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**Records of Women Scorned:
Anomic Feminine Imagery in the Poems of Felicia Hemans**

Karen Dale-Douet
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Introduction

Felicia Dorothea Hemans was one of the most popular poets of the nineteenth century and was generally perceived as the most purely feminine of the Romantic women poets. Byron so resented her popularity that he termed her "your feminine He-man" (punning on her name) and stated that if "she knit blue stockings instead of wearing them it would be better" (Manning and Wolfson 176). Despite the threatened Byron's slurs upon her femininity, Mrs. Hemans is most frequently remembered as the poetess of the domestic woman, writing primarily of women's position and concerns. Though the sentimental tone of her poetry detracted from her popularity in the early part of the century, Hemans's poetry is currently enjoying a revival in interest. Twentieth century critics like Norma Clarke and Tricia Lootens are now examining Hemans's writings and life in terms of feminist and historical criticism. Her depictions of women and of patriotism serve as commentary on her era. Hemans explores diverse images of women ranging from American Indians to the wives of the ancient Romans. The unifying theme of these disparate representations is her portrayal of women deserted in strange circumstances by either the death or desertion of a husband. Nevertheless, even while expressing this doubt regarding the true effectiveness of the patriarchy of the nineteenth century, Hemans reiterates the primacy of hearth and home for all women.

The sustaining argument for Hemans' femininity lies in that she seems to presuppose the correctness of the domestic female position, though she deplors the rarity of a woman's unalloyed access to that position. The early desertion of

Hemans' own husband necessitated that she pursue a career in order to support her family, barring her from the purely home-centered sphere. This abandonment by her spouse violates the English common law concept of coverture, which held a man accountable for the support and well being of his wife. In a society that relied intrinsically upon the virtue and strength of men and assumed the emotional and mental inferiority of women, Hemans' insistence upon the fallibility of the patriarchy seems radical, though softened by her insistence upon the fitness of the domestic sphere for women. The dichotomy that Hemans perceives between the proper role of women and the reality of women's existence is best labeled *anomie*, a sociological term meaning a state of normlessness. Women of the nineteenth century were indoctrinated with the rhetoric of the home and hearth, yet were frequently unable to occupy the expected role due to circumstances beyond her control. Despite its seemingly radical anomic imagery, her poetry remained highly popular perhaps because her female audience recognized the accuracy of her anomic vision.

Feminine Ideology and British Culture

Felicia Hemans is most commonly aligned with the nineteenth century's cult of domesticity and the idealized family. Her poems "The Homes of England" and "Casabianca" are most frequently cited as proof of her status as the staunchly domesticated muse. While it is true that her poetry does reflect the interest in the family characteristic of her era, it is not necessarily a paean to the patriarchal system. As Peter Manning and Susan Wolfson indicate in the new Longman Anthology :

Some readers still read her poetry as celebrating traditional gender values: women's place at home and her value in upholding "domestic affections", religious faith, and patriotic sentiment. But to others this same poetry seems only tenuously conservative and far from replete- haunted by sensations of the futility of the very ideals it celebrates, invaded by sadness, melancholy, betrayal, suffering and violence, and repeatedly staging women's heroism in scenes of defeat and death. Hemans' imagination was particularly tuned to conflicts besetting women who achieve fame in nontraditional roles, especially as artists, typically at great cost to personal happiness (Manning and Wolfson 706).

The unusual status of Mrs. Hemans' own domestic arrangements alone, bar her from any unbiased commentary upon the structure and function of the nineteenth century family, even without her conflicted representation of that family within her poetry.

This obvious ambiguity to the roles of women inherent in her poetry can be attributed to the desertion of her husband in 1818. Prior to the birth of their fifth child, Captain Hemans traveled to Italy and just never returned. (Leighton and Reynolds 1-2). This abandonment forced Hemans into a position not only nontraditional, but inherently unfeminine according to the strictures of her age. In Norma Clarke's biography of Felicia Hemans and Geraldine Jewsbury she notes the cultural attitudes towards women and domesticity.

According to the dominant ideology, men's strength protected women's weakness: men's knowledge provided for women's ignorance; men's substantiality buttressed women's flimsiness. In individual cases, such an account was as likely to be true as untrue, but the significance of the formulation, as with all cultural myths, was the use to which it could be put. Women writers who wished to establish themselves in the mainstream cultural world, who desired to earn an income and lead satisfying lives, participated in sustaining the cultural myths which defined woman as weak and man as strong. How far individual women consciously colluded, how far they covertly resisted, is a matter for individual study; but the climate in which all women writers operated in the first half of the nineteenth century was increasingly antipathetic to shows of strength from women (Clarke 19).

These cultural strictures both constrained and enabled the woman writer. She was at least permitted to write and maintain her respectability, but was also bound to uphold the ideology that relegated her to merely "women's writing."

The mental inferiority and weakness of women was a concept so inherent to the nineteenth century British culture that British Common Law of the era established that a state of *coverture* existed within a marriage. According to the law of coverture, "A man and wife were one person in the law; her existence was, as it were, absorbed in that of her husband; she lived under his protection or

cover" (Perkin 13). This assumption accorded a woman separated from her husband no position at all. A woman married, but deprived of her husband, by that husband's choice, had no legal existence. The abandonment by her husband and father violated a concept so intrinsic to the culture of that era as to be inscribed in law. The Common Law states repeatedly the husband's responsibility for his wife, both her actions and her well-being. A wife's possessions before marriage, if not specifically assigned to her in trust, reverted to her husband upon their marriage. If her property was stolen, it could only be reported as her husband's property (Perkin 13). The courts offered little protection for a woman abandoned by her husband, although he was obliged to render her some portion of her property, "as long as she was virtuous and unprovided for" (Perkin 14).

Neither the Courts of Common Law nor of Equity could oblige a man to support his wife. But a wife whose husband without valid reason refused to support her, could rent lodgings, take up goods, etc. suitable to her station, and the creditors could compel the husband to pay. If a wife became chargeable on the poor rates, as a result of having to enter a workhouse, the Poor Law authorities could sue the husband for the cost (Perkin 14).

The law allowed little recourse for the abandoned woman short of relying on the good nature of the abstaining spouse, borrowing or outright begging. It is consistently assumed that not only will a woman be married, but she will also be

married to an honorable man who will accord her the rights of her station by supporting her and her progeny. In the case of Felicia Hemans, at least, this assumption is erroneous.

Even beyond the financial sphere of the woman separated from her husband there lay the risk of social exclusion as a result of her unhappy marriage.

Just as the burden of happy marriage lay on the woman's shoulders, so too did the resolution of unhappy marriage.

And just as, in earlier decades, social ostracism affected women more keenly than men where marriages broke down in acrimony - Lord Byron, in spite of everything, continued to be socially desirable in a way that Lady Byron did not -- so too the woman released from marriage by due process of law at the end of the century faced harsher social and economic conditions than her ex-husband. The men who governed the country and ran the judiciary did not see it as their function to smooth the path of a woman who chose to make her lot contrary to custom -- as they saw it (Clarke 99-100).

The fear of social ostracism in a culture that valued the family above all was a very real one, especially to the women of the middle to upper classes, with few resources beyond their social ties. Yet, this pressing threat never seems to be realized for Mrs. Hemans. While no evidence suggests that she ever received any support from Captain Hemans, financial or otherwise, following his abdication to Italy, there is likewise no suggestion that she was held socially accountable for

the dissolution of her marriage. Her careful maintenance of an extremely domesticated public image and lack of rancor towards her wayward spouse seem to have allayed the public stigma of the abandoned woman.

Not only were women of the nineteenth century required to depend upon their husbands for financial support and legal existence, but they were also encouraged by the patriarchal values of their culture to view the family as the heart of their existence. Women were supposed to be creatures of pure emotion, which could be best put to use at hearth and home, as a center of morality. Sarah Ellis, a didactic writer of Hemans' era, if not her direct contemporary, argues that a woman's worth is bound up in the domestic affections.

Affection, too, is a subject in which the interests of woman are deeply involved, because affection in a peculiar manner constitutes her wealth. Beyond the sphere of her affections, she has nothing, and is nothing. Let her talents be what they may, without affection they can only be compared to a splendid casket, where the gem is wanting. Affection, like gratitude, must begin at home. Let no man choose for the wife of his bosom, a woman whose affections are not warm, and cordial and ever flowing forth, at her own fireside (Ellis 264).

The Cult of the Domestic construed women to be the ethical force of the household because of the perceived intensity and single-mindedness of their affections. According to Ellis, "the most serious act of a woman's whole life is to

love " (Ellis 316). Not only were women instructed to love as their primary function, but it was to be a love centered around the patriarchal domestic core of a father or husband.

In woman's love is mingled the trusting dependence of a child, for she ever looks up to man as her protector, and her guide; the frankness, the social feeling, and the tenderness of a sister - for is not man her friend? The solicitude, the anxiety, the careful watching of the mother - for would she not suffer to preserve him from harm? Such is love in a noble mind, and especially in its first commencement, when it is almost invariably elevated, and pure, trusting, and disinterested (Ellis 318).

When centered around the home, a woman's love is considered to be elevated to the realm of the ideal and religious, and becomes the sum of her worth. In fact, a woman's hope for religious salvation was perceived as revolving around her position in the home. As a faithful satellite to her husband, and as the source of moral force within the home a woman could hope to attain immortality.

Yet under the Christian dispensation, she who was the first to sin, is raised to an equality with man, and made his fellow-heir in the blessings of eternal life. Nor is this all. A dispensation which and permitted her merely to creep and grovel through this life, so as to purchase by her patient sufferings a title to the next, would have been unworthy of

that law of love by which pardon was offered to a guilty world. In accordance with the ineffable beneficence of this law, woman was therefore raised to a moral, as well as a spiritual equality with man; and from being first his tempter, and then his slave, she has become his helpmate, his counselor, his friend, the object of his most affectionate solicitude, the sharer of his dignity, and the partaker in his highest enjoyments
(Ellis 262-263).

Though the passage claims that woman is man's spiritual equal, a woman's salvation is mentioned only in conjunction with a man's. A woman's path to spiritual completion is via her domestic connection to her husband, as his adoring acolyte and counselor. In fact, a wife and mother seems not only responsible for her own spiritual well being, but for that of her husband and children as well. The womanly ideal of Coventry Patmore's "Angel in the House" must ^{have} ~~needs~~ pervaded the female psyche of the nineteenth century, even when in conflict with their common sense and better judgment.

The fact was -- and many women, married and unmarried alike, knew it, - that the promise of marriage was pitched well beyond what most men had it in them to produce. Ideal versions of womanliness called for ideal versions of manliness which were often quite as problematic of men as the womanly ideal was for women. The crucial difference

was that woman's part was spoken, was a part of public discourse, and a very popular part, while man's was not (Clarke 100).

The ideal of woman's essential domesticity and the ideal of manly nobility espoused by the legal doctrine of coverture were just that, ideals, and doubtless few families hoped to embody them flawlessly. Yet they existed all the same, as part of the national consciousness and perceived moral fiber. It is this breach between the model of "The Homes of England" and its reality that becomes so painfully pronounced in the poems of Mrs. Hemans.

These widely accepted precepts of coverture and domestic affection were for several reasons not avenues open to Felicia Dorothea Hemans. One of six children born into the family of George Browne, a Liverpool merchant, she was, from an early age at least partially responsible for the financial security of the family (Leighton and Reynolds 1). Upon the failure of Mr. Browne's business in 1800 the family moved to Wales. In 1808, at the age of fourteen she and her mother published her first volume of poetry in order to finance her education (Feldman 149), and it is supposed to be around this time that her father departed for Quebec and never returned (Leighton and Reynolds 1). Felicia and her mother were left the responsibility of raising and supporting a large family without assistance. Despite her father's example, Felicia apparently continued to hold faith in the matrimonial convention as in 1812 she married Captain Alfred Hemans. After six years of marriage and five children, Captain Hemans, like his father-in-law before him, abdicated as head of the family structure. He traveled to

Italy and never returned home. This second violation of the heart and hearth results in the strain apparent in much of Mrs. Hemans' poetry.

The approved public tone for speaking about men as husbands was a respectful tone modeled on the tone of respect appropriate to fathers. Felicia Hemans' reversion to a childlike status within her family was aided by the similarity of tone generally accepted as fitting for both husbands and fathers, even bad ones. It was not in her interest to draw attention to her position, even supposing she had been so inclined, by complaining about her husband; ostensibly, she continued to view all men in ideal terms as heroes while speaking vaguely about women's sufferings in marriage (Clarke 100-101).

Mrs. Hemans had been abandoned by her husband and her father, and could not publicly denounce them, even had she desired to do so. Wordsworth even praised her for her continued loyalty to "an unfeeling husband" (Leighton and Reynolds 1). The unspoken resentment and normlessness of her position would later find its way into her poetry.

Solely responsible now for the financial support of her own large family, Felicia Hemans again turned to her art for her living. Amazingly enough, the income of a poetess was more than sufficient for the needs of a large middle class family: "Indeed Hemans earned a comfortable income for her household of seven when many publishers in Britain had become skittish about bringing out

poetry volumes" (Feldman 149). A significant portion of her income came from the literary periodicals of her day, and records indicate that she was the "single highest paid contributor to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*", receiving more per piece than Sir Walter Scott (Feldman 149). According to the records of her publishers, Mrs. Hemans' total recorded earnings over the course of her literary career from 1816 to 1835 came to 2,988 pounds (Feldman 151).

In an age when women of a certain class were not expected or supposed to earn a living, Felicia Hemans earned a substantial one and still managed to maintain the public image of the domestic muse. Yet the strain of maintaining the balance made itself felt. She wrote :

It has ever been one of my regrets that the constant necessity of providing sums of money to meet the exigencies of the boys' education, has obliged me to waste my mind in what I consider mere desultory effusions... My wish ever was to concentrate all my mental energy in the production of some more noble and complete work... which might permanently take its place as the work of a British poetess (Clarke 101).

Until her death in 1835 Mrs. Hemans remained one of the most widely read and published poets of her era, perhaps because her life and poetry embody the division between the ideal of the domestic archetype, socially structuralized in the precept of coverture, and the actual fact of domestic existence.

Anomie and Mrs. Hemans

This disjointure between the actual and the ideal found in the poetry of Felicia Hemans is perhaps best termed "anomie." In an attempt to explain both suicide and the dissatisfaction of the industrialized labor force, Emile Durkheim proposed the existence of a condition he termed "anomie," or a state of disjointed normlessness, a disjunction with the collective consciousness of society.

Since a body of rules is the definite form which spontaneously established relations between social functions take in the course of time, we can say, *a priori*, that the state of *anomy*, is impossible wherever solidary organs are sufficiently in contact or sufficiently prolonged. In effect, being contiguous, they are quickly warned, in each circumstance, of the need which they have of one another, and, consequently they have a lively and continuous sentiment of their mutual dependence (Durkheim 368).

Anomie is a sort of falling out of the appropriate social order, a lost sense of societal position, whether it be merely perceived or in fact. While in Durkheim's studies sociological anomie is primarily examined in terms of suicide and the labor force, it seems that the normless state could also manifest in itself in the area of literature, any time writers perceive themselves, and their position to be outside the normative social order.

For Durkheim, society was a set of interrelated social institutions, all of which served a specific function in

relationship to the entire social order. Any failure on the part of any social institution to fulfill this function resulted in problems for society. In his classic work, *Suicide*, Durkheim discussed how anomie, i.e., a state of normlessness in society created situations without normative regulations, and contributed to certain types of suicide (Heitzig 66).

Though anomie is typically discussed as a phenomenon affecting a particular social group, it seems logical that an individual might also experience personal anomie resulting from a personal normless situation. An individual experiencing a sense of discord with a larger social institution, real or imagined, is experiencing anomie.

In the case of the nineteenth century woman separated from her husband, the societal institution of marriage has failed to fulfill its implied obligations, and the parties involved would in all probability experience anomie as a result of the failure of the institution. The entanglement of their identity with that of the family would result in anomie should that connection be fractured. Particularly in the case of Mrs. Hemans, when the fall of the institution of marriage denoted the violation of coverture, another social convention.

There is, however a case where anomy can be produced although the contiguity is sufficient. This occurs when the necessary regulation can be established only by submitting to transformations of which the social structure is incapable.

The plasticity of societies is not indefinite. When it reaches its limit, even necessary changes are impossible (Durkheim 369).

The violation of social convention, even when necessary to escape an unhappy marriage, is not acceptable in the laws of Mrs. Hemans' era. Her ^{seemingly} ~~relatively~~ ^{anomalous} ~~unprecedented~~ marital position, ~~or at the very least unusual~~, would naturally result in a state of ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the position and roles of women in society, as well as her own societal role.

Mrs. Hemans' poetry is rife with anomic imagery. Her poetry abounds with women thrust into violations of the accepted social order, accompanied by tones of foreboding for even the normal roles of women. Mrs. Hemans seems to perceive the traditional role of women as dangerous because it is so precariously balanced and easily disordered. The violation of coverture by both her father and Captain Hemans resulted in an anomic position reflected in her poetic voice.

Hemans and the Structures of Feminine Romanticism

To further establish the argument for anomie, it is important to position Mrs. Hemans within the Romantic tradition and illustrate the anomic status of any socially acceptable Romantic woman writer. The prescribed position of women in the Romantic tradition tends to be that of the improvisatrice that Leticia Elizabeth Landon frequently evokes. The Romantic improvisatrices are reactive and expressive, with little of the logical and studied introspection that characterizes the male Romantics. In order to meet the expectations of them as women,

(always woman before poet), thus rendering them marketable, the poetesses of the Romantic era tend toward the emotive and improvisational, upholding the image of the woman as a creature of pure emotion. In her article on the image of the nineteenth century woman poet, Glennis Stephenson characterizes feminine Romanticism as an immediate emotional explosion rather than a reflective recollection.

The manner in which women wrote was as prescribed as the matter, and a critical commonplace was there was little, if any, conscious artistry in their works; they were often seen to exemplify a debased Romanticism - Wordsworth's 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' rather than being recollected in tranquillity, are immediately spewed out upon the page (Stephenson 65).

Gender based perceptions and outright restrictions imposed upon the women poets of the Romantic movement limit both the subjects and the manner of handling them. A high moral tone and concern with matters perceived as womanly such as romance and familial ties, portrayed in terms of the expressive, rather than the logical, seem to characterize the poetry of the Romantic women.

These strictures create a genre of distinctly "women's" poetry, setting the experience of the woman Romantic quite apart from her male contemporaries. Yet, these prefacing suppositions regarding womanly morality and poetic style are in a way as liberating for the woman poet as they are confining.

The setting apart of women's poetry provided them with a genre of great flexibility despite its outwardly rigid precepts. The perceived moral tone of their writing created a secure and respectable sphere for them in the literary milieu of England in the nineteenth century.

It is probably no exaggeration to say that an account of women's writing as occupying a particular sphere of influence, and as working inside defined moral and religious conventions, helped to make women's poetry and the 'poetess' (as the Victorians termed the woman poet) respected in the nineteenth century as they never have been since (Ross 321).

The very convention of moral effusions that seems to so bind the poetess, serves conversely to free her from the more insidious difficulties of her precarious position as woman and poet. By deliberately involving herself in the public marketplace, a woman opens herself to questions regarding her virtue and morality. The aura of purely emotive virtue that surrounds the notion of the poetess, defuses public criticism of a woman writer. If the poetess is only writing her own sweet, emotional, domestic self, what can be the harm in it? In a roughly contemporary example of this attitude, Edgar Allan Poe states that 'a woman and her book are identical' illustrating the virtuous though public poetess.

The assumption of her expressive virtue allows the woman poet freedom to widen the boundaries of her role as poetess. The character of the improvisatrice and the assumptions accompanying it permit the woman Romantic

poet to focus on subject matter outside her realm of appropriate experience. All things ever heard or imagined may be filtered through the improvisational art of the poetess.

Mrs. Hemans in particular uses the presumptions regarding the woman poet and uses them very much to her advantage. She first uses the expressive poetic voice to create the character of a poetess. Hemans depicts herself as the reluctant but obliging improvisatrice, responding to the irresistible muse of poetry and a voracious public. This is in fact a character, employed to please the reader and solidify the respectability of Hemans' position.

The memoir of Mrs. Hemans written by her sister, Harriet Owen, is particularly amusing in its attempts to preserve the image Hemans carefully cultivated in her poetry of a woman formed for the 'quiet happiness' of domestic life. Repeatedly the loyal sister parades before us references to Hemans' 'weary celebrity'. Her only enjoyment of her 'weary celebrity' we are assured, 'was derived from the happiness it created in those around her. That "Fame can only afford *reflected* delight to a woman," was a sentiment she unceasingly felt and expressed'. Hemans was not as careful of her image in her personal letters and journals as she was in her poems, and the sincerity of that sentiment is somewhat undermined by the great delight she expresses when, far from those

'reflectors', her family and friends, she mingles in literary society (Stephenson 63).

Throughout the whole of her literary life, the studied veil of the 'poetess' shrouded Mrs. Hemans from the criticism that the nature of her later poetry might have engendered. Though she publicly espoused the doctrine of improvisation Hemans' poetry is obviously more than the spontaneous overflow of feeling. Her poems are more accurate portrayals than feverish responsorials. Stephens characterizes Hemans as an extremely thoughtful improvisatrice.

Hemans refers to one particular mode of discourse (improvisation) so frequently that her audience, accustomed to her fulfilling the expectations she creates with regard to story, does not seem to recognize that she actually frustrates them in the matter of discourse (Stephenson 66).

Apparently Mrs. Hemans outwitted the literary critics that came after her, as well as her eager audience of contemporaries. W. M. Rossetti characterizes her work as 'cloying', 'feminine', 'female', 'sentimental', 'right minded' and 'emotional gush', ignoring the notes of strain and dissidence that not infrequently undercut the "moral" of her work (Ross 321). The perceived sentimental morality of her poetry rendered Mrs. Hemans acceptable and popular in her own era, but served to lessen her popularity with a more skeptical generation of critics.

Firmly ensconced in her position as poetess, Mrs. Hemans further establishes her respectability by creating the character of the domestic muse. Hemans employs the imagery and rhetoric of home and then uses it to expand

the boundaries of her station yet again. "As Landon did with the cult of beauty, Hemans situated her self and her poetry wholly within the category of feminine domesticity: her poetry celebrates the enduring value of the domestic affections " (Mellor 124). She extends the language of the home to encompass the nation of England and the image of family to incorporate the politics of her country.

All the same, Hemans was steeped in Scott and Wordsworth; she dreamed of nations united not merely by reason but also by mythic folk identities inseparable from relations to the land. While Hazlitt envisioned patriotism that could not be "in a strict or exclusive sense, a natural or personal affection," Hemans' patriotism attempted to unite such an affection to "reason and reflection" (Hazlitt 67), thus creating a stable, satisfying feminine position that inextricably connected nation and family (Lootens 239).

Though Hemans did not participate in a traditionally structured family, she nonetheless continued to assert her feminine right to ally herself with the domestic, and the national via the domestic. Thus expanding the definition of the areas of feminine concern, Felicia Hemans uses the position of poetess to express her opinions of traditionally unfeminine areas. Having established her right to discuss unfeminine topics, Hemans proceeds to present her own anomic vision of the patriarchy and the position of abandoned women within the patriarchy.

Anomic Imagery Within the Poems

The anomic voice of a woman fundamentally displaced by the failure of the patriarchal legal and moral system of nineteenth-century England pervades the poetry of Felicia Hemans, and nowhere more dramatically than in her collection of verse entitled Records of Woman. The volume abounds with imagery of women abandoned, betrayed and desolate, but three poems in particular best embody the sense of social displacement germane to the precept of anomie; "The Bride of the Greek Isles", "Edith, a Tale of the Woods" and "Indian Woman's Death Song".

"The Bride of the Greek Isles" recounts the tragedy of Eudora and Ianthis, two ill fated Greek lovers. The poem provides an intriguing blending of Eudora's voice and that of a narrator, that serves the same function as a Greek chorus, explaining and commenting on the poetic action. Eudora exemplifies the traditional, domestic woman when failed by the accepted social order. The poem opens with an account of the joyous wedding preparations and the bride's rich attire, but quickly shifts to reflect the conflicting emotions of the apprehensive Eudora. The narrator recounts her uncomplicated and innocent history, but Eudora herself voices her sorrow upon leaving her old home. She questions her melancholy, "Why do I weep?", but soon resolves that she will regret her "sunny childhood" passed within her paternal home. It is not only the innocence of childhood that will soon be lost, but also the ties of familial affection that Eudora laments. Though she mentions her father and sister, it is the final plea to her mother that resonates most strongly.

Mother! I leave thee! On thy breast,
Pouring out joy and woe,
I have found that holy place of rest
Still changeless, - yet I go!
Lips, that have lull'd me with your strain,
Eyes that have watch'd my sleep!
Will earth give love like *yours* again?
Sweet mother! let me weep! (Hemans II 67-74).

The familiar bond of solidarity between mother and daughter is to be irreparably violated, however desirably, by the coming wedding. Eudora's lament over the loss of her family and innocence upon marriage is the only portion of the poem in which her voice is related directly to the audience, indicating that this is a theme essential to the understanding of her character. Hers is the voice of a woman disillusioned because the parents she has cherished and looked to cannot prevent and have at least partially engineered the separation she dreads.

After Eudora's lament, the poem shifts back into the voice of the chorus/narrator and relates the blossoming affection between the bride and groom, replacing the earlier apprehensive tone, though never quite canceling it.

Wake again, mingle, sweet flute and lyre!
She turns to her lover, she leaves her sire.
Mother! on earth it must still be so,
Thou rearest the lovely to see them go.
(Hemans II 83-86).

Despite the pleasant imagery of the young couple, the impending division of mother and daughter is reiterated, emphasizing a discordant note in the festivities and undercutting the depiction of "the triumph of youth and love". The disconnection from her mother heralds the beginning of the tragedy of Eudora's brief marriage, indicating Mrs. Hemans' own discomfort with the married state on

behalf of mothers and daughters. Already she makes apparent her anomic anxieties regarding the effects of marriage for women.

The poem goes on to narrate Eudora's journey to her husband's home and to depict the bridal bower itself, and even here the imagery is characterized by foreboding and the foreshadowing of tragedy. Though the home is described as "still and sweet" the surrounding foliage indicates both the potential joy of marriage and the external perils that threaten it.

Asleep in the silence of noon's clear sky,
Citrons amidst their dark foliage glow'd,
Making a gleam round the lone abode;
Laurels o'erhung it, whose faintest shiver
Scatter'd out rays like a glancing river;
Stars of the jasmine its pillars crown'd,
Vine-stalks its lattice and walls had bound,
And brightly before it a fountain's play
Flung showers through a thicket of glossy bay,
To a cypress which rose in that flashing rain,
Like one tall shaft of some fallen fane. (Hemans II 100-110).

The fruit trees and splashing fountain represent the potential fruitfulness of the union, while the "stars of jasmine" illustrate the budding passion of the young couple. The laurel and the bay that "o'erh[ang]" the dwelling are traditionally associated with the crowns of poets, indicating the creative capacity of the married state, briefly envisioning a union between creativity and the domestic affections. Yet even this bright possibility is overshadowed by the presence of the cypress, in the lexicon of the nineteenth century, a tree of cemeteries, indicating death. The foreboding existence of the cypress tree that obscures all the bright potentiality of the surrounding foliage, both foretells the tragedy that will shortly befall the lovers, and further illustrates Mrs. Hemans' ambivalence

towards the married state. Its dark, phallic rise above the lovers' villa finalizes Mrs. Hemans' anomic view of marriage. The threat of masculine possession and thereby betrayal override any benevolent possibilities. The image of the "dark foliage", "lone abode" bound by vines and the further depiction of the cypress as the remains of some "fallen fane" also delineates the somber potential of the union. Though marriage seems to promise fruitful happiness, in Mrs. Hemans' view, the potential is marred by the looming presence of death, or at least separation from the beloved. The anomic voice of her poetry is further evident in this passage, as it makes obvious her perception of the disjunction between the married state and a woman's happiness.

The idyllic wedding feast is swiftly interrupted by an attack by pirates who slay Ianthis and the majority of his household, leaving Eudora widowed just as quickly as she was wed. The doleful prophecy of the cypress is fulfilled in the gruesome conclusion of the wedding supper. Eudora is not even permitted to grieve for the loss of her husband, before she is abducted by the pirates.

But they tore her thence in her wild despair,
The sea's fierce rovers - they left him there;
They left to the fountain a dark-red vein,
And on the wet violets a pile of slain,
And a hush of fear through the summer-grove -
So closed the triumph of youth and love!
(Hemans II149-154)

The forced departure from her new husband and home, and the violation of both mirrors an intensification of Eudora's nuptial separation from her parent's home. The tender bloodshed that would have marked her wedding night, is perverted into the bloody and horrific murder of her husband, and the eve of her marriage

degenerates into an emotional rape. This magnification of the normal events following a wedding further illustrates the ultimate distress and helpless displacement of women Mrs. Hemans perceives in marriage.

The narrative of the poem is briefly interrupted by a vision of Eudora's mother gazing out to sea, concerned for the well-being of her daughter and wondering about her fate. This short suspension of action serves to further indicate the distressing effect of marriage on women, both mothers and daughters that Mrs. Hemans' anomic poetic voice so emphasizes.

The poetic narrative resumes with the scene of the blazing pirate bark upon the waves.

Eudora, Eudora! Where, where art thou?
The slave and the master alike are gone.-
Mother! Who stands on the deck alone?
The child of thy bosom! - and lo! - a brand
Blazing up high in her lifted hand!
And her veil flung back and her free dark hair
Sway'd by the flames as they rock and flare,
And her fragile form to its loftiest height
Dilated as if by the spirit's might,
And her eye with an eagle gladness fraught, -
Oh! could this work be of woman wrought?
Yes! Twas her deed! - by that haughty smile,
It was her's! - She hath kindled her funeral pile?
Never might shame on that bright head be,
Her blood was the Greek's, and hath made her free.
(Hemans ll200-214)

The violated Eudora has wrought vengeance upon the marauding pirates who so perverted the ceremony of her wedding day. This is a further magnification and perversion of the marriage. Rather than the joyful engendering of a child in the lawful embraces of her husband, the evil acts of the pirates have begotten a terrible and fiery vengeance. Rather than being elevated and revered by her own

child, Eudora is destined to be loftily destroyed by the flames of her retribution. She is depicted as an "eagle" and as "dilated as if by the spirit's might", becoming a vision of divine requital rather than the domestic and maternal angel. This displacement of the domestic order results in the anomic vision of the retributive avenger.

Mrs. Hemans' perception of the social order of marriage may have been focused on its negative effects on the women involved, but the violation of that order once it has been established, wreaks consequences of a dire nature. Her own apprehension is mirrored in Eudora and her mother and becomes the anomic voice throughout the poem. By the failure of domestic protection Eudora is forced into the anomic position of avenger, instead of domestic pursuits, just as Hemans was thrust into the role of the abandoned woman. The poet always remains patently aware of the perceived danger to women via marriage, and the anomic voice pervades "The Bride of the Greek Isles."

The vision of anomic hood is further expanded in "The Indian Woman's Death Song", an account of the murder/suicide of an Indian woman and her infant daughter. It is an overt reflection of Hemans' own anomic status and anomic poetic voice, in its portrayal of a woman and her child deserted by the man who is both lover and father. Within the microcosm of the poem, the natural order of the family is fractured by the father's desertion and the only resolution to the perversion of the domestic norm is death.

The introduction lays the poem within "the western wilds", indicating the utterly foreign and "other" nature of the broken family, and among the "piercing thick forest gloom" to reflect the necessity of concealing the shameful fracture.

Down a broad river of the western wilds,
Piercing thick forest glooms, a light canoe
Swept with the current: fearful was the speed
Of the frail bark, as by a tempest's wing
Borne leaf-like on to where the mist of spray
Rose with the cataract's thunder. - Yet within,
Proudly and dauntlessly, and all alone,
Save that a babe lay sleeping at her breast,
A woman stood upon her Indian brow
Sat a strange gladness, and her dark hair waved
As if triumphantly. She press'd her child,
In its bright slumber, to her beating heart,
And lifted her sweet voice, that rose awhile
Above the sound of waters, high and clear,
Wafting a wild proud strain, her song of death.
(Hemans II1-15).

The imagery of the "light canoe" and "frail bark" "borne leaf-like" mirror the helplessness of the deserted woman and mother. This emphasizes the violation of the doctrine of coverture, as even in a the "western wilds" a woman requires the protection of her husband. Mrs. Hemans even manages to escape moral criticism by characterizing the Indian mother as foreign and other, somehow alleviating the enormous ethical breach of bearing a child out of wedlock. Even the depiction of the Indian woman as proud and dauntless indicates a certain defiance, necessary to the flouting of conventions. The defiant imagery is reinforced with the description of the "wild, proud strain, her song of death." The abandoned woman is left with only bravado in place of wedded and domestic dignity.

The body of the poem that is the "death song" itself further emphasizes the anomic nature of the Indian woman's position. The woman invokes the patriarchal spirit of the river to witness and amend the violation of the family.

Roll swiftly to the Spirit's land, thou mighty stream and free!
Father of ancient waters, roll! And bear our lives with thee!
The weary bird that storms have toss'd, would seek the sunshine's
calm,
And the deer that hath the arrow's hurt, flies to the woods of balm.
(Hemans ll16-19).

An appeal is addressed to the "Father of ancient waters" to correct the wrongs inflicted by a human father, there is the appeal to the patriarchy to still redeem itself by some divine act of recompense. The anomic state is reflected in an address to a heavenly father because the earthly father has violated the earthly bond of family.

The poem goes on to detail the precise fracture of the family unit, in the father's infidelity.

Will he not miss the bounding step that met him
from the chase?
The heart of love that made his home an ever-
sunny place?
The hand that spread the hunter's board, and deck'd
his couch of yore?
He will not! - roll, dark foaming stream, on to the
better shore! (Hemans ll28-31).

The Indian woman laments that "my warrior's eye hath look'd upon another's face,/ And mine hath faded from his soul, as fades a moonbeam's trace." She herself is rendered a "broken reed" by the violation of the familial norms. She continues to bewail the fact of her desertion, invoking the pleasant domestic imagery shattered by the perfidy of her lover. "Will he not miss the bounding

step that met him from the chase? / The heart of love that made his home an ever sunny place?" She details the domestic chores she performed for his benefit and his lack of regard for those things she valued so highly as labors of love and affection. This reflects the perceived devaluation of woman's work in the domestic sphere, further illustrating Mrs. Hemans anomic view and voice. The Indian woman is portrayed as displaced as the heart of the husband and hearth, creating a normless position for wife and mother.

The mother also expresses fears for her abandoned daughter, who may be destined for the same abandoned fate.

And thou, my babe! though born, like me, for
woman's weary lot,
Smile! to that wasting of the heart, my own! I
leave thee not;
Too bright a thing art *thou* to pine in aching. We
away,
Thy mother bears thee far, young Fawn! - from
sorrow and decay. (Hemans ll36-39).

This passage repeats and intensifies the mother/daughter tension of "The Bride of the Greek Isles" and rescues the Indian mother from the stigma of the Medea figure, bent solely on selfish retribution. Sincere concern for her daughter's fate in a "woman's weary lot" is at least the partial basis for the extreme course of her action. Of course, the fact that the Indian woman is killing herself and her child, might cause the reader to question her sanity, as well as her reliability as a narrator. This does not materially harm the argument that women are damaged by the anomic position. In this case the Indian mother is either committing noble suicide and sympathetic infanticide, or else she has been driven mad by the abandonment by her husband.

Envisioning some alleviation of her pain and normlessness, the Indian woman briefly invokes an idyll in which she can forget her displacement.

Some blessed fount amidst the woods of that bright land must flow,
Whose waters from my soul may lave the memory of this wo;
Some gentle wind must whisper there, whose breath may waft away
The burden of the heavy night, the sadness of the day.
(Hemans II32-35).

The humiliation of the shameful, anomic status, necessitates an escapist fantasy of forgetfulness and cleansing. This passage can also be interpreted as a view of the spirit realm (heaven) for which the woman and her child are bound, as it is made clear in the following stanzas that the only Lethe possible for the anomie of her position, is death for herself and the child of her violated family.

She bears thee to the glorious bowers where none are heard to weep,
And where th' unkind one hath no power again to trouble sleep;
And where the soul shall find its youth, as wakening from a dream,-
One moment, and that realm is ours - On, on dark rolling stream!
(Hemans II40-45)

Reliable or not, the Indian mother honestly seems to believe that she bears herself and her child to a better life, apart from the foibles of husbands and fathers who abandon and betray. The plight of the Indian mother and her child, to her mind, can only be resolved in their mutual death, fully illustrating the anomie, or normlessness, both of their individual predicament, and Mrs. Hemans' anomic poetic voice.

The theme of feminine anomie that pervades the poetry of Felicia Hemans is further realized in the account of "Edith, a Tale of the Woods." The poem recounts the ill-fortune that plagues the gentle Edith upon her entrance into the North American wilderness. The doleful tale is laden throughout with images of

an innocent woman abandoned to the forest and the forest dwelling Native Americans, referred to as Indians. Edith personifies Hemans' concept of the anomic woman, forced from the safe, but confining bounds of home and hearth, much to her bewilderment.

The poem opens with a depiction of the woods, a literary trope delineating a place of trial and testing. This concept of the forest dates at least back to Dante's Inferno, when the poet is lost in the forest of sin until he encounters the shade of Virgil.

The woods – oh solemn are the boundless woods
Of the great Western World, when day declines,
And louder sounds the roll of distant floods,
More deep the rustling of the ancient pines;
When dimness gathers on the stilly air,
And mystery seems o'er every leaf to brood.
Awful it is for human heart to bear
The might and barden of the solitude.
(Hemans II1-9).

This passage emphasizes the otherworldly qualities of the forest and its complete separation from the woman's normative domestic sphere. The woods are "boundless" and populated with "ancient pines" while "mystery seems o'er every leaf to brood." The language accentuates the reality of the forest as other, foreshadowing, before we are even introduced to Edith, the life altering events that will soon occur.

The following stanzas present Edith and the details of her plight are related. She is depicted as "young and fair; and oh! how desolate!" , cradling the head of her dying husband to her bosom. He and their entire settlement have been slain in some unspecified battle, presumably with the Indians native to the

area. Though surrounded by the corpses of her neighbors Edith's only thoughts are with her husband, indicating the natural primacy of the bond Hemans perceives between husband and wife. Eventually Edith gives in to full, unmitigated grief, and is portrayed as mad. This depicted madness is the physical representation of the anomie Mrs. Hemans perceives for the woman torn from the protection of her domestic ties, however ambivalent she might feel towards them.

She knew the fullness of her woe at last!
One shriek the forests heard, and mute she lay,
And cold; yet clasping still the precious clay
To her scarce heaving breast. O Love and Death!
Ye have sad meetings on this changeful earth,
Many and sad! But airs of heavenly breath
Shall melt the links which bind you, for your birth
Is far apart. (Hemans 1147-54).

The protector husband is rendered ineffective, separating Edith from the familial norms of the feminine, creating a state of anomie depicted as anguished madness. Not only have the matrimonial ties been severed, but Edith's bonds with the paternal family are rent by her distance from her homeland, "for your birth is far apart." This last severance is the overwhelming point of Edith's frenzied grief, overpowering her and she loses consciousness. This faint indicates the heroine's desire to deny her undesirable anomic position.

Upon waking from her stupor, Edith looks upon "faces dark and strange" of the Indians responsible for the death of her loved one. They have transported her back to their village "in the stillness of her grief" out of pity for her desolate state, "won by a form so desolately fair."

Where was she? 'Midst the people of the wild,
By the red hunter's fire: an aged chief,
Whose home look'd sad – for therein play'd no
child,
Had borne her in the stillness of her grief,
to that lone cabin of the woods; and there,
Won by a form so desolately fair,
Or touched with thoughts from some past sorrow
sprung,
O'er her low couch an Indian matron hung,
While in grave silence, yet with earnest eye,
the ancient warrior of the waste stood by,
Bending in watchfulness his proud grey head (Hemans 1174-84).

Edith's slain family has been replaced by an Indian family, complete with father and mother figure. This return to the bosom of her family indicates a reversion to a childlike state. Left alone by the protector/husband figure, Edith is taken into a surrogate family, but must revert from wife status to that of daughter. It is telling that she has been removed from woods, to a domestic dwelling. If the forest is a place of trial and testing, then her hysterical response to that trial can be perceived as rendering her childlike, and needing to be preserved from further pain. Again, reasonable grief would not be censured, but Edith's faint seems to represent uncontrolled emotion. Edith's reaction to the anomie of her normless state, in the context of the poem, seems to mark her as unfit for further adult life. Hemans does not seem to intend an indictment, but one wonders, regarding her own anomic status, how she would truly perceive a woman who responds to it by hysteria and fainting fits. The characterization of the Indian family as "other" also emphasizes the anomie of Edith's new position. Rather than a fatherly gentleman and a motherly gentlewoman, Edith is greeted with an aged chief and an Indian

matron, not unkind, but alien nonetheless, just as Edith is alien within their social milieu.

Edith is absorbed into the culture of her new kin, and comes to truly love them, as well as being well loved in return, although she pines for her old life.

The heart's whole power of love, its wealth and worth
Of strong affection, in one healthful flow,
On something all its own! - that kindly glow,
Which to shut inward is consuming pain,
Gives the glad soul its flowering time again,
when, like the sunshine, freed, - and gentle cares
Th' adopted Edith meekly gave for theirs.
Who loved her thus: - her spirit dwelt the while
With the departed, and her patient smile
Spoke of farewells to earth (Hemans II104-113).

The family has lost a daughter, just as Edith has lost a spouse, and effectively the family of her birth, and each fills some need in the other. Yet while the family is satisfied, Edith longs for her other loves. She counterfeits joy in these new domestic affections, but misses her old ties. This seems to indicate how unsatisfactory her reversion status is to Edith. After having experienced the bonds of marriage, she cannot successfully return to a state of childlike submission. That return further delineates and emphasizes the anomie of her position. (What normative position can there be for a white woman adopted by "savages") As unbearable as that anomie must be, the daily reminder of what she has lost worsens her awareness of her position.

Edith attempts to fill her womanly lot, by "mothering" her new family and converting them to Christianity. "By faith and sorrow raised and purified,/ So to the Cross her Indian fosterers led." Yet once that task is fulfilled, Edith continues

to pine and fade, indicating that even the role of missionary fails to suffice for the aborted mission of wife and mother.

And she was passing from the woods away;
The broken flower of England might not stay
Amidst those alien shades; her eye was bright
Ev'n yet with something of a starry light,
But her form wasted, and her fair young cheek
Wore oft and patiently a fatal streak,
A rose whose root was death (Hemans 145-151).

The comparison of Edith to a dying flower illustrates Hemans' view of a woman's inability to thrive apart from her legitimate domestic sphere. Although she may mother and convert the world, the satisfaction of the work does not suffice for her anomic separation from those she would depend on. The portrayal is not an indictment of Edith's frailty, but rather seems admiring that she accomplished anything at all before her demise. Edith's consumptive state is almost beatified, in the delineation of her "starry light" coupled with the "wasted" form. She is gracefully wasting in longing for her natural domestic ties, both those of marriage and of blood. This emphasizes the dependent role that Mrs. Hemans perceives for women, dangerous because of its precarious reliance on human affections.

The poem goes on to further recount Edith's fade into an anomic feminine decline, characterized in the passing seasons.

The parting sigh
Of autumn through the forests had gone by
And the rich maple o'er her wanderings lone
Its crimson leaves in many a shower had strown
Flushing the air; and winter's blast had been
Amidst the pines; and now a softer green
Fringed their dark boughs; for spring again had
come,
The sunny spring! But Edith to her home
Was journeying fast (Hemans 151-159).

The swift passage of the year indicates the unnaturally rapid passing of Edith's life. The natural span of a woman's life is encompassed in a year, yet the imagery grows more promising as Edith dies. Rather than ending in winter, Edith is dying in the spring, indicating that her death is kindly and more merciful than an anomic existence apart from her familial ties. Hemans implies that the most acceptable end for the abandoned woman is death, and that this end is welcome. In fact the coming end is further glorified by a depiction of heaven and the afterlife.

Is it not brighter then, in that far clime
Where graves are not, or blights of changeul time,
If here such glory dwell with passing blooms
Such golden sunshine rest around the tombs?
(Hemans ll164-167).

This depiction of a heaven beyond the earthly pain of separation, presents an alternative to the position of the anomic, un-domesticated woman. If no worldly ties can provide solace for the loss of domestic bonds, then Hemans feels that Heaven can suffice.

The poem ends with Edith's passing from this world, and her fond farewells to her last companions, who could not quite fulfill her sense of loss. Each is reassured by the thought of meeting again, and Edith finally rests peacefully, yet leaving behind her the grief of abandonment.

Lay me by mine own,
Under the cedar shade; where he is gone
Thither I go. There will my sisters be,
And the dead parents, lisping at whose knee
My childhood's prayer was learned, the Savior's
Prayer.
Which now ye know, and I shall meet you there

(Hemans II180-186).

Edith will be reunited with her loved ones and subject to the ultimate Father/Husband figure in Christ, renewing and bettering her old domestic ties. In heaven the patriarchy that failed Edith is justified as all humans, parents and children alike are rendered equal at the "knee" of the great Husband and Father. Edith's desire for reunification with her family is gratified, but now she is transformed into the deserter by the gratification of that desire. To be fulfilled and yet find new cause for sorrow, even in death seems to be the burden of the anomic heroine. In the world of Hemans' poetry there is no untainted joy for the anomic woman, such is the dual nature of her lot. She is simultaneously free from domestic constraints, but burdened for lack of them.

Conclusion

Throughout these three poems the image of the anomic woman remains the most dominant theme. Felicia Hemans's own normless position as an abandoned wife and mother and a woman writer has clearly made itself felt within her poetry. She perceives the potential anomie inherent in the domesticated woman's dependent position, yet she does not offer the reader a different order. Though the three poems do progress to a more positive view of the feminine anomic position, Hemans can conceive of justice and satisfaction only in the next life. Hemans chooses instead to explicate and expose in her popular verse the anomic position of the abandoned woman and the unstable position of the woman dependent upon the patriarchy of the nineteenth century. The tone of the poetry

seems to seek to enlighten her readers to the to the marked potential for failure in the current social order of coverture and assumptions of women's inferiority. Mrs. Hemans uses the public perception of her as an improvisational, domestic seraph to question, if not revise, the deficient customs of her era. The presence of anomic strain and tension within the poetry of Felicia Hemans illustrates the true depth and critical potential of her work. Despite Hemans's own dismissal of her work as "mere desultory effusions", its accurate reflection of the precarious position of women within her society, renders her poetry the true "work of a British poetess", just as she desired.

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