is there a good knight then would stand aloof,
> When a queen says with gentle queenly sound:
> O true as steel, come now and talk with me,
> I love to see your step upon the ground. (14-15)

As queen she should be above their accusation —'is there any law/ To make a queen say why some spots of red/ Lie on her coverlet' (11) — and she further upbraids the knights who leave the queen to a self-defence when they should be her protectors not her

accusers: 'so must I defend/The honour of Lady Guenevere?' (11). With a typically medieval concentration on physiognomy, Guenevere uses as a defence the concept that nobility and beauty of person equates to nobility and honour of action, and again draws attention to her rank:

> Being such a lady could I weep these tears
>
> If this were true? A great queen such as I
>
> Having sinn'd this way, straight her conscience sears
>
> And afterwards she liveth hatefully,
>
> Slaying and poisoning, certes never weeps (9)

Throughout the poem there is a simultaneous focus on Guenevere as woman, and her sexuality, this physicality being also the focus of Morris's oil painting *Queen Guenevere*, which was first exhibited in 1858, the year that saw the publication of *The Defence of Guenevere*. The title of the painting has caused some controversy, many reviewers identifying it as *La Belle Iseult*: however, the painting was certainly first exhibited under the title *Queen Guenevere*, and contemporary records refer to the subject as Arthur's queen.[29] Similarities between the magnificent queen of the oil painting and the defiant

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[29] To some extent this confusion arose because the dog curled up in the crumpled sheets is reminiscent of Iseult's hound in Malory: however, from the thirteenth century there have been are many examples of Guenevere being depicted with a hound, as Muriel Whitaker explores (see,'The Illustration of Arthurian Romance', in Lagario and Leake Day eds, 1990, II, 125). John Christian suggests that confusion over the identity of the figure depicted arose because Morris was working on two other oil paintings (unfinished) at the same time as *Queen Guenevere*, both compositions taken from the stories of Tristram and Iseult (see *The Tate Gallery Catalogue For Exhibition 7 March - 28 May 1984* ed. by Alan Bowness (London: Tate Gallery/Penguin), 169). For alternative readings of the picture as Iseult, see Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 100, and Poulson, 1999, 161-162.

Guenevere who verbally defends herself in Morris's poem suggest overwhelmingly that the painting presents the same figure. The painting shows a figure of authority, the golden crown on her head and her regal poise leaving the viewer in no doubt that she is a queen, the 'mistress of her own private space' (Pearce, 124). In stark contrast with the grovelling penitent of Tennyson's 'Guinevere', this queen is proudly upright, surveying her reflection in the mirror, satisfied with her self-image. As Pearce observes, 'Although her attention is directed merely to the apparently trivial action of fastening her belt, she is nevertheless *in control* of what she does' (125), in sharp contrast with the majority of static and impotent Pre-Raphaelite heroines.

Morris's Guenevere is an assertive heroine, who, through her own language in a dramatic monologue, boldly fashions for herself the roles of queen, lover, and political victim, faithful to the roles embodied by Malory's medieval queen. This figure, unsurprisingly, proved a powerful inspiration to women writers and illustrators later in the nineteenth century. In 1861, Mary Elizabeth Braddon produced an analogous work, 'Queen Guinevere'. Braddon is clearly aligning herself with Morris's portrayal of Guenevere rather than Tennyson's, but her dramatic monologue fulfils a very different function: 'Queen Guinevere' is the presentation of the internal struggle, longings, and desires of a queen, not a public defence. Guinevere is simply stating facts: it may be 'wicked' to love Lancelot, but she has no defence against it other than death. She is struggling to live without Lancelot, but is finding it a 'dreary life bereft of end or aim!', and longing to die to escape the pain. The repentant and despairing tone of the work is aligned in ethos to

'King Arthur's Tomb'.[30] Braddon's Guinevere repeatedly refers to her passion for Lancelot as 'wicked', a far cry from the orator of 'Defence', but similar to the despairing nun who tells Launcelot 'for my sin in being such,/ About my whole life, all my deeds did twine,/ Made me quite wicked' ('King Arthur's Tomb', 37). Like Guenevere in 'King Arthur's Tomb', who cannot pray 'For Launcelot's red-golden hair would play,/ Instead of sunlight, on the painted wall'(37) of her convent cell, Braddon's queen similarly is distracted by the face of her absent lover: 'There is a face I see in mournful splendour,/ In each star-jewel of the crown of night/ Whose lineaments all nature's beauties render,/ In shadow and in light'. While Morris's nun seems mad to Launcelot at the start of their meeting, but asserts 'I am not mad, but I am sick' (31), by the end of her speech she seems to have driven herself almost insane, 'I shall go mad,/ Or else die kissing him, he is so pale,/ He thinks me mad already' (40). Braddon's work also uses this motif of madness, Guinevere lamenting, 'Oh, dreadful madness, that consumes my soul'. However, the action of 'Queen Guinevere' takes place before the death of Arthur, when Guinevere is still 'A queen, aye, worse; oh, misery, a wife!', struggling with the public icon/private woman split of her position. She is trying to forget the bleak concept of a future life on the 'weary earth without my Lancelot', the grief Guenevere is struggling to endure in 'King Arthur's Tomb'. Reflecting the nun's desperate prayers in Morris's poem, Guinevere here also begs God for 'self-control' and 'strength to bear and silence keep'. Braddon's work has a similar tragic focus on Guinevere's desperate longing for death, as an escape from the pain of not being with Lancelot, 'I pray to die, that thou

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[30] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, 'Queen Guinevere', *Garibaldi and Other Poems* (London: Bosworth and Harrison, 1861), 269-271.

mayst be forgot;/ If we forget in death': the work ends with her plea, 'Angels, once women, pity woman's pain,/ And hush me to that slumber, calm and deep,/From which none wake again!'.

As in the medieval 'Maying' imagery of 'Defence', there is a sense of the relationship of Lancelot and Guinevere as an elemental and benevolent force of nature here also: 'There is a voice, whose music ever changing,/ I hear in ev'ry murmur of the sea, In ev'ry wind o'er moor and mountain ranging,/ In ev'ry rustling tree'. Like Morris's queen who demands 'say no rash word/ Against me, being so beautiful' (13), Braddon has Guinevere also using the medieval focus on physiognomy to suggest goodness. However, this Guinevere appears politically cunning rather than imperious, using her beauty to hide her transgression: 'But yet so subtle am I in fair seeming,/ None dare my fame gainsay'. Guinevere's confession that 'There is a figure that I should not fashion,/ Whose form I shape from every changing shade' suggests the helplessness of the queen against an overwhelming and inevitable love. This image reflects the simile used by Morris's queen to show how she was powerless to stop loving Launcelot: 'So day by day it grew, as if one should/ Slip slowly down some path worn smooth and even,/ Down to a cool sea on a summer day' (6).

In stark contrast to Tennyson's 'Guinevere', Arthur is scarcely mentioned: we are presented with the queen's own articulation of her interior, impossible struggle to stop loving Lancelot. Guinevere here despairs because of the grief of losing Lancelot, rather than in an anguished acceptance of having wronged an ideal king, as in Tennyson's

'Guinevere'. The very fact that Braddon's title asserts Guinevere's regal role, in contrast with Tennyson's *Idyll*, is significant. That her work highlights the impossibility for a queen to have both a public persona and a recognised private life is immediately established: 'I wear a crown of gems upon my brow,/ Bright gems drop down upon my yellow hair,/ And none can tell beneath their grandeur, how/ my brain is racked with care'. Braddon's discussion of the idea of the impossibility of the public/private split in the role of queen seems significantly prescient for the situation of the recently-widowed Victoria. When Victoria fulfilled the required domestic ideal of a devoted wife, retreating from court as a sincerely devastated, grieving widow, calls were made for her abdication on the grounds that she was unfit to rule, and should be replaced by her male heir, despite his questionable morality. Victoria's position was infeasible: even when fulfilling the ideal of a domestic monarchy that the public had demanded from her very accession to the throne, the queen was still widely censured. Public images of Victoria focus on her role as chivalric liege lady, or on her role as devoted mother and wife. The other sides of Victoria, the stubborn politician, the desiring woman, and the passionate lover, are scarce: but her letters and journals provide striking evidence that she was a woman who embodied all these qualities. Braddon uses the figure of the legendary medieval queen to explore ideas about queenship, and the expectations of a woman in a public role, which were of significant contemporary relevance.

Sara Teasdale similarly focuses on ideas of queenship in her dramatic monologue 'Guenevere' (1911), which is heir to Morris's 'Defence' in both style and approach. The American poet presented the work in *Helen of Troy* (1911), a collection of dramatic

monologues that allow legendary female figures the right to self-creation through their own voices.[31] The work opens in a tone of despair, Guenevere vocalizing her failure in her main three roles,

> I was a queen, and I have lost my crown;
>
> A wife, and I have broken all my vows;
>
> A lover, and I ruined him I loved:—
>
> There is no other havoc left to do.

The poem does not address the moral elements of Guenevere's adultery, but rather considers the impossibility of maintaining her symbolic public role as queen and her private desires. For her subjects, the queen is a semi-divine icon:

> I was the flower amid a toiling world,
>
> Where people smiled to see one happy thing,
>
> And they were proud and glad to raise me high;
>
> They only asked that I should be right fair,
>
> A little kind, and gownèd wondrously,
>
> And surely it were little praise to me
>
> If I had pleased them well throughout my life.

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[31] Sara Teasdale, *Helen of Troy and Other Poems* (New York and London: Knickerbocker, 1911), 14-16. As well as Helen of Troy and Guenevere, the other dramatic monologues here are envisioned from Beatrice, Sappho, Mariana Alcoforando, and Erinna. The link between Helen and Guenevere, both as women who became scapegoats for the destructions of kingdoms, is significant.

Guenevere's culpability, the 'single fault' for which she is eternally branded, is for failing to live up to this static ideal, by being a desiring and active lover: 'A queen should never dream on summer eves,/When hovering spells are heavy in the dusk'. The destruction of Guenevere's iconic role means the death of her queenship in the eyes of the court: so her chambers become 'but a sepulchre,/ The very rushes rotted on the floors,/ The fire in ashes on the freezing hearth'. The final stanza of the poem focuses on the moment that she recognized her love for Launcelot, and closes with a sense of the injustice, that although the separated lovers have suffered so greatly, 'none will pity me, nor pity him'. By contrast to the view of queenship held by her subjects, Guenevere's own construction of her queenship allows her to be woman as well as icon. She sees her queenship as her birthright, not just a position as Arthur's consort, and thus it is elemental and inborn: 'I was a queen, the daughter of a king./The crown was never heavy on my head,/It was my right, and was a part of me'. Guenevere argues for her medieval possibility as a courtly lover, that she can be both lover and queen: 'The world would run from me, and yet am I/No different from the queen they used to love'.

The creation and maintaining of the public image of a queen is of obvious contemporary significance, even ten years after the death of Victoria: ideas of queenship can be used to illustrate a wider issue of the expectations of all women in a society that still codifies gender behaviour along chivalric lines. In the nineteenth century's obsession with queenly women, the legendary queen of Camelot became absorbed into the pattern of treatment for queens, and thus an exemplar of womanhood, most obviously a repentant adulteress. It is significant that, as with Elizabeth I, Guinevere's childlessness becomes

noteworthy in the Victorian age. Examples of a medieval Guinevere as a mother can be found: the early thirteenth-century French Prose Romance *Perlesvaus* shows Guinevere dying of grief after the death of Loholt, her son with Arthur. In Early Medieval German versions of *Erec and Enide*, Guinevere is shown to have a maternal relationship with Erec: this translates to her role as mother-figure for Gawan in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (1200-10). The Alliterative *Morte Arthure,* at the end of the fourteenth century, also portrays Guinevere as a mother, although here she is a bad one, deserting her children in her flight to a convent. Malory renders Guenevere barren, as Terence McCarthy writes, 'not only because a child would be a sign of shame, but because it is essential to the pull of loyalties and the tragedy that there should be no heir, that the disaster be complete'(115). By contrast, Tennyson's Guinevere is childless because any offspring of hers would be corrupt and diseased, as Arthur expresses: 'Well is it that no child was born of thee./The children born of thee are sword and fire,/ Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws' ('Guinevere', lines 421-423). In Morris's 'The Defence of Guenevere', the queen invokes the sense of 'mother of the nation' used consistently by historical queens: she turns on Gauwaine and suggests that to bring a guilty verdict upon herself would exhibit the same 'awful drouth/ Of pity' (10) as Agravaine's matricide, reinforcing her role as queen, therefore feudal 'mother' of the Round Table, by linking herself to Gauwaine's biological mother.[32]

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[32] Rebecca Cochran offers an insightful discussion of Morris's recasting of Malory's Orkney clan, most particularly making Agravaine, not Gaheris, the matricide (83-86).

In a bizarre twist, Guinevere appears as the epitome of a 'queenly' woman, as the virtuous heroine of a girl's conduct manual, published by the SPCK in 1913. Charlotte Ainsley Gillespy's *Guinevere, or The Ladder of Love* (1913), is a tale of intense love, but mainly platonic and unfulfilled until middle age.[33] The story bears very little resemblance to any aspect of Arthurian myth apart from the use of Arthur and Guinevere as names for the protagonists. This church-going exemplary Guinevere is the epitome of self-sacrifice, surrendering her own academic ambitions and her longing to be the 'strength in weakness' (129) of her beloved Arthur to stay at home and care for her siblings following her mother's death. Guinevere is presented as the epitome of the domestic icon espoused by Ruskin, the moral 'pretty picture of English girlhood' (23), eventually rewarded for her virtue by becoming the ideal wife of the similarly selfless Arthur. The Guinevere in this irritating morality tale could not be further from the character of the medieval queen. Neither Morris's articulate figure of authority nor Tennyson's repentant adulteress, Guinevere here fulfils utterly the Victorian ideal of queenliness and chaste womanhood, moving from dutiful daughter to virtuous wife, while demonstrating perfect domestic virtue and acts of social Christian charity. Yet what this does show is that, despite the nineteenth century's general desire to stereotype Guinevere as merely a repentant adulteress, enough of the virtue of Malory's original queen remained so that her name could be used for an example of perfect duty and fidelity, even if that relates to Arthur rather than Lancelot. The work of Morris and the women writers whom he influenced was obviously significant in this, ensuring that to some extent Guinevere can always

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[33] Charlotte Ainsley Gillespy, *Guinevere, or the Ladder of Love* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1913).

personify 'the feminine ideal', as Elisabeth Brewer suggests (307). What that ideal is — noble queen, faithful lover, articulate woman fighting against persecution — is entirely open to interpretation, as is vibrantly demonstrated in the work of women artists who illustrated editions of Tennyson's and Morris's work in the early twentieth century.

Plate 5 ***And Enid Sang*** **(1874-5)**

Julia Margaret Cameron's Illustrations to Tennyson's **Idylls of the King** ***and Other Poems*****,**
as shown in Julian Cox and Colin Ford, ***Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs***
(London: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 472, Figure 1161.

Plate 6 ***The Queen who sat betwixt her best***
Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court
The wiliest and worst.

Alfred Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King,* ill. by Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), facing 150.

Plate 7 ***As in golden days***

Alfred Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King,* ill. by Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), facing 168.

Plate 8 ***The sombre close of that voluptuous day***
Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King

Alfred Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King*, ill. by Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), facing 172.

Plate 9 ***O golden hair with which I used to play***

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Guinevere: An Idyl of the King*, ill. by Jessie M. King (London: Routledge, 1903), facing 34.

Plate 10 ***And gave the naked shield***

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Elaine: An Idyl of the King* ill. by Jessie M. King (London: Routledge, 1903), facing 54.

Plate 11 ***She threw her wet hair backward from her brow***

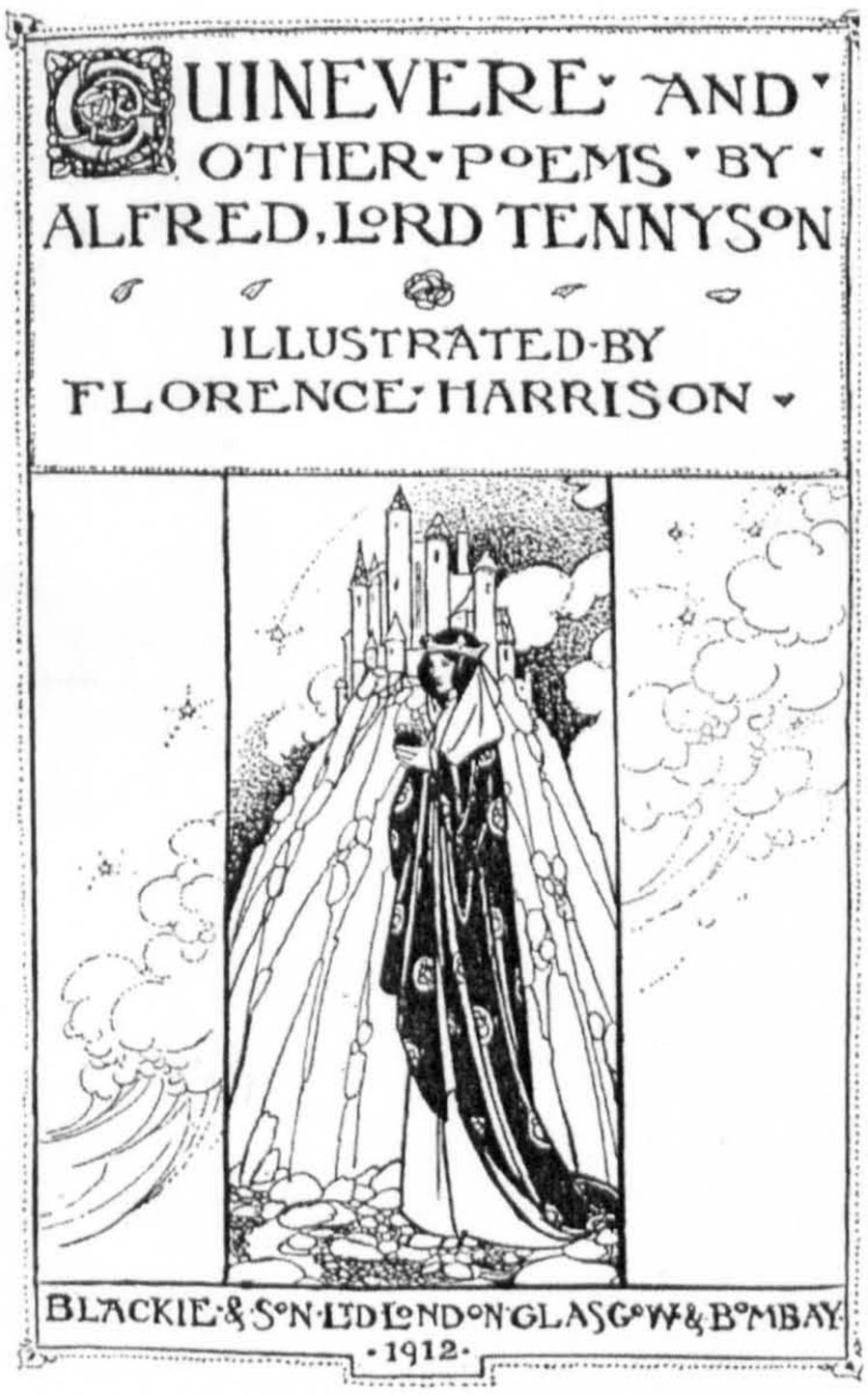
William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, ill. by Jessie M. King (London and New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1904), facing 18.

Plate 12 *My maids were all about me*

William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, ill. by Jessie M. King (London and New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1904), facing 40.

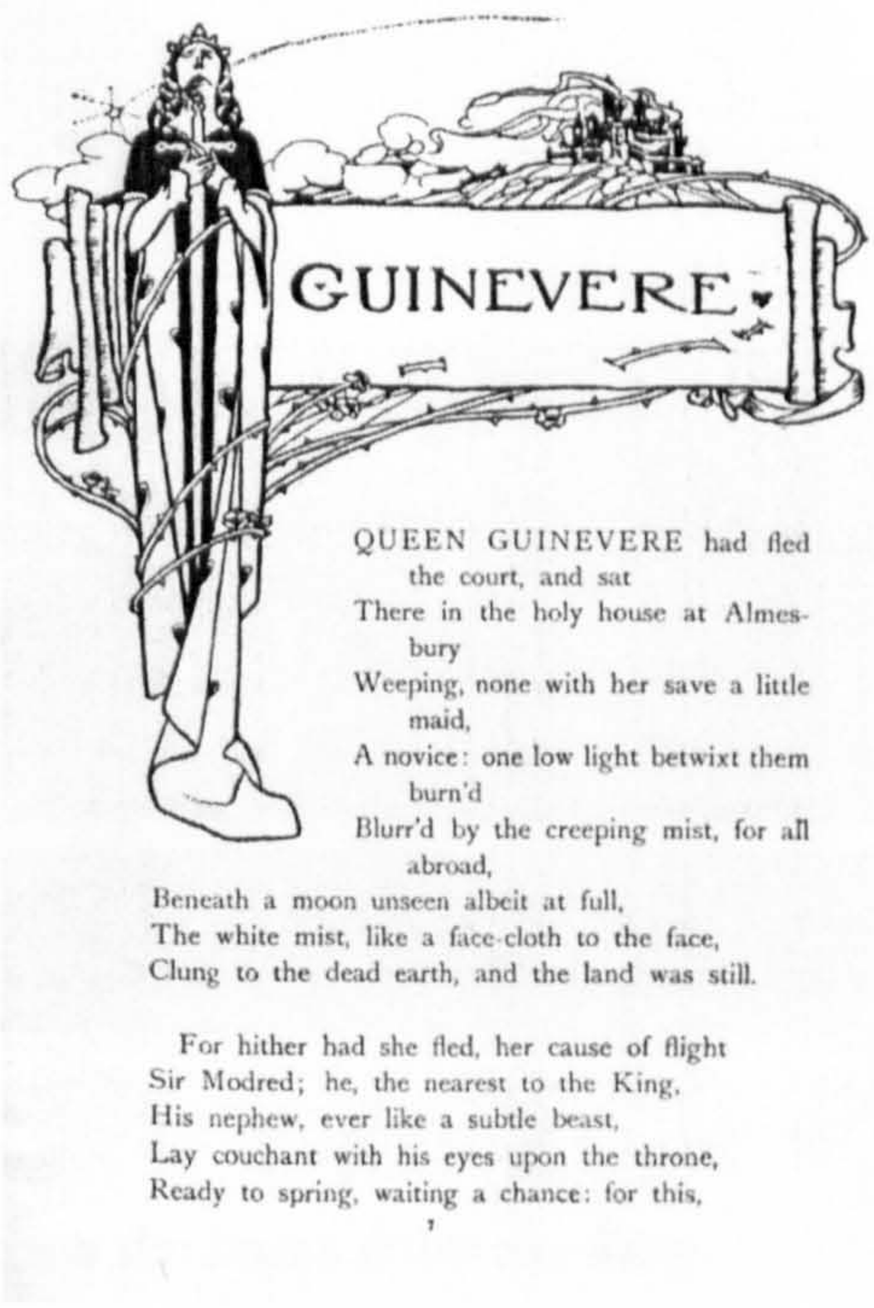
Plate 13 ***He did not hear her coming as he lay***

William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, ill. by Jessie M. King (London and New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1904), facing 58.



(a)

(b)



QUEEN GUINEVERE had fled the court, and sat
There in the holy house at Almesbury
Weeping, none with her save a little maid,
A novice: one low light betwixt them burn'd
Blurr'd by the creeping mist, for all abroad,
Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full,
The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still.

For hither had she fled, her cause of flight
Sir Modred; he, the nearest to the King,
His nephew, ever like a subtle beast,
Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,
Ready to spring, waiting a chance: for this,

(c)

Plate 14(a) Title Page

Alfred Tennyson, *Guinevere and Other Poems*, ill. by Florence Harrison (London, Glasgow and Bombay: Blackie and Son, 1912).

Plates 14(b) & (c) Cover and Header

Tennyson's Guinevere and Other Poems, ill. by Florence Harrison (London, Glasgow and Bombay: Blackie and Son, 1923).

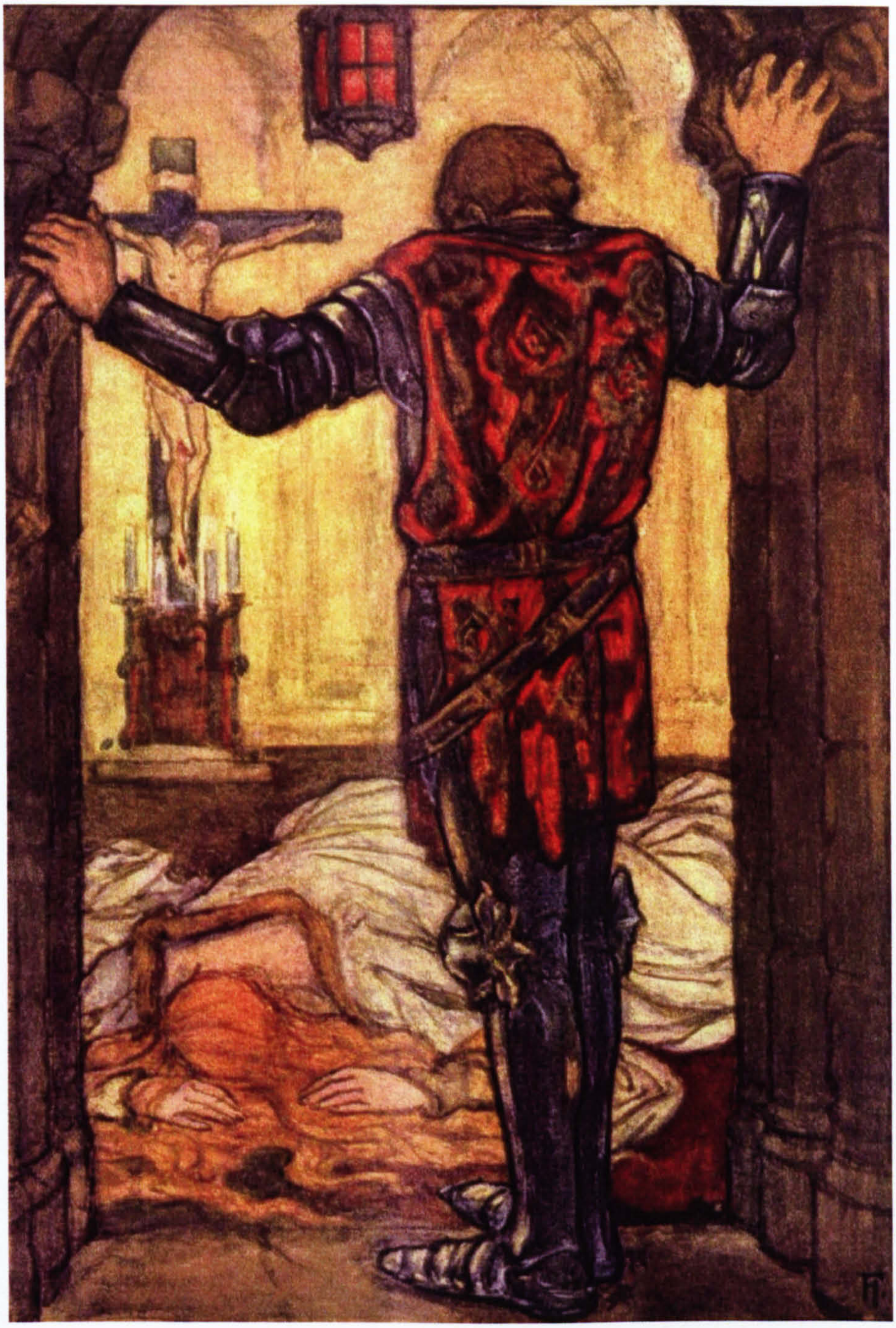


Plate 15 ***She made her face a darkness from the king***

Alfred Tennyson, *Guinevere and Other Poems*, ill. by Florence Harrison (London, Glasgow and Bombay: Blackie and Son, 1912), facing 16.

Plate 16 ***We needs must love the highest when we see it***

Alfred Tennyson, *Guinevere and Other Poems*, ill. by Florence Harrison (London, Glasgow and Bombay: Blackie and Son, 1912), facing 26.

Plate 17 ***In that garden fair***
Came Launcelot walking; this is true, the kiss
Wherewith we kissed in meeting that spring day,
I scarce dare talk of the remember'd bliss.

***Early Poems of William Morris*, ill. by Florence Harrison**
(London, Glasgow and Bombay: Blackie, 1914), Frontispiece.

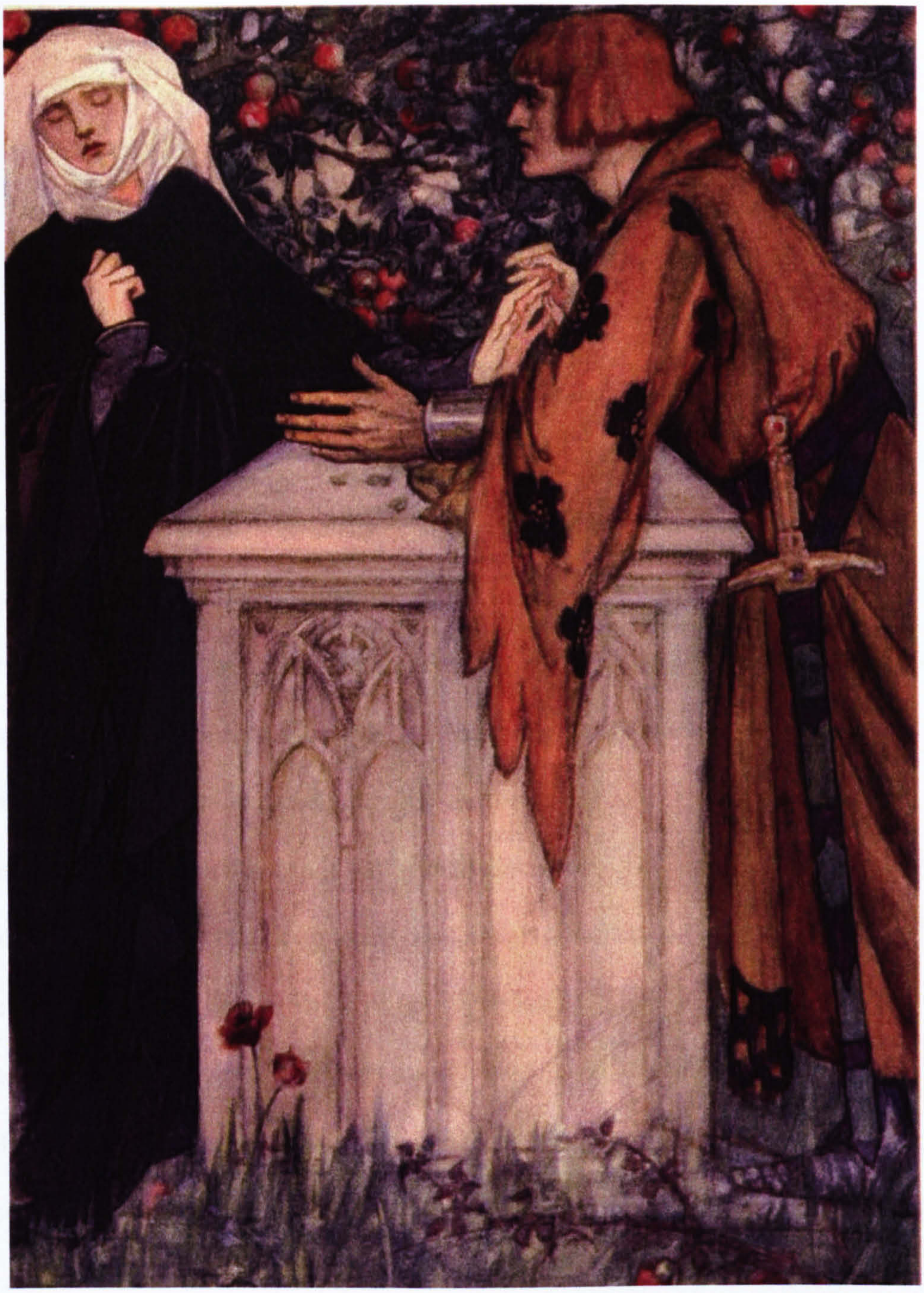


Plate 18 ***"Guenevere! Guenevere!***
Do you not know me, are you gone mad?"

***Early Poems of William Morris*, ill. by Florence Harrison**
(London, Glasgow and Bombay: Blackie, 1914), facing 23.

7 Re-reading Guinevere: women illustrators, Tennyson and Morris

Tennyson's version of Arthurian myth may well have been the one to reach most readers in the nineteenth century, but it was far from unchallenged, as the work of many women writers attest, particularly those influenced by Morris. What is also clear, is that Tennyson's version itself was greatly open to interpretation, and can be seen to raise as many questions about the moral culpability of the main protagonists as provide answers. This space was the aspect of his work on which women illustrators of his poems capitalized in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Tennyson's lack of enthusiasm for book illustration is well-documented, the poet deciding that 'illustrators did not (and could not) match up to his own imaginative vision'[1]: he stifled the creativity of the visual artists by demanding that 'an illustrator ought never to add anything to what he finds in the text'.[2] Despite the poet's reservations, his work inspired a vast range of visual art and illustrations, notably by women: these make a fascinating study, particularly when considered alongside illustrations for Morris's Arthurian poems by the same artists. For illustrators, the selection of text to be illustrated is of primary significance: when we consider which aspects of Guinevere's narrative they choose to depict, we find not only intriguing interpretations of the source, which often highlight

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[1] See Leonée Ormond, *Alfred Tennyson: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), 131. Ormond provides an exploration of Tennyson's relationship with a variety of illustrators (131-144).
[2] From W.H. Hunt *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (1905-6), as shown Ormond, 1993, 133.

contrasting aspects from those that form the focus of the written text, but also a social commentary on the contemporary society of the artist. I shall consider these interpretations of the work of Morris and Tennyson by women artists, focusing on the work of four women: Julia Margaret Cameron, Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale, Jessie Marion King, and Florence Harrison. These artists have highly divergent styles and offer a varied commentary on both their source texts and society, demonstrating the space for interpretation to be found in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, and Morris's 'The Defence of Guenevere' and 'King Arthur's Tomb'.

In autumn 1874, Tennyson asked his friend and neighbour Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-79) to produce photographic illustrations for his *Idylls*: in doing so 'he was making a request of an accomplished photographer with an established point of view', and a woman who held a fervent desire to ennoble the art of photography.[3] He was also dealing with an astute business-woman who needed money for her sons' education: a letter to family friend Sir Edward Ryan, dated 29 November 1874, shows Cameron musing on the commercial potential of her photographs for the *Idylls*. She explains how the hiring of costumes and models had cost her a great deal, thus she needs to make a profit so that, '*I can help my youngest boy who has not yet had one farthing from us*': she also emphasizes that 'It will make a beautiful Xmas gift book or Wedding gift book—the Elaine of May Prinsep and the Enid of another lovely girl are as all agree *not* to be surpassed as Poems and Pictures, and the King Arthur all say is a magnificent Mystic mythical a real

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[3] See Joanne Lukitsh, 'Julia Margaret Cameron's Photographic Illustrations to Alfred Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King*', in Fenster ed., 2000, 247-262, 248.

embodiment of conscience—with piercing eyes and spiritual air and look' (as shown Lukitsh, 249). Cameron has obviously realised that it is these three figures from the *Idylls* who will appeal to purchasers of gift books, laden as they are with Victorian respectability or tragic allure: the finished volumes have more images of Elaine 'the Lily Maid of Astolat' than any other character. Wynne-Davies suggests that Cameron's decision to illustrate the *Idylls* 'echoes, somewhat too readily, the gendered roles which society expected [her] to assume', complying with a conventional nineteenth-century view of female creativity by presenting herself 'in relation to the artistic accomplishments of men' (Wynne-Davis, 152). Wynne-Davies further suggests that 'There was, for example, no reason why Cameron should not have chosen to illustrate Guest's *The Mabinogion*'(152): none, that is, except the hugely significant fact for the photographer, that illustrating the Laureate's well-established *Idylls* would have a far greater commercial potential, and prove a wider showcase for her art.[4] There were eventually two volumes of the *Illustrations*, the first published late December-early January 1875, the second May 1875, dedicated to the Crown Princess: of the fifteen photographic illustrations, eleven are from the 1859 group of *Idylls*, *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine* and *Guinevere*, and demonstrate significant developments in the presentation of Tennyson's protagonists.[5] The model in Cameron's 'And Enid sang' [Plate 5], for example, seems to have been posed almost exactly as one of Rossetti's 'stunners', with a doubtless similar

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[4] This is surprising as, later in her chapter on Cameron, Wynne-Davies states that 'Cameron wanted to be a commercial success – in material terms, she needed the money' (159) when considering why the photographer specifically focused her work to appeal to the male viewer, with, in the majority of cases, the far greater financial capacity to purchase her works.

[5] References to *Julia Margaret Cameron's Illustrations to Tennyson's* Idylls of the King and Other Poems, are taken from Julian Cox and Colin Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003).

appeal for the male viewer: a bust-length portrait with abundant flowing hair, contemplative gaze, and columnar neck, below which fall pearls and voluptuous robes. Yet, despite this association, the respectability of both Cameron and her model are maintained as the viewer knows, from the title of the work, that the figure depicted is the ideal of married love: it is worth noting that Cameron used the same model, Miss Peacock, as the epitome of wifely virtue for 'The Angel in the House' (1873).[6] Cameron also saves her Enid from being simply the passive female object for a male gaze by making her active: Enid here is singing, and accompanying herself on a musical instrument, her contemplation easily accounted for by her own artistic creativity. In making Enid respectably active, Cameron is highlighting the propriety of her own artistic endeavours: 'the incarnation of the dutiful, but independent and creative, wife, is far closer to Cameron's — and, indeed, Guest's — self-fashioning than to the tortured identity of Tennyson's heroine or the erotic objects of Rossetti's portraits' (Wynne-Davies, 160).

Cameron's commercial acumen made her exploit the appeal of Elaine, as so many visual artists do throughout the century: her images of Elaine all focus on her ideal vision of love for Lancelot, and her death because that love was unrequited. Cameron's Elaine is, however, far from being merely a victim, as Lutkish explores, 'Through the use of visual parallels between the photographs of Elaine and King Arthur, Cameron elevated Elaine's fantasy of love into one of the major events of Camelot. Elaine and King Arthur are the

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[6] For a in-depth discussion on the links between Cameron and Rossetti's work, and the question of the male gaze and moral respectability, see Wynne-Davies, 156-161: I am indebted to this study for many points in my exploration of Cameron's portrayal of Enid.

only characters represented in visually continuous, paired sequences, and both are represented on boats, symbolic of their passage into immortality' (257). Cameron highlights the parallels drawn by Tennyson between Arthur's dream of an ideal society and Elaine's dream of an ideal love: but in the photographic illustrations, Elaine almost supersedes Arthur, the fulfilment of her dying wish for her corpse to be presented at court raising her to a level of self-fashioned immortality. Elaine's creativity is thus celebrated here, just as it is with her act of embroidering the shield cover in earlier photographs. Cameron's women are active, while her men remain passive: Gareth sleeps while Lynette keeps watch, Merlin is imprisoned and impotent at the hands of Vivien, Galahad is inspired by the Pale Nun. Within this scheme, Guinevere is also presented as a sympathetic figure of dignified activity: Cameron's final *Illustration*s do not demand that Guinevere should grovel at the feet of Arthur, unlike the images of Gustave Doré, who had illustrated this same group of Elaine, Enid, Guinevere, and Vivien in 1867-68, in four volumes. There are some similarities in the work of the two artists, both presenting black and white illustrations with a similar melodrama of composition and pose of the central figures: however, Cameron believed her work to be the far superior. Doré's 'The King's Farewell', the final image of the volume, shows a prostrate Guinevere, with bare feet, shapeless robe and loose hair, lying face down at the feet of a stern Arthur, who is elderly with brows furrowed in anger, and seems as immovable as the dark columns of the cloisters around them.[7] It is clear that at one stage Cameron had planned a similar penitent Magdalen tableau, as the model for Guinevere complained about having to lie all day at Arthur's feet, but such an image is not found in the extant copies of the

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[7] Alfred Tennyson, *Guinevere*, illustrated by Gustave Doré (London: Moxon, 1868), facing 31.

Illustrations (see Lutkish, 256-257). There is, in a prototype copy, a photograph of Guinevere standing alone, preceded by a text showing Guinevere's jealousy of Elaine (.... 'and rose again,/And moved about her palace, proud and pale'). This was ultimately replaced with the image of 'The Little Novice with the Queen Guinevere in the Holy House at Almesbury', thus significantly changing the focus from Guinevere as Elaine's rival, to the remorseful queen. Cameron thus makes Guinevere a more sympathetic figure, not placing her as a direct contrast to the idealized Elaine, and finds a way to focus on her redeeming remorse: but she does this by allowing the queen the dignity of being a beautiful and veiled nun, with long hair flowing loose beneath her veil, rather than grovelling sinner. Even Guinevere's adulterous relationship with Lancelot is represented sympathetically, both in 'The Parting of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere', where the queen is a beautiful, yet distraught, lover, and 'Lancelot and Guinevere' where she is crowned and retains the dignity of Queen Consort despite being with her lover. Similarly in the portrait of 'Guinevere' the nobility of the solitary, crowned figure first strikes the viewer: presented in an active role as queen, she is invested with all the authority that the role necessitates. Cameron's photographs uphold the essential order of Arthur's kingdom and Tennyson's vision, but also highlight the potential for activity of the women characters, consistently allowing them a dignified and positive position.

Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale (1872-1945) also turned to Tennyson as a source, producing illustrations for *The Idylls of the King* in 1911: these show how she continued to paint in a Pre-Raphaelite style until well into the 1920s, reflecting as they do a Pre-Raphaelite focus on colour, and symbolism of costume and flowers, to depict class, period, and

moral and emotional states, despite the fact that 'The Pre-Raphaelite movement must be viewed as coming to an end at the close of the nineteenth century or, at the latest, with the First World War'.[8] In doing so, Brickdale was in many ways assisted by Tennyson's text, which often gives specific details of symbolic costumes, such as the gold and green clothes of the powerful, yet deceitful, Vivien. Brickdale would have been confident that viewers would have been used to the meanings of the botanical symbols in her work, as the popularity of dictionaries such as Kate Greenaway's *Language of Flowers* (1884) suggest. Critics have accused Brickdale of being uninspired in her illustrations, Muriel Whitaker saying, 'It is true that this artist was not particularly original', relying on traditional constructions of 'the representation of beautiful women who are either innocents or destroyers', and most scathingly that 'One feels that Tennyson would have approved her attention to "what the writer said"'.[9] She is also damned by the praise of Walter Shaw Sparrow, who used his review of Brickdale's watercolour exhibition at the Dowdeswell Galleries for *The Studio*, 15 June 1901 as a means to expound his view that 'what the world needs now is a general return to womanliness by the ladies who try to be artists' (34)[10]: he views her work favourably, that her 'noble heart and strong genius has a woman's heart and a woman's prescient intuition' (33), concluding that, 'Altogether, the highest praise that can be given to a sister of art is to say that her genius grows in strength without losing its womanliness. This can be said of very few women, but it is beyond

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8 Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement* (London: Virago Press, 1989), 143.

9 See Muriel Whitaker, 'The Woman's Eye: Four Modern Arthurian Illustrators', in Fenster ed., 2000, 263-286, 270.

10 Walter Shaw Sparrow, 'On Some Watercolour Pictures by Miss EFB', *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*, 23, 15 June 1901, 31-44, (34).

question true, in the case of Miss Fortescue-Brickdale' (36). However, since Sparrow says of women artists that 'Imagination in its highest form [...] they have never as yet possessed'(36), being 'womanly' equates to being unimaginative. Similarly, Marsh and Gerrish Nunn say that, 'perhaps this weight of tradition inhibited Brickdale, for her works broke no new ground but seem in a sense to represent summaries of previous endeavours', Enid and Elaine being favoured over Vivien and Guinevere. They do, however, excuse her by offering the traditional condemnation of the source text: 'Any artist tackling Tennyson's *Idylls*, however, was more or less obliged to rework the Victorian division of femininity into self-sacrificial, asexual virtue and self-indulgent, sexual vice' (148). While this conclusion could be applied to presentation of the Enid/Vivien pairing, Brickdale consciously contrasting the two characters, I shall here demonstrate how the Elaine/Guinevere group is far more complex than the artist's detractors suggest. Far from being unoriginal, in her presentation of Elaine and Guinevere Brickdale offers a fresh approach, being neither as celebratory of the maid, nor as condemnatory of the queen, as tradition dictates.

Brickdale had produced black and white illustrations for Tennyson's *Poems* (1905), but in 1909 was given the opportunity to express herself in colour, when she was commissioned by The Leicester Galleries in London to produce a series of twenty-eight watercolours based on the 1859 first set of *Idylls*, 'The True and the False', which were then reproduced in a 1911 volume.[11] Brickdale's portrait of 'Enid' (facing 14) shows a

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[11] Alfred Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King*, ill. by Eleanor F. Brickdale (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911).

seemly matron, eyes downcast, hands clasped, veiled over a draped wimple. Her blue gown symbolises fidelity in love, her deep green robe aligns her with spring and nature, colours she is consistently wearing throughout Brickdale's illustrations: see, for example, the rich blues of her robes in, 'The Queen who sat betwixt her best/ Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court/ The wiliest and worst' (facing 150) [Plate 6]. The tulips in her walled garden suggest innocence, spring and the burgeoning success of the Camelot ideal, upheld by the virtues of such as Enid. The turtledoves suggest suitably feminine attributes of gentleness and affection, a love of the domestic, and the idea of true love. As Tennyson does in his textual pairing of the two *Idylls*, Brickdale sets Vivien up as a foil to Enid, echoing the composition of her portrait of Enid in, 'At which the King/ Had glazed upon her blankly and gone by' (facing 70). Here Vivien is a Pre-Raphaelite, auburn-haired *femme fatale*, with a green-lined (here green suggesting deceit), tiger-skin cloak over a flame-coloured gown. The walled garden here, in which she had tried to trap Arthur, has autumnal leaves and ripe apples, in contrast to the spring of Enid's garden, suggesting a dual idea of the 'Fall'; firstly as autumn, the idea of Camelot coming to an end with the moral decay of the kingdom, and the 'fall of man', because of an apple in the garden of Eden. The diaphanous veil has fallen from her head, in contrast with the modest head wrappings of Enid, and while Enid's hands are folded demurely in front of her, Vivien grasps the fur of her cloak and the stone panther's head on the seat beside her in contempt and rage for the King's innocent indifference; her panther coming as a stark contrast to Enid's doves. She is a serpentine temptress; 'O master, do you love my tender rhyme?' (facing 78) shows Vivien clad in a snakeskin-like silver and green sleek gown, winding herself onto Merlin's lap, fingering his beard. Yet Brickdale's Vivien is a

knowing and political schemer, rather than an embodiment of all that is morally worst in womankind: in 'Nor saw she save the King, who wrought the charm' (facing 86), she lies, amid the trappings of Eastern luxury, fingering the King piece from a game of chess, with a look of amused disdain at the political game she is playing.

While Brickdale is happy to pair the first two *Idylls*, her presentation of Elaine and Guinevere is more complex. In contrast to Cameron, Brickdale does not seem to engage with Elaine's story, or feel the need to celebrate it: her illustrations do not in any way touch the subversive nature of Elaine's desires or actions, but seems to treat them as dreams of a child who causes needless suffering with her poignant death. 'Elaine' (facing 102) is in her chamber, looking down at the shield cover she is embroidering, with the rosy cheeks of a child: 'Then to her tower she climb'd, and took the shield,/ There kept it, and so lived in fantasy' (facing 110) continues this image, Elaine fleeing to hide her handiwork. The most striking aspect of, 'But to be with you still, to see your face,/ To serve you, and follow you thro' the world' (facing 118), is the contrast between the remarkably aged Lancelot and the youthful Elaine, this again suggesting the poignancy of the maid's fantasy of a life with the experienced knight: the garden where Elaine makes this declaration has lilies, showing her purity and virginity, and thus heightening the force of her newly-awakened desire. What Maria Greenwood has said of Malory's Elaine is the element that leaps out of Brickdale's work: 'Elaine matures rapidly, but not entirely, through her non-courtly passion, to which she brings the fatal intensity of extreme youth

and provincial inexperience'.[12] It is significant that 'So those two brethren from the chariot took/ and on the black decks laid her in her bed' (facing 134) focuses on the grieving brothers and father, whose sorrow is caused by the actions of the dead Elaine: the idea of dying for ideal and unfulfilled love is not celebrated, her death being presented as the tragic loss of a child, rather than the destruction of an ideal love by corrupt adulterers. Similarly in 'Farewell, fair lily' (facing 142) the barge and ethereal corpse is very much in the background, the focus being the figure of Lancelot as he watches the barge pass in the distance, and laments for the loss of the maid.

As Frontispiece for the volume, Brickdale chooses to illustrate the moment when 'Sir Lancelot went ambassador, at first,/To fetch her, and she took him for the King', the knight here with a face of Edwardian serenity that sits strangely on the medieval armour. Yet, Brickdale's choice is significant: from the outset she is showing the relationship of Lancelot and the Queen in a favourable light, as their love predates Guinevere's ever having met the King. 'The Queen who sat betwixt her best/ Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court/ The wiliest and worst' (facing 150) [Plate 6] shows Guinevere's physical position here reflecting her moral one: it is significant that she is seated closer to Enid, and dressed more like the virtuous wife than the serpentine Vivien. Guinevere here is a dignified Queen, her crown resting on a veiled head, with draped wimple, the gold of her embroidered gown, with its rich red sleeves, indicating her royal power. This is her May garden, dominated by a magnificent blossoming chestnut tree in the background: her role

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[12] Maria K. Greenwood, 'Women in Love, or Three Courtly Heroines in Chaucer and Malory: Elaine, Criseyde and Guinevere', in *A Wyf Ther Was*, ed. by Juliette Dor (Liege, Belgium: Liege Language and Literature, 1992), 167-177, 169.

as lover is highlighted both by the statue of Cupid in the fountain in the foreground and the red rose she is sniffing. Guinevere can thus be a courtly and adulterous lover, while maintaining her right to be a dignified queen, and occupy the moral high ground away from the scheming Vivien. Yet this sober, regal Guinevere is in great contrast to the youthful lover in 'It was their last hour,/ A madness of farewells' (facing 158), where a girl-like Guinevere, clad in the blue of 'fidelity in love' clings to a young swain of a Lancelot, who seems at odds with the grizzled-haired ambassador who had first met her, and had rebuffed the love of Elaine. The scene is hot with love and passion, as emphasised by the torch hanging over the bed, the floor strewn with red roses, and the red-rose shaped precious stones on Guinevere's girdle. In Guinevere there is an echo of Brickdale's desperate childlike Elaine, her face twisted in sorrow and despair, the illustration suggesting a tender sadness rarely seen in images of the experienced queen.

Red roses again play a significant symbolic role in 'As in the Golden Days' (168) [Plate 7], flourishing in the idyllic May garden, embroidered in the queen's surcoat, and reflected in the rich red of her gown. It is worth noting that beneath the rose bush, lilies bloom: here, in golden days, Guinevere's love for Lancelot can seem both as pure as Elaine's, and as true as Enid's for Geraint, as the presence of doves reinforces.

Guinevere's ermine trimmed, rose-embroidered surcoat seems to have been inspired by one that Queen Victoria wore when she appeared as Queen Philippa at the 1842 Bal Costume, as celebrated in Landseer's painting: it is of great significance that, unlike Tennyson with his elaborate framing in the Dedication, Brickdale does not shy away from linking Queen Guinevere and Queen Victoria in this image. This illustration is

important as it shows an acceptance of Guinevere as virtuous queen (crowned), yet true lover, with no sense of judgement that the one whom the Queen loves is not the husband of her political marriage. Guinevere here is mistress of her own space, although the cloister window in the background foretells her doom. The sober nun in Brickdale's final illustration, 'The sombre close of that voluptuous day/ Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King' (facing 172) [Plate 8] comes in stark contrast to the golden-haired young queen. The garden here has typically Edwardian blue delphiniums and golden lilies, signalling religious faith, and salvation for the penitent queen. Her rich bright robes are replaced by a rough habit, her hair bound in a wimple and heavy veil. Marsh and Gerrish Nunn have written that 'this is the last plate, suggesting a resolution of the entire series as well as of Guinevere's own narrative. Brickdale chooses to show the queen in her repentant phase as a model of good womanhood — chaste, pious, obedient, philanthropic'.[13] Guinevere seems far from contented in this state, brow furrowed in a frown, eyes heavy and sorrowful, with remorse for her part in the fall of the kingdom, or grief at being separated from Lancelot. Yet by showing Guinevere in this role, an active member of the convent with a basket of bread to give as alms, Brickdale avoids the 'penitential queen before Arthur' confrontation. She focuses instead on what happens after Arthur leaves Guinevere in the convent, when the former queen works again towards a ruling position of power and influence, chosen to be abbess for her good deeds, and intrinsic authority. The figure of the nun had been one used frequently from the late 1840s, and was potentially loaded with controversy. The founding of the first Anglican

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[13] Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn, *Pre-Raphaelite Women Artists* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 155.

Order for women in London in 1845 was part of the revival of Catholic-style worship in the Anglican Church, and as such was significant in the discord between High Anglicans and those suspicious of anything relating to 'popery'. The medieval revival itself, of course, came into this pro-Catholic category for many. On another level, convent life was distrusted for giving women 'limited but real freedom, through their vows of obedience, and outside the patriarchal jurisdiction of the family'.[14] So showing Guinevere as a nun is not necessarily denying her the nobility and the status she had relinquished in fleeing the court: Brickdale is showing the sober and repentant Guinevere in a role of dignity, and potential power, and thus focusing on the positive ending to Tennyson's *Idyll*, which lifts the queen from the convent floor to a position of social and moral redemption.

While this image may be the resolution of Guinevere's narrative in Brickdale's 1911 illustrations, it is not the artist's last word on the subject. Brickdale was commissioned to prepare fifteen watercolours to accompany literary texts chosen by herself for *Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale's Golden Book of Famous Women* (1919), the paintings forming her last solo exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in April 1920. The image of 'Queen Guinevere' here could not prove a greater contrast to this final presentation of the charitable nun. Confusingly, the text that Brickdale has chosen, printed in full, is actually Tennyson's 'Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere: A Fragment' (*Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, 1830), while the title quotation which accompanies the watercolour is, 'Her memory from old habit of the mind/ Went slipping back upon the golden days/ In which she saw him

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[14] Jan Marsh, *Pre-Raphaelite Women: Images of Femininity in Pre-Raphaelite Art* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 36. A comprehensive discussion of portrayals of religious sisterhoods in art can be found here in the chapter on 'Holy Virgins'.

first, when Launcelot came' from 'Guinevere' (1859) instead. What these texts have in common is their celebration of Guinevere as the archetypal courtly lover, Guinevere at her most glorious, in tune with nature. 'She seemed a part of joyous Spring/ A gown of grass-green silk she wore,/ Buckled with golden clasps before', is reflected in her white, green and gold gown, and her long golden plaits, in the watercolour, which make her part of the natural landscape in the background. This choice is significant: it is not the repentance of the queen and retreat to a life of penitence that Brickdale illustrates, but '*Queen* Guinevere' (my italics — Brickdale gives her the title denied her in the title of the *Idyll*), the true lover, aspects she has been able to select from Tennyson's texts as easily as the more usual repentant adulteress.

Similarly it is the role of Guinevere the lover which is celebrated by Jessie Marion King (1875-1949), highly successful artist of the Glasgow School, in her illustrations for the works of both Tennyson and Morris: that she illustrated the works of both poets allows an interesting comparison to be drawn between her source texts. King's work is clearly influenced by Aubrey Beardsley's (1872-1898) elongated Art Nouveau line, offering a similar repertoire of motifs, such as the poppies, brambles, and billowing gowns. However, she softens Beardsley's harsh lines by using dots, uses white space widely instead of dominant black, and generally renders Beardsley's more cynical landscape a dream-like space, evoking, as Whitaker suggests, 'the magical and mystical'.[15] The most celebrated of Beardsley's images from his illustrated edition of Caxton's text of the

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[15] Muriel Whitaker, 'Unifying Makers: Lancelot and Guinevere in Modern Literature and Art', in Walters ed., 2002, 159-180, 175.

Morte D'Arthur (1893-4) are the numerous ones depicting the Tristram and Isoud story, such as 'How Sir Tristram Drank of the Love Drink' (facing 218), and 'How La Beale Isoud Nursed Sir Tristram' (facing 198). Yet, the two illustrations presenting Guenever are both significant in their selection.[16] 'How Queen Guenever Rode on Maying' (between 554-555), is a lavishly bordered double-page spread, imbued with the regal splendour of the richly gowned and plumed queen, with her draped horse and elegant knightly escort. It is a powerful evocation of Malory's textual celebration of Courtly Love (opening passage of XIX: i), specifically a reflection of Malory's tribute to Guenever as lover,'that while she lived she was a true lover, and therefore she had a good end' (XVII:xxv, 552). It also illustrates an episode which presents Guenever unequivocally as queen: her knights, from whom she receives the devotion of a chivalric icon, fulfil her every whim, appearing in green to 'ride on Maying into the woods and fields beside Westminster' (XIX:i, 553). Similarly the illustration for 'How Queen Guenever made her a Nun' (facing 614) depicts Guenever at a moment of authority: it is significant that, as the title suggests, Guenever is the active determining force here, entering the convent through her own choice to make amends for the destruction she has caused. The image faces the opening of Guenever's greatest rhetorical moment in the *Morte D'Arthur*, when she manifests herself in complete control, commanding Lancelot and forcing him to react to the initiative that she has taken. Throughout the work Guenever has been consistently defended, and has had her virtue affirmed, by Lancelot's actions, his prowess saving her from the charge of treachery and from her impeachment for murder. By contrast, here Guenever takes action for herself, presenting herself as

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[16] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, ill. by Aubrey Beardsley, 2nd edn (London: Dent, 1909).

simultaneously commanding queen, constant lover, and penitent woman: she is making amends in the way she chooses for the destruction that her actions have unwittingly caused. Beardsley invests his portrayal of Guenever as nun with the possibility of all these aspects, mainly by presenting her as an enigmatic blackness, swamping her with a huge hooded habit, which hides all except her face, recognisable as Guenever only in the context in which she is presented, and by the title. Concentrating on her activity of reading, she is in control of the space that she dominates with her immense robes, still queenly while being a nun, easily imagined as the 'abbess and ruler' (XIX:vii, 613) rather than the working nun of Brickdale's sorrowful Guinevere. Beardsley is celebrated for his paintings and illustrations, like these of his Malory edition, that represent his contempt for the confining gender constructions of his contemporary society: 'His protest was not merely an advocacy of sexual education and sexual exploration, but also a disapproval of social hypocrisy and the sexist social conventions which fostered that hypocrisy'.[17] Appalled by Victorian attitudes to women, and insistence on female passivity, in his portrayal of Guenever Beardsley recuperates a positive view of active femininity. Alongside this, he demonstrates his contempt for the attitude of his contemporary society to chivalry and knighthood, his men also failing to conform to expected behaviour: 'Instead of engaging energetically in tournaments or riding into the forest to seek adventures which involve performing "noble acts of chivalry", his knights recline

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[17] Linda Gertner Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 2.

langorously, use their swords as walking sticks or stand about in dreamy contemplation of phallic floral arrangements'.[18]

It is this refusal of Beardsley's to box characters into expected representations, as well as his Art Nouveau style, which is reflected in King's illustrations for Tennyson's *Idylls*. She provided illustrations for Tennyson's *Guinevere* and *Elaine*, when these works were published as Routledge's 'Broadway Booklets' in spring 1903.[19] Critics have written disparagingly of her illustrations for William Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1904) that 'Perhaps because King could not draw convincing armour, Launcelot is neglected' (Whitaker, 2002, 175). It is worth noting that in her illustrations for *Guinevere* and *Elaine*, King portrays both Arthur and Lancelot in armour, suggesting that the relatively fewer depictions of Launcelot for the Morris text shows a conscious choice by the artist to focus on the queen.[20] In fact in a unusually touching illustration for 'O golden hair with which I used to play' (*Guinevere*, facing 34) [Plate 9] it is an armoured Arthur who, a far cry from the stern Teutonic warrior of Doré's engraving, lovingly fingers the golden hair of the kneeling Guinevere. King presents an Arthur who is desolate, yet loving, neither the political sovereign of Malory nor Tennyson's severe moralist. He is not simply remembering past pleasures, but almost torturing himself by reliving them for the final time: King's Arthur, like Beardsley's knights, behaves differently from expectations. Guinevere, on bended knee before the King, seems sad and

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[18] Muriel Whitaker, 'The Illustration of Arthurian Romance', in Lagorio and Leake Day eds, 1990, II, 123-150, 140.

[19] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Guinevere: An Idyl of the King* (London: Routledge, 1903), and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *Elaine: An Idyl of the King* (London: Routledge, 1903).

[20] The use of Lancelot/Launcelot here reflect the poet's choice of spelling.

regretful as she touches his cloak, but is bending as a subject to a king, not prostrate as a sinner before a Christ-substitute. King's cloister seems less claustrophobic, more serene than Dore's, the windows and the roses giving a sense of space and things growing and living outside the stone walls: the focus is the grief of the unrequited King and the lamenting of his wife who loves another, not on judgement, righteousness and penitence. The poignant sorrow of Arthur's personal tragedy is obvious here, as it also is in 'And near him the sad nuns with each a light' (facing 36): the bowed heads and downcast eyes of all the characters highlight the impending doom of the youthful and handsome King, as he takes his final farewell from his wife. The reciprocal love of Guinevere and Lancelot is, by contrast, the focus of 'Under groves that look'd a paradise of blossom'(facing 22), with a shared gaze and a clutch of the knight's arm: the cherubic creature above them and the ornamental bower of roses, almost a halo around their heads, depicts the naturalness of their love, a celebration, in no way condemnatory. Similarly, in the unusually dark setting for 'None with her save a little maid, a novice' (Frontispiece), King uses the text's statement that, 'one low light betwixt them burn'd' to highlight the heads of Guinevere and the novice. However, this light ends with falling stars, depicting Guinevere's 'fallen star', the end of her joyous love with Lancelot, her position as Queen, and the destruction of the Kingdom. The cascade of Guinevere's billowing hair over a bent head as she weeps into her hands, is again a focus, emphasising her sensuality and physical beauty, despite the tragedy and peril of her plight.

It is worth noting that King's portrayal of Elaine in the illustrations for the Broadway Booklet version is not so very different from images of Guinevere: both show beautiful

young women with trailing hair. This is not simply a reflection of King's use of similar style in illustrations, or her inability to draw any other kind of face, but is a demonstration of King's refusal to prejudge any of her characters. Guinevere, like Elaine, is a tragic heroine, not a penitent Magdalen: King's Elaine is not a poignant and dreaming child, like Brickdale's, but a woman who loves, and has reason to believe she can be loved in return. It is significant that King illustrates 'Kiss'd the hand to which he gave' (facing 38), showing a moment when the innocent maid is introduced to the 'courtesies of the court' (41): Gawain presents the prize diamond to the maid to give to Lancelot with words that encourage her to believe that Lancelot loves her, which Elaine wistfully ponders, hand on chin. Gawain encourages her belief that the love could be reciprocated, that it is not a mere childish fantasy: 'he wore your sleeve: would he break faith with one I may not name?' (40). King's other two illustrations that depict 'Elaine' focus on the 'naked shield'.[21] A shrewd Elaine discovers the knight's true identity in 'Stript off the case and read the naked shield' (Frontispiece). She is significantly active again in 'And gave the naked shield' (facing 54) [Plate 10], kneeling before Lancelot and presenting the shield, in a reversal of the traditional chivalric formula of kneeling knight presenting gifts to his lady-love. King shows Elaine at moments of activity, unusually offering no image of the beautiful corpse, and as such heightens the dignity of her conduct, and thus the tragedy of the death of a woman of vitality: rather like the protagonist in Costello's 'The Funeral Boat' (1829), this Elaine is a perceptive woman in a tragic trap rather than a self-deluding child.

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[21] Elaine does not appear in the illustration for 'Then came the hermit out' (facing 28), which focuses on the armoured Lavaine and dying Lancelot.

Given King's empowerment of Guinevere and Elaine in her illustrations for Tennyson's work, it is not surprising that when she contributed the cover design, page decorations and twenty-four full-page illustrations to John Lane's 1904 reissue of Morris's *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, she upheld the vibrant power of the queen Morris presents.[22] The cover image shows a female figure, arms outstretched, with doves on either hand, locked into a decorative box by a sash of stars, flanked by burning torches: that this figure is Guenevere is substantiated by the halo of stars, which is also used to denote the queen later, in 'King Arthur's Tomb', and the full decorative roses used as Guenevere's hair ornaments here and throughout the illustrations. This, then, is representative of the aspects of Guenevere on which King will focus: the torches suggest passion, the doves evoke true love, the star-chain representing the Queen locked in her marriage and social role.[23] Each of the plates is dominated by the figure of Guenevere, with abundant hair and a billowing gown, that becomes darker as the text approaches Guenevere's entry to the convent, and ultimately becomes the black habit of the nun in 'King Arthur's Tomb' when 'All her robes were black with a long white veil only' (facing 54). Again King's refusal to judge Guenevere and Launcelot is obvious, just as Morris's is in the text. Their mutual love is celebrated in the shared gaze of, 'But stood turn'd sideways; listening' (Frontispiece), Guenevere joyful at the approach of her

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[22] William Morris, *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, ill. by Jessie M. King (London and New York: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1904).

[23] Given the association between Guenevere and traditional images of Mary Magdalen in illustrations by some artists, it is interesting that, in the same year, King provided the cover image for *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalen: Translated from the Italian of an Unknown Fourteenth Century Writer by Valentina Hawtrey* (John Lane, The Bodley Head: London and New York, 1904): this shows the haloed saint in a positive image of contemplation, standing upright, examining a tiger-lily, a far cry from the prostrate sinner stereotype.

rescuer. Their grief when making their final farewells, in 'My maids were all about me' (facing 40) [Plate 12], is depicted as a noble tragedy. The presence of the crucifix on the wall, and the cross held by one of the mourning maids, is significant, as they herald the religious life to which the lovers will turn, but do not suggest religious judgement: indeed the maid appears to be using her cross as a focus of a prayer for help and support in time of need, rather than for forgiveness for the lovers, her upright praying posture in no way suggesting penitence. King is also faithful to the intense sensuality of Morris's text: 'She threw her wet hair backward from her brow' (facing 18) [Plate 11] focuses on the graceful figure of the Queen's curved figure, eyes downcast in a Pre-Raphaelite pose, bringing the attention of the viewer to her physical beauty, the action of fingering her hair accentuating the desiring and desired sexual vitality of Morris's heroine. Such a vibrant and physical presence seems incongruous in front of the high stone wall that is the background here, as it is in all the illustrations that show Guenevere outdoors. This becomes most obvious in 'That wall of stone that shut the flowers and trees up with the sky and trebled all the beauty' (facing 26). That Guenevere is trapped within these walls, the boundaries of her loveless marriage, is clearly the point King is choosing to emphasise from Morris's text. This message is also illustrated by the sorrowful queen, clad largely in mourning black, who sits at the open window, trapped inside the house, in 'Nor any brings me the sweet flowers that lie so thick in the gardens' (facing 36). By the time the grief-stricken Guenevere is saying her final farewells to Lancelot ('My maids were all about me', facing 40) [Plate 12], black skirts again dominating the picture, she is completely enclosed in a room, without even a window, suggestive of a convent cell. In the interior scenes the cross and the crucifix on the otherwise blank walls symbolise that

the cage in which the nineteenth-century Guenevere finds herself is built by the establishment's socially constructed formation of Christianity — moral respectability — which gives the demands of an empty political marriage precedence over love.

Yet, even when Guenevere has made the transformation into a nun in 'King Arthur's Tomb', when 'All her robes were black with a long white veil only' (facing 54), her sensuality, represented by her flowing hair, seems barely hidden: it is merely tied up in a rose, the diaphanous white veil seeming more bridal than conventual. The halo of stars around Guenevere's head highlight her new religious life, like a halo to emphasise divine status, but also serves as a crown: this nun is queen still. She makes an interesting contrast with Beardsley's nun in his illustrations for *Le Morte D'Arthur*: while Beardsley's nun wears a black robe that utterly envelops her and makes her shape scarcely recognisable, King's Guenevere is the same thinking, loving, desiring woman that she had been when making her defence. In 'He did not hear her coming as he lay' (facing 58) [Plate 13] Guenevere is again crowned with stars; her hair escapes from its braids and once again cascades down her shoulders, a symbol of her consistent desire for Launcelot, who lies prostrate over Arthur's tomb. Guenevere is upright; hand outstretched, half in benediction, half longing to touch her now forbidden lover. King depicts Guenevere as still desiring in 'For Launcelot's red golden hair would play instead of sunlight on the painted wall' (facing 66), choosing to illustrate this aspect of Morris's text, where the tragedy is the separation of the lovers, not the death of Arthur or fall of the kingdom. She illustrates lines which allow her to celebrate love and desire: here, Guenevere is distracted from the priest behind her, the crucifix before her, and the rosary

beads at her fingers, and is focusing on a dream of Launcelot's image on the wall. Despite this apparent religious irreverence, King still provides the Queen, who this time is without her nun's habit, with a halo: her constancy in love for Launcelot is here to be celebrated and applauded, as in Malory, her 'trew lover' status allowing her 'good ende'. This idea is seen throughout the illustrations for 'King Arthur's Tomb' (and also in 'Nor any brings me the sweet flowers' and 'My maids were all about me' [Plate 12] from 'Defence'). The crosses and crucifixes on the walls in the illustrations are not simply there as stern reminders of Victorian Christian morality: they highlight the idea of sacrifice, the sacrifice Launcelot and Guenevere choose to make in separating. The criticism that 'King's Guinevere lacks the blatant sensuality and demonic energy by which some other artists have characterized her' (Whitaker, 2002, 174) has been made against her work. I would argue that, in King's work, it is exactly Guenevere's sensuality and physical vibrancy which fight against the enclosed spaces and walled gardens in which she is restricted. In her illustrations, King presents Guenevere as a desiring and sensual woman caged by the confines of her social role.

Marsh and Gerrish Nunn have remarked that King's 'work is notable for its attenuated linear quality and delicate, elusive imagery. Its links with Pre-Raphaelitism are visible in the *fin-de-siècle* compositions with their shallow spaces, flowing lines and stylised motifs, executed with a distinctively chaste hand (137). However, fellow Glasgow school artist, (Emma) Florence Harrison's (activity dates: 1877-1925)[24] style, like Brickdale's,

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[24] There is some debate, and little certainty, over Harrison's birth and death dates. I have given her activity dates as these are more reliable.

owes far more to Pre-Raphaelite influences in its rich use of colour and symbol. Harrison illustrated *Guinevere and Other Poems* in 1912, a new edition of which, with fewer illustrations, appeared in 1923.[25] The 1912 edition has seven plates for 'Guinevere', as well as headers and end papers illustrating this title poem of the volume. The front cover of the book shows a crowned Guinevere in a pose reminiscent of Joan of Arc. With closed eyes raised to heaven, she clasps a long sword in both hands, the rich swirls of her art deco gown hiding the bottom of the sword. The religious iconography is continued in the angels who hold her veil at either side of a semi-circle that forms a halo around her head, a star in the centre of which alights above her crown. Clouds at either side of the halo suggest a storm brewing which will blight the bright star: the inclusion of decorative hearts shows the love focus of 'Guinevere', as well as of many other poems in the volume. The tongues of flame suggest both passion and destruction, a passion that will burn up a kingdom. Yet this is not an image to suggest any blame to Guinevere; instead we get an image of a medieval warrior queen, presented as a martyr and tragic heroine. Even before we open the book a positive view of Guinevere is uppermost, even if the raised eyes suggest prayers of penitence.[26] The endpapers of the book continue this image, with a crowned Guinevere, in flight from Camelot, looking back lovingly at the kingdom from the safety of the wood, with hands clutched as if in prayer. The title page similarly places Guinevere against a backdrop of Camelot; here again there are stars falling and clouds billowing around the queen and the kingdom, portentous of its

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[25] Alfred Tennyson, *Guinevere and Other Poems*, ill. by Florence Harrison (London, Glasgow and Bombay: Blackie and Son, 1912). Alfred Tennyson, *Tennyson's Guinevere and Other Poems*, ill. by Florence Harrison (London, Glasgow and Bombay: Blackie and Son, 1923).

[26] The same cover image was used for both the 1912 and 1923 editions; see Plate 14 (b).

downfall [Plate 14 (a)]. Guinevere is clearly portrayed as queen, crowned, fingering an orb, dominating the image with her dignified presence. It is worth noting that Harrison produced a revised header image for the 1923 edition that was far more in keeping with the cover image used for both editions [Plate 14 (c)]. The crowned queen, still clutching the long sword, eyes still raised heavenwards, is now no longer veiled and robed: she is bound by brambles which seem to come from Camelot and pierce the title scroll, so her gown no longer falls in rich swirls; even her hair is fettered in the braids of a *crispinette*. The image is highly sacrificial, as if suggesting that Guinevere's personal happiness has been sacrificed for her role as queen of Camelot, although she unwittingly brings about its destruction: the star in this image has fallen from above Camelot to sink in clouds behind the queen. Guinevere's queenship is foremost, the fact that the *Idyll* opens '*Queen* Guinevere had fled the court' (my italics) is highlighted by capitals. This image is post-First World War, during which images of Joan of Arc and the idea of sacrifice and chivalry had flourished: it is, however, significant that, like King, Harrison focuses on the idea of Guinevere's sacrifice.

The Frontispiece, the first colour plate, illustrates this opening line and shows a wimpoled, veiled Guinevere, with horned headdress, like those worn by medieval nuns, swamped in a red-lined black cloak, eyes wide in terror: this is not a queen, but a frightened woman, grabbing at the stone walls of the staircase as she flees for her life. The next image we have of the Queen comes in stark contrast to this, recalling the farewells of Guinevere and Lancelot, 'It was their last hour' (facing page 4). This is a passionate, erotic parting embrace, Lancelot's phallic flame-red sword is highlighted

against the darkness of his robes and his stone seat, and Guinevere's gold gown provides a sense of warmth, genuineness, and nobility: Harrison is apportioning no blame to the couple here, but focusing instead on their love and passion, and the tragedy of their situation. This image is removed from the 1923 edition as is the illustration for 'She made her face a darkness from the king' (facing page 16) [Plate 15], which shows Guinevere in the pose most resonant in Tennyson's *Idyll*, that of repentant Guinevere at the feet of Arthur. Harrison's image makes a far more overt comparison of Arthur with Christ than in the more famous Doré illustration for the same text: the King's pose, with arms outstretched leaning on either side of the stone archway, head drooping forward, reflecting the image of Christ crucified on the cross in the background. Yet, while the focus of Doré's work, like Tennyson's, is Arthur's face, Arthur's 'forgiveness' of his queen, Harrison concentrates instead on the queen herself, her remorse and pain: our eyes look through the archway, past the King in the foreground, to the prostrate queen behind. Guinevere here does not seem so much to be imploring at Arthur's feet as collapsed with grief and sorrow. Again the idea of sacrifice comes to the fore; Arthur's sacrifice, Guinevere's sacrifice, Christ's sacrifice. This image holds little of the poignant affection of King's 1903 illustration, and the queen is afforded less dignity, heaped as she is on the floor rather than on bended knee: Harrison emphasises the drama and high tragedy of this final meeting of king and queen. Yet, unlike Dore, Harrison does not leave Guinevere grovelling on the floor. In 'We needs must love the highest when we see it' (facing 26) [Plate 16] Harrison highlights the ambiguities of Tennyson's text at this point: Guinevere here articulates how she failed to live up to Arthur's ideal, and renounces her love for Lancelot. The queen is left guilt-ridden and in despair by her separation from Arthur, as

she only could be after his speech in which she was called, among other things, 'a pollution'. However some critics have argued that Guinevere's rejection of her past love is too contrived, that she is trying to convince herself that she can forget Lancelot when the very repetition of his name in the speech, the reiterated phrase, 'Not Lancelot, nor another', demonstrates that he is uppermost in her mind.[27] The focus of the illustration is the beautiful, tortured Guinevere, kneeling in a pool of dull gold and crimson, made by the skirts of her voluptuous gown, and the red lining of her cloak. Her bare head framed by triptych behind. This blaze of colour comes in stark contrast to the black and white, habited, upright nuns in the background, who appear separate and remote, like jailers, watching her at the King's request. The colour also serves to highlight the sovereignty and dignity of the queen, gold holding a 'reputation as sacred and divine', the rich red suggesting royalty and nobility, rather than the scarlet of a *femme fatale*.[28] Guinevere's pose, with columnar neck, contemplative gaze and flowing hair, may be reminiscent of a Pre-Raphaelite 'stunner', but her act of prayer and the context of the illustration mean that she can be more than just an objective icon. The straight lines of the triptych, the windows, and the nuns with their candles, also emphasise the sensuous curves of Guinevere's body, the waves of her hair and the folds of her gown: this is not the penitent of Dore's or Brickdale's work, but a desiring, sensuous woman. That the queen's beautiful face is stricken with grief and pain cannot be doubted, but the cause of this distress is ambiguous: remorse for the hurt she has inflicted on Arthur and Camelot, or sorrow at the idea of a life divided from the man she loves? Far from being ready to

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[27] See, for example, Ahern, 103.

[28] *Color*, ed. by Helen Varley (New York: Leon Amiel, 1980), 200.

embrace her fate in the convent, she is clearly still set apart from the watching nuns. Harrison offers no moral judgement on Guinevere, but instead presents a positive view of a grief-stricken, yet still desiring, queen. This is the image of Guinevere with which Harrison leaves us, not the nun who has embraced her fate, as in Brickdale's version, nor Doré's prostrate sinner, but a woman racked with grief and desire, illustrating the possibility for this reading of Tennyson's 'Guinevere'.

Between the two editions of Tennyson's 'Guinevere', Harrison illustrated the *Early Poems of William Morris*.[29] This is a striking combination as the Pre-Raphaelite poet offers the opportunity for Harrison to use her rich colour symbolism to highlight the desiring, sensual queen here, as in the illustrations to Tennyson. The black and white plate that illustrates 'Nevertheless you O Sir Gauwaine lie' (5) has many similarities to the imposing queen of Morris's oil painting. It shows a dignified queen who, though with troubled brow, dominates the situation, both by her physical positioning, foregrounded as she is in light robes against the darkness of Gawaine and the other watching knights, and through her obvious authority. She is as tall as the men around her, and clothed in the sweeping fold of a jewelled gown, the suitably rich robes of a queen. She is clearly in a position of command, despite the perilous nature of the situation. While her left hand caresses her cheek, 'As though she had had there a shameful blow' (1), her right arm is outstretched to Gawaine, in what seems a gesture of reconciliation between friends rather than one of supplication: Gawaine, with his arms folded across his chest in refusal, seems

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[29] *Early Poems of William Morris*, ill. by Florence Harrison (London, Glasgow and Bombay: Blackie, 1914).

churlish in face of the queen's magnanimity. That this gesture places Guenevere's hand in the centre of the picture reflects Morris's textual focus on her hands, which accentuates the sensuality of the queen. Harrison also portrays the long abundant tresses which flow freely down Guenevere's back, another device Morris uses to show how she brings the attention of the audience to her physical beauty and sensuality. Harrison presents the same noble queen, who is mistress of the situation, and offers a spirited defence.

The Frontispiece of the volume offers the only colour image from 'The Defence of Guenevere' that portrays the queen.[30] It illustrates the line, 'In that garden fair/ Came Launcelot walking; this is true, the kiss/ Wherewith we kissed in meeting that spring day,/ I scarce dare talk of the remember'd bliss' [Plate 17], the part of the text where the queen recalls her first embrace with Launcelot. In placing this image at the front of the volume, Harrison pinpoints at the opening the focus of Morris's depiction of the queen, her enduring, true love for Launcelot, despite the sorrow and penitence at the destruction that arises from this love. This image is a celebration of their love: the setting is spring, the apple tree behind them covered in blossom, the ground verdant in grass that is dotted with spring flowers. The lovers are leaning towards each other over a rural stile, Launcelot's blue robe corresponding with Guenevere's billowing azure gown, the colour representing fidelity in love. Guenevere's abundant golden hair lies loose and free, except one strand that is bound in a norse-style braid. This first kiss is shown as slightly hesitant, Launcelot's fingers joined in a gesture of uncertainty: while his eyes are closed as he

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[30] The only other colour image for this poem illustrates 'And one of these strange choosing cloths was blue,/ Wavy and long, and one cut short and red;/ No man could tell the better of the two' (facing 2).

kisses the queen, she looks directly at him, with a slightly surprised, reluctant passion. Guenevere's open eyes suggest a knowing woman; she is literally going into the affair 'with her eyes open' to the risks and perils, but cannot stop herself all the same. The composition of this image is directly reflected in the only full-page colour image for 'King Arthur's Tomb', '"Guenevere! Guenevere!/ Do you not know me, are you gone mad?"' (23) [Plate 18]. Here, instead of a stile, the lovers lean over Arthur's tomb. The apple tree is full of autumnal fruit rather than blossom, and a bramble and poppies replacing the spring flowers at the feet of the lovers. Harrison also uses these symbols for the poem's header (15), where a huge bramble, that sweeps the whole width of the picture, binds around both their ankles, reminiscent of Harrison's header for Tennyson's 'Guinevere'. Here again the thorns symbolise that the lovers are trapped in their fate. The apple trees behind them evoke the fall of man, the end of Eden, just as the idyllic time of the lovers is over, and the glorious days of Camelot destroyed: the apple trees also denote autumn, the decay of the kingdom. While the header shows Launcelot in full armour, with head bowed in penitential fashion before Arthur's tomb, in the colour image Harrison accentuates the sense of autumn by portraying Launcelot in a russet-coloured robe with a sheathed sword at side, in contrast to the blue robe and phallic sword that hangs in front of him in the spring image. He is leaning over the tomb at the point of grasping Guenevere's fingers with his right hand, holding his left hand out towards her in a beseeching pose. Guenevere is far from the distant and upright nun of the header: even in her wimple, veil and full habit she seems a sensual figure, her robes gathered softly under her breast, from which elegant folds drop. This time it is Guenevere who has her eyes closed, not Launcelot, from whom she turns with face of poignant agony: she draws

her right hand away, but leaves her left hand still lingering to receive his clasp. Harrison, in this one image, captures Morris's textual portrayal of a Guenevere who still desires, still passionately longs for Launcelot, but who is repentant and will adhere to her vow, despite the despair that this brings to her. We do not leave this Guenevere as a successful abbess, as in Tennyson's poem, but as a desperate and desiring lover, though still graced with nobility, and sensual beauty: the tailpiece offers a similarly tragic image of Launcelot, struggling to rise up, using his sword as support (31).

Harrison, like King, highlights the poignant tragedy of Guenevere and Launcelot in Morris's text. Like her source text, she shows the queen as a determined woman who remains noble and desiring, even when forced to renounce her queenship and her lover. More surprisingly, four women artists with highly divergent styles, from a range of social backgrounds and using a range of media, find similar space in Tennyson's text, to explore the more complex nature of the Laureate's queen, and her actual emotional position at the close of the *Idyll*. This is despite the surface reading of Tennyson's conclusion which seems to allow the queen redemption only through utter renunciation. These illustrators also find ways of showing the many interpretations possible from the other female characters of the work, Brickdale's images, for example, diverging from the usual celebration of the ethereal Elaine to suggest the impossible fantasies of a child, leading to a poignant loss and tragic waste of life. Jessie King goes even further, in her rejection of received roles for both sexes: she rescues Arthur from being simply the condemnatory judge and heightens the tragedy of his position, showing him losing the woman he loved, and watching the destruction of his kingdom and his life. This comes in stark contrast to

the more usual images shown in, for example, Doré's work. Through their decisions to illustrate the medieval work of two male poets, these women artists are empowered to comment on both the societies in which the texts were wrought, especially Tennyson's obviously Victorian brand of medievalism, and their own social landscape, considering the public demands on both men and women. It is significant that the artist Tennyson asked to illustrate his *Idylls* was in fact a photographer: in Cameron's stylized tableaux there is a sense, absent from the other illustrations, of a clash of past and present. The obviously Victorian men and women, sitting as characters from Victorian myth, surrounded by bed sheets and paste-board moons, seem faintly ludicrous now: and yet, by so obviously medievalizing the present, 'Cameron permits the tension between the unknowable past "as it was" and that which we call "history" — meaning our interpretation of the past — to remain, instead of romancing the viewer with a wave of the paintbrush'.[31] Cameron's medievalism thus has affinities with Tennyson's: like the poet, she is not recreating a medieval past, but consciously bringing medieval elements to the Victorian present, using them to comment on contemporary life.

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[31] Marylu Hill, '"Shadowing Sense at war with Soul": Julia Margaret Cameron's Photographic Illustrations of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*', *Victorian Poetry*, 40 (2002), 445-456, (454).

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the wealth of medievalist works by women writers, an area in which there is an obvious dearth of criticism, and to explore the use and significance of medievalism as evidenced in their works. The volume of such medievalist works by women is immense: this thesis can only focus on a sample of the vast range of material that I have explored in my research. Not all women use medievalism in new ways: many writers can be seen to uphold the dominant ideologies of gender spheres, and to applaud chivalry as a discourse in which men can inhabit an active sphere, while women remain passive and iconic. However, a tradition emerged of a consistent trend in which medievalism was used in ways which challenged and subverted dominant discourses: I have brought this tradition into sharper focus and shown how it develops. I chose the texts which best illustrate these uses, by the writers whose work often showed a consistent use of medievalism as an empowering discourse. The desire to demonstrate the confining nature of socially constructed ideas about gender, and behaviour expectations, seemed foremost in these works, medieval motifs providing a powerful, yet discreet, way of expressing this critique. Barrett Browning's work stands out particularly in this area, with her long-neglected sonnet sequence hidden behind a shield of translation, and her compelling ballads of the 1840s.

The use of medieval chivalry to critique contemporary warfare, to comment on gender roles at times of war, and to demand a right to involvement and engagement with the

public sphere can also be seen to be pervasive: even when the Crimean War had seen a greater acceptance of woman's commentary on war, medievalism was still seen as a means of challenging the position of women and demanding equality in public life. That the suffragists chose Joan of Arc as 'the central emblem of feminist rebellion against the state', suggests the idea of a development of a new, female-focused chivalry, which was concerned with government and politics, rather than warfare, a crusade for equal rights, and a right to involvement in public as well as private life.[1] Hemans and Landon emerged in my research as writers whose work is still in need of reassessment, despite a decade of excellent new analysis. My work on Hemans and Landon has demonstrated the continuities between their work and the work of women in the officially established Victorian period, 1837-1901, suggesting that the boundaries between what is known as 'Romanticism' and 'Victorianism' are actually far more permeable than is actually allowed for by the majority of critics.[2] A pattern of women's use of medievalism for subversive purposes can be seen to stretch back into the eighteenth century, and forward to the first half of the twentieth. Hence I have needed to look back at the work of important forebears and indicate significant descendents of the women who form the focus of my time period.

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[1] Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), 209.

[2] Although some anthologists do recognise this; for example, they appear in Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds eds, *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) to reflect the idea that 'The twilight years between Romanticism and Victorianism proper, between about 1824 and 1837, could be said to belong to women' (xxxv).

Questions of women's empowerment are particularly absorbing when considered during the reign of the socially ultimately empowered woman: as I have shown, Victoria both had her personal authority contained by dominant ideologies and expectations, but conversely used them to secure the position of her monarchy and her family in times of social unrest, notably in the outcry following the Crimean. The contrast between the ways in which society viewed 'queenly' women as empowered and the reality of the kind of empowerment that women writers consistently demand is fascinating. Suggesting that the ideal of a domestic icon is a morally and spiritually empowered woman has associations with the similarly hollow authority enjoyed by the iconic and passive beloved of medieval literary chivalry: women writers consistently demonstrate the sterility of this idea and demand a more earthy empowerment, one of equality of freedom and expression. While historical queens and famous women were used consistently in conduct books to teach women how to behave, how to be 'queenly' ideals, some women writers can be seen consistently overturning these ideas, showing the reality of the successful subversion of these women, and emphasising that involvement in public life, and demanding the right to individuality rather than gender type, does not necessarily mean loss of virtue. Joan of Arc stood out as a compelling study of this contrast, the empowered victim, the warrior saint, the military woman, the articulate maid: women used her to support their upholding of the dominant gender discourses, while others, notably the suffragists, found in her a symbol of women's freedom and power. Her role, as exploder and upholder of ideas of chivalry, lends itself to both forms of empowerment, and as such she was integral to the study of female medievalism.

Similarly, the women of Arthurian myth held a fascination through the period for precisely the types of womanhood they could be seen to convey, Tennyson fuelling this by his packaging his first four *Idylls* as examples of True and False womanhood. While Vivien seemed unquestionably false, and Elaine and Enid could be easily seen as true women, although some women writers did exploit the actual transgression inherent in their stories with fascinating results, Guinevere posed more of a problem. The desire to judge the queen as merely repentant adulteress, epitome of the redeemed fallen woman type, can be seen in juxtaposition with those writers who revived her medieval presentation: the same writers generally abhorred the chivalric gender types inherent in the courtly love story of Lancelot and Guinevere, and thus can be seen to make the medieval queen active and articulate in her own defence, not simply the championed beloved. The work of Morris, and the women writers influenced by him, make a compelling study. Women illustrating the work of Tennyson and Morris early in the twentieth century give visual expression to these struggles in diverse and fascinating ways.

This thesis has generated as much new work as it has completed, not least numerous still little-known writers, further investigation of whom will be immensley rewarding. In particular a thorough reassessment of the works of Louisa Stuart Costello is long overdue: the richness of her work, its breadth of genre, its enduring popularity over the Romanticism/Victorianism divide, means that it offers a compelling and worthwhile study, with immense value to a variety of fields of research. As one example of the significance of her work, Costello produced the first nineteenth-century literary version

of the Elaine/ Lady of Shalott myth, with 'The Funeral Boat: A Legend', written for *Forget Me Not: A Christmas and New Year's Present for 1829*. It thus predates Tennyson's more famous 'The Lady of Shalott' (1832) and can be shown to use the same Italian source to a strikingly different end. Both poets use a translation of Novella LXXXII, the story of la Damigiella di Scalot, the Lady of Scalot or Shalott, from the *Cento Novelle Antiche* or *Il Novellino*, as translated by Thomas Roscoe in *The Italian Novelists* (1825).[3] Costello's version is significantly different from Tennyson's and her Italian source as the guilt for the Lady's death is placed firmly at the feet of her seducer, Launcelot.[4] He acknowledges his guilt and complicity in the lady's death, and is ultimately allowed to redeem himself because of his penitence and sorrow. On his introduction in the work Launcelot, situated amid a throng of merry-makers on the shore where Arthur holds court, appears in stark contrast to the dead lady and the silent journey of her funeral barge that we have just witnessed. He is instantly presented as a seducer: 'His words could softest thoughts awake;/No look, no tone, was lost:/And store had he of gentle words/To charm a lady's ear'. Launcelot's song to the 'lovely bands' of court ladies and the queen is laden with sexual imagery. The sword of his song has obvious phallic symbolism when the battle foe is love:

> My sword is rustling in its sheath;
>
> Again I needs must try its power,

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[3] See Thomas Roscoe, *The Italian Novelists,* 4 vols, (London: Septimus Prowett, 1825), Volume 1, 45-46.
[4] Louisa Stuart Costello, 'The Funeral Boat: A Legend', *Forget Me Not: A Christmas and New Year's Present for 1829*, Frederic Shoberl ed., (London: Ackermann, 1829), 185- 192. The Italian epigraph suggests, however, that Costello may be working directly from the Italian original rather than Roscoe's translation.

Since not for me is twined the wreath,

The golden wreath, in beauty's bower.

Once more I'll haste to seek the foe,

On whom my wasted force to prove;

Alas! there is but one I know-

My only enemy is love!

Launcelot's song is silenced by the strange murmurs on the wind that announce the funeral boat's arrival, and reprove the knight outright. The 'Testament' read by Queen Guenever from the scroll in the dead woman's hand calls Launcelot 'false as the treacherous ray/ That loves in April's sky to play': he has seduced the lady into loving him then deserted her. The guilt for the lady's death is laid at Launcelot's feet: Costello suggests that he is a reckless abuser of women, not the constant lover of the queen as in the Italian source, or Tennyson's unwitting knight.

Costello's poem is much closer to the original Italian text than Tennyson's version, opening with the lady's deathbed scene, leading to a boat journey by sea not a river, and omitting references to curses, weaving, or a magic mirror. A crucial difference between Costello's poem and both her source and Tennyson's work is that it foregrounds the female roles in a way that other versions of the story do not. In his rare contemporary article on Costello's work, Roger Simpson also makes this comparison.[5] However, it is

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[5] Examples of recent critical studies of Costello's work are virtually non-existent. In a very rare example Roger Simpson looks at 'The Funeral Boat' as an analogue of 'The Lady of Shalott' (Roger Simpson, 'Costello's "The Funeral Boat": An Analogue of Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott'", *The Tennyson*

somewhat concerning that Simpson suggests that this focus on the 'feminine viewpoint' from which the poem is written is also apparent in 'the evident interest in dress and accessories' (131) demonstrated. He goes on to quote lines from the opening of the poem where the lady is listing the ornaments she wants around her when her dead body is placed in the funeral boat as proof for this argument. Far from being mere frippery, these funereal trappings are all imbued with a symbolism that Costello, interested and knowledgeable as she was in medieval works, would appreciate. I accept that Simpson's focus is not Costello's poem, but how this relates to Tennyson, his major interest, and I applaud him for recognising the significance of Costello's groundbreaking work as a major source for Tennyson and his appreciation that 'At the very least, Louisa Costello deserves recognition for writing what seems to be the first nineteenth century version of the Elaine legend' (131). However, it does seem unjust that here he treats this work with a degree of frivolity that seems to undermine her accomplishment while bolstering Tennyson's: it is disappointing that Simpson is following the tradition of Costello's contemporary reviewers, praising while making light of the achievement.[6]

In Costello's poem, the lady is far more active and in control: the whole first half of the work is her voice recounting her desires in the full knowledge of the tragic death she is willing upon herself because of Launcelot's treachery, and it is her ghostly voice that

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Research Bulletin, 4 (1984), 129-131). Simpson's focus is Tennyson's work and 'the contrast between a major and a minor poet's handling of identical source material' (130).

[6] This is especially the case as he continues his praise of Costello in his article '"A Legend of Tintagel Castle": Another Analogue of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott"', *The Tennyson Research Bulletin,* 4 (1985), 179-185, citing her as a case of 'neglect' by critical scholarship and noting that significantly 'Costello's work functions, in fact, as an intermediary between antiquarian circles and a wider reading public' (181).

stops Launcelot's misogynist song. The funereal trappings the lady demands are imbued with a significance similar to what they would have in medieval literature. The lady wishes to be surrounded by rich silk and velvet fabrics, and her hair dressed with pearls and crystals, as true, pure and rich as the love for which she is dying. The flowers on her shroud must be daisies and myrtle, white, clear and innocent, and the roses in her hair must be red, for love, and white, for purity. The richness and beauty of the fabrics and jewels must symbolise the actual love for which the lady dies in contrast with the horrible, pining away she has endured because of it, 'All must look joyous, bright, and fair,/ Except the corse that withers there'. The jewelled girdle, in blue, the colour associated with the Virgin, emphasises the purity of her chaste love: 'Bind round my waist a precious wreath/Of turquoise, purely blue,/To tell that, to my latest breath,/I ceased not to be true'. A silken purse, spangled with gold, must be used to hold the scroll of the lady's last words, which magnifies the importance of this message and her request for a grave from Launcelot. By focusing on these demands Costello portrays a lucid mistress of her actions, one who is not simply pining away through love but betrayed by Launcelot, whom 'she had loved too fatally', is making a choice to surrender her life. Costello's influential and thought-provoking work needs further research and exploration: accounts of nineteenth-century women's writing which ignore her contribution to presentations of female experience are excluding a valuable source.

There is still a great deal of work on this long-ignored area of female medievalism to be undertaken: a comparative study of the work of 'working class' women poets who use medievalism will be extremely enlightening, and will open up further ways of

understanding the whole culture phenomenon. I hope this thesis not only addresses the long-ignored question of female medievalism but also highlights the immense significance of the whole discourse of medievalism to all areas of nineteenth-century society: to the discussion of war, the development of gender ideologies, and the way in which duties of public life were performed. Central to this was the fact that medievalism could be exploited as patriotism, nationalism and the building of the Empire: war service, public service, and the ordinary movements of everyday life all became inextricably codified as a knightly championing of the Lady Victoria. Yet, at the same time, from within the same discourse, a demand was made by women writers that such gender ideologies should be overturned, and recognized as sterile for both sexes: that iconic, passive femininity should be allowed an articulate voice.

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