

## SIX POEMS OF SEPARATION

If one's marriage were to collapse in humiliating, semi-public circumstances, and if one were in part to blame for its collapse, one's reaction would probably be to maintain a discreet and (one would hope) a dignified silence, and to hope that the thing might blow over in a year or so. Byron's reaction was write, and publish, poetry about it while it was still collapsing. The first two of these poems were written in London – the first is to his wife, and the next about and to her friend and confidante Mrs Clermont – before he left England, on Thursday April 25th 1816. The next three were written in Switzerland after his departure, and are addressed to his half-sister Augusta. The last one is again to his wife. They show violent contrasts in style and tone (the *Epistle to Augusta* is Byron's first poem in ottava rima), and strange, contrasting aspects of Byron's nature. That he should wish them published at all is perhaps worrying. The urge to confess without necessarily repenting was, however, deep within him.

*Fare Thee Well!* with its elaborate air of injured innocence, and its implication that Annabella's reasons for leaving him remain incomprehensible, sorts ill with what we know of his behaviour during the disintegration of their marriage in the latter months of 1815.

John Gibson Lockhart was moved, five years later, to protest:

... why, then, did you, who are both a gentleman and a nobleman, act upon this the most delicate occasion, in all probability, your life was ever to present, as if you had been neither a nobleman nor a gentleman, but some mere overweeningly conceited poet?<sup>1</sup>

Of *A Sketch from Private Life*, William Gifford, Byron's "Literary Father", wrote to Murray:

It is a dreadful picture – Caravaggio outdone in his own way. I have hinted at the removal of one couplet – if its sense be amended it may be compressed into one of the other lines. Its powers are unquestionable – but can any human being deserve such a delineation?

I keep my old opinion of Lord Byron – he may be what he will – why will he not will to be the first of poets and of men? I lament bitterly to see a great mind run to seed, & waste itself in such growth.

Ever yours,  
W.G.<sup>2</sup>

And it is true that the spite depicted in the *Sketch* seems in excess of any malice Mrs Clermont may have harboured. One theory is that she is only the pretended victim, and that Byron's real hatred is focussed on his mother-in-law, Lady Milbanke, who, we know, hated him back, and whose death he looked forward to with eagerness from now on. But a comparison with the final poem here (*Lines on Hearing that Lady Byron was Ill*) suggests that by the end of 1816 he had dropped any such pretence, and that he saw Annabella, as well as her friend and her mother, as representing the kind of treachery which he seems to have associated with Geraldine, the vampire (perhaps) and lesbian (perhaps – we shall never know) in Coleridge's *Christabel*.

And even as we are moved by the less questionable sincerity of the three poems to the innocent Augusta (*Though woman, thou didst not forsake*), we are nudged by Hobhouse's superb parody of the third one (it is Hobhouse's best poem) into an awareness that other attitudes to Byron's exile were possible.

The affair provided Byron with excellent comic material two years later, when he wanted a model for Donna Inez, the hero's mother (*In short, She was a walking Calculation*)<sup>3</sup> in *Don Juan*.

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1: John Gibson Lockhart, *John Bull's Letter to Lord Byron*, ed. A.L.Strout (Oklahoma 1947), pp.107-8. The whole passage is worth reading.

2: Undated internal memorandum, John Murray Archive / National Library of Scotland.

3: *Don Juan* I 16 1.



Still must mine, though bleeding, beat,  
 And the undying thought which paineth  
 Is – that we no more may meet.<sup>8</sup>  
 These are words of deeper sorrow  
 Than the wail above the dead; 30  
 Both shall live, but every morrow  
 Wake us from a widowed bed.  
 And when thou wouldst solace gather  
 When our child's first accents flow  
 Wilt thou teach her to say 'Father!' 35  
 Though his care she must forego?  
 When her little hands shall press thee,  
 When her lip to thine is pressed,  
 Think of him whose prayer shall bless thee,  
 Think of him thy love hath blessed. 40  
 Should her lineaments resemble  
 Those thou never more may'st see  
 Then thy heart will softly tremble  
 With a pulse yet true to me.  
 All my faults (perchance thou knowest) 45  
 All my madness – none can know;  
 All my hopes, where'er thou goest,  
 Wither – yet with *thee* they go.  
 Every feeling hath been shaken,  
 Pride (which not a world could bow) 50  
 Bows to thee – by thee forsaken,  
 Even my soul forsakes me now.  
 But 'tis done, all words are idle –  
 Words from me are vainer still;  
 But the thoughts we cannot bridle 55  
 Force their way without the will.  
 Fare thee well! – thus disunited,  
 Torn from every nearer tie,  
 Seared in my heart – and lone – and blighted –  
 More than this, I scarce can die. 60

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8: Compare *Macbeth*, I i 1.

## A SKETCH FROM PRIVATE LIFE

[Drafted March 30th 1816; fair-copied by Augusta on the same date; privately printed April 4th 1816; pirated in *The Champion*, April 14th 1816; first authorised printing in a three-volume John Murray complete Byron, 1819. The text below is from CPW III 382-6.]

“Honest – Honest Iago!  
If that thou be’st a devil, I cannot kill thee.”<sup>9</sup>  
Shakespeare

Born in the garret, in the kitchen bred,  
Promoted thence to deck her mistress’ head;  
Next – for some gracious service unexpressed,  
And from its wages only to be guess’d –  
Rais’d from the toilet to the table, – where 5  
Her wondering betters wait behind her chair,  
With eye unmoved, and forehead unabash’d,  
She dines from off the plate she lately wash’d.  
Quick with the tale, and ready with the lie –  
The genial confidante, and general spy – 10  
Who could, ye gods! her next employment guess –  
An only infant’s earliest governess!<sup>10</sup>  
She taught the child to read, and taught so well,  
That she herself, by teaching, learn’d to spell.  
An adept next in penmanship she grows, 15  
As many a nameless slander deftly shows:  
What she had made the pupil of her art,  
None know – but that high Soul secur’d the heart,  
And panted for the truth it could not hear,  
With longing breast and undeluded ear. 20

Foil’d was perversion by that youthful mind,  
Which Flattery fooled not – Baseness could not blind,  
Deceit infect not – near Contagion soil –  
Indulgence weaken – nor Example spoil –  
Nor master’d Science tempt her to look down 25  
On humbler talents with a pitying frown –  
Nor Genius swell – nor Beauty render vain –  
Nor Envy ruffle to retaliate pain –  
Nor Fortune change – Pride raise – nor Passion bow,  
Nor Virtue teach austerity – till now. 30  
Serenely purest of her sex that live,  
But wanting one sweet weakness – to forgive,  
Too shock’d at faults her soul can never know,  
She deems that all could be like her below:  
Foe to all Vice, yet hardly Virtue’s friend, 35  
For Virtue pardons those she would amend.

But to the theme: – now laid aside too long  
The baleful burthen of this honest song –  
Though all her former functions are no more,  
She rules the circle which she served before. 40

<sup>9</sup>: *Othello*, V ii 157 and 290 (conflated).

<sup>10</sup>: Annabella Milbanke was an only child.

If mothers – none know why – before her quake;  
 If daughters dread her for the mother's sake;  
 If early habits – those false links, which bind  
 At times the loftiest to the meanest mind –  
 Have given her power too deeply to instil 45  
 The angry essence of her deadly will;  
 If like a snake<sup>11</sup> she steals within your walls,  
 Till the black slime betray her as she crawls;  
 If like a viper to the heart she wind,  
 And leave the venom there she did not find; – 50  
 What marvel that this hag of hatred works  
 Eternal evil latent as she lurks  
 To make a Pandemonium<sup>12</sup> where she dwells,  
 And reign the Hecate<sup>13</sup> of domestic Hells?  
 Skill'd by a touch to deepen scandal's tints 55  
 With all the kind mendacity of hints<sup>14</sup>  
 While mingling truth with falsehood – sneers with smiles –  
 A thread of candour with a web of wiles;  
 A plain blunt show of briefly-spoken seeming,  
 To hide her bloodless heart's soul-hardened scheming; 60  
 A lip of lies – a face formed to conceal;  
 And, without feeling, mock at all who feel:<sup>15</sup>  
 With a vile mask the Gorgon<sup>16</sup> would disown;  
 A cheek of parchment – and an eye of stone.<sup>17</sup>  
 Mark, how the channels of her yellow blood 65  
 Ooze to her skin, and stagnate there to mud,

**11:** Compare *Manfred*, I i 232-51:

From thy false tears I did distill  
 An essence which hath strength to kill;  
 From thy own heart I then did wring  
 The black blood in its blackest Spring,  
 From thy own smile I snatched the Snake,  
 For there it coiled as in a brake;  
 From thy own lip I drew the charm  
 Which gave all these their chiefest harm;  
 In proving every poison known,  
 I found the strongest was thine own.

By thy cold breast and serpent smile,  
 By thy unfathomed gulphs of Guile,  
 By that most seeming virtuous eye,  
 By thy shut soul's Hypocrisy,  
 By the perfection of thine art  
 Which passed for human thine own heart,  
 By thy delight in others' pain,  
 And by thy brotherhood of Cain,  
 I call upon thee! and compell  
 Thyself to be thy proper Hell!

Compare also the snake-visions at Coleridge, *Christabel*, 549-54 and 583-8.

**12:** Home to all the Demons. See *Paradise Lost* I 692-730.

**13:** Queen of the Witches. See *Macbeth*, III spurious scene v.

**14:** Echoes Pope, *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*, 204: *Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike ...*

**15:** Echoes Pope, *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*, 202: *And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer ...*

**16:** The foremost Gorgon was Medusa, whose glance turned people to stone.

**17:** Compare the address to Castlereagh at *Don Juan*, Dedication, 16 1: *Cold-blooded, smooth-faced, placid Miscreant!*

Cased like the centipede in saffron mail,  
 Or darker greenness of the scorpion's scale –  
 (For drawn from reptiles only we may trace  
 Congenial colours in that soul or face) – 70  
 Look on her features! and behold her mind  
 As in a mirror of itself defined:  
 Look on the picture! deem it not o'ercharged –  
 There is no trait which might not be enlarged:  
 Yet true to "Nature's journeymen",<sup>18</sup> who made 75  
 This monster when their mistress left off trade, –  
 This female dog-star of her little sky,  
 Where all beneath her influence droop or die.<sup>19</sup>

Oh! wretch without a tear – without a thought,  
 Save joy above the ruin thou hast wrought – 80  
 The time shall come, nor long remote, when thou  
 Shalt feel far more than thou inflictest now;  
 Feel for thy vile self-loving self again,  
 And turn thee howling in unpitied pain.  
 May the strong curse of crush'd affections light 85  
 Back on thy bosom with reflected blight!  
 And make thee in thy leprosy of mind  
 As loathsome to thyself as to mankind!  
 Till all thy self-thoughts curdle into hate,  
 Black – as thy will for others would create: 90  
 Till thy hard heart be calcined into dust,  
 And thy soul welter in its hideous crust.  
 Oh, may thy grave be sleepless as thy bed, –  
 The widow'd couch of fire, that thou hast spread!  
 Then, when thou fain would'st weary Heaven with prayer, 95  
 Look on thy earthly victims – and despair!  
 Down to the dust! – and, as thou rott'st away,  
 Even worms shall perish on thy poisonous clay.  
 But for the love I bore, and still must bear,  
 To her thy malice from all ties would tear – 100  
 Thy name – thy human name – to every eye  
 The climax of all scorn should hang on high,  
 Exalted o'er thy less abhorred compeers –  
 And festering in the infamy of years.

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**18:** *Hamlet*, III ii 32-4: *I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.*

**19:** Sirius, the Dog Star, is brightest of all the fixed stars. Roman poets recited their verse when it was brightest. Mrs Clermont has the opposite effect on people. See *Don Juan*, Dedication, 4 3, and Pope, *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*, line 3.

## TO AUGUSTA

[First published (as *To* —) in *Poems, 1816*, pp. 9-12.]

1.  
 When all around grew drear and dark,  
 And reason half withheld her ray –  
 And hope but shed a dying spark  
 Which more misled my lonely way;
2. 5  
 In that deep midnight of the mind,  
 And that internal strife of heart,  
 When dreading to be deemed too kind,  
 The weak despair – the cold depart;
3. 10  
 When fortune changed – and love fled far,  
 And hatred's shafts flew thick and fast,  
 Thou wert the solitary star<sup>20</sup>  
 Which rose and set not to the last.
4. 15  
 Oh! blest be thine unbroken light!  
 That watched me as a seraph's eye,  
 And stood between me and the night,  
 For ever shining sweetly nigh.
5. 20  
 And when the cloud upon us came,  
 Which strove to blacken o'er thy ray –  
 Then purer spread its gentle flame,  
 And dashed the darkness all away.
6.  
 Still my thy spirit dwell on mine,  
 And teach it what to brave or brook –  
 There's more in one soft word of thine,  
 Than in the world's defied rebuke.
7. 25  
 Thou stood'st, as stands a lovely tree,  
 That still unbroke, but gently bent,  
 Still waves with fond fidelity  
 Its boughs above a monument.
8. 30  
 The winds might rend – the skies might pour,  
 But there thou wert – and still wouldst be  
 Devoted in the stormier hour  
 To shed thy weeping leaves o'er me.
- 9.

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**20:** Compare the solitary star at *Manfred* I i 49 (stage direction).





## EPISTLE TO AUGUSTA

[Drafted July 26th 1816, fair-copied same day; fair-copied later by Claire Claremont; not published in Byron's lifetime, its publication being forbidden by Augusta; first printed in Moore's *Life*, 1830, II 38-41. The text below is based on the draft in the Huntington Library, California. The volume in the John Murray Archive containing Claire Claremont's fair copy of *Childe Harold III* and other poems, has pages 192 to 204, numbered by Claire, missing. Page 191 contains the end of *Darkness*, copied in a hand not Claire's, showing that the original has been removed, with, on the reverse, the opening of the *Epistle*.]

1.

My sister, my sweet sister – if a name  
 Dearer and purer were, it should be thine.  
 Mountains and seas divide us,<sup>21</sup> but I claim  
 No tears, but tenderness to answer mine:  
 Go where I will, to me thou art the same – 5  
 A loved regret which I would not resign;  
 There yet are two things in my destiny:  
 A world to roam through, and a home with thee.

2.

The first were nothing – had I still the last  
 It were the haven of my happiness; 10  
 But other claims and other ties thou hast,  
 And mine is not the wish to make them less.  
 A strange doom was thy father's son's, and past  
 Recalling, as it lies beyond redress;  
 Reversed for him our grandsire's fate of yore – 15  
 He had no rest on sea, \* nor I on shore.

\* Admiral Byron was remarkable for never making a voyage without a tempest<sup>22</sup> –  
 But, though it were tempest-tost,  
 Still his bark could not be lost.

He returned safely from the wreck of the *Wager* (in Anson's voyage) and subsequently circumnavigated the world many years after – as commander of a similar expedition.

3.

If my inheritance of storms hath been  
 In other elements, and on the rocks  
 Of perils overlooked or unforeseen,  
 I have sustained my share of worldly shocks: 20  
 The fault was mine – nor do I seek to screen  
 My errors with defensive paradox:  
 I have been cunning in mine overthrow,

**21:** Echoes the Petrarchan epigraph to de Staël's *Corinne*: "...udrallo il bel paese / Che Apennin parte, e il mar circonda, e l'Alpe" ("it will be heard in the Beautiful Country [*that is, Italy*] which is divided by the Apennines, and encircled by the Sea, and by the Alps" – Petrarch, *Rime*, 146, 13–14). In 1819 B. quoted this in the inscription he wrote in *Corinna* (the Italian translation) for Teresa Guiccioli (BLJ VI 216).

**22:** Their grandfather Admiral John Byron was known in the Navy as "Foul-Weather Jack". His book *The Narrative of the Honourable John Byron* (1768) will be one source for *Don Juan* Canto II (see stanza 137, 7-8). See Cochran, *Don Juan, Canto II: A Reconsideration of some of Byron's Borrowings from his Shipwreck Sources*, *Byron Journal*, 1991, pp. 141-5.

The careful pilot of my proper woe.

4.

Mine were my faults, and mine be their reward; 25  
 My whole life was a contest, since the day  
 That gave me being gave me that which marred  
 The gift – a fate or will that walked astray –  
 And I at times have found the struggle hard,  
 And thought of shaking off my bonds of clay; 30  
 But now I fain would for a time survive,  
 If but to see what next can well arrive.

5.

Kingdoms and empires in my little day  
 I have outlived and yet I am not old;  
 And when I look on this, the petty spray 35  
 Of mine own years of trouble, which have rolled  
 Like a wild bay of breakers, melts away:  
 Something (I know not what) does still uphold  
 A spirit of slight patience; not in vain,  
 Even for its own sake, do we purchase pain. 40

6.

Perhaps the workings of defiance stir  
 Within me, or perhaps a cold despair,  
 Brought on when ills habitually recur;  
 Perhaps a harder clime or purer air – 45  
 For to all such may change of soul refer,  
 And with light armour we may learn to bear –  
 Have taught me a strange quiet which was not  
 The chief companion of a calmer lot.

7.

I feel almost at times as I have felt  
 In happy childhood – trees and flowers and brooks, 50  
 Which do remember me of where I dwelt  
 Ere my young mind was sacrificed to books,  
 Come as of yore upon me, and can melt  
 My heart with recognition of their looks –  
 And even at moments I could think I see 55  
 Some living things to love, but none like thee.

8.

Here are the Alpine landscapes, which create  
 A fund for contemplation – to admire  
 Is a brief feeling of a trivial date –  
 But something worthier do such scenes inspire: 60  
 Here to be lonely is not desolate,  
 For much I view which I could most desire,  
 And above all a lake I can behold –

Lovelier, not dearer, than our own of old.<sup>23</sup>

## 9.

Oh that thou wert but with me! – but I grow 65  
 The fool of my own wishes, and forget;  
 The solitude which I have vaunted so  
 Has lost its praise in this but one regret –  
 There may be others which I less may show;  
 I am not of the plaintive mood – and yet 70  
 I feel an ebb in my philosophy  
 And the tide rising in my altered eye.

## 10.

I did remind thee of our own dear lake  
 By the old hall which may be mine no more;  
 Leman's is fair, but think not I forsake 75  
 The sweet remembrance of a dearer shore:  
 Sad havoc time must with my memory make  
 Ere *that* or *thou* can fade these eyes before –  
 Though like all things which I have loved, they are  
 Resigned for ever, or divided far. 80

## 11.

The world is all before me<sup>24</sup> – I but ask  
 Of nature that with which she will comply:  
 It is but in her summer's sun to bask,  
 To mingle in the quiet of her sky,  
 To see her gentle face without a mask 85  
 And never gaze on it with apathy.  
 She was my early friend, and now shall be  
 My sister – till I look again on thee.

## 12.

I can reduce all feelings but this one,  
 And that I would not – for at length I see 90  
 Such scenes as those wherein my life begun  
 The earliest were the only paths for me.  
 Had I but sooner known the crowd to shun,  
 I had been better than I now can be;  
 The passions which have torn me would have slept – 95  
 I had not suffered, and *thou* hadst not wept.

## 13.

With false ambition what had I to do?  
 Little with love, and least of all with fame!  
 And yet they came unsought and with me grew,

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**23:** The lake(s) at Newstead Abbey.

**24:** A deliberate echo of *Paradise Lost*, XII 644-5: *The World was all before them, where to choose / Their place of rest, and Providence their guide ...*

And made me all which they can make – a name. 100  
 Yet this was not the end I did pursue –  
 Surely I once beheld a nobler aim.  
 But all is over – I am one the more  
 To baffled millions which have gone before.

## 14.

And for the future – this world's future may 105  
 From me demand but little from my care;  
 I have outlived myself by many a day,  
 Having survived so many things that were;  
 My years have been no slumber – but the prey  
 Of ceaseless vigils; for I had the share 110  
 Of life which might have filled a century  
 Before its fourth in time had passed me by.

## 15.

And for the remnants which may be to come  
 I am content – and for the past I feel  
 Not thankless, for within the crowded sum 115  
 Of struggles happiness in time would steal;  
 And for the present, I would not benumb  
 My feelings farther – nor shall I conceal  
 That with all this I still can look around  
 And worship nature with a thought profound. 120

## 16.

For thee, my own sweet sister, in thy heart  
 I know myself secure – as thou in mine  
 We were and are – I am – even as thou art –  
 Beings who ne'er each other can resign,  
 It is the same together or apart: 125  
 From life's commencement to its slow decline  
 We are entwined – let death come slow or fast,  
 The tie which bound the first endures the last.

## STANZAS TO AUGUSTA

[Date of composition unknown; fair-copied by both Byron and Augusta on unknown dates; published as “Stanzas to ——” with *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), pp.24-6. The text below is from Byron’s rough draft in the Huntington Library, California, his fair copy in the British Library (B.L. Ashley 5758), and Clare Clairmont’s fair copy, which is without stanza 6, in the John Murray Archive / National Library of Scotland.]

## 1.

Though the day of my destiny’s over,  
 And the star of my fate hath declined,  
 Thy soft heart refused to discover  
 The faults which so many could find;  
 Though thy soul with my grief was acquainted,       5  
 It shrunk not to share it with me,  
 And the love which my spirit hath painted  
 It never hath found but in *thee*.

## 2.

Then when nature around me is smiling,  
 The last smile which answers to mine,       10  
 I do not believe it beguiling,  
 Because it reminds me of thine;  
 And when winds are at war with the ocean,  
 As the breasts I believed in with me,  
 If their billows excite an emotion,       15  
 It is that they bear me from *thee*.

## 3.

Though the rock of my last hope is shivered,  
 And its fragments are sunk in the wave,  
 Though I feel that my soul is delivered  
 To pain – it shall not be its slave.       20  
 There is many a pang to pursue me –  
 They may crush, but they shall not contemn;  
 They may torture, but shall not subdue me –  
 ’Tis of *thee* that I think, not of them.

## 4.

Though human, thou didst not deceive me;       25  
 Though woman, thou didst not forsake;  
 Though loved, thou forborest to grieve me;  
 Though slandered, thou never couldst shake;  
 Though trusted, thou didst not betray me;  
 Though parted, it was not to fly;       30  
 Though watchful, ’twas not to defame me,  
 Nor, mute, that the world might belie.

## 5.

Yet I blame not the world, nor condemn it,

Nor the war of the many with one –  
 If my soul was not fitted to prize it 35  
   'Twas folly not sooner to shun:  
 And if dearly that error hath cost me,  
   And more than I once could foresee,  
 I have found that, whatever it lost me,  
   It could not deprive me of *thee*. 40

## 6.

From the wreck of the past, which hath perished,  
   Thus much I at least my recall,  
 It hath taught me that what I most cherished  
   Deserved to be dearest of all:  
 In the desert a fountain is springing, 45  
   In the wide waste there still is a tree,  
 And a bird in the solitude singing,<sup>25</sup>  
   Which speaks to my spirit of *thee*.

**HOBHOUSE'S PARODY OF STANZAS TO AUGUSTA**

[Text from Michael Joyce, *My Friend H.*, pp. 107-9.]

## I

Dear *Byron* this humbug give over;  
   Never talk of decay or decline.  
 No mortal alive can discover  
   The cause of so causeless a whine.  
 My soul with thy griefs was acquainted,  
   But the devil a merit in me;  
 For Momus himself never painted  
   A livelier creature than thee.

## II

When every one round thee is smiling  
   In hopes of a look or a nod,  
 'Tis you and not we are beguiling  
   In talking so doleful and odd.  
 No winds were at war with the ocean,  
   The tide and the breezes were fair;  
 If the billows caused any emotion,  
   'Twas one where the heart had no share.

## III

The voyage 'twixt Ostend and Dover  
   Your stomach would rather be better for,  
 And the veriest poet or lover  
   Can never be drowned but in metaphor.  
 You talk of your pangs. Heaven defend us!  
   "They may crush," but you never will wince;  
 "They may torture" – the word is tremendous,  
   But the thing was abolished long since.

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25: Compare the bird at *The Prisoner of Chillon*, section 9.

## IV

Though a poet, you should not abuse us;  
     Though a wit, have a truce with your jokes;  
 Though you govern us all, yet excuse us  
     If we think there's enough of this hoax.  
 Though trusted, no creditors touch thee;  
     Though parted, 'tis but from thy wife;  
 Though wakeful, with Molly to much thee  
     'Tis not such a damnable life.

## V

You blame not the world, nor despise it,  
     Nor the war of the many. Well done!  
 You serve the world right not to prize it,  
     That has left all her many for one;  
 If dearly that pref<sup>r</sup>ence has cost us,  
     One comfort we all may foresee –  
 Whatever our choice may have lost us,  
     We're sure of fresh poems from thee.

## VI

Though the stock of our verses hath perished,  
     No dearth, it appears, can befall,  
 Since the poet that most we have cherished  
     Bids fair to be longest of all.  
 Fresh Harolds for ever are springing;  
     In spite of his well, and his tree,  
 Our bard on the Brenta keeps singing  
     Of heroes mistaken for thee.

## LINES ON HEARING THAT LADY BYRON WAS ILL

[Written at an unknown date late in 1816. Not published in Byron's lifetime. First published by Lady Blessington in *The New Monthly Magazine*, 1832.]

And thou wert sad – yet I was not with thee;  
 And thou wert sick, and yet I was not near;  
 Methought that joy and health alone could be  
 Where I was not – and pain and sorrow here!  
 And is it thus? – it is as I foretold, 5  
 And shall be more so; for the mind recoils  
 Upon itself, and the wreck'd heart lies cold,  
 While heaviness collects the shatter'd spoils.  
 It is not in the storm nor in the strife  
 We feel benumb'd, and wish to be no more, 10  
 But in the after-silence on the shore,  
 When all is lost, except a little life.

I am too well avenged! – but 'twas my right;  
 Whate'er my sins might be, *thou* wert not sent  
 To be the Nemesis who should requite – 15  
 Nor did Heaven choose so near an instrument.

Mercy is for the merciful! – if thou  
 Hast been of such, 'twill be accorded now.  
 Thy nights are banish'd from the realms of sleep! –  
 Yet they may flatter thee, but thou shalt feel 20  
 A hollow agony which will not heal,  
 For thou art pillow'd on a curse too deep;  
 Thou hast sown in my sorrow, and must reap  
 The bitter harvest in a woe as real!  
 I have had many foes, but none like thee; 25  
 For 'gainst the rest myself I could defend,  
 And be avenged, or turn them into friend;  
 But thou in safe implacability  
 Hadst nought to dread – in thine own weakness shielded,  
 And in my love, which has but too much yielded, 30  
 And spared, for thy sake, some I should not spare –  
 And thus upon the World's trust in thy truth –  
 And the wild fame of my ungovern'd youth –  
 On things that were not, and on things that are –  
 Even upon such a basis hast thou built 35  
 A monument, whose cement hath been guilt!  
 The moral Clytemnestra of thy lord,<sup>26</sup>  
 And hew'd down, with an unsuspected sword,  
 Fame, peace, and hope – and all the better life  
 Which, but for this cold treason of thy heart, 40  
 Might still have risen from out the grave of strife,  
 And found a nobler duty than to part.  
 But of thy virtues thou didst make a vice,  
 Trafficking with them in a purpose cold,  
 For present anger, and for future gold – 45

**26:** Clytemnestra was the wife of Agamemnon, who, on his return from the Trojan War with his concubine Cassandra, netted him in the bath helped by her lover Aegisthus, and hacked him to death.



And buying other's grief at any price.  
 And thus once enter'd into crooked ways,  
 The early Truth, which was thy proper praise,  
 Did not still walk beside thee – but at times,  
 And with a breast unknowing its own crimes, 50  
 Deceit, averments incompatible,  
 Equivocations, and the thoughts which dwell  
 In Janus-spirits – the significant eye  
 Which learns to lie with silence<sup>27</sup> – the pretext  
 Of Prudence, with advantages annex'd – 55  
 The acquiescence in all things which tend,  
 No matter how, to the desired end –  
 All found a place in thy philosophy.  
 The means were worthy, and the end is won –  
 I would not do by thee as thou hast done! 60

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27: Compare above, *A Sketch from Private Life*, 62n.