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**The Madness of Writing:
Lady Caroline Lamb's Byronic Identity**
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Lady Caroline Lamb's madness is a stereotype of the romantic period: she was the woman Byron drove insane. Her literary output has been seen simply as the product of a "diseased sexuality," as Malcolm Kelsall has aptly put it (4). Perhaps so, but the "disease" in her writing is different from what criticism has led us to believe. Lady Caroline almost certainly suffered from bipolar disorder (manic depression), which is often associated with creativity. Her volatility, self-recriminations and temper tantrums clearly predated her affair with Byron. Her behavior as a child, often exaggerated as completely wild and uncontrollable, nonetheless showed cyclothymic tendencies—a pattern of emotional peaks and troughs dramatic enough to attract the attention of her peers and elders. Her moods seem to have been sustained over periods as short as minutes and, at other times, over months, or even years. These changing moods captivated her companions throughout her life. Even at the end, when Lady Caroline was struggling with drug and alcohol addiction, Lady Morgan observed, "One of her great charms was the rapid transition of manner which changed to its theme" (Morgan 2: 255).

High rates of alcoholism and manic-depression have been found among writers across the ages. Byron himself has been mentioned as a probable sufferer of bipolar disorder (see Goodwin and Jamison 324-56, 367). Lady Caroline Lamb's undiagnosed mental problems are thus crucial to understanding her literary efforts, for her novels and satires of Byron's poetry represent a struggle to find her own voice amidst a disastrous personality fragmentation. Since both she and Byron assumed that he engendered and she embraced this disintegration, we may understand his fascination and repulsion. It was a pattern in their relationship that she well understood. Lady Caroline coined (posthumously, through her friend, Lady Morgan), the famous formula for Byron: "mad, bad, and dangerous to know." And yet this quotable condensation captures not her immediate impression of Byron, as we have so often been told, but rather a perspective achieved with age and reflection. Long before this, Byron himself had labeled Caroline "mad and malignant," a "monster," who "cannot be in her senses" (to Lady Melbourne 2 July 1814; *BLJ* 4: 135). As he courted Annabella Milbanke, he framed Caroline in this way: "[H]er whole disposition is a moral phenomenon (if she be

not *mad*) it is not feminine—she has no real affection . . . but everything seems perverted in her—she is unlike every body—& not even like herself for a week together (to Annabella Milbanke 9 Oct. 1814; *BLJ* 4: 203-4). Her chameleon quality drew him, and yet it also challenged him. He actually insisted half-seriously to Lady Melbourne around this same time, "I am as mad as C" (*BLJ* 4: 123).

Psychosocial or physical elements may trigger manic-depressive episodes, but, as Frederick Goodwin and Kay Jamison note in their standard text, "The most clearly established biological fact about manic-depressive illness is that it involves a genetically transmitted vulnerability" (371). Lady Caroline Lamb inherited such a vulnerability. She may have had it through her mother's line, though the dispositions of her mother and grandmother appear not to have been colored by depression. While it is impossible at this date to establish whence her vulnerability came, a tantalizing possibility exists. One of the most obviously manic-depressive characters in London society of the time, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, apparently believed himself to be Lady Caroline Lamb's father.

This possibility was discussed in the 1930s by Kenelm Foss, who argued against it. He pointed out that while Sheridan was certainly one of Lady Bessborough's lovers, he was by no means the only possible alternate parent. He also stressed that the illegitimate parentages of many other high-born personages—including William and George Lamb, for example—were commonly spoken of and "transmitted to posterity." If Lady Caroline was Sheridan's child, Foss asks, why was it not commonly known (Foss 287)? These are convincing points. However, there remains the fact that Sheridan's affair with Lady Bessborough occurred around the time that she conceived Lady Caroline. And to dismiss Sheridan as a possible father, one must also explain the puzzle of his striking behavior, starting around the time of Lady Caroline's betrothal in January 1805. Let us briefly explore the case before turning to Lady Caroline's fictionalization of her traumas.

One important piece of evidence is that Sheridan sent poison pen letters Lady Bessborough and to Caroline and several London newspapers in the months before her wedding (Granville 2: 3-9). The letters were full of obscenities and innuendo designed to wound Lady Bessborough. After the wedding, in June 1805, his frustration became even more public. At more than one celebratory ball, Sheridan followed Lady Bessborough around alternately weeping and spouting epigrams and trying to get her attention (Granville 2: 86, 93). He pursued her everywhere, in fact, even to Melbourne House, where Lady Caroline re-

sided with husband William. He literally chased Lady Bessborough up the stairs. She was extremely put out: "I do not like his having got the entrée there, and think him, even old as he is, a dangerous acquaintance for Caroline" (Granville 2: 236). Why did Lady Bessborough perceive him as a threat to her daughter? There seems to have been at least a minor element of jealousy in her posture toward him at this time. Sheridan's attentions indicate an extraordinary interest in young Caroline, but not of an amorous type.

Meanwhile, Caroline showed strong signs of instability linked to a genetic heritage of manic-depression. She seemed to be doing pretty well after the wedding, in September of 1805, according to one observer (Foster 242). By October, however, her cousin Harriet thought she looked "pale and ill" (Gower, *Hury-O* 118). This may have been due to first trimester nausea. She continued to be and look ill, with a cold in December and an attack of influenza in January of 1806. Her cousin wrote paradoxically: "[T]hey seem the happiest of human beings. She looks very ill." Caroline acted "amiable but looked extremely ill. She worries herself to death about a pain in her chest" (Gower, *Hury-O* 141, 150). She miscarried that month and took a long time to recover on a regimen of "tonic medicines" and sea-bathing (Bessborough 146).

Ten months later, in November 1806, she was pregnant again. The morning sickness, headaches and dizziness were accompanied by nervous fits. Her grandmother Lady Spencer wrote to Caroline's mother Harriet on 23 December 1806: "I do not like Caroline's still having these nervous attacks & I dread their becoming habitual. I think the physicians (not you) should tell her that much might be done by her trying to resist them . . . but I do not know whether it will have any effect on fainting and giddiness" (Bessborough 155). As her due date approached, Sheridan became obstreperous, forcing his way into Lady Bessborough's box at the Opera and then seeking her out after a fight with his own wife, Hecca (Granville 271, 274).

Lady Bessborough was with Caroline as she went into labor before the birth of this only child who would survive, and she was amazed to receive a note from Hecca Sheridan begging her to come. Reluctantly, she left Caroline for a few moments. She had arrived at the Sheridans' and been in conversation with Hecca for a few minutes when Sheridan burst drunkenly into the room. A bizarre scene ensued in which he apologized, asking for mercy and compassion, admitting he was a "wretch," and telling Harriet she was the woman he was most in love with. When Hecca Sheridan indignantly cried, "Why, you always tell me I am the only woman you ever were in love with," Sheridan replied, "So you are,

to be sure, my Dear Hecca," upon which Hecca remonstrated, "Except *her*?" This farce went on for three hours, according to Lady Bessborough. She made her escape and returned to her daughter's lying-in only when she and Hecca locked Sheridan up (Granville 2: 276).

Lady Caroline delivered a boy named George Augustus Frederick after the Prince of Wales, who would stand as the child's godfather. Her cousin Harriet described her as having "grown very thin" and looking (paradoxically again) "heated, though in very good health":

One hears such wonders of her both ways and every way when one is away from her, that I always feel an involuntary surprise to find her, as I did, at Hadley, like another, to quote Lord B[essborough], and when she is quiet, gentle and reasonable I am glad to see her and to believe that much of what we heard must have been exaggerated. I do not mean to say that there is not too much reason to wonder at her oddity, and blame her conduct at times. Lady Elizabeth (who in general takes her part in any attacks upon her) says she stood in a corner one day flinging cups and saucers at William's head (a pretty pastime for him, poor man), but she says they all worked one another up and all had a share in the blame they so plentifully heaped upon her head. (Gower, *Hary-O* 242-43)

Lady Bessborough and Caroline did everything they could to prevent Sheridan from attending baby Augustus's christening. But the ingenious Sheridan got the Prince of Wales, the child's godfather, to designate him as his attendant for the day (Granville 292). At the ensuing party, Sheridan recited impromptu verses on the new baby causing Caroline to get up and abruptly leave the room, in which was sitting the Prince of Wales himself.

Sheridan's behavior stemmed partly from his alcoholism. But why were his attentions directed only to Caroline and never to any of Harriet Bessborough's other three children? An unwelcome guest, he pursued this attachment—once even into the nursery, where Lady Bessborough was attending Augustus alone, waiting for the return of Caroline and the nurse. In an attempt to stanch the flow of his monologue, she held up the child and asked him whether his grandchildren were as pretty as hers. The effect upon Sheridan was drastic. He vowed to take vengeance, cursed her, and ordered his carriage. As he was leaving, he grabbed her violently, gripping her hand so powerfully that she was left with bruises, swelling, and a badly cut ring finger (Granville 2: 308-9). His reactions suggest that he believed her reference to "grandchildren" was meant to wound him—but why would it do so, unless he believed Augustus to be a grandchild of his own?

Sheridan died in miserable circumstances in 1816. Lady Bessborough visited him as he lay on his deathbed, and she later told Lord Broughton that he had frightened her by saying he would come to her after he had died. She protested that he had persecuted her all his life. Why would he wish to prolong the persecution beyond the grave? His answer echoed Hamlet's father's ghost: "Because I am resolved you shall remember me" (Granville 2: 541). Samuel Rogers reported that, shortly before he died, Sheridan said, "Tell Lady Bessborough that my eyes will look up to the coffin-lid as brightly as ever" (Rogers 50).

It is hard to know what to make of Sheridan's volatile relationship with Lady Caroline's mother. It is also difficult to say what Lady Bessborough herself may have believed. She may have been uncertain who Caroline's father was. She may have believed the father was her husband. Or she may have known Sheridan was the father, but preferred not to put it about because the knowledge would have had the reverse effect from admitting that the child's parent was a duke, a prince, or an earl. Sheridan's social reputation was poor, although he was well-known, widely accepted, and knew himself to be descended from James II and his mistress Ann Jones. His outrageousness, however, may have made Lady Bessborough reluctant to allow knowledge of Caroline's parentage to become widely known. Or she may simply have feared Sheridan's aggression. If Sheridan thought he was Caroline's father, Lady Bessborough was either unable or unwilling to persuade him otherwise. His compulsive jealousy and violent nature would then have driven her to protect her daughter in any way necessary.

Although we cannot be certain, it is at least possible that Sheridan's manic-depressive personality lies at the root of Lady Caroline's own mental difficulties. However she came by them, she was definitely afflicted. One additional point should also be borne in mind when assessing the genetic component of the diagnosis offered here. As Goodwin and Jamison have reported, there is mounting proof of the connection between epilepsy and manic-depression (116). Augustus Lamb was afflicted with severe epilepsy.

Regardless of the conclusions in this interesting line of speculation about Lady Caroline's parentage, her behavior, as described by herself and her contemporaries, proves that she was what a modern clinician would call a cyclothymic personality, with an approximately equal balance between hypomanic and depressive moods. Not atypically, her manic-depressive tendencies were exacerbated by pregnancy and morning sickness. As Augustus's first birthday approached (August 1808),

Lady Caroline became pregnant again. Five months later, at the end of January, 1809, she went into early labor and delivered a premature little girl who died within twenty-four hours and was buried at St. Ethelreda's Church in Hatfield along with her first child.

Lady Caroline now became predominantly manic, diving into social events and engaging in flirtations that led to indiscretions, including an affair with Sir Godfrey Webster in 1810. She exhibited more and more outrageous behavior. Her grandmother was annoyed to hear that she had leapt over a couch during a party in early summer 1811 (Elwin 144). That fall her cousin Hary-O wrote that she had received a "very odd" missive from Lady Caroline. She wished "the learned could explain the incongruity of [Lady Caroline's] behaviour. They would be put to it indeed" (Gower, *Letters* 1: 20).

All this leads up to her famous affair with Byron. By March of the following year (1812), Lady Caroline had pursued and temporarily captivated him. Certainly she was infatuated. She was also hypomanic—Byron would later call her "little Mania." After her affair with Byron fell apart, Lady Caroline's family took her to Ireland, where she slid deeper into depression. She was apparently cycling rapidly and experiencing mixed states. During this time, Lady Melbourne received two letters on the same day from her, "one full of Spirits, gayete, Dinner Parties, &c. &c. ye other *false* written to deceive me, talking of her unhappiness & affecting to be perfectly quiet & resign'd" (Melbourne 122). Lady Melbourne interpreted this as manipulation, but it seems obvious that Lady Caroline was suffering uncontrollable mood swings. If she really hoped to dupe her mother-in-law, she would never have sent both letters. Nor would she have entreated Lady Melbourne to show Byron her letters. The letters seemed to be from two entirely different people—one almost drunk on amusements, the other suicidally depressed.

Byron was getting similar communications. In late October, he was feeling "sick & annoyed" and angered by the endless stream of letters from Ireland (*BLJ* 2: 233). He determined to put an end to their correspondence, which he had unwisely continued. So he wrote to hurt and offend Caroline, probably with the help of Lady Oxford, upon whose friendship Caroline had naively counted. "My opinion of you is entirely alter'd," he said, "& if I had wanted anything to confirm me, your Levities your caprices & the mean subterfuges you have lately made use of while madly gay—of writing to me as if otherwise, would entirely have open'd my eyes" (*BLJ* 2: 242). This letter, with its painful accusation of duplicity, is crucial to understanding Lady Caroline's deteriorating mental and emotional condition. It struck just as she was preparing to return

to England. According to the account Caroline later gave Lady Morgan, the letter arrived "with a coronet on the seal. The initials under the coronet were Lady Oxford's. It was that cruel letter I have published in *Glenarvon*: it destroyed me: I lost my brain. I was bled, leeches; kept for a week in the filthy Dolphin Inn, at Rock. On my return I was in great prostration of mind and spirit" (Morgan 2: 201).

How much of this melodramatic account holds up under examination? Quite a lot, actually. Caroline certainly suffered nervous prostration upon her return from Ireland. She was described by her cousin Harriet shortly after her arrival:

The Bessboroughs have been unpacked about a couple of hours. My aunt looks stout and well, but poor Caroline most terribly the contrary. She is worn to the bone, as pale as death and her eyes starting out of her head. She seems indeed in a sad way, alternately in tearing spirits and in tears. I hate her character, her feelings, and herself when I am away from her, but she interests me when I am with her, and to see her poor careworn face is dismal, in spite of reason and speculation upon her extraordinary conduct. She appears to me in a state very [little] short of insanity, and my aunt describes it as at times having been decidedly so. . . . Caro. has been excessively entertaining at supper. Her spirits, whilst they last, seem as ungovernable as her grief. (Gower, *Letters* 1: 40-41)¹

Lady Caroline was now suffering rapid manic-depressive cycles. In general, mania may come on suddenly, while depression takes longer to develop; some individuals make the bipolar circuit in a matter of minutes. Meanwhile, the madness does not seem to affect the sufferer's ability to reflect rationally upon the episodes (Caramagno 35, 37).

Her divided mental state began to be mirrored by the imaginative reveries she created to escape into a fantasy world based on her once close relationship with Byron. Doubtless, she had already conceived herself as the heroine of a story like *Glenarvon*, which is set almost entirely in Ireland. Eventually, she found that elaborating this Irish Gothic narrative would become her "sole comfort" (Granville 2: 543). In the three years that ensued, she found many lucid periods in which to transcribe her odyssey of pain. Increasingly snubbed and isolated, she was vulnerable to bouts of despair that finally led her to publish her novel.

This was an act of self-immolation. Many of the novel's characters were transparently based upon her mother-in-law, her cousin, her friends Lady Holland and Lady Oxford, the poet Samuel Rogers, and others whom she presented in an unflattering light. The novel is clearly an example of what Evelyne Keitel has called a "pathographic text." The book

evokes the experience of bipolar disorder in the presence of a duplicitous seducer whose effect upon those around him is contagious and vampirical—the novel's concluding line is "... the spirit of evil infatuates before he destroys" (3: 322). It is a text that cannot escape the vortex of its proposition: a work of art that performs a self-destructive obsession. As Keitel puts it in *Reading Psychosis*,

the effect of pathographic novels [involves] the depiction of psychotic experiences. Psychotic personality fragmentation is the experience of being suspended at the verge of non-existence which cannot be communicated in its full range of content and emotion, either in everyday discourse or through psychological and philosophical theories. Psychotic experiences ... can be interpreted as self-confrontation, as the extreme form of an identity crisis. (2-3)

We can see the truth this holds for *Glenarvon* on almost every page, for example, in the way the plot hinges on doubling. Glenarvon as Byronic hero is also the evil Count Viviani: a beautiful assassin, a heroic coward, a political leader of no lasting convictions, a passionate lover who seduces cold-heartedly. Peter Graham has said that Lady Caroline "shrewdly and accurately captures Byron's special blend of liberal politics and conservative social attitudes" (108-9). She also captured a protean satanic presence.

If Byron appears under several guises—Glenarvon, Viviani, even Gondimar, the female pole of the novel's center is also astonishingly multiple. Lady Calantha Avondale, the ostensible heroine, is not the simple "self-portrait" advertised by most commentators. Calantha is merely one alter-ego of the author. There is also Elinor St. Clare, who plays the harp, writes powerful lyrics, and dresses like a man. There is Fiorabella, the young woman murdered by her husband after being left by Glenarvon. Lady Caroline may even be found peeping at us from the eyes of the little page-boy, Zerbellini. Lady Caroline, when dressed in her own page's outfit of hussar jacket, feathered cap and silver buttons, was called by her friends "Cherubina" (Strickland 53). Lady Caroline is certainly also present in the character of Alice MacAllain, who is seduced by Glenarvon, bears him a son named Clare, suffers his abandonment, and then dies from an excess of emotion when he shows her the unexpected kindness of visiting her on her sickbed (*Glenarvon* 2: 336-51). The effect of all this is to bring a choir of female voices into play around the theme of Glenarvon's contagious duplicity.

Glenarvon as pathographic text confronts a love-hate for its eponymous hero and, metonymically, for itself. The novel condemns Glenarvon

and yet seeks to emulate him. This approach/withdrawal response is mirrored in the personalities of its multiple heroine-victims. Condemned by the women he wrongs, Glenarvon still obsesses them. They each repeat the same tale of passion, bereavement, and self-destruction. The author's desire seems to circulate restlessly between two images of her hero—one inspired, the other damned. The repetitions become painful. Must Calantha engage in yet another self-analysis? Must Glenarvon's "fatal attraction" repeat itself? Why is Elinor also called "St. Clara," the name of her own aunt? Why is Alice MacAllain's child named "Clare"? *Glenarvon* creates a world "obsessive, repetitive and unreal," in Keitel's words. In doing so, it mirrors the psychotic processes that produced it (Keitel 37). And at the same time, the novel functions as a prose counterpart to Byron's *Childe Harold*, in all its coy glory. The key to this *roman à clef* keeps slipping. The author has derived characters from her life, placing them in scenes that invert Byron's narrative poetry, punctuated by songs obviously modeled on such lyrics as "Maid of Athens" or "To Inez." Lady Caroline had been on the other side of sanity, but she was not psychotic when she wrote the manuscript.

Byron's reading of the novel undoubtedly affected his composition of *Don Juan*, and this in turn would affect Lady Caroline's further literary efforts. A line in canto 2 makes his cognizance of *Glenarvon* plain: "Some play the devil and then write a novel" (2.201).² Lady Caroline is often traced to the character of Lady Adeline Amundeville in canto 13, stanza 2, where Byron's earlier association of Caroline with a volcano appears more condescendingly: "Poor thing. How frequently by me and others / It hath been stirred up till its smoke quite smothers" (13.36).³ But Byron's debt to *Glenarvon* can be found in other places, like the Dedication, in which he seems anxious to dissociate himself from any Glenarvon-like betrayal of Irish patriots, or more obviously in *Don Juan*'s many glittering aphorisms on sex and marriage. Peter Graham has said that *Glenarvon*'s insights are "found, essentially unchanged" in the English cantos of *Don Juan* (Graham 118). For example, toward the end of the first volume of *Glenarvon*, Lady Augusta Selwyn tutors Calantha in the rules of marriage, explaining that a wife "must either be in love, or out of love with [her husband]. If the latter, they wrangle; and if the former, it is ten times worse." Asked which case applies to herself, Lady Augusta remarks:

Neither, my child, neither. He never molests me, never intrudes his dear dull personage on my society. He is the best of his race, and only married me ... because I let him cheat at cards whenever he pleased. (*Glenarvon* 1: 211-12)

Graham points out that *Don Juan* also describes such a match in the marriage of the Duke and Duchess of Fitz-Fulke: "Theirs was that best of unions, past all doubt, / Which never meets, and therefore can't fall out" (14.45). Later, Juan describes Lady Amundeville's obsession with arranging "unobjectionable matches" that "might go on, if well wound up, like watches" (15.40).

There are many other debts to *Glenarvon* in *Don Juan*. Susan Wolfson has remarked that Lady Adeline may be thought of as a "later variation on Julia" of canto 1 (Wolfson 588). Julia's letter from the convent at the end of canto 1 might easily have been drawn from Lady Caroline's communiqués, reworked by Byron for the plot, a sort of *touché* for Caroline's inclusion of one of Byron's own letters in *Glenarvon*. Julia's letter echoes Caroline's letters—or more accurately, the versions reshaped by her for Calantha in *Glenarvon*, which I suggest as an additional source for Julia's letter in canto 1 of *Don Juan*. The letter in Byron's poem begins with a Carolinish self-dramatization: "I have no further claim on your young heart, / Mine was the victim, and would be again," and goes on to reproach Juan through disclaiming any such:

"I loved, I love you, for this love have lost
State, station, heaven, mankind's, my own esteem,
And yet cannot regret what it hath cost,
So dear is still the memory of that dream;
Yet, if I name my guilt, 'tis not to boast,
None can deem harshlier of me than I deem:
I trace this scrawl because I cannot rest—
I've nothing to reproach or to request."

(1.193)

In *Glenarvon*, Calantha writes to her lover: "Remember that you are all on earth to me; and if I lose that for which I have paid so terrible a price, what will be my fate!" (*Glenarvon* 3: 60); and in another letter says, "I forsook everything for you" (3: 78). She also indulges in self-condemnation: "It is myself alone I blame. On me, on me be the crime" (3: 60). Yet she also expresses a lack of regret: "Think not that I wish to repine, or that I lament the past" (3: 61). She repeats many times the sentiment that Julia expresses in the last line of the stanza just quoted above: "Glenarvon, I do not reproach you, I never will" (3: 58). "Oh fear not, Glenarvon, that I shall intrude or reproach you" (3: 59). "I will never learn to hate or reproach you" (3: 77).

The next stanza of Julia's letter to Juan centers upon the painful gap between what is possible for Glenarvon, and what Julia may expect as her woman's lot:

Man's love is of his life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence; man may range

The court, camp, church, the vessel, and the mart,
Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange
Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,
And few there are whom these can not estrange;
Man has all these resources, we but one,
To love again, and be again undone.

(1.194)

Some accused Byron of plagiarizing these ideas from Madame de Staël's *De l'Influence des Passions* (1796) and *Corrine* (1807)—Hobhouse at least thought he recognized them as stemming from that source, though Jerome McGann suggests a possible alternative in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (CPW 5: 680, note to stanzas 192ff. and 194). The charge of plagiarism is interesting, when one considers Byron's cutting imputation that Caroline's letters were *Delphine* and therefore unoriginal.⁴ But the theme also occurs in Calantha's letters in *Glenarvon*: "You know not what a woman feels when remorse, despair, and the sudden loss of him she loves, assail her at once" (*Glenarvon* 3: 79). The narrator's voice contributes to this theme in the same chapters:

That which causes the tragic end of a woman's life, is often but a moment of amusement and folly in the history of a man. Women, like toys, are sought after, trifled with, and then thrown by with every varying caprice. Another and another still succeed; but to each thus cast away, the pang has been beyond thought, the stain indelible, and the wound mortal. (*Glenarvon* 3: 90-91)

And the narrator subsequently comments that "Calantha saw Glenarvon triumphant and herself deserted" (*Glenarvon* 3: 119). The sentiments are typical recriminations and rationalizations of the jilted, and Donna Julia's letter may be viewed as "an eloquent statement of a deeply traditional set of ideas," as McGann remarks (CPW 5: 680, note to stanzas 192ff.). But they are also clearly in close relation to Calantha/Caroline's epistolary wail of anguish, as Byron/Glenarvon escaped her grasp—with self-glamorizing adjustments of a type Byron knew Caroline could appreciate. Juan comments that Julia's seal read, "Elle vous suit partout" [She follows you everywhere] (*DJ* 1.198).

Since Byron seemed to have incorporated Calantha's letters to Glenarvon in the first canto of *Don Juan*, Lady Caroline was certainly not unjustified in reading the letter as an allusion to herself—or at least to the fate of women who had fallen under Byron's spell. This, taken with the insult of the second canto's dismissive "Some play the devil—and then write a novel" (*DJ* II, st. 201), provoked her *riposte*. She published her own version of *Don Juan*, titled "A New Canto" (1819).

Anyone who compares "A New Canto" with the first two cantos of *Don Juan* will recognize at once that Lady Caroline's twenty-seven-stanza *tour de force* is more packed with imagery and more consciously poetical in its diction than its original. Nonetheless, the poem is eminently Byronic and remarkably well-constructed, showing great cleverness with *Don Juan*'s ottava rima. It consists of two fanfare stanzas, twenty-two that narrate an imaginary apocalypse, and three concluding deflationary stanzas. It is a thematically unified rapier thrust at Byron's ego, and it never falters from the first line's satirical evocation of Byron's disingenuous protest against publicity—"I'm sick of fame" (st. 1)—to the last's open acknowledgment of his appetite for notoriety: "And keep my name in capitals, like Kean" (st. 27).⁵

The poem is chiefly a preview of doomsday, which the poet observes from his vantage high atop a collapsing St. Paul's Cathedral. The heat rises, "the town is a volcano," and holy water boils in the font (st. 5). Stanzas 7 to 9 focus upon the fates of beautiful women with "tragic airs" and "maids and ugly men" over whom "black volumes" close, silencing them (st. 7 and 8). "A woman then may rail," the narrator surmises, "nor would I stint her" (st. 9). With this allusion to her authorship, Lady Caroline proceeds to have her revenge by writing well, abusing Byron's stylistic conceits and outrageous rhymes with glee: "The Turkish infidel may now restore / His wives to liberty, and, ere to hell he go, / Roll to the bottom of the Archipelago!" (st. 13) At the same time, in adopting Byron's voice, she sides with him against the hypocritical and sexist culture of London, a place as "wicked" as any in the world:

An odious place too, in these modern times;
Small incomes, runaways, and swindlers eager
To fleece and dash; and then their quacks and mimes,
Their morals lax, and literary rigour,
Their prim caesuras, and their gendered rhymes,
Mine never could abide their statutes critical,
They'd call them neutral or hermaphroditical.

(st. 19)

Her reproach to Byron re-emerges strongly in the final stanzas, however: "Blessed they, who wear the vital spirit out," intones the poetic narrator,

Even thus, degrading not the holy fire,
Nor bear a prostituted sense about—
The misery of never-quenched desire
(Still quenched, still kindling, every thought devout
Lost in the changeful torment—portion dire!)

(st. 24)

Here we have returned to that interior principle of pain and longing that provided the axis on which *Glenarvon* rotated. "A New Canto" describes another confrontation with the Byronic "self" with which its author has been infected. Even as she condemned Byron for failing to live up to his potential in choosing to write with amoral designs about low subjects, Lady Caroline could not help being drawn toward those very same impulses. "Some have accused me of a strange design," wrote Byron subsequently, "Against the creed and morals of the land, / And trace it in this poem every line" (4.5). He was referring to reactions to his poem shared by his current lover, Countess Teresa Guiccioli (who extorted from him a promise not to continue writing the work), and Lady Caroline Lamb. Lady Caroline published in 1821 another verse-satire in ottava rima, *Gordon: A Tale*, which appeared just after the publication of cantos three, four, and five of *Don Juan* (April 1821). In her preface, Lady Caroline wrote that while *Don Juan* was universally acknowledged as a work of genius, she was "deeply grieved to find [Byron] exerts his powerful talents only to destroy what is beneficial to man—Morality" (*Gordon* 5). *Gordon: A Tale* consists of two cantos of 31 and 71 stanzas, respectively. It adopts the characters of Juan and Haidee, and talks back to Byron in endnotes that attack the portrayal of the adulterous Julia as if it had been a personal affront to herself (*Gordon* 71).

Lady Caroline's literary pursuit of Byron was obsessive and skilled. She was certainly not uncontrolled when she wrote these two carefully constructed works. Nor was she when she wrote her two subsequent novels. In *Graham Hamilton* (1822) Lady Caroline turned her attention to a realistic portrayal of social life—perhaps modeled on Jane Austen's or Fanny Burney's work. It was praised by *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* as "belonging to the class of proper and good novels," and Lady Caroline was patted on the head for having "learned to restrain her exuberant imagination within the bounds of good taste," and encouraged, "should she still labour under the *cacoethes scribendi*, to persevere in her present strain." Despite the reviewer's pleasure at Lady Caroline's having not written another farrago, the book had some discomfiting features, and its "moral" seems to have made the reviewer uneasy. The moral was that "weakness and instability of character occasion more misery, and are consequently more mischievous, than positive vice." This position, the reviewer said, "needs qualifying."⁶

Graham Hamilton consists of a dialogue between the title character and a Mr. M, who is physically repulsive and amoral. Graham Hamilton's confession of his sins is interrupted by deflating remarks from his interlocutor, who calls him "silly" even before the narrative has gotten prop-

erly under way.⁷ The main character is a reincarnation of the willful Calantha—yet another copy of the Byronic persona.

Wild and indocile, I struggled against discipline, and rejected instruction, preferring ignorance and liberty to accomplishments, rewards, and praise. Even my mother's gentle admonitions could not control me; and my boyhood was passed away in idle musings, visionary projects, and entire neglect of useful study. Early, too, I learned to dazzle and confound my own understanding by indulging the wild [21] wanderings of fancy and yielding to the impulse of passion. Not only did I not see things as they were—but I saw them as they were not. . . . (1: 20-21)

Lest we miss the point, Mr. Hamilton tells us bluntly, "I was spoiled" (1: 33). The sentiments here represent a modulation, not an abandonment of the themes of *Glenarvon*, where the narrator tells us that Avondale responded with too much severity to his wife's provocations:

It should be remembered that, like madness, these disturbed characters see not things as they are. . . . Such a character is open and guileless; but unhappily, the very circumstance that makes it sincere, renders it also, if misturned, desperate and hardened. (*Glenarvon* 2: 144-45)

In her revisions to the second edition of *Glenarvon*, Lady Caroline added to this passage: "Hypocrisy and falsehood, however disgusting, are perhaps less dangerous symptoms than that fearless openness. The former at least proves a sense of shame, and whilst this exists all virtue is not extinct" (3d ed. 2: 144). Here we find the seed from which this "realistic" novel grew. It was a reflection upon her maddened state that found no way out of the self-accusation so typical of manic-depressive illness. This self-accusation, which had so often been viewed by her family and friends as a transparent attempt to forestall criticism, was finally the main path she could see to hold on to her sanity. At the same time, she held cunningly to the *virtue* of madness, its superiority to the petty "virtue" of hypocrisy.

Like *Glenarvon*, *Graham Hamilton* structures itself on ambiguous doublings that dimly evoke the loves of Byron's famously incestuous pairings, like Zuleika and Selim of "The Bride of Abydos." Graham has a cousin Gertrude, whom he loves. These two evoke characteristics drawn from both Calantha/Caroline and Avondale/William. Gertrude reads but is modest and not inventive. Graham does not like to read, but is passionate and impulsive (*Graham Hamilton* 1: 26-30). Mr. Hamilton is to become an heir, if he can endure living with his miserly uncle, Sir Malcolm. The uncle plays a sort of Miss Havisham to Graham's Pip,

instructing the boy to avoid the social and financial traps that surround him. His instruction proceeds in a most peculiar manner, however, for he parodies the good-spirited advisor in front of the boy merely to tweak the noses of hypocrites:

I, Sir Malcolm, thus speak to my heir: 'Take money in thy hand—open thy house—ha' the best of everything.—And, as my Lord Chesterfield doth hold that the exterior deportment is of the most important consequence to the man, take care, dear Nephew Graham, to acquire an easy, and something of an insolent manner; look nae modest, nae sharp. Have eyes that see not, ears that hear not; and repress every voice that would utter the genuine feelings of human nature. Learn neither to laugh loud, nor weep; say little, learn discretion. . . . Affect to be weary of everything and in time you will grow so. . . . Hate no one,—it is too much trouble: envy no one. . . . Aspire to nothing, then nothing can greatly humiliate you. Never love: [59] and whilst you assume power over every other, beware of putting yourself into the power of any one. . . . Form no intimate friendships. . . . associate with the worthless. . . . Call feeling hypocrisy. . . . (*Graham Hamilton* 1: 57-59)

The young Graham heeds the letter, not the spirit of this ironically intended advice, becomes entrapped in the social hypocrisies of his milieu, and sacrifices his true love (Gertrude) for a false one (Lady Oroville) with the result that Gertrude's reputation is ruined and he flies to America, where the dialogue with ugly Mr. M transpires. While nowhere near as claustrophobic and melodramatic as *Glenarvon*, Lady Caroline's second novel still shows evidence of a deeply divided psyche.

Even as the *Blackwood* reviewer had rendered his approval of this new path of social realism for the aspiring novelist, Lady Caroline was in the process of departing from it. She was writing her last novel, *Ada Reis* (1823). That novel has often been viewed as a phantasmagoria—like one of Byron's Turkish Tales on hashish. It is anything but. The main character, a "once-famous Corsair, the Don Juan of his day" (1: xvi), is impulsive and impetuous, an abuser of alcohol who clearly stands in for Caroline at the same time that he stands for the Byronic hero (*Ada Reis* 1: 3, 9-10). Lady Caroline's choice of "Ada" (Byron's daughter's name) for her male hero is as prickly and as telling as her choice of Byron's friend, John Clare, as a nexus for the naming in *Glenarvon*. The characters of *Ada Reis* reenact her authorial echolalia: Fiormonda (instead of Fiorabella), Count Condulmar (instead of Count Gondimar), Kabkarra (in place of Abracadabra), Zevahir instead of Zuleika. Clearly modeled on "The Bride of Abydos" and Byron's famous encounter with Ali Pacha, the novel also includes lyrics that weirdly reiterate Byron's "Tambourgi, Tambourgi" from *Childe Harold* canto 2.

Ada Reis's Vathek-like conclusion offers a cameo appearance of Caroline-in-Hell. She appears as a "thin woman" who tells the evil *Ada* as they stand at the portals of damnation:

My punishment is now to see shades of every one once dear to me pass by me with indifference; to feel intensely, but to know that none do feel for me; to hear from time-pieces, all day and all night long, not the hours, but all my thousand follies and faults repeated; and to be conscious that all my thoughts, wishes, and actions are misrepresented. Sir, can I say more? I was idolized—I am—ah! would I were only forgotten!—But it is well—I lost myself. I felt the harshness and unkindness of some too keenly—I seized a pen—and the pen which knew once but to write with the milk of human kindness I dipped in gall. (*Ada Reis* 3: 95-96)

The world's response to her literary work is contained in *Ada Reis's* response: "No woman should ever write" (3: 96). *Ada Reis* presents the apotheosis of Byron-as-Satan, and as in *Glenarvon*, this condemnation is rehearsed again and again with different characters, one of whom is *Ada*, another *Condulmar*. When the beautiful *Condulmar* appears before his admirers, his "visage became deformed, and its expression terrible." The onlookers recoil: "'Is this,' they said, 'him whom we have loved?'" And his answer is that they have duped themselves: "'I was ever,' he cried, 'as you see me. I did not even disguise myself, fair and frail ones, but you chose to love me in spite of what I was. I sought you not; more even than this, I warned you.'" He acknowledges that he retains his "splendid talents" and "powers of seduction," but not his physical beauty. The voice of Byron is unchanged, but it dwells in a corrupt body of horror (*Ada Reis* 3: 130-31).

Lady Caroline's last novel represents, then, some artistic, but no psychological progress. She was unable to sort out the psychodynamics of her own situation beyond this obsessive repetition of its terms. She knew this, and it tormented her as she wore herself out. She wrote on May 21, 1823 to her young admirer and erstwhile lover, Edward Bulwer:

I wish I did not dread to die. When I wrote the book you like my career was over. I was miserable and in a state however in which I might have dared to die. I have lived since and to little purpose. Mine has been an absurd, unprofitable and erring life. However it is no use to obtrude all this on you—you are like Zevahir in *Ada Reis*. (Hoge 332)

Despite her desire to form a liaison with Bulwer in the role of the angelic spirit-child Zevahir, Lady Caroline knew her race was run. Separated from her husband because her mood swings had finally become impossible for him to bear, she was permitted to stay alone at the Melbourne country residence, Brocket Hall, where her tempers would afflict no one

Byron probably never read *Ada Reis*. Had he done so, and had he managed to read to the end, he might have recalled his curse-poem, which would be published immediately after his death, in Medwin's *Conversations of Lord Byron* (1824). Titled "Remember Thee," that poem condemns Lady Caroline to a life of pain: "Till Lethe quench life's burning stream, / Remorse and shame shall cling to thee, / And haunt thee like a feverish dream" (CPW 3: 84). To read such a curse after she had envisioned herself in hell must have entailed feelings at which we can only guess.

Images of Byron as a destroyer who compelled Lady Caroline's pen had certainly affected Byron himself and lingered in his imagination. His use of this material had a devastating effect, however, on the unstable partner with whom he had fallen in love in 1812. Lady Caroline read Julia's letter in the first canto of *Don Juan* as an allusion to herself. This, taken with the insult of the second canto's dismissive "Some play the devil—and then write a novel" (DJ2: 201), provoked her "additions" to *Don Juan*, and as she sought to master Byron's poetical voice, she pursued the invention of a fictive "self." This deeply conflicted self condemned and celebrated the Byronic persona on which it was molded. Byron woke in her the desire to become a writer of power—to replicate the power of the writer who seduced her. She found that she did indeed have power—but madness overtook her. She could not control the internal forces that shaped her life and exhausted herself trying to think and feel her way through them. In response to some compliments from her friend Lady Morgan, she wrote in thanks and frustration:

Your kindness about *Ada Reis* I feel the more, as everybody wishes to run down and suppress the vital spark of genius I have, and in truth, it is but small (about what one sees a maid gets by excessive beating on a tinder-box). I am not vain, believe me, nor selfish, nor in love with my authorship; but I am independent, as far as a mite and bit of dust can be. (Morgan 2: 210-11)

Notes

1. This letter is erroneously dated September 12, 1812 in the transcription in the *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*. Indeed, a sequence of letters seems to have been misdated, here, as Hary-O describes herself in two different letters as awaiting the Bessboroughs: "They all come here on their way from Ireland." "I shall have [Caroline, George Lamb's wife] with me when the Irish horde pour in upon us. . . . They intend being here on the 12th" (Gower, *Letters* 1: 39). These letters cannot have been written in August, as it is claimed in the text, since they refer to the Bessboroughs' return from a trip they had not even begun in that month.

2. References to Byron's *Don Juan* are by canto and stanza numbers from volume 5 of *The Complete Poetical Works*. References to McGann's notes and commentary are indicated by the acronym "CPW" and by volume and page number.

3. Byron wrote in April 1812: "[Y]our heart—my poor Caro, what a little volcano! that pours lava through your veins, & yet I cannot wish it a bit colder, to make a marble slab of, as you sometimes see (to understand my foolish metaphor) brought in vases tables &c. from Vesuvius when hardened after an eruption" (*BLJ* 2: 170-71).

4. Byron had written to Lady Melbourne in January 1813 that Lady Caroline had sent him a letter avowing that she was responsible for the theft of a picture. Byron noted that the letter was written "in her wild way and Delphine language" (*BLJ* 2: 12).

5. References to "A New Canto" are by stanza number to the text as reproduced in Duncan Wu, 695-703.

6. Review of *Graham Hamilton* in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 11 (1822): 731-33.

7. Lady Caroline Lamb, *Graham Hamilton*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn, 1822), 1: 26. Subsequent parenthetical references to this edition appear in the text.

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