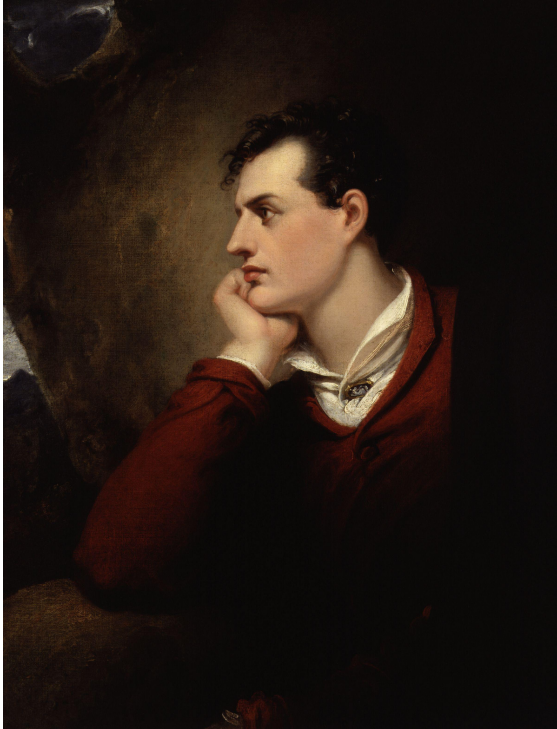


Rebellion, treachery, and glamour: Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* and the progress of the Byronic vampire

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I'm going to take as my starting point what Lady Caroline Lamb wrote in her commonplace book on seeing the poet Byron for the first time: 'That beautiful pale face is my fate'.¹ That facial pallor and that idea of fatalistic passion will reappear throughout this talk. Lamb's novel *Glenarvon*, first published in 1816, is usually seen in terms of her revenge for Byron's ill treatment of her after their brief but fiery love affair. Lamb met Byron in March 1812; she was 27, he was 24. The affair was over by November.

It's a mistake, I think, to stress the novel's autobiographical elements, as many people have done. It stands on its own as a novel and has as much merit as many Gothic/sentimental fictions of the period, if not more – it's quite a dazzling achievement. Yet as Nicola Watson has shown, there is a strong intertextual relationship with Byron's poems, the letters between the two, and other works by Lamb. And one aspect of their lives is important – that is, the way their public personas were invented and manipulated. That was part of the celebrity status that hung around Byron. It's been argued that Byron was the first celebrity in the modern sense. Byron himself talked of his celebrity as 'the contagion of Byronism' spreading across Europe; this idea of contagion is another theme I will be tracking.²

Then, there is the further intertextuality of Byron's fragmentary vampire tale, upon which Polidori drew for his novella 'The Vampyre', fusing this with his personal acquaintance with Byron and elements from *Glenarvon* – I'll return to this at the end. Thus there is a complex criss-crossing between lives, life-writing, and fiction.

Glenarvon was seen by critics as transgressing gender by its clashing of genres. The *Monthly Review* 'could not decide whether [it] was romance or

biography', calling it 'of the *doubtful gender*, though a feminine production'; genre and gender become confused – like 'the doubtful gender' of Lamb herself with her notorious cross-dressing.³ Clara Tuite says the novel also initiates the genre of 'Byronic silverfork'.⁴ This clashing of genres, of autobiography, political adventure, high society satire, love story, and Gothic novel, accounts for much of *Glenarvon*'s interest and value. One of Caroline Lamb's distant heirs may be the paranormal romance of our times, which involve a similar hybridity and which I'll discuss briefly later.

Glenarvon

Glenarvon initiates a fictional trope that is now very familiar, with a vampiric figure that is hypnotic and sexually seductive. Lamb turned her own attraction-repulsion to Byron into a Gothic and sentimental fiction where amatory seduction and betrayal is aligned with the political upheaval of the Irish Rebellion of 1798. Here, the eponymous Lord Glenarvon, or Clarence de Ruthven (the name appropriated by Polidori), is notably Byronic, feeding off Byron's own self-fashioning and Lamb's



mimicry of him, while drawing on Milton and Richardson. *Glenarvon* 'had a mask for every distinct character he wished to play', stressing the artifice and self-fashioning of his persona.⁵

Glenarvon is characterised with the melancholy nobility and satanic allure that inaugurates a series of vampiric heroes from the Brontës, the Gothic Romance of du Maurier and others, and the sympathetic vampires of paranormal romance. He is frequently

characterised by diabolical epithets such as 'arch fiend' (111) and 'fallen angel' (121). Similar images occur in the Brontës' novels and are a stylistic marker of the Gothic Romances. He howls at the moon and his ancestor is said to have drunk blood from a skull.

But at the novel's centre is the heroine, Calantha. She is an intelligent, passionate young woman, somewhat untamed, whose education has been indulgent. She has married Lord Avondale but has become discontented by his absences on

business. In the amoral society life of London, she meets the charismatic Glenarvon and is fascinated by him. She eventually becomes his lover.

Glenarvon is involved in the anti-colonial rebellion against British rulers, inciting the people with his rhetoric and personal charm. Political subversion, in the domestic sphere and at the level of the nation is equated with madness and yet with glory. Glenarvon's political persuasiveness is linked to his sexual glamour. All this resembles the satanic revolt of the Byron figure. Glenarvon's women themselves become Byronic, denouncing God, family, and society, and swearing satanic vows of abjuration; Byronism is an infection, like vampirism.

Byron and his avatars

Byron saw Lamb as his 'evil genius'.⁶ Frances Wilson says, 'Lamb struggled not to regain him but to become him'.⁷ Byron's persona in some ways was also Lamb's creation; they invent and reflect each other.

She would return to Byron and his persona as a focal point of her writing. In her last novel, *Ada Reis*, of 1823, the hero is 'the Don Juan of his day'.⁸ And at a ball in 1820, Lamb appeared dressed as Don Juan.⁹ Mimicry abounds as her novelistic practices invade her actual life; she dresses as Don Juan, forges letters from Byron, and imitates his style with great accuracy in *The New Canto* (1819), an apocalyptic political satire which also takes aim at Byron while mimicking his poetic style to perfection and which she tried to pass as a continuation of *Don Juan*. This mimicry – which might be called vampiric – lies behind the character of Glenarvon, who is recognisably Byronic.

Glenarvon is not the only Byronic figure; the novel is like a hall of mirrors, where facets of the diabolic poet-hero can be found anywhere. The mysterious and sinister Viviani is one such figure: 'A deep melancholy played upon his spirits; a dark mystery enveloped his fate' (13). He is – apparently – a scheming Italian, often appearing as a monk, who owes much to Ann Radcliffe's version of Gothic. Who is Viviani, asks the Duke. Glenarvon, in deprecating Viviani, is bitterly self-lacerating about the infectious charm of celebrity, especially its effect on women: 'He is [. . .] the idol of the fair, and the great. Is it virtue that women prize? [. . .] Throw but the dazzling light of genius upon baseness, and corruption, and every crime will be to them but an additional charm' (335). But this is Glenarvon's confession, too, though I'm at risk of a plot spoiler here.

Other figures are cast in the Byronic mould; the Byrons proliferate like a virus. Viviani, with little justice, blames Calantha's scheming aunt, Lady Margaret, for her own malignant influence over himself; he calls her 'something even more treacherous and perverted than myself'. Lady Margaret 'concealed a dark intriguing spirit' (10) and has a 'face of an Angel, distorted by the passions of a Dæmon' (14).

Calantha is herself Byronic. She swears an 'impious oath' to Glenarvon, abandoning God (221). Comparing herself to one of Glenarvon's victims, Elinor, she fatalistically prophesies her own doom:

her uncontrolled passions must have depraved her heart. [. . .] I
think I understand the feelings which impelled her to evil. [. . .]
Something seems to warn me [. . .] that, if I wander from virtue like
her, nothing will check my course – all the barriers, that others fear
to overstep, are nothing before me. (119)

She calls to her husband: 'Save me. [. . .] who knows whither the path I follow leads? My will – my ungoverned will, has hitherto, been my only law' (119).



It's impossible to read the novel without being aware of the flamboyant life of its author, whom Calantha strongly resembles, and one senses Lamb judging herself in the novel. Calantha dresses as a pageboy for her first secret assignation with Glenarvon (219). Lamb notoriously cross-dressed: as a pageboy on numerous occasions, to get admittance to Byron, even to dictate her novel. And yet we must still be careful to separate life from fiction.

The fallen Elinor has fallen into the ultimate Byronic scepticism: 'It were presumption to believe: I doubt all things' (319). Elinor is another avatar of Lamb, or of the female equivalent of the Byronic persona; she 'unblushingly' follows Glenarvon in 'the attire of a boy' (142). When Elinor's uncle is injured, his outcast niece seeks a reconciliation, dressing as a pageboy to effect an entrance (194), taking the name 'Clarence', thus repeating Lamb's cross-dressing and impersonations of Byron. Elinor appears again as a cross-dressing Byronic figure: 'the soft smile of enchantment blended with the assumed

fierceness of a military air, the deep expressive glance of passion and sensibility, the youthful air of boyish playfulness' (321).

Duplication, pallor, and infection

I have mentioned the significance of Byron's pale, beautiful features. Lamb wrote to Byron: 'How very pale you are [. . .] a statue of white marble, so colourless, and the dark brown hair such a contrast. I can never see you without wishing to cry'.¹⁰ And here's Glenarvon when Calantha first observes him in society: his 'pale cheek and brow expressed much of disappointed hope' (147). Thus, the pallor is bound up with the characteristically Byronic inner torment. We can already see prefigured here Anne Rice's marble-like Lestat and *Twilight*'s glittering Edward Cullen (and Kaja will be developing this idea in her talk). And Polidori's Ruthven is attractive to women 'despite the deadly hue of his face', from which passion is absent though the features are beautiful.¹¹

The Byronic vampire is diseased. In the fragment by Byron that was the basis of Polidori's tale, we read that Darvell is 'a prey to some cureless disquiet'. (We creatively misspelled 'cureless' as 'curious' for this conference as you may have noticed.) The incurable malady here may, says Polidori's narrator, have arisen from 'ambition, love, remorse, grief [. . .] or a morbid temperament' (247). This combination of qualities is again typically Byronic.

This pallor is associated with ill health (as a medical symptom that connotes glamour, this is linked to tuberculosis; Marcus will be talking about this). This makes Glenarvon a Gothic figure, more living dead than truly alive and clearly laying the ground for his literary metamorphosis into vampire.

Annabella Milbanke, who would become Byron's wife, compared Lamb at the time of her infatuation to a rabid dog and 'thought that [she] had bit half the company and communicated the *Nonsense-mania*'.¹² It is Milbanke who also coined the term 'Byromania' for the infectious glamour the poet spread around him.

Byronism is contagious; as has Calantha, so Elinor St Clare has become an image of Glenarvon. This Byronism dissolves gender boundaries as Lamb herself did. Elinor, who reflects Lamb as does Calantha, has taken on a masculine, soldierly identity, one which sides with revolution (321).

Infection through music and poetry

Calantha rebels against domesticity: on Avondale proposing marriage, she scorns the epithet of 'wife' (51). She despises feminine occupations such as needlework (62); music becomes the dangerous obverse to domestic work (63). Calantha is especially susceptible, claims Viviani, and music will be an instrument of seduction (69). Likewise, Elinor's musicality reveals her passionate nature (63). Music announces Calantha's first encounter with the Byron figure Glenarvon. Music and poetry are like the infectious power of the hypnotic vampire.

The utilitarian doctor at Calantha's father's castle, Sir Everard, fears presumption and is misogynistic, despises poetry, 'heroics', 'romance and fooleries in women', and favours 'common sense' (67). He writes pamphlets against the growing plague of republicanism. Thus rebellion, which Lamb has some sympathy towards, is linked to both the poetic and disease, announcing the ambivalent pathology of Byronism.

Music heralds Calantha's first meeting with Glenarvon as she hears his flute. She catches sight of Glenarvon's face, that of the suffering hero-villain:

It seemed as if the soul of passion had been stamped and printed upon every feature. The eye beamed into life as it threw up its dark ardent gaze, with a look nearly of inspiration, while the proud curl of the upper lip expressed haughtiness and bitter contempt; yet, even mixed with these fierce characteristic feelings, an air of melancholy and dejection shaded and softened every harsher expression.

[. . .]

She could have knelt and prayed to heaven to realise the dreams, to bless the fallen angel in whose presence she at that moment stood.

(120-21)

Calantha asks O'Kelly about this mysterious man. He says he is infected with 'the distemper' from sleeping in the dog kennel. Now, 'he howls and barks, whenever the moon shines bright' (122). There's a hint of lycanthropy here – and at this time the werewolf was not clearly distinguished from the vampire.

The ambivalence of sensibility

A love of music and sensitivity to poetry was an index of sensibility. The protagonists of the sentimental novel were prone to extraordinary emotional receptiveness and expressions of emotion. *Glenarvon* acts out the politics of sensibility that is a much-analysed feature of politics of the period. Attacked and embraced by conservatives and radicals, it can at once be the spark of revolt and the cement of social life, a dangerous negation of critical thinking and a humanising force.

Like Jane Austen's Marianne Dashwood and many other threatened or ruined heroines of the period, Calantha is endangered by her sensibility. Her lack of a meaningful and fulfilling social role contributes to her vulnerability to corruption – there are shades of Mary Wollstonecraft here. Viviani says of her: 'Wild fancy, stimulated by keen sensibility and restless activity of mind, without employment, render her easy [. . .] to be influenced and worked upon' (90).

Avondale's uncle, the Admiral, 'is neither very refined, nor very sentimental' (246), so judges Calantha harshly. He talks with contempt of 'German sentiments' (249) (idealist Romantic philosophy) and 'the jargon of sensibility' (250) (much discussed at the time). So Lamb is clearly positioning herself in that struggle of ideas that much contemporaneous literature took part in but her allegiance is ambivalent. The Admiral is 'for the King, and old England' and curses 'the Irish marauders' (230). Lamb is aligning sensibility and sympathy with the Irish here, making the novel politically ambivalent.

Revolt and betrayal

In Ireland, Calantha reads *Glenarvon*'s 'address to the United Irishmen' that has been circulating to much effect. It is 'so eloquent, so animated', that she fears its infectious potential. This is Calantha's first awareness of *Glenarvon*. Then Sir Everard appears, raging about the 'licentious democrats' and 'rebellious libertines' that have infected his wife and daughters and, in particular, his niece, Elinor, who lives with them. They have been 'struck mad, like Agave in the mysteries of Bacchus', he says.¹³ They are 'running wild [. . .] hair dishevelled [. . .] ornamented with green cockades' (111) – the Irish nationalist symbol. All stirred up by the 'arch fiend' (111) *Glenarvon*. The women follow *Glenarvon* 'as if he were some god'; this is the celebrity fervour that surrounded Byron. The castle retainer MacAllain says, 'The whole country are after

him [. . .] it's a rage, a fashion' (111), accurately describing the Byron phenomenon. The doctor retorts that it is pathological: 'a frenzy' (111) and 'a pestilence' (112). The Duke, Calantha's father, thinks Glenarvon himself is diseased and 'acting under the influence of a mad infatuation' (112).

However, for all his avowed anti-imperialism at the level of the state, Glenarvon sees Calantha in the light of imperial conquest. In her face he reads 'his empire and her own weakness' (177). In the manner of the demonic lover of many a romance, he asserts his dominance: 'I must be obeyed: – you will find me a master – a tyrant perhaps; not a slave. If I once love, it is with fervour – with madness' (182). But, in the context, this has wider political overtones. He tells her, "I know my empire. Take off those ornaments: replace what I have given you" [. . .], throwing a chain around her' (192). There is a hint that she is bound by him with jewellery that is imperial plunder: 'richest jewels brought by him from distant countries' (194). So Glenarvon's political radicalism is shown to be suspect. Glenarvon's politics can already be seen as superficial and tied up with his egotism, as he declares his abandonment of Ireland (243).¹⁴

Glenarvon's betrayal of Calantha is connected to his betrayal of revolution; it's not made explicit, but both coincide with the restoration of his property and granting of a ship by the English court and with the prospects of his marriage to the eligible society woman Miss Monmouth. Calantha has died of grief. The betrayals are twinned, casting doubt on his love and patriotism both, which appear now to be motivated by self-interest and self-love.

This cause is justified; the inhabitants of one region show, to the apparently impartial narrator, signs of 'oppression, poverty, and neglect' (316). However, despite their oppression, Avondale's contemptuous view of the Irish argues that they are not fit for self-government; on hearing their loyal cry' and 'enthusiasm in his favour', he denounces them thus: 'These are the creatures we would take to govern us: this is the voice of the people: these are the rights of man' (317). But it is an odd moment, for they are also apparently condemned for *not* rebelling. It is their loyalism that makes them unfit for independence, their betrayal of themselves.



It is Elinor who, after Glenarvon's betrayal, continues the authentic rebellion for Ireland, which is represented almost as a betrayed mistress (351) (the image of Ireland as wronged woman is frequent in nationalist iconography; even, on occasion, as victim of vampirism, as Christopher Frayling has pointed out).

But Glenarvon is still Elinor's muse, of lyrical poetry and rebellion despite his betrayal (352). Glenarvon ultimately betrays both his women lovers and Ireland (352), yet still somehow he is an inspirational force, though for rebellions doomed to tragedy, both for the transgressive women and for the nation in revolt. With all these conflicting forces, Lamb's novel shifts between an anti-Jacobin stance and radicalism.

Elinor faithfully pursues the goal of emancipation after Glenarvon has been exposed, with a rousing speech (351) and passionate poetry (352-53) that stirs the populace into revolt. It's hard to doubt the sincerity of the lyrical voice here, adding to the novel's polyphonic ambivalence where voices of loyalism and revolution are represented side by side.

Glenarvon's heirs

I've mentioned the hypnotic powers of the vampiric Byron figure as infectious. We can see that the depiction of the mesmeric powers to stir up women's desire is strong in *Glenarvon* but becomes attenuated in Polidori – necessarily, I think, to keep the satiric force by downplaying any sympathy for the victims as much as the vampire. The sympathies aroused in *Glenarvon* are erased in Polidori; he casts Lady Caroline Lamb as Lady Mercer, 'the common adulteress' who 'dressed as a mountebank'.¹⁵ Later, in the descent from Polidori, in *Dracula*, the hypnotic act is seen as repulsive

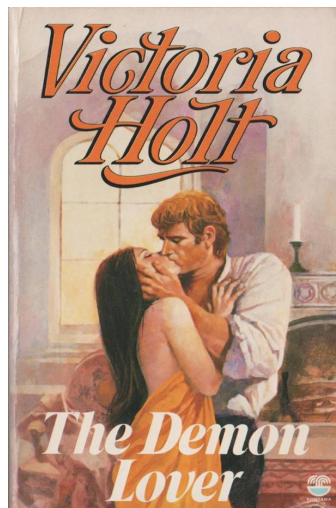
because observed by men unsympathetic to the monster who see ‘their’ women alienated from them. But in woman-centred fictions, this aspect becomes alive again.

Thus Polidori, seizing on elements of Byron’s life in the flesh and within literature, transformed the blood-bloated vampire of the East European peasantry into a pale, cold aristocrat.¹⁶ This also continued a tradition in ethnographic accounts of Enlightenment satire against *ancient regime* tyranny but, in addition, spawned a long-lasting archetype of Gothic horror. But there is a parallel strand of the Byronic figure as demonic lover and betrayer, initiated by Lady Caroline Lamb and enduring through



Gothic romance.

Thus Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* cast Heathcliff as vampiric; here, Laurence Olivier as Heathcliff in the 1931 William Wyler film is shown in a bedside pose that is familiar from vampire iconography. The demon lovers of the Gothic Romances that

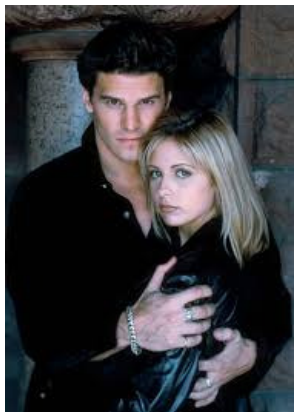


follow the Brontës via Daphne du Maurier repeat the imagery.

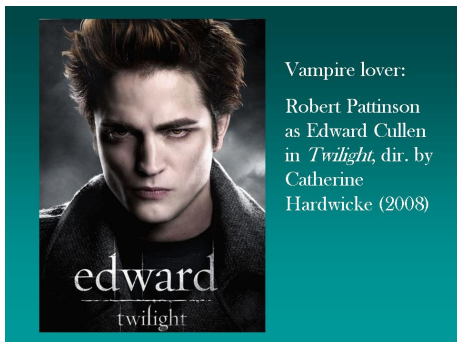
And as I’ve shown, Lamb’s vampiric love story also performs political commentary. Polidori made the monster explicitly a vampire; Lamb’s Glenarvon is only implicitly so. Polidori’s Ruthven is somewhat reified, made thing-like rather than humanised, whereas the demon lovers that follow Lamb are sympathetic despite their treachery. The two strands reunite in the paranormal romances of the present day.



Coppola's version of Dracula and Anne Rice's Lestat are sympathetic lovers.



Joss Whedon's broody, tormented Angel is in the same vein and then you had that explosion of vampire lovers of whom *Twilight*'s Edward Cullen is the most famous. This enabled a whole brood of monsters as lovers – werewolves, zombies, even mermen – and worse.

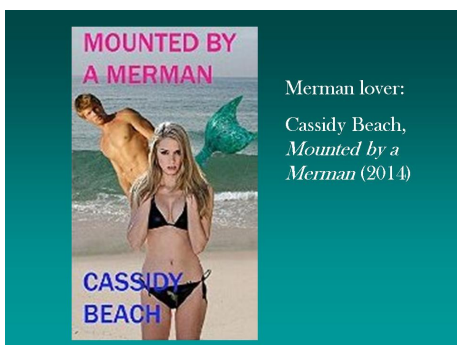


Vampire lover:
Robert Pattinson
as Edward Cullen
in *Twilight*, dir. by
Catherine
Hardwicke (2008)



Zombie lover:

Nicholas Hoult as R in *Warm Bodies*, dir. by
Jonathan Levine (2013)



Merman lover:
Cassidy Beach,
*Mounted by a
Merman* (2014)



Finger lickin'
good lover:
Harland Sanders,
*Tender Wings of
Desire* (2015)

Polidori's revision of Ruthven strips away Lamb's ambivalence, but by clearly marking the aristocratic demon lover as both Byronic and a vampire, inaugurates a literary archetype. Polidori also undermines the allure of romantic villainy – his naïve protagonist has cast Ruthven 'into the hero of a romance' (5). Yet many of the

descendants resurrect the alluring mix of rebellion and faithlessness that Lamb depicted. But what happened to the political critique? Heathcliff has buried themes of class revolt. Anne Rice's Lestat and others are perhaps sexual revolutionaries. Often, like Angel, they can act as conservative guardians of order. In one recent and very sophisticated paranormal romance, Holly Black's *The Coldest Girl in Coldtown*, the vampire Gavriel does appear pitted against oppressive systems, both the feudalism of the old order of vampires and the neo-liberalism of the dystopian present. But perhaps the novel of the radical vampire lover as an agent of emancipation – a sort of Bolshevik *Twilight* – has yet to be written.

¹ Lamb, in her commonplace book, 24 March 1812, in Paul Douglass, Paul, *Lady Caroline Lamb: A Biography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 104.

² Clara Tuite, *Lord Byron and Scandalous Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. xx. Also, p. 1.

³ Douglas, *Lady Caroline Lamb*, p. 198.

⁴ Tuite, p. 21.

⁵ Lady Caroline Lamb, *Glenarvon*, intr. by Frances Wilson (1818; London: Everyman, 1995), p. 288. All further references are from this edition and are given as page numbers in parentheses.

⁶ Douglas, p. 205.

⁷ Frances Wilson, Introduction, *Glenarvon*, p. xxxii.

⁸ Lamb, Lady Caroline, *Ada Reis: A Tale*, 3 vols (London: John Murray, 1823), I, p. xi.

⁹ Duncan Wu, 'Appropriating Byron: Lady Caroline Lamb's "A New Canto"', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 26 (1995), 140–46 (p. 46).

¹⁰ Lamb to Byron, in Henry Blyth, *Caro the Fatal Passion: The Life of Lady Caroline Lamb* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973), p. 120.

¹¹ John Polidori, *The Vampyre*, in *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre*, ed. by Chris Baldick (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 3. Mario Praz describes the 'sombre portrait of the idealised [Byronic] self' thus: 'The pale face furrowed by an ancient grief, the rare satanic smile, the traces of obscured nobility [. . .] worthy of a better fate'. This, he says, is derived from Ann Radcliffe (Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. by A. Davidson, Rvdsd. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 64, 68; p. 87, n. 30. Paz on 'The Corsair' and 'The Giaour', p. 66.

¹² McConnell Stott, *Summer in the Shadow of Byron* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2015), p. 153.

¹³ Agave is the princess and Maenad who tears apart her own son Pentheus in Euripides' *The Bacchae*.

¹⁴ For the egotism and self-interested individualism of *Glenarvon*'s politics, see Malcolm Kelsall, 'The Byronic Hero and Revolution in Ireland: The Politics of *Glenarvon*', *The Byron Journal*, 9 (1981), 4–19 <<https://doi.org/10.3828/bj.1981.11>>. Here, he is like the reformulation of Lovelace in anti-Jacobin novels – see Vallaton in Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* (1800). Kelsall sees *Glenarvon* as a scapegoat figure, used to absolve the ruling class liberals of their guilt over Ireland.

¹⁵ Polidori, p. 3; 'a fictionalized Lady Caroline Lamb' (Patricia L. Skarda, 'Vampirism and Plagiarism: Byron's Influence and Polidori's Practice', *Studies in Romanticism*, 28 (1989), 249–69 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/25600775>> (p. 250).

¹⁶ David Punter downplays the importance of Byron as the model for Polidori: 'Ruthven is the representation not of a mythological individual but of a mythologised class. He is dead yet not dead, as the power of the aristocracy in the early nineteenth century was dead and not dead' (*The Literature of Terror: The Gothic Tradition*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1999), I, p. 104). Yet