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Sir Thomas Lawrence
(1769 -1830)

Lady Caroline Lamb

LADY CAROLINE LAMB'S REVISIONS TO HER NOVEL
GLENARVON: SOME OBSERVATIONS

Paul Douglass

I am glad to have the opportunity in these pages to share a little of what I have discovered while working on an edition of Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon*, to be published in 2009 by Pickering and Chatto as part of a three-volume *Collected Works* endeavour, undertaken in collaboration with my co-editor, Leigh Wetherall-Dickson. *Glenarvon* appeared in 1816 under the imprint of Henry Colburn, who would go on to publish what became the "silver fork" novels of the 1820s and 1830s, by writers such as Bulwer-Lytton. He had quite an extended correspondence with Lamb, which is preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum. It started with the proofs, which had changes not desired by the author: "I shall be seriously angry if any alteration is made whatever either in punctuation or orthography," she wrote.¹ She was also upset when Colburn left two musical settings by Isaac Nathan out of the galleys. She felt Nathan's music would help sales, because the second volume of Byron and Nathan's successful *Hebrew Melodies*, had just appeared. Colburn put the music back in just before the novel was published anonymously on 9 May 1816. The novel contained errors, including mis-numbering of chapters,² but the author was proud, and sent copies to friends and acquaintances. Lamb's pride soon turned to dismay when her mask of anonymity was ripped away, and friends and family accused her of treacherously betraying them. When Byron's close friend John Cam Hobhouse threatened to retaliate by publishing some of her letters, Lamb expressed "great astonishment."³

She must have been more astonished by the reviews. The book was described as consisting in "scenes of seduction and adultery" and the author as seeming "to glory in her guilt."⁴ One review even said *Glenarvon* was comparable to John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*.⁵ These undeserved attacks surely influenced the author when she revised her novel. Lamb intended to pacify her relatives and friends as she sat down to revise *Glenarvon*. "I am doing every thing I can to stop the further mischief," she assured her mother-in-law, Lady Melbourne.⁶ Yet Lamb ended up changing little of her portrayal of the English aristocracy, which she strongly critiqued, and this theme would persist as the focus of her later novels *Graham Hamilton* (1822) and *Ada Reis* (1823). Taking her cue from John Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1633), Lamb had focused upon the disaster of denying true love, even if it is taboo, while strongly condemning the failure of the aristocracy to live up to the standard of *noblesse oblige*. Shortly before she dies, Lamb's Lady Calantha (who is named for Ford's Princess Calantha in *The Broken Heart*) confesses her own guilt and failure: "I acknowledge before God and before man, that for me there is no excuse. I have felt, I have enjoyed every happiness, every delight, the earth can offer. Its vanities, its pleasures, its transports have been mine; and in all instances I have misused the power with which I have been too much and too long entrusted."⁷ This passage remains unchanged in the second edition of the novel.

In the second edition, however, plenty else has changed. For one thing, Lamb defends herself strongly in a preface, charging that a double-standard has been applied, excusing Byron for gross misbehavior while chastising her for the slightest infraction of social etiquette.⁸ Lamb argues that *Glenarvon* is not immoral, despite the inclusion of characters and actions that may appear blameworthy.⁹ She asks that readers accept her intention to describe, not to degrade human nature, and reminds them that many great novels, plays, and narrative poems have such material in them.¹⁰ Lamb's preface apologizes for *unintentionally* transgressing,

then defends the novel, sounding hardly contrite at all. This pattern also characterizes the revisions she made to *Glenarvon*, working as an experienced editor, ensuring the printer could re-set the novel at minimal cost. For every word she added to her 152,000 word novel, she subtracted at least one other. Revisions actually decreased the page count of volume one from 295 to 288. The page counts for volumes two and three remained *exactly* the same, however: 390 and 322 respectively. This is remarkable when one realizes that she made over 2,000 individual changes. She changed the portrayals of Glenarvon and Calantha, cut or adapted passages that family and friends disliked, made Glenarvon less Satanic, and transformed Calantha and her family into devout Catholics.¹¹ Lord Avondale grew more noble and courageous; he also more specifically wished he had maintained better control of his wife.

A number of Lamb's revisions were intended to avoid those charges of immorality and blasphemy levelled in the press and no doubt repeated in the drawing room. She cut most direct references to God in favour of "Heaven." She played down the sexuality of Glenarvon's affair with Calantha. In a brief passage in Volume Two, Lamb alters the phrase "fires of lust" to "fires of passion," changes "whirlwinds of passion" to "whirlwinds," and substitutes "pure" for "chaste."¹² Similarly, she altered the following passage: "As he spoke, he again pressed her to his bosom, and his tears fell over her." The second edition alters this to, "As he spoke his tears fell upon her hand."¹³ In the fourth chapter of volume two, Lamb cuts several descriptions of physical attraction. For example, the following was cut completely from Volume Three: ". . . but the kiss I have snatched from your lips is sweeter far for me. Oh, for another, given thus warm from the heart! It has entranced—it has made me mad."¹⁴ Lamb tones down the sexual aspect of the relationship but does not eliminate it.

A good example of Lamb's revision technique may be found in chapter sixteen of volume two of the novel. Changes include the deletion and insertion of dashes and commas; spelling out the word "damn'd"; and the correction of several typographical

errors. Lamb cut twenty-eight words and added fifteen. Typical of her efforts to tone down the sexuality of the relationship between Calantha and Glenarvon, she altered the following passage:

As he spoke, he pretended to pick up a ring. "Is this yours?" he said. "No." "It is," he whispered; and placed it himself upon her finger.

In the second edition, the same passage reads simply: "He gave her a ring."¹⁵

Lamb's revisions, though extensive, do not sway her from her condemnation of the English aristocracy, nor from excusing the adulterous relationship of Calantha and Glenarvon as stemming from forces not under their control. For example, she added a paragraph at the end of a chapter in Volume One appearing to condemn Lady Calantha for lacking stability and a "tranquil and humble spirit." But by the end of the passage the reader is asked to see Calantha as simply a victim, not a criminal.ⁱ In another passage, an entire song lyric is inserted for Elinor St. Clare to sing on the occasion of a ball at which Calantha is asked whether she has read *The Broken Heart* (she has not). The lyric emphasizes the pain of ill-fated love, but ends by underscoring Ford's ideal of nobility:

If to lose all that love thee, should e'er be thy lot,
By the world, that now courts thee, contemn'd or
forgot;
When thy own fickle heart has all others estranged,
Then remember St. Clara, who never had changed.

Who had followed thy steps, though in sickness and
sadness,
More firm to the last than the foes who upbraid her;

Who had followed thy steps, though to death and to
madness,
Then mourn o'er the grave where thy falsehood has
laid her.

Ah, say not! Ah, think not! she e'er can recover,
The blow never fails from the hand of a lover;
Full home it was struck, and it fell on a breast
By remorse and unkindness already deprest.

A smile, oft in death, may illumine each feature,
When hope, fondly cherished, forever is past;
And the heart that is noble and high in its nature,
Though deserted and scorn'd, will be firm to the last.^{vi}

When Lady Calantha is about to die, Lamb also inserts a passage that promises to answer those who charged that the author was too easy on her protagonist: "And did she thus die, some may perhaps exclaim, unpunished for her crime!" The answer, apparently, is "yes," for Lamb writes that God does, "in mercy," spare Calantha, and that she is oblivious of her danger.^{vii}

Similarly, in her choice of epigraph, Lamb not only does not back down, she actually strengthens her resolve to adhere to Ford's themes of aristocratic stoicism and respect for the sanctity of the passions, even when they lead to disaster. Her original epigraph, drawn from Dante, focused upon Glenarvon's betrayal of the Irish rebellion by evoking the story of Ugolino, whom Dante learns is to be tortured perpetually for having acted as a traitor. After considering another epigraph from Tacitus, she then adapted a passage from Voltaire which underscores the unavoidable nature of the passions, which are described as "winds which fill the sails of the vessel." Though they are dangerous, "without them she could not sail."^{viii}

This represents a strengthening, rather than a weakening, of the artistic intentions of the first edition of *Glenarvon*.

Lamb's novel portrays Glenarvon as a charismatic individual with whom Calantha and her feminine peers are hopelessly besmitten, but also as a Whig aristocrat whose stand against tyranny is self-serving theater. He seduces and betrays both his female lovers and his male followers.^v Lamb's portrait of Glenarvon thus forms a political as well as personal observation, one that apparently resonated with her husband, William, who supported her through it all and later corresponded with her publishers to help sustain her writing career. With all its faults, the novel is the work of a literate and principled writer, who stuck to her guns when under extreme pressure from reviewers, refusing to abandon her themes when it would have been so easy to succumb to the threats and pleadings of her family. The complicated history of *Glenarvon's* revisions yields this much, at least: a portrait of a writer who stayed true to her message.

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Notes

¹ 'I shall be seriously angry if any alteration is made whatever either in punctuation or orthography & I entreat you to send me the proof sheets. Remember and send the remainder of the 1st vol. - for I have been obliged to alter it all back again. . . ' Forster Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, correspondence of Lady Caroline Lamb and Henry Colburn.

² *Glenarvon* numbered its chapters with Roman numerals. Volume one omitted to use the ninth numeral (IX), throwing off the remaining count by one. Volume two mis-numbered chapter twenty-six (XXVI) as twenty-four (XXIV); chapter twenty-seven (XXVII) as twenty-six (XXVI); and chapter thirty-six (XXXVI) as thirty-four (XXXIV). The third volume of the novel numbered chapters from seventy-two (LXXII) to one-hundred six (CVI).

³ George Paston [E. M. Symonds] and Peter Quennell, *'To Lord Byron': Feminine Profiles Based Upon Unpublished Letters 1807-1824* (London: John Murray, 1939), p. 73.

⁴ *The British Critic* 5 (June 1816), pp. 627-31.

⁵ *Theatrical Inquisitor* 9 (August 1816), pp. 122-25.

⁶ Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Melbourne, n.d. (after 9 May 1816). British Library Add. MS 45546 f.91-92.

⁷ Lady Caroline Lamb, *Glenarvon, First Edition* (London: Henry Colburn, 1816), vol. 3, p. 145.

⁸ Lady Caroline Lamb, *The Whole Disgraceful Truth: Selected Letters of Lady Caroline Lamb* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 159.

⁹ *Glenarvon, Second Edition*, London: Henry Colburn, vol. 1, p. ii.

¹⁰ *Glenarvon, Second Edition*, vol. 1, pp. ii-iii.

¹¹ In revisions to the second edition of *Glenarvon*, the Duke of Altamonte is said to have 'married into a Roman Catholic family' in chapter II of volume one. Mrs. Seymour and her daughters, Frances and Sophia, are made specifically Catholic in an interpolated sentence in the second edition, chapter VIII of volume one: 'She was a Roman Catholic, and all who differed from that persuasion were, in her opinion, utterly lost'. Calantha's allegiance to Catholicism is similarly specified in an interpolated passage in chapter XVI of vol. 1.

¹² Compare *Glenarvon, First and Second Editions*, vol. 2, chapter 12.

¹³ Compare *Glenarvon, First and Second Editions*, vol. 2, chapter 23.

¹⁴ Compare *Glenarvon, First and Second Editions*, vol. 3, chapter 4 (numbered Chapter 75 in the first edition) .

¹⁵ Compare *Glenarvon, First and Second Editions*, vol. 2, chapter 16.

¹⁶ *Glenarvon, Second Edition*, vol. 1, pp. 140-1.

¹⁷ *Glenarvon, Second Edition*, vol. 2, p. 131.

¹⁸ *Glenarvon, Second Edition*, vol. 3, pp. 160-1.

¹⁹ See the title pages of all three volumes of *Glenarvon, Second Edition*.

²⁰ "Glenarvon it seems has left his followers, as he has his mistress," remarks Cormac O'Leary, one of the United Irishmen, in volume three. *Glenarvon, First Edition*, vol. 3, p. 191.

