The Grieving Process: Loss in British Romantic Women's Poetry

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... If those paint sorrow best – who feel it most!

Charlotte Smith

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Introduction

Individuals deal with grief in a variety of stages. Whether the loss of a loved one or of a long-held dream, people tend to dwell on loss by experiencing different emotions. During the Age of Romanticism, certain poets expressed loss through their poetry and addressed each of the levels of the grieving process. Although the model of the Five Stages of Grief was not developed until at least a century and a half after these poets, Kübler-Ross’s theory does tend to fit the reactions of these poets’ loss. While looking at the poetry from the Romantic Period, one quickly notices that the women poets of the time usually wrote about some of the same themes. Some of the most popular categories were childhood, nature, love, sleep and dreams, and death; yet, regardless of the obvious theme of the individual poems, all of these poems have the common, underlying theme of loss. Because the main theme of a particular poem, such as a poem on love, might not as obviously be about loss, the Kübler-Ross model is useful for poetry analysis, for it helps to identify another layer of a poem. By applying Kübler-Ross’s Five Stages of Grief, one soon discovers that loss is the topic in almost all of these poems.

Although some of the poems do not explicitly address loss, which ranges from the loss of innocence to the loss of a loved one, the tones and attitudes of the poets demonstrate their attention to this theme. The question then arises if these poems are the result of individual experiences or if they are speaking for a larger population. Due to the changes during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, events such as the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution had a profound effect on the society, which possibly influenced the poetry. By looking at some of the most famous and influential women poets of the day, one can infer that
they were most likely speaking for the broad population. Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon (L. E. L.) all enjoyed a certain degree of success and influence in society and the literary world of the time. Writing on the same broad themes, they share a sense a loss that could be attributed to the changes and uncertainties of the time. While the people reminisced about the past and tried to move forward, these women tried to unite them through their poetry, for all shared the loss that kept appearing in their poetry.

By breaking down four of the five themes mentioned in the opening paragraph and how they fit into these discussions, or obsessions with loss, the different kinds of loss become evident in their expression through the Five Stages of Grief. Certain biographical and historical details suggest possible motivations for each of these broad themes. Personal love-life problems of the poets prompt their love poems to be filled with loss. The Industrial Revolution was beginning to destroy the rural landscapes, instigating the subject of nature in the poems. Because of the terror and violence of the French Revolution, the loss of childhood and innocence becomes a popular subject in Romantic poetry. Finally, these internal and external problems caused confusion and stress, which the poets undertook to relate in their poems. Yet this produced a need by the public and the poets alike for an escape, which they searched for in sleep and dreams. More often than not, however, one or both of these were disturbed by that very confusion and stress they sought to leave behind, making sleep and dreams another topic of interest. While other possible explanations might exist, these are just a few speculations to keep in mind when reading these poems. In order to see what, if any, connections can be made with the poets’ personal and private lives, a brief background section for each poet will precede the poetry analysis. Because of the limitations of this paper, only the love poems will be analyzed to show the prevalent theme
of loss. Taking three to four poems from each of these women and applying the stages of grief, one will notice how loss appears in poems that might not be as obvious at first glance, but the question to keep in mind will be how much it can be attributed to societal issues or personal ones.

Before one can understand what the poets are trying to say through their poetry, one must understand the basic outline of the Five Stages of Grief model and more recent interpretations of grief in general. In the 1970s, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross conducted studies to understand patterns that arise during the grieving process, particularly when it concerns death. Breaking down the process into five stages, Kübler-Ross labels her stages as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The first stage, denial, takes place after the initial shock wears off. When the "initial feeling of numbness begins to disappear . . . man's usual response is . . . denial" (Kübler-Ross 42). After the buffer defense of denial wears off, anger and resentment replace it as the start of the second phase. The anger is usually displaced and focused at anyone or anything, including loved ones (Kübler-Ross 50). "The third stage, the stage of bargaining, is less well known but equally helpful to the [person], though only for brief periods of time," and it consists of finding a way to "postpone the inevitable" (Kübler-Ross 82). During the fourth stage of depression, loss, particularly of hope, overwhelms and consumes the individual (Kübler-Ross 85, 109). By the last stage, the person finally gives way to acceptance. Yet, acceptance does not mean happiness. Rather, there is almost an absence of feelings and a giving in to the struggle (Kübler-Ross 113). Through the different stages people experience, they are merely "coping mechanisms to deal with extremely difficult situations. These means will last for different periods of time and will replace each other or exist at times side by side" (Kübler-Ross 138).
Although her theory was originally intended for instances of death and dying, the model can also be loosely interpreted in other incidents where loss occurs. Each of the following poems that are representing this progression, may exhibit one or more of these stages, but all hold at least one of the characteristics of grief.

I. Charlotte Smith

*It is, indeed, a melancholy truth, that at this time there is so much tragedy in real life, that those who having escaped private calamity, can withdraw their minds a moment from that which is general, very naturally prefer to melancholy books, or tragic representations, those lighter and gayer amusements, which exhilarate the senses, and throw a transient veil over the extensive and still threatening desolation, that overspreads this country, and in some degree, every quarter of the world.*

Charlotte Smith  May 15th 1797
Preface to Volume II (Elegiac Sonnets)

Arguably the most famous Romantic women writer has to be Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), who, through her innovative style, led the way for women poets to emerge onto the literary scene. A contemporary of Mary Robinson and a direct influence for Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Smith shared with others the bleak situation for women. Her troubled private life deeply affected her poetry, giving it, at the very least, a sense of melancholy. Her political activism and popularity helped to leave a lasting impression on her readers, but her poetic style is probably the most lasting aspect of Charlotte Smith. Looking back to Petrarch, Smith helped to bring back renewed interest in the sonnet, particularly with her collection of *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Poems*. She set the “standard for the sonnet in the early Romantic period” (Robinson 185). Because of the apparent influence of her private and public lives on her work, Charlotte Smith’s poems can help audiences better understand the possibility of a larger
social problem that would cause the women’s love poetry to all have an underlying theme of loss.

Disappointment and loss made its way through many aspects of Smith’s personal life. Her mother died while Smith was still young, and her marriage at a relatively early age did not survive in the end. Marrying at sixteen, Smith attempted to perform her wifely duties and bore her husband a total of twelve children. Yet, the family could not seem to move past their poor financial situation. Smith’s husband was unable to properly handle his grandfather’s estate, and he continuously gambled away the family’s finances (Foster 466). Because of the family’s monetary troubles, Smith turned to publishing her literary creations to provide for her family, even writing her novels while spending time in debtor’s prison. After twenty-two years of marriage, Smith eventually left her husband (Theirfelder 33). During this time, however, all of a married woman’s finances and property came under the sole control of her husband. She could not reclaim it, even after separation since divorce a rare occurrence (Curran xxi). Without the support and security of money and a husband, Smith lived the rest of her life worrying about her family’s situation, which becomes apparent through her bleak poems and novels. In later editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith more explicitly mentioned her husband in less-than-flattering terms, mainly as the source of her “calamities” (Curran 7). “She toiled ceaselessly writing novels in order to procure her independence, and yet never in her lifetime achieved financial security. Throughout her trials, she felt the isolation of a woman without a spouse, a father, a mother, or anyone with whom to share her troubles” (Tayebi 137). By looking at her work, primarily her poetry, one quickly notices how her poetry’s focus on loss mimics the suffering in her own life. Because of this, one cannot help but consider a biographical reading of her work. She embraced her misfortunes, rather than pushing them aside, and used them as inspiration for sharing her
story with the rest of the world.

For her public life, Smith actively followed the political situations of her day and used her literary works to share her ideologies. She “spoke out openly for a British revolution . . . , and wrote frequently on ‘the condition of England’ in novels like The Old Manor House” (Theirfelder 33). She liked to attack political inconsistencies and injustices, especially when it concerned women. Incorporating her “socially concerned spirit” in most of her poems, Smith found herself acting as spokesperson for her fellow countrywomen, even when only using the “I” pronoun as her subject (Theirfelder 33). While her novels and “Beachy Head” are her most political works, some critics do interpret some of the poems in Elegiac Sonnets as containing political commentary, which is an interesting interpretation worth noting. In her Elegiac Sonnets, Smith consistently focused on the legal, social, and religious barriers set up against women, which only added to her popularity. Writing sonnets that were both elegies and in the elegiac form, Smith symbolically passed on these issues to her audiences, who read of the despair and woe of the typical woman. Through this two-fold form, Smith was conveying a political message that could not be ignored.

[N]early all of Charlotte Smith’s remarkable sonnets—many set during the symbolic nighttime of social darkness or out in the raging weather of political and religious dialectic—contain images and ideas that can be seen as the elegy intoned not just by one narrator, but by all women living in the throes of a patriarchal system that would ultimately want to keep them in their ‘proper’ place (Theirfelder 34-35).

Unflinchingly taking on issues that were usually restricted to men, Smith proved herself as an
early feminist who was not afraid to take an active part in politics.

While “Beachy Head” is one of Smith’s most famous poems, her collection of poems in the *Elegiac Sonnets* is just as memorable and full of the heart of Smith. “Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets* [was] first published in 1784 and expanded in ten editions by 1811” (Robinson 185). The title makes it obvious that most of the poems are about grief. Some critics, such as Sigmund Freud in his essay “On Melancholy,” lump all of the sonnets together and label them, because of their intense despair, as examples of melancholy. Yet, several of the individual poems, as will be seen by the application of the five stages of grief, do move past the melancholy, for acceptance, which divides grief from melancholy, does present itself in several of the sonnets. In most of the poems, however, Smith’s speaker frequently turns to “morbid thoughts of death and a desire for oblivion,” which highlights the intense loss of both Smith and her speaker (Robinson 191). Because of the intense suffering, one might wonder if there is any hope for the speaker. Some critics believe that “the sonnets seem oppressive because Smith offers little consolation,” yet that confines Smith in too small a box (Robinson 192). She does offer consolation, as seen in her “From Petrarch” collection, but it is not necessarily conventional. Her speakers must deal with a variety of losses, including childhood, nature, and love, so she cannot wrap up the grief too quickly. For example, the Petrarch sonnets take four sonnets to work out the grief Petrarch the poet experiences over the loss of Laura.

Yet, one must not forget what remains at the center of Smith’s poetry. “Throughout her

\[1\]This paper will be drawing from the sonnets in Stuart Curran’s *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*. In it, Curran combines together Volume I and II, which were initially published four years apart. For Volume I, Sonnets 1 through 59 come from the ninth edition; whereas, Volume II’s Sonnets 60 through 92 derive from the second edition (Curran xxix).
poetry, Smith finds despair and alienation more often than peace and tranquility” (Tayebi 148).

With her unfortunate background and her desire to see change in society, Smith could not let her work reflect anything less than the troubles around her. It was not that she had no hope for something positive, but, rather, she tried to unite society together under the banner of reality and sincerity. Charlotte Smith, living in England during a very explosive time in Europe, called upon her fellow patriots to right the wrongs of society and did so through her poems of grief for what had been lost or might have been.

While much of Charlotte Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets and Other Poems* is written with the sub-text of her daughter’s death, Smith does devote a few of the poems to the theme of romantic love. Although one might argue that Smith’s persistent fascination with death and loss is a sign of melancholy, these few poems on romantic love demonstrate a working-through of the Five Stages of Grief, especially since they all conclude with a form of acceptance. The acceptance, then, determines whether or not a poem is melancholy and immersed in loss, or if it progresses through the grieving process. “To the winds” is a prime example of poem turning to romantic love and working through grief.

At first glance, “To the winds” looks like another Romantic poem on nature, but, by the middle and end of the poem, it becomes clear that Smith merely uses the nature imagery to setup the passing of time. This poem also appears in the novel, *The Young Philosopher* (1798), in which Elizabeth Lisburne’s suicide is discussed by the protagonist; this poem is read from some of the papers she has left behind (Smith 182-185). The poem begins with the female speaker addressing the winds and asking if they ever encounter anyone as “lost” and miserable as she (l. 5-6). This marks the first stage, depression, for she constantly refers to her misery and to death.
The next two stanzas talk of different kinds of loss by death—the loss of a child, a friend, a lover. And, it addresses how the survivor of a loved one’s death cannot find relief through the grief. “Some wretch who has himself survived,/ Laments in vain” (l. 11-12). In the fourth stanza, something changes, which signals the move into the second stage, bargaining. She wishes her grief were the result of his death, because that would be more bearable than trying to endure his rejection of her. The speaker is facing the loss of her lover’s love.

Ah! were it Death had torn apart

The tie that bound him to my heart,

Tho’ fatal still the pang would prove;

Yet had it soothes this bleeding breast

To know, I had till then possest

Hillario’s love. (l. 19-24)

She believes she would have eventually found peace with the dulling of the pain over time if he had died instead (l. 27-30). The speaker sees death as easier to handle than rejection.

The poem then progresses into the third stage, anger. Her tone changes in stanza six; she is now playing the part of a scorned lover, as is highlighted by the use of three exclamation points. Hillario is alive and is giving his love to someone else. “But still Hillario lives, to prove/

To some more happy maid his love!” (l. 31-32). She imagines how he is demonstrating his love and exclaims, “But not for me!” (l. 36). By this point, she has come to terms with the fact that Hillario deceived her with his “words” (l. 37) and his “looks” (l. 38). She has, both literally but

2 It should be noted that “Hillario” is an interesting choice here, since it most likely derives from the Roman name “Hilarius,” meaning “cheerful” (Campbell).
more importantly figuratively, awakened from her dreams and sees death— the death of her love for Hillario. “In dreams may all Elysium see,/ Then undeceiv’d, awake, like me,/ Awake and die” (l. 40-42). She calls herself “abandon’d, lost” (l. 43) and spends her time at the coast awaiting his return. But, in the middle of stanza eight, she admits the futility of it all. “But hopeless watch and vainly rave,/ Hillario o’er the western wave/ Returns no more” (l. 46-48).

In the last stanza, there is an interesting shift into the fourth and final stage, acceptance. She forgives Hillario for wronging her and wishes him a better fate than the one she foresees for herself.

Yet, go forgiven, Hillario go,

Such anguish may you never know

As that which checks my labouring breath;

Pain so severe not long endures,

And I have still my choice of cures,

Madness or death. (l. 49-54)

Yet, her final words are not necessarily more hopeful for her own outcome. Rather, he fares better in the end by her than she does by herself. The acceptance comes because of the fact that she releases him from anymore obligation and leaves it to Fate to determine her end. She will not let this betrayal consume her life anymore. It is interesting that the poem does not contain the stage of denial. This suggests that the speaker never thinks he might still love her or that she can win him back. Instead, the stages of grief highlight the woman’s coming to terms with her loss and situation. “To the winds” is about a woman’s unrequited love, the wrongs against her, and her equating that loss to death, if not something worse.
When Smith composed her *Elegiac Sonnets*, she, for the most part, relied on previously established forms for her sonnets, of which she then used variations. One can naturally assume then that she would have been knowledgeable about Petrarch and his work. It should come as no surprise then, that Smith wrote four sonnets about Petrarch, or rather revised versions of some of his own sonnets. When Smith wrote the *Elegiac Sonnets*, she looked back to Petrarch for inspiration and ended up constructing much of her poetry as he did. “Smith takes on the persona of a lonely, grief-stricken wanderer, not unlike Petrarch,” but in her portrayal of some of Petrarch’s love poetry, she makes some changes (Robinson 200).

Before one can understand what Smith is doing with Petrarch and his poetry, one must understand what Petrarch wrote about. The majority of Petrarch’s love sonnets talk about his desire for the unattainable Laura and her subsequent death from the plague— the “Black Death”— in 1348. After Laura dies, Petrarch believes he will reunite with her in heaven. This “gives him hope and the fortitude to aspire for divinity on earth, difficult though it might be” (Robinson 201-202). What is interesting about Smith’s take on the Petrarchan sonnets, Sonnets XIII-XVI, is her view of Laura. While Smith emboldens Laura more than Petrarch, the sonnets are less about Laura and more about the breaking heart of the Petrarchan lover. “[I]n Smith’s version, she [Laura] is more coy and flirtatious, where, in Petrarch’s she is angelic and brilliant” (Robinson 212). Smith does not want Laura to be placed on an impossible pedestal that she has no control over but gives Laura power by determining the outcome of the situation. Laura, in Smith’s sonnets, manipulates Petrarch, while Petrarch’s poems never give a voice to Laura herself. Smith also complicates the situation with the power of psychology. The power of thought can overcome the difficulties of reality. Smith’s Petrarch believes Laura loves him back, so he does
not view her as unattainable. The question of whether or not Petrarch’s efforts are in vain does not matter to him, for Smith constructs the relationship in such a way that Laura has to love Petrarch, or did at one time. “Both versions question the possibility that Laura returns Petrarch’s love, but Smith more confidently asserts an affirmative” (Robinson 212). Despite the differences in Smith and Petrarch’s take on Petrarch’s love, Smith tries to stay true to Petrarch at least in her use of the Petrarchan sonnet form. She empowers Laura and increases the stakes for Petrarch to work his way out of his grief, for the physical loss of Laura is more painful knowing she loved him at some point. Smith’s poems on Petrarch are great examples of loss in her love poetry and in the overall theme and construction of her *Elegiac Sonnets*. These four consecutive sonnets are all entitled “From Petrarch,” which suggests that they can and should be read together as part of a grouping. When applying the model of the stages of grief, each of the sonnets usually highlights only one stage, although anger is never really present in any of them. Since the poems should be read together, it only makes senses to follow the stages of grief as they progress through each of the sonnets.

In “Sonnet XIII: From Petrarch,” denial is the first stage present in the sequence. Petrarch, as the speaker, mentions the different extremes he could experience but would still love Laura. He demonstrates his faithfulness in maintaining his love to her. He does not say that she does not love him but the language suggests that he should not love her, and vice versa.

Tho’ my fond soul to heaven were flown,

Or tho’ on earth ‘tis doom’d to pine,

Prisoner or free– obscure or known,

My heart, O Laura, still is thine,
Whate’er my destiny may be,
That faithful heart still burns for thee! (l. 9-14)

With all of the talk of “destiny,” imprisonment, and fame, it becomes obvious that much hangs in the balance of this love. Yet, he refuses anything less than the proclamation of his love for Laura and denies the world, his life for the love of Laura. This sonnet displays the stage of denial with his denial of reality and the consequences of his loving Laura.

“Sonnet XIV: From Petrarch” brings the next stage, bargaining. Laura once looked on him with love, but she averts her eyes now. He wonders, “Was I deceived?” (l. 5). He praises her beauty and speaks of her as “a goddess— not a mortal maid” (l. 10). The bargaining comes in because he says he will never stop loving her, trying to convince her to show him love again. Through his own devotion, he hopes she will be inspired to return the favor.

Yet tho’ thy charms, thy heavenly charms should fade,
My heart, my tender heart could not escape;
Nor cure for me in time or change be found:
The shaft extracted does not cure the wound! (l. 11-14)

Cupid’s arrow struck him once, but the removal of it will not remove his love for her. By reminding her that she once showed him love, he tries to persuade her to follow his lead. Because of society’s constraints, they would have faced much difficulty in acting upon their love, but Petrarch wants Laura to see she is an immortal goddess who does not have to respect the rules of society. He is casting down any barriers for their love, so this sonnet shows him bargaining with her for her to do the same.

In “Sonnet XV: From Petrarch,” Petrarch moves onto the next stage, depression. Laura is
dead before the beginning of the sonnet. As Petrarch takes refuge in the natural world, Laura, as an angel, comes to speak to the grieving Petrarch. She mentions the toil his depression is having on his life. "‘Unhappy Petrarch, dry your tears;/ Ah! why, sad lover! thus before your time,/ In grief and sadness should your life decay’" (l. 8-10). Because she does not want Petrarch to waste the rest of his life in grief, she attempts to give him some hope and promises to see him in the afterlife. "‘But raise thine eyes to Heaven— and think I wait thee there’" (l. 14). This hope will help to motivate him, as will be seen in the next sonnet.

In the fourth and final sonnet of this set, "Sonnet XVI: From Petrarch," the final stage, acceptance, is finally reached. Unlike the three previous sonnets, this poem exhibits more than one stage. At the beginning of the poem, the depression still lingers from the prior sonnet, for he describes his "bitter tears" (l. 10) and "trembling hand" (l. 11). Yet, Petrarch does eventually give way to acceptance. Petrarch starts the poem by addressing nature. "Behold my grief, ye witnesses of love!" (l. 4). He wants it to see his grief over Laura’s death but realizes that time moves on for everything.

For ye beheld my infant passion rise,

And saw thro’ years unchang’d my faithful flame;

Now cold, in dust, the beauteous object lies,

And you, ye conscious scenes, are still the same! (l. 5-8)

While he might still be grieving over his love at the end of the sonnet, he finally accepts her death and that she will not be coming back. "‘To heaven she’s fled! and nought to me remains/

But the pale ashes which her urn contains” (l. 13-14).

It is interesting to consider how these four sonnets cover the two major forms of loss
within romantic love. At the beginning of the set, Petrarch faces the possibility of unrequited love, or at least newly rejected love. Through his dealing with his grief over this, he proceeds to lose Laura herself. He says prior to her death that nothing will keep him from loving her, and now he is put to the test, for she has physically left him. His acceptance by the end, then, is not related to the loss of her love or his, but the loss of her physical body, of which he holds only the remnants in an urn. The issue of the love is never fully resolved, but one can assume that the presence of Laura the angel in the third sonnet indicates her continuing love for Petrarch, which should, and does, offer him a certain degree of comfort.

In one of Charlotte Smith’s most famous poems, “Beachy Head (1807),” she “introduces the reader to a lovesick wanderer. He rambles through the ruins, forest and hills reciting poetry about the love he has lost” (Tayebi 137). The first poem within a poem by the wanderer shares his working through the stages of grief. This selection, along with the rest of “Beachy Head,” gives quite a few images of nature. Unlike the sonnets “From Petrarch” where nature marks time and continues after others have passed away, nature in “Beachy Head” represents something much more powerful and dangerous. Due to the imagery throughout the poem, nature is seen as a place of corruption and death. So, while the stranger describes nature in positive tones, the rest of the poem suggests that anything in nature will only bring pain and disappointment. This context for the wanderer’s song, then, informs the reader that the wanderer’s songs about his love are not going to end well.

All of the stages are present in the poem and only a little out-of-order. In the traditional first stage, denial, the man begins his story by remembering the past. He believes the countryside “[w]here once I walk’d with you” still contains traces of his love (l. 535). The stranger thinks he
can still hear and see his love. “Believe, that from the woody vale/ I hear your voice upon the gale/
In soothing melodies” (l. 538-540). Because of this, he infers that if he stays in this place where he
thinks a part of her still is, then they would never really be separated from one another. He refuses
to move on with his life. He has not forgotten her and hopes she has not forgotten him. From here,
he moves directly into the second stage, bargaining. At this point, he is willing to get from his love
whatever he can take. He would gladly suffer, even die, if that means she will remember and mourn
for him once he is gone.

I think, I could endure my lot

And linger on a few short years,

And then, by all but you forgot,

Sleep, where the turf that clothes the spot

May claim some pitying tears. (l. 546-550)

No one else matters to him, and he pleads with her to at the very least pity his death. Although the
three other stages all come up in the last stanza, this bargaining train of thought never really goes
away, for he continues to hope she will remember him after he dies.

In the last stanza, the third stage, depression, takes a twist that is different than in most of
the other poetry dealing with the stages of grief. The wanderer does not express his own depression
but the depression she would have for him. He cannot easily forget about her, his love, and
imagines her grief for him after his death.

For ‘tis not easy to forget

One, who thro’ life has lov’d you still,

And you, however late, might yet

With sighs to Memory giv’n, regret
The last and final stage is a combination of anger and acceptance. Passive-aggressive, he wishes for her to regret her rejection of him, and he is hopeful that she “might yet” do so. His acceptance, though, is not as easy to recognize and is only evident after looking at the poem as a whole. Rather than continuing to plead and bargain, he leaves her with the final thought of memory and ends his song.1 Since the poem ends rather abruptly, one sees his acceptance in that he is no longer trying to do anything to win her back. The way anger and acceptance intermingle at the end, it is also possible that the wanderer’s acceptance comes from his attempt to hurt his love by focusing on her regret. Instead of his previous idealization of her, he changes his tone by wanting her to feel a pain like he has had to endure. Even though this song is a selection from the longer poem “Beachy Head,” it can most certainly stand on its own as a lost love poem. Influential for her followers, Charlotte Smith made it acceptable to write poems about the grieving process.

II. Mary Robinson

Poor poet! Happy are thou, thus removed
From pride and folly! For in thy domain
Thou canst command thy subjects, fill thy lines
With the all-conqu’ring weapon Heav’n bestows
In the grey goose’s wing which, tow’ring high,
Bears thy rich fancy to immortal fame!

Mary Robinson, composed 1800
“The Poet’s Garret” (l. 64-69)

One of the more controversial female poets of the day, Mary Robinson (1758-1800), drew upon her own experiences and the external events of her time in her poems. The life she led was

3Felicia Hemans’ “Properzia Rossi” was later influenced by this model.
not an easy one, but one marked by sorrow and disappointment. Because her father left her family, she was prevailed upon to marry for money, not love. During her unhappy marriage, her daughter died (Close 183). She turned to writing to support her family while her husband remained in debtors’ prison (Runge 582). After her marriage was dissolved, Robinson continued to have illicit affairs, including one with the Prince of Wales. Before and during this affair, Robinson enjoyed increasing success for her poetry. Although she tried to branch out and write Gothic novels, Robinson derived the most success and popularity from her lyric poetry (Close 174). In the 1790s, Mary Robinson became a “highly productive and well-regarded poet” (Runge 564). Yet, once her relationship with the Prince of Wales also failed, Robinson was left “alone, unemployed, and the object of public scorn” (Close 183). Her liaison with the Prince of Wales and her open sexuality gave her notoriety, not respectability, which “justified her position in the public realm and entitled her to a legitimate position from which to speak” (Close 175). Despite the fact that her private life came under much scrutiny, Robinson still managed to hold onto her influence through her poetry. The fact that she led such an interesting life only helped her career. While she faced criticism from her peers, the public’s interest only grew. As people rejected her, they also made her more famous by drawing more attention to her, adding to her notoriety.

When Robinson’s Memoirs were finally published, Robinson herself attempted to make sense of her life. She looked at it from her standpoint and how society influenced it. Since she was nearing the end of her life as she wrote it, Robinson clearly has a negative view of how her life played out. This bleak tone may be the result of her sufferings, or it may have always been a part of her life. If one reads her Memoirs as a retrospective take on her life, then it is very likely that her cares culminate in this work and cause her to be more despondent than when the actual
events took place. In her *Memoirs*, “[a]s Robinson presents it, the plot of her life resonates with Gothic tensions: deceiving appearance, threatened innocence, [and] unmerited suffering” (Close 181). She takes certain critical moments of her life, such as her marriage, and sheds light onto her reasons for acting the way she does, perhaps to justify her actions. “The narrative [*Memoirs*] implies that she enters into wedlock for reasons of familial loyalty and prudence, though the marriage turns out to be a legal and moral union with a spendthrift rake” (Runge 577). Robinson, as narrator, looks back on her life and remarks upon it at a time when society does not hold her in the highest regard. Whether or not society’s approval or disdain means anything to her, Robinson depicts her life in such a way that makes one question her motives. If she truly does not care what others think, as is evident by her lifestyle choices and lovers, one has to wonder why she feels as though she must justify her actions. Based upon her wording and tone, Robinson’s *Memoirs* is clearly giving the image of her as a victim of circumstances (Runge 585).

Mary Robinson’s presentation of her life and of herself is probably meant to be read as a personal reflection and as a message to the public. While society both loved and hated her, the people more likely than not held preconceived notions about her that she attempts to address in her autobiography.

While her personal life, both as others saw it and as she wrote about it, was a crucial element to her poetry, external elements also inspired her poems. The plights of the people deeply affected Robinson and caused her to examine certain events of the period in her poetry. While living in London during the days of the Industrial Revolution, Robinson witnessed the ever-growing divisions that arose in the developing cities. With the disparity between the rich and the poor, people chose either to respond or to ignore the social, economic, and political
problems of the less fortunate. People were physically divided, as well as emotionally, for not everyone wished to supply charity for the lower levels of society. Robinson’s poems tend to look at the “tension or contradiction between hearing and involving oneself in a tale of misery and remaining apart and detached from that misery,” as evidenced by the contradictions within London itself (Miskolcze 211). Besides the situation in cities like London, Robinson lets other less-than-pleasant occurrences influence her work. During the end of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth century, Western Europe, in particular, found itself experiencing some of its most violent moments up until that point. As Robinson’s writing career was in its prime, it “coincided with some of the bloodiest conflicts between France and England, as well as with the internal conflicts in France like the Terror” (Miskolcze 213). The French Revolution’s Reign of Terror certainly left an impression on Robinson, for, like the Industrial Revolution, it signaled a change in times. To express her concerns over these conflicts and changes, Mary Robinson turned to her work. This emotional outlet sent a message to others about how they all lived in a connected world. Her poetry shows “the diverse and often devastating effects on society of both personal and political social conflicts” (Miskolcze 218). While society may have influenced her poetry, Robinson attempted to influence society with her poetry. Robinson lived, like the other Romantic women poets, during a time of instability and uncertainty; yet, she used that as the basis for most of her poems and as an opportunity to make statements about the need for change. She embraced and highlighted disturbing social issues of the day.

Due to internal and external factors, Robinson’s poems tend to have certain types of characters and situations. The majority of her subjects fall into the categories of “the isolated, the abandoned, the confined, and the despairing—tormented people who long for oblivion” (Feldman
593). These people do not necessarily achieve fairy-tale endings. In the universe Robinson creates “injustice prevails, merit goes unrecognized and unrewarded, and love fails to triumph” (Feldman 593). Slightly obsessed with the theme of alienation, Robinson incorporates some aspect of it in most of her poems. Her poetry, then, gives the impression that Robinson is a pessimistic poet who only wishes her characters ill. Yet, this is not the case. Instead, Robinson aims to relate to her characters. Although she reveals a world “marked by alienation and exile,” Robinson merely does so because it is the reality she knows best (Miskolcze 209). Her own life, as previously mentioned, faced much suffering and sorrow. This allowed her to interact with characters that knew, just like herself, what life was really about. “Nothing lasts in the poet’s world; Hope’s aid fades, love’s dart leaves a wounded heart, Fame is but a name, Friendship’s beam is but a dream, and beauty goes quickly to the tomb” (Miskolcze 218). The worlds of her poetry are all the same. They are all a part of her world; the only one she has ever known. While her characters and situations may come across as depressing, that is her intention because that is how she perceives real life.

One of Robinson’s most Gothic poems, “The Lady of the Black Tower (1804),” speaks of loss through images of madness. A Lady awaits for her lover to return from the Holy Wars, and she has visions that tell her to forget him. Yet, she cannot. She goes to extremes and faces danger to be reunited with him. At the end of the poem, the lover arrives back to his Lady just in time. This poem raises the question about how much power fears hold. Do they have the power to drive someone to madness? According to Robinson, one’s internal worries can consume the self and result in insanity. The Lady almost reaches this point, but the physical return of her lover saves her from driving herself to madness. While almost all of the Five Stages of Grief
appear in the poem, anger is noticeably absent. Since the Lady rarely speaks or offers her own internal monologue, the reader is left to learn about her feelings, actions, and emotions through others in the poem. So, while other beings may exhibit anger at times, the grieving Lady never expresses anger. The Five Stages must follow the one who is grieving; therefore, only those stages that directly pertain to the protagonist will be considered.

The poem starts off with the first traditional stage, denial, and repeats it throughout the majority of the poem. As the Lady waits for her lover, she is visited by nameless phantoms, but one wonders if she really sees them or merely imagines them. Either way, they constantly say to her,

‘Lady! from the Holy wars
Never will Thy Love return!
Cease to watch, and cease to mourn,
Thy Lover never will return!’ (l. 3-6).

She is holding out hope that he will come back. In addition, her visions are determined to convince her that she must deny this and realize he is lost to her. They also repeatedly tell her that whenever she will see him next he will be “pale and dead” (l. 10). As the poem progresses, depression appears as the next stage for the Lady. Apparently she has passively awaited the return of her lover, only showing sighs, groans, and tears to express herself. She is unable to do anything to speed or aid his return, so instead she stays in her tower.

‘The sun will rise to gladden thee:
Lady, Lady, cheerful be.’

So spake a voice! While sad and lone,
Upon a lofty tower, reclin’d

A Lady sat (l. 29-33).

Obviously she is downcast and upset, and this assessment is reinforced by the language of the phantoms that are telling her what will make her feel better. Her seclusion also indicates that she is experiencing a state of depression. During this hard time for her, one is unsure whether or not these words are coming from a supernatural presence, her conscience, or a mind that is slowly falling into a state of disarray. Voices from graves, bleeding knights, and appearances of “sightless skull and bony hand” suggest that her nightmare is taking over reality (l. 85-90, 105-108).

Those around her start to question her sanity. The monks have to convince her that she is just seeing things and whisper to one another that “God grant our Lady be not mad” (l. 73-78). From the middle of the poem until the end, something changes about this woman. Rather than sit alone and cry in her tower, she takes matters into her hands. She sees a ship arrive and with it a voice telling her to stop mourning. “Thy lover hastes to comfort thee:/ Lady, Lady, cease to mourn;/ Soon they lover will return” (l.178-180). She understands this to be her opportunity for active involvement. So begins the third stage, bargaining. By catching passage on the ship to the Holy Land, the Lady believes she can be reunited with her lover. She offers to do something daring and dangerous if it means the force keeping away her lover will repent. After enduring many trials, the Lady arrives in a castle in the Holy Land, which is filled with the bodies of the dead who welcome her. Ghosts and skeletons start to overwhelm her when she awakes in the tower. Apparently, she did not leave the tower but fell asleep. “[D]reams of dreadful phantasie/ Had fill’d the lonely moon-light hour,” hinting that the Lady awoke from more than just a bad
dream (l. 261-262). She had been on the verge of fully losing her mind. The poem ends with a fairy-tale conclusion, which points to the final stage of grief. The Lady accepts the idea that dwelling on her fears keeps her in a dream world. Only giving up her obsessions and living in reality can she be prepared to accept the outcome.

But now a real voice she hears:

It was her lover’s voice;— for he,

To calm her bosom’s rending fears,

That night had cross’d the stormy sea:

‘I come,’ said he, ‘from Palestine,

To prove myself, sweet Lady, THINE (l. 265-270).

Although the lovers are reunited at the end, this love poem gives one of the scarier accounts of loss. As the stages show, loss can have devastating effects. Not only do the phantoms almost convince her of her lover’s death and cause her to almost lose her mind, but the Lady’s near breakdown are clearly signs of the effects of loss. When loss pertains to love, one’s sanity and mortality are at stake, according to “The Lady of the Black Tower.”

“A Thousand Torments Wait on Love” (1797) describe love in painful terms, as the title suggests. The poet describes love as everything; it consumes every thought and action. Jealousy is the marker of love. Jealousy is love, and love is life, so jealousy, by the transitive property, must be life. Awake or asleep makes no difference, for the pains of love, of jealousy always remain. “At morn, at eve, the fever burns” (l. 13). A product of love, jealousy remains even after the love is over. Yet, love cannot be experienced without passion (suffering), and this too remains due to the harmful nature of jealousy. As one reads the poem, however, one must
question what Robinson's overall view of love and its by-products is. Does she imply that jealousy is synonymous with love?

The poem begins by describing the depression stage, which is a crucial aspect of love. Evidence of being in love comes from wanting it to be returned. "The sigh, the tear, the anguished groan" all depict the outward appearances of wanting to be in love (l. 2). If one has never been jealous, however, then one has never known what love is. "But he who never learnt to prove/ A jealous pang has nothing known!" (l. 3-4). While the poet does not explicitly address denial, the very act of not experiencing jealousy suggests that such an omission is the denial of love, life, and self. It is a combination of self-denial and denial of jealousy and love that briefly touches on the stage of denial.

These depressing acts quickly intertwine with a version of the anger stage. In this poem, the expression of anger comes across as jealousy. The person in love shows jealous tendencies when in a relationship or in love with someone. Most of the poem focuses on this stage and describes how jealous feelings torture the bearer of them. Love and jealousy "haunt the brain,/ And pangs, . . . / In wild, convulsive tumults reign" (l. 10-12). Jealousy, as the "supreme of woe," causes the person in love to become even more depressed.(l. 5). Nothing the individual does can erase love if the feeling is truly there. By not being able to reject the feelings of love and jealousy, the lover remains in the states of depression and anger. "Day brings no calm, and night returns/ To mark no soothing hour of rest" (l. 15-16). While there is no clear stage of bargaining in the poem, the poet does end it with the stage of acceptance.

If passion and love mean essentially the same thing, at least in this context, then the last stanza implies that one has reached the stage of acceptance if he or she acknowledge that the love
is over, regardless the reason.

Nor, when the bosom’s wasted fires

Are all extinct, is anguish o’er;

For jealousy, that ne’er expires,

Still wounds, when passion lives no more (l. 17-20).

After examining the entire poem, one can conclude that, at least in this context, Robinson intends for jealousy to be synonymous with love. In the end of the poem, jealousy remains as the lingering result of lost love, perhaps in the form of rejection, but in the context of love. Passion, however, is the suffering for love while the love still exists. That is how one can distinguish between passion and jealousy, both of which coincide with love. Loss in “A Thousand Torments Wait on Love” becomes clear through one’s physical sufferings due to internal feelings of grief.

Some of Robinson’s most famous poems fall into a collection entitled Sappho and Phaon. In a Series of Legitimate Sonnets, with Thoughts on Poetical Subjects, and Anecdotes of the Grecian Poetess (1796). Attempting to rework the traditional Petrarchan sonnet, Robinson includes forty-four sonnets as part of one large poem. The basic premise of the poem is as follows: “She [Sappho] loved Phaon, who forsook her; after various efforts to bring him back, she took the leap of Leucata, and perished in the waves!” (Wu 190). While they are meant to be read as a whole, telling the story of Sappho and Phaon’s love, one can certainly look at the individual poems as separate entities, for they are works of art within themselves. Yet, the sonnets are meant to tell a story, to tell of a love, so the stages of grief progress throughout the entire poem. To demonstrate this, I will give examples from the sonnets that give appropriate examples of the Five Stages of Grief.
For the stage of denial, Sappho discusses the all-consuming power of love, which keeps her from admitting Phaon’s lack of interest. Sonnet XVII “The Tyranny of Love” describes how love “[g]rasps ev’ry thought, and burns in ev’ry vein” (l. 7). Because of this, Sappho refuses to think about anything else, including Phaon’s take on it all. For Sappho, love is a “tyrant” that lives “enshrined” in the heart, so she cannot even allow herself to realize that her love will be unrequited (l. 8). For the bargaining stage, Sonnet XXV “To Phaon” begs him to remember her. She reminds him of her “voice, her form, her dulcet lyre/ That, melting ev’ry thought to fond desire,/ Bade sweet delirium o’er thy senses roll?” (l. 2-4). By calling up fond memories and feelings from the past, she hopes to entice him to return to her. Sappho believes she can find a way to control the situation, which is evident in this stage of bargaining.

While depression is one of the stages that lingers throughout several of the sonnets, one of the sonnets in particular depicts depression as a part of the love process. In Sonnet XXVIII “Describes the Fascinations of Love,” Sappho says that sorrow is increased by love and an expression of love. “He never loved who could not muse and sigh,/ Spangling the sacred turf with frequent tears” (l. 9-10). Her depression continues to increase throughout the rest of the sonnets, but this example gives a clearer picture as to why she is willing to dwell so long on her misery instead of moving on to another stage. Her stage of anger comes later in the poem and is the only one out of order in the traditional Five Stages model, but there is a reason for this. While Sappho may have been a slight bit irritated at times in previous sonnets, Sonnet XXXV “Reproaches Phaon” is the first time she really displays her anger through her harsher tone and language. “Phaon is false!” she repeats twice and mentions her own death and hopelessness (l. 5, 8). Perhaps the reason it takes her this long to get to this point is because of her lingering denial.
and bargaining. She cannot let go of the possibility of winning him back, which she still attempts a few sonnets later, but this moment is when she fully realizes his faults in the whole ordeal.

Acceptance, in this poem, signals resolution. She has pleaded with Phaon for the last time and still received no satisfaction, so she prepares for her death. In Sonnet XLIII “Her Reflections on the Leucadian Rock Before She Perishes,” Sappho concludes her part in the story and accepts her fate. As she stares down at the water below the cliff, she decides to

Welcome returning Reason’s placid beam,

While o’er my breast the waves Lethean roll

To calm rebellious Fancy’s fev’rish dream;

Then shall my lyre disdain love’s dread control,

And loftier passions prompt the loftier theme! (l. 10-14)

Love and Phaon no longer hold their power over her, so she deigns to commit her life, or rather her death, to a higher purpose. Her nightmare with love is now over, and the poem concludes by telling of Sappho’s fate. Unlike “The Lady of the Black Tower,” the Sappho and Phaon sonnets give a much bleaker image of love, at least in the sense that it does not end happily ever after.

All of the Five Stages of Grief are covered in this poem, although Robinson changes their order just a little. Throughout all of these love poems by Mary Robinson, loss is almost always due to some aspect of unrequited love, rather than the death of a loved one, and could be due to her own personal experiences with love.

III. Felicia Hemans

I have lost the faithful, watchful, patient love, which for years had been devoted to me
and mine; and I feel the void it has left behind, must cause me to bear 'a yearning heart within me to the grave'; but I have her example before me, and I must not allow myself to sink.

*Felicia Hemans*  
*January 1827*  
*Letter to a friend on the death of her mother*

One of the most popular female poets of her day, Felicia Dorothea Hemans (1793-1835) captivated her audience by transfusing her poetry with the hardship of her own life. "In the United States and Britain, she was one of the best-selling poets of her century and one of the first women to make a living by writing verse" (Wolfson xiii). As she gained critical feedback from contemporaries such as Wordsworth and Walter Scott, Hemans established herself as a promoter of the female voice in her poetry. Her heroines, for example, did not always come to happy endings, but Hemans gave them a voice in the literary genre that was typically dominated by males—poetry. Drawing on her own background, Hemans’ poetry presented strong heroines who find themselves in bleak circumstances, and these subjects found a large readership audience during her time.

More so than her public life, Felicia Hemans’ private life played a crucial role in her poetry, particularly in the way that she created her heroines. Having experienced many sorrows, Hemans would give her heroines variations of the same problems in order to figure out the way one would react, given the circumstances. Early on, Hemans faced two difficulties in becoming a poet. First off, she was a woman, and, second off, she felt compelled to write British patriotic poetry. Felicia Dorothea Browne, however, was born to a part-German and part-Italian mother and an Irish father, which would affect how she sought to write nationalistic poetry for Britain (Lootens 239). With her eclectic background, Hemans faced another challenge, for she lived most of her life in Wales, not England proper. Yet, she did not consider herself Welsh but a
British citizen (Lootens 247). In addition to this struggle for achievement in her poetry, two events left an everlasting impression on her life and her poetry. Early on in her life, her father left her family. Within a few years, the action would be repeated by her husband. “In 1812 Felicia Dorothea Browne married a soldier, Alfred Hemans,” and the result of this marriage affected the rest of her life (Lootens 240). As three different sources say as well, her husband’s failure to stay committed to the marriage, to her, started a turning point in her poetry. “When her husband abandoned her and their five young children, Hemans sunk into a grief so deep, she saw the specter of her forsaken self at every turn” (Lundeen 11). “The marriage never mended either (repeating her father’s desertion). The idealism of house and home for which [she] would become famous was haunted by these desertions” (Wolfson xxii). Because of the lack of commitment, and financial support, of her husband, Hemans’ family relied more and more on her writings to provide for the family.

As the sole provider, Hemans turned to her own personal experience to relate to her readers. “Hemans’ most successful work, ‘Records of Woman,’ continually return[s] to and rework[s] the central events in her life as a woman artist: her husband’s desertion of her . . . and her continuing literary fame” (Lootens 240). Later on her life, one more tragedy would cause Hemans to remain in a perpetual state of grief. “The death of her mother in 1827 was a devastating loss, deepened by the relentless breakup of the household, as older sons left for school and siblings married or moved away” (Wolfson xxiii). One might wonder if it is fair to attribute the sorrow in her poems directly to her own experiences, but most people tend to agree with this type of reading. During her own day, contemporaries such as Letitia Elizabeth Landon already assumed that it was appropriate and correct to believe Hemans incorporated aspects of
her own life in her poems. "Landon [in her tribute poem to Hemans] attaches herself to Hemans the person and finds her life, with its sorrows and burdens, has seeped into the poems" (Robinson 78). Although much of her personal life plays itself out in her poetry, particularly "The Records of Woman," Hemans' public life and status only increased during her day.

As her popularity grew, Hemans and her readers saw her as a national poet, speaking for both the country and the women (Lootens 239). Outside of her private life's involvement in her poetry, Hemans also wrote about actual events, even if she did cloud some of them with her own reactions and experiences. "Casabianca," for example, actually commemorates a real event (Lootens 241). Besides keeping history a part of her poetry, Hemans also considered her audience. "Hemans, unlike most of her male colleagues, was forced to make a living by her poetry to support herself and her family and therefore had to worry about the popularity of her chosen subjects" (Simonsen 329). Yet, Hemans knew that most of her readers would be women, and, by recognizing them as purchasers of poetry, she helped to empower women of her day.

Prior to the Romantic period, women had little control over poetry and its subject power, for women themselves were very rare in the field and unable, therefore, to raise women's issues. This is why most of Hemans' poems deal with domestic issues in England: "women enclosed in domestic spaces in the submissive role of childbearing wife, often suffering miserably due to the neglect of husbands, fathers and lovers" (Simonsen 330). Because of her typically female audience and feminine subject matter, one might mistake her poetry as merely sentimental, and possibly weak. Yet, Hemans creates heroines who are anything but weak and powerless.

While most of her poems deal with women who are reacting to male dominance, Hemans creates a type of heroine who takes action, regardless of how powerless she might appear.
Hemans’s protagonists do not fit the familiar profile of a female victim. Though they are at the mercy of circumstances, one of those circumstances usually being a heartless man, they triumph over those conditions. Of course, their triumph is frequently posthumous, but in the world of her poems, a post mortem victory is better than no victory at all (Lundeen 4).

Speaking of victory in death, most of these women do find a sense of hope with their deaths. A unique aspect of Hemans’ poetry is her motif of death for her heroines who find themselves in difficult or hopeless circumstances. Death, however, is not the end. By their self-sacrifice, Hemans’ heroines demonstrate their active, “heroic” selves, as in “The Indian Woman’s Death-Song” (Robinson 20). For most of her heroines, Hemans addresses the aftermath of a failed relationship, either real or hoped for, and explains how society leaves these women with only the option of death. “The women in her poems who are thrown out of the comfort and safety of marriage usually find themselves exiled from society altogether, with no recourse but death” (Lundeen 7).

Death, though, is more positive than negative. The women are not giving up, rather they are taking action and choosing not to remain in a loveless world that no longer accepts them.

In these poems it is death alone that validates the woman’s significance, either because her lover has died and so ensured that his love for her, and hers for him, cannot change or because the woman has died and in the act of dying is identified with one or another’s noble cause (Harding 142).

In the majority of Felicia Hemans’ poetry, whether or not intentional, Hemans crafts her heroines and poems in such a way that one cannot help but read them as biographical. This, perhaps, is
what drove her popularity. Since women were her prime readers, they could relate to the sufferings of one of their own during the time of a mostly male-dominated society. While most of her heroines are inextricably linked to death, she does so to highlight the bleakness of a woman’s options in her world and to offer some sort of noble escape from sorrow. “‘Gender was the haunt and main region of her song: she wrote of woman’s social fate in a man’s world, her sufferings and love-longings, her abandonments, desperate suicides and infanticides, her release only through death’” (Simonsen 530).

One of Felicia Hemans’ most popular collections deals with these very women she felt the most connected to. The Records of Woman (1828) was groundbreaking poetry, for it centered solely on the women of the day and their own personal issues. In “Indian Woman’s Death-Song,” the protagonist mourns over the fact that her husband has left her for another woman. Out of her grief, the woman takes their baby girl with her in a canoe that is heading down the river toward a cataract. Without a doubt, this canoe is taking them to their deaths. She sees it as the only way she can free each of them from the pain of rejection and lost love. Commanding the river to move the canoe faster, the Indian woman is resolute in her belief that this is the best course of action for her and her daughter. As is true in every one of the Records of Woman poems, this poem starts with a “true-story” description paragraph and a couple of quotes. In the first stanza, the narrator sets up the scene, while the rest of the stanzas are the Indian woman’s death-song. For the rest of the poem, the reader gets a first-hand account of her feelings through her own words.

Almost every stage of grief is represented within this poem, but denial is noticeably absent. The reason for this probably lies within the fact that she says early on that her husband
has left her and their love. "[M]y warrior’s eye hath look’d upon another’s face,/ And mine hath faded from his soul" (l. 20-21). Denial, then, more than likely took place prior to the action of the poem, for this woman actively demonstrates her responses to all the other stages. Anger appears as the first stage, obvious by the inflection in her voice when describing their differences. "The voice that spoke of other days is hush’d within his breast,/ But mine its lonely music haunts, and will not let me rest;/ It sings a low and mournful song" (l. 24-26). Her husband does not love her any more, yet she cannot let go of her love for him. The next line makes the quick transition into the second stage, depression. Even before the one gets too far into the poem, it is quite clear that the protagonist is suffering from a deep depression and does not want to live any longer. Yet, she does not verbalize these feelings until she states, "I cannot live without that light" (l. 27). Since we are following the stages of grief through the Indian woman’s own internal experience, we cannot assume that the stage of depression exists at the beginning of the poem. Rather, we must wait until this point when she realizes her intentions for herself.

While the Indian woman is clearly depressed throughout the majority of the poem, Hemans allows her only one line to establish this stage. Immediately after she makes her depression known, the Indian woman starts pleading with her absent husband. During the bargaining stage, she cannot accept that he refuses to remember the past. "Will he not miss . . . / The heart of love that made his home an ever sunny place?" (l. 28-29). Within the same breath, however, this woman accepts her fate. Her last stage of grief, acceptance, begins with, "He will not!" (l. 31). Her emphatic realization that there is no going back to the past or changing of his mind gives her the strength to control her own, and her baby’s, fate. As she works through her acceptance, she remembers her daughter. "And thou, my babe! tho’ born, like me [a woman] . . ."
/ . . . I leave thee not” (l. 36-37). Unable to force her husband to stay with her, the Indian woman realizes that women, at least in her culture, are powerless when up against the will of the men. Because of this, she cannot bear for her daughter, unfortunately born a girl, to suffer the same disappointment with unrequited love. “Too bright a thing art thou to pine in aching love away,/ Thy mother bears thee far, young Fawn! from sorrow and decay” (l. 38-39). Determined to be proactive, the Indian woman leads her daughter toward their tragic destiny. They will both die and leave this unfulfilled existence behind. As she does in most of the rest of the poem, the woman commands the river to carry them to their fate as speedily as possible. “One moment, and that realm is ours – On, on, dark rolling stream!” (l. 43). Rather than reading this poem as a woman giving up on life when it gets too hard and sad, Hemans intends for her heroine to be just that, a heroine. She is not dying because it is easier; she is killing herself and her baby to save them before this world can do anymore damage to them. She never stops loving her husband, never lets go of the loss, but attempts to shelter her daughter from an unforgiving world.

In “Juana,” Hemans bases her poem on the true story of Joan the Mad and Philip the Handsome. Like “Indian Woman’s Death-Song,” the narrator sets the scene, but, soon, the audience gets to hear the protagonist’s voice as she speaks aloud. While anger is not present within this poem, there is another sort of madness exhibited by Juana, insanity. This woman refuses to believe that her husband is dead. She stays with his corpse, waiting for him to awake. He did not love her during his lifetime, so she hopes to win his love by showing how faithfully she waits for his return. While one might immediately jump to the judgment that this woman is merely delusional, care must be given to the stages of grief. By applying them to the poem, one notices she is the product of a failed relationship.
From the start, Juana fits the model of grief by displaying the first stage, denial. She, as already established, refuses to leave his side because she thinks he will return.

Amidst the silent room of death, the dreamer spoke aloud;
She spoke to him who could not hear, and cried, ‘Thou yet wilt wake,
And learn my watchings and my tears, beloved one, for thy sake.
They told me this was death, but well I knew it could not be.’ (l. 14-17)

Due to the premise of the poem, Juana sitting for days or weeks over her dead husband’s body, the stage of denial lingers throughout the rest of the stages, at least until the final stage, acceptance.

While still in denial, she moves on to bargaining. Contrary to what one might think, she does not necessarily bargain for his return. Rather, she is bargaining for his love. Since her needs were not met during the marriage, she believes she can get him to change his feelings toward her while she has his attention. She thinks she can gain his love by keeping her vigil by him. “I know thou hast not loved me yet,” and, yet, “I have but a woman’s heart, wherewith thy heart to seek” (l. 25, 28). By proving she will not leave his side but continue to show her love, she hopes he will return the love. Her thoughts revolve only around him, and she lives only to receive his love. While she bargains for his love, Juana lets her depression creep onto the scene. As she works through the stages of grief, Juana naturally remains upon her depression in her monologue to him. She remembers his past mistreatment of her and of her present suffering. As she laments over her past disappointment, she sees her current sadness and its outpourings as evidence of her love for him.

‘But when thou wak’st, my prince, my lord, and hear’st how I have kept
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A lonely vigil by thy side, and o’er thee prayed and wept;

How in one long, deep dream of thee my nights and days have passed,

Surely that humble, patient love must win back love at last!’ (l. 29-32)

Her “years of hope deferred” shed light on this tragic relationship (l. 36). Just as she sits by her husband’s decaying body, so does the love that might have been in this marriage. One may speculate if Hemans’ Juana is a product of denied love or the cause of it, but the truth remains that she still carries around the pain of that rejection. After repeatedly pleading for him to awake and right this injustice, she gradually comes to the acceptance stage. She finally comes to terms with the fact that he will not be coming back, and, after several days of languishing over the deceased’s body, she lets them remove the corpse. Even though she lets him go, “a woman’s broken heart was left in its lone despair behind” (l. 52). Unlike the Indian woman, Juana does not resolve to escape from the cause of her grief but lets it stay a part of her. Yet, Juana does complete the acceptance stage, for she allows the servants to bury the body. Whether or not Juana remains mad is unclear, but she holds onto her losses, her husband and his lack of love.

Perhaps the best example of loss in Hemans’ love poetry is the poem “Properzia Rossi.” The poem is based on a true story of the unrequited love of a sculptor, which ultimately causes her to die. The entire poem deals with her internal feelings and debate after her love is rejected. Due to this lack of love, Properzia sees death as her only option but does not give up easily. She plans to leave behind a statue of Ariadne for him who broke her heart.4 This statue will remind

4“Ariadne was the daughter of King Minos of Crete, who imprisoned the Greek prince Theseus in his labyrinth, there to be devoured by the Minotaur. In love with Theseus, Ariadne told him how to slay the monster and escape the labyrinth. He married her, but after they left Crete, he abandoned her on the Greek isle of Naxos, where she pined away for him. He married her sister Phaedra” (Wolfson 355).
him of her and so re-win his love. As she debates with herself, she considers death as a way to
win her fame, particularly from her love. This internal debate over how best to gain his affection
progresses through the five stages of grief.

While the poem is broken down into only four sections, they clearly follow the five stages
verbatim. This is because the line separating the denial and bargaining stages become blurred, so
these two stages actually mesh together into the first stage. In the first section, Properzia believes
she has one more chance. “One dream of passion and of beauty more,/ And in its bright
fulfilment let me pour/ My soul away!” (l. 1-3). Refusing to give up on all hope, she believes she
can convince him to love her if she leaves him something she has laboriously created.

I would leave enshrined
Something immortal of my heart and mind
That yet may speak to thee when I am gone,
Shaking thine inmost bosom with a tone
Of lost affection – something that may prove
What she hath been whose melancholy love
On thee was lavished (l. 9-15).

Despite his rejection, Properzia cannot bear to let him go, even though she herself cannot stay.
So, she intends to use her artistic endeavors to speak to him. She tells her developing sculpture
of Ariadne, “In thy work breathe out, that he may yet,/ Feeling sad mastery there, perchance
regret/ Thine unrequited gift” (l. 23-25). A remark such as this suggests that she wants more
from him than love; she wants revenge, to a certain degree. After her death, any remorse that he
might feel for his treatment of her will be unreconciled. He will be unable to ask for forgiveness
and give her his love. Instead, she is leaving him in such a state that he will never find peace. This then leads into the next section and stage.

In the second section, her second stage, anger, clearly shows the shift in her emotions. Properzia now wants to show him her strength through adversity. As before, she intends to leave behind her sculpture, but, now, she decides it will be her most perfect piece of art. She suddenly gains inspiration to create something so captivating and compelling that she cannot be ignored, even after her death. She begins to pour every aspect of herself into it. "I fix my thought, heart, soul, to burn, to shine/ Through the pale marble’s veins" (l. 34-35). By giving all of herself to this sculpture, she hopes she can live vicariously through it and make her past sorrow known.

From thee my woe

Shall yet look beautiful to meet his sight

When I am passed away. Thou art the mould

Wherein I pour the fervent thoughts, th’ untold,

The self-consuming! (l. 41-45).

She pleads now not just to him but to her creation. Properzia tells this her counterpart to convey her “love and grief” (l. 49). While Properzia does not become violently angry or rail against the one who did her wrong, her anger does exist in this section. It is an anger that stirs her and gives her the power and strength to leave her mark on the world.

Right after this, however, something changes for Properzia, which leads to the third section and stage. While the reader is not clear as to why Properzia starts to doubt her plan and herself, the protagonist certainly loses some of her motivation. She thinks her aspirations for her work have been too high, and she cannot, then, create her masterpiece. She decides she has not
been loved for so long that she cannot create a piece that would be the epitome of love, or at least
provoke feelings of love from him. Rather quickly, Properzia is facing her depression.
Previously in the poem, she expresses moments of sorrow and sadness but not to this extent. Her
longing for death may seem a sign of her depression, but it is not until the third section that the
depression fully takes place. Her death is an action against the injustice of her situation; it will
make him see what he has lost. Yet, it is not just a last resort when all hope is lost. That does
not come until this section. Here, she has no hope, believes she cannot create her perfect statue,
and sees everything all in vain.

But I have been

Too much alone; a heart whereon to lean,
With all these deep affections that o'erflow
My aching soul, and find no shore below,
An eye to be my star, a voice to bring
Hope o'er my path, like sounds that breathe of spring,
These are denied me – dreamt of still in vain (l. 65-71).

Perhaps Hemans can relate to this with her own work. Her husband's desertion may inspire her
poetry, but it can also hinder the creative process, for it makes her doubt herself like Properzia.
From this point on, the rest of the poem has more of a dejected tone, especially when compared
to the second section. Her broken spirit, due to her inability to complete her conceived
masterpiece, sees her schemes to gain his love as fruitless and decides to accept another course of
action.

At this point, the fourth and final stage appears. In the last section, Properzia accepts her
fate. The attempt to win his love by achieving fame seems useless. “Worthless fame,/ That in
his bosom wins not for my name/ Th’ abiding place it asked!” (l. 81-83). He broke her and her
heart, and now she realizes she can do nothing but move on.

And thou, oh thou on whom my spirit cast

Unvalued wealth, who know’st not what was given

In that devotedness – the sad and deep

And unrepaid, farewell! (l. 104-107).

While one might see her moving on as negative, more of a giving up, she actually sees her death
as a positive thing. Once again, Hemans gives a female protagonist who has limited choices for
action and decides that death is a positive action. Death for these women gives them a release
from the social restraints of their world where they cannot fight back for love. By dying, they,
like Properzia, make a statement to those they leave behind. They show the world that their men
failed them and must live with that. With Properzia’s acceptance, she moves on, particularly by
dying, and hopes that he realizes his mistake one day. “And one day haply in thy heart revive/
Sad thoughts of me” (l. 125-126). At the end of the poem, Properzia hopes he will one day say,
“‘Twas hers who loved me well!” (l. 129). Even though Properzia attempts to forget about him,
a part of her still wants him to remember her. Life, then, is not as important as remembrance,
which is what most artists want. Artists tend to create immortal works to surpass them when
they die, but they do so to leave their mark on the world, showing that they want to be
remembered even after death. They, like Properzia, leave something behind them to stand the
test of time. But, rather than a statue to remember the artist Properzia, she ultimately wants her
love to be remembered, the love of the woman Properzia. Her sculpture is more than a piece of
art. It is the result of a love won and lost, and the artist's attempt to win it back. She hopes to have her love embodied in her work. Fame, then, is not that achieved from a nameless audience but that from one specific individual. Clearly speaking for women, Hemans' *Records of Woman* includes several poems that somehow equate love with loss, and ultimately death.

IV. Letitia Elizabeth Landon

*Was not this purchased all too dearly? – never
Can fame atone for all that fame hath cost.*

*We see the goal but know not the endeavour,
Nor what fond hopes have on the way been lost.*

*We say the song is sorrowful, but know not
What may have left that sorrow on the song . . .*

L. E. L., published 1838

"Felicia Hemans" (l. 33-36, 41-42)

Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838), or L. E. L., devotes many of her poems to the themes of either love or nature, yet her poetry reflects aspects of both her private life and the lives of the general population. When looking at the life of L. E. L., critics, such as Cynthia Lawford, suggest that she maintained an affair with her editor, William Jerdan. One might speculate that evidence of this relationship shows she used personal experiences for her poetry. "[T]he woman who can find no happiness and wants no life without her man, regardless of how he treats her . . . [is] a source of poetic inspiration which Landon used" (Lawford 2-4).

Particularly when it comes to love in her poetry, L. E. L. tends to incorporate suffering and despair into her poems, which demonstrates how her own struggles influenced her work. Yet, social concerns also infiltrate the tones and themes of her poetry. Her work slightly falls into the category of post-Romantic poetry, for it is both Romantic and "simultaneously reject[s] the
Romantic artist's claim that art transcends the ills of the social environment into which it is born” (Riess 813). Rather, L. E. L. conveys the popular sentiments of her day. Unrest, loss, and despair of society inspired her poetry, even when disguised as an individual issue. “L. E. L.’s melancholy song called forth the best feelings of which humanity was capable, the ready sympathy for tales of woe which came from understanding that everyone suffered and the most attractive suffered most. That is, poetic geniuses and women” (Lawford 28). Landon’s poetry, then, incorporated aspects of her own disappointments, and these private issues sometimes resulted in poetry on larger issues of discontent. 

Not only was Landon affected by her own shortcomings, but she also followed the trends and demands of society. Rather than keeping poetry as an individual outlet for expressing herself, L. E. L. turned her poetry into a mass-market commodity with her participation in serial publications. In a market of growing commercialism, even in the areas of art and literature, poets like Landon found success by letting their work be inspired by national trends (Riess 808). Landon wrote for the people, for an artist at this time needed their favor to sell his or her work. Landon, then, let her work follow the economic trend of supply and demand. “Her poetry did not simply acquiesce in the increasing commodification of literature and art; rather, it was an active, willing participant” (Riess 810). Her basic survival depended upon her willingness to respond to popular sentiments. The melancholy tone in most of her poetry can then be interpreted as having both a private and a social component.

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5 Her sudden and unexpected death also attest to her most likely having personal problems. While the cause and means of her death were never officially established, many have suggested her husband as, at the very least, an accessory to her death, which was possibly due to poisoning (Wu 596).
Regardless of the interpretation one has of how Landon arrives at writing poetry about loss, one thing remains consist throughout her poetry. Whatever the issue, L. E. L. is using her art to work out the issues and concerns she has. For Landon, art and literature hold greater value than mere enjoyment. “Landon shows that real-life experiences will inevitably leave one longing for the safe pleasures of literature, the pleasures that books such as The Improvisatrice; and Other Poems can supply” (Montwieler 28). Her poems represent more than just her thoughts, the public’s demands, or a leisure activity. Literature, particularly poetry, provides its readers with the ability to live life vicariously without the consequences of reality. This is especially true when it comes to love. Through her signature poem “The Improvisatrice,” Landon extends to her readers the theme that romantic ideals and love are, if not fatal, at least dangerous to women. Her poetry, then, offers the escape and experience of love without causing harm. L. E. L. argues that literature does not kill and provides a safer outlet to explore love than real-life male lovers (Montweiler 3, 25). Since love plays an important love in the majority of her work, both as the inspiration and as the subject, Landon uses her poetry to safeguard her readers from the effects of love while providing a means to understand it.

Before one can understand the interplay between love and loss in Landon’s poetry, one must first establish who are the subjects she uses to address relationships. Landon tends to write about relationships – relationships between people and between individuals and nature. Yet, she almost always speaks through the viewpoint of a female, either as the narrator or as the subject. Her inclination to use women is not simply to leave them in a submissive role, subject to the more powerful male figure. Rather, these women are her heroines through whom she speaks. Although her heroines represent the “suffering woman,” she does so “as a means to an end”
Landon reinforces her own dissatisfaction with love by using her heroines to represent the average woman. She gives the view that women, more so than men, probably due to the age in which she lived, experienced misery with love. “Landon caused her heroines to be forsaken by their lovers, bringing about the heroines’ grand display of more presentable and yet dangerous passions . . . those passions are the jealousy, bitterness, hate, and despondency that . . . typically culminate in the longing for death” (Lawford 33). Exhibiting some of the Five Stages of Grief, her heroines face rejection much like L. E. L. herself. Love, however, is not always eros love or love for another. Landon also uses love in situations regarding landscapes and strangers, but she consistently links love with loss.

Landon’s conscious decision to present loss through these type of characters sets up the backdrop for her poems. Although most of her poems bespeak of love, Landon also dwells on the theme of nature; yet, neither provide hope for a happy ending. Landon may write love poetry, for example, but rarely do the women find their love reciprocated. One sees Landon’s obsession with despair and her avowal that “woman’s love brought her misery for which there was no solution except death . . . [and] no better way for Landon’s sentimentality to express violent sexual passion than through the dying of a broken heart” (Lawford 33). Although physical death is not always the prescribed end for her heroines, these women, at the very least, die emotionally. When love is not fulfilled and expectations are not met, one loses not only a loved one or an ideal but part of one’s self. By understanding how L. E. L. views love and sets up her female subjects for disappointment, one can conclude that she was asking her readers to sympathize with the common woman and her misfortunes.

When addressing how the sentiments of the day affected Landon’s poetry, Landon
follows the trend in her portrayal of love. She celebrates in her poetry the “melancholy which broods on lost love, refusing to accept being rejected and not letting its desires be the least diminished by rejection” (Lawford 10). One of the best examples of Landon’s love poems is “Love’s Last Lesson (1827),” for it represents loss and all the stages of grief. The beginning of the poem has the heroine dwelling on her present situation. In a story of unrequited love, the male, referred to as a “god” (l. 3), tells the woman that he does not love her. Although she does not work through the steps of grief in the order Kübler-Ross proposed, the heroine makes her way through the grieving process as best she can during her grief. Most of the start of her narration concerns her anger. “Your last command, ‘Forget me’, will it not/ Sink deeply down within my inmost soul?” (l. 5-6). Apparently, her love has told her to forget him, which she both accepts and uses to vent her anger. “Forget thee! Aye, forgetfulness will be/ A mercy to me” (l. 7-8). She recognizes her pain and uses that to further her rage over the request he has made to her. “By all my withered feelings, ruined health,/ Crushed hopes, and rifled heart, I will forget thee!” (l. 23-24). Yet, though she resents his suggestion to forget him, her decision to do so demonstrates her eventual acceptance that she will have no affection in return. As her anger starts to subside, she moves into what is traditionally the first stage of grief, but what, in this case, has become the third stage – denial. Accusing him of leading her on, the heroine blames him for teaching her love and making her love him. “But you first called my woman’s feelings forth/ And taught me love ere I had dreamed love’s name” (l. 35-36). The woman gave all of her love and, therefore, all of herself to him (l. 54-57). Because of her misery, she tries to put down her feelings on paper but, struggling to do so, she stops.

Starting at line 61, the narrator intercedes and speaks of her tale to the audience. The
narrator speaks in a pessimistic tone, which does little to provide hope for the end of the poem. Instead, the narrator, presumably Landon, gives a cautionary warning to all who would aim to fall in love, “[i]t is thus with the heart; love lights it up/ With hopes . . . with joys” (l. 88-89). She compares love to the image of a volcano, that heats up with passion but ultimately destroys life and cools itself (l. 75-87). Once the heart is consumed with the ideal of love, its needs are unfulfilled, and the heart is “burnt and crushed/ . . . scorched and withered up” (l. 96-97). According to Landon, “this is love” (l. 98). Such a bleak outlook on love describes both the heroine’s fate and that of others, satisfying the stage of depression. As the narrator starts to conclude the poem, she depicts part of the story that the heroine has previously left out, perhaps due to her need to play the victim in this relationship. “He said he loved her not, that never vow/ Or passionate pleading won her soul for him/ And that he guessed not her deep tenderness” (l. 114-116). Apparently the heroine’s attempts at bargaining, her last stage, were not sufficient and came too late, causing him to beg for her to dispel her memory of him. The reason for choosing “Love’s Last Lesson” as a prime example for looking at loss in one of Landon’s love poems presents itself within the poem. As the narrator makes this situation applicable to all who would fall prey, L. E. L. justifies her decision to tell such a desolate account, for it is “a common tale/ of woman’s wretchedness” (l. 100-101). According to Landon, love may initial tempt one with its promises but ultimately fails almost every time. Love only helps to incite the feelings of loss, as seen through the stages of grief when unrequited love is at hand.

The “Conclusion” poem in Landon’s Medallion Wafers is yet another of Landon’s many poems on unrequited love. While the speaker never makes it clear if it is Landon herself talking, one can safely assume that the speaker is female, due to the focus on women and their
relationship with love. This woman begins the poem talking to both Love and her lover; both have misused and rejected her. According to the speaker, a woman achieves a place in life and society and remembrance by others through love alone. For this woman, she can no longer hope to have this sort of security and must turn elsewhere for comfort, her music. During this mainly internal debate, the speaker repeatedly references her lute and song. The nameless he has been a part of all her songs, so, from now on, she will not include love in her music. He has tainted her songs and, subsequently, love in general. Yet, this woman does not stay bitter about how his rejection of her has destroyed the purity of love. By the end of the poem, she admits that her heart is breaking over this disappointment, as is her lute. Both the speaker and her music have been forever changed because of her new take on love.

The very first stage in this poem is the shortest stage of all. In one line, the speaker addresses her anger and then moves past it. Emphasizing with exclamation points her accusation toward Love, the woman vents about the loss of what was and can never be again. “ALL, all forgotten! Oh, false Love!” (l. 1). Immediately from here, she transitions into the second stage, denial, and does so in a unique way. The speaker reflects on her ignorance in the past when she did not think of the possibility of anything less than love, particularly in the case of rejection and sadness. “I had not deemed that this could be” (l. 2). Apparently up until this point, she had included sorrow in her music, but she had never considered that she might experience it herself.

I did not dream, when I have loved

To dwell on Sorrow’s saddest tone,

That its reality would soon

Be but the echo of mine own. (l. 5-8)
At the same time that she deals with her denial, she lets the reader get a glimpse of her depression, for she mentions her encounter with sorrow. Her depression never develops into its own stage, but it is a part of her denial and acceptance stages.

For this poem, something unusual happens with the third stage. Relatively early on in the poem, the speaker arrives at acceptance. She tells him, "Farewell! I give thee back each vow,/Vows are but vain when love is dead" (l. 9-10). Letting him go, she knows she can do nothing to change his mind. She accepts the fact that their love cannot be revived. Yet, she mentions anger in her attempt to let him go. "But go! be happy and be free,/My heart is far too warm for thine" (l. 13-14). Not willing to let him go easily, she spitefully claims him to be cold-hearted, by her implication that her "heart is far too warm" (l. 14). In which case, he is not worthy of her or her love. Within the same stanza, her depression reenters into her tone, for she speaks of "what tears and clouds are mine" (l. 16). Because the poem is only halfway over by the third stage, it is clear that her acceptance has not yet been finalized.

Starting to waver in her decision, the woman proceeds into her fourth stage, bargaining. Not really bargaining with him or with Love, the speaker continues the debate within herself. "But I, – oh, how can I forget/What has been more than life to me!" (l. 17-18). She tries to talk herself out of forgetting him because of the memories of their love. Since her songs are her life, literally and metaphorically, his link to her songs makes it difficult for her to let go of such inspiration and life.

Thy name is breathed on every song –

How can I bid those songs depart?

The thoughts I’ve treasur’d up of thee
Are more than life-blood to my heart. (l. 21-24)

By the beginning of the next stanza, however, her resolution becomes firm. She enters into the fifth and final stage. Once again she attempts acceptance, and, this time, she succeeds. Playing on the dichotomy of remembrance and forgetfulness, she informs both him and herself of her willpower. Changing her mind in remembering him, she says, “But I may yet learn to forget” (l. 25). Twice she refers to her pride, which gives her the strength to acknowledge her own self-worth without this particular male. Moving on, she knows she will never be able to compose the same sorts of songs again, but she will not let that keep her from pursuing her music. “I yet may learn to wake my lute— / But never at Love’s call again” (l. 27-28). Even though women are inextricably linked with love, “Love, love is all a woman’s fame” (l. 32), she refuses to be reminded of him through love in her songs. Through her new songs that do not include love, she will make him notice her and how she is moving on with her life. As the poem ends, she lets her depression seep in one more time. “When love has left both heart and harp,/ Ah what can either do but break!” (l. 35-36). Rather than leave this as a rhetorical question, the woman says it as both a declaration and exclamation. She is not giving up on life but rather accepting a natural part of reality and of grief. She cannot change how she feels at this moment when her emotions are still raw, but she is not rolling over and giving up on life. Instead, she will simply sing about something else.

In “Song” (1827), Landon once again leaves it up to the reader to figure out who is speaking about what. By the references to a lute and songs, one can safely assume that she is following a motif she has in the poem previously discussed. More than likely, the speaker is female who has experienced unrequited love. While the poem does not directly mention love,
the speaker’s preoccupation with the heart suggests that the heart and love are the one and the same. According to her, her heart is slowly breaking and resulting in the death of her ability to love. Feeling rejection, she believes no one cares about her state, which leads to her digression on her fate. She spent the youth of her love too quickly and now, like the flowers, is fading away and dying. Yet, others will not heed their pursuit of love because of her fate and will likely tread down the same path. From here, she spends the rest of the poem dwelling on her music. Once again, her heart and song are breaking. Both of them are fading away into the past. Her song and her lute will soon be as forgotten as she, for she only sees death.

At the beginning of the poem, the first stage that appears is anger. Not only is her heart, and her love, failing, but her anger, symbolized through heat and flame, is slowly dying as well. “My heart is like the failing hearth/.../ One by one its bursts of flame/Have burnt and died” (l. 1, 2-4). More than likely, the majority of the speaker’s anger actually takes place prior to the start of the poem, and, so, the poem begins with the diffusing of the anger, as well as her passion, for both are represented by the dying fire. The woman then progresses into the second stage, depression. Feeling alone, she says there are “none to watch.../And none to care” (l. 5-6). As she transitions into the third stage, denial, the description of her fate links the two stages together. “My fate is as yon faded wreath/Of summer flowers,” for her life and ability to love are both passing away (l. 9-10). For, when not cared for, the flowers themselves will die. “Other flowers, unwarn’d by them,/Will spring instead” (l. 15-16). The denial, then, is not that of herself or of the situation but of others. They refuse to recognize her pain and to take heed of her warning against the failings of love.

The speaker then turns back to herself as she approaches the fourth stage. Returning to
her depression, both her heart and music are dying. "And my own heart is as the lute. . . . . . . . .
They both are breaking" (l. 17, 20). Yet, for someone more concerned with remembrance, as in the previous poem, the speaker dwells more on whether or not she and her song will be remembered.

And of their song what memory
Will stay behind?
An echo, like a passing thought,
Upon the wind. (l. 21-24)
This possibility of being forgotten depresses her more than her being unloved, as is obvious by the eight lines or so she ends the poem talking about it.

By the end of the poem, she reaches the final stage of acceptance. While the poem ends with a depressing tone, she speaks of her death, it clearly shows her not fighting her fate.

Silence, forgetfulness, and rust,
Lute, are for thee:
And such my lot; neglect, the grave,
These are for me. (l. 25-28)
She accepts her lute's fate of rejection and hers of death. It is not clear whether she is speaking about her death literally or metaphorically at the end. With the previous talk of her heart and how it probably represents love, one could conclude that she is speaking of the death of her ability to love and be loved. She can no longer sing of love; therefore, she is not compelled to use her lute. In the same way, her unrequited love prevents her from loving again. Arguably one of the more ambiguous love poems, "Song" does cover all of the stages of grief except for
bargaining. Because it is not quite as straight-forward as other poems, its interpretation is susceptible to more subjectivity but does lend itself to better understanding of the grieving process. Using a music motif in most of her love poems, Landon likes to discuss how music, which is linked to life and love, suffers with the loss of the inspiration of love.

Conclusion

The Kublêr-Ross model of the Five Stages of Grief gives a nicely-structured starting point for looking at the common thread in all these poems. Even though the poems do not always follow the model exactly or leave out stages, each of these love poems does contain enough aspects of the grieving process to suggest that loss does exist in these Romantic women's love poetry. After applying the stages of grief to these love poems, one is able to consider two reasons for this universal link of love and loss. This generation of women poets either influenced society or was the product of society. In the individual cases, the women all had biographical reasons for writing about unrequited, disillusioned love or the loss of a loved one. While this may just be a coincidence, then, one has to keep in mind that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were a time of change. Society, as a whole, was experiencing a sense of loss, then, and found poetry as a means for uniting society. The undercurrent of loss in these poems might be due to individual personal problems or because it gave voice to the bigger social issues of the day. The best way to approach these poems would be to consider both positions.

As women in a field previously dominated by men, these poets could reach more readers if they wrote about things they knew best. Drawing from personal experiences and tragedies,
these women were able to find acceptance in society and still convey an early feminist message. Trapped by the bonds of society, women, like Smith, had almost no legal standing when wronged by their husbands. To provide for their families, they needed to write about items of interest for their mainly female audiences, such as the failures that surround love. Due to their popularity, these women obviously appealed to the masses with a subject that many could relate to. By considering both the private and public aspects of these love poems, one can conclude, at the very least, that these women used personal experiences to address a larger social problem that was affecting many women in society.

Since readers today do not live in as restrictive a society, it may be difficult to relate to these sometimes dated poems. Taking a more modern psychological model to look at loss and grief in the poems, readers can find emotions and situations that transcend time, making these late eighteenth and early nineteenth century poems more accessible to twenty-first century audiences. Something like this, then, is needed as these women find their way back into the literary canon.
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