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# Overstepping Otherness: Christine de Pizan and Letitia Elizabeth Landon's Genealogical Retranslations of Canonized Text

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Goethe writes, "Everything great molds us from the moment we become aware of it."<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom's essay "Antithetical Criticism: An Introduction," the precursor to *The Anxiety of Influence*, relates how every poet must face anxiety about surmounting preceding poets. The Romantic poets—Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Blake—were faced with going beyond Milton who had to surpass Donne who had to somehow transcend Shakespeare, etc. As each new poet is faced with a genealogy that they must rise above in order to canonize themselves, they confront a problem that leads to an undeniable anxiety. What these poets must do to overcome genealogy is to find a way to retranslate previous poets in order to canonize

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom, "Antithetical Criticism: An Introduction," *Diacritics* Vol. 1, No. 2. (Winter, 1971): 40.

themselves. This pursuit, not only incredibly difficult for a male writer to accomplish, is even more complicated for the ‘Other:’ woman. For feminine canonization, woman must not only transcend those of a genealogical past, woman must overcome a principally patriarchal history which forces a radical retranslation of the male dominated canon. Christine de Pizan, a medieval French writer, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, a Romantic poet, are women who, though faced with Otherness, broke the bounds of not only the male canon but also patriarchal definitions of woman. This goal is accomplished through ‘completion’ of a canonized author’s text and, often, a calculated misreading of a text to further explore or present it in a feminine aspect. Christine and Landon are forced to retranslate important texts—they must “invaginate” a source text and, in completing or mistranslating the text, allow their retranslation to grant female canonization, genealogically based political progress, and, ultimately, an affirmation of their personal uniqueness in the realm of a feminine genius.

#### **“The Only Female Member of a Male Canon”: Christine de Pizan’s Genealogical Retranslation for Means of Canonization**

Christine de Pizan overcomes genealogy by first canonizing herself among male figures of an older canon. Kevin Brownlee’s article “Christine de Pizan: Gender and the New Vernacular Canon” reveals how Christine writes a series of autobiographical accounts in which she encounters Jean de Meun, Dante, Ovid, Boccaccio, and Boethius—who all act as a personal canon for her to transcend. “In these works, Christine engages quite polemically with each of her authorities in turn, rewriting these *auctores* in accord with the requirements of her ongoing and self-authorizing autobiographical project. At the same time, she establishes her own status as a member of the new multilingual canon—French, Italian, Latin—that she has set into place as such.”<sup>2</sup> Christine is thus, by rewriting these *auctores*, retranslating them. She will not only ‘complete’ their texts from her perspective

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<sup>2</sup> Kevin Brownlee, “Christine de Pizan: Gender and the New Vernacular Canon,” *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Women Writers and Canons in England, France, and Italy*, ed. Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan UP, 2005), 100.

but will also retranslate from the source text into a dynamic, “hybrid” target language<sup>3</sup>.

Christine de Pizan begins by displacing Jean de Meun: “...the single most important author figure in the French vernacular canon.”<sup>4</sup> She does this in her *Debat sur le “Roman de la Rose”* which is translated as *Debate on the “Romance of the Rose.”* Christine presents a public debate on de Meun’s text, *Romance of the Rose*, as an event in her autobiography. This debate not only undermines de Meun’s text but is also the first ever such debate in French literary history.<sup>5</sup> Second, in *Chemin de longue estude*, Christine manipulates Dante’s *Divine Comedy* in a narrative that presents her as a regendered Italian Dante who writes in French.<sup>6</sup> Next, “...the onset of her widowhood and the beginning of her literary career” is set in *Mutacion de Fortune* in a retranslation of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* which focuses on a gender transformation of woman to man. Christine is able to empower herself as a woman historian but also reveal a startling gender change.<sup>7</sup> Not only is Christine rewriting and completing these canonized works in relation to an autobiographical context—penetrating the texts with the feminine—she is also constructing herself as a woman who has lived *through* and beyond these men. The fourth retranslation is in the *Cite des Dames*, where Christine de Pizan “...radically and visibly rewrites her Boccaccian model, the *De mulieribus claris*,...in such a way as to present herself as a ‘corrected’ Boccaccio figure, regendered, vernacularized, and writing in the first person. Boccaccio’s third-person, male-authored Latin treatise on women is rewritten as Christine’s French autobiography.”<sup>8</sup> Coming out of a retranslation of Boccaccio, Christine then authoritatively cites herself as an *auctor* in the *Livre des Trois Vertus*. By doing this, she presents herself as a member of her canon and then completes this personal canon in part 3 of the *Avison*.<sup>9</sup> Here, Christine “stages herself...as a regendered

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<sup>3</sup> Christine de Pizan was bilingual in French and Italian which shows in her writing.

<sup>4</sup> Brownlee, “Christine de Pizan: Gender and the New Vernacular Canon,” 101.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 101-102.

Boethius” who is also the “legitimate descendent—as autobiographical subject, as writer, and as thinker—of her “canonical predecessor.”<sup>10</sup> Christine uses genealogical retranslation to insert herself as the only female member of an all male canon.

In penetrating and entering an all male canon, despite presenting herself as regendered, Christine is faced with the problem of masculinization. In *Cite des Dames* Christine constructs an all-female canon and, as its writer and creator, successfully transcends her own text. She does this by presenting the female writers Cornificia, Proba, and Sappho as masters of their craft. Cornificia “...through a combination of native talent and exceptionally hard study, becomes a master poet.”<sup>11</sup> Proba is similarly shown as a master poet but also a master Virgilian. Proba’s work consists of rewriting Virgil under a feminine-Christian lens.<sup>12</sup> Sappho’s literary innovation and productivity are stressed as well as the idea that her literary achievements go beyond the classical world and maintain influence in the present. Furthermore, Carmenta—the inventor of the Latin alphabet—and Minerva—as a Greek maiden taken for a goddess and also inventor of a shorthand Greek script—are also situated within the text.<sup>13</sup> These women all share a common theme in that they are able to attain achievements that are equal to if not more superior than their male counterparts. Christine de Pizan’s strategy “...for establishing herself as a new kind of “canonical” woman writer involves her presentation of an all-female literary and writerly canon firmly situated in the temporal remoteness of the classical world. The fifteenth-century Christine is authorized by the example of this canon but remains distant from it.” Thus, since this canon does not include any contemporary woman writers, Christine maintains authority as the only and best of the new canon. As well, *Cite des Dames* authorizes her as truly the only *woman* writer in an all male canon. Far from complete regendering of herself, she creates and situates herself in a

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 103.

woman's canon which asserts her undeniable femininity and uniqueness.

After positioning herself above both a past male and female canon, Christine then takes the steps necessary to maintain a genealogical link to contemporary French poets that are developing a new vernacular literary canon in tying herself to Eustache Deschamps. In a letter to Deschamps, she sets up a "hierarchical, genealogical relationship with Deschamps" by naming him as a distinguished poet and then saying that she is his student or even disciple.<sup>14</sup> Christine formulates an identity with Deschamps from just writing to him. Deschamps responds in a ballade in which he bestows upon her "canonical status" and even names her his "sweet sister."<sup>15</sup> In setting up a master-disciple relationship with Deschamps, she links herself again to the vernacular canon. This genealogical stratagem reinforces Christine's autobiographical retranslations of Jean de Meun, Dante, Ovid, Boccaccio, and Boethius and her recreation and feminine emphasis of the lives of Sappho, Cornificia, and Proba because it further separates her from them. With this third genealogy, Christine strengthens her contemporariness *and* femininity. As she is clearly a woman—thanks to the second genealogy—this last genealogy makes her unique in her status as the only female writer of a male canon. "Her 'unique' status as *female* canonical writer is doubled by special links to two key classical writerly models, which provide her with a kind of supplementary prestige at the same time as they highlight her own exemplary characteristics as a writerly model in her own right..."<sup>16</sup> Christine is figured not as a member of a classical canon or a womanly canon, but "...as the only female member of a male canon"—one who looked Otherness in the face and transcended it.

### **The Penetration of the Poetess: Letitia Landon's Use of Genealogical Retranslation in Subverting the Identity of the "Poetess"**

According to Virginia Blain, the word "poetess" was used in the late Romantic/early Victorian period to denote a female

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 108.

poet. At its most neutral, it was a generic term but, often, the connotation was derogatory. Similar to “poetaster,” “poetess” could signify a woman poet who simply imitates men or true poetry and ascends no higher.<sup>17</sup> Letitia Landon, one of the first “poetesses,” interestingly expresses and embraces the dual nature of the poetess. Glennis Stephenson suggests Landon’s “Poetic self, L.E.L., manages to challenge and subvert, at the very same time as it submits to, the boundaries assigned to the poetess.”<sup>18</sup> Landon, as a professional poet, was a self-sufficient woman who wrote to ensure the survival of her family. She would write about what would *sell*—romance, sensuality, vicariousness, etc. Thus, she plays the role of the imitator but, similar to Christine de Pizan, actually uses genealogical subversion underneath her words to canonize herself. In mistranslation and retranslation of already quickly canonized Romantic male poets, Landon establishes herself among and even beyond their accomplishments.

Identified as the “Byron of our Poetesses,” Landon actively manipulated Byronic texts in her pursuits. Adriana Craciun writes that in “The Enchantress,” “Landon develops a Promethean, distinctly Luciferean model of poetic identity and self-creation. She accomplishes this by rewriting the biblical fall, and the birth of a poet, in a distinctly (proto)feminist way and yet also Byronic way.”<sup>19</sup> Landon identifies that Byron’s heroes are dangerously misogynistic and, in doing so, defines the possibility of the woman poet rather than poetess.<sup>20</sup> The heroine of this text can be viewed as a regendered extension of Manfred and the speaking self never allowed to Astarte.<sup>21</sup> In *Manfred*, a dramatic poem by Lord Byron, Manfred is a Byronic hero—fallen, alone, refusing to be dominated, and introspective. Astarte, his love, dies when she sees Manfred in his fallen nature and symbolizes the notion that women become the victims of liberty—those dependent upon the patriarchy die. Manfred, refusing to be dominated even by God,

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<sup>17</sup> Virginia Blain, “Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Eliza Mary Hamilton, and the Genealogy of the Victorian Poetess,” *Victorian Poetry* 33, No. 1 (Spring 1995): 32.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>19</sup> Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 2003), 204-205.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

cannot escape himself or his memory<sup>22</sup> but can escape, for at least some time, from the patriarchy. Manfred wants knowledge and spiritual power but, ultimately, cannot create this freedom without destruction. Landon retranslates the Byronic Manfred into a female Medora in “The Enchantress.” Medora is similarly Satanic<sup>23</sup> but also, “Like Byron’s Astarte then, the Enchantress has both Manfred’s immortal longings, forbidden knowledge, and disillusionment, as well as the pity and tenderness which he lacked, and loved in Astarte.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the Byronic Enchantress, out of pity, assumes the life of the dying Medora—showing Landon’s notion that the “Satanic overreacher” acquiring forbidden knowledge is, in Byron’s poetry, “attained largely at the expense of women.”<sup>25</sup> Landon ‘misreads’ Byron in order to retranslate and regender the Byronic hero. Through misreading, Landon completes the hero and gives a voice to the female characters in Byron’s poetry. She revises “Byronic conceits” for a distinctly feminist end—empowering the woman with speech.

Landon also rereads and retranslates Shelley and Wordsworth. Craciun connects “The Prophetess” as a response to Shelley’s “Ozymandias.”<sup>26</sup> In “Ozymandias” a first person narrator meets a traveler who found a statue in the desert. This statue is of Ozymandias, the king of kings, who arrogantly commands one to look on his great works and despair, but now nothing remains except the colossal wreck of the statue. Similar to “Ozymandias,” the Prophetess “teaches that human work and art are powerless against destruction” but Landon does not suggest the “possibility that poetry or truth survives the desolation and decay, instead suggesting . . . that Power and Nothingness alone withstand time.”<sup>27</sup> Landon again completes a canonized poet by retranslating his poetry. However, Landon interestingly manipulates a reverse notion of canonization to do it. Ideally, canonization would entail the survival of works. Instead, only power and nothingness

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<sup>22</sup> Manfred is haunted by incest and summons Spirits to grant him forgetfulness of his past.

<sup>23</sup> Satanic in the sense of Satan in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>24</sup> Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism*, 207.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.



withstand time—the power to retranslate Shelley and insist on his nothingness. If Landon can, with such ease, retranslate and regender she will, as Christine, actually survive with time in the emphasis of the power of her uniqueness.

Craciun goes on to relate that in “Life Surveyed,” Landon “rereads William Wordsworth’s idealized nature and reveals the material decay Wordsworth tried to transcend.”<sup>28</sup> For Wordsworth’s poetry, where nature becomes an inspiration, bowers become the womb<sup>29</sup> and in “Tintern Abbey” this parallel is completed as the poet can establish a kind of dyadic union<sup>30</sup> with nature. Language is needed to describe the state, but nature can still allow for transcendence to the state. Craciun writes that: “Landon’s ironic treatment [in “Life Surveyed”] of the landmark Romantic experience of transcendence on a mountain top demonstrates that the ‘purity’ and ‘glories’ of such transcendent visions are only possible through active denial of the ultimately inescapable ills of the material, and in this case distinctly urban, world and its ‘close and bounded atmosphere’.”<sup>31</sup> Landon here completely retranslates the Wordsworthian affinity with nature from that of an ultimate state of transcendence to one of denial. This retranslation not only reveals the practicality of woman in the shadow of male idealism, it reveals an acceptance of the Symbolic Order. Landon has accepted law, language, desire, civilization,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>29</sup> This is the case in Wordsworth’s “Nutting.”

<sup>30</sup> The dyadic union or the Imaginary is defined by Lacan as the bond between mother and child in the womb and directly afterwards. All the child knows is the mother and therefore together they have a unity. The child defines itself through the mother and really does not know the idea of “I.” In order to attain subjectivity, the child must leave the dyadic union. This happens through the father in the mirror stage. Within the Symbolic Order the child becomes “I.” The child sees their reflection in a mirror and realizes that they are a separate entity from the mother. When this happens, the dyadic union is broken and the child begins to have desire, law, separation, and ultimately, language as they agglomerate into a body ready to enter civilization. Lacan insists that humankind is always, unconsciously, trying to return to the dyadic union because of the repression created once one leaves the union. However, the “only” way back is through dreams and, generally, death.

Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York, NY: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1985), 99-101.

<sup>31</sup> Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism*, 231.

and consciousness—using language as her profession to survive in the urban world. This use of genealogy is not simply that of dismantling Wordsworth but, more importantly, a penetration—invagination—of Wordsworth poetry for female political progress.

This continuing motif of manipulation of genealogy for not only self-canonization but female progress is found again in Landon's retranslation of Thomas Lovell Beddoes—a non-canonized poet. Beddoes' *The Improvisatore* is retranslated in Landon's *The Improvisatrice*. Landon rewrites this long poem in a very similar format to Beddoes but from a female viewpoint to correct his "tortuous misogyny."<sup>32</sup> Virginia Blain suggests that she does this in her usage of Sappho as "a model of doomed female genius."<sup>33</sup> Sappho's problem "...is the inevitable loss of love suffered by a woman who exhibits her genius in public (prostitutes herself)..." The Sappho described in Landon's poem is similar to the poetess: she must write in the public sphere to make money or gain any recognition. But, in order for a woman to write something that a man would want to read in the 19<sup>th</sup> century she would have to write from the viewpoint of the Other. She would have to give the reader something no man could—but, in the process, possibly suffer from remaining as the Other. Landon neatly sidesteps the 'public woman' dilemma by "...constructing her poetry as a kind of tragic peepshow, and the 'poetess' as puppet/victim. This was a very successful strategy because it left an implied space beyond the L.E.L. masquerade for the reader to imagine some 'real' agent at work."<sup>34</sup> Landon's retranslations then often situate her writing as the Other but, when 'stripping' away the more vulgar language, a woman's genealogical pursuit for political progress is found.

### **Translational Transcendence of Otherness and Embracing the Feminine Genius**

In *Translation and Gender: Translating in the "Era of Feminism,"* Luise von Flotow writes: "Gender awareness in translation practice poses questions about the links between social

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<sup>32</sup> Blain, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Eliza Mary Hamilton, and the Genealogy of the Victorian Poetess," 41.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 43.

stereotypes and linguistic forms, about the politics of language and cultural difference, about the ethics of translation, and about reviving inaccessible works for contemporary readers. It highlights the importance of the cultural context in which translation is done.”<sup>35</sup> Christine de Pizan and Letitia Landon both retranslate their predecessors in explicitly gendered ways. Canonized texts are retranslated as Christine and Landon invaginate them—penetrating the text for distinct, genealogically based political progress. These women, despite being faced with Otherness, do not accept their ‘position’ but actively subvert it through interventionist retranslation. As von Flotow describes in her notion of interventionist feminist translation: feminist translators will often “correct” texts—intervening and making changes to a source text that departs from a feminist perspective.<sup>36</sup> This is exactly what Christine and Landon accomplish in their genealogical retranslations, regardless of whether or not canonization is achieved. Both Christine and Landon are able to transcend Otherness and, in doing so, attain feminine genius through a unique creation of their own types of language.

Martin Le Franc insists of “...Christine as the single—but glorious and triumphant—*female* member of the new French literary canon that she had herself earlier expanded and regendered by a strategic act of self-inclusion.”<sup>37</sup> As Christine uses genealogical retranslation to insert herself into the canon, she is able to step outside of Otherness while remaining a woman. Because of her unique gendered status as the only woman author of a fully male canon, “...she simultaneously continues, corrects, and completes” the canonical texts that she retranslates.<sup>38</sup> Christine, as a translator, continues, corrects, and completes. She brings regendered texts to the present, asserting her femininity, but also her equality. These texts are then kept “alive,” to her contemporary standards, as well as infuse a new “Franco-Italian vernacular hybridity” within her target culture.<sup>39</sup> As a foreignizing

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<sup>35</sup> Luise Von Flotow, *Translation and Gender: Translating in the “Era of Feminism”* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1997), 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Brownlee, “Christine de Pizan: Gender and the New Vernacular Canon,” 108.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

element in translation brings aspects of the source language into a target text and language, so too does Christine in creating her own kind of ‘woman’s language’ in this hybrid language. Rene d’Anjou also stresses that: “this bilingual aspect of Christine’s new vernacular canon is extended and monumentalized.”<sup>40</sup> Christine’s language is not only unique, it is monumental. As the only woman in an all-male canon who speaks in an invigorating gendered hybrid-bilingual language, Christine is not only able to maintain her femininity but go beyond. Christine most certainly does not become a man but, greater than an Other, becomes a creator—becomes a genius.

Letitia Landon faces the same problem of Otherness but is also able to transcend. Landon, using poetry as her profession, must embrace the dual nature of the poetess. She is ‘forced,’ as the imitational side of poetess would imply, to ‘misread’ her predecessors and write about romance and sensuality. A criticism by many of her contemporaries was of her focus on these notions of romance and sensuality. But, Blain writes, “Men as well as women rushed to read her, drawn in by the titillation of the half-veiled subject matter as much as by the mellifluous verbal skills so effortlessly displayed. She was a nineteenth-century ‘performance poet’...”<sup>41</sup> Landon indeed performs—putting on a show in her words—but only to sell her work. As a ‘poetess,’ she would not be able to sell poems on surface subjects tackled by ‘true’ poets like Keats, Byron, or Shelley. She would not be able to sustain professionalism. Instead, she became “...a true poet whose work subverts her cultures reading of femininity through a technique identified by Irigaray as that of exaggerated mimesis.”<sup>42</sup> Instead of becoming man by becoming Byron or Shelley, she uses her femininity as only a woman could: by creating poetry as a kind of “peepshow” for cultural critique.

Underneath her words lies the true language of Letitia Landon. This notion of the dual notion of poetess in Landon—the ‘puppet’ versus the ‘real agent’ is exemplified in her poem “Love’s Last Lesson.” The narrator asks for forgetfulness of a lover who

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>41</sup> Blain, “Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Eliza Mary Hamilton, and the Genealogy of the Victorian Poetess,” 46.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 43.

has left her tortured. Superficially, the poem relates this heartbreaking. Underneath the words however, lies the meaning that the poem is more about self-expression and language than love. Landon writes, “I loved unconsciously: your name was all/That seem’d in language, and to me the world/Was only made for you;...”<sup>43</sup> The love within her was *placed* through the language of the lover. By articulating her own words, by finally speaking for herself, the narrator is able to begin to forget. This mess inside of her, her ‘heartbreak,’ is the language of the patriarchy—a false language that has left her bereft. She must learn “love’s last lesson”: creation of the self in self-expression, in subjectivity. The narrator must write her lover down on paper and, throwing him away, maintain her own identity from words. On the surface, the poem is about a lost love; below, the poem reveals that in the creation of your own language, woman can shed the patriarchy that has forgotten her.

Thus, L.E.L.’s language is one of translation of the self and all women into words. Landon writes as if the Other and gives a superficial perspective of Otherness in order to sell her poetry. But, when ‘stripping’ away her language, Landon invaginates canonical male poets’ texts to allow for genealogically political progress. Her texts give the means for a retranslation of female characters like Byron’s Astarte into speaking subjects. Furthermore, her poems extend the notion of a language of ‘exaggerated mimesis.’ Even Landon’s superficial language plays a role in identity as that of a foil. In a time period still greatly influenced by Rousseauian gender practices, woman would not ‘be able’ to truly read accomplished male poets. In Landon’s “exaggerated mimesis” she reveals this notion by often ‘mistranslating’ her predecessors. “Love’s Last Lesson” begins: “Teach it me, if you can –forgetfulness!”<sup>44</sup> compared to Byron’s *Manfred*: ““What wouldst thou with us, son of mortals—say?”/Manfred: ‘Forgetfulness—’”<sup>45</sup> Landon ‘misreads’ the

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<sup>43</sup> Letitia Elizabeth Landon, “Love’s Last Lesson,” *British Literature 1780-1830*, ed. A.K. Mellor and R.E. Matlak (Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle, 1996), 1387.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 1386.

<sup>45</sup> Lord Byron, *Manfred, A Dramatic Poem*, *British Literature 1780-1830*, ed. A.K. Mellor and R.E. Matlak (Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle, 1996), 929.

Byronic need for forgetting a terrible deed and replaces it with forgetting, what would seem, a childishly over-passionate love affair. Landon however, manipulates mistranslation in order to successfully use the poem to create her own language. She ‘penetrates’ the canonized male texts and ‘withdrawals’ a language for femininity. She, like Christine, uses genealogy to ascend into a canon of men. Yet, in creating her own language and retranslation of these canonized poets, Landon emphasizes her uniqueness and, in this transcendence, attains feminine genius.

To return to Bloom’s essay *Antithetical Criticism: An Introduction*, Christine de Pizan and Letitia Landon successfully use clinamen<sup>46</sup> and tessera<sup>47</sup> to genealogically retranslate canonized authors. “In the movement of *tessera*, the precursor is rescued from his supposed incompleteness. He is regarded as not having gone far enough, rather than having fallen in the wrong direction.”<sup>48</sup> The canonized precursors, often forgetting or silencing woman, are incomplete. Instead, Christine and Landon are not only able to transcend this male canon, they are able to create their own woman’s language—initiating an original and unprecedented advance in their time. Because of this, they are able to transcend the male canon and, in doing so, attain a notion of feminine genius promulgated by Julia Kristeva. Kristeva writes that feminine genius is: “...the flourishing of the individual in his or her uniqueness, to what makes an individual *who* he or she is and raises him or her above ordinariness—*genius* being the most complex, the most appealing, and the most fruitful form of this uniqueness at a particular moment in history and, given that it is so, the form that is lasting and universal.”<sup>49</sup> Landon and Christine creatively challenge the sociohistorical conditions of their identities and, with innovative uniqueness, are able go beyond the patriarchy. They become women no longer Others but something greater—the unique “only female member of a male canon”—who

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<sup>46</sup> Clinamen: misreading because of the assumption that the precursor was wrong.

<sup>47</sup> Tessera: completion because the precursor is, logically, incomplete.

<sup>48</sup> Harold Bloom, “Antithetical Criticism: An Introduction,” *Diacritics* Vol. 1, No. 2. (Winter, 1971): 44.

<sup>49</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Is There a Feminine Genius?” *Critical Inquiry* 30, No. 3 (2004 Spring): 494.

speaking a pure language that does not cling to the past but breaks free from the shackles of the patriarchy and embraces the woman's present.