

## Marmoreal Sisterhoods: Classical Statuary in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing

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Commanding pow'r! whose hand with plastic art  
Bids the rude stone to grace and being start;  
Swell to the waving line the polish'd form,  
And only want Promethean fire to warm; —  
Sculpture, exult!

Felicia Hemans, 'The Statue of the Dying Gladiator' (1812).<sup>1</sup>

In 1810, *The Dying Gladiator* (Fig. 1) was the topic of Oxford University's Newdigate Prize, established in 1806 to reward the most successful ekphrastic poem written each year on a specified topic.<sup>2</sup> In subsequent years, subjects included the Parthenon (1811) and the *Apollo Belvedere* (1812), evidence of a cultural investment in classical sculpture that had begun in the preceding century.<sup>3</sup> This intellectual engagement with classical culture emerged from the educational programmes followed in Britain, France, and Germany, and was reinforced by interest in the aesthetic treatises of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), whose writings on classical art contributed to his modern reputation as 'one of the "founders" of academic art history'.<sup>4</sup> Winckelmann's work informed aesthetic theory in Britain and in Europe and was part of an enduring fascination with the classical world which 'evolved into a mass-cultural phenomenon that incorporated

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Statue of the Dying Gladiator' was published in *The Domestic Affections and Other Poems* (London: Cadell & Davies, 1812), pp. 136–38 (p. 136).

<sup>2</sup> The Newdigate Prize was founded in memory of Sir Roger Newdigate (1719–1806). *The Dying Gladiator*, a Roman copy of a Greek original from the third century BC (Capitoline Museums, Rome), is also known as *The Dying Gaul* and *The Dying Galatian*.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Simonsen, 'Late Romantic Ekphrasis: Felicia Hemans, Leigh Hunt and the Return of the Visible', *Orbis Litterarum*, 60 (2005), 317–43 (p. 327).

<sup>4</sup> Vicky Coltman, *Fabricating the Antique: Neoclassicism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 14; Whitney Davis, *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 11. Among Winckelmann's most famous works are 'Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works of Art in Painting and Sculpture' [*Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*], first published in 1755, and *History of the Art of Antiquity* [*Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*], published in 1764.



Fig. 1: *The Dying Gladiator* (now known as *The Dying Galatian*), late third century BC, Roman marble copy of a Greek statue, Capitoline Museums, Rome.

literary and non-literary writing, as well as the consolidation and study of antiquities'.<sup>5</sup>

In Britain, the elite educational system ensured intimacy with the literary and mythic worlds of ancient Greece and Rome. The minds of British public schoolboys were 'steeped in the classics', and once they left school those travels around Europe that became known as the 'Grand Tour' provided them with concrete experience of the classical heritage that had so heavily informed their learning (Coltman, p. 14). Such tourists were evidently already familiar, not only with the mythical characters depicted in statuary, but also with images of the statues themselves. On seeing the statues in the Belvedere Courtyard at the Vatican Museum in Rome, an eighteenth-century traveller, Edward Wright, commented that they were already well known to him from prints, casts, and models which he had seen in England; similarly, another tourist, Arthur Young, on visiting the Uffizi in Florence wrote that, having seen 'numberless casts' of the *Venus de' Medici* (Fig. 2), he was keen to rush to the Tribune 'for a view of the dangerous goddess' (Coltman, pp. 123, 126).

These encounters aroused a passion for collection and possession that brought classical statuary physically into public and private domains, stimulating British and American writers and neoclassical sculptors. In 1817, the Elgin Marbles were exhibited in the British Museum in London and later in the century copies of classical sculpture were displayed in American galleries such as the Boston Athenaeum, thus becoming increasingly accessible

<sup>5</sup> Noah Comet, *Romantic Hellenism and Women Writers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 5.

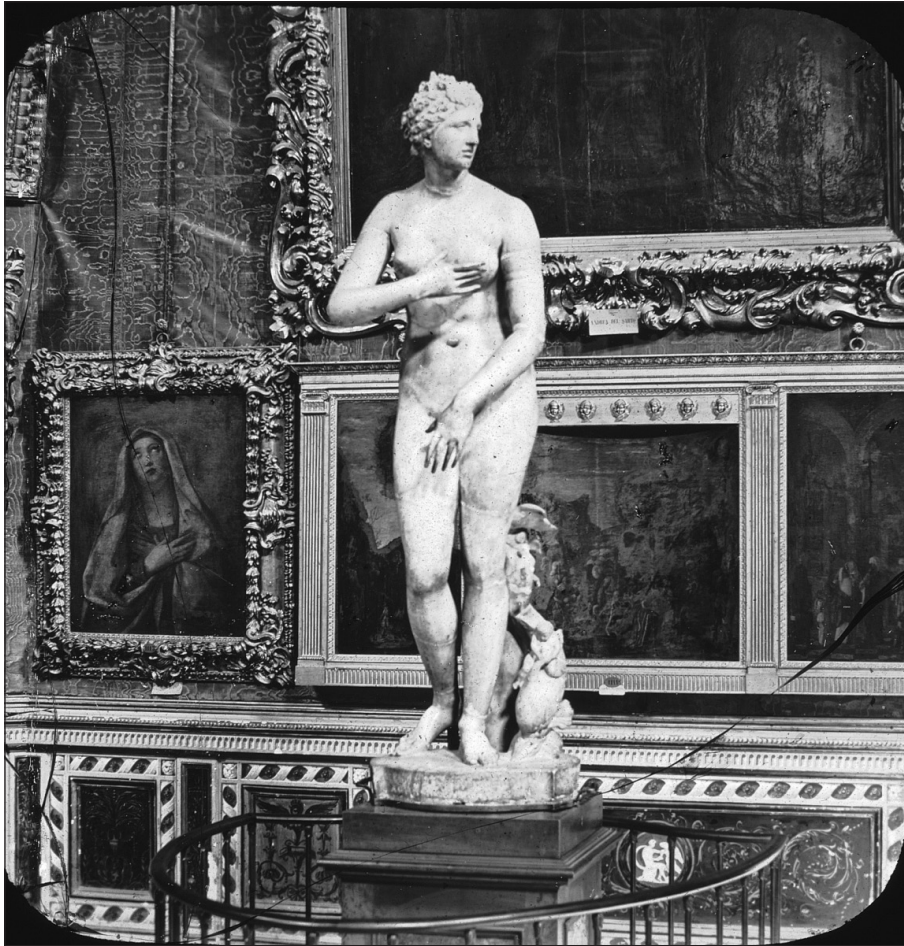


Fig. 2: William Henry Goodyear, *Venus de' Medici*, before 1923, lantern slide, Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum Archives, Goodyear Archival Collection. Wikimedia Commons.

to public view.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, photographs of major sculptures were also commonly circulated and made accessible to those who could not afford to visit Greece or Rome, or had no access to the museum setting, but still aspired to 'superior' taste.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Gail Marshall, *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 8; Deanna Fernie, *Hawthorne, Sculpture, and the Question of American Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> See Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500–1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 16–22, for information on the European circulation of casts, engravings, and prints; and Stephen L. Dyson, *Ancient Marbles to American Shores: Classical Archaeology in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 63, for details of the circulation of photographs of classical statuary in the US.

For nineteenth-century women, exposure to such antiquities, whether as readers, viewers, writers, or sculptors, was invariably complicated by conventional constructions of femininity. As Isobel Hurst has shown, women's first-hand access to the classical narratives that had inspired such sculptures was limited. Unlike many of their fathers, brothers, and husbands, who had been classically educated at school or university, for most of the nineteenth century it was 'undeniably more difficult for a girl to study Latin and Greek at home [...] or at school or college'.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, even those fathers who did allow their daughters to pursue such studies often controlled their reading, thus avoiding their exposure to those 'indecenties' which their male counterparts regularly encountered in the course of their education (Hurst, p. 4). However, as the century progressed, classical texts became more generally available to women in translated forms and, for some, following the admittance of women to universities, they became the object of scholarly study.<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding the limitations imposed on female education, many did engage with classical statuary. As Melissa Dabakis has demonstrated, enthused by sculptural antiquities and classical culture, a group of American women settled in Rome and became professional artists and sculptors.<sup>10</sup> Dismissively described by Henry James as 'that strange sisterhood of American "lady sculptors" who at one time settled upon the seven hills in a white marmorean flock', these women were among the first female artists to attain professional standing in the American art world and acquire international fame.<sup>11</sup> While their material production of statuary has been a topic of increasing critical analysis, less attention has been paid to those literary counterparts (often compatriots) who fashioned the sculptural form in poetry.<sup>12</sup> This article aims to redress that balance by examining the ways

<sup>8</sup> Isobel Hurst, *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Hurst, pp. 32–34. Hurst notes that such translations included Alexander Pope's *Iliad* (1715–20) and *Odyssey* (1726) as well as passages from classical works that appeared in periodicals such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and were accompanied by translations to aid comprehension. Collections such as A. J. Valpy's Family Classical Library (1830–36) or Bohn's Classical Library (1848–1913) also provided introductions to canonical texts.

<sup>10</sup> Melissa Dabakis, *A Sisterhood of Sculptors: American Artists in Nineteenth-Century Rome* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), p. 2. The artists discussed by Dabakis include Harriet Hosmer (1830–1908), Edmonia Lewis (1844/46–1907), Anne Whitney (1821–1915), Vinnie Ream (Hoxie) (1847–1914), Emma Stebbins (1815–1882), Margaret Foley (1827–1877), Sarah Fisher Ames (1817–1901), and Louisa Lander (1826–1923).

<sup>11</sup> Henry James, *William Wetmore Story and His Friends: From Letters, Diaries and Recollections*, 2 vols (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903), 1, 257; Dabakis, *Sisterhood*, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Kate Culkin, *Harriet Hosmer: A Cultural Biography* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010); Kirsten Pai Buick, *Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); or Edward S. Cooper, *Vinnie Ream: An American Sculptor* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2004).

in which nineteenth-century women writers appropriated and employed classical statuary as a liberatory strategy that allowed them to sculpt their own identities and, like their sister sculptors, participate in debates that were both personal and political.

### Women and the classical world

Between the years 1790 and 1880 British and American women were largely excluded from the study of the classics common in public schools, though some, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861), learned classical languages at home or through correspondence courses.<sup>13</sup> As Jennifer Wallace has observed, such forays into classical culture were often couched within acceptable parameters of feminine response. Felicia Hemans (1793–1835), who learned Latin from a local parish priest, published translations from Horace and poems such as *Modern Greece* (1817), but located them in the suitable contexts of patriotism and self-sacrifice. Nevertheless, Hemans’s deployment of classical culture in her works constitutes a challenge to the customary male dominance of the literary field. Her engagement with ‘Romantic Hellenism’ and classical sculpture surfaced not only in *Modern Greece*, but also in ‘The Statue of the Dying Gladiator’, and in *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* (1816), in which she apostrophizes a series of famous artworks now returned by the French following the fall of Napoleon in 1815.<sup>14</sup> These include Florence’s *Medici Venus*, ‘Love’s radiant goddess, idol of mankind!’, and Rome’s *Laocoön*, whose pains ‘agonize the breast’ (Fig. 3).<sup>15</sup> Hemans’s reference to such sculptures, particularly to that of Laocoön and his sons, is informed by her ‘careful reading of Winckelmann’.<sup>16</sup> In particular, Hemans’s allusion to the ‘stern combat’ that shows mankind Laocoön’s ‘suffering nature, and enduring mind’ resonates with the ‘noble simplicity and quiet grandeur’ Winckelmann identified as one of the key qualities of Greek sculpture.<sup>17</sup> In responding

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Wallace, ‘“Greek under the trees”: Classical Reception and Gender’, in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, ed. by Norman Vance and Jennifer Wallace, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012–15), IV (2015), 243–78 (p. 244).

<sup>14</sup> *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* marks the French return of Italian artworks following Napoleon’s defeat in 1815; *Modern Greece* participated in debates relating to the acquisition of the Elgin Marbles, removed from the Parthenon by Thomas Bruce, the seventh Earl of Elgin (1766–1841).

<sup>15</sup> Felicia Hemans, *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* (Oxford: Banter, 1816), pp. 14, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Michael T. Williamson, ‘Felicia Hemans’s Public Poetry, Winckelmann’s *History of the Art of Antiquity* and the Imaginative Plenitude of the Victory Ode’, *Women’s Writing*, 21 (2014), 25–40 (p. 27).

<sup>17</sup> Hemans, *Restoration*, p. 17; Johann Joachim Winckelmann, ‘Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture’, in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 30–34 (p. 30).



Fig. 3: *Laocoön and his Sons*, c. first century BC, marble, Vatican Museums, Rome. Pius-Clementine Museum, Octagonal Court. Wikimedia Commons, photograph by Marie-Lan Nguyen.

to Winckelmann's works and in writing of these renowned classical statues, Hemans transgresses the boundary that marks high art as the province of male scholarship. While Noah Comet argues that in *Modern Greece* Hemans paradoxically 'defends precisely the kind of theft *The Restoration* condemns', he also recognizes that in that poem, as in *The Restoration*, she 'disrupts the monopolization of Hellenism by classically educated men' (pp. 79, 71). Moreover, in a much later poem featuring the Renaissance sculptor Properzia de' Rossi, who herself appropriates the ancient art of classical sculpture, Hemans privileges a woman artist and arguably gives rise to 'a sister arts kinship between an English poetess and an Italian

female sculptor praised by Vasari', thus drawing attention to the skilled and valuable nature of her own art.<sup>18</sup>

Published in *Records of Women* (1828), 'Properzia Rossi' refers to a painting by Louis Ducis in which Rossi shows her last work, a bas-relief of Ariadne, to an unresponsive male viewer (*Fig. 4*). In Hemans's poem, he is constructed as the object of Rossi's unrequited affection, and the sculptural image of the abandoned Ariadne therefore merges with Rossi's own in Ducis's painting. Prefiguring Robert Browning's dramatic monologues of Renaissance artists in such poems as 'Fra Lippo Lippi' and 'Andrea del Sarto', which appeared in *Men and Women* in 1855, Rossi is the speaker in Hemans's poem, thus permitting the reader insight into her thoughts on art and love. The poem is preceded by an explanatory note in which we learn that this 'celebrated female sculptor of Bologna' was 'possessed also of talents for poetry and music'.<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, Hemans herself acknowledged that in 'Properzia Rossi' she expressed personal sentiments (Simonsen, p. 332). In drawing attention to Rossi as poet as well as sculptor, Hemans tacitly asks us to think of her talents in relation to Rossi's own, thus constructing herself as a sculptor-poet whose artworks are thoughts shaped and carved in language. This parallel is reinforced as Rossi describes the creation process:

The bright work grows  
Beneath my hand, unfolding, as a rose  
Leaf after leaf, to beauty — line by line,  
Through the pale marble's veins. It grows! — and now  
I fix my thought, heart, soul, to burn, to shine:  
I give my own life's history to thy brow,  
Forsaken Ariadne! — thou shalt wear  
My form, my lineaments; but oh! more fair,  
Touched into lovelier being by the glow  
Which in me dwells, as by the summer-light  
All things are glorified. (pp. 26–27)

Peter Simonsen has shown that, here, the sculptural and poetic arts are seemingly merged: 'Hemans aligns poem and sculpture as she puns on the word "line" to denote the lines of sculpture, but certainly also the lines of verse inscribed on the white page' (p. 332). Moreover, such a slippage

<sup>18</sup> Michelle Martinez, 'Women Poets and the Sister Arts in Nineteenth-Century England', *Victorian Poetry*, 41 (2003), 621–28 (p. 623); Properzia de' Rossi is the only woman to feature in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550).

<sup>19</sup> Epigraph to 'Properzia Rossi', in Felicia Hemans, *Records of Women and Other Poems* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1850), pp. 25–29 (p. 25). This poem's engagement with unrequited love and Rossi's depiction of Ariadne's abandonment resonates with Hemans's own abandonment by her husband, Captain Alfred Hemans, who left her to support herself and their children through her writing.



Fig. 4: Louis Ducis, *Properzia de Rossi Finishing her Last Bas-Relief*, 1822, oil on canvas, Musée de l'Évêché de Limoges. Wikimedia Commons.

between the arts suggests that 'she not only saw the two art forms as mutually reinforcing sisters, but that for her, the sister arts were ideally carried out by sister artists', allowing Hemans to debate the conflict between the emotional demands of domestic femininity and the life of the woman artist, using Rossi as her mouthpiece (Simonsen, p. 332).



While written in the sentimental tradition that privileges intensity of feeling, the poem's validation of 'sisterhood' undermines conventional representations of female victimhood. While Rossi may declare her talent a 'fruitless dower | That could not win me love' and rails against 'Worthless fame', she nevertheless 'greet[s] it proudly', as does Hemans, to produce high art (pp. 26, 28). Hemans's 'Properzia Rossi' highlights the long-standing problem faced by the woman artist, whether sculptor or poet, who traditionally functions as the muse rather than the creator of art.<sup>20</sup> Yet, in feminizing the muse–artist relationship through a series of displacements — Ariadne as muse to Rossi's sculptor; Rossi as muse to Hemans's poet — Hemans foreshadows the possibility of a woman artist who is, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh, 'simultaneously poet and muse'.<sup>21</sup>

In his discussion of Hemans's public poetry, Michael Williamson notes that, 'unlike Pygmalion's Galatea', Rossi 'is not made to conform to a male fantasy of female perfection' (p. 35). Instead, I would argue, Rossi appropriates not only Pygmalion's role as sculptor, but Aphrodite's life-giving breath, bidding her own spirit to 'wake! [...] | Live! in thy work breathe out!' (p. 26). Similarly, at the end of 'The Statue of the Dying Gladiator', Art, personified as female, 'Smiles o'er the marble, her divine control | Moulded to symmetry, and fir'd with soul!' (*Domestic Affections*, p. 138). Eschewing the limitations of the muse, in her own poetry Hemans constructs the woman artist as a combination of Pygmalion and Aphrodite who indulges in her own act of self-creation and thus 'liberates' herself from the gendered constraints imposed on her art. This libertarian narrative, founded in the sculptural body, is more overtly present in the first edition of *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy*, published anonymously in 1816.<sup>22</sup> In this poem Hemans celebrates the release of the famous sculptures she names from 'Napoleonic tyranny to the hopeful climate of Italian freedom', locating 'the desire for national liberty in the "living forms" of [these] statues' that are now animated by 'a liberatory republican vigor' (Williamson, p. 29). In writing about sculpture — whether Greek, Roman,

<sup>20</sup> According to Dabakis, given the physical nature of her artwork, the female sculptor was often conflated with her figural art through what she has termed the 'Pygmalion complex'. This became particularly problematic in the case of women sculptors who, like Vinnie Ream and Louisa Lander, were accused of using themselves as models for the sensuous sculptures they created, and whose moral values therefore came under scrutiny (*Sisterhood*, pp. 80, 189).

<sup>21</sup> Joyce Zonana, 'The Embodied Muse: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* and Feminist Poetics', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 8 (1989), 240–62 (p. 241).

<sup>22</sup> Two editions were published in 1816, the second much revised. The title page of the first edition states that it is written 'By a Lady'; the second 'By Felicia Hemans'. See Felicia Hemans, *Selected Poems, Prose and Letters*, ed. by Gary Kelly (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2002), p. 112, n. 1.

or Renaissance — and using epic poetry to do so, Hemans questioned the limitations of women's poetry and blazed the trail for those female poets on both sides of the Atlantic who would engage with statuary in ways that are both 'ideological and intertextual' in order to raise questions of liberty that were at once private and public (Martinez, p. 626).

### Roman sisterhoods

Among such poets are both Barrett Browning and her fictional counterpart, Aurora Leigh. For Angela Leighton, Aurora Leigh, 'with her long, self-conscious disquisitions on the nature of female creativity', is also 'the natural descendant of Properzia Rossi' and of Letitia Landon's 'The Improvisatrice' (1824).<sup>23</sup> Like Hemans's 'Properzia Rossi', Landon's 'The Improvisatrice' alludes to a woman artist, based on both Mme de Staël's eponymous heroine, Corinne, and the poet whose life prompted her creation, Corilla Olimpica, the only woman to be crowned poet laureate on the Capitoline steps in Rome in 1776.<sup>24</sup> In Book 11 of *Aurora Leigh*, Aurora famously reinvents this scene in the private space of a garden bower, self-crowning with an ivy wreath only to find herself watched by her cousin Romney:

I stood there fixed —  
My arms up, like the caryatid, sole  
Of some abolished temple, helplessly  
Persistent in a gesture which derides  
A former purpose. Yet my blush was flame,  
As if from flax, not stone.<sup>25</sup>

Stilled in a moment of self-creation, Aurora is constructed simultaneously as sculptor and poet, though the caryatid she shapes in words implies a supporting role compliant with the expectations of Victorian femininity. Nevertheless, this act of self-fashioning represents a challenge that reflected that posed by living women poets and sculptors of the age and it is unsurprising therefore that Aurora is not only Rossi's descendant, as suggested by Leighton, but also inspired by a contemporary woman sculptor, the young Harriet Hosmer (1830–1908), who became the Brownings'

<sup>23</sup> Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 80.

<sup>24</sup> Melissa Dabakis, 'Angelica Kauffmann, Goethe, and the Arcadian Academy in Rome', in *The Enlightened Eye: Goethe and Visual Culture*, ed. by Evelyn K. Moore and Patricia Anne Simpson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 25–40 (p. 33).

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, ed. by Kerry McSweeney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Book 11, p. 35, ll. 60–66.

friend while in Rome.<sup>26</sup> Hosmer's interest in literary subjects no doubt reinforced this friendship, her early work centring on female figures in mythology and poetry, including *Daphne* (1854) and *Medusa* (1854) from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; *Hesper* (1852) and *Oenone* (1855), who featured in poems by Tennyson; and *Beatrice Cenci* (1857), informed in part by Shelley's verse drama *The Cenci: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (1819).<sup>27</sup>

Having arrived in Rome in 1852 and begun her training with the respected sculptor John Gibson (1790–1866), whom she described as the 'acknowledged head of artists' in the city, Hosmer soon proved her worth (Culkin, p. 30). Producing neoclassical sculptures that captured the imagination of collectors and the public alike, Hosmer's fame grew. As a woman sculptor, however, she was subjected to accusations that suggested her work was not her own, but that of Gibson, her tutor. As Gail Marshall explains:

The insinuations about Gibson had long been a part of Hosmer's working life. They were based on the commonly-held assumption of women's lack of originality and almost irresistibly invoked the figure of Pygmalion, the sculptor-king of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, who not only made statues, but breathed life into one of them, as her detractors seemed to imply Gibson had done for Hosmer. ('Harriet Hosmer', p. 209)

Such accusations eventually appeared in print form in the *Art Journal* and the *Queen*, both of which intimated that Hosmer's *Zenobia* (1857–59) (Fig. 5) had really been sculpted by Italian workmen in Rome (Culkin, p. 70). Hosmer did not let the accusation stand, and not only brought a lawsuit against the journals in question, but published her own repudiation and explanation in 'The Process of Sculpture', which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in December 1864. In this essay, she emphasizes the fact that the workmen who 'assist' her also assist those men who are her fellow sculptors. Hosmer stresses that such workmen's position in the studio is 'a subordinate one'; their role is to 'translate the original thought of the sculptor, written in clay, into the language of marble', and she goes on to clarify the importance of the sculptor's final touch:

The translator may do his work well or ill — he may appreciate and preserve the delicacy of sentiment and grace which were stamped upon the clay, or he may render the artist's meaning coarsely and unintelligibly. Then it is that the sculptor himself

<sup>26</sup> Gail Marshall, 'Harriet Hosmer and the Classical Inheritance', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 39 (2003), 202–13 (p. 204).

<sup>27</sup> See Joy S. Kasson, *Marble Queens and Captives: Women in Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 146; Culkin, pp. 24, 48; and Marshall, 'Harriet Hosmer', pp. 206–08, for a longer discussion of the dispute.



Fig. 5: Harriet Hosmer, *Zenobia in Chains*, 1857–59, marble, St Louis Art Museum. Wikimedia Commons, photograph by QuartierLatin1968.

must reproduce his ideal in the marble, and breathe into it that vitality, which, many contend, only the artist can inspire.<sup>28</sup>

For Hosmer, sculpture represents thought in marble form, and her references to writing, language, and translation forge a strong link between sculpture and her own literary interests. Indirectly, such allusions, together with Hosmer's insistence that it is the sculptor who breathes into marble 'that vitality which [...] only the artist can inspire', again invoke the Pygmalion myth. But, in doing so, Hosmer undermines male artistry; although she refers to the sculptor as 'he' throughout her essay, she makes it crystal clear that the sculptor, in this case, is very much a woman. In becoming the artist who breathes 'vitality' into her sculpture she, like Properzia Rossi, becomes both Pygmalion and Aphrodite in one, countering Pygmalion's position as the pre-eminent sculptor of ideal form.

### Victorian Galateas

As a number of critics have noted, the Pygmalion myth had its 'heyday' in the nineteenth century, pervading both high and low culture throughout the era.<sup>29</sup> Its reinforcement of ideal femininity, purity, and passivity concomitant with prevailing social mores perhaps explains why a number of women poets on both sides of the Atlantic revised and rewrote the myth for subversive ends. As Essaka Joshua has observed, most retellings of the myth seem to be by American women poets, though in 1881 the Irish writer Emily Henrietta Hickey (1845–1923) published a sonnet written from Galatea's perspective.<sup>30</sup> Hickey also published a longer poem, 'A Sculptor' (1881), that resonates with the myth and with Thomas Woolner's twelve-book poem *Pygmalion*, published the same year. For Joshua it is

<sup>28</sup> Harriet Hosmer, 'The Process of Sculpture', *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1864, pp. 734–37 (pp. 735–36).

<sup>29</sup> See Essaka Joshua, *Pygmalion and Galatea: The History of a Narrative in English Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. xx; and Marshall, *Actresses*, p. 61, for details of the myth's popularity in the nineteenth century. For a sustained discussion of the origins of the Pygmalion myth, see George L. Hersey, *Falling in Love with Statues: Artificial Humans from Pygmalion to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For an overview of contemporary critical work on the Pygmalion myth, see Amelia Yeates, 'Recent Work on Pygmalion in Nineteenth-Century Literature', *Literature Compass*, 7 (2010), 586–96.

<sup>30</sup> Joshua, p. 139. Hickey was an Irish poet and translator, now best known as co-founder of the Browning Society in 1881. It is difficult to determine the exact reasons behind the particular appeal of the Pygmalion and Galatea myth to American women poets. However, their subversive treatment of the relationship between creator and created perhaps speaks to the people of America at this time, a colony that had forged its independence and was engaged in processes of social and cultural self-fashioning.

Hickey's 'Sonnet' that marks a rise in women's interest in the story, but Pygmalion had received prior attention in Frances Sargent Osgood's short lyric 'The Statue to Pygmalion' which appeared in *Poems* (1850), and in Eliza C. Hall's 'Galatea', published in *Scribner's Monthly* in November 1879.<sup>31</sup>

Osgood's appropriation of the myth positions Galatea, the desired object, as desiring subject, offering a form of 'lyric coquetry' that sanctioned public expression of 'private' feeling. Eliza Richards demonstrates this strategy in her critique of Osgood's poem 'Would I were only a spirit of song':

Oh! would I were only a spirit of song!  
I'd float forever around, above you:  
If I were a spirit, it wouldn't be wrong,  
It couldn't be wrong, to love you!<sup>32</sup>

For Richards, Osgood's lyric carries 'a range of impersonally personal erotic messages that bear no clear relation to anyone in particular'; expanding her analysis she writes:

The poem plays with the notion of an 'I' at once identified with the authorial body of Osgood, who laments the taboo against physical intimacy with the poem's recipient, and the poem's 'I', who can indeed 'float ... around — above' her lover without censure. Taunting the reader, the lyric speaker enacts a poetic 'touch' that mimics physical bodies touching, yet leaves the author blameless.<sup>33</sup>

Her lyric 'The Statue to Pygmalion' plays with love, desire, and erotic touch in similar ways:

Gaze on! I thrill beneath thy gaze,  
I drink thy spirit's potent rays;  
I tremble to each kiss they give:  
Great Jove! I *love*, and *therefore live*. (Osgood, p. 94, emphases in original)

Pygmalion's gaze here becomes a form of 'touch'; his eyes transmit the 'potent rays' of his spirit's desire, eliciting a somatic response in the statue that 'tremble[s]' orgasmically as it comes to life in love. Osgood's mergence

<sup>31</sup> Frances Sargent Osgood (1811–1850) was a famous American poet in the 1840s, sometimes referred to as the American Sappho. Eliza C. Hall was the pen name of Eliza 'Lida' Calvert Obenchain (1856–1935), a Kentucky author and suffragist who became best known for *Aunt Jane of Kentucky* (1907).

<sup>32</sup> Francis Sargent Osgood, *Poems* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1850), p. 423.

<sup>33</sup> Eliza Richards, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 64, 73.

of sight and touch appears to draw on Herder's proposition in *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream* (1778) that, when viewing sculpture, the eye must deploy vision differently: the eye's 'ray of light becomes a finger and the imagination becomes a form of immediate touching'.<sup>34</sup> Herder's philosophical theory of visual perception is seemingly appropriated by Osgood to sanction Galatea's response to her maker's visual — and erotic — 'touch'.<sup>35</sup>

Like Osgood's 'The Statue to Pygmalion', Eliza Hall's Pygmalion poem represents a Galatea in love. The poem marks the moment when, aware that bringing his statue to life condemns her also to the 'thorny crown' of love and 'death that puts an end to all fair things', Pygmalion expresses 'sharp remorse'.<sup>36</sup> Galatea sheds a tear, now conscious of the burdens life will bring, yet, 'woman-like', kisses Pygmalion, and assures him: 'Be comforted my own; | Could I have spoken, this had been my choice, | Since love atoneth both for life and death' (Hall, p. 34). Hall employs the Pygmalion myth as 'the backdrop for a hymn to love' contributing to what Lynn Niedermeier has described as 'a torrent of "magazine poetry"' often written by women that saturated popular periodicals in the late nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> While Hall's Galatea, despite her classical origins, is a model of conventional femininity, such love poetry enabled her creator's financial independence, written by Hall as much to support her personal freedom as to explore her private feelings.<sup>38</sup>

Among Hall's fellow magazine contributors were Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844–1911) and Emma Lazarus (1849–1887), both of whom later achieved reputations that transcended their early careers in the periodical press and would go on to write poems featuring sculptures: Phelps, 'Galatea' (1885) and 'The Stone Woman of Eastern Point' (1892); Lazarus, 'Venus of the Louvre' (1888) and, most famously, 'The New Colossus' (1883) which in 1903 was inscribed on the pedestal that supports the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour.<sup>39</sup> I will discuss Lazarus in greater detail in

<sup>34</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream* [*Plastik: Einige Wahrnehmungen über Form und Gestalt aus Pygmalions bildendem Traume*], ed. and trans. by J. Gaiger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> The poem also resonates with the romantic relationship between Osgood and Edgar Allan Poe, who published many of her poems in the *Broadway Journal*, which he edited in 1845, at the height of their friendship. In this context, Poe becomes a literary 'Pygmalion' to Osgood's 'Galatea'.

<sup>36</sup> Eliza Calvert Hall, 'Galatea', *Scribner's Magazine*, November 1879, p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> Lynn E. Niedermeier, *Eliza Calvert Hall: Kentucky Author and Suffragist* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Niedermeier, p. 44. Niedermeier notes that Hall published her poetry with a view to funding a planned trip to New York that was later aborted.

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, 'Galatea', in *Songs of the Silent World* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885), pp. 69–71; and 'The Stone Woman of Eastern Point', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, February 1892, pp. 436–37. Phelps became a respected writer

due course, but for now I want to focus on Phelps's proto-feminist version of Galatea who is arguably the most outspoken. Phelps's 'Stone Woman' is her reimagination of a granite gatepost in Gloucester, Massachusetts, as the ossified body of a fisherman's wife, forever looking out across the North Atlantic for the safe return of her husband's boat, 'Shapen of stone and of chance, | Craven of wind and of time' and 'Dumb in her life and her death' (p. 436). In contrast, her Galatea is certainly not dumb, but speaks only too clearly. The poem's conceit is that Galatea, caught at a pivotal moment between animation and stasis, is trying to decide whether to be Pygmalion's statue or his bride. Motivated by John Stuart Mill's *Subjection of Women* (1869), Phelps became an activist for women's rights seeking greater equality for married women and these concerns are discernible in her poem.<sup>40</sup> Galatea's self-questioning, 'Whether to be thy statue or thy bride', leads to her realization that with humanity comes the burden of life as a living woman; who, she asks,

Foreknowing, ever chose a fate like this?  
 What woman out of all the breathing world  
 Would be a woman, could her heart select,  
 Or love her lover, could her life prevent? (pp. 69–70)

Yet in Phelps's poem, as in *Aurora Leigh*, love, the 'awful law', wins; it is 'greater than all torment or delight', 'mightier than the marble or the flesh', and Galatea capitulates, acknowledging to Pygmalion,

[']Thine am I, thine at all the cost of all  
 The pangs that woman ever bore for man  
 [...]  
 Thine, I dare to be, in scorn of them;  
 And being thine forever, bless I them!' (p. 71)

Like Phelps's statue, Emily Hickey's Galatea also speaks and is 'lov'd [...] into life'.<sup>41</sup> Yet, unlike Phelps, Hickey highlights the irony implicit in her animation. Acknowledging herself 'Pygmalion's handiwork' who 'grew | Into that beauty he had bidden be', she points out that in praying for her animation, he damages his future standing as a great sculptor (p. 138). Had

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and women's rights activist, publishing essays, fiction, and volumes of poetry. Lazarus was a Jewish-American poet born to a wealthy family in New York. She was privately educated, learned several languages, and moved in elite circles in Europe and New York.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Duquette, 'Introduction', in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Selected Tales, Essays, and Poems*, ed. by Elizabeth Duquette and Cheryl Tevlin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014). Kindle edition.

<sup>41</sup> E. H. Hickey, 'Sonnet', in *A Sculptor and Other Poems* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1881), p. 138.



she remained an ideal statue, his fame would have been assured. Instead, she laments, 'Alas for the perisht pride, the fame-gold dim, | The gift, my life, that to his name was death'; once alive, she is an ordinary mortal and no longer a magnificent work of art (p. 138). Pygmalion's lack of judgement in this sonnet is repeated in Hickey's 'A Sculptor' which tells the story of Ceccolino and his foster sister Lotta who marries him ostensibly for propriety's sake but is secretly in love with him. Unlike Pygmalion, Ceccolino is a failed sculptor who cannot translate his artistic vision into marble. The poem is framed by a debate on his artistic worth:

'A Sculptor!' 'He left no work to see!  
'A genius!' 'Wherein might his genius be?'  
[...] 'Reverence for the dead  
Must never blind to the truth,' ye said,

foreshadowing Pygmalion's fate as imagined by Galatea in Hickey's 'Sonnet'.<sup>42</sup> Though there is that in Ceccolini that is 'divine', his 'fetter'd Thought could never, free, | Go forth in its strength and symmetry' (p. 1). While Ceccolino chisels obsessively — and fruitlessly — at his ideal statue, Lotta, 'winner [...] of the daily bread', takes on paid work in addition to her domestic chores, yet seems unable to win his attention or his love, which is reserved for his art (p. 8).

Hickey's poem is in the tradition of such works as Edgar Allan Poe's tale 'The Oval Portrait' (1842) and Christina Rossetti's 'In an Artist's Studio' (1862), in which artists 'feed' vampirically on their muses to produce their paintings, but it also recalls Henry James's short story 'The Last of the Valerii' (1874), where Count Valerio, obsessed with an unearthed marble statue of Juno, offers libations to it, and neglects his wife who, 'to rival the Juno', turns to marble herself.<sup>43</sup> Like Valerio, Ceccolino offers the gods a libation in a bid to achieve perfection, but to no avail. At the poem's denouement, Lotta enters her husband's studio to view his 'master-piece'. Like Valerio's wife, she is now 'Marble-cold and marble-fair', and 'Marble-cold, and marble-pale', she awaits the statue's unveiling (Hickey, 'A Sculptor', p. 11). Inevitably, it is another disaster: Ceccolino's 'Thought, unshrin'd in the failure grim, | In terrible pathos looks at him' and, unable to countenance his inadequacy, he pines and fades, recognizing Lotta's love only at the point of death (p. 12).

Hickey's sculptor bears more than a passing resemblance to Thomas Woolner's Pygmalion who, like Ceccolino, fails to recognize the ministrations and the love of Ianthe, his mother's handmaiden who, bringing him food each day as he works, always returns unnoticed. It is not until he

<sup>42</sup> Hickey, 'A Sculptor', in *A Sculptor*, pp. 1–13 (p. 1).

<sup>43</sup> Henry James, 'The Last of the Valerii', in *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, ed. by Michael Swann (London: Penguin, 1983), pp. 13–42 (p. 37).

considers her as a model for his statue of Hebe serving Zeus that he begins to see and ultimately realize his love for her. For a contemporary reviewer writing in the *Spectator* in 1882, Woolner's revision of the Pygmalion myth 'purifies' the dubious nature of Ovid's tale, showing 'that the physical magic in the story — the actual bringing to life of the statue, and the marriage with the maker of it — is a degenerated form of its true meaning', which is in fact that 'it is love which gives life to the artist's work, and that nothing less than love will make it truly live'.<sup>44</sup> Such a reading is tacitly anticipated in the final stanzas of Hickey's 'A Sculptor', when an unnamed observer asks 'why fail'd the man?' and muses:

Why and wherefore I know not, I,  
Nor take upon me the mystery  
Of things, as if I were God's spy.

Think ye God answers *no* or *yes*  
To men as they idly guess and guess,  
'If he had lov'd or if — ' — that *If*  
Is God's undecipher'd hieroglyph. (p. 13)

Yet, as in 'Sonnet', Hickey undermines the efficacy of love as a means of inspiration, success, and lasting fame. We cannot be certain that love would have transformed Ceccolino's sculptures into ideal statues. Instead, his failure to love Lotta becomes one more failure to add to his catalogue of sculptural catastrophes. Hickey's women evade capture; neither Galatea nor Lotta are silenced into statuary and both have superior powers of understanding. In contradistinction, her male artists are both solipsistic and inadequate.

### Statues of liberty

The women poets I have discussed so far all challenge those notions of female passivity implicit in the Pygmalion myth, and represent their 'Galatea' figures as active thinkers, speaking subjects, and/or agents in their own lives. In rewriting the Pygmalion story, they appropriate the animated statue for their own ends and give her life in their own words, thus liberating themselves and their own art in the process. In choosing to rework the poetry of Ovid, such women also lay claim to literary prowess. Harriet Hosmer was engaged in a similar enterprise, albeit in the sculptural arena, reworking and appropriating classical forms and proving herself the equal of her male forerunners and contemporaries. As Marshall remarks, in choosing to excel in the production of neoclassical sculpture, Hosmer 'was declaring her right to a place in Rome within a highly visible heritage of

<sup>44</sup> 'Mr. Woolner's Pygmalion', *Spectator*, 7 January 1882, p. 25.

sculptors working back through her teacher Gibson, and Canova [...] and ultimately to Phidias and Praxiteles' ('Harriet Hosmer', p. 211).

For the sculptural sisterhood in Rome, such questions of women's artistic freedom and validity were intertwined with wider concerns focused on the abolition of slavery. In the literary world, Hosmer's friend Elizabeth Barrett Browning famously confronted the topic in such poems as 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point' (1848), published in the abolitionist gift-book *Liberty Bell*, 'A Curse for a Nation' (1854), and 'Hiram Powers' Greek Slave' (1850).<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Hosmer and her fellow sculptor Edmonia Lewis also 'addressed issues of emancipation (freedom, citizenship, and suffrage) [...] in their sculptural imagery'.<sup>46</sup> Of particular note is Lewis, of African American and Native American descent, who worked on three neo-classical sculptures aimed at highlighting the plight of the 'contemporary freedwoman'; these were *Preghiera* (Prayer; 1866), the now lost *Freedwoman and Child* (1866), and *Forever Free* (1867) (Fig. 6) (Dabakis, *Sisterhood*, p. 169). According to Melissa Dabakis, the composition of Lewis's *Preghiera* 'reveals a formal allegiance to the feminist antislavery emblem *Am I Not a Woman and a Sister*, designed in Britain in 1828 in response to the emblem *Am I Not a Man and a Brother* of 1787' (Fig. 7); a symbol which by 1845 had been adopted by female anti-slavery campaigners (*Sisterhood*, p. 169).

The female figures in both *Preghiera* and *Forever Free* are manacled to the ground, unlike their male counterparts who are either in the process of rising, as in *Am I Not a Man and a Brother*, or shown with broken shackles, as in *Forever Free*. While the male figures in both sculptures are identifiably black, the woman in *Forever Free* is not racially specific, perhaps a silent acknowledgment of the 'radical abolitionist view that collapsed the oppression of slaves with that of women' (Dabakis, *Sisterhood*, p. 169). As Dabakis remarks, 'Lewis no doubt understood that self-sacrifice and submission were traditional values associated with true womanhood and that they crossed class, racial, and sectional lines in the United States' (*Sisterhood*, p. 174).

Like Lewis, the African American poet Henrietta Cordelia Ray (1852–1916), well known in the African American literary community in the late nineteenth century, adopted the classical tradition for her own purposes.<sup>47</sup> Following in the footsteps of black women writers, such as the eighteenth-century

<sup>45</sup> See John MacNeill Miller, 'Slavish Poses: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and the Aesthetics of Abolition', *Victorian Poetry*, 52 (2014), 637–59, for an extended discussion of Barrett Browning's engagement with emancipatory dialogues.

<sup>46</sup> Dabakis, *Sisterhood*, p. 149. Edmonia Lewis became the first black woman to achieve recognition as a sculptor in the fine arts. She was part of the expatriate community of artists in Rome and of the Boston abolitionist circle in the US.

<sup>47</sup> Ray was the daughter of Charles B. Ray, a pastor who was also a prominent abolitionist and publisher of *The Colored American*. Ray qualified as a teacher, and later became a poet, publishing mainly in periodicals between 1880 and 1900. She also published two volumes of poetry: *Sonnets* (1893) and *Poems* (1910).



*Fig. 6:* Edmonia Lewis, *Forever Free*, 1867, marble, Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

poet Phillis Wheatley, who incorporated 'literary themes, archetypes, and literary figures from Western classical antiquity into their own narratives', Ray wrote a number of poems that referred directly or alluded to



Fig. 7: *Am I Not a Man and a Brother*, medallion modelled by William H. Hackwood, Wedgwood, Etruria, England, c. 1786, tinted stoneware, Brooklyn Museum. Wikimedia Commons.

classical sculpture.<sup>48</sup> Among these are the sonnets 'Niobe' (1893) and 'The Venus of Milo' (1910), as well as a longer poem, 'The Sculptor's Vision' (1910). For nineteenth-century African American poets, classical culture had an emancipatory significance; signalling higher learning and superior taste in white counterparts, a knowledge of classics served to both elevate 'the Black man and woman from their inferior status' (Walters, p. 50). For women poets

<sup>48</sup> Tracy L. Walters, *African American Literature and the Classicist Tradition: Black Women Writers from Wheatley to Morrison* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 4.

such as Ray, the classics also offered ‘a liberating space to engage readers in a feminist critique of the misrepresentation, silencing, and subjugation of Black women both in literature and society’ (Walters, p. 51). Ray’s ‘The Venus of Milo’ is a paean to the statue’s beauty, and ‘Niobe’ is more concerned with the myth than with Niobe’s sculptural counterpart in the Uffizi in Florence, but, as Tracy Walters points out, Ray’s Niobe poem does explore ‘the relationship between silence and oppression’ that has existed since antiquity (Walters, p. 51).

In ‘The Sculptor’s Vision’, I suggest, Ray appropriates classical myth for a different though related purpose: to highlight women’s capacity to evade artistic confinement and forge their own identities. The poem treats of a sculptor who, inspired by a vision, aims to produce it in marble:

A vision on his dreaming broke;  
With parted lips and eyes that spoke,  
A statue stood of beauty rare,  
And chiseled with such exquisite care,  
It seemed no mortal hand had share  
In what was like embodied prayer.<sup>49</sup>

Although the statue begins to form ‘In curves of beauty, strength and grace’, despite the sculptor’s endless effort, it never matches his ideal (p. 6). While the poem may be read as an allegory of the soul’s journey to spiritual perfection — ‘let us, like the sculptor, still | Pursue our toil with deathless will, | Advancing towards a glorious height’ — its focus on the female ideal sculpted by a male artist invites us to return to the Pygmalion story (p. 7). In this context, the sculptor, like Hickey’s Ceccolino, is continually frustrated, unable to capture the feminine ideal his imagination constructs. Though the collective ‘us’ Ray’s speaker addresses may be considered man in general, the poem may also be read not only as an instruction to women poets who wish to advance towards the ‘glorious height’ of the arts, but also to those women of her own race who, through artistic achievement, might liberate themselves from servitude.

Ray’s fame, such as it is today, rests on her poem ‘Lincoln’, read in Washington DC on 14 April 1876 to celebrate the unveiling of the Emancipation Memorial (*Fig. 8*), a sculpture that commemorates Lincoln and the abolition of slavery.<sup>50</sup> While the monument itself shows Lincoln

<sup>49</sup> Henrietta Cordelia Ray, ‘The Sculptor’s Vision’, in *Collected Black Women’s Poetry*, ed. by Joan R. Sherman, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), III, 6–7 (p. 6).

<sup>50</sup> Ella Higginson (1861–1940) also wrote a poem which may be about the Lincoln Emancipation Memorial. Entitled ‘The Statue’, it appeared in Higginson’s third collection of poetry *When the Birds Go North Again* (1898). Due to uncertainty about the poem’s subject, I have not included it for discussion in this article. Thanks to Laura Laffrado at West Washington University for her help regarding the source of Higginson’s inspiration.



Fig. 8: Thomas Ball, *Emancipation Memorial*, 1876, bronze, Lincoln Park, Washington DC. Wikimedia Commons.

in what was then contemporary dress, Ray's poem nevertheless alludes to classical culture, lauding his 'Rare heroism, spirit-purity | The storied Spartan's stern simplicity', that echoes the 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' of Winckelmann's antique ideal.<sup>51</sup> Anticipating the determined stance the speaker asks us to adopt in 'The Sculptor's Vision', Ray praises Lincoln who, unflinching in his task to achieve her race's emancipation, fulfilled his 'mighty mission with a deathless will' (p. 5). For Ray, the classical world offers ways in which to engage with the political and yet heighten the importance of personal freedom, whether artistic or racial.

While worlds apart in terms of wealth and education, like Ray the Jewish-American poet Emma Lazarus is now known primarily for 'The New Colossus', a poem associated with a public monument and with questions of race, but she also engaged with statuary in a later work, 'Venus of the Louvre' (1884). In this sonnet, the speaker praises the *Venus de Milo's* beauty which 'glistens like a star' (*Fig. 9*); like Galatea, Lazarus's Venus is caught between animation and stasis, 'transfixed to stone', but 'none the less immortal, breathing on'.<sup>52</sup> The speaker is not alone; this vision of the Louvre *Venus* is shared with the poet Heinrich Heine:

Serenely poised on her world-worshipped throne,  
As when she guided once her dove-drawn car, —  
But at her feet a pale, death-stricken Jew,  
Her life-adorer, sobbed farewell to love.  
Here *Heine* wept! Here still he weeps anew,  
Nor ever shall his shadow lift or move  
While mourns one ardent heart, one poet-brain,  
For vanished Hellas and Hebraic pain. (p. 239)

Inspired by the preface to Heine's final volume of poetry, in which he describes his farewell visit to the *Venus de Milo*, Lazarus's sonnet precludes her essay 'The Poet Heine', first published in the *Century Magazine* in December 1884.<sup>53</sup> For Lazarus, Heine was 'a Jew, with the mind and eyes of a Greek', a hybridity captured in the last line of her sonnet, in which it is perhaps her own 'ardent heart', her own 'poet-brain' that mourns, like Heine, 'For vanished Hellas and Hebraic pain'.<sup>54</sup> Yet, as Esther Schor has argued, Lazarus's consciousness of such duality also fostered 'a liberatory

<sup>51</sup> Henrietta Cordelia Ray, *Lincoln* (New York: [n. pub.], 1893), p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> 'Venus of the Louvre', in *Emma Lazarus: Selected Poems and Other Writings*, ed. by Gregory Eiselein (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2002), p. 239.

<sup>53</sup> Lazarus published translations of Heine's poetry in 1866 and 1881. See *The Jewish Reception of Heinrich Heine*, ed. by Mark H. Gelber (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), p. 207.

<sup>54</sup> Emma Lazarus, 'The Poet Heine', *Century Magazine*, December 1884, pp. 210–17 (p. 210).





*Fig. 9:* Alexandros of Antioch, *Venus de Milo*, c. 130–100 BC, marble, Louvre Museum, Paris. Wikimedia Commons.

passion for opposition'.<sup>55</sup> Lazarus's poem, 'The New Colossus', published a year earlier, presages this hybridity, alluding to the melting pot of modern America and giving voice to this neoclassical statue of the Roman goddess Libertas who famously begs,

'Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!'<sup>56</sup>

Originally written reluctantly by Lazarus as part of a fundraising campaign to raise money for the pedestal on which the Statue of Liberty (*Fig. 10*) would stand, her sonnet of welcome to the disenfranchised seems at odds with America's stance on immigration at the time. As Gregory Eiselein comments, 'the poem's pro-immigration stand and its image of America as a nation that welcomes impoverished, persecuted, or homeless immigrants from all over the globe were in direct conflict with widespread anti-immigration feeling in the US.'<sup>57</sup> Subverting the significance of a statue that marks America's own independence from Europe at a time of heightened nationalism, Lazarus's sonnet constitutes a political act.<sup>58</sup> Acutely aware of the discrimination experienced by her own race in the Russian pogroms of 1881 and 1882, Lazarus was increasingly politically active, advocating the resettlement of Jews in Palestine.<sup>59</sup> However, her transgressive act is veiled by the 'womanly' nature of the sentiments expressed by the Statue of Liberty. As Lazarus's poem shows, the statue is no aggressive victor like the Colossus of Rhodes, that 'brazen giant of Greek fame' who stands 'With conquering limbs astride from land to land', but a nurturing 'Mother of Exiles' (p. 233). For Priscilla Wald, this reinvention of the Statue of Liberty as a maternal figure conforms 'with the precepts of "The Cult of True Womanhood"'.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, in giving the statue those memorable

<sup>55</sup> Esther Schor, *Emma Lazarus* (New York: Schocken, 2006), p. 211.

<sup>56</sup> 'The New Colossus', in *Emma Lazarus: Selected Poems*, ed. by Eiselein, p. 233.

<sup>57</sup> Gregory Eiselein, 'Introduction', in *Emma Lazarus: Selected Poems*, ed. by Eiselein, pp. 15–32 (p. 20).

<sup>58</sup> As Marina Warner notes, the Statue of Liberty was given by the French to the Americans as 'a gesture of republican fellowship'; the broken chain at Liberty's feet marking the liberation from British control effected by the American War of Independence which ended in 1783. See Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 6–7, 11. The broken chain recalls the broken shackles in the anti-slavery emblem *Am I Not a Man and a Brother* of 1787, mentioned above.

<sup>59</sup> Max Cavitch, 'Emma Lazarus and the Golem of Liberty', in *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*, ed. by Meredith L. McGill (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), pp. 97–124 (p. 102).

<sup>60</sup> Priscilla Wald, 'Immigration and Assimilation in Nineteenth-Century US Wom-

lines, Lazarus also breathes life into it and gives it meaning; as Max Cavitch writes, the sonnet has a ‘vivifying effect, endowing the statue with a kind of speech [...] that is tantamount to the life no sculptor could bestow upon it’ (p. 115). Lazarus appropriates Pygmalion’s role and reshapes the statue’s form; at the same time, she gives it life, ‘animates’ it, and in that sense becomes, like many of her predecessors, not only Pygmalion, but Aphrodite, claiming both masculine fame and feminine life-giving power.

Facing the Atlantic, the Statue of Liberty might be considered a colossal version of Phelps’s stone woman of Eastern Point who stares forever out to sea but who, as the ‘Mother of Exiles’ waits for her children rather than her husband to come home. For Marina Warner, Liberty is simply another abstract concept ‘expressed in the feminine’ and thus cannot articulate her own freedom, let alone that of others (p. 12). Yet, drawn from literature and myth, the sculptural figures appropriated by the women I have discussed, including Liberty, appear to have provided them with subversive opportunities. Like Hosmer’s statues and busts of women, they permit acts of reclamation. While mythical figures such as Medusa, Daphne, Beatrice Cenci, and Oenone may be viewed as victims, in Hosmer’s sculpture they acquire an unexpected strength.<sup>61</sup> Joy Kasson notes that

in choosing her ideal subjects [...] Harriet Hosmer appears to have emulated her male colleagues who emphasized the pathos of woman’s victimization. At the same time, however, her sculptures suggested an added psychological dimension, a deeper probing of the experience of transformation in *Daphne* and *Medusa*, a stronger suggestion of the ambiguities of power and powerlessness in *Oenone* and the parricide *Beatrice Cenci*. (p. 150)

The same could be said of those women poets who, following Hemans’s poetic lead, used the sculptural body as a means to interrogate questions of ‘liberty’, be it of the woman poet, of captive slaves, or of those immigrants who, in a reversal of Hosmer’s journey, sought the American shore.

For American women, in the crucial period of nation formation, the classical world began to acquire special significance.<sup>62</sup> While classi-

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en’s Writing’, in *Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing*, ed. by Dale M. Bauer and Philip Gould (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 176–99 (p. 189).

<sup>61</sup> In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Medusa, like Daphne, is raped by a god (in this case Poseidon) and it is Athena’s jealousy that condemns her to her fate. Oenone is Paris’s first wife who gives birth to their son, Corythos, and whom he later abandons for Helen of Troy. Oenone enacts her revenge by sending Corythos to help the Greeks find their way to Troy.

<sup>62</sup> Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 2.



*Fig. 10: Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi, Statue of Liberty (La Liberté éclairant le monde), 1884, copper, Liberty Island, New York Harbour. Wikimedia Commons, photograph by featherboa.*

cism had long been considered a male stronghold of erudition and knowledge, it became of increasing importance to women, part of the aesthetic experiences that informed their reading and writing; moreover, it offered reformers 'a new platform for women's classicized public action' and supported 'movements such as abolitionism and feminism' (Winterer, p. 3). As Caroline Winterer makes clear,

educated in new, classically steeped female academies and reading circles, and accustomed to a print culture imbued with classical female exempla, they now reached into their quivers of classical history to attack such social injustices as chattel slavery and female subservience. (p. 3)

For these women, as for British and Irish precursors and contemporaries such as Hemans, Barrett Browning, and Hickey, the sculptural ideal offered ways to interrogate and counter gender constraints and racial inequalities. The Pygmalion myth in particular, with its transformative and vivifying power, could be reimagined and relocated to not only question female passivity, but to appropriate aesthetic artistry, whether in poetry or sculpture itself.