

## PARISINA

*Parisina* is the sixth and last of Byron's eastern tales to be published (though not, it seems, the last to be written). It is the shortest, and the only one in which there is no trace of even residual "Turkishness," since it is set in Italy, with no oriental action antecedent to its action, as *Lara* has. It also has no vocabulary heavily-weighted with local colour – it seems that Byron, in an Italian setting, either did not feel the need to use strange words, or had none as yet to use. Its drama relies on the triangulation of older man / younger wife or betrothed / younger lover – familiar to the world since Theseus / Phaedra / Hippolytus from Greece (see Pushkin, quoted below, line 233n), and both Arthur / Guinevere / Lancelot and Mark / Tristram / Iseult from British and Celtic myth. Byron had already made himself familiar with the variations possible inherent in such a pattern with *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Corsair*.

Parisina is the sexiest of Byron's early heroines – in fact, the only one who is allowed a sexual appetite. She is, it goes without saying, damned for it, as well as running mad at the consequences of having allowed her life to be governed by its dictates.



*Parisina and Hugo*<sup>1</sup>

Hugo, is with corresponding aptness, not a Byronic hero. For one thing, he is unambiguously heterosexual – too much so for his own good – has been a successful soldier, and is a good Catholic, not rejecting, as the Giaour does, the consolations of the church in his last hours. He is only a rebel in erotic, not political terms, and accepts the abstract justice of what happens to him: though that does not stop him, in his central speech (admired by Pushkin) from making it impossible for his father ever to forget what killing one's finest son means.

We lack the rough draft of the poem in Byron's hand, so that we can't date its composition. The main manuscript is Annabella's fair copy – the fact that she was prepared to fair-copy it rendered it respectable in the eyes of the Murray clique. The poem was published on February 13th 1816, in the same volume as the very different *Siege of Corinth*. Byron's immediate source is Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works*, edited by the Earl of Sheffield, and published 1814 by Murray – a book which Hobhouse reports himself as reading while bridegroom-to-be and best man-to-be travel gloomily north towards Seaham, in December 1814. However, Byron owned an earlier edition, from 1796,<sup>2</sup> so the Murray edition is not necessarily the one he took the characters from.

Parts 1 and 2 of *Parisina* had already been published, as *It is the hour* and *Francisca*, in *Hebrew Melodies*. *It is the hour* appears both in Murray's text-only edition of 1815 and Nathan's edition, with music, of April 1815: *Francisca* is in Nathan's November 1815 musical edition, but not in Murray's text-only book.

As with *The Siege of Corinth*, but more deeply subtextual, there are echoes in *Parisina* of what seems to have been for Byron that most influential of poems, Coleridge's *Christabel*, which Byron first heard Walter Scott recite in the spring of 1815,<sup>3</sup> and which he first read in its entirety on October 27th 1815.<sup>4</sup>

1: Illustration from <<[http://people.bu.edu/jwvail/byron\\_illustrations.html](http://people.bu.edu/jwvail/byron_illustrations.html)>>. The density of her clothing, and the weight of his armour, would refute the eroticism of the passage illustrated (it is the poem's opening).

2: See the 1816 Sale Catalogue at CMP 237, item 166.

3: BLJ IV 318-19.

## Parisina

TO  
SCROPE BERDMORE DAVIES, ESQ.,  
THE FOLLOWING POEM IS INSCRIBED,  
BY ONE WHO HAS LONG ADMIRER HIS TALENTS AND VALUED  
HIS FRIENDSHIP.

Jan 22, 1816.

### ADVERTISEMENT.

The following poem is grounded on a circumstance mentioned in Gibbon's "Antiquities of the House of Brunswick." – I am aware, that in modern times the delicacy or fastidiousness of the reader may deem such subjects unfit for the purposes of poetry. The Greek dramatists, and some of the best of our English writers, were of a different opinion: as Alfieri and Schiller have also been, more recently, upon the Continent. The following extract will explain the facts on which the story is founded. The name of *Azo* is substituted for Nicholas, as more metrical.<sup>5</sup>

"Under the reign of Nicholas III., Ferrara was polluted with a domestic tragedy. By the testimony of a maid,<sup>6</sup> and his own observation, the Marquis of Este discovered the incestuous loves of his wife Parisina, and Hugo his bastard son, a beautiful and valiant youth. They were beheaded in the castle, by the sentence of a father and husband, who published his shame, and survived their execution. He was unfortunate, if they were guilty; if they were innocent, he was still more unfortunate; nor is there any possible situation in which I can sincerely approve the last act of the justice of a parent." – Gibbon's *Miscellaneous Works*, vol. 3d. p. 470,<sup>7</sup> new edition.

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**4:** BLJ IV 321.

**5:** For "Nicholas" read "Niccolo". B. would have learned of the name "Azo" from earlier pages of *Antiquities of the House of Brunswick*, in Volume III of the 1814 Murray edition of Gibbon's *Collected Works*. Gibbon writes (page 479) that the name "was deduced as a manifest corruption from the Latin original of *Attius* or *Accius*, or *Actius*," and that "this fanciful identity" was "an article of faith in the court of Ferrara." The volume also includes the name of "Eccelin" (pages 432-3) which B. uses in *Lara*.

**6:** The first edition of *SoC / Par* has "attendant;" but Gibbon writes "maid."

**7:** Actually pages 470-1.



They only for each other breathe;  
 Their very sighs are full of joy,  
 So deep, that did it not decay,  
 That happy madness would destroy  
 The hearts which feel its fiery sway – 40  
 Of guilt, of peril, do they deem  
 In that tumultuous tender dream?  
 Who that have felt that passion's power,  
 Or paused, or feared, in such an hour?  
 Or thought how brief such moments last? 45  
 But yet – they are already past!  
 Alas! we must awake before  
 We know such vision comes no more.

#### 4.

With many a lingering look they leave  
 The spot of guilty gladness past; 50  
 And though they hope, and vow, they grieve,  
 As if that parting were the last,  
 The frequent sigh – the long embrace –  
 The lip that there would cling for ever,  
 While gleams on Parisina's face 55  
 The Heaven she fears will not forgive her,  
 As if each calmly conscious star  
 Beheld her frailty from afar –  
 The frequent sigh, the long embrace,  
 Yet binds them to their trysting-place, 60  
 But it must come, and they must part  
 In fearful heaviness of heart,  
 With all the deep and shuddering chill  
 Which follows fast the deeds of ill.

#### 5.

And Hugo is gone to his lone bed, 65  
 To covet there another's bride;  
 But she must lay her conscious head  
 A husband's trusting heart beside.  
 But fevered in her sleep she seems,  
 And red her cheek with troubled dreams, 70  
 And mutters she in her unrest  
 A name she dare not breathe by day,  
 And clasps her lord unto the breast  
 Which pants for one away –  
 And he to that embrace awakes, 75  
 And, happy in the thought, mistakes  
 That dreaming sigh, and warm caress,  
 For such as he was wont to bless;  
 And could in very fondness weep  
 O'er her who loves him even in sleep. 80

## 6.

He clasped her sleeping to his heart,  
 And listened to each broken word –<sup>10</sup>  
 He hears – Why doth Prince Azo start,  
 As if the Archangel's voice he heard?  
 And well he may – a deeper doom 85  
 Could scarcely thunder o'er his tomb,  
 When he shall wake to sleep no more,  
 And stand the eternal throne before.  
 And well he may – his earthly peace  
 Upon that sound is doomed to cease. 90  
 That sleeping whisper of a name  
 Bespeaks her guilt and Azo's shame.  
 And whose that name? that o'er his pillow  
 Sounds fearful as the breaking billow,  
 Which rolls the plank upon the shore, 95  
 And dashes on the pointed rock  
 The wretch who sinks to rise no more –  
 So came upon his soul the shock.  
 And whose that name? – 'tis Hugo's – his –  
 In sooth he had not deemed of this! – 100  
 'Tis Hugo's – he, the child of one  
 He loved – his own all-evil son –  
 The offspring of his wayward youth,  
 When he betrayed Bianca's truth,<sup>11</sup>  
 The maid whose folly could confide 105  
 In him who made her not his bride.

## 7.

He plucked his poniard in its sheath,  
 But sheathed it ere the point was bare –  
 Howe'er unworthy now to breathe,  
 He could not slay a thing so fair – 110  
 At least, not smiling – sleeping – there –  
 Nay more – he did not wake her then,  
 But gazed upon her with a glance,  
 Which, had she roused her from her trance,  
 Had frozen her sense to sleep again – 115  
 And o'er his brow the burning lamp  
 Gleamed on the dew-drops big and damp,  
 She spake no more – but still she slumbered –  
 While, in his thought, her days are numbered.

**10:** Leigh Hunt asserts (1850 *Autobiography* p.252) that it was he who gave B. the idea of the woman confessing adultery in her sleep. We need not believe him, with *Othello* III iii 414-30, and *Macbeth* V i as precedents. Of course, Iago is probably lying, and no-one is more committed maritally than Lady Macbeth, so that adultery is the last thing of which she would be guilty.

**11:** The rhyme, and perhaps the sentiment, are from Coleridge's *Christabel*, 408-9: *Alas! they had been friends in youth, / But whispering tongues can poison truth ...*

## 8.

And with the morn he sought, and found, 120  
 In many a tale from those around,  
 The proof of all he feared to know,  
 Their present guilt, his future woe;  
 The long-conniving damsels seek  
     To save themselves, and would transfer 125  
     The guilt – the shame – the doom – to her;  
 Concealment is no more – they speak  
 All circumstance which may compel  
 Full credence to the tale they tell;  
 And Azo's tortured heart and ear 130  
 Have nothing more to feel or fear.

## 9.

He was not one who brooked delay;  
     Within the chamber of his state,  
 The chief of Este's ancient sway  
     Upon his throne of judgement sate; 135  
 His nobles and his guards are there, –  
 Before him is the sinful pair;  
 Both young – and one how passing fair!  
 With swordless belt, and fettered hand,  
 O Christ! that thus a son should stand 140  
     Before a father's face!  
 Yet thus must Hugo meet his sire,  
 And hear the sentence of his ire,  
     The tale of his disgrace!  
 And yet he seems not overcome, 145  
 Although, as yet, his voice be dumb.

## 10.

And still, and pale, and silently  
     Did Parisina wait her doom;  
 How changed since last her speaking eye  
     Glanced gladness round the glittering room, 150  
 Where high-born men were proud to wait –  
 Where Beauty watched to imitate  
     Her gentle voice – her lovely mien –  
 And gather from her air and gait  
     The graces of its queen; 155  
 Then – had her eye in sorrow wept,  
 A thousand warriors forth had leapt,  
 A thousand swords had sheathless shone,<sup>12</sup>  
 And made her quarrel all their own.  
 Now – what is she? and what are they? 160  
 Can she command, or these obey?  
 All silent and unheeding now,  
 With downcast eyes and knitting brow,  
 And folded arms, and freezing air,

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12: Compare *TBoA*, 893.

And lips that scarce their scorn forbear, 165  
 Her knights and dames, her court – is there.  
 And he, the chosen one, whose lance  
 Had yet been couched before her glance,  
 Who – were his arm a moment free –  
 Had died or gained her liberty; 170  
 The minion of his father's bride –  
 He, too, is fettered by her side;  
 Nor sees her swoln and full eye swim  
 Less for her own despair than him;  
 Those lids – o'er which the violet vein – 175  
 Wandering, leaves a tender stain,  
 Shining through the smoothest white  
 That e'er did softest kiss invite –  
 Now seemed with hot and livid glow  
 To press, not shade, the orbs below; 180  
 Which glance so heavily, and fill,  
 As tear on tear grows gathering still.

### 11.

And he for her had also wept,  
 But for the eyes that on him gazed –  
 His sorrow, if he felt it, slept; 185  
 Stern and erect his brow was raised.  
 Whate'er the grief his soul avowed,  
 He would not shrink before the crowd;  
 But yet he dared not look on her;  
 Remembrance of the hours that were – 190  
 His guilt – his love – his present state –  
 His father's wrath – all good men's hate –  
 His earthly, his eternal fate –  
 And hers – oh, hers! he dared not throw  
 One look upon that deathlike brow! 195  
 Else had his rising heart betrayed  
 Remorse for all the wreck it made.

### 12.

And Azo spake – “But yesterday  
 I gloried in a wife and son;  
 That dream this morning passed away; 200  
 Ere day declines, I shall have none.  
 My life must linger on alone;  
 Well – let that pass – there breathes not one  
 Who would not do as I have done;<sup>13</sup>  
 Those ties are broken – not by me; 205  
 Let that too pass – the doom's prepared!  
 Hugo, the priest awaits on thee,  
 And then – thy crime's reward!  
 Away! address thy prayers to Heaven  
 Before its evening stars are met – 210

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13: Compare *The Giaour*, 1022-3: *Nor needest thou doubt this speech from one / Who would but do – what he hath done.*

Learn if thou there canst be forgiven;  
 Its mercy may absolve thee yet.  
 But here, upon the earth beneath,  
 There is no spot where thou and I  
 Together, for an hour, could breathe; 215  
 Farewell! I will not see thee die –  
 But thou, frail thing! shalt view his head –  
 Away! I cannot speak the rest;  
 Go! woman of the wanton breast;  
 Not I, but thou, his blood dost shed; 220  
 Go! if that sight thou canst outlive,  
 And joy thee in the life I give.”

### 13.

And here stern Azo hid his face –  
 For on his brow the swelling vein  
 Throbb'd as if back upon his brain 225  
 The hot blood ebb'd and flow'd again;  
 And therefore bow'd he for a space,  
 And pass'd his shaking hand along  
 His eye, to veil it from the throng;  
 While Hugo rais'd his chain'd hands, 230  
 And for a brief delay demands  
 His father's ear – the silent sire  
 Forbids not what his words require.<sup>14</sup>

“It is not that I dread the death –  
 For thou has seen me by thy side 235  
 All redly through the battle ride,  
 And that not once a useless brand  
 Thy slaves have wrested from my hand,  
 Hath shed more blood in cause of thine,  
 Than e'er can stain the axe of mine; 240  
 Thou gav'st, and may'st resume my breath,  
 A gift for which I think thee not;  
 Nor are my mother's wrongs forgot,  
 Her slighted love and ruined name,  
 Her offspring's heritage of shame; 245  
 But she is in the grave, where he,  
 Her son, thy rival, soon shall be.  
 Her broken heart – my severed head –  
 Shall witness for thee from the dead  
 How trusty and how tender were 250  
 Thy youthful love – paternal care.  
 'Tis true that I have done thee wrong –  
 But wrong for wrong – this deemed thy bride,  
 The other victim of thy pride,  
 Thou know'st for me was destined long. 255  
 Thou saw'st, and coveted'st her charms –  
 And with thy very crime – my birth,

**14:** The following speech was highly thought of by Pushkin: “Read all that belauded tirade, and you will be convinced that Racine had no understanding of how to create a tragic character. Compare it with the speech of the lover in Byron's *Parisina*, and you will see the difference between minds” (Myasnikov I 199, Shaw I 213: Pushkin's “it” Hippolyte's speech *D'un mensonge si noir justement irrité* ... in Racine's *Phèdre* (IV i)).



Thou tauntedst me – as little worth!<sup>15</sup>  
 A match ignoble for her arms,  
 Because, forsooth, I could not claim, 260  
 The lawful heirship of thy name,  
 Nor sit on Este's lineal throne;  
 Yet were a few short summers mine,  
 My name should more than Este's shine  
 With honours all my own. 265  
 I had a sword – and have a breast  
 That should have won as haught a crest \*  
 As ever waved along the line  
 Of all these sovereign sires of thine.  
 Not always knightly spurs are worn 270  
 The brightest by the better born;  
 And mine have lanced my courser's flank  
 Before proud chiefs of princely rank,  
 When charging to the cheering cry  
 Of 'Este and of Victory!' 275

I will not plead the cause of crime,  
 Nor sue thee to redeem from time  
 A few brief hours or days that must  
 At length roll o'er my reckless dust;  
 Such maddening moments as my past, 280  
 They could not, and they did not, last –  
 Albeit, my birth and name be base,  
 And thy nobility of race  
 Disdained to deck a thing like me –  
 Yet in my lineaments they trace 285  
 Some features of my father's face,  
 And in my spirit – all of thee.  
 From thee – this tamelessness of heart –  
 From thee – nay, wherefore dost thou start?  
 From thee in all their vigour came 290  
 My arm of strength, my soul of flame –  
 Thou didst not give me life alone,  
 But all that made me more thine own.  
 See what thy guilty love hath done!  
 Repaid thee with too like a son! 295  
 I am no bastard in my soul,  
 For that, like thine, abhorred controul;  
 And for my breath, that hasty boon  
 Thou gav'st and wilt resume so soon,  
 I value it no more than thou, 300  
 When rose thy casque above thy brow,  
 And we, all side by side, have striven,  
 And o'er the dead our coursers driven;  
 The past is nothing – and at last  
 The future can but be the past; 305  
 Yet would I that I then had died;  
 For though thou work'dst my mother's ill,  
 And made thy own my destined bride,  
 I feel thou art my father still;

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15: As Giaffir despises Selim in *The Bride of Abydos*; see *BoA*, section 4.

And, harsh as sounds thy hard decree, 310  
 'Tis not unjust, although from thee.  
 Begot in sin, to die in shame,  
 My life begun and ends the same;  
 As erred the sire, so erred the son –  
 And thou must punish both in one. 315  
 My crime seems worst to human view,  
 But God must judge between us too!”

\* “Haught,” haughty – “Away, haught man, thou art insulting me.” – SHAKESPEARE.<sup>16</sup>

#### 14.

He ceased – and stood with folded arms,  
 On which the circling fetters sounded;  
 And not an ear but felt as wounded, 320  
 Of all the chiefs that there were ranked,  
 When those dull chains in meeting clanked;  
 Till Parisina’s fatal charms  
 Again attracted every eye –  
 Would she thus hear him doomed to die! 325  
 She stood, I said, all pale and still,  
 The living cause of Hugo’s ill!  
 Her eyes unmoved, but full and wide,  
 Not once had turned to either side –  
 Nor once did those sweet eyelids close, 330  
 Or shade the glance o’er which they rose,  
 But round their orbs of deepest blue  
 The circling white dilated grew –  
 And there with glassy gaze she stood  
 As ice were in her curdled blood; 335  
 But every now and then a tear  
 So large and slowly gathered slid  
 From the long dark fringe of that fair lid.  
 It was a thing to see, not hear!<sup>17</sup>  
 And those who saw, it did surprise, 340  
 Such drops could fall from human eyes.  
 To speak she thought – the imperfect note  
 Was choked within her swelling throat,  
 Yet seemed in that low hollow groan  
 Her whole heart gushing in the tone. 345  
 It ceased – again she thought to speak,  
 Then burst her voice in one long shriek,  
 And to the earth she fell like stone  
 Or statue from its base o’erthrown,  
 More like a thing that ne’er had life – 350  
 A monument of Azo’s wife –  
 Than her, that living guilty thing,  
 Whose every passion was a sting,  
 Which urged to guilt, but could not bear  
 That guilt’s detection and despair. 355

**16:** B. might have checked Richard II’s line before paraphrasing it so crudely: *No lord of thine, thou haught, insulting man ...* (IV, i, 254).

**17:** Compare *Christabel*, 253: *A sight to dream of, not to tell!* The echo would ask us to compare the icy self-control of Parisina with the deceitful appearance of the vampire Geraldine.

But yet she lived – and all too soon  
 Recovered from that death-like swoon –  
 But scarce to reason – every sense  
 Had been o'erstrung by pangs intense;  
 And each frail fibre of her brain 360  
 (As bowstrings, when relaxed by rain,  
 The erring arrow launch aside)  
 Sent forth her thoughts all wild and wide –  
 The past a blank, the future black,  
 With glimpses of a dreary track, 365  
 Like lightning on the desert path,  
 When midnight storms are mustering wrath.  
 She feared – she felt that something ill  
 Lay on her soul, so deep and chill –  
 That there was sin and shame she knew; 370  
 That some one was to die – but who?  
 She had forgotten – did she breathe?  
 Could this be still the earth beneath?  
 The sky above, and men around;  
 Or were they fiends who now so frowned 375  
 On one, before whose eyes each eye  
 Till then had smiled in sympathy?  
 All was confused and undefined  
 To her all-jarred and wandering mind;  
 A chaos of wild hopes and fears; 380  
 And now in laughter, now in tears,  
 But madly still in each extreme,  
 She strove with that convulsive dream;  
 For so it seemed on her to break;  
 Oh! vainly must she strive to wake! 385

### 15.

The Convent bells are ringing,  
 But mournfully and slow;  
 In the grey square turret swinging,  
 With a deep sound, to and fro.  
 Heavily to the heart they go! 390  
 Hark! the hymn is singing –  
 The song for the dead below,  
 Or the living who shortly shall be so!  
 For a departing being's soul  
 The death-hymn peals and the hollow bells knoll; 395  
 He is near his mortal goal;  
 Kneeling at the Friar's knee;  
 Sad to hear – and piteous to see –  
 Kneeling on the bare cold ground,  
 With the block before and the guards around – 400  
 And the headsman with his bare arm ready,  
 That the blow may be both swift and steady,  
 Feels if the axe be sharp and true –  
 Since he set its edge anew;  
 While the crowd in a speechless circle gather 405  
 To see the Son fall by the doom of the Father.

## 16.

It is a lovely hour as yet  
 Before the summer sun shall set,  
 Which rose upon that heavy day,  
 And mocked it with his steadiest ray; 410  
 And his evening beams are shed  
 Full on Hugo's fated head  
 As his last confession pouring  
 To the monk, his doom deploring  
 In penitential holiness, 415  
 He bends to hear his accents bless  
 With absolution such as may  
 Wipe our mortal stains away.  
 That high sun on his head did glisten  
 As he there did bow and listen – 420  
 And the rings of chestnut hair  
 Curled half down his neck so bare;  
 But brighter still the beam was thrown  
 Upon the axe which near him shone  
 With a clear and ghastly glitter – 425  
 Oh! that parting hour was bitter!  
 Even the stern stood chilled with awe;  
 Dark the crime, and just the law –  
 Yet they shuddered as they saw.

## 17.

The parting prayers are said and over 430  
 Of that false son – and daring lover!  
 His beads and sins are all recounted,  
 His hours to their last minute mounted –  
 His mantling cloak before was stripped,  
 His bright brown locks must now be clipped. 435  
 'Tis done – all closely are they shorn –  
 The vest which till this moment worn –  
 The scarf which Parisina gave –  
 Must not adorn him to the grave.  
 Even that must now be thrown aside, 440  
 And o'er his eyes the kerchief tied;  
 But no – that last indignity  
 Shall ne'er approach his haughty eye.  
 All feelings seemingly subdued,  
 In deep disdain were half renewed, 445  
 When headsman's hands prepared to bind  
 Those eyes which would not brook such blind,  
 As if they dared not look on death.  
 "No – yours my forfeit blood and breath –  
 These hands are chained – but let me die 450  
 At least with an unshackled eye –  
 Strike!" – and as the word he said,  
 Upon the block he bowed his head;  
 These the last accents Hugo spoke –  
 "Strike!" – and flashing fell the stroke – 455  
 Rolled the head – and, gushing, sunk

Back the stained and heaving trunk,  
 In the dust, which each deep vein  
 Slaked with its ensanguined rain;  
 His eyes and lips a moment quiver, 460  
 Convulsed and quick – then fix for ever.

He died, as erring man should die,  
 Without display, without parade;  
 Meekly had he bowed and prayed,  
 As not disdainng priestly aid, 465  
 Nor desperate of all hope on high.  
 And while before the Prior kneeling,  
 His heart was weaned from earthly feeling;  
 His wrathful sire – his paramour –  
 What were they in such an hour? 470  
 No more reproach – no more despair;  
 No thought but heaven – no word but prayer –  
 Save the few which from him broke,  
 When, bared to meet the headsman's stroke,  
 He claimed to die with eyes unbound, 475  
 His sole adieu to those around.

### 18.

Still as the lips that close in death,  
 Each gazer's bosom held his breath;  
 But yet, afar, from man to man,  
 A cold electric shiver ran, 480  
 As down the deadly blow descended  
 On him whose life and love thus ended;  
 And, with a hushing sound compressed,  
 A sigh shrunk back on every breast;  
 But no more thrilling noise rose there, 485  
 Beyond the blow that to the block  
 Pierced through with forced and sullen shock,  
 Save one – what cleaves the silent air  
 So madly shrill – so passing wild?<sup>18</sup>  
 That, as a mother's o'er her child, 490  
 Done to death by sudden blow,  
 To the sky these accents go,  
 Like a soul's in endless woe.  
 Through Azo's palace-lattice driven,  
 That horrid voice ascends to heaven, 495  
 And every eye is turned thereon;  
 But sound and sight alike are gone.  
 It was a woman's shriek – and ne'er  
 In madlier accents rose despair;  
 And those who heard it, as it passed, 500  
 In mercy wished it were the last.

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18: Compare *Macbeth*, V, iv, 7-8: *What is that noise? – It is the cry of women, good my lord.*

## 19.

Hugo is fallen; and from that hour,  
 No more in palace, hall, or bower,  
 Was Parisina heard or seen;<sup>19</sup>  
 Her name – as if she ne'er had been – 505  
 Was banished from each lip and ear,  
 Like words of wantonness or fear;  
 And from Prince Azo's voice, by none  
 Was mention heard of wife or son;  
 No tomb – no memory had they;<sup>20</sup> 510  
 Theirs was unconsecrated clay;  
 At least the knight's who died that day.  
 But Parisina's fate lies hid  
 Like dust beneath the coffin lid;  
 Whether in convent she abode, 515  
 And won to heaven her dreary road,  
 By blighted and remorseful years  
 Of scourge, and fast, and sleepless tears;  
 Or if she fell by bowl or steel,  
 For that dark love she dared to feel; 520  
 Or if upon the moment smote,  
 She died by tortures less remote;  
 Like him she saw upon the block,  
 With heart that shared the headsman's shock,  
 In quickened brokenness that came, 525  
 In pity, o'er her shattered frame,  
 None knew – and none can ever know;  
 But whatso'er its end below,  
 Her life began and closed in woe!

## 20.

And Azo found another bride, 530  
 And goodly sons grew by his side;  
 But none so lovely and so brave  
 As him who withered in the grave;  
 Or if they were – on his cold eye  
 Their growth but glanced unheeded by, 535  
 Or noticed with a smothered sigh.  
 But never tear his cheek descended,  
 And never smile his brow unbended;  
 And o'er that fair broad brow were wrought  
 The intersected lines of thought; 540  
 Those furrows which the burning share  
 Of Sorrow ploughs untimely there;  
 Scars of the lacerating mind  
 Which the Soul's war doth leave behind.  
 He was past all mirth or woe; 545  
 Nothing more remained below  
 But sleepless nights and heavy days,

**19:** The historical Parisina was executed with her lover.

**20:** Tomblessness is a fate they share with many Byronic protagonists: see *The Giaour*, 1325-8; Astarte, referred to at *Manfred*, II iv 82; or Haidee and Lambro, at *Don Juan IV*, 72, 6-7.

A mind all dead to scorn or praise,  
 A heart which shunned itself – and yet  
 That would not yield – nor could forget, 550  
 Which, when it least appeared to melt,  
 Intently thought – intensely felt;  
 The deepest ice which ever froze  
 Can only o'er the surface close –  
 The living stream lies quick below, 555  
 And flows – and cannot cease to flow.  
 Still was his sealed-up bosom haunted  
 By thoughts which Nature had implanted;  
 Too deeply rooted thence to vanish,  
 Howe'er our stifled fears we banish; 560  
 When, struggling as they rise to start,  
 We check those waters of the heart,  
 They are not dried – those tears unshed,  
 But flow back to the fountain head,  
 And resting in their spring more pure, 565  
 Forever in its depth endure,  
 Unseen, unwept, but uncongealed,  
 And cherished most where least revealed.  
 With inward starts of feeling left,  
 To throb o'er those of life bereft; 570  
 Without the power to fill again  
 The desert gap which made his pain;  
 Without the hope to meet them where  
 United souls shall gladness share,  
 With all the consciousness that he 575  
 Had only passed a just decree;  
 That they had wrought their doom of ill;  
 Yet Azo's age was wretched still.  
 The tainted branches of the tree,  
 If lopped with care, a strength may give, 580  
 By which the rest shall bloom and live  
 All greenly fresh and wildly free;  
 But if the lightning, in its wrath,  
 The waving boughs with fury scathe,  
 The massy trunk the ruin feels, 585  
 And never more a leaf reveals.

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