# BYRON THE VAMPIRE, AND THE VAMPIRE WOMEN

*Peter Cochran*

## PART I: Charlotte Dacre

Byron was not an automatic despiser of women who wrote. Intermittently rude about Maria Edgeworth (he refers her as having "a *pencil* under her petticoat")[1] he was delighted to receive praise from Elizabeth Inchbald.[2] The fact that he had little time for Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon*[3] hardly sets him apart; and his sympathetic brand of orientalism was deeply influenced by Lady Mary Wortley Montague.[4] He had a high opinion of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*:

> Mary Godwin (now Mrs. Shelley) wrote "Frankenstein" – which work you [Murray] have reviewed thinking it Shelley's – methinks it is a wonderful work for a Girl of nineteen – *not* nineteen indeed – at that time.[5]

He *may* have read Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, which John Murray published, and there *may* be a reference to its twenty-third chapter in Julia's letter, at *Don Juan* I 194:

> "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.[6]

Hobhouse thought the sentiment there was borrowed from Madame de Staël's *Corinne* Book XVIII, v, a passage Byron annotated[7] and Andrew Nicholson has recently suggested that Byron takes the idea from Ovid;[8] in the first two cases, a female writer *may* have given him the material for one of his most sympathetic insights into women's contemporary lot. We must admit, however, that he acknowledged the debt in no case – supposing there to have been one.

This paper deals with two woman writers with whom he enjoyed mixed literary relationships, about one of whom he wrote a lot, and about one of whom he wrote very little: and, as I hope to show, he less he wrote, the greater his creative debt seems to have been.

Byron had taken rough note of the verse of Charlotte Dacre in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, speaking of her under her pseudonym Rosa Matilda:

> Far be't from me unkindly to upbraid

---

This is a paper given at the Cambridge University Romantics Postgraduate Seminar, Queens' College Cambridge, on October 28th 1999.

**1:** BLJ VII 217.

**2:** BLJ III 236.

**3:** BLJ V 131.

**4:** See *Don Juan* V, 3, 8.

**5:** BLJ VI 126.

**6:** See *Persuasion*, Chapter 23 "... Man is more robust than woman, but he is not longer-lived; which exactly explains my view of the nature of their attachments. Nay, it would be too hard upon you, if it were otherwise. You have difficulties, privations, and dangers enough to struggle with. You are always labouring and toiling, exposed to every risk and hardship. Your home, country, friends, all quitted. Neither time, nor health, nor life, to be called your own, It would be too hard indeed" (with a faltering voice) "if woman's feelings were to be added to all this."

**7:** CPW V 680 St. 194n; CMP 222-4.

**8:** See 1999 Byron Journal, pp.

> The lovely ROSA's prose in masquerade,
> Whose strains, the faithful echoes of her mind,
> Leave wondering comprehension far behind …[9]

Jerome McGann claims that these lines represent a betrayal of Byron's earlier indebtedness to Dacre's two volumes *Hours of Solitude* of 1802, in Byron's own *Hours of Idleness* of 1807.[10] McGann takes the likeness between the two titles to be no coincidence, but "a massive act of allusion" by Byron towards Dacre.[11] This claim is hard to sustain, for *Hours of Solitude* is much less cavalier-flippant than Byron's youthful volume, and more Gothic, featuring numerous poems about passionate and even guilty love, as well as a substantial leavening of death, horror, spectres, skeletons and mould. However, Byron's charge of incomprehensibility remains gross, for Dacre writes with clarity, if not with genius. Some of her love poems are written in male personae – Byron never attempted the complementary experiment.[12]

Here is an example of Dacre's verse, from the first of her two 1802 volumes. The poem, which stayed with Byron for some time, is *The Mistress to the Spirit of her Lover*, a nine-stanza soliloquy by a woman whose lover, though dead, seems still to hover before her. The poem is presented by Dacre firstly as a prose imitation of Ossian, and is then versified. Here are stanzas four to six of the verse version:

> In the darkness of night, as I sit on the rock,
> I see a thin form on the precipice brink;
> Oh Lover illusive, my senses to mock –
> 'Tis madness presents if I venture to think.
>
> *Unreal* that form which now hovers around,
> Unreal those garments which float on the wind,
> Unreal those footsteps that touch not the ground,
> Unreal those features, wan vision, I find.
>
> 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.[13]

It is but a short step and a gender-switch from the perhaps unadventurous rhythms in which Dacre writes here, to the grief and implacability of Alp faced with the spirit of Francesca in *The Siege of Corinth*, or, still more important, to the anguish of Manfred faced with the unrelenting spirit of Astarte in the Hall of Arimanes.

Another poem of Dacre's, *Moorish Combat*[14] is, in sketch, a clear prefiguration of *The Giaour*, in that it features a triangular conflict between a Moorish girl, her lover, and his rival: the rival kills the lover, and the girl, much more full of initiative than the notoriously passive Leila in Byron's poem, then kills the rival.

The abuse which Dacre's volumes receive in *English Bards*, though facetious enough in the short run, should thus have given Byron some embarrassment in the long run – but although he does express shame at *English Bards*, he shows none on account of his treatment of her. In joking about her, he can not, from the perspective of 1809, see how influential some of her ideas will be for him later. Or not influential as the case may be: her sexy passages are certainly more so than his, which are self-conscious and literary by contrast. Here is Dacre, in a stanza from *Moorish Combat*:

---

**9:** CPW I 253.
**10:** See *My Brain is Feminine*, in *Byron Augustan and Romantic*, ed Rutherford, pp 26-51.
**11:** Ibid p 27.
**12:** *Hours of Solitude* was reprinted by Garland in 1978, with an introduction by Donald H.Reiman.
**13:** *Hours of Solitude*, vol II p 35.
**14:** Ibid, vol I pp 108-12.

How vain to stem their rapture as it flow'd,
Or whisper to their stagg'ring sense, beware!
His eyes inebriate wander'd o'er her charms,
While hers to earth were cast with chastened air.[15]

… and here a verse from Byron's *To Mary*:

Now, by my soul, 'tis most delight
To view each other panting, dying,
In love's *extatic posture* lying,
Grateful to *feeling*, as to *sight*.[16]

*To Mary* was thought too hot by Byron's Southwell friends to appear in *Hours of Idleness*: but it is of the same period.

It is with Byron's reading in Dacre's novels that I wish to deal next.

Byron was more extensively read in the pulp fiction of his day than any other poet of the "romantic" movement. "I have also read (to my regret at present)", he writes as a postscript to his 1807 reading list, "above four thousand novels …"[17] He goes on to acknowledge a clutch of respectable novelists, Cervantes, Fielding, Smollett, and so on: but I should like to mention one work which he seems to have read in the first decade of the century, and which, whether he knew it or not, seems to have stayed with him for a decade and a half. In the twenty-sixth chapter of Dacre's *Zofloya* (1806) the ironically-named heroine, Victoria, has revealed to Henriquez, her brother-in-law, how much she has always adored him. He is disgusted, for his brother – her husband – died only recently (and, though he does not know it, at her hand, assisted by the black demon who gives his name to the book). Betrothed to another anyway, he rejects her with detestation, and she responds with ill-judged violence:

> "Miserable youth!" she cried – "it is enough – your insulting coolness, your bitter reproaches, I could have borne, – have borne, proud as I am, with patience! – but that you should dare, without trembling, to acknowledge in my presence, your love for another" –
>
> "Love!" interrupted Henriquez with enthusiasm – "Love! – say, adoration, idolatry! by heaven my Lilla is a gem too bright to shed her pure rays beneath this contaminated roof, – oh! wretched Victoria," he continued, with a bitter smile, "and could you attempt to talk of love to the lover of Lilla?" –
>
> Can language describe the feelings of Victoria? Her brain worked with wildest rage, producing almost instant madness! – Yet revenge, thirsting revenge, was the predominant sensation of her soul, swallowing up every other! – by an effort, and self-command, scarcely credible, she reined in the tumult of her passion, and forebore to recriminate upon Henriquez. – What! drive him from the castle, and lose thereby the power of sacrificing the abhorred Lilla to her vengeance, the pigmy, the immaterial speck, that she had deemed unworthy of a thought! To lose too, for ever, the possibility of softening, (perhaps even yet subduing) the stern insensitivity of Henriquez? – No – the sacrifice to frantic rage would have been too great! – Her decision was prompt, and instantaneous. – Covering her face with her hands, she sank into a chair, and audibly sobbed!
>
> A reply so different to what he had taught himself to expect, knowing the violence of her nature, at once surprised and affected Henriquez. – In a moment he regretted the asperity with which he had spoken …[18]

Why Dacre changed from promising poetry to second-rate fiction may have something to do with the need for money – we know very little about her. Byron had shown in a note to *English Bards* that he'd read *Zofloya*, for he mentions her "sundry novels" (in fact she wrote

---

**15:** *Moorish Combat, HoS* I 110.
**16:** *To Mary*, 45-8: CPW 134.
**17:** CMP 6.
**18:** Charlotte Dacre, *Zofloya; or, The Moor, A Romance of the Fifteenth Century*, ed Kim Ian Michasiw, OUP World's Classics 1997 (hereafter *Zofloya*) p. 196.

four) "in the style of the first edition of the Monk".[19] What Byron read casually, as usual, he remembered. If an echo arises as we read the *Zofloya* passage above, it is of the encounter between the immovably chaste Juan and the irresistibly seductive Gulbeyaz, in *Don Juan* Canto V – except that it is not the woman who weeps at first:

> She now conceived all difficulties past,
> And deemed herself extremely condescending
> When, being made her property at last,
> Without more preface, in her blue eyes blending
> Passion and power, a glance on him She cast,
> And merely saying, "Christian, can'st thou love?"
> Conceived that phrase was quite enough to move. –
>
> And so it was, in proper time and place;
> But Juan, who had still his mind o'erflowing
> With Haidee's Isle, and soft Ionian face,
> Felt the warm blood, which in his face was glowing,
> Rush back upon his heart, which filled apace
> And left his cheeks as pale as Snowdrops blowing;
> These words went through his Soul like Arab Spears,
> So that he spoke not, but burst into tears. –

To have the man cry at the idea of being desired is a witty variant on Dacre. Juan's tears don't take long to prompt some from Gulbeyaz:

> … Gulbeyaz, though she knew not why,
> Felt an odd glistening moisture in her eye.

Even though she has, like Victoria, her own black assistant (the non-demoniacal eunuch Baba) on the watch for her husband, time is, for an adulterous Sultana, of the essence:

> To lose the hour would make her quite a Martyr,
> And they had wasted now almost a quarter. –

After Byron has digressed a little, she tries a mixture of imperiousness and physicality:

> At length, in an Imperial way, She laid
> Her hand on his, and bending on him eyes
> Which needed not an empire to persuade,
> Looked into his for love, where none replies;
> Her brow grew black, but she would not upbraid,
> That being the last thing a proud woman tries;
> She rose, and, pausing one chaste moment, threw
> Herself upon his breast, and there She grew.

Further memories of *Zofloya* may be at work here, for Dacre, in one of her rare moments of physical description, refers to Victoria's

> … strong though noble features, her dignified carriage, her authoritative tone – her boldness, her insensibility, her violence …[20]

---

**19:** CPW I 413: the first editions of *The Monk* had to be censored before reprinting.
**20:** *Zofloya*, p 194.

But none of these qualities are of any use to Gulbeyaz, for Juan's pride, chastity and moral abhorrence are – like those of Dacre's Henriquez – more than equal to the occasion:

> … looking coldly on her face, he cried,
> "The prisoned Eagle will not pair, nor I
> "Serve a Sultana's sensual phantasy.

Byron then lists several of Gulbeyaz's literary antecedents (without mentioning Victoria):

> Suppose – but you already have supposed –
> The Spouse of Potiphar, the Lady Booby,
> Phedra, and all which Story has disclosed
> Of good examples; Pity! that so few by
> Poets, and private tutors, are exposed
> To educate, Ye Youth of Europe! you by;
> But when you have supposed the few we know,
> You can't suppose Gulbeyaz' angry brow.

Her resentment becomes very passionate indeed:

> A Storm it raged, and like the Storm it passed,
> Passed without words; in fact she could not speak,
> And then her Sex's Shame broke in at last,
> A Sentiment till then in her but weak,
> But now it flowed in natural and fast
> As water through an unexpected leak,
> For She felt humbled, and humiliation
> Is sometimes good for people in her Station …
>
> … Her first thought was to cut off Juan's head,
> Her second, to cut only his – acquaintance;
> Her third, to ask him where he had been bred,
> Her fourth to rally him into repentance,
> Her fifth to call her Maids and go to bed,
> Her Sixth to stab herself, her Seventh, to sentence
> The lash to Baba; but her grand resource
> Was to sit down again, and cry of course. –

*Zofloya* reasserts itself at last, in the echo of the crying Victoria quoted above; but by now so many subtexts are swirling in the depths of the Byronic stew that we are losing sight of Dacre completely. As Itsuyo Higashinaka points out,[21] lines 1105-12 here are derived primarily from *Joseph Andrews*: Betty the chambermaid, having rejected her master, Mr. Tow-wouse, has just thrown herself at Andrews, although with as little success as either Victoria or Gulbeyaz:

> Betty was in the most violent Agitation at this Disappointment. Rage and Lust pulled her Heart, as with two Strings, two different Ways; one Moment she thought of stabbing *Joseph*, the next, of taking him in her Arms, and devouring him with Kisses; but the latter Passion was far more prevalent. Then she thought of revenging his Refusal on herself; but while she was engaged on this Meditation, happily Death presented himself to her in so many Shapes of drowning, hanging, poisoning, &c. that her distracted Mind could resolve on none. In this Perturbation of Spirit, it accidentally occurred to her Memory, that her Master's bed was not made ...[22]

… and, this being a comic novel, she ends up in bed with her master Mr. Tow-wouse after all – any lover being preferable to none. Mrs. Tow-wouse, however, catches them; a violent

**21:** *Gulbeyaz and Joseph Andrews*, *Byron Journal*, 1984 p. 74.
**22:** Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, I 18.

row ensues; Betty loses her job, and Mr. Tow-wouse has to promise to spend the rest of his life in atonement.

Neither employment nor atonement carry much weight in the schemes of either *Zofloya* or *Don Juan* (neither does comedy, in the case of *Zofloya,* except of the unwitting sort) and Gulbeyaz's tears at last have the same effect on Juan as those of Victoria do, temporarily, on Henriquez:

> Juan was moved, he had made up his Mind
> To be impaled, or quartered as a dish
> For dogs; or to be slain with pangs refined,
> Or thrown to Lions, or made baits for fish;
> And thus heroically stood resigned,
> Rather than sin except to his own wish;
> But all his great preparatives for dying
> Dissolved like snow before a woman crying. –

… just as does the hard heart of Henriquez before the tears of Victoria.

There are more points of contact between *Zofloya* and Byron. The novel's later chapters are set in a huge Alpine cave, with banditti all around, and, in the centre,

> … a graceful figure, distinguished by his high and single-plumed helmet and by the fierce eccentric costume of his dress. He looked, and was the chief of the Condottieri, elected unanimously as their leader, on the death of a famed chief who had preceded him. His face was concealed by a mask …[23]

The scene would have given Byron hints for the Hall of Arimanes (which is presumably located beneath the Alps) in the second act of *Manfred* – more evidence of his excellent memory, and of his ability to take details from anywhere, and to re-collate them at his creative convenience. The masked leader turns out to be Victoria's brother – a point not borrowed by Byron in *Manfred*, though what Victoria undergoes in the cave does, like Manfred's ordeal, constitute a kind of test. Unlike Manfred, she fails it. Where she fails to forgive her mother for making her the woman she is, Astarte fails to forgive Manfred for doing … whatever it is we understand him to have done to her. But, where the destroyed Manfred defies the devils and lives to suffer further, the impenitent Victoria is taken out by her black familiar Zofloya, who is the devil in disguise (compare the end of *The Monk*, except that he's not in disguise there) and cast by him into "the dreadful abyss".[24]

The Alpine cave reminds us further of that all-pervasive Byronic sub-text, William Beckford's *Vathek*, the influence of which upon the Hall of Arimanes scene in *Manfred* has often been noted. Vathek, like Victoria, has problems relating to his mother; like her, he has his familiar demon; like her and her mother, he and his mother meet their well-deserved but differing dooms in a great supernatural cavern.

In 1805 Dacre had published the first of her novels, *The Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer*, written, she tells us in her introduction, when she was eighteen, and only published at the encouragement of a friend. While by no means as "wonderful" as *Frankenstein* (Byron's word, quoted above) it is highly literate, and shows – albeit without irony – the way the heroine's passion and self-delusion triumph over her moral sense, by masquerading *as* her moral sense – rather in the way Byron portrays the same thing in Donna Julia. Here is a relevant passage. Sixteen-year-old Cazire, the oddly-named heroine, meets Fribourg, her married admirer, in the garden:

> It was one evening when, as usual, I had flown to the appointed spot; for Fribourg had long since silenced my scruples on that subject[;] he had said that on me alone depended the domestic tranquillity of an innocent wife, that as I raised or depressed his soul by my compliance or refusal of what he termed his guiltless wishes, the effects would be perceptible in his family. Happy in

**23:** *Zofloya*, p. 237.
**24:** *Zofloya*, p. 267.

> being thus furnished with excuses for the wildness of a disastrous passion, I suffered its fatal innovations with something so like pleasure that all my philosophy became powerless to resist it.[25]

For the girl to be taken in by her seducer's argument, that the proposed adultery is necessary for the happiness of his family, should be a comical idea, but Dacre, anxious throughout to be moral, presents it without smiling. Compare *Don Juan* I, stanzas 78-9:

> 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,
> And if the Man should ask, 'tis but denial;
> I recommend young ladies to make trial. –
>
> And then there are things such as Love divine –
> Bright, and immaculate, unmixed and pure,
> Such as the Angels think so very fine,
> And Matrons, who would be no less secure,
> Platonic, perfect, "just such love as mine";
> Thus Julia said – and thought so, to be sure,
> And so I'd have her think, were I the man
> On whom her reveries celestial ran.

Although the title of Dacre's 1807 novel *The Libertine* might lead us to expect otherwise (it is, after all, the title of the Don Juan play by Thomas Shadwell) I find no borrowings from it by Byron. It is at once lurid and at the same time of the most conservative morality, with a contrived plot governed by coincidence. The protagonist, weak and wicked but made sympathetic by the depth of his suffering, is uninteresting psychologically, and prefigures Byron's Juan not at all.

*Zofloya*'s Oxford editor draws attention to a parallel between the Chamois Hunter episode in *Manfred* and the start of Dacre's last novel *The Passions* (1811).[26] The lift is interesting, for, as with *Moorish Combat* and *The Giaour*, as with *Zofloya* and *Don Juan* V, Byron takes Dacre's idea and turns it on its head. Dacre's protagonist sees the Chamois Hunter asleep near an Alpine cliff: Byron's Chamois Hunter sees Manfred as he contemplates jumping off an Alpine cliff. In Dacre's novel (epistolary, for the most part) the Chamois Hunter seems at first the one who lives in a Byronically dangerous way:

> The face of the hunter, though he was still a young man, bore the marks of age; it was haggard, lean, and deeply indented; but his eyes, though sunk, were ferocious and wild, his dark brows were knit, and his features were those of a hardened warrior, scorning danger.
>
> "Why," said I, "do you lead this life?"
>
> "I like it," he replied.
>
> "How can you like an existence so hazardous, when the dreadful perils you encounter make each moment precarious?"
>
> "Life is always precarious," he answered; "what matter whether a man dies by falling down a precipice, or in his bed?"[27]

In *Manfred*, the Chamois Hunter is a type of Alpine professionalism and Christian normality, and Byron's protagonist is the one who lives dangerously. However, Dacre's

---

**25:** *The Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer*, Arno Press reprint 1972, Vol I pp. 182-3.
**26:** *Zofloya*, p xxv.
**27:** *The Passions*, Arno Press reprint 1974, vol. I pp. 7-8.

cunning lies in the way in which, as the narrative of *The Passions* develops, more and more of her non-Alpine characters are revealed as slumbering on the brinks of metaphorical precipices, so that the Chamois Hunter, seeming at first freakish, soon becomes to seem normative.[28]

Byron's memory for the novel's detail is to be seen in his borrowing of such phrases as "I stand alone – I am a mouldering column in the midst of ruins" (ibid, vol. IV p. 1: compare *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* IV 25 1 - 3, "I … stand / A ruin amidst ruins"); and the repetition of the phrase "Oh, Julia!", once the novel's central adulterous intrigue is under way, is wearying enough for one to wish the speaker to be interrupted by the need to vomit, as is Don Juan in *his* address to Julia at the start of the second Canto.

Charlotte Dacre surfaces twice later in Byron's life, on both occasions in 1814. On April 20th 1814 Byron acknowledges having been "taken in" by Thomas Moore's joking assertion that he had thought the *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte*, published four days previously, to be by "Rosa Matilda".[29] And earlier, on February 10th, he praises an answer to *Lines to a Lady Weeping* which has appeared in the *Morning Post* two days earlier. Dacre was the mistress of the paper's editor (they had three children, but did not marry until 1815) and *may* be author of the following, which is addressed to Byron:

> Unblest by nature in thy mien,
> Pity might still have play'd her part,
> For oft compassion has been seen,
> To soften into love the heart.
>
> But when thy gloomy lines we read,
> And see display'd without control
> Th'ungentle thought, the Atheist creed,
> And all the rancour of the soul,
>
> When bold and shameless ev'ry tie,
> That GOD has twin'd around the heart,
> Thy malice teaches to defy,
> And act on earth a Demon's part,
>
> Oh! then from misanthropic pride
> We shrink – but pity too the fate
> Of youth and talents misapplied,
> Which, if *admired*, we still must hate.[30]

Byron's intuitive commentary on this runs as follows:

> … in another [riposte], I am an *atheist* – a *rebel* – and, at last, the *Devil* (*boiteux*, I presume). My demonism seems to be a female's conjecture: if so, I could convince her that I am but a mere mortal, – if a queen of the Amazons may be believed, who says *ariVon coloVoifei*. I quote from memory, so my Greek is probably deficient: but the passage is *meant* to mean [Moore, our source for the letter, discreetly substitutes asterisks for the phrase "a lame beast covers best", or, "a cripple makes the best fuck".][31]

Alas, there is no record of Byron's meeting Charlotte Dacre, so his threat – or promise – remained unfulfilled, and the only fluid expended in their relationship was ink.

---

**28:** *Hours of Solitude* features a poem called *The Hunter of the Alps*, about just such a man - see vol II pp 63-4.
**29:** BLJ IV 100.
**30:** LJ II 482.
**31:** BLJ IV 51.

## PART II: FELICIA HEMANS

I don't imagine Byron retained a detailed memory of Charlotte Dacre's *Hours of Solitude*, *The Passions*, *The Confessions of the Nun of St. Omer*, *The Libertine*, or *Zofloya* (though Thomas Medwin writes that Shelley was "enraptured" by the last).[32] Byron would be amused to know that some bits of Dacre's books had sunk into his subconscious, whence he had, in his own idioms, regurgitated them. However, he was all too well aware of the work of the second female author about whom I wish to write.

Felicia Hemans was, in sales, the most successful English-language poet of the nineteenth century, and is thus – though it's hard to believe – in commercial terms, the most successful woman poet ever.[33] She was anxious to make her facility for verse into a source of cash, and had, after three juvenile productions, obtained, as publisher, none other than John Murray! When, in 1818, her husband left her for Italy, leaving her to bring up their five sons, her need for a reliable income became still more pressing.[34] (Captain Hemans let it be known that "it was the curse of having a literary wife that he could never get a pair stockings mended".) Later she was very popular in the United States. Her works sold well, and she was able to support her family comfortably. She moved eventually from Murray to Blackwood of Edinburgh, whom she hoped would be more generous (he wasn't).

After Byron left England, Murray became his main source of new literature, and among the packages Murray sent were volumes from his own lists. There is no reference to Hemans by Byron outside of his correspondence with Murray. The first of her volumes dispatched (to Switzerland, in 1816) was *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy*, which was published anonymously in May of that year, with a false second edition under the authoress's name. Byron wrote to Murray from Diodati:

> Italy or Dalmatia & another summer may or may not set me off again – I have no plans – & am nearly as indifferent what may come – as where I go. I shall take Felicia Hemans' "restoration &c." with me – it is a good poem – very.[35]

It's hard not to read this as sarcasm, at the expense of the innocent publisher. *The Restoration* purports to be about such works as the Laocoön, the Bronze Horses of St Mark, and the Apollo Belvedere, which had been purloined by Napoleon (legally, as clauses in peace treaties) only to be returned to Italy after the Congress of Vienna (in defiance of the earlier treaties). Wellington had written to Castlereagh on the matter in a dispatch from Paris, dated 23rd September 1815, arguing that the artworks must be sent back, or the French would be deprived of an opportunity for instruction:

> The same feelings which induce the people of France to wish to retain the pictures and statues of other nations would naturally induce other nations to wish, now that success is on their side, that the property should be returned to their rightful owners, and the Allied Sovereigns must feel a desire to gratify them.
>
> It is, besides, on many accounts, desirable, as well for their own happiness as for that of the world, that the people of France, if they do not already feel that Europe is too strong for them, should be made sensible of it; and that, whatever may be the extent, at any time, of their momentary and partial success against any one, or any number of individual powers in Europe, the day of retribution must come.
>
> Not only, then, would it, in my opinion, be unjust in the Sovereigns to gratify the people of France on this subject, at the expense of their own people, but the sacrifice they would make

---

[I am very grateful to William St. Clair and Susan Wolfson for their help with this half of the paper.]

**32:** See *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 1847, p.25, quoted *Zofloya* ed Michasiw, p.xxiv.

**33:** This argument includes her America sales, many of which were piracies.

**34:** Quoted Duncan Wu, *Romantic Women Poets*, p.489.

**35:** BLJ V 108, to Murray, September 30th 1816.

would be impolitic, as it would deprive them of the opportunity of giving the people of France a great moral lesson. / Believe me, &c. / WELLINGTON[36]

The dispatch was published, and Byron had reacted with derision to the idea of the Allies educating the French about anything. He uses Wellington's phrase "a great moral lesson" over and over again in his poetry and prose: at *Ode from the French* 77-8; in the Preface to *Don Juan* VI, VII and VIII; at *Don Juan* XII 436; and in the Preface to *The Vision of Judgement.* The reference from *Don Juan* XII may stand as representative:

> My Muses do not care a pinch of rosin
> About what's called success – or not succeeding –
> Such thoughts are quite below the strain they've chosen;
> 'Tis a "great moral lesson" they are reading ...

*The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* would have done nothing to persuade him to change his mind. Brief, vague and high-minded, it tries to impress on the reader the value of the works to Italy, without being able (any more than Wellington can) to give an idea why they're of value, beyond what Hemans can derive from books – to some descriptions from which, especially of the Laocoön, she refers unguardedly in her notes. In opposition to the need to restore the works is the satanic figure of Napoleon, who removed them in the first place in the interest of his own self-aggrandisement:

> Nerv'd for the struggle, in that fateful hour,
> Untamed Ambition summmon'd all his power;
> Vengeance and Pride, to frenzy rous'd, were there,
> And the stern might of resolute Despair.
> Isle of the free! 'twas then thy champions stood,
> Breasting unmov'd the combat's wildest flood,
> Sunbeam of Battle, then thy spirit shone,
> Glow'd in each breast, and sunk with life alone.[37]

It seems unlikely that Byron, whose attitude both to Napoleon and to the "Isle of the free" was quite other than this, would really have valued *The Restoration* enough to "take it with him" on his travels to "Italy", still less to "Dalmatia".

Hemans spends thirty-six lines – eighteen heroic couplets (for she chooses that conservative idiom in which to write) on the Horses of St. Mark's:

> Proud Racers of the Sun! to fancy's thought,
> Burning with spirit, from his essence caught,
> No mortal birth ye seem – but formed to bear
> Heaven's car of triumph through the realms of air … and so on.[38]

… without considering that Venice had herself stolen the Horses from Constantinople, during the Fourth Crusade in 1204. Irony is not something she values, or cares to employ, even in heroic couplets. Lofty and patriotic thoughts sell better. Parenthetically, it is impossible to imagine Hemans writing as unrelentingly downbeat and pitiful a poem as Charlotte Dacre's *The Poor Negro Sadi* about the dereliction and death of a free slave on the streets of London – another excellent item from *Hours of Solitude* (vol II pp 117-22) at one in its vision of inhumanity with that of Blake.

A year later – in June 1817 – Hemans published *Modern Greece*, a meditation upon that country in a hundred and one Spenserian stanzas, which she and Murray thought best to put

---

**36:** Wellington, *Dispatches*, ed Lieut. Colonel Gurwood, London, John Murray, 1838, vol. XII pp.645-6.

**37:** *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy*, p.4.

**38:** Ibid, p.15.

out anonymously. Still stranger feelings must have come over Byron as he read such things as this (it is the forty-fifth stanza):

> Lo, where th'Albanian spreads his despot sway
> O'er Thessaly's rich vales and glowing plains,
> Whose sons in sullen abjectness obey,
> Nor lift the hand indignant at its chains:
> Oh! doth the land that gave Achilles birth,
> And many a chief of old illustrious line,
> Yield not one spirit of unconquer'd worth,
> To kindle those that now in bondage pine?
> No! on its mountain-air is slavery's breath,
> And terror chills the hearts whose utter'd plaints were death.

The manner of *Childe Harold* is skilfully caught. Hemans is a highly professional *pasticheuse*. She never travelled abroad, had no personal or political axe to grind in relation to Greece, and her intention was to break into a market which Byron had in great part created. The standard writers about Greece, on whom, as her notes reveal, she has conscientiously relied – Chandler, Potter, Pouqueville, Holland, Mitford – exclude Hobhouse and Byron, though her poem owes much more to Byron than to anyone else. Could Murray have insisted on anonymous publication as a marketing ploy, to fool the public into thinking that another Byron poem was before them?[39] It's possible.

If so, he was over-optimistic. *Modern Greece* – unlike *Childe Harold* – will upset no-one.[40] It's conventional in its praise of and regret for the Greece that was, in its sentimental nostalgia for the ancient Olympian religion, and in its regret that the Turks don't appreciate what they now rule:

> Their glance is cold indifference, and their toil
> But to destroy what ages have revered,
> As if exulting sternly to erase
> Whate'er might prove *that* land had nurs'd a nobler race.[41]

Hemans wouldn't want to know about the Turkish officer who wept as the Parthenon frieze was taken down by Lord Elgin's agents[42] For her, Elgin's deed will fuel England's future artistic genius:

> … who can tell how pure, how bright a flame,
> Caught from these models, may illume the west?
> What British Angelo may rise to fame,
> On the free isle what beams of art may rest?[43]

Byron, ignorant of the author's identity, but at odds with him / her at least on the question of the Elgin Marbles (perhaps annoyed, too, by the way he / she impugned the manners and status of his old chum Ali Pacha, "the Albanian") was scathing:

> Paris in 1815 &c. good. Modern Greece Good for nothing – written by some one who has never been there – and not being able to manage the Spenserian stanza has invented a thing of it's own – consisting of two elegiac stanzas a heroic line and an Alexandrine twisted on a string –

---

**39:** Other explanations are the standard anonymity often taken by modest female writers; and the need to save Captain Hemans' face, for he was humiliated by his wife's talent and success, having neither himself.

**40:** For a more positive judgement on *Modern Greece*, see Byron Raizis' account in *Childe Harold's Offspring, English and America*, in Tessier (ed.), *Lord Byron, A Multidisciplinary Open Forum*, 1999, pp.44-7.

**41:** *Modern Greece*, stanza LXXXVII.

**42:** See William St. Clair, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles*, 1998, p 103.

**43:** Ibid, stanza XCIX.

> besides why *"modern"*? – you may say *modern Greeks* but surely *Greece* itself is rather more ancient than ever it was.[44]

The neutral "a thing of *it's* own", may reveal Byron's suspicion; and his blustery final argument seems cover-up for a deeply-felt affront. His intuition that Hemans' book is based on nothing but other books is accurate – his own books being principal among them; but Hemans' technical control of the Spenserian stanza is actually quite as good as his – she's just a lot less ambitious about the feelings and ideas she expresses within it.

When Byron read *Modern Greece*, *Childe Harold* was not quite finished. In its fourth canto he gives some space to works of art, including the Laocoön and the Belvedere Apollo, which he, unlike Hemans, who rarely left North Wales, had seen: in a letter he compares the Apollo to Lady Adelaide Forbes.[45]

As epigraph to *The Restoration …*, Hemans had placed the first five lines of the famous sonnet by the seventeenth-century Italian poet Vincenzo da Filicaia:

> Italia, Italia o tu, cui feo la sorte
> Dono infelice di bellezza, ond'hai
> Funesta dote d'infiniti guai,
> Che in fronte scritti per gran doglia porte:
> Deh! fossi tu men bella, o almen più forte …

["Italy, Italy o you, to whom fate gave / an unhappy gift of beauty, from which you got / a funereal dowry of infinite troubles / that on your brow inscribed by pain you bear: / Alas! were you less beautiful or at least more strong ..."]

The rest of the sonnet goes

> Onde assai più ti paventasse, o assai
> T'amasse men, chi del tuo bello ai rai
> Par che si strugga, e pur ti sfida a morte.
> Che giù dall'Alpi non vedrei torrenti
> Scender d'armati, nè di sangue tinta
> Bever l'onda del Po Gallici armenti:
> Nè ti vedrei del non tuo ferro cinta
> Pugnar col braccio di straniere genti,
> Per servir sempre, o vincitrice, o vinta.

["… So that much more would he fear you, or much more / love you less, who for your beauty in the rays / seems to pine [[for love]], yet challenges you to death. / Thus I would not see from the Alps torrents / Come down armed, nor tinted with blood / drink the wave of the Po Gallic herds / Nor would I see you dressed not with you own armor / Fight with [[using]] the arm of foreign people, / To serve no matter, winning, or won." – literal translation by Gabriele Poole.]

I don't know whether or not Hemans' epigraph introduced Byron to Filicaia (this may have been done by Madame de Staël – see note 45). On September 14th 1816 Hobhouse had recorded the Karvellas brothers from Zante as saying

> … the Greeks report badly of Italy Austrian – Filicaia and Beccaria forbidden books –[46]

… which would indicate a degree of familiarity. Byron, whatever he may have thought of *The Restoration …*, thought highly enough of Filicaia's banned sonnet to translate and expand it himself, as stanzas 42 and 43 of *Childe Harold* IV:

---

**44:** BLJ V 262-3, to Murray, September 4th 1817.
**45:** BLJ V 227.
**46:** BL Add Mss 56536 120r.

Italia! oh Italia! thou who hast
The fatal gift of beauty, which became
A funeral dower of present woes and past,
On thy sweet brow is sorrow plough'd by shame,
And annals graved in characters of flame.
Oh God! that thou wert in thy nakedness
Less lovely or more powerful, and could'st claim
Thy right, and awe the robbers back, who press
To shed thy blood, and drink the tears of thy distress;

Then might'st thou more appal; or, less desired,
Be homely and be peaceful, undeplored
For thy destructive charms; then, still untired,
Would not be seen the armed torrents pour'd
Down the steep Alps; nor would the hostile horde
Of many-nation'd spoilers from the Po
Quaff blood and water; nor the stranger's sword
Be thy sad weapon of defence, and so,
Victor or vanquish'd, thou the slave of friend or foe.[47]

The next year, 1818, in a volume called *Translations from Camoens and Other Poets, with Original Poetry*, Hemans produced her version of the same poem:

Italia, oh! Italia! Thou, so graced
With ill-starr'd beauty, which to thee hath been
A dower, whose fatal splendour may be traced
In the deep-graven sorrows of thy mien;

Oh! that more strength, or fewer charms were thine,
That those might fear thee more, or love thee less,
Who seem to worship at thy radiant shrine,
Then pierce thee with the death-pang's bitterness!

Not *then* would foreign hosts have drain'd the tide
Of that Eridanus thy blood hath dyed;
Nor from the Alps would legions, still renew'd,
Pour down; nor wouldst thou wield an alien brand,
And fight thy battles with a stranger's hand,

---

**47:** (CPW II 138). Madame de Staël translated the sonnet too, although when is not clear. May her translation, which makes the Italian sonnet sound like the *Marseillaise*, have drawn Byron's attention to Filicaia in Geneva in 1816? Here it is:

ITALIE, Italie, ah! quel destin perfide
Te donna la beauté, source de tes malheurs?
Ton sein est déchiré par le fer homicide,
Tu portes sur ton front l'empreinte des douleurs.
Ah! que n'es-tu moins belle, ou que n'est-tu plus forte!
Inspire plus de crainte, ou donne moins d'amour.
De l'étranger jaloux la perfide cohorte
N'a feint de t'adorer que pour t'ôter le jour.
Quoi! verra-t-on toujours descendre des montagnes
Ces troupeaux de Gaulois, ces soldats effrénés,
Qui, du Tibre et du Pô, dans nos tristes campagnes,
Boivent l'onde sanglante et les flots enchaînés?
Verra-t-on tes enfans, ceints d'armes étrangères,
Des autres nations seconder les fureurs;
Et, ne marchant jamais sous leurs propres banières,
Combattre pour servir, ou vaincus, ou vainqueurs? (Œuvres inédites, de Mme. La Baronne de Staël publiées par son fils, Londres 1821, vol III p.399).

Still, still a slave, victorious or subdued![48]

I don't know when she did the translation, whether before or after *Childe Harold* IV appeared on April 18th 1818. But the difference is interesting. Byron, in expanding Filicaia's sonnet into two Spenserian stanzas, has, in such phrases as "undeplored / For thy destructive charms", feminised and demonised Italy rather more than Filicaia, and much more than Hemans. As a result his version is more vivid, and his reason for choosing the sonnet – its relevance to Italy's plight under the Austrians and the Bourbons ("the robbers") in 1817 – clearer. He passes no comment on the coincidence, though Murray must have sent him a copy of Hemans' translation volume.

Later, in *Lays of Many Lands* (1825) Hemans published some "Greek songs", using ideas borrowed from modern French writers on Greece. Her lyrics lack either the irony, or the bucolic qualities, we find in *The Isles of Greece* from *Don Juan*. Byron of course never knew them, having died in the Greek cause four years previously.

Two more of Hemans' volumes, *Tales and Historic Scenes in Verse* and *Stanzas to the Memory of the Late King*, came out in 1819 and 1820. Byron refers to neither of them. But later in 1820 Murray published *The Sceptic*, in which Hemans expresses pious warnings to, and pity for, rationalists, who according to her all die in misery. Of it she had written to Gifford

> … it is entirely free from political allusions, and is merely meant as a picture of the dangers resulting to public and private virtue and happiness, from the doctrines of Infidelity …[49]

To the volume Byron – whose verse was rarely free from political allusions – reacted as if challenged:

> Mrs. Hemans is a poet also – but too stiltified, & apostrophic – & quite wrong – men died calmly before the Christian era – & since without Christianity – witness the Romans – & lately Thistlewood – Sandt – & Louvel – *men who ought to have* been weighed down with their crimes – even had they believed. – – A deathbed is a matter of nerves & constitution – & not of religion; – Voltaire was frightened – Frederick of Prussia not. – Christians the same according to their strength rather than their creed.[50]

Arthur Thistlewood was one of the Cato Street Conspirators, opposed in politics and religion to everything the "a-political" (that is, the Tory) Hemans' poetry advertised itself as standing for. Sandt and Louvel had murdered Kotzebue and the duc de Berri.

One of several passages in *The Sceptic* which Byron may be answering is

> Oh! what is nature's strength? the vacant eye,
> By mind deserted, hath a dread reply!
> The wild delirious laughter of despair,
> The mirth of frenzy – seek an answer there!
> Turn not away, tho' pity's cheek grow pale,
> Close not thine eye against their awful tale.
> They tell thee, reason, wandering from the ray
> Of Faith, the blazing pillar of her way,
> In the mid-darkness of the stormy wave,
> Forsook the struggling soul she could not save![51]

---

**48:** *Translations from Camoens and Other Poets, with Original Poetry*, p.27.
**49:** Quoted Paula R. Feldman, *The Poet and the Profits: Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace, Keats-Shelley Journal* XLVI 1997, p.156.
**50:** BLJ VII 113, to Murray, June 7th 1820.
**51:** *The Sceptic*, pp.16-17.

What did Byron find in such stuff to upset him, or to make him want to acknowledge it, even? An important sub-text to *The Sceptic* seems to me to be *Manfred*. Hemans' opening advertises it clearly enough:

> When the young Eagle, with exulting eye,
> Has learn'd to dare the splendour of the sky,
> And leave the Alps beneath him in his course,
> To bathe his crest in morn's empyreal source,
> Will his free wing, from that majestic height,
> Descend to follow some wild meteor's light,
> Which far below, with evanescent fire,
> Shines to delude, and dazzles to expire?[52]

Note the Augustan balance of the final line: further evidence of Hemans' expertise in parroting the conservative mode she thinks will sell best, and therefore go down best at 50 Albemarle Street. The passage seems to echo the moment in *Manfred* I ii when the protagonist – a "wild meteor" if ever there was one – wandering in the Alps, reflects:

> There is a power upon me which witholds,
> And makes it my fatality to live,
> If it be life to wear within myself
> This barrenness of Spirit, and to be
> My own Soul's Sepulchre; for I have ceased
> To justify my deeds unto myself,
> The last infirmity of evil. –
>
> *An Eagle passes.*
>
> Aye,
> Thou winged and cloud-clearing Minister!
> Whose happy flight is highest into heaven!
> Well mayst thou swoop so near me – I should be
> Thy prey, and gorge thine Eaglets; thou art gone
> Where the eye cannot follow thee, but thine
> Yet pierces downward – onward – or above –
> With a pervading vision: beautiful –
> How beautiful is all this visible World![53]

Hemans' eagle, being indifferent to human wretchedness, is very close to Byron's. The difference is that her Sceptic would not acknowledge his own littleness, whereas Manfred is all too happy to acknowledge his. Later on in *The Sceptic* we find

> Lord of th'Ascendant! what avails it now,
> Tho' bright the laurels wav'd upon thy brow?
> What, tho' thy name, thro' distant empires heard,
> Bade the heart bound, as doth a battle-word?
> Was it for *this* thy still unwearied eye,
> Kept vigil with the watch-fires of the sky,
> To make the secret of all ages thine,
> And commune with majestic thoughts that shine
> O'er Time's long shadowy pathway? – hath thy mind
> Sever'd its lone dominions from mankind,
> For *this* to woo their homage? – Thou hast sought
> All, save the wisdom with salvation fraught,
> Won every wreath – but that which will not die,
> Nor aught neglected – save eternity![54]

---

**52:** Ibid, p.1.
**53:** *Manfred* I ii 23-37 (my edition).

The passage seems, from its context, to be addressed to Satan, but the third and fourth lines could refer to Napoleon. It is Manfred who "[keeps] vigil with the watch-fires of the sky, / To make the secret of all ages [his]" and Byron was always being confused in the popular mind with his various heroes, Manfred not least among them. Hemans has, from her reading, and with a good instinct for what will make the public shudder, created a universal fall-guy out of Satan / Napoleon / Manfred / Byron, and allows her readers to select whichever one takes their imaginations (compare the *Morning Post* poem in my previous section). The fact that none of the figures were or are "sceptics" doesn't bother her at all.[55]

It comes as no surprise that, two months after the letter previously quoted, we find Byron begging Murray

> … no more modern poesy – I pray – neither Mrs. Hewoman's – nor any female or male Tadpole of Poet Turdsworth's …[56]

In the following month he returns to the fray, alluding again to the second-hand nature of Hemans' inspiration:

> I do not despise Mrs. Heman[s] – but if [she] knit blue stockings instead of wearing them it would be better. / *You* are taken in by that false stilted trashy style which is a mixture of all the styles of the day – which are all bombastic (I don't except my own – no one has done more through negligence to corrupt the language) but it is neither English nor poetry.[57]

By now his jokes, re-sexing, de-sexing or trans-sexing Hemans (compare the bluestocking gag with the words of Hemans' husband, quoted above) making her "Hewoman" and "Heman", may convey his sense either that she is a rival or opponent, or even that she is in some way a version of *him* – writing the kind of poetry that Murray – and Gifford – would love *him* to write. Perhaps he sees her as a Frankenstein monster which his "negligence" and "corrupt(ion) of the language" has created – so much of her output is parasitical upon his own pre-ottava rima manner. On September 20th 1820 Murray, who had asked him for "a volume of nonsense", was treated to the following extempore effusion:

> I perceive that the Species
> Of "Nonsense" you want must be purely "*facetious*",
> And as that is the case you had better put to press
> Mr. Sotheby's tragedies now in M.S.S. –
> Some Syrian Sally
> From common-place Gally –
> Or if you prefer the bookmaking of women,
> Take a spick and Span "Sketch" of your feminine *He-Man*. –[58]

Hemans has ceased to bother Byron. He insists, knowing how much it will hurt Murray, on reading her *ersatz* earnestness as facetiousness. Further small ironies are found in later letters:

---

**54:** *The Sceptic*, pp.19-20.
**55:** She may be misusing *The Prisoner of Chillon*, too:
He, who hath pin'd in dungeons, midst the shade
Of such deep night as man for man hath made,
Thro' lingering years; if call'd at length to be,
Once more, by nature's boundless charter, free,
Shrinks feebly back, the blaze of noon to shun,
Fainting at day, and blasted by the sun! (*The Sceptic*, pp.14-15)
**56:** BLJ VII 158, August 12th 1820.
**57:** BLJ VII 182, to Murray, September 28th 1820.
**58:** BLJ VII 183, CPW IV 290: to Murray, September 28th 1820.

> I say nothing against your parsons – your Smedleys – and your Crolys – it is all very fine – but pray dispense me from the pleasure, as also from Mrs. Hemans[59] … It is doubtful whether the poem [*The Irish Avatar*] was written by Felicia Hemans for the prize of the Dartmoor Academy – or by the Revd. W. L. Bowles with a view to a bishopric – your own great discernment will decide between them.[60]

The joke about Dartmoor refers to Hemans' poem of that name, published in 1821, which won her fifty guineas from the Royal Society of Literature. Another high-minded poem, it draws a comfortable contrast between Dartmoor's barbaric past and England's Christian present, dragging in, *en route*, Napoleon, French PoWs, and Remorse.

Byron, no longer annoyed by the covert dialogue in which she seemed to be engaging him, by now saw Hemans as one among many canting parsonical poets whom the Tory Murray favoured. His answer to the problem she poses lies implicit in the sentence which follows that just quoted above:

> By last post I sent the "Vision of Judgement" by Quevedo Redivivus" – I just piddle a little with these trifles to keep my hand in for the New "English Bards &c." which I perceive your people are in want of – and which I only wait for a short visit to your country to put me more in possession of the nonsense of some of your *newer* ragamuffins – to commence. – I have *not* sought it – but if I *do* begin – it shall go hard – as Shylock says – "but I shall better the Instruction". – –[61]

*The Vision of Judgement* was his riposte to Southey, the greatest canting parsonical poet of them all. But there seems little doubt that Hemans (one of Murray's "*newer* ragamuffins") trailed Southey, in Byron's demonological race, by only a short head.

The problems posed by the publication of *The Vision of Judgement* were to sever Byron's relationship with Murray for good.

---

**59:** BLJ VII 201, to Murray, October 12th 1820.
**60:** BLJ VIII 236, to Murray, October 9th 1821.
**61:** BLJ VIII 236-7, to Murray, October 9th 1821.