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Lord Byron's Feminist Canon: Notes toward Its Construction

Paul Douglass
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Abstract

Lord Byron took a highly ambivalent attitude toward female authorship, and yet his poetry, letters, and journals exhibit many proofs of the power of women's language and perceptions. He responded to, borrowed from, and adapted parts of the works of Maria Edgeworth, Harriet Lee, Madame de Staël, Mary Shelley, Elizabeth Inchbald, Hannah Cowley, Joanna Baillie, Lady Caroline Lamb, Mary Robinson, and Charlotte Dacre. The influence of women writers on his career may also be seen in the development of the female (and male) characters in his narrative poetry and drama. This essay focuses on the influence upon Byron of Lee, Inchbald, Staël, Dacre, and Lamb, and secondarily on Byron's response to intellectual women like Lady Oxford, Lady Melbourne, as well as the works of male writers, such as Thomas Moore, Percy Shelley, and William Wordsworth, who affected his portrayal of the genders.

1

Lord Byron's attitude to female authors was, to say the least, ambivalent. He wrote to his friend John Cam Hobhouse on the eve of the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, "Of all Bitches dead or alive a scribbling woman is the most canine" (*BLJ2*:132).¹ Yet, as Peter Cochran has argued, he "was not an automatic despiser of women who wrote" (1). Indeed, he was profoundly influenced by scribbling females. His poetry, letters, and journals exhibit many traces of the power of women's language and perception—not just contempt, frustration, or occasional grudging admiration for such "canine" felines as Madame de Staël. When he is most acerbic, Byron is sometimes also most responsive to the women writers he discusses—for their literary proximity increased his desire to keep his distance. His response to the literary works of women—including Sappho's fragments, the novels of Maria Edgeworth, Harriet Lee, Madame de Staël, and Mary Shelley, the plays of Elizabeth Inchbald, Hannah Cowley, and Joanna Baillie, the fiction and verse of Lady Caroline Lamb, Mary Robinson, and Charlotte Dacre—shows that women writers affected Byron profoundly. In a broad sense, his career was shaped by the gravitational pull of a feminine perspective, reflected in his borrowing and adapting from women writers, and in the development of the female (and male) characters in his work.

2

Here, I will investigate the impact on Byron of a few writers: Lee, Inchbald, Staël, Dacre, and Lamb. Because Byron's response to women as intellectuals consists in a social and a literary response, and because these responses are not easily separated, I am compelled to bring into my discussion some assessment of his relationships with women (and men) who affected the development of his writerly treatments of femininity, feminism, and the female. Thomas Moore, Percy Shelley, and William Wordsworth play roles here. More importantly, Lady Oxford, Lady Melbourne, and Lady Caroline Lamb formed important intellectual relationships with Byron that were elaborated in letters and conversation which echo in his subsequent poetry and drama. Byron's reading of several thousand works of popular fiction (most of it by women), certainly impacted his work. His relations with his wife, and with Teresa Guiccioli and the Countess of Blessington ought also to be considered. Trying to account for these manifold influences while not neglecting the chronological development of his thought and writerly practice complicates my argument, but it does so *needfully* because one must try, in Wallace Stevens' apt phrases, to "include the things / That in each other are included, the whole, / The complicate, the amassing harmony" (229). These are notes toward that harmony.

3

In the beginning, there was Byron's mother, of course. The adolescent Byron certainly formed his self-concept in the crucible of his maternal relationship, and the configuration of his writerly self was shaped by representations of female experience that resonated with his mother's strength, passionate sentimentality, and vulnerability. Perhaps then it should not surprise us that Byron had a taste for Gothic drama and sentimental poetry and fiction, genres identified with women writers like Harriet Lee, Elizabeth Inchbald, Charlotte Dacre, and Maria Edgeworth. He read Lee's *Kruitzner, The German's Tale* (1801) when he was fourteen (CPW 6:384). This experience proved to be crucial for his entire writing career, as he later acknowledged. The novel's protagonist, Frederick, who takes the alias "Kruitzner" when he is exiled for dereliction of duty during the Thirty Years War, is presented as a strong critique of egotism. Kruitzner/Frederick ultimately regains the lands and title of his father, Count Siegendorf, but realizes that by acting selfishly he has lost everything that matters. He has taught the catechism of selfishness to his son, Conrad, who "neither loved nor esteemed his father" (303). Julie Shaffer has pointed out that Kruitzner's wife, Josephine, embodies the virtues that the novel valorizes: community, communication, charity, and love. Josephine nurses "Kruitzner back to health shortly after meeting him," and "does her best to assuage his destructive self-absorption, distracting him from 'corrosive reflections'" (Shaffer para.16; Lee 119). But we are left with the wreck of a Kruitzner, not the return of a Siegendorf.

4

As Peter Cochran has recently reminded us, the story of the heir to the Siegendorf lands and title attracted the attention of the Duchess of Devonshire, who collaborated with her sister the Countess Bessborough (mother of Lady Caroline Lamb) to write a play titled *Siegendorf*, which was probably never produced (Cochran 179; Foreman 331). Though Byron never saw *Siegendorf* on the stage, it is not impossible that he later received a copy of the manuscript of the play from Lady Caroline Lamb, as Amanda Foreman guesses (Foreman 431n8). If Byron received the script of *Siegendorf* in 1812-14, this might help explain why he began his own version in 1815. Nonetheless, as Margot Strickland notes, Byron's Preface to *Werner* focuses only upon *Kruitzner*: "The following drama is taken entirely from the '*German's Tale, Kruitzner,*' published many years ago in '*Lee's Canterbury Tales*' ... I have adopted the characters, plan, and even the language of many parts of this story." Byron's debt to Harriet Lee was so great that he acknowledged in 1822 that *Kruitzner* contained "the germ of much that I have since written" (CPW: 6:384; Strickland 10). The sentimentality and melodrama that attracted women readers like the Duchess of Devonshire and Countess Bessborough also appealed to him throughout his life.

5

For this reason, Byron also admired Elizabeth Inchbald's popular novels *A Simple Story* (1791) and *Nature and Art* (1796), and he reacted strongly to her *Lovers' Vows* (1798) when he saw the play in London in 1804 at the age of sixteen (Elledge 110-15). *Lovers' Vows* was an adaptation of August von Kotzebue's *Das Kind der Liebe* [The Child of Love] (1790), and it focused on the predicament of a bastard son, Frederick, his mother Agatha, and half-sister Amelia. Agatha had been seduced and forsaken by the Baron Wildenhaim some twenty years previously, after which she bore a son named Frederick. The Baron had rejected pregnant Agatha to marry a woman closer to his social station. Now, Agatha has been thrown out of her lodgings by her landlord. Frederick returns from military service and begs on the street for his mother's support. He accidentally encounters his father, but the Baron is unaware of Frederick's identity. When

the Baron offers a paltry amount to sustain Agatha, Frederick becomes enraged, attacks him, and is thrown in jail. Eventually, Frederick reveals his identity, and the Baron is forced to acknowledge and marry Agatha, giving Frederick his legitimacy. The play is morally conventional and blighted by the verse-speeches of the butler, Verdun.⁶ But despite its shortcomings, Byron responded to it. "No child in so vexed a maternal relationship as Byron's," comments Paul Elledge, "could have witnessed without pangs (and perhaps disbelief) the mutually doting, compassionate, sacrificing (Byron might have said 'treacly'), at times almost spousal attentiveness of Agatha and Frederick" (113). Byron might well have been responding also to Jane Austen's more tasteful and playful version of *Lover's Vows* in *Mansfield Park* (1811).

As Elledge notes, "women control the action in this play" (111). Agatha's power and Amelia's resolve are the focus as the drama ends. The Baron turns beggar for forgiveness. Amelia defies convention and marries a Chaplain who is socially beneath her. Frederick luxuriates in his mother's embrace. *Lovers' Vows* is a feminine adaptation of a male writer's drama, and it spoke to women of the period who, like Countess Bessborough and the Duchess of Devonshire, had been forced to give up their bastard babies. Lady Bessborough wrote to her lover Lord Granville,

I cried my eyes out. The detail of all ye disadvantages a natural [i.e., illegitimate] child must suffer would alone have affected me, but it is impossible to give you an Idea of what this creature is—his tenderness to his Mother, his perfect freedom from all affectation and whining [...] it is impossible to conceive greater perfection.

Granville 1: 491

Whether Byron wept in response to the drama we do not know, but strong traces of the sentimentality associated with Inchbald, Hannah Cowley, and Mary Robinson can be detected in Byron's juvenile verse, which evidence his response to women's perspectives and undoubtedly bear the imprint of his mother, whose tortured relationship to her son sometimes makes us forget what a bedrock of (conflicted) love she provided, and what a blow it was to Byron when she died. Inchbald remained important to Byron, and when in 1814 she wrote a note to Samuel Rogers praising *The Giaour*, Byron was gratified and made note of it in his journal (*BLJ* 3: 236).

Lovers' Vows offers a rather idealized version of chaste and chastened femininity—for its period, at any rate. Byron was observant of both books and life, and saw plenty that had been left out. And, like all aspiring poets, he cribbed. Jeffery Vail has shown how attentively he studied Thomas Moore's *Odes of Anacreon* (1800) and *Poetical Works of the Late Thomas Little* (1801) in crafting the more explicit poems of *Fugitive Pieces* (1806).⁷ Byron's portrayal of women as erotic fantasies and coquettish torturers, like these lines addressed to his childhood flame Elizabeth Pigot, owe much to Moore:

[...] he who sees that witching grace,
That perfect form, that lovely face;
With eyes admiring, oh! believe me,
He never wishes to deceive thee [...]

CPW 2: 131

Another early poem, "To Mary," describes the end of an affair in terms that derive from Moore's work: "Embraces oft repeated cloy," Byron writes: "Ours came too frequent, to endure" (CPW 2: 133). (It is worth noting that Byron never allowed this poem to be reprinted during his lifetime.) Byron's three youthful productions—*Fugitive Pieces* (1806), *Poems on Various Occasions* (1807), and *Hours of Idleness* (1808)—are indebted to Moore. Yet there is another debt, equally large.

Byron's youthful responsiveness to feminine writing is probably epitomized by his apparently modeling *Hours of Idleness* on Charlotte Dacre's *Hours of Solitude* (1802). Jerome McGann has argued that this not-so-slim volume mimics—right down to the title page—Dacre's two-volume collection of sentimental verse (54). Peter Cochran thinks it is "hard to sustain" McGann's claim that Byron has committed "a massive act of allusion" in titling his volume after Dacre's (2), but goes on to argue that many traces of *Hours of Solitude* persist in Byron's subsequent work. For example, he cites Dacre's "The Mistress to the Spirit of Her Lover":

In the darkness of night, as I sit on the rock,
I see a thin form on the precipice brink
.....
Oh vain combination!—oh! embodied mist!
I dare not to lean on thy transparent form;
I dare not to clasp thee, tho' sadly I list—
Thou would'st vanish, wild spirit, and leave me forlorn.

Hours of Solitude II.35

I agree that here we are "a short step and a gender-switch" away from Byron's portrayal of Francesca's spirit in *The Siege of Corinth* as well as the "anguish of Manfred faced with the unrelenting spirit of Astarte" (Cochran 2). Similarly, Cochran argues that Dacre's "Moorish Combat" (*Hours of Solitude* I.108-12) paved the way for Byron's composition of *The Giaour*. The more one looks at Dacre's work, the more intricate the relations between it and Byron's appear.

Known for Gothic novels like *The Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer* (1805) and *Zoffoya* (1806), Dacre wrote under the Della-Cruscan style *nom de plume* of "Rosa Matilda." Two years after he responded to Dacre's *Hours of Idleness* with *Hours of Solitude*, however, Byron carved her up in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), which mocks "lovely ROSA's prose in masquerade" (CPW 1: 253), describing her in a note as having produced "two very respectable absurdities in rhyme" (CPW 1: 413). The "respectability" of the two volumes of *Hours of Solitude* to which Byron alludes is meant ironically, for sentimental poetry, like the Gothic novel and drama, was considered rife with sexuality:

Reclining here, beneath the shade

Sleeps a languid, half-dress'd maid;
There, a youth, whose varying cheek,
Seems disorder to bespeak [...]

Hours of Solitude I.7

Dacre was not shy about describing the "falt'ring sigh, / Voluptuous eye, / And palpitating heart" of "rapture as it flow'd" (*Hours of Solitude* l.23, 110), and such elements are evident in Byron's *Fugitive Pieces*, which portrays lovers' delight in seeing "each other panting, dying, / In love's extatic posture lying, / Grateful to feeling, as to sigh" (CPW 1: 134; Byron's emphasis). McGann points out that Byron's quick annulment of his literary liaison with the amorous-feminine writing of Dacre, Cowley, Robinson—and I am adding Inchbald—asserts his "turn from 'feminine' to 'masculine' modes," and that he sought to make this turn public in a manner that is at least deceptive, if not an "act of poetic bad faith" (56-57). By adopting in *English Bards* the attack-dog posture and style of William Gifford and Murray's *Quarterly Review* (so McGann argues), Byron sold out on a true source of his inspiration—so clearly indicated by his imitating Dacre's verse. According to McGann, he acted, or re-acted, out of humiliation at being exposed in practicing a "feminine" art.

10

McGann goes on to assert that deceit and treachery subsequently became important themes in Byron's poems about (or addressed to) women up through 1816. I differ with McGann here. True, in the three youthful works that preceded *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* Byron had sometimes written of female lovers whose "eye beams a ray, which can never deceive" (CPW 1: 136). True, he later wrote of traitorous lovers in poems like "When We Two Parted" (1815?), written ambiguously to Lady Caroline Lamb and Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster. He did so in a few other poems, like "Go — Triumph securely — the treacherous vow" (1812), and "Again Deceived! Again Betrayed!" (1812). Yet themes of deceit and treachery in love are not absent from Byron's juvenilia. *Hours Of Idleness* doesn't neglect the "captious coquette" (CPW 1: 148), a comic style of feminine portraiture that Jeffery Vail shows Byron derived from Thomas "Anacreon" Moore's erotic poetry. Contrary to what McGann implies, there is plenty of coy sex in Byron's earliest published work. As Jonathan Gross has pointed out, Laclos and Rousseau provided important touchstones for the young Byron's nervous self-image. *Fugitive Pieces*, *Poems on Various Occasions*, and *Hours of Idleness* exhibit traits of eighteenth-century libertinism, and so they cannot be read as straightforward praises of "perfect forms" and "lovely faces" (see Gross 31ff.).

11

Moreover, there is a problem with the second half of McGann's equation—that is, the obsession with traitorous women that Byron's work from 1808 to 1816 is supposed to exhibit. For example, the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* evoke heroines almost entirely *not* of the treacherous type to whom Harold briefly alludes when he asks "who would trust the seeming sighs / Of wife or paramour?" (CHP I, verses between stanzas 13 and 14). Despite this nod to the stereotype of fickle femininity, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* often depicts women as erotic daydreams that inspire the protagonist in ways conventional for male readers. There is the silent Inez, and there are the exotic beauties of the harems, "[t]am'd to [their] cage[s]," where their voices are "never heard" (CHP I.61). Harold has standard male fantasies: "I love the fair face of the maid in her youth, / Her caresses shall lull me, her music shall sooth" (CHP II, verses between stanzas 72 and 73). This element of fantasy is akin to that found in his juvenilia, but the portraits of women in *Childe Harold* are more complicated and more powerful. In this poem, Byron created the beautiful and steadfast female characters for which he justly was made more famous by William Finden's highly successful book of engravings. Finden's portraits include, for example, the Maid of Saragossa, Jephtha's Daughter, the Maid of Athens, Astarte, Laura, and others.

12

Byron's portrayal of women in his poetry bears on the general argument over what he owed to women writers because it reflects his openness to and empathy for the feminine perspective. In saying this, I do not excuse or dismiss the misogyny that sometimes characterized his relationships with women, especially his mother and wife, and which is exhibited in his many harsh witticisms—like his reference to scribbling bitches, or to Maria Edgeworth as having “a pencil under her petticoat” (*BLJ* 7: 217). And yet in 1814 Byron freshly dedicated *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to “lanthe,” “fair in form, as warm yet pure in heart” (*CPW* 2: 7). “lanthe” was Lady Charlotte Harley, the second daughter of Lady Oxford. She was just thirteen years old when the dedicatory poem was added to *Childe Harold* I and II in 1814, which has led some critics to read the dedication as the tribute of a Humbert Humbert to a Lolita, but no evidence in the text or in Byron's letters supports such a view. Recall also that he began his poem with a rather bashful invocation to the nine muses:

Oh, thou! in Hellas deem'd of heav'nly birth,
 Muse! form'd or fabled at the minstrel's will!
 Since sham'd full oft by later lyres on earth,
 Mine dares not call thee from thy sacred hill [...]

CHP I.1

He also described the “laughing dames in whom [Harold] did delight” (*CHP* I.11) before he left home, and also “Spain's dark-glancing daughters”, who showed bravery in battle—those “black-eyed maids of Heaven, angelically kind” (*CHP* I.59). He also mentioned reverentially the goddess Athena, “sad Penelope” and “Dark Sappho” (*CHP* II.39). Though there was certainly misogyny later, Byron does not seem to express it in the period leading up to the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* I and II, nor is it evident in those cantos.

13

In Byron's early work, then, we find a strong presence of women, whether as traditional love objects, heartbreakers, or sources of inspiration. Women torture the speakers in his poems—what could be more typical of the traditions of male writing?—but they also practice arts and provoke passions he finds strong and admirable, even if they were usually kept out of speaking roles:

Childe Harold had a mother—not forgot,
 Though parting from that mother he did shun;
 A sister whom he lov'd, but saw her not
 Before his weary pilgrimage begun [...]

CHP I.10

These lines acknowledge a mother with whom Harold had a painful, but indispensable relationship, and a sister whom he “lov'd”—the starkness of the expression implies that this was devotion without qualification. Similarly, Canto II begins with an invocation to the goddess Athena:

Come, blue-eyed maid of heaven!—but thou, alas!
 Didst never yet one mortal song inspire—
 Goddess of Wisdom! here thy temple was,

And is, despite of war and wasting fire,
 And years, that bade the worship to expire:
 But worse than steel, and flame, and ages slow,
 Is the dread sceptre and dominion dire
 Of men who never felt the sacred glow
 That thoughts of thee and thine on polish'd breasts bestow.

CHP II.1

Byron/Harold carries a torch for "august Athena!"—because the goddess inspires mortal males to act as "men of might" and to become "grand in soul." She is therefore first among the Gods in Byron's elegy for a world that has "pass'd away", "a school boy's tale, the wonder of an hour!" (CHP II.2). These allusions in *Childe Harold* I and II to mother and sister, Athena, the sea-nymph lanthe, and to the heroic sacrifices of Spanish women, evidence a range of female roles much wider than traitorous wives and lovers. Women's judgment becomes the standard this narrator's psyche implicitly seeks to satisfy—whether embodied in the maternal Athena, the eroticized women of Spain, or the sisterly lanthe, behind whom stood her mother, Lady Oxford, in all the ripeness of her middle-aging beauty, with whom Byron had an affair in 1812-13.

14

Despite these important caveats about Jerome McGann's argument over Byron's development, however, his fundamental point still stands: in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* Byron tries strenuously to appear as a "masculine," rather than "feminine" writer. But the record also shows that, after *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron was eager to absorb a feminine education, even if he wished to keep those feminine influences below the surfaces of his texts. In the immediate aftermath of the success of *Childe Harold*, he would meet and love (in varying degrees of heat) Lady Caroline Lamb, Lady Melbourne, and Lady Oxford. He would also encounter (in June 1813) Madame de Staël, whom he later described to Lady Blessington as "certainly the cleverest, though not the most agreeable woman he had ever known" (Blessington 22). Each of these women taught him important lessons, changing his understanding of culture, erotics, and politics, and in the cases of Lady Caroline and Madame de Staël, challenging him as a writer.

15

Lord Byron's love affair with Lady Caroline Lamb began immediately after the publication of the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in March 1812. Like many of his female "fans," Lady Caroline wrote to Byron imitating *Childe Harold*:

Oh that like thee Childe Harold I had power
 With Master hand to strike the thrilling Lyre
 To sing of Courts & Camps & Ladies Bower
 And cheer the sameness of each passing hour
 With verse that breathes from heaven and *should* to heaven aspire [...]

Whole Disgraceful Truth 78

Perhaps Byron liked the nuance in that last line that *his* aspirations seemed headed the other way. In any case, he was impressed enough that he let his friend, Robert Dallas, see the letter, and told him he thought it came from Mrs. Dallas—though Dallas didn't apparently get the joke.

16

Lady Caroline Lamb's overture was the proof that *Childe Harold* had changed Byron's social status. Moore later wrote that up to this point London had been a social "desert" for him, but

now he "saw the whole splendid interior of the High Life thrown open to receive him" (Moore I: 256). Leslie Marchand, biographer and editor of Byron's letters, has said that Byron had a "psychological urge, built upon the whole background of his early life, to be accepted as a social equal in the aristocratic world" (324). That desire, of course, goes back to his relations with his mother, whose ambition colored her son's entire existence. Lamb symbolized his arrival in that realm he yearned to reach.

17

Thoroughly scandalous and definitely sexual—Byron described Lamb's heart as "a little volcano that pours lava through your veins" (BLJ 2:170-71)—theirs was also a writerly intercourse. Byron brought Caroline books on a daily basis (Marchand 339). She reciprocated. They talked about Hume's prose style and discussed romances and Gothic novels, like Choderlos de Laclos's *Les liaisons dangereuses*, Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, William Beckford's *Vathek* and Jacques Cazotte's *Le diable amoureux*. Robert Dallas described Byron as "so enraptured, so intoxicated, that his time and thoughts were almost entirely devoted to reading [Lamb's] letters and answering them" (246). Byron probably wrote at least 250 letters to Lamb that spring and summer of 1812. He also met her at literary soirées of hostesses like Lydia White. Even after their affair was over, Lamb still sent him books. For example, in 1813 she sent him a copy of Dante's collected poetry and a translation of Goethe. She told John Murray, Byron's publisher, "[Y]ou owe his quotations from Dante [appearing in *The Corsair*] and the beginning of the *Bride [of Abydos]* to me—and not to Mad. De Staal—for I sent him Dante last year so that you see I was not useless even to his genius." If Lamb was telling the truth, Byron wrote the beginning of *The Bride of Abydos* by cribbing from books she gave him, rather than de Staël's redaction of Goethe found in *Corinne* (1807). Either way, of course, Byron took advantage of literary cues given him by a woman.

18

Lamb's literary ambitions were real, and they blossomed after she met Byron. She hoped that her relationship with him would improve her poetry, which she knew was inferior. Lamb had seemingly made the fatal error of thinking she could become a writer by becoming a writer's mistress. A few weeks after a near-elopement in summer 1812, her family took her off to Ireland, where she began writing the songs and stories that would become her first novel. In a short while their affair—though not, strangely, their relationship—ended. Though most critics minimize the role that Lamb played in Byron's development, both personally, and literarily, it was a significant contribution, for Byron later described her to Teresa Guiccioli as "in every country and at all times—my evil Genius" (BLJ 7: 37). Perhaps he meant that she had first placed him in the demonic pantheon of heroes, not by calling him "mad, bad, and dangerous to know" (Morgan II:200), a phrase he never heard in his lifetime, but by writing about him in *Glenarvon* (1816) and *Ada Reis* (1823). Or perhaps he meant simply that she pursued him, though the pursuit can only have been psychological.

19

As he prepared in fall 1812 to "snap the knot" of his love affair with Caroline, Byron had already formed close ties to two other intellectual women (BLJ 2:194). The first was Caroline's mother-in-law, Lady Melbourne, whose conversation he described as "champagne" to his spirits. He would come to regard her as "the best friend I ever had in my life" (BLJ 3: 48, 209). He was fascinated by Lady Melbourne's wisdom and experience, which made him admire her, as he put it, "certainly as much as you were ever admired" (BLJ 2: 208). Such admiration aimed at a very high bar indeed, for Lady Melbourne had been exceedingly successful in enriching the fortunes

of her family by strategically planned love affairs. She had captured the wealthy but untitled Peniston Lamb, who in 1768 had inherited a fortune valued at over £1,000,000 (what would amount to at least \$160 million today). In short order, Elizabeth had provided her spouse with a male heir and improved her family's social standing through liaisons with the Earl of Egremont, Earl Fitzwilliam, and the Prince of Wales, who fathered, respectively, William, Emily, and George Lamb. In honour of the birth of little George, Peniston Lamb was named first Viscount Melbourne and took a seat in the House of Lords.

20

Thus Byron joined a queue of Lady Melbourne's admirers stretching back over the previous four decades. Like Lady Caroline Lamb, Lady Melbourne offered Byron literary and intellectual companionship, worked out in a rich chain of letters. The older woman used her great experience to charm Byron thoroughly. She advised him on his marriage prospects and on his strategies for breaking off his relationship with her daughter-in-law: "You might agree to see her quietly when she returns [from Ireland], provided she makes none of ye scenes she is so fond of" (Melbourne 122).

21

Byron responded to Lady Melbourne's letters: "I never saw such traits of discernment, observation of character, knowledge of your *own sex*, & *sly concealment of your knowledge of the foibles of ours*, than in these epistles", he told her (BLJ 2: 229; emphasis Byron's). Later, he told Lady Blessington that Lady Melbourne united "the energy of a man's mind with the delicacy and tenderness of a woman's", and that if she had been somewhat younger, "Lady M. might have turned my head" (Blessington 132). We cannot rule out the possibility that Byron was a late love-conquest of this elder stateswoman of the Whig "Gynocracy."¹⁰ Certainly her tutelage was indispensable to Byron's social acumen, and she provided him with a profound understanding of the feminine perspective on life in general and politics in particular.

22

Lady Oxford was the second powerful woman with whom Byron took lessons starting about the time of Lamb's departure from London in September 1812. This paramour, whom he aptly nicknamed "Armida" and "The Enchantress" (BLJ 2: 260, 3: 9),¹¹ was a master of Greek and Latin, and possessed a gentle but formidable wit. She also played a crucial role in the unravelling of Byron's affair with Lamb. She encouraged him to doubt Caroline's claims of suicidal depression: "Why tell me she was *dying* instead of *dancing* [?]", he complained in a letter from Cheltenham (BLJ 2: 230). When Byron finally wrote to break off the affair with Lamb—an affair he was having much trouble ending—it was with Lady Oxford's help. Byron's letter arrived with a coronet on the seal under which one could clearly recognize the initials of Lady Oxford (Morgan II: 201). When Byron relented and agreed to another meeting with Lamb, he stipulated, at Lady Oxford's suggestion, that his new lover be present. And when he acceded to a request from Lamb for a lock of his hair, he sent instead a lock of Lady Oxford's and gloated that if Lamb discovered the truth, it would have an effect upon her comparable to a lock from the head of the Gorgon Medusa (BLJ 3: 37, 40).

23

Byron's behaviour toward Lamb was cruel. At one point he warned Lady Melbourne that "C is suspicious about our counter plots [...] I am obliged to be as treacherous as Talleyrand, but remember *that treachery is truth* to you [...] her worst enemy could not wish her such a fate as *now* to be thrown back upon me" (BLJ 2: 193-96). Byron here implies that, if necessary, he

inflected despair in other poems in *Hours of Solitude*, like "The Mother to Her Dying Infant" (l.39ff.), "Death and the Lady" (l.82ff), and "Simile":

THE little Moth round candle turning,
Stops not till its wings are burning:
So woman, dazzled by man's wooing,
Rushes to her own undoing.

Hours of Solitude l.98

Thus, Byron's awareness of Dacre's work generally, his reading of her novels, including *The Passions*, together with the juxtaposition of the three poems in the second volume of *Hours of Solitude*, argue that they are at play in *Manfred's* gestation, and that Byron's debt to Dacre extends far beyond the youthful production of *Hours of Idleness*.

43

We have already noted that just prior to beginning the composition of *Manfred*, Byron read *Glenarvon*. I have argued elsewhere that Byron derived a significant and useful feminine perspective on himself from the novel of his former lover, Lady Caroline Lamb, which he applied in composing *Don Juan* (Douglass 2005). *Glenarvon* shows Lamb's mastery of Byron's habitual styles of expression. Claire Claremont certainly validated Lamb's skill, for she wrote to Byron in Oct. 1816: "Some of the speeches in [*Glenarvon*] are yours—I am sure they are" (*His Very Self and Voice* 192). The novel surprised Byron by reproducing his voice in a feminine and sometimes feminist context. Byron at first thought of *Glenarvon* more as fan mail, and he gently mocked Lamb by suggesting improvements: "It seems to me that, if the authoress had written the *truth*, and nothing but the truth—the whole truth—the romance would not only have been more *romantic*, but more entertaining" (*BLJ* 5: 131.) But his claim that the novel was *insufficiently* true implies that it was already partly so, and *Glenarvon* recurred in his conversation and letters that fall and winter. For example, Byron wrote to Thomas Moore in March 1817 that he had read Coleridge's "Christabel," among many other works, and also "Glenarvon," too, by Caro. Lamb—God damn!" (*BLJ* 5: 187). Echoes of his own verse in the many lyric poems in *Glenarvon* caused Byron to comment with amusement that Lady Caroline wrote "pretty songs, and certainly has talent", or so Lady Blessington reports (Blessington 151). In August 1817, Byron also intervened to allow an Italian translation of *Glenarvon* to be published despite the local Censor's refusal (*BLJ* 5: 255). He also gave a copy to his lover, Teresa Guiccioli, who was reading it in February of 1820.

44

In *Glenarvon* Byron encountered an image of himself as a manipulator who "unites the malice and petty vices of a woman, to the perfidy and villainy of a man" (*Glenarvon* ll.359). Lamb had portrayed him as a feminized man, and he responded by creating such a character in *Don Juan*. Just as Byron feminizes Juan, he also portrays women differently. Instead of treacherous lovers, silent inspirations, or stalwart defenders of their men, they became more complicated, starting with Donna Julia in Canto I. As Peter Graham has said, Byron now felt the necessity to portray female characters as "potent, complex beings" (Graham 90, 118). Byron's affair with Lady Caroline Lamb and his reading of *Glenarvon* help to explain *Don Juan's* dedication, which attempts to neutralize any comparison between Byron's politics and *Glenarvon's* betrayal of the Irish Patriots in the 1798 rebellion. It also helps trace the origin of some of Byron's aphorisms on sex and marriage. But it is Byron's near-elopement with Caroline in 1812—as retold in *Glenarvon*—that takes shape as *Don Juan's* "earliest scrape" with Julia (*Don*

Juan I.199). Julia's letter from the convent to which she has retreated at the end of the Canto is Byron's *riposte* to Lamb for printing passages from Byron's letters in the novel and recreating his voice so effectively.

45

There are other women's texts that contributed to *Don Juan*. For example, Peter Cochran has pointed out that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu ("the charming Mary Montagu," [*Don Juan* V.3]), provided for Byron that "sympathetic brand of orientalism" to be found in Byron's comic epic (Cochran 1). More importantly, Cochran argues convincingly that Byron's reading of Dacre's *Zoffoya* furnished dramatic coloring and characterization for Don Juan's encounter with Gulbeyaz in Canto V, in which Dacre's description of Victoria and her black assistant is echoed by the physical appearance, demeanor, and actions of Gulbeyaz and Baba (*Don Juan* V.117ff.). Here too, as in the descriptions of Julia and Juan in Canto I, Byron dwells upon tears, inverting gender roles: "To have the man cry at the idea of being desired is a witty variant on Dacre," as Cochran says (4). Though there are "many subtexts swirling in the depths of the Byronic stew" of *Don Juan*, including *Vathek*, *The Monk*, and even *Joseph Andrews*, Cochran shows that Dacre's *Zoffoya* is part of the mix. Given Byron's extensive reading of popular novels, it should not surprise us that Dacre's *The Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer* (1805) can also be connected to *Don Juan*. According to Cochran (7), the novel lingers behind the description of Donna Julia in Canto I, where Byron has once again satirized the sinuous hypocrisy of female rationalization:

And even if by chance—and who can tell?
 The Devil's so very sly—She should discover
 That all within was not so very well—
 And if still free—that such or such a lover
 Might please perhaps—a virtuous wife can quell
 Such thoughts, and be the better when they're over [...]

Don Juan I.78

Cochran shows that this passage is likely based on one from *The Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer*, in which a sixteen-year-old heroine contemplates taking a married lover (Cochran 7; *Confessions of the Nun* I.182-83). As we delve more into Byron's reading of fiction by women, such discoveries will become less and less surprising.

46

The conclusion of Canto 1 of *Don Juan* describes a masculinized woman in Donna Julia, who writes, "[m]y eyeballs burn and throb, but have no tears" (*Don Juan* I.192), and the narrator underscores it: "[S]he did not let one tear escape her" (*Don Juan* I.198). Byron will later make the contrast as stark as possible by describing a Don Juan in "effeminate garb," who, when confronted by the beautiful Gulbeyaz, "burst[s] into tears" (*Don Juan* V.76, 117) Julia's dry eyes link her to the type of woman Lord Byron had encountered and studied between 1812 and 1818, including Madame de Staël and Lady Caroline Lamb, who perhaps could not escape what Byron considered the inherent emotionality of her sex, but who nonetheless "thought like a man" (Blessington 24). *Don Juan* redeploys gender stereotypes for disruptive purposes—it is no celebration of feminine supremacy. Rather, Byron aimed to satirize the "Gynocracy", which was comprised of women who practiced power through the hypnotism of their sexual allure. Byron claimed the poem exposes "the wish of all women to exalt the *sentiment* of the passions—& to keep up the illusion which is their empire. —Now D.J. strips off this illusion—and laughs at that

& most other things" (BLJ 8: 148). Laughter was Byron's defense against the traditional feminine weapon of tears.

47

Yet he stole the tears from Julia's cheeks to make his point. Byron's male literary heroes and competitors, from Shakespeare, Spenser, and Pope to Moore, Wordsworth, and Shelley, gave him everything—in a sense. But I am convinced that, without those scribbling women and their intellectual stimulation, Byron could never have become the poet of *Don Juan*.

Annexe

Postscript

I am only too aware of the inadequacy of the preceding essay to the scope of its topic. Byron's acquaintances included a remarkable number of literary women, most of whom, like Harriette Wilson, never got closer than the writing and receiving of letters.^[1] Of those who got closer, there are three in particular that I have not discussed at any length. One is Byron's spouse, *née* Anne Isabella Milbanke, whose poetry Byron respected. A second is Teresa Guiccioli, his last great female relationship.

Guiccioli's *Lord Byron's Life in Italy* has finally been translated by Michael Rees and edited by Peter Cochran. It is a remarkable document that never concedes the obvious fact that Byron was her lover. Nonetheless, and even though she is often mocked as the prude who demanded Byron stop writing *Don Juan*, Teresa Guiccioli had the literary taste and acumen required of anyone who would keep up with Byron, and her account provides, as editor Peter Cochran says, a "voice of intimate understanding, truth and love", a witness to Byron's life that is essential to our comprehending his love for Italy and his decision to go to Greece, where he would die trying to foster the Greek cause of independence (Guiccioli 51).

The third is the Countess of Blessington, who met Byron in 1823, not much more than a year before he died. Just a year older than Byron, and a renowned beauty, the Countess is generally respected for her *Journal of Conversations with Lord Byron* (1834), though Teresa Guiccioli commented that the book should have been titled "Imaginary Conversations" (Guiccioli 540-3). She had at the time of encountering Byron already published *Sketches and Fragments* (1822) and *The Magic Lantern* (1822). Subsequent to her composition of the *Conversations* she penned a novel in three volumes called *The Repealers* that, like *Glenarvon*, is based partly on events of the Irish rebellions of 1798 and 1803. She also wrote *The Idler in Italy*, published by Henry Colburn in 1839, and the novels *Meredyth* (1833) and *The Memoires of a Femme de Chambre* (1846). Hers was a brief acquaintance, but it shows again how responsive Byron was to the women writers he encountered, and also how they were inspired by him to keep after the lonely art of composition.

Notes

[1]

BLJ will be used in the text for references to *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie Marchand.

[2]

intends to do the honorable thing and marry Caroline. But that willingness is expressed diabolically as a terrible fate for her.

24

For her part, Lamb perceived a feminine streak in Byron's behaviour, the pettiness and vindictiveness of which pained her.

[I] agreed never to see him—thinking him then one of the Best & most generous as I knew him to be one of the cleverest & most fascinating of men or Women I had ever met with—his treatment since—was not deserv'd—& it is not my desire to repeat it—he has acted in all things as a Woman might—when anxious to pique and humiliate & irritate those over whom she has acquired influence & ascendancy. [19]

Lamb believed that she was observing the influence of her mother-in-law and rival (Lady Oxford) on Byron, who had made the most of his opportunity to observe and interact with these women of the highest strata of British aristocracy. He had been "enchanted" by Lady Oxford and talked of leaving the country with her and her husband when they departed for Sardinia in late June 1813. He stayed behind, however, and felt he could now understand a little of Lamb's pain. He asked Lady Melbourne not to mention Lady Oxford's name, since, "to tell you the truth—I feel more *Carolinish* about her than I expected" (BLJ 3: 69). His awareness of Lamb, uncomfortable enough, was about to become more aggravating.

25

In June 1813, as Lady Oxford departed, Madame Anne Louise Germaine de Staël arrived in England. Byron first dined with her on 22 June. He already knew her major works: *De l'influence des passions* [On the Influence of the Passions] (1796), *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* [The Influence of Literature upon Society] (1800), *Delphine* (1802), and the aesthetically-oriented romance novel *Corinne* (1807), as well as *De l'Allemagne* [Germany] (1810), a study of the German country and its character. Byron made many critical and even insulting remarks about "Corinne", as he called Staël. He felt a competitive urge toward this voluble and arrogant woman who steamrolled dinner table conversation and dished out personal remarks with annoying aplomb. "She *thought* like a man," Countess Blessington reported Byron later said, "but, alas! she *felt* like a woman" (Blessington 24, her emphasis).

26

Within three weeks of their first meeting, Madame de Staël condemned Byron's treatment of Lady Caroline Lamb to his face: "The Staël last night attacked me most furiously—said that I had 'no right to make love—that I had used [Lamb] barbarously—that I had no feeling, and was totally *insensible to la belle passion*, and *had been all my life*" (BLJ 3: 76, Byron's emphasis). A little later, Staël told Byron she found him "affected," and disapproved of his habits, including that of shutting his eyes during dinner—a charge he strenuously denied (BLJ 4: 33). Byron retaliated, but privately to his friends, not directly to Madame de Staël. He told Lady Melbourne that Staël was a dramatist of her own emotions who "cannot exist without a grievance—and somebody to see, or read, how much grief becomes her" (BLJ 3: 94). He was finding that Lamb had created a sort of benchmark for the strangeness and difficulty of feminine thinking and behavior: "[Staël] is in many things a sort of C[aroline Lamb] in her senses—for *she is sane*" (BLJ 3: 87, Byron's emphasis). When Staël's treatise against suicide appeared that summer, Byron predicted it would "make somebody shoot himself" (BLJ 3: 73). He also told his publisher

John Murray that he had tried *De L'Allemagne* as cure for insomnia (BLJ 3: 181). But we know that Staël's study of Germany was extensively and admiringly annotated by him. ²⁶

27

Joanne Wilkes's *Lord Byron and Madame de Staël: Born for Opposition* (1999) details the fractious but ultimately respectful literary relationship that developed between the two writers before Staël's death in 1817. More importantly, Wilkes illuminates the political attitudes and writerly lessons that Byron absorbed, noting, for example, strong parallels between the Byronic hero and the heroines of *Corinne* and *Delphine*. These protagonists "resemble each other in that they ultimately emerge as figures whose brilliant potential cannot be realized" (60). Byron paid particular attention to the fifth chapter of the eighteenth book of *Corinne*, titled "Fragments of Corinne's Thoughts." His annotations in the copy lent him by Teresa Guiccioli show he identified with Corinne's perception that, despite her talents, everything had gone very very wrong (60-61). The influence did not go only one way. Toward the end of her life, Staël contemplated travelling to Greece, hoping to find inspiration there for one last work, a study of Richard the Lionhearted that would have been influenced by Byron's *Lara* (197).

28

After Staël's death, Byron wrote a tribute to "the incomparable Corinna" that appears in the notes to *Childe Harold IV*, predicting that Staël would now "enter into that existence in which the great writers of all ages and nations are, as it were, associated in a world of their own, and, from that superior sphere, shed their eternal influence for the control and consolation of mankind." Perhaps to atone for the rudeness of some of his previous remarks upon her, he extolled her "unaffected graces", her amiability, and her generosity (CPW 2: 236). Wilkes points out that Byron seems anxious in his praise to forestall critical gossip about Staël's private life and shortcomings as a woman, because he seems to have thought she was praised too extravagantly by admirers who found her personally rather than literarily attractive. This leads to Byron's startling statements that "the dead have no sex," and that "Corinna has ceased to be a woman—she is only an author" (CPW 2: 235).

29

In this stark language, Byron encapsulates the desire of a woman writer to be treated as an author, not as a woman who happens to write. Even though he found it as difficult as any male of his culture and time to confer this privilege, he came at least to understand the yearning, and to comprehend it from the view of women he had encountered before 1818, the year in which he completed the last two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and began his satiric epic *Don Juan*.

30

Reviewing the events leading up to the inception of *Don Juan* may help explain the development of Byron's thinking. Partly out of fear that he might be forced to elope with Lamb, he married Annabella Milbanke, the niece of Lady Melbourne, in January 1815. The marriage was doomed from the start, and Byron became so agitated and behaved so badly that his wife feared he had gone mad. Scarcely a year later, Byron was separated from his wife and infant daughter. His tender feelings for Annabella were submerged in anger and paranoia, for he dreaded she might expose him to charges of incest or sodomy. He left England in April 1816 with a sense of being hounded by women. At one point during his affair with Lamb he described her as having "ravished" him (BLJ 3: 12). Now he truly felt the condemnation of the "Gynocracy," with the Press portraying him as abandoning his wife and child. When he arrived in Geneva to meet the Shelleys in May 1816, Byron put down his age in the register of the Hotel Angleterre as 100.

31

There followed a period of reassessment. Byron spent part of the summer with the Shelleys, visited Madame de Staël at Coppet, read Lady Caroline Lamb's novel, *Glenarvon* (1816), and apparently returned to thinking about Charlotte Dacre's work. In Geneva and its environs Byron lived for a while in very close quarters with Percy and Mary Shelley, and with Claire Clairmont, who would bear his illegitimate child Allegra. Mary Shelley's later *Frankenstein* certainly impressed Byron (*BLJ* 6: 126). But it was Percy Shelley who had the most immediate impact on Byron's willingness to consider philosophical ideas and poets for which he had small inclination—pantheism and Wordsworth, for example. Shelley's presence had a moderating effect upon Byron's darkness. It was, in a sense, a feminizing influence, because it opened Byron to the work of one whom he had identified in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* as the author of "Christmas stories tortur'd into rhyme" (*English Bards* 245), whose vaporous and oversimplified portraits, like that of "The Idiot Boy," he associated with the verse of popular female writers for magazines.

32

Charles Robinson pointed out long ago that during that summer Percy Shelley took every opportunity to "dose" Byron with Wordsworth, and that we can observe the effect in *Childe Harold III* (Robinson 21 and 14ff.)²¹ For example:

I live not in myself, but I become
 Portion of that around me; and to me
 High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
 Of human cities torture: I can see
 Nothing to loathe in Nature
 [...]
 Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part
 Of me and of my Soul, as I of them?

CHP III.72-75

Such Wordsworthian sentiments centering upon "[t]he Spirit of each spot" (*CHP* III.74) bolster Alan Rawes's recent re-assertion of Wordsworth's presence in *Childe Harold III*, although, as Rawes notes, these sentiments are qualified (20). Nevertheless, Byron employed Wordsworthian imagery and diction in the poem because of Shelley.

33

As Robinson argues—Byron learned from Shelley that he could at times overleap the "immediate" to seize a more "cosmic vision" (27). Shelley's influence may be found in other places in *Childe Harold III*, like the stanzas on the mountains on the Jura range: "There breathes a living fragrance from the shore / Of flowers yet fresh from childhood; on the ear / Drops the light drop of the suspended oar [...]" Here Harold contemplates a kind of love "infusing" itself "Deep into Nature's breast" so that "we stand in thoughts too deep," and find by this means a "feeling infinite [...]" In solitude [...]" (*CHP* III.86-90). Byron's choice to quote Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" ode ("thoughts too deep") argues that he had softened his acerbic attitude toward Wordsworth, whom he called earlier (and later) "Turdsword" (*BLJ* 7:158). Echoes of Wordsworth in *Childe Harold* convey a respect for the Lake-poet that is not ubiquitous in Byron's letters or poetry. Wordsworth played a role in the composition of *Childe Harold III* and *IV* as a result of Shelley's influence. That influence also played a role in softening Byron's response to more feminine forms of expression.

34

Even more important to Byron's career was his reunion with Madame de Staël. It occurred in July 1816, while he was living in the Villa Diodati. Staël had previously attacked Byron for his behavior toward Lady Caroline. Now, she provided him with her copy of *Glenarvon* during one of his visits to Coppet in July 1816 (*BLJ* 5: 131). John Cam Hobhouse had written to him of the novel, which had been published on 9 May 1816, assuming Byron had already heard of its notorious portrait of himself, but Byron was ignorant: "What—& who—the devil is 'Glenarvon'?" (*BLJ* 5: 81). On 12 July, Madame de Staël regaled Byron with "marvellous & grievous things" about the novel, including the fact that the first edition bore an epigraph from his poem, *The Corsair*: "He left a name to all succeeding times, / Link'd with one virtue and a thousand crimes" (*BLJ* 5: 85, 85n). He joked that the novel was probably best viewed not as "kiss and tell" but as "— — — and publish," and he was apparently flattered by being turned into fiction: "I ought to be ashamed of the Egotism of this letter" (*BLJ* 5: 85). By 29 July he had read *Glenarvon* and quipped to Samuel Rogers, "From furious Sappho scarce a milder fate / — — — by her love—or libelled by her hate" (*BLJ* 5: 86).²² In no way does Byron seem to view the novel as a problem or annoyance. It would stay on his mind, however, influencing the composition of *Don Juan*.

35

In the meantime, Byron began writing *Manfred* in September 1816. In doing so, he apparently returned to his youthful reading of Charlotte Dacre's *Hours of Solitude*. The editor of the Oxford edition of Dacre's novel *Zoffoya: or, the Moor* (1806), notes that her later novel, *The Passions* (1811) opens with a letter describing a Count Wiemar's encounter with a chamois hunter he observes asleep near the edge of a cliff in the Alpine mountains. The Count first describes his exhilaration at hiking the heights of the Alps: "Oh! when on these proud heights, how is my ethereal essence elevated and purified [...] I am no longer a mortal" (*The Passions* I.3). When he finds the hunter, the Count awakens him and warns him that he was in danger: "Had you started in your sleep [...] had you moved but an inch" (*The Passions* I.6). The scene is inverted in *Manfred*, where the protagonist is observed by the chamois hunter as he thinks of jumping off an Alpine cliff.²³ But why, if Byron read *The Passions*, as he almost certainly did, did this scene resonate with him, and how did he come to create a chamois hunter who contrasts so sharply with the one in the novel, who is still a young man, yet "haggard" and "lean" and like a "hardened warrior," who scorns danger and brushes off the reproaches of the Count that his family will suffer if he perishes (*The Passions* I.7-8)? As Peter Cochran notes, Dacre's chamois hunter seems more like Manfred than the hunter of Byron's play. And Byron's chamois hunter is an older character who values his hearth and family. The answer to this minor puzzle leads us back, I think, to the probable seeds of *Manfred* in three poems of the second volume of *Hours of Solitude*, so well known to Byron.

36

The first of the three poems that seem suggestive of the themes of *Manfred* is "The Evil Being." It harmonizes with the Faustian and Vathek-like spirits Byron would evoke in his play: "How cam'st thou, fiend, upon this earth to dwell? / Did thy perturbed spirit rise from hell?" asks the poem's nameless speaker (*Hours of Solitude* II.59). Just three pages later, Dacre moves from the Faustian to the fraternal, from Hell to mountain heights. The second poem in *Hours of Solitude* that bears upon the origins of *Manfred* is "The Hunter of the Alps," which describes a "hunter keen" who follows "the feather-footed chamois's flight." The chamois hunter is seen pursuing his prey as it flees "on the brink of a fearful abyss", where he appears as a symbol of "the strange delights of savage life." But this hunter is different from that of *The Passions*, for he

stands at the nexus of "tender ties": "A cottage, children, and a gentle wife! / For whom, while braving death, his bosom glows" (*Hours of Solitude* 63). Dacre's chamois hunter lives a healthful life of "constant animation" that prevents his soul from suffering "from torpor and despair" (64). He is a prototype of the protective chamois hunter of Byron's play, who pursues his prey in "break neck-travail" but saves Manfred from falling into the abyss. When Byron created his "peasant of the Alps," he gave him "humble virtues, [a] hospitable home, / And spirit patient, pious, proud and free", and described him as having "days of health, and nights of sleep", and performing "toils, / By danger dignified, yet guiltless" (*Manfred* II.1).³⁷ The parallels between the chamois hunter of *Manfred* and the chamois hunter in Dacre's *Hours of Solitude* are manifest. The chamois hunter of *The Passions* is, by contrast, brusque and arrogant. He takes his breakfast from a brandy-bottle and has "no time to spend in compliments" (*The Passions* 1.6-7).

37

Could the parallels between the chamois hunters of *Hours of Solitude* and *Manfred* stem simply from the fact that both writers employed a stock character? Scientific and literary texts of the eighteenth century dealing with the Alps gave the chamois hunter an almost magical status as monarch of the alpine range. He survives in that inhospitable environment, yet also embodies fear of death associated with such an extreme place. This is the chamois hunter of *The Passions*. What is unusual about Dacre's rendition in *Hours of Solitude* and Byron's in *Manfred*, however, is that their chamois hunters are given a gentler nature, and "tender ties", as Dacre phrases it. Both characters are given nurturing aspects.

38

The third poem that bears upon the origin of *Manfred* follows immediately after "The Hunter of the Alps." Here Dacre offers her readers a short work that is like nothing else in *Hours of Solitude*, although its theme is repeated in poems throughout the two volumes. Neither verse nor prose, this monologue's juxtaposition with the poem on the chamois hunter argues strongly that it lurks somewhere among the texts that inspired *Manfred*. To credit this fact, one must read this soliloquy in its entirety:

SONG OF MELANCHOLY

DARK as the wintry midnight is my soul; sad and tempestuous. Fain would I sit upon the stern brow'd rock, listening to the roaring of the terrible cataract.

Fool! to endure life, wandering, as I do, in the solitary path, while gloomy shadows stalk in the dim mist, and point at me with melancholy gesture,

I come, I come, gloomy shadows!—I hasten to be disembodied.

Bitter shrieks the North wind over the mountains; the night-bird screams dismal o'er the dark green yew. Oh! let me be laid in the grave, and let the spirits of the air bend over my tomb!

I am unfit for the world; black misery pervades my brain; the desert of gloom suits my soul. The wild blast driving the heavy clouds over the mountains—the dreamy din of midnight chorus, oppressing thy soul with deadly and mysterious sorrow, best befits me—the forgotten of Heaven!

Man is the monster from whose jaws I fly! whose poison'd arrow still festers in my

heart, and defies the skill of the physician.

Spirit of death I bear me from the scene of my woe! all night will I watch for thee on the cold tomb-stone. Take pity, and receive me among ye—stretch forth from the slowly yawning tomb your slender arms, spirits of the quiet dead!

Oh! what have I done, that dreadful woe should haunt my footsteps? What have I done, that the phantom of despair should fly before me, shrieking and wringing her lurid hands?

Oh! let me die, that my sorrows may rest in the tomb—that the voice of man may strike never more upon my maddened brain, and that the innocent smile of * * * * * may never mock the bursting of my sad heart.

God of Heaven! I beseech thee for death; stop, in pity, stop the feverish beating of my heart—let not my own hand urge the life away. Yet never can the tempest of my mind be quell'd—the stormy ocean may be easier to appease! I feel in my soul that happiness can never more return. Sad and strange are my nights; my days are a dim mist. Smile on me, oh! God! and send thy pale angel, Death, to bear me away in his arms.

Bitter shrieks the North wind over the mountains; the night-bird screams dismal from the dark green yew. Oh! let me be laid in the grave, and let the spirits of the air bend over my tomb!

Hours of Solitude II.65-67

Evidently, basic elements of Manfred's character and predicament are outlined in Dacre's prose-poem monologue.

39

The protagonist and his situation are strikingly similar: One character sits and listens "to the roaring of the terrible cataract" (*Hours of Solitude* II.65), while the other stands "on the torrent's brink" (*Manfred* I.2). Dacre's speaker has a dark soul, like Manfred's, which makes him or her "unfit for the world" (*Hours of Solitude* II.66); her speaker feels guilt for a nameless crime and a sense of being cursed with a "mysterious sorrow" (II.66), like Manfred's "curse" (*Manfred* I.1); her speaker has a longing for death and wishes to escape from the "tempest of [his or her] mind" (II.67), again in parallel to Manfred; the speaker also expresses enmity for humanity and fears to confront the "innocent smile" of an apparent soul-mate (II.67), reminiscent of Manfred's tortured love for Astarte.

40

The parallels go deeper: Dacre's melancholy speaker invokes "the spirits of the air" twice, asking them grant the release of death and to "bend over my tomb!" (*Hours of Solitude* II.65, 67). Manfred calls upon the "Spirits of earth and air" from whom he seeks "Forgetfulness" and "oblivion," which he hopes will come with death (*Manfred* I.1). He wishes to escape from himself, from "that which is within me" (I.1). While Dacre's speaker cries out, "What have I done [...]?" as if unconscious of any crime, yet it is made clear that he or she is an outcast who is fleeing the "monster" of humankind (*Hours of Solitude* II.66). Happiness is as impossible for Manfred as

it is for Dacre's melancholy speaker. In both cases, ocean imagery is used to frame the unsettled, seething aspect of their natures. Manfred compares the mists and clouds boiling up around the glaciers to "foam from the roused ocean of deep Hell," and these rolling vapours make him giddy (*Manfred* I.2). Dacre's speaker describes the "wild blast driving the heavy clouds over the mountains" and compares his or her inward turmoil to a "stormy ocean" (*Hours of Solitude* II.66, 67). And in both cases the protagonists long to be reconciled with a beloved. Manfred wishes to be reunited with Astarte, whose presence plagues him as a reminder of a crime they have committed in loving each other. The speaker of Dacre's prose-poem prays that "the innocent smile of * * * * may never mock the bursting of my sad heart" (*Hours of Solitude* II.67).

41

For those who have combed Byron's letters looking for clues to the origin of *Manfred* character, these poems by Charlotte Dacre suggest an answer to what Byron meant when he wrote: "It was the *Staubach* and the *Jungfrau* and something else, much more than *Faustus*, that made me write *Manfred*" (*BLJ* 7: 113). Prompted by the opening pages of *The Passions*, Byron seems to have remembered the earlier version of the chamois hunter and the voice of Dacre's tortured soul, the setting and the theme of lost love, then mixed it with the arrogance and power of *Faust*, and pushed the outward storm inward, superadding to Manfred's personality his own peculiar sense of living under a curse of self-consciousness: "These eyes but close / To look within" (*Manfred* I.1). Manfred joins the "brotherhood of Cain," while a disembodied voice at the end of the first scene chants, "I call upon thee! and compel, / Thyself to be thy proper Hell!" (I.1). Dacre's speaker is, similarly, "the forgotten of Heaven!" (*Hours of Solitude* II.66). When he or she repeats the desire to "be laid in the grave," that phrase finds a grandiose echo in Manfred's "Earth! take these atoms!" (*Manfred* I.2).

42

Byron was thoroughly familiar with *Hours of Solitude*, and there can be little doubt that he had read the three poems cited here. "Song of Melancholy," in particular, expresses a *feminine* despair that Dacre articulated in several other poems in *Hours of Solitude*. The poem interceding between "The Evil Being" and "Song of Melancholy," for example, imagines the revenge of a mother cat on the man who has drowned her five kittens. Another poem titled "The Exile" and subtitled, "Composed on the sea-shore, and founded on the fate of an unfortunate Female born to better hopes. (Written at Sixteen.)," describes a lost soul wandering on a "dubious shore":

Sweep on, ye winds—congenial billows roar,
As, lost, I wander on your dubious shore;
In sad review each shudd'ring vision see
Pass slow along, and turn their looks on me;
See pale Experience with her sadden'd eye
Gaze on the shades, and hear her hollow sigh;
Bless the relentless gloom that weighs the air,
And hail it, fit associate of Despair.

Hours of Solitude I.11

The speaker of this poem, like that of "Song of Melancholy," is "rob[e]d in sadness": "Dark as my fate the prospect round me low'rs [...]" (*Hours of Solitude* I.11). Dacre propounds a female-

Kruitznier was a part of Sophia and Harriet Lee's collaboration, *Canterbury Tales* (1798, 1805).

[3] CPW will be used in the text for references to Byron's *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome McGann.

[4] Strickland's article responds to the charge of plagiarism leveled long ago against Byron by the grandson of the Duchess of Devonshire, Frederick Leveson Gower, who claimed Byron received the manuscript of *Siegendorf* from Lady Caroline Lamb and then published it in his own name as *Werner*. See Hugh Stokes, *The Devonshire House Circle* (London: H. Jenkins, 1917), 277. Peter Cochran is convinced that, while Byron wrote his own play (*Werner*), "there is plagiarism, in two vital factors and several details (Cochran 179).

[5] In Act III of *Lover's Vows*, Verdun recites an account of the Baron's and Frederick's fractious first meeting: "The youth was in severe distress, / And seem'd as he had spent all, / He look'd a soldier by his dress; / For that was regimental."

[6] See Vail 14-40 and *passim*.

[7] The line appears in *Hours of Idleness*, in one of several poems titled "To Caroline".

[8] I have argued that this poem may have been written as early as 1812 (Douglass 2004: 322-23). Lady Caroline wrote in late 1824 or early 1825 to her cousin the 6th Duke of Devonshire that she wanted to send him a "[c]opy of the last letter written to me by Ld Byron 'When we two parted in silence & tears' — it was written the very week after we supped at Devonshire House & my Mother was ill." (Letter in the Chatsworth Archive: Devonshire MSS. 6th Duke's Group, f. 1130).

[9] "To Inez," a lyric inserted between stanzas 84 and 85 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage I* (CPW 2: 40).

[10] Citations of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* are by canto and stanza number in Byron's *Complete Poetical Works*, vol. 2.

[11] William Finden's *Les Dames De Byron; Or, Portraits Of The Principal Female Characters In Lord Byron's Poems* (London: C. Tilt, 1836), epitomizes this aspect of Byron reception, with numerous steel-plate engravings capturing his various heroines.

[12] In October of 1813, Lady Caroline half-facetiously asked Murray to take for publication a collection of "250 letters from a young Venetian nobleman—address to a very absurd English Lady." Lady Caroline Lamb to John Murray, 7 October 1813. John Murray Archive.

[13] Lady Caroline Lamb to Lord Byron, 1812. John Murray Archive.

[14] Lady Caroline Lamb to John Murray. n.d. [dated by internal evidence to February 1814]. John Murray Archive.

[15] "[M]y beautiful Rhapsodies like every thing else I do—burst forth on every event to perish with it—witness all the Elegies I have written since five years old for every dog cat monkey & squirrel that left this goodly world & where is the young Lady who has not address Cynthia bright Goddess—Hygea—innocent Doves—Lambs playing on the Green—the return of Spring—the Fall of the Leaf—a cow ruminating after its dinner & all the other Images that awaken sympathetic emotions in the youthful heart." Lady Caroline Lamb to Annabella Milbanke, 22 May 1812. Bodleian, Dep. Lovelace Byron 359. Marked as endorsed by A.I.M.: "a letter of Lady Caroline Lamb to me—1812—very remarkable."

- [16] When Juan comments in the first canto of *Don Juan* that Julia's seal read "Elle vous suit partout [She follows you everywhere]," the phrase seems to refer to Caroline's pursuit of Byron, a recurring theme of his letters (*DJ* I.198).
- [17] Byron coins the term in *Don Juan*, 12.66, and 16.52.
- [18] Armida is a beautiful enchantress in Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (1581). She bewitches Rinaldo, one of the Crusaders, just as Circe did Ulysses.
- [19] Lady Caroline Lamb to her uncle Lord Spencer, 13 May 1814. British Library, Althorp Papers 76113, unfoliated.
- [20] Byron's annotated copy of *De L'Allemagne* is held in the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
- [21] "Dose" is probably Byron's word, as reported by Medwin (194).
- [22] The lines are from Pope's *Horace Imitated*. The dashes stand for "poxed" (Pope wrote "P—xed by her love").
- [23] I am indebted to Peter Cochran for drawing my attention to this passage in the introduction to the Oxford edition of *Zoffoya* by Kim Ian Michasiw (xxv).
- [24] Citations of *Manfred* are by Act and scene numbers in Byron's *Complete Poetical Works*, vol. 4.
- [25] Citations of *Don Juan* are by canto and stanza number in Byron's *Complete Poetical Works*, vol. 5.
- [26] Frances Wilson's biography, *The Courtesan's Revenge: Harriette Wilson, the Woman Whom Blackmailed the King*, tells all there is to know about Byron's relationship to the remarkable woman born Harriot Dubochet.

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