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The Poet and the Profits: Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace

PAULA R. FELDMAN

WHAT did it mean—in financial terms—to be a successful Romantic woman poet? What were the economic realities and possibilities of her life? What standard of living could she achieve? Was it possible to maintain a middle-class household on poetry writing alone? What were the most lucrative sources of income from poetry production, and how did financial considerations affect a poet's literary decisions? To what extent might a woman poet participate in negotiating terms with publishers and even in making marketing decisions about her work? How might economic decisions affect her poetic reputation? We are remarkably ignorant about such matters. For the most part, twentieth-century literary historians have relied on reviews or on commentary in letters, journals and biographical memoirs to gauge the success of women poets among their contemporaries. But these, taken alone, are imperfect measures at best, subject to bias, sometimes skewed by manipulation or affected by the accident of what documents may or may not have survived. What the market was consistently willing to pay is, in many ways, a more reliable measure of the extent of a poet's contemporary audience and the attention she commanded among readers. Few, however, have considered this dimension of Romantic literary life.1

ness proposition for the professional women poets of the Romantic era. To recognize that, to explore its intricacies, is to go a long way toward understanding the peculiar conditions of authorship during the period.

The career of Felicia Hemans provides an illuminating case study; her income throughout her most productive years can be reconstructed with the aid of unpublished correspondence files and cash books of her two major publishers, John Murray and William Blackwood, along with other published and unpublished materials (see fig. 1). And that reconstruction challenges some conventional assumptions. For example, ledger books reveal that Hemans was the single highest paid contributor to Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, commanding more per page than such well-respected writers as John Wilson (“Christopher North”), Thomas Hood, William Godwin, Thomas DeQuincey and Walter Scott. Moreover, literary annuals, virtually ignored in twentieth century histories, clearly became a substantial source of income for Hemans, as they must have been for many poets of the era. Though we think of London as the center of literary culture in English throughout this period, Hemans successfully negotiated the literary marketplace without once visiting London, residing for most of her life in a small village in Wales. Indeed, Hemans earned a comfortable income for her household of seven when many publishers in Britain had become skittish about bringing out poetry volumes.

Hemans’ literary career began in 1808, when she was fourteen. Her father’s business failure had left the family in reduced circumstances, and her mother decided to publish her precocious child’s poetry by subscription to raise funds for her education. She used the London firm, Cadell and Davies, William Blackwood’s London agent, to bring out a handsome quarto volume simply entitled Poems. The poet’s mother had lined up well-placed support, but despite 978 subscribers and 1178 copies printed, records of subscriptions were poorly kept, and some subscribers failed to pay promptly. Both sales

“The Impact of Byron’s Writings: An Evaluative Approach,” in Byron: Augustan and Romantic, ed. Andrew J. Rutherford (New York: St. Martin’s, 1990), pp. 1–25. Research for the present article was partially funded by a University of South Carolina Research and Productive Scholarship Grant.

2. Hemans had been to London twice as a child, but never returned.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Maga</th>
<th>Monthly Mag.</th>
<th>Annuals</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>1816</td>
<td>70/-</td>
<td>11/18/4</td>
<td>80/11/9.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1817</td>
<td>25/20/7</td>
<td>64/7/6.5</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>11/18/4</td>
<td>64/7/6.5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>70/-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>64/19/9</td>
<td>383/13/2</td>
<td>7/7/10</td>
<td>101/4/4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 1822 | 38/4/- | 7/7/10 | 47/5/- | 18/12/-
| 1823 | 345/9/2 | 33/19/4 | |
| 1824 | 64/19/9 | 383/13/2 | 7/7/10 | 101/4/4 |
| 1825 | 60/- | 180/- 170/- | 250/- 100/- |
| 1826 | 139/8/4 | 225/5/6 | 456/13/3 | 287/16/- | 298/14/- |
| 1827 | 18/12/-
| 1828 | 12/12/-
| 1829 | 5/2/-
| 1830 | 18/12/-
| 1831 | 23/8/6 | 48/6/- | 57/4/6 |
| 1832 | 10/10/- | 10/10/- 7/7/- | 50/8/- | 5/5/- |
| 1833 | 50/-/- | 10/-/- | 10/12/- |
| 1834 | 217/13/9 |
| 1835 | 232/18/9 |

(cont.)
**Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace**

**Total Earnings for Literary Career**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Maga</em></td>
<td>£227/1/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Monthly Mag.</em></td>
<td>£280/16/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annuals</td>
<td>£930/-/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>£1,550/19/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£2,988/17/27</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Earnings for books published by John Murray are shown (in pounds/shillings/pence) in the year the book was originally published, even if payment was made in later years, as it often was. Payments to Hemans' estate after her death are not included. Also not included are earnings from four books published in Boston and edited by Andrews Norton for which Hemans is known to have received payment, Hemans' first three books all published by T. Cadell and W. Davies for which financial records are unknown, and any poems published in periodicals other than those listed. Hemans' books were widely pirated, especially in America, and her poems were often reprinted without her permission in periodicals and anthologies. From these sources she received no payment.

2. All figures for *Monthly Magazine* contributions are estimates, based upon the known rates of payment to Hemans per page multiplied by the number of pages published.

3. All figures for earnings from literary annuals are highly conservative estimates based upon the supposition that she received ten pounds from each British annual to which she is known to have contributed in any given year. Her actual remuneration was probably considerably higher.

4. In 1826, Professor Andrews Norton of Harvard University edited and published in Boston a volume entitled *League of the Alps, The Siege of Valencia, Vespers of Palermo and Other Poems*. Though Hemans received payment for this volume, the amount is unknown.

5. In 1827, Andrews Norton edited and published in Boston two volumes by Hemans—*The Forest Sanctuary and Hymns on the Works of Nature, for the Use of Children*. He secured her the profits from these editions, but the sums she received are not known.


7. This sum represents what Hemans must have earned *at a minimum* during her career. It does not include, for example, earnings from her first three books, any anonymous periodical publications, any contributions to periodicals other than the *Monthly Magazine* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, untraced contributions to literary annuals or any profits from the four books edited in Boston by Andrews Norton.
and reviews were disappointing.\(^3\) Still, Percy Bysshe Shelley was impressed enough to want to initiate a friendship, an overture quickly rebuffed. The same year, Cadell and Davies brought out another of her apprentice works, *England and Spain; or Valour and Patriotism.* Though there were no subscribers for the five hundred copies printed, the publisher's lack of interest in promoting the book suggests that it was privately financed. In the year following publication, the poet's mother complained that "it does not appear that [Cadell and Davies] have disposed of a single copy," and belated efforts to interest the publisher in purchasing the copyright were, no doubt, unsuccessful. In 1812, the poet married Captain Alfred Hemans, shortly before the publication of her third book by Cadell and Davies, *The Domestic Affections,* financed by an elderly friend, Matthew Nicholson, and completely ignored by reviewers.\(^4\) Despite three books, Hemans was still virtually unknown to the literary world. Even so, she showed enough talent that when she sent Walter Scott a poem inspired by *Waverley,* he published it in the *Edinburgh Annual Register* for 1815.

Hemans' association with the publishing house of John Murray did not begin auspiciously. Murray paid seventy pounds for the copyright to *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy,* a work Byron called "a good poem—very," printed 1000 copies and brought out a false next edition, but twelve years after he first published it, he reckoned his loss at a little more than fifteen pounds. When he remaindered 380 copies to Cadell at the end of 1828, he figured that finally he had broken even.\(^5\)

Murray's letters to Hemans appear not to have survived, but many

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3. Peter W. Trinder, *Mrs. Hemans* (n.p.: University of Wales Press, 1984), p. 6; and Francis Nicholson, "Correspondence Between Mrs. Hemans and Matthew Nicholson," *Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society,* 54.9 (1910), 1-40 (5-6). How much subscribers paid is unknown. The book is dedicated by permission to the Prince of Wales, the future King George IV. Francis Nicholson identifies William Roscoe not only as the author of the anonymous advertisement but as the one who conducted business arrangements with the publisher. (I am grateful to Barbara Taylor for calling my attention to Nicholson's article.) The book's initial stanzas thank Lady Viscountess Kirkwall, who had encouraged the young poet's literary aspirations.


of the poet's missives to her publisher are extant and are quite revealing of her desire to appeal to the public taste in order to author a profitable book. In early June, two weeks after Murray purchased *The Restoration*, she wrote,

I have been told that a poem on the Elgin Marbles, would be likely to be popular at present, and some of my friends have recommended me to attempt one; I should be happy to know your opinion on the subject.

Apparently, he did not volunteer it until the work was almost complete, for in February of 1817, when she sent the manuscript of *Modern Greece, A Poem* for his approval, she added,

Had I been more fully aware of the very limited taste for the Arts which you inform me is displayed by the Public, I should certainly have applied myself to some other subject; but from having seen so many works advertised on Sculpture, Painting, &c. I was naturally led to imagine the contrary—I am much concerned to hear of your loss by the 'Restoration' &c and have reason to think that part of the second edition would have sold very well at Oxford, as I have been told by friends that many of their acquaintance there, had enquired for it, and would have purchased it immediately had it been on the spot—I should have mentioned this circumstance to you at the time the 2d. Edition made its appearance, but imagined you must have been aware of it—As I have several friends at both Universities, and one in particular of great interest and high literary reputation at Cambridge, I cannot but think that the present work, if published, would be well received there and at Oxford,—and I could easily procure their exertions, even were it to appear without my name.

Thinking that perhaps the offer of a well-coordinated and gratis publicity campaign might not be all that was needed, she suggested,

Perhaps it would be more advantageous that it should not be known to proceed from a female pen, but this point I leave entirely to your decision—Should you, however, decide against its publication at all, I shall be much favored by your suggesting to me any subject, or style of writing, likely to be more popular. . . .

Murray did publish *Modern Greece* in June of 1817, without Hemans’ name on the title page, but he was not about to repeat his previous costly error. This time, rather than giving the poet money up front by purchasing the copyright, he entered into an agreement to split the profits with her after all expenses of the publication had been paid, and he also cut his print run in half, to 500 copies. This strategy had a happier outcome for the publisher than his previous one, for the edition sold out by September 1821 when Murray split nearly a fifty-two pound profit with Hemans. But for the poet, this arrangement was far less advantageous; she had to wait four years for a sum only a third the size of the one Murray had paid for her previous book. To Murray, Hemans’ book, while profitable, was only a very modest success compared to some of his other current poetry titles. For example, S. T. Coleridge’s *Christabel*, published in April of 1816, went through three true editions by the end of the year, for a total print run of 2500 copies, and showed a profit for Murray of 120 pounds. Byron’s *Hebrew Melodies*, published in April of 1815 with a print run of 6000 copies, showed a profit of 836 pounds. Though Murray paid Byron 315 pounds for the copyright to *Manfred* in June of 1817, he still made, after all expenses, a profit of 753 pounds.

Hemans clearly recognized that to make her poetry a significant source of income she needed to do a better job of gauging the public taste, and she enlisted advice whenever she could. In November 1817, when she sent Murray the manuscript of her *Translations from Camoens, and Other Poets, with Original Poetry*, she told her publisher,

> Accept my best thanks for the privilege you have kindly offered me of consulting you whenever I shall have fixed upon a subject likely to excite a more general interest than my former publications could claim—It is, I assure you, a privilege which I shall value highly, and of which I hope soon to avail myself.

She reveals how strong a force economic factors were exerting on the character of her art when she adds,

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7. Murray’s edition of *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* had included the poet’s name on the title page, as had been the case with Hemans’ first three books published by Cadell and Davies. The first edition of *The Restoration*, published by Pearson and Ebers was acknowledged only as “By a Lady.”

I have now seen how little any work of mere sentiment or description is likely to obtain popularity, and have had warning enough to give up that style of writing altogether—

Uneasily aware of the money-making potential of poetry and of how far she is from her goal, she jokes,

The sum you have given [for Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, Canto III, 600 pounds] really seems immense—I observe you have his Lordship upon your seal, I really think he ought to wear ___ on his.9

Shrewdly judging the limited demand for Hemans’ *Translations from Camoens*, Murray printed only 200 copies. Though the book showed a modest profit, in 1837, nearly two decades later, Murray still had twenty-five copies on hand. But the publisher seems to have believed in Hemans’ talent and potential. For Hemans, the need to make her writing a more lucrative enterprise gained greater urgency when, in September 1818, shortly before the birth of her fifth son, her husband left her, never to return and, apparently, never to contribute substantially to his family’s support.10

The following May, Murray published 750 copies of Hemans’ *Tales and Historic Scenes, in Verse*. Though she pressed him to buy the copyright for a fixed sum, he chose the safer method of splitting the profits. By year’s end, he split £23.15.1 with the poet; in March of 1821 he was to split a further £94.19.1. The reviews were good, and the book sold out; Murray published a second edition of 750 copies in November of 1823. But as was the case with *Modern Greece*, he overestimated his market and the second edition sold slowly. In 1837, he still had 246 copies on hand.11

By 1819, Hemans was beginning to garner increasing critical respect and recognition. Her *Wallace’s Invocation to Bruce; A Poem* won a fifty-pound prize and was published in the September issue of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* along with John Wilson’s appreciative comment, “Scotland has her Baillie—Ireland her Tighe—England

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10. By 27 January 1819, *Translations* had shown a profit of £22.0.8 (Murray Archives, Ledger BB 2, ff. 24–5).
her Hemans.” Fifty pounds would support her household of seven comfortably for six months.12 A female patron underwrote William Blackwood’s publication of 500 copies in April of 1820 and book-sellers sold them for three shillings six pence for the benefit of the author.13

Probably at Murray’s suggestion, in November of 1819 Hemans wrote to William Gifford, one of the literary friends Murray consulted when he was undecided about a manuscript. She told Gifford,

I have taken the liberty of sending for your perusal a few extracts from a little poem I have now by me, which would I should think, be appropriate to the present state of public feeling, if it were brought out promptly—it is entirely free from political allusions, and is merely meant as a picture of the dangers resulting to public and private virtue and happiness, from the doctrines of Infidelity—I have called it ‘the Sceptic,’ but perhaps if a more suitable title should occur to you, you would have the kindness to suggest it to me. Should it be in any way inconvenient to you to favour me with your opinion of the poetry in writing, Mr. Murray will, I am sure, communicate it to me, and I would also request that the specimen may be shewn to him, as I am anxious to receive his answer on the subject.

Murray did respond quickly, for within a month Gifford himself was correcting the proof. Shortly thereafter, Hemans asked Murray not only for a list of errata but to let her know “the price of the poem, and also the terms upon which it is published, respecting which I am quite ignorant—”;

12. “Christopher in the Tent,” Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, September 1819. A senior officer on half pay, who would be expected to support his family in the style of a gentleman, received one hundred shillings per week, or 260 pounds per year (William St. Clair, “The Impact of Byron’s Writings”). Living in a small village in Wales, without the expense of a carriage, fine clothes, wine, a large staff of servants and other costly items, Hemans could comfortably support a middle class household on 100 pounds per year.

13. The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany 84 (November 1819) 448.

14. Both her brother, Col. Browne and her friend, William Jacob, acted at various times as her financial negotiator. Murray Archives, Hemans to William Gifford, 17 Nov. 1819; Hemans to John Murray, 18 Dec. 1819, 15 Jan. 1820 and 22 June 1825; and Hemans to William Jacob 20 May [1825].
retrospective review of Hemans’ work in the Quarterly Review for October 1820, probably helped the book sell swiftly, earning the poet £27.17.9 and going into a second edition in September of 1821. Murray published Hemans’ Stanzas to the Memory of the Late King in early 1820 on the same terms, (reprinting it with a second edition of The Sceptic in 1821), but it brought the poet only £6.5.5½, two thirds of which she took in copies. When she won the Royal Society of Literature’s fifty-guinea prize for Dartmoor in 1821, she asked Murray if he would like to purchase the copyright, but he passed on publishing a work of only a few hundred lines. He did, however, increase his print run to 1000 when he brought out The Siege of Valencia, The Last Constantine, and Other Poems in June of 1823. The book sold well and earned Hemans and her publisher each a respectable sixty-six pounds. In March of 1823, Hemans became a regular contributor to the New Monthly Magazine edited by Thomas Campbell, adding a welcome, more steady source of income.

But drama was to be her big money maker, if not her artistic triumph. At Reginald Heber’s urging, Covent Garden produced her five-act tragedy, The Vespers of Palermo, with Charles Kemble playing the tortured hero, Raimond di Procida. Anticipating a lucrative, popular success, Murray deviated from his usual practice with Hemans and paid her 210 pounds outright for the copyright. The play opened on 12 December 1823 and closed after only one night, by all accounts a disaster. However, at Joanna Baillie’s urging, Walter Scott persuaded Sarah Siddons to stage it in Edinburgh the following April, where it played successfully with an epilogue by Scott, delivered by Siddons. Murray’s print run seems to have sold out. Still, John Wilson wrote in the Noctes Ambrosianae, “I love Mrs. Hemans; but if Mrs.

15. John Murray Archives, Ledger B, f. 256. The second edition eventually brought Hemans another £8.18.6, although a further £10.14.6 was paid to her estate six months after her death (John Murray Archives, Ledger B, f. 339).
17. Sixty-five pounds nineteen shillings one penny, to be exact. An additional £9.3.8 was paid to Hemans’ estate as profits on this title six months after her death (Murray Archives, Ledger B, f. 300). See Hemans’ letter to Murray dated June 21 [p.m. 1821] in the John Murray Archives.
Hemans loves me, she will write no more tragedies.”19 Indeed, Hemans barely published at all in 1824.

But when she completed the manuscript of her long narrative poem, *The Forest Sanctuary*, in April of 1825, she pressed Murray for a quick decision, despite new fears of public censure occasioned by her London stage humiliation. “I have only to request the favor of an immediate reply, in order that I may address some other plan of publication in case of your reluctance,” she told her publisher. A week later, Hemans’ mother, reflecting the poet’s increasing savvy about the realities of the publishing world, told Murray, “Mrs. H. begged to have a very early answer, (as the season for publishing is now advanced)”. The following week, Hemans wrote Murray again, trying to wheedle an answer from him:

I begin to imagine from your delay in writing to me, that you continue disinclined to publish my present Work, and yet perhaps feel unwilling to occasion me disappointment by communicating your decision. . . . I am too well aware of the disadvantages with which my name has so long had to contend, not to make every allowance for your present reluctance to publish for me.

Still having heard nothing two weeks later, she inquired whether the manuscript had safely arrived and reminded him that she had a literary friend who would “dispose of the poem advantageously for me, in case Mr. M. shall wish to decline it.” On the same day, however she confided in another correspondent, “I begin to imagine that he must have sent it to the press.” In fact, he had.20 Always aware of the value of timely promotion, on June 22, Hemans urged Murray, “As I have many friends who are looking for its appearance, I should think it would be right to announce it without delay.” When the book had not appeared by the beginning of October, she told him, “I conclude that you are keeping back my new work until a more favorable season for publication.”21 But Murray brought out the book shortly

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20. Samuel Smiles reports that Murray was hesitant to publish the book and that it had to be sent back to Hemans for revision and condensation (Smiles, ii, 244).
21. Letters from Hemans to John Murray dated April 21, 1825, April 29, 1825, May 8, 1825, May 20, 1825, June 22, 1825 and October 5, 1825 and from Hemans to Mr. Jacob dated May 20, 1825 (John Murray Archives).
thereafter in an edition of 750 copies, and Hemans earned almost thirty-four pounds by 30 June of the following year.\textsuperscript{22} She was talented; she was shrewd; she was persistent, and now it was paying off.

Hemans had at last evolved into an author of consistently profitable books. But good fortune and well-placed friends would also play their parts in helping her to increase her income during the coming years. In the fall of 1825, Professor Andrews Norton of Harvard University asked permission to superintend the publication and secure Hemans the profits of a complete American edition of her works. In an age of flagrant, even habitual, American piracies of British authors, this was an extraordinary offer. The Boston firm of Hilliard, Gray, Little, and Wilkins brought out four volumes by Hemans from 1826 to 1828, including the first edition of \textit{Hymns on the Works of Nature} in 1827. This relationship with Norton was particularly fortuitous, because John Murray was suffering financial difficulties and poetry volumes had become somewhat harder to place during this time. Hemans’ earnings from these American editions are unknown, but their sale was said to be extensive, and she had almost no book income from British publishers during 1826 and 1827 (see fig. 1).\textsuperscript{23}

Hemans was, however, developing alternative profitable avenues of publication in the British market. If publishers in 1826 and 1827 were more hesitant than usual to bring out books of poetry, the public was quite eager to purchase poetry, along with short fiction and steel plate engravings, in the form of literary annuals, then just coming into vogue. Despite suspicion of a venue that catered so conspicuously to a largely female, middle-class audience, many authors accepted large sums for contributions to literary annuals. For example, in 1828 for a single contribution to \textit{The Keepsake}, William Wordsworth accepted 100 guineas, Walter Scott accepted 500 pounds and Robert Southey and S. T. Coleridge each accepted fifty pounds. Hemans’ fee for her

\textsuperscript{22} The precise figure was £33.19.4. Murray had sold 696 copies by 30 June 1826 (John Murray Archives, Ledger B, f. 328).

\textsuperscript{23} See D. M. Moir’s “Biographical Memoir” published in \textit{Poetical Remains of the Late Mrs Hemans} (Edinburgh: William Blackwood; London: T. Cadell, 1836), p. xxiv. In 1826, a friend helped her to pay her son Arthur’s tuition at school, suggesting she may have experienced some financial difficulties during this period. (See Hemans’ letter to Samuel Butler dated 30 July 1826, British Library Add. MS 34586, f. 217.)
poem in this annual, “The Broken Chain,” is unknown, but it must have been at least forty-five pounds and possibly more. The annuals were, to say the least, an irresistible source of income to Hemans and to other women poets such as Letitia Elizabeth Landon and the Countess of Blessington, the latter of whom reportedly received a guinea a line for her poetry in these publications. Furthermore, because they had such a large sale, the annuals extended her readership considerably. But money was not the only consideration for Hemans; she had a literary reputation to consider. In 1825, she told the publishers of The Amulet that she would

have pleasure in affording her assistance to the interesting work which Messrs. Bayne & Son have undertaken, although it is not at present in her power to promise that her name shall accompany her contribution. If the Publishers could favor her with the sight of some of the embellishments, and further particulars respecting this plan, she would be better able to decide upon the nature of her own communication.

Clearly Hemans wanted to exercise firm control over her image. But she must have approved of what she saw, for the 1826 Amulet included three of her poems.

During her literary career, Hemans contributed at least ninety-four poems to thirteen British literary annuals, mostly during the years 1826 to 1832 and principally to the Literary Souvenir, the Amulet and the Winter’s Wreath. Figuring a ten-pound fee for each contribution, an estimate that is probably far below what she actually received, yields a substantial income from this source (see fig. 1).

24. Taking the total of two thousand pounds paid to authors for contributions to the volume, subtracting the known fees and dividing the remaining 1296 pounds by the twenty-nine contributors whose individual fees are unknown, yields an average fee of £44.69.
25. R. R. Madden, ed., The Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855), ii, 225. Longman’s records document that in 1832 it cost £9,487 to produce two annuals—The Keepsake and the Picturesque Annual. According to The Bookseller for 29 November 1858, “The first volume of the Keepsake, of which from 12,000 to 15,000 copies were sold is said to have cost 11,000 guineas [to produce]! That for 1829 must have demanded a considerably larger outlay, as nearly 20,000 copies were disposed of in less than a month” (498). A large part of a publisher’s costs would have been payments to authors and engravers.
27. Hemans’ poems were “The Hebrew Mother,” “The Trumpet,” and “Christ in the Garden.”
From 1827 to 1830, Hemans would have been able to support her household of seven comfortably on her literary annual income alone. No wonder she chose to publish most of her poems first in literary annuals or periodicals before collecting them in book volumes. Still, the result of such a publishing strategy was that book reviewers complained that most of the poems in the volume had already appeared in print and, for that reason, tended to ignore her later books. Her poetic competitor, Caroline Bowles, observed that Hemans' name was "perpetually placarded" in the annuals.29

Having recently suffered a serious financial loss, John Murray had decided to concentrate on the travel books and memoirs that had traditionally been his forte and declined to publish any more new poetry.30 But Hemans had already established a strong relationship with the Edinburgh publisher William Blackwood by the time she needed to place her next volume. Along with Thomas Cadell, William Blackwood had published her prize poem in 1819, and had printed her lyric "On the Death of the Princess Charlotte" in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine for April 1818.31 The previous August, the periodical had carried a glowing review of Modern Greece. In June of 1827, shortly after publishing "The Homes of England" in the April issue of Blackwood's, a poem which would become a nineteenth-century classic, William Blackwood invited her to join his stable of regular contributors to Maga, as the periodical was affectionately called. Hemans agreed, "provided," she assertively stipulated,

you should not object to the mode of remuneration to which I am accustomed . . . . I receive from the publishers for whom I write [chiefly the New Monthly Magazine], 24 guineas a sheet [that is, £1.11.6 per page] for

30. Murray had invested in a new newspaper, the Representative, and lost at least 26,000 pounds in this venture (Smiles, ii, 215).
31. From 1818 to 1819, John Murray was a financial backer of the magazine and took an active interest in its management and editorial practices (Smiles, i, 480). Hemans' publications in the periodical, along with Reginald Heber's recommendation, had probably helped interest Murray in being her publisher. When she was forced to leave Murray, he probably recommended her to his old friend and associate Blackwood.
poetry, with the liberty of drawing upon them for the value of the contributions, at my own convenience.32

Hemans was demanding more than such poets as Thomas Hood, Caroline Bowles, Walter Scott or Hartley Coleridge.33 Blackwood was hesitant to agree to such steep terms and asked his friend John Wilson to advise him on a course of action. Wilson replied with his candid appraisal of Hemans’ work from the point of view of the market:

She is the best of our female writers of what is called Poetry. Her verses are often beautiful, always melodious, but—I think they should either be all accepted or all declined. For none of them that I have read are unworthy of a place in that department of a Magazine, as verses go—and she is a popular enough writer, entitled, I think, to that right. It would be offensive to her to have them returned; and I scarcely think any of them should be rejected. Are they then worth the money? Confound me if I know! To me they are not. But, I believe, to many readers they give much pleasure. They make an agreeable break, and they are generally pleasant reading. Besides, she was, I presume, flattered by their reception, and perhaps might feel hurt by being cut off, as well as injured by the loss of the coin. I am rather disposed to think you should go on with her; but I will converse with you about it, as it certainly is a point rather perplexing. It is surprising that she is not run out entirely, and dry as a whistle. Poetry is certainly a drug—but hers don’t seem to disgust.34

Blackwood agreed to Hemans’ terms, and her “Song of Emigration” appeared in the July 1827 issue of Maga; her verse was to become a regular feature of the periodical.

In early November 1827, Hemans wrote to William Blackwood in reply to his request to print her name in full next to her contributions,

32. Dated June 13, [1827], Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 4019, f. 183; I am grateful to the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland for permission to quote from the Blackwood Archives.

33. Thomas Hood received £1.1 for “Ode to the Moon” (1½ pages) published in April 1827; Caroline Bowles received £2.2 for a 3 page poem published in December 1827; Walter Scott received 10 pounds for an 8½ page contribution to the same issue; and Hartley Coleridge received £2.10 for 4 pages of poetry in the July 1828 issue (National Library of Scotland, MS 30659).

I enclose another little poem for the Magazine. I fear I cannot allow more than my initials to be affixed to it, because having refused the same request to the Editors of other periodical Works, I might make myself enemies by granting it in the present instance.—I wish to consult you respecting the publication of a little volume which I have now nearly completed. It is a series of poetic tales entitled Records of Woman, and illustrative of the female character, affections and fate. . . . I should like to have the volume published by you, provided we can come to an agreement respecting the terms.  

Blackwood replied,

I am ever so perfectly satisfied with your reasons for only giving your initials which [?] would designate you almost as much as your name in full length. I am very much flattered by your applying to me with regard to your intended publication of ‘Records of Woman’ and if I find I can read your views, I shall be happy to be your publisher. I would beg the favour of you therefore to write me what you would expect for the volume, and as I never engage in any publication until perusing the MS. I hope you will have no objection to send it to me.

Though her reply has not turned up, Hemans must have asked for a flat sum for a limited copyright but must have been coy about naming an amount. Blackwood told her that he didn’t know what to say about the publication of your Records of Woman, not as to the undertaking the publication, but as to the remuneration you ought to receive for it. I wished very much to have had your ideas on this head, for I would not wish on any account to publish the Book unless I could do it as advantageously for you as what your London publisher has been accustomed to do with regard to your other works. I shall of course be most happy to publish the volume, but I regret to say in the present state of demand for poetry I could not venture to offer a sum for it, I could only take on myself the expenses of press & printing, and divide profits with you.

35. Blackwood’s letter is dated 27 September 1827 (Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 30310, ff. 282–3). Her reply is dated 3 Nov. [1827] (Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 4719, f. 101).
in the usual way after the expenses were paid from the sales. I need hardly say that I would use my utmost exertion to promote the sale. . . .37

Hemans had hoped for more, but she understood the realities of the marketplace. She agreed to his terms, noting that she was aware that what you say respecting the demand for poetry at present, is perfectly correct; but I have other reasons, besides the hope of profit, for wishing to publish this volume, in parts of which I have expressed more of my own personal feelings, than in anything I have ever before written . . . 38

Blackwood published 1000 copies of *Records of Woman* in May of 1828, and by July, the publisher paid Hemans seventy-five pounds and was planning a second edition. With the exception of *The Vespers of Palermo*, this was more than Hemans had ever received from Murray for any of the nine books he had published for her (see fig. 2). She would continue personally to handle her own financial negotiations with the House of Blackwood throughout the rest of her career. Eager to capitalize on her success, she told Blackwood,

I hear with very great pleasure of the success of the Records, . . . . Do you think it would answer to publish with it, of an uniform size my last previous work, the Forest Sanctuary with Lays of Many Lands?—It is now out of print, and is, I have heard, a good deal inquired for, and I have not disposed of the copy-right.39

Blackwood took the bait and told Hemans,

It will . . . do me great pleasure to bring out a new edition of the Forest Sanctuary, and Lays of Many Lands, for I am quite confident of its success. The one will help the others.

37. Letter dated 22 Feb. 1828, Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 30310, f. 417. This offer was actually more liberal than it might appear. In 1820, Blackwood had told John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats' friend, “As I told you before, we have a horror at poetry, and decline it at all hands, except where the author pays the paper and print—and this resolution arises from experience—no one poem that we have published having done any business saving Walter Scott—the publick are gorged with Poetry and the trade will not look at it” (Blackwood papers, quoted in Leonidas M. Jones, *The Life of John Hamilton Reynolds* [Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1984], p. 307).

38. Dated 1 March [n.y.], Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 4719, f. 91.

39. Dated 29 July [1828], Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 4719, f. 98.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pub. Date</th>
<th>Earnings</th>
<th>No. Issued</th>
<th>Remaindered</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td><em>Restoration</em> May 1816</td>
<td>70/-/-</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>380²</td>
<td>-/4/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Modern Greece</em> June 1817</td>
<td>25/20/7</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-/5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd ed. Sept. 1821</td>
<td>-/6/5³</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>535⁴</td>
<td>-/5/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Translations</em> May 1818</td>
<td>11/18/4?</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>25⁵</td>
<td>-/3/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tales &amp; Scenes</em> May 1819</td>
<td>11/17/6.5</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-/6/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd ed. Nov. 1823</td>
<td>60/16/5</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>238⁶</td>
<td>-/6/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Sceptic</em> Jan. 1820</td>
<td>24/6/6</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-/3/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd ed. Sept. 1821</td>
<td>12/9/9</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>230⁷</td>
<td>-/3/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Stanzas to King</em> Jan. 1820</td>
<td>6/6/3.5</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>359⁸</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Siege of Valencia</em> June 1823</td>
<td>74/12/9</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-/9/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vespers of Palermo</em> Nov. 1823</td>
<td>210/-/-</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>-/3/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Forest Sanctuary</em> 1825</td>
<td>33/19/4</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-/4/10 &amp; -/4/6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Totals: 533/15/5 | 8,950 **

1. All information comes from documents in the archives of the publisher John Murray, 50 Albemarle Street, London, and is reproduced with permission.
2. Murray didn’t break even until 31 Dec. 1828, when he sold his remaining 380 copies to Thomas Cadell, as agent for William Blackwood, for fifteen pounds.
3. This sum was paid to Hemans’ estate after her death.
4. Copies remaining as of 18 January 1837, when they were sold to Cadell, as agent for William Blackwood, at 20 pounds for the lot.
5. Copies remaining as of 18 January 1837, when sold to Cadell at five pounds for the lot.
6. Copies remaining as of 18 January 1837, when sold to Cadell at ten pounds for the lot.
7. Copies remaining as of 18 January 1837, when sold to Cadell at ten pounds for the lot.
8. Copies remaining as of 18 January 1837, when sold to Cadell at fifteen pounds for the lot.

She was clearly a writer now with a public, and Blackwood looked for ways to sweeten the pot, suggesting, “Besides your delightful poetry, I still think you could send me some charming prose articles” to increase the *Maga* income. He was shrewd in terms of marketing and told the poet,

I had almost forgot to say that I think it would be better to insert any additional pieces in the new edition of ‘The Forest Sanctuary’ rather than in the Records of Woman, because the latter being so recently published,
the purchasers of the first edition might complain, while the former being longer out many might be tempted to purchase the new edition of it as being uniform with the Records and a much better size. . . .40

Blackwood puffed the book in the November 1828 issue of the magazine, which contained the following exchange in John Wilson’s “Noctes Ambrosianae”:

Shepherd. Does that dear, delightfu’ creter, Mrs. Hemans, continue to contribute to ilka Annual [the Amulet], ane or twa o’ her maist beautiful poems?

North. She does so.

Shepherd. It’s no in that woman’s power, sir, to write ill; for, when a feeling heart and a fine genius forgather in the bosom o’ a young matron, every line o’ poetry is like a sad or cheerfu’ smile frae her een, and every poem, whatever be the subject, in ae sense a picture o’ hersel’—sae that a’ she writes has an affectin’ and an endearin’ mannerism and moralism about it, that inspires the thochtful’ reader to say in to himself’—that’s Mrs. Hemans.

North. From very infancy Felicia Dorothea was beloved by the Muses. I remember patting her fair head when she was a child of nine years—and versified even then with a touching sweetness about sylphs and fairies.

Shepherd. Early female geniuses, I observe, for the maist pairt turn out brichter in after life than male anes. Male anes generally turn stoopiter and stoopiter—till by thirty they’re sumphs.

Adept at manipulating the market in other ways as well, Blackwood replied to Hemans’ suggestion that he publish a second volume of Records of Woman by noting,

It is quite easy for you to give it a distinct title, which is always much better, for many will buy a single volume which appears complete in itself, who would not look at a 2nd volume.41

Two months later, he told her,

I find that with all the additional Poems . . . [the second edition of The Forest Sanctuary] will not extend to more than 240 or 250 pages. And I

40. Dated 20 Aug 1828, Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 30,311, f. 46.
41. Dated 4 Sept. 1828, Blackwood’s Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 30,311, f. 55.
think it would be advisable to add 40 or 50 pages more, which you could easily do from what has appeared in my Magazine, the annuals or what you may have lying [about] you. . . . I would be most obliged to you when you write if you would send me a chronological list of your writings. I expect to have a splendid article soon upon your poetical works, and I would wish to give my friend an exact list of the whole, whatever he may notice.42

She replied immediately,

In consequence of your advice, and that of three of my friends, I have thought lately of turning my attention occasionally to prose, but as I am somewhat mistrustful of my strength in any continued effort of this nature until I have felt my way, I should be glad to know whether you think a little Volume something in the style of [Caroline Bowles’] “Solitary Hours” with detailed sketches, tales, thoughts &c and perhaps interspersed with poetry, would be likely to answer. I anticipate much pleasure, and much advantage, from the intended article you mention. . . .

Then, as if to coach her reviewer, she added,

I am sensible how very great a difference there is, I will not say of merit, but of subject and interest between my earlier and later poetical works; whatever they may contain of character at all peculiar to themselves, began, I think, to develope itself in the volume of the Siege of Valencia, and I attribute this greatly to my having gained courage, about that time, and not before, to draw from my own thoughts and feelings, and also to the ardent study of German literature.—I had before written with great timidity, at an early age, and in a situation remote from all literary connexion, and was glad to take shelter under fact and authorities and classical names, from which I have since freed myself. I have mentioned these particulars because they throw light upon the change of style, should your friend think it at all worth remarking.43

A long, appreciative piece appeared in the Edinburgh Review for October 1829.44 Though Records of Woman is a strong feminist work,
its ironies and subversion were subtle, for Hemans literally could not afford to alienate any major segment of her buying public. She felt obliged to exert extreme care in this regard. On one occasion, after having sent Blackwood a poem for Maga entitled “The Broken Lute,” she reported that some of her friends who saw the lyric, objected much to my having taken a motto from Shelley. I had really thought no more about it, than that the lines happened to be particularly appropriate to my poem; will you however be kind enough to have his name omitted, though I should wish the motto to remain.45

Blackwood reassured her by return of post,

Your Poem was printed off before I read your note about withdrawing Shelley’s name. It does not signify for... with all his follies and impieties [he] was a true poet...46

In December 1828, Blackwood informed Hemans he was crediting her account for 150 pounds for the second editions of Records and The Forest Sanctuary. Because this credit preceded the publication of the latter work, it must have been that the popularity of Records led Blackwood to alter his previous financial arrangement with the poet so that he was now purchasing the limited copyright outright for seventy-five pounds. Should the book sell “as I expect it will do,” he told her, “I shall credit you with £25—more. I hope this allowance will be to your mind...”.47 She purred in reply, “I am more than satisfied, and think myself fortunate in having placed my works in [your] hands.” But always ambitious, she added,

The copy-rights of them all are now at my own command, should you on any future occasion be inclined to publish a complete edition, which Mr. Murray strongly recommends.48

The move to Blackwood was a fortunate one and would have implications not only for Hemans’ purse but for the character of her poetry. She would no longer feel constrained to make her work com-

45. Dated 14 Feb. [1828], Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 4719, f. 89.
47. Dated 18 Dec. 1828, Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 30,311, f. 149.
patible with Murray’s travel book/memoir list, though she would continue, at least for the next few years, to make use of exotic settings and to base important poems on historical record. But with the artistic freedom Blackwood accorded her, her work would increasingly become more explicitly autobiographical and eventually devotional. Moreover, she made considerably more money per book with Blackwood and, unlike Murray, where she often had to wait years after the publication of a book to be paid out of profits, Blackwood always paid her generously up front. (See figs. 2 and 3, which show that over the course of ten years she earned 533 pounds for nine books with Murray, while over the course of seven years she earned 850 pounds for four books with Blackwood.)

The second edition of The Forest Sanctuary sold well and from this time forward Blackwood always paid Hemans 100 pounds up front for her books. This compares favorably with the £59.3.3 he had paid in 1826 to Caroline Bowles for her share of the profits from Solitary Hours.49 But Hemans was still not in a class with Robert Pollok, whose blockbuster poem The Course of Time sold 11,000 copies the first year (1828) and earned Pollok 2,320 pounds in seven years. Neither is it in the same league with the 1000 pounds Blackwood paid Susan Ferrier on 19 September 1823 for the copyright to her novel The Inheritance.50 Prose, however, was generally more lucrative than poetry. Blackwood was pleased with the performance of Hemans’ books, though he thought her sales potential higher and he continued to press her for prose, stressing the interrelationship between her magazine publications and her book sales:

I am very desirous that you should try when you are in the humor for it, something of greater length for the Magazine, either in verse or prose. The very popularity of any article in the Magazine could give it a better chance of being popular when separately published.51

49. Indeed the total amount Blackwood paid Bowles for her half of the profits for five books over a ten year period from 1826 to 1836 was only £99.17.3, and, having lost £104.3.2 on three of her books, Blackwood was not even breaking even. Bowles earned £71.17 between December 1825 and January 1829 for her contributions to Maga (National Library of Scotland, MS 30,302, ff. 576–77).
51. Dated 18 Dec. 1828, Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland MS 30,311 f. 149. Blackwood had been urging her to write prose almost from the start of their association. He told her the
Though Blackwood usually cajoled, he sometimes took a critical stance to urge Hemans into prose, telling her at one point,

I hope you are proposing some prose articles for me, and that you are likewise going on with a poem of some length—an interesting Irish tale would be very popular, and be much more effective, for beautiful as your little pieces are, people look for something different from you.\(^52\)

As late as 1834, she told him, “My next work will, I think, be a small volume in prose,”\(^53\) but despite all his urging on this point, Hemans knew her forte was the lyric; she never sent Blackwood any prose.

Similarly, she rejected several potentially lucrative offers from other sources, including the promise of an assured and steady income if she would move to Boston to edit a periodical.\(^54\) But she would not allow her way of life to be sacrificed for money. Even London was out of the question, though her career would have benefitted from a move to the center of British publishing. She resisted, partly on financial grounds but partly on temperamental ones. She did not like London and never ventured there as an adult. This meant that in all the years she published with John Murray, she never met him face to face. But she did make a journey to Edinburgh in July of 1829, where William Blackwood found her apartments and where the two dined together.\(^55\) By January of 1830, the second edition of *Records of Woman*...

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\(^{52}\) Dated 24 Oct. 1831, Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 30310, ff. 282–3.

\(^{53}\) Dated 26 April [p.m. 1834], Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 4039, ff. 19–24.

\(^{54}\) According to H. F. Chorley, “so general was the interest excited in America, that a most liberal offer of a certain income, and still more, of a friendly welcome, was made to her, in the hope of tempting her to take up her residence in Boston, for the purpose of conducting a periodical. She would smile at her own unfitness for such an undertaking, while she felt with all her heart the flattering & substantial kindness of the proposal” (*Memorials of Mrs. Hemans, with Illustrations of her Literary Character from Private Correspondence*, 2 vols. [London: Saunders and Otley, 1836], 1, 108–9).

\(^{55}\) “I sometimes think it might be more advantageous to myself to reside near London,” she once told a correspondent, “but I fear the expenses at Harrow or Eton would be too great not to overbalance the recommendations” (dated July 23 [p.m. 1829] and quoted in Chorley, 1, 86–7). In Edinburgh she also met Ann Grant of Laggan, dined with Francis Jeffrey, visited Henry Mackenzie and sat for a bust by Angus Fletcher. On that same trip, she visited Walter Scott at Abbotsford.
Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace

Figure 3
Hemans’ Earnings from Books Published by William Blackwood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Earnings</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wallace’s Invocation</td>
<td>April 1820</td>
<td>50/- + 2</td>
<td>-/3/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records of Woman</td>
<td>May 1828</td>
<td>75/-</td>
<td>-/8/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd ed.</td>
<td>Oct. 1828</td>
<td>75/-</td>
<td>-/8/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd ed.</td>
<td>June 1830</td>
<td>75/-</td>
<td>-/8/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th ed.</td>
<td>Oct. 1830</td>
<td>75/-</td>
<td>-/8/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Sanctuary</td>
<td>Dec. 1828</td>
<td>75/- + 2</td>
<td>-/8/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd ed.</td>
<td></td>
<td>25/-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd ed.</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>100/-</td>
<td>-/8/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs of Affections</td>
<td>1830</td>
<td>100/-</td>
<td>-/7/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd ed.</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>100/-</td>
<td>-/7/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenes and Hymns</td>
<td>1834</td>
<td>100/-</td>
<td>-/7/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>850/-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. All information comes from the Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, and is reproduced with permission.

2. Hemans was awarded fifty pounds for this poem as first prize in a competition; 500 copies were privately underwritten and sold for the author’s benefit. If all copies sold, Hemans could have made £87.10 in addition to the fifty-pound prize.

had nearly sold out, and Blackwood was preparing a third. Now Hemans imitators were capitalizing on her popularity, especially in America. One of them even posed a dilemma for her in Britain, causing her to change a long-time policy. She told Blackwood,

I should like to have my pieces in Maga announced, for some time to come, with my name at full length in the table of contents, and without any signature. Some One, for whose perpetrations I am not at all desirous to be answerable, has adopted the signature of F.H., and I am rather perplexed as to the best means of proving my own Identity.—Even if I lay aside the use of the initials altogether, I fear I should not quite free myself from the imputations of Mr. F. H’s poetry, which really is ‘so middling, bad were better.’ Perhaps you can give me some advice on the subject.56

From this time forward, she signed all of her contributions to Maga in full.

But she was not above capitalizing on her own popularity, even with her old friend Blackwood. On 18 September [1831] she pressed him:

Mr. Colburn has lately raised the terms on which I sometimes wrote for him [for the New Monthly Magazine] to two guineas a page—if I should not hear from you to the contrary, I shall conclude that you will not be less liberal.57

Per page, Hemans had already been Blackwood’s highest paid contributor to Maga, and now she was demanding still more. But Blackwood consented the following week, telling her,

Though 2 guineas a page is so much higher than what I pay even to my most gifted friend [John Wilson], I will not grudge it to you, as I look forward to your bringing out another volume in which these can be inserted. I hope therefore you have some long Poem in view, as now that you are in Ireland, you must be meeting with some striking tales that could make a splendid story.58

Evidently, Hemans’ books had proved profitable enough that Blackwood considered it worthwhile to bribe the poet with high fees for individual poems in Maga to encourage her to turn out enough new poems so that a volume could be put to press more swiftly. Hemans earned £48.6 in 1832 alone for her Maga contributions and £57.4.6 in 1833—a comfortable living in itself. But this paled next to John Wilson’s earnings, though he was paid less per page. His considerably longer prose contributions earned him, for instance, in the six months between December 1825 and June 1826, two hundred pounds.59

Blackwood published Hemans’ Songs of the Affections, with Other Poems in 1830; though the book was barely noticed by reviewers, it

57. Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 4029, ff. 241–44.
58. Dated 26 Sept. 1831, Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 30312, f. 234.
59. Thomas DeQuincey earned £218.5 in the nine months between 22 June 1830 and 6 April 1831. Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 30659, ff. 44, 132.
eventually went into a second edition. In November of 1833, Hemans told Blackwood

my volume of Sacred Poetry being nearly ready, it would perhaps be advisable that you should begin to advertise it—I wish to know which of these titles you would think best—'Poetry of Religion, in Scenes and Hymns of Life, by Felicia Hemans'—or this, 'Scenes and Hymns of Life, a volume of Sacred Poetry, by F. H.' I trust the new edition of the Records will very soon be ready.

Perhaps on Blackwood's advice, Hemans chose the shorter title. Though she pressed her publisher to get out word of it as quickly as possible, she also resented his urgency to have the manuscript delivered and found it convenient to blame him for whatever defects haste in composition had caused. She told one correspondent,

I have been busily employed in the completion of what I do hope you will think my best volume—the 'Scenes and Hymns of Life,' though Blackwood's impatience to bring it out speedily has rather prevented my developing the plan as completely as I have wished.

The volume appeared in the early summer of 1834, but the reviews were few and disappointing. Hemans observed,

I was somewhat surprised at . . . rather an ungentlemanly review of my 'Lyrics'—the first indeed of the kind of which I ever knew myself to be the object. Very probably there may be more such in existence, but you know my habitual indifference to such things, (now greatly increased,) and I scarcely ever read any remarks upon myself either in praise or otherwise. Certainly no critic will ever have to boast of inflicting my death-blow.

Her end came within a year, in fact, far less dramatically than that of Keats, to whom she here obliquely refers. Amid fever and delirium, she dictated her last poem, "Sabbath Sonnet," on Sunday, 26 April

60. But not until five years later, in 1835. Apparently, the only review of Songs of the Affections was published in the Literary Gazette (26 June 1830), 410–11.
61. Undated but postmarked 8 Nov. 1833 and 6 Nov. [1833], Blackwood Archives, National Library of Scotland, MS 4036, ff. 72–81.
62. Dated 4 May 1834 to an unnamed correspondent and quoted in Chorley, II, 255.
63. Dated 4 July 1834 to an unnamed correspondent, quoted in Chorley, II, 262. The review in question would have been either the Literary Gazette, 917 (16 Aug. 1834), 563, or the Eclectic Review, 53, 12 (Aug. 1834), 178–80.
1835, and died in Dublin on 16 May, at the age of forty-one. In early April, word of her illness had been brought before the Royal Literary Fund, where C. W. Dilke successfully sponsored an application to award her fifty pounds as “testimony of the Society’s sympathy for her situation.” Rumors had been circulating that Hemans was destitute and were so persistent that when Blackwood’s Magazine published “Sabbath Sonnet,” the author of an accompanying brief appreciative commentary felt compelled to note,

As most erroneous impressions regarding the pecuniary circumstances of the late Mrs Hemans have been recently made on the public mind,—through what channel we know not,—we have much pleasure in saying, that such statements were quite unfounded. Indeed, the exertions of her own fine and fertile genius—appreciated as it was by the world—made such a circumstance sufficiently improbable, and must have rendered her moderately independent. . . .

Though the article goes on falsely to claim that she received a regular allowance from her estranged husband and discreetly neglects to mention that she had received a monetary gift from Sir Robert Peel, it is clear that Hemans and her family were financially comfortable from her literary earnings, even toward the end of her life, earning at least 185 pounds in 1834 and 232 pounds in 1835 (see fig. 1).

Hemans’ treatment of her Maga earnings provides another index to her sound financial standing. Because banking services were fairly primitive in those days, authors typically called upon their publishers to perform some functions of a financial institution. But these functions varied from author to author. Thomas DeQuincey, who seemed always to be living from hand to mouth, treated Blackwood’s as a lending institution, taking advances and loans of five, ten and twenty pounds at a time. Hemans never seems to have requested advances for her work, another sign of good financial health. John Wilson asked

64. British Library Microfilm M1077/2b, Archives of the Royal Literary Fund 1790–1918, Extract from the Minutes for 8 April 1835: “Mr. Dilke, a member of the committee, mentioned to the meeting that Mrs. Felicia Hemans, an Authoress of high and deserved reputation, was now in Dublin in a state of sickness and distress, when it was unanimously Resolved that the sum of Fifty Pounds be voted to this Lady, and that Mr. Dilke be requested to ascertain the best method of conveying this testimony of the Society’s sympathy for her situation.” (Quoted courtesy of the Royal Literary Fund, London.)

the firm to function as if it were administering a checking account, frequently asking that drafts be made out to others from what was owed him. But Hemans treated her balance at Blackwoods as if it were a savings account, on some occasions not drawing on the publisher for her past Maga work quite literally for years.

Still, Hemans blamed financial considerations for her not having attained the level of poetic excellence to which she aspired, once remarking that,

It has been one of my regrets that the constant necessity of providing sums of money to meet the exigencies of the boy’s education, has obliged me to waste my mind in what I consider mere desultory effusions:—

On another occasion she observed,

My wish ever was to concentrate all my mental energy in the production of some more noble and complete work: something of pure and holy excellence, (if there be not too much presumption in the thought,) which might permanently take its place as the work of a British poetess. I have always, hitherto, written as if in the breathing times of storms and billows.66

Would Hemans’ achievement have been greater had she had financial independence? Or was it, in large part, the lack of such economic security that motivated her to write for publication? Whatever the case, Hemans’ career earnings could not have been less than about three thousand pounds (see fig. 1), a total which rivals the lifetime earnings of such successful authors as Charlotte Smith and Amelia Opie, who relied heavily upon prose, both more lucrative and dependable as a source of income than poetry.67 From 1823 onwards, Hemans’ average yearly income surpassed two hundred pounds.68

67. Smith’s income from poetry during her career was 930 pounds, though she earned another 3260 pounds from her mainstay, fiction, and averaged 270 pounds per year in her most prolific period, from 1787 to 1798 (Stanton, 375–401). Amelia Opie’s lifetime earnings, which included some poetry but mostly prose, were £4181.10.4½. Frances Burney earned 4,280 pounds for all her novels, including the almost unheard of sum of 2,000 pounds for Camilla (Fergus and Thaddeus, 204 n. 26, 205 n. 27). Excluding that novel, Hemans’ earnings would have surpassed Burney’s.
68. Her income was almost on a par with that of Letitia Elizabeth Landon “L.E.L.”, whose novels and editorial work boosted her earnings substantially. William Jeryn estimates that Landon made an average of 250 pounds a year, with a lifetime total of at least 2,585 pounds, a figure that is probably far
With total book sales during her lifetime of approximately 18,000 volumes, her sales were appreciably higher than those of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Scott and Byron outsold them all. Her lifetime earnings exceeded those of Mary Shelley and Jane Austen. While Hemans was fortunate in her choice of the savvy William Blackwood as her last publisher, her financial and literary success owed much to her shrewd business acumen and her ability to use her poetic talents to create an appealing product for the marketplace. At her death in 1835, many of Hemans’ poems had already acquired the stature of classics—"The Stately Homes of England," "The Better Land," "The Graves of a Household," "The Treasures of the Deep" and "Casabianca" foremost among them.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Mary Robinson had described "The Poet's Garret" as a place with a "scanty fire," where "the wind / Whistles thro' broken panes" and the poet's "old rusty suit . . . [was] Brush'd thread-bare." Despite such characterizations, the case of Felicia Hemans demonstrates that a professional woman author, insisting on writing poetry exclusively, by the 1820s and 30s could be an economically viable entity, who could maintain a comfortable middle-class existence through literary labor alone.

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too conservative. (See Richard Henry Stoddard, Personal Reminiscences by Moore and Jordan [New York: Scribner, 1875], p. 198.) I am grateful to Lucy Morrison for bringing these figures to my attention.

69. In their lifetimes, Wordsworth sold approximately 13,000 books, Coleridge 8,000, Percy Bysshe Shelley 3,000, Keats 1,500 and Blake not more than about 200. Scott's total sales were about 130,000 and Byron's more than 200,000 (St. Clair, forthcoming book on reading in the romantic period).

70. Hemans' income far surpassed that of Jane Austen, whose total profits during her lifetime, according to Samuel Smiles, "did not amount to more than seven hundred pounds" (Smiles, 1, 283). This is probably in the right ballpark. Austen's letters document that she earned 110 pounds for the copyright of Pride and Prejudice, 140 pounds for the first edition of Sense and Sensibility, and twenty pounds for the second edition (letters dated July 1813 and November 1812). Mary Shelley's lifetime literary earnings did not rival Hemans'. For example, her earnings from Frankenstein were surprisingly low. After her initial payment of £41.66 for her share of the profits from the first edition, she made an additional thirty pounds from the 1831 Bentley reprint (St. Clair, forthcoming book). Mary Shelley did negotiate more for subsequent novels, for example, 300 pounds for The Last Man (Sylvia Norman, ed., After Shelley, The Letters of Thomas Jefferson Hogg to Jane Williams [London: Oxford University Press, 1934], p. 61), but an independent income from her father-in-law supplemented her literary earnings. In an average year, Hemans earned more than Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Blake or John Keats each made from poetry in their respective lifetimes. Neither Hemans nor any of the now canonized Romantic poets made more than Byron, whose lifetime earnings were approximately 20,000 pounds (St. Clair, forthcoming book).