

THE PAGE AFFAIR:

LADY CAROLINE LAMB'S LITERARY CROSS-DRESSING

by Rosemary March

In 1816, while “playing ball” with one of her servants, Lamb committed an act which confirmed to the many contemporaries with a penchant for gossip and rumours that she was eccentric, impulsive, and indecorous, if not entirely mad. She later related this act to Lady Morgan:

Then came my *fracas* with the page, which made such noise. He was a little *espiègle*, and would throw detonating balls into the fire. Lord Melbourne always scolded me for this, and I, the boy. One day I was playing ball with him. He threw squibs into the fire, and I threw the ball at his head. It hit him on the temple, and he bled. He cried out, “O my Lady, you have killed me!” Out of my senses, I flew into the hall and screamed, “Oh God, I have murdered the page!”¹

Lamb referred to this accident as her “page affair”². This statement may be taken as a metaphor for Lamb and Byron’s *literary* relationship: literally, their written and textual affair with each other’s “pages.” Their famous literary portraits of one another—Glenarvon and Lady Adeline Amundeville—have been much discussed. Their true “page affair,” however, is far more wide-ranging than this, and can be seen in its earliest form in Lamb’s “commonplace books.”

In the John Murray Archive at 50 Albemarle Street, London,³ are two hard-backed leather-bound books, one in bottle-green morocco and one in navy blue. The green book, approximately 21cm x 25cm and 4cm thick, is embossed in gold with the letters “W. L.” The blue book is of a similar size, marginally slimmer, and has a small lock binding the covers. These books are archived as “Lady Caroline Lamb’s commonplace books.”

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “commonplace book” as “a book in which one records passages or matters to be especially remembered or referred to, with or without arrangement.” Lady Caroline Lamb’s green book in the John Murray Archive contains a collection of striking or notable passages, but is arguably a more literary text than a “commonplace” book. This book can be read in support of the idea of Lady Caroline Lamb as a coterie writer and thus moves away from the definition of “commonplace” as “common and trite; an ordinary, everyday object, action, or occurrence.”⁴ The term Lamb used to describe the green book—her “album”—demonstrates that she did not view its contents as “commonplace.”

Lamb’s green book is the more conventional of the two works held in the archive. From the contents of this book, we can tell that Lamb did indeed use it as something of a literary scrapbook. It is plausible that Lamb took the book to social occasions to transcribe bon mots, occasional verse, and note literary scraps that caught her attention. The green book is indicative of Lamb’s reading and also her literary coterie and social circle. It contains pencil sketches, exercises in Greek, short occasional verse, detailed watercolours, newspaper clippings, cuttings taken from books, rebuses,

silhouettes, limericks, quotations from other works annotated by Lamb (she writes “stupid,” “dull,” and “odious” among other editorial comments), and poems and messages in different hands.

The proportionately high volume of occasional verse written by other poets, it could be argued, makes the green book more of a “coterie book” or coterie production rather than simply a personal literary “scrapbook.” Indeed, the works contained within the book in another hand emphasise this: it must have been quite literally passed around to other writers. In the book there is a translation from Sophocles in William Lamb’s handwriting, a poem from Thomas Moore’s *Irish Melodies*, a long prose composition entitled “Pleasure,”⁵ a message in French, and an epitaph on Canning—all in different handwriting. The occasional verse by others—members of Lamb’s social circle and, what we may now term, her literary circle—supports the idea of a coterie. It contains occasional verse by Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, the Duke of Devonshire, Matthew Gregory Lewis, Charles James Fox, Lady Bessborough, Lady Spencer, and Lord Forbes; poems to Byron, to Samuel Rogers, to Lady Elizabeth Foster; quotes from Sheridan, lines from Madame de Staël translated by Lamb, lines from Euripides, unidentified French, German, and Greek texts; an epitaph on Douglas Burke of Brandon and Hamilton; occasional poetry by Lamb, verses prompted by a visit to the Duc d’Orleans garden, by Nelson at Trafalgar in 1805, and “on seeing Lady Mary Deerhurst in mourning just after her wedding”:

No wonder Lady Mary mourns
For Deerhursts Wife that’s dead
For who the Devil would not mourn
to be his wife instead – ⁶

The green book also includes prose entitled “Upon sending a deaths head to Lady Catherine. by H.G.,” printed pictures of Thomas Moore, Lady Morgan, and William Gifford; as well as numerous watercolours by Lamb. From the contents of the green book we are presented with a full and rounded sense of Lamb’s life: of her hobbies; her social circle; and of her own reading.

The blue book is the less conventional work of the two books in the John Murray Archive. The reason that the blue book is different from the green book is that it is specifically not a scrapbook or a commonplace book as such. It does contain “striking or notable passages, noted for reference or use,” but these are fair copies and were probably noted elsewhere at first. Lady Caroline Lamb’s blue “commonplace” book is rather, a literary letter to Lord Byron.

Each “commonplace” in the blue book is a direct comment to Byron, constructing the book as a souvenir or remembrance of their (failed) relationship of 1812 which Lamb has compiled to give to Byron. She prefaces and concludes the blue book with letters directly addressed to him, the first of which is neatly written and is indicative therefore of its being a fair copy (Lamb had a difficult epistolary style and at times egregious handwriting). The opening letter clearly states that this blue book is a literary remembrance of their affair:

1812
This comes from one that suffers —
When you open this book you will be as far from
me in distance as you are now in heart —...

This letter must have been written in late 1812, after the end of the affair and perhaps when Lamb was “removed” to Ireland in September of that year. It takes much of the blame for the end of their affair (“I believe time which softens all resentment —will make you forget many of my faults”⁷). It is doubtful that Byron ever received this work (certainly, it is not mentioned by him, or by any of his biographers), yet the opening prefatory letter unquestionably establishes it as a souvenir book for Byron.

Following Lamb’s opening letter in the blue book there is a short prose composition entitled “Biondetta —1812.” Lamb has written this story as an allegorical tale about their affair. It is clearly directed *to* Byron in order that he can learn how cruelly he has treated Lamb and is about “a small spaniel Bitch whom Lord Byron took a fancy for as he saw it bounding wildly along in company with a thousand other dogs —.”⁸ Biondetta is taken up by Lord Byron but soon neglected, and then completely forgotten. Biondetta pines for Lord Byron but he remembers how badly she behaved as his dog and then “abuses” her: she sickens and dies. He becomes the owner of a prettier dog, but the narrator states that no dog ever loved Lord Byron as much as Biondetta did. “Biondetta” contains phrases with pointed double-meanings which refer to Lamb, William Lamb, Lady Oxford, Lamb’s family, and the Byron affair. It may even be a cruder, earlier version of the *roman-à-clef* technique Lamb was to use so effectively in *Glenarvon* (1816), in which many of the fictional characters had “real” counterparts in Regency society. “Biondetta” (“little blonde”) was a name that Lamb had ascribed to herself during her affair with Byron. On 9 August 1812 she sent the poet a clipping of her pubic hair —a somewhat more visceral take on the usual exchange of locks of hair —with a note signed “ricordati di Biondetta / From your wild Antelope.”⁹ “Biondetta” also refers to a character from Jacques Cazotte’s *Le Diable Amoureux* (1775), translated as *Biondetta, or the Enamoured Spirit: A Romance* in 1810. By September 1812, after the end of the affair, Lamb was figuring herself as Cazotte’s literary character. In the story “Biondetta,” the Lamb character is “a small spaniel” and in Cazotte, Biondetta is the devil in the guise of a white spaniel. The story of Biondetta/Lamb appears to be heavily influenced by Cazotte’s Biondetta:

In a short time she would hardly suffer me [Don Alvarez] to return home at night to my hotel;...I was overwhelmed with notes and messages;...Her jealousy at first finding no object, fastened on every woman who possessed any charms to captivate me; and if she could have gained that tyrannical controul [*sic*] over me for which she perpetually struggled, I should have been compelled to treat with insolence every female except herself.¹⁰

Lamb herself deluged Byron with notes —Rogers was later to recall that “she absolutely besieged him”¹¹ —and Lamb’s “Biondetta” is Byron’s jealous, badly behaved “pet”, who “would bite & bark at everyone who approached.”¹² “Biondetta” relies on both parties’ knowledge of Cazotte’s character and thus constitutes a veiled threat to Byron: earlier she had written “ricordati di Biondetta” — remember Biondetta: she turned into the Devil.

At the centre of “Biondetta” is a quotation from William Cowper’s narrative poem, *The Task*. Lamb has included a section from Book VI, “The Winter Walk at Noon” and uses some of Cowper’s arguments to emphasise the pathos she aims for in Biondetta’s story. She quotes:

Attachment never to be wean'd or chang'd
 By any change of fortune, proof alike
 against unkindness, absence and neglect
 Fidelity that neither bribe nor threat
 can move or warp & gratitude for small
 And trivial favours lasting as the life
 And glistening even in the dying eye —¹³

Cowper, in his “Argument” to Book VI, writes “Animals happy, a delightful sight. — Origin of cruelty to animals. — That it is a great crime proved from Scripture. — That proof illustrated by a tale.”¹⁴ Byron is thus shamed further by Lamb: through her use of Cowper and the allegory of Biondetta, she emphasises that Byron has committed a great religious and moral crime in his cruelty to Biondetta. The moral message of “Biondetta” is reinforced by the inclusion of Cowper’s poetry and the more established writer thus becomes another author involved in the “page affair” of Byron and Lamb.

The next entry in Lamb’s book to Byron is another quotation. There are several quotations to follow, all of which are messages to Byron. The blue book demonstrates just how literary their lived relationship was, and how intertextual their page affair was as Lamb takes on the characters in the quoted passages. In her personal letters, Lamb participates in a form of intellectual cross-dressing: she adopts both “men’s intellectual clothing” (rhetorical devices and sometimes literary “fancy dress”) in order to develop a more authoritative and credible literary persona. In signing her epistolary self under the guise of various pseudonyms—from real people like Emily Cowper (her husband’s sister) and Sophia Heathcote (at whose ball she cut or stabbed herself), to literary or fantasy characters like “Biondetta,” “Molly Teacok,” and the “Syrop of Elderob”—her letters take on a plurality of voice combined with an inherent creativity. Lamb’s multi-vocal letters catalyse the creation of her literary personae and the blue book presents another aspect of this process. In her literary adoption and adaptation of already-written literary characters, Lamb assumes another writer’s voice. In the blue book, through her use of Cazotte and Cowper, Lamb employs texts to battle with Byron and involve him more deeply in their “page affair.”

In a second quoted passage in the blue book, Lamb figures herself and Byron as characters from a short story, *Mirza, ou Lettre d’un Voyageur* (1795), by Madame de Staël: here Byron features as “Ximéo” and herself as “Mirza.” *Mirza, ou Lettre d’un Voyageur* is a short story written by Madame de Staël when she “was barely twenty years old” (in, or around, 1786). The story is a combination of sentimental romantic tragedy and anti-slavery polemic, and Staël felt *Mirza* was an example of literary mawkishness combined with a transparent political message. It is possible, however, to see a nascent, perhaps slightly clumsier “Corinne” in “Mirza” and Lamb obviously felt some connection with the short story when she read it. Some of *Mirza*’s appeal for Lamb may have emanated from Staël’s “Preface”: “It is said that misfortunes hasten the development of all moral faculties, but sometimes I fear that it has the opposite effect, that it throws you into a state of melancholy which makes you indifferent to yourself and to others.” Lamb must certainly have felt that this was pertinent to her situation in late 1812, and it echoes the sentiment of the prefatory letter and moral of the Biondetta story in the self-effacing letter-book to the reader, Byron.

Madame de Staël wrote *Mirza* as a “story within a story,” narrated by Ximéo, a “noble savage” character from the African kingdom of Cayor and the son of a tribal chief. Ximéo was engaged at birth to Ourika, but while out hunting he overhears a woman singing and is enchanted by her voice. When she reveals she is the composer of her own songs, he falls in love. In order to seduce her, Ximéo tells Mirza that he feels sorry she has merely intellectual pleasures and that only love will complete her soul. Ximéo is then overpowered by the force of Mirza’s love, and she becomes repugnant to him. He marries Ourika and abandons Mirza, meaning to return to her to offer her friendship, but he is taken prisoner during a war and sold into slavery to Europeans. Mirza, after a powerful and heart-wrenching speech to the Europeans, ensures his freedom. Mirza cannot, however, bear Ximéo’s inconstancy and stabs an arrow into her heart, leaving Ximéo to Ourika and his tortured memories of Mirza.

Lamb neatly copies into her souvenir book the section beginning with Mirza’s question “Ximéo... mais assure, es-tu bien sûr que tu m’aimes?” [Ximéo... are you quite sure that you love me?] ¹⁵ Lamb underlines the sentences which she feels are most similar to her relationship with Byron, for example:

Je frémis alors en songeant à quell excès son Coeur
savait aimer [Thinking then of the excesses to which
her heart could go in loving me made me shudder]

Lamb essentially writes Byron’s voice into the character of Ximéo, recontextualizing Staël’s story for her former lover. Gretchen Rous Besser writes of *Mirza* that it has “no proper plot, character development, or suspense. Its stick figures play out a sentimentalized version of the lovesick heroine who —like Delphine, Sappho, and Corinne —is superior in all respects to the man who deserts her and yet without whom she cannot live.”¹⁶ It is this uncompromising tragic vision with which Lamb identified. By aligning herself with Mirza, Lamb depicts herself as arguably the earliest Byronic heroine. She has sacrificed herself —Mirza stabs herself in the heart; Lamb does not wish to lose her husband, family, and social reputation —yet her love for Ximéo/Byron makes her doom inevitable. Ximéo narrates that when Mirza first confesses her love for him,

elle avait l’air abattu; soi *presentiment*, soit tendresse,
elle avait passé ce jour dans les larmes. [she looked
dejected, either because of *foreboding* or tender
thoughts. She had spent that day in tears.]¹⁷ [my
emphasis]

Lamb seems to express Mirza’s already-written emotions when she claimed to say upon first seeing Byron that “that beautiful pale face is my fate.”¹⁸ In making the semantic choice of “fate” rather than “destiny,” Lamb writes herself as Mirza, confronting an inescapable, ominous fate rather than engaging in a wish fulfilment, and she appears to be sentenced to that fate, possibly even star-crossed with her lover.

In her blue souvenir book Lamb also writes original poetry, which permits her to create her own writing persona and to adapt fictional personae through quotations which are intertexts in the page affair. (Byron also made use of imagery from their shared intertexts and wrote of Lamb as a character and as someone who inspired his work —she was his “evil Genius.”¹⁹) In the blue book, Lamb copies out two of her poetical compositions, both of which are inspired by Byron. One of these was later recycled in *Glenarvon* as the song “Waters of Elle” and she includes an early version of it here:

Here 'twas at Eve when [on?] this bank reposing
 Harold once pulled a rose from yonder tree
 Wear this he said then first his love disclosing
 Near to thy heart in memory of me.
 Loves cherished gift the rose he gave is faded
 Loves blighted flower never can bloom again.²⁰

Lamb had first addressed Byron as his fictional alter ego, Childe Harold, in her letter of 9 March 1812 and does so here again. In the blue book the song is about Byron's faded love for Lamb, and about her forsaken heart.

Another original poem Lamb includes in the blue book is untitled:

Say ere we part that little word "farewell"
 Farewell 'though spoke in tears may sooth our pain
 Does it not chear ye when it seems to tell
 that though we part —' we yet shall meet again?

But oh how like the knell of Death it falls
 Upon the heart whose every hope is o'er —
 How the affrighted fancy it appals
 When Farewell seems to say "we meet no more."

or if we meet the scene may then be chang'd
 youth may have fled - & with it every trace
 Of what we lov'd —in manner form or face
All like the affections altered and estrang'd —

Yet say the word —for since we are to part —
 never again to meet as friends —ah never
 we can so speak it —that each sever'd heart
 hearing Farewell —shall know it means forever.²¹

This is a revised version of Lamb's original poem, which was first written into the green book. The blue book version offers only the speakers' questions and requests without any reply and we must, from the contents and context, assume the speaker to be Lamb writing to Byron. The final verse in the blue book is altered from the version found in the green book —the amendments have been italicised here:

(green book)

Yet say the word for since we are to part
 never again to meet as friends ah never
 You can so speak it that each alter'd heart
 hearing Farewell —shall know it means forever

(blue book)

Yet say the word —for since we are to part —
 never again to meet as friends —ah never
 We can so speak it —that each *sever'd* heart
 hearing Farewell —shall know it means forever.

The added punctuation emphasises the sentiments of lovers saying “farewell” and the dashes also literally separate the sentences. The speaker in the blue book appears to be able to say “farewell” by the end of the poem; she writes “we can so speak it,” as opposed to in the green book where it is only he, or “you,” as Lamb calls her addressee, that can so speak it. The blue book version thus progresses to a joint farewell whereas the green book version remains rooted in abandonment. Not only does the blue book version appear “healthier,” but it appears more powerful as it removes the ability to say farewell solely from the addressee: within the poem Lamb finds her voice. The change of the state of the heart —from “alter’d” to “sever’d” — seems to hint at a more conclusive separation in that it is altogether removed rather than just “alter’d.” In the blue book version then, the speaker is empowered as she takes on a voice and “severs” her heart, becoming a stronger character than in the green book.

After “Say ere we part,” Lamb quotes from George Crabbe’s “The Parting Hour.” She makes use of Crabbe in a manner that repeats her use of Cowper. Both quotations from literary grandfathers seem to support the sentiments of Lamb’s original work, “Biondetta” and “Say ere we part.” Lamb quotes several stanzas of Crabbe’s Tale, in which Judith and Allen, who have been childhood companions and are now lovers. Allen, like Conrad in *The Corsair*, abandons Judith to go to sea. Lamb’s quotation from “The Parting Hour” presents the message to Byron in her letter-book from a different intertext, but retains the same meaning: that she has been cruelly abandoned.

Lamb then quotes from Pope’s *Essay on Man*:

The Lamb thy riot dooms to bleed today
Had he thy reason would he skip & play
Pleas’d to the last he cropp’s the flowery food
And licks the hand uprais’d to shed his blood ²²

Underneath the quotation, pointedly modified in the comment to Byron (“*thy* reason”), Lamb has added a personal message to him: “what you always repeated.”²³ If Byron did always repeat this to Lamb, he was punning on her name to invoke a mockery of her innocence and also of her morality. Thematically, the lines from Pope resonate with the story of Biondetta (both are also dated “1812”) as they show Lamb to be an innocent victim of what she saw as Byron’s tyranny. Maynard Mack’s commentary on the passage from Pope illuminates another interpretation of the page affair:

The force of this passage, and its relation to Pope’s larger argument, come in part from man’s being presented as the middle and least attractive term in the ratio: lamb is to man as man is to God. In his status as an inferior, man lacks the lamb’s trustfulness; in his status as a superior, he lacks God’s impartial thoughtfulness. Cf. the clash between the associations given to the lamb (*skip and play, pleased to the last, lick the hand*), and those given to man (*bleed, shed his blood, riot* —the latter ironically emphasized by the

judicial pretensions of *doom*), and those given to God
(*kindly, equal eye, God of all, etc.*).²⁴

In Lamb's quotation, Byron is "the least attractive term in the ratio" as he "lacks ... [Caroline] lamb's trustfulness" and would lack "God's impartial thoughtfulness" if she had quoted the next few lines of Pope's *Essay*:

Oh blindness to the future! Kindly giv'n,
That each may fill the circle mark'd by Heav'n;
Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,
Atoms or systems into ruin hurl'd,
And now a bubble burst, and now a world.²⁵

If Byron had "always repeated" Pope to her, as part of her revenge Lamb would have been justified in quoting the longer passage to invoke a more vehement criticism of him. For Lamb to write that these lines from Pope were what he always repeated to her makes Byron seem threatening, while Lamb obviously figures herself as the sacrificial "lamb."

Lamb then quotes from the most common intertext of Lamb and Byron's page affair: the *Inferno* from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, especially the tale of Paolo and Francesca. Here she quotes from Canto V:

Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
nella miseria

O lasso
quanti dolci pensier, quanto desio
meno costoro al doloroso passo!²⁶

Lamb has quoted Canto V.121-3 and 112-4. Byron used the same lines as epigraphs to his roughly contemporaneous work, *The Corsair*, which Lamb claimed to have influenced by having given Byron a copy of Dante's collected poetry in 1813.²⁷ Lamb quotes Francesca speaking to Dante, and then Dante speaking, which is the reverse of the original text. However, what is in effect a misquotation makes more meaning in her souvenir book. Henry Cary's contemporary translation of Lamb's text as she quotes it is as follows:

No greater grief than to remember days
Of joy, when misery is at hand!

Alas! by what sweet thoughts, what fond desire
Must they at length to that ill pass have reach'd.²⁸

By quoting Francesca's words first, Lamb is able to adopt her sentiments before reflecting—through Dante's words—more generally on the end of the affair. Lamb, as the victim, thus speaks first and, by misquoting, adapts Dante for her own purpose. The modern standard edition translates her misquotation as,

There is no greater sorrow than to recall, in
wretchedness, the happier time.

Alas! how many sweet thoughts, what great
desire, brought them to the woeful pass!²⁹

Although this is less poetical, it sounds more like Rochefoucauld's 136th maxim, to which Byron may have alluded: that there "are people who would never have fallen in love, had they not heard about it."³⁰ . However, the message is the same: Lamb is like Francesca, caught in her own personal hell of memory and utterly wretched that "dolci pensier," "sweet thoughts" have brought her to "doloroso paso," a "woeful pass."

Dante's *Inferno*, and especially Canto V, is Byron and Lamb's most frequently used intertext. As the blue book shows, however, there were other literary couples and models that Lamb (and Byron) used in the page affair. Paolo and Francesca, Ximéo and Mirza, Biondetta and the Byronic hero, and also —oddly —Megacles and Lycidas in Pietro Metastasio's *L'Olimpiade* (1733).³¹ Lamb quotes an arietta from Act III.iii of *L'Olimpiade*. In this arietta Megacles, an Athenian, is talking to Argene (a Cretan who has disguised herself as a shepherdess) about Lycidas, a friend of Megacles. Megacles believes Lycidas has betrayed him by wooing Aristeia under the name of Megacles:

Lo sequitai felice
quand'era il ciel sereno:
alle tempeste in seno
voglio seguilo aneor
Come dell'oro, il fuoro
Scuopre le masie impure
Scuoprono le suenture
De falsi amici il Cor.³²

[I followed him in happiness
in former times when skies were clear,
and now that tempests round him rage,
he'll find me with him once again.

Just as the glowing flame reveals
impurities contained in gold
our mishaps bare those false to us.³³]

Lamb here quotes Megacles's sentiments to Lycidas (i.e., her reader, Byron) as her own, thus adopting a masculine voice. This quotation adds a homosocial aspect to the Lamb/Byron affair and perhaps recalls the occasions when Lamb adopted her page's attire to visit Byron.

Lamb then copies a long prose quotation into her souvenir book, which she identifies as from "Nature and Art." *Nature and Art* is Elizabeth Inchbald's novel, first published in 1794, and Lamb quotes from chapter 26 which begins

There is a word in the vocabulary more bitter, more
direful in its import, than all the rest. —Reader, if

poverty, if disgrace, if bodily pain, even if slighted love
is your unhappy fate, kneel and bless heaven for its
beneficent influence, so that you are not tortured with
the anguish of —*remorse*.³⁴

Nature and Art is the story of two very different cousins, one of whom seduces a young woman with whom he is in love but will not marry because she is socially inferior. The cousin who represents “nature” has a pure love for a woman of the same social status as the first, but this cousin is willing to marry her. The “artful” cousin abandons his mistress while she is pregnant: she is eventually hanged after being forced into a life of crime to support herself; her child dies of grief. Again, Lamb uses the story of a slighted and tragic figure to represent her affair with Byron. In the “artful” cousin, the seducer, the reader, Byron, should see a portrait of himself. Her quotation offers a general message from Inchbald’s narrative voice to Byron in which she highlights ‘the anguish of —*remorse*’ .

Lamb ends her souvenir book and collection of quotations from intertexts with another “farewell” letter to Byron. All previous writing has been neat and precise as if the blue book is a presentation copy for the poet. This final letter is written in very small, cramped writing —we may think of the comment that Lamb’s works have been seen as the “distressed outpourings of a diseased sexuality”³⁵ (i.e. one that is obsessed with Byron) — which exhibits obvious signs of anguish at the moment of writing. The final letter, dated only “May —,” is as follows:

one only word. You have rais’d me from
dispair to the joy we look for in Heaven —
your seeing me has undone me forever —you
are the same —you love me still —I am sure
of it your eyes your looks your manners your
words, say so. —Oh God can you give me up if
I am dear —take me with you take me my
Master my friend I will serve you take me with
you —who will fight for you serve you in sickness
& Health live but for your wishes & die when
that can please you who so faithfully as the
one you have made yours & bound to your
heart of hearts. yet when you read this you
will be gone. you will think of me perhaps
too as one who gave you sufferings &
trouble —Byron my days are past in [illeg]³⁶
being what I once was to you —I wish you
had never known me or that you had killed
me before you went. God Bless & preserve my friend & master
your
Caro³⁷

It is significant that here Lamb names Byron rather than assigning him a symbolic title as previously. Perhaps this letter is her response to her collection, her conclusion to the souvenir book. Lamb the letter writer here seems to be a combination of all the previous “characters” and writerly personae: Biondetta —“my Master”; Judith —“yet when you read this you will be gone”; Hannah Primrose —“you will think of me

perhaps too as one who gave you sufferings & trouble”; Megacles —“my friend I will serve you”; Francesca —“bound to your heart of hearts”; Mirza —“your seeing me has undone me forever”. The letter writer here is indistinguishable from all the previous characters —the already-written have obscured Lamb’s own persona to the point where it could be suggested that this letter is the outpouring of a confusedly literary mind.

Lamb is, however, perhaps more of a Byronic heroine in this letter than at any other point in the text. In the green book, Lamb demonstrates she was part of a literary coterie, hinting at the shared consciousness of Lamb and Byron’s later intertextual relationship. In the blue book she writes to Byron under the guise of several personae, invoking literary characters and intertexts as part of her disguise. The final letter combines all of these ideas and she appears to prefigure Richard Westall’s watercolour sketch “The Byronic Heroine.” Westall’s portrait depicts a female who appears to be utterly despondent —she looks down towards the ground, her shoulders are hunched, her arms limp, even her hair and clothes seem flaccid and lifeless. She is literally wilting: a “blighted flower,” in Lamb’s words. Westall’s figure has the costume of a stereotypically “Eastern” woman, which now puts us in mind of Leila, Zuleika, or Medora. The woman stands at a doorway, outside any domestic or convivial space. The edge of the cliff adds to her desolation in its barrenness. In the bottom left corner of the sketch we see the sails and the prow of a departing ship: the act of abandonment is still in progress. Westall’s sketch dates from 1819 but Lamb appears to paint this sketch in words in approximately 1813:

...your seeing me has undone me forever... Oh God can
you give me up... take me with you take me my
master... when you read this you will be gone... I
wish... you had killed me before you went.

Should we see the Byronic heroine as yet another fiction, a persona adopted? Lamb, in this final entry in her memorial book of the affair seems to disappear under the weight of fictional personae and to become an archetypal Byronic fictional portrait. As A. S. Byatt asks, “[w]hat is the relation between a mask and a portrait when they are the same image?”³⁸ Lamb’s mask is her assumed persona, but her portrait has become Byronic, rather than her own adaptation. The Byronic Heroine —either the painting or the person —existed, and throughout the page affair Lamb created it, acted it, and then could not escape the role being acted upon her.

NOTES

¹ S. Owenson, Lady Morgan, *Lady Morgan’s Memoirs, Autobiography, Diaries, and Correspondence*, 2 vols. (London, 1862), ii. 201-2.

² Lamb to Captain Thomas Medwin, 1824, British Library, Wentworth Bequest, 54088, vol. CCLXXII.

³ The Scottish Government is currently raising funds to complete the purchase and relocation of the archive to Scotland, and so the Commonplace Books and other manuscripts and ephemera from the publishing house’s distinguished history will soon, we hope, be accessible to many more scholars.

⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, 20 vols. (Oxford, 1989), iii. 571.

⁵ I have been unable to identify both the text and the handwriting.

⁶ Lady Caroline Lamb, Commonplace Book (Green), John Murray Archive.

- ⁷ Lamb, Commonplace Book (Blue), John Murray Archive.
- ⁸ Lamb, Commonplace Book (Blue).
- ⁹ Lamb to Lord Byron, 9 August 1812, Bodleian Library, Dep. Lovelace-Byron 155, f.79-81.
- ¹⁰ J. Miller (trans.), *Biondetta, or the Enamoured Spirit: A Romance* (London, 1810), 90-1.
- ¹¹ S. Rogers, *Recollections of the Table-talk of Samuel Rogers* (London, 1865), 233.
- ¹² Lamb, Commonplace Book (Blue).
- ¹³ William Cowper, *The Task*, Book VI, 625-31, in Lamb, Commonplace Book (Blue). In this essay all quotations from the blue book are copied exactly as Lamb transcribed them, including slight grammatical errors, altered punctuation, etc.
- ¹⁴ W. Cowper, "Argument of the Sixth Book," *The Task: A Poem in Six Books* (London, 1785), 229.
- ¹⁵ G. de Staël, *Mirza, ou Lettre d'un Voyageur*, in *Oeuvres completes de Madame la baronne de Staël publié par son fils* (Paris, 1821), ii. 221-244. The translation is by F. Massadier-Kennedy, *Slavery in the Francophone World: http://www.uge.edu/slavery/text/literary_works/mirzaenglish.pdf*.
- ¹⁶ G. Rous Besser, *Germaine de Staël Revisited* (New York, 1994), 24.
- ¹⁷ G. de Staël, *Mirza, ou Lettre d'un Voyageur*.
- ¹⁸ *Lady Morgan's Memoirs*, 2:200. This phrase, like her description of Byron as "mad, bad, and dangerous to know," cannot be securely dated, because she wrote both as accounts to Lady Morgan late in life.
- ¹⁹ Byron to Theresa Guiccioli, February 1820, *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. L. A. Marchand 12 vols. (London, 1973), viii. 37.
- ²⁰ Lamb, Commonplace Book (Blue). I don't know if I have misread the commonplace book here, but I don't have 'on' in my notes, and I have 'delighted' rather than 'blighted'. Perhaps LCL revised the poem for *G*?
- ²¹ Lamb, Commonplace Book (Blue).
- ²² Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle I. 3. Lamb slightly misquotes the final line, which should be: "And licks the hand *just raised* to shed his blood" [my emphasis].
- ²³ Lamb, Commonplace Book (Blue).
- ²⁴ A. Pope, *An Essay on Man*, ed. M. Mack (London: Methuen & Co., 1950), 23-4.
- ²⁵ Pope, *An Essay on Man*, I.85-90.
- ²⁶ Lamb, Commonplace Book (Blue).
- ²⁷ Lamb told John Murray, "[Y]ou owe his quotations from Dante [appearing in *The Corsair*] and the beginning of the *Bride [of Abydos]* to me—and not to Mad. De Staal—for I sent him Dante last year so that you see I was not useless even to his genius." Letter to John Murray. n.d. [dated by internal evidence to February 1814] John Murray Archive.
- ²⁸ *The Vision: or, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, of Dante Alighieri*, trans. H. Cary (London, 1819), V. 47 and 46.
- ²⁹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, trans. C. S. Singleton (Princeton, 1970), 55.
- ³⁰ Duc de la Rochefoucauld, *The Maxims of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld*, trans. C. FitzGibbon (London, 1974), 58.
- ³¹ Between the quotations from Dante and Metastasio is an Italian text which I have been unable to identify.

³² Lamb, *Commonplace Book* (Blue).

³³ *Three Melodramas by Pietro Metastasio*, trans. J. G. Fucilla (Lexington, 1981), 146.

³⁴ Mrs [Elizabeth] Inchbald, *Nature and Art* (Dublin, 1796), 140.

³⁵ M. Kelsall, "The Byronic Hero and Revolution in Ireland: The Politics of *Glenarvon*," *The Byron Journal*, 9 (1981), 4-19, 4. Kelsall is in fact arguing that Lamb's novel *Glenarvon* "has hitherto been regarded as merely the distressed outpourings of diseased sexuality. On the contrary, the very spontaneity of Lady Caroline's portrayal of Whig society and of Byronism enhances the value of the insights which the work offers." My use of Kelsall's words here merely emphasises the misogynistic and archaic criticism which has been applied to Lamb's work – criticism which Kelsall's essay works to dispel.

³⁶ Virginia Murray suggests Lamb may have written "remission" or "recession" here.

³⁷ Lamb, *Commonplace Book* (Blue).

³⁸ A. S. Byatt, *Portraits in Fiction* (London, 2002), 60.
