

War and the Origin of Painting in Felicia Hemans's *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy*

Masashi Suzuki

During his Italian campaign, Napoleon Bonaparte plundered about 5,000 artworks for removal to Paris to enhance the prestige of his empire. They carried them to the Musée central des arts whose name was changed to the Musée Napoléon in July 1803. With Napoleon's fall in 1815 and the restoration of the monarchies, nations demanded the 'restoration' of their art treasures. Felicia Dorothea Hemans's *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy: A Poem* (1816; hereafter *Restoration*)¹ is occasioned by the return of the works of art of ancient Rome and Greece looted and confiscated by Napoleon to Italy.

The Battle of Waterloo is "a landmark in the political and imaginative landscape of English Romanticism."² Francis Jeffrey writes in his review article of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III* for *The Edinburgh Review* (54, December 1816), that poetry on Waterloo was a cultural phenomenon: "All our bards ... great and small and of all sexes, ages, and professions, from Scott and Southey down to hundreds, without names or additions, have adventured upon this theme" (277–310). Betty T. Bennett's anthology, *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793–1815* includes "The Battle of Waterloo" of 84 lines by William Thomas James Fitzgerald in 1815, which, she notes, is "representative of the vast number of poems written on the subject."³ The poem comprises what Simon Bainbridge terms the "matter of Waterloo" (Bainbridge 159), such as the condemnation of Napoleon's atrocities, praise for Wellesley, description of the battle, and comparison of Waterloo to Blenheim. Waterloo poetry combines any number of these features.

In 1816 *Restoration* written by Hemans is also permeated with references to the battle of Waterloo, Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington (33–50), the valour of the British unknown soldiers (51), and atrocious acts by Napoleon ("Spoiler" 134). All these features constitute a core of the "matter of Water-

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¹ Quotations from Hemans are, unless otherwise indicated, from Susan J. Wolfson, ed., *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000).

² Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 153.

³ Betty T. Bennett, *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793–1815* (New York: Garland, 1976), 492–94.

loo,” and hence her poem could be seen, like those of her male predecessors, as of a genre of Waterloo poetry. In many criticisms of *Restoration*, however, nobody seems to have paid any due attention to the poem nor discussed it substantially in these terms.⁴ It celebrates — apparently — the victory of Britain and the fall of Napoleon, but what distinguishes it from other Waterloo poems is that it consists primarily of a series of detailed ekphrastic descriptions of the restored artworks of ancient Rome and Greece plundered by Napoleon.

What follows is an attempt to focus on *Restoration* and explore Hemans’s two views of art. After seeking for some contextual factors, I would argue that two views of art are embedded in the text; if her ekphrastic writings of the restored ancient classical artworks are based upon the ‘general’ view of Art with a capital letter, those dealing with unknown soldiers’ tombs on the battlefield are considered from the ‘particular’ view of an uncapitalized art. While Hemans identifies herself with the former, sharing the public celebration of the victory of Waterloo, she questions its ultimate value in the latter with an incisive critique of imperialism. Then I will relate Hemans’s ‘particular’ view of art to her radical idea of the origin of painting, involving a split between representation and material trace and conclude by suggesting *Restoration* uses a comparable structure to become a form of ‘elegy’ for unknown soldiers in the post-Napoleonic moment.

1. Politicization of Art

Andrew McClellan writes in *Inventing the Louvre* that “Official confiscation of art, as opposed to random looting by troops, was authorized by a report . . . on 27 June, 1794, the day after the French victory at the battle of Fleurus” in Belgium.⁵ In 1796 the policy of confiscation was taken south to Italy by General Napoleon Bonaparte where it was raised to new levels of sophistication. Though Napoleon manifested little personal interest in art, he well understood its value in the realm of politics and war.⁶ Breaking with the informal looting of collections in the Low Countries, Napoleon stipulated the surrender of works of art as part of the armistice he signed with the Duke of Parma on 9 May, 1796, setting a precedent for future treaties (McClellan 116–17). As a result of Napoleon’s Italian campaign, the Louvre took on an increasingly military air. Artists and the public now had the army to thank for the museum as much as the

⁴ Philip Shaw, *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). Although another Waterloo book by Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) has a chapter “Of War and Taking Towns’: Byron’s and Hemans’s post-Waterloo Poetry, 1816–1828,” he makes no reference to *Restoration*. See also Philip Shaw and Tom Toremans, “Introduction,” *Waterloo and British Romanticism*, a special issue of *SiR* 56 (Fall 2017): 309–19.

⁵ Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (1994; Berkeley: U of California P, 1999), 114.

⁶ Napoleon, who is said to have drawn up a shortlist of works of art to be transported back to France on the successful conquest of England, did use art explicitly as a symbol of military conquest. See Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500–1900* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981), 67.

Revolution. As Napoleon was preparing to invade Italy, the Directoire government sent him precise instructions to requisition art treasures:

The citizen commander-in-chief is, moreover, invited to enrich the capital of Liberty with the masterpieces to which Italy owes its reputation, so that the charm of the arts, beneficent and consoling, may add lustre to the brilliance of the military trophies.⁷

Hemans's anger against Napoleon's "rapacity" in plundering art works from Italy is clearly seen in her prose epigraph to *Restoration* from John Chetwode Eustace's *Classical Tour Through Italy* (1815; hereafter *Classical Tour*), where Eustace remarks that the Napoleon's army "laid their sacrilegious hands on the unparalleled collection of the Vatican, tore its Masterpieces from their pedestals, and dragging them from their temples of marble, transported them to Paris, and consigned them to the dull sullen halls, or rather stables, of the Louvre."⁸ Hemans invokes Napoleon as using "Power of the ruthless arm, the deathful spear, / Unmov'd, un pitying in [his] dread career" ("War and Peace: A Poem" in "Domestic Affections" 301–02).⁹

Since the French occupation of Rome in 1796 and Napoleon's subsequent systematic removal of Italian art treasures to Paris, British governments had perceived a need to build up their collections.¹⁰ In late eighteenth-century Britain, as in contemporary France, "the arts, art journalism, and aesthetic statements were used to stake positions in domestic political debates."¹¹ Artists and writers started to lobby in earnest for a central public or national gallery. Continental development provided the background for their campaigns (Hoock, *King's* 199).

The lack of a national gallery was increasingly seen as a disgrace to government, especially as the *Examiner* put it, a national gallery "established by neighboring and rival France stares us so reprehensively in the face" (*Examiner* 6 Jan., 1822). As the review article of *Restoration* in *The Edinburgh Monthly Review* (April, 1820) shows, Hemans "hail[s] with fine and deep enthusiasm the rescue of the immortal

⁷ Germain Bazin, *The Louvre* (new revised ed. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 56.

⁸ John Chetwode Eustace, *Classical Tour Through Italy, Exhibiting a View of Its Scenery, Its Antiques, and Its Monuments; Particularly as They Are Objects of Classical Interest and Elucidation; With An Account of the Present State of its Cities and Towns; and Occasional Observations on the Recent Spoliations of the French* (1813; 3rd ed. India: Prana-va Books, 1815), 2. 60.

⁹ Felicia Hemans, *The Domestic Affections, and Other Poems* (1812), ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, *Revolution and Romanticism, 1789–1834* (Poole and New York: Woodstock Books, 1995), 106.

¹⁰ Holger Hoock, *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture 1760–1840*. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 2003), 286.

¹¹ The 'plan for a National Gallery' in Britain was not realized until 1824 when John Julius Angerstein's collection of 38 paintings were purchased for the nation and displayed at Angerstein's town house in Pall Mall. See Brandon Taylor, *Art for the Nation: Exhibitions and the London Public 1747–2001* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1999), 29; W. G. Constable, "The Foundation of the National Gallery," *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 44(April 1924): 158–82.

monuments of Italian art from the den of Gallic plunder" (375). The reviewer sees behind the celebration of the return of the artworks her patriotic rhetoric in which she implies her rivalry resistance against France in terms of a national gallery.

William Blake showed great enthusiasm about a national collection of art in Britain when he wrote to George Cumberland — "I have to congratulate you on your plan for a National Gallery being put into Execution. All your wishes shall in due time be fulfilled...only now we must possess Originals as well as France or be Nothing" (To Mr Cumberland, 2 July, 1800).¹² The last sentence refers to art confiscation in the Napoleonic Wars. By "Originals" in particular, Blake means looted ancient Greek and Roman masterpieces. The Royal Academician Martin Archer Shee writes in his *Rhymes on Art, or, The Remonstrance of a Painter* (1805) that "[i]n Great Britain, ...the fine arts seem never to have been viewed by the public as a national object, nor to have experienced from the state that paternal protection, which less prosperous countries have been forward to bestow"(xiii).¹³ During 27 August to 11 October 1802, Shee was among those more than a dozen Royal Academicians who used the Peace of Amiens of 1801–02 to visit Paris to see Napoleon's new acquisitions in the Louvre. Shee suggested in *Elements of Art* (1809) that they invade the Louvre to prevent the collection from being "converted to the advantage of the common enemy and to secure the superiority of our arts as well as of our arms."¹⁴

Hemans's *Restoration and Modern Greece* (1817) are poems about the plunder of art objects by Napoleon and Lord Elgin. The notion of a competition with Napoleonic France was ever-present in the Elgin project as well. As early as 1801, when he had shipped the first two metopes to England, Elgin emphasized that the metopes were now the "prove of inestimable service in improving the National Taste" of England.¹⁵ The Elgin Marbles were purchased for the nation and displayed in British Museum in 1816. Hemans in *Modern Greece* celebrated the plunder of the Parthenon marbles and their relocation in London. She showed similar feelings to Blake's concerning the need for a national art collection.

Hemans believed that "these Marbles with the name of Phidias thrown into the scale of a common sense, might lift the Fine Arts out of that Limbo of vanity and affection into which they were conjured in this country about fifty years ago... the shadow of a shade."¹⁶ Hemans voiced an argument that Greece was exposing its treasures to barbarous aberration of plundering or Napoleonic pillage while Britain's own arts would be 'restored' from the Elgin Marbles inspiration; she says that the Elgin Marbles would bear "to light another land (England), / The quenchless ray that soon shall gloriously expand" (*Modern*

¹² William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman and Commentary by Harold Bloom (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1982), 706.

¹³ Martin Archer Shee, *Rhymes on Art, or The Remonstrance of a Painter, in Two Parts, with Notes, and Preface, including Strictures on the State of the Arts, Criticism, Patronage, and Public Taste* (London: H. Ebers, 1805), xiii. '[S]tate' includes "both government and Parliament." See Hoock, *King's* 226.

¹⁴ Shee, *Elements of Art, A Poem; in Six Cantos, with Notes and a Preface, including Strictures on the State of the Arts, Criticism, Patronage, and Public Taste* (London: William Miller, 1809), 107n.

¹⁵ Quoted in St. Clair, *Lord Elgin*, 93ff. See Hoock, *King's* 288n.

¹⁶ *The Examiner* (June 16, 1816), 379.

Greece 969–70) and improve the arts of England (“thou hast power to be what Athens e’er has been” 990).

In 1815 when nations demanded ‘the restoration’ of their art treasures, Pius VII sent the sculptor Antonio Canova, an ardent Anglophile, to Paris to secure the return of the treasures of Rome.¹⁷ Christopher M. S. Johns writes that the ultimate decision to support the restitution came from the Duke of Wellington. Wellington’s intervention was decisive, and “in all probability Wellington saw the restitution almost exclusively as another way to punish France for its Bonapartism” (Johns 178). On 23 September, 1815, Wellington wrote his view on the subject of restitution to Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, later Lord (Earl) Londonderry (chief of the British mission in Paris):

The feeling of the people of France upon this subject must be one of national vanity only. It must be a desire to retain these specimens of the arts, not because Paris is the fittest depository for them, as, upon that subject, artists, connoisseurs, and all who have written upon it, agree that the whole ought to be removed to their ancient seat, but because they were obtained by military concessions, of which they are *trophies*.

(Johns 179; my emphasis)

These are some important contexts that lie behind *Restoration*, a poem which reflects on the on-going politico-aesthetic issues in both England and Europe after Waterloo. Hemans explicitly states that ancient classical artworks are “precious trophies” (89); this demonstrates that she gets deeply involved in the controversy about artworks as ‘spoils of war.’

2. War, Tomb and Art

Restoration is a work of 518 lines in heroic couplets, celebrating the return of the looted art treasures of ancient Greece and Rome to Italy. Motifs such as empire, war, politics, gender and nationalism are all complexly intertwined around this issue. Hemans had neither visited Italy nor Greece nor seen the artworks she described at first hand but through casts, prints or engravings. As if guiding us readers around ‘imaginary museum,’ she takes us around the gallery of her vivid ekphrastic writings of art treasures confiscated from Florence, Venice, and Rome during the Napoleon’s First Italian Campaigns, and among them are interspersed brief descriptions of those cities conquered by Napoleon. The poem implies that restitution of classical artworks and commitment to the political culture that created them can inspire Italy’s return to freedom and independence — and also ensure the independence, freedom, and resulting cultural creativity of ancient Rome’s modern heir — Britain.

For a prologue to the second edition of *Restoration* are placed the opening 5 lines of the famous *son-*

¹⁷ Christopher M.S. Johns, *Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998), 171–94.

etto *I of All'Italia* (1708) by Vincenzo da Filicaja. Byron translated the sonnet in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage IV* (1818) in a section praising Italy's art and lamenting its history of invasion by "robbers." Hemans's translation of the sonnet goes as follows:

Italia! Thou, by lavish Nature graced
 With ill-starr'd beauty, which to thee hath been
 A fatal dowry, whose effects are traced
 In the deep sorrows graven on thy mien;
 Oh! That more strength, or fewer charms were thine. (1–5)

In *Restoration* Italy is described as a fallen woman again and again, whose "charms" and "dowry" are none other than artworks plundered by Napoleon. Hemans amplifies the image of Italy as a doomed heroine with a prose epigraph, as has been argued, from Eustace's *Classical Tour*; Eustace was an Irish Poet who vigorously supported the cause of Catholic Emancipation. Eustace's influential volume was reprinted many times through the first half of the century and Alexander Milsom contends that "(t)he promise that the author would discuss the 'Recent Spoliations' of the French was special since few guidebooks had been witness to the consequences of the wars that forever changed the sights of the previous century's Grand Tour."¹⁸ In the "Preface" Eustace states his "abhorrence of that (French) government" (Eustace xvi) and of Napoleon's wars "against the liberties and the happiness of mankind" (Eustace xvii).

In *Restoration* Hemans follows a sociological type of criticism that is typical of Germaine de Staël. Reading de Staël's very popular novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807), which Eustace describes as the "best guide or rather companion which the traveler can take with him" (1.30*n*), "That book," writes Hemans, "has a power over me which is quite indescribable; some passages seem to give me back my own thoughts and feelings, my whole inner being, with a mirror more true than ever friend could hold up."¹⁹ She considers "the Italianate aesthetics of *Corinne, or Italy*" as "an indirect but potent means of feminist cultural critique,"²⁰ and identifying herself with Corinne, she even writes "C'est moi" at the end of bk. 4 "Rome" of her copy of *Corinne*. Just as *Corinne* is a guidebook to Italy as much as it is a guidebook to the woman of genius as Corinne a conquered Italy's spokeswoman and advocate, so *Restoration* is a guidebook to Italy in terms of art treasures as much as it is a Waterloo poetry with an implicit critique of military patriotism in post-Napoleonic England.

Restoration opens with a sonnet, where Hemans invokes "fallen Italy" (12) or "Lost, lovely Realm" rendered passive and conquered/disgraced by Napoleon's violence. Italy is also referred to as "hallow'd

¹⁸ Alexander Milsom, "John Chetwode Eustace, Radical Catholicism, and the Travel Guidebook: *The Classical Tour* (1813) and Its Legacy," *SiR* (Summer 2018): 221.

¹⁹ Qtd. in Ellen Mores, *Literary Women* (London: The Women's P, 1978), 177.

²⁰ Ellen Peele and Nanora Sweet, "Corinne and the Woman as Poet in England: Hemans, Jewsbury, and Barrett Browning" in Karyna Szmurlo, ed. 206.

soil" (3) or "Home of the Arts" (5) contrasting an ideal of domestic affection against Byronic libertinism. She apostrophizes Muses to "Seize with bold hands the harp, forgot so long, / And hail, with wonted pride, those works rever'd, / Hallow'd by time, by absence more endear'd" (26–28), then she asks them to "Sing of that leader, whose ascendant mind, / Could rouse the slumb'ring spirit of mankind" (33–34), referring to the Duke of Wellington who had led the British army against Napoleon in Spain's Sierra Mountains.

After placing the poem in the historical context of the post-Napoleonic wars, Hemans addresses again Italy (Ausonia):

And well, Ausonia! May that field of fame,
From thee one song of echoing triumph claim.
Land of the lyre! 'twas there th' avenging sword,
Won the bright treasures to thy fanes restored;
Those precious trophies o'er thy realms that throw
A veil of radiance, hiding half thy woe,
And bid the stranger for awhile forget
How deep thy fall, and deem thee glorious yet. (*Restoration* 85–92)

The quotation encapsulates all of Hemans's strategies in the poem. "[T]hat field of fame" is none other than the field of Waterloo, and "th' avenging sword" implies both Wellington and his army. "Those precious trophies" refer to the plundered and returned works of art. The political dimensions of "trophy" are evident in its key definitions: "A structure erected (originally on the field of battle, later in any public place) as a memorial of a victory in war" (*OED*1a.) as well as "Anything taken in war, or in hunting, etc.: a spoil" (*OED*2a.). The usage of "restored" is both direct and indirect: based etymologically on the notion of giving back, bringing back to a previous condition, it manipulates the structure of direct returning in an indirect, political way.

The reinstatement of the Bourbons in the sovereignty of France in 1814 is also implied in "restoration" (*OED* 2b.). Hemans does use the word in the current political context, knowing how dangerous it might be to do so in 1816. "Thy woes" are closely related to Italy as a "fallen" woman (12); it directly refers to the fact that Italy is deprived of her art treasures. Hemans says that Italy's woes won't be healed ("hiding") even by "A veil of radiance," a crucial word in Hemans's works. Nanora Sweet argues that 'equivocal veil' or 'the deceptive veil of feminization' "'half' hides Italy's irretrievable (because sexual) fall."²¹ Although the trophies of Italian art are returned to Florence, Venice, and Rome, they cannot be *re-*

²¹ Nanora Sweet, "History, Imperialism, and the Aesthetics of the Beautiful: Hemans and the Post-Napoleonic Moment," *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism*, ed. Mary A. Favret & Nicola J. Watson (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994), 176–77.

stored: they are instead suspended in a feminine beauty and deceptiveness (Sweet 176).

Even ancient Rome's artworks, however, were originally confiscated and removed from other nations in the Mediterranean. Hemans writes:

How many a state, whose pillar'd strength sublime
Defied the storms of war, the waves of time,
Towering o'er earth majestic and alone,
Fortress of power — has flourished and is gone! (*Restoration* 255–58)

Hemans associates the migration of works of art with the decline and fall of empire. Like the later work, *Records of Woman* (1828), *Restoration* shows the cost of masculine history as conflict, war, and destruction; empire is discontinuous and fragmentary, but she believes artworks survive, though they move from one political domain to another:

For there [in Rome] has Art survived an Empire's doom. (*Restoration* 323)

Hemans seems to assert that even war or empire cannot overcome "Art" with a capital A. For Hemans the "narratives of war and empire, and narratives of the cultural politics of the imperial state, were inevitably connected with each other."²²

By referring to J. J. Winckelmann in her scholarly notes to *Restoration* and perhaps with the help of John Flaxman, an eighteenth-century sculptor (whom she quotes in *Modern Greece* 950), Hemans's guided tour around 'imaginary museum' consists of a series of ekphrastic writings on looted sculptures such as *Laocoön*, *Venus de' Medici*, *Horses of St. Mark's*, *Belvedere Torso*, and *Belvedere Apollo*. Hemans's selection of the ancient sculptures was perhaps largely influenced by William Hayley's *An Essay on Sculpture* (1800). *An Essay on Sculpture* can be taken as a collection of commonplaces widely accepted at the time. It consists of six epistles in heroic couplets with copious prose notes, and is addressed to Flaxman. Hayley gives ekphrastic descriptions of the same ancient sculptures as those of *Restoration*, and further Hemans's descriptions seem to be similar to Hayley's.²³ Her preoccupation with sculpture is clearly seen in *Memoir of The Life and Writings of Mrs. Hemans* by her sister Harriet Mary Brown (1840); Brown shows how wildly enthusiastic Hemans was about sculpture — "On entering a gallery of sculpture, she involuntarily exclaimed — 'Oh! hush! — don't speak'"²⁴ and [Brown] says that Hemans retained the most vivid recollection of the great works of art which she was taken to see. Brown writes that:

²² Holger Hoock, *Empires of the Imagination: Politics, War, and the Arts in the British World, 1750–1850* (London: Profile Books, 2010), xvii.

²³ William Hayley, *An Essay on Sculpture* (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1800), Epistle II 157–58, Epistle III 476–87, 497, 540–47, 568, Epistle V 487–88.

²⁴ *Memoir of The Life and Writings of Mrs. Hemans. By Her Sister* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1840), 37, 53.

... her inspirations were chiefly derived from classical subjects. The “graceful superstitions” of Greece, and the sublime patriotism of Rome, held an influence over her thoughts which is evinced by many of the works of this period — such as, the *Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy, Modern Greece*... (*Memoirs* 53)

Now Hemans celebrates the “restoration” of the confiscated art treasures to Florence, Venice and Rome in the following apostrophes:

... Fair Florence! Queen of Arno's lovely vale!
Justice and Truth indignant heard thy tale,
And sternly smil'd, in retribution's hour,
To wrest thy treasures from the Spoiler's power.
.....
Florence! th' Oppressor's noon of pride is o'er,
Rise in thy pomp again, and weep no more!
.....
Athens of Italy! Once more are thine,
Those matchless gems of Art's exhaustless mine.

(131–34, 143–44, 157–58; my emphasis)

By “Spoiler’s power” and “Oppressor,” Hemans refers to Napoleon and his army. “Matchless gems of Art” includes *Venus de’ Medici*, which on 16 August, 1803 was carried from Florence to the Musée Napoléon in Paris, then on October 1815 removed and arrived back in Florence on 27 December, 1815 (Haskell and Penny 325).

Throughout *Restoration* ancient and classical art objects of ekphrases are almost always and inextricably related to “Art”; for example, *Venus d’ Medici* displays “full magnificence of Art” (200), *Horses of St. Mark’s* are “Moulded by Art” (247) and *Laocoön* represents “Sublimest triumph of intrepid Art” (409). Another example is *Belvedere Torso*, which was ceded to the French under the terms of the Treaty of Tolentino in February 1797 and reached Paris in the triumphal procession of July 1798. It was removed in October 1815, arrived back in Rome on 4 January, 1816 and was returned to the Vatican Museum by the end of February of the same year 1816 (Haskell and Penny 312). Hemans refers to it as “Disputed trophy, claimed by Art and Time,” and celebrates its return to the Vatican Museum:

And thou, triumphant wreck, e’en yet sublime,
Disputed trophy, claimed by Art and Time,
Hail to that scene again, where Genius caught

From thee its fervors of diviner thought! (*Restoration* 351–54)

One of the most interesting rhetorical strategies in *Restoration* seems to lie behind her descriptions of tombs in Rome and on the battlefield of Waterloo. Gary Kelly says that “Death is a major theme in Hemans’s work,” and “Hemans was the major poet of what might be termed Romantic death. This culture of death was a response to what many say as the meaningless mass death of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic cataclysm, and indeed of most of human history.”²⁵ Isobel Armstrong notes that “the sepulcher is a virtual obsession throughout her (Hemans’s) life.”²⁶

Hemans describes the tombs on the battlefield:

Oh hearts devoted! Whose illustrious doom,
Gave there at once your triumph and your tomb,
Ye, firm and faithful, in th’ ordeal tried
Of that dread strife, by Freedom sanctified;
Shrin’d, not entomb’d, ye rest in sacred earth,
Hallow’d by deeds of more than mortal worth.
What tho’ to mark where sleeps heroic dust,
No sculptur’d trophy rise, or breathing bust,
Yours, on the scene where valour’s race was run,
A prouder sepulchre – the field ye won! (*Restoration* 55–64; my emphasis)

In the quotation, it should be noted, the battlefield “where sleeps heroic dust” has transformed itself into “A prouder sepulchre” strewn with unknown soldiers. On the other hand, she describes tombs in Rome:

For there has Art survived an Empire’s doom,
And reared her throne o’er Latium’s trophied tomb;
She from the dust recalls the brave and free,
Peopling each scene with beings worthy thee! (*Restoration* 323–26; my emphasis)

It is worth mentioning, too, that soldier’s tombs in both quotations acquire slightly different, nuanced implications: the one is a “trophied tomb,” while the other is a tomb with “No sculptur’d trophy.” What’s most important is that in the latter quotation Hemans writes that “Art” with a capital A builds her own

²⁵ “Introduction,” *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Prose, and Letters*, ed. Gary Kelly (Peterborough: Broadway P, 2002), 27.

²⁶ Isobel Armstrong, “Natural and National Monuments — Felicia Hemans’s ‘The Image in Lava’: A Note,” in *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Isobel Armstrong and Julie Melnyk (London: Palgrave, 2001), 221.

“throne” over the Roman soldier’s “trophied tomb” (318), whereas in the former, the unmarked tomb of those killed in the battles that drove Napoleon’s forces from “various fields and small farmhouses at Waterloo” (Wolfson, *Hemans* 31*n*) has no sculptured trophy nor tutelage of Art; Hemans might have thought that the trophied tomb and the unmarked tomb are on equal terms because they contain dead soldiers’ remains (“the dust” and “heroic dust” respectively), so no discrimination should be made between them. Hence Hemans is further suggesting that if the trophied tomb presided over by Art is an artistic equivalent of the looted classical sculptures represented by Art, then why should not the unmarked tomb be given the same artistic status as the trophied tomb? In Hemans’s mind, I presume, the unmarked tombs on the battlefield, even though they are with “no sculptur’d trophy” (62) nor guarded by Art, are still invaluable artworks.

3. Dust, Trace and the Origin of Painting

In order to elucidate the association of tomb and Art/art, it would be helpful to make a comparative analysis between the trophied tomb in Rome and another figuring of “the fiery tomb” (15) by Hemans in an ekphrastic poem “The Image in Lava” (1827) of 44 lines. A footnote to “The Image in Lava” says that it refers to “[t]he impression of a woman’s form, with an infant clasped to the bosom, found at the uncovering of Herculaneum.” However it was not at Herculaneum itself, an ancient Roman town destroyed by a sudden catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79, but outside the Herculaneum Gate of Pompeii that the “impression” of a woman and a baby was found. It was not lava, of course, that buried this woman but dust and ash (Armstrong, “Natural” 214).

“The fiery tomb” has much in common with the trophied tomb: both are the monuments which do not contain any dead bodies but their “trace” (“The Image in Lava” 7) or “dust” (*Restoration* 61). Also both were inscribed with the power or force that could not be resisted; the one (the fiery tomb) with a natural volcanic power, while the other (the trophied tomb) with the destructive force of war. In Tricia Lootens’s words, “The Image in Lava” is “a particularly powerful example of Hemans’s feminine antiwar writing.”²⁷ Just as Art presides over the trophied tomb and apostrophizes the “dust” within the tomb and “recalls the brave and free, / Peopling each scene with beings worthy thee!” (325–26), so in such an apostrophic poem as “The Image in Lava,” a first-person speaker directly addresses the “trace” of a woman and a baby in the fiery tomb as in “Haply of that fond bosom, / On ashes here impress’d, / Thou wert the only treasure, child!” (21–23). By so doing, Hemans animates the absent and dead beings as a crucial part of her ekphrastic apostrophe.²⁸ She is suggesting that the fiery tomb is equal to the trophied tomb under the tutelage of Art in terms of the artistic value.

²⁷ Tricia Lootens, “Hemans and Home: Victorianism, Feminine ‘Internal Enemies,’ and the Domestication of National Identity,” *PMLA* 109 (March 1994): 238–53, esp. 246.

²⁸ In Barbara Johnson’s words, “The absent, dead, or inanimate entity addressed is thereby made present, animate, and anthropomorphic.” See “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,” *Diacritics* 16.1 (Spring 1986): 29–47, esp. 30.

In the next quotation, Hemans makes a further implicit identification between the fiery tomb and the looted classical masterpieces when she emphasizes that the “trace” in the fiery tomb “Survives the proud memorials rear’d / By conquerors of mankind” (11–12), just as the confiscated Artworks with a capital A of ancient Greece and Rome have “survived an Empire’s doom” (323).

Temple and tower have moulder’d,
 Empires from earth have pass’d, —
 And woman’s heart hath left a trace
Those glories to outlast!
 And childhood’s fragile image
 Thus fearfully enshrin’d,
Survives the proud memorials rear’d
By conquerors of mankind. (“The Image in Lava” 5–12; my emphasis)

Hemans seems to confirm that although it has no guardianship of Art, the fiery tomb still has the same value as “matchless works” (101) such as *Belvedere Apollo* or *Laocoön*, because both of them outlasted “Those glories” of Empire. The connection of Art/art and mould, tomb and mould is also unmistakably clear, as in *Belvedere Torso* being “Mould of a Conqueror” (368) or *Horses of St. Mark* being “moulded by Art” (247); in the same vein “the fiery tomb” which is called “affection’s mould” (36) should be a work of art (Armstrong, “Natural” 222.).

Now what these three tombs — the trophied tomb, the unmarked tomb and the fiery tomb — have in common is the conjunction of virtual tomb with the thematization of art.

What seems to be most intriguing and interesting about Hemans’s descriptions of the three tombs is her specific attention to something intermediate. She emphasizes that the tombs in Rome or on the battlefield do not hold dead bodies but their “dust” or “heroic dust,” dust in the sense of “moldered remains of a dead soldier’s body”(OED3a.), while “the fiery tomb” in “The Image in Lava” is said to hold “seal”(3), “trace”(7), “image” (9), “print” (38) or “ashes”(22, 43) , trace in the sense of “a tracing, drawing, or sketch of an object” (OED8). ‘Dust or trace’ has special significance in view of their being a medium. In other words, through dust or trace Hemans throws voice, life, and human form into the addressees, turning their silence into mute responsiveness. What, then, does this Hemans’s preoccupation with such medium as trace or dust signify?

Now I would like to delve more deeply into her own aesthetic theory which she is struggling to articulate in the immature early work, and show how Hemans’s interest in medium is closely associated with her radical idea of the origin of image or painting.

The image of a mother and a baby which Hemans calls “print”, “seal” or “impression” immediately reminds us of three ancient myths which have traditionally been referred to as the origin of painting; they

invariably ascribe the origin of visual representation to shadow, impression and mirror image. One of the myths is recounted by the naturalist Pliny the Elder who tells the story about a young woman who traces the shadow of her lover when he is leaving the country;²⁹ a second myth deals with the Veronica or *vera icona*, a cloth or handkerchief held out by St Veronica, supposedly impressed with an image of Christ, when she wiped his sweating and bleeding face when he passed on his way to Golgotha.³⁰ A third relates how Narcissus, a beautiful youth, fell in love with his own reflection in the waters. According to Leon Battista Alberti, Narcissus might be regarded as inventor of painting.³¹ What is most interesting about the myths is that the origin of image or visual representation is said to be produced not by a direct observation of any object but by some medium in between, shadow, impression and reflection.

To make the point much clearer and more persuasive, let us take a little closer look at the myth about the Corinthian maid in particular. The subject is derived from *Natural History* by Pliny the Elder, where he writes that the Corinthian maid was in love with a young man and she, when he was going from her to some remote country, drew in outline on the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp" (Pliny the Elder IX. xxxv 43). Robert Rosenblum shows that abundant editions and translations of Pliny were produced in the eighteenth century and that the subject seems to fascinate artists for some fifty years, from the 1770s until the 1820s, when it again disappears.³² He cites "The Origin of Painting" painted by the Scottish master, Alexander Runciman in 1771, as the first work to proclaim this new iconographic tradition. David Allan, another Scotsman, also executed a work on this theme in 1733 for the Academy of St. Luke in Rome and won greater fame with it in his native Scotland. An English example can be found in Joseph Wright of Derby's. Originally commissioned in 1778 by Josiah Wedgwood and sometimes known as the "Origin of Painting," his *Corinthian Maid* (c.1782–85; Fig.) is one of many versions of the subject that were produced in England and France during the second half of the eighteenth century. In a room lit by a single lamp a young woman traces the shadow of a sleeping youth on a bare wall. He sleeps heavily and a faithful grey hound at his feet. She is posed precariously; her left hand steadies her right as it tentatively guides the pointed instrument along the line of his silhouette. Through an archway in a second room grows a potter's fiery kiln.

In 1781 William Hayley embellished Pliny's tale in a poem entitled *An Essay on Painting: In Two Epistles to Mr. Romney*.³³ The poem inspired Wright of Derby who wrote to Hayley in 1784 when the work

²⁹ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Loeb Classical Library IX, tr. H. Rackman (Harvard UP, 1952), xxxv 15.

³⁰ For Veronica and Mandyion, see Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica & Her Cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a "True" Image* (Cambridge: Basis Blackwell, 1991); Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994).

³¹ "For this reason, I say among my friends that Narcissus who was changed into a flower, according to the poets, was the inventor of painting. ...What else can you call painting but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain?" See Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer (1956; Rev. New Haven: Yale UP, 1966), 64.

³² Robert Rosenblum, "The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism," *The Art Bulletin* 39.4 (December 1957): 279–90, esp. 282.

³³ *An Essay on Painting* (London: Printed for J. Dodsley, 1781). For a full account of Hayley's connection with Wright



Fig. Joseph Wright of Derby, *The Origin of Painting*, c1782–85. National Gallery of Art.

was nearly complete, “I have painted my picture from your Idea” (Egerton 133).

Inspir'd by thee [LOVE], the soft Corinthian maid,
 Her graceful lover's sleeping form portray'd
 Her boding heart his near departure knew,
Yet long'd to keep his image in her view:
Pleas'd she beheld the steady shadow fall,
By the clear lamp upon the even wall:
The line she trac'd with fond precision true,
 And, drawing, doated on the form she drew:
 Nor, as she glow'd with no forbidden fire,
 Conceal'd the simple picture from her sire:
 His kindred fancy, still to nature just,
 Copied her line, and form'd the mimic bust.
 Thus from thy power, inspiring LOVE, we trace
 The modell'd image, and the pencil'd face!

(William Hayley, *An Essay on Painting*, “Epistle the First,” 126–39; my emphasis)

of Derby and his importance for *The Corinthian Maid*, see Judy Egerton, *Wright of Derby* (London: Tate Gallery, 1990), 132–34 and Benedict Nicolson, *Joseph Wright of Derby: Painter of Light*, 2 vols. (1968; New Haven: Yale UP, 1971), I. 143–46.

For Wright of Derby's painting, however, Hayley, unlike Pliny, locates the origin not only of drawing and painting but also of clay modelling in the maid's tracing of the shadow.

Pliny, in recounting the invention of painting with reference to the Corinthian maid, notes that "[t]he question as to the origin of the art of painting is uncertain ... but all agree that it began with tracing an outline around a man's shadow" (Pliny the Elder IX. xxxv 15). The first act of representation described by Pliny resides in the fact that the first pictorial image would not have been the result of a direct observation of a human body and its representation but of capturing this body's projection.³⁴ In the same vein when she apostrophizes the "trace" in "The Image in Lava", I think Hemans, like the Corinthian maid, finds herself seeing the image of a mother and her baby in the "trace." The pictorial image she got is not the result of a direct observation but of capturing a mother's and her baby's "trace." What concerns us most again is that both "The Image in Lava" and *Corinthian Maid* ascribe an origin of the image or painting to the 'trace' and the 'shadow,' something which is a medium between the object and the image.

The idea of the origin of painting in the ancient myths as Hemans found it is closely and inevitably related to love, death and rebirth. This is what she holds in her mind throughout *Restoration*, i.e., rebirth of dead unknown soldiers. Hemans certainly could have got a vision of them made present, walking here and there in their "heroic dust" (61) as she did in 325–26.

4. Art vs. art, the general vs. the particular

Seen in a long perspective, Hemans's view of art is largely based on neoclassic aesthetics in eighteenth-century England. As Ernst Cassirer remarks in *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, the relation between the general and the particular was an urgent problem in the theory and practice of art for a diverse group of eighteenth-century figures from John Dryden to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.³⁵ It is indeed a *locus criticus* in the eighteenth-century poetic and artistic theory.³⁶ It is well known that Sir Joshua Reynolds wrestles with the issue in his *Discourses* (1769–90).³⁷ He praises the quality of generality in ancient classical masterpieces and detests particularity as being "deformed," "imperfect," and "accidental" (*DC* III 105, 106). As president of the Royal Academy of Arts, Reynolds's view of art carried considerable cultural weight especially when delivered in an institution supported by royal patronage.

Hemans was an avid reader of Reynolds. In her letter to Matthew Nicolson on 17 July, 1811, Hemans

³⁴ For the first act of representation described by Pliny, see Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 7–12.

³⁵ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Boston: Beacon P, 1951), 287.

³⁶ Scott Ellege, "The Background and Development in English Criticism of the Theories of Generality and Particularity," *PMLA* 47(1947):147–82; Walter J. Hipple, Jr, "General and Particular in the *Discourses* of Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Study in Method," *JAAC* XI (1953): 231–47; Elizabeth A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 73–82.

³⁷ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses*, ed. Pat Rogers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).

expresses her respect and admiration for Reynolds; “I have been reading lately the memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds, with his discourses to the Royal Academy, & I am so enthusiastic an admirer of the beauties of painting, that I derived both pleasure and instruction from the perusal” (Wolfson, *Hemans* 476). Eustace in *Classical Tour*, it should be remembered, recommends Reynolds’s *Discourses* as a best guide or companion for travelers to cultivate “the discriminating eye of the professed artist” (1:19). Hemans was undoubtedly familiar with such arguments by Reynolds in the “Seventh of his *Discourses*” delivered on 10 December, 1776 as “[the] first idea . . . in the consideration of what is fixed in art, or in taste is . . . the general idea of nature” and that “Deformity is not nature, but an accidental deviation from her accustomed practice . . . particularities cannot be nature” (*DC* VII 182). Reynolds expounded the theory of generality in three numbers of Samuel Johnson’s weekly periodical *The Idler*. In the second of these papers, Reynolds made a comparison between the Dutch and Italian Schools where he plead for the superiority of the Italian School:

The Italian attends only to the invariable, the great and general ideas which are fixed and inherent in universal Nature; the Dutch, on the contrary, to literal truth and a minute exactness in the detail, as I may say, of Nature modified by accident. The attention to these petty peculiarities is the very cause of this naturalness so much admired in the Dutch pictures, which, if we suppose it to be a beauty, is certainly of a lower order. (Reynolds, “To the Idler” 352, no. 79. 20 October, 1759)

Reynolds concludes:

. . . if it has been proved that the Painter, by attending to the invariable and general ideas of Nature, produce beauty, he must, by regarding minute particularities, and accidental discriminations, deviate from the universal rule, and pollute his canvass with deformity.
(“To the Idler” 358)

However, if Hemans’s ekphrastic descriptions of confiscated ancient and classical sculptures like “matchless gems of Art” (158) or “fair creations, to perfection wrought” (93) are based upon the ‘general’ view of Art, those of unknown soldiers tomb or the fiery tomb are made from the ‘particular’ view of art because she attends to the dust or trace which Reynolds might have regarded as “minute particularities” or “accidental.”

Hemans’s descriptions of artworks in *Restoration* imply a bifurcation between Art and art, ‘the general’ Art and ‘the particular’ art. But we find Hemans re-considering the dichotomy between them. Only once are they identified:

Models of art, to deathless fame consign'd,
 Stamp'd with the high-born majesty of mind;
 Yes, matchless works! Your presence shall restore
 One beam of splendor to your native shore,
 And her sad scenes of lost renown illume,
 As the bright Sunset gilds some Hero's tomb. (*Restoration* 99–104; my emphasis).

I do believe Hemans in *Restoration* is cautious and meticulous about the usage of 'Art and art.' And this is the only use of 'art' with a small letter in *Restoration*, and it is, I should say, Hemans's most 'Blakean' moment when 'Art' ("Models") or the general is identified with 'art' ("art") or the particular. Hemans attempts not to distinguish the general from the particular but to give them equal importance or identify them. As "She (Art) from the dust recalls the brave and free" (325), Hemans has strategically placed Art alongside art ("dust") in order to undermine the dichotomy of the general and the particular. Being capable of uniting Art with art is meant by Hemans's implicit identification among the trophied tomb, the fiery tomb, the unmarked tomb, and the looted classical masterpieces.

Hemans seems careful about revealing her gender as well as her political tendencies in her works. Behind this equivocation seems to lie a subtle but persuasive tension in Hemans found between the general and the particular; it is perceived by Marlon B. Ross who points out that Hemans was to place "her political interest behind the veil of domesticity and writing political poems that take as their immediate concern the trials of feminine affection."³⁸ This is perhaps the reason why her political views became half-transparent as if covered with diaphanous veil; in *Restoration*, Hemans was sharing the public celebration of the victory of Waterloo on the one hand, and on the other, in Benedict Anderson's words, she regards "cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers" as "emblems of the modern culture of nationalism."³⁹ Hemans's views of the general and the particular are at times cooperative and complementary but at others represented as being contradictory and opposed. This near reversal is paradigmatic for Hemans's patriotic verse.

Living in an era dominated for nearly a quarter century by warfare against Revolutionary and then Napoleonic France — involving her two brothers and a husband-to-be, Hemans might seem preoccupied with domestic and political strife, violence and warfare. Referring to *England and Spain: Or Valour and Patriotism* (1808) and relying on *Memorials of Mrs. Hemans* (1836) by Henry F. Chorley, Kevin Eubanks remarks that "Hemans followed the war closely, reading the papers every day to learn the progress of the

³⁸ Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), 285. See also Susan J. Wolfson, "'Domestic Affections' and 'the spear of Minerva': Felicia Hemans and the Dilemma of Gender," *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776–1837*, ed. Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994), 128–66, esp. 140.

³⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; London: Verso, 1991), 9.

British troops.”⁴⁰ Hemans wrote to her aunt (19 December, 1808) that “Spain is the subject of my thoughts and words —‘my dream by night, my vision of the day’” (Kelly, ed., 413). If we look at *Restoration* as comprising elaborate ekphrases of returned artworks based upon the general view of Art, *Edinburgh Monthly Review* (April 1820) was absolutely right in admiring Hemans’s “fine and deep enthusiasm” for “the rescue of the immortal monuments of Italian art from the den of Gallic plunder” (375). But Hemans distances herself from the former of the two categories and turns her affectionate and careful, if not furtive, eye to the latter, the particular. If we read closely the poem with this affectionate and careful eye, we find “tombs of unknown soldiers” buried in the text as a work of art with a small letter and as a compensation for patriotic soldiers’ lives lost in war. *Restoration* is one of those ‘Waterloo poems’ celebrating the British victory, but it is also an ‘elegy’ mourning the death of unknown soldiers.

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⁴⁰ Kebin Eubanks, “Minerva’s Veil: Hemans, Critics, and the Construction of Gender,” *European Romantic Review* 8 (1997): 343.

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