

**NAMING “IANTHE”:  
CHARLOTTE HARLEY AND BYRON’S CLASSICAL SOURCES<sup>1</sup>**  
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Ernest Coleridge’s 1899 edition of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* provides the following footnote to the dedicatory poem *To Ianthe*:<sup>2</sup> “Ianthe (‘Flower o’ the Narcissus’) was the name of a Cretan girl wedded to one Iphis (*vid.* Ovid., *Metamorph.*, ix. 714).<sup>3</sup> These two classical explanations—the meaning “flower of the narcissus,” and the character in Ovid—are still appearing in major Byron editions and biographies.<sup>4</sup> But Ovid’s Ianthe is not the only classical character of that name, and the translation “flower of the narcissus” does not cover every meaning, nor even the usual one. I will argue that a different classical character and a different classical meaning present more illuminating parallels to Byron’s poem, and to his relationship with Charlotte Harley, the historical girl he calls “Ianthe.”

It may be objected that the name Ianthe cannot serve as an interpretive key to the poem because it was such a late addition—Byron added the classical alias in his holograph edits to the proofs.<sup>5</sup> I will argue, however, that the addition of the second stanza between the draft manuscript and the fair copy<sup>6</sup> adds key parallels between Charlotte and Ianthe; it thus constitutes a revision towards a classical name which expresses themes already present in the poem.

I.

I will first consider the suggested translation of Ianthe as “flower of the narcissus.” Frederic Ives Carpenter’s notes to “To Ianthe,” published a year after Coleridge’s, point out that “Ianthe” comes from *anthos* (meaning flower) and *ion*, which he says can refer either to the violet, the narcissus, or the lily.<sup>7</sup> The entry for *ἰὼν* (*ion*) in the Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon, however, does not mention the narcissus at all. It lists gillyflower and lily (*krinon*) as secondary meanings, but the primary flower meant by *ion* is the violet.<sup>8</sup> Hederich’s 1803 *Graecum Lexicon*, a Greek-to-Latin dictionary which Byron owned, likewise gives “violet” as the definition.<sup>9</sup> Even the Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder says that this Greek word refers to the violet.<sup>10</sup>

In any case, viewing Byron’s Ianthe as no more than a flower leads to interpretations that are inconsistent with Byron’s portrayal of her. Fiona MacCarthy, who compares Byron’s relationship with the eleven-year-old Charlotte to his relationship with his seven-year-old cousin Eliza, renders “Ianthe” as the “fragile flower of the narcissus”.<sup>11</sup> MacCarthy’s addition of the adjective “fragile” implies that for Byron, Charlotte is not only as beautiful as a flower, but shares its passive vulnerability. But neither the Charlotte of reality nor the Ianthe of Byron’s poem was very passive.

In “To Ianthe,” Byron speaks of love not as an emotion which active lovers express to a passive Charlotte, but as something radiating from Charlotte like light: he writes of her “charms which varied as they beam’d” and how her “ripening beauties shine.” Her eyes are “brightly bold” and they “dazzle” the viewer because they do not take in light, they emanate light (*To Ianthe* 7, 22, 29-30). This light is not only marvellous, but dangerous. In an early draft, when her eye dazzles a man, it “wounds as it wins”.<sup>12</sup> That is, the light from her eyes penetrates a man’s heart like

**1:** I would like to thank Blanche Conger McCune for her invaluable assistance with classical texts and scholarship, and my many other readers who gave generously of their time and feedback. Any errors are of course my own.

**2:** Strictly speaking, *To Ianthe* was added after the first two cantos and originally served as a dedication only for these.

**3:** Coleridge 13, n.2.

**4:** CPW II 273, Levine 25n, MacCarthy 195, Eisler 385n.

**5:** CPW II 6, 8.

**6:** CPW II 267-8, Erdman, David V., and David Worrall, eds. *Lord Byron: Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, A Critical, Composite Edition*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1991, 12.

**7:** Carpenter, Frederic Ives, ed. *Selections from the Poetry of Lord Byron*. New York: Henry Holt, 1900, 311.

**8:** Hereafter I will abbreviate the lexicon by Liddell et al. as LSJ.

**9:** Byron’s 1816 sale catalog includes “Hederici Lexicon Graecum, *russia*, 1803” (CMP 237).

**10:** Pliny the Elder, Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff, ed. *Naturalis Historia*. Lipsiae (Leipzig): Teubner, 1906, 21.16, 21.37, 37.58.

**11:** MacCarthy 195.

**12:** CPW II 7, n.30.

an arrow: “all younger hearts shall bleed” (*To Ianthe* 24). Thus, her shining eyes compel men to love her; this is “the doom [her] eyes assign” (*To Ianthe* 25). In the poem, Charlotte is not the yin—dark and passive—but the yang—bright and active.

If Charlotte’s adult life is any indication of her childhood, she was not only attractive but had a forceful personality. She was celebrated for her beauty and married a cavalry officer years before her siblings were married.<sup>13</sup> She used to ride around with her husband and his men when he served in the Portuguese civil war, and she laughed when fired upon by the enemy.<sup>14</sup> When she grew old and stout, those who had admired her beauty still admired her laughter and amiable, vivacious conversation,<sup>15</sup> though she shocked some respectable matrons with her use of strong language.<sup>16</sup> All in all, she was a woman to be reckoned with. As a child she would have had less independence and fewer opportunities to show her boldness, but an attentive companion would be unlikely to miss it. Byron’s image of her radiant power shows that he knew her active character well. His *Ianthe* is more than a flower—she is a beacon of light and power.

## II.

To determine which classical persona Byron assigns to Charlotte, we must first examine the way he applies his imagination to reality in general. Anne Barton observes that Byron not only uses the facts of his life as a basis for imagination, but actually uses poetry to reimagine his life, to “exact from life itself the qualities of great poetry. . . . Byron needed to mythologize fact”.<sup>17</sup> The year Byron met Charlotte, he also began writing his “Oriental Tales.” Barton identifies these poems as an important step in his reimagining of fact: they are “invented histories in which the important truth is not literal but psychological”.<sup>18</sup> *The Giaour*, for example, is based on an episode from Byron’s life in which he just barely managed to save a woman from being drowned—possibly an execution for sleeping with Byron. Though the drowning never actually took place, Byron contemplated that potential tragic ending with an “icy” horror—and in *The Giaour*, he tells that imagined story of drowning rather than the literal history.<sup>19</sup>

*The Giaour* mythologizes a historical woman as a character in an “Oriental Tale,” but *To Ianthe* actually mythologizes Charlotte Harley as a character from classical mythology. Identifying the correct classical character could illuminate both Byron’s poem and his relationship with the addressee. The significance of the name lies in three themes which Byron associates with Charlotte. Since Byron himself is our primary source of information about his relationship with Charlotte, even the biographical details are filtered through his perspective and constructed into his own narrative. As Anne Barton has pointed out, Byron mythologizes his life even in his letters.<sup>20</sup> In particular, Byron’s accounts of his relationship with Charlotte tend to imagine their future—and as with the imagined ending in *The Giaour*, the plots of these imaginary futures incline towards tragedy. I would like to highlight three major themes Byron introduces in this biographical narrative which will reappear in “To Ianthe.”

The first theme is *youth*—both Charlotte’s and Byron’s. Byron’s biographers tend to emphasize the connection between Charlotte’s age and Byron’s feelings about his own youth. Marchand writes that Charlotte was at an age “that excited his romantic sentiments most profoundly. . . . No one could have had more poignant sentiments of the beauty of youthful innocence than the disillusioned young lord who had known too early the disappointments of love fading into satiety”.<sup>21</sup> Benita Eisler drives the point further: because of “Byron’s painful

**13:** Charlotte married Anthony Bacon in 1823 (Glegg 81). Her elder brother Edward never married, and her younger brother Alfred married in 1831 (Cokayne et al. X: 270). Her sisters Jane and Frances were married in 1835 (Hardy 444, “Obituary Notices”), and her sister Anne was married in 1836 (Manzini, Enrico. “Cav. Giambattista Rabitti.” *Memorie Storiche dei Reggiani Più Illustri Nelle Scienze Nelle Lettere e Nelle Arti*. Reggio nell’Emilia: Degani e Gasparini, 1878, 279). Her remaining siblings had died in infancy (Debrett 566).

**14:** Tolmer, Alexander. *Reminiscences of an Adventurous and Chequered Career at Home and at the Antipodes*. 2 vols. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1882, I 27-8.

**15:** Tolmer, op. cit., II 281; “Art and Literary Gossip.” *Supplement to the Manchester Weekly Times* 20 Mar. 1880: 96.

**16:** Macaulay, Rose. *They Went to Portugal*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1946, 307-8.

**17:** Barton, Anne. “Byron and the Mythology of Fact.” *The Byron Foundation Lectures Online*. The Byron Centre for the Study of Literature and Social Change, 2009. 27 April 2012. <http://byron.nottingham.ac.uk/>, 12.

**18:** *Ibid.*, 9.

**19:** *Ibid.*, 9-10.

**20:** Writing of a series of letters Byron wrote September to October of 1813, Barton says that if one compares Byron’s letters to epistolary novels, “we are being presented on the one hand with a factual record and on the other with the constructions of the imagination, but... effectively there is no way of telling them apart. Unplanned, unretouched as they were, the Byron letters confront us like a formal work of art” (Barton 14).

**21:** Marchand II 135.

obsession with his own youth... he longed to reclaim this fleeting moment, to become once more the child by possessing her".<sup>22</sup>

If Byron hoped that Charlotte could help him return to childhood, he succeeded in some measure—or presented himself as having succeeded. He was at his most boyishly playful with Lady Oxford's children. In November of 1812 he wrote that he was "reading, laughing, & playing at Blindman's buff with ye. children".<sup>23</sup> By April, the weather offered other possibilities: "We have had as yet very few fine days & these I have passed on the water & in the woods—scrambling and splashing about with the children".<sup>24</sup> The phrase "scrambling and splashing" illustrates the way Byron casts himself as entering into the activity with the same abandon as the children did. By contrast, F.T. Palgrave's paraphrase of Charlotte's later reminiscences makes the same activity sound sedately adult: "Ld Byron... used to take her out for a walk or a row".<sup>25</sup>

If Byron presented himself as rejuvenated, he also expressed a preoccupation with Charlotte's tender age. In the April 1813 letter already quoted he gushes to Lady Melbourne about "Charlotte Harley whom I should love forever if she could always be only eleven years old—& whom I shall probably marry when she is old enough & bad enough to be made into a modern wife".<sup>26</sup> In these brief lines Byron captures the paradox which (in the future he imagines) dooms their relationship to an unhappy ending. His love for Charlotte is contingent on her remaining a child forever, but he knows she will grow up. If he marries her "when she is old enough," the very thing he loves her for will have passed away. Despite the dream of rejuvenation—that Charlotte's youth will rub off on Byron—Byron's letter ultimately implies a tragic plot in which both of them lose their youth.

Related to the theme of youth is the theme of the *one-sided December-May romance*, in which Byron plays the part of an older man in love with a younger woman who will never return his love. "Playing the part" is no exaggeration, because Byron compares himself and Charlotte to characters in a play. Alluding to his alleged plan of marrying Charlotte, Byron writes Lady Melbourne later in April, "I am very busy educating my future wife—& look upon the epistle of another's spouse with a prophetic twinge that makes me feel like Moody in the Country Girl!".<sup>27</sup> In Garrick's *The Country Girl*, Moody is a fifty-year-old man who wants to marry his nineteen-year-old ward, but the girl outsmarts him and marries a younger man.<sup>28</sup> Although this is the plot of a comedy, Byron assigns himself a role with a tragic ending—he is to remain unloved while Charlotte pursues men who possess the youth he envies.

Byron introduces the third theme not in his letters but in a shocking story he later told his wife. Among Lady Byron's statements justifying her separation with Byron was the claim, "He told me that at the time of his connexion with Lady O she detected him one day in an attempt upon her daughter, then a Child of thirteen [sic], & was enraged with him to the greatest degree".<sup>29</sup> Though Benita Eisler contends that such an act would not be out of character for Byron, Fiona MacCarthy and Leslie Marchand are inclined to question the reliability of the source.<sup>30</sup> In Byron's defense, he refrained from sleeping with another beloved child, the Maid of Athens, when offered the opportunity.<sup>31</sup> More significantly, Lady Oxford did not act "enraged with him to the greatest degree." She never threw Byron out of her house, as she might be expected to do after such an incident. In fact, she remained friendly with him until the final days before she left England, defending Byron's presence to her husband when Byron followed her and her children to the port.<sup>32</sup> The lack of reaction on Lady Oxford's part makes it probable, as MacCarthy says, "that the 'attempt' on Lady Charlotte went no further than an unwisely ardent embrace".<sup>33</sup> Charlotte herself remembered Byron fondly to the end of her life,<sup>34</sup> but neither her perspective nor the historical facts are truly the question at hand. The "attempt" on Charlotte existed in Byron's imagination, just like his marriage to her and her scheme of fleeing his affections in the arms of a younger man. Like the many classical tales of

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22: Eisler 385.

23: Letter to Lady Melbourne, November 18th 1812; BLJ II 249.

24: Letter to Lady Melbourne, April 5th 1813; BLJ III 36.

25: Pafford, J. H. P. "Byron's Ianthe and F. T. Palgrave." Notes & Queries 232.1 (Mar. 1987), 30.

26: Letter to Lady Melbourne, April 5th 1813; BLJ III 36.

27: BLJ III 42.

28: BLJ III 42n, MacCarthy 196.

29: qtd. Elwin, Malcolm. *Lord Byron's Wife*. New York: Harcourt, 1962, 163; MacCarthy 196.

30: Eisler 384-5; Marchand II 140; MacCarthy 196.

31: According to Hobhouse's diary (March 3rd, 1810): "Theresa 12 [years old] brought here to be deflower'd, but B would not" (qtd. in MacCarthy 114).

32: Marchand, II 143-4; BLJ III 59, 65, 69.

33: MacCarthy 196.

34: Pafford, op.cit.

*raptus*—with the double sense of *taking* and *rape*<sup>35</sup>—Byron’s story is as much about “possessing” the beloved<sup>36</sup> as it is about sexual desire. The *raptus* theme suggests a plot that is tragic for the unwilling victim but also tragic for the guilt-ridden villain, brooding over his crimes. All three themes, in fact, imply unhappy endings as much as they imply admiration for Charlotte.

### III.

The themes Byron highlights in his autobiographical accounts of himself and Charlotte shed light on which Ianthe he has in mind. Two classical characters bear that name. As Coleridge observes, one appears in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, but a different Ianthe appears in Hesiod’s *Theogony* and in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. Coleridge’s view that Byron is alluding to Ovid is not unreasonable, because Ovid’s Ianthe has a larger role in her story than the Ianthe of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymn has in hers—in fact, in both texts, Ianthe is only a member of a group, a name in a cluster of other names. Nevertheless, I will argue that Ianthe’s portrayal in the *Theogony* and the Hymn to Demeter, and Byron’s portrayal in “To Ianthe,” share the three key themes discussed above. Byron chose Charlotte out of six siblings;<sup>37</sup> he could choose her classical alias for its meaning out of a list of names.

Benita Eisler, however, connects the alias to the myth of Iphis and Ianthe (Ov. *Met.* 9.666-797), an interpretation consistent with her emphasis on Byron’s internal conflict. In Ovid’s telling of the myth, a girl named Iphis is disguised as a boy from childhood. She and a girl named Ianthe fall in love, but Iphis despairs that her love is unnatural, wishing one of them were a boy.<sup>38</sup> The night before the wedding, however, the goddess Isis transforms Iphis into a boy, and the couple are wed.

Eisler says tantalizingly that Byron’s allusion to the myth is “telling,” but she does not say what, exactly, the allusion tells us.<sup>39</sup> It is conceivable, of course, that Byron is casting himself in the role of Iphis to reflect his bisexuality. But in Charlotte’s case, it is her age, not her gender, that makes her both enchanting to Byron and forbidden to him. As I have shown, the theme of *youth* is central to his view of Charlotte in his letters, and *To Ianthe* only makes the theme more explicit. His poem doth protest too much when he writes that he is not moved to love because his “years already doubly number thine” and then tells her—and us—not to “question why / To one so young my strain I would commend” (*To Ianthe* 20, 34-35). Byron even had Charlotte’s portrait painted in the likeness of Hebe, the goddess of youth.<sup>40</sup> Eisler herself says that the poem grows out of “Byron’s painful obsession with his own youth. ... He longed to reclaim this fleeting moment, to become once more the child by possessing her”.<sup>41</sup>

If Eisler is correct, Byron had every reason to feel what Iphis felt, that his love for Ianthe was unfitting. But Iphis’s concern arises because she and Ianthe are the same—both women. If Byron is troubled by his feelings for Charlotte, it is because he and Charlotte are too different—he is an adult and she is a child. These concerns take the form of the *one-sided December-May romance* and the *raptus* themes, neither of which is an issue in the case of Iphis and Ianthe. The Ianthe of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, on the other hand, is closely connected with all three themes.

### IV.

According to Hesiod,<sup>42</sup> Ianthe is one of the daughters of Ocean who “bring [men] up from boyhood” (Hes. *Theog.* 347, cf. 349).<sup>43</sup> This is not the role of a lover, but of an overseeing goddess or an attentive mother. If Byron

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**35:** More fully, *raptus* means “1 The action of snatching or tearing away. ...2 Robbery, rapine, plunder. *b* the seizure of prey. ...3 The action of carrying off, abduction, rape” (“raptus”).

**36:** Eisler 385.

**37:** Six of Lady Oxford’s eight children survived infancy (Debrett 566).

**38:** Pintabone, Diane T. “Ovid’s Iphis and Ianthe: When Girls Won’t Be Girls.” *Among Women: From the Homosocial to the Homoerotic in the Ancient World*, ed. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Liza Auanger. U of Texas P, 2002. 256-81. (Notes 281ff.), 265.

**39:** Eisler 385n.

**40:** See Westall, Richard. *Lady Charlotte Harley, Later Lady Charlotte Bacon (1801-1880) as Hebe*. The Treasurer’s House, Martock, Somerset. *National Trust Images*. 1 April 2012. <http://www.nationaltrustimages.org.uk/>; cf. Brockedon, W. “Ianthe.” *Finden’s Illustrations of the Life and Works of Lord Byron, with Original and Selected Information on the Subjects of the Engravings*. Vol. 2. London: John Murray, 1833.

**41:** Eisler 385.

**42:** Byron included Hesiod in his list of authors and works he had read (CMP, cf. 255).

conceived of his Ianthe as a goddess watching over his coming of age, it is only natural that he should dedicate *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* to her. The youth Childe Harold, Nature's "never-weaned... child," begins by "parting from [his] mother" and crossing the "wide, wide sea."<sup>44</sup> Who better than a daughter of Ocean to watch over him?<sup>45</sup> As Childe Harold wanders across Europe, dwelling in one place after another, Ianthe's piercing gaze also travels: it "wins as it wanders, dazzles where it dwells" (*To Ianthe* 30, emphasis mine).

Considering that Byron is the adult and Charlotte is the child—especially since he wrote of "educating" her—it does not at first make sense that he would reverse their roles by naming her after Hesiod's Ianthe. But if we read *To Ianthe* in light of Byron's love for Charlotte, he may think of her as an adult after all. In *To Ianthe* love is danger to a man, but power for a woman. Byron's prophecy is that when Charlotte's "ripening beauties shine... all younger hearts shall bleed"—that is, when she grows into a woman, men will love her (*To Ianthe* 22, 24). Byron claims that his age makes him "safe" from this "doom" (*To Ianthe* 22, 25). In reality, however, he loved Charlotte even while she was a child. By the logic of the poem, it is she who is safely wielding a woman's power, and Byron who is weak and in danger—she who is the adult, and Byron the vulnerable child.

Byron did in fact describe himself as being emotionally vulnerable to women, and compared this vulnerability to the weakness of a child. What is more, he was capable of revealing this childlike vulnerability to Charlotte. He gave her a copy of *Go—triumph securely*,<sup>46</sup> a poem he wrote addressed to a female lover (not Charlotte), which includes the lines "Ashamed of my weakness however beguiled, / I shall bear like a Man what I feel like a Child" (lines 7-8).<sup>47</sup> But for Byron to feel like a child with Charlotte was not a negative thing. The fact that he could share his childlike vulnerability with her shows that he felt safe with her. He played the role of child with Charlotte, after all, by playing blindman's buff and "scrambling about" in the woods. Calling Charlotte by the name "Ianthe" may simply mean that she began to "bring him up" from boyhood by first returning him to a carefree boyhood.

Certainly childlike, carefree play is associated with Ianthe's other appearance in Greek literature. The same Ianthe, the daughter of Ocean whom Hesiod names, reappears in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, as one of the playmates of Persephone (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 418).<sup>48</sup> They are gathering flowers together when Hades steals Persephone away to be his unwilling bride in the underworld (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 19-20), grieving her desperate mother, Demeter.

Ianthe and Persephone are not literal children—they are described with terms that may be translated "deep-breasted,"<sup>49</sup> and Persephone is of marriageable age. But their childlike behavior at the beginning of the story is

**43:** Greek: ἀνδραῖς κουρίζουσι. The κουρίζω entry in LSJ cites this passage and translates the verb "bring up from boyhood or to manhood." Similarly, one of Hederich's definitions for Κουρίζω is "to educate from the age of boyhood" (*à puerili aetate educo*). Tyrrell renders the phrase as "bring men to adulthood" (347-8). Other translations focus less on maturation but still suggest maternal care: West suggests "nurture men" (West, *Theogony and Works and Days* 13), and Evelyn-White renders the phrase "have youths in their keeping." I use West's 1966 edition of the *Theogony* for my Greek text.

**44:** *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* II.37 (CPW II 56) and I.10 (CPW II 11), and stanza 9 of "Adieu, adieu! my native shore," the interlude between I.13 and I.14 (CPW II 15).

**45:** Although Ocean, the father of Ianthe, was originally "conceived as a *great River* which compasses the earth's disc," later Greek literature applied his name to "the great Outward Sea" (Ὠκεανός, LSJ)—that is, the "ocean" in the sense of the English word.

**46:** "The Byron Mystery", *The Quarterly Review* 127 (July & Oct., 1869): 400-444, 432n.

**47:** McGann suggests the title "[To Lady Caroline Lamb]" at CPW III 16-17, but as no two variants of the poem share the same title, it seems less ambiguous to refer to the poem by its first line, as I have done. Lady Caroline Lamb is probably the addressee, though Lady Anne Hardy thought it was Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster (CPW 393, n.189).

**48:** My primary texts of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter are Allen, Halliday, and Sikes (Greek) and Athanassakis (English translation). Interested as he was in Greek culture both ancient and modern, Byron would have been drawn to the Hymn to Demeter. The Hymn was a relatively new discovery, and David Ruhnken's edition (Greek with a Latin translation) was published in 1780, with a revised edition in 1782 ("Ruhnken, David" 194), which was positively reviewed in England and went into a number of reprints. Even if Byron never read the Hymn to Demeter, he would have known Persephone's story from Ovid (*Met.* 5.341-571), and would have known from Pausanias that Ianthe was her playmate (Pausanias 4.30; in Taylor's translation, I: 424-425). We know Byron read Pausanias because he quotes a different part of the same work, from Taylor's translation (CMP 168, 469 n.35).

**49:** Persephone's companions are βαθυκόλποις (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 5), that is "full-bosomed" (Athanassakis 1) or "deep-breasted" (Cashford 5). LSJ renders the term "with dress falling in deep folds... with deep, full breasts" (βαθύκολπος, LSJ). Hederich similarly defines the word as "having large folds, from clothes" (*magnos sinus habens, de veste*) or "having a deep bosom" (*profundum sinum habens*). Autenreith suggests "deep - bosomed, i.e. with deep folds in the garment," and Cunliffe says "Whose robe falls down in a deep fold over the girdle." In Cashford's translation, Persephone is similarly "deep-breasted" (Cashford 13), but Athanassakis uses the more literal "deep-girded" (Athanassakis 6). The Greek word is βαθυζώνοιο (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 201), literally "deep-girded" (βαθύζωνος, LSJ) or in Hederich, "wearing a broad and beautiful girdle" (*latum et pulchrum cingulum*

unmistakable. Not only do they pick flowers, but Persephone sees a flower as a “toy.”<sup>50</sup> Ianthe and Persephone both begin as innocent maidens, but Persephone loses her innocence and her childlike playfulness; Ianthe does not. To name Charlotte after one of Persephone’s companions would be to imagine her never losing her innocence and never growing up—a natural poetic choice for Byron, who wishes, “may’st thou ever be what now thou art” (*To Ianthe* 10).<sup>51</sup> Ianthe embodies *youth* in Byron’s poem.

Unfortunately, the *raptus* of Persephone overshadows Ianthe’s story. Persephone clearly does not want Hades to take her away: “Against her will he seized her and on his golden chariot / carried her away as she wailed; and she raised a shrill cry” (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 19-20). Her mother, Demeter, grieves for her desperately, and is not comforted by the suggestion that Hades has improved Persephone’s station in life (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 90). This is the *raptus* plot in its full-fledged form.

The *raptus* of Persephone is, however, specifically a *December-May raptus*. The Hymn to Demeter is very much concerned with age and maturation: the story begins with flowers and ends with fruit, begins with maiden innocence, and ends with an unhappy marriage. When some of the characters in the myth judge Hades and Persephone to be a mismatched couple, this is the theme they are addressing.

The marriage is not only unfitting and unhappy because Persephone is young and Hades is old, although this is true. Hades is older than her father and is in fact her uncle,<sup>52</sup> like the rather avuncular Byron who shared Charlotte’s family home. But more important than age is what that age and maturation mean. Persephone and her mother are connected to the kind of maturation which brings fullness of life, whereas Hades is connected to the kind of maturation which brings death.

For the women of both Byron’s story and Persephone’s, the seasons of life echo the seasons of the earth. Persephone is young, and she is also goddess of spring, not only a gatherer of flowers but herself a girl “like a budding flower in face.”<sup>53</sup> Not only does Byron connect Charlotte to a “matchless lily,” but he uses spring as a metaphor for Charlotte’s childhood: “Ah! may’st thou ever be what now thou art, / Nor unbeseem the promise of thy spring” (*To Ianthe* 10-11). And in fact it was spring when Byron declared he would marry Charlotte.<sup>54</sup>

These girls of spring have autumnal mothers. The maternal Demeter is the goddess of harvest, and Byron twice said that Lady Oxford was in the autumn of her life. He praised Lady Oxford’s “autumnal charms” to Lady Blessington,<sup>55</sup> and “the autumn of [her] beauty” to Medwin.<sup>56</sup> And it was autumn when he and Lady Oxford began their affair.

For Demeter, the maturity of crops and of people is about growth, nourishment, and life. The Hymn to Demeter not only describes her “mak[ing] the life-giving seed grow” (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 469), but also beginning to bring up a mortal boy to both maturity and immortality (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 219-62). Lady Oxford similarly “rears

*gerens*). Hederich does not say that the term describes a full figure, but instead that it connotes “a woman of the highest order and of the most noble stock” (*summi ordinis et clarissimi generis foemina*). Autenreith says “deep-girdled, i.e. with girdle low down over the hips,” and Cunliffe says “deep-girdled, so girt that the upper part of the robe falls down in a deep fold... over the girdle.” I draw on the Homeric lexicons of Autenreith and Cunliffe for the Hymn to Demeter because the Homeric Hymns share the dialect of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (Rayor, Diane J. “Introduction.” *The Homeric Hymns*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2004, 1).

**50:** Greek: ἄθουρα (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 16)—“plaything, toy” (LSJ). Cunliffe also says “plaything.” Hederich defines ἄθουρα as a “child’s game” (*ludus puerilis*), which similarly indicates the childish nature of Persephone’s view of the flower.

**51:** He would also, as previously noted, “love [Charlotte] forever if she could always be only eleven years old” (Letter to Lady Melbourne, April 5th 1813; BLJ III 36).

**52:** Hades is the brother of Zeus (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 30), and Persephone is Zeus’s daughter (*Hes. Theog.* 912-14). Zeus was the last born of the children of Kronos, and thus his brother Hades is older (*Hes. Theog.* 478-9).

**53:** Greek: καλυκῶπιδι κούρη (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 8). The LSJ lists κούρη as a variant of κόρη, meaning “girl.” For καλυκῶπις the definition is “like a budding flower in face, i.e., blushing, roseate.” Hederich defines Καλυκῶπις as “having a rose-colored (that is, beautiful) face” (*roseam, i. e. pulchram, faciem habens*). Athanassakis renders the phrase “a girl with a flower’s beauty” (Athanassakis 1), Cashford says “the girl with eyes like buds” (Cashford 5), and Evelyn-White says “the bloom-like girl.” Persephone is also compared to a “sweet flower” (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 67; Athanassakis 3), or a “sweet young shoot” (Cashford 8).

**54:** Letter to Lady Melbourne, April 5th 1813; BLJ III 36.

**55:** Blessington 149. Lady Blessington only refers to the lady as “Lady —.” Perhaps because this description resembles the description of Lady Oxford in Medwin, Rowland Prothero opined that Byron was “probably” describing Lady Oxford in this passage from Lady Blessington (Prothero II 164, An.3). Marchand likewise quotes the phrase “autumnal charms” in connection with Lady Oxford (*Portrait* 129, BLJ II 286). Lady Blessington gives the lady’s age as forty-six—which is closer to Lady Oxford’s age when Lady Blessington spoke to Byron (49, in 1823) than it is to Lady Oxford’s age at the time of her affair with Byron (38-9, in 1812-1813). However, if Byron told Lady Blessington what he told Medwin, that Lady Oxford was “double my own age” (Medwin 70), and if Lady Blessington thought he was twenty-three in 1812, instead of twenty-four, she may have reconstructed forty-six from Byron’s age.

**56:** Medwin 70.

[Charlotte's] youth," and Charlotte has "ripening beauties," a horticultural metaphor (*To Ianthe* 15-16, 22). For Hades, however, maturity leads only to unhappiness and death. The underworld also bears fruit<sup>57</sup>—a pomegranate—but eating it does not nourish Persephone; it obliges her to remain in the underworld. Hades satisfied his appetite, and now Persephone has unfortunately satisfied hers. This kind of maturity, the unhappy fulfillment of appetite which Hades gives Persephone, is like the "fulness of satiety" of Childe Harold and Byron himself.<sup>58</sup> Imagining himself making an "attempt" on Charlotte, Byron must have feared sharing this unhappiness with her.

As with Childe Harold, Byron's experiences give him a brooding "dark mind";<sup>59</sup> an internal landscape like Hades's kingdom of "misty darkness" (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 464).<sup>60</sup> As gloomy as the underworld, Byron may even anticipate what Jock MacLeod calls the "posthumous stance" of *Childe Harold* III—Byron's sense that life is over and he is a dead man among dead civilizations.<sup>61</sup> Neither Byron nor Hades is suited to the innocent children of the light: the "brightly bold" Charlotte with her "beam[ing]" charms (*To Ianthe* 29, 7), and Persephone, who longs for the sunlit world: "while the goddess looked upon ... the starry sky ... and the rays of the sun ... hope charmed her great mind" (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 33, 35, 37).

The profound divide Byron imagines here explains all too well why Byron cannot "be ever more than friend" to Charlotte (*To Ianthe* 33). So he rejects the Persephone plot, and casts Charlotte as Ianthe. She never undergoes *raptus*, and never has to be forced into an unhappy *December-May romance*. She still has *youth*, and can pursue younger men, but Byron assures her in *To Ianthe*—with a touch of jealous bitterness—that in reality this theme has a tragic plot, as well. His sole consolation for not winning her himself is that he can escape this particular unhappy ending. Charlotte will lose her youth, and he is "happy" he will never see her beauty "in decline" (*To Ianthe* 23). She can pursue younger men, but love is so painful for a man, he says, that he is even "happier" to "escape [this] doom" (*To Ianthe* 25). Youth and romance, the poem suggests, end only in tragedy.

Thus far, *To Ianthe* echoes Byron's autobiographical account in that its mythologizing of Byron's three themes is pessimistic. The original draft of the poem is in fact rather grim, but Byron makes a major change between his draft manuscript and his fair copy of *To Ianthe* by adding the second stanza.<sup>62</sup> The second stanza resonates with the end of Hymn to Demeter and with the meaning of the name Byron would soon add to his poem.

Near the end of the Homeric Hymn, Persephone returns to the world above and to her mother. Explaining to Demeter what has happened, she begins with the girls who gathered flowers with her, naming her friend Ianthe among them. According to Hugh Evelyn-White, Ianthe's name means "she who delights,"<sup>63</sup> coming from the verb *iaíno* (ιαίνω), to "warm" or to "warm... the heart."<sup>64</sup> Taken from her friends' delightful, heartwarming company, Persephone has lost the pleasures of childhood.

But as soon as Persephone finishes telling her sad story, the Hymn to Demeter says of Persephone and her mother,

being one in spirit,  
they warmed each other's hearts and minds in many ways  
with loving embraces, and an end to sorrow came for their hearts,  
as they took joys from each other and gave in return. (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 434-7, emphasis mine)

**57:** The Hymn to Demeter only says that Persephone eats the fruit in the underworld, but Ovid describes Persephone (Proserpine) plucking the pomegranate from a tree in a garden in the underworld (*Met.* 5.534-8).

**58:** CHP I.4, CPW II 9.

**59:** CHP III.3, CPW II 77. Though composed later, this passage specifically describes the hero of the earlier cantos composed "in my youth's summer" (CHP III 3).

**60:** Greek: ζόφον ἠερόεντα (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 446). ἠερόεις is "cloudy, murky" in LSJ and "full of shadows, full of darkness" (*tenebricosus, caliginosus*) in Hederich. Cunliffe renders it "hazy, gloomy, dark," and Autenreith says "cloudy, gloomy." ζόφος refers to the "nether darkness... realms of gloom" (LSJ) or "darkness, shadows" (*caligo, tenebrae*) in Hederich. Autenreith gives the definition "gloom, darkness, esp. of the nether world, and for the realm of shadows itself," and Cunliffe suggests "darkness, gloom... the gloom of the nether world." In the translation by Athanassakis, the kingdom of Hades is consistently described as a place of "misty darkness," both here and elsewhere in the hymn (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 81, 446, 464; Athanassakis 3, 12, 13).

**61:** MacLeod, Jock. "Misreading Writing: Rousseau, Byron, and *Childe Harold* III." *Comparative Literature* 43.3 (Summer 1991): 260-79.

**62:** CPW II 267-8, Erdman and Worrall 12.

**63:** In his note to Hesiod's *Theogony* 345-50.

**64:** More fully, "warm, soften by warming... met[aphorically], warm, melt, move the heart to compassion, cheer, etc." (ιαίνω, Autenreith). Compare LSJ "heat... melt... melt the heart... warm, cheer" and Cunliffe "to warm, heat... to gladden, rejoice, cheer, comfort, placate." Hederich similarly says it means "to make hot, to make warm... to gladden" (*calefacio, tepefacio... exhilaro*).

The key verb in this passage is *iaino*.<sup>65</sup> Persephone has become like her friend Ianthe, warming her mother's heart. Though Persephone's childhood is behind her, she has a future in community with her mother.

This is Byron's final reimagining of Charlotte—not a tragic vision, but hope. Calling her “warm yet pure in heart” (*To Ianthe* 12), he says she will give her mother joy. This is the ultimate expression of Charlotte's resplendent maturing youth. The dazzling light which makes others love her may be dangerous to men—and to Byron—but for her mother it is a brightening rainbow that takes all sorrow away:

And surely she who now so fondly rears  
Thy youth, in thee, thus hourly brightening,  
Beholds the rainbow of her future years,  
Before whose heavenly hues all sorrow disappears. (*To Ianthe* 15-18)

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<sup>65</sup>: Greek: ἀλλήλων κραδίην καὶ θυμὸν ἴαινον—“they warmed each other's hearts and minds” (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 435).