

The Imperial Picturesque in Felicia Hemans' "The Indian City"

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Summary

This essay studies Felicia Hemans' *The Indian City* as embodying an aesthetic view of India. The essay argues that the poem deploys the aesthetic of the picturesque in order to produce a cultural fable about the collapse of an Indian city. The first section maps Hemans' "Indian picturesque" and its pastoral *Concordia discors* in which diverse elements exist in harmony, and with a definite feminisation of the landscape. In the second section, it shows how this picturesque is subverted through an emphasis on the moral geography of the city; the feminisation of the land continuing in a different fashion. In the final section the essay argues that the civic picturesque of the poem retreats behind the natural picturesque, a process again initiated by the woman's presence, even as the landscape itself serves as a space of gendered memorialisation. It argues that, ultimately, Hemans presents the Oriental woman as politically ineffectual because although Maimuna is initially a point of political coalition she slides into the role of a sentimental mother blunting her political role and ambitions.

Opsomming

Hierdie essay bestudeer *The Indian City* deur Felicia Hemans as omvattend van 'n estetiese beskouing van Indië. Die essay voer aan dat die gedig die estetika van die pikareske aanwend om 'n kulturele fabel oor die ineenstorting van 'n Indiese stad te skep. Die eerste gedeelte stippel Hemans se "Indiese pikareske" en sy herderlike *Concordia discors* uit, waarin diverse elemente in harmonie voorkom, en met 'n definitiewe vervrouliking van die landskap. In die tweede gedeelte wys dit hoe hierdie pikareske omgekeer word deur klem te lê op die morele geografie van die stad, terwyl die vervrouliking van die land op 'n ander manier voortgaan. In die laaste gedeelte, beredeneer die essay dat die stedelike pikareske van die gedig terugsak agter die natuurlike pikareske – 'n proses wat weereens deur die vrou se teenwoordigheid geïnisieer is – selfs terwyl die landskap self dien as 'n ruimte vir geslagspesifieke herdenking. Dit voer aan dat Hemans uiteindelik die Oorsterse vrou as politieke nutteloos voorstel, omdat – hoewel Maimuna aanvanklik 'n punt van politieke bondgenootskap is – sy die rol aanneem van 'n ma wat haar politieke rol en ambisies afrond.

As a poet, Felicia Hemans (1793-1835) presented herself as a nationalist and patriot, and as concerned with questions of womanhood and motherhood as with Britain's geopolitical significance (Lootens 1994). Whether this nationalism and its attendant military patriotism also carried within it an Orientalist impulse is arguable, although poems like the one that is the subject of this essay certainly seem to merge the militaristic with Orientalist attitudes, and both manifest in the representation of the non-European woman. The epigraph of the poem, from Byron, famous for his *Eudora* ("The Bride of the Greek Isle"), suggests Hemans' embeddedness in a particular kind of Orientalism where the Oriental woman offers a model of female heroism (Osman 2006). Women poets like Hemans, Anne Mellor has proposed, "participated fully in the discursive public sphere and in the formation of public opinion in Britain by the late eighteenth century" (2000: 7). Hemans' "The Indian City" offers up in the character of Maimuna such a public figure, a heroine, a warrior and, of course, a mother, thus bridging multiple worlds. By casting a non-European woman in this kind of public role, Hemans might well be offering a model for the European woman although, as I shall demonstrate, she ends up depoliticising Maimuna's revolt. It also retains the Orientalist paradigm, first examined by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), of imagining the East as static, falling to ruins, or the equivalent of Europe's premodern past.

This essay argues that Felicia Hemans' poem "The Indian City" might be taken as an instantiation of Hemans' aesthetic vision of India, and whose aesthetic enables her to, on the one hand, offer a model of female heroism in Maimuna, but on the other both depoliticise such heroism and track the collapse of the (Oriental) city to Maimuna's actions. The poem, the essay suggests, is a cultural fable that imagines the collapse of an Indian city. A cultural fable, usually a mechanism to alleviate cultural and national anxieties, is a "collective enterprise" with tremendous aesthetic power (Brown 2001: 1-4). In Hemans the aesthetic power comes from a deft deployment of the picturesque, specifically an imperial picturesque, which I take to be the dominant mode of viewing India in the poem. The imperial picturesque in the poem moves through three specific stages. In the first the aesthetic functions in the mode of the traditional picturesque, mapping a peaceful pastoral setting of calming sensory potential. In the second, the aesthetic acquires a moral-affective dimension that seems to unearth the alleged evil and tragedy lurking underneath the native city's picturesque scene. In the final stage, the aesthetic is almost entirely given over to the ruin in order to generate what I term the "ruin picturesque" an aesthetic centres the decay of a city as a melancholic spectacle and a haunting reminder of war, destruction and mortality.

Hemans forges an implicit and later explicit link between the picturesque aesthetic and gender in the course of the poem's progress. Further, as I shall demonstrate, Hemans' aesthetic vision depoliticises the subcontinent's

potential for change by attributing the change to affect and sentiment rather than any political rationality of the natives. The picturesque thus functions as a political aesthetic here, moving from the mapping of an idyllic, if exotic, Asian setting, to its slow collapse into ruin.

The picturesque was theorised in England during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and executed in the form of landscape efforts and plans by William Gilpin, Uvedale Price, Richard Payne Knight, “Capability” Brown and Humphrey Repton. It was interested in the “aesthetics of poverty” (Andrews 1994), seeking to improve and alter the land for more pleasing effect (Andrews 1989; Daniels & Watkins 1994). Taste, aesthetics, and landscaping were aligned with class and gender, as studies of the politics of the picturesque have pointed out (Copley & Garside 1994; Bermingham 1994; Fulford 1996; Bohls 1997). The picturesque was not, however, restricted to English descriptions of their country, but very often spilled over into their accounts of other nations, regions and cultures. In the case of the Indian subcontinent, numerous works from the last decades of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth capture a picturesque India. Bishop Reginald Heber and James Tod were described by reviewers and readers as having detailed a picturesque India (*Athenæum* 21 March 1828: 259-260; 28 March 1828: 295-296; 21 October 1859: 654). The artists Thomas and William Daniell (1784-1794) and William Hodges (1793) painted picturesque Indian scenes. James Forbes, who travelled in India between 1765 and 1784, left over 500 sketches, paintings, and portraits, which were crucial in making exotic India available to the English back home, and even contributed, critics believe, in significant ways to the Romantic aesthetic (De Almeida & Gilpin 2005). Emma Roberts published poetry and prose on the theme (*Oriental Scenes*, 1832). Fanny Parks titled her India travelogue *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque* (1850).

The *Athenæum* declared that India’s “picturesque splendour” was worth admiring although it might not be “in conformity with the canons of academic taste” (28 August 1832: 556). Studies of this colonial and imperial picturesque have attempted to document the variations from the canon and “academic taste” that the *Athenæum* gestured at. Sara Suleri suggests that for the female English traveller the aesthetic “temporarily converted the subcontinental threats into watercolors and thereby domesticated into a less disturbing system of belonging” (1992: 75-76). Nigel Leask argues that the imperial picturesque rejected details and the survey mode (2002: 166-168). Romita Ray examining the Englishwoman’s picturesque proposes that the “imperial picturesque” “represented the colonial landscape as an aesthetically pleasing still-life instead of a politically unstable mass of land” (1998: 90). The numerous missionaries who kept detailed accounts of their lives in India evolved a new canon of the colonial picturesque, an aesthetic that was *transformative* and converted India into a site of English labour

aimed at achieving a *Concordia discors* the conceptualisation of encirclement that signified harmonious variety and balance. It was a principle of reconciling opposites, such as nature and culture (Andrews 1989; Cosgrove 2001; Nayar 2008). The picturesque was also an aesthetic of exoticisation (Nayar 2012).

With no English traveller or observer, Felicia Hemans' "The Indian City" provides a bird's eye view of the events unfolding in an anonymous Indian city. This bird's eye view is, however, not simply the "monarch-of-all-I-survey" scene of travel narratives (as M.L. Pratt theorizes, 1992) nor is it a "prospect" view in the sense that John Barrell has argued (1985). Rather, as I shall show, it is a textual picturesque, of a picture-perfect Indian 'scene' that then mutates into a scene of cultural conflict and civilisational collapse.

The Indian Picturesque

Hemans' Indian picturesque opens traditionally, using the visual vocabulary associated with the aesthetic. She presents two clear "domains" of the picturesque: the natural and the civic.¹ The Indian picturesque in Hemans is a landscape of variety, harmony and serenity. It is also feminine.

The natural picturesque is embodied in the account of the aesthetic appeal of natural scenery in the subcontinent. (Hemans does not give us any history of this city, and the poem offers us no temporality to the events being narrated in the poem.) Hemans (2013) also offers a catalogue in order to convey the sense of variety, so that the first section of the poem functions more like a collector's or encyclopaedist's narrative. She describes

the plantain glitter'd with leaves of gold,
As a tree midst the genii-gardens old,
And the cypress lifted a blazing spire,
And the stems of the cocoas were shafts of fire.
Many a white pagoda's gleam ...

(p. 235)

She goes onto inventory lotuses, lakes, streams, cane, stags and birds in subsequent lines. Hemans also conveys a sense of the fantasmatic antiquity of the landscape by invoking "genii-gardens old". The antiquity of the place is of course self-evident with her account of the banyan tree – one of the longest living trees on the subcontinent. The picturesque is in the details of an uneventful landscape. Besides the omniscient narrator through whose eyes we see these details, there are two additional "gazers" on the Indian landscape figure in the poem: the Muslim woman and her son. The former initially finds the landscape quiet, calming and beautiful:

1. I take the idea of the civic picturesque from Malcolm Andrews 1994.

For the pomp of the forest, the wave's bright fall,
The red gold of sunset – she lov'd them all.

(p. 237)

The boy, likewise, is dazzled by the beauty of the city and its settings:

He gazed where the stately city rose
Like a pageant of clouds in its red repose ...
He track'd the brink of the shining lake,
By the tall canes feathr'd in tuft and brake.

(p. 236)

His eye, writes Hemans, had a “kindling flash” in it. Thus both mother and son are transfixed by the beauty of the natural and the manmade scenery of the forest and the city.

But Hemans also dovetails the natural picturesque into the civic picturesque when she merges man-made and natural structures in the area. In the very first landscape description we are told that there is a “crown of domes o'er the forest high”. The banyan tree – an iconic horticultural marvel in colonial writings on India – and its branches are like “pillar'd vaults” creating “torch-lit aisles midst the solemn wood”. The city itself is perceived by the wandering Muslim boy to be “a pageant of clouds”.

The natural and civic picturesque are also aligned through the presence of a woman, or rather many women:

Many a graceful Hindoo maid,
With the water-vase from the palmy shade,
Came gliding light as the desert's roe,
Down marble steps to the tanks below;

(p. 236)

The Hindu maid represents at once nature and culture: she is a graceful human who “glides” like a “desert roe”. Feminising nature and naturalising the feminine (a key feature of the English Romantic poets, as Anne Mellor, 1993, has demonstrated), Hemans feminises the picturesque itself. Stepping lithely, like a roe, across architectural features (the tank steps), the Hindu woman epitomises the sleepy and harmless picturesque of India. Aligning the picturesque with an erotic geography, Hemans suggests the feminine as a foundational component of the Indian scene. Later in the same section we are informed that Maimuna, another native woman, has pitched her tent in the city's “glorious bowers” and was enjoying the “pomp of the forest, the wave's bright fall”. She also perceives the city as quiet and she wishes “calmly to linger a few brief hours”. Here again a woman's presence in a tent in the forest seems to be natural, since it is, after all, an Indian city's outskirts.

Hemans portrays a landscape of safety: the woman rests in her tent near the edge of the city and her young son goes wandering off alone. The Indian picturesque is a space of incredible stillness, lacking almost all movement and therefore portraying a soporific landscape, except for the boy who leaps, swims and walks. But this set of boyish actions too adds to the sense of the landscape as a *secretum iter*: it is a landscape where the boy can wander about with complete abandon, since the land *appears* to be safe and secure. The poem's opening does not offer conflict or even dynamism because everything, natural and civic, seems to be in harmony with everything else. Hemans crowds several images of this sleepy landscape into the opening sections. "Calm" and "quiet" would appear to be the dominant mood of the first parts of the poem so that when the crisis occurs the effect is all the more palpable. The city, like the surrounding landscape, is in "repose", the pagoda's gleam "slept lovely round upon lake and stream", and it is the sun's "last hours". Even the waters of the lake appear "enshrin'd", says Hemans. Given that the forest functions as the space of the mother's temporary retirement from the stresses of travel, it is a *secretum iter* as well. The visual dominates in Hemans' picturesque. The senses are lulled into a somnambulant state, and all you hear is a "murmur" in the "scented air". What Hemans underscores in this account of the Indian picturesque is primarily its quiet safety and beauty.

Hemans' Indian picturesque is essentially the representation of a *Concordia discors*. In Hemans' opening moments of the imperial picturesque both nature and culture come together. The domes seem to arch over the forest in the opening lines. The forest seems to acquire an architectural feature of lighting due to the banyan tree's branches creating aisles of light. The maze of paths finally reach, writes Hemans, "to the very heart of the holy ground", suggesting a convergence, which is a feature of the *Concordia discors*. What we see here is the *Concordia discors* in which man-made culture (buildings, tanks, tents) seems to be seamlessly merged with nature (this anticipates the ending of the poem where it does become impossible to differentiate the two).

This calm landscape of a *Concordia discors* is the inaugural moment of the picturesque.

The Picturesque Subverted

Having offered us the *Concordia discors* where culture and Nature are seamlessly intertwined, Hemans proceeds to demonstrate the assertion of the civic picturesque, an assertion that begins to effectively dismantle the *Concordia discors*.

Section II opens with the death of the Muslim boy. Hemans first ponders if his injury is from a serpent or a tiger – thus continuing to foreground the natural picturesque (now bordering on the unsafe picturesque, of course).

The boy from the high-arch'd woods came back
Oh! what had he met in his lonely track?
The serpent's glance, through the long reeds bright?
The arrowy spring of the tiger's might?

(p. 237)

But then it emerges that the boy's fatal injuries have nothing to do with nature.

Murmuring faintly of wrongs and scorn,
And wounds from the children of Brahma born:
This was the doom for a Moslem found
With a foot profane on their holy ground;
This was for sullyng the pure waves, free
Unto them alone – 'twas their God's decree.

(p. 237)

Hemans first shows the erosion of India's civic picturesque where the quiet landscape is a mere façade for the evil within: the boy was attacked by Brahmin boys for stepping on to Hindu holy grounds.

In this place of quiet repose and silent natural beauty, man alone is vile. In keeping with a tradition of colonial aesthetics that traced evil underneath the picturesque landscape (Nayar 2008: 104-106), Hemans now peoples the land with horrors: a young, innocent boy is killed for unknowingly stepping on to holy ground. Implicit in Hemans' account here is the moral geography of the place where evil and intolerance lurk beneath the surface beauty. With this Hemans begins to erode the power of the picturesque.

Hemans, having shifted the civic picturesque into a troubling moral geography of the landscape – thereby also offering a moral interpretation of the aesthetic – then almost entirely abandons the aesthetic in favour of the affective. In the next set of lines, Hemans shifts attention abruptly: on to the *sentimental* effects and response to the landscape of the boy's suffering. This affective geography has two determining moments in the poem: the mother's grief and the smiling Brahman groves.

We are first told the boy "breathed ... / like a low-voiced dove". The grief-stricken mother "mother shriek'd not then", as her soul "sat veil'd in its agony". When she bows, she does so "mutely", says Hemans, thus retaining the sense of languor and quietude. And then the change occurs:

And shrieking, mantled her head from sight,
And fell, struck down by her sorrow's might!

(p. 238)

Maimuna, the mother of the poor boy, rends the air with her screams here.
When she rises again the landscape's picturesqueness is all but fled:

She rose
Like a prophetess from dark repose!

(pp. 238-239)

Then Maimuna swears revenge on the city:

And said – "Not yet–not yet I weep,
Not yet my spirit shall sink or sleep,
Not till yon city, in ruins rent,
Be piled for its victim's monument.
– Cover his dust! bear it on before!
It shall visit those temple-gates once more."

(p. 239)

During all this, the "Bramin groves", says Hemans, smil'd/as the mother pass'd with her slaughter'd child. The landscape, Hemans suggests with her anthropomorphic image of the smiling landscape, participates in the tragedy in some significant way. Here the poem's landscape imagery turns right around. From the *secretum iter* where the boy and his mother rested or wandered in complete abandon and with a sense of security, the landscape has metamorphosed into something monstrous. In Hemans' moral interpretation of the landscape, it is no more the "plain" Indian picturesque, for beneath the external passive beauty lurks evil that laughs at a mother's grief.

If in section I the Hindu maid's presence feminised the picturesque, Maimuna's screams and oath take it all away. As in her poem "War and Peace" with its image of the "imploring mother", Hemans attributes Maimuna's grief with enormous powers. Hemans presents the Muslim woman as the agent of change although, as Sharifah Aishah Osman notes, motherhood is invariably associated with martyrdom (2006). As the instrument of retribution, Maimuna will change the picturesque setting into the space of conflict. In her acts of mourning Hemans finds the origins of landscape transformation itself. In her grief familial and communitarian forces seem to converge, as we shall see. In other words, Hemans sentimentalises the picturesque through a gendered image: the grieving mother.

It is important that section III opens, in sharp contrast to the first two that were dominated by the visual as we have noted, with aural images:

Hark! a wild sound of the desert's horn
Thro' the woods round the Indian city borne,
A peal of the cymbal and tambour afar –
War! 'tis the gathering of Moslem war!

(p. 239)

The shift in the dominant imagery, from the visual to the aural itself marks an erosion of the picturesque. This shift is anticipated in Maimuna's screams of anguish at her son's death, and Hemans' sentimentalisation of the picturesque is coterminous with the shift from the visual to the aural: from an account of the visual appeal of the land the poem moves on to the sounds of anguish (Maimuna's) and anger (the Muslim hordes') in the land. I would go so far as to propose that the visual appeal of the Indian landscape is effectively undermined by the shift to the aural image, depicting the land as a place of competing sensory perceptions rather than a harmonious mingling of the many senses.

The shift in the dominant imagery also enables Hemans to set up one of the poem's key themes, of Muslim aggression. Till this moment in time, except for the chanting the Hindu has been portrayed as a passive creature. It is only in defence of his hallowed ground that the Hindu is stirred to action, and results in the killing of the Muslim boy. But the Muslim seems to be very willing to take up arms and march into battle. The shift from the quiet Indian landscape to the noisy one is the transition Hemans suggests from a Hindu landscape (the "Brahmin groves") to a Muslim one that, as we shall see, is encoded as ruin.

Maimuna's presence also erodes the *Concordia discors* of the early Arcadia in another way. She now unites different tribes and chieftains to her cause. The Tartar and the "chief of Araby" are both on her side and their "chain of long lances begirt the wall" of the city. The *convergence* and encirclement here is of different tribes and perhaps even races in Maimuna's cause, and this transforms the landscape into a militant one. At the centre of this transformation and heightened conflict of the Hindus and Muslims is the mother's grief. Tricia Lootens has proposed that Hemans' poems often portray a "deadly collision course between female figures and a state whose brutality is implicitly unveiled as senseless" (1994: 242-243). In "The Indian City" Hemans shows a native woman, the victim of a culture's (Brahmin-Hindu) brutal intolerance becoming the centre of a resistance movement. Even nature seems to quake, as the poem abandons all the early descriptors of a passive Indian picturesque:

And the canes that shook as if winds were high,
When the fiery steed of the waste swept by;
And the camp as it lay like a billowy sea,
Wide round the sheltering Banian tree.

(p. 239, emphasis added)

From the early moments when the landscape's quietude seemed to eddy around, in a *Concordia discors*, around the banyan tree, we now have forces and currents of violence and waste, destruction and fury converging on to the tree.

The picturesque's *Concordia discors* falls away as Hemans maps the collapse of the harmonious unity by describing surging crowds and noisy presences. If the "Hindoo maids" and Maimuna marked the feminine picturesque of the first section, here in the third, Maimuna is once again the agent of the anti-picturesque or the ruin picturesque.

The Ruin Picturesque

There are three identifiable components of Hemans' ruin picturesque: the feminine "causes" of ruin, the naturalisation of ruin and the ruin-memorial. I therefore depart from Romita Ray's assumption that the imperial picturesque only depicted still-life in the colony. My argument *contra* Ray is that the imperial picturesque functions to show the collapse of the Indian picturesque landscape into ruin. It maps movement, not still life, albeit a movement into collapse.

The imperial picturesque, sliding from the passive scenic to the ruin, is also therefore the site of the powerless maternal in the setting of the Arcadian Indian city. Maimuna's failure to protect her child might be read as her implicit trust in the passivity of the scenic landscape. "His mother look'd from the tent the while, /O'er heaven and earth with a quiet smile", writes Hemans, gesturing at the mother's ill-founded confidence in the land that her son was exploring at the moment. Fooled by the landscape's soporific and sensuous passivity, Maimuna does not accompany her son into the woods. The poem, I propose, deploys the aesthetic therefore, to show how the native woman does not read correctly the moral foundations of the picturesque land. If during the picturesque phase in English writing, as Elizabeth Bohls and others have argued, the woman needed to be instructed in "appreciating" the landscape, Hemans seems to suggest that the native woman, who ought to know better since it is "their" land, does not understand the landscape at all. The powerless maternal is therefore not simply the ruins of the maternal but the inability to move beyond the surface beauty of the landscape to the evil within. The ruined maternal and the ruined city seem to supplement each other.

The woman's failure to "read" the landscape results in the death of her son. But the mother's resultant grief transforms the land. The ruin picturesque, an aesthetic driven as much by an appeal to sentiment as it is by the appeal to the visual sense, is initiated through the woman's grieving presence on the pastoral landscape. One woman's grief becomes the originary moment of collective action and the anterior moment to a civilisational collapse. Maimuna now assumes an entirely different role: from mother and pilgrim (she is on her way to Mecca) she becomes a grieving mother and now she is a "queenly foe". Her eyes carry a "wild flash" and she functions as a "spirit and a sign", thereby suggesting both

materiality and a mysticism to the forthcoming martial acts. Hemans clearly renovates the stereotype of the vulnerable and quiet native woman here.

The Hindu woman was described as a quiet and graceful creature, and the Muslim woman is a fiery warrior. The landscape was rendered picturesque by the Hindu woman, and the Muslim woman inserts a discrepancy into the civic picturesque by promising ruination. From the languorous landscape of the former, Maimuna and her grief convert it into a martial one. If the picturesque, as noted above, is an aesthetic of transformation, Hemans' imperial picturesque traces this transformation to the woman's presence and reprised role. Screams, the sounds of weaponry and the noises from horses and warriors transform the landscape once characterised by mere "murmurs", where Maimuna herself was once described as "murmuring".

This civilisational-civic collapse is primarily to do with India's communal cauldron. Hemans maps the landscape as one characterised by Hindu-Muslim conflict. Historians such as Gyanendra Pandey (1992) have demonstrated how colonial historiography saw Hindu-Muslim communal clashes as being of great antiquity, where every incident was treated not as a singular case but one more reiteration of an old, persistent problem. This "old" problem is also part of the evil lurking underneath the passive picturesqueness of the land (the moral interpretation of the Indian picturesque I have already referred to).

Falling back upon the colonial stereotype of depicting the natives only in the form of crowds, Hemans effaces the appeal of the quiet landscape and replaces it with a martial *woman* figure and her army. It is also important to note that Hemans shows the uprising as driven not by political considerations but by collective mourning. The tribesmen support Maimuna as an injured mother, not as a political leader. It is personal grief harnessed into a collective project that Hemans portrays. The woman is no political leader or military strategist. In this Hemans retains the colonial stereotype of the helpless brown woman even as she makes a token gesture at reinventing the woman. It is personal grief, a feminine one, and not politics that transforms the picturesque land into a ruin.

Further – and this is where the colonial, Orientalising discourse of vulnerable and ultimately ineffective native femininity asserts itself yet again – Hemans also does not carry the martial woman image for too long. Maimuna, we are told, "wither'd faster, from day to day". Her "frail dust", writes Hemans, was "ne'er for such conflicts born". Maimuna therefore dies. Hemans returns us, briefly, to the quietude of the early picturesque:

She spoke, and her voice, in its dying tone
Had an echo of feelings that long seem'd flown.
She murmur'd a low sweet cradle song,
Strange midst the din of a warrior throng.

(p. 241)

Hemans retains the quiet woman stereotype, as Maimuna's martial role is quietly erased as she lay dying. Hemans' trope of the grieving mother demonstrates the cultural influence of feminine grief and its limited political utility but ultimately shies away from expanding on this role for Maimuna. One acknowledges the portrait of a woman warrior and martyr that, in Sharifah Osman's words, "call into question the nobility of military acts of valor and sacrifice, and endorse instead the fierce nationalistic spirit that underlies a feminine martyrdom based on the domestic affections" (2006: 5), and thus create a public figure, leader and martial heroine. (Other critics have noted the tension between nationalist ideology and domesticity and mothers in Hemans: Mellor 1993; Wolfson 1994; Cass 2006.) However, Osman's argument that Maimuna's "dramatic display of controlled rage, demonstrates the unmistakable pride and passion of Byron's most rebellious Oriental heroines" (23) seems to me to ignore the slide in Maimuna's slide from political provocateur into helplessly sentimental woman. Thus in Hemans' representation domestic grief writ large has a definite but limiting influence on the public space. The section traces the putting to work of public sentiment over what is essentially private grief.

Hemans, I propose, after the token gesture at India's communal "problem" depoliticises any kind of native collective action by attributing it to not political rationality but to sentiment. By showing armies gathering around maternal grief rather than any kind of political reasoning or ideological difference, Hemans on the one hand feminises Indian polity and politics and extends the "effeminate native" stereotype of the period. It is Maimuna who is instrumental in collecting an army ready to serve her. On the other hand, Hemans links the ruins of the landscape to the maternal ruin.

In the final moments of the transformation of the picturesque land Hemans "naturalises" the ruin of the civic picturesque.

We are told of the collapse of the temples, the Tartar enters through the city gates and the "streams flow'd red". The animalising of the Muslim completes the rhetoric of violence:

And the sword of the Moslem, let loose to slay,
Like the panther leapt on its flying prey.

(p. 241)

The *Concordia discors* returns in tragic fashion now:

The poem concludes with:

Palace and tower on that plain were left,
Like fallen trees by the lightning cleft;
The wild vine mantled the stately square,
The Rajah's throne was the serpent's lair,
And the jungle grass o'er the altar sprung—
This was the work of one deep heart wrung

(p. 241)

The picturesque's transformation is now complete. Having poem opened with the smooth *harmony* of the civic and the natural picturesque, after the battle, the city is ruined and the civic picturesque is literally wiped out. Manmade objects and spaces have been reclaimed by nature. The civic picturesque modulates into the ruin picturesque.

Let me turn briefly to Saree Makdisi's arguments about the English Romantics to unravel the politics of Hemans' ruin picturesque. If Makdisi is to be believed, the Romantic age represents the first sustained opposition to the culture of modernisation (1998: 9). Further, Makdisi argues, this critique of modernisation relies heavily upon a "certain fascination or even obsession with the pre- or anti-modern (Nature, the colonial realm, the Orient)" (10). The ruination of the civic picturesque in favour of the natural toward the end also invites the argument that the English were indeed happier with the horticultural and mineralogical attractions of the colony rather than with the anthropological-zoological. No life forms except of the botanical variety (and the serpents) are mentioned in the last stanza of the poem – which is a remarkable shift from the plenitude of animals in the opening sections. The picturesque aesthetic that posits a return to primitivism, embodied in the creeping "naturalisation" of the city in the last stanza, alleviates the threat of an Indian civilisation. By returning it to the pre- or anti-modern, Hemans denies the civilisation any power or influence, just as P.B. Shelley did in "Ozymandias" where the creeping desert overwhelms even the remains of a ravaged civilisation.

The ruin, as we know, was central to the picturesque. In this case, Hemans' imperial picturesque transforms the Indian picturesque, which was a blend of the natural and the civic, into a ruin that is more given over to nature. The imperial picturesque in Hemans thus maps the transformation of a landscape through a woman's intervention, even though Hemans desists from entirely reinventing the native woman. The emotional distress of the woman initiates social-civilisational unrest.

However, Hemans does not entirely give up the *Concordia discors* trope: she merely subverts it. The civic component that was merged with the natural one does find some presence in the ruin picturesque, but in the form of memorials and mourning. The poem is an elegy for the dead Muslim boy and also for Maimuna, but Hemans' elegy ponders not over the death of the woman but of the advantages and power of sorrow. Michael Williamson has argued that Hemans' elegiac poetry "laments the waste of women's psychic and imaginative energy on a world tainted by male death, [and] deplore[s] the absence of any commemorative interest in the histories of dead women" (2001: 19). But "The Indian City" maps at once an affective gender economy of the colony – Maimuna's grief triggers political unrest – and a public memorial: the actual, concrete grave of Maimuna and her son. If in her other elegies, Hemans deplores the absence of commemoration

(Williamson 2001; Ryan 2008) in this poem she offers two commemorative sites: the grave and the ruined Brahmin city.

The landscape at the end of the poem has changed from the passive but *prosperous Hindu City* to a *Muslim Ruin*. By showing how the Muslims ruined the existing and beautiful Indian city, Hemans once more maps a moral geography of the land. The Hindu city had offered a sleepy but secure landscape, while the Muslims had destroyed the land entirely, except for the graves.

Hemans ends the poem describing the ruin as “the work of one deep heart wrung”. From the convergence of the natural and the civic picturesque, Hemans maps a slide toward a ruin picturesque characterised by naturalised ruins, affect and memorials. The ruined city is the “work” of Maimuna’s sorrow, and her epitaph. Hemans thus calls for the recognition of the woman’s role in the rise and fall of *native* civilisations. The remnants of the city constitute a monument to Maimuna’s life and death, and thus encode her into the country’s history as part of the architectural ruin.

A city of ruin begirt the shade,
Where the boy and this mother at rest were laid.

(p. 241)

The memorial is the site of convergence, in what is surely a discrepant *Concordia discors*.

Evoking the sentimental response to the ruin and the landscape so characteristic of the picturesque, Hemans’ poem generates a cultural fable of communal disturbances, intolerant piety and a new, if brief, role for native women.

The landscape’s transformation from a *secretum iter* with a harmonious convergence of nature and culture to a memorial-cum-ruin landscape, Hemans suggests, is the woman’s doing. Maimuna as mother functions within the symbolic economy of the war – “maternal nationalism”, as Sharifah Osman characterises it – in the poem. On the one hand this suggests a certain agency for the woman: for, after all, Maimuna shapes the fortunes and history of the city and its populace, as well as the Muslim supporters she garners in the poem. But on the other it shies away from making the woman a hero, for Maimuna requires the help of several males, and herself dies without seeing the battle through to its end. Hemans also evacuates the woman’s role in the history of the place in another way. Although Maimuna is instrumental in bringing down the Hindu city, she herself functions merely as a symbol and a sign. The war is waged on her behalf, under the sign of her grief. Ultimately, Hemans presents the Oriental woman as politically ineffectual because although Maimuna is initially a point of political coalition she slides into the role of a sentimental mother blunting her political role and ambitions.

The ruin picturesque is the effect of a series of manoeuvres that start off as accounts of picture-perfect scenes. The aesthetic vision of India enables Hemans to convert the events into offshoots of affect and sentiment, and depoliticizes them. The aesthetic vision, therefore, becomes a mode of alleviating the anxiety over the incomprehensibility and complexity of India's Hindu-Muslim relations, religion and culture. The picturesque, one might conclude, is a political aesthetic in Hemans's hands.

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THE IMPERIAL PICTURESQUE IN FELICIA HEMANS' ...

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