

THE PICKERING MASTERS

The Works of Lady Caroline Lamb

Graham Hamilton (1822) and Poems

Edited by
Leigh Wetherall Dickson and Paul Douglass



ROUTLEDGE


THE PICKERING MASTERS

THE WORKS OF LADY CAROLINE LAMB
VOLUME 2

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Ada Reis, A Tale

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Volume 2

Graham Hamilton (1822) and Poems

EDITED BY

Leigh Wetherall Dickson and Paul Douglass

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2009 by Pickering & Chatto (Publishers) Limited

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Lamb, Caroline, Lady, 1785–1828.

The works of Lady Caroline Lamb. – (The Pickering masters)

1. Aristocracy (Social class) – England – Fiction. 2. England – Moral conditions – Fiction.

I. Title II. Series III. Dickson, Leigh Wetherall. IV. Douglass, Malcolm Paul.

V. Lamb, Caroline, Lady, 1785–1828. Glenarvon. VI. Lamb, Caroline, Lady, 1785–1828.

Graham Hamilton. VII. Lamb, Caroline, Lady, 1785-1828. Ada

Reis.

823.7-dc22

ISBN-13: 978-1-85196-902-9 (set)

Typeset by Pickering & Chatto (Publishers) Limited

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INTRODUCTION

Graham Hamilton

When Lamb was considering subject matter for her second novel she was advised by Ugo Foscolo, later called the father of modern Italian fiction, to write a book that would ‘offend nobody – women cannot afford to shock’.¹ After the furore that surrounded the publication of *Glenarvon* it would appear on the surface that Lamb heeded Foscolo’s advice, and was applauded for doing so by one critic in the *Monthly Review*:

Conceiving ourselves justified, then, in reviewing this publication as emanating from the fair writer of *Glenarvon*, we have pleasure in stating our opinion that it is much more creditable to her than its predecessor, both as displaying greater powers and as subject to less objection on the score of personal allusions and revolting characters. It is an elegant and pathetic tale; and its style and execution would not reflect discredit on names much more known in this department of literature than that of her *Ladyship*.²

In contrast to both *Glenarvon* (1816) and *Ada Reis* (1823), *Graham Hamilton* is sparing with plot, characters and superfluous detail. It has a carefully considered simplicity and focus which Lamb found was a very different experience to write than it would have been for her audience to read. Writing to William Godwin she explains how the composition of *Graham Hamilton* was an exercise in constraint:

Thank you for being pleased with your visit and not displeas’d with Graham [Hamilton]. The circumstances of my writing it – and the Tale I wish you to see, were these. Ugo Foscolo said try if you like you like to write – to take one simple plot describe one character as I have done in my *Jacopo Ortis* [–] do not seek events – if you find them in yr way take them – I said I would try but the feeling was like writing a letter upon ruled paper and to ease myself I wrote *Ada Reis* during this time which pleased me better but which I fear is nonsense – after all I had better read than write [.]³

The constraint that Lamb felt herself under when writing a second novel was borne out of her awareness of being watched by her family, who were desirous not to have a repeat of the scandal created by *Glenarvon*, but also by the critical press. Lamb felt that this self-conscious writing of the novel, in anticipation of its critical recep-

tion, denied the finished *Graham Hamilton* any imaginative power and resulted in it being as 'dull as our dullest dinners are.'⁴ Lamb's fears for the finished product are, however, unfounded, as it is the very quality of understatement that makes this tale of the social destruction of the self all the more poignant.

Lamb's frustration at the power of critics to subdue an author is commented upon in the novel; Moncrief, the only character in *Graham Hamilton* whose judgement can be consistently relied upon, speaks for Lamb's frustration when he observes that 'the writer, who remembers even the critic, will ever be cold and flat.'⁵ Not only does Lamb disapprove of critics for their constraining influence on natural expression, but also for their propensity to pass judgement; Moncrief states that the critic's duty is to 'feel beauty or detect errors,' nothing more.⁶ Lamb presents her personification of the ideal critic in *Graham Hamilton* as Gertrude, Graham's childhood sweetheart. The unassuming Gertrude possessed the 'power of comprehending a subject, and feeling the merits and beauties of a work before her nice discernment was struck with its defect.'⁷ Gertrude is a critic in the real sense and not one 'who, incapable of sympathizing with the writer, feels joy only in discovering and pointing out his faults.'⁸ Moncrief and Gertrude make such excellent critics for two reasons: because they themselves are well-read and have formed their own tastes and opinions as a result, and because they are not part of, and therefore not subject to the vagaries of, the fashionable world. *Graham Hamilton* is a forthright depiction of the callous and superficial nature of fashionable society that Lamb and her vastly extended family dominated, and which she depicts as 'tarnished, faded, false' in the harsh light of day.⁹ It is a milieu that only looks its best at night, when it dazzles and confuses the senses 'amidst the glare of torches and the splendour of silk and tinsel',¹⁰ and the eponymous character is at first its votary and nearly its victim. A debt to Frances Burney's novel *Evelina* (1778), is acknowledged in the naming of *Graham Hamilton's* characters, the most obvious being Lady Orville. Lamb portrays young parvenu Graham Hamilton's entry into this dazzling but dissolute world. Through Graham's eyes, as he narrates his own story retrospectively, the reader sees the cracks appear in the thin veneer of this soulless society, as he tells of his progress from laughing stock, in all his obviously new finery, to the toast of the town as the chosen companion of Lady Orville, the acknowledged leader of the society, to disgrace and dishonour in the debtor's prison.

The *Monthly Review* complimented Lamb on providing less objectionable 'personal allusions,' perhaps indicating a recognition that Lamb's two central characters, Graham Hamilton and Lady Orville, had their fictional origins in two people very close to Lamb, Byron and her beloved aunt, Georgiana Cavendish, the fifth and ultra-fashionable Duchess of Devonshire. If indeed Byron was recognized as the original for the eponymous character it may have been

considered less objectionable than the one that appeared in *Glenarvon* because it was not a portrayal of Byron the lover, but of the corruption of provincial innocence by contact with the tawdry metropolis. Graham Hamilton and Byron both originate from Scotland and neither was initially brought up immersed in an environment of fashionable extravagance and aristocratic interconnectedness in the same way that Lamb was from birth. Graham gains his entry by being adopted as an heir by his wealthy moneylending uncle Sir Malcolm; Byron, though aware of an illustrious lineage that stretched back to James I of Scotland on his mother's side,¹¹ was brought up disconnected from his aristocratic background and in extremely straitened circumstances. Leslie Marchand suggests that Byron was initially out of his depth in fashionable Whig society and appropriated a 'studied politeness and cynical pose' to mask his sense of unease.¹² Byron had entered a closed environment that had its own code of behaviour and even its own slang that reinforced its sense of social identity and cohesiveness; the Devonshire House drawl was initially spoken by the family of Georgiana's husband, William Cavendish, the fifth Duke of Devonshire, and picked up by Georgiana in an effort to fit in with her new in-laws.¹³ But wherever fashion's favourite role model went, the rest were sure to follow, and it became a distinctive mode of speech within the wider circle of fashionable Whig drawing rooms, becoming its own distinctive patois. The 'drawl' now seems awkward to enunciate and must have taken some considerable practice and concentration to appear natural; hope was written and pronounced as 'whop', yellow becomes 'yaller', cucumber becomes 'cowcumber', and you is written and pronounced 'oo'.¹⁴ This 'slanguage' was also accompanied by a set of nicknames, the origins of which are sometimes obscure, illustrating the need to have full insider status to comprehend the references. Some are self-explanatory such as Charles James Fox being known as 'The Eyebrow' because of his great bushy black eyebrows, but what about Georgiana as 'Mrs Rat', Lady Elizabeth Foster as 'Racky', Richard Brinsley Sheridan as 'Argus' or Marie Antoinette being known as 'Mrs B'?

It is this sense of closely-guarded impenetrability that Lamb depicts as being the most unattractive aspect of her own milieu, which she represents as an aspect not perpetrated by the aristocracy, but rather by those who slavishly imitated them for their style rather than for their substance to the denigration of both the imitator and the imitated. The odious Frederick Brandon and his vulgar sister, who owe something of their existence to Evelina's cousins the Branghtons in Burney's novel, try and keep Graham at arm's length, not only because he is so obviously a parvenu, but to preserve their own sense of identity as being amongst the elite. However, their desperate insistence on being people worth knowing undermines their worthiness. The Brandons attribute their fashionable status to the very thing that limits them as people; Frederick does not read anything but

reviews and adopts the opinions of others, and Miss Brandon's self-proclaimed 'oddness' as a desirable and fashionable characteristic underlines the affectations not only of themselves but the limited, uninformed and essentially dull-witted society they represent.

Lady Orville is Miss Brandon's idol, or rather Miss Brandon desires Lady Orville's social position for herself, for she does not actually know Lady Orville personally, and in fact nobody does. 'Do you know Lady Orville' Miss Brandon asks Graham Hamilton, which she then amends to 'that is, have you seen her [...] for few I believe out of her own set know her', ending her raptures about Lady Orville's beautiful appearance with 'how happy she must be! how incredibly happy!'¹⁵ Lady Orville, however, is not happy. Closely modelled upon Georgiana, or 'George-ayna' as she became known in the dialect of the 'Devonshire House drawl', she is the central star around which fashionable society orbits, and whose social success compensates for a deeply unhappy marriage to a man who is indifferent to her. Despite being betrothed to her childhood sweetheart, Moncrief, Lady Orville accepted Lord Orville's 'proffered hand' as he was 'one of the richest and handsomest men in England', and she states that Lord Orville's indifference to her was her just reward.¹⁶ Sir Malcolm mocks the mercenary aspect of Lady Orville's dynastic marriage, advising Graham sarcastically 'Marry some girl of rank, whom others love [...] but sells herself for your fortune; and let her be the only woman you treat with cold neglect.'¹⁷ Lord Orville's indifference drives his wife to seek recompense and companionship in society, and he is only roused to take an interest in her by the impending financial disaster that is born out of Lady Orville's need to compensate for her empty marriage. Lady Orville's experience is modelled upon that of Georgiana, who overcame an unhappy marriage to the Duke of Devonshire, a gambling habit that threatened the stability of even the immense wealth of the Cavendish family, and an enforced exile to Europe when her husband discovered her affair and illegitimate child with Lord Grey (despite his making Georgiana's best friend his mistress and the three of them living under the same roof), eventually finding her vocation as a respected politician and mediator.¹⁸ Miss Brandon has therefore misread Lady Orville's situation in light of her own limited ambition.

The ability to read correctly is the predominant theme of *Graham Hamilton* because, Lamb argues, it allows one to maintain the integrity that comes with being able to think for oneself. For Lamb, a writer of reviews who takes pleasure in denigrating the efforts of others commits a lesser crime than the people who read them, as personified by Frederick Brandon, for whom 'learning runs through a brainless head, as water through a pipe or channel, leaving it as empty as it found it.'¹⁹ Brandon's conversation is made up of 'crude common-place remarks' and his limited stock of knowledge is soon exhausted.²⁰ Moncrief and,

to a much lesser extent, Gertrude are the only well-read characters, and therefore those whose judgement can be consistently relied upon, whereas Graham Hamilton tells his interlocutor, the mysterious and possibly criminal Mr M, to whom he relates his tale, that he was not fond of reading. This becomes a source of deep regret for Hamilton as he comes to the retrospective conclusion, in light of his experiences, that only those who have read widely deserve to be heard for they have ‘enriched their minds with the stores of other ages’, and are not likely to be ‘eager to display their own acquirements, nor over-confident of their own powers’, for they recognize the transient nature of such posturing.²¹ This is not a point of view that Mr M shares. For him the key skills for survival are ‘reflection, memory, natural sagacity, and observation’,²² but in light of the tale that unfolds it is Graham Hamilton’s opinion upon this subject that is borne out. Graham is the one who observes that those who do not read are overconfident of their powers of interpretation because without a wealth of acquired knowledge that gives insight, the act of interpretation can only be based upon appearances which prove to be misleading. Those who do not read and who judge only from appearances receive the brunt of Lamb’s criticism of the shallowness of fashionable society and those who emulate it. Lamb deploys a Jonathan Swift poem as the epigram for the second volume of *Graham Hamilton* to reprimand this narrow mindset that can only judge by its own limited frame of reference:

Bare innocence is no support,
When you are tried in Scandal’s court. [...]
The World, a willing stander-by,
Inclines to aid a specious lie;
Alas! they would not do you wrong;
But all appearances are strong!²³

Swift’s court in Lamb’s novels is the habitus of the social elite that is described by her as ‘censorious, officious, intermeddling [...] ever greedy of scandal, ever ready to adopt the worst construction, and hasty to condemn.’²⁴ Gossip about Graham’s relationship with Lady Orville is fuelled by a series of misinterpreted scenarios. It appears to the other characters that they are indeed having an affair because the concept of platonic friendship seems ridiculous to them, and Graham’s open defence of Lady Orville’s reputation fuels the fire of the scandal that surrounds them. He fights a duel in retaliation for the ‘many unfounded stories [that] were circulated by malice against her’, and Moncrief condemns Graham for adding to the precariousness of Lady Orville’s situation, saying ‘be her ruin; go the old hackneyed course, under the name of Friendship.’²⁵ The difference between Moncrief aiding Lady Orville and Graham’s impassioned defence of her is that Moncrief does so unobtrusively, whereas Graham’s is carried out in the full glare of a society that, ‘judging from [its] own want of both, believed in

neither honesty nor virtue.²⁶ Graham's attempts at defending Lady Orville's reputation are undertaken with the best of motives, and are only misguided because of the society, ever greedy for scandal and incapable of judging upon merit, in which he is operating. However, even he misinterprets Lady Orville's motives for appealing to him for support as she finds herself 'alone upon the earth; [passing her] days in a struggle to appear gay, [her] nights in tears.'²⁷ Graham takes her hand to kiss and Lady Orville exclaims 'Oh no, [...] you misunderstand me: 'tis a friend – a kind, an ardent, an unspoiled friend, I wish for.'²⁸ The eventual ruin of both Graham and Lady Orville is brought about because of false reports of the ball and their relationship in the newspapers, and it is telling that only Moncrief, the sole friend Graham has left, has the good sense to not to believe what he is reading without verifying the facts for himself.

Moncrief had undertaken to be the protector of Lady Orville's reputation and happiness despite her earlier rejection of him as a suitor and her subsequent toying with his affections. However, despite striving to make her become a woman 'who might have been heaven's masterpiece in mind, in character, as she is in beauty,'²⁹ Moncrief laments that he was always doomed to disappointment by treating a 'woman whom he loves as if she were a rational being.'³⁰ Lady Orville's relief at his relinquishing his severe guardianship to the more lax and enthusiastic Graham Hamilton might, at first glance, appear to be an unsympathetic portrayal of Georgiana as a woman incapable of independent thought or action without disgracing herself. This is not the case, however, and this deeply personal portrait of Georgiana in *Lady Orville* reflects Lamb's thoughtful assessment of her Aunt's predicament. In 1809 she wrote to her cousin 'Hart', William Cavendish, the Marquis of Hartington and Georgiana's son, saying 'I have read Rights of Woman, am become quite a convert'³¹ and nowhere is this more in evidence than in *Graham Hamilton*. Mary Wollstonecraft's radical polemic *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was stimulated by her indignation at Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), to which she initially responded with *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790). Wollstonecraft was particularly outraged by his chivalric denunciation of those who had insulted Queen Marie Antoinette, and his conclusion that without chivalry 'a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and animal not of the highest order.'³² Wollstonecraft wanted genuine respect to replace such chivalry, for this would encourage the fine lady, defined by her helplessness, to become a rational woman, capable of nurturing her children and being a useful member of society. Neither Moncrief's protection nor Graham Hamilton's duel in defence of Lady Orville demonstrates any respect for her as a rational creature, but rather reduces her to a pet or a child that needs to be vigilantly watched as it is incapable in taking proper care of itself, albeit disguised in the most flattering form of attention. Graham's attention in

particular exemplifies what Wollstonecraft described as a ‘young person, in the first ardour of friendship, deif[y]ing the beloved object’, about which she asks ‘what harm can come arise from this mistaken enthusiastic attachment?’³³ Lamb demonstrates clearly in this tale that severe damage can ensue, since the attachment is not based on respect or rationality. Graham Hamilton’s admiration of Lady Orville cannot properly be called friendship; it is not based on esteem for her, but merely on his idea of womanly perfection and vulnerability which his sense of chivalry dictates needs protecting, and which nearly ruins them both. However, the fault does not entirely lie with Graham Hamilton as Lady Orville has, to a certain extent, imbibed the social construction of the helpless female as a result of what Wollstonecraft’s contemporary Priscilla Wakefield describes in *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex* (1798), as a ‘contracted education, custom, false pride and idolising adulation.’³⁴

So thoroughly has Lady Orville internalized this value accorded to her position in society that she is terrified of leaving her social position in the city for the countryside, though it is a move that might save her from financial and spiritual ruin. She is urged by Graham, whose developing maturity is indicated by his recognition of the shallowness of fashionable life, to ‘resolve upon an interval of reason and reflection’, after which she ‘will no longer care for these things, as [she] does now’, insisting that with her ‘mind, with [her] resources’, who knows what she might achieve – she might even find happiness in attempting to do so.³⁵ However, Lady Orville does not agree that she has anything to offer. She has spent so long basking in the gaze of ‘idolising adulation’ she has, as Wakefield describes it, ‘concealed, not only from others, but from [herself], the energies of which [she is] capable.’³⁶ So paralysed is she by the fear of losing her identity as the envy of others, that Lady Orville’s existence is only validated in the gaze of others; so successful has she been at smothering her authentic self and assimilating the external values of an artificial society in which the ‘perpetual change of scene, variety of conversation, and multiplicity of acquaintance’ has ‘become necessary’ as a distraction from its very emptiness, that, without such distractions, Lady Orville sees nothing but a void.³⁷ Lady Orville’s relief at Moncrief’s relinquishing of his guardianship of her welfare is twofold; because she recognizes that his admonition for her irrational and irresponsible behaviour is completely correct, but also that it is completely impractical for those who actually live in the world, by which she means those living within the narrow acceptable confines of an elevated, essentially meaningless female existence. Lamb recognizes the validity of Wollstonecraft’s criticisms of aristocratic woman as being corrupted into a characterless and merely decorative creature incapable of exertion other than the hours spent at dressing, which is effectively done for her anyway. Wollstonecraft deplored women’s obsession with dress, but traced this preoccupation back to two root causes; imitative behaviour of their mothers and to the lack of

larger interests which might otherwise occupy the day. Georgiana took the art of dressing merely for the sake of dressing to an extreme when she devised head-dresses that took two people several hours to construct, comprising a kind of scaffold tower padded with horsehair that was then decorated with a tableau in miniature. One day she would sport a ship in full sail; the next stuffed birds and waxed fruit.³⁸ Her inventions and her imitators were depicted in satires as being forced to sit on the floors of their coaches to travel due to the incommodious nature of their hair.

Although Lady Orville does not go to the extremes of Georgiana, she is the epitome of Wollstonecraft's lifeless aristocratic woman; Graham Hamilton's first close-up view of her at Brandon Lodge is of someone more a wax mannequin than a woman of flesh and blood, hardly moving but for languid gestures and whispered conversations. Lady Orville's demeanour is the product of unhappiness rather than indolence but the root cause of her sorrow is the social and economic system which relegates women to a status of elevated inferiority. Lady Orville is the embodiment of Wollstonecraft's observation that, for the want of any other challenge, 'pleasure is the business of woman's life [...] the sovereignty of beauty – they have, to maintain their power [...] chosen rather to be short-lived queens than labour to obtain the sober pleasures that arise from equality'.³⁹ When Lady Orville declares, for want of any meaningful activity, 'write I do; but were I to publish what I write, I should only make enemies, or incur censure',⁴⁰ she speaks for Lamb's awareness of the unenviable position in which unrestrained writing had already placed her, and for Wollstonecraft's statement that 'women have seldom sufficient serious employment to silence their feelings'.⁴¹ Deprived of any other significant sphere of action, writing is the only outlet and, therefore, a potentially highly emotional or highly critical floodgate for women whose inner lives are at odds with the desirable representation of being as happy as Miss Brandon assumes Lady Orville to be, and whose role was, in Wollstonecraft's words, only 'to please, to manage their persons, and regulate the exterior behaviour'.⁴²

Wollstonecraft cites and criticizes works by the influential French educator and fiction writer Madame Stéphanie-Félicité Genlis, particularly her *Letters on Education*, because of what Wollstonecraft identifies as Genlis's promotion of 'blind submission to parents, but [also] to the opinion of the world'.⁴³ This phrase would have leapt out at Lamb, for these are the very words her formidable mother-in-law, Lady Melbourne, also known as 'the Thorn' by Lamb's mother and aunt, wrote to Lamb to upbraid her for publicly displaying her attachment to Sir Godfrey Vassal Webster. An adroit practitioner of the laws that governed life within the elite, Lady Melbourne snapped at Lamb 'I see you have no shame or compunction for yr past conduct every action every impulse of your mind is directed by Sir Godfrey Webster [...] When one braves the opinion of the

World, sooner or later they will feel the consequences of it.⁴⁴ Reading this exact phrase in Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* may well have given Lamb the courage to denounce it with the realization that dependency upon the opinion of others is corrupting. When everyone watches everyone else to see how to behave, an artificial notion of acceptable behaviour is constructed that ultimately corrupts not only the individual but the level of society in which those individuals practise such deceit. Mr M speaks for Lamb on the damaging effect of this dependency when he observes to Graham that the 'biggest criticism that can be levelled against those that inhabit the fashionable world is that, whilst they desire distinction, they dread being thought of as different and therefore attract the wrong kind of attention'. This is exactly the case with Miss Brandon and Lady Orville. Miss Brandon's affectations to 'oddness' are rendered ridiculous because they are performed with one eye constantly upon the reception of her foibles and with an anxiety to ascertain how far they would be tolerated by the taste of the small circle that she desperately wished to join. Lady Orville dares not take the opportunity offered to her to break away from her potential ruin and relinquish her place in society, lest she too become an object of derision quickly replaced, as she relinquishes the tenuous hold she has over the fickle and transient heart of fashionable society. So constantly is everyone measuring themselves against each other that this portion of society becomes a focus for what Mr M calls the 'idolatry of self' that has no regard for what is occurring beyond this narrow sphere.⁴⁵ Wollstonecraft observes that regard for the opinion of the world has devolved entirely upon women since, from childhood, they are educated in a manner that forms them as women, being encouraged to pay assiduous attention to 'show rather than substance',⁴⁶ thereby not only promulgating an emphasis upon mere physical appearance, but also a false notion of virtue which only requires that its appearance is maintained and vice remains hidden.

This false virtue is exactly the code of unsentimental conduct that Lady Melbourne adhered to. Having provided her husband with an heir, she went on to have affairs that benefited herself, her husband and the offspring from those liaisons. Lady Melbourne was ferociously practical and discreet with her affections, and she had no time for public display of any kind. Her scolding of Lamb for the Webster affair and her fury about the Byron affair was not that because Lamb was having extra-marital affairs, but that she was doing so in the full glare of the world, and that the relationship was of no benefit to anybody. Lamb writes against this inverse sense of morality as dictated by Lady Melbourne, and her stand against hypocrisy is inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft; she stresses the point by making the relationship between Graham Hamilton and Lady Orville purely platonic. Lady Orville plainly asserts that she has never been unfaithful to her husband. This may seem an unlikely theme for Lamb to pursue in light of her relationship with Lord Byron. However, she is also writing about the damaging

effect of the suppression of spontaneous, natural feeling by a cynical society, not unlike Lamb's opinion of critics. Lamb considered her relationship with Byron to be genuinely heartfelt on both sides, hence her initial disbelief and subsequent despair at the callous and casual manner in which he terminated his involvement with her, which she portrayed in *Glenarvon*.⁴⁷ The writing of *Graham Hamilton* is a vindication of genuine emotion, but also a condemnation of the society that encourages the denial of such feeling for fear of what other people might say. This is not to say that Lamb wrote *Graham Hamilton* in the belief that Byron still secretly loved her and dared not speak it publicly, but rather to demonstrate how quickly the value system of a self-styled elite can invade the psyche when the desire to join in and be accepted smothered any integral sense of the authentic or natural expressions of the self.

Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* is directed specifically towards middle-class women because only these live in a 'natural state' in the strata 'in which talents thrive best'.⁴⁸ Lamb appears to be in agreement with Wollstonecraft's recognition of middle-class strength, integrity, and ability to change; Graham observes that the 'middle rank' of society 'is the sap and stamina of the country', whereas the aristocracy is merely the beautiful but ultimately useless flower.⁴⁹ Wollstonecraft targets the middle-class woman as being rational and capable of change as long as she has not been influenced by or aspired to the lifestyle of aristocratic women, who, according to Wollstonecraft, have all been ruined beyond redemption by what she describes elsewhere as a 'voluptuous atmosphere' in which they can hardly resist the contagion of indolence, and which they could not help but pass on to their daughters.⁵⁰ Wollstonecraft's firsthand experience of aristocratic women derives from when she was employed as the governess to the children of Lady Kingsborough, whom Wollstonecraft recorded as being 'a shrewd clever woman, but whose lisping speech and 'infantile expressions', mainly directed at her pet dogs, rendered her in the eyes of her new employee 'an order of being, that [she] could not love'.⁵¹ Wollstonecraft was prepared to accept her inferior status but, during a serious illness of the eldest daughter of the family, she thought Lady Kingsborough was prepared to offer true intimacy due to Wollstonecraft's empathetic concern. However, writes Janet Todd, Wollstonecraft seriously misjudged Lady Kingsborough's polite enquiries about her family during this time, and upon the recovery of her daughter, Lady Kingsborough withdrew back to her dogs and reinstated the class barrier, leaving Wollstonecraft mortified.⁵² She never forgave this rebuke to her pride, and Lady Kingsborough became the model for all aristocratic women in the *Vindication*, ridiculed by Wollstonecraft as someone who 'takes her dogs to bed, and nurses them with a parade of sensibility' while allowing her children to 'grow up crooked in the nursery', and whose duties as a 'wife, mother and human creature, were all swallowed up by the factitious character which an improper education and the selfish vanity of beauty had

produced.⁵³ Todd observes that when Wollstonecraft described Marie Antoinette, whom she had never met, as the epitome of the idle and empty-headed aristocrat of her time, it was Lady Kingsborough who sat in for the portrait.⁵⁴

Lamb clearly recognized Wollstonecraft's description of the indolent aristocratic woman and, in her portrait of Lady Orville, demonstrated her agreement with Wollstonecraft that the environment in which they are brought up is more to blame than the women themselves. However, despite engaging with Wollstonecraft's radical feminism, Lamb was also thoroughly aristocratic and did not agree that they were beyond redemption, nor were they incapable of exerting themselves beyond the indolence for which Wollstonecraft condemned all aristocratic women. She was surrounded by clever, resourceful women; her grandmother, Lady Spencer, was a diligent scholar, who could read and write Greek, French and Italian, and was a keen amateur composer. Lady Spencer passed on the necessity of a good education to her daughters, Georgiana and Lamb's mother, Henrietta. As well as the usual female accomplishments, they were taught practical subjects such as geography and languages, and a similar education was arranged for Lamb. However, even when there were educational opportunities, there was no real incentive to pursue them or anybody ready to ensure that these opportunities were made the most of. Lamb's governess was Selina Trimmer, daughter of the famous educationalist Sarah Trimmer. Selina was introduced into the family by Lady Spencer in a desire to provide Lamb and her cousins with a stable focus, despite their peripatetic aristocratic upbringing, but even Selina was powerless to enforce on her charges studies that they did not wish to undertake. When Selina complained to her patroness that Lamb was refusing to do her arithmetic, Lady Spencer advised the governess not to worry as 'the fancy [...] will come again as I have reason enough to be very sure she can do anything of that kind when she chooses to set about it.'⁵⁵ Lamb continued in her attempts to improve upon her education throughout her adult life, with her husband William acting as tutor to her willing pupil, and she even undertook to learn Greek under the tutelage of Lady Oxford. These diligent efforts, however, became submerged by the aristocratic seasonal round of social events. The lack of necessary discipline and motivation and the wasted opportunities for self-improvement that are sacrificed for the sake of transient pleasure comprise the major concerns of *Graham Hamilton*. Lady Orville is only roused from her indolent lifestyle by extreme necessity, but it turns out to be the making of her. She is last heard of in straitened circumstances but, in making herself useful, happy at last. This echoes Georgiana's experience of enforced exile, during which she escaped her addiction to gambling – which was symptomatic of her deeply unhappy life – and also developed a lasting interest in chemistry and mineralogy. When her husband allowed her to return home after a two-year exile, she was a changed woman; she swapped the ballroom and gambling arena for lectures

and time devoted to experimentation. Instead of the glamorous figurehead of the Whig party that she had previously been, Georgiana became the thoughtful mediator that drew together the disparate factions of the splintered Whig party.

When reading *Graham Hamilton* in conjunction with Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, one sees that the personal exertions of Lady Orville, Georgiana and Lamb all take place after a personal crisis which threatens to destabilize a previous mode of existence; Lamb's own sustained commitment to writing began after her disastrous involvement with Byron as a means of not only examining her own motivations, but also those of the environment in which she lived. Lamb must also have been influenced by Georgiana's own literary analysis of the fashionable world, in her novel, *The Sylph* (1779), which reveals the marriage of the young and naïve Julia Stanley to be nothing more than a brutal sham in a vicious society where bullies and blackmailers are the best equipped to survive, and where women have absolutely no rights and must defend themselves as best they can. However, as much as Lamb is influenced by Wollstonecraft and Georgiana, her analysis of the environment in which she functioned from birth is born of her own observations and beliefs. Wollstonecraft's work is both a feminist and a political manifesto, and while Lamb is converted by the polemic against the invidious position in which women find themselves, she does not subscribe to Wollstonecraft's belief that the aristocracy and its vacuous women will be swept away wholesale in a reformed society.

Lamb is an aristocrat who believes in the naturalness of the aristocracy as leaders distinguished by ability, property, and a privileged education, all of which should instil a high sense of honour, responsibility and public duty. Lamb's depiction of that aristocracy in her own time shows it in self-destruct mode, engaged in behaviour that opens the gateway for criticisms, and acting as if it were nothing more than the embodiment of entrenched privilege and arbitrary power. *Graham Hamilton* takes up where *Glenarvon* left off in exploring the theme of the interdependent nature of the relationship between the personal lives and the political actions of this set of individuals who are also part of the governing institution. Lamb makes the nature of *noblesse oblige* quite clear by demonstrating the consequences of what will happen when that basic tenet is neglected; revolution in Ireland as in *Glenarvon*, ruin and disgrace, and the breakdown of trust between the rulers and the ruled, in *Graham Hamilton*. Tellingly, Lady Orville ruins not only herself but the tradesmen she can no longer pay. That the aristocracy need to relearn the lessons of honour, self-reliance, and responsibility is driven home by Graham's apparent failure to wean himself from the dependence upon the exterior deportment that he believes makes him a gentleman and imbibe the set of values that would place him in a natural position of leadership. In the end, Graham Hamilton's future, which symbolizes that of an effective

aristocracy, depends upon his relearning the lessons of his adoptive class. As a representative of the privileges that great wealth brings, only Graham can save himself from himself.

The Poetry of Lady Caroline Lamb

Lady Caroline Lamb wrote poetry from a very early age. Even in adulthood, her letters often slip into verse and linguistic experimentation, and her earliest verses show a precocious awareness of poetic convention. Like the sketch-art and watercolours in her notebooks, her early writing exhibits a distinctive style. Lamb's juvenilia show that she was a writer long before her affair with Byron in 1812.⁵⁶ Many of the themes, turns of phrase, and even names found in her novel *Glenarvon* were incubating in her poetry before she met Byron. The groupings the reader will find below are arranged in chronological order, and within each grouping the poems are arranged roughly by date of composition. Dates are given in the endnotes, whenever available.

Lamb was strongly encouraged from childhood to express herself in verse, and the first poem recorded here ('I'm Mad') dates from January 1797, when she was eleven years old. Her mother Harriet, Lady Bessborough, and her Aunt Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire, delighted in her juvenile self-expression, and she responded by writing letters that frequently break into rhyme. Her aunt wrote verses for young Caroline one Christmas, titling her poem 'To Lady Caroline Ponsonby With a New Year's gift of a pencil', calling upon her, 'Fairy, sprite, whatever thou art', to employ her '[m]agic genius', and without 'fear / Boldly mould, invent, design.'⁵⁷ By age twelve, Lamb had mastered her pencil to the extent that she was sketching, writing and generally seeking to fulfill her image as the vivacious 'sprite' of the household. She filled her letters with poetry she knew would be passed around and shared by her correspondents.

Poems in letters are thus finished works – although the reader will observe that she often revised them over many years. Many of the poems in her letters, drawn from the Archives at Chatsworth, West Sussex, Castle Howard, The Brotherton Collection of Leeds University, the Murray Archive in the National Library of Scotland and the Bodleian Library, have already been published in part or in whole in biographical and critical works focusing on Lamb, her family and circle of acquaintances, and are thus often known to scholars and readers interested in the Regency period. These have been augmented by others less known or previously unpublished to give a full sense of Lamb's poetic achievement.

Like most educated women of the period, Lamb compiled 'commonplace books' containing sketches, original verse and commentary, together with quotations and translations. Also like many other women, she created bound books of sketches, verse, descriptions and fiction; handwritten but intended as keepsakes

for friends and family. The gift book is a form of publication we have honoured by the inclusion of the majority of poetical contents of two such, omitting only those poems that are alternate versions of others in the selection, and collating those alternate versions as textual variants.

One gift book is held in the Hertfordshire Archives. Its date and intended recipient are not known, but the book may have been intended for a friend of Lamb's grandmother. The other gift book dates from around 1807, and its recipient was Lamb's cousin Georgiana, also known as 'Little G', the eldest daughter of Lamb's Aunt, the Duchess of Devonshire, who later became Lady Morpeth. This second gift book is held in the archives of Little G's husband's estate, Castle Howard. From early childhood, Lamb shared intimacy with G, or 'Jarry', as she calls her in letters written after her eleventh birthday. Their closeness continued after G's marriage to Lord Morpeth (the future sixth Earl of Carlisle) in 1801. They shared an important connection in both suffering from depression. With a few notable exceptions, the verses in Lamb's letters and gift books concentrate on themes of love, friendship and nature, traditional topics of poetry. Their occasions are also familiar ones: pain at the loss of a lover or friend, distress at the flux of time, joy in friendship and love, a favourite pet, the beauty of the natural scene. A number of these poems are spontaneous, but the great majority show an effort to practise the craft of prosody. An important theme in the second gift book is Lamb's acknowledgement that her devoted husband, William Lamb, had first loved Little G.

When she turned to fiction, Lamb did not leave verse behind, even temporarily. Lamb's first novel, *Glenarvon* (1816) is unusual in having incorporated numerous song lyrics, and even, in two cases, printing music for the verses. In this, her fiction is almost unique, although it also mirrors a practice in popular journalism that dates from at least the 1790s. For example, the *Lady's Monthly Magazine* of the period had been publishing music along with embroidery patterns, and other women's magazines had emulated the practice; *Godey's Lady's Book* is one example. Still, printing extensive passages of song lyrics, much less actual musical settings, was highly unusual. Lamb also followed her Aunt Georgiana and other ladies of high social standing in dabbling in sheet music publications.

Song lyrics written by women were competitive in the London market, but tended to conform to conventional models. A poem published in the *Scots Magazine* in 1795, for example, was titled 'Ellen; or, the fair insane'. Another, printed in the *Monthly Magazine and British Register* in 1797, was called 'The Penitent Mother'.⁵⁸ Lamb's Aunt Georgiana had published a song that Jane Austen chose for her personal songbook: 'I have a Silent Sorrow Here'. The titles typify the roles in which female writers were cast, and the characters in Lamb's fiction mirror that social stereotype. But her ambitions in the song market were anything but typical. By 1814 she was collaborating with a young Jew named Isaac Nathan

on settings of her lyrics, and it is he who provided the music for *Glenarvon*. Lamb probably believed the music was a selling point for the novel, because the second and final volume of Byron and Nathan's *Hebrew Melodies* had just been published on 18 April 1816, scarcely a month before *Glenarvon* appeared. The music was popular already (the first volume had sold well the year before), and Byron's well-publicized departure on 23 April made sales even better. Nathan's friendship with Byron (Nathan set more than thirty of Byron's lyrics to music with his permission) was an important point in his favour, from Lamb's perspective.⁵⁹

Nathan would ultimately publish twelve songs with lyrics by Lamb. See Volume 1, pp. xli–xlii for a listing of these. Lamb was so proud of the songs in *Glenarvon* that in 1819 she arranged to have all of them printed and bound in a volume titled *Verses from Glenarvon*, probably as a gift book for friends and family. Those texts, plus one short verse not included in it, are reproduced here. The songs of *Glenarvon* are at the core of Lamb's artistic vision and mode of expression. Seven of the fourteen lyrics in the novel are sung by Elinor St Clair (also known as St Clara), who accompanies herself on the harp, an instrument Lamb loved. Lamb identified strongly with St Clara, the doomed rebel whose voice dominates the second half of the narrative. In her fictionalization of the relationship among herself, her cousin Georgiana and her husband William, she gave herself the name of 'Clare'. The last song of *Glenarvon* is sung by St Clara just before she plunges to her death – and political martyrdom – in the sea.⁶⁰

To this point in her career, Lamb's poetry primarily comprises works intended for family and friends. Thereafter, Lamb published in more regular venues, in hope of reaching a wider audience. The first of these works was *A New Canto*, published anonymously in October 1819. The 1892 *Dictionary of National Biography* lists *A New Canto* as a work of Lamb's in an article signed by George Fisher Russell Barker, a contributor to *Notes & Queries* and a biographer. Since then, other authoritative bibliographies have listed Lamb as the author of *A New Canto*.⁶¹ Some have doubted that the satire is Lamb's work. Yet who but the author would have requested publisher John Murray to send Lamb's brother Frederick a copy of *A New Canto* along with another book of her own?⁶² The poem is a brilliant send-up of *Don Juan*, published at a time when a number of other parodists were taking advantage of Byron's popularity to gain a readership. The fun had actually begun with *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, which had been satirized in poetry (for example, *Lines to Harold* (anon., 1812), and *Childe Harold's Monitor* (by Francis Hodgson, 1818). Less than a week had passed after the first two cantos of *Don Juan* were published anonymously on July 15, 1819, when satirist and bookseller William Hone published *Don Juan: Canto the Third*, which consists of 114 stultifying stanzas. The anonymously published *Jack the Giant Queller, or Prince Juan*, offered thirty-eight stanzas of similar calibre.⁶³ Another anonymous response to *Don Juan* was published at

this time: *Don Juan: with A Biographical Account of Lord Byron and his Family; Anecdotes of His Lordship's Travels and Residence in Greece, at Geneva, &c., including, also, a Sketch of the Vampire Family*, done in ottava rima. This work, which purports to be a biography of the poet, was printed for William Wright by W. Shackell, both of Fleet Street. The names of Wright and Shackell also appear on the publication of Lamb's *A New Canto*. The editors are persuaded that Lamb is in all likelihood the author of *A New Canto*, and that there is no other credible claimant of authorship.

A New Canto is far better than the other contemporary satires of *Don Juan*. It evokes a British apocalypse – a British nightmare of political upheaval in which St Paul's cathedral catches fire and the ball on its dome goes 'tumbling with a lively crash,' '[t]eeth chatter, china dances' with the shock, the Bank of England collapses and a raving Prince Regent 'sends about for ministers in vain.' London has become a volcano, and crowds run frantically about, seeking salvation in the church where 'the font is hot, and fizzing.' As the earth tremors increase, the waves shake even the Peak District, far north of London, a private allusion intended to amuse Lamb's cousins, for that is where the Devonshire country estate, Chatsworth, stands. The inventiveness and power of *A New Canto* derives partly from Lamb's mastery of Byron's tricks in *Don Juan*, but she may also have been mocking earlier poems of Byron's with this volcanic scene. In his 'Translation from Horace,' published in *Hours of Idleness*, Byron had described the 'flames of an expiring world,' its 'vast promiscuous ruin' and wreckage a 'glorious funeral pile'.⁶⁴

A New Canto also mocks Byron through cutting allusions to his worship of Napoleon, who is said never to have flinched at 'massacre or murder.' Ruthless Napoleon is contrasted with Don Juan, who 'pitifully wince[s]' at the conflagration. Thus Byron's hero proves no 'true one' (a direct echo of the opening stanzas of *Don Juan*) but a 'bloodhound spaniel-crossed'. The epithet 'spaniel-crossed' carried for Byron and Caroline (both dog-lovers, and both readers of *Faust*) connotations of impure breeding and bargains with the Devil, who first appears to Faust in the form of a dog. Lamb had been involved in breeding dogs, and was the owner of a Blenheim spaniel, a special breed that continues to this day.⁶⁵ Lamb also satirizes Byron's pose of pretending to lose track of the story, as the narrator's mind wanders off and devils consort with prostitutes in the London red-light district. A weakly constructed catalogue of the damned draws the narrator back to the ongoing destruction of Europe that provides the power of *A New Canto*: 'Return we to our heaven, our fire and smoke'. But the next line is deflating: 'Though now you may begin to take the joke!' The joke here is that Byron's apparent purpose is merely to perpetuate his fame, 'And keep [his] name in capitals, like Kean,' an allusion to the career of actor Edmund Kean and Byron's long-time connection to Drury Lane Theatre.

Few reviews of *A New Canto* were apparently published. In 1821 the *Monthly Review* offered this comment: 'The writer of this lively nonsense has evidently intended it as an imitation of Lord Byron. It is a rhapsody from beginning to end, describing the sudden arrival of dooms-day; and to those who are fond of extravagance, and doggerel versification, it may seem to possess merit.'⁶⁶

Two years after *A New Canto*, Lamb weighed in with another more extended parody of *Don Juan*. According to Lamb's preface, it was Byron's choice to continue the poem with cantos three and four that prompted her to write *Gordon: A Tale, A Poetical Review of Don Juan* (1821). In her preface she describes *Gordon* as 'partly a burlesque parody in the style of *Don Juan*; partly a sacrifice of praise offered at the shrine of talent, and partly arguments proving its immoral tendency'. This mixture of motives and the much greater length makes the poem a less impressive send-up than *A New Canto*, though it has its moments. It begins with the narrator purchasing the first two cantos of *Don Juan* and praising Byron's abilities to describe scenes, evoke emotions, and in general 'set all your soul on fire'. The narrator opens the new cantos of *Don Juan* expecting to find 'intellectual joys', but is strangely unaffected by Byron's 'persuasive song', and his fire sympathetically dies in the grate. While the author of *Gordon* finds some praiseworthy things in *Don Juan*, Byron is faulted for becoming distracted from doing good with his abilities and losing himself in humorous asides. '[J]ust as he is on the point of winning', notes the narrator disappointedly, '[h]e turns aside, sits down, and falls a grinning'.⁶⁷ The narrator also laments, 'Would that he used his talents for our good!' Instead, Byron's genius is used 'but to infect: / Its powers perverted, all its time mispent'.⁶⁸

In the second canto of *Gordon*, the narrator meets a tall, cadaverous visitor whose attacks on Byron cause the narrator to rise in his defence. A long argument ensues over whether Byron is truly immoral or has simply described nature without being aware of doing probable harm to the morality of readers. To bolster her argument, Lamb introduces in a footnote a lengthy quotation from a review of *Don Juan* that was published in the *Imperial Magazine* for May 1820 attacking Byron for treating adultery comically and complaining that in *Don Juan* 'sacred things are treated with levity'.⁶⁹

The tall visitor in *Gordon* is now revealed as a supernatural being who calmly discourses while penetrating screams are heard in the background. Through the keyhole, the narrator glimpses enough to guess that his servants are being tortured.⁷⁰ The ghastly stranger compares *Don Juan* to 'a destructive stream of filthy water', a burning desert, Adam's body before he received his soul, a whirlpool, and a poisoned apple.⁷¹ *Gordon's* purpose, it emerges, is identical to that of *A New Canto*. Byron has squandered his genius merely to show off. His reward 'for such enormous pains / Is, "*Byron did it!*" – is this all he gains?'⁷² The best parts of *Gordon: A Tale* come towards the end, with an apocalyptic scene that is ironi-