

‘START NOT, GENTLE READER!’
Re-reading Alicia LeFanu’s *Helen Monteagle* (1818)

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‘READ HELEN MONTEAGLE’, NOTES MARY SHELLEY in a journal entry of January 1818.¹ Alicia LeFanu’s three-volume novel had arrived at the printers in Clerkenwell in the Autumn of 1817, at around the time Shelley was reading its immediate predecessor, LeFanu’s first work of fiction, *Strathallan* (1816). *Strathallan* was in its second revised edition by November 1816, and had run to a third in 1817. Shelley was perhaps persuaded to give *Helen Monteagle* swifter attention than she had LeFanu’s first novel by an early notice printed in the *Literary Gazette* which ‘safely’ recommended it ‘to the perusal of all who received delight from *Strathallan*’.² A then 19-year-old Claire Clairmont, on the other hand, was certainly not convinced of its merits and in her journal roundly dismissed *Helen Monteagle* as a ‘Stupid foolish Book’.³ If this is a verdict which arguably belies the wit of LeFanu’s novel, it is one which did not anticipate its author’s enduring presence in the literary marketplace for the next twenty years. *Helen Monteagle* is one of six multi-volume novels LeFanu completed in the period 1816 to 1826, before turning to poetry, essays and short stories published in the popular and periodical press in the 1830s. LeFanu had begun her career much earlier at the age of eighteen with *The Flowers; or, the Sylphid Queen: A Fairy Tale. In Verse* (1809). In 1812, *Rosara’s Chain; or the Choice of Life. A Poem*, went on sale in the Juvenile Library established by Clairmont’s mother Mary, and William Godwin. LeFanu would have been amongst the first to discountenance the idea that quantity of literary output was any measure of its quality or worth, but *Helen Monteagle* is a far from stupid novel which focuses upon and practises deviation from predictable courses of action.

This article is the first to re-read *Helen Monteagle* as a contribution to understandings of the variety of prose fiction published in the Romantic period. Its circulation in print coincided with that of *Frankenstein* and *Northanger Abbey*, and its disappearance is typical of the many novels produced by a generation of writers who did not achieve the distinction of Shelley or Austen. *Helen Monteagle* is not radical or revolutionary, but it is ambitious and, in its interest in what Henry Fielding referred to as ‘the Science of *Authoring*’, curiously experimental.⁴ Tracing the eponymous heroine’s defiance of parental authority, the article begins by exploring how this shadows forth other incidents of female transgression in *Helen Monteagle* which in turn serve the broader purpose of articulating reflections on authorship in the early nineteenth century, and about women novelists in particular. The tendency of LeFanu’s fictionalised author–narrator

to intervene in the romance narrative she is otherwise purposed to write is seen to anticipate the increasingly self-reflexive mode adopted in *Leolin Abbey*, the novel LeFanu completed in 1818, and which was published the following year. Both texts are considered against the backdrop of LeFanu's attempts to retain some agency in the process of her professionalisation.

LeFanu was connected by birth to a distinguished line of celebrated writers, which included her maternal grandmother, the novelist and dramatist Frances Sheridan, and her uncle, Richard Brinsley Sheridan; the Victorian novelist Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu was related to her as the grandson of her maternal aunt. *Helen Monteagle* is the work of an intelligent and proficient reader of literary history, and in its comical portrayal of literary pretension LeFanu develops *Strathallan's* lively interest in writers and readers. It also, as this article suggests, betrays a greater apprehension of the threat amateurism was presenting to the integrity of LeFanu's immediate literary culture.

Women Writers and the 'siren arts'

Helen Monteagle weaves its narrative around a triumvirate of female characters, the eponymous heroine's experience of elopement and estrangement intersecting with the lives of her sister, Adeliza Marchmont, and a brilliant actress, Cordelia Clifford, who has retreated from public life to the home of the Marchmonts' widowed neighbour, Angelica Temple. Set principally in Wales and Scotland in the decade following the War of the Second Coalition (1798–1801), the domestic action is shadowed by references to the Mediterranean locations of military and off-duty conflict as experienced by Helen's husband, Edmund Monteagle, and Angelica's enigmatic cousin, Sir Almaric Douglas.⁵ Monteagle is an honourable and distinguished army captain disinherited as heir to his uncle's estate for refusing to abandon military life. Douglas is similarly a warrior at once celebrated and unsuitable. A veteran of British diplomacy and intervention in North Africa, Douglas is a respectful admirer of the places he has chosen to visit: Algiers, Tripoli, Tunis and Egypt. However, his laudable military record is offset by scurrilous speculation about his travels. Adeliza eventually falls in love with this troubled man, though it is Helen's initial courtship by Monteagle, and the circumstances of their marriage, which form the basis of what appears to be principal of the novel's three plotlines.

This tale originates with the usually sensible Helen's resolve to defy her father's objections to Monteagle, whom she agrees to marry in secret. Helen is naively unaware of the elaborate plans Monteagle has put in place for their elopement, the success of which depends upon his friend—Douglas's young impulsive cousin, Edric—acting as a decoy in company with Helen's maid-servant. When Helen's father, Lord Rosstrevor, discovers that he has been pursuing the wrong couple, he assumes her complicit in such a wicked deception, and is distraught. Promptly disowning Helen, Rosstrevor forbids that she return to Rock Trevor, the family home in South Wales, or to his seat at Marchmont Hall near Edinburgh. She becomes in his estimation 'a blasted monument of

beauties, graces, talents, bestowed in vain' and 'too conscious of transgression to find happiness in herself'.⁶ Helen's anxiety at the scrutiny to which her once inviolable reputation is subject, is replaced by the deprivations she experiences as one amongst 'that most pitiable race of human beings, the wives or widows of soldiers' (III, 289). A new recruit, Helen feels isolated in their peripatetic and garrulous company, and realises that romantic love alone is a fragile defence against the unfounded jealousies and suspicions which beset her marriage to a man profoundly committed to his calling.

Ultimately, Helen disproves the adage that 'two years, in a soldier's wife, is, generally, too long a time for beauty to last' (III, 291), and is happily reconciled with Monteagle and her father. However, with Monteagle invalidated out of active service, Helen's happiness—and, arguably, LeFanu's interest in its depiction—is compromised. Helen is overjoyed at Monteagle's return but a fuller portrait of her pleasure is left to the reader's imagination on the grounds that

[l]anguage, which has so many forms and shades to define and describe all that is painful, and all that is wrong, becomes barren, flat, and limited, when the picture to be represented requires only the tints dedicated to beauty, to virtue, or happiness. (II, 466)

As one of several interventions from LeFanu's narrator, this comment acknowledges the preternatural quality of an impossibly idealised femininity. At the same time, it betrays a reluctance to dwell upon the sometimes tiresome fictional heroines an author is obliged to place centre stage.

In the novel's more intriguing subplot, LeFanu investigates all that is painful and wrong about Cordelia, the reluctant actress living in a state of near nervous exhaustion at Angelica's Welsh villa, Caerlaverock. Although Cordelia is, like Helen, a woman whose choices test the limits of female propriety, her actions are guided by filial duty rather than romantic love. Cordelia's heart is decidedly 'dried up and dead' (I, 261) and for years her captivating performances under the stage name 'Miss Evelyn' have been dedicated to earning money sufficient to clear her father's debts. Once a prosperous merchant living at the Tuscan port of Livorno or 'Leghorn' on the Ligurian Sea, Cordelia's father suffered under its occupation by French forces in the summer of 1796. Left behind by many compatriots whose escape was successfully effected by the British navy, he was stripped of his assets and, upon returning to England, consigned to prison. At the time of Cordelia's semi-retirement from stage life, he is still living there with her Italian-born mother and brother Emilio. Cordelia's father has consistently welcomed his daughter's very public acts of selfless enterprise, the success of which is measured in the rage for 'Miss Evelyn' related merchandise—'the Evelyn robe, the Evelyn scarf, the Evelyn sandal' (II, 199). However, pride and an increasingly righteous fervour prevents her mother from sharing his enthusiasm, and Emilio's bitter taunts and cruel sarcasms conspire to aggravate Cordelia's already troubled sense of prejudicial assumptions about female players. Her sensitivity to the kind of press criticism which is designed 'to hurt, not to correct' adds to the complex web of private and public opinion in which she is

enmeshed (II, 251). Cordelia's eventual breakdown, however, is also caused by the indignities of success: 'To have my talents ostentatiously brought forward' in the newspapers 'would be in itself be sufficiently painful', she observes (II, 249). But to this is added the torment of having 'any imputed advantages of person I may possess, dwelt upon with inconsiderate, and exaggerated eulogium; enumerated with the exactness of a dealer in pictures, and appreciated in the language of a connoisseur' (II, 249–50).

Cordelia's anxiety reflects how 'regular reviews of both performances by and portraits of well-known actresses contributed to the extraordinary visibility of those public figures' whose 'private lives were often plundered for narratives which provided tales both of social mobility and adulterous liaisons'.⁷ Cordelia actively pursues neither, but the fact that Lord Rosstrevor wishes to make her his second wife, and Almaric Douglas considers her a 'justly dreaded enchantress' (I, 222) threatens to compromise her innocence. Cordelia's retreat from public scrutiny and initial reluctance to advise on and participate in Rosstrevor's private theatricals perhaps bears traces of real-life actress Elizabeth Farren (1759/62–1829). She met her future husband, the Earl of Derby, at his friend the Duke of Richmond's private theatre at the height of her fame in the late 1780s. Farren's chaste lifestyle was a matter of public record, and she sustained an impeccable reputation throughout a career which included, among numerous comic roles, that for which Cordelia is most celebrated, Hermione in the *Winter's Tale*. Farren's transformation, however, to Duchess of Derby upon the death of the Duke's estranged first wife in 1797, inevitably attracted suspicion that it was motivated by a long-nurtured desire to move in circles above her station.⁸

There is another public story relevant to that of Cordelia which has a very personal dimension for LeFanu, concerning as it does Eliza Sheridan, *née* Elizabeth Linley (1754–92) who, prior to marrying LeFanu's uncle, Richard Brinsley, gained celebrity as a soprano and was revered for both her beauty and extraordinarily expressive voice. From the point of her stage debut in Bath at the age of eight, Linley was worked hard by her music-master father, Charles Linley, and as a fêted but guileless 17-year-old was betrothed to Walter Long, a man over forty years her senior. When she successfully implored Long to break off the engagement, Linley found herself re-imagined onstage as 'Kitty Linnet' in Samuel Foote's farce, *The Maid of Bath* (1771), and was once again harassed by Captain Mathews, a married man who had previously proposed that she be his lover. In 1772, Elizabeth determined upon running away to a convent in St Quentin and was escorted as far as Lille (before falling ill) by a lovelorn Sheridan, whom she had approached as the trusted brother of her neighbouring friend. Their apparent elopement, prudent marriage, and the two duels Sheridan fought with Mathews upon his return to London, made for an entertaining national scandal.

Joseph Roach has observed that the writer Frances Burney (the name of whose first fictional protagonist, Evelina, is echoed in Cordelia's stage persona) 'consciously or unconsciously identified some of her own aspirations and anxie-

ties about public performance' with Linley, 'the prodigy she at first called "the Syren"'.⁹ In *The Wanderer* (1814), Burney reflects upon the ambiguities of performance through her initially disguised heroine who acquires the name 'Ellis' but is actually Juliet Granville. She prompts further anxiety when, having agreed to participate in a private theatrical performance of *The Provok'd Husband*, she proves herself a consummate actress, and later accompanies herself on the harp 'in a slow and plaintive air, with a delicacy, skill, and expression, at once touching and masterly'.¹⁰ Ellis invites suspicion in an exclusively non-commercial context but her performance 'retroactively', as Nora Nachumi puts it, 'calls into question the apparent authenticity' of her ladylike demeanour offstage, and Burney 'reveals a culture that cannot reconcile its notions of feminine modesty with the spectacle of a woman performing in public'.¹¹ In another novel of 1818, Charles Maturin's *Women; or, Pour et Contre*, this spectacle is transmuted into the significant threat to life posed by Zaira, a celebrated actress and opera singer. Whereas for Burney and LeFanu the contests which centred on the real-life performers of the previous generation pertain in complex ways to their own public displays of make-believe, questions of legitimacy in Maturin's novel are appropriated to a tale in which Zaira is, albeit unwittingly, a rival in love for the broken-hearted heroine she only later discovers to be her own daughter. However indirectly, she is implicated in her daughter's death and mired in sexual scandal.¹²

LeFanu's portrait of Cordelia, a woman made wretched by her work, explores the contradictions Jennie Batchelor has identified as inherent to the perceptions and experiences of the female professional in the latter stages of the eighteenth century.¹³ An actress 'whose manners might fascinate all, while her situation, some parents might disapprove' (II, 227), Cordelia's financial rewards further complicate estimations of her inspired performances; the intelligence she brings to her roles, at odds with her baldly commercial imperative. This double bind is further complicated by her lack of authoritative control: though an active agent of the marketplace, Cordelia is paradoxically also its object. LeFanu arguably traces an analogy here with women writers for whom a genuine literary talent is the potential source of both intellectual satisfaction and much needed capital. As Batchelor observes, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) 'laid down the foundation for a new kind of literary authority', from which emerged the 'modern author' as a 'disinterested professional' not 'adversely implicated in the trucking and bartering practices to which commercial man was supposed to be naturally inclined'. In the final decades of the eighteenth century, 'the literary' appeared to be 'increasingly associated with the "masculine" [...], with those traditionally "male" subjects such as economics and politics that were held to be superior to such inferior, ubiquitous and feminine productions as the novel'.¹⁴

Cordelia's most severe critic is the dashing and enigmatic hero, Almaric Douglas. Some years prior to the action of the novel, a friend of Douglas had developed an unreciprocated and, ultimately, fatal passion for Cordelia. Though Cordelia was brought 'to the brink of the grave' by that friend's suicide (III, 307), Douglas is merciless in demonising her part in it. His distrust of Cordelia's

profession clearly influences his interpretation of her conduct in private. The 'diabolical arts' by which Cordelia 'had quenched the love of fame' and a 'thirst for glory' (III, 306–07) are commensurate with 'the syren arts, the cold-hearted triumphs of coquetry' he assumes were the means by which she wilfully destroyed the most 'delicate and discerning' of men (III, 305). But Douglas woefully misreads Cordelia's part in this tragedy. Naturally disinclined to exploit any passion her beauty often and unwittingly excites, Cordelia had, in this instance, prudently distanced herself from a would-be lover driven to distraction by his own 'frenzied' obsession (III, 311). That Douglas perseveres in such a contemptuous and uncorroborated view of a woman he does not know, makes for a significant flaw in a character otherwise functioning as the male embodiment of romantic 'virtue, valour' and 'heroism' (III, 313). But this is perhaps LeFanu's point. As Jacqueline Pearson observes, the sexualisation of women's acts of creativity became, particularly in the years 1817–20, a characteristic of Byron's surreal and obscene 'outbursts against literary women', and Douglas arguably represents a wider community of sceptical, if more respectable, male authorities.¹⁵ The opening of Walter Scott's *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814), for example, with its "elaborate suppression of prior", mostly female "narrative models" is cited by Pearson as indicative of a heightening of anxiety about literary women in the second generation of Romantics.¹⁶ Douglas's much lamented friend, and supposed victim of Cordelia's artfulness, was a man of knowledge and taste who 'would have undoubtedly contributed much to enlarge the sphere both of arts and literature' (III, 304). Cordelia's propensity for deception, like the woman writer's pretensions to fiction, rival and displace a male prerogative.

Gentle Readers and 'soft sympathy' Novels

In light of these contexts *Helen Monteagle* is less a 'stupid foolish book' than it is a romance which simultaneously sustains an interest in perceptions of novel writers and their readers. In the guise of *Helen Monteagle's* narrator, LeFanu defends the novel genre as a 'much abused and misrepresented species of writing' (III, 273), a phrase which recollects the observation included in *Northanger Abbey* (1818), that 'no species of composition has been so much decried'.¹⁷ Cordelia-like, she works with professional integrity. But she too forcibly acts a part, implementing the conventions of a romance novel, with its emphasis on domesticity and sympathy, whilst questioning its objectives. *Helen Monteagle's* principal female and male protagonists, wronged by the world and divested of their rightful inheritance are, for instance, duly vindicated, and true lovers prosper at the expense of others' venality and pride. But LeFanu's narrative interventions suggest ambivalence about the adequacy of that fictional framework. When, for instance, Helen is described as resembling Monteagle 'too much to be a fit wife for him', the narrator pre-empts the reader's surprise:

Start not, gentle reader! for surely the readers of 'soft sympathy novels,' ought to become gentle, if not so by nature, yet from the constant income-tax we levy on their sensibilities. (I, 311)

The allusion to hard currency is a fitting one, the narrator proceeding to explain the Monteagles' mutual tendency 'to spend money, and there is no money, on either side, to spend'. LeFanu most likely does sympathise with the kind of profligacy her narrator is obliged to censure, but she is also playfully invoking the assumption that readers and, in particular, women readers, are debilitated by literary consumption. This Laurence Sterne-inspired address to the reader also incorporates a different kind of emphasis on fidelity and betrayal. LeFanu is true to the spirit of earlier fictions of sensibility, but is acutely aware of their shortcomings. In addition, she implies that for every talented practitioner of prose there are innumerable imitative writers whose inferior efforts negatively influence perceptions of modern fiction.

In this respect, LeFanu takes her place as successor to the satirical novelists of the previous century for whom careless approximations of 'soft sympathy novels' were a cause for concern. William Beckford's *Modern Novel Writing, or the Elegant Enthusiast* was published in 1796 and followed, in 1797, by *Azemias: A Descriptive and Sentimental Novel. Interspersed with Pieces of Poetry. By Jacquetta Agneta Mariana Jenks*. As announced on the title page of Beckford's first 'rhapsodical romance', the heroine and 'elegant enthusiast' is Arabella Bloomville, whose 'interesting emotions', also 'interspersed with poetry', are to be related by the fictional author, Lady Harriet Marlow. The opening chapter of *Modern Novel Writing* reveals the retired location of Arabella's cottage, '[a]t the foot of a verdant declivity overshadowed by woodbine, jessamine and myrtle, and softly inundated by a sapphire rivulet that wandered through the neighbouring woods in serpentine simplicity'.¹⁸ The description of its inhabitant is similarly effusive. Arabella's

complexion was neither the insipid whiteness of the lily-bosomed Circassian, nor the masculine shade of the Gallic brunette; the freshness of health glowed upon her cheek, while the lustre of her dark blue eyes borrowed its splendour from the unsullied flame, that gave her mind the perfection of intellect! (p. 46)

Arabella's lips, teeth, hair, fingers, arms and bosom are considered in turn, and 'her little feet were so enchantingly pretty, that they ravished all beholders' (p. 47). The most important of her admirers is Henry Lambert, a military hero distinguished by the kind of relentless 'suavity which operates beyond the shafts of courage, or even the prevalence of despair' (p. 42). As is clear from the outset, Beckford's design 'seeks to debunk the (bad) "Modern" fad for "Novel Writing" by reformulating the paradoxical criticism that its "novelty" is formed of existing materials recycled to the point of redundancy'.¹⁹

The opening paragraph of *Helen Monteagle* defaults to the kind of idyllic scene-setting mocked by Beckford, transporting LeFanu's reader to a remote and 'delightful villa, romantically situated in the Principality of Wales'. It is immediately established, however, that 'a party of gay young people' lately arrived there, at the invitation of its owner, Angelica Temple, 'came to the following wonderful and astonishing resolutions':

That no sentimental novels, doleful ditties, horrifying romances, or soul-harrowing poetry, should be read or recited in that society which was formed entirely for the support of harmless recreation and innocent mirth. (I, 1–2)

LeFanu is more explicit than Beckford in distancing her own novel from fictional works of dubious quality and potentially detrimental effect, but incorporates in her ensuing narrative close and ironic imitations of their worst excesses. The arrival of Helen Monteagle on the scene of Angelica Temple's utopia, for example, is heralded by an unattributed quotation from Thomas Tickell's mock-heroic poem *Kensington Garden* (1722), uttered by an impressed Edric Douglas. Helen is, by association, possessed of 'A faultless beauty, and an angel mind' (I, 55). A reference to the fairy Prince Azuriel in Tickell's poem, the line in LeFanu's hands (substituting 'angel' for the original 'spotless'), at once confirms Helen's superior qualities and implies that such qualities are unattainable and therefore unmatched in the real human lives of her readers. Helen's *incredibility* is further underlined by the following account of her appearance: 'Helen was a brilliant *blonde*; with blue eyes, and a glow of complexion, united to all the graces and fascinating vivacity of a brunette.' (I, 55) As is the case with the earlier description of Beckford's Arabella, this paints the heroine in accordance with specific reference points only to produce a rather blurry picture. It is not quite clear what these young women look like. As the narrator of Charlotte Smith's novel, *Marchmont* (1796), observes: it is 'difficult' for 'a novelist to give to one of his heroines any very marked feature which shall not disfigure her!'²⁰ Ultimately, LeFanu's Helen is developed in the novel as a sincerely drawn character capable of speaking for herself ('the bees of eloquence and poesy' have, after all, 'shed their honey upon her lips' [I, 86]), but she is also the object of her creator's occasional acts of self-parody.

If the present readership were in any doubt that LeFanu is knowingly invoking, rather than straightforwardly practising the language Beckford saw fit to burlesque, her third novel, *Leolin Abbey* (1819), confirms her inclination to subvert expectations. LeFanu was working on the novel by August 1818 and it was published early in the summer of the following year. Its hero is the grown-up Alured Vere, recently bereaved of his father and facing an uncertain future in Dublin with his stricken mother, Emmeline. Across the first two chapters, Emmeline discloses to Alured the identity of her own father, Lord Trelawney, and his seeming to have persevered, throughout Alured's life, in punishing her for marrying against his wishes. His revenge is apparently exacted at the expense of Alured, whom Emmeline has not been able to fix in any profession on account of Trelawney's covert influence. Aware that she herself is dying, Emmeline's only hope is that her brother—whose own history is outlined in chapter three—will honour his promise to look after Alured's interests. By the close of the fourth chapter, Alured has left Ireland for his grandfather's seat, Leolin Abbey, and LeFanu's narrator is sure that she has 'endeavoured to make the reader as well

acquainted with every branch of my hero's family as I am myself'.²¹ It is a comment, however, which provokes dissatisfaction:

'Bless me!', my fair reader returns, 'that is exactly what you ought *not* to do. Who cares for a man that knows his parents from the very beginning? No; I'll tell you what you ought to have done. The beautiful Emmeline, you say, married against her father's consent: Captain Vere should die abroad—Emmeline, feeling herself about to leave this world likewise, (observe, all this ought to take place during the hero's infancy,) should cast about for some contrivance to recommend the young orphan to his flinty-hearted grandfather. She might either leave him in a basket, and place him (as the Turkish incendiaries do a lighted match) at the entrance of a door, or on the sill of the window. You authors know how to manage the details of those things,—somehow with a spring; or if he was either bought of a gypsy, or fished out of a horsepond, or saved from a shipwreck, or discovered descending in a balloon,—that would be delightful; and then he might be called, "The Child of Doubt;" or "The Child of Mystery," you know, which would be so pretty, and, above all things, so new'. (I, 52–53)

Warming to her borrowed theme, the reader has further ideas as to how such doubt or mystery might be resolved. As he matured, Alured would bear an increasingly uncanny resemblance to those distinguished predecessors whose portraits grace the walls of Leolin Abbey, and his true lineage would thus be triumphantly restored. At this point, LeFanu's narrator puts a stop to such fervent enthusiasm for novelty:

Patience, patience Madam, 'I would not have you be too sure,' as Puff says in the Critic, that my hero *does* know his parents. All I have as yet written may have been purely *pour vous désorienter*. Leaving these matters to a future consideration, I now request your sympathy and indulgence in favour of Alured, for the first time introduced to the formidable ordeal of a family circle. (I, 53–54)

The reader's proposed revisions are hackneyed, formulaic and clearly popular. The child in possession of something or other was a recurrent motif of writing in the last decades of the eighteenth century.²² Minerva had published *The Child of Providence* in 1792 and the trend prevailed with *The Child of Hope* (1800), attributed to Mary Pilkington and, in 1808, the very title suggested by LeFanu's reader appeared as, *The Child of Mystery, a Novel, in Three Volumes, Founded on Recent Events*, by Sarah Scudgell Wilkinson.²³ The response of *Leolin Abbey's* narrator is to conjure Mr Puff, the panegyrist turned playwright of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's final play *The Critic* (1779), who instructs a company of players in the performance of his tragedy, *The Spanish Armada*. The line quoted in *Leolin Abbey* is the answer Puff gives to the theatre critic, Sneer. He has accompanied the writer Sir Fretful Plagiary to a rehearsal of *The Spanish Armada* by actors given leave by Puff 'to cut out or omit whatever they found

heavy or unnecessary to the plot'. When the underprompter informs Puff that 'they have taken very liberal advantage of your indulgence', he concedes that the actors are, 'in general, very good judges'.²⁴ Upon delivery of a risibly short four-line soliloquy by a Beefeater—only later revealed to be a privateer, and the eventual assailant of the play's Spanish leading man, Whiskerandos—Sneer remarks: 'A most sentimental beefeater that, Mr Puff'. Puff replies: 'I would not have you be too sure that he *is* a beefeater'. Sneer's 'What! A hero in disguise', is met with Puff's 'No matter; I only give you a hint' (III. 1. 97–100).

The allusion to Puff sees LeFanu mine sources rich in debates about literary innovation. *The Critic* was successor to what Michael Corder describes as 'a series of metatheatrical playscripts' originating with George Villiers's Restoration play, *The Rehearsal* (1671).²⁵ Sheridan's Puff is adapted from Villiers's character Bayes, a playwright and satirical distortion of John Dryden, whose new play in rehearsal confuses the actors at every turn. Whereas Bayes is an advocate of new directions in dramatic writing—for which he is ridiculed—Puff is uninspired 'to strike out anything new'. His approach is inimical to probability and historical accuracy; 'but', he asserts, 'I take it I improve on the established modes' (II. 1. 458–59). Puff is reliant on literary precedent and, by aligning herself with him, the narrator of *Leolin Abbey* seemingly admits to her own limited powers of creative imagination. She also hints that she is in the business of disorientating the reader, though this is to the ultimate end of, maybe, giving that reader what she wants. It is a tease which is highly inventive. It threatens the kind of confusion Puff's literary precursor, Bayes, caused with his radically new departures from established modes of dramatic writing, at the same time as it accentuates the decidedly conservative expectations of a reader for whom 'new' is a rehash of familiar and rather tired fictional tropes.

If LeFanu's novels of 1818 and 1819 suggest some affinities with earlier eighteenth-century satirists, they were also published at a time when, as Lisa M. Wilson's study has demonstrated, continuities were emerging across a range of satirical novels written by women. Despite the political and literary differences between, for example, Mary Robinson, famed actress and mistress of the Prince of Wales, and Sarah Greene, author of *Romance Readers and Romance Writers* (1810) and *Scotch Novel Reading* (1824), Wilson argues that they deploy comparable satirical strategies. Robinson emerges from this picture as a particular kind of self-satirist who, in *The Natural Daughter* (1799) 'satirises the popular taste for just the kind of novel that she is often accused of writing: the tell-all satire that ridicules her acquaintances and capitalises on the reading public's prurient interest in the private lives of the celebrated'.²⁶ An illustration of this sees Robinson's heroine, a novelist, advised by her duplicitous and venal publisher that a tale spun from any real-life scandal and billed with a familiarly salacious title will sell. There is a nice correspondence between this and the pert recommendations of *Leolin Abbey's* reader to its narrator which hints at LeFanu's interest in fellow Longman novelist Robinson, not only as a stage, but also literary performer. The terms of engagement are different, however. Rob-

inson's fictional publisher is subjected by her to the very lance of ridicule he suggests the novelist-heroine should swap for her pen. LeFanu's fictional reader is insubordinate; operating at a superior level of narration and, by implication, with greater influence in the literary marketplace of 1819.

Leolin Abbey develops the formal disruption of narrative LeFanu experiments with in *Helen Monteagle*, and signifies her increasing familiarity with a market characterised by surplus supply and reader-driven demand. Nearly a decade had elapsed between LeFanu's first publication, *The Flowers*, and the sale of *Helen Monteagle*, and during this time LeFanu had begun to appreciate that there was not a direct correlation between a book's merit, and its potential to turn a profit. LeFanu's increasingly astute understanding of the terms of success is an important context in which to understand her technique; a technique which bears traces of that 'mingling of satiric derision and self-implication' Corder identifies as at work in Sheridan's *The Critic*.²⁷ Early reviewers of *Strathallan* in 1816 had been quick to publicly acknowledge a correspondence of talent between niece and uncle. Conscious of this, perhaps LeFanu enjoyed another private joke in her allusion to Puff, recalling, at a time when her view of the writing profession was at its most sceptical, the very play in which Sheridan's ingenuity was as much in evidence as his 'diminishing' faith 'in theatre itself'.²⁸

'Forming connexions in the literary line'

In an 1859 review of 'lithographed mock-sentimental drawing-room ballads of the usual calibre', the *Literary Gazette* attends to one of the title-page emblems with barely concealed derision. It describes an 'impossibly fair youth' leaning upon the 'frail shoulder' of an 'ideally perfect young lady', with the 'impossible tenderness of pressure (looking, however, "intensely nowhere") [...] in a wholly impossible posture'. This is mere segue to the review's damning opinion of a previous generation of women writers. This 'ravishing picture' is one

upon which Louisa Sydney Stanhope, Nella Stephens, Alicia Lefanu, Rosa Matilda, or any other of the Leadenhall tribe of petticoat novelists who long since enriched the Minerva press, would have constructed a romance in three volumes, with graceful induction, and 'most saddest sequel'.²⁹

LeFanu would have been disappointed to read her name in association with Minerva, a press which, though it dominated the market primarily in women's writing across a range of genres, persisted into the nineteenth century as a byword for inferior, widely circulated and ultimately forgotten fiction. Notwithstanding the business acumen and influence of its founder, William Lane, Minerva—the name Lane adopted for his premises at 31 Leadenhall Street in 1790—became 'a common term to describe a particular type of light society romance or thriller, much condemned in conduct literature'.³⁰ According to William St Clair, many advice manuals familiar to eighteenth-century readers—by such as James Fordyce, John Gregory and Hester Chapone—and which generally advised against novel reading, enjoyed long print runs in the Romantic

period. Reissued after the French Revolution 'to meet a new demand for older certainties',³¹ conduct books of the previous generation were supplemented by new titles which perpetuated the idea that 'Minerva' and the business of the circulating library were synonymous. As successor to Lane, A. K. Newman gradually shifted the company's publishing priorities, but he had also inherited the circulating library at Leadenhall Street, where the system had been mobilised by Lane as early as 1784.³² His 'main catalogue and six additional parts, printed between 1814 and 1819, list 7,967 items, including more than 3,500—or 40%—fiction titles'.³³ In 1819, twenty years after first warning of the dangers of reading for young girls in the oft reprinted *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, Hannah More thought the proportion sufficient to identify the circulating library as 'no unfrequented road' to the divorce court.³⁴

Despite this, of the women writers listed in the *Literary Gazette*, only Stanhope is a Minerva author in the strictest sense. In a career spanning 1806–1827, she published almost exclusively with the press through its various incarnations, including nine novels under the Minerva imprint by 1818.³⁵ LeFanu's association with Minerva comes in part from her dealings with 'A. K. Newman & Co. Leadenhall Press', with whom she published in 1823 *Tales of a Tourist, or Fashionable Connexions*, and *Don Juan de Las Sierras*, as well as her last known novel, *Henry the Fourth of France* (1826). Antony King Newman had been an apprentice of Lane's, and became a publishing partner in 1801. His name appears in 'Minerva Press' title-pages of 1802 alongside that of his employer. Subsequent changes to the name under which Newman operated were occasioned by the incorporation of other partners, and by Lane's retirement in around 1808 and his death in 1814.³⁶ Newman continued to honour Minerva's long-standing commitment to publishing novels, romances and adventures but, after 1820, dispensed with the reference to 'Minerva Press' altogether, and specialised in instructive 'Juvenile Prize books'.³⁷ LeFanu's connection with the 'Leadenhall tribe', like that of Nella Stephens, began at this phase in the company's history.

Recent scholarship has sought to redress the balance in favour of Minerva authors. Notably, Anthony Mandal's account of Minerva regular Elizabeth Meeke invites reconsideration of a woman 'whose literary career acts as a metonym for the ways in which women novelists found themselves continually inscribed, erased, and reinscribed at the time, without leaving a trace of them for posterity'.³⁸ In LeFanu's case the author finds herself written into a history of which she was never fully a part. Similarly, Rosa Matilda, the pen-name of Charlotte Byrne, more commonly known by her other pseudonym, Charlotte Dacre (1782?–1825), was not a Minerva author. The opprobrium she excited upon publication of Gothic fantasies in verse and prose in the first decade of the nineteenth century was, however, a sufficient link to a supposedly discreditable organisation. For LeFanu, several decades on and yet still within her own lifetime, the relatively positive reputation she achieved as a novelist of the Romantic period was being undermined by prevailing prejudicial attitudes towards a press she had herself deliberately avoided.

Helen Monteagle was published with Sherwood, Neely and Jones, the partnership also responsible for *Strathallan*, and the anonymously-authored *Lucy Osmond* (1809) which I have argued for elsewhere as written by LeFanu's mother, Elizabeth.³⁹ Sherwood, Neely and Jones published across a more diverse range of disciplines, incorporating economics and agriculture as well as history, drama and fiction. From the point of view of an author, publication 'by a house other than Minerva [...] provided an invitation for its critics to view it as at least potentially non-detrimental'.⁴⁰ From Sherwood's perspective, *Helen Monteagle* was certainly a low risk investment. *Strathallan* had received generally positive reviews which had acknowledged LeFanu's distinguished heritage as well as her ingenuity. In 1816, for example, the *Anti-Jacobin Review* had been particularly emphatic: 'Intellectual excellence is not often hereditary, but in the family of Sheridan, it has shone forth for now more than half a century. Miss Lefanu is the last, but not the least, of those claimants to renown.' The review continued that if *Strathallan* perhaps 'exhibits sometimes the imperfections of an unpractised pen, it always betrays the exuberance of an original and cultivated mind—nothing is borrowed', and concluded with an assertion of LeFanu's potential, declaring *Strathallan* 'to be among the best works of fiction which have issued from the press for many years'.⁴¹

William Sherwood had expanded his business ten years earlier, having taken over from Henry D. Symonds—one of several publishers imprisoned in the early 1790s for selling Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*—to trade with Symonds's son-in-law, Samuel Dunbar Neely, and Robert Jones at 20 Paternoster Row.⁴² As LeFanu was completing *Helen Monteagle*, however, Sherwood courted his own controversy and found himself at the centre of what has since been described as 'the most decisive single event in shaping the reading of the romantic period'.⁴³ In February 1817 Sherwood sold pirated copies of Robert Southey's *Wat Tyler*. The manuscript of Southey's republican verse drama had been suppressed since the 1790s by radical publisher James Ridgway, who had already served a sentence in Newgate for printing the work of Paine. Created poet laureate in 1814, Southey was at risk of embarrassment given the sympathies of *Wat Tyler* and tried to ban Sherwood's version and sue for damages. His failure proved not only lucrative for LeFanu's publisher, but also for the sellers free to trade in cheap, pirated copies: 'And the readership spanned the whole nation.'⁴⁴

Helen Monteagle attracted fewer though no less favourable notices than *Strathallan* upon its publication in 1818 and perhaps LeFanu's change of publisher in this year owed more to her ambition than it did to reluctance on Sherwood's part to negotiate for *Leolin Abbey*. In August 1818, LeFanu first made the acquaintance of Thomas Moore whose recent oriental verse romance, *Lalla Rookh* (1817), and satirical *The Fudge Family in Paris* (1818), had been published by Longman. The occasion of their meeting was Moore's work on his biography of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who had died in 1816. Unlike Sheridan's first posthumous biographer, John Watkins, Moore was keen to consult his family. LeFanu's mother, Elizabeth, had been annotating her copy of Watkins's

biography, correcting his mistakes in a state of exacerbated contempt for what she perceived to be his distorted account of Sheridan history. But the desire to publish any riposte had been overwhelmed by further bereavement and failing health. Her younger daughter—LeFanu's sister Harriet—died in February 1818 in her twenty-second year. Five months previously, the LeFanus had received news from Dublin of the death of Elizabeth's older sister and, within the same week, of the demise of her nephew, Tom Sheridan. By September 1818 Alicia LeFanu's increasing responsibilities saw her also undertaking, on her mother's behalf, to select, annotate and copy materials for Moore. In this she answered not only his specific requests for family papers relating to Sheridan's political life, but also entrusted him with private correspondence which she thought provided insights on the other personalities with whom he was dealing.

Moore and LeFanu had enjoyed each other's company upon his visit to her Warwickshire home, and he was no less discouraging of her literary ambitions than she was of his plans to resurrect her uncle's reputation. Habituated to receiving appeals from aspiring writers desirous of his influence, Moore did not number LeFanu among the 'paupers, and poets, and poetesses that accumulate on me' in the course of their begging and bothering letters.⁴⁵ He willingly agreed to her request that he read the manuscript of *Leolin Abbey* in advance of its submission to Longman, an 'establishment publisher' as Moore put it, which specialised in respectable religious and school books.⁴⁶ Jane Porter, whom LeFanu greatly admired, had been a Longman author since publication of *Thaddeus of Warsaw* in 1803, and both she and her sister Anna Maria continued their association with the partnership throughout the 1820s. Upon eventual completion of *Leolin Abbey* in December 1818, however, Moore was away from home and advised LeFanu against any delay his looking over it might incur. Moore also encouraged a realistic perspective on the extent of his influence with Longman as market leaders: 'as the booksellers are to be your grand jury, either to find the bill or throw it out, you had perhaps better, in the first instance, send the manuscript to them, and you may depend upon my backing it with all the recommendations which my opinion of your talents, as well as my warm interest in yourself, incline me to give it'.⁴⁷

Longman numbered *Frankenstein* among the many literary works rejected but, in 1818, LeFanu was offered the terms upon which Moore had published with them since *Lalla Rookh*, for which he was paid £3000. She was to share any profits equally with the publisher and, although the initial print run of 500 copies was, by early nineteenth-century standards, relatively modest, her prospects looked good.⁴⁸ Within the year, however, Longman had shifted just over half its stock. Although there was a residual advertising budget, in the spring of 1821 LeFanu was informed of the decision to sell off all remaining copies to trade.⁴⁹ LeFanu retained credit enough with Longman to elicit a commitment to at least advise on her next manuscript, and Longman did initially accept what was, in all likelihood, *Tales of a Tourist*, pending minor revision of the title page. But LeFanu wanted to renegotiate her terms, desirous of relinquishing copyright

rather than continuing with the previous arrangement of publishing on shares. After consideration Longman sent LeFanu word of its decision not to enter into terms on a new work on the basis of the scant success of *Leolin Abbey*.⁵⁰ The letter, dated 28 August 1821, arrived less than a month after the death of LeFanu's father, Henry, a half-pay officer. That it was LeFanu who 'discontinued her dealings' with Longman, is the phrase used by her mother Elizabeth upon soliciting the advice of Thomas Wilkie as to the chances of their securing another 'respectable' publisher.⁵¹ It was mid-November and the women's sense of isolation was exacerbated by it not being in LeFanu's 'power' as Elizabeth put it, 'to go to London on her own business, and our long residence in the country has gradually estranged us from all knowledge of the best manner of forming connexions in the literary line'. Grief, the pride of a family once renowned in 'the literary line' and a carefully managed frustration inform the widowed Elizabeth's need to facilitate her daughter's 'earnest desire to dispose' of her new work by the end of the year. As things proved with Newman, the timescale, and ambition to establish a relationship on a more permanent footing were achievable.

'In these days who is not an author?'

As a novel set in 'vile, money-jobbing times' (I, 95), it is tempting to read *Helen Monteagle's* comic portrayal of an aristocratic 'knot of literati' in whose company Lord Rosstrevor, 'always so *blue* and attic' becomes 'dyed of a deeper blue, and more brilliant and attic than ever' (II, 344), as in dialogue with the sentiments of the poet and novelist Charlotte Smith, for whom 'amateurism and merit were incompatible'.⁵² Although unlike LeFanu, Smith used her prefaces as the means of openly admitting to the impecunious circumstances in which she published 'from necessity'—as it is phrased in *Marchmont*—she firmly believed that 'only professional writers could lay claim to literary excellence, and only those who subscribed to authorship's demanding work ethic could count themselves as one of this group'.⁵³ LeFanu's own inventive reference to writing as labour comes in one of *Helen Monteagle's* now familiarly abrupt references to the mechanisms of authoring. The narrator reflects on the years which have elapsed since Edmund Monteagle's posting abroad: 'years which I shall follow the example of my most illustrious as well as my most insignificant fellow-labourers. in passing slightly over' (III, 362–63). This nicely plays on the ambiguity of the terms illustrious and insignificant; each can be as readily applied to writers distinguished only by virtue of rank, as they can to professional authors past and present whose actual literary worth is at risk of being overlooked.

In *Strathallan*, LeFanu had satirised the aspirations of the provincial *salonnière* and, in *Helen Monteagle*, depicts Lord Rosstrevor's utterly delusional belief in his literary ability as a means of diminishing the authority of a man who, with all the 'self-deceit of parental ambition' is blinded to 'the cruelty of this conduct' towards his daughters (I, 291). In Helen's absence, Rosstrevor inflicts his attempts at poetry and drama on his younger daughter, Adeliza. This he creates in his 'Ivy Bower', a folly with a rotational floor built on the site of a

former windmill. It allows him access to every sun- or moonlit vantage point, and causes mistrust among servants quick to rename it the 'whirligig'. For her part, 'there was nothing Adeliza dreaded so much' as her father's spending time there (III, 20). A 'formidable rhymester' (III, 220) Rosstrevor is inspired 'like Pope' when he is least equipped to write anything down (I, 230), and applies to himself Isaac D'Israeli's proposition that a literary collection might be made of the nocturnal thoughts which visit 'the minds of men of genius' (I, 231). It is only 'after tiring out three French valets, and two secretaries' with his twilight musings, that Rosstrevor 'was obliged to have a pen and ink constantly by him, that he might not be cheated of any of his intellectual treasures by the affected deafness, or real drowsiness of his attendants' (I, 231). D'Israeli's estimation of male genius and its social significance had formed the basis of his *Essay on the Manners and Genius of the Literary Character*, first published in 1795 and revised in 1818. His prose fiction, which included the romance, *Mejnoun and Leila* (1797), might also be figured in Rosstrevor's own self-penned, tragic take on Persian history, 'Vachtanga, Prince of Georgia, or the Fatal Vow'. When this masterpiece is all but finished Adeliza takes a chance upon her father giving her a fair hearing on Helen's situation. LeFanu's narrator intervenes in apparent agreement:

Every author knows (and, in these days, who is not an author?) that a person who seizes the happy moment in which one of that vain and moon-struck race has just perfected to his satisfaction some exquisite and laboured performance, is as likely to obtain a gracious hearing, whatever may be the nature of the request, as from an adventurer who has just gained a prize in the lottery. (II, 333)

In a sequence of further analogies the moonstruck author is compared to individuals of varying backgrounds whose satisfaction is, in most cases, only the result of luck and circumstances beyond their immediate control.

LeFanu's particular identification of 'Vachtanga' as the ultimate symbol of Rosstrevor's ridiculous estimation of his literary abilities works in curious relation with another of *Helen Monteagle's* 'eastern' tales. This term best describes the interpolated story of Euphemia Melrose, a relative of Almaric Douglas and rightful heiress to the family estate. Her introduction clarifies that episode in his history which has remained, for much of the novel, a source of mystery and harmful speculation. The history of Euphemia—or 'Zenaida' as she becomes known—serves to redeem the hero, but is also important to what this article has sought to define as *Helen Monteagle's* preoccupation with novel writing and its contexts. Together with 'Vachtanga', the tale of Zenaida is an experiment in writing inspired by the 'East' which reflects Romanticism's fascination with Turkey, Persia and the expanding eastern Mediterranean empire. In the context of a discussion of pretensions to authorship, it is also a story in which LeFanu explores the implications of this fascination for her own literary culture.

In brief, Euphemia's experience of kidnap, sexual aggression and near-fatal violence originates with one woman's transgression against another. Euphemia's

father, the Earl of Glenaladale, is stationed at Gibraltar during the first years of his marriage. Here, his wife appoints as nurse to their infant daughter her favourite servant, Rachael, 'a Jewess' whom she had discovered and brought back with her following a trip to Ceuta on the North African coast (III, 159). Rachael is, however, preoccupied with her lover ('a Moor') and, disgruntled at Lady Glenaladale's protesting at her neglect of the child, conspires with him to return to Ceuta with stolen Glenaladale heirlooms and its young heiress (III, 160). Their troubled fortunes take them to Morocco, Mecca and eventually Algiers where, her lover having died, a repentant and compassionately drawn Rachael gives up the child to a 'Mahometan protectress', namely the widowed sister of the sovereign Prince (III, 172). Rachael also entrusts her with the stolen heirlooms as proof of the child's lineage. Zenaida (as she is then renamed) is 'initiated into the acquirements, the opinions, and the religion of those whose humanity had, probably, saved her from destruction'. However, growing up in the court seraglio, she attracts the notice of the tyrannical Prince, to whom she is betrothed. Although a fire provides her means of escape into the purely paternalistic arms of Almaric Douglas, who has lately arrived at Algiers 'in the course of a tour of pleasure' (III, 174), Zenaida fears endangering his life further, and attempts to kill herself with a dagger. She recovers and, in running away, thinks she is sparing Douglas the damage to his reputation misunderstandings of his role in her tragedy nevertheless cause. Zenaida finds a trusted female friend of Rachael's, by whom she is hidden for her own protection in an underground grotto, but both women are tricked by a 'wily priest' (III, 192) determined only upon their conversion, and he forcibly commits Zenaida to a convent in Cadiz. The chance arrival of Edmund Monteaule as a serving officer entitled to shelter at the convent, leads to him successfully rescuing Zenaida (by his adopting the guise of a friar), and to her reunion with her mother.

The fate of Euphemia/Zenaida is, like that of her namesake in Charlotte Lennox's *Euphemia* (1790), implicated in the protection and defence of British interests abroad. The adventures of LeFanu's infant Euphemia begin in territory fought over by Britain and Spain, and Lennox's heroine initially travels to New York on account of her husband's military obligations in a novel set prior to the American revolution. Adelaide O'Keeffe and Sydney Owenson also situate narratives of empire in the historical past, and the oriental aspects of their fiction give fuller expression to those depictions of eastern tyranny and religious conversion touched upon in LeFanu's interpolated tale. O'Keeffe's reworking of the life of the Jewish third-century regent and antagonist of the Roman Emperor, *Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra*, was published in 1814, three years after Owenson's popular novel, *The Missionary* (1811), located the tragedy of the Hindu priestess Luxima, and the increasingly infatuated Franciscan missionary tasked with her conversion, in seventeenth-century India. Recent scholarship has recognised the ways in which these novelists articulate a sophisticated engagement with assumptions about eastern culture and colonial oppression, and both O'Keeffe and Owenson are seen to explore analogies between the historical subjugation

of nations and the relationship between Britain and Ireland.⁵⁴

If LeFanu's tale of Euphemia Melrose is a genuine if limited effort to 'stick to the East', as Byron put it to Thomas Moore in 1813, because 'the public are orientalizing, and pave the path for you', it is at least exciting and compellingly written.⁵⁵ There are satirical overtones, however, which suggest that it is part of LeFanu's more elaborate conceit. The story relies upon exactly the kind of plot contrivances discussed between the narrator and reader-character of *Leolin Abbey*. Euphemia Melrose is effectively a 'child of mystery'. Her kidnap is successful because the Melroses are unaware of it: Rachael improbably substituted their infant for the dead child of a destitute widower whom she pays off, and convinces the Melroses that 'Euphemia' died in front of her very eyes from a seizure. The important coincidence of Douglas arriving in time for the first rescue, and of Monteagle for the second, is relied upon again when Euphemia's mother happens to be present at the very inn her daughter visits upon arriving at Portsmouth. Euphemia's religious conversion from 'a nominal protestant, a good Mahometan, and an indifferent Catholic' (III, 204) and back again is as dizzying and pointless as a turn in Rosstrevor's whirligig. Joy gives way to tragedy when Euphemia's mother dies shortly after regaining her long lost child, but all ends well given that Edric Douglas fulfils her dying wish that Euphemia is restored to the estate allocated, in her absence, to him as a distant heir.

Read in this way, the tale seems designed to disorientate and invite awareness of the difference between sensitive and token appropriations of eastern culture. A generally positive review of *Leolin Abbey* thought LeFanu culpable of the latter, and took exception to its heroine's keeping a tame lion brought back from India. It did so not upon the reasonable grounds of improbability, but because '*lions* are not natives of the East Indies'. Notwithstanding the actual whereabouts of Asiatic as opposed to African lions in the early nineteenth century, and the confusion of vague geographical boundaries, the reviewer is more concerned to attribute this apparent mistake to the regrettable situation of 'ladies planning scenes in countries that often the most glaring incongruities prove they have never visited'.⁵⁶ Perhaps LeFanu's parodic rendering of eastern adventures betrays her suspicion that many of the other writers profiting from exotic settings were virtual tourists too. On a conventional level, Euphemia's tale in *Helen Monteagle* is essential to a re-reading of Almaric Douglas. By means of this (and his accidental reconciliation with Cordelia) Douglas is exonerated for actions which seemed to compromise female reputation and is deemed truly deserving of the love of Adeliza Marchmont. Their romance is, in fact, enabled by a mutual appreciation of eastern literature. When Adeliza finds verses Douglas has written in response to *Gulistan*, a collection of cautionary tales, rhymes and analogies composed by the Persian Sufi Saadi Sheikh (1184–1291), she instinctively selects 'to suit *his* taste' (II, 426) passages from the poem 'Palestine' (1803) by Reginald Heber, later Bishop of Calcutta (1823–26). But again, although the vogue for the East is recognised, LeFanu is ambivalent about the success of its application. As it turns out, Douglas is troubled by the memories such readings

excite, and calls for their singing together a ballad of his native Scotland, 'For the lack of gold she left me'.⁵⁷

In a now familiarly self-conscious move, the narrator of *Helen Monteagle* draws 'the variegated tissue of our narrative [...] to a close' with time to spare in volume three for the 'clear[ing] up of the few remaining circumstances that have been unexplained respecting the personages who have acted a part in it' (III, 303). If this indicates that she might well have made a good dramatist—as some of her early reviewers observed—it also serves as a reminder that LeFanu writes complicated and densely populated romantic adventures. Informed by serious and extensive reading, LeFanu's is a learned, inventive and assured voice, which expresses its delight in storytelling alongside another which intelligently questions the limits of fiction. The result is a curious harmony. Naturalistic in places, ironic in many others and sometimes very funny, *Helen Monteagle* values the bonds of sympathy which unite families, military communities and literary circles, at the same time as maintaining a realistic sense of the fissures and fractures which are part of the tissue of real life. Or, at least real life as we know LeFanu encountered it. *Helen Monteagle* did not have an afterlife in translation as *Strathallan* and *Leolin Abbey* did in Paris editions published, respectively, in 1818 and 1824, but is at the very least deserving of a re-reading in the bicentenary year of her more celebrated contemporaries. 

NOTES

1. Shelley abbreviates Helen to 'H.' in the entry for 7 January 1818, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley: Volume 1: 1814–1822*, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 192; cited in 'Anecdotal Records' for Alicia LeFanu's *Helen Monteagle* (1818), in P. D. Garside, J. E. Belanger and S. A. Ragaz, *British Fiction, 1800–1829: A Database of Production, Circulation & Reception*, designer A. A. Mandal (Cardiff: Cardiff University, 2004), record no. 1818A038 <<http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/titleDetails.asp?title=1818A038>>.
2. 'Literary Intelligence', *Literary Gazette*, 46.6 (December 1817), 367.
3. 8 February 1818, in *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. by Marion Kingston Stocking (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 82; cited in 'Anecdotal Records' for Alicia LeFanu's *Helen Monteagle* (1818), DBF 1820A061.
4. See *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews* (1742), in *Joseph Andrews and Shamela*, ed. by Douglas Brooks-Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 79.
5. A phase in the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, the Second Coalition signalled the allegiance of Britain, Russia, Turkey and Austria against France. In 1802, a treaty signed at Amiens aimed to recognise and organise the territorial rights of Britain, France, Spain and the Netherlands, and secured a relatively quiet fourteen-month interval of peace between European nations.
6. Alicia LeFanu, *Helen Monteagle*, 3 vols (London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1818), II, 415. All subsequent references are to this edition.
7. Gill Perry, 'Ambiguity and Desire: Metaphors of Sexuality in Late Eighteenth-Century Representations of the Actress', in *Notorious Muse: The Actress in British*

- Art and Culture 1776–1812*, ed. by Robyn Asleson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 57–80 (pp. 62–63).
8. For a more recent and compelling fictional reworking of Farren's story, see Emma Donoghue, *Life Mask* (London: Virago, 2004).
 9. Joseph Roach, "'Mistaking Earth for Heaven": Eliza Linley's Voice', in *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730–1830*, ed. by Elizabeth Eger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 123–40 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667428.009>> (p. 129).
 10. Fanny Burney, *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, ed. by Margaret Anne Doody, Robert L. Mack and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 315. Burney apparently began the novel in the late 1790s and worked on it over a fourteen-year period.
 11. Nora Nachumi, *Acting Like a Lady: British Women Novelists and the Eighteenth-Century Theater* (New York: AMS Press, 2008), p. 140.
 12. Christina Morin has recently argued for a renewed evaluation of the impact and influence of Maturin's lesser known writings in *Charles Robert Maturin and the Haunting of Irish Romantic Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011). In later fiction, the 'best' actress in terms of talent is also 'the woman who winds up on stage by accident rather than design, who acts unselfconsciously with no view toward the audience, and whose deepest wish is not for fame or fortune but a home in which she can more properly exercise and display her virtue'. See Lauren Chattman, 'Actresses at Home and on Stage: Spectacular Domesticity and the Victorian Theatrical Novel', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 28.1 (1994), 72–88 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1345914>> (p. 72).
 13. See Jennie Batchelor, *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010) <<https://doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9780719082573.001.0001>>.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
 15. Jacqueline Pearson, *Women's Reading in Britain, 1750–1835: A Dangerous Recreation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 40 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511582899>>.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
 17. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. by Marilyn Butler (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 34.
 18. *Modern Novel Writing, or the Elegant Enthusiast*, ed. by Robert J. Gemmet (Stroud: Nonsuch Publishing, 2008), p. 37. All subsequent references are to this edition. To give its full title, *Modern Novel Writing, or the Elegant Enthusiast; and Interesting Emotions of Arabella Bloomville. A Rhapsodical Romance; Interspersed with Poetry. In Two Volumes. By the Right Hon. Lady Harriet Marlow* was published for G. G. and J. Robinson, and reiterates the phrasing of Ann Radcliffe's popular and influential *Mysteries of Udolpho: A Romance; Interspersed with Poetry*, published in 1794. In addition to Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and, on account of the episode involving his Man of the Hill, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Beckford had in his sights the 'general proliferation of sentimental Gothic novels in the 1780s and 1790s, particularly if they were authored by women' (p. 18). The title of the second edition of *Azemia* (1798) was revised and expanded to: *Azemia, a Novel: Containing Imitations of the Manner, both in Prose and Verse, of Many of the Authors of the Present Day; with Political Strictures. By J. A. M. Jenks.*

19. Mary-Celine Newbould, *Adaptations of Laurence Sterne's Fiction: Sterneana 1760–1840* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 108.
20. Charlotte Smith, *Marchmont: A Novel*, 4 vols (London: Low, 1796), 1, 178.
21. Alicia LeFanu, *Leolin Abbey. A Novel*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1819), 1, 52. All subsequent references are to this edition.
22. See James Thistlewaite, *The Child of Misfortune; or the History of Mrs Gilbert*, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1777); Elizabeth Norman, *The Child of Woe*, 3 vols (London: Symonds, 1789); J. H. Wynne, *The Child of Chance; or, the Adventures of Harry Hazard*, 2 vols (London: Hookham, 1789).
23. The title was resurrected in 1837 for Hannah Maria Jones's *The Child of Mystery; or, the Cottager's Daughter. A Tale of Fashionable Life*, as listed in Montague Summers, *A Gothic Bibliography* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964).
24. *The Critic*, in Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *'The School for Scandal' and Other Plays*, ed. by Michael Corder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), II. 1. 48–52. All subsequent references to *The Critic* are to this edition.
25. Corder, 'Introduction', in *ibid.*, p. xxxix.
26. Lisa M. Wilson, 'British Women Writing Satirical Novels in the Romantic Period: Gendering Authorship and Narrative Voice', *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840* (Summer 2007), 24–46 <http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/romtext/articles/rt17_n02.pdf> [accessed 26 April 2019] (p. 34).
27. Corder, p. xli.
28. *Ibid.*, p. xlv.
29. 'New Musical Publications', *Literary Gazette*, 2.41 (April 1859), 473.
30. William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge, University Press, 2007), p. 244.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
32. See Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press 1790–1820* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1939), p. 18.
33. Christopher Skelton-Foord, 'Circulating Libraries in Britain between 1790 and 1830', *Literatur und Erfahrungswandel 1789–1830*, ed. by Rainer Schöwerling, Hartmut Steinecke and Günter Tiggesbäumker (Munich: Fink, 1996), pp. 31–43 (p. 34).
34. See *Moral Sketches of Prevailing Opinions and Manners, Foreign, and Domestic* (1819), quoted in St Clair, p. 283. More's work was popular: in the two years since its initial publication, *Moral Sketches* had, at nine alleged editions, at least matched the number achieved in the same period by *Strictures*.
35. See the records for Louisa Sidney Stanhope in *DBF* <<http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/authorTitles.asp?author=778>>.
36. Blakey, p. 22.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
38. Anthony Mandal, 'Mrs Meeke and Minerva: The Mystery of the Marketplace', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 42.2 (2018), 131–51 <<https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-4384591>> (p. 132).
39. See Anna M. Fitzer, 'Revealing Influence: The Forgotten Daughters of Frances Sheridan', *Women's Writing*, Special Issue: Beyond Influence, 1680–1830, 20.1 (2013), 64–81 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2013.754258>>.
40. Julie Shaffer, 'Non-Canonical Women's Novels of the Romantic Era: Romantic Ideologies and the Problematics of Gender and Genre', *Studies in the Novel*, 28.4 (1996), 469–92 (p. 486).

41. *Anti-Jacobin Review*, 52.227 (1817), 126–27.
42. See Ralph A. Manogue, 'The Plight of James Ridgway, London Bookseller and Publisher, and the Newgate Radicals 1792–1797', *Wordsworth Circle*, 27.3 (1996), 158–66 <<https://doi.org/10.1086/TWC24042936>>.
43. St Clair, p. 316.
44. *Ibid.* p. 317.
45. Entry for August 1824, in Thomas Moore, *Notes from the Letters of Thomas Moore to his Music Publisher, James Power* (New York: Redfield, 1853), p. 113.
46. St Clair, p. 159.
47. Entry for 21 December 1818, in *Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence of Thomas Moore*, ed. by John Russell, 8 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1856), VIII, 251–22.
48. This is the same number of copies contracted for the first edition of *Frankenstein*, with net profits divided between the author and publisher at one- and two-thirds respectively. See St Clair, p. 359.
49. See 'Publishing Papers' for Alicia LeFanu's *Leolin Abbey* (1819), *DBF* 1819A044 <<http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/titleDetails.asp?title=1819A044>>.
50. *Ibid.*
51. Elizabeth LeFanu to T. Wilkie, 11 November 1821; London, British Library, Add. MS 29764, f. 46.
52. Batchelor, p. 100. There are interesting echoes of Smith's *Marchmont* in *Helen Monteagle*, which include, in addition to Adeliza's and Helen's family name, the coincidence of 'Everleigh'—where Helen rents a rundown cottage—and *Marchmont's* neglected Eastwood–Leigh estate. Here another rebellious daughter, Althea Dacres, peruses Mrs Trevyllian's library: 'where there were more than mere books of amusement' and these had 'given her thoughts a direction which in the common intercourse of the world they would perhaps never have taken' (III, 60–61).
53. Smith, *Marchmont*, I, vi; Batchelor, p. 100.
54. See e.g. Donelle Ruwe, 'Zenobia, *Queen of Palmyra*: Adelaide O'Keeffe, the Jewish Conversion Novel, and the Limits of Rational Education', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 36.1 (Winter 2012), 30–53 <<https://doi.org/10.1215/00982601-1457093>>. James Watt describes *The Missionary* as a 'remarkable novel' which 'itself exerted an important influence on the work of poets such as Thomas Moore and P. B. Shelley'. See 'Orientalism and Empire', in *The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period*, ed. by Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 129–42 (p. 137). Morgan's influence on Shelley is traced in Nigel Leask's *British Romantic Writers and the East* (Cambridge University Press, 1992). For discussion of Lennox's novel, see Susan Kubica Howard, 'Seeing Colonial America and Writing Home about It: Charlotte Lennox's *Euphemia*, Epistolarity, and the Feminine Picturesque', *Studies in the Novel*, 37.3 (Fall 2005), 273–91.
55. Nigel Leask, 'East's', in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, ed. by Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 137–48 (p. 137).
56. *La Belle Assemblée; Being Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine*, n.s., 20 (September 1819), 141–42 (p. 141).
57. *Gulistan* was variously translated in editions of the 1770s as the 'Bed of Roses' or 'Rose Garden'. Heber's 'Palestine' was in 1812 the basis for the composer William Crotch's celebrated oratorio of the same name. The ballad was attributed to

Dr Austin in *Select Melodies of Scotland*, ed. by George Thomson, 6 vols (London: Preston; and Edinburgh: Thomson, 1822–25), II, 24r. This edition gives the variant title ‘For the sake of gold’.

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