

## Byron's Love Poems, 1811-14

**Contents: John Edleston; Lady Oxford; Mercer Elphinstone; Caroline Lamb; Frances Wedderburn Webster; Augusta Leigh; the Duke of Dorset**

(other love poetry will be found in *Nottinghamshire Poems*, *Poems of Separation*, and *Poems for Teresa Guiccioli*)

For all his reputation in legend, Byron wrote very little poetry about love itself. He wrote poetry of lament, of mourning, of regret, of farewell, of mistrust, of jealousy, of warning, of hatred, of gratitude, of reproof, of bitterness ... hardly ever of love. He never writes about the moment, but is always bidding farewell. One can't imagine him writing,

She's all states, and all princes I;  
Nothing else is;  
Princes do but play us; compared to this,  
All honour's mimic, all wealth alchemy.  
Thou, Sun, art half as happy as we,  
In that the world's contracted thus;  
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be  
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.  
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;  
This bed thy center is, these walls thy sphere.<sup>1</sup>

Neither did he write in anticipation of the moment. Still less can one imagine him writing,

Now therefore, while the youthful hue  
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,  
And while thy willing soul transpires  
At every pore with instant fires,  
Now let us sport us while we may,  
And now, like amorous birds of prey,  
Rather at once our time devour  
Than languish in his slow-chapt power.<sup>2</sup>

Happy celebration of heterosexuality wasn't his thing, still less of seduction: he claimed, of course, never having needed to try and seduce anyone:

“*Convent*” – and “*carry off*” quotha! – and “*girl*” – – I should like to know *who* has been carried off except poor dear *me* – I have been more ravished myself than anybody since the Trojan war ...<sup>3</sup>

Even in *Don Juan*, love is accompanied by guilt, doom, nemesis, a sense that one will have to pay, or a sense of degradation and prostitution. Love was for him more unreal than it is for most people:

1.

“Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas” – VIRGIL.<sup>4</sup>

They say that Hope is happiness –  
But genuine Love must prize the past;  
And Memory wakes the thoughts that bless;  
They rose the first – they set the last.

---

1: John Donne, *The Sun Rising*, stanza 3.

2: Andrew Marvell, *To his Coy Mistress*.

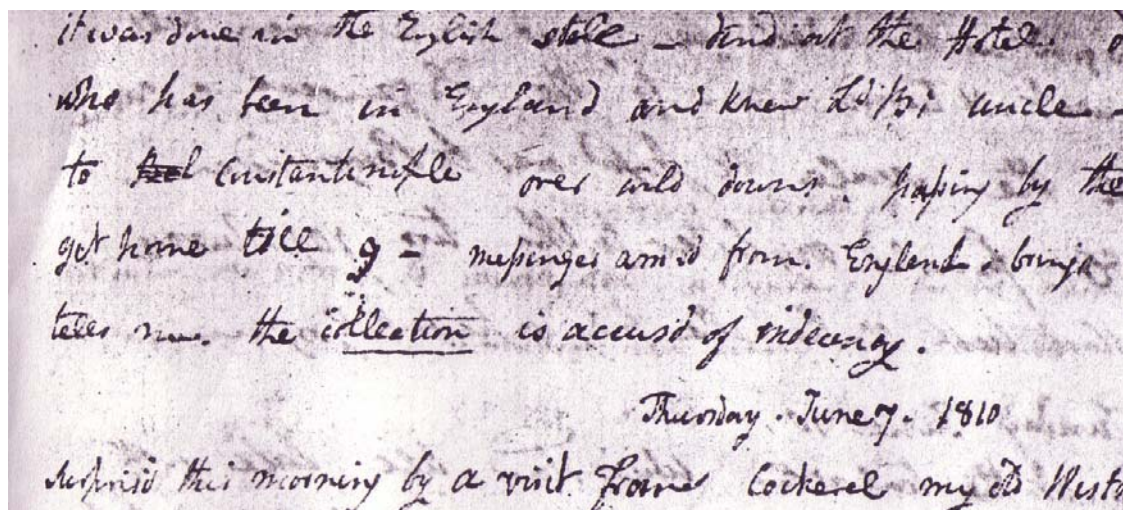
3: BLJ VI 237; letter to Hoppner, October 29th 1819.

4: Virgil, *Georgics* II 490: “Happy is he who understands the cause of things”.



summer & Winter, without passing *one tiresome moment*, & separated *each time* with increasing Reluctance. I hope you will *one day* see us together, he is the only *being* I esteem, though I like many. –<sup>5</sup>

His relationship with Edleston did not survive their going down from Cambridge, and he was devastated by Edleston's death, coming as it did with those of his mother and of C.S. Matthews. He heard about it in October 1811,<sup>6</sup> and, having written no poetry about the relationship while Edleston lived (which would have been hard, given the morals of the time), now wrote some of his most passionate laments. He borrowed the name "Thyrza" to disguise the gender of their addressee.



Leslie Marchand (*Byron A Biography* I 245 n8), reads this extract from Hobhouse's diary as "the Edleston is accus'd of indecency". In fact it reads "the *collection* is accus'd of indecency", referring to *Imitations and Translations*. (B.L.Add.Mss.56529, entry for June 6th 1810).

All the Thyrza poems were printed in 1812 with *Childe Harold* I and II, except *There be none of Beauty's Daughters* and *Bright be the Place of thy Soul*. They are here in the order of *CHP* I and II, seventh edition, 1814.

The tenderness of the Thyrza poems places in sharp relief the negative qualities of the later poems to women.

#### Stanzas for Music

Those who claim that this poem is addressed to Claire Clairmont ignore three things: first, that Byron wrote no other poems to Claire, whom he seems rather to have disliked; second, that the first line would indicate that the poem's addressee, if female, is not beautiful; and third, that it must therefore be addressed to one of Beauty's sons. Edleston was after all a choirboy.

1.

There be none of Beauty's daughters  
 With a magic like thee;  
 And like music on the waters  
 Is thy sweet voice to me;  
 When, as if its sound were causing  
 The charmed Ocean's pausing,  
 The waves lie still and gleaming,  
 And the lulled winds seem dreaming.

5

<sup>5</sup>: BLJ I 124-5.

<sup>6</sup>: BLJ II 110.

2.

And the midnight Moon is weaving  
 Her bright chain o'er the deep;                   10  
 Whose breast is gently heaving,  
 As an infant's asleep;  
 So the spirit bows before thee,  
 To listen and adore thee;  
 With a full but soft emotion,                   15  
 Like the swell of Summer's ocean.

### Written Beneath a Picture

1.

Dear object of defeated care!  
 Though now of Love and thee bereft,  
 To reconcile me with despair  
 Thine image and my tears are left.

2.

'Tis said with Sorrow Time can cope;                   5  
 But this I feel can ne'er be true;  
 For by the death-blow of my Hope  
 My Memory immortal grew.

### To Thyrsa

“Thyrza” comes from Solomon Gessner’s *The Death of Abel*, where, as “Thirza”, it is the name of Abel’s wife: “The tenderest love and the purest virtue shone with mildest beams in the fine blue eyes of Thirza, and gave attractive graces to the carnation of her cheeks: while her fair locks, waving in ringlets on her snowy neck, and hanging with a becoming negligence down her back, added to the beauty of her fine and delicate form”.<sup>7</sup>

Without a stone to mark the spot,<sup>8</sup>  
 And say, what Truth might well have said,  
 By all, save one, perchance forgot,  
 Ah! wherefore art thou lowly laid?  
 By many a shore and many a sea                   5  
 Divided, yet beloved in vain;  
 The Past, the Future fled to thee  
 To bid us meet – no – ne'er again!  
 Could this have been – a word – a look  
 That softly said, “We part in peace”,                   10  
 Had taught my bosom how to brook,  
 With fainter sighs, thy soul's release.  
 And didst thou not, since Death for thee  
 Prepared a light and pangless dart,  
 Once long for him thou ne'er shalt see,                   15  
 Who held, and holds thee in his heart?  
 Oh! who like him had watched thee here?  
 Or sadly marked thy glazing eye,  
 In that dread hour ere Death appear,  
 When silent Sorrow fears to sigh,                   20

<sup>7</sup>: *The Death of Abel in Five Books, Attempted from the German of Mr. Gessner*, 13th edn., 1798, p.4.

<sup>8</sup>: Thyrsa is, like Astarte, Conrad, Haidee, Lambro, and many other Byronic characters, without a gravestone.

Till all was past? But when no more  
     'Twas thine to reckon of human woe,  
 Affection's heart-drops, gushing o'er,  
     Had flowed as fast – as now they flow.  
 Shall they not flow, when many a day      25  
     In these, to me, deserted towers,<sup>9</sup>  
 Ere called but for a time away,  
     Affection's mingling tears were ours?  
 Ours too the glance none saw beside;  
     The smile none else might understand;      30  
 The whispered thought of hearts allied,  
     The pressure of the thrilling hand;  
 The kiss, so guiltless and refined  
     That Love each warmer wish forbore;  
 Those eyes proclaimed so pure a mind,      35  
     Ev'n Passion blushed to plead for more.  
 The tone, that taught me to rejoice,  
     When prone, unlike thee, to repine  
 The song, celestial from thy voice,  
     But sweet to me from none but thine;      40  
 The pledge we wore – *I* wear it still,<sup>10</sup>  
     But where is thine? – Ah! where art thou?  
 Oft have I borne the weight of ill,  
     But never bent beneath till now!  
 Well hast thou left in Life's best bloom      45  
     The cup of Woe for me to drain.  
 If rest alone be in the tomb,  
     I would not wish thee here again;  
 But if in worlds more blest than this  
     Thy virtues seek a fitter sphere,      50  
 Impart some portion of thy bliss,  
     To wean me from mine anguish here.  
 Teach me – too early taught by thee!  
     To bear, forgiving and forgiven:  
 On earth thy love was such to me,      55  
     It fain would form my hope in Heaven!

### Stanzas

1.

Away, away, ye notes of Woe!  
     Be silent, thou once soothing Strain,  
 Or I must flee from hence, for, oh!  
     I dare not trust those sounds again.  
 To me they speak of brighter days –      5  
     But lull the chords, for now, alas!  
 I must not think, I may not gaze  
     On what I *am*, on what I *was*.

2.

The voice that made those sounds more sweet  
     Is hushed, and all their charms are fled;      10

<sup>9</sup>: Either a reference to Trinity College Cambridge, or to Newstead.

<sup>10</sup>: May refer to the cornelian which Edleston gave Byron, though "*we* wore" would contradict that.

And now their softest notes repeat  
 A dirge, an anthem o'er the dead!  
 Yes, Thyrsa! yes, they breathe of thee,  
 Beloved dust! since dust thou art;  
 And all that once was Harmony 15  
 Is worse than discord to my heart!

## 3.

'Tis silent all! – but on my ear  
 The well-remembered Echoes thrill;  
 I bear a voice I would not hear,  
 A voice that now might well be still.  
 Yet oft my doubting Soul 'twill shake; 20  
 Ev'n Slumber owns its gentle tone,  
 Till Consciousness will vainly wake  
 To listen, though the dream be flown.

## 4.

Sweet Thyrsa! waking as in sleep, 25  
 Thou art but now a lovely dream;  
 A Star that trembled o'er the deep,  
 Then turned from earth its tender beam.  
 But he, who through Life's dreary way  
 Must pass, when Heaven is veiled in wrath, 30  
 Will long lament the vanished ray  
 That scattered gladness o'er his path.

### To Thyrsa

## 1.

One struggle more, and I am free  
 From pangs that rend my heart in twain;  
 One last long sigh to Love and thee,  
 Then back to busy life again.<sup>11</sup>  
 It suits me well to mingle now 5  
 With things that never pleased before;  
 Though every joy is fled below,  
 What future grief can touch me more?

## 2.

Then bring me wine, the banquet bring;  
 Man was not formed to live alone; 10  
 I'll be that light unmeaning thing  
 That smiles with all, and weeps with none.  
 It was not thus in days more dear,  
 It never would have been, but thou  
 Hast fled, and left me lonely here 15  
 Thou'rt nothing – all are nothing now.

## 3.

In vain my lyre would lightly breathe!  
 The smile that sorrow fain would wear  
 But mocks the woe that lurks beneath,

---

**11:** Anticipates Tennyson, *He is not here, but far away / The noise of life begins again ...*

Like roses o'er a sepulchre. 20  
 Though gay companions o'er the bowl  
 Dispel awhile the sense of ill,  
 Though Pleasure fills the maddening soul,  
 The Heart – the Heart is lonely still!

4. 25  
 On many a lone and lovely night  
 It soothed to gaze upon the sky;  
 For then I deemed the heavenly light  
 Shone sweetly on thy pensive eye:  
 And oft I thought at Cynthia's noon,<sup>12</sup>  
 When sailing o'er the Ægean wave, 30  
 "Now Thyrsa gazes on that moon –"  
 Alas, it gleamed upon her grave!

5. 35  
 When stretched on Fever's sleepless bed,  
 And sickness shrunk my throbbing veins,<sup>13</sup>  
 "'Tis comfort still", I faintly said,  
 "That Thyrsa cannot know my pains";  
 Like freedom to the time-worn slave –  
 A boon 'tis idle then to give;  
 Relenting nature vainly gave  
 My life, when Thyrsa ceased to live! 40

6. 45  
 My Thyrsa's pledge in better days,  
 When Love and Life alike were new!  
 How different now thou meet'st my gaze!  
 How tinged by time with Sorrow's hue!  
 The heart that gave itself with thee 45  
 Is silent – ah, were mine as still!  
 Though cold as e'en the dead can be,  
 It feels, it sickens with the chill.

7. 50  
 Thou bitter pledge! thou mournful token!  
 Though painful, welcome to my breast! 50  
 Still, still, preserve that love unbroken,  
 Or break the heart to which thou'rt prest!  
 Time tempers Love, but not removes,  
 More hallowed when its Hope is fled:  
 Oh! what are thousand living loves 55  
 To that which cannot quit the dead?

---

**12:** Cynthia's noon – the full moon. Cynthia is the moon goddess.

**13:** B. suffered several attacks of fever during his Mediterranean travels, 1809-11.

### And thou art Dead, as Young and Fair

“Heu, quanto minus est cum reliquis versari quam tui meminisse!”<sup>14</sup>

1.

And thou art dead, as young and fair  
 As aught of mortal birth;  
 And form so soft, and charms so rare,  
 Too soon returned to Earth!  
 Though Earth received them in her bed, 5  
 And o’er the spot the crowd may tread  
 In carelessness or mirth,  
 There is an eye which could not brook  
 A moment on that grave to look.

2.

I will not ask where thou liest low, 10  
 Nor gaze upon the spot;  
 There flowers or weeds at will may grow,  
 So I behold them not;  
 It is enough for me to prove  
 That what I loved, and long must love, 15  
 Like common earth can rot;  
 To me there needs no stone to tell,  
 ’Tis Nothing that I loved so well.

3.

Yet did I love thee to the last  
 As fervently as thou, 20  
 Who didst not change through all the past,  
 And canst not alter now.  
 The love where Death has set his seal,  
 Nor age can chill, nor rival steal,  
 Nor falsehood disavow: 25  
 And, what were worse, thou canst not see  
 Or wrong, or change, or fault in me.

4.

The better days of life were ours;  
 The worst can be but mine:  
 The sun that cheers, the storm that lowers, 30  
 Shall never more be thine.  
 The silence of that dreamless sleep  
 I envy now too much to weep;  
 Nor need I to repine,  
 That all those charms have passed away 35  
 I might have watched through long decay.

5.

The flower in ripened bloom unmatched  
 Must fall the earliest prey;  
 Though by no hand untimely snatched,  
 The leaves must drop away: 40

---

**14:** The epigraph is a funerary inscription by William Shenstone: “Alas, how much less it is to mix with those who remain than to remember thee!”



And yet it were a greater grief  
 To watch it withering, leaf by leaf,  
     Than see it plucked today;  
 Since earthly eye but ill can bear  
 To trace the change to foul from fair. 45

6.

I know not if I could have borne  
     To see thy beauties fade;  
 The night that followed such a morn  
     Had worn a deeper shade:  
 Thy day without a cloud hath passed 50  
 And thou wert lovely to the last;  
     Extinguished, not decayed;  
 As stars that shoot along the sky  
 Shine brightest as they fall from high.<sup>15</sup>

7.

As once I wept, if I could weep, 55  
     My tears might well be shed,  
 To think I was not near to keep  
     One vigil o'er thy bed;  
 To gaze, how fondly! on thy face,  
 To fold thee in a faint embrace, 60  
     Uphold thy drooping head;  
 And show that love, however vain,  
 Nor thou nor I can feel again.

8.

Yet how much less it were to gain,  
     Though thou hast left me free, 65  
 The loveliest things that still remain,  
     Than thus remember thee!  
 The all of thine that cannot die  
 Through dark and dread Eternity  
     Returns again to me, 70  
 And more thy buried love endears  
 Than aught except its living years.

### **If Sometimes in the Haunts of Men**

1.

If sometimes in the haunts of men  
     Thine image from my breast may fade,  
 The lonely hour presents again  
     The semblance of thy gentle shade;  
 And now that sad and silent hour 5  
     Thus much of thee can still restore,  
 And sorrow unobserved may pour  
     The plaint she dare not speak before.<sup>16</sup>

---

**15:** Echoes Isaiah 14: 12 – *How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the Morning!* with a possible echo of Wordsworth, *Fair as a star, when only one / Is shining in the sky.*

**16:** Anticipates Wilde, *Mine is the love that dare not speak its name ...*

2.

Oh, pardon that in crowds awhile  
 I waste one thought I owe to thee, 10  
 And self-condemned, appear to smile,  
 Unfaithful to thy memory;  
 Nor deem that memory less dear,  
 That then I seem not to repine;  
 I would not fools should overhear 15  
 One sigh that should be wholly *thine*.

3.

If not the Goblet pass unquaffed,  
 It is not drained to banish care;  
 The cup must hold a deadlier draught,  
 That brings a Lethe for despair. 20  
 And could Oblivion set my soul  
 From all her troubled visions free,  
 I'd dash to earth the sweetest bowl  
 That drowned a single thought of thee.

4.

For wert thou vanished from my mind, 25  
 Where could my vacant bosom turn?  
 And who would then remain behind  
 To honour thine abandoned Urn?  
 No, no – it is my sorrow's pride  
 That last dear duty to fulfil: 30  
 Though all the world forget beside,  
 'Tis meet that I remember still.

5.

For well I know, that such had been  
 Thy gentle care for him, who now  
 Unmourned shall quit this mortal scene, 35  
 Where none regarded him, but thou:  
 And, oh! I feel in *that* was given  
 A blessing never meant for me;  
 Thou wert too like a dream of Heaven  
 For earthly Love to merit thee. 40

### Bright be the Place of thy Soul

Fair-copied on the back of a lady's calling card. First published in *The Examiner*, June 11th 1815, and intended as a Hebrew Melody, but never collected by Isaac Nathan in any of his editions. The poem could be Byron's lament for Edleston; though it can also be imagined in the mind of Manfred as he thinks of Astarte – except that Astarte has no tomb, as line 9 here indicates the addressee does.

1.

Bright be the place of thy soul!  
 No lovelier spirit than thine  
 E'er burst from its mortal control,  
 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 the shadow of gloom  
In aught 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?

**On a Cornelian Heart which was Broken**<sup>17</sup>



*A cornelian heart.*

1.

Ill-fated Heart! And can it be,  
That thou should'st thus be rent in twain?  
Have years of care for thine and thee  
Alike been all employed in vain?

2.

Yet precious seems each shattered part, 5  
And every fragment dearer grown,  
Since he who wears thee feels thou art  
A fitter emblem of *his own*.

---

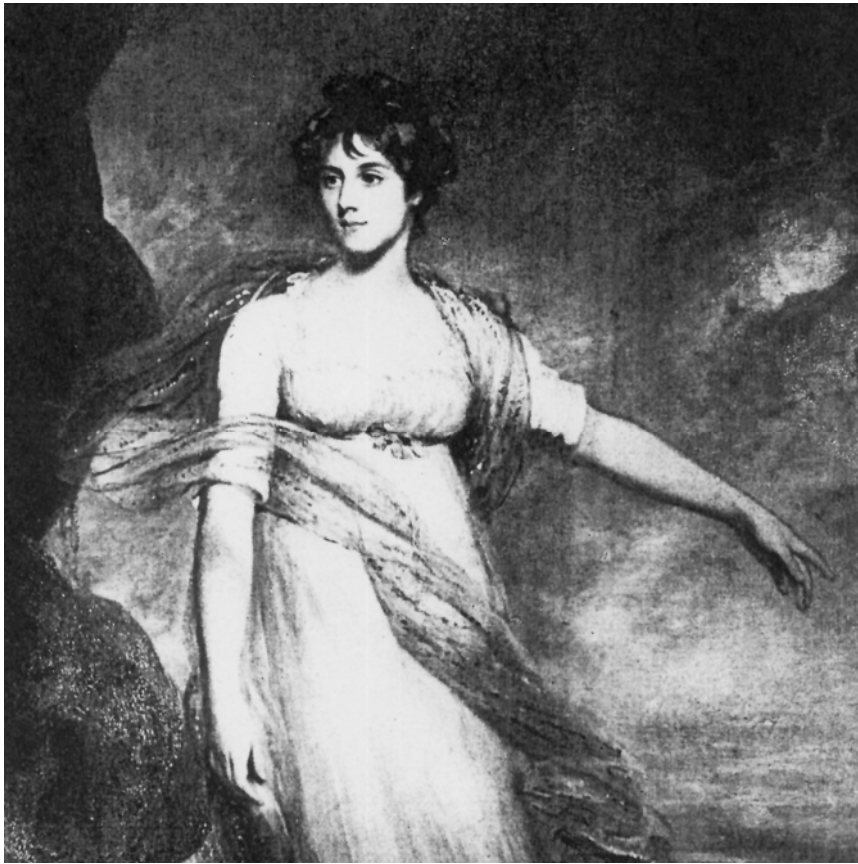
**17:** Edleston had given B. a cornelian as a parting gift. Compare *Don Juan* I, 198, 7.

### Elizabeth, Countess of Oxford



Byron's affair with Lady Oxford was tranquil, fairly long-lasting, and happily consummated (we assume). He appears to have written no poetry about it, or about her, at all.

### Mercer Elphinstone



On the morning of his near-elopement with Caroline Lamb on July 29th 1812, Byron, as if anxious not to keep all his eggs in one basket, wrote a letter<sup>18</sup> to Mercer Elphinstone, daughter of one of the richest sailors in the Fleet, who was known as “the fops’ despair” because she would be the biggest golden dolly they could get, except that they couldn’t get her.

She seems to have been fond of Byron, but kept him sensibly at a distance, eventually marrying, to her father’s disgust, the comte de Flahaut, who had been an aide-de-camp to Napoleon himself.

One of Byron’s letters gives her the loan of his Albanian costume, with the memorable “if you like the dress – keep it – I shall be very glad to get rid of it – as it reminds me of one or two things I don’t wish to remember ...”<sup>19</sup>

This poem seems to be a warning to Mercer to stay clear of Byron, whose motives in wanting a wife at this time were (the pun was inevitable, and common), mercenary. The poem *may* be addressed to Annabella Milbanke, but the reference to Plutus at line 20 indicates someone very rich. This fits Mercer better than it fits Annabella – who was, of course, as Byron discovered after he married her, not rich at all.

#### “I cannot talk of Love to thee”

1.

I cannot talk of Love to thee,  
 Though thou art young and free and fair!  
 There is a spell thou dost not see,  
 That bids a genuine love forbear.

---

18: BLJ II 183-4.

19: BLJ IV 112-3.



## Caroline Lamb



“Mad, bad and dangerous to know” is Caroline Lamb’s least useful contribution to Byron studies: least useful because everyone’s heard it, and it’s become an alternative to reading and thinking about the man; and because it seems such an apt description, not of him, but of her. Hobhouse described Caroline as “the mad skeleton”: but *she* described *herself* as “ugly & thin & mad & dispised”.<sup>22</sup> Her cliché phrase for Byron merely illustrates her addiction to adjectival clusters, and her language when describing herself was so much crueller than anything she used when describing him.

What sexual factor it was that drew Byron and Caroline together, that made their relationship so stressful, and that made it impossible for either ever to forget the other, is hard to intuit.

A phrase of Byron’s in relation to Caroline may help us: “Such a monster as that *has no sex*, and should live no longer”.<sup>23</sup> I don’t think that the last clause is recommending that his correspondent (Augusta) should *murder* Caroline: he thinks she “should live no longer” in their memories, should function no longer as an incubus to trouble their sleeps. Far more pertinent is the first clause, with its italics: “Such a monster as that *has no sex* ...”

Byron, we know, was bisexual, with something androgynous about him, masculine as he was in so many ways. How straight was Caroline? On Tuesday 25th July 1820, Hobhouse recorded in his diary:

I went to Kinnaird’s. Dined there – then went with him and his brother to little theatre and saw Madame Vestris act Macheath – I was delighted. Lord Kinnaird was told by Madame Vestris that Lady Caroline Lamb had sent for her to ask her to go to a masquerade, and had frightened her with certain testimonies of personal admiration, such as squeezing, etc. *Heureuse qui près de toi ...*

The French is the first line of Boileau’s translation of Sappho’s famous Lesbian ode *Φαινεται μοι κηνος ισος θειοισιν*.<sup>24</sup> But Hobhouse misinterprets: it was not Vestris the woman that turned Caroline on: it was Vestris *en travestie*, the woman masquerading as a man, the androgyne.

Byron never, so far as we know, pleased Caroline by dragging-up: such give-and-take would not have been in his idiom. She, however, knew that her power over him was doubled if she masqueraded as a servant-boy: “My pen / is at the bottom of the page ...”<sup>25</sup>

Her husband William, though loyal and affectionate, was a sexual neuter with a dull tendency to fantasise about spanking. But we may guess that Caroline, because so skinny, would have lacked the Bridget-Jones *derrière* with which to please him, and it’s not clear that Caroline enjoyed being spanked, no matter how often she merited it. How intriguing it must have been for her to find – and in such a celebrated charismatic as Byron, too – someone who did satisfy her alternative libidinal predilections so well. William’s notorious complaisance may have been because cross-dressing and androgyneity were areas in which he just wasn’t interested, and he knew that Byron thus posed no threat where it might matter.

Byron was fascinated by boys who reminded him of women, and had on the other hand once dressed up one of his mistresses as a youth,<sup>26</sup> rather in the manner later to be tried out by

22: *The Whole Disgraceful Truth Selected Letters of Caroline Lamb*, ed. Paul Douglass (Palgrave 2006), p.122.

23: BLJ V 93.

24: See Cochran, *Byron, Sappho ... and Castlereagh*, in *Byron as Reader*, Petra Bridzun and Frank Erik Pointner (eds.) Essen 1999, pp. 195-205.

25: *Beppo*, 99, 5.

26: Marchand I 150.

Vita Sackville-West and Violet Trefussis. Such games could with ease inspire, years later, the post-coitally disgusted “Such a monster as that *has no sex ...*” What he means is, “Such a monster as that *is of neither sex*, being of both”.

Caroline asked too much, made too unrealistic an assumption about what Byron intended. Towards the end of their affair, when he was trying to break it off, she wrote:

Oh God can you give me up if I am dear – take me with you take me my Master my friend I will serve you take me with you – who will fight for you serve you in sickness & Health live but for your wishes & die when that can please you who so faithfully as the one you have made yours & bound to your heart of hearts. yet when you read this you will be gone.<sup>27</sup>

Byron may have rejected the offer, but he remembered the phrasing, and an ideal version of Caroline appears as Kaled the page-boy – in fact girl – in *Lara*:

His zeal, though more than that of servile hands,  
In act alone obeys, his air commands;  
As if 'twere Lara's less than *his* desire  
That thus he served, but surely not for hire.<sup>28</sup>

In truth, the nature of their relationship, given England's moral constraints, was best kept in poems – but not too many poems.

That is not all. Caroline's relationship with Byron was also a literary one – at least, on her side. From 1812 onwards she's writing pastiche Byron:

oh that like thee Childe Harold I had power  
With Master hand to strike the thrilling Lyre  
To Sing of Courts & Camps & Ladies Bower  
And chear the sameness of each passing hour  
With verse that breathes from heaven & *should* to heaven *aspire*<sup>29</sup>

When their affair ends, she cultivates John Murray, with the view (so goes one uncharitable interpretation), to obtaining manuscripts, proofs, advance copies, and so on – appropriating the Byronic word after being denied the Byronic flesh. She is a critic of his work, assuming some proprietaryity over it. She writes to Murray in February 1814:

“The soft triumvir” – “*sol*” pauses on the hill” I wish altered – *sol* is at all times a common place term, tell your friend to speak English it is a goodly language & while he writes in his Mother tongue he had better use the terms we are us'd to – “Gull” & the Bulbul and a young Galeongee are just so many baits to draw sneers – which however disposed are always better avoided – I think the Bride of Abydos full of these lesser faults but the Corsair is quite beautiful – indeed he has a very splendid Genius – & I cannot but feel a deep & lasting anxiety that he should be *himself* in all things it is all I ask – you owe his quotations from Dante and the beginning of the Bride to me – & not to Mad. De Staal – for I sent him Dante last year so that you see I was not useless even to his genius<sup>30</sup>

When, in May 1816, she publishes *Glenarvon*, with its lurid portrait of Byron, we read the following, chanted to the heroine by a fortune-teller:

The star, that on thy birth shone bright,  
Now casts a dim uncertain light:

---

27: Douglass, op.cit., p.107.

28: *Lara* I, 560-3.

29: Douglass, op.cit., p.78.

30: Douglass, op.cit., p.117-20.



A threatening sky obscures its rays,  
And shadows o'er thy future days.

In fashion's magic circle bound,  
Thy steps shall tread her mazy round,  
While pleasure, flattery and art,  
Shall captivate thy fickle heart.<sup>31</sup>

Now what is this but Caroline's version of

The Star which rules thy destiny  
Was ruled, ere Earth begun, by me;  
It was a World as fresh and fair  
As e'er revolved round Sun in air;  
Its course was free and regular;  
Space bosomed not a lovelier star. –  
The Hour arrived – and it became  
A wandering mass of shapeless flame,  
A pathless Comet, and a Curse,  
A bright deformity on high,  
The monster of the upper Sky! –<sup>32</sup>

It's from a section of *Manfred* written in advance of the complete work. Exactly when is not known, but it looks as if Caroline had seen and remembered it.

Glenarvon is a very interesting portrait of the Byron who wrote (at least), the poems in this section:

The day, the hour, that very moment of time was marked and destined. It was Glenarvon – it was that spirit of evil whom she beheld; and her soul trembled within her, and felt its danger.

Calantha was struck suddenly, forcibly struck; yet the impression made upon her, was not in Glenarvon's favour. The eye of the rattle-snake, it has been said, once fixed upon its victim, overpowers it with terror and alarm: the bird, thus charmed dares not attempt its escape; it sings its last sweet lay; flutters its little pinions in the air, then falls like a shot before its destroyer, unable to fly from his fascination. Calantha bowed, therefore with the rest, pierced to the heart at once by the maddening power that destroys alike the high and low; but she liked not the wily turn of his eye, the contemptuous sneer of his curling lip, the soft passionless tones of his voice; – it was not nature, or if it was nature, not that to which she had been accustomed; – not the open, artless expression of a guileless heart.<sup>33</sup>

Caroline never stopped writing about Byron, or in a Byronic style. If legend is true, she even tried her hand at a *Don Juan* imitation (*A New Canto*, 1819). She is alone among Byron's lovers in having had the instinct, and the modicum of talent, necessary to "write Byron". But she never succeeded in writing him out of her life.

### **"Yet fain would I resist the spell"**

This poem exists only in a manuscript by Caroline. She writes, "These are the first lines L<sup>d</sup> Byron wrote to me – I had made him a present of a gold neck chain and these lines were written at the moment".

Yet fain would I resist the spell  
That would my captive heart retain,

<sup>31</sup>: *Glenarvon*, Ch.25; ed. Frances Wilson (Dent 1995), p.81.

<sup>32</sup>: *Manfred*, I i 110-19.

<sup>33</sup>: *Glenarvon*, Ch.42; ed. Frances Wilson (Dent 1995), p.148.

For tell me dearest, is this well?  
 Ah Caro! do I need the chain?  
 Nor dare I struggle to be free, 5  
 Since gifts returned but pain the giver,  
 And the soft band put on by thee,  
 The slightest chain, will last for ever!

**“Remember Thee! Remember Thee!”**

1.  
 Remember thee! remember thee!<sup>34</sup>  
 Till Lethe quench life’s burning stream  
 Remorse and Shame shall cling to thee,  
 And haunt thee like a feverish dream!

2. 5  
 Remember thee! Aye, doubt it not.  
 Thy husband too shall think of thee!  
 By neither shall thou be forgot,  
 Thou *false* to him, thou *fiend* to me!

**To One who promised on a Lock of Hair**

Vow not at all<sup>35</sup> – but if thou must,  
 O, be it by some slender token!  
 Since pious pledge, and plighted trust,  
 And holiest ties too oft are broken;  
 Then by this dearest trifle swear, 5  
 That if thou lov’st as I would have thee,  
 This votive ringlet’s tenderest hair  
 Will bind thy heart to that I gave thee.

**“Go – triumph securely”**

1.  
 Go – triumph securely – the treacherous vow  
*Thou* hast broken, *I* keep, but too faithfully now,  
 But never again shall thou be to my heart  
 What thou wert – what I fear for a moment thou art.

2. 5  
 To see thee, to love thee! what breast could do more?  
 To love thee, to lose thee, ’twere vain to deplore;  
 Ashamed of my weakness, however beguiled,  
 I shall bear like a Man what I feel like a Child.

**34:** Thomas Medwin reports B. as saying that Caroline “... promised young Grattan her favours if he would call me out. Yet can any one believe that she should be so infatuated after all this, as to call at my apartments? (certainly with no view of shooting herself.) I was from home; but finding ‘Vathek’ on the table, she wrote in the first page, ‘Remember me!’ / “Yes! I had cause to remember her; and, in the irritability of the moment, wrote under the two words these two stanzas ...” (Medwin ed. Lovell, p.218).

**35:** Compare Juliet to Romeo, II ii 112-13: *Do not swear at all, or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self ...*

3.

If a frown cloud my brow yet, it lowers not on thee,  
 If my heart should seem heavy, at least it is free; 10  
 But *Thou* in the pride of new conquest elate!  
 Alas! even Envy shall feel for thy Fate.

4.

For the first step of Error none e'er could recall,  
 And the woman once fallen forever must fall;  
 Pursue to the last the career she begun, 15  
 And be *false* unto *many* as *faithless* to *one*.<sup>36</sup>

5.

And they who have loved thee will leave thee to mourn,  
 And they who have hated will laugh thee to scorn,  
 And he who adores thee yet weeps to foretell  
 The pangs that will punish thy falsehood too well. 20

---

36: Compare *Don Juan* III st.3: In her first passion Woman loves her Lover,  
 In all the others all She loves is Love,  
 Which grows a habit She can ne'er get over,  
 And fits her loosely – like an easy Glove,  
 As you may find, whene'er you like to prove her;  
 One Man alone at first her heart can move;  
 She then prefers him in the plural number  
 Not finding that the additions much encumber.

### Frances Wedderburn Webster



Love affairs were a kind of game which rich married women played when they had nothing else to do, which in some cases was all the time. The next poems would lead us to believe that Frances Wedderburn Webster and Byron were lovers: but they weren't. The poet had been conducting a sort of laboratory-experiment flirtation, with his observation directed as much at the comical psychology of the husband, James Wedderburn Webster, as at the charms of Frances. He kept up a running account of the business for the amusement of Lady Melbourne.

On October 15th and 21st 1813, while the thing was afoot, Byron made two loans to James Wedderburn Webster of £500 each. They were never repaid. Frances Wedderburn Webster was finally adulterous, not just with anyone, but with the Duke of Wellington, in Paris after Waterloo in 1815.

The two sonnets to Frances Wedderburn Webster which Byron wrote in December 1813 are addressed "To Geneva," a wronged heroine (in fact Ginevra), in *Orlando Furioso* cantos 4 and 5. Ginevra is the Italian Guinevere, except that she is Scottish, and married neither to King Arthur nor to anyone else. The story of Ginevra is the source for the Claudio/Hero/Margaret/Borachio plot in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and using her name for Frances Wedderburn Webster makes Frances into the wronged Hero, the ignominious James Wedderburn Webster into Claudio, and Byron a Borachio who hasn't been to bed either with Hero, or with any local Margaret or Margarets. I'm not sure Byron was aware of this subtext when he chose "Genevra" as the name of his addressee.

#### Sonnet. To Geneva

Thine eyes' blue tenderness, thy long fair hair,  
 And the wan lustre of thy features – caught  
 From contemplation – where serenely wrought,  
 Seems Sorrow's softness charmed from its despair –  
 Have thrown such speaking sadness in thine air,                     5  
 That – but I know thy blessed bosom fraught  
 With mines of unalloyed and stainless thought –  
 I should have deemed thee doomed to earthly care.  
 With such an aspect by his colours blent,  
 When from his beauty-breathing pencil born,                     10  
 (Except that *thou* hast nothing to repent)  
 The Magdalen of Guido saw the morn –  
 Such seem'st thou – but how much more excellent!  
 With nought Remorse can claim – nor Virtue scorn.

#### Sonnet. To Geneva

Thy cheek is pale with thought, but not from woe,  
 And yet so lovely, that if Mirth could flush  
 Its rose of whiteness with the brightest blush,  
 My heart would wish away that ruder glow;  
 And dazzle not thy deep-blue eyes – but oh!                     5  
 While gazing on them sterner eyes will gush,  
 And into mine my mother's weakness rush,

Soft as the last drops round Heaven's airy bow;  
 For, through thy long dark lashes low depending,  
     The soul of melancholy Gentleness                 10  
 Gleams like a seraph from the sky descending,  
     Above all pain, yet pitying all distress;  
 At once such majesty with sweetness blending,  
     I worship more, but cannot love thee less.

**“Thou art not False, but thou art Fickle”**

1.  
 Thou art not false, but thou art fickle,  
     To those thyself so fondly sought;  
 The tears that thou hast forced to trickle  
     Are doubly bitter from that thought;  
 'Tis this which breaks the heart thou grieve'st                 5  
*Too well* thou lov'st – *too soon* thou leavest.

2.  
 The wholly false the *heart* despises,  
     And spurns deceiver and deceit;  
 But she who not a thought disguises,  
     Whose love is as sincere as sweet,                         10  
 When she can change who loved so truly,  
 It *feels* what mine has *felt* so newly.

3.  
 To dream of joy and wake to sorrow  
     Is doomed to all who love or live;  
 And if, when conscious on the morrow,  
     We scarce our Fancy can forgive,                         15  
 That cheated us in slumber only,  
 To leave the waking soul more lonely,

4.  
 What must they feel whom no false vision,  
     But truest, tenderest Passion warmed?                     20  
 Sincere, but swift in sad transition;  
     As if a dream alone had charmed?  
 Ah! sure such *grief* is *Fancy's* scheming,  
 And all thy *Change* can be but *dreaming!*

**“Remember him whom Passion's power”**

1.  
 Remember him whom Passion's power  
     Severely – deeply – vainly proved:  
 Remember thou that dangerous hour,  
     When neither fell, though both were loved.

2.  
 That yielding breast, that melting eye,                         5  
     Too much invited to be blessed;  
 That gentle prayer, that pleading sigh,

The wilder wish reprov'd, repress'd.

3.

Oh! let me feel that all I lost  
 But saved thee all that Conscience fears; 10  
 And blush for every pang it cost  
 To spare the vain remorse of years.

4.

Yet think of this when many a tongue,  
 Whose busy accents whisper blame,  
 Would do the heart that loved thee wrong, 15  
 And brand a nearly blighted name.

5.

Think that, whate'er to others, thou  
 Hast seen each selfish thought subdued;  
 I bless thy purer soul even now,  
 Even now, in midnight solitude. 20

6.

Oh, God! that we had met in time,  
 Our hearts as fond, thy hand more free;  
 When thou hadst loved without a crime,  
 And I been less unworthy thee!

7.

Far may thy days, as heretofore, 25  
 From this our gaudy world be past!  
 And that too bitter moment o'er,  
 Oh! may such trial be thy last.

8.

This heart, alas! perverted long,  
 Itself destroyed, might there destroy; 30  
 To meet thee in the glittering throng,  
 Would wake Presumption's hope of joy.

9.

Then to the things whose bliss or woe,  
 Like mine, is wild and worthless all,  
 That world resign – such scenes forego, 35  
 Where those who feel must surely fall.

10.

Thy youth thy charms, thy tenderness,  
 Thy soul from long seclusion pure;  
 From what even here hath passed, may guess  
 What there thy bosom must endure. 40

11.

Oh! pardon that imploring tear,  
 Since not by Virtue shed in vain,  
 My frenzy drew from eyes so dear;  
 For me they shall not weep again.

12.  
 Though long and mournful must it be, 45  
     The thought that we no more may meet;  
 Yet I deserve the stern decree,  
     And almost deem the sentence sweet.

13.  
 Still, had I loved thee less, my heart  
     Had then less sacrifice to thine; 50  
 It felt not half so much to part  
     As if its guilt had made thee mine.

The last poem was written after Waterloo, when Frances' affair with Wellington (whom Byron despised) became common knowledge. It would read better if we knew Byron *had* been Frances' lover: its tone of sadness and reproof disguises his bitterness at realising that Wellington, the man of blood, had had the boldness to rush in where he, the mere man of ink, had feared to tread. Byron always wanted a life of action, and died trying to live one.

### “When We Two Parted”

1.  
 When we two parted  
     In silence and tears,  
 Half broken-hearted  
     To sever for years,  
 Pale grew thy cheek and cold, 5  
     Colder thy kiss;  
 Truly that hour foretold  
     Sorrow to this.

2.  
 The dew of the morning  
     Sunk chill on my brow – 10  
 It felt like the warning  
     Of what I feel now.  
 Thy vows are all broken,  
     And light is thy fame;  
 I hear thy name spoken, 15  
     And share in its shame.

3.  
 They name thee before me,  
     A knell to mine ear;  
 A shudder comes o'er me –  
     Why wert thou so dear? 20  
 They know not I knew thee,  
     Who knew thee too well;  
 Long, long shall I rue thee,  
     Too deeply to tell.

4. 25  
 In secret we met  
     In silence I grieve,  
 That thy heart could forget,

Thy spirit deceive.  
 If I should meet thee  
 After long years,  
 How should I greet thee?  
 With silence and tears.

30

### Augusta Leigh

It's Sophocles' Antigone who says<sup>37</sup> that the brother / sister bond will always be stronger than the marriage-tie. Husbands and even children may come and go, but brothers are for ever. I don't imagine that Augusta read Sophocles; but the unpossessive way in which she loved Byron suggests that she had the confidence that nothing could destroy their relationship. The only thing which could weaken it was prolonged separation, and this was their doom.

On November 29th 1813 Augusta writes to Byron (the "+"s signifying physical affection):

I want to know dearest B + your plans – When you come + when you go – ... umph! when the writings travel – when y<sup>e</sup> Cake is to be cut – when the Bells are to ring – &c – &c – &c – by the bye my visitors and acquainted with *a* & did praise her to the skies – they say her health has been hurt by *Studying* &c &c &c I have not a moment more my dearest + except to say ever thine [*scrawl*]<sup>38</sup>

The italicised "*a* ... praised to the skies" is Annabella Milbanke, and the whole business spirals out of control when, thirteen months after



Augusta writes this, Byron marries Annabella, aware all the time that it's a colossal mistake, and despite Augusta's encouragement.

Byron's best poems to Augusta are the poems of gratitude he wrote to her upon leaving England (see *Poems of Separation*); the two here (dated 1814), are only tentatively assumed to be addressed to her.

### Stanzas for Music

1.

I speak not, I trace not, I breathe not thy name,  
 There is grief in the sound, there is guilt in the fame:  
 But the tear which now burns on my cheek may impart  
 The deep thoughts that dwell in that silence of heart.

2.

Too brief for our passion, too long for our peace,  
 Were those hours – can their joy or their bitterness cease?  
 We repent, we abjure, we will break from our chain –  
 We will part, we will fly to – unite it again!

5

<sup>37</sup>: See Sophocles, *Antigone*, 904-12.

<sup>38</sup>: Quoted Michael and Melissa Bakewell, *Augusta Leigh* (Chatto and Windus 2000), pp.141-2.



3.

Oh! thine be the gladness, and mine be the guilt!  
 Forgive me, adored one! – forsake, if thou wilt; 10  
 But the heart which is thine shall expire undebased,  
 And *man* shall not break it – whatever *thou* mayst.

4.

And stern to the haughty, but humble to thee,  
 This soul, in its bitterest blackness, shall be;  
 And our days seem as swift, and our moments more sweet, 15  
 With thee by my side, than with worlds at our feet.

5.

One sigh of thy sorrow, one look of thy love,  
 Shall turn me or fix, shall reward or reprove;  
 And the heartless may wonder at all I resign –  
 Thy lip shall reply, not to them, but to mine. 20

### Farewell! if ever Fondest Prayer

1.

Farewell! if ever fondest prayer  
 For other's weal availed on high,  
 Mine will not all be lost in air,  
 But waft thy name beyond the sky.  
 'Twere vain to speak – to weep – to sigh; 5  
 Oh! more than tears of blood can tell,  
 When wrung from Guilt's expiring eye,  
 Are in that word – Farewell! – Farewell!

2.

These lips are mute, these eyes are dry;  
 But in my breast and in my brain, 10  
 Awake the pangs that pass not by,  
 The thought that ne'er shall sleep again.  
 My soul nor deigns nor dares complain  
 Though Grief and Passion there rebel;  
 I only know we loved in vain – 15  
 I only feel – Farewell! – Farewell!

### Stanzas on the Death of the Duke of Dorset

Byron's two early poems to his younger Harrow friend the Duke of Dorset were added to *Hours of Idleness* in its section version, *Poems Original and Translated*. Dorset was killed in a riding accident in February 1815, shortly after Byron's marriage.

1.

I heard thy fate without a tear,  
 Thy loss with scarce a sigh;  
 And yet thou wert surpassing dear –  
 Too loved of all to die.  
 I know not what hath seared mine eye,                   5  
 The tears refuse to start;  
 But every drop its lids deny  
 Falls dreary on my heart.

2.

Yet – deep and heavy, one by one,  
 They sink and turn to care;                                   10  
 As caverned waters wear the stone,  
 Yet dropping harden there –  
 They cannot petrify more fast  
 Than feelings sunk remain,  
 Which, coldly fixed, regard the past,                   15  
 But never melt again.

#### “In those young days so fond and fair”

1.

In those young days, so fond and fair,  
     When Childhood shone above thee,  
 And beating with a Brother's care  
     My heart was proud to love thee –  
 In those young days, so fair and fond,                   5  
     Which saw our souls united,  
 I little deemed the years beyond  
     Would see my hopes so blighted.

2.

But thou art gone – where all must go –  
     So soon, so sadly stricken;                                   10  
 Thy heart scarce felt the sudden blow,  
     But ours forever sicken.  
 The pangs that spared thee live for those  
     Who mourn that now they kill not;  
 And many an eye like thine must close,                   15  
     Ere o'er thy name it fill not.

### Stanzas for Music

The waste, loss, and disillusion we find in all the above are well summed-up in this poem, written, like the two poems about Dorset, a month after Byron's marriage. Its sentiments do not look well coming from the pen of a newly-married man with a loving wife.

"O Lachrymarum fons, tenero sacros  
Ducentium ortus ex animo: quater  
Felix! in imo qui scatentem  
Pectore te, pia Nympha, sensit."<sup>39</sup> – Gray's *Poemata*.

1.

There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,  
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay;  
'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek the blush alone, which fades so fast,  
But the tender bloom of heart is gone, ere youth itself be past.

2.

Then the few whose spirits float above the wreck of happiness,  
Are driven o'er the shoals of guilt or ocean of excess:  
The magnet of their course is gone, or only points in vain  
The shore to which their shivered sail shall never stretch again.

3.

Then the mortal coldness of the soul like death itself comes down;  
It cannot feel for others' woes, it dare not dream its own; 10  
That heavy chill has frozen o'er the fountain of our tears,  
And tho' the eye may sparkle still, 'tis where the ice appears.

4.

Tho' wit may flash from fluent lips, and mirth distract the breast,  
Through midnight hours that yield no more their former hope of rest;  
'Tis but as ivy-leaves around the ruined turret wreath, 15  
All green and wildly fresh without but worn and grey beneath.

5.

Oh could I feel as I have felt – or be what I have been,  
Or weep as I could once have wept, o'er many a vanished scene;  
As springs in deserts found seem sweet, all brackish though they be,  
So midst the withered waste of life, those tears would flow to me. 20

---

**39:** "Oh fountain of tears which have their sacred / sources in the sensitive soul! Four times / fortunate is he who has felt / thee bubbling up, holy nymph, / from the depths of his heart!" B. has used the epigraph before, for *The Tear* in *Fugitive Pieces* and *Hours of Idleness*.