

Byron
and
Trinity
Memorials,
Marbles
and Ruins



Edited
by
Adrian
Poole



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4. Poets and Travellers¹

William St Clair

Lord Byron was twenty-one and not yet famous when he wrote *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* shortly before he set out on his voyage to the Mediterranean.² Since there was scarcely a single contemporary writer, famous or obscure, who escaped his satirical scorn, the manuscript was turned down by ten or more regular London publishers.³ Eventually Byron contracted with James Cawthorn, a fringe publisher, for an edition of 1,000 copies to be published anonymously. Byron later authorized a second edition with amendments, then a third and a fourth, each of 1,000 copies, all of which acknowledged his authorship.

Soon after his return from his travels, when he realized that *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* had been unfair to many authors who were now his friends, he refused Cawthorn permission to print a fifth edition, and ordered the poem to be suppressed. This made little difference. The price of second-hand copies soared. An advertisement of 1818 by a Paris pirate publisher claimed that ‘this work is so scarce in London that copies

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- 1 Published in *Lord Elgin and the Marbles: The Controversial History of the Parthenon Sculptures*, 3rd revised edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), Chapter 17, pp. 80–200. Reprinted by permission of David St Clair.
 - 2 The main features of the early publication history are noted by Thomas James Wise, *A Bibliography of the Writings in Verse and Prose of George Gordon, Lord Byron* (London: private circulation, 1933). Repr. edn (Folkestone, Kent: Dawsons of Pall Mall), https://archive.org/details/bibliographyofwr0002wise_t1q8/page/n5/mode/2up.
 - 3 ‘[T]en or twelve’ according to Byron’s letter of 25 December 1822, *Byron’s Letters and Journals*, ed. by Leslie A. Marchand, 13 vols (London: John Murray, 1973–94), X, 70. All subsequent references to *Byron’s Letters and Journals* are to this edition, hereafter *BLJ*. The reason for Longman’s refusal is confirmed in a letter to Revd Mr Card, 8 May 1815, ‘some of our friends were hard treated in it’ (Longman archives, University of Reading Library, 99/98).

have been sold for five guineas and upwards'.⁴ Shelley's friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg noted that the book 'became so exceedingly scarce that a large price was often given for a copy, and some curious people even took the trouble to transcribe it'.⁵ Many manuscript copies written by professional copyists appeared on the market.⁶ When an Irish publisher put on sale a printed pirated edition Cawthorn took legal proceedings to have him stopped. But the real pirate was Cawthorn himself. Denied permission to print a fifth edition, he went on reprinting third and fourth editions. About twenty such fakes have been identified, all claiming on the title-page to have been issued in 1810 or 1811, but all reprints and all manufactured from paper on which the manufacturing dates of 1812, 1815, 1816, 1817, 1818, and 1819 are clearly visible in the watermarks.⁷

Over the first ten years after publication Cawthorn probably sold about 20,000 copies of *English Bards*. By the standards of the day, the poem was a runaway best-seller. Many of the readers, we can be sure, were the members of London fashionable society who patronized the large circulating library in London which was Cawthorn's main business. Indeed there can have been few men or women among the upper and middle classes who did not read it. By the 1820s, because the ownership of the copyright was uncertain, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* was reprinted by other publishers and became available to an even wider readership in innumerable cheaper editions.

Towards the end of the poem, as an aside from the scorn at the writers, Byron took a swipe at the antiquarians:

Let ABERDEEN and ELGIN still pursue
The shade of fame through regions of Virtue;
Waste useless thousands on their Phidian freaks,

4 Advertisements by A. and W. Galignani in copies of books published by the firm. Five guineas would imply a premium of over 2,000 per cent above Cawthorn's price of five shillings, itself not cheap.

5 Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1858), I, 300, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Life_of_Percy_Bysshe_Shelley/O18JAAAAQAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1

6 They are still commonly found. Most were written in expensive morocco notebooks, and carefully reproduce the title-page, the preface, and the notes as well as the verse.

7 There are also fakes of the first edition, and of the third edition with paper watermarked 1808, copies in the author's collection (now in Trinity College Library).

Mis-shapen monuments, and maimed antiques;
 And make their grand saloons a general mart
 For all the mutilated blocks of art:⁸

In a footnote he added 'Lord Elgin would fain persuade us that all the figures, with and without noses, in his stoneshop are the work of Phidias! "Credat Judaeus!"'

Few readers of the poem outside art circles are likely to have realized that Byron was endorsing the Payne Knight view that the claims made for the Parthenon sculptures were exaggerated.⁹ Byron's sneer at Lord Elgin's syphilitic nose, on the other hand, probably caused titters and sniggers among those in the know. Another rhyme about Lord Elgin's noseless marbles is known to have been widely repeated, and perhaps invented, by Byron.

Noseless himself, he brings home noseless blocks,
 To show at once the ravages of time and pox.¹⁰

On his way back from Greece in 1811, Byron acted as courier for a letter from Lusieri to Elgin. On 29 July 1811, Elgin paid a personal call on him at his hotel in order to thank him, and when he found him not at home, wrote a letter asking for a meeting:

I did myself the honor of calling upon your Lordship this morning, to thank you for the letter you was so good as [to] bring for me from Malta—and with a desire of enquiring into the nature of Lusieri's late acquisitions & operations at Athens, in regard to which I have not

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- 8 *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, lines 1027–32, in Byron: *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93), I, 261. All subsequent references to Byron's poetry are to this edition, hereafter CPW.
- 9 [ed.: In a previous chapter, St Clair described Richard Payne Knight (1750–1824) as 'chief spokesman for the art collectors, the art patrons, and the art connoisseurs'. Payne Knight told Lord Elgin that his marbles were over-rated—not Greek but Roman of the time of Hadrian, and spent 'ten years proclaiming that the sculptures of the Parthenon were inferior works, mere architectural decoration' (*Lord Elgin*, pp. 167–69).]
- 10 CPW VII, 103. The couplet was attributed to Martin Archer Shee but is not included in his *Rhymes on Art* (London: H. Ebers, 1805). For Byron quoting it, see also *Medwin's Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. by Ernest J. Lovell Jr. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 211. The attribution to Byron is made in some unreliable editions of his works. A short poem in Latin, CPW I, 330, repeats the satire of the revenge of Venus which is among the main themes of *The Curse of Minerva*, discussed below.

received any recent information. If your Lordship would do me the favor of naming any time, when I could, without inconvenience to you, wait upon you for that purpose, I should be greatly indebted to you.¹¹

Byron responded to this request from his fellow peer in a letter, now lost, in which he gave a report about Lusieri's activities. Something of the contents and friendly respectful tone of the letter can be deduced from a second letter which Lord Elgin wrote in reply on 31 July:

I am under a very great obligation indeed to your Lordship for the trouble you have taken on my application to you. And I have extreme reluctance in being further importunate, but in truth, the circumstance of your not being a collector makes me attach double value to the opinion you may have formed on the objects of the researches still carrying on for me at Athens, and I confess I should esteem it a very essential favor to be allowed a few minutes conversation with your Lordship in those matters.—If you would therefore permit me, & I hear nothing to the Contrary from you—I would beg leave to do myself the honor of waiting upon you about Eleven o'clock tomorrow forenoon; otherwise at any other time you might prefer.¹²

It was on that day or the next that Byron received news that his mother was seriously ill and he left London immediately. He probably never met Elgin, nor had he any wish to do so. As he wrote to his friend Hobhouse on 31 July when he was still in London and after he had received Elgin's second letter:

Lord Elgin has been teasing to see me these last four days, I wrote to him at his request all I knew about his robberies, & at last have written to say that as it is my intention to publish (in *Childe Harold*) on that topic, I thought proper since he insisted on seeing me to give him notice, that he might not have an opportunity of accusing me of double dealing afterwards.¹³

Whatever the warning was there was little that Elgin could do, nor could he ever have guessed that the young lord who had used his painter as his guide to Athens and had sailed in his ship from Greece

11 John Murray archives. Not previously published or known. Original spelling retained.

12 Ibid. Not previously published or known.

13 Letter to Hobhouse, 31 July 1811, in *BLJ* II, 65–66.

to Malta was destined to do him more damage than Payne Knight or Napoleon Bonaparte.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a Romaunt, the long poem which Byron had been composing during his travels, was turned down by Longman and by Constable, the two leading literary publishers of the time, because it contained attacks on Lord Elgin. William Miller, who published Elgin's *Memorandum*, also turned it down, and there may have been others.¹⁴ It was only with the help of a friend with connections in the literary world that, after some months of disappointment, Byron managed to place it with John Murray, who was then still an outside publisher with little to lose.¹⁵ The result was one of the most astonishing events in English literary history.

Within three days of the book's publication on about 1 March 1812 the first edition of 500 copies was sold out. Over the next two years 13,000 copies were printed and sold, mostly to members of the British aristocracy and gentry, to circulating libraries, to book clubs, and increasingly abroad.¹⁶ With *Childe Harold*, as he used to say, Byron woke up and found himself famous. The hostesses of London crowded him with invitations, fashionable young ladies vied for his attentions, the Prince Regent joined in the congratulations, and the literary world at once forgave the youthful excesses of *English Bards*. The scurrilous versifier had become a great romantic poet, and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was eagerly read in every drawing-room in England. It was to become one of the most admired and most read poems of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

14 Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* (London: Murray, 1830), Chapter 11.

15 That Constable was among the publishers who rejected *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is shown by Byron's reference to 'the Crafty' in his letter of 25 December 1882, BLJ X, 70, not previously identified as a reference to Constable as far as I know. For Constable as 'the Crafty' see Mrs Oliphant, *Annals of a Publishing House: William Blackwood and his sons, their magazine and friends*, 2 vols (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1897–98), I, 121, and J. G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart*, one-volume edition (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1893), p. 167.

16 Murray archives. In order to give the book-buying public the impression that the book was selling even more rapidly than was the case Murray, by changing the title pages, pretended that there were ten editions before the end of 1814, although there were only six.

17 William St Clair, 'The Impact of Byron's Writings: An Evaluative Approach', in *Byron, Augustan and Romantic*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 1–25.

Only once in the body of the poem did *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* attack a living individual. At the beginning of Canto II Childe Harold has arrived in Greece. Sitting upon a 'massy stone, the marble column's yet unshaken base' and contemplating the ruins of the Parthenon, his melancholy gives way to anger.

But who, of all the plunderers of yon fane
On high, where Pallas linger'd, loth to flee
The latest relic of her ancient reign;
The last, the worst, dull spoiler, who was he?
Blush, Caledonia! such thy son could be!
England! I joy no child he was of thine:
Thy free-born men should spare what once was free;
Yet they could violate each saddening shrine,
And bear these altars o'er the long-reluctant brine.

But most the modern Pict's ignoble boast,
To rive what Goth, and Turk, and Time hath spar'd:
Cold as the crags upon his native coast,
His mind as barren and his heart as hard,
Is he whose head conceiv'd, whose hand prepar'd,
Aught to displace Athena's poor remains:
Her sons too weak the sacred shrine to guard,
Yet felt some portion of their mother's pains,
And never knew, till then, the weight of Despot's chains.

What! shall it e'er be said by British tongue,
Albion was happy in Athena's tears?
Though in thy name the slaves her bosom wrung,
Tell not the deed to blushing Europe's ears;
The ocean queen, the free Britannia bears
The last poor plunder from a bleeding land:
Yes, she, whose gen'rous aid her name endears,
Tore down those remnants with a Harpy's hand,
Which envious Eld forbore, and tyrants left to stand.

Where was thine Aegis, Pallas! that appall'd
Stern Alaric and Havoc on their way?
Where Peleus' son? whom Hell in vain enthrall'd,
His shade from Hades upon that dread day,
Bursting to light in terrible array!
What? could not Pluto spare the chief once more,
To scare a second robber from his prey?
Idly he wander'd on the Stygian shore,
Nor now preserv'd the walls he lov'd to shield before.

Cold is the heart, fair Greece! that looks on thee,
 Nor feels as lovers o'er the dust they lov'd;
 Dull is the eye that will not weep to see
 Thy walls defac'd, thy mouldering shrines remov'd
 By British hands, which it had best behov'd
 To guard those relics ne'er to be restor'd.
 Curst be the hour when from their isle they rov'd,
 And once again thy hapless bosom gor'd,
 And snatch'd thy shrinking Gods to northern climes abhorr'd!¹⁸

With the publication of these verses, the controversy over the Elgin Marbles moved to a new battlefield. No longer did the conversation turn on the dry academic question of whether the marbles were truly 'Phidian' or not. Now the question was what right had Elgin to remove the precious heritage of a proud nation, what right had he to raise his hand against a building that had stood for over two thousand years. The Elgin Marbles had now become a symbol, of Greece's ignominious slavery, of Europe's failure to help her, and of Britain's overweening pride. The land of Greece, with its intensely beautiful landscape and clear atmosphere, offered a powerful romantic fantasy—classical ruins with goats in the foreground, turbaned pashas, inscrutable and cruel, smoking their long pipes, black-eyed girls, young, passionate, and open. The mixture of ancient classicism and oriental exoticism made a strong appeal to the peoples of Northern Europe and North America who could visit the Mediterranean only in their imaginations.

After *Childe Harold* Byron published a rapid succession of other poems with Greek themes, *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *The Siege of Corinth*, all of which were immensely popular both at home and abroad, then and later. By the time the battle of Waterloo brought the long wars to an end in 1815 Byron was a European figure, almost as famous as Napoleon.

Much of the poem is about the present condition of the countries through which the poet made his pilgrimage. The Greeks are slaves, Byron proclaimed. And it is no good the Greeks looking to foreigners to help them, what Greece needs is a violent revolution. The Greeks will never be free until they imitate their ancient ancestors.

18 *Childe Harold*, Canto II, 11–15; CPW II, 47–49.

When riseth Lacedemon's hardihood,
 When Thebes Epaminondas rears again,
 When Athens' children are with hearts endued,
 When Grecian mother shall give birth to men,
 Then may'st thou be restored; but not till then.¹⁹

There is contempt for the Modern Greeks for their ignorance and lack of patriotism:

Shrine of the mighty! can it be,
 That this is all remains of thee?
 Approach thou craven crouching slave—
 Say, is this not Thermopylae?
 These waters blue that round you lave
 O servile offspring of the free—
 Pronounce what sea, what shore is this?
 The gulf, the rock of Salamis!²⁰

No need to remind a European readership of the associations of these names. The Modern Greeks, it is implicitly assumed, are the descendants of the Ancient Greeks, degenerate slaves, passively accepting their humiliation among the monuments of their former greatness. The word 'lave' exists in romantic poetry mainly to provide a rhyme for 'slave'.

Byron was an example of a type which was already a familiar feature of the Greek scene, the milordos or travelling gentleman. Greeks and Turks could understand how it might be necessary, from time to time, to go to the trouble, expense, and considerable danger of travel for the sake of business or to make a pilgrimage. But to travel for pleasure, or to look at ruins, that was a western European madness. The travellers, whether British, French, or from other countries necessarily saw the country through eyes that had been pre-set by their education in the classics. Clutching their copies of Plutarch and Pausanias, they mostly knew nothing of the history of the country after the death of Alexander the Great. They simply assumed that the Modern Greeks were the linear descendants of the ancients, although much debased by foreign occupation, without bothering too much about the facts or the implications. They looked carefully at Greek faces to see if they

19 *Childe Harold*, Canto II, 84; CPW II, 72.

20 *The Giaour*, lines 106–13; CPW III, 43.

could find the Grecian profiles shown in ancient vases. They wondered whether Modern Greek customs such as the siesta and love of arguing, were survivals from ancient times.

Byron's ideas about Greece were not new. They had been constructed by a succession of travellers and writers mainly British and French, during the eighteenth century.²¹ The notion that Greeks might overthrow their Turkish rulers and take their place among the nations of modern Europe was also already a commonplace among the literatures of Europe, and had been adopted by some prominent Greek writers living abroad. But not until Byron had the ideology of philhellenism been expressed with such power or carried so widely all over the Western world. Byron shared in the glamour of Greece, but Greece in its turn was carried along by the glamour of Byron, with innumerable painting and engravings giving a visual reinforcement to the philhellenic myth.²²

Under the conventions of the long romantic poem, as it was developed in Scotland and England by Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Thomas Moore, and others, it was the custom to complement the verse part of the poem with explanatory and historical prose notes which were not only of direct interest to readers in their own right but added authority and legitimacy to the verse. With the verse appealing to the emotions and the prose to the intellect, a long romantic poem could thus not only address the whole mind of the reader, but it could also offer cumulative, and occasionally alternative, ways of reading and of understanding the main text. In the case of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a Romaunt*, more than half of the book was taken up with writings other than the verse narrative. Although contemporary readers of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* could thus, if they wished, read the work as an impassioned polemic,

21 See Terence Spencer, *Fair Greece, Sad Relic: Literary Philhellenism from Shakespeare to Byron* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1954), and the early chapters and appendix of William St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free: The Philhellenes in the War of Independence*, new edition (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2008, <https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0001>), which describe, and to some extent quantify, the books and reading by which the philhellenic myth was consolidated and diffused.

22 See especially Fani-Maria Tsigakou, *The Rediscovery of Greece: Travellers and Romantics in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Fine Art Society, 1979) and *Through Romantic Eyes: European images of nineteenth-century Greece from the Benaki Museum, Athens* (Athens, 1991), and the many gorgeous illustrations in *The Parthenon and its Impact in Modern Times*, ed. by Panayotis Tournikiotis (Athens: Melissa, c. 1994).

it appeared at the same time as a carefully considered and researched factual account by a highly educated traveller who had been on the spot and who knew both ancient and modern Greek.²³

Many of the notes in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* related to Lord Elgin.

We can all feel, or imagine, the regret with which the ruins of cities, once the capitals of empires, are beheld; the reflections suggested by such objects are too trite to require recapitulation. But never did the littleness of man, and the vanity of his very best virtues, of patriotism to exalt, and of valour to defend his country, appear more conspicuous than in the record of what Athens was, and the certainty of what she now is. This theatre of contention between mighty factions, of the struggles of orators, the exaltation and deposition of tyrants, the triumph and punishment of generals, is now become a scene of petty intrigue and perpetual disturbance, between the bickering agents of certain British nobility and gentry. 'The wild foxes, the owls and serpents in the ruins of Babylon', were surely less degrading than such inhabitants. The Turks have the plea of conquest for their tyranny, and the Greeks have only suffered the fortune of war, incidental to the bravest; but how are the mighty fallen, when two painters contest the privilege of plundering the Parthenon, and triumph in turn, according to the tenor of each succeeding firman!²⁴ Sylla could but punish, Philip subdue, and Xerxes burn Athens, but it remained for the paltry Antiquarian, and his despicable agents, to render her contemptible as himself and his pursuits.²⁵

In another passage, written on 3 January 1810, before Lusieri's ship had sailed he declared:

23 Without going back to the early editions, especially those published before 1816 when *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto the Third*, was published as a separate book, it is hard for present-day readers to recapture a reliable sense of how *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt*, was read, appreciated, and understood in the years immediately after it was published. With the development, in Victorian times, of the romantic notion that it was only the verse part of the book which constituted the 'poem', most editions, including the *Complete Poetical Works*, have tended to cut back the long passages of accompanying prose or to treat them, anachronistically, as if they were equivalent to scholarly editorial annotations to a prime text. Many modern editions omit them altogether. At the time when the work was first read, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, A Romaunt*, with its voluminous factual supporting and illustrative information about the antiquities, the state of literature, the history, and the political options open to the Greeks, probably reinforced the impression that Byron was no mere armchair visionary or polemicist, but a careful, thoughtful, observer who had been to the places he wrote about and who knew what he was talking about.

24 [ed.: 'firman', a letter of permission from the Turkish authorities]

25 Note to Canto II, line 6; *CPW* II, 189–90.

At this moment [...], besides what has been already deposited in London, an Hydriot vessel is in the Piraeus to receive every portable relic. Thus, as I heard a young Greek observe in common with many of his countrymen—for, lost as they are, they yet feel on this occasion—thus may Lord Elgin boast of having ruined Athens. An Italian painter of the first eminence, named Lusieri, is the agent of devastation; and, like the Greek *finder* of Verres in Sicily, who followed the same profession, he has proved the able instrument of plunder. Between this artist and the French Consul Fauvel, who wishes to rescue the remains for his own government, there is now a violent dispute concerning a car employed in their conveyance, the wheel of which—I wish they were both broken upon it—has been locked up by the Consul, and Lusieri has laid his complaint before the Waywode.²⁶ Lord Elgin has been extremely happy in his choice of Signor Lusieri. During a residence of ten years in Athens, he never had the curiosity to proceed as far as Sunium, till he accompanied us in our second excursion. However, his works, as far as they go, are most beautiful; but they are almost all unfinished.²⁷

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is, among much else, a political poem. In the verse part Byron's view is an uncompromising reassertion of the philhellenic myth. Ignoring two thousand years of intervening history, Byron asserts an identity between the Modern Greeks of the nineteenth century and their putative ancestors, the Ancient Greeks of the classical age. The Modern Greeks are a degenerate enslaved nation who will only be freed when they begin to imitate their ancestors and start a violent revolution. The rich Westerners coming to visit the birthplace of civilization invariably drew melancholy comparisons between the glories of ancient Greece and her modern degradation. It was a pleasing antithesis especially as they and their readers were in no doubt that their own countries now represented the acme of modern civilization.

And lo! he comes, the modern son of Greece,
The shame of Athens: mark him how he bears
A look o'eraw'd and moulded to the stamp
Of servitude.²⁸

26 [ed.: 'Waywode', Turkish governor of Athens]

27 Note to Canto II, line 101; CPW II, 190–91.

28 William Haygarth, *Greece, A Poem in Three Parts* (London: W. Bulmer & Co, 1814), Part II, lines 222 ff., https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Greece/_oJOAQAAAMAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1

So wrote William Haygarth and most of the travellers agreed with him. That the Greeks were a thoroughly contemptible race was, it was said, the only point on which Fauvel and Lusieri were agreed.²⁹ Byron alone was of a different opinion. In his notes to *Childe Harold* he declared:

They are so unused to kindness that when they occasionally meet with it they look upon it with suspicion, as a dog often beaten snaps at your fingers if you attempt to caress him. 'They are ungrateful, notoriously, abominably ungrateful!'—this is the general cry. Now, in the name of Nemesis! for what are they to be grateful? Where is the human being that ever conferred a benefit on Greek or Greeks? They are to be grateful to the Turks for their fetters, and the Franks for their broken promises and lying counsels: they are to be grateful to the artist who engraves their ruins, and to the antiquary who carries them away; to the traveller whose janissary flogs them, and to the scribbler whose journal abuses them! This is the amount of their obligations to foreigners.³⁰

In the prose notes Byron offers an alternative, even a contradictory, discourse, to the rhetoric of the verse. The Greeks will never be independent, he notes, and in any case it is nonsense to discuss the problems of contemporary Greece in terms of their putative ancestors. That is like discussing the future of Peru in terms of the Incas.

As a guide to the contemporary political situation in Greece, the notes to *Childe Harold* are more reliable than the verse. And it was by no means obvious that the future of a land inhabited for hundreds of years by peoples of different traditions and religions in conditions of social harmony lay in driving out the minorities and trying to establish a homogeneous nation state. Capodistria, the most eminent Greek of the time, put his faith in a gradualist approach, relying on the spread of education to liberalize the institutions of the Ottoman state. Others looked forward to the day, which did not seem far distant, when the Greeks would supersede the Turks as the dominant group within the Ottoman empire, would gradually take over more and more of the positions of power, and establish a new Byzantium. The educated Greek classes who, apart from a large diaspora in western Europe, mostly lived in Constantinople were strong upholders of the Ottoman system

29 *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto II, 'Papers referred to by Note [to Stanza 73]'; CPW II, 201.

30 CPW II, 201.

in which they filled many positions of power and wealth.³¹ Few of the Greeks living in the territory of present-day Greece shared the views set out in the verse part of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and would not have understood his allusions. They did not, in Elgin and Byron's time, think of themselves in nationalist terms. They were not Hellenes, but the Orthodox Christian inhabitants of a large multicultural empire. When Western travellers heard stories about the great men and women of ancient times, they thought they had picked up a genuine continuous tradition, but in most cases, it is likely that they were repeating back stories derived from previous travellers.³²

Even before the custom began of leaving out the prose notes, it was the message of the verse which readers wanted to hear. In the decades after 1812 the fame and influence of Byron's Grecian poems helped to consolidate and strengthen the philhellenic fallacy first in Europe, and soon, increasingly, in Greece itself. And from the beginning the Parthenon became an integral part of the construction of the Modern Greek sense of national identity, a visible and tangible manifestation of the continuity which the myth required and asserted.

Some weeks before *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* was due to be published Byron received a letter from Edward Daniel Clarke, the Cambridge professor who had quarrelled with Carlyle and Hunt³³ in the Troad in 1801 and had subsequently witnessed the taking down of the first sculptures from the Parthenon. Clarke reported that Lord Aberdeen wished to propose Byron for membership of the Athenian Club, a club of rich young men who had visited Athens, almost an offshoot of the dilettanti.

The letter put Byron in a dilemma. On the one hand, he seems to have been genuinely flattered to be invited. On the other, he was afraid

31 See, for example, C. M. Woodhouse, *Capodistria: The Founder of Greek Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) and the documents in *The Movement for Greek Independence, 1770–1821*, ed. and trans. by Richard Clogg (London: Macmillan, 1976).

32 In the 1970s, a friend of mine doing research on the life of Lawrence of Arabia was taken to meet an old Bedouin who spoke confidently about Lawrence whom he gave every appearance of having known personally. It turned out that his information was derived from seeing the film.

33 [ed.: Joseph Dacre Carlyle (1758–1804) and Philip Hunt (1772–1838), both Anglican priests, on Lord's Elgin's staff.]

of how the Athenian Club would receive the attacks on Lord Elgin in his forthcoming poem. In his reply to Clarke, Byron remarked:

In the notes to a thing of mine now passing through the press there is some notice taken of an agent of Ld. A's in the Levant, *Grossius* by name, & a few remarks on Ld. Elgin, Lusieri & and their pursuits, which may render the writer not very acceptable to a zealous Antiquarian.—Ld. A's is not mentioned or alluded to in any manner personally disrespectful, but Ld. Elgin is spoken of according to the writer's decided opinion of *him* and *his* [...] Truth is I am sadly deficient in gusto and have little of the antique spirit except a wish to immolate Ld. Elgin to Minerva and Nemesis.³⁴

Lord Aberdeen was prepared to overlook the remarks on antiquarians but Byron did not join the Athenian Club. The exchange of correspondence with Clarke did, however, reveal that he too was an old enemy of Lord Elgin and an alliance directed against Elgin's reputation grew up between the two men. In writing to congratulate Byron on the publication of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Clarke told him the story of the damage caused to the Parthenon cornice when the first metope was taken down and of how the Disdar³⁵ had wept when he saw it. Byron gratefully incorporated the story with due acknowledgement in the notes to subsequent editions of his poem.³⁶ Clarke, in his turn, asked permission to quote from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in the enormous book of *Travels* on which he was then engaged and obtained Byron's thanks for 'preserving my relics embalmed in your own spices &—ensuring me readers to whom I could not otherwise have aspired'.³⁷

In his huge multi-volume *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa* Clarke attacked Elgin mercilessly for 'want of taste and utter

34 Byron to Clarke, 19 January 1812, *BLJ* II, 156. Marchand reads 'Grossius', but, having looked again at the manuscript, British Library Egerton MS 2869, fol. 7, I believe that the true reading is 'Gropius'. Georg Gropius was Aberdeen's agent. Byron frequently made jokes on names but the manuscript suggests no such intention here. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto II, note to line 101, Byron says that Aberdeen completely disowned Gropius' collecting activities (*CPW* II, 191). It is clear, however, from a letter of Hamilton to Elgin (May 1809, Elgin Papers) that Aberdeen at that time was laying claim to the vases collected by Gropius. The occasion of Byron's apology to Aberdeen is described in British Library Add. MS 43230, fol. 114.

35 [ed.: 'Disdar', warden of a castle or fort, in this case, of the Acropolis]

36 In all editions after the first.

37 Letter to Clarke, 15 December 1813; *BLJ* III, 199.

barbarism'.³⁸ The Parthenon sculptures removed from their original setting, he said, lost all their excellence. Elgin was compared to 'another nobleman who being delighted at a Puppet Show, bought Punch and was chagrined to find when he carried him home, that the figure had lost all its humour'.³⁹ Clarke's narrative (which described proudly the numerous removals of antiquities which he himself had accomplished and includes several views drawn by Lusieri and the Calmuck which had improperly come into his possession) provides ample confirmation of Elgin's view that the Parthenon was being quickly destroyed and that the Turks were incapable of preventing it even if they had wished. The British public knew nothing of what lay behind the scenes. To them it seemed simply that the opinions of the passionate poet were being confirmed by the painstaking researches of the scholar.

Byron was being a little disingenuous in telling Clarke that it was only Elgin that he wished to attack. At a late stage before publication the manuscript of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* contained the following lines:

Come then, ye classic Thieves of each degree,
 Dark Hamilton and sullen Aberdeen,
 Come pilfer all the Pilgrim loves to see,
 All that yet consecrates the fading scene—
 Ah! better were it ye had never been,
 Nor ye, nor Elgin, nor that lesser wight,
 The victim sad of vase-collecting spleen,
 House-furnisher withal, one Thomas hight,
 Than ye should bear one stone from wronged Athena's sight.⁴⁰

Dark Hamilton is probably Sir William Hamilton, who had bought many antiquities while ambassador in Naples, although it was William Richard Hamilton, Elgin's private secretary, who had been involved in the Elgin collecting. Lord Aberdeen too had removed pieces of sculpture from the Parthenon and fully deserved the charge of pilfering. 'One Thomas hight' is Thomas Hope, another prominent member of the Dilettanti, author of a book on ancient furniture, who had obtained a sculptured

38 Edward Daniel Clarke, *Travels in Various Countries of Europe, Asia and Africa*, 6 vols (London: Printed for T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1810–23), Part II, section 2, 484, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/ddmjahws/items>

39 Clarke, *Travels*, II, 2, 485.

40 British Library Egerton MS 2027; CPW II, 48.

fragment from Athens several years before which he exhibited in his London house as a fragment of the Parthenon.⁴¹

In another rejected stanza Byron suggests:

Or will the gentle Dilettanti crew
New delegate the task to digging Gell

and comments 'According to Lusieri's account he (Gell) began digging most furiously without a firman but before the resurrection of a single sauce-pan the Painter [Lusieri] countermined and the Waywode countermanded and sent him back to bookmaking'.⁴²

In the notes to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* as it was published Lord Aberdeen is not mentioned by name. He is 'Lord—' exempt from even the usual partial identification of asterisks. He is, compared with Elgin, 'another noble Lord [who] has done better, because he has done less'.⁴³ Georg Gropius, who acted as Lord Aberdeen's agent in collecting antiquities although he pretended to be only a painter, quarrelled with Lusieri over the ownership of some vases, each claiming them for his master. In the early editions of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron tells a story that Lusieri challenged Gropius to a duel and asked Byron to arbitrate.⁴⁴ In later editions Byron withdrew even these heavily veiled criticisms of Lord Aberdeen in an unnecessarily profuse apology.

Byron at one time considered making a reference to Elgin's nose and to his wife. A rejected passage declared:

Albion! I would not see thee thus adorned
With gains thy generous spirit should have scorned,
From Man distinguished by some monstrous sign,
Like Attila the Hun was surely horned
Who wrought this ravage amid works divine
Oh that Minerva's voice lent its keen aid to mine.⁴⁵

41 *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain*, described by Adolf Michaelis, trans. by C. A. M. Fennell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1882), p. 285, <https://archive.org/details/ancientmarblesin00michuoft>.

42 Egerton MS 2027; *Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics VI: Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, ed. by David V. Erdman with the assistance of David Worrall (New York: Garland, 1991), p. 109.

43 *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto II, note to line 101; CPW II, 191.

44 Ibid.

45 Egerton MS 2027; CPW II, 48.

Besides Clarke, more and more travellers returning from Greece took up their pens and, since the war had put a stop to the Grand Tour of Italy, more travellers found their way to Greece in the early part of the nineteenth century than ever before. Almost without exception they had something disparaging to say of Elgin although equally they were all full of praise for Lusieri. F. S. N. Douglas, who wrote a book comparing the Ancient and Modern Greeks, while admitting most of Elgin's arguments in the *Memorandum*, concluded:

It appears to me a very flagrant piece of injustice to deprive a helpless and friendly nation of any possession of value to them [...] I wonder at the boldness of the hand that could venture to remove what Phidias had placed under the inspection of Pericles.⁴⁶

Edward Dodwell, himself a despoiler of the Parthenon, wrote of Elgin's 'insensate barbarism' and of 'his devastating outrage which will never cease to be deplored'.⁴⁷ Thomas Hughes, another visitor to Athens, wrote of Elgin's 'wanton devastation' and 'avidity for plunder'.⁴⁸ J. C. Eustace in a popular *Classical Tour through Italy* condemned Elgin fiercely without having been to Athens and seen the circumstances there.⁴⁹ French travellers combined indignation at Elgin with regret that the marbles had not gone to the Louvre. Chateaubriand joined in the condemnation although, when he left Athens, he too had a piece of the Parthenon in his pocket.⁵⁰

46 F. S. N. Douglas, *An Essay on Certain Points of Resemblance between the Ancient and Modern Greeks* (London: John Murray, 1813), p. 89, <https://archive.org/details/anessayoncertain00dougooog>

47 Edward Dodwell, *A Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece, during the years 1801, 1805, and 1806*, 2 vols (London: Rodwell and Martin, 1819), I, 324, 322, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/A_Classical_and_Topographical_Tour_Throu/sqkXAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1

48 T. S. Hughes, *Travels in Sicily, Greece and Albania*, 2 vols (London: J. Mawman, 1820), I, 261, <https://archive.org/details/travelsinsicily01hughgoog/page/n5/mode/2up>

49 J. C. Eustace, *A Tour through Italy*, 2 vols (London: J. Mawman, 1813), II, 20. Notes to pp. 192–94, <https://archive.org/details/classicaltouritaly03eust>

50 Especially F. C. H. L. Pouqueville, *Voyage dans la Grèce*, 5 vols (Paris: Firmin Didot, Père et Fils, 1820–21), IV, 36, 74, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k97401533.image>; J. L. S. Bartholdy, *Voyage en Grèce* (Paris: Dentu, 1807), p. 45, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Voyage_en_Gr%C3%A8ce_1803_04/TZ8wAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1; and Louis, Comte de Forbin, *Voyage dans le Levant en 1817 et 1818*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (Paris: Delaunay, 1819), II, <https://www>.

During the centuries when the Parthenon was a Christian church, the names of the bishops of Athens were inscribed on one of the columns. In 1802, in a new form of cultural appropriation, the names Elgin and Mary Elgin with the date of their visit were carved deeply and clearly about half-way up one of the columns of the Parthenon in a place which Hunt had specially reserved in May 1801.⁵¹ Elgin's name was soon deliberately erased but that of Mary Elgin could still be read in 1826.⁵² Byron's name could be seen carved on several monuments which he had visited, at Sounion, in the quarry at Pentelikon, on the wall of the monastery at Delphi, on the Monument of Lysicrates and hidden in one of the capitals of the Erechtheion.⁵³

On one of the surviving original Caryatids some wit from the West wrote 'Opus Phidiae' (the work of Phidias). On the crude brick pillar substituted for the Caryatid removed by Elgin's agents, he wrote 'Opus Elgin' (the work of Elgin).⁵⁴ Another traveller, familiar with the ancient Greek convention of signing works of art, wrote, in Greek, 'Elgin Made Me'.⁵⁵ A better joke could be seen carved on a wall inside the Erechtheion. There some donnish wit, recalling the story that even Alaric and his Visigoths had respected the monuments of Athens, wrote the Latin rhyme 'Quod non fecerunt Goti, hoc fecerunt Scoti' ('What was not done by the Goths was done by the Scots').⁵⁶ Travelling gentlemen would have recognized the echo of the older tag about the Popes of Rome who used bronze from the Pantheon in the building

google.co.uk/books/edition/Voyage_dans_le_Levant_en_1817_et_1818/cFY9AAA
AcAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&printsec=frontcover

51 François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand, *Travels to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, through Egypt*, 2 vols, 3rd edn, trans. by Frederic Shoberl (London: H. Colburn, 1835), I, 187, <https://archive.org/details/travelstojerusal02chat/page/n5/mode/2up>

52 Hunt to Elgin, 22 May 1801, Elgin Papers.

53 William Black, *Narratives of Cruises in the Mediterranean* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1900), p. 295. Black gives the date 1806, which is clearly impossible, <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/b69gt278/items>

54 See C. W. J. Eliot, 'Lord Byron, Early Travelers, and the Monastery at Delphi', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 71.3 (1967), 283–91. For the name on the Monument of Lysicrates and the Erechtheion, not, as far as I know, found during the recent careful examination connected with the restorations, see N. Parker Willis, *Summer Cruise in the Mediterranean* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1853), pp.145 and 148, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/48264>

55 Forbin, *Voyage dans le Levant*, II.

56 Dodwell, *Classical Tour*, I, 353, and *Quarterly Review* (May 1820).

of St Peter's. 'Quod non fecerunt barbari, fecerunt Barberini' ('What barbarians did not do, was done by Barberini'). These jibes, clearly intended to impress other travellers and not the Greeks or Turks, were gleefully recounted by travellers and taken up by the newspapers and literary reviews at home. Within a few years the stories current among the foreign colony in Athens were so confused that Elgin was soon being blamed for actions he never committed.⁵⁷ Indignation at the Turks waned in proportion.

The most bitter attack of all was *The Curse of Minerva* by Lord Byron. Like the first part of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* some of it was composed when Byron was in Athens, but it appears to have been mostly written on his return to England.⁵⁸ Originally it was intended that the two poems should be published together in 1812 along with some other of Byron's satires. At the last moment, however, owing to the intervention of one of Elgin's friends, Byron decided not to publish the *Curse* and the full version did not appear under his name until some years later.⁵⁹

Byron had not the heart to suppress it entirely.⁶⁰ In 1812 a few copies were printed and sent to Byron's friends. To Clarke, for instance, in thanks for the story about the Disdar, Byron wrote 'I have printed 8 copies of a certain thing, one of which shall be yours'.⁶¹ Samuel Rogers had another, and no doubt many people had an opportunity of reading it.⁶² In 1815 a pirated copy, much mutilated, appeared in the *New*

57 John Cam Hobhouse, *A Journey through Albania and other provinces of Turkey in Europe and Asia, to Constantinople, during the years 1809 and 1810* (London: James Cawthorne, 1813), p. 345, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/A_Journey_Through_Albania_and_Other_Prov/8nfVAAAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1. Many other references.

58 A. H. Smith, 'Lord Elgin and His Collection', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 36 (1916), 163–372 (220), quoting William Turner, *Journal of a Tour in the Levant*, 3 vols (London: John Murray, 1820), I, 347, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Journal_of_a_Tour_in_the_Levant/dCoNAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

59 CPW I, 320–30.

60 The suggestion in Moore's *Byron*, Chapter 55, that Byron's decision was aided by a 'friendly remonstrance from Lord Elgin or some of his connection' is confirmed by a reference in the Journal of Edward Everett. Everett met Byron on 18 June 1815 shortly after Elgin's Petition to Parliament was debated. 'I asked him,' he wrote, 'whether his poem which he speaks of as "printed but not published" in the notes to the *Corsair*, would ever be given to the World. Oh No! he replied it was a satire upon Lord Elgin, which a particular friend of each had begged him to suppress.'

61 Byron to Clarke, 27 May 1812. British Library, Egerton MS 2869, fol. 10; BLJ II, 178.

62 Rogers's copy is in the British Library. It seems likely that many more than eight copies were printed.

Monthly Magazine and other versions began to circulate some months later.⁶³ Although Byron attempted to disown the pirated versions, his authorship was clear.⁶⁴ Another poem called *The Parthenon* published by James and Horace Smith in 1813 bears evidence of having been paraphrased from *The Curse of Minerva*.⁶⁵

The Curse of Minerva begins with a beautiful descriptive passage on the evening in Greece which Byron used again in *The Corsair*. The poet (as in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*) sits alone and friendless within the walls of the ruined Parthenon when suddenly Minerva herself appears. She is hardly recognizable. Her aegis holds no terrors, her armour is dented, and her lance is broken.

'Mortal!' ('twas thus she spake) 'that blush of shame
Proclaims thee Briton, once a noble name;
First of the mighty, foremost of the free,
Now honoured *less* by all, and *least* by me:
Chief of thy foes shall Pallas still be found—
Seek'st thou the cause of loathing?—look around.
Lo! here, despite of war and wasting fire,
I saw successive tyrannies expire.
'Scaped from the ravage of the Turk and Goth,
Thy country sends a spoiler worse than both.
Survey this vacant, violated fane;
Recount the relics torn that yet remain:
These Cecrops placed, *this* Pericles adorn'd.
That Adrian rear'd when drooping Science mourn'd.'⁶⁶

Byron claimed in a footnote that he was referring to the Temple of Olympian Zeus built by Hadrian, not here subscribing to the Payne Knight view that the Parthenon sculptures were Hadrianic. The poem continues:

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- 63 *New Monthly Magazine*, April 1815, 'The Malediction of Minerva'. This version is very corrupt and bears the signs of having passed through several manuscript versions before reaching the printer. *The Curse of Minerva*, in its abbreviated form, also appeared in editions sold by the Paris pirate publisher Galignani.
- 64 A month after 'The Malediction of Minerva' was published in the *New Monthly Magazine* a correspondent had pointed out that the author was Byron, *New Monthly Magazine*, September 1815. Other versions of *The Curse* were published in London in 1816, 1818, and 1819. Full versions under Byron's name were published in the United States in 1815 and 1816.
- 65 [James and Horace Smith], *Horace in London* (1813), ode xv, 'The Parthenon'.
- 66 *Curse of Minerva*, lines 89–102; CPW I, 323.

'What more I owe let Gratitude attest—
 Know Alaric and Elgin did the rest.
 That all may learn from whence the plunderer came
 The insulted wall sustains his hated name:
 For Elgin's fame thus grateful Pallas pleads,
 Below, his name; above behold his deeds!
 Be ever hail'd with equal honour here
 The Gothic monarch and the Pictish peer:
 Arms gave the first his right, the last had none,
 But basely stole what less barbarians won.
 So when the Lion quits his fell repast
 Next prowls the Wolf, the filthy Jackal last:
 Flesh, limbs and blood the former make their own,
 The last poor brute securely gnaws the bone.'⁶⁷

Minerva then observes that another goddess has helped to avenge her:

'Yet still the Gods are just, and crimes are crost:
 See here what Elgin won, and what he lost!
 Another name with *his* pollutes my shrine:
 Behold where Dian's beams disdain to shine!
 Some retribution still might Pallas claim,
 When Venus half aveng'd Minerva's shame.'⁶⁷

To those in the know, Elgin's syphilis, his cuckolding, and his divorce are a punishment for his sacrilege.

To this outburst from Minerva the poet dares to make some reply. Do not blame England for this terrible deed, he says. England disowns him, the plunderer was a Scot. Just as Boeotia was the uncivilized part of Greece, so Scotland is the uncivilized part of Britain:

'And well I know within that bastard land
 Hath Wisdom's goddess never held command:
 A barren soil where Nature's germs confin'd
 To stern sterility can stint the mind,
 Whose thistle well betrays the niggard earth,
 Emblem of all to whom the land gives birth;
 Each genial influence nurtur'd to resist,
 A land of meanness, sophistry and mist.
 Each breeze from foggy mount and marshy plain
 Dilutes with drivel every drizzly brain,
 Till burst at length each watery head o'erflows,

⁶⁷ *Curse of Minerva*, lines 103–22; CPW I, 323–34.

Foul as their soil and frigid as their snows;
 Then thousand schemes of petulance and pride
 Dispatch her scheming children far and wide,
 Some East, some West, some every where but North,
 In quest of lawless gain they issue forth.
 And thus, accursed be the day and year!
 She sent a Pict to play the felon here.⁶⁸

It was necessary for the argument that Elgin's Scottishness should be stressed. But Byron was conscious of his own Scottish origins, and obviously did not want to be included in his own condemnation. His solution was very neat and contains one of the few hints of humour in the poem. Just as Boeotia managed to produce a Pindar, he said, so there was hope for a few Scotsmen, 'the letter'd and the brave', provided they were prepared to shake off the sordid dust of their native land.

Minerva curses not only Elgin but his children. The only surviving son, Byron knew, was mentally retarded. As for his other children, from what had been said about Lady Elgin at the divorce trial, could Elgin be sure that he was really their father?

'First on the head of him who did this deed
 My curse shall light, on him and all his seed:
 Without one spark of intellectual fire,
 Be all the sons as senseless as the sire:
 If one with wit the parent brood disgrace,
 Believe him bastard of a brighter race:
 Still with his hireling artists let him prate,
 And Folly's praise repay for Wisdom's hate;
 Long of their Patron's gusto let them tell,
 Whose noblest, *native* gusto is—to sell:
 To sell, and make, may Shame record the day,
 The State receiver of his pilfer'd prey:
 Meanwhile, the flattering, feeble dotard West,
 Europe's worst dauber, and poor Britain's best,
 With palsied hand shall turn each model o'er,
 And own himself an infant of fourscore:
 Be all the bruisers cull'd from all St. Giles,
 That art and nature may compare their styles;
 While brawny brutes in stupid wonder stare,
 And marvel at his lordship's "stone shop" there.⁶⁹

68 *Curse of Minerva*, lines 131–48; CPW I, 324–35.

69 *Curse of Minerva*, lines 163–82; CPW I, 325–36.

After some amusing remarks about the embarrassment of the young ladies of London at seeing such huge naked manly statues Minerva pronounces her curse. Lord Elgin, like Eratostratus who set fire to the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, will be for ever hated: 'loath'd in life, nor pardon'd in the dust.' Vengeance will pursue him far beyond the grave 'In many a branding page and burning line'.⁷⁰

Elgin's deed is so terrible that it is not enough that he alone should be punished. Britain herself must suffer the penalty. The terrible war on which she has embarked will soon destroy her. In the Baltic and the Peninsula she will be defeated. In the East the Indians will 'shake her tyrant empire to its base'. At home Minerva will strike. Trade will languish, famine break out, the Government become powerless. The country itself will be invaded and ravaged. And, says Minerva, no one will be sorry. It is too late. The country has brought all this upon herself.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and *The Curse of Minerva* have coloured the world's view of Lord Elgin's activities ever since they first appeared. And it is no criticism of a satirist to say that he gives only one side of an argument. On the other hand, the indignation of satirists which appears to be spontaneous and heart-felt is often little more than a literary exercise, an attempt to recapture the spirit of Juvenal and of Pope. When Byron was in Athens John Galt was writing voluminously both in prose and verse. As his letters show, Galt clearly recognized that the antiquities of Greece were being quickly destroyed by the travellers and by the Turks and that if Elgin had not removed the Parthenon marbles the French certainly would.⁷¹ Nor was he averse from acquiring them himself if he had had the chance.⁷² While he was staying at the Capuchin Convent, however, Galt knocked out a satire on Lord Elgin which he called the *Atheniad*.⁷³ He showed this to Byron, who kept the manuscript for several weeks before returning it by way of Hobhouse. On his return to England Galt intended to publish his poem but, like Byron, he was

⁷⁰ *Curse of Minerva*, lines 199, 204; CPW I, 327.

⁷¹ John Galt, *Letters from the Levant* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1813), p. 112, letter dated 1 March 1810, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Letters_from_the_Levant/7A4IAAAAQAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1.

⁷² John Galt, *Autobiography* (London: Cochrane and M'Crone, 1833), Chapter 7.

⁷³ An edited version of the *Atheniad* was published in Galt, *Autobiography*. Another version appeared many years earlier in the *Monthly Magazine*, 49 (1820).

dissuaded by one of Elgin's friends, in this case Hamilton.⁷⁴ It was not published until 1820.

The *Atheniad* is an amateurish piece of mock heroics, good-humoured enough on the whole. Where the *Curse* becomes bitter against Lord Elgin, the *Atheniad* merely shows bad taste. It was clearly never intended to be more than a literary exercise. In Galt's satire, the gods of Olympus, dejected by the oppression of Greece, are consoled somewhat by the memory of the former glories of Athens and by the contemplation of her ruins. Then Fate takes a hand. Mercury is sent back to earth disguised as a man called 'Dontitos' (Don Tita Lusieri). 'Cadaverous, crafty, skilled in tints and lines, A lean Italian master of designs', Dontitos seeks out a nobleman called 'Brucides' (Lord Elgin) and tells him he will be famous if only he will rescue the Parthenon sculptures from the Turks. Brucides falls for this trap and sets to work.

With ready gold he calls men, carts, and cords,
Cords, carts and men, rise at the baited words.
The ropes asunder rive the wedded stone,
The mortals labour and the axles groan,
Hymettus echoes to the tumbling fane,
And shook th' Acropolis—shakes all the plain.⁷⁵

Suddenly the gods of Olympus realize what is happening and one by one they take their revenge. First Neptune conjures up a storm and sinks Brucides' vessel at Cythera. Minerva inspires Brucides with delirious fancies so that his diplomatic dispatches are filled with talk of 'basso-relievos' and 'marble blocks' instead of military and political affairs—Brucides at once loses his ambassadorship. On the way home, however, Brucides makes a partial recovery. He lingers in Italy and France and 'still has sprightly pleasures left'. But Minerva soon has the better of him. She drives to Paris in her golden chariot and disguising herself as

74 In a letter to Elgin on 17 September 1811 Hamilton wrote: 'I saw Mr. Hume a few days ago who called to give me the satisfactory intelligence that M. Gant [*sic*] had given up all idea of bringing to light the production of his Muse, and that the absence of Lord Biron [*sic*] had given him time to reflect on the improper tendency of his former intentions', Elgin Papers. Hamilton's misspelling of the names of Galt and Byron shows how little known both men were at the time.

75 [John Galt], 'The Atheniad; Or, The Rape of the Parthenon', *Monthly Magazine* 49.336 (1 February, 1820), https://archive.org/stream/sim_monthly-magazine_1820-02-01_49_336/sim_monthly-magazine_1820-02-01_49_336_djvu.txt

Talleyrand, she persuades Napoleon to arrest all the British in France and so to possess Brucides 'a prize more precious than the Greeks of old, From Ilion stole'.

Meanwhile Mars too is taking his revenge. In order to effect the transfer of a very useful cart from 'Fouvelle' (Fauvel) to Dontitos he stirs up wars in Egypt, Russia, and Spain, and finally, in a delightful piece of bathos, causes a conflict in Athens over the wheel of this cart, which by 1810 had changed hands between Fauvel and Lusieri at least four times. Next Venus in her turn takes her revenge on Brucides, but the poet is reluctant to speak of it—he is forbidden by Juno. Those in the know would detect the usual references to syphilis and cuckoldry. Cupid's revenge is to thrust a flaming torch into Elgin's face disfiguring him to look like a noseless antique bust. And finally Apollo vents his wrath by inspiring John Galt to record these great events 'in epic strains'.

Thus wrought the gods in old Athenia's cause,
Avenged their fanes, and will'd the world's applause.

The Curse of Minerva clearly owes some of its ideas to the *Atheniad* although its whole tone is different and Galt was never able to persuade Byron to acknowledge any debt.⁷⁶ Most probably it was the idea itself that Galt inspired. Perhaps Byron on reading Galt's literary effort, decided that he could do much better than his tedious companion and dashed off the *Curse*. It may be a literary extravaganza. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, too, undoubtedly owes much to its literary predecessors. Its main theme—that of a reborn Greece rising against the Turks—was far from new when Byron wrote: it was already a well-known literary genre.⁷⁷ A long anonymous poem on this theme—*A Letter from Athens addressed to a Friend in England*—appeared almost simultaneously with the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.⁷⁸ Another—William Haygarth's *Greece*—was actually being written when Byron was in Athens and he knew and liked its author. All three poems show similarities of idea if not

76 John Galt, *Life of Byron* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), p. 183, https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Life_of_Lord_Byron/guwyAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1

77 For a discussion of this point see Terence Spencer, *Fair Greece, Sad Relic*, pp. 247 ff., and St Clair, *That Greece Might Still Be Free*, early chapters.

78 Kelsall. Name of the author from Spencer, *Fire Greece, Sad Relic*, p. 279.

of style. Haygarth's *Greece* also has a few resemblances in construction to *The Curse of Minerva*.

Is then Byron's indignation against Elgin purely literary? Was he being no more serious in attacking Elgin than he was in his satire against the *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, much of whose unfairness he later regretted? Was his main objection Elgin's 'robbery of Athens to instruct the English in sculpture'.⁷⁹ Or was there something about Elgin personally which roused his anger, his Scottishness, for example, or his Toryism, or his apparently typical British contempt for foreigners? The cruelty of *The Curse of Minerva* is unusually personal. Possibly the answer lies in Byron's sheer perverseness, his wish to be different from the careful moderation of Hobbhouse and Galt. Writing of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* in September 1811, some months before it was published, he declared boldly that he had been forced into the attack by the contemptuous review of his first poems which had appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*:

I have attacked De Pauw, Thornton, Lord Elgin, Spain, Portugal, the *Edinburgh Review*, travellers, Painters, Antiquarians, and others, so you see what a dish of Sour Crout Controversy I shall prepare for myself. It would not answer for me to give way now; as I was forced into bitterness at the beginning, I will go through to the last. *Vae Victis!* If I fall I shall fall gloriously, fighting against a host.⁸⁰

Byron's attack fell on a man who was already almost broken by his misfortunes. Lord Elgin, trying desperately to restore his finances in his Scottish retreat, was strangely silent. The world's reception of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* coming so soon after his rebuff from Spencer Perceval⁸¹ seemed merely another in the long series of misfortunes to which he was now almost accustomed. After *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* it seemed to Elgin that every time he opened the *Edinburgh* or the *Quarterly Review*, yet another book of travels had been published with its inevitable sneers

79 Byron, *A Letter to * ** [John Murray] on the Rev. W. L. Bowles's Strictures on the Life and Writings of Pope* (London: John Murray, 1821), p. 25.

80 Byron to Hodgson, 25 September 1811; *BLJ* II, 106. De Pauw and Thornton were authors of books contemptuous of the Modern Greeks.

81 [ed.: In a previous chapter, St Clair described the snub administered by the Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval, to Elgin's proposal that he be awarded a peerage: 'To a Scotch peer, [...] nothing could be so desirable as a British peerage' (*Lord Elgin*, pp. 177-78).]

and accusations. What could be the meaning of it all? What had he done to deserve such treatment? He had only done what men of his class had been doing for over a hundred years, the exception being that his interest in antiquities had been so genuine that it had ruined him. There must be some explanation, Elgin felt. The world could not be so unjust without some cause.

Who could the arch conspirator be? Could it be his hated neighbour Robert Ferguson of Raith, the man who had run away with his wife and whom he had successfully sued for £10,000? Possibly. Ferguson, who sat in Parliament as a Whig, might have persuaded his friends in those days of increasing political bitterness to attack a prominent Tory.⁸² Could it be Clarke? His hatred of Elgin seemed to be unlimited, despite the many kindnesses he had accepted at Constantinople. This too was a possibility, although it was unlikely that a mere Cambridge don could exert so much influence.

But there was a man who held his grudge against Elgin more deeply than either of these. John Spencer Smith could not forget the disgrace of being superseded by Elgin as minister in Turkey and then of being dismissed for incompetence and disobedience. He could not forget too that the accusations which Napoleon had levelled against Elgin in 1804 of mistreating the French in Constantinople had subsequently been transferred by the French government to himself; and that, partly as a consequence, he was bundled out of his last diplomatic appointment in Württemberg. Here, Elgin suspected, was his conspirator. Spencer Smith's tongue was active against him in England and the merchants of the Levant Company were maligning him to travellers, English and French in Greece and Constantinople. The Levant Company had an interest in preventing any more ambassadors extraordinary being appointed to Constantinople to break their precarious monopoly.

82 This seems to have been Hamilton's explanation to Haydon, *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. by Willard Bissell Pope, 5 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), IV, 594: 'October 27, 1839. Spent the greater part of the day with Hamilton—a delightful one. He let me into the secret of the opposition of Lord Elgin at the time. He said Lady Elgin's Friends who were Tories (the Manners) & Ferguson's friends who were Whigs, were violent in their hatred of every thing he did, & made all that stir in opposition, backed by the jealousy of Connoisseurship.' Elgin's counsel accused Ferguson of deliberately attempting to misrepresent Elgin's public life in the divorce trial of December 1807. *Trial of R. J. Fergusson Esquire*, 9, and *Trial of R. Fergusson Esq.*, 8.

And had not Byron had an affair with Spencer Smith's wife in Malta on his way to Greece and commemorated the event in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*?⁸³

Elgin was wrong in thinking his misfortunes were the result of a conspiracy. His detractors were too numerous and, for the most part, too independently minded to be so carefully disciplined. What looked like a conspiracy can be seen in retrospect to have been simply a conjuncture of events, the discovery of Ancient Greece and its triumph over Rome, the cultural shift in Western attitudes to works of art and literature known as romanticism, and the increasing power of western European notions of national identity and how it should be constructed, celebrated, and reinforced both in western Europe and, increasingly elsewhere.

83 Mrs Spencer Smith, the daughter of Baron Herbert, Austrian Ambassador to the Porte, had made a dramatic and romantic escape when the French entered Venice in 1806. This was related by the Marquis of Salvo in a book published in 1807. She is described in enthusiastic terms in Byron's letters. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto II, 30, she is:

Sweet Florence! could another ever share
 This wayward, loveless heart, it would be thine:
 But check'd by every tie, I may not dare
 To cast a worthless offering at thy shrine,

Nor ask so dear a breast to feel one pang for mine. (CPW II, 54)