

## HEBREW MELODIES



This collection of lyrics was written in late 1814 and early 1815, and many of the poems in it were fair-copied by Annabella Milbanke at Seaham, County Durham, on Byron's visits, in October-November 1814 and January 1815, prior to and after their wedding. The dates, and the circumstances, may account for the high moral tone of most of them. At the suggestion of Douglas Kinnaird, they were set to music, after several of them had been written, by Isaac Nathan, to be sung by the famous tenor John Braham.

Nathan had in fact advertised his project as early as 1813:

J. Nathan is about to publish "Hebrew Melodies," all of them upwards of 1000 years old and some of them performed by the Antient Hebrews before the destruction of the Temple.

It was, at the very least, a bold assertion: little or none of the British synagogue music then sung was that old. Joseph Slater writes:

A framework of ancient ritual was stuccoed with tunes which cantors had picked up or composed in all the cities of Europe: hymns were more likely to have been sung at Vauxhall a hundred years earlier than at Jerusalem before the destruction of the Temple.<sup>1</sup>

Nathan approached Walter Scott first, without success; then Byron, in June 1814, also without result. Later in the year, however, on Kinnaird's recommendation, Nathan and Byron did collaborate in part. For the full story, see Appendix 1 below.

There was nothing new in the project. Nathan, and to an extent Byron, were cashing in on a vogue for nationalist airs from minority cultures or oppressed peoples in all corners of the globe. The market was flooded with Scottish, Welsh, Indian, and of course, from Thomas Moore, Irish Melodies. The ethnic authenticity of none of such scores could be relied on.

Byron was schizophrenic on the subject of Jews. Empathising with their outcast lot on the one hand, he was scathing about their financial prowess and influence on the other, having owed his own social disasters in England in part to their readiness to lend him money. In 1822, he wrote, in *The Age of Bronze*:

But let us not to own the truth refuse,  
Was ever Christian land so rich in Jews?  
Those parted with their teeth to good King John,  
And now, ye kings! they kindly draw your own;  
All States, all things, all Sovereigns they controul,  
And waft a loan "from Indus to the Pole."  
The banker – broker – Baron – Brethren, speed  
To aid these bankrupt Tyrants in their need.  
Nor these alone; Columbia feels no less  
Fresh Speculations follow each Success;  
And Philanthropic Israel deigns to drain  
Her mild percentage from exhausted Spain.  
Not without Abraham's Seed can Russia march,  
'Tis Gold, not Steel, that rears the Conqueror's arch.  
Two Jews, a chosen people, can command  
In every realm their Scripture-promised land –  
Two Jews keep down the Romans, and uphold  
The accursed Hun, more brutal than of old;  
Two Jews – but not Samaritans – direct  
The world, with all the Spirit of their sect.  
What is the happiness of earth to them?  
A Congress forms their "New Jerusalem,"  
Where Baronies and Orders both invite –  
Oh, holy Abraham! dost thou see the sight?  
Thy followers mingling with these royal swine,  
Who spit not "on their Jewish gaberdine,"  
But honour them as portion of the Show –  
(Where now, oh, Pope! is thy forsaken toe?  
Could it not favour Judah with some kicks?  
Or has it ceased to "kick against the pricks?")  
On Shylock's shore behold them stand afresh,  
To cut from Nations' hearts their "pound of Flesh."<sup>2</sup>

However, when he considered Israel's historical plight, Byron could get emotional. Nathan and Braham published the work, with music, in two volumes, the first in April 1815, the second in November 1815.

The books were dedicated to Princess Charlotte, and prefaced thus:

"The HEBREW MELODIES" are a Selection from the favourite Airs which are still sung in the religious Ceremonies of the Jews. Some of these have, in common with all their Sacred Airs, been preserved by memory and tradition alone, without the assistance of written characters. Their age and originality must, therefore, be left

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1: A.Z.Idelsohn, *Jewish Music*, (New York 1929), pp. 176-217; quoted Joseph Slater, *Byron's Hebrew Melodies*, in *Studies in Philology* (1952), p. 78.

2: *AoB*, 674-705.

to conjecture. But the latitude given to the taste and genius of their performers has been the means of grafting on the original Melodies a certain wildness and pathos, which have at length become the chief characteristic of the Sacred Songs of the Jews.

The book was a great success. It was to have had a preface by Robert Harding Evans, about the role music plays in the Bible; but this seems to have been vetoed by Kinnaird, who had, perhaps, begun to have doubts about the music's Hebraic authenticity, as well (for he was an amateur singer) about its quality.

John Murray's establishment resented Byron's association with the two musicians. On February 17th 1815, Murray wrote to Byron, describing Hobhouse's antipathy, too, to the collaboration:

I am delaying the publication of our edition in four volumes only until you find a leisure moment to strike off the dedication to your friend Mr. Hobhouse, who still thinks that it is not precisely the same thing to have music made to one's poems, and to write poetry for music; and I advise you most conscientiously to abide by the determination of Mr. Hobhouse's good sense.<sup>3</sup>

"Writing poetry for music" was exactly what Byron had done with Nathan. Hobhouse was still jealous of anyone who collaborated with his friend in a creative endeavour. Murray brought out a text-only edition, in May 1815. See Appendix 2 below.

Just before Byron left England, Nathan sent him some motzas, with the following note:

My Lord, I cannot deny myself the pleasure of sending your Lordship some holy biscuits, commonly called unleavened bread, and denominated by the Nazarites Motsas, better known in this enlightened age by the epithet Passover cakes; and as a certain angel by his presence, ensured the safety of a whole nation, may the same guardian spirit pass with your Lordship to that land where the fates may have decreed you to sojourn for a while.

Byron acknowledged the gift thus:

Piccadilly Terrace, Tuesday Evening

My dear Nathan, – I have to acknowledge the receipt of your very seasonable bequest, which I duly appreciate; the unleavened bread shall certainly accompany me on my pilgrimage; and, with a full reliance on their efficacy, the *Motsas* shall be to me a charm against the destroying Angel wherever I may sojourn; his serene highness, however will, I hope, be polite enough to keep at desirable distance from my person, without the necessity of besmearing my door posts or upper lintels with the blood of any animal. With many thanks for your kind attention, believe me, my dear Nathan,

Yours very truly,  
BYRON.<sup>4</sup>

Nathan also operated as a royal librarian, journalist, boxing promoter, and actor / singer, but found it hard to make ends meet. He left England for Australia in 1840, where, despite occasional bankruptcies, he became the Father of Australian Music. Though he had his children baptised, he presided over the opening of the first Australian synagogue. He wrote the first Australian opera, *Don John of Austria* (1847), "a new national anthem", *Long Live Victoria*, a setting of the Lord's Prayer, and was responsible for the first Australian Mozart productions: but probably did not write the tune of *Waltzing Matilda*, as has been asserted. He was killed at 5 p.m. on June 15th 1864, when run over by a horse-drawn tram-car in Pitt Street, Sydney.

To say that Jews were disadvantaged in Byron's England is no large statement: so were most of the population. But Jews, in addition to being as disenfranchised as most of the rest, could not engage in retail trade, nor take oaths in court (though this problem was circumvented when necessary). They were not allowed to be M.P.s until 1858. Zionism was a thing of the future, but the sense of persecution, lost community and threatened tradition which led to Zionism was ever-present, and Byron was well aware of the issues, as he was of the similar problems faced by the Irish and the Armenians of his acquaintance (Ireland and her "legendary past" had already been hymned by Moore). Still, by no means all of the *Melodies* relate to the Jewish community, and some have nothing to do with Jewish problems or issues at

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3: Smiles I 351.

4: BLJ V 69.

all. Some are not even songs: two of them surface later as the opening to *Parisina*. *Hebrew Melodies* is of all Byron's books of verse the one with the most misleading title (apart from *The Bride of Abydos*, which is totally misleading).<sup>5</sup> Of the thirty poems it usually contains (thirty-one in the edition below) thirteen have nothing to do with Judaism except insofar as Judaism deals with universal themes; and the reason why we shall probably wait for ever for the CD is because Nathan's settings are so tame, sub-Handelian, and non-Hebraic. "Wildness and pathos" are a long way off. Only seven of them have been identified as having Jewish music in them. They are: *She Walks in Beauty*, *Oh! Snatched Away in Beauty's Bloom*, *The Harp the Monarch Minstrel Swept*, *My Soul is Dark*, *Jephtha's Daughter*, *On Jordan's Banks*, *Thy Days are Done*. *Oh! Weep for Those* and *The Wild Gazelle* are English folk song adapted into the cantorian tradition.

Nathan republished the *Melodies* – without music – in his 1829 book *Fugitive Pieces*, adding notes and reminiscences, in 1829, by which time he had set twenty more Byron lyrics. I have included some of his more interesting anecdotes.

The theme of military defeat and political humiliation, which we can see in the collection's recurrent figures of Saul and Belshazzar, reflects Byron's interest in Napoleon, whose career, during the period of the poems' writing, was going through what seemed its final, disastrous stage. He was on Elba at the start of the period, and didn't make his dramatic "escape" until after the poems were about to be published (see letter in Appendix 1 from Kinnaid, dated March 10th 1815).

Accidentals and some readings for the texts here are taken from the drafts and fair copies in the Bodleian Library for the following poems: *Magdalen*; *Oh Snatched away in Beauty's Bloom*; *Saul*; *Song of Saul before his Last Battle*; *All is Vanity*; *When Coldness Wraps*; *Sun of the Sleepless*; *Were my bosom as false*; *Herod's Lament for Mariamne*; *On the Day of the Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus*; *By the Rivers of Babylon*; *In the Valley of Waters*; and *The Destruction of Sennacherib*

from Augusta's commonplace book in the B.L. (Add. Mss. 58802) for the following poems: *The Harp The Monarch Minstrel Swept*, *I Saw Thee Weep*, *If That High World Which Lies Beyond*, *It is the Hour When From the Boughs*, *Thy Days are Done*, and *She Walks in Beauty*

from Byron's draft, in the BM, of *On Jordan's Banks The Arabs' Camels Stray*

from various Mss in the John Murray Archive for the following poems: *The Wild Gazelle*, *The Harp the Monarch Minstrel Swept*, *Oh Snatched Away in Beauty's Bloom*, *Saul*, *Song of Saul*, *All is Vanity*, *When Coldness Wraps this Suffering Clay*, *The Vision of Belshazzar*, *Were my Bosom as False*, *On the Day of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, *We sate down and Wept*, *The Rout [sic] of Sennacherib*, *From Job*, *Herod's Lament for Mariamne*, and *To Belshazzar*.

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5: There are no brides; it is not set in Abydos.

## HEBREW MELODIES

### Magdalen

The hour is come, of darkness and of Dread,  
That makes Earth shudder to receive the dead –  
When the first Martyr to his offered creed –  
The man of heaven – the Son of God must bleed!  
The hour is come of Salem's giant Sin – 5  
The doom is fixed – the bloody rites begin! –

There be loud cries on Sion's lofty place –  
And struggling crowds of Israel's swarthy race,  
Stamped on each brow an idiot hatred stood –  
In every eye an eagerness of blood – 10  
Each scornful lip betrayed its wayward thirst  
Of ill – and, cursing him became accurst –

Wroth without cause – revenged without a wrong –  
Tribes of self-sentence! ye shall suffer long,  
Through dark Milleniums of exiled grief – 15  
The outcast slaves of sightless unbelief! –  
Stung by all torture, buffeted and sold,  
Racked by an idle lust of useless gold –

Scourged, scorned, unloved, a name for every race  
To spit upon – the chosen of disgrace – 20  
A people nationless, whom every land  
Receives to punish, and preserves to brand –  
Yet still enduring all – and all in vain –  
The doomed inheritors of scorn and pain –  
Untaught by sufferance – unreclaimed from ill – 25  
Hating and hated – stubborn Israel still! –

Written spring 1814. Not set by Nathan (probably never seen by Nathan), and never collected with the rest of *Hebrew Melodies*, perhaps because of its uncompromising quality, this poem seems, however, to belong with them. It was first published in *Murray's Magazine* as late as 1887.

## She Walks in Beauty

1.

She walks in Beauty, like the Night  
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;  
And all that's best of dark and bright  
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;  
Thus mellowed to the tender light 5  
Which Heaven to gaudy day denies –

2.

One shade the more – one ray the less  
Had half impaired the nameless grace  
Which waves in every raven tress  
Or softly lightens o'er her face 10  
Where thoughts serenely sweet express  
How pure – how dear their dwelling place!

3.

And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,  
So soft – so calm – yet eloquent,  
The smiles that win, the tints that glow, 15  
But tell of days in goodness spent –  
A mind at peace with all below –  
A Heart – whose love is innocent!

Not on a theme exclusively Jewish. The poem is said to have been written on June 12th 1814, inspired by Mrs Wilmot Horton, wife to B.'s cousin Wilmot Horton, later to side with Annabella during the separation and to become one of his enemies, being one of the two Memoir-burners in 1824. James Wedderburn Webster wrote:

I *did* take him to Lady Sitwell's Party in Seymour road. He there for the first time saw his cousin, the beautiful Mrs. Wilmot. When we returned to his rooms in the Albany, he said little, but desired Fletcher to give him a *tumbler of brandy*, which he drank at once to Mrs. Wilmot's health, then retired to rest, and was, I heard afterwards, in a sad state all night. The next day he wrote those charming lines upon her – She walks ...

Nathan thought the lines were about Augusta, whose fair copy is the only Ms. She entitles it "Lines written by Lord Byron after seeing M<sup>rs</sup> Wilmot at Lansdowne House." Nathan wrote:

When arranging the first edition of the Hebrew Melodies, it was remarked that his Lordship generally requested to hear this melody sung, and would not unfrequently join in its execution. There was a melancholy expression hanging over his countenance on these occasions, which would induce a belief that there was somewhat more of reality connected with the feelings that the lines expressed, than the mere imagination of the poet (*Fugitive Pieces*, pp. 1-2).

Nathan's heavily-decorated and repetitive setting uses a tune called *Lakha* (or *Lekha*) *dodi*, of doubtful antiquity. He and his family made their Australian debut with his trio arrangement, at the Caledonian Hotel, Melbourne, on February 18th 1841.

## Oh! Snatched Away in Beauty's Bloom

1.

Oh! snatched away in Beauty's bloom –  
On thee shall press no ponderous tomb;  
But o'er thy turf shall Roses rear  
Their leaves, the earliest of the year;  
And the wild Cypress wave in tender gloom – 5

2.

And oft by yon blue-gushing stream  
Shall Sorrow lean her drooping head,  
And feed deep thought with many a dream  
And lingering pause, and lightly tread;  
Fond wretch! as if her step disturbed the dead. – 10

3.

Away! we know that tears are vain,  
That death nor heeds nor hears distress –  
Will this unteach us to complain?  
Or make one mourner weep the less?  
And *thou* – who tell'st me to forget,  
Thy looks are wan, thine eyes are wet. – 15

Not on a theme exclusively Jewish; perhaps a lament for John Edlestone (see next poem); Byron would not tell Nathan for whom it was written, but said, "She is no more" (*Fugitive Pieces*, p. 30).

Lady Byron writes on her fair copy of this poem, "Given me at Seaham before my Marriage."

Nathan's setting resembles an *Eli tziyan*. The setting of *wave* at line 5 has to be heard to be believed. The repetition of ... *as if the step disturbed the dead* at line 10 is spooky. There is a long *larghetto* coda for the piano solo.

## Bright be the Place of Thy Soul!

1.

Bright be the place of thy soul!  
No lovelier spirit than thine  
E'er burst from its mortal controul,  
In the orbs of the blessed to shine.  
On earth thou wert all but divine, 5  
As thy soul shall immortally be;  
And our sorrow may cease to repine  
When we know that thy God is with thee.

2.

Light be the turf of thy tomb!  
May its verdure like emeralds be! 10  
There should not be shadow of gloom,  
In ought that reminds us of thee.  
Young flowers and an evergreen tree,  
May spring from the spot of thy rest.  
But nor Cypress nor Yew let us see, 15  
For why should we mourn for the blest?

Not on a theme exclusively Jewish. Fair-copied on the back of a lady's calling card. First published in *The Examiner*, June 11th 1815, and never collected by Nathan. The poem could be Byron's lament for John Edleston; though it can easily be imagined in the mind of Manfred as he thinks of Astarte – except that she has no tomb.





## I Saw Thee Weep

1.

I saw thee weep – the big bright tear  
Came o'er that eye of blue;  
And then methought it did appear  
A violet dropping dew –  
I saw thee smile – the sapphire's blaze 5  
Beside thee ceased to shine:  
It could not match the living rays  
That filled that glance of thine. –

2.

As clouds from yonder sun receive  
A deep and mellow dye, 10  
Which scarce the Shade of coming eve  
Can banish from the sky –  
Those smiles unto the moodiest mind  
Their own pure joy impart;  
Their sunshine leaves a glow behind 15  
That lightens o'er the heart.

Not on a theme exclusively Jewish. Set (as *Die Weinende*) by Schumann. Nathan writes:

Lord Byron often made a dissertation on the organ of sight, always eulogizing the characteristic expressions of the eye: ["in that organ,"] his Lordship frequently observed, ["are developed the inward feelings of the heart, and I put more faith in the language thus tacitly expressed, than in all the fallacious rules of Lavater, Gall, or Spurzheim["]] (*Fugitive Pieces*, p. 35).

## Oh! Weep for Those

1.

Oh! Weep for those that wept by Babel's stream,  
Whose shrines are desolate, whose land a dream;  
Weep for the harp of Judah's broken shell;  
Mourn – where their God hath dwelt, the Godless dwell!

2.

And where shall Israel lave her bleeding feet? 5  
And when shall Zion's songs again seem sweet?  
And Judah's melody once more rejoice  
The hearts that leaped before its heavenly voice?

3.

Tribes of the wandering foot and weary breast!  
How shall ye flee away and be at rest? 10  
The wild-dove hath her nest – the fox his cave –  
Mankind their Country – Israel but the grave.

A proto-Zionist poem. Referred to in a letter from Kinnaird to Byron, dated September 19th 1814 (see Appendix 1). The last two lines echo Matthew 8, 20: And Jesus saith unto him, the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. The poem is close to Moore's famous *The Harp that Once Through Tara's Halls*:

The harp that once through Tara's halls:  
The soul of music shed,  
Now hangs as mute on Tara's walls  
As if that soul were fled.  
So sleeps the pride of former days,  
So glory's thrill is o'er,  
And hearts, that once beat high for praise,  
Now feel that pulse no more.

No more to chiefs and ladies bright  
The harp of Tara swells;  
The chord alone, that breaks at night,  
Its tale of ruin tells.  
Thus Freedom now so seldom wakes,  
The only throb she gives  
Is when some heart indignant breaks,  
To show that still she lives.

Nathan's setting uses an effective, melancholy northern folk-song, adapted into the Passover service. He writes:

That a period of about 1800 years should have elapsed, and that these people should still preserve their religion, their laws, and their customs, in defiance of ecclesiastical and civil oppression, does indeed seem astonishing; but less so, when the effect of his Lordship's observation is sufficiently understood. On one occasion he remarked, "unfortunate men, surrounded by enemies among whom they are compelled to live; oppressed, scorned, and outcast: condemned as criminal, because they cannot succumb to their oppressors, nor see the justice of that religion which is perverted to their injury." The last line of these stanzas he sometimes repeated with a feeling of melancholy sincerity (*Fugitive Pieces*, pp. 24-5).

## From Job

A spirit passed before me! I beheld  
The face of Immortality unveiled –  
Deep sleep came down on every eye save mine –  
And there it stood – all formless – but divine!  
Along my bones the creeping flesh did quake,       5  
And, as my damp hair stiffened, thus it spake:

“Is man more just than God? Is man more pure  
Than He who deems even Seraphs insecure?  
Creatures of clay – vain dwellers in the dust –  
The moth survives you, and are ye more just?       10  
Things of a day! you wither ere the night,  
Heedless and blind to Wisdom’s wasted light!”

Biblical. Compare Job, 4, 13-21: Amid thoughts from visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face; the hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice: “Can mortal man be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error; how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth. Between morning and evening they are destroyed; they perish for ever without any regarding it. If their tent-cord is plucked up within them, do they not die, and that without wisdom?”

A rarity among Byron poems in that one of its drafts is in Moscow, at the Institute of Russian Literature, Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg.

## The Harp the Monarch Minstrel Swept

I.

The harp the Monarch Minstrel swept,  
The King of men – the loved of Heav'n,  
Which Music hallowed while she wept  
O'er tones her Heart of Hearts had giv'n –  
Redoubled be her Tears – its chords are riven. 5

2.

It softened Men of iron Mould,  
It gave them virtues not their own;  
No ear so dull, no Soul so cold,  
That felt not – fired not to the Tone,  
Till David's Lyre grew mightier than his Throne. 10

3.

It told the Triumphs of our King –  
It wafted Glory to our God –  
It made our gladdened valleys ring –  
The Cedars bow – the mountains nod –  
Its Sound aspired to Heaven and there abode! 15

4.

Since then – though heard on earth no more –  
Devotion and her daughter Love  
Still bid the bursting Spirit soar  
To sounds that seem as from above  
In dreams that day's broad light can not remove. – 20

Another poem with a proto-Zionist implication. "The Monarch Minstrel" is King David. The poem is perhaps suggested by – though it's quite different from – Moore's *The Harp that once through Tara's Halls*, from *Irish Melodies*. For the second line, compare:

The American Ambassador's wife asked Darby Smith whether she knew that "the lady on the sofa near you is Madame de Boissy, the Guiccioli of Lord Byron?" Darby Smith had not known, and asked to be presented. Her conversation opener was, "Madame, I am so happy to have the pleasure of meeting one whose friendship for Lord Byron has been so sincere. He was, I think, the king of poets." This was very well-calculated indeed, and the Marquise (the *ci-devant* Teresa Guiccioli) responded with, "He was the king of men." (taken from Smith, Mary R. Darby. *Recollections of Two Distinguished Persons: La Marquise de Boissy and the Count de Waldeck*. Philadelphia, 1878, 19-20). Teresa Guiccioli made copies of all the *Hebrew Melodies*.

Nathan's setting (in which he may have been assisted by Braham) employs the tune *Ya'aleh tahunen*, from the Eve of Yom Kippur. He writes:

The rapidity with which Lord Byron wrote must be sufficiently obvious from the number of his works, the best of which were generally the most hastily composed. The words of this melody have been greatly and deservedly admired; yet the circumstances that attended the composition of the latter lines may be interesting. When his Lordship put the copy into my hand, it terminated thus –

"Its sound aspired to Heaven, and there abode."

This, however, did not complete the verse, and I wished him to help out the melody. He replied, "Why I have sent you to Heaven – it would be difficult to go further." My attention for a few moments was called to some other person, and his Lordship, whom I had hardly missed, exclaimed – "Here, Nathan, I have brought you down again," and immediately presented me the beautiful and sublime lines which conclude the melody (*Fugitive Pieces*, pp. 32-3).

## The Wild Gazelle

1.

The wild Gazelle on Judah's hills,  
Exulting yet may bound,  
And drink from all the living rills  
That gush on holy ground –  
Its airy step and glorious eye 5  
May glance in tameless transport by. –

2.

A step as fleet, an eye more bright,  
Hath Judah witnessed there;  
And o'er her scenes of lost delight  
Inhabitants more fair. – 10  
The cedars wave on Lebanon,  
But Judah's statelier maids are gone.

3.

More blest each Palm that shades those plains  
Than Israel's scattered race;  
For taking root it there remains 15  
In solitary grace.  
It cannot quit its place of birth,  
It will not live in other earth –

4.

But we must wander witheringly,  
In other lands to die 20  
And where our fathers' ashes be,  
Our own may never lie,  
Our temple hath not left a stone.  
And Mockery sits on Salem's throne.

A proto-Zionist poem. Nathan, seemingly oblivious to such ideas, writes:

Lord Byron's fondness for animals, generally was conspicuous: he was in possession of some beautiful parrots, with which, during the intervals of his writing, he used commonly to amuse himself. He had rendered one of these so attached to him, that though entirely at war with strangers it evinced the greatest anxiety to be always with him. If his Lordship seemed to notice any person particularly, this bird would express its indignation and jealousy in the most alarming manner, and would immediately attack his Lordship, until he bestowed his caresses on it (*Fugitive Pieces*, p.18).

Nathan's setting uses an English folk-song melody, adapted to *Yig dal*. The piano does a lot of running and dancing, to mimic the gazelle. Nathan changes key and slows the tempo to *largetto* for the last (human) verse.

## My Soul is Dark

1.

My soul is dark – Oh! quickly string  
The harp I yet can brook to hear;  
And let thy gentle fingers fling  
Its melting murmurs o'er mine ear.  
If in this heart a hope be dear, 5  
That sound shall charm it forth again –  
If in these eyes there lurk a tear,  
'Twill flow – and cease to burn my brain –

2.

But bid the strain be wild and deep,  
Nor let thy notes of joy be first – 10  
I tell thee – Minstrel! I must weep,  
Or else this heavy heart will burst –  
For it hath been by sorrow nurst,  
And ached in sleepless silence long –  
And now 'tis doomed to know the worst, 15  
And break at once – or yield to song.

The poem is to be imagined as Saul speaking to David. See I Samuel 16, 23: And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him. The figures of Saul and Semnacherib are seen by Dante in the pavement of Mount Purgatory – see *Purgatorio*, XII, 40 and 53. Nathan writes:

It was generally conceived, that Lord Byron's reported singularities, approached on some occasions to derangement, and at one period indeed, it was very currently asserted, that his intellects were actually impaired. The report only served to amuse his Lordship. He referred to the circumstance, and declared, that he would try how a *Madman* could write; seizing the pen with eagerness, he for a moment fixed his eyes in majestic wildness on vacancy; when like a flash of inspiration, without erasing a single word, the above verses were the result, which he put into my possession with this remark: "if I am mad who write, be certain that you are so who compose!" There were occasions, nevertheless, on which his Lordship seemed grieved at the misrepresentations that were made of him: they were however transitory, and became afterwards the subject of his jocular and wit (*Fugitive Pieces*, p. 37).

Nathan uses another adaptation of the Passover tune, based on a folk-song, which he uses in *Oh! Weep for Those*.



When these beautiful lines were composed by Lord Byron, I was anxious to ascertain his real sentiments on the subject, hinting my own belief that it might not necessarily mean a positive sacrifice of the daughter's life, but perhaps referred to a sentence of perpetual seclusion, a state held by the Jews as dead indeed to society, and the most severe infliction that could be imposed. With his usual frankness, he observed, "Whatever may be the absolute state of the case, I am innocent of her blood; she has been killed to my hands; besides, you know *such an infliction*, as the world goes, would not be a subject for sentiment or pathos – therefore do not seek to exumate the lady" (*Fugitive Pieces*, pp. 10-11).

Dante thought that Jephtha should have seen the folly of his vow, and repented of it: see *Paradiso*, V, 66-7. Nathan's setting is a version of the *Shir Hashirim*, or Song of Songs. He gives "bosom" (line 4) three beats. The daughter sounds a little smug, as the text might suggest.



## Herod's Lament for Mariamne

1.

Oh Mariamne! now for thee  
The heart of which thou bled'st is bleeding;  
Revenge is lost in Agony,  
And wild Remorse to rage succeeding.  
Oh Mariamne! where art thou? 5  
Thou canst not hear my bitter pleading:  
Ah! could'st thou – thou would'st pardon now,  
Though Heaven were to my prayer unheeding.

2.

And is she dead? – and did they dare  
Obey my Phrenzy's jealous raving? 10  
My Wrath but doomed my own despair:  
The Sword that smote hers o'er me waving!  
But thou art cold, my murdered Love!  
And this black heart is vainly craving  
For her who soars alone above, 15  
And leaves my Soul unworthy saving.

3.

She's gone, who shared my diadem;  
She sunk, with her my joys entombing;  
I swept that flower from Judah's stem  
Whose leaves for me alone were blooming, 20  
And mine's the guilt, and mine the hell,  
This bosom's desolation dooming;  
And I have earned those tortures well,  
Which unconsumed are still consuming! –

Fair copy annotated by Lady Byron 'Jan. 13. 1815.' Mariamne was the wife of the much-vilified Herod the Great, he of the alleged Massacre of the Innocents. He had – so goes the legend – killed most of her family, and finally, convinced of her infidelity, had her murdered too. He was forever after haunted by the remembrance of his deed. Like Saul and Napoleon, Herod is a man with much on his mind. He resembles Henry II after the murder of Becket, Henry IV after the murder of Richard II, or even Macbeth after the murder of Duncan: except that none of them have killed their wives; Byron may intend a reference to George IV and Queen Caroline, a much duller coupling. Nathan writes:

At the time his Lordship was writing for me the poetry for these melodies, he felt anxious to facilitate my views in preserving as much as possible the original airs, for which purpose he would frequently consult me regarding the style and metre of his stanzas. I accordingly desired to be favoured with so many lines pathetic, some playful, others martial, &c. One evening, when his Lordship was obligingly submitting to my wishes in that respect, I unfortunately (while absorbed for a moment in worldly affairs) requested so many *dull* lines – meaning *plaintive*. His Lordship, observing that I was wrapt up in deep meditation, and understanding my real meaning, instantly caught at the expression, which so much tickled his fancy, that he was convulsed with laughter, and exclaimed, "Well, Nathan! You have at length set me an easy task." This afforded him amusement for the rest of the evening, and observing my confusion whenever his eye met mine, he would occasionally make some witty allusion to the *dull* lines, until I enjoyed the joke equally with himself. The result, however, proved very fortunate for me, for we parted he presented me these beautifully pathetic lines, saying, "Here, Nathan, I think you will find them *dull* enough (*Fugitive Pieces*, p. 51).

## We Sate Down and Wept By the Waters of Babel

“By the Rivers of Babylon we sate down and wept.”

1.

We sate down and wept by the waters  
Of Babel, and thought of the day  
When our foe, in the hue of his slaughters,  
Made Salem's high places his prey;  
And Ye! oh her desolate daughters! 5  
Were scattered all weeping away. –

2.

While sadly we gazed on the river  
Which rolled on in freedom below,  
They demanded the Song – but – Oh – never  
That triumph the Stranger shall know! – 10  
May this right hand be withered forever,  
Ere it string our high harp for the Foe! –

3.

On the willow that harp is suspended –  
Oh Salem! its sound should be free –  
And the hour when thy glories were ended 15  
But left me that token of thee –  
And ne'er shall its soft tones be blended  
With the voice of the Spoiler by me! –

Fair copy annotated by Lady Byron, ‘Jan. 15. / 1815. Hahnaby.’ Nathan sets it as a tenor / soprano duet.

Byron writes on the fair copy, “Dear Kinnaird / Take only *one* of these marked <no> 1 & 2 – as both are but different versions of the same *thought* – leave the choice to any competent person you like / yours / B –

A proto-Zionist poem. The theme is popular, and is the subject of the Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves in Verdi's *Nabucco*. Nathan writes that

Lord Byron observed, on my singing this melody, “Why, Nathan, you enter spiritedly into the oriental feeling; recollect, however, that although you *captivate*, you are no *captive*; and with all due submission to the Babylonians, I think their levity was ill-timed in trying to extort mirth from sorrow (*Fugitive Pieces*, p. 45).



## On the Day of the Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus

1.

From the last hill that looks on thy once holy dome,  
I beheld thee, Oh Sion! when rendered to Rome –  
'Twas thy last sun went down – and the flames of thy fall  
Flashed back on the last glance I gave to thy wall.

2.

I looked for thy temple – I looked for my home – 5  
And forgot for a moment my bondage to come;  
I beheld but the death-fires that fed on thy fane,  
And the fast-fettered hands that made vengeance in vain.

3.

Oh many an eve, the high spot whence I gazed 10  
Had reflected the last beam of day as it blazed;  
While I stood on the height, and beheld the decline  
Of the rays from the mountain that shone o'er thy shrine.

4.

And now on that mountain I stood on that day,  
But I marked not the twilight beam melting away;  
Oh! would that the Lightning had glared in its stead, 15  
And the thunderbolt burst on the Conqueror's head.

5.

But the Gods of the Pagan shall never profane  
The shrine where Jehovah disdained not to reign –  
And scattered and scorned as thy people may be,  
Our worship – oh Father! is only for thee! – 20

A proto-Zionist poem with Napoleonic overtones, suggested by Moore's *Tho' the last glimpse of Erin with Sorrow I See* from *Irish Melodies*. Annotated by Lady Byron, 'Halnaby. / Jan 15. 1815.' The Emperor Titus (39-81 A.D.) was the son of Vespasian and the brother of Domitian. His magnanimity is the subject of Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito*; but he is most famous for his attack on Jerusalem, and destruction of the Temple, in 70 A.D., a cataclysmic event, which led to the Diaspora. Nathan writes:

In the composition of the foregoing stanzas, he [Byron] professed to me, that he had always considered the fall of Jerusalem, as the most remarkable event of all history; "for," (in his own words) "who can behold the entire destruction of that mighty pile; the desolate wanderings of its inhabitants, and compare these positive occurrences with the distant prophecies which foreran them, and be an infidel?" (*Fugitive Pieces*, p. 61).

## Saul

### 1.

Thou – whose spell can raise the dead –  
Bid the Prophet's form appear.  
“Samuel, raise thy buried head! –  
King, behold the phantom Seer!”

Earth yawned; he stood the centre of a cloud: 5  
Light changed its hue, retiring from his shroud.  
Death stood all glassy in his fixed eye:  
His hand was withered, and his veins were dry;  
His foot, in boney whiteness, glittered there,  
Shrunken and sinewless, and ghastly bare; 10  
From lips that moved not and unbreathing frame,  
Like caverned winds, the hollow accents came –  
Saul saw, and fell to earth, as falls the oak,  
At once, and blasted by the thunder-stroke.

### 2.

“Why is my sleep disquieted? 15  
Who is he that calls the dead?  
Is it thou, Oh King? behold  
Bloodless are these limbs and cold;  
Such are mine, and such shall be  
Thine, tomorrow, when with me – 20  
Ere the coming day is done  
Such shalt thou be – such thy son.  
Fare thee well, but for a day,  
Then we mix our mouldering clay.  
Thou – thy race – lie pale and low, 25  
Pierced by shafts of many a bow;  
And the falchion by thy side  
To thy heart thy hand shall guide –  
Crownless – breathless – headless fall –  
Son and Sire – the house of Saul!” 30

The story of Saul and the Witch of Endor is told in I Samuel, 7-20, and another text is set by Purcell in his anthem *In Guilty Night*. See the lines about Milton at *Don Juan*, Dedication, 1-4:

Think'st thou, could he, the blind Old Man, arise  
Like Samuel from the Grave, to freeze once more  
The blood of Monarchs with his Prophecies ...

Byron starts *in medias res*: And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.

And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee. And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?

And Saul sware to her by the LORD, saying, As the LORD liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing. Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel. And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul. And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh

up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.

And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.

Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And the LORD hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David: Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.

Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel: and there was no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night.

There is a vague anticipation in the poem of Manfred summoning-up the Witch of the Alps, or Arimanes summoning the Spirit of Astarte. Nathan writes of the poem:

I felt a difficulty in the composition, because I saw the height of beauty his [Byron's] lines had reached, and I trembled lest he had soared too high for my imagination's accompaniment: it was therefore with some apprehension I rehearsed the composition to him, and I scarcely need add what delight I felt in discovering his Lordship's enthusiasm in the repetition of his own writing "Why is my sleep so disquieted, &c." continued after its performance, and he declared that the passage would haunt him. With perfect good humour he assured me the next morning, that he had greeted some early intruder with what he could recollect of that passage. It is hoped I shall be pardoned when I confess that my *vanity* was highly gratified at this declaration, but my *curiosity*, to know who the unwelcome intruder was, predominated: his Lordship, however, anticipating my desire on that subject, exclaimed, "Come, Nathan, do not imagine that I have been honoured by an interview with Lady Endor, or with Samuel's vision – the intruder that greeted me was no hobgoblin I assure you, it was only Douglas Kinnaird (*Fugitive Pieces*, pp. 54-5).

This lyric tests Nathan's limits, as the anecdote implies. The trio version has a few ghostly harmonies, but his idiom is not able to encompass the supernatural nature – the "wildness and pathos" – of the scene. Samuel's spirit sings with hollow conviction.

## Song of Saul, before his last Battle

1.

Warriors and Chiefs! should the shaft or the Sword  
Pierce me in leading the host of the Lord,  
Heed not the corse, though a King's, in your path:  
Bury your steel in the bosoms of Gath! –

2.

Thou! who art bearing my buckler and bow, 5  
Should the soldiers of Saul look away from the foe,  
Stretch me that moment in blood at thy feet!  
Mine be the doom which they dared not to meet.

3.

Farewell to others – but never we part,  
Heir to my Royalty – Son of my heart! – 10  
Bright is the diadem, boundless the Sway,  
Or kingly the death, which awaits us to-day. –

Fair copy annotated by Lady Byron, 'Seaham 1815'. This poem is set (in translation) by Mussorgsky as ?????  
????? ????? ?????. It would have clear Napoleonic overtones, if only Napoleon had fallen in battle. Nathan reports  
Byron saying:

“That man is not to be utterly despised as a coward whom supernatural evils have worn down; nor is it difficult to account for the subsequent weakness of Saul, who was once gloriously surrounded by strength, power, and the approbation of his God, when we perceive that he had sunk from this, to a reliance on his own exertions even for safety. The confidence he possesses; the power he beholds, was all blighted ere he sunk to pusillanimity; in spite of which, I cannot but uphold him originally a brave and estimable man. That he cherished the man fated to destroy him, was more his misfortune than his fault” (*Fugitive Pieces*, pp. 42-3).

Byron's text is I Samuel 31: Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchishua, Saul's sons.

And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. Then said Saul unto his armour-bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armour-bearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.

And when his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men, that same day together. And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them.

And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan. And when the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

## Vision of Belshazzar

1.

The King was on his throne,  
The Satraps thronged the hall;  
A thousand bright lamps shone  
O'er that high festival.  
A thousand cups of gold, 5  
In Judah deemed divine –  
Jehovah's vessels hold  
The godless Heathen's wine!

2.

In that same hour and hall,  
The fingers of a hand 10  
Came forth against the wall,  
And wrote as if on sand:  
The fingers of a man; –  
A solitary hand  
Along the letters ran, 15  
And traced them like a wand. –

3.

The Monarch saw, and shook,  
And bade no more rejoice;  
All bloodless waxed his look,  
And tremulous his voice. 20  
“Let the men of lore appear,  
The wisest of the Earth,  
And expound the words of fear,  
Which mar our royal mirth.”

4.

Chaldea's seers are good, 25  
But here they have no skill –  
And the unknown letters stood  
Untold and awful still. –  
And Babel's men of age  
Are wise and deep in lore; 30  
But now they were not sage,  
They saw – but knew no more.

5.

A captive in the land,  
A stranger and a youth,  
He heard the King's command, 35  
He saw that writing's truth.  
The lamps around were bright,  
The prophecy in view;  
He read it on that night, –  
The morrow proved it true. – 40

6.

“Belshazzar's grave is made –  
His kingdom passed away –  
He, in the balance weighed,

Is light and worthless clay.  
 The shroud, his robe of state, 45  
 His canopy, the Stone;  
 The Mede is at his gate!  
 The Persian on his Throne!"

The most famous musical celebration of this event is the oratorio by William Walton; Nathan's tame and monotonous setting does nothing for the drama of the tale, enormously long runs on "on" and "his" in the last line notwithstanding.

This poem has a clear Napoleonic theme; though it could equally well be addressed to the fun-loving George IV (see next poem). Belshazzar was the son of Nebuchadnezzar, and the last king of Babylon. Byron makes the prophet Daniel a "youth," as does not seem the case with the original. Unlike Saul or Herod, whose sins are mortal, Belshazzar's lies in profaning the sacred vessels of the Jews – though this is heinous enough in the context of *Hebrew Melodies*. Byron refers to the same event at *Don Juan III* stanza 65:

These Oriental Writings on the Wall,  
 Quite common in those Countries, are a kind  
 Of Monitors adapted to recall,  
 Like Skulls at Memphian banquets, to the Mind  
 The words which shook Belshazzar in his Hall,  
 And took his kingdom from him: You will find,  
 Though Sages may pour out their Wisdom's treasure,  
 There is no sterner Moralist than Pleasure. – –

The story of Belshazzar's Feast takes up all of Daniel 5: Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished. Now the queen by reason of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation.

Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing: And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom.

Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was

driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

## To Belshazzar

1.

Belshazzar! From the banquet turn,  
Nor in thy sensual fullness fall;  
Behold! While yet before thee burn  
The graven words, the glowing wall.  
Many a despot men miscall 5  
Crowned and anointed from on high.  
But thou, the weakest, worst of all –  
Is it not written, thou must die?

2.

Go! dash the roses from thy brow –  
Gray hairs but poorly wreath with them; 10  
Youth's garlands misbecome thee now,  
More than thy very diadem,  
Where thou hast tarnished every gem –  
Then throw the worthless bauble by,  
Which, worn by thee, ev'n slaves contemn; 15  
And learn like better men to die!

3.

Oh! early in the balance weighed,  
And ever light of word and worth,  
Whose Soul expired ere Youth decayed,  
And left thee but a mass of earth. 20  
To see thee moves the scorner's mirth:  
But tears in Hope's averted eye  
Lament that ever thou hadst birth –  
Unfit to govern – live – or die. –

Murray did not publish this poem in 1815, for fear of offending the Tory establishment he served, and offending the Prince Regent, to whom the lines apply: compare *Don Juan* X, stanzas 86-7, lines adjuring Elizabeth Fry to talk to the residents of Carlton House:

Teach them the decencies of good threescore;  
Cure them of tours, hussar and highland dresses;  
Tell them that Youth once gone returns no more,  
That hired huzzas redeem no land's distresses;  
Tell them Sir William Curtis is a bore,  
Too dull even for the dullest of excesses,  
The witless Falstaff of a hoary Hal,  
A Fool whose bells have ceased to ring at all;

Tell them, though it may be perhaps too late  
On Life's worn confine, jaded, bloated, sated,  
To set up vain pretences of being great -  
Tis not so to be Good; and be it stated  
The worthiest kings have ever loved least State ...

*To Belshazzar* was first published in the Moore / Wright edition of 1831.

## The Destruction of Sennacherib

1.

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,  
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;  
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,  
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee. –

2.

Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,                   5  
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;  
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,  
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

3.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,  
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;                   10  
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,  
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still. –

4.

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,  
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;  
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,                   15  
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

5.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,  
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:  
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,  
The lances unlifted, the trumpets unblown. –                   20

6.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,  
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;  
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,  
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord! –

A Biblical poem with clear Napoleonic overtones; because of its paradoxical delight in violence, the most-taught in English school of all the *Hebrew Melodies*. Fair copy annotated by Lady Byron 'Seaham – Feb. 12. 1815.' The fair copy at JMA is entitled *The Rout of Sennacherib*.

The figures of Saul and Sennacherib are seen by Dante in the pavement of Mount Purgatory – see *Purgatorio*, XII, 40 and 53. The story is at 2 Kings 19, 32-7: Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.

See also Isaiah 37, 32-8: For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and

smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Armenia: and Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.

It seems likely that Nathan wrote the melody to this song, and Braham the accompaniment, which has dramatic flourishes and rumbles as if to compensate for the paucity of Nathan's melodic invention. "Snow" (last line) is given an extravagant flourish.



## When Coldness Wraps This Suffering Clay

1.

When Coldness wraps this suffering clay,  
Ah! whither strays the immortal mind? –  
It cannot die – it cannot stay,  
But leaves its darkened dust behind –  
Then, unembodied, doth it trace 5  
By steps each planet's heavenly way? –  
Or fill at once the realms of space,  
A thing of eyes – that all survey?

2.

Eternal – boundless – undecayed –  
A thought unseen, but seeing all, 10  
All, all in earth or skies displayed,  
Shall it survey, shall it recall –  
Each fainter trace that Memory holds  
So darkly of departed years,  
In one broad glance the Soul beholds, 15  
And all, that was, at once appears. –

3.

Before Creation peopled earth,  
Its eye shall roll through chaos back;  
And where the furthest heaven had birth,  
The Spirit trace its rising track – 20  
And where the Future mars or makes,  
Its glance dilate o'er all to be,  
While Sun is quenched – or System breaks –  
Fixed in its own Eternity. –

4.

Above or Love – Hope – Hate – or Fear – 25  
It lives all passionless and pure;  
An Age shall fleet like earthly year,  
Its years as moments shall endure.  
Away – away – without a wing,  
O'er all, through all, its thoughts shall fly; 30  
A nameless and eternal thing,  
Forgetting what it was to die. – – – –

Fair copy annotated by Lady Byron, 'Seaham. Feb. 1815'. Not on a theme exclusively Jewish. The lyric seems a companion-piece to *If that High World*.

## If That High World

### I.

If that high world, which lies beyond  
Our own, surviving love endears;  
If there the cherished heart be fond,  
The eye the same – except in tears –  
How welcome those untrodden spheres! 5  
How sweet this very hour to die!  
To soar from earth, and find all fears  
Lost in thy light – eternity.

### 2.

It must be so – 'tis not for self  
That we so tremble on the brink, 10  
And striving to o'erleap the gulph  
Yet cling to Being's breaking link:  
Oh! in that future let us think  
To hold each heart the heart that shares,  
With them the immortal waters drink 15  
And soul in soul grow deathless theirs!

Not on a theme exclusively Jewish. The lyric – which does not seem well-suited to song – seems a meditation suggested by Dante's *Paradiso*. It seems a companion-piece to *When Coldness Wraps this Suffering Clay*. Nathan writes:

On the occasion of his presenting me with these verses, I could not refrain from remarking that that the monosyllable (if) with which it commenced, would doubtless form the ground of very grave condemnation. He smiled, and observed, that there were two distinct classes of readers, especially of poetry: the one could understand and appreciate the feelings of a writer, without making every imaginative thought the foundation of a judgment on his principles; the other could neither understand nor judge of any thing save matter of fact – line and rule critics – with whom he had never had any ambition to become a favourite (*Fugitive Pieces*, p.5).

“It must be so” anticipates Beethoven's exclamation “Es muss sein” in the score of the String Quartet in F Major, Opus 135, epigraph to the fourth movement (1826). “Es muss sein” was one of Beethoven's favourite phrases (quoted in *The Letters of Beethoven*, III no. 1318, ed. Emily Anderson, 1961). Beethoven refers once to Byron, in a letter to A.M.Schlesinger of March 7th 1821 (*Letters*, II 915). He couples Byron with Scott, as writers he may set. No reading of Byron can be inferred.

Augusta's fair copy is the only ms. Nathan uses a tune sung to Kaddish after the reading of the law.

## “All is Vanity, Saith the Preacher”

1.

Fame, wisdom, love, and power were mine,  
And Health and Youth possessed me;  
My Goblets blushed from every vine,  
And lovely forms caressed me;  
I sunned my heart in Beauty’s eyes, 5  
And felt my soul grow tender;  
All Earth can give, or Mortals prize,  
Was mine of regal Splendour. –

2.

I strive to number o’er what days  
Remembrance can discover, 10  
Which all that Life or Earth displays  
Would lure me to live over.  
There rose no day, there rolled no hour  
Of pleasure unembittered:  
And not a trapping decked my Power 15  
That galled not while it glittered. –

3.

The serpent of the field, by art  
And spells, is won from harming;  
But that which coils around the heart,  
Oh! who hath power of charming? – 20

It will not list to Wisdom’s lore,  
Nor Music’s voice can lure it;  
But there it stings for evermore  
The soul that must endure it. –

Not on a theme exclusively Jewish. A variant of the title-phrase occurs five times in Ecclesiastes: at 1, 2; 1, 14; 2, 17; 3, 19; and at 12, 8: Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. Byron returns to the theme at *Don Juan*, VII, stanza 6:

Ecclesiastes said that all is Vanity –  
Most modern Preachers say the same, or show it  
By their examples of true Christianity;  
In short, all know, or very soon may know it;  
And in this Scene of all-confessed Inanity,  
By Saint, by Sage, by Preacher, and by Poet,  
Must I restrain me, through the fear of Strife,  
From holding up the Nothingness of Life? –

## On Jordan's Banks

1.

On Jordan's banks the Arab's camels stray,  
On Sion's hill the False One's votaries pray,  
The Baal-adorer bows on Sinai's steep –  
Yet there – even there – Oh God! thy thunders sleep.

2.

There – where thy finger scorched the tablet stone!           5  
There – where thy Shadow to thy people shone!  
Thy Glory shrouded in its garb of fire:  
Thyself – none living see and not expire!

3.

Oh! in the lightning – let thy glance appear!  
Sweep from his shivered hand the oppressor's spear:           10  
How long by tyrants shall thy land be trod?  
How long thy temple worshipless, Oh God?

A proto-Zionist poem with Napoleonic overtones; though the idea of Bonaparte as Jehovah guiding Israel to the Promised Land is a bit extreme. About the penultimate line, Nathan writes:

“How long by tyrants,” &c. On these lines he [Byron] remarked that it seemed as though an irrevocable malediction had been passed on the enslaved regions of Judah; yet had the crusades been now projected, he knew not that he would be able to refrain from joining in an effort which, though perverted, was in itself calculated to enlighten the wretched slaves of the east. His Lordship's subsequent conduct, in joining the standard of independence in Greece, has sufficiently evinced the ardent love of liberty which influenced all his actions (*Fugitive Pieces*, p. 28).

Nathan's setting is an adaptation of the *Ma'oz tzur*, a martial-sounding Chanukah tune, marked *animato*, based on a thirteenth-century German hymn. There is an awkward repetition of *the oppressor's* at line 10.

## Thy Days Are Done

1.

Thy days are done – thy fame begun –  
Thy Country's strains record  
The triumphs of her chosen Son –  
The slaughter of his sword –  
The deeds he did – the fields he won – 5  
The freedom he restored! –

2.

Though thou art fall'n, while we are free  
Thou shalt not taste of death –  
The generous blood that flowed from thee  
Disdained to sink beneath: 10  
Within our veins its currents be –  
Thy spirit on our breath!

3.

Thy name – our charging hosts along  
Shall be the battle-word –  
Thy fall the theme of choral song 15  
From virgin voices poured!  
To weep – would do thy glory wrong;  
Thou shalt not be deplored!

Not on a theme exclusively Jewish, though see 2 Samuel, 1, 19-27: And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son: (Also he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher.) The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

This poem may be another version of B.'s lines *On the Death of Sir Peter Parker* (see BLJ IV 197-8); though it can also be interpreted as a lament for the fall of Napoleon, although, again, Bonaparte defeated Byron's expectation by not dying in battle (though he did attempt suicide, a fact of which Byron remained ignorant). Nathan writes, most pertinently:

Lord Byron remarked, "that had Napoleon died in the field at Waterloo, his end would have been more in unison with his former intrepid career." I submitted that in taking into consideration the ambition of Napoleon, his future views in preserving life, may have been the possibility of being one day restored to the throne of France, and of securing to his son, a lineal succession.

"Nathan," returned his Lordship, you seem anxious to support the credit of a great man, but I must repeat, that Napoleon would have ranked higher in future history, had he even like your venerable ancestor Saul, on Mount Gilboa, or like a second Cato, fallen on his sword, and finished his mortal career at Waterloo."

His Lordship here gave me a significant look as if reading my abhorrence of any thing like self destruction, and said, "bear in mind, Nathan, that I do not, by this remark, wish by any means to become the patron of suicide" (*Fugitive Pieces*, p. 40).

Nathan's setting resembles an old Missinai tune of the High Holidays. Augusta's fair copy is the only Ms.

### **It Is the Hour**

It is the hour when from the boughs  
    The Nightingale's high note is heard –  
It is the hour – when lovers' vows  
    Seem sweet in every whispered word –  
And gentle winds and waters near                     5  
Make music to the lonely ear.  
Each flower the dews have lightly wet,  
And in the sky the Stars are met:  
And on the wave is deeper blue,  
And on the leaf a browner hue;                     10  
And in the Heaven that clear obscure,  
So softly dark – and darkly pure,  
That follows the decline of day  
As twilight melts beneath the moon away. –

Not on a Jewish theme at all. Augusta's fair copy is the only Ms. The passage is in fact the opening of *Parisina*, published with *The Siege of Corinth*, February 13th 1816.

## Francisca

Francisca walks in the shadow of night,  
But it is not to gaze on the heavenly light –  
But if she sits in her garden bower,  
'Tis not for the sake of its blowing flower.  
She listens – but not for the nightingale,                   5  
Though her ear expects as soft a tale.  
There winds a step through the foliage thick,  
And her cheek grows pale – and her heart beats quick.  
There whispers a voice thro' the rustling leaves,  
And her blush returns – and her bosom heaves.                   10  
A moment more – and they shall meet –  
'Tis past – her Lover's at her feet.

Not on a Jewish theme at all. The passage, with a name-change, becomes lines 15-28 of *Parisina*. It is one of the sexiest pieces of poetry Byron ever wrote. Francesca (not Francisca) is the heroine of *The Siege of Corinth*, in which, however, she appears only as a ghost.

Nathan was probably assisted in the setting by Braham; but even between them they are unable to express the eroticism of Byron's text.

## APPENDIX 1: The genesis of *Hebrew Melodies*

Byron's tastes in music were unsophisticated. As a note to stanza 45 of *Don Juan* XVI, he appends the following:

I remember that the Mayoress of a provincial town, somewhat surfeited with a similar display from foreign parts, did rather indecorously break through the applause of an intelligent audience – intelligent, I mean, as to the Music – for the words besides being in recondite languages (it was some years before the peace – ere all the World had travelled – and while I was a Collegian) were sorely disguised by the performers – this Mayoress, I say, broke out with, “Rot your Italianos! For my part I loves a simple Ballat!” Rossini will go a good way to bring most people to the same Opinion – some day. Who would imagine that he was to be the Successor of Mozart? However – I state this with diffidence, as a liege and loyal admirer of Italian Music in general, and of much of Rossini's, but we may say, as the Connoisseur did of Painting in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, “that the picture would be better painted if the painter had taken more pains.”

Byron seems to empathise with the Lady Mayoress's musical taste. Teresa Guiccioli records:

Those evening conversations changed their style according to circumstances and the people who were present. Lord Byron's Journal shows that music played a large part in them. A feature common to all his predilections was his constancy. He liked what he did like because he had done so before. Music, for him, had an ample share in that pleasing attitude of mind. The Countess was aware of this, and when she noticed that he was somewhat thoughtful she would fling open her piano and play him the homely melodies he was fond of—which led him to state that he cared for no music save that which she made for him. If, on occasion, she added variations to the theme, Lord Byron would ask her once more for the *plain tune*.

“... Music—Tyrolese air, with variations,” he wrote on the tenth of January [1821]. “Sustained the cause of the original simple air against the variations of the Italian school.”<sup>6</sup>

Douglas Kinnaird, on the other hand, was an excellent amateur singer, with a successful professional singer – Maria Keppel – as his mistress; so that when he wrote Byron the following letter on September 15th 1813, Byron would have been impressed:

Dear Byron,

Your grim white woman [*Mrs Mule, his housekeeper*] gives me no hope of finding you in Town for some time, I am reduced therefore to the necessity of recording a piece of indiscretion which I am only anxious you should not consider as quite unpardonable. – It is no less than to endeavour to put your poetical talent in requisition for the benefit of a composer of Music, whose very singular merits, both as a composer and a man, have interested me on his behalf. – He is about to publish some Hebrew Melodies as they are call'd. They are the very identical religious airs sung by the Jews, 'ere our blessed Lord & Saviour came into the world to be the cause of the persecution of these bearded men. – He very properly concludes that, if you would give him a few lines (if only for one air) the sale of his work would be Secur'd and his pocket enrich'd –

The music is beautiful certainly – and I shall be greatly gratified if your determination shall be in favour of the Petitioner. He already set to a very beautiful piece of composition those six lines in Lara beginning with “Night Wanes” – The Music is in Handel's style, & I am much mistaken if all the musical world do not 'ere long mouth your lines after their usual fashions. –<sup>7</sup>

Byron was in fact so impressed that he agreed to the project at once, indifferent to the question, is it possible for music which dates from before Christ to sound like Handel? Kinnaird wrote to him again, just four days later:

My dear Byron,

You desire me to acknowledge the safe arrival of your letters at your rooms in Albany; but I am too impatient to thank you, not to give myself a chance of saying to you what I feel, before you leave Newstead ...

The benefit conferr'd on my protégé is really an important one; & that thought makes me still more thankful to you. – It is a great satisfaction to me to be able to assure you, that your kindness & Poetry will be conferr'd on both worth & talent. – And, that he has met with misfortunes in his career, will I am sure be no ill recommendation to your notice. –

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6: *Vie*, 4,529-30.

7: All letters from Kinnaird to Byron are from the John Murray Archive.

Be assur'd that your lines shall be made use of with discretion. – The lines beginning “Sun of the Sleepless!” are *beautiful*. – If you hereafter give him leave to set them to music, well & good. But I would not for the world that he separated the lines from *Lara*, from the music he has added to them. – I am delighted at your proposal to hear the airs play'd & chaunted to you. – You shall then hear the lines from *Lara* sung. – You will be *delighted*. – For I can almost venture to say the music is worthy the lines. I have heard nothing so good, that is not in Handel. I have no doubt that, as the Oratorios, when it will be produc'd, it will create a great sensation. –

The lines beginning, *Oh! weep for those that wept by Babel's stream*, are, I think, very well suited to the style of some of the Hebrew Melodies – & are beautiful. None of the verses not to be set to music shall pass out of my hands; but shall be return'd uncopied to you. –<sup>8</sup>

On September 19th he wrote again to Byron, who had agreed to his proposal:

... you have surprised & delighted me into an obligation which I have too much sincere pleasure in feeling myself under to you, to be able to lighten it in any degree by the warmest expressions of thanks –

The benefit conferr'd on my protégé is really an important one; & that thought makes me still more thankful to you – It is a great satisfaction to me to be able to assure you, that your kindness & poetry will be conferr'd on both worth & talent – And, that he has met with misfortune in his career, will I am sure be no ill recommendation to your notice – Be assur'd that your lines will be made use of with discretion –

The lines beginning Sun of the Sleepless! are *beautiful* – If you hereafter give him leave to set them to Music, well & good – But I would not for the world that he separated the lines from *Lara*, from the music he has added to them – I am delighted at your proposal to hear the Airs play'd & chaunted to you – You shall then hear the lines from *Lara* sung – you will be *delighted* – For I can almost venture to say the music is worthy the lines – I have heard nothing so good, that is not in Handel – I have no doubt that at the oratorios, when it will be produc'd, it will create a great sensation –

The lines beginning,

*Oh weep for thou [sic] that wept for Babel's stream*, are I think, very well suited to the style of some of the Hebrew Melodies – & are beautiful –

None of the verses not to be set to music, shall pass out of my hands; but shall be return'd uncopied to you –

Within a month, Byron and Nathan seem to have become close friends. By October 1814, Byron is writing to Nathan:

My dear Nathan, – You must dine with me to-day at Seven o'clock. I take no refusal. / Yours truly, /  
BYRON<sup>9</sup>

Kinnaird sees Nathan – who may have been teacher to Maria Keppel – as an innocent. On October 2nd he tells Byron

I inclose a copy of Nathan's proposals – I hope you will approve the manner in which your name is introduc'd – His pupil proceeds with great success – Two Professional Judges are to hear her next Sunday – Nathan made us laugh exceedingly the other evening by a trait of simplicity – He was speaking of a female lodger in his house, who had contriv'd to swindle him out of monies; & on one occasion he ventur'd to tell her he thought she equivocated – to which the lady replied, he arms a kimbo, “*you lie*” – “*Then you know, [ ]*” said Nathan, [ *] began to see thro' her” –*

At least for the sake of Annabella, his high-minded fiancée, Byron advertises his pride in the Nathan connection. He writes to her on October 20th 1814:

P.S. – Oh. – I must tell you one of my present avocations. – D[ouglas] Kinnaird (a friend of mine brother to Ld K[inaird]) applied to me to write words for a musical composer who is going to publish the *real undisputed Hebrew Melodies* which are beautiful & to which David & the prophets actually sang the “songs of Zion” – & I have done nine or ten – on the sacred model – partly from Job &c & partly my own imagination – but I hope a little better than Sternhold & Hopkins – it is odd enough that this should fall to my lot – who have been abused as “an infidel” – Augusta says “they will call me a *Jew* next.”<sup>10</sup>

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8: John Murray Archive.

9: BLJ IV 187.

10: BLJ IV 220.

Kinnaird and Nathan did not get on, for all that it had been Kinnaird who had introduced poet and composer in the first place. Nathan records himself as singing, before his version was published, with Kinnaird and Maria Keppel, a trio from the collection, while Byron listened. It would have been either *Saul* or *In the Valley of Waters*. At this *soirée* that Kinnaird waxed boorish:

... encouraged by the approbation of Lord Byron for his best endeavours in the performance of the trio, exhilarated by the sweet singing of his fair companion, and gratified by the honour of having in his house the first poet of the day to entertain, [Kinnaird] appeared to fancy himself *greater* than the *greatest* of the *great*, and, forgetting all gentle manly feeling and propriety of hospitality, he turned towards me with an air of consequence peculiarly his own, and vociferated with all the stentorian power of his lungs, "Mr. Nathan, I expect – a – a – that – a – you bring out these melodies in good style – a – a – and bear in mind, that – a – a – his Lordship's name does not suffer from scantiness – a – a – in their publication." ... [as soon as Kinnaird had left the room] Lord Byron observing my distress at the unfeeling attack, seized the opportunity of shaking me most cordially by the hand at the moment the *mighty Don* left the room and in a low voice said, "Do not mind him, he's a fool! ... [and added the next day,] "Nathan, do not suffer that capricious fool to lead you into more expence than is absolutely necessary; bring out the work to your own taste: I have no ambition to gratify, beyond that of proving useful to you."<sup>11</sup>

Hobhouse's diary for November 26th 1814 records a similar unpleasantness:

... supped with Kinnaird and his piece, and a Mr Nathan, a music master, a Jew, for whom Lord Byron has written words to Jewish melodies. Lord Byron was at Supper – we had a scene – which is a good lesson against keeping – poor Byron was taken to task for making Mr Nathan impudent by shaking hands with him.

"Keeping" is Hobhouse's misogynistic word for having an irregular liaison with a woman. He probably disapproved of Maria Keppel as much as of Nathan.

Further discord came when John Murray expressed a desire to publish the *Melodies*. Kinnaird was caught in the crossfire, and did not wish Murray to have such a privilege. On January 10th he wrote to Byron:

I inclose you a note I have just received from M<sup>r</sup> Murray –  
On Sunday last I accompanied Nathan to Braham – These two Gentlemen have entered into a partnership in the publishing – that is to say, Braham will do the whole & Nathan take half the profits – After what I have done, you will laugh at all my prophecies – But I think I may now venture to foretell that Moore may tremble & that your words will be in every mouth that can chaunt – Braham is to sing them in public –

It was on Sunday night that I first slept Soundly, since I became aware of Nathan's insufficiency – and now comes Murray's note to make my bed again a bed of thorns –

I entreat you to let me hear from you on the Subject, as I cannot bring myself to give up <the/your> words to Murray without your direction for me to do so – I will venture to say now that not one of Nathan's golden dreams will have carried him beyond the truth – & I cannot but think that the printing of these poems w<sup>d</sup> destroy the effect of the publication of the music –

Braham had requested me to write to you to ask you to alter the Song of Jephtha's daughter into a dialogue between the father & daughter in alternate stanzas –

But all this is premature while I know not your final determination – If I could consider myself as having no personal concern with the business, I would say, that to consult your reputation, you sh<sup>d</sup> leave them in Braham's hands – If the first Poet & the first *musician* as well as singer cannot ensure success for a joint production; I know not what Can – As for the merchant Murray, I could silence him by speaking to his interest – Let him reserve these for the next whole edition of your works – But this Scotchman considers you as his property –

On January 12th he writes again:

I have just seen Braham, who protests, albeit humbly, against the printing of your *Psalms* in the edition of your works, unless it be intended to spoil the sale of the Musical work –

It now appears that Murray wanted to purchase to poetry of Nathan – & failing in that, he endeavours to persuade you that it would be doing no harm to those whom you intended sh<sup>d</sup> be benefitted, *provided they were worthy of your words* – I hope you think *that Braham is* –

He proposes to sing one at the oratorio at Covent Garden, & to teach some singer to sing one of them at Drury Lane – This is to be previous to their publication, which would be in about two months – Braham feels very confident of their success –

Byron is no happier (and does not re-write *Jephtha's Daughter* as Braham wishes him to). He writes to Nathan, also in January:

Dear Nathan, – Murray being about to publish a complete edition of my poetical effusions has a wish to include the stanzas of the Hebrew Melodies – will you allow him that privilege without considering it an infringement on your copyright[?] I certainly wish to oblige the gentleman but you know Nathan it is against all good fashion to give and take back[.] I therefore cannot grant what is not at my disposal[;] let me hear you on the subject[.] / Dear Nathan yours truly / BYRON<sup>12</sup>

It's a white lie, for Murray wants to publish the *Melodies* in a separate edition. The contention between Murray and Nathan becomes irksome. On January 26th Byron writes to Hobhouse:

“The Melodies” – damn the melodies – I have other tunes – or rather tones – to think of – but – Murray can't have them, or shan't – or I shall have K[innaird] and Braham upon me.<sup>13</sup>

On February 9th Kinnaird writes to Byron, and seems to be getting apprehensive:

Supposing Lady Byron not to have seen them I am sure the four accompanying Covers will be an acceptable present to her Ladyship – I feel only still fearful that even Braham will not be able to do justice to them – What I have however heard have very much tickled my poor ear – I shall see him to-morrow & hear them – We are to talk about a Preface – I think that instead of the first line being placed at the top of each song as a motto, an appropriate one might be found in the application of each song to some event or person in sacred history – Pray turn this in your mind & let me know what you think – & will you place the motto yourself to such as you think will take them of a sacred nature – The few words in Hebrew which you perceive, are the first words of the several psalms to which these different airs are applied in the Temple, not *the Synagogue* – Then as to the Preface – Something should be written – but not too much – will you do this or not? The musicanti must not have the doing of this – If you like it, I will see if Braham & I can cook up something for your inspection – But the time is come when all this must be done – I think there sh<sup>d</sup> be no notes to the Songs, but such as you would chuse to put to the words, if any – or a mere musical remark –

On February 17th he writes again:

The selection for the first number, I take it, is made – Do you see any objection to any of the words which I sent you in print; or do you know any just cause or impediment why they should not be married to Music of the first number? If not, I trust you will agree with me that the Musicanti should not have the keeping of your verses untill they begin to work upon a second number – which cannot be immediately – The alteration you mentioned in *glow* for *beam*<sup>14</sup> shall be attended to – & the large letters shall be introduc'd – Notwithstanding what you have written I have put into the hands of a friend well read in the Scriptures & of an elegant mind, the Songs, with a request that he would apply them to Scriptural events & personages – He is to give mottos & any note that might give an interest to the particular Song – But when this is done I shall send the result to you, for your approbation or rejection –

In March Kinnaird writes again to Byron, principally about Edmund Kean's *Romeo*; but adds:

I have got some of the Melodies, & am to take the opinion of Braham & others on them 'ere they are committed to public trial.

On March 4th Kinnaird sends Byron a list of proposed notes for *Hebrew Melodies* which a clerical friend of his has prepared, giving biblical precedents for the least likely lyrics: *I Saw Thee Weep* is to be Solomon addressing the Shunamite; *She Walks In Beauty* is to be Solomon addressing the object of his famous Song; *It is the Hour* (in fact the opening of *Parisina*) will concern Othniel's love for Achsah,

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12: BLJ IV 249.

13: BLJ IV 260.

14: *I saw Thee Weep* 15 (see Ashton 135).

from Joshua 25; *Thy Days are Done* is to be the War-Song of Judas Maccabeus. None of these suggestions are printed.

Kinnaird next writes to Byron, on March 10th 1815:

My dear Byron,

I arrived very near at the end of my labours yesterday, when I receiv'd from Braham my shield & armour against all your wicked waggeries (sh<sup>d</sup> the Melodies fail) for in reply to a letter from ~~me~~ throwing all the responsibility on him alone, he writes to me that the music would *be launch'd into the world and bid defiance to the storms of Criticism* –

Am I to understand by your letter that you think the songs had better be printed one & all without the mottos – & if so, of course they would be without notes – Please to let me know this by return of Post – Also if you see any thing to object to in the Prefatory lines which I inclose for your perusal. –

Nathan says that Braham sung his Song ill – This looks ill, I grant you –

Kean has surpass'd himself himself – Nothing can be said too much in praise of his Richard the 2<sup>d</sup> – It does no honour to the alterer & compiler but will immortalize Kean –

Adieu Godbewyou

Douglas Kinnaird

Boney is up with 50.000 at Lyons – Massena has join'd him –

The Nottinghamites are on their way to London – The Guards set out this evening to meet them – Rare fun! –

We do not have Byron's "wicked waggeries;" his side of the correspondence does not survive.

Thomas Moore, in contest with whose *Irish Melodies* the *Hebrew Melodies* had been written, and who really had used traditional Irish tunes for his work, found the musical result of the confidence-trick (as he conceived it) laughable. He wrote to his publisher:

How Lord Byron must curse that fellow Nathan, who is puffing off his Jewish wares in all sorts of quackish ways. He had a puff about them the other night directly under the Lottery Squibs, in the small type part of the Courier. Talking of the Jew – I have the second verse of "Fall'n is thy throne O Israel!" to send you ... I flatter myself it is both words and music, a very tolerable hit. Was there ever anything as bad as the Hebrew Melodies? Some of the words are of course good, tho' not so good as might have been expected – but the Music! "Oh Lord God of Israel!" what stuff it is! and the price! If the Angel in the title page had *four crowns* instead of *one* and the odd shilling tucked under his wing, it would be four times more emblematical than it is.<sup>15</sup>

*Hebrew Melodies* was, despite Moore's sneers, an instant success; but, despite valiant work by its modern musical editors, Burwick and Douglass, none of the songs in its pages have entered the mainstream repertoire.

## APPENDIX 2: The Three Earliest Editions, and later printings

Text	Murray	Nathan		Nathan Murray	
	1815	1815 (Apr)	1815 (Nov)	1827-9	1831
Magdalen	X	X	X	[ <i>Murray's Mag.</i> , 1887]	
She Walks in Beauty	v	v	X		
Oh! Snatched Away ...	v	v	X		
Bright be the Place	X	X	X	X	v
Sun of the Sleepless!	v	X	v		
I Speak not – I trace not	X	X	X	v	
I Saw Thee Weep	v	v	X		
Oh! Weep for Those	v	v	X		
From Job	v	X	X		
The Harp the Monarch	v	v	X		
The Wild Gazelle	v	v	X		
My Soul is Dark	v	v	X		
Jephtha's Daughter	v	v	X		
They Say That Hope ...	X	X	X	v	
Herod's Lament	v	X	v		
We Sate Down and Wept	v	X	v		
In the Valley of Waters	X	X	X	v	
Destruction of Jerusalem	v	X	v		
Saul	v	X	v		
Song of Saul	v	X	v		
Vision of Belshazzar	v	X	v		
To Belshazzar	X	X	X	X	v
Semnacherib	v	X	v		
Were My Bosom ...	v	X	v		
When Coldness ...	v	X	v		
If That High World	v	v	X		
All is Vanity	v	X	v		
On Jordan's Banks	v	v	X		
Thy Days Are Done	v	v	X		
It is the Hour	v	v	X	[ <i>Parisina</i> ]	
Francisca	X	X	v	[ <i>Parisina</i> ]	

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[Manuscripts:

Jephtha's Daughter; no mss extant  
My Soul Is Dark; no mss extant  
Oh! Weep For Those; no mss extant

Lovelace Bodleian 157 has the following at ff. 26-48, with xerox copies in 158:

Magdalen (ff. 152-3) [not published till 1887]

The Destruction Of Sennacherib annotated by Lady Byron 'Seaham Feb. 12 1815' (f. 48; fair copy entitled The Rout of Sennacherib, JMA)

"All is Vanity, Saith The Preacher" (f. 32; fair copy, JMA)

Herod's Lament For Mariamne draft and fair copy, annotated by Lady Byron 'Halnaby. Jan. 1815' (ff. 38-9; fair copy, JMA)

In The Valley Of Waters, endorsed by Lady Byron 'Halnaby 1815' (f. 46), Lady Byron's fair copy, Harvard [first published by Nathan 1827-9]

Oh! Snatched Away In Beauty's Bloom, annotated by Lady Byron 'Given me at Seaham before my marriage' (this is a fair copy: draft, and Charles Hanson's fair copy, JMA) (f. 28)

On The Day Of The Destruction Of Jerusalem By Titus; draft and fair copy, endorsed by Lady Byron 'Halnaby. Jan 18. 1815' (f. 41-3; fair copy, JMA)

Saul; (f. 29; two fair copies, JMA)

Song Of Saul Before His Last Battle; endorsed by Lady Byron 'Seaham 1815' (f. 30; three fair copies, JMA)

Sun Of The Sleepless! (f. 35; fair copy, JMA)

Were My Bosom as False As Thou Deem'st It To Be, endorsed by Lady Byron 'Seaham 1815' (f. 36; fair copy, JMA)

When Coldness Wraps This Suffering Clay, annotated by Lady Byron 'Seaham. Feb. 1815' (f. 34; fair copy, JMA)

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I Saw Thee Weep – The Big Bright Tear, fair copy, Texas; Augusta's fair copy, BL Add Mss 58802, f. 64v.

If That High World Which Lies Beyond, Augusta's fair copy BL Add Mss 58802, f. 63 v.

It is the Hour When From the Boughs, Augusta's fair copy, BL Add Mss 58802, f. 64

On Jordan's Banks The Arabs' Camels Stray, draft BM

Thy Days Are Done, Thy Fame Begun, Augusta's fair copy, BL Add Mss 58802, f. 65 r.

She Walks in Beauty, draft in private hands, Augusta's fair copy BL Add Mss 58802, f. 62 r.-v.

To Belshazzar (Belshazzar! from the banquet turn) fair copy JMA  
Vision of Belshazzar (The King was On His Throne) Lady Byron's fair copy, JMA  
The Wild Gazelle On Judah's Hills, draft, JMA]

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