

Lord Byron, *Don Juan* (Canto 1)—all about the hero's mother!

- X.
For every branch of every science known—
In every Christian language ever named,
With virtues equalled by her wit alone:
She made the cleverest people quite ashamed,
And even the good with inward envy groan,
Finding themselves so very much exceeded,
In their own way, by all the things that she did.
- XI.
Her memory was a mine: she knew by heart
All Calderon and greater part of Lope;
So, that if any actor missed his part,
She could have served him for the prompter's copy;
For her *Feinagle's were an useless art,
And he himself obliged to shut up shop—he
Could never make a memory so fine as
That which adorned the brain of Donna Inez.
- XII.
Her favourite science was the mathematical,
Her noblest virtue was her magnanimity,
Her wit (she sometimes tried at wit) was Attic all,
Her serious sayings darkened to sublimity;
In short, in all things she was fairly what I call
A prodigy—her morning dress was dimity,
Her evening silk, or, in the summer, muslin,
And other stuffs, with which I won't stay puzzling.
- XIII.
She knew the Latin—that is, "the Lord's prayer,"
And Greek—the alphabet—I'm nearly sure;
She read some French romances here and there,
Although her mode of speaking was not pure;
For native Spanish she had no great care,
At least her conversation was obscure;
Her thoughts were theorems, her words a problem,
As if she deemed that mystery would ennoble 'em.
- XIV.
She liked the English and the Hebrew tongue,
And said there was analogy between 'em;
She proved it somehow out of sacred song,
But I must leave the proofs to those who've seen 'em;
But this I heard her say, and can't be wrong,
... And all may think which way their judgments lean 'em,
- XV.
Some women use their tongues—she "looked" a
lecture,
Each eye a sermon, and her brow a homily,
An all-in-all sufficient self-director,
Like the lamented late *Sir Samuel Romilly,
The Law's expounder, and the State's corrector,
Whose suicide was almost an anomaly—
One sad example more, that "All is vanity,"—
(The jury brought their verdict in "Insanity!")
- XVI.
In short, she was a walking calculation,
*Miss Edgeworth's novels stepping from their
covers,
Or Mrs. Trimmer's books on education,
Or "Coelebs' Wife" set out in quest of lovers,
Morality's prim personification,
In which not Envy's self a flaw discovers;
To others' share let "female errors fall,"
For she had not even one—the worst of all.
- XVII.
Oh! she was perfect past all parallel—
Of any modern female saint's comparison;
So far above the cunning powers of Hell,
Her Guardian Angel had given up his garrison;
Even her minutest motions went as well
As those of the best time-piece made by
Harrison:
In virtues nothing earthly could surpass her,
Save thine "incomparable oil," Macassar!
- XVIII.
Perfect she was, but as perfection is
Inspid in this naughty world of ours,
Where our first parents never learned to kiss
Till they were exiled from their earlier bowers,
Where all was peace, and innocence, and bliss,
(I wonder how they got through the twelve hours),
Don José, like a lineal son of Eve,
Went plucking various fruit without her leave.

Notes: **Feinagle** — a teacher of mnemonics, or a trickster. **Romilly** — Byron hated this lawyer for his part in legal actions against his own family. **Maria Edgeworth** — an Anglo-Irish novelist who wrote educational books for children and some fine adult society novels, notably *Castle Rackrent* (1800). **Sarah Trimmer** was also an educational writer who wrote *An Easy Introduction to the Study of Nature* (1782), while *Coelebs' Search for a Wife* (1809) was a moral tale by **Hannah More**. Taken together, the ladies are seen as virtuous women authors remote from Byron's pose as a diabolical writer. **Harrison** is a watch-maker. **Macassar** is a hair-oil. The **Hebrew noun** *Yahweh* means "God" which is prefixed to "damn" to give English "Goddamn!" (or 'Goddam' in American English)—a subtle, if irreverent, joke at the expense of Biblical studies.